

TOBECO LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL 2012



## COVER ART BY LOREN BENTON

The Tobeco Staff would like to thank the writers and artists who submitted their work to this year's journal. We would also like to thank PAGES, Student Senate, The Viz Arts club, Michelle's Café, designers Anthony Driscoll and Seth Sparico, and the university's students, faculty and staff for their support. This year's edition is dedicated to Don Wilson, a former faculty member and founder of *DARE*, the first student literary magazine.

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Tobeco Literary & Artistic Journal is a student organization that strives to enhance literary and artistic life at the university and within our local community by accepting submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, world translations, and artwork. Through this publication, we hope to raise cultural and artistic awareness and to advocate a comfortable and creative environment for writers and artists alike. The name "Tobeco" is taken from the Native American word for the Clarion River. Through this connection, we show our involvement with the local area.

We are currently reading for next year's issue. Please send poetry, fiction, nonfiction or art to:  
**tobeco@clarion.edu**

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## IT TAKES ME HOURS TO START A POEM

---

JAMIE WYATT

Nothing is more terrifying  
than this  
blank white page.  
It is  
empty.  
No safe ledge  
to balance on as I  
peek over the edge.  
No words to guide me,  
and if I'm not careful  
I might  
fall  
in.

## SUMMER JOB

---

MOLLY MAYS

Miss Davis and I  
Work under the sun  
Perched up high  
Like a beacon

I've been digging up tiger lilies  
Three summers now  
Gardening at the Davis house  
She and I everyday  
Out in the yard

Sweat clings to her black skin  
And to mine  
Tinted golden  
By time  
Spent in the glow of June, July, and August

We talk of her family  
Farming in Virginia  
Years ago

And of mine  
Selling the fields  
Only to sink down deep into  
The coal mines

And I wonder what they'd think  
Our ancestors  
Of this graceful ageing black women  
And this jaded wary white kid  
Splitting tiger lilies  
Like bread

Brushing the dirt  
Off their hands  
Laughing at their  
Calluses  
The hateful bugs  
And basking  
In the glare of the sun

## T. S. ELIOT AT THE DOLLAR GENERAL

---

BRIANNA SNOW

Her red cashier's apron fought to fit.  
To justify her smoke break,  
she held the door open for me as she lit  
up. The tobacco leaves try to fake  
her life into having a good day.

A wall of cheap conditioner, one dollar,  
they all smell the same from their stay  
on the shelves taller  
in dust than discounts.

The girl with static burdened bags  
handles my change and miscounts.  
With no lag,  
the girl, cigarette-less now, mentions Michelangelo.  
The girl, thinking my nickel is a dime, returns I think  
he painted a ceiling. Then, I go.

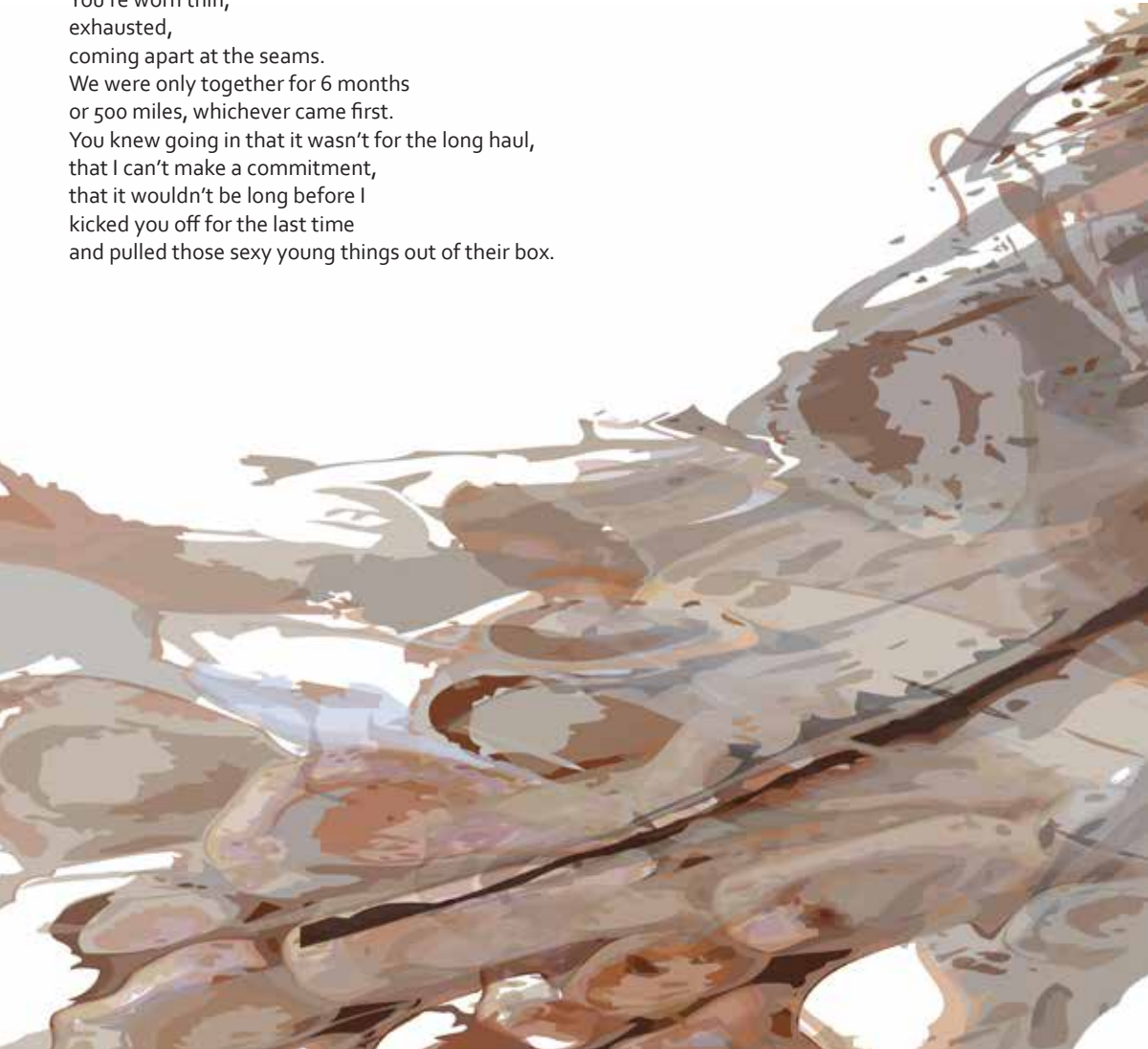
## ODE TO RUNNING SHOES

---

JAMIE WYATT

I should feel bad  
when I retire you to the back of my closet,  
mud dangling from your sole  
laces fraying at the ends,  
to lay with the five other pairs of soggy, smelly,  
tired brown shoes  
that all get together and dream  
about what color they used to be  
like old ladies stroking their gray curls.  
You're worn thin,  
exhausted,  
coming apart at the seams.  
We were only together for 6 months  
or 500 miles, whichever came first.  
You knew going in that it wasn't for the long haul,  
that I can't make a commitment,  
that it wouldn't be long before I  
kicked you off for the last time  
and pulled those sexy young things out of their box.

ARTWORK BY SONNEY ANNALISE





## NOTEBOOK

---

ELIZABETH TAKACH

Every day I get abused! She writes on my pages like she owns them, but she doesn't. No matter what she thinks (which I know a lot of whether she thinks I do or not), she doesn't have any right to defile my body.

She likes using different colored pens, but they all hurt the same. Nevertheless, I like the purple pen the best because it glides more smoothly across my face. Not to mention, the color looks simply beautiful on me. Pencils hurt less, but they still scratch at my pages. And erasers, don't even get me started about erasers! It's like just because she messed up she wants to change me even more! How fair is that? They tickle so much, but she never hears me laugh. Sometimes I twitch under the eraser, but then she always holds me still until her mistakes disappear.

I like when she writes poems and stories in my pages. Those at least capture my interest a little bit. More so than class work. What do I care about her classes for? It's her that needs to know things, not me. I just get shoved in a bag, which I hope she realizes is ripping on the inside. It's creepy in that bag. It smells happy and fruity, but it's so dark I feel as though something bad is going to happen to me in there.

I also get abused in that dark, scary bag. I get thrown on the ground. I get jostled. I get slammed against her leg when she walks. And she doesn't even appreciate me. No, never a thank you, nothing. I do so much for her and put up with so much that you would think I'd get a little gratitude.

I have no choice. I have to keep doing her bidding until she gets bored with me and moves on. Oh, I just wish she knew how I feel, maybe then things would be a little bit better.



## DUMPSTER DAMSELS

---

CASSIE BOWER

Biting rain, an early spring Sunday morning,  
the smells of someone's Tuesday leftovers,  
empty beer bottles reeking of bad decisions,  
red-ink stained ruins of someone's Civilizations test.

Our arms outstretched into the dirty green abyss  
because our friend Ben's fiancé walked out on him  
four months ago. Today, he tossed her belongings -  
some stuffed inside heavy black Hefty bags, others left exposed in this  
open-casket. Kim sifts through clothing and Christmas decorations. I

sort out nicknacks, shoes, jewelry boxes,  
seven pairs of too-small jeans for my mother, whose  
disappearing body outpaces her diminishing bank account.

A pair of heavy winter boots for me, some sweaters for Kim,  
and four bags of brand name clothes destined for Goodwill  
settle like old friends in the backseat of my car,  
or like refugees from a war-torn home. Ben staggers to the window,  
beer in hand, bellowing Kim's name, beads of sweat on forehead,  
cheeks red, mouth puckered in rage.

We flee the scene like criminals with down-cast eyes -  
leaving behind a college degree, a mangy teddy bear,  
a pack of birth control, a Charlie Brown Christmas tree.

ARTWORK BY SONNEY ANNALISE



## ZOMBIES

DAKOTA KLINGENSMITH

---

I don't like to let people bite me. It has always made me feel inferior to them. I guess it could mean that I have some sort of self-conscious issue... maybe. Or I could just simply not thoroughly enjoy the feeling of dirty man fangs grinding on my skin.

