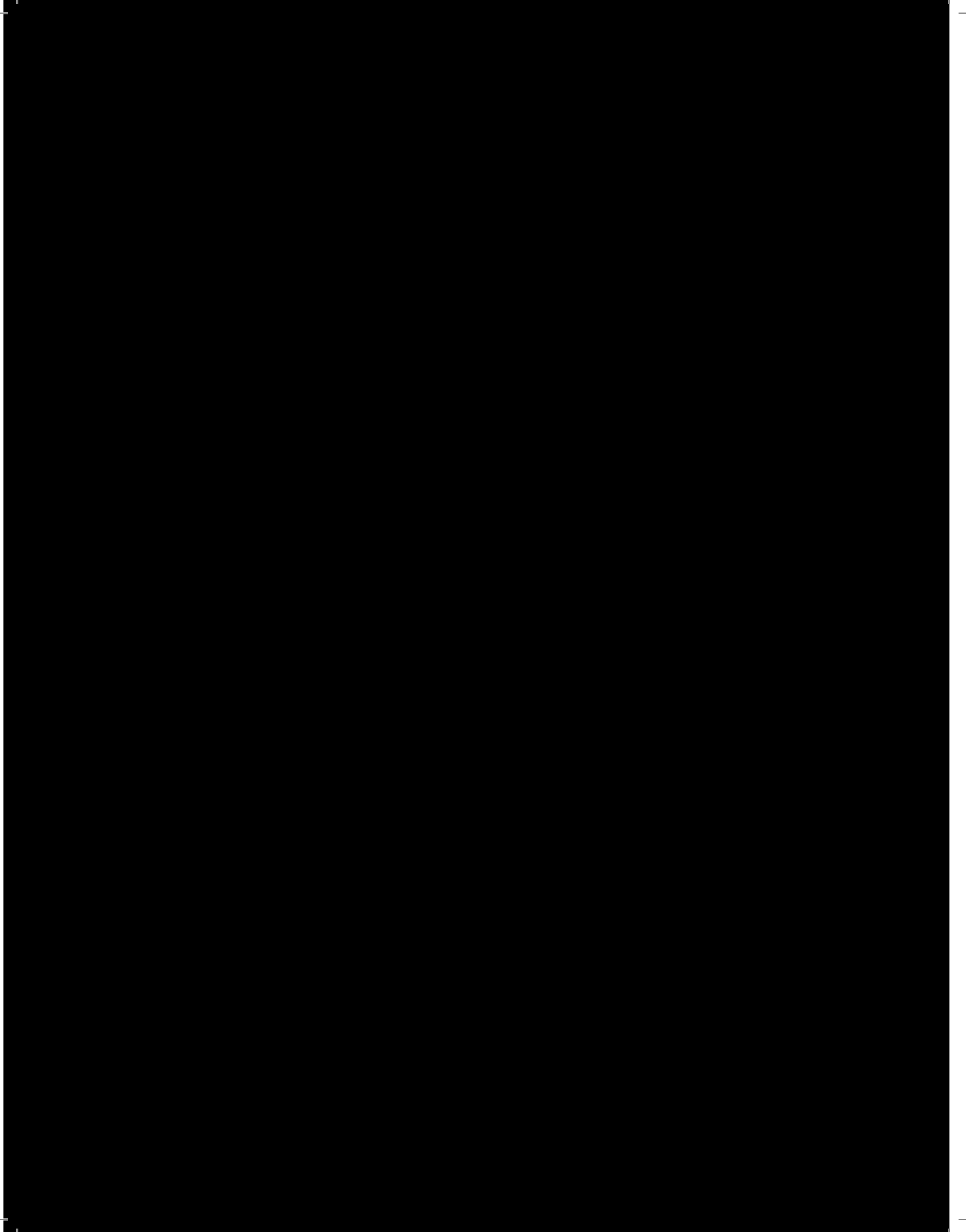


CARPE
NOCTEM

Seize
the night

THE LYRICIST

2016



The Lyricist

Editor's Notes/Acknowledgements

For the Lyricist staff, this year has been a year of new beginnings. We started a blog, hosted some extremely fun events around campus, and for the first time ever, we published a Lyricist magazine in full color. We have a lot of people to thank for all of our success. Thanks to Mrs. Susan West for her help in event planning (and making sure we had lots of food). Thanks to the Mabel Powell English Club for joining together with us on events. Things went so much smoother, and we hope to be able to co-host events in the future. Thanks to Ms. Haven Hottel for teaching us all about design and layout. She's part of the reason our new layout looks so snazzy this year! Thanks to Dr. Gina Peterman for working with us to publish in color this year. Thanks to the University Administration for their continued help and support. Thanks to all of our extremely talented contributors. Without you all, we wouldn't be able to continuously put out such a high quality literary magazine. Last but not least, thanks to our advisor, Mr. Nathan Salsbury, who never said no to our crazy ideas and always had positive words to share. We are all so very grateful for the steps you all have taken to aid us in making this year's edition just as stunning as those from past years.

In this year's edition, we found the theme "Carpe Noctem" or "Seize the Night" befitting of the large amount of dark and emotional works we received. As an artist, sometimes your most profound ideas spring into mind in the dark hours of the night while you drift between wake and sleep. My advice is to always keep a pen and pad near you so that when creativity strikes, you can write or quickly doodle what passed through your mind and then roll over and go back to sleep. It's what *I* do.

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POETRY



COYOTE | Paul King

I heard a coyote call

I heard a coyote call tonight
Just past that cedar pole fence
His dancing made the hen-house chatter
The horses heighten sense

He sang "I love you" on a juniper breeze
Peddled promises with whines for fine dinin'
A secret reindeveux, with a hen or two
To dance 'neath the November moonlight

And for all his wooin' and all his woein'
Sometimes tippin' sometimes toein'
Couldn't find a means of goin'
And his love no way of knowin'

He turned his tail and dropped his eyes
"I have lost at love" he sadly sighs
"I have lost at love" the night replies
And with a dusty paw he wipes his eyes

I heard a coyote call tonight
The dessert embraced his love starved cries
A sad sonata neath southwestern skies
Across arroyos and mesas where the rattlesnake hides
A song for his love
for her he passionately pines

I heard a coyote call tonight

EVERYONE BUT YOU

Paul King

she waved raven hair
away from her face
away from her eyes

she made me right there
by the ways of her face
what she says with her eyes

i'm falling
over you

i'm falling
over you

i've fallen
and everyone knows that's true
but you

she moved liked she cared
away from the shades
away from the light

she brings more I can't bear
away from the shades
goin' out of my mind

i'm falling
over you

i'm falling
over you

i'm falling
and everyone knows that's true
but you

she whispered on air
between shades of gray
between wrong and right

she hung the clothes on the chair
in a game of charades
then she put out the light

i'm falling
over you

i'm falling
over you

i've fallen
and everyone knows that's true
but you

she waved raven hair
away from her face
away from her eyes

THAT OL' ROCKER

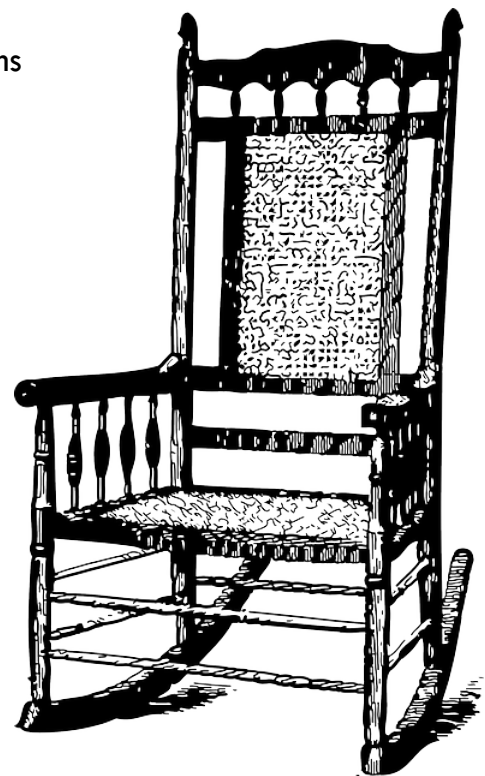
Paul King

That ol' rocker

leans a little too much to the left some
 leans a little more to the right
leaves a little less than expectation
 leaves a mark on the kitchen tile
that ol' rocker

spends the day in some dark corner
 afraid to come out in the light
keep it quiet keep it undercover
 seen the bad and the good in this life
that ol' rocker

Burns and scars on the Back and arms
Cut the carpet long ago
Mornings past September farms
Midnight kisses five below
When the days add Up to when
That's the day it's Time to go
for that ol' rocker



FRED | Stephanie Yun

he's always there
his name is FRED
behind my eyes
inside my head

but FRED only becomes my FRIEND
with my Insecurity
and with No one there

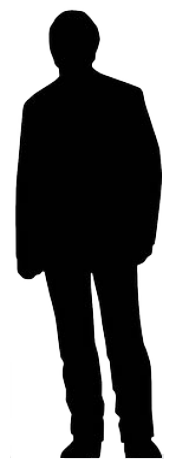
FRIEND keeps me company
with IN to keep him there
but the Insecurities lead Emptiness
and the Nothingness follows D...

it.

without Reason, my FRIEND becomes a FIEND
and without Nurture my mind becomes FRIED
with the fiery FRED forever burning and branded in my brain

leaving Responsibilities, Improvement, and Nothing behind,
i FLED to the endless corner of the room
where i'm left with
Fear, Loneliness, and Endless Desperation
until FRED comes back around
to replace my Loneliness with Regret

some kind of friend...



NOSTALGIA

Stephanie Yun

Muffled crackling snow
As I follow the scent of
feast and open fire.

I miss the days when
my biggest childhood fears
were the monsters under my bed,
not the ones living in my head.

WINTER
SENSES
Stephanie Yun



Forbidden Fruit

Katherine Wolfe

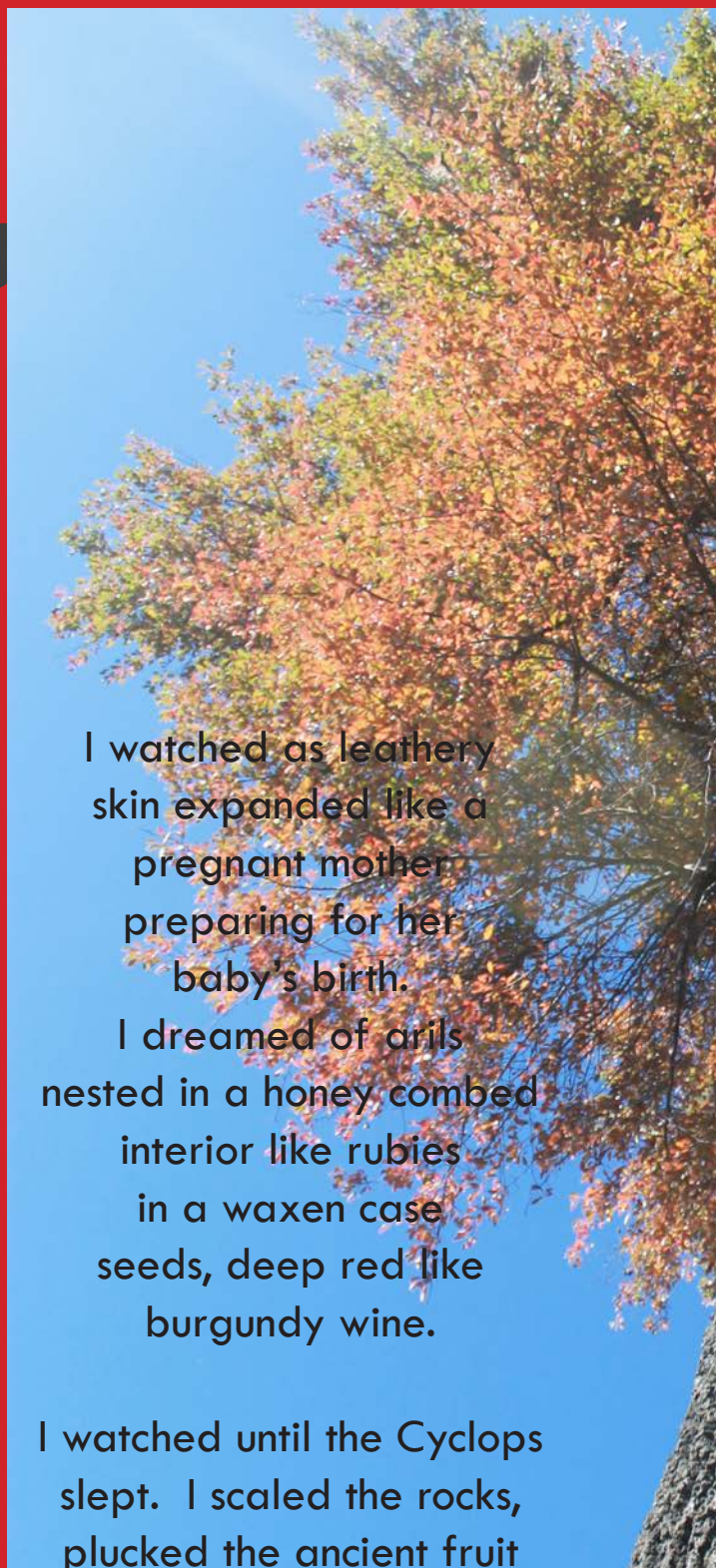
The pomegranate
was the forbidden fruit
of my youth
enclosed by a fence
of ballast stones
in the garden
of the one-eyed
dog, Cyclops.

