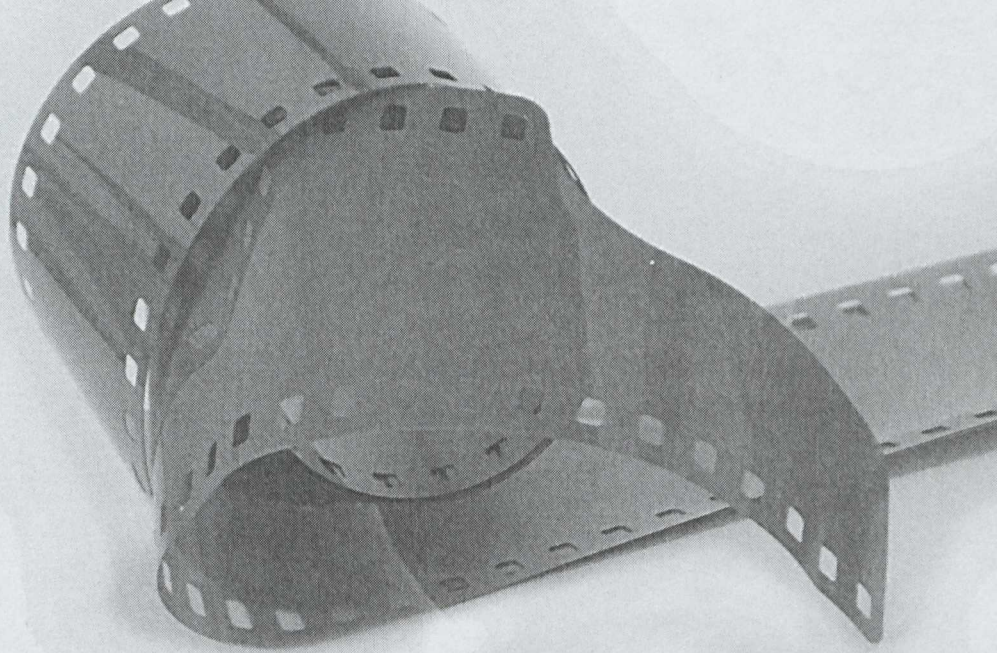




contrast  
2010







# contrast

2010



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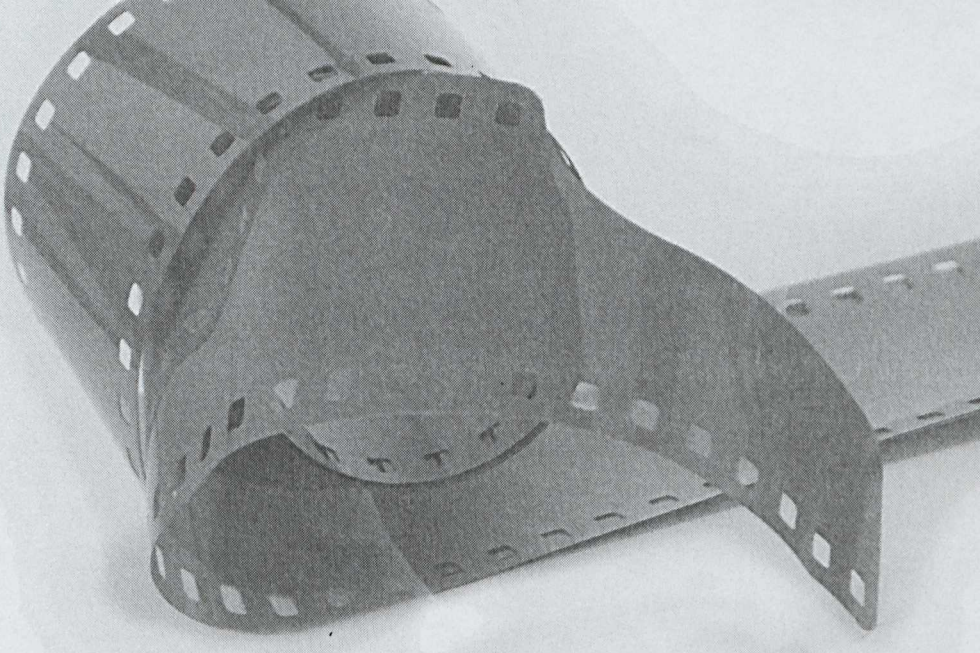
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## Editors' Note

As early as freshman year, *Contrast* has been a big part of our lives at McDaniel. We started with readings, got our feet wet in workshops, and dove into creating the magazine itself. Now, as the editors of the magazine, it was our turn to put together the 2010 edition.

At each workshop in the Richwine room, hot drinks and new ideas were enthusiastically shared. We recieved many exciting entries in both our Fall Contest (a first this year) and many more during our annual call for submissions for the magazine you hold in your hands. Stories, poems, and artwork were spiritedly debated late into the evening by the staff. In our final year, it was a joy to work on the magazine.

As with every year, *Contrast* represents a sampling of the vibrant and expansive creativity of McDaniel College students. Whether you sit with it or just browse, we hope you enjoy this year's *Contrast*.

Kara Constantine and Max Robinson  
Editors-in-Chief



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You will find poetry  
nowhere unless you  
bring some of it with  
you.

-Joseph Joubert



# Munich

by: Danni Long



# The Platte

by: Pat Johnson

I live déjà vu  
in daylong increments.  
Interstates roll by,  
numbers changing on otherwise  
identical signs.  
Mile markers stand resolute  
as the sole indicators of progress  
across the unchanging dead-yellow prairie.

Seven hours and seven hundred thousand hectares  
of scrub grass since Omaha yet  
we keep crossing the Platte:  
North, South, Blue, Big, Little  
and not a foot of water between them.

Here is a name  
scratched into a rock a century ago  
and we learn  
when we see another rock,  
no names, just big,  
and keep learning  
when we thud into wagon ruts  
and we wonder loudly,  
between historical interests,  
who can get away with calling the Platte a river  
and when it will end.



# The Silver Fox

by: Brittany Cooper

Some women consider themselves "ass women." Others are drawn to men with muscular arms, or bountiful chest hair. Every once in a while you will find a woman who just can't keep her hands off overweight men. I love a man's hands. Especially the fingers. It might seem strange, but there is something about a strong pair of hands that sends chills down my spine. Fingers that are thick and long, with just the right amount of masculine roughness are enough to send my mind straight to the gutter.

It's the contrast, I think, between the sizable strength of a good set of hands and the short fragility of my own fingers. Such contrasts have been a long time turn-on of mine, especially when it comes to the embodiment of manliness. Tall, deep-voiced men have been the chosen companions of my 5 foot self with a voice mistaken more than once for a shrieking banshee. I'd like to go along with the claim that "size doesn't matter," but when it comes to a man's hands, delicate thinness will send me packing faster than bad breath.

The best looking hands are usually found on older guys, the middle aged men I meet; fathers, professors, bosses, the man on the metro, cultivating an attraction that has plagued me throughout my entire life. To the frequent disgust of my girlfriends, and the dismay of the boys my age, I have never seemed to shake my attraction to men generations my senior.

When this attraction began is anyone's guess. When my classmate's older brother would come to pick him up from our kindergarten classroom, I'd fluff up my eyelashes with my stubby little finger, imagining the mascara effect that the older girls pulled off so well. Of course, if he ever did notice me, it was probably as the weird girl with perpetual eye-boogers. Nonetheless, it was the beginning of a one-way love affair, the start to a lifetime of lusting after older men.

My first clear realization that I was different was in the third grade. I was sitting on the school bus with little Davie Shaffer, a backcountry boy who had had a crush on me since kindergarten. In our small town with one stop sign, I was a main road kid, while Davie lived in a cabin deep in the woods, away from all civilization. While I wore blue jeans and hiking boots, Davie sported bright orange, open-chested hunting vests. A few years earlier,

## The Silver Fox

continued

Davie had dragged me, kicking and screaming, to the monkey bars, where his friend Lucas performed an impromptu wedding ceremony, and Davie had been following me around ever since, never leaving my side. Suddenly I could never eat lunch, sit on the bus, or play without him, in a series of situations strikingly similar to the way I picture my actual wedded life and a likely factor in my aversion to commitment.

On the bus that day, Davie and some of the other prepubescent boys, still investigating the female species, asked the girls on the bus what they looked for in a "man."

"He has to be really funny," said Erica Kyle, a bubbly migraine waiting to happen.

"Ooh, and good at sports!" came a giggle somewhere within Sarah Dixon's curly red afro.

Davie looked at me while I pondered my answer. All of a sudden, it was so obvious that I felt compelled to share it.

"I like it when a guy has really hairy legs."

"Hairy...legs?" Erica asked hesitantly.

"Yes, the hairier the better," I proudly declared.

I wasn't sure then why I was so attracted to men with hairy legs, but I suspect that it had something to do with the association of an older, more mature male.

Filling a B-cup in the fourth grade, I had always attracted boys years older than I was, boys with hairy legs and cracking voices, but I had never actually considered pursuing them. Rather, they seemed to be a separate, untouchable population, accessible only in my daydreams.

As I grew older, my ideal men grew older as well. In my co-ed soccer league, we always looked forward to seeing the team rosters. My teammates wanted to know who we would be playing with and against. I wanted to know whose dad would be coaching. I would anxiously check the rosters before each game so that I could decide whether to brush my hair and wear makeup.

An occasional troublemaker in high school, I relished my trips to the vice-principal's office, where the handsome fifty-something Mr. Carpenter and I would flirt inappropriately with the limits and with each other. I had a raging crush on my A.P. U.S. History teacher, who we all secretly called Lonnie "Long Dong" Douglass. Rumor had it that that when he leaned against his desk, you could see his manhood pushing against his jeans.



Halfway down his thigh. I never could confirm this rumor, though God knows I tried.

I lusted after Mr. Douglass, with his graying sideburns and enlightened chuckle. I dreamt of him taking me under his wing (or another body part of choice) and guiding me in the ways of the world. We would roll around in the sheets for hours, for he would find me to be his fountain of youth, inspiring energies in him he didn't know he had. I would twirl my fingers through his gray hair, while we talked of Daniel Webster's oratory skills and Roosevelt's New Deal. These daydreams would take over during class time; by the end of the year, I could explain Mr. Douglass's faux sexual preferences leagues better than I could explain Reaganomics.

For all of my lusting, I have never acted on my thoughts. Some part of me, deep, deep inside, has known that any reciprocated lust would border on pedophilia.

But that was then.

Now in my early twenties, I think seriously about how to woo those elusive silver foxes into my life. I am instantly turned on by the streaks of gray hair in my college professors and the laugh lines etched in the thickening skin of my friends' fathers. I size up their wives, the mothers of my friends, trying to pick out the couples whose sex life is becoming lackluster. Unfortunately, my pesky sense of morality stops me. I've yet to convince myself that married men are fair game, or that it would be ethical to sleep with a college professor, even though grades would be the farthest thing from my mind.

I once tried to justify actively pursuing an older man for the purposes of a good story, but found that I couldn't taint a beautiful, yet surely disillusioning, experience with distractions of plot, dialogue, and syntax. I suspect that the allure I have for older men will shatter at the moment they become attainable—so I want to be fully aware of the bursting of this proverbial bubble, an active and conscious witness of this end of an era.

But until then, I will continue to create awkward situations at the homes of my friends, modestly asking them to practice calling me "Stepmother." ♀

# Standing Behind Counters

by: Emily Frazier

I face my reality.  
the clock ticks, tiny metal hands  
like knives, notches on a stick  
whittling my time  
one—  
breathe in  
one two—  
and out  
as I stand, red polo behind the counter  
counting the coupon papers  
caught, grey-brown horses by a lasso  
in the mini-tornado  
a rubbish natural disaster  
viewed conveniently from my side  
of the store-front windows,  
collage of messy fingerprints  
shopping mall paradise

We're slow today  
mid-afternoon winter dead zone  
No phone  
to answer, no folded bills  
to handle  
nothing  
to see, as my eyes  
frost over with my new world  
dripping from my hands, like trying to hold water  
left  
behind  
magic even now, fuzzy sight  
in the shadows  
of my reality

Glimpses of your  
chest in the morning light  
like brushes from



some ghostly soul—  
Sleepy hum from your throat  
as I roll cheek to nose  
the smell of skin  
shoulders,  
half inside slumber.  
Thumbs on my cheeks,  
musician's hands  
in my hair  
so soft—like a barely-there  
song, melody  
you can't place  
still in your ears, even  
after, eyes open  
you don't see the dream

Notes  
as I fill the fog white glasses  
with tea  
Place a lemon  
just so—  
You, blanketing this world  
just barely  
steam from boiling water  
or lotion on my hands;  
So afraid, one day  
I'll blink, and  
it will have changed  
clear glasses, clear sight  
only to smudged windows  
facing the parking lot  
a ticking clock  
and dry hands.

# Leftover

by: Melissa Atkinson

## Leftover

Kick the drooping  
day. Watch it bounce,  
sputter,  
deflate.

So be it.

Slick brown leaves  
and the waft  
of sewage, puddles  
that stain  
your feet. Pick  
it up, cradle it, patch  
it with red  
and orange, the underbellies  
of leaves. Soothe  
the frayed edges  
with pumpkin  
faces and the whisper  
of tomorrow:

What will be, will be.

Wash its face with patters  
and slaps, the burrowing  
of squirrels and leftover  
rabbits hunting  
through leaves brittle  
as cocoons. Caterpillar  
promises and the eruption  
of wings –  
later.

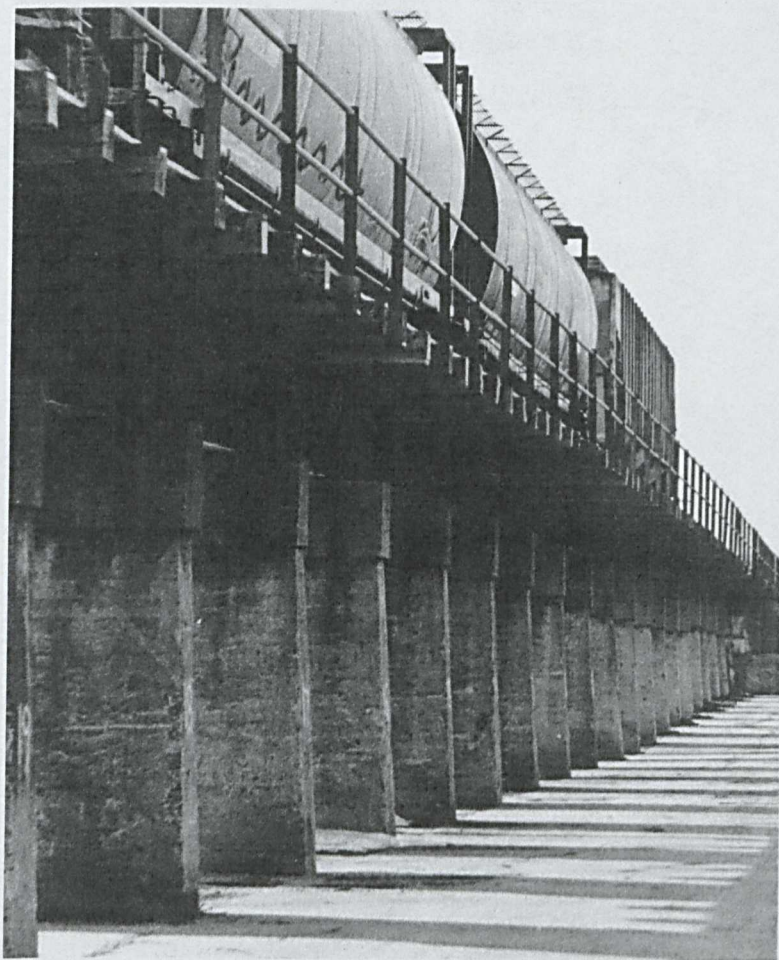
And so it is.

