

*16<sup>th</sup> Annual Café Shapiro*

*February 11 and February 19, 2013*

*Shapiro Undergraduate Library*

*Anthology of Selected Poems  
and Short Stories*

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## Café Shapiro

Welcome to Café Shapiro! Café Shapiro began in February 1998 as part of the University's "Year of the Humanities and Arts" (YoHA). Originally conceived as a student coffee break, Café Shapiro takes place in the Shapiro Undergraduate Library during winter evenings in February. It features undergraduate student writers nominated by their professors, many of whom have also been nominated for various writing prizes within the University and beyond.

Students are invited to perform a live reading for a peer audience. For many student writers, Café Shapiro is a first opportunity to read publicly from their work. For others, it provides a fresh audience, and the ability to experience the work of students they may not encounter in writing classes. Through its sixteen years of existence, Café Shapiro has evolved to become a night (or several) of sharing among some of our best undergraduate writers, their friends, families, and the wider community.

Café Shapiro has been popular, and in many years we've created an anthology to provide access to these students' works after the live performance. We are delighted that this year's anthology could be printed, once again, on the Espresso Book Machine (EBM). The University of Michigan acquired the EBM in order to help our users connect with content in the ways most useful to them, thereby supporting the research and learning needs of students, scholars and faculty. For more information about the EBM, visit <http://www.lib.umich.edu/espresso-book-machine>. It's exciting to see our mission being realized in this year's printing of the Café Shapiro Anthology.

We hope you enjoy reading the work of these talented writers.

Shapiro Undergraduate Library Reference Department  
Ann Arbor, Michigan  
March 2013



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*Nick Anastasia*

## Nick Anastasia



Junior, Double-majoring in English through LS&A and Creative Writing through the Residential College

I was born in 1991, grew up and have lived in the suburbs near Detroit all my life. I began writing in my Senior year of High School and entered the University of Michigan in 2010 to participate in the RC's Creative Writing Program.

## A Record

Wearing rust over black,  
the lamp stands watch,  
a sentinel besides an  
empty street filled with  
twin yellow lines  
that'll never meet.

Lamplight at the edges,  
it's always at the edges  
it's where the sun hits the ocean,  
the world becomes a disk, spinning,  
but there's a scratch so it's  
always and always it's repeating  
a needle and a vinyl  
that'll never meet,

flattened, like a map stretched  
with scotch tape, held at the edges,  
browned with age and  
smudged by eager fingers  
where childhood dreams  
were all drawn out  
in thick purple crayon  
next to a life  
that'll never meet.

## Luminescent Reminiscence

What if you stole  
a moment  
and hung it like a star

to let it shine  
in a night sky of memories  
with the clouds whipping by,  
reeking of fate and nostalgia,

but a seeming semblance  
of that night  
that past so long ago,  
so long ago, but  
dreamt of still,

that night,  
dreamt of so long ago,  
passed in dreaming  
and that star shining,  
so brightly now,  
hanging,  
hanging in the night sky,  
hung by the tethered tears  
of a moonlit screaming

screaming, tearing through the  
tenuous tethers of synaptic  
galaxies collapsing,  
swirling and colliding,  
combining,

and still that star is  
shining,  
singing and shining

and you find that you're smiling  
teeth bleached by bone white tears.

## Safe

There is a tree that still stands  
in the back yard, among grass  
that was always left  
to grow too long.

It's built of good, strong oak  
and always smells clean  
after a warm spring rain.

It was safe,  
when we used to chase  
each other behind  
the bushes and garage, still  
reeking of freshly laid green paint,  
but never across the street,  
the street was out-of-bounds.

Tag-you're-it, unless you fell,  
grass stains bleeding green  
on your knees, making you cry,  
and you'd have to go inside

for a bath to scrub off the mud,  
but as you got bigger, you could  
make waves in the tub  
and drench the towel on the floor.

The leaves fell while I was leaving,  
off to studies and books written  
by people long resigned to dust.

But now it's cold,  
and the grass is buried, dead  
beneath the weight of snow,  
which tracks my trail as I  
return, making my way to  
sit beneath the old oak again,  
and turn eyes weary of words  
to look up, and see its bare branches  
filled with the stars.

## Her Old Address

Starlight streams through the  
smudges of silvered lenses,  
with less clarity than the  
sight of the blind.

It's a clear night,

and he's sitting on the  
concrete steps, leading up  
to the porch leading up  
to the door.

Breath fogs the  
films of glass  
and he removes  
the delicate  
frame, wiping it  
upon a sleeve stained  
with muddy snow.

And looking up  
to the sky, he can  
see the stars

but still can't remember the tune  
of the song that's stuck in his head.



*Rishee Batra*

## Rishee Batra



Class of 2016, prospective English major

I am a member of the UM Debate Team and have only recently been getting into poetry. My favorite books include the Phantom Tollbooth, Middlesex, and The Brothers Karamazov, and I love Shakespeare.

## Advice from my Father, the Palm-Reader

Intersecting lines of fate  
Display themselves on my hand.  
Oh—I'll live until I'm 95.  
But I'll lose my memory too?  
Unhappy relationships until I'm 40—  
But my love life will turn around,  
Just as my health begins to falter.  
This palm is a map of my past, present, and future.  
My palm portrays my path, and—as my father thinks—  
Forewarned is forearmed.  
So let me set forth  
With this pseudoscience in my head, on my hand,  
And guiding my heart.

## Hyper-Caffeinated

Sometimes I feel the most alive  
When my body has been saturated  
With pools of caffeine.

Speeding up, running faster,  
My mind hurls me at—into—the world,  
Keeping my body on its toes, tensed up but somewhat  
Relieved to be in the backseat.

Pushing me up an incline,  
Inducing a wholly engaged but still  
Absent consciousness,  
Coffee stands between me and bittersweet black sleep.

## Laying Open

I bask in gratitude toward the world—  
That indifferent, relentless, unsympathetic entity  
Which has blessed me with so much.

But sometimes even such immense gratitude  
Is swallowed up by a dark despair.  
When I stew in my pit of anguish—  
Gloomy, I curl up and close myself off to that same  
Vast, incomprehensible  
World.

Only when my joints finally get stiff  
From lying in the fetal pose for so long  
That I yawn and stretch out my limbs.  
Slowly, I uncurl  
And let the beautiful warmth of the heartless world send shivers  
Of happiness up my spine.

## I'm Not a Loose Cannon

I'm not an angry person,  
But I know what it's like to be angry.  
To be seething in the very pit of my furious stomach,  
To feel my face, white hot, scalding with rage and passion.

To be driving down the freeway, flying past the calmer cars at 110  
miles per hour,  
Hoping to lose control and crash into the divider.  
The divider between this lane and the next,

The divider between this world and the next.

Fury is something that infects your entire body.

It spreads from your abdomen to your boiling face and furrowed eyes.

It infects your body, against your will,

But also—with your permission.

I'm not a loose cannon.

But I am a cannon alright.

And I know what it's like to be set off.



*Alex Bernard*

## Alex Bernard



Freshman, Psychology and English Majors

I'm from Clinton Township, Michigan. Growing up a Michigan State fan, attending the University of Michigan has been an adventure. Needless to say, I've been turned to "The Dark Side" as my father calls it. After attending an all-boys Catholic high school, U o M has certainly been a new, eye-opening experience. Since arriving on campus, I've made the Mock Trial team, researched health care reform, and learned how to function in classes with girls. My story primarily deals with the question of identity in not only young homosexuals, but high school students and young people in general. I wanted to write a story outside of my comfort zone that could be relatable and still maybe ask some new questions. I hope you enjoy it.

## Where the Sidewalk Breaks

The aroma of cheap body spray and overpriced perfume filled the halls at Vestibus High School as my tardy feet shuffled to first hour. A trickle of sweat slid down my cheek as the Spanish door came into view. My hand reached out to the ominous oak, eager to be in my desk and hide from whatever humiliation awaited me on the other side. My fingers wrapped around the doorknob. I melodramatically prepared myself to face the music, ready to combat any taunt, no matter how emotionally shattering. My fingers began to turn, but not on their own. The door swung open to reveal a villainous smile curled in delight. “Señor” Ericson glared at me, his mind no doubt having already devised my punishment.

“Hola, Señor Wagner,” he said loud enough for the entire class to hear. He stretched an arm out to point me to where to go: in this case, the front of the room. “¿Dónde estabas?”

I stood panting in front of my entire Spanish class, the fluorescent lights glaring down on me like those at an insane asylum. I collected myself, mustered up my best Spanish, and began to explain.

“Hola, Señor Ericson,” I said in a perfect American accent. “Yo estaba...at my home.”

A few snickers rose from the class. Damn them.

“¡En español!” Señor Ericson barked.

“¿A mi home?”

“¿A su casa?”

“Yes.”

“¿Sí?”

“Sí.”

“Sit down, Mr. Wagner.”

A sigh escaped my lips. The battle had ended with only minimal casualties to my self-esteem. A few students continued to scoff at my misfortune as I began the long walk back to the dark recesses of my desk. A few of my “partners in learning” stared up at me, still amused from the early morning entertainment. I don’t know why, but I didn’t hate my high school, even though I easily could have. Vestibus High School was a smorgasbord of flaws and shortcomings. First of all, the cafeteria food tasted like burnt tires and undercooked dreams. This pitiful excuse for nourishment could only be washed down with water that was pumped with enough “nutritious” chemicals to power a car. As if our food didn’t inspire enough gloom, monotonous pep rallies demanded we raise our voices in celebration of the Vestibus “Workers.” Students pulled straws to determine who would be condemned to serve as our school mascot, the Vestibus Coal Miner. Sure enough, basketball games were filled with “Go Workers!” cheers and “Let’s go to work!” chants. Karl Marx would’ve been proud.

Yet despite these transgressions, the most repulsive Vestibus deception occurred on a regular basis. Each day, girls put their hair in tiny, neat buns and claimed they “weren’t trying.” I may have believed them too, if not for the eyeliner, lipstick, blush, bulging cleavage, and skin-tight yoga pants. Sure, it made them look “cute,” or whatever the societal opinion of “cute” was. Frankly, girls, particularly these marvels, never really appealed to me.

Most students had their heads face down on their desks, sleeping or passed out from exhaustion, much thanks to the forced learning of a foreign language. Strolling past these hibernating teenagers, I was no doubt staring into my future, one that couldn't come soon enough.

My skinny torso slipped into a desk, and I allowed my face to collapse onto a mountain of Spanish notes. An unforeseen pencil case greeted my forehead with a crash. I groaned and straightened up onto my seat. The pain pierced my left eye, waking me up for the moment. Someone whispered loudly.

“Hey, Nick!”

A pair of familiar eyes was resting on me. Gordy Tanner's cheeks were constantly blushed so it became impossible to tell if he was embarrassed or not. His dirty blonde hair compulsively crashed over his face and revealed a single blue eye. Gordy's lone pupil stared at me quizzically as though my shoulders had sprouted a second head or, the more likely explanation: that my hair was sticking up. A couple of my fingers traced a few black curls to their origin and smoothed down a stubborn cowlick. Gordy's stare persisted. So did mine.

Gordy Tanner kept life interesting. Best friends since the dog days of eighth grade, not a minute had passed between us without Gordy making a far-fetched, impossibly abstract philosophical observation. “Do you think apples ever get jealous of the tree that they came from?” and “Should we live our lives like people or like souls?” were just a sliver of Gordy's playbook. The superfluity of his pretentious intellect was astounding. Half the time, he lost me amongst a concoction of hypotheticals and scenarios; but we could talk about anything and generally had the same, unwavering opinion of our generation: disappointed and largely ashamed. Our

friendship blossomed on the system of “sticking together,” which we always did.

Gordy’s mouth remained open, patiently waiting to answer any response.

“What is it, Gordy?” I whispered.

“Why are you late?”

“I was getting a perm.”

“Really?”

“No, stupid!”

Gordy chuckled and returned his attention to the present subjunctive. My eyes gained weight and started to drift, my vision narrowing with each utterance of “Repita, por favor.” A page of notes stared up at me, urging, no, begging me to write anything. I declined the invitation and allowed my mind to roam free, far away from this useless class. The room slowly darkened and transformed into my own mental playground, when Gordy’s voice interrupted my tranquility, rattling into my head.

“Hey Nick!”

My neck craned upwards. The brief nap had left my vision foggy.

“What?” I moaned.

“Do you think gay guys would want a vagina or would they be grossed out?”

My eyes shot up, pointing straight ahead. Most teenage boys would catch the word *vagina* and instantly teleport themselves to a land

with a surplus of women and a shortage of clothing. But not me. I heard Gordy say, “gay.” Gay. The word felt like a blow to the stomach; only I didn’t know who was punching or why. Nobody knew I was gay, not even Gordy. I packed it so far down, even I forgot for a while, but now it was alive again, beating inside of me like a second heart. Every feeling of attraction I’d ever felt swelled up and flowed into my brain, immersing my thoughts. Caught up with desire, my eyes drifted around the room, briefly settling upon each boy in the class. No longer were they a conglomeration of hormonal, post-pubescent high-schoolers. Each was his own collection of attractive features: chins, eyes, chests, biceps, lips. In just the utterance of an unsuspecting word, my world was reopened, and Gordy had no idea.

Breath returned to my lungs. I turned back to Gordy and answered his previous question with one of my own.

“Why? Do you want a vagina?”

That shut him up.

I shifted back to the front of the class. The entire room had swiveled around in their chairs. They stared at me.

“Hola,” I muttered nervously.

---

The bell shrieked, abruptly ending a train of thought while simultaneously piercing my ears. Like pigs drawn to a trough, packs of students migrated to the cafeteria. I lingered behind at Gordy’s locker. His hands were pushed into two jean pockets as he gazed into his locker. I never really found Gordy attractive. Maybe it was because I’d known him since metal lined his teeth and acne covered his chin. Maybe it was because he had been around since

before I started thinking boys were sexy. None of that would have mattered much though if Gordy was actually gay, which he wasn't, not that I ever asked. I didn't want to know.

Gordy glanced up at me.

“What are you thinking about, Nick?”

“You.”

He laughed as though it were a joke.

Just then a tiny hand shoved itself into my scalp and tussled my hair, probably an improvement to the previous mess of black licorice. My hand straightened out a few loose ends as Monica Holden crept into view, a half smile on her face and a small notepad in her hand. She flipped off the cover and started reading.

“It's not what you look at that matters; it's what you see.”

“Who said that?” I asked.

“Henry David Thoreau.”

“Is he in style nowadays?”

“If he was, I probably wouldn't stoop so low as to conform to society's expectations by telling you his quote, now would I, Nicholas?”

“Oh I'm sure you could find some pretentious, metaphorical reason.”

“Oh please! I’m just here to guide you two!” she said. “Do you want to know why I don’t follow the trends and styles of our fellow young adults?”

“Oh please grace us with your wisdom,” Gordy said sarcastically.

“Because I am the style! Or at least my own,” Monica said.

“You’re going to be the next Marilyn Monroe,” I said.

“No. I’m just the first Monica Holden,” she answered, turning a rosy cheek at me. “Hey! I like that! I’m writing that down!”

Monica pulled a small black notebook out of her messenger bag, scribbled something on one of the pages, and slipped it back into its own exclusive pocket, never to be seen by human eyes, Monica not included.

“So what goes on in your lives?”

“What goes on in our *minds* is a better question!” Gordy proclaimed triumphantly.

“Fascinating, Gordy,” Monica deadpanned. “But seriously, what’s up?”

“Everything,” Gordy answered.

“Is that another one of your philosophical responses?” I asked.

“No. Wait! Maybe? Perhaps...” Gordy trailed off, exploring the metaphysical boundaries of time and space, deciding what *is* and what *is not*.

“That should keep him busy,” I said.

Monica laughed and snatched my hand.

“Let’s walk, Wagner.”

I met Monica Fantasia Holden my freshmen year. Her family had moved around a lot, but finally settled here, God knows why. Despite her geographical instability, Monica constantly reminded Gordy and me that her vast experience had left her severely cultured and wise in ways we couldn’t comprehend in our underdeveloped states. She wore berets and vests to school and carried a satchel, which never held textbooks. Her symbol of youth and enlightenment “couldn’t possibly be subjected to the oppressive lessons of the establishment, you silly boys.”

