The cover features a central white text area framed by a colorful, abstract collage. The collage includes several black-outlined bees with yellow and green bodies, set against a background of vibrant, layered brushstrokes in shades of blue, red, yellow, and green. The overall style is expressive and artistic.

17th Annual

Café Shapiro

Shapiro Undergraduate Library

February 10, 2014

February 11, 2014

February 12, 2014

February 17, 2014

Anthology of Selected Poems
& Short Stories

©2014

The authors retain all copyright interests in their respective works.
Reprinted by permission.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced without permission of the authors.
Please contact undergrad.library@umich.edu for permission information.

*Original Artwork provided by: Margaret Hitch
University of Michigan
Major: Art and Design*

Printed on the University of Michigan Library's Espresso Book Machine

Introduction

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 seventeen years of existence, Café Shapiro has evolved to become several nights 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 have 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 is exciting to see our mission being realized in this year's printing of the 17th Annual Café Shapiro Anthology.

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

The University of Michigan Libraries
Shapiro Undergraduate Library
Learning and Teaching
Ann Arbor, Michigan
March 2014



Contents

Yasin Abdul-Muqit

The Moon is No Door 8

Whatever moves within me 9

Jennifer's Piece 9

The Elegy of Spring 10

You know that blue house on Evelyn? We'll die there 11

Jill Abrell

The American Experience 12

Untitled 15

Miranda Ajulufoh

Inauthentic 17

Corinne Albrecht

I Counted Every Single One And I Should Have Known One Would Be

The Final 23

The Depression Dictionary 24

Cara Anderson

Science 27

The Winter Blues 28

Justin Anderson

He Told It to the Mitten on a Stick 30

Vivian Anderson

206 Bones 37

Rishee Batra

Icarus's Friend 52

Wet Wings 53

Switches 53

Silver Manifesto 54

Freida Blostein

Dawn Farm OR 55

I Want Him Better, I Just Don't Want Him Here 55

Julia Byers

The End 59

Madeline Chais

A Microcosm of Madness 63

The Irony Party (2006) 65

-
- Kelly Christensen
 Paperweight 69
- Audrey Coble
 Around the Time of Benito Mussolini's Death 73
- Leela Denver
 Botanical 75
 When the Water Boils 76
- Sarah Dittrich
 A Letter to a Nice Boy 77
- Carlina Duan
 uptake 80
 a kiss 82
- Allison Epstein
 Lost and Found 85
- Cameron Finch
 Love Drunk 90
- Elis Fisk
 This Is What Really Happened. – *A confession by Tyler Vance* 97
- Noah Gordon
 Deadline 108
- Sierra Hansen
 Time: This is a layover 115
- Adam Hart
 High Tide 120
 The 100+ Year Chicago Enigma (and still counting) 121
 Chicago's St. Louis Blues 122
 The Maker and the Made 123
 To know you still love me 124
- Jeannette Hinkle
 No Worries Mate 126
- Margaret Hitch
 A Collection of Maps 131
 Lowland 132
 Regarding Your Tweet This Morning 133
 Bad Girls 134

Erin Hull

Crossroads 136

Caitie John

New York, I Love You 142

Bennet Johnson

Huron with Gabe 147

Huron with Chris 148

Quellies 149

Room Ten-O-Nine 151

Ariel Kaplowitz

Night in Paris 155

Aging 156

world on fire 157

Sarah Kimmel

A New Kind of Horror 159

Nadia Langworthy

Diving in with the Unoffended Kiwi 168

Daphne Li

My Grandfather and His Country 180

Pareesa Memon

Karachi Slums 185

Jamie Monville

Treasure Hunt 197

Sena Moon

Summer of Love 205

Sydney Morgan-Green

Forest of Darkness 212

Emily Morley

After 216

Théo Münch

(Home) 224

Une Lettre de Mamy 225

Memory 225

Murmur 226

Jake Offenhartz

Moonlight 228

Nikki Page

The University of Michigan's Only Aspiring Waitress 231

Amanda Peters

\$1.75 238

Vanitas 239

Julianne Potter

The Maid of Orleans 242

Allison Punch

The Rise and Fall of the C.A.M. Agency 246

Ben Simko

Strip Mall 251

Karinne Smolenyak

The Exposition 254

John Tobin

Eulogy 261

Crossing the Street 262

Adam's Rib 263

To My Left 263

Open Mind 264

Claire Van Winkle

Leaving Aotearoa 266

Dominic Vetuschi

Michael Cali 274

Marissa Wais

to my familiar: 278

printed on the fire hydrant 279

north : ghazal 280

Xue Zhang

Mich and Ohi 281

Yasin Abdul-Muqit



Junior

Major: English

The Moon is No Door

The moon is no door to the past—

I stare at it and see memories before me like a mirror that crosses an eternal distance—

Only a step away from a final half-birthday, to a dusk—

When all of hell is ready to let loose from the heavens, from my mother's eyes, from the annals of her squid chambered heart—

For a short time when I was waiting for the world to unend—

Doubts still saturate my tongue as biting as an apple's mantle yet remains like a bitter core's shell—

A final sweetness that all else tastes grey and rubber bland, yet, still so redolent—

It sits in the air, heavy as sun stanked salmon depreciates all these years. It whispers—

The moon is no door to life again.

You know that blue house on Evelyn? We'll die there

We used to live across from each other and skip school to jump kids or play foursquare on Mr. Hendrick's backyard patio. Sometimes we met in the middle to eat his prized grapes until he came home. He was never there until late in the day, we treated it like a some kind of paradise, some kind of sanctuary, we'd stay there for the longest time, hide the bikes we stole behind his garden shed and tell the police we had no idea. How many times did we get in trouble for bumrushing the 7Eleven on Evelyn? We'd replenish our five finger discounts, many for the price of free, then strut down town teaching cats to Crip Walk and tut with our two left feet and pockets full of Blue, Black and Red Radberries trading swigs of Moon Mist and Cream Soda. Then we found that empty blue house. We set the woodwork on fire, danced in the flames like magicians until the sirens told us it was time to go. Remember when your mother lost that dollar and grounded everyone because she said someone stole it? Y'all got thrashed one at a time until we saw that guy, the hobo vagrant, with his cart full of beer bottles. Then we robbed him for dimes regardless of who needed it more (whose butts were sore?), Then Mama D applauded y'all for finally being honest. We kept the extra money, bought Twizzlers, sat behind Mr. Hendrick's place and got high on sugar 'til we passed out in the garage. Then we took our stolen bikes, hightailed it to the library, did bike tricks on the stairs and jumped handicap ramps. We lured little kittens into cardboard boxes with promises of leftover Vandecamps, rode them to school, covered our faces with masks, let 'em run loose in the schoolyards at recess, poured gallons of stolen milk in the hallways and laughed like banshees as Principal Greene chased us out the hallways shouting, "You little rats are going to rot in hell!" We went back to Mr. Hendrick's and poured tall cups of the Moon Mist. What was it you told me? "Here's to living forever."

Jill Abrell



Senior

Major: PitE (program in the environment)

After attending universities in Indiana, Nebraska, and New York, I transferred to Michigan in the fall of 2012 and am majoring in Program in the Environment. Although I have been writing poetry for awhile, I shared my poetry for the first time last semester in a workshop course. I am now enrolled in my second poetry class and read most Sundays at the poetry slam. In addition to writing, I also enjoy the great outdoors (as my major may imply), and have a strong interest in women's rights. When I'm not in class or working, I can normally be found making enchiladas, watching The Monkees, or perusing record stores.

The American Experience

America, Allen Ginsberg wanted to know when he could go to the supermarket and buy what he needed with his good looks. That was 57 years ago and I'm still asking. I work two part-time jobs and still can't pay my rent.

America, look at your universities. Why do athletes get scholarships but scholars have to pay? I know the answer and it's fucked up, could you give me a different one? I feel like I have a contribution to make and no one is willing to help me. My parents work middle-class jobs but live like they're poor. They can't help me. America, when I was 18 we couldn't afford the prom dress I wanted it was \$80 fit perfect and I stood in the dressing room and cried in it and felt worthless, took a picture and hung

it up so I could have a reminder to not want things I could never have, I sat on the bench in the mall feeling bitter wishing everyone had to work as hard as my family did.

America, why are you obsessed with immigration? America, at some time in your history my dad's ancestor's moved here from Germany and wouldn't let their kids learn German, they were obsessed with Americanization, an entire heritage lost in one generation. I have no idea where the rest of my roots come from. I don't care. I am a European mutt, what makes me so superior? America, I like to think that when my ancestors came they saw that 151-foot statue in New York, and America, I'm worried that you've forgotten what that means.

America, your streets are crowded, everyone thinks they're above public transportation and no one wants to work together to carpool. When I take the bus I sit at the stop invisible as everyone zooms by in selfish independence, and when I drive in selfish independence I look at the stop and know that's where I belong. I walk to work and move faster than automobiles, people sit in their car in solitude cursing the jam. Their car exhaust fills the air. Their car exhaust chokes me. Their car exhaust chokes the Maldivians. America, the Maldives is going under water. We are going to lose an entire nation to the ocean, why don't you care?

America, you bailed out banks and car industries, can't you help your middle class? Detroit declared bankruptcy. Can't you help Detroit? America, Detroit needs innovation, Detroit needs reinvented. Detroit does not need an emergency manager, he is auctioning off their art. America, this is detrimental. Without art there is no culture, society, or identity. America, Detroit needs their art more than anything else.

America, your mental institutions are full of cracks. People who need help are out in the streets spare changin' or shooting people in elementary schools and universities and movie theaters with guns they never should have been able to purchase. America, some days I worry that I will be in the wrong building at the wrong time, I shouldn't have to worry about such things. You're letting lobbies control you instead of people. What about my concerns? I know I don't have any money but I should have a voice. America, go tell the NRA to fuck itself.

America, legislators keep telling me about legitimate rape. I was raped and didn't get pregnant, it doesn't make me feel better that you've deemed it legitimate. Legislators are trying to limit my access to abortion. That is my right, don't take it away. I don't know if I would have an abortion but I should have the option. Why do I get the feeling that if men were the ones to give birth we wouldn't have such restrictions? America, why do you treat me like a second-class citizen?

America, no one knows what it is to be conservative anymore.

America, when I look at you I wish I could see the prospect everyone else
does but all I see is degradation.

America, I have more to say but I'm too tired.

Fragments

*How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!
Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd.*
- Alexander Pope

If I forgot you, would I love you again?
Would I repeat my mistakes, relive all the happy moments,
suffer through all the bad ones?
Not know, not realize, because I would have no memory or recollection?

Would you hold me close and make me laugh?
Distance yourself and make me cry?
Would our past be on repeat,
never finding the right answers, neither of us knowing we had lived through
this before?

If I forgot the pain, would I love you again?
Would I repeat all my mistakes if I let you back in?

One day you'll be
a memory of a memory,
distant and lost in my brain –
your face will be fuzzy,
conversations vaguely recollected,
things we did together nearly forgotten.

One day you'll be
part of my imagination,
a memory of a dream.
I won't know if it happened or if it's just a fabrication.

I'll try so hard to remember,
how your body felt against mine,
how our fingers intertwined –
just when I think I can almost

feel it again, I'll start to doubt.

All I have are scraps
of paper
of proof
of our time spent together:
the movie ticket stub from Cloud Atlas
a train ticket I found two weeks ago and almost cried
the wristband from Four Winds –
I watched you watch me pack it.
A question unasked,
remained unanswered –
what words would have fumbled from my mouth?
I couldn't have told you the truth.

All I have are snapshots
stored in my brain
that will fade with time.
Nothing to look at, nothing to hold
as if we never were.

Untitled

On my walk I pass by 17 goddamn trashcans, a fake shattered window while I skirt around real shattered glass on dirty sidewalks and other nameless people, a homeless man with a cigarette grasped between two fingers sits asking for change and I say, not today, as if I'll have money tomorrow, as if I have money to spare at all

Snow falls and I don't know if it's October or April it could be either and my watch like a chained weight constant companion tells me the time and date and day of the week and that I'm running late like always, tells me that I should have done more by now, a measurement of unachieved goals, failures, lack of success in normal life progression, where I am and where I should be dictated by something so small as time

We have so much time and there is never enough and it's precious and shouldn't be wasted and don't relax, rush rush everywhere and have this done in an hour in a year in four years and be ashamed when it's not, even if we had more than we were given, if a day was more hours it still wouldn't be enough we are greedy

A year ago I was walking by a river on a clean sidewalk lined with trees, it was quiet and peaceful and I wasn't bundled in a thick coat, matching scarf,

hat, and gloves, passing people with more important things to do than notice that I am a person and not an obstacle to walk around, I was following the rules set by time and humanity, showing up at the right time, leaving at the right time, meeting my goals at the right time

A year ago, two years ago, last week, I cannot remember memories all run together and I cannot recollect the proper order they occurred just that they did at one time and now I'm somewhere else and tomorrow I won't remember when this happened just that it did

Miranda Ajulufoh



Junior

Major: Neuroscience

I grew up in Oak Park, Michigan and graduated from Ferndale High School. At the University of Michigan, I am the member-at-large for the University of Michigan Chapter of the Scientista Foundation, an executive board member for Global Development Collaborative and a member of the Golden Key International Honor Society. I am currently majoring in Neuroscience and plan to attend medical school.

Inauthentic

You know when parents randomly bring up old childhood friends that you haven't talked to in years, leaving you reminiscing? Well, that's what happened to me a few months ago. My mom and I were riding in the car, coming home from the grocery store. The sun was peeking through the clouds, blinding us through the window shield as it followed our every path. I was in the passenger's seat, squinting my eyes with my headphones in my ears playing Ariana Grande's "The Way" when my mom said:

"So have you seen Jenny and Tasia recently?"

"No, we don't really talk anymore." I said.

"Why not? Someone stole someone's boyfriend?"

"No, Mom! We haven't talked since middle school."

"Middle school? That's so long ago."

"Yeah, well, things happen."

What happened between Jenny, Tasia and me should have been a scene from the movie *Mean Girls*. I thought it was a typical day during lunch period at my middle school. But boy was I wrong. Jenny, Tasia, and a couple of others, were already waiting at the lunch table surrounded by walls outlined with our schools hideous combination of colors, tree bark brown and Forever 21 shopping bag yellow, before I arrived. I was carrying my lunch tray filled with, well, I don't really remember what it was but I'm sure it was some sort of mush they saved from two weeks ago. The voices of rowdy teens and worn out shoes making contact with the floor fused together from all angles of the lunch room, producing a collage of chaos that the principal didn't bother to bring back to order. I remember putting my tray on the table but before I could sit down, Tasia said, "You can sit here today Miranda, but after that you can't sit here anymore." For a second it was like everything paused as I pondered to myself, *what is happening right now?* I glanced over at Jenny as she nodded with agreement. I couldn't help but feel like the entire lunch room was staring at me, holding back laughs. I remember I didn't say a word. My main priority was trying to hold in the tears. By the time my eye sockets started burning from the aggressive water molecules that were each trying to be the first to push their way out, I just abandoned my tray and left the lunch room.

I couldn't understand why they would do something like this to me. I must admit, I should have seen this coming. The moment I walked through the halls on the first day of school to see the numbers 666 engraved in bold print on my locker, I should have known bad luck was coming my way. But Stevie Wonder's wise words of, "superstition ain't the way," wouldn't let me live in fear. These were my best friends. The girls who I shared my Crayola 64 pack and the cool built in crayon sharpener with in kindergarten. These were the girls who defended me when the class bully, Ciara, stole that same pack in the first grade.

We were velcro in elementary school. Not even the madness arising from children squirming down the halls during those obnoxious fire alarms drills could separate the three of us. We rapped along to age inappropriate songs like "Get Low" by Lil Jon and the East Side Boyz in the bathroom. Jenny and Tasia would always say the bad words but I never did. They would pick on me about that occasionally and call me Miss goody-two shoes. I was always taught not to cuss or use slang and I was too afraid of what would happen to me, whether from my parents or some higher being, if I ever tried to. When it comes to slang, it never sounded right coming out of my mouth anyway. These girls were a bunch of mini Bobby Browns. Treating school like an amusement park and doing whatever they wanted with the small bit of freedom they had in school was their "Prerogative" and I went along for the ride.

The beginning of middle school was an exciting time for us. This was the first time we didn't have to walk in single file lines. We could walk in the hallways by ourselves between classes when the bell rang just like we saw Raven and Chelsea do on "That's so Raven." We were officially grown. Well, at least that's what we thought. In the lunchroom we found a table near the back that we claimed along with three other girls. Jenny said she liked this table because it was by the window, but the fact that it was positioned in a manner that led to a perfect view of the back of pretty boy Brandon's head, proved otherwise. Lunch was a time for us to talk about what has happened so far throughout the day such as, how mean a teacher was for giving us homework over the weekend or better yet, who said what about who behind his or her back. I remember one particular time when Tasia said something along the lines of:

"The bus is the best part about school. We be clownin. All the black kids sittin' in the back actin' foolish."

"Not really. Jalen sits up front, by the bus driver." I responded

"Jalen doesn't count."

"Why not?"

Jenny and Tasia chuckle at each other. "He just doesn't" Jenny responds. Jalen was a straight A student, the president of the school newspaper club, and the 2nd chair flute player in band class. He wore preppy clothes to school every day and his friends were predominately white. His parents never attended parent teacher conferences because there was no point, other than hearing the teachers brag about how intelligent and well spoken he was. With caramel macchiato skin and hair as kinky as burnt bacon, the boy was clearly black. There was no doubt about it in my mind. But to them, he wasn't.

Although Jenny, Tasia and I would see each other in lunch, we didn't get to spend as much time together throughout the day because I was now in an entirely different branch of classes. My parents heard about a program at my middle school called Open Classroom. It was an intensive program designed for students to learn independent study habits, gain self-discipline, as well as facilitate outdoor learning through field trips and camps. The moment my parents attended an information session and were told that students who enter this program score high on standardized tests, and do better in honors, drama and music programs, my parents jumped on this idea like an excited five year old on a trampoline. Although I wanted to stay in the regular classes with my friends, I had no choice.

You see, my parents have always thought education was the universe. While other families sit down with their children in the living room to have the birds and the bees talk, our family has what I call the "Get your life

together" talk. From little children, my mom would give my brother and me these long, repetitive speeches about excelling in school and presenting yourself to people with mannerism, despite what your friends think, so that you can get a good job and provide for yourself. Her favorite line was "you like to eat don't you?"

My Dad was no different. He grew up in Nigeria, where he faced the Nigerian-Bafarian war and food was scarce. He constantly stresses how he learned at a young age that the way out of poverty was by coming to America for a higher education. After school, if he did not see us studying there was a problem. I remember lying down in my room and hearing my father forcefully pound on my brother's bedroom door. Our house is pretty small so I could hear every knock from his rough knuckles vibrating my brother's door like an earthquake was hitting. He would holler with his harsh tone and accent that only we could understand, "Barrington, what are you doing? Get out here and do your homework. All you do is eat, sleep, shit and play the video game." My brother never caught on to the trick. I learned to have my textbooks, papers and pencils ready on the dining room table prepared to look like I'm studying, even if I'm just staring at the pages, when he came home.

With parents like this, there was no backing out of the Open Classroom Program. I was just happy that Tasia and I were still in Spanish together since there was no open class for Spanish. In the beginning, my desire to start focusing more on education sprung from fear of my parents, as well as not trying to look like the dumb one in classes filled with students who have parents with extensive connections with the Board of Education and probably already buying preparatory books for the ACT. Yet, as the year progressed, the program showed me a completely different side of education, the fun side. A side that didn't involve receiving a long list of vocabulary words and having my mom, half unconscious, stay up all night reading them to me. But instead a side that allowed me to play jeopardy games for learning simple algebra or go to Kensington Park to learn about the Lewis and Clark Expedition. I will never forget that field trip because I got stuck in mud and lost my shoe, as if I was sinking in quick sand. It was like a little adventure, exploring in the woods, trying to find treasures while keeping a journal to experience Lewis and Clark's journey, and not just read about it. I thought it was fun but Jenny and Tasia were far from impressed. "You wouldn't catch someone like me in the woods."

My grades improved dramatically that year and my viewpoint on education shifted from some annoying topic my parents wouldn't stop talking about to something that may actually become valuable to me. I became studious, not just for my parents but for myself. It felt good seeing smiley faces and sparkly stickers next to my name on an exam. Whether it was finally solving a math problem or simply getting 3rd place in the schools science fair, it gave me a sense of accomplishment. I even decided to join the before

school fiddlers club, playing my violin. I had already been playing classical music since fourth grade. However, the fast bowing, fingering and vibratos that accompanied folk and country fiddle music, was totally different. I was probably last chair at the time, but it was fun. When Jenny and Tasia found out about the fiddler club, they were stunned like they didn't see it coming. "So you come to school before everyone else to play that kinda music?"

I started sensing my connection with Jenny and Tasia diminishing. There were certain conversations that they would have that I could no longer relate to. While they spent everyday laughing about the fight they saw in class that put Steven out of school for the rest of the year, healing from being stitched up at the hospital, all I could contribute to the conversation was how my math test went better than I thought. While they would talk about how fun their after school hip hop dance team was, all I could respond with was how I was starting to sound less like a screaming cat on my violin. Our classes were as opposite as we were becoming with each other. To add to our disconnection, my mother never let me go to the parties that they invited me to. The day I told Tasia that I couldn't go to her party because I had to practice my violin for the recital that the fiddlers were doing with the band must have been the last straw because a week or so after that I was standing in the lunch room, with a mush filled lunch tray, being told I couldn't sit with them anymore.

The day after I was kicked out of their table, I sat with a new group of friends that I made in my open classes. The lunch room seemed louder than ever and the principal just stood by the stairwell, as always. Looking around I could see from the corner of my eye Tasia eyeing me and whispering to Jenny. I was just another one of their topics to gossip about at the lunch table. *I hate you two*, I thought to myself. And then there was Jalen, sitting about two or so tables away from me with a couple of other familiar faces. Every time I saw Jalen, in the back of my mind were those words that Jenny said: "he doesn't count." It bothered me but I never thought seriously about it until after the car ride conversation that I had with my mother about Jenny and Tasia. It was almost as if blackness was something you had to prove. As if there was some sort of book of rules titled, "How to be Black," that black babies are given the day they popped out of their mothers' womb. Ultimately, there were black norms and Jalen wasn't following them.

Jalen was what I now know as someone who didn't act "authentically" black, a traitor, a sell-out. In the black community, being black has become less about the color of your skin and more about the your lifestyle: the way you talk, the type of music you listen to, the way you dress, your mannerism, what you do in your spare time, where you live. Any deviation from these implicit stereotypical rules on how to act, talk, and dress, was considered, trying to "act white" and because of this Jalen was an outcast to many black kids at my school as someone who "[didn't] count." He was black alright, but he wasn't black, black. Yet here I was, in the same open classes as him,

trying to excel in school just like him, stringing my violin along with the band that he was in, and now sitting on the same side of the lunch room with him. At this point, we were both in the same position, exiled and on the outside looking in. Was I the new Jalen? Was I too, not black enough to “hang?” I think I intrinsically knew that there was something about Jalen’s way of excelling in school that caused him to “not count” when I started hiding my grades from Tasia. “How did you do on that Spanish exam?” Tasia would always ask. Despite already knowing that my score was pretty good, I would tell her that I didn’t look at it yet because I didn’t want the score to ruin the rest of my day.

This creation of a narrow definition of blackness reduces individuality. I mean, who said that it wasn’t authentic for black people to be well mannered and excel academically in school? How is it that Jalen and I are any less black when we look in the mirror than the thug walking down the streets of Detroit who has been in and out of jail his entire life or the girl in East Harlem who wears African print clothing with her hair in its natural state puffed up in an afro and sings Neo-Soul RnB? For a long time, I’ve wondered if there is an authentic blackness, if there is a particular way to be truly black. And then, I remembered the quote I read freshman year of college by Henry Louis Gates: “If there are 40 million black Americans, then there are 40 million ways to be black.”

Corinne Albrecht



Sophomore

Major: Secondary Education – English

I would say that I've been writing poetry for two years and I absolutely adore stars in the night sky!

I Counted Every Single One And I Should Have Known One Would Be The Final

The first time you tell me you love me I think I am going to die. I had felt your love for weeks, felt it deep in my bones, electricity in my veins, and light in my head. Debates on if I should say it first had played themselves out, with a crowd that shouted its approval and disapproval for each side, and then things had gotten nasty and scandals broke out and the debate was shut down, so I hadn't said a thing. When you say it, a brush of chapped lips on the cartilage of my ear, my heart stops. It doesn't move for twelve seconds, just as still as my eyes but just as warm as your hands.

The fourth time you tell me you love me I think I am going to throw up. The air was thick and warm with passion and sweat, with breath and hungry hands. Your fingers were intertwined with mine and your lips were on my neck and then you say it and you pull away, shocked, eyes like spotlights—too bright spotlights, ones that show my every blemish and I blush—you say it accidentally, like a blemish of words, and we freeze as lovers in a photograph and my stomach lurches.

The thirty-second time you tell me you love me I think you are lying. There were ceramic pieces of broken promises on the floor and lines of liquid salt on my face and I was shaking so hard my teeth were falling out of my mouth. But then you say it, sitting with your head in your hands like a man who lost the only game he ever played—you whisper it, hushed and defeated, and I take you for the Devil.

The ninety-ninth time you tell me you love me I am in shock. You had the flu—a nasty one, and you slept in nothing but tossing, turning fits. Things were hard and I worried too much, fretting over futures and fevers, but in your disturbed sleep you mumble the words and I sit back and cry.

The five hundredth time you tell me you love me I kiss you hard. It was sandwiched between my name and four words that sounded like bells in my ears. You say them and there they are and I tackle you and kiss you with all the love and life I have inside of me.

The seven hundred sixty-seventh time you tell me you love me I fall apart. I was in white, and you were in black, and you had tears in your eyes and you say it with a chuckle because I am the one who is supposed to be crying. Your voice cracks with unbearable truth and then I split apart at the seams.

The last time you tell me you love me I know you are going to die. The soundtrack to my life has become an orchestra of beeping machines and dripping liquids, of chest-tearing coughs and your pathetic insistence that you are okay. I can see the blood move through your veins like depressed factory workers on their way to a job they despise, but you are still beautiful. I have cried too many times here, and I am crying again as the beeps grow louder and faster like an off-key angel chorus. You look at me and smile and say, "I want my last words to be 'I love you,'"

And then they are.

The Depression Dictionary

For starters, a Bad Day is not a lowercase b, lowercase d, noun.
It's not a lower case so
"I had a bad day" is worlds different from "I had a Bad Day."
Lowercase bad days are
How I woke up late, (had the wrong date,
Thought it was Sunday, turned out to be Monday)
Spilled coffee on my shirt as I got into a car that wouldn't work,

Didn't do my homework and wore two different socks,
Tried to remember something I had already forgot,
Paper cut on my knuckle and blister on my ankle,
Paid for a new coffee, left without it promptly,
And came home only to realize—are you *kidding me?*—
My sweater's inside was outside.

No, Bad Days are Capital Case, Proper Nouns, so when I say
"I'm having a Bad Day,"
I mean that I woke up in darkness and tried to make it darker,
I didn't have an appetite (meaning, I ignored my hunger),
I slept for hours upon hours, dreaming of absolutely nothing
Because my brain has absolutely nothing,

Nothing,

Nothing inside like a chemically unbalanced carcass
Of a girl that once was,
With blue-white pills lying next to a bedside
That has sheets with a shape carved out;
The shape of a body since decayed that never left,
Only stayed.
Stayed because the world outside was too wide,
It doesn't care and
I will not bear it anymore,
It's just too hard, too hard, too hard.

Bad Days are not made up of laziness.
Lazy is ignorance with a rushed insistence on finishing once time has almost
run out.
Bad Days are made of up nothingness,
Of incessant apathy
And the absolute lack of desire to do, to move,
Where time moves like molasses but less sweet,
Where everything is heavy and thick and you are
Gagging and gasping and going to tell someone,
Yes,
You're going to ask someone for help

But
No,
You can't even do that,
It's too hard, too hard, too hard.

Too hard to let the monster inside you show,
The murky black tar that peels your muscles off your bones,

Leaving you a skeleton and alone—
A chemically unbalanced carcass with
Nothing,
Nothing,
Nothing inside.

See, the Depression Dictionary doesn't have words like "sad" or "bad day,"
Instead we have "numb" and "Bad Day,"
Because depression is not a black rain cloud.
It's a black tar pit where you go to disappear, to become extinct, to watch as
you sink and sink and sink and you cannot escape because
It is too hard, too hard, too hard.

Cara Anderson



Freshman

Major: Movement Science

My name is Cara Anderson, I'm a freshman and I am thinking of majoring in Movement Science. I have taken several creative writing classes, one at the University. Writing is my favorite hobby, I try to do it as much as I can in my free time, but I don't think I would like to make a living out of it. I also like to draw and I'm very interested in science!

Science

Humans fear the dark
For the same reason
That we fear the future,
The planets,
The minds of others, and
Numbers that we cannot count up to.
Before you turn on the lights,
Anything could be there.

We obsess over the dark possibility of
Endlessness, infinity,
What we do not know.
Hurtling through space so deep
It folds in on itself

And turns into velvet blue,
Humanity struggles to light its way,
Our eager eyes seeing the path only
An arm's length in front of our faces.

We exist as
Incredibly improbable accidents
Of favorable cosmic circumstance.
Gifted with this chance at sentience,
We venture.
We arm ourselves with weapons of illumination
To burn out the obscurity of the universe
And make it visible.

We fear not the darkness.
We advance upon it
A champion upon its prize,
A predator upon its prey.
We will consume it
And heat it like coal
Until it transforms into
Diamonds,
Glinting brilliantly,
Constantly shedding light upon
What we do not yet know.

The Winter Blues

The winter blues have come for me
They grow deeper every year
Like snow that goes all the way up to my knees
(Or up to my eyes, like I fear)

I feel like I'm waiting to drown
In the wearisome thoughts that I think
Wasting my energy treading water
When it would be easier just to sink.

Yet ice floats, as I learned once in school,
And ice is what forms my mind
Frozen solid, slow, and fragile,
Colorless thoughts, unrefined.

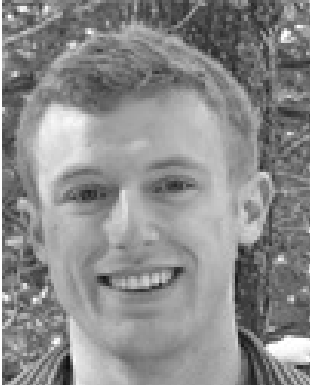
The snow on the ground is unbroken and pure
Yet that is not how I feel
I cling to the few bits of sense in my mind
Which decide what is and isn't real.

My love is distressed, she asks me now,
"How do you ease this fate?
What makes it better?" she wants to know.
I tell her all I can do is wait.

"I'll wait with you," she promises me,
Gingerly taking my hand.
And all of a sudden, I stop treading water
And find a way to stand.

Now, as the sun sinks below the horizon,
Hanging in the sky by a string,
We anticipate its sweet return
On the shores of warm, welcome spring.

Justin Anderson



Junior
Majors: Informatics and Creative Writing

Justin Anderson was born and raised near Grand Rapids, Michigan and is a third-year student of Informatics and Creative Writing. Passionate for technology and the wilderness, Justin spends his time designing websites and climbing rocks and trees. Sometimes you'll see him on a unicycle.

He Told It to the Mitten on a Stick

It was a Wednesday. It could've been a Sunday. Or a Thursday, Friday, Monday, or Tuesday. It didn't matter. They all had the same suffix. Nolan would still be standing on the same bricks in his once-white tennis shoes. Like he was now. The sidewalk ended at a little patio on the edge of the park. He stopped, setting his backpack on the picnic table with its sun-cracked wood and bird droppings. With his index finger, he rubbed the corner of his eye. His fingernails were unevenly short, groomed to a respectable level by front his incisors. His fingers were clubbed, smelling of the pink soap from public restrooms. His palms were wide and pale and smooth. His hands removed the three balls from his backpack. Two in his left hand, one in his right. Little blue orbs, like three Neptunes with no atmosphere and a rubber surface. Unlike the planet, they were familiar and within Nolan's grasp.

Stepping away from the picnic table and over the weeds peeking out between the bricks, Nolan noticed the little plot of pink impatiens growing before the narrow basement window of the home next to the park. A single

wooden stick stuck out of the flowerbed, holding up the frayed, red, handless mitten. The mitten's thumb drooped in the passing breeze, as if nodding in Nolan's direction. Thumbing the smooth globes in his hands, Nolan returned the nod. The wind ruffled the impatiens and tugged at his hair as he began. Flicking his left arm, Nolan tossed one of the balls into a smooth arc. At the top of its projection, he flicked his right arm, tossing the ball into an equal but opposite arc. Muscles loosening, Nolan's left palm released the ball as his right hand caught the first. The cascade began.

* * *

Fifty-nine SIA forms were awaiting documentation on Nolan's Frayo Electric ThinkPad. Fifty-nine emails had to be composed in the morning, requesting high-priority information from fifty-nine clients. SIA documentation was mission critical. Last week, Scott had assigned it to Nolan in the usual manner—standing by the water cooler, shooting the breeze, talking about the Eagles game on Saturday and asking if the girlfriend was keeping Nolan busy. Then, speaking of busy, Scott asked Nolan about his bandwidth. Nolan told him the usual: that he was "working on a few reports" but could probably "take on something else," if need be. Scott offered him the SIA project, and Nolan, of course, offered to take it.

That was great. Scott clapped Nolan's shoulder and forwarded him the email from Mahesh. Nolan spent the next week talking with Mahesh, who referred him to Sunil, who arranged a meeting with Venky, who told him to contact Chinmay, who was on PTO and sent an automated email requesting all urgent requests be forwarded to Krishna, who referred him to Latha, who told him to meet with Gohil, who then referred him back to Mahesh. While he worked his way up to five cups of Swiss Miss hot chocolate a day—he didn't like coffee—Nolan managed to get help from Srinath and Pradip, who compiled a list of fifty-nine additional POCs. Srinath and Pradip had told Nolan to contact them in regards to beginning the mission critical SIA documentation. Nolan didn't know what SIA stood for.

* * *

One time, Whitney asked him about work. Naturally, Nolan talked to her about work. A monologue later, she told Nolan that he was very intelligent. Clearly she didn't understand the abstraction of his glorified nothingness. Anyhow, whenever she asked him how his day went, he now returned the template response of "Not too bad, you?" and opened up a long conversation. Whitney was a teacher—high school math. She'd talk about students like they were her kids. Bethany got the highest marks in the class and was captain of the tennis team and very determined and was going to go far one day. Jeremy always had to take off his flat-bill because no hats were allowed in school and he knew it and one of these days she'd write him up for it. Melissa always had to sit in the front row because she had bad vision but was afraid her friends would mock her because her glasses were purple and

neither big nor hipster enough to be fashionable. Whitney understood that. Nolan didn't. Whitney was fashionable. And attractive, to both Nolan and pubescent high-schoolers. She connected with students and made a difference. Nolan thought about Whitney. Her hair was a beautiful shade of brown—not too dark, and not light enough to be mistaken for blonde in the wrong light. It had a light touch of red to it, not enough for her to be considered a ginger, but just a touch to give it that extra beauty. Her skin was light, but not pale, eyes blue—naturally blue, not from colored contact lenses.

* * *

Nolan recalled needing glasses in the eighth grade, and his dad's complaints echoed in his ears. "You're always in front of that damn screen, it's no wonder you're going blind." Glasses made him weak. "If this was ancient Sparta, you'd have been killed by now" his dad would bitch, snatching the hatchet from Nolan's shaky hand and beheading the chicken himself. "Why are you taking art?" he'd ask of Nolan in high school, "You can do painting in woodshop." Nolan had never taken over his dad's carpentry business. He'd gone to college for some bullshit degree in computers. "Those damned computers in cars cost me my legs!" His dad's voice over the phone resonated in Nolan's mind after he'd got out of the hospital with a severed spinal cord two years ago. He traded in his Buick for a wheelchair. Nolan had been flying home for the past few months to help his mom care for his dad. He'd be better this weekend. Nolan was taking him canoeing. Fishing had always been one of his dad's past-times and he didn't need to walk to do that. It'd get him out of the house at least, make Mom happy. Maybe the canoe would tip over? Make Dad happy.

* * *

Nolan remembered he had to order his plane ticket. He'd do it tonight. Another bag of stale pretzels and a sweaty ass. More frequent flyer miles.

* * *

He wondered if Frayo was ever awarded frequent acquirer points. There was so much documentation to be done because of all the damned acquisitions this quarter. The fiscal year was coming to a close, and everyone was trying to finish up everything they'd been procrastinating on during the previous three quarters. They were high-schoolers with ties and pencil skirts, worrying if their glasses weren't Burberry-enough. It was such a Frayo move. Buy up Telkor—arguably the world's best video-conferencing start-up—and sand-down its innovative drive to the glacially slow corporate pace.

Last year, the phone in Nolan's cubicle was replaced with the Frankenstein's monster phone of acquired technologies, complete with a Telkor screen and webcam from the mini-camcorder company Frayo had acquired a few years back. The company was called Colorfield. The phone was the same

corporate gray as Nolan's ThinkPad, stamped with the asterisk-shaped Frayo Electric Inc. logo. HR thought it was so great that they ordered a human-sized model of it to take to executive briefings. It was the beautiful ethnic child of Frayo's integrations. To maintain the innovative nature of technology companies, Frayo Electric Inc. was not a conglomerate. They integrated all of the companies they acquired, to create a cohesive Frayo experience.

* * *

There was a great online video series that Nolan had watched during high school called "Will It Blend?" He remembered the plethora of devices tossed in the blender, from paintballs to pool cues. The BlendAll blender could really blend it all, but what use did one have for a heap of smart phone dust?

* * *

She was a great woman, sitting before an awful excuse of a gourmet meal. Frayo had paid Nolan enough for him to own a spacious-enough apartment near the city, to fly home to visit his dad enough, and it provided just enough for him to take his girlfriend on a nice date every once in a while. Last weekend wasn't one of these nice dates. Nolan had grimaced as he mashed ethnicities across his plate, still warm from the industrial dishwasher. It was a palate of gourmet cuisine to paint a mural of diversity upon the walls of his stomach. A clump of Idahoan potatoes beside a pile of brown rice and curry with a side of Alfredo fettuccini and a pita wrap doused in Mexican hot sauce. Nolan wasn't a religious man, at least not anymore, but these sorts of things made him wonder. If God or whoever or whatever it was wanted him to have a varied diet, why didn't he/she/it/whatever put bananas and cherry trees in the same garden? Was he, as a member of humankind, supposed to go on some sort of nutritional scavenger hunt? It didn't matter, Nolan supposed. He just needed Whitney to be happy. She was probably expecting more than a shitty dinner at an all-u-can-eat buffet with a neon sign advertising that "Kids Eat Free on Sunday," however. A trip to the jewelers was unavoidable, Nolan decided.

* * *

His left hand fumbled, and the ball bounced off the bricks. Nolan caught the other balls as the first rolled into the lot of impatiens. He was sweating, feeling the dampness gather in the armpits of his t-shirt.

* * *

Laundry needed to be done, Nolan remembered.

* * *

Wiping his forehead, Nolan was careful not to step in the garden as he

retrieved the ball from the impatiens. Curtains were always drawn over all the windows of the house, so he had no idea who lived there or had stuck the knitted red mitten on the stick. Turning, he stepped back onto the patio and resumed juggling, changing the routine. He'd already cycled through his reps of cascades, waterfalls, and towers, so it was time to work on Mill's Mess—a difficult routine requiring the arms to be crossed at intervals—which leads to the mastery of more complex skills. Tossing a ball in the air, Nolan began again.

* * *

If he became skillful enough at juggling, maybe he could take off to Vegas to be the side-act in a lion-tamer show? It only takes 10,000 hours to become an expert at something, supposedly, so he was moving in the right direction—slowly but surely. It was like death, Nolan decided. Given a long and prosperous life, one would eventually decay into expertise. Nolan remembered his dad saying something like that once, about nursing homes. The man hated being sedentary. Ever since Nolan could walk, he remembered being dragged outside to run around with his dad. He would bring Nolan in the backyard to kick a soccer ball around, teaching him how to rainbow kick and other fun moves. Once, his father even arranged a trip to Europe and he bought them tickets to a Turkish soccer game. It was one of the best trips of his life. But he supposed it was easy to be the best when there were no comparisons.

* * *

Nolan had not been on any vacations since, other than the frequent flights back to his hometown. He wanted to go on an Alaskan cruise, to see the aurora borealis and glaciers and polar bears. Maybe he could hit some golf-balls off the deck, like vacationing executives at a Fortune 500 company like Frayo? It'd be a nice honeymoon, Nolan decided. Whitney's parents were well off and liked him; they'd only want the best for their daughter's post-wedding activities.

* * *

Whitney was coming over that night, after her Pilates class at the fitness center. Nolan had to start dinner. His refrigerator was filled with Tupperware: lunch-hour restaurant food and leftover pasta and burgers. There was a frozen four-cheese pizza and Moose Tracks ice cream in the freezer. Maybe he could sell that as a movie night and get around to watching the latest season of Break-In Brad? He loved the lawyer-gone-jewel-thief archetype and the raunchy sub-plots. Nolan was allowed to like that sort of thing; he wasn't responsible for children or being a role model. Yet.

* * *

Nolan wondered if he'd ever have kids. After he and his to-be spouse had unprotected sex on the Alaskan Cruise Line, the chances were likely. Nolan didn't want kids, especially girls. They'd be fine when they were little—five, six. But once they reached middle school and began undergoing hormonal changes, Nolan wouldn't know what to do. He hoped, in the worst case scenario of having kids, that he'd have a boy who enjoyed soccer. Then he could copy what his dad had done, other than the curse words, of course. It was always good to have a template.

In the spring, when HR would send him an email about the "Annual Frayo Festival," Nolan would take the wife and kids to the company picnic, where he'd wear a tucked-in polo and the khaki shorts his wife had picked out. His kid would be on the same Little League team as Chuck and Earl's kids. They'd continue to talk about the Eagles and yesterday's game and how great the wives were who drove them crazy. He'd start going to a bar and emptying his thoughts to some bartender who'd and say "Uh-huh" and to the other guys who idled at the front counter and talked about their shitty wages and the damn government. He'd put on weight, to make his wife feel better about her pregnancy. His hair would fall out, from all the worrying about that promotion from grade eight to grade nine. It was scary, like a T-Rex in the rear-view mirror of Jeep stuck in mud.

* * *

Nolan watched the balls cycle through the air before him. There was a soft sheen on their blue coat in the departing sunlight. Each ball moved along the same path, like an invisible rollercoaster operated by his hands. Nolan breathed in through his nose, out through his mouth. His hands varied the style, going into the "Machine." He'd idly toss two balls in one hand while the other acted like the claw in a toy machine, dropping the extra ball into the mix. When the new ball was added, the juggling hand would toss out another one for the claw to catch and deposit again. It wasn't one of the most enjoyable routine to juggle, but it looked great to the audience. If it'd had eyes, the mitten would've enjoyed it.

* * *

Mom pitied Dad. She'd try to massage his back and feed him, and ask if he wanted her to read to him. Dad hated that. Nolan knew he did. But Mom was his wife and she felt the need to give him bottomless dosages of tender care. That's just who she was. Nolan never pictured his dad in a wheelchair, sitting in the house grimacing at a book or having someone help him use the bathroom. The day after Halloween, Nolan had watched his dad toss the jack-o-lanterns onto the compost pile. He never waited until November 2nd. When Nolan was a little boy with a Band-Aid clinging to his skin, Dad would rip it off quickly and Nolan would scream in pain for a second before it left. The idea of rot perturbed Dad. Nolan hated the thought of his dad in a wheelchair. If only he had died with his Buick, driven it off a steep cliff that

gave him a glorious last view before his life got ripped away like a Band-Aid. Because of airbags, Dad was rotting like a hollowed-out pumpkin, stuffed with drugs to deal with “moodiness.”

* * *

There was a single painting of a pumpkin, still on the vine, hanging on the wall of Nolan’s apartment. It was the only one left from his high school art class. Green veins streaked around the top of the vegetable as it grew orange and away from the roots. A pair of wide green leaves, single bristle strokes of white to accentuate the bit of fuzz around the edges, shrouded the corners of the canvas. A curly vine—bright green and out of place—twisted away from the dark mud beneath the orange. Nolan had always hated it.

The vine was a mistake, an accidental streak of green that Nolan had decided to force into something rather than paint over. It kept the realism out of the painting. It made the shitty still-life look mobile. Nolan wanted the painting to be natural, the pumpkin unmistakable from the one that had been in his garden. The curly fuck-up vine kept that from happening, and whenever Nolan looked at the painting, his focus was on the unfortunate streak of green. It was shitty, but Nolan kept it over the years. It was small—easily portable. It was something to stick on an otherwise empty wall. Maybe a memento of something he forgot? Maybe it was just room-fill? Regardless, Nolan decided that he no longer hated it. It was all just paint on a canvas, a reflection of what actually was.

* * *

The white bulbs at the top of the lampposts turned on as Nolan dropped a ball. It bounced lightly off the bricks and rolled into the grass. Catching the other two balls, he walked over to pick up the third. He dropped them into his backpack and slung it over his shoulder. It was time to head in. Whitney would be over soon. He needed to buy the ticket to visit his dad, do a load of laundry, and get to bed early so he could wake up in time for work.

It was about falling into cadence. Nolan’s hands could operate without his mind, the balls flowing in cascading arcs around one another as his muscles operated from memory. The routine could change, but the pattern would adapt to maintain consistency. After 10,000 hours, he’d develop a deft skill. No balls would drop. People would gather around to watch. To learn from another performer on the street. He’d have an audience. It’d matter.

But for now, Nolan juggled to a mitten on a stick.

Vivian Anderson



Sophomore
Major: English

I grew up in Grand Blanc, Michigan. In my free time, I like to think about reading, actually read, take good care of my tamagotchi, and take cartoons way too seriously.

206 Bones

She finds him tossed out in the garbage behind her elementary school, a pile of bones in a leaky trash bag. He's haphazardly bagged up and spilling out onto the sticky concrete. When she walks closer to inspect him, her shoes make velcro noises as they come away from the ground, and they stick like glue on the downfall. A banana peel has leaked out of another bag and strewn itself across his face. She plucks it from him and rests it on the ground. His skull shines in the sun where the banana has left its slime.

The garbage bag he is in has stuck to the ground and when she moves to lift it, the bag rips, and his bones tumble out, becoming an even greater mess. An array of screws roll away under the dumpster. She takes what she can into her backpack and begins her trek home.

Home is a too crowded double wide trailer in a part of town that she sometimes hears her teachers call, "the less polished part of town." She knows her home doesn't shine the way the pennies in her mom's purse

sometimes do, but she's been to other parts of town, where the houses are bigger and fancier, and they don't shine like those pennies either.

Her bag sags with the weight of the bones in her bag, but it is a happy weight for her to bear.

When she returns home, she gingerly dumps the contents of her bag out on the living room floor, and runs to fetch her dad's old medical textbook, *Gray's an Ant and Me*, out from beneath her sister's bed. She should have 206 parts, it says, but she loses track every time she gets past 180. The pile on the floor certainly looks like there are enough pieces to make him look like the picture in the book, so she starts lining them up anyways, just like a puzzle. No one asks her what she's doing with a skeleton on the carpet, and that is just fine with her. It takes her hours, but when she finally steps back and looks at him, a body made out of all those tiny parts, she feels as though she's done something great.

He seems to think so too, because the next day, he wakes up.

She knows when opens her eyes upon him, the harsh, bleached white color of his bones softened by the pale pink of her bedsheets, that something about him has changed. She feels the same way she does when someone's eyes are on her in class, or the way she feels when she finishes her sister's sentences. Her suspicions are affirmed when his head swivels back and forth, seemingly taking in the room around him, and his head stops when it faces towards her, as though his empty sockets are searching hers. Most of her classmates would probably be scared, she thinks, but something about his hole-y gaze makes her grin, and she puffs her chest out in pride for being brave.

He cocks his head, or at least she thinks he means to, but laying down, his head just lolls to the side. He must be awfully confused. She softens to a smile and pats him gently with a warm sleepy hand. His skull is cool and smooth to the touch.

"Good morning."

His jaw hinges open, as though he would like to speak, but no noise comes out. He snaps his mouth back shut almost immediately, and his bones grind together, shifting in distaste, at his inability to communicate.

"Can't you talk?"

In the other room, she hears her mother yelling, probably at her sister, and she can hear her baby brother crying. She can hear her other brother

too, with his nasally whine of a voice. They're always so loud. Wordlessly, her companion shakes his head, and it makes her smile to hear the cartoonish squeak of his head on his neck, like a door with hinges in need of oil.

"That's okay. Talking's not that great anyways."

A glance at the clock on the wall tells her it's either 12:15 or 3:02 (she can remember which hand is which), but either way, it's probably time to get up. She rolls out of bed effortlessly, landing on her feet with a soft plop. On the other hand, the instant her friend puts his weight on his feet, shakily standing at last, his bones rattle, and his top half collapses under its own weight into a milky white mess on the floor. She huffs a shocked laugh and sets to putting him back together again. This time she uses all the scotch tape from the box under her bed (where she also keeps her strings and sealing wax, gifts from her sister that she still doesn't quite understand). He looks marginally sillier after than he did before, but he seems to be all right again. His jaw works up and down rapidly as though he wants to stutter an apology to her, but there is no voice. She helps him to his feet. Only his arm falls off this time, but he manages all right.

She snaps his freshly detached arm back into place, and instead of letting it go, reaches for his hand, which she shakes enthusiastically. "It's nice to meet you!" she chirps. She shakes too eagerly and his arm breaks off again. From the floor, where she's scrambled to collect all the parts of his arm, she calls up to him, "I'm Mila!"

"Here," she says, putting a notebook down in front of the skeleton. "Can you write?"

His fingers, still unsure of themselves, tremble as he lifts a pen and puts it to the paper. On his first try, he pushes too hard. The pen makes a light scratch on the page and his index finger falls out of the socket. She is eager to help him put himself back together and he tries again. The first things he writes are lines, straight and curvy, and then, when Mila prompts him to write with a giddy, "Can you write my name? M-I-L-A, Mila!" he tries to write that, too. His letters are sloppy, but he is relieved that he knows how to do this. When he woke up across from the little girl in her bed that morning, he hadn't been sure of much of anything, and even now he's still lost as to who he is, but maybe she will be able to help him. Maybe she'll put his pieces back together in this way, too. There remains a lot that he is confused about, but the shaky letters on the page spelling Mila are proof that he is moving forward.

His left hand traces along the letters he has drawn. The ink is thick and wet, and it stains his fingertips. The ink is thick and wet, and it is real.

"What about your name? What's your name?" Her own fingers dance around the edge of the table, eager to learn more.

He fumbles, at a loss for words. *Do not know*, he writes in his sloppy, childish scrawl.

Her eyes crinkle at the edges as she reads what he's written. He watches as her lips purse around the shape of each syllable, and he thinks for a moment that she must be very young. Reading might be as new to her as writing is to him. "Really?" The disappointed tone in her voice doesn't go unnoticed, but she smiles anyways. "Why don't we just give you one then?"

OK, he writes.

She names him Jeremiah after a goldfish her father had won for her at the fair when she was younger. Her mother had named the fish, she tells him, and he had big, poppy eyes. "You don't have any eyes though," she muses later, laughing, "so I guess you're different."

He doesn't know what to say, so he writes, *Thank you*.

"He died." She averts her eyes and scratches away at a sticky spot at the table. "We flushed him."

Jeremiah runs his bony fingers through her hair in what he hopes is a comforting gesture. The fine strands get caught in the his joints and she winces as he takes his hand away. He picks up the pen and writes, *Sorry*, and the hairs tangled on his fingers kiss the paper with a nearly imperceptible scratching sound.

"About my hair? Or the fish?"

Both.

Mila sits with him on her bed for a while and talks to him about the things that go through her mind. While Jeremiah doesn't quite understand all of it, her voice is soft and excited, and she's so full of life in the way that her fingers flutter around in her enthusiasm, that he can't quite bring himself to mind. She tells him about school and how she doesn't care for it much, but the year is coming to an end, so she won't have to go anymore. There's a sense of finality in the way she tells him this, but he can't pinpoint why.

She tells him that there are some things that she likes about school, and she excitedly springs from the bed and begins to root around in her book bag, finally pulling out a battered, sparkly pink pencil box. She holds it like a treasure, and when she says, "I like this," she sounds breathless in rever-

ence. Jeremiah wants to chuckle at her, but instead his jaw just clicks up and down. She quirks her head at the sound and brings the box to him. "Look," she whispers, opening the box gently.

He expected there to be pencils inside, but instead he finds himself looking at a stethoscope and some old band aids, so old that the paper wrapping has become yellowed. He writes a question mark on his note pad.

"These were my dad's!" she tells him cheerily. She prods each item with her index finger as she lists them for him. "Stephoscope, Tom and Jerry band-aids, regular band-aids.." She pauses and looks up at him sadly. "I had more but Reggie threw them away."

Jeremiah doesn't know what to say, so he just lets his head swing sadly from side to side. He thinks to ask her who Reggie is, but the question seems inappropriate so he lets it go.

"I looked for them," she continues, "but I found you instead, so..." Her eyes are a little wet when she says, "Who needs that stuff anyways," and shuts the box. She returns it to her bag and pauses a moment with her back to him. The moment seems longer to Jeremiah than it really is.

Finally, she zips up the bag and returns to his side at the bed, but Jeremiah can't help but notice how the zipper fails as she does it, and the side flaps open, hangs there like an open mouth.

He wants to ask if she'd like to go look again, even though he feels like to do so would be an exercise in futility, but she is too quick for him. She tells him that she's hungry, and the rumbles in her stomach second that motion wholeheartedly, so she pads away to get a bowl of cereal. He stays put at her suggestion, not wanting to alarm her family with his looks. Before she leaves the room, she asks him if he'd like anything from the kitchen ("We don't have much, but tummy is so empty!" were her exact words, sneaking a tiny hand into the space below his ribs), but he politely declines. He feels he has enough on his plate as it is.

However, not five minutes later, a young boy bursts into her room, trailing mud behind him from his sneakers. Jeremiah panics, tenses so hard that his skull pops off from his neck and rolls to the floor. It's a strange experience, having his head roll away from his body, and he becomes so dizzy that if he had a stomach to empty, the contents of it would surely of it e on the floor. When his head stops spinning (both literally and figuratively), he returns his attention to the boy who has now taken to rooting around in Mila's dresser, muttering something Jeremiah can't hear. Jeremiah is shocked that the boy hasn't taken notice of the spectacle that has just unfolded, but when the boy turns around, his eyes darting around the room in a furtive gesture, they never pause on the upright skeleton on the bed, and Jeremiah starts to think that maybe the boy can't see him. Its' odd if that's the case, but then, the

whole ordeal was pretty odd to begin with.

Jeremiah accepts the strangeness of the situation, and, following the logic that if he is aware of his body, then he should be able to move it, he attempts to move his arm. In response, his left arm quirks, jerking into the air for a split second. Jeremiah takes this as a success and tells his body to stand. Fortunately, there is no repeat incident of earlier that morning, and his body remains upright, taking tentative steps towards his head. He fears that when his body leans down to lift his head from the ground, he'll tumble into a bigger mess than he already has, but his luck prevails, and a moment later he is screwing his head back onto his neck. He feels almost giddy as he makes his way over to where the boy is knocking the little girl's clothes carelessly to the floor.

When Jeremiah stands behind him, watching from over his shoulder, the boy pauses, and Jeremiah fears for a moment that he's somehow been discovered. However, a only a beat later, the boy makes a relieved noise and clasps whatever he had been looking for in the drawer. He pulls out a small package, that, up on Jeremiah's closer inspection, reveals itself to be a box of cigarettes. Jeremiah doesn't understand what this little boy would need with them or why Mila would have them in her possession to begin with, but there's nothing for him to do but watch as the boy turns on his heels and struts out of the room.

Mila comes back a little later after the rumbling in her belly has been sated and frowns at the mess of clothes left on her floor. "Did you throw this stuff around?" she asks, though she hardly looks as though she has any real suspicion. Jeremiah shakes his head, and she sighs, bending to pick up an off white t-shirt from the ground with a peeling floral decal decorating it. "That was Reggie then. My brother." She doesn't elaborate any more than that, and when she turns back to face him, there's a smile on her face.

Maybe he imagines it, but Jeremiah can't help but think that he sees her lips quiver ever so slightly.

Mila ends up having a large family, Jeremiah finds in the following days. He learns a lot about them as they stomp through the hall and yell across the house to one another.

There's Mila's mother, Sherry, a woman who looks surprisingly young for how many children she has, though the tightness around her lips and eyes tells Jeremiah that she can't be as young as she seems. She has a weary way of dealing with her children, usually delegating problems to her eldest daughter, Cat. He mainly gets the opportunity to observe her whenever Mila is sick and detained to bed, leaving him to wander around the house. She's sick often, but it's only a bug she's ill with, and it will pass soon enough,

or at least that's what she tells him with her shaky smiles from just above the top edge of her blanket. The image that sticks with Jeremiah the most whenever his thoughts drift to Sherry is of a time he saw her washing dishes. She wore a wistful expression, looking out the window at their patchy lawn, browning for lack of water, and there was a dampness on the front of her blouse. The soapy water splashed recklessly around the counter top as she lost herself in the wringing motion of rinsing out the glass in her hands. Jeremiah watched her do this for an indeterminate amount of time, as the clock on the stove no longer worked and he could find no other timepiece in the room. Her reverie was finally broken by a shrilly cry from the youngest, a boy named J.J., and her hands slipped, letting the glass fall to the bottom of the sink. She left, a muttered "shit" under her breath and wet spots on her jeans from where she had wiped her hands.

