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Contrast

Spring 2017

"Let me live, love, and say it well in good sentences"

Sylvia Plath

Contrast Literary Magazine

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Fiction

1st place: Marya Topina

Angel

2nd place: Katy Kissel

The Gift

3rd place: Kaiijaii Gomez Wick

The Banging in the Pipes

Nonfiction

1st place: Katy Kissel

Before He Turned Fifty

2nd place: Madison Gamble

Waterlogged

3rd place: Jazzy Williams-Smith

Molly

Poetry

1st place: Kaiijaii Gomez Wick

why i am not a christian

2nd place: Jimmy Calderon

Promiscuity

3rd place: Andrew Tyler

The Bathroom of an Exxon Station

Somewhere Between Houston and Denver

Honorable Mention: Kyle Granger

Shots

Art

1st place: Rachel Sentz

Sea Vortex

2nd place: Mei-Le Apalucci

Run Away

3rd place: Samantha Wilson

Sorry, Pardon Me, Didn't See Ya There

Editor's Note

I find the complete and utter variety of perspectives to be one of the most interesting facets of life. Art is one way for us to celebrate this—through reading, I receive glimpses into other people's lives and can gain more understanding to how they see the world. I can escape to other places. Authors can send a shudder rippling down to my toes, can cause my blood to run cold with the pain of a loss, can send a rush of warmth flowing to my fingers, can most of all, remind me that we are not alone. *Contrast Literary Magazine* dares us to continue creating, to jot idle musings down, to polish a piece for sharing, to remember to tell the stories we have within.

Thanks for picking up this copy. I hope you enjoy what these students have created and I hope that it inspires you to share a story of your own.

Ema Barnes

Editor's Note

Contrast Literary Magazine has been a constant presence in my life at McDaniel College. Always eager to contribute, it has challenged me to create even if I didn't feel particularly innovative. Given the opportunity to work internally, the magazine has continued to offer new challenges that have only been overcome through the help of the *Contrast* team: Ema, Jimmy, and Jazzy. And of course through the leadership of the *Contrast* goddess Dr. Dobson. For all of us, words have proven to be an extraordinary elixir, dulling life's sharp edges to produce a place of possibility and inspiration.

What you will see in these next pages are indisputable proof of how much literature and art has the power to bond people together, to make the world a little brighter and a little more colorful. Always fans of originality, we have tried to add our own touch of individuality to the spring 2017 edition...we hope you enjoy!

Kailey Rhone

A Note on Fiction

When reflecting on the power of fiction, the immortal genius of J.K Rowling flashes in my mind in the form of the wise white-bearded Albus Dumbledore who once said: “words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic.” How incredible it is that if we decide that the banality of everyday life doesn’t cut it, the deep swoop of ink on paper has the ability to create an entirely new universe!

Fiction allows one the freedom to construct kingdoms with castles that climb high into the sky. It allows one to design characters, from their toes up to the hair on their head. Prose is one’s infinite imagination laid out on a blank canvas, and what’s more magical than that?

Kailey Rhone

Angel

Marya Topina

Inspired by Adrian Borda's artwork "Angel"

I heard the piercing scream just before her body broke through the surface of our sky. Not far from where I was resting, a bundle of struggling fury disrupted the gentle ripples of the water. All at once, this new presence dominated my ocean, demanded my attention. I could tell the tied-up girl wasn't particularly beautiful, even as she thrashed about. Her evident anguish further contorted the features of her face, but that would all soon change. I still hadn't moved towards or away from her, but I needed to think first. I wasn't surprised by the girl, and yet it confused me that we would receive a new Two-Fin after all this time. The last one had her Shift over a year ago. It seemed the sailors had finally grown suspicious and most likely knew how to lessen our numbers. Lately, we had all given up hope and started to expect the worst...

But this new girl changed everything. With her, we might still have a chance against the men. The problem was, no one else could meet me fast enough right now. Usually two or three Sisters helped a Two-Fin with her Shift, but I knew everyone else was scouting deeper waters for a new ship. I was the only one left behind to double-check on supplies. Sighing, I floated towards the girl. This was going to be a lot harder without any help.

I swam closer, assessing the pained young woman. She still fought against her bonds, the attached rock barely scraping along the sandy ocean floor. In fact, the rock resembled more of a large boulder, anchoring her to us. And yet she did not give in for a second. The ropes strained as she pulled with all her might towards the surface, but still held fast. The poor Two-Fin was twisting and entangling herself further in the dreaded ropes. Only her wild dark hair floated free, exposing the pale skin of her naked body.

They had beaten her, just like the rest of us. Ugly bruises stained the expanse of her raw limbs. Stinging gashes beneath

the tied ropes spat red blood in obvious offense. Her wide eyes searched frantically for an escape as frustrated pockets of air darted from her mouth towards the surface of our sky. How she must envy those free bubbles! The girl's gaze finally settled on me, disbelief etching itself in the blue-stained glass of those windows. She seemed to disregard her uncertainty all too quickly and instead pleaded for help with her entire body, her whole essence screaming louder than her lungs ever could.

I kept my distance, but met her stare straight on. Experience had taught me not to force the process. No one wants a crazed, half-Shifted girl on their hands. So I left half a whale's length between us and simply watched her relentless resistance. This was never pleasant, but I forced myself not to turn away, for her sake. I smothered the traumatic memories of my own Shift that were threatening to consume me. My ability to remain calm would determine this girl's fate. I had to soften my expression as best as I could, trying to reassure this stranger.

"You'll be safer if you stop fighting. It's easier if you don't resist." Of course she didn't believe me, they never did. But I needed to let her know as much as possible before she lost consciousness. Her frightened eyes remained open despite the saltwater. She was still fighting, but it was clear she was losing strength and slowly growing tired.

"Listen. Just breathe. Trust me, just relax and it will be okay." Her expression communicated a hundred thousand unsaid words. I could see her fear and her helplessness taking over. The ropes continued to cut into her skin and she contorted her limbs in every way imaginable just to hold on to that last shred of hope. I felt her despair drifting towards me like waves carrying broken seashells, stabbing from all directions.

"It will be alright. Accept the water and breathe. Don't struggle, and you'll live. If you think of life, if you breathe, you'll have another chance. You just have to trust me." The girl looked away and shut her eyes for the first time, defeat becoming an

unwanted barnacle latching onto her soul for all eternity. She shook her head, tossing those wild strands of hair back and forth with defiance. I sadly watched as her tears joined ours. Now the ocean welcomed her, the endless salt tears of my past sisters drawing out those of this girl.

She was growing even weaker. The battle against her imprisonment was now just a feeble flailing of extremities. She hung her head and I no longer saw the thoughts written in her eyes. "Please. Just take a breath. Fighting will kill you. Giving up will kill you. Just listen to me and you'll live. You'll be one of us and you'll have a new life. I promise it will be okay." I could see her giving up, slumping her shoulders and acknowledging the prospect of death. She wasn't going to listen. This stupid girl was going to die and I would be responsible.

Fighting the shrieking protests of the voice in the back of my head, I swam closer to the Two-Fin. I was never good at this, and being alone this time scared me. I was going to lose her. The lack of oxygen was already taking its toll on her. She no longer fought; she didn't move at all and even her wild hair seemed tamed into submission. A few more seconds, and she'd be lost to oblivion. Pushing down my alarming thoughts, I tried to reach out as calmly as I could. I gently took her hand and placed it above my heart, willing her to sense the throbbing spirit of life she was missing out on. I needed her to feel the raw, burning realness of life—my life—that could soon be hers, too. She used her last ounce of strength to slightly lift her head towards me. And then the girl looked straight into my eyes and breathed.

The salt water rushed into her throat and she balked from the stinging pain. But soon she took another hesitant breath and braced herself for the impact. She drew her hand away from my chest and then wrapped herself tight around my neck. My first instinct was to recoil, but I forced myself to relax. I'd never had a Two-Fin respond this way, but the relief of not losing her was more important. I held her close and waited as her gasping breaths soon

turned steady. The rough salt of our Sisters' tears wore away at her pain. It wore away at her features and her wounds. It scrubbed down her now useless lungs and her throat. It swirled between her legs until the tight ropes merged her fins into one. It would take a while for her weak fins to grow together completely, but she was already Shifting. Soon this broken creature would have a strong fin to call her own and a safe place among us.

We still don't understand the Shift completely. Countless Sisters tried to explain it, but the truth of the matter is that it works, it saves us, and we shouldn't question it. I held this trembling girl and thought of the future ahead of us. The salt would work its way into every pore, every crevice of her being. She would be rubbed raw, stripped of all insecurities and evils. Our tears would merge and give her beauty, give her a fin, give her a second chance. And she would become one of us. Soon the water would even replace her voice. A sweeter tone would deem her irresistible, and our new sister would embrace her duties among us.

I pictured her swimming along, luring in the sailors with a song and then taking her first revenge. She would drown them and feel horrified, but in the end content. We all went through the conflicting emotions. But this was the inevitable life ahead: to endlessly try and bring justice to those that did not survive the Shift, and to ourselves, and to those ahead of us, all of us rejected, all of us hated for our complete woman-ness. Tossed to sea as omens of bad luck, we now come back to haunt our former captors. We would unite like always and celebrate the lack of males this side of the sky.

She was safe now. My new Sister had fought to live, and she had succeeded. Never again would anyone harm her. Never again would she be surrounded by hate. And never again would she face defeat. The girl pulled away and looked at me with softened eyes. We clutched each other for support against the gentle current and simply looked at each other. Then her grip suddenly tightened and she spoke in the voice of the sailors.

"You. You will be the first angel to die."

The Banging in the Pipes

Kajaii Gomez Wick

Did you know that when they're heating up, the pipes in McDaniel Hall's heating system bang? I didn't. I first found out while me and my roommate Julia were moving in for Jan Term—we'd spent fall semester, our first semester, in DMC, and then, well, shit happened. We wanted to move. Michael Robbins coordinated to find us a quad that had only two people currently living there, and we met them, and all of us agreed on the move.

Well, that day in early January, we had finally finished dragging everything up four flights of stairs and were collapsed onto our beds, gasping, and then there was this horrifying noise—a loud, metallic, wet BANG. My head shot up.

"What—what the hell is that?" I asked. Our RA, a nice girl who had helped us move in, shrugged.

"It's the pipes in the radiators. They bang when they're heating up." Julia piped up, "They sound horrible. Can you make them stop?"

Our RA shook her head, "No, not really. They don't do it all the time, though. You could put on music if it really bothers you—there's nobody on this floor but you guys and me."

Our other roommates were both off vacationing. Julia and I had decided to take our Jan Terms here together, get them over with early. That way we could settle into our new dorm, get a feel for it. Julia fumbled for her laptop and put on some K-pop, and it drowned out the horrible banging.

"Any other horrible noises in the night we shouldn't be alarmed by?" she asked dryly.

Our RA looked irritated now. "Well, they also whine sometimes, but don't worry about that. Just leave them alone, except to turn their heating dial. Don't hit them back or try to open them up or something. And never talk to them." Me and Julia both

looked at each other, very creeped out. “Uh...okay?” Julia said, nonplussed. “We won’t.”

“Good,” our RA said very firmly, like a too-old-for-foolishness middle school teacher. “Oh, and make sure to rinse out the shower and throw out your hair if it falls out a lot. It’s really gross when the drains get clogged.”

“Okay,” we both said, and then looked at each other and... didn’t quite laugh. Something seemed too off for this situation to be actually funny. Maybe it was how our RA was still glowering, or how she had gone from friendly to pissed. She stormed out the door, we broke eye contact, and started unpacking.

“Maybe she’s just pissy because it’s cold,” Julia opined as she started to fill her dresser. “I mean, I wouldn’t want to have to stay for an unnecessary Jan Term either.”

“Sure, maybe,” I said.

“She’ll go back to being nice tonight,” Julia decided with a nod. “I’ll text her and we can meet up in Glar. It’ll be normal in a week, you’ll see.”

It wasn’t normal in a week.

Our RA had cooled off and even apologized at dinner—apparently, they’d had some stupid people break the radiators before, and even scare a couple of people away from McDaniel by telling them that the radiators were haunted or something, so they had to be strict when they told new people the rules. I could understand that. It’s like how my Intro to College Writing professor had been a stickler for everything done exactly right—no grammatical mistakes or citation errors allowed. I figured the RA was crabby about one thing, and hey, if that was her only fault then she was a hell of a lot better than our old one, who refused to even report our problems until we went straight to Michael Robbins.

But Julia... I don’t know. She got hung up on it.

“Why did she tell us not to talk to them?” she said one night when we were lying in bed and the banging started. “Seriously,

what could possibly be the harm in that?"

"I don't know, Julia," I groaned, a pillow shoved over my face. "Maybe it's just one of those things, like how we're not supposed to have hard liquor here either."

Julia shook her head. "No, it's got to be something more than that. There's something she's not telling us." I moaned and rolled over, muffling Julia's voice and the banging. This was just another one of her obsessions, and it was annoying.

Don't get me wrong, Julia was a great roommate. She kept her stuff on her side of the room, she kept her food in a box and her fridge clean, and she never did any of the inconsiderate bullshit I'd been warned about. She never had sex in the room without asking me to not be there with at least two days notice ahead of schedule, she never kept or did drugs in the room, she always turned down her music when I asked her, and she slept without so much as a single snore. She was always out when I really needed to buckle down and study, and she was, to my happy surprise, perfectly fine with rooming with a lesbian, even after I drunkenly confessed I thought she was hot.

"Mos' people think I'm hot, an...an it's because I am," she had said, drunker than me, clumsily patting my face. "It's okay! You don't do creepy things. You're not creepy. You're great, Maddie. Great with a 'g.'"

But she did have one obnoxious quirk, and that was that she got obsessed with things sometimes. Once, during orientation, Julia's skirt had started to rip at the top right before we had to go to Choices, and she was upset. We didn't have time to run back to our dorm, so I fished a paper clip out of my backpack and used it to hold her skirt together; she'd gotten starry-eyed for them after that. It led to her going crazy over paper clips.

She photographed them, she filled up her Facebook page with album after album of them, she researched their history and repeated it to everyone within hearing range, she used them on almost everything she could, and she ended up ordering thousands

of them in every conceivable shape and size, putting them all in a massive transparent plastic box in our dorm room and admiring them loudly every day for hours at a time.

Finally, I had told her to stop; she got really offended for a few days and then moved onto something else. I got over it after a while. Julia was just like that; she was obsessive and latched onto things too quickly and didn't want to let them go. It was like how she fidgeted by tapping things—her pencil against her desk, her fingernails on the Glar tables, her feet on the floor—irritating but nothing to make a big deal out of. So I wasn't surprised when her weird obsession with the radiators went on for the first two weeks uninterrupted. She looked up our radiators, measured them, went to the ones in the hallways and photographed them, and wouldn't stop pacing our room at night, muttering to herself about the radiators.

Of course, sooner or later, she decided to talk to them, not loudly, I knew. I was there when she made the decision—not a whole lot of other places to even be on campus during Jan Term, not with the snow and the unsettling empty feeling to the campus. She then pulled out her phone and started in. She sat by the radiator and whispered, and I rolled my eyes. And then our RA knocked on the door, and we looked at each other. I got up and opened the door when she knocked again, louder, angrier.

"I said don't talk to the pipes," the RA said, her face red. I looked at her, baffled—how had she even known? She continued on, berating us as she stomped into the room, "How fucking difficult is it to do that? Just ignore them. Ignore the fucking pipes and the radiators! That's all you need to do!"

I was confused and started to get pissed off as she went off on Julia, who was staring with her eyes huge, the whites of them visible in a bright ring. "For fuck's sake, all she was doing was talking to it. It's a radiator, what's the problem?" I yelled at the RA, putting myself between her and Julia, and the RA's face purpled.

"The problem is that if you can't take my instructions

seriously then you can't be in this dorm. The college takes this sort of thing seriously. You two already have a strike against you—"

"What fucking strike? We moved out because our suitemates were filthy and wouldn't stop getting drunk and trashing the damn place," I snapped back at her. "Look, it's not that big of a deal. Julia will get over it in, like, a week, and then you can stop acting like a fascist asshole. It's a fucking radiator; it's an inanimate object. We're not touching it."

"You better not," the RA said, breathing deeper now. "If you interfere with them one more time, you're out."

"What, you'll kick us out into the snow? Fuck you. Fuck you, get out," I said, my voice low and angry as I stepped towards her. She sneered and left, and I locked the door.

Julia had recorded the whole thing.

The really creepy part was how our RA was otherwise an extremely nice person. Seriously, she was enormously sweet and kind, bringing us hot chocolate when she hung out with us in the afternoons and offering to let us borrow some of her extra blankets on the colder nights. She smiled at us every time she saw us, and held open every door for us. It was just something about the radiators that made her act so angry.

I tried to put my head down and focus, but my Jan Term class was nowhere near difficult enough to work for that. Instead, I cleaned our room almost every chance I got, vacuuming every other day, making my bed every morning, hauling laundry up and down stairs with a grim determination to ignore what was going on around me. Because, you see, Julia hadn't detached from her obsession. Far from it, she was just being sneaky now. She was still taking pictures of the radiators and still watching them. She had a spreadsheet of how hot they were at what times of day, and was tracking them fervently. She just took her data when our RA was out. I wanted no part of it, and told her to keep it quiet so we didn't have to move again. And mostly, she succeeded at that—the RA couldn't catch her and eventually cooled off.

But one night things went bad. I was sitting up in bed, watching videos of our new litter of puppies my mom had sent me and grinning, when I heard Julia walk over to me.

"Maddie? Can you please record me?" she asked, holding out her phone. I took it cautiously.

"Julia, what are you going to do this time?" I said, holding it. It had a rubbery case. She was moving our dressers in front of the door. I repeated, a little louder this time, "Julia. What are you doing?"

She grunted and unplugged her mini-fridge, dragging it over and holding it in front of the door. "I'm... making sure... that this will work," she said and groaned as she shoved it into place.

"Ugh. There. Now we can't be interrupted again. Please make sure you're recording me," she said, and stood in front of her bed. I looked at her and put the phone down. "Julia, again, what are you doing? I'm not going to help you until you tell me." She looked at me, deadly serious, and said in a hushed undertone, "I'm going to take the cap off the radiator and find out what's inside."

I sighed heavily. "Julia—"

"I told you and now you have to help!" she interrupted quickly. "And besides, look, I have to know. And if you don't record it then it will all be for nothing."

I looked at her, and I took a deep breath. I figured if I did this with her, she'd get over her stupid obsession and move on, and before we even knew it our Jan Term would be over and our RA would be busy with other people and classes and she'd forget about it.

"Fine. But only once," I warned Julia, and I picked her phone back up.

"Make sure you have a good angle," Julia said, and then cleared her throat. "Alright, so we're safely inside the room, and we're not going to be interrupted. And now we're going to open up this radiator and find out what they've all been keeping from us."

My heart sank. Ugh, I couldn't deal with Julia if her next

obsession was a conspiracy or something. She squatted down, and I followed her, pointing the phone at the radiator cap. The door started banging, loudly, and I could hear our RA suddenly shouting, "Julia and Maddie! Stop right now!"

"And now for the moment of truth," she whispered.

