

Contrast

Literary Magazine



**Contrast
Literary
Magazine**

Contrast Literary Magazine

McDaniel College
2019

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3rd	<i>You'll Love Your First Job</i> by Kaylan Hutchison	37

"And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt."

—Sylvia Plath

Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

Great writers have always talked of the therapeutic nature of writing. Writing lets us express things that would be strange to bring up in day to day conversation. It lets us stare into our own minds and pull at the seams of our thoughts until there is enough string to spin a yarn. Untold stories weigh on us. That is the purpose for *Contrast*. This collection is meant to take on some of the strain, let each reader shoulder some of that weight. It is a place for creative minds to share their stories, spread their message, or breathe life into fiction.

This year, our goal with *Contrast* was to provide a space where writers felt comfortable sharing their pieces. In the fall, we encouraged people to take risks and try writing something new or out of their comfort zone at our weekly writing workshops. It is so important to be experimental in your writing without judging yourself too harshly and we wanted to share that sentiment with our peers.

Let the words you find written in this book inspire you to try something new. Write something you've been too nervous to put down on paper. Trust me, I know it's difficult, but give it a shot.

Finally, I want to thank you for picking up *Contrast*, whether you're reading it out of curiosity, loyalty to a friend, or what have you. Take the time to appreciate the works between these covers because each writer has put a bit of their soul into each page.

As Mary Shelley said, "my swelling heart involuntarily pours itself out thus."

With hope,

Emma Driban, co-editor-in-chief

Editor's Note

"The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all." —T.S. Eliot

Thank you for exploring this issue of *Contrast*. The authors and artists represented in this literary magazine have worked hard to share intimate parts of themselves and their view of the world. They have made themselves vulnerable and entrusted us with their creative work, and we have, in turn, devoted ourselves to representing it in the best possible light. We hope you enjoy experiencing and relating to the emotions these students have chosen to share, no matter how positive, painful, or challenging.

It's important for everyone to have such a creative, cathartic outlet for emotion. In the fall, Emma and I held *Contrast's* first-ever weekly writing workshops for creative minds on campus to collaborate together. We wanted to provide a comfortable space for students to find inspiration for new projects, work on existing drafts, and share completed poems and short stories for feedback from the group. Together, we have laughed, cried, and lived through each imaginable feeling. Many of the published works you now hold in this magazine grew from those workshops.

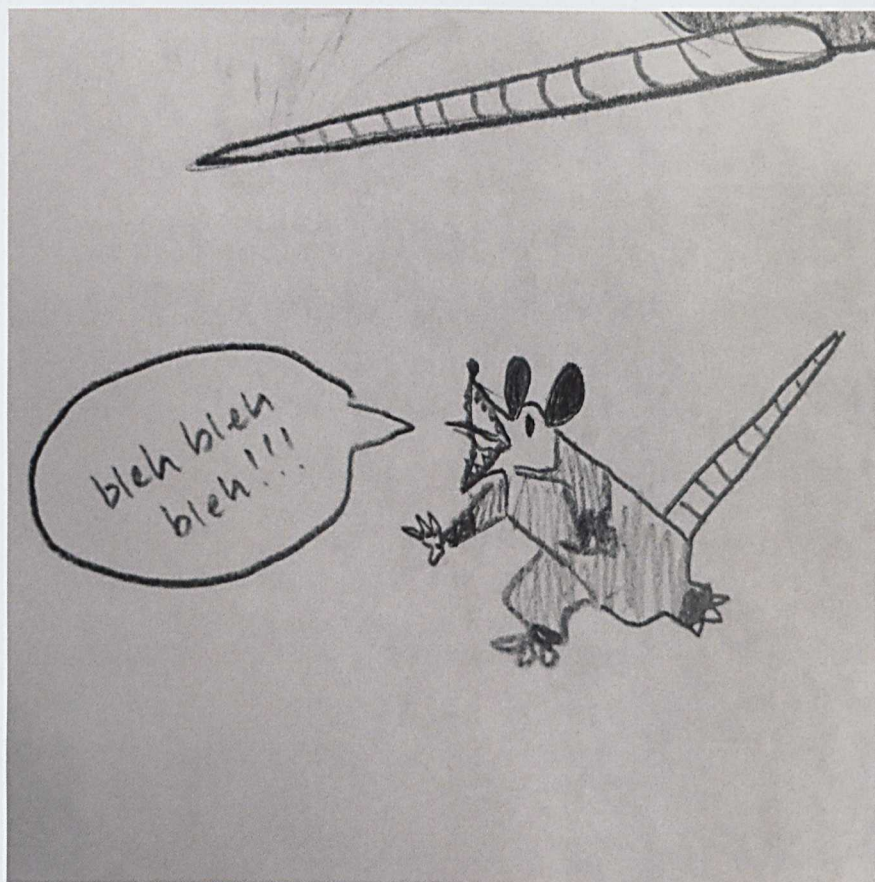
It is with great humility and joy that we now present the 2019 issue of McDaniel's literary magazine. We encourage you to take the time to view each piece and embrace the emotion behind it. After all, to feel is to be human.

—Marya Kuratova, co-editor-in-chief

The Terror of Man

Lauren Beckjord

1st Place Art



Novelty Pens

Lucas Craig

2nd Place Prose

It began with a phone call. A number he found scribbled neatly on an index card, half buried in the red mulch lining his garden. A most unusual sales tactic.

David resisted the temptation to call this number for all of forty minutes. He spent that time pacing in his kitchen, occasionally pausing to inspect a leaky faucet he'd surely get around to fixing, and contemplating whether this was something he would share with his wife. She did love a good mystery—she was the only person David knew whose favorite board game was adapted into her favorite movie. And over the years (four to be exact—that's one dating and three married) David and Kelly had solved many mysteries together. The mystery of whose pool they repeatedly trespassed for a midnight swim. The mystery of which of their asshole neighbors (her words, not his) called animal control on their basset hound, Clouseau. No case was too tough to crack in their capable hands. And he knew that Kelly would absolutely love to investigate the case of the enigmatic index card. But she wouldn't be home for another week. She was in London—business—and David reasoned that even if he could wait that long, the moronic salesman that'd no doubt answer the phone wouldn't be worth the wait. For him, for Kelly, or for the salesman. That's the problem with mysteries. The answers are always as disappointing as the questions are frustrating. *I'll just fix the fucking sink*, he thought.

He waited through five rings before the call went to voicemail.

Yo! You've reached Britt Hawthorne. I can't answer the phone right now, obviously. Leave a message or call me back some other time. Or, you know, text me like a normal person.

She sounded young, maybe early 20s. Unburdened by experience. Her voice was deep and slightly raspy. Maybe she was a smoker. Her tone was conversational, but there was a sultry quality to the way she emphasized words like "normal" and

"obviously." The phone beeped, and David was left with its silent expectations. He hung up.

David spent the rest of the day imagining Britt Hawthorne. Her face, her legs, her breasts, her ass. What she wore, what she studied in school, who her friends were and who they thought she was. All of the events in her life that led her to becoming secretly infatuated with David, the burning desire that forced her to plant that index card in the mulch. He jerked off that night thinking about the identity he had spent the day constructing. "Fuck me harder, *obviously*," she would say.

Thoughts of Britt had not dissipated from David's sleep-deprived mind the following morning. In the early hours of the day, barely a thought ever penetrated his brain beyond the instinctual, the reptilian. Shower, coffee, eggs, teeth—each action dominoing into the next. Before 9 a.m., David was not a man, but a mechanism powered by a primordial routine. So what was so intoxicating about the 23-year-old smoking graduate student that caused David to spill coffee all over his suit?

When he arrived at the office, it registered to no one that he was twenty minutes late. Work had always been an exciting prospect and a dull affair. When David was young, his father would only let him stay up to watch TV if he was watching sports or the news. It seemed now that David's entire career as a journalist hinged on his lifelong antipathy to televised sports.

David was the youngest editor working for *The Sun* by about fifteen years—a fresh face in a dying medium. He spent most of his days typing notes into the dull pages of gray writers. The age demographic of *The Sun's* writing staff and people who still read newspapers were equally specific.

During his lunch break, David took the time to call his wife. But as soon as he heard her adenoidal voice, he felt a tinge of regret. A part of him, he realized with disgust, had hoped to hear the voice of some British man, maybe breathing heavily, answer with a senseless "Hello?" that was not his place to give. Kelly would snatch the phone hastily from his sweaty palm. She would start to give some lame half-assed excuse before breaking down in tears.

She would apologize profusely and beg his forgiveness, and he would hang up without a word. Alas, David was greeted with nothing but a loving wife.

Kelly did not wait for David to finish saying his own pointless "Hello?" before launching into a long-winded story about a man on a train who she swore looked exactly like a modern day Jack the Ripper, what with his deerstalker hat and creepy trench coat (seriously, who wears a trench coat in May?) and this weird way he had of sitting, all hunched over. David listened with interest. He loved his wife's stories. Even when they were rambling and confusing and nonsensical, she told them with a confidence David could never seem to muster. Every character had their own unique voice, and in the story of the man who looked like Jack the Ripper, each voice seemed to be a variation of 'terrible British accent,' including her own. When she reached the story's climax (the man actually stood up and asked her for directions!) David laughed louder than the story warranted, and he could hear her smiling. They spent the next fifteen minutes deciphering the motives of this man who was most definitely a serial killer, how he had probably stalked her off of the train, how he was just waiting for her to hang up to strike. Neither of their jobs came up in the conversation, and David felt this was the sign of a healthy relationship.

She hung up by jokingly shouting "I want a divorce!" It was an inside joke that had gotten David into trouble with his parents (his mother) more than once (four times). David chuckled, as he always did when she said this, and tucked his phone into the right pocket of his back-up pants. His break was over, but he couldn't bring himself to gather the remnants of his now finished lunch. He stared at the empty bag on the table before him. Vestiges of his tuna salad sandwich still lined the plastic. He picked up a morsel of tuna, and meticulously rolled it into a perfect sphere, before taking his thumb and index finger and undoing his work by squishing the ball into a paper thin disk. He cycled through this simple, stupid procedure a few more times, not quite ready to return to work that brought him neither joy nor pain.

Yo! You've reached Britt Hawthorne. I can't answer the phone right now, obviously. Leave a message or call me back some

other time. Or, you know, text me like a normal person.

By now, David had the whole thing memorized by heart. Though he felt the command that tagged the voicemail, text me like a normal person, no longer applied to him, as listening to the same voicemail in four separate instances in one day was not something he, or it seemed Britt, would classify as normal. He found it odd that not once had she answered, and odder still that after his constant pestering, she hadn't blocked his number. He left a brief and awkward message the third time he called, explaining the situation in the least uncomfortable terms he could fathom. David didn't know of many twentysomethings that went 24 hours without checking their phone, but then again, David didn't know many twenty-something-year-olds.

He found himself pacing once again in a kitchen that might as well have been designed for a Martian. This was Kelly's domain, and they were both better for it. The mystery of who served a Thanksgiving turkey with a raw center was not difficult to solve. Clouseau watched David pace, the dog's eyelids heavy with genetic code that shaped him into the canine manifestation of clinical depression. He had sunken into the floor as he so often did, a compressed, furry accordion, out of sight only enough to trip David and Kelly when they were foolish enough to tour their home without their chins glued to their chest. Clouseau watched with curiosity as David walked back and forth and muttered to himself in a language only he understood. David tried to distract himself from himself by taking the time to fix the leaky sink, but as he begrudgingly tightened the clamp around the newly applied rubber, he found himself inexplicably blaming Kelly for the leaky faucet, even though he was the one who volunteered to fix it. He imagined yelling at her about the sink, humiliating her, and hated himself for enjoying the fantasy. Some cold, opaque fluid dripped onto his cheek, startling him enough to bang his head on underside of the sink. He cursed loudly and Clouseau raised his ears, registering for a moment an unpleasantness he didn't understand.

David was watching the news in his bedroom, enjoying the freedom to spread out and fart to his heart's content. Clouseau was curled up at the edge of the bed, likewise enjoying a

freedom he was only granted when Kelly was out of town. David drank three beers and ate a bag of Fritos for dinner, and now relished a pain in his stomach he knew intimately. He might've been fat had he met Kelly any later in his life. It seemed to David that the world supplied Kelly—the ultra-healthy fitness-nut—just as David's once reliable metabolism gave out.

He was licking the salt off his fingers, basking in a slight buzz and half listening to a story about a local fire, when his phone rang. He picked it up a bit too eagerly, and sighed loudly (Kelly hated when he sighed, but she was gone and damnit David loved a good sigh) when he saw it was his father. A month passes quickly.

"Hey, Pop!" David began, a bit too enthusiastically.

"Junior!" his father replied in earnest (it should be noted that David's father's name was Albert. Why he'd always referred to David as 'Junior,' a nickname David still detested, was the one mystery he had long ago given up trying to solve).

"How's it going? What's new? I heard Kelly's out of town. How're you holding up?" David's father was always asking how he was holding up. It was question Albert posed to all of his children, but somehow it still felt like a personal indictment on David. Like he was weak, incapable of looking after himself. David hated to think that this was how his father saw him, or anyone for that matter.

"I'm fine, Dad. Working on a new story for work," David replied.

"Oh, what's it about? Do you need any help?"

"No, Dad, I don't need help."

"So what's it on?" Albert continued. David removed the phone from his ear and savored another drawn out sigh.

"There's a watercolor art exhibit opened up a couple days ago. Frank wrote four pages on it, I have to get it down to three."