We walked down an overly lighted hallway lined with mediocre art projects and 3<sup>rd</sup> place sports trophies. Our bagged lunches swung at our sides, nearly bumping into each other with every step. Monica curled a few strands of dark brown hair around her fingertip and shot me a look. Her red beret rested just on the back of her head, pushing her hair forward so it fell over her chest. Two green eyes squinted at me as Monica’s lips curled into a sly smile.

“What?” I asked.

“I think I’m going to sign my novels: Monica F. H.” she said.

“As in first name, middle initial, last initial?”

“Indubitably, Nicholas.”

“I assume there’s a deep-seeded reason behind this.”

“Oh, Nicholas you know me so well!” Monica swung her satchel around to her stomach and retrieved the black notebook. She

flipped a few pages and traced her finger down the page, stopping near the bottom.

“When you read a story,” she read, “there are two people involved: the author and the reader. As the reader, I can’t help but feel like I’m cheating the author. I don’t know him. I’ve never talked to him. And yet I am granted the privilege of his innermost observations and ideas? I don’t want that when I write. I want my readers to feel like they know me. Instead of Hemingway, Thoreau, and Emerson, why not Ernest, Henry, and Ralph? Well people will know me as Monica, like they do now.”

Monica’s eyes glanced up from the page, a smile half spread on her face.

“So what do you think?” she asked, closing the notebook and returning it to its home.

“People know you as Monica right now? I think of you as M. F. Holden, or Mother Fucking Holden.”

She laughed. “On second thought, I think I like that better.”

We turned and continued walking down the nearly vacant hallway. Glaring lights bounced off the tile and reflected our silhouettes as we passed. My feet meticulously avoided the cracks between tile squares, and I let my mind travel back to a time when evading breaks in the sidewalk was our biggest problem. Too often my life seemed to never have any cracks to miss. I stepped on smooth surface and kept walking without any repercussions. My mother never broke her back, and nothing ever changed. At least if there were cracks, we had something to avoid.

I stepped on a crack and felt a pang of guilt.

“What are you thinking about, Wagner?” Monica asked.

“Aw, you know, life,” I said.

“Oh you are so deep.”

“That’s what she said.”

“You’re dirty.”

“And you’re just a naïve, innocent girl!” I teased.

“Ah, Nicholas! How dare you! My one vulnerable spot! My Monica’s heel!”

I laughed as Monica clutched her chest and pretended to faint.

“Wonderful performance, crazy-pants,” I said. Crazy-pants? What the hell was I saying?

“Oh please hold your applause,” she paused. “Psycho-shirts.”

Monica playfully hit me with her bagged lunch as we walked into VESTIBUS BANQUET HALL, the name of our school cafeteria painted in bold capital letters across the top of the walls. My gaze rotated around the lunchroom, spotting groups of friends and the occasional mixture of awkward freshmen who had nowhere else to sit but with others exhibiting similar social ineptitude. The stench of stale French fries wafted in the air and drifted by my head. I mentally thanked God, and my mom, for my homemade lunch.

My eyes continued to drift until they eventually rested on a boy, one I’d never held a conversation with for more than an “excuse me” or “what’s for homework?” I knew who he was though.

Mark Sorenson.

His straight black hair was slicked back over his right ear, the rest cascading over his forehead to compliment his “boy next door” face. If I hadn’t seen him before, I may have thought he was the male protagonist from a 90s romantic comedy come to life. Whenever I pictured myself with a boy, I thought of Mark. I thought of his calm brown eyes and being able to literally feel his gaze upon me, touching his stare with my own. Even the slightest nudge from him would make my skin melt. What I would give just to feel his thick arms around me once, holding me tight; to hear him tell me, “You’re safe.” What I would give.

Mark sat across the cafeteria at a table with his equally muscular, but not nearly so dreamy, friends. He punched the guy next to him in the arm. That blow would have snapped me in two, not a fellow football player though. To them, it was a sign of affection, one of the few I was okay with not experiencing from Mark.

Monica waved me over to our usual spot. Gordy had already found his way back to the lunchroom, but oddly, yet not surprisingly, without his lunch.

“Where’s your food, Gordy?” I inquired.

“Hmmm good question. Where is anything? Where is us? Earth? Here? The universe? School? Who defines where something is? Certainly not me, Nick. It’s above my pay grade.”

Monica chimed in.

“You forgot it, didn’t you?”

“Yup.”

Monica smirked and winked at me. I didn't respond. Mark was passing, catching my attention and my eye.

---

Friday didn't start like any other day. I ate breakfast. That was my first mistake. Years of rebellion against the conceited "most important meal of the day" were all in vain. My once proud stance for adolescent laziness fizzled for one morning. I should have stayed home right then and there, but no! I valued my education. How stupid.

I pulled my cell phone out of a jean pocket and checked the time. 7:35. Holy Shit! Late! Again! Suspicions of breakfast had not been unjustified, just as I originally suspected. The inaugural daily food consumption had put me behind schedule. Damn you, balanced breakfast.

I hastily threw a sweatshirt over my head and slung a suspiciously heavy backpack onto my shoulder. The weight practically dislocated my arm, the strap pressing against my collarbone. In grade school, my backpack felt more like an accessory than a means to carry my "cargo." Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if you wanted to leave town, you put an apple and a wood carving in a bandana and tied it around a stick. Unfortunately, that makeshift suitcase couldn't support a workbook, let alone a textbook. People who suggest that teenagers do more manual labor should try lugging around my bag of concrete education. Maybe then they'd finally learn something about hard work.

I quickly caught a glimpse of my glaring awkwardness in the bathroom mirror and, consequently, rushed to fix my disheveled hair, which looked less like dark flowing locks and more like a mess of black silly string. In truth, there wasn't much wrong with it, but there doesn't need to be for me to have a nervous breakdown. Still,

it was unhealthy, and I knew it. It was just going to get re-messed up regardless: either from the wind, rain, or my own hands pulling on it from an overload of stress and social perplexity.

The school day, in contrast to my morning, transpired like most others, monotonously painful and painfully monotonous. The bell rang before I could slip into a desk so, once more; I was humiliated in front of the entire class, courtesy of Señor Ericson. Then, as usual, Gordy cheered me up by asking, “Have young animals ever wondered where baby animals came from?” No answer presented itself to me. Gordy thought for a moment and said, “yes” quite assuredly.

Just around lunchtime, Monica snuck up from behind and hugged me around the waist.

“Good day, Nicholas!” she said.

I cringed.

“Gordy, it feels like an Oompa Loompa is trying to molest me.”

“Somebody better call Mr. Wonka and tell him he’s got a lustful Loompa on the loose,” Gordy said.

Monica shoved her head into the space between my arm and stomach. She glared up at us. “I hate both of you.”

“I can’t even hear you from all the way down there,” I added.

“You guys suck.”

She pushed her whole body through the opening so my arm was around her. My wrist awkwardly retreated from her shoulder and planted itself in my pocket.

“Speaking of being molested from behind,” Monica said, “have you gentlemen pondered who you will summon to the merriment of incessantly rubbing adolescent genitalia together whilst repetitive pounding and seizure-inducing strobe lights set the mood?”

“You lost me at ‘genitalia,’” I said.

“You had me at ‘genitalia!’” Gordy said.

Monica clarified, “Have you guys thought of who you’re going to ask to prom?”

While the idea of prom wasn’t repulsive to me, I never really considered myself a viable candidate to be someone’s date.

“I thought we were just going to have a movie night like at homecoming,” I said.

“We’re not taking in another film,” Monica said. “At least, I’m not. I want to get dressed up in an absurdly expensive dress and dance with, ideally, a boy. So how about you, Gordy?”

If there was one person who thought prom was an existentially fleeting gig, it was Gordy.

“As a matter of fact, I’ve been thinking of asking someone,” Gordy said.

“Seriously?” I asked.

“Yep.”

“Who are you gonna ask?” Monica questioned.

“I was thinking about asking Rebecca Michalowski.”

Monica glanced at me out of the corner of her eye.

“You mean the Rebecca Michalowski that graduated two years ago?” Monica asked.

“The one that’s older than your sister?” I added.

“You better believe it!”

Monica and I burst out laughing.

“Okay, okay slow down. Have you ever even talked to her before?” I asked.

“Nope! And what a lovely first conversation it will be!”

“Gordy, my dear casanova, how do you propose to win her over?” Monica asked.

“With my looks, charm, wit, humor, sensitivity, and respect of women! Also, I bought roses,” he said gleefully.

“Oh wow. Well good luck, Tanner!” Monica said. “What about you, Nick? I’m sure the women are lining up at your door. I bet you have them take numbers and get in line to keep it organized! Come on, who’s the lucky lady, Wagner?”

Apparently the idea of skipping the dance still wasn’t occurring to Monica. “No idea. How about you?”

Monica blushed and half smiled.

“Actually, I already got asked by someone. I just don’t know if I’m going to say ‘yes’ yet.”

My eyebrows rose. Monica was pretty but rarely conversed with anyone outside of Gordy and me.

“Really? Who asked you?”

Monica adjusted the satchel hanging on her shoulder, keeping one hand on the strap.

“You may not know him. He’s on the football team. Mark Sorenson.”

My heart dropped. My temperature rose. Of fucking course.

---

Friday night, the three of us all rode together to a bonfire Monica “and friends” had been invited to. Upon arrival, Monica led us to the backyard just as the Sun dipped below the clouds. A pink glow covered the west, yellow rays shooting above us. After a half hour, the light disappeared and the Sun was gone. The glowing rays rattled in my head though, struggling to break free and release themselves into the sky. They never did. The darkness remained.

Monica chatted with everyone. Her demeanor was less than that of a sixteen year-old girl and more of an orator. She’d engage in ferociously aggressive conversations with people Gordy and I had never even seen at school, or at least tried not to see. She punctuated each point with a flick of her cup and a raising of the eyebrows. Her mouth never closed, even in silence.

On the opposite side of the party, Gordy and I twiddled our thumbs on the living room couch. Speakers blasted music from the iTunes top 50 at our ears. The party happened around us.

Despite the constant thumping and unbearable rhythms, we ignored the noise and discussed our own brand of philosophy.

“Well maybe,” I said, “there are multiple universes!”

“So what would you call this individual realm of universe then?” Gordy asked, clearly intrigued at my nonsensical speculation.

I stretched out my arms and painted a picture with my hands.  
“Reality.”

“But, Nick, there can’t be a single reality if each universe has its own separate reality!” Gordy proclaimed.

“So what do we call our own particular reality then, Dr. Tanner?”

Gordy scratched his chin and raised an eyebrow, no doubt to build suspense.

“Gordyville!” he said throwing his arms up.

We laughed and continued on like that for a while. Gordy posed a question, I replied with an explanation, and then he gave the correct “answer.” We became so consumed in our abstract analysis though, that a few key party details slipped by our ears. Luckily, Monica ran in from outside with the scoop, a goofy smile stretched across her face.

“Hey, what are you guys doing?” she asked.

“Just talking about *guy* stuff,” I answered.

“Yeah, sure,” she said sarcastically. “So hey, guess who just got here, Gordy!”

Gordy glanced up at Monica and flipped the hair out of his eye.  
“Who?”

Monica paused for effect. “Rebecca Michalowski.”

“Are you serious?”

“I swear to God! She’s outside by the bonfire.”

Gordy cleared his throat and rose from his chair. “Well, ladies and gentlemen,” he said to only Monica and me, “the time has come. If you’ll excuse me, I have a lion to tame.”

“Good luck, stallion,” Monica said.

“Don’t get clawed,” I added.

With that, Gordy was out the door and into the backyard’s black unknown, leaving me alone with Monica. She had curled her hair and painted her nails for tonight. A thin red cardigan covered her arms but was unbuttoned to reveal a little cleavage beneath her navy blue tank top. She sat on the couch staring at me, her head leaning on a soft, tiny hand. A quiet smile rested on Monica’s face.

“So have you decided whether or not you’re gonna go to prom with Mark yet?” I bravely asked. The question had been trapped inside of me all day and was just waiting to shoot out of every pore of my body. Even so, I didn’t want to hear the answer, just ask the question. The answer terrified me.

The smile disappeared. “Uh yeah. I said yes.”

Yes. The word itself was a train. I’d laid myself on the tracks and tied the rope, preventing any hope for escape. Only Monica could have saved me, but she said “yes.” The train ripped me apart.

The first thing out of my mouth was laughter. I shouldn't have laughed, but I did. I laughed and laughed and laughed. I couldn't stop.

"Wow!" I said, still badgering Monica with impulsive delight at my tragic circumstances.

"What?" Monica asked.

"Wow! Just – of course!"

"What?!" Monica's voice wasn't calm anymore. She was irritated.

"Nothing...nothing."

My laughter collapsed from obnoxious to downright cynical to quiet sobbing.

"Nick, do you have something to say?"

My head fell into my hands; my fingers pulled at my hair. I could feel tears approaching, but fought them back. "I just can't believe you're going with *Mark*."

"Since when do you care?"

"I – I – I don't know."

Monica looked away, then returned her stare.

"Look, Nick." Monica spoke softly. Her tone had changed. "I – uh – I don't think you should be upset. We're just friends and I can do what I want and...and..."

Monica's voice shrunk.

“Because, well, I don’t totally have to go to prom with him, right? It’s just a stupid dance, isn’t it? And I mean, um – well I wanna go to prom...”

I lifted my head up and looked at her, my eyes moist with jealousy and heartbreak.

She continued. “Do you have anything to say, Nick?”

Yes, but I remained silent.

She continued slowly, carefully. “Look, we’ve been friends for years, right? Right. And through those years, we’ve been through a lot together. Like remember when we went to the pet store because I wanted to see the puppies and you had to drag me out of there because I was crying because they were so cute and I wanted to buy one but you wouldn’t let me because it was stupid? Remember? Sorry I’m talking so much I just...I just can’t take it anymore. I – I like you, Nick Wagner. And as Robert Fulghum said: ‘We’re all...’ um, I forget the quote. But I *do* like you, Nick. I can explain that to myself in my own words.”

A tear dripped off my cheek and hit the carpet. Monica’s eyes were soft and damp, her lips full and curled into a thin, hopeful smile.

“Oh, Monica, I –“

Mark barreled into the room, a beer can clutched in his thick fingers.

“Monica!” he said. “There you are! I’ve been looking everywhere for you! How you doing? You good? I’m so good!”

“Uh yeah. I’m good, Mark.”

He stood as a tower blocking the light in his Vestibus varsity jacket. “Who’s this guy?” he asked pointing at me with the beer.

“This is my friend Nick,” she replied. Her words were low and frail.

“Hey what’s up?” Mark said, turning to me. He took a gulp of his beer.

My mouth dried up. I mustered a shrug. I could feel him examining me up and down.

“Hey, wait! What’s going on here?” Mark asked.

“Nothing, we’re just talking,” Monica said.

“Sure doesn’t look like talking.”

I realized just how close Monica and I had gotten to each other. I spoke up. “No, um, seriously, we’re just friends.”

“Oh,” Monica said under her breath but incidentally loud enough for Mark to hear.

“What?” he said furiously. “You like this guy? *This guy!*”

Mark reached down and pulled me off the couch like a rag doll. His strong fingers wrapped around my collar then threw me to the living room floor. Monica shrieked.

“MARK, WHAT THE FUCK?!”

I caught a glimpse of the crowd forming outside the glass door. They were eager to see a fight, eager to watch a weakling get stomped. My gaze shifted to the giant hovering over me like a

vulture having spotted the dead meat. Mark's beautiful brown eyes glared down at me, rage encompassing the vicious stare that was pointed right at my feeble body.