"STOP! I WILL CALL THE POLICE!" Julia shook her head and the doorknob rattled. She grasped the white head, twisting and pulling—

Our RA was screaming in rage—

It popped off with a loud POP—

And the lights went out, suddenly and completely, and I recoiled, tripping backwards and falling—the phone fell out of my hand—I swore and scrambled back, I—

You know that feeling when you're dreaming and suddenly it turns wrong and into a horrific nightmare? That's how it felt. I ran back, trying to get to the door, but it was totally and completely blocked, and the pipes weren't banging now so much as firing guns, loud and terrifying, and they weren't whining but screaming and I—

I think I blacked out. I don't know.

I don't know.

Here's the really awful part—I don't know how to explain it. I remember the RA looking at me and saying, "She opened it, didn't she?" I remember nodding, numb from fear, and I remember seeing her sigh while picking up Julia's phone. And ever since then, the RA won't talk about it. She looks at me like I'm crazy every time I ask her what happened to Julia. I went above the RA and emailed Michael Robbins about it too, and he hasn't responded. I don't know what to do.

I tried calling Campo and they told me there's no such student. I tried logging into Blackboard under her account—Julia was terrible at hiding her passwords—and it was gone. Her school email address was suddenly gone too; emails sent to it bounced. I tried talking to our new roommates, and they acted like they didn't

know who she was. And her parents hung up on me when I called them and begged them to file a missing person report!

I'm so, so scared. All her things are still here: her giant bin of paperclips, her bed, her computer. I feel like I'm going crazy, and I failed my Jan Term from all the stress. What's worse is that I still have to stay in this room, and I can't sleep in it. I've been catnapping on the hallway floor. And the pipes keep banging, but softer now. They're tapping, really. Like a pencil against a desk, fingernails on a Glar table, feet on a floor.

They sound like Julia.

Before the End

Katy Kissel

"I only did what I had to do." The young man's hand was shaking and covered in red.

Officer Bryant wished that he could say it was paint, but the body on the floor and the knife in the young man's other hand made it quite clear that it was blood. "That's okay, son," he said, keeping his voice low and steady. "But I need you to put the knife down now."

"I... I can't," he said, his voice shaking. "Please, you can't ask me to put it down. It's not safe!" He wasn't looking at Officer Bryant at all but was instead staring at the body.

Officer Bryant couldn't even get close enough to see if she was alive. "Okay," he said. He took a deep breath. They went through training for situations like this before they became officers, but it had literally been years since anything like this had ever happened in their small, sleepy town. In fact, he was almost certain that something like this had never happened before.

He thought he remembered. "Okay, it's okay if you won't put down the knife. Just... just don't make any sudden moves, and everything will be fine."

"R... right," the young man said. He still seemed to be more focused on the body than on Officer Bryant, but that was okay. It might make getting the weapon away from him that much easier if he had to.

Was there something about establishing empathy, maybe?

"So, what's your name?"

Now the boy's eyes darted to him. They were green, bright, and puffy, like he'd been crying. "Will," he said. "My name is Will."

"It's nice to meet you, Will." Officer Bryant took one step closer and froze when the boy's knife immediately rose. "Okay, I won't come any closer, but my name is Jack."

"Hi Jack." Will closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Jack

watched his shoulders rise and fall.

If he were a faster man, he probably could have gotten the knife away from the boy in that moment. But the fact of the matter was that Jack had been pushing the wrong side of fifty for way too long to even be remotely comfortable with the thought of trying to rush a young man with a weapon. In all of his thirty years on the force, he'd never had to shoot someone. Jack really didn't want to break that streak with a scared young man who wasn't even as old as his youngest son.

So he didn't try it. Instead, he said, "So, Will, tell me what happened here."

Normally, authority was soothing to people in distress. It's why he made it an order instead of a question. For a moment, it seemed to be working on Will. He took several deep breaths and raked a hand through his already-disheveled brown hair, the blood on his hand making the mess even worse.

Then he let out a small snort. "Sorry, Jack, I don't think you'd believe me if I told you."

Jack blinked at him. "You'd be surprised what I'd be willing to believe," he said. "If you were attacked, if this was self-defense, we could work with that. But you've got to help me out here, because right now I'm looking at a murderer, and I'd rather not think that's what I'm seeing."

"Murder?" Will laughed, the sound oddly bitter. "You think that I'm a murderer?"

"Son, you're standing over a body with more blood out of it than in it, with the knife in your hand and blood all over you." Jack shrugged. "I don't know what else I'm supposed to think."

"It's probably not even dead," Will said. He laughed a little bit more, a rueful chuckle. "It's always so hard to tell if I got the spinal cord severed or not. Chances are it'll be up and moving in a few days."

Jack just stared. What was he supposed to say to that? "I'm sorry, son, but I'm gonna need an explanation from you."

Will didn't say anything for a long time. When he did speak, it sounded like he didn't expect to be believed. "It's going to reanimate in two to three days. You won't believe me, of course, and I guess I can't blame you. It sounds ridiculous, but I'm telling you that's what's going to happen."

He knelt by the body, gripping the knife even tighter. "Unless..." He grabbed the body's head by its hair, dragging it up so that Jack could see that the body had once been a woman whose neck had once been a smooth, pale, unbroken line. Now it gaped open, giving Jack an intimate look at her severed vocal cords and other things that he'd never really been interested in seeing.

Jack didn't want to hurt the kid, but he had to make a move at this point. Clearly, Will was in the middle of some kind of episode. He lunged forward and got the knife first. Will, surprisingly enough, didn't fight him. The kid just let himself be knocked to the ground and stared up at Jack, his green eyes going vacant.

"It doesn't matter anyway, I guess," Will said tiredly. "She was bitten by someone, and I don't know who. So it's already going to start, no matter what happens."

"A zombie apocalypse?" Jack asked. He couldn't stop himself from shaking his head. "Kid, I don't know what's wrong with you, whether it's bad drugs or a psychotic break, but we're gonna have to take you into custody while we figure it out."

Will just laughed, again, that same oddly bitter tone to it. "Whatever," he said. "Like I said, it doesn't matter if you believe me or not. Just... just promise me something?" There was another strange note to his voice now, an almost vulnerable quality to it.

"Kid, I can't make any promises to a murderer, even if you are probably on a bad trip right now," Jack said as he hauled the boy to his feet. There was an ambulance waiting outside for the girl, but he already knew it was far too late for her. Nobody could survive that kind of injury.

"Just promise that when it starts, you won't leave me to rot

in my cell. Either break me out or kill me, but don't leave me there."

Jack shook his head. "I can't make that promise," he said.

"Please!" Now the boy sounded urgent, and he started to struggle against Jack's hold. "Please, I can't... I can't go through that again. Please, if you're going to lock me away, just promise you'll let me go, one way or another, before the virus starts to spread!"

Jack struggled to hold the boy, who was oddly stronger than he should have been, and, when it felt like he was actually going to slip free and Jack would then have to shoot him, he shouted, "Fine!"

Immediately, Will stilled. "Say it," the boy insisted. "Say it out loud. I need to hear you say it."

"I promise you that, if by some random circumstance a zombie apocalypse should start, I will come and either set you free or kill you." Jack hated the words coming out of his mouth, but if it was going to make the kid go peacefully; yeah, he was okay with that.

One person was already dead; he wasn't okay with adding a second person to the body count.

The rest of his night was oddly mundane. There was paperwork to go with the arrest, but after that, Jack was back to doing his normal patrol while Will sat in a cell in the county lockup until the sheriff could decide what he wanted to do with the kid, or until the lawyers got involved. Either way, he'd be there until tomorrow morning at least, probably until a few days from tomorrow.

Jack wished he could say he put the grisly scene out of his mind, but he didn't. When he went home that night and pulled his wife close and closed his eyes to try and sleep, the woman's body was there in his dreams. And in his dreams, she wasn't dead. Or maybe she was, but her body was twitching. It was freaky.

It was probably because of the boy's rambling about zombies. Yeah, that had to be what was causing it.

So Jack did his best to ignore it and when, a day later, the girl's body was still popping up in his thoughts, he took the time for

a visit to one of the department's shrinks. Angela, the psychiatrist, was nice enough, but basically told him that it was to be expected, given that he was the only officer who'd been on scene in one of the most violent murders their town had ever seen.

She told him to come back and see her if it hadn't gotten any better in a few weeks. Jack left feeling oddly dissatisfied, like he wanted something more from her.

But by the next day he was feeling much better, even if there seemed to be a strange set of attacks that had broken out across the town. A couple of people had turned up at the ER in the past two days with strange bite marks on their arms and hands, talking about a feral woman. Jack didn't get assigned to those cases, but he did get assigned to the next one that came in, a day after those.

This one was a hysterical little boy whose left arm was nearly hanging off. He looked as though it had been chewed through, and Jack fought the urge to throw up at the sight of it. The boy's parents were with him, and they talked over each other as they tried to tell him what happened.

Jack couldn't make out a word they were saying until he held up his hand. "Let's start with this," he tried, and the couple fell silent. "Can you give me an idea of where the woman went? We've been trying to track her for the past two days now."

"Woman?" the husband echoed, confused. "No, no, this was an old man. He had a beard."

"Oh." Jack frowned. "Okay, then," he said. He took the couple's statement, wished them well, and headed for the hospital's exit. As he was on his way out, he heard shouting coming from the desk.

"What do you mean, she's moving?" the nurse was saying. When Jack turned around, reluctantly, he saw that the nurse was staring at the desk, his eyes widened in shock. "Tom. Tom, listen, I saw that body myself! Trust me when I tell you that that girl is dead. Nobody survives having their throat cut like that!" He paused to listen, then shook his head. "She couldn't have bitten

you! Maybe you need to check yourself into the psych ward or something, Tom. Or get some rest. Jesus.” The nurse hung up the phone.

Jack closed his eyes and thought about it. The kid had said, Will had said, and he hadn’t believed him. But what else could be happening here? If that woman’s corpse really did...

He went up to the desk. “Excuse me, Nurse Johnson,” he said politely. “I heard you telling your friend that a woman was dead? I was wondering which woman you might have been referring to?”

The nurse glanced at his nametag. “The one whose killer you caught,” he said. “The one whose throat got slit? How many people do you think we get with cut throats in here?” The nurse rolled his eyes. “Like I told him, Officer, he’s probably just worked too many shifts in a row and needs to get some sleep.”

“Probably,” Jack said with a nod. He walked away from the desk, his hands starting to shake. What if... god, what if that kid had been telling the truth? What if they were on the brink of some kind of crazy zombie apocalypse?

He headed for the county lockup, knowing that Will still hadn’t been moved. He would’ve heard about it if he had been. When he got there, he found the place in an uproar. “What happened?” he asked one of the guards.

The guard shook his head. “Some freak got in and started biting people,” he said. “Then another prisoner got involved. He took out the one doing the biting with some kind of homemade axe. We’re still trying to figure out where he got it, but he took the guy’s head clean off!”

“And the prisoner who got involved?” Jack asked, his heart in his throat.

The guard just shook his head again. “Wouldn’t put the weapon down. He’s dead.”

Jack knew, without even going further into the jail to check or asking anyone else, that it had been Will. He closed his eyes and

took a deep breath. "Thanks," he said. "I'll come back and do my interview later."

He left the jail and headed back to his cruiser, which he'd parked haphazardly in a handicapped space.

He never made it, though. He felt a body land against his own, heavy and solid. Jack tried to throw the body off of him, to go for his gun, but he didn't manage to do either before teeth were sinking into his throat.

As his blood spurted out all over the sidewalk and the thing on top of him continued to eat him, Jack used his last few seconds to hope that he would not reanimate as one of those things. And if he did, he hoped that someone would kill him before he hurt anyone he cared about.

And then the world went black.

Cicada

Jimmy Calderon

It was a cold summer night, one of those mid-September nights when it's so nice out that you can't really tell whether it is summer or fall (that ethereal and ephemeral twilight of the seasons).

As I made my way back to my apartment from the library, walking between old buildings and dim streetlights, I couldn't help but to listen to the silence surrounding me. This was a bit strange, to say the least, since it was only 10 p.m., and that's the time when most students are coming out of night classes, or making their way to the library. But that night it was silent. I could hear the hum of a soft breeze, chanting its olden memory of better and happier times, and, in the distance, the song of the cicadas. This is the season when cicadas die.

I walked at a moderate pace, making sure to enjoy every second of the chilled air, as this might be the only night I would be able to; the forecast called for a series of hot days before the beginning of fall. My phone vibrated in my pocket. I ignored it for the moment and kept walking. I was nearing one of my favorite spots on campus, a staircase between two academic buildings. My phone vibrated again. I ignored it again. I have always liked this staircase for some reason, even though back in my freshman year I fell from the top of the staircase and dislocated a shoulder on the way down. Perhaps it is the trauma, or perhaps it is the past (the memories of laughter and pain). Whatever the reason is, I will always like this staircase.

As I carefully walked down, I noticed something strange on the right-hand rail of the staircase. I stopped for a second, not perceiving that someone was walking behind me; I almost caused that person to fall on her butt. I apologized immediately and got out of her way. Once the only soul of that night had proceeded

to her underworld, I began to investigate the object that had caught my eye. To my surprise, it was a cicada that was still alive. Remember, this is the season when cicadas die.

My phone vibrated not once, not twice, but three times. I ignored each consecutive vibration, but began to get annoyed with them. My attention swiftly moved to the living cicada. I stood there, observing the breathing creature, documenting in my mind each of its movements. I approached it slowly, in fear the rare jewel would take off and disappear in the dark distance. But it didn't. And I was able to observe it up close. My attention was taken again by my phone, which this time rang instead. I searched for the turn off button through the fabric of my pants, not caring about the call. And once again I shifted my attention to the cicada.

The cicada wasn't moving, and I thought it may be because of my presence. But then it moved. And it moved again, and again, each clumsy step almost making it fall from the rail. On its last step, it lost its footing, and my immediate reaction was to catch it in my hand. And there it was, safe in my hands, but frightened. The phone rang again, but this time I let it ring, once again not caring who was on the other side. After long minutes of contemplation, the cicada was moving rapidly in my hand and began crawling up and down my arm, making a low hum as it moved. This was astonishing to me, to see a cicada so full of life in the season when cicadas die.

As I continued my playful observation of the cicada, my phone vibrated, and rang, and vibrated and rang again, all in vain because at this point the total of my attention was on the creature I had found and had thought dead. I began going down the stairs, taking the playful cicada with me, and being careful that neither it nor I fell. And it seemed that with each consecutive step I took, there was a vibration from my phone.

I finally made it home, after quite a long time of cicada-watching. I searched for my keys, but in the rushed movement of my arm, the cicada fell to the ground. At the same time, my

phone rang its last ring of the night. Exhausted, I answered the call, opened the door and went inside my apartment. I argued with him on the phone for quite a while, cried for a bit more, and finally hung up, happy that that episode of my life was done, that the final shards of the glass holding those memories together had fallen, happy that the one that had hurt me was finally gone from my life. But then I remembered the cicada. I went out to look for it, and there I found it, laying in the cold ground. A chill breeze came out of nowhere. I picked the cicada, and started to check for life in it, but there was nothing left in there, only an empty shell of what used to be a happy friend, short-lived, like many things in my life. And that's how I came to accept that this is the season when cicadas die.

The Gift

Katy Kissel

"Try to understand that everything I've done up until now was done with you in mind." He stared at me, his eyes wide and hopeful.

I stared at the gift resting on my bed. "I never asked for this!"

"But I did it for you anyway. Because I love you."

"Do you, though?" I looked back to the gift, something I neither needed nor wanted, and thought about what he'd just said and the way that he'd said it. He didn't love me.

"Of course I do! I've been trying to tell you forever, but I'm just... not that good with words."

His words made my face fall. "I don't—"

He braced himself for my response.

"—love you." It was *such* a relief to get the words out!

I watched his face *change* into something I couldn't recognize, his lips curling back. His hand touched my cheek, then he pulled back. "You'll regret this!" he whispered, and walked away, leaving me standing in my room, the... gift still on my bed.

I didn't regret it.

"Try to understand that... *Everything* I've done up until now was done with you in mind!" He *stared* at me, his eyes wide and... *hopeful*.

I stared at the ...gift resting on my bed.

"I *never* asked for this."

"But I did it for you anyway, because I love you!"

"Do you, though?" I looked back to the ...gift, something I neither needed nor *wanted*, and thought about what he'd just said. And the *way* that he'd said it. He... *didn't*... love... me...

"Of *course* I do! I've been *trying* to tell you forever, but I'm just not that good with words!"

His words made my face fall. "I—"

"Don't!" He braced himself for my response.

"—love you!" It was a *such* a *relief* to get the words out!

I watched his face change into something I couldn't recognize, his lips curling back. His hand touched my cheek... then he p u l l e d back. "You'll regret this," he whispered, and walked away, leaving me standing in my room, the gift still on my bed.

I didn't regret it.

How to Say Thank You

Ema Barnes

He had searched through the newspaper for days and days and submitted his rsume to multiple jobs. Sitting by the phone where she had left him, he had waited for someone to ring, but no one had had the decency to send so much as a 'no thank you' to him.

When finally the phone rang, he lifted to his ear but paused before answering.

"Hello?" The woman's voice was chipper and friendly, but it wasn't hers.

"Oh, hello," he said.

"Mr. Koss?" The lady said his name, queried if he were free for an interview in the next week. He checked his watch, surprised that it appeared to only have been four hundred and fifty-six hours since they had taken her away. He supposed he was free, and begun practicing how to smile.

He was the perfect candidate for the position, the lady noted. Nothing seemed to sway his emotions. He had a gruff shadow of stubble and a mouth that seemed to curve permanently downward, and, despite being perfectly polite and courteous, he didn't seem like someone to mess with. Though his hair was greying rapidly, as if he was still dealing with the effects of a punch life had dealt him, he was quick to move and could probably catch those who tried to dodge him.

So he found himself on a schedule and a route with two others. Each week, some bureaucratic overlord told them where they would go, and they requested all passengers riding city owned transit areas present proof of payment.

About six months passed. Seasons may have, too; in the city, he never really could tell. He was always under the shadows of endlessly tall buildings or under the shallow bright lights

of the train stations. He had been allotted a pass in exchange for his work that allowed him on buses with a simple swipe—how uncomfortable it would be for the fare inspector to be caught without fare. Sometimes, when he had finished his allotted duty and checked out, he took the train straight home. Other days, he simply forgot to get off and wandered bus routes until he snapped to, realized he needed to feed himself in order to continue existing.

He hadn't touched her side of the bed yet, hadn't so much as smoothed the place her head had left on the pillow, hadn't wanted the wrinkles to show a shape other than that of her hair. He hadn't dared sniff the air, for fear he might take from it the remnants of her perfume.

Sometimes, when he had been kicked off the bus at the end of the route, he sat at the stop for a few hours, watching the people that walked by, wondering what they wanted out of life and if they actually believed they could get it, knowing that their hope was so ridiculously fickle.

His colleagues complained about the people they encountered every day, while the people they encountered complained about them.

"Another one saying her purse grew a hole."

"Do they really need to pay three of you?"

"He said his girlfriend stole his transfer."