I only stand a whopping five feet and two inches. For a man my age, that could pose as a problem in a lot of situations that I try to conquer. If I had to get something off the shelf for a lovely lady, it wouldn't happen. I'd be that asshole who calls for help because I'm too short to reach. It would especially be a problem if I were challenged to fight somebody. I would probably turn my macho man on but run like hell when the first punch is thrown.

I remember one time when I was in a fighting situation that didn't turn out too well. I was standing beside a beautiful woman at a hot dog stand on my lunch break. I munched on these delicious hot dogs day in and day out and if we are what we eat then I'm a pretty well rounded human being.

I looked at the woman beside me. She turned and smiled at me. Of course this was a huge ego booster and I couldn't help but submit a cheesy smile back to her. You know, smiles are a funny thing. They can be sweet and innocent but could also cause a tragedy and spread like a wild disease. There are so potent, even, that they can cause mixed emotions – which is exactly what I felt when she returned my submitted smile with a look of horror on her pretty little face.

I wondered if something were in my teeth. Did I forget to shave? Was I breaking out in zits? I reached into my pocket to fumble for a toothpick when she decided to scream bloody murder! Who in their right mind would just scream bloody murder in the middle of a busy street in downtown Chicago? I thought she might be a freak. That's when she also decided to point right at me.

I was thinking to myself, "seriously, what's so wrong with my face that you have to point and scream?" Then I heard pitter patter behind me. Pitter patter. Pitter patter. I knew that there wasn't a 5k being ran that day so my mind was all kinds of blown. I turned around and saw hundreds of people running down the road. Jumping over cars and knocking over tables and signs. My tiny man-self decided that it would be a good idea to run away.

Of course, I tripped. Did I mention that I'm also clumsy? I remember thinking to myself that I would be pummeled by these people and that I needed to get away – fast. Sadly, though, that didn't happen easily. One bite, two bites, they were munching away at my arms and neck. I remember screaming in terrible agony. It wasn't so much the pain that freaked me out, it was seeing the blood dripping off of their mouths and my fat oozing from their teeth.

Eventually they were sick of my meaty flesh and ran on to find another platter. I remember lying there breathing heavily, crying a little. It felt like days had passed before I had the strength to stand back up. Was I dead? No, at least not in the sense that my vital organs weren't working any longer. I was perfectly alive but extremely hungry despite my stomach full of hot dogs. I ran after the mob.

Life isn't so bad anymore. The only thing I really have to live for is eating, though. Bites don't seem too bad either. In fact, they actually kind of make me smile.

JANUS SAID

---

JUSTINE YEAGER

I blessed you when you  
walked through the doorway,  
picked up pen and paper,  
and wrote your wounds instead  
of honoring them with your skin.

I bless you now, through  
the portal of academia,  
through the wonder of craft  
and weight of criticism,  
to open Possibility's doors.

I will bless you when  
your daughters climb from  
your womb, wriggle  
then walk, and find  
pen and paper of their own.



ARTWORK BY HEATHER KING



## 501 HARRISON AVE., APT. 3

---

JUSTINE YEAGER

Hot air and strategic fans; the  
writing room that never was; stained  
hardwood and stiff futon full of  
squandered flesh; flashes of future

interrupted by endless engines  
as I switched from tobacco to  
grass to tobacco and back,  
battled and embraced the pen,

and knew that an uncertain  
beginning was still a beginning.

# THE MYSTERY OF THE AFGHAN GIRL

---

REBEKAH DONNELLY

Terror  
breaks her down to debris  
that needs to be cleared away.

An adolescent girl,  
photograph taken,  
face saved.

Brilliant green eyes,  
flickers of shimmering gold  
stare me down,  
as if I offended her.

Wisps of straggling hair flow  
in her face.  
Dust and dirt cake  
her appearance.  
An open wound to the side  
of her petite nose.  
A faint scowl  
upon her pale lips

Cloaked by a  
radiant red dress,  
torn and ragged  
at the edges.  
Hints of craftsmanship  
in the stitching,  
stunning in its time.

ARTWORK BY JOHN GORNATI





## Back Then

---

BRIANNA SNOW

I bring my dad's fish to show and tell. The wood it is mounted on splinters from aging in the attic. The fins are long and extend past the wood, jabbing my arm as I carry it to the front of the classroom. The carpet below me looks like a clock, and all the other kids are standing on a number. Their parents are close at their sides. I shared, "This was my father's fish. He caught it in Wisconsin." The kids just stared; most of them were still focused on Emily's cat, Oreo. The cat was alive and meowed when it wasn't being petted. The fish was dead and quiet like my dad. I wanted to ask my mom if the fish died the same way that my dad did, but I was afraid it might make her cry. I was getting the hang of not mentioning him anymore. Was my dad mounted on some log? It could be possible. The log must be far away though because I never get to see him.

My hands were in the pockets of my dress as a couple of the parents brought their kids closer to see the fish eyes and the fish scales. The next person up was Jake. I took the fish back to my desk and returned to the number five on the carpet. I looked down and made sure my black shoes with the big silver buckles across them were facing the person presenting just like Ms. Roberts had told us to do. With his ears too far from his head, he said, "This is a skeleton from my mom's work. It isn't real." A dead person that wasn't real? It confused me at first. Then I realized that the police that had told my mom that my dad was dead must have been confused. They had found a dead body that wasn't real and had mistaken it to be my dad. I felt myself smile, and my hands were slippery.



Photograph by Anthony Driscoll

# HAWK

---

ROB PRESHAK

It was on a blistering summer morning,  
some years ago  
that, as I sat on my back porch, drinking strong coffee,  
I saw it.

High, high, high up in the air  
the black shape,  
making slow circles.

As it descended to Earth,  
I began to see the details.  
The sun gleamed between feathers,  
giving the edges a brilliant, golden glow  
like a stained glass window.

Silently it came,  
the circles becoming smaller, and smaller and smaller  
as it centered on its prey.  
I suddenly began to worry about my orange cat,  
where it was, what it was doing.

I looked back, through the glass of the door  
and saw him sitting there,  
a small blot of orange fur, raised on its haunches,  
crying to come out,  
unaware that a predator was out.

When I turned back to the bird,  
it dove, silently, swiftly and lethally,  
a flash of brown, cutting across the blue sky,  
dipping into the high grass of the hay field,  
coming up with something small and fuzzy  
in its talons,

then back into the sky clutching its bounty,  
off to the rising sun,  
and I suddenly felt that the world  
was in perfect order, right now, at this moment.  
And I finished my coffee.

## A SLIVER OF ORANGE

---

NATALIE GEARHART

Softball sized, sweet and ripe  
my mother placed the hard fruit  
in the plastic bag,  
for school.

So when I sat at my blacktop desk,  
among the to-do lists and neon sticky notes  
I peeled  
off  
the layers of orange-  
my nails digging into the crevices of the small slivers,  
and the veiny white peel,  
spreading like a net across the top,  
letting the juice sweep through,  
collecting clumps of pulp.

The savory juices burned around my thumb nail,  
the small paper-cut sizzling,  
the raw redness contrasting against the bright glow  
of the orange-  
the red orange, red orange,  
like the sunset illuminating over the barren hills.

And among the scraps  
of shuffled notebook paper,  
I sat,  
peeling  
layer after layer  
placing a sliver to my dry lips,  
smelling the citrus scent,  
savoring every bite.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY DRISCOLL



## WHEN MY DAD GETS HOME

---

KIRSTEN WARHOLAK

The man in the Pittsburgh Steelers cap  
with thinning, sandy-brown hair, hidden beneath.  
Lounging on the La-Z-Boy,  
sun-dried, chapped lips, consuming a Coors Light.  
Piercing blue eyes that have witnessed a harsh day's work.  
Right thumbnail beat up and black as hot ash.  
Knuckles, swollen and bone white from gripping a jackhammer.  
Scent of oil and grime from the construction site  
seeping through his blazing, orange t-shirt.  
Feet, callused and constricted like a pig's hoof in steel-toed boots.  
Sitting in rugged, ripped Levi's held up by a worn leather belt.  
Smile sparkling in the sun, riding his Ruckus around the yard.

I was having a great day yesterday. I got an A on my spelling paper and a boy in my class named Joey asked me to sit by him at lunch. Joey has really pretty blonde hair and the whole time I wanted him to hold my hand, but I think he was too shy. His cheeks kept getting red when I told him how much I liked his hair. My sister Hayley waited for me at the end of the day and we sat together on the bus. She's two years older than me and hates the fourth grade. I fell asleep on the way home, and Hayley said I drooled on my lap and we laughed so hard I thought I would pee. We walked home from the bus stop and mom met us on the front porch; she was so happy when I showed her my A in spelling. She made us bologna and cheese sandwiches and let us watch Spongebob while we did our homework in the living room.

Our big brother Jake and sister Carly are in high school, so they don't get home until later. We like to go meet them outside when we hear the bus go by the house. We went out but only Carly was there. I asked her where Jake was but she didn't know. She was really mad that he wasn't there, so we just walked home without talking. When mom realized Jake didn't come home she got really sad and started crying. I hugged her leg and told her he was okay, but she was getting her phone out to call dad and didn't hear me. I didn't really want dad to come home, he wasn't very nice a lot of the time. I try not to make him mad, and I knew he was going to hit Jake when he came home. Every time dad hits Jake or Carly, I try to hide so he won't find me and I won't see anything. Jake and Carly yell a lot and Carly always cries.

I saw Jake's girlfriend, Sarah's, car pull in the driveway later. Carly doesn't like Sarah, but Hayley and I do. She's nice. Sometimes she helps me with my homework or colors with me. She's older than Jake, I think that's why dad doesn't like her. He's always mad when she's here to see Jake. But I don't think it matters, they always kiss and hug so it must not bother them. Dad's face got really red when he saw her car, but not the way Joey's face did. He slammed open the door on the side of the house and the glass in the door broke and went everywhere. Mom yelled to him and told us not to come outside, so Hayley and I went to look out the front window. Dad was yelling at Jake and dragged him into the yard. Hayley covered my eyes when I started to cry, and when she let me look again Jake was bleeding and having another one of his seizures. Dad was holding something in his hand; I think it was a big rock. It had red all over it. Dad started kicking Sarah in the belly, I'm not sure why. She was trying to help Jake. She knows what to do when he has seizures now. Hayley ran out to mom; she was sitting on the front steps crying. I tried to go too, but Hayley wouldn't let me.

