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Sobering Truths

"I can't tell you how many times I've been told to keep my mother's addiction a secret. My dad would claim, 'No one has to know.' They wanted this secret to stay behind the walls of our house." *Memoirs, page 10*

Cover art by Stephanie Shen, Lake Hiawatha, NJ

What Teen Ink Has Done for Me

Teen Ink gives me the voice I'm afraid of using face-to-face. It lets me share my opinions, find peers with similar interests, and it helps me grow as a writer – and as a person. With the constant flow of feedback and new reading material, it's just the place for teens with a passion for creating. Artists, photographers, poets, writers, critics – there's a tab for everyone. Teens who want to be environmentalists or doctors, activists or fantasy authors are welcome. Even people who are just stopping by to check out the book, video game, and movie reviews will be satisfied.

This is an inclusive magazine and website where everyone has an equal opportunity to post in the forums, submit their work, and connect with an online community of friends, future leaders, and young risk-takers. More often than not, sharing your piece in the chat section, the forums, or by doing read-for-reads with other writers will bring on an onslaught of helpful feedback. It's honest – not too harsh – and it makes a world of difference to someone like me who has a busy family and uninterested friends.

One thing Teen Ink gives me that no other place ever has is courage and confidence in my literary works. I cannot describe the way it feels to look at all the Editor's Choice awards I've gotten, or the two magazine issues on my desk with articles I've written printed in them. It makes me feel accomplished; you don't have to be a middle aged man with four degrees to have your voice heard, or to share your stories with the world. You don't even have to be out of middle school.

I've always been afraid that someone would think my essays, stories, or poems were silly and immature. After I joined Teen Ink, that changed. I began to write more boldly, come out of my shell, and let the way I truly feel come through in my literature. No more covering up what I felt was too

dangerous. No more holding back. I became a strong person. I was less afraid.

What I'm getting at is that I wouldn't be the writer – or the person – I am today without Teen Ink. The editors, staff members, and sponsors of this awesome magazine mean the world to me. Thank you for what you do and for making my life brighter.

*Liv Harris, O'Fallon, MO
author of "Seventy-Five Names" and a review of Washington University in St. Louis*

Wilson, the Princess

In "Wilson, the Princess," "Allie" describes a boy who played with girl toys and was considered strange. It is disappointing that some people still think boys have to play with specific items. Allie writes that from an early age society told her, "Wilson's are boys and boys like Transformers and toy cars and superheroes." When I was little, I enjoyed superheroes, but that doesn't make me strange.

Allie wonders about the grown-up Wilson: "Maybe he's had to hide who he really is and act like someone he's not." The author hopes that her friend is able to be himself. She also wonders if he will fit in wherever he is and is not pretending to be a jock.

Near the end of the article, Allie concludes, "I wish that we were little again and didn't know how to hate and didn't know, or particularly care, that Wilsons are boys and boys should like boy toys." I believe it shouldn't matter. What truly matters is that you are your unique self, and no one should try to change who you are inside and out.

Madison Arden, Defiance, OH

Ashamed to Be American?

Teen Ink is a place where teens nationwide can share their opinions about a plethora of topics. Recently, the piece "Ashamed to Be American?" by Delaney Davis caught my eye. Living in a liberal state and being

born to a family of liberals, issues such as sexism, police brutality, and LGBT rights are prevalent in my life. I'm a pro-gay marriage, feminist teenager. I hate having to bite my tongue when sharing my feelings on these issues because the response is always, "If you hate America so much, why don't you just leave?"

However, Delaney shared an extraordinarily well written piece eloquently explaining America's problems, despite her pride at being an American and her love for this country. It's shameful that our own police, who swore to protect and serve our country, kill citizens without blinking an eye. It's shameful that a woman walking in the street in a short skirt is thought to be "asking for it." It's shameful that homophobia exists.

Yes, this country has issues, and we can't sweep that fact under the rug. But I love my country and am proud to be an American. Or, as Delaney put it, "Of course, I am aware that I'm extremely privileged to have the freedoms that I have. I'm not taking them for granted ... When America collectively makes a conscious effort to fix the long list of problems we have, I will never stop talking about how proud I am to be an American."

Shivi Chauhan, Staten Island, NY

Gun Girl

A big round of applause for "Violet" from Peterborough, N.H., for her article "Gun Girl." I was able to picture the situation and could feel the terror she felt as she described it. I think her message is an important one for teens especially because every day we are faced with tough decisions that could hurt or help someone – and in this case truly impact lives.

This article also provided two different perspectives because Violet talked about how she thought the guy who brought the gun to her school was going to harm her classmates; however, he was really planning

to use it on himself. With Violet's brave conscience she saved someone's life, and although she suffered for it, she is a hero.

Thank you, Violet, for sharing your courageous story and showing us that telling someone when a situation is dangerous is the right thing to do and can save lives.

Tequasia Harris, Phoenix, AZ

Good-Bye Forever

"Good-Bye Forever" by Alex Helm is a meaningful, sentimental piece about letting go. The author speaks about saying good-bye to her friends as they graduate and feeling selfish for being sad that she will have no one to hang out with next year.

I can relate to this story. I tell myself often as the end of the year approaches that I will make new friends, keep in contact with old ones, and that it'll be all right. However, it's difficult to think positively when your friends are moving on.

Katie Zhou, Brooklyn, NY

Cyberwar

In "Cyberwar" by Danielle Layman, a social media app created a cyberbullying situation in her high school. Kids were posting negative things about their classmates, which left all the students feeling "frustrated, sad, even depressed," writes Danielle. In my high school the same thing happens on numerous social media apps, whether it is anonymous or not.

