

2013 Lyricist



Editor's Letter

Writing allows us to reinvent ourselves, to travel to exotic places, and, perhaps most importantly, to send a message to the world. *The Lyricist* exists so that our contributors can share their unique experiences and thoughts with our sojourning readers. Thank you to all who submit and peruse!

The 2013 *Lyricist* would have been lost at sea if not for our wonderful crew of literary-loving students and our fearless captain, Mr. Nate Salsbury, who always helms us through choppy waters. A special thanks to Dr. Gina Peterman for her ever-patient counsel, to Mrs. Susan West for her tireless activity in our favor, and to Mr. Daniel Rodgers, Ms. Haven Hottel, and Dr. Cordelia Hanemann for imparting their knowledge of design, technology, and poetry to our staff. Without the help of these and more, the 2013 *Lyricist* would never have made it safely to shore.

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by Justin Bradley

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2nd Place: “Painting the Sun” by Ashleigh Bilodeau

Honorable Mention: “Beckoning Gibbous” by Erin Overton

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2nd Place: “Pop Ferguson’s Blues” by Joyce White

Honorable Mention: “By the Tracks” by Mitchell Cox

Lyricist Student Prose:

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Honorable Mention: “Nigel” by Luke Mannion

Special thanks to our *Lyricist* 2013 judges:

Dr. Cordelia Hanemann, Ms. Katherine Richards, and Ms. Leslie Baker

Grief

“The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is. ... I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature.” -- Ralph Waldo Emerson, Experience

Boys can drown in a drop of water,
they used to tell me when I was a child,
knees bloody from grinding my skin
into the gravel of my grandmother's driveway
as I sailed ships of broken bark and petals
freshly stripped from the stems of azaelas
on the boundaries of the front yard.

I know you lost a child and first wife,
your grief a well whose bottom
you did find after a torturous descent
and whose meaning offered a drink
different from the one I have tasted.

You might have consoled yourself with religious
doctrines, but Marx's opium meant nothing
to one who already had discarded old beliefs
like clothes beyond the point of mending.
Instead you looked to the underside of a flower

to find your solace, pale as light from
distant stars, a common pleasure
from every day now your creedless creed.

But tributaries of even the shallowest
of puddles may manifest revelations
in the blooms that spring from the pain
within the bent roots of ourselves.

— Mitchell Cox

Fresh Waters

At Dolly Sods

Approaching ice once ate these hills
and loosely flung a sheet
of high, cloud-clinging earth,
rocky horizons smoothly rolling,
the stony, gray paths pointing
back at ancient, glistening chill-fingers
that slowly groped so near,
relentlessly nudging their arctic debris
into a wind-swept lunarscape
of boulder, bear, and berry—
a land flattened by the snowflake's delicate desolation.

In the Valley

We drove across the deep, brown Kanawha
on rust-patchy bridges painted

pacific blues and greens, cautiously

eying the calm, barge-bearing current.

It looked mud-tired from the rapid New River descent,

in no hurry to join the Ohio at Point Pleasant,

where, in a blast of breaking,

the Silver Bridge let go of itself

and fell heavily as lead-speckled

birds drop from the air.

Afterwards, small children passing

high over in long cars held their breath...

listening...

for the unerring sweep-beating of

immense, dark, moth-man wings

whipping the greedy, dark water,

monstrous red eyes glowing

as murkily as submerged headlights.

—Martha Owens



by Jacob Berger

The Place Our Race Began

What's this that falls below my cheek, a salty water tear?
That when it lands upon my chest, my life is void of fear.

A gentle breeze, amongst the trees, does push the waves aground,
And then it chose, I do suppose, to ripple through the sound.

The time we spend, along wit's end, is shallow at its high,
A thousand spies, with watchful eyes, will likely catch me cry.

A life of seat aghast the sand, is not moved by the wind,
Unless my rest, be put to test, and tidal waves roll in.

Whatever blooms upon the sand, is likely made of gold,
Poseidon's reach, consumes the beach, his fingers wet and cold.

Until, in time, a year goes by, will see the beach again,
Then finally, we all will see the place our race began.

And if by chance, the circumstance, decides to be our end,
Then finally, we all will see, the place our race began.

—Solomon “Sully” Goetz

Sediments

The long land's solid solace sought,
through which no gulping reservoir could leak—
helpless before the rush of time's angry gush
if wild water made the world's oldest mountains weak.

But the handy sandstone we used as sidewalk chalk
inscribed a ubiquitous tan tale, buoy-bleak,
of a vast ocean floor on which we rated
a mere carbon-carrying black streak.

—Martha Owens

Remembering Thanatopsis

For those who walk under the fleeting spell of Life,

Memento Mori.

The lab has yet to abstain the hollow, black awakening

Which drinks upon time squandered.

Bombs which defuse on its final count,

Will succeed in destiny and fate.

Without consent Nature calls us back

To her bosom, her deathly embrace—a curse.

And to each man whose sight reaches far awaits

Inevitability, but he quakes and

Suffers the solemn agony of waiting

For a signal which arrives cruelly on

His greatest day. Lost to that forgettable brier

Accompanies yet another of the Uncountable;

Whose reach spans eternity and equal is their

Grief.

All but the last, as it began

Praise which must have fit a billion

All by your side, march along

Silently, but whose footsteps are heard among

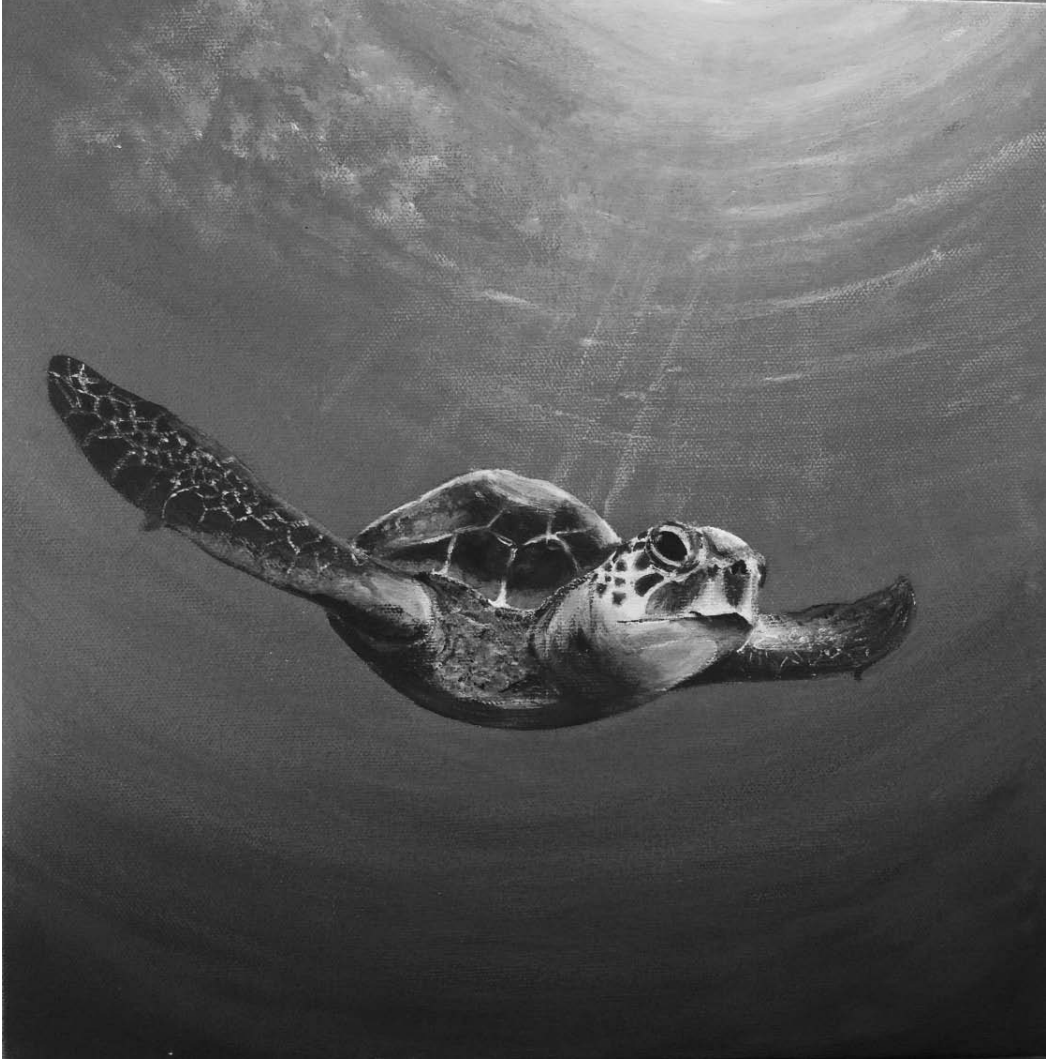
The Hearts of the living.

Arranged and read

With decorous poignancy, familiars and strangers

Reminisce for sake of those forfeited to Lord Umbra,
Now paying servitude by forsaking mirth and future.
Other worlds casting paltry glimpses of Earth in their sky
Must be filled with the same emptiness that far outnumbers
The living.
Across the universe, upon these graveyard worlds comes life
From life.
Each orbits as a generational ship with innumerable sleeping
Who will never see the light of a new world,
But will be upon his home on its last day.
Find comfort that your bed shall be made with fallen enemies,
Yet sorrow for each remembered face now locked in your tomb.
If not your gaze nor your smile shall be carried in legacy,
What of that?
Upon the day, go to face kindred and unknowns
With unfaltering longevity and close thine eyes
As one who has enjoyed a feast of kings
With all the peasants of the world.

—David Arellano



by Hannah Lamb

As Long as Waves are Rolling and the Tide is Coming In

The water's really salty and the towels are always wet,
The kids are always happy and the parents too, I bet.
The kites are always flying with their tales into the breeze,
As long as wind is blowing and it's high above the trees.

The lifeguard's always watching for a swimmer needing aid,
The water washes up shore turning old footprints to fade.
The tourists have on sunscreen so their skin will keep its white,
As long as sun is shining and providing all the light.

The pier is old and weathered and the hooks all hang below,
The bobbers hang above it, if a fish bites they will know.
The teens are walking cross-beach looking for someone to see,
As long as college students find the beach the 'place to be'.

The sun is always shining and the sand is always hot,
The wind is always blowing and the water's warm a lot.
The surfer's always surfing and the skimmers always skim,
As long as waves are rolling and the tide is coming in.

The beach is always quiet,
Yet, it's also always loud,
The sky is always cloudy,
Yet, there never is a cloud,
The water washes sorrow,
And the sun replaces sin,
As long as waves are rolling,
And the tide is coming in.

—Solomon Goetz

Vessel

I'll be Your vessel in the sea,
Carrying cargo over tides
When Your waves carry me
I'll do as You decide
When hope seems like a tune or myth
A siren's call from distant cliff
I'll put my faith in You and with
The truth You provide

—Jacob Berger



"Venice Parking Lot" by Andrew Zimmerman

Beyond the Far and Stormy Seas

Beyond the far and stormy seas
Beneath the shade of woven trees
They lie in wait, hardened by hate
While foolish men do take their ease

Across the waste of wild water
Lies a land of fear and slaughter
In dark of night, when dies the light
Then tremble, mother, father, daughter

Beneath a free and wild sky
The fair and verdant islands lie
Like open doors, the sandy shores
Lure in the foolish, doomed to die

Deep in the misty forests green
Where naught save trees can e'er be seen
In shade they lurk, in inky murk
Where rotten trunks in silence lean

In secret caves, in hidden ways

They sharpen swords, sing battle lays
Of times of old when heroes bold
Ruled all the land, those golden days

In quiet evenings they steal forth
In battles fierce, to prove their worth
The clash of steel, the mute appeal
Of those who fail and fall to earth

The air turns red in hidden glades
And carnage stains the forest shades
Silence is rent, as days are spent
Fighting the war that man has made

Ere daylight dawns they slip away
And where they go, no man can say
For none would dare, to find their lair
He would not see another day

They leave behind a silent wood
Where bodies lie in trampled mud
While crimson stains, like fallen rain
Paint sodden leaves, artists in blood

They have gone, yet will come again
Blown like grass in an autumn wind
‘Tis clear to all, who hear their call
That none knows when this fight will end

*Beyond the far and stormy seas
Beneath the shade of woven trees
They lie in wait, hardened by hate
While foolish men do take their ease.*

—Brenna Jones

To My Knitting Needles

Sharp, cold, you twist in my hands.
My knitting needles, clicking and clacking.
You devastate the yarn, pull it to pieces,
Knitting is my favorite pastime activity.

The red pools around the gleam of the needles,
Weaving, writhing, wriggling like slippery snakes
You smell of razor sharp, like knives and chains.
You see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing.

The people slink into the shop, eyes shifty
They talk of revolution, of blood running like wine in the streets,
Weaving the fabric and the plans of the new world.
We know nothing of this, we only knit.

—Sarah Vassello



“East Coast Winter” by Rebekah Barker

Life and Death

The dead lay silent below
An old man is sitting near me
He tells the tales of the past
How the guards would toss slices
Of bread to the prisoners and laugh
How the smoke from the crematoria billowed against the moon
He wears a remnant of the night that was
A long row of numbers forever marches across
The inside of his forearm
How strange it is to think this ever occurred.
The flowers at the grave gently blow in the wind
No one is there to admire them.

