

Non-Fiction Poetry Sculpture

Issue

95

Photography

Fiction Prose Painting

# TOWERS

Student

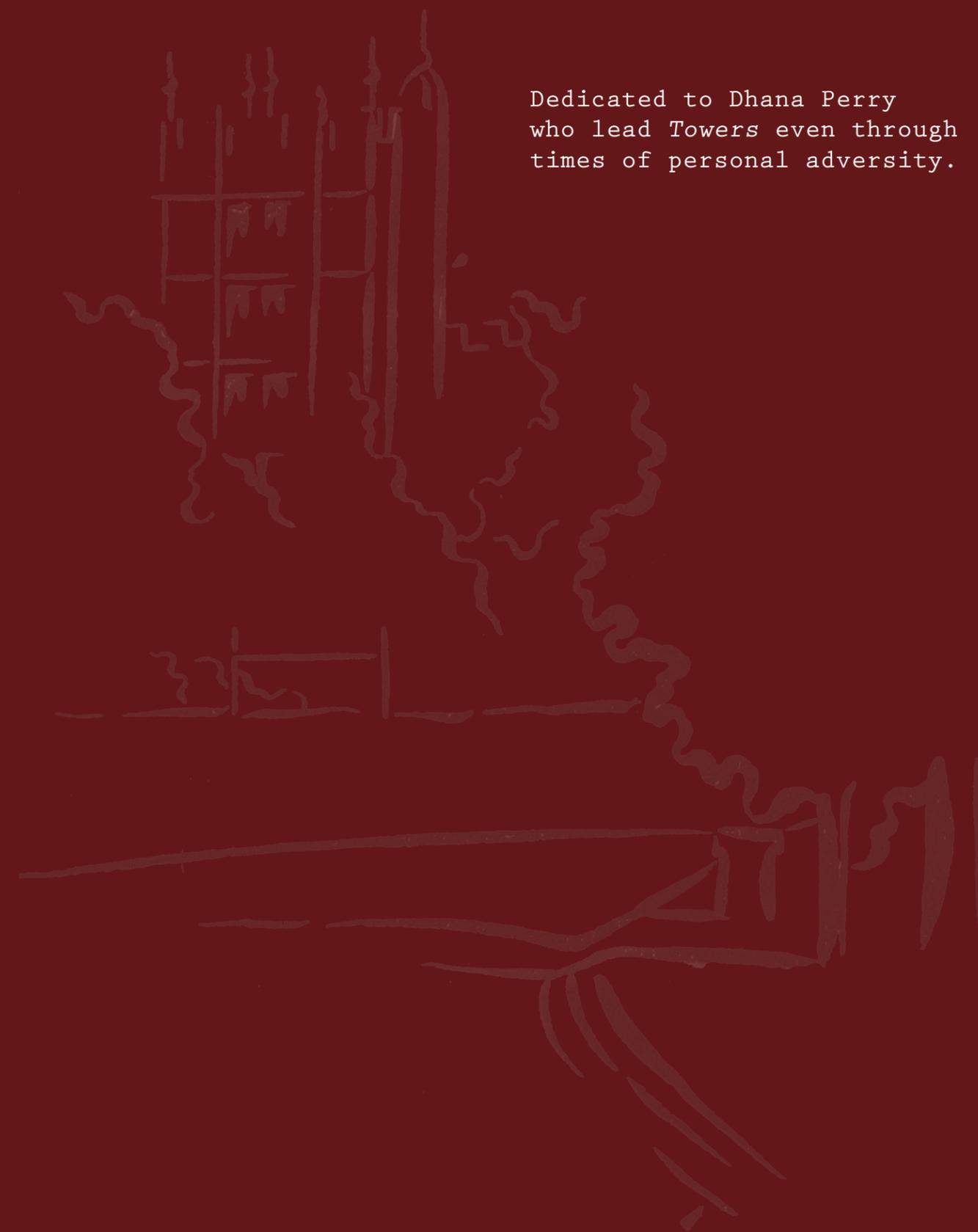
Magazine

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Named for the spires of Altgeld Hall, the "Castle on the Hill," Towers is Northern Illinois University's literary and creative arts magazine. Originally sponsored by the Xi Delta chapter of Sigma Tau Delta (International English Honor Society) and Nu Ita Pi, the publication has been printing student work since 1939.

Dedicated to Dhana Perry  
who lead *Towers* even through  
times of personal adversity.



# Contributor Thanks



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LISE SCHLOSSER	EMILY KOWAL	BOB SELF
SARAH BRESNAHAN	KIM ROSENTHAL	RYAN EICHBERGER
JANET LEEANN	SCOTT BALCERZAK	JAKE STEWART
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Discovery, Amy Henkel

EDITORS CHOICE

# Eveline

BECCA PEARCE  
DRAMA

EDITORS CHOICE

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

FRANK, a twenty-two year old Dublin sailor, filled with both bravado and sincerity

EVELINE, a nineteen year old Dublin shopkeeper, a practical romantic

## SETTING

Dublin, 1910

*The stage opens to a Dublin street, late at night. Eveline and Frank enter, holding hands.*

FRANK, *singing*. But the standing toast that pleas'd the most, was "the wind that blows, the ship that goes, And the lass that loves a sailor."

*Frank does a little jig and kneels before her with a flourish. Eveline applauds. Frank takes her hand.*

FRANK. Would you still like me if I was a minstrel instead of a sailor?

EVELINE. Aye, I think I would.

*Frank kisses her hand and gets up.*

EVELINE. Frank?

FRANK. Yes, Poppens?

EVELINE. What lass were you singing about?

FRANK. Which lass do you think?

EVELINE. Is it the lass from Buonas Aryes?

FRANK. Oh come now, there's no Irish lassies in Argentina.

EVELINE. Is it the savage lass from Patagonia?

FRANK. Aye, it could be...

*Eveline looks at him.*

FRANK. But it's not.

EVELINE. Does the lass in your song have brown hair?

FRANK. Aye, she does.

EVELINE. Does she have green eyes?

FRANK. Aye. In fact...You know, now that I think about it...She looks a lot like you.

EVELINE. Oh, does she now?

FRANK. Aye...I think her name is Liz. Your name's Liz, right?

*Eveline lightly pushes him away.*

EVELINE. Oh, shove off.

FRANK. Ah, no, I remember!

EVELINE. Is that hard to keep track of?

FRANK. A bit—

EVELINE. What, do you have a lass in every port?

FRANK. Sweet, sweet Eveline. Come here, darling.

*He pulls her close.*

EVELINE. Do you love me like the lass in the song?

FRANK. No.

EVELINE. What's that now?

*She goes to pull away and he pulls her tighter.*

FRANK. I love you more than her, because you're real.

*He kisses her.*

EVELINE. We can't be long, Da expects me back tonight.

FRANK. He won't notice a few more minutes.

EVELINE. Y'know how he gets. He'll wake up and find that I'm not there...

FRANK. He'll not be able to find the bottom of the bottle at this time of night.

EVELINE. He used to be alright. Y'know, as Da's go. A bit too much at times, but alright. And, y'know, just the other day, when I was sick, he sat with me by the fire and made me some toast. Told me a ghost story. He's

kind, when he wants to be.  
FRANK. He didn't take too kindly to me.

*Eveline touches his face. There's a bruise on Frank's cheek.*

EVELINE. The bruise is fading at least. I'm sorry, I didn't mean for you—  
FRANK. It was just a little knock, nothing to fret about.

EVELINE. He wasn't always like that. Just after Mum went. He never used to come after me...But now, it's just me and the little ones, since Ernest is gone and Harry's away on work...It's worse. Some men can't handle being sad, is all.

FRANK. Never really knew me own Da. He left Mum soon after me sister was born.  
EVELINE. You were just a boy, what did you do?  
FRANK. Left for the harbor as soon as I was old enough to pull a rope. Got on the Allan Line going out to Canada and never looked back.

EVELINE. Except for now.  
FRANK. Aye, I missed Dublin. Wanted to see me sister and the highlands again. Nothing in the world compares to the fog rolling around the hills.  
EVELINE. What about all those lands you've seen?  
FRANK. Nothing.

EVELINE. Not even Straits of Magellan?  
FRANK. Not even them. Ireland's quite beautiful, ya know.  
EVELINE. I don't think so.  
FRANK. That's only 'cause you've never seen anything else.

EVELINE. Dublin's dirty and ugly.  
FRANK. Aye, but you've never seen it from the water.  
EVELINE. What, is it only pretty when you can only see the tops of the buildings?  
FRANK. Ya know it doesn't hurt it when you can't hear the people shouting or the chickens squawking. Things have a way of looking peaceful when you can barely see them.

*A bell tower chimes. Eveline pulls away.*

EVELINE. It's midnight, I've got to go.

I love you  
more than her  
because you're  
real.

FRANK. No, don't go just yet.  
EVELINE. I need to go take care of the little ones. They'll be wondering where I've been.  
FRANK. They're sleeping, aren't they? What's a few more minutes?  
EVELINE. I promised Mum that I'd watch over them.  
FRANK. They're not yours.  
EVELINE. Aye, I know. But they're still family. I've got to go.

*Eveline goes to leave. Frank stops her.*

FRANK. Come with me.  
EVELINE. What?

FRANK. Get on the boat with me tomorrow.  
EVELINE. Tomorrow?  
FRANK. Come with me.  
EVELINE. Pull the other one.  
FRANK. I'm serious.  
EVELINE. We aren't even married!

*Frank kneels down and clears his throat.*

EVELINE. Don't you dare.  
FRANK. Marry me.  
EVELINE. Get up.  
FRANK. Marry me!  
EVELINE. You're being silly.

*She pulls him up.*

FRANK. I'll take you back to Argentina with me. We'll get married, nice and proper like.  
EVELINE. Don't joke about such things.  
FRANK. No, darling. I'm serious. Marry me.  
EVELINE. A real wedding, you say?  
FRANK. Aye. A church wedding. You'll be Mrs. Frank Galway, the most respectable woman in town and we'll have a little house with blue painted shutters. We'll even have daisies in the front yard.  
EVELINE. That does sound lovely.  
FRANK. Do you remember the day we met?  
EVELINE. Aye. It was a Thursday.  
FRANK. I saw you walking down the street, your little leather purse clutched in your hand. And even though you were rushing home, you glanced my way and smiled at me.  
EVELINE. You looked so dashing, leaning against that

gate.  
FRANK. You had this glint in your eyes when you smiled that made me think "Aye, that's her. There's the lass I want to marry."  
EVELINE. How many times has that line worked?  
FRANK. I'm trying very hard to woo you, love. Don't you want to marry me?  
EVELINE. I just- I don't know. I can't just leave.  
FRANK. Why not?  
EVELINE. Da.  
FRANK. You're going to choose your Da over me?  
EVELINE. It's not that. I want to but...He's family. I can't...He's all that I've got left.  
FRANK. Eveline, look at me.

*She does so, reluctantly.*

I can be your family.

EVELINE. What about the kids? I can't leave them alone with Da.  
FRANK. They aren't your kids. They aren't even your mum's kids. Besides, they're nearly grown as it tis. Why can't you leave?  
EVELINE. Dublin's...Home.  
FRANK. You hate Dublin.  
EVELINE. Aye, but it's still home. Are there even fields in Argentina?  
FRANK. What do you mean?  
EVELINE. Do you see ov'r there? By those houses?  
FRANK. Aye, what about them?  
EVELINE. There used to be a field there, back when I was small. The children of the avenue used to play together in that field— the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns...Every single evening. God, I loved playing there. Then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses in it — not like our little brown house but bright brick houses with shining roofs. Dublin's changed, aye, but it's still home...I don't want to have little ones of my own if there aren't going to be fields for them to play in.  
FRANK. Do you want to know what the old sailors say?  
EVELINE. What's that?  
FRANK. They say that you'll always have your three homes. You have your home where you were raised. That'll always be your first home. Then you've your second home, with your wife and your family.  
EVELINE. And then what, you've got a home with some other lass in some far off port?

FRANK. And, you've your third home in your love.  
EVELINE. That's a load of rubbish.  
FRANK. You see, you've always got your home because you've always got your love. It doesn't matter where ever you go or where ever I go: as long as I'm with you, I'm home.

*Frank kisses her deeply.*

EVELINE. You promise you'll take care of me. No matter what?  
FRANK. Aye.  
EVELINE. And you've never be like me Da and get mean drunk when you don't get your way?  
FRANK. Never.  
EVELINE. And you won't turn into your Da and disappear some morning?  
FRANK. I'll never leave you. I swear.

*Pause.*

EVELINE. Alright.  
FRANK. Alright?  
EVELINE. Yeah. I'll go with you.  
FRANK. You mean it?  
EVELINE. Yeah.

*He grabs her and twirls her around.*

FRANK. I'll let you go back home now.  
EVELINE. What, I've said yes, now you're done with me?  
FRANK. I'm only letting you go back home because I know tomorrow, you'll be all mine.

*He kisses her goodnight.*

FRANK. Meet me at the harbor tomorrow night at seven.  
EVELINE. Goodnight love.

*She starts to leave.*

FRANK. Eveline?  
EVELINE. Aye?  
FRANK. This is happening, isn't it?  
EVELINE. Aye, it tis.

*Eveline smiles and exits. Frank smiles after her and runs off.*

*Time passes, represented by sounds of the day. The sound of the ocean. A long, mournful ship whistle. A crowd of people. Sea birds. Eveline reenters, looking over her shoulder, with a suitcase to the front of the stage. She crosses herself and stares out, mouthing a silent prayer. Frank reenters, with a sailor's duffel and stands next to her. She doesn't look at him. The sound of the ocean becomes louder. Frank talks, but his words can't be heard. Eveline stares deadpan out, clenching her fists. A ship bell clangs. Frank turns to Eveline and takes her hand.*

FRANK. Come.

*He goes to pull her offstage. The ocean becomes overpowering.*

FRANK. Come!  
*Eveline gives a cry of anguish and jerks her hand away.*

FRANK, pleading. Evvy!

*Eveline stares at him passively, like a helpless animal. Her eyes give him no sign of love or farewell or recognition. Frank takes a step back.*

FRANK, *whispered.* Eveline.

*She turns to the audience and stares out. Frank turns away and exits. The sound of a woman sighing. The ocean.*

LIGHTS DOWN

# The Absence of I

SHAWN THOMAS  
DRAMA

CAST OF CHARACTERS  
HUGH, *a man in his twenties*  
VAL, *a woman in her thirties*  
JAKE, *a man in his thirties*

LOCATION  
A small dark room with one chair.

TIME  
Present

NOTE TO THE DIRECTOR: HAVE FUN.

*Jake sits on a chair. Enter Hugh with a Bible.*

HUGH. Last words?

JAKE. Yes

HUGH. What?

JAKE. Release me.

HUGH. Can't.

JAKE. Why?

HUGH. The law, you've broken them.

JAKE. Have not!

HUGH. The jury and the judge agreed you must be executed.

JAKE. So, why does that matter?

HUGH. Don't know, but that's what's real. That all you have to say?

JAKE. There are other thoughts that need out.

HUGH. Proceed.

JAKE. Bye mom and dad. We'll meet at heavens gates.

*Jake dies. Lights dim and come back up Hugh sits in the chair and Val is in Hugh's old spot.*

VAL. Your state?

HUGH. Exhausted

VAL. Good

HUGH. Why are you so cruel?

VAL. Cruel?

HUGH. Yes Cruel.

VAL. Don't know; maybe because mommy left me.

HUGH. Really?

VAL. Would Val speak falsely to you?

HUGH. Yes you would, you are crazy.

VAL. True.

HUGH. Go ahead then.

VAL. Not yet your day to leave earth though.

HUGH. Damn them!

*Lights dim Jake and Val switch spots.*

JAKE. What are decent people?

HUGH. Not Sure, maybe the partner of my soul Val; but not sure

JAKE. What are bad people?

HUGH. Us.

JAKE. Why?

HUGH. We don't work properly for the mold of the world.

JAKE. To not work properly makes us bad?

HUGH. Apparently.

JAKE. That's saddens me.

HUGH. Me to. You'll do well, on the other end of.....

JAKE. Of what.

HUGH. Fate.

JAKE. You buy that?

HUGH. Have to.

JAKE. Why?

HUGH. Just do.

JAKE. That's not a good reason. You need to do better than that.

HUGH. There's got to be more to all of these challenges than chance.

JAKE. Could there be a penance for me?

HUGH. Yes.

JAKE. Beats the empty cell, correct?

HUGH. Correct.

JAKE. Save me.

HUGH. Let's pray.

JAKE. Lets

HUGH. Our father who art gone to heaven

Our father who art gone to heaven

HUGH. Hallow be thy name.

JAKE. Hallow be thy name

*Lights dim. Val switches spots with Hugh.*

VAL. You are good at that.

JAKE. At what?

VAL. The oral.

JAKE. Thanks, you taste good. You're good at the oral as well

VAL. Thanks, you're also pretty tasty.

JAKE. Are we wrong here?

VAL. Why do you ask?

JAKE. Our acts just feel wrong to me.

VAL. Do they?

JAKE. Yes

VAL. Well cope.

JAKE. We shouldn't just cope, when we are wrong.

VAL. So, do you not enjoy all of our meet ups then?

JAKE. That doesn't mean we are not wrong.

VAL. Well then leave.

JAKE. Never gonna return here Val. We are done for good.

VAL. So long, see you next week, when you succumb to the wrong once more.

JAKE. Ah, blow me.

VAL. Already done that. Let's face the facts you are too weak to stay away from me.

JAKE. Not true. We won't ever see each other anymore.

VAL. Why though, my husband doesn't care enough to catch us, he's too busy at work where he executes people all day.

JAKE. You took the vows though.

VAL. Yes, but to be untouched by my husband for months wasn't on the paper we both autographed.

JAKE. Noted, but we are over just the same. Good bye forever Val.

VAL. See you tomorrow.

*Lights dim Hugh takes Jakes spot. Lights to full.*

HUGH. You want to separate?

VAL. Yes.

HUGH. Why?

VAL. We don't work anymore.

HUGH. That can't be the only reason.

VAL. There's no love from me to you anymore.

HUGH. There's someone else maybe?

VAL. What's that matter?

HUGH. That's a yes.