Even though it was depressing to read this selection, how Danielle's school stopped the cyberbullying amazed me. She writes, "We got to school and found personal, handwritten notes on lockers telling us how important it is to make people feel good about themselves." I believe my own school should do this to decrease the harsh comments made on social media.

Korbyn Martin, Defiance, OH

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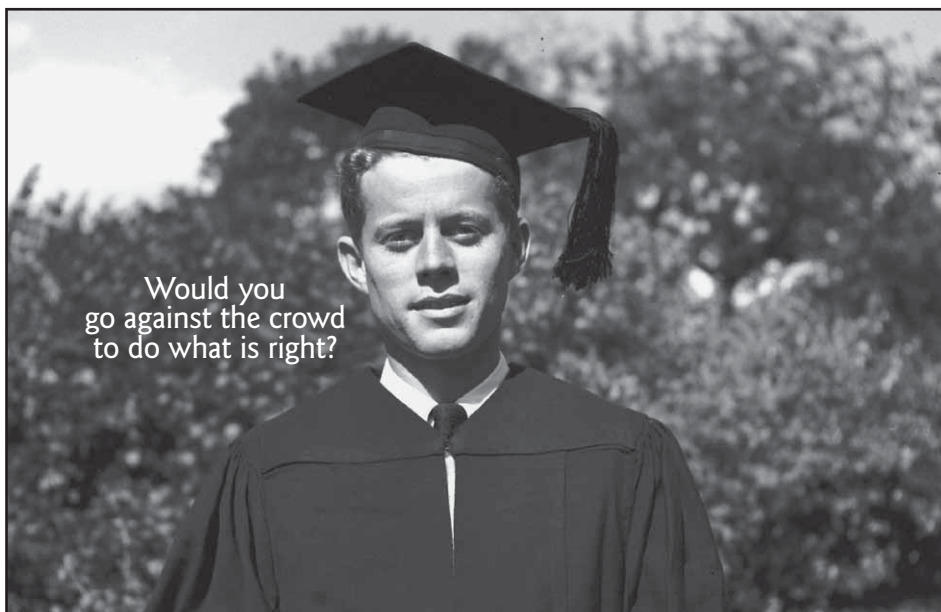
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The Discovery of Cool

by Daniel Dedina, Imperial Beach, CA

I stared at my fifth-grade school picture that my mother had been obligated to buy. The T-shirt I wore had a rather large stain on the front, and there was a small tear in the shoulder from a recent skateboarding fall. Frequent use of a wet suit had colored my neck the shades of Neapolitan ice cream: pale near my chest, red at the halfway point between my chin and my collarbone from a wet suit rash, and very tan the rest of the way up. The skin under my eyes was dark from sunburn, making my eyes appear sunken.

What was happening on top of my head was a different story altogether. A shock of white-blond hair that would have reached to my shoulders was plastered back over my scalp, and thanks to chlorine and salt damage, strands had clumped together to form what resembled snakes from the skull of Medusa. Needless to say, I was grateful that they didn't sell yearbooks in fifth grade. Not that I really had a problem with the way I looked.

I surfed and skated and had fun, and I didn't know or care that I looked like a small girl who had unfortunately become addicted to methamphetamines.

"Let me look at it," boomed my father, smiling proudly.

He paused for a moment as he took in the image.

"This is awesome!" he blurted. "You look like one of the Z-Boys! Like Stacy Peralta or something. That's cool; it's what I looked like when I was a kid."

His words made me flinch. It's not that I thought that the Z-Boys weren't cool, it was the fact that he said I also looked like him. I wanted to be original and preferably not comparable to my dad. Besides, in all the surf magazines, those guys who lived a dream and rode perfectly blue water all day in remote Indian Ocean atolls had short hair and bangs that swung to one side of their forehead.

That was cool.

"Yeah, I guess," I responded flatly.

I sought the solitude of my room, where sunlight burst through the gaps in the deep blue curtains as if to let me know that the afternoon was waning away. Sitting on the edge of my bed, I wondered what it would be

like to have short hair. It was a strange thought for me, a new thought; I had never had a real haircut, just the occasional trim to get rid of dead ends.

I thought of my favorite surfers and how smooth they looked in the glossy ads in my magazines and how much fun they always had in the many videos of my surf movie collection. One day I would be like them, traveling the world in board shorts and sandals, always seeking the perfect wave. My dad never did what they did – or at least he didn't seem as cool doing it.

My abundance of strawlike blond hair all of a sudden felt annoying and heavy. The pointy ends scratched the back of my neck and bothered me as I slept.

The next morning was Saturday, and I had decided that I would cut my hair once and for all. It needed to go if I was ever going to live a life like professional surfers Andy Irons and Taj Burrow. I strode confidently into the living room, clad solely in my boxers, and announced that today I was going to get my hair cut.

"Oh, but honey, you look so handsome!" protested my mother.

"I bet you just want to look like that Jack Beerber singer or something," my father said, glancing up from the newspaper. "Look, you can cut your hair, but just know that college girls love a guy with long hair. They think it's cute."

Strangely, this only reinforced my decision.

"I just think it's time for a change," I replied.

I made an appointment for 2 o'clock that afternoon and made sure to bring the latest issue of *Surfer* magazine. It had an interview with one of my favorite surfers – and a head shot. I thought it would be a good reference for the hairdresser so she could really capture the style I wanted.