"Why don't you send me a copy? I could take a look."

"Dad, that's really not necessary."

"Ah, come on. I'm a great editor—"

"Dad, I don't need any fucking help!" David snapped, and then immediately apologized. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I just—I know what I'm doing, okay?"

Albert chuckled and so did David.

"It's good to hear from you, Son."

"Yeah. You, too, Dad."

The two talked for another ten or so minutes—mostly about work stuff—before David hung up.

Work that week was slower than usual. He finished the watercolor article and two others before his lunch break the following day, and spent the rest of that afternoon attempting to give the appearance of diligence. He resolved to ignore his apprehension regarding normalcy and texted Britt. A pithy message that echoed his voicemail in even blunter terms. She didn't respond.

To pass the time, David plundered one of his knick-knack drawers—a treasure trove of broken pencils and old toys and dusty figurines. A pack of cards here, some discontinued gum there. All the accoutrements of some bizarre, materialistic nostalgia. In this drawer, David discovered an old novelty pen he had acquired at a state fair years ago, and clicked it for no other reason than to experience the familiar jolt most people despise. He giggled automatically, and Frank, who was just then walking by, shot him a disapproving look. Davis shoved the pen in his pocket, red in the face, and retreated back into his visage of concentration.

The night before Kelly's return, David enjoyed a frozen dinner courtesy of Trader Joe's (it really was fortunate that Kelly was a good cook) before snuggling in bed with his laptop. A disappointing Facebook search one day earlier only revealed the extent to which Britt Hawthornes had taken over the country,

though this phenomenon of Britt Hawthornes had not appeared to have found its way into the state of Massachusetts. The Instagram account David set up for the sole purpose of finding this damn woman proved equally unsuccessful, and David later deleted the account out of embarrassment.

David called the number again, maybe for the tenth time since discovering the card, but now, Britt's warm, inviting voice was replaced with a cold robotic one.

We're sorry. You have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service. To speak with a communications professional, press 1...

David let the options ring out as he sank into his pillow. Clouseau was downstairs somewhere, probably staring out the window with those drooping, sad eyebrows, waiting for Kelly to return, unsure if she ever would. Tomorrow, David would have to leave work early to pick her up at the airport. He wouldn't say much on the drive home, but he'd listen to her many stories and adventures from across the pond. They would laugh together and go out to dinner at that new taco place that just opened up. They wouldn't have sex, she'd be too tired from the flight, and that was okay. She would fall asleep in his arms, and he would remember why he loved her.

David pondered this day he would have, and was comforted by its warm presence. He closed his laptop and set it where Kelly would ease into a peaceful sleep the following night. He reached for the novelty pen he brought home from the office, now resting on his dresser, and gave it a click. As the shock electrified his body, he enjoyed, for a moment, a pain he was capable of understanding.

Trazodone

Emma Driban

I wait for the morning,
Wait for sleep,
But I am wide awake,
Listening to the murmuring snores.
Insomnia.
Lying in the dark.

In the oppressing darkness
I wait and I mourn.
Insomnia.
The elusiveness of sleep,
Evading my grasp like water fleeing the shore,
Leaving crumbled sandcastles in its wake.

It's as if I'm at a wake,
Everyone dressed in clothing so dark
And feeling so unsure,
Huddled together in the mourning.
But I mourn the loss of sleep.
Insomnia.

Insomnia
Is counting the hours I lie awake
Praying for the embrace of sleep,
Blanketed by a room so dark
It's like it will never again know the morning,
Like a boat never again to reach the shore.

I am more than sure
Insomnia
Will last until the morning.
Rampant thoughts, raging through my head like unencumbered
tempests, leave chaos in their wake,
Twirling and dancing in the dark,
Taunting a brain deprived of sleep.

And my body cries for sleep,
Cries for the blissful snoring
Or being unaware of the dark.
Insomnia.
Painfully awake
To greet the rising morning.

I long to be claimed by sleep,
but Insomnia
Floods my mind and now I'm sure,
I'll always be awake
To witness the gentle hush found only in the dark
and lonely hours of the morning.

Send in the Clowns

Emma Driban



Public Service Announcement

Emma Driban

Adapted from a black-out poem

we see

nightmares

negative thoughts about
the world,

strong feelings

for

trouble

you see

The world no longer feels like
a safe place.

women are
jumpy

Men are
Angry

We

are

anxious.

Immediate

intervention is key.

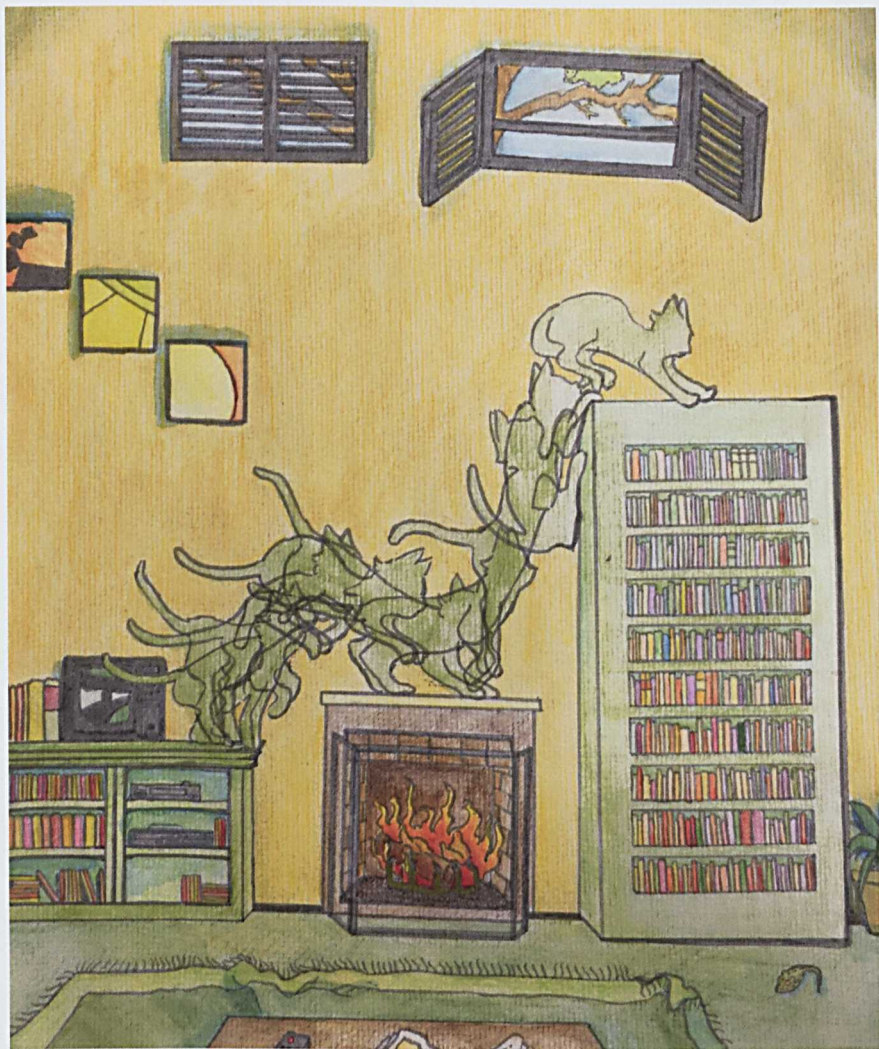
Philly Streets

Emma Driban



Framed Cat

Sheila Evans



End

Brenna Gutshall

I always seem to write
The ending
Before the beginning.
I know how
It will end
Before it's even started.
So is this the
Ending
Or the beginning?
Because once you
Know how a story will
End
Is it even worth writing?

Pretty Girl

Brenna Gutshall

pretty girl
people only call when drunk
the bed has room to entertain
host is easy
guest is hard

Attached to the Fucked Up Few

Brenna Gutshall

I want to create a story.
Where the fucked over,
get a better ending.
Where the fucked up,
get the help they need.

I want to tell a story.
Where you cry when you read it,
but not because the story isn't fair.
Where you cry when you read it,
because it's so, so real.

I can't have both though,
Can I?
The fucked remain fucked.
They were fucked from the start.
The beginning. Page one.

My name is blurred
Blurred blurred
Blurred blurred
Just keep your cool,
You're not fucking insane.
Blurred blurred
You aren't the fucked one.
You won't lose it now.
You didn't.
You did.
You will.
You are.

You need help.

You die in the end.
Or something equally fucked.
Spoiler.
Sorry.

You shouldn't have gotten so
Attached

What Happened

Brenna Gutshall

"What happened to you?"

he asked his daughter.

He looked at her

like she had suddenly become someone
entirely different.

He looked at her

as though he had no idea

who she even was.

"I grew up, Dad," she responded,

"wish you could have been there."

His Name is Conroy

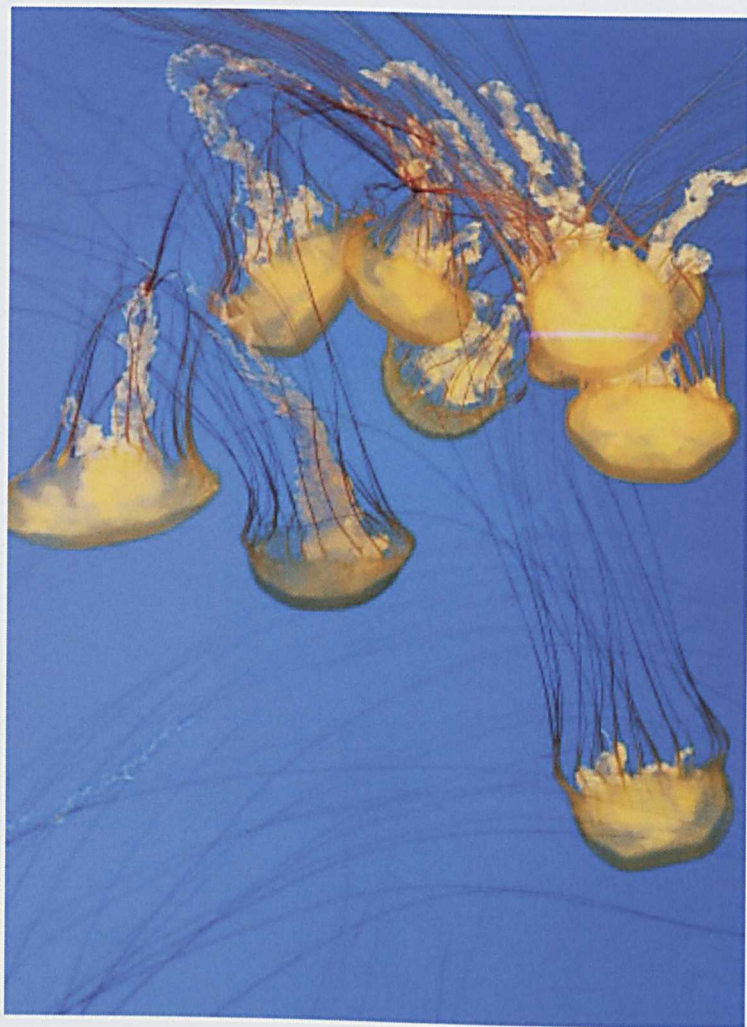
Brenna Gutshall

3rd Place Art



Jellyfish Jam

Brenna Gutshall



I and Allison **Becca Halaney**

How many times had we
Romped and pranced about the taciturn pond,
The one with the lazy, pre-drought
Fountain, beside the hunched and wrinkled
Oak—how many times had we
Run calloused, barely-pubescent
Hands through the whiskered fronds, despite
The way they burned our skin, despite
Our fears of disturbing
The deceptively downy geese?

Oil-slicks painting filmy arcs of color,
Crinkled crisp-wrappers, murky silt—and excrement—
Clouded water swirled about the hardened clay partition
Cutting them off from the larger aquatic body,
The partition
That appeared so much larger to our growing
Eyes, stirred to life by the nursery minnows
Drowning, writhing,
Drowning in filth and grime—and in vain, we plotted
With breaking voices above the balmy,
Cooling autumn breeze
To save them.

With excitement more due perhaps
To our perceived heroism
Than to the peril
Of the gasping pollywogs, we
Scooped at the puddle, frenzied, with slim, cupped
Fingers, styrofoam chalices chipping
And adding to the poison,
Plastic spoons, aged and rotting
Leaves from the oak, attempting
To gently capture the strangled newborns
Even as they fled in restless scatters

As you and I had been fleeing
From each other.
Exhausted, having been unsuccessful
In our extrication,
We sank, cold and giddy,
Onto the matted carpet beside your bed;
The freckles on your complexion, the flecks
Of gold refracting in your almond eyes as you stared,
Oblivious, back at me from beneath the molasses swaths
Of overcast hair trailing over your chafed
Lips murmuring gravelly nothings.

Something within me became tangled,
Rolled in upon itself, beating back the warmth
That surged and broiled behind my ribs
And I wanted
I wanted to kiss you.

How many times had we
Told secrets, hiding
Behind the cattails? Endless secrets,
But never this one.

We had not been scrabbling to liberate
The minnows at all; rather, it was I.
The partition had been keeping me
To stagnate and suffocate in my own mire
Of denied identity.
Crouching with twelve-year-old nails buried
And tugging at the disintegrating
Carpet, I turned my stinging eyes to my own
Lap, and did nothing

Because good, normal girls
Dream instead of future husbands.