"Son of a bitch!" Mark yelled as his foot swung back then kicked me below the ribs. I rolled over, the pain coming slowly then all at once. The giant reached down and rolled me over so I was flat on my back. His fists clenched, his biceps strained, Mark crouched on top of me, his knees pressing against either side of my body. I grasped at my crush's face, trying anything to prevent another strike. He moaned, swatted my hand away, and jabbed into my stomach. Wind cascaded from my mouth as two weak lungs deflated. They gasped for air. I gasped for help. Once again, Mark's firm chest met my hand as I pointlessly pushed against his pecs. I'd dreamt of this moment before. I'd lie in bed and feel his muscles hold me. They protected me. But now, his thick hands held my wrists down and forced tears out of my eyes.

Stop, Mark. Stop. Take your hands off of my wrists and help me up. Fix my hair and say you're sorry. It was just the booze right? I know it will never happen again. I know, Mark. It's okay. I forgive you.

Gordy burst through the crowd and dragged Mark off of me.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Gordy shouted, his hand resting on Mark's chest, separating him from me.

"Monica likes him! Goddamnit!"

Mark was drunk out of his mind.

"You moron! Nick is gay!"

Mark's eyes grew wide as his stare fell on me.

“What? Are you fucking serious?” Mark asked.

I turned my head over to look at Monica. She looked back and nodded subtly. I stayed quiet.

“Yeah he is super gay! You know he probably has a crush on you, dude!”

“Ah gross!”

“So clearly he and Monica couldn’t be together now could they?”

“I-uh...I guess...Whatever. The faggot still deserved it!” Mark sneered at me.

He turned and stormed off through the open screen door, the crowd parting to let him through, then following Mark outside. My body remained on the ground though, no other option available at the moment. I stared at the ceiling. It was beige. Monica and Gordy knelt down on either side of me. Monica gently moved some hair off my face and used her sleeve to dry my tears and clean my cheek. The living room light silhouetted her from above, hiding her face. Something started dripping on my cheek. Monica’s tears fell one by one where mine had been.

“I’m so sorry,” she said.

“It’s okay, Crazy-pants. Hey, Gordy,” I coughed. “How’s Rebecca?” I asked, conjuring up a meek smile.

Gordy smirked. “She’s good. Boy, is she good. Funny story though: turns out, her name is actually Rachel. Woops!”

I laughed, aggravating my still unrecovered lungs. Gordy and Monica propped me up on the couch.

“Well, you’ve had quite the night, slugger,” Gordy said. “So in lieu of this spectacular display that all decent men should emulate, I feel obligated to honor your heroism by retrieving a bag of ice for your cheek. While this bag of ice may nurse your physical wounds, your emotional scars shan’t be mended so effortlessly. Ms. Holden, the floor is yours. Nick, allow Monica’s words to work as a metaphorical bag of ice...for your heart and your soul.”

“Thanks, Gordy,” I said.

Gordy smiled and whispered, “No problem, you reckless jackass.” He turned and ran out of sight.

Monica gently curled a strand of hair behind my ear and sniffled. She clasped my hand and shut her eyes tightly for a few seconds as tears dripped down her face, soaking her shirt. Before the party, she must have stressed over her wardrobe, and now it was wet and ruined and pointless. I reached a hand out and wiped her tears with my thumb, but Monica’s eyes remained closed, probably trying to push out the memories; or hold them inside, not wanting to let go, not wanting to forget.

“Hey,” I said. “Don’t cry. It’s okay.”

Her eyes gently cracked open, still soggy and sad.

“I’m not crying,” Monica sniffled. “I’ve just got something in both my eyes.” She mustered a microscopic grin and wiped her nose.

“Look, Nick, can I ask you—”

“No. No don’t ask me anything.”

“Nick, I just — ”

“No, Monica. I can’t. Not now. I’m hurt.” My breathing quickened. “And I can’t tell you the reason but I just need you to hear me and understand that this is the worst kind of pain because it’s irreparable. You know what I mean? No, don’t answer that. Just understand and don’t ask ‘why.’ That’s the most you can do for me.”

Monica held my shoulders tightly in her small hands. “Okay, Nick. You’re okay.”

She was warm.

“So are you.”

Monica shook her head and smiled. “That’s so cliché.”

“Yeah.”

And then she kissed me, and I kissed back. Monica’s soft, wet lips brushed up and down my mouth, over and under the bottom and top of my lips. I felt her body; I felt her breath; I felt her hands, but I wasn’t kissing Monica. Mark’s full lips pushed against me and fell inside my open mouth. They engulfed me and wouldn’t let go as he drowned me in his muscle. His rough hands slowly moved across my jaw to the back of my head and through my sloppy curls. His mouth opened wider as his kisses gained speed and ferocity. Every kiss carried with it the desire of a thousand kisses that could have never been had, but were now being experienced. It was the surest definition of pleasure, and I couldn’t be satisfied. My hands grazed over his back muscles as his chest collapsed onto mine, the sweetest suffocation I’d ever felt. Mark held my waist and stroked my neck as his lips now fell softly onto mine. The kissing conceded sexuality for adoration. We moved each other’s lips gently, feeling our mouths as wholly as possible. I heard him giggle.

A tiny hand grasped my chin and delicately lifted it to a soft peck.

I opened my eyes and saw Monica. She was kissing me. Her eyes were shut. Maybe she was thinking of Mark too.

*Kenneth Ip*

## Kenneth Ip



Junior, Cinema Studies

I am from Hong Kong and I have just transferred here to the University of Michigan last semester from NYU. Staying in New York City for just a few months, I reckoned that a city encourages much separation and what it means to be alone but lonely. More importantly, I concluded in my short stay that I was borne out of a city but not destined to be in one, ultimately bringing me to Ann Arbor.

## To Yanie: The Great Mechanics of Time

In the departure hall, the sentiment of bittersweet lingered in the crowd, overwhelming with mothers and daughters crying goodbye; and fathers and sons hugging awkwardly tight. Chuckling and weeping, they wished their children the best and asked them to call home once they landed on the other side of the world. But at an age that is insensitive to condescending glares and the scope of the seriousness of things in general, he stood in the crowd surrounded by friends from school, joking and laughing innocently amidst the solemn ambience of farewell. "Hey Kenev, how do you pronounce leopard?" his friends asked, referring back to 8th grade when he pronounced it, along with some other vocabularies, as a two syllabus word. "I don't love you any more, I won't give you any call!" his friends memorized in unison, a line they all knew well by heart in one of his many laughable poetry attempts. And they would go on, teasing him good-heartedly like they always did in school, when time never seemed to pass and school was everything in their lives.

Back then in school, everyone had assigned seats in the classroom, and he and his friends their own territory. Sitting on the first seat in the last row of the classroom, he lived through the craziest times when Physics lessons would always transform the classroom into a battleground, with crumbled paper balls firing into every direction, claiming casualties on both sides of the force, while Newton's first, second and third laws were being explained; he also witnessed the spectacular incident when a water bomb was hauled forcefully straight to the face of Dr. Mao, the same Physics teacher who had somehow written a dissertation on nuclear weaponry. He always watched the scene detachedly with his friends, unable to feel their classmate's excitement, but also at the same time not pitying the teacher who ended up teaching high school Physics. In between periods, the back of the classroom would be changed into an arena,

where well built athletes in class would, with the help of other classmates, launch on the few usual victims, ripping off their uniform while they were kicking and moaning. With ample artistic expressiveness, they would write phrases and draw pictures onto the naked bodies with a marker, leaving traces of their friendship in the wildest time of life. This unwritten ritual of the school bordering on bully baffled him at first, but he eventually, like others, understood it was what bonded and strengthened generations of friendship among the boys in school.

A truce was signed during English classes, and the Great Battle of the Paper Ball and the epic fights in the arena would be suspended, as order was resumed in class with attentive eyes fixed on Miss Pi, the teacher who shared the same name with the mathematic value 3.14 and was allegedly a BBC war reporter. Although neither really explained the authority she commanded in the classroom, the class was unusually well behaved, engaging enthusiastically in grammar exercises and composition tasks. Those were his formative months, reading his choice of books while others were distinguishing gerunds from infinitives; writing only on topics that held his interest while others were desperately squeezing literary juices out of their brain in vain; reading some more again as the writing exercises were more often than not pointless to waste paper and ink upon. Physics and English were the only time he had ever spent in class, the rest of the classes he spent in the library, living in his own bubble constructed of books and films oblivious to everything else in the world.

The crowd started walking slowly towards the entrance of customs as the time came to board, some of their faces proud and dignified, sending their first children to college; some others solemn and grave, reluctant to leaving their loved children in foreign soil; that of his parents resigned and dejected, seemingly knowing already that they would seldom hear from their son the minute he was gone; and that of his friends joyous and carefree, unaware of the

last moment of their pure brotherhood. Waving his friends goodbye while stealing only a brief glance at his family, he walked straight into customs; his face anxious but excited, uncertain but expectant at what awaited in the United States of America.

The captain of the flight welcomed the passengers on board, saying they would be in Philadelphia 17 hours later. He looked down at the city that he was so familiar with having lived there for the most part of his life. The bustling streets were rescaled to a mass of indistinguishable grey as the flight took off, dwindling quickly into a small black dot that blended into the complete darkness of the night.

Intertwined with narrow streets tightly packed under the aligned skyscrapers, the city seemed to be the only gigantic world that existed for those who had never been out of town before. A pang of uncertainty flooded his thoughts as the faint contour of his homeland now faded up in the air, being replaced by only remnants of what he could remember. He was all of a sudden unsure why he decided to go to the East Coast when almost all of his friends went to the opposite side instead. He heard from his friends about the sunny beaches that were everywhere in California, and the Hong Kong students that made up more than half of the population in the schools there. Although he had convinced himself and others that he needed the cloud, the cold, the snow, and the gloominess for his creativity, he was rendered helpless thinking about all of his friends in California, worrying what life would be like being alone in Pennsylvania.

The light dimmed and the cabin was soon turned into a dark abyss. He was in Santa Monica a second and London the next, reuniting with friends who were studying abroad all over the world. He dreamt of roaming on the streets with his friend and literature mentor Jay on a drizzling afternoon, trying to find the obscure second handed bookstore hidden in the busiest part of the city.

They were tired and soaked from the long walk in the rain by the time they found it in a dilapidated building, but they stayed there until nightfall, pouring over forgotten books abandoned in dusted corners and digging through hidden gems lying unattended on shelves. The bookstore was beyond magical, freezing time and disintegrating space as they savored every word on the pages and lived the fantasies that were vividly crafted. It was a safe haven shielded from the hectic outside world and an orphanage for unwanted books. That day was the first memory of many to follow a journey of unexpected discoveries of alternative realities.

Inside his dreams, he wanted to ask Jay how it was like studying abroad in a foreign country; how were things different from home; how did he find another group of friends; how did he continue to live in the bubble; he asked all of the questions desperately, expecting him to answer all of them like he always did. But he could not hear himself no matter how loud he spoke, and he started yelling louder and more urgently, emitting only muffled sounds that sank deeper into the silent currents of their reconstructed world.

He woke up unsure of where he was, finding everything around him to be shaking violently. The captain said something about a turbulence, and that they would be touching down in an hour. He suddenly realized how far away from home he was now. His friends and family who were next to him only an instant ago seemed so distant and unreachable now. A surge of panic ran pass his mind, realizing that he would soon be alone in a foreign environment with nothing and no one to rely on.

Returning his United States passport, the custom officer welcomed him home, causing him to feel even more out of place at this country, where he had only spent the first few months of his life. At the arrival hall, he saw a man holding a large banner with his name and that of the school printed on it, and he followed the driver to

the limousine, travelling to his new school with a heart stricken by fear and homesick.

It is amazing how he encountered turning points in his life one after another in a school as obscure as this. So distant was the terrifying memory of studying abroad and mingling into the new culture; nevertheless, the first weeks passed by almost too easily, and he found himself already blending into the once foreign environment. How he yearned for the friendship he had readily taken for granted in his first year. The loyalty and unity of students like himself, studying miles away from home in hope of a better education. They shared in pride when some of them transferred away, and they stayed strong together when some others failed. The constant companionship made everything almost effortless; life was too easy without even having to try. Alone was not a moment he had ever spent; loneliness was hardly a sentiment he could understand. After so much that had happened, he could barely remember the days when he couldn't wait to transfer away to a college with a bigger name.

It was still weeks before the new semester began. The dormitory and cafeteria, once bustling with students, were now vacant. Red chairs under grand canopies, once seats for inquisitive minds, were now squirrels' instead. The faint trace of footsteps was the only thing they left behind. The path they had once strolled together he now walked alone. No more were the late nights they all stayed up; no more were the mornings they all sleepily scurried to class. Everything started to blur, as drops of woeful tears ran freely, smearing the last remnant of the moments he strove to remember.

His mind wandered frantically backwards in time, desperately trying to stay there and never come back. But a phone call for the arrival of the new students came through at the last minute, pulling him away from his rueful past. Treading on the border of past and present, he was barely sober in the office crowded with students

looking as lost as he was. The fatigue from the long flight was visible on their faces, as was their eagerness to explore and to learn miles away from home. He wished to be a part of them, sharing a clean slate brimmed with blanks to fill and a new beginning with possibilities to imagine.

Still lost in his train of thought, he unconsciously stepped out of the office into the September night, ready to help the new ones settle into their respective rooms. He almost missed the girl standing apart from everyone else, slim but graceful, cold yet fragile. Her accent is melodic, standard British. Her face is beautiful, mystically melancholic. That night was the first time they met, a memory so well guarded even time could never steal it.

Her dormitory was isolated in the woods. With a thousand thoughts in mind, he stammered when he spoke. The woods offered its help, conducting the awkward silence with the whistling breeze. He rehearsed the sentence again, but someone walked out of a car and offered her a ride. The car dwindled out of sight, but he stood firmly on the spot, walking with her among the dreamy woods.

He cursed his cowardice. The dim street lamps agreed, outshining the light in his eyes. The rattling branches concurred, whispering louder than his voiceless thoughts. He never smoked, but he lit a cigarette desperately nevertheless. Hiding in the veils of smoke, he walked in the darkness of the miserable glow.

Days and night he now writes of their days he still remembers and some others he does not. When he runs out of ideas, he indulges in their early days when hours were spent getting to know each other sitting on those red chairs that were everywhere on campus. They would chat until the end of the day and watch the horizon with its different shades. But at times they would also sit and comfortably share the silence with cascades of autumn brown. Rays of twilight

would shine through branches once donned with bright green leaves, glistening in those evenings that belonged only to them. The days now seem distant yet eternal, dissolving into fragments of memories he fears will be lost forever from the plunder of tomorrow.

He sits on the same couch everyday, painstakingly trying to remember with paper and ink. He forcefully shuts his eyes when he forgets, blissfully filling the memory gap with black concentrated caffeine. She was sitting across from the others while watching the game. He was completely out of shape yet he ran endlessly from the ends of the court, trying to impress the girl although he knew nothing about the game. He glanced at her severely adorable smile, and suddenly forgot about those moaning muscles he felt sure would be soon dysfunctional. He was again robbed of words when he saw her waiting as the crowd left. They strolled silently back to his room, casting two long shadows in the fleeting dusk.

She picked a book from the stack of gems waiting to be discovered. She flipped the heavily underlined pages as he bathed and caressed the same phrases he loved. The lines he once read alone she now whispered aloud, treading to the same fantasy constructed of words he once dreamt about. Although his incongruous array of books hardly said anything about him, she knew he was a loyal lover of words.

No one was in the room as he stepped out from the curtain of shower, and a thousand thoughts vaporized together with the steam. Yet an opened book was laid on the table, waiting for its reader's return. There she was waiting in the courtyard, her expression nonchalant but elegant, distant yet lovely. The sun had already set, and the road was now tinted with patches of yellow streetlamps. No longer did they keep a conscious distance as they wandered down the path they walked just hours ago, and no longer

did they fear the awkward silence in their moments spent alone.  
That was the first day when he fell in love.

He reluctantly opens his eyes again and looks through the cafe window as people come and go. He winces as he sips the last drop of the now sour espresso, crumpling the remnants of their last bittersweet memory. He steps out of the café as he wanders alone among others with a past too dear to forget. Going to the post office before it closes, he encloses the story dedicated for her in a big brown envelope, wondering if she is going to read through this.