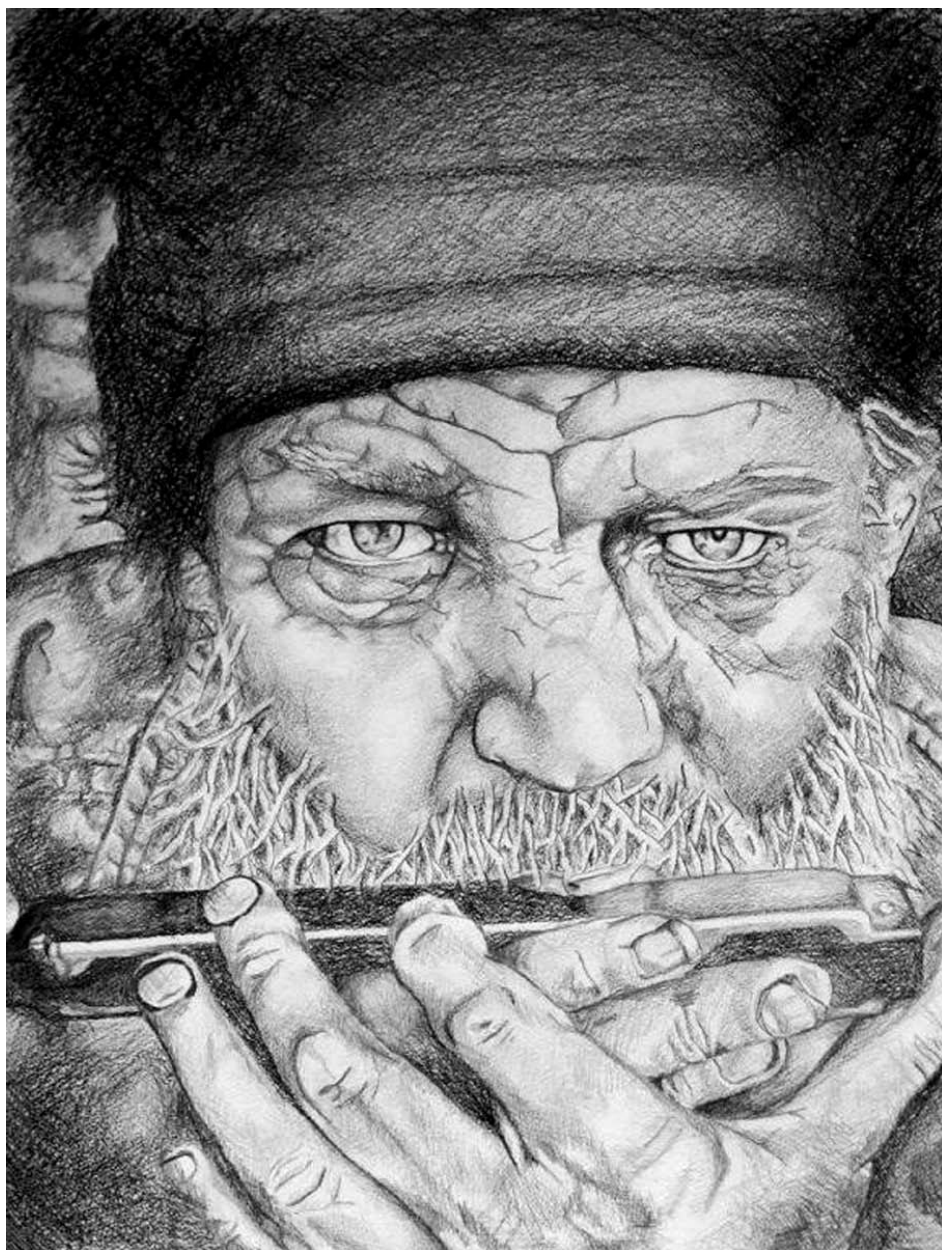
—Dana Dale

Vietnam

I'm
teeming
with mildness;
Mildly invested;
Mildly soft -- mildly useful;
Abound
with that blue-eyed look,
like the one on the combat veteran
I met today;
He was full of holes and
mildly
pitiful and maybe even somewhat
pathetic;
The man --
the veteran --
he mentioned his time spent in Vietnam
only briefly,
and he stared with his blue eyes,

and the bullet hole scar on his face
stared at me, too;
It was too severe for such a
mild conversation;
He knew it and he was kind,
cutting the discourse short by grumbling,
“The whole country should have been paved.”
And leaving it at that.

—Wes Byers



"Nigel" by Luke Mannion

Our Brother, Our Friend

When you were young, they caught your eye,
The shiny red trucks when they passed by.
You longed so bad for just one ride;
When you were young, they caught your eye.

When you were older you made up your mind,
You felt the calling to fight so others could survive.
When you were older you made up your mind.

You went through training to be the best;
You strived to be perfect at being the best.
You learned new ways to fight the beast;
You went through training to be the best.

You left your family on holidays;
You left your family during gatherings and birthdays.
They sacrificed so you could sacrifice;
You both paid the price.
You left your family because disaster does not know time.

You did your duty, you responded to the call;
You turned your life upside down like a rolling ball.
You cared for others no matter their title;
You worked hard to fight, you were never idle.
You did your duty and responded to the call.

You ran into danger no matter the cause;
You did what was best no matter the loss.
You lived your life to help another;
You were there for your friends, your comrades, your brother.

Your strength came from God;
The strength to fight.
To be a silent hero day or night
You help others in time of need.

You never asked for recognition though you deserved it all;
You never desired anything more than to help them all.

—Adam Keever

Untitled

Christ promised us a resurrection
Said that death would rewind
I just thought he had something
A little different in mind

They moan and groan
Decompose and rot
The infection is deadly
The fever is hot

The bite on my arm
Feels like it's on fire
It tingles like its asleep
I can hear gunfire

I sit, helpless and still
My family is gone
I have no hope left
I won't live 'til dawn

My consciousness is slipping
My skin is pale
I can see a silhouette
The body of a male

He's coming closer
I can't move
He's not human
This I can prove

It's jaw is agape
Yet no words come out
Just growls and gurgles
This is it for me now

I thought I could survive
I thought I could live
I thought this would pass
Nothing more to give

Take me back

—Victoria Palmieri

Daughter of Mine

They said you were wild.

I said you were free.

They said you wouldn't listen.

I said you would, to me.

They said you had a wonderlust

all of your own.

I said it was your ancestors calling you home.

They said you'd never settle.

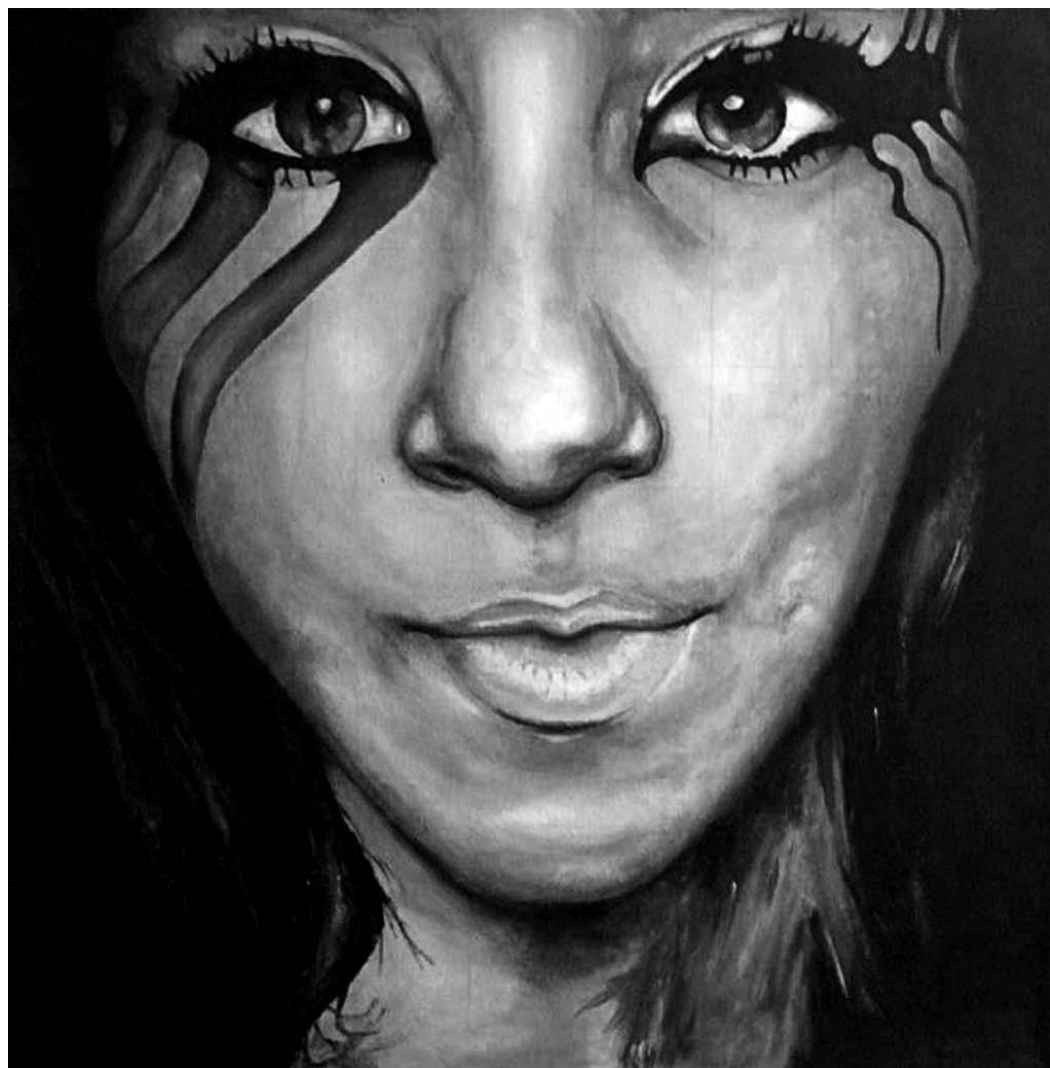
I said you would-but not until you though you should.

They said you had talent for everyone to see.

I said it had always been obvious to me.

They said you were pretty, and I agreed.

—Dana Dale



by Luke Mannion

Dad's Boots

Dad's tattered boots.
They're ragged and torn.
They're painted and worn.
They've seen better days.

They've walked in mud and trampled down dirt.
They've helped prop up guns and seen him get hurt.
They've swung a swing and talked it out.
They've brought mud in the house and took it back out.

They've fended off wrenches, bolts, and gas alike.
They've put in spark plugs and tightened them tight.
They've felt oil splatter and blood too,
They're not afraid like me and you.

They've kicked my butt when I messed up,
And raised me up when things were rough.
They've caught my tears,
And never let my words fall on deaf ears.
Dad's tattered boots.

—Justin Bradley



“Rico the Cow” by Rebekah Barker

THE PAINTING

A couple came upon the doorway,
the rugged gentleman entered
unable to see through
scratched, unsurfaced walls,
dingy floors, patterned with dirt,
never grasped the beauty
beyond, behind
trashed corners,
bobbed, shook his head in disgust.
But the lady, an artist,
crossed that threshold
with opened eyes, sparkled large,
her mouth exploded with smile
as she imagined the room
just another canvas to splash
bursting colors,
transfer dingy dull
into magnificent,
after erasing garbage grime
with soap, water, hard work.

She sensed splendor,
future ambience,
knew not many ever
peered past such rubbish
sighting an old slate
turned masterpiece.

—Patsy Kennedy Lane



"Art is Born" by Andrew Zimmerman

The Best Kept Secret

I heard ‘em say, “It’s either my way or the highway”,
But either way, I’m a live life like every day’s a Friday.
All my life I’ve been judged just ‘cause I sin a little differently,
Money on my mind, it’s my dignity versus epiphanies.
But here’s a piece of knowledge that college won’t even teach ya,
If you expect handouts, at best you’ll be a substitute teacher.
I’m a lyrical revolutionist as I hold up my right fist,
You get the gist; I got more heart than the average cardiologist.
So the difference between us requires no subtraction,
I just chain the wheels for traction and roll over distractions.

But then I stop and ponder as I let my mind wander,
Is the grass really greener over yonder? Or which is worse...
To be industry or to be in the streets?
I just wanna be heard like a shepherd,
I’m the modern day Bo Peep, I used to think...
I could right my wrongs by writing these songs,
But now I bleed my soul like hemophiliacs, and through it all, my heart is strong.

I just pray to God that I get mine in due time,
The devil's playground is an idle mind, but not mine.
So if you're used to being misused and abused
Stand by me as I grab the mic 'cause I got something to prove, like I refuse to lose
So whether you approve or disapprove I'm gonna improve 'cause I'm...
The true decree of a true emcee,
But what's life if you don't wonder "What if..." between the L and E?
That's the best kept secret.

—William Wooten

MY ROCKIN' MUSIC

Post-forties born, torn
between *Sweet Caroline* and *Tangerine*.
I prefer the earlier kind,
Glenn Miller's *Begin the Beguine*,
fifties' wringer washing machine
humming to get the laundry clean,
clothes sunshine-dried on the line,
music soaking into my preschool mind.
Melodies that I carry are mine
a half-century later when I
need something older to soothe
these nasty New Millennium blues.

—Sandra Adams



by Michal Hatley

Pop Ferguson's Blues

Music hidden in an old guitar
liberated by calloused brown fingers
flows into the room becoming
honey
sweet on the heart
wine
cooling to dry parched lips.
Licorice waves of music slide into waiting ears
wrapping the soul in praline coats of chewey caramel
to be tasted and savored
long into the hot dark night.

— Joyce White



“Heart” by Rebekah Barker

Dreams

Dreams grow wings and fly away
Through thunderstorms and days of gray
Reaching out, you try to catch them if you can.

Never ever let them go
Because if you do, you will never know
So hold tight to dreams; they will try to leave you;
They'll try their best to deceive you.

Dreams are like a piece of glass,
Like a slurred word that you can't grasp,
So take a breath and close your eyes
And what you dream of next is your surprise!

—Samantha Moore

Beckoning Gibbous

Pale periwinkle panes, patterned in rhombuses
Reflected, ghostlike, into my room
My window's whispers mesmerize me
Sharing the secrets of the cerulean moon.

Lunar lullabies of
Lakes and starry eyes, of
Whispered sentiments, of
Heartbreak's shrill laments.
The moon has seen it all
Yet still finds the time to call.