It can be hard to know that one has had a substantial amount of hair cut away until they get up from the barber's chair and walk around and feel the wind through it, but for me the feeling was instantaneous. When the hairdresser finally put her tools down, I felt as if a great shaggy cloud had been lifted from my head. For the first time I felt a chill on the back of my neck and realized there was no longer a curtain of hair covering it. I nearly ran out of the salon without paying; all I wanted to do was run around with my new light, sexy, sleek head of hair. I left a twenty on the register and galloped out the door with the breeze caressing my nearly visible scalp, and boy, did I feel cool. ♦

A great shaggy cloud had been lifted from my head



Photo by Joseph Gonsolis, Sacramento, CA

Streetlights and Stars

by Patience Kish, Pittsburgh, PA

We were the oddest of friends, you and I. You sported khakis and Polo shirts while I wore too-tight-to-function skinny jeans and band T-shirts. You sang in a church choir while I drowned my grievances in pathetic, angsty poetry.

But we worked.

We were close; we didn't like to admit it, but we were. And that night, I had never felt closer to you.

We lay in the darkened field under a streetlight that cascaded a warm orange glow upon us. I was pressed up against your side in an attempt to keep warm. It was late October, and the first breath of winter was creeping into the air.

We relived the good memories and some of the bad, and we talked about the important things: family, friends, school, politics.

And then I told you about the boys I loved.

"But you have a boyfriend, Pay," you said. I sat up, pulled my knees to my chest, and pretended that it didn't hurt that I knew.

"Look up," I said. And you did. You knew not to question me.

"What do you see?" I asked.

You scrunched up your face in confusion.

"What do you mean what do I see? Just a streetlight?"

I smiled knowingly. "Right. And do you know what lies beyond the streetlight?"

"Stars," you answered. And I still remember what you looked like when it dawned on you.

I was playing a game with the streetlights and the stars, and I still don't know whether you were happy or sad when you realized you were neither. ♦

"But you have a boyfriend, Pay"

Marching

by Hana Tzou, San Jose, CA

The sky is starburst colors – pinks and yellows exploding from a nebula of clouds, breaking through the seas of ice that shade the blue of the sky.

band ten hut!

and my fingers slip directly into the folds and crevices of the cold brass.

dress right dress!

and my head snaps to the right, ponytail whacking my mouth in its ferocity.

ready front!

I settle into attention, my back stick-straight and my shoulders up. The chill is biting, seething, roaring. My thin hoodie is not enough to clothe my skin from the breeze, but I am not cold. My eyelids droop in protest of my nocturnal adventures, but I am not tired. I am nothing but focused, I am nothing but strong. I stand and wait for the drum major's call, directly in formation, steady, tall. My hands are at home, fitted in between the angles of the trumpet, and my mouth is firm and ready.

horns up!

The drumline starts, and I feel the rhythm in my frozen bones, echoing, reverberating, bliss. I fit my mouth to the metal, tasting the familiarity of valve oil and breath.

The drums count me off and I start to play. ♦

Beyond the Grave

by Jade Stemmler, Saint Louis, MO

I bounded up the back porch steps and swung open the kitchen door. I let the car keys slide all the way across the table as I fiddled with the rolls of paper, trying to see the art inside. When I held both ends of the paper, I found my charcoal rubbing abloom under the bright florescent lighting. Up until that point, I had no idea what the picture would look like – when I made it, it was so dark out I couldn't see a foot in front of my face as my hand rapidly ran charcoal across paper. It had turned out perfectly. There were grand flower blossoms bordering a rectangular cement block that held the names of an elderly couple who were long deceased. What to do now? Surely my dad would want to see this. My mother, not so much. She's already seriously weirded out by me.

"Hey, Pa, come here! Look what I made!" I yelled, excitedly holding up the grave-rubbing.

He stared at the paper, then back at me. "You're more twisted than your sister, huh?" was his response.

I just replied, "I like it," and rolled it back up. Hi. My name's Jade and I'm a graveyard addict. Okay, so maybe "addict" isn't the most accurate way to describe my infatuation with graveyards, but other people seem to see it that way. I go to graveyards often in the middle of the night or the day, just to hang out and spend some time outside.

A lot of people find graveyards freaky. It's reasonable to have these feelings, since they are a place of death and sadness, and there are many superstitions about the deceased. When I think about graveyards,

I don't think of superstitions or bad vibes. I like to imagine how life was for those buried there.

Though graveyards are places to bury the dead, in all honesty, their purpose is for the living. We put our loved ones in extravagant wooden boxes, with expensive outfits and ceremonies, and carve a big piece of rock with the person's name so they are forever there.

The first time I visited a cemetery, I was with a friend and it was the middle of the night. We wanted to go somewhere and do something but couldn't decide what. I'd been wanting to go to a graveyard for a while, not for a personal visit, but because of a desire to be amongst the dead. I was thankful that rather than saying I was weird, my friend admitted she had always wanted to do that too. We decided to go and take photos.

There's something marvelous about graves in a big grassy field. There are so many features of graveyards that make every picture unique, and one is the variety of headstones. Some are simple rectangles, and others are adorned with carved flowers or even sculptures of angels. This feature, as well as how visibly pleasant the arrangements are, make me enjoy taking pictures there.