Mila's sister, Cat, is somewhat of a mystery to Jeremiah. She comes and goes at strange hours, leaving early for school, but coming home much later than Carlton, her step-brother who is more or less of the same age. Mila tells Jeremiah that it's because she has a boyfriend that she's gone all the time, but something about her worn out nature whenever she returns home leads him to wonder if there's not something she's keeping secret. That, and she frequently goes out again, much later in the evening, returning when most of the family has already gone to bed. Of course, Jeremiah is still awake during these times, and he's made it a bit of a habit to observe Cat when she comes home. Most nights, Cat just drops her bag, removes her bra, and crawls into bed, but other nights, she comes and sits beside a gently storing Mila, and occasionally brushes a stray lock of hair from Mila's face. Jeremiah can't pretend to understand these moments in the same way Cat does, but seeing her like that, affectionate towards Mila, it warms him to her.

Though Jeremiah tries his hardest (at first) to feel a similar fondness for the boys of the family as he does for Cat and Mila, he finds he cannot, and eventually gives up trying. He catches Reggie smoking in the backyard one day, and while the action itself doesn't both Jeremiah so much, he finds himself disturbed by the image of the young boy with his cheeks hollowed out on the smoke he draws in, and the way the afternoon sky hits his face makes him look gaunt and so much older than he really is. Jeremiah sits, fascinated, and watches how Reggie breathes the smoke in and out like a natural. The pack is different from the one he had taken from Mila's dresser on that first day, so Jeremiah reasons that this must be a regular habit for Reggie if he has a supply tucked away somewhere. Jeremiah startles when Ron, Sherry's boyfriend, appears behind them. He's holding J.J., swaddled in a threadbare blanket with one hand, and he has one arm stretched down to Reggie, his palm open and ready to confiscate the cigarette. That's what Jeremiah assumes at least. "Gimme that," Ron demands, his voice deep and gravelly.

Reggie shrugs and passes it to his father, who, to Jeremiah's surprise,

brings it to his lips and takes a long drag on it. He's careful enough with his smoke not to exhale on the baby, which Jeremiah supposes is generally a good thing, but then he sits down beside Reggie, handing the cigarette back. "Shit's foul," he remarks at last, and it makes Reggie break out in a grin.

"It ain't that bad," Reggie laughs.

"Where you been getting' those from anyhow? You know your momma don't want you smokin'."

"Sherry ain't my momma." At this, Ron gives him a stern look and cuffs him lightly on the side of his head. Reggie looks sheepish for a moment before admitting, "Old Todd, a few trailers over. You know."

Ron scratches at the dirty blonde stubble on his chin and squints up at the sun, a low rumble of a laugh vibrating through his chest. "That old son of a bitch." He plucks the cigarette from Reggie's lips, mid-suck, and takes a drag himself before crushing it against the side of the trailer. Reggie whines in protest, but his complaints fall flat on Ron. The ash leaves a dark circle on the off-white of the trailer's siding, and Jeremiah wants desperately to rub it away. "You make sure your mom don't see you with those, all right?"

When Ron leaves, Jeremiah follows, lingering only long enough to watch Reggie light up another cigarette and bring it to his lips. He understands now that later Reggie will hide his remaining cigarettes in Mila's dresser so that Sherry won't find them, and while Jeremiah knows that it's only a small crime for Reggie to do, it still leaves him with an uneasy feeling in the stomach he doesn't have.

The more Jeremiah observes Reggie, the more he finds that he's just a bully and that's all there is to it. It's not uncommon for Reggie to take Mila's things or for him to call her odd names that make her cry later for reasons Jeremiah cannot parse together despite his desperate efforts to. One day, Reggie's taunts of, "Braniac, brainiac," were enough for Mila to shut herself up in her room all day, isolating herself from everyone, even Jeremiah, until at last Cat came home and was able to console her. He listened closely near the door, hearing only Mila's bubbling sobs and Cat's soft "shh'-ing. Mila apologized later, an apology that Jeremiah felt was entirely unwarranted, but when he asked why she had been so hurt, she only changed the subject.

For the most part, Jeremiah avoids Ron. After that incident with Reggie and the cigarette he has felt wary of the man, and Jeremiah finds that he doesn't care for the way that Ron sometimes looks at Mila but sees right through her, as though she weren't there at all. Jeremiah is used to being looked through, but Mila is there, with flesh on her bones and a voice in her throat. She has no reason to be invisible like him.

He asks about her real dad just once. He had been sitting beside her on

the couch while she ate a banana and watched cartoons. Cat had stormed in, with Ron following not far behind her, his face red in anger. "Goddamn, Cat, how many times do I hafta tell you to quit guiltin' your ma about all that?"

Cat turned around from the entrance to her room, but she didn't say anything. Jeremiah could see the hate in her eyes, and she fixed her chilly stare on Ron, only looking away for a second to shoot a worried glance at Mila, who was staring pointedly at the television. After a moment, Cat groaned, and went into her room, slamming it behind her. Jeremiah could hear the tiny click of the door locking.

Ron appeared to be even more angered by this, and he through his meaty fists at the door, yelling, "You go out and apologize to your damn mother!" Loud music came from behind the door in response, and Ron stormed back outside. He called out for Sherry as he went.

Jeremiah expected this kind of thing from her family on a regular basis at this point, but this time, he couldn't help but to ask. There was something about how Mila was so entirely unmoved by their displays that compelled him to press the issue to her. He picked up his notepad from beside him and wrote, *Where's your dad?*

Mila had furrowed her brow and pointed to the front door, confusion on her face. It made Jeremiah ache.

YOUR dad, he amended.

"Oh," she had exclaimed around a mouthful of food. She swallowed. "He died after that time with the fish! The goldfish, you know? Jeremiah. In the car." She popped the final bite of her banana into her mouth. "Crash."

Jeremiah hadn't known how to respond. He was horrified by how blatant she could be. Finally, at a loss for anything else to say, he wrote, *Were you close?*

She nodded vigorously. "Yeah! But it's okay, I'm not sad."

The pen in his fingers had twitched back and forth on the page as he stumbled on what to say next. Thankfully, she saved him from that, brandishing her banana peel in front of her and asking, "Think I could trip Reggie with this?"

They don't talk about her father again, but he learns, or at least verifies, from eavesdropping on a conversation Cat has on the phone one night that he used to be a doctor, and that's why there are medical books scattered around the house everywhere. He doesn't find out much more than that. Jeremiah doesn't like to hear Mila say sad things with her happy little voice,

so he's learned not to ask anymore.

Weeks pass for Jeremiah and, when Mila clutches at his bony hand with her own surprisingly clammy hand and tells him, "Jeremiah I'm so glad I found you," it dawns on him that maybe he's part of the family now too. Her family at least.

The news comes to him as less of a shock than he'd really like to admit, but it's no less devastating. It happens like this.

Mila is in her bedroom resting because she had a headache, so Jeremiah is loitering around the house. He's chosen to sit at the dining room table and watch as Cat makes a salad for the family and Sherry pokes at a pile of potatoes with a fork before baking them. Sherry's tone is prying as she asks slowly, "Where were you last night, Cat?"

Cat sighs, never pausing from chopping the vegetables in front of her. "Momma, you know I was workin'."

This is all news to Jeremiah, and if he had ears, they would be perked in interest. He had always assumed that she had been out with her boyfriend when she comes home late. Sherry waits a moment before replying. "The school called again today. You gonna drop out for real or just keep skippin'?" She puts her fork down. "Where do you go during the day, if you work at night? You sure as hell haven't been goin' to class." Jeremiah likes to think that she's concerned, but he can't help noticing how her annoyance comes through her voice more than anything else.

"You know I waitress in the mornings before the bowling alley gig." Cat's voice is soft when she speaks, but not so much in gentleness, rather, it sounds tightly controlled. She purses her lips. "Stephen's been helpin' me study for my GED on my days off, so I guess I pretty much quit school at this point, yeah."

"Why you doin' all that, Cat?"

Jeremiah is startled by the tenacity that Cat slams her knife down on the counter with. Her back trembles with the force of her sudden emotion. "You know why." Her fingertips clench at the counter like she's grasping for something to hold on to. "Someone's gotta at least try to get her the help she needs."

Sherry's left eye tics and her lips quirk into something ugly. Her expression is gone just as quickly as it came. She picks up her fork once more and continues pressing into the mound of potatoes. Her actions are jerkier now, more violent. "You know there ain't no point. She's gonna die." From the counter, Cat lets out a strangled sound that almost seems like a laugh.

Sherry takes that as a sign to continue. "You were there, you heard that doctor. There's nothin' to do, no matter how much money you put together. Buy a car with it or somethin' instead."

Cat turns to face her mother and her expression is so raw, so visceral, that Jeremiah almost feels that he should look away, almost feels as though he's being invasive by just seeing her that way, but no, he can't-- he's too glued to the spot by his confusion and growing dread. "Don't you dare talk like that, Momma. I don't know how you think you can just... accept that, but I sure as hell can't."

Sherry shakes her head, looking defeated. Jeremiah wonders how it is that the fight she had just a moment ago has already come and gone. "You're wastin' your life doin' what you're doin'."

Jeremiah watches as Cat's fingers shake again, and for a moment he's afraid that she'll grab the knife and do something rash, but instead she just rakes her nails across the counter, and the sound reminds Jeremiah of his own fingers skating across glass. "I'm wasting my life? And you're not?"

Sherry just shakes her head in exasperation, like they've had this discussion before. They probably have, and the sudden realization makes Jeremiah feel as though he's just been punched. They're just headaches and fevers, he reminds himself, thinking about Mila just down the hall, thinking about she said so herself, saying, "You ever play Dr Mario?" and he shook his head, of course he hadn't. She shrugged and went on, "I guess you wouldnta, but it's just like that! Got the chills!" and she'd exaggerated a shiver as she crawled under the covers. "Don't worry about me," she told him, and he'd let it go. *Just the chills. Dr Mario.*

"That's really funny, Momma, that I'm the one wastin' my life, when I'm givin' up all I've got to make sure that little girl has a chance, while you just sit around here and wait for her to--" She chokes and can't seem to force the words out. Jeremiah can see how her eyes are wet from where he sits.

"No stoppin' it," Sherry mutters, and Jeremiah can't say he's surprised by the hand that swings out and slaps her across her face. Sherry's expression doesn't indicate that she's too surprised either. Her eyes are still dull, the wrinkles by her mouth tight. He thinks of her at the sink, twirling the dishrag over and over and over again into the glass.

"I'd leave for good, if it weren't for Mila," Cat threatens, and a tear finally escapes, but she wipes it away harshly with her shirtsleeve where it's rolled up tight at the crook of her arm. She stares at Sherry for a long moment, like she's waiting for her mother to challenge her, and for a moment, Sherry stares at her as though she will, but then she gives a slow shake of her head and returns once more to the potatoes. Cat leaves loudly, slamming the front door behind her.

Jeremiah is still at the table, and Sherry is still at the counter. Sherry gives a dry cough and shuffles over to finish the salad.

That night, Jeremiah wants to go see Mila, to have her prove them wrong, to say that she'll be okay. When he peeks into her room though, she's still sleeping. He can't bring himself to wake her up. Not after all that.

Instead, he moves around the house like he has for the past month or so. He watches Carlton and Reggie roughhouse in the yard from the windowsill for a few minutes, but when Ron enters the scene, clambering out from under the old pick-up he fixes up in his free time, Jeremiah has to move away in disgust. He thinks back to Reggie's teasing and how Ron rarely took notice of Mila. They must have known, even back then.

At a loss for where else to go in the tiny little trailer, he returns to Mila's room. He sits on Cat's side for a while. She'll be back soon, probably, but he doesn't mind. She's the only one besides Mila who he thinks he could be around right now. Cat's side, while small, is a nice place to be, and over the past few weeks he's spent his fair share of time hanging around it while Mila was resting. She has drawings that her little sister made for her on the walls, stuck there by colorful stickers. They generously feature all eight members of the family and Jeremiah finds himself struck by a wave of sadness. He can't pry himself away from the images though, and he traces his fingers lightly against the wall as he scans the collection. They're all more or less the same, Cat and Mila standing in front of the trailer, Cat and Carlton separated by Reggie and Mila, Sherry and Ron with baby J.J. Floating between them. He stops at the last one, a series of white lines and circles on a piece of black construction paper. This one is him. He doesn't know why Cat would hang this here, but for the first time since his new life with Mila, he wishes he could cry.

He stands there for a long time, brushing his rattling bones across the fuzzy black paper. She wrote something here, but he can't read it, not with her childish writing. He wishes he could.

He almost doesn't hear them come in, Cat and some young man, but their entrance is a bit of a relief to him. He sinks down to the ground beneath his portrait and sets about listening to them. Anything to take his mind off of Mila and her quiet snores from the other side of the room.

The man is Stephen, he learns, Stephen the boyfriend. He's a college student, or so Jeremiah thinks from the snippets of references to his education that he makes. Cat seems to have the same idea as Jeremiah, opting to listen to anything for a distraction.

"The beauty of the light of at the end of the tunnel," Stephen is saying, taking a long drag from his cigarette and exhaling it a beat later through the crack in Cat's window, "is not that there's a promise of good fortune in the end, but rather that it's a tunnel we're in, as opposed to a cave."

Cat scrunches up her nose, either in confusion or at the smell of the smoke, Jeremiah doesn't know. He doesn't think this is a particularly profound thing for Stephen to say, but there's something like wonder in her voice when she asks, "What do you mean?"

Clearly this is the question Stephen is fishing for, because his eyes gleam enthusiastically and his chest puffs up, leaning towards Cat and crossing his legs in a way that makes his pants ride up at his ankles. "What I mean to say is that we spend all this time fumbling blindly through the hardships in our lives, but the light lets us know that there is an end. It might not necessarily end in the best possible way-- the light might be any color, Cat; it doesn't really matter. And maybe there's a series of tunnels and we leave one and re-enter another, but what's important is that the ends exist, and someday we'll find them. Troubles end, Cat, they do."

She pushes her book away from her and her brow furrows in thought. After a moment's thought she asks, her tone hesitant, "Do you think that some people are in a shorter tunnel than others?"

She's talking about Mila, Jeremiah knows. Mila, who, if Stephen's allegory means anything, has hardly even entered the tunnel of her life yet. It's more like she's just passing through an overpass.

Jeremiah doesn't intend to stick around for Stephen to give the inevitable "yes," but before he can leave the room, he hears Mila rouse from her bed. "Cat?" she calls, her voice scratchy.

Cat stands and pulls Stephen with her, a sad expression on her face. "It's all right. Go back to sleep, Mila."

Mila rolls around noisily in her bed, pulling her comforter up from where it had been cozily tucked into her mattress. Her hands pat around blindly, in search of something.

"You need anythin', baby girl?"

"Jeremiah?" Mila asks, and Cat laughs softly, picking up a raggedy stuffed rabbit from the floor and tucking it in beside her. She kisses Mila on the cheek.

"Get some sleep, kid," Cat tells her fondly as she leads Stephen out of the room.

Mila throws the rabbit to the floor and Jeremiah crawls in beside her

instead.

Mila doesn't go back to sleep right away. She just lies there with her head turned slightly to face him and he can see that her pupils are unfocused. Her fingertips trace idly down his arm, her lips quirking into a soft smile. Doing his best not to disturb her too greatly, he grabs his notebook from the bedside table, and, as gently as he can, folds himself down beside her again. He flips the nightlight on, so she can see what he writes.

Are you sick?

Her eyebrows draw together and it takes her longer to read what he's written than it would have just a little while ago. He wants to chalk it up to the poor lighting, but he knows now-- he just wants to hear it from her. After what seems like an eternity, she answers, "A little."

Sick where?

"My brain." She raps on the side of his head, listening to the hollow noise. "Wish my head was empty like yours."

He wants to tell her it doesn't make a difference. That even though he doesn't have a brain bumping around in his skull, that he still feels pain by some cruel trick of fate. He doesn't though. Maybe Sherry would make that sort of comment, but not him. *What can I do?*

She *hmm*s and then flips the nightlight back off, taking his notepad and tossing it haphazardly to the floor. It lands beside her stuffed rabbit. "Take a nap with me."

You just woke up from a nap, he thinks, but he can't possibly say no, so he bends to fit himself more tightly in the tiny space of her child's bed and fits his head on the pillow beside hers. He pulls on his arm, popping it out of the socket, and he drags the appendage across the blanket with his other arm, dances his dangly finger bones up and down the space between them because he knows she likes that. She gives a breathy laugh, and by the time his fingertips are tiptoeing next to hers to finally take their place for the night in the spaces between her own tiny digits, she is already asleep. He holds her hand anyways.

She looks so healthy in her sleep, and Jeremiah almost believes that the conversation between Cat and Sherry earlier had been a lie. Her face is round and rosy. He thinks about Reggie, that time with the cigarette, and the hollowed out gauntness of his face then. For a split second, Jeremiah finds himself wishing that Reggie was the sick one, instead of Mila, and that

their faces could really be so indicative of their health. He imagines it, Reggie being sick to his bed and Mila bringing him soup and cold washcloths. She wouldn't be at all to him the way Reggie was to her. Yes, it would be better, he thinks, if Reggie were sick instead. However, no sooner than he thinks that, he catches a glimpse of the drawing on the wall of Mila and her siblings, with their generic happy faces. This is how she sees them, he knows. She sees them for the damaged people they are and loves them despite of it. She would never want Reggie to be sick in her place. Jeremiah feels sinister inside for having thought of it, and he squeezes her hand in apology.

She murmurs a soft noise in her sleep, and Jeremiah likes to think that she's forgiven him.

Still, he does wish that he could do something to change things for her. He hears the family moving around the trailer, Sherry occasionally laughing at the television, and Ron listening to a football game on a tinny little radio outside while he works on his truck, hooting whenever his favorite team makes a pass. These could be normal people, with a normal family and normal lives, but they're not, and Jeremiah resents them for trying to be what they're not. They're broken people with broken lives and a daughter they ignore and they're just waiting for her to die. He wants them to know that she's there, and that all of them, she's the one who deserves to live the most.

There's nothing he can do for her though, not like that anyways. He's just a pile of bones with a notebook. The best he can do is what he's always done, and that's to be her friend. He knows that's all she wants, but still, he wishes there were more for him to do.

But then...

But then he thinks of his first day with her, and how he had felt so lost for his reason for being there with her. He had wanted to know so badly who he was, and she had told him. She saw him as a lonely, discarded skeleton, and she had taken him in, given him a home, and given him a friend, expecting nothing in return. He's there to be her friend in the same way that she's been there to be his. He thinks of the warmth he feels when she laughs, and he imagines that maybe his company makes her feel it too. Maybe it's him that keeps her together, keeps her from looking as sick as she is inside, just like she keeps him together, popping his arms back into their places with scotch tape and featherlight kisses. It's frustrating, not being able to do more for her, but then...

This is enough.

Rishee Batra



Sophomore
Major: Creative Writing and Literature

Rishee Batra is a sophomore. He loves to read (especially Shakespeare and poetry), writes a lot, and strangely also enjoys math.

Icarus's Friend

I

Icarus may I try them on?
I'd love so much to see the dawn
While seated next to buoyant birds
Who chirp such happy morning words.
I promise not to fly away.
I'll bring them back within the day.
Just let me ride a chilly breeze
And I'll return down from the trees.
So could you lend those waxy wings?
Your nod, good friend, would make me sing.

II

How easily I blushed and rhymed
And made him lap up all my lies.
My heartbeats now are dense and red

For I'll be flying soon instead
Of dwindling on this worthless rock
That I no longer have to walk.
I've always meant to touch the stars
So now's the time—no wall's too large!
And on the way I'll pass the sun
And let it know its reign is done.

Wet Wings

I'll be the crest of a wave, you can be a gull
Flying overhead in your free glory.
Can you swoop real low every once in a while
On your cerulean trips?

You might feel a few splashes of salty droplets
On your splayed wings.

But don't worry.
That's just me writhing in joy
To see your feathery belly, your bright beak
Against a clear sky.

Then I'll wait for you to stop by again,
After you fly away
Like I know you will.

Switches

The lights are on, and
You might as well be in my arms:
Just a wall, a window away
But I have no way through that door,
Although you did let me in before.

Good thing I have X-ray imagination:

You're sitting on that couch where we kissed,
Your feet up, eyes scanning a book (maybe even the one I

left behind),
Drinking honey tea with a smile—

Do you remember that day when
Your turquoise toes hid grains of sand
In the fur on my legs,
And Spanish filled our mouths
As we devoured Neruda?

That's the day I learned what this world's for,
And my cries became simple:
You can generalize up, but never down,

So all I seek is
The rendition of beauty
And the coincidence of love.

Silver Manifesto

At night the rain would dance upon our heads
And lights of lamps would bounce off streets and cars.
I'm thinking back to what you always said:
That you preferred a neon sign to stars.
Yet now we lie beneath this sheet of dust,
Our spines on grass and torsos to'ard the sky.
Before you slept, I pleaded that you must
Join in, to trace those soft bright dots up high.
We gave them names that no one else had thought,
Saw elephants and laughed at twinkling trunks
That like your eyes held such surprise at what
The world reveals after the sun has sunk.
 I'd like to wake your sleeping frame, although—
 It's just so I can say I told you so.

Freida Blostein



Sophomore

Major: Public Health and Epidemiology

Freida Blostein is a sophomore interested in Public Health and Epidemiology. She currently participates in a poetry tutorial with Ken Mikolowski at the Residential College.

Dawn Farm OR

I Want Him Better, I Just Don't Want Him Here

Dead dogs go to farms when they bite
Too hard, or get too old they head upstate
Pastures of never ceasing light - lies
Half truths whispered into small seashell ears
When brute honesty goes beyond
Necessity

What do I think when I'm told my brother is at a farm?

It is a farm and it isn't, I find
Visiting between the hours
Prescribed by clipboards mounted on
Human frames.
Directed by GPS and duty down
Dirt roads that aren't charming,
Simply honest, I find

It is a farm and it isn't.
They call it a farm, the clipboard soldiers,
Believe it's a farm in their clipboard hearts
So it is a farm.
Pigs with deeply intelligent eyes, chickens
Laying spotted eggs
Roam the grounds already frosted with early cold
So it is a farm
And it isn't.
Doesn't smell like farm, no sweet manure
Odor, no heavy sweat of lowing beasts
There's an alpaca, for some godforsaken reason,
No country smell though
In this exotic menagerie.
Whiffs of cigarette smoke permeate the soil instead
Singular vice allowed the main exhibit:
(Not the alpaca or pigs or rooster crowing)
No, many addicts are the farms
Primary beasts of burden.

Deadbeats are sent to the farm
They drank too much or injected
Quicksilver streams of forgetfulness into their veins
Flushed their lives, their needles, their papers and all
Away, until, if they're loved, they get sent
Here: it is a farm and it isn't.

I don't see any black people
Can't picture crack addicts of ghettos
Finding their sorry way to a farm
Paying in green bills for a stint
As mules repentant for their sins.
Three k a month is too high a rent for any addict
Unless they're loved, sprung
By suburban moneyed worried parents.
Not that there isn't diversity here
Addicts are from all over:
Arizona, Alaska, Illinois, my brother introduces
Friends with names I don't even bother to hear
(I'm so lucky, I only drove 5 miles
Of shitty roads
To find this farmnotfarm.)
Addicts are from alcohol, heroin, cocaine
Pills that spilled over bedspreads
Yeah, there's diversity here
In these greywashed walls of plaster.

Maybe what the farm harvests, in semi-
Straightened lines of shorn heads
Isn't wheat or corn or sustenance in grain
But ideas and life and habits from
Substance coated pasts

Do you take care of the animals?

I ask my brother, trying to solve the riddle
Farmnotfarm?

No he says and I pity him

Not because of the times he dropped

In the streets and totaled cars

Or woke in hospitals all prickly with plastic

Drips, not because his bagged eyes,

Fabled past or golden future.

He would be good working with the animals.

Instead this place won't let him

They are the prize herd, the addicts

Enmeshed in daily tasks of boredom

They are shuttled from meeting

To meeting, which are Anonymous

Or Religious, but it is an ambiguous

Anonymous religion

CHRIST isn't said outloud, sort of mouthed

Into the palm of the hand

So no one can hear it even though everyone can

Meetings and Meetings but no Farmwork

My brother's herd is entrusted with bathroom cleanings

Or food prep

Not with the small lives of furry creatures

How could they be? We don't

Trust them with lives of their own.

Maybe the farm doesn't feed

Hungry mouths with its fresh produce, but feeds

On the individuality of this brave new

World of youth in timorous revolt

I know that's dramatic, they're just junkies, but

He's my junky

What do you do? Read?

I ask my brother, implying I want

An answer that's not "meetings"

His blank stare answers me, hitting

Home, straight in my gut, twisting

Me up in the realization
They do not read
 Books are escapism
They are allowed no sex
 Fucking is escapism
They are relieved of phones
Electronics and internet
 The outside world is escapism
They awake at five every morning,
On the dot, always, assumedly because
 Dreaming is escapism too
I stare into his blank eyes, pupils
Rightly sized for once but dim, I
Never knew before that I spent so much time
Escaping.

Julia Byers



Sophomore

Major: Creative Writing and Literature

Julia Byers is a sophomore in the Residential College, majoring in Creative Writing & Literature. Her work has previously appeared in *Teen Ink* magazine, the *RC Review*, *White Ash Literary Magazine*, and the *82nd Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition Collection*. Recently she won the Children's/Young Adult category of the *82nd Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition* and a 2014 Hopwood Underclassmen Fiction Award. She currently works as a remote intern for a literary agent and runs the Chapter One Young Writers Conference. Her hobbies include Netflix and not going outside.

The End

Dylan used to tell me sunshine on funerals was a good thing, like how rain on weddings was good. When I asked him how he knew, he said it was obviously true, because more babies were born during storms than when the sun was present and white and hot, and weddings and babies promised the same thing: a new beginning. So sunshine on a funeral was a good thing, too, since it was the opposite: the end.

I don't believe him, though. With the way the sun's shining down through the pine needles way up above, reflecting off everyone's shiny black shoes and pooling too bright against the newer gravestones that still haven't been worn rough by bad weather, I can't help but think that sunshine is an awful bad thing at a funeral, because it makes everyone slow and sleepy and

content, sitting there in their rows of rickety white folding chairs, while inside I am screaming, and reeling, and dying myself, staring at his casket beside the hole.

Dylan used to tell me there was one four leaf clover in every field, if you just looked hard enough. When I told him it was BS, he scrunched his thick eyebrows low until they brushed against his eyelashes to tell me no, it had to be true, because it took a certain amount of luck for a piece of land to become a field for kids like us to play on, and therefore there must be a four leaf clover hidden somewhere there.

I don't believe him, though. We were lying out in a field, the group of us from the Regent High Photography Club that went out for burgers after our meeting instead of going home, when the bee stung him, and his throat swelled shut so fast he couldn't even finish chewing his mouthful. If that field had been lucky, the bee wouldn't have landed on Dylan's cheek. It would have found my hand instead, which was just a matter of inches away in the grass. It would have stung me and it would have hurt, but not like this, since I am not the one who was allergic to bees.

Dylan probably would have said the field was lucky once upon a time, and someone just stole its four leaf clover, if he knew I was thinking that now, while clutching the program for his funeral in my unblemished fingers. But Dylan can't say anything anymore.

Dylan used to tell me the lines on the palm of your hand determined how long you were going to live, and while he traced a finger over my sticky skin with the heat blowing in on us through my open bedroom window, I'd ask him how he was sure, and he'd reply in that slightly gravelly, never serious voice, "Because yours say you're going to live 'til you're a hundred, and I wouldn't have it any other way."

I didn't believe him though, and now he'll never know, will he? He'll never know if I'll live to a hundred, and I'll never know what the lines on his hand said because I never dared look—I was never brave enough to see when he'd die. Thinking back on it, I still don't know if I'd rather have known or not. Maybe the bee was there because he had to die; maybe it was his time, and his hand said that, and it was not just some random occurrence, some twist of chance or fate, like Janice tells me over and over again when she calls me on the phone, crying, every night.

He never said he loved her. That's what she talks about mainly, when she cries. He never said he loved her, and now she'll never know.

Dylan used to tell me that God lived up in the clouds, on the biggest one in the sky. When I asked him how he knew, he said he didn't. But when he looked up there on sunny afternoons, when everything was too bright and too intense and too concentrated—so alive you had to squint to see it and it made you tired just to breathe it in... when he looked up at the sky, then, there was something in his face that made it seem like he did know, after all.

I believed him, though. I believed him that God lived on the biggest cloud in the sky, because although sometimes I didn't believe in Heaven, I did believe in the strong curve from Dylan's chin to his ear, and the way the little blond hairs along his jaw would catch in the sunlight, like they were shining too. I believed in the swoop of his thick, straw-colored hair along his forehead, and his rounded cheeks, and the way his eyes were never quite blue or green or grey, but a mixture of all of them, like that non-color the sink turns when you rinse out a paintbrush.

And now my stomach is burning, cold and hot and not quite painful, but not quite okay either. And my eyes are burning too, but they're burning more like that sort of pain you get from sprinkling salt over rug burn, and the inside of my left cheek throbs from biting it to keep back the screams. My hair is twisted away in a too-tight bun because the counselor told my mom not to leave it down or I might try ripping it out again. My dress is navy blue and too short for a funeral, with an off-white cardigan thrown over its spaghetti straps even though it must be ninety degrees out, because I never thought Dylan would die, so I never thought I'd need something conservative and black and impersonal to wear to his funeral.

Janice sits beside me and sobs with the heels of her hands pressed against her eyes, strawberry blond hair done in curls, down around her shoulders, but I am silent and still and staring, while inside I tear myself apart.

The day Dylan died he told me, "I need to get home, Alexis. I've got a chemistry test tomorrow," and when I said it wouldn't take all that long to get burgers, we were just going to the McDonald's down the street with the field out behind it, he said, "But I need to study real, real bad."

I didn't believe him, though. I said, "It'll take twenty minutes. A half hour tops."

And because the thing Dylan hated most in the world was disappointing me, more than he hated disappointing his chemistry teacher, or the people looking over his college applications, or Janice, who he was supposed to be studying with later, he said, "Fine."

And with the sun beating down on us, the group from the Regent High

Photography Club walked down the street to McDonald's, while Dylan walked away from life. His fingers were warm, brushing against mine on the way there, as he pointed to the sun and told me how it meant the end.

His fingers were warm, and mine are still warm, but now his are not.

Madeline Chais



Senior

Major: English

Minor: Global Media Studies

I grew up in Los Angeles and will be returning there permanently this May to work in the entertainment industry. My grandmother was the driving force behind my love for literature and hope that writing will remain a part of my life after graduating.

A Microcosm of Madness

I normally live in Los Angeles, if you can call it normal living
– Steven Morrissey

Los Angeles is a city I love but don't like to touch. I can talk about it forever. Sometimes it starts off with my adoration and eventually deteriorates into the grime and seediness. Other times, I start with the grime and seediness and that somehow explains my love for the city. It's like the sun, creating this warm glow that seems directed right on you, but if you look at it for too long, your eyes burn out of their sockets. It's ingrained in me—the twisted stop signs, the cockroached litter, the plastic faces that Andy Warhol described in awe—intertwined with my DNA and mental hardwiring. I see through it but still desperately love the novelty of it: the tourists lined up on Hollywood Boulevard to take a picture with a convincing-looking Jack Sparrow, tween Midwestern girls in town for a cheerleading tournament trying to synchronize their jumps for a picture in front of the Hollywood sign; I love

them but I speed past them as they hold up traffic, complaining to whoever sits beside me, “fucking tourists...”

My parents worked tirelessly to shield me from the insanity of our city until age fourteen when it became impossible. When the other carpool mom who had recently won an Oscar for Best Actress drove her daughter and I to school, we left far earlier than other days to avoid ravenous photographers; my mother took alternate routes during the gay pride parade week—not out of disapproval, but because I was too young to be exposed to men adorned in nothing but peacock feathers; my inquiries about why our street was the only one that didn't have speed bumps elicited only shrugs from my parents, who refrained from explaining that we lived on the same street as the mayor, who was afraid of scuffing the rear suspension on his fancy car. Their lack of explanation left these moments as blips in my memory rather than fully formed experiences.

Today, walking to and from classes in Michigan weather, I cherish the stories my exasperated mother tells me on the phone of the crazies and hooligans and the woman walking down Sunset with a rat on a leash. My mother isn't like me. Her frustration is real. I sigh along with her and pretend to feel her anguish, but it's a façade. I relay these stories to my friends and tell them, “that's LA for you,” sitting on the porch of our Michigan home, thousands of miles away from my real home, which is tucked away up the secluded, winding roads of Beachwood Canyon.

In Los Angeles, you can go from \$20 million homes to gang warfare turf in about twenty minutes (including the dreaded 405 traffic time). This is what has always intrigued me about my city. During my high school years I lived in Hancock Park, an affluent neighborhood with pools and tennis courts, but less than two miles from some of the more dangerous streets in the city. Neighbors complained about feeling unsafe, despite the price tags of their square footage, and it was rare to see a car leaving a driveway heading east rather than west. I was fascinated by the east. I would drive through the streets looking up at the feet swinging from apartment balcony windows, the handmade, misspelled flyers offering to teach English, the Korean food/donut shop. I wanted to stop everywhere but heeded my mother's warnings to not let my curiosity get the best of me. Still, I could only resist for so long.

Los Angeles is an ugly collage you make in an art class you only took for a requirement. It has beautiful photos ripped from billboards and hideous ads ripped from bus stops, but the glue seeps through the sides and sticks to your fingers no matter how much you run them under hot water. An ugly mosaic of Dorian Gray, Los Angeles is a collection of stories.

The Irony Party (2006)

Children of celebrities fall into two major categories. There are the ones who revel in their parents' fame and fortune, basking in the addictions and elegance that of their modern Bel-Air homes. Then there are the ones who avoid their parents' fame and fortune at all cost, using false last names and ignoring the tabloid magazines at the stores that others gawk at. The two groups—baskers and avoiders—tend not to associate with one another. They see each other at exclusive social functions around the world, but they live very different lives and don't like to acknowledge one another. This is not out of anger or spite, but simply because the only thing that makes them similar is something completely out of their control.

In high school, I was friendly with a few of the baskers. They liked to revel in the irony of their parental situations, being as bizarre as they could be. One of these was the daughter of a famous actor who played legendary roles but has recently faded into oddity and obscurity. I received a mass text message from his daughter, who we will call Morgan, during my sophomore year of high school.

Party this Saturday @ my place. 10 pm. Alc provided. Theme: dress as your favorite serial killer.

So far so good until I got to the theme. Dress as your favorite serial killer? It fit into the offbeat mold she and other baskers had created for themselves, but still. My favorite serial killer? Who had a *favorite*? There were the famous ones, all of whom were men, whom I had only seen looking hideous and evil in their orange jumpsuits on television. Certainly it strayed from the party themes that allowed girls to come in barely-there cat costumes, but what could one wear? I immediately created my own text group with my friends: Lindsey, Emily, and Chiara.

Did you guys get Morgan's text?? Wtf are we gunna wear?

The responses recommended we get together after school, blow off homework, and do some serious research. The party had a strange sense of competition. Who would come dressed the most provocatively or unusually? No one would admit the party came with a sense of costume rivalry because it wasn't cool to care about those things. I knew if I asked anyone Friday night what they were planning to wear, they would shrug it off, saying they'd whip something up Saturday afternoon—no big deal.

We met at my house, which was conveniently located only a few blocks from our prestigious, all-girls high school, and began googling furiously. The most famous female serial killers had lived during the 19th century and the most recent ones (a la Aileen Wuornos) were not the most attractive bunch. Chiara suggested we go as a group costume, as we would obviously be going to the party together anyway. No one showed up to parties alone. Emily's

freakishly accurate knowledge about everything from early Mesopotamia to the differences between Percocet, Vicodin, and Demerol led us to the decision to go as Manson girls. They weren't necessarily serial killers themselves, but we figured it would be close enough and we wouldn't have to seek out bonnets to be Lavinia Fisher or Belle Sorensen Gunness, two particularly homely serial killers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

We were Catherine Share, Cathy Gillies, Diane Lake, and Kathryn Lutesinger. We wore loose 60s dresses with no bras, varying pairs of saddle shoes and kitten heels, and our hair down, messy, and loose. We knew we looked good, but not in a way that would prompt anyone to think we'd put research into our attire. Though Chiara lived nearly twenty minutes closer to Morgan's house, we got ready in my room, our normal pre-party spot. I had recently seen *Rebel Without a Cause* for the first time and while the film should have been a warning, I found the title evocative and decided to emulate that instead. I had no cause but was determined to rebel. We had a small bottle of vodka we shared between the four of us. Lindsey had swiped it from her mother's liquor cabinet, which of late was often filled with vodka bottles full of water. Lindsey noted that we would need to find another source soon, but that would be a problem for another day. Giggling, we took a few photos of ourselves in serious poses, trying to imitate the sadistic women we were dressed as.

Emily drove—as the most mature member of our group she often assumed that responsibility. I wouldn't realize until years later that her apparent disregard for this opinion of her was actually a masked, genuine appreciation of this role. After showing our newly acquired driver's licenses to the guard at the gate leading into the community of six-car garages and pool heating controlled from smartphones, we parked a few houses down from Morgan's house and waited a few extra minutes in the car listening to music and smoking cigarettes that Lindsey's sister had begrudgingly bought for us. We didn't want to be among the first guests to arrive but we also didn't want any cars to see us waiting. We hadn't decided which of these two options would be less cool. After listening to a mix CD made by Emily's older brother (who we all had open crushes on), we walked up to Morgan's house.

The door was closed but unlocked so we sauntered in two at a time, Lindsey and I behind Emily and Chiara. The walls and floors were mostly wooden with southwestern style rugs and paintings that reminded us of the roles the homeowner had played in Hollywood. The house was sprawling with wide, open rooms that could have fit far more teenagers than were actually there. This wasn't some open party—baskers wanted control over who attended their soirees. People like them or at least people who would appreciate their odd behavior.

Most of the guests had congregated outside by the pool—scarves and fedoras perched on tasteful, beige lounge chairs. Two Ted Bundys stood

side by side, recognizable by their drawn in semi-unibrows, passing a joint. A Robert Lee Yates Jr. in large, round glasses jokingly picked up a serial killer victim in a bloodied nightgown and pretended to throw her into the deep end of the illuminated pool. It was eerily glamorous and innately disconcerting. Look at how *weird* we were, who would *ever* do something like this, we're so *out there*. I had an elongated moment of feeling incredibly stupid, but it passed when a handsome boy whose serial killer identity was not immediately recognizable to me ushered everyone into the living room.

Morgan said we can blaze inside and we have some other shit, too. Let's go, freaks!

For some reason this garnered shrieks and moderate applause from the group of self-declared freaks. The hand-painted bowl that looked like it had been rescued from a New Mexican art fair and the miniature wooden bison that rested upon the glass table were scooped up and shoved carelessly among other knickknacks that cluttered a nearby shelf. Pills and powders and curdled-looking vegetables were separated in a surprisingly neat manner for a group of teens that had just recently begun raiding their parents' liquor cabinets for leftover rum and vodka.

Everyone participated—some more than others, usually those who had older siblings who had already given them a taste of this excitingly toxic pastime. I was nervous, but more nervous to ostracize myself from the group than to partake in the nefarious entertainment. Morgan had invited me because I was one of the group, and to refuse what one of the Ted Bundy's had referred to as "party favors" was to remove myself from it, perhaps entirely. The social stratification of popularity for teenagers in Los Angeles was established: hard to move up and remarkably easy to move down. I knew what I was doing, but to acknowledge why I was doing it was too much for me to admit at that point—abandoning common sense for common acceptance.

That was the night I saw LA for the first time. It wasn't Los Angeles anymore—it wasn't this place of dreams that entices so many hopeful souls to pack up and move to the City of Lights. It was dirty, dirty glamour. It was gross but also so alluring and intriguing. Maybe it was a lack of willpower, or the desire to fit in, not with the baskers but with LA as a whole, but I couldn't say no. I wanted to be a part of this adolescent circus. I wanted to ride on the backs of elephants and crack my whip at roaring lines and walk the tightrope—even if I fell.

**

In all of these intrinsic memories, the potential danger was overwhelmed by my curiosity. Nothing felt precarious—a teetering Ferris Wheel, copious amounts of drugs, tens of thousands of intoxicated ravers—because Los Angeles felt enclosed and comforting. It was something that had been there

forever, that would never let anything bad happen to me—a third, omniscient guardian intervening when I wasn't even aware of what could have happened next. It gave me a risky, yet exquisite freedom.

For the past three and a half years I have, for the first time, lived away from Los Angeles. It has been rewarding, experiential and, as most college years are, a total blast. However, there is something about being a native Los Angeleno that creates this rope that wraps around your ankle and slowly but steadily pulls you back. I will be moving back there in a few months with no plans to ever live anywhere else. I have visited for days and weeks at a time, immersing myself in the city without allowing myself to get too attached. It felt like a tease, like running into a former lover and exchanging pleasantries without delving into your real, shared past. The drive from the airport to my house is always a wave of recollection—the donut shop where my friend and I used to get bear claws and sit on the hood of my car, the intersection where I got into my first and only fender bender, and my high school boyfriend's house where his mom chased me out after finding out I had spent the night without permission.

Los Angeles is my home, but a certain part of me is wary, even nervous to rejoin a city that breathes, remembers, and pulses. It is alive, all hours of the day and night, and a strange part of me feels guilty for leaving it—almost as if I owe it an apology. The city made me who I am, but I just ran away one day and now I am expecting it to reaccept me with open streets and sidewalks. I spent years flip-flopping over my feelings towards Los Angeles. Sometimes I adored it and sometimes I loathed it. The city was so rooted in me that I was unable to separate myself from it and see it as what it was and is: a captivating caricature of the millions of individuals who compose a chaotic five hundred square miles. I am just one of them.

No, I am not a fan of PCH bumper-to-bumper traffic. I don't enjoy the screeching sounds of inebriated women in sky-high stilettos ranting about some douchebag bartender. I'd rather not sit down at a restaurant where I can't be served gluten. These are the pockmarks covered by layers of concealer on the face of the city. I can go from Disney Hall and hear the LA Philharmonic to Skid Row in five minutes, walking. I can watch thousand-dollar purses swing by Help Wanted signs. I can see movie premiere spotlights and LAPD helicopters dance around one another—a curious waltz. These are the things that both insiders and outsiders see, but insiders recognize and accept, like the flaws of a lover.

Kelly Christensen



Sophomore
Major: English
Minor: Women's Studies

Originally from southern California, Kelly is still acclimating herself to the concept of winter. When she isn't writing short stories, she writes and sings her own music. On campus, you can find her singing with her a Cappella group, the Compulsive Lyres, or training for her first marathon next month.

Paperweight

1.18.14

When I left California for Michigan, I fell in love with Seattle.

When I realized that this heart of mine
Had tied, woozy-eyed, to a city I'd never set foot in,

I denied, mystified, trying to push you from my ribcage,
To expel you from within.

My roommates binge watch Grey's Anatomy like it's their profession
I sit, curled on the couch, swallowing the confession
That the only reason I suffer through their show
Is to catch a glimpse of Seattle.

I'm not masochistic, wielding some strange form of torture.
It's just when I see that city I know you are there,
Somewhere in those lush, green, northwestern trees
You are living, breathing, and just fine without me.

I have fallen in love with Seattle,
Even though it summons that stabbing sensation in my stomach
The very same one who reared its head, when you said:
"I can't do distance."

And I love Seattle; because it holds the memories of the week I spent with
you
Before I was no longer worth the fight
You bought my plane ticket to you, to a world so new
How could I have guessed you'd turn day to night?

We found ourselves lost on subways and backstreets
As the stars blinked sleepily into the sky
Laden with colors of honeydews and greens

And bless your heart you searched all afternoon to find that damn fish mar-
ket
Even though I said "I hate fish," and you're like "I know, I know,
But its cultural Kelly, You've got to go"

So we went, and we saw, and we crammed
Into your tiny twin bed that night,
You apologizing incessantly for the college-standard size.

And looking back on it now,
I would give anything for your elbow in my back
A midnight moment like that
In exchange for who we are now.

But I am here. And each time I hear rain
Announcing itself on the wooden planks of my ceiling
I feel my breath catch, like thorns in my lungs
You, Your city, have claimed the rain as your own.

Yes, I am a native of the sun but I don't much mind the snow
Its quiet, overnight tundras most times go unknown
Until I wake. A new morning and fresh ground so near,
Powder I am too frightened to touch
Lest I ruin the only beauty I've found here.

But the rain, it plummets in anger

Never falling in one place the same.
And the rain brings me back to Seattle,
Drowning, Drenching, in more than simply windowpane.

I know somewhere in that other time zone you go about your life
Padding barefoot across wooden floors
In that worn, cotton t-shirt that I love and memorized
Hiding collarbones and freckles only I knew you wore.

You fumble up the staircase in the dark
Closing the bedroom door behind you with a silence devoted
Slipping underneath crisp, white sheets; you slide an arm around her torso
And she, she doesn't wake. She doesn't even notice.

My heart drops like a paperweight
Splitting into thick shards of glass
Burning sparks and streaks across my bedroom floor
I open my mouth to scream, but I can only spit ash.

We assumed that what is meant to be will be.
But assumptions are about as reliable as tarot cards
And while I used to believe the stars could align
I can only stand here, my lips blackened and charred.

I wanted to say this with the fewest words I could
I want to believe you were always the man I saw.
To realize, I thought at some point you would
That your apathy has scraped me raw.

I fell in love with Seattle because it brought me to you
And because after all you put me through
At least the city makes me feel something.
And I can say with pride, I wasn't the one who gave up.

I'm not denying you once loved me, we were simply pulled apart
I'm just left a little confused, wondering who you really are.

I didn't make us up, and I know you'd hate to admit it
But the only reason you walked away
Was your fear of distance.

But I didn't imagine the way we fit like perfect lock and key.
And I wasn't hallucinating when your tears blazed trails down your cheeks,
Asking how you would go on without me
And forgive me if I'm wrong but I do recall,
A whispered promise of forever, that someday we'd have it all.

I didn't dream up the best three years of my life
I'm not angry, just lost
In the confusion and pile of memories and moments and promise and while
You may pretend you do not notice
My handprints burned onto your skin
I have found strength and truth from within,

I will learn to dance in the rain at any cost,
With Seattle as the keeper of my most loved lost.

Audrey Coble



Sophomore (Class of 2016)

Majors: English and Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience

I'm a second year student born and raised in the Midwest who is interested in one day pursuing research in literary neuroscience, and is looking for ways to make connections between social justice work, research, and academia. As someone who is biracial and trilingual (and working on a fourth language!), writing is an important way for me to explore and integrate various aspects of my identity with each other and with my Midwestern surroundings.

Around the Time of Benito Mussolini's Death

I.

My mother's father's father worked as a Qing Dynasty official.

My mother's father was the seventh of seven.

In the Manchu tradition, he wasn't permitted to look up at his father's face; a sign of respect.

My mother's father's father died when he was twelve, and all he has to remember is a stern black and white photograph and the shape of his father's feet.

II.

As a child, my mother's father watched a carful of Japanese soldiers hit a little Chinese boy in the street, squeezing

the white rice from his stomach and the stomach
from his body. The soldiers went
immediately to the little boy's
home and executed his entire
family because only the Japanese
were allowed white rice during wartime.

III.

My mother's father was walking home from school when the Japanese
bombings began.
He briefly ducked into a barbershop for shelter,
then kept running,
only to look back and see the next bomb
annihilate
the barbershop he'd briefly ducked into for shelter
just one moment earlier.

IV.

Learning English has become an act of resistance for the recent mothers in
my family.
My mother's mother learned English against the Japanese occupation,
translating Russian classics aloud for my mother in a time when
owning foreign books could mean public execution.
My mother learned English against the communist invasion,
and moved to the United States with twenty-five dollars and a will to
survive.
I am still finding my *against*.

V.

I'm not sure that luck is the even the right word;
perhaps my ancestors are as fierce protectors in death as they were in life.
I have already defied death in hundreds of ways,
blood flowing gritty, vibrant survival
just to be alive today.

Leela Denver



Junior

Majors: English Language and Literature

I'm a third year student from Ann Arbor studying English, Urban Studies, and Creative Writing. I have dabbled in short fiction writing, but poetry will always have my heart. Currently, my favorite word is *drool*.

Botanical

we stroll through Sunday-

Daddy carries our long-trip-thermos
(deep green & dented & topped with a chrome cap)
it is filled with brown tea
which we drink from small glasses shaped like hexagons
the flavor makes me carsick

amongst the glossy fronds and ivies
i become wrecked

and the scene goes:

trees
gaping down
pink-limbs drool off wide trunks
thick bunches hang green & greedy above

while orange lilies throw their heads back
bossy & fluted
capturing the silence in their soft throats

i know my flaws:

sometimes i get too caught up
in verbs & muscles sometimes
i become damp in the sunlight sunlit rooms
can swallow me sometimes
i walk in circles that end with nausea
and a bench surrounded by lemon grass

When the Water Boils

I will come downstairs.
Lean over the silver pot, blue
flame bubbling its
one part milk – one part water.

*Three cloves,
three cardamom,
and one piece of cinnamon bark.
Hold your palms over the mouth, Rosie
golden-brass mouth. Careful
not to let the ingredients escape
from beneath your heavy pestle.
Let it boil.*

And when it does, I will come downstairs,
turn the heat off, stir the chai gently.

Do not worry, Mama. Stay stretched out,
your toes reaching across sunlit carpet.
Do not worry.

I will come downstairs, strain
the dark leaves over white teacups.
Keep flipping the gray pages
of your newest VARIETY PUZZLES. Keep
wielding that old mechanical pencil. Keep
etching in the answers.

Sarah Dittrich



Junior

Majors: English and Informatics

Sarah Dittrich was born and raised in Rochester, Michigan, where she spent her childhood reading everything that she could get her hands on. This quickly developed into a passion for writing, which she has carried with her into adulthood. In addition to being a student, she is also a freelance writer and an avid Netflix fan. She hopes to pursue a career as an author--preferably one who doesn't embody the term "starving artist."

A Letter to a Nice Boy

Do you remember when you slept over back in August because you were too drunk to drive home and I had to take your keys? You were on the floor, and I was on the bed, facing you, bathed in the dim glow of my alarm clock, with my hair streaming off the edge. And you said that I should never cut it, that I should be careful with the golden silk, that I should grow it out like Rapunzel did. But when the prince tried to climb up her hair, he didn't yank it out like it was his birthright, and he didn't gather the strands into a rope to make it easier to drag her back when she tried to run away.

You were simply giving me what I was too afraid to admit I wanted, right? You were done being the nice boy, the kind of boy you always complained that I never dated, the type of guy you said I didn't like. I was too young, too immature, to see who you really were and decide what my own body was worth. But you, on the other hand, you spent all your time ap-

praising my figure, imagining what it would look like underneath you. Every time I told you about my day, you were looking into my mouth at my teeth and tongue, assessing my value like farmers do to horses on market day, and each time you held the door open for me, you were buying another inch of my flesh.

When I was wrapped up in blankets in June after another boy had dumped me, you were whispering soothingly, playing your part perfectly. But as I cried about how no one would ever love me, you were calculating what I owed you. Figuring out how many times you could squeeze my breasts with your fingernails digging into my skin. And those sympathetic hugs you gave me? Well, the exchange rate for that was a cut on my lip as I tried to get you off of me. And a series of bruises on my wrists that, now scars, act as helpful markers of time on my body whenever I forget when it was that you slammed my bent wrists into the pavement as you thrust yourself into me and I tried to scream through your crushing weight on my ribs. And don't forget when I needed help with my calculus homework, and you were nice enough to take time out of your busy schedule to help me. That was worth at least a few claw marks between my thighs from when I tried to wrest myself out of your grasp and you yanked me back underneath you so that you could get what you deserved. That's a fair trade, right?

Hey, I get it. I was a pathetic little bitch, and you deserved something for listening to me and being my friend for all those months. You earned me. You earned the right to peel me open, have your fill of my flesh, and discard my body like an old apricot pit. And now you, and all of our friends, and the school, and your parents, and the police, don't understand why I don't want you to do it again. We were always together and you were always so good to me. You're a nice boy, and I'm just a little slut with a case of the next morning regrets. After all, I had let four other guys inside of me, and I was only nineteen. What's one more? There will probably be thirty more after you, anyway.

But the scar from when you bashed my head onto the concrete in front of the bushes is still here. The twenty-three year old clerk at the drugstore checkout still looks at me strangely when I'm buying another six bottles of glue so that I can keep my legs shut forever and three more tubes of concealer because you don't have to be wearing glasses to see the fingermarks still around my throat. And my skin is still angry and raw because every day I yank a sponge back and forth over every inch of it at least ten times, which, happen to be the number of times that I said *no, get off, please*, and you didn't.

And now, you've gotten what you wanted for so long. You'll have to live with the fact that you wasted all of your time pretending you cared about a little bitch when you could have just shoved her forcefully onto her back the first night you met her at a party. I'll have to live with wanting to crawl out

of my own skin like a snake so that I can be somewhere that you haven't been.

Back in September, after we went to that shitty little diner at two in the morning—you remember, the one just off of Main Street behind the old movie theater—you took me back to your room and told me that I was beautiful. You picked up your guitar and you looked into my eyes and sang about how my body was a wonderland, but when Alice fell down the rabbit hole, I don't think she gouged her name into every tree and held the sap dripping down as though the blood was hers to keep, and I don't think she burned all of the talking flowers so that as the flames licked their bodies and the smoke filled their lungs, they couldn't cry for help or even ask why.

Carlina Duan



Junior

Majors: English and Creative Writing

Carlina Duan loves peaches and sprinting. She is currently a junior studying English and Creative Writing. Her favorite sandwich involves challah and honey, and her favorite poet is Aracelis Girmay. She's the co-author of the book *Electric Bite Women* with alum Haley Patail. After graduation, Carlina hopes to study Thai, write comic books, and live on a boat.

uptake

my mother is not
from your country
filled with chocolates
and rain.

don't ask me
where my solitude
comes from —
in this country I know
we floss our teeth.

in this country I know
how to swim, how to part
my lips. what's black,
& what's bent. what's
not mine to touch.

salt sparkles
on sidewalks of
hung snow, in
this country
my lungs
are strong. my elbows:
sharp, I get that
from my mother.

we do not pour soy
sauce on our rice.
we do not eat our
cheeseburgers
with quiet hands,
we toast white
breads and smash
their faces thick
with butter.

fish have gills
in this country,
the oranges have
pulp. we have luck,
and steam, we like
the taste
of ginger.
my mother
is not from your
country, and I am
her daughter.
don't ask me
what it's like
being small
and Chinese.
I have Tupperware
and eat almonds—
I have pride: warm
and plump,
like a moon.

my mother
does not own a
Laundromat, or
a takeout restaurant,
she waters orchids
and doesn't

look your president
in the eye.

my mother is not
from your country,
and I am not
ashamed. I
slip my hands
through her
wise hair,
& blacken,
& blacken—

& keep.

a kiss

consider swung hair,
the apples caught
in the plastic bag:
one hot throat
gulping near
the radiator.

consider cocoa,
and cavities. the
gold tooth flashing
against the lip.
the tongue like
a nervous fish, netting
into yours, glimmer
& soft glimmer,

consider what he
catches in your
mouth: rain, & rain.
papaya: your mother's
rush to the grocery
store when you said
fruit. liquid mornings.
the knife galloping
through the underside

of a melon:
its hot, silver plunder.

consider not backing
away from the small
kettle you love. steam,
heat, you are strong
enough to take it—
consider your mother, alone
in the blinking rain.

consider
your mother wielding
a kitchen knife.

consider
allegiance—
a small
bird. smallest
bird, your elbow.
the body's chirp.
the body's blood,
its lake-water.
your bicycle wheels
hissing dirty
into the grass.

consider cussing,
and sleep. cussing,
and sleep. what
spreads thin
across your pillow,
what you've given away:
batteries, and lips.
the darkness you've
licked. his tongue returning
and returning to you.

consider mustard drumming
over bread, rich body
& history of pools
and sandwich meat,
every piece you've
ever placed inside
your mouth. dizzy.
dizzy. his
square teeth—

your heart is a muscle
that slips in the rain, can
he handle that.

the moon, and
the dark: a
daily unwrapping.

consider your body:
barking, and
taming, and touching.

the chocolate
in your gums

before sleep.

Allison Epstein



Senior

Majors: Creative Writing, English, and French

Allison is a senior in LSA's Residential College studying creative writing, English, and French. She is the editor and a contributing writer for the body image website *Adios Barbie*, as well as being deep in the middle of her creative writing honors thesis, a historical fiction novel set in Renaissance England. When not writing (which, to be honest, is not that often,) Allison enjoys improvisational baking, Netflix, and knitting very small hats.

Lost and Found

When objects no longer had a home, when they found themselves tossed out into the cold by owners who no longer needed them, they found a new resting place with Peter Martin.

He was the collector of teddy bears with dust in their bead-black eyes, golden rings without sparkle or fingers. He picked them up out of gutters and off moth-eaten blankets at garage sales, and he stowed them in the brown leather briefcase he carried to and from work, always leaving out valuable tax documents and figures to make more space because, really, you never knew. He would take them home, these lost things thrown from a moving car, and he would dust them off and polish them until they shone. He kept them in the library, put them on shelves one right next to another, arranged so that they could make friends with their neighbors.

There were no books in the library. He had never been much of a reader.

Life didn't end the way books did. It went out not with the soft rustling of pages, but with a flash and a bang and a cloud of smoke. He didn't like the way books lied to him. But the library was where he kept all his stories. Every evening, after the streetlights clicked on, he would sit in his favorite chair, in front of the kite with a bent tail and the inkless fountain pen and the picture-less frame, and they would talk together until the sun came up. They, at least, would listen without interrupting or taking notes.

When tiny motes of dust hung suspended in the beams of sunlight, he would end his sentence, stand up, and walk to the hall closet to put on his jacket and pick up his briefcase. It didn't matter if he'd left off in the middle of a thought: they'd all be waiting for him there when he came back, probably a new brother or sister tucked into his pocket to add to their number. They had nothing if not loyalty and time.