He looks at families on the street, fathers and sons leaving a trail of warmth in the chilling night. He walks among couples whose hands are clutched and hearts madly in love. For a second, they almost seem to be there to mock his incredulous fate. He shudders when someone pats on his shoulder and wishes him a merry Christmas. The night he sees has the color of melancholy, flooding streets of neon lights with different hues of red. There she is waving in the crowd; he crosses the road oblivious to the headlights and the honk, confessing his love for the last time to the brooding Christmas night.

“Dear Yanie,

I hope the post has found its way safely and timely into your hands.

Time really does fly, a cliché to even call it as such now, but fittingly so. It has been more than two years since we last talked, at least in the physical world. I have lost count of the days, trying desperately to remember every moment, the good and the bad, the joy and the dread, that we have spent everyday in that short month of September. A devilish trick of the mind, your face was the first thing gone, slowly becoming nothing one day as a faceless blank. We choose what to remember and what not to, but there are some things so vital as such that we have no decision over. Terrified by

what gone first was what I had always taken for granted, I started to write. It was almost a year ago, last March, shortly after I went back Hong Kong for my short detour in life that I regularly went to a coffeehouse and sat along among others, foolishly trying to write faster than time, remembering everything that remained. Some parts fortunately lingered - your scent, your words, some movie nights, an evening stroll in the baseball field, the sunsets and your wise thoughts we indulged in the big red chairs - but that started fading away too no matter how fast I wrote and how consciously I strove to remember. One September night and an autumn evening stood out, however, or rather your two questions posed on me. The first you asked why I walked you back every night; I forgot my response but remember insistently doing so every night insofar as you consented so that I could spend a little short of half-an-hour more with you as we strolled, for I feared our time spent would not last. The other you asked as we strolled on the leaves of fallen autumn brown, what I would tell a girl whom I love. I said nothing, my heart desperately trying to leap out and say you are the one I love.

I am embarrassed and ashamed now, thinking how I deliberately avoided you in the cafeteria, the library, even that French class we once took together. Silly and youth did not seem to be quite able to separate themselves. That I regretted most of our short-lived relationship among many other moments that we had spent. Two years have changed everyone, including you and me. I wonder everyday of you and your life, of bits that have changed and others that have not. I changed too, plundered by time, except of my foolish love.

I have been reading much poetry now, marveling how it can make one understand more of life, and life of poetry. The sonnets are especially fascinating, written by poets of sensibility immensely greater though hearts not unlike mine. I often think of you as I read, wondering if I would read such things if it was not for you.

My year at Albright before you came was frankly a complete blank now, my first supposedly bright and memorable college year entirely disappeared. You came in my second year, changing everything of the bubble I had obliviously lived in. These two years, you have given me everything - mind, thought, passion and heart, although I have nothing at the same time. I am afraid I have said an awful lot, but I had ventured to write this because all that was said has been my only genuine heart.

I wish to spend this Christmas with you, but for now I genuinely hope you have found my presence in my words.

With deepest affections,

Kenneth”

*Caitlin Kelly*

## Caitlin Kelly



Freshman, Creative Writing

I've been writing probably since kindergarten when I made plans with my best friend to become famous author-vet-horseback riders who would live in a horse trailer with hundreds of the four-legged animals around. Though I might not want to be a vet anymore, and much less live in a horse trailer, I never stopped writing. I would stay up writing passages to my friends for fun or filling my journals with poems describing my life. Slowly, my hobby turned into the one thing I wanted to do with my life. At the end of high school, I began and finished my first novel, *Unhinged*, with the hopes of publishing before I graduate college.

## A Taste of Wine

*(Abridged)*

Her jean shorts were rolled up even shorter, almost to her butt, but no one complained. She was thin. Her legs were long. She walked with graceful strides and let her hips swing gently, but she wasn't proud. Her chin was slightly tucked. Her eyes downcast unless she was looking at the merchandise lining the streets. If she made eye contact with a stranger, she'd shrink her long frame and fade into the crowd. Shy. Unnoticed. Vulnerable.

It was only a matter of time before she came to my booth. And I would be glad to help. I feigned boredom when I noticed her pretty blonde head coming my way. She grasped the hem of a dress between her fingers. Her nails were long and manicured. Her cuticles clean. On cue, I was at her side. "Bonjour, madame. Aimes-tu cette robe?" She looked at me with pale blue eyes.

She blinked once and smiled. "Yeah, it's really pretty." She glanced down, letting her heavy black lashes conceal her gaze. "But I'm only looking. Désolée."

I smiled at her and leaned against a display shelf. "Don't worry about it," I said, "But if you don't mind my asking, what kind of accent is that?" I knew very well where she was from. I'd met girls like her before.

"You can tell?" She frowned and turned back to the dress.

"A little."

"I'm from America."

“What brought you to France? Friends? Family?” She came into town alone.

“Non. Just vacation.” She looked me in the eyes and smiled. She found me attractive. Friendly. Her pupils dilated.

“You’re travelling the country alone?”

“Only Dordogna. I’m biking.”

“Really.” I tipped my head and leaned a little closer. She forgot the crowds milling around Sarlat’s streets.

“Oui, I bike between towns, and hopefully I find a place to stay a couple days, then I bike on.”

I furrowed my brow and studied her made-up face. She didn’t like to disappoint people. She wanted to feel attractive and needed.

“You don’t have a place to stay?”

“Not yet.”

“If you need it, I have some space.”

She blushed and touched the dress. Her eyes tried to block me out, but they kept twitching in my direction. “I – uh – I’m going to check the hotel first. Sorry.”

“No worries.” I smiled and went back to the cash register. A few locals I knew were browsing through my things, so I made small talk with them like I did the girl. I joked with their son. He laughed. The girl saw. She smiled and walked away, but she’d come back. There was only one hotel in Sarlat, and it was full.

I leaned back in my chair behind the cash register. My breathing was slow, patient. I never let it speed up. Anxiety showed on the face. It made one less approachable, and so I smiled.

“Excusez-moi,” it was that American voice again. She could pass as French to a less trained ear, but I was skilled in picking out accents. It was a learned talent.

I opened my eyes and looked at her. I sat up and kept my smile contained. If I let it grow as much as I wanted to, she could be unsettled. I stayed calm and acted like I didn't care she came back. I could feel my heart beat a little faster, my toes curled and uncurled in my shoes.

“I,” she paused. She massaged her left pointer finger with her other hand and bit her lip slightly. “Do you still have a room?” Her eyebrows pulled together. Her voice was quiet. She didn't want other people to hear her ask a stranger for a bedroom. Much less a male stranger. She wanted to be unnoticed.

“Oui, j'en ai une.” Yes, I had one.

I could have told her how beautiful she was, but she didn't trust me yet. She never turned her back to me. Her body acted out of defense, but her mind told her I was a good person. She wanted to trust me. She wanted to please me because society told her to be polite. She had no choice but to stay the night, even if her body told her to leave. The least I could do was put her mind at ease by acting friendly. Make it easy for her to follow society's rules.

“You know,” I said as I packed my wares, “I'm not one for letting strangers into my home. What's your name?” I smiled slightly and let my gaze wander to her lips and back up to her eyes. She blushed. She clearly enjoyed male attention, and I would give her plenty of it. I was doing her a favor.

“Natalie,” she almost whispered. She was trying to be seductive. She blinked slowly and flashed her gaze towards my lips. I didn’t give her the pleasure of a kiss. Suspense is the most enchanting feeling. It speeds up the heart, yet comforts it. It lowers a person’s defenses because she finds herself wanting the end result more and more. She finds herself wanting to be more perfect to get a better reward. She becomes hungry for my attention and affection.

“Natalie. Is that a common American name?” I honestly didn’t know. She was the first Natalie I’d met. I’d met Gabby’s and Emily’s and even an Ellie, but never a Natalie.

“Um, yeah, I guess so. I don’t usually go to a stranger’s house, so what’s your name?” She smiled, playing the flirtatious comment back. Repetition. It leads to a familiar feeling of kinship and attraction.

“Je m’appelle Christophe.”

“I guess we aren’t strangers anymore, Christophe.” She smiled at me. Her teeth were snowy white. Probably bleached.

“Well, shall we go home?” She nodded and walked close enough to me that our arms kept brushing. The touch barrier was breaking. She was viewing me as a friend. Someone she could trust.

By the time we got to my house, lights were glowing through windows, casting long shadows across the streets. No one would be going outside at this hour. I stepped inside and flicked on the lights, holding the door open for her, acting as the gentleman I needed to be.

She smiled and stepped past me, careful to swing her hips so she didn’t bump into me, but she wasn’t avoiding me. She swung them

slowly and athletically. She was showing off her body. Flirting. I deprived her of a reaction.

“You have a beautiful home,” she said.

“Merci.” I sat opposite of the dining table and pushed a glass of water towards her. She smiled and sipped silently from the glass. She looked down, her long lashes hiding her dewy eyes. “What made you come to France alone? Why not with friends?”

“Well,” she began and smiled as she looked up at me. She was embarrassed to bring it up. “I wanted to do something on my own. I’m a big girl. I can take care of myself.” She looked at me with round eyes. She wanted approval.

“I do hope you’re being careful.”

“I am.”

“C’est bon. After all, they haven’t caught that man yet.” She sat up straighter.

“What man?” she asked.

“He’s a serial killer in Dordogna. No one’s figured out who he is.” She didn’t seem scared. Just curious. Americans. So desensitized.

She leaned forward to ask another question, her blue eyes not backing down. “What’s he look like?”

“They don’t know. They only know he’s out there because women disappear. When family calls and gets no response, it gets reported, but no locals have been hurt. It’s only been foreigners that go missing. Curious, non?”

“It’s smart. I think it’d be harder to catch him that way. But only women? Perv...”

“The police think he lures women into his home by asking for help for something or other. Why do women fall for that?”

“I don’t know.” Natalie shifted in her seat. She wrapped her hands around her glass and stared at the water. Her shoulders lifted up slightly. The muscles in her back tightened. I said the wrong thing. She was nervous.

“What town are you going to tomorrow?” She relaxed a little bit. Hearing about the near future makes people forget what’s happening in the present.

“I don’t know. I want to stay here another night. That okay?”

“Bien sur! I don’t have any company tomorrow.” She shifted around in her seat and smiled. Her shoulders drooped forward, and she sipped from her cup.

“When do you think they’ll catch the guy?”

“Soon hopefully. They say he drugs the girls when he has them, maybe in their drinks or something, so hopefully they don’t know what’s going on.”

“That’s so horrible. I can’t even imagine.”

“Je sais. It is horrible. I need to start cooking, and I am parched. Do you want any wine?” I stood up and walked to the kitchen.

“Yeah, that sounds great.”

“Red or white?”

“Red.”

“This is a new bottle. Very good and only for special occasions, but I suppose this is indeed a special occasion.” I took down two glasses and opened the bottle, filling each glass just a third of the way. She was innocent. I opened a jar and looked at the white powder inside. I dropped the smallest of pinches in her glass. The powder swirled through the dark liquid, but with a quick swish of my hand, it dissolved. She trusted me to take care of her.

I walked back into the dining room and saw her standing by the cupboard. “Merci,” she said, looking at a photo as she sipped the wine. “Who’s this?”

I stared at the framed picture. I was standing with a woman in front of an old church in Paris. “That was my wife.”

Natalie took finished her wine. She swallowed lightly and looked at me, “I’m sorry. What happened?”

“We were having a fight one night, and she left angrily... She got into an accident.” I spoke slowly, haltingly, mastering my voice to draw on her sympathy.

“Oh mon Dieu...” She looked around the shelf, trying to change the topic. Her eyes settled on a wooden sculpture of a dragon. I picked up the dragon, turning it over in my hands. “Did you make that?”

“Actually, yes, I did. I love carving things.”

“It’s amazing.”

“Thank you. I’ve heard I’m very skilled with a knife.” I smiled at her. A few more minutes, and the drugs would start to affect her. Her mind would be practically split in two. Partially conscious, but unable to control herself, her thoughts, her actions. She’d know what was going on, but there’d be nothing she could do.

Natalie stumbled forward slightly and giggled, blood turning her cheeks the color of her wine. Her mind was slow. She was cute when she couldn’t think straight. She’d be cuter when she couldn’t speak. “Was that just wine? It’s so strong.” She dragged her words out on a string and laughed.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“N’okay, I won’t” She pointed at the dragon in my hand. “That’s so good.”

“Why don’t I show you my... studio? I don’t let others see it, but I know you won’t tell anyone.”

“What’re you working on?”

I smiled at her and took her hand, “I’m starting something new tonight, but it’s a secret.” I ran my fingers across her cheek and watched her eyes widen before pulling her down the hall.

*Rachael Mack*

## Rachael Mack



Junior, majoring in English

I'm an international student who comes from the United Kingdom. I came to Michigan in 2010 to start my four years of college and I am a member of the Michigan Field Hockey Team.

## The Precipice of St. Andrew

Jason made sure everything was ready for the trip. The contents of his backpack were laid out neatly on his bed, in order of size from smallest to biggest. His pair of tinted, Oakley, all weather sunglasses were sitting next to it, followed by the pocket-sized map his father had given him before he passed away, folded neatly into a rectangle, fraying a little at the edges. His shiny blue flashlight set a small groove in the duvet of the bed, while his empty silver water bottle waited anxiously to be filled. The first aid emergency kit in its ugly looking white container came next, despite its unfortunately bland appearance, Jason knew he would never set out to hike without it. Next came the more intense equipment. He had laid out two long, carefully wound pieces of rope, one blue and one red, their terse looking material seemed all the more stronger as they lay motionless on the bed. The carabiner clips were collected in a pile next to the rope, their colours were as varied as the rope itself, ranging from green, yellow, black and gold. Jason knew you could never have enough carabiners. Positioned next to the carabiners was an extra black climbing belt, Jason always carried a spare just in case. After feeling satisfied that everything he needed was in front of him, Jason began to carefully fill his backpack, sealing it up so that he didn't miss a thing.

Jason had done this specific hike before. He knew the path; its small crevices, difficulties and easy parts, like the back of his own hand. He and his father used to do this route before they had to leave for long business trips, a way of spending time together when they knew they wouldn't be able to see one another for a while. "This route ma wee son, is my favourite. The wee bugger takes you up some steep gradients but you get a bloody gorgeous view of our lovely Scotland." These were his exact words every time the day came for Jason and his dad to climb the peak. Even though his father had passed away over a year ago now, Jason could still hear

those words in the front of his mind as he finished filling his backpack.

The village was deserted as Jason made his way through the winding roads. He drove alongside the green fields that surrounded the feet of the mountains and watched the cows lazily chomp away on the grass below them. He turned right off the main road onto a foggy, narrow dirt track that you could not see the end of. After travelling down that for about a mile and a half, Jason eventually turned right to veer off into a car park that was hidden behind the bushes. Once noticing that there were no other vehicles in the car park, he swung his waterproof jacket around his body, mounted his backpack on his back and slid his sunglasses over his eyes. "Here we go!" he said to himself loudly, as he began to march into the trees that seemed to be calling upon him.

The morning fog was beginning to subside as the trees gave way to ripples of sunlight. The yellow rays peeked through the array of leaves as they collected in pools on the ground. The morning dew dripped and drizzled, falling away from the leaves as Jason made his way up the first major incline of the hike. The route was dense here, the overshadowed path weaved itself around large tree trunks that stood solid in form, the bushes were packed high on either side of the path, their branches and leaves intertwined with one another making it almost impossible to break through them. Broken branches inhabited the trail itself, they were scattered all over the route with smaller twigs assembling around them. The mud on the embankments of the path was slippery and heavy, clearly an aftermath from the rain prior to Jason's trip. After about two and a half hours of walking, Jason made his first checkpoint. The first incline was one of the hardest but he always felt great looking back at the hill he'd just conquered. He cracked open a power bar and took a few bites while sipping on some water. As he slid his bottle back into the side pocket of his bag, he saw a small, red, cotton-like material out of the corner of his eye. He turned his body a little and

bent down to pick up one red glove. It wasn't particularly dirty, nor was it old looking, so it seemed quite peculiar to him that it should be positioned in the mud at this point of the hike. Maybe it just fell out of someone's bag as they climbed he thought to himself. Or maybe someone left it there on purpose, to mark out the track so that they could find their way back. Jason couldn't help but feel a little uneasy about the presence of this glove, especially as it wasn't wet so couldn't have been there overnight, as the rain would have soaked it. There were no other cars in the car park this morning, unless someone did the walk even earlier than him, perhaps they'd just lost it on their way. "Eh, who knows." Jason spoke again as if trying to assert in his own mind that it didn't matter and he was ready to continue walking. He left the glove on the ground where he'd found it, in case its owner by chance came back to claim its lost possession.