The second time I visited, not only did I take my camera, but also several large sheets of paper and charcoal. I wanted to try rubbing prints from the graves onto the paper. It was already dark, but I was determined. I went looking for graves with interesting designs, names, dates, and shapes. I finally found one. It was a double headstone for a couple

*I had a desire
to be amongst
the dead*

buried together. There were vines around the names with little blossoms hanging as they would on a perfectly windless day. I made a rubbing of this, as well as a few others, and even mixed and matched border prints with letters from stones to create my name. I was thoroughly pleased with the rubbings, and they now adorn my bedroom.

Graveyards are like parks that hold the markers of people's lives. You can touch their headstones, see their names, touch the ground they are under, and imagine what they might have lived through.

Don't get me wrong, graveyards are designed as places for people to lay flowers and mourn and miss their loved ones, but there is so much more. They are the art of life. ♦



Photo by Jillian Sloman, Murfreesboro, TN

Haunted Hysteria

by Julia Szydowski, Rochester, MI

All I wanted to do was make friends. Yet as a brace-faced, four-eyed teen entering high school, this proved hard. I had opted out of four years of hell at a public high school, but the small, private, all-girls school did not feel as welcoming as I'd hoped. Some of the girls had known each other in middle school, and some for their entire lives. I knew this school was the place for me, but I wanted a partner to help me navigate those hallways of chaos. So I decided to explore my options out of the 38 girls in my class.

Soon the opportunity I was waiting for arose. One of my classmates, Sarah, invited our class to volunteer at a haunted house. If I could win her over, I would have someone to walk with in the hallways, work with as partners in class, and do things with after school.

On that fall day, I followed Sarah's instructions and dressed in all black. I raced to Bower's Farm, eager to help out my soon-to-be friend. Soon after I arrived, I was swept into a cluttered room in the back of the farmhouse. Masks of all shapes and sizes on the wall stared at me with their eyeless holes. Bloody clothes and muddy shoes were strewn across the room in the panic to get ready. I made a beeline toward Sarah before being quickly dismissed to find a costume.

I searched for a mask to cover my thick eyeglass frames, then finally found the perfect extra-large one covered in ugly sores. With my pale skin tone and crooked, metallic smile glinting through the mouth hole, I was the epitome of scary.

In the cornfield beyond the farmhouse were five pop-up wood shacks connected by a maze of corn paths. Each was loosely covered with a plastic tarp to keep out moonlight or wet weather. Within these crudely built structures, nightmares came to life.

Dressed in my hideous mask and dark clothes, I was assigned to hide at the end of the final shack and pop out to scare the patrons one last time. As a girl who couldn't even watch "ET"

without covering her eyes, I already knew that this would be a challenge.

We made our way to our stations. I watched Sarah disappear into the pitch black shack, then anxiously awaited the patrons. Now, I am far from scary; I'd be more likely to trip and take the person down rather than to scare them by popping out and screaming. But I was doing this for Sarah, to show that I would be a great new friend, so I was determined to try.

*I reveled in
their screams
like a succubus*

Soon I heard the ear-splitting screams and yelps of innocent patrons at the front of the shack. Hands sweating in anticipation, I readied myself to frighten the customers trying to exit the terrifying chain of huts. I was the last character they'd see; I had to make this big.

I made out four forms approaching through the flickering of the seizure-inducing strobe light. I could hear their sighs of relief as they neared the end. Unbeknownst to them, I was waiting.

My glasses slowly slipped off my face in my sweaty apprehension. As soon as the customers' shapes were recognizable, I revealed my hideous face and an earth-shattering scream.

My sudden appearance startled them; their piercing screams filled the air. I had done it!

I readied my body to pounce again and again. My feet throbbed, my throat burned, sweat ran down my back, and my glasses continually slipped down behind the mask. Yet I kept going, scaring person after person, reveling in their screams like a succubus, feeding on the fear.

As I waited for another victim, I forgot that the only reason I was there was to make a friend. I was in too deep. I had transformed my personality to match

the mask on my face. I waited, scared another, waited, scared another, lost in the darting of light from the strobe and the sounds of faceless yells.

Provoking screams became too easy. I needed a real challenge, and finally one presented itself. The man was around 20 years old, with a full beard and an FBI sweatshirt stretched over his broad chest. His girlfriend was clutching his arm. All my muscles tightened; I felt like a cat ready to pounce. A scream started to bubble in my throat. I leapt at them and let out an animalistic cry. All of a sudden, I felt an impact on my lip and the skin on the inside of my mouth tore on my braces. My nose started to swell and leak as my glasses fell to the ground. I was frozen in shock; my victim had fought back! I looked into my conqueror's face. Amidst the fear, I saw regret in his eyes.

My attempt at gaining a friend failed. My mom was called to come pick me up while I was supplied with Skittles, an ice pack, and an accident report form. I can still remember my mother's hysterical laughter at the daughter who is, I quote, "the only child who would ever get punched in the face for looking ugly."

I had to leave Sarah behind that night, and to this day, I feel our lost friendship as painfully as a bloody nose and a busted lip. ♦

Goldfish Coupons and Forgotten Love

by Grace Coberly,
Oak Park, IL

May, freshman year
I smiled to myself as I walked down the empty sidewalk toward my elementary school. It was spring again, and by some miracle, I had almost finished my first year of high school. Piles of homework still lay strewn across my bed, but that could wait. I had been anticipating this day for weeks. I hadn't been back to visit my old school in the four years since I graduated fifth grade, and I couldn't wait to see how much had changed. I knew that none of my old friends or teachers would recognize me – my bangs and patterned headbands were long gone – but that didn't matter. I could introduce myself and try to pretend that we still had things in common. Anyway, I wasn't going just to see them; I was volunteering at the Fun Fair.