VAL. That no longer concerns you!

HUGH. So long as we are betrothed, you are my concern.

VAL. Deal, let's end our contract.

HUGH. We have more than a contract.

VAL. No we don't!

HUGH. Yes we do!

VAL. Too late we are done. You don't love me anymore, you never have.

HUGH. Not true.

VAL. Prove me wrong then.

HUGH. How?

VAL. Say what you never say.

HUGH. What's that?

VAL. That you love me

HUGH. Can't

VAL. Why not?

HUGH. To angry and hurt and heartbroken

VAL. So; welcome to my world.

HUGH. We are not the same. Nor do we have the same world.

VAL. Whatever.

HUGH. OK then.

VAL. OK then what.

HUGH. You want to end our deal then by all means go ahead you'll be sorry!

*Lights dim Val sits on the chair and Hugh and Jake stand on both sides of her.*

HUGH. So my replacement stands before me.

JAKE. Please Hugh don't; lower the gun.

VAL. Please Hugh no.

HUGH. Why not? You are both wrong, both bad.

JAKE. Not that bad. please Hugh no.

VAL. For God's sake put the gun down.

HUGH. Why? What shall be granted to me for an act of mercy? You both had none for me.

JAKE. Be better than us Hugh, Be good.

HUGH. But what's good.

JAKE. Val?

HUGH. Correct Jake, but even good can be bad.

VAL. Hugh that makes no sense.

HUGH. Don't Start Val. Shut up both of you, and be judged.

JAKE. Me to?

HUGH. Yes Jake meet your judge and jury. How do you plead?

JAKE AND VAL. Not wrong.

HUGH. We have reached a judgment. You are both bad. Your sentence Jake shall be at a later date. However Val yours shall be now. You never should have been bad Val because Jake has now got to be your murderer.

*Lights dim. A gunshot. Jake sits on a chair. Enter Hugh with a Bible.*

HUGH. Last words?

JAKE. Yes

HUGH. What?

JAKE. Release me.

HUGH. Can't.

JAKE. Why?

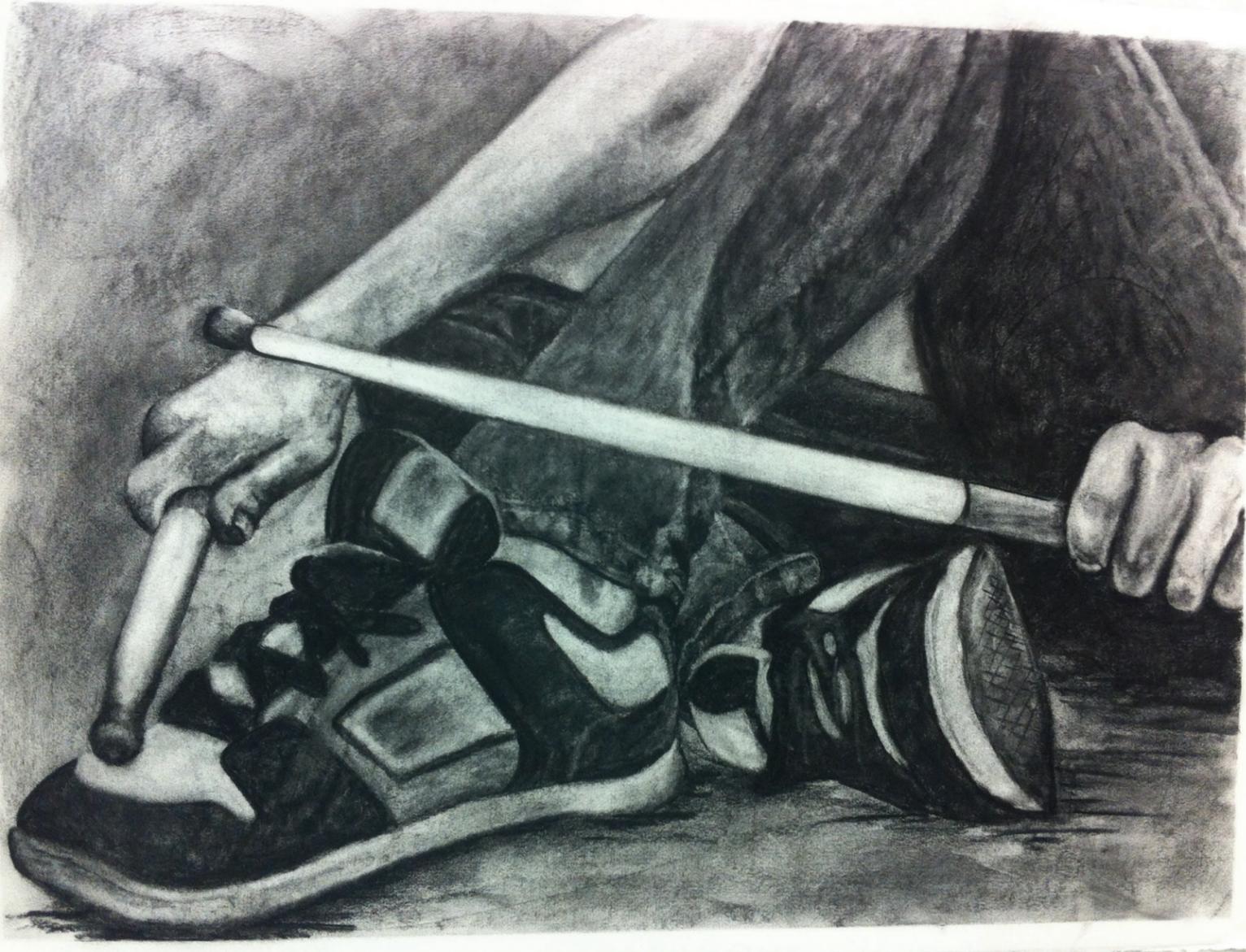
HUGH. We don't work properly for the mold of the world.

JAKE. To not work properly makes us bad?

LIGHTS



*False Security, Faith Mellenthin*



*On My Feet*, Faith Mellenthin

#### EDITORS CHOICE

## Red Velvet

DANIELLE BROWN  
NONFICTION

The sun rose a little slower that morning, hovering over the world, anticipating what would become of that day. The stillness lasted longer than usual, foreshadowing the tranquil moments in which the day would see. But we never notice the signs and live as if we are invincible. The tragedies linger over our days. We

think that they, the tragedies, will never find us. We always feel that we are the exception and that bad thing that happened to someone else, will never happen to us.

He was standing in the middle of the train tracks. He wore a white shirt and baggy blue jeans. It looked as if he had been in this exact same outfit for a while now. The

young man had a face that looked like smooth black leather. He was average sized and could not have been older than 24. It was daytime, the sun was shining, the sky was clear, the weather was warm, and life looked right. It was a sunny summer day, flawless, like the ones you see in the movies. I was waiting at the intersection on the corner of my

block at a stop sign. The train horns began to sound and the red and white lights flashed. The man stood on the tracks like there was not going to be a train. He had a cell phone up to his ear and his mouth opened and closed slowly like he was yawning instead of talking. He stumbled across the tracks, making it obvious that he was drunk, but he wasn't in any type of panic.

It could easily have been me falling across the tracks as a train was approaching. I had walked those tracks numerous times after nights of drunkenness to make it home. My feet had once stumbled where his were. And I could not help but imagine what was possibly going through his head in that moment. Part of me wants to say that he was just too drunk and maybe he wasn't aware of his surroundings. I really wanted this to be true because I do not ever want to say that I witnessed a suicide. But he was conscious and functioning so he could not have been that drunk to a point where he could not see or hear a train coming.

He stumbled so calm and swift like he did not have a problem in the world. The train was coming closer and I looked to the car next to me and saw a face as frightened as mine. At this point all we could do was hope that the train would somehow miss him or that he would jump across that track, but he didn't.

The train braked and slowed down but there was not enough time for it to make a complete stop. It hit his body in slow motion but there was still a strong enough force to knock him down. The train dragged his body underneath and moved a

couple more feet before stopping. The man who had just had life and was functioning was now on the ground and gutted like a fish. All it took was a second for him to be lifeless.

He didn't even look real anymore. His skin looked suddenly like rubber and his bones liquefied. He wasn't moving and he was covered in blood.

The blood was splattered onto his t-shirt. I can only assume that it was all over his body because I was at a distance where the specific trickles of blood were not apparent. Only on the white t-shirt did the blood clearly make its mark. His body

I felt some kind of  
ecstasy from his  
dark velvet blood  
that you cannot find  
in any drug out  
there.

reminded me of a ketchup packet that had been ripped open and used and contorted. If you ever look at the ketchup packet before you throw it away, you can see where it was torn and the remains of the substance all over the wrapper. That was his body and that was his blood.

It was as if the world was making an art piece out of this tragic incident. His t-shirt was the canvas, his blood the paint, and the train the paint brush; distasteful, yet admirable. The spots of blood clumped together on what was once a dull t-shirt and created an escape that acted as a cheat for death. It was

like staring for hours at an abstract painting that I did not understand. The redness of the blood was dark, but there was brightness in it that riveted through my eyes. The more I stared the more intriguing the color became and I knew that I would never see anything that would make me feel that way again. I felt some kind of ecstasy from his dark velvet blood that you cannot find in any drug out there. It pains me to say, but the blood that spilled from his body was somewhat beautiful. And it sent me into a daze in which everything was gone except for me and his red velvet blood. In this fantasy there was no train, there was no body, there was no sadness, and there was no compassion; there was only the deepest shade of

His blood made me think of all my past birthdays when my father made me red velvet cake. Each year he would make it for me because he knew it was my favorite. I was never a fan of the taste;

I just loved it for the color. The idea of taking a color and making it into something real fascinated me. And I would eat that cake every year just so the red velvet would become a part of me. I pictured the inside of my body would be red and dark and beautiful, just as the cake.

Me and all the cars around just sat and stared. I pulled out my phone and dialed 911.

When the operator came on and asked me what was my emergency the lump in my throat scratched against my flesh pushing a dry sound out of my mouth. The words chaffed against my neck as I tried to make



# Hazy Day

KATIA GOMES  
NONFICTION

Blazing sun  
Blasting music

Crowds of people  
Cries of excitement

All blending as one  
This is the worst day for a music festival.  
And here I am in the middle of it all.  
The scorching summer heat creates a mist of sweat  
which wafts around my face, filling my lungs with its  
putrid stench. Bodies merge into one, adamant to wait  
for the beloved band to appear on stage. Sweat trickles  
down my body from the sweltering sun – half of it isn't  
even my own.  
Why am I here?  
My friend grabs my arm and begins to drag me.  
Further within the throngs of people.  
Further within the scorching heat.  
Further within the place I didn't want to be.  
We glide through, edging closer to the stage. She raves  
about how much she wishes to touch the lead singer  
of the band. For months she has been anticipating this  
concert. I smile, trying to share her enthusiasm, but it's  
hard. My legs feel like they're ready to cave in under me.  
Numb

So hot  
Can't think  
- I'm going to sit for a minute.  
- Ok.  
Relief rushes through me as I crouch to the ground.  
It doesn't last.  
The heat intensifies.  
A forest of legs surrounds me.  
The air is dense with sweat.  
I can't breathe.  
Is there no way to end my torment?  
Why am I here?  
In an attempt to relieve myself of the smothering heat I  
stand once more. My legs protest, but I can't give in. Not  
unless I want to suffocate. I gasp for breath, trying to catch  
as much air in my shriveling lungs. But it doesn't ease my  
suffering.  
Black spots begin to obstruct my vision.  
- Are you ok? You don't look so good.  
Body – so heavy.  
Tongue – can't speak.  
Brain – can't process.  
What was I doing again? Is someone talking? What are they  
saying?  
Why am I here?  
My world turns black. I can't see.  
What's happening?  
The precious air eludes me. I can't breathe.

What's going on?  
There is a tug on my arm. I'm being dragged.  
Where are they taking me?  
My feet stagger to keep up. We're pushing past the horde  
of people.  
The darkness fades.  
I can see.  
My friend is dragging me away from the stage. Relief  
beings to rush through me. I'm finally escaping.  
Then the darkness returns, oppressing me once more.  
But I'm still moving.  
Shoving past the blockade of people.  
Fighting against my screaming legs.  
Attempting to make it to  
salvation.  
My foot catches on something.  
Was that a person?  
I don't care.  
Just let me out.  
Why am I here?  
Finally the glide of sweat covered bodies against my skin  
ceases. Fresh air breezes by my face. I inhale, savoring the  
sweet air I have been deprived of. The world around me  
returns. It's shrouded with flecks of black.  
But my legs don't stop moving.  
My friend continues to tow me along.  
Where are we going?

My brain still doesn't process. It isn't until we reach a  
canopy covered cooling station that I realize why we kept  
moving.  
A place for me to rest.  
Relief screams through my body as soon as I collapse on a  
chair. My friend quickly rushes off to get me some water. I  
must be suffering from dehydration.  
Then my brain begins to process.  
What just happened?  
Did I really almost pass out?  
How could that happen?  
I thought I was stronger than that.  
Why am I here?  
Coming was a terrible idea.  
I've never felt so bad.  
My friend returns with water.  
Thoughts of how excited she was to see that band filters  
through my mind. A weight rests on my conscious. It was  
my fault she wouldn't get to see the only band she came to  
this festival for.  
- Sorry I made you miss the concert.  
- Don't worry about it.  
- But you were so excited for it.  
- It's ok. Next year we'll make sure you're more  
prepared for this heat!  
...next year?

# George

DANIELLE BROWN  
NONFICTION

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder in which the occupant may hear or see things that are not really there. This illness can be very terrifying because it takes away the sense of knowing what is real and what is not. The person can suffer from delusions, thought disorders, and movement disorders; causing them to sit for hours without speaking or having peculiar behaviors a person without the illness would not understand. Schizophrenia effects 1 percent of the population 18 or older. Scientists have found many different possible causes for the illness. One being that it is a genetic mutation from the genes we receive. Another possible cause is brain chemical malfunctions that could have been caused by viruses before birth. There are antipsychotic medications available to ease the symptoms. Living with schizophrenia is different for every schizophrenic and there are many stories that suggest violence, substance abuse, and dependable care are relevant in their lives (NIMH RSS). But in George, I see something different.

George Brown is tall, hovering over 6 feet, and slim with hunched shoulders. His arms never fully hang. They are held above his midsection in an awkward I-don't-know-what-to-do-with-these position, like a

rock star without his or her guitar. He wears round glasses that cover squinty eyes, he has a gray beard that takes up most of his face, and he is my uncle. It is hard to observe a detailed description when you have to count on your peripheral to scope him in the corner surrounded by shadows. He is never fully in the room when all the family is around. It is as if having one foot through a door makes it easier for him to escape after a few short minutes.

George never stays in a room for long unless he is alone. And I can't help but wonder what peace that aloneness brings. Is it the same as

... he is  
filled with  
blank pages.

mine? Meditative and reflective. Or is it something more complex that I do not fathom? When visiting, I on countless nights lay awake in fear of George's panicky paces throughout the dark house, only to hate myself in the morning because I know that he would never harm anyone. It's in

the ignorant hours where I forget who George is as a person.

I have very brief conversations with George. He never initiates them, it always has to be my job. In return I receive short answers— "yeah", "uh huh", or "good morning". But they are enough to keep a conversation going and depending on the moment it can be a fulfilling conversation. His words interact with mine in a way that overpowers the schizophrenia, making it not seem real anymore. But there are times where the words barely make it past his lips and are sometimes hard to understand because of his deep, shaky voice from all the cigarettes that have inhabited his mouth. Every time I see George, I see a cigarette as well. They act as his all-time accessory that he never goes without. His habit is extreme, he goes through packs a day.

Research has proven that people with schizophrenia are 20% more likely to be addicted to cigarettes than normal people. The nicotine helps lessen the psychotic symptoms (NIMH RSS). The house reeks of tobacco and there are clouds of smoke that resonate around the corner from George's room. The smoke is kind of a forewarning that George is near and it is helpful because he comes into a corner so quietly that it will alarm you if you

don't see him coming. I have asthma and the smell of the cigarette smoke irritates the crap out of my lungs but I have this admiration spot in my heart for George that I will risk all the asthma attacks.

I have always felt this closeness to George. I do not think there is anyone else in the world that is more like me than George. I see him sitting alone in a room, just looking in the same direction, appreciating the loneliness. The same way I sit alone in the quiet searching for truths and not taking for granted the alone time I get with myself. Something in his eyes tell me that there's more to George than his illness. There's a whole person in there that the world does not know and I feel that there is so much inside of me that the world does not see either. George was not always this way. It was not until college that he changed. I have been told that in college George started experiencing with drugs, mushrooms to be exact. He must have had a very bad trip because after that he was never the same. He left college and his behavior changed. That is when he was diagnosed

schizophrenic. It is not to say that the mushrooms caused his illness, but they did trigger it. And his life was changed.

I walk into George's room to find him sitting in a chair facing the wall, staring in a trance like the character from Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" but there is no mark on his. He does not turn and acknowledge my presence, so I creep in a little slower to avoid startling or upsetting him. I am distracted by the eeriness he lives in. The walls are stained brown from all the nicotine that resides in them. The darkness makes it hard to decipher whether it is day or night. He says he likes to read and to write, which explains all of the scribbled paper on the floor and the many messy stacks of books that mirror my room. I ask George what are some important things in his life and before answering he squirms in his seat saying "holidays". I knew that was all I was going to get out

of him. George does not understand many of the questions I ask. He is not able to process them and that shows me more what a schizophrenic experiences than him telling me. I ask him what he feels on a daily basis and he responds by saying drinking coffee in the morning. It is almost as if he is talking to someone else. The look of muddle on his face makes me think he does not know either. I hear these jumbled uncomprehensive answers and they come at me like a dagger to the heart. What I thought was genius was just an empty mind. I had been projecting myself on George because the trappings he is in makes it all look the same, but it is obvious now that no philosopher lies within him. He says a goal that he would like to accomplish is to never forget to send a birthday card. And from that answer I see that George is not this embellished novel with words of significance, he is filled with blank pages.