—Erin Overton

Lace

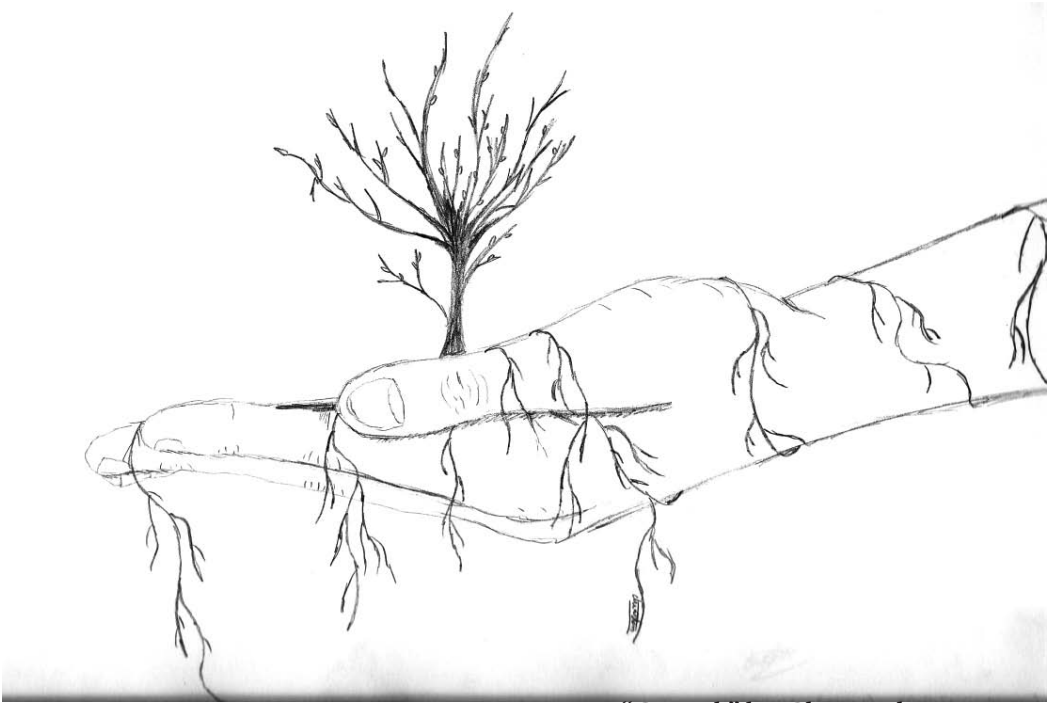
There is lace in my dreams;
Wavy rays of Moonlight and power
and the will to go on;
Yesterday, I broke everything,
prayed over it like an undernourished Shaman,
then put it all back together;
These dreams have shown
that you must ask yourself:
Why?
Do I have the wisdom to grow?
And the sense to one day die?

There's yellowed fiction in my dreams;
Things that dance down in the heart, they fight
through the blind curves of memories,
twisting
and writhing,
making their way into my bed at night;
I rub the scar on my head;
It's purple and white
and mean;
There's the most marvelous beauty
in the dirtiest things.

My hands plow through my hair,
shaking;

There is lace in my dreams.

—Wes Byers



"Growth" by Christopher Weston

Betwixt Night and Sunlight

Wisps of indigo faint in oleander's potent paint
inscribe invisible words of fate
on light sails of navy blue.

Night has come, Night waits true.

Lantern light ripples of luminescence
form mystical quasars with the quintessence
of a Gentleman's balmy, midnight airs.

She travels green valleys, ascends castle stairs
an heiress born of Dawn's delicate dew
robed in spectral gown of forget-me-not blue.

Forsaking her throne and Morning's diadem
entranced by Night's harmonious hymn
she traverses veils into gloam's towered glen
where morphing shadows beckon and befriend.
Apparitions of fog, draped in netted webs,
guide where smelted, lemony-starlight ebbs.
Her ebony mares, painted with familiar's flank,
pummel palisades of leafy river bank.

In streaks of ghastly lightening gothic spires glow:
a black-ice fortification— a crow-perched chateau.
'Neath shaded cherub arch Night's heir reclines
framed in creeping jade tendrils and incarnadine-fruit vines.
In velvet robes of ebony-sleek, he promenades with integrity.
posed with pomp and reverie— a chessman majesty.

Bronze and restless, the clock rapidly ticks
as slender fingers of Horizon prick the web of onyx.
Dawn's maid and Night's Prince—a final embrace enfold
as porcelain fireflies—sunrise— gnaw on tales foretold.

Their crimson ramparts bleed rosary-pea reflections
crumbling Crescent's kingdom of tides and bastions.

Their lips touch momentarily, sweetly
as transparency evaporates her beloved completely.
Warmth fades... replaced by a dew-gilded morning glory
and the remembrance—eternal— of an incomplete story.

—Ashleigh Bilodeau

Snakes of Emerald, Heart of Glass

Beautiful.
Terrifying.
They whisper in silence
The blues and browns,
Windows to the soul.

Tempting.
Temptress.
Fallen from grace
Persuaded by the snake
An infidelity of mistake.

Fair.
Feared.
The fates trick us all
The princess becomes the monster;
Mortality is brutal.

Exquisite.
Atrocious.
The ultimate conquest
Pieces of glass don't shatter twice
Come and face the beast.

Statuesque.
Flawed.
Young Fool, love does not come so easily
Princesses tied to rocks are for the serpent
Coil your heart around stone.

Soft.
Hard.
Look into my beautiful eyes
Liberate yourself from deceitful enchantment
And watch the world stand still.

—Sarah Vassello



by Loni Gonzalez

A Song in the Night

A song in the night, a song in the darkness
A bell ringing in the midnight air
A call in the forest, a voice in the distance
Will the listeners ever hear?

A light in the dark, a candle in the dusk
A star in the distance shining free
A lamp in the forest, a flame in the distance
Will the watchers ever see?

Down in the night, down in the darkness
Alone in the forest dark and drear
My voice echoes back in the empty air
Will those who listen ever hear?

Deep in the midnight, deep in the dimness
There is no one, none but trees
My gaze goes out to the distant horizon
Where those who watch choose not to see

—Brenna Jones

Love is a Wilted Rose

Love is a wilted rose
Fighting for its life
Fighting against its foes
It doesn't know what is right

But one day this rose will grow
One day the rose will show
It will find, sweet sunlight
Everything will be alright

But soon the sun will set
and the moon will begin to rise
The flower will begin to fret
with the moon, locked in its eyes

But it is now that the rose will shine
oh what a place to be
The rose with the will of a pine
Oh what a sight to see.

The rose will climb searching for the sun
its climbed as it bled
but now the rose is all and done
the rose, it lay dead

But true love is not a flower
Nor is it a toy
True love is not a form of power
No, true love is a girl, and a boy.

—Ethan Hawks



“Rose in Charcoal” by Joni Martin

The Song of Sorrow

My love, my Orpheus
I am sorry I have left.
My heart is with Morpheus
And leaves you bereft.

Somehow I know we will meet again
And so will end our woe.
I will be lifted from the arcane
And will rise up from below.

I will follow you into the light
Taking your hand in mine;
We will leave this place despite
The fate that had been assigned.

I beg of you, do not look back
For our love is on the line.
Your lyre can not set back
The permanence of time.

—Sarah Vassello

Treatment

I walk into the office and give my name;
The omega sign forms between the receptionist's eyebrows,
and she tells me,
"Take a seat. We'll call when we're ready for you."
So I sit, and I stare;
I look at my twenty-two-year-old hands
and begin to wonder about
pain,
trying to churn out a method to just
think it away;
The waiting room coddles its occupants
with yellowed posters and paintings of families
and hands being held
and cats;
I stare at them, unmoved;
I blink, and stare, and blink,
and almost forget;
There's a poster above one bald woman's
slick head:
"A Decade of Excellence"
with fine print, boasting Ivy League doctors
and an innovative and expensive

armamentarium;

I appreciate the effort,

but continue to stare and

I don't really feel any better about anything;

In the dendrites of thought, I finally remember

the dream I'd had the night before;

I was naked and floating on my back in the Ganges;

All I could see was electric, red sky,

and I could only hear the breath of the water,

but even in the confines of a dream,

I could think clearer than I ever had before;

I thought about my Mom,

and I thought about my sister --

the two of us splashing each other at my Aunt's pool;

I thought about second grade books;

I thought about the feeling I had at a new school;

I thought about girls and what little romance I'd experienced;

As I stared at the Indian sky, everything passed through my mind;

Holy ghosts and God and

the sick feeling I got on the day of the SATs;

I remembered when I got my first car,

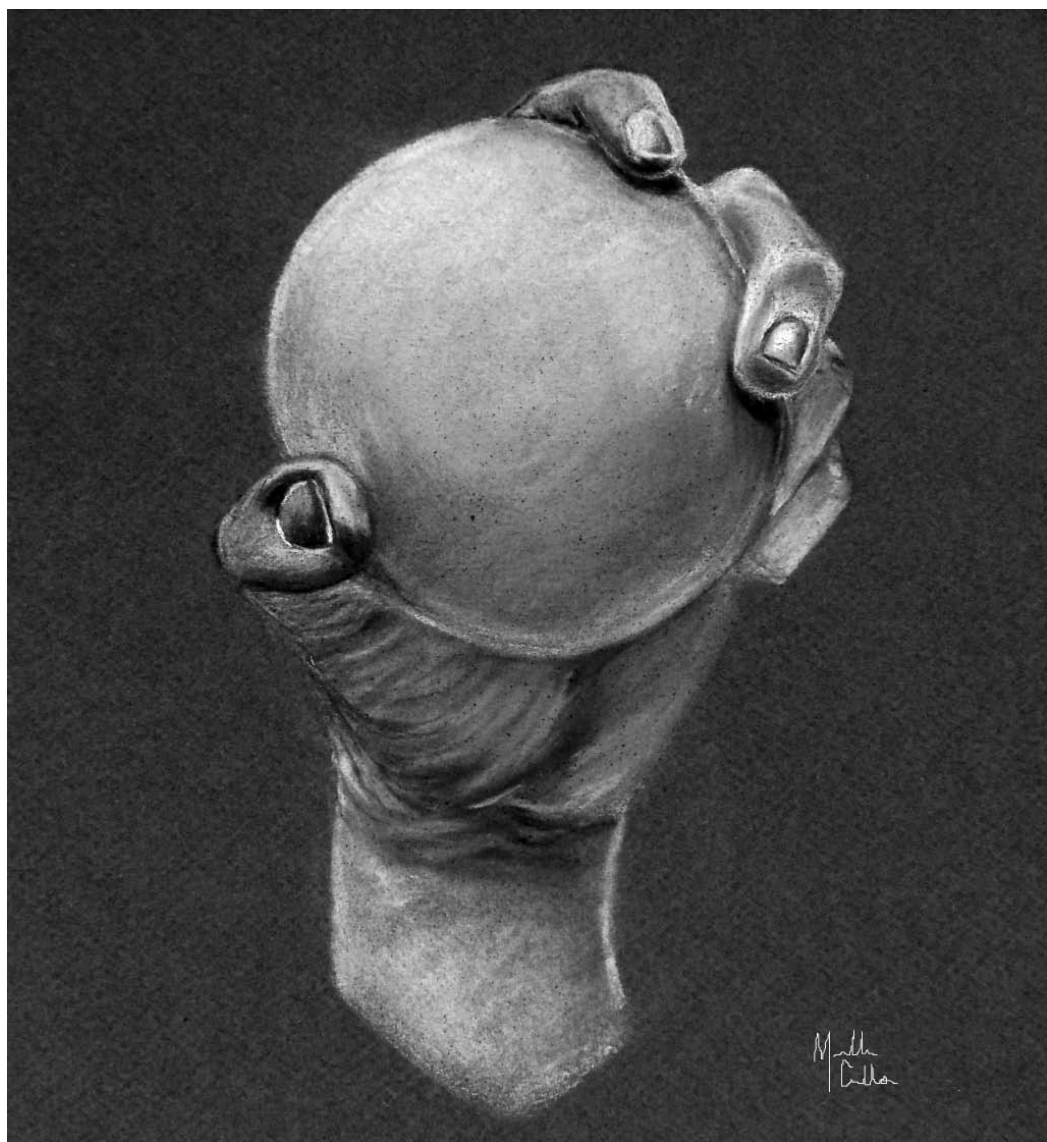
then remembered the time I wheeled it right into the back

of my Mom's car;

I thought about homecoming court my Senior year --
about the girl I was escorting and the smell of her blonde curls;
I remembered the years I lived with my Grandmother
because the stress of work had finally gotten to my Mom,
and I thought about Dr. Pemberton telling me what
she couldn't change:
“...the treatment doesn't seem to be having an effect,
but we won't jump to any conclusions just yet,” she said;
Finally, I thought of death;

Outside of the office, the wind blows,
A trolley car hums past,
A group of homeless men pass a bottle;
Some things are meant to be;
Some are meant to go on;
Some are meant to end.

—Wes Byers



"Always Within Grasp" by Mallorie Cubillos

By the Tracks

You died over there by the tracks
that run between our houses,
when the ladder on the train
clipped the back of your head,
opening it like a melon
for half the world to devour.

Some said they could see splotches
of your brains on the gravel
where the ties protruded beneath the rails.
I found only old pennies,
flattened by the roaring wheels
we listened for, playing our game,
two careless boys under stars and clouds,
waiting, breathless, vibrations rumbling
through us like the quake of teenage love,
jumping to safety just in time.

Timing you said was essential
as you lifted the dead rat,
the trophy we had found while
hunting in the woods, and dropped it

in the drawer of Ms. Robinson's desk,
leaping back to your seat
before she returned from monitoring
the hall between class breaks.

What made you choose that night
to wait too long beside the tracks?

Not your girlfriend
whose child was conceived the
summer you were away at your grandmother's,
in the mountains; you never cried
a tear when you saw her rounded belly,
just spit on the ground at her feet,
hopped in your old pick-up
and drove down to the river
where the tires stuck in the mud,
and we rode up front in my daddy's
wrecker as he towed your vehicle home.