When Jake stopped shaking, Dad sat him up against a tree. He looked like he was sleeping. Sarah had gotten back in her car. Mom and Dad started fighting, and Dad made Hayley come back inside. I didn't watch them yell because it made me too sad. A cop pulled in behind Sarah's car with his lights on. I was so scared; I thought they were going to take Dad to jail, but they didn't. They put handcuffs on Jake and took him away. Sarah was crying and her dad and my dad were yelling. My mom was hugging Sarah; she really likes her. I saw blood on Sarah's pants; I think something was really wrong with her.

Jake still wasn't back today. I hope I see my brother again.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH LOFINK

## LE PETIT JEU

---

ERIN KELLEY

It started because of her mother  
Between jobs, between boyfriends, between apartments  
Between between.

Mom wasn't prepared to afford luxuries like food.  
She valued other bills and neglected groceries.  
She told her to go without, to grow up.

It continued as a game.  
She'd practice math- addition of calories and more importantly  
Subtraction. Just another way to learn.

She would play colors.  
Today-yellow food:  
Lemon squares (1.5) and a bit of squash (baked not fried).

Yesterday- orange feast:  
Cheez-its (12) sweet clementines (3) and a mango smoothie  
Plus all the carrots she could dream of (28, baby).

Tomorrow- white:  
Maybe even carbs:  
Crackers or noodles or half a slice of Munster cheese.

She moves away from her mother, but it goes on.  
She tries to eat three times a day, but she is accustomed  
To being barely there- slight and skinny and small and thin.

She hides during  
Dinner, breakfast, lunch  
She mumbles:

"I ate at work."  
"I'm allergic."  
"I don't eat meat."  
"Indigestion."  
She buys food with her own money for her own fridge  
But lets it shrivel and rot.

Her hip bones jut out.  
When she runs her fingers over them,  
She shuts her eyes, imagines her skeleton:

Clean and white and menacing  
Like the one in front of her health class  
She opens, she's flesh, too.



ROSE

MELINDA WARNSING

---

Named after my Nana,  
who no longer speaks to me.  
After a stunning flower,  
that grows on a depraved bush.  
Sometimes pleasant and appealing,  
like the vibrant crimson petals,  
or feisty and iniquitous,  
like the thorns on the long stem.  
Independent the flower stands sturdy,  
just as I.  
Needing love,  
like roots need water,  
as we grow together,  
one breath at a time.

## THE DICHOTOMY OF MY MOTHER

---

CASSIE BOWER

My mother has icemaker hands,  
so soothing to the fevered forehead.  
Sitting in the smoky kitchen,  
she listens with the ears of a shrink,  
arms ready to embrace my shuddering shoulders  
like a well-worn zip-up cotton robe.  
With the eyes of a wandering stray dog,  
seeking shelter or a friendly scratch behind the ear,  
she slides through the world in socked feet  
over freshly waxed linoleum  
to the sound of "Mr. Bojangles"  
clutching her sixth empty bottle of Coors Light.  
Bones creaking like the abandoned blue armchair in our living room,  
a reclining reminder of the man she tried to follow into death,  
she is as bittersweet as the strawberries she slices and steals a bite of  
despite the puffy pink patches which will splatter her skin.  
My mother is the waves of the river which lift my floating body upward  
and the undertow which drags me to my demise.



## LAVENDER ON THE LAWN

---

NATALIE GEARHART

A long day,  
heavy heat tucked between the distant trees.  
A patriotic lawn chair, checked and frayed,  
sits idly in the grass,  
the metal, cool to the touch.  
A grandma brings out bubbles,  
the soapy suds squish along the sides  
of the bottle,  
as the girl in lavender laughs-  
a hearty giggle of  
bliss.  
Floating worlds of pixie dust and  
Neverland,  
picked up by the breeze,  
the bubbles,  
bobbing up  
and down.  
The sweet and pungent aroma of  
lavender, followed  
by a sharp pop.

## THE COMPETITION

---

BETHANY SHONTZ

There was one day that I will never forget. It was the day that he brought her into the apartment complex. She had to be at least a ten. Her hair was dark brown compared to my blonde. Oh, so he likes brunettes now. I thought wryly as a vicious smirk appeared slowly on my face. Oh, no he didn't...this calls for action!

I watched with a hawk-like gaze as he led this mysterious beauty—my competition—into our living room and proffered her a seat on my side of the couch. The worst part of this was the fact that he never said a word to me, and yet he looked at me with those eyes that asked “Could you get me drink, dear?” I almost wished my eyes would bore holes through his skull as I walked to the kitchen.

I knew his weakness. I would make him a nice, orange smoothie. Serves you right...too bad you were born with a mild case of lactose intolerance. I had cut the orange in half with a medium sized cleaver—and in the process cut one of my forefingers open. The citrus juice entered my wound, causing me to clamp my free hand over my mouth to stifle a scream. Right then, the TV stopped on a Catholic channel as my boyfriend looked back at me. The priest was saying something, but my urge to scream had turned into a sneeze that I couldn't hold back, so I wasn't paying attention. Seconds after I sneezed, I heard the priest say, “I bless you—” and then the channel changed.

Finishing the smoothie, I started stalking over to the couch, but I had forgotten the tiny strip of metal that separated the hardwood of the kitchen floor from the living room carpet. I landed flat on my face with my outstretched arms, thankfully keeping the smoothie in tact. I could feel that my nose had cracked, and had started bleeding.

Struggling to stand, I wiped away the blood on my shirt sleeve and handed the smoothie to my boyfriend with a smile. He and she were so absorbed in the TV show that neither of them noticed my presence. And then it got worse.

His arm wrapped around her shoulder! I quickly spun around and marched back into the kitchen, looking for a suitable weapon. If the smoothie can't deal with my cheating piece of scum, then I'll take matters into my own hands! The thought quickly vanished as I turned away from my boyfriend to face the island where I had chopped up the orange. I had just felt the handle of the cleaver, slippery with orange particles, slide into my hand when I felt arms wrap around me. I was so shocked that I dropped the cleaver. I watched it fall and land in the space in between my big toe and the other four. I barely noticed that he had said anything.

“Honey, did you hear me?”

“Wh-what? I'm sorry, I spaced out for a minute.”

“I told you that my sister left.”



The roads were wet, and the heavens were shedding their tears in the form of raindrops. I needed something to reaffirm my faith. Today was special, but I only felt the coldness inside my chest. I was listening to a secular radio station, but I was praying that one song would touch me. As the next vibrations filled my ear, I was stunned and silently listened to my heart crack because of an answered prayer.

She was warm in my child hands. A red body told the truth of the dire situation. I kept looking at her eyes, which were closed, and tried to imagine how they would look opened. What color would they be? Such were the thoughts of a nine year old. I could still smell the disinfectant amidst the other smells that came with a hospital room and a labor, which was strange and rather unpleasant to me. The nurses in the hospital knew. My mother knew. My dad knew. And, somewhere, deep down, despite my praying, I knew.

Time comes and passes onward, leaving some people alive as it passes through like a sudden storm in the night, but others are not so lucky. Her head was misshapen, and yet, her frail little body remained peaceful. As I stared at the life-form that was in my arms for a few moments, I wondered if her fingers would reach out and grasp one of mine. Even her fingers were underdeveloped, so I knew better. These were the signs of a very premature birth. A reminder that my mother's labor was unfairly induced, but there was nothing more the nurses could do. I still had the hope that she would recognize the world, or at the very least, part of her family before...

My chair was shaking uncontrollably. Craning my head, I watched my hero cry. My father had helped birth the life so tranquil. The corners of my mouth twisted into a smirk. I would prove myself stronger than him. A tear slid down my face. Another. And yet another still until I too started to shake uncontrollably, baring my sorrow and what I felt was shameful to the world.

An hour and a little more. That was all the longer my sister had lived. Time is so cruel. My prayers had been answered, but not in the way I had wanted them.

My mother was driving the car when she looked at me and said, "Do you remember what today is?" April 12. When I was checking my email, something pricked my heart, as though I was forgetting something important. "No," I'd said rather curtly. Even my former hero, my father, had forgotten the tears he had shed.

"Her birthday. She would be ten."

I stared at the dashboard in front of me, silently letting the shock settle in. I thought it pointless for my mother to keep opening an old wound year after year with birthday cakes and candles lit. Those flames I would have to extinguish in an instant with one painful breath. Such is the course of time and life. Scars leave the most pain, but we have to fight our way through the storm and find that one glimpse of life through the clouds. It's like hearing a Christian song on a secular radio station, reminding us that prayers get answered, but not always how we expect them.

LA DENSITÉ DU RÉEL  
THE DENSITY OF REALITY

(EXERCICE DE PHYSIQUE)  
(AN EXPERIMENT IN PHYSICS)

---

DR. ELISABETH DONATO

Densité du réel =  $\frac{\text{Masse de l'existence}}{\text{Volume du rêve}} = \frac{\text{Masse du corps}}{\text{Volume de l'âme}} = \frac{\text{Poids de la permanence}}{\text{Étendue de l'évanescence}}$

Density of reality =  $\frac{\text{Mass of one's existence}}{\text{Volume of one's dreams}} = \frac{\text{Mass of body}}{\text{Volume of soul}} = \frac{\text{Weight of permanence}}{\text{Extent of evanescence}}$

## MY FATHER PREACHES TO COACH SCHMADER

---

JOSIAH RENAUDIN

He's doing it again.  
This tête-à-tête was meant to end  
what now feels like four score  
and seven years ago.  
My fingers gallop across the oak table,  
nails ticking like a metronome,  
as I observe my father's attempt  
to convince my golf coach  
that reading the Bible  
is like dialing a direct line to God.

