



TOBECO LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL 2013

CREDITS

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, English Club, Sigma Tau Delta, Michelle's Café, designer Brenda Stahlman, and the university's students, faculty and staff for their support.

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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 are reminded that art is as timeless as the river itself.

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

Cover art by Lauren Sutley

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When once I stepped into a book.....

Cayleigh Boniger

I.
Weave me into the webs of magic:
my hair
threading into the pattern,
my fingers
untangling,
blood and bone and flesh undoing
little by little -
the edges of me
unfolding,
finding snares and filaments
to intertwine into my skin.
Strands of darkness
that flush
into the colors of crushed Queen's velvet,
of lilac petal in the evening's fall,
the shimmer of color accompanying ebony
wings,
the heart of a blueberry,
skin that nestles the fruit.
shadowy ink stains my skin,
marking me for all to see,
if they could see me.
I am the doppelganger of the night tree,
of the lamppost.

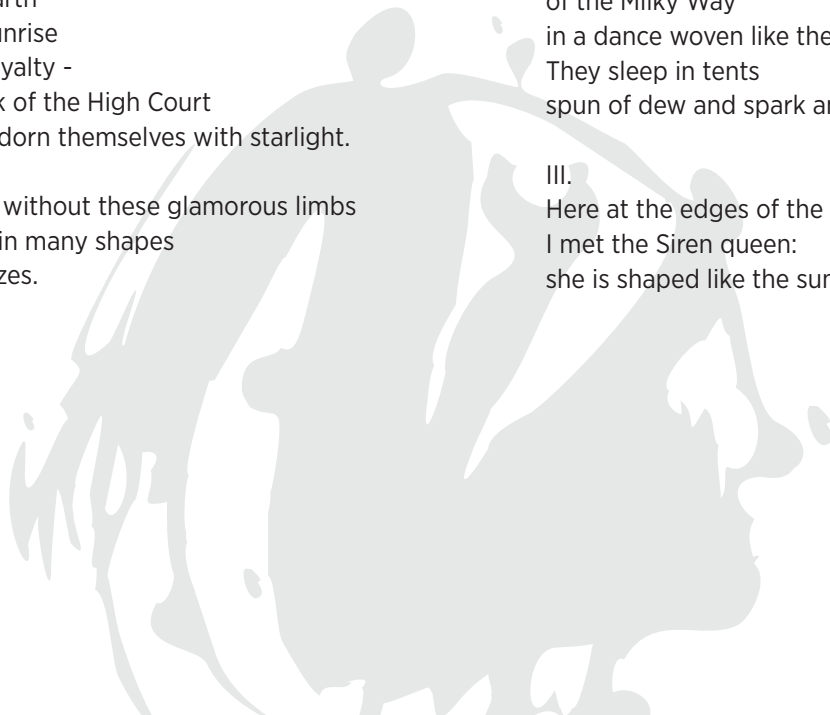
II.
Faery wings delicate as a butterfly's kiss:
shiver under the slightest sigh.
Translucent opal
and midnight
and earth
and sunrise
and royalty -
a mark of the High Court
who adorn themselves with starlight.

Those without these glamorous limbs
come in many shapes
and sizes.

Some have faces with flesh of bark
and humor that bites.
Others born of flint and granite
with eyes the shade
of hot tar;
their hair a curtain
of pearly white.
Sprites as tall
as the primrose grows,
with skin that mimics
the newly budded leaves.

They are the shimmer of sun
'neath a wind-shaken tree,
the burning of blue stars
in deadest night,
the soft rain of cherry blossoms
when Spring has exhausted herself,
the dance of a million, million celestial crystals.
their song is ocean's sighs,
ice splitting,
hunter's cry,
storm's whisper,
unfurling green,
Aurora's murmur,
mountain's sob,
snow's hum.
Their touch
the ladybug's kiss
and bite of the ice-knife.
they revel on the carpet
of the Milky Way
in a dance woven like the spider's web.
They sleep in tents
spun of dew and spark and breath of the forest.

III.
Here at the edges of the wide sea,
I met the Siren queen:
she is shaped like the summer grasses



and speaks as sweetly.
To her slim waist
drips her oblivion tresses,
tracing undulating rivulets down her back.
Her skin takes its complexion
from the foam that rides
atop the ocean waves;
the scales of her tail
glint like moonlit pools hidden
among the rocky shore.
In her wide eyes
play the silverfish in forests
of kelp and seaweed.
Her crown a string of cowries,
pauas,
miniature nautili,
and saltwater pearls.
She offered up a conch,
instructing me to whisper my secrets
to join with a thousand others.
This is the way of the ocean.

IV.
You sing the warrior,
you cry the monster.
Sheaves of paper
layering and building -
a transfiguration into miles of desert,
stretches of ancient forest,
mountains that tower Babel.
Pillars of murdered kings
and merry men.
you are the twilight's body -
your voice in every breath
of sighing wind;
your hair is the drift of the wind.
You are the little voice
in the back of the mind
and the front of the heart
that insists
there is magic in the tips of your fingers
and the sweep of your lashes.

Artist: John Gornati



Romanticizing a Sunburn

Catherine Henry

We met in a field by chance
One summer

He came from nowhere
A giant
So kind
So warm
So caring
Undeniable

I welcomed him as my lover
There in that happenstance field
He drenched my shoulders
My face
My breasts
With warm burning kisses

I basked in his attention
I thought us destined
Fated
To always be together
But no

He left me in that field
Our field
Alone
In the dark

Now all I have from our encounter
Is the enduring memory of our day
Together

And
This enduring
Sunburn

The Way I Write

Diamond McKay

Think really hard,
let all of your creative juices overflow your ink.
Write what you feel. Write what you think. Write what you know.
Write something. Write anything.
Lay your pretty blue pen tip on the paper, let the ink fall.

Only sometimes,
it doesn't.

It doesn't fall. It doesn't fall, because it's stuck.
It lingers a little longer, forcing that last drop of juice to plunge.
It clings on to your last thought. It becomes your last hope.
You plunge it onto the paper before you can't take anymore.
Think harder. Write faster. Create more.

Let your voice speak through your words,
let the verbal become visual and the visual become physical.
Jumble your thoughts.
Collect them, and jumble them more wisely.
Make some sense out of them.

You don't have to be as long as Whitman,
as beautiful as Frost,
as dark as Poe,
or even as brilliant as Dickinson.
Much to my dismay, I have to acknowledge her brilliance.
But don't write like her.
You can't write like her. You're not that smart.
But you are. And you can. Just don't write like her.

Write like yourself.
Put these words together on the page,
and leave them for appreciation. Leave them for you.
Appreciate your writing.
Appreciate yourself.

Now look here. Look at what you've done.
Look at the way you write.
You, are brilliant.

WRITER SPOTLIGHT

KAITLIN REDDINGER

A Photo from 1995

Kaitlin Reddinger

And there we sit,
forever happy to be bound
within the border
of a small cedar frame.
Velvet photo corners
hold us in place.
No matter,
we are content to stay
in the summer of '95.
I on grandfather's knee,
sister at his feet,
two princesses crowning their king,
with chubby tan arms
clasping Barbie doll scepters,
and lips bestowing kisses
of pink Popsicle juice.
Our royal beagle, Cubby,
tries to hide the remains
of the chewed paper sashes
we spent all morning coloring.
The King beams down
at his "sweet little buddies"
and suggests mint chocolate ice cream
for us three to share
out on the warm blacktop.
He pays no mind
to the tightening of his chest,
to the cough welling deep
in the black of his lungs,
as we squeal for treats
and sidewalk chalk.



Kaitlin Reddinger is a senior mathematics major at Clarion with a minor in creative writing. Originally from Summerville, PA, Kaitlin will soon be found in Bowling Green, Ohio, where she'll pursue her master's degree in applied mathematics.

Kaitlin finds that the relationship between math and writing in her life is a symbiotic one.

"The freedom of creative writing helps me see the beauty in the order and structure of numbers, and the logical training of mathematics helps me stay focused in writing a story or an essay," she said.

A self-proclaimed "amateur naturalist," Kaitlin finds inspiration in nature, the works of E.B. White and Robert Frost, and the teachings of her parents.

Eyes of the Island

Kaitlin Reddinger

Our feet find footholds
swifter than our eyes,
as we hunch through the brambles,
a knotted green web
of flowering vines.
The trees twist in the July air,
as though straining to watch us
promenade up the path.
Their wrinkled bodies
relax.

Sweet as soggy cookie crumbs,
the musky scent of damp earth
hangs like a scarf about our heads.
It clings to our collars,
the hems of our pants –
a drenching perfume
we will savor all evening.
We make our way to the edge,
where the sandpipers sleep
on the border between seaway and sky.

A breath of wind
curtsies among the pebbles
and tickles our ears with a whisper.
Leaves of sugar maple
and white pine needles
scatter across the red-granite rocks,
as if kicked up by the feet
of invisible lovers,
dancing boldly on the shore
over remnants of driftwood.

And here we find a ruffled mirror,
rolling like blue-gray silk.
Sunbeams trail like glowing fingers
through the frigid teal water,
stroking the marbled mire
of the riverbed.
Our knees creak
like the hulls of sailboats,
as we stoop with cupped hands
on this shoal.

We watch the barges
carrying European goods,
charmed by the faint echo
of loons lost in the mist.
The St. Lawrence
weaves a wide bandeau,
tying us together.
Its waters drip from our sweaty faces,
and continue the journey downriver.



An Ode to Coffee

Kaitlin Reddinger

Arabian, bitter, black, bold,
brewed, pressed, piping hot,
decaf, instant, perked or not,
java, mocha, drinkable seed,
Turkish magic, chocolate beans,
Columbian wrapped, Seattle's Queen,
Dunkin' dipper, doused with cream,
sweetened with Splenda,
or elegantly plain.
Oh my dear, cafe au lait –

My table top friend,
my bookmark stain,
cup-holder companion,
this poor man's champagne.
You need no partner yet never complain.
When paired with cinnamon
or nutmeg,
you dance just the same.

Strike up the band.
Call the sun from its bed.
And pick-me-up, Joe.
Whether with froth or foam,
whether fresh from Verona where the houses
blend
the prized brown marbles through smoky mills,
whether smoothed from the earth,
polished to powder by mortar and pestle,
the best way to salute today is
with a chipped mug,
or a flimsy cardboard cup,
or that hard plastic tumbler
with the screw-on lid.
Come.
Grasp this holy grail.
And hold the morning in your hands.

Night Fishing

Kaitlin Reddinger

The coolers slosh
with melted ice.
Our fingernails are black,
encrusted with worm dirt.
This is our last cast
for the evening.

Aching backs hunch
once more
over sticky hooks,
as the trolling motor
hums in the voice
of a thousand cicadas.

Sunglasses unveil
perfect white ovals,
circling our eyes –
a stark contrast
to the shiny pink blisters
blooming on our noses.

Plop!
The sinkers,
tethered like
solid silver raindrops,
disappear from the ends
of our fishing poles.

The sun melts
into the line of hemlocks
like a tangerine
Popsicle,
as campfire smoke
drifts across the river.

Hands slap at mosquitoes.
Water laps the hull.
Twirling reels click click click.
And through this sweet rhythm
of unorchestrated music,
we wait for a nibble.

Little Blades

Andrea Fulmer

The interesting thing, she supposed, was that when you found someone you loved, it was supposed to be sunshine and daisies all the time. This was generally true, though the sunshine was at times wan and the daisies died in the winter. Still, there was warmth in the knowledge that you loved someone. Resting somewhere between your brain and figurative ear, it simmered away, day after day, while you went out to dinner or watched movies or played card games together. It made gloomy days romantic and casual forgetfulness a symptom of young love.

What they didn't tell you, and this to her was the interesting part, was that for all the bliss you could feel, the world was not sympathetic to you any more than it was to anyone else. It moved and turned and time came and went without a thought about one person or another. It brought distance where it wasn't wanted and melancholy where it was forbidden. It wasn't cruel, just orderly. No one was exempt, not even a pair of people who loved each other. Love didn't find people jobs, and love didn't make deportation disappear.

She walked past places daily and felt bitter – this restaurant did not let him be a busboy, this hotel would not let him clean the rooms, this flower shop would not let him make deliveries, and so on – until by the time she walked the four blocks to her own job, she usually turned around and called to tell them she was stuck in traffic. They didn't know she walked to work.

They didn't tell you that—when they come to take the person you love away—you will cry for weeks. Sometimes for hours and hours until you are heaving into your garbage can and your throat is sore, sometimes for moments when you are sitting on the subway, but always crying. They did not tell you that you would have aches and cramps and headaches and eat little, sleep less. They didn't mention that they would forget things when they left and you would find them for months, tucked in corners or swept under the couch, and they will hurt you like a blow to the ribs. You will find an old shirt jammed under your bed that has the last few whiffs of his cologne on it. You will find his empty shampoo bottle at the bottom of your recycle bins. You will find a matching pair of tickets from that off-Broadway show underneath a coaster. They did not tell you that the sun will sympathize and burn less brightly, the daisies will stop blooming even in the spring, and the world becomes more grayscale than you remember.

They have greeting cards for love. Picture frames for photos of it. They have this, or that, for a pair of people to enjoy. They have smiles for people who walk to and fro with hands clasped. They didn't tell you that when they take these things from you they leave traces and that—like hidden little blades—they will make the hurt go on for years. They didn't tell you, when they took the boy you love, that they would take you too and leave your body behind.

It was interesting, she thought, how much they didn't say.

The Angels of December

Stephen Boland

On the roof of the grade school
across the street, grandfather saw
angels singing when he was three,

proclaiming the glory of the Trinity,
assuring him God watched from above,
and that they were there to protect him.

The angels were there, so he said,
one night over Berlin when they lifted
the wings of his plane over a line of trees.

They were there, so he said,
the morning my uncle took a tour
of Vietnam and was introduced to God.

They were there, so he said, on the day
doctors discovered the cellular civil war
encroaching upon his posterior cranial fossa.

The lump grew to the size of a lemon,
but the angels sweetened the bitter
taste with sugar, so he said.

Three months later, I watch
my breath evaporate in the chill air
when grandmother comes looking.

With my father to my right
and grandmother to my left, I gaze
down upon my grandfather resting

in a bed of oak and silk, wearing his best
suit, holding his beloved Rosary, and ask,
“where have your angels gone?”

Epiphany

Elizabeth Takach

Sometimes it's okay
to give up.

Necessary even.
Give up the dream
of holding his hand,
of feeling protected
and wanted, of being
happy.

Sometimes it's hard
to give up.

Painful.
But the pain
turns into
relief.

Relief that you
no longer have that
burden, dragging you
down.

It doesn't matter
what he
thinks,

says,
does.
And that relief,
grants you your
freedom.

The Holy Man

Natalie Gearhart

Dad was never a religious man, but on Sunday mornings I would wake to find him on the back porch, tossing seeds haphazardly on the banister for the birds, standing solemnly with a cup of coffee in his other hand, the steam rising, meeting his lips. It was in these ritual moments, right as the sun kissed the wiry treetops on the horizon that he believed in the natural world: a divinity much larger than himself.