"You don't have the right to request my proof of purchase."

"The fare machine was broken and he says he transferred."

"You're too slow to stop me if I run."

It was all noise to him. While his two peers checked people's proof of payment, he became the one to write citations for those lacking tickets. There was something stoic about him; when people started telling him their sob stories—did they honestly think "my dog ate my transfer" was a valid excuse when animals weren't even allowed on transit?—he was able to turn a deaf ear and merely ask for the information needed to complete the ticket.

One in ten passengers rode without paying fare. The

inspectors checked all routes sporadically, some much more often than others. Per the directions of their bureaucratic overlords, he and his fellows targeted everyone from the morning business crowd in the Embarcadero to the tough-acting crowd on the 47-Van Ness, the wide-eyed tourists on the F Market-Wharves to the elderly Asian ladies on the 71 Haight-Noriega. They found evaders on the T-Third Street heading out of the city via Caltrain; they found miscreants on the 29-Sunset deeming themselves too 'cool' as high-schoolers to pay; they found culprits on the 108-Treasure Island saving their money for upcoming music festivals. No area was spared.

More time passed, and his team was slowly replaced as his colleagues found better opportunities. One questioned why he didn't apply for an alternate job, but didn't seem to understand that he was just looking for some way to fill time until the end came, didn't seem to understand that he himself was merely drifting from day to day.

He often forgot to change out of his uniform when off duty; there was no point in owning an alternate set of clothes. It didn't seem to faze him—or maybe he just didn't notice—that the one person in ten immediately stood up when he sat down, moved off the bus before he could pull out a pad and issue a ticket. It wouldn't be a stretch to guess the man wrote them for fun.

Even with the passage of time, his attendance record remained perfect. Vacation accumulated, despite the meagre benefits of his government-paid job, but he had no need to take it. The day of his first absence was Christmas, an understandable absence had it been anyone else.

The day before he had been inspecting proof of payment at Powell Station inbound, solemnly issuing tickets to eager shoppers attempting to spend more money before Christmas hit. The people ebbed and flowed, people streaming past as trains drew in. A few attempted to dodge past the first two fare inspectors, but were nabbed; he stood off to the side in order to catch them and to

front of him. "I'm heading out of state in a week. I don't live here anymore"; and indeed, he recognised the Oregon State logo he'd seen on *her* diploma every day for years.

He sighed. "You can contest the fine by writing a letter to this address," he said, pointing out the citation review center listed on her ticket. "I've noted what you said here. Reviewing your case will take at least a month and no fines will accumulate during that time."

She was nodding repeatedly, and he could see little droplets beginning to form in the corners of her eyes.

"Now, don't cry!" he told her, more emotion entering his voice than he'd felt in many years.

She sniffled a tad. "I'm trying not to," she said. "I'm sorry; I can't help it."

"Oh, don't cry!"

"I'm trying not to make your job any harder than it already is," she told him, holding his eye contact directly. "I know this can't be particularly fun." Her voice wavered the slightest tad, but anyone tuned only into the sound of the conversation wouldn't have guessed how quickly the tears were streaming down her face.

"I wouldn't wish my life on my worst enemy," he told her, eyes shadowed.

She attempted a half smile. "I'm sure it can't be that bad," she said, "but I'm trying not to make it harder."

"Oh, you make me feel so horrible!" he told her. He'd written up single mothers and high-school sweethearts; he'd written up ragged old men and ladies shuffling through vouchers without so much as a kind word, yet it had all come to this: here he was, ruining the life of this girl who was barely an adult, barely old enough to vote.

"I'm sorry!" she exclaimed, wiping the tears roughly from her eyes as if trying to deny them existence. "I'm trying not to cry!"

"If there were another option, I'd give it to you," he told her, thinking of *her*; if there had been any other option...

She kept nodding, half-heartedly attempting to smile, and seemed to decide that the conversation was going nowhere. She backed away slowly. "You have a nice day, sir," she said, her voice barely audible. "And have a merry Christmas."

He may have nodded, but couldn't quite remember later if he had had tears in his own eyes. He couldn't remember ripping off his copy of the ticket and tearing it up so that she wouldn't be able to pay the fine, nor could he remember how he made it through the rest of the day.

In fact, he couldn't really remember anything much after that. The routine checks on employees who fail to show up fell a little late due to the holiday season, meaning that the scene was less than picturesque when they found him lying horizontally across the bed, arms wrapped around a shabby blue pillow. Being a public employee, the thread of his existence grew a little hazy from there on, until he had faded from all memories except hers.

Though she'd always regret being too fearful to ask the fare inspector his story, she'd never know how much her life had affected him.

A Kiss

Rachel Zanoni

A kiss, it truly starts with a kiss. Some say it's in the eyes, the look, the conversation, some illusion of a personality, intelligence, or the curve of a body—it is truly in the kiss. The connection between two humans in a manner which can no longer just be an interpretation of a lonely mind. A hope fulfilled as two pairs of lips meet, the physical interpretation of a mistaken affection fulfilled by touch.

How else could this continue? This painstaking hope pinned upon you, presumably your hopes pinned on me too, smashed like our faces, a gentle smoothing of dreams shattered like glass on your front porch. We pull apart, uncertain in each other's fantasies, checking to see if they might align tonight for just one kiss, or maybe a little more if the liquor runs thick in our veins like the blood we spill in the bedroom. We look into each other's eyes, pretend that it means something, and move on. No caution now, crashing into each other like the pain we feel on an everyday basis in the office, afflicting each other with raw emotion like the yelling of your boss or my unsatisfied customer, fooling ourselves into believing that we matter, that this moment means something. Even though it doesn't. Even though in the morning we'll feel the shame of society and our own emptiness with renewed senselessness and pray to live in our crudely constructed castles with just you and me a little longer.

Until then, I'll feel your skin, tough from a life of torture, yet soft to my pleading, prying fingers. I'll open my eyes in the morning, but tonight let me close them to a fantasy wrapped in nocturne.

Seven Diary Entries

Kajaii Gomez Wick

I.

So, I'm using a new transcription notes app. I'd never used one, ever, mostly because, well... I mean, that's what anonymous blogs are for, aren't they? But I'm much too scared of the thing that's pretending to be my roommate finding it to do that. Let me explain. Last week, I was walking down the stairs—running down them, actually, which was stupid but I'd done it a million times before but at the time I didn't realize it could be dangerous. I was running down the stairs because I was late for my calc class and my foot slipped and the next thing I knew I was lying on the bottom of the steps and there was a strange, metal smell all around me. I know I blacked out for a minute because my roommate, Alex, had called out to see if I was okay, and I didn't answer. She came out to go and see if I was okay, and then she saw the blood and freaked out.

I remember her trying to talk to me, but it all sounded like it was through a pool, or how the radio sounds when you're taking a bath and dunking your head. 911 was called, and pretty soon I was on the way to the hospital; my roommate was riding in the ambulance with me. The paramedics kept asking me a bunch of questions, and some of them didn't really make sense (why did it matter that I knew who the president was or that I could add 3 and 8?), but I tried my best to keep talking.

They got me to the ER and took me through to a private room for some stitches and tests, and they asked my roommate to wait outside for a minute while they checked over the rest of my body (they had to cut off my shirt because I couldn't lift it over my head, but I didn't really mind—it was an old, shitty shirt that I barely wore anymore). And the next time I saw Alex, it wasn't Alex anymore, it was an imposter. I know it sounds crazy, really, really

crazy, 'you are literally psychotic' crazy. But it's true. It wasn't like seeing someone wrong out of the corner of your eye—I see her and I know it's an imposter. It's not right. It's not her. I can't explain it yet. I'm going to find out more. Right now I'm laying low, getting scanned and treated, being monitored by the hospital and the doctors so I'll be okay. But I know the truth about the imposter, and right now I'm the only person who's spotted it. I can't tell anyone before I have proof. I have to find out more and somehow expose it.

II.

Things about the imposter I've discovered so far through careful investigation:

- The imposter's very, very good but not foolproof. It can fool the other housemates because they don't know Alex, but I do. We've been roommates since freshman year.
- The imposter is almost certainly human. Phew, I don't have to deal with any aliens or robots or something.
- The imposter could be an identical twin OR someone who has had the best possible plastic surgery. I looked up how far plastic surgery can go, and the answer is REALLY, REALLY far. Like, it can make girls look exactly like Barbie, then why not make some crazy person look like Alex?
- The imposter is very good at faking some things but NOT EVERYTHING!!! She hates her new English class, which Alex would have LOVED. She complains about the reading, and that's ridiculous. Alex LOVED heavy reading classes. She used to tease me about how she never had to do problem sets, just read good books and articles. It's definitely NOT HER.
- The imposter has almost perfect hair, fingernails, and skin. Alex had dry skin, especially on her forearms.
- The imposter rocks on her chair legs during class. Alex didn't, ever.
- The imposter flirts with other guys who aren't her boyfriend!

Alex would never do that. Is this imposter an amateur or something???

- The imposter's purpose is unknown. Does she want, I don't know, money? Or did she kill Alex and want to cover it up?
- The imposter doesn't seem actively malicious. She hasn't hurt anyone; I've been following her to check. She pets the stray cats, smiles at people, sings in the shower.
- The imposter doesn't know I'm onto her. She acts really friendly with me. It's horrible but I have to stay friendly with her too. I pretend I'm tired/headachy/have to do makeup work, but that excuse will run out soon enough. I want to vomit even being in the same room as it. I've got to get the proof before it catches on that I know.

III.

Good news, I'm really not crazy. I've been gathering evidence and there's definitive proof my roommate has been replaced.

First of all, I sent a few of the imposter's hairs off to this mail-in lab that tests hair to see if it's dyed or natural. (Apparently, this is mostly for dudes who want to date 'natural' blondes, redheads, whatever. Don't know why they can't just, you know, ASK the people involved). The imposter dyes her hair red. Alex is a natural redhead. Strike one. Second of all, the imposter has a 'gluten intolerance' very suddenly. As in, Fake Alex doesn't eat any bread unless it's from the container next to the simple servings station, and she won't eat regular cereal anymore either.

The imposter claims it's because she only just discovered it and keeps telling everyone about how gluten is bad for you (why people have been eating it for thousands of years if it's bad for you, she can't answer). Alex loved bread and cereal and stuff. No gluten problems. Strike two. Third and most damning of all, the imposter screwed up. She screwed up BAD. Now, you probably don't know this, but Alex has a bunch of little tattoos: she has a daisy chain on

her ankle, a little red poppy flower on her back shoulder, a black cat on her right wrist, and a little dog head on her right underboob. The imposter's replicated all of the tattoos perfectly, even how faded the daisy chain is, except for the dog head. It's supposed to be pointing towards her sternum. The imposter's version POINTS THE OTHER WAY ENTIRELY. I checked my phone to see if I'd ever taken any pics of Alex's underboob tat and I HAD. The imposter screwed up the underboob tattoo, and I have the pictures to prove it! I snapped three of them and in good lighting too! Strike three, motherfucker. Now it's time to take action. I won't let this stand.

IV.

So I probably should have thought this through. I told everyone Alex wasn't Alex, it was someone else pretending to be Alex. I called Campo, I called the police, I called and Facebooked her parents and her boyfriend, I told our housemates, and I printed out and put up posters everywhere to explain it. I even got it onto the campus announcements by pretending it was stuff about the BSU.

Well, Fake Alex freaked out. Obviously, I mean, who wouldn't? But then she called the hospital and told them, and then when the police showed up, they didn't arrest her for fraud or trespassing or impersonation or identity theft or anything, they just took me away to the hospital and the next thing I know I had fifteen very concerned doctors wanting to lock me away. They couldn't—they didn't—because I stayed calm and didn't hurt or threaten anyone and wasn't suicidal. It was pretty scary, but eventually they got me to agree to spend a few hours talking to a psychiatrist from out of state if I stayed away from Alex completely and didn't talk to her until the psychiatrist told me to. I said yes. I couldn't stand to be around the thing that stole Alex's face anymore anyway, so the cops escorted me back to campus, and I took my stuff to go and sleep in a friend's apartment.

My friend Nora was pretty freaked out too, but she, at least, agreed that it was possible and said it was good that I hadn't done anything crazy like put the underboob pics on my posters. That part actually hurt my feelings, though. Of course, I didn't! That's messed up! Everyone knows not to put up naked pics of anyone without their permission.

V.

I cried in the psychiatrist's office today. A lot. Dr. Mona is great, don't get me wrong, but she was also insanely persuasive at pointing out how I've gone crazy. Every time I offered up proof, she told me how I could be hallucinating, misinterpreting the situation, or how Alex could really have changed. Some people apparently really do think they're gluten intolerant when they're actually just lactose intolerant or have something else. Some people do dye their hair because it bleaches over the summer or starts to change color when they get older. And it's really easy, she said, to hallucinate a tattoo pointing the wrong direction. I kept arguing with her right up until she showed me the Wikipedia article on Capgras delusion. And that's when I realized that falling down the stairs had actually made me full-on delusional. I couldn't deal with it, I kept crying and screaming and stuff, but Dr. Mona eventually helped me calm down.

She said she's used to working with people who have really specific or singular delusions—fuck, I mean, I have a delusion—and that we can 'still lead happy and fulfilling lives' and that it doesn't make me worthless or stupid or anything. It hurts, still. She said that it was normal and that I should 'forgive myself'. But how can I? I didn't hurt myself, I hurt Alex. I—hell, I stalked her. I had followed her around, spied on her during her classes, I even recorded videos of her when she slept to see if she'd talk in her sleep about being an imposter. Oh shit. And then I'd gone and told everyone about it—everyone! It was a whole goddamn hashtag, #AlexIsLiterallyFake! I feel sick. I need to apologize, somehow.

VI.

Me and Alex are friends again, finally. She said she forgives me and that it literally isn't my fault, and I guess she's sort of right. It's from a head injury, and that was no one's fault but mine. I still feel horrible whenever anyone brings it up, but Alex doesn't. It's really hard not calling her Fake Alex in my head. But apparently Capgras is hard to treat, and the possible medications aren't necessarily worth the side-effects. I can Facebook message her just fine, and we can even talk over the phone without it provoking a reaction. She sounds just like herself, it's just...her face that makes me think she's an imposter. Dr. Mona showed me research about how it's possibly something to do with the part of the brain that recognizes faces getting damaged. She also pointed out that I should limit face-to-face contact until I can deal with the 'overwhelming feelings' better. She's right. Right now I'm focusing on catching back up on stuff—I have three weeks to do at least half of my makeup work, or I'll have to take a medical withdrawal from the semester. And that would suck, but I do recognize Dr. Mona's reasoning as being right. I'm just going to put my head down and study.

VII.

Oh, god. I don't... I don't know what to think.

Let me start by saying I know talking about people behind their back is wrong. Really wrong. 'You should have learned this in middle school' wrong. But in my defense, I didn't start it. I was on Facebook a week ago, you know how Sundays are, and Alex's boyfriend messaged me. I was kind of expecting him to be angry, maybe message me to yell at me, but instead it... it wasn't like that at all.

"Have you noticed anything strange about Alex lately?" I looked at it and I thought it was a trap, so I messaged back carefully.

"What do you mean? has she been weird around you?"

You know those bouncing ellipses you get when the other person is typing? I got those for a long, long time. Then he finally pressed 'enter.'

"She's changed. idk. it's not right. she's not right."

I felt sick, and I started to panic before I decided no, it was some stupid trap or prank or something, and I closed the tab. I was pissed at him, and I had a good reason to be. It's not funny to say shit like that to someone with a mental illness! It's not! It's like those people who try and make their friends think they've gone crazy for April Fool's Day—only terrible people do stuff like that.

So I ignored it, right up until yesterday when I was helping Alex fix her phone. See, she's like my mom's wife; she's terrible at just sorting out technology problems and fixing them herself. This time, Alex's phone had been glitching in regards to her texts, showing old texts as brand new ones, so I was doing all the normal things: updating apps, deleting random old data, Googling the problem, etc., when a new text popped up.

And for the record, before we continue, I know you're never supposed to read other people's texts without their permission. I know! But this—it was so weird. I had to open up the conversation. It just said 'project?' I thought it was a group project the second I'd tapped to open up the whole conversation, and was about to close it and beat myself up about it when I read Alex's reply: 'Perfect. Suspicions suppressed.'

I stared at it and then I closed the conversation, but it was all burned on my optical nerves. It was such a bizarre little exchange, and from a number, not a contact, and it was the only thing in the phone's entire history with that number, and—there was no way I could ignore that. It couldn't mean anything innocent. Nobody could possibly think that.

It made the Capgras delusion grow and grow and grow. I gave Alex her phone back and wanted to run away the whole time; I couldn't look at her horrible wrong face anymore, I had to avoid

her, and it made me feel so guilty I felt sick all over again. I couldn't win. I almost called Dr. Mona at midnight. I was so afraid that I had snapped and needed help, that I had hallucinated the texts and the tattoos and I was really, really crazy and should be locked up, but I didn't. I made myself hold on.

And early this morning, like two in the morning early, I went back over these notes and I remembered my conclusive proof: the underboob dog head tattoo. And I thought hey, maybe if I have some proof it was just a hallucination or my memory of how it was supposed to look was wrong, I'll go back to normal.

So, I went back on Facebook and asked Alex's boyfriend for a picture of her tattoos. The dog head one was definitely pointing toward her sternum. And the one from the girl in my room was definitely pointing the opposite direction. I freaked out, sure I was hallucinating, sure it was my brain rationalizing, and I sent her boyfriend the picture on my phone of Fake Alex's tattoo.

He messaged me back two hours ago.

"That's not right. her dog tat points the other way."

I sent him back quickly: "you're sure?"

He's still typing. And here I am, sitting, soaked in sweat, shaking.

While I was looking up the underboob tattoo picture on my phone, I had to flick through some older photos of Alex, some selfies with me and her. In every one of them from before I fell down the stairs, she looks completely normal. Same face, same hair as the girl who's sleeping on Alex's bed right now. But when I look over at it, I can tell right away—it's not Alex anymore. I'm sure.

Summer Owens, 1980

Kailey Rhone

She decided she would stop smoking when the baby was born. For now, she slipped a Camel between her teeth and lit it quick with a match. She had read that the nicotine was better concentrated when the cigarette was ignited this way, though she had her doubts that this was true. Nevertheless, she watched the thumbprint flame catch the butt and smoke out with a wave of her hand.

She admired the sky and wondered if God preferred using a match too. She thought God was a clumsy fellow, dropping the flame and setting the sky ablaze with angry red fire. She didn't mind the colors, but she cursed the South Carolina heat that came with it.

The willow in the backyard was surely weeping, its weakened slender leaves brushing the ground in reverence, Let us rest, Oh sacred ground. I cannot hang here any longer! But a gust of wind came through like angels breathe and blew the green strands like the hair above Summer's shoulders.

Summer. She hated her name. Why did you name me Summer? she asked her mother. Because that's the season everyone looks forward to, she said. You can't be sad in summer. She defied this reasoning and contended that nothing good came from the months of June to September, only mosquitos and sweltering temperatures. The little villains were nipping at her swollen ankles now. She scraped her sandal against her flesh and let out a sigh. July will be gone like the smoke off my tongue, she thought.