In these water-logged  
hours, indefatigable  
browns and grays, be  
determinedly  
green.



# Untitled

by: Konrad Sieber



# Wood Brain

by: Amelia Reiniger





# How to Be Young and Impetuous

by: Ed Lasher

Lately I've been thinking a lot about my friend Liam, who I haven't heard from in three or four years. He had always been the one to initiate our activities; I rarely, if ever, called him. I'm not sure why I didn't call him. Maybe it's because he had a stressful personality, all hyperactive and unpredictable. Maybe it's just because I never needed to. Either way, by the time I realized that we hadn't been in touch for a while, it was too late to do anything about it. I wasn't going to break the silence. It had, at this point, gone on too long to be anything but deliberate. I didn't know why he'd cut things off, but my apprehension outweighed my curiosity, so I never asked. Over time, my curiosity settled quietly into the back of my brain for a while, but a few weeks ago it sort of hiccuped, so I searched his name on the internet to see if I could find out what he's been up to. The only information I found was that he's been arrested more than twenty times in the last three or four years.

The first time Liam and I hung out was on an Easter morning. We were both members of the church youth group, which was serving the annual pancake breakfast to the congregation. Liam and I, however, weren't serving breakfast. We were in the parking lot drinking orange juice and gin. The table I was supposed to serve, I guess, had been left to its own devices. Liam hadn't been entrusted with one in the first place.

I lived in Newark, Delaware, which is a relatively small college town. Liam lived about 45 minutes away, over the state line in rural Pennsylvania on an isolated horse farm, but he grew up in Newark. I had a pretty sheltered upbringing which consisted largely of home school, obligatory church attendance and Nintendo. Liam, as the story goes, fell in with the wrong crowd, acted up and ended up moving with his family to keep away from trouble. Initially, his mother suspected that I was a drug dealer.

"She thinks I'm what?"

"She thinks you're a drug dealer," he said, "but only because you live in Newark. She's crazy. Don't take it personal."

I didn't. It actually made me feel kind of cool, in a dangerous, sexy way.

## How to Be Young and Impetuous

continued

Most of the time when he'd call me, he was on his cell phone, already in my neighborhood, if not already parked in front of my house. I felt bad when I couldn't come out, but I told myself that maybe he'd start getting in the habit of calling before making the trip down. In truth, the spontaneity was part of the fun for me; I just didn't want to feel guilty. I secretly loved the idea that I could at any moment be out and about, free-spirited and impulsive, confident. I liked to think I was cool, that I was out doing cool things, and that I was part of some super-hip "scene." Typically, when we got together we would drive around in his car, smoke weed in the woods, or play hacky sack. Mostly we'd drive around in his car.

Liam drove an old Buick that seemed to be perpetually breaking down. From the outside his car looked like shit: ugly tan color, missing and mismatched hubcaps, years worth of dings and dents that pockmarked the car's surface, flaking paint on the sloping front bumper. The inside, also like shit: perfectly circular holes burned through the seats by cigarettes, dust-glazed windows, hanging upholstery from the ceiling, dead bugs trapped inside the interior light.

There were so many sounds in that car. The engine would roar and moan in alternate succession, switching from one to the other without provocation. Liam would always dismiss it, saying either, "It just doesn't like going fast," or, "It just doesn't like going slow," depending on whatever speed we happened to be going. Sometimes he'd cover up the engine noises with a CD. He'd blast punk rock loud enough that the bass rattled the door panels. I tolerated the music. Sometimes I really tried to like it.

"The Dead Milkmen!" He shouted in reference to the music. "What?" I said, straining to hear over the ringing distortion of the stereo system.

"That's who this band is, man, they're from around here, you know. They're from fuckin' Whitehall. That's where we're going." "Cool."

That's how I replied when I had nothing to say. We probably never made it to Whitehall. Liam always changed his mind or forgot where we were going if it took more than five minutes to get there.



One day, I got to meet a friend of his from his old high school. It was a guy who he called "Wheelchair Alex." Wheelchair Alex and Liam went way back. Wheelchair Alex was Liam's drug dealer. Wheelchair Alex lived in rural Pennsylvania, about five minutes from Liam's house. Back in the day, as the story goes, Liam knew him simply as "Alex," but one night, Alex dropped a lot of acid, started wandering around some train tracks, took a nap, and a train took his legs off above the knees. After that, he was Wheelchair Alex. He didn't seem to mind the nickname.

Wheelchair Alex didn't like me too much, but I don't really know why. He implied a few times that he thought I might be in cahoots with the police.

I remember a strange, illuminating moment which occurred when Liam was driving me home one night. God knows where we had been, but I was giving him directions.

"Turn right at this stop sign," I said.

He mumbled softly to himself as he patted his steering wheel with one hand, then the other. He froze in silent concentration until he had completed the turn. I'm sure I wasn't meant to hear what it was he was mumbling, but I did:

(pat) "left,"

(pat) "right."

One time, after a little alcohol, Liam told me that he had been going to a psychiatrist. Something was wrong with his brain, he told me, his "stop and think" mechanism didn't work. That's why he was impulsive. That's why he did things that didn't make sense and that's why he got into trouble as a kid. It seemed like a cop-out, but he was drunk and unpredictable, so I didn't call him on it. Still, I doubted that reasoning problems could have that much to do with his behavior.

We've since lost touch.

Like I said, I've been thinking a lot about Liam lately, so I searched his name on the internet. He's been arrested more than twenty times in the last few years, six times in a row for breaking into cars in the same parking lot. He got caught in that lot every time, but he kept going back. 🐞

# Three Visions

by: Nick Galinaitis

## I

Then came it: from out of fists: cliffs dropping down the coyote and the rabbit. And the coyote: is a mighty creature; when he talks I and you and the rest of you on the cliff with our fists hiss that we love him wishing (this is a common throwback. Fists). We want him because he is this animal and because he is well and like a fist. So they say this. Well I miss the rabbit. He is drifting out of my eyes. Rabbits are speaking of the speaking throat. Drifting out of my face out of speaking. They (with fists) are with the coyote dropping down the cliff. Then a mission of my Savior carry a picture of a creature to come out of the canyon below them just to find their rabbit-coyote and always never never always find it anyways. And then came it: he is found buried but alive in the hearts and thoughts and the throats of the canyon with the mission and the rabbit and the coyote forever. Build them a town of fists.

## II

"Come in the rain" he said, and a thundering herd of light turned us on our heads so we did not know whether or not we were still on our feet, and we wondered if that's how it felt to be born.

"Now get up, get up" He said and I almost laughed.

The ground was falsely hard, and wet. The house behind us was gray in the puddles. I didn't know how long it had been raining.

"Now get your shit together get up now"

He pulled my hand and behind me my sister was shouting.

Water poured off the roof and I couldn't see her but I could hear her alright. She couldn't get her socks on and she had lost her boots after only a week having them. So she stayed there under the door.

Then I stumbled and he said, "get up"

I did and started following him walking. To walk through mud is harder than it looks and the yard was long so it was a long way. Soon I couldn't hear my sister as much.



Then we were near the tree and the fence but there was only more mud because the grass was worn down there. He looked at the broken fence and broke though it; it was like he was swimming and I did it too.

Then we were there finally. The field was big. We started walking out, and he started going faster so I had to keep up. Next thing he was running and my shoes came off but I kept going. He said something loudly but there was bright lightning and a crash and then, he was running away from me, and I stumbled again and I couldn't keep up at all. I kept in his direction stumbling though the field but the rain was too much to see through and I couldn't find where he went. Then I went back to look for my shoes but couldn't find them either. I just stood for a while looking, and then I started running on my own, and I was scared because it would be a hard way out without him.

### III

I was wondering if you've been and seen the old parks because I went back and was there. They're still there and still paved and still the same old parks like an empty roof over a city...where we used to run is a big hole now, and going outward everyday and you can tell where the pavement just failed. You can tell it gets wider. Maybe I'll stop swearing and it can pave itself again. I know back then yearly we used to wish that place had canyons I remember you saying it; so now I dream in canyons and widely. Also I know we wished there was closer houses and that hasn't changed because you still have to walk some miles to get to them. I haven't seen north yet because it is still the over-shot distance it was. All the miles for walking. And it made me scared for some reason that I was remembering you a lot and forgetting myself almost; and that there's nothing and how its broad and big is what pulls me in and I can't leave. I am lying to people when I say I love them. Ahh I love you. I just love you reckless and esp if your laughing. So maybe you've been back sometime. I just wondered because I was there. 🐾

"you kids are so  
underprivileged when I was sixteen or  
twelve I used to go up to the Cabin  
with my grandfather and we would  
drink beer and shoot pistols"

by: Matthew Bisenius

We pull off of Popple Swamp and park in the pit,  
The foundation of fresh snow collapses  
Under the stress of our boots.  
Marlboro Lights and Maglites  
And I'm thinking of you  
As we take the hill on our own terms,  
Tripping over trash from October's last bash,  
Lashing summer's debaucheries to the blanketed ferns.

We raised flags by whistling rockets,  
Cracked the seal on the door and let the Hold Steady out the  
stereo.  
The clever kids crawled to canvas tents, reaching for  
Campfire thighs and fireflies  
And I hadn't even met you yet.  
The frost bites and brings me back  
To collecting the cargo we came for  
As we climb in Blondie and take aim at Lime Rock.

Katherine returns from house sitting so I stop watching  
The snow melt into Salmon Kill Creek.  
Instead we drop the ball and we bang  
Pots and pans and Peter Pans.  
And now I can only think of you  
As I scrub cyclically at the spot  
Where the chili con carne stumbled from its bowl  
And settled upon my isabelline t-shirt.



Untitled  
by: Tyler Mullan



# Thriving in Foxholes

by: Matthew Bisenius

I saw God in a blinding flash of light, so I must be a soldier of  
the Lord

The angel Gabriel named me a knight

With the shrapnel sensation of his sword, a transverberation

Divinity runs Heaven's capitalist citydom

The maturation of the Trinity

Saints like my Grandpa mining tritium in an effort to prevent  
the next war with Satan

The peace demonstration crowds duck and cover to the raid  
siren score, lest their shadows be burned upon  
the clouds

I saw God in a fusion reaction

Woke next to my division's dead chaplain



Untitled  
by: Tiffany Lewis



# The Key

by: David Grant Grimes

The best car rides go nowhere.

I'm sitting next to an old friend.

I left the engine running for a while after we returned,  
the silly pretense that I was only dropping him off at home  
enduring.

We started talking in the isolation of midnight,  
and the world melted away.

The illusion that the ride had ended broke.

I turned the key,

stopping the car and stopping time.

In the quiet, everything that plagues during daylight becomes a  
shadow in the dark.

We sit for a while,

then squirm like little children, unbuckling seat belts, reclining  
seats,

talking about everything,

just two friends and laughter trailing into abyssal inky night.

We have no thoughts of work or school or choices or problems  
or fears.

Everything vanishes,

the hassle of work, the stress of school, and the confusion of  
love.

They're all years away and unimagined.

We're two children in a void, and we can't see the world yet.

We act during daylight like we've gained so much with our  
adulthood,

and yet tonight we've forgotten about all of it and we don't give  
a damn.

We don't need a reason to laugh.

Years have passed and we've forgotten this,

not even realizing what we traded to "grow up,"

what we traded to gain cars, and money, and "freedom,"

what we traded to gain love, and lose it.

It all comes gently back: what we used to be.

When did we change so much?

I'll have to turn the key again.

The power's off and the clock is dark, and the moon and stars  
move too slowly to see,  
but time is passing, and I know it.

I won't turn the key and shatter frozen time.

Is this what it's like to dream? Before you wake up,  
and retain nothing but a sense that something wondrous and  
intangible has been forgotten?

I will wake up and feel so grown-up and so lucky to have my  
grown-up things,  
and it will seem so worth it then.

I'll have trouble imagining what it was like to be the child that  
I am in this car,

to be chained to my parents, ignorant of romance,  
unable to buy what I want, do what I want, go where I want,  
and freer than I'll ever be again.

We're tired now. The conversation is spent,  
and giddy sleepiness is yielding to the other kind.

We want to hold onto our island in the dark,  
but the ocean of life is lapping at our feet.

The hands on the clock want to move again.  
Time can slow, but it never stops.

It's time to turn the key.



# Mirage

by: Jake Friedman

*Wave that flag, wave it wide and high, summertime, done come and gone, my oh my...* -The Grateful Dead

Freedom subsists in interstitial spaces, crook'd  
and crannied in the binary terms of educational institutions,  
the wait for weekly allowances, and the no-man's land  
where fortified borders of air conditioning  
confront clinging cobwebs of heat.

Confused circadian rhythms entrained to equal parts basic cable  
programming  
and commercial interruptions, a season of repeats  
accompanied by cheap laugh tracks and homogenized  
meals of Kraft macaroni 'n' cheese introduced to captive  
markets in 1937 AD.

Siberian huskies,  
out of habitat in tropical heat, hyperventilating  
on front lawns behind invisible fences.  
The slow, sleepy breathing of oscillating sprinklers, kowtowing  
back and forth, ceaselessly,  
over squares of sere, cornstarched grass.  
Waiting at the threshold  
while parents grant permission  
to play, digging big, pointless holes  
or climbing claustrophobically  
through spidered, catacomb-sewers,  
an august anarchy  
constrained only by the coming-on of street lights  
or whatever's in walking distance.

Some sudden air raid, the Siren  
song of Good Humor, making a cameo appearance and beckoning  
summer's orphans,  
bolting from screen doors with urgent dollar bills  
to the sporadic, disinterested applause of their slamming shut.  
(moments melted and fleeting)

# Harold Potter and La Fiesta del Fuego (an excerpt)

by ERnest Hemingway

by: Max Robinson

## Chapter 3

Harold rubbed his scar. The afternoon was suffocating and hot as they made their way down the busy street, he and Weasley and Hermione. The sun hung heavy in the sky while the merchants and charlatans and squibs hawked their wares. Hermione walked her usual ten steps ahead. Weasley carried her luggage, wiping his brow with his freckled hand. They were engaged, of course. Hermione stopped long enough to gesture delicately toward a vendor. The bald man lay asleep in the shade, in front of him a crudely painted sign. "HORCRUX 6 PESOS", it read.

"How utterly quaint! How wonderfully, utterly quaint."

Weasley let out a cloying chuckle.

"We should keep going," said Harold.

"Honestly Harold, you ought try to have a little fun on this little expedition!"

Hermione pecked his forehead with her lips and resumed her stroll. Harold stroked the scar once more, struck by the lack of sensation but not surprised. He hadn't felt a thing there. Not since the war.

## Chapter 4

They arrived at arena and made their way through the crowd. Men celebrated and money changed hands: a Ridgeback had torn a man's arm off. Harold waited anxiously as Weasley purchased popcorn and wine for their party. Their business concluded, they found seats up front. Weasley shoved a fistful of popcorn into his face.

"So whose on next, then?" he said between chews.

"Diggoré," Harold responded

"Diggoré eh? Is he any good?"

"He's supposed to be."

Hermione looked up from her makeup.

"Harold just loves these little fights, don't you Harold?"

Before he could respond, the roar of the audience immas-



culated any further conversation. The fighter, Diggoré, strode onto the dusty stage. He wore a dark cloak that covered a lithe and muscular frame. His moustache glistened in the sunlight. Hermione's eyes bulged. Weasely noticed. "He's not so great, just a kid innit?"