You found me again,
Now, years beyond that day pretending
By the pond—your syrup-amber hair shorn
To the jaw as square and sturdy
As I remember it, your voice as rough

As the sandpaper I used to compare
It to. I thought I had moved away
From my girlish pash
Until I saw the fresh ink interwoven
Between the freckles dotting your arms, the way your eyes glinted
Gold with unforgotten mischief, and the warmth
That had died that day within
My throat sat upright in the ashes.

I am a tadpole swimming away from the partitioned,
Polluted waters, wondering why I did not leap
Over that barrier sooner.

I Love You So Much

Becca Halaney

2nd Place Poetry

I left my heart buried
Beneath the cacti, nestled safe
Above the limestone table, separating
Me from the aquifer,
The trickle of the water and the conversation
Of the salamanders comprising
The undying yet murmuring
Beat—
Like me.

Retrospectively, the sweat clinging
To the bluebell-smattered linen between my skin
And the heavy, wavering
Atmosphere does not feel so oppressive
As it should have been. The tea
Peach, honeyed, iced and quickly melting
Tongue numb on the empty formation of vowels only hoarsely
Whispered—
Like me.

The chatter
And the dense scent
From bats with smiling lips the breadth
Of my thumbnail welcome me on my wanderings
Meanderings, listless, to a Greek chorus I remember
Loving with that time-capsuled heart,
And I wonder why and when my fingers ceased
To feel the prickly pears' aubergine spines, when the balmy
Mid-morning hill-country sun no longer could reach deep
Enough to burn, when the gossip
Amongst the coyote and the armadillo no longer
Included
Me.

I left it there,
And here,
One thousand five hundred and forty three
Twenty two
Four and fifteen away,
I can feel the mumbling pulse
As it tremors, but remains unwilling to quiet in its incessant
Refusal—
Like me.

Here, wind far icier than that I have tasted before
Sears the cavities in my bones
Like nicotine, or so I'm told.
Instead I feel the prick of ageless pines, my hair sodden
From snow drifts instead of sweat, and I wonder
If the weightless taste of the air, the space-cadet
Wash of the sky, the way the heat caused tremors
In the oxygen, caused tremors—
Tremors like fondness in my soul
If that tenderness and swiftly dimming felicity
Had ever truly been.
I wonder—
Like me.

Or perhaps, instead,
A delusion to fill my need
For nostalgia to displace
The empty spaces.

Whether Bittersweet or Very Hearty

Becca Halaney

The first time that we argued, the wind
Tossed and tousled my hair with fingers colder than yours
(Colder than you)
And I hid my face behind the collar of my turquoise jacket, fleece,
Itching my already dripping nose.
The lines between your brows shifted and softened at the sight
Signifying that the annoyance had melted, my face warm enough
To permeate the November chill

"Let's walk,"
And the cracked cement nearly tripped my tangled ankles
But my eyes would not leave them, fixed
To tennis-shoed toes they did not really see between the blur
Of repressed and salty sentiment

Arriving on the balcony,
Atop the hill, leaning down over
The evergreens nesting the pinpoint, jewelbox
Town reflected back at us in the cosmic-latte as black
As our eyes as you held me, shivering, curled into your
Lap, and I was safe; you shielded my chapped lips from the gale
—do you remember?

This place was yours
Is yours
You shared it with me once, then, but not now. Now,
Now, I avoid it avidly. I should
Have known

You'll Love Your First Job

Kaylan Hutchison

3rd Place Prose

You haven't yet become jaded to the cheese, the golden, gooey magma you used to idolize before you were gifted the swipe of small pimples on your forehead as complex and plentiful as stars in a galaxy. You haven't yet gotten your first wallet stolen, jumped by teenage boys, stranded there in the street as the smell of car exhaust and pizza escape you. You haven't yet been welcomed in by the topless woman with the C-section scar that whispered to you as she handed you a fifty, "I can swing that way, if you can." You haven't gotten your first complicated customer. Not yet a little girl, or a boy your age, or a house party.

It's your first night. Pizza still smells good. You and Freddie snuck a piece before you got in the car for the delivery. You haven't yet had drunken sex with him at that after-work party. Right now, you text him funny videos you retweeted on Twitter (that he never saw, since he doesn't have an account). What can you say, you're a child of divorce and need the validation.

You come to work with your hair up in a bun and your nails done. You'll learn that better tips come from your hair down. The nails will never matter. You haven't yet been given your first fake ID, so what's in your wallet is the real stuff, all yours. At week five, you'll have it figured out. The wallet will be bought from Goodwill. Velcro. The first fake you get will be the name "Eleanor Hough." You won't need to memorize it though, since you'll lose an average of one wallet a week. Sometimes, you'll even get a man's ID. Again, it won't matter.

You think you know the area well, but by week twelve, you could have been the woman that designed the whole city. You'll know the routes with your eyes closed.

You'll have regulars. You'll have a particular house that requests "the girl." You'll hate the smell of pizza.

Your boss hasn't yet gotten creepy. Right now, the only thing you

know about him is that he hired you, he's got a baby on the way, and he smells like your dentist. The boys you work with are all freshmen at the local college, which makes you feel good about yourself for keeping up with them. High school isn't so different from college anyway, you think. You'll be able to hold your own with alcohol, and you'll give Jared a hand-job that makes you celebrity for a week. Don't get your hopes up for getting with him again, he'll be into someone else. Just FYI.

Your first customer will be a woman. This will be a good initiation. She will be curt and she will tip you 20 percent. Don't get used to this. With the next delivery, you won't be so lucky. You're not too good at doing math in your head yet. Or about being assertive with tips and with orders. You'll get there.

You'll also learn how to censor when your dad asks you about your day at work. You can never tell him about the boy that asked for your number (and that you gave it), or the man that asked if you'd be willing to do "anything else" for tips. You'll learn to tell him about, either, the sweet little family that bought pizza for their movie night, or, that it was "slow."

You'll shower that first night, and this time, you'll go to sleep smelling like tropical shampoo and Downy-fied pajamas. This, too, will change. The next time you shower, you won't be able to get the smell of pizza crust out of your hair. You'll have garlic butter under your fingernails. You'll find yourself mouthing "pepperoni" when you're alone and bored.

You'll quit when school starts. We'll get out of here. I promise.

Not an Old Soul, I Can Tell You That Much

Kaylan Hutchison

I think I was in my
first serious relationship
when I realized that I was a new soul

this was later "confirmed" at an aura reading in Chinatown
as an older woman sipping a sparkling seltzer
traced her fingers along my
red and orange-lemon wash of photographed
energy: "Very positive, very optimistic, very unsophisticated."
I was told my expression of emotions
was strong and transparent
compared to something exposing and childlike

When I was in Santa Fe
on a short family vacation
six months before this "real" reading
my mom saw my aura in the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
She didn't tell me what color it was
and I didn't ask

A boy once told me
that I was too bright to look at
It was a sunny day
so I told him it was the weather
and with that, he told me,
"You're simple."

That was the summer
I felt spiritually-auspicious
through and through
I would stay up late discussing
astrological charts and fuzzy futures
I spent a great deal of time reading Turkish coffee cups
and inhaling the healing energy of
fragrant olive in the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens

I deleted my Instagram and adopted stupid mantras

My Sagittarius sun
that's a fire sign, mind you
and Virgo moon
my vata and pitta doshas
my rose quartz and citrine pendants
follow me around
kissing my forehead with a sense of validation
something my soul needs to spark interest in my life

I own books on "presence" and "selflessness"
but I try too hard
they're not happening

This time around feels like the expository rough-cut
a beginner's demo
like
next time will be better and I'll be aligned with the Dao
my chakras will balance out
and I won't be a Cancer rising anymore
Hopefully

There are No Tears

Kate Jacob

A gentle breeze sways the branch where
I sit, perched in a tree
There are no tears.
Not anymore.
I think there is not a single remaining
Drop of emotion in my body.

I feel numb.

There is only
Growling, ferocious hunger
And perhaps a spark of loneliness
The only thing
I have energy to feel.

I don't know
Where I am anymore.
I think
I'm lost.
Too far from home,
Certainly
As if I could ever go back.

I don't know
What to do now.
They say
Nothing to do but keep moving forward.
But I'm not sure if there is a forward.

I don't know what it would be.

A gentle breeze sways the branch where
I sit, perched in a tree
There are no tears.
Not anymore.
I think there is not a single remaining
Drop of emotion in my body.

A gentle breeze sways the branch where
I sit, perched in a tree
There are no tears.
Not anymore.
I think there is not a single remaining
Drop of sadness in my body.

I feel light.

There is only
Dancing, singing joy
And perhaps a spark of contentment
The only thing
I have room to feel.

I know
Where I am now.
I think

I'm home.
Far from the past,
Certainly
As if I could ever go back.

I don't know
What to do now.
They say
Nothing to do but keep moving forward.
But I'm not sure where forward is.
I just know how great it will be.

A gentle breeze sways the branch where
I sit, perched in a tree
There are no tears.
Not anymore.
I think there is not a single remaining
Drop of sadness in my body.

Abandoned Shell Gas Station, Somewhere Just Outside City Limits

Marya Kuratova

He made the world feel
like the color of weak tea,
festering yellow,
like the stale bruises tracing her ribs
and encircling her throat as a dainty necklace
or the soup stains imposing themselves on
the sleeve of her threadbare sweater.

The morning fog is just a placebo
for the safety she feels.
Beneath the stench of his cigarettes
lingering on her neck,
she smelled like quite stale coffee
and quite fresh desperation.

Stumbling down the empty highway,
making her way towards the gas station,
she tramples the roadside dandelions.
No cars in sight, the pumps are deserted
and the only sign of life is the
convenience store's flickering neon sign,
more sporadic than her fluttering pulse.

Sucking in the cool September air
and clutching the crumpled dollar bills
in her pocket for comfort, she soon finds herself
in a mildewed bathroom, full of past
motorists' regret. The overflowing sink quickly
darkens pink as she rinses off the congealed pain.

A harrowed ghost in the mirror judges her
with deadened eyes, but the feel
of the glass against her forehead
is cool, comforting, and
the four grimy walls sprawled with graffiti
are her new safe haven, her sanctuary,
for now.

Lingering Traces

Marya Kuratova

I take scalding hot showers
thrice daily
just to burn the memory of you
off of my skin.

While the whisper-hum
of every insult you've ever dared utter
keeps knocking at the back of my mind,
making its presence known.

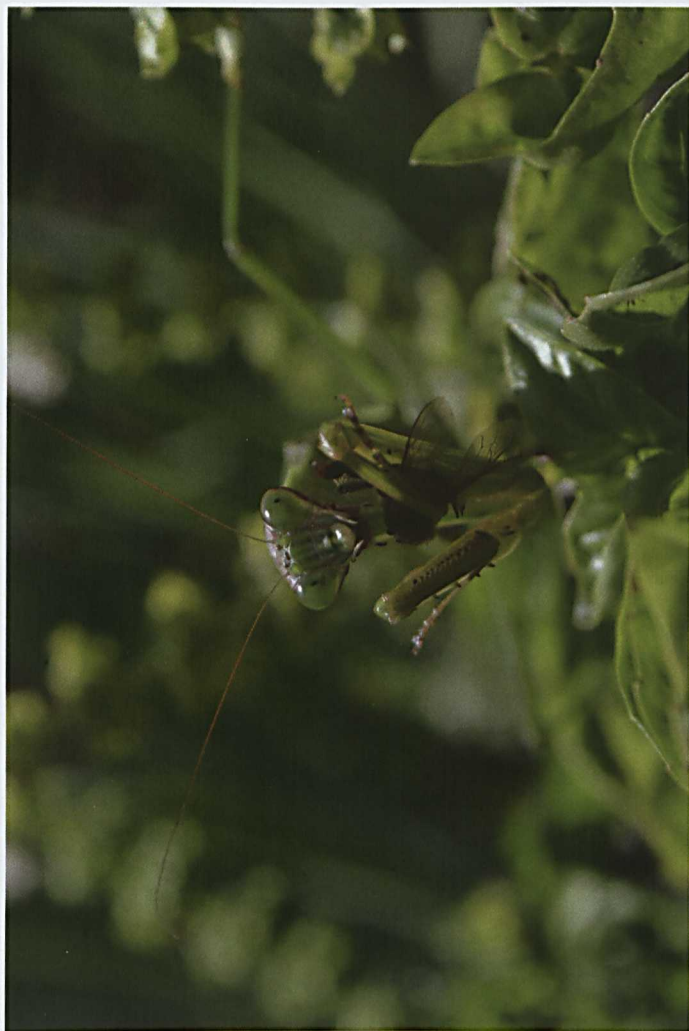
I'm three cigarettes deep
and I still can't sear the taste of you
out of my mouth.
I put them out on my thigh,
hoping the sharp scorching pain
will replace the thought of
your rough hands running through my hair.

And still the residual vibrations
of your voice linger in the air,
no matter how many times
I exhale my smoke out into space,
pushing away the offending remnants.

They say it takes seven years
for every cell in the human body
to fully regenerate.
But that's an awful long time to wait
to be untouched by you.
Is there nothing I can do
to help speed up the process?