The second part of the walk was the easiest but was always the one that took the longest. The ground was pretty level, perhaps with a very gradual incline that didn't call for a rest until about four hours of walking it. The trees lessened and the path became more open. He could see the sunlight up in the sky but the clouds were closing in as if to capture it in their own plan. He didn't seem to care though, Jason was very content. He paced up the mountain, keeping his breath in tow and taking regular sips of his water. It was nearly two o'clock when he reached his next checkpoint and after consulting his map he knew he only had about another two hours before he reached the precipice of St. Andrew. The thought of being so close excited Jason and his pace quickened a little as the trees began to close in on him again and the incline rose, foreshadowing the most demanding part of the climb. The ground was muddier up here and the track became more difficult. The sunlight was now unfortunately hidden behind the clouds that almost looked threatening. They had gone from their white fluffy colour to that of a solemn grey. Oh well, Jason thought to himself, can't have a perfect walking day every time. He knew the sun

wouldn't be up for much longer, so he accelerated his stride to be sure to reach the precipice before the darkness set in.

Jason eventually saw the clearing at the top of the trail where the trees stopped growing and the muddy path opened out onto a greener looking platform. He gave out a little sigh of relief as he had finally reached the top. He marched out of the trees, followed the outline of the rocks that had been carved into the mountainside as if by nature and was finally standing on the ledge: the ledge that looked out over Scotland, the precipice of St. Andrew.

He sat down at the edge of the mountain, his legs dangling beneath him as they overhung the rock that had gotten its proud name. It really was bloody beautiful. Jason wished his father were still here to experience this with him. "You were right old man, bloody gorgeous", he stated aloud, looking up to the sky as the words fell from his mouth. After sitting silently for about twenty minutes, the skies above him continued to darken and Jason knew he'd better get a move on. The best part of the trip was yet to come and he didn't want to waste another minute. The abseil down the steep rock face of the precipice was so adrenalin shocking that Jason got goose bumps just thinking about it. After getting the rope and the carabiners out of his backpack and fastening them tightly together, he turned around to look for the large rock that he and his father had used to tie the rope around. Jason spotted it out the corner of his right eye and made his way over to the large grey rock that arched over in a way that offered a cave-like protection from the wind. Jason stiffened the rope around the front half of the rock and began to walk behind to make sure it had fastened all the way around, and that's when he saw it. The violently bruised and bleeding body of a young man, curled into a distorted ball along the inner rim of the caved rock. His eyes were closed as sacks of black engulfed the sockets. A trickled line of red blood ran from his broken nose and battered mouth into the grass beneath him. Jason bent down to try to feel a pulse, to try to see if his chest was

moving. There was nothing. “Holy shit”, Jason fell backwards onto his butt, at the realisation of a dead man lying right in front of him.

Jason’s heart raced, he could feel his pulse quickening in the hollowness of his throat and his palms were sweaty and shaking. He stood up and looked around, darting his eyes in every direction. “Fuck, what the hell do I do?” he couldn’t help but speak aloud, his internal thoughts were racing through the frightened fibres of his brain and all his emotions rolled into one producing a grave sensation of fear. ‘I wonder what happened, I wonder who did it, I wonder if their still out there’. It was as if Jason was speaking to an invisible friend, his voice quivered in the blades of darkness that began to splinter themselves around the rocks. He couldn’t leave him here, how could he? To die a cold and lonely death on top of St. Andrew, Jason could not do that.

Did the missing red glove belong to this man, an epiphany struck Jason? He leant over the body and lifted the arm out from under the limp frame. His right hand was missing a glove while the red, cotton glove was still intact on his left hand. It was his! He paced up and down in front of the body, occasionally stealing a glance at the cold looking human lying immobile on the floor. He stopped when a notion came over him. Years ago, when he and his father had first climbed this peak, Jason was only six. He was too young and inexperienced to abseil down by himself, so his father attached Jason’s rope around his own and clipped their carabiners together into one unit. His father carefully manoeuvred his way down the precipice with Jason on his back, moving slowly down the sharp rocks to make sure his son felt safe. Jason had this memory in the forefront of his mind as he wondered whether he could do the same with this man. He had enough rope and enough carabiners to tackle the logistics of the drop, but it was the weight that worried him. There’s a huge difference between a scrawny six-year-old boy and that of a fully-grown thirty five year old looking man. As this thought occupied his mind, Jason heard the distant crack of a stick,

as if somebody had just stepped on a branch and was walking toward them. Dusk was beginning to really set in now and Jason trembled. He could still see most of the precipice platform but there was no one in sight...another crack of a branch sounded out. "Shit shit shit!" Jason whispered under his breath as he shuffled around trying to find a hiding spot. Then he heard angry voices in the distance, he could make out two distinct sounds which he assumed came from two people. There was nowhere to go. Jason was panicking, his vision kept flitting back to the dead body hidden beneath the cave. "The cave," Jason voiced to himself as he crawled over to the rock. He clambered over the body, moulding his own silhouette to fit into the same shape, in perfect position behind the dead man. Jason moved closer to the wilted physique as if to try to mesh the bodies into one. Jason hoped, as the voices got closer, that they wouldn't see his figure, half hidden beneath the cave and half merged together into the lifeless character.

"Look, he's still there, chill the fuck out," the voice came from above. It was rough and harsh, the thick Scottish accent piercing the wind. Jason could feel their overruling presence as he lay there, silent as a lamb, ready for slaughter. He didn't move a muscle despite every nerve in his body wanting to scream. "Let's go back down to the car, get the bag, the lighter, and get back up here as quick as we can." His voice was assertive and clear, no messing around and this petrified Jason. He shivered beneath the cave hoping that neither of the two men saw or heard anything. And much to his relief he heard the footsteps diminish and he knew they'd moved away. Jason let out a brief sigh, but that wasn't before he felt a quiver, and he knew this time it didn't come from him.

"What the...", before Jason could finish his sentence, the apparently not dead body let out a miniscule gasp of air, his lungs inflated upwards in the tiniest motion as if to signify the last limbs of life. "Jesus Christ, you're alive!" Jason cupped his hands around the beaten face of the young man and tried looking into his eyes.

The mouth let out a low, pain-filled groan and Jason began to lift the man up, raising his arm around his own shoulder to help him up. "I'll get you out of here, just stick with me mate, come on, stay with me". Jason struggled to lift him, this guy was a little bigger and the fragility of his body made him all the more heavier. "Just a little bit farther, we're almost there." Jason kept talking to him, maybe more for his own benefit than his. When they reached the precipice, the body collapsed down and Jason began rummaging through his backpack. He had no idea who this guy was or why he was in such a state. Neither did he have any clue who the other two men were. But he did know that he had to try his best to save this assaulted human, he couldn't leave him to die.

Jason slipped the black belt he had luckily packed earlier that day around the waist of the body and fastened it as tight as it would go. He clipped six of his ten carabiners onto the belt of his companion, and clipped the other four around his own. He quickly secured one of the ropes around the cave rock they'd been hiding under and clipped it into the carabiners on his own belt. He then struggled to lift the dead weight body, he seemed to be getting heavier by the minute. "Stay with me mate". Between panting breaths, Jason attached each of the carabiners on the guy's body to his own belt and then tied the other piece of rope tightly around his waist multiple times and then once again to his own belt. He had to attach him as closely and as tightly as possible because he didn't know how much weight the rope could handle. Jason peered over the edge of the precipice, it was dark enough now that he couldn't see where the drop below him ended. But he did know the rock face and he knew he was an accomplished abseiler, so with these thoughts in mind, he began to lower himself, with the weighted body on his back, off the ledge and into the blustery air of the Highlands.

Jason struggled. Little by little, he lowered himself and his companion, but with each slow drop, his hands became more

numb and his muscles that little bit weaker. The belt attaching the two men together gripped sharply to Jason's waist and his stomach felt crushed beneath the weight. "We're getting there, hold on." Jason said such things to reassure himself more so than the comatose individual clasp onto his back. He knew they must be at least half way down the drop now. But then he felt the rope jerk violently from above. As he peered upward, Jason saw the bright shine of a flashlight emerging from the ledge of the precipice, "Fuck!" The two men had got back already, how is that possible he thought?! Was it really them or was it someone to help? Jason had so many questions and was clearly in no state to begin to answer them. He felt the jerk of the rope again, "Shit!" He had never felt so vulnerable in his life, he was literally staring death in the face; what, with a practically dead man on his back and a drop of god knows how many metres left, Jason couldn't help but feel powerless. And as if by fate, the taut structure of the rope loosened and the tight grip that once was, was no longer. Jason stared up at the ledge of St. Andrew and saw the glare of the flashlight dampen in the darkness of the Highland skies.

*Clarissa Ortiz*

**Clarissa Ortiz**



Sophomore, LS&A, concentrating in Screen Arts and Cultures

Clarissa was born and grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. “Since I was in elementary school I loved reading and writing stories, which I continued even in high school. In high school I participated in dance, theatre, and video communications. My love for video and movies drew me to the University of Michigan in hopes of pursuing film editing. With the support of my family, they have helped me feel comfortable in pursuing film and creative writing to the university level and beyond.”

## Day and Night

My skirt was drenched with sweat as I lay on top of the hood of my car. I might as well get a tan. On the day of my wedding my car breaks down in the middle of the desert. No phone, no gas, and no way in hell I'm walking. The sun was scolding hot on the red metal of my car. I gazed up at the sky wondering, but not too hard, what to do. I played games with the sun like "who will give up first" but, obviously, I lose. Bored of my streak, I rolled over the car and kicked dirt at the wheels.

"What did I do to deserve this, huh?" I said to my battered Ford Focus. "I treat you right, don't I?"

But who was I kidding, I couldn't even fool my own car. All the embarrassing late night hookups it's witnessed, reckless driving, and I knew it was long over due for an oil change. And now, worst of all, it would witness my tragic marriage.

What perfect timing, all sarcasm intended. My maid of honor, a.k.a best friend, will never forgive me. I should've listened to her when she said that the club was too far. And how there are rarely any hot guys willing to leave the city. And how I needed to get gas. Well, when do I ever listen? How was it my fault that the most talked about party was going to be over an hour outside of Vegas? I had never been to such a place and didn't know what was going to happen and that intrigued me. Unfortunately, I didn't find much; you could tell every guys life by just the smell of their cologne and the hair-gel they used. But no matter what anyone said, I still had to go.

My best friend was so excited for this day. More excited than me I'm sure. "Everyone is going to be so surprised you're getting married!", she'd say. Geez, I'm surprised. I had one last night of fun

before I'd be locked away from the world for good. Too bad I couldn't remember much of it.

I looked at my dash and pressed the button to turn on the radio/clock. Forty-five minutes. I felt like I was laying out here for hours. And in a few hours my best friend would be rolling up to the church to get ready for my/her big day. The day she had planned out basically with me on the sidelines (even if it took a couple times breaking down my door to wake me up, or dragging me out of clubs to help make decorative decisions). Honestly, I didn't know where I'd be with out her. Which is why I decided that it was time to walk.

I grabbed my spare change of clothes (mostly underwear) and hoisted the oversized, puffy garment bag over my shoulders. My hair was pulled up using a rubber band I had found under my seat, and I found a lollipop there too. I didn't know if the tartness came from its age or the reaction to the lack of food I'd had, but when I took one last glance through my knockoff Burberry sunglasses, I looked ready for an adventure.

Every step I took away from my car left me questioning if I did the right thing. I mean, who knows what could happen to my car? My Focus could become some desert hobo's lucky find and he could make a home in it! I stopped in my tracks at the thought of me having to call some human-pest control to get a half savaged man out of my car seats, by then he would have already urinated on to mark his territory. I whirled myself back towards the direction of the little red lump in the middle of the sandy sea. I closed one eye and held my thumb up to cover the view of my car. I was proud of myself for the distance I'd made. Even though I had to continue to rub sweat from my eyes, I was determined to make it back at least to the outskirts of the city in a few hours. There, I'd call a cab and, if my best friend still wanted to talk to me, explain all the hell I'd been through just for her. She'd have to understand that.

Ready to advance further, fully committed to my act of best-frienditude, I lowered my hand and adjusted my baggage. I had to stop though. I took off my sunglasses to see if I had just smeared something on them, but unless my eyes were tricking me, there was now a black speck next to my red speck.

I ran.

I thought of how much I regretted not joining a sports team in high school, but I still kept going. My stomach was crying by the time I arrived about fifty feet away from my car, and that's when I decided to lightly jog. It was a large truck. I didn't know too much about cars to recognize a model but it was definitely old. The rust was eating away at all edges, it looked like brownish flames were trying to engulf it. I got close enough to realize that the car was a dark green color.

I stopped and dropped my bags a few feet away from my hood. A bang came from under my car, by the trunk, and a man with a ball cap appeared from where the noise came from, messaging his head as he squinted up at me. He was thin, a little skimpy for my appetite of beefy muscles.

"Excuse me, but what do you think you're doing?" I asked as I crossed my arms around my chest. As soon as I'd done it though, I wish I hadn't. The man focused all of his attention above my arms, where my v-neck rested. I was still in my clothes from the night before, so they looked a little too bedazzled to be wearing in the middle of the desert. The run back to my car didn't help my situation either, because every drop of sweat glossed my chest, making it appear more vulnerable than it was supposed to. I could almost bet he was squinting more because of the glare from that than the sun.

“You’re out of gas,” The man said still keeping his attention waist up, but shoulders down.

“Yeah, I’m pretty aware of that, especially when the car just stopped moving and left me in the middle of the road. How very astute of you.”

He gave no reaction. I don’t think that he realized I’d insulted him, but I didn’t care too much because he eventually carried his eyes over to my car windows. *Thank God.* I took this time to wipe my hand across my chest.

“So are you going to tell me what you were doing under my car?” I had asked again, this time a little more concerned with what he’d been up to. For all I knew, It could have been worse than having a hobo trapped inside.

“Well, I usually don’t see cars sitting by themselves on the side of this road here. I thought that maybe something happened to the driver, so I stopped to check it out.” He leaned against my car, now with his arms folded. It was definitely too hot for a jacket, but he was wearing one. It was dark brown and rolled up below the elbows. From there I traced down his forearm. His skin seemed too pale to be from someone who seemed to live in the desert. Actually, his clothes didn’t look like they had even touched dirt before. He was wearing a white v-neck under his jacket, and some dark jeans. His shoes didn’t have a single scuff or dirt spot. The only thing that seemed to match the desert was his cap. It faded in some areas. Most of the design was tattered, I couldn’t even make out what the stitching used to say. The shadow from his cap created an overcast on his face. Something about that hat just didn’t seem right with him though. It wasn’t something you’d just slap on when the rest of your outfit was carefully picked and new.

I interrupted the silence left between us by saying, “Well, the driver’s here now so everything’s okay.”

“But it’s not.”

“What?”

“You need a ride, don’t ya?”

I was a little surprised by his question. He didn’t give off the vibe of a friendly person, so why would he even suggest me needing a ride?

“Well, actually I just thought of walking, but thanks for the gesture--”

He was smiling now. Not enough to show his teeth, but he seemed to be laughing at me toward the ground. His eyes were squinting even more. I didn’t like it. Feeling like an outsider to an inside joke, I asked him what was so funny. He turned to me this time, still smiling, and said, “If you’re thinking of walking, you better feel okay about sleeping on rocks, because you’ve got hours to go and eventually it’s gonna get dark.” He took another look at me from below my shoulders and continued with, “And you really don’t look like someone who likes to sleep on rocks.”