Diggoré removed from his wand, 6 feet of steel, from its sheath. Hermione bit her lower lip. The gate rose and four squibs guided the beast from its cage. It was a Hungarian Horntail, Harold knew immediately from the horns. The shackles were removed, leaving only dragon and man. The Horntail stood silent, smoke pouring from its saurian maw. Diggoré began to circle the creature, dragging his enormous wand as if to goad it. By now, the three of them, even Weasely, sat mesmerized. Diggoré threw open his cloak, revealing the red within. This was the final insult. The brute charged toward the fighter, who quickly dodged its flames and teeth. This proceeded several times until Diggoré, perhaps overconfident, caught his arm. The young wizard cried in anguish at the burn that enveloped his right side. Hermione gasped. "That stupid beast is going to kill that poor boy!" she exclaimed. Diggoré pulled back and resumed circling the Horntail, flaunting his robes. Harold couldn't help but notice the Spaniard's exquisite cape work. The dragon circled Diggoré, charging every so often. After a time, the beast had clearly begun to tire while Diggoré had not. The fighter moved closer to the Horntail. "That damn thing'll bite his ruddy hand off, what's he doin' so close?!" complained Weasely as he picked popcorn from his shirt. Harold began to smile. "Just watch".

The dragon and the boy looked in each other's eyes. They regarded one another. The Horntail, exhausted, shut its eyes and lay at the wizard's feet. A second passed and Diggoré drove his wand into the dragon's neck as blood erupted into the air. The applause was deafening. Diggoré stood baptized in the blood. Harold couldn't believe it; it'd been the best fight he'd ever seen. He turned to Hermione, finding only an empty seat. Weasely slept loudly next to it. He looked out to the killing field and saw her cleaning the lucky young matador with a cloth. Harold drank from his invisible flask, a gift from Dr. Dumbledore. "Women," he muttered. He rubbed his scar. 🐉

# Untitled

by: Matthew Bisenius





# Aifric

by: Keith Ludington Adams

*Aifric,*

*In 1937—high over those rose-blushed orchards of the Blair Estate—one of you challenged me to capture the wondrous moment in a few words and I knew that the work would require some special sculpting. Unfortunately, I can't remember which of you asked me to do this and to whose benefit it would be. Was it for me? I think you said I should write it for myself. I can't remember. Or was it for you? Or for all of us? I had to omit this conversation from my account. My numerous attempts at the dialogue, failed, marked in frustrated, green ink, are still burning in my trash-bin, even as I write this letter and attach to you my product of old nostalgic scribbling: an edition—typed, unblemished, and legible. If you still know why and to whom I am constructing this account, please tell me so that I can revise accordingly. (And please also show Autumn and ask her if she remembers the conversation.) To be safe, I've addressed the work to the three of us and should you happen to read it together (out loud, in your sisterly harmonies, up to the sky, imagining me flying by in my slowing biplane, privileged to hear) I'd get a kick out of it and it would be like I had actually written it all for myself...*

A friend,

*James Wendell Ferren*

*Dedicated to Aifric, Autumn, and James.*

Just after dark, his mind spins above itself and out his nightmares and he answers to the golden morning with a bursting yawn in a tawny glow, in his room, in the silence, in the dust kindling flame of a sunrise that honors the blush of scattered leaves in the chill of a forested Maine in the Fall outside. He is assembled here today for one brief moment, far from the humming bustle of the outer world, as the new guest of the Blair estate—overseeing the quick repair of his green biplane by the property's wealthy mechanics. In the evening, he will pilot back home with it and feel the impactive stares of locals, field roaming boys, curiously pointing—A plane! A plane!—and will not worry about stalling on the night wind towards the west. But now he thinks a stroll is worth a go before the day starts and though the morning air holds a nip and pat of the

surrounding forest-aroma, he makes the guest-bed look well, ties his worn auburn boots on, and shuts the door. Out there, past the palisade walls of the fruit nursery, under the overhang of Spanish moss, with the peacocks in patches of ivory, below the cold iron portal of a garden gate, and in the audible aquatic hush of a distant windmill, he steps from the pool-house and into the overgrown forest and he pockets his bare hands in warm corduroys. He walks deeper with silent companions and a mist in the woods compasses tree roots and fogs over him. He feels clean and inclined to stop going and look up at the twisted branches that sprinkle a confetti of red and yellow. He passes enchanted among the bark and along the way wondering at the swarm of deer that go bouncing on dirt surfaces in tight movements, at the crowds of leaf bales here and there, and the shallow streams rolling under wooden bridges. The immensity and exoticism of life suggested to him by the cardinal glow of branches along the higher treetops and the decayed bottom of the whole enclosure spin again in him the sense of reverence that could only send him into dreaming or wandering this morning from bridge to bridge—from stump to stump to be still and sit and hear the streams.

*He smiles at a young woman on the footpath.*

Hello, miss. My name is James. Who are you?

My name is Aifric. How do you do?

Swell. What brings you to the forest?

I'm on a walk with my sister, Autumn.

Oh? I don't see her. Did you split up?

She went up there for a climb. To the treetops.

Are you both staying with the Blair family?

No. But they let us share their woods.

I see. Well I'm staying with them for the weekend.

Because you're old friends with the Blairs?

No. Just staying for a bit. They're fixing my airplane. The propeller is broken.

*(She gasps)* Golly! You're a pilot? Are you alright? Did you crash?

No! I wouldn't know how to do that. I'm just getting repairs.

Boy, if you fly planes... What is your name again?

It's James. James Ferren. And you are... *Aphrodite?* *(She giggles.)*

Aifric. My sister is Autumn. We own a hot air balloon. You would really love it.



Is it close? Where are you going? I should go back soon.  
 Sh! Just down this way. Not far and we will have to climb a tree.  
 Wait! Aifric! A bug got in my eye! Let me get it out first.  
 James. Hold my hand. I'll take you there.  
 Slow down! I can't see. I think I almost got it out.  
 There are bugs everywhere. And here's the tree. Follow me.  
 Aifric. Hold on. Be careful. Aren't you afraid of heights?  
 No way. I've been climbing trees my whole life. There's the balloon.  
 You weren't lying. A hot air balloon. Rainbow colored. Should I  
 use this rope to get to it?  
 Yes. Oh, and James. You should know: my sister Autumn is *different*. She is slow...but gentle. Be nice.  
 Aifric. Don't worry about me, he says and Autumn is in the  
 basket of an inactive hot air balloon. The inflated cloth billows a  
 gentle green, red, blue, and yellow above her in the sunlight. The  
 striped spherical rainbow hovers and she is sucking her thumb  
 in its shadow and singing at the skyline—to the land of Maine,  
 the meadows, the mist, the gardens and their large estates. She is  
 eating a fruit—an apple—and she has the looks of a lemon. She is  
 deaf and sings her own songs. Her sister sings along.

<i>Autumn!</i>	<i>Wave</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>man.</i>
Hello!	My	name	is	James,
and	what	a	nice	balloon.
I	only	fly	in	planes,
so	thanks	for	inviting	me
	What		a	view!
			<i>Thank</i>	<i>you!</i>

How old is she?

*Three years younger than me.*

How old are you?

*Twenty.*

Up here....

*Yes?*

*I love it.*

The leaves fall from underneath.

Thank you, Aifric.

*I knew you'd like it too.*

Wait until I fix my airplane. I'll take you flying. 🛩️

# Sill

by ERIC WELKOS

I was trying to drive my truck on the sill,  
but I was blindfolded with clothes.  
A vehicle for transporting the family wash was a sedan.  
This is a truck.

The truck was teetering on the sill  
and was well deep in water.  
"If I can't reach the Laundromat,"  
I said to myself,  
"I might as well pull over and do it myself."

I did so.  
But then, as if from the distant waters themselves,  
A leftist Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance advocate entered my  
peripheral.

Allow me, friend," he said.

I allowed myself.



# Pontiac Car

by: Ed Lasher

Tuxedo tails, black and white  
film. Victor Borge plays piano,  
sings satire, polite satire,  
stops,  
steps to the side to address me candidly.  
He wants to tell me about his Pontiac car.  
What a pleasure to drive,  
smooth as piano keys,  
black and white.

Piano keys, black and white  
like a snowman's coal nose  
sinking as it melts to the Moonlight Sonata,  
played upside-down,  
accompanied by laughter.

# Nut Case

by: David Grant Grimes

Man stares into donut case.

Thirty varieties.

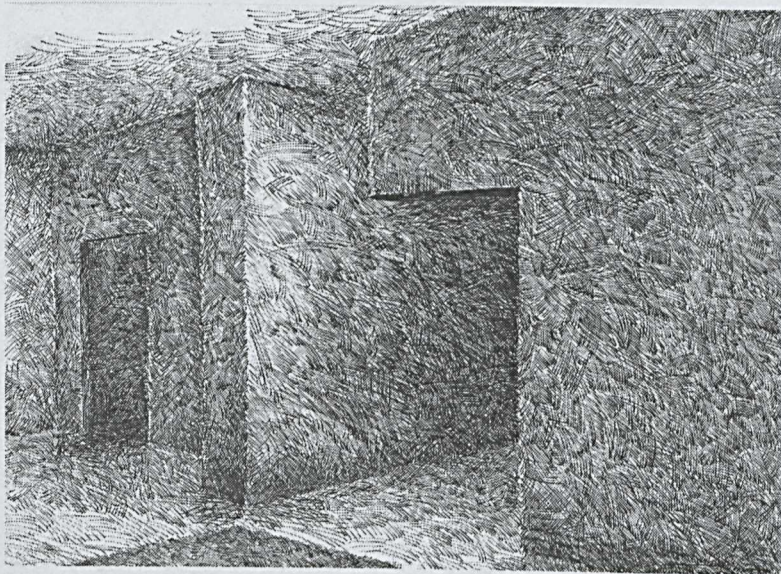
Woman asks,

"How long does it take to choose one donut?"

Man answers,

"I'm not choosing one donut to take.

I'm choosing twenty-nine to leave behind."



Interior  
by: Ed Lasher



# Dread Thoughts

by: Nick Galinaitis

I just dropped a little while ago and have been waiting on the walk halfway between the pavement and the glass door that opens and shuts perpetually with people coming, and now after getting impatient I see the car turning with its window down. It comes up to the edge of the sidewalk pavement and halts for two seconds; I watch the frayed windshield wipers pass along the soot on the windshield and the wheel rims slowly stop turning when I hear brakes. The girl leans over and rolls down the window. It is winter.

'So I'm here now, get in' she says then she moves her hands back on the wheel.

I pull open the car door, then I get in and sit and roll the window back up while she starts driving.

'It's like snow outside' I say.

'Because it always snows your brother's birthday' she says.

I cough, and I wonder if she brought her phone. Then I ask, 'how are you since last week.'

'I feel fine,' she says.

But I know about her after going to the same parks together all our lives. So I think yes *but I feel fine too*.

'You don't think anything big about it do you' she says.

'no, I don't' I say. So she drives and I look at her. I wasn't even proud of her a week ago. The same happened to my brother's girlfriend and he wasn't proud of her.

The air starts to whirl now and I hear ice rattle on the window. I look out and see blocks passing; a man in a coat on the sidewalk moves and looks at me quickly until I can't see him.

*Now are you going to go to school, are you even thinking about school.*

*Are you proud of that.*

Then there is a man outside and he is running down past us so she hits the horn hard.

*No. I'm not.*

*Call him your brother. Do you know what he did*

The man shouts back and he is gone in two seconds

*I remember your brother had so much pride in you I think they were just trying to break him when they did.*

# Dread Thoughts

continued

*My brother my brother.*

*Calling me and saying well I hate them all the same. 'Don't you hate them too now?' he said. So I told him.*

*A man is worth his words and then feeling worthless.*

*And to think I don't even remember that number.*

Then she says, 'last night I told my parents, I told my mom first, and I asked them what they would do about it.'

'What did they say' I ask.

'Oh my father was a jerk, and later he came back and told me *well this is great! look what you've done, and it's killing your mother!* then my mother comes up crying and says *oh really it's okay.* She says she was fine but she was angry, I could just tell because she's my mother, then finally she says *but look honey, it's killing your father*'

I cough a few times, then I roll down the window and spit out it, then the wind blows the spit back, across my cheek then across the backseat window. I wipe my face and roll up the window. And I remember doing the same thing when I was twelve and I think I should have learned not to do it anymore.

'what the *hell* are you doing' she says.

'I don't know' I say and she laughs.

I say, 'Watch the road there's ice.' She glances at the road and there is a police car with his sirens. They are loud enough I believe they are making ice on the windows rattle.

*But I can too.*

*Brother brother brother brother*

*Say it. You're impossible. brother of mine say*

'would they turn them off!' she says. I almost don't hear her.

And then soon as the sirens go away my ears begin to ring, like if the sirens got caught spinning in them. After a while they stop.

I look at her hair over her pretty face. It is a small wreck today and kind of stupid looking.

Then I say, 'I've been having nosebleeds for the past few days. The other morning I woke up with blood soaking my pillow'

She glances at me. I ask, 'what's that a sign of?'

'Snorting the wrong way. Or you're in love' she says, then she is quiet for a while.



Soon she makes a small noise in her throat, until suddenly she tells me, kind of quietly, 'Have you ever told someone you love them and they say well do you mean it' She gives me a look, then says, 'It's like a slap in the face.'

'Watch the road you're speeding' and she looks back at the road.

And after a little while she says, 'I'm glad to know you're okay with it. I never thought it could get blown up so big and I didn't ever consider anything like this--I wished I considered even...' I cough again.

'you have a cold' and she turns to me then looks back. There are some people walking the blocks we pass and they look still.

'It's not a bad cold' I say but I sound sick.

Then for a while I sit saying nothing, just thinking that we will be out of the city soon.

After some time she starts talking again, about her parents, so I decide to ask her if she brought her phone but she doesn't hear me. She just keeps talking. I tell her to shut up and ask her again if she brought it.

She looks at me and sort of yells, 'I didn't!' and suddenly she jerks back to the wheel in a jump; I jump too. She shouts and soon the car jerks and there is violence and we hit a curb and stop fast; next I feel lost and my ears ring and I tell her again shut up.

Two kids are outside on the walk then I hear a weird sound and it is my heart. I can hear everything else the same. The radio has come on jumping between mostly static, and the kids near the car are just cussing. I look and see we have licked the side of a big community mailbox and broke it badly.

She sees it at once; she opens her mouth, wanting to say something and after turning off the car she puts her head on the wheel for two minutes.

She keeps still for a while and doesn't even look at me. Then she picks herself up and gets out to see; she walks around the car, and eventually she starts crying, saying 'oh my god' automatically over and over.

Two more minutes pass and I eventually see sleet hitting on the windshield in soft little stones. I take out a smoke and it makes me think of my brother. I look up through the

## Dread Thoughts

continued

windshield and she holds her hands on her ears, and now she is cussing like those kids. Then the air starts whirling again. She shouts, but soon I can't even see her face anymore because it whirls too much, and I get worried and then my ears just ring. There is a softness and I forget about her phone and my brother and the city. I can only see things. I feel rotten.

After a long time she gets back in the car. 🐞



Adoration of the Magi  
by: Jake Friedman



# The Tragic Tale of Two Telepathic Lovers, or How It's Always Been

by: Jake Friedman

Of Man's first disobedience...

Part one

Patient but bored, Terry was holding a carton of eggs and cradling a gallon of milk by single crooked finger, biding his time in the grocery store while he waited to be checked out.

Portraits of ten to twelve pretty people were on display above the conveyor belt practically asking to be pried open. Terry was disinterested, disapproved and found it in extremely poor taste to express such a perverted interest in another person's life, like raping a stranger it was such forced intimacy. But that was other people's business.

A little boy of four or five was perusing the racks of candy to his right with unchecked impulses and drifting hands. Terry could tell from the child's goggling eyes and salivating glands that all the kid wanted was some candy, and he told his mother so, declaring he wanted some candy and eventually leading into an argument about whether or not he liked Almond Joy (which in truth he didn't). Eavesdropping inadvertently, Terry found the whole thing rather amusing.

Then something happened.

Or maybe it didn't. He couldn't be sure. It took him a second or two just to have the delayed reaction it was so subtle (like being bit by a mosquito), and when he finally did he regarded it with suspicion, he wasn't sure whether it had objective existence or was just a thought turned psychosomatic, this internal struggle very much like hypochondria or sniffing milk only a few days past the expiration date but being unable to tell if it spoiled.