*In My Hands*, Faith Mellenthin



*Micro/Macrocsm, Jesse Knirsch*

## Memorialized in Time

EMILY TUDOR  
NONFICTION

I sometimes walk by a tree or large stone and see some couples has carved their initials into them. I used to assume it is some young naïve couple whom has done the carving in some misguided attempt to share their love with the world. As I have gotten older I am questioning this whole cliché of initials on a surface with “4 ever” scrawled after it. I think as kids we were able to love with a lot less restraint and it caused relationships to be extremely short lived but burned with an extreme passion. We get older, more serious, and build walls after we are hurt. It’s called growing up for most of us and since we often grow up because of pain we don’t question what we have lost.

I like to look at those initials and question if they’re still together. I think in most cases the tree or rock will last far longer than the relationship inscribed in them. I think that the realities of life have a way of making relationships very difficult, but in that first relationship we don’t have the same attitude as we do now. We grow up hearing stories of princesses and dream relationships. We all think we are getting a happily ever after story and the reality of life can’t touch our love. We are invincible and our love is the most amazing thing that has ever happened to the history of the world. We shout it from the rooftops and write

poems and songs that were the most amazing thing we have ever created at the time. We love with all of our hearts because we have never been hurt before. It makes life so serious in high school. High school doesn’t last, neither does that song you wrote and played once when you were 14 or that poem in our memories. We were always broke so we spent time instead.

I think we all want to be remembered in some way. I think we all want to feel special and have our love be recognized and accepted by others as something unique and special. I think we all just want to share things that are special to us. So how does someone in a turbulent time such as life leave a permanent mark?

I think we carve our names into trees not out of childish vandalism but out of hope for the future. That we leave our mark and our relationship will last as long as that tree well. That future generations might look upon that same tree we fell in love under and have that same experience. A living testimony of our love. Somewhere along the way we stop caring about trees and care more about paper; less about those stones we used to skip across the pond and more about much more expensive stones. I think we care more about money spent than time spent on us now. I now wonder if those kids we used to be were right...

# The Illuminating Shadow

JOHN PRICE  
NONFICTION

I found myself in the chapel. That is not meant to be a flowery way of expressing location. When we arrive at a setting, pregnant with contemplative possibilities, it often makes us wonder how we got there. Amid the utilitarian milieu which constitutes our daily existence, moments of true reflection can feel as though we have awoken in a foreign land with no understanding of the path that has proceeded our arrival. And so I repeat, I found myself in the chapel.

It was indeed a place that invited introspection. I would estimate the room at perhaps twenty feet across and not quite twice as long. It contained two sets of pews, four rows each, giving the room its posted capacity of thirty-five people. The interior of the roof consisted of bare wood planks and supporting beams that reached a greatly exaggerated point, well above the height that a flatter ceiling would have presented, and made the overall shape of the structure reminiscent of a tiny ski chalet perched halfway down a long Alpine slope, providing a minor oasis to those bent on weary descent.

There were no windows on the

side walls. There were two windows in the back of the room. Churches are strange structures; you enter through the rear. If I say to you, "Meet me in front of the church," how is it that after you arrive and we go in, and find ourselves in the back? I suppose it is all perspective. These "rear" windows may well have provided the room with adequate daylight, but they were not the dominant aperture. The "front" wall was, from side to side and floor to apex, made entirely of glass. Only broken by the minor interruptions of the supporting wooden framework, this otherwise transparent facade

Here I am, a  
blank slate.  
Fill me with  
your thoughts.

provided a surprisingly panoramic view given the relatively small size of the entire edifice.

What a juxtaposing was there! On one side of the glass wall, golden candlesticks, pious statuary, and

the ornate and radiant monstrosity. On the other, a rolling field of grass, spotted with pine trees so tall that they nearly eclipsed the sky. This vista afforded one the opportunity to observe great tempests of snow, wind, and rain, yet from a safe vantage point. The contrast between the interior and the exterior imagery reminded one that the elements on one side of the glass divide were a fervent attempt to comprehend and even embrace the elements on the other side.

It would be difficult in such an environment to not be meditative. The only danger here was that those demons of the outside world, schedules and deadlines, might have somehow stowed away in your pockets or even the folds of your garments and then leapt out upon you, when you were at your most vulnerable, thus causing you to crash back down to reality like a failed Icarus. But, if you could not be thoughtful here, I fear you are doomed to a life of pure pragmatism. As for myself, above all the aspects of this locale that induced soul-searching, I must draw attention to the floor.

It was a bluish-gray tile. Not so



*Glowing Bright*, Katarzyna Wozniak

blue as to even initially be described as blue, but not so gray as to suggest drabness. It was as if the blue of the Union uniforms had blended with the gray of the Confederate uniforms and this time, contrary to history, the gray dominated. It had no recognizable design or pattern. It was as though this surface was designed to elicit musing; as though it were saying, "Here I am, a blank slate. Fill me with your thoughts." It was even more inviting than if it were pure white. Such a canvas is intimidating; it demands your effort. This floor seemed to coax it. Although we may think it so, a movie screen is not pure white. It has specks of silver in it, thus the moniker – silver screen. This is meant to make the projected image glow. The picture is reflected back to you with greater vibrancy than it fell upon the screen. This floor did not glow, but it did, through provision of

a welcoming agar, return enhanced deliberation.

And so I thought. I thought how life was loss. All life was loss. Not just the loss of loved ones. At the very least, life was a loss of innocence. At its most regretful, a loss of opportunity. Even in the fullest life, experience pales in comparison to the ocean that is possibility. And yet, within me lies the Universe. Everything that can be known comes to me through my senses. I've seen it, tasted it or felt it. If not I personally, then I have read it or heard it. Inside of me, the Universe is comprehended and given meaning. My experience therefore, both first-hand and second, despite how inadequate I first categorized it, is sufficient. It is, in fact, everything.

Why then do I struggle, as have so many, to break out of my self-contained universe and become part of that greater universe?

That's what this room is all about, isn't it? We make think it is about the "how," but it is really about the "why."

Even secularists seek meaning. Without meaning, there is nothing but a dreary chain of causality. We all want to belong to something larger, right? You may believe in the Brotherhood of Man. That's a rather abstract concept and, in light of human history, perhaps void of any reality. Even a devout atheist can believe in love. But can he point to love? He or she may say that they can see the results of love, but is that not like a theist saying he or she sees the results of God? Can you put love in a box and give it to me on my next birthday? Can you give me the atomic weight of love? What is its mass or other physical properties? What color is love? What does it smell like? What atmospheric pressure does it exert? Is love short and fat or tall and thin? Is

it bigger than a breadbox? This “love” of yours is going to make for a tough round of twenty questions.

Love is one of Plato’s shadows on the wall of the cave, is it not? Plato believed in the supremacy of ideas. Somewhere there is the perfect concept of a chair. But we exist in a cave and face away from the opening. All we see is the shadow of that pure concept projected on the cave wall and these projections are faint at best. The chairs we deal with daily vary greatly and yet when I say chair to you, we have some common understanding. There must exist a “perfect” chair from which all variants arise. Oh heck, Plato was an ancient Greek. He didn’t even know what a telephone was.

And yet...

Any cinematographer will tell you, as indeed anyone who has ever thought about shadows will, a cinematographer more so only because he makes his living dealing with shadows, that not all shadows are created equal. If he puts

a metal scrim directly in front of the light, it does not create a perceptible shadow on the subject at all. It simply lessens the intensity of the light. But this is a shadow! When he erects a flag between the light and the subject, he begins to get a discernible shadow. The closer to the light, the less distinct the shadow. The closer to the subject the more sharp the shadow. So some shadows are indeed more pronounced than others. Some shadows reveal more information about the chair.

As I look at the blue-gray floor, it is a world of shadows. Images formed in black and white, or more accurately in light blue-gray and dark blue-gray. The shadows do not give me great detail of the objects that cast them, but they tell me something of them. Shadows of the tables, shadows of the statues, shadows of the candlesticks...

Suddenly, I was struck by the shadow of the candlestick. In the real world, it sat on a three foot high stand of gleaming gold. Atop the stand was

a red glass container, in which rested the lit candle. As with all shadows, the golden surface and the detailed designs of the original were lost in the “projection.” Then it dawned on me like a picture coming into focus. Amid all the monochrome shapes, the glass container of the candle shone bright red! It was an amazing thing to see. It was more amazing that it took many minutes of staring at it for this anomaly to become sensible to me. But most amazing of all was the realization that I had never before seen color among shadows. Yet there it blazed like a solitary buoy light lost in the darkness of the water and the night sky.

I stared at this phenomenon for I don’t know how long. I wanted to share it with someone, but that is the downside to contemplation...solitude. I wanted to run out and tell someone. I wanted to tell Plato. Not all shadows are equal! In fact, some shadows actually illuminate.

## EDITORS CHOICE

**Blood Brothers**

TIMOTHY SCHULTZ

Brother, O Brother!  
We were born of great labor;  
Given tall frames to construct structures,  
Told to plow the fields to gain favor!  
We were simply nothing less than blood and flesh.

From the womb we came,  
Into the ground we will go;  
The fleshy walls that could not hold us  
Gave us to the earth to swallow whole—  
As if we were dung, keeping the World fertile!

By blood we will give,  
Our lives will be sacrificed  
For industry, for agriculture,  
For mathematics, for science, for art.  
But Brother, what does that leave us to receive?

My back is breaking,  
Oh Brother, beneath the weight  
Of demand. So much is asked of us,  
But for what cost? Our humanity?  
We are the Dependables—the Throwaways—

Held in factories,  
Churning out pieces and parts  
To construct tall structures, nothing is  
Natural, Brother. We’ve all become  
Machines with heavy loads, mass-reproducing.

The World seldom gives,  
And when we hold our hands out  
We will find veins turned into wires,  
Skin made into layers of metal.  
But remember Brother: steel was once flesh,  
Oil was once blood,  
And we were nothing less.

**Black Cat**

TIMOTHY SCHULTZ

Black Cat  
on the prowl  
beneath the cover of leaves  
and

Darkness—

except for  
a single lamp post  
in the most unlikely  
of  
places,

upon where  
Black Cat  
was seen by a child under  
her  
window:

returning  
a mouse—  
the most unlikely  
of  
situations;

Black Cat,  
with head bowed,  
faced a little hole  
crying,  
“Forgiveness.”



Autopsy, Amanda Roberts

## Lily's Lament

SARAH ROSENGARTEN

there is an empty place in my head  
 almost as hollow as the space in my bed  
 where once you laid and kept me warm  
 guarding my body — my heart — from harm  
 sometimes I still wake and turn just to stare  
 for it's such a surprise that you're not there  
 and it takes me a moment to find where and when  
 and it settles in my heart, heavy now as then  
 that you're gone for good, and I'm still alone  
 watching my heard and my spirit corrode  
 forgetting you has been no easy chore  
 I still feel the loss of you to my core  
 without you I'll never find solace or peace  
 without you I'll never set my heard to ease  
 down the road by your side is where I'm meant to be  
 yet now that path is cloudy and so hard to see  
 how many more days and how many more hours  
 must I spend in mourning? how many more flowers  
 laid atop your casket, so pale in the light  
 I look at you and all I see is another endless night.

## There Were No Flowers at Your Funeral

TIMOTHY SCHULTZ

There were no flowers  
 at your funeral,  
 for you were never fond  
 of picking stems  
 or plucking petals—  
 but rather  
 watching them grow:  
 beautiful, bright,  
 and yellow.

When the men  
 came with you  
 in the casket,  
 I had them bury you  
 in the field,  
 beside the churchyard,  
 so you could watch the flowers grow:  
 beautiful, bright,  
 and yellow.

## The Way to Insanity

DESMOND KING

I walk into this blank empty frame.  
 There is nothing, only white.  
 Everything: the floor, the walls the ceiling, same.

I feel nothing in this place, everything quite tame.  
 I can't tell the time, or the day. There is not even a night.  
 I walk into this blank empty frame.

Voices of the past, people I cannot name.  
 I look around rapidly, knowing that in spite  
 Everything: the floor, the walls, the ceiling, same.

I cover my ears to stop the voices. I know how to play their game.  
 If I don't listen long enough they will disappear into the night  
 I walk into this blank empty frame.

The voices scream now! They name to know my claim!  
 I look around frantically; nothing is right!  
 Everything: the floor, the walls, the ceiling, same!

I scream for help but nothing do I obtain.  
 I fall, the voices devour my light.  
 I walk into this blank empty frame.

Everything: the floor, the walls, the ceiling, same.

## So Now I'll Never Explode

DANIELLE BROWN

We're walking down this long road.  
 The winds of frost are approaching.  
 They whip against my face,  
 slapping the black and blue fade from this type of daze I've been in since forever.  
 My face is cold and the sublimating chill that I once yearned for,  
 has vanished.  
 There's not much to see.  
 We are prisoned from the imaginations breaking loose in our heads.  
 The block of nothing does save us from the false mirages of skies and trees.  
 The things we want to grab,  
 never come close enough for fingers reach.  
 So I sit and wait for the power to extend within the feelings burning inside all our hearts, minds, and fingertips.  
 The warmness from a sudden truth seeps into my pores and releases through my skin,  
 onto you, so maybe the bravery and courage pay off.  
 Until then we will walk with bareness in our eyes.  
 And I'll walk next to the mirage of you,  
 until I can gain reality to follow your footsteps and you follow mine.

## Sudden End

MARIKA PACIOREK

Gasp in air as if coming up from water  
 repeated reoccurring recollection  
 crowded room, I can not bear  
 like I see a billion mirrors with your face  
 lingering laughter, one last seat

Do you even care?  
 question marks clutter in my head  
 nine neglected matterless months?  
 must of moved on, out of mind

Keeps replaying like never ending movie trailer  
 yet a buzz is never heard  
 once called best, now no chattering  
 sensed it coming, early suffering  
 did, tried, to discuss

Lonely lost lifeless  
 no battle but unseen weakened wounds  
 the powers been in your hands

All would spill out  
 if you'd come try to reunite.



Brave, Jennifer Peters

## Morphea

SARAH ROSENGARTEN

There's a hole in my head.  
 Well, okay, there are eight  
 Most folk have but seven —  
 Or none at all, depending on your perspective  
 But mine is special  
 Or my death impending —  
 Depending on your perspective.



*A Feeling of Relief, Jesse Knirsch*

## The Sky Was Mourning

MAURICE MILES

The sky was mourning the death of the sun.  
The trees embraced the silence of the Brown Spotted Sparrows.  
The road loathed because of the absence of movement.  
The town struggled for sign of life to appear.  
The old lake shriveled into the surrounding weeds.  
In the distance, a flame grew.  
Moments later, the town was infected with burning blood.  
However,  
As I left the saloon for the last time, tears escaped these empty sights.  
I doused the aimless inferno with these tears of despair.  
They screamed for forgiveness. Begged. Prayed.  
The biblical burning entity became infatuated with my flesh.  
Kissing every inch, leaving only lifeless ash behind.

## Mist

MAURICE MILES

It was a light drizzle. The clouds drifted amongst each other, peacefully and ever so gentle.. Her eyes wide and loving.. Her hair mimicked the dancing of the wind. Her smile was Helios pulling the sun across the sky. Her lips...toxic addiction. Her hips... professional seduction. Her waist slim and fulfilling. So slim.. she will slip out of your grip. And fall... Farther and farther...drifting there, ever so gentle and ever so out of your reach.



*Fowl Framework*, Amy Henkel

## Disgust

MARIKA PACIOREK

Green grass grows gigantic  
and free

Where is pure nature?  
What is real anymore?

Flocks flutter chirping, nesting  
wherever they please

Loose and free  
yet not anymore

Ducks splash paddling in  
wide, knee deep lakes

Now limited and  
constricted

Insects scamper from  
enormous rubber spiky soles

Sadist, brutal act  
perfectly placed

Gray dirty stone  
aligned making a path

Random selecting  
what should live

Place a tree over here  
another over there

Make it look pretty  
for comfort and pleasure

## Death by One Thousand Moments

SARAH BRESNAHAN

Your glistening skin  
shrouds me.  
I am momentarily  
Blinded;  
bits of sunlight  
Streaming  
through the shades.  
You burn  
your gaze into  
My face,  
chest,  
shoulders.  
La petite mort.

My body  
is a funeral pyre,  
Your mouth  
is gasoline.  
Our touch,  
Diamond matchsticks.

La petite mort.

I am glass  
sheltering the  
belching magma  
underneath.  
It goes unnoticed until  
eruption,  
shards of me  
fly everywhere.

La petite mort.

## Missing Pigeon

MARIKA PACIOREK

Enslaved pigeon to a pelican  
you grubby, cruel pelican  
with your fat gular pouch hanging low  
your weird crooked beak  
feathers damaged, dirty and brown  
so don't mistake yourself for an pure angelic swan

That pigeon, my sibling  
sits in your shadowy beak  
demolished gray wings unable to fly free  
a hole in the sky to where he belongs  
as we fly together as a flock

Infatuated and delusional  
the love between you two is unrequited  
stop toying with his mind and other pigeons  
if only I could I'd grab him and flap my wings quickly  
crackle, crack, I'd break your beak  
tear out those filthy feathers

I'd make you go hungry so you could die  
but right now I have to tighten my beak  
and sit and see  
how you entertain yourself  
twiddling with my brothers mind

But if I ever did anything, he would pluck out my gray feathers  
and shredded, separated they would blow through the wind.



*Which Wolf Do You Feed, Jennifer Peters*

## Fragments

DANIELLE BROWN

Once you stop and see what becomes of the beyond,  
 you appreciate the things that never got a chance to have been.  
 Just thinking about it makes me all cold inside,  
 I can barely write these words breaking loose in my head.  
 And everything in the distance is so beautiful, just as I thought it would be.

## Alicante

ALICIA GONZALEZ

Babies bubbling laughter, mothers sweet cooing lullaby.  
 The child bundled safely within her un-guarded arms.  
 Enthralled, beguiled, bewitched and absolutely fixated  
 by a display that comes from ardors own flesh.

While above slithered the danger that is the Alicante.  
 Smoothed cool spotted body making a Ka-trak Ka-trak sound.  
 Wide open and toothless but hinged mouth.  
 As it moved across the last of the red clay tiled crown.

Scheming, treacherous and duplicitous it slid its way down.  
 Pulsing with attentive yearning,  
 As it breathed in the scent of her absolute task guised as love.  
 Waiting for the moment that her breast would be unbound.