This morning, the clouds that had hung with quiet, unspoken threats all night followed through on their promise, and big heavy drops the size of quarters splashed against the sidewalk as Peter hurried to the bus stop. Of course, he had forgotten his umbrella; there were eight items with varying degrees of usefulness in his jacket pockets, and none of them would be helpful in warding off the rain. Glancing around him in search of shelter, he spied a large, gnarled oak tree on the patch of grass between the sidewalk and the road, and panting with effort, he hurried over to it. It was plain that the tree had been there long before the sidewalk had, and it wasn't taking the intrusion without a fight. Its huge tangled roots reached this way and that, rippling the sidewalk, protruding up through the grass, nearly tripping him as he ducked underneath its moist green leaves and waited for the downpour to lessen.

It occurred to him briefly that he would be late, and Mr. Fassbender would puff angrily on his cigar and shout at him again, but the idea barely bothered him. The men at the office had learned never to expect too much from him, and "not too much" was something he excelled at delivering. He would stay an extra half-hour to finish the piles of forms on his desk, and then he would walk down Third Street and turn onto Hilltown Parkway and follow the neighborhood roads back, and when he finally made it home everything would be dark again. The rain pitter-pattered against the leaves like marbles on a snare drum, and a huge wet drop fell *plop!* on the tip of his nose. Crinkling his brow, he looked down and shook his head, and the raindrop continued down to land on the sodden grass.

And that was when it caught his eye, shining with tiny beaded droplets and nestled beside the tree's root. He felt that familiar rush of excitement as he stooped down to pick it up, that tingling at the ends of his fingers. He was like a pirate discovering buried treasure, Romeo spotting Juliet from across a crowded ballroom. He turned it over and over in his palm, feeling its cold, smooth weight against his warm skin. The tin soldier did not respond to the

sudden affection of his touch; if it had been drafted to see action during the Tet Offensive, it would have won a medal for steadfastness in the face of the unexpected. The soldier's uniform was smart and freshly painted, and his arms and legs bent on a tiny, invisible hinge, subject to movement at the impulse of its owner.

With a smile beginning to spread across his face, Peter manipulated the left arm into a sharp salute, and whispered so softly that the sound was almost drowned out by the tapping of the rain. "Reporting for duty, sir. Over and out."

The bus pulled up to the curb with a wheezing belch of exhaust, an elderly gentleman heaving himself forward with a prayer. Hastily, he tucked the tin soldier into his coat pocket and took up his abandoned briefcase with his left hand. His right never relinquished its hold on the tiny tin talisman hidden in his pocket.

~*~

The air was hot and heavy. He thought that if he closed his hand around a fistful of it, it would turn to water between his fingers, and drops of sweaty rain would run over the edges of his knuckles. He wished he didn't have to wear this heavy jacket and pants. He had mentioned it to Reggie the night before, as they lay next to one another in their tent, and Reggie had laughed so long that Peter was afraid he was going to piss himself.

"What, you wanna go out into the jungle wearin' your deck shorts and sandals? Jesus, you crack me up. Not a bad idea, when ya think about it. Them Commies would never think you were comin' in to get 'em if you dressed like you was going to a country club."

He didn't comment on this; the way Reggie threw around words like "Commie" and "comin' to get 'em," made him uncomfortable, but he never told him this. It was enough to have someone to share the tent with at night, to tell stories about home to and to sit up late and look at the stars with through the branches of the jungle. He wasn't about to ruin this by nitpicking.

But in any case, the jacket and the pants had stayed. The jungle was completely silent, except for the cries of birds Peter had never seen before and the steady crunching of twigs and leaves beneath their boots. He wished they could just stay still and listen to their surroundings for a few minutes. If he had been alone, he would have sat down, maybe even laid down in the underbrush, staring up at the patterns in the clouds and seeing if he could make animals out of them. He had always loved doing this, finding whales and bears where other men only saw blobs of condensation. There was always something beautiful to see, if you looked carefully enough.

Reggie stood at his side, both hands on his rifle, peering ahead into the darkness. He was a great sharpshooter, Reggie, having developed laser-accurate aim during his childhood trips to the woods hunting squirrels and turtledoves. Peter didn't particularly like the idea of doves falling out of the sky with bullet holes in their wings, but he couldn't deny that Reggie was a much better shot than he was, and spent much less time getting shouted at by the commanders for missing the target and hitting a nearby tree instead.

Making a motion with his head, Reggie indicated that Peter should follow him. He followed the unspoken advice, and the two of them delved deeper into the dense overgrowth. Their footsteps became louder and louder, for all that they tried as hard as they could to make no noise. To truly be unnoticeable, they would have had to be transplanted to a different war. The jungles of Vietnam masked them from sight, but as with any other kind of blindness it seemed to heighten the other senses in retaliation. Peter didn't know where they were going; in fact, he had already forgotten the mission that their lieutenant had explained to them that morning before packing up camp. It had something to do with tracking down Viet Cong, some village on the outskirts of the river, something to do with the words "search and destroy," but that didn't help. The lieutenant's orders had collapsed into buzzwords, meaningless jargon with more syllables than necessary. Besides, Peter had started to tune him out when he insisted on calling him "Martin," without even asking whether it was his first name or his last.

His first name was Peter. His last name was Martin. Not that it really mattered.

Reggie continued on in front of him, a bobbing silhouette against the deep green of the jungle. Peter allowed his eyes to wander, glancing through the trees, continually moving in a straight line as his eyes bounced left and right in a dizzying zigzag. He thought he saw something to his left, something brighter and subtler than the khakis and greens of their platoon, and he glanced over his shoulder in search of it, keeping his left hand on the butt of his rifle as he had been taught to do...

The tiger moved so quietly that if Peter had not caught a flash of orange and black out of the corner of his eye, he would have missed it. Reggie saw nothing; he didn't even miss a beat in his stride. But Peter felt as though he had been nailed to the spot, pinned there by the bead-black eyes of the feline face that stared at him, framed by leaves and darkness. Somehow, he was not afraid that the tiger was going to pounce; there was no predatory hunger in its eyes. It had recently eaten, or in any case it was not interested in the kind of meal an armed US soldier would have provided under the best-case scenario. There was no fear in their shared gaze, nor was there any horror. Just a lingering sense of understanding.

"There's more to see here than they know. Maybe they'd notice me if they were looking."

It had always been one of Peter's quirks to fancy he could hear the voices of animals. Still, he thought Reggie could have heard the tiger speak too, if he'd stopped to see it.

"Reggie," he whispered, turning his head over his shoulder and trying to catch his attention without making enough noise to disturb the tiger. "Reggie, look at-"

BANG.

Peter flinched and dropped his rifle. He bent down hurriedly to retrieve it, and when his face was nearly at ground level, he saw Reggie, sprawled on the bed of leaves, a sticky scarlet stain spreading across the dark green. Reggie's rifle, never far from his hands, laying uselessly near a log several inches away. Three dark, barefoot shadows with guns in their arms, turning on their heels and fleeing back into the jungle, not speaking a word, their feet making no noise.

Peter looked over his shoulder, but the tiger was gone too.

He was alone.

~*~

The sun was spreading through his library windows. Night was almost over, and soon it would be morning. Friday morning. The last day he would have to wait for the bus beneath the oak tree, the last day Mr. Fassbender would appear behind him and shout that he wasn't paying attention, again. He had finished his story almost at the same moment the sun came up. It was as if the moon had been listening and had prolonged her stay to hear the end.

Peter stood up from his favorite armchair. The air seemed too warm in the library, too humid. He made a mental note to check the air conditioner when he returned home that evening. As he turned away from the center of the room and walked toward the entrance hall, slipping his jacket on and picking up his briefcase, the objects in the library remained on their shelves, perfectly arranged, waiting for him to return and take up the story where he had left off.

The tin soldier, rescued from the rain and polished with a cloth and some dish soap until he shone as brightly as if he had been brand-new, sat in a place of honor on the second shelf from the top, next to a rock shaped like an arrowhead and a miniature plush lion from a fast-food kid's meal. Left arm raised in an eternal salute, he watched Peter walk out the door and close it behind him. He would be there still when he returned.

Cameron Finch



Sophomore

Majors: RC Creative Writing and LSA English

Minor: RC Drama

Cameron Finch is a sophomore, double-majoring in the Residential College's Creative Writing and Literature program and LSA English, with a minor in RC Drama. On-campus, she is the PR Editor of the 2013-14 *RC Review* literary magazine and a core member of Writers' Community, a student-led creative writing workshop group. Outside of the university, she is an editorial intern for Dzanc Books and dedicates much of her time as a volunteer at 826Michigan, where she shares her love of words and imaginative writing with the local children of Ann Arbor.

Love Drunk

The young man inched back into a cool leather chair. When he leaned his pale head against the cushion, the liquid sloshed to the starboard of his brain.

"My head. How do I make it stop?" he groaned.

"Still not feeling too great, huh?" asked the spritely girl sitting on the couch facing him. "Oh, it would've just killed me to leave you alone after all that happened last night."

He recalled going to a party at the club with his buddies. She said she was friends with a few of the guys' gals. But everyone knew she had invited

herself because he was going to be there. Of course, there had been drinking. To him, that's all that there had been.

The five o'clock church bells chimed with a violence that seemed to shatter through his window. It always felt like five o'clock, Cocktail Hour, to him. Though today, it felt all wrong. His hands jumped to his ears and tried to muffle the echoing clang. The pounding in his head intensified. It hurt too much to speak, so he didn't.

The girl picked up the dropped conversation with ease. She was good at filling space. "I hope you don't mind that I woke you up a tad before cocktails. To get your bearings. Grogginess and gin don't mix too well."

His pulsing brain locked his chin in place so he could only view a narrow slice of his apartment. There were more pink accents decorating the room than he had remembered. A pink shawl draped over the sofa. Magenta pumps lined up ruler-straight beside the door. Even his nose was invaded with a reek of pink.

"I didn't think there was some magical time when cocktail hour is to begin. Isn't that sort of up to us?" he pointed out.

"Oh, how I love the way you think! Should I make you a drink now?" she said. "You like Manhattans, right? If I'm making one for you, I suppose I'll just have to whip one up for me too." She jumped up to tend to the liquor cabinet. She was all too familiar with his property.

"No!" His words boomed with an unexpectedly firm defiance. "What kind of genius ever thought that you could cure a hangover with more drink?"

The girl sunk sadly back down onto the sofa. She wanted to mix him a drink. She wanted to give him what he wanted.

"Was I really that bad last night?" he asked. What he really wanted was the cold, hard truth.

"Gosh, we were all pretty wild. It's hard to say that anyone was the worst. It definitely wasn't you, though." His apathetic face told her that last night's incidents were yet to be stored in his mental inventory. The girl continued to set the scene of her epic. "Well, your suit suffered a bit though."

"Oh no, that marvelous one? With the brass cufflinks and silk trim?"

She nodded. "Yes, I'm afraid so. The pants just ripped right down the seat."

"What a joke I must have been. The fool of the party, I must say."

"Poo, poo. You were a hoot," she said to console him. "But the girls were so jealous of me that I got to dance with such a handsome man. Now

there's a man to marry if I ever saw one, they told me. What a great sense of humor he has."

But he was still stuck on the pants. "Have you any idea why my suit is ruined? Pants don't just rip by themselves!"

"I mean, there was the little scuffle with Dean Maltzby. But we got him calmed down after a little while. Don't you worry, I don't think the other tables noticed the commotion."

Had he received a blow last night? He realized that if Dean had socked him, the black eye should appear about now. He hadn't a chance to consult the mirror yet. No indeed, for that would require him to find his feet. And he was in no condition to take on such a task at this hour.

"Dean has a good sixty pounds on me, at least! Good God, what did I do to him?" he asked.

"I wouldn't say you did anything at all. You were very much just minding your own business," she said. "I think Dean may have overreacted a bit. He tends to do that when he thinks someone is messing around with Laurie."

"Are you saying that I was flirting with Laurie?" Had he kissed her? He scooted to the edge of his seat, but held his head in place. It helped to ease the sloshing.

"No, anyone watching would have known that you were obviously fooling around." She was quick to respond. "But you know how Dean can get. Laurie was fine. She only seemed a teensy bit annoyed that you had poured your whisky all over her dress. But she'll get over it."

"Poured whisky all over her dress?" he said.

"Yeah, what a waste of perfectly good Scotch," she said. "You just said something about how plain her white dress looked. And then you just sort of...tossed it."

He envisioned the incident to have looked like an egg toss gone wrong. An abstract splatter of yolk on an immaculate canvas.

"Laurie wasn't expecting it at all! It went all over her lap, her shoes. Some even got in her hair. But I helped her clean up, like a good friend should. Nothing a little bleach can't get out," she said.

Then she leaned forward, cupped her hands around her mouth as if she were playing 'Telephone,' and whispered, "In my opinion, you did her a favor. It was quite a hideous dress to begin with, if you ask me."

"Good golly. What should I do?" He didn't want Laurie to think he was a prig or anything.

"She'll be fine. She's probably forgotten all about it. After your spill, Dean was attached to her lips like a suction cup." She made a dramatic gagging sound. "I wouldn't worry too much about the dress if I were you."

"Okay. If you say so." He felt his muscles begin to relax. You give in too easily, bud, he curses himself.

"How are you feeling now? The same?" the girl asked. "How I wish there was something I could do for you."

He knew he should feel lucky. She was the type of girl who knew how to take care of a man. She had been for a steady two years now. But she was like alcohol, with an inexplicable addictive charm (the kind all vices have) that sobered his resistance. The kind of fun you had on Saturday nights, regretted in the morning, and then repeated the next night anyway.

"Be honest. Did I do anything else last night that might have been of note?" he asked. "Because I rather you tell me before I read it in the crime report."

"Not at all!" she laughed. "Last time I checked, it's not considered a crime to steal the show if the audience really wants you."

He couldn't remember the last time he had sung out loud, other than in the harmonious confines of his shower.

"We tried to follow your lead, but we couldn't understand what you were singing. You never told me you knew Korean! Or was it German?" she asked.

"I really don't know," he said, shaking his head, which just made his headache worse.

She continued, "I don't think the band minded too much. You were obviously more entertaining."

For a second, he felt better. Compliments did wonders to a broken man.

"And it seemed like you were never going to run out of songs!" Nor was she skint of praise. "You were a regular old jukebox, singing right through dinner."

She had finally caught his attention. His stomach growled and the aches returned. He couldn't remember the last time he had skipped a meal.

"Though, my dear, I'm sorry, but the threat about stabbing the waiter may have been a bit too much," she quickly added, because she hated to criticize him.

"Stab him...with what?" he asked.

"I believe you said something like, 'Give me one more poisoned peanut and I'll stab you with your own fork, right in the-'"

"Oh my god." He closed his eyes. The tingling in his brain seemed like it would never subside. "What a night. It's a wonder I didn't get thrown out," he said, jokingly.

"You did! You don't remember? Right out on the street even. It was just like one of those radio crime programs!" She waved her hands excitedly.

"Come on, you're pulling my leg now. I think I would remember if I was the city's most wanted."

She answered quickly, "It was real, alright. Everything had been going really well."

"I don't consider almost getting arrested 'going really well,'" he said.

"No really, it was turning out to be a very pleasant evening. That is, until you became quite adamant that the gent across the room had stolen his shoes from the Japanese emperor. You marched over to him, and demanded that he give them back. Imagine that! Stealing shoes from the Japanese emperor!" She fell back into the cushions, laughing.

"But I don't know what the Emperor's shoes look like," he said.

"You sure seemed like you knew last night," she said. "The way you grabbed at his leg?"

He had stopped listening and was deep in thought. Were Emperor shoes the sort with the little tassels on the top?

"...then he yanked you by the collar..."

If he couldn't remember what Emperor's shoes looked like, how could he have attacked the man last night?

"...and then he shoved you out the door."

"But I made it out before the police showed up, right?" he said, checking the facts.

"With my help," she reminded him. He'd be lost without me, she thought with a smile.

"There was this nasty little curb that managed to snatch at your foot, and my, did it yank you hard. I don't think I've seen a fish flop as much as you did."

"My hip did hurt when I got out of bed today." He rubbed his side just to

make sure the pain was still there. It was.

"But let's get to the taxi ride," she sped ahead. "Wasn't it the greatest?"

She stared at him intensely. He felt the pressure to respond, but he didn't know what to say. Had he ridden in a taxi last night? For all he knew, he could've grown wings and flown back to the apartment.

"It was swell, I guess." His fictive words were just the fuel that the girl's engine needed.

"No, it was the loveliest!" she gushed. "It seems I'm one of those girls who has always dreamed of a fairytale proposal. And now it's finally come true!"

Proposal? Was she implying that the taxi driver had asked for her hand last night? I must have been ridiculously soused to have missed such an occasion, he thought.

"Well, I think a congratulations must be in order then," he said, slurring his words together. He raised his hand to make a toast, and wished desperately that he was cupping a nice frosty glass. Why hadn't he asked her to make a drink again?

"Oh, sweets. I just never really knew that you felt that way about me all this time." She paused in an enchanted stupor to fiddle with her braid.

"You didn't know, you say?" He propped his head up on his hand, the way you might stare blankly out of an airplane window or at a TV sitcom in the wee morning hours.

"No, darling, I didn't." She hid her blushing cheeks with a demure hand. "You know what I think? I think that last night was the best day of my life." Her face instantly lost its pinched redness and glowed with a new confidence.

"Sure, if you think so," he responded.

"Oh, I do hope I remember to tell everyone important about our magnificent night!" She began silently counting off her confidantes on her fingers.

He bobbed his head, which may have been in agreement to the girl or may have been because his arm slipped with a sudden shake. He wasn't so sure himself.

"Only a real man would've had the guts to speak his mind." It was about time he felt the spark, she told herself. What had it been? Two, three years now?

But I didn't say anything, he thought.

"And that's why I love you," she professed. "My goodness, I don't think I will ever tire of telling you that."

All this talk of love and taxis and telling secrets was confusing him. His parched brain wanted answers, straight up.

"I think I'll take that drink right about now," he said. Yes, a drink was definitely in order, he thought. Strictly for medicinal purposes.

"I knew you'd come around! It'll do you good, trust me." She kissed him on the cheek, and with a smile, pranced to the kitchen to retrieve the man's drink.

She came back with a tumbler filled with ice that clinked noisily against the glass. As she brought it closer, the man heard cymbals crash through tempestuous waters. A lime-shaped boat careened over the edge of the glass.

"Drink up," she smiled. He had already thrown back the glass in one gulp. The liquid's fiery sting singed and prodded as it slithered down his throat.

"Well, this has been fun, but I should really be going." He tried to get up, but the room quaked into a blur. He lost his balance and sunk back into the leather quicksand of the chair. The girl came back into focus.

"But you live here! Where could you possibly have to go at six in the evening?" She couldn't imagine why anyone would leave at the peak of Cocktail Hour. "You aren't in any condition to leave either. Plus, we love each other, remember? Doesn't the taxi mean anything to you?"

Taxi: yellow, black. He knew what a taxi was.

You're losing strength now, the girl realized. What does he need? Give him what he needs. "You must still be thirsty. I'll be right back." The girl scurried away to fiddle with the trusty liquor cabinet. "Don't move. I mean it!"

I guess I can stay a little longer, the man decided. Just one more drink.

He caught a glimpse of the girl, stirring a brown liquid now with a slender silver spoon. She sure knew how to make an irresistible drink. But how much longer was he going to live this way? He knew his tolerance had reached its absolute maximum.

Elis Fisk



Senior

Majors: Neuroscience and Pre-Veterinary

Elis Fisk hails from Macomb, Michigan. When not studying, Elis enjoys reading, writing, doodling, drinking tea, hat collecting, and taming unruly leopard geckos with the power of mediocrely played electric guitar.

This Is What Really Happened. — *A confession by Tyler Vance*

The snowflakes drift across the windshield, their crystal bodies a prism that scatters streetlights into rainbows. It could've been one of those beautiful frozen nights, if my car wasn't squealing its way into a death roll through a gas station liquor store window. Beer cans and candy wrappers fly past my head, and there's a sharp, shattering crunch as my guitar takes off out the front passenger side window, the edge of the fret board slamming Ryan upside the head by way of a parting gift. The stereo's wailing out the soundtrack of this snuff scene, that horrid 'Blah Blah Blah' song by Ke\$ha. I'm screaming my lungs out and the car is completely out of control and I'm going to die to fucking Ke\$ha.

My dearest fans, the press, and the paparazzi: I just want to go on the record saying that this wasn't Ryan's fault. Yes, he was high. Yes, he was probably hyped up on Red Bulls and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. But just a little.

My dearest fans, this is my confession: I'm not a badass. I'm not an artist. I'm not some emo rocker with a heart of gold. I'm not anything like the

persona you've been led to believe in.

No. I'm the asshole who let my best friend take the fall for me. And if I'm going to clear his name, I need to take you back. Back before the crash, before the broken glass, before Ke\$ha starts wailing out our death knell. Back when things aren't what you'd consider 'bad' but well on their way to getting there. Back to that night in 2011 when the band and I are on stage in some concert hall in some city that looks like most of the other cities I've been to, but colder.

"It's all about looks." That's what Jean-Claude's always saying, fingering his mustache-- if you can call the congregation of stray hairs on his upper lip a mustache, that is. When Jean-Claude talks, my eyes can't help but follow his hypnotic twitching. "If people wanted to hear your music, they'd buy your CD," he'd add, "They come to concerts to see you. So give them something to look at."

So that's what we do as we run out on stage that night with our band name, "THE FRESCO," screaming behind us in bright lights that look straight out of a vaudeville dance hall. There's so much smoke floating around from doobies and cigarettes and other assorted burning objects that, peering out over the crowd, I can't tell where one fist-pumping head banger ends and another begins. I feel like I'm playing to a screaming ocean, each kick drum beat making the waves slosh toward where the ceiling probably is above those sooty cigarette clouds.

Ryan's on guitar, Kohl-heavy rings accentuating his hazel eyes as he focuses on his slender fingers gliding over the frets. Every now and then he flips his choppy chestnut bangs out of his face so he can see his guitar proper, causing the front-row-fangirls to scream even louder than they already are. I can't really blame them I suppose, Ryan's fine features and long eyelashes are enough to make anyone feel giddy when those bright eyes look in their direction.

The odd thing about Ryan is I know he has fretboard memory, so he doesn't really need to look at his guitar when he plays. Yet during every concert, there he is, eyes locked on the frets. He's strange like that sometimes, but I'm pretty strange myself, so I'm not really one to talk.

The me you see, the me you think you know, is a few feet away from Ryan. This me is nothing but an illusion propped up with blond, piecey bangs and frosted tips. Eyeliner and a leather jacket. Even looking at my face, all you're really seeing is the layers of makeup caked on to keep me from looking like a corpse in the stage lights. Here I am, an oblivious mofa masquerading as a badass, singing songs about break-ups and cheating and hearts and hate and how weird organized religion is. I'm feeling awake and alive and like I really want to crowd dive even though the last time I did that a fan tried to stick her hand down my pants, which was awkward.

Ryan launches into a guitar solo, and I take the opportunity to crack open a water bottle and drink a few sips. I go to fling the rest over the crowd, like a priest wielding holy water over a congregation. Except my fingers are all sweaty, so the whole bottle slips through them and flies out over the fans. It thunks a girl the head, right on her massively teased-up black and pink hair puff. It hits in a way you'd think might knock a person out, but no. It just bounces right off all those hairsprayed layers. Other fans dive for the bottle, and after a brief scuffle one of them's clutching the thing high over their head, shrieking like they've just won the lottery.

Our bassist looks like a Jesus throwback – if Jesus had a raging unibrow, a cubic zirconium lip stud, twenty-eight tattoos, droopy bloodshot stoner eyes, and a thing for wearing jeans full of designer rips and literally no other article of clothing. We call him Jay, which is long for 'J', which is short for Jesus, if you can follow that. If he does have a real name, he's never let on, and nobody ever bothered to ask.

Jean-Claude, the mustache guy, is on drums. As if to offset Jay's almost-nakedness, Jean-Claude insists on wearing expensive overcoats and scarves at all times, never mind that the spotlights and body heat of the crowd have us cooking at around eighty-five degrees. No, Jean-Claude wouldn't be caught dead looking anything less than so anti-mainstream it hurts. He looks like what happens when a rich person decides to 'slum it' and dress up like a street-side panhandler. Sure, his clothes are dirt-colored and tattered, but in a way where you can tell the whole ensemble cost over five hundred bucks. If you couldn't pick up on that, the pair of white aviators he's hiding behind totally blows his cover.

To tell you the truth, I don't even think Jean-Claude is his real name, probably some hipster pseudonym he adopted to sound more French. But I keep my mouth shut about his probably-fake-name because he also doubles as our band manager, which makes him in charge of everything. And since he's thirty-something and the rest of us are twenty-something, he's also got seniority. He must not want us to forget it because he's always dispensing "advice", constant little reminders that he knows best.

Some of it's good stuff, like the time he told me, "Don't Google yourself. Ever." Most of it is shady as fuck, like the tip he dropped on us back when we started touring for our first album. Ryan and I are relaxing backstage during intermission, when suddenly he drops this bombshell.

"You know, most people think you're gay for each other."

Instant impact.

"What?" I ask, glancing awkwardly at Ryan as he blurts out simultaneously, "Why would they think that?"

"You're always hanging around with each other," says Jean-Claude with a shrug, "and sometimes... a lot of the time... you do things that... you know..."

He looks at me pointedly, moving his hand in a circle as if trying to urge me to a revelation. I stare blankly at the Marlboro dangling from his lips.

"...Like when you guys break the two-second rule," he finishes.

Ryan looks as lost as I do.

"Seriously, guys? Two men are only supposed to hug for two seconds. Keep breaking the two-second rule and people start to talk."

I open my mouth to inform him of the utter ridiculousness of said rule, but he cuts me off.

"Hey, wait- it's not a bad thing, per se. Stage gay and bromance are actually really hip in rock bands right now. We could actually make this work out to be a really fantastic thing for record sales if we play the cards right."

"Stage gay? You mean... like fake gay?" asks Ryan, one eyebrow migrating upward to get lost in his bangs. "Gay for pay?"

"Like t.A.T.u.?" I ask, sucking in my lips uncertainly.

"Something like that," says Jean-Claude. "But there's a certain trick to it. You have to do it right, else it'll just backfire."

I shift uncomfortably in my seat, glancing out of the corner of my eye at Ryan. He bites his lip, looking as uncertain about the whole idea as I feel. It's not that I'm revolted with the idea of pretending gayness with Ryan. It's nothing like that. What I'm thinking is this: gayness offends some straight people, and faking gayness would probably offend actual gay people. All those offended people probably wouldn't buy my music.

My skepticism must be showing on my face because Jean-Claude bolsters his argument with a "Trust me, I'm a professional. A musical connoisseur, if you speak French."

Sacre bleu. That's French for "Jean-Claude is full of shit but since he books my gigs I should probably listen to him anyway."

"What's the trick?" I ask hesitantly.

"Ambiguity." He blows the word out with a puff of smoke as if trying to give it some extra majesty. "You have to be ambiguous."

Ryan's eyes role to watch the smoke tendril toward the ceiling tiles. His frown looks how mine probably does right now.

"You see," continues Jean-Claude, reclining back into the couch cushions, "stage gay is edgy. Edgy is good. Edgy gets attention. But." He pauses to squish out his Marlboro in the ashtray. "But, you don't want to be too edgy. You can't alienate your more conservative fans."

"Right," I say, though I'm not sure he is. Mostly he just made me realize how weird the word 'alienate' sounds out loud.

"Besides," adds Jean-Claude, "if you had a fully acknowledged, real gay romance, you'd ruin all your fangirls' dreams of landing you in the sack. And since sex sells, you absolutely cannot have that. So you have to play both fields. Simple as that. Kiss Ryan on stage, and make out with whoever your girlfriend is that week off stage."

"As simple as that, huh," says Ryan. For a moment I swear he sounds almost sarcastic, but Jean-Claude doesn't seem to notice.

"That's right. And when you get asked about it in interviews, avoid the question. So, Tyler, if I'm an interviewer and I say, 'there have been a lot of rumors going around about you being gay. Any comment?' What would you say to that?"

I squint at him as if trying to find the right answer spelled out in the ash on his mustache. I finally settle on: "...Next question?"

"No, no," sighs Jean-Claude, "you can't just ask for a new question. Interviews don't work that way. What you should do is give them an answer, just not a definite one. Maybe, I don't know, something like, 'I don't get why people keep spreading these rumors, it's ridiculous!'"

Ryan mumbles something that sounds suspiciously like, "...not the only thing around here that's ridiculous."

"What's that, Corvo? You want to answer the next question?"

Ryan falls silent, developing a sudden and intense interest in the silver buckles on his boots.

Jean-Claude turns his attention back to me. "Okay, Tyler, let's try again. So now let's say I, the interviewer, say to you, 'well, you can't deny that you did kiss Ryan on stage. Multiple times.' What do you say back?"

"Uh." My thumbs start thumb-wresting each other. "This is a trick question, isn't it?"

"Mon Dieu," mutters Jean-Claude, fishing around for another cigarette. "How about, 'well, that doesn't make a person gay, you know.' You see? Just say something that could be taken either way. Ambiguity, Tyler, ambiguity."

He lights up, giving me the sort of tight-lipped expression you might

expect to see on a sea turtle, or maybe Dick Cheney.

"If you do it right," he says, "fans who like the bromance will realize you dodged the question, and anyone against it will hear 'that doesn't make a person gay' and think you're just fooling around. Like two drunken girls making out at a bar to impress the guys. You see, it appeals to the full audience."

I don't want to disappoint Jean-Claude any more than I already have, so I nod sagely. To this day I still don't get it completely, I just keep kissing everyone. Really, it's not as bad as it sounds.

The truth is, when you're on stage, you're on autopilot. You're a marionette with the crowd holding the strings, jerking them with well-timed screams and applause.

And tonight is no exception. It seems like we only just ran out on stage when I suddenly find myself crying out the last line of the final song in tonight's lineup. In the smoldering echo of Ryan's last chords, I run over to his amp and grab the camera perched on top.

"Everyone try to look less god-damned ugly!" I shout into the microphone, "I'm going to take a picture to commemorate this moment—to commemorate you!"

I go through this same ritual every night, with every crowd I sing for. I have a photo of every house I've ever performed to. I've never missed a single one.

I position the camera just so. "Smile, you motherfuckers." Flash.

More cheering, more clapping. "ONE MORE SONG! ONE MORE SONG!"

I can't give you one more song, but I still want to go out with a bang. Maybe the bright lights and cheering are getting to me because the next thing I know I'm doing a backflip off the piano. I land square on my feet and, not missing a step, dance over to Ryan. I grab the back of his head and push his face into mine, my lips meeting his in a kiss. The crowd goes wild.

Dear amateur music webzines, in case you want to slather some juicy details into your future me-related exposés, here's some words to describe the kiss: Wet. Three seconds long. Slight aftertaste of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups.

In past performances, when I'd go to plant one on him he'd always turn his face so I could only reach his cheek. So up until now I'd only ever cheek-kissed him. I must have caught him off guard this time. As I pull away, his cheeks flood a shade of crimson that even his stage makeup can't conceal. His hazel eyes look like he wasn't expecting that at all.

I have to admit, I wasn't either.

"Good night, Detroit! I love you!" I scream to the crowd, who screams back as I drop the mic and swagger off stage. I glance over my shoulder at Ryan.

He's still stranded where I left him, and it isn't until Jean-Claude gives him a nudge that he snaps out of it and wanders after me.

Exit stage left.



Skip ahead a few hours.

By the time we're done with the after-show meet-and-greet, packing up our shit, and losing the tail of fangirls following us out of the city, it's already two thirty AM. I'm driving the tour bus we live out of during concert season, and Ryan's riding shotgun, watching the snow pelt the windshield in the dark. Since tonight's performance he's been answering me with nothing but yes's and no's, or noncommittal noises.

Jay and Jean-Claude are bringing up the rear in the ugly green Subaru hatchback we drive if we want to go into town without drawing a crowd of drooling fans and paparazzi. It used to be mine before I was a somebody. Ryan started calling it 'The Derpmobile', and the name stuck.

We ride out to the middle of nowhere and park in an abandoned field shielded from the road by trees. Whether it's pleasantly secluded or just flat-out lonely, I can't decide.

Either way, once we park I make my way back into the bus 'living room'. It's nice for a tour bus, very clean, though I can't imagine how it stays that way. The bus is like one of those stain-resistant shirts in the way that none of the dirt or trash or stray clothing we leave lying around ever seems to stick. The only sign we've really lived in it is a smattering of cigarette burns across the furniture. It's odd because I know I've never cleaned any of that shit up.

Anyway, I print out the photo from earlier. The one of the crowd. That's right, a picture of you, my dearest fans. I hang it on the wall with the others, another tile in a growing wallpaper of your faces. As I step back to admire my work, I catch Ryan out of the corner of my eye watching me with a disapproving frown. When I turn my head he looks away quickly, staring now at nothing in particular.

"Look at these mofos," I say, gesturing at the most recent photo with my thumb. "Is it just me, or do our fans get creepier every year?"

I was hoping for at least the twitch of a smile, but if anything his frown

deepens.

"It's not just the fans," he says, looking pointedly at me as he sinks into a chair. It's the longest thing he's said to me since we got off stage.

"And you hung that picture up crooked," he adds.

I purse my lips, feigning a look of hurt pride. Actually, it may not have been all that feigned. Ryan looks away, grabbing a thick book off the coffee table and throwing it open across his lap. His eyes don't move back and forth as he stares down at the pages.

A cold burst of air swirls snowflakes through my frosted tips as Jean-Claude pushes the bus door open, Jay following in his wake.

Jean-Claude looks from Ryan's obstinate lower lip to my tragic-diva-face. "Another lover's quarrel?"

"No," mutters Ryan. He flips the page just a bit too violently, and it makes an ominous crinkly sound like it's about to rip, but it doesn't.

Jean-Claude raises an eyebrow. "Well, whatever it is, forget it. Tonight isn't a night for fighting."

He reaches over to his 'office' (a one foot by one and a half foot desk with a laptop) and grabs his golden Café au Lait Fountain Pen.

"Tonight," he announces, unscrewing the pen tip, "is the official halfway mark of our tour." He inverts the open pen over the coffee table. A stream of white flows out, making a tiny mountain snowcap on the wooden surface. "Tonight is a night for celebration."

"Sweet," says Jay, absently scratching the naked lady tattoo on his arm.

As Jean-Claude divvies the pile up into four even lines with a stack of hundreds, I glance at Ryan out of the corner of my eye. Has he ever done lines before? I know I haven't, the hardest thing I've ever done is the occasional doobie, but I don't want to let on. Jean-Claude hands us each a Franklin and rolls his own into a narrow tube. I copy him, trying to act all casual like I've been here before.

"To a job half-done," says Jean-Claude, before snuffing up a noseful. Jean-Claude. He's what your mother would call a 'bad influence'. He's always leading us into things that sound good until you look back at it and realize that sounding good and turning out good are two completely different things that rarely coincide.

I know this, but I snort up the line anyway.

"Did you know," says Jean-Claude, leaning back with his eyes closed,

self-satisfied smirk under his mustache, "that ninety-nine percent of the banknotes in London have traces of cocaine on them? Ninety-nine fuckin' percent! This shit makes the world go 'round."

My giggle turns into a laugh that won't seem to stop. My heart starts pounding against my chest so alarmingly hard that it feels like it's escaping and I need to chase after it. So I leap to my feet and make a break for the door.

"Tyler!" says Ryan, getting to his feet too. "Where are you going?"

"I'm just going!" is what I think I tell him. "I just gotta go, you know?!"

And with that I fly out the door, letting it clatter behind me in the wind. Snowflakes are everywhere and I'm not even wearing a coat and I never noticed how fucking amazing it feels just to be cold.

Ryan's head pops out through the door crack just in time to see me pulling open the Derpmobile door. He looks real worried, but I can't imagine why.

"That's a bad idea," he calls after me.

"I know very well exactly what I'm doing!" I sing back at him and I slide into the driver's seat.

Ryan waffles by the door for a few seconds, then, looking pained, starts plodding through the snowdrifts to the tune of 'shit' and 'oh shit' and 'what the hell am I doing?' He just makes it into the passenger seat before I step on it. The tires squeal up frozen plumes as Ryan slams the door closed.

"What the hell, Tyler?!" The tires catch and we jerk forward.

I answer by turning up the radio and sliding, literally, out into the road.

"Did we just hit something?" cries Ryan over the radio, his face as white as the blizzard outside. "I think we just hit something!"

It's three AM and the road is empty, a runway. Fuck the center line. I floor it right down the middle of the street. On the radio Ke\$ha's asking me to show her where my dick's at, and I'm shouting to Ryan that if she needs help finding my dick after all the dicks she's mined out of other guys' cheap Levi's, then she should be asking for help with a lot more than just dicks. Ryan makes a sound that might be a laugh, but given the circumstances it's probably more like a horrified wheezing.

The engine roars and pins our backs to the seats, and I'm seriously impressed, especially because I'm pretty sure some of the Derp's undercarriage got messed up from when I ran over a big old stump that sprung up in front of me when I was trying to pull out. The speedometer creeps past 65

and starts touching tongues with 70. Snow flies past in the darkness, turning into stars in the headlights. I'm flying through the stars now. I'm in fucking space!

"Space race in the Derpmobile, fuck yeah!" I scream, throwing my head back in elation. I never knew the old Derp had it in her.

"The road, watch the road!" croaks Ryan, his fingers curled whitely around his seat.

"Relax, there's nothing to watch!" I try to explain to him, but that's a lie because out of the wall of stars bursts a pair of quasars, growing into headlights, growing into a car before I can even blink. For a second, the car's insides are photograph-clear in my headlights-- a dashboard. Seats. The shocked face of some grungy kid behind the steering wheel, bangs down to his nose, mouth agape.

I don't remember jerking the wheel. But suddenly the Derpmobile is shooting off the road, past the other car. But more than shooting, it's sliding, squealing, fucking careening into a death roll, straight for probably the only damn thing I could have hit within a 20-mile radius. That gas station liquor store.

Just for the record, I didn't picture dying like this. I pictured dying of an overdose. That's how all the cool celebrities are doing it now a-days. Death by car crash is so ten years ago.

If you've been following along, this is the part where candy wrappers and guitars start flying, where Ke\$ha's singing, and where I turn the glass store window into a downpour of what the minimum wagers in the joint will have to clean up. Only they'll never be able to clean it completely because the little flecks will go everywhere, slide under shelves, dig into rubber shoe soles, make this disaster live forever.

There's a CRASHslam-BANG-BANG-BANG-CRASHFFFSSSSssshhhhhh as the Suberu hits one shelf, then another, then another. My face is full of airbag. By the time the car bowls down the fourth shelf, it's slowed down enough to roll to a stop.

The shock of the crash pushes all the thoughts and fears and panic far back to a place where I can't see them anymore. Nothing's left but blank whiteness that echos dully with the sounds of the car shoving over shit-filled shelves. Even the high is fading now. The door is all dented and squished like a stepped-on, used-up cola can, but I manage to wrestle it open, instinctively trying to escape. I half-climb, half-flop out the opening, stumbling face-first into a heap of fallen boxes of Lucky Charms and Pop Tarts. There's green car confetti everywhere.

The scene feels like a lucid dream. I struggle to my feet and survey

the damage. The floor is an apocalypse of spilled cans and boxes and fresh fruits, all ejected from shelves that toppled over like dominos as my car barreled into them. Broken glass studs the floor like glitter across Hollywood Boulevard. Lights flicker above me, and I wonder dully if that's my fault too, or if they were already like that. The store had probably closed hours ago because the only witness is a security camera perched behind the vacant checkout desk.

"...Sorry about all this," I say, addressing the camera, gesturing vaguely around me. Then I realize that even the camera can't see me; the red recording light is off.

Suddenly my insides freeze over with a horrible sick feeling. Ryan. He's still in the car.

"Oh my God, Ryan!" I scream, clambering over food and debris. My shoes slide on the floor, slick with the entrails of busted-open corn cans and liquor bottles, but I somehow make it to the passenger side door. I fumble for the handle and try to wrench it open, but it won't give. The window is shattered, shards missing, and with the tail-end of my high I claw the rest of the glass away. It cuts into my hands, buries itself in deep.

Ryan's slumped over a deflating airbag. A deep gash across his head drips blood, leaving a red streak that looks too bright on the blank white airbag surface. He's not moving. I can't tell if he's breathing. I need to see if he's breathing.

I unclip his seatbelt and wrap my arms around him. I drag him out through the window. We fall to the ground in a heap. His eyes are closed, he's definitely unconscious. His clothes are covered in blood, and I don't know if it's his or if it's from my hands, sliced open from the glass. I never thought of him as delicate before now, but as I look at those slender wrists, those skinny legs, all I can see are all those breakable bones.

I try to feel for a pulse but my hands are shaking too hard to feel shit. So I just start shaking his shoulders instead, shouting his name again and again, shouts that turn to mumbles that turn to sobs.

Somewhere, there's police sirens. Red and blue bursts of bright.

My dearest fans, this is the part where you'll start hating me. And that's okay. You should.

Because as I crouch next to Ryan, I suddenly feel afraid of what will happen if they find me here in the middle of all this destruction. Afraid of them finding me fresh off a highly-illegal high. But most of all, afraid of them finding my best friend, unconscious and hurt or worse, lying next to me. And none of those fears make what happens next right.

I run. I fucking run.

Noah Gordon



Senior

Major: Political Science

Noah is from Washington DC. He enjoys soccer, Martin Amis, and almost everything on HBO. His influences include whatever he can remember.

Deadline

Of course, the big things matter. From a woman you want facial symmetry, you want a fit body, you want a general intelligence, and you want someone with drive and confidence and money. But it's only after it's happened--after you've watched her squirm when you nibble her warm ear, and watched her unselfconsciously watch PBS in the bath, and watched her sing karaoke in a Cher costume at a party where she knows nearly no one--that you come to realize that these are character traits you can't live without; so it was with great dismay that Charlie Kliefloth discovered Jasmine had also slept with the man whom he'd come to regard as his mentor.

Jasmine. Charlie started to write her name in bubbles on the glass of the shower, but thought surely that would be worse than calling her, and that doing so would violate his self-imposed rule: no contact today, none whatsoever. Discipline, he told himself, discipline.

Charlie pulled the drain plug out with a satisfying "gloomph," watching the white-foamed water slide down the walls of the tub. Charlie thrust his hips into the air a few times as the bath drained. He thought he looked like a U-boat rising out of the deep.

After a few minutes drying and grooming, Charlie was almost ready to rush to the interview. First though, he needed a few minutes to evacuate his bowels. He sat down on the toilet bowl and put his hands under his chin, resting his elbows on his knees. "Evacuate" was a word he often came across in his position as a sub-editor at the Washington Times. Half the staff seemed determined to write sentences like "the residents evacuated", when it should be "the residents were evacuated." The fools. The former gives the impression the residents are doing something quite different. He saw his naked body in the mirror, elbow still resting, and wracked his brain for the name of the Rodin sculpture the image evoked. Nothing. The mind wanders before coffee.

Anyway, Charlie felt a word so often associated with tragedy was appropriate for the current circumstances. The young man was, after all, shitting.

He cleaned up and rushed into the bedroom to dress for the day. He picked a red tie of fine cotton and a navy blue suit to go with his only clean dress shirt.

He drank his coffee. After smoothing his thin red hair into the right direction, he glanced at his phone: 9:24. Charlie had to be in Georgetown by ten o'clock, so it was likely that he would be late again. Tardiness was one of his quirks.

Idiosyncrasies. Everyone had them. Not all of Charlie's were sexual either. Well, what isn't, tangentially—from 7th to 8th grade he was the hero of a comic strip titled "Sid the Id", in which the eponymous hero drove through a neighborhood, Charlie's suburban Baltimore neighborhood, and persuaded buxom housewives to take a drive—all in three frames or less. He is less prurient today. Most of his peculiarities are work-related. As previously mentioned, he was always late. He buys a brand new tie at The Bargain Basement to wear every Monday. But Charlie works hard enough and knows how to conduct himself, when to glide by his news director Lance Latimer's luminous corner office with some pithy line and when to hide behind his cubicle, slashing loose apostrophes and modifiers. Lance, that wise tower of salt-and-pepper, really had become Charlie's mentor, which was why the young man was having so much trouble adjusting to the news about Jasmine.

Charlie jogged down the four flights of stairs to the parking garage, nodding to some minor resident of the building as they crossed paths. His deodorant could handle only so much hurrying. Charlie jumped into his used Volkswagen Jetta, turned the key, and roared out into the daylight before the door was all the way up.

Recently, Lance had been offering Charlie the chance to do some short writing of his own, usually minor obituaries or culture recaps. But two days ago, on Monday morning, the news came through that Charlie Friedrich Kliefoth would be writing a feature in the Sunday edition. A bonafide feature,

perhaps even a photo. Lance had his sweet, forgetful secretary Tracy send the email, "Lance says it's time for a reporting test..." she had said, "Let HIM talk and just be YOU." A link to the subject's Wikipedia page sat at the bottom in hyperlink blue. Charlie thought it quite a coincidence, or perhaps some weird joke, that he'd landed the big assignment just days before his bout of heartbreak, but he wasn't about to ask any questions.

Charlie swerved left off Wisconsin Avenue, narrowly avoiding a family of squirrels, and surveyed the streets around him. Staid townhouses rose out of cobblestone streets and cast their shadows over tram tracks, relics of a bygone era. There still wasn't a metro station in the neighborhood. Georgetown's gentry won't allow it. The private Jesuit university is their castle and the shops of M street their church.

Charlie checked his watch again. It told him he was late. He cruised up and down the shady side streets, scanning for a spot. Weighty trees swayed and whined in the wind. Charlie extricated his gangly body from the car, slammed the door, and after another controlled jog, found himself skidding towards the revolving doors of the Melrose Hotel.

If this sort of thing makes it into a two-page feature, Charlie thought, I'm going to describe this lobby as palatial. The lobby was comfortably modern, splashing white against black on a marble floor dotted with high-backed armchairs in various shades of blue. Golden banisters curved off to the staircases on either side of the lobby bar, from which a tall man with a crew cut was marching in Charlie's direction.

The man spoke with a smile, "Mr. Kliefoth? I'm Rusty Hamilton, Mr. Rapids' publicist."

Charlie shook his hand warmly and said, "Yes. Nice to meet you. Frankly, I'm surprised Mr. Rapids still employs a publicist."

"As am I." Rusty furrowed his brow and swept a long arm towards the elevator. "After you."

The doors took a few seconds to close. Rusty said, "While we're being frank, and surprised, I thought Latimer might've sent someone more senior."

Charlie shrugged and chuckled. Looking down at the floor, he scraped his French leather shoes together. The publicist had surprised him because Al Rapids, the scabrous porn king and the focus of his article, had been retired from the business for several months. Charlie knew that much. He also knew Rapids had been married to his wife, Linda, for forty-two years, and that he'd burst into the American consciousness with the late 1970's release of Slide, a glossy pornographic quarterly that aimed to capture the fleshy truth about (shapely) American bodies from all walks of life. Charlie thought, correctly, that Rapids had grown up in Miami.

Rusty held the door open as the elevator reached the top floor. "Last door at the end," he said. Charlie stepped out. The doors were closing and Charlie gave Rusty a quizzical look.

"This is goodbye, then?"

"It is. Al likes to do his interviews one-on-one. You really have nothing to worry about."

Charlie brushed down his suit, just to be sure, and set his eyes towards the door.

Now, when writing a short profile, writers don't necessarily need to be experts on their subject. They're not asking tough questions, or looking for a sound bite, but simply spending time with someone they think the readers might find interesting. The subject must feel as though they are hanging out with a friend, not filling out a questionnaire. Charlie, however, had done only minimal background research out of a casual indolence, and he strode down the carpeted hallway under no small mental discomfort, before knocking three times. No answer. Again, "Rap, rap, rap" he punched on the wood. He stood still and waited. As it was well past ten o'clock, he thought it hypocritical to grow angry about Rapids being late, but, nonetheless, he tapped his foot with a restless urgency.

Charlie had met Jasmine at a concert. The DJ had played techno music, or maybe house or trap. Jasmine had gotten separated from her friends, and Charlie hadn't come with any. He wasn't that lonely—he could only finagle one free ticket from the office. He and Jasmine bumped into each other on the stairs and spilled their respective bottles of water, after which they exchanged hasty apologies, and explained through laughter that they hadn't taken any drugs this particular time but weren't opposed to the idea, in principle, when it was convenient. The strobe lights had come on, and Charlie had told the girl that Jasmine had been his father's name, and whether she believed him, he was soon brushing the remaining droplets from the milky plains of her long, flat stomach and staring, calmly and unabashedly, at her sharp white face.

It was over the next two weeks—eight nights out of the fourteen, in fact—that Charlie learned about the ear nibbling and the bathing and the karaoke, and how she laughed when he quipped after sex that the engagement ring was under the pillow, and if she hadn't bounced around so much they wouldn't have lost it, and that it could take ages for him to save up for a new one.

The door opened. From behind it emerged a jaunty, grey-haired woman, skin more wrinkled than her lurid orange dress. She was bouncing on her toes as if she were nineteen, or twenty-five, like Jasmine. If Charlie had done his prep, he'd have known Rapids' wife was named Linda.

"Hello. I'm Charlie Kliefoth from the Washington Times. And you must be—"

"Charles!" she leant up and hugged him, "I surely am Linda Rapids. Come on in—Al's in the back room."

Bewildered, Charlie followed this sprightly woman through the foyer of the magnificent suite. The walls were lined with typical Washington hotel paintings: horses, landscapes, the White House; but some of the carpets and chairs were clearly not befitting of the Melrose's painstakingly crafted image. La-Z boys weren't even in style anymore. To his left Charlie could see a room floored with what looked like linoleum. As he got closer he realized that the Rapids had slid together about a dozen yoga mats together in an effort to build a makeshift exercise room. Raggedy birthday banners hung from the ceiling in the main living room, and the "kitchen"—normally consisting of only a teakettle and a minibar—appeared to have been converted into an army mess. It looked like a wounded spider, various extension cords and wires connecting toaster ovens and hot plates and three black mini-fridges. Linda hopped over in that direction. "Anything to drink?"

"W-water, please"

"YOU MAY ENTER NOW, YOU SWINE!" Charlie heard these words, spoken in what he presumed to be a German accent, shoot at him from the far corner of the suite. Linda remained silent, so he marched into the room.

A teal Miami Dolphins desk chair swiveled to reveal a massive, sweaty creature. Al Rapids, the porn king. He was stroking a tiny white cat with his pinky finger.

Before Charlie could swallow his Adam's apple back down, Rapids cracked into a wild smile and reared back his head to reveal thick nose hairs sprouting in every direction. "Mary mother of Jesus fucking Christ you should have seen your face!"

"Al! Language!" Linda's admonishment carried from the other room.

"Sorry, babe," Al yelled back. "I promised her I'd stop cursing so much. New Year's resolution, 1993. Anyway, I've always wanted to pull that Bond villain gag. What's the bad guy's name in Casino Royale?"

"Le Chiffre?"

"Yeah that's it. 'Course a reporter would know. I don't know if that one's got a cat but who gives a shit. Still a great gag."

"Al!"

"Sorry, honey!"

Al leapt up to shake Charlie's hand. He was not just wide but tall, at least 6'5". Charlie stood up straight. He liked the way "reporter" sounded.

"The hotel permits you to have pets up here?"

"When you pay full price for the penthouse suite for two years you can do any damn thing you want. I was saying forget Penthouse, they should call it the Slide suite with what I'm paying," with this pun Al burst into laughter, a garbled cackle, so genuinely pleased with himself Charlie couldn't help but laugh, "But Charles, please, sit down. I'm sure you're a busy man. I used to be too before I uh... Lisa, sugar, what's the word again?" Al bellowed these last few words. Shouting between rooms was evidently a frequent mode of conversation for these two.

"Rusty would know," Lisa said.

"Abdicate?" Charlie volunteered.

Al clapped Charlie on the shoulder. "Right, right, abdicate. The porn king abdicates. So, Charlie boy, what'd you want to talk about?" Rapids was nearly bald, but he wore his remaining hair well on his round face.

The interview almost conducted itself. Though the video recorder was on, Charlie scribbled frantically on his notepad, declining Linda's continual offers of tea and Doritos. Al Rapids talked and talked, nose hairs growing with each successive exploit, stampeding through his youthful misadventures and his rise to the top of the porn industry while requiring only gentle and occasional guidance from his underpaid cowherd and faithful cow.

Al had actually been involved in the running of the bulls once, the real one in Pamplona. This was in the early 90's, when Slide was belatedly breaking into the video market. For publicity's sake, Al held a contest. The first naked man to finish the race would be offered a starring role in a Slide film. Twelve brave souls entered, none of whom were seriously gored, and the next fall a squat young Catalan put on his poolboy clothes and made a cuckold of an absentee husband to the feigned delight of the aging star of the 1964 Playboy calendar.

Rapids' idiolect was a strange one, peppered with crude puns and an astounding grasp of the anatomical lexicon. Everything was "distended", or "turgid". Towards the end of the interview, long after Charlie had gathered enough information to writing his story--he's a porn magnate with a stable marriage to a woman his age, Charlie thought, slap on a headline and this thing was ready to deliver--Al asked him an interesting question. Al asked Charlie a very interesting question. Al asked Charlie about his own love life.

Charlie cleared his throat and twiddled his skinny thumbs. He thought, for some reason, of his first kiss behind the bleachers, the one that had brought an end to Sid the Id's adventures. Then he thought of Hitomi, the

winsome HR coordinator on whom three weeks prior he had performed perfunctory cunnilingus in exchange for two blowjobs. B.J.: Before Jasmine. The movie hadn't been bad either—Charlie loved comedies—and he had woken the next morning and bathed in cold water for over an hour, feeling a quiet shame that the woman had seemed to enjoy the whole thing so wholeheartedly. Hitomi had kept staring and brushing his shoulders, even afterwards, during the desultory search for her clothes. With Jasmine, things had seemed more distant, even transactional, but when he looked into Jasmine's brown eyes he was filled with a healthy confidence.

"There is one girl."

Al rolled up the sleeves of his suit jacket. "Is this the part where you ask me to go off the record?"

Charlie thought of the previous evening, spent sullenly watching TV sitcoms with his phone turned off, and wondered if these situations were covered in the interviewer seminar that he hadn't attended. "Her name's Jasmine."

"Hold on," Al said, "Linda, sweetheart, come in here a minute."

*

(Chapter 1 of a longer work)

Sierra Hansen



Junior

Major: English

Minor: Anthropology or German

Sierra Elizabeth Hansen is a wanna be Ann Arbor punk rocker who has been listening to a lot of Christian Death lately. She wears faux fur in winter anyway.

Time: This is a layover

Just yesterday, my friend and I reached Huntington Beach in our resident Californian friend's Zipcar. We'd traversed Venice Beach awash in buttery sun the day before, but this time around we watched the ghost of the infamous Milky Way star flame down the beach through a prism of smog.

I'm recounting yesterday's experience, sitting in the Los Angeles Airport (LAX), and I have time. I just went on vacation for the first time in a very long time, My shoulders aren't so white. I'm so relieved, because this past year marks the first time that I've truly vacationed. By that I mean I let go and truly did not allow guilt to thunk against my head.

I find it incredibly difficult to stop looking around at the bus stop, and this is mostly due to the fact that I did not grow up away from poverty. I have always been the person sitting at the bus stop who manages to lock eyes with at least one person, every single ride, who sees me acknowledge them and begins to tell me their story. Toothless men and women, women who tell me about their first-born children who have gone away to college,

and the man who came into Ambrosia and asked for a muffin. He claims to see Jesus Christ, and I have a flashback to the time that I was so sleepy I fell asleep in my coffee and couldn't function due to my Bipolar medication I stopped taking a long time ago. I could be him, I think to myself. That could easily be me. I give him the muffin, and he doesn't bother me with stories about what he believes. Instead, he asks me about my credo. When I explain that I don't have one, he doesn't bother me about how I don't place much stock in belief systems that way. Instead, he commends me for being independent and thanks me. The next time I see him, my friend gestures to him and whispers emphatically, "He's completely out of his mind. You should listen to him talk, he's one of those Jesus loving types."

As Addie whisks me along the edge of the ocean by the arm, I know that she understands the meaning of this vacation, for both of us. She's worked hard to earn six years of school set to the soundtrack of traffic and the smell of rolling salt. I know that we won't talk about how we both know that the couple one hundred feet away is shooting up, nor will we talk about how earlier in the trip there was a moment of tension when Addie became self-conscious about how we were the only people still attempting to eat in peace near a screaming woman. Addie became frazzled and begged for me to move with her, and of course I did, but I felt myself trying to stay put. Essentially, I wanted to stay and resist turning away like everyone else, because I don't see a reason for moving in the open air away from one of many miserable beings. What's wrong with daring to be miserable, when your life feels like a miserable place? I'll tell you from personal experience that when you don't have anyone and then suddenly, you have people who recognize you for the potential that you have, you don't ever forget being alone and ready to walk in front of traffic because nobody will care. What does it really do for us, when we walk away?

The way to find your sense of self again after a long while without a break has a lot to do with having time to sit still. You sit still in your body. You sit placidly somewhere. You gather pleasurable reading material (For me right now, it's all about that Sherman Alexie, the Quartz Daily Brief, & Susan Sontag). You sip a tall glass of Sangria slowly and unwind, listening to falling water on the patio. This is, after all, a semi-arid desert. You smell an oncoming monsoon and see it fall one-hundred feet from you while the sky directly above you stays clear and blue.

The metal voices inside of the magazines, in corporate typeface, all repeat the same obvious directions. Again, and again, and again. Eat superfoods, get your omega-3s, here is how good sex works. Here, the gothic anatomy of a bad breakup. Here, the overpriced cloth made by youth prying at yarn with their battered fingernails, in danger because of the possibility of the roof over their head collapsing. The single roof that shelters the underpaid also threatens them constantly, while we in the US aim for the opportunity to roam forever under open skies that are crisp as laundry, away from

everything we know.