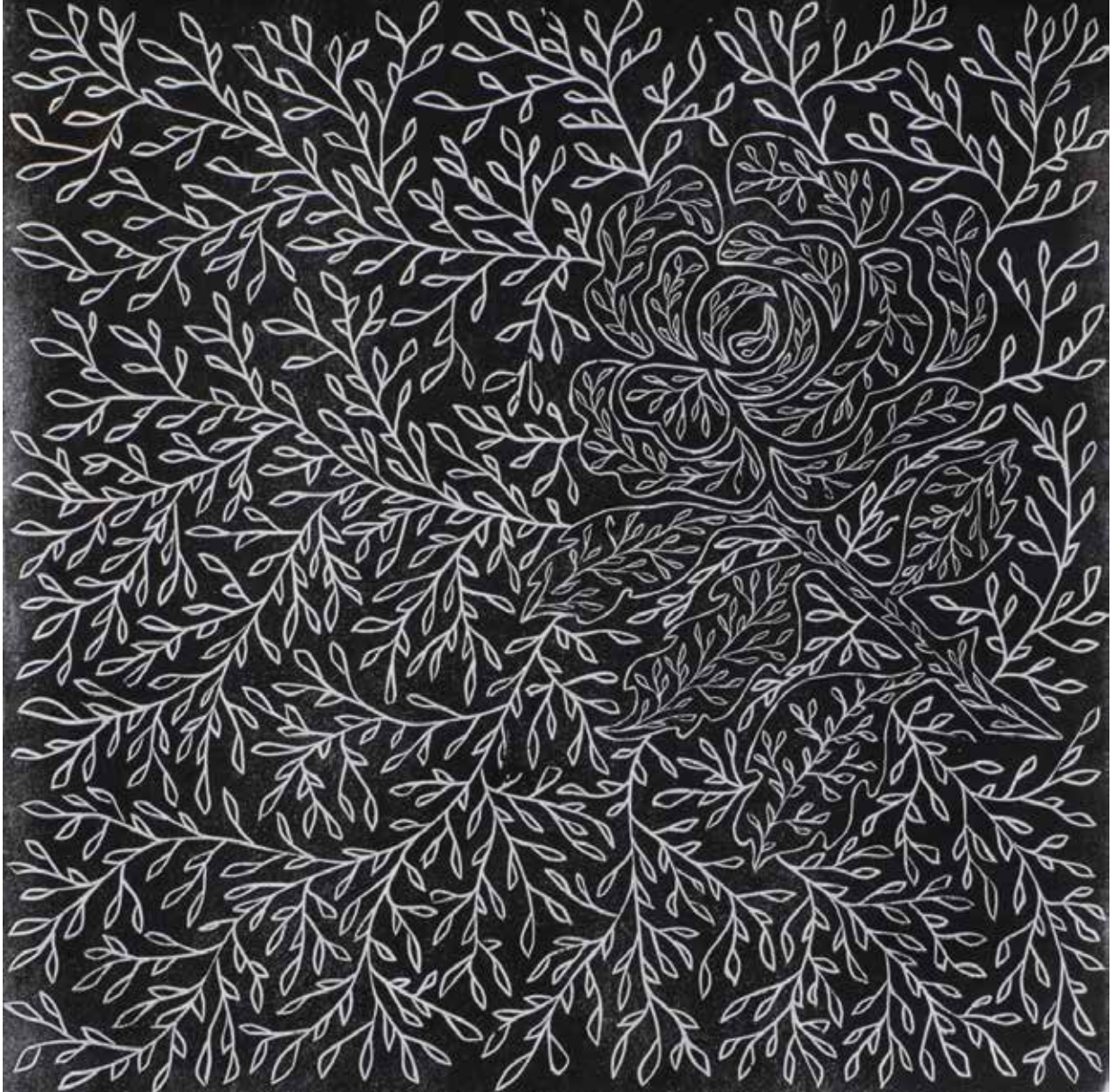
Never baptized, no first communion. Here now, though, I can picture him at the head of the table, bald head bowed, red and raw from forgetting to wear his cap outside in the snow. It was a tradition to say grace before dinner. I always sat next to Dad on the left and Mom sat to his right, with Macy next to her in her high-chair, bopping up and down, cooing softly and blowing spit bubbles into the air, which would then propel forward, onto the table.

Dad was a carpenter, his father was also. It was years later that I learned he had made the table as a wedding present for Mom, combining different woods together: dark mahogany, old pine, and solid oak. It was only when Macy was old enough to walk on her own that I found the inscription "To my love, Grace" during a competitive game of hide-and-seek. The cut in the wood was smooth, the edges slightly rough from a sharp blade. I would sit, legs crossed, and trace the outline. Love was just a four letter word to me then.

In college, Sunday mornings began with Christian helping me load up the jeep, preparing for our six hour drive back together to school. Out of the few boyfriends Macy or I had brought home, Christian was the only one to stay at table with Dad, even after the plates had been cleared, washed, and dried in the kitchen strainer. He got him to smile, laugh, even tell jokes, which made me blush and both men bond. In fact, it was at this table my father told him to sit, the day he stopped by while I was out. Christian later admitted to being terrified, gripping the rings in the back of the chair, while asking Dad for my hand. Dad, I can imagine, sat there, fingers interlocked, head bowed.

Years later, while Christian is at work and I am off, I sometimes move the chairs away from the table we inherited and army-crawl my way underneath. Our Dalmatian, Porter, thinks I am playing and crawls next to me, his rough tongue licking my face. I flip over and lie on my back, looking at the different wood shades, blending together like watercolors. I lift my hands and trace the outline of the words: Dad's blessing.

Artist: Marissa Muffie



Drive

Stephen Boland

Cruising at seventy, above
the legal limit, but below
the radar that decides
if I'm a criminal, I listen
to the liquid pat pat pat

pummeling the windshield.
My genetic memory recalls
the far off echo of Anglo-Saxon
hordes that once roared through
Europe and Britain, borrowing

words and obliterating cultures,
imbuing my blood with a Euromut
infusion from non-English speaking
Progenitors who washed across
the world in relentless waves.

A million miniscule iron mallots
pound away, pat pat pat
as I watch the gravity
defying drops drive upward,
across the glass. Climbing.

Climbing like sperm swimming,
sidewinder missiles striking toward
their target with a mindless
desire to duplicate DNA.
Memories wander to my first born,

nine months in the making,
emerging blood soaked and screaming,
enraged at his sudden, unwanted
displacement from an Italian womb.
One more genome added to the mix.

Standard Fear

Drew Sernik

My initiation into adulthood
donned polished navy paint,
and a golden Chevy emblem.
Two thousand dollars worth
of independence, which
I was helpless to operate.

Rrrvvvv, hop, stop.
With every failed turn of the
engine, I yearn for the surge
of a spark to snap my heart
out of its cardiac arrest.

Rrrvvvv, hop, stop.
My stomach rose and
condensed, a storm cloud
of panic in my throat.
Perspiration puddled
my pits and palms.

Rrrvvvv, clutch, shift,
cruise. My feet commanded
each gear. My shoulders sighed
in relief. I lowered my white flag,
and slowly conquered the road.
Just a girl and her Chevy.

Burning Car

James Rose

Driving contentedly down streets lain with the pavement of night,
row houses stretch on either side,
nine lanes apart,
stretching to the vanishing point.

The events of the night clunk through my head
with the deliberation of an old slide projector.
The remains of rush hour cars
sneak by me down Roosevelt Boulevard.

Whoosh! And there was suddenly light,
a hunk of black metal,
the remains lay encased in flame.

I passed it, and all at once,
the memories began to whirl through my head,
until I reached the vanishing point.

To Envy a Man Slowly Dying

Eric Stevens

To envy a man
slowly dying,
the remnants of life
like sand slipping through
your fingers at a beach
as you leave your better days with faint memory.

At your back,
these grains
fall and wait.
They are you,
your brother,
your sister,
your enemies,
your lovers,
the ones that never loved,
the ones that never loved you

and the millions of other specs,
waiting,
waiting for the high tide to
come crashing in and
pull these grains away by their ankles
still reaching to be remembered.
Or a low tide yearning
you first at your fingertips
and creeps up your
arm before pulling
you completely in,
you drift off into sea
and within that space;

you find dreams,
few and far and infinitely between.

In My Father's Shoes

Christopher Shields

Rise with the sun,
leave the cool morning air
for the sweltering heat inside.

Everything is covered in
thick brown dust,
takes hours to broom it away;

it's just as thick by noon.
Surrounded by towering machines,
caked in grease and dust,

powerful enough to
rend thick steel plates.
Pink kerosene and

cool acetone sting the
hundreds of tiny cuts
on my palms.

I soak a rag with
pungent chemicals
and set to scrubbing away

the years of grime.
Make them shine,
a superficial breath of life.

On my knees in the filth,
everything but my hands black.
dripping sweat at mid-day,

even though I'm sitting still.
My eyelid spasms
with each sudden, distant boom.

The cutting sheer,
or maybe they're unloading a truck.
My father finds me at closing,

I strain to stand and follow him.
We wash away what dirt we can
with scratchy soap and

scalding water.
My father has been at it
twenty years.



Different Gods

Brianna Snow

I feel a layer of snow on the basement door knob. I turn it and let the warm air escape onto me. Stephen's friends are on the couch. They say hello without looking up from the video game.

I head upstairs to find Stephen in the pretty room. Rich people always have a pretty room. I'm not suggesting that all the other rooms of the house are ugly. It's just that there is one particular room set off from all of the others where the kids aren't allowed to go. Everything surrounding Stephen is white and blue. The blue is dark, how the ocean is just before its depth becomes black. His mother has made sure that every hue is a match.

Not wanting to get anything on the white carpet, I take off my shoes and put them near the front door. I'm afraid expensive vases will topple over just from me disrupting the air in the room. I sit down on the chaise lounge beside Stephen. He's on the phone. I keep quiet because it's his dad. His parents are off visiting his brother at Notre Dame. I wouldn't say that he is having a party behind their backs. It's more like a small get-together.

Stephen hangs up and exaggerates the moment by wiping non-existent sweat from his forehead. He doesn't get worried. We simultaneously lean in and kiss. I proceed to ask when Zach and his new girlfriend will be arriving. I am not used to his friends having girlfriends. It will be nice to have another girl around. I hope that she doesn't like video games.

We grab some pop for the guys. Downstairs, we find that the love seat is already occupied.

Zach looks up at us. "Hey, guys. This is Rachael."

She stands up and shakes Stephen's hand with a "Hello."

I give Rachael a hug. "I didn't know you were Zach's Rachael. It's good to see you again."

"You, too."

Stephen asks how we know each other, and I explain how she went to my school freshmen year. Then, I remember the Pepsi in my hands. I toss them to Phil and Chris on the couch.

I turn to Rachael, "Do you want to come with me to get a drink?"

"Sure," she says. I can't tell if knowing me is making her more uncomfortable to be around all of Zach's friends or not. I try to remember something specific to bring up from when we went to school together.

The tile is cool on the parts of my legs that are between my knee-highs and plaid skirt. We voted to work on our posters in the hallway. I spot Ms. Jones nearing our group, so I turn to Sarah and refocus on deciding who should draw Moses and the broken tablets. I'm thankful Sarah can draw more than just stick figures, so I tell her that I'll color everything once she is done drawing.

Noticing that Sarah and I each have a marker in our hands and that we aren't talking, Ms. Jones passes by with a short, approving smile. The groups that are now behind Ms. Jones start talking off-subject. The hallway isn't filled with the sound of a hundred freshmen—just twenty-two. As I start to hear Jim telling Will that Julie is going to the Freshmen Welcome dance with him, Ms. Jones speaks. She isn't loud, and she isn't talking to me.

"Rachael, you have beautiful handwriting. If only you didn't dye your hair..."

As I make a mental note to never dye my hair, I watch Rachael lean slightly forward allowing her black strands to cover everything but her nose. Then, I grab the gray marker and fill in the pieces of the Ten Commandments spread around Moses's feet. I don't hear Rachael respond. In her defense, I didn't know it was bad to dye your hair either.

"I like your hair." She has part of her hair braided and wrapped across the top of her head like a headband. I don't feel comfortable asking why she left St. Thomas's. I am sure that I already know the answer. She looks up and replies, "Thanks."

Implosions over Lunch

Mark Skalski

Downtown, in the middle of a café that is either the least or most noticeable on its street depending on your predilection towards chic foodstuffs, sit two twenty-somethings across from each other in the table by the window. They are eating appropriately trendy sandwiches. They are also breaking up with one another.

The guy is of normal appearance and normal customs, with normal habits and normal temperament; a spitting image of typical. Currently, he is quietly sobbing over his ham sandwich. I will not describe the girl (who is more than ordinary), for doing so would benefit no one; suffice to say, she is the girl that every guy has chased at least once. It is of some importance that I mention she, unlike her male companion, is not crying over her carefully prepared 'Très Cher' veggie burger.

The café has just enough customers that the couple remains unnoticed by all except their unfortunate twenty-something waitress, watching secretly behind the counter, who suspects the tip from her new customers is going to be less than adequate.

After a bit of blubbing, the guy opens his mouth to speak.

"So that's it, then. Seven months, gone. That's like a lifetime. All those weeks. All those memories. All that history—gone. And for nothing."

At this, the girl starts.

"Look – it's not nothing. I'm not trying to rub this in, really, I'm not, but this isn't just 'some guy' I'm leaving you over. What he and I have – well, it's special."

The guy considers this for a moment. He is devastated, shocked, awed, blown away, horrified, terrified – and yet, he remains curious. In all his time with the girl, the guy hadn't once considered how she felt about him, as he was too busy obsessing over her. If her ideal man wasn't him, what kind of man would the girl like? Was he a pious jock? A pretentious intellectual? A rugged outdoorsman? Or, perhaps, was he the ever-prized strong, yet silent man?

"I can tell things aren't going my way here, so...I have to ask. This guy; who is he? What's his name? What's he, uh, into? Other than you?"

The girl pauses for a moment without changing expression. Perhaps, the guy considered, he wasn't just one of the stereotypical hot guys. No. Perhaps – dare he consider it – he was *all* of the stereotypes? A competition beyond competing with? The girl looks out the window as she speaks.

"He's a musician, and a poet. A writer, really. But he writes music, too, and paints. I guess you'd say he's artsy. And loving."

Ignoring that last part, the guy's questions persist.

"So he's artsy. What kind of art? You just kind of said all art. Surely he has some specialty...?"

"Um. Sure. Above all, he's something of a musician."

"Something of...?"

Before the guy finishes his pressing questions, the audibly nervous waitress chooses the best possible time to make an appearance. When both parties confirm they are indeed O.K. on their current amount of soft drink content, the conversation continues and the girl speaks.

"His band is experimental. They play exclusively with invented instruments."

"Invented – wait, what does that mean?"

"Oh, you know. Trash cans and books, and...Tupperware and things."