At my grade school, the Fun Fair was the most eagerly awaited day of the year, coming in ahead of the Family Picnic (which was always rained out) and even the legendary Olympic Day (which was only fun if you could pick marbles up with your toes). Students dragged their families to school on that Saturday morning to play games and win thrilling prizes like Slinkys, bracelets, and rubber frogs. I would be in charge of handing out the most elite of all the prizes: goldfish coupons. The object of the game: throw a ping pong ball into one of 25 plastic fishbowls. How many skeptical parents would be forced to visit the pet store tomorrow? It was up to me to decide.

As I approached the unusually quiet playground, I squinted up at the oak tree by the chain-link fence. I had never been tall enough to climb it, but I was too old now. I missed out on a lot of things that way, waiting too long and letting my time run out.

Thud. Someone had jumped out of the tree. A fifth grader, probably. I turned around.

It was Landon.

"Hey," he said, his voice surprisingly deep.

I kept walking, trying to act casual. "Hey." I blinked a few times in a weak attempt to calm the avalanche of memories rumbling down behind my eyes. *Walk, Grace, walk. He doesn't recognize you.*

"Grace, right?"

Feet frozen, heart pounding, I turned to face this person I thought I'd never see again. Our eyes met. The 15 feet between us kept me wondering if his eyes were still as blue as they had been six years ago. I took a breath.

"Right." I paused. "Landon, right?"

"Yeah."

My memories somersaulted into view, dusty and untouched.



Photo by Nicolas Sales, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

I was his Someone

February, third grade

I crossed my sweaty fingers – both hands – as I stared at Mr. Krauter. He had settled in the reading chair, the one with gold-painted legs and a collapsing velvet cushion, and we had gathered around his feet in a sad, clumpy circle. It was time to Drop Everything And Read. But first, someone had to be chosen. Mr. Krauter squinted through his bushy eyebrows at the clipboard of names. He cleared his throat.

"Emma, you picked last week." Emma nodded. She had requested Read to Self. Not bad. I'd take anything but Word Work.

"Let's have a third-grader pick today," Mr. Krauter offered. "Who wants to do it?" My hand shot up, as did everyone else's. We wiggled with anticipation. There was no greater honor than being chosen, and we all knew it. Our teacher let his eyes linger on each of us, taunting us, until they finally landed on someone. "Landon, what do you want to do?"

Landon didn't hesitate for a moment before declaring, "Read to Someone." Grinning, I let my hand fall to my pocket. I could feel his note inside: a promise. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Our favorite book. I was his Someone, and when he flashed me an excited smile, I knew I was the luckiest Someone in the world.

Thirty seconds later, Landon and I were in our usual spot, tucked away in the corner closest to the door. It wasn't a very comfortable place, but it was ours. The cold from the scuffed tile floor soaked into our bodies. We rested our backs against the cubbies. Our arms were pressed together out of habit; our classroom's air conditioning was always stuck at the highest setting. I set our red paperback bible down across our laps, and we read. He read the odd pages, I the evens. We were shushed once or twice for laughing loudly – not that it stopped us.

That was how it started.

April, third grade

The projector breathed gently behind me. *Whirrrrrrrr click. Whirrrrrrrr click.* Mr. Krauter was droning on about something – grammar? The solar system? It didn't matter. I had only one thing on my mind. I glanced to my right, where Landon had turned around in his chair to watch the presentation. His face glowed in the faint light that spilled out. Each strand of his messy golden hair was illuminated. I didn't want to look away. There was something about that image, the shadowy smile playing on his lips, that enchanted me.

Reluctantly, I tore my gaze from him. I was running out of time. With a glance toward Mr. Krauter, I flipped to the last page of my notebook. Its edges were cratered and uneven where I had ripped bits and written notes. Today I tore off a small Kentucky-shaped piece and wrote *I like you*.

I sealed my note with care: one horizontal fold, one vertical, another horizontal. I cupped the note in my hand and waited. Landon was still focused on the monotonous presentation, his blue eyes sparkling with projector runoff. He seemed so much calmer than me. I was almost angry. Didn't he know



Photo by Grace Montalto, Brielle, NJ

how much was at stake? Didn't he understand? Of course not.

Biting my lip, I nudged his arm with my elbow and offered him the note. (This was normal for us.) He plucked my secret from my fingers casually, as if it didn't matter. I tried to look away, to slow my heart's incessant pounding, and then –

"Can I have some?"

It wasn't God, just Mr. Krauter. He had seen me pass the note. I panicked. Could he have some what? Some gum? Some glitter? It didn't matter. Landon was already handing over the note. Fortunately, no one saw me blush in the soft light. I watched the slip of paper disappear in Mr. Krauter's massive hand: tiny, helpless, and still folded.

I spent the rest of the day in an embarrassed daze. Every glance at Landon reminded me of my failure. I had daydreamed about this moment for weeks, and for what? Now Mr. Krauter knew, but Landon never would.

December, fourth grade

My Santa hat was itchy. They all were, as experience told me. The webbed plastic lining dug into my forehead, pulled at my hair. This was the curse of every Christmas choir performance. We were adorable, I'm sure, but the hats clashed with our maroon T-shirts and made it hard to enjoy the carols we were singing. Our first-through-eighth grade voices echoed through the mall lobby, falling upon the ears of last-minute shoppers.