Nor your mother's weekend
drunks when she would fling
whatever was at hand, glass

bottles shattering against the
walls of your trailer, belt buckle
flying by your head as you ducked
these misdirected missiles of hate
aimed for the deserting husband
she saw in the mirror of your face.

And surely not the hunger of the gossips,
sniffing out the details of what
might have happened in the back
of your Ford in the softness
of the hay we fed your horse,
or along the bank of the pond
where we said we had been
only swimming in the summer heat.

In the end, they have licked
their lips and tasted more of you
than you could have imagined, taking
our place by the tracks between
their jaws, leaving nothing,
not even a crumb of you.

—Mitchell Cox



"Corn Stalk Sky" by Summer Cook

Neither Here Nor There

The elevator waits on the first floor
The doors open wide, beckoning me in
I board and greet the people around me
And I'm met with blank stares from empty

eyes

The doors slide shut, and I can see
Skeletal reflections of the people behind me
Specters of my past that threaten and haunt
Like the roots of an oak, they twist and they

turn

The elevator rises and we reach the next floor
With a sigh of relief, I watch everyone go
Leaving me alone in my little metal sanctuary
As once again the lift resumes its climb

upward

And then the floor beneath me gives a heave
With a sound like metal grinding on rocks
The lift has just stopped between two floors
It groans and jerks once, as though it is

trying

To struggle on, but then it is still and quiet
As a tomb, and panic creeps up my throat
For now I am trapped here in this coffin
Stranded and unable to get where I need

to

Go, completely alone in this prison
Between two worlds, neither here nor there
Below me the land of lies I've left behind
And above the glorious realm I'm striving to

reach

I cry out for help, praying I can be heard
And then I start to hear voices and sounds
I rejoice, for my rescue is at hand, and my soul
Can find rest as I anxiously wait to meet

the

One that has saved me from this cold steel hell
The elevator begins to move once again
Rising steadily upward without pause or strain
And as the doors open, I at last see glorious

light

—Christopher Weston

Grandmother Talks

and evolution just ain't so,
it's evil-lution like that preacher
on the radio said yesterday morning
when I was drinking my coffee,
always have it black with a bite
of a unsalted poached egg and some butterless toast,
at least ways since my doctor told me
to lay off the salt,
bad for my blood pressure,
he says,
looks a lot like my boy
that doctor does,
I still don't know where Jimmy gets those books,
the ones with those pictures of hairy men
comin' up from the apes,
I tell him that there's only one book for me,
and the Bible is the Word of God,
and He speaks to me when I am pulling down a can
of green beans from the pantry,
don't you tell your mother,
'cause her and them others,
with their cigarettes and their new ideas of what is right,

and the psycho-iatrists they send you to,
and the dope they give you,
all of them busybodies would tell me that I'm wrong,
that the voices I hear ain't nothing more than
some imbalance of chemicals in my brain,
but I know when the wind is more than wind,
when the ocean speaks in God's voice, and
it's often times in the cool of night,
I hear, like little Samuel must've heard,
a voice, not my own --
but then he would come and bring to me
those rabbits he had shot,
and one day I just got tired of skinning and cleaning,
and I said, Hadley, time for me to move on,
Ma and Pa are dead,
and there's bound to be more for me than playing housekeeper for you
when all you want to do is chase after some married woman
and waste your money on that boy you're not even sure is yours.
And that's when I took off and found myself a job at the cigarette factory,
and took up smoking.
Oh, I knew it weren't right, that and the dancing,
mighty fine time we'd have after we'd closed up the shop
for the night, I was young and sin was in my blood,
that's where I met Andy,

and we danced and danced and danced,
the Charleston and those other dances,
I can't remember their names now,
danced until
he stormed out that night,
I'm not even sure what we was fussin' over now,
I can still see his red hair,
the dance of sunlight on it.
I cried and cried and went back to work,
that was it, wasn't it,
that I would not stop working,
that I had to support myself
now what kind of animal does that,
I know we didn't come from no monkeys,
but those children sure enough
did look like the goats
that pulled their cart up our lane
back when we moved out to the farm the year after
Henry died
Henry came into the factory one day,
he was one of the owners,
been married once to a woman barren and mean,
but she'd been dead for years,
and the child they'd adopted

died of consumption too,
his attention and letters was nice at first,
but he was so old,
thirty years difference in age,
I was tired,
and he wouldn't give up, and he did have money
and promises, and he did offer love,
was I fool to not think twice about children,
I am sorry they came when they did,
but my head was not clear,
filled with voices, voices, voices,
so disturbing, I couldn't think
and I'd be damned if I'd put them up for adoption,
no matter what that preacher said,
and I know the talk behind your back
and a man twice your age,
and the land deals and swindles,
and the gambling,
but I was tired, and the voices
wouldn't stop
you take care of your own
where I come from,
if you know what I mean,
if you know what I mean

but those voices break into the silence of the head,
they lift themselves like winged words off a page
in my Bible. Sometimes I just have
to write Stop, Stop, Stop, Stop
or else they'd go on and on
if you know what I mean
if you know what I mean

—Mitchell Cox



by Jacob Berger

PASSING OF TIME

A tiny 'burg' stuck between the hills, dying a quiet death in desolation, stillness covers a Saturday night hanging on the streets like moss.

The signal lights blink green, yellow, red while a single horn sounds through the night; somewhere on Main Street a portly gentleman holds a bible and preaches to the street.

The gentle breeze tries to cool the concrete towers heated by the sun. A lonely man shuffles down the street that once some thirty years ago, held dreams.

Night settles in; the ringing of a telephone from an open window breaks the silence, a dog barks, death comes a little closer. Hollowed remains of buildings take on a ghostly look.

In the far off distance, a siren screams its mournful cry as it rushes to save the injured. Next door, pink roses dead from drought turn brown on the fence. It's as if the roses are the flowers on the grave of a town dying.

Down the street on dirty concrete steps a lonely woman drags on a cigarette, in her hand a beer warmed by neglect. Sitting, waiting for something wonderful to happen in her life but afraid it never will.

A stray cat darts across the empty street going nowhere.

—Ann K. Belmont

Fogs

Not the white-blind highways of melted moon,
pressing with soggy palms of car-tossing weightlessness,
nor the hot pavement's aching steam-release,
when black roads send gray showers damply rising,

Not the valley's smoggy, yellow, chemical
stink-finger gag-gliding down the throat,
nor even the thickly silent mountaintop-mists that
coolly brush prickly red spruce with cloud-white hair,

But the hollow-hovering, hill-breath phantoms
haunting Indian summer evenings
in West Virginia's jagged, mid-state counties
fresh-censed the slopes of deepening darkness.

Lying lightly as uncertain, silent prayer,
they wisp-hinted, so benevolently, it seemed,
at thick, white monoliths and tidal terrors
that will creep, do rage, have streamed.

—Martha Owens



“Carry On” by Christina Price

Long Hot Summer

Summer clings offensively like the stench of garlic breath.

Leaves have changed their color but the heat hangs oppressively.

Grass, neither green nor growing, is shredded wheat brown.

Soil is parched and dry like an overheated kettle.

The air is still, pressing against one's nostrils until the body screams for release.

Where does Indian Summer go when its overstayed its welcome?

— Ann K Belmont



by Jacob Berger

To Beloved

Gazelle, majestic, leaps through my swollen heart,
Pounded and beaten, a dust cloud rises.
For the times my heart has fallen apart,
I, disillusioned to love's surprises.

My aching heart is a dry, lonesome plain.
Sun-baked dust and empty grey-skies abound,
cracks in the wistful earth mirror my pain,
Abandoned, deserted, hunting ground.

But, the novel taste of our love, your love,
sweetly tart, like exotic ambrosia fruit,
reminds me of sky-lit Heaven above,
risen on the lullaby of a flute.

My passionate love, renewed for flight,
Emulates the sun and removes all blight.

— Katherine Kirkman

Ireland to Her St. Patrick

A lovely wedding, you and me:
The lifeline and the emerald sea.
The picker of the four-leaved foam,
The lighthouse leading the voyager home.
The lover of this billowing land
Has tossed a life ring to its hand.

—Erin Overton



by Michal Hatley

TWO STEPS

Standing at the bottom of a spiral staircase

I weigh the risk of climbing to the chapel.

It's not fear of falling, but rather,

dread of heightened pain,

and simply not wanting to add liability

to my sixty-year-old body.

As I look up, bright light glistens.

I follow, allow myself the luxury

of going up two steps, where I can peer

through glass panes.

Below is green Maritime Forest.

Beyond that, the ocean, the sky.

— Sandra Adams

Painting the Sun

Open canvas, washed and white
breathes lullabies of newborn cries
tender salmon pinks and docile creams
swaddled in a blanket of evergreen.

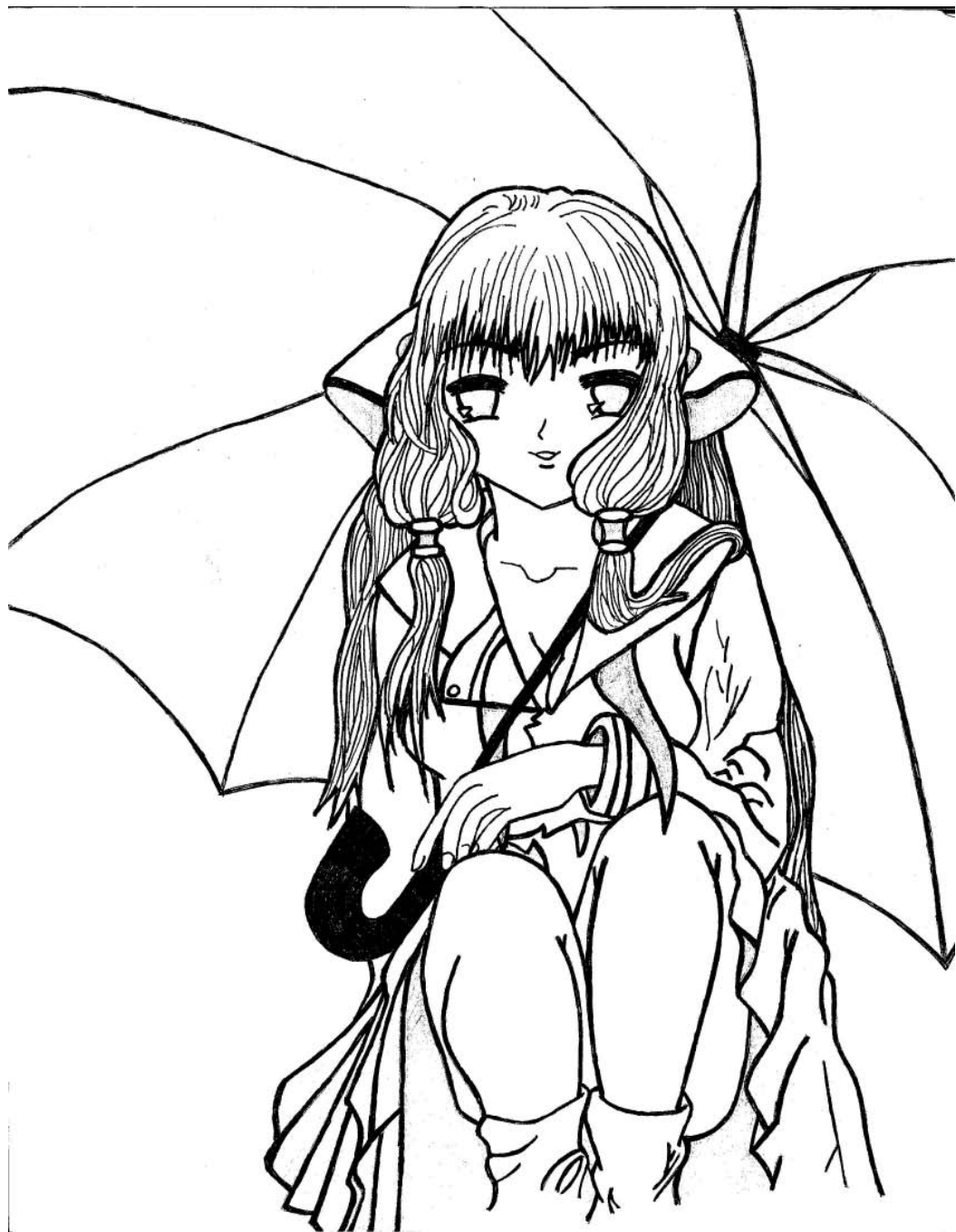
Morning glories purple and plush
candidly kiss the infant's cheek
while bees sap-hued and honey sweet
form humming, bobbing mobiles at his feet.

Midday cloth, cerulean and clean
beckons with warmth and powdery sheep
as toddler toes tickle the tidal keep
seeking a cloud cradle of cushioned sleep.

Afternoon storms, fierce and furling,
swallow the child in windy pools, whirling
of mist and fog and rain's rod stirring
by trials of maelstroms he is maturing.

Evening winds, crisp and calling
Cool the sun's brow of endless toiling
all fatigue fading with moon's light embracing
as their children, the stars, are twinkling and playing.

— Ashleigh Bilodeau



by Loni Gonzalez

Muddled

She remembered
lying in bed often
with jumbled thoughts,
her scrambled mind
at age eight
attempting to figure out
from where she came,
thinking maybe
she just appeared
or dropped
out of the sky.
She kept holding
onto those topsy-turvy feelings
left by her folks—
hatched, they said,
found under a rock!
Like most children
of fifty years ago,
today, she knows better,
no more mixed-up senses

cluttering her brain,
adding to its confusion,
as aging brought the realization
that it no longer matters
from where one came,
only where one's going.

— Patsy Kennedy Lane



“Bundle of Joy” by Christina Price

This Used To Be My Playground

The Innocence of Youth
Is always at play
Within a child's heart
My curiosity
Leads me astray
From my safe park
Now the whispers of memories
Are talking about me
Of how naive, I used to be
I only catch phrases and bits
Since remembering myself as a kid,
I recall so little
All I can say is...