The Plight of the Bee

Marya Kuratova



Goodbyes

Marya Kuratova

The day my mother left me, we drove past a car crash on the side of the highway. I remember seeing a woman sob into her phone, a man reaching out to try and comfort her, bring her closer to the grass and away from oncoming traffic. I wondered if, years later, she would remember the screeching sound of the sudden impact or the soft crunch of broken glass beneath my tires in the stillness that followed. I saw the deployed airbags start to deflate, retreat back within themselves, just like the air being crushed out of my lungs in painful, ragged bursts whenever I thought about the imminent goodbye. I wanted to catch the woman's gaze, give her a reassuring smile. But instead all I saw was the eye of the gaping hole where the car door once was, glaring back at me in obvious disgust. We passed the wreckage in silence, but I felt my mother tense up in the passenger seat beside me, most likely envisioning my body tied up in that wrangled piece of metal. For the rest of the drive, she would instinctively slam her foot down on imaginary brakes, as if she didn't fully trust my reflexes.

The day my mother left me, I forgot to set an alarm. Something subconsciously refused to believe that this day would come, refused to let it start. She plaited my hair into two French braids and I vowed not to shower for a week, just to make sure I didn't wash away the memory of her nimble fingers against my scalp. When she finished tying off the last braid, she continued to hold my hair, our eyes locked in the mirror. She already felt so far away.

The day my mother left me, we tried to bake one last cake together. It was meant to be a fun project to get our minds off the situation at hand. But we ran out of sugar and even chocolate couldn't sweeten the bitterness we both felt. The cake came out misshapen, as if it had started to rise and greet its new world with open arms, but then changed its mind and retreated at the last second. It didn't quite taste right, just like the lump in my throat. I wanted to help, keep my hands busy and my thoughts occupied, but instead I stood in the corner, constantly adding to the ever-growing pile of sodden tissues. I watched her work in the

kitchen, willed my mind to memorize every curve of her hands as she mixed, measured, and stirred.

The day my mother left me, the moment it was time to drive away, we were both rooted to our spots, unable to move. I couldn't will my arms to lift and turn the key in the ignition. I looked at her through what felt like miles and miles of windshield glass, standing on the curb suddenly looking so small, so frail. Eternity stretched out between us and all I could hear were that poor woman's sobs, drowning out my own.

The day my mother left me, I had already forgotten the scent of her favorite perfume.

Symmetry

Marya Kuratova



Preemptive Nostalgia

Marya Kuratova

The small rented spaces
my thoughts sleep in are
out of place.

Don't belong there,
just like the box of cigarettes
hidden in my top desk drawer.
(they're next to the bag of gumballs she gave me,
long since sticky and melded together,
no longer sweet.)

And she's writing song lyrics
on the bedroom wall again,
carving sunrays into the dresser frame again.
While all I care about is
keeping the smell of mothballs
from permeating our entire life.

And even if that means throwing out all the
frayed garments and fragmented reveries,
all the discarded memories shoved in the back of that closet,
so be it.

My dreams grew stale years ago but
I don't want that aging sadness to ever creep into her
little corner of the world.

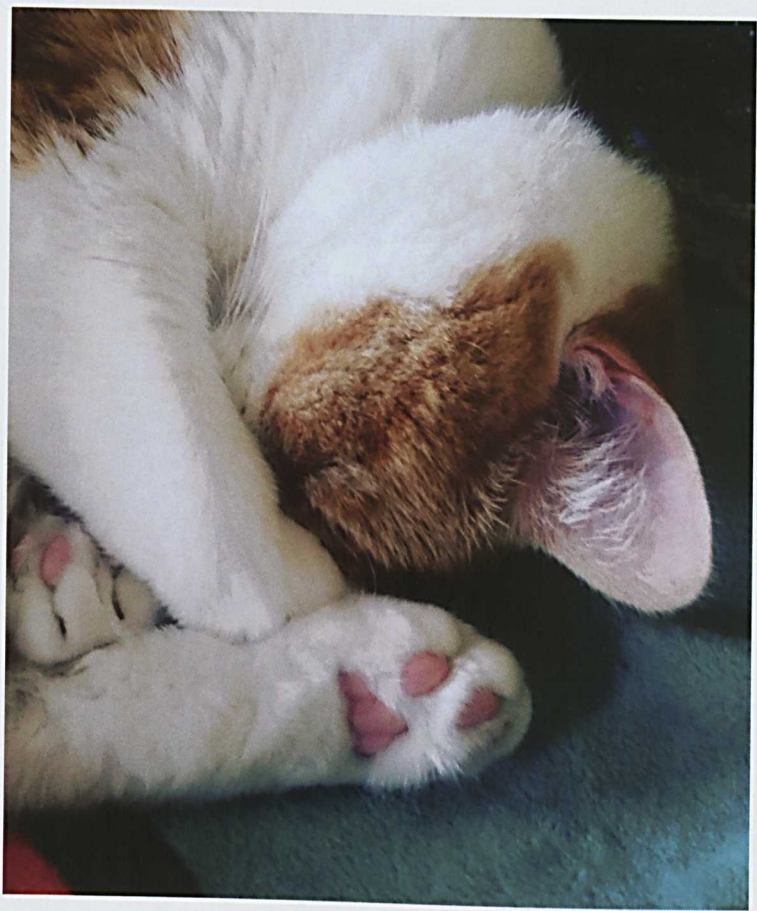
I've long since accepted the bloody nose of defeat,
learned the angle at which to hang my head,
but I won't let them hammer out her smile
into that perfectly placated straight line of agreement.
Even if that means reliving all those sorrows again,
let me shoulder her storm clouds, keep the gray from advancing.
Let me separate those gumballs,
return those colorful orbs
one

by

one.

Mildred

Liv Lauer



A Woman's Routine

Maddy Lee

1st Place Prose

There's a woman that used to come to the restaurant—some worn, gross establishment that hadn't met the health code standards in years. None of us cared. Neither did the customers. She ordered a soup every day, sipped it alongside her coffee. She read paperback novels beneath the glaring lights above. She tipped forty percent on a six dollar check.

The first time she came in, she wasn't alone. I stood at the host stand as she could scarcely contain herself. It was their anniversary, she said. They met here on a blind date, she said. I have a soft spot for the romantic. They sat at that very same booth, holding hands across the table and (I imagine) reminiscing about a decade well spent in love. I don't remember what he looked like.

I just remember that he didn't come back. She started her routine on a random day in January, and has not stopped since. She would talk about him when he was gone. I learned a lot through taking her orders. He drinks black tea in the morning and at night. Decaf. He does the crosswords in his pajamas on Sunday. His mother never comes to town, but he calls her once a week. He likes dogs. He likes sports.

She stopped talking about him for a while. She would place her order and wave me off for weeks on end. There was a dark cloud above her, eclipsing the light by which she read those trashy detective novels. I knew her name from the credit card, but God knows I couldn't talk to her. If something was wrong, it was none of my business.

I learned from the bartender that she was going through a divorce. His idea. He met some woman on the job. Left her on a Sunday, black tea cooling on the tabletop. I wonder if he finished his crossword.

She mentions little facts now and again. What he's doing.

Where he is. It seems to come almost like a flicker of light. She remembers the way he likes to sleep. A dark room with the sound of the fan. She remembers his forty-ninth birthday party. She made him a red velvet cake. It was undercooked. She says all this as she stares into her coffee. She never smiles, and hardly looks at anyone. She never seems any further in the book, the same pages always dog-eared.

I met a girl of my own during this time. She liked to drive down the backroads when her mother invited her boyfriend over. He drank all the milk in the fridge and always put it back empty. She would take me on those drives. We talked about leaving town for college. We talked about family. We talked about how much the football team at our high school sucked.

I talked to her about the woman once. How she was so sad, so lost. She sat at the same booth everyday, like nothing else in the world grounded her. She might just blow away into dust if the coffee pot didn't stay brewing. The girl I knew had a bleeding heart. She came to the restaurant a few times to help out. Offered the woman some coffee, some company. They hit it off. She would sit across from the woman and talk about school. She was head of the drama department, and there was always some new story about how much she hated the director. She kissed me for the first time at night—swimming in a lake. Our homework was scattered in the back of her Jeep.

Looking back, we were as in love as young hearts could be.

But growing up has its kiss for all. We fell out one day—details of which I won't bother telling. She did things. I did things. There was yelling and cursing and then, silence. We don't talk anymore. She transferred schools, driving those back roads down all the way to coast. She lost my number and I lost hers.

There are nights, when I think about going swimming in that lake, that I remember the woman in the booth. Her soup. Her coffee. She keeps her routine because she has more in her head than she knows what to do with. The man that left her likes black tea in the morning. They met in a booth—and I know which one. They shared an undercooked red velvet cake.

There came a day when he was up and gone like ten years had not mattered.

And she knows him. She knows him as well as any of us know another person. I think about how I used to know that girl. We took those long drives. We shared those great dreams. We were vulnerable at a time when children barricade their hearts against the world. She drove off anyways—and left me with questions.

What am I supposed to do with her? What am I supposed to do with every little, intimate thing I know about her? I see things at the store she would like. I hear things about the drama teacher I know she would have a fit over. I hear songs that played on the radio when we were together. My mind is full of useless, paramount knowledge. People come, and people go. But they always forget something. They forget to take the months of time with them. They forget to take the secrets. They forget to take everything that made them a real, fully-fleshed person. And what am I supposed to do with that?

Life goes on without them. The woman still comes to the restaurant. She asks about her sometimes—that sweet girl that used to sit with her a few times a week. I hesitate to tell her she moved away. But she did.

And what am I supposed to do with that?

Childhood Heroes

Maddy Lee

When I was a child, nothing in this world could compare to the power of my parents. They were the all-knowing, the all-mighty. If they said it, it was true. If they did it, it was right. I learned all I know at the hands of my mom and dad. That can't last forever, though. Small children cling to their mother's skirts, but nevertheless let them go when class starts. We grow up. We move on. There comes a time in every child's life where this switch will flip. More often than not, it is the teenage years of angst, bitterness, and resentment. The phenomenon baffles, supposedly.

But it doesn't. Our mothers are not all-powerful. Our fathers are not all-knowing. One day, when we ask "why," we will get an answer that does not sit right beneath the skin. We question. We learn. We change. It's our greatest betrayal.

Someday we all lash out at those that love us most. Even if we think we were the exception, we weren't. Every mother notices when her baby looks at her differently. The shining light is gone. She isn't Wonder Woman anymore. She's just a regular woman, hair falling out of her bun and eyes lidded with sleep lost.

My mom lost her light when I entered adolescence. She had already divorced my father. My siblings and I were tossed between them, one Christmas to another. She had not learned to cook yet. We ate cereal and pizza bites. I started asking too many questions, pushing too many boundaries. My teachers grew exasperated with me. I finished my work too fast, read too much under the table. So I was pushed to join more things. I placed second in a cooking competition. I did choir performances. I went to Beta Club conventions. Mom had work.

Dad never seemed to. He was there for every recital, for every competition, for every awards ceremony. He missed dates. He blew off friends. He skipped on sleep. All just to be there. So where was Mom? She worked later hours, slaving as a waitress to make ends meet. One event after another trailed by.

My robotics team went to state competition. I was so proud. I had written our performance script myself. But the drive was far, some six hours. Mom couldn't take the day off. Per usual, Dad went instead. We packed into the car and made a weekend trip of it. We had dinners. We went to museums. The day of competition came. We took second place, and I cried in the bathroom because it wasn't first place. Her seat was filled by someone else's mother. I tried not to take it personally, but how could I not?

Children take everything personally.

I came to resent her absence. I complained about how she loved my sister more. How she loved her boyfriend more. How she loved herself more. I convinced myself I was not a priority in my mother's life. I didn't have to worship her anymore, as far as I was concerned. I was an adult. I was independent.

I was full of shit.

In truth, I had imprinted on my father twice as hard. I trusted him with everything I had. The pressure must have been insurmountable. I needed him to have every answer, every available second, every ounce of forgiveness. I stayed long nights at his house, convincing myself I was helping him. Dad was lonely. Dad needed company.

Flipping his switch was much slower. It was a creeping hand on the light, dimming till I was squinting to see his face. I started to feel the mess. I started to see the exhaustion. My dad was not Superman. He was a single man with three kids, working a job he couldn't stand. He hated everything that wasn't us. Girlfriends came and went—sometimes unseen altogether. They never stayed. He made jewelry for my sister and I at the kitchen table. We stopped eating there years before.

There was something disheartening about realizing my place in a sad man's life. I stood, arms linked with my siblings, atop a rocky lighthouse in an inky black sea. Nothing for miles. They lashed the shoreline, too narrow to rest his ship or his legs. He would never reach the things he still could see.

I lost my way for a time. My siblings must have at some point too, though God knows we never talked about it. Vulnerability is weakness. We powered through. Our relationship was all throwing the remote, yelling curses, apologizing with food and forced company. I shared a room with my sister, sitting on a bed mere feet from hers. We didn't talk.

People get it into their heads that they are the only ones to ever have felt something. Their pulse—and their pulse alone—beats to the sad tune of life. How lonely it must be to be the only one with a soul. How dramatic we must all feel in those formative years. My solace was headphones, listening to songs with lyrics about loss and death and despair. I thought I could relate, siphoning and twisting my grievances to meet the magnitude. I walk a lonely road, the only road that I have ever known—it's almost charming when I look back.

I thank the powers that be that I got through those years. They were powerfully sad. I fought with friends. I fought with family. I fought with myself. I started sleeping all through the day, all through the night. It's honestly a miracle that I remember anything that happened in early high-school. Looking back, I'm fairly certain I was in a coma. My transcript alone provides evidence I even went to class. The days lasted long, but didn't last completely.