"Uh. Wow. What are they called?"

At this, the girl unmistakably hesitates. Swallowing, she answers:

"They're called 'Love's Radiation Comes Quietly.'"

The guy reacts physically this time, choking slightly on his own spit. Expecting this, the girl predictably launches a pre-prepared offensive argument about how the guy 'never creates but always criticizes', but the guy is simply far too enamored with this new discovery to play defense. The waitress, though across the room and behind the counter of the tiny establishment, does not conceal her laughter.

After the argument ends, the melancholy tone returns, and the guy regains his somber attitude and continues his questions.

“You never told me, though. What’s his name?”

The girl does not want to answer, and, in fact, refuses. At this, they argue once more. Realizing this to be the last time she would have to do this, the girl finally gives in and answers.

“His name is Jean-Luc.”

Uh oh. The guy’s *French*. There was never any chance.

“He’s *French*?”

Curiously, the girl steels herself up – she knows where this is headed.

“No.”

The guy is in a state of significant dumbfoundedness and there is a pause. Then the girl speaks.

“He changed his name.”

Like the eye in the heart of a violent storm, silence falls between them. Where things go from here, no one knows. At this point, the waitress is openly listening, which would usually offend her manager had he not been as equally captivated – though the waitress can’t help but feel an abundance of empathy her manager may not share for the guy. The silence finally ends when the guy speaks.

“...you’re dating a street artist who changed his name to Jean-Luc. This – you’re leaving me for – wait.”

The boy pauses to suffer a small aneurism. The girl interrupts.

“He’s an *individual*. You wouldn’t understand.”

The boy agrees.

“No, I wouldn’t. You’re dumping me for a man who makes noises with garbage in front of people and names himself Jean-Luc to create a persona he probably isn’t even close to suited for.”

Things, at this point, are indisputably getting intense. The girl retorts.

“Jean-Luc is tender. A man’s man. Or, a lady’s man. Or – oh, whatever, Jean-Luc is awesome. I don’t need to answer to you for who *I like*. That’s why we’re here. Because we’re over.”

“We’re over because of a guy who makes noises in front of people and calls it art!”

“Well. I mean, he hasn’t played in front of anyone but me yet. He’s working towards that.”

At this, the guy’s head involuntarily falls directly into his open palm. He assumes this position for some time.

After a good deal more bickering (which will not be transcribed here for decency’s sake), the girl leaves to use the restroom, otherwise known as texting her friends about what a bummer all this is. The guy sits alone, once again returning to solemnity. The waitress approaches, this time choosing the *actual* best moment of interruption.

“I, um, heard what happened. That all really sucks.”

“Yeah. Thanks. That’s very nice of you, actually. How much have you heard?”

“Literally everything.”

Had the guy been less unnerved by everything, he may have reacted negatively to all this. As it stood, he felt any kind of recognition of the ridiculousness of the situation was, in this moment, very valuable to him. In a state of awkward exasperation, the guy asks a question.

“So, uh, what do *you* think?”

“To be honest, I’m more interested in what you think. You’re the one who’s being dumped here. I know it’s rough.”

“Do you? Have you ever been dumped for a not-French French person?”

“No. But I’ve been dumped *by* a not-French French person.”

“Jean-Luc?”

“No – *Pierre*.”

The two continue talking for a while, and the waitress tries making the guy feel a little better. The guy’s courage – a somewhat liberally used term – is bolstered by the waitress’ words. Suddenly, the girl emerges from the restroom and saunters towards the table. The waitress offers her counsel:

“Don’t worry about her. You can do this. Jean-Luc is a *dick*.”

The girl returns, but the conversation ends rather quickly. The girl wants to leave and, to the guy’s own surprise, he doesn’t mind when she walks out. The waitress returns, and names are exchanged, and then stories are exchanged, and then numbers are exchanged. Some time passes.

Sooner, rather than later, the girl and Jean-Luc are forgotten. The guy, predictably, begins spending a lot more time at the trendy little restaurant.



Father of Our Bustling Nature

Nathan Milner

Is it me trudging through the woods,
the leaves upon the forest floor
crunch like potato chips
while the whispering brook
keeps the conveyor belt of water
flowing down its pebbly path?

Maybe a squirrel bounces from
rock to mossy rock in the creek,
like a concert security guard,
keeping the acorns from drooping
down the white water ruffles,
as if they're rambunctious,
black-finger-nailed adolescents.

Is he separating the nuts from the
twigs and leaves, letting them
float by like tiny lifeboats
being ignored by a higher power?

I see them drift further down the creek,
the water as smooth as spandex upon
a muscly, earthy thigh.

And there is you,
slouching in the tree hollow,
as if it belongs to you.
Your sacred oaken throne.

Artist: Laura Duncan



The Journey

Carla Cilvik

Wandering alone down a deserted road
The path – this road – so familiar,
No footsteps heard, no footprints made
The only company is my shadow.
Following behind like some lost soul—
Neither living nor dying
Just drifting along
Fading in and out with the sun

The path—long with winding turns
Twisting and turning their way
Alongside the labyrinth of trees
Leading to who knows where
I follow the yellow and white colored lines
Painted and straightforward like destiny
They are my guides
They lead, I follow.

Nature is my only company here
So serene and settled
Like the sun that rests in the drifting clouds
I watch the world of brilliant blue and gracious green
Pass me by as my journey unfolds
I pass the silent, swaying trees
They whisper ever so gently
No other sound penetrates the air

Tall, wispy grass line the edges of the road
The brittle brown stalks—dancers in the breeze
So carefree in the midday heat
It's here, on this road void of civilization
Winding through the wooded land
That I feel an immense release
Free—as if the chains of reality were broken
And I was able to breathe—live without worry



Artist: Jade Jensen

The Flower
By Katie Hogg

I brighten a young girl's five star
 when her lover presents me early morning, I place smiles on brides,
 her lover presents me morning, as they carry me down the aisle
 presents me morning, as they carry me down the aisle
 mothers in the spring, I a a crying widows
 greet mothers in the spring, I a a crying widows
 I greet mothers in the spring, I a a crying widows
 by children special day I a a crying widows
 children special day I a a crying widows
 on their special day I a a crying widows
 b
 l But like
 o I all fates,
 s I will wither return to dirt
 s will wither return to dirt
 o will wither return to dirt
 m will wither return to dirt
 a
 s
 I
 g
 r
 o
 w

Note: Start in the center at the "I", then go down the stem and read the petals left to right (end with the falling petal). Each one should start with the first word bold and red. Start the bottom half of the petal when you reach the comma.

An Orange in the Sun

Christian Crankfield

I peel back the calloused shell of the orange.
The taut flesh of the fruit underneath tempts me.
It quivers with juice that my teeth sink into.
I savor a sour and slightly sweet flavor
that makes me shiver.
The pleasure of it runs down my spine.

I find joy in the simplicity of peeling -
A task to do with my hands while my mind floats.
Fresh oranges all around, I could eat them in the dozens.
Each one brings a smile to my face.
Every one a different taste.

Coalesced into a shining sun,
which makes my joy apparent.
There is not quite any time
like one spent in the sun,
Peeling back the soft orange skin from this tangy fruit.

During a Storm

Joseph Fallecker

During a storm,
I danced for rain
with a Native American girl
who had not yet realized
she was a woman,
as we chucked chunks of pumpkins
from a second story balcony.

Artist: Brittany Hauser



Savage Nights

Catherine Henry

Barbaric yells echo on the scorching night.
Flames burst and grease spits.
She tends the fire, head ducked low.
She watches them all.

Their bodies sway and their arms swing.
Hundreds of feet roar out an ancient beat.
Faces lit with a wild ugly glow.
Their voices rise and fall, chanting for victory.

She watches the drunkards stagger and stumble over their shadows.
She watches the children clawing and tearing at each other.
And the fire, she always watches the fire.
Its blazing fingers coil and reach for her face and arms.

The smell of sweat and charred flesh burns her nostrils.
The smoke is like a rancid prayer to their barbaric savior.

She sighs and croons with the rest of them under her breath,
“One, two, three strikes you’re out at the old ball game.”

A Pumpkin Patch of Memories

Kate DiVito

A long time ago
in a not-so-far-away place,
my brother, mother, and I
would search for the most
perfect pumpkin in the pumpkin patch.
Straight from karate lessons in Sewickley,
my brother still wore his white uniform.

Bobbing, bouncing, bumping along
on the hay ride.
Terrifying tales of haunted places,
about green thumbed pumpkin thieves
and the legend of the Jack-o-lantern,
are told to frighten tiny toddlers
such as myself.

Row upon row
of orange and green pumpkins
attached to the vine
just waiting to be picked.
A sea of orange and green
fills my vision.
The perfect pumpkin awaits.

A brilliant shade of orange, minimal spots,
and somewhat symmetrical.
The dazzling orange stood out in stark
contrast to the clean white karate uniform
as my brother carries our chosen pumpkin.

Trouble on the Tracks

Katherine McIntosh

“Remember this?” Sam asked while gazing at a Polaroid photo surrounded by a homemade frame of turquoise and purple beads. It rested at the top of a loaded cardboard box. As my younger brother, he had been selected to assist in carrying things to the minivan for their relocation to my first college dorm room.

My attention was directed to the image, in which a catfish dangled from my fishing line, suspended by a hook that was lodged in one of its whiskers. I was holding the line up proudly for the camera, with a smile comprised of teeth covered in metal braces with tiny pink rubber bands.

That photo was taken about four years ago. That same day, my mother stood in front of a train with desperately flailing arms in a downpour as Sam and I ran along side it, trying to make it across the tracks before it started moving again. The train’s engine had been ignited, and the engineer was about to set it into motion. When he glanced up at the tracks, he noticed her standing there, wearing heels, dress clothes, and a fearful expression.

I was fourteen and Sam was ten the summer that fishing became our passion. My pink, push-button fishing pole hung on my bedroom wall like a trophy. It came with a plastic pink tackle box in which I stored my spare sinkers, bobbers, and hooks. We would stay at the river for hours, armed with nothing but two bottles of Gatorade and our fishing gear.

We fished along the edge of the Ohio River, which divides the glamorous lights of West Virginia’s Mountaineer Racetrack from our dual-stoplight town of Wellsville, Ohio. The murky, polluted waters of the river cloak mutated species of fish. Large, flat barges creep steadily through the muck.

Railroad tracks separate the river from a row of large, old houses with tree bark textured exterior walls. Dry chips of paint cling to their frames. The sidewalks vary between brick and cracked cement, with tree roots extending upward from beneath them. Tall buildings line Main Street as a reminder of the economic giant that Wellsville used to be, when many households were supported by money earned at pottery factories that have since traveled to the ground.

Paved streets have developed deep craters that reveal the old brick roads that lie beneath them. Some small roads are still made entirely of pale yellow bricks. Cars that sit low to the ground often fall victim to busted axles and blown tires at the hands of drivers who lack familiarity with the rugged terrain. The railroad tracks along the river continue to bare the weight of trains roaring loudly past this modest town on the way to larger, more important cities. Some stop briefly at Mini-Mart before heading on their way out of town, but they never stay.

One sunny morning, we decided to try a new fishing spot. The grassy land on both sides of the marina was separated by deep river water, but the land masses were connected by a shallow train trestle, perched about ten feet above the water. I was slightly concerned about Sam going on this trip. He had recently done some damage to his ankle and was wearing a gray medical boot on his left leg that seemed like a contradiction hanging off of his large, athletic frame. He was five-feet, four-inches tall, and had just completed fourth grade. His overly adventurous personality had the tendency to drive my mother crazy. He insisted that he was up for the challenge, so we grabbed our poles and headed out the door to make our way toward the marina.

“Be careful!” our mother yelled as the screen door slammed shut behind us, setting a nearby set of bronze wind chimes into harmonious collision.

We stopped at Mini-Mart for night crawlers then walked about three blocks until we encountered the train trestle. We paused to listen carefully and scan the perimeter for oncoming trains before crossing. My brother bent down to grasp one of the metal rails to feel for vibration, just in case our eyes and ears were deceiving us. We were safe.

“Twinkle, twinkle little star,” I began to sing quietly to myself to calm my fears as we crossed the trestle. It was sturdy enough to carry the weight of a train, and we weren’t very far off of the ground, but I was still nervous.

When we got across the trestle, we climbed down the steep hill that led to the edge of the river. Sam had to turn his booted foot sideways as he cautiously descended. I was careful too, because the hill was full of chunks of rock combined with loose sediment. We could see the hills of West Virginia across the river. The water appeared to have its usual green tint as sunlight reflected off the polluted surface.

I hopped up on a tall cement block that separated the land we were on from the water that flowed into the marina. I pulled off my flip flops and allowed my bare feet to dangle over the edge. My brother thought he would have more luck if he stood on the riverbank. We baited our hooks then cast our lines, hoping to reel in a river monster. About an hour passed before we encountered any sign of life in the murky water. Then we noticed something floating across the surface. We had initially thought it was a harmless twig. Upon closer examination, we realized a water snake was headed toward us.

I made room for Sam on the tall concrete block as the snake crept onto the shore. It slithered across the spot where he had been standing, less than four feet away from our concrete block. I had held snakes at summer camp before, but there was something intimidating about the way this snake approached us. Its slim, luminous body had no trouble transitioning from the surface of the water to the grainy land. We watched it disappear into the brush before bringing our attention back to the river.

We continued our cycle of baiting, casting, and reeling for the next couple of hours. We hauled in many decaying leaves and clumps of river scum before I finally felt a real tug on my line.

“I’ve got a bite!” I cheered as my arms worked quickly to reel in the beast.

My left arm yanked the pole while my right hand turned the reel. Sam grabbed the pliers to remove the hook and my Polaroid to get a picture of the catch. I brought a nice size catfish to the surface. My hook was caught in one of its barbels.

“Poor kitty fish. You grabbed him by a whisker,” Sam said with a slight chuckle.

He snapped a quick photo then placed the print upside down on the ground before heading back to his tackle box for gloves. We went to work removing the hook, then released the fish back into the water. As it swam away, I retrieved the picture and noticed the image hadn’t completely appeared yet, so I began to shake it to speed up the process.

Satisfied with my catch, I suggested that it was time to head home. Sam wasn’t ready to give up yet, so we continued to fish. Gradually, the sky began to fill with thick, gray clouds. We heard thunder rolling in the distance. I began to put some things back into my tackle box as I heard the familiar roaring of a train coming roaring down the tracks. It was distant, but we would still have to wait. After the train passed, we would need to rush home to avoid being caught in the storm.