Bow shaped lips filled pink with life, expectant need filled the child's eyes.  
 Breast finally unbound, miniature plump hand curved over wintry heart.  
 The snake slid down standing straight to meet her eyes.  
 Inserted its intrinsic beauty into her yearned life.

Stunning. It's green and pointed eyes.  
 Assault on women and on life as it hissed and shivered side to side.  
 The Alicante moved closer to the mother who never shielded the baby's eyes.  
 As it attached to her breast and took life.

It feeds its thirst, anxiety and satisfies her fears.  
 But remains fully attached reveling in its meal.  
 Pain that arched into tears and swirled into churned waters.  
 An unknowing smile from the mother.

The glutton has the nerve to pacify the child,  
 By placing it's rattled tail into its tiny succulent mouth.  
 As breasts waste and child dies.  
 Father never catching sight of the beast with green eyes.

## False Teeth

ASHLEY PALMER

happiness can be measured with a smile  
 sparkling white like pure first fallen snow  
 but enamel fades for some after while  
 exposing veneer's mask of what you won't show  
 facial lines etched in, downward sloped and thick  
 I arrive at the top and eyes don't lie  
 the vertigo alone makes me feel sick  
 I ride a tear down as you start to cry  
 "The point is," you say as we sit for tea,  
 corners curled, lips stretched; a pearly facade  
 "a smile doesn't always reflect the real me."  
 But you offered me one anyway, how odd  
 the base is, I thought, as I watched you strain  
 you shine so brightly, but live so mundane

## Fix

DESMOND KING

I dance with death each time I inhale.  
One, two, three, four, five. Minutes later I lose concentration.  
One day blurs into the next. I expect it, just like you would expect the mail.  
My fingers begin to tap, my body to shake. This is from an unquenchable sensation.

One, two, three, four, five. Minutes later I lose concentration.  
My lungs on fire, turning into ash; accumulating tar.  
My fingers begin to tap, my body to shake. This is from an unquenchable sensation.  
My eyes start to dance across the wall of confusion and haze.

My lungs on fire, turning into ash; accumulating tar.  
Ahh, that's it; the sweet sensation is back my eyes gloss over.  
My eyes start to dance across the wall of confusion and haze.  
Where is he? Death, where are you? You promised you'd come, if I wasn't sober.

One, two, three, four, five. Minutes later I lose concentration.  
One day blurs into the next. I expect it, just like you would expect the mail.  
My fingers begin to tap, my body to shake. This is from an unquenchable sensation.  
I dance with death each time I inhale.

## Paranoia

EAN SMITH

I lay in bed, eyes open wide, my mind it starts to race  
These thoughts I have, recurring foes, follow me to every place  
Everywhere, I feel the stare, trails me like a dog  
Constantly, it's watching me, surrounds me like a fog  
Invisible eyes, to my surprise, I realize, these thoughts are lies  
But in my head, those thoughts are read, as a warning that I will soon be dead  
Shadows moving, whispers whispering  
Was that a thud? Is something crispering?  
A step, a foot step, I know it was there  
I dare not move, I can feel its stare  
Heart racing, skin sweating, mind pacing, forgetting  
That I'm alone, no one is home, it takes just one who is not known  
I can't control what happens next  
This paranoia leaves my body hexed  
I rise and charge, inside I scream  
I know the truth, but I'm in a dream  
My mind will ruin me, letting fear consume me  
I try to resume me, but these thoughts have doomed me  
Anticipating who is waiting, I search for what's not there  
Illustrating how frustrating this sickness is to bear  
Back in bed, I fill with shame  
All for nothing and I'm to blame  
Obsessive thought I try to tame  
Eyes wide open, another foot step, the same.



Performance, Faith Mellenthin



What You Don't See, Jennifer Peters

## Nobody Would Believe

DESMOND KING

Nobody would believe that I am a Super Hero  
 That I fly high in the sky  
 Watching the city lights blur as I zip by  
 I hear the voices of those in need  
 And I hear the voices filled with greed  
 "Help, Help," a cry is what I hear  
 So I scream out, "Never fear, I am here!"  
 The weak have been oppressed and the strong have won  
 But not for long because "Up, Up and awaaay," here I come!  
 The bad guys dressed in formal suits  
 The victims standing there saying, "Please don't shoot!"  
 I swoop in at the last second and the bullets stops  
 The villains quake in their boots because they pray to god I'm a cop  
 They're out like a light with two swings, a punch and a kick  
 Looking at them makes me sick  
 I bend over to lend a helping hand  
 "You are no longer victim, because hero I am!"

## Vanguard (of Femininity)

JOSHUA NIXON

I thought we met before. I know we did,  
 but this new exterior

slowly moving hands crafted from grace working with  
 an elegantly erect torso

makes drinking Diet Pepsi ethereal(royal).

Somehow this side of you didn't poke thru during  
 Our last couple business meetings.

How did this mountain of femininity so easily hide beneath a quit waterline?

That enthralling aura seeped into my own.  
 Condensing on my skin and evaporating as gaseous pheromones surround my body.

I feel less smooth or witty while the  
 delightful new aura weighs down my  
 thinking speed and bloats my self-judgment.



Hermit, Jesse Knirsch

## Naked Notebooks

SARAH ROSENGARTEN

what a fucking tease  
all bare and blank and  
asking for it  
demanding to be despoiled:  
a virgin into a volcano  
white linens aching  
for one spilled glass of wine  
needing to be inked —  
to be stained

damn this white page  
it was asking for it again.

## The Storm Cometh

BRANDON SCHADEN

Into the sparkling blades of grass  
I dip my foot into millennial tide —  
tides of green, brushed by the hands of warm breeze.

The coming storm in the distance,  
sympathetic to my soul,  
speaketh.

To its prayer I listen.

I am unable to respond,  
but in my heart realize the beauty

of the coming storm.

## Before We Parted

TIMOTHY SCHULTZ

The predators who prowl these streets rule with animal might  
Monsters of a manner who no man could wish to meet  
Even jungles can't escape the sultry city nights.

Neon lights tangle above, a canopy nuclear-bright  
Chatter of monkeys at every turn, a drum in every beat  
The predators who prowl these streets rule with lustful might.

This hungry city's hunting now — so choose from fight or flight  
The billboards above all combine to produce this brilliant heat  
Even jungles can't escape the wicked city nights.

Snarling jaguar teeth glint sharp and snowy white  
(From the hood of a car creeping slowly up the street)  
The predators who prowl these streets rule with monstrous might.

Mirrored skyscrapers tower to ever-dizzying heights  
Shadows half a step behind, stealthy on their feet  
Even jungles can't escape the steamy city nights.

There's nowhere truly safe enough to hide away tonight  
No corner of this wild new world the neon lights won't seek  
The predators who prowl these streets rule with animal might  
Even jungles can't escape the sultry city nights.

## ADA

HANNAH CARMACK

We fall through cracks,  
not being considered when  
the world decides what's next.  
No one ever asks about our  
chronic needs.  
Not every disability requires a ramp.  
Not every disability requires you to bow your head and say  
I'm so sorry.  
Reprimanded for existence  
and punished for our bodies  
we must navigate a world  
that was built with only God in mind.

## Welcome to Bangkok

TIMOTHY SCHULTZ

She stood  
           in a crowd  
 of friendly faces.  
  
 for all the wrong  
                     Friendly—  
                     reasons.

## Fragment

JOSHUA NIXON

The faces of my ex-s each crack. Fragmented sections become a cloud that follows me.  
 Pieces of Amy's cheek bones, the sympathetic curvature of Kelly's eyebrows and/or Kelsey's full-mouthed smile.  
 Pieces come from the cloud to nuzzle their jigsaw edges onto faces of strangers in crowds on my way class, at parties, anywhere I go.  
 The pieces attach to any face with similar features, at this point, I'm not sure if my mind purposely warps unfamiliar faces  
 Well regardless of the cause, I am continually reminded of these cloud-borne women.  
 Surrogate Amy is walking on the sidewalk on the far side of the commons  
 Doppelganger Kelly is sitting on the couch across the crowded room

I find myself reflectively staring at these familiarly featured female just to feel the layered warmth of reminiscence.

*Familiar, Pt. II, Amy Fleming*



## Sorrow and Sunshine

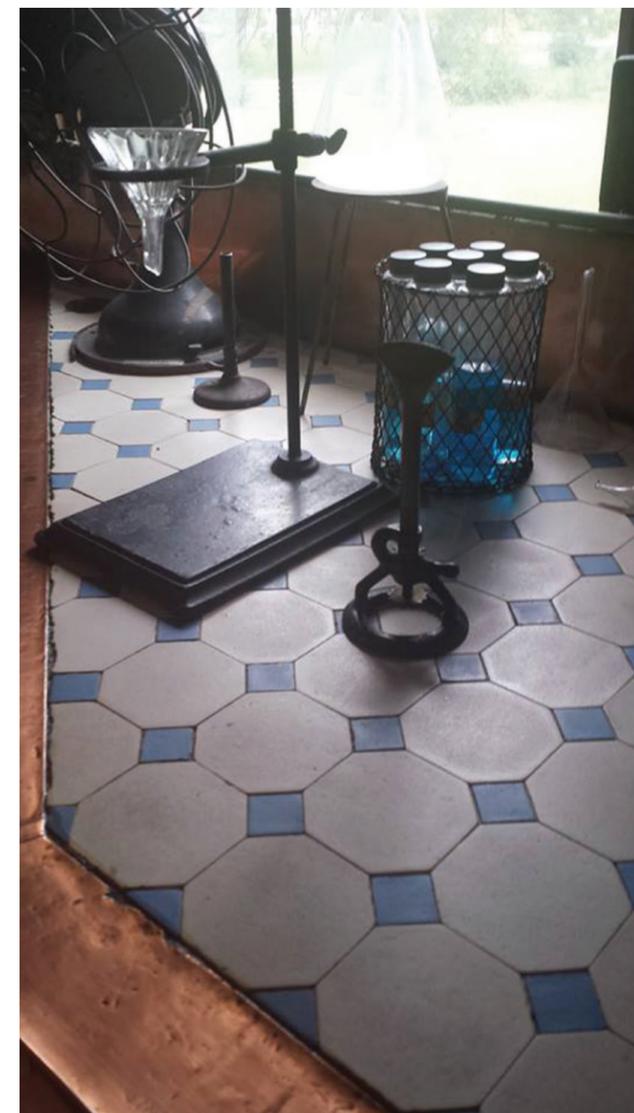
BRANDON SCHADEN

Sorrow and sunshine join together  
 amidst the lamentation of the fading moon  
 sunrise lifts his head to the sky  
 and moon descends into her slumber.

I fix my eyes upon the hills, the rugged mountains  
 who have scattered themselves among the path  
 as towering burdened prison walls  
 casting their dark shadows across the land,

The darkest valley  
 valley of shadows,  
 Where brothers,  
 death and dying crouch.

The only rod that offers any comfort  
 are the living rays of the distant sun,  
 beckoning me upward with his loving arms.



*Test Tube, Amanda Roberts*

## I Can Be With Her for Countless Days

MAURICE MILES

I can be with her for countless days..  
 I can look at her for endless hours..  
 Her flowing brown hair, soft eyes, and pink lips..  
 I want to hold her until our hearts beat a similar tune. To feel her breast push  
 against my chest and her head resting. I can imagine embracing all of her sweet  
 and warm scents. I would then grab your neck ever so gently and kiss you deeply.  
 If I could, I'd kiss the pain and heartache away.  
 If I could, I'd hold you until the sorrow no longer has you.  
 If I could, I'd give you a love so majestic and fulfilling.  
 If I could, I'd giving you a loving leaving you breathless.  
 If I could, I'd awake every morning to see you rise like the sun in my sky.  
 My sun that doesn't burn. Only lights the way.  
 If I could....If only



## Fool's Cafe

BRANDON SCHADEN

One drinks his coffee black.  
Pleasing, its heavy-thick aroma  
but bitter-sweet to the taste  
enlivens and awakens,  
quickenning the hearts pace.

Indigestion takes place,  
surfacing up not long after  
tasting dregs of dark waters,  
receiving the black abyss,  
then craving another.

More caffeine—beautiful  
black poison poured with gruesome haste  
one knows he should avoid.  
But the ceramic handle fits the hand so perfectly.  
Another like it cannot be found.

## Roses

SARAH ROSENGARTEN

No more roses here do grow  
Only the headstones in each neat row  
Barren trees that reach and groan  
From their rattling branches, the crow has flown  
With raucous caw and harsh rebuke  
Angels carved quiet, marble and nude  
Watching over the waiting land  
Holding their breath for the outstretched hand.

The grass is sere and brown and dead  
Some bird shat on an angel's white head  
Leftover wreaths from Yuletide still sit  
Limp against gravestones, no longer fit  
To represent love and remembrance for  
The dead in the ground who've passed through the door  
To the gardens where the clear streams flow—  
But here in the graveyard, no roses grow.

## Like Patience on a Monument

SARAH BRESNAHAN

Like a veiled woman  
forever alone  
atop a gravestone  
waiting for Heaven  
but will never see it

Like a tree  
rooted atop a hill  
tendrils snaking through dirt  
peering out from the cliff  
reaching for the water  
knowing its salty content  
contains only death

Like a lover  
in the early hours  
cocooned in warmth  
and dirty bed sheets  
staring at the ceiling  
and glancing over  
waiting for the other to wake.

## A Cheating Star

TRISTAN RODRIGUEZ

Don't ever cheat on someone.  
You might think it's fun,  
But it will hurt them more than you can imagine.  
Cheating is a sin. You're playing a game you won't win.  
The look in their eyes when you tell them,  
The fade in their smile when you tell them,  
The breaking of trust when you tell them, is more damage than any vodka bottle can fix.  
There is no special mix of drinks that will stop the hurt.  
They'll think the only fix is to do like Kurt Cobain.  
They'll stop the pain with cuts on their body  
Just because you wanted to fuck some hottie.  
Your shoddy actions messed them up.  
In short, you suck.  
But, look at the upside...  
At least you got laid.  
Who cares if you made them cry?  
Who cares that all they do now is depressingly sigh?  
Who cares if you made them think that everyone lies?  
At least you had a good time.  
At least you haven't turned sour like a lime.  
At least your heart can still shine like a star while mine  
Falls to earth. My wish would be to not miss you so much.



*Up In Smoke, Marina Alcantara*

## Untitled

MAURICE MILES

It was pure bliss. The rain accompanied us as we held each other in with an warm embrace. She fit in my arms like the last puzzle piece. She turned and began to talk. Instead of her words, I was lost in her eyes. It was as though I was seeing her world. When she smiled, it was so infectious and vibrant. I smiled too. Her hair had a mind if it's own. Twisting and curling into perfection. And her lips... moving so swiftly and seductively. Begging to be caressed. I heard them call. I placed my hand on the side of her face, under her ear. Three fingers lay in the abundance of curls, while two caress her face. She was still talking. And we made eye contact. I said her eyes remind me of a sunset. Calm. Peaceful. Gorgeous. I wanted to plunge deep into the sunset. To feel the warming rays of it must be euphoric. I said she was beautiful. And she smiled and stopped talking. I felt her embrace around my arm tighten. I felt the rain slowly remind us they it's still with us. Again, I going myself I her eyes, then eventually her lips. We kissed. Our lips were infatuated with each other. My hands conformed to the curves of her body. They demanded more. Her body screamed to be touched. They continued their adventure, until they found it. It was warm and soft as memory foam. They did not hesitate and began their assault. Their strategy was to search, rub and repeat. She immediately pulled back from our embrace to let out a moan. She wants more. I want more. I want her. But does she want me or just my embrace?

## Letter to Us All

BRANDON SCHADEN

You're probably familiar with me,

I see you *every* morning.

I am often tired  
hence my troubled expression.

Not quite amusing  
but often boring.

I am easily bothered,  
sometimes prejudice,

and often selfish.

I am also fragile  
carefully crafted with emotion.

Long for love,  
to be understood.

I know what it means to embrace  
and to hate.

I know well the blinding bright days,  
spiraling dark.

Most of all  
I know how  
to breathe.

I too, came from my mother's  
womb.

## The Tangerine Miscreant

SARAH BRESNAHAN

A hush fell over the  
holied gluttons  
as the presenter rose  
and bowed in feral display  
raised his arms  
and crashed them down again  
signaling the choir  
whose dismal gaze  
barely pricked with  
the Pavlovian reaction  
their mouths salivating  
prepped and ready  
their chapped and bloodied lips  
ready to state the words  
that would bring the congregation  
to its decay  
“Let's Make  
America  
Great Again!”

*Shining Holiday Spirit, Katarzyna Wozniak*

## Grandpa

REBECCA KURTH

My feet don't reach the floor.  
The wood of the chair  
feels cool against my legs.  
I swing them together,  
separately,  
then in sync once more.  
I'm wearing white socks,  
frilly with lace,  
not my favorite.  
They look like white clouds  
as I seem them appear,  
disappear,  
then reappear  
over the tops of my knees.  
I'm leaning against the backing  
as Grandpa's cooking.  
He's singing a song  
underneath his breath.  
I don't know what he's saying,  
it's in another language.  
But I know it's happy,  
because when he turns  
to ask me how I like my eggs,  
he smiles.  
And I smile too.

## Box

JENNIFER MCQUE

Where did I grow up?  
I grew up in a box.  
Insufficiently sized,  
Almost irregular,  
Rectangular,  
But mostly...Not,  
Because we all grow up in boxes.

Where did I grow up?  
I grew up in a box.  
Rusted stairway entrance,  
Almost brown,  
Obnoxious,  
Inconvenient,  
But mostly...Not,  
Because we all grow up in boxes.

Asking where did I grow up?  
Well, I grew up in a box.  
Smudged close to next door's box,  
Almost on top of it,  
Touched with grass,  
A yard they called it,  
Depriving,  
But mostly...Not,  
For we all grow up in boxes.

Say again, where did I grow up?  
For I grew up in a box.  
Streets were entertainment,  
Almost safe,  
Irresistible,  
Dank,  
But mostly...Not,  
Because we all grow up in boxes.

Well, where did I grow up?  
Why, I grew up in a box.  
Cramped and crazy packed,  
Almost phobic,  
But mostly...Not,  
Because we all grow up in boxes.