She held the cigarette in front of her eyes, letting the ash fall over the moon of her belly. Why did I have to go and get myself pregnant? She supposed it wasn't entirely her fault. John had played some part on that night in January. When the winds blew hard and the sky colored lavender around suppertime. She

had lay quietly in bed, pondering the colored speckles her eyes painted in the dark when she felt his rugged hand between her legs. She resigned herself to his touch, sure that it would help her sleep anyhow.

When he finished, a great sweaty mass hovering above her, he rolled over and cleared his throat. There, that should do it, he said. She hadn't known what he meant until she was arched over the toilet, retching the chicken pot pie she had spent the afternoon cooking.

John was a good man, she knew that much. He was serious and tight lipped, but she thought it suited her fine. On the day they got married, at a small chapel across from the liquor store, she had wept at the loss of her independence. No more night walks for a pack of cigarettes and a jug of orange juice. No more re-reading *Little Women* beneath her mother's weeping willow. She would miss that most: the peace of getting nowhere, of lying still in the grass reading a story that made her cry even after the thirtieth time.

Being married meant she would always have someone for whom she'd have to mark her page too soon and leave the grass behind with an imprint of her happier and more content self. But she was wrong and pleased that her assumptions were incorrect. She was further surprised by how much independence was still allotted to her; John never asked where she went to when the air chilled and the stars came out of hiding. When she smoked beneath the willow tree, sitting in the rusted metal beach chair, John didn't even snatch the cigarette away and call her bad mother. He would blink solemnly, like a cozy cat and slink back into the house.

When Summer was little she asked her mother if she would fall in love someday. Her mother cried most nights and slept most days. Summer wasn't sure her mother believed in love, but she had no one else to ask. Summer, she said, you're already falling, babes. One day you will find someone and that's when you'll stop. She figured not falling was a good thing at the time, but sometimes she looked at her mother, a ghost in the land of the living, and suddenly

she wasn't so sure.

She knew she must have had a father; after all you needed a man and a woman to have a baby. But there were no pictures to prove his existence, nor did her mother tell her stories about who he once was. When Summer asked about him her mother would say, Sticks and stones, babes. Walk over them. Only pick up the pretty things. So she never mentioned her father again, even though she wondered why he broke her mother's heart.

Sometimes Summer looked at John and imagined what she would do if he packed his pile of white undershirts and his box of baseball cards and left while she slept. Would she spend the rest of her days looking for the past in the reflection from her television set? Would she search for everything she lost between the cushions of the couch? She couldn't stand the idea that she had stopped falling and may never do so again.

She lit a second cigarette as the lightening bugs fancied themselves stars. The baby kicked as she took a long drag. She rested her free hand over the great giant lump and shook her head. Oh, god, please don't be a girl. There's too much weight to carry. It'd be smart of you to be a boy. Her lips tasted like tar. John would close his eyes after he kissed her, tucking what he might have said in his back pocket.

She wanted to shake him like a coin jar until all his worth fell out in a shimmer of copper and silver. She loved him for his constancy, not his words. But she would prefer a rose over a bundle of sturdy weeds every once and a while. Then sometimes Summer just thought she was being ungrateful. Weeds, after all, gave her something to work with. A rose just looks pretty before it wilts and dies.

Summer was huge now. Her skin was always flushed and stretched, and her breasts ached in preparation. The baby would be wailing any day now, a burst of thunder over the calm waters of the Owens household. What would John say then? Would he say anything at all?

Summer had asked her mother what to do when the baby was born. She stayed silent for a long while, and dripped cream into the blackness of her coffee. When she answered, the heaviness of lost sleep weighed down her words. Take a breath, close your eyes, and let yourself bleed. Summer wasn't comforted by her words, but knew that's what her mother had done when she spread her legs and introduced her to the world. She knew too that her mother was still bleeding these twenty years later.

The baby kicked again, a heel jammed into her bladder. Calm yourself, she said, I'm going inside now. She let the cigarette fall and stepped it into the damp mud. She hobbled to the back door, stopping to turn and gaze into the indigo evening. Goodnight, she whispered, as the lightening bugs glowed and vanished, waiting for the sunrise from beneath the willow tree.

A Note on Nonfiction

Reading nonfiction is a humbling experience in a way that is more intimate than fiction because each page is a piece of the author's memories. The reader gets to, without any kind of limitations, take a front row seat to the author's most precious, embarrassing, or heartbreaking moments. Can you imagine the amount of strength it takes for an author to write about their experiences so candidly? To cast themselves as a character that the audience may not see in the best light?

I commend the authors of the following memories for allowing us the opportunity to peek into their lives and I hope that the reader enjoys the product of the author's vulnerability.

Jazzy Williams-Smith

Before He Turned Fifty

Katy Kissel

I don't actually remember too much about my father's death, not in the way of dates or anything. Part of that is because he hid a lot of information from my sister and I, like the type of cancer he actually had; part of it is probably that I genuinely don't like thinking about it. But the things I do remember, I remember well. I remember that I found out that he was sick sometime before the Christmas season, and for some reason I think it was in October. I know that I was at work, and I know that it truly sucked.

I am folding clothing at work, men's Dockers in the khaki section, when I notice the missed call on my cell phone. The rules are pretty lax, or rather the enforcement is; it's late and it's not busy, so I duck into a fitting room to check my phone for messages. There is a message from my father, and he's asking me to call him when I can.

It's not busy, so I don't hesitate to call him from the fitting room. What he had to say makes me wish that I hadn't called him back. I'd known he was in the hospital again; he was always in and out because he didn't take care of himself, but he was supposed to be getting out that day.

He said to me, more serious than he normally is, "They're keeping me for more tests, Katy. They think that maybe they've seen some tumors."

I frown. "Tumors?" What does that even mean?

"Cancerous tumors," he clarifies. "But I'm young, Katy. It's nothing to worry about, I'm sure."

He is young. He's not even fifty yet. I try to keep my mind off of it, to go back to folding Dockers, but it's not really working that well. I can't quite focus, and I guess that it's a good thing that

the work is mindless.

My father will be fine. He's not even fifty. He'll beat this.

It should have been fine. Christmas that year was subdued, but what else could be expected? Of course things were going to be different! My dad was sick, nothing would be the same. By that time, it had become apparent that things weren't going to just go away. My father had shaved his head and was starting to lose weight. These weren't great signs, I knew that, but I still hoped that things would be okay.

I remember being so mad at my stepmother because she was being awful to him. My father was sick, and he was going through a lot; I didn't think that Mary B. was doing a great job taking care of him. But what did I know? I was just twenty years old. And surely how they acted on Christmas wasn't how their relationship was all the time, right?

My stepmother is glaring at my father. "Can't you pretend to be enjoying yourself?" she snaps at him.

Christmas morning has never felt so long in my life. My father looks tired, of course he does. Cancer takes a lot out of people. I'm twenty, and I don't know much, but I do know that. My father isn't well, and he's allowed to be tired. If I can understand that, why can't his wife?

But I don't say anything. And then my stepbrother, Joey, chimes in. "Yeah, Mark. You should try to cheer up. Mind over matter, right?"

It's not that easy, I know that, and Joey should know it, given all of the things he's gone through in his life. But I don't say anything. I don't know how to interject. I haven't learned this skill. I just sit there, silently, and let them continue to pick on my father.

"Would you stop shaking your leg?" my stepmother asks.

"You're making the entire couch shake. You know that Katy probably doesn't appreciate that."

This I can respond to. It's partially directed at me, after all.

"I'm fine," I say. "I don't mind."

Mary B. Kissel rolls her eyes at me. "He shouldn't be shaking his leg like that," she says to me.

I don't say anything else for the rest of the night, mostly because I don't know what else to say.

Things got worse, not better. By early spring, it became pretty clear that my father wasn't getting any better. I finally learned around that time that the cancer was stage four, that it had been stage four all along. The care that my father was getting was just meant to extend his life, and there was no chance that he was going to make it.

I didn't expect to be as sad about the news as I was. My father and I didn't have the best of relationships, mostly because he was never there, and when he was there, he wasn't the nicest of guys. He wasn't abusive or anything, he was just an asshole. I remember finding out that he wasn't getting better, and I remember how much it hurt.

"So, we've got to talk," my father says one night after the family dinner that we've had every Sunday night. Work gives me shit about it, needing to be out by six, but I don't care. My father's sick. If he wants to see me every Sunday night, they can just schedule me to be out by six. It's not hard.

My father tells us that he's really sick, because that's supposed to be some kind of surprise. He doesn't seem to know where to go after this, but my stepmother steps in.

"Your father is dying," she tells me and my sister. My sister and I start paying attention. Mary B. looks like she's crying, like she's been crying for a while. That explains the tense atmosphere of the night, I suppose. "We've been trying to get the doctor to give us a timeline, but he's not willing to give us a date."

My father laughs now, like this is some kind of joke or a

game. "We started giving him dates that are coming up. Important ones. Like, I'll probably make it to Easter, and I should be okay for Mary's and my anniversary. But Jess, bad news about your wedding. The doctor thinks that maybe that date ought to be rethought."

It's sometime in March now, and the wedding is going to be in October, but my sister just nods. "Then I guess I'll move the date up," she says, sounding way more calm than I am.

I don't know what to think. I don't remember saying anything to him, but I'm sure I did. I can't imagine having not done so.

Jess moved her wedding date up. She had to change her venue, her budget, her dress, everything. Getting my dress was a pain, as well as getting all the other bridesmaids' dresses. It turned out that my sister knew nothing about buying wedding dresses, or bridesmaids dresses; they had to be ordered months in advance. Since my sister moved the wedding up to June, we were scrambling to get everything done. But we did.

I remember the wedding was awful. I remember standing up there in these awful silver stilettos that I bought for three dollars because they were cheap, and I'd only have to wear them once. I didn't realize the pastor that she and Jon chose was going to talk for an hour, and that I'd be standing for all of it.

I remember that my father checked himself out of the hospital to come to the wedding, and that he had to spend most of the time sitting down. He was out of breath a lot, and I didn't know why. I still have no idea what kind of cancer killed him. I'd like to know, but I doubt I ever will.

Time passed, and my father continued his slow and steady decline. He decided to stop treatment at some point, I don't remember when. And he called my sister and I to the hospital sometime in early September. I think it was September anyway, because I remember it was close to my birthday.

My father looks awful. He's tired, and I can see that he's ready for this to be over. I'm not ready, and I don't think I ever will be. He's my father. He was never a great father, but he's the only one I've got, and I don't want to watch him waste away like this. But he asked my sister and I to visit him, and of course we do. What? Are we going to say no to a dying man?

He's quiet as he talks to us, my stepmother sitting by his side. I remember at one point she jokes that she never signed any papers for him, so she wouldn't be responsible for his medical debts. My father thinks she's clever, and I remember smiling at the morbid joke.

But the conversation turns serious. He apologizes to my sister and I and tells us that he's sorry that he was never there, that he loves us very much and that he wants us to forgive him. My sister and I both tell him we do, because how can we not forgive him? He's our father and he's dying. What else are we going to say to a dying man? No, dad, I don't forgive you? I don't forgive him, but I can't tell him that.

"I'm checking myself out of the hospital," he tells us. "I'm ready to go home."

I don't think that's a bad idea. He's sick, yes, but they've just told us that he's going to still be around for Christmas, they think. Maybe it'll be an early Christmas, like around November, but he's got a few more months.

"Okay, dad," I say to him. I smile as I leave. He's not going to be okay, he's going to die, but we have time to adjust to it.

We didn't have time. He died that night, actually, after he got out of the hospital. I woke up the following morning to about fifty missed calls on my cell phone and the knowledge that my father had passed away in the middle of the night. My sister and I went over to my dad's house, and we stayed there the entire day. Then I went home.

My mother was invited to the funeral, which I thought was

nice of Mary B. But the funeral was actually the worst part of the whole thing, and it is the part that I remember most clearly.

Jess, Jon, my mother, and I arrive at the funeral. It's strange, because my uncle, my father's brother, is wearing a Hawaiian shirt. I've never seen Uncle Jay in one of those in my life. And then it gets stranger, because I spot one of my stepbrothers wearing the same kind of shirt, and my grandfather too. I guess it makes sense, because my dad did love Hawaiian shirts, but it's strange that Jon hadn't been told to wear one too.

We look for my stepmother to try and pay our respects, but she is coldly polite to us. She gives my mother a few minutes to say goodbye to my father in private, and then she leaves my sister, Jon, my mother, and I to our own devices. My grandparents come over and talk to us during the viewing portion, but none of my stepsiblings do so.

There's a break between the viewing and the funeral service, and my grandmother says to me as she's leaving to eat dinner, "We'll see you at the diner."

I stare at her. "What diner?" I ask.

She blinks at me. "The diner where everyone is going. Didn't Mary tell you?" Then she looks at my mother and blushes a little. "Mary B., I mean."

We weren't invited to the diner, and that's strange. We talk about going, but how awkward would that be for my mother? We don't go to the diner. Instead, we wind up at a fast food place. None of us are in the mood for anything heavy, anyway.

After dinner, at the funeral, my sister and I sit in the back with my mother while my stepsiblings and my stepmother sit up front. The worst part is the eulogies. I have to listen to someone get up there and say, "We used to joke with Mark and Mary and ask them when they were going to get married. We all knew that they needed to, because they were so perfect for each other!"

I'm angry, and I want nothing more than to get up and tell

them all that the reason my father had to wait to marry Mary B. was because there was, in fact, a Mary A., and she was my mother, and my father had still been married to her when he started seeing Mary B. But I don't. This isn't the time, and I know that. So I bear it in silence.

Most of these people don't even know I exist, anyway.

My sister and I weren't invited to the spreading of my father's ashes. It took years before I found out why. Apparently, Mary B. hadn't wanted us to forgive my father for being a shitty dad; she'd wanted us to tell him that he wasn't a bad father. We hadn't said the right thing, and she hadn't forgiven us for it.

Later still, I found out that my father had been cheating on Mary B. too. I wanted to feel sorry for her, but honestly, I couldn't. How could I? He'd cheated on my mother for 23 years, the entire length of his marriage to her, and he'd only been cheating for three of those years with Mary B. Did she think she could change him? Maybe.

Now that I'm older, I'm kind of glad that the whole thing went down that way, that Mary B. just cut me and my sister out of her life. She was kind of a horrible person, and I know that if she hadn't cut us out I would have felt obligated to continue interacting with her.

These days, I don't think too much about my father. He probably would have been happy that I finally went back to school, even if he would have hated that I am an English major, and he probably would have laughed at the joke my mom likes to tell sometimes, even if it is at his expense. She often says that he died because he found that he really couldn't live without her.

We think it's funny, and I'm pretty sure he would too. He was the kind of guy who loved inappropriate jokes.

From the Porch

Emma Driban

My legs cling to the plastic chair, still warm from a day of sitting in the late August sun. I stretch out, cracking my back, and let myself sink back into the chair. By my side my sisters chatter about this or that, nothing important. Their whispered tones, like a prayer, careful not to break the peaceful quiet that covers us like a blanket. Ice cream from Woodside Farm melts in my hand. The chocolatey goodness drips from the cone down my fingers to my arm, making my rings and bracelet stick to my skin.

Next door, a neighbor is grilling a late night dinner, his spatula gleaming in the fading light. The smell of burgers floats through the air. I see his kids setting the table, arguing over which fork goes where or something trivial like that, when a ringing catches my ear. Children on their bikes are riding home, the bells on their handlebars chirping in response to the birds flying over them. They glide alongside our hosta-lined fence, racing to beat the sun before it goes to sleep.

I peer past them across the street to the pond. An elderly man in a hat is hunched over on a bench. His ancient hands waver as he tosses breadcrumbs to the excited geese. Even from a distance I can tell that his hands are well-used, covered in calluses from years of hard work. He sits by himself. I wonder if he feels alone or if his memories of the past keep him company.

Above his head I see leaves already beginning to fall, turning over and over in the space between the trees and the grass like a quarter flipped in the air to settle a dispute. Over the high-reaching pines the sky turns scarlet. Then purple. Then black. Its appearance constantly changes with the setting of the sun. Soon the day will be done, put to rest. But, like the stars, we will be awake.

La Memoria de un Venezolano

Mario Fernandez de Lima

I am afraid, and I am not alone. Millions of immigrants in the United States are worried about whether they will have a future here, or if they will have to start all over again in another country. Do not say that these people can just "go back to where they came from," because newsflash, they can't. Most immigrants move because they have no other choice. They do not have a bright future where they come from. Do you truly think that people just move to a completely different country, leave their families and cultures behind and start from zero just for fun? No, and do not try to pull out any alternative facts to prove me wrong. I can't tell the story of all immigrants—theirs is not my narrative to tell—but I can tell you my own.

I come from Venezuela, a beautiful country. I wish I could say I will go back, but I can't. It is nearly impossible to return to a home that is no longer yours. It would be like visiting your childhood home and seeing some other happy family in it. Except that in my case there is no happy family, there is no green grass to return to, there are only memories and the hard truth.

Let me start from the beginning. In 1998, Hugo Chavez came to power, a man with the backing from the military. This man ran a campaign very similar to another contemporary demagogue, blaming outsiders for the issues facing the nation, scapegoating, and feeding on the ignorance of the people.

Venezuela had already seen its golden age in the late 20th century. It was an oil rich country; the country had a wonderful future. But years of corruption and presidents surrounding themselves with unqualified people had taken its toll by the time Chavez came around. From day one, Chavez had a revolutionary plan to help the country, but within years an already-crumbling country was demolished. Chavez and his regime began to destroy freedom of speech and the media. The people who opposed him

always saw him for the true dictator that he was, but others finally began to turn the corner. The people had rarely been more divided. The Chavistas—Chavez supporters—and those who opposed him began a war of words that only escalated to violence.

My story begins with my parents. The company my parents worked for, PDVSA, a government-owned petroleum company, fired them in March 2003. Did I say fire? My apologies, I meant escorted them out with the business end of a gun. They had to leave everything they had in their offices, the pictures my sister and I had drawn as kids, the ones that parents hang up on fridges. Yeah, those. They left family pictures, sometimes even irreplaceable ones. My parents didn't stand by and let that happen. They were the brave ones, and I would have been proudly standing at their side if I had been older. They, and thousands of others, fought for our rights; they fought against corruption, but at the end they lost. My parents fought; they protested, and they put their safety on the line for our country. The government saw them as violent rioters and sore losers. The protesters were put down with tear gas, rubber bullets, police dogs, and fire hoses. People we knew were arrested, others we knew "mysteriously" disappeared.

In Venezuela, the future was bleak. Jobs were becoming harder and harder to find, especially if you did not support the regime. Education was awful and was getting worse. Violence was through the roof. My dad had to move to Kazakhstan to find a job in order to support my sister and me. For twelve years, he had not been with me for my birthday, don't tell me that he chose to miss me, his only son, growing up. My mom, sister, and I stayed in Venezuela until 2005. We fled when we were granted political asylum to the United States, and I had a light at the end of the tunnel; I had a future.