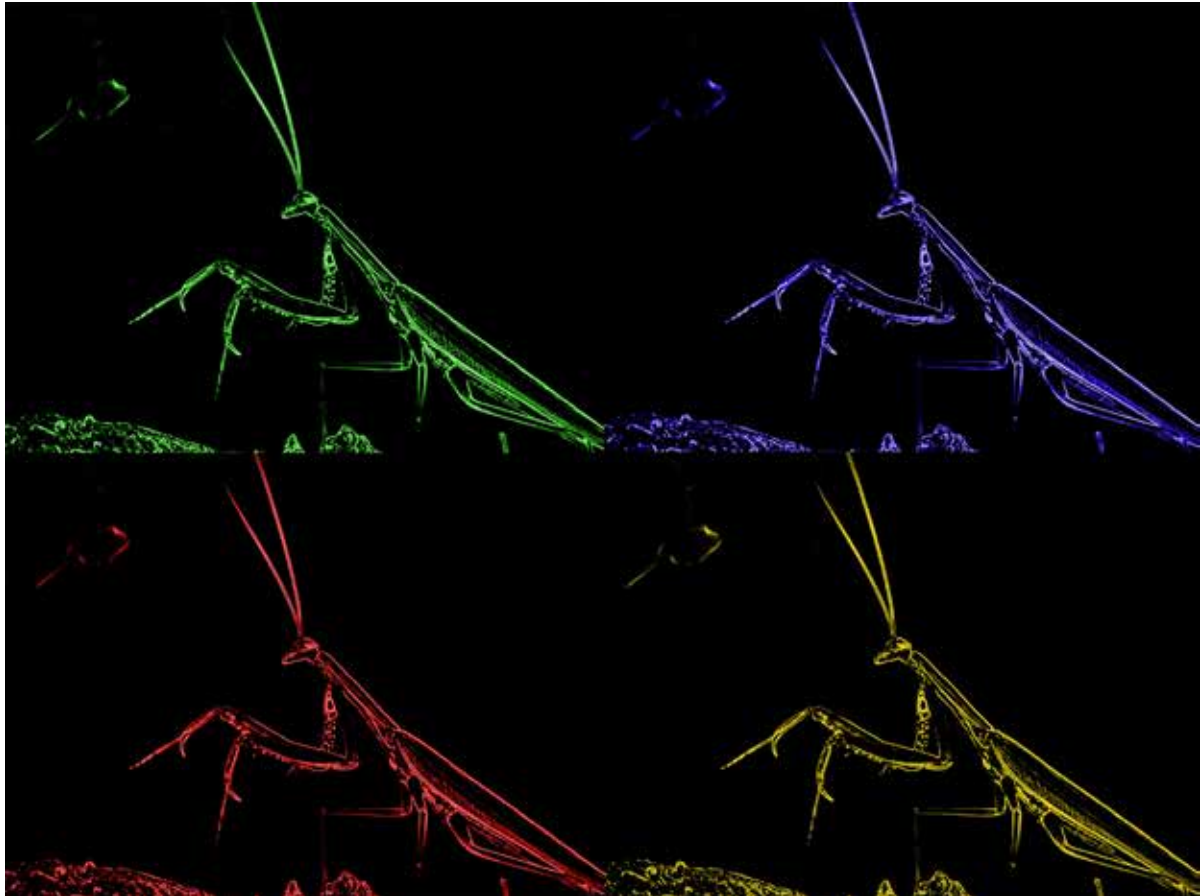
The train had been hauling approximately thirty cars, and we had to wait for each of them to pass us before we could leave. We climbed back up the hill that led to the trestle and listened again. There wasn’t anything coming, so we decided to cross. Anxiety rose inside of me again as I watched the water below us through the spaces between the wooden railroad ties. My brother walked fearlessly ahead of me. His medical boot had no chance of slowing him down.

We noticed that the train that had just passed us had stopped at Mini-Mart. The river was on our left, and the train was on our right. We needed to cross the tracks before that train got moving again, because our house was on the other side of it. The rain began to pour, and our bodies quickly became drenched with cold water as it permeated through our thin t-shirts. The cushion of Sam’s boot was absorbing the water like a sponge; his left foot squeaked as he ran.

Soon, we were near the house. As we approached the front of the train, we could hear it start up. We began running to try to cross the train in time. We were sure that it would start moving any minute, forcing us to stay out in the rain until it passed. The sky continued to darken and a bolt of lightning crackled in the sky. We passed the window of the front car and peered in. The engineer had a puzzled expression on his face, and was staring at the tracks directly in front of him. We turned our eyes in that direction, and noticed that our mother was standing there, blocking the path of the train with her body. We crossed the tracks behind her, and she gave the engineer a courtesy wave before following into the house.

“That was an adventure,” I replied to Sam’s question upon reentering reality.

Artist: Tony Martin



Gone

Kaylyn Brown

It was Saturday night and the basement was hazy, full of smoke and floating dust particles. Evan sat on a sunken, floral couch aimlessly strumming his guitar with Eden next to him, cooing made-up lyrics. He was hypnotized by the way her voice emerged, a raspy whisper tainted with melancholic undertones that he recognized as one of her many signatures. There was always a sadness that awkwardly lingered after she spoke, no matter how content she seemed. Tonight the words stunned him in a gracefully haunting way, and he couldn't let go. He continued playing, even though his fingertips ached, so he could soak in the beauty of her words that would echo in his head long after she left him tonight.

Eden abruptly stopped to grasp the joint that was passed to her. She took a hit and held it up for him before returning to their song. They were in their own world, coming back only when asked to take a shot with their friends. The tequila burned its way down their throats and Eden pulled a cigarette from her purse. She caressed it between her thumb and index finger, rolling it back and forth as her orange nail polish glimmered radiantly in the dim light. Without a word she leaned forward, waiting for Evan to draw his lighter for her. Instinctively, he reached in his pocket and flicked it in front of her face, the flame disappearing almost instantly. He tried again, but the draft coming from the open window smothered the light before the cigarette could catch.

"Damn it," Evan mumbled under his breath as he raised his other hand to cup the end of the cigarette. Eden's hand grazed his as she did the same, sending sparks tingling through his arm and rippling through his spine.

With the cigarette finally lit, Evan took hold of the hand and stood her up. He led her past the vintage coffee table that sat in front of the sofa, where their friend was meticulously rolling another joint, and into the vacant space beside the staircase. The ceiling was low and the multicolored Christmas lights tacked loosely to the wood paneled walls created a dreamlike rainbow glow. Grabbing her waist, they began rocking in their high to the background music. They were in slow motion and Evan was growing acutely aware of every detail. He could feel Eden's shallow breaths at the base of his neck, the bass of the music ricocheting off his skin, and the goosebumps raising on his forearm. He couldn't tell what had gotten him this stoned: Eden's presence or the weed. He felt it was her; she was intoxicating.

She rested her head on his shoulder, feeling the tension of his muscles beneath her cheekbone. Evan ran his fingers through her hair, pausing to tightly contract his hand into a fist and pull the roots at the scalp. After a moment he loosened his grip and smoothed her locks behind her ear before tracing the backside of his hand along her delicate jawline. He'd been waiting to do that all night, although he couldn't pinpoint why. He wanted her in a way he didn't understand. She made him feel alive, like he'd been dormant prior to meeting her. He craved her cool menthol kisses, and found something nostalgic in the way she smelled—a combination of cigarettes and Chanel No. 5—another one of her signatures. She consumed him, and Eden knew it.

The memory of when they'd first met was burned into her brain, a scar in which she found rare beauty. Jagged, it ached and pulsed beneath the glowing warmth of the magic of their chance meeting. It had only been six months ago, in the late hours of a sweet summer night. Honeysuckle and cicadas filled the air. Eden sat in the tire swing that hung from the only lonesome tree that occupied her backyard, twirling the rope into a tight knot before releasing the tension. She picked up her feet, looked into the clear sky and let herself spin uncontrollably until the rope untangled itself. Repeat. It was nearing 2am when she spotted a black figure standing across the street, the end of a cigarette blazing red-orange in the black. *I wonder how long they've been watching*, she thought. She stared as the person began walking away, passing under a streetlight. Wait. She knew him. They went to school together; he was two years younger.

That was Evan.

“Where are you going?” Eden yelled to his back. He turned around, squinted to see who was talking, and began to approach her.

“I don’t know. Just takin’ a walk. Couldn’t sleep.”

“Me neither.... Well, gimme a push.”

The fluorescent light of the moon made her dark eyes sparkle with promise. The pale of her skin reflected the rays like she was made of porcelain. Still on the swing, Eden stretched out her endless legs and tilted her head back as Evan pushed her high off the ground. Her long blonde hair cascaded two beats behind her body, and she let out a high-pitched laugh that penetrated the silence of the night. The birthmark on her upper lip was especially noticeable when she smiled, and her winged eyeliner accentuated the devious twinkle in her black eyes. She was all the class of the 50’s tinged with a bad-girl swag. Evan was mesmerized by her almost immediately and couldn’t resist bringing her to a halt. Standing behind her, he pulled her luminous locks behind her shoulder and planted the faintest kiss on her collarbone, tasting the salty-sweet dew of sweat that coated her skin.

“What was that for?” Eden asked, her eyes shifting down, avoiding contact with his. Even in the night he could feel the warmth of her blushing cheeks.

“I don’t know,” admitted Evan. “Just because, I suppose.”

“Ok,” Eden said as she flashed him a half-smirk before pulling him in close. Her hand found the back of his neck and she began tracing the curve of each vertebrae with the tips of her long fingernails. Her directness surprised Evan, but he welcomed the kiss. Her lips were soft and sweet, a mixture of silk and cherry schnapps. She gave him just a taste before pushing away.

Evan reluctantly sat down at the base of the tree, still captivated by Eden’s charm. A long silence followed, not uncomfortably but in awe. Strangely, they understood each other. Evan watched as Eden continued her game on the swing, extending her arms as it twirled in circles. He caught a glimpse of a tattoo inked on her forearm.

“Why a mermaid?” He asked, nodding toward her arm.

“Oh, that? Well, its kind of weird to explain,” Eden said, rubbing the spot as if it were sacred.

“Try, then”

“Ok... when I was a kid, I used to... pretend I was this magical creature that lived in the unseen corners of the ocean. I liked the idea of being mysterious to the world, truly known only to myself. Anytime I was in water—taking a bath, at a pool party, swimming in the lake—it didn’t matter, I was a mermaid. The water, it healed me. And I longed to always belong to that safe haven. Even now, just talking about it, I can still feel the pull of the water on my skin.”

Evan stood up and grabbed Eden’s wrist, twisting it until the tattoo was fully exposed. Kneeling his head, he kissed the skin, suddenly fragile in all its meaning...

Eden snapped out of the memory. My God, they were so young. He was falling harder by the second and she didn’t want to be his first.

“I gotta go,” she coolly whispered in his ear before kissing him on the cheek. She let go of his hand and with that, she left, leaving only a smudge of red hot lipstick to prove that she’d been real.

Color Me Stupid

Marissa Galupi

Last night,
we dressed in basic black
and held hands in the midnight blue
cheeks flushed pink with love.
Now I sit in a purple haze,
wondering when gray skies
will dissipate.
White-washed walls with flame-burnt
orange;
a blood-red sun will dip below,
yellowing my hopes.
And the greener grass will die
in the shadows
of pure prism light.



Artist: Loren Benton



Backroom Blues

Judson Bass

No sunlight
in the backroom of
a discount store, where
employees gussy up their
dreams and desires
and send them to the floor
to be sold at
half price.

No need to remember names.
Same reasons, just different faces.
Focus on the delusion of a forever jolly and
unified team who are at your beck and call
instead of the reality, a cluster of misfits
on the verge of mutiny, while the captain
has the ship headed straight for
a massive iceberg, seen ahead
even in the foggiest
of nights.

Big toothy smiles and kind glossy eyes
even though no one's around.
Locked away behind eyelids and
lips are the stifled screams of
miserable employees, who have sold
themselves for minimum wage and a
10% discount.



Anti-Hipster

Josh Byers

The vultures of the wayward
generation.

Those tollians, those toolens, those toolites,
who thrive off remnants of the counter-culture.

Living a life of obscurity,
not because they like obscure
things,
but because looking for obscurity
makes them “non-mainstream.”

These are the conceited,
egotistical, narcissistic,
snobbish,
self-admiring,
self-important,
self-centered-loving-appreciative,
boastful, bragging, bastards.
The most opinionated people you will
ever meet.

They live-to-try-to-absorb as much,
lost, left, life-style, as they can.

They move from dive to dive,
buying small things and not,
tipping.

Pretending to be poor, unpaid,
starving artists.

Pretentious Pricks.

These people aren't the ones,
with the angel-heads,
Ginsberg spoke about.

They aren't the beats
Kerouac inspired.
Nor the expatriates Hemingway
hung around with, in Paris.

No, these people, this breed,
of “Hipsters” don't do justice
to the name.

They don't live up to,
live in,
or know how to live.

They just exist,
spreading, like an infection.

Searching for the next
arcane thing.

Forever sullyng,
the name, by which they,
are cynically called.

It's a shame,
cause they had a chance,
to be great,
to be beats,
to venerate the ancestors.
But they failed,
in the name of, obscure-ness...



Kiss me, I'm Irish

Caleb Baker

You bring out the Irish in me.

The Lucky Green Shamrock in me.

The Flaming Red hair and Freckles in me.

The hatred of British oppression and Italian attitude in me.

The Drunken Lullabies in me.

You bring out the, "Erin go Braugh!" in me.

The Claddaugh in me.

The Celtic Knot in me.

The Modest Proposal in me.

The Boondock Saint in me.

You bring out the Irish Rover in me.

The Guinness and the Blarney Stone in me.

The Lugh and the Tuatha Dé Danann in me.

You bring out the Lack of Potatos in me.

The Factory Jobs of America in me.

The Celtic Club and the Danny Greene in me.

The fiery temper in me.

Lass, you bring out the Samuel Rea in me.

Counter-top Marionettes

Nathan Milner

I've been sipping this coffee for so long that the burning sensation on my tongue has been drowned out by numbness. It's funny, though, that the more this worries me the quicker the dainty red-headed server is about scuttling over to ensure that my refill comes post haste.

This waitress, "Tiff" as her name tag states, comes off as sweet as can be. Maybe all of five foot nothing if she's lucky, a hundred or so pounds, curly locks squeezed together in a tiny ponytail on the back of her head. Sweet might be an understatement, as she is downright adorable. Crooked little smile sitting snug beneath her blushing button nose. Her eyes squint out of existence every time she smiles with her cheeks turning an even fleshier pink. She even adds the extended S sound on the ends of all her plural words, just to further pronounce how precious she really is. After she pours my coffee, she makes her way back past the various other waitresses gathering the entrees and sides for their tables and through a swinging aluminum door. I continue observing her through the window between the grill cooks and the servers. Between the bustling of the employees and the commotion of the customers, I have a bit of trouble pinpointing every word she says.

"The asshole at table twenty two only left me two dollars!" she practically shouts, unaware that there are professional eavesdroppers such as myself in the vicinity. "I'm so sick of these pricks coming in here with their government checks on the first of every month just so they can make other people miserable by having to deal with their nasty fuckin' kids. I need to get the hell out of this place..."