It's not an argument, he says.  
A witness to the most high.  
Spreading the good and holy word.  
He's God's most charismatic salesmen,  
and eternal life's one hell of a product to promote.  
Coach Schmader's demeanor,  
now bubbling over like the great Krakatoa,  
suggests otherwise. This is a war of holy words,  
and my dad is trying his damndest to win.

Like a pugilist with a chin  
too granite for his own good,  
my father trades evasiveness  
for pure power of will.  
Never a glint of fear  
or a care to wipe the honest  
smile from his face –  
no matter the weight  
behind the punches being thrown.

Call it what you will:  
duty to the divine,  
devout tug-of-war,  
or just men being men.  
My father lives for these moments –  
to show the world what he's got.  
It's a full time job –  
and this retirement thing  
gives him all the time in the world.

ARTWORK BY MARIAN BARBER





## MY FATHER PRAYED IN THE BATHROOM

---

JOSIAH RENAUDIN

Pacing up and down the dull,  
dim hallway, the sweet aroma of honey and cinnamon incense.  
A bladder filled to the brim with freshly squeezed  
juice and youthful elation,  
a callow mind overflowing with reverence for the sermon  
behind the tightly locked restroom door.

To my father, a prayer was more than just a hurried reminder to  
God that chow was on the table, or a distress signal  
when the car's engine suddenly refused to hum.  
Words escaped his mouth,  
scurried past the spotless commode,  
danced around the corroded shower head and found  
their way to the gates of heaven.

The divine replies he shared  
locked my levies and held back my lower floodgates.  
My creator talking to my Creator –  
things only heard of in my family's favorite book.  
To interrupt his prayers that could last for hours would be tragic,  
so my thoughts drifted from the here and now  
to where I hope to be at his age.

On my frayed adult knees.  
In that same sacred bathroom.  
God on the phone,  
releasing truths only shared with the angels  
and His one and only Son.  
Relishing in a true, divine love,  
separate from what I feel for my beautiful wife.

Yet, here I rest  
on that same white seat now losing its sparkle.  
Staring at the shower's spout – finally replaced.  
A call that won't connect and an inbox  
full of nothing but SPAM.  
A knock, knock, knock and my business is interrupted.  
A sigh as I stand to leave.  
I've grown no strength in faith, but only in bladder.



## I QUIT GOING TO CHURCH

---

NATALIE DORFMAN

I quit going to church  
when I was told  
that I could not cut my hair,  
swim with boys,  
play a musical instrument,  
or mingle with homosexuals.

I certainly hope that Hell  
is less strict.

## HAPPY EASTER

---

NATALIE DORFMAN

When I was a kid,  
my uncle bought my brother and I  
a live bunny rabbit for Easter.

It probably would have been  
the best present ever,  
but we awoke on Sunday morning  
to find a tattered cardboard box,  
the gooey remains of a liver and brain,  
and our housecat, Sneakers,  
licking his chops on the back porch.

From that point on,  
we received chocolate bunnies.

## IN THE OPINION OF CHURCH LADIES

---

MOLLY MAYS

Nora let  
that youngest boy  
of hers  
drive her powder blue  
pick-up truck,

her sitting  
in the passenger seat  
up through Mr. Harris'  
pasture  
weaving through cows  
and straight into  
an old oak tree  
so big around  
the leaves  
hardly even shimmied.

And all the old  
church ladies  
said she was  
a damn fool.

And when Nora's  
husband saw  
that truck  
he up and left.  
Seemed he'd just  
been waiting on  
some excuse  
to move down  
the mountain  
and live with that  
nice blonde woman  
he'd met a Peachin's.

And when Nora's boy  
went to town  
to live with his father  
those old  
church ladies  
made her a  
cake and a Tupperware bowl  
full of ambrosia  
said what an  
awful shame  
it was.

# SO HELP ME GOD, DON'T MAKE ME TWIDDLE

---

S.C. NOLAN

I grew up Catholic-  
ish.

When I was young--

nine, eight, and below--

I was dragged to mass  
every Sunday morning.

Dressed up, stiff, starchy.

A lamb of the savior  
led to slaughter.

A short drive to a place  
that felt like the eternal  
damnation it was designed

to prevent.

There, I'd sit, kneel, stand

--I swear to God--

twiddling my thumbs.

As the man in the bathrobe  
delivered his diatribe,  
droning on like a cawing

bird, too early in the morning  
to be deemed acceptable,  
I'd invent games:

How fast could I count  
the stained-glass fragments  
in the windows?

How loudly could I sing,  
when we had to  
turn our hymnals to page whatever,

without receiving admonishment  
from my fellow parishioners?

How quietly, without

being nudged by my mother?

I know, somewhere,  
there were lessons to learn

and I learned them  
(if subliminally).

But that was it.

Church. Then nothing.

Oh, and grace.

We said grace before dinner.

Never lunch. Never breakfast.

# THE KING OF SEASONS

---

NATHAN MILNER

Did you see me out there on the hillside with no song to sing?

Slowly walking down the crest of the slope  
Through the tall grasses I trample, to the earth my feet grope

Sunlight melts through the canopies and dries out the seas  
I'm told not to trample on the dead leaves or I'll be trampled twice as hard  
Ruler of my way, I fall not victim to the pleas

The shivering autumn air chills my skin as I reach the edge of the moat  
Your drawbridge kicks up as if it was predestined that I would arrive  
A steady step across the wooden strips brings me to the gate  
Am I a welcomed guest in this world or will I find meaning afloat?

It is to my surprise now that the golden gates open wide  
There you stand, your hair down in braids  
Your dress's wingspan practically flutters me out of existence, yet I stay  
The hand you grant invites me to all the glory for which I've strived  
With you I'll take on the world, the all, the tide

The softest of kisses you plant upon my lips in moonlight  
Sleep is not affordable, but it comes easy with an angel in your arms  
Eternity is not long enough to spend in this cloud  
Through dreams I run and from my arms you disappear  
Awake now, out in the deathly frost I lay  
Alone now again I manage to ignore the fright

Through the blistering frost I push away from the kingdom I sought  
No tracks by my side to keep me at bay but my own behind me  
As the blizzard sets in, thoughts of the past drive me  
I can hear the leaves beneath the ever rising snow crunching  
Yet the disease that you've become has nothing left to rot

The blizzard falls steady as the snow cascades down  
Through the forest I trudge as the green still flourishes slightly about me  
Frozen grounds cannot keep my evolution from rising up  
Icicles melting out, dying out, pushing away from my frown

Snow becoming slush and slush sinks away through the dirt still warm  
The frozen ground melts away and becomes the dew the sun can once again dry  
Like the ground, my past melts away to reveal my new form

I survived through your ice age for the finale of time  
My body is now ready for any mountain I must climb

Because here in the sun drenched fields, I could build anything





## MINNOWS

---

JAMES ROSE

You and I once treaded water,  
In a river of encourageable depth.  
We floated by the logs and flotsam of the northern woods.

Minnows swarmed around us,  
As though carried on some divine purpose,  
Some swam between our kicking legs,  
Some no more than an inch from the surface.

“Watch this”, I said playfully,  
And went to grab the minnow playing in our wake.

I had never caught a falling leaf,  
Or a cloud, or a snowflake,  
Nothing so incredible as that,  
Had ever been my lot.

So I was surprised to feel cold, slippery life,  
Grasped between my fingers.  
In a desperate attempt at salvation,  
It jumped from my hands and into its ancestral home.

You and I marveled at this for awhile,  
Until we once again became fish,  
Making our way to the Mississippi.



PHOTOGRAPH BY TAYLOR RADGOWSKI



## THE SOUND OF FEAR

---

SUE ANN SMITH

Lost.

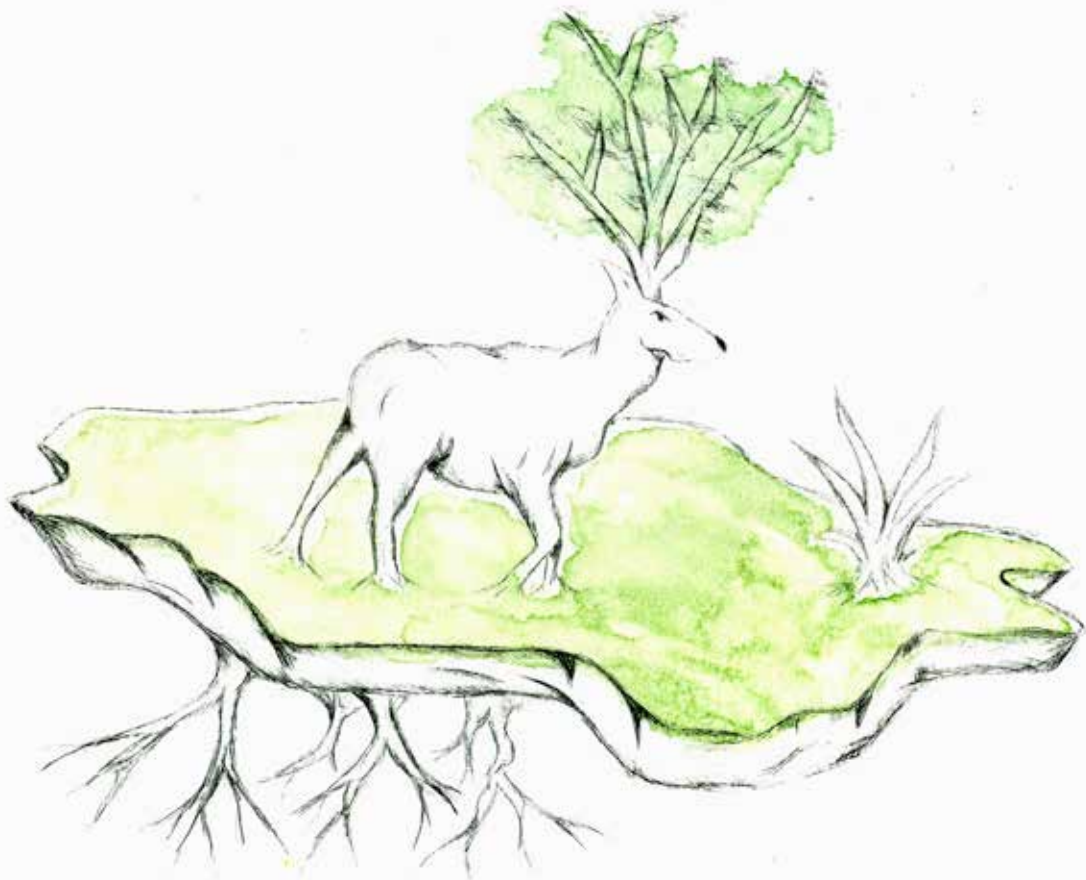
Fallen leaves crunch and crumble  
Under my scrambling feet.