We were nearing the end of our holiday repertoire when Landon and his family entered the lobby to escape the snow. Intrigued by our chorus of Santas, they stopped to listen. Landon waved when he saw me. I smiled back. We had gone our separate ways after third grade: he to Ms. McGurn's class, I to Ms. Wennerberg's. We only saw each other at recess now. Sometimes I missed him. Sometimes I regretted not telling him how I felt, but what was the point? He never found out, and now he had new friends. New books.

This wasn't the first time I had waited too long to do something, and it wouldn't be the last. There was the long night I spent doing my entire Native American project. The white dress I kept squeezing myself into long after I outgrew it. The three years I spent in middle school silently hoping that my crush would ask me out. Was it just a habit, or was I afraid of something?

Landon's family stayed for a few songs, then moved on. I felt like I had missed another opportunity. But what could I have said? ➤➤

He plucked my secret from my fingers

The Bumblebee Necklace

by Honor Ford, Furlong, PA

I've never lived a normal life, but I wouldn't ask for it to be any other way. My parents discovered early on that they were having twins, but they didn't expect my brother and me to be born two months early. I was delivered first, and as they say, the early bird gets the worm, or rather the series of birth complications. My brother was unaffected, if you don't count his small size of two pounds and the quick-witted (and most times obnoxious) humor he grew into. My three pounds brought with it cerebral palsy, a neurological disorder that can come in various forms, but for me meant muscle tightness, an unnatural gait, and the need for a shunt to drain the fluid from my brain so blood could pass. So needless to say, perseverance is an essential part of my life. Enter my bee necklace, given to me by my dad and mom on my thirteenth birthday. Over the past four years, it has quickly become a staple of my personality and a sweet reminder on tough days.

I could let cerebral palsy handicap me

cliché “God never gives you anything you can't handle.” But this small scientific fact spoke to me even more. It gave my struggles substance and meaning and personality. I had something to take my mind off of what I couldn't do, and keep it on what I am blessed to do. Sure, my one-mile time in gym isn't the fastest, and I'll probably never have a career in ballet, but I have power. Power to speak for those who feel alone, to speak out about disabilities, and to speak up against bullies. And the timing of the bee necklace couldn't have been more perfect.

This necklace is close to my heart because I knew my dad, who ultimately chose it, put a lot of thought into it. Not only did he know I would wear it, but I knew he'd envisioned my reaction to it because that is the man he is. He wanted every detail to be perfect. I was transitioning to middle school, and my insecurities were at an all-time high. My elementary school friends had naturally accepted my unnatural gait, but in middle school, not only would I have to navigate classes, but new people as well. No doubt I would endure curious stares from my classmates.

The bee necklace reminded me that with a little elbow grease, I could be just as capable as these new peers, and I didn't have to be bothered by their stares. The story of the bees represented me and henceforth became a motto that I try to live by.

I could easily let cerebral palsy handicap me, and people would understand. I've been asked multiple times if a wheelchair or an elevator key at school

would make life easier. The bee forces me not to choose to do something just because it's easier. Now that the bee has become a symbol for me, teachers, friends, and parents expect me to be more than a helpless, self-pitying lump.

In conclusion, the bee necklace has changed my outlook on life and expanded my belief in my capabilities. It's a reminder of the struggles I've gone through and how much I have overcome. Instead of defining myself by the frequent hospital visits and physical therapy sessions, over these past four years, life has become an endless possibility.

I have no goals to be a prima ballerina, but I do hope to one day be an author, something that to me seemed unattainable a few years ago. The bee has filled me with dreams and belief in myself. It has become a part of me. ♦



Photo by Deborah Tombs, Vernon, BC, Canada

Its sterling silver chain and handmade charm – a curlicue shaped body with frozen yet determined wings – came encased in a pale green box, delicately laced around a lavender pillow and paired with a card whose words have become imprinted in my mind:

“According to science, bees shouldn't have the ability to fly. Their bodies are too big for the size of their wings.”

When my dad handed me the box and waited for me to read the card, I burst into tears. I'd heard the

.....
A confession? An apology? Maybe I should run after him

But instead I sang Christmas carols in a lobby, wearing an itchy hat.

May, freshman year

I let out the breath I had been holding, forcing my gaze toward the chain-link fence, tracing the peeling green paint with my eyes as I used to with my fingers. Landon watched me as I shifted my weight, already feeling the need to go. His casual discomfort was barely visible. To him, I was just another distant memory. Our words bounced off each other like ping pong balls on fishbowls.

“Well, I have to—”

“Right—”

“—the goldfish—”

“Yeah, go—”

“Okay.”

“Bye.”

I looked at him one last time. “Bye.”

I think he smiled.

I didn't look back as I entered the school.

I stopped to chat with my fifth-grade Spanish teacher, who told me that the Spanish club I had started was still going strong. My feet stumbled over the shallow, speckled steps that led to the second floor, down the hallway, into the bustling gym. I found my station, taking a blue apron from a mom who was running the game. “Watch out,” she told me. “You never know quite where the ping pong balls are going to bounce.”

I smiled at my first winner, an eight-year-old boy. “When can I get the fish?” he asked.

“Whenever you want,” I told him. “But don't wait too long. Those coupons expire.” ♦

Drown but Not Die

by Delaney Kranz, Glendale, AZ

Someone from my school died this morning. He drowned at 4:30 a.m. but then died in the hospital. I don't get how that works. How can you drown but not die?

I found out from my mother, who texted me and asked if I knew anything while I sat here, at camp, 49 states away. She told me the kid's name wasn't released and asked me to check Facebook. I found it.