The night we left, the government was policing the major airports in order to ensure that people did not leave for good. Luckily for us, we were eventually able to get through. Think about how it felt to move schools as a kid. You had to make new friends,

start from zero and hope that you could still keep a connection with your old friends, but deep inside you knew that you wouldn't. Well, for me, that is exactly what happened, but worse; I fled. So do not tell me we chose to leave our home for good, to leave our family and friends behind.

I still have family in Venezuela. My grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts are still there. Their struggles are becoming more and more prevalent with each passing day. In order to get the most basic of goods they have to stand in lines at supermarkets, at ungodly hours of the night, and stay there for hours until the stores open, only to find out that they do not have toilet paper, deodorant, shampoo, or any other necessities. There is a black market for everything, even toilet paper. Many times when my family walks out of the store with food, they put a target on the back of their heads because food is becoming so scarce. Food, just food, is enough to be robbed at gunpoint in Venezuela. When my mom goes to the store here, she sometimes buys for two families, why? Because it is cheaper and safer to send deodorant, toilet paper, and nonperishables from here to her home than it is to buy it there.

Venezuela is becoming more dangerous as well. Maracaibo, my hometown, is one of the most dangerous cities in the world. When you hear that your hometown, the streets where you and your friends played in, where you went to school, is called one of the most dangerous cities in the world, it is heartbreaking. Millions of Venezuelans pulled the short straw; they are still stuck there, with no bright future ahead of them.

I, on the other hand, have been lucky, more than lucky. I truly cannot begin to put into words how fortunate I truly am to have left when I did. Here, I have gotten a better education than I would have ever gotten in Venezuela. Here, I have made better friends than I have ever made in Venezuela. I have loved and laughed here, more than I had ever loved and laughed in Venezuela. I miss home, my real home, more than ever, but I push on. This country has welcomed my family and I with open arms and there is

nothing I can do to repay the kindness that people here have shown us. We came with nothing, absolutely nothing aside from a few bags and the clothes on our backs.

Now I am in college, I have a computer, and running water; I can go into any store and buy what I need without waiting for hours. I have been lucky. I became a citizen on February 1, 2012, but this is still only my adoptive country; I am still Venezuelan through and through. My people are still suffering, and their suffering is my suffering. This is my story, one of millions around the world, and one of the few that truly has a happy ending. The United States has been vital to that happy ending.

Molly

Jazzy Williams-Smith

I met Molly at a Christian summer camp where we were both counselors and atheists. I was there because I desperately needed a job but Molly was there because if she didn't work at Camp Sonshine, her parents were going to sell her beloved Mustang.

Molly was gay and very upfront about it; her first words to me when we arrived at our room were "I'm an atheist and a lesbian and if you have a problem with that you better move into a room with the other bible thumpers." Her brashness startled me; I would learn later that that was just the way she was. She was all hard edges and abruptness even when she had no reason to be, it was like she was always geared up for an argument but she was also intelligent, kind, and she had this way about her that made you forget that she could be kind of a bitch. I didn't quite understand my attraction to her; after all, she was a woman and I thought I was straight.

"Hey Jay." Molly walked in to the room that we shared and flopped on the bed next to where I lay reading. "What are you doing here?"

I semi-playfully glared at her and went back to reading; she knew I hated that nickname. Molly had given me the irritating moniker as soon as she found out we were bunkmates. She took one look at my name tag and said "I hereby crown you Jay, because Jazzy is a mouthful." We'd been attached at the hip ever since, even though I kept telling her not to call me Jay.

We were both given the day off from our job as camp counselors because she sprained her wrist and had a doctor appointment and I was sent home because I'd had an allergic reaction the day before and had to use my epi pen. Molly plucked the Kindle out of my hand and tossed it on top of her bunk.

"Let's watch a movie." She lay down next to me, her long

red hair covering my face for a second before I pushed it away.

"No," I said definitively. "You're just going to put on the *Time Traveler's Wife* so you can watch me cry, again."

"Scout's honor."

I rolled my eyes and she turned on her side to face me.

"That only works if you're actually a Girl Scout. You were not, so it doesn't count." I knew I'd end up watching a movie and I also knew that it would probably end up being something that made me cry. Molly was fascinated by my sensitivity to the plight of fictional characters.

"Pinky swear that we will not be watching the *Time Traveler's Wife*, or *The Notebook*, or *A Walk to Remember*." I rattled off the names of movies that she and I both knew would make me cry. I should have known when she agreed so quickly that she had prepared for my answer and had readied a contingency plan.

My Sister's Keeper. *My fucking Sister's Keeper*. I glared at her as soon as the first line of the movie were spoken by Abigail Breslin: "My name is Anna Fitzgerald. I was not a mistake. I was created for a specific reason: to save my sister Kate." I knew in my soul that this movie was going to gut me. Molly ignored my glare and entwined my hand with hers, bringing them both into the small space between us.

I watched the movie and Molly watched me. She drew on my hand with the pads of her fingers: first her name, then mine, and finally just random shapes. The heat of her fingers on my hand made me nervous but I didn't stop her. I didn't want to stop her; her fingertips lightly brushing against my hand felt so intimate, almost like a kiss. Then her fingers stilled and she pulled her hand away from mine but she never once stopped looking at me. I know because I checked.

Every now and again I'd look at her from the corner of my eye because turning to look at her would have meant acknowledging that I knew something else was happening and

I wasn't ready for that at all. So I gave all of my attention

to the movie. I became engrossed as I watched Anna's family fall apart and Kate's illness get worse and then, in the scene where Anna finally confesses that Kate wants to die, the dam broke and the tears that I tried so hard to keep in started to fall. Molly took one hand and brushed them away and finally I turned to look at her. As I looked into her hazel eyes I wondered what it would be like to kiss her.

As she scooted closer to me, slowly closing the distance between my face and hers, I was still wondering, at least until her lips met mine. It was a slow kiss, a kiss that said I know you're kissing me back but I'm not trying to freak you out. I jerked my head away and sat up because kissing Molly was dizzying; I felt like I needed more but also like more would be too much. I was so confused. She sat up and touched my shoulder.

"I'm s—" I needed space. I couldn't think with her so close so I bolted before she could finish her sentence, mumbling something about cooking dinner before the other girls came home. Of course, Molly followed me into the kitchen and with her hands on her hips said "What's your problem? I know you liked it, you kissed me back."

I ignored her in favor of grabbing chicken out of the fridge. She snatched the package out of my hand. "This is why I don't mess with straight girls."

"God, you're such a bitch." I grabbed a knife from the drawer closest to me and started dicing onions with way more force than necessary. Not gonna lie, for a second I totally considered cutting her.

"Can you give me two goddamn seconds to figure out what this"—I gestured to the space in between the two of us—"means to me? Give me a fucking break."

"You knew that when you kissed me." Molly looked hard at me for a minute and then spun on her heels without another word. I swallowed back the lump in my throat that threatened tears and kept cooking. I was not going to cry.

The next day I avoided Molly. I was more than a little annoyed after our conversation yesterday but that's not actually why I was avoiding her. I had no idea what she wanted, let alone what I wanted. I mean, we kissed so what did that make us? Friends? Friends with benefits? Girlfriends? Did Molly even want any of that with me? I had no earthly idea, so I avoided her. I woke up at six and hitched a ride with our house manager to the camp. I took the kids to prayer time with Perry the Pirate thirty minutes early just to avoid going to her activity station. I joined the kitchen crew to avoid being on the extended care action team with her. I had my friend Amanda, who lived in Silver Spring, pick me up every day after work and drop me back at the house around one o'clock in the morning when I knew she'd be asleep. I had successfully avoided Molly for an entire week before she kidnapped my Kindle and left a ransom note in its place.

Jay,

You have been a naughty girl!

I had no IDEA my little bookworm was reading such naughty books. ;-)

If you want your Kindle back, stay home today.

-M

I finished reading her note and burst out laughing. Though I wanted to kill her it was such a Molly thing to do that I couldn't help but laugh. She knew me too well. The house emptied as I waited for her to show up. I still couldn't believe that she had taken my Kindle; it was sacred! I started looking around the room for some leverage but the only thing Molly had left in plain sight was her Camp ID badge which wouldn't do me any good.

"Looking for something?" I sighed loudly, hardly upset at being caught but annoyed because I could hear the smugness in Molly's voice. She stood in the doorway in a t-shirt and shorts with hair pulled back in a ponytail; she looked ready for a fight.

"Yeah. My Kindle, have you seen it?" I said accusingly,

standing with my hands on my hips. I couldn't help my tone; I was already on the defensive because talking to Molly was never easy. She tossed the Kindle onto my bed.

"Why have you been avoiding me?"

Molly matched my stance and steeled her face but her tone clued me in: she was hurt. My annoyance deflated. I felt the heavy weight of remorse and an odd sense of relief because Molly actually cared. She seemed so flippant about everything that I had no idea where I stood with her and she walked away from me so easily that I thought she didn't care.

"I'm sorry." I walked over to where she stood and pulled her into a hug. "You're my best friend and I'm sorry I hurt you. I just wasn't sure what to do."

"Am I just your best friend?" Molly took a step out of my arms and looked at me. "This"—she gestured between the two of us—"is up to you. I like you a lot but you have to tell me what you want."

"I'm not sure. I..." I walked over to my bed and sat down. "I don't know what I'm doing or how I'm feeling." Molly moved from the doorway where I'd left her and sat next to me, leaving plenty of space in between us.

"What about when we kissed?" she asked hesitantly, as if she were insecure about her own prowess.

"I liked it but it was sort of an 'oh, shit' kind of moment." The tension left the room. She laughed and I smiled. She put her arm around my shoulders.

"We can work with that."

"So there is a we now, right?" I asked still a tad unsure about what had just happened.

"There was always a we." She clasped my hand. "We'll figure us out together. So no more avoiding me!" she wagged her finger at me.

I laughed and hesitantly kissed her.

We hadn't solved all of our problems but we had a pretty

good start.

Never Again to Neverland

Kailey Rhone

When I was seven, I crossed over into another dimension, a world where the leaves on the trees tickled the highest point in the sky. The roots reached deep into the earth like spindly fingers. Nothing could possibly go wrong in the woods.

“Take off your shoes and come in with me!”

Alexandra was always keener than I was to get dirty. I had my reservations due to the fact that my grandmother was a stickler when it came to mud. I respected her too much to defy her rules. I shook my head at Alexandra’s suggestion, electing to instead crouch beside the stream and examine the little ants that crawled in the dirt.

We had, on numerous occasions, ventured into the woods in the hopes we would see deer or, perhaps, a bear. It was a place wherein anything was possible. It was our Neverland. There was what seemed to be millions of hues in its flora and fauna. There was a wide stream with smooth multicolored rocks at its floor.

When she was bored of stomping through the ankle-deep water we explored deeper into the woods. I remember a narrow pathway with greenery on either side.

“Alexandra, watch out for the poison ivy; my grandma says ‘leaves of three, let them be.’”

“I know what I’m doing!”

But I saw her shin brush against the leaves and I wondered how long it would take before the little red bumps would appear on her skin. We wandered onward, further and further into the woods. The only sounds that could be heard were the chirping of birds and the occasional snap of a twig far off in the distance. As Alexandra continued to hum and walk, I would hesitate behind her, and look around, afraid that the snapping twig signaled the approach of a wild animal. Perhaps, we would see a bear after all.

We came upon a huge rock, and my mind raced to the image of a giant with his face buried in the grass, napping. I only hoped there were no true monsters hiding in our woods. I prayed silently that there were no monsters awake amongst the trees with their teeth and claws bared. As Alexandra tried to climb the rock, I remained silent and tiptoed past.

“Wait! I’m the leader!”

Alexandra hopped away from the giant’s back and sped past me to lead the way. I didn’t mind her enthusiasm to make me the follower; I could see the world around us while she had to find a way through it. However, she soon stopped, and naturally I did as well. Then we heard it in unison, looking at each other with an expression of pure joy.

The creek was obstructed by hanging branches and ample leaves, but we listened and followed the melody of rushing water, like a siren’s song pulling us closer. When we finally saw it, we were ecstatic, so much so that even I took off my shoes as quickly as I could muster, and peeled off my socks, jumping in before Alexandra could even untie her laces.

“Can you touch the bottom?” Alexandra was clearly proud that she could, her hands on her waist in triumph.

“If you can, then I can. We’re the same height.”

“I know. But it doesn’t make sense. I’m older.”

We swam beneath the surface as best as we could in the shallow water. We took turns counting how long the other person could hold her breath, or how many seconds it took to swim from one tree to the other. Outside of the creek we skipped stones and walked barefoot in the mud, delighting as it squished between our toes. My hair began to dry when a third party joined our fun.

He was a spirited golden retriever, puppy paddling to the edge of the creek where he stepped out next to me and shook the water violently from his fur. I was thrilled and simultaneously shocked to be greeted by our new four-legged friend. I knelt down to pet his belly as Alexandra shouted and squealed, still swimming

in the creek.

The splashing stopped after a moment, however, and I looked up from the golden retriever who lay vulnerable in the mud. I watched as Alexandra slowly came out of the water, her gaze directed beyond towards something I could not see from my vantage point. A middle-aged man with charcoal hair speckled with gray, and a pair of square-shaped wire rimmed glasses waded through the creek.

“Well, hey there you two! I see you’ve found my dog.”

Alexandra had made her way next to me, her hand gripping my wrist. I was struck with a sense of unease as the man stepped out of the creek and stood a mere five feet in front of us. Nothing about his appearance made me believe that he would hurt us, in fact he looked quite kind. But I remembered what my mother and grandmother had told me about strangers. No matter how nice they seem, if you don’t know them, don’t talk to them. Judging by the tightening of Alexandra’s hold around my wrist, I assumed her mother had told her something similar.

“What are your names, girls?”

We didn’t respond.

He grinned at both of us, and bending down on his knees he reached out his hand. The dog stepped closer towards him, exalting as his owner scratched beneath his chin.

He was even closer to us now.

“The dog’s name is Nugget if you were wondering.”

I glanced behind me at my shoes and wondered if the bottoms of my feet would be able to withstand sharp rocks and sticks if Alex and I were to run. He must have sensed my panic as he let out a loud laugh, a deep hearty sound that seemed to shake the earth on which we stood. He poked my belly, like my mother had done when she wanted to see me smile.

“There’s no need to worry, girl.”

But the stuttering of my heart told me otherwise. The woods no longer seemed wide and never ending. All at once it closed in on

us. The branches seemed like hands reaching down to grab us. The ground was like quicksand, ready to swallow.

Pulling Alexandra with me, I bolted and picked up my shoes in passing. We ran past the sleeping giant, and past the poison ivy, and the quaint stream. We ran uphill back to my grandmother's house, paying little attention to the rawness of our feet and the pains in our chest from breathing so heavily.

"Who was he?" Alexandra asked, coughing into her arm as her breathing began to regulate. I shook my head.

"I don't know, but he was scary." On this fact, we both agreed.

But there was another shared sentiment. We were in silent agreement that the woods behind my grandmother's house were no longer a magical wonderland. No matter how much we wanted to stomp in the creek or search for deer tracks, we simply could not. The thought of encountering the man who hid behind the trees was enough to make the woods seem more like a trap rather than a place of freedom.

I thought about our Neverland, and the promise it had always held for us. We had certainly shared in an adventure, one that made our hearts quicken and our minds wander with imaginings. The creek had offered a magical escape into daydreams of mermaids and underwater castles. But that man, with a smile that hid something much less kind made us remember villains; The dark and evil monsters that lurk around corners and in the shadows, waiting to pounce and devour us. How does one go back to a place too altered to recognize, though in our hearts the memories of what once was remain? Despite our wishes to feel the thrill of adventure, we never spoke of it again. We let time close the clearing into the woods with overhanging branches and wild plants, and never again returned.

Waterlogged

Madison Gamble

“...and I want to break the women’s 800 free relay record,” I heard myself say. The team sat in a circle on the pool deck. This was the last Saturday practice before the biggest meet of the season, and one by one, we were sharing an individual and team goal for Conference Championships. Joanna, Syd, Shannon, and I had echoed each other. We wanted to break the oldest record on the record board and we wanted to break it in a week.

A few days prior, Syd had sent out a group text message asking that we send our split goals for the relay. When we calculated the total time, it was significantly below the record. All we had to do was trust our conditioning, power through, and I—the anchor—would bring us home.

“Attitude is everything.” “We’re not going to panic.” Coach Jeff’s words from the past few months swirled in my head. No pressure, I thought. *No pressure. You have no idea what to expect. You’re just going to give it all you’ve got. And relax, the meet is still a week away.* At the team meeting, I had ignored my goal time for the 200 free—my favorite and best event—and opted to throw my goal for my least favorite, the 100 free, in front of the group instead. I didn’t want to over-manage my expectations or the expectations of anyone else. Taper was not going well and the last seven months of my sophomore year had been a roller coaster.

First, there had been weight loss after a summer of disordered eating and heavy training, then came suspicion of a chronic illness, an overwhelming academic schedule, intense two-a-day practices, and a confirmed diagnosis in December; my body had been thrown for a loop. Practice and meets were unpredictable—I had good days and bad days.

By the time the training trip came, after relaxing over

Christmas break, my practicing had improved. I felt some of my usual intensity, and I tackled workouts better than I had during the first half of the season. "You look strong," Jeff had said excitedly after pushing me through a tough morning race set. "I think this year is different than last; you're stronger in the second semester whereas last year you came in strong from the start." (Then he threw in his typical "let's keep this rolling.") The previous year, coach had challenged me to see myself as a "champ," someone who could take my solid, aggressive practice performance and translate it into race day results. Jeff was about attitude, emphasizing positivity, mental toughness, and teamwork as the driving forces behind successful swimming. I partially believed him.

By late January, my races were again lacking. We knew it was because I was not feeling well. I had stuck with it though. I had fought through the discomfort and the confusion. And now, I couldn't count myself out. *Remember the good practices, the yardage you completed, the sets you conquered. And that relay record.*

A week later, I sat on my bed staring at the card Sam, another teammate, had just given me during our team's traditional night-before-Champs "secret psyher" gift exchange. Sam and I were very similar: both mathematics majors, honors students, loyal, detail-oriented, driven... and hard on ourselves. "It's finally here," she had written. "This is what we have been working on for countless hours these past six months (and realistically almost ten plus years). And I promise all the hard work and training won't let you down now. You of all people have put all your blood, sweat, and tears and worked through the pain. You own this one, because you have earned it. So go out there, swim fast, and have fun! You only get four of these." She had also made me a "jar of encouragements" with quotes and words of inspiration that resonated with her. I dumped the notes out on my bed. "You are as good as everyone else in the pool. Show them," one said. "Everything holding you back is in your head. Knock down the walls. Let it all go!" Another: "Your

only limit is YOU.”

During swim team bible study the week before, I had told the group that because of my health, I was going into Champs with no idea about how I would swim. My faith had been a major part of my swimming since I had broken my leg in 2010. Knowing prayer was the best way for my college teammates and I to focus our minds on serving Him through competition, I prayed, “No matter what happens, Lord, remind us that we are Yours.” Tonight, sitting in my dorm room alone, I prayed again. *Let the team see You in me. Let them see how You bring good out of all things.*

The Encouragements were scattered all over my comforter like the jumbled mess of jitters and excitement in my head. I knew the notes were just silly clichés, and that He was in control of the outcome, but I read each anyway: “Enjoy the little things. Breakfast, dinner, and time with the team. You never get them back.”