If there is any light I can give, it is that the light will be given back. At the end of the tunnel. We grow up—for real this time. Not that faux-independence where we pretend the world can't get to us. We flip those switches back on our loved ones. We realize. We give credit where it is due.

Mom was distant because that's where the world is. And the world demands money. She came home still to us, to hold our hands and ask about our days. She paid the bills, kept the lights on so that we might ignore them under the covers. My mother is not all-mighty. She loves me still.

My father was sad because that's what happens. He is not where he thought he would be in life. He still shows up to the robotics competitions. He still pulls me crying from the bathrooms. My

father is not all-knowing. He loves me still.

I learned all I know from the hands of my mom and dad. I learned humility, loyalty, the value of hard-work. Sometimes it feels like they lead my decisions, even as I go to school six-hundred miles away. One foot leads with Mom's decisiveness. It's time to go to work. I got bills to pay. One foot leads with dad's sincerity. Remember to stop and smell the flowers. I cannot say with which foot I step out in the mornings. I cannot say who leads me forward. Most days, it is on both I stand, though I rejected them powerfully once.

I text them both now as I sit in class, waiting for the lesson to start. I love you. I miss you. I will be going home in a few weeks for the first time in months. I wonder sometimes if they had any idea what they were doing when they raised three kids. I wonder if any parent does. The task is daunting. All the children I have met have been so difficult. They throw themselves on the floor and scream. They are a tall, demanding order. My parents text back—Dad first, Mom later. I think about all the times I threw myself on the floor and screamed. To be honest, they probably didn't know what they were doing.

They love me still.

Extracurriculars

Mikayla Lee

2:45pm From That Old Beaten Building

We Ran.

We Ran Down Trumpeter Ave,
And Made Faces At The High Schoolers As We Passed,
Waiting All But Patiently
To Fill Their Shoes.

We Ran Through Full-Figured Thickets
The Breath Of Youth Forcing Way Through Our Throats.

Hurry up, it's almost time!

We Rounded The Corner.
Losing Balance From The Sharp Tilt
At Which We'd Pivot Our Ankles,

And Halted Without Warning.
An Assortment Of Tweens
Huddled In Communion.

Beat that bitch!

Screamed Little Jaz
From Cedar Ln.
She Never Made It To Graduation.

Promptly,
Danger BlueRed Sirens Came From Patuxent.
Only So Many Would Make Getaway.
Heartbeats Rising To Our Gullets,

we ran.

Walt Disney in Heaven

Sam McCarthy

Walt Disney clambered out of bed and slid into his silk dressing gown. He lit up a cigarette. He thought how ridiculous it was that they wouldn't let Tom Hanks smoke in that Mary Poppins origins movie. How inaccurate a portrayal. It was one thing showing mice talking and steering river boats and such—there could be justification for it. But misrepresenting the personal habits of one of the greatest cartoonists and filmmakers in history? He simply couldn't fathom it.

Disney wandered downstairs. Heaven hadn't been so bad, he guessed. He had hoped for a larger house, but Saint Peter had informed him on day one that as delightful as children might have found Mickey Mouse, it wasn't quite on par with martyrdom. Disney had wanted to object, but stopped himself when Saint Paul had wandered past holding his decapitated head, chatting with Joan of Arc, her skin burnt to a crisp.

"Something wrong, Pete?" Paul had asked.

Disney had shaken his head and laughed the most nervous laugh he had ever heard. Also, Saint Peter had informed him that he was lucky to be here at all, as not many entertainers made it this far.

Unfortunately, this meant Disney was awfully lonely up here. He was hoping Dick Van Dyke would show up soon, but good God: that man just wouldn't die! Disney had found, after his first few weeks in Heaven, that his neighborhood was largely empty. He went to have a bit of a chat with Saint Peter on the subject.

"I've noticed," he started, "that I seem to be the only one living in my neighborhood. Don't get me wrong, it's a lovely piece of property and all that, but... there doesn't seem to be anyone else around."

"Ah, yes," said Saint Peter. "You see, you were placed in the residency for entertainers." Disney had never liked that term. An

entertainer was a man who would sing songs at bars and loosen his tie after the first two, and then hang out afterwards hoping one of the waitresses would take a shine to him and ask him to stay the night at her place. "We don't have many," continued Saint Peter. "Entertainers, that is. There's Bing Crosby, of course, but he lives in the residency for priests. Someone on the board saw too many of his films and thought he actually was a priest—but it's too late to do anything about it now."

"Well, mister Saint Peter," said Disney, plucking up his courage. "I don't actually think of myself as an entertainer. I'm more of an artist, really, sir."

Saint Peter stroked his beard pensively. "I see," he said, at long last, in a tone which indicated he most certainly did not see. "Well, Leo is the chair of the artists' residence. I suppose I could always speak to him about it." Saint Peter picked up a phone on his desk and dialed a number. "Ah, yes, I'm looking to speak with Mister Da Vinci... Thank you... Leo? Yes, Pete here; how are you? Lovely, thanks. Listen, I've got a mister Walt Disney here, and he's rather dissatisfied with his after-living arrangements. Any chance we could transfer him to... Oh. Oh, I see. I see. Well, yes, it would be rather unfair to ask Vincent to move in with Dali. He may chop off his other ear. And yes, the work Mikey did on the Sistine was outstanding and quite worthy of... Understood. Thanks anyway, Leo." He hung up the phone and looked rather balefully at Disney. "I'm sorry, it seems they're rather full in the artists' residence. They have one building that's technically open, but Michelangelo is busy painting the ceiling, so it's not quite suitable for living at the moment. My apologies."

Disney's face fell. "What about Fred Rogers?" he asked. "He was an entertainer—his own television show and all that. Why isn't he in my neighborhood?"

"Mister Rogers was actually classified as an educator," Saint Peter explained. "He lives with all the other educators and, as charming as your mouse was, I'm afraid the case simply couldn't be made to have you classified as an educator."

Disney felt himself running out of ideas—something which had

never happened before. It must be the altitude. "What about that fellow who wrote children's books? About lions and witches and closets and such? I'm sorry, I never read them, but surely he would..."

"No, no, I'm afraid Mr. Lewis resides with the other philosophers. I'm sorry, Mr. Disney, but there doesn't seem to be much hope. You'll just have to wait for a wholesome entertainer to arrive. God alone knows when that will happen, of course. Not many entertainers slipping in here. Not on my watch, anyway."

The next few years were lonely. Disney started talking to birds out the window. It had always looked cute in his movies, but it wasn't as cute in actuality. It was actually rather pathetic. He would lean out the window and wave at squirrels as they would scramble about in his lawn. He was very concerned that one day, they might actually wave back. Was it possible to develop a mental illness in Heaven?

One morning, Disney awoke to his phone ringing loudly. It was Saint Peter: "Listen, Walt? Stroke of luck here, we've just had a man show up (a little unexpectedly) who passed with flying colors. There's no question, he's an entertainer. It looks like you'll have a friend after all! He should be moving in shortly." Then Saint Peter rang off.

Disney crawled out of his bed and peered out the window. Sure enough, there was a moving van rolling down the street. It stopped at a rather large house—larger than Disney's—and out clambered a short man with a beard. A handful of mover-angels started unloading boxes. The short man grabbed an item out of a box and held it close to his heart. Disney recognized it immediately: it was an Academy Award! Those bastards told him that he couldn't take his twenty-two Oscars with him! What made this guy so special?

Disney made a small plate of brownies, whistling while he worked, and strolled over to his new neighbor's. He knocked on the door, then hurriedly quashed out his cigarette. There was no response. He rang the doorbell. He heard someone shuffling down the hall. The door popped open and he stood facing his new neighbor,

a short man whose face was at once very middle-aged and very boyish. His blue eyes twinkled and his smile glistened underneath his beard.

"Hi," said Disney. "I'm your neighbor. Walt Disney."

"Hi," said the other man, sticking out his hand. "I'm your new neighbor. Robin Williams." He was all smiles as he looked at the plate of brownies. "Are those pot brownies?"

Disney soon learned that the board must have made some exceptions for Mr. Williams to be admitted. Undoubtedly an entertainer, he was by no means "wholesome." Every time he opened his mouth, it seemed, profanity would spill forth, unchecked and unwarranted. Everything was a joke to him—fatherhood, alcohol, even death. Disney couldn't stand his incessant rude jokes, his unending crass comments, his uncontrollable gutter mouth.

Williams would often spend his evenings at social gatherings, making Saint Patrick, Mozart, and many others piss themselves laughing, almost nightly. Williams always invited Disney to join him, but he always declined, politely, not able to imagine spending an evening with this obscene man.

He lodged a complaint with Saint Peter: "How in the world could this man have slipped into Heaven? He's vulgar!"

"Well, Mr. Disney," Saint Peter said, steepling his fingers.

"The work Mr. Williams did during life was unparalleled. He was, despite his profane demeanor, an inspiration to many. He supported many who struggled with depression, addiction, and suicidal thoughts. Through his example and his actions, he encouraged many—as trite as it may sound—to pursue their dreams. And he was a tremendous ally to the United States armed forces, performing many comedy shows for the military, bringing to them much-needed joy and laughter."

The word "dreams" struck him. Disney was shocked. This profane, vulgar little man had achieved so much good... more, perhaps, than Disney may have.

"He touched countless lives and hearts," Saint Peter explained. "Many men and women were empowered and inspired to do good because of his example."

It was late evening. Disney was making pancakes for himself, because he felt like it. Depression food. He saw a little blue bird out the window and smiled at it. The bird flipped him the bird, lifting his middle feather. Disney flicked his cigarette out the window, aiming for the bird. This is what he had become: a man so lonely he wanted to communicate with rude birds. Disney was startled when his phone rang and he nearly dropped his bowl of pancake batter.

"Hello?"

"Walt! Hey, it's Robin! Some of the guys and I are getting together to hang out tonight—Aristotle, Shakespeare, and... uh... Milton, I think. Shakes and I are gonna see who can make the dirtiest joke without cussing. Wanna join us?"

Disney sighed. He had turned down Williams every time the man offered his friendship. He felt ashamed of himself. All this man wanted was to bring joy to others, to make them laugh. Disney knew he was in desperate need of friendship, and this was a man who had brought such joy to many millions.

"Alright," said Disney. "Sure! I'll come!"

"Great!" said Williams, laughing. "I'll pick you up, but you're driving back!"

Their friendship began here. Williams, it turns out, had acted in several films produced by Disney's studio. The more time he spent with Williams, the more he enjoyed his company. His jokes were creative and his laughter infectious. He always had a smile on his face.

Except for now. Disney poured himself a fresh pot of coffee and was searching for a bowl for his cereal when he heard pounding at the door. He sauntered down the hallway and pulled open the door.

"Hi, Robin!"

Williams was scowling. It was the first time Disney had ever seen him not smiling.

"Is something wrong?"

"What the *hell* did you do?"

Williams pushed past Disney into the hall. Disney closed the door and turned to his friend.

"What are you *talking* about?"

"Your damned studio, dumbass!" Williams pulled out his iPhone and opened YouTube. "Watch this."

Disney watched. He wasn't sure what to think. He was utterly confused. Not only had he never seen an iPhone or a YouTube before, but what he saw on the screen was bizarre, to say the least.

"You son—of—a—bitch!" Williams shouted, smacking a table with each syllable. "Will Smith?"

Disney scratched his head.

"That was *my* role! And it's been turned into a monstrosity!"

"That's... horrifying," said Disney. "I've never seen something so bright and so blue and so... *disturbing*."

Williams breathed in deeply, calming himself. "You're dead. It's not your fault. I'm sorry."

Disney shrugged. "Is there something we can do?"

Williams sighed. "I don't think so." He scratched his head. "Unless..." He looked at Disney, an impish smile creeping back to his face. He took his iPhone back and punched in a number. "Hey, Pete? Yeah, it's Robin... Hey, I've got a question for you. I know it's an unusual request, but..." He looked at Disney again, grinning like a child. "What's the policy on haunting studio executives?"

Diary from the End of the World

John McEachern

1st Place Poetry

I.

Today, I was told that the world is to end
Tomorrow at quarter to three;
That houses will burn and buckle and fall,
Engulfed by the weight of the sea.
That the earth will shake and the winds will blow
That demons among us will rise
And upon the ruins of all that we knew,
Build cities of torment and lies.

II.

Today, I was told to jump out of my bed
With dagger and sword in my hand,
And ready to fight, to spray them with lead,
To take back control with our land.
All day we went marching in orderly lines
'Til darkness had lowered its pall.
Then we lit up our fires, our guardian shrines
And kept watch on the shadowy wall.

III.

Today, I was told that the world would pull through,
That the others had lied and everyone knew
From tracing the outlines of righteous attacks
And soft, blue glows that back up the facts.
I struggled to hear as their high prophets spoke—
An unfamiliar language from a too familiar cloak
And I found myself shuttering down to my corps
When they said that the world would be ending at four.

IV.

Today, I got up and I went for a walk,
When seeing some children at play,
I stopped to observe as they drew with their chalk
The devils and gods of the day.
I stood, befogged, and watched a boy hurl

His pieces of chalk at the littlest girl,
Who did not react—flinch or even sway—
As they exploded against her sable curls.

V.

Today, I remained in my bed until one
In the blistering heat of the day;
In showers of particles shot by the screen
I could feel my skin start to fry.
There seemed to exist the present alone—
Not future or past or life being lived;
But only the moment, stacked like histories
And vast as the back of a god.

VI.