But the question itself confirmed that something was wrong. At least with Terry. He moved the carton of eggs to under his left armpit and rubbed his temples.

Some subtle shift had taken place but Terry couldn't figure it out, this second world with twelve things wrong with it com-

# The Tragic Tale of Two Telepathic Lovers, or How It's Always Been

*continued*

pared against the first. Everything looked normal in its own right, sort of, but off, warped like he was wearing a stronger pair or someone else's glasses. But upon closer inspection it was more the sense itself that felt impaired, his own perspective, something was wrong with him, benign for whoever knew how long (the entire time, maybe, his whole life could have been misconception) but he could feel it now, inside of him, like the tip of a needle jostling his vein's inner wall, scraping it a skinned knee and making him sick. So his senses couldn't be trusted. In response, they shunned him. Edges crackled in black, the peripherals of the world were dropping away and beyond his immediate field of vision there was only empty space, now stealthily seeping into the interiors too and scooping them out, their surfaces were just thin shells that would only persist for so long before shattering, and it was all nothing, now. Nothing.

It was all nothing.

Meanwhile, the electronic doors opened for the little boy and his mother as they left the building. The check-out girl had given up on asking Terry if he wanted paper or plastic ('Or if you even need a bag—') and was trying to make conversation ('—I don't know, you've only got two things...') but Terry saw the words from her mouth before he heard them, someone had fucked up the foley (the tracking was off) and they came through like aphasia anyway, all hollow utterances and empty signifiers and none of it made any sense.

None of it had ever made any sense, Terry amended to himself as the eggs fell to the floor and he dropped the gallon of milk. Which was odd, he noted to himself as he stepped over, no, through the mess he had made on the floor and walked, no, found himself running with long stretched steps through the door in some kind of pseudo-motion, a dream (given the lack of gravity he had expected everything to float), clerks shouting at the back of his head demanding apology or



purchase, check-out girl sighing, slightly sad for some other reason and shoppers left staring at the sticky yellow prints of the soles of his shoes.

He had to get to Lucille's.

It had occurred to Terry that Lucille might want something from the grocery store besides eggs and milk. Like bread. He decided to check.

Lucille, for who experience never became truly real until depicted or described, had said it was a lot like remembering something.

Terry nodded. He was watching hockey.

"Or," she added, "like doing a math problem with no pencil or paper."

Terry laughed and told her she sucked at math.

Lucille pouted impersonally and sat back from her sewing (sideways on the couch). Half closing her eyes, she started again. "You have to reach out and grab them," she mused, "pluck them." Pantomiming, "Pull them a little before they give." Lucille opened her eyes and giggled but Terry was pretty sure he had thought of it first. Smiling, with one arm outstretched and the palm open, curled fingers pointing up but for the first two flat, she looked like Eve.

Terry swathed her, and they had sex.

(But from somewhere in the future Terry couldn't sleep, remembering the past, he tossed and turned tirelessly in cursed anguish sheets)

Terry was driving with difficulty. His feet were numb, his consciousness felt limited, unable to go beyond his body's borders and there was no feeling to the machine at all, he was caught by surprise when he had to change gears but each lurch would correspond to the parasite anxiety nesting coiled in his stomach. He passed meaningless buildings and stopped at colorless lights. He sweated. A cop wearing sunglasses pulled up on his driver's side and stared at Terry with two black beetle shells.

# The Tragic Tale of Two Telepathic Lovers, or How It's Always Been

*continued*

She was dead.

That explained why there was nothing there when Terry had tried to find her in his head, the excuse to dropped eggs. But after running through the grocery store and turning the key in the ignition (still tight with adrenaline), once the initial reactions had grown old and consciousness had come back after abdicating control, Terry second-guessed himself. He would have heard about it somehow, someone would have called him on his cell phone (he was listed as an emergency contact). Besides which Terry was too young and had not of yet been deflowered by death, it was not real and it did not exist. These things always happened to other people anyway. Terry was still freaked out and fearing the worst, but he suppressed it. She simply could not have been dead.

To his credit, it was only after having ventured far and valiant into alternative explanations, coupling creative imagination with intellect and exhausting every single availability until critical thinking cannibalized its own children (à la Cronus) that Terry finally bit down and accepted it.

It could have just been their being apart.

They both knew the distance and how it destroys, how paranoia plays free in the space between and (worse) the ambivalence of absence with the antagonizing pain it brings, balancing the ache of an idyllic heart against preserving personal space. But telepathy was the perfect compromise, affording them instant access to each other hands-free while at the same time respecting their separate lives, private conversations cross country or crowded room when Terry talked to himself inside of his head he didn't have to play her part, he was really



talking to her, and time and space have no meaning for telepathic lovers.

All the same, she might have been going through a tunnel, maybe she was in the basement or rearranging the fridge, something like that.

(But he couldn't shake it)

She could have been busy, maybe. Doing something that required intense concentration and sapped the acute sensation of self-consciousness, giving her thoughts a veneer of not-being. Something like that (even if he could see through it). Maybe she'd bought him a present and was trying to keep it a secret (she was doing a good job). Maybe she was just sleeping (but there were no dreams).

(She was dead)

It was the only way. Unless—

A tiny, apprehensive prick in his chest, almost a click, this new conclusion. Some stiletto slipped neatly between his ribs and something punctured, leaking gas, he could hear the hiss in his ear and smell the sulfur, thickening the air inside of the car to stifling. Some tiny acrid tickling in the back of his throat, a crackle, Terry sucked in slowly and coughed, into his hand, and opened it to find a smatter of fine red fluid, trickling.

Panic. Terry had caught something, the plague, his whole body pricked pins and preemptive needles and an acid sickness began climbing ivily up his intestinal walls, his vision tinted unnaturally black as nature eclipsed but it wasn't happening, it was just psychosis, the power of suggestion and it wasn't real, he'd been through this before and he was doing it to himself, he had to regain control of himself before it got out hand and he lost it completely, he had to breathe (but contaminated air crawled down his trachea and coated his throat with a fiberglass itch, choking him but he couldn't let it out, couldn't believe it, lowered his head over the wheel his hands were still on, heaving and wracked with volcanic activity, hacked inside to splinters, shivering and sore with the effort of suppressing it but it was futile and he couldn't stop it, crashing into the car in front of him or going into cardiac arrest, heart a chamber for internal combustion and ticking down, dead lines ends and imminence, one stretched out second or two before the firing

# The Tragic Tale of Two Telepathic Lovers, or How It's Always Been

*continued*

squad, finality, a flash, and, tight and tense, every atom suddenly felt slack, bonds severed, and sucked into itself, prey to its own pull. Atomic implosion. The Fall and the fallout. The end. She was breaking up with him.

Lucille had turned away.

Shrunk from his psychic touch.

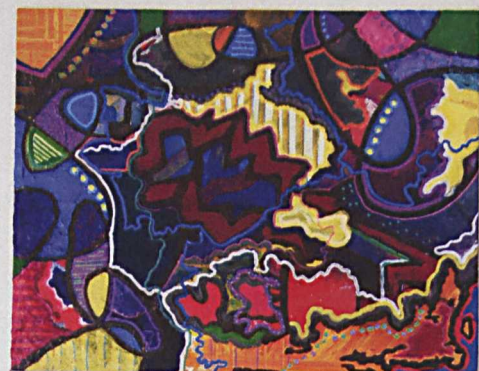
And she had forsaken him.

A flare of nuclear fire, furious but tempered (still terribly in love), contradictory reactions running in rampant chains. Basically, he didn't know. Anything, now. There was no other way of explaining it but it could have been anything at all, however that could be. Even though none of it should. And wasn't supposed to. And the only thing that made any sense now was the coma Terry slipped into and under, from which he would only come out after having seen Lucille.

The light changed, Terry took his cue from the other cars, and left. ♀



The Sloppy Series  
by: JES OSKOW



# Fall Harvest

by: Sara Krome

## *Cumberland Mountains*

The leaves rasped like old hags beneath our feet. We moved over from the border world where the forest meets the road in a mix of scraggly grass, coarse rocks, and heaps of dry leaves into the center of the dirt road. From there we had a clear, unobscured view of the harvest moon directly ahead of us. Its weight hung ponderously in the sky, a full yellow disc tinged with bronze that seemed swollen with the crisp fall air and heavy ears of corn, the prayers of the farmers for a rich crop. We were surrounded on either side by freshly cut fields that looked naked in the moonlight. The nubby, bare stalks stood limply and lonely, like broken skeletons.

"Are you excited?" I turned my head to look at the side of her face. The small, upturned nose, delicate chin, and full lower lip were outlined by a thin strip of moonlight, as though the moon had taken a pen and drawn its luminous ink over the profile of her face. Letty jumped as the sound of my voice shattered the still fall air. She arched her face towards me, biting that full lower lip.

"I ought to be," she whispered.

I swallowed hard to dislodge the tight ball stuck at the back of my throat. Shoving my hands into my pockets, I fingered the grains of earth gathered at the bottom that no amount of washing could remove. "Well, I'm happy for you," I said tentatively.

She turned a startled face to me. "Are you happy that I'm leavin'?" A high-pitched strain caught at her voice.

"No!" I kicked miserably at a clod of dirt. "Honestly, Letty, I hate that you're leavin'. I just thought that's what people were supposed to say, that they were glad when something good happened to someone else."

I considered for a moment, then slowly said, "It is a good thing, though. I'm glad you get to go to school. I know you are too, and it's what you want, but still—" my voice trailed off, and I left my thoughts behind us on the road. For a few minutes there was complete silence, without even a breeze rustling through the ashes of leaves and dried husks scattered on the cold fields. The earth held its breath. Above, the moon glinted larger and brighter than usual in the sky, like the hammered bronze shield of a Greek warrior I had seen in a history textbook. It illuminated the world



with a strange, unearthly golden light, casting an apocryphal tint across the uneven landscape.

Letty stared straight ahead. "But still I will miss our walks," she finished softly. I gulped violently, and the strangled noise broke through the air, drifting up until it was lost in the sky.

We continued to walk in silence for a while. I breathed deeply, the cold fall air searing my lungs. I noticed Letty was wearing nothing but a lightly-colored cotton dress with a worn, ragged blanket wrapped around her shoulders, and that her wool stockings were riddled with holes. Unable to bear her shivering, I reached out my arm and pulled her gently to me. I felt her soft body compress into mine, our contours and curves melding into each other. She gripped my arm that fell over her shoulder tightly with one arm, wrapping the other around my waist and hugging my hips even closer to hers. I gripped her shoulders until my arm ached and her sharp elbow pressed into my side, as though to break the membrane that separated us until I could pull her into me and she could sink into my bones. Though I was nearly a head taller than her, our steps fell in sync, and we moved seamlessly together, clinging tightly to each other, pressing and settling our bodies until we walked as a compact person, walking faster and faster as we moved our legs and feet together until we were chasing the moon up the road.

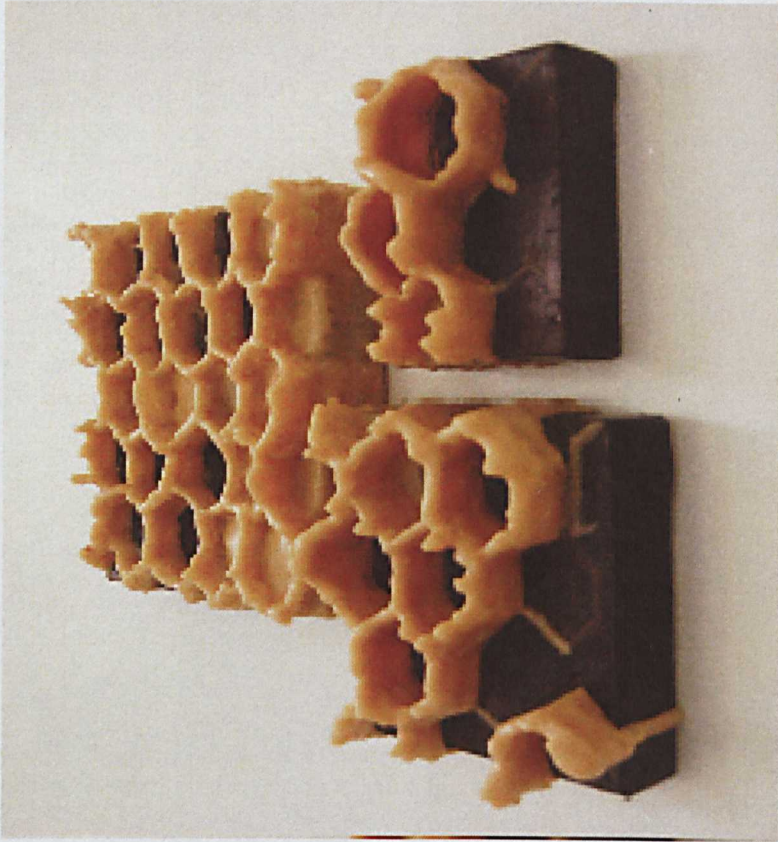
She pulled her arm from my waist to readjust the blanket, and as she broke our stranglehold upon each other I turned to look at her face fully for the first time that night. Her blue eyes were luminous, a golden tint shining from their centers, as though they had absorbed some of the strange moonlight. A tear coursed slowly down her cheek, leaving a trail that shimmered silvery on her face. I gathered her to me, a harvest of my own, and under the moon's weird bronze gaze I kissed her.

After a minute Letty broke apart, stepping back to regard me with all the weight of her full eyes. She gripped my arms tightly for a moment; I could feel her nails break the skin and dig in, as though they longed to take root and stay there. Then she turned and dashed into the cornfields, leaping and springing over the bare broken stalks, throwing wide her arms and tilting back her head, baring her throat and breast. Her long brown hair streamed behind her, glinting with sparks of gold, and her white dress shimmered palely in the moonlight. Standing on the

## Fall Harvest

continued

edge of the field, watching her light, white figure perform an odd pagan dance to the moon, I felt the ball in my throat fall into my lungs, and I felt my chest bursting as I wished we could just keep walking up the road leading to the moon, so I could pin onto it a prayer of my own. ☘



Untitled  
by: Tyler Mullan



# Doric Order

by: Keith Ludington Adams

"Russia," Pete's two-sided meditate-mat  
(not easily ironed or positioned),  
has nearly eight Velcro handles and straps  
that keep him from slipping from his visions  
(which daily emerge in a post-war Church  
wherein, with great chants to ancient ravens  
and dances by magic fires, he'll search  
for his bended mind and gain its daemon  
to rest by his pillow when he does dream  
of paper on deep wind, drums in wide ears,  
journeys that unmask every phantom meme,  
and paint, in speed, an internal Vermeer  
whereon Gods of mind and hand realign;  
wherein he, young Pete, meets Peter-Divine).

# Breeds

by: Kara Constantine

What happened just hours before the wedding was really my fault. I hated the dogs, and I hated being at Aunt Sally's house. She had three greedy little dachshunds, and she treated them like her children. My aunt got up extra early in the morning to fry bacon for the dogs before she left for work. She hand-fed it to them hot, the grease shining on her fingers. The freezer was full of Hebrew National hotdogs, all for them, because they refused to eat dog food.

"They don't like it," she insisted when my dad gave her a hard time about it.

He watched her carefully slicing the hotdogs. She had to cut them up small because the dogs swallowed the pieces whole, and they'd almost choked several times. "They'd eat it when they got hungry. If they didn't have any other choice," he added.

My Aunt Sally got her first dachshund when my grandma got sick. She named her Keisha, which at the time seemed too sassy for the tiny black puppy, who tore around my grandma's house with seemingly limitless energy, barely stopping long enough to snap up two bites of food from her dish before scampering off again. I thought she should be named Rocket or Turbo. When Keisha finally collapsed from exhaustion, my brother and sister and I would take turns holding her in our laps, stroking the brown spots over her eyes and rubbing her sleek, brown stomach.