Crown of yellow,
light pink, blood red,
visible only through
a wrought iron gate
with gold tipped spikes
like the entrance
to Buckingham Palace

I watched as leathery
skin expanded like a
pregnant mother
preparing for her
baby's birth.

I dreamed of arils
nested in a honey combed
interior like rubies
in a waxen case
seeds, deep red like
burgundy wine.

I watched until the Cyclops
slept. I scaled the rocks,
plucked the ancient fruit
from spiny branches,
cut away the crown,
peeled away the exterior
until the ripe arils
crunchy, bitter sweet
were mine to share
only with the gods.



The Burial

Olivia Briere

When all is quiet
and the earth is still
with only the rain falling
covering the grass in a film of tears
the mist covering everything even their eyes.

The cemetery is their empire,
the old church their castle
when they seek salvation, sanctuary,
they run there.

This is where they are dragging me now

My music resonating off their bone white walls
a swan's song for the ages perhaps,
drowning out their wails and cries of loss.

The song drags on
the sirens voice high and sweet,
not stopping their tears.

Her talk of dreaming resounds in my deaf ears.
It's all true now.

All I did was a dream,
all I did was a lie.

Nothing was true,
Nothing was real,
I'm here to join their legion now,
to be placed in the dirt with the rest.

I'm in their sanctuary.

Dressed like a doll,
pale skin and ruby red lips,
my crimson dress lights up the black parade around me,
Driving away the darkness of them.

As the song ends,
the heavens release their aggrieved tears.
Crying along with the others
mourning my loss

I don't care

I am gone,
And it is their fault!
I am now alone in a cold dark realm
With no one to let the warmth in
There are no cracks to let the lights through

My corpse may look like a doll,
But it's far from perfect.
The eyes are broken
The ears cannot hear
Their jobs are done.

Finished.

And so am I.

So lay me down in my barren hole
And place the tear soaked dirt upon me
In the ceremony followed for years
I don't want to be a ceremony, I never have.
But as soon as you bury me
It'll be done and then the smile I've been longing for will cross my lips.





The Summer Solstice

Katherine Wolfe

When our chests were flat
as tabletops, our hair braided
and bowed, we pressed

our fingers into the grainy
particles under the sea,
and dug for crabs and cowry.

When our bodices were bursting
at the seams, our hair loose,
falling in waves on our shoulders

we covered ourselves with
tie-dyed shirts, climbed
on rafts, floated to China


and returned the same day
to oil each other's backs
and lie together on circus

striped towels whispering our
inner passions and dreams,
promising to meet, each year,

when the summer solstice begins.
And we always have, fifty years
or more now. But today,

the solstice three days past,
striped towel in hand, I wait.
Neptune kites fly overhead.

The sea gulls look for your
sourdough bread. Come
soon. Our rent is overdue.

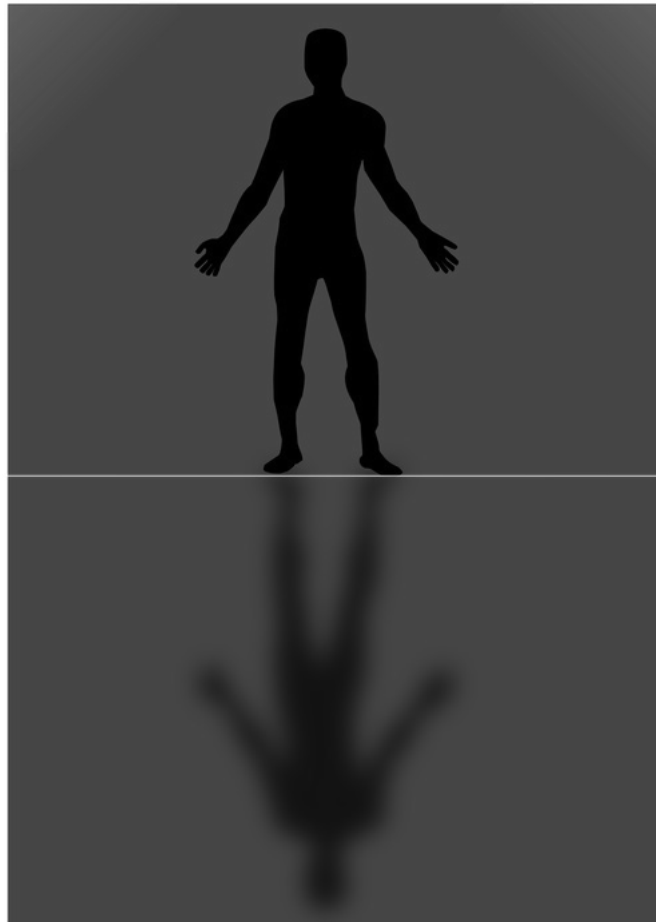




Who Are You?

Erica Wammock

We are all someone; who are you?
Are you a lover of others or a lover of self?
Do you prefer to be alone – like a book left on a shelf?
Or do you enjoy being with others?
Some prefer both – a mix, if you will.
Are you strong or are you weak?
Do you think you have a winning streak?
As life goes on, we find out who we are.
So find out for yourself – who are you?
Better yet, who am I?



CONFINED

Jasmina Reyes

Desolate roars and hard thumps beat wildly inside.

The caged beast tries to escape its prison.

The beast restlessly paces yearning and looking for an escape.

The beast roars and scratches at the bars that entrap it.

The bars are tough and rigid.

Undeterred the beast continues to strike at the bars.

Visions of freedom tantalize the beast.

Time is lost as it gets wrapped in the ecstasy of it all.

It continues the desperate pursuit to flee the prison.

Lungs reaching and grasping for air the beast becomes still.

The stillness sets in, takes hold, and the beast can no longer strike at the bars.

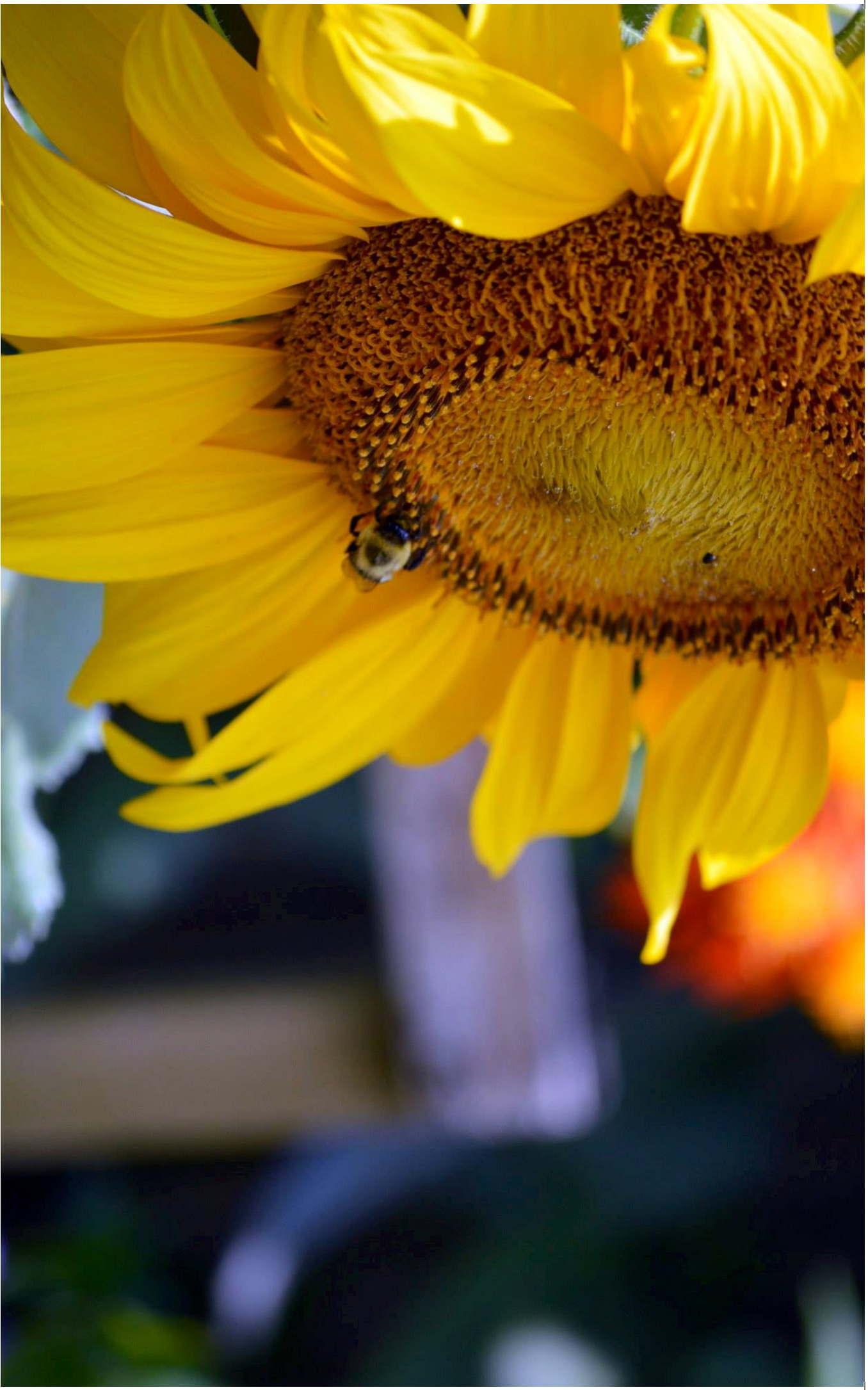
It sits.

It has resigned.

It understands its fate; it knows that it will never escape.

It goes to a corner of its cage, curls within itself, and with a quiet breath closes its eyes.

My heart aches, as emotion lies caged in my heart.



Flight of the Bumblebee/ Mercedes Torreo
PHOTOGRAPHY

Sea Glass Globes | Olivia Briere

Marble blue sea glass globes
Hiding behind pale grey storm clouds.
The rain starts to fall,
Drifting down solemn, hollow cheeks painted red with emotion.

We have been a drift in the same stormy seas.
We are all enamored with the tune of the drifting tides.
They come, rhythmically crashing into our lives,
And it is, as always, a joy to behold these wonderful waves.

The waves themselves are wild and free.
They know no bounds and break on the sands
Rearranging the picture that has been laid out.

The globes, the clouds, the waves.

See, Create, and Are the never ending ripples of change.



Of a Coin

Michael Mahalik

The light is called part of what is right,
While Day is enemy of the dark.
What aught is there that's fey?
There is no Day at Night.
Those who hark
Always say
Light.
Night,
They do pray,
Remains all bark.
In Night, there is yet light:
Truth, hidden, won't so stay.
Take no heed of the difference stark,
Take comfort under the shade of Night.





Roadside Car Fire

Hannah Shackelford

Blazes burning
Tires turning
Sirens blaring
Faces staring

Blaring sirens
Turning tires
Staring faces
Burning blazes

The Candle

Hannah Shackleford

You're alone in a cave with your sorrows.
We're all here, but we're all alone.
Talking about lost loves and lost innocence,
Lost people and lost times.
Losing ourselves in this cave of sorrows.

We sit and talk with that one light,
Talking about our feelings,
Our fears, and our families.
Trying to find the love we all need so much.