This used to be my playground
Now the jungle gym
Is a complex web
Which I'm tangled in
Upside down hangs my head
This used to be my playground...

The forgetful transition
Of becoming an adult
Is scarcely understood
All this pain I'm feeling
Can it all be my fault?
By preferring childhood?
There's a haunting reminiscence
Of my younger self's essence
In the past? Or in the present?
The time of millennia's
Obliterates nostalgia
I recall so little
All I can say is....

This used to be my playground
Now the merry-go-round
Is the wheel of life
The centrifugal sound
Kills me without a fight
This used to be my playground...

In the corners there are shadows of myself when I was smaller
Funny how much more I crumble now that I am taller
Once swung from bar to bar, hopped from step to step
Now I jump from one age of life onto a new stage of life
Is this how we all are bound?
What happened to our playgrounds?

— Jacob Berger

The Son of a Coal Miner

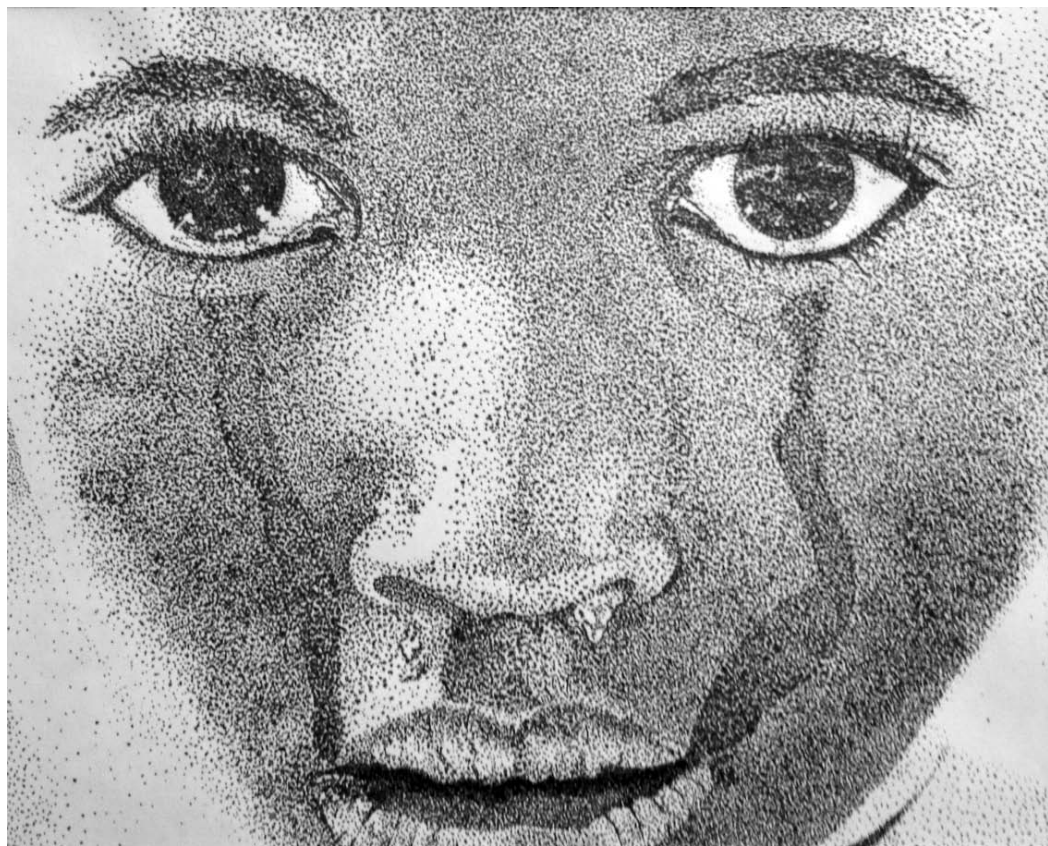
Don't you cry.
You're not allowed to be a child anymore.
Today is the day that you become a man to your family.
No more school; not that it would have done you any good.
Stop crying! That won't bring him back or feed this family,
Your tears do nothing but waste time!

You knew from birth that the way you would live would be decided for you,
That your life was meant for these mountains, meant for this dust, that blackness.
Your friends may move onto better things
But that was never a choice for you.
Dad never intended this life to happen for you, he tried to leave
But the times were hard for a farmer, and this was all the work he could get.

You're too small for your father's clothes but here is his helmet
And take this lantern to light the way.
Just do as you're told, work hard, and come straight home.
Learn, but forget the terrible things that you see.
That place will try to change you, and in many ways it will.
It will make you hard, like the earth.
But don't let it make you cold.
Don't let it rob you of your soul.

Time for you to go, don't take anything from anyone, unless it is advice.
I did not want this for you
But it's all I can give.

— Tanner Johnson



by Hannah Lamb

The Toad

O Toad, you solemn little beast!
Which on flies and bugs doth feast—
Can you, can tell me this
Why on Frog, not you, they land a kiss?

O Toad, why do the beasts pass by
And do not see your teary eyes;
But when Frog, green Frog, happens to chance
Upon him their gaze doth glance.

O Toad, don't weep, my little friend
For you to me your luck did lend
I am quite the same as you
Ah, yes, Toad dear, tis very true.

Though you do hop and I do walk
We both have frogs that steal the talk.

— Jessica McBrayer



"More Than Black and White" by Mallorie Cubillos

1964 Convertible VW Bug

Scarf to keep my hair in place
Bright red lipstick, peachy rouge
Shades to mystify my face
Joyride before the deluge.
Sunlight kisses pale pink skin
Ocean air relieves my lungs
Whistles from the passing men--
My name's the word on all their tongues.
Lowered shades then flirty wink
Just enough to keep them piqued
How I wonder what they'd think
If they knew I'm just a geek.
I return to Seaside Street
Check the old familiar box
Ascend my widow's balcony
Slip into my fuzzy socks
Write a song to match the waves
Breaking out the windowed bay
Pity my piano's pleas
Through the glass watch storm clouds play.
I contemplate my wistful life,
And all the lives in dreams I've known;
The one in which I have my bug
Is the one I'd make my own.

— Erin Overton

Writer's Canopy

Alas stagnant and unyielding
towering walls entrapped me— suffocating buds of writing
until debris of doubt spread tainted seed.

A walk, a venture, a change by the unknown
granted me inspiration to write Nature's ode.

Within a gazebo—my window—
decadent and fruitful, life began to breathe
unharnessed, unabashed, easier than perceived.
Creatures frolicked, unconcerned for watcher's eyes
Jubilation, not pride, gifted them purpose in life.

My twisted grove of emerald veil fair
cradling the wooden bridge and whimsical child-marked stairs,
for you my hand embraces a gold, enamored pen.
For you, dear friend,
liquid onyx paints the page in poetic calligraphy.

Within this glade of waving trees and silken dreams,
sands warm sandal-covered feet and naive giggles,
like succulent, honeyed streams,
melt among the warm incantations
of chortling doves and sweet chickadees.

'Neath your protective arms my writing dreams set sail
charting memories into tales under a sea foam vale.
As tranquility conjures within, deep,
Serendipity sings in choral sweetness and locks release.
“Prisoner no more— my muse set free!”
Ink shyly kisses the page for the world to see.

Tree- traced shadows stretch into diadem panorama
a menagerie perplexing—enthraling with flora and fauna.
With wise phantasmal fingers, wind braids and inspires,
while glyphs dapple my skin— a dance of sun motes transpires.
Alas Nature's fortress is my creative castle,
and hope blooms anew for me, Poetry's vassal.

— Ashleigh Bilodeau



"Reality of Dreams" by Andrew Zimmerman

Writing In Red

Why do I write in Red?
Does it truly matter in the end?
Thoughts on the page, read from my head.

The color runs, bleeds, and leaves a stain.
The color of stocks and wrongly made gains;
The color of wrong pencil strokes,
Missed spell checks and high pitched sharp notes.

But none of this answers the simple question asked:
“Why do I write in red,” I said, I questioned, I tasked.

Maybe I write in red because I think I am wrong.
Constantly needing to see the color that means to be strong.
Maybe I write in red to see it better than green
Poor, poor colorblind me.
Maybe I write in red to be original, be free.
Maybe I write in red to be seen, to sheen, to be obscene.

No. I write in red to see the finale,
To know the end before I walk the cold alley.
I write in red to hold the end in my hand,
To never let it slip by like sand, slipping sand.

—Justin Bradley



"Towering Trees" by Christina Price

Egaeus

Jaclyn Myers

Thy soul shall find itself alone

'Mid dark thoughts of the grey tomb-stone;

Not one, of all the crowd, to pry

Into thine hour of secrecy.

--Spirits of the Dead (Edgar Allan Poe)

Cousin Egeus,

Perhaps you find it strange to see these pages written in my hand. Indeed, I am sure until this moment you were not entirely convinced that I knew the alphabet from one end to the other. I do not blame you- the mud stains in the sitting room and the crack in the library window attest to my childhood carelessness. In some ways I suppose I have little changed, but this one decision, which I resolved upon this very hour, should redeem my reckless heart, at least in your noble mind. To help you understand this choice, this single greatest sorrow and pride of my life, please give my words a small portion of the attention you lavish on your books, and we will both be satisfied.

When we were children, I watched you run blindly through the library to escape the slightest footfall, stirring up dust as you dove behind bookshelves and under desks. I imagined you were playing with ghosts and fighting spectral enemies, a thought which filled me with fascination and great respect

for you. I had hoped that your fantasies would lead you out of doors; you never came, but I always cleared a seat for you under the trees. I have written that I admired you for your library adventures, but know that I also resented you for never smiling or even uttering a sound to me and our family. Indeed, I thought that you were like Grandmama, silent and toothless, until one day I heard a grunt from the library and peered around the door to see you biting your lip, worrying yourself over a musty old idea.

I am sure you thought I was just as ridiculous, running around like a wild animal with my pockets full of moss and more twigs than hair in that tangled heap atop my head. I know Grandmama would still not approve of me now, were she alive, but she did teach me to walk without scuffing my shoes and to sit and make conversation when company calls. I was not compliant in the least, talking only of squirrels while she insisted that politely mentioning the weather did not include discussing its effects on all creatures, great and small. I am sure your serious mouth could not resist a smile as you listened from the library.

Yes, I have grown up by degrees, Egaeus, but you were always grown. I see your true nature now, but when we were children, I thought you both aged and pitiful. Yes, it was pity that drew me toward you in friendship and pity again that led me to accept your proposal of marriage. Your words seemed so sure as they turned themselves around in your small, white mouth that I felt some hope. Hope for love? No, but you seemed to propose that

our motherless hearts could find a home in each other. Surely you knew that I did not love you with any more passion than that of a cousin and friend.

I suppose I pitied you, and therefore accepted your offer, because I knew your sorrow so well. Remember, I was there when our uncle cursed loudly outside the library door, shouting at you for taking life from her and from this house. I know you looked for your mother in your books; I searched for mine among the trees. Once I stole a book, the smallest I could find, from your library and ran out to the second grove of trees behind the house. I stayed there the whole afternoon, nearly ripping out pages as I flipped back and forth, hoping I could, in the very least, find your mother, who could then lead me to mine. Unsuccessful, I almost abandoned my search until one day, three years ago, I crept into the library after supper and found a book lying open on the desk. For years I'd curiously peeked into your sacred room, but never had I seen a book marked and sitting out. The poem you left for me seemed to be penned with the dark, sad blood from your own old heart. I resolved from that day forward never to withhold anything from you.

But in withholding, I had to gather my true feelings within my fists and wait to scatter them during my long walks through the woods. Reticence does not come naturally to me as it does to you, and I am afraid that I have deeply suffered for it. At first, when I thought of our upcoming marriage, I would be taken with a slight trembling in my arms, followed by a headache that would pound until my eyes were overtaken by the dark pulsations. My only hope was that the pains would be a sufficient retribution for my deceitfulness.

Unfortunately, the debilitating short spells of shaking and mindlessness were not the last or the worst of my ailments, as I am sure you have noted. My skin, browned and sometimes bruised from my roaming out of doors, could never

be mistaken for that of a proper young lady, but this new coloration, this ghastly, sweaty film that even now is spreading itself thickly over my face and hands, stops my breath when I glance in the mirror. My hair, previously a tousled mass, has become a limp creature, spreading lethargic shadows like an infection each time it swipes its curled, yellow fingers across my skin. I have grown tired and hideous by degrees, and still I have no hope of recovery, although my new resolve does give me relief. I ask for just a few pages more to explain myself.

Never in my life have I desired solitude, but as my appearance now repulses even myself, I have begun to seek out silent rooms in which to sit undisturbed for hours. I do not mean to say that thoughtful contemplation was a practice altogether unfamiliar to me, but outside my thoughts are usually filled with the movements of life and the millions of colors that make it up. Sitting beneath a tree, I forget to think about troubles and instead let the rushing wind between the branches fill up my ears until I am mindful of nothing else. In the house's drafty rooms, though, my past swirls down on me in chilly blasts, and my future slams in front of my face repeatedly, like the heavy library doors at the end of the hallway. You might assume that these unpleasant thoughts would put me in a melancholy state, but they have strangely led to an inexplicable joy.

This joy stems from nothing other than spending a considerable amount of time thinking about you, dear Cousin. You might believe that only our uncle supervises you, swinging open the library door long enough to reassure himself that you are still alive and then letting the heavy wood slam loudly shut. However, you can have confidence that even when I cannot walk down the hallway to see

you, I listen carefully for your footsteps. As I sit with my senses

heightened, I wonder on occasion if you ever think of me, imagining that the heroes in your books wander through their lives carefree and reckless, just as I do, and I have a silly hope that you picture us together in stories, fighting dark dragons side by side.