“We'll miss you,” the status read, with an angel x and a link to his Facebook, where we could scroll through photos of him holding up his phone before a mirror. And it makes me wonder *What does it mean to be a real person now?* because this doesn't seem like a real person on my computer screen. And it doesn't seem like a real person to put up your likes dislikes kisses bangs slaps up in little text boxes if you get enough blue fists pressing thumbs to the sky.

It doesn't seem real to press my skin against this screen and hold up a camera in the angle where my nose stops being stocky and my breasts stop being nonexistent and my mouth stops being flat. I look at these photos of me malformed and disfigured into beauty, and it doesn't seem like a human – it isn't me, it isn't you, it's just something else. I look at these little bits of my life, the time line full of Halloweens and photos of my chubby baby cousin and me holding a medal, and it doesn't seem real because it's not. It's a thousand pixels in a thousand colors on something that looks like something else, and how can you be online but not alive?

How can you be gone but still exist?

Someone from my school died this morning. He drowned in a pool and died in a hospital but he's still alive as ever on the Internet.

Sometimes, at night, when my head is full of this pressure that I can't explain without sounding like a theoretical sad little s**t, this pressure that's just there because I like clicking the spout and letting it in, sometimes, I pretend to erase myself. I get a big pink eraser and press it against my toes, my ribs, my nose still stocky, my breasts still nonexistent, my mouth still flat, and I forget everything. The only thing left is the something else people text and take photos with and screw up my mouth until it's not flat anymore and giggle at my chubby baby cousin it's not me.

When I am gone like this, I wonder why it is so easy. Why it's so easy to be gone, and then I wonder what else is inside me, past this flat mouth and stocky nose and reach into my gone little head and wonder if there's anything there. Sometimes on a Tuesday or a Thursday I'll find a little jaded thing that glances and shifts, and sometimes on a Wednesday I'll find a few scraps of trash, but sometimes on weekdays and weekends and nighttimes and daytimes I don't find anything, and it's just the other thing there, malformed and disfigured and singing and screaming and there is nothing left in me and there is nothing left here because I've been erased because I did that because how can you be gone but still exist? How can you be gone but still exist? How can you be gone but still exist? How can you drown but not die? ♦

Sobering Truths

by "Catherine," Iowa

In a second I could tell if she was drunk. I could tell by the way she texted me – lacking clarity, with unnecessary spaces between words – and by the way her car was parked too far to one side in the garage. I could tell by the scratches on her side mirrors, showing that she had side-swiped another car. Even without these clues, I would have known just by listening to her slurred voice, seeing her bloodshot eyes in her blotchy face, and hearing her tell me, "I have not been drinking."

When I was little, I would confront her and try to force the truth out of her, but all I got in return was her thinking I was crazy and saying it was my fault she was drinking. As I grew older, I learned not to argue with her and just let her sleep it off on the couch, hoping that tomorrow would be a better day.

Learning to love an alcoholic has been the hardest lesson in my life. I can't tell you how many times I've been told to keep my mother's addiction a secret. My dad would claim, "No one has to know," and my mom would say, "You aren't telling people I'm in rehab, right?" They wanted this secret to stay behind the walls of our house. But the more I kept it a secret, the more anxious I became. I spent hours at school wondering which side of my mom I would come home to.

I awoke to the phone ringing. A male officer informed me that my mother had been arrested for drunk driving. I was 12 and never should have had to hear that. The night before, a friend had come for a sleepover at my house, and my mom had gone out to get us dinner. I watched as she drove down the street on the left side instead of the right and immediately regretted letting her get in the car.

We waited for four hours, and she never returned.

When I answered the phone and it was the policeman telling me she had been arrested, I immediately blamed myself. *If I had stopped her ... if I hadn't wanted takeout food ... if I had only been nicer to her.* Mom got on the phone and asked me why I'd let her drive, then begged me to bail her out, but my dad was out of town, so I had no way to help her. She made me feel that her situation was my fault. I couldn't sleep that night.

After her night in jail, Mom became depressed. Refusing to admit she had a problem, she continued to hide the alcohol from us. I turned into a detective, rummaging through cupboards to find half-empty bottles hidden, as if we couldn't tell she was drunk.

My dad was confused, not knowing how to talk to her. So she drank. My brother was too ashamed to bring friends home because she might be drunk. So she drank. I developed social anxiety and was scared to go to crowded places or talk to friends. So she drank. We created a fake reality to cover up Mom's problem, hiding behind the walls of our house so our neighbors and relatives would think we were a perfect family.

My parents fought constantly. My mother would force my dad to buy her alcohol by threatening to walk to the store in a snowstorm or drive the car herself, despite being drunk. My dad abided by her rules and became her servant, stocking up on bottles of liquor to fulfill her cravings.

My parents' marriage disintegrated, but they agreed to keep living in the same house. "If I make her move out, she'll be homeless," my dad explained, making me feel like accepting her alcohol-

ism was the only way we could keep her alive. My dad set up camp in his office down the hall, turning his couch into a bed. But that was not enough for my mom; she complained that his phone calls were too loud and forced him to go to the library to work. My mom became queen of the house, and we were her servants.

We didn't talk about our problems because we were scared to admit that we needed help. We were a broken family, and we all knew it was because of her drinking, but we couldn't blame her. When I was 14, my dad researched the disease and informed my brother and me of the effects of alcoholism. We found support groups called Al-Anon and Alateen for families of alcoholics. I asked my dad why we needed to go if it was my mom who was the alcoholic. I lied and said I was not affected by my mom's drinking, but Dad bribed me to go, so I gave it a try.