That light you hold,
A symbol of the people you're trying so desperately to help,
A beacon in the night we're all sharing,
Shows us all how alone we are,
And yet how surrounded we are
With those who share the love we're all searching for.





Ode to Those Like Me

Donovan May-Parker

When you turn the lights, off you cannot see me.
I am too rich, in fact, Chocolate,
I am among the richest.
I am the darker brother ¹
I am the cherry, the mahogany, the rose, wait no—
I am the Wenge, the Cocobolo, and the Mpingo
amongst the wood,
while the Hickory is stained to save money.

The shadows harmonize with me as we sing a song of luminosity.
They do some wonderful things.
They have some wonderful fun.²
A song that cries on deaf ears unless we're
twisting and singing along on our rhinestone platform.

A splash quite unnoticed³

Invisible barriers built by the blue-veined of society, though our veins are
equally as blue.

Our African diamonds constantly sit below us in the earth, never discovered,
never cultivated. Just waiting...But for whom?

My brothers,

Sink down those hands of ebony and unearth your diamonds. Refine your
own wood,
And when they turn the lights off,
scream.
Then they'll see how beautiful [we are]
And be ashamed—1

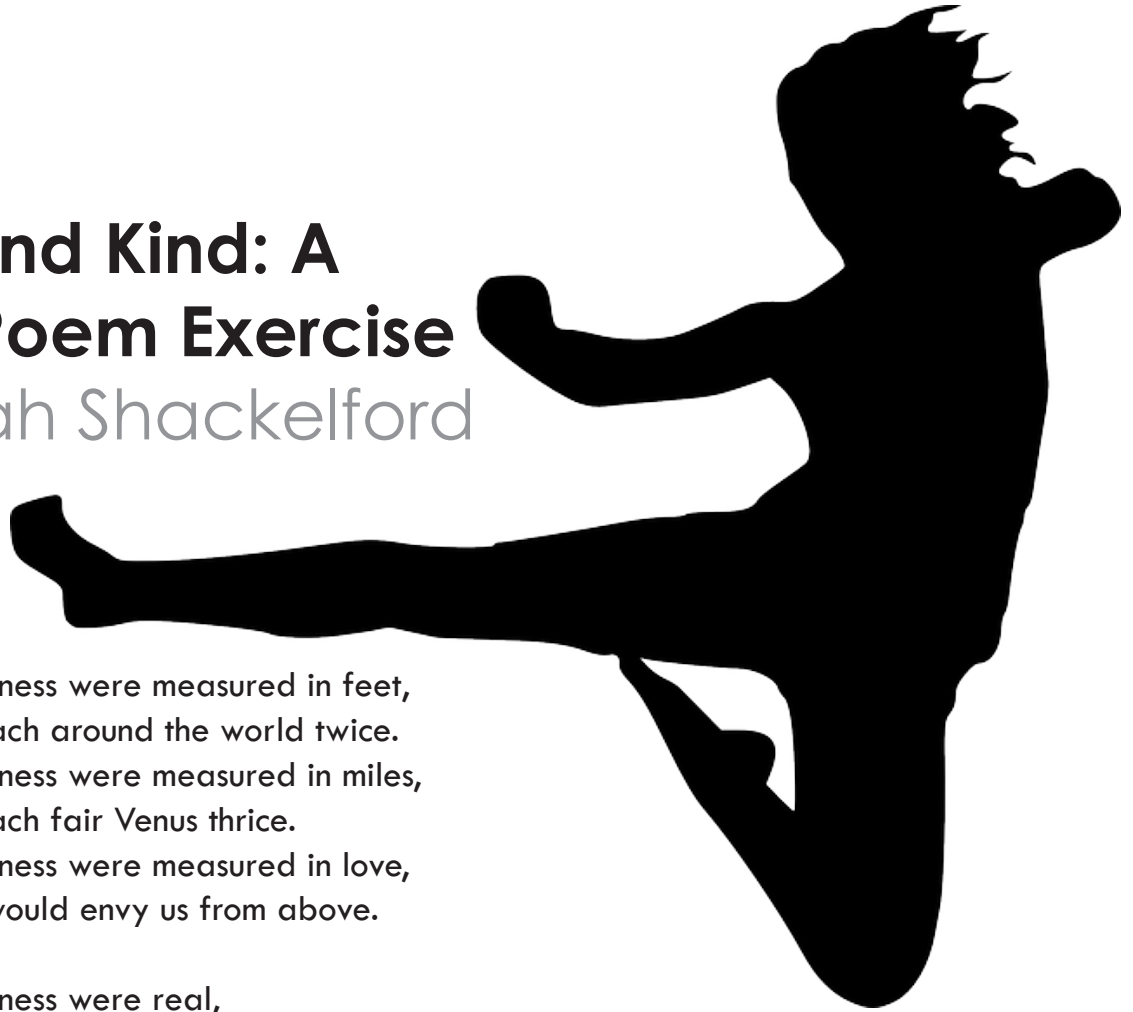
1. "I too" —Langston Hughes

2. "A song From the Front Yard"- Gwendolyn Brooks

3. "Landscape With the Fall of Icarus"- William Carlos Williams

Feet and Kind: A Love Poem Exercise

Hannah Shackelford



If your kindness were measured in feet,
It would reach around the world twice.
If your kindness were measured in miles,
It would reach fair Venus thrice.
If your kindness were measured in love,
The Gods would envy us from above.

If your kindness were real,
That would be great,
But if kindness were feet,
I'd kick you in the face.



You Wrecked Me

Sara Sellers

Lung sparkling full
of glass stalagmites,
slipping out sharp breaths.
Dashboard canyons
curved around kneecaps.
Metal pieces paint
portraits into my flesh
with precise incisions.
Vertebrae break, snapping
on the seat,
falling into the floorboards.

I veer into the left lane,
I never know when to stop.



Snow in My Veins

Jacob Berger

I crawl like water
Fleeing from the frigid air that
Wants to capture me.
I'm following after
The call of your bed.
Your blankets and arms
May enwrap me;
You strip me bare
And leave me where
I lie slain.

I move so slow;
It is the snow,
The snow in my veins.

I stand so lonely
Like an icicle.
Each drop that drips comes
From a gentle shove;
You touch me warmly.
It's not difficult
To melt like snowflakes
On your glove
You discard me.
I can hardly
Rise again.

I move so slow;
It is the snow,
The snow in my veins.

Snow Day: January 23rd, 2016

Austin Maynor

Academia sits in natural contemplation,
shrouded in a light jacket of temporal glaze.

Cold breezes whisper through the air,
rattling icy twigs against frozen needles.

In chilled silence,
standing on a sheet of crunching snowflakes,
we experience anew
our place
in this beautiful life of holy existence.



THE ARCHITECT'S SONG TO THE ARTIST

Austin Maynor

At the art gallery,
bright hues collapsed against the canvas
when the light was brave enough to peek
into your hazel gaze.

Debussy poured from a thousand Steinways at the crack of your ivory smile.
Our arms touched
unlocking
the unexplored corridor of my being.
I thought I'd thrown away the key years ago.

That weekend
next to you
turned me loose into the fantastical woodland within.

I'm scared of mirrors.
But your whisper coaxed me out of my cave.

Held by the breeze under a magnolia's shade
within the hidden garden of my reverie,
We lie down on the grass, crunching the autumn leaves
while securely fastened in each other's arms.
I learned to step into the waiting future
without ever wandering
outside of your embrace.

I held you
and
you held me
and
the galaxy looked on holding its breath.

We were at the height of our euphoric waltz.
My emotions whirled around me.
Dizzy with dreams.
Then I tripped across the chords of my own inaction.

Stumbling across the ballroom floor,
I tried incessantly to replay the lost rhythm
of our unheard anthem.

Music is no longer audible
now that I can only hear the uneven beat of my wingtips
clicking across the radiantly painted tiles
of this hollow moment.

Alone.

I am not yours. You are not mine.
I am only the meticulous architect of a consuming daydream.

Come with me.
Come away from this tempestuous odyssey of my own imagining.
It's good for neither of us.
I want to see your feathers caressed by the wind
as you soar
boldly
into the brightness of your God-given existence.
You are free to live beyond my imagination.

You tickled me with the tip of love's paintbrush,
spilling magenta and cobalt from your pallet.
Color has leaked into my life.
I bedew the canvas before me with thankful tears.

I've been standing next to the hearse for several minutes.
Through the stone wall, I can hear the hum of the organ.

And somewhere off in the distance,
somewhere in between the blossoming orchards of life untouched,
I hear a violin.
It calls to me.
Onward.

Sitting in the Bathtub at a Motel 6

Sara Sellers

A razor took a walk –
not across the street, but
down my blue-veined road.
It tripped on tendons and
dragged serrated feet
down yellow-bricked bone.
Red puddles dripped,
rolling down curved
wrists, dissolving
to rust clouds in the
white porcelain ocean.



Against Evil

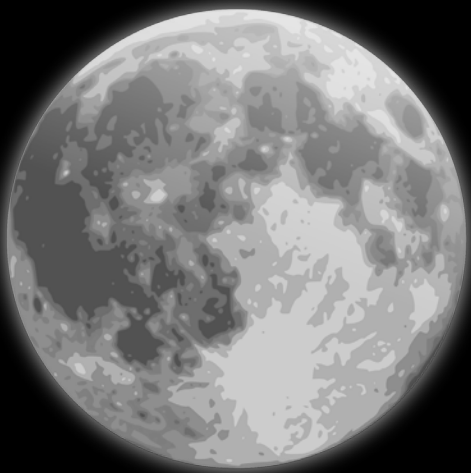
Brenna Jones

Against evil I did not speak
Though I had words to say
Fear crept unbidden to my heart
And stole my words away

Against evil I did not act
Though I had deeds to do
For I was a coward at heart
My courage was not true

Against evil I dared not think
My mind it froze in fear
For with one touch of a man's hand
My thoughts could be laid bare

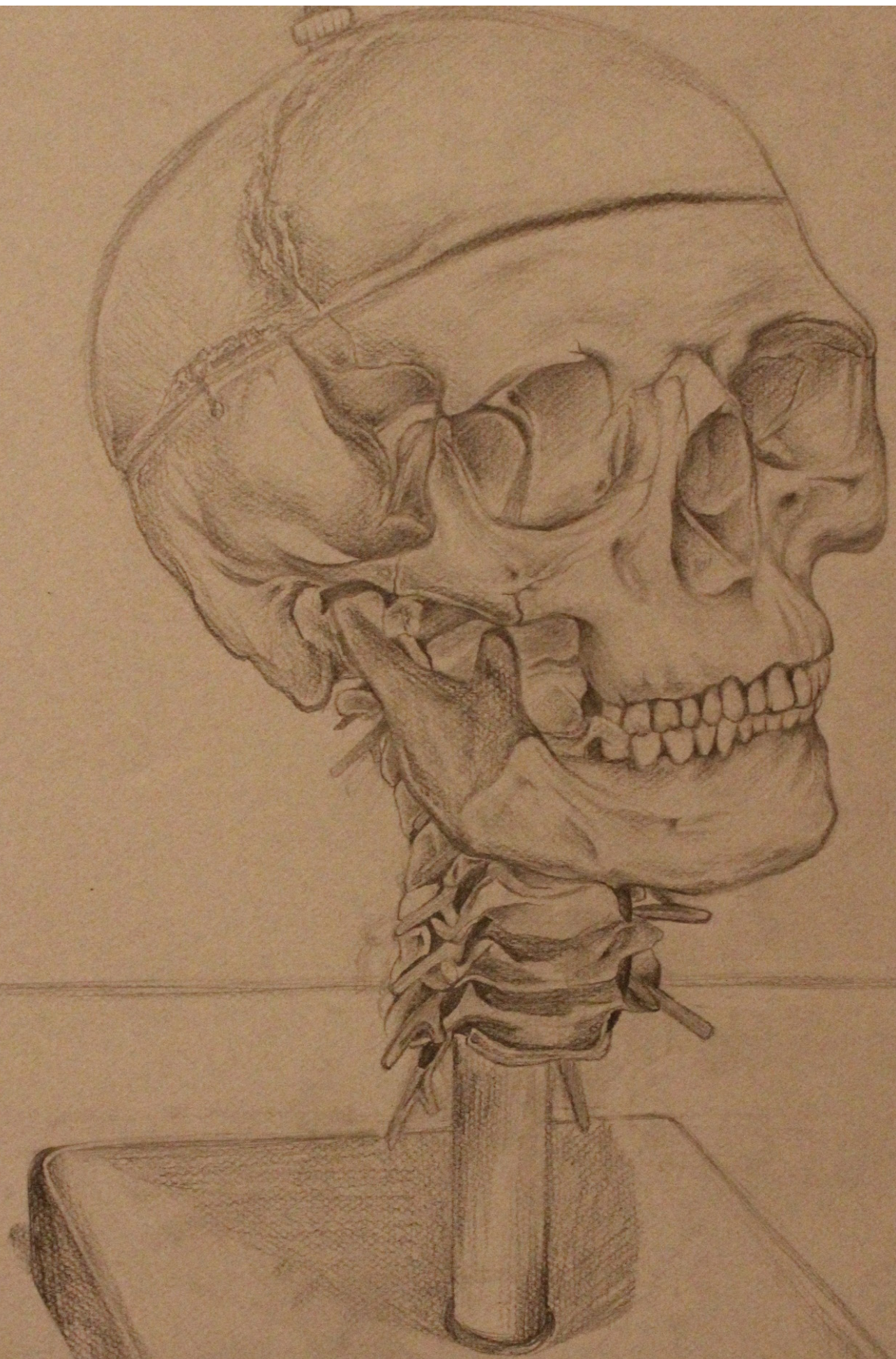
Against evil I once did act
But only when it fell
And to my one courageous deed
I bid a last farewell



Late at night, the moon wears
red lipstick and peeps
in my window. I lie dreaming
of a black cloak slumbering
on my floor. Sheet white bones
caress curved hips,
sockets lock with mine.