So where did I grow up?  
I grew up in a trailer.  
Squished and squeezed,  
Almost sad,  
But entirely...NOT,  
For we all grow up in boxes.

## Traitor Narrator

BEN WALTER

I feel unintelligent  
relevant  
to my potential spelled self-evident  
in some sentences sounding good together  
when they're strung out hanging in a row  
and I didn't want to be the one to tell you  
but I thought that you should know

You can't believe  
all that you read  
as tried untrue  
by the evening news  
And I can clue you in  
to the inside story  
but don't you dare  
take my word for it

See the media  
tries to mediate  
what's happening  
and what they want you to think  
Not quite brainwashing  
but still dirty pool  
and it's insulting  
to be played a fool

I'm a traitor narrator  
and unreliable witness  
I'm not guilty but I will be  
and I ask your forgiveness  
This reporter  
misinformer  
would like to ask you a question,  
“Do you believe in where I'm going do you need some direction?  
I can't promise I'll be honest but I've got your attention  
in an expansion of my passion—passing passive aggression  
follow the sound of my voice and its subtle suggestion”

## Ungrounded Temptations

JOSHUA NIXON

If we were toddlers, we would start our own club.  
We would play the best games cause we would make them all.  
Looks of judgment would float near us, but our happiness with one another would cover us  
each with a buffer against negativity.

At that age, I would not feel the need to change the vibrations we share to a  
more romantic melody. Yet still, I actively imagine a sexual annex to our relationship.  
A cuddle session and more emotional intimacy and just  
a lil more  
attention  
from you.

I tell myself this alternative would not be healthy

And

that I should enjoy what we already have.  
This may be a ploy to accept the relationship to diffuse cognitive dissonance.

I regularly give into my urges for sexual satisfaction  
even though many of them are hollow and end with faint regret.  
From masturbating in boredom to pursuing short erotic flings, I strive for sexual activity  
even when  
I don't want to.

Having to mix  
“Trying to sexualize my relationships for no grounded reason so I can have ambivalent sex”  
with  
“the relationship we have”  
is murky.

My standard attempts to sexualize are only reinforced by ideas of shifting into a productive  
romantic relationship, but I think it's just me wanting just for the concept of having it.

My attempt to sexualize takes away from my ability to enjoy you. Such a well-shaped  
complement to me and I'm wandering in thoughts for the sake of wandering.



Entangle, Jesse Knirsch

## Facts

HANNAH CARMACK

I am tired of this draining tithe,  
that feeds off misguided self-hatred.  
Darling, I'm sorry, this will take time.

How much longer must we comply,  
pretending that our friendliness is not outdated?  
I am tired of this draining tithe.

I say, "Like the flu?" You say, "That's over simplified."  
Never before has a death sentence made me so liberated.  
Darling, I'm sorry. This will take time.

Suddenly, more pain, amplified.  
Some transfusions are contaminated.  
I am tired of this draining tithe.

I want to go back, to be rebaptized,  
but instead, we must declare the past sacred.  
Darling, I'm sorry. This will take time.

Freedom. Chastised.  
My existence has been castrated, regulated.  
I am tired of this draining tithe.  
Darling, I'm sorry, this will take time.

## Twas the Night of Halloween

KATHRYN MENEUE

Twas the night of Halloween, and all through the sky  
Flew the ghouls and the demons, searching from up high.  
They searched through the streets looking for the right house,  
To claim their next victim to be Hell's new spouse.

The end of the street had a house black as coal,  
Where the demons traveled to grab their next soul.  
They flew in through the windows and under the doors,  
To lead their victim down to Hell under the floors.

As they grabbed a young woman asleep in her bed,  
She awoke with a fright and fought against the dead.  
But she was no match for the creatures of death,  
So she gave up the fight and took her last breath.

They killed the woman, but kept her soul alive  
To bring her to Hell, til her new husband arrived.  
They laid her down next to the pool of dead souls,  
Where she lay in wait, contemplating her new roles.

And then with a flash of the raging fires of Hell,  
The sly devil appeared to claim his new belle.  
With a voice like daggers piercing through the heart,  
He told the young woman his plans for her new start:  
"Now honey, now sweetie,  
Now here's how this will go,  
You will stay here with me  
For as long as you know.  
You will never escape.  
You'll never even try.  
If you do, consequences  
Will be quite high!"

With this, the devil picked up his newly claimed bride,  
And took her away with a victorious stride.  
Though she screamed and she wept, she begged and she plead,  
The devil would never release her to be freed.

The devil's wife waited for another year,  
Before enacting her plan to disappear.  
She found that she could escape on Halloween night,  
In order to escape from the devil's eye sight.

However, there were some terms to her escape plan.  
She had to find a replacement before she ran.  
She chose to take the next soul from her old home,  
And she traveled to get there through the catacomb.

She slipped through the barriers, fighting off the flames,  
And found her old house, ready to end all the games.  
She crept down the hall and found her old bedroom,  
Where lay a child that could replace her from her doom.  
She crawled under the bed of the child so small,  
And pushed against the bed, causing the girl to fall.  
When the little girl rose up from the wood floor boards,  
She was bound and sent to Satan's House of Lords.

With her replacement set and her new freedom gained,  
The devil could no longer leave her soul constrained.  
Her soul was now free and could rise up to Heaven,  
Without worry that Satan would come beckon.

However, the story does not end right here.  
In fact, it just started a cycle each year,  
Where each victim would return to the old house,  
And claim the next victim to be Hell's next spouse.

Once each year, a little girl will fall out of bed,  
And come to realize that she is now dead.  
So as a warning, I share these words of advice:  
"Hold the covers tight, or pay the ultimate price."



Candy Queen, Faith Mellenthin

## Bobby Pins

JENNIFER MCQUE

I think of where my bobby pins have been.  
 I think of them and the sinks they've sat in.  
 I think of the houses and the rooftops  
 And the travel bags and the drink cups  
 In cars where they've swayed with loose change  
 And how much they must long for a reason.  
 I think of where my bobby pins have been.  
 I feel sorry for the sinks they've fallen in.  
 I wish they hadn't seen as many houses  
 Or rooftops or travel bags or drink cups  
 And I wish for change.  
 I wish they had a home to live in.  
 I think of where my bobby pins have been.  
 I think of all the outfits which I have wished  
 They could compliment.

I think of all the significance  
 In their small existence  
 And I feel sorry for the sinks they've missed  
 In the houses under certain rooftops,  
 Sorry for them not seeing certain drink cups  
 Swishing within close range of only chewing gum.  
 If only they had that to share space from.  
 I think of where my bobby pins have been.  
 I'm going to change the sinks they've known of.  
 There won't be many more houses or rooftops  
 Or travel bags or drink cups.  
 It's not a change they are supposed to be makin'.  
 They are just tiny witnesses to all my reasons.  
 I only need to be thinkin'  
 Where my bobby pins are goin'.

## Calming Shapes

NOAH KOOB

Form a circle with  
 your thumb and middle  
 ironically,  
 then solemnly,  
 without remembering  
 the Eastern reason  
 other than its supposed  
 gestural peace,  
 like some crap  
 about balancing out the body.  
 It's the same as coffee,  
 served up hot in the belly,  
 with or without caffeine,  
 the copious sugar spoons,  
 and overly pumpkinned creamer  
 to dull a frantic vein  
 for a moment's worth of warmth  
 Flick a lighter to singe  
 your thumb and middle  
 a few times before  
 moving on to cigs  
 and stoically smoke  
 grey power clouds  
 electrically into the lungs  
 It's the same as  
 bible passages  
 carefully plucked ripe  
 from an old best seller  
 and interpreted to fit  
 any kind of degradation.  
 Form a circle with your body  
 and find a good corner  
 to chew your thumb and middle  
 It's the same as surviving

## This Band Could Be Your Life

FIONA MYERS

we are the devoted ones,  
 refreshing the browser with wide-eyed fervor  
 at some ungodly hour of the morning,  
 poised to snap and snatch the tickets out of unworthy hands.  
 hail stubhub, full of grace.  
 give us this day  
 something to look forward to,  
 one shining golden square  
 in the monotonous grid of the semester.  
 forgive us that time we said we hated that song  
 and deliver us unto the venue on time,  
 amen.

sometimes i think the best part is the anticipation,  
 the champagne fizz of fantasy and nerve.  
 "but what if i meet him?  
 and how should i do my hair?  
 how long do you usually wait outside, afterwards,  
 before the band shows up?  
 will they play that song,  
 the one that tears my heart to ribbons?  
 should i wear these shoes,  
 or will they give me blisters if i dance?  
 are cut-up feet worth it, to look so pretty?  
 and when he sings,  
 will he look into my eyes?"

"so you just like them because he's cute," they say.  
 but oh, gatekeeper, you're not a real fan  
 until you've stood in a sea of bodies  
 and held someone you don't even know in your arms,  
 shuddering and weeping together  
 because the music is reaching in with needle and thread  
 to sew up those old wounds that ache in the night;  
 until you believe, until you truly believe,  
 that these nights are magic,  
 that nothing else can save you but this;  
 until you look at all your unknown sisters singing along  
 and think of the words of your erstwhile idol,  
 "all girls to the front! all girls to the front!  
 all boys be cool, for once in your lives."

we limp home,  
 full of love,  
 clutching confetti relics for our shrines.

## Empty Space

JOSHUA NIXON

Do you know how much empty space we are!  
Atoms on Atoms on Atoms on Atoms on Atoms on Atoms  
Stack to make us look like we're solid.

I want to see people for what they are and not get boggle down  
and mistaken by using this human vision that was forced on me.

Intra  
I look at a body and I see the different parts in an exploded view.

The body oscillates and I see each fragment emitting small waves to a network of glowing pipelines.  
Secondary lines are in each limb which feed into a mainline down the center of the body.  
The fragmented pieces shake to a crunch and break into specks.

Now I'm looking at a more accurate form of a body: specks and space.

The specks propagate vibrating waves and a living, animating force rushes through the pipes.

Inter  
The pipelines melodically wail out a frequency. The main pipeline in each individual is like a central antenna booming a frequency out into the empty space around it. Objects and other beings react to this frequency by adjusting their own, and in turn, the original frequency adjusts.

The frequency is a mix of the being's natural vibration and the current emotional vibration.  
Some frequencies are easy to pass onto another—like anger.

But some beings have strong affinities toward certain frequencies, which makes affecting their environment so much easier. The dog at home may have a natural affinity for joy, which very easily disrupts the stressed frequency you bring home to it.

See the individual frequencies and their interactions with others is everything.  
That is it.  
That is all there is.

The breath and the waves between the spaces is the real life to see. Don't get tripped up with solidity.

## Stay Out of Treble

SARAH ROSENGARTEN

you tune her, she mumbles;  
from the amp — a bit of fizz, and  
feedback as you show the strings  
what a loving caress is  
I know why you've picked her up  
I know why you've plugged her in  
there's things inside you that can't get out  
that you can also no longer hold in

so let it go, and let it drown  
let all the words flow free  
balance and peace, gentle release  
find something worth singing to me

learn me a love song; put your heart into words  
play me a little piece until all the lines are blurred  
show me a scale that transcends all the noise  
bring me through the burning of the fire that destroys  
learn me a love song — show me all the hidden things  
share with me, if you would, the song that your heart sings

find me a riff or a chord or a line  
run me a run that will make me feel fine  
shred that axe, wild man all a-fire  
play with all the passion of our combined desire  
write me out a wish and then throw it down a well  
tell me you'll follow me through the depths of hell  
send me a sonata, send it from afar  
send me everything you've got, no matter where you are

learn me a love song, an ode to pretty eyes  
finger me a fret or two and help me realize  
play me a piano or a ukelele's strings  
tell me I'm your fallen angel; tell me all those silly things  
learn me a love song that shows what you would hide  
tell me all the crazy things you bury deep inside

is this too much to ask? do I want to know too much?  
is it strange to want to know your mind, your heart, your soul, and  
such?  
is this more than I should hope for; should I just back down?  
or are you all of my dreams come true – the one to wear the crown?

learn me a love song; put your heart into words  
play me a little piece until all the lines are blurred  
learn me a love song, an ode to pretty eyes  
finger me a fret or two and help me realize  
learn me a love song, show me all the hidden things  
share with me, if you would, the song that your heart sings  
learn me a love song that shows what you would hide  
tell me all the lonely things you bury deep inside

learn me a love song that's heartfelt, raw, and true

## Friends

BEN WALTER

Successful selfish shells of friends sit  
On your shoulders citing profits  
or in your retinas, carrying boxes  
one of which has your name on it  
You're listed, listlessly carrying on

I've seen the greatest minds of our generation  
high on a life lived in a basement  
or trapped in a cage of good behavior  
only to be caught in the crossfire  
bleeding out on the pavement

But they're spared the pain of existence  
You hear the sirens in the distance  
Taking solace in silence as the only witness  
and begging yourself for forgiveness

Successful selfish shells of friends sit  
on the shelves of your kitchen cabinets  
Saying it works, works just like magic  
they know your weakness now you must have it

Needing an answer, they say they have it  
A force of nature just formed a habit

## Disappeared

MARIKA PACIOREK

Up in the sky there you are  
always looked up to you, and  
you guided me as I grew

Northern star  
used to be close, once screamed warmth  
yet now brings frigidity as it fades  
on this ship losing my journey of life

Echoed all its advice though  
now drifting away like its  
frozen silent, full of somber  
holding on, but you're just too far

A blue bright light  
shredded by a blackhole  
buzzes away

## Puppy Love

SARAH ROSENGARTEN

Great and growling; vicious, feral, she —  
Waiting, clenched jaws taunting overhead  
This hunger, howling, lurking, hunting me  
Lonely as can be, but only when as dead.

From the corner of my eye, I glimpse again  
The drifting beast that comes to claim my life  
Though once, I was but careless — then  
This watchful wolf who has made me her wife.

Beneath her paw, a mouse but pinioned, held;  
With carious breath that tickles at my hair  
Trapped in teeth that seem to melt and meld  
Strangling out the sweetness of the air.

Through the stones and dirt that build my cairn  
I hear the laughing moon, who turns her face  
Can this solace be found in wolf-jaws, there?  
In finding, seeing, knowing — at last! — my place.

## Coffee Cat

SARAH ROSENGARTEN

My cat has four white paws  
Small and soft and clawless  
They sneak her past and back again  
As sweet little cat-feet ought.  
My cat has four white paws  
But one is stained perpetually brown  
She is a connoisseur of coffee  
That could shame the snobbiest of Starbucks' elite.  
Every morning she sneaks onto the table  
Inching ever closer to my cup, a furry little mooch  
Innocently looming, waiting in the most adorable way  
As she angles for her fix.

I did not know  
That a cat could be left- or right-pawed  
But it is always her left foot she dips into my cup  
To lick daintily clean as though using the finest crystal chalice  
Until her little white toes  
Are stained coffee-brown.

## Emeralds of Bone and Dust

TONY JACOB

They enter the great unknown  
 Their skills most needed be hone  
 Adventure awaits  
 For these awful primates  
 Lest they rather choose a gravestone

A treasure so precious to their eye  
 Shimmering like a butterfly  
 The legend so old  
 More value than gold  
 Its greatness many testify

It's a shame they are such good friends  
 They have bonds not easy to cleanse  
 Grievous sorrow they be  
 Or tendered malice, we'll see  
 I wonder if they'll make amends

In our time betrayal was a must  
 Never did our connection rust  
 One left us behind  
 But went out of his mind  
 Just for emeralds of bone and dust

## An NIU Winter from a Monocle Perspective

ASHLEY PALMER

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The lightest snowfall, fainter than it's been all day, doesn't affect the ground now littered with purple salt. Grey clouds loiter, refusing to let the sun through. If not for the absence of the absolute dark of night, one could easily argue that it wasn't day at all. Pine trees stand tall and boastful. The greenery

of their branches are still intact. But the majestic atrophy of the bare barks of seasonal trees are not impressed. Cold and sterile as the winter is, everything outside has found its place—undisturbed by human activity which occasionally whirls by like the wanted summer breeze.



10 Below, Jesse Knirsch

## EDITORS CHOICE

## Liskel

FAITH MELLENTHIN  
FICTION

It was an arm bone this time, all the times before have been smaller hand and foot bones. Liskel has been around for only a few months, but it sure let the human race know about its presence.

Sitting in the Emergency Room, I only had a second to tremble and be nervous. The arm patient was on his way in an ambulance, doctors all around me were waiting for him as well, like a calm before the hurricane. But a flood had already reached our shores, surgical supplies and bandages drifted in the violent waves and tears.

"We're coming up!"

"Ready to operate, don't lose this one!"

The doors have been wide open for the past week, letting the cold air live inside during these late hours. Visible to all in the E.R., red and yellow lightning came charging, blinking fast and lurching our anticipation.

"Move him!" Faster than the ambulance had rolled up, we pushed this man down the hall, gathered like a pack of wolves around his body.

"He's already sedated."

"Time of start?"

"Approximately 30 minutes ago."

"That's half the stage of a little one."

"There's only been the appearance of a heartbeat, no flexing yet."

"Maybe we can save his arm still."

I grabbed a scalpel and began the procedure. Only when I was halfway done with the incision was the patient fully hooked up to the monitor in the

operating room. The cut only pierced through the thick, swollen skin and revealed no bone.

Contracting his yellowed skin, dark red blood was calmly flooding out onto the table. Re-entering the wound, I let the blade slide further down, effortless as it already had a path to follow along the forearm. A doctor beside me propped open the gap and began draining the flow of blood, finally showing off the bone inside.

I could see it had already begun growing and was detached, broken at the wrist joint and the elbow joint. Using a smaller blade, I cut along the edge of the bone to detach it from any connective tissue that was holding the bone in its place. By slowly wiggling and slicing, the bone was popping out.

Two stub legs were apparent when the arm bone was halfway out of body. I held back my human curiosity to study any further at this moment. Just keep cutting.

"Almost out!" I shouted.

"Forty-five minutes past start."

I grabbed the end of the bone that was in the air and gently pulled while cutting the last of the tissue away. I held the bone openly in both my hands. Turning to store it in an observation box, the rest of my team quickly tried to fill the hole with a prosthetic bone of relatively the same size. The cuts I had made around the tissue were so close that the replacement could easily fit inside.