In dark, forest green,  
Mysterious sounds  
Sink their murderous talons into my body  
As I rush past sky-caressing, inky trees.

The voice of a vulture,  
Stifled by a sticky crimson  
Building in his throat  
And staining a hunter's knife.

The caw of a crow,  
Its slender neck  
Wrenched and twisted like a dishrag –  
His last cry mixing with the snapping of bones.

The bay of a coyote  
Telling its mother,  
The scarlet moon,  
That it has spotted its prey.



ARTWORK BY SETH SPARICO

## WAR WOUNDS

---

DARRYL MAIN

Lands unfamiliar to most but in the crosshairs,  
Of those behind the desk of authority.

Peace and negotiation left on the table,  
Like that of a procrastinating student.  
The man in the banker suit,  
With his pre-written speech announces,  
War is the only solution.

Nation backs the man in the black suit,  
As they been told to do since birth,  
Days pass and the carnage seen,  
Soldiers, civilians, mangled in streets.  
Blood spilled by brave soldiers,  
A decision decided by phone.

Families weep as letters,  
Not members are sent home.  
The man in the suit says, Victory is near.

Unrest in the country begins,  
The wave of change gains new heights.  
Tears of lost family and friends stream,  
As questions as to why begin to flood.  
Why are we dying in this foreign land?  
Why wasn't peace thought through?

The man in the suit has but one answer, his time has passed.  
The next man promises change,  
Victory, just as the last voiced.

Peace seen as radical,  
However no weeping eyes, no families torn apart,  
No friends lost, no lost talent, when peace is used as a weapon of war.



## WHO ARE YOU?

---

RYAN MCWHERTER

There was once a boy. A boy who loved to play classical music. A boy named Tommy.

Tommy's parents named him after The Who's rock opera Tommy. Tommy (the boy, not the opera) always thought this was funny but quite sad. Thus, he hated being called Tommy, and for the purposes of staying on his good side, we will refer to him from here on out as Tom.

Tom was a pretty insightful kid. By the time he was 16, he had figured out a few things. First, he was pretty smart and was able to skate through school without much trouble. Secondly, he realized his parents were members of a very sad generation, and he pitied them.

Through a little bit of curious investigation, he discovered that they spent most of their lives (from high school through right before he was born, anyway) smoking marijuana and listening to rock music. The ideas of rock music, its need to be rebellious, certainly struck a chord with Tom, but it never inspired him and always seemed far too simple. And marijuana was nothing that Tom had any interest in. Although he did like the smell.

Anyway, on Tom's 17th birthday, Jim, Tom's dad, bought him an electric guitar, an amplifier, and a book; Learn The Who's "Tommy", The Complete Score.

"Go on, learn your namesake!" said his balding father. Jim smiled, big grin flashing slightly yellow teeth, "you learn it, and then you can teach me."

Little did Jim know, but Tom had secretly taught himself the piano they kept in the living room and had found interest in playing for ballets, not rock and roll concerts.

"Thanks dad," feigned Tom. He might of hated his namesake, and a lot of what his parents stood for, but he was polite and hated to upset them. Jim drove a semi-truck for a living and was only home on the weekends. Tommy couldn't help feeling only a little neglected, wishing his dad was around more to get to know him better.

In a few weeks, Tom had learned the guitar to a fairly proficient level. From the get go, he never thought it fit his style. He was lanky with thin sandy-blond hair. No rock star he knew of looked like him. On top of that, his mother insisted he play as loud as possible as her stint following the Grateful Dead around in the 70's had deteriorated her hearing. Tom loved music but loved his hearing more.

Despite that, he always tried to keep up with his parents' view of him. It was getting tougher now, however. He had gotten a position at a Madame Rene', a local (but fairly prestigious) ballet school. He was hired as the backup pianist, just behind the principal pianist. He could be found most afternoons after school pounding out music for the classes. Madame Rene' always preferred a live musician to a recording for her dancers. Tom was in love with the job and had quit his previous job at Burger King without so much as a phone call. Working the fryers was ever glamorous, but he preferred the piano.

"Hey Tommy?" called his mother from the kitchen, just off the main hallway of their small ranch-style house. He had just come in the door from work.

"Yeah ma?" he asked, walking into the kitchen.

"Where were you just now? Burger King called and told me you've been fired because you haven't been there in two weeks?" His mom started sincere, but her voice edged up in a way that Tom knew he was in trouble.

"I was at work..."

"Don't lie to me."

"I got a new job. It pays a dollar more an hour than BK did."



"Where? The mall? I heard the record store was hiring," her eyes lit up. "Do you get an employee discount?"

"No..." and with that, Tom decided it was best that he just told the truth. He loved it so much, he might as well be open about it. "I got hired as the second pianist for a ballet school called Madame Rene', its downtown."

"Oh my... you need to stop. And we can't tell you're father!" said Tom's mother, throwing her hands to her cheeks.

Her eyes suddenly filled with terror.

Tom's father glided into the kitchen in the most appalling neon pink leotard. He was not an ugly man but years of driving over the road had made him somewhat overweight, more the shape of a rotten pear than a man.

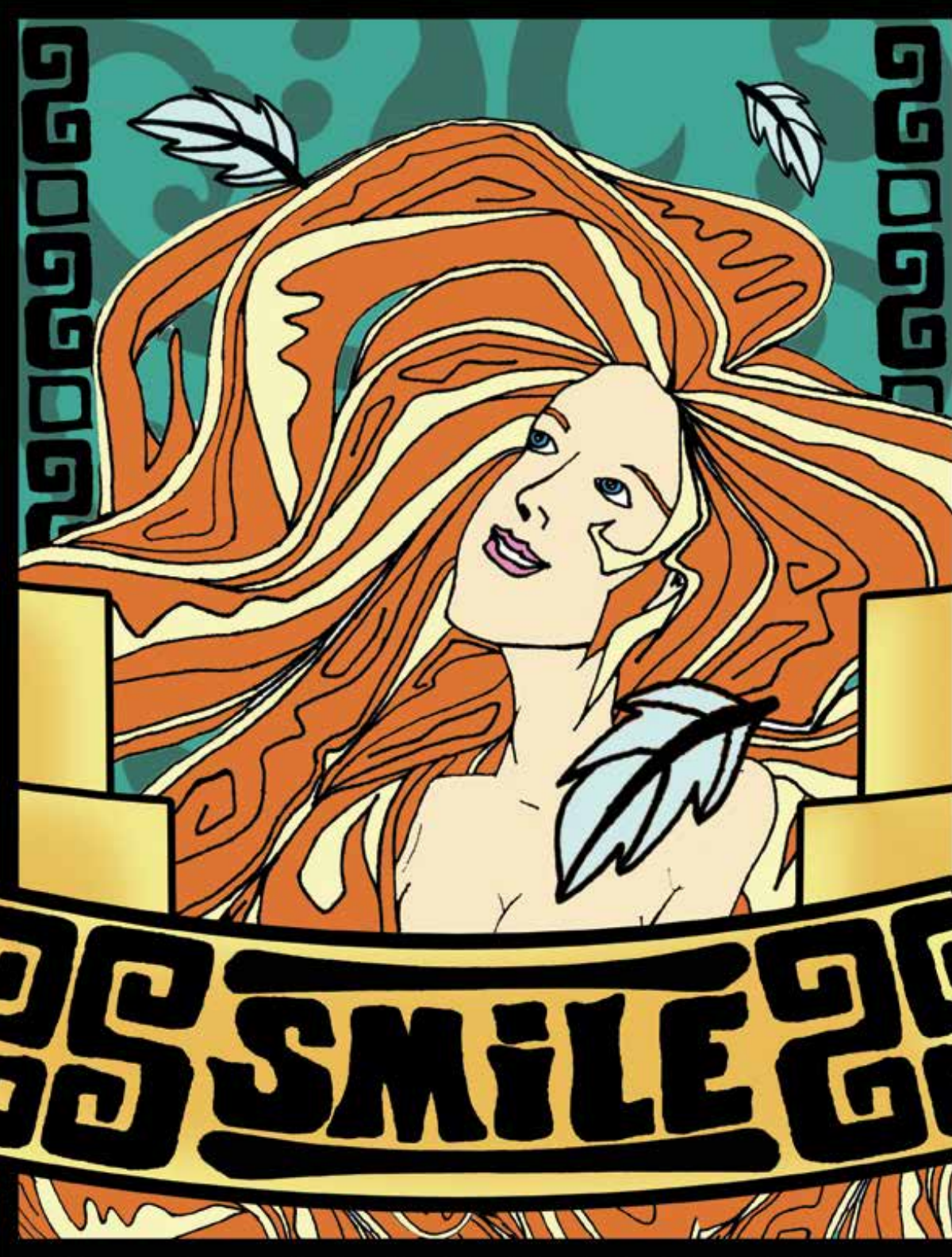
"You will play for me. Stravinsky's Rite of Spring if you don't mind," said his father, much in the way only a Broadway diva would.

He handed Tom a worn book of sheet music, an original edition of the 1913 ballet. And with that, spun gracefully on one foot and headed toward the living room.

"Do as he says... the only way he will stop is to make him dance to the point of exhaustion," Tom's mother explained.

The Rite of Spring is a ballet that lasts approximately half an hour. Tom was forced to repeat it for 5 hours, until his delicate fingers could no longer move.

And with that, Tom never touched a piano again. All he could picture was his father in a leotard. From that day on, he preferred to be called Tommy, and played in a successful Led Zeppelin cover band until he died of a marijuana influenced McDonald's chicken nugget binge.