With that, she pops back out through the aluminum door, coffee pot still in her hand, and her smile just as big as ever. How tiring it must be to put on a different front for everyone you encounter throughout any given day. The man beside me chuckles a bit, clearly at the same monologue that I witnessed just a moment before. I glance over at him to find him shaking his head at the situation. I've seen this fellow in here before. His jet black hair perfectly collapses into his full beard and mustache. His eyes are a bit sunken into his skull, just beneath his bushy brows. He, too, is sipping on coffee, and is only interrupted when a waitress makes her way over to ask if everything is alright. I've seen this guy a few times now, and every time I see him he seems to have a different style of facial hair going on. This particular one, coupled with his monotone voice and lack of enthusiasm towards communication with the servers, strikes me as a classic serial killer. I can just imagine following him home and camping out in the bushes for a few hours while he goes about what I can only suspect his nightly routine consists of: Plotting escape routes, fashioning weapons from melted plastic, and branding himself to make up for his daddy issues. I can practically see the bodies beneath his porch, dead gazes bounding out past the mulch and weeds, crying for an investigation.

Or maybe he's just an ordinary guy, on his lunch break from the daycare center. But as he keeps to himself beside me, and as I throw the next scalding gulp of coffee down my gullet, I find myself peering across the counter and towards the first set of booths where a few couples reside with one another, mowing down their breakfast, lunch, dinner; whatever meal time it may be. I hone in on one particular male and female. I'm going to wager that they're both in their thirties. Both of them young, attractive, chipper. The male is in a business suit of sorts, laptop case at his side, curly blond hair a bit lopsided on his head. He fixes his black rimmed glasses as if to get a closer look at the fox across the table from him. Mini skirt, beige colored high heels, breasts busting her top at the seam. She, too, is a blond, as if any other hair color could fit this body type. It's only when I realize their hands are on the table but not touching that it becomes blatantly apparent of the man's leg bouncing about as if he's combating some psychosocial nervous disorder. So I'm forced to ask myself, what I'm witnessing, exactly? Is this the first date, maybe a blind date? Maybe this guy is cheating on his wife with the prize stripper from the skin joint just out of town. Maybe he's meeting with a client for the first time, and this Tuesday afternoon just happens to be her casual Friday. Whether or not any of these are valid I'll never know, as I'm forced to look away when they feel my observational gaze and glance over at me curiously.

The last sip of coffee goes down a bit smoother now with the amount of time it's had to cool down. Whether the sun is going up or down I can't tell, but it's peering through the blinds directly into my eyes. This tells me that whether it's seven in the morning or seven at night it's time for me to take my thoughts elsewhere. Just as I prepare my palms to hoist myself up from the counter, the redhead flies out of nowhere, dumping another helping of java in my mug. I look up at her, greeted by that adorable crooked smile, yet again.



Artist: Brittany Hauser

Beyond the Waves

Lauren Pellegrino

Eyes closed,
I stand on the deserted beach-
the night's chilling whisper swirls around me,
a salty, sweet tingle on my skin.
I can taste the air.
The breaking of the waves masks my own breathing.
Their rhythmic beating of the sand is like
the smashing of glass and the silence that comes after.
The sand squishes in-between my naked toes
playing tickling tricks on my feet.

Eyes open,
the full moon shines down into the water,
the only light the small ray in the distance
beckoning me towards it like a safety net uncoiled.
The soft sand traps my feet from moving,
caging me in one place.
The waves crash to the sand screaming,
they beg not to step farther.
The ocean could go on, but the sky
swallows it whole.

Sock Monkey

Hannah Gloeckl

The sock monkey that sits
between the leaves on my sheets is
unfortunate.
Given at an age "too old" for stuffed animals,
it became my abused child.

The fading date on its tag
and the stuffing-filled hole where a nose
will never be
showcases the rag-doll abuse and neglect
from rebellious teenage years.

Past its unfocusing golden eyes
I store my own little simplicity.
Animal fur and hot chocolate scents
revealed only through brown and cream stitching
I leave traces of a waiting home.

A quick squeeze repairs distance
and conjures thoughts of nights it was
left alone
for star-gazing with a lively pup.
It was the same pup,

now a full grown dog,
that saw it her one duty to
tear away the nose above the stretched red smile
that it will never have again.

Samsāra

Kara Parsons

This time, I want to watch my world burn.
I am on a crusade to destroy
every word I've ever written,
all of my memories –
to stare at shivering flames
embracing my dreams to a crisp.

My dreams, tissue paper butterflies,
flit through fire, catching the glow.
Lightly, they fall on my lashes:
pastel dust.

I used to capture them,
these winged caterpillars.
I wrote them in my notebook,
which is no way to change anything.
I no longer have the time, so
I won't waste it
tracing dreams on pages.

This notebook, it's mine.
I possess the right to erase
every penciled word, the right
to rip off its wings, one by one.

You cringe as I tear stripe-stained pages
into cheap, ragged confetti.
I throw it in your face,
your mouth gaping, open then shut,
like a fish taking its final breath.

Now you look at me,
imitating the concern of a mother.
Soothing sounds seep from your mouth,
and I take two steps back in disgust.
Your lips, so pale, icy, and stiff,
should remain pressed together.

At me, you preach empty advice,
words you stole from your therapist.
I think you think
you are trying to save me.
Save your Samaritan act instead.

I will weave my own crown of thorns –
I will reduce everything in my world to nothing,
if I want to.

Sobs stuck in your throat,
you gaze at me and my flaming world.
You weep as ashes settle around you,
mumbling something about destruction.
You do not understand the cycle:

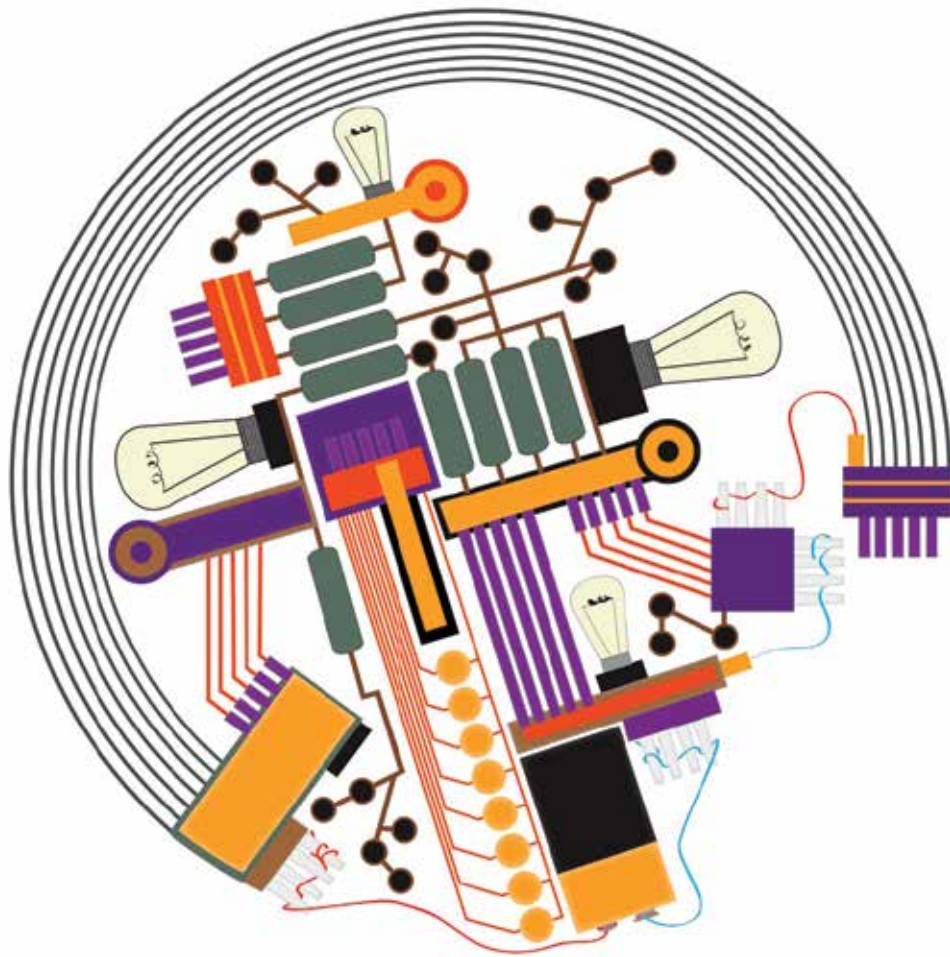
Smoldering embers spark new life.

Man as Machine

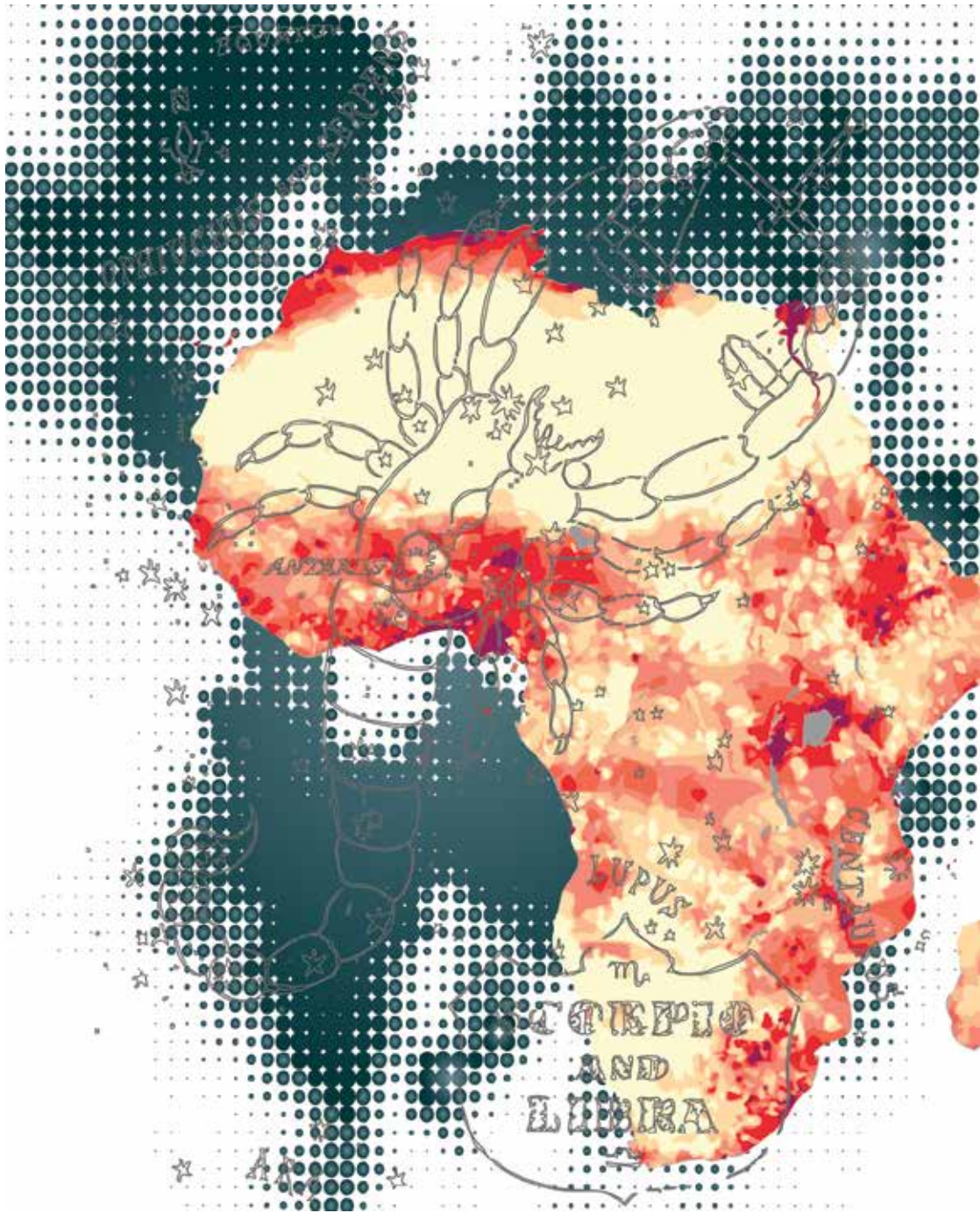
Scott Anderson

To play the drums is to dance,
four limbs in perfect harmony,
a fine-tuned machine of precision,
rods of hickory,
extensions of my arms,
colliding with metal sheets,
feet ignition to cannons
in the heat of battle,
body moves in time-
two-step, waltz, samba -
the light rat-a-tat crescendos
into the sis-boom-bah of
rumbling thunder,
constant rhythm,
as a well-oiled engine.

Artist: Megan Odonish



Artist: Laura Duncan



An Unexpected Encounter

Catherine Henry

Ding Dong

The Devil closed his eyes for a moment. “Ding-dong-ditchers have just made the top five for my favorite spit turners.” He took a sip of his coffee. Few people know that the Devil had a house in Ohio. Suburbia had its merits. He strode to the door and looked out the peephole. There was a small child in Star Wars pajamas sitting on the porch steps. The Devil blinked and then opened the door.

The small tousle-haired blonde boy looked up, eyes wide.

“Shouldn’t you be at home?” The Devil asked. The boy nodded. “Where do you live?” The boy pointed across the street. The house was identical to the Devil’s own except it was white rather than blue.

“Do you talk?” The boy nodded again. The Devil rolled his eyes, shifting his coffee cup to his left hand and leaned against the door jamb. “Well, what’s your name?”

The boy picked at his sleeve as he mumbled, “Johnny.”

“Why are you over here? Go home.” The Devil gestured as if the shooing motion would send the boy scurrying off his porch.

“I thought you’d look scarier,” Johnny whispered, cocking his head as he looked the Devil up and down.

“What?”

“All the pictures I’ve seen of you are red with horns and fire.”

The Devil was taken aback. In this guise he looked like a heavy fifty something man, slightly balding. The neighborhood regarded him as possibly a widower and most definitely a loner. No one ever asked him any questions, they were the most un-neighborly of neighbors; the joys of suburbia. The Devil downed the rest of his coffee and came out to sit on the porch next to Johnny.

“Well, that’s just my business suit.”

“And these are like your pajamas?”

The Devil shrugged in response, for what could he say?

“I can always tell when you’re here. Your porch light keeps me up all night. I guess I thought you were waiting for me to come over.” The boy took turns between staring at the Devil and staring at his own knees.

“Why? You are wrong, but why?”

“Because porch lights are kinda like welcome mats. That’s what my mom told me on Halloween.” He looked back up at the Devil nervously.

“Kid, I don’t want any company.”

“You sure? I think you want a friend. If you want, I could come over and play.” He smiled nervously. The Devil noticed two missing teeth in the kid’s elfin smile.

“Why would you invite yourself to the Devil’s house?” he asked, bewildered by this entire conversation.

“Because everyone likes to play. Besides, you aren’t really mean.”

“How do you figure?” the Devil was genuinely curious about the response.

“Well, bad people do bad things. That’s not your fault. That’s their own fault. You just punish them, and God rewards the good. You guys are kinda like parents.”

“I’m filing for a divorce,” the Devil said, chuckling. Johnny looked solemnly back up at him.

“That wouldn’t be good. I know it happens but kids without a mom or dad...they just get lost.”