Sleeping with the Reaper

Stephanie Yun



The Skull / Kimberly Martin
DRAWING

A Shadowed Land

Brenna Jones

The mountains raise their grey-crowned heads to the northern sky
Above the narrow valleys, where watchful eagles fly
The clouds gather above them, warning of coming storm
A shadow lies over this land, where legends once were born

These northern skies were cloudless once, were clear and bright and fair
And mountain peaks they glimmered, like glass in the morning air
Yet winds of time blow swiftly, their course no man can stay
And all our peace is gone and fled, forever and a day



My Road

Brenna Jones

The world is fair, and passing free
That lies before my feet
The world's words are too much with me
I find them passing sweet

The woods lie dark beneath the moon
A land that time forgot
The path runs on through forest gloom
A land that light knows not

My road lead far o'er yonder hill
Beyond the world of man
It wanders through the fields and rills
I follow as I can

My journey leads me through this world
And to the one beyond
The voices whisper in my ear
But still I carry on

I carry on through storms and tears
I carry on through pain
While hoping still, for all my fears
To find the sun again

La Rue des Rêves (The Street of Dreams)

E.H. (Ellen) Locke

I walked with you along the Street of Dreams.
We went where jeweled shadows softly led,
and all the while dim alcoves seemed
to whirl inviting whispers 'round our heads.

Swept through the night on vapors cool and clear,
we wandered down ethereal alleys lit
by stars and hopes that dreamers hold so dear,
until we saw the nightshade lift, and for a moment

waking morning sun passed waning moon,
aware that they could never stop to greet the day
as one (like star-crossed lovers, doomed).
Then reality invaded restless sleep,

reminding me that you
(so young, unmoved) had tarried far too long,
and I (once wise) passed through a door to view
dream worlds where foolish hearts do not belong.





Masquerading as a Poet

E.H. (Ellen) Locke

I long to write a poem profound and sophisticated,
sculpting wordscapes with rich phrases
spread thickly, like oil paint, across the paper,
drawing dimensional pictures with oblique language
that creates concrete images.

But the prosaic simplicity of my existence
makes me fear I would become like a little girl
sneaking to the attic to dress up in mommy's old clothes
and, discovered, want to hide my face,
feeling small and somewhat foolish.

An Apology | Catie Godbold

My love, even if we take our lives,
we will wake back up
in a different place and time,
going by a different name,
but having the same damned souls.

Beings like us,
made of bruised bodies,
bloodied knuckles,
and red-rimmed eyes,
hold on to a sense of purpose
barring us from final cease.

Until we lose our fight,
our silly ideals and our righteous anger,
we'll just keep waking up to a different battle
(one with a spin on the same idea:
 a crying Earth
 hollow corpses and
 broken, bleeding hearts)
forced to wade through the losses
back to one another.

Warriors like us do not quit at forty years,
a century, or a millennia.
Our humanity keeps going even when we just want to
stop.
If I put a bullet in my brain,
I will wake up and see you again
undeservedly so.

None of our actions warranted this reward.

I do not know if I will kiss your bloodied knuckles,
or punch you myself.
I may not recognize you,
may hate you,
maybe even still love you,
but I know fighters like us,
we always return to the battlefield
where we will meet again.

God has never been lacking in disciples,
conquistadors eager to please.
Why do we do this to ourselves?
To live fighting concepts,
what fools we are.

Over the years, we have drawn up our weapons
 a sword and shield
 gun and powder
 pen and paper
 fists, words,
 ideals
only to swear never again,
always that we *cannot*
please no more.

Yet, we always do and
there is always more and,
my love,
I am sorry.

I can only give you the truth,
and you deserved so much more.

If it is any consolation,
one day, we will not wake up at all.
One day, you will have your day of rest.

Even though He does not give it to you,
please know I would
 (and I am sorry).
You deserved better.

Nighttime Patriotism

Catie Godbold

Clothes off and back in her bunk,
date-night's done.
Reminders linger: the itch of lace leggings,
the redness of beard burn.
Earning MRS degrees takes dedication.
The soul-crushing lessons taught by privileged professors
make students veterans of war.

Her tired limbs hide beneath linen sheets.
Knees drawn up toward the ceiling; feet planted.
A soldier's stance for someone eager to be free
of the work day's pencil skirt and expectations.
The days may be long,
but the nights are longer, a secret reprieve.

Fallen curls and lingering eye wings,
she stays pretty for her own private banquet,
one where she determines the rules,
the standards,
the steps.

In her bedroom, she grants liberty to all her people.

A true patriot, a sister of democracy.
At night, her plans for a better world formulate.
Good nationalists lie back and think:
country matters.

A true patriot, a sister of democracy.
She dreams of dripping red wine, open-mouthed kisses,
the prevented 1984,
secrets shared between sisters working the same firm by day.

Their safe escape: drunken daydreams
or a secluded night.
(Stacked summer magazines, soft curves,
glossed cherry lips —)
Gentle gasps and button pressed,
she creates love and conquers fear.
Possession of the self denied by day
reclaimed by night.





Untitled

E.H. (Ellen) Locke

Sunset stains the sky
Orange smudges now yielding
To night's insistence



Sunset Steam/ Logan Allen
PHOTOGRAPHY



Center of Attention / Logan Allen
PHOTOGRAPHY

PROSE



Soap in a Porce

Madeline hated soap. She never used the stuff. She dropped gobs of toothpaste onto her arms and scrubbed until the skin was raw. She mixed baking soda with water and sloshed it across her legs. It burned scars around her knees.

She smelled strange, like a janitor's mop bucket. Every morning, she doused herself with fruity perfume, but it always faded during the walk to school. Instead of smelling like strawberries, Madeline smelled of sweat and dust from the dirt road—like a muddy lake.

The boys teased her. They picked at Madeline's frizzy hair and said she had lice. They wiped their hands on their jeans after passing her assignments forward.

Madeline hated them. A teacher scolded her once for saying it out loud. A blond boy with big ears strung a car freshener around her neck. She ripped it away and slung it in his face.

"I hate you!"

"Now, Maddie," the teacher said, even though the name Maddie made her skin crawl. "*Hate* is a strong word. You don't really hate Jeremy for playing a little joke."

"But I do." Madeline picked up her notebook

and stuffed it in her backpack. "And I hate you, too."

She was already out the door before the teacher ordered her to the principal's office, the woman's shrill voice crackling down the hallway. Madeline towed her backpack like a flight passenger lugging a heavy carryon. The hall was empty except a sixth grader bearing his restroom pass like a green card. Madeline passed the front office and strode toward the principal's door, not knocking before going inside. She flipped her frizzy hair, dropped her bag in the floor, and plopped down in the chair opposite the principal's desk.

The principal turned slowly from her computer. She eyed Madeline like a beta fish staring out of a tank before situating herself—body turned to face the student, elbows tucked in, fingers laced on top of her desk. The stringy muscles in her arms contracted beneath her paper-skin, and her tightly pinned hair stretched her eyes toward the tops of her ears. "Madeline, you've been causing trouble for months, and it can't continue."

"I'm not causing trouble. They're picking on me."

"Who is?"

Madeline crossed her arms over her flat chest. "The boys. They call me 'Stinky Maddie'."

Victoria Griffin

The principal pressed her sharp shoulders back. “Well, Madeline, maybe if you—showered—more frequently.”

“I do shower. I don’t use soap.”

The principal’s eyebrows bowed up like a warped two-by-four. “You don’t use soap?”

Madeline shook her head.

“What does your mother have to say about that?”

She shrugged.

“Now you don’t want to talk. All right, go sit in in-school suspension.”

She hauled her backpack over her shoulders, tugging her hair from the straps. “Don’t call my mom. Please.”

“I have to, Madeline. You know that.”

The principal saw the fluorescent lights reflected in Madeline’s dewy eyes before the girl turned away.

#

There was no clock in the suspension room. Phones weren’t allowed, and Madeline didn’t wear a watch. Each second stretched into three like putty. The teacher behind the metal desk was an old man with a white beard and a wheezing cough. He always looked

a moment from sleep—the kids called him Sandman. He should have retired years ago, but something about teaching hateful twelve year olds appealed to him. Madeline thought he must have a terrible wife, a woman who yelled when he came inside and pulled him around the house by his beard. He must have a good reason to be here, rather than home.

Madeline chewed on her eraser. A science textbook was open in front of her, but she didn’t read the words or study the diagrams. She watched the pages like a movie reel showing her life, seven years past. Madeline remembered too well. She replayed everything in her mind like a DVD recording. She remembered her mother wearing an artist’s hat to hide her bald head, but she couldn’t hide the bare brow bones above her eyes. They made her look sinister. She was in the bathroom—the downstairs one that flooded last spring. The baseboards were not yet ruined, and the paint low on the walls was still smooth and even. She held a bar of soap in her twiggy fingers, held it in front of her and—

“Madeline. Your mom’s here.”

She snapped her book closed and gawked at the Sandman standing over her, his white beard dripping onto her desk. As she cocked her head to the side, her frizzy hair sprung up like a jack-in-the-box. “I don’t want to see her.”

The old man’s eyes glazed like honey over a warm stove. He shrugged his bony shoulders and returned to his place at the front of the room, settling

his hips in the desk chair and studying the back of his wrinkled hand.

Madeline tossed her textbook in her backpack. The corner of the book poked through a tear in the canvas. As she passed the rows of desks, a boy pretended to flick bugs from her shirt, and a girl wrinkled her nose. Madeline crept down the hall until she saw her mother around the bend. She was sitting on the bench outside the principal's office, her thin frame like the skeleton in the biology lab. She wore a beanie, despite the temperature being well above eighty, and Madeline could make out the blush she had powdered on her cheeks

to make herself look less pallid. To make herself look like she wasn't dying.

Madeline backpedaled out of sight and pressed her spine against the cinderblock wall. She covered her eyes with her palms, then smoothed her red hair against the base of neck, breathing slowly from deep in her stomach.

Sunlight streamed through the exit to her right. She stepped away from the wall and looked both ways down the empty hallway before raising her fingers to the door. As she pushed it open, she read the words on the glass pane: *Fire exit. Alarm will sound.*

Lights flashed in the hallway behind her, and the alarm screeched loud enough to fill the Grand Canyon. By the time the classrooms were emptied,

Madeline was on the other side of the parking lot. By the time the students, the teachers, and her mother had evacuated the building, and stood watching the windows for flames, Madeline was over the chain-link fence and hidden within the thick trees separating the school from the outside world.

She set a path on an old gravel road her mother would never turn down and started walking.

Madeline wanted to see her dad—it was only a thirty-minute walk—but that was the first place her

mother would look. Madeline had worn the path from the gate to his gravestone to the soil, and she had scoured the entire hill

for wild flowers. It was a family cemetery. The hillside kept the corpses of three generations. Madeline would be buried there someday, right near her father.

Her mother would not.