Today, I was told that the world is to end
Tomorrow at quarter to three...

A Moment Passed (Or: Buber in Love)

John McEachern

I sit in the ruins of a moment passed
Among the disassembled stones, the tattered cloth
The shimmering images permitted to stand
By the fickle mind of a single Goth
Or the random act of a grinning flame—
Or perhaps it was the wind to blame?

But whether wind or flame or phantom buzz
I think it still remains the same
For leaving me here, on an uncut beam,
Where once a tower grew, spiraling upwards

Into a revealing fog
That left all alike in wonder;

Where suddenly, the world cut through its obstructions:

It's colors and its forms
It's numbers and uses
It's failures and skepticisms;
And there were not tall trees
But trees
Not green leaves
But leaves
Not pond or sky or passer-by
But only You and only I
Bound together in tongue-twisting heat.

Or perhaps it's better still to say...

But I guess it's gone now anyway...

Gone and dropped the floor from beneath
And (though I never felt the fall)
Placed me here, all incomplete,
To build my models in distorted glass
Of an indescribable moment passed.

March 24th, 2018

John McEachern

The world today is filled with anger—
Anger like a snake biting its own tail;
Or which simmers, then spoils
Before it ever boils
Or reaches their waiting plates.

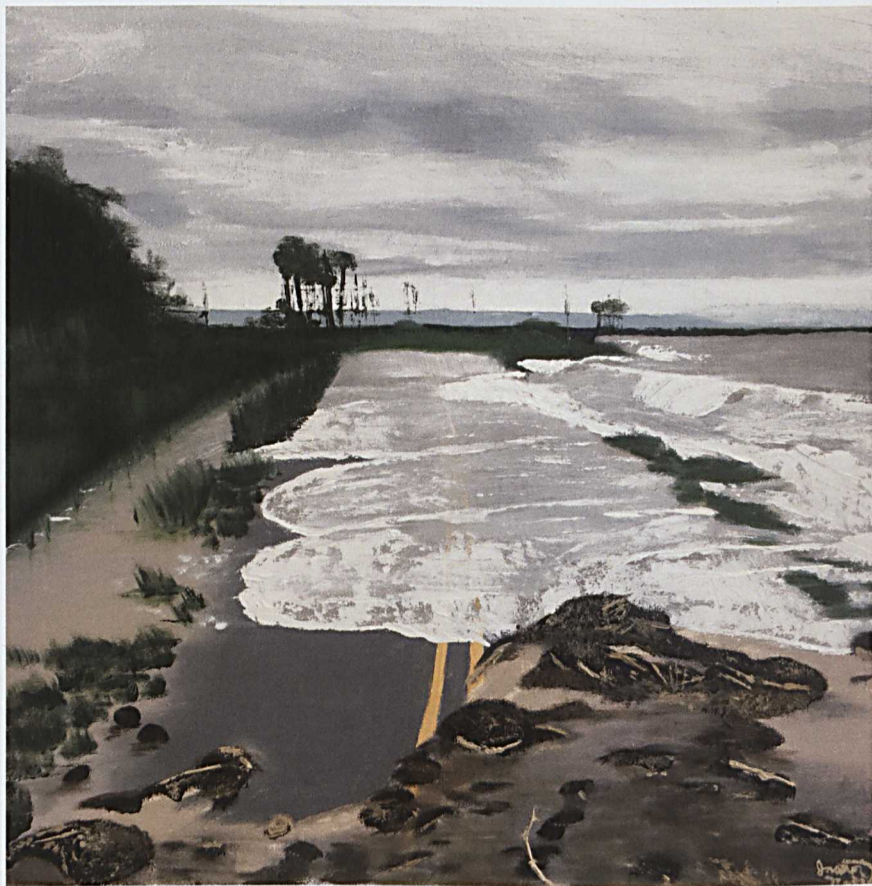
An anger which destroys, but never creates
Or which buries us all in sand.

But today, I saw an anger,
If only in passing,
That I have rarely seen before.
It sounded against my face
Like a tunnel of city wind
And reminded me
That the Appalachians once had peaks.

Hooper's Island

Jonathan Nepini

2nd Place Art



137th Street

Jonathan Nepini



To, You.

Rachel Pigott

Love is a sunset,
Some would say,
Even Shakespeare compared love
To a summer's day.
But ours was not that simple.

Our love was
A thunderstorm
And from the chaos,
My love was born,
And left destruction
In its wake.

First came the light,
Blazing glory,
I put up no fight
And let it consume me wholly
Until I was shroud in your presence.
That was the first time I saw you.

Then came the thunder,
So overwhelming
Until it pulled me under
And I couldn't escape,
Even if I wanted to.

The thunder strikes were
The words you spoke,
Your sweet nothings,
Our inside jokes
That, though whispered,
Felt like drumbeats in my head.

But my favourite was the rain,
Soft and pure,
Those were the moments I came
To simply be near you.
Not more was necessary.

And in that storm
I was washed away
By my utter devotion to you,
No matter how much people say
It was never meant to be
You and Me.

Sirens

Laurel Pogue

I had always wanted to be a mermaid,
So of course I didn't think twice when they asked me to join them.
But mermaids and sirens look very much alike—
I didn't realize the difference
Until I saw the broken boards of ships upon the rocks
And the harsh glint of moonlight on sharpened teeth.
I left the rocks while they were distracted by their reflections.
To this day I doubt they noticed that I was gone.
To this day I doubt they remember I was ever there.
It's been years now since I've been to the water.
I live far from the shore,
Among sailors who escaped the watery deaths of their crew.
And yet, even now, I awake in a cold sweat,
Clawing at my legs to pry free scales that are not there.

What May Have Been

Darrick Rowe

The first spring.
Newly planted.
Seeds were now aborning.
Stylishly slanted.
It was quite the morning.

The second summer.
Time showed what his effort earned.
The gardener was just one man.
Under the sun, foliage burned.
Too much for one watering can.

The third autumn.
At dusk, he found solace from torment.
The dark, a soothing quilt
Blinding potential judgement
On what was foolishly built.

The last winter.
Leaves clung only to pine
White quickly entombed all.
Such factors helped to align
The beginning and end of the fall.

What may have been
Ended as the flower yet to bloom
Too soon, it wilted, then froze.
The memory of her perfume
Pierces like the thorn of a rose.

Sun's Grimace

Darrick Rowe

I've heard people say that Summer is the most dangerous time of the year. The heat gets to people's heads. Makes them angry. Aggressive. Volatile. I've felt it, too. Out there in the heat, sweating your skin off. Just one slight, and it all comes down. First time I ever got in a fight? Best believe it was during the summer. Wasn't even over anything I bothered to remember. I do remember getting the snot kicked out of me though; that's something I'll never forget.

Today was a slow day. School's out, and there's nothing to do but lie in bed, paralyzed by the heat. Wasn't long I'd been awake before I heard a commotion outside. Well, "heard" is a bit of a strong word. It was more like, a couple of sounds, no louder than the "tick-tock" of a clock. Anyway, it roused me up from my sorry state. Anything that would be a break from the mundane, I appreciated. I got up, looked out the window, and saw the scene as it unfolded before me.

A hatted man towered over a boy not too older than me. I couldn't make much of either of them. The man's face was hidden in shadow, and the boy's was skewered in a scowl under the sun. The boy was on the ground, and the man, who I could hear more clearly only now, yelled at him to get up. Their voices grew hush as the boy rose. From then on, the heat let me see only shapes moving. It was all I could do to paint the scene in my own imagination. The boy must have done something to tick the man off. Perhaps he cracked a joke as he walked past, and the man wasn't having any of it. Whatever had happened, things weren't getting any better. The tension growing made me more alert. I could tell they had stopped talking. Words no longer being exchanged. They only stared. The boy, in terror—in the man, only malice. I knew what was going to happen next.

It was only a flash, a moment, but I saw the hatted man draw. Gunshots. One, two. *BANG! BANG!* The boy's body hit the ground. The man just stood there, either triumphant in his actions or transfixed by the realization of what he'd done. I knew

I should've ducked down, or at least looked away, but by the age of nine, I was already used to the sight. The sound hurt my ears, and made my heart stop, if only for a moment, but that was all. I couldn't say I was surprised, but I would be lying if I said I wasn't the least bit afraid. Afraid for the boy, for his family. For myself. For the man, and for his future. Or, what's left of it. Yeah, I was terrified. No point in a false show of bravado. Not every day you see a kid die outside your window. I went back in bed and tried to lull myself into sleep, into relaxation. But the heat and my own nerves kept me. I lied in a pool of my own sweat or tears, I couldn't tell. Maybe both. Eventually, sleep, the ever-merciful savior, granted me my peace.

I woke to the sound of sirens. It had been hours, as I could tell from the setting sun. Not too long after, and I heard my father yelling, asking if I was alright. He's home—I'm safe. I yelled back to him so he'd know I was okay. He called me downstairs and turned a tragedy into a lesson that would stay with me for life.

"Be careful on the streets, son. People, especially round now are ornery. All it takes to tick a man off is something you won't even think of. Something you couldn't possibly mean to offend. Something as simple as the sun's grimace."

Heads or Tails

Darrick Rowe

Again, it begins. The same
Flick that sends it high or low.
And then, it descends. The game
Ends—each time a new show.

On one side a face. The other
Changes every time.
Usually an eagle, but another
Could be an image so sublime.

But why the dedication
To something so mundane?
Perhaps each revelation
Keeps the flipper sane.

So, I ask once more:
"Heads or tails?" I implore.

Rowe Your Boat

Darrick Rowe

Rowe, row, row your boat;
Swiftly with the team
Barely, Warily, Terribly, Scarily:
Life is not a dream

Rowe, row, row your boat;
That's what they told to me.
But as I thought, I felt the lot
Gather 'round for all to see.

Rowe, row, row your boat;
It's what I'd always hear.
I tried to try, but couldn't see why
Their eyes felt tight and near.

Rowe, row, row your boat;
I was in the 4th grade.
I didn't do much, and I found such—
Their watch made me afraid.

A Glimpse into the Soul
Spenser Secret



Fat

Spenser Secret

I feel fatter.

Do I look fatter to you?

I have been eating pizza A LOT more than usual.

Is my gut bigger?

Was I fat to begin with?

Is it stress?

Have I been stress eating?

Do I seem to be eating more?

Do I seem to be enjoying eating more?

What if I become fat?

Would I still be the same, if I was fatter?

Am I fatter?

Maybe I was fat to begin with.

Will anything change for me if I become fatter?

Would I know it if I was fat?

I hope I am not fat.

I hope I am not getting fatter.

Simplicity

Amila Sefo

Tones of grey. And dark. Not black. Maybe just the sky. The night sky looks black between all the stars. Contrasting. A million lights in eternal darkness. Nature is so cheesy. And unpredictable. Indescribable. The tall green trees at the side of the road... What kind of green are they? You could say black, since it's so dark. But they're green.

Who's to say that's true though? Sunlight could be just as deceiving as the darkness. Maybe the trees are blue? But the sun is so yellow that it changes every color? Or this is the truth. More like just a glimpse of it. The stars and moon prevent pitch black darkness. What are they hiding? Is the darkness so horrible? Most people are afraid of it. But I find it oddly soothing. Is that odd? Or is everyone else odd? Once you start philosophizing, there is no stop. There is no end. What if there is?

"I like car drives at night." I like to keep things simple. My mind might run miles per millisecond. But I try to keep things simple. Why should I be awake during the day when I like the night? Just because it is a habit? Should I be afraid just because thousands of generations before me have been? Should I be afraid because I don't know what there is to darkness? I'm not. I find the unknowing soothing. No one expects you to have answers. No one expects anything. Everything is possible. There are no boundaries. No rules. Simple.

"I do, too." I'm glad to have found someone who shares my pleasure in nightly driving. It's never been much of an issue worth mentioning to other people. For them it is just transportation. Through the darkness. Following the lights. Just waiting to be in one of them again. It's almost like travelling through space. Now that I think of it. I love abandoned streets though. Country roads. Empty highways. Forest paths. The lights only stars below the horizon. I wonder if the driver feels the same way. Or is it just the point of not having to think? Concentrating on the journey. Not the surroundings. Not the destination. Just the darkness, the path and you. Silence. Soothing. Feeling alone. But not lonely. Like the

moon.

"I love the moon. Especially when it's full. It's beautiful." I have always been attracted to the moon. More than to the stars or even the sun. I want to hear a wolf howl during full moon. I wonder. Maybe they also think it's beautiful. Wolf experts say they don't howl at the moon. But they can be wrong. They can't read the wolves' minds or anything. It's just assuming. Humans love to do that. Just like they assume the moon wouldn't shine without the sun. What if it did? They'd be baffled. Ha, I'd known from the start. But I wouldn't tell anyone. They wouldn't care anyway. They wouldn't believe. Because they can't read minds.

"Just like... Us." I smile. I don't like it when people try to flatter. It's always just to make the person feel better. No one cares if it's the truth. They want to believe it. So it's true. So it's not a lie. But a lie depends on what the truth is. Truth can change in mere seconds. Every heartbeat can change the world. My heartbeat. A fly's heartbeat. A camel's last breath. So I'm glad the compliment is for us. A special connection.

"Everything is beautiful." As I look out the window, it is. Even the grey concrete crawling beneath the black wheels. Even the mosquito that comes to suck your blood. And leaves behind a pink blotch on your skin. The battered pickup that passes us. The crumpling flowers somewhere on that field. Their time of pride gone and forgotten. Next year's portion desperately awaited. People so easily take and throw away, replace. Go through life trying new. Storing the old. Replacing the old as soon as the new changes.