“More lost,” the Devil corrected.

“Yeah. I need to go home. Goodnight, Mr. Devil,” Johnny patted his shoulder as he got up and started down the stairs and crossed the street.

“Goodnight, Johnny,” the Devil whispered in wonderment.

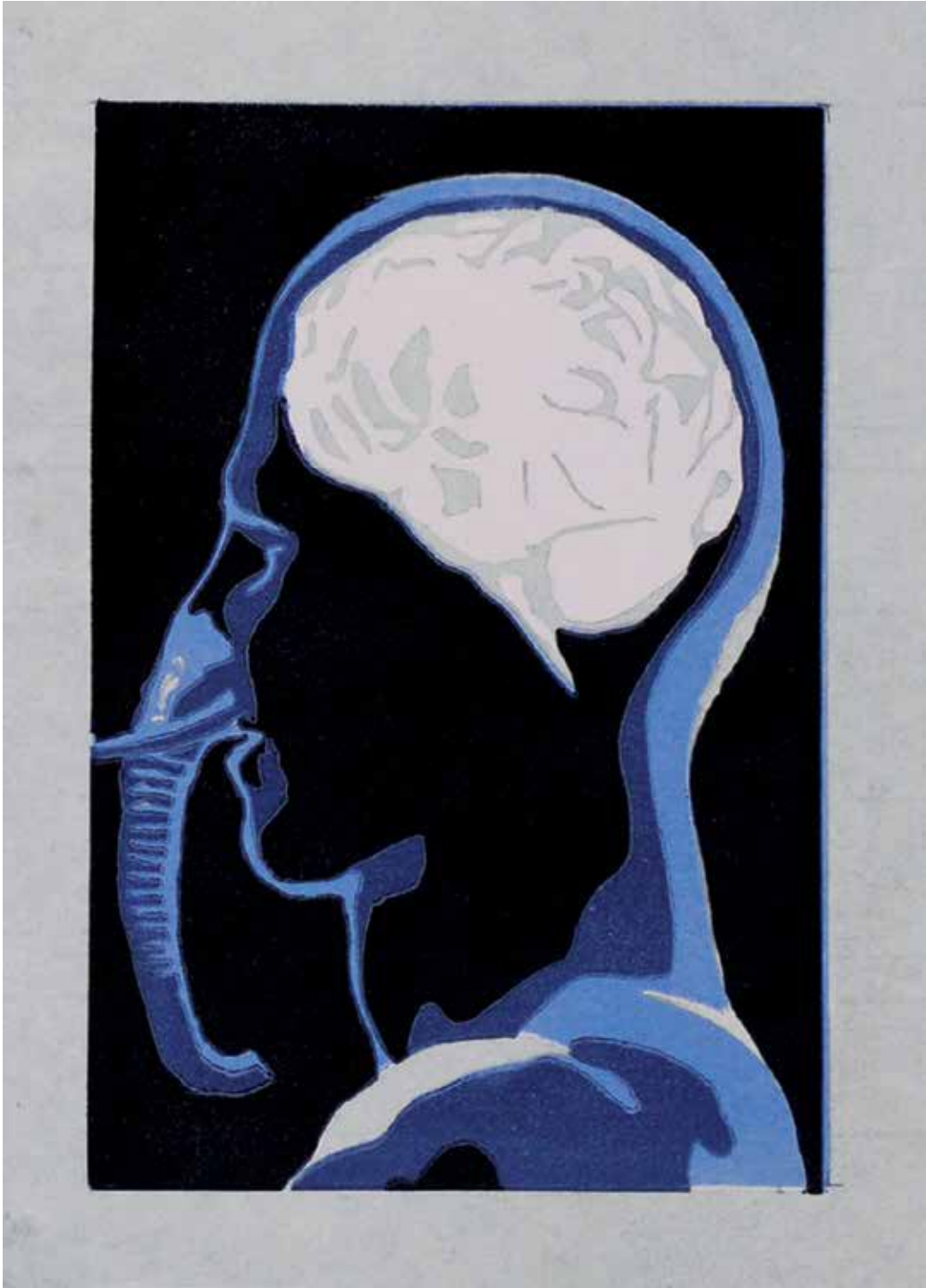
THREE MONTHS LATER

The Devil took a sip of his coffee, looking across the street at the white bungalow. He flipped a switch, and the porch light flickered on.

Artist: Ryan Prilinski



Artist: Ryan Prilinski





Hairstick

Cayleigh Boniger

A few inches
of solid siren's tears molded into a wand
for Nimue,

an adornment for the hair of
otherworldly princesses
dancing under ancient moons.

Four dragon's eyes wrought along its
length,
a fifth eye plucked
from the head of Medusa herself.

The three-petaled flower of France
atop the totem-pole of ridges;
two lines telling the days of oceans at its
point.

A relic,
a charm,
a mark of enchanters--

and fairies
and glamorous courts
nestled in the downy fluff

of my hair.

Utensils

Jack O'Keefe

The Customer unrolls his napkin, and separates utensils.
A table away, scientists scribble in their notepads.
"What would you like to order?" I ask.

Unable to speak, The Customer points to the menu.
Lemon-glazed Salmon. No sides. Just Salmon.
Perhaps it's presumptuous of me not to be surprised.

Over the clinking of glasses and casual conversation
I ask "a glass of water to drink?"
The Customer bellows a polite growl.

It feels as though it was yesterday
I was reading bad puns about bears using tools,
procuring rocks to wash themselves.

Oh how fast the world moves sometimes.
I bring The Customer her water.
I make haste back to the kitchen.

As the chef cooks the meal I stare out into the dining area
where The Customer waits patiently for her food.
Her paws struggle to grasp the utensils.

However, by the time I bring her salmon to the table,
it has somehow gripped its fork and knife.
"Nguuuhhh" she remarks.

The knife penetrates the fish, releasing a citrusy aroma.
The Customer pierces a piece with her fork
and brings it to her snout.

She scoops her tongue around the aquatic meat
yanking it off the fork and into her mouth.
The Scientists shake hands and cheer.

We've moved forward as a society.

Leap of Faith

Elizabeth Takach

It didn't hurt as bad this time, but she cried anyway. Instead of crawling away, Mary just took the beating. She knew that it would be worse if she tried to escape, that the punches would be harder, would last longer. Her father was asleep in the next room; she was forbidden from waking him up.

Mary looked up at Mother and wondered why she deserved this life. She wasn't a bad person; she did pretty well in school, had a couple good friends. So why did she have to be afraid to go home every day?

Mother's hand gripped around Mary's forearm, pulling her back to her feet. She squirmed slightly, knowing that she would have to wear long sleeves to school tomorrow to cover tonight's mistakes up.

"Now, have you learned your lesson about telling stories?" Mother asked, her face an inch from Mary's.

"Yes ma'am."

Mary knew she was telling the truth, but explaining herself was futile. At school, all the other students were talking about how there were people that were actually going to travel to the moon.

Mother went into her husband's bedroom, and Mary knew that that was her cue to get out of the house.

"You need to get out of that house, Mary," Mark whispered in her ear as he held her close. "I can't stand the thought of you going back there tonight. You need to come to my place; my parents won't mind. We'll just explain it to them. They'll understand."

"You can't pick who you love, right?" Mary half asked, half joked.

"Come on. Let's get you cleaned up."

"What are you thinking bringing a white girl here at this hour? And look at the state she is in. This is going to have the neighbors talking for *days!*" Mrs. McClain blocked most of the doorway, but warm yellow light poured out around her.

Mary didn't know what to do; this was the first time she was meeting Mark's mother.

"I'm so sorry. I'll just go home," Mary said, trying to turn around.

"You most certainly will not," she said, as Mark kept a firm grip on her. "Get in here, and let me see what I can do for you."

Mary tripped up the stairs to the door, glancing at Mark who smiled in encouragement.

Once they were all in the pale blue kitchen, Mrs. McClain gave a harsh look to her son. "Am I to assume this is the girl you are always sneaking out to see?"

"Yes ma'am. This is Mary Williams."

"Well, Miss Mary, my son seems to be rather taken with you, so I hope you feel the same way about him. You two are going to face a lot of problems for this. I pray that he is not the reason you look so ragged right now."

"No ma'am. No one did this because of him."

"Ma'am? Please, call me Sandra. So are you going to tell me what happened then, or do you want me to just get you some ice?"

"Mary, tell her. I'll get you something while you two talk," Mark suggested, already rifling through the freezer.

"It was my mother. She was upset with me for telling stories, but I wasn't telling her a story. I was telling her the truth. There are people going to the moon; I know there are. Everyone at school has been talking about them, but she didn't believe me, and—" the great rush of words stopped suddenly as Mary let out a great sob and found herself in the arms of Sandra.

"Shhh, shhh. I'll take care of you. It will be okay," she said, stroking Mary's hair.

"Here're some cold things you can use as ice." Mark handed her something wrapped in a yellow towel.

"Thanks."

"You aren't going home tonight, Mary. I can't let you. You have to stay here with us," Sandra said, pouring lemonade into a chipped glass.

"If I don't go home tonight, things will just be worse when I do go home."

"Then you'll go get your stuff when no one is home, and then you'll just come live with us," Mark suggested, looking hopefully between his mother and Mary.

"I don't know how your father will feel about that, Mark."

“Come on, Pops will love Mary!”

“We’ll talk about it when he gets home. We can’t just kidnap this poor girl; you want us to go to jail, boy?”
“I’ll leave a note about how I’m running away. She’ll believe it.” Mary needed this to work for her. She knew going home to Mother would be all but a death sentence.

“Like I said, we’ll discuss it later, but if he agrees, then I guess I am okay having such a beautiful young lady living with us.”

* * *

It was three months after all of Mary’s belongings disappeared from the house. Mary’s Mother turned on her brand new television set and saw a blurry picture of someone in a funny-looking costume. He said something quite odd: “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” As she continued to watch, she realized that these men were on the moon. The screen disappeared as tears filled her eyes. She fell to her knees and cried.

Artist: Abbi Connor



Daddy's Home

Marissa Galupi

Daddy's home.

The garage door awakens with a grumbly growl. The whole house rumbles, especially the living room—where vibrations are felt through the tattered, twenty-year old carpet. I curled my toes on the tan shag. My bare feet stiffen. I am rattled to the core.

Chuck's triangular ears jolt upward in sensitive reflex. He had been catching zzzs on the jungle-green loveseat. Buzzed from doggy dream land, he blinks his coal eyes, then proceeds to lift up, shaking his old bones. Tags on his collar jingle as he jumps to floor and scampers to the bay window. Click, clop—his untrimmed nails and warm paws rest upon the sill. Busting his snout and forehead through mom's beige blinds, he sees a black and white figure exiting a beat-up Pontiac. Suddenly, Chuck slips from the perch and flicks a wide-eye glance at me.

Master's home.

My mother—god bless her kind soul—is maneuvering between the range and kitchen table, stirring a purple pot of home-made spaghetti sauce and clanging Corel Ware in their proper place in front of our designated dining spots. She slurps a spoonful of her secret recipe, smacking her lips and analyzing the flavor. She smiles in self-approval of her traditional Friday meal, then recognizes the bi-monthly sound. Rushing to the sink with a bunched bouquet of silverware in hand, she peers out the kitchen window. Through blue and white curtains, she spots the top of a black ball cap disappearing behind the rhododendron. God bless mother dearest; she's the only one who smiles.

Joseph's home.

The mad -dash begins.

Chuck immediately disappears. He picks up a squeaky, rubber hamburger and dashes around the corner—the quickest I've watched him move in a decade. Half-chewed rawhide remains scattered in chunks around the floor. A few Milkbone biscuits poke out the couch cushions—crumb trails leave evidence. I roll a fuzzy tennis ball out of sight. I toss a rope toy in Chuck's basket. By now, he's squeezing his rump underneath my broken bed frame. I picture his slender tail sticking up and out. I'd laugh if his sudden action were for a different scenario.

Noodles are boiling over on the stove. The care-free angel in an apron doesn't fret. She doesn't make a peep. Mom simply scurries for a tea-towel to soak up suds. The microwave beeps; a timer dings; my mother doesn't speak. All the buttons are pushed. All the knobs and switches are reset. I hear a loud whoosh of water draining and the plop of dense Rotini (his favorite pasta variety) landing in sweet sauce. She stirs the starchy Italian staple with a red-plastic spaghetti fork, sending an enticing aroma to me in the next room. I'd have an appetite, if she would have cooked the same food yesterday.

There's a video game freeze frame glowing on the television screen—my character is mid-jump attack. The vicious mutant-enemy snarls, blood dribbling down its chin like milk on a baby's. My hero's "HP" is depleted to its last bar. So is the dastardly demon's. One more minuscule hit, one last punishing blow, and I would either reign victorious or suffer defeat. But I instinctively hit "pause." Now I consciously, frantically, disable the console, pushing the black rectangle and my controller beneath the TV stand—I'll never know. Wires intertwine more than noodles on a plate. I snap each case closed and commence a ten-second tidy-up of the surrounding area. Pillows are plumped and put back against the arms of the furniture. I use the long sleeve of my black shirt to wipe the pool of condensation my pop can left on the coffee table. I grab the remote and switch the format back to standard viewing, leaving the twenty-four-hour sports network on screen and setting the device down on his armchair (his throne). I might have finished the boss battle if this weren't a "danger day."

Thunderous stomps sound from the basement steps. He ascends, one-by-one, with authority. The wooden foundation shakes. My hands and shoulders shake. Mom shakes parmesan cheese on steaming Rotini. The cellar door cracks. Chuck lets out a low moan from the distance. Cheap musk seeps in, competing with pasta for the dominate scent. I hold my breath for more reasons than one. A shadow startles me. I expect a face, yet all I receive is a black, button-up over coat in my peripheral vision. Carpet creaks and crunches around the corner. I dodge the first bullet, but I bound to experience blood loss.

From the kitchen, I hear my mother proclaim in happiness. “There you are, baby.” I, of course, am just beyond their sight in the next room. She kisses his cheek, and I gag in silence. Affection—how does she have it after all this time? What’s the view behind those gilded glasses of hers?

He slips out of his jacket, hanging the garment on a white chair at the table. Nothing irks my mother more, yet she blissfully ignores the offender. The ball cap stays firm on his head. How a man who has been through war can disregard removing his hat before eating is beyond me. I wouldn’t dare stare at his receding hairline. “You’re just in time for dinner,” my mother mentions in her sugary tone. A hand brushes across his shoulder blades on her way to pick up the serving bowl. Coat the world with sugar cane—dad’s home.

The brooding man pulls out his designated chair and sits down without sound. He takes the white paper napkin and places it in his lap. Bad cologne finishes diffusing and losing to my mother’s masterful meal. Even Chuck can’t resist the heavenly scent. Like a cartoon animal, his nose blindly leads him from hiding. Mom has meat balls quartered in a metal bowl by the fridge for him. Man sees his “best friend” emerge and lowers a hand, snapping twice, nice and loud, with his calloused fingers. Old Chuck’s tail droops in disappointment. He wanted food, yet he must obey Master. He creeps towards the hand and cautiously rest upright. Master pats his head three times; Chuck winces with every touch.