She had decided years ago to be cremated and to have her ashes destroyed. *It'll be just like I never walked the earth. Isn't that beautiful?*

Madeline thought it was sick, but her mother was sick so she guessed it worked out all right. She couldn't help wondering what might have happened if her daddy had survived, if his motorcycle hadn't skidded on that gravel, if he had been there the day she was born.

She ducked into the trees to her right and sat down at the base of a large trunk. The thick roots

“The hillside kept the corpses of three generations. Madeline would be buried there someday, right near her father. Her mother would not.”

cradled her legs, and the grass scratched at her tattered skin, the scars around her kneecaps. She had heard about hot springs high in the mountains, with natural minerals that would make a person clean as a dish right out of the sink. She would go there, if she ever got away from her mother. She would give anything to feel clean again, instead of like her skin was a potato peel that needed to be sliced off.

But every time she looked at soap she thought of her mother holding that white bar in front of her. She thought of her mother's bloodshot eyes, her nostrils flaring wide open like caverns. And she was speaking fast and high-pitched, like the day she'd come home to tell Madeline about ovarian cancer and that she was going to die. Her voice sounded like a mouse caught in a trap. *Look here, Maddie, look at this here soap. It's gonna fix me, fix me right up. I been so bad. I been so damn bad, talking about death and dying and throwing around words a damn kid shouldn't be hearing. And ah, shit. I mean—I'm sorry, Maddie. I'm sorry, I can't keep myself straight. I always hated when your daddy cussed. Did I tell you that? I made him suck on soap once, like my momma did me. I made him hold it in his mouth for a good minute, and then he didn't cuss no more, not that day! If I just swallow it, if I just get it down in my belly, I'll be all better. It'll clean out my insides, the badness, and then the cancer won't have nothing to live on. You just look here, Maddie.*

She could still hear her mother's whiny voice

and see that goddamn too-white bar of soap pinched between her fingers like a cucumber sandwich. She could still feel the knot in her stomach tighter than her shoelaces. She remembered thinking about her sixth birthday party the next day and wondering if her mother would scare away her friends.

The sun was beginning to sink, as though weighted with chains. It fell out of sight, and a breeze wound through the shadowy trees, raising the thin hairs on Madeline's arms. But she couldn't go back to that house. She wouldn't.

Her mother's mother said once that Madeline's daddy was a mean man, that her daughter shouldn't have married someone so wild—*he was buck wild, girl*. Madeline stood up, pressing her tailbone to the tree trunk behind her, and wrapped it in a backward hug. She sucked in the cool air and let her gaze fog over. The shadows of the dusk-laden forest became a canvas streaked with black and gray paint, a harmless finger-painting. If she could let her gaze fog over on her life, maybe she could see it like these branches and shadows. Maybe her mother would be a poor, sick woman, and her teacher would be a textbook and a whiteboard. Maybe her pain would become dull as the roots beneath her feet, and her memories would blur beyond recognition. Maybe she would be able to use soap again.

Suddenly the memory was vivid like a theater screen. It was so sharp it sliced her. She could feel her second skin bleeding raw, the one hidden beneath

layers of grime and potato-peel flesh. Madeline sank down in the grass, away from the tree, aware of its bulk looming a few feet away. She wrapped herself up in the grass and sticks and dirt, and she tried not to see it, not to hear it, not to remember it.

But there it was. Clear, as though her fogged over memory had been cleaned with wiper blades. As though it had been heated from the inside. As though it had been washed with soap.

Her mother sat on the edge of the bathtub, the white of the porcelain matching the bar of soap in her hand. Madeline sat cross-legged on the rug. Usually her mother would have scolded her—*don't sit down in the bathroom!*—but her mother couldn't chide her with soap in her mouth.

If I just swallow it—

Madeline watched with eyes like saucers as her mother pressed the soap behind her teeth.

—if I just get it down in my belly—

Her mother's throat bulged and constricted as she tried to swallow. Madeline could see the bar of soap stuck in the back of her mother's throat.

—I'll be all better.

Her mother fought like a snake swallowing a mouse. She wheezed and rasped, urging the soap to slip down her throat, into her stomach. Urging it to make her well so her daughter would not have to watch her die.

The soap clung to her tongue, and her mother's face turned nearly transparent, then blue-gray like

mold. Her skinny arms flung toward the ceiling, and her bare feet kicked away from the tub, nearly striking Madeline. The little girl hopped up from the rug and backed away, pressing her back against the vanity cabinets.

Her mother tipped—like the game Madeline played with near-empty coke cans. Drink it down almost to the bottom, then balance the can on its corner, and it looks like it's floating. Drink it *almost* down. Don't finish it off. *An empty can won't do nothing but—*

Fall.

Her mother sprawled backward, her arms and legs stretching up like an insect on its back. Madeline heard a crack, and her mother's frail body was still and crinkled. Her hat was flat in the bottom of the tub, and her body fell over the side like a ribbon laid across a pot.

Madeline screamed, "Mommy!" She inched toward the tub where her mother lay still and quiet, and she saw red streaks creeping over the wall of the tub like veins.

Madeline backed into the corner, between the toilet and the wall. She crammed herself into the space like dough in a jar and tucked her chin between her knees. She didn't shake or cry. She just piled herself in the empty space, stared at the blackness of her eyelids, and thought about the fact that her mother had died earlier than she had said.

But she didn't die, Madeline thought as she lay

on the forest floor, the dusk settling into night.

Madeline's first grade teacher worried when she didn't come to school. He worried more when no one answered at home, since he knew her mother was sick. If the ambulance had arrived five minutes later, her mother would have died in the bathtub. She wouldn't have endured another seven years of chemotherapy. She wouldn't have spent three years in a psychiatric hospital, and Madeline would still be living with her Aunt Janey. Why did they take her away? Her mother hadn't earned her. She didn't deserve her.

Madeline had called her aunt a month ago.

Take me back, Janey. Please, take me back.

Your mother has custody, baby. She's gotten her life together. She's stable.

She's not.

Maybe you can come visit, over summer.

Madeline scratched her dirty arms. It was cold, and bugs chewed at her skin. She walked out to the road and filled her fists with gravel. She squeezed until her palms bled.

She walked to her mother's house and stood in the yard. The light was on in the bathroom. Her mother was in the tub, washing her fragile skin with a bar of white soap. Madeline curled up in the corner of the garage. In her half-sleep, she dreamed of hot springs. Then she dreamed her mother started the car with the door closed, and the fumes killed them both.

###

The Red Door

Vicki Japha

“So, I found this door. It’s red, don’t really know if that makes a difference, but it’s a door I found,” Tom whispered to his friend at the local coffee shop.

“Why the hell are you whispering, it’s a freakin’ door. Big deal, man.”

“No, you don’t understand, it’s a complete door I found. It’s not attached to anything, it’s just a red door,” Tom twisted.

“I’m not seeing the problem. It’s an old junk door, throw it out, call the garbage people and have them pick it up on like big items day or something.”

“You aren’t listening to me,” Tom stroked his balding head impatiently, “This is a legit door, standing, red and not attached to anything.”

“I feel like I understand every word coming out of your mouth, but you aren’t making any sense.”

“How hard is this,” exhausted Tom in between clinched breaths, “I went outside to pitter patter around in my garden a couple days ago, I pulled back a curtain of vines to reveal a big red door, upright, with nothing in front or behind it,”

“Pitter, patter? Did we suddenly turn into our friendly neighborhood grandma? I’ll take some sweet butter biscuits, Ma’am.”

“STOP!” Tom stood abruptly shuddering every ear in the coffee shop with the loud, sudden screech of the metal chair pounding against the tile floor. “This is serious, I need to know if I should open the door,” he

announced embarrassed and agitated.

“Ok man, sorry, calm down. Why wouldn’t you open the door?”

Tom sat, “...because I have a family, two kids and a wife. What if the door leads to a place I hate and can’t get back from or worse a place I love and don’t want to come back from?”

“Again, I have to say, not to upset, but this is real life, random doors don’t trap people in fairy tale lands of good and evil. Who am I kidding, doors don’t take people anywhere but into a room or a building.”

“I can’t explain it, but I think this one is different,” Tom announced frankly staring melancholic into thin air. “When or if I open this door, I need to already have an answer as to if I will walk through. That’s why I called you here. I need your help.”

“I don’t know if I can help you. I just can’t escape the simple fact that this is not a real thing. This door is just a door. When you open it you will just walk through it and be in your garden still.”

“You haven’t been near the door, you haven’t felt what I felt. It expels heat like it’s breathing. The paint almost pants as it inhales,” Tom exhaled shakily. “Please, help me.”

“I can’t, man. This isn’t real.”

“It is real, dammit!!” Tom pounded the table, “It’s as real as you are to me.”

"It's not real."

"Doctor, do you think my husband will ever come out of this?"

"I honestly can't say, Mrs. Miller. If I just had more information. Was anyone in his family mentally unstable? Does he have a history of "disappearing" for hours or days inside his head? Did he come into contact with anything toxic within the last forty-eight hours?"

"I don't know."

"We will keep a close eye on him here, he is in good hands at Saint Mary's, I promise. A nurse will call you with any changes as soon as they occur."

"I'm going to tell you one more time," Tom whistled unearthly calm, "this is real, now tell me what to do."

"Alright, fine, just relax. What are the pros and cons?"

Tom closed his eyes, "I will never see my wife and kids again."

"Is that a bad thing?"

"I don't...know," Tom pondered while rubbing his eyelids. "Jodi has been a real bitch lately, always going on about her job. You know she got promoted to vice-president of sales, but its still just selling vacuum cleaners. And the kids; Tommy Jr. was adorable in his school play as the little flower that could and Sarah is always a bubble of delight when she's sleeping. They both conspired to set the dog on fire last week. So I've definitely created a couple of Hellions there. Life, what...is...life? I'm a stay at home dad with two devil children and a narcissistic wife."

"So it's not a bad thing to never see them again?"

"I didn't say that," Tom shouted breathless, "they are my life, they are all I have in the world. And...they do care about me, that's something...I can't...I don't want to think about them. Just give me an answer."

"Aren't they your answer? If they are your life then why would you leave them?"

"It's the door, it sings to me at night...all the possibilities that lurk inside." Tom smiled, his first smile in a long time, it almost tore his skin. "I can imagine riding on clouds, a blue sky so blue it stings my eyes, animals that talk, grass that sings me to sleep as I lay upon it for rest...how do you not see it too? These things have to be real, don't they? Don't we all need them to be real...to hope in a world where magic exists and everything is right? I need this to be real...to make my life bearable."

"I don't see it."

"How? How, can you not see it?"

"I don't see it."

"How? Just give me an answer!!"

"I don't have an answer."

"Give it to me, GIVE IT TO ME!!! Give it to me or I will slit your throat with this spoon."

"I can't"

"Give ME now!!"

"FINE!! Open the Door!! Just Open the Door and walk through!!"

"Mrs. Miller, your husband was lucid for a few minutes this afternoon."