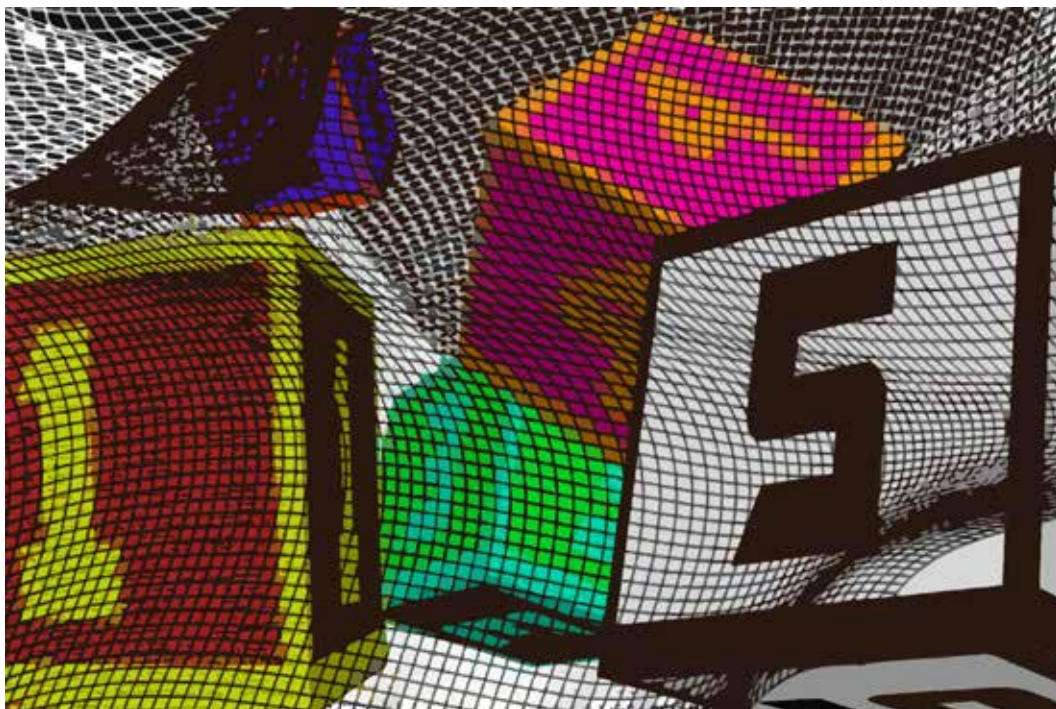


SMILE

My daughter Leah  
that splendiferous,  
fantabulous,  
young girl  
that inhabits  
the top corner  
of my world;  
turned twenty-one the other day.  
"Holy Shnikeys!"  
I thought.  
While I'm chasing my dreamsies,  
Read'n, write'n and run'n,  
till I can hardly  
keep my retina region open.  
Life is slip'n by.  
We must  
"Embrace this time."  
"Jeez Louise!"  
uber fun  
is what we need.  
Things are too normal  
in this section of P to the A.  
This calls for  
a celebration,  
a Happy Womb Exiting Day!

Soon I found myself  
knee deep in cooking,  
stoked for laser tag,  
slash bowling,  
slash food consumption,  
slash mass bonding.  
Interrupted by  
plenty of phone call-age,  
Friends asking,  
"What time is this picnic shindig?"  
Hillbillyish as it may be-  
We found ourselves all bonding healthishly,  
around a classic fire  
with delectable foods.  
Bout midnight,  
I longed for my bed,  
Wondering was the party a failboat?  
"Negatory," I said.  
As I was putting the party to rest  
all back on the shelf,  
I got snappy and snarly with the  
splendiferous one.  
She said,  
"You are a bear,  
go attack a long night of sleep!"  
So I did-  
and now  
we are golden!

ARTWORK BY HERMAN LOCKE



## DIRTY MARBLES

---

LIZ VITELLI

I hold the smooth, green  
see-through dice  
in my clammy, sweat laden  
hand.

Lucky dice have a chip  
on the corner—  
mine has one between 2 and 5.

Family rivalry,  
the tally marks mean everything.

Vitelli's: 4

Fischer's: 3.

A white marble-and-gold, shiny trophy awaits  
the next winner.

Will it be me?

My pulse quickens as my turn arrives—

thumb it right,

tuck my thumb under the dice,

quick release, too quick to notice

as I flick my wrist and pray.

Calculated right: roll a 6;

mess it up and everyone notices.

Deep breath,

shuffle the dice, once,

twice, and with a flick of

the wrist it hits the table.

Clink, clink against the wooden dining room table

like ice cubes plunked into a glass.

My breathing stops

6, 6, 6, 6! Come on!

"3."

Damn it.

In the wings for the next time.

Blue "gazing ball" marble sneaks up behind me,

in slow motion

four away,

three,

two,

one,

back to the beginning.

There are no teams—on my own

in this Hillbilly, messed up, backwards

game of strategy.

## DINNER TIME

---

ELIZABETH TAKACH

Today I woke up from a nap that had me well rested  
And able to keep my eyes open.  
I felt the energy sizzling through my veins  
As I sprung up out of bed.  
I dreamed dreams of magical lands where anything was possible,  
Everything a sparkling green with cool, crisp spring air  
Tickling my nose.  
But alas, it ended and I was attacked  
With the biting winds and the gray sky that is winter.  
My dreams of actually seeing the sun were crushed as I trudged  
Through the snow up to the dining hall.  
Crunch! Went the snow under my dark brown boots,  
Contrasting loudly in the startling silence of the setting night.

Soon I will be walking in to be swarmed by the warm air  
Rushing at me, melting the snow that is clinging to my hair.  
Colors, words, signs, they all catch my attention at once,  
Some telling me to do things: exit, push, save \$.  
Other things are just advertisements: Your opinion matters!

Dr. Pepper, Mt. Dew, Pepsi, all of these start the  
Saliva flowing in my mouth in anticipation of the cool,  
Refreshing, carbonated drink, sending bubbles of fizz into my body,  
Electrifying my senses.

I sit in the corner, slumped in my seat, sleeves down,  
With my head angled down, so as not to draw attention  
To myself as I watch people shuffle past holding their  
Plates of food that I can't see.

I watch the tables. I watch and listen to the gossiping mouths of  
Many students, talking about those they don't even know, and  
Don't care to meet.

I sit and watch, biding my time before I have to go  
Back out into the hatred that the sky is letting loose.

## SAFE HOUSE AMIDST THE STORM

---

JEN SCHWARTZ

The sounds of the storm  
Never really ignited the sense  
Of fear in my sleeping belly  
As I lay contently beneath the crested waves  
Of blankets and sheets.

I'd pull up that tide, until I was chin deep,  
Snuggling my cheeks into the sand dunes  
Of the warm side of my fluffed pillow,  
Knowing several other waltzing heart beats,  
In symphony to my own, resided like a pack  
Of hibernating bears, huddled closely together  
Under the same roof,

The roof that shielded us from rhythmic pellets  
Of rain cascading down window frames  
And clanging the gutters, the white hot solar flare  
Of lightning spitting through the slits in the blinds,  
Or the clashing stampede of rolling tankers  
Of thunder.

How much more fortunate we were  
Than those little invisible critters,  
Burrowed into holes in the sodden earth and cradled  
Under rain slicked wings, when those summer  
Storms raged, lulling on.



## HER STORY SLEEPS LIKE ABUSE

---

APRIL PRAGLE

Margaret set her hand on my shoulder. "They're going to ask you questions now. You need to answer them." She'd bent down to see me on eye level. Her pale green eyes looked as far into my soul as she could manage. "They just want to know who she is. They want to write down that you didn't hurt her. I know you didn't. Just answer their questions, Vincent. Please."

How could I tell them about Andromeda? I don't even think I knew her. Do I tell them about her hair, so-black-it's-blue? Do I tell them about her soul-reflecting eyes? Do I tell them about perfectly even sun-tanned skin? How do I even begin to tell them who she was?

"Please, Vince." Margaret uses my shoulder to help herself back up. She gets the police officer. They stand in front of me, making sure I know they're there, above me. My head hangs, body sinking into the rump-softened sofa.

"I want to help, Vince." The woman with the badge and dyed-blond hair says. "The Police Department needs to know who she is, where she's from. Someone's out there, looking for her."

"Andromeda," I whisper. "Her name's Andromeda." Her eyes could light up infinity, if she'd only open them.

"What was her last name?"

"I don't know. She never told me."

Andromeda. An-drom-e-da. Ann, she begged, for short. Andromeda, I called her. She wrinkled her face at me. Then, 'I like the way you say it. For you, Andromeda is fine.'





"We need you to help us, Vince." The cop pleaded, bending to lower herself to my level. "We need to help her. We need to know you weren't involved."

I was. I was involved. Her life, her happiness. For that short period of time, I was the satellite that orbited only her. Only her. Even now, as her lungs lie in disuse, my mind orbits her reality. Andromeda. She's all that was. All that could be. All that is.

"Andromeda is regal. Perseus saved her from the beast."

"You're not helping, Vince." Margaret said, from beside me. I forgot she was here. "Stop saying things like that. They want to know about Ann. Not that story." I heard her shift her weight.

"Andromeda is some goddess in Greek mythology. Ann told us stories as though they were hers. She was a dreamer. I'm sorry. I think he's still in shock."

"We need to get as much information as we can, as quickly as we can. Memory degrades faster than we'd like."

"I don't know who she was. She said she'd moved here, recently. She was evasive about where she lived. I didn't question it." That was how she was. You didn't question her. She had a reason for everything, and she always believed.

'Do you really believe in nothing, Vince? Nothing at all? Not even the sky or the clouds? I believe in those. And colors. And lies. Sometimes truth.'

"Do you know where she was from?"

Andromeda, of course- between Cassiopeia and Pegasus. "No, she never told me."

'Andromeda, where are you from?'

'Andromeda, of course. It's a galaxy you've never been to. It's lovely there. The trees sprout purple and the sky is always cloudy. We dance every morning, welcoming the day that's about to come. We share glances and handshakes, hugs and heartbreaks. It's beautiful there.' It's beautiful, Andromeda. You were so beautiful. Won't you open your eyes?'