Mom serves a heaping helping on our blue plates. She drops two meat balls on the side of the pasta pile. They look like eyeballs. She places a crusty end of garlic bread on top of the noodles, just how he likes it, and backs away with a smile slyly curling up her lips.

He’s starving. He drove two-and-a half hours on I-35 during rush hour. He worked overtime all week. He has a bad back. He’s exhausted. He’s home.

He lifts a fork to cut into a plump meatball, but lowers the utensil before reaching the food.

“Carter Joseph?”

He beckons for his only son.

The judgment period arrives, right on schedule. I know a cue when given. I tug on my shirt and pull up my khaki cargos. Bangs dangling above my forehead are smoothed back. He hates my hair style (or lack thereof.) My black socks have holes in the heels, but I cannot remedy things now. Some miracle motivator moves me forward like a slow-marching soldier. Call it obedience. Call it stupidity. Call it a bad habit.

As I turn the corner into the kitchen, I feel the heated spotlight of the overhead light fixture beat down like an interrogation lamp. I stop a few feet from him. Standing with my hands folded behind my back, his venomous eyes pierce my body. Poison nerves sting and pinch. A thousand needles prick bare skin. Sweat accumulates.

My face flushes as I try to extend a respectful amount of eye contact without overstepping or upsetting. No doubt he is jabbing his dagger orbs at the gray skull plastered on the fabric covering my chest. “No son of mine dresses like a dirty punk,” he tells guys at the warehouse. I just shot down his precious impression. He gets revenge, though. The skull feels more like a gaping hole he shot right through me with a rocket launcher. He only opens his mouth to bark a request. “Get me a cold one.”

Out of better reasoning, I watch my feet move. The handle of the stainless steel refrigerator opens with a yank. Twenty-four glistening, brown-glass bottles reflect in the dull interior light. My right hand scraps a metal cap as I wrap around the neck. The door shuts on its own. We face each other.

“Give it.” He commands with a scowl.

I hold a liquid time bomb in my hand. The second this one slides down his throat, more will follow at rapid speed. He’ll pound them back, hard and heavy, until his toothpick-length fuse fizzes and sets off brutal explosions. Summer’s coming soon. Sleeves won’t save me anymore. Mom will be heartbroken.

“Give it.” He reiterates. “Daddy’s home now, boy.”

I can’t stomach the thought. I’m seventeen and scared stiff.

Commodore Perry High School

Drew Sernik

August to June,
I count the months
in books.

June to August,
I count the months
in paint.

My best friend and I
sport faded,
crusty t-shirts,
marked with the colors
of last week's room.

Aching shoulders,
groggy eyes,
ears full
of gusting fans
and pop tunes.

Our paint brushes,
with gnarled bristles
stab the crevices
in the cinderblock.
Rollers are no match.

Fingers filmed over
from blue tape
and paint flecks.
Faces slick
with sweat
and determination.

Tape,
paint,
chat,
listen for jingle
of the boss's keys.

Chicken Girl

Andrea Fulmer

"Here comes the chicken girl!"
with my maroon apron, latex gloves, dull knife, & blue tub.
Sixteen naked, chilled birds
at the mercy of my critical eye and steady hand.
Skin and fat around the neck, then the neck itself
(slippery and tricky, with my knife sticking between vertebrae)
Skin and fat around where once was a butt
and now is a gaping hole.
Guts left behind go into the garbage with the rest.
White wall splattered red and cream with blood and fat.
Dunked into their own soaking water
like they've been dropped from a chair into a tank when the target's hit.
Cross the gap, try not to drip onto the floor, and the wet slap of skin hitting metal.
Pull a rod up through its body and out the other end
to secure it with those funny bits
I never did find a name for.
Bend back the wings, pretend it's sunbathing, then
dump the gritty seasoning inside.
Use the shaker next until it looks not naked, just sunburnt.
Lather, rinse, repeat.
Four chickens to a rod, four rods to a job well done.
Rub the splashed chicken water from your cheek,
dry it from your hands where you tore your glove and it snuck inside
and wonder how you haven't gotten salmonella yet.
Then stop wondering.

Bear You on the Breath of Dawn

Erin Kelley

She didn't want to have another one but knew she would have to. Marie had just given birth to Jane, her sixth girl and ninth child. Gerald usually gave her a four month break between pregnancies, to recover. By "recover," he meant lose the baby weight so she'd be fuckable again. Only a few short weeks had passed, but he seemed restless already. She'd caught him licking his lips when she tucked a breast back into her bra after a feeding. She knew that wasn't a good sign and wondered if he'd last until she was able to wear regular pants instead of sweats. The normal clothes phase was always a short one.

Marie knows that Jane is the ugliest baby yet. She remembers when John, her oldest, was born. That pregnancy had been the longest, but the easiest. She had been so excited, spending hours at the library reading every book on pregnancy and parenthood she could find. Every morning she choked down prenatal vitamins with orange juice. She'd close her eyes and massage her abdomen, imagining the folic acid reacting with the molecules in the uterus, pumping blood and nutrients into the tiny fetus. Instead of her usual candy-topped ice cream, she blended smoothies with Greek yogurt and spinach. She counted out six whole grains each day, even though they mostly ended up in the toilet. At eighteen weeks, the baby could hear. She played her favorite songs. She thought he might come out singing "On Eagle's Wings." When she was alone, she would whisper to her son.

"You're going to be so strong," she'd say. "You're going to save me."

He was due October nineteenth, but stayed inside until November first. Those last eleven days, she thought the pregnancy might never end. She dressed up as a pumpkin that Halloween. There's a picture of her hanging, still, on the bulletin board at the church. Every time she passes it, she notices that she's holding her stomach with both hands. If she had just kept him within her, he would have been protected. At the time, infinite pregnancy seemed ideal. When she saw old friends from high school at the supermarket, they told her she glowed.

Jane was premature, but they saved her. She looked immensely tiny in the clear little box they kept her in. Her skin was purple and wrinkled. The doctors had to hook her up to machines so that she could breathe. Her organs were too new; she just barely had lungs. Marie had wanted to keep her inside too, but it was getting harder. She was losing control of her body. When she was younger, she had wanted to be a ballerina. One weekend in middle school, her parents went out of town and let her stay home alone. She didn't change out of her leotard the entire weekend, practicing her positions relentlessly in front of the full sized mirror in her mother's room. No matter how many times she tried, third position never looked quite right. Her long calves didn't seem to match her muscular thighs or thin hips. Now, she was shriveling. Her spine, seeking revenge for all the weight it had carried, forced her into a perpetual hunch. She was no ballerina. The last month of Jane's pregnancy, Marie only left bed to drag herself to the bathroom.

Maybe if he had come to the hospital to see their infant hooked up to tubes, Gerald would have been able to keep his hands to himself. The day after he licked his lips, he snuck up behind Marie as she stirred pasta sauce at the stove. He rubbed circles into the worn fabric of her old sweatpants. First soft and slow, then quick, rougher. She wanted to scream but turned around with a smile. He had bought her veneers for her thirtieth birthday. He grew angry when she didn't show them off. She hated when he was angry.

Once, she had told him no. It was when Jasmine and Jackie were only a few months old. She had gotten up a third time that night for a feeding. When she placed the child back into its crib, she realized she had no idea which twin was which. Marie wondered—did she not know her own children or was she just exhausted? She tried to climb into bed silently; it was five in the morning, and she didn't want to wake him. He had always been a light sleeper.

"You woke me up, you little bitch." He was always cranky, especially when he first woke up. "I'm sorry," she whispered. "But be quiet, if you can. I just got them back down."

A faint pink light crept through the gaps in the Venetian blinds on the window. He saw a pale shoulder sticking out of her flannel nightgown.

“While I’m up, we may as well—“

He climbed on top of her, slid his hand up her thigh and pinched her hip bone.

“Gerald, no.”

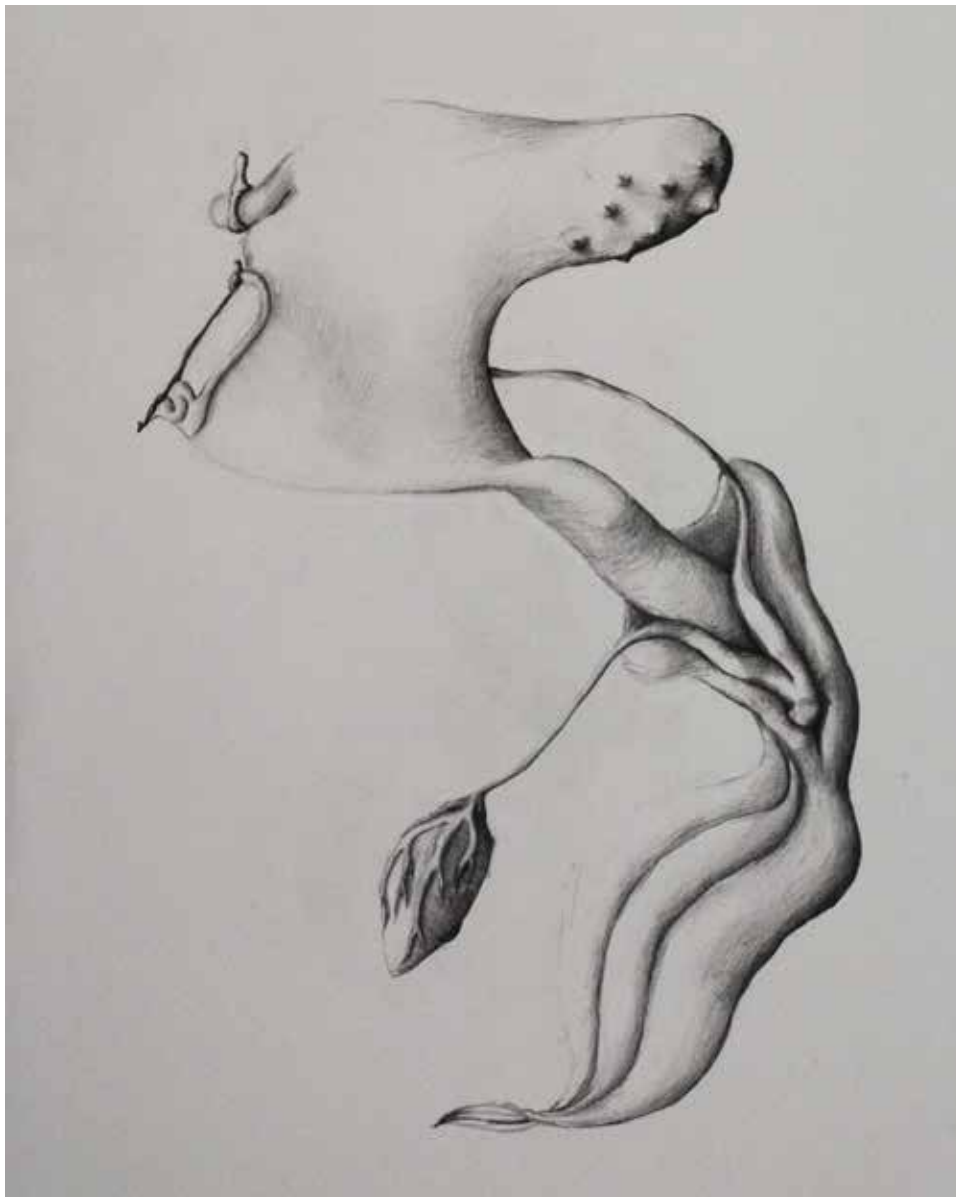
“What did you say?”

“I mean, not now. I’m tired. And we can’t afford another. You just asked for a raise, and there’s still not enough money.”

The hand that wasn’t pulling on the elastic of her panties moved up to her neck. He pushed his sweaty palm into her sternum and wrapped his slimy fingers around her thin throat.

“You don’t say no to me.”

That’s how Jesse was conceived.



Artist: John Crain

The Sale

S.C. Nolan

“Well, whaddaya think?”

“It, uh... what is it?”

“Whaddaya mean what is it? It’s clear as day right there in front of you.”

“What does it do?”

“Well now there’s a question. This here... it does everything.”

“What do you mean everything?”

“You look like a smart young man, what do you think I mean? I mean everything. Need help around the house? You got it. Car won’t start? There ya are.”

“Really? It does all that?”

“Sure thing it does. And more. Whatever you want. So is that gonna be cash or credit?”

“Wait, what?”

“Well I can’t just give it to you. Trust me, friend, if I could swing it, I would, but I got a family to feed, ya know? Sure you understand that.”

“Yeah, of course, I just... I don’t even know how much it costs.”

“Well why don’t I ring you up, then. It shows up right there on the screen, tax and everything.”

“Can’t you just tell me?”

“Would if I could, pal, but I got a pretty big inventory. Hard to remember all the prices, ya know? Just one second here... alright, there you go. With tax, that’ll be a-hundred and eighty-four dollars and seventy-five cents.”

“A hundred and eighty-what? I can’t afford that. I don’t even really know what this thing does.”

“Sure you do, we talked about that. That’s another thing it’ll do for ya. Won’t have to worry about your memory anymore, ya know? And besides, I already rung you up.”

“I, uh... I don’t know about this. That seems like a lot of money. Times are tough nowadays. Can I at least get a demonstration?”

“Bud, I would love to give you a demonstration. Only one problem: if I give you a demonstration now, the product won’t be new when you bring it home, ya see? This way, you’ll get to be the first one to try it out: brand new.”

“I’m still not sure. I’m gonna call my wife, talk it over with her.”

“What’s not to be sure about? But yeah, I get it. Gotta talk to the ‘ol lady. ‘Ol ball and chain. Tell you what, I’ll keep it back here for ya, you go take care of business. Payphone’s in the back if ya need it.”

“Sure, but what does it do?”

“Everything, honey. It does everything.”

“Is it a robot? What’s it like?”

“It’s not really like anything. It’s not like- you haven’t seen it on TV or anything. The guy says it does everything.”

“Where are you again??”

“This mom-and-pop place outside of town, only mom doesn’t seem to be around anymore. Guy seems like he’s trying to sell what he can and get out.”

“Why’s that?”

“Doesn’t matter. Anyway, I think I’m gonna buy it.”

“Can you at least tell me about it? We don’t exactly have two hundred dollars lying around.”

“It’s less than two hundred dollars. And I wish I could describe it. You have to see it. Only, no, seeing it doesn’t do it. It’s something else.”

“That sounds promising. How does it work? What does it look like? ... Are you there? Hello?”

“Look, I know a good deal when I see one. This thing could do a lot of good for us. For you.”

“You think we need some kind of robot-”

“It’s not a robot.”

“Some kind of, whatever, to fix what’s going on? That’s not the kind of stress I was talking about, David. Jesus, it’s not just the housework. And two hundred bucks? Before you quit, fine, I would’ve indulged you, but we’re hanging on by the skin of our teeth here and you don’t seem to notice.”