Before locking the bone away for further studies, I felt it flex.

Right there in both my hands, the bone was almost fully developed, flexing its four grown legs, beginning to arch its back, and to rolling its neck. Draw to the lizard-like appearance of this particular Liskel, I watched the mouth slowly begin to open up. It happened in a crease right where the bone had been attached to the elbow joint of the patient just fifty minutes ago.

"Doctor?"

"It flexed." Quietly and slowly I responded, not turning to look at the speaker. Carefully placing the bone in the observation container, it was carried away by a highly trained group of biologist. I was told that they were working in close ties with the government.

"Doctor!"

My amazement and curiosity was slowing my reactions and thoughts. It felt like a lifetime before I turned and responded.

"Doctor!"

"What's failing?" I asked, hearing the frantic beeping from nearly every machine the patient was hooked up to.

"He's lost too much blood."

"He's having a bad reaction to the sedatives."

"We need to close the wound and try to steady his breathing," I ordered.

"Doctor, he's not breathing at all."

"Close this," I gave the bloody job

to the person next to me just as the heartbeat flat lined.

Pushing down on the man's chest, all I could feel was his ribcage underneath my hands. It bent up and down with each force I gave, cracking slightly. Removing all obstacles from the mouth, I gave him more air than I had been breathing in myself. The team was still scrambling to read monitors and save his life.

I pressed down on his chest even more.

One, two, three. I could feel the bones bending over his heart and lungs. Just keep pushing.

But my efforts were not persuasive enough. There was a sudden, monotone stillness.

"Time of death, 1:07 AM, 10/30/2015."

I felt like a dead man myself, following my team out the door in a slow procession of defeat. Once in the lockers, and slide to the floor and hung my head. Everyone else took up other positions of exhaustion, and we were all covered in blood that was not just from this man.

"We tried." My friend sat on the bench in front of me, but I did not feel like responding to him, so I just nodded. Like dirty piles of laundry we all hung there in the locker room for what seemed like another lifetime. I had to break the silence.

"These Liskels are just going to keep getting bigger. This was only the first that we've seen."

"Other hospitals have contacted us, they've already dealt with arm bones." My friend in front of me responded.

"One in Asia just had a leg bone case." Said the woman who I had told to close the wound in the operating room.

"There may be an advantage to larger Liskels though," I contemplated. "They have a larger growth time, so if we perfect our procedure, we can definitely remove the Liskel before it tries to kill major organs, and we can probably save the limb"

"The smaller bones were tricky, they would develop so quick and immediately find its way to the

I gave him more air than I had been breathing in myself.

patient's heart or brain before we could see it crawling"

"How do you think this is spreading?" Asked the only other woman in the room. There was a long silence, nobody knew the answer.

There had been no breakthrough in research about that part. One theory was shared on the news about a scientist and historian who believed that it Liskel wasn't a disease at all, but an evolutionary phenomenon. He thought that humankind was dying out, and this was how the next generation of living species was producing, therefore it wasn't a disease that could be avoided. He used the old myth where Eve was created from Adam's rib bone, showing this happening in previous history, but humankind probably created the familiar story overtime because it was a less gruesome tale.

I stood up, pacing back and forth from the chaos of not knowing what

to do. My team didn't bother to look up because they knew it was just a habit of mine. Back and forth I walked, and then felt a sharp pain.

Instinctively, I grabbed at my chest. Lurching me to the ground, I couldn't speak.

"Ren?" My concerned friend panicked, being careful not to touch my and make the pain worse.

"Ren!" Now everyone was shouting as I laid down on my back wincing from the pain in my chest.

Lifted onto a stretcher, the pain doubled as I felt around my ribcage. Screaming, I was able to move a rib bone on my left side; it was no longer attached.

"Sedate him!" I was in the operating room now, after what seemed like the last lifetime I would know. They didn't waste their time though, a thin blade trickled down my sternum. It dug deep to my bone, and I felt the cut like a vibration throughout my ribcage. The wound was being drained, and I no longer had senses to express what pain was.

"It's already flinching!" And there was a slight moment of hesitation, where I could sense the doubt in the room.

With every ounce of strength I had left, my head tilted up and my eyes looked down. The rib bone flinched, stretched, and disappeared. The doctors had no idea where it was, but I felt it digging up my spine, towards my brain.

I wanted to think to about my fear, but then I remembered that scientists theory from what was just moments ago. I saved my last thought for all my friends, family, and humanity.

Just keep living.

## The Last Game

ZAC WENDLER  
FICTION

Table stakes again?" the thin man asked. He wore black, and the lines that time had etched into his face were harsh.

"Not this time, I think," the shorter man said. He wore white, a business suit so pristine that it almost hurt to look at. The thin man cocked an eyebrow.

"The last game, then?" he asked. The man in white considered for a moment, then nodded. Without another word, the two set up the chessboard which lie between them. It was concrete, and set into the table they shared, so grimy that even despite the bright midsummer light of a New York day, the city's grime had rendered both the white and black spaces a nigh-indistinguishable grey. Still, the two set their pieces, each drawing polished marble figures from a case of his own possession. The man in white played black, and the man in black played white. White king's knight to f3.

"Conservative," the man in white said.

"This is the game that matters," the man in black said. Black pawn to d5. Behind the white man, a couple walked past—two men, holding hands. The younger of the two was also shorter, Puerto Rican, and wore

fitted polo shirt. His jeans could've been sprayed on. The man in black blinked mildly. The Puerto Rican man led his partner, an older black man with a salt-and-pepper beard and a charcoal business suit, to the table next to the two playing chess. The two kissed, the young fellow sitting on a concrete table identical to theirs.

"Interesting company," the man in black said. White pawn to c4. The man in white looked over slowly, rheumy eyes thoughtful.

"Réti Opening," he said, slowly returning his gaze to the board. The man in black shrugged. Black pawn to e6. "It's surprising, in a way, to be

It's not that simple, Lucifer. It never is.

playing this game, finally"

"All the world, hanging on a game of chess," the thin man said, and there was a note of satisfaction in his voice, of savor. "All that ever was,

all that is, and all that ever might be, decided by the movements of clicking marble and alabaster. One of us rises, and the other done away with forever. An eternity surrendered and true omnipotence gained." Yes, real enjoyment now. Anticipation. Hunger. Black pawn to g3.

"Wait, what?" the black man broke away from his amorous partner. He looked at the two old men, one in white and one in black, but he didn't break his lover's embrace.

"Nothing you need to fret over," the man in white said. Black King's knight to f6. He waved a hand, half-distracted, and the black man started to turn back to the loving arms of his partner, but he hesitated.

"No... There was something you said..." he muttered, forehead creased in intense concentration, almost as if he'd just forgotten something truly important.

"We're playing Neo-Catalan today," the man in black said, and smiled. "It favors white, you know." White pawn to d4. The man in white shrugged.

"You two are playing for something important," the black man said, and broke away from his partner.

"David," the Puerto Rican man whined, but he followed his partner's



Familiar Pt. I, Amy Fleming

gaze.

"I said—" the man in white said, again raising his hand.

"Let them be. It won't matter if I win, and you can erase their memories if you do," the tall man interrupted, and smiled. He turned to the two. "I am playing this man for the fate of all the world." The Puerto Rican man laughed out loud, but the black man, David, remained stone-faced.

"You're the devil," he said, and

when he said it there was a moment of perfect quiet, the thunder of the city and the park stilling for just that one instant. The tall man smiled, but said nothing. Black pawn to a6. David turned a bit. "And you're God." "Not as you imagine," the man in white said, glancing up. "Though I prefer Yahweh. The old names are nice."

"David, they're having fun with you," the Puerto Rican man said, taking his partner's hand. David didn't

move. White Queen's bishop to f4.

"You're off your game today," the tall man said. "Not good." Yahweh shrugged ever-so-slightly. Black queen to e7.

"Can't you beat him?" David asked, alarm growing in his eyes.

"Probably," Yahweh said. "But those aren't the rules we play by." The man in black snorted in derision.

"Remarkable," he said. "You heap abuse on them, and they still grovel for you." David glanced over, and

Yahweh cocked his head to the side.

"Oh?"

"Such hate for men who lie with men. Stone them. Burn them. Hang them," the tall man said, sneering.

"It's not that simple, Lucifer. It never is," Yahweh said. Lucifer shook his head. White pawn to a3. Lucifer turned to David.

"Are you a man of God?" he asked. David drew in a breath of surprise, and glanced at Yahweh.

"I like to think so," he said, cautious.

"And you are a man who lies with men. A gay man." It was a statement. David nodded. Lucifer gestured across the table at Yahweh. "His books say you should die. Horribly. How can you be both?"

"I ..." David faltered. "I don't know. I just am."

"You call that free will?" Lucifer asked.

"I do," Yahweh said. Lucifer shook his head. Yahweh turned to David.

"Are you happy?" he asked. David blinked.

"I ... I don't know," he said, and both Lucifer and Yahweh paused. "I'm kind of scared right now, to be honest."

"Aside from that," Yahweh said. "Your life. Is it good?" David considered.

"Sometimes," he said. "Not all the time. It's complicated."

"You see?" Yahweh asked. Lucifer shook his head and sighed.

"This claptrap again," Black pawn to e6, an obvious error. White pawn to b4, swiftly, capturing black bishop.

"Why is it complicated?" Yahweh asked, seemingly unperturbed at the loss of his bishop.

"Well, I love two people. Alex," David said, and squeezed his partner's hand, "and my wife, Marissa." Lucifer laughed.

"Adultery as well!" he said. Yahweh didn't speak.

"They both make me happy," David continued, gaining steam. "And I—I can't be with either one alone." He bowed his head. "I wish I could be honest with her, though."

"Thank you," Yahweh said, a small smile warming their corner of the park. "You would do it differently?" he asked, turning back to the board. Black king's rook to H6.

"Of course I would," Lucifer said. "That's the whole point, isn't it?"

"How?" Yahweh asked, and Lucifer froze.

"You've never asked me that before," he said after a long moment.

"I'm asking you now." Lucifer thought.

"No love would be wrong," he said, and looked at David. "They're not hurting anyone. Why should they be punished?"

"What about Marissa?" Yahweh asked. Lucifer didn't say anything. After a time, Yahweh asked, "What else?"

"Freedom," Lucifer said, and the word was a whisper. "Real freedom. No commandments from on high, no walls of faith or law, nor condemnation by the righteous as punishment. Men and women could do as they pleased." Yahweh looked surprised.

"You don't think they have that?"

"They never have," Lucifer said, and shook his head very slowly. "You created the most magnificent of all things, beings who could truly decide their own fate with only the dictates of existence itself to restrain them. No spiritual obligations, and yet minds as keen as the greatest of the Seraphim. Mankind was perfect in every way, and the first thing," Lucifer broke off and chucked for a moment. "The very first thing you do

is wall them in." He laughed again, loudly and long. David threw an arm around Alex, and drew the smaller man close.

"No," he said, with a sigh of savor. "I would see what they can really do. Whether they could surpass even you in the fullness of time. I would see what comes from real freedom." White queen to d4. "Check." Yahweh leaned back and regarded Lucifer.

"Is it really that simple for you?" he asked, after a time. Lucifer nodded. "Well, then, I suppose that I've been playing defensively for long enough today."

And, slowly, Yahweh tipped his own king over. David gasped, and Lucifer's face screwed into a mask of confusion.

"I don't claim that the rules I chose were right," Yahweh said, his fingertips fading. "Only that they were the rules I chose. I hoped to help my children grow a little taller by their existence."

"You didn't need to do that," Lucifer muttered, eyes still fixed on the fallen black marble king.

"Of course I did," Yahweh said, and Lucifer finally met his gaze. "They weren't the only ones I gave free will to." His rheumy eyes twinkled for a moment, and then began to fade. "Your rebellion was my greatest triumph. I could barely believe it when you rose up." Lucifer's breath turned ragged.

"They're yours now, in a way." There was a silence, as the last traces of Yahweh faded away. Then, like a scarcely-heard voice on the breeze, he added, "Not so simple, is it?"

Nobody said anything, for a while. "What happens now?" David asked, meeting Lucifer's gaze.

"I don't know," he said eventually. "It's complicated."



## There Once Was a Princess

AIDAN OSTERBY  
FICTION

**M**y eyes were wide open. It'd been forever since mom turned the lights out and I still couldn't sleep. I had tossed and turned endlessly, but it wasn't happening. I finally gave up, turned on my side, and pushed myself to the edge of the mattress.

"Donny, I'm bored." I whispered out to the dark shapes of my room. No answer. I extended my arm the few inches between me and the floor, tapping the carpet to try and get his attention. Still nothing. I grabbed Snuffles the polar bear from the other side of the bed and tossed him into the impossible space between my bed and the floor.

"Hmm?" There was a rumble underneath my bed as Donny shifted his massive body so he was sitting upright in his spot, wherever that spot was. The growling reply came shortly afterward. "What the f—" it stopped short. Donny always tried really hard not to swear around me. "Kid, why are you still up? Didn't your mom put you to bed, like, an hour ago?"

"Yeah, but I can't sleeee-eeep." I whined and flopped back down on my bed. "It's been foreveeeerrrrr."

"You mean an hour?"

"Yeah, forever," I agreed.

Donny sighed. "Right. Why can't you sleep?"

"Dunno."

"Too much on the noggin?"

"Mmm-mm", my head shook from

side to side, hair rubbing against the pillow.

"Hungry?"

I made an "n" sound with my mouth, refusing to finish the "no".

"Stomachache?"

I turned over and groaned a muffled reply into my pillow.

"So what, just really not tired?"

"Hm." The groan was thoughtful this time. With an effort, my arms pushed my body back over onto my back. "I think so?" I still wasn't sure.

"You could read, that usually gets your eyes heavy."

"Maybe." I put my head out just over the side and looked down at the floor. "How about you tell me a story?"

"Oh no," I could hear him shift uncomfortably, his fur made a swishy sound, "you know I'm no good with stories."

"What are you talking about; you're great at telling stories," I urged with a smile.

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are," I hissed.

"I'm really not."

"You really are," I copied his tone.

"I'm average at best."

"You. Are. Great."

"Nope."

"Yessss."

"Uh-uh."

"Pretty please?"

"Not happening."

"With whipped cream on top?"

"No thanks."

"And a cherry?"

"Negative."

"Marshmallows?"

"Kid, come on."

"Chocolate syrup?"

"No."

"Chili peppers?"

"...What?"

I giggled uncontrollably. The snort from his big muzzle was louder.

"Alright, alright, you win, kiddo; I'll tell ya a story."

"Yay!" I exclaimed, then promptly shut my mouth and put my hands over it. I waited a few seconds and listened for the sound of footsteps out in the hall, but all was quiet. I opened my fingers and quietly whispered, "Yay." Then, I waited for Donny to start.

"Once upon a time, there uh, there was a princess. The—"

"What was her name?"

"What?"

"What was the princess's name? She's gotta have a name."

"Oh, her name was..." the sound of him scratching his furry head with a claw was just loud enough to hear, "her name was Mia."

I gasped, "That's my name."

"So it is, would you look at that." We both knew he did it on purpose. "Now, Princess Mia lived a grand life, in a grand castle, in a grand kingdom. She was a beauty like no other, stories were told of her throughout the world."

She also happened to be a master swordsman... swordswoman... whatever, she was good with a sword."

"I getcha." I reassured him.

"Good. Only problem was that she was cursed with a lack of confidence. To those she knew well, she was perfectly normal, but she had trouble giving speeches and being stuck alone with a diplomat terrified her."

"I like her," I concluded almost immediately, like I did with all of Donny's characters.

"She was the only child to a king and queen, and since they had no son, she was told that she had to get married."

"Why didn't they have another kid?" I rolled onto my back and looked at the ceiling again.

"Dad had performance issues."

"What does that mean?"

"Something very, very sad... ask your parents. Actually, don't; that's a bad idea."

"Why?"

"Just is, kid trust me. I'm serious though, don't bring that up, I don't need to be responsible for that conversation."

"Okay, okay, I won't, just keep telling the story."

"Alright then. Now poor Mia didn't know what to do. Most nobles and swordsman tended to be somewhere between a 7 and a 9 out of 10, the kind of guy that could turn her into a silently babbling mess. She didn't wanna get scared into making some random guy her husband, and she sure as he...eck wasn't gonna be his doting dame."

"So what did she do?"

"Well, see, Mia had to find a way to keep her head when looking at

the boys, and there was one thing she knew basically everything about, swordplay. So she held a contest. The best swordsmen, noble or not, from

## But who cared about another swordswoman when there were babes?

all over the world, were invited to test their skill against a single champion known as the Princess Guard. If they won, they got to have her for a wife."

"Gee, I wonder who the Princess Guard could possibly be."

Donny chuckled, "You have just proven yourself smarter than basically all the guys who showed up. See, the one place Mia would have the confidence to tell a guy straight out whether he was good enough or not was in an arena, with a sword in her hand. And if they wanted her respect, they had to win. A bunch of weapons were made special for the contest, dulled and rounded so that nobody got hurt. Kinda defeated the purpose if she lost a limb in the process."

"She sounds like a smart cookie."

"You bet she was. Now, her dad was basically just your average king; nice guy, but a bit egotistical. He heard about this and boy was he not happy. He goes up to Mia while she's arranging it and starts yelling, 'how dare you shame the Royal Cliché family—'"

"Cliché?"

"Yeah, they were French."

"Dad says the French are pansies."

"Well I don't know what revolution he learned about, but that's neither here nor there. Now where was I?"

"Dad was mad."

"Right. The king kept going on and on about how the kingdom needed a strong ruler, and Mia, who was feeling a bit uppity about all of it, basically just replies with 'what, am I not good enough or something?'"

I giggled.

"See you're laughing, but Daddio didn't have an answer, because yeah, she was. He never thought

about putting a woman on the throne, having a king reign was just kinda what they did. She had him beat though, so he gave in and let her have her contest. Hold on a sec, I need to take a drink." There was silence except for the sound of several large gulps, I hear his horns tap lightly against the wall behind him.

"And you said you weren't good at storytelling." He grumbled something under his breath, then continued.