He was right. It did take me a little over an hour to drive all the way out here and I didn’t even make it a fifth of the way back before my gas ran out. It would take many hours, most likely into the night, to walk back and who knows when the next time someone else will be driving by. Plus, I had a puffy dress slung over my shoulders making me ten times hotter than I should be. It would only be about a forty minute ride anyways, what could happen?

I walked over to the passenger side of the green truck as he met his own door. He was still smiling. This left my stomach feeling a little inside-out. He really gave me the creeps. I tried getting into the seat, but apparently my dress didn't like to share space. I felt a tug and the dress was flung into the small back-seat area of the truck.

“Hey! Be careful with that!” I honestly hated the dress, but nothing about being with this guy made me happy. I just had to keep repeating to myself that at least when everyone sees me I won't be a *terrible* sweaty mess. Just a regular sweaty mess. That was normal for me.

“No worries, it's in one piece” he said, smiling at me. I glared back, but couldn't help noticing his eyes. The shadows in the car helped even out the shadows over his face. His pupils were so tiny. It was mostly iris. His smile started to disappear, but I didn't have enough time to mentally celebrate, because the next thing I felt was a sharp pain in my stomach as a warmth rushed through my body, and everything went dark.

A dripping noise woke me up. My eye's slowly opened, like they do after a good nights sleep. I had an amazing dream, but I couldn't remember what happened. I could still feel the dream though, its warmth especially. I missed it. It was too cold now. My arms moved to stretch but then I felt a pain on my wrists. The burn snapped my eyes from half awake to frantically alert. It was dark, but I could feel it was either really late or really early. Why were my hands tied together? Where was I? I couldn't make out anything but the outline of some shelves that were in front of me. They imprisoned me from the rest of the dank room. There was a dim light coming from a smoggy window overhead on the left wall.

An ache in my stomach started scaring the numb from my legs. I was able to move them so I scrambled to my feet, but I soon knew that was a mistake when I could no longer feel them again and my

head was whirling in circles. My body then registered a stab on my shoulder, and was followed by my ears ringing from a huge crash. I must've knocked down one of the shelves in front of me, but the ringing kept my eyes from opening. I was starting to get frustrated with myself. I wormed my way forward, running into various metal objects that continued to make the ringing worse.

“Hello?!” I attempted to yell, but my throat was dry. My heavy breathing wasn't helping. The ringing continued on until my lungs were tired and the pain wasn't as sharp. What did I get myself into? This must've been what I deserved for trying to have some fun before my wedding. I wanted to explore a bit and now I was going to end up dead, buried in some creepo's backyard with nothing. Opening my eyes, I noticed they were adjusted to the darkness. I no longer was in an endless black pit. There were some stairs opposite the window. I wiggled myself onto my shins and knees. Sitting up, I looked straight ahead to find the man staring at me.

The right side of his body was softly illuminated by the window, while the rest of him spilled into the black. I probably didn't hear him come down into the basement because of the loud ringing, but I wasn't too sure. It was ghost-like. He could've been standing there the whole time without me knowing. My wrists started to burn again. He just continued to stare at me.

He didn't say a thing and that's when not only my wrists, but my face was burning in annoyance. But underneath my skin, the muscles continued the shake.

“What are you looking at?” I sneered, my hatred for him taking me only fueled my tone.

“You.”

I was taken off guard. I remember his voice. It was the voice from my dream. But how could it be? My dream only made me feel good... And in real life I remember him to be creepy.

“What do you want from me?” I asked, my voice starting to sound less raspy, but leaned a little bit more on the hysterical side. I didn’t know what to think of him anymore. I should stay away from him, but my own habits wanted me to know more. Why did he take me? What was he going to do? Who was he?

He then took three long strides to me and crouched down so we were face to face. Without any warning he leaned toward me. I squinted my eyes and turned my head. *There’s no way I’d let him take advantage of me!* I heard a tear and then my arms felt funny from of the lack of pressure now being held against them. He leaned back, only a foot or two from my face, and stopped. I didn’t remember his eye’s being so soft before. There was a gloss over them that, even with only diffuse light leaking through the murky window, still captured its light.

He grabbed me by my shoulder --my good one-- and helped me get up the stairs. The basement was so empty and grimy compared to the rest of the house. I was squinting and, as though he knew that I was struggling, we walked over to a switch that dimmed the lights throughout the rest of the house.

I turned over to face him, but he was looking away. I wanted to see those eyes again, but trying and failing at it left me to turn my head back away from him, embarrassed. I looked around trying to get a feel of my surroundings and, hopefully, find an escape. But every hallway led to another. I wouldn’t even be able to get back to the basement if the smoggy window was my only chance out.

He brought me to a room and before I could freak out, shut the door behind him when he left. I stared at the door for a few

minutes before I had entirely convinced myself that he wasn't going to change his mind and charge in when I turned away.

The room was decorated like a modern hotel room. It even had the cheesy, mass produced paintings to go with it. I walked over to the bathroom and almost scared myself. My mascara and eyeliner had pulled itself all around the bottom of my eyes. I snatched the hand soap off the shell sculpted dish and began scrubbing the sweat and dirt from the day. When I was satisfied with my appearance I walked back out to the room. My bags with my spare clothes were now sitting on the bed along with my car keys. I put the keys in my pocket and decided that nothing else was as important.

Poking my head out of the hallway, I was relieved he wasn't waiting outside the door. Trying to find my way back, and feeling pretty unsuccessful with it, I couldn't help but notice how the house looked. Every room I glanced into looked hotel-like, like the bedroom I was in. Most houses out in the desert are just farm houses filled with thrift store furniture, but some of this stuff looked pricey. I also noticed that every light, whether it was a lamp or scented candle, was turned on.

I uttered to myself, "Wow, his electricity bill must be expensive...-"

"It's not too bad."

I jumped back, with my hand ready at my pocket. I've seen commercials where woman use their keys as knives, and even though I had never taken any of the self-defense classes they advertised for, I didn't think it was too hard to stab.

"Whoa, whoa! Look, I'm unarmed! There's nothing to freak out about," He said while putting his hands up in the air.

"Why did you bring me here? What are you planning on doing?"

“Don’t worry, I’m--”

“Answer me!” I was starting to fight off the fuzzy feeling in my head. His voice wasn’t the same from when I met him. This drove me crazy! Why?

“Look, I’ll explain everything to you, but you have to get something to eat first.”

But as soon as he finished his last word my vision started to go blurry and I could feel my legs turn into noodles. Before they could fully give way, he was around me, hoisting me to another room.

I didn’t get it. He had freaked me out so much at first, and I still didn’t know why he brought me here, but I didn’t have a problem with him helping me. I didn’t have a problem with him touching me either. It almost balanced everything out. Just like he was helping me keep my balance until he sat me down in a chair. My vision was clearing and only cleared up more with every whiff I took of the food in front of my face. Roasted chicken, steamed green vegetables, and some creamy soup. I don’t even remember finding or picking up the fork but it was already in my hand poking at the chicken. It pierced the skin with ease, I could almost hear the meat tearing from itself as I broke pieces apart. Everything was warm and steaming. I’m not a vegetable person, but even that was cleaned off my plate. No crumb or piece of skin was left when my fork clattered against the naked china plate. The meal made up for the almost twenty-four hours I hadn’t eaten.

I looked up to see him sitting across and to the left of me. He wasn’t staring at me and how piggish I must’ve looked right now, or my plate. He was just staring.

“You need to leave before daylight breaks.”

“Wait,” I couldn’t believe he was telling *me* to just leave, “why would you *abduct* me if you were going to just let me go?”

He looked at me, his eyes pleading.

This unfamiliarity frustrated me. It made me a little more confident too.

I answered them back saying, “No, I want answers and you’ve pretty much given me none! I think I deserve it.” I sat back and crossed my arms, signaling to him that I wasn’t going anywhere.

When he gave out a long sigh and got up from his chair I thought he would just leave me in the room for me to find my own way out. I mean, it’s not like it’d be the first time that’s happened to me before. But he came up to me and put his face up to mine, like he did in the basement.

“I didn’t abduct you. Well, at least, this version of myself didn’t do it.”

“This version? I don’t understand what you mean. Don’t start saying weird things to avoid the truth!”

“No,” his eyes were pleading again, “Listen, I know this is a lot to get, but in the daytime I become... someone else, then at night, I change to what I am now. It’s not so much physical as it is mental. I swear, this is true--”

“You should’ve just stuck to the ‘I have an evil twin brother’ story. That would’ve been at least a bit more believable.” I pushed back my chair so quickly it probably left scratches against the floor, but I didn’t care. I wasn’t going to just sit here as he fed me these lies. I

didn't even know why I sat here for so long. Then I felt a light pressure around my raw wrists.

I glared back ready to yell, but remembered why I hadn't left yet. It was this feeling. This warmth his hand had around my wrist. It burned, but this type of burn didn't hurt like the ropes had. It made me want more, to know why I wanted more.

I sat back down, not sure if I was going to accept what he'd just told me, or because I really wanted him to convince me. I looked into his eyes. They were still soft even though his iris' were dark. They looked almost black. He no longer was wearing the frayed, old cap. His hair was a dark brown, but red tints could be seen when the light hit it just right. Still pale, his skin almost popped out from his other features.

A beeping brought those dreamy features to life. When he broke his glance from mine, I felt like I had woken up from a dreamless nap. The beeping was a muffled, high pitch noise that annoyed me as he dug for it in his pockets. Finally, pulling his phone out from his jacket pocket, the light from the screen slightly contracted his large pupils as his eyes opened in surprise.

“No, not yet.”

Whatever was creating this sudden stress on him, I didn't like it.

He got up and without my brain's permission, my arm took hold of his. The beating coming from my throat was loud and clear, I'd be surprised he couldn't hear it. His eyes wandered over to my hand, but trailed up my arm all the way to my eyes. The silence continued for too long, but I don't think he wanted to break it yet.

“Prove it,” I said, without letting go of my gaze, or his arm. I really wanted to say, “Don't go,” but I felt like saying that would've

caused him to leave sooner. He blinked and decided to sit back down, moving his eyes to the china in front of me.

“Prove it to me that you’re not crazy and what you said really happens to you. Then I’ll leave,” I added, hoping he wouldn’t throw me out because of such a personal request.

Glancing at his phone again, it washed away his eyes and the light left them glowing. He then looked to me. No longer pleading, they were glaring, almost daring. I jumped when he popped up from his chair saying, “Don’t blame me if you get hurt,” and he walked into another room.

I was left in the quiet. What have I gotten myself into? I decided to get up as well after a few minutes, to follow him, but there was a cry, then banging from another room. This was repeated over and over, drawing me to the source, almost like a trail of bread crumbs. Hopefully, though, a witch wasn’t getting her cauldron ready to eat me at the end.

I found him in a living room, throwing a baseball at the wall and letting it bounce back. On the wall where the ball hit perfectly in the same spot was a broken indent, the wood frame for the house could be seen through the hole. With every throw I could see the form his body took, just as perfect as the one before. It gave me chills.

“Did he let you out?”

I didn’t want to respond. His tone was what I remember back in the desert. My body was aching all over again. I stood quiet as he turned around to face me. His eyes made me wish I took up the offer of leaving earlier. They made me regret saying “prove it,” instead of “where’s the door?”

A couple strides were in between us, but he crossed that and yanked my arm to his face all in one sweep. I squinted, unprepared for his roughness. That smile crept to his face again as he took in the damage he'd caused on my wrist.

He saw me looking and said "You hate me for this don't you?"

I still wouldn't respond. If I did, I'd cry with all the animosity I felt for his cruelty right now. Suddenly I was pressed against the wall, I hadn't even noticed he was pushing me. He took my silence as an answer and after rubbing my hand on his cheek he dropped it without a care. I took that chance to storm out of the room.

He followed me around that whole day. There was always an uncomfortable space left between us because I didn't want him to come any closer. I didn't want to give him a chance to corner me again. Eventually, I locked myself in the room I was put in earlier, it only took me an hour or so to find it. His vibe was so different now, I couldn't stand it. I wanted the other him back, but I wasn't sure how long I could wait in this room before he came back.

I left the room when I guessed it was the late afternoon. I found my way back to the dining room. There were pots clanging and a faint sizzle coming from behind a swinging door. My dish was put away, but in its place was the tattered cap. I grabbed it and thought to myself what was so special about it? Caressing the rim, I tried to rub off the dirt and dust. My face shot up when I noticed a blur in my peripheral and there was a sudden pain against my shoulder and back. I struggled opening my eyes from the pain to see him centimeters from my face. He pinned me to the wall, as a knife rested under my chin. But I wasn't paying much attention to the pain he put against my shoulder, or the distorted face he made out of anger when I opened my eyes. I just held my attention to his eyes. His iris' were huge, I felt like I was going to be absorbed into them if he didn't let me go soon.

“Am I going to have to tie you up again?” He sneered. He continued saying, “Don’t ever touch what belongs to me, got it?”

A tear escaped and ran down the side of my face as I answered, “But why? What’s with this hat? Why would you bring me here anyways?!”

He paused switching gazes back and forth, between each of my eyes, then let out a sigh. As he let go of me he put the cap on and the shadow fell over him again. “There are just some things you can’t know.” He laid the knife down on the table before he left the dining room. I waited in the corner trying to recover the strength in my legs. I slid down the wall and felt a jab against my hip.

My keys. It was time to leave.

I ran through the swinging doors into the kitchen. The smell of spicy herbs filled my lungs and puffed up my eyes. They glossed as my hunger was brought back to me. Across the room was a door, I pulled the knob and my battered up Focus was sitting in the middle of the nearly empty garage that smelled of gas fumes. Next to it was the dark green truck. The red light of the sunset sky was steadily creeping away as I had my hand ready to throw my car into reverse. I looked back at the kitchen door, and I felt strange. I still wanted to see him before I went. That was the only reason why I felt I needed to prolong my escape.

On impulse I honked the horn and the kitchen door swung open.

“What do you think you’re doing?” His face looked strained, I couldn’t tell if he was mad or upset. He was squinting, as streaks of light across the garage floor began to dissolve into the washed out blue.

He started to step towards my car, but tripped over his own feet. I've never seen so much pain until I saw him at that moment. His body writhed all over, and it bent in ways it shouldn't. Like his hands had a mind of their own, they started attacking his face. The eyes especially. I didn't want to watch, but it was so disturbing I had to. Soon though, the cries turned into gasps, and his body churning dissipated into heavy breathing. The hat had fallen off, unable to resist the strong movement.

He was turned away as the light of the night broke across his face. When he lifted his head in my direction the shadows made his exhaustion look more worse than what he probably was feeling, but I knew he had changed. The soft was there and his eyes were fully dilated, ready to prevent any light that dared to come his way.

I threw my car in reverse and pulled out of the driveway, like one of those cool car thieves you see in the movies. Leaving that house should have made me feel like the happiest person in the world, but I couldn't help but feeling I left something behind. I decided when I would get back to the city I'd break the news to my best friend about canceling the wedding, but I guess she wouldn't be surprised since I was already a few days late anyways. My gas meter was only filled until I could find the next gas station. I kind of struggled in deciding if I should've just passed it and kept going or stop to make sure I'd get home. In a couple minutes I had hit the main road and started heading south towards Las Vegas.

I only looked back a couple of times.

*Jayna Sames*

## Jayna Sames



Sophomore, Program in the Environment and International Studies

Born and raised in a big family from Detroit by a father who is a painter and a mother who has a social work background, led me to be interested in community issues, art, and creating change. I've always dabbled in visual art but upon entering the University I joined a poetry organization called FYI and started writing/performing. I spend much of my time putting on cultural, educational, and service events as a member of a Latina Sorority and I also play on the club Rugby team. Spontaneous moments of creativity give birth to the thoughts most worthwhile. Try it some time.

## Hobo

Do you know what it means to be a hobo.?

No im not talking about a homeless person with a crack pipe and a long potato sac shell with a cell phone in his pocket, card board sign making 2 grand a day injured cuz he “fell.”