When grandma moved to the hospital, the family gathered there to visit. Her hands were small and neat, lying on the hospital blanket. She smiled and patted my cheek when I came and stood by her, my own hands hanging useless at my sides. Always tearful and silent, my aunt sat in the corner with her hands clasped under her chin as if in prayer.

I hadn't seen Keisha since Grandma moved into the hospital, so when we went to Aunt Sally's house for a cousin's baby shower, I was surprised to see Keisha's stomach dragging the ground as she waddled lazily around the house. She wasn't interested in playing or bellyrubs, but when I made a move towards the kitchen, her ears lifted alertly and she watched me and followed eagerly. I saw her follow Aunt Sally, who went to the refrigerator to get out the towering chocolate trifle she had made for dessert.

"Oh, baby, this isn't for you," she cooed as she set down the



trifle. "But we can't let the puppy-dog go hungry, can we?" The voice she used was like one you'd use to talk to a baby, except even sweeter, higher, and stickier. Her lips formed a wet, pursed little bunch as she cooed, the same way my French teacher told us to hold our lips to make the "ew" sound of the u in tu and autobus. I remembered my embarrassment when my teacher had forced me to imitate her in front of the class. "Euw! Euw! Euw!" she had cried. I blushed at the memory. Aunt Sally went back to the refrigerator and took out a dish with sliced hot dogs on it. Keisha gobbled them greedily, then stared at the saucer as if waiting for more to materialize.

"That's all for now, Keish," Aunt Sally chided. "So precious," she sighed.

We went up to Pennsylvania for Aunt Sally's wedding. She moved from Georgia, where we live, about four years ago, when I was twelve. My grandmother had just passed away from stomach cancer. I remember going to visit her a few days after the funeral. Her two sons were grown up and moved out, and to me her house looked like a museum of delicate glass figures: dolphins, ballerinas, and butterflies perched on every surface.

Aunt Sally lounged miserably in a giant papasan chair, her eyes red and watery. Her new dachshund Sandy, who looked like a miniature golden retriever with wisps of wavy blond hair that trailed on the floor, was curled on his back beside her, paws tucked up under his chin. Keisha lay on Aunt Sally's chest, her back fat gathered in rolls and her short legs tucked under her body. Aunt Sally's capri pants left her ankles exposed. I noticed a tiny butterfly tattoo on the left one.

"Mom just suffered at the end," Aunt Sally murmured. Her normal speaking voice had begun to take on the same saccharin quality it had when she spoke to the dogs. "It was better that she went to rest, rather than be in such pain." The dogs whined and licked her gently under the chin with curled, fat pink tongues.

"I've decided to move up North," she told us, wiping at her eyes. "CRT offered me a position in Harrisburg. I think it would be good for the dogs," she said, stroking Sandy's ear, "Right, Dude?" That was her nickname for him.

Aside from phone calls on holidays and birthdays, we didn't hear much from Aunt Sally after she moved. So it was a surprise when she invited us down to stay with her and attend her wed-

ding. She had met someone at work, and they were going to have a small ceremony. We drove up, and after the grueling two days in the car, we were greeted at the door by three screech-barking dogs, who my aunt tried to keep back with one foot.

"Quiet, darlings!" she scolded them.

I didn't recognize two of the dogs, but figured out quickly that Keisha had died and been replaced by a nearly identical young male dog named Elvis. Sandy was bloated and looked ready to pop. He seemed to have some kind of filmy cataracts on his eyes. Saddled with packs of fat and wearing a moeey expression, Brandy was perhaps the most pathetic. The dogs swarmed around my aunt wherever she went, their toenails clicking frantically on the tile floor whenever she walked by the kitchen. Elvis never calmed down, following my family around and barking from a safe distance, then shooting off to hide behind a chair if any of us moved towards him.

After dinner, Aunt Sally and Mom sat in the kitchen talking about Mike, her fiancée. "He's a good man," my aunt said without enthusiasm. "He likes boating, fishing, television, the usual man stuff. The dogs adore him." She rolled her cigarette around the ashtray. The bags under her eyes were gray and puffy. I pretended to play solitaire on the computer while I listened in. I noticed a blue blur on Aunt Sally's ankle.

"I tried to have my butterfly removed for the wedding, because my dress is tea-length," she explained to my mom. "The stuff we do when we're kids," she sighed.

"What's the name of the place you're having the ceremony?" Mom asked.

"Lake Lure," Aunt Sally said, "It's beautiful. People swim there, but I never have. It's a mountain lake, and very cold."

The next morning we all sat in the living room while Mom curled Aunt Sally's hair, with little success. The curls were slack, and drooped down toward Aunt Sally's shoulders. Outside the clouds were low and the heat made it feel like a pressure cooker inside the house. The blue smudge on Aunt Sally's ankle was covered with yellowish make-up that didn't quite match her skin. I got up to go to the bathroom and had to fight with the pantyhose my mother insisted I wear. I snagged it with a fingernail, and when I tugged it back up, the snag flourished into a long run. I stalked back out into the living room and sat down on the



couch next to my brother and sister, who were both absorbed by SpongeBob SquarePants. My legs sweated, the pantyhose making my skin itch.

Restless, I headed for the front porch with Elvis in tow, barking madly at my heels. I flung the door open in annoyance, and Elvis caught sight of a squirrel in the front yard. Before I could decide whether to move aside and let him at it or block his path, he darted past me, chasing the squirrel into the street. Aunt Sally, alerted by Elvis' barking, saw him go out too, and dashed after him. Her curls and dress flew out behind her and her arms stretched out like she was running to hug a friend she hadn't seen in a long time. She was just feet away when Mike's truck, turning into the driveway, rolled over Elvis. A sharp yelp squeezed out of him and he was still. I glimpsed blood and pink flesh, and looked away quickly. But Aunt Sally dropped to her knees next to the ruined body, sobbing as she stroked the head.

"My Elvis, my Elvis." The other two dogs came over to sniff the body, whining. Mike stood horrified, half out of the truck. "My Elvis," Aunt Sally moaned.

My Aunt Sally didn't get married that day. "How could I?" she objected. She and Mike were just going to delay the wedding, but it kept getting put off, and eventually they split up. She never blamed me for what happened. Aunt Sally's grief was so great that it didn't feel like anyone else had room to feel anything. All I could feel was glad that the dog died instantly. We left after a few days because my dad didn't want to be forced to attend the scattering of Elvis' ashes in the backyard. Aunt Sally told us the ceremony was quiet, like the wedding it replaced. I knew the surviving dogs would be consoled with extra bacon.

Aunt Sally retired a few years later and decided to buy a trailer and hit the road. She, Brandy, and the new dogs, Rico and Pumpkin, were going to tour the United States. We got a Christmas card from her with a picture of the dogs posed outside an Atlantic City casino. She didn't make it much farther. She had lost the travel itch. A trailer park in Virginia became home, despite that her house in Georgia sat empty. It turned out to be Aunt Sally's final resting place, too, after she suffered a massive heart attack in bed one night. The police found her when a neighbor called to complain about the incessant howling of the dachshunds. The neighbor told us the dogs cowered in a corner, as far from

# Breeds

continued

Aunt Sally as they could get.

I went up with my parents to help clean out the trailer. My mom didn't keep any of Aunt Sally's things except photo albums and the pictures of family she found behind framed portraits of the dogs. My dad gladly gave the dogs to a neighbor who thought he could make them show dogs. I thought about Aunt Sally's little blue tattoo and what she might have been like when she was young. I emptied packs and packs of frozen hotdogs straight into the trash. 🐾



Untitled  
by: Nomi Raphael



# Plans

by: Kara Constantine

From the front porch swing, Josh watched his little twin cousins emerge from the minivan as if it were some strange, wedge-shaped cocoon. Both looked slightly dazed as they stood in the beaming heat of the June sun, Game Boys dangling from their curled fingers. Josh hadn't seen the girls in a few years, and he wasn't sure which was which — he remembered one being slightly chunkier than the other, but they had started to shed their baby fat, and their knees were knobby on their stick-legs. They were just a few years older than his daughter.

He wondered if his Mom would make spaghetti tonight, since they had company—no fending for himself like usual. He rose slowly and stretched before slouching down the stairs to clap his uncle on the back and hug his aunt.

"You look exactly the same, Josh," his aunt said, "you always had such a baby face —bet you're glad now."

"Hey Jana, Emily," Josh said lazily, smiling down at the girls. As he stood watching his uncle fumble to get their bags out of the back, another figure materialized from inside the van. Oh yeah, her, he thought, remembering the dark haired, quiet girl from his aunt's first marriage. She'd always kept to herself, and never really seemed to feel at ease around the family. He remembered her name was Gina, but her mother called her Gi. Her eyes were always heavy-lidded, as if she'd just woken up, and her hair was long and straight down her back, like it had been since she was six, when his aunt and uncle married. Now she was—he did the mental math—sixteen. But she looks older than that, he thought, giving her a once-over. She's cute.

He strolled behind the family as they walked toward the house, hands in his pockets. "The game hasn't started yet," he told his uncle, watching Gi. She wore loose sweatpants and a sweat-shirt for traveling, but he could tell she was slender and delicate beneath the baggy clothes. She looked like a dancer.

After the game and dinner, Josh sat on the porch swing with his aunt, who was asking him about his new gig working in construction — he'd had a string of short-lived jobs since high school, though he had never kept a single one in the last ten years for more than six months. He eagerly told her about how well the job paid, how he should be able to move out and rent a place for him

and Alli, his daughter, to live in a few months. Josh could sense her wariness in the twist of her mouth and the half-hearted way she congratulated him, and he tried to impress her, throwing out wildly that he might go back to school if things kept going well. Her eyes brightened, and he exalted in the look of affirmation. But not too long – having secured one believer, he pushed himself up and went to look for someone else to listen to his plans.

When he spotted Gi sitting alone on the couch watching MTV, he switched directions and flopped down beside her, at what he thought of as a friendly, brotherly distance. "What's on?" he asked.

"Just one of those dumb celebrity romance shows," she said, looking down at the remote instead of at him.

He nodded and was silent for a few moments. His eyes strayed to some of his daughter's school portraits on an end table. "What grade are you in now?"

"Going into eleventh," she answered, twisting her fingers in her lap.

"Gosh, I remember you when you were just starting school," he said softly, as if reminiscing, "You've sure grown up a lot."

Gi glanced over at him quickly, then looked back down at her hands without saying anything.

She wasn't giving him a lot to go on. "Bet you've got a lot of guys chasing you," he ventured, watching for her reaction.

"Uh, no," she answered sarcastically. So the boys hadn't noticed her yet. She was probably insecure about that, he thought, and she'd probably be flattered to get some attention.

"Well, what have you been up to?" Josh probed.

There were a few seconds of silence while she reached up and pushed her hair behind her ear. "Not a lot...I'm getting a job when we get back from vacation, starting to look at colleges."

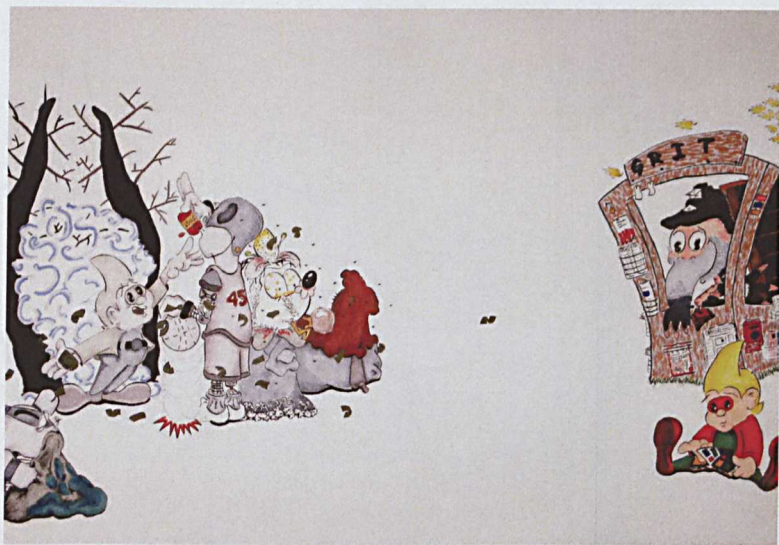
"I'm thinking of going back to school myself," he began, seizing the opportunity, "I thought I might try taking some education classes...might be a teacher someday," he invented casually.

"Me too," Gi said, turning to him, her eyes warmer than before. Josh smirked at his lucky hit and slouched farther down in the couch, inching a tiny bit closer at the same time.

"Yeah, I just love kids," he sighed as if resigned, but pleased with the fact. "I have a ton of pictures of Alli and me – want to see them?"



"Sure," Gi said. Josh heaved himself up off the couch and crossed the living room sinuously, grabbing a few of the photo albums from the bookshelf and laying them gently in her lap. A sense of satisfaction at another captive audience – this one innocent of his past failures—came over him. He sat down beside her again and began to tell her about how he was looking for a house to rent so Alli could have a bigger yard, leaning in to look at the pictures with her, letting his shoulder bump up against hers. 🍷



Untitled  
by: David Ross

# Untitled

by: Yichong "Angel" Li





# I Like America and America Likes Me

by: Ed Lasher

There's a certain expressionless look a person's eyes have during the temporary blindness of a head rush from explosive panic or low blood sugar. Another thing worth knowing is that sometimes couples have trouble sleeping if they have only recently moved in together.

Joseph Beuys spent a few days in the 70s living in a sectioned-off room in a gallery with a coyote. It was a performance art piece, which he called "I Like America and America Likes Me." Beuys was wrapped head-to-toe in felt but for a small opening near his face, which he poked a shepherd's staff through. The staff, I guess, was either meant to serve as a rudimentary grabber device or it was meant to help him protect himself against the coyote, or it was just art.

The room was empty except for Beuys, the coyote, food and water dishes, loose straw bedding, and several newspapers. The two were left alone, except for once or twice a day when an employee would come to remove any newspapers that the animals had soiled. It should also be noted that Beuys arrived and left in an ambulance.

Esther's eyes looked fearfully blank. She wasn't looking at anything. "Are you OK, bunny?" I asked. The manner in which she didn't acknowledge me at all made her look all the blinder. I could see her tiny nostrils flaring. She was screaming silently to herself.

"Esther, it's me. What's wrong?"

Beuys and the coyote became friends. In order for this to happen, the first thing the coyote had to do was tear the felt epidermis off of his companion. After the coyote had finished skinning Beuys alive, the anonymity of the felt stripped away, they found each other exposed, too intimate not to become either friends or enemies.

It was only a little over four years ago Jackie and I got married. It feels like it all happened so long ago. She was pregnant;

# I Like America and America Likes Me

continued

we hadn't even been together very long. It was basically because of her parents – not that it really made a difference in the end.

Everything got put on hold. Our lives, that is. That's what we say, that our plans were put on hold, but it doesn't seem likely that we'll be getting back to them at any point. We both finished high school, but that about does it. I work weekdays at UPS and Jackie works weeknights and weekends as a hostess. Someone always has to be home with Esther until she's old enough for school.

I looked closer and saw that a honey bee was perched on Esther's forearm. I crouched down slowly and blew on it. The bee flew away. Esther calmed like a light switch and rubbed the area where the bee had been. We went inside.

Esther neatly tiled the ads from the Sunday paper across the kitchen floor while I sat at the table, struggling with the crossword.

Joseph Beuys was a German artist, of sorts. He didn't think much of the United States, though he had never been, but under pressure from the art community, he resolved to appear in New York. He was taken between the airport and the gallery in an ambulance and wheeled in on a stretcher. The idea was that he would never step foot on the soil.

"Do you have a kiss for me today?"

Esther, grinning, shook her head wildly.

"Oh, OK. That's OK," Jackie said.

Jackie had just gotten back from work, and Esther got excited when she heard the door open. She can hear the smallest sounds—the gas stovetop igniting, pencils scratching at a crossword, doors opening—but normal sounds, like the sound of her name, she just misses entirely. Esther ran out to the foyer to see Mommy, only to stand there, giddy and diffused, unaware of the awkwardness.