The fonts in the periodicals we consume don't have regional accents, and the typeface is specifically designed to bring us to attention. Boldface quotes such as "Nobody would go into this business to become famous". We are fascinated by massive crowds and ego trips. We are raised to desire the dream of having both, for the gratification. This is not a polemic, though. This is personal.

As a society, we don't value solitude, the silently cursive and complex individual. It bothers me. I need solitude, as an introvert and as a human being, to free up a part of myself and loosen my ego. If there isn't a companion attentively waiting, society wants us to experience existential terror so that we consume.

What's more, I'm convinced the primary reason we don't shed our self-absorption for those in need most of the time is fear that we ourselves are somehow doomed to that same fate. Here in the first world, we want always to play the role of tourist. Even now, as we edge into war with Syria. We want to be passive tourists, even in the face of news of our own war. This morning, I read on Reuters: "Eight Paraguayan bus drivers have had themselves nailed to crosses to protest being fired by a transportation company after it rejected their plea for higher pay."

It is clear, from the nature of this news, what sort of world we neglect to live in. The realities we turn away from as we feed invisible typed ink to robots, for later. We press Save. Here, most of us can assume that we will have time to finish a project without worrying about satisfying a basic need.

Our first-world eyes don't see an end, and so we look away continuously. We can savor Sangria with warm four-berry pie, and so why not? It's delicious and replenishes good energy. I support this, but also can't help but look. I look hard. It can be grueling. This is why, for the past ten days, I have let go. Happy hour IPAs and sangria, fancy hippie coffee, and warm pie. I felt like smiling the entire time. This is remarkable considering that I am frequently told I have a Mona Lisa smile (As opposed to an actual smile?), and even more recently that I have an "Angry Eastern European Woman look" to me. I'm not sure that I know what this means, but there is at least one photo the friend that drove us took of Addie and myself on Huntington Beach, under the glow of a setting, polluted sky. I am smiling with teeth, and I will admit freely that this never happens.

TBC, Zone 3 is now boarding. It's going to be a four hour flight, and my friend Read is picking me up from the Detroit Airport at 6 am.

I'm home now. Ann Arbor, Michigan. A first-class college town, a resort town for well-off young folks by the world's standards. Here in the first world, we tour the many worlds of people who are stuck. We watch them in

movies, we read books about the plights of oppressed people, or we watch them in person as if they are sidewalk cinema.

There was one homeless man who I used to give food to, at my old job in a cafe being overworked for minimum wage. Everyone in my generation and beyond, of course, is suffering this fate. Some people have been doing it for far longer, since before the Recession. It was always clear to me that he'd had a rough go of things from the way he didn't expect anything, and would even offer to help us close. It was easy to just take the food, to give it to him in the alleyway.

Once I went two months without seeing him. When I next saw him, he placed a ripe nugget of marijuana in the palm of my hand when I wasn't looking, and closed my fingers around what felt at the time like a pine cone because the furry nugget of marijuana was nearly frozen. While it was only late November, the weather outside was transforming the air into an icy forcefield of visible breath. He told me not to look just yet, not just yet, then disappeared so I could open my palms back up to glimpse it, before going back to work to be felt up and sexually harassed by one of the cooks in the walk-in fridge. I never saw him again. Winter was coming, he is known to be migratory and I don't work there any longer.

While in Los Angeles, traveling through posh neighborhoods studded with billboards and open-air strip malls, there was the more than occasional vagrant. Usually, the unruly and haphazard mumbling of the vagrant either drew eyes or cleared a path around them. Near Santa Monica Beach, a woman screamed in Vietnamese at no one while my friend and I savored a Kim-Chi cheese quesadilla from a food cart. People flashed annoyed glances, and then moved until my friend and I relented and did the same.

When I tell the story of trying to light a cigarette at a bus stop in Tucson, one where I was heckled by a man claiming to have been born in Germany, I expect a certain reaction. We turn our eyes & thoughts from people who have obviously bleak life situations that we don't want to see as possibilities for ourselves. Not us, we think. Not us. Relentless optimism is a symptom of both voluntary blindness, and necessary blindness to conserve emotional energy. It can be all too tricky to balance the two.

We are conditioned to overstate the situation, where I see bare facts. Fact: The man asked me if Germany has discovered that Communism doesn't work. Fact: He claimed the place he was born in didn't exist. Fact: He was generally loud, and obnoxious.

Encountering this man didn't make me uncomfortable, though, because every time I meet someone similarly disgruntled I remember to study their eyes. I look at them. I hear him claim to be from Germany, and inquire, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" I, myself, speak nowhere near fluently. I am a long work in progress.

He says no, and then comments briefly on the disappearance of his birthplace. I don't know that I believe him. His sentences dissolve like water lifted into the Sonoran desert. His voice laps against the air, with futility. Everybody ignores him, but something makes me want to keep talking to him.

The evidence that any human being wants acknowledgment, despite the act of being disgruntled that is so freely associated with the destitute, is in the eyes. Perhaps you've heard of the stripper eyes before. Avoiding meaningful eye contact is a way of distancing yourself, and in the case of the stripper avoiding such eye contact is a method of survival: "Here are our bodies, but I'm not really here with you."

I could see that this man wanted to be acknowledged because of his eyes and the way they were taken aback when I asked him, in preschool German, if he spoke the language of the country he claimed to be from. It's the way they softened into conversation once I bothered to ask him questions. Fact: He just wanted to talk. When I leaned around the Plexiglas of the bus stop to block the wind and light my cigarette, and I couldn't do it because my lighter wouldn't light, he went so far as to say "I actually want to help you now. I actually want to help you kill yourself."

He was following up on his original question. He, like everyone else, wanted to know if I knew that smoking cigarettes would kill me. Of course, I said.

But his eyes only wanted to lock. I want that sometimes, too, when my breath spins awkwardly in my chest. Sometimes, humans want someone to hear anything. Sometimes, they just want to see others see them into being human.

Adam Hart



Senior

Major: Psychology

Minor: Creative Writing

I enjoy sports, chess, and writing.

High Tide

Orange flames massage red fingers
burned plastic upsets noses, wood stutters
and hisses a laugh. The stars
are waiting. Crickets, too. Even the wolf is muzzled.
Must we piss off all living things? Funny
how people talk forever about nothing,
nothing about everything. She pities
me a glance, nose up, lips down. An animal among
creatures, she sits too straight, knows I love the happy
arch of her back. Unmistakably, it is frowning, now.

A forest is only green half the time.
The darkness has red eyes.
It's seen us before, but it hasn't seen
us. A bold gust and a tree loses
its finger. The hushed
waves kidnap our footprints and drag them
out to sea, captive for eternity where they

rest in aqueous peace, an invitation
to make new ones.

But now is too late.

A veiny leaf
ballets to the ground,
unable to pick where it lands
or where it will go next.

My lips part, words stuck between
love and hate,
breath and death.
Stuck like a worm under
a rock, searching for air
as when under
blankets
lids
ground.

The embers, muted, soon sink
deep into the Earth where
I follow their faint glow,
not wanting to be
left behind.

The 100+ Year Chicago Enigma (and still counting)

Balding and bearded bowling ball-bellied beer-binging
Bleacher Bums sit shirtless, affirm
their nickname on a visible breath
April Tuesday, golf-applaud the maligned
left fielder stiffly jogging
as he chews and spits shit's
edible twin. His jersey is ruled
paper. The outfield wall is a sad, unshaven
brick, unable to swallow a ball
with its mid-summer swarm of m-shaped
leaves. Frost tiptoes up the foul pole.

I've got an Old Style in my left, Chicago
dog in my right. No ketchup. Scorecard
between my knees, decades of pain

everywhere. I am puzzled as the organ
begins—who are these Bums with thick
accents and thicker necks and why
do they pay to watch bums play?

Futility's prodigy, the Chicago Cubs.
They bathe in failure, dry off in
defeat. Even God says they won't
win until hell freezes over or
He receives a postcard
of Bartman riding a goat into the sunset.

Cubs, I hate you. I love you.
Like soap operas or Twilight.
We are all Bums in some way.
How selfish to neglect you, lost
dog, pooper-scooper of the National League.
My parents loved you. Their parents, too.
Your spirit, your promise.
Day games, Harry Caray, and playing two.
Your sanctuary: The Friendly Confines.
Ivy, the lake, the city.
You are family, therefore I can't hate you.
But please, family reunions are awkward enough.

Chicago's St. Louis Blues

The air is piss and burnt rye.
Square-faced twins smack
gum, pregnant teenager screams
on her phone, past-loud Michael Jackson
earthquakes from all-white-clothed boy somehow
reading, my Tribune crinkles.
Black and orange T.R.U.T.H. poster hovers above mound
of shoveled-snow Newports, a twice-man
collapses onto a half-occupied two-person
bench – his toupee blows off as the
Howard-bound Red Line train rumbles thru.

A breath

then,

Louis Armstrong blasting from brass-wielding gray
black man – tight lips birth
sirens, improvisation written on
wrinkled forehead.

Bent forward from necessity, upright
 trumpet gives Dizzy man inches from
 death Miles of life, limbs fastened loosely like
 high notes. Shift to soft
 trills reminiscent of suited-wait staff
 bistro – no one remembers the
 piano. Can you taste the chicken
 Marsalis? Glasses clink as
 coins in jar—Cheers!—and
 applause and a toast with melodies smoother
 than butter, a charitable feast for
 the ears.

A breath

then,

A shrugging, toothless smile when I ask
 if he makes enough playing.

*Son, do you make enough not playing,
 whatever enough is?*

He hands me his business card and slips
 into the southbound train car, whistling,
 leaves me with a suitcase of harmony,
 suitcase of buts and what ifs.

The Maker and the Made

Perched in Papa's rocking chair,
 I wondered why this pendulum persists
 while his ceased. The worn, blueberry
 muffin cushion, molded like a mouth guard,
 is a cocoon, a warm, wet rag on your forehead,
 a cup of hot
 cocoa and slippers.

Boredom cannot solely explain golf naps.

I was a trespasser, an alien,
 afraid of wrecking the precisely
 propped pillows or leaving
 them too warm.

But he wouldn't have minded.

He loved making connections
 with wires, with people, with asses.
 And knocking down walls
 to improve ventilation.

Papa, you weren't a burden,
despite what you may have thought.
Even the chair enjoyed your weight
and time and wait.

You loved your family
and showered us with
a potluck of praise.

And so the half-man, half-nature made rocker
residing under the aptly named clock stuck
on midnight will remain for eternity.

To know you still love me

eats at me like maggots, rips all
flesh muscle tissue leaving nothing but
forgetful bone. It was my fault.
Tears sprinting from your face.
I caused them, I catch them. The ambiguity
persists like that stain on your devil dress with slits
underarm you wore the first night we coalesced.
Your dignified anger when I pushed
your plate closer, prepared
sugarless tea, questioned skirts' lengths. Unintentionally
intentional. Cheeks flush with cold
heat. You are a beautiful rage.

Writing this on wet paper I can't help but feel your short fingers
chubbier than you'd prefer wandering listlessly down my back
tracing your favorite scars tucked under my ribs
arriving just below my shoulder blade where my heart
supposedly lives.

I don't know why I don't love you like before.
That first time I professed my love
when we were lying in bed devouring each other's warmth,
our bodies morphed into one ultra being,
I saw a million colors in our dark room.

Is faded blue still blue?

Trust has eroded like the banks of Crooked Lake
where I taught you how to skip jagged rocks
and catch popcorn in your mouth.
That kernel wedged between your molars,
promise me it has stopped hurting.

It pains me to see you in pain.
A wound I inflicted, a wound
I can't heal.

Jeannette Hinkle



Senior

Major: General Studies

Jeannette is from a town just outside of Boston, Massachusetts. She has written for the MetroWest Daily News, The Marlborough Enterprise and The Hudson Sun. She plans to pursue journalism and creative nonfiction after graduating. If that doesn't work out, she will be a flight attendant. So it better work out!

No Worries Mate

We were two hours past Bendigo. We kept a steady speed of 100 kilometers an hour on the cracked two lane highway as we zipped by hundreds of acres of Victoria's vast and shimmering wheat fields into the heart of the Australian bush. That afternoon, I loaded up my backpack with white bread and peanut butter and long brightly patterned skirts and a sleeping bag that I got for fifteen dollars at the Big W, Australia's equivalent of Walmart. The Southern Cross was just now appearing in the darkening sky.

I was reclined in the passenger seat of a blue ute, Australia's equivalent of a pickup truck, basking in the last AC I'd have for a while. I met the vehicle's owner two days earlier at a bar called Prudence. He had just graduated from the university where I was studying and was biding time until ski season in Canada. We talked for three hours over some watery whiskey and Cokes about Maitreya, a music festival that finally materialized through a cloud of dust as we pulled into the state park.

I didn't know what the fuck a bush doof was but I love music festivals, and that is precisely why, when he said he had an extra spot in the ute, I said I'd meet him outside of my apartment on Friday afternoon, ready for four days of camping and psy-trance.

His name was Scotty and after we traded our printout tickets for a cloth bracelet with the dreaded girl at the entrance tent, we met the rest of the group at the campsite they had staked out in a grove of Eucalyptus trees. He threw me a swag, a kind of sleeping bag/ tent he told me real Australian bushmen had been sleeping in since the convicts got off the boat. I rolled it out and pushed the stakes into the dry dirt, which spidered as I drove them deeper. Brushing some Bull Ants from my ankle, I walked toward the open-air tent where everyone was laughing and dividing up capsules and lines and pills and tabs.

After a long night of lasers and music and the most stars I'd ever seen, I woke up hot from the sun beating down on the dark canvas of my swag. I unzipped myself and climbed out, energized by memories of the night before and by the Australian morning sun. A tall girl named Wiz who was brushing out her purple wig in our tent said that I looked like a butterfly emerging from my cocoon. Rawson, a muralist from San Francisco, and the only other American in our group, agreed and asked if I wanted body paint to complement my metamorphosis. I said yes, of course I did.

"Okay, lil cutie. Wait till I take my tab," he said, the dirt on his face crinkling with a warm smile. He bent over, every rib and every bone in his spine visible on his naked back as he rummaged through a drawstring bag on the ground for the keys to the rented Ford where the drugs were safely locked in the glove box.

I made my first peanut butter sandwich of the day as Wiz poured white powder into a clear glass pipe and rotated it over a lighter until the contents began to bubble. Scotty told me to pass the nangs, which I had learned the previous night is Aussie slang for nitrous. The pair inhaled simultaneously and sat quietly for a minute as I bit into the crust of my sandwich.

They exhaled, and Wiz instantly stood up, shifting weight between her feet. She announced that she was going to get some pizza from the vendor trucks and then to check out the stages, which were setting up for the second day of the festival. Scotty said he'd go with her. She cleaned her pipe, wrapped it in toilet paper, and placed it gently in her purse. Scotty pulled a wad of tinfoil from his pocket, opened it and pulled out a tab, placing it on his tongue as the pair set out down the sandy road.

Jazz was laying on her back on a cooler, waiting for Rawson to come back from the car and finish painting her stomach. As far as I could tell, she and Rawson were in some kind of a relationship, though I am confident that he was gay and that they were just friends who both liked drugs, dancing

and sex. They met at a festival called Rainbow Serpent.

"He kinda just followed me home and never left."

Now Jazz was smoking a cigarette and telling me about a bike trip she'd taken through Africa. She said she had brought a Camelbak, and every time that she stopped in a village to fill it up, she was swarmed by villagers who mistook her for a medic because of the fluid-filled bag with a tube sticking out of the top.

"Fuckin' sad," she said, taking a long drag.

Rawson was back from retrieving the acid from the glove box.

"There's a French girl crying on the road," he said, in his Valley girl voice, unzipping the tent to step inside and throwing a thumb in the direction from which Wiz and Scotty had just departed.

"You're back, I've been laying here for fuckin' ten minutes," Jazz said, crushing the filter of her cigarette into the fine dirt next to her.

"I was trying to figure out what was wrong with her, but she was crying too hard. I told her to come up here if she wants."

"Nice of you," Jazz said. "Hurry up and finish, the mushies are kicking in, I want to explore."

He dipped a paintbrush into the little blue jar.

After a few minutes of silence, which I filled by scribbling some lines in my notebook about the previous night, I heard crying. It rapidly grew in decibel, and I looked up to see a girl in a dirty white dress with red cherries on it stumbling up the sandy hill toward our tent, a guitar carelessly dangling from her long fingers, a sheet of tangled brown hair obscuring her face.

She just walked in, not saying a word. Her dress stretched with her heaving chest, which was nearly exposed until she pulled up the lacy neckline a little and fell into a folding chair. She put her face in her hands and cried harder.

"Its okay, girl," Rawson said, not taking his eyes off the mural materializing on Jazz's stomach.

"What's your name?" Jazz asked, lighting another cigarette.

The crying girl looked up, shocked out of her tears by the question.

"Fleur," she hiccupped. "It means flower."

She was pretty, but she looked worn out. She seemed to be at the end

of her twenties, her tanned skin just starting to age. Her long hair was greasy and thin and dotted with burrs. She was crossing bruised legs at her feet, which were laced into a pair of hiking boots that looked odd with her feminine dress. She had big brown eyes, but the whites were blood red. There were a dozen flies crawling on her swollen eyelids and she wasn't brushing them away, so I stood up and went over to do it for her.

They dispersed from her eyes in a frenzy, slamming into each other as they fled into the hot air. No one asked, but she told us why she was alone.

"I met him last week, we has so much fun with each other," she began without context. Her broken accent gave the words a tragic beauty that both riveted and disturbed me. Rawson and Jazz were starting their trip and were engaged in each other's bodies, seemingly unfazed by the distraught French girl that had collapsed in our tent. If I had been on half the substances they had ingested in the previous half hour I'd say Fleur was bad vibes.

"We came here together," she said, looking out at the circle of tents laid out like a shantytown around the billabong in front of our site.

"He said he loved me." She broke down into heaving sobs again, and I dragged my fingers in figure eights over her glistening back.

"I drove with him. To here. This desert. And then last night," she wiped the dripping snot from her nose, "he left me." I handed her a baby wipe from the box we'd been using to cleanse ourselves of the omnipresent dust.

"I don't know why," she said, deep irregular breaths starting up again like a train, crumpling the wipe in her hand. "Probably, because, I look like this."

I told her she was beautiful and the guy was just some fuck, but she wasn't in our tent to listen to people, she was there to be with people. It's something about music festivals that I always forget. People are together. But nearly every person retreats into his own mind for an experience in the presence of others but not really with others.

"It was so cold at last night. In the car he drove, he had my clothes. I just had my bikini. But I survived the night, because now it is morning." She took another wipe without asking and cleaned her underarms.

"I stole this dress. And these shoes." She looked down at herself, smoothing the dirty white material over her legs, fluffing the lace underneath.

"I'm a bitch," she said, closing her big eyes. "And I am a slut." She started laughing. A light, girlish laugh.

"I get fucked."

"We all get fucked," Jazz said. Fleur laughed harder and the sounds transitioned back to sobs.

Black streams of tears colored by leftover mascara bled from her eyes, which were populated with flies again. I desperately wanted to make her happy. I barely knew the people I was there with, but I hadn't felt alone until I saw her abandoned in the bush. I had felt so anxious since I arrived on that dry and remote continent, and I was just starting to find my groove. But the more she spoke, the more uneasy I became. She was deconstructing the liberation that I had awoken with that morning and replacing it with something dark and isolating. I saw the guitar neglected by her side and asked if she could play.

She met my gaze with narrowed eyes that opened wide with her answer, causing the flies to scatter.

"Oui. And I can sing, too," She nearly fell off the folding chair reaching for the guitar.

She began to sing, her long fingers wrapping around the neck in sharp angles to press the frets. I hoped she would sing in French, but the same irregular English came out of her cracked lips.

"I came here to Australia," she began. "With this little guitar. But I know only three chords. I am stupid. So stupid, and ugly. Why I didn't stay in France."

I lit a cigarette, my heartbeat rising. I wanted her to leave.

"Fucking music. And I meet a man, he says he will take me to music and good people. So many good people here, he says to me. But I never see them." Her voice was beautiful, but her words were foul. Her fingers bent and bowed on the frets, pressing and releasing.

"Some of the people are nice to me. These people let me in their tent." She looked detachedly at Rawson, who still hadn't taken an eye off his brush. "A girl give me druuuugs." The three chords repeated. The flies had gathered on her eyes again.

"And all the people that I meet, they say, 'No worries, mate.'" Her voice broke, and she stopped strumming, her fingers sliding from the strings onto the dust-coated body of the guitar. The bass from the main stage started pulsating from across the sea of tents. Day two of Maitreya had begun. She let out a shuddering sigh.

"But I am alone, and so I am worried. And I am not their mate."

Margaret Hitch



Junior

Major: School of Art and Design

Margaret Hitch is a third-year undergraduate student in the School of Art and Design. She specializes in creating narrative-driven work in a wide variety of 2D media, including oil painting, printmaking, watercolors, and pen and ink drawings. She especially enjoys the process of writing and illustrating her own stories and poetry, and plans to also minor in Creative Writing.

A Collection of Maps

Here are jungles!
Your mother's mountain ranges!
Seas and sea-birds, lichen galleries;
Snaking brown rivers and cities made of silver!
And there, is Africa: a brief flash of vision.
The yellow, the grasses of the veldt,
stream into the clear white sky,
A giraffe is there and a hunting creature
lies beneath, hungry and glassy-eyed.
I fly. And once over the Pacific,
I taste the sands of the Sahara.
In modernist marbled rings, they sweep out
from the Western Coast like dancers.
I go barefoot to the beaches in Iceland:
The holy matter of the sky disguises itself in the pink tongues of lambs

at the back of hollow-tree canoes bound for New Zealand,
Yet, how easily I live in the name of where I am from!
Between a map's marks for sailors, and among
the wrecks of teenage snowmobilers,
the name of Superior reaches out to the name of
Isle Royale, the end of the earth.
Still, I am here and there, with
Magellan, the conquistadors.
once more following the length
of the monstrous continent
brought forth from the Nile.
(Mary Ruefle Imitation)

Lowland

Lance, owner of the Mariner Theatre,
is still prematurely balding over blue eyes and
hitting on my blonde girlfriends. Out front, a flock
of mopeds is gathering under the stars and the dog
in the neighbor's yard is going crazy for them.

But I am far away from everything, thank god,
dreaming long dreams on top of this long-liner.
There is no land but the island where we anchor up
to keep from wandering through the night. In low
tide we find glass buoys and toys from Japanese drifting.

But the storm and its forecast has not happened yet. I am
nineteen years old, and it is the first time I am driving this far.
Today, all the fire danger signs read Very High! and I am
sweaty as heck, wearing only a swimsuit and listening to the
radio, which tells me how to grow moss with buttermilk;

This idea consumes me. At the nearest rest stop
I will pull off of US 41 and check out the first trail I
see. There will be more than enough to gather, but
I do not have enough hands, for the Juniper Haircap,
the Four Tooth and Feather Flat varieties and I will start

to drop almost everything I have as I begin running
because five point four miles is a long way to go and
there are many more hours till the border. The sun will
burst through the sparse-topped summer pines and at the

same moment all the cicadas start singing, or seem to.

I'm running out of this deafening bit of the
Hiawatha and towards the end of my employment,
when one rainy day Lance finally quits trying,
and the ship has been out ten days after the storm
has passed, and there is ocean and nothing else.

Regarding Your Tweet This Morning

Which read
Loneliness, or nothing to rally around.
All day, this plays in my head:
rally.

The official word for hitting a tennis ball
back and forth—
What my dad and I used to do when we took
the gold Focus out to the park;
where we swung wide white arcs
across the darkness of the sky.
Today *rally* vibrates ghostly round
my skull and I do not mind.

Yes, each small phrase on my mobile screen excites me.
I find out that a girl I once knew
has made a name for herself as a porn star from Wisconsin.
Another friend was baptized in the river today.

I imagine the priest
took him to the shipyard's entrance;
the river filled with years of paper mill losses.
Each fleck of rust that was once a pellet of iron
from the mines up North accumulates
into something specific.

And yet this is where he is told to jump in.
The water tastes like blood but he is filled
with glory. Years ago, he learned to swim here.
Race across the channel before a ship comes,
was one dare. Jump from the lighthouse base and risk
falling short, onto the cement edge.

The cops in the bushes watch over all
the young hoodlums who swim naked and neck and smoke weed.
Here, in the place of his youth, the pastor calls out
and all the crowd imagines that the clouds open up
and bathe his white young body in light.

Bad Girls

Pt. I

The only girl who likes weed
in Marinette county
knows how exciting it can be to
be out and about with boys
after 1:00.
The car is parked in the driveway, and
in the backseat,
she is twittering the emoticons of stars.
She takes the boys out
to the country,
over twenty miles of gravel roads,
to father's second house—
an empty log cabin;
a field for an unbought horse.
Lit, by her high beams
in a forest made of darkness,
the boys fill the air with whooping.
For a moment, their hair is covered;
they pull off their cotton shirts
and laugh maniacally at each other.
She waits at the car's door, watching:
a comforter draped over her back.
At the end of the driveway
a giant man-made pond
awaits their nakedness,
surrounded by monstrous light fixtures;
the type that gleam across the field
on Friday nights.
It is so humid that it looks like it is snowing.
the best part of the night
is when she and the boys jump in.

there is no one around for miles.

Pt II.

I am hypnotized
as they pass; these
sly
creatures of the wild.
two ninth-grade girls
wearing berets and smoking cigarettes,
decide to be bad today.
they traipse through backyards and
basic cable TV.
and tell their teachers
that they already know everything.
they demand anarchy and
the world opens up at their fingertips;
fair
nymphs at the swamp's edge,
I vow to give all
my small faith to them, in prayer.

Erin Hull



Freshman

Major: Undecided

Erin Hull has been writing fiction since before she can remember. A fan of all pursuits creative, she has participated in events like National Novel Writing Month and Script Frenzy since her first year of high school and plans to continue writing well into the future. She is a dog lover and hopes to go to medical school after finishing her undergraduate degree.

Crossroads

His blue eyes fell on the book. Restless fingers drummed against the desk at which he sat, one leg crossed over the other. He ran his other hand through his dyed blond hair, unconscious of how much his roots were showing. His eyes flicked to the door, the hand in his hair curling into a fist. Slowly, he reached an arm out to the book, cautious. Before he could touch it, he drew his hand back suddenly. In his nineteen years of life, he'd never been this scared to touch a goddamned book.

"Hey, Harvey," his roommate said cheerfully, walking through the door at the end of the room. Harvey jumped, nearly falling out of his chair.

"Erik," he snapped, harsher than he'd intended. "What the hell, man?"

Erik narrowed his hazel eyes, setting down a plastic grocery bag on the end table. "What's your problem?" Harvey and Erik had been close friends since first grade. Since neither set of parents were around much (Erik's par-

ents were CIA agents and Harvey's father was an actor), the pair had ended up spending more time with each other than either would care to admit.

"My asshole father," Harvey muttered, standing wearily to stretch. He glanced around the cramped room, blinking hard a few times. He'd been staring at the diary for the past half hour.

"He's always your problem," Erik said with a sigh, brushing back a strand of hair, cut in a style reminiscent of a nineties era Jon Bon Jovi. He sat down on the small apartment's squeaky couch. "What did he do now?"

Taking a quick, deep breath, Harvey snatched the book and held it up. "He mailed me this. He says it's Mom's diary."

Erik's eyes went wide.

"Yeah, I know," Harvey said, reading his friend's expression and looking away. "It ends when I was eight - I mean, obviously, since that's when she left - so I was..." He trailed off, sitting back down in the chair. He traced the book's silvery trim absently.

"Hoping to get some answers?" Erik finished.

"Yeah."

There was a moment of silence.

"Are you going to open it?" Erik asked. He was well aware of Harvey's parental issues, and that learning the truth of what happened that morning wasn't something to be taken lightly.

That morning.

Eight-year-old Harvey woke up earlier than usual. He crept out of his room and toward the stairs, hoping he wouldn't wake up his parents in his quest to watch Saturday morning cartoons. He reached the top of the staircase and realized that his mom and dad were already up.

"I won't stop you, Lilith," his dad said, voice cold and even, "but don't come crawling back to me, either. Take Harvey and go."

Harvey's mom laughed bitterly. "After all you've put me through, you expect me to take him with me? He's your problem now, Alex."

Harvey was confused. What were his parents talking about? This wasn't like one of their usual fights, with yelling and bad words.

There was a brief moment of silence from Harvey's dad. Harvey wanted to look around the corner to catch a glimpse of them, but he was afraid of what they might do if they knew he was listening in.

"Alright, Lilith," Harvey's dad said, "I'll take him. If he's mine."

"Oh, don't you start that again!" Harvey's mom protested, voice rising in pitch. "Whose else could he be? He's just like you! You should hear what they say at the parent teacher conferences at his school!"

Harvey kept staring at the book. "I don't know."

"Should I leave?" Erik asked, standing.

"No," Harvey said quickly, looking up with wide, terrified eyes.

"Do you know what you're going to do with it, then?" Erik asked, sitting back down on the protesting couch, leaning back.

"I might just look at it for another few minutes," Harvey said dryly, turning the diary over in his hands a few times. He sighed. This would be less of a problem if his mother was still alive: having died in a car accident a couple months after leaving him with his father, what was contained in this diary was it. He couldn't read it and call to make up for anything: these were thoughts she took to her grave.

"And after that?" Erik asked, unamused by the sarcasm.

Harvey turned the book over in his hands. "Well, I guess I'll have to figure out if I want to know what's in there or not."

"Don't forget that you wanted to have a child, Lilith," Harvey's dad said, voice even. "We agreed at the beginning of this relationship that you would be in charge of any children you had. That included if we chose to separate."

Harvey didn't understand what his dad meant. Separate? Was his mom going to leave? Was that it? But separating wasn't like divorce, right? He had a friend named Johnny in school whose parents were divorced, and he had to go back and forth between houses every weekend. But separating wasn't divorcing, right? Separating wasn't forever.

"I wouldn't have agreed to that if I knew he'd be like you!" Harvey's mom said, sounding flustered. Harvey didn't get what was wrong with being like his dad. His dad was in movies, and had a cool accent. Sometimes he was even on magazine covers with pretty girls and shiny cars. Sure, he said mean stuff to Harvey's mom sometimes, but he would always take her out for dinner at a fancy restaurant to make it better.

"But you did make the agreement. If you want to leave, you're taking your son."

"He's just as much your son as he is mine! Don't put this on me!"

"Harvey? You okay?"

Harvey blinked hard, shaking his head quickly. "Oh, no, it's... nothing."

Erik shifted on the couch. "You sure you don't want me to go? It's okay if you need to be alone."

Harvey normally didn't like to have company when he was sorting through things, but now was different. "No, I... I shouldn't be alone now."

"Alright," Erik said, forcing a smile, "but don't try to get rid of me, because it's not going to happen." Erik thought for a moment. "Okay, maybe this'll help: what is the worst thing that could come of you reading the diary?"

Harvey rolled his eyes. "I find out neither of my parents wanted me." Not that he didn't already suspect this: it's the confirmation that would hurt the most.

"And the best?"

Harvey was silent, an odd look crossing his face. He hadn't put much thought into that possibility. "Um, I guess my mother... didn't want to leave me? That what she said that morning--"

"Look, I'm going, Alex, and you can't stop me!" Harvey was confused: if his mom was leaving, why didn't she want him to come with her? Did he mess up? He knew his dad sometimes didn't want to be around him, but his mom was always nice. Had he done something to make her not like him anymore? Something he couldn't make better?

"Fine," Harvey's dad said, composure starting to fracture for the first time in the argument, "go ahead and leave. See if I care. Good luck in the real world, Lilith."

"- wasn't what she really felt?"

"And?" Erik asked.

"And what?" Harvey replied, getting sick of figuring all of this out himself. He'd turned to Erik for answers, not a game of Twenty Questions.

"Is it worth it?" Harvey remained quiet, so Erik elaborated, "Would finding out that your mother wanted you to go with her outweigh finding out for sure that she didn't?"

"I-" Harvey said, turning back to the diary and slumping his shoulders. He was silent. "I don't know."

Erik sighed. "Well, looks like we'll be here a while." He stood up, yawn-

ing. "Hold on a sec, I'm going to get something to drink." Erik walked quickly through the door.

Again, Harvey was left staring at the book. It mocked him with its worn leather cover. God, this was so typical. Just when everything looked like it was going right, his bastard father decided to send this his way. Harvey couldn't believe that he used to admire this guy. Then again, he was just a kid back then: all kids revere their fathers.

This string of thoughts gave Harvey pause. Why did his father send him the diary, anyway? They weren't on good terms with each other, that much was certain, so was this supposed to be some petty act of revenge? Or maybe a gesture of peace? It would be out of character for the guy, but weirder things have happened.

He stood and walked over to the garbage can near the sofa. He crouched down and gently removed the crumpled piece of paper at the top of the pile. He'd thrown out the note that had been sent with the book after reading the words "mother's diary", assuming his father was just being an asshole, as usual. Now he smoothed the paper, leaning against the wall as he read.

Harvey,

I was cleaning out the attic and found this. It's your mother's diary. I have no use for it, so you may as well have it. I'll be filming in England on the fifteenth, and I'm sure the post won't come before then.

Sincerely, Alex

Harvey looked up from the note. Well, that didn't explain anything, except that his father wasn't going to be around to bother him for another couple of months. He crushed the letter again and tossed it over his shoulder.

His attention then returned to the book, and he began to really consider Erik's question. Which would be worse: confirming his suspicions that neither parent liked him or missing out on a diary entry that might explain everything? What if the argument he'd heard was all a ruse? Maybe his mother hadn't really wanted to leave him, but she thought that expressing interest in custody would only make things worse. After all, his father would have won, anyway: she was a stay-at-home mom, while he was a famous actor. He had the lawyers and the time to make sure he always got exactly what he wanted.

But, still, there was the possibility that the diary would be full of growing contempt toward Harvey. As far as he knew, his parents' marriage had begun happily enough, but had spiraled into hatred once his mother realized what kind of person his father really was. If she thought that Harvey was

just like his dad...

Then again, how could that be? He'd been eight years old: you can't blame an eight year old for acting kind of shitty, it's practically in their nature. Why, he could even recall the night before everything happened, his mother had come into his room...

"You okay, sweetie?" Harvey's mom asked, sitting at the edge of the blue-blanketed bed. "Did you have a bad dream?" He nodded.

"Dinosaurs were attacking," he said, snuggling further under the covers. His alarm clock read 11:30 p.m.

His mom tsked. "I'll have to talk to your father about letting you watch *The Lost World* right before bedtime. What can I do to help you get to sleep?"

"Just stay here for a minute, okay?"

His mom smiled and nodded. "Of course, Harvey." He closed his eyes and she started singing softly:

You are my sunshine

My only sunshine...

If he remembered it correctly, it didn't sound like his mother disliked him. Maybe what she'd said was in the heat of the moment, or she knew that his father's money would provide him a better life than she ever could, even with all the love in the world. After all, her opinion of him couldn't change overnight, right? Although, at the same time, his father was a manipulative bastard: maybe he'd begun to rub off on her and that maternal kindness was just an act.

Harvey looked down at the book miserably. This was starting to feel like more trouble than it was worth.

Erik took this opportunity to walk back into the room, clutching a pair of sodas. "Hey. Decide yet?" He tossed one of the cans to his roommate and flopped onto the couch.

This was Harvey's last chance to change his decision. Last chance to back out.

He took a deep breath and nodded. "Yeah, I think I have."

Harvey opened the book.

Caitie John



Junior

Major: English

Minor: Writing

Having studied at NYU prior to UofM, I am currently a proud Wolverine, just like my parents. I was born in Michigan, but grew up in both the United States and Germany, and have found that the excess of culture in my life has allowed me to write without personal boundaries. I write in a fresh and somewhat cynical voice and want my writing to convey the truly honest, and humorous, insights of life. I will always be indebted to my parents for supporting my passion

New York, I Love You

Betsy died on a Wednesday. In October actually, which is such a shame since there's nothing like New York in the fall. It was 8:35 pm and she was all alone. And dead. Betsy was alone and dead at 8:35 pm on a Wednesday in October in New York. What a way to go.

...

I wake up at 8:46 am to the sound of my roommate masturbating ferociously. It was really the grunting of a mustasheoed porno stud that did it, but the sound of a man pleasuring himself in one of your old tube socks will really seal the deal. Some girls might gasp and curse and rain shame upon such a man for being so vulgar in the presence of a lady. I am not a lady. Peter continues to masturbate.

I feel alert, sharp. I am the edge of a brand new knife that kids sell door to door. I am cheddar. I have a midterm at eleven in nutrition and dietetics and I cannot afford to feel battered. Some kids come to NYU to follow in the steps of the Coppolas and Jonzes and Gagas, filming and singing and dancing their way into disparity and student debt. I prefer to spiral down in the course of battling childhood obesity and whatnot, simultaneously feeding my undernourished body and mind. Peter sings and dances. And masturbates.

I can feel the grimy sludge on my teeth as I come to. I like to roll my tongue over it a while before brushing, licking the gelatinous build up, suckling the dried spit for just one instant. I decide it is time to brush my teeth. Peter already finished so it is not awkward when I straddle over his bed to squeak in the bathroom. I have a one bedroom with a full bath and murphey kitchen and one horny roommate, with a total of 600+ square feet. My rent is 1675 a month. The peeling moldings along the ceiling haunt my insomniatic dreams and the bodies of cockroaches accentuate the fir flooring. At least it retains it's rustic charm.

After I brush my teeth I turn on the shower and strip off my shirt. I stopped wearing panties three years ago. I'm not trying to be sexy, I just would rather pay someone to make me coffee than do all that extra laundry. The shower steam clouds the mirror just as I finish counting my ribs and I step inside. I buzzed off my Barbie hair with Peter on a whim two months ago, so showers are really based on how much landscaping I want to do. Today I just shave my armpits. The only one seeing my vagina right now is Peter, and no amount of scaping will make him want it. I just shave my armpits.

I get out of the shower and patter off my sickly bones. Taped to the brick wall of the bathroom is the wilting page of vogue I tore out last Thursday. There I am, not on the cover I mean, but If you look real close on page 76 at the Marc Jacobs runway snippet, you can see Johanna walking and my right arm and left leg behind her. My first big break. I bought two copies and sent one to my mother. It was the only picture framed of me in her house. Fuck yeah, I've made it.

I pull on my jeans, and yes, one leg at a time like everyone else; but with them zipped up, my twenty-three inch waist and nearly four foot legs cost an average of 200 dollars more than anyone else's. I'm precious. I pull on my cashmere sweater, riddled with moth holes and stains. It's cool to look poor, as long as you're not actually poor; but I spent all my bones on these jeans, and now I am poor. Oh, what tragic irony!

I look at my phone to gauge my popularity. For a successful model of Vogue status, I get a lot more texts from my dad than...anyone else. But alas! Today is different! Nine missed calls from...Sylvia. My nurse, dietician, and self-appointed therapist. The last time she called this much was to tell me my left kidney was septic and I should go to the nearest emergency room for emergency surgery since it was an emergency. Fuck.

...

I look really great in blue plaid, and the ties in the back really accentuate my spine. I'm joking. No one looks good in a hospital gown. It's 11:45 am and I emailed professor G. From my iPhone, but what could I say? Hey Professor, I was called to the hospital because apparently my kidneys have gone to shit and my heart is mush, so could I take my midterm tomorrow instead? Thanks. That's what I say.

Sylvia is the worst at breaking news, I mean she's paid to handle sixty percent of my problems, so please do not pander, bitch. She always wants to talk about my dreams, as if me dreaming about Easter Island has anything to do with my verge on organ failure. The disorder program assigned Sylvia to be my personal nurse. She draws my blood, scans my brain, and weighs me every other day, but it is her prerogative to break all the news and mend my heart. Upon my nearly fatal report, courtesy of the lovely Sylvia, Peter bucked up and walked me the three miles to the university hospital. Peter spent all his spare ambulance allowance on porn. I spent mine on jeans. At least it's October.

Laying in the ER in New York is a lot like watching Cops. Homeboy next to me got cuffed to his trundle bed when he tried to eat twelve cotton swabs. A girl down the row is being questioned on her lover's drug operation. Give me some taser action and a few xanax and call me entertained.

I sit in my bed for hours waiting for the plan of action. All I get is an old homely nurse to weigh me and another to take my blood. A third approaches and asks me what medication I take, to which I ask what medication don't I take. She doesn't laugh and I tell her my cocktail. 800 mg Neurontin three times daily, 60 mg Celexa once in the morning and 54 mg Concerta every five and a half hours. She says I must be really messed up. No, I tell her, I'm really fucked up. She doesn't laugh. She asks me how many cigarettes I smoke a day, am a sexually active, do I engage in recreational drugs. Five (plus 8). Yes. No. Unless she counts the blow from Monday's student government meeting, but that shouldn't still show in my urine.

Nurse Three jabs my picc line in and squirts the potassium up my arm. She tells me I don't eat enough potassium. She tells me my electrolytes are unforgivably low. She tells me I don't eat enough. I could tell her that even without her half-ass degree. I don't tell her that, she doesn't seem to be the humorous type. She leaves me to wait for a real doctor.

I hear a wailing cry of my name, a voice I am intimate with. It is my mother. Running towards me. Sylvia must have called her. My mother is a pseudo-saint with narcissistic tendencies and a flair for adultery. I told my mother she was a whore last time I was home. I told her I hated her. And now here she is to save the day again, flying five hours from Michigan on the first flight out, about to fix the world with righteousness and... and... thank

you Sylvia.

I haven't laid with my mom in years, it's been two since the last snuggle in a hospital bed. I forgot the sweet musky smell of her perfume, dabbed only on her collar bones. I forgot how at home it feels to lie my head against her breast, breathing in rhythm to her heart beat. I forgot that I was really a brunette, like her; the loose strands of her ponytail dusting my cheeks. She runs her manicured nails up and down my fuzzy scalp and hums " You are my sunshine" in my ear. I cry. And for once someone is there to wipe my puffy eyes dry and sooth my pretty pink heart. I'm sorry Mama. I've missed you Mama.

Unaware of our Kodiak moment, the potassium burns. It scorches my vein, bruises my muscle. I cannot lift my arm in protest such heinous pain! Thus, as a beaten rebel, I submit. My heart nearly pummels out of my chest as I hear the the monitors sound their alarm. I fade out just in time to see the oxygen mask cup my face and my mother being pulled away from my side, still clutching my limp hand. Please come back Mama. Fuck.

...

Curled, knees to nose, I lay in the intensive unit of the psych ward. Too many crazy pills for the ER. Too sickly for the common room, fit with one TV and four bipolars. Even with the hordes of fresh potassium coursing through my veins, my heart is giving out. The real doctor said so. Remember to eat your bananas kids!

I never considered myself a has-been, but I'm considering becoming one. All the nostalgic perks really peak my interests. My new name will be That Girl. That Girl who went to NYU and had a bangin' bod (minus the hips and ass and tits) and was a supermodel. That girl who had it all, met Jay-Z and lived next to the drummer from Wilco. That Girl who had everything, and everyone, and gave it all away. For one moment of control. That Girl, in New York, the one pool where she'd happily drown. At least being a has-been would mean you ever really were something. Fuck it, I'll take it.

My roommate of an hour seems nice, but in that way you want to say she's a fucking psycho but still want to remain politically correct. She seems nice, like that. She even offered to let me help her chip away at the window for a shard of glass to stab our necks with. I said no thank you, like that.

Barely alive, skin leached with electrodes and bounded by oxygen tubes, I lie here. And wait. I lie here and wait for God to take my pretty pink heart up to heaven. I haven't been a Christian since I was four, and even then I was really more into the songs. I decide if I'm going to accept Jesus, our Christ and Savior, into my heart and cleanse my soul of this city's grimy sins now would be a Hell of a time to do so. Bam. I am officially a Child of God.

In my new found-again religious sanctity I declare to save the children

of Africa and liberate the prostitutes of the Russian sex slave trade and cure childhood obesity in the great US of A. They tell me I won't live out the week so I can declare my bony ass and it won't make a difference, I'll just have a more fanciful obituary. My mother would prefer it so. She had to check in to the Astoria down 32nd when visiting hours were up, so with my secretary absent, I write all my new life goals on a tissue with the stick of liner I keep in my fall jacket. Praise God Almighty it is October.

I literally and figuratively don't have the heart to call Dad, he should call me. My mother has surely updated him on his baby girl and I know he would have come instead of Courtney but he has this high-paying and awfully stressful job that wouldn't allow him to just pick up and fly cross country to be with his only and loving daughter on her death bed and I know he wants to call me but I'm sure he just doesn't have service and he's trying everything, running payphone to payphone trying to call. Yes. That sounds about right. And I know I just declared my dying act to be bringing clean water to the distended kids of Mali, but all I really want to do before I die in this city of soon to be has-beens is talk to my dad. I love you Daddy.

I start to get worked up and feel that lump in my chest you get when you finally tell the truth to yourself and it hurts so good. Oh wait, no, that's my heart palpitating. Those tugged heart strings are actually my valves constricting and the sweet mania of my brain is really just slight suffocation. I am such a goof! The light around my halo fades as I am blissfully swept into that comfortable black claustrophobia. I hear Father coo and I smile as my eyes flutter shut. Fuck yeah.

...

Betsy died at 8:35 pm on a Wednesday in October in New York. She was a beautiful girl and a Hell of a psychotic roommate. But she wasn't alone, not really. I was there, all the doctors were there and few nurses; but all eyes and hands and hearts were on me and my emergency tracheotomy. It's why no one noticed her start to lunge for the scalpel and slit her own throat. Bitch. They had to get me a whole new scalpel. But it's not politically correct to speak ill of the dead, so I guess I was really fond of her, you know, like that. But she wasn't alone, not really. I was right there on the edge with her. On that Wednesday night. In New York. The one pool where we'd happily drown.

Bennet Johnson



Junior

Majors: English and History

Whenever I go into a bookstore I make it a point to hide copies of Snooki's novel behind the Twilight series. I think "sonder" needs to become a real word. If time travel is ever invented there will be a rousing debate in my brain between having a drink with Emily Dickinson, or seeing Jimi Hendrix perform at Woodstock.

Huron with Gabe

So you'd never hit another guy?

No.

But he put hands on my mom.

(Silence)

An ex-boyfriend.

Tried to rough her bad.

I knew it cause I heard him swearing.

Piece of shit was his favorite.

I went to the kitchen.

Got ready.

He rumbled in.

Told me if I was gunna do it, to do it.

He chuckled.

Tried to slap me.

So I stuck him.

Looked at it for a minute.
Then he took it out.
Wiped it off.
Off on his jeans.
He rumored.
That didn't hurt.
But I knew it hurt.
I knew it.

That's why I want to go live with my dad, you know?

Yeah.

My mom is always frustrated.

(Silence)

Sometimes I want her to not be frustrated.

Like back when we lived in Virginia.

Before my dad's hell happened.

I ask her for it to maybe end.

When?

She tells me,

Gabe, you damn well know when.

I try to remember that it's not me.

Or her.

It's just where we both are.

Right now.

We're both here.

Game of house in quicksand.

But you know where the tree roots are.

You just can't reach.

Huron with Chris

That part in the river
where the bend goes under an old
rusty set of train tracks.

You can't listen pretend
answer.

Where there's a long straight:
the water becomes a deep green and when
the sun gets covered up a putrid purple.

Time to hear.

Paddles sweet yellow.

Canoe a tonguing silver.

Bolts in the bottom worn brown.
Nodding from the current's basement
slept scattered empties.
Labatt.
Pabst.
Leftovers from scavengers.

Brain chases reverie.
Speak so he knows anyone
heard.
High-schoolers who thought
they might get laid.
Try not to look direct.
Rebellious collegiate
who tried to philosophize
grandiose.
Twenty-somethings reliving
that which they never were.
Thirty-somethings just
bored of it already.
Grownups who wanted
to get high one last time.
Veterans with winking
scars like long lost helicopters.
All diplomats for the sake of toxins.
With their feet stampering.
Waterfall words.
Runaways, vagabonds, derivations of
the fires left unlit.
Then their numbers
got picked.
And playwright called them back in
for dinner.

Quellies

Let me be
guttural for
you.

Yes you
the one with
right eye

tad bigger than
left.

Ellie quotes
by all
Sirens.

Dirt and mist
portrait:

Bomb Pops
in air
slip n' slide
smile curls.

Peel back
raven avalanche.
I need to
see those
fucking eyebrows.

Let Lilly
petals
flutter.

Caress
tentacle tongue
cherry teeth
stained.

Pewter
blue
throat.

I can't do
anymore.

Don't wait
pour it out
embalm me
take a sip
smirk to
cause a coup.

Theorize yours
truly.

Make it an angel's
mistress.
Like diving
into a pool
I want to
fall
beneath.

Make it stutter.
A hope of
crystalizing convulsions.

Learn a leggy name.

I'd have really
tried
(honest)
if you
jumped.

Room Ten-O-Nine

"Oh, couldn't see to get a line on you, my sweet honey love."
-Mick Jagger

Just stretch out here.
There's a great chance
we'll see some

enabling, altruism, pathological lies,
sacredness, drug dependency, and his
ravenous urgency to hear Duke Ellington,
Live at Newport 1941, side B.

But the bed looks like Janis Joplin's hair
and smells like Abbey's perfume.
We should make a circle on the floor.
This feels like kindergarten.
I adore all the knick-knacks.

See that figurine.
Little boy holding the lamb.
Its Jean's.
They're porcelain giggling.
Scrape open the drawers beneath them.
We're going to need the Mag-Light.
Sorry, I just hate opening the mail.

Yellow shines on
Emiline's future hammy down camera,
Mark's rocks from Kentucky,
Susan's reading lamp,
Robert's Swiss army knife,
and all of the blank paper adjacent to full pens.
I guess we're saving our ink for another rainy day.
The pedestals supporting the peeling oak slink into the carpet.
If only it was all utterly fascinating.

We never read enough.
These shelves have too many friends.
Dumping grounds of the static—atomic—snipe hunt.
They're all real, though.
I promise.
Just wipe them off and give a little crack.
Leave me something I've always meant to getting around to but never have.

I'm terribly apologetic,
I forgot that you'd be hungry.
So why don't we make pretend while the Chinese comes
and play War.
Halfway house?
How about doctor?
School?

Whatever you want we're splendid with.
Because this is just a room with
four walls and a crooked shitty door
you have to "umph" into to
close.
There isn't any lock.

So why not
stretch out here?
There's a great chance that if
we listen closely
to the music
you'll hear your favorite
song.

Ariel Kaplowitz



Junior

Major: Creative Writing

Minor: Literature and American Culture

Ariel is passionate about writing and social justice, and has tried to use her time at college to figure out a way to combine the two. She has facilitated dialogues with the program in Intergroup Relations, taught a classroom for six weeks in Ecuador, and climbed to the top of Mount Washington through the New England Literature Program. As a double major in American Culture and Creative Writing, Ariel hopes to someday use her writing to create positive social change.

danny

1.

danny is the one with the lungs.

we knew the second he was born: this

kid would make some noise. he

started talking earlier than most kids;

his first word was my name. he had brown darting eyes

and pink orbs for cheeks. danny made noise with every part of his body.

at the age of three, he memorized the words

to "American Pie" and howled it, stomping along to the rhythm.

danny wore cymbals on his shoes.

his tantrums were thunderstorms. his laughter was symphonies.

he couldn't carry a tune. he outsmarted every ghost in our house.

they left him alone, even as the rest of us huddled and
 jumped at the shadows. danny sang over them.
 he held our hands when we were afraid.
 he snuggled next to any warm skin.
 he loved bodies. when we went to
 the pool in summer, he would go up to strangers
 and pinch flabs of their stomachs, just
 to fill the space between his fingers with
 the reality of another person's flesh.

2.

danny is thirteen. at any moment, he might sprout
 like a geyser into the world, a tall man with a creaky voice and
 stubble on his round cheeks. the doctor predicts he'll be
 over six feet. danny will start kissing people and
 having secrets. he will start holding back his bellow and squeal, his
 echo, his glitter. I want to keep in a jar all the danny i know, the sweet
 squishy kid who pins down the dinnertable with his voice –
 I want danny to always stay danny, whose soul clicks and snaps like
 a typewriter on a glass kitchen table –
 I want to preserve the night we played monopoly and danny hollered
 and farted and roared, when danny thought my
 jokes were funny and touched my knee, when
 danny, losing, still tried to make me a deal.
 This is how I want to remember my danny, before he decides
 to lose weight, turn in, tame down. I want to remember
 this cinnamon freckle boy, this everything-bagel kid. Too late,
 I realize that I'd tear the world to shreds to keep
 danny exactly like this, a glowing little sun. Too late, I realize
 that everything about danny has been a gallop and a feast,
 and that I am lucky to have been running along.

Night in Paris

Years from now, when I am grown, I will
 think back to this night: black kitchen
 table, candy wrappers strewn, rumbling city,
 the four of us gripping
 the hands we were dealt. We have
 rarely played cards before:
 age difference making us strangers,
 though I recognize my mother's round cheeks on each face,
 my grandfather's eyes in my sister's.

Tonight, we laugh so hard my
father wakes up to hush, and we roll
our eyes behind his back.
One brother leans against my shin.
My sister whispers, "can we play again? it's so much - "
and "fun" isn't the word
for these glimmering moments, this sudden
awareness of pounding hearts,
fellow soldiers in a wobbly life.
Until now, our twenty-year job has been:
argue, complain, fight. Not laugh, not lean on each other's shins,
and not love,
at least, not mention love, our implicit and hidden beast.
It's been there all along, beating for
those brimming round faces who
shaped my bones & dreams & fingernails.
I want to say, then, how this night feels like apples and honey,
but when I open my mouth,
my old line, "Not tonight, it's too late" – slips out.
I wish I could suck those words back into my lungs,
and say yes, of course, another round, &
I love you & you alone know me truly,
but I falter in my human way
as life careens swiftly forward and
we become grownups and nights like
these are only silky memories.

Aging

My grandma has grown to hate spicy food, but
is too stubborn to admit it. Last night,
she made the reservation at the Indian restaurant
but could not eat a bite. We said to the
waiter mild mild but grandma
w/ her thinning blonde hair could
not withstand the slightest tinge & silently
picked at her mild food & sweat. It was
the first time I'd seen her sweat in my life, b/c
she was always turtle slow and sat in
lawnchairs when we danced.
Her forehead glistened w/ sweat
and her upper lip while the
rest of us chomped away, and

she wiped it w/ a white napkin from
 her back pocket and apologized. I cringed
 beside her, not wanting waiter to notice
 her shining face, her wilting tastebuds, her
 wrinkled skin and how her white fingers looked
 so heavy and frail, hoping no one
 would see how our cheeks sag in the same way, how we
 both hold our cups with just four fingers, pinkies dangling,
 how this hunching woman, (who first
 left home, fell in love, went to college,
 refused to sit down, refused to be quiet,
 worked and worked & said
 let me have it all, lost my grandpa w/ his blue eyes,
 picked up pieces, taught
 me to question, to laugh, to
 square my shoulders, to wake up from screaming
 dreams & say
 no I know I am smart enough)
 is my grandmother –
 I was ashamed of the sweat that trickled into
 wispy hair behind fleshy ears &
 did not once think of the glaring strength it takes
 to grow old & pale & soft, to sit & burn
 silently at a dinnertable,
 to love and love a granddaughter
 despite my frozen ugliness, despite
 the fact that I sat next to her and
 did not speak, despite the fact that I am
 so afraid of death and age that I shrink
 away from the one who loves me most.

world on fire

tonight, the whole
 damn world tastes like raw onions. it's
 the kind of night where i swear to god and
 everyone that i will move out of michigan as
 soon as i graduate, and let lies
 waft out of the pores of my skin. my roommates
 call me poison and i hiss, pleased. tonight, i
 am a fire hazard. i am the flickering socket that smokes, i
 am the shivering question that lurks, i
 am the tall man in the pink bathrobe who waits outside the door, i

have enough blood in me to cover the surface of the moon, i
have a peach pit for a heart, i
am halfway through my second book of poetry & i
am so sure of what to say in dialogue, i never have to think
of backup questions.
starting tomorrow, i can guarantee you that
i wont see the sun for another eight months, but the scary part
is that now i learned why we lock our doors.
tonight, i will
lie in bed awake
& awake & awake, and
i'll boil and
i'll peel
off the skin & bones & strings and you
will walk through the door &
you will gaze and laugh and squint
and you will make everything
green turn to ice.

Sarah Kimmel



Junior

Majors: English and Art History

Sarah Kimmel is a sophomore at the University of Michigan studying English and History of Art. She is a Michigan native, living in her hometown of Lansing for 18 years before coming to U of M. She hopes to become an author one day."

A New Kind of Horror

"So, what happened next?" Jamie asked, her eyes on me in the passenger seat. I turned up the heat in the car, despite it being the middle of June, and peered out the rain-soaked windshield. Lightning crashed on top of us and I squeaked in terror. "So he took me upstairs and we fucked. That was it—no phone call, no thank you. He kicked me out after," I said to her, rejection filling my voice. I hated him. She shook her head and turned up the speed of her windshield wipers, peering out. "I can't honestly believe that. How fucked up do you have to be to just use a person like that?" she asked. I shook my head and shrugged. Another crash of lightning, this time closer, struck, and I heard an odd creaking noise. We were in the middle of the woods, driving to our friend Mark's grandparent's house to house-sit for the next month. The place was supposed to be one of those really cool, older style colonial mansions—an old plantation in the middle of B.F.E.

"Holy shit. HOLY SHIT," Jamie screamed and slammed her feet on the brakes. I looked up and saw it—a massive pine tree was falling in front of us. I screamed and clutched the handle on the top of the passenger side door

and felt the impact before I heard it. The force was intense and I felt inertia push me to the side, causing me to hit my head on the window with a dull thud. I felt a second impact before I lost consciousness, blindly guessing that we had hit Mark and Hop in front of us.