Im saying that grimey old man runnin down them tracks to jump on the last train car.

Without money, food or blow.

Hobo.

That one dude who has a scraggly old gandolph beard with oreo crumbs and ants weaving in and out and a broken gold chain in his pocket?

hobo.

One who doesn't have a house but always a home.

No tv, 400 dollar Versace car loans or twitter account. The necessities ya know?

And then I say shit, I kinda just really wanna be a hobo.

Whats wrong with having dreams, ya see?

Why does it always seem like I gotta chase after wallstreet?

Or have two letters and debt forever follow me as a shadow.

And this shadow has a pulse.

Over and over engulfing me like fog until I cant even see straight anymore. No forget it. Cant even see at all.

What I once was, my thoughts, its dark. Weighted with guilt. Itll always be there if this is not what I want at all.

And I know what you're thinking, im not thinking. Right?

Who wouldn't want to strive for the business degree.

making big money. Why wouldn't you want to be a doctor helping people?

and then I say.

Fuck that.

I don't want to live in a cubicle. Alongside twenty thousand other drones on the phone. In the dark.

Becoming more and more mechanical until the phone becomes their arm and their face fixed in a stagnant state and soon enough all they can say, is "hello, would you like to invest in potatoes?"

but they've never seen a potato.

They don't know what the smell of potatoes are like?

They've never even touched the fungi of the tubers of anything.

And you're cruel.

To ask me if I want to invest.

Invest in your pursuit. Of not happiness or the future. For one moment do not think about being stable no.

just the truth.

That maybe you're like me. Looking past the division of nature and human beings. I am the road and sometime I am alone.

Wouldn't it make sense to just go out on my own.

Wrong? My problems not with the positive. passions pulsating a little different.

you may love to work at Kroger, you may have a gift for stacking cards at the casino.

And maybe you really like planting potatoes.

But Id rather be on a train traveling somewhere. I don't know. Mysterious. Maybe profane.

But you should know there's more than two or three or a hundred tracks to go.

And maybe you walk or swim. But Because if one morning I wake up on ground hog day over and over again.

I might skip over the stream of my thoughts concentrated on a specialized thing that doesn't really mean anything out of the context of American capital.

I will leap over that river and sprint and hopefully find what it is im looking for?

But that's the thing. Light at the end of the tunnel but I have no fucking clue what it is.

Naa but im just playing. Im not about really about to be a hobo...but listen.

you are not your parents. Pride

Wrongs with the professional office life- live in a cubicle- stuffy and low pay. Wasting your life away drowning myself in a pool of unhappiness. It may be for you to wish for money to haggle with crooked thieves in suits but I want to travel-want to see the open road.... Maybe its your passion to move up on the latter to cut organs out of living bodies or fight off your families electrical bill. Living in a concentrated stream of thoughts on a particular thing that doesn't particularly mean anything out of the context of American capitalism

I want to be a hobo

Ramble off all these ideas of future careers. Totally psychotic and unreasonable.

Gets down to money. Being stable. Securing my future. Family. Do I have to a mother? Give up my career and live as a housewife ( but I don't want to leave it to beaver.)

What if I don't want to leave it to beaver. What if all I want is this. I wish I could to art for the rest of my life. Travel and live by myself in complete bliss. Silence from the chemicals, technology, crime, and violence, except that of my own mind because I may have a small voice but I can never be silenced.

Because I think I want to be a hobo.

And then najee says...no

*Peter Wagner*

## Peter Wagner



Senior, majoring in Creative Writing & Literature

For Halloween he's been Peter Pan, Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater, Peter Rabbit, and next year perhaps Peter Piper. He loves his current job at 826michigan and with some luck he'll be teaching English next year in Indonesia.

## Only For a Bracelet

It was quite odd when people closest to the Summa Cum Laude from Harvard Law noticed he wasn't talking. This was a person whom The Onion deemed, "someone simply too brilliant to fail; a polymath so complete he makes the rest of us seem like simple fractions." People began to ask: why is the President silent?

The night before, his wife was the first to observe something odd. They were an hour away from the Prince of Norway's arrival. An opulent dinner of Fårikål, the guest's national dish, had been prepared. After putting on her dress she asked if it looked okay, if she looked fat. While not the best time to be quiet, the President nevertheless had nothing to say. Doors swung open, she stormed out, and Secret Service's questions fell flat as the President refused to answer.

It's safe to say no one was exactly mad at the President—a woman's reaction to the fat question is hardwired and reflexively angry. It shouldn't be taken seriously. The people were simply confused. And with that, confusion-tinged ripples soon spread to the President's Cabinet, into news stations, blogs, and eventually streaming into every American living room.

Presidential coverage was at its highest point since Watergate.

Left Wingers thought it was an act of heroic proportion: the President was calling out companies who engage in slave labor, who fail to hear the voices of their employees; that it was a total-body commitment to National Sign Language month, when even though the President himself knew no gestures, he was partaking in his own special, silent way. Or, because world was in such despair, the President was trying to focus more on its noises rather than his own, simply to become more attuned, understanding.

The Right, on the other hand, tried to debase the President. A certain conservative on EIB Public Radio, whose name rhymes with Hush Himbaw, had such visceral words for the President when his silence became known, that Hush burst a blood vessel on air, needing to be rushed to a local ER. His website still says “ON TEMPORARY LEAVE.”

Some conservatives viewed this as a God Given opportunity to take back the Hill, and ran viscous ads. But the majority of the Right found themselves in a sort of love-hate paradox with the situation. They looked at that term, conservative, and realized it assumes a certain economy with all aspects of life, speech included. So it seemed silence was more preferable than overindulgence, gregarity. So while this was potentially time to attack him on political grounds, they were awe-struck by the President’s current silent streak. They had no urge to bring harm to anyone who mastered this art so well.

Once the silence was known, the President’s personal ratings began to ebb and flow. World markets didn’t know what to make of it. The US Dollar took quite a hit in the beginning phase but recovered once it was confirmed the President wasn’t suffering from some sort of mental illness. He still attended his scheduled appearances, went to his daily meetings, signed bills, was seen taking walks with his wife (who wore normal clothes but, oddly, no dresses), he even stood on podiums, hands on their edges. The thousands before him ogled, completely silent. Citizens acknowledged he wasn’t crazy, or his plans with all this didn’t involve leaving the White House to become a hermit, they just hoped he wasn’t a mute.

Every TV-channel had a Presidential Silence Tally on the screen’s bottom right. People started using the number in relation to their everyday life. Instead of saying “Hey, should I meet you here on

Sunday?” they’d say, “So, I’ll see you here on Day 10, right?” College students who supported the President followed silently in suite. Within days of full media-coverage, every American classroom was filled with Professors’ voices.

The public eventually seemed on edge.

Psychologists who studied the students were interviewed by news stations. They tried framing the condition in scientific terms, but what they said was blurry. “It’s a tip-of-the-tongue thing. There’s something odd going on in their brains. No question. Something is there. It’s as if the feeling’s deep within their stomachs. Look, the President’s supposed to be a leader, yes? Their leader. Leader of the Free World. An odd phrase, at least now. He seems to be in some weird sort of slavery with his body. No longer able to produce the charismatic effects he requires. No longer free from usual human limitations. I mean, during his campaign every speech went off without a hitch; every single one. It all seemed so fluid, so moving. We haven’t even made it through his first spring and he’s frozen. Soon to be frozen in the summer? And if our most powerful person we have isn’t able to be free, in his own country, then what hope do we have? Our brightest and best have?

Once Day thirty passed, citizens started accepting the fact that their President might never speak again. A conclusion was reached that he really was “too brilliant.” His thoughts simply transcend language’s ability to describe.

Attacks from Congress lessened. Both sides admired the President for his courage: that during such rough political times he felt not the urge to speak, but simply to act. To try and make things better. No words are needed. He knows what to do, does it, and that’s it.

\* \* \*

When you came back, I knew it was finally over. The silence could finally end. You asked if I had done it, if it was hard, if I made people angry. I said yes to all three. For my part of winning our little bet, you gave me a bracelet made at camp. We spoke of how much Mommy and I missed you. And though I didn't talk, I'd lie in bed listening to her speak about how she never wants to send you away again. That four weeks is too long. I'd nod.

After you gave me the biggest hug, I put you on my shoulders. We stood on the White House's balcony, and I said to the world, "it's finally over. My Baby's back. I'm free to speak."

The people below seemed awestruck. Something they were so accustomed to, that everyone had in common, vanished. They needed meaning for why they had to accept yet another adjustment to their daily lives. Most seemed confused; one or two seemed happy. A kid smiled.

I was able to respond to the first question that reached my ears from below: what did you learn?

*Scarlett Eliza Wardrop*

## Scarlett Eliza Wardrop



Freshman, undeclared major

I was born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I've always been interested in writing and playing with language, ever since I learned how to read and write. My passion for writing in particular has recently been rekindled and now I feel I can't stop because inspiration often seizes me and I absolutely must compose a poem or short story right then and there; I thank my lucky stars there is a notepad on my phone. I think everything I write is an extension of me, for it is how I come to terms with reality. Some would insist I have a rosy or imaginative view of the world, and I do agree with them, for I see beauty in everyday things and there's always a bit of magic in the ordinary. I like to highlight imaginative aspects of life and play with the motif of contrasts, especially that of light vs. dark.

## Relinquish.

the black widow  
with velvet-gloved limbs  
weaves its booby-trapped  
web until completion  
when she looks,  
with all eight eyes,  
greedily at me,  
semi-hoping I will shrink  
from her gaze,  
fall within her trap.  
but I declare, I cannot,  
this is no Wonderland,  
so I leave her be.  
the next day,  
I enter that bathroom,  
sobbing,  
and it's all unfair,  
so unjust and unreal,  
I'm spewing  
wordsandwordsandfearsandunknowns:  
what happens when  
a soul leaves a body,  
what happens, then?  
then, then I see her,  
from tear-blurred eyes,  
the menacing Widow,  
curled up,  
stretching her spidery limbs  
against the grubby green tiles.  
suddenly she doesn't seem  
so menacing anymore,  
but dare I say—welcoming

with her filigreed frame  
atop beckoning limbs,  
I scramble to my knees  
to get a better look at  
her web-wrought majesty,  
bowing on a whim.  
until we are face to face,  
I reach out my hand,  
fingers just barely curled,  
exposing my delicate wrist  
ever so slowly,  
painstakingly,  
and she tentatively  
scuttles to rest above my  
throbbing veins.  
whether her virtue or bloodthirsty menace the cause,  
I cannot be certain,  
but what pure solace when her venom  
removes me from this world.

**no nightmare.**

I cheated death last night  
in the throes of sleep.  
you should know,  
you were there.  
you even saw the ring  
Death gave me,  
all black and polished,  
emblazoned with  
ink-filled diamonds—  
a skull.

at first you didn't believe me,  
I hardly believed myself,  
but this nagging in my brain  
from somewhere  
beneath my subconscious  
drove me to seek  
those shadowy places  
I've never touched  
out of fear and grief.  
so I dug and I scoured  
and there it was,  
Death's insignia,  
his physical crest,  
buried deep within  
my tender chest.

I don't even now.

### **That glance.**

that glance.  
you know you already  
tipped the scales in our favor,  
I can read lightyears into that look  
with a flutter here  
and a patter there,  
you're hooked.  
the differences between  
your fingerprints and mine  
is mere fog upon  
the mirror of our souls,

that dissipates with  
a miniscule melody  
you have brought to life  
in your spirited wanderings  
upon the staff.  
my wonderings have  
just arisen from the  
chemistry of your mind,  
and the chance that brought it  
to being.  
you know I was caught unaware  
the first moment I looked up  
and you were there.  
then I glanced to my right  
where your soul stared back  
bashfully,  
and oh—that glance.

*K.D. Williams*

**K.D. Williams**



Senior, Spanish and English with Creative Writing Fiction sub-concentration

I'm from nearby New Boston, Michigan. I won an Undergraduate Short Fiction Hopwood Award my sophomore year (2011). Though my thesis I'm working on for the creative writing sub-concentration focuses on short fiction, I also frequently write poetry. Last semester I taught a first-year Honors seminar I designed titled "Character Development," focusing on short fiction. I recently applied to seven Master of Fine Arts programs and my career goal is to become a professor and published author.

## An Evolution of Mantras Said Under Your Breath

First, tomorrow was only *I will try*  
because *I can* was a busted vacuum  
and today was two years  
of dust  
on a mock-oriental rug.

Then, tomorrow was always  
*Prove it*. When I could,  
it was the end of today —  
when I couldn't,  
I couldn't.  
The static hum of vacuous  
conversation filled  
my mouth with dustbunnies,  
my mind with corners for them  
to breed.

Now, tomorrow is *Do*  
what is necessary and  
today is sometimes  
necessary  
and sometimes a gathering  
of hair in spirals  
on my living room floor.

## Seven-word Memoir

Found: Notebook, last page  
torn out.

## Something Known

“O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king  
of infinite space —were it not that I have bad dreams.” —  
Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

I dreamed you  
smothered me in my sleep.  
When I woke, your mountain  
lion back arched next to me,  
I was afraid to move.  
You purred. My hands  
shook like a stampede.

The used air gathers  
about my face and I feel  
bound by your back  
and the wall  
with the window  
through which I sometimes  
stare, the people in the alley  
never knowing I am  
watching.

The smoke from after dinner  
still stirs in my lungs  
and I want it  
to escape and fill  
this space obscured by  
silhouettes of faces, shadows  
without light cast  
against the wall.

At least you are  
familiar.  
And I think I'll wake you,  
if only to die  
by something known.

### **Apophasis**

Which means to mention by not mentioning. Christianity--to  
describe God by what he is not.

I don't think about you  
anymore. I don't dream  
we're walking in a fog.

You don't say *please*  
don't walk so fast  
or I'll lose you in the fog.  
I don't run to the park. You don't  
chase me.

A tree isn't the same  
tree if you put it among

other trees. Its branches  
aren't anything  
like dendrites.

I never wake up  
on a clear day and wish  
for clouds to cover the ground.

## Resurrection

I spent four hours in my bathtub  
trying to mold myself  
into the person I want to be.

It took two months of inactivity  
to make my muscles malleable  
like taffy, and three kinds  
of experimental medication  
to numb the expanse  
of my skin.

It wasn't easy.  
At first, my thighs  
wanted to turn to mush  
and my mouth sagged  
with the weight of a frown,  
but a little after the third hour  
of soaking and picking and placing  
the pieces of myself

into approximations,  
my hips started to respond to my touch  
and my feet felt useful  
under my weary fingertips.

So I rose, and gave walking a try,  
but first on water  
because leaving the tub  
a new person — no —  
the same as I used to be,  
would be  
the real miracle.

### Six-word Memoir

*After Hemingway*

Can I have my tab, please?

(the clouds pause after rain)

I am a conduit of sunshine —

My cells litter  
the pavement and I am  
raw with phoenix plume.

I fill in  
my eyebrows with dust  
to replace the hair  
I left on your pillow.

I chip off  
the rest of the red  
polish to let my craven nails  
breathe.

I smooth out  
the scuffs your beard  
rasped on my shoulder.

— the sun shifts  
and I don't even have  
your number to call  
and say I don't think about you anymore.

## The Only Way to Look

"They're called floaters," a nurse informs me  
when I describe the orbs bounding behind  
my eyelids, and at first, the color I want  
to describe them is blue, but then again,  
they're more a lack of color, like a song  
my best friend used to play for me.  
And while I know it's the medication  
talking, for me, I think  
they're the same bruised clouds  
that dot my eyes when I've stared  
too long at the sun. "The only way  
to look is up," I say as I close my eyes.

## Breakthrough

"You are not alone," Ed says.

Somewhere, in another city, in a badly decorated office, there's girl  
just like you. A counselor named Ed may or may not be there. The  
walls are definitely spinning. Her thoughts are definitely racing.  
She's just like you, except she has brown eyes and a crescent scar  
above her lip. She's just like you, except she isn't.