Twelve hours later, we were loading up the bus and heading to Gettysburg College. Thankfully, I was feeling better from the virus I had contracted a few days earlier. Unfortunately for my nerves, however, the only empty seat was close to the front and across the aisle from Jeff. “Ready?” he had asked, smiling in his laid-back way. “Yup,” I said, flashing one back at him. I needed to be positive and that’s what he wanted to see.

My pace work was a little shaky. “You good?” Coach asked. I nodded, trying not to overthink. I could work with it. The stands were filling with eager parents who looked out over a deck littered with kickboards and Gatorade and bodies stirring the waters of two large pools. Smooth jazz music rang through the natatorium. Relax. I was attempting to shake off the disappointing 500 free race I had swam in yesterday’s Championship prelims and warming up for today’s 200 freestyle.

Becca and I would be swimming in the same heat. Her usual energy—earbuds in, singing and bopping her head around—was reassuring and contagious. I followed her up to wait behind the

blocks. I saw my parents in the stands and our teammates lining the pool. *Just like last year.*

When the whistle blew, we stepped up. *Alright, here we go.* I gripped the block with my toes and hovered my arms over the edge in anticipation. The official's voice cut through the stillness. "Take your mark," he said. "Beep!" With one explosive motion, our bodies slid in. I fought to the surface and chugged to the first turn. *This is gonna be a fight.* I sucked in the energy of the room: the cheering, the arms waving us on, the bodies racing on either side of me. Swimming the 200 freestyle requires a certain careful patience. I knew how to hold back a bit and then turn it on. I knew how to build into my pace. But even before the second 100, I could taste the unnerving fatigue. There was no choice—I *had* to conserve energy. Fading through the 150, I could see the other girls pulling farther away. I didn't attempt to chase them down; I didn't even want to. *Keep your eyes in your lane, focus on your finish.* By the last turn, my body had shut down. When my fingers finally struck the touchpad, I peered up at the scoreboard. "2:06.92."—more than 10 seconds slower than my goal time. Weak and dizzy, I leaned my head into the wall.

Pulling myself out of the pool and sinking down onto the bench, I breathed unusually heavy, too numb to be upset. Becca joined me. "Not feeling good?" I shook my head, keeping my gaze on the pool. She understood. As distance swimmers, we trained and raced together. Becca had seen me struggle in practices, at the tough meets. And when no one had asked how I was doing, she always had. "How'd you do?" I finally uttered. Her time was almost a personal best. That meant she had beaten me for the first time in the 200 freestyle, adding to her first-ever 500 free victory over me from the previous day.

I avoided eye contact as I walked pass the team, distracted by embarrassment and the stiffness in my legs. Jeff, as confused as I was, had little to say.

I am not a hugger, but I let my mom hug me hard. I let tears sting my eyes there in the lobby of Gettysburg's athletic complex where family members were congratulating their swimmers with embraces and high fives and laughter. Disappointment and stress were on my dad's face. Throughout the weekend my "I'm sorry" was always returned with "You have nothing to apologize for. There's nothing to be sorry for," but I wanted to make him and Mom proud. I wanted them to see that all the effort, time, and money that went into swimming was worth it. Instead, it seemed like all they had seen these past few years was my hurt or frustration. And they had questioned my decision to stick with it.

Standing there as a freshman, I had cried because my lifetime best 200 freestyle prelim time, 2:01.01, had not been good enough. I had wanted to break at least 2:00.00 and Jeff believed I was capable of a 1:55. Dad, always the one to put things in perspective, and who rarely ever cursed, had pulled me to him and frustrated, said into my ear, "You took off two seconds...that's like two fuckin' body lengths."

Today, he gave me the same tough love. I said, swimming the A 800 free relay that night at finals would be embarrassing and risky. Shannon, Lexi, Kerrin, and I had failed to break the record in 2015, even with my lifetime best split time of 2:00.00. We currently had Joanna and Syd, two fast 200 freestylers, and would lose Shannon, a senior, after the season ended. This year would be the year to break it. Becca, I pointed out, had been swimming well this whole weekend. "Yeah, you have to put Becca in," Dad answered bluntly. Even though I already knew this was true, he might as well have punched me.

After lunch, I curled up on my hotel bed. "Hey Becca, please don't be mad at me for this..." I typed, before explaining that I wanted her to take my spot in the A relay that night, to swim another 200 freestyle even though she hated that event, because it was the only way we would get the record. "I know you can do it," I

told her.

Within minutes, she replied to my text. Saying she loved me and admired how I had pushed through the hardship, that she could never do what I had done this season, she agreed. She wouldn't take being on the relay for granted and she'd give it her best. She even wrote that if they got the record, it would be mine too. I was overwhelmed. In the group chat for the 800 free relay, I let the girls know what I had decided. "I'm too risky right now..." I explained. The messages "love you Maddie" came into my inbox.

I texted the boss last. He learned that I wanted to swim the B Relay in Becca's spot and that the A relay girls were on board. "Yes, that is fine," he sent back.

Jeff climbed up the stairs of the bus. "You're a good teammate, Maddie," he said slowly with pity in his voice, giving me a pat on the shoulder as he took his seat. *Gee that's real comforting.* I stared out the window.

Shannon cruised through her 200 free final, following her 1:57 prelim performance with an impressive 1:56 (only one second off the 200 free team record). I watched her, my training partner, snatch the time I knew I was capable of. She came back and was showered with hugs and "good job's." She was going to send the A relay off in a fast start.

Emma, Jules, Cara and I tackled the B relay later that evening. Cara dove in first, then Jules, then me—posting an even slower time than the one that morning—and finally Emma. After our 8:24 finish, we walked over to lane 2 to cheer the A relay on. The girls were on edge. The room began to buzz.

Shannon started off, smashing another solid 1:56. Our teammates, clad in obnoxious green and yellow from head to toe, stood alongside the competition pool, out cheering the rest of the conference as usual with arms and noise makers waving while our parents echoed them in the stands; adding their own

cheers to the feminine high-pitch noise, the men's relay joined us behind the blocks. Becca was next. I crouched down attempting to grab a better view of the pool between people's legs and to hide the emotion swelling inside me. *But if you're emotional, everyone will feel bad for you, they'll see how great of a sacrifice you made.* I frantically motioned Becca on, throwing myself into cheering. *Stop, this is not about you, this is about them.* Down on my knees, choking on sobs, I yelled, "Go Beccaaaa! C'mon Beccaaa!" She looked good. Shannon, Syd, and Joanna yelled and watched the scoreboard anxiously. Jealousy panged in my stomach. When Becca touched the wall, Syd charged ahead, following her gold medal 50 freestyle performance from yesterday with a fast 200 swim that set Joanna up for a successful final stretch. The room was vibrating with energy, my head throbbing. Part of me was hoping she would mess up. *Slow down, Joanna. I usually beat you.* Everyone was screaming. *They won't really break it, will they?* But we didn't even have to look at the scoreboard when Joanna's eight laps were up. We knew they had broken it. 8.01:52.

The rest was clapping and hugs and smiles and good jobs. I hesitated, absorbing what had just happened. Jules, noticing my struggle, hugged me tight. You're here for them, this is not about you. I hugged and congratulated. "Love you Maddie," Syd and Joanna said. Becca came over and squeezed me. "That was for you, Maddie," she said emotionally. I was crying.

While standing on the edge of the cool down pool, I felt someone grab my head from behind. "Hey, you just keep doing what you're doing," Brad, team captain and the Centennial Conference's star distance swimmer, said into my ear. "You have more heart than anyone else." I gave a quick nod and jumped in, trying to see through goggles filling up with tears, trying not to see the replay in my mind of the 100 freestyle I had just swum. My time had been slower than my 100 freestyle times from middle school. Where I felt that I was working hard and moving quickly through

the water, the other girls kept surging ahead. I had been stuck in slow motion, in another dimension, exhausted halfway through a race that was only four laps. "My body is just done, it's run down," I had said, trying to justify myself to Jeff who had been checking up on my pain level all weekend. "I can't manage my symptoms anymore."

The latter part of the weekend had been full of these out-of-body moments. Staring out over the pool, the fancy technical suits, swimmers dancing with headphones on, the champions celebrating up on the podium, our parents waving big green letters spelling out GREEN TERROR in the stands, I felt distant and out of place. Then we'd huddle up as a team and Jeff would give us a pep talk—his smiling eyes meeting me with that silent *I am proud of you look*—and I'd see my teammates. I'd remember the goals they had set, the fun we had, the sacrifices we made every day, the commitment I had to serving them this year. I'd snap into it. I'd smile, cheer, and ask how their races were going. I'd joke around and find fun in the small moments of the weekend. *Let them see You in me. Right now, your "attitude is everything."*

Three hours after my 100 freestyle, in between Sunday's prelims and finals, I sat in a diner booth with my parents. "Something is very wrong with me," I said with tears in my eyes as the waitress came back to check on us, throwing a concerned look my way. "I can't move in the water, I feel trapped." We knew I needed to get additional medical help after the meet—there was something undiagnosed going on.

My thoughts drifted back to August 2010. I was lying on the ground in agonizing pain, having just crossed the finish line of the Bull Run Invitational cross country race. Powerless, I waited there in a daze until an EMT came to my rescue. "What do you think it could be?" they had questioned, staring at my leg and moving my mangled body onto the stretcher while my family and coach watched in shock.

Several hours later we learned my left femur had broken completely in two. "The pain you were experiencing before running the race must have been a stress fracture," Dr. Tis explained. I had decided to run through the pain.

Although I quickly returned to swimming, the titanium implant impacted my ability to perform. Coach Paul had attempted to comfort me after a disappointing Regional Championships 200 backstroke race, "You're just having some physical problems right now, Maddie." I hated hearing excuses and limiting words like those come from his mouth or mine, race after race. In high school, I yearned for a breakout season, to take my persistent hard work and goals and translate it into fast races like I had done as a dominant eleven and twelve-year-old. I was angry that it seemed people had begun to lose faith in me. And I was losing faith in myself.

In March 2012, the rod implant was removed. I switched swim teams and made improvements in my junior and senior years. During freshman year at McDaniel, I was in the best shape of my life and Jeff had pushed me to tap into that.

I sat in the diner thinking over my swim career. I'd pushed through the ups and downs, but this felt like rock bottom. Amongst bites of mashed potatoes and applesauce, I let myself fully cry for the first time all weekend. "Look, I believe God is using you to reach someone right now," Dad had said after I explained that I had wanted my teammates to see God bring me success after persevering, that I wanted to glorify Him, but I felt they had only seen my struggle and disappointment. "I mean your nickname on the girls' team this year was Wonder Woman, you've started this swim team bible study..." He was right, but I didn't want to believe it.

"I knew this year was going to be hard and different," I admitted. "So I committed myself to serving the team, but..." But, it wasn't good enough. I had wanted success. I had wanted success for *me*.

At finals, we cheered with what voices we still had left. I looked down the row of Terror swimmers, covered in green face paint, temporary Terror tattoos, and dedicated passion. Family. I watched them grab lifetime and season bests. *This is not your time to shine. This is My time to work in and through you.* I hopped in for a quick warm-up and gave the B 400 freestyle relay a final push.

Jeff climbed onto the bus. For the first time ever, our interaction didn't involve swim talk or an awkward conversation. He paused, gave me several fatherly pats on the shoulder, and then addressed the rest of the team celebrating behind me with pizza. I stared out the window into the darkness. Sometimes no words are better than few words.

I'm still sitting in the silence, waterlogged by both hope and anxiety, learning patience. Some days recovering from chronic conditions and health battles seems so close. Other days, I wonder if I will be able to return to competitive swimming after this year as team manager.

But He's the anchor in this relay called life. He's pulling me home. And I'm watching from the sidelines as He does His thing.

A Note on Poetry

What is poetry if not a place where the abstract meets the physical, where thought meets paper, where sound meets the word?

Poetry is not just literature, not just art. Poetry is where our humanity comes closer to the divine, where emotions can run unbound from the physicality of our bodies, where expression meets the limitless.

And yet, historically, poetry has been bound by forms, by rules, by structures created from a desire to control that which can't be controlled. In the end, however, poetry always breaks free from these chains. Time and time again poetry has been caged, and time and time again it has escaped, bringing with it revolution.

So, if poetry is revolution, what is the poet? The poet is the vehicle to revolution. The poet is a warrior: their sword is the pen, their shield is the paper. Their victory comes not from their will to fight but from their will to write.

However, because poetry is boundless, the poet is at the mercy of poetry, and thus the abstract, the divine, continues to win...

Jimmy Calderon

The Bathroom of an Exxon Station Somewhere Between Houston and Denver

Andrew Tyler

Stray squares of paper crawl
Like tumbleweeds across the dusty tile
Beneath the yellow haze of a fluorescent sun.
A hand fumbles across the gallery
Of desperately primal art and poetry
That encases the small, desolate refuge
From the brutality of the sun-scorched pavement stage
Across which he had been condemned to dance.
A pair of hollow, glassy blue eyes
Sink from their stained and rusted reflection,
Beside the Sharpie scribbles of his comrades,
To the sink wherein the convergence
Of the lethargic leak of sulfur-scented water
And the beads of crimson tumbling from his lip
Mimicked the jarabe of tarnished snowflakes
In the gentle ripples of the small Oasis resting
In the spoon
Above the lighter.
Some fat jackass bangs his greasy fist on the door.
“Hurry the fuck up in there!”
Barks a voice left drained and crusted over
By the late August afternoon's ferocity.
“Give me a goddamn minute!”
His voice is shakier than the spoon
In his restless, thirsty hand.
There's a fierce crack

When he finally finishes cooking
And the seat and the rim of the distressed throne
Collide beneath his weight.
Fuckin' tellin' me to hurry up—ha!
The tattered sleeve of a brown leather jacket
Rolls upwards in a hurry.
He's gettin' fuckin' impatient?
The black leather snake at his waist
Slithers free from denim belt loops.
He doesn't even fuckin'—
A silent sting kisses his arm;
His eyes flutter faster than the
Faded fluorescent flicker.
He doesn't even fuckin' know
How slow life can get.

The Effective Prayer

Kajaii Gomez Wick

i am not asking to live happily.
please, god, let me fall sick and die.
let me cough out blood and tar and lungs
spit out my esophagus through my nose
in front of you and everyone to see.
make me the sloppiest filthiest pigdog drunk
on this godforsaken boozehound planet
and the one time i decide to
drive drunk for two miles the same night,
make the most overzealous ugly hideous disgusting
snout-faced pigdog cop decide to take in anyone
he can for a DUI and you know everything else
and please make him stink rancid worse than
me so the smell permeates throughout the
whole drunk tank. god, i am not asking
to live happily, without worry or terror or
pain, to triumph effortlessly while wagner
blares in the background. i do not want parades,
chocolate cake, or cheering crowds.
i know better than to ask any authority for
so much as another sunset. better to lower your
expectations, drop your standards off a howling
cliff, and grin that bitter broken glass grin.
please, god, let me suffer and die.

February Twelfth, Two Thousand Fourteen

Ema Barnes

you laughed at me because i stopped in the middle of rushing cars to rescue a battered woolen glove from the slush. it was wet, soggy and limp, but i felt a little better to lay it next to a lamppost, a tad closer to home.

it took twenty-four hours for you to have me following your every word, watching you to see what made you laugh, learning how to cause that mischievous twinkle in your eye to emerge. somewhere amongst the “good to see you” and the “how was your winter?” a camaraderie emerged; i teased you about your fascinations and you chuckled over my curiosity.

at three am you woke me with a whispered shout and a shake. “come on!” you exclaimed. the sky felt extraterrestrial as you led me by the hand out into the snow and we set off running past the streetlights, your hand the only string binding me to earth.

you caught me smiling as you discoursed about an Egyptian goddess once detailed in a book, as your hands enunciated her words and your eyes accented their meanings. “what?” you asked me. “that’s beautiful,” i said with a shake of my head. “you’re beautiful,” you told me, and i believed it.

you were perhaps the most broken person i had met.

you were so flawed, such a wonderfully imperfect human, with tears in your eyes and flowers in your head and ideas that made the world barely bearable to live in.

february fourteenth, we came together, a meeting of two souls: i slotted my head onto your shoulder and you gripped me as though i were your only tether to the world and we breathed the same air and shared dreams we thought other humans might not hear.

february seventeenth, two thousand and fucking fourteen.

it took you twenty-four hours to age me ten years, to feed me a pill of bitter cynicism that would have bile in my throat for years following, to devastate me to a smiling shell.

now no one remembers you here except me, except me. so sometimes i bring you up to remind everyone that a shooting star once fell here.

Ghosts

Juliette Levchenko

It used to feel wrong,
Walking through a house of ghosts.

The first time, when I came back,
It was winter, and all the trees had lost their leaves,
And his birthday was coming up.

I spat out the thought with my gum, which had turned bitter and
flavorless.

And I opened the door.

The sun had just set, and gold poured in through the windows,
Over the gleaming floors,
And onto the couch.

I dropped my bags.
And I sat down,
Where we used to sit,

Where I'd fall asleep,
To the mindless circles he made up and down my arm.

Pictures of smiling faces coated the walls,
And their consistency should have been a comfort,
But they just seemed to mock me.

As I floated up the stairs,
All I could see
Were empty spaces,

Dripping with memories.

They filled my nostrils with their rotting scent,
And slithered around my brain,
Scratching me with their skeleton fingers.

I looked in my room and I closed my eyes and I hoped they would be quiet.

But I smelled my locket decompose on the nightstand,
And I felt the dresses I wore for him snicker in the back of the closet.

I was haunted.

Not by him.

But by how we used to be.

My bedroom was a graveyard.

But I am strong now.

And my home

Is just a home.

And ghosts are not welcome here anymore.

I-95

Emma Driban

It's a cold winter night,
my breath billowing in little white puffs.
The frigid darkness interrupted only
by the fiery yellow-orange of
eye-like headlights on speeding cars
rushing past me as I head north,
as I head home.

The streaking lights illuminate the web of frost
creeping across my windows.
Quarters rattle in the door,
singing like tone-deaf wind chimes.
Their ignored performance is the sole
sound breaking the eerie silence.
That, and the gentle hush of snow
dancing across the windshield,
across the Susquehanna River,
across the nearly deserted highway. I-95.

Alone, kept company by a cup of coffee, slowly
chilling
in the cup holder by my knee.
Where I am going there will be light and laughter.
For now,
the lone thing filling the empty space
is a scent,
linens and lavender,
sailing through the air from a clip on the vent.

A warmth spreads through me
as I turn up the heat
and think of home.

I shimmy out of my coat and scarf,
crack my back and stretch out my legs.

I have come a long way, still miles from home.