Voices, I heard voices. I tried to open my eyes but found them stuck shut, with what? I must have been crying before I passed out, I realized, and raised my hands to my face. It was wet, and when I pried my eyes open, I saw blood, gooey blood, on my fingertips. I had hit my head, too, it seemed. Next to me, Jamie was sobbing on her steering wheel, muttering something about not seeing a tree in time. "We hit a tree?" I asked her, and she nodded. She wasn't bleeding, but a grotesque black bruise was appearing on her collar bone and in the hollow of her neck. I guessed that she had hit it on the steering wheel.

There was a knock on the window and I jumped in surprise. Mark's face shown between the beads of water on the glass, his fist taking on a red shade in the shadow of my blood. He opened the door cautiously and reached in, unbuckling my seatbelt and pulling me out. I staggered against him and eventually found my footing. It was pouring out, and I was already soaked, my tee shirt and white shorts see-through in the rain. "We have to get out of this—" he yelled, but was cut off by another crash of thunder. The dirt road that we had been on was now one giant mud slick, and I began to fear the rising water at our feet. The river was not too far from here and it was obviously flooding the shallow valley we had been driving through.

He grabbed my elbow and dragged me past the front of the smashed car and over the tree, making me cut myself on the wicked branches along the way. With each crash of thunder my skull seemed to shrink, squeezing my brain until I was sure that the blood was being pushed out, not freely falling. Next to me were a hysterical Jamie and an angry Hop. We climbed through the slush of mud and debris slowly uphill into the forest where our cars were leading us not fifteen minutes ago. After what seemed like hours, we stumbled across a driveway, gated with iron and a thick, rusted chain. Mark kicked the gate and, oddly enough, the chain broke, revealing yet another long road. The gate had read "C.G." at some point, but it was now some sort of sick distortion of initials with various tree branches and spiders nesting in it. It was almost like the gate wanted to open for us, like someone was finally on our side in all of this mess.

I realized, as we approached a massive mansion, that this was straight out of some scary B-movie, and I would naturally be the first to die since I was the most promiscuous. Blond hair and big breasts, I dominated the playing field like a praying mantis during mating season. I devoured men like grapes and apples, spitting the seeds onto the forest floor. Shaking off the anger I felt for my earlier conversation with Jamie, I mounted the stairs to the fortress first, peering into its windows fearlessly. If I was going to die, I

was at least going to do it right.

A hand caught my shoulder and I felt Jamie's breath on my neck as she peered in as well. There weren't any lights on, and all of the furniture was covered in sheets of white. I snorted—someone was trying pretty hard to keep Scooby and the Gang out. Hop tried the door knob to no avail, and then kicked in a window, just like that. I was furious—it was one thing to make our stay discrete, but now he was blatantly inviting in the cops. "What the fuck are you doing, Hop?! Do you know how much this is going to cost to replace? IT'S ORIGINAL STAINED GLASS," I screeched and punched his shoulder. He shrugged and ducked inside, miraculously not cutting himself. The door swung open and we all hurried inside, me glaring angrily at Hop. "I'm sorry, okay? We needed to get in. Would you have rather died of hypothermia out there? It can't be more than 30 degrees!" He pulled out a joint and lit it up, passing it to me in apology. I glared at him but took a hit anyway. My head throbbing, I coughed on the inhale and passed it back.

Jamie was exploring the staircases that bordered the left and right sides of the entrance. They seemed to be made out of wood, and from the way that they were collapsing in on themselves, it looked like they had been rotted for quite some time. Mark, catching sight of Jamie's precarious position, jogged over to her in a courtly manner. I looked at Hop and he gave me a sideways glance of annoyance. I cocked my eyebrow and he smiled at me, high as a kite, and passed me the joint. I coughed, and he said, "Whoa there partner. Take it easy," with a wink.

Suddenly, I heard the all-too familiar sound of wood cracking just in time to see Jamie fall through the stairs that she had been bravely, scratch that, stupidly, testing. She squealed in terror as she disappeared from view, and Mark dived through the broken boards. There was a dull "umph" as he hit the bottom of the floor beneath the staircase, and then a "Holy shit!" from Jamie. There was an odd way that her voice echoed from beneath the stairs, and I ran over. I couldn't see them through the dust and darkness. "Shit, Hop, go find something to get them out. A ladder, anything," I said to him, peering down through the hole. Hop disappeared to my left into the room with all of the sheets, and I blinked black dots from my vision. "Jen, go get yourself cleaned up. The last thing we need is for us to be stuck down here and for you to pass out," Mark called up. I nodded at them and ducked around the stairway and into a hallway leading opposite the door.

I jogged into the darkness, digging my cell phone out of my pocket and regretting instantly my decision to not download the flashlight app when there was wifi available. Instead, I clicked open the camera and used the flash on the camera to light my way. Flash. A painting to my left of a woman in turn-of-the-century garb—a black high-necked button down and a gigantic grey bustle. Flash. A painting to my right of a man in a long black coat, half on, half off, staring directly at me. Flash. A painting to my left of two chil-

dren, oddly resembling the Grady twins. Flash. A painting to my right, a still life of corpses that I realized resembled one from my Art History course back home. Flash. A statue, directly in front of me, of...wait, is that the creature from the Black Lagoon? It stood about seven feet high and whatever it was, scared the living shit out of me. I flashed my camera frantically, stepping around the thing, and continued into another room, looking back over my shoulder to make sure that it wasn't moving.

I stepped across the threshold of the hallway into a large...dining room? I quickly crossed the marble floor to what looked like a wall of curtains. I tugged at them but they wouldn't open, and I let out a frustrated cry. "Stupid fucking old house, creepy ass dining room...Mother fucker!" I yelled when my hand went through the opening and punched something resembling a thorn. I checked the time on my phone. 12:39—Hop should be back in a few minutes with a ladder. I walked along the wall of curtains until I reached the far end of the room, and found a heavy cord with a gigantic tassel at the end. I yanked the cord, but it wouldn't budge. Placing one foot on the wall, I pushed off, the tassel in my hands, and opened what must be the world's oldest drapes, falling on my ass from the force of my thrust.

Behind the curtain were rows and rows of arching windows, like something out of the ballroom scene from *Beauty and the Beast*. The glass was foggy with dirt from the outside, but the rain had cleared several large streaks of normal-looking window which I pressed my nose to. Lightning flashed and I made out a dilapidated garden, wildly overgrown with ivy and untamed rosebushes. Large hedges blocked off my view to the left, but I could see the jumbled outline of a large lily-pond in the center of the garden. In the center of the pond stood a giant weeping willow tree, on some sort of island in the pond. Creepy, I thought, and turned around, wondering if that's where the statue lived when it wasn't on scare-duty.

When I turned around, I came face to face with Hop, letting out a squeak of surprise. He smiled mischievously at me, aiming a flashlight in my eyes. For a moment, I was blinded, seeing double of everything. Lightning lit up the room and I saw two tables still set with china and candles in the center of the room. Past that, I noticed an empty hallway, the one that I had come down earlier, and let out a muddle cry and pressed my back as far into the window as humanly possible. "It's not there, it's not there. Hop, did you see a statue when you came in here?" I asked frantically, blinking to clear my vision as fast as I could. He cocked his head and raised an eyebrow. "What the hell are you talking about? We need to go get Mark and Jamie, come on." "No, Hop, you don't understand. It was right there and now it's not." He forcibly grabbed my elbow and began dragging me across the room toward the hallway. "Hop, stop. You don't understand. You're hurting me!" I said, clawing at his hand. "I'm sick of this bullshit, Jen. First, you yell at me for getting us in here, and then you send me off to find a fucking ladder, in this place? Now you're giving me shit about some fucking statue that you think

you saw? What's next, my performance in bed?" He pulled me toward the hallway and I reluctantly allowed it, grabbing his arm like it was a fucking life boat and I was stuck on the Titanic.

"Jamie! Mark?" he shouted when we got to the entrance hall. We walked over to the hole in the stairs and Hop shone the flashlight down. It looked deeper than it should be, much deeper, and I could only make out footprints in the dust. "We have to go down and get them," I said in my most definite tone. I looked around me in search of a ladder, although really, where the fuck would I have gotten one? Hop disappeared into the dark hallway one more time, leaving me alone by the hole. I counted the breaths I took in. One. Thunder. Two. Thunder. Three. Thunder. Four. Thunder. Five. FUCK. I heard a low moan coming from the hole in the floor, so I peered in, using the flashlight to take a look around. "Jen? Jenny, help me! I—I don't know what's going on. Someone just took Mark and—" she was cut off by a sob and curled up below the light in a ball. "Fuck. Okay. Um. You probably hit your head on the fall down, Jamie. No one took Mark. Hop is looking for a way to get down to you. Do you see anything? A door or rope or anything?" I asked. She lifted her head from her hands and looked around, using her cell phone to light the room. "I don't see anything, Jen! It's too dark." Fuck. I leaned precariously over the hole and called out Hop's name. I felt two hands grasp my waist and I instantly turned into my big-busted alter ego. Fearing the swamp monster, I punched blindly and let out a sound only familiar to whales in mating season. I was pulled onto my back, falling on top of a soft body, and saw the faces of Jamie and Mark standing over me, motioning for me to be quiet. Confused, I rolled off of Hop, not the creature, and let them drag me cautiously to the other staircase, which we mounted as softly as possible. "What the FUCK is going on? How're you up here? I just saw you!" I whispered. "That thing down there? It's not Jamie. We don't know what it is, but it woke up when we fell," Mark said in a hushed voice. The stairs creaked under us but seemed sturdy enough, so we climbed to the second floor.

We moved as far away from the hole as we could, heading down a long hallway. We came across two double doors printed with some sort of freaky language, and decided against all better judgment, to enter. They creaked open revealing a circular room with bookshelves lining the walls. In the center of the room was a large table, and just beyond that was another set of doors. On the table, lay an open book, how convenient, and we circled around it...Jinkies. I scanned it, realizing that none of us could read Latin, and turned to Mark and Jamie. "Tell me exactly what happened." Jamie sighed and began, "So, I wanted to see if the stairs could hold me when they broke and I fell down. Mark stupidly dived in after. As soon as you left we realized that something wasn't quite right about the room. For one, there were bloody handprints everywhere," she said, and I made a mental note to buy hand sanitizer as soon as we got out of this place. "There was also a sort of glass box in the center of the room filled with murky water. It was straight out of Independence Day or something. There was a person, a bald

grey person floating in it." Mark interrupted with a surreptitious "Freaked the shit out of me, man." To which Jamie rolled her eyes and continued. "So we got the fuck out of there. Locked the door behind us and just booked it. The whole place is rigged with passages."

I shook my head and thought it over. Big tits was going to save the day. "Wait, Jen, didn't you say you saw something in the hallway?" Hop asked me. I dug out my cell phone and pulled up the pictures. We scrolled through them, painting by painting, until, sure enough, my monster was on screen. "Is that the fucking Swamp Thing?" Mark asked. I gave him a cross look and corrected, "No, it's the fucking Creature from the Black Lagoon. You know, Universal Classic?" "Wait. Wait a fucking minute. What are your favorite movies, you two?" I asked. Jamie became dreamy and stated The Notebook with ease. Mark thought about it for a minute and then mumbled "The Thing". "The Thing? As in, the movie about an alien that takes the shape of different people? Oh fuck me for Christ's sake!" I said exasperatedly. I turned to Hop and asked him as well. "I don't know, Harry Potter?" he responded unsurely. I quirked my eyebrow. "What the hell do movies have to do with anything?" Mark asked angrily.

My head was really starting to bother me, and I wavered on my feet. "Jen, you okay?" Hop asked, pulling my hand away from my forehead and moving my matted hair. I heard him inhale sharply, and said, "Well, fuck, that makes me feel better." He shook his head at me and looked around the room. Eyeing a couple of covered-up chairs, I looked at him. He walked over to them slowly and took out a pocket knife, stabbing the white sheets. Soon he had a long piece of fabric, and he came back over, wrapping it around my skull. Jamie dug a couple of aspirin out of her pocket and handed them to me. I swallowed them whole, choking only slightly. "There, that should hold you over for a while," she said, and I smiled appreciatively.

"So, why the hell are you bringing up what we're going to watch at our next fucking slumber party, Jen?" Mark asked me, gesturing angrily with his hands. We were all exhausted, and I sighed. There was a scraping sound from the back of the room all at once, and we turned toward the unopened doors. "I guess we'll find out," I offered, and picked up the closest heavy object. It was a candelabra and I wielded it in front of me like a cheap, amusement-park sword. The handles on the door began to turn slowly and the doors squeaked open. In front of me stood a rugged Ryan Gosling wielding an ax, brown hair spilling sexily over his eyes. "WHAT THE FUCK KIND OF FUCKED UP MOVIES DO YOU WATCH?" I whispered to Jamie, who quivered. "Erm, Ryan?" she ventured, and he suddenly ran forward toward her. "Run!" I screamed and we all made it out the door, grabbing the handles to keep mountain-man Ryan Gosling from coming after us. Hop rested his head against the door in relief, but was disrupted by the sharp tip of an ax cutting into his ear. He screamed out in pain and we all made a run for it down the hallway. We didn't stop running until we hit a dead end, the four of

us smashing simultaneously into the wall. Manic-Ryan's footsteps were echoing down the hallway toward us and we clumsily climbed off one another and began trying rooms left and right. None of them would open. "Wait! Can you reach that?!" I screamed wildly at Mark, pointing at a square in the ceiling with a piece of rope dangling. Hop jumped up and grabbed it, pulling the thing down. A ladder unfolded and we scrambled up, Hop staying last to pull up the ladder. "Hurry it up, man!" I yelled. He scrambled up the ladder and pulled it close after him. We were alone in the darkness.

Mark was the first one to take a flashlight and shine it around the empty room. It was massive, full of trunks and furniture and mirrors, and reminded me instantly of the funhouse in R.L. Stine's *Carnival of Horror*. Hop began to push a large armoire over the opening in the floor, so I stumbled over to help. While Jamie and Mark freaked out, we stacked another dresser in front of it just in case love-crazed Ryan somehow moved it. Jamie was mumbling on the floor something about axes and Rachel McAdams.

I took Hop's hand and walked down the room, dragging him with me. "We have to find another way out of this place," I said, and he nodded, looking around distractedly. "Earth to Hop! Hello!" He promptly ignored me and pulled a sheet off of a human-shaped mannequin. Underneath was a beautiful yellow ball gown, stunningly heavy. "So what, Voldemort's going to pop out of here somewhere? Be careful what you open, you might let a death eater in," I joked. He laughed nervously and scratched his head. "Yeah, something like that..." he said. I pulled him around in front of me. "Hop, your favorite movie is Harry Potter, isn't it?" I asked him seriously. He didn't make eye contact and instead scrunched up his face. "Hop?" I heard the wet slap of something hitting the wooden floor before I saw it. In front of my, Hop's eyes were piercingly wide, and his mouth was beginning to form a giant "O". Fuck. Oh shit, I thought, and slowly turned around. There, lying on the floor in some sick disfigurement was a redheaded mermaid, her skin dark, resembling the blubber of a whale. "The Little Mermaid?!" I screeched in exasperation, and she clawed her way towards us. We backed up slowly, me wielding my candelabra in front of me. Hop was trembling beside me, and he whimpered out something along the lines of "I've always had a soft spot for redheads."

Ariel breathed heavily in front of us and we continued to back up. Suddenly, though, Jamie let out a piercing cry upon stumbling over the mermaid in her search for Hop and I. Ariel went nuts, letting out a high-pitched screech and attacking Jamie. Mark's boots were the first thing I heard, and then his deep, bellowing scream of anger. "I'M COMING JAMIE!" he yelled, tackling the mermaid blindly. Hop and I stood there dumbfounded while we watched Mark beat the mermaid into a bloody pulp. Hop ripped the lampshade off of a tall light and tossed it to Mark, who caught it and promptly stabbed Ariel through the heart with the make-shift spear.

Jamie cried hysterically and Mark stood up, pulling her with him. He kissed her with an awkward, Dawson's Creek-type passion. Hop and I uncomfortably put our hands in our pockets and looked around, not making eye contact. Finally, when the coast was clear, Mark approached us. "So now what? Is it over?" he asked me, and I shrugged. "I have no idea. I mean, we're safe up here now, right?" I speculated. "Wrong," came a deep and sexy voice from behind me. I didn't have time to scream before the blade of Gosling's axe cut through Hop's shoulder, and he let out a strangled cry of pain. Jumping back, Ryan pulled the axe out with an excruciating crunch and stepped closer to us. Hop fell to his knees, coughing, and then crumbled to the floor. "Run. RUN. OH MY GOD RUN!" I screamed, and we dispersed like a pack of seagulls.

I could hear the heavy boot steps of my least-favorite boy toy behind me, and I ran faster. A slimy hand, however, creeped out from under a table and grabbed my ankle, causing me to fall flat on my face. The steps slowed, and I slowly looked up, coming face to crotch with Ryan Gosling's evil doppehganger. He smiled crudely at me, and as he raised his axe, I dove to the left, pulling my leg and the slimy arm with me. The axe tore through the arm of what I now realized to be the Creature, and it let out a strangled cry. The axe, however, seemed to be embedded in the floor of the attic, and Ryan stared angrily at me. Before I could make a move, a very familiar light post pierced through the ribs of Gosling, and he fell to his knees in a way much too similar to Hop. "Fuck, I wanted to kill him!" I cried out angrily, glaring with shaky playfulness at Jamie. She gave me a look that would send most sailors to their grave, but I promptly hugged her anyway. Coming up behind her was Mark, who was supporting a bloody Hop.

"So what should we do about him?" Jamie asked, gesturing to the Creature. He was, writhing on the floor, his big eyes staring up agonizingly at me. "I don't...I don't know," I said, looking at him pityingly. "Let's just go... I don't think I can kill him, you know?" I said, and Jamie gave me a skeptical look. I shrugged in return, and we all stepped carefully past the bloody body of Ryan Gosling.

We were now in the far end of the gigantic attic, directly opposite the door in the floor that we had come up. Slowly, cautiously, we made our way back to the armoire that covered the hatch to the attic. Mark set Hop down on a wooden crate, and the three of us moved the armoire and dresser out of the way. Opening up the hatch cautiously, Mark peeked his head through the hole and looked around. "The coast is clear!" he whispered, and dropped the ladder. Jamie and I pulled Hop up and Mark helped him down the stairs, taking his feet and most of his weight while we lowered him.

Finally, my feet landed with a thud on the carpeted hallway floor, and I pushed the hatch to the attic closed, peering around the darkened area. Slowly, we made our way back to the main staircase, quietly stepping down

the steps and toward the front door. "Wait, shouldn't we wait here until it stops raining?" Jamie asked, but Mark shook his head. "Hop needs a hospital, Jamie. We have to see if either of our cars will work," he replied, and pulled open the front door.

A cool rush of air blew in, along with icy drops of rain. Hop was shivering badly, his shirt soaked with blood in back, but he stepped out with Mark, leaning heavily on him. Together, we made our way back down the winding driveway, Jamie and I huddled together for warmth. When we saw the silvery outline of Jamie's car, we ran forward, and she violently turned the key in the ignition. After a few tries, the car started up, and she let out a squeal of happiness. I stepped out and opened the back doors for Mark, who helped Hop slide in. I rounded the car and sat next to him, Mark entering shotgun, and together, we hauled ass out of dodge.

But I hadn't noticed the changes inside of me before now, when I finally had a chance to breathe. It felt like my stomach was churning, and all at once I felt a specific beat in my gut—a heartbeat. "Wait," Hop said suddenly. "Wait. What happened to the Thing?" For a brief moment we were silent. Before I knew it, though, I was choking on something giant and phallic, and a blood-covered tentacle erupted from my mouth. Jamie screamed bloody murder in the driver's seat and swerved the car wildly while I felt my insides being rearranged. Hop screamed next to me, pressing his bloody back into the door as a look of terror crossed his eyes. I knew that this was it, and before I completely let the monster take me over, I gagged on a sick smile. And then, there was only darkness.

Nadia Langworthy



2013 Dec
Major: English

A recent graduate of the University of Michigan (this past December) I began as a pre-med student and then realized my passion for creative writing. I became an English major and have taken a few screenwriting courses and plan on moving to LA and becoming a screenwriter. I enjoy fresh linens and iced chai lattes with skim milk.

Diving in with the Unoffended Kiwi

I met him in Piccadilly Circus outside of Zoo Bar in a little alleyway that would've otherwise been empty if it weren't a Thursday night. He was leaning against a brick wall, oxfords laced up, fitted suit hugging his body in all the right places, and a leather banded watch peeking from the sleeve of his white button down. His brown belt matched his brown shoes, so I mentally awarded him brownie points. He had a rugged look to him: light stubble, disheveled brown hair, and intense green eyes. His nose was slightly crooked, but he was still handsome. He was bobbing his head and began to sing Frank Sinatra's Nice 'N' Easy.

His voice was nothing like Sinatra's, but was smooth like my freshly shaved legs, yet had a scratchy quality to it, like the spot I'd missed on my right knee. His singing was the sexiest thing I'd ever heard. I thought of strutting up to him and maybe –

"Charlie." My friend's voice cut my fantasy short. "We're close – get your

ID out.”

I looked at Hannah, who was teetering on six-inch stilettos and adjusting her breasts to increase her amount of cleavage.

“Hey. Han, calm down with the boobs. We’re fine, we’ll get in.”

“And what if they give us a hard time like they did at Fabric?” she asked.

I glanced at the guy leaning against the wall. He was texting. Or looking up pick-up lines to use on me. I hoped for the latter.

“Well I don’t think you’ve insulted the bouncer in any way this time, so that’s a good start to getting in.”

Hannah dramatically raised her eyebrows and brushed her red hair off her shoulder. “The Fabric guy ignored me when I asked how much longer the wait was. That required me to ask whether or not he was deaf.”

I smiled. “Let’s just get in hassle free, all right?” I snuck another peek at the wall. He was still there.

“You looking at Mr. Oxford Shoes over there?” Hannah asked.

I whipped my head back around to face Hannah and felt myself blush a little.

“Go talk to him,” she said. “He’s super cute.”

“I don’t know. Devon’s just – ”

“Oh my God, Devon can screw himself. You need to get over him. That son of a bitch douchebag – ”

“Okay. Okay. That’s good for now, Han. Thanks.” I studied Mr. Oxford Shoes. Hannah had a point; I needed to get over Devon. We’d dated for the last two years of college and then I found a pair of panties he swears I don’t remember buying for myself. I guess I’d forgotten how big my ass was, too because they were mediums, and I wear smalls, damn it.

“Babe, I remember you buying them from Victoria’s Secret. I swear,” he’d said. Devon had put his hands in his pockets. He always did that when he lied. I stared at his covered hands and felt my throat tighten and tears begin to form.

“Yeah?” I managed.

He nodded, gently smiling at me like I was a forgetful child.

“They’re yellow, Devon.” He looked at the panties I was waving in his face. “You know I fucking hate yellow,” I screamed, throwing the bitch’s

britches at his head.

Everything unraveled after that. Devon had been cheating on me for the last three months of our relationship with some sophomore girl named Bethany and, ironically enough, those three months were the months I was happiest. We were planning an exciting future together where we'd both live in New York. He'd go to medical school at Columbia, and I'd work for a publishing house in Manhattan. We'd get a too-expensive apartment together, eat frozen dinners, and he wouldn't fuck other girls. It was going to be great.

"I think you should invite him to come inside with us," Hannah said.

I was scared at the thought of hitting on someone and looked at Hannah skeptically.

"Charlie, it's been four months. Dive back in and have some fun. Go." She nudged me with her clutch. "Gooo."

"Okay, okay, fine." I forced a smile and ducked under the tape. I tried to walk smoothly and with confidence, but wedges can only let you be so cool when you're navigating cobblestone. I smoothed my teal dress, brought some of my brown hair in front of my shoulders, and finally reached him.

Clearing my throat, I told him, "You have a nice voice."

He looked up, confused, as he wasn't singing anymore. "Sorry?"

I immediately regretted my decision to come over to him. I was never the girl to strike up a conversation with a stranger, especially a male stranger. But I was in a new city, in a new dress – the novelty of it all was inspiring – and Devon could suck it.

"Oh, earlier. I heard you singing earlier. Nice pipes." I looked down at my feet, wanting the Earth to swallow me for making the pipe comment.

He laughed a little and said, "Thanks. You aren't from here, are you? Your teeth are way too straight. I mean, that, and you have an American accent."

"My teeth? That's... pretty stereotypically astute of you. I'm from Illinois. And based on your accent, I want to say either Australia or New Zealand, but I know Kiwis get offended when people assume they're from Australia, so..." I looked at him expectantly.

He grinned, extended his hand, and said, "I'm James. And an unoffended Kiwi."

"Charlie," I said, shaking his hand.

James accompanied Hannah and me that night to Zoo Bar. Hannah met

up with her boyfriend Russell who'd gotten back that night from visiting family in France. They hadn't seen each other in five days, a cruel hiatus for both of them. Hannah spent most of the night clinging to Russell's neck, and he spent his time giving her spontaneous kisses. In my broody post break-up frame of mind, I found them disgusting.

James and I started out at the bar. He bought me two drinks – I'd intended for him to buy me only one, but he'd incorrectly assumed I enjoyed gin and insisted on buying me my favorite drink, a white Russian. We began to chat. James told me he had moved to London from New Zealand four months ago to study at the London School of Economics to eventually become a lawyer. I was immediately intimidated. I'd moved to London because I'd studied abroad there as an undergrad and thought it'd be an amazing place to live. I was also shamefully running away from Devon and the life we'd dreamed up together. Three months later, I was living with my best friend from college in a flat the size of my parents' closet, working as an assistant at a small children's books publishing house, and trying to become a writer. James seemed smart, sexy, and driven. I felt small, lost, and awkward – awkward because I'd just tried to find my straw with my mouth and hadn't succeeded. I surrendered, set my drink down, and braved telling James what I did for a living and what I wanted to do.

To my surprise, he appeared genuinely interested, even a little jealous that I was pursuing a dream. James enjoyed his studies and was happy, but there was always that little voice that asked him, "Hey, what if you followed your dream and tried to be an actor?"

"You'd be living with your best friend in a closet," I joked.

James laughed. "No, but in all seriousness, what you're doing is brilliant. Takes guts. Really. And that Devon bloke sounds pretty horrible. Good for you for starting fresh, you know?"

I smiled and replied with a quiet "Thanks." I still wasn't convinced that what I was doing was brilliant, but James definitely was shining a positive light on it.

"I do have to say, though," he continued with a half-smile, "that yellow is my favorite color. That a deal breaker for you?"

I couldn't help but break out into laughter. "I think I need to leave now," I joked. James laughed back and ordered me another white Russian.

A couple drinks later, James and I'd made it to the dance floor, the hot air stale, our shoes sticky, and our hips fused. We had great dance chemistry and danced until the bar turned its unflattering lights on and played a revolting country song to get people to leave. Bouncers walked around the bar directing people out the door as if they were directing an aircraft and we

were pushed outside.

James stood in the alley with me while I waited for Hannah and Russell to emerge. The temperature had dropped a bit and it was drizzling. I rubbed my arms to warm up, then felt James drape his jacket around my shoulders. I turned, looking up at him. He smiled slightly and leaned in toward me, his face nearing mine. His hand was on the small of my back, drawing me closer. Behind James, Hannah's bouncing red head caught my eye, and our moment was cut short as she bumped into James and threw her arm around his shoulders.

"Hey, ready for a nightcap, meez ameez at chez Hannah and Charlie's?" Hannah asked, drunkenly excited. She always tried to speak French when Russell got back from visiting his family, and somehow her accent became increasingly worse with each visit.

"Babe, it's mes amis," Russell said, like she'd remember in the morning. He grabbed Hannah's hand off of James, giving him an apologetic glance.

"Um, yeah, that sounds good. Wanna come, James?" I asked. "We don't live too far. Just in Spitalfields."

"That'll be beaut. Perfect, actually, 'cause I live pretty close to there. In Shoreditch," he said.

Hannah leaned into me, pressing her lips to my ear and said in what she thought was a whisper, "He's got a hot accent. Australian?"

I smiled and nudged her back into Russell.

The Tube shut down at midnight and since it was four in the morning, we were left with the option of taking a taxi or the night bus back. It was a unanimous decision to ride the night bus due to the fact one was bound to get off with a story.

"Oh, definitely the night bus. Last week, me and my mates took the two-forty-three home, and we met this crazy old bloke who said we should take all the squirrels and dress them up as pilgrims," James said.

We all burst into drunken laughter as we walked toward the 243 bus stop. Hannah, being the most intoxicated, laughed so hard she had to stop walking and clutched Russell's arm for balance.

James continued his story. "The guy turns to us, makes sure no one else is looking – but really everyone on the bus is, I mean this guy was mad – and he pulls a fuckin' squirrel out of his coat pocket," he cried out, trying to keep it together.

At this point, it was all too much for Hannah and she fell to her knees,

crying from laughing so hard. Russell tried to help her up, but he couldn't keep a firm grasp on Hannah in between his own fits of laughter, and dropped her, which added to our storm of cackles.

By the time we boarded the bus, my buzz was wearing off and I started to wonder what I was doing with James. I'd just met him – what if he was a serial killer? Or worse, what if I was “the other girl” with they yellow pantsies? I pushed the thought out of my mind, gave James his coat back, and we scanned the bus for stories. There was a woman sleeping on the back row of seats, a couple on the verge of having sex, and a group of silent girls on their phones.

“Not much activity tonight, huh?” Russell said, absentmindedly stroking Hannah's knee.

“Unfortunately not, mate,” James replied. Smiling, he turned to me and asked, “Want to make a story?”

“What?” I asked.

“A story. We'll make one. I dare you to... ”

“Switch clothes with one of those girls,” Hannah enthusiastically suggested, pointing at one of the girls.

“Hannah, no,” I cried, eyes wide, forcing her arm down.

“No, I think that's a good idea, babe. Let's see it, Charlie,” Russell said.

Hannah glared at Russell and smacked him on the arm.

“Ow – come on, you know I'm kidding, Han. Come here.” Russell pulled Hannah in close and they began making out. I smiled at first, but it faded when they didn't stop. Hannah ran her fingers through Russell's black hair, and I was surprised they didn't get stuck with all the gel he used. Her blue mini skirt was riding up to the point where James and I could tell what color thong she was wearing (purple) and I lightly kicked her shin with a sharp “Fix your skirt.” She did so, never coming up for air.

Back at our flat, Hannah disappeared into her room for a while and Russell followed to take care of her. James and I were left alone, drinking the only nightcap I knew how to make, rum and Cokes. When James wasn't looking, I tried to straighten the place up a bit. I fluffed the pillows on the couch while he looked at photographs on our fridge, put away boxes of cereal in the kitchen while he perused my and Hannah's sad record collection in the living room, and snuck into my bedroom to get rid of that month's Cosmo with the excuse that I had to charge my phone.

While I was in my room I began to quickly make my bed, then stopped.

What would it mean if I made my bed? Would it seem like I was expecting something to happen tonight? Was I expecting something to happen? Did I want something to happen? Maybe I was just a tidy person. I left my bed unmade, but threw out some trash on the nightstand.

Sipping on our rum and Cokes, James and I sat in the living room on the couch. I originally wanted a fabric couch (fabric's cozy), but Hannah had convinced me that having a modern-looking white leather couch would "really bring this place together." We went searching for said couch but realized through a succession of failed shopping trips and Internet perusals, we couldn't afford anything like that. So there James and I sat on an olive-green fabric couch sipping rum and Cokes.

We rested our bare feet on the coffee table and stared out the floor-to-ceiling window at glittering London as the rain lightly tapped the glass.

"Nice view. What street is this?" James asked, standing up. He put his glass on a coaster and walked over to the window. "I've never been down this way before," he said. I came over to stand next to him, mainly to check my reflection in the window. My brown eyes looked sleepy, my round cheeks were a bit red, and my hair was frizzy from the London drizzle.

"It's Frying Pan Alley," I said, discretely trying to pat down the fly-aways.

James looked at me, incredulous. "No."

"Yeah, that's the actual name. I feel like I'm in a Harry Potter movie. Minus all the cool stuff that happens."

James smiled and leaned against the window, which made me very nervous. "I had a lot of fun tonight."

I smiled back, waiting for the window to give. "Me too."

"I... I don't want to overstay my welcome, though. I should probably get going, yeah?"

"Oh. Um, okay. Early day tomorrow?" I asked.

"Yeah. Well, no, not really. Just trying to be a... a gentleman, I guess."

"Oh, right." I smiled politely, pushing the thought of us rolling around in bed to the back of my brain.

We walked to the door in silence. I opened it, waiting for James to leave, and we stood there awkwardly. His body was calm, cool, and collected but his eyes flitted around the flat, then my face, then through the open door and into the hall. James looked back at me, appearing confused.

"Well, cheers, Charlie," James said, weakly smiling. He pecked me on the

cheek and turned to go.

I was watching the first guy I'd had the best time with since Devon walk out of my flat. I'd been brave enough to invite him out – couldn't I be brave enough to –

"Wait, James. You think maybe you could skip being a gentleman to-night? We were just having such a good time."

James stood in the doorway, considering. "You're right. What the bloody hell am I doing?" he blurted, firmly grabbing my face and bringing it to his. Our lips locked and his stubble lightly scratched at my cheeks. Then I'd clumsily managed to get the door shut, and James pushed me against it, one hand at the small of my back and the other at the nape of my neck. I pulled his blazer off his shoulders and yanked it down and off his arms. He unzipped my dress in one smooth motion and ran his hand down the length of my exposed back. James did not end up going home that night.

The next morning I woke up and squinted the fuzzy red digits into focus. Ten o'clock. I had a momentary panic attack as I imagined what I might look like. I wiped underneath my eyes with my fingers to get rid of any mascara crumbs, pinched my cheeks to bring some color to them, and as subtly as I could, smoothed my hair. I slowly rolled over to see if James was facing me, only to find a note on the pillow.

Sorry I had to run this morning. Love to take you out sometime, give me a call. 07523 772 959.

-The Unoffended Kiwi

P.S. – Glad I wasn't a gentleman.

"Charlie," I heard Hannah hoarsely call from the living room. "Aussie boy left his undershirt here – oh my gosh. Aussie boy left his undershirt here," she cried.

Then I heard Russell hiss, "Babe, he could still be here. Shut up."

They began to bicker about whether or not James was still in the flat and I poked my head out of my room, silencing them. Hannah mouthed "sorry."

"It's cool, he's gone," I said

Hannah's jaw dropped. "He left? That stupid jerk. "

"No, no, it's ok. Come here," I said, smiling.

In unspoken girl code, Hannah understood just how well things had gone, and her face lit up as she skipped into my room, squealing.

"Wait, what happened? Hey, what happened?" Russell called after us.

"Well you have to call him," Hannah said after I told her what happened.

I shrugged. "I don't know. Do I? Yeah, I had fun, but I don't know if I want to get into anything."

"You don't want to get into anything," Hannah echoed looking at me with narrowed eyes. "Bull. Guess what last night was? Getting into something. Into a bed, specifically."

"Not it wasn't," I replied.

"Yeah-huh," Hannah protested.

She shook James's note in front of my face. "He left you his number. Come on. You can't tell me you weren't into him."

I was totally into him. What I wasn't into was the possibility of something great going sour again.

"Don't let Devon mess this up for you," Hannah said. I pursed my lips and picked at my blue duvet cover. Hannah rolled her eyes. "Ugh, why do I have to do everything for you."

She jumped off my bed with James's note.

"What are you doing?" I said. "Hannah, what are you doing?" I repeated with force, following her. She broke into a clumsy run across the living room and into her bedroom.

"Hannah, don't," I yelled, running past Russell.

Hannah tried to slam the door shut but I stopped it and forced my way in, naturally being stronger than Hannah whose only muscle was her heart. I squeezed my way into her room and grabbed hold of her cardigan, which she wriggled out of. I lunged for her, but tripped over a pillow on the ground and knocked over a canister of pencils from her desk.

"God, clean your room," I shouted at her.

Hannah leapt onto her bed and began dialing James's number into her phone.

"I'm doing this for your own good," she said. "It's ringing."

Conveniently, Russell came into Hannah's room at that moment. "What the hell is going on?"

"No," I shouted. "Hannah, stop." I stood up and chucked the pillow I had tripped on at Hannah's face.

"Oh, shit," Russell said.

Bullseye. The impact made Hannah drop her phone and I launched myself into her bed, clawing for her cell amongst the blankets. Hannah attached herself to my back like a leech and put her hand over my eyes.

"Whoa, whoa. Guys, stop," Russell shouted from the end of the bed.

"Tell your girlfriend to stop. Get off of me," I yelled.

"Russell, help me," Hannah cried out.

"I don't know, I'm kind of enjoying—"

"Russell!"

"Ok, ok, sorry."

I fell on my side and Hannah and I began to wrestle for the phone. Russell came over and tried to either pry us apart or get the phone himself; I couldn't really tell. It was a big blur of tangled limbs, fragmented sentences, and shouted obscenities.

"You two just need to – "

"You're on my fucking hair – "

"Charlie, just call him –"

Russell was finally able to get a hold of the phone and jumped off the bed triumphantly.

"Aha," he shouted victoriously, holding the phone above his head like the Statue of Liberty. "Wait." Russell looked at the phone's screen and his face turned to shock. He put the phone to his ear.

"Hello?" he said.

Hannah and I could easily hear who was on the other line and I glowered at her. Russell pulled the phone away from his head like it was on fire and pointed at it. He urgently whispered, "He's on the phone, he's on the phone."

"Who's this? Hello? Anyone there?" we heard James's voice call out.

"Um," Russell said, putting the phone back to his ear, "Charlie's here." Russell offered me the phone.

"You idiot," I hissed. I snatched the phone, punched Hannah in the arm, and sweetly said "Hello?" into the phone.

In the safety of my room, after about a five-minute conversation with James, in which I let him know that it was not in fact my phone, by Hannah's, a funny story I'd tell him later (or never), we agreed to meet for a late dinner the next day at a place some of his buddies told him about, The Breakfast Club.

As I sat at our table, I thought about how I'd never heard of The Breakfast Club before, despite it being a seven-minute walk from my flat and very close to Liverpool Street Station. I rubbed an indent in the wooden table and looked around while I waited for James to arrive. In the very back of the restaurant hung a neon "Sex, Drugs, and Bacon Rolls" sign and in one of the corners they had a functioning Sega Mega Drive console, which at that moment was being played by a man very intense about Sonic the Hedgehog. The side opposite me was a sleek bar, black-tiled with white grout, and finished off with colorful backless barstools and hanging Edison bulbs. The place screamed edgy vintage, especially with their white 1950s Smeg refrigerator against the bright blue wall adorned with Christmas lights.

I was just staring down at my breasts, wondering if my black dress was too low-cut when James arrived and approached our table with urgency, checking his watch.

"I'm not late, am I?" he asked.

I smiled at his concern and hoped he hadn't seen me checking out my own boobs. "No," I said. "I just like to be early."

He grinned, pecked me on the cheek, and sat down. "You look great. Really. You're doing that dress a favor." He paused and looked at me sideways. "Too cheesy of a line?"

"Yeah that was pretty cheesy," I teased.

"Alright, no more cheese. Promise. Except on the burger I'm going to make you get – it's fantastic. You're not vegetarian are you? Or one of those girls who only eats salad in front of the opposite sex?"

I shook my head and laughed.

"Good," James said.

That night we talked so much we had to send the waiter away twice because we hadn't even glanced at the menu when it was time to order drinks. Thirty seconds and two suppressed smiles later, we chose what we wanted to order, and continued conversation.

I learned that James was the oldest of three boys, his mother was a dentist, and his father was a poet. James feared going blind, any sort of insect, and Professor Sooker, who, rumor had it, liked to practice taxidermy

in his free time.

James shuddered at the thought and said, "Imagine: Little stuffed mice and raccoons perched atop the latest edition of *The Economic Structure of Corporate Law*. It's not right."

I laughed at the image and stared at James while he scraped the last of his breakfast-infused food off his plate. He grabbed the check, much to my protest and purse shuffling, and we sat a few minutes longer.

"So. Charlie," James said, "the question is, are you having a good time?"

"What?" I asked. "Of course I am. This place is great. And so is the company." Ugh, my hitting-on skills had struck again.

James smiled mischievously. "So you want to make a story then?"

I grinned, nodding. "What do you have in mind?"

"When the waiter comes by again, tell him that we're here to see the mayor."

"Here to see the mayor? Why? What's that mean?" I asked.

"You'll see," he said.

The waiter walked by and I timidly flagged him down. I felt silly saying such a ridiculous thing. The mayor couldn't possibly have been in Spitalfields dining at The Breakfast Club. The waiter smiled and requested we follow him. He led us through the restaurant, bits of conversation and my surroundings dulled as my brain raced to figure out what was happening. The waiter stopped in front of the Smeg refrigerator and opened the door.

Inside the Smeg refrigerator was not food or drinks, but a wooden staircase leading down into the basement. The walls were dark and lined with more Edison bulbs and from below I heard the lively notes of a trumpet and light chatter.

I looked at James, intrigued.

"It's a sort of secret speakeasy apparently," he said.

A woman in the speakeasy began singing. Her voice was anachronistic – high and full and sounded like she was plucked from the 1920s.

"So. Want to make this story with me?" James asked.

I let that cheesiness slide and looked down into the dimly lit staircase and back at James's hopeful face.

"Yeah," I said. "Definitely."

Daphne Li



Freshman
Major: Undecided

I am from San Jose, California. I have enjoyed reading and writing for most of my life, though I started considering it as more than just a hobby only recently. I hope to become a better writer as I go through my life at U of M.

My Grandfather and His Country

For the first half of my life, I was accustomed to greeting a pair of eyes whenever I walked into a room. Up until the age of nine, I attended school in Taiwan, where in the classrooms, or at least the auditoriums and gyms, hung portraits of Sun Yat-sen, the "Father of Taiwan." Hanging the face of this important political figure in the room was, to me, in no sense creepy, as if the eyes watched our every movement. On the contrary, our eyes would fall on him during those humid days when the classes seemed endless, and our attention would turn from our teacher to the clock to the posters, to anything else on the wall. Sun's portrait was rather like a picture of a kind grandfather which we occasionally notice, and once we do, instill within us a somewhat sense of pride and respect. In much the same way, I would enter the living room of my grandmother's house and feel similarly when I see the framed picture of my grandfather who passed away a year before I was born.

Childhood weekends consisted of my sister and I piling into the back of our family's Ford Focus to visit my grandmother on my father's side. My favorite part was exploring the big house my grandmother lived in by herself.

Sitting in the back of the sedan, I thought about the dark closets, the cold floor tiled with black and white stones, the glittery castle that perched on top of the glass cabinet, right next to the portrait of my grandfather in the living room. Once at the door, I dropped my luggage, blocking the entrance, and met my grandfather's eyes before I made my routine inspection through the two-story house. After bouncing off the leather sofa in the living room, opening the shadowed storage beneath the stairs, climbing up on all fours to the second floor, I would pass by all the smaller rooms and stop right before the master bedroom at the very end of the hall. I stood in the doorway. Opposite of me was the window, which let in sunlight that covered the always made bed. I didn't go in, but breathed in the air of the room. It smelled fresh and old at the same time, as if I was breathing in the sunlight and the dust that drifted out from within the walls. Unlike the rest of the house which aged yearly with my grandmother, this room had a timeless quality, as if frozen in time like the face of my grandfather in his portrait; yet I never went in, always stopping just in time where I could see the entire room and there on the wall, another portrait of my grandfather hung firmly in place above the bed. I met his eyes again.

That bedroom I would later remember in an instance when my mother showed me a photograph of my grandfather holding my toddler sister. They were in the very room, standing in front of the bed. The man in the photograph looked significantly like my father. And when I asked her if he ever held me in the same way, she replied, "No, he died a year before you were born. His life never coincided with yours."

The very next time I stopped in the doorway of that bedroom, I tried to imagine in my head my grandfather picking my sister up from the bed and posing for a picture. I thought about how he slept in that bedroom and wondered if he used the sheets that were on the bed. Still, even though his face was present in the room, I could not feel his presence or grasp the idea that he was ever here. Nor could I sense an absence, that something was missing. Seeing that photograph only proved to me the fact that my grandma shared a room with my grandfather. Knowing that he never saw me nor I him in person created no sense of loss within me. It was clear to me that unlike some of my friends who were devastated when one of their grandparents died, I never had to experience the losing part, even as an infant. I was saved from the pain of losing a grandparent and the knowledge of what it is like to have a father to my father. I dismissed the idea that my life was in any way affected by him. Yet I could glimpse the pain of that loss in those around me.

Oddly, it was one Sunday in church when I was very young that contradicted this notion of his insignificance. On that Sunday, we did not return home after eating lunch with the other church members like we normally would. Instead, we climbed back up the stairs into the main chapel, where several other families also were. The meeting was informal, unlike a ser-

vice. Everyone sat wherever they liked at the front, forming a semicircle. In the open space stood a table with red cloth, on it multiple black and white photographs of people. I remember how airy the chapel seemed, empty of its usual occupants. The windows were open so that the sun shone in and I could hear my friends playing in the parking lot down below. I settled between my sister and my mother on the piano bench as people talked. I did not listen to a word, only wishing that I could join my friends in their games. Then, my mother got up next to me. With my hand in hers, she walked to the opening of the semicircle and picked up the portrait of my grandfather from the table. That was when I realized that everyone in the room had lost somebody, and all the people talking were talking about the loved ones they have lost. I held my mother's hand as I listened, as I truly paid attention, to the life of my grandfather and how he lost his battle with cancer. Maybe because my mother has always been an eloquent speaker or maybe because the story she was telling was particularly moving, I felt tears swell up behind my eyes. My mind drifted away from the shouts of the kids outside and gravitated to what was going on right in front of me, right inside of me. Standing in a sunlit chapel that seemed angelic while the voices of children rang innocently outside, my heart was moved, only we were not talking about God. I knew it was important for me to be there even though I never knew him, to maintain the solemnity in the name of my grandfather.

Right then and there I came to know this force of family. I wasn't sad, so why did I want to cry? At the moment, what was happening seemed so appropriate. I was grieving the loss of a grandfather I had never met, a grief I thought I was spared from. It appeared that his life did have an effect on my life after all, his death did as well. All I knew was that I didn't know what kind of effect it was. It slithered in and out of my life and resurfaced in places unexpected. But just as I was about to grasp it, it escaped from my hands once again.

On major holidays or spontaneous weekends, my relatives would all gather under one roof. Taiwan is a small country, consequently, the living room on the sixth floor of one of the many skyscrapers in our city is a small room. On holidays, the living room was cramped with people old and young. The children crowded around the television three feet away from the mah-jong table that blocked the way to the kitchen. Any acquisition of food would require an assembly line passing plates from the kitchen over the mahjong table and finally onto the floor between the children and the TV. When I think back to those days in Taiwan, it is always this scene that I recall most fondly. I like to think that Taiwanese people have a bond between them because they are always forced to be within small proximity of each other. That was what I always took comfort in as I bumped into many people while walking through the streets, that you can't ever be alone, not really, because someone would always notice your absence. To the nine-year-old me who had lived in crowded cities all her life, it was how family had always been. Whom I considered my family depended on who would show up in our liv-

ing room. For that reason, it was hard to imagine a whole other land where another branch of the family existed. It was an unknown land, and I had always thought of it as "Old China," different from the modern, bustling Taiwan streets where I grew up.

The China I imagined was all lush mountains and wide rivers. When I heard the word "China," I saw in my mind a camera flying overhead misty mountains and valleys, offering me a bird's-eye-view of acres and acres of green, watery paddy fields. Instead of cramped skyscrapers, I imagined China had old houses with pillars of wood and roofs made with tiles. Each house would have a huge yard and in the middle a stone well, where the servants would get the water to start a day of cooking. The source of this imagination was the fictional television dramas I would watch along with the adults in my family.

Although both my paternal grandparents were born in China, at the end of 1949 when Chiang Kai-shek formed his government in Taiwan, approximately two million people left China and went along with him. My grandfather was one of them. So was my grandmother, whom he met later on and married, while the ancestors on my mother's side had been on the island of Taiwan even before then. The way I saw it, my father's parents had cut off the China side of their identity and embraced this new, however small, land they lived on. Then one day, quite unceremoniously, my mother told me about a wife and two girls my grandfather left behind in mainland China. This was quite common, as many people had no choice but to flee and leave behind what they had.

I imagined my grandfather among all of this --the "Old China" I saw on television--and somehow he fit better there than he did in the bedroom of my grandmother's house. The timeless essence that was in the bedroom seeped out of my imagination. In my head I saw him sitting on traditional Chinese furniture, dressed in a Chinese robe, sipping tea while two girls with pigtails played at his feet. For a while, that was who my grandfather was. He had transformed from the face on the wall to a fully-bodied man in the "Old China" I made up in my head.

It was strange to think I have relatives in China. After I learned of them, I couldn't help but think of "Old China" whenever I think about my family. I began thinking that this "Old China" was in my blood, that somehow through this grandfather whom I had never met, I was linked to this land that I would had never identified with. His significance in my life had evolved into what it said about my nationality. For the first time, I could conceive the unpronounced hold of my grandfather in my life and identity.

I have not seen a portrait of my grandfather in years, not since after we moved to California, where my sister and I were born. Nevertheless, my grandfather still affects my life, as he always had. Somehow, just because

he was the patriarch of my family, his life defines my life. I used to think the only part he occupied in my life was the picture of him that hung on the wall of my grandmother's house, but now I know his life was significant to me because I carry his family name, because his blood runs in my blood. It holds significance in my life simply because he was my grandfather, and pieces of his life remain in the life of his family, and therefore, in mine.

Now that I am in college, the fact that he lived still plays a part in my identity. When the professor asked in my sociology class what nationality we identify with, I thought, "That's easy, I am a dual citizen of the United States and Taiwan." Then, it hit me that perhaps I would be considered Chinese by some standards too. In the same class, we learned that nationality in some countries is based on blood, while in others based on birthplace. So what does that make me? I grew up half of my life in Taiwan and the other half in the U.S. where I was born, but what about the blood that runs in me, my grandfather's blood? Do I have some "Old China" blood running in my veins, the same kind as my distant cousins in China have?

The answer, if I am completely honest with myself, is that I do not consider myself Chinese. Although my grandfather escaped from China to Taiwan, and even though through him I have Chinese relatives, I do not consider China part of my identity. Unlike my childhood in Taiwan or my birth certificate, the distant land does not hold any significance to me. Nevertheless, I cannot deny the meaning his life hinted in mine. One day, possibly I will feel a pull toward the land he once lived in and treaded on, and I will rediscover how the life he lived shapes the one I live. More importantly, as I grow older, perhaps I will begin to feel more of my grandfather's presence in my life other than just as a framed picture on a wall. The fact is that his life never coincided with mine, but that doesn't necessarily limits the bond of family between us.

Pareesa Memon



Sophomore
Major: English

I was born in Pakistan and have lived back and forth between there and the States.

Karachi Slums

She awoke to gunshots.

Her hair was a salty, tangled mess on her pillow. Her clothes, soaked with sweat, clung to her body. The city was Karachi. Her name was Zainab.

~~~

He patted his trousers in search of a cardboard carton. GoldLeaf. He took out a single cigarette, half-emptied its tobacco, and stuffed it with hash. He lit up and inhaled until his lungs burned. Buzzed, he headed to work—a small shop tucked in the corner of his neighborhood. The city, unfortunately, was Karachi. His name was Ali.

~~~

Every day was the same: Zainab woke up, cooked for her father, he'd head to work in the neighborhood store, while she stayed home tending to a slew of kids teaching them their ABCs. Every day.

She never got tired of it, but that might be because she didn't have an-

other option. This was the only life she knew and it would be foolish to think of another one. She lived in the slums, where the violence ran rampant, not like the posh areas near the sea where the rich were nestled safely inside the intimidating high walls of their homes, guarded by men with equally intimidating guns and mustaches.

Zainab knew she couldn't change her life, and that meant she had accepted mediocrity. She had accepted that her years would be spent within the diameter of the slums. She accepted, with a sense of pride, that her worries consisted of how they could ration their money for food—not where she could go to school and how she could “find herself”. She thought that housing these thoughts came with luxury and added a different kind of poison to life. It was a wonder to her how with money and the basic necessities of life, people harbored new wants and ignored the comfort at hand; ignored the chance to sense the scents, colors, and textures of life splattered around them.

Zainab made a point to not miss out on the little details. She felt it was important to take note of the small beauties in her proximity and recognize the wonders they are. She was very curious about the world, even though she had seen very little of it. What surrounded her seemed so eventful and complex, it boggled her mind to think that there was more outside: more worlds, with their own politics, people with their own needs, people who saw the world as they were the center of it, just like she was the center of hers.

So, she often kept inside her head, watching everyone else. She thought people give away everything about themselves without even knowing—in the way they smile with only their mouths, or the way they stomp their feet proudly walking down the gravel, or the way they pick at their nails when their alone. She didn't speak in fear of her thoughts being another casualty in this town. Her inner self was sacred to her, and she didn't want others to commit sacrilege to it. She didn't want to be an open book, misinterpreted. So she found happiness in reading everyone else. She thought they all had a role in the cinema of this city and she was the narrator who rationalized them. Sometimes, it scared her how unknown she was to herself because she spent so much of her time in others, studying them. No one really understood her. Well, almost no one.

She didn't know how to act around the other girls on her street. It seemed like too much effort, her cheeks would hurt from all the laughing she pretended came from her belly, and she would be exhausted from thinking of what to say. She had no idea what was the *right* way to be with them. What was supposed to be funny, what was scandalous, what was taken seriously—she never got to think about what *she* felt because she was always framed by others opinions and the threat of not fitting in.

She thought of her dad and tried to remember a conversation with him that didn't involve the house's tight finances or that we'd be eating lentil

again that night; a real conversation where they joked and shared something about themselves, an intimate moment of them together not only as father and daughter, but as friends. Her father was a man wearing a mask of perpetual worry, one he wore since the death of her mother. She died giving birth, so Zainab isn't just a reminder of tragedy but also a disappointment in place of a boy—someone who could've taken over the business. Being around her father made Zainab happier somehow. He worried enough for the both of them. It also made her frustrated because the fence of formality and obligation he put in front of Zainab was something she couldn't gouge at; she wanted to penetrate that barrier to see the raw, bleeding flesh of his emotions, his regrets, his anxieties. He was another wonder to her—her own father who remained very much a stranger to Zainab.

Instead of walking into the danger zone past her gate, Zainab stayed in the courtyard of the house, sipping tea and watching the chaos. She watched kids play with a battered soccer ball. The world cup was in a few weeks and that meant there could be a sliver of peace. Every year, the teenagers vulnerable to street crime and drugs were too immersed in playing soccer and following their teams succession in the tournament to succumb to the neighborhood dons' insistence. Some boys even made it out of the neighborhood to play in professional teams amongst Karachi's elite. There was a sense of joviality in the air. The melodic thud of the leather ball against the dirt was a song Zainab loved to hear; it made her believe anything was possible every time she heard it.

A cluster of plump middle-aged women sat near them, immersed in gossip, flailing their hands all about. Zainab smiled in her cup, thinking of what poor woman they were attacking, probably for something frivolous.

"Did you see the way she tried to dodge me? I mean, I went over in hopes of getting some tea and company, but she sent out her daughter to tell me she wasn't home. I could see her, mind you! Poking out of the kitchen like some thief."

"Oh God, Fehmina! Why do you even bother? Everyone is too careful around this neighborhood, no one want anything to do with each other!"

"It's ridiculous. Must be those cheap *Muhajirs*."

Around the corner, a man pushed a cart abundant with fried junk: *Samosay*, *pakoray*, fries—any form of fried dough and starch, you name it. One of the woman's sights landed on him and her eyes lit up. Just as she bundled her fist around a 10 Rs. note and made her way to claim a snack, policemen huddled over the cart. They grabbed everything in view before spitting on the man's face. Down the street, the soccer ball got caught on a shard of glass and deflated, so the kids ended up kicking around an empty can of tear gas.

~ ~ ~

Ali idly restocked the shelves, moving the expired packets to the front. He thought of them as dead bodies, there for show, yet still readily consumed. Kind of like the politics in this town. The politicians said they would make this part of town better, they would end the violence, they would end the drug cartels, but they were shot before lifting a finger. Regardless, their names live on the lips of the poor.

“Long live Bhutto! Long live Nabil! Long live, long live...”

He wondered when people would realize no one cares about them; it was all just a game of power struggle. Politicians loved money and the position of royalty given by their poor subjects. The people are just a bunch of groups to these leaders; they're all labels of sect used to win over votes. If a Sindhi governs the area, you can bet they will have special protection. If a Punjabi wins, you can bet everyone else gets screwed over.

The power and preference each group gets under their respective leaders, entrances them into thinking they're above everyone else. A few nice things provided by the dons of the city intoxicated them, made them loyal to a chain of gangsters, imagine what heroin could do. More and more people became preys to drug addiction. It made Ali sick, the swift easiness with which the good parts of town turned bad. Almost willfully, like a child with rotten teeth eating sweets behind his mother's back.

Now Ali wasn't anything if not a hypocrite. The same dons he hated, were the ones he did business with. But only for hash, nothing else. Ali promised himself that. He didn't want to give anyone a *real* reason to hate his guts. Being called *Muhajir*—immigrant—four generations after the Partition was more than he could handle. His entire family, like all others who had not occupied Sindh before 1947, Karachi especially, were immigrants from India and the source of trouble according to all “*real*” Pakistanis. They were the reasons for the shortage of jobs and the violence ensued by poverty. His great grandfather, a wealthy owner of a car company had left everything in India—his lands, his million rupee business, his high status—all so his remaining generation would not have to be ridiculed of being Muslim by the Hindu majority. Instead, they were penniless and considered a nuisance by their Muslim brothers. How lovely, Ali grimaced.