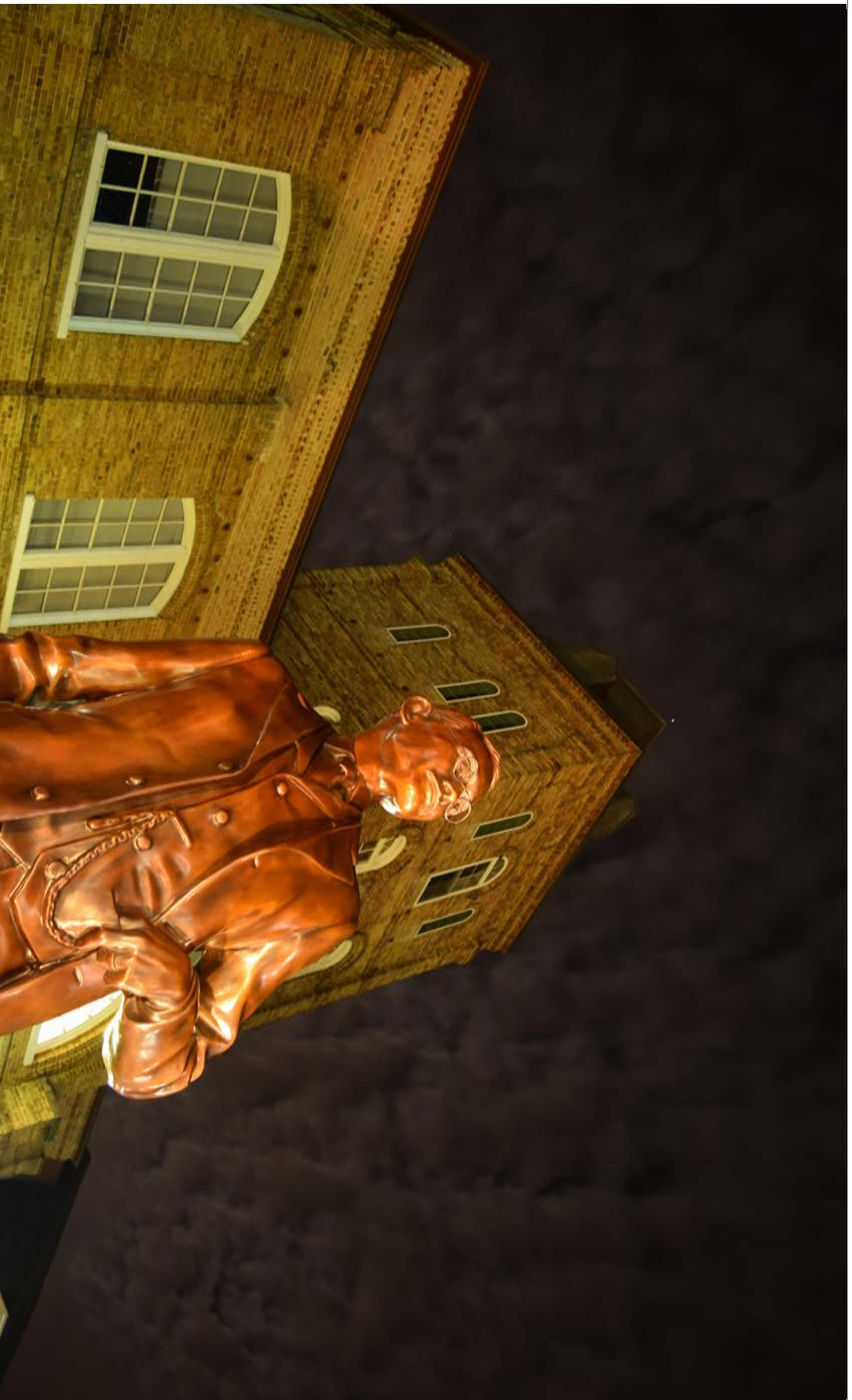
"That's great news, Nurse. Is he going to pull through this?"

"I can't say."

"Well, can you at least tell me what he said in his lucid moment?"

"Of course, Mrs. Miller, he said, "Damn, a place I hate."

THE END



J.A.'s Finest / Logan Allen
PHOTOGRAPHY

I'll Remember

Anna Marie Vagnozzi

I stepped onto the beautiful red brick pathways on campus and I just knew. From my first day of classes at Campbell, I was certain that I just knew exactly how the next two years would play out. I knew that when I graduated and looked back on my college experience, I'd remember all of my accomplishments. I had a plan, after all. I'd work diligently and I'd ace my classes. I'd get super involved on campus and meet a ton of people and impress my teachers. I'd be a successful student.

Oh, I was so certain I knew.

A year and a half later, I'm so happy to say I was wrong about the memories. Now, don't get me wrong – there's still that test grade I'm proud of, that challenging class I somehow managed to make an A in, that semester of holding up my GPA when it seemed like the entire world was crashing down around me. But there is so much more to the college life, this life we all share for a few short years of our existence.

Like the moments.

I'll remember the hug I got from my roommate when we saw each other after a long summer.

I'll remember the time I sat with my residence hall staff in the floor of our RD's apartment eating brownies out of the pan with spoons after a really stressful Monday.

I'll remember walking to the library and being hit with this unexpected onslaught of emotion as I saw, really saw, just how beautiful our little campus is.

I'll remember a kiss on the cheek in the moonlight from the person that told me that I was strong...strong enough to move on. Eventually I realized that I was.

I'll remember the friendly staff in Marshbanks that I learned to know by name, the ones I could always count on to brighten my day.

I'll remember meeting a professor who completely rocked my world with her kindness and awesomeness, and how she's been one of the best mentors I've ever had. I'll remember the way a conversation struck up by a stranger turned into one of the most beautiful friendships I've ever experienced.

I'll remember the deep discussions about life that lasted until 3 a.m.

I'll remember laughing uncontrollably until my sides

ached. It was a good ache.

I'll remember sinking to my knees in prayer, and somehow feeling closer to God there on the ground than I had in months.

I'll remember meeting people who were just as excited about math as I was. The conversations people must have overheard between us probably made us sound like complete nerds. But we were okay with that.

I'll remember the football games where we cheered so loud that we were hoarse the next day.

I'll remember coffee shop conversations and inside jokes.

I'll remember how it felt to discover the things I'm passionate about.

I'll remember the advice I received from my advisor as I struggled over changing my major. He said that whatever I decided, I should listen to God's calling and follow my heart. I did.

I'll remember the way we laughed, we cried, we saw, we felt.

I'll remember being surrounded by so much love...so much love.

I'll remember the moments. Because after all, isn't that what this life is? It's a series of precious, invaluable moments that we have the privilege of experiencing every single day. It's about recognizing the beauty in every single one of those moments.

That is what I'll remember.

But most of all, I'll remember the day I stood on the edge of campus, watching the sun set over the Aca-

demic Circle, and I realized something, in one of the most profound moments of all: My college experience was absolutely nothing like I'd expected...yet it was everything I'd ever dreamed it to be.

Skin Cancer

Noah Merkouso

Oh, how pleasant is that smile!

She could put up that smile for anyone at anytime and it was the exact smile she gave him when he ran up from behind her and introduced himself. “Hey, parlez-vous français?” he said knowing she would understand him after seeing her speak to the french professor. “Oui” she stumbled. He said, “I saw you talking to the foreign language chair and was wondering if you’ll be taking French?” She replied, “I’m considering it.” There it was! Her eyes squinted and her cheeks rose to calm his nerves after an unprecedented exertion of himself. “Well I hope you do. I plan on on trying to fit it into my schedule” he assured her. “Yeah, my schedule is quite full as it is, but I do eventually want to take French” she replied. She then politely let him know that she had to get back to her dorm, but didn't leave without giving him her number.

It was just him, her, and Dr. Wheegar sitting in a small office cluttered with small stacks of paper and lined with old books about French language and Aristotle. Wheegar was an old man who had taught French for some sixty odd years and had recently undergone skin surgery on the top of his balding head. He currently had a large bandage where cancerous skin used to be. Encircling the cloth was a red soreness from the cancer. To avoid contact with the sun, he would walk

around campus with a fedora lightly placed on his head. “Had we completed chapter six last friday?” he asked his two pupils who were sat across from him. Just as he didn’t realize if the chapter had been finished, he had not noticed that his only two students were three and five minutes late for class and quite unusually disheveled. Her hair was knotted in small bunches and he was wearing the same outfit as the day before. Each of their faces held a similar hue of red that anchored their thoughts on the previous night. She was only coming over to study and he had similar intentions, yet each wanted a certain intimacy beyond exchanging notes. After eating a meal he prepared and only getting halfway through the homework, the idea of watching a French film was tempting beyond what each of them understood. Having settled comfortably on his bed and having begun watching *Tu Sera Ma Copine*, their limbs grew acquainted with one another. He, as he thought what he believed to be a personally unique thought, despite its recurrence with each woman he would be with, considered the peculiarity of having a woman in his apartment, on his bed, under his sheets, in his arms. He loved the feeling of surrounding her.

Before the movie was finished, each were asleep and still entwined. When light was cast on the white sheets and their unruly hair, they both awoke a couple of

hours before French class. Having grown accustomed to each other's warmth, neither was prepared to get up. The small amounts of skin that were touching were not satisfactory. Slowly, a slight friction between each of them began and limbs sought to feel more of the other. Eventually, clothes were removed. Lips kissed at skin until finding another pair. Gradually, the motions became swifter and the gravity between the two increased. Tongues danced within their mouths and each head was filled with a heat that caused their cheeks to blush. She pushed her way on top of him, removed the cloth cover-

ing each of them,

and took him inside of her with a powerful, yet

gentle force. She loved the feeling of surrounding him. Their tardiness to class was lost to the professor, but not to his pupils. For the next hour, each of their thoughts were focused on what precipitated just minutes before coming in. The red of their cheeks had not left their faces just as the red sore from Dr. Wheegar's operation was peeking out from under the bandage. Although each pupil was not paying attention to the lesson and instead upon the friction of sheets and skin, their thoughts could not have been more dissimilar.

After class was finished, the two rosy cheeked students left the tiny office and made their way outside. He, walking behind her, was encompassed in a haze of crimson. Attempting to delve deeper into the red mist, he asked if he could make her breakfast. "I make a lovely blueberry oatmeal" he assured her. Her face lost its color and she stumbled to pronounce her thoughts

on hot cereal. It was less about fruity oats and more about the unfortunate circumstance of clearing the smoke from her suitor's sanguine eyes.

During his last moments of thinking about the many bowls of cereal he could share with her, Dr. Wheegar mosied by them heading to his next class with his fedora covering his sensitive scalp. Just before he could attempt to persuade her to have another meal with him, she resolved to remove any romantic intentions from her enamoured companion. She said, "I'm sorry for confusing you this morning. My hormones have

been all over the place and I've seemed to have lost control. I don't mean to

hurt you, but I just want to be friends." There it was!

Her eyes squinted and her colorless cheeks rose to remove the red from his face. She could put up that smile for anyone at anytime and it was the exact smile she gave him when she broke his heart. Oh, how pleasant is that smile!

Her eyes squinted and her colorless cheeks rose to remove the red from his face.





Tennessee Trufula/ Lori Minor
PHOTOGRAPHY

Mushrooms

Stephanie Bailey

I loathed the grocery store.

First of all, I hated being cold, and once you hit the deli meat section, there's really no recovering for the rest of the shopping trip.

Second, I never remembered where anything was located. The only thing I consistently shopped for was cheap candy to smuggle into movie theaters. The concept of finding "Uncle Ben's Rice, brown" was about as familiar to me as peeing standing up: it was conceivably possible for some people, and I had definitely seen it done, but the execution? Impossible for me.

And third, it meant I probably had to see Daniel. But when Mom—grading test papers with one hand and soothing a sobbing four-year-old with the other—asked me to run to Lowes Foods, it wasn't like I could reasonably say No.

"What do you need?" I asked, trying not to sound like the martyr I felt.

"Um." Mom frowned and circled a student's answer with an irritated swoop of her red pen. "Hotdog stuff."

"Hotdogs, buns, chili...?"

"Just the buns and chili. And ketchup. We might need milk. Can you check?" She switched her attention to my inconsolable sister and started a discussion on "That's Why We Don't Try To Jump From the Bed to the Desk."

I checked the fridge. We did, in fact, need milk.

By the time I reached the frigid milk section, the cold had thoroughly seeped into my bones. I then proceeded to scan the shelf for 1 percent, a process that took one solid, embarrassing minute. A middle-aged woman in Mom Jeans strode past me and threw me a smug look that screamed "I May Not Have a Career, a Sense of Humor, or Pants That Fit Me, But By God I Can Grocery Shop."

I clung grimly to a sole, redeeming reality: I had not seen Daniel yet. (I ignored the fact that he usually worked the checkout.)

"Okay. Chili," I mumbled. "Find the chili and you're more than half way done."

As I turned down the next aisle, my eyes slid past the display of eggs and I felt the corners of my mouth tug upward.

"Why don't you make an egg? That's good protein."

I sat on Daniel's couch, legs curled underneath me, and watched him scramble to shove binders and pens and loose sheets of paper into his backpack. "You have to eat something. You don't want your stomach roaring in the middle of your speech."

"I hate scrambled eggs and you know it." He cut me a shining blue-eyed look, all mischief and affection, even when running late for the debate tournament. "They don't have to be scrambled," I said. "You like hardboiled."

"That takes fifteen minutes I don't have!" He glanced around wildly, tossing his brown hair in and out of

his eyes. It was getting too long. “Where are my dress shoes?”

“I’ve been wondering if you can make hardboiled eggs in the microwave.”

Daniel looked at me. “That... sounds like a terrible idea.” I smiled. He grinned. “Okay fine. I’ll find my dress shoes, you experiment with the egg. Just don’t blow it up.”

We went our separate ways. My way included putting an egg in a bowl of water in the microwave and setting the timer for eight minutes. You boiled an egg for fifteen minutes; the microwave was like twice as fast, right?