'Open your eyes! You can't see the stars if you keep them closed, Vince. Look, you can see dreams. Over there,' she points 'happiness. All that cosmic energy, producing happy you've never felt before.'

'I've been happy before, Andromeda.'

'Not like this, you haven't.' She turns to face me, 'Not like this.'

"Did she mention anyone- a sibling, a parent, any extended family?" She'd straightened up now, no longer on my level.

"No one. Towards... the end, I was beginning to believe she didn't have anyone." I asked her, too many times. 'I don't have family, silly. I'm a god!'

"How old was she? Is there anything you can tell us that would help us to identify her? Did she ever mention any places she'd been? Any friends, any... anything?"

"No. She never told me anything."

She told me she was a god, and gods had no use for age. Gods were immortal, and every day was like waking up to greet eternity, knowing it would always be there. 'Like the sun. You wake up, and you know it's going to rise. You've never had a reason to believe it wouldn't. Every morning, I wake up and I hear eternity. Eternity whispers 'Good Morning, Ann,' and I whisper back. 'Good morning, Eternity.'

The police officer is talking to Margret again. "Look, I don't think we're going to get anything out of him today. I'll stop by tomorrow. Do you know if she knew anyone else? The department is going to go to some of the local shops and see if anyone knew her."

"No, no one. I didn't even know they were hanging out until a few weeks ago. They were always at the park. He told me she never talked to anyone, so I don't know. I don't know if she even had friends."

"Alright. And thank you. If you think of anything, anything at all, here's my card. Just ask for Sandy, and they'll patch you through to me. If I'm not there, leave a message with the secretary." She walks out, heavy feet hitting carpet. "The preliminary autopsy seems to show that she had a medical condition. I know it's not good news, but at least you won't have to worry about any accusations."

"Thank you. And if he starts saying anything, I'll let you know. Man, if he stays like this, I'll need to get him a shrink."

'Andromeda, do you ever wonder if we're all crazy? This world is just some delusion we're under?'

'Every day.' Her so-black hair gets ruffled by the wind, finding its way into cracks on the tree bark.

'Have you ever wondered what reality is to someone who has it all-together? Do you wonder what it's like to have reason?'



## STORMS

ROB PRESHAK

Storms roll over the green hills,  
like a Siren's song  
Deep peals of thunder like the roars of Zeus  
accents of lightning tear apart the darkened sky  
into pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

The rains pound against my roof,  
staccato through the rooms like machine gun fire.  
Outside, the old trees shatter and fall,  
and the young ones bow in submission.  
The whipping wind is like a slap from God  
Underneath a blanket of black clouds.

## RACKET MELODY

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LUKE SHOFESTALL

Half deaf, I made my choice  
I blame the noise  
The racket of confidence in ignorance  
The bellow of indignant demand on principle  
I still hear "why?" ringing in my ears  
I could have been spared such calamity  
Had I kept a quiet resignation  
A simple compliance with expectation  
But, noise is my music  
I've heard a complex dirge play the jagged notes of discord  
Then give way to the smooth and clear melody  
of enlightened purpose and joy  
Clamor still pens the score, but the song is familiar  
And out of dissonance comes harmony  
But silence  
Can be so sweet

ARTWORK BY JESSE CAGGIANO



FOR CRYIN'  
OUT LOUD

## A WEEKLY MEETING AT THE BAR

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S.C. NOLAN

Every Thursday night, just after ten o'clock, a group of incredibly dissimilar individuals, alike in just one important way, meet in a place that won't encourage their disease. The Jumping Juice and Java Bar on 8th Street plays host to the local Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. It's here that the men and women of Fairfax County with a predisposition toward the drink order their fresh-squeezed juices and their sugar-filled coffees before getting to the usual rundown.

Mack, the owner and barkeep, has never been afflicted by the disease, but genetics tell him he's got a pretty good chance of drinking himself to death. In the spirit of his father, who had done just that, Mack became an honorary member of the group, hosting its meetings in the establishment he'd owned for ten years. He, like everyone else in the assembly, had sworn the oath of secrecy and vowed his trust to every member of the group.

One of the best things about the Juice Bar, especially for its Thursday-night patrons, is that it looks exactly like the pubs they all used to frequent, but could no longer trust themselves in. At the long stretch of polished mahogany in the front of the room sit eight stools, padded and wrapped in maroon faux-leather. Behind the bar are six juices on tap, mostly original blends of different fresh squeezes, with a few staples like apple and orange, as well as bottles of just about everything else. Lining the walls of the establishment are sports relics, Hollywood memorabilia, and just about everything else Mack could find when he went through his father's old things. The only thing missing from the tavern experience was the smell of dried booze on the floor and stale peanuts.

On one not-so-particular Thursday night, with the drinks poured and the seats taken, Mack starts the procedures. They begin with the prayer, read the statement of purpose, and then Mack asks the members to go around the room.

First, there's Nancy Coragine. She's a forty-five year old woman who took her alcoholism by the horns about a year ago. On this night, she's been sober for five months, having slipped up a couple of times early on. The others welcome her, and she begins to tell the story of her most recent bout with alcohol.

"My husband," she says, in her southern drawl, "isn't the most supportive of fellas. Last week, when I was workin' late, he said he couldn't make it home to take the kid to soccer practice. Well I couldn't leave work, so my kid missed his practice. That night, all I wanted to do was drink, but instead, I took a deep breath... and I told that deadbeat to get out 'the house. He wouldn't a'course, cuz it's his name on the lease, so I unleashed on the bastard. Hit him so hard he had to go to the hospital. Had him tell the nurse he'd slipped on a patch'a ice." Nancy smiles at the group. "But," she said, "I didn't drink."

The other members applaud and smile back at her. It is, after all, the point of the meeting. Bill Simmons is next, and boy, does he have a story to tell.

"Ya see," he starts gruffly. The coarseness his voice had gained from years of hard liquor would always serve as a reminder of those dark days. "I gave up the drink about twelve years ago. And as I've told ya before, it's been great for me. Ya see, the drink, for me, wasn't an escape from my problems. It was just a diversion. That's why I switched to the plant. Last week, I rolled myself the sweetest blunt you ever saw and I smoked that baby start to finish."

Again, the applause is round and boisterous, especially when he invites any and everyone in the room to join him next time. What an achievement, they all think, hopefully. Twelve years.

Next up is James Warner, a businessman who thought about going into politics awhile ago until he made a fool of himself, tying on a few too many at a fundraising mixer. He's been dry ever since, of course, and now, with no reputation to protect, he tells the circle of secrecy about his proclivity toward the ladies of the night. "In fact," he says, as if he's presenting a sweetheart deal to the board of directors of a competing company, "I've got one lined up to meet me as soon as I get out of here."

There are a few envious hoots from the men in the crowd and even the women smile and clap politely.

After James sits down, it's Melanie Yost's turn to speak. She's in her early thirties and just breached the three-hundred pound mark. The others have watched her, week in and week out, pack on the pounds, filling the void left by alcohol with one mouthful after another. She's been sober now, though, for two-and-a-half years.

"Can I freshen anyone up?" asks Mack, grabbing the empty glasses from the bar. A few members raise their hands for the refills and Mack complies with a grin.

And so, as the night plays out, the Alcoholics swapping stories about their sobriety and the various paths they've taken to avoid drinking—from simply smoking their lungs black with two-pack-a-day diets, to resorting to kleptomania, replacing the thrill they'd once received from drinking the night away.

On and on they talk, clapping with the conclusion of each tale of success, and by the end of the meeting, Mack will be damned if he isn't a little bit proud of each and every one of the patrons. He looks around the Juice and Java Bar with a beam of accomplishment on his face, sharing in the reverie of this dysfunctional community.

"You know what," he says, waving off the members who are starting to pull out their wallets to pay their tabs, "the drinks are on me."

Five words that everyone in the room can appreciate.









PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH LOFINK

## THE TEMPER TANTRUM OF THE PAST

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SUE ANN SMITH

It's 11:59 –  
that pivotal time  
when our present  
will become our past  
with the quick costume change  
of the clock  
into midnight.

It makes its dramatic exit  
with a slamming door  
like the thunder,  
whose sound pierces into dreams,  
as if an angel just scored a strike  
in a game of bowling  
and all the other angels are shrieking  
with pure excitement  
or possibly defeat.

It waves a hurried goodbye  
with a brilliant flash  
of lightning  
that quickly scares the darkness into hiding,  
even if only for a millisecond,  
as if a single lit lamppost  
highlighting the golden streets of Heaven  
has spontaneously combusted  
like a phoenix.

It mourns the loss of its departure  
long after it has overstayed its welcome  
through a torrential downpour  
that hurtles mercilessly to the Earth,  
riding gravity's coattails,  
as each of the thousands of tears it cries  
shatter like a priceless crystal wine glass  
keeping me wide awake during its little temper tantrum  
to see the flashing numbers 12:00  
that open the door to my future.



ARTWORK BY LINDEN ANNE

## THE INDIAN WOMAN & THE IRISH MAN

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KIARA BROWN

I stare at the faded photo...

Her pigment, fair.

A shade lighter than Bryer's French vanilla ice cream.

She looked and could have passed as a white woman  
but you could tell she was Native American by her tribal garb.

Blues, greens, yellows and rust colored reds—  
her head band, with no feather, wrapped around her head.

Blackfoot was the tribe to which she belonged.

Her jet black hair,  
as smooth as silk—

long and intertwined...like two braided ropes;  
a smile—that is non existent.

My Great grandmother's mother.

Her husband,  
an Irish man.

A man I've never known much about.

It was him who gave me  
my perfectly placed freckles,  
and it is all I have from him to keep.