He was considered an outsider everywhere, even the place he called home. He was unwanted by India even before his birth and another burden to be put on Pakistan's already depleting resources. These were the reasons why he never seemed to warm up to Karachi, even though he saw much of himself in the city. His identities were split and unique, just like the blocked, categorically organized neighborhoods of Karachi. The city, like Ali, was bruised by its inhabitants despite its efforts to win them over with the cool monsoon winds it breathed twice a year and the rains it washed their anger

with. The cosmopolitan stayed intact for decades, accepting more and more strangers, embracing them in every crevice. It was soft and welcoming because it understood the feeling of being stranded, grazed only by the rough waves of the ocean. It knew itself to be a distinct entity with no loyalties to a specific being, and greeted other outcasts to its once-clear shores. The image of Karachi now is a beat up photograph of the serenity it once was; no more is the beach's sand a lighter, whiter shade of brown nor are the skins of towering buildings free from tattoos of obscene graffiti. Karachi is the product of the people in it. And so is Ali.

He felt his buzz wearing off and he lit up again. He needed something to calm his anger. He knew the kind of people that would come by the shop. They'd laugh about another raid against Zafar Baloach, their gang leader, and how he paid the police off.

More violence was being bred in the slums and it was broadcasted on all the major news networks. Baloach was charged once again with drug trade, theft, and murder. Naturally, to counter the negativity, the police would carry out their own broadcast: a mass raid against the don. It was all just for show anyway. The police just needed to show the media that they gave a shit. Nothing would ever really change. It was the slums; it had always been like this and it would stay this way.

Ali would then be harassed into buying some hash.

"You need it don't you, *chars?*"

Druggie. He hated being called that. Especially by the likes of low-life, callous criminals. He was just someone else they could push around and they took advantage of that fact. If he retaliated, he could be killed and despite everything, that was the last thing he wanted. It would mean escape, but not exactly where he wanted. There was only one place he knew he wanted to be. The hash just helped him get through the misery of the day so he could find himself there.

He checked his carton and saw it housed two cigarettes. It was enough to hold him until night. He never smoked at night.

Ali propped his elbow on the glass countertop of his store, ensuring his legs grazed the wooden drawer filled with cash beneath it. He had been saving up for months, but every time he'd have *just* enough to leave this hellish place, he'd get robbed, sometimes by the policemen and other times by anyone under the don's protection. Maybe Ali did this to himself; he would leave the drawer unlocked or leave a 500 Rs. note poking from its side. He was just being careless, he thought.

Not this time.

Ali pushed the drawer further in, making sure there was no gap thicker

than a hair in the outlines of the drawer. He locked it deliberately, and stuck the key deep in his pocket.

He exaggerated his movements to mimic the finality of his decision on the day he would finally leave, but was overwhelmed with sadness. He remembered his first clear memory: a leather ball hitting the pavement, his father kicking it to his five year old frame, and the twinkle in his mother's eyes. He thought of his last good memory: a delicate figure cloaked in white by the moonlight.

It was five in the afternoon and the sun was its hottest, baking everyone underneath it. Ali saw an old man sitting across the shop. His back was against a brick wall, knees up, face pointed straight at the sky, eyes closed, sweat pooling in the wrinkles on his forehead. Ali stared at him in bewilderment, wondering why he didn't even try to seek shelter.

A young girl wobbled to him carrying a bottle of cloudy water.

"Uncle, get in the shade! Please come inside! You'll get sick!"

She pulled on his sleeve, bit her lip and furrowed her eyebrows. The man looked taken aback. His face softened smoothing his wrinkles. He followed her slowly, his eyes watering. Ali's do too.

~*~

She had just been drifting to sleep when she heard rattling. She twitched her eyes to see Ali gesturing outside the window. Sleep escaped her eyes and she followed the drill. She grabbed her mother's neatly folded shawl from her chair and wrapped herself with it—covering her face, revealing only her kohl-rimmed eyes—and took the stairs to the roof.

Their houses were next to each other, almost hugging at the sides, but one was slightly taller. Zainab smiled at how even the buildings knew about the pair's nightly antics and wanted to make it easier for them. Zainab and Ali could never agree which structure was taller and every night they'd debate until finally one would declare that they would just measure it one day.

He waited on the ledge of his roof and extended a hand as soon as she appeared from the stairs. He pulled her over and just as she let out a hint of a scream, his hand reached to cover her mouth.

She elbowed him, "Oh, relax!"

He smiled, "You can never be too careful."

She revealed herself, setting the shawl on the ledge and laying on top of it. He sat next to her and lit up his only hash-free cigarette of the day.

He didn't feel restless in the air around Zainab. Somehow, the city didn't

tease him at this hour—he thought maybe it too softened at the sight of her under the moonlight. He grazed his hand on the concrete of the ledge and saw the palm of his hand painted with dust. It made his hand look like the color of milk at night and not the dull, grey slab of meat he saw in the day. He took a drag of his cigarette and blew it in her direction. He wondered how they must look on the roof, their silhouettes jutting out of the rough skyline of the city. Out of place. At least she was. His edges were probably undefined and obtuse in all the wrong places, just like the metropolis. Hers were smooth, kind, and sure; they mellowed the acid spewing from neighborhood. Ali surveyed the crumbling houses below them, a flicker of light coming from a few. He knew these will be put out eventually, reflecting the drabness in everyone's eyes. Everyone's besides Zainab's.

Zainab loved being here at night, under the musty breeze and stars. She loved it because of Ali. She didn't need to think about what she would say around him. Her stomach would hurt from all the laughing. She liked that he listened to her, and disagreed. She liked his confident, sharp contours which were in stark contrast to her blunt form. She wanted to be like him: less timid, spontaneous. She forced herself up and stole a puff from his cigarette, but ended up coughing. She saw the corner of his mouth twitch and he turned to her briefly. She didn't understand why his eyes sparkled with wonder in these subtle moments. It was like the scarce love in his veins would swell and overflow and he'd choose to spill it on her. She didn't know why.

She felt like an alien in this city, untouched by all its toxicity. She didn't believe the only place she had ever known could ever hurt her. She then looked at Ali: his disheveled hair, dusty, wrinkled clothes, the wrinkles on his forehead, and the scars on his mouth and under his eye from the fist fights he couldn't keep out of. These were all the souvenirs the city offered him and it made her heart sink. She wished she could sport his marks and steal the bad memories they reminded him of.

She loved looking out to the city and seeing *things*. People, houses, cars, stray dogs and cats. The sounds of car horns, the planes flying above, and the brightness from lights pouring out of buildings—nothing was ever lifeless, at least never all at once. Somehow, the city never showed the perpetual darkness it was in and that was comfort to her.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?"

Ali looked at her in disbelief. "Beautiful? *Beautiful?* It's filthy, it's overpopulated, it's—"

"Home." Zainab answered contently, until she realized that may be a lie. It was home, but it was home because of Ali. With him, the air seems less polluted, the Arabian Sea less murky, the gunshots deafened. The thought of this—them on the roof—made her feel only they knew the secret of surviving

in this city. While the street slept, Zainab was most alive, her eyes brimming with wonder at the world around her. She wondered if he felt the same—if she was the pulse in his heart, too. Her chest became heavy with this question.

“Some home. One I’m always trying to escape.”

“You don’t try to escape me.”

He cocked his head, expressionless. “No. I don’t.”

This was enough to ease her chest. The remnants of his voice lingered around them, making the buzz of silence more pronounced. She peered at his words pleasantly, watching them float higher and higher into the sky, taking with them her consciousness. She drifted to sleep.

~ ~ ~

While Zainab slept, Ali wondered how much longer they could keep up their routine before his only solace was snatched from him. He knew this was temporary, before Zainab got married, before either of them became victims to the gunshots. He didn’t want out of Karachi, but just out of the war zone. Out of these slums.

He wanted to take Zainab with him, ask her to leave at his side but he was always afraid of being rejected. She grew up in the confines of this neighborhood, and never experienced the hostility of the dons firsthand. She had her father to look after and kids to teach. She was *comfortable*, while Ali was aching to start anew. He wanted to heal his wounds that just seem to stay sore and opened in this part of town, susceptible to dirt and other contaminants which slowed the process.

Ali thought of life without Zainab and it pained him. She was the center of his world because his days ended with her on the rooftops of Karachi and started with the glimpse of her tangled hair covered by a tattered shawl, retreating to her room at the crack of dawn. He got through the days to dwell in these few moments. He couldn’t ever bring himself to say goodbye to her, no matter how exaggerated he made his movements. He didn’t want there to be finality in their goodbyes.

He smiled at the thought of him waving overdramatically to her, with violins in the background, a glorious sun setting behind his head, and her nonchalance. She would probably laugh and slap him on the back of his head, telling him to quit joking. He would comply because he knew she was right; night can’t commence without the two of them under the sky together.

Ali knew then that he would ask Zainab to marry him tomorrow. Marry him and leave everything behind.

~ ~ ~

She awoke to rain.

Rain drops fell on her forehead, cooling her face and clouding her eyes when she opened them. The air was cold and smelled like wet dirt. She shivered and lifted her blanket over her head to seek shelter. She could hear the sound of laughter and kids playing in the muddy puddles outside, the rain stripping the neighborhood of the dust settled on it since the last time it made an appearance. She couldn't even remember when.

Zainab was getting restless knowing the rest of the world was already up so she lifted herself off the bed and headed to her father's room in hopes that he had not left for work yet and she could make him his breakfast.

She headed out of her room and saw his shoes propped on the ledge he left them on yesterday. He must not have left. Zainab made her way to the door of his room and knocked a few fateful times before growing impatient. She wanted to sit in the rain; it had been ages since she drank tea polluted with the salt of rain water. Zainab decided to open the door slightly while knocking and saw her father still lying on his bed.

"*Abba jan*, please get up. I'm making you breakfast and it's raining! We haven't had rain since—well forever. Now, hurry up!"

No response.

Zainab furrowed her eyebrows and went in the room to face him, but saw a pale grey face with dark under eyes in place of her father. Her knees buckled and she put her face in his lifeless chest and sobbed softly in defeat.

~ ~ ~

Ali left the roof in a slew of emotions. He was excited, nervous, and overjoyed. He knew today was the last time for everything and it made him even more certain when the first rumble of clouds threatened to empty themselves over the slums. Ali loved rain because it cleansed him and everything it touched. It offered the blessing of a new beginning, even to the smallest creatures: an ant grasping on to a leaf carried by a torrent and flies erupting from all directions at the end of a downpour.

Walking slowly through the rain, Ali arrived at his store.

~ ~ ~

Zainab stood outside while the men took out her father's body, washed it, and wrapped it in white cloth in preparation for burial. She felt a strange emptiness, like her innards had been flattened and the remaining hollow spaces were filled with questions she never asked and things she never said

to the man who raised her. He left her with the quietness he had when he dwelled around her—completely unnoticed as if to cause minimal disturbance. She thought that said something about him, and something about what he thought of her. He was a simple man who tried his best to give his daughter a comfortable life, one where she didn't need to know about the dirty details of the world because they would taint the iridescence of how she saw it all—in the way *she* wanted.

She stood in the rain for a while, letting her clothes get soaked, letting the water seep into the roots and tangles of her hair, and letting the tears wash off of her face, leaving behind only their ghosts.

~*~

It was a surprisingly uneventful day at the store. No one came by to harass Ali, or give him smug orders about what to put on the glass counter. Or get him to buy hash—not that he needed it today.

The sky had turned a brownish gold, releasing rain ever so often. It seemed like the city smiled at everyone today and so did Ali. He watched children play on the wet streets of Karachi and the elderly enjoy their breakfast under the clouds. He watched two boys kick around a brand new soccer ball and listened to the thuds of its leather to their feet. Remarkably, the ball didn't get dirty through their game. Mud tried, but couldn't adhere to the ball's slick surface.

Suddenly, a teenage boy ran down the street, waving his hands over his head, panic all over his face.

"They—they got him! Zafar *sahib*! The police—they say the state will put him on trial! He could get the death penalty!"

Another, more hysterical boy followed, running behind him.

"Zafar Baloach *Zindabad*! Long Live Zafar Baloach!"

The pair went on through the neighborhood relaying their message and Ali watched the reactions settle in the faces of the people around him.

Shock.

Tears.

Half in anger. Half in laughter.

Ali would have fallen to the floor if it wasn't for the glass counter in front of him where he placed his elbows and buried his head in his forearms. He couldn't believe how this was happening after years of disappointment and just as he had lost hope for this town. He was grinning ear to ear in his arms and weeping feverishly, overwhelmed by how everything was finally falling

into place; the broken pieces of himself, Zainab, Karachi were being mended right in front of him and each chunk lined up seamlessly so the cracks seemed like a faint memory.

Ali heard the noises of the neighborhood citizens getting louder, but they were being drowned out by the rain which seemed to pour harder and harder, splashing Ali despite his shelter in the shop.

~~~

Zainab had been answering doors all day, women coming one by one to give her their condolences. She mustered a half smile and told them to keep her father in their prayers. She felt alone and didn't know what to do with herself, what she would do tomorrow, or the day after. Her routine had been broken and it left her mind spinning with the uncertainties that lie ahead. All she wanted was to see Ali on the roof, but it saddened her that even novelty of their secret meetings has vanished with the death of her father and thus, no reason was left for secrecy.

She had sat on the porch almost all day watching others play in the rain and seeing commotion break out with the passage of two young boys yelling something. She felt different and unconcerned with trying to figure out what happened in the faces of others. The animation of the cinema in her street would have excited her yesterday, but it all seemed unimportant to her when the curtains were drawn shut on her own play. She wanted to go out past her gate to find out what happened, instead of guessing. And she did.

~~~

Ali threw away all the expired goods in the store and moved all the old items at the very back of his shelves. He even gave away a new case of chips to the kids playing on the street. He closed the shop early because he couldn't wait to get back to Zainab. He didn't remember the last time he was this happy and he wanted to run up and down the streets yelling it to everyone.

Ali travelled to a small jeweler's shop, five miles outside the slum, with a fist full of 1000 Rs notes in his pocket. He came out with a small blue velvet box and dropped it into the chest pocket of his shirt instead of his pants.

He made his way back home and saw Zainab outside the house surrounded by women. She looked somber with a white headscarf on and her eyes looked slightly swollen and red.

"Didn't you hear?"

Ali turned to see a man looking in the same direction as him. Ali was confused.

"Excuse me?"

"Her dad passed away this morning. Heart attack. I've hardly ever seen the girl out before. I wonder how she's doing."

Ali looked at the man in disbelief and rushed to her. He broke the circle of women and reached for Zainab. Women let out gasps and cursed at the shamelessness of the pair. Zainab went limp in his arms, crying desperately and consciously. She cried for the loss of her father, the mother she had no memory of except for a tattered shawl, the distraught city, and above all she cried gratefully for Ali because he made it all bearable.

Ali cried too, at finally witnessing Zainab's vulnerability which she kept buried so diligently within her tiny frame. He cried at how the two of them survived in this madness. He cried for all the nights they spent on the rooftop secretly waiting for this day.

~ ~ ~

They awoke to neither gunshots nor rain.

Only to each other's faces which mirrored the past they both endured—they saw themselves in each other.

Jamie Monville



Junior

Major: English

Minor: Writing

Jamie Monville hails from Waterford, Michigan and has a deep appreciation for lakes. Last spring she spent a semester in New Hampshire with the New England Literature Program (NELP) and developed an appreciation for unlined journals. She's attracted to small things of beauty, like typography, or raindrops. And perhaps more importantly, she's finding it exciting and scary to be on the other end of the publication of a journal, working on the staff and being the Editor-in-Chief of the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program's Art and Literary Journal for the past three years.

Treasure Hunt

My brother and I used to play treasure hunt. We'd find something, usually a bottle cap that didn't make it into the trash can, or a small toy that was abandoned on the walk to school. It was never our own things; we had too few of them to be so careless. We'd find something, hide it, and draw a map to get there on the back of one of our returned school assignments. We tried to be detailed in our drawings, accurate in our measured steps. One misstep could throw you entirely off course. When we told that to our grandpa last November, he gave a little smile, a hard sigh and said "Life's that way." He died this past January. Car crash.

Gramps was a map man. He set us off on our first adventure when Cody was four and I was seven – handing us an old rolled up blueprint with a map

of our house on the back. We followed it exactly through the kitchen, up the stairs, through Cody's room, and my room, and back down again. When we finally reached the garden, two hand shovels were laid out with a piece of scrap paper underneath. "You're close! Now get digging!" About a foot down was an old Altoids tin with two tickets to see Finding Nemo.

The best hunt Cody led me on took me six hours; four alone just to find the map. Gramps liked to start us off with the map, but Cody and I were in agreement that the longer it took to find the map the better – that way it was like finding two treasures. This hunt started on a Sunday morning. Like always, Toby woke me up with his slobber. I jolted awake, grunting sleepily "Toby, not again!" and rubbed my face into his fur. I liked to think that giving him his slobber back gave him a taste of his own medicine, but he just saw it as nuzzling. He kissed me more and we wrestled for a while before I took all of his 180 pounds into my arms and gave him a bear hug. Sitting up in my bed, I kissed each of his floppy ears then looked into his deep brown eyes and before he became uncomfortable and looked away, I kissed him right on his nose. He shook his head away, tickled. We were even.

As I walked downstairs, the smell of bacon filled my nose and I knew that mom was home. Bacon meant it was a good work week. The table was set with plastic plates with Disney characters Cody and I had out grown. Mom wasn't quite ready to retire them.

"Is breakfast ready yet?" Cody asked.

"About five more minutes, honey," she said over the cracks and pops of the bacon grease. She turned, the edges of her smile gently rising, "Jacob, nice to see you out of bed."

"Yeah, well," I said wiping the sleepies from my eyes, "Toby made sure of that."

"How come he never sleeps in my room?" Cody whined.

"He doesn't like you."

His eyes looked up and his mouth opened just wide enough, ready to object, before he thought about it and reconsidered. Toby was my dog. Nobody could refute that.

Mom walked over with a steaming hot plate of bacon in one hand and scrambled eggs in another. Her eyes smiled, setting the plates down.

"Breakfast is served."

We were too busy eating to talk. When I finished, I got up, grabbing my plate to rinse and put in the dishwasher. That's when I saw the note underneath. My heart sank a little as I made eye contact with Cody. We hadn't

played since grandpa died. He locked eyes with me and nodded. I rinsed my dish, put it in the dishwasher and nervously, looked at the note.

Go to the laundry room.

I smiled. I always tried to make mine poetic and cryptic, but Cody's were always straight to the point. You had to love him for that. I made my way towards the laundry room.

"Where are you off to so fast?" my mom asked. I turned on my heel, thinking of something fast.

"I need to get some stuff then I'm doing homework at Jason's"

"Will you be home for dinner?"

"Yeah."

I made sure not to make eye contact with Cody.

The door struggled to open against the barricade of clothes and I soon found myself among them. I tried to right myself, but like a beanbag, I kept getting sucked in. *Okay*, I thought. *There's a reason he sent me here first.* Then I remembered. *Mom does laundry on Sundays!* I ransacked the mounds searching through each pair of jeans pockets. It was in the third one, a pair of Cody's.

Exit the laundry room and take 10 Cody steps to your right. When you reach the fork in the hallway, your heart will lead you in the right direction.

I laughed. *Hmmm, looks like he's adapting my cryptic style after all.* I followed his directions and saw, as soon as I reached the fork, the Valentine's Day poem I wrote for mom in the second grade. She cried when I gave it to her. Not happy, eyes watered with joy tears, but big, black, alligator tears that made mascara run down her face. She hugged me so tight, I felt her tears drop, wetting my head. Then suddenly as if she remembered she wasn't supposed to let us see her cry, she sniffed it all up, held me out and told me, very softly, I was beautiful. I felt guilty and confessed that everyone in class made one. That it wasn't special. She said, "Everything you make is special to me."

I lifted up the frame and there it was, just like I expected.

Visit Toby's favorite sleeping quarters.

I couldn't tell whether or not he was talking about my room or the couch. He liked both for different purposes. I was closest to the couch so I started there. I tore each couch cushion off, growing more disappointed with

each empty underside.

"What are you looking for?" I suddenly heard mom say.

I jumped. "I, uh, lost something."

"I thought you were going to Jason's?"

"I haven't found everything I need to go over there."

"Can I help you find whatever you're looking for?"

"No, Mom. I've got it."

I went back up to my bedroom to see if that was where he meant. I searched my room cleaning up as I went. It was clean about an hour later, but still no sign of the note. I took the note out of my right pocket (I was keeping the completed ones in my left) and stared at it, trying to figure out what he could mean. *This is Toby's favorite sleeping quarters.* I got down on all fours and pretended to be him. I realized I always fell asleep before he came in, so I didn't actually know where he slept. I tried out patches of carpet to see which ones were the comfiest. I even considered making it dirty again to figure out what he would find comfy in its normal state, when he came trotting into my room. He ignored the fact that I was on all fours and jumped right up onto my bed and laid his head on the pillow I always thought was just there for decoration. Upon a closer look I saw the unmistakable drool marks. I moved his head over and took the pillow out from under his head. He whimpered for a moment and then adjusted. Tucked in the pillowcase was the next note.

**If my calculations are correct, it's about lunchtime.
Go ahead and make yourself something to eat.
Your tummy will thank you.**

I looked at my alarm clock. 1:03. *Really, already?* And instantly my stomach started to grumble. I had to hand it to him – he was nothing if not spot on. In the kitchen, Mom was making herself a BLT. She heard me walking in and turned around.

"You're still here?"

"Still here."

"You want a BLT too?"

"I can get it," I said, grabbing for the white bread.

We sat in silence for a while, waiting for our slices to toast. She warmed up the bacon briefly in the microwave.

"So what homework are you and Jason working on?"

"We have a project for science."

"What kind of project?"

"It's called a Rube Goldberg project."

"Ah yeah, the cartoonist guy."

"You know him?"

"I mean, I don't *know* him. Grandma loved his cartoons though. Grandpa would joke that she loved Rube more than him, but I think they reminded her of him. He always went about things in the most convoluted way."

The toast popped and I grabbed mine and started slathering on Hellman's.

"You mind doing mine?" she asked.

We switched and she added all of the toppings to mine while I put mayonnaise on the side without all of the fixings. We cut each other's and switched back.

"Yeah, so anyway, the end goal of the project is to untie a pair of shoes without touching them. It has to have at least five steps, but we get one point of extra credit for each added step, as long as it works. We have to either video record it working or bring it to school. We're gonna video record."

"Sounds like a cool project."

"Yeah, it's not bad. Right now we're just kind of trying things seeing what works, what doesn't."

"I'm sure you'll figure it out."

"Yeah." I looked at my plate, now empty. "You want me to take care of it?"

"I've got it, go figure out your project."

"Thanks." I looked around. "Hey, where's Cody?"

I was surprised I hadn't seen him. It was a rule that we weren't supposed to interact with the other when we were in the middle of the hunt, but usually the creator would be so excited that they'd be spying on the hunter, seeing how long it was taking them, snickering silently when the other was stumped.

"He went over to Talia's."

Talia's? I thought, wow he certainly has confidence in his set up if he's willing to actually leave.

"Oh, I almost forgot," my mom said while putting the dishes in the dishwasher. She looked around for a washcloth, but settled for her pants. "He wanted me to give this to you."

She handed me an envelope.

"Are you still going to be home for dinner?"

"I don't know."

"Well, call me when you figure it out okay?"

"Sure."

I left the room flabbergasted. I didn't even have to open the envelope to know that it was the map. It was such a bold move on Cody's part. Everything had to line up perfectly in order for me to even get the envelope at all. What if mom hadn't been eating at the same time as me? Or had he created a background plan for that too? Maybe Cody's plan was to keep me in the house long enough so I would inevitably run into mom? But I'd already run into her in the living room...And boldest of all, what if mom had opened the letter? Treasure Hunt had always been a secret game between Cody, me and Gramps. Why would he risk ruining that? I took the piece of paper out of the envelope, and folded up on the back of one of Cody's graded math homework's (it wasn't his best) and saw one of the most simple maps I'd ever seen. It was a long walk, but pretty much a straight shot.

I walked off the porch, took a left and kept going. I passed the elementary school Cody would graduate from in June, passed the barber and the market. When I reached the end of Thompson street I had to make a choice, left or right. I consulted the map, but it told me to keep going straight. I looked closer and saw a note I hadn't seen before.

**When you get there, find Hank.
He'll show you where to go.**

When I looked back up I realized that I was at the cemetery. It looked smaller somehow without all of the snow. Not that I'd really know - I'd stayed in the car. Everything was blurry then. I remember the phone ringing, Mom answering and dropping the phone - like they do in the movies. "What's wrong?" I asked, but she just held me, her fingers shaking - wetting my hair again with her big, black, alligator tears. I fought out of her grasp. "Mom!" I said, stern, scared. "What's wrong?" but she couldn't answer. The phone was still dangling. I picked it up - dial tone. I hit redial. "Hello?" It was my grandma. "Grams," I said, "why is mom crying?" There was a silence, a swallow. "It's your grandfather, darling" she said her voice getting higher attempting to hold back her tears. Something about a car crash. Something about seatbelts and snow. "He didn't make it." I didn't say goodbye. I left the

phone dangling where I found it.

Then I was walking. I'd grabbed the blueprint map from my dresser, but I wasn't following it, I just needed to know it was there. It was starting to blizzard – white blurred my vision. I don't remember getting home. Or the next day or the next. Then I was in the funeral home. I saw his face. I saw my Grams face. Cody's hand wiping Mom's tears away. I sat in the back and watched old people talk in solemn tones. They all came and spoke, but nobody said anything about the treasure hunts. They didn't even know him at all.

I refused to see him buried. "Jacob, come on" my Mom pleaded. I pretended not to hear her. She didn't understand why I wouldn't come and I couldn't understand why she wanted to go. "YOU CAN'T SAY YOUR GOODBYES TO A DEAD MAN," I screamed out the window as she joined the others. "HE WON'T HEAR YOU!" Cody looked at me for a while and then said "Why can't you see that she's hurting too?"

Yeah, it is different now, I thought. It was more than the lack of snow. There were no people, the wind was calm. *It looks kind*, I thought. I swallowed and kept going. I walked up to the building, *who knew cemeteries had buildings?* and in the front door. The lobby had the familiar smell of a funeral home, and despite the cold, it was stuffy. There was an elderly man sitting inside.

"Excuse me sir," I said.

He didn't jump, just looked up. "Yes, how can I help you?"

"I'm looking for Hank."

His eyes softened as he got out of his chair.

"You must be Jacob."

I was expecting him to be chatty while we walked - like Joel who ran the used book store, eager for social interaction, but he wasn't. He wasn't solemn either for a man surrounded by sadness and death. Or shy. He was just quiet.

We stopped walking. I stood foot to foot with my grandpa's tombstone.

"Here," Hank said, pulling out an envelope from his jacket pocket. "It's from Cody."

I took the letter, looked at it for a while and then sat down on ground. It was cold. Hard. The ground hadn't frosted yet, but it felt like it would soon. I looked down at the envelope in my hands and finally decided to open it.

Dear Jacob,

I know this is not where you thought you'd be today. I know it's probably not where you'd like to be. But I think it's time you came and saw him.

It works differently for everyone, I know that, but some times it helps me to just sit with him. I don't talk to him. I know he's not here and he can't hear me, but I like to sit and think about him and let all of the memories rush over me. It's okay to cry here, because everyone who comes here is sad.

So try it okay? Just once. And if it doesn't work you never have to come back again. I just don't want you to hurt.

Cody.

P.S. Thank Hank for me okay? He's a really good guy.

I closed my eyes and saw his cold, dead, face in the casket. In clumps they came up to see my grandfather, like they weren't brave enough to go it alone. Then I thought, maybe that's what he would have wanted. Gramps was an entertainer – always looking for the next joke. He was at his best around a crowd of people. There he was, on our living room floor, laughing at a wobbly legged Toby as his puppy brain tried to wrap his head around the logistics of "fetch." His laugh was warm, like fresh pine cracking in the fireplace we didn't have – the perfect complement to mom's pumpkin pie. "Hey, now!" she smiled, coming in from the kitchen, "Who said you get to make fun of my dog?"

Gramps putting up his hand as if telling a secret to just Cody and me, "I remember a certain young lady pretending she was a dog..." shifting his eyes in the direction of my mom while pointing at her, obviously, behind the protection of his held up hand.

Grandma laughed, "Yeah! She thought the doggie paddle made her a dog!"

"I did not!" Mom interjected.

"Did too!"

And we laughed and we laughed and we laughed. I found myself laughing too, on the cold November ground in front of his tombstone. I got up, brushed myself off and followed the path back to Hank. I thanked him, for Cody and for me. Then I asked him if I could borrow his phone. I dialed, it rang, I heard "Hello?"

"Hey Mom," I said, "It's Jacob. I just wanted to let you know I'm coming home."

Sena Moon



Junior

Major: Art & Design

I'm originally from South Korea. This is my third year living in the US. I always enjoyed writing, so I'm grateful for the opportunity to read and write my own words.

Summer of Love

1998 marked the year where so many dads lost their jobs and friends moved away to smaller homes. Something called the IMF was the main talk in many dinner conversations. Mothers complained of high prices in the market. But to me, 1998 was the summer when Titanic was all the rage. I wasn't supposed to watch it because it was rated R, but my resident Vietnamese babysitter/cleaning lady—my ajumma—had her heart set on Rose and Jack. She even let me tag along to rent the video, twice, because it was so popular. Mama would've killed her, but for all that she sees through her glasses, mama lets a lot of things slide.

One thing she didn't let slide though, was my sugar intake. Mama hated sugar. She hated condiments of all sorts—said everything was too salty, too sugary. She was very into the natural way of eating things, which meant daddy just kept asking for the salt all the time during meals.

Meanwhile, Daddy was too tired to care about stuff like sugar intake because he made money like a pro. He rarely spoke and when he did, he complained of job losses and the government in that tone you take when

you're talking about something that doesn't concern you. Mama always told us she was lucky to have landed a man like daddy in times like these. She watched my sugar intake like a hawk because you might not land a man like daddy if you were say, five kilos overweight.

My sister Yura started sneaking out during this time. She was supposed to watch over me because ajumma wasn't really a reliable source—Mama said. But every afternoon, she tiptoed into mama's dressing room even though the house was empty and ajumma didn't give a damn as long as she got to watch her stories. Yura was smart enough to never touch the clothes with all those plastic covers, but she did get into the make-up cabinet, carefully smearing this and that with exotic confusing names such as Phyto-Lip Star Extreme Shine and Sun-Glow Press powder.

She would emerge looking like mama.

Yura would then slap together a jelly sandwich with the jelly all lumped together on one corner and the crusts still attached. When I complained, she broke off from preening in front of the bathroom mirror to get me a spoon because even she wasn't crazy enough to hand me a knife. Before she snuck out she handed me half a Snickers bar, promising the rest if I kept my jelly stained mouth shut.

With Yura always off on one of her rendezvous, I usually spent time with auntie Min who lived a couple of bus stops down from our home. I say a couple of stops but it might as well have been a continent away since everything's so different from Kangnam district. There's no uniformed doorman wishing you a good day, only a drunk man sitting on the stairs with his head buried in his arms—different suit but always seemed like the same guy.

Ajumma slunk away reminding she'd pick me up by four thirty. I stood there knocking, knowing I'd have to wait at least a full minute and a half before auntie came to the door. She always took her time. She sometimes had her hair up in curlers but had nowhere to go. There was nobody in the house but her now that uncle moved out forever.

Here's the story Mama told about uncle.

Uncle used to own a toy factory—actually his daddy used to own one, but I think somebody stole all the toys. He used to give me and Yura special edition toys for free until we both outgrew them. Mama says he met a bad woman and everything went down the drain. Because he "didn't want to upset auntie," he chose to move out of the house and out of the family tree that we were forced to research at school.

Here's the story Yura told about uncle.

"He met a gold digger and got her pregnant. His father sacked him because the toy factory's actually not his. He tried crawling back to auntie Min

but the gold digger threatened him with suicide so he went back. He's hiding out in Busan I heard. No wonder they never dished out the details to us. "

She was flipping through a movie magazine while she spoke. A still cut of Rose and Jack smiling out at the sea caught my eyes. Holding up the magazine, she handed out this piece of golden wisdom of a fourteen year old:

"Not everything's like Rose and Jack. Ships sink but no one's clapping for you. "

When she finally came out, Auntie Min was humming a song from the eighties and her hair was up in rollers. She smiled but her lips drooped at the corners. And she was wearing a bathrobe at three in the afternoon.

"Yuna darling! Great to see you as always—but this isn't the best time sweetie. "

Her hair shook as her head spied the corridors and she pulled me in with a single swoop of her spindly arm. The front of her robe swung open, revealing a skimpy negligee that Mama would have dubbed as the eighth sin. I wondered if she was sick, hence the morning garments.

"What's wrong auntie? "

"Nothing's wrong darling! Everything's super in fact. "

I had to admit she had kind of a glow, not unlike Yura's apparent delight at having landed a senior in high school. Placing myself temporarily on the seedy couch, I noticed the change in the apartment. There was a new fridge and a coffee maker, along with fancy plastic bags not unlike Mama's that held newly bought clothes from a boutique. Instead of the ratty fake fur coat that was always hanging on the coat hanger, there was a silky mink in its place, still in its plastic cover. A gleaming handbag sat next to me, monogrammed thoroughly with its namesake: Louis Vuitton. Framed wedding photos that she took down but kept on the kitchen counter was missing, replaced by—I had a bout of *déjà vu* here—a small poster of Jack and Rose, smiling out at the sea.

"Now I'm going to give ajumma a call to take you back home, okay darling?"

She even had a new cellphone.

I returned home and informed Yura about this development. As she rubbed make-up off her face, Yura sneered and chucked her used face wipes into the wastebasket.

"She's got herself a sugar daddy you dumbass. "

"What's a sugar daddy? "

Yura muttered under her breath as she checked her pores under the bathroom light.

"Why don't you go ask mom? It's something totally sleazy."

She snickered. I replied I didn't want to ask if it was something sleazy.

"Whatever. Can't wait till Mom hears about this."

Mama eventually heard, and from auntie Min herself.

Auntie paid us a surprise visit out of the blue one evening when Daddy was out making money and Yura was out making trouble. I'd been napping on the couch. I woke up at the sound of intercom and the sound of shuffling slippers. Mama slowly rose from her spot, her permed hair throwing a shadow on her profile. Her head suddenly shifted and I squeezed my eyes shut as I felt the full extent of her glare. When I worked up the courage, I peeked from under my lashes and saw Mama and auntie seated on opposite sides of our long table. Auntie was wearing her new mink.

"Vulgar."

Mama commented as she pursed her lips and glowered into her tea-cup as if she wanted to spit in it. I remembered those times when mama coached auntie vigorously on her eti-cat. I dunno what a cat has to do with manners but every one of those talks ended with auntie Min sniffing and making excuses while mama made her pinched face, that one she makes when she's about to blow the roof but doesn't want to show it.

"I love him unni. "

Auntie pleaded with mama, not knowing I was only pretending to sleep. Mama merely brushed off something from the rim of her cup, ready to get rid of this visitor, but auntie had more to say.

"You don't know what it's like for me. You never had to grovel. You have Junsang."

Mama flinched because that was daddy's name. I expected something worse to happen but the slap never happened and auntie Min rose from her seat like a ghost, the mink making her seem larger than life. It was the only time I saw auntie Min standing up to mama, all brazen like that. She didn't care if he was a married man, no no.

I wasn't allowed at auntie Min's home after that.

Chusuk came by and we all packed our bags to celebrate at our grandparent's home. Granny used to have this big picture of all of our families together, aunts and uncles and cousins all standing under a gigantic pine tree in suits and dresses. This picture used to decorate the living room, right

on top of the fancy credenza as the “crowning glory of her matriarchy.” Now a huge poster of Titanic took its place, looking ridiculous and somewhat lost as if it walked onto the wrong wall and stuck there. It was a contribution by Yura, a temporary solution that granny only allowed because she was soft on Jack, and also because “it is certainly big enough.”

Chusuk was normally a festive hectic event, where everyone talked too much and let down their hair, with even mama participating in a round of hwatoo—a card game that involved a lot of name calling and petty gambling. This Chusuk wasn’t very festive. Granny retired early complaining of headaches and ungrateful daughters. Grandpa smoked and drank with daddy and second uncle while they spoke of politics and golf. Second aunt whispered a lot with mama, only breaking off when my cousin spilt sweet rice drink on her new skirt. I overheard her saying: “She thinks she’s being romantic. Like Rose—the impoverished counterpart of Rose! “Second aunt cackled.

It was only because everything was so low-key that I noticed Yura slip out. I was sitting alone on the couch staring at the silly Titanic poster when I saw Yura slinking off with her Maryjanes dangling from her right hand, her coat in the nook of her left arm. Mama would have killed her for trying to miss out on a family event, but there were more catty remarks to be made about auntie Min. It broke my heart so I quietly slipped my sneakers on and followed Yura.

She half-walked half-skipped to the Dosan Park behind granny’s apartment. I hid behind a giant copper statue of Dosan Changho Ahn and watched Yura meet her own Jack.

Yura’s Jack wore a North Face Parka and had spiky dyed orange hair. He was tall but skinny, his bulky parka tapering off into a thin pair of chicken legs and a ridiculously large set of neon green Nike sneakers. He had angry zits erupting on his face and looked mean. He was nothing like those pretty K-pop singers Yura was normally crazy about. She didn’t seem to mind though. She hung off his arm and made faces I didn’t know she could make. I think she also put socks in her bra. I was needless to say, disappointed by her taste in men. She could do better.

Yura should have known Mama wouldn’t approve.

That one day when KBS broadcasted the last episode of “Happy Together” and I caught a cold, Yura finally received the final word on this boyfriend situation.

She didn’t take it well.

“Well fuck you!!! ”

She threw the receiver against the wallpaper, dragging down the entire

phone. It smashed on the floor, rousing ajumma from her nap.

“—I’m blowing this joint.”

Yura snapped, more to herself than me.

“But you have school.”

“I don’t care. ”

“Mama says we’re too young to date. And he’s ugly. Why are you crying?”

“He’s good looking and I love him. ”

With black mascara streaks on her flushed cheek, she tore off a jacket from the hanger and kicked the closet shut. She started randomly pulling out a couple of her dust ridden textbooks until she found the one she was looking for and fished out crumpled bills from inside the cover of “Principle of Mathematics.” I stood dumbfounded, holding the cup of ginseng water I was told to drink at 4pm to cure my cold and watched her break havoc in her room.

“Do you love even his zits? Enough to leave home? ”

She halted and looked daggers at me.

“Whatever. What would you know about love—BABY! ”

She spat the last word as if she meant it as a bad word.

But I did know love. I’d learnt so much about love these past few weeks that I was terrified of it.

“Ajumma’s not going to clean that up. Mama said—”

“Oh my god, mama says, mama says!!”

I anxiously circled her like a broken satellite as she dumped the contents of her school bag onto her bed and filled it with money, clothes, and Sisley make-up stolen from Mama’s drawers. She included her Sony Walkman as an afterthought before stomping out of the room, nearing slamming my fingers.

Ajumma was awake and on the couch, entirely focused on the character in TV who was revealing to the TV daughter that she was adopted. The TV mother started crying on cue and ajumma didn’t even flinch when we both left the apartment, Yura screaming and me crying. I followed her easily with my shorter legs because even in these dire dramatic moments, Yura never took the stairs. But when we got outside, I was definitely short-handed.

“Unni! ”

She gave me the finger without turning her head.

“Unni—!! ”

Lagging behind, I tried again, pausing by the mail slots to catch my breath. The sun was out, brilliantly lighting up the lobby in pools of golden light. Rows and rows of sun speckled trees flanked the apartment gates, showing off their vibrant foliage. It was such a pretty day and Yura was leaving home forever. That seemed tragic.

“Unni—wait!!! ”

I hollered at her one last time, hoping to god she didn’t elope with this North Face parka guy, disappear from our family photos and turn into a poster of Titanic.

“You can’t fall in love—mama says falling in love is VULGAR! ”

Sydney Morgan-Green



Sophomore
Major: Creative Writing

I'm currently a Creative Writing major in the Residential College. I'm currently in my sophomore year working towards not only getting a major in Creative Writing, but also in Psychology. I'm the current art director on the RC Review and like any other aspiring author I love to spend my time reading any book I can get my hands on.

Forest of Darkness

She could see Nikolai watering his garden. Although the plants were dried and obviously dead he watered them as if they were blooming. Rose could vaguely hear him whispering unintelligible nothings to the plants as she approached him. He was without a doubt insane, but he was her only chance, and if he could reveal any information about the forest, Rose would stop at nothing to get it.

"Excuse me; Are you Nikolai?"

He turned to her and asked with confusion in his voice, "Who's asking?"

I want to know about the forest," Rose said cautiously.

"Child, nobody goes into that forest. Bad things are in there."

"What bad things are in there? You're the only person to enter the for-

est and get out alive, please tell me all that happened," She pleaded as she walked closer towards him.

"I don't know what you're talking about, child. I have never set a foot in that forest," He said defiantly turning back to his dead flowers.

"But I know you went into the—"

"Silence! I haven't entered that forest," he said angrily turning to her.

Knowing that if she angered him she would get nothing, Rose stepped away from him and watched him care for his dead flowers. Was this really the person who had the answers to her questions? Words interrupted her thoughts.

"Why do you want to know about the forest?"

Using her one chance to get anything out of him, Rose said, "I can't stay in this village any longer. They plan to use me for the offering and I just want to live. I really need your help."

"Ah. So the same fate that Megan had has befallen you as well. Why do you think the forest will solve your problems?"

"It is the only way I can escape."

"You don't know what's in that forest. Things no person wants to see are in there. We were just as naïve as you, we thought salvation was in that forest. There was only hell and terror. They beckon you and make you think they are family and friend. They adapt their bodies and voices to look like those you know, and then they attack. They attack you and consume your fear. They trap you and then eat you whole. I saw them do it; they ate Megan without any remorse."

Quietly, Rose asked, "Who are they?"

Seeming as if a trance was broken, Nikolai looked at Rose with confusion and asked, "Who are you?"

Taking that as her cue to leave, Rose turned and started to walk home, but before she was too far she heard Nikolai say, "Rose, the light will illuminate the truth. The light of the sun will protect you."

Rose turned and asked, "How did you know my name?" She received no answer though; Nikolai was turned back to his dead garden giving it all of his attention.

That night Rose lay in her bed and thought about the day to come. Tomorrow she would be offered to the gods and that would be the end of it. She would never escape, not with the village guards watching diligently

outside of her house. If death was approaching, she would welcome it.

She rolled onto her side hoping for some sort of comfort and was greeted by the familiar eyes of her brother.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Be quiet. Put these clothes on and come with me. Don't make a sound. We need to get past the guards," Leo said as he handed her clothes.

Doing as she was told, she and her brother quietly exited their house through the back door and met up with their father. Not wanting to give them away she followed them through the back alleys of the village to the entrance of the forest.

Rose turned to her father and brother and asked, "Wait. What's going?"

"We won't let you be offered to the gods. We want you to live, and the only way you can escape the clutches of the Elders is if you do what mom did," said Leo.

"But the Elders will punish you for this," Rose exclaimed.

"Don't worry about us, just go, and don't look back," said her father.

"I don't care about what the Elders will do to me, as long as my children are safe I will do anything regardless of the punishment."

Before she could say anything to her father, shouts from the distance interrupted her.

"Looks like we're out of time. Go. We'll handle the guards," said Leo looking to where the guards were coming from.

"It's late, how will I see in the darkness." Her father reached in his pocket and handed her a pack of matches quickly. He then pushed her towards the fence and turned his back. "Go," he said firmly.

Rose stuffed the matches into her pocket and climbed the fence. As soon as her feet hit the ground on the other side she hesitated. She looked to see her brother and father being apprehended by the village guards and nearly called out to them, but she knew better. They had done this for her, and she wasn't foolish enough to jeopardize their efforts. With tears in her eyes, Rose ran into the darkness of the forest. She had no sense of direction, and no beacon to lead her. She only had her determination to escape the clutches of the Elders, so she ran. The branches scratched her face and tore her clothes, but she didn't stop. She only stopped when she could breathe no longer.

She sat where she was and took deep breaths; as she breathed in and

out she felt a figure approach her. She took the matches from her pocket and lit one. She used the light to see who was coming, hoping it wasn't a guard. It was a woman, who looked injured. She was crying and mumbling in a language Rose did not know. Rose got up and approached the woman, to attempt at calming her. The woman seemed so distressed, but as soon as she got close to the woman with the match, an inhuman scream came from her and her body morphed into an unearthly figure.

Without a second thought, Rose dropped the match and ran in the opposite direction as fast as she could. As she ran she could hear Leo and her father screaming behind her. They were calling for her, begging for her help, they needed her. Swallowing her fear she turned around and ran back towards them. They needed her, and regardless of her desire to live, she would help her family. Rose stopped when she reached where their voices were coming from and no one was there. She looked all around her and saw no one, but her brother and father were still calling for her. She covered her ears and crouched down, the voices only got louder and more desperate. This must have been what Nikolai was talking about. The things in this forest were fooling her, and terrifying her so they could devour her.

She lit a match and when she looked up she saw her brother and father, but like the woman she had seen before they were covered in blood from head to toe. Too scared to take her eyes off of them she failed to move fast enough when her match was extinguished and they lunged at her.

Emily Morley



December 2013 graduate
BA from School of Art & Design

Emily Morley is a recent graduate from the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design. Her interests include travel, photography, printmaking, writing fiction and non-fiction, collage, and blogging. She hopes to become an author and independent artist in the future.

After

Ivy could hear the dim movement of people around the house from the stool where she perched, and she waited a moment to make sure no one was near the stairs before slipping out of the bedroom and into the hallway. There must be a dozen women from her village in the kitchen, all of them cooking, cleaning, and talking as she stayed upstairs with a dying man. It was noon and lunch would be ready soon. One of them would fill a tray with two plates, two forks, two glasses of water, and deliver them to the bedroom. Ivy would be expected to feed her father. He hadn't accepted much besides water that week and always wanted her to hold his hand. It surprised her how needy he was, how slow the fever was taking him. She wiped his brow and kissed his cheek. They hadn't touched like this since she was a little girl. Whenever she had to step outside to go to the bathroom, guilt rushed her forward. Suppose he passed while she was bathing. Suppose she was sleeping when it happened. Suppose he was alone.

No, she couldn't leave him. Dahlia took care of everything else and

perhaps it was selfish of Ivy to let her but she couldn't help it. Surely Dahlia understood. Surely she saw how important it was that Ivy stay with her father. They were reading a book together, some dusty, boring old thing, but he kept asking for more. It was as if he was in denial, picking something so long and complex. Wouldn't it have been simpler to read folktales or poetry-something shorter? But Ivy didn't complain. She liked to think that he found her voice soothing and was, in fact, surprised they'd gotten this far in the book, considering he drifted in and out of sleep so frequently. They had two chapters to go when it happened.

At first, she thought he'd simply fallen asleep again and had closed the book to sit in the stillness of the heat. It was stuffy in the bedroom and dark. They only kept the curtains open at night so he could watch the wandering stars. She was glad for a rest, but all she could think about were his last words to her.

"You have to get to America," he'd suddenly gasped as they finished a chapter. "Promise me."

Ivy had looked at her father and seen the worry in his eyes. It wasn't only death he feared. It was the inability to make the journey across the ocean with his daughters that concerned him. It was the sending them into the vast unknown with only hope and luck to shield them from a harsh journey and a harsher destination. He'd always spoken about opportunity in America as if one just had to reach out and snatch it, and kept postcards of beaches that didn't look so different from the ones past the edge of the village.

Greetings From Miami! one postcard proclaimed. The Magic City! said another. On the front there were pictures of palm trees and people in sunglasses and bathing suits and scrawled beneath the printed greetings were spanish translations. Saludos de Miami! La Ciudad Mágica! On the other side were messages that seemed to validate the claims. America really was a place of magic both great and terrible.

Mostly, Ivy thought it was all talk. Her father had conjured up dreams of moving there so many times that she'd stopped believing them a long time ago. But he was dying, and he'd sold the house. He'd spent everything to send her away. There were people to stay in Cuba for but only Dahlia really mattered and apparently she was coming along. Ivy turned the idea over in her head and stroked her father's hand. She was so wrapped up in it that she didn't see that his eyes were open and unblinking. Once she realized, she dropped his stiffening hand and moved to sit on the bed beside him. She felt for a pulse. Nothing. She'd been sitting right there, and she'd still missed it.

Ivy pushed the thought away. She stood up and left the room. She had to tell Dahlia.

It was cooler in the hall. Sazon wafted up from the kitchen, and Ivy could hear someone laughing. She wiped her damp face on the skirt of her dress before pulling the whole thing off and tossing the clothing over the stair railing. She would yell downstairs for Dahlia just as soon as she found the right words. A few minutes of ignorance couldn't hurt her. Perhaps it would do the opposite.

Ivy gripped the wooden rail as she crept down the hall towards her father's study. It felt right to be barefoot on the wooden floor of the house. It felt right to be stripped down to her underwear, as if it were some sort of preparation for the coming onslaught of the world. Any time now it would be colliding, crashing, collapsing in all around her. Time was now arranged in two categories: before and after.

No one had been in her father's study for months except Ivy. She had come to open the windows for the fresh ocean breeze and to dust and tidy and shuffle around the papers on the desk before collapsing into the lumpy armchair her father so cherished. Now, when she opened the door the chair was facing her, almost like a challenger, and she paused for a moment, one hand on the door handle, the other dangling at her side. How many times had she seen him in here? How many times had she interrupted his work? He'd taught her how to perform stitches on an unripe banana in this room, taught her how to clean wounds and wrap them. When he had taken her out into the village to tend to the sick and dying, she helped him pack his kit. She knew where all of his supplies were--that needles and bandages were in the bottom left drawer and the sharp instruments of surgery were in a leather case on the bookshelf. She knew he always took a jug of water and a bottle of wine. Patients always wanted one or the other.

Some people in the village said it wasn't right, taking someone so young to see such injuries, but Ivy had never minded the blood. When Mr. Molina had broken his arm ten years ago, she had almost felt excited as they rushed to his house. They'd found a crowd huddled around him and his wife holding a damp cloth to his forehead, whispering some unknown words of encouragement. Ivy's father had set down his bag and began assessing the damage right away, but all Ivy could do was stare at the exposed bone sticking out of Mr. Molina's arm. It didn't seem real, but he wailed when her father tried to set it. On the way home, after it had all been taken care of and settled, her father put his arm around her--a strange but welcome gesture.

She stared at his chair and her legs suddenly felt weak. Her arms hung loose. All at once she stumbled towards the chair, caught herself, and then slumped in it. She stared at the bookshelves on the opposite side of the room. How many of the books had her father read? How many would remain untouched? She certainly wasn't going to read them. How could she? Her father had winked out like one of his precious stars and these books belonged to him. Ivy sat for what felt like a long time, waiting for the world to adjust

to a new equilibrium now that it was one soul lighter, and only started when she heard the creak of the second-to-bottom stair.

The women downstairs must be stirring. Ivy thought about getting up to shut the door but stayed frozen in her chair. She prayed it was Dahlia coming up the stairs and not one of the mothers. When she heard slow, plodding steps, Ivy knew it was Dahlia. The footfalls stopped halfway up the stairs and then suddenly quickened.

Dahlia must have seen the dress. Such a small flag but she had always been good at sensing those types of things, good at reading the room as if passion and tension were codes she could decipher in the air. Ivy had always valued her for that, even when they were little girls. She remembered the moment they met, how she'd been impressed with the length of Dahlia's hair--almost to her waist. They'd sat on the border between the grass and the road, never mind dirtying their dresses and black buckled shoes, and Ivy combed Dahlia's thick hair, tips to roots and back again. Dahlia picked at the weeds that weren't prickly and drew with a single finger in the dust of the road. Somehow that afternoon had flourished into something more encompassing than friendship.

It had taken a while for Ivy to realize why her father had agreed to take Dahlia in. Everyone knew she was poor but the first time Ivy invited her over for dinner, Dahlia devoured as much as she could and tried to stuff rolls in her pockets. They found pats of butter and a few mangos and papayas in her backpack. Ivy didn't remember leaving Dahlia alone in the kitchen and thought she might get blamed for the theft, thought maybe her father would yell and forbid Dahlia from the house, but he did something else entirely. He adopted her. Unofficially. She moved in the next day although it took a few weeks for her to adapt to the idea that food and water were readily available. Every time Ivy went into the guest bedroom, there was a new stash of fruit, but somehow her father never got angry. They shared chores, walked to school together. The three of them even went on medical runs although Dahlia wasn't fond of the blood and quickly found excuses not to join in.

"Ivy!" her sister yelled now. "Ivy, where are you?" A moment later she filled the bottom half of the doorway in a stained apron, her face flushed and hair wild from the steam of the kitchen. She must have put the tray of food in the bedroom. "Are you okay? Why's your dress off?"

Ivy didn't answer.

"Did he---did it happen?"

"Yes," Ivy whispered. The world was beginning to crumble in the corners of her vision. "It happened."

"Jesus christ," Dahlia said, turning to rush to the bedroom.

Ivy watched her go and then sprang up to follow her. She slowed as she reached the doorway of the bedroom, reluctant to step inside. It felt like she was underwater, unable to breathe, unable to hear, each movement resisted and slowed. She stood adrift, waiting for something to push her closer to her father. Already he looked grey and uncomfortable. His mouth hung open just slightly and there was a faint smell of urine in the air.

"You didn't even close his eyes," Dahlia said in a softer voice, coming around the side of the bed to thumb his lids shut. Ivy watched silently as she pulled up the covers, adjusted the pillows, and opened the shades to let in the afternoon sun. It occurred to Ivy that she should have been doing those things, that no one deserved to die in the darkness, but she was once again rendered mute and dumb.

They both stared for a minute or two, Dahlia clutching the bed frame. Ivy could hear her sister's tears and finally entered the room. She sank onto the stool she'd perched on earlier.

Dahlia looked towards her and quietly asked, "Why didn't you call for me?"

Ivy looked at the unraveling rug beneath her. The plastic mat beneath it looked skeletal.

"I couldn't."

"What?"

She gripped the seat of the stool. "I couldn't."

"You couldn't?" Dahlia repeated. "Are you kidding me?" The tears were coming faster now. "You couldn't? I'm downstairs actually doing something productive during all of this--cooking, cleaning, taking care of you, taking care of him--while you sit up here like you're the one dying."

Ivy looked away. "I'm sorry."

"You've done nothing to take care of Father except hold his hand," Dahlia spat. "Who do you think feeds him? Who do you think bathes him? Me. I do that--not you. I should have been there when he passed! I deserved that."

Anger grew in Ivy's chest, nearly choking her as she blurted, "You're not even his daughter."

Dahlia looked as though she'd been slapped. "I still deserved to be with him."

"Yeah?" Ivy said, rising. "Then why did he never ask for you? Why did he never want to speak with you, Dahlia? Answer me that."

"Because we talked while you were gone!" Dahlia cried. "Did you really think we never spoke while I fed him or changed the sheets? God help me, it would be a slow death if you were the only person he had to talk to."

"Get out," Ivy whispered.

"Excuse me?"

The world was shaking, tumbling down in full force. "Get out of my house!"

"Oh, fuck you, Ivy," Dahlia said before storming out of the room. "It's not your house."

"He sold it, you know," Ivy called after her from the doorway. "The house and everything in it."

Her sister turned back. "What?"

"It's all gone."

Dahlia seemed to sag as she came back to the bedroom. She moved past Ivy to grip the footboard and stare at their Father. "But why? But what about us? Where will we go?"

Ivy against the doorframe. It was beginning to crack. "He wants us to leave," she said. "He wants us to try to get to the States."

"That was all talk."

"It wasn't. He changed the will when he first got sick. He already paid for the journey."

Dahlia moved to sit on the bed. She took Ivy's father's hand. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"What would I have said? I tried to tell him not to do it."

"Why wouldn't he have mentioned it to me?"

"I don't know."

There was a pause and they wouldn't look at each other. Ivy crossed her arms. She should have told Dahlia earlier. She couldn't quite say why she hadn't before. Perhaps it had been easier to pretend that her father wasn't forcing their hand.

"What are we going to do?" Dahlia asked.

"We're going to go," Ivy replied.

Dahlia dropped her father's hand. "Are you insane?"

"People have done it before."

"Bullshit," Dahlia said. "You think people have done it before. Big difference."

"We have the money to go," Ivy said. "Everything's already paid for. Do you remember that skinny man who came to the house a few weeks ago--the one we'd never seen before?"

"Yes."

"He set it up already. He's the man that leads people on these trips. I guess someone meets us on the other side, too."

"That doesn't exactly inspire confidence."

"But that's why father sold the house, Dahlia. He thought he was giving us a gift. We've talked about leaving, too, haven't we?"

"When we were young," Dahlia said. "It was a dream. It doesn't make sense now. Why risk it? We have a life here."

Ivy couldn't come up with an answer.

"You can't actually believe Father's stories about the U.S.. He was delusional about that place."

Ivy turned away. "Don't say that."

"He was. He thought it was some kind of paradise, Ivy!"

Ivy ran her hands over her face and then let them drop with a sigh. "What are we going to do about the burial?"

"I don't know. Should we have told everyone downstairs yet?"

Ivy almost laughed. "I suppose so." She took a roll off the tray of food that was sitting on the bedside table. "Caldo gallego," she said, nodding towards the bowl of soup. "His favorite."

Dahlia hesitated and then took the bowl and began eating. "It's good," she said between mouthfuls. "Mrs. Lima knows what she's doing."

"She's downstairs?"

"Yeah. She got bored--said there was only so much a woman could cook--and started game of poker." Dahlia laughed. "Nearly cleaned everyone out, too." A silence fell over them and then she asked, "So you really want to go? You really want to risk it?"

"Yeah," Ivy said. "I do. What's keeping us here? Think of everything out there."

"Death. Starvation. Exposure to the elements."

"But if we get past all that--"

"We won't."

"But if we do," Ivy said. "It'll be worth it. Come with me. Please. Think about it. Father wouldn't have wanted us split up."

Dahlia placed the bowl back on the tray, stood up, and went to the door. She paused, turned back, and said, "I'll go tell them."