"So the big day arrives, and contest arrives, and the contestants arrive, and everyone's thinking that they'll get a chance to show off how cool they are to the princess while they beat down on her champion. Everyone knew the stories about how sirens blushed when she smiled at them, and how dragons didn't even feel worthy to touch such a treasure. But none of them had ever heard the stories of the dragons who'd tried or the sirens who got jealous of her. None of them had heard that Princess Guard was the name given to her after slaying a man-eating cyclops who was attacking a village when Mia was just sixteen. But who cared about another swordsman when there were babes?"

That got another snort out of me.

"Most of the guys who showed up were pretty big dudes, the shortest was at least half a foot taller than Mia. Most of them were also ripped, not the kind of guy she'd be able to trade blows with."

"Whatcha mean?"

"Well, usually you try to block a sword hit with a shield. But if it breaks your arm anyway, it doesn't do ya much good, does it?"

"Oooooohh."

"Yep. So instead she took a short sword in her right hand, and a parrying dagger in her left."

"What's a pairing dagger?"

"Parrying. Say pair."

"Pair."

"Now put another *e* before the *ing*."

"Pair-e-ing."

"That's it. Now, you know what a normal dagger is?"

"Mm-hmm." I closed my mouth to stop from yawning, I wasn't falling asleep until we finished.

"Parrying dagger is a lot thicker and doesn't have a blade. What it does have are notches on one side that the other guy's sword can get caught in. Once it does, you yank him off balance, then you got a clear shot."

"That sounds fake."

"Who's telling the story, you or me?"

"You."

"That's correct. Now as you can imagine, there were a lot of fights. Dudes from all over came to fight for her hand, and she took on every last one of them."

"I am not surprised."

"There were so many fights that she found a pattern after a while. The guys all seemed to fall into one of three categories. There were the

ones who downright refused to fight her after they found out. They all just went home."

"Quitters and babies." I pushed back my yawn again.

"Pretty much. The next were the guys who knew when they were beat and took it with grace. She let them hang out. They watched the rest of the fights, cheered her on, even made up a few chants."

I sucked in a breath, "Are you telling she had a bunch of big burly cheerleaders?"

"That is exactly what I'm telling you."

"What a hero."

"Then there was the third group, who were just insulted that this little lady had kicked their butt. They stuck around too, but they always cheered on the other guy to beat her. Didn't matter which group he turned out to be, they just wanted her to lose. So eventually, there's 2 crowds. One's cheering her on, and the other's cheering on her opponent. Then you have Dad in the background, losing

## No winning streak can go on forever.

his mind because at this rate she was never gonna get married."

"So did she lose a fight?"

"Unfortunately yes. No winning streak can go on forever. She lost the very last fight."

I felt robbed. "Against who?"

"The warrior came from the eastern provinces. In the right hand was a sword shaped like a hook. It was meant to be spun around so that if a guy was using a shield, the tip would go right over and still hit him. In the left hand was a sai."

"What's a sai?"

"Basically a big three-pronged fork, but the prongs are spaced out and the middle one is longer than the other two. Does the same thing as a parrying dagger."

"Okay, ye ye, I know what you mean now." I finally let go of the yawn now.

"The warrior's name was Maya, and she was said to be the greatest warrior in the east."

"That's a pretty name," I murmured, suddenly interested again.

"The princess would agree, in fact, she'd go a bit further than just the name. When they entered the ring and saw each other for the first time, Mia started got it into her head that maybe winning wasn't everything."

My eyelids were getting heavy and I laughed sleepily, "Somebody thinks somebody else is pretty."

"Yeah kid, yeah she did. So they fought, and the fight lasted longer than all the other ones combined. They had to take breaks when they both got too tired to

keep going. In between bouts, they talked, had tea, told jokes; Mia had trouble forming a thought from time to time, tripped over her words, and Maya just gave her patient smiles. To her surprise, Maya didn't laugh at her insecurities, but that's because she

had plenty of her own. All the fighting she'd done over the years had left her skin rough and scarred, and her skill was intimidating, so the boys weren't exactly lining up outside her door."

"Aww," I murmured sadly.

"Whenever they were both feeling up to it, they returned to the duel. In total, the fight lasted a week. During that time, the two crowds kinda morphed together, dumbfounded with all the action they were seeing. When Mia finally felt the dull blade against her neck, she knew it was

over. And when she looked at her opponent and soon to be wife, she was pretty okay with that."

He took another drink, and I felt myself starting to fade.

"The king just kinda ran with it since hey, she was getting married at least. The next day they were wed, all the jerks and cool guys showed up, everybody knew each other pretty well by now. And thus the Age of Two Queens began for the grand kingdom. Maya and Mia ruled for many years, loved each other very

much, and had a whole bunch of kids together." The silhouette of a big, furry, paw-like hand rose up from under the bed, holding Snuffles. It set the bear lightly just against my arm. "Both lived happily and lovingly ever after. The end." He'd rushed the end a bit, but I was just about gone anyway.

I just gave a sleepy smile as my eyes finished closing and barely got out, "That was a good story," before I was asleep. I was so tired that I never even questioned how two girls could have kids. /

## Sleep Tight

KAITLYN DAHLMAN  
FICTION

Hey honey, it's time to wake up. You've been sleeping in too long," my mom's voice floated through the foggy sleepiness.

She rubbed my shoulder, and my eyes opened to see her sitting on the edge of the bed. She was smiling and her eyes were wrapped in crow's feet. I groaned, "Unngh, just five more minutes," and stuffed my head back in my warm pillow. I had the best sleep of my life. It was deeper than ever before and my body still felt heavy from drowsiness.

My mom stood up and huffed. It was time to take drastic measures. She ripped the comforter off and the cold air stung me. "No, no, put it back! It's so cold!" I whined.

"You've been sleeping long enough, Roy," she said, flipping on lights and opening the shades. With mom, you only get one chance for a peaceful wake-up. You refuse it, then you're asking for all the evil methods of waking up she cooks up in her brain. All for fun, of course. I rubbed my eyes and blinked slowly, squinting against the bright light.

"You gotta get up, hun. We've got the room to work on today," she said, putting her hands on her hips. I didn't want to incur any more dreadful concoctions.

"Oh right! Finally," I said. It was the day I got to work on getting my own room together. She left, I rolled out of the bed, and zombie-walked to my

new room.

For the first time in the 15 years of my life I had the freedom in having my own room. I had spent so many years sharing one with my stupid older brother, sharing everything from favorite toys and clothes to personal space. Now my brother was away at college, and my own personal space quickly became my own personal haven. I surveyed the boxes and mountain of clothes that littered the floor. There was a lot to get done.

My mom knocked on the door frame. "Roy, I'm gonna go out for a little while. I'll be back sometime soon, so don't worry," she said, digging through her purse for her car keys.

"Alright, mom," I responded. The shelves threw dust all over the place when I cleaned them, and I sneezed. My mom was still standing there, but she had tears in her eyes.

"Mom? Are you okay?" I asked, a bit uneasy, preparing for some bad news.

She sniffed, wiping her tears away. "Roy," she choked up, and continued. "I'm here. I don't know if you can hear me, but I'm here." Before I could respond, she rushed from the room and out of the house. Quiet settled. I shook my head and shrugged. She's probably just sad I'm growing up or something, I thought. Time to get back to cleaning.

The shelves were free of their dust, and books moved in to the many-floored complex. I cleaned the

desk out, and took a few moments to enjoy the one and only time this desk would be clean. Clothes enjoyed resting on hangers, knowing that their organized closet will also be short lived. The big mirrored closet doors had to be wiped, and I sprayed them down. In the reflection I saw a white face in the window. It was a bit distorted, and hard to make out in the sunlight. I looked back, and saw nothing. I turned back toward the mirror. Nothing there either. Weird, I thought.

I went to the bathroom to put away the cleaning materials, and as I turned I saw the face again flash in the mirror out of the corner of my eye. When I looked, there was nothing. Someone's just messing with me, I reassured myself. My brother left a couple of weeks ago for school, and I wondered if somehow he was back. That would explain the faces, somewhat. The sadistic idiot always played pranks on me, and sometimes they could get downright horrifying. He loved scaring me to death.

I walked past family photos, and a picture of my brother caught my attention. Normally, he had the straightest face and you could almost see the disgust dripping from the frame. Because in reality, who likes taking family photos? But the picture was different. Twilight had come, and the waning light cast strange shadows. It could be some weird light

coming in from the sunset. I walked up and peered closer at the photo. A smile overlapped his mouth, and it was stretched wide, with red in the teeth. But it wasn't in the photo, it was a reflection. I looked across the photo, and I didn't see anything. I looked at the picture again, and red eyes had replaced my brothers. I wiped the glass, and the face still stared at me.

"Wake up, Roy," my mom's voice whispered behind my shoulder. I jumped, but she wasn't there. The face disappeared, and I sighed. I should stop watching horror movies. They're messing with my head.

Looking down the hall, I saw something in the mirror. A thin pale figure was small, and it looked like it was standing next to my own reflection. The hairs on my arms and next stood on end, as if they could feel something near me. There was a faint sound of ragged breathing and sounded sick and labored.

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When darkness fell,  
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"It's just in my head," I whispered, trying to calm my racing heart. The house was dark, and there were shadows draped all over the house. The walls looked green and sickly. I couldn't bring myself to look out the black windows. Still alone, I tried to rush to my room. I hated the house at night. When darkness fell, the

unknown ghosts of the world found some comfort in this building.

I made it back safe to my room without seeing the face, and when I closed my door I started to feel secure. I climbed into bed and curled up under the covers. The stillness of the room was deafening, and as I laid there, I watched the moonlight seep into the room. My heart was still beating at a crazy rate. Everything had taken on an evil feel in the darkness, and I watched my large mirrors. No face, no figure. "It was my imagination," I whispered. My heart sighed in relief, and settled back to normal.

An hour passed, and I laid on my bed teetering on the line between awake and falling asleep. I looked around my room half-asleep, eyed the mirrors again. Nothing. I felt truly alone. I closed my eyes and waited for sleep to take me to the sweet glorious morning. Soon, there was wonderful slumber.

It felt like only seconds passed when my eyes snapped open. The moon had passed and its pale light made my room appear as if it were of some ghostly underworld. I wanted to get some water, but when I tried to

get up, I found I couldn't move. I was frozen, arms and legs weighed down as if straps were tying me to a gurney. I started to sweat. It was hard to breath. I didn't want to look, but I knew it was going to be there. My eyes reluctantly turned to the mirror.

The face peered at me through the glass.

The figure I saw earlier was standing in the large mirror. It was starting at me, as if I was a tasty morsel waiting on a silver platter. Its ashen humanoid body was perfectly still, with long arms and fingers reaching the floor. The fingers were long and clawed, like the talons of a hawk. It was like a skeleton that had thin skin stretched tight over it. I was fixated on the eyes. They were red and glowing, like the candlelight that flickers behind the eyes of a jack-o-lantern. There was skin stretched over the rest of the face, and the seeing no mouth unsettled me to the core.

I stared at the figure, and my heart went icy cold. Sweat ran profusely down my face. It's all a dream. I'll wake up any moment, I thought. I closed my eyes, counted to three, and opened them again. The pale monster's face was looking at me. Red eyes piercing me to my core and filling me with sheer panic. Its eyes as flames looking to engulf me. To incinerate me completely.

It's still here. It's still here, my mind repeated, a broken record skipping and scratching.

I blinked.

A hand now had emerged from the mirror. Its long, spidery fingers were stained black and dripping, ink-like liquid oozing all over its hands. The ashen face was split as a mouth ripped into a hideous grin. The skin had torn, and there was black liquid dripping from the cracks in its mouth. The teeth were jagged, sharp, and smiling.

I tried to scream. To free myself from my straps, flee down the hallway to my parents, and be wrapped in their warm embrace. But no sound came when I tried to scream. I panicked and looked around the room for something, anything that I could use. Nothing. The walls changed, they were dark and dirty, something black oozed from the corners and pooled

onto the floor. I wasn't in my room anymore, I was in the demon's liar, and laid out on his feeding table.

I blinked rapidly, hoping that the moon's light was only playing tricks on my mind in the dark. With a disturbing rigidity, like the creepy stop-motion films, the monster stepped out of the mirror with every blink. The ashen figure stood in my room, as if the mirror was a door from the hell it came from. The red eyes were brighter and blazed as it focused on its next victim. Me. The mouth was pulled into a sinister smile and glared its teeth. Sharp, pointed teeth, with blood and flesh stuck in its jaws. Sweat ran into my eyes, stinging them, and I blinked.

The creature was now a foot closer. It moved without taking a step. Its arms now raised and stretched out. Looking to pin me down with its long, black fingers. My mind couldn't process what was happening. Raw terror flooded my brain and my heart. All I could do was lie there. Unprotected. Vulnerable. Like prey.

Blink.

Closer.

One arm rested on the foot of my bed. A bony leg was half-raised as the creature was crawling on the bed up to my face. This had to be a nightmare. I squirmed, the once comforting blankets now constricting my desperate attempts to get out. I was trapped. My eyes were locked on the ashen figure. My mind screamed, Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

I couldn't close my eyes and let the monster get closer. Keep it away by never blinking. Tears threatened to make me blink. He's gonna eat me... He's gonna get me! Wake up! Wake

up! Wake up!

"Wake up! Wake up, Roy! Please, you have to wake up!" I heard my mom's cries. Loud banging on the

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He was a mess,  
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was no longer  
himself.

---

door. She was trying to get in. Or something else was.

The salt from my sweat stung my eyes. I couldn't keep them open much longer.

I blinked. I screamed in my mind, Mom, mom! Help me, I can't get out! I can't move! Mom!

The demon was over me now. One hand pressed on my chest and I could feel the icy claws digging into my skin. The other hand was raised for the killing blow, the long arm and outstretched fingers nearly touching the ceiling. I glanced at its arms briefly. Then my eyes locked on to its face.

The eyes were on fire, blazing with delight and throwing red shadows all over the room. The flames danced wildly, poised to lick at me. The jowls were wide open. Laughing. I heard my mother's laugh, mixed with a low gravely sound distorting her voice. It was waiting to sink its teeth into me. To rip me apart.

I was frozen. Helpless. My mind screamed for all it was worth. I heard the air escaping my lungs in a silence screech for help. Help would never come. This was the end.

Red eyes blazing. The smell of

smoke and sulfur seeped from the open mouth. Black fingers poised to deal the crushing blow. Cruel smile aching with hunger. Mouth craving sweet blood. My eyes burning from sweat and tears and screaming to blink it all away. Blinking for even a moment would mean death. Gruesome death.

I blinked. The darkness consumed all.

"Hey honey, it's time to wake up. You've been sleeping in too long,"

Roy's mother said, sitting on the edge of her son's bed. They had a lot of work to do today to get the new room ready for Roy to move in. They worked hard yesterday to move shelves, bed, and his desk in. She rubbed his shoulder. He wouldn't budge. Still worn out from yesterday, she guessed. But it was nearly noon, and it was time to get up and moving.

She got up and huffed. He used up his one and only gentle wake-up she offered. She threw the covers off. She flipped on the lights and threw open the curtains. So far this move was fool-proof, never failing her once. With a firm tone she said, "You've been sleeping long enough, Roy." Normally, the boy would be yelling and clawing at the comforter, trying to get back under the warmth. But he was still lying there, still and asleep. His skin was pale, and his breathing was shallow. Last night he complained that his head hurt. Some strong throbbing in the back of his skull that wouldn't go away, even after medicine. Maybe he caught a sickness over the night.

She came over to his bed again, and felt his head. It was cold and clammy, and he still did not stir.

She tried to wake him again, and said with a trembling voice, "You gotta get up, hun." She shook him vigorously. "We've got the room to work on today." She didn't want to worry or panic, but her mind went immediately to the worst case scenario. Over and over she thought, "Something is wrong." She turned and hurried out of the room. Her husband was brushing his teeth, with an untied tie hanging around his neck, when he rushed to him.

"Roy isn't waking up! He's pale and cold when I felt his forehead. Something's wrong, David.

Something's wrong with Roy!" she cried, with fear clear as day shining through her eyes. David spit, and rushed to his son's room. Joan was not a woman who panicked like this.

Ambulance sirens drowned out any other noises as Joan and David rode with their son to the hospital. David rubbed her back in silence, a shock spread over his face.

Roy was rushed in, and there were doctors and nurses hovering over her son like flies. She tried to follow, to stay as close as she could to Roy. She couldn't leave him, but a nurse and David held her back. She struggled and fought as the doors closed after Roy. She had the sinking feeling that she may never see him awake again.

"We can't do anything for him now, Joan. We have to let the doctor's work," David tried to comfort her as tears ran heavily down her face.

Hours seemed to stretch out into years as the couple sat waiting for news. Joan was wrapped in David's arms, still crying but wide-eyed with worry. David whispered, "It's going to be okay," to try and get her calm.

He didn't believe a word he said, and neither did she. Finally, a doctor came in, and they sprung to their feet, too afraid to ask the only question they had on their mind.

She needed to see  
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He spoke in a calm manner, and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Reeves, I'm afraid to say that your son is in a coma. We're running tests to see what happened, but my primary assessment was that he had bacterial meningitis. We are doing everything we possibly can for him," he said, sounding rehearsed. "You can see him in a few minutes." The Reeves were the farthest thing from calm.

A half an hour later, they were at Roy's bedside. The beeping of the heart monitor was a constant reminder that their son wasn't okay, and that their horror was actually happening. David stepped out to call Roy's brother, Colin. They had called and told him the news in the waiting room, and Colin was doing everything he could to get back in time. He may be too late.

Joan gripped Roy's hand. Her face was wrecked with pain, and in the past few hours, she seemed to have aged a decade. She looked on her son. He was deathly pale, and she didn't have a grain of hope that he was going to get better. It was so hard to hold

onto that hope when Roy looked so sick. She wondered if he could hear her.

David tapped on the door. The man's eyes changed, they were graver and lost their unshakable joy. "Joan, Colin wants to talk to you. He... he's having a friend drive him here." Small tears dropped from the corner of his eyes, and he wiped them away. Through tears of her own, she turned back to Roy and whispered, "Roy, I'm gonna go out for a little while, I'll be back sometime soon," she said, even if he couldn't hear her, "so don't worry."