"Not everything." I am reminded. And I only need one look at the silhouette next to me to understand. Humans. Horrible beings. Doing gruesome things. It's sad to watch. The way they destroy themselves. And the worst thing is that we all know this. We all destroy ourselves. We know it. But we only see the others. Ignore our own destruction. Because we know we can't change it. We have no control over ourselves. So we desperately try to control something else. Clinging. Eyes closed tightly. I wonder. Could we change it if we really tried?

I want to. I try to. But I don't know if I really am succeeding. Or if I only think I am. I can't tell. I don't think anyone can. No one knows. And it frightens people. Just like the dark.

Would it be more awful if we knew we couldn't change anything? Is living in hope, clinging like we are, better? I don't know. Because if it is, there is no way to tell. Unknown. Like so many things. People try to cover uncertainty with rules. As long as the rules are followed, everything is fine. When they are broken though, the system crashes. Which is why they immediately cover it up again. Stick lawbreakers into jail. Buy their obedience with money. Something that we need to survive in the system. A system that doesn't allow life without it.

"THIS is everything," I close my eyes. A hand finds mine. A light squeeze passing from mine to the other. I open my eyes. Nothing changes. I'm in a car. Driving on through the night. And if I try hard, I can imagine that this journey will take forever. That there is no house we will have to return to in the morning. That we are alone. That the lights in the distance are other worlds. Far away. Unknown. And that's what they'll always say. That everything is beautiful. And that there are no questions to be asked and no answers to be said. That this is everything. It's easy. Simple. I don't even have to close my eyes.

Rainbows

Amila Sefo

You know someone who came back to a broken home
A house so grand and full of life, reduced to ashes and coal
You know he lived between charred walls, irrevocably wrecked
His world lit up and burned till all but one had left

And maybe, you think, when you see me, of pure strength
And probably, you think, you always have to go the length
To keep on pushing past the limit, just to endure another day
You think, "I'm gonna be okay, there simply is no other way"

But what if I told you, you're carrying a burning house yourself
What if the walls are cracked and your arms are bent
I know you could hold that house for a lifetime, or three
But what if I said, you can let it fall on me?

I'm still going to love you, like I've done for so long
Just for tonight, you don't have to be strong
You can cry, and scream, you can tell me everything
I'll love you, anyway, in every sense of the word, every meaning

So let those groaning beams fall and the draining tears pour
I will love you then, as the smoke rises, and forevermore
Watch what happens when love meets pain
Like a ray of light breaking through the rain

You'll see colors dance past the sky's ends
We'll find peace beyond the river bend
We'll be rainbows, darling, and nothing will hurt
I'll still love you in the morning, so let the world do its worst

Monsters

Amila Sefo

There were different kinds of monsters. Genim learned this early in life. There were the ones under your bed, the ones in the mirror, and then there were the ones with claws and fangs and blood-red eyes.

The latter were the ones that jumped out of the bushes on those full moon nights where it was still too dark to see.

"They aim to kill and kill they will," as Genim's grandfather said the first time the boy met the white-haired old man who liked to move wildly in his rocking chair as if he were still riding into battle on his wild stallion, Vithar. The man told stories from morning till midnight and the usually restless, little 7-year-old Genim sat still to listen to them all wide-eyed. Grandpapi told him about devils in disguise that walked the bustling streets with smiles as gentle as his mother's; shapeshifters who shed their skin, teeth and eyes for those of Fenrisúlfr; demon wolves whose claws could pierce through a grown man's throat front to back, with fangs that infected you with their evil, and eyes as red as the blood they drank.

"Werewolves!" Genim informed his grandfather of the appropriate word with a gasp. That interruption led to a fierce gaze from the older male and barking laughter.

"Half-man is not what they are," Grandpapi replied. "Dark blood runs through their veins. The human body is nothing but a mask, a trap to lure their victims in. They are monsters! Monsters, through and through."

Genim listened and wondered, setting out to explore his backyard and the woods beyond as soon as the visiting relatives were gone. There was magic out there. There was fairy dust and moon flowers; there were rituals and spells.

There were ways to bring his little sister back.

Genim wasn't afraid of what he would have to fight. His grandfather had fought and won and little Genim would be a strong man like him, he was sure.

The village gave up looking for Genim after the third day of his disappearance into the wilderness. If he hadn't been eaten, they assumed, he would have dehydrated or starved by then. No one had expected the boy to come back running another four days later, a flask clutched tightly to his chest.

"I can save her," he proclaimed in excitement, showing his father the thick purple liquid. He wanted so hard to make little stillborn Gage breathe and to stop the terrible, awful sound of his mother crying through the nights.

But to his horror his father dumped the elixir down the drain while Genim screamed and burst into tears. The slow-moving, wrinkly druid had said this was the only way to bring her back and she could not make it for him again. He had given her a part of him, she had said, something that he only had once. Genim had begged his father to go visit the lady until he had been unceremoniously dragged to his room, the strong grip bruising his shoulder.

His mother didn't stop crying, didn't start eating, and soon she was too weak to leave the bed. Genim saw relatives from across the land, who he usually never saw, for the second time within the summer season.

He refused to listen to the old white-haired man the second time around because he was talking more shrilly this time, increasingly furious, and still lying, lying about the creatures in the woods. They had helped little Genim. Dedrick had saved him and taken care of him. They had tried to help his dead sister and his dying mother and they had been doing the right thing. It was everyone else who had yelled at him, sneered and deemed him possessed. It were the monsters in everyone's heads, the ones they spun wild tales of, that had ultimately doomed his family.

Genim was 11 when he decided that monsters weren't just in people's heads, but also in their hearts. His father had become

the bad man. To protect himself from the shouting and the sour smell of alcohol, Genim tried to remember the times when he had ridden on his father's shoulders laughing, rather than having to duck his head away from his slaps, and tried to remember how gentle the man's voice had been when he had called him his son instead of devil's little helper.

This time when he ran down the same path into the forest in tears, he knew where he was going. He remembered well where he had met Dedrick the first time. There he waited, collecting flowers until it got too dark to see. It started to get cold and he started to wish he had thought about bringing his cape. The red one. He waited and waited until he fell asleep only to awake in the old druid's home, looking up at a ceiling full of drying herbs. She said she didn't know where Dedrick and his family had gone.

Within a few years, he had learned the ways of magic and he thought he had started to get a hang of it. He really did have an extraordinary talent, but with 16 years of age he still had a lot to learn. This he discovered when humans came to raid their tiny cottage. It all happened within seconds, strategically, and he only survived because of his mentor's knee jerk reaction to cast him invisible. He was only able to do so much as blink and the druid he had thought immortal had already bled out on the floor in front of him. Moments later the wooden hut was set on fire and Genim had to flee to save his life, the horror leaving him numb.

No, monsters did not have red eyes or speak in foreign tongues to tell you who they were. Monsters were the fear of the unknown, the fear of what could be, the uncontrolled pain that manifested in rage. The fear would twist the good into bad, lies into truth and sanity to insanity, further leading to destruction and suffering.

He thought he would never see Dedrick again. He hoped that he had fled the forest with his pack years before the forest next to Genim's old village had been burned to the ground. The only one thing he wanted more than to find his friend again was to have the male safe and happy.

The wolf that approached him was fully grown and alone. His shoulders came up to a man's hip, and he was covered in thick coarse fur that swallowed the dying light of the sun. Only in patches was it slick and carried the scent of blood with it, especially around muzzle and paws. Genim was reminded of his grandfather's detailed, vulgar description of Fenrisúlfr, but all he saw in front of him was a beauty of such degree that it took his breath away. There was a kind of royal power in those muscles, bundled and led by grace. The red eyes were cast down when the slow approach came to a halt and he didn't cower, but it seemed to the human that the beast shrunk in on himself. He lowered his head and left the back of his neck exposed, vulnerable, guilty.

Genim didn't need any explanations or confessions from the werewolf. They were all guilty in war. But this beast was no monster. This was a friend who had helped him when he had been in need and who now needed him. Picking the flower at his feet, he kneeled down and presented it, waiting for the wolf to look up again. He smiled at him when the male finally did and watched the miraculous transformation of Dedrick finding his human form again. Cracks ran out into the quiet air. Dedrick stumbled and whimpered, leaving enough time for Genim to start worrying. It didn't look right. Eventually he stepped forward on human legs, multiple scars now visible on his skin.

"Thank you," Dedrick whispered in a rough voice, as if he hadn't used it for a while. He was different and older and yet still himself. The eyes were the honey brown as they had been over a decade ago, the same but sadder and wearier. His fingers were warm when they settled over Genim's to grip the flower, the other hand coming to hook gently around his neck. The werewolf pulled him in to press his lips against his forehead ever so lightly and the human let himself sink against the other's chest with a breathless, happy laugh.

Many monsters roamed the world, he thought, spreading poison with every breath. Many monsters ravaged the world, but they didn't rule it. No. They didn't always win.

The Necropolis: A Byword

Christopher Shatzer

The folks at Shriven Grove United Methodist Church were proud of their little parish. It wasn't especially large in membership, but what it lacked in congregation, they made up for in spirit. The place was known in surrounding precincts as "The City on the Hill," due to the general beauty and happy spirit which seemed to emanate from there, the kind of spirit which draws the fabled pilgrim to seek the sublimely serene wise man on the mountaintop, seeing them filled with age-old knowledge and enlightenment. Indeed, a kind of light seemed to emanate there, especially during their nightly worship services and their coffeehouse fellowship nights on Fridays, where the more spirited and scholarly members would cheerily debate theology long into the night and others would shake off the long and constant toil of the week from their backs like so many old cobwebs, renewed in the companionship of their fellow men.

But alas, Winthrop's famous sermon also made note of bywords—how such a city can become a city not of light but of ruin, and there were times when the church became a symbol of such very things. It happened gradually at first—some nasty gossip here, a few white lies there, but at a certain point the community was almost torn apart. Thankfully, though of course nobody in the congregation was completely perfect, they were soon once again to restore their congregation to its former deep-knit closeness. That closeness was not to change for as long as the congregation lasted.

The congregation was not to last, though. Such beautiful things, in the grand scale of time, are all ephemeral, like the morning glory whose empire of the dawn fades into obscurity by night. It so happened that one day the town in which the church was in declared that the famous itinerant circuit riding system of preachers common in that day and age had to abate, and the church had to find a new, more permanent preacher or else lose its right to hold services.

And so it was that Gary Samson was ordained a minister. He had come up from the land around the town that year and was figured as good a choice as any to head the town church, if lacking in the vigor of the circuit riders who thundered into town with the word of their God on their horses' hooves. He was untiring, though, if plodding in his monotonous sense of mission, and quickly set to work building. Within a short span of years, the city on the hill had its beauty which the more literarily inclined of Shriven Grove would say rivaled the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Although that wasn't quite true, the garden was both a miracle of fundraising and of horticulture, though some of the more plain-living folk of the parish claimed there wasn't anything wrong with the parish before. And there truly wasn't, the others conceded, but this was truly a triumph of man-made engineering. Had they known a certain Gregor Mendel, they might have invoked his name in praise of the marvels of modern man.

Soon, though, there was an issue that greatly divided the congregation. The Rev. Samson declaimed that within a generation or two, the cemetery would be filled. It only made sense, then, to buy another plot. This was not readily apparent to every parishioner, especially when some claimed they could just use smaller headstones or form family plots by burying all individuals in a succession of caskets—the first one to pass on deepest underground, the others closer to fresh loam. One especially learned but not very practical parishioner suggested a system of catacombs, though this was promptly rejected. Eventually, though, it was decided that the purchase was to be done, against the vociferous objections of some in the parish.

That purchase put the parish in a great deal of debt. Initially, the parish tried to set up a pavilion and invite people from the town to sample items in annual bake sales, but the elegant pavilion proved to not be enough of a draw, even with the combined forces of the church's band and choir playing with all their might until their lungs ached. Renting the space out for other events still did not provide enough income, though it did manage to keep the congregation afloat, though just barely.

Eventually the time had come when the cemetery purchase fully converted into a deadweight around the drowning parishioners' ankles. The parish was to be sold and turned into a school. The cemetery plot would be turned into the town's public cemetery. There was great lamenting in the church. By that time the grand era of the fiery-worded orating circuit riders had ended in earnest, and it was just a shadow of its former self. The church's coffee-house, peculiar for that era, had ceased to be inspiring and now was just a curiosity. Under Samson, the things of this world had mattered, but now, with the church without beautified, the church within was dying.

And the church without still had to pay their dues, and these would fall upon Samson's head most of all. It would be incorrect to say he didn't care about the congregation, even if his care was less pastoral than managerial, and he gallantly fought until the last man to prevent the town from annexing all of the parish. He stood at the door as the assayer came and stood there later as the bell and the cross were pulled down. It was this last gesture that would prove his downfall. Knowing the risks, he held out his arms to steady his by then frail legs, pushing against the walls of the church, decorated with marble pilasters resembling Corinthian columns on either side, a beatification he himself had made. It was then that the cross fell upon his head, causing a blow to his head that knocked the life out of him. When both man and cross landed on the ground, the cross was in the shape of an X, in the rumored style of the crucifixion of the Apostle Peter. This was not lost upon the more talkative members of the former parish, and there was much discussion about it for weeks, especially as Samson was the most high-profile of the first to be buried in the town's new cemetery. After the buzz died down, many of the parishioners left the town. It no longer had anything to offer them. Some questioned, rightly or wrongly, if it ever had at all.