Thinking of us together has made a startling connection in my mind. My lonely hours have revealed to me that you have sat musing for years, quiet and unchanged, but I have progressed from a free-spirited, thriving soul to a repulsive invalid. It is harsh, Egaeus, but nevertheless, it is true. I have tried to bear my infirmities nobly, but I fear my silence exudes bitterness rather than the thoughtfulness or silent strength which emanates from you. My hollowed face and dripping eyes would be discouragement to even the most dedicated of suitors, yet you have not withdrawn your proposal. You have neither left me a note of retraction nor given any hints of disapproval.

With this realization, I have stumbled upon another: I love your small, white mouth, your motherless eyes, and your trembling hands. I have heard you utter only a few words these many years, but your quiet faithfulness has filled me with an emotion so strong that it rushes through my ears louder than the rustling of a thousand trees before a storm. The peace I always hurried out of doors to find has been nesting inside your library, murmuring to me through the turning pages you peruse, and my discovery of this treasure has stilled all worry and suppressed my despair. This new joy renewed my energy the instant I unearthed it; I pushed myself out from the cushions into the hallway, shuffling quickly to reach the library before the weakness could fill my legs. When I burst through the heavy doors, you took in a large gasp of air and blinked your eyes at the unwelcome light.

I nearly laughed the moment I saw your startled face; I suddenly realized that I had emotions, not words, to express. Overwhelmed by my inability to convey my gratitude and reciprocation of your constant love, I could only part my lips to form a smile. Your knowing look confirmed what I had suspected to be true.

As I turned my back to you and slowly shuffled to the sitting room, I started to shake, not from illness but out of joyous excitement too abundant to contain. My ears began to ring with the songs of your love of which I felt so undeserving. When my mind finally reached the hurried pace of my heart, I realized that the emotions I so greedily clutch are completely undeserved and rooted in selfishness.

You knew me when I was beautifully carefree, but now I am like a creature from your books, stalking around dark rooms, waiting for the mysterious poison in my blood to stop life altogether. It would be an unforgiveable injustice to bind you to your promise of marriage, so with tears yet a firm resolve, I ask you, Egaeus, to gently disentangle yourself from the love you so nobly wrapped us in.

These words are written in haste, for I dare not put my strength of resolve at the mercy of time, but my request is nonetheless sincere and will not be revoked. You are loved, dear Egaeus, and I wish for my love to set you free.

Berenice

314 Minus One

Veda Henion

He stumbles among the corpses scattered on the ground, dirty and broken. Smoke and noise fill the air with lingering terror, inhibiting his senses. He jumps at each gunshot, praying that he is still alive. He falls, expecting to hit the cold, hard ground, but instead he is drowning. Beneath a pool of blood he watches corpse after corpse sink him further into the blood that he has spilt. He can't breathe. He can't hear. He can't move.

Now he's being pulled out by a beautiful woman, crying and covered in blood. He starts to thank her, but she shakes her head, wide-eyed. A little girl only two or three is standing next to her, staring at him, confused and bewildered. The woman snatches up the little girl and starts backing away, begging him to let them go. He reaches out to them when a shot is fired, then another. The woman and child lay sprawled out on the ground, adding to the blood and corpses around him.

He looks down at the ground in front of him to see the gun at his feet, still smoking among the thousands of dead people surrounding him, piled high for as far as the eye can see. A single tear rolls down his face as he looks out across the sea of bodies. He studies the gun in front of him for a moment before picking it up. He puts it to his temple and pulls the trigger. He doesn't want to see anymore. A click, but nothing else. Once again, he pulls the trigger. Nothing. He kneels to the ground and drops the gun. He's trapped.

He opened his eyes to see the dark ceiling above him. Staring into the night he felt goose bumps rise up all over his body as tears threatened to drift down his face. He rolled over and shut his eyes once more against salty tears. He sat up and set his feet on the cold, wooden floor. His bones ached as he reached for the nearly empty whiskey bottle beside his bed. The digital clock beside the bottle read 3:14.

The doorbell rang loudly and all of a sudden he was back in his living room, watching Jenny smile excitedly at him as she rushed towards the door to welcome in their neighbor. That sweet smile directed at him was brighter than sunshine. That was what he missed the most.

Once again the bell rang, waking him from the beautiful, painful memory. Slowly he stood with his whiskey in hand and staggered towards the door.

Hesitating before turning the knob, he knew who stood waiting for him.

The wooden door slowly opened revealing an aged figure he knew all to well.

“Kevin,” said his father with soft-spoken concern. “I thought you’d be up.... May I come in?”

Sighing, he mumbled, “Sure.” His father carefully stepped into the messy, reeking house shaking his head, obviously disappointed. Kevin shut the door and they both stood with heads hanging low, not talking for several minutes.

“I’m not going dad,” Kevin sighed, taking a swig of whiskey, “I appreciate the offers, but I’m happy doing exactly what I’m doing.” He dropped the now-empty whiskey bottle on the dirty, cluttered floor.

“I didn’t want to do this Kevin,” his father sighed angrily, “but I had to....for you. I’m admitting you son. When you tried to.....kill yourself....last time you drank, well, it gave me the legal right to do this. I can’t keep letting you do this to yourself. You need help.” Kevin cocked his head at his father in shock.

“You can’t do this,” he said quietly, “I’m a grown adult. You come in here telling me that I don’t have the *legal* right to be in my own home. Bullshit! I’m not going anywhere.”

“They’re here for you now, Kevin. I’ll leave, but they won’t. Not without you. It’s for your own good son. I hope you forgive me someday...” his father sighed, tears welling up in his eyes as he calmly left the somehow sad and tortured house. Kevin kicked several empty bottles across the floor. He paused, panting, and rushed into the living room. As he reached into the basket by Jenny’s old chair he heard the door open and footsteps filled the house. He dug frantically through the basket but as soon as he glimpsed the gun he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Let’s go kid,” an older man dressed in black said sternly. His hair was dark gray and his face was creased with age but he had the frame of a 30 year-old wrestler. Kevin reached for the gun but the man in black was too fast. He twisted Kevin around and restrained him while another man put a blinding white straightjacket on him. Kevin struggled and kicked as they dragged him out of his own house.

They put him into a car with dark windows and then they were moving. With people on either side of him there was no chance of escape. They drove for what seemed like hours, and he was too tired to struggle anymore. Finally they came to a stop outside of a large, brick building that seemed much too secure for anything but a hospital. His body ached within the heavy jacket restraining him, making him hot and sweaty. They carefully guided him out of the car and into the

terrifying building. The address was in big, white letters next to the door: 314. They

led him across the cold, tile floor to the front desk where a tall, thin man sat, typing madly at an out-dated computer. The man looked up with a too-friendly smile.

“Hello. Welcome to St. June’s Rehab Center. We have Cindy coming out right now to show you to your room,” he said. As he looked back down at his computer a plump woman emerged from a nearby door. She looked at the men holding him and nodded. Leading the way the woman Cindy walked up the long stairway winding towards the sky.

When they reached the top of the stairs he was led down a hallway lit with florescent lights to a room with the number 314. It was unreal...how many times he had seen that number just since he woke up that morning.

“Come on,” Cindy said sweetly as she pushed open the door for him. A man in a white coat sat at a steel table across from a seat with straps, nailed to the floor.

“Would you like to talk, Kevin?” the man in the white coat asked sincerely. Kevin scowled as they removed his straightjacket just to strap him down to the uncomfortable chair.

“We have a lot to talk about, Kevin,” he said slowly. The men that had brought him here left with Cindy and they shut the door tightly behind them.

“How do you feel about the death of your wife and child, Kevin? What’s your mental reaction to that memory?” he asked casually. Kevin stared at him blankly. This isn’t what they did in rehab centers, was it?

“Aren’t I here to recover from my.....my drinking problem?” Kevin asked. This wasn’t right.

“You’re right Kevin. I just heard there was a new guy that recently had his family die. I was just curious. I lost my mother recently if that counts,” he said. Kevin looked around and realized he wasn’t strapped to a chair at all. The man wasn’t even in a white coat. Kevin was sitting on a bed in a small, dim room, having this conversation with a simple man in his pajamas. Kevin blinked several times and lay down on his bed. He felt his body begging him to go to sleep. He closed his eyes and drifted easily into sleep.

The dream came again, haunting him like it had before, but this time the

smoking gun usually at his feet was lying at the feet of a shadow man nearby Then he was being woken up violently as his roommate shook his shoulders.

“My watch is broken,” his roommate said with wide eyes, sticking the silver watch in Kevin’s face, “Been broken for hours now! Can you fix it?” The watch read the familiar time, 3:14.

Kevin looked at his own ticking watch and took the battery out of it. Slowly, he replaced his roommate’s battery with his own and watched it start ticking again. He handed it over to the man and rolled over to try to get some more sleep. The man cocked his head sideways to look at the watch. A smile spread across his face as he innocently lay down next to his new friend Kevin. Kevin jumped up and looked towards the door. The man looked confused and was about to say something when Kevin ran out the door.

He was headed down the hallway, not sure where he was going, when he saw the sight he was hoping to never see again. His wife and little girl lay in a heap on the floor in front of him. Eyes open, hearts still, they were right there. He kneeled to the floor crying but as soon as he blinked they were gone. A nurse caught up with him and grabbed his shoulders with both of her hands as if she was trying to shake him out of it. He felt the world spin around him...

A harsh white light was all that he could see. He squinted as the brightness overwhelmed him. Several faces looked down on him, smiling as if they were relieved.

“Hello Kevin,” a man in white said with a deep voice, “How are you feeling?” His body was stiff as though he hadn’t moved in days and his head was pounding.

“Where am I?” asked Kevin worriedly.

“You’re at a mental hospital Kevin. Don’t you remember?” a plump brunette woman asked.

It all came flooding back to him. The death of his wife and child, cutting his wrists open over and over, admitting himself to a mental hospital during the few moments that he was sober, the fantasy he had created to provide motivation... But what just happened? Why was he here? He nodded solemnly at the woman and tried to sit up. Straps held him firmly to what felt like a hospital bed.

“We’ll explain it all, but for now all you need to know is that you passed,”

the man grinned, “we’ll get you the belongings you came here with and your clothes.” He unstrapped Kevin and helped him sit up. Another woman in white led him to a small changing room and handed him his possessions. She left him to change and he thought about what all of this could possibly mean.

Kevin emerged from the changing room to find a circle of doctors in white, smiling at him.

“Please sit down Kevin,” the head doctor said. Kevin sat tiredly in a little wooden chair nearby.

“You’ve been our 314th successful patient in our Reveal Recovery program Kevin. You’re free to go home now, but would you like to know what you just experienced first?” asked the head doctor. Kevin nodded confusedly.

“We put you to sleep for a while and gave you some fears and memories that contributed to your illness. Using a new method of hypno-therapy and electric suggestion, we fed your mind these fears and watched to see how you reacted to them. If we saw that you were reacting the same way that you had in the past, we knew that there was still some work to be done. But if you corrected the images we fed you, we would know that your recovery was complete.”

“When we gave you that dream, demonstrating how guilty you felt about you family, you woke yourself up from it. When we gave you a problem with alcohol you incorporated your father into the illusion and had him admit you to rehab. When we implanted one of your past psychiatrists talking to you, you transformed a bad memory into a harmless roommate. Then, when we gave you the dream again not only did you change it so we knew you weren’t blaming yourself anymore, you woke up. Finally, we dared to give you an image of your family and you simply blinked it away. It was all you!

“We know it’s a lot to take in. We’ll have someone escort you home whenever you’re ready,” said one of the other doctors. One by one they all stepped up to congratulate him, “Congratulations Kevin, After seven years you are finally free to go home.”

Kevin stared blankly at the doctors around him. Images flashed through his head as he remembered the true reality of his life for the past seven years: the exams, the therapies, the consent he gave them to perform this experiment, everything up to this point. Now, after all the hell he had been through, he was finally free.. He couldn’t do anything but stare, bewildered at what he had just experienced.

Kevin stood from his chair, shaking, and said, “I’m ready doctor.”

Then, like a dream come true, the doctor smiled and led him out the door to freedom.

The rest of the day passed in a blur until he arrived at his house. It looked abandoned and rustic from the outside, but as soon as he stepped in he saw that it was exactly the same as he'd left it. He strode through the house,

remembering back on everything that had happened here. Good and bad, painful and sweet, awful and wonderful....

He stepped into the kitchen where the murder of his wife and child took place and for once he didn't feel pain. He felt free and happy. He had finally recovered from that terrible experience and he was ready to take on life again.

He turned to walk out of the kitchen to see blood soaking the floor. It was everywhere, spreading across the tile floor like ink on silk....the faces of his daughter and wife clinging to every surface in the room, lifeless and staring at nothing. He couldn't escape....there was no where he could go and nothing he could to block this reoccurring image.

He could never escape.

Halley's Pub and a Pack of Reds

Justin Bradley

The chrome plated Zippo came into focus as reality battled fantasy to pull me back into the musky, rambunctious room I had drifted out of. Glossed with polish, the slick, redwood bar reflected a middle-aged drunk. A cloud of smoke floated above the room, as neon lights colored the haze blue. Halfway through my eighth light, the wooden door creaked open for the sixty-third person since I had slumped onto my stool. The floor at least fifty years out of style, snapped and bowed under each new intruder's step. Weathered windows and smutty walls, adorned with James Dean, made this place. Black leather bar stools hosted many, as home cooked food and a sexy bar keep offered a type of comfort few things in this world could. I loved this bar, this was Haley's pub.

Located at the corner of Madison and Dover Street, a mile from Carver University, Halley's had become the central meeting place for college hoards and parties. I hated the side of the bar they plagued. My spot, the lone seat in the corner, was overrun with college frat boys. That, I also hated. I had attended to my spot for over twenty-four years now. That seat was accompanied by many fond memories for me, and there they were too wasted to even make a memory. This was my pub, they had no right.

I snatched out my Marlboro Reds, a man's cigarette, and hit another light. I was trying to quit, but I was still breathing in more smoke than oxygen it seemed.