It broke her heart to talk to Colin. He was a mess, broken to the point where he was no longer himself. It was over an hour of weeping, unanswered questions, and unbridled fear. After she couldn't take it anymore, David gently pulled the phone away from her grip. He bent and kissed her forehead. She staggered back into the room, the bare, white walls and beautifully arranged flowers adorning the tables. It smelled clean and sanitary and sickening.

"Roy, I'm here. I don't know if you can hear me, but I'm here," she whispered. She wanted to see his eyes. She yearned to see his eyes open and full of life. He was so young, and the energy infused the house with life. Even Colin, the grumpy and melancholy Colin, would laugh and tease with his younger brother. She couldn't lose that. She was the mother, she fought to keep everyone safe and everyone together. They stuck together through thick and thin, fights and happy days. Roy needed to be back with them, because she would not accept losing a part of her

family. She needed to see Roy's eyes again like she needed daylight and air to breathe.

At the moment, the doctor walked in. His face was serious, his years of experience nearly covering up the devastating news he had. David was close behind, ending the phone call with a quiet, "I'll call you back in just a few minutes," to Colin. Joan knew her son was on the verge of a breakdown, and she couldn't be by his side to support him.

The doctor opened with, "I'm afraid I have some bad news..." and the rest was drowned out by a heavy intense ringing in her ears. Everything sounded like it was underwater, the rest of his words were muffled and indistinguishable. Joan couldn't hear

the rest. Didn't want to hear the rest.

Roy would wake up any moment, she could feel it in her bones. She needed to see him smile, to laugh, and she studied his face intensely for even the tiniest flicker of his eyelids. She knew he would be awake soon. She needed him to be. Desperation to have her son back overwhelmed her. She grabbed Roy's hand and yelled, "Wake up, Roy!"

David was at her side immediately, trying to loosen her grip. She screamed over and over, crying out his name. She pounded on the bed frame, using every wake-up technique she had in the book to get her son back. She felt David's hands on her shoulders, taking her away from her child. She fought back fiercely. Claws

tearing at David's jacket. Through the ringing she heard a few words, "...brain dead...nothing they...turn off..." Joan couldn't take it anymore. She screamed.

Her voice pierced the quiet room as she screamed, "Wake up! Wake up, Roy! Please, you have to wake up!" She grabbed the chair, the door frame, anything and everything she could to get her back to Roy. She was being dragged away. Roy was getting further and further from her. She was a monster, viciously fighting to get back to her treasure. The doctor and David pulled her away, afraid she would hurt herself. Joan was sobbing hysterically, scratching and punching them over and over.

Roy's heart beat flat lined.



Words Sting, Jennifer Peters

## What Are Words Gonna Do?

JARRON WILLIAMS  
FICTION

Don't you think I rather write verses? Grab a notepad and write these curses in cursive? Don't you think that I hate snatching purses? But as they say, a person's a person no matter how imperfect. Don't you think I rather cling to clichés than cling to these ways that cling to the phrase, can't cling to these days? But I can't afford that. God don't reward that. When I shoot to kill, pass out a pill, and don't go to church still... God don't record that. Cause he ain't watch and make sure my mother stayed clean. He ain't watch and made sure my brother ain't sip poorly made lean. He ain't keep my father off my sister or keep clothes on her back. I did that! So when my brother is spazzing cause he ain't got his meds, I don't call feds, cause those meds, were sold to some brain deads, with long dreads. I'm more than these baking soda skills, I flip cheese with no grills with these rice and sugar meals.

That every so often, my momma comes in coughing, a cold wind away from her coffin... I'm the actor! The sole benefactor, of this constant distractor. I make sure these kids don't see their own mother fall. Just cause she did it to me, that doesn't mean she has to do it to all. They can't watch her foaming at the mouth, taking a drive down south, and pulling blue bodies out. When these arguments crescendo, I turn up my brother's Nintendo, I speak through

an innuendo, so my nosy sister never gets to hate her mother. I'M THE ONE! I make sure they never meet each other. I already fucked up when I let her hold my brother. Left him in the dark, at a park, where no one could find him. So every step he takes now, I make sure I'm right behind him. He don't think right but she don't know that. She don't visit clinics and get none of this blow back, so I scream at the bitch, fade lights, and go black! Go back to whatever crevice you crawled from. Your son may be dumb but one thing he is not, is your son! Mind your business; you don't get to see my sister. Tried to sell her to a mister, who wanted to rape, pound, and fist her.

I clench my fist tight, every night, and thrash against the wall. I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU! Why do I have to pick you up when you fall? Why do I have to call you and make sure you're okay? Please, mother I beg you, can you be the parent today. But no... shit just don't work like that, so every time I see her, even though my heart wants her to come back, I tell her to leave. Words that make it hard

for me to breathe cause even though this blood runs dry, it's the same blood that I know we both bleed. Even though I need her, it's not about what I need. I got two mouths to feed, so how the fuck can I succeed!?

My teacher told me that I was born to be a poet, I really don't believe him, but I feel as though I already know it. Yet, when I scribble on all the work that I never do, I don't know who am or who I'm speaking to. I guess these dreams are mine and don't belong to

Shit just don't work  
like that.

you.

How could I avoid stares as I share these nightmares, wondering who the fuck really cares? Who the fuck cares about a boy who may not graduate? I think it's too late for me to start this debate... about being somebody. How could words make an impact on a life that needs action? A poet with passion only covers a

fraction of the needs I am lacking. What are words going to put on this table every night? Are these words gonna protect me in the midst of a fight. Will an S on my chest double as a bulletproof vest, will my poems help me evade my consistent arrest? Tell me the words I need to calm my brother when he panics at night and all his meds are gone. Cause the only words I ever say, please bro, stay strong. I've cried, and I've yelled, but nothing ever works, when his condition is getting worse and he starts going berserk. When he picks up chairs and raises them to my sis and I beat his dumbass feeling sick in my fist, what are words gonna do to calm this boy? What words can I say to make the hell stop? What are words gonna do when they finally watch my mom's body drop? What are words gonna do when my sister has to wear the same outfit, again and again? What are words gonna do when she finally lashes out, and beats a bitch ass, cause they were running too slow, and talking too fast? What are words gonna do when

I have to teach her how to fight? What are words gonna do when she can't do it right!?

I say fuck your lessons. I say fuck your words. Fuck this teacher, you do not deserve, any credit from me. You teach words that I will never need. You trying to teach me a language that I already know. But I'll enter your contest. I'll show them my flow. I'll jive and I'll spit. I'll as you say, just do my best. But you know how this will end. You know I'm wasting my time. A stomach will growl before I finish this line. And when I'm not there, and when I don't win... remember your words and forget all my sin!

Sorry Mr. Suburbs, I can't conjugate these long verbs, or understand these long words. Now say you're sorry, Mr. Urban. I knew you weren't as deserving as these wide eyed pupils that have time for this education. The future doctors, lawyers, and teachers of this nation. I'm not one of them! I'm not one of you! When you say poetry will save me, I say, WHAT ARE WORDS

GONNA DO?! Colleges aren't interested and even if they were, I can't leave these kids, so I can't leave this world. I can't leave this tiny little space that I shouldn't have been put in, in the first fucking place! You've seen a whole world, I've seen a couple blocks. I crack cards and kick rocks, y'all hire guards and sell stocks! You got that ring, and them suits to floss while the only thing I have to my name is, Jason. Garrett. Doss.

I've departed from dreams of being an artist. I've departed from theories of being your target. I've heard you, I've heard you loud and clear. But it kills me to say this world speaks a little louder. I wish I could boast my talents and stand a little prouder but their cries sound a little greater. I wish I never had to tell my mother that I hate her, but my love can't compare to the sound of all this anger. So you whisper words that are hard for me to hear. Can you speak a little louder, there are children in my ear. You say stuff like I have talent, yea that ain't nothing new. But it still begs the question... what are words gonna do?

## I Am Shallow

FAITH MELLENTIN  
FICTION

I went swimming when I was a child, into the shallow water.  
But the water weakened my knees.  
Ever since I've walked on my hands.  
People laughed at me, until I told them to try it, and nobody could.  
"How do you do it?" they would ask me.  
"It is not balance..."  
"It is not patience..."  
"It is not skill..."  
"Then what is it?"  
And I showed them my secret.  
"All you do, is pretend you can do it."  
Ever since, everybody was able to walk on their hands.  
However, I stumbled all of the time, and nobody else ever did.  
"How do you do it? I asked them.  
"We don't know."  
"Don't you see everything upside down?"  
"No we don't, we may be upside down, but we see right side up."  
I became frustrated that I had taught them, and they had become better than me.  
All the people in the world saw things normally.  
Ever since I went swimming as a child, I became a shallow man.  
Walking upside down did not make me different.  
It did not make me better.  
It did not make me unique.  
I only made me a teacher to those who wanted to learn.  
To those who pretended they could do what I had pretended I could do.



## Confessions of a Normal Person

JARRON WILLIAMS  
FICTION

Ummm... Good morning. Hello. How are you? Hi! No wait... I'm Kyle. Kyle Weathersby. I'll be your blind date for today. Before we start there is something you should know. I'm a pervert. I wish I could say I like to stare up girls' skirts or watch their breasts. But no. I'm a predator. A sexual deviant. The worst kind of sexual deviant. Again, I'm a predator. I am a child predator. I am sexually attracted to kids. Young kids. Under the age of thirteen. I am not, I repeat, am not, and never will be a child molester. But I have LOOKED, just looked, at child pornography. Well, I bought some too and took some pictures but that's it! I understand if you don't want to go on this date. But I would love for you to give me a chance and- ... that was the part when she slapped me and ran out screaming for the police. Who was I kidding? I tried... I really did try. I followed all the rules we set out. I followed the guidelines of living a normal life but we all have to realize that if you need guidelines to help you live a normal life... chances are that you never will.

Hello... I'm Kyle Weathersby. Cold Turkey for six years, four months, one week, and two days. I wonder if other more 'popular' addicts feel this way after announcing their sobriety time sheets. I wish I could go up to a girl and say, I haven't gotten drunk in twelve years, let's enjoy the night

as you continue to judge me by the context of my character and not my inner demons. Call me crazy, but that sounds like a wild time. Not being judged. Not living in fear of being judged. Not living in fear of judging yourself. It just gets so hard sometimes. You just gotta keep looking for reasons to exist and some nights you lay in bed and realize you can't find any. Just gotta go to sleep anticipating the nightmares. Us Catholics roll out of bed on Sunday and repent half our sins to the priest. Then we go home to cry and curse at God for making us the monsters we all believe we are. Then we drag ourselves to work. To school or sometimes we just say fuck it and go back to sleep. I'll wait patiently. What the hell I'm waiting for I don't know... but I'll wait. Wait for something, anything, to give me a reason to keep going. Nothing ever works. Nothing ever convinces me that my life is worth saving. Sunshine reminds me of the hell that awaits me after I finally give the hell up and give my emergency pistol a good workout. Emergencies my ass! I've put that pistol to my head forty times this week. This was a good week. Birds chirping remind me of the family I could never have cause I refuse to even imagine the feelings I would have for a child I brought into this world. Oh God... oh God. I'm a sick human being. Who thinks like this? Why? Why me? Why any of us? Am

I cursed?! I was a good kid. A good enough kid! That's all any normal person has been! What the fuck went wrong?! For the love of God give me someone or something to blame cause you know better than anyone I'm tired of blaming you and having to apologize the next morning!

I remember my childhood. When I'm up at night counting the reasons to live on my right hand and jerking off with the left, it's the only thing that is allowed to come to mind. I had great parents. I had great siblings. I was the baby in the family. They all cared about me. There was no love lost. I had friends. I was never the most popular kid but I had nothing to complain about. I played t-ball. I was on little league. I got third place in a science fair. I almost caught the ball at a Sox game. I had good grades. A few C's, and a D that one year I had with that really mean science teacher. But I was a pretty good kid. I was a normal kid. I was normal! I didn't look at my toy guns and wish they were real so I could shoot myself! I didn't hide my erections all the time and if I did it was because I was a teen and Ms. Jensen was showing waaay too much cleavage. Cause that was normal! That was okay! But now when I see kids walking past holding hands I get jealous! Jealous of fucking what?! These kids aren't in a relationship. They are just forming the normal friendships that I used

to form! I used to be that kid! I WAS THAT NORMAL KID! WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED?!

I don't remember the day I became a monster. Wish I did, but I don't. But I do remember the first time I looked... The first time I watched, 'kiddy porn.' I was nineteen and in my freshman year of college. I had taken a year off from school cause I was one of those people who didn't know where they were going in life. Turns out that was normal, most people still don't know where they want to end up. I remember orientation day everyone was talking about the whiz kid. The girl from India that had skipped several grades. Why she was in community college I will never figure out but she was twelve in college. That was an accomplishment. I wasn't too interested in her life story like most people were. Guess I was just jealous of her success and didn't want it rubbed in my face... like a normal person. But when I saw her... she was so beautiful.

Gorgeous. Flawless bronze skin. Her earrings dangled perfectly over her well curved shoulders. Her thin little frame showed the slight promise of blossoming breasts.. Oh God. God... forgive me. Forgive me Father, for I have sinned. Forgive me father as I continue to sin! She was stunning. Back then I had this little thing called confidence because I was normal! I walked up to her and asked if she needed help touring the place, as if I wasn't a freshman myself. She retreated back, just a little. I remember... three adorable steps back. Like she was tiptoeing on wind. She murmured, thank you,

scampered away, and then she... she gave me a look. She looked back as if she liked what she saw in me but society was telling her I'm too young and he's too old. But she looked back at me and my heart fluttered. It was a mere two seconds before she skipped down the corridor, her long hair bouncing restlessly as she took those adorable steps. That was all it took, I was hooked. Not on kids though... just her. Just her!

I was planning on pursuing a photography minor after I had gotten my associates degree. Taking pictures

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I was normal! I didn't look at my toy guns and wish they were real so I could shoot myself!

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was always more than taking pictures. I captured moments that I relished. On my wall I keep a collage of life's most beautiful images. The last leaf hanging in there as winter begins to peek its ugly little head. An ant army lifting one of their own dead soldiers off of the ground and carrying him back home. And that girl. That girl whose name I never got. She filled my wall. Every picture of her flipping through her textbooks. Every picture of her eagerly raising her hand. Every picture of her sitting alone in the cafeteria afraid to go outside the normal... afraid of people like me... perverts. Predators.

I guess I should mention that I had a girlfriend at the time. Her name I do know. Jane. Jane Jamie James. If you knew her wretched mother that would make a lot more sense. Just like her to be so passionate about such a horrible idea. Jane was determined to see my dorm. Since I didn't share one with anyone she didn't see any reason why she couldn't visit me. Unfortunately, I couldn't find any good excuses either. I tore the pictures off of the wall, stuffed them into a shoe box under my bed. Now I was ready. Ready to be normal for her. When she visited we both had one thing on our mind, sex. I was in college and having sex... like a normal person. We're messing around and kissing each other in some of the least sensual places possible like shoulders and chins... like normal people. Then I pull out my rubber. She tries to put it on seductively and rips it on her first try. We laugh. College kids that couldn't use a condom right... normal stuff.

Then she starts looking for another condom and my eyes get wide. I realize she's reaching for the shoe box under my bed. I don't stop her. Half of me can't figure out what to do, the other half just felt as though she needed to know. She flips through many of the pictures. Some she's seen but most she hasn't. Especially the one with that little Indian girl. I watch her. I watch her eyes go from big to slanted. To angry, to tearful. She looks up at me with a mix of anger, fear, and absolute sadness in her face. I look back at her with the most pathetic puppy dog face that I could have ever put on. No screaming, no yelling, no ranting, just a simple question...

"Isn't this girl twelve?" I nod my head and she leaves. Actually, she storms out. And she doesn't look back at me. She doesn't give me that look... that look the Indian girl gave me.

Needless to say, I fled college... like a coward. I didn't know if she would tell anyone but I wasn't gonna sit around and wait. I tried to leave that moment right there but that is not where it stayed. I found more beautiful girls like the one at my college. I took more pictures. I filled up the walls of motels, rinky-dink apartments, condos, all of em! I became a monster! And when the innocent pictures weren't enough... I bought porn. Kiddy porn. Disgusting, abused children porn. I watched these children suffer at the hands of a monster only slightly worse than me and jerked off to it. Got euphoric sensations from it. Dreamed of it. Slept thinking about it. Stuck it in the crevice of my darkest memory and pulled it out every night just so I could jerk off to it again!

One day, one unlucky day... I ran into Jane. On a bus. I said nothing to her and she said nothing to me. We

sat across from each other, staring at each other. Both trying to figure out what the other was thinking. Finally, I reached out and just said, "Hi... Jane." Like a normal person. Her eyes burst and she curled up. She bawled. I got off on the next stop... I couldn't go through that. I couldn't face her. I couldn't confront her let alone the demons I had been ignoring. I attempt to wait for another bus but some guy followed me outside. He must've heard Jane's side of the story. He kicked my ass. Merciless, unwavering. Scolding me with every stomp. I don't remember what he was saying. I couldn't even tell you if it was morning or night but what I do remember is that... I wanted him to kill me. I wanted him to finish me off so bad and when he didn't... When I got up with a severe headache surrounded by no one and realized I was still alive... I was mad- I WAS PISSED. Why had he not done his civic duty and gotten rid of a monster when he was given the chance! That's the day I bought a pistol. The first time I put it to my head. The first time I realized I was such a coward I

couldn't even kill myself. That was the day I actually tried to stop myself. I found you guys. A support group. A group of people like me, struggling with this, that could help me function. That was the day I decided to stop watching child porn. Six years, four months, one week, and two days. The best thing I've done all of my life. And to think I was so tempted to jeopardize it all just because some girl rejected me. Just because I saw Jane in her eyes. Just because I remembered that little Indian girl! I don't want anyone to remember me as the monster that I am, rather the monster I tried not to be. The six years, four months, one week, and two days. So, today is the day I die. The day I put an end to it all. No one will be able to say I relapsed. Please if the world knows anything about me let them know that I stopped a monster. Let them know I got him good. And leave them with this in their mind... six years, four months, one week, and two days! It's time I fight back against a monster... because I HATE myself. I HATE MONSTERS... like a normal person.