Théo Münch



Junior

Major: Psychology

Minor: Creative Writing

Théo Münch was born in Paris, France and moved to Western Michigan when he was five years old. He grew up in the small town of Saugatuck, Michigan and is now a Junior studying Psychology and minoring in Creative Writing at the University of Michigan. He decided to pursue creative writing because of the simple yet conceptual aspects of poetry, and strives to describe the unknown in terms of the known. His writing style tends to be simple and consistent while aiming to be physical and abrasive.”

(Home)

The loft in Paris. Glass squares creating translucence around a bathroom with a tub bigger than I will ever be. A TV, sitting cross-legged watching Aladdin over, and over, and over. The spiral staircase, falling from it, crying on it at my goodbye party. The bedroom framing an abandoned train station, where we once went to pull levers and press buttons. The laundry room, sitting on the dryer, confusingly staring at the Darth Vader in my little hands. Haircuts, cutting follicles in lines hard and straight like the thin bar in the kitchen. Sliced cucumber with salt, only with salt. Kiwis and then not kiwis. The skywalk overlooking the living area, turn around and you can see for miles. For miles, Paris wakes you up in the morning and sings to you at night the sweet, cracked mixture of the city. Listen closely and you can hear two people saying I love you. Listen closer and you can hear a heart beating.

Une Lettre de Mamy

It comes in waves.
the first line a small puddle,
the second line has a stir
the third like a shallow stone dipping into a pond
rushing water over the words on the page
drowning them deep,
cold but forgiving.

and when the lines converge
with every last word about you
and the seasons changing
and dinners with family
and the weather becoming colder,

the tide is high.

I am in open water
vision blurred
thunder spilling
clouds overflowing
water merciless
pushing me down,
but I float.

Tu me manques
as in
you are missing from me
instead of,
I miss you

Memory

It wasn't as though
he didn't feel it
and it wasn't as though
he didn't want to.

Graying nails, skin,
fragile fingers cracked his ancient air,
Icy waves of rotund reassurance

pushing away from his hands
just so that he could
not reach them

You might not know how it feels
tasting it
the tiny tactile tips of your fingers
kissing shyly at the words
never finding an opening
just a glimpse, then
nothing

He was bruised, but not broken
a frame
unframed
and while his thoughts were temporary
and never ending rows of light
shone upon from the hollow sun
filling empty cavities
leading to a smiling sea of bliss,
the only thing he knew
was fading

Murmur

What would I do with you if I found you?
An innocent heart murmur
touching
an innocent heart murmur,
wires intertwined,
legs stretched
feet up
the drop of your back slowing into a smile.

Maybe planets would shift into a row
contemplating their own sanity
making sure everything is
in
its
place,
just to be reassured of reality.

Maybe time would start
stopped after so many years of cuts and bruises
cuts and bruises
cuts and bruises.

Maybe a light would turn
on,
somewhere,
white wiring wisps of light burst
elegantly exploding the room with
color

Maybe my lips would move.

Maybe my eyes would close.

Jake Offenhartz



Junior, Ford School of Public Policy
Minor: Creative Writing

Jake enjoys writing in a variety of forms and sometimes dreams of becoming a writer. Other times he dreams of being better at math and becoming an astronaut. Or a doctor. He's currently studying in Madrid, where he is not worrying about stuff like this at all. He enjoys coffee and writing and napping with his cat, though not necessarily in that order.

Moonlight

We arrive at the trail's highest point and I'm silenced. Mount Washington is visible from across the valley, its peak obscured by snow-carrying winds that whisk through the Presidential range. In many ways, witnessing the great cliff from here is more remarkable than standing atop it, though I suspect many would disagree.

"It's wonderful," Rob whispers. "I haven't come out here in years."

"Me neither," I say. I watch as Rob takes a seat on the ground, pushing his ungloved hands into the snow and bringing chunks of it to his mouth. I try to say something about high culture and low culture and almost everything being meaningless, about man-made structures, social constructions that we'd tried so hard to subvert but in doing so had accidentally erected our own. But I can't find the words and so I just sit down next to Rob.

"You had an exorcism then?" he asks. "You're not haunted anymore?"

"No," I tell him, "Not yet. I've lived simply for six months, without ego. I fill in at the inn and work as a handyman in the village, plumbing-related calls mostly. The demons—emotional disturbances, if you prefer—still come to me sometimes. Mr. Thomas thinks maybe they can be extracted. So does Charlotte."

"What do you think?" he asks.

"I don't know," I say. "Every conviction I've ever had is gone. I don't know if they're right—sometimes I don't even believe in the demons, but Mr. Thomas seems to know what he's doing. Their family is happy at least—happier than anyone else I've ever met. And when I'm around Charlotte, I'm happy too. I know that counts for something. What do you think?"

"It doesn't matter, does it? You've already made up your mind." Rob rises from the ground then and I realize it's time to go home. We walk back to the house in silence, our chins pressed to our chests to fight against the wind. We arrive in the yard and Rob stops, pausing before an oak tree and gazing back toward Mount Washington. "It's freezing out here," Rob says. "I don't like it at all."

"Me neither," I mumble.

"And it changes so fast, with absolutely no warning." I nod again, unsure if we're still talking about the weather.

"Do you want to run through it?" I ask.

We stand there and I feel the cold seeping into my body, passing through my skin and into my bones. "I'm terrified for what you've become," Rob says, then skips across the front yard without waiting for a response.

In that moment he is serene; a silhouette tumbling atop a pure white foreground, dwarfed by a sweeping alpine backdrop, the thicket itself belittled by the infinite heavens freckled with stars. My heart pumps euphoric plasmas down to my gut, out through my pores and into the atmosphere. I am exalted, outright honored to exist in a world with so much love, love that is crushing and good! The view grows more arresting as my elation reaches a maddening crescendo. I briefly shut my eyes and the fragile scene collapses to black. I feel the world spinning and so I spin with it, my hands clasped above my head like a blind ballerina.

I open my eyes to find the beauty has vanished. The landscape is spoiled, a soggy spectacle of wilderness interrupted by our postmodern cabin of questionable taste. I am a dizzy and drugged-up deadbeat, emitting carbon dioxide from a still-breathing corpse while the dozens or millions of long-extinct stars shine as luminous graves in an uncaring universe. A creeping realization settles in my brain and I grow certain that a villain lies somewhere in the shadows. The thought dances through my brain that it is

me, that I am the imposter. The idea lingers only for an instant, before it is dismissed as nonsense.

“Wait up,” I say, and join Rob under the moonlight.

Nikki Page



Junior

Majors: American Culture and English

Nikki's life goal is to reference Will Smith in everything she writes. Though, at the moment, she's failing.

The University of Michigan's Only Aspiring Waitress

A couple of months ago, I could've said I'd never seen The New York Times in real life. I could've bet my boss Charles hadn't either. So the day he dropped the Sunday edition on the drink counter, I had to ask, "Where did you get that?"

Laugh-talking, he said, "I stole it from the neighbors." I smiled, mostly because I couldn't think of any Ypsi neighbors that would've had a subscription. He must have gone out of his way to take it. I continued to sit behind the counter, sipping coffee and staring into the empty dining room. By this time, I had been a server long enough to know to water down my coffee. Otherwise my habitual sipping could've kept me from sleeping for weeks, as it had before.

Flipping through the additional New York Times restaurant magazine, Charles said, "Nikki, look at this." I scootched my chair closer to him. The page read, "737 Park Avenue." I didn't say anything. "Seriously, look at this." Looking closer I realized it was an advertisement for a 12-room, 5-bedroom, 7.5-bath condominium. Complete with a "fitness center with glass skylight." For sale. In the New York Times. Honestly.

The longer he stood next to me, the easier it was for me to tell he hadn't washed his chef coat recently. It smelled like a George Foreman grease pan with a hint of red onion. "Don't you wish you lived there? Look at that view," Charles said as he put his elbows on the counter, face in his palms. Nearly every wall in the condo was made of glass. Situated on the 40th floor, the windows overlooked the city.

It was 8am and I wasn't much of a crack-of-dawn person, though I was a morning person. Provided, morning started at 11am. So, all I could do was smile at Charles and hope he remembered my vocal chords didn't work that early. Thumbing through some more, Charles stumbled upon a story about a very successful restaurant in New York. "I can't believe this," he said, "that's an entire vat of potatoes." Charles hated that we were in an old Taco Bell, complete with Spanish-style architecture: orange-tiled floor, stone walls, large semi-circular windows. He hated the lack of space even more. "Even if we had the resources, we still wouldn't be able to get that much food out." I got up and refilled my coffee as he stared at photos of closets lined with nothing but chef coats, soup bowls washed by industrial dishwashers, and dining rooms filled with nicely dressed New Yorkers. Sitting back down, I imagined Charles owning a New York restaurant, one worthy of a T.V. reality show. Even though "moving up" was his dream, I hated the idea. I hated imagining Charles and the Blue Wolf Grill leaving our Ypsilanti dive and moving to corporate New York. That's when I said, "Actually Charles, there's no way in hell I would live at 737 Park Avenue."

He buttoned up his blue chef coat embroidered with "Charles" on one side and "The Blue Wolf Grill" on the other. He walked back to the kitchen laughing because he thought there wasn't a single person who wouldn't want to be rich. But I liked being a waitress in my small town, nine-table restaurant. I liked the bearded lady that always asked for extra pink sugars and the guy who always tipped at least 35%. I liked hearing the chefs speak Spanglish: white chefs craving to learn Spanish, Hispanic chefs craving to learn English. Charles asking, "¿Donde están las papas fritas?" and Miguel responding in chef-slang, "They're working."

Charles went back to cutting tomatoes and making strawberry cream cheese, and I was left at the counter thinking where do I want to live when I get older? I knew a place like 737 Park Avenue wasn't for me. When I was younger, I would always be the person in the board game "LIFE" to choose the house that was split in half by a tornado, while my cousins chose the mansions. And back then, if someone asked me what I wanted to do when I got older, I would've said, "I want to be a Paleontologist." If you were to ask me now, I'd say, "Be a server. And write."

When my friends at the University of Michigan ask that question and receive that answer, they respond, "Oh, that's cool." They feel a mix of "This-is-some-weird-shit-only-Nikki-would-say," and "She-could-do-so-much-

better." After all, I'm going to graduate at the age of 21 with a double major (English and American Culture) and a subconcentration in Fiction. According to their reactions, I should've gone to law school and "done something" with my life. I like what I'm doing, even if it makes my mom say, "You better not be going to Michigan to end up a waitress." A couple months ago, I wasn't quite sure what about waitressing sucked me in. A couple months since then, I'm still not sure. Something about waitressing made me never want your typical University of Michigan graduate, intellectual-all star, high paying, 737 Park Avenue kind of job.

I've always wanted a job where I could go to work and then choose to come home. I've never wanted to be a doctor where work was work and home was work, too. Never once have I thought being on-call would be fun. I've never wanted to be a lawyer, where relaxing at home means responding to client's emails. I've always wanted to go to work and then come home. Then I could write and write and write. Maybe edit every once in a while. When I became a waitress, I noticed it seemed to fit my job criteria pretty well. Though, I think there's more to why I like the job.

I've thought about how getting sucked into serving maybe has something to do with all of the regulars at the Blue Wolf Grill knowing my name, even though I've never worn a name tag. I've thought about how much I love and hate the couple that come in every Sunday brunch and order a Roast Beef Hash to split and always ask for sugar-free strawberry jam. How that couple asks every week if we have our thick cracked wheat bread back in stock, even though we stopped offering it as a toast option months ago. The days when I don't work, I miss having Ben the cook follow me around and tell me about how high he and his friends got the night before. I miss his Ninja Turtle flat-billed hat and how his long, curly hair looks perpetually greasy. I miss the community I feel most comfortable in.

The homeyness of the restaurant atmosphere might have something to do with my mom having owned a bar since I was five. Mom's place was a sports bar, but nothing like Buffalo Wild Wings. The building was a large remodeled house in St. Joseph, Michigan, located right on the V where Lakeshore Drive split into Cleveland Avenue. A sign covering the front window read, "Vickie's Sandbar, Home of the Scoop Burger." On the inside, Budweiser mirrors covered the dark wood paneling and reflected just enough light to see a pitcher of beer or a Keno ticket. Even though the smoking ban had already been passed in Michigan, the walls were still caked with eleven years' worth of yellow sludge. A big, metal support beam ran through the back quarter of the building, widthwise. The low ceilings allowed anyone to reach up and tag the black beam with chalk. Aaron was here. Sam will you marry me? The Big Bad Bitches. But after my dad died, the regulars scrubbed off all the multi-colored chalk and wrote in thick, white chalk, "The Champion of the Sandbar, David J. Page 9.28.09."

I grew up knowing "the regulars" as family. Though, in 1999 when Vick-

ie's Sandbar opened, my mom knew these people as "the guy who gets a large pitcher of Oberon," or, "the lady who gets a Bacardi and Diet, no lime, and two straws." After many Michigan football seasons and Summer APA pool leagues had passed, Phil and Janet and Big B and Ron Romelhardt and Rusty and many others became family: the kind of people you're okay with skinny dipping in your pool. Eventually, Christmas and Thanksgiving consisted of Mom, Grandma, Grandpa, Granny, Papa John, and whichever regulars had no other place to go. Those were the same people who could spell my dog's name "Cocojejomocomoflelo," who knew the code to our garage door, and who were the only people I let call me by my middle name, "Blue."

Sometimes my "family" irritated me. Especially when Ron Romelhardt used to cook five-star-chef, dark chocolate, star fruit, papaya brownie something-or-others and bring it in to share. Which sounded like a nice thing to do. Unless, of course, you knew he did it in order to one-up the food my mom served. Or when Rusty played the drums so fucking loud during Wednesday open mic nights that he almost broke my snare head every week. But the regulars were my family. And I loved them.

Slowly but surely, I'm starting to love the regulars at the Blue Wolf. Maybe not in the same way as back home at Vickie's Sandbar. The Blue Wolf regulars don't know broccoli is my favorite food or what kind of car I drive. They don't have a key to my house and they don't know I have more than a gray shirt and black pants in my closet. But something about them makes them feel uniquely mine in a way the Vickie's Sandbar regulars didn't. Maybe because The Blue Wolf customers never knew me as "Miss Vickie's Daughter," as most of the patrons of Mom's bar did. When I first started, The Blue Wolf customers knew me as the girl who always wore the grey shirt. What they knew from that point on, was my choice.

Even though he pisses me off on a regular basis, Blaire the Regular makes me feel more at home. I don't know too much about his past, but I do know that Blaire has to use an electric wheelchair to get around. Not a morning shift goes by where I don't see him wheeling down the side of Washtenaw, one of the busiest roads in Ypsi. He comes in and asks me to refill his three-month-old styrofoam cup that he washes after every use and brings back. Sometimes I say, "Goodmorning Blaire" in a I-have-to-say-this-because-of-social-norms kind of way. Then I purposely forget his blue sugar, spoon, and two creams just so he has to ask. Sometimes I'm a bitch.

Blaire leaves before 11 am only to come back and "help" close the restaurant around 9 p.m. He's not a paid employee. Just a guy looking for a place to belong. He wheels his chair in the back and scrapes the mashed potatoes and butternut squash ravioli sauce into the trash so the dishwasher doesn't have to. In the process of navigating around the three-square-foot area of the kitchen, he gets tire marks all over the floor. The other waitress gets pissed off and yells, "Blaire always gets his goddamn wheelie marks

everywhere." Blaire hears her and goes outside to smoke a cigarette so no one sees him cry. He calls the next morning and I read the caller-ID, "Blaire Bayha." If it were any other number, I'd answer the phone by saying, "Thank you for calling the Blue Wolf, this is Nikki." But when Blaire calls, I say, "Hi Blaire. What do you need." He asks to talk to Charles. Later in the day, Charles lets us know that Blaire was upset about not feeling included. We agree to be nicer.

Blaire is a lot like Ron Romelhardt and the other regulars in the way he irritates me so easily. He's also similar in the way that I am starting to love him in a family way. I care about how the health care system is fucking him over, possibly causing him to move to Plymouth. I appreciate how he tries to save the Blue Wolf money by reusing his Styrofoam cups and always offers to navigate Washtenaw in order to get change for the register. He talks to me in the morning when I'm staring into the empty dining room, sipping my coffee. He rambles about upcoming the Michigan football game and spends twenty minutes deciding which kind of pop he wants when he's done with his coffee. Sometimes I give him free food, especially when the chefs make apple pie because I know that's Blaire's favorite.

Another part of why I like waitressing is bitching to Cheri about Blaire. About shitty customers who leave 8% tips. What I bitch about the most were the customers who walk in and sit at the only dirty table in the entire restaurant. I mean the kind of dirty were it looks like the previous customers used the table as a napkin and a toilet.

Cheri and I talk about everyday things. Mostly problems with Charles, her boyfriend and her Blue Wolf co-owner. Once, she came from the kitchen and said, "Charles just told me he's going to Necto with Miguel tonight." B-lining it to the coffee pot, she threw the grounds in the trash. My doing menial chores, she tried to channel her anger and avoid eye contact with me and everyone else. "There's no reason to go dancing if I'm not going."

I chimed in, "Seriously. If any single girl sees a single guy on the dance floor, she's going to be all over that shit."

"That's what I'm saying." She emphasized each word. Then the dinner rush came and we had no choice but to stop thinking about Necto.

Maybe I like being a server because of the simplicity of the job: thinking, learning, improving. How you still have to think a lot but in a different kind of way. Being a smart waitress is remembering the seven-top had a water, two root beers, a black berry lemonade, a coffee with cream, and three Diets. It's remembering on the fly that table 2 had hash browns and toast so you have to preset their table with butter, jam, and ketchup before you have to sit all of the other tables down for brunch. It's remembering that table 4 wanted a bowl of Salmon Chowder before their meal.

My first day, Charles yelled, "Order up, ladies," which is my cue to start running dinner plates out. I stuck my hand in the food window, grabbed the thick porcelain plate, but couldn't seem to lift it. "Weak wrists?" He laughed and lifted up French Dip and Au Jus so I could just snag the plate and run. Being able to lift the plates by myself took about three weeks of serving Ribeyes on the oblong plates which spanned the length of my forearm. Three weeks for me to build my wrist muscle. I never got a "good job" or anything, but Charles stopped laughing at me, which was the essentially the equivalent of a "you're one of us now."

Soon after the silent acknowledgement of my induction into serverdom, the other waitress taught my how to carry three plates at once. "Okay, grab the edge of the plate without using your pinky."

Nervous-laughing, I grabbed the bacon burger. "Good, good," Cheri said. "Now, take your pinky and stick it straight up." Not being used to separating my pinky and my ring finger, my pinky muscles got confused and froze.

"Ow," I said. Then I laughed. As she continued explaining, I stared at the bun on the top of her head. It wasn't a normal ballerina bun. Her bun looked more like a hand-held paper fan, or a rainbow. Cheri's bun reminded me of a photo of my mom working at Mickey's Pub before she bought her bar. Her black curly hair was pulled back into a teal fabric scrunchie, the kind that every girl wears when it's "80's" day in high school. My hair hadn't evolved into waitress hair yet. I still wore my hair in a normal ponytail.

"Now rest another plate on your forearm and use your pinky to keep the second plate balanced." I officially could carry a Strawberry and Feta Salad, a Bacon Burger, and a Ribeye all at the same time. Even though, when I went to take my first step, I spilled half the order of fries on the ground. Cheri said, "Haha, you suck," and walked away.

Though I like fitting in at the Blue Wolf, I think a lot more of liking to serve has to do with fitting in at home: having something to bond with my mom. My mom has been a waitress since she was twelve, when my grandpa opened a pizzeria. She had the typical "parent" childhood where she had to walk up a hill both ways to get to the bus stop. But actually, she bought her first house when she was sixteen (Mom's dad married a woman she hated). My she never stopped gaining more bills to pay.

With very minimal interest in school, she doesn't mind when I explain my argumentative essay on the Paul McCartney conspiracy theory. She likes to hear about how I learned about Alan Ginsberg and Ken Kesey. She listens, and she's a good listener—knowing exactly when to say "mhm" and "yeah" and "that's cool." But a part of me wants to have a conversation with her. A real one. Where she's passionate and says more than "Good job, baby. Good things are going to happen to my Nikki Blue."

So it's become a custom that I call her when I get out of work. As I leave the parking lot, I wave goodbye to Blaire, who's outside smoking a cigarette. I dial the 269 area code that I've almost completely forgotten existed since I moved to Ann Arbor. "Hi baby," she says, nearly yelling in excitement.

"Hi, Mom. Do you have time to talk?"

"I always have time to talk to you," she laughs, knowing damn well she's always busy trying to keep her bar afloat. Spending too much time organizing Halloween parties and Battle of the Bands.

I tell her about my upcoming assignments because she likes to know I'm staying focused.

I tell her that Cheri showed me some new tips and that I can carry three plates at once. She tells me that's great because now I can flip tables faster. Make more money.

I tell her about the mold in the bathroom at my house and how my landlord doesn't really care. I tell her about how much more my utilities cost because it's winter. Not because I want her to help me with money, but because I want her to tell me, "Yeah, I've been there too, baby."

But what she really says is, "This is why you're at Michigan. You know what I always say, you're going to be the next J.K. Rowling. Except you're going to write the book and make the movie and compose the soundtrack and do the advertising." She laughs because she knows she's exaggerating, even though she's serious about my future fame and hyper-human accomplishments. "Go Blue," she says optimistically. I laugh and say thanks because I know she means "Go Nikki Blue," but the play on words never gets old to her. I tell her I have to go because I'm tired, though I just don't want to talk about school anymore. I toss my phone in the passenger's seat, in slight frustration: wanting to be the next J.K. Rowling and Miss Vickie Page at the same time.

Amanda Peters



Sophomore

Major: History and History of Art

My name is Amanda Peters. I am a Sophomore studying History and History of Art. I love to travel and visit art museums, and I am part of Léim Irish Dance on campus. I read constantly-- Vladimir Nabokov and Tony Kushner are my favorite authors, and I don't write nearly as often as I should.

\$1.75

One seventy-five. I wasn't thinking of you as I tripped, sorry.
The metal ridges of the second step carved grooves into my knees.
I watched the bus fare slip out of my hand and land- plink plink plink- into the rotting gutter below.

I muttered a word, you know, the one you're so fond of?
I was immediately grateful that our son (curly-haired, ruddy cheeked, hands shoved in the pockets of his ratty windbreaker)
Stood waiting for the school bus across the street, far from the poison of my language.

A hand reached down for mine. Strong, wide. Veins wrapping around delicate bones.
He helped me up—dark locks cascading down an angular face with a beard neatly trimmed (so neatly trimmed)
"Are you okay?" (God forbid those words ever left your tongue before. Do

you remember? As I stood, weighed down by the cluster of cells—that life inside of me that neither of us had wanted?)
Did I detect an accent—Irish or British, maybe?
I met his deep brown eyes, and matched the smile he wore under that neatly trimmed beard.

He slipped a few coins into the box, paying for my fare. One seventy-five.
I walked to the fourth bench (the one I sit in every morning, not that you care)
He followed me.
I could feel his presence behind me
emanating heat, pressure, urgency.
Of course I allowed him to sit beside me.
Of course I made no protest as he whispered words laced with honey.
And the weight of his hand resting on my knee was welcomed, craved.

I slyly slid the ring (that fleck of cubic zirconium set against a thin band—formerly gold, rubbed silver) off my third finger.
Thankfully my tan had faded, no pale shackles visible to bind me to you.
I felt his full mouth against mine, his beard (so neatly trimmed)
tickled my cheek,
And I wasn't thinking of you, sorry.
As the bus took off, I glanced back at our son (you remember the one, right?
afraid of you? afraid of us.)

One seventy-five.
That's all I cost.
Just one seventy-five.
I gripped the man's hand tightly, brimming with promise.
This wasn't the first time and it wouldn't be the last
I avoided our son's knowing eyes.

Vanitas

Drink!
Be merry!
Lift your bow!
Pass the sherry!
Play your fiddle!
Never show
the sorrows you hold
deep below!
Silence, Mirror!

There are no creases 'round my eyes,
no thinning lips,
no aching thighs!

I hide my worries,
drink more wine,
find some way
to bide my time.

Yet, there are feathers upon my hat
guilders line my pockets
and I know that:

I am merry!
I am strong!
I am never in the wrong!

Silence, Lord!
I will never be a skull,
arranged among flowers,
fair warning to all.

What is this,
a twist of fate?
My tongue, it burns
my fear is great.
The glass, it shatters
as it hits the ground.
I collapse alone
my heart, it pounds.
Blood sputters past old, chapped lips
oh, Lord, I am sorry for my quips!
You were right!
I do now know—
et in arcadia ego.

Julianne Potter



Senior

Majors: Creative Writing and English

A senior, graduating from the Residential College in May, Julianne is doubling majoring in English and Creative Writing, and double minoring in Near Eastern Studies and Peace & Social Justice, with a subconcentration in Arab-American Studies. When she's not writing for tutorial, she lives in Ker-rytown with other RC students and leads a youth philanthropy organization that supports women in southeast Michigan. Virginia Woolf and a history of catholic education informed her Creative Writing thesis, a selection of which she'll read today.

PRE-READING -

Relevant information on the piece: Joan of Arc was born to a well-respected family in a small Burgundian village in 1412. Around 1425, she began to hear what she later described as the voices of Archangel St. Michael, and Sts. Catherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch, telling her to go to France and lead the French army to victory over the Burgundians and English. At the age of 16, she became the youngest person to ever have full command of a military force, and led a victorious siege at Orleans to swing the tide of the war, earning her the name, The Maid of Orleans – after a mythical prophecy foretold that a maid from the forests of Lorain would lead the French out of the Hundred Years War. Two years later, she was captured outside Paris and sold to the English, who tried her for heresy, pushed her to confess, and then – when she recanted her confession by putting on forbidden men's clothing – burned her at a stake in Rouen, France in 1431. She was 19.

The Maid of Orleans

It was I who brought the message of the crown to my King. I was the angel and there was no other.

--

I am still angry with God, not for the pain or the sadness, or the raw, weeping wounds, but for the burden. For asking so much. And when I want to cry out for myself, I cry out for her too. She was just a little girl, putting on her brothers' pants.

I was first told of her bravery, her martyrdom, her undying faith. It's grotesque. The girlish butterflies well up and up, a knot of silence deep in my throat, pressing upward, eager. The condemnation pounds in my head. "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you."

The stories don't tell you the way you will reach and bend and beg. They leave out the disappointment and the deepest betrayals, the silences.

--

Somebody asked me today if I wanted to hurt myself and I said no so convincingly that I didn't notice I was lying until I sat here and bit my fingers, one by one, until the tips were mottled purple.

What if it is like this forever?

--

They dragged her out to face the mouth of hell, crackling flames to lick her bare feet black in the cold French spring.

I can taste the sweat of the crowd as they pressed together, swelled against the shields holding them back. I can breathe the dust they loosened to the air with their impatient feet. They had never seen the Maid of Orleans before. Here she was, bound in front of her pyre.

"Why won't you save yourself?"

She had been promised so many things – deliverance, and innocence, and a great victory. Cleansing by fire.

I cannot pick between the two scenes, Christ weeping blood in Gethsemane, or two men, plated dull and bent, at her shoulders. A shivering small girl with her hair shorn off.

"Why won't you save yourself?"

She signed her confession, scratched out a cross because she had never been taught her name.

The Burgundians took her off the scaffold. The stamping, urging crowd quieted, returned to the warmth of their own hearths. Rouen went silent for five days and waited for the whistling, popping flames to return. They would only see her twice.

--

She foretold the outcome of a battle at Orleans, before she had even left Vaucouleurs. She found the answer from heaven Charles was waiting for. She predicted her own wounds. She rode first into battle with only a blunt banner, rippling above her, twelve feet long, alone against the wind.

To the end she insisted. She pressed for more time. She would be delivered a great victory. When did she decide to go on regardless?

--

Her details pull me in, the way they warp the rest of the story to fall toward them, hinge on belief and latin written dark and spotted on paper, veined yellowed skin.

I was told I could ask questions of God, like an oracle of old. Open the Bible to get the answer, a magic eight ball game of prophecies and finding the most hopeful words on the page. I haven't asked anything of God recently. I stick to openly amateur astrologers and Joan.

I read her answers like the lines on my palm, tracing them back, unchanged. Each time I find the heart line, I decide it means something else. For years, I've been counting the blue veins in the center of my left wrist; it's either three children or four. Maybe it's none, because that was a game we made up on the grade school playground.

--

I have this compulsion to be wholly faultless.

She refused to take an oath; there were revelations she would not share. These I have never told or revealed to anyone, save only to Charles, my King. Saying them out loud makes them real? Makes them belong to someone other than just yourself, asks someone else to pick them up. Instead, I shrink away until I am able to curl into the ground, like a dried seed planted in a wintertime trench.

When I was a child, I loved Joan for her short, ugly hair. We are kindred in countless other ways; I was only foreshadowing. Presented the impossible task, we follow it to the flaming, fiery ends.

Most days, I taste bitter. Like dark chocolate and gas from an empty stomach, like regret and the fruitless kind of hatred for loneliness. Most days, I smell foggy; the gray blue stale ink that spreads under my eyes.

I cover the puddles of lethargy under my eyes and smile. When I pass a smoker on their porch, I breathe in air, sweet and dense and wet, like swallowing foggy, hazy evenings. Like I am eating the time I have to spend with someone else. Like I won't really miss it. Instead, I cannibalize it for this moment, this night, get me through one more day without stopping. When I stop, the disappointment roars and embraces - the foamy, salted darkness of the sea.

--

She had champions. The Bishop of ancient Embrun, Jacques Gelu, wrote to Charles after her capture. He promised Charles the shame of a most culpable ingratitude, but the king she crowned would not buy her back from Burgundy.

She defended Charles until the very end. What you say is not true.

--

How quiet is enough to hear the angels and saints and all the choirs of heaven? How still, how small, how strong?

The mass is teeming with morbidity. Beseeching, purging flagellation. I have knelt on the cold floor until my knees burned and my toes went numb, but I could never pray like Joan must have. I have lowered my forehead to the floor and closed my eyes, but I was never spoken to.

I hold this envy of Joan and her saints. I have never needed them without having them.

How many times have I asked, begged? Not once have I woken to a soft voice in my ear, not once has someone told me where to go.

--

It happened quickly. By the fourth day, the justice would wait no longer. The guards at the door took her dress, left her the bag filled with soldier's clothing she had promised, on pain of death, never to wear again.

When I think about letting myself slip away, I remember, at first, she got back into bed. I think it is a reminder to treat myself gently, the moment when even the fearless ask for the cup to pass from them.

Then, I remember how she reached for the inevitable. I imagine the way she must have returned to the doublet and hood; the way it must have felt - a resignation and a comfort. I wonder if she carried herself to the scaffold. I

wonder if the voices told her she would die like this.

--

Five days filled with the prickly sense of waiting for the snare to fall could not have been enough for oceans of grief, for the rituals of mourning, for counting each breath you have left.

In every story, she is tender even as they tie her to the post. Her farewell to the crowd moves them to tears, the executioner apologizes, she wails for Jesus, dies thanking Him. Denying women ire is a kind of violence.

There are days when I need her strength to be in her rage, in her overwhelming fear, in her bitterness. I need her last words to be curses and not blessings. Her king, her church, her saints, I need to see the desolation grow from where betrayal made its home.

Alone and imprisoned, my Joan, the commander who drove camp wives from the circle with the broad side of her sword, could not have been so gentle.

I need more than acceptance. It takes me so long to forgive.

--

When they asked, she promised, "I have never killed a man."

How many times have I wished she had?

They burned her anyway.

--

The heat rolling off the kindling, her people pushing and breathing together and their prayers shouted over each other, tangling in the air like snow. I can see the way time seems to bend over her, hang in close and almost pause.

Her general was trying to rescue her.

He was always going to be twenty miles too late.

--

What you say is not true.

In her very last hour, the maid still loved France and its bishop more dearly than she loved to breathe. She held on to herself.

It's an infuriating kind of faith in fatefulness.

Allison Punch



Majors: International Studies and Political Science

Allison Punch is a native Ann Arborite currently studying international studies and political science. She is an active member of Human Rights Through Education and enjoys poetry, caesar salads and feminism

The Rise and Fall of the C.A.M. Agency

Today, yellow is my favorite color. Yesterday it was burgundy, but yellow is so much better. Yellow perfectly compliments Scotty's blue eyes. His brown hair looked dull next to the burgundy shirt yesterday but today it shines.

"I love how he always wears solid colored t-shirts," I say to Marielle. "It's so different from the sports jerseys all the other boys wear."

"His hair looks so soft," Marielle sits on the carpet with her hands holding her feet.

We have formed a club: The C.A.M. Agency. C is our code name for Scotty - calling him S would be too obvious because everyone knows we would never have a crush on Seth Alexander or Stephen Lutz. Collectively, we are C, Allie and Marielle. The C.A.M. Agency officially meets every Wednesday during recess, behind the tree we used to play orphans in during first grade. Unofficially, every moment we are in proximity of Scotty in Mr. Brogue's fifth-grade class is another opportunity to stare and sigh.

Marielle and I have been best friends since kindergarten, but we didn't have second grade together so I don't know if we should count that. In third grade, after a call to the office, my mom was able to get me switched back in her class. In many ways we are opposites; she is the youngest child and I am the oldest; she likes to sing and I like to read, but we share everything, even crushes.

Tuesday is Marielle's mom's day off so she picks us up after school and we spend the afternoon at her kitchen counter dipping apple wedges in caramel sauce and compiling a list of all the girls in our class who have started wearing a bra. So far we only have three names: Olivia Lu, Jodie Korba and Ashlyn Jones, but I believe there may be a couple more we haven't identified yet. We use various methods: A girl will wear a white shirt and you can see the outline of a trainer bra or straps will fall when she wears a tank top. Sometimes we resort to hugging girls and feeling their shoulder blades for straps. In the case of Ashlyn Jones, she bragged about it so much that the whole class knew before lunch time. My mom won't buy me one before I need one, which is okay because bras are dumb.

*

On Wednesday in music class, Scotty's face turned burgundy as Mrs. Kalb-Parnell pulled him aside after he sang out of tune. She gave him The Dreaded Tube: with one end to your ear and another to your mouth, you are forced to sing until you hit the right note. I have been pulled aside with The Tube many times and it is always embarrassing. Usually I try not to think about what would happen if Scotty were to like either me or Marielle, but I am tone deaf too and Marielle played Annie in our fourth grade musical. Her rendition of "Tomorrow" left the audience in a standing ovation. His shirt was a dark blue, almost black.

*

Friday night we are at Marielle's house, putting on makeup. The only makeup I have, purple glitter mascara given to me by my dad's sister last Christmas, was applied in our bangs and eyelashes. Mar's older sister Victoria is in college; she owns all the essentials and had taught Mar how to do blush over the summer. We spray ourselves with a tangerine scented perfume left behind in Victoria's room. We had nothing to put in our purses but brought them along anyway.

Marielle's dad drives us to Hollywood Video every Friday after we finish our makeup. We are standing in front of the Romance section trying to decide between two PG movies when Mar puts her hand on my shoulder and gasps, "Allie!" I look up and see familiar shiny brunette hair standing in front of the Action section.

"What should we do? Should we hide?" Mar whispers excitedly.

"We could wait and see what he rents, rent it ourselves, watch and figure out what sorts of things he is interested in!" I can't tell if I am joking or not.

She gave me a look and hisses, "That's creepy!"

"I don't know. Should we say hi?"

Marielle's dad walks over and his loud voice booms, "Girls, have you picked out your movie?" right as Scotty turns around and makes eye contact with me. I smile and feel a speck of purple glitter fall from my eyelashes into my eye and it starts watering as I try to blink the glitter out.

I wave and he nods his head in that way that fifth grade boys do, like they thought they saw a monster on the ceiling and are too afraid to look for long.

*

Scotty is friends with the popular boys but isn't necessarily popular himself. He is good at soccer, despite being one of the shortest boys in class. He talks only when he is called on, but he always smiles and laughs at lunch so we know he has a personality. He seems approachable, though we have yet to approach him since he moved to Burns Meadows from Wisconsin in fourth grade.

I don't remember how it came out that we both had crushes on Scotty. Marielle and I don't keep any secrets from each other and we never, ever compete. My mom says that is what makes us such great friends.

*

When Marielle finds out that Clare Julian also has a crush on Scotty, we allow her to join the C.A.M. Agency, changing our name to the Double-C.A.M Agency. We chant, "Double C, Double C, Double C-A-M, A-gen-C!" Clare is also in our class and her best friend is Olivia Lu, but they always fight. Clare and Olivia got in a big argument over Halloween costumes and haven't talked all week. Clare invites us over for a sleepover at her big house in another neighborhood.

Marielle is lying on the carpet with both hands propping up her head. "Does livia really need a bra? Or she just wears one?"

Clare walks over to her bookshelf and pulls out a tall, thin paperback book, *The Care and Keeping of You*. "Look at this." Laying on our stomachs, we fan out around the book as Clare opens to a dog-eared page and points to a picture of a cartoon blonde girl without a shirt. "I think this is where she is. Stage two of development: Breast buds."

Marielle and I tip our heads to the side simultaneously. Four pictures in a row show the same shirtless girl at different stages of puberty: first, flat like me and Marielle; then some lines under the nipples that make them look like a one-eyed happy face that gets progressively happier until the final picture which looks like women in the changing room at the YMCA. Clare proudly announces that she is at stage one and a half.

Clare tells us her mom is a gynecologist, and when Dr. Julian comes home from work still wearing scrubs, we are sitting at the counter eating cereal for a snack. "I just delivered a baby to a sixteen year-old!" She exclaims, "So no sex, no sex, no sex." She points to each of us one by one. I blush and when I leave in the morning, I ask Clare if I can borrow her book.

*

Clare is a lot more outgoing than the rest of the members of the Double-C.A.M. Agency and she is shaking things up quite a bit. When we get our November seating assignments, Mr. Brogue has placed Clare and Scotty sitting at a table together. We celebrate at first but I quietly begin to regret allowing her in the AgenC. She and Olivia are friends again and sit with each other at lunch, but Clare joins us behind the tree during recess.

"He doesn't have very good handwriting," she reports after two days of sitting next to him. "I'm going to talk to him about his dog!"

I didn't know he had a dog. Marielle and I look at each other.

"We don't really talk to him. We haven't yet. Once we said hi at Hollywood Video."

"Hollywood Video? You should ask your parents to get Netflix," Clare says, matter of factly. "They send the movies right to your door."

*

Marielle and her parents visit her sister at NYU over Thanksgiving break and I spend the long weekend on the couch with my younger brother. Each day I go into the bathroom and pull up my shirt.

The day after Thanksgiving break, Marielle slides me a note with small, purple letters written on.

"I got one."

I look at her. "What!?"

She widens her eyes and mouths, "I got a bra!"

I look at her chest and see the faint outlines of a training bra underneath her blue t-shirt. I can't see any breast buds through her shirt. She tells me

that Victoria helped her pick it out at Nordstrom Rack in Times Square.

The rest of the day, my stomach feels so hot I am convinced I am getting menstrual cramps, but nothing happens.

*

Two days later, on the first bitter cold recess of the year, we are seated on the crunchy dead leaves of pre-snow November. I am not listening to Marielle and Clare talk, distracted by the feel of my nipples perky against my sweatshirt in the cold. I squeeze my eyes tight and think of spring and buds and middle school next year and all of a sudden my head is on the ground. I open my eyes and Scotty is running towards me like the movie Marielle and I rented two weeks ago.

That's when I see the burgundy blood coating my eyelashes like mascara. To the left next to me is Scotty's soccer ball and I feel a knot in my head swelling to the size of Ashlynn's left breast.

"Are you okay?" gasps C, my third-ever crush, barging into the meeting of an Agency that revolved around talking about him but never talking to him.

*

Marielle immediately takes me to the school nurse while Clare stays behind, touching Scotty's arms. She tells him he should be ashamed of himself but by the looks of her smile, she is hard to believe.

After school, Clare invites us over but Marielle and I politely decline. My head is throbbing, but I didn't need stitches. We are quiet on the walk back to my house, knowing that the Double-C.A.M. Agency will disband but not talking about it, just as we have not talked about her bra since the first day she wore it.

Marielle looks at me sympathetically. "I can't believe he hit you in the head. I don't know if I like him anymore."

"It was just his soccer ball. I don't know if I ever liked him," I admit.

"I can't wait until we get to middle school and have boyfriends!" Marielle puts her arm around me.

For now, I think to myself, we have each other. Through flat times and beyond.

Ben Simko



Freshman

Major: Undecided

"Ben Simko was the webmaster of smashmouthfanclub2.freewebs.com"

Strip Mall

So I was, like, sitting on the couch with Mark earlier today and we were watching Superbad on TBS. Don't watch Superbad on TBS. They can't say "fuck" and that defeats the purpose. They can't even say the "hole" part in "asshole." I never got that. Mark thought that seemed vaguely homophobic. I said he was probably right. Mark hadn't seen Superbad before, so I turned it on. Ultimately, it probably ruined Superbad for him. That sucks.

So we weren't really paying attention to Superbad because nobody was saying "fuck." And then my mom came home from Target. She told me she bought some of those Totino's Party Pizzas. That excited me. I hadn't had those in a few months and I forgot about them. I was thinking about making them for Mark and I. We got KFC wedges on the way home, though. That seems like too much shit to eat. Besides, I want to save them for when I'm watching Netflix at night over the weekend. I'm working through Parks and Recreation right now. Mark recommended it to me. I'm in season two and it's just okay so far.

My mom was kind of dressed up that day. She usually isn't. She was wearing a bunch of shit she got at Banana Republic. It's, like, business casual. Or smart casual. Or something like that. Basically, it's a fucking blazer.

And Mark asked why that was. And I told him that it was because she had a job interview that day. This was odd because my mom hadn't worked in, like, forever. Mark asked what she did. I told him she was trying to become a PES at Oakwood Elementary. Mark didn't know what that meant. I said that it was a Physical Education Supervisor.. Mark didn't know what that meant either. I told him it was one of the moms who watched the kids on the playground. He said oh. We watched part of a Swiffer commercial. He said that the name of the position seemed weird, like, it made it sound like she was an assistant to a gym teacher. I thought so too.

That's weird. Like, calling it a Physical Education Supervisor. They should call it a playground attendant or something. Something that's less drawn-out. There are too many words in work titles. My dad is something like a Co-Director of Sale Strategy Analysis. I have no idea what that means. Whenever he tries to explain it to me, I'm like "what the fuck." He just says he works for CVS usually. That's weird too. My great-grandfather was a butcher. I met him a few times but he had Alzheimer's or Dementia or something like that. My grandpa said that back in his time people were just -ers and -ists and -men. Butch-ERs. Flor-ISTs. Police-MEN. Now there's these long, drawn-out titles. So people just say they work for whatever company they work for. He said that people used to identify themselves by what they did, not who they worked for. I thought that was interesting. I texted that to Mark after my grandpa told me that and Mark agreed.

So anyways, we're watching Superbad on TBS. And Mark said that the guy who spits on Jonah Hill at the beginning of the movie reminded him a lot of Aaron Grabowski. I thought so too. Aaron Grabowski is a douchebag. I heard he got a blowjob from Kiera, who I was friends with in middle school. She and I used to chat boys we liked on AIM together. She would log into my account (gymnasticsislifefee92) and then she would message the boys I liked (either zachisbored23, masterchief111, hockeyking48002, or total-lyxnotxrobby) and message them "hi :) <3". I would squeal and make her log out. I would call her a bitch. My mom would walk outside the door and say "excuse me?" I would apologize. I would log back on to AIM and then have an interaction like:

gymnasticsislifefee92: looll sorry kiera did that
zachisbored23: oh lol thats ok
gymnasticsislifefee92: ok good lol bye
zachisbored23: bye lol

Mark looked bored. We've been dating for like five months, but sometimes he looks bored. It worried me, but I try not to think about it or anything. I told him what my grandpa told me again. He said I had told him about it before. I said I knew but it was on my mind. Mark said oh. Then he said it's pretty weird how everyone knew the same kids in high school. I asked him what he meant by that. He said how everyone he had ever talked

to, even from other high schools, had the same kids in their life. I asked him like what. He said like the kid that you remember from sixth grade health class who laughed at the puberty video harder than anyone else or the kid who offered you weed sophomore year. I laughed and I agreed. It is pretty weird. I said it was also weird how we don't have -ers or -ists or -men anymore. He said yeah. Those things aren't really related, but they feel related. I asked him why he thought of that. He said he was talking to some guys he knew from Oliver High at a track meet and they agreed. Afterwards they went to Denny's together and took a picture of it and put it on Facebook. They were all eating eggs. Mark was in the back with his mouth open and his eyes wide. I liked the picture. I like Mark. I think I'll marry someone like Mark, but I don't think I love Mark. Maybe I do love Mark. I don't know if he loves me. He hasn't said so.

Superbad went on commercial again. One of the commercials was for a movie with Steve Carell in it. I like Steve Carell. I asked Mark if he liked Steve Carell. He said he liked The Forty Year Old Virgin. I said I hadn't seen it, I had only seen Crazy Stupid Love and Despicable Me. He said the Office was good too. I said yeah. Mark's mom texted him and asked him to come home, but to pick up some Wonder Bread from Wal-Mart first. He texted back okay. He said he had to go. I said okay. I walked him out and he kissed me. It was okay.

Karinne Smolenyak



Senior

Majors: Political Science and International Studies

I was born and raised in Charlevoix, MI. I study political science and international studies and I am currently writing my honors thesis. After graduation I plan on attending graduate school.

The Exposition

Inspired in part by Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

It was the 5th of October, and two siblings were planning to inaugurate a new chapter in their lives with a small get-together composed of close friends and family. Robin, the younger sister, had just moved into a spacious apartment in the city, one of the privileges ensuing from the prestigious fellowship she had received to attend grad school, while Annalise, the elder sister, was endeavoring to forget the unremarkable past few years and to mobilize some degree of excitement for her new position at a top tier accounting firm. It was to be a quiet but pleasant affair, with hors d'oeuvres, not-so-cheap wine, and maybe some flowers to decorate the sparse white expanses of Robin's new apartment.

As usual, Annalise had ensured that the morning would be engrossingly hectic, knowledge which brought her comfort. When she was busy, there was no time for her mind to wander. The guests would begin to arrive around four o'clock, so the next several hours of her schedule would be utterly filled with preparations. She surveyed her mental list. Her Good House-

keeping-worthy spread of appetizers would be incomplete without crostini, so she needed to drop by the bakery to buy baguettes. More pressing, however, was the need for flowers. She was picturing gladiolus, the elongated stems with vivid blossoms acting as a focal point for the room. Or lilies maybe—anything that was alive and decorative.

As usual, Annalise mused as she walked through the supermarket, she was picking up Robin's apathy-induced slack. Robin hadn't decorated at all, despite having lived there nearly two weeks already. But, then again, Robin had never been the type to do things as banal as decorating. Decorate? Robin would inquire absently. I don't need any doilies... it's just distracting, Annalise, and George would hate it, I'm sure. That's why Annalise was arranging the details of the party, while Robin floated around the edges, looking pensive. She hoped that Robin was preparing the fruit, because, incredibly, that was the only task Annalise had delegated to her.

It wasn't that Robin consciously evaded responsibility; it was more accurate to say that Robin was simply incapable of dedicating effort to a task she was disinterested in. Her tremendous, sometimes almost disturbing, intellectual intensity was strictly limited to several narrow fields like art history and philosophy, fields that Annalise refused to understand. Robin had done brilliantly well in her academics, and she had achieved her current much-coveted success in spite of her overbearing, cold-hearted mother. Annalise and Robin had always been a united front against their mother. As they grew older and began to fight to break free of her rampant alcoholism and dreams of pageant gowns they started to call themselves Bonnie and Clyde. Annalise had volunteered reluctantly to be Clyde; Robin was always Bonnie. The nicknames were forgotten now, and the partnership had crumbled as their lives parted ways. Robin's intellect had, to Annalise's shock, attracted the attention of George, an impossibly gorgeous Ivy Leaguer and the product of generations of upper crust New England marriages. They had been dating for over three years, and Annalise was well aware that the only facet of George's life that he loved as much as Robin was his job as a journalist at CNN. Annalise exhaled through her nose vehemently and redirected her attention to her list.

Back at her apartment, Robin was preparing as well. She was contemplating the plastic containers brimming with out of season fruit and the cutting board that sat on the kitchen counter. Her long, thin frame seemed threatened by the unnecessary vastness of the room. Soft brown hair floated messily around her face, framing defined cheekbones and lush eyelashes. She wore hideous, tasteless glasses with large awkward frames and still unconsciously created an effect of loveliness. Robin felt a twisted knot of homesickness forming in her stomach. She had an odd desire to hug her mother, to be embraced by her iron arms and to be enveloped in the Chanel perfume that had always disgusted her. Robin tugged a long serrated blade from the knife block and held it loosely between her fingers, running a

thumb lightly across the edge. She felt a sting and watched as a drop of ruby blood appeared. As she sucked the blood from her thumb, she eyed the golden barbs of the pineapple. Pineapple was one of George's favorite fruits. No doubt Annalise was aware of the fact—from the moment she met him at Christmas three years ago she'd been obviously smitten. Robin craved the tangy flavor, but every time she ate the fruit the tangy juice and harsh fibers tore stinging gashes in the roof of her mouth. With a sigh she discarded the knife. She felt her sister tugging at her heartstrings but she could not obey the impulse to follow directions. She went to the bathroom, and turned the bathwater on steaming hot, relishing the thought of it scalding her skin. She searched through the cupboards until she found a bottle of bubble bath, lavender scented, and she dumped the contents of the bottle into the heat-clouded water. When the tub was full nearly to the brim, she shut off the faucet, shed her clothes, and sank in up to her chin.

Clutching the paper grocery bag full of dips, vegetables, and cheeses from the market against her hip, Annalise strode down the sidewalk to the bakery. Her progress was not at all impeded by the aggressively pointed heels she wore. A bunch of celery was leaning out the top of the bag, but Annalise hadn't noticed. Other pedestrians leapt out of her path, warned by her determined air and the leaves of celery stalk that flapped over her shoulder like a battle flag.

She greeted the bakery owner with a terse nod as she entered the store, the doorbell chiming behind her. She surveyed their assortment of French breads and frowned at the charred, lumpy crusts. She was running out of time so she selected two loaves and paid. She left, opening the door by pressing her backside against it, grappling with the grocery bag and two loaves of bread in her arms.

Out on the street she frowned at the darkening sky. The steely swollen clouds clearly boded rain. She worried about her guests. Annalise had never told anyone, but rainstorms petrified her. When she was young, maybe around five or six, someone had left her alone in the living room playing with her dolls for quite some time. The TV had been left on and a special program on a recent flood had been playing, she didn't remember which one. Little Annalise had watched in growing terror as houses filled with turbulent, muddy water. Pets were swept along until they became tangled in fallen tree branches, and then they struggled desperately, waiting for their beloved owners to rescue them. The camera panned in on their frantic movements. From then on, she had never lost that feeling of horror brought on by the sound of rain. The fear that one day she too might be swept away, and that everything left in her wake would be covered in a thick layer of brown. Pushing her anxiety aside, she hurried to the flower shop across from Robin's apartment and quickly chose a bouquet of lilies. The gladiolus looked inauspiciously faded and defeated.

Robin extended one pale calf out of the bathwater into the sleep-scented haze. Water droplets fell from her heel and from each rounded point on the underside of her toes. Her head lolled on the porcelain rim as she reminisced. When the sisters were younger they used to pretend their dolls were twin princesses. One afternoon in the heat of summer Robin took a pair of their mother's sewing scissors and cut her princess doll's hair off in radiant yellow chunks. The scissors were so sharp they glided over the plastic strands like skates on ice. Annalise's eyes had grown wide and she had run and tattled to their parents but at the time Robin hadn't understood why; she hadn't done anything to Annalise, she reasoned. Now she understood, but there was nothing she could do. Robin felt a wave of sympathy for Annalise so intense, inexorable tears formed in the corners of her eyes. She dunked her head below the clouded surface, mixing tears with bathwater. When her chest began to throb involuntarily, she surfaced. Thinking about Annalise made her feel helpless.

In the lobby of the apartment building, Annalise's cellphone rang. She called the doorman over and shoved her purchases into his arms brusquely, digging her cellphone from her purse. The name on the screen was her mother's. As she flipped open the phone to answer she murmured curses under her breath.

"Hello, mother, how are you?" She motioned the doorman toward the elevator. "Yes I know, mother, I'm excited to see you as well.... Yes, we're expecting you at four." She stepped in the elevator and pressed floor five, awkwardly cradling the lilies in her elbow. "...Oh, I wasn't aware he was coming... Yes that's fine, of course... It's accounting, mother, not finance... mhmmm I'll let Robin talk..." The elevator door slid open and she led the way down the narrow hall to her sister's door. She fished her keys out of her pocket and entered, directing the doorman to the table where he could set down his burden. "Yes, it's a fabulous apartment, mom, you'll adore it, I'm sure..." The doorman backed out of the room unobtrusively and Annalise began unpacking. She saw with irritation that Robin hadn't cut the fruit.

"Robin!" she yelled, muffling the phone for a moment.

"Yes?" came the languid call from the adjacent room.

"Oh, nevermind!" Annalise yelled back exasperatedly. "Yes, mother, of course I'm listening."

Robin wearily stepped from the tub. Spirals of steam clung to her wet skin like spider webs. Without bothering to towel dry, she stepped in front of the mirror. Glistening drops of fragrant water rolled down her stomach, her temple. Her image recalled a painting from one of Picasso's early periods, except that she would have said that the artist rendered the legs too long, the hands too large. The alcove between the two tendons in her neck and her clavicle seemed unnecessarily prominent; it was a small hollow hiding too

many secrets. Her mother would have disagreed: "We could make you into a winner, honey. If you just lost a pound or two and wore some makeup you'd be perfect." She enveloped herself in a towel and listlessly dried herself, one lengthy limb at a time. She treaded lightly into her bedroom, savoring the texture of the carpet between her toes, and pulled on a cotton tee and shorts.

In the absence of vases, Annalise was arranging the flowers in large glasses. She set the glasses artfully throughout the room, but when she stepped back to survey the effect of her mastery, a sudden heaviness suffused her body. The bleached white of the lilies was too severe. The walls dwarfed the lilies and now seemed to tower over the feeble wooden table and its array of delicate finger-foods and beverages, so carefully positioned by Annalise. She altered her arrangements fervidly, but no matter how she positioned the petite bouquets of imperturbable blossoms, the atmosphere was marred.

The muscle below her right eye twitched ominously. She steeled herself and checked her watch. Two hours before guests would begin to arrive. She went to Robin's room and knocked lightly.

"Yes?" Her sister called in a sleep-leadened voice.

Annalise drew open the door and slipped into the room. Curtains swathed the windows, creating a counterfeit impression of the darkest hours of night. Her eyes slowly attuned themselves to the gloom and she saw the vague shadow of her sister's head on the pillow. The room was impeccably clean; only the few small items on the bedside table were out of place.

"Robin, there's only a couple hours until the party, shouldn't you be getting ready?" Annalise asked.

"Yes, I'm just about ready. Don't worry, I'm just resting first."

"Ok, everyone will be here at four, remember. I'm sure mother will be extremely punctual."

"Yes, of course."

"Alright." Annalise withdrew from the room, pulling the door closed behind her.

"Oh, Annie!" Robin said hastily, using the abbreviated form of her name that she hadn't heard in years.

"Yes?" She questioned, reopening the door and allowing a sliver of light to fall into the room.

"I'm sorry I didn't cut the fruit," Robin professed in a quiet plea.

"Oh," Annalise shrugged, a little surprised. "It's nothing; we have plenty of time still." She shut the door with a click, shaking her head a little at Robin's peculiarity. In spite of everything, in some ways she was still so fragile.

Annalise set to dissecting the melons, pineapple, and mangoes, and composing bowls of complementary colored chunks. She wondered whether her refreshments would be enough. She had wine and lemonade, but would that suit everyone? Maybe it would be best to have beer as well. She checked the time. An hour and a half until the party. It would be easiest to have someone to bring it for her—George would do it, absolutely. She dialed his number and listened to the phone ring several times. He picked up at last.

"Hello?" He answered in a preoccupied tone.

"Hi, George, it's Annalise," she replied.

His voice brightened. "Hi Annalise, how are you?"

"I'm good! I was actually wondering if you could please swing by the store and pick up a six pack or two for the party before you arrive. I just realized—"

"Uh—"

"...that I hadn't accounted for the men like you who might prefer beer and then --"

"Annalise—"

"Then I thought, why doesn't George just pick it up and then if he gets here a tad early there's no problem at all, even though Robin still isn't ready—"

"Annalise!" He raised his voice finally and she stopped abruptly. "I'm sorry," he laughed, "but I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about. What party?"

"What do you mean...You aren't coming to the party?" she asked in confusion.

"Well this is embarrassing." He laughed again uncomfortably. "I talked to Robin yesterday and she didn't say anything about any party."

"Oh," Annalise said faintly. "I see."

"Yeah. Um. I'll let you get back to your party planning."

"Ok...Yes, umm, I'll talk to you later..." She hung up slowly. A strange feeling uncurled in her gut. Something was wrong.

Annalise stood with her pineapple-juice coated hands gripping the sink for support, unable to process anything for a moment. George and Robin had dated since freshman year of undergrad, serious from the start. Everyone in their family expected the proposal to be imminent. They shared everything with each other; it seemed impossible that Robin hadn't invited him to the party. A feeling of trepidation was overtaking Annalise. Unbidden, her mind recalled the scene within her sister's room. On the bedside table, a glass of water... she struggled to recall the exact image. A growing sensation of nausea made it difficult to concentrate. Yes...there had been a medicine bottle. Not at all disquieting at the time. So minor, unapologetic for its contents.

The rightful flow of time seemed to slow to a trickle as Annalise, with great effort, pried her limbs free of their frozen stupefaction. She moved toward Robin's door as the air resisted and her feet were fusing to the hardwood floors. She pounded at the door as if she might pulverize it.