The pack fit snug in my flannel pocket. The red and white striped shirt had

smelled of tobacco and tar since I was seventeen. Jeans, one of four pair I had, were part of my normal pub attire. My desk job frowned upon casual dress, so whenever I got the chance to wear comfortable clothing I gracefully took it.

Halley herself eventually entered the pub, making her rounds to the regulars. I was included in this list, since I had been here every day after my wife's death in 2004. Lung cancer had claimed her, and I still drew on my cig like it was my life support. Nicotine is a very powerful drug. Halley stepped up and apologized for the slack service, and proceeded to fix up my usual, scotch on the rocks. No, I wasn't James Bond and shaken or stirred made no difference to me. I just wanted my J&B. I got my wish and tried to calm myself from the ruckus growing in the corner. My seat had turned into a dance pad for some overzealous senior. I crushed my cigarette in the nearest ash tray and downed my scotch. It burned like it had burned everyday for the past five years. The pain never left, never even weakened its onslaught. My body was ingratiated as the liquor cursed into a seemingly starved bloodstream. Five years of constant abuse had driven me to addiction, yet I never considered the possibility that I was an alcoholic.

Time passed as the antics continued on, for what seemed like days. I had downed twelve glasses. That much scotch was unusual, but they were driving me crazy. Halley noticed my agitation and stared apologetically across the bar. She eventually approached me and informed me that I had had enough. I disagreed, elbows up on the bar, pouting like a child. I retreated to the relief found in my left shirt pocket.

The grey Dodge insignia on my lighter reminded me of brighter days, days

of fast cars and freedom. Days of the past, that held nothing but hot girls and sweaty nights in the back seat of a Dodge Challenger. The leather usually left you raw, but it was worth it. The face of my beloved flashed before me, nothing but a lingering memory, Candice Renee Edwards. Her brown hair shimmering in the sun's rays, that face with blue eyes melting me with each captivating stare. This was summer in North Carolina, and God had made it so beautiful.

Suddenly I realized I wasn't in the driver's seat, but on a worn out bar stool. I was in the same place I had frequented since the day she died, and she was never coming back. Life happens to the best of us I suppose. The college brats continued to wear my patience thin, as reality sunk in. My chair was still being used by party animals. The life of the party was in between the chair and a twenty year old belly dancer that was as they say, in his grill. Usually this type of entertainment was not tolerated in Halley's, but an exception was made for the extra Benjamins the pricks had thrown her way. This type of disregard for the standards everyone else was expected to follow also infuriated me. Why did the younger generation get to slide by on experimentation and underdeveloped reasoning? Why should their corruption affect the morals of older generations? Was it out of tolerance or submission?

The boy in the middle of the action, I had learned, was named John "Weasel" Fret. Weasel was his nickname. He leaned in real close to the girl and whispered something in her ear. Whatever it was got her attention, as it made her laugh and purr like a cat. I hated the male example that Mr. Weasel set, wanting nothing but their next piece of ass. They lived like fetid, hefulle standard riedt oneverlookback. Yet,

deep inside they were scared and had no idea where their lives were headed. In

his case, he was probably headed to the bathroom stalls of Halley's Pub to knock up the young girl hanging on his shoulder. How do I know? Once I was dangerous. I had the fast car, the multiple girls a night, and the opportune drink. My life once, as theirs do now, revolved around girls, booze, and fast cars. Alas, I had become fed up with the life of partying and lying with a different woman every night. So, I settled down. Now here I sit; a smoking, drinking, widower.

Mr. Weasel, apparently tired of the illustrious woman sitting on his lap, grabbed his glass and began to stroll in my direction. I presumed he was going to "drain the main vein." I swiveled on my stool and took a long drag on my Red. It smoldered and died when I pushed it into ashes. "Watch it gramps!" SPLASH! A cold liquid ran down my face and all over my back, as the voice of Mr. Weasel echoed in my head. I spun on my seat to see Weasel yelling at me, like I had done something wrong. Alcohol dripped off my face and hit the bar room floor; my anger and temperature was rising with every barley infested drop.

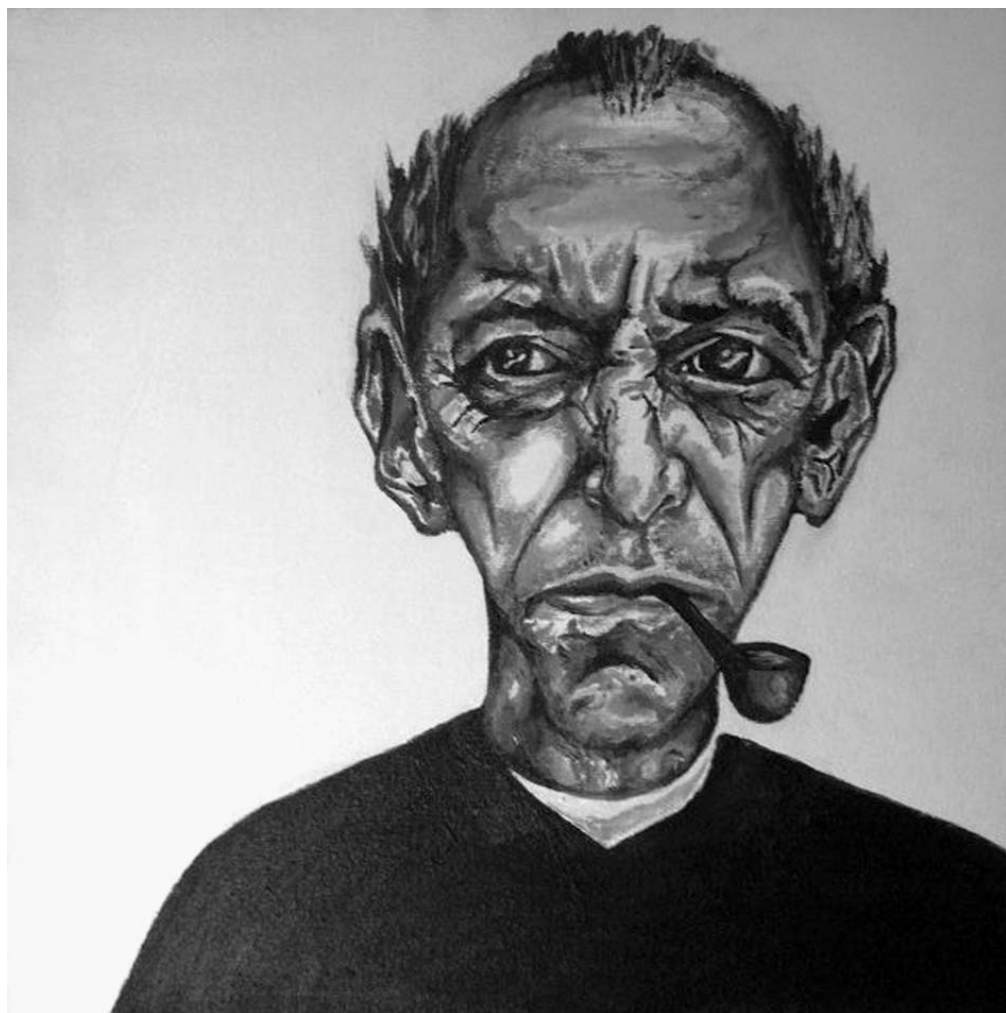
After the incident Mr. Weasel, who's knew nickname happened to be dumbass, didn't apologize. In his drunken delirium he hardly noticed that he had spilt his beer and continued on to the facilities. Without a care in his mind he swung the hinged door to the stall and never looked back to see what had happened to his now empty beer mug. Shock, anger, and disgust coursed through my veins, as the alcohol had minutes ago. I grabbed the nearest napkin, which Halley had just placed there to keep the scotch glass from scaring the bar's finish. With it, I began to scrub my face with ridiculous force to remove the backwash from my pores. My face eventually reached its breaking point and I couldn't scrub anymore.

Halley looked at me with as much remorse as she could muster. I flashed her a half-hearted smile, left my cig burning in the tray, and exited the place I normally found peace in.

After about three months of this drunken routine, I had memorized my walk home. I had never driven to Halley's because it was only a block away and I was almost always inebriated upon leaving anyway. I listened to the Run DMC blasting from a low-rider half-way down the street and something hit me. DMC wasn't my music, not at all. It did catch my attention, however, and for some reason it reminded me of Mr. Weasel. The oblivious punk deserved to be punished and shown how to cooperate as a functioning member of society. This young man was going to be dead by the time he was twenty-five. An alley resounded the sound of crashing trash cans. Upon further inspection, I found Mr. Weasel. He was stumbling around in a pool of his own vomit, and the pathetic scene almost brought forgiveness to my heart, but that disappeared as the smell of alcohol hit my nostrils. It set me off. My pores were still filled with Budweiser, the beer of choice from Mr. Weasel's well placed mishap. The thought of that punishment crossed my mind. Alleys were filled with all kinds of hazards, who would know the difference between an effectively swung two by four and an accidental head trauma acquired during extreme intoxication? This I pondered to myself as the mess of a man wobbled before me, barely able to maintain his balance, much less fend off an attack from a patron drunk much more in control of his inhibitions. Bloodlust hit me as revenge ravaged my will. Everything was telling me to show Mr. Weasel how to respect others, in the most effective manner possible, hands on learning.

The scrap lumber propped up against the dumpster to my left was an opportune weapon. It was like fate had lead me to this very spot, to find a weasel in need of a lesson. The wood, damp from the evening storm, felt good in my hands. Its strong oak material, saturated with moisture, was the right weight for inflicting pain. It wasn't really heavy enough to kill this worthless weasel, just leave him a reminder of what stupid inconsideration costs. It wouldn't snap on impact; it wouldn't give when it broke bone. This board was my vessel for vindication on all that life had thrown at me, its culmination a drunken Mr. John Fret. I approached the young man, lost in his drunken stupor, hate poised and ready to strike. My footsteps hastened the more space I closed between us. The poor sap didn't even see me coming, as the board landed across his skull with the force five years of pent up rage and bitterness alone can inflict. A satisfying crunch was followed by a loud thud. Weasel hit the pavement, a crumpled mess.

I looked down at what I had done and winced. A concave indentation indicated where the wood had landed and split over his head. I had felt his body give way to the blow and knew without looking that he had taken his last greedy breath in that waste filled alley. Even still, I couldn't help but stare at the work of my anger. I had just taken a life from this world, just as the world had taken a life from me. All seemed right for those haunting seconds I spent over his corpse. Fate had taken control of my life once before, and there in that alley I had taken it back with a vengeance. That vengeance was nothing more than a tough break for the kid, guess life happens to the best and worst of us. I didn't check to see if anyone was looking; I didn't care. I didn't even stop to pray. I lit up my last Red and walked back into Halley's Pub.



by Luke Mannion

Back in the Saddle

Christopher Weston

I wonder if I'm about to die.

I'm not ready to die. Who is? I'm only seventeen years old and I have my whole life ahead of me. College, career, family, retirement...a full, eventful life. Could it really end right here and now, within the next hour or two? I think back on my life. Have I really done anything worthwhile? Have I done anything that can potentially be considered a legacy? Has any action of mine been notable? No, not that I can recall. Then again, my mind is just a tad preoccupied at the moment with other things.

I walk up to the pasture gate and see him, standing innocently in the far corner of the enclosure. A black and white paint gelding. Gypsy. My horse. He is grazing, without a care in the world.

I grab the halter hanging on the gate latch and step into the pasture. At the sound of the gate's squeak, Gypsy looks up at me, and our eyes meet. He flicks an ear – to dislodge a fly? – and stands perfectly still as I approach.

Can he sense the fiery fear that's pounding through my veins?

"Hey there, boy," I say. It's a perfectly ordinary greeting, one I've said dozens of times. But this time my voice shakes.

Gypsy's ear flicks again and he snorts.

I take a deep breath and reach up, half-expecting him to back away. Surely he can feel my fear, taste it as though it flavored the grass he'd been munching on not two minutes before. But he doesn't react at all when I slip the halter over his head and begin leading him to the gate. His walk is brisk yet calm, and his head bobs gently with each step. If he knows how terrified I am in this moment, he isn't showing it at all.

I tie him to the hitching post and step back, observing him for a moment. He is tall, about sixteen hands high, and in good shape. He is 1200 pounds of flesh, muscle, and bone, all coated in a fine layer of black and white hair in shapeless patches. His mane and forelock are white, and his tail starts out white but turns to black about halfway down. He's beautiful. And utterly terrifying.

I take a deep breath and pick up a currycomb, thus beginning the grooming ritual I've performed countless times before. By making small circular motions with the comb, I bring the dirt clinging to his body to the surface, and I will sweep it away a little later with a brush. Gypsy huffs once and relaxes, leaning slightly into my hand. He's enjoying the attention, and I can't help but smile.

It had been this way a month ago. I was grooming him without a care in the world, and he was enjoying it. I was happy, and he was happy. How could I have ever suspected what would happen?

Gypsy suddenly reaches his head back, teeth bared, and I yelp and jump backward, convinced that he's trying to bite me. But no, he's just scratching at an itch on his shoulder, probably where a fly had landed. Satisfied, he straightens his head and quietly waits for me to continue grooming him. My hand is shaking when I do, fighting the urge to flee to my car and drive away.

"You've got to stop this," I say aloud to myself. Gypsy's ears swivel backward to catch the sound of my voice. "You can't keep jumping at everything. You'll be okay. Stop freaking yourself out."

Easier said than done.

I set down the currycomb and start brushing his coat, lifting the dirt from his body with short, brisk strokes. Gypsy snorts and stomps one hoof to dislodge a couple of flies that have landed there. I flinch but don't draw back, and I will my heart to slow down as I continue brushing him.

I remember the first day I'd seen him. Rachel, my riding instructor and owner of the ranch where Gypsy is boarded, had suggested I take a lesson with him to see how we cooperated, and I'd been amazed how quickly I'd fallen for him. He was obedient, gentle, and patient, yet he had a certain spunk that I couldn't help but admire. After that, he was the only horse I'd wanted to ride for my lessons, and on my seventeenth birthday, my parents had purchased him for me. He was mine.