Imprinting

Samantha Wilson

words were only as comforting as the immobile, steel chair I sat on,
lovingly,
desperately stroking the
delicate skin of the knuckle
of your thumb,
attempting to memorize the sensation of your skin under mine
to last me a lifetime...

how romantic, I thought, watching the dust particles float through the
sunshine, landing on your cheekbone,
illuminating that mole I always wondered if
you were self-conscious of.

watching the dust float around as aimlessly as
your life had now been rendered,
I listened to the lifeless ping and the
stagnant exhalation and artificial inhalation
and the beating of my own heart,
pounding twice as hard
in a futile attempt to sustain both you and me.

why is your skin so soft?
is it because of the babies you have held,
the sweetpea lotion you used,
why?
“hold her hand, keep her warm,”
the nurse encouraged,
as her rose acrylics clicked against the tubes and keyboard
on your other side,

your mother fell into deep
resounding sobs
echoing in the depths of the
cavern which my body had become
and your hand,
soft and numb and barren in my own,
has never let me go.

That calls itself my
Stomach grows in protest.

A sigh.
Can't take it anymore.
Crawl across the room —
Twisting through the dark,
Hoping not to be heard,
Heading for the kitchen.

At last!
Fingers grasp the handle
To the charcoal kitchen
Kneel on the pottery.
Weak and empty yet giddy
From the prospect of food.

A pause.
Is it worth it? Yes, far too
Hungry to think otherwise.
Grabbing the first thing in sight —
Jar of cookies. The first one goes
Down slowly, the flavor savoring.

Not anymore.
Faster and faster the cookies

Licorice

Tyler Van Dyke

Today I finished
your licorice—
ink-black candy,
staining tongue and teeth,
writing a pungent aftertaste that
feels like driving away
from a rainy airport
with the radio

off.

Midnight Race

Marya Topina

Can't sleep.
Eyes open, searching,
Hands clenching the
Sheets. Hollow core
That calls itself my
Stomach growls in protest.

A sigh.
Can't take it anymore.
Creep across the room—
Fumbling through the dark,
Hoping not to be heard,
Heading for the kitchen.

At last!
Fingers grasp the handle
To the glorious kingdom
Known as the pantry.
Weak and dizzy, yet giddy
From the prospect of food.

A pause.
Is it worth it? Yes, far too
Hungry to think otherwise.
Grabbing the first thing in sight—
Jar of cookies. The first one goes
Down slowly, the flavor savored.

Not anymore.
Faster and faster, the cookies

Are stuffed into my mouth and
Forced down my throat. No longer
Appreciating the taste, it's simply
A race to eat them all.

What's next?

The empty cookie jar discarded,
My eager hands reach for another
Victim—the peanut butter. One finger
Delicately dips into the paste and
Comes back to the awaiting tongue.

Another race.

Soon whole handfuls of the stuff
Are being consumed—no notion of
Using a spoon even considered.
As quickly as possible, the
Container is picked clean.

Oh no—

Sickening feeling as the
Realization of this grotesque act
Hits home—I'm a pig! Stumbling
Through the dark once again,
No worries about being heard this time.

A purge.

Coughing, hacking, clutching
The toilet as the entire binge
Is forced back up. Reaching into
My throat, not satisfied
Until blood speckles the floor.

It's gone.

All the disgusting sweets are
Finally out of my body. Exhausted,
But no longer frantic, stumble back
To bed and collapse, realizing that this
Will be the routine for the rest of my life.

Muffled Static

Zoie McNeill

You were sobbing on the phone
The night that you were counting down from 10
With a gun in your hand.
You told me that it was your grandfather's gun.
I didn't know that you even knew how to hold a gun.

You said that it was at your temple,
And that in
10, 9, 8...
You would shoot.
I didn't know that you even knew how to shoot a gun.

7, 6, 5...
I didn't know what to do.
We were engaged to be married soon,
I was wearing the pretty diamond ring that you
Gave to me on Halloween.

4, 3, 2...
And yet,
We were separated by the muffle and static
Of a telephone and a hundred miles
Of Mountains.

No Flames in the Furnace

Emma Driban

My pilot light is cold.

The furnace in my chest lacks flames.

No spark comes along to ignite my heart.

The match won't be struck that chases away the darkness,

That chases away the monsters,

That chases away the loneliness.

In the house that is my body, the attic is too full

to allow the fireplace to light up the walls.

The room remains a shell of what could be.

Cold. Dark. Empty.

The repair man never showed up.

Never fixed the broken pipes to let the blood flow through.

Never fixed the hollow vents to let my heartbeat spread

in the air and warm the icy bones of my

vacant fingertips.

All of the hands never held, the lips never kissed

flash through my mind.

They're painted on canvas and thrown in the trash

to spare myself the unbearable pain of knowing

I am incapable of capturing their beautiful art.

Unable to spin the softest silk that even

the heartless spider creates without difficulty.

It's too easy for me to separate myself,

remain unmoving and unfeeling,

So much simpler to abandon the ancient wires,

leaving them to rot in the walls covered in cobweb,

their frayed ends stretching like fingers,

reaching for connections that never existed.

I prefer the quiet solitude. Just me and myself.

Alone. Distant. Frigid.

Contained to the yawning rooms
that stand deserted behind barred doors.
So when people ask why they find me on my own,
Why I lock myself away,
Why I'm always so emotionless,
I just look at them and say,
My pilot light is cold.

Promiscuity

Jimmy Calderon

Let me touch you with those...

Fingers that travel down your back
And have brought pleasure in other days,

And let me guide them to the places
Where you enjoy the most.

Allow them to bring back the memories of
Better times.

Let them guide you into an ecstasy of the past.
Walk with them and feel every sensation
And every moment of pleasure they bring,

To you.

Let me travel through your head,
With hands that know how to pleasure a man,
The hands that glide through locks of hair,
And other places,
More difficult to navigate
But that bring a greater reward.

Don't let go of them,
Not for a second,
For they are not leaving so easily:
Don't force them to leave.
Don't force them to stay;

Let them be and they will work you just fine.

Let me touch your...
Charming skin with my lips.

And let me guide them to the place
You enjoy the most...

Up high and down below
An ecstasy of the touching
Hands all around the nips
Of wild flowers and cotton
Balls floating in the air...
Gracefully touching the stem
Of the flower in bloom,
As it explodes,
As it releases the white
Spores of bittersweet and times
When we used to smile,
Together.

And as I once kiss you again,
With lips of poison,
Let the flashbacks overwhelm your brain
And the senses take control of your body.
Be one with the experience.

Let me once again be...
Yours and yours only.

And let me do the things that once
We did in rooms prohibited.
Allow me to show you how much I've grown,
How much I've learned,
How much I've yearned your touch.
You have gone and I have stayed.
You have gone and I have learned.
You have gone and I have grown.
Let me show you now.

Let me remind you of what you left behind.
And let me make you fall in love again—
Even if you never once fell for me.

Let me enter once again,
And let a new adventure unfold.
Two bodies that become one are
Doomed to come back together,
Even when they separate;
Let us return to a oneness of the body.

I have let you enter me before,
And once again I let you in.
Now I ask of you to let me inside...

Your heart.

Let us dance once again
The horizontal dance, a dance of fusion
To become complete.

And if you're not...

Let me guide you back inside me.
Allow me to show you what you once did before.
Let's bring the memories and the sensations,
Together.

And if you will...

Let's be one again.

But if you don't...

Let's just fuck.

Shhh

Marya Topina

Shhh

The match strikes the box,
A flaring wisp of flame appears,
Seeming to breathe as it grows.

The tiny flash of fire latches
Onto a candle, mesmerizing
And enchanting. I lean in,
Closely watching those
Flick'ring flames, singeing my breath.

Shhh

Speaking to each other as they
Send out probing tendrils—
Searing flames char the edges of my soul.

Illuminating the pale expanse of my mind,
The glow dances with a life of its own.
Reaching out, grasping the warmth,
I melt away those hurtful thoughts
That coat my surface.

Shhh

I hush my quick gasp of pain
As I feel the heat morph, blister into a cool outer
Shell, protecting from future attacks.

A smile, a dry, wry laugh.
The beauty of fire makes itself clear.
This destructive blaze has

Done its job well—healing my mind,
It's no longer required.

Shhh
A traveling sigh murders
Those once graceful dancers,
Now flying away as smoldering ribbons of smoke.

Shots

Kyle Granger

She fills me up
and stares at me
like a blank page
at the start of a paper.
Her eyes linger and her fists
clench, preparing to bring
me to her lips and take
every ounce of me away.

When she is finished,
I am as empty
as she is.
She's been hunting for clarity,
but I'm not the kind of clear
that opens your eyes.

She fills me up
With the tears that once soaked her face
only to suck them back down
her burning throat
so she can sob once again,
and her tears are eighty-proof.

I am every broken
promise, every lie
he's ever spoken and she's choking
me down
to forget every time
her trust was betrayed.

I only make it worse.
I want nothing
more than to help her forget,
but the more she suffocates
herself with me,
the more the memories burn.

But by now she has no control
under the influence
of my distilled contents.
She begs me to ease
her suffering, but I
am just another chapter of her tragedy.

Silvertongue Soul

Maurice Hargrave

I need you.

I need you like the sky
needs the ocean
when the sun is setting it ablaze
for keeping it up too long;

you save me
over and over,
you turn my tears into monsoons
that could drown all the broken souls
and make them new again;

you big beautiful ugly mess
of emotions, and memories,
and dreams, and heartbreaks,
and breakthroughs, and breakups;
you hold universes
in the content of your chaos;

I need you,
my sweet release;
the way you put my mind at ease,
you are the bringer of peace
in my life; oh
what would my life be
if I could not spill this ink!

Sparkplug

Maurice Hargrave

When I get low,
I like to watch the lights,
those lost ones
that litter the streets
of ghost towns
on restless nights, just like this one,

twisting and bending
through naked branches
and orphaned windows made of fog,
giving their best impression
of what beauty might look like,

so free I can't believe it;
every time I see it
my soul gets a little less dim.
I guess that's where they hide the fire.

St. Martin's Church, Szombathely

Stefan Specian

interloper in a foreign land, trespasser
on hallowed holy ground, I gazed
upon moss covered graves and tombs,
and in silence searched for peace.

ivy that grows from mausoleum roofs—
inside sits a vagrant's half eaten food
as autumn's vocal birds chirp and sing,
soon to hide from winter's chill.

in word and granite, memorialized
bodies, ancient when compared to mine,
with names in tongues I cannot speak;
their lives forever unknown to me.

the last burnt candles of All-Saints
toppled and broken on the brown grass;
how beautiful our remembrance is,
and how quickly it fades into the past.

a train squeals into the station behind
as an old lady and son kneel quietly, near
the drizzling rain falls on my naked head,
as if to tell me that I belong not here.

so past the monument of Christ I go,
down the well trodden gravel road,
for it is fated destiny I now know,
for them to stay, for me to go.

En el teocalli de la ciudad de Baltimore

Veronica Johns

"La mejor ciudad en los Estados Unidos"
Ahora contiene tiendas destruidas.
En un tiempo unida por fútbol americano,
ahora está infestada por hechos inhumanos.

El naranja y morado de las camisetas
Cambió a piel azul y negra.
Las luces como estrellas que iluminaban a la noche
Se convirtieron en el fuego que rabia en los coches.

Nunca sabrá la posteridad
de la violencia hacia inocentes y falta de libertad,
o el miedo de ir de compras en la luz de la mañana,
o decir adiós a la gente. ¿Papá quién protege a las ciudadanas?

Pero también nunca sabrán
de la fuerza y la oración,
o la unidad de la policía, la iglesia y la gente
a través de la nación.

Nos dieron sus recursos y su amor
Y como a un bebé nos alimentaron a salud.
Tan afortunados son los niños del futuro
Que vivirán en esta América durante su juventud.

The Riots in Baltimore

(Translation of En el teocalli de la ciudad de Baltimore)

Veronica Johns

“The greatest city in America,”
Now filled with destroyed shops.
At one time united by football,
Now infested with inhuman acts of violence.

The orange and the purple of the t-shirts,
Changed to skin of blue and black.
The lights that illuminate the city like stars in the night,
Changed to the fires that rage in the cars.

Children of the future will never know
Of the violence toward the innocent and the absence of liberty,
Or the fear to go shopping, even in the daylight,
Or to say goodbye to your father, a police officer who protects the city.

But they will also never know
Of the strength and the prayer,
Or the unity of police, churches, and people
Across the nation.

They gave us their resources and their love,
And like babies nursed us back to health.
How lucky are the children of the future
That they will spend their adolescence living in this America.

Para leerse con un espejo

Jimmy Calderon

Para leerse con un espejo
en dimensiones barata,
con manos apietas,
y ojos caídos;

que los recojan los cretinos,
y los cocine la apreta,
(que se siente sola)
que se siente sola);

sola está ella,
allá en la llanura,

la llave de la lluvia,
la lluvia de la nube cae,
y se caen los ojos,
como se cae la lluvia,
y la apreta;

se cae y se calla,
callarse es dormirse,
y dormirse es caerse;

se caen los ojos,
en las manos apietas,
y se llenan de llanto,
de los ojos,
de las manos;

y en la otra,
la apreta sostiene,
sostiene la lluvia,
y se siente sola,
y se siente sola,
se ve en el espejo;

y se ve sola,
y lee el poema,
para leerse con un espejo.

To be Read with a Mirror

(Translation of Para leerse con un espejo)

Jimmy Calderon

to be read with a mirror,
in parallel dimensions,
with hands that now welcome,
and eyes that have fallen;

that they be picked by the crows,
and be cooked by the elder,
(she now sits alone,
she now feels alone);

lonely she is now,
over there in the valley;

the vault of the winds,
and the winds of the winter,
and the fallen eyes,
like the winds that have fallen,
and the elder;

she falls and she's silence,
to not speak is to sleep,
and to sleep is to fall;

the eyes that fall,
in the hands that now welcome,
and they fill them with sorrows,
of the eyes,
of the hands;

and in the other,
the elder sustains,
the winds of the winter,
and she feels alone,
and she sits alone,
and she looks in the mirror;

and she seems alone,
and she reads the poem,
to be read with a mirror.

Tuesday Night Blues

Andrew Tyler

Tuesday night in some jazz club: talk of gods
And anarchism, vermouth and soda
(Cognac, if we meet our ticket quota),
Dimes of the shit that bought Parker's first jobs.
The brittle beats of Ben's brushes beckon
Kat's gut-string grooves to growl like the storm
Of my steady strumming, strong and slick, and
Jay screaming poetry into his horn.
This time feels like the thousandth fucking time
I'm scuttling out, up only a dime.
"Your shit was prime!" a drunken chorus chimes.
Thanks, I guess, but my bills are still behind.
But hell, I'd stake my soul on any note
It'll give me, until wayward it floats.

We Are Not OK

Darby Bortz

We are born of blood
And of pain
The sweet carnality
Which writhes and breathes
In the spirits of the mortal
Holds immense power

Yet, it also breeds fear

Sins of the flesh
Dark and beautiful
Are consistently corrupted
By those who choose
To use it as a weapon
As a threat

We pray that we never
Become the statistic
One in Five
One in Five
One in Five
When did this mantra
become justified?

Why do our nightmares consist
of walking alone at night?

My mother
A victim of jealousy
Her body beaten so brutally

That even now
Decades later
Bruises swim
Beneath the skin
But not so invisible
That her daughter
Can't see

My friend
A victim of appetite
Her body seized
Our collective nightmare realized
In its horrific entirety
The truth of her story
Questioned by
Her.
Supposed.
Protectors.

My lover
A victim of abuse
Her eyes now betray
That which she does not
Have the strength to say
I fear I cannot protect her
From the nightmare
From herself
I fear I will awake one day
To find that she
Has gone away

Their voices have gone quiet
Their silence has meaning
We are not OK.

When The Spider Caught the Fly

Jazzy Williams-Smith

She was the first of three,
The one forgotten
The one
Too old for coddling,
But too good for attention.
She wasn't bratty,
Or needy
She was
Just there.
She got tired
Of being
Ignored,
Of being
The wallflower
Cemented in a corner,
Sporadically watered,
By strangers,
But never by those
Who promised to care.
Family was just a word
with no evidence.

The spider saw her ache.
He trapped her,
Wrapped her
In pretenses of love and affection.
Suffocated her
With his fist and vicious words.

He isolated his prey
From all she
Had ever known.
His eight legs,
Snugly ensnared her
In his web
Where his venom
Paralyzed her
In fear and worthlessness.
But he didn't kill her.
That's not how the game
ends.
He was just playing
with his food.

He let her go,
But only long enough
For her to think
She was
Free.
And then,
When she felt
Safe
And got
Comfortable
He took his
Favorite snack
Back again.
But she could only take
So much
Before
She remembered,
The only thing
She had left.

The only thing
He couldn't
Take from her:
Her will to
Live.

Her funeral was small,
The service unremarkable,
She was,
After all,
Just a wallflower.
No one paid much mind
To the blood red
Sleeves,
Just long enough
To cover the
Sliced skin
On both wrists.

She was the oldest of three,
Her name chiseled
In granite.
A child of only 16
Too young to die
Too broken to live.
A cautionary tale
Of what happens
When a
Spider catches
A fly.

While Sparrows Watch

Marilyn Hanchett

Dark-eyed juncos descend
in tumbling snow,
charcoal shadows smudging
a winter white canvas.
They claim sleeted remnants
of vanishing grass
with seed-scattering dance,
while on ice brittle branches
hungry sparrows watch.

why i am not a christian

Kaijaili Gomez Wick

because i have never been in a church except to gaze at it with the eye of an art museum connoisseur, a child skeptical of the tarred canvas; because i have prayed exactly twice in my life and both times it was as stupid as shouting at a wall; because the ambassadors to this faith are white men in clean pressed salmon red suits with smiles made of stale coleslaw and eyes like cannibal car salesmen; because i do not consent to anyone, much less a man i've never met running around offering forgiveness to those who have wronged me; because if i want to eat flesh and drink blood i prefer them to have a great deal more salt and tendon and muscle to them, to be satisfying to shred with my teeth; because i love the red scream and red lights and red sparks behind my eyes when i come hard to the filthiest delights the internet and my own dreams have to offer and i will never feel guilty for a single second over any sex i have; because women have always been my first love, not any crucified man; because i prefer my politicians to snort their cocaine off the asses of their sex workers without shame; because i love the primal rush from the old dark pagan rituals, the dancing around a bonfire, the gush from a goat's throat, the sweet smoke from sage as you purify your house; because you say this and i say why; because i take nothing on faith; because if there is anything or anyone who indeed created the universe then he can shut his mouth and meet me after dark in the world's most isolated walmart parking lot so i can splinter his jaw under my holy fist because fuck you, creator of all; because if your greatest offer is 'believe what we say or you will be thrown into a tornado, turned into a tree or eaten in an arctic apocalypse', then i will laugh and slam my door on you; because your scam artists are hideous in their eggshell suits and gold rolls-royces;

because my mother raised me with a pointed silence and smile
so my beliefs would be meaningful and not another thing to inherit
in her will; because i will not follow any prophet i cannot meet
and witness myself; because every time i have even driven past
a church, the hairs on my neck stood up high and my heart
beat like i just saw a rabid dog far off in the distance; because
you plural you yes you do not want me, you do not welcome me,
and i will not be the arm's length black sheep of more than even
one family; because protestant churches smell like dentists' offices.