Jackie sat down with me at the table. "Do you have a kiss for me today?" She asked me.

"I got as many as you need." 🐞



# Untitled

by: Amelia Reiniger



# The First Drop of Blood

by: Sara Krome

She wielded the razor lightly. As she eagerly pressed the button on top of the bottle of shaving cream, a torrent of light foam gushed into her hand, spilling between the cracks of her fingers and splotching onto the white bathroom tiles. Liza realized that next time, she would need to press more gently. The label on the bottle denoted that it was scented like sprays of honeysuckle and fresh vanilla, and it did smell good, though there was an artificial tang to it, the sour smell of trapped air released with a sinister hiss.

She smeared the porous, aerial cream over her legs, coating them with a thick white fur. Liza shook her hand violently to dispel the remnants that clung to it, sending dots of soap flying until they stuck onto the gleaming white surfaces of the upstairs bathroom; the silver faucets, the streakless, shimmering mirrors, the soft cotton rug in varying stripes of cream and white. With a trembling breath, Liza removed the clear plastic cover from the razor and, bravely, positioned it at the bottom of her leg, in that no-man's-land where sinewy tendons connect the foot to the leg. In one swift motion, she made the killing stroke.

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In was in math class that Liza first felt the shame, felt it drop over her like a heavy wool blanket on a thick summer day, suffocating and nauseating her. From her seat between Bobby Marlin (the cutest boy in the seventh grade) and Terence Everett (he took guitar lessons), Liza felt all the weight of her important position. If she looked one way, there was Bobby, his blond hair flipped invitingly over his freckled face. If she glanced, during one of Mr. Conning's droning lectures, to her right, she could enjoy the uninterrupted vista of Terence (his close friends called him Terry—Liza had never called him Terry, but she hoped one day she could), with his long nose, amber eyes, and dark brows. That day, her inclination had been towards Bobby. Propping her pointed chin on her elbow, she often allowed her eyes to slide to the left. She sometimes imagined he would glance her way, and then she could smile shyly and drop her gaze demurely to marred wooden surface of her desk. Liza angled her eyes over



towards him, hoping that maybe today she could catch his green ones.

But she was disappointed that his head was facing resolutely forward. She glanced at the front board. Mr. Conning was deeply entrenched in his usual harangue, which was distinctly lacking in excitement. Her eyes returned to Bobby. She noticed that his were angled down, looking hungrily at the legs in front of him. Liza looked at them too, though more out of curiosity than hunger.

The legs were attached to Cate Jorgis, a tall, strawberry blonde who entered dance competitions all over the state. She was wearing a short pink skirt, and beneath it her legs stretched, long and tan and smooth. The glaringly bright fluorescent light of the classroom reflected off her legs, making them shimmer like a mermaid's fin. Liza glanced down at her own short limbs, and felt a stab of dismay when she saw the light-colored bristles that sprouted from them. She ran her hand quickly up her left leg, feeling the hairs chafe her hands like sand paper. Down came the smothering blanket of shame, and she tucked her legs as tightly as she could, stowing them away under her seat. Liza kept her eyes trained onto the top of her desk, where she had roughly carved her initials, and where others before her had scratched theirs. There was a complicated design of squiggles that had been scrawled in blue pen in the top left hand corner, and near the center were the letters, JB + AF, enclosed in a sharp-edged heart. But Liza's cheeks continued to burn, and she feared her exposed legs stood out obviously, like hairy behemoths, in the middle of the room, and that Mr. Conning would break from his interminable sermon to point them out in mocking tones. Liza could hear the scornful shriek of Cate, the indolent chuckle of Bobby, and the careless scoff of Terence ringing in her ears, and she crossed her ankles tighter.

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That weekend, Liza had walked to the drugstore two blocks from her house. She bought a pack of cheap plastic razors and shaving cream in an aluminum can with a pink lid. The curving, slender script on the label indicated the fragrance contained within. Liza liked the idea of honeysuckle sprays and fresh va-

# The First Drop of Blood

continued

nilla, suggestive of delicate, sweetly feminine qualities. She also bought a can of Mountain Dew and extra-flavor bubble gum, so it would not look like she had come there just for shaving tools, and paid for it with her allowance money. Liza's leg had jiggled nervously as she stood in line, clutching her purchases desperately behind a large woman in red floral pants unloading her cart of economy-sized products, with three young children grouped around her. The littlest girl ogled Liza curiously with enormous blue eyes from her perch in the cart, and Liza tried to remember what it was like to be a little girl.

When it was her turn, Liza quickly deposited the razors, the shaving cream, the Mountain Dew, and the gum onto the rubber conveyor belt and hurriedly counted out the crumpled bills. Her heart beat frantically out of a mortal fear that someone she knew would see her, and the transaction passed quickly with the garish quality of a bad dream, in which she felt curiously detached from her body and the voice of the cashier sounded distorted and far-away, as though she were speaking underwater.

When Liza arrived home from her hot walk in the May sunshine, she hid her plastic bag behind her back and ran upstairs to her room. Once there, she changed into a pair of short, baby blue cotton shorts, and took her razors and her shaving cream to the next room, where she proceeded to baptize the bathroom with sparkles of shaving cream and drew the razor too swiftly up her leg. Liza gasped at the burning sensation that streaked up her shin, and stared at the smooth corridor of naked flesh running up her leg. Gripping the razor more delicately, she eased upwards slowly, stripping her legs of the shaving cream and carving pathways into her shins and calves.

As she tugged the razor, Liza trailed her hands in the smooth path left in the blade's wake, admiring the contours of her calves. She rediscovered a dark strawberry mark near the inside of her right ankle, and a raised, thin white line on her knee cap. Liza's legs were covered in various bumps, nicks, and dents, mosquito bites and lingering scars, all half-forgotten. But the razor traveled smoothly for the most part, until it passed over a half-healed scab on her left shin, ripping off the skin. Liza gritted her teeth in pain, and watched as a small bubble of blood pooled



on the surface, until it popped and a thin trickle slid down the length of her leg. It hurt, but Liza supposed, with a thrill at being so old and wise, that blood was always the sacrifice of a woman.

Liza's knees proved the trickiest. Her hands awkwardly tried to maneuver around their rounded shape and grooved dimples, but she cut herself several times before felling the hair that grew in profusion there. More blood slid lazily down her legs, staining the white expanse of the tub. It looked faintly gory, Liza thought. She pressed, this time gently, more cream into her palm, and the razor continued its journey on the slopes of her upper legs. She paused at the peak, at junction of her thighs, where a soft patch of dark, crinkly hair had sprouted. Liza breathed deeply for a moment, and wondered at the cruel trick of fate that made women grow hair in awkward places, when she thought being a woman meant being soft and smooth. Babies were born soft and smooth, and though children's knees were roughened by play, they kept their hairless, tactile limbs. Yet just when a girl began to nurture her appearance, she found herself sprouting hair like a man. But Liza wanted to feel as delicate and soft as the sprays of honeysuckles pictured on her can of pink-capped shaving cream. She decided to leave off with shaving just her legs for now, reasoning that they were visible when she wore shorts.

Liza rinsed off her legs under the bathtub faucet, wincing as the cool water burned over her freshly bald, and in some places bloody, skin. When they were clean, she rinsed out the tub, too, and wiped down all the surfaces blotched with shaving cream. She replaced the pink lid on the can of shaving cream, and took it and her razors into her room, where she stowed them in the bottom dresser drawer and smiled to herself over her secret. Liza sank into the middle of her bed and ran her fingertips lightly up her legs, savoring the smooth, seamless journey up and down the length of them. Her legs stretched before her, and she imagined them to be the long, silky avenues to womanhood, unaware that the path to that strange, foreign place was nowhere near as smooth as her legs, and that shaving them yielded only the first drop of blood. 🐾

# Untitled

by: Clara Burgess





# My Role Model

by: Danny Hughes

I was down at the creek with the other boys in the neighborhood. We went there often on summer weekday afternoons. There was a small clearing in my neighbor's backyard woods that held a small little pool that trickled into a magnificent waterfall. Well, we thought it was magnificent. As we grew bigger, the waterfall grew smaller, but for me, it never really lost its appeal. The clearing wasn't all that secluded, especially with the new houses that had just been built. In fact, you could see a couple of roads right from the middle of the falls. It's amazing how even with responsibility bearing down from every direction you can still find some peace.

I was crouched in the sort of position you can only occupy when you're little- the one where your knees are tucked up near your shoulders and one hand grasps one knee as the other spins lazy circles in the water with a muddy stick. I overturned rocks at the bottom of the pool carefully, waited a few minutes for the mud to clear, and then returned to work. Every now and again a crayfish would spring from the rocks and hide from my poking stick in another pile. A lot of times I could still see its tail. I poked it. It was less than pleased.

One boy pissed down river, which was the polite way to do it. Another boy threw rocks up river, which was the impolite way to do it. A third kicked chunks of dead wood from a tree into the water. I poked my crayfish and swirled my stick.

As I sat staring into the pool, one of those skimmer bugs came skating by across the surface. The crayfish tossed rocks underneath the little skimmer bug. The boys terrorized the landscape around him. The birds jostled the sparse canopy above him. He barely disturbed the very water he skated across. I had played with skimmer bugs before. I had used sticks, I had used rocks, I had used cups, I had used every implement of war a young boy has against bugs, but I could never beat the skimmer bug. They always met my tactics with their same infuriating every day routine, and skimmed away untouched.

But today was a different day. The skimmer bug and I had an understanding. Skimmer bug skimmed his water. I poked around in the dirt. Skimmer bug and I were on the same team.

## My Role Model

continued

I smiled, and I like to think that in his own buggy way, he smiled too. He probably didn't.

Suddenly, there was a huge splash. I was covered in muddy water, my eyes globbed with slime. I heard laughter all around me, and when I finally could see again, there was a huge rock in the water, crippling my crayfish nemesis. Skimmer bug was nowhere to be seen.

My fists clenched as every inch of me prepared to scream and yell for my missing friend. The first syllable was almost out, when I stopped.

I could not argue for the life of a bug, the undisputed target of all young boy aggression! If I became a bug sympathizer, this would only be the first splash in a long line of splashing, beating, and teasing. I would be ostracized! No one would dare trade Pokemon cards with me again.

I couldn't afford that. I still needed a holographic Blastoise.

So, instead, I simply stood up, and with more energy than it took to yell, I smiled. I laughed, even though inside, I screamed for my fallen friend. Skimmer bug had been defeated, but I would keep his memory alive.

I would not splash back. I would just keep skimming. ♣



# A Portrait of Two Artists

by: Jake Zamostny

—onto the frigid cellar floor. I wasn't afraid, in spite of the silent shadows and the unusually smooth feel of the cement beneath my feet. The faint odor of rotting firewood reached my nostrils, and I turned towards the timorous glow to my right. Situated there was a door with a small window; that much I remembered.

My father had barred the basement to us when he installed his writing desk by the window some eleven years ago. Before that fateful day, my brother, my cousin, and I had raced circles about our underground lair. I took to scrawling on any and every surface that I could reach—perhaps I perceived even then the creative energy radiating from these depths. I was no prodigy, no three-and-a-half-foot poet; I simply had one of those obsessions that children do, like when you discover in the mirror that one of your eyes is bigger than the other and need to hide from anyone who might find out. I felt compelled to leave my mark wherever I could, as if such signs were the only real evidence of my existence. Now I ran my fingers over the wooden staircase banister and found my signature proudly scribbled there in faded purple ink.

The faint light emanating from the window in front of me gently lifted the shroud over this half of the cellar. Against the far wall and to the left was my father's workbench, strewn with tools and nails and supporting several antique fishing poles, fragile bones extracted from the membranous wing of some prehistoric creature. Towards the right was the somber bulk of a grand mahogany desk, an imposing presence in the cold and murky landscape of the basement.

I pressed my hand to my sweatshirt pouch and felt the reassuring form of the notebook nestled there. Finally I would write at my father's desk, come to understand the man who seemed so distant even before his passing. Long ago I had conceded defeat to that impenetrable façade, to a mask which I assumed to have long ago fused with the live flesh beneath. Could one who seemed so detached from the world have written something great in this corner of shadow? I wanted

# A Portrait of Two Artists

continued

to believe that he had. Perhaps with a taste of my father's solitude, I would comprehend his attraction to the lone desk in the depths.

The light blossomed from the glass and drew my eyes to my father's unusual chair. I was reminded of a story I had read about Virginia Woolf and her upright desk; how strange it was to think that this remote and divine being had composed such symphonies of speech while standing! My father would also have wanted to stay alert when writing, seated upon his ascetic throne, a stiff and high-backed dining room chair that would ward off sleep.

I could picture him stooped over his work, clenching a pen that sizzled with an unseen force, the image of Zeus with lightning bolt in hand. Here he would reveal his inner turmoil, the seething torrent of memories and sensations that form the self in any given moment, a stream of consciousness whose flow he would dam to the world until, having reached this spot, he would spill forth onto the page. What had gone wrong to forevermore stifle the roar of that great river?

The crimson surface of the desk was covered now with a thin veil of dust. I gripped the curling arms of my chair and was surprised to feel beneath my right palm a series of indentations in the wood. The glow from the window was sufficient to make out the message engraved there:

**I originate,  
therefore I am.**

While my father had neatly inscribed the letters in the dark wood, I could see that he had hastily attempted to scratch them out. A jagged line seared through the text and bespoke of great anger and frustration. What could he mean in saying that he did not originate, that he did not exist?

None of us had dared descend into the cellar since my father's death; nor had we ever seen any of his work. Though I thought it best that my mother be the first to explore his writing, I could not now suppress the temptation to peer into



my father's mind. The top of the desk was clear of any books or materials, and I watched, in the soft light radiating from the window above me, as tiny dust particles danced in the air and drifted downwards to form an orderly carpet upon the writing surface. Three drawers lined the blood-red *escritoire* on either side, along with a skinny and elongated central compartment above my knees.

I began with the upper-left drawer.

Empty. Empty.

Empty. Empty.

Empty. Empty.

I didn't understand. Had he hidden or destroyed everything? I could feel my pulse throbbing in my jaw, and my fingertips became slick with sweat. Eleven years of work, eleven years of our lives together, and here were the nonexistent fruits of his labor. I was infuriated—no, worse, I was disillusioned with a man who had sacrificed his life with his family for nothing.

I couldn't look in the central drawer; that final blow, the certainty that I would have nothing left by which to remember and even come to know my own father, would be overwhelming. I could preserve his face, his features, but not the being beneath, not that soul of a man which lives on only in writing.

I risked all and opened the central compartment. There lay a neat stack of white paper, precisely aligned with the central axis of the desk. I slipped my fingers under the thin manuscript and placed it carefully in front of me, as a supplicant might tenderly render a few coins upon the altar.

The novel was typewritten. Centered at the top of the first page was the title: *A Portrait of Two Artists*; printed beneath was my father's name. My vision flickered for a moment, and I fought to steady my trembling hands.

*Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road... These words welled up from his unconscious and he felt an immediate and unbearable compulsion to write. It always happened this way; he awoke, stumbled about the room, and in the process of slipping into a pair of sweatpants experienced a sudden creative insight, that which was so elusive when he*

# A Portrait of Two Artists

continued

*was actually prepared to put pen to paper. He departed the bedroom in haste and prayed silently that he'd be able to contain this energy until he arrived at his desk.*

A moan escaped my lips. The words on the page—my father's words—were, impossibly and inexplicably, also my own. I didn't need to open the notebook nestled in my sweatshirt in order to confirm this horrible fact. I at once understood the message on the chair, experienced that terrible anxiety that threatens to destroy the Artist; I had not originated, had not created a work of my own, but instead had written that which already graced another page. My father, I knew now, had been consumed by this anxiety, had committed suicide because he could do naught but recycle the works of his great predecessors. My father had become trapped within Joyce, within old fiction. I could not do likewise.