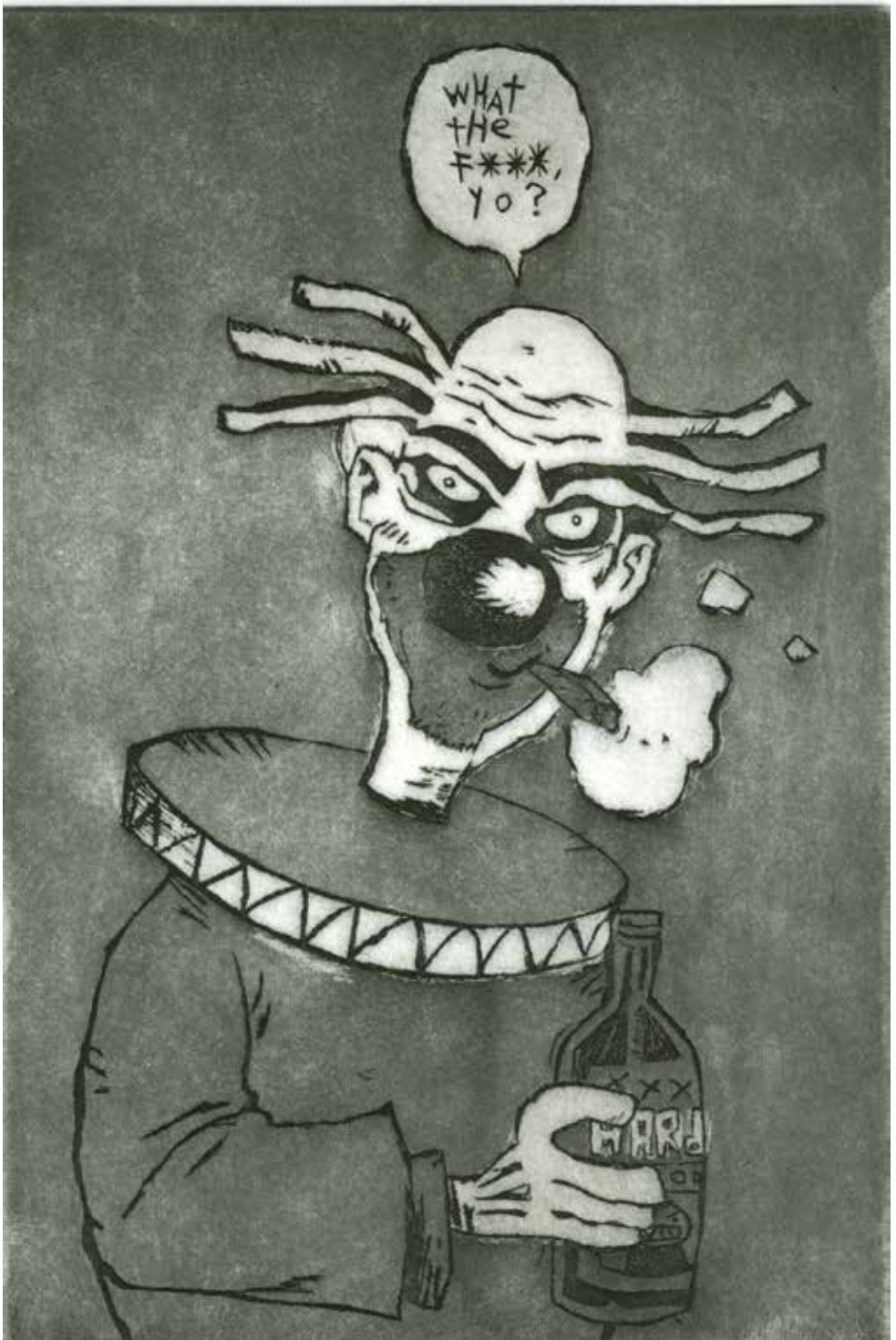
UNTITLED

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REBECCA GREENMAN

I drew an eight of spades from the deck of life,  
Neither fierce nor passive, devoid of vice,  
Appropriately black, drawing little attention,  
The reds far too bold and dismissing convention,  
Middle class of this numerical reality,  
Rejecting advancement as a dreamer's fallacy,  
Complacent and ever-accepting,  
Stability and normality complexing,  
I drew an eight of spades from the deck of life,  
Returned it and drew another in hopes of extravagance or strife.

ARTWORK BY MARK EHRENSBERGER



## WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU ABOUT NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

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KRISTEN JOBLON

Fall semester schedules come out. My husband has classes nearly every day starting at 8:00. I don't start until 9:00. That's one extra hour of beauty sleep to look forward to. Plus, both of our days end around 3:00. Just think of all that time we can study and spend time together. Or, think of it this way...

It's 5:45.

My alarm is the first to go off because I take the longest to get ready—a punishment for being a woman. I'm tired. I'm pregnant. I want to sleep. But I have to get up so that I have time for my morning responsibilities. I shower and beautify as much as thirty-five minutes allows—it's never enough.

While my husband showers I get our son ready for school. At 6:30, I wake him up. His mood determines the timeliness of this process. I comb his hair, get him dressed and brush his teeth. He's shipped downstairs where he is greeted by my husband who is ready to pour cereal and serve beverages to anyone there at the time. I'm never there.

I feed the cat. My husband takes out the dog. It's time to go.

It's 6:55.

Because of my husband's 8:00 class, our son's bus stop has to be at my mom's house. We drive him there, tell him to have a good day, and hit the road. If we left there any later than 7:00, my husband would be late because of the commute. As long as we don't get stuck behind any school buses or modular homes, we will make it in just under an hour.

At 3:15 he picks me up after my last class. We use the hour commute to spend our "quality" time together.

It's 4:30.

If I want to get my son to bed by 7:30, I can't waste any time. So the moment we get home, I start dinner. We eat, rinse the dishes, grab the dog and go for a walk. For a half hour we walk around the neighborhood. This is when we catch up with our son.

As soon as we get back, our nightly routine begins. My husband chooses dishes, and I get bath time. I run the water while my son gets undressed. I shampoo him, rinse him, and then supervise his body washing. After he is clean, he's allowed to play in the tub for fifteen minutes.

That is when I get to do laundry. Whatever is in the dryer is folded, and whatever we need for the remainder of the week is washed. All other items are out of luck until the weekend. With laundry started, I head back upstairs to get my son out of the tub. He lines up his toys and gets dried and dressed. Then he brushes his teeth and he says goodnight to his dad. We sit in bed and review his homework. Then it's story time. We read a book or two and it's lights out.

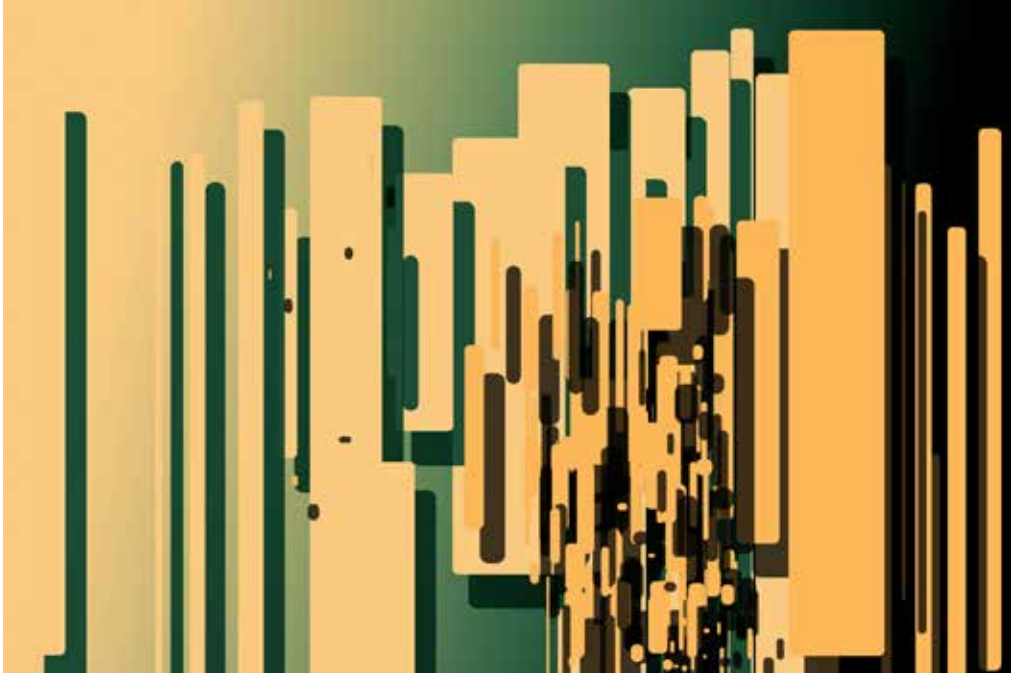
At 7:30 I start packing lunches for the three of us. They go into the fridge with a verbal reminder to my husband not to forget to put them in the car in the morning. My husband switches out the laundry.

It's 8:00.

We're exhausted. I grab two glasses of water, and my husband grabs our backpacks. We study. Not anywhere near as long as our professors suggest—but, we study.

Around 11:30, depending on if we have exams, we stagger to bed. Six hours and fifteen minutes later, my alarm rings.





ARTWORK BY JEFF GRAHAM

## OCTOBER'S DOOR

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DEBRA MATTHEWS

Tall, silver, cylinder on the stove  
steam shooting,  
trapezoid rocking back and forth with swish swish,  
juice boiling, bubbling, and Ball lids popping  
rows of color, greens, reds, purples, golds—  
Stores for winter preserved in Mason and Atlas.

Untie the knot in the back—  
royal blue apron sprinkled with sticky seeds,  
bare toes across tomato stained floor.  
It's time to leave all this.

Step through October's door  
onto the crunchy pine needle path,  
every step releases the fragrance.

How can death smell so good?

Oak and maple leaves dress with yellow, orange  
scarlet, silk and taffeta,  
the pine and hemlock  
put on their brown fatigues and drop.

Step into the field of goldenrod.  
Fingertips skimming over the tops, palms tickled  
by yellow pollen dust, honeybee's delicacy.

The hickory, gray like slate,  
stands shaggy on the bank, pummeling the ground  
with green and brown.  
Gray squirrel scampers down the ruffled trunk  
scratching, tail flitting,  
gathering his winter's cache.

Flocks of sparrows dive,  
swoop and rise like swimmers  
in an aquamarine sea of air,  
gathering on the line above,  
chattering like busy bodied women.

Laying down in the warm sun bleached weeds  
Now we will sleep  
for in April there will be a resurrection.