Thus, the old light was gone. New lights replaced it, but they lacked the closeness in community that had been present in the old lights, and so were but lesser gurus upon the mountaintop which the pilgrim trekked, only to reach the top and find that the guru at the summit had descended some time ago, losing what he thought he had found in his own wisdom. The school proved to be a footnote in time too, torn down and replaced by a

drive-in movie theater, which was then replaced by a large chain restaurant.

The last legacy of Shriven Grove's old church is the town's cemetery. It filled up quickly as plague year after plague year turned the city of living and light into a city of the dead and sorrow. If you walk the long, melancholy avenues of its somber streets, you may see a name that time has almost erased. His plaque reads SAMSON, in large, elegant gothic letters, wearing each year more and more. Go soon, for soon, like too many things, those letters too may be gone. And dull, silent stone shall be alone with the flaps of crows wings and the cry of the whippoorwill in that forsaken necropolis.

James Gatz

Jacob Summerlin

3rd Place Poetry

you can't do this forever
old sport.
drunken stupors and
not saying too much
but always punctual
and sharply dressed
drenched in whiskey.
they hide their fears
behind ruby red lipstick
and dirty money.
watch how they stumble out
each and every weekend
still sparkling.
still afraid.

do we know where we stand
my beautiful little fool?
certainly not in torrential downpours
because then we couldn't cry out loud—
we couldn't be anything but numb
drawn into the green lights
and no longer each other

In His Honor
Jacob Summerlin

MOURN: CELEBRATE
IT COULD BE BRILLIANT
BEAMING : BAWLING
FEEL EVERY LAYER

when's the date?

... i don't know if i can.

LOVE : FEEL FEEL FEEL
HE'S NOT HERE OR THERE
WORDS : DANCE
YOUR TANGO MAKES ME WEEP
BRILLIANT TEARS
MOURNING LIFE THAT MOVED ON
MORNING : YOUR HAPPIEST TIMES
CRYING BECAUSE WE WERE SO BRILLIANT

i'll be there

not because i'm lost or anything

just swimming
in deep blue
fields of hydrangea
soft—i found one of
your curly hairs
in my bed again

i miss you

silly damn head

so brilliant

Alchemy

Danielle Wendt

There is no
escaping these walls.
Squeezing.
Crushing.
Strangling.
My heart pounds
as I wrestle them.

I resist
with all my might.
But I can't stretch
much farther.
Pressure molds me.
What will I become?
A piece of clay,
shattered in the kiln?
Or a masterpiece,
glazed and glorious,
gold dust
forged through
chrysopoeia?

Self-Demonstration

Danielle Wendt

The word 'demonstrate'
Comes from the latin 'mōnstrāre'
Meaning to show.
To show your true self
Is to bare your teeth
To demonstrate
The monster inside of you.

Dandelions

Jackie White

The best memories I have of my childhood are with Rhiannon. She started going to the school on the same military base that I did in the sixth grade, but we'd lived in North Yorkshire for about the same amount of time. She went to an off-base private school for a while, but when she started middle school her parents decided that her and her siblings should go to school with all of the other American kids. We both moved back to the States before the eighth grade started, so we only really had two years together, and they were tweenaged years at that. This albeit short-lived best friendship during late childhood was still something that left one of the biggest impressions on my life. I don't think I'll ever forget the experiences I had at her house playing hide and seek in the dark, with walkie-talkies to communicate and a giant expanse of both backyard and forest to run around in. Spending time with her siblings felt like finally experiencing the big-family life I had never known. She was the oldest of four kids, all having names beginning with R: Rhiannon, RJ, Ramie, and Ronan. We'd often take scooters down the road to the candy shop a few miles from her house and buy huge, decadent Cadbury Caramello bars. It didn't matter if it made me sick to eat the whole thing, it was worth it for the childish thrill. I had my first ever McDonald's hash browns at her house the morning after a sleepover; Rhiannon, RJ, and I had all piled in her double bed near sunrise and awoke to the smell of hot fast food waiting for us. To this day whenever I get McDonald's breakfast I think about sitting on her carpet and picking up the Sims game we'd abandoned at three in the morning the previous night. Though I treasure all of the adventures we went on and the unhealthy dietary choices we made, the memory that sticks with me most, however, is a sunny afternoon when we were both eleven.

As an only child, I didn't really play outside often. That's probably why my legs ached and the breaths I took burned with every inhale as I chased behind my best friend. It was a hot English summer day, which meant that it was about seventy degrees Fahrenheit and partly cloudy.

"He's gaining on us! We can't let the pirate king prevail!" Rhiannon shouted towards me from over her shoulder, not a touch of exhaustion in her voice. I picked up the pace a little bit, inspired by the urgency of the situation. The sound of her younger brother RJ's angry shouts began to get louder behind me, and I felt a tickle of excitement run up my spine. This kind of dramatic play-pretend game was rare for me, and I was trying not to laugh. If I started to laugh, the chances of me tripping on a stepping stone and landing face-first into the dewy riverside weeds would increase exponentially, and I really didn't want to get stickier than I already was. My legs continued to pump beneath me against the stone and grass, and I was distressingly aware of the way my t-shirt was clinging to my back.

Rhiannon finally stopped ahead of me and I was grateful for the break. As I heaved beside her, she looked toward our right, but I didn't notice what had gotten her attention until her brother joined us, dropping his angry evil pirate persona.

"What's up with that field over there?" he asked, catching my attention enough to finally stand up straight and look. Contrasting from the greens and browns of the surrounding environment, there was a large patch of white about ten yards from us. We soon realized that it was a huge patch of dandelion puffs, and Rhiannon's eyes widened.

"Do you wanna go check it out?" she asked me. I hesitated. It was pretty close to somebody's home, and I saw the tall weeds separating us from it. My skin crawled just imagining what kind of bugs lived in those weeds, and visions of meaty grasshoppers and the mosquito hawks that stuck to everything had me taking a step back. My bug phobia had been a deep seated issue that had carried over from a very young age, and it's something that college-aged Jackie still struggles with. Back then it was even worse, though, and because it was kind of embarrassing, I didn't really tell anybody about it. Rhiannon saw the worry on my face but shrugged it off, going ahead with RJ. They made it a good bit in, and I had no choice but to follow. I wasn't about to sit by myself on the dirt path until they finished playing. So I took a step into the grass, breathed deeply through my nose, and followed after my friends.

We waded through the tall grass, and the moisture from the morning's rain dampened my socks and chilled the skin exposed by my shorts. By the time we got to the dandelions, the weeds brushed the middle of our thighs and I was still paranoid about the bugs, but I swallowed my fear as I picked up my first puff. It was huge, and I was not nervous about trespassing anymore, it was obvious that whoever owned the land hadn't touched it in months.

We started picking as many dandelions as we could, gathering a huge bunch in each hand. I squeaked at any dark spot in my bunches, assuming that it was some kind of insect every time. My hands quickly became sore from gripping onto the stems of the weeds so tightly, but I didn't want to drop them. Rhiannon made eye contact with me and smiled, holding up her own bunches. When RJ finished picking his, we all simultaneously waved our dandelions around in the air with as much force as possible, creating a cloud of seeds around us. They stuck in our hair and on our clothes, but the cool wind quickly moved them away from us. We watched as they drifted over to the empty grass over towards the river. RJ immediately went back to pick more, and Rhiannon moved over to a spot that we hadn't picked through yet. I stayed in the same spot, picking seeds off my face, cringing at how they tickled my nose. I thought about the bugs again.

When I was done, I looked over at where Rhiannon had gone to, and even though the moisture of the dew and my dried sweat had started to become a little uncomfortably chilly, the sight warmed me. The setting sun cast an orange glow over us, and Rhiannon had become almost silhouette-like in appearance. She leaned over to grab more flowers, and I wondered to myself what other magical experiences like this I'd missed out on because I had been too nervous to adventure even just a little bit. The thought left my mind pretty quickly though, because if I didn't hurry up, RJ was gonna take the biggest dandelion puffs, and I'd have to pick the small ones.

After she moved to Texas and I came to Ellicott City, Maryland, we kept in contact through games. We'd play Roblox, Minecraft, or Assassin's Creed online whenever we could. We'd keep each other on Skype while we did so, and RJ would join sometimes,

too. Hearing them laugh at me when I died in-game was strangely comforting, and even though I was struggling to make new friends at school, it was nice to know that I still had Rhiannon. We weren't able to talk as often when the school year got underway, and after that we started talking less and less. A week would pass in between us talking, and then a few weeks, and then a few months. It wasn't weird, though; we both understood that we were preparing for high school and getting more involved with new friends in our respective schools. We always talked about visiting each other eventually, but I was kind of resigned to that being a wild dream. Rhiannon, however, was dead serious. When I was fourteen and she was fifteen, she called me to tell me that she had managed to save up enough money for plane tickets to Maryland. I couldn't believe that she was really going to fly alone across the country just to see me. I got nervous ordering fast food by myself, and she was going to go full-on unaccompanied minor. She always was the brave one.

She stayed at my house for a week, and it was just like the sleepovers we had two years before (minus the British dales to run through whenever we wanted). We stayed up late, talked about everything and anything, and caught up with what we'd missed in each other's lives. She'd cut all of her waist-long hair off, and the pixie cut she originally had after donating her hair had grown out to a little flippy style, reminiscent of 1970's-era teenage boy. Texas had given her quite the tan, and she finally had enough assets to wear a real bra. She looked a little different, but she was still Rhiannon. Saying goodbye after that week was decently harder than I had expected it to be, and it was kind of hard going back to not being able to play video games in the same room again.

Years passed. Right after she visited we talked rather often, but our relationship became similar to the relationship you have with The Sims. You obsessively play it every day for a week, and then forget about it for about eight months. It wouldn't be uncommon for almost a whole year to pass without us saying anything to each other, but when one person would reach out we'd pick up like a single day hadn't passed. She'd tell me about the boy that took her to homecoming while we built forts on Minecraft, and six months later over the sounds of a templar bleeding to death on

my Playstation, I'd get the story about how she dumped him.

Then came the time where she had a breakup that wasn't so simple. When I was eighteen and she was nineteen, I got a phone call from her, and even though we hadn't spoken in months, she announced that she had the money for a plane ticket, and was going to come stay with me for two weeks if I'd let her. It was a large surprise to say the least, but how could I say no? A month later she was at my house. Just like the last time we had seen each other, she was older, more mature, a little taller, but definitely still my Rhiannon. She slept in my bed for the whole two weeks that she stayed with me, and we stayed up late every night staring at the dark ceiling and talking about what we'd missed. She'd just broken off an almost three year relationship with a boy that had wanted to marry her one day. She almost failed out of college. She was fighting with RJ. I was shocked. Usually Rhiannon was the one who had everything together, and for once in my life I had to be the one who led her. I wasn't the scared little kid who didn't want to go into the dandelion patch because she didn't like grasshoppers. I had to be the person to comfort her in the face of uncertainty, and it was a shocking role-reversal. During an elongated break in the conversation with the sound of the fan running and the crickets chirping outside, I realized that I was suddenly the brave one. I didn't really know how to respond at first. An hour later we were hugging and crying together under the covers as I reassured her that her choices and her feelings were valid, and that she would make it out of the pit she was in eventually.

During those two weeks we went out to see the city, walked miles on end to catch Pokémon (yes, it was during that whole craze) and tried our best to figure out who we were as budding adults. She was there for my birthday for the first time since I turned twelve, and it was nice to be able to spend time together in the short period each year in which we are actually the same age. I think it was symbolic, in a way, that we came to stand on more equal terms in maturity both literally and figuratively that summer.

The two weeks she spent with me felt far too short, and I found myself waving goodbye at the airport as she disappeared into the security line at BWI with a bittersweet feeling in my chest and

a smile that was just a little fake. I didn't want her to go. I knew how we were. I knew we'd probably be a third of the way into our twenties before we'd see each other again. But she couldn't stay forever and I knew that.

While writing the first part of this, I sent her a text. I told her that I missed her, and that I was writing a story for my memoir class about her. She Facetimed me as soon as she could, and we shouted at each other for letting seven months pass like it'd been seven minutes. It was all in jest, though, and she prodded me for information on what the story was about.

"Do you remember that time we found that huge field of dandelions?" I asked her, waiting for the internet to catch up with the phone call as her picture froze for a moment.

"Oh yeah, when we trespassed onto somebody's land and stayed out past sunset. Remember how mad my mom was when we got back?" she laughed, clearly not having not thought about that day for a while. But I don't remember anything past the dandelions that day. It was a definitive moment in my life where I got to experience some kind of adventure, even on a miniscule scale. I stepped out of my comfort zone and pushed myself to a point that may have not been that extreme for others, but was a big step for myself. I don't remember her mom being mad at all. I just remember being there and finally reaching the point where I finally stopped worrying so much, and just lived in the moment. It was a small event that didn't really mean much in the big picture, but I let go of my fears for just a few minutes, which is something that I still struggle to manage to do today. I think I value my friendship with Rhiannon so much because I know that we've pushed each other to grow in different and special ways. She's always been the one to reach out a hand and invite me along to do something out of the ordinary, but these days I tend to feel myself reaching out to grab her hand. It's less of an adventure that I'm trying to lead her on, but something different.

Maybe next time I'll finally fly out to Texas to see her. I could use some new best memories.