A Note on Art

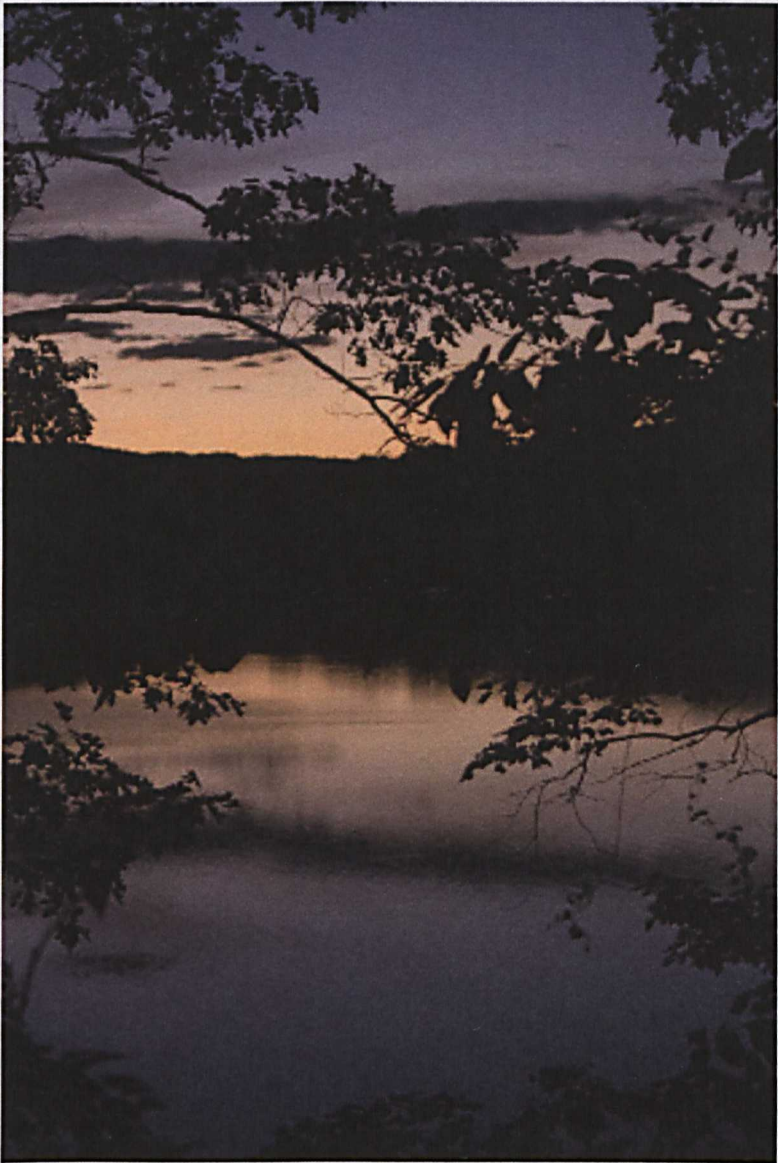
Never particularly skilled in any visual medium myself, I used to take issue with the idea that pictures having a thousand words. I am often guilty of moving too fast to stop and appreciate art, but within these pages come snapshots into other worlds that show a scene of life's story.

Art reminds us that while we are all islands, we might not necessarily be alone; there's always a connection to be made within and there's an opinion to be had. Most importantly, visual media always captures or elicits some form of emotion.

Emma Barnes

Days End

Delaney Roper



Even a Butterfly Must Wait

Delaney Roper



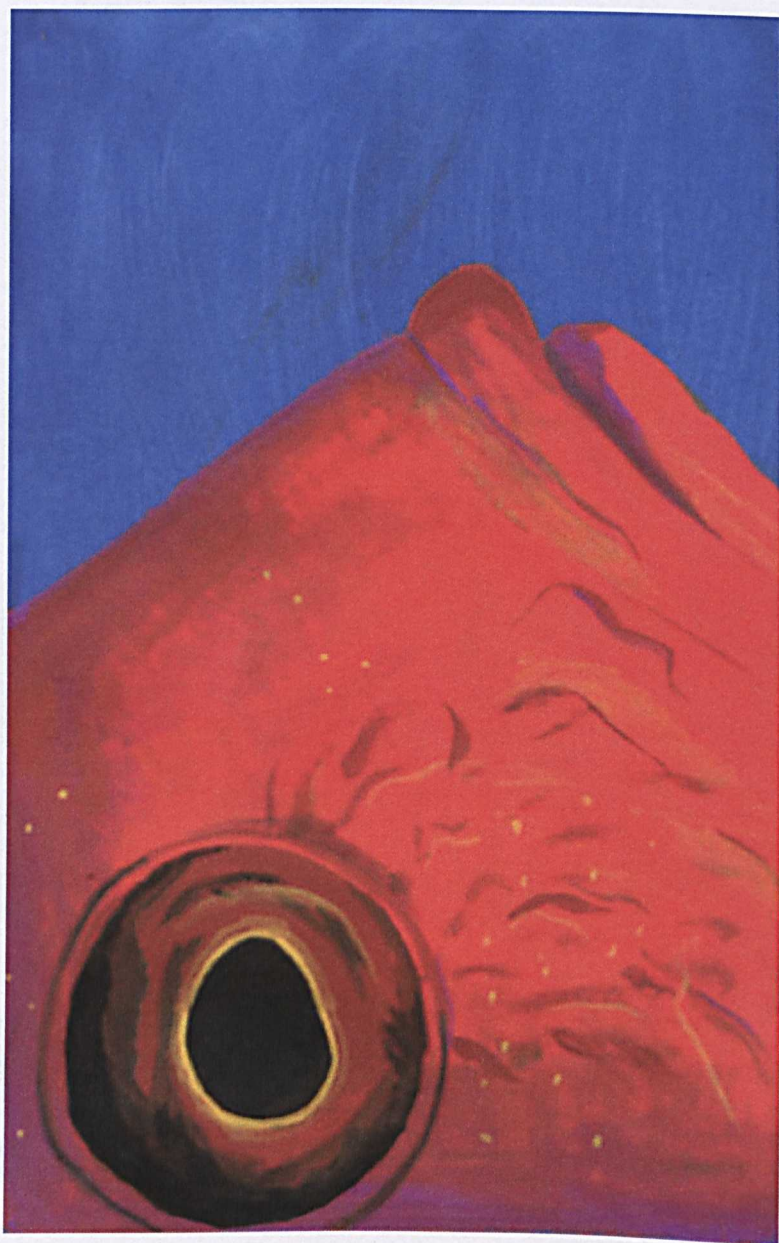
Ferris Wheel

Mei-Le Apalucci



Fish-Eye View

Rachel Sentz



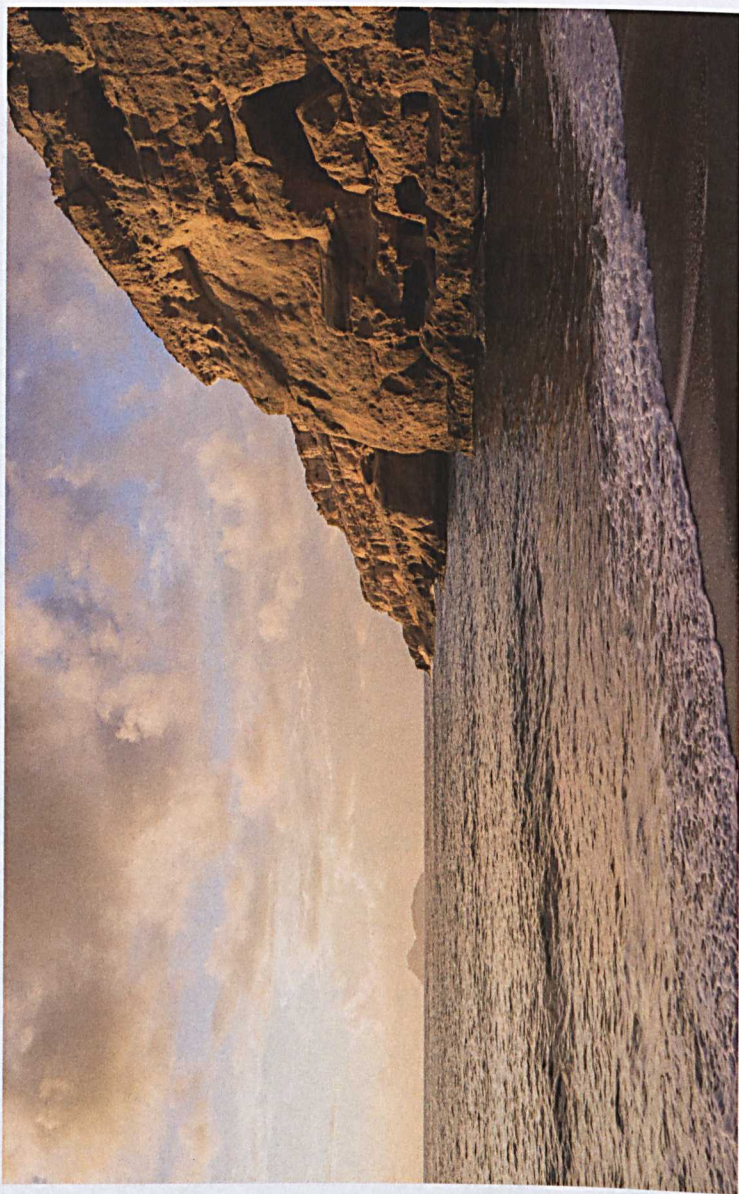
Golden Years (Daisy 2001-2017)

Kyle Parks



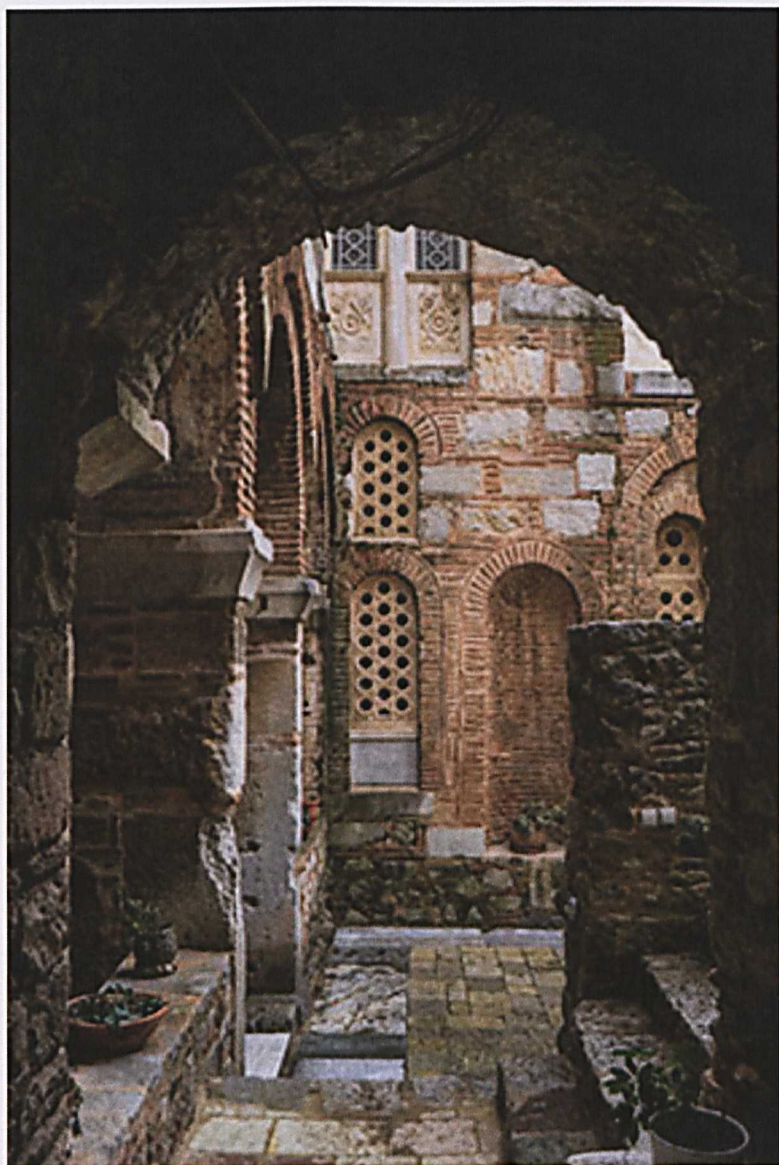
Matala Beach

Kyle Parks



Monastery of Hosios Loukas

Kyle Parks



Precision

Samantha Wilson



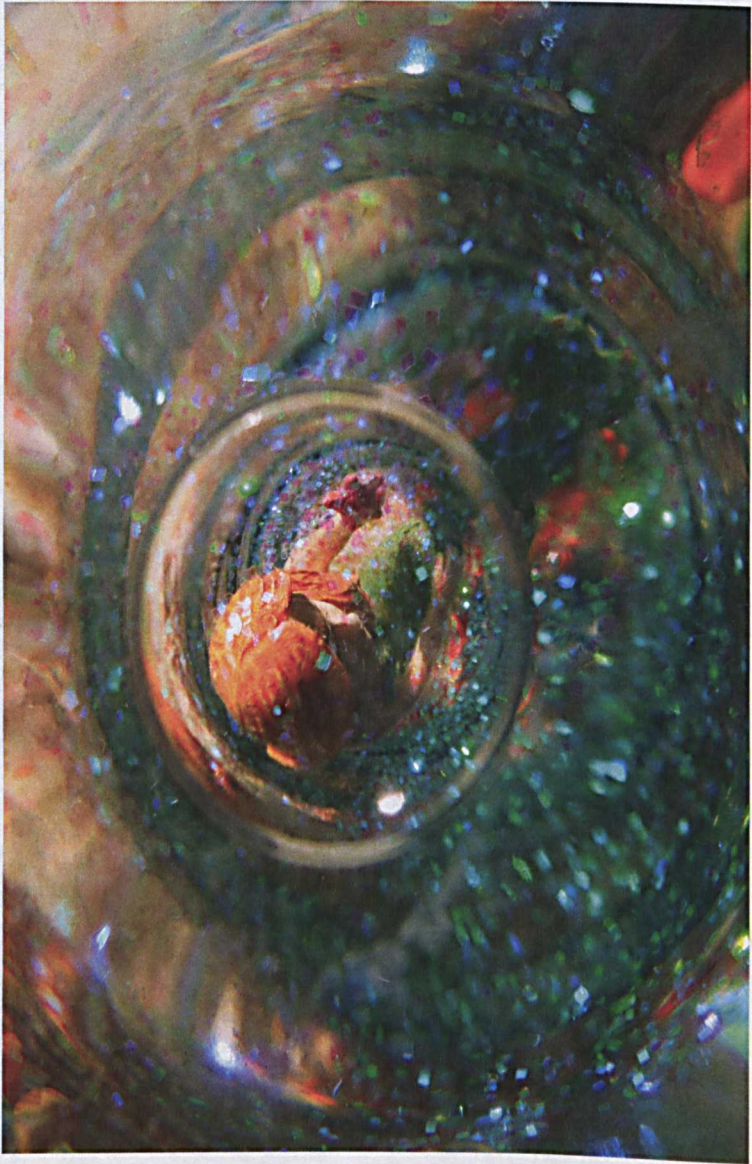
Run Away

Mei-Le Apalucci



Sea Vortex

Rachel Sentz



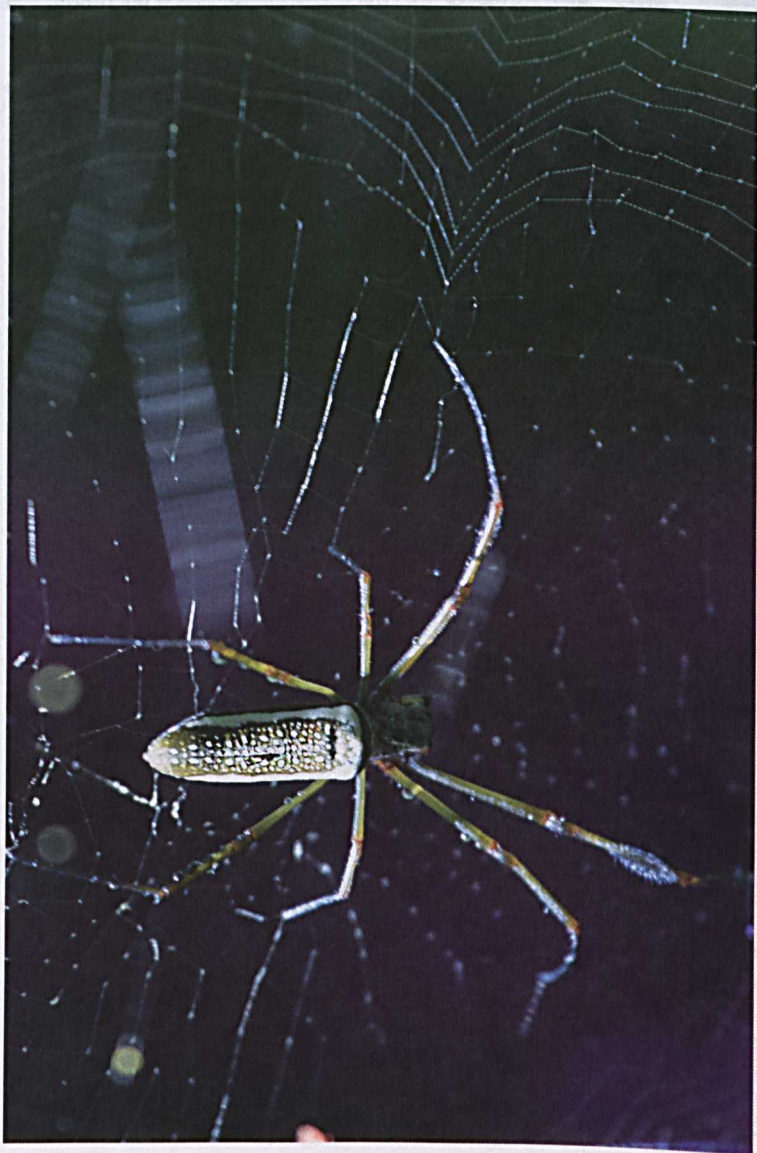
Set the Tone

Dylan Brown



Sorry, Pardon Me, Didn't See Ya There

Samantha Wilson



The Snowy Walk Home

Dylan Brown



Time Resists Passing; Light Moves On

Jimmy Calderon



Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

Ema Barnes



Dedication

As writers, it was a challenge to put into words the virtues of Dr. Kate Dobson. As a professor, she has continuously pushed her students outside of their comfort zones, perceiving their potential and guiding them in the direction of greatness. As the advisor for *Contrast Literary Magazine*, she has nurtured it and has sustained its legacy within the McDaniel Community.

Her professional roles aside, Dr. Kate Dobson has proven herself to be an ally to all students, an irreplaceable friend, and an intelligent and eloquent individual who has enriched the McDaniel English Department. As we, the four editors of the 2016-2017 edition of *Contrast*, near the end of our time in college, we fondly dedicate this year's magazine to Dr. Kate Dobson.

We appreciate you, we love you, and we will miss you,

Ema, Kailey, Jimmy, and Jazzy

The End



Contrast Literary Magazine Team, 2016-2017
Thank you!