POW!

Seven minutes later, the microwave door exploded open, spewing smelly chunks of yellow and white egg flesh all over the door, floor, and wall. My heart stopped. I stared. I heard Daniel run up behind me. “Wh—” He saw. He smelled. And then he laughed. “Okay seriously? When we get married, you’re not allowed in the kitchen.”

I found the chili in record time and headed for the bread aisle. As I passed, I glanced down the candy aisle, considering a bag of Twix as a reward for being such an excellent daughter. The colors and shapes and textures of the aisle screamed with tiny enticing voices. I watched as a woman speed-walked down the aisle, a look of premature impatience on her face as her little boy began his begging spiel.

“Mom, please, just like one thing,” he said, directing all his bouncy energy to a bright box of candy.

“Ohhhh, Mom, have you ever had Gobstoppers?”

Mom, they’re so good. Mom, it’s only a dollar—”

Daniel leaned against his locker, eating Gobstoppers and waiting while I switched out my books.

“So basically, there’s no way I can rewrite the paper in time,” I said, slamming my locker door. “And it isn’t even my fault. But will Mrs. Matthews care about that? No, she won’t. And therefore, my life is ruin—”

I looked at Daniel’s face and blinked before bursting into laughter. He looked like a Dr. Seuss Who: he had a Gobstopper stuck under his top lip, between his lip and his teeth. He grinned.

“Oh, ouch,” he said, panic suddenly registering in his eyes. “OUCH.”

“What?” I managed through my laughter.

“OW. I can’t stop smiling—”

His grin pressed the Gobstopper painfully into his gums, which struck him as sort of funny and made him laugh—channeling even more tension into the

candy and even more pain into his gums. He swore, but he still looked like a Who, and I couldn’t stop laughing, which made him laugh too, which made the Gobstopper all the more painfully lodged...

I couldn’t help but smile for a moment at the memory. But that faded. It was a long time ago.

I found hotdog buns with no trouble.

As I approached the check-out line, I lied to myself. I told myself that Daniel probably wasn’t even

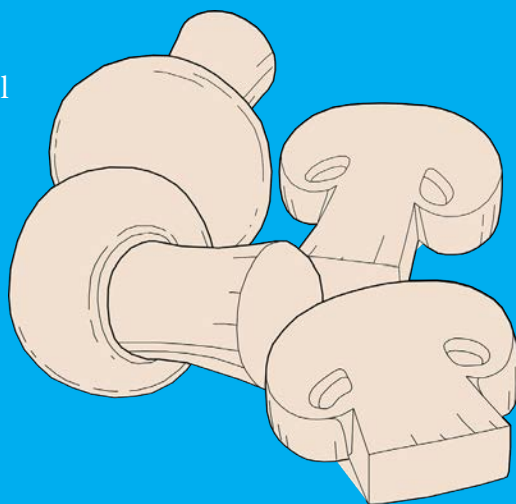
working tonight. I told myself maybe he didn’t even work at Lowes Foods at all anymore. Maybe he was moving up in the world. Maybe he’d gotten a better job, or was really focusing on college. He was definitely still going to college. The expulsion rumors were definitely just rumors. He was definitely not caught with—

“Mushrooms!” A woman behind me exclaimed. A startled jolt, like cold water, crashed over me. “Knew I forgot something.” Without thinking, I glared at the woman over my shoulder. She threw me a look of polite sheepishness, but was already heading for the Mushroom Aisle—wherever that was.

I scanned the cash register signs. Only one was lit up. But it definitely wouldn’t be Daniel’s.

Except that it was.

Seeing him felt like falling out of an airplane without a parachute: there was the adrenaline; there was the regret; there was the anticipation of pain. There was some beauty, but of a stressful, strained, desperate nature. He’d been a good-looking guy—okay, he’d been a great looking guy—and he’d been mine. His shoulders had projected confidence; his eyes had spoken mischief. Every part of him had meant something. There had been infinite substance to his soul. But now. Hollow. He just looked hollow. Hollow cheeks, hollow torso—hollow soul. He smiled at the customer in front of me. His lips curled upward and a dull suggestion of a spark lit up somewhere behind his eyes. To a stranger, it probably looked real. To me, it was like something out of a horror movie. There was an impression of possession radiating from him.



He was possessed—and not by himself. Something contracted inside my chest. I looked away. Self-possessed. I had first heard the phrase in tenth grade, in reference to Daniel.

Mr. Eaton, the debate teacher, shook his head, a wry half-smile on his lips. “Does everyone else get that?”

Daniel had no idea what to say to Jessica.” Mr. Eaton pulled his lips down and shrugged. “No clue.” He pointed a finger across the classroom at Jessica and gave her a solid nod, eyebrows raised. “And well done, by the way. Excellent cross-examination questions. But Daniel.” He laughed. “Well done. You kept your composure, you used what you

knew, you answered authoritatively and yet said absolutely nothing. During cross-ex, that’s about as much as you can do sometimes. You are one self-possessed kid.”

Self-possessed. That’s what Daniel had been.

His fingers were bony. I watched them curl around a filmy bag of peaches and drop them onto the scanner. He punched in some keys. His chest seemed to rise with effort as he breathed.

“That’ll be \$18.35.” He looked exhausted, like someone had reached inside his caving chest and drawn out the last handful of energy. The exhaustion ran from his dull eyes down his slouched spine to his shuffling feet and straight into the floor. But his voice was the same. Clear and cocky. Self-possessed. His bony fingers reached out and took the customer’s cash. He punched in some keys. He counted some change. He handed the change to the customer. The customer left.

And then it was my turn.

The crack of my basket hitting the counter sent a shock to my stomach.

I swallowed, forced air through my throat, and formed a word: “Hey.” It sounded stilted and harsh. I blinked and his eyes were on me. His eyes used to be blue—the kind of blue that made you want to lean closer and listen—but now they seemed too cloudy to be colorful.

“Oh, hey,” he said. His face registered recognition, but the difficult, overly polite kind reserved for distant relatives at funerals. “How’s it going?”

“Okay,” I said. I felt myself smile with an emptiness that mirrored his own. “I’m just home for fall break.”

“Oh yeah?” He scanned the cans of chili. “Got any

fun plans?” If I didn’t look at him, if I just listened, it was almost okay; he almost didn’t scare me.

“Well, I’m at the grocery store in the middle of it,” I said. “So no.”

Daniel laughed—a snicker, a chuckle, all sarcasm and good-nature knocking against each other. “Well, I am

too,” he pointed out. “So don’t feel too bad.”

“You still at UNCG?”

“Mm...” he murmured noncommittally. I glanced up at him without thinking, and cut my heart on his sharply sunken cheekbones. “Not so much.” The hotdog buns beeped as he passed them expertly

across the scanner. The milk went next.

“Do you...like working here?”

His bony shoulder rose and fell. “It’s all right.” Bony fingers. Cash register keys. “\$10.91.” I gave him eleven dollars and a penny.

“Do you have lots of ‘regulars’?” I asked while he fished around the register for a dime. “I always thought that’d be fun.”

He gave the shadow of a grin, his eyelids barely paying his eyes the courtesy of opening. A flood of nausea washed over me. “Yeah, there are a million regulars,” he said. “I made a bet with someone else who works here about what a person was gonna buy. I was right and won 20 bucks.”

“Nice!” I accepted my dime. “Twenty bucks is a lot to us college kids, right?”

Daniel smirked. That suited him better now than a grin. “Depends on what you wanna buy,” he told me. I didn’t know what to say. I took my grocery bag and the gallon of milk and left as fast as I could without running. I hated being cold.



The Beauty of Nature / Mercedes Torrero
PHOTOGRAPHY



Starry Lantern Night / By Stephanie Yun
PHOTOGRAPHY

The Whale's Song

Jacob Berger

Stephen listened to a recording of a whale singing. He wanted the voice to drown out his life which was filled with the chaotic noises of his brain. He pretended that he was out at sea sinking low like the whale's baritone. But despite his imaginations and the CD blaring at top volume, he could still hear his mother banging on his door. After her fist pounded the door several times, she flew in angrily.

"Stephen, do *not* ignore me like that! I need to talk to you...would you turn that stupid recording off?"

"It's not 'stupid', Mom, it's a gift from Meredith." Even though the mention of Meredith caused him some pain, his voice was lifeless. His mother turned off the stereo and said in a calmer voice,

"I didn't mean that it was stupid, but I do get upset that you spend most of your day listening to that. You need to do other things, like singing.

You love to sing, and if you spent just half the time *actually singing* that you do listening to animals sing, then I think you would be much better off." His mother continued to prattle on about how Stephen should improve his life; Stephen paid little attention.

He reminisced when his older brother, Meredith, gave him this recording of whales. Meredith was offered a research assistant position at Nova South Eastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Meredith planned to study Marine Biology. All his undergraduate professors said he showed a lot promise, and they all praised him for his ability to observe and relate to aquatic creatures.

Fort Lauderdale, FL was a long way from Port San Louis, California, and Stephen, whose favorite pastime was being with his brother, begged Meredith not to go so far away from school. When Meredith insisted that he must go, Stephen was

angry with his brother for the first time in his life. Stephen had not spoken to Meredith for days until Meredith gave him the CD. Stephen could vaguely remember the day.

"Hey!" Said Meredith. "I know you are upset with me, but I can't leave half way across the country with my little brother mad at me can I?" Stephen did not respond. "Come on, Stephen. You've always been my number one fan. You can't bail on me now when I need you the most; I'm pretty scared to move so far away you know." Stephen doubted the last part; Meredith was not afraid of anything. "Well, anyhow, I thought I ought to give you a parting present." Still no response. "Here!" Meredith shoves a wrapped square looking thing in Stephen's hands. Stephen reluctantly opens it and sees a disc that has written on it: "To my favorite person."

"Do you remember the whales I was studying this past summer? These are the recordings of all their songs. I know how much you love music, so I thought it would be the perfect gift. Now if you ever miss me, you can listen to this CD and imagine me out studying whales, or whatever I will be doing at school."

"Oh, Meredith, thank you! I'm sorry to be so melodramatic, but I am going to miss you so much. I don't know what I will do without you. But I'll listen to this all the time; I promise!"

"Don't listen to it all the time. You've got better things to do with your life than just listen to a

CD." Though it was difficult for Stephen to relive any memory with Meredith, those last words echoed vividly in his mind as his mother was coming to a close on her lecture.

"I know you've been going through a really tough time for this past year...we all have. But that does not mean that you should throw away everything that you worked so hard on. You won last spring's California's Talented Musical Youth. Just because Meredith never got to fulfill his potential, doesn't mean that you shouldn't reach yours. Miss Jessica says you can be in the recital this fall. You can resume your lessons with her this summer. You can get your life back in line," his mother sounded so hopeful yet so doubtful like she knew that Stephen had no desire to sing nor get his life in line.

"I'm sorry you're disappointed, Mom, I really am...but I just can't."

"Stop saying, 'I can't!' You are not allowed to ever say that again!" Stephen started to cry silently—practically everything about him now was silent—his mother then let a few unwanted tears stream down her cheek. She then left with her face in her hands saying, "I just can't find a way to get through to him. I just can't."

Stephen struggled to remember Meredith. Each remembrance would fade in and out just as the ocean breathes out all its water on the beach then quickly inhales it back in. Still, Stephen could

perfectly recollect Meredith's death. Mostly because it seemed like each second he lived had Meredith's death hovering over him like haunting mist over the ocean at night.

He remembered when his parents and he first heard the news. Both he and his mother did not speak for weeks; it was like a competition of who could remain quiet the longest: Stephen won. Dr. Pose, Meredith's advisor, gave them the call; he said that Meredith was such a great student, that he wanted to personally offer his condolences as means to show his respect for Meredith.

According to Dr. Pose, the Marine Biology Department was studying a gam of whales. Meredith, in Dr. Pose's words, made, "Keen and superb observations and connections to the whales." Meredith often would study the whales by himself on weekends or days off. "He could really connect to the creatures, and on a much deeper, emotional level than I have ever seen before," remarked Dr. Pose. When Meredith's saturated, dead body was found on the beach Monday morning, the team could only conclude that Meredith went too far out to sea on his own, or stayed on the water too late in the night. In either case, Meredith's blind ambition caused his death.