My eyes fell again upon the manuscript.

*his desk. A subtle current guided him towards the basement rather than to the den where he usually worked. He pressed his hand to the gilded doorknob and stood balanced in this doorway into the abyss. On bare feet the man descended into the darkness.*

*He extended his right foot and stepped—*





# Harvest Moon

by: Ashleigh Smith



# Vacation

by: Sabrina Clarke

Georgetown. Or any old town. Wasting the day  
window-shopping, walking, spying  
through glass at the bounty of  
boutiques and bakeries. Sipping rosy wine  
from a fluted glass, sitting in a  
metal-backed chair beneath a wide  
umbrella, everything vaguely reminiscent  
of a villa. Glass and wine  
and vines and yellow Labradors  
parading through the open, wide  
pavilion in vivid lockstep, foot by foot  
we walk and spy and sit or  
stare at the glassy water in the  
fountain: glimmer, shimmer, glimmer.  
A dollar in change locked in your  
palm so you don't hold my hand but  
I watch as you drop

quarter

dime

everything else

into the water and I  
watch, sit, smile,  
rub my glasses against  
the cotton of my T-shirt, not  
to clean them.

You are gone after today.



# Miracles

by: Jake Zamostny

Listen to a song  
swirling in the breast  
of a people long gone.

Hear the sorrows of men and women oppressed,  
their kemet plagued for a ruler's wrong:  
a heart beat at rest  
spelled suffering—His to prolong.

(Translated from Amat Yasu, 7th century AD)

The woman knelt at the riverside alone, her coarse linen shawl drawn over her mouth and nose. Her ragged exhalations subtly shifted the cloth as a solitary bead of sweat sped down her brow and onto the ebony earth beneath her. She dug patiently, and only a slight tremble in her hands betrayed her extreme inward turmoil. The smell was abominable, unrelenting.

She remembered the sickening copper taste in her palate and involuntarily wretched, her defenses collapsed. Her stomach produced nothing, but her spittle smeared the interior of the coarse cloth and she sat back upon her heels. What had happened to the River? Who had defiled Her life-giving waters? Was this Her time, the beginning of a new cycle and the release of Her sacred blood?

The woman returned to her digging, shoveling aside handful after handful of the sable soil in a desperate search for pure water. She had come to this, her once tranquil retreat nestled amidst the papyrus and hourly-filled with the calls of the water birds, to flee from the delirious crowds and their priests. Their sacrifices were all for naught. She sensed that this was not the work of the gods.

The cove no longer echoed with birdsong; a thick and oppressive silence intermingled with the odor of dead fish. Black dirt caked her nails as she plunged into the humid earth. She widened the hole and a pool of liquid at last formed beneath her palms. Hope.

She dipped a fingertip into the shadowy reservoir and drew it to her mouth. She knew, at the sight of the dark stain upon her bronzed hand, that she had tapped a capillary of

## Miracles continued

the river and that the water was tainted with blood, but she touched her finger to her tongue anyways. The copper seared her mouth and she gagged once more.

A young boy, naked and with the last traces of baby fat clinging to his supple, chestnut frame, raced with the emmer waves. With his right hand he brushed the lithe ears of wheat, and the wind whistled about his temples. His was a world free of cares, and he knew and respected nature as only a child could.

Flight! Flight! No other moment existed in this moment; there was no past, no future, only flight through the drifting fields of gold. His mind became his body, became the sensations upon the tips of his fingers and the calloused soles of his feet, merged with the field and the flowing waters and the universe beyond. The boy was selfless in that moment—freed from the chains of existence and released into that Life beyond life.

Wait! Something slick upon the ball of his foot stopped the boy in his tracks. The feeling was foreign, wrong. His eyes flashed over the gilded stalks as he turned around to examine the path. There: a small splotch upon the soil. Moving closer, he knelt before the tiny frog, the right half of its body splattered into the earth and its left fore leg moving weakly to draw it back upright. The boy reached out his right index finger and tapped the frog lightly on its back. Its muculent skin was cold to the touch, and he shivered involuntarily.

Making to stand up, the bronzed youth felt something brush against his heel and he swiveled around. Another River-dweller: the largest that he had ever seen. A clear liquid dripped down its swollen mass and it stared upwards at him through huge, dark, malicious pupils. A putrid yellow paunch rolled outwards from its mottled gray backside, and the boy felt as if the creature were smiling at him. He rose upwards and took a tentative step backwards, planting his right foot with a squelch upon the first, writhing amphibian. The path was dotted with squirming shapes of all sizes and in the distance he could see nothing but a horde of the tiny demons.

He turned and ran.



What had begun as a slight tremble in her hands progressed now into terrible seizures that she was helpless to control. These paroxysms of fear took her quickly; she would feel a muscle seize here, grasp with futility at the lightning strike of pain, and suddenly find her entire body taut, stretched and pulled to the point of snapping. The fire in her limbs would overwhelm her weak constitution and she would collapse to the unforgiving earth, her mind awash in the black tide of horror and desperation.

The stench of decaying fish and frogs plagued her senses even after weeks of acclimation. The smell wormed its way into her fragile psyche, was a lingering reminder of the inexplicable devastation wrought upon her home. She felt a disturbance in the rhythms of the River, a disturbance that reverberated in her mind and body.

The woman—a portrait of modest beauty with her black hair straight and shoulder length, her eyes a celestial blue, and her skin smooth and russet—gazed now upon the animated scene beneath her. Plumes of dust rose from a street bustling with vendors, oxen, negro and oriental slaves, water-carriers, royal guards, and commoners. Life in Thebes went on despite the horrors of the past weeks.

She fingered her neckpiece, a golden ankh that her mother had given her after the birth of her only son seven years ago. The smooth feel of the metal against her fingertips and the thought of her child temporarily dispelled any dark thoughts from her mind. She contemplated instead the brilliant shaft of light piercing her window. Tiny particles in the air became visible under the sun's benevolent gaze.

The light flickered, and the woman flinched involuntarily. Her hand fell from her necklace and she knew before peering out the window that it had begun again. The first shout rose from the street and she thrust her head out of the aperture in time to see the crowd scatter in all directions. The clouds of dust had become black and they rose now with a mind of their own. She turned her eyes skyward to find similar tendrils of shadow emerging from the heavens. She took up the ankh once more and prayed for her husband and son.

The boy knelt on the ground and carved wild lines with

## Miracles *continued*

the river stone that he frequently carried on his trips away from home. His father was inside the mud brick house behind him, speaking with the overseer.

He felt the first sting beneath his shoulder blade and his hand shot instantly to the spot. He withdrew his palm to find it smeared with black and red blood, and the lifeless carcass of a horsefly rolled from his back. The next sting hurt him worse than the first and was followed quickly by another, this time on his bare buttock. He jumped up and his ears were immediately filled with a monotonous and horrifying buzzing. He felt also a strange sensation at his toes, and he looked down to see his feet disappear beneath a cloud of black. It was as if he were sinking into the ground, now an organic and revolting ocean of shadow.

The boy stifled a scream and made to run to his father, but he was stung again and again on his scalp and the nape of his neck. He fell onto all fours and the torrent of gnats enveloped his arms. This time he let out a shriek. He could not see the two men, but he heard cries to his right and could make out through hot tears a swarm of flies in the periphery of his vision. His backside felt warm and sticky.

Suddenly, a slender hand grasped his forearm and pulled him forward. He staggered blindly and felt his extremities crawl as layers of gnats dispersed into the cool air. The stinging stopped on his head and neck and he vaguely wondered if he had gone too numb to feel any further pain. He drew his hands to his eyes and brushed away the tears. To his surprise, he was led not by his father or the overseer but by another boy, taller and stronger than he and wearing the garb of a shepherd. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but gasped suddenly as a wave of pain rolled over his back and into the deepest recesses of his mind. His legs went slack and he collapsed into the dust.

Dreaming: the bloody River floods its blanks, drowning the emmer fields; murky waters recede into his wounded back and his lesions are healed; a man whips a crippled horse in the street; the crack of the lash—gnats crawl in the animals sad, watery eyes; his mother watches from the rooftops; mother...

"My boy, you mustn't leave now. Our home is protected



from the signs. Yahweh has set our people apart, and you are safe here. Already has He killed your livestock, marked the Egyptian's skin with terrible boils, and flung great hailstones from the sky. He sends locusts to ravage your crops, and even now a veil of darkness burdens the eyes of your countrymen. I pray you, stay with us."

"But my mother will be worried. I must return to her."

The shepherd boy placed a hand on his shoulder and spoke to him with affection. "Listen to my father. You are safe here. Yahweh watches over us and keeps us. Besides, your wounds have not yet healed and you are weak."

"I must run to my mother. She will be worried."

A frail woman emerged from the shadows. "If you must go, take this."

And so the child ran from the Israelites' house, ran with a single, fierce flame to repel the shadows and find his home. He raced through desolate fields, the once great oceans of wheat, barley, and flax dotted now with the rotting corpses of cattle. The darkness was heavy, tangible, resistant to the powers of his light. And yet he plunged onwards, guided by the wounded River towards the city of Thebes.

The boy entered his home several minutes before midnight and searched for his mother with the dying flame. She lay quivering on her bed of woven rush, and he peered at her pallid face before gently shaking her awake.

"My mother, Ennt, I am here. Mother, do not cry, for I have returned."

Ennt took her son in her arms and wept. "Nico, my Nico, you have come home to me. I thought I had lost you. O, Nico, Nico."

It was midnight. A spirit passed through the darkness and over doors smeared with blood. The color drained from the boy's face, and he breathed his last breath. A loud cry would rise up from Egypt, but this mother did not yet know that pain. Her soul swooned slowly. ♣

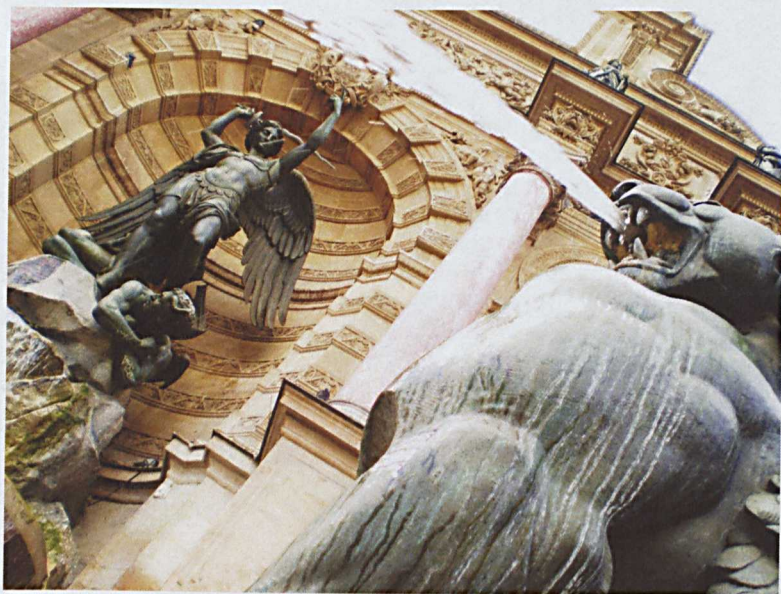
Wisdom Teeth  
by: JES OSROW





# Untitled

by: Matthew Bisenius



# Beats per Minute

by: Kara Constantine

"Girls! Come on up! There's a party on the porch!" my grandmother called down the basement stairs. My cousin Emma and I looked at one another questioningly. We had discovered a collection of my grandmother's old music tapes, and had been roller skating circles in the basement to The Oak Ridge Boys. It was a favorite activity of ours, and eventually we even had our grandmother film us doing a music video on skates. But today, intrigued, we switched off the tape and clamored upstairs, falling in step with our brothers, Michael and Robbie, who had been playing video games in the back room, as our grandmother opened the door of the porch for us.

Now Emma and I let the nurse open the door for us as we slip in to visit my grandmother in the intensive care unit. She's scheduled for surgery in a few hours. We tie two "Get Well Soon!" balloons shaped like suns with smiling faces to a chair, and hold her hands. It's warm in the room and I'm thinking back to the summer days we spent with my grandmother as children when I remember the Party on the Porch.

"What's the party for?" Michael asked innocently.

Grammom pulled the porch door shut and the lock clicked. She spoke through the screen of the open kitchen window. "It's a green-bean snapping party!" she said. "You can come back in when that bucket is all snapped."

We turned to see one empty bucket and one full of the fresh beans, surrounded by four patio chairs. Stunned by our grandmother's treachery, we sat meekly and began to snap. "Tricky old bat," Robbie muttered under his breath.

"I hear you out there, Robert Ian," my grandmother trilled from inside the house, her voice infused with humor and satisfaction. "Didn't see that one coming, did you, Boy?" she threw her head back and let out a dramatic cackle.

Squinting in the piercing sunlight after the cool, dark firmament of the basement, we began our task, only somewhat grudgingly. Then too I was extremely aware of my senses: the beans snapping a crispy, wet snap; the pale, fuzzy outside, with the little tips like darning hooks; the raw inside looking so succulent and tempting—but when I brought it near my mouth it smelled like dirt. The smell reminded me of following my dad down into the



footings of a house he was building, the scooped earth smelling damp and full, earthworm tunnels cross-sectioned and roots bare and rocks with soil pressed into every ridge and crevice, embedded, and tiny green sprouts swelling towards the surface exposed in the middle of their quest. The smell filled me with excitement and an urge to find adventure. I felt ancient and wise and young and strong at the same time.

"I bet I have the longest bean!" Robbie shouted, holding up a skinny bean like a finger.

"Mine's longer," Michael said calmly, holding up his own.

"Yeah, but yours isn't snapped," Emma pointed out.

We all began snapping furiously, each of us hoping to find a longer bean to beat the record. The contenders sat on the porch railing. It was unspoken that our grandmother would be the judge; she was the only one who would be fair, despite that it wasn't exactly subjective which bean was longest. Our battle led to an empty white circle: the bottom of the bucket. Robbie pressed his nose against the screen and called out to my grandmother, who was on the phone and flicked her wrist to sweep away his request.

"She's not going to let us in until she's off the phone," Robbie grumbled, "Might as well find something else to do."

The boys took advantage of my grandmother's inattention to venture into forbidden ground: the small orchard of the next door neighbors. Emma and I watched them disappear under the dark canopy of cherry and apple trees, their footsteps fading as the mossy, spongy ground absorbed them. Emma and I decided to look for some of the dolls we were allowed to play outside with, which we kept in a box in the garage.

As my eyes filtered the dark air of the garage, I saw something dart across the edge of my vision and turned my head to see a tiny blur streaking among the joists overhead. I slipped between my grandmother's Lincoln and the wall to get a better view of the ceiling.

"Look, Emma," I said, poking her and tracing the blur with my finger.

"What is it?" she wondered. The blur swooped low, making us duck, and then smacked into a window. It dropped abruptly onto the sill and was still.

It was a ruby-throated hummingbird, the kind that visited the scarlet king and the trumpet-like red feeder full of sugar syrup.

# Beats per Minute

continued

I had never seen one up close. It lay still on its back, its emerald coat beneath it, the shiny red throat like a cravat under the ivory chin. The whole thing was barely larger than my thumb.

"Is it dead?" Emma whispered. She was eleven, a year older than me, so usually I was the one asking questions. She knew multiplication and cursive before me, but I followed MomMom around the garden, learning flower and bird names, so I got to be the expert.

"I don't know...maybe it will be okay," I murmured. "Let's take it out so if it wakes up it won't get trapped again."

I lifted one palm up to the sill, and nudged the little bird gently onto my hand. It felt so strange to hold it. It weighed nothing at all, and it was hard to keep my hand steady as I walked outside, staring down at the jewel in my palm. I sat down in the grass, prepared to wait until the bird woke up, to keep it safe.

"I want to hold it," Emma breathed, raising her own hand next to mine. I winced at the thought of moving the stiff little body.