"You don't have to be alone in this," he says, snapping me from a  
daydream.

“Duh,” I say. “You’re right there!” Ed doesn’t laugh like I hope he will.

“You’ve got to use the resources available to you.” Ed tries to meet my eyes, then turns to his desk. He’s shaking as he pores over forms. He tells me how many mental disorders present around my age, how there are highly effective medications. I might be in a mixed state or something, Ed says. Mania is waning and the dark night of depression waits. Ed doesn’t say that, but I’m a poet sometimes.

I study Ed as he studies me. He’s wearing a green-checked button-up that his wife probably told him to iron, but he didn’t, thinking no one would notice. The shirt’s awkwardly tucked into his khakis, which are so close to his skin color that it creates the illusion that he’s not wearing pants and there’s something very wrong with his legs. Actually, his hair is pretty much the same color too. He’s fucking creepy-looking. I might’ve made him up.

“Am I dreaming?”

Ed stops scrawling on the green form on his desk and twists to face me. *Are you serious?* his expression asks me. His diploma from a college I’ve never heard of whimpers in the corner.

“No,” Ed says as he drops his pen. “Do you have a hard time knowing what’s real?”

I keep my gaze wandering and disconnected because I don’t want to see the change on his face when it happens. The bookshelves are lined with baseball memorabilia. I want to tell him it’s his uninspiring life that makes me think he’s one of my dream people. A few months ago I would’ve rambled on about the deterioration of my sleep schedule, my ups and downs and how they’ve led me to

question the fabric of reality, but I've been trying to put fewer words into the air lately, so I nod instead.

"Is this a new occurrence?" He takes a big gulp of imaginary coffee.

"Not if you count the imaginary lion friend I had in kindergarten." I laugh. He doesn't. The noise canceling machine whirs in the doorway.

"So, this is what's going to happen..." I zone out. My father's somewhere in Indiana today. At least I think. It's hard to keep track of his truck route, and he hates talking on the phone. I wonder if and when someone will call him. How he'll take it. He'll be calmer than my mother. They'll both hesitate to say anyone got it right, claiming I've always had trouble sleeping, handling stress, fitting in.

"Do you know how to get there?" Ed asks. I'm afraid to ask where I'm going.

"Oh, I can walk." I wiggle my legs in my new purple jeans. My wardrobe indicates a sense of urgency lately. The purple paired with my bright red coat really sets the tone.

---

It's the Jesus freaks in the quad again. This isn't how I thought I'd go, if I ever thought I'd be on my way to commit myself anyway. I'm not even sure what they'll do when I get to the Psych ER. Until last Wednesday, I didn't know a separate ER existed for mental emergencies. I like the idea, though. Imagine having a Stubbed-Toe ER. There wouldn't be any corners. Just round rooms and pillows and the soothing coo of nurses. Specialization is key to recovery. Anything's possible with the right treatment plan.

I'm crying over the brassy center of the quad, the symbol branded on the ass of this university. I plan on blaming the sting of the January air if one of the Jesus freaks feels benevolent enough to come over and ask what's wrong.

I texted my roommate to meet me here. She was at the gym. I'll bet you ten bucks she's wearing the short blue shorts, even in this weather. I rub my hands together and sit down to collect what little feeling I have left.

My eyes tell the Jesus freak to go to hell as he stares at me from under his white tent. A man strums a guitar behind him. *The Lord's lost a sheep, but my soul he has to keep.* He croons.

A Jesus freak walks over. Hi. I am a Jesus freak, but you can call me Mike, I think he says.

"Hey, Mike."

"What's wrong? We're offering free encouragement in the tent."

"I could use some of that. All my paid encouragement ran out."

Mike smiles awkwardly and escorts me to the tent.

My roommate's wearing the blue shorts when she approaches. Several Jesus freaks are praying over my head, and the man with the guitar howls. *The Lord has many addresses, but his place is in my heart.*

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"Nice ass!" I shout over the music.

---

Suddenly, we're in my roommate's car and less religious music is playing. You want to go to the seaside. I'm not trying to say that everybody wants to go.

"I feel like I'm your dog, and you're taking me to be put down."

Leslie doesn't smile like I hope she will. Her nose is huge. That's not her nose. I know her nose.

"So, where are you hiding the gun?"

---

The lady behind the counter isn't speaking English. I sort of understand Spanish, but I haven't been to class in a few weeks and I hate to be reminded of my failures. I'm human like that.

"Is she speaking English?"

"No."

"Tell her to stop."

"Stop speaking English?"

*Please fill out this intake form*, her eyes tell me. I speak eyes.

---

The intake form is yellow like my mother's coffee-stained teeth. The first part's easy — age, social security number and insurance information. Marital status: single and ready to mingle. Then it gets tough — Reason for coming in: \_\_\_\_\_

I pause. "Why am I here?" I ask the nose that's Leslie.

She sneezes us into the next room. Oscar's taking my blood, and I stare at the needle as it enters my skin like the proboscis of a mosquito.

"Spell your name for me."

"No. It's on the form."

"It's a formality." He switches vials.

"That's what they modeled it off after all." I tell him.

"Modeled what?"

"The needle. It's like the mosquito's proboscis. It's a nose."

"Could you stop watching me? No one ever watches me."

"Jesus is always watching, Oscar."

---

I don't know how long we have to wait. When I got here I had all the time in the world. Enough time to count the triangles on the grey carpet and make up names for the ladies behind the counter to my left. Now my head lolls forward and my eyes are full of sand.

"You should really tell your patients what's going on," I tell Carmen.

"Que estás hablando?" she asks.

---

I want to read to Leslie and her nose. There are several copies of AARP magazine, but I choose *Animals that Live in Trees*.

“This book changed my life,” I announce to the room and hold up the book for all to see. A small, grey lady kicks off her slippers across from me. The little boy next to me cranes his neck.

*There are lots of animals that live in trees. Some of them are only in trees sometimes. Some of them make homes in trees.*

People come and go. It’s fun to guess whether they’re the crazy ones or if they’re here to see someone crazy. A girl is wheeled in on a bed, using her brown hair like a canopy for her face.

*The three-toed sloth gathers moss.*

Their hair grey and short, her parents tail her. She’s definitely the crazy one.

*It can take Mr. Sloth months to get enough moss.*

I wonder if they were crazy once. Maybe their hair was making them insane.

“Cut off her hair!” I shout. “Save her!”

To my right, the little boy flashes an incomplete grin at me. Leslie deflates her nose and it lets out a Shhhhhh.

“Okay, jeez.” I point my left thumb at Leslie and raise my eyebrows at the little boy. “Tough crowd.”

He giggles. His mother pats him on the head. She’s wearing a dark green sweater I really dislike, the color my mother always said would bring the lightness out of my brown eyes. It might not look

like it, but I bet she made the little boy crazy somehow. I wish I was lucky enough to have someone to blame. My parents aren't crazy. This has to be my fault. I press my fingers to my temples as if I can extract whatever foreign body is causing me this mental vacillation.

The ceiling fan stirs the used air in the waiting room.

"I should've taken the medicine. I'm sorry," I tell Leslie.

She's blowing her nose, but nods like she knows how I feel.

"I just wanted to take my chances being myself."

"But you're always yourself."

"Except when I'm not."

The ceiling fan isn't the only thing spinning.

---

The woman near the television hasn't taken off her sunglasses, but I don't think she's blind. They gave her soup on a plastic tray with a plastic spoon. I want soup.

"If I gouge my eyes out, will I get soup?"

"No. Don't do that."

Not everyone's eating soup in the waiting room. Some get to go to the vending machine outside. Three fat black women are eating Doritos and Honey Buns in the left corner.

“I’m so hungry,” I say in their direction. My heart hurts and my brain feels fuzzy, but I don’t share everything with everyone.

“Can I go to the vending machine?”

“No. You have the bracelet on that says you can’t leave,” my little boy friend says to me.

He holds up his bracelet – a leather strap with a sensor the same as mine, but with much more slack on the ends – and I don’t feel alone, which makes me feel worse, but I still manage to smile at him.

“Fine then. Let’s stay! Want to read with me?”

His five teeth say yes, but his mother wraps her arm around him from the chair to his right. I wonder if I’ll get to leave and see my mother again. She’ll probably have to come see me in here. I’ll live in this chair. The bracelet’s getting tighter and tighter. I’ll never leave.

---

Dr. Yang gives me some pills and clicks his pen.

“Spell your name for me.”

I’m sleepy so Leslie drives me home. I sleep a long time. So long, when I wake up, her shorts have grown into pants.

“How do you feel?”

“This has been a long time coming,” I answer.

“We all break down sometimes. You’re going to be fine.”

“This isn’t a breakdown,” I say, making my voice deep. “It’s a breakthrough.”

---

We go to a party like we used to. Or maybe it’s when we used to. First, I put my coat on backwards, but I make it a fashion statement, so it’s okay. Everyone loves a fashion statement. All my friends are at the party. They’re snorting coke and laughing. I go to the bathroom with a bottle of Jack.

“Hello, Jack.”

“Hello.”

“Wouldn’t it be funny if I didn’t wake up tomorrow?”

“No.”

“Wouldn’t it be nothing?”

---

I come back to life for dinner with my family. We eat at a burger joint I’ve never been to. It’s like it sprouted up in the middle of the night. My little boy friend from the Psych ER is there, this time in a red shirt.

“Are you my brother?” I ask his little toothy face.

“I love you,” he spits.

---

“Spell your name for me.”

“Y-O-U-R-N-A-M-E.”

“Do you know where you are?”

“The hospital.”

“Which hospital?”

“The moon hospital.”

“Stop being playful. Which hospital?”

“The one we’re in.”

“Okay. What day is it?”

“Today.”

“What day of the week? What year? What month?”

“Did you know that in Portuguese each day is called a fair? It’s the day of the first fair. Tomorrow will be the second.”

“What time is it?”

I pause.

“Now?”

---

The outpatient form gives advice. It’s pink like the scar tissue on my father’s hand.

Stop smoking. Stop drinking. Stop doing drugs. Floss. Eat an apple. Floss again. Check here to release your information to your psychiatrist.

“Can your roommate with the big nose come pick you up?” the secretary asks me.

“I live alone,” I say to the door.

I take a taxi. The cab driver asks where I want to be dropped off.

“I’ve never picked someone up from the ER before.”

“Take me to the ice cream shop.”

I order a triple-fudge brownie sundae. The man behind the counter asks if I want a receipt.

“No,” I say. “I want no evidence of this ice cream’s existence.”

He laughs and laughs and laughs.

---

I feel like myself when I look in the mirror this morning.  
Everything’s going to be okay. Everything’s going to be okay.  
Everything’s going to be okay.

*Matthew Yodhes*

## Matthew Yodhes



Freshman, undeclared major

Matthew is from Warren, Michigan and writes both poetry and fiction.

## Median Dreams

Sullen Nature in step  
At the concrete helm.  
Roads of bark  
Asymmetric as the stars  
Stand unwavering.  
Boulevards of thin veins  
Stretched like yawning fingertips  
In the directions of scattering morning light.  
Afternoon shadows sleep  
Homeless, curled in restless  
Balls of unkempt cowlick afros  
On the cragged cloud skin  
Of rebar anacondas  
Perfunctory beetles with glimmering  
Shells of icy gray water scurry  
Past the yellowing destitute interned  
By buzz cut hair on edge in garnet garb  
Under the watchtower bridge - Out, Out

Brief candlelight field  
Golden grain flames flicker and sway  
From the snuffing exhale of God  
braced by chlorophyll candle stems:  
An exhibit in a wax museum  
Enclosed by concrete overgrowths  
And scattered granite weeds on the side

Walking path of woodchip pebbles  
Waist high Martians welcome  
Pale skin aliens with honey branch handshakes  
And curious stares of purple petal flesh.  
A stumbling bee hums a chainsaw tune

Tripping towards the next nectar high.  
An evergreen braces his hat in the wind  
Its coattails fluttering and flayed as it  
Rushes futilely towards the bus  
Away from the hunchback path  
And the cacophony of rubber soles  
A few transcendental feet away.

### Night Walk

I hear whispers from the windowsills;  
Wisps of snide conversation.  
Exhalations of lustful TV screens  
Sing to me the light wheeze  
Of tranquility.  
Chatter emanates from the sprinkler streams;  
Drops of ascorbic wit  
Trickles of pitter-patter laughter  
Fall on naïve blades of plenty  
Light shouts in the dark taciturn  
Screaming quips at Evil  
Bemoaning lost days  
Into the solemn shadows.  
I stand silent.

## Maternal Vibrations

Morning dew fresh on the lawn during an early run.

Tiny azure eyes in a baby blue robe,  
damp, wet hair and hot steam

Chocolate coffee wafts drip dripping,  
Surging with sugar substitute Splenda  
And thick vanilla  
Cream

Pale cheesecloth skin goes taut with each stroke of the  
brush

Gaunt fingers and painful knots pulled

Warm, crumbly cinnamon buns marbled  
Magnanimously with some molten mounds of icing-  
Delicious simulacrum of Candyland Mountains -  
On top of a humming stove  
Just done.

A trace of Her perfume behind  
The sweat stains as she chased me around  
The dilapidated Eden behind  
Our house. Mulched Grass  
And hiccupping coos  
Of laughter. Her cigarette  
Stained teeth in a semicircle  
Smile the whole time.

Hot clean clothes just tumbling out of the dryer  
Giving off a flowery fabric softener sigh.

Oblong legs in a straight pantsuit.  
Suffocating by the strangle of that last button  
Ties clipped, crosses pinned.  
Holy water and burning wax.  
Hallowed Wafer, thin and dry  
Swallowed; it's hollow.  
An austere eye drizzles  
Like that leaky faucet in the half bath.

Grilled Cheese melting, sizzling buttered bread.

Cough syrup gag: cherry flavored  
Click of a spoon on teeth. Swallow  
Ramen noodles crushed  
With a bent meat tenderizer,  
Chicken Flavored bouillon in bubbling water  
A worried warble smile and painted red nails  
Trailing feverishly through my hair.

Dried Dog urine emanating from shit colored carpet.  
A flurry of detergents, disinfectants and cleansers sprayed  
In a swirling storm; either way  
The fabric's wet.

A trace of burnt rubber rising  
From a blaring vacuum, but overwhelmed  
By the shrill shout of a siren –  
Like sharpened pencils to the eardrums.  
A meek smile upwards  
And a guilty conscience.

Clumps of red potato mashed in a pot  
Fresh cream, salt, pepper and oregano  
Whipped and smacked on a plate.

Aromatic air, anticipated hunger  
Angry eyes through my dank haze  
Ancient Anger Awakened.  
What I am and what I ought.  
Danger in those clenched hands,  
A harbinger of disappointment  
In aged pajamas  
Another anxious hour in hashish anxiety.

Sweet biting tequila; A warm sea of whiskey; A shiver and twitch of  
Jaeger.

A musty cabinet closed with the long gulps of a fiery rum, 151.

Salvoes of slush slide down  
The sloping gullet between  
Slightly parched lips with  
A lemon-lime pinched smile.  
Slow mutual chortles -  
Sugar rimmed, no salt.  
A slew or two more  
Salivating drinks  
With a maternal friend.

An oblong curved perfume bottle, empty  
But reminiscent of dried fruit and shadowy  
Bars of smoke through frosted glass. Trash.  
The fuming pang of the shattering cask  
In the putrid basket.

Furious movement  
Excited accelerating pumps.  
Coming so close to  
A sudden stutter  
And a look of repressing shame

The slender figure  
Dominating the doorway  
Approaches.  
A warm hand  
Up an inner calf  
Her hand  
Where mine was.  
Pale Cheesecloth skin  
Goes taut with each  
Stroke; gaunt fingers  
And painful knots  
Pulled.

The Smell of Semen.

Midnight dew dripping on the dead granite stone.  
A rectangle prism of loose earth  
Pungent with sand, mud and decay.  
A new engraving. Numbers with a dash  
- A lifeline. How short.  
Withered Chrysanthemums and sickly snapdragons  
Stand the graveyard shift with me  
Hoping without chance for the bell to ring.