"It really is remarkable that his body was found on shore. Typically bodies are lost at sea. It's like something didn't want us to forever wonder what happened to Meredith; it wanted to give us

some closure. I don't know how his body made it to shore, it truly is fascinating—tragic—but still nothing I can wrap my head around," Stephen could remember Dr. Pose saying to his parents over the phone.

During the immediate days after Meredith's death, Stephen kept begrudging Meredith's foolish recklessness. Stephen had always admired Meredith's fearless tenacity, and he always wished his meek, reserved personality could be more like Meredith's strong, outspoken one. But now, Stephen hated Meredith's once beloved characteristics for causing his ruin. Meredith's sense of adventure always drew him to the sea with its ever present threats. Never did Meredith fear, and he never detected any danger of the sea. Meredith's ambition was also a force to be reckoned with. Whenever he was determined on something, nothing could deter nor impede him. If Meredith were motivated to get a breakthrough with the whales, nothing could separate him from them, that is, nothing but death.

Although Stephen knew that Meredith was fearless and unstoppable, he had trouble recalling specific instances with Meredith. Stephen could only conjure a vague notion of Meredith, and he listened to the whale recordings in desperation to see Meredith's face or hear his voice clearly again. He wished that the recordings of the whales did as Meredith promised and helped him distinctly picture Meredith. The CD repeatedly proved in vain.

But as Stephen was about to fall into his standard, restless slumber, he heard a whale singing and not from the boom-box but from the beach he could see out his window. The voice was much purer and stronger than the recordings. The actual song of a whale was like a forceful tidal wave overpowering the mumbling streams and banks that the recordings sounded like. The song enveloped Stephen as though he were underwater next to the whale. The tune echoed around Stephen's mind, awakening memories which he thought he had forgotten. Like a rowboat getting pulled effortlessly further by the ocean, Stephen felt himself drifting into his past, felt himself getting embraced by brother.

"I wish I were more like you," Stephen said to Meredith.

"Don't say that! I think you're the perfect brother just the way you are," Meredith said as he walked to dry land dropping the seashells and stones that he retrieved from his diving.

"I take ten minutes to get enough guts to dunk my head under water for ten seconds. You can swim all day always finding something cool or doing something cool," said Stephen as he gestured towards the treasures Meredith just uncovered. Meredith looks at Stephen for a few seconds realizing that his brother is genuinely saddened.

"Yeah, but you can sing ten times better than I can. Everyone who hears you always says that you

have the best voice they have ever heard. You're bound to tour the world one day and perform at the Grammy's or something."

"Well, I wish we were more alike. I just want to be more like you; I hate that we are so different." Meredith looks to the water as he thinks like he can count on the ocean to give him wisdom and advice. His face lifts to a smile like the foam rising high.

"Stephen, do you know what animal is just like you and I? If you and I were to both be one animal, do you know which one it would be?"

"No..." Stephen trailed off while becoming curious.

"A whale."

"What! How? I can't even swim!"

"Yes, but I can. The whale represents the ocean and marine biology which I love. But it also has your musical talents and beautiful voice."

"I mean...I guess you're right.

"You bet I am! Whenever you feel like we have nothing in common, just think of the whale and know that we have all kinds of similarities."

"Cool! So we're not that different!" Stephen said elatedly.

"Of course! And remember, that if anyone were to take away the whale's song, it would not be the cool, majestic creature that it is. The whale needs both of us to be so magnificent." Meredith said as he put his arm around his brother.

With that command, the memory faded as

did the whale's song. Stephen knew that it was the whale's tune that communicated this vision which was the clearest memory Stephen had of Meredith since his death.

"No! Please, keep singing! I *need* to remember more!" Stephen raced to his window and pleaded to the distant, unknown whale. But the whale's melody had ended, and Stephen was frantic to hear it again.

Finally, night had arrived. The moon came out to greet the beach, and the waves excitedly and somewhat voraciously shot up its hands hoping to receive a touch of the moon's gentle beams of ethereal light. Stephen did not catch the simplest rhythm of the whale's song all day, although he listened intently. Now at night, he waited anxiously hoping that the whale would perform for him once again. Suddenly, the sound burst into Stephen's room as forcefully as the waves beat the shore. Interwoven with the whale's voice, he heard his name being called, "Stephen! Stephen! Where are you?" It was Meredith's voice joining the whale in a surreal duet. Just as before, the song brought with it a memory.

Stephen was crouched behind a big rock, crying; until, he heard Meredith calling, "Stephen! Stephen, where are you?" Meredith, always coming to the rescue, found him. Stephen was safe and relieved when he saw Meredith's bright face peer around the

rock and find him.

Though Stephen knew that the memory should end with Meredith leading him home, the visualization switched from comfort to abandonment. *Meredith all of sudden was gone; Stephen was alone again. Still, Stephen continued to hear, "Stephen! Where are you?" Stephen arose dazedly and stumbled to the water, wondering if Meredith were swimming. Stephen just stood there wading searching blankly for Meredith in the endless blue of the water.* Returned in his bedroom at present time, Stephen could see himself staring out his window at the night sky over the ocean. He could still hear the whale singing, but it sounded more like a call. Meredith's voice was still resounding, "Stephen! Stephen!" Stephen knew Meredith was out in the ocean, and for the first time that he ever had the same determination that Meredith had, Stephen dashed towards the beach knowing that he was going to see his brother again that night.

Being led by the whale's mellifluous voice which was continually becoming more strongly synchronized with Meredith's cry, Stephen was in a boat drifting further out to sea and closer to his brother. The whale's sound wrapped around Stephen like a whirlpool, but instead of feeling drowned by water, Stephen felt Meredith's presence. Meredith was the adventurous one: the brother who would swim, take risks, and be brave. Stephen was the brother who waited on the beach

for Meredith to get back, or spent the weekend in his room singing one of the hundreds of songs that he knew. But now, simultaneously hearing the whale in his ear and feeling Meredith on his side, he felt like he possessed some of Meredith's courage and dare. For the first time in over a year, Stephen felt like he could sing. He wanted to join in the whale and Meredith's duet, but not until he located Meredith.

The song stopped.

There was no sound except the boat plopping back in the water after the tumultuous waves pushed it high in the air. The currents were not stopping for anything; they vigorously pounded upon Stephen's small boat.

"Meredith! Meredith, where are you?" No sound. "Maybe he's in the water," Stephen mused nervously. "Meredith loves to swim." Stephen leaned over the boat, and the sound of his imploring voice was his own siren's call dragging him into the ravenous ocean.

The ocean's embrace was not gentle and welcoming like the whale's melody. The salt attacked Stephen's eyes and lungs like he were an intruder on its territory. Its assaults prevented Stephen from seeing any sign of Meredith or from calling out for him. Then Stephen heard the familiar ballad of the whale; he could even see the whale not too far from himself.

Yes, Stephen saw himself lying limp a few

feet away from the whale and could hear the whale kindly speaking to him. But wait...was this himself that Stephen was seeing? Stephen gazed closer and saw something much more.

Meredith was on a small, open boat while the sun was setting. Noticing all the notes lying in the boat, Stephen knew that Meredith had been examining these whales all day. Meredith's eyes looked wild with excitement as he jotted quickly more observations. He did not see the sky go dark nor feel the air get cold. His entire life at that moment was focused on the whales.

The waves circled Meredith like they were soldiers equipped for war. They surged against the boat just like they were jostling an enemy. In the only time Stephen saw weakness in his brother, Meredith did not have enough strength to fight. He fell defeated and sunk deeply into his attackers widening, gaping mouth.

The same whale that sang to Stephen dove under and Meredith landed delicately on its back. The whale uttered a worried cry as it swam upwards. The whale hovered at the surface, but the air either refused to greet Meredith or he refused to meet the air: Meredith lay still like the shells that the ocean has banished to the shore. The whale's beautiful chant turned into a mournful requiem. As the whale repeated its sorrowful refrain, Meredith's body sunk into the whale. Stephen could even see Meredith's soul join the musical notes the whale released, har-

moniously becoming one with them. His spirit then accompanied the rhythm back into the whale as the animal breathed in.

The whale then slowly swam towards shore. It tenderly let Meredith's corpse slide off it and land in the water. The once furious ocean seemed to be submissive to the whale's authority. The animal let out a final parting wail, and as if by command, the waves gently lead Meredith's lifeless body to shore. When the waves receded back, it looked like a hand reluctantly letting go of Meredith.

Back to reality, Stephen knew that the same could happen to him. He could be with his brother again; he could resume singing and join this whale's chorus. His skin could become wrinkled and wholly saturated by the angry water while his spirit could be welcomed by his loving brother and this majestic whale.

"What would I miss? What's left for me in life?" thought Stephen, and as he pondered this question, he realized that he truly did not know the answer. Stephen had no notion of what to expect in life, of what he would love or what he would want to do...yet there was this inkling that wanted to discover his unfinished melody.

"Stephen. Stephen." Meredith's faint voice murmured as the whale evenly sang.

"Help me, Meredith. Rescue me like you did years ago when I was lost on the beach," Stephen mentally communicated as his lungs were getting

strangled by the water's belligerent hands.

Stephen felt himself land on the whale's back, and the whale began to swim forward, singing a joyful tune. Stephen reached the surface with the whale's guidance, but his body did not lie limp and his soul did not connect to the creature's tune. Instead, Stephen inhaled his first breath in what seemed like ages, and he realized that in a sense it was his first breath since Meredith died.

The whale took Stephen to shore as close as it possibly could. By then, Stephen had enough strength to make it to ground. In the end, Stephen had to bring himself home; on his own, his brother was not there to lead Stephen back like he was when Stephen was a lost child on the beach.

Stephen lay on the sand greedily sucking in all the air that he could. After several moments, he heard the whale jubilantly shouting a song of celebration. Stephen was muttering along, then after studying the rhythm of the song, he accompanied the whale. Stephen had not sung since Meredith's death. Now he remembered all the music that once filled his life, and he could almost foresee the songs that he would one day sing. As for this moment, he sang with the whale, letting his and its voice resonate every memory and emotion he had of Meredith. He felt much more than the presence he did on the boat; he experienced a profound kinship with Meredith. "Maybe like the one Meredith has with the whale..." Stephen thought.

Just as he had done back in his room, Stephen could see Meredith. But this was not a distant, faded scene he envisioned in his mind, Stephen physically saw Meredith sitting on the boat that Stephen had left behind in the ocean; the exact image of Meredith before he met his death in the water.

“I love you Meredith...good bye.” With that, he walked home still singing the refrain with the whale. Although he learned many other songs throughout his life, Stephen always in some way, whether by a soft hum or a hearty belt, followed the melody of that song.

The Whale’s Song



Who's There?/ Alexis Oliveira
PHOTOGRAPHY

USE THESE NEXT FEW PAGES TO HONE
YOUR SKILLS! WE'VE PROVIDED SOME
SUGGESTIONS TO GET THE WHEELS
TURNING, STRAIGHT FROM OUR BLOG.

20 THINGS TO DRAW by Katria Farmer

Your favorite teacher as a sumo wrestler

A zombie in class

"The Rock" as a rock

Hipster Benjamin Franklin

Batman and Superman, BFFs

"The reason I procrastinate"

Realistic version of your favorite cartoon character

Pluto's demotion

A shady salesman

A bounty on Cupid's head

How to avoid parking tickets

Fall devours summer

Teenage Mutant Ninja Elephants

Something green

Your pet peeve

The dark side of the moon acquires lamp

"You give me butterflies"

Your favorite musician's biggest secret

A stickman with an intricate background

Idea explosion

10 WRITING PROMPTS by Stephanie Bailey

Pick a line from a song (or an entire song) and base a short story on it.

Watch two people have a conversation and make up their dialogue and backstories.

Base a story around a pen that is passed around as people borrow and forget to return it.

Find someone who looks rushed and write a story about what he is hurrying to—or away from.

Imagine yourself as the opposite gender. What would your life be like? Or imagine meeting the opposite-gender version of yourself. What would you think?

Look around and pick the two people who look least likely to date each other. Then write a story about them dating.

Remember (or listen for) a piece of advice. Imagine a story where someone applies that advice and it goes horribly wrong.

Listen for or remember a really obnoxious laugh. Describe the journey of learning to love (romantically, platonically, grudgingly...) someone who laughs like that.

Identify a smell around you. Now imagine that smell triggering a childhood memory for someone. What is the memory? What is the effect of remembering?

None of these prompts are working for you. Imagine yourself standing up right now and chucking your laptop or phone as hard as you can—only to notice someone was just walking over to you. What happens next?

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