"Robin!" she screamed, dread saturating her being, "Robin wake up! Answer me!"

She sank to the floor as darkness filled the room, seeping from the cracks around the door. She pleaded with the murkiness that was settling in, smothering her voice and enveloping her bones in frost. Fear rendered her body useless; her eyes were blind; her fists clenched unknowingly, her nails drawing unnoticed blood from her palms; the raw voice crying her sister's name wasn't audible to her ears. The failing processes of her mind clung to one piece of futile reasoning: if she didn't open the door, there was a chance that Robin had not yet succumbed to the despondent blackness. Annalise willed the pills back into the bottle, screwed the childproof cap back on. If she only left the door shut, two Robins existed. The darkness could have one, and she would have the other.

John Tobin



Senior

Majors: Biopsychology, Cognition and Neuroscience, Creative Writing and Literature

Hello, my name is John Tobin and I'm from Gambrills, Maryland, just outside of Annapolis. I've been studying poetry for 4 years in the Residential College under Ken Mikolowski and Lolita Hernandez. Poetry is an art I've loved since childhood when I first read and re-read the poetry of the ever-great Shel Silverstein and would lie in bed to my mother and father reading me Aesop's Fables and singing songs by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. I come from two large families, one Greek and one Irish who have always lived nearby and consequently given me the eyes to see what I write, in ways I could only begin to recognize after leaving home to study at the University of Michigan. I've been most notably inspired by the poetry of C.P. Cavafy, Robert Frost and Edgar Allen Poe.

Eulogy

I slept with myself
when I felt unwanted
held myself
wept silently

I tousled my hair
and looked into the eyes
I knew would be leaving soon

I said
"It'll be okay,
cause heaven might not
exist, but you will"
and replied
"I'm scared"
and grasped my hand tightly.

There was a warmth to it
and a coldness
and a love
that I had missed somewhere along the line

Crossing the Street

Three times I didn't want this
and let your hand rest upon my thigh
Three times I didn't want this
and yet you call me each night trying to kiss me
Three times I didn't want this
and each time it gets better

I wonder then
how you might cry at night
each time I tell you to back off
and how you might cry at night
because I've told you I don't want you
and how you might cry at night
because the world is an echo inside your head

People often look left and turn right
Wanting left and turning right

Because the right is right, right?
It's natural to turn right
Needs are met and it feels right
The first time I had you
The second time I had you
The third time I had you
The fourth time you had me
and we veered off to the right
eyes on the left
feeling alright

eyes straight ahead
feeling right
eyes on the right
feeling unbelievable

Adam's Rib

I feel the night rising
as the pall falls on yet another
version of myself

The elegant dark,
who I can only see
when she strips each
layer of the sun
from her body

Her desolate heart
exposed
is as black as the fate
of the setting sun

Her body is my pain
Her voice, my emptiness
Her touch, a distant beauty
I once tried to keep

My heart thrums slowly in my body
the Hypnotist, the Mesmer,
to convince myself
I loved her
but in the night the truth
has fewer ribs

To My Left

is the face of a lover
ragged and worn
from constant abuse

and too much coke
and too much alcohol
and from rearing a child
when you were young
with big blue eyes
that you don't see any more

you see me
and smile and laugh
and scream and laugh
and use your fists, no longer laughing
and sink your head in tears
and your nostrils bleed
as you twitch a smile and laugh
and grunt with sexual desire
you'll soon spend on someone more willing

and there's pain in your eyes
and there's love in your eyes
and there's drugs in your eyes
and there's lust in your eyes
but you can't choose just one

and I'll look at you in wonder,
wonder at what you are
wonder because the rest has left me
in wonder that my words are gone

They say time is a universal healer
to those who use it well
and torturer to those who don't

like the King of Hearts on the side of a card
and a bloody red mess on the other

I tried to play healer
but, like Time, it had two sides
and two sides like the King of Hearts

Open Mind

sometimes I think
I'm receiving a message
from god knows what

in waves
and cycles
like sleep

today is like a dream
I'm trying to make sense of
while time is still moving
and the present is in flux

life is still
when I sleep

I see the leaves
brightly falling in the wind
and I lie in the dark water
of my emotions
by the end,
by the end,
I'll wash up somewhere

Claire Van Winkle



Senior

Major: PitE (Environmental Studies)

Minor: Creative Writing

I plan to read a non-fiction piece I wrote in Professor Sugi Ganeshanathan's 425 essay writing class about the idea of saying goodbye

-The piece I plan to read is from my travels in New Zealand and from my three-night stay at a Maurae, which is a tribal center for the South Pacific Islanders who settled in New Zealand about 1000 years ago.

-I am an environmental studies student hoping to travel, write, and inspire people to be better environmental stewards.

Leaving Aotearoa

I.

Short, sharp battle calls pierced the air. I saw his legs first, thin but strong, whiter than I'd expected. We stood in rows of four by the gate, women in front, with our heads bowed. I remember looking down, staring at my bare feet, but also stealing shy peeks through the wooden fence posts. The screams grew louder as he approached; they came in bursts, like dog barks, only shorter and higher pitched. I shook with fear. This was the land of his ancestors. The wind quieted down when he cried out, as if to give weight to his battle calls.

As I became more daring with my peeks, I watched him fling his long, grey ponytail madly in every direction and listened as he howled at us. He

had a runner's body, thin and muscular, detailed with veins and wild, looping green-ink tattoos. He danced before us, half-naked, wearing only a small rabbit fur garment around his waist that pulsed with every twitch of his muscles. Running around the courtyard, he lunged at us with his spear and opened his eyes so wide that we could see the whiteness beyond his pupils. My palms grew sweaty. The warrior whipped his tongue up and down and then stuck it in and out again like a snake. He beat his chest and twirled his spear before us. He stamped up and down on the ground and pouted.

Then, with a thud, his wooden spear landed at our feet, and the singing began. The warrior opened the gate and led us up a beautiful spiral stone pathway to the Marae. The grassy field before the house birthed short, purple flowers and vertical stones. In the distance, we heard sticks clacking together and gathered that the men were practicing with taiahas, their fighting sticks, out by the ocean.

The women of the Marae called to us from the porch of the whareniui. Their voices were deep and manly but beautiful. We sang back to them in Maori while moving forwards slowly in a clump, our heads still bowed out of respect. I mouthed the words to the song because my breath was gone. We proceeded through the rest of the powhiri, the welcome ceremony, until at last we were invited to Hongi, to exchange our breath and be welcomed officially onto the Marae.

I waited in line for my turn to Hongi. The Maori arranged themselves in a receiving line and ordered themselves according to their status within the tribe. The eldest male stood first, followed by his wife. I pressed my nose and forehead to each member of their party one at a time. This pressing of faces was the softest of gestures and was followed by both parties exhaling loudly. The exhale was a mutual assertion of trust. Tena Koe, we said, and then shook hands. I had to remember to always face forward as I walked down the line; turning your back is seen as a violation of trust.

After the ceremony ended, we were invited into the kitchen for pastries and afternoon tea. I spent the majority of my tea hanging out with a little Maori girl named Henney, who told me she could walk through walls and make rainbows come out of her fingers. Later, in the whareniui, the large communal sleeping room, she asked me to braid her hair. I did, but was later told that I could not do that again, because if you touch a child's head there is a risk that you will steal their soul. Maori treat the soul as the essence of personhood. That is why you are not allowed to take pictures in the whareniui, where wooden carvings of ancestors line the walls.

The whareniui is a long wooden room with intricate carvings and colorful paintings. The carvings tell stories of war, love triangles, leadership and brotherhood. They are intimidating structures depicting warriors with sharp tongues and huge penises. At the end of the room, there is a carving of a boy riding in to save the kingdom on the back of a whale.

On our first night in the Marae, we listened to Tai, the tribe elder, talk about the carvings on the walls. We were instructed to avoid pointing our feet directly at him as a sign of respect. He began by thanking us all for staying with them and for “keeping the walls warm” with our spirits and joy. Tai told us that it is essential to fill important places with happy people and thoughts and how this energy gets transferred by the place itself to the next group that arrives. A place like that was never really empty, he said.

And I felt it, in a dream. Before bed, we lined up our mattresses next to each other on the floor. As we slept, we enjoyed a funny sense of community over the wheezing, funny breathing, and sleep talking of our neighbors. Then the dreams took over. At some odd hour of the morning, I awoke to what I thought was a screeching fire alarm. I remember looking, but not being able to move or speak. To my right, through the window, I watched a stream of whirling bright lights. The lights reminded me of blobby sheep. In the morning, I told Tai about my dream. He raised his eyebrows when I pointed to the spot I’d seen the lights. That spot, just outside the window was the spot where they used to bury their dead.

Our last night on the Marae was filled with great joy and sadness. We came together as a community of students, teachers, and members of the Marae, to perform a customary talent show. I thought for awhile about what I would do. My talents include writing, drawing and playing soccer; none of those can be preformed in two minutes before an audience. So I settled on reading a poem I’d written about sheep. I called it Red Carpet Sheep Dream. It was a modern poem, consisting of fifty questions about sheep:

Has there ever been an albino blacksheep?

Would a sheep appreciate a wool sweater as a birthday gift?

Would a sheep grandma like it better?

Benji and Nate played guitar and sang a duet. Maren hula-hooped. Connor sang. Jono rapped. Hannah demonstrated how she could say any sentence backwards. The show lasted for over three hours. It was the most incredible display of community and the beautiful things of which humanity is capable.

At the end of the talent show, Tai and his wife played a Maori love song on guitar. We all joined in on the last verse.

Hine Tangi Manawa Ki Ahau

Tama Arohaina I Te Tau

Ka Pine Ai

He Pine Pae

Wairua O Te Aroha

Then, we all held hands and stood in a circle. I was on the verge of tears. Everything was so beautiful. Tai turned to us, and became very serious. He spoke slowly:

“Thank you all for keeping the house warm with your love. We will see you again soon.”

He proceeded to explain that the Maori never say goodbye. To say goodbye is to imply something much more permanent and should be reserved for the dying. I did not know whether I would return to the Marae ever again. And with that, we hongied one last time, took in each other’s breaths and said see you later.

II.

Long before my study abroad class traveled to the Marae, I met John, who had an entirely different philosophy on saying goodbye. The first time I’d met him, he’d been barefoot in the Auckland baggage claim. He was a small, old New Zealander with freckly skin. When he picked us up, he was wearing a sheep whistle on a string around his neck and funny striped leggings in lieu of pants.

John was the field leader for my environmental studies study abroad program. In his spare time, he climbed mountains and went deer hunting. It was hard to tell whether he was a very fit old man, or a man who had done so much in his life that his age was showing early.

On my first day in the country, I stared out the window at the foreign, green landscape through the back window of John’s van. I knew immediately that I wanted to stay after the program and explore on my own and that was before I fell in love with the mountains, the kiwis, and the sheep.

Out of the car window, the pine trees looked like the little, rigid Lego pine trees my brother and I used to stick outside our Lego houses. The cows were oddly thin compared to our American cows, and their coloring reminded me of toasted marshmallows. Sheep dotted the grass and followed each other in lines, zigzagging around the rolling hills and carving wormy patterns into the landscape because they refused to differentiate their paths. Lines. It was always lines with sheep. We passed some mussel farms out on the sea. We could barely make them out.

“Those black dots out there in the water,” John said from the driver’s seat of the white van, “are little black boys.”

We froze. A few people exchanged glances.

"Black boys?" Benji asked.

"Not boys. No. Buoys." He tried for a moment to make his accent disappear.

"Oh. Buoys," we all laughed.

The thirty of us, students and teachers combined, lived on a small hippie campus by the ocean. Aside from growing our own vegetables and our naked bike rides, dinners could always be counted on for fun. The best way to guarantee that you had an interesting dinner conversation was to sit as close to John as possible. Connor and I used to wait for him and his dog to come out of their trailer, where they lived behind our classroom, the wharekai. John would go into the kitchen and help himself to generous portions of stir-fry. We'd scan the long wooden tables out on the deck to see where his deaf sheepdog, Joe, had settled for the night and then seat ourselves as near to that as possible so that we could listen to John's stories.

He alternated between speaking and shoving rice into his mouth, and I looked out onto the field beyond the deck to avoid watching the rice get stuck in the toothless portions of John's mouth. The sun disappeared and the broccoli-shaped trees bent their arms in the wind as he asked us all about our days. When at last all the vegetables were cleared from his plate and the Southern Cross made its debut in the night sky, he would start in on something grand. We knew when he was about to dive into a story because he'd cross his legs and point at the air.

Conversation topics ranged from the best way to kill a possum, to the reasons why internships are stupid, to the story of the time he fasted for two weeks straight. On the subject of the fast, he spoke of spiritual visions, colors mostly that became less colorful without food. A red tea towel had made him sick. Colors weren't the same when you didn't eat, he said. Maybe that's why corpses grew paler. I remember him describing in brutal detail the difficulty he had eating again:

"I wanted nothing."

I often wished I had a pen, so that I could record his opinions about how the only food you really need while camping is olive oil, about American's obsession with water, secret beaches, the story of the flood and the carrot lady, and what happened the time the owner of the bar gave him the keys and went to bed.

He was incredibly smart and interesting to listen to. Whenever he talked, I made sure to listen. In Opoutere, he gave us his most important piece of advice.

III.

Several weeks into my study abroad program, our group traveled to Opoutere. On our last afternoon there, we were all out on the lawn, packing our stuff. While everyone was loading kayaks onto the trailer, I found a baby parrot in the grass. It was a Kaka. I recognized his red stomach from a picture book I'd seen in the Wharekai. His small claws curled beside his beak, and he was still. Tormented by the idea that the flies would come by soon enough and pull pieces from him, I used a Frisbee to carry his limp body down the hill to a quiet spot by the estuary.

The water glistened in the warm afternoon light, and the small mangrove pneumatophores stuck up out of the water like straws. My Frisbee grew light again. I turned to walk back up the hill and immediately wished I could have taken one last kayak through the salty water or dug at low tide for cockles and wedgeshells again. But it was time to go. We were off to do research at the marine reserve in Leigh.

When I returned to the top of the hill, the trailer was packed and looking cheery with all the bright neon kayaks. My classmates waved me into the van. They were playing a game of would-you-rather and wanted my opinion on whether I would rather have no eyebrows or no big toe. I chose to keep my toe, so I could run.

John was sitting in the driver's seat and was wearing a pair of purple swim shorts on his head like a hat.

"The sun's gotten a bit of me this week," he explained while patting his head, "think I'm peeling."

He was always doing weird things, but his strangeness was why we found him so wonderful.

It was sunset by the time our van pulled down the grassy hill and onto the curvy road. John stopped the van just outside the hostel gate and scurried to close it behind us.

"He looks a little bit like Sméagol," Nate said from the back of the van, when John was out of earshot.

John wasn't crazy like Sméagol, maybe a little odd, maybe a little alone. At least he had a family in Thames, who he biked to see every other weekend. I couldn't help but agree that physically, he did look a little like Sméagol.

When John finished closing the gate, he jumped back into the van with a boyish leap. The van shook a little when he landed, because it was old and rickety. He shifted gears, and we descended the remainder of the hill in our white school van. Ahead of us, the estuary beamed and rippled in the wind. It was shaded on the East by a number of tall, thin-leafed kahikatea trees

and a smattering of thick mangroves in the shadows.

The water in the estuary shimmered and captured the last signs of sunlight on its surface. John spoke:

“You need to learn how to say goodbye to people and places...You must always do this, because you can never be sure that you will see them again.” He was talking about Opoutere and the estuary, but his words carried a greater weight. It was only a matter of time before we would have to say goodbye to this beautiful country and the warm souls we had met along the way.

IV.

As summer left and April rolled around, the country stayed green as ever. The leaves did not turn orange, or rock to the ground in the breeze. On this green island there was nothing to signal the coming of fall except the thinning of air and the occasional cloudy day.

During this season of thin air and wool socks, John became the project leader of my small group’s research project on Hochstetter’s frogs. He led us through the Huia water catchment, where we descended large, forested hills and waded through streams to lift rocks and search for camouflaged frogs. In order to find our predetermined survey streams, we were required to take bearings and follow a combination of maps and handwritten instructions. We surveyed in streams only as wide as a doorframe, banked on either side by boulders and robotic fantail birds. On the day Hannah and I took a wrong turn in the thick forest, John said something to the effect of:

“Do you even know how to read a map? We might as well just all piss off if you’re going to take that turn.”

I nodded. My throat burned. I didn’t understand why he needed to be so rude. I shrugged back at him, and he took it as an insult and stormed off into the bush.

“Fucking kids.”

Granted, it was true. I was a horrible map-reader. I just didn’t want to admit it to anyone. The problem was that I read maps selectively. I searched for river crossings and other landmarks the way I scanned newspapers for articles of interest.

When my mom and I had driven my brother out to school in Montana the summer before I went to New Zealand, she’d put me in charge of the map. We ended up on a dirt road in Wyoming. John may have been trying to help, but I was too proud to admit that maps were not my strong suit. And I was angry at him for being frustrated with me. My anger did not last long

though.

When I decided to stay an extra month in New Zealand, John sat down with a small group of us in the school office before we left. It was 10pm, and he held a cup of hot tea in his hand.

“Well, what’s the plan?” he asked.

Our plan was to hike the great trails in Fjordland and live out of our backpacks. He smiled and said:

“Rules for hitchhiking: always keep your bag with you. Don’t put it in the trunk or they might drive off with it before you have time to get in. Be comfortable saying no. If a car stops for you, you don’t have to get in.”

Although he was very much a believer in adventures and hitchhiking, he wanted us to be safe. It was the closest thing I felt to warmth with him, until he said goodbye.

He drove us to Auckland so that we could catch our flight to Queenstown. I got out of the van slowly, making sure I had my stuffed animal dragon and my passport. Tears blurred my sight. I hugged the other teachers one last time, buried my face in their shoulders and thanked them for their hospitality. I have never felt as loved by non-relatives as I did in New Zealand.

When John said goodbye, he gave me a hug so tight it was as if that was the last time he was ever going to see me.

“Goodbye.”

I later found that he had tucked a few extra maps in the front pocket of my backpack and couldn’t help but think what a wonderful way that was to say goodbye. He practiced what he preached.

I realized, in those departing moments, that I had neglected or chosed not to say goodbye back to John or to any of the teachers. I’d hugged all of them. I’d cried a lot. But I hadn’t said goodbye, as John suggested we must learn to do. I couldn’t bring myself to say the words. Instead, I said see you later, just as I learned to do on the Marae.

I stand by my decision to not say goodbye. I can never be sure why I chose one form of goodbye over another, but I believe my decision was ultimately rooted in fear. When I was leaving, I worried that I might never see the beautiful country or its wonderful people ever again. And that wasn’t acceptable to me. I needed to go back. I did not want leaving to be a permanent thing. So I said see you later, with the hope that I could return one day.

Dominic Vetuschi



Sophomore

Majors: English and Religion

Born in San Diego, Dominic's first word was sock. His interests include: writing, cooking, sailing, and banging on trash cans (he performs with a high energy percussion group on campus called "Groove"). Someday, he would like to be a teacher.

Michael Cali

"What a fucking weirdo," my friend Joe said one day as a few of us walked past the Huron River. We watched an old man as he stood in the middle of the water, moving around large rocks and tossing aside soggy plants. My friends were palpably surprised and amused. Picture this: a man in his mid-seventies standing in a river shifting around its contents with the same intent and focus that a photographer might use to finely adjust his camera settings. Finally he stood there with his hands on his hips, examining his hard work. A crowd of bikini-clad girls got up at once to leave. He turned to them all and said, "I hope my cleaning isn't making you go." Joe and Sean's faces dropped in amazement. "What is this guy's deal? That is so creepy," Sean chuckled, grinning wide as he leaned against a tree. What my friends didn't know was that this man had once explained his lifestyle to me for several hours. His name was Michael Cali.

I'd met him one day over the summer, as I was sitting on the steps by the river. I was taking a short break from my jog to enjoy the scenery, and

I had headphones in my ears playing ambient music. I watched dogs chase after sticks their owners had thrown, drunken twenty-somethings float by in inner tubes with cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon in their laps, and small children remove their tiny shoes and socks and dip their toes in the cool ripples of the rushing water, retreating with squeals to their parents when they realized how cold it was.

Approaching me, Mike said "You really should take those things out of your head. You're missing out on the lovely music I've composed for you." At first I thought I'd misheard him, although I did agree that Brian Eno was no match for the sounds of the waves lapping against the rocks, the symphony of cicadas vibrating all around me, and the extra dimension which was added to the already pleasant smells, tastes, and sights of the Nichols Arboretum. So, I took the earbuds out of my ears and wrapped them up. Looking up at him, I saw his face was wrapped in a thin blanket of white hairs, which collected and dripped down off his chin like furry icicles. He wore a thin red flannel and some kind of khaki-flavored denim pants, which were frayed towards the bottom, and damp from him wading through the river. Dark gray wispy tangles snuck out from beneath his beige baseball cap and hung down the sides of his wrinkled face, framing his pointy crooked nose and wintry grayish-blue eyes, which he fixed directly on mine. As he spoke to me I was the absolute center of his attention. His eyes did not waver to the left or the right. Nor did they shoot down to the ground in apprehension. Instead they remained locked sincerely on mine, intent and focused.

"See those rocks out there?" he said, smiling as he pointed to a spot in the river that did not ripple as much as the rest of the wavy stream surrounding it. Upon further inspection, I saw that this spot was the result of housecat-sized stones arranged in such a way that when the water collided with them it rolled past smoothly. "I arranged those rocks. I spent countless hours observing the different sounds they make when the water passes over them. It's my own sort of water music." He looked out across the river for a moment, his eyes seemingly focused on nothing in particular, or everything all at once, I couldn't tell. There was something eerie and foreign about the way his gaze blanketed the world ahead of him. His focus seemed to spread out like beams from his eyes, laser pointers which he aimed once more at my pupils, saying, "I listened and explored, I gradually learned the subtle way that water speaks when it flows over rocks, and all the differences in tone depending on the different angles that water can strike the stone. I worked very hard. I just wanted to add to the atmosphere of this place."

I watched him closely as he turned away once more to soak in his surroundings. He seemed entranced, in some sort of altered state. I wondered what it might be like to be so perceptive of such tiny details as the water lapping over the rocks, to the degree that he decided to spend all that time arranging them into what was evidently a carefully crafted form of music. Yet, as he watched the children playing beneath the canopy of leaves, there was

joy on his face. Contentment. Not quite pride in his work but pleasure in the fact that he had created something, invested his time and energy for hours, days - however long it takes to compose a "rock music" symphony - and had made a difference, at the very least for himself.

"You know, this really is a special place," he said. "The Nichols Arboretum is a gift. It's a place where people can come to get away from the materialistically motivated, self-centered prison that is the city. The more we fight for making ourselves happy, you see, the farther away we get from actually being happy. The only thing that can really bring us joy is giving."

He paused for a moment to let me think about what he'd just said. Was this because giving is the only way to get anything, really? I'd always felt that whatever Karma was, it worked something like that. It was funny that he should use the word joy, too. It reminded me of one of the first times I'd heard about Karma. It was in Catholic school and we certainly didn't call it Karma. My teacher told us that joy wasn't when your parents let you have ice cream, or when they let you stay up past your bedtime. Real joy was when you took your priorities and spelled them out with the letters of the word joy: First, Jesus, then, Others, and finally, Yourself. Funny that my mind had taken me back to Catholic school and lessons about God, as Michael's next words were, "So many people are trying to be happy by carrying out their own plan, but that leads us to a lot of misery. This is the world's way of telling us that we need to become aligned with God's plan instead." Mike did not strike me as your average Jesus-freak, and certainly not the type to push his beliefs down my throat like a traveling preacher who wears signs around his neck saying "Judgment and Hellfire are coming for Fornicators, Homosexuals, Pot Smokers, Hypocrites!" etc. He confirmed my suspicion when he said, "The Church is a failing institution. I used to be a part of it, but I realized I would never really get too far in carrying out God's plan in a place like that. So, when I was 20, I sold everything I owned and I've lived off of the grace of God ever since. Miracles."

Miracles? Like turning water into wine? Like parting the Red Sea? I wondered: What did he do for work? How did he pay rent? You can't just cheat the system like that and skate by on "miracles," could you? I asked where he lived and he pointed off past the train tracks. "I live in a small studio apartment on the top floor of that tall brown building in the city. I told the tenant there that I was living my life for charity, and he's let me stay ever since. I own very little. Everything I do own I own for the sake of my work. It's better that way. You're free to do so much more with your life, and the only things you collect are those, which are absolutely necessary, and most useful for you. Everything you need is right there, God's providing it for you. We're just so used to excess and comfort that we hardly notice the endless system of support and grace that He's surrounding you with at all times."

Now he was beginning to sound like a spiritual version of Fight Club's

Tyler Durden, trying to get me to realize that what you own ends up owning you. I realized that there might be some semblance of wisdom in what he was saying. Did my headphones really bring me joy, or did they distract me from something bigger? How about my drum set, or all my clothes? I wasn't prepared to throw away all my possessions, but it was at least valuable to take a second look at what I own.

Maybe I could do without some of it. I'd always gotten a giddy feeling in my chest when I watched Brad Pitt say you are not your job, you're not how much money you have in the bank, you're not the car you drive, you're not the contents of your wallet, you're not your fucking khakis. Of course, Michael differed from Tyler Durden in that I don't think he was trying to get me to join a cult of counterculture terrorists, bombing Blockbusters to liberate the world of its 9-5 shackles. I think he just wanted me to look at my life, cut out all the nonsense, and do something worthwhile.

"That's the thing people miss most about Jesus," he continued, "when he says to sell all your possessions and follow him, he means it. Otherwise you're praising false gods. You need abstraction from the life you've been signed up for. You need the clarity of owning nothing to decide what it is you really want to be. That's how you get to heaven. By doing what you love. Your vocation is the work your heart loves doing." The whole time Michael was talking, perhaps the reason I kept listening was because he and I both agreed that hell was not a place you go because you smoked pot and had sex outside of marriage, but that hell is the life sucking state of surrendering your power and time to what you don't love.

Michael loved "rock music," I could tell. Michael loved sitting on branches and listening to the sounds of the river. Michael loved the people who came to spend time by the river, and he loved spreading his message. He lived day by day, and he was the only person I'd ever met to interpret Jesus' teachings so literally. He's inspiring to me because he got to where he is by paving his own road. He didn't listen to what other people told him was good, what was sane, or what was possible. He just found out what he couldn't live without doing, and did it.

Marissa Wais



Junior

Majors: English and French

Marissa is a junior majoring in English and French with a minor in the Environment. Although she's from West Bloomfield, Michigan, she swears she belongs along Lake Superior instead. Marissa spends a lot of her time dancing, wandering in the woods, and writing about it.

to my familiar:

it's friday night and you aren't here
again. i'm not wearing
my black shine high heels – the ones you bought
because you thought they'd make me
look different. instead, i slip

into a poetry reading under the city's
ribcage. i ask the long white hair
if this seat is taken. she says
"i know you! you read your poetry
at sweetwaters coffee shop! i know
you!" and i smile and i say
"no." no, but she's got three times
my years and she swears she knows
my voice. i'm black coffee drip. i'm
a size seven rain boot without a single

squeak. maybe there are friday night
november tailwinds of my hair
all over this curly city.

the poet firecrackers and
signs my book. her eyelids fissure and
she says "i've seen you before."
i'm questioning if that's a question. i tell her
about the woman sitting next to me and she says
"maybe you have a familiar soul." i wish
she wrote that in my book
for me to always recognize, just in case i picked
to wear the high heels by mistake. i almost wish
that poet would tell it all to you
instead of to my paperback. so tell me:

if i raced into the shower, river, rain, if i
was held only by a t-shirt too cold for november, if i
stuck out my hand (as a matter of fact)
to bring you with me if you wanted,
would you swear you'd seen me before?

printed on the fire hydrant

here lies the air you grabbed to yell
tag you're it tag you're it, air
flying in you, flying feet away

from this funny red thing. your mother
always told you not to touch it because
it was just for the fire fighters to hold, but the golden retriever
with the squeaky toy eyes just couldn't stop eyeing it down.

red takes the air around your hands
and burns them. don't fight fire with fire
(your mother always told you that). remember

days when your feet were burned instead, fire running
in august dinnertime air. now remember when

the grey in the sky (or the red in the concrete)
exploded blue rivers
and it felt okay to walk instead.

north : ghazal

they don't know which way to point to find north,
just up, near sky, toward wild in the north.

the woodsmen inhale all they need before dusk:
breathe trees, black tea, their lovers of the north.

in detroit, children throw primordial snow from their eyelashes
and pick it back up off the concrete. please sing for the north

but yell farther – they can hear past lake superior.
pull hair and scratch goodbye and go just north

of the trans-canadian highway's final convenience store.
cry under evergreen. pine. don't pretend to lose heat in the north.

only some of the lakes will want to freeze ankles
into crabapples, root them into growing through the north

and back out again in whichever way they know how.
pride tastes like freshwater here in the north –

wounds won't even cry when they kiss. open up.
nothing bites harder than another's breath in the north.

Xue Zhang



Junior

Majors: RC Creative Writing and English Literature

I am from China. I am a writer who loves rabbits. I love writing and it makes me feel infinite.

Mich and Ohi

Mich

King Mich sometimes likes to climb to the top of a big tree and look at the shimmering hills under the sunset like when he was little. He wears his blue armor and maize helmet, and holds the last football in his strong arms. The weight of the brown oval object is so real. King Mich holds it carefully as if he is holding infinite time itself.

The last football. King Mich still wonders about this. Is it real? On that day in that moment, everyone believed that all the footballs were burned in that hellish fire. How could this be real? In the old time of the Big Kingdom, flowers that had the color of angels' feather once were blooming cheerfully in every green tree. After flowers enjoyed their show, footballs would grow out as fruits. In every autumn, trees and trees of footballs would bring a smile to the face of everyone in the Big Kingdom. That smile was happiness.

Now, whenever King Mich holds the last football, he always remembers to smile. After all, football is the symbol of the Big Kingdom. Although football seems to not have any significant use, people of the Big Kingdom believe that this special fruit is the gift of their land. Football provides the energy

that makes people feel alive and hopeful, and it makes the Big Kingdom a legendary place.

Legendary. King Mich likes this word. This word belongs with something that forever lasts, for example, the sun. That's why Mich enjoys the beauty of the sunset. It is the magic played by the sun and the sky. It begins slowly; colors get together at the end of the horizon little by little. Everything is patient until the moment when the sun finally kisses the horizon. All light bursts, and it makes everything on the ground shine with it. You are amazed, and you don't realize how fast time could be until the horizon turns to a gentler color of the cheek of a maiden who is first in love. You are not sad because you know that the sun will come back after a night.

Like the sun, the Big Kingdom is supposed to be a place that always has a tomorrow – at least that is what people who live there believe. As the king, Mich is going to do his best to keep this belief for his people and himself. The last football would be a seed for a new brighter age. He hopes that someday, the Big Kingdom would be covered by the green trees with footballs as it used to be.

In this moment, King Mich is sitting on the top of a big tree alone. The last football is in his hands. His maize helmet shines as always. He looks down to the hills, and he sees young children are chasing each other on the fresh grass of the summer. He smiles even gentler. Once upon a time, when the young princes of the Big Kingdom were still innocent kids, they used to run to the sunset together. In fact, King Mich sees a younger himself now, and he sees younger Penn, Indi, Minne, Wiscon, Nebra, and Owa as well. He also sees the younger Ohi is trying hard to catch up with his big brothers.

"Mich, someday, I want to be someone like you"! Little Ohi with baby face said this all the time.

They are all running toward the light.

At the end of the horizon, the light, which is surrounded by the burning red, is igniting the whole wide world.

Penn

Prince Penn, of course, is a prince. When they were all little and there was no king, Penn was one of the princes. Now Mich is the King, and Penn is still a prince. Well, technically, the first prince is different from the second prince, but it is the same word anyway. Penn doesn't really care about his title since he has no interest in being the King. While someone like Mich is meant to be the King, someone like Penn is meant to be a playful prince.

Honestly, if he could choose between the two types of princes, Penn

would choose to be the first type – the little carefree prince who spends all his happy time with his brothers. One reason is the younger a person is, the less responsibilities he has to carry. Another reason is Penn really misses the old time when footballs were everywhere. Actually, he misses everything of the old time.

Prince Penn remembers that those green trees were so tall as if he could never reach the top of it. Everything is bigger for a little child. Penn and his brothers all believed that their Big Kingdom was an endless world and every tree could grow as high as the sky. Mich was as brave as ever, and he was always the first one to climb on a tree and find a path for his brothers. The little prince in maize and blue offered his hand, and other little princes in other colors took Mich's hand and climbed the tree one by one.

Till today, Prince Penn still could feel the bright sunshine that goes through the heavy branches kissing his face warmly. Every time he looks up, he sees little Mich in maize and blue, and he sees the backs of his other brothers who were trying to climb higher. Usually, Indi was the second and Nebra followed right after him, then Minne and Wiscon, the two were always together, climbing the tree at almost the same time. Owa would go whatever order he liked. Penn used to stay on the ground a little longer, but he was not the last. The last was always Ohi.

"Everybody slow down." Little Ohi spoke to his brothers every time when he was left behind. Sometimes his two round eyes were filled up with helpless tears. Ohi was little, but what he wanted was big.

Occasionally little Penn would kindly make a joke of little Ohi's situation. Penn was also very satisfied that no matter how slow he was, there was always someone even slower than he.

"Penn, can you slow down and let me go first?" Little Ohi once asked Penn when they were about to climb a very big tree. "So I don't have to be the last one."

"Only if you can catch up with me." Penn smiled naughtily and suddenly started to follow his other brothers quickly. Apparently, little Ohi's puppy-like watery eyes had no effect on proud little Penn.

Just before little Ohi was about to shed tears, Mich jumped to the ground from a high branch. The young prince in maize and blue smiled and used his right hand to touch his little brother's hair.

"You are not the last one," little Mich spoke to little Ohi gently. "I will let you go first."

"Mich is the best"! Little Ohi bloomed a big smile, and he hugged Mich tightly like a koala bear hugged his branch. When little Ohi noticed that Penn was watching him from the tree, he tried to act independently but didn't

want to let Mich go. Little Ohi's facial expression was a mix of joy and embarrassment.

That look still makes Prince Penn laugh whenever he recalls that memory. Penn is taller and stronger now, so it is much easier for him to climb a tree. However, now he prefers to climb a tree all by himself rather than with Mich and his other brothers. Since Ohi is not in the Big Kingdom anymore, maybe, Prince Penn also misses the feeling of knowing that he would never be the last one to climb a tree.

Indi

Prince Indi does not really understand what King Mich and Prince Penn think about. How could they still think well of Ohi after everything he had done? Have they forgotten that Ohi was the one who started the hellish fire that almost destroyed all the footballs? How come Mich and Penn still recall Ohi as their brother? What kind of brother would burn down his own home and hurt his family like that? For Indi, Prince Ohi is a name of the past. Wizard Ohi is the enemy of the Big Kingdom.

Prince Indi's body was covered with several scars. He got those scars in that war with the gray knights from Odium City, the evil underground community that was full of dark energy. Prince Indi likes his scars because they are the evidence of his courage and braveness. At the same time, those scars also remind Prince Indi the pain he once experienced and the huge responsibilities he has for his kingdom. The fight has not ended yet. A fight takes time.

For centuries, rulers of Odium City attempted to break down the Big Kingdom because those evil creatures believed that footballs were the sources of great power. Generations of Kings and Queens of the Big Kingdom lost their lives in the battles against Odium City's gray knights. The parents of Prince Indi and his brothers also answered the call of their destiny. They both went to the war and fought in the front, and the victory that cost their lives brought peace for the Big Kingdom for decades.

Even after the Big Kingdom lost its King and Queen, people still had lots of hope. They believed that the young princes were the future of their kingdom, and those young princes believed this as well. Nobody could ever imagine that one day, one of the princes would open the gate of the Big Kingdom and let the enemies in. The entire kingdom was nearly broken down, and the footballs that the young princes once loved were almost gone. That was a bloody war. Even though the rest of the princes fortunately led the army win the war, the price they paid was too painful.

Years later, for Indi, the last battle of the war is as clear as yesterday. Princes of the Big Kingdom were fighting with Los, the dangerous ruler of

Oidium City, gray knights, and Ohi, their little brother. Indi feels ashamed about that memory, but he clearly remembers that his sharp sword was moving fast toward Ohi while the latter was trying to run away. Indi almost made it, but the pain from his shoulder slowed him down.

The outraged Prince Indi turned his face angrily, and he saw it was Mich who uses the maize-blue-sword penetrate his skin. Mich did not put much force, but he successfully stopped Indi's action.

"What are you doing?" Indi shouted at Mich. "Let me kill him"!

"He is our brother." Mich said and turned away his face to the direction where Ohi was running. It was too brief for Indi to read the emotion in Mich's eyes, which are as deep as lakes.

Now, Mich is the King, and he has the power to decide a lot of things. The damage done by Mich's sword that day became a slight scar on Indi's left shoulder. Every time Prince Indi touches it, he feels the anger and disappointment he once experienced. Maybe Prince Indi feels something else as well, but he learns to not think about it.

Minne

Prince Minne had the aspiration about being the king. However, Wiscon did not like that idea, so Minne gave it up.

"Let Mich be the King." After the war, Wiscon said softly to Minne while they were sitting on the remains of the Kingdom's wall. "Let us just be the Princes with easier lives."

Feeling Wiscon's head on his shoulder, Minne put down his golden helmet right beside his maroon cloak. For the person next to him, Minne was willing to take off his armor and walk away from the war zone. "All right. Whatever you want," Minne said gently with a smile.

"You and Wiscon are always so close." A long time ago, a little prince with baby fat said to Minne with great envy. "I hope that Mich and I could be like that, too"!

Looking into those innocent eyes, little Prince Minne tried to sound serious: "That is not going to happen, Ohi. Mich is going to be the King, and a King belongs to his kingdom, not a single person."

"I don't care." Little Ohi shook his round head rapidly. "I want Mich to be mine."

Little Minne and little Ohi argued for a while, and neither of them was able to convince the other. When little Minne was about to make his little

brother have a big cry, little Wiscon came to pull him away while little Mich started to comfort the unsatisfied little Ohi.

"Minne said that you would never be mine! He is lying! He is a liar"! Little Ohi was still shouting while little Minne walked away with little Wiscon.

Today, Prince Minne does not remember what little Mich said to little Ohi on that day. Prince Minne is not even sure about whether little Mich said something or not, but he chooses to let it go. He has learnt that there are things that he cannot control. He also knows that it is important to seize what you care about while you still get the chance.

On the day when Los, the ruler of Odium City, and his army showed up in the Big Kingdom, Prince Minne couldn't believe his own eyes. Their little brother, Ohi, was with the enemies. Prince Minne recognized it was Ohi because his gray helmet, which Minne once laughed about its color. However, when Prince Minne rushed to Ohi, he didn't really know that if the person standing in front of him was the same Ohi he remembered.

Ohi's scarlet armor was burning. To be more accurate, flames were dancing wildly around Ohi's body as if he dressed the fire.

"Ohi, what happened to you? Why are you burning"? Prince Minne looked at the Ohi-like figure and asked in disbelief.

"He is one of us now." Los, Odium City's ruler answered Prince Minne's questions in a cold voice. "Ohi is the smart one. He knows that the only way to gain great power is to join our Odium City, the hell of hate"! Los looked at the rest of the Big Kingdom's princes with a scornful look, and his dark red eyes were shining with merciless joy. "Ohi ate the hell nut, Buuckeyee, and now he is surrounded with the ever lasting hell fire"!

Prince Minne ignored Los's words and he tried to pull Ohi. The next thing he knew was the fire was wrapping his hands like snakes, and he heard Wiscon call his name before he passed out.

Years after the war, this moment still haunts Prince Minne. He dreams about it even when he is taking a nap on the fresh grass on a lovely afternoon. He wakes up with a scream, and then he calms down as soon as he finds out that he can still feel his hands. Usually, Wiscon, the one who is always beside him would give him a long hug. Two of them share the warmth that only exists between them.

Luckily, the hell fire of Ohi's body did not destroy Minne's hands. Prince Minne is still able to hold the one he cares about so much.

Wiscon

Prince Wiscon always loves the warmth of Prince Minne's hug. He never wants to lose it, therefore, he asked Minne to not be the King. Prince Wiscon doesn't want Prince Minne to be a great King who belongs to the people of an entire kingdom. All he wants is that he belongs with him.

Prince Wiscon knows that he might not be a qualified people's prince, but he is OK with it and so is everyone else. One of the perks of having someone like Mich around is you don't have to be that brave. Since Mich takes the crown and receives all the glory, it's understandable to stay behind the King to avoid the storm. Prince Wiscon has no interest to know how fearless he would be if the sun disappears from this world. What he enjoys is to sit on a lovely hill with Minne and watch the sun come from the east and slip away to the west.

The Big Kingdom is safe now, and it will be safe for a long time. The result of that bloody war years ago was the princes of the Big Kingdom defeated the enemies from Odium City. Gray knights ran away with their ruler, Los. Ohi escaped as well even though Prince Indi almost got him. The Big Kingdom's princes caused a significant trauma to the dark community, and it would take decades even centuries for the latter to recover.

"It feels unreal that the war is over." Sometimes Prince Minne says this to Prince Wiscon. "It is even more unreal that the war once had happened."

Prince Wiscon looks at Prince Minne with a smile that is as gentle as the breeze of May, and he tells him that the moment they have right now is real. While Prince Minne is taking a nap and Prince Wiscon is awake, Prince Wiscon likes to hold Prince Minne's hands that were tortured by the hell fire around Ohi's body on that day. Prince Minne's brief contact with the hell fire did not cause any physical damage, but the horrible thing about the hell fire was it would bring the overwhelming despairing emotion to the person who touches it and let him hear the thrilling cry from hell.

The strange thing is, although Ohi was the one who caused Minne to get hurt, Prince Wiscon doesn't really hate Ohi. He is supposed to hate him, but for some reason he just doesn't. Prince Wiscon rarely shares this thought with others, but he can see that at least Minne bothers with the hell fire itself rather than Ohi, who was surrounded by the hell fire.

Maybe, both Prince Wiscon and Prince Minne will never learn to actually hate Ohi. For them, Ohi is always their little brother with an innocent look on his baby fat face. Ohi is always that little prince who followed other little princes especially the one dressed in maize and blue. Ohi is the boy who shed lots of tears whenever he felt helpless, and that little boy always asked his big brothers to pick footballs from big green trees for him.

"How could you do this, Ohi?" Prince Wiscon asked Ohi when he first figured out that Ohi was one of the enemies. "Even if you want power and you go dark, how come you joined Odium City? You know that they are going to destroy the footballs. How come you allow this happen? Aren't footballs your favorite?"

Ohi in the hell fire armor seemed to be untouched by Prince Wiscon's words. He didn't even blink when he said the following words. "Footballs? It must be one of the unworthy memories I forgot."

"What do you mean by you forgot?" Prince Wiscon asked again. This question drew the attention of all other princes of the Big Kingdom. Everyone including Mich looked at the little brother.

"I ate the hell nut, Buuckeyee. Now I am the Dark King Ohi." Ohi proudly raised his head while he spoke. "I don't have the memories of that poor Prince Ohi anymore. He is gone."

Whenever Prince Wiscon recalls this conversation, he realizes that he or Minne or anyone else indeed doesn't hate Ohi. The person they don't love anymore is someone else, not Ohi.

Nebra

Prince Nebra is a bit different from his brothers. Rather than desiring to be the one who writes the history thematically, he desires to be the one who records the history, literally. In other words, Prince Nebra wants to record the history of the Big Kingdom with words. Compared to swords and shields, Prince Nebra enjoys pens and ink much better.

A reason Prince Nebra likes writing is it makes him feel peaceful. He puts his thoughts into his words, and then his words become alive. Since the old time when everyone was little, Nebra likes to keep a dairy for himself and his brothers. He is an observer with a sensitive heart, and he wants everything that has happened to last forever.

The sunset is so gorgeous. One day, little Prince Nebra thought about this while the other little princes were focusing on catching their breath in the long run to the burning sunset. How wonderful if we could always stay in this moment. So at that night, after they went back to the castle, little Prince Nebra wrote down what he saw about the sunset and what he and his brothers did. Then he started to write how many footballs little Mich picked up from the big green trees, how frequent little Indi fought with little Penn, and how many times little Ohi cried in one afternoon. Till now, a long time after these events originally happened, the sparks of these moments are still shining in Prince Nebra's words.

Another reason Prince Nebra chooses to write is he likes the feeling of everything being in his control. Although he is a prince of the wonderful Big Kingdom, there are things that he can do nothing with in life. For example, he couldn't prevent that bloody war years ago, and he was not able to save those footballs. However, when he writes, it is possible for him to manage his own words, and sometimes that makes a bit of differences.

For instance, he could describe the loss of footballs as "the loss of the old golden age of the Big Kingdom." Or he could reword that statement to "a brand new start for the Big Kingdom's new golden age." Likewise, he could write about Ohi's amnesia as "the evil betrayer paid his price for eating the evil nut, Buuckeyee." Or he could switch the phrases and write "the naïve young prince miserably lost his memory because of his excessive ambition of getting stronger."

Most of the time, Prince Nebra writes in a neutral way. After all, now his job is to record the history of the Big Kingdom. He is in charge of editing the volumes of books about that bloody war with Odium City. His favorite part of the collection is:

"After the war, the princes could barely recognize the kingdom where they grew up. Ancient dragons that were called by Los's dark magic burned all the green trees in the Big Kingdom. Even though some green trees were still alive, the footballs that grew on the trees were burned into ash.

While people were depressed for the loss of their homeland's spirit, Prince Mich was searching among the wrecks. He believed that the footballs cannot be all gone, and there must be some hope. After days and nights of constant seeking, finally, Prince Mich showed up with the last football in his hands. He found it in the ash. In that moment, people in the Big Kingdom knew that there was a tomorrow for their homeland. Mich, the bravest prince in the war, was going to be the new King, who would bring a brighter new age to the Big Kingdom – just like it said in the ancient prophecy."

Owa

Prince Owa is the keeper of the Big Kingdom's ancient prophecy tablet. He was assigned to this job on the day he was born because the tablet said: "the prophecy is going to be protected by the royal boy who is born at the moment when a meteor flies across the sky." Prince Owa thinks this is kind of funny, and he wonders who else would be the tablet keeper if he came to this world a bit sooner or later.

The Big Kingdom's ancient prophecy tablet is magical. No one knows where it came from, but the information on that tablet was precisely what happened in the Big Kingdom for the last hundreds of years. The tablet told about the wars between the Big Kingdom and its dark enemies, and it even

predicted the result and damages of each war. Generations and generations of people of the Big Kingdom had faith in the tablet.

However, even though the ancient prophecy tablet once had great value, Prince Owa's job to protect the tablet is super easy now. The tablet has no more information about the future of the Big Kingdom. People simply want to honor the past. The last prophecy on the tablet was about the war with Odium City years ago. It said: "The loss of the Kingdom's brightest thing would lead to the rebirth of the land."

At the time when the young princes of the Big Kingdom passed their teenage years, everyone knew that a war was coming because that was what the ancient prophecy tablet said. Most people believed that "the Kingdom's brightest thing" referred to the footballs, the gift of the land.

For the Big Kingdom's people, although footballs were not the source of great physical power as the rulers of evil Odium City believed, footballs did provide the Big Kingdom great positive energy – happiness. Therefore, the entire Big Kingdom was in the panic of never being happy again. "Can you imagine that no one will laugh again after the war?" Young Prince Owa heard some of his brothers ask about this, and that was the typical question that everyone at the Big Kingdom asked at that time.

Prince Ohi was the only one who read the prophecy differently. Instead of worry about the footballs like everyone else did, Ohi believed the "the Kingdom's brightest thing" was actually referring to Prince Mich.

"Let me read the tablet for one more time, there should be more clues." When the war was about coming, Prince Ohi came to Prince Owa, the ancient prophecy tablet keeper, and asked for the tablet for many times.

"I know you are always attached to Mich," Prince Owa used to say to his little brother. "But we are not going to lose Mich in the war."

"I have to make sure about it." Prince Ohi stated firmly. "Let me read the tablet again."

"The brightest thing of our Kingdom is football." Prince Owa reminded his little brother while Ohi was reading the tablet over and over again. It was interesting for Prince Owa to watch Ohi was so stubborn about this topic.

"For me, Mich is the brightest thing of the Big Kingdom." Young Prince Ohi repeated his belief with a smile. "He will always be."

By the time the dark army from Odium City was outside the gate of the Big Kingdom, young Prince Ohi became obviously more anxious at the possibility that they might lose Mich in order to win the war. He came to Prince Owa more frequently to ask for the tablet and read it for hours. Finally, Prince Owa lost his patience.

"Ohi, I don't really get what you are doing right now." Prince Owa refused Ohi's request when Ohi came for the tablet again. "The enemies are outside our Kingdom's gate, and our brothers are preparing for the fight. Even if you are not strong enough to fight, you should at least do something more meaningful than reading the tablet. There is only one sentence about this war. How many more times are you going to read it"?

"I am strong enough to fight." Ohi said word by word. His tone was angry.

"OK, you are strong enough." Prince Owa had no interest in starting an argument. "Then go ahead to help our brothers."

"I am helping." Ohi tried to control his anger. "That's why I want to make sure Mich will be safe."

"There is nothing more you will get from that one sentence on the tablet." Prince Owa started to believe that he should never let Ohi read the tablet. "If you really worry about Mich that much, why don't you go to talk with him"?

"I did." Ohi lowered his voice. "Mich also believes that the "brightest thing" is the football. He said even if he dies in the war, that is his destiny. He is going to take it anyway."

"See?" Prince Owa was pleased about the lecture that Mich gave to Ohi. "Mich is right. The prophecy is already on the tablet. No matter what is going to happen, eventually it will happen. There is nothing you can do with it. Ohi."

The young Prince Ohi looked into young Prince Owa's eyes. Ohi's body was taller and stronger at that point, but his face still had a piece of child-like innocence. "We are not going to lose Mich." After he said this, Ohi turned back and walked away.

It was the last time Prince Owa met Ohi as his little brother.

The next thing Prince Owa knew was Ohi joined Odium City and he led enemies into the Kingdom through a secret path that only princes knew about. When Prince Owa saw Ohi again after the war bloodily began, the hell fire surrounded Ohi and he announced that he lost his old memories because he ate the hell nut, Buuckeye.

The princes of the Big Kingdom led the army to fight with the evil enemies, and at last the Big Kingdom won. Almost all the footballs were lost but fortunately King Mich found the last one. Just like the prophecy tablet predicted, something bright was lost, and the Big Kingdom was reborn.

Betrayer Ohi fled away with the rest of Odium City's gray knights. Soon

after that, the rumor said that Ohi replaced Los and became Odium City's new ruler. Because of the great damages they suffered in the war, the dark community had to stay underground for a long time.

Prince Owa is still the ancient prophecy tablet keeper years after years, but the tablet gradually became a symbol of the past since it provides no more prophecy. People in the Big Kingdom believe that the tablet finished its job, and now the Kingdom enters a brand new age that is started by King Mich.

For some reason, Prince Owa doesn't usually mention his conversation with Ohi right before the war to his brothers. He talked about it with King Mich once, and they both were silent for a while.

"I should talk to him more." King Mich said at last. His eyes were looking at somewhere far away.

Prince Owa is not sure if he should be responsible for Ohi's betrayal at any degree. Perhaps this is one of the questions that would never have a clear answer. By the time passes, both the question and the answer will precipitate like the sand on the bottom of a river. The truth is going to fade in a place called past as the ancient prophecy tablet did.

Prince Owa has learned to let it go.

Ohi

In the underground world, even though time still passes, you don't feel much about it since there is no significant difference between day and night. Sunlight doesn't belong with a place like Odium City, and everything always looks dark.

Ohi is absolutely fine with it. The hell fire around his body brings enough light for him, and he only needs that much light to live in the dark.

He has been the ruler of Odium City since the war. He is the strongest ruler that the dark place ever has. Rumor said that is because the power of the football is in Ohi's blood. It said that everyone in the Big Kingdom is born with the power of the football in his blood, and the Big Kingdom's people are blessed with a special kind of happiness and strength. When Ohi ate the Buuckeyee, the power of the hell nut combined with the power of the football in his blood. That is why the hell fire did not burn Ohi like it had done to most people. Instead, Ohi is able to have extreme power.

Maybe that is correct. Sometimes Ohi thinks, but he doesn't really care about the cause of his power. What's important is he has the great power now, and that is all what matters.

Years ago, after gray knights of Odium City lost to the Big Kingdom's army and returned to the underground, it only took a few seconds for Ohi to burn Los into ash with hell fire.

"Don't do this! I am the one who gave you the Buuckeyee when you first came to us. Now as you wished, you have power and your brother Mich is still alive. They didn't let us take the footballs, so we burnt them. What's wrong with that? Just let me go." Los begged Ohi with desperate fear.

"Yes, I have power now." Ohi replied with a coldly satisfied smile. "So I can do whatever I want." Then Ohi managed a stream of his hell fire to wrap around Los's body like snakes. The beauty of the burning fire and the painful crying of Los drew the attention of the entire underground.

The more Los suffered, the better Ohi felt. Ohi recalled several weeks ago, while Odium City's army was outside the Big Kingdom, he came to Los and asked for a deal.

"I can lead you in and let you take some footballs." The Young Prince Ohi tried to make himself sound as calm as possible. "But you must promise me that you will not hurt anyone in the Big Kingdom, especially Mich. You must promise me that no one would hurt Mich."

"I can promise you that, my prince. Peace is what we all want." Los smiled like a fox. "But for showing your sincerity about committing the deal, I require you to eat this hell nut. Don't worry, the power of this nut will only last for a while. After we take the footballs and leave the Big Kingdom, I will give you the antidote for the nut."

"Deal." Young Prince Ohi said without a second thought.

What a stupid move. Ohi thought to himself while he watched Los burning in the hell fire. Who would make a deal with demons and expect the promise would be kept. At that point, Ohi was able to control his power much better than when he first ate the Buuckeyee. He just wished that he could manage himself much better than he did, so he could stop the gray knights destroying the footballs in the Big Kingdom. The Buuckeyee made Ohi become someone else, or even something else. Ohi made the fire wrap Los's body tighter and tighter until eventually, there was nothing left except the flowing ash.

After everything was over, Ohi looked at the gray knights around him and asked: "Now who else still questions my power"?

Now, after being on the dark throne for years, Ohi is able to easily manage his power and rule the evil community underground. He doesn't know if one day Odium City will regain its full power and start another attack for

the Big Kingdom. That ancient prophecy tablet did not say anything about it. Perhaps only time will be able to reveal the answer.

The hell nut, Buuckeyee, changed Ohi a lot. He is cold and he doesn't feel anything when he makes others suffer. He couldn't go back home and he doesn't want to go back. The Big Kingdom was the home for the person who he was, not for the person who he is.

However, it didn't make Ohi lose his memory. Ohi has no idea of why he told Wiscon and his other brothers that he lost his memories on that day. But maybe, sometimes, forgetting would make things much easier than remembering.

Ohi still remembers his panic of losing Mich in the war. He still remembers he went to Owa and asked for the tablet, and he remembers Nebra said he would write down how anxious Ohi looked. He still remembers how much he admired the close bond between Minne and Wiscon, and he remembers he always thought he would like Indi better if Indi were gentler to him.

He remembers before the war, he told Mich that he didn't want to lose him. Mich answered him in the same way like a long time ago, when little Ohi cried about the fact that Mich does not only belong with him.

"I am going to fight no matter what." Prince Mich said in his maize helmet and blue armor. "My life belongs with my kingdom and its people. That is the price of being a prince."

A price. Everything has a price. Sometimes Ohi wonders about the choices he once made. Was he too stubborn? What if everyone else was right and the "brightest thing" did refer to the footballs rather than Mich? If Ohi could go back and make another choice, he would choose a more sophisticated way to ensure Mich's safety – maybe figure it out with his brothers. However, in a corner of his heart, Ohi knows that no matter how many times he faces the same situation, he will always choose to make sure that Mich won't get hurt even if Ohi has to pay the same stupid price again.

Ohi also remembers that when he was little, he always looked up to Mich and told him: "Mich, someday, I want to be someone like you."

Little Mich would smile at little Ohi who had a baby fat face and said: "Ohi, you don't have to be me. You can always just be yourself."

Then little Mich would touch little Ohi's soft hair, and little Ohi would feel the warmth of little Mich's little palm.

It was so warm.

Mich

The pink orange still occupies at the end of the horizon after the sun slipped away. The sky dresses in a brief brightness before the night comes. King Mich in his blue armor is sitting on a branch at the top of a big tree, and the last football stays right beside him. He takes off his golden helmet and feels the breeze gently touching his cheeks.

In this peaceful moment, King Mich tries to guess what everyone is doing right now. Penn always enjoys some wine before dinner, and sometimes Indi joins him. Minne and Wiscon must stay together as always. Nebra perhaps is writing down his thoughts for the day. Owa brings the ancient prophecy tablet with him wherever he goes even though he always announces that he is totally bored with his job. Ohi also has his own life now somewhere else.

King Mich smiles. He hopes that everyone is happy under such a beautiful sky. No one could rewrite the past, but the future starts with the present that he is having right now. Mich is doing his best to be a good King for his people, and he is bringing his Kingdom to a new golden age.

Years after the war ended, the green trees that were damaged in that hellish fire start to recover. Stems become taller, and new branches grow out. Maybe in a spring in the near future, the flowers with the color of angels' feather will bloom again. Then the magical fruits, footballs, are going to bring joy to the land of the Big Kingdom and bring people lots of laugh. That day is coming.

King Mich looks at the end of the horizon for the last time before heading back. He holds the last football and his maize helmet carefully when he jumps down from the tree. The wind cheers around Mich's ears and he feels infinite. Like the sun, the Big Kingdom always glows with the brightest glory after a long night.

That is what is called a legend. A legend never ends.