“That’s not- sweetheart, you know that’s not what I meant. I just think having something like this—something to make things just a little easier—we could use that right now.”

“Fine. I don’t care. Sure, buy the damn thing.”

“You know what, I’m trying here.”

“Does it even have a name?”

“Not that I could see. I’m telling you, it’s a one-of-a-kind item.”

“It sounds a little too good to be true. What happens if it breaks down?”

“Then I’ll return it. The guy seems nice enough. But whatever. I’ll just tell him thanks but no thanks.”

“There he is. Were you able to convince the lady of the house?”

“Not so much. The banker says no dice.”

“Oh. I see. One of those guys.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Oh, nothing. Meant nothing by it. Just used to a different way of things, is all. Nowadays everybody’s got veto power, you know? Just different than the way it was. Anyway, I appreciate you checking it out. Tell your friends if you know anybody who needs something for everything.”

“Now wait a minute. I can buy the thing if I want. I just don’t know if it’s worth it. You haven’t really shown me what it can do. I don’t even know what to call it.”

“If it had a name it’d be on shelves everywhere. That’s not what this product is about. This here’s about what it can do for you. Just you. And your family, of course. But, like you said, ya can’t do it. I understand that, pal, I really do.”

“You know what? Here. Two hundred bucks. I’ll take my change and the instruction manual, please.”

“Oh, there’s no instruction manual, but it’s not hard to use. You’ll figure it out in no time.”

“Alright.”

“Alright. Fifteen dollars and twenty-five cents is your change, and here’s your bag. You have a good day, now, sir. And enjoy.”

Remains

Erin Kelley

Some foods still make me feel dirty. The habitual post-nut, fish, or bell pepper scrubbing started early in your life, but I'm sure you don't remember.

When you were eleven months old, you were very grabby. You'd started to walk a little, holding on to the edges of tables and chairs to take shaky steps. You were curious, and every curiosity had to be tasted. I'd gone grocery shopping, and your mom was watching you. Maybe watching is a strong word. I should have known better than to leave you two alone in the afternoon; she has to watch her stories. She can't focus on anything else.

She'd eaten a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. One of the few things she can make for herself, though poorly. She always spreads too much peanut butter and squeezes the remains back onto the plate. Even today, she leaves her soiled dishes out on the table instead of walking them to the dishwasher.

Mom had forgotten to put up the baby gate. I guess Sonny was finally (for the fifth time) reuniting with Carly or one of the Quatermaines was kidnapped. She was sitting on the couch in the living room when you started to choke in the kitchen. I'm surprised she heard you, honestly. She was oblivious. You don't remember this, but she was. It must have been a commercial break.

When she found you, your skin was already red and your throat closed. She called me first, sobbing like Brenda Barret in a love triangle. I was at the supermarket, and I wanted to kill her.

"I'm not sure he's breathing, his skin is splotchy—"

"Call an ambulance, dammit! I'll be home in five."

I left a nearly full cart in the frozen foods aisle. Some poor stockboy had to put all that produce and cereal back in place. I wonder how long the food sat there until someone noticed that it was abandoned.

The house was empty when I got there, even though I ran at least four stop signs. Your mother had scribbled a note on the counter: "On our way to general."

When I met you there, you looked tinier than I'd ever seen you. Something about that huge hospital bed, the needles in your arms, the tubes in your nostrils. The doctors would stick you with more needles, and you would cry as a parade of pink danced across your back. The image of you in that bed is the one that sticks with me most. Some fathers remember graduation smiles or frosting fingers or first cars. I see you with your eyes swollen shut and your limbs shaking with epinephrine.

You've been dead for three years now. That's a long time, you know. A full year more than you would have spent in the junior high, if you'd finished. My friends have learned to avoid speaking of their children in front of me. They think it's insensitive to mention what colleges little Meggy is applying to or that James wants to move in with his boyfriend.

After all this time, I still remember you small in that first hospital bed. I know they took me to see your body; they pulled back a sheet and told me it was okay just to nod if I couldn't speak. I have a list of your injuries from the police report. I know what happened, but I can't picture you on that table.

The therapist says if I stop picturing you at night, I'll stop having nightmares. But what else am I supposed to picture? I try to keep your face clear in my head, but your features are starting to blur. I like to think you're returning from presumed death—replaced by a new actor with a slight resemblance, eager to repeat your old storylines.

Maybe it's safe now, to contaminate the countertops, but I can't break the habit.

Diminishing Returns of the Middle Name

Eric Stevens

On the front lawn,
I played in the dusk sea of grass
unknowing, uncaring.
The sun behind me loosened
its assured grip of glow,
kneeling into the horizon with an insouciant stare
encroaching yet retracting
beyond the roof of the house.

A screen door let out
a creak of my mother
stepping outside with a haste of worry that
I might fall off the end of the earth,
the grainy road in front of our house.

She yelled at
and for
me
by my first
and middle
name.

Her yelling like a frantic bee with chastising
nervousness needed at my attention.

Swept in immediacy, I broomed myself inside,
while the sun acceptingly prepared
like a last stretch before falling asleep,
a slow thrust for contentedness.

Now when my mother calls
me by my first and middle name,
delicately, sweetly,
as she didn't for years,
I cringe like the daunting ends of every day.



99 Ways of a Switchblade

Ethan Merritt

99 ways of a switchblade
a strap action thread killer
a carver of wood, a spring sustainer
a dirty toy for a little boy
95 more to go
a razor blade for a sour apple
a mirror for a mouse, a human claw
a slit wrist scissor twister drawing near
91 more to go
a criminals right-hand man
a balloon popper, a life stopper
a hate loaded steel blooded dictator
87 more to go...
and counting...

Light

Elizabeth Takach

Cover me with bruises,
bathe me in despair,
tear apart
my innocence:
he will still be there.

Crush my dreams to pieces,
extinguish all my hopes,
annihilate my love:
for He will help me cope.

Knock me to the ground,
spit in my face,
tell me I'm worthless:
next to Him, not you,
is my place.

Artist: Sara Golembiewski



WRITER SPOTLIGHT

MILEA SCHALL

Green Screen

Milea Schall

Dead Garden

Frigid air stings my flesh
and caresses the faces of
the fallen warriors.

Limp brown strings that were once
healthy green bean vines
coil on the ground like skin shed by a snake.

Squashes that have turned
to mush inside
crumble into the earth.

It didn't have to end this way.
I was not here to defend the lives of my comrades
when the icy air attacked.

I salute them with teary eyes,
promise them that I will raise their children
next Spring
and never forget
their sacrifice.

The Forbidden Fruit

was probably green.
A classic Granny Smith,
sour with a bitter aftertaste.

The feeling of guilt
sliding down your esophagus,
plopping into your stomach and plaguing your
body.

Sin dripping from your lips
and running down your chin,
making your hands sticky.

Only blood to wash them off.



A Punxsutawney native, Milea Schall is a sophomore secondary education major specializing in English at Clarion University, with minors in music and creative writing. Outside of the classroom, Milea is a member of the Clarion Concert Choir, jazz band, wind ensemble, the women's cross-country and track teams, and Campus Crusade for Christ.

Before sitting down to write, Milea always prays.

"I ultimately believe that all of my inspiration comes from God. That's why most of my writing touches on my faith," she said.

Milea also prefers to write outside while snacking on pretzels.

In her (admittedly scarce) free time, Milea enjoys writing, running, playing the piano, watching movies, knitting, and bird watching.

Summer Leaves Fallen

Sometimes the leaves are still green when they fall,
edges brown
like a sheet of paper held too close to a flame.

But their hearts are green,
healthy.
Still they fall to a quiet and untimely death,
drift gently downward
to land in their grave.

The Grass on the Other Side

It is usually greener,
but not now.

Neighbor John mows his yard at least once a day,
and spends the rest of his hours
tanning in a Speedo on a lawn chair.

The summer is dry this year,
and his grass has had too many haircuts.
It turns brown and dies,
becomes literal blades,
sharp to a bare foot.

The grass in my yard is still green.
My dad only has time to mow once a week.

Suicide

No note.
That is what hurts the most—
a lack of explanation.

Careful placement in the full sunlight,
a meticulous watering schedule,
the expensive purchase of top-quality soil
and an adequate amount of TLC
apparently just wasn't enough
to make them happy.

I swear they did it just to frustrate me,
threw their lives away in spite.
I want to fill the pots again,
but these cacti will be hard to replace.

A Solution for the Hit Man

The Hit Man kills a waitress for
accidentally giving him peas at dinnertime.

He does not like peas
because they do not balance well on the fork.

How about using a spoon?

Solitary Walk in the Woods

The moss ate the trees.

The wind knocked them over,
forcing them to the ground.
Their old bodies could not stand.

They reached to the sky
with pointed, shaggy limbs,
begging the sun for help.

Nature turned her back
as the moss crawled forward,
squirmed onto the ancient bark.

It gobbled up the tree,
the soft green carpet growing
as the giant sunk into the earth.

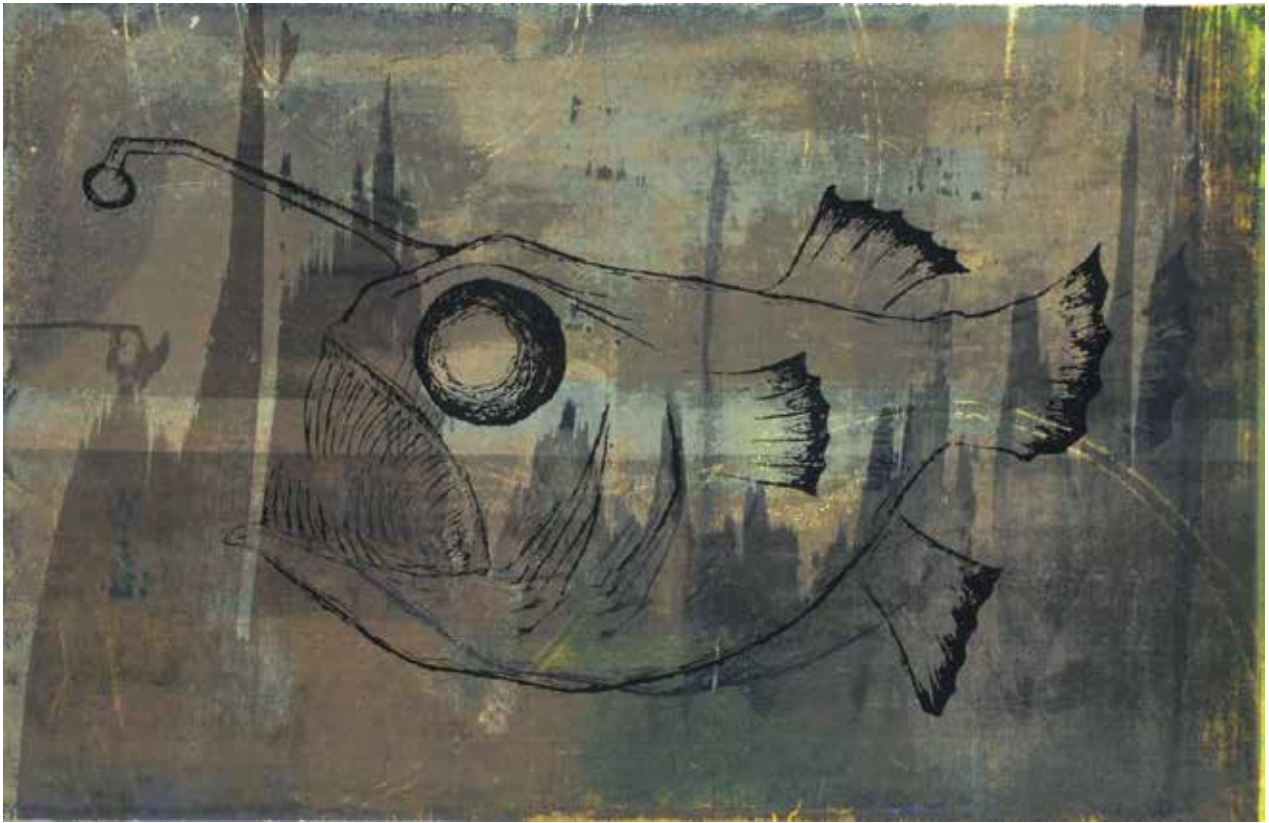
Hope of Spring

No more leaves now.
They have finished their performance
and left the stage,
applause still echoing in the hills.

They will return
after a bitter three months.
Just when we begin to lose
hope.
They will come back.

Better than ever.

Artist: John Gornati



The Fish at the Bottom of the Sea

Natalie Gearhart

It is the moping fish that-
stops.

Waiting in the depths of sea salt,
blistered by the cold at the bottom
of the sea-

electrifying fins and blue gills,
scratched,

ripple and sway-

a slow dance until it goes

belly-up.

Fisherman Attacked by Otter

Cayleigh Boniger

He was straddling my rock.
That insolent, arrogant, violent-orange-vest-wearing son-of-a-bitch
was straddling my rock.
The one that steams like a sauna in the afternoon sun,
gleaming muddy brown like my silky fur,
a dimple in the center that fits me exactly
when I fold myself, origami-style,
Head on tail, paws lost somewhere underneath.
The rock where she and I first met
and lay blissfully
under the misty morning blanket,
wearing each other like a comfort.
Yes, by God, that man
had assaulted my rock
when he thought he could fish wherever he damned well pleased.
Except, that he forgot he'd have
to deal with
me.
His back turned -
(he'd bent over for a sandwich)
I pounced! The full fury
of my two-foot long body of sheer muscle
was too great a strain for his
soft pink papery skin.
His vest the shade of obnoxious
couldn't fend off my river-bed teeth,
my water-born claws,
weapons that SEALs can only dream of.
But I did not expect
the blunt boot to come crashing down
like Lucifer's fall from grace.
Comets shot across my vision
and I leapt for the safe arms
of Lady Allegheny,
but not without one last flip of the tail,
the only way I know to
flip the bird.

Half My Life

Emily Oravitz

Your coffin, Fuff, is a time capsule.
Closed up with meaningful trinkets
never to be opened again.

Greeted at the ivory double doors
by faceless elderly men in suits.
A maze of endless hallways
send me back in time.

70's décor plagues the rooms.
Putrid pea soup colors the carpets.
Withering couch gardens
slumped against wilting blue floral wallpaper.

The warmth of the hospitality room
gone now.
I sit shaking in this basement.

Only a brief decade spent with you
A coffee with seven spearmints tries to wash away
the bitter taste resonating in my mouth.

A monotony of vehicles
proceeding in fashion to an eternal resting place.
Lowered into the dampened soil.

A makeshift garden
of ribbon wreaths and red roses
atop freshly agitated earth.
Comfort for the living
no use for the deceased.

Shut off
a recluse in the attic.
Staring out of a window
fighting back tears
watching colossal pines quiver in the wind.

Storm Clouds darken the sky
casting shadows throughout the room,
my only companions.
Vulnerable on the floor
knees drawn into me,
it rains.

Artist: Megan Odonish



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2013