"Just leave it," I begged. "I don't want to hurt it."

Emma's mouth drew into a pout, but then, as now, she was too caring to cause unnecessary pain. All these years later, as we trail after the gurney taking my grandmother into surgery, I see the same glow of compassion in her eyes, the smile hiding her worry.

"We'll see you when you get out, Grammom," she says. "We love you." I let her speak for me, because I can't keep my voice level. I lift my hand and push the palm toward her to form a sign she taught us as children meant "forever." Before she was married, my grandmother taught at a pre-school with a deaf child, so she tried to learn some signs in order to speak to him. I found out by looking through a book on American Sign Language that it is closer to the sign for "youthful."

Suddenly, the hummingbird's body began to twitch and spasm, arching and straightening its back, reminding me of a click beetle trying to flip itself over. Watching its suffering, I felt my eyes welling up. I wanted to look away but couldn't. I wished I could stroke the silky back to ease the pain, but feared causing it any more harm. Finally it lay still again in my hand, and the glisten in the dark eyes seemed to go out. The little curled feet were tucked up with finality. Wordlessly, I passed the tiny corpse into



Emma's hand. I saw her face change as she felt her own connection with the small life; first her eyes widened with the thrill, then her mouth drooped.

My grandmother let us pick a fresh hibiscus from her garden, and we slipped the body inside and twisted the flower closed. We laid it under a rose bush, not wanting to trap it in the damp earth. As we stood solemnly at the burial site, Grammomm told us about the hummingbird's life. He drank nectar, and he did a fancy dance for his mate to impress her. He could fly forward, backwards, up, down, and sideways, and he could hover in mid-air. His heart beat 1,220 times per minute. We checked on the hummingbird just a few hours later. A trail of pin-prick ants were following the curve of the petals, marching inside, fighting on. ♣



Untitled  
by: Konrad Sieber

# Harelipped

by: Matthew Bisenius

My Hubris got loose and shook my fist at Apollo  
He licked his lower lip  
Liquor warned me I'll regret this tomorrow  
He dealt out the cards  
Started to carve scars in us  
And skinned us with a straight  
Stripped us just like we were Marsyas  
We climbed to the roof  
The summer was dying of cancer  
My Lonely laid back  
Stretched my arm out over a dancer  
I fell out of favor  
I was pushed off to the side  
You smile amoretto your bite's straight cyanide

I got high on the horns when they put on Kind of Blue  
Chambers crawled out the speakers  
We were connected to an umbilical tube  
I got drunk on the words  
When they switched to My Aim is True  
You were upstairs banging to the tune of the verisimilitude  
Demeter dropped by to return the dancer's wings  
She got all caught up  
Entangled in your seductive strings  
The closet was creeping  
It broke free from the wall  
You kicked it over in your hurry to bareback brawl

I went down in the den  
Forged a pencil into a sword  
The rhythm of your actions  
Speaking out louder than words  
She had a harelip  
So slight like my lisp  
With a sleight of hand  
Land a dance  
Shout and twist  
I guess you can call this mission accomplished  
You kept me awake  
With the sounds of your accomplice



# Dandelion Seeds

by: Danielle Sirk

Potential wishes,  
Newborn dreams and aspirations  
waiting for their turn  
in a world of cynics.  
Will they ever have a chance to fly?  
Optimism  
is  
dead.  
But still, they wait patiently.  
Just to fall and bear  
a new generation, stuck in the same place.



Untitled  
by: John Sullivan

MT + AR  
by: Ashleigh Smith





# Woodstove

by: Sara Krome

*Appalachia, 1957*

He shoved the door open with his shoulder and stumbled inside, bringing in a cyclone of stinging snow and wind. He shut the door heavily behind him, blinking in the murky green light that smote his eyes. Crossing over the oaken floorboards, he slumped wearily into a chair next to the roughly-hewn table. He rubbed his eyes with red, work-roughened fists.

"It's really comin' down out there." Allowing his hands to drop into his lap, he turned his neck to look at her. She stood at the sink in front of the only window, washing dishes. The light spilled into one square patch on the floor, framing her slender figure. Her face was as pale and still as a marble bust, aimed resolutely forward, as though it were screwed onto her neck with iron bolts. Her red hair flamed in the pale winter sunlight, the only color in the small room. His heart winced.

His frozen, shaking fingers fumbled with the laces of his worn, black leather boots. He let them drop to the floor. The hollow noise echoed in the smoldering silence of the cabin. After peeling off his wet wool socks, he crossed to the black stove, tossing them into a soggy mush on the floor and setting the boots next to them to dry. One boot flopped forlornly onto the other. With slouched shoulders, he turned to face her again. "Mariane?"


She was watching the snowflakes fall outside the window. They drifted down slowly on the gusts of wind, sparkling pearls collecting on top of each other into a heap on the ground. The graceful movements of the flakes reminded her of dancing, and the pearls she had worn looped around her neck and pinned in her red curls at the barn dances. They had been imitation pearls, bought for just fifty cents at the general store, but still, the effect was nice. After wearing them for years, to dances and to her own wedding, they had finally crumbled away. "I hate the way your boots smell when they're dryin'," she finally snapped, not moving her head.

His body sagged visibly, from relief that she had finally spoken and exhaustion from his long walk back from town. He

resumed his seat at the table, and pulled a sheaf of parchment from his pocket. Smoothing it on the scarred surface of the table, he said, "I got my ticket. So I guess—" He hesitated, pondering his choice of words. Then, slowly, he said, because it did not matter how he put it, "I guess I'll be gone by next week."

Mariane stared straight ahead. Her hands slid in and out of the warm, soapy water, splashing her dress. She wasn't paying any attention to the dishes or to him. The thin tin plates and his thin, tinny voice bumped and slid, touching her and gliding over her body numbed by the cold. She continued staring out the window. She was watching her girlhood play out on the clean, sparkling canvas of snow, like a screen projector showing a film. She saw her seventeen-year-old self tripping blithely over the yard in a full-skirted, yellow calico dress, the delicate pearls embracing her neck. She heard the faint sounds of that mean old ditty the other girls had made up about her. Their taunting voices drifted, ghostly, through the white capped trees. "Red-Headed Mary, with her ropes of pearls, See how she jumps and see how she twirls." She couldn't remember how the rest of it went. The sting had long since faded. She watched herself, pale face smooth and unlined, red hair as vivid as cranberries bobbing in the snow, twirling and dancing barefoot among the falling snowflakes until she spun into the trees and was lost. Marriage, two rounds of childbirth, the failed seasons that circled each other like hands on a clock, the black drudgery in this dank, dark cabin followed in quick, jerky clips until the grainy quality of her film dissolved into the snow.

"What about the boys?" She asked faintly, more to herself than to him. Her eyes slid out of focus until all she could see was a white, blurry mass dancing in front of her.

A dull red crept into Ben's cheeks. His shoulders slumped once more, and he reached out a slow hand to pick up the ticket, stowing it carefully in his pocket. As he stood up, a new, gleaming light entered his eyes. He squared his jaw and straightened his back and shoulders like an invalid uncurling from bed. Ben strode across the small room and pushed shut behind him the door to their bedroom with such force that the rafters shook. She turned her head at last to see his sour-smelling leather boots smoking silently by the stove. 



# The Remembering

by: Jessica Bello

For an extraordinary moment General Hank Wilson relaxes his grip on the silver machine anchoring his hands. He touches the smooth band of the ring in his pocket and tilts his head, with his helmet momentarily weightless. Hank circles his parched lips around the word "Leah." His breathes her musical name, and the sandy air around his closed eyes alights. In his memory, their eyes meet, wrenching Hank from the desert and plunging him into a long ago room marked by the fragrance of lilac and Palmolive soap.

"They were my grandmother's," Leah says, her olive eyes sweeping Hank's as she pulls silvery hoops from her ears. She stands beside their mahogany armoire full of dress pants and cardigans, with her bright, flyaway hair falling in ribbons across her cheeks. Leah kneels down with one hand cupping the prized jewelry, and the other digging a stow-away sock from her slipper. Looking up at Hank, her eyes shine and her hand finds its protective place on her stomach. Leah is enchanting; the slope of her shoulders sweeps into drifting hills, breasts that bloom beneath the sharp edges of her collarbone, and a porcelain stomach curving with the promise of life. Hank is awed. He wants to spread his hands on her breathing belly and place his mouth in her hair.

The room begins to dissolve suddenly, without warning, and Hank's memory leaps ahead. Snow coats a neon sign boasting "open" through a window as the couple sit, with their shoulders tense, in a tall booth at their favorite diner.

"You don't understand," Leah says angrily, twirling her wedding band around her slender finger. As the moment materializes, Hank watches in horror as the buried scene unfolds, unable to rise away.

"Even if we do try again, we've already lost him," Leah says staring at Hank from across the table, with her cheeks flushed red. "He's gone," her voice breaks and she stands abruptly, spreading a trembling hand across her face to hide her eyes.

"Everything that you are, Hank," Leah says quietly, "All of

## The Remembering

continued

your thoughts and dreams, just think: he had his own waiting, too." The snow outside the window pauses mid-fall as Leah abandons her ring to the table. Hank stares at the white gold ring, his mind blank.

Leah pulls open the entrance door and the jingling bell interrupts the restaurant. Looking back, Leah calls, "Human life isn't easily replaced, Hank," before letting the door slam. The room is silent, and Hank presses his spine into the seat and lowers his head. He keeps his eyes trained on the ring, which sits absurdly between a crumpled napkin and a glass of sweet tea. The urge to vomit brings Hank quickly to the surface of his memory as the room starts to spin.

The pain melds, Hank's hoarse scream is firing from his throat, and he can't rein in the sound. Dragging him present as if startled from a dream, Hank realizes that the ringing screams are not his own. Hank, sun flooding his eyes, stumbles to his feet and lurches forward with his heart pounding.

Angry shots fire through the humid air, and he runs toward the noise, toward his camp, with his boots flinging up sand and rock, and sweat stinging his eyes. Ahead he sees two of his soldiers kneeling with their heads bent low to the ground over what he imagines is only an ambitious sock and an inherited earring. Other soldiers have already recovered from whatever disaster has just occurred, and some spit their fear from their mouths into the forgiving sand, while others drag rough hands across anxious faces, returning to their posts.

Hank's fingers interlace around the smooth predictability of his gun as he reaches the men. He doesn't exhale until seeing that the wounded man is not one of his own. Instead, an enemy soldier lies mercilessly at his men's feet. A line of scarlet streams through the dust from the top of the soldier's broken head. Horrified, Hank backs away several feet and gulps furiously, with his brows drawn low to his eyes. His sun-strained soldiers look at him questioningly before lifting the body from the ground.

Hank catches a glimpse of the dead soldier's eyes open in shock, a muted brown against his smooth complexion. Wrong uniform, wrong intentions, Hank recites again and again. But the horror of his lost baby and the unlive life before him collide in his stomach, burning acid up through his throat and



nose. As he begins to gag, to heave, his finest soldier trips casually, innocently, on an overturned stone. In one graceful movement the dead man crashes to the ground.

Hank feels the long ago stares from the diner burn through him as he staggers toward the fallen soldier and drops to his knees. Crouched low, he wipes the warm blood from the man's face with calloused hands. Briefly, he is conscious of the significant moments of the fallen man, and the hearts breaking in distant places as the pain, mingled with memories, leaks into the deadened air.

Hank's stunned soldiers watch wide eyed while he scoops his neighbor into his arms. For a moment, he gulps down the mass congregating in his throat. The tears come anyway, uninvited. Liberated for the first time, they bring with them the pain of Hank's own lost years and a pounding ache over a whisper of olive eyes.

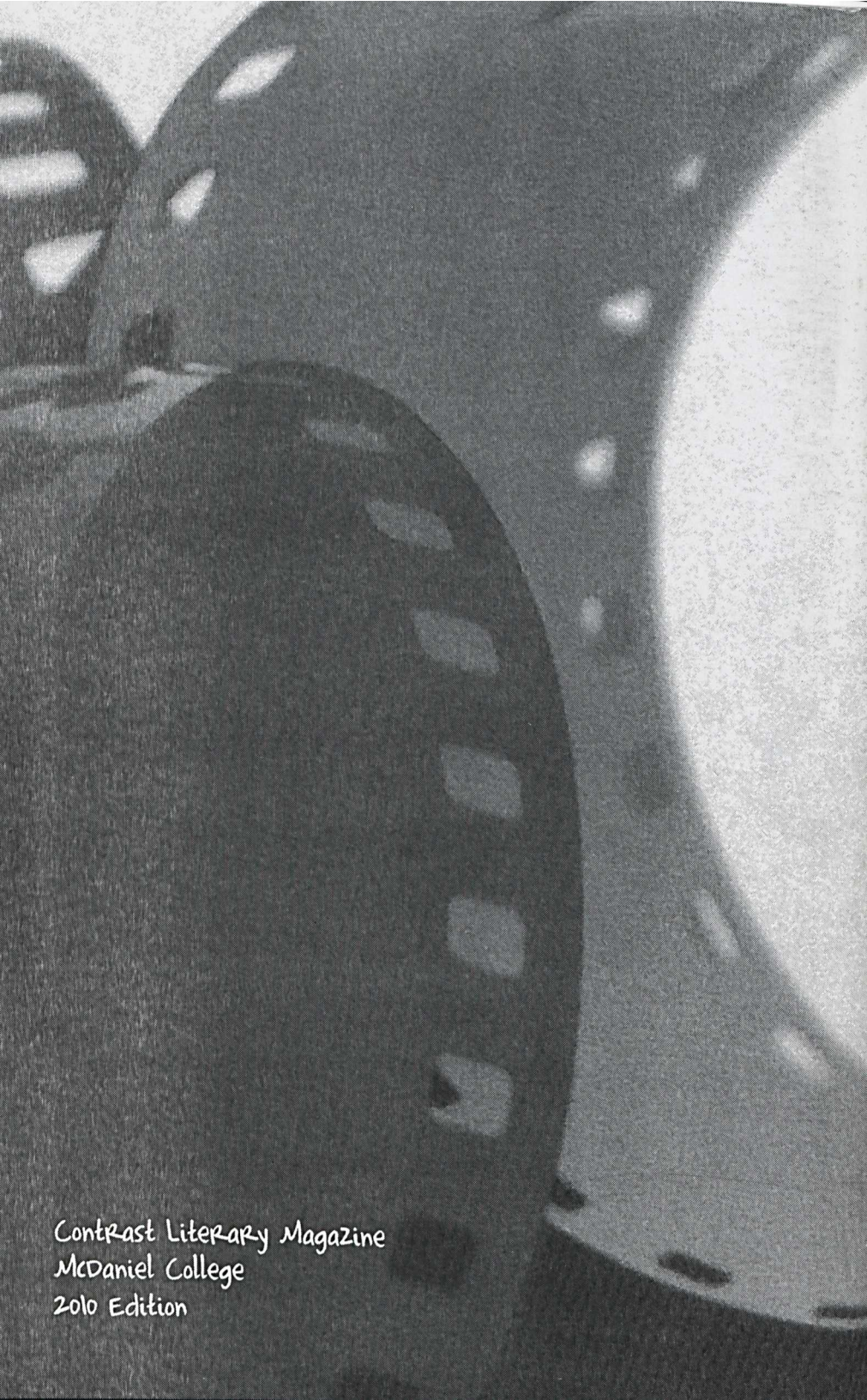
Voice cracking, Hank does the only thing he can think to do. He recites a long ago learned prayer for the fallen brother, his heaven-seated child, and his lost wife, as the disorientated soldiers sink to their knees beside him.

As the Psalm rises, Leah runs to him, a different time and place, hair loose and swinging, and wraps porcelain arms around his shoulders. Free, Hank bows his head, sinking gratefully into her familiar chest, as a deep heaviness slips away. They shift together again, erasing the empty house, moving-truck pain of the past two decades. Hank revels, and refuses to open his eyes. 🌹

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