One month later, I'd fallen off.

Rachel had told me at the beginning of my lessons that every horseman falls off. It just happens, and there's no avoiding it. So I'd been half-expecting it.

But this fall...

Done with the brush, I grab the hoof pick and lift his left foreleg. I dig the point into the compacted dirt and muck and scoop the mess out of the grooves, but my mind isn't on the task. It's on the circumstances surrounding that day one month ago. I see the arena before me, I feel the motion of my horse beneath me, and I remember asking him to pick up a canter, something I've done a hundred times before. And then...

Finally done cleaning his hooves, I start to tack Gypsy up. The brown leather English saddle goes on first, and as I fasten the girth, my horse takes a deep breath, ensuring that I can't tighten the leather strap around his barrel. I chuckle. "You're too smart for your own good," I inform him, leaving it loose for now. I will tighten it later, once he has relaxed. It's an old trick he does. You'd think he'd figure out that I know about it.

Then it's the bridle, a mass of thin leather straps and buckles all centered around the metal bit that I slip into his mouth. I'm lucky to have a horse that doesn't fight the bit like so many others do. Truly, Gypsy is a blessing.

Then why am I so afraid of him?

I put on my riding helmet – the gesture feels like signing my own death

certificate – and lead my horse to the round pen next to the arena. Once inside, I fasten the reins so they won't trip him, and I pick up a longe whip with the intent of working the edge off him before getting on. At my command, he starts trotting along the rail, his legs snapping up in a lovely rhythm that I hear beating in my head. I watch him as he moves: his ears are tilted in my direction, and his head is lowered submissively. I smile, although my heart is still pounding in my chest, and ask him to canter.

He does more. He bucks.

He's doing it to let off steam, I know. He has pent-up energy that he's releasing, and nothing more. It's not an angry gesture, or one of defiance, or even one of fear. It's just his way of commenting on the nice day.

It sends my heart up to my throat. My smile vanishes, and I start to shake. The whip falls from my slackened grip, and I turn away, eyes closed and breathing shallow. I can't do this. He's 1200 pounds of sheer muscle, and I'm a puny 190-pound teenage boy who, when push comes to shove, can no more control this horse than I can swim across the Atlantic Ocean. Who am I kidding, thinking that I can somehow ride this creature, can take charge and order him around?

Something soft touches my right hand, and I yelp and whirl around. Gypsy has come to a stop directly behind me, his muzzle down at the level of my lowered palm. It's the same hand whose wrist had been shattered a month ago.

Tentatively, I reach out and stroke his forehead. He huffs contentedly, and I take a deep breath. "Okay," I say, my voice still trembling, "let's get this show on the road."

I lead him to the arena, where Rachel is waiting. By her expression, I can tell she knows what's going through my head. "You'll be okay," she tells me. "You have to get back in the saddle if you're ever going to conquer your fear."

I nod but don't speak. I don't think my throat will allow speech.

I tighten the girth so that the saddle won't slide when I mount and then I pause. Take a deep breath. And another. I look at my horse. He looks at me. I don't move. There is silence. I turn my head to look at an ordinary patch of dirt along the rail. The spot where I'd been painfully acquainted with the earth. It had just been a stumble and nothing more. But I'd departed from the saddle. Was I about to depart from it again?

And would I depart from more than just the saddle this time?

I look back at Gypsy. He's watching me, apparently wondering why I haven't mounted yet. I take another deep breath, which does nothing to calm my frayed nerves.

And then I'm on his back.

Everything goes smoothly. We walk around the arena at a leisurely pace.

Rachel calls out directions to me: "Heels down. Remember to look up at where

you're going. Engage him, squeeze with your calf muscles to get him going. That's it. Watch your heels, keep them down."

After two trips around the arena, I ask Gypsy to trot. This is fine; if he stumbles, I'm at a fair enough position to catch myself. Unlike I will be at the canter...

I remember how the canter felt before I was suddenly flying through the air. Smooth, pleasant, rather like riding a rocking horse, only much, well...faster. And farther off the ground. Gypsy has a great canter though, and it's very enjoyable to ride with.

Do I dare...?

Before I can even complete the thought, Rachel calls, "Okay, ask him to canter." She must notice me stiffen at once, for she adds, "Don't worry. Just relax and ride. Go ahead."

I take a deep breath. Gypsy, in the absence of any command, slows to a walk, and I don't correct him. Deep breath. In through the nose, out through the mouth. *You can do this*, I think. *You've done it before and not done a faceplant into the ground. You've got this.*

I pull back slightly on the right rein and lift the left one, shifting his body so that he's almost sidestepping. At the same time, I apply pressure with my right calf. Gypsy speeds up a little but doesn't break gait. It's no surprise; he can tell that I don't want to do this.

Yet at the same time...I do.

I close my eyes for just a second.

"Well...if I'm going to die, then it might as well be while doing something I love."

And I ask for the canter.

Gypsy breaks into a perfect canter, and I panic. I grip his body with my legs as tight as possible and hold my breath without being aware of it. "Relax!" Rachel calls, but she might as well be talking to the fence for all the good it does.

Gypsy canters on, as if unaware of my crisis. He rounds the corner nicely and doesn't break stride once. I can see we are approaching that spot, the place he'd stumbled last time. I brace myself.

We pass over it without the slightest falter.

I make it around the arena once before I can't take anymore and bring Gypsy back down to a trot. Rachel cheers and yells, "See? I told you you could do it!"

I smile weakly. Yes, I've done it. This time. But the ride isn't over yet. There are still plenty of opportunities to get hurt.

Yet to my great relief, the rest of the ride goes smoothly. We canter once more, this time in the other direction, and my body stiffens in terror again, but it doesn't last quite as long, and I'm more able to control what's happening.

Gypsy simply canters without a problem, as if it doesn't bother him in the slightest to thunder along the ground at breakneck speed.

When I'm finished, my heart is pounding, partly from exhaustion but mostly from a mixture of exhilaration and slowly-ebbing fear. My legs are shaking when I dismount, and as I take the saddle and bridle off I find I have a hard time breathing. But I can't help but smile.

"You did good today, buddy," I say to my horse, reaching up to stroke his forehead. He huffs contentedly. Then he reaches back to nip at his shoulder, where a fly is bothering him. I jump slightly, alarmed by the sudden movement, but I calm down pretty quickly. It's going to take some time.

I lead Gypsy back to his pasture and say good-bye, giving him a fond rub on the muzzle. I leave, and he immediately begins grazing as if I had never interrupted his meal. I chuckle and head for my car.

My legs are still shaking, and the bitter taste of fear is still in my mouth.

The Castle McIntosh

Sara-Beth Testerman

The ability of pain is something that has caused great anguish for centuries, and has been the root of all heartache and reasoning behind an individual's suffering. What makes any individual feel the way that they do? What exactly makes one's heart ache? A person, a place, longing for something or someone of the past, triggers these memories. The heart misses, or at times longs to forget, and the ability to convey this emotion comes out as the singular most beautiful expression of truth. The yearning of the past, of the need for things to change, reveals itself as an exquisite form of water, that travels from the eyes and comes out of the heart, and reveals the problems of the soul to the world.

The castle in the woods heaved and wanted to crumble under the weight of the night sky. Since the passing of my mother and father, the Castle McIntosh never was the equivalent of the years seen by its predecessor. The outer boundaries had managed to be trodden down from weather, and the inner walls found no shelter from the decaying mold and remnants of chipping stone. The only forms of life left in the castle, it seemed, were myself, my sister, and the other servants, of a staff which collectively appeared to be dwindling out. Agnes forces me to feel like a better man for taking care of the house, but in reality I have decided that the dank appearance of the cobwebbed furniture and the scarce semblance of light, except for natural light, has made it rather difficult to live in for my betrothed. The corridor assigned to her is dark, and windows are not found, although she will move upstairs very shortly. One must learn to live in darkness, if the mind is going to be able to perceive all the darkness holds. When one is incapable of seeing, of being able to determine what is or isn't, the possibilities are endless as compared to when we see the constraints of the world in light.

The wedding will take place on the eve of the new year, of what is soon to be a full moon. The decorations are mediocre at best, but the torn tapestries and hallways lit with fire lanterns will most certainly increase the liveliness for the guests. She agreed to marry me under the pretenses that I incorporate the clan colors from both houses into the wedding, and in the event, the meshing together of the family crests would unite us completely. Although this arrangement took place in quite haste, the event should be pulled together well into a form fitting, masquerade ball for the masses. My exasperation with the event is made clear regularly on evenings I visit her downstairs, and her tears concern my indecisiveness with the large amount of people, food, and event altogether. My efforts are spent upon making her jubilation

known to everyone, while on the other side of the McIntosh tombs she weeps dramatically.

The thought of her crying over such a trifling thing as marriage disgusts me. Her ability to see nothing but the harshness of life, to not see the joining of two monumental houses together, and her necessary need to be in love ruins the thought. My love for her is “ever thine, ever mine, and ever ours,” and she continues to ruin it, and disgrace the family name by shedding an immense amount of tears. It forces one to contemplate the thought of the source of this sadness. Her need to be immensely unhappy with me, and her lack of being able to conquer that thought, forms the one shred of emotion felt in these dreary halls. They move like beads of rain that perk in the eyes, and fall silently down her cheeks. At times, they seem to have a life of their own, and move around her face as she moves, following her movements and approving of her rebellion of this matrimony. The tears shed are animals moving wildly from her face to her garments, the bed, and on the many books she reads. They jump and swarm to her defense, and threaten the very likes of me. At other times, her tears seem more remorseful than upset with me, of the poor lad she lost tragically before. They silently move about the room, absorb into everything in the room, and overwhelm me when I walk into the room. They are everywhere, silently watching me scold her, beg her to come upstairs, throw myself down and apologize to her, and the recurring ending of me throwing myself into another lashing.

They follow me, and during the night, as I wander the halls, they run down the stones and stain the marble walls. During the dinner festivities, she remains in the room beside my ancestors’ tombs, and I eat upstairs with Agnes. Agnes chats to me about her day, the wedding planning, and her intentions to be my best man since my father is no longer here, a sister will have to do in lieu. The tears begin to stream down the walls of the great hall, and start to run towards my feet on the floor. They drop in my soup, and fall on the tops of my hands resting on the table. The sobbing is heard everywhere, and my beloved’s unhappiness is felt by no one but me. The dinner concludes with the dishes collected by the waitstaff, Agnes going up to bed for light reading, without a blemish on her clothes or skin. The garments that now disgustingly hang off my body are drenched in her disgusting water, that pours constantly. They are acidic, and sting my face and hands. The walls are damaged, and the entire castle will need to be cleaned. The waters are evading the entire premises. After writing in my nightly journal, I pick up my parchment to admire my work. The ink flows from the page onto droplets and stains my clothing. The book dissolves and slips between my fingers as a sift, and salty black water stains my hands.

Several hours pass after dinner, and I still found myself lingering in the depths of the study. The main focus of my works consisted of looking through “Neurypnology” by James Braid. Braid’s origins, so close to our estate, made me formulate the idea that I could induce my own self-hypnosis, but this is hardly likely. The thought escapes me, and I hurriedly scramble down to see her. The tombs have an eerie liquid dripping off the outside, and I find her almost completely swallowed in fabric and books. My beloved’s clothes and outer appearance finally reflect the madness within. Her body appears to float within the garments, and perpetually, her tears are flooding the room and drowning me. While it is difficult to determine my best escape route, the water spewing will most surely force me to meet an early fate.

The most reasonable cause of this calamity according to the housestaff would be my imagination running away with me. However, I have never been a reasonable man, and my betrothed’s untimely death would be more likely given the circumstances. The pressing issue of the detrimental effects of the water on the walls, as well as the lack of place for the water to go, forces me to come to a quick decision. As I gather a vial from my study, the act of holding something to catch her tears in, seems somehow murky to me. The housestaff is correct, and my imagination can get away with me, but my ability to finally capture these single expressions of beauty, yet, what would be the demise of my existence is a major feat in itself. The power of the entire castle is within a single vial of water, now held across her face to capture every aspect which has been driving me mad for months.

The next morning at brunch, everyone in the castle is disheartened to learn of the sad passing of my fiancé. It was determined that her death was caused by drowning, and she was found visiting the McIntosh relatives down in the tombs as a loose pipe busted in the corridor. There was no way she could be saved. I am in the state of lucid dreaming as I hear this terrible news, and hear the staff speak of the curious hand like mark around her neck. While this is marked as a terrible tragedy for the castle, one must remember the words I so desperately tried to convince them of before. The heart misses, or at times longs to forget, and the ability to convey this emotion comes out as the singular most beautiful expression of truth. I loosely move the vial of salty water around my neck, as drops of the same nature come from everyone else in the castle in mourning.

The Edgar Allan Poe story, “Berenice” influenced the main ideas behind this rewritten version. The famous story centers around the well known theme in Poe’s works of gruesome details, and the fading away image of the woman. This version uses the same technique, but the “thing” of interest is rewritten to be tears. I would thought tears to be particularly interesting to be fascinated with, as so many people cry for different reasons, and at times, they cannot be stopped. This version was meant to entail that the narrator

could not make his bride-to-be happy, by locking her in the tombs already with the dead, and in turn, her tears and his inability to stop them are what drove him to madness. The setting takes place in an older Scottish castle, somewhere around the medieval times. Another feature changed from Poe, is the lack of names. The only name mentioned in this version would be his sister, who is ironically of little importance. The names of the narrator as well as the bride to be were not developed, as this gives the story an anonymity to relate to every reader. I also wanted to downplay the importance of getting to know the characters, and thrust the ideas of the narrator, and his thought processes out for the majority of the story. The incorporation of Scottish naming and James Braid's work provided a point of reference for readers to research further. Overall, this work was meant to be an adaptation of the previous "Berenice", and provide another oddity in which the madness of men could be lost.



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