When I first walked into Alateen, I saw the distant, scared faces of young people just like me. In Alateen, teenagers meet weekly to discuss what they've been through with alcoholic or drug-addicted family members. I could see in their eyes that they had experienced a lot. I heard the stories of kids with abusive parents, and many whose parents had divorced. I felt lucky that my parents had stayed married despite my mom's drinking. I knew that if we didn't support my mom, she might be living on her own somewhere worse off.

I surprised myself by sharing a lot at that first Alateen meeting. I had bottled everything up and didn't think I could let it out. When I spoke, everyone listened and responded, "I'm here for you." Many of the teens gave me their phone number and told me to call them if I needed anything. I finally felt supported and understood.

I liked how it didn't matter if the girl who was sharing was the captain of the cheerleading squad or just an average student. Alateen was anonymous, so anything shared in the group would not be repeated elsewhere. I felt safe and free to reveal how I really felt about my mom.

My mom agreed to go to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings after her second arrest for driving drunk. Living without a license for six months was difficult, and she was scared of getting a third DUI and losing her license for even longer.

She came home crying after her first meeting. I was really confused why this disease made people so emotional. Alcoholism was not like cancer; she wasn't dying. She informed me that she had faulty wiring in her brain that made her addicted to alcohol. This addiction ran in our family and could affect my brother and me.

Mom befriended a sponsor through Alcoholics Anonymous who suggested she attend a rehab session at the local hospital. She did, and my dad, brother, and I went to the family meetings there. Learning in depth about the disease helped us understand what she was going through. We felt more sympathetic knowing that we had no control over it.

Now, six years after I answered the phone call that changed my family's life, I am proud to say that Alcoholics Anonymous, Alateen, and Al-Anon have saved my family. I wouldn't be so accepting, loving, and caring toward my mother if not for these groups. I would still be blaming myself and covering up our family secret.

I have also learned how common alcoholism is. One in five adult Americans have grown up with an alcoholic parent, according to statistics from the National Association of Children of Alcoholics. Although my mom is not cured of this disease – and she never will be – she is on a path to recovery that I support. Alateen helped me cope with her disease more effectively. I have learned to live a happier life, no longer taking responsibility for my mother's drinking, and understanding that she must stop on her own. All anyone can do is take it one day at a time. ♦

If you need help dealing with a loved one who is an alcoholic, check out Alateen: www.alateen.org.

We created a fake reality to cover up Mom's problem

This Morning

One morning
I will wake up
and notice the way
the sun streams through
the windows
instead of
how heavy
my eyelids are

I will get out of bed
and wash the sleep
off my face
instead of
drowning myself
in the blankets

I will pour myself
a bowl of cereal and milk
and actually eat it
instead of
clutching my stomach
churning from skipping dinner
the night before

I will go to school
with laughter in my eyes
and stretched cheeks
instead of
a storm
in my mind

by Cecelia Bui, Shoreline, WA



Photo by Laura Holton, Marietta, GA



Art by Maggie Liu, Waukesha, WI



Art by Jessica Han, Thousand Oaks, CA



Photo by Dakota Mayo, Torrington, WY



Art by Sydney Ghoreishi, Valparaiso, IN



Photo by Emily Weaver, Westernville, NY



Photo by Grace Lam, San Jose, CA



Art by Christina Voss, Marietta, GA



Photo by Simran Minhas, Delta, BC, Canada



Life as I Know It

by "Karen," Charlotte, IA

Ask most eight-year-olds what they want to be when they grow up, and you'll get answers like "princess" or "cowgirl" or even "a famous rock star." But if you asked my eight-year-old self, you would get one definite, unchanging reply: I wanted to be married forever.

For me, divorce meant Mom moved out and Dad got the house. "Dad's house" and "Mom's house" became regular phrases. They are separate places, and Dad's house will never be Mom and Dad's house again.

Dad's house hasn't changed much: it's where my bedroom is, where all of my toys are, where everything I have grown up with is, but where my dog is not and where I miss my dog. Mom's house is in town, where I sleep on the couch because my new room is too scary at night, where I have nothing to play with but my dog, where I miss everything at Dad's. Divorce is missing my dad's house when I'm at my mom's and missing my mom's house when I'm at my dad's.

Divorce is order. There is a schedule. Mom gets Thanksgiving, Dad gets Christmas, Mom gets New Year's, Dad gets Easter – but where do I go in between? Of course, there's

a schedule for that too. Dad gets most weekdays and every other weekend. Mom gets Wednesdays and the weekends Dad doesn't. What about when it's Thanksgiving but it's Dad's weekend? Divorce means holiday schedules overrule regular schedules. You see, divorce is like math. Holidays are like multiplying and dividing, and regular weeks are like adding and subtracting. You always multiply and divide before you add or subtract. Math is complicated, and so is divorce.

Divorce is packing. It's packing clothes for the weekend at Mom's or my favorite shirt for the school day at Dad's. I get there and unpack.

When it's time to go back, I pack up again.

Divorce is my mom writing a list of what I took to my dad's and expecting to see it all come back with me. Then, a few days later, it's time to go back to Dad's, and what do I do? Pack again. Divorce is repetitive.

Divorce is fighting, back-and-forth accusations, making small problems into bigger problems just to prove who-knows-what. Neither parent ever takes the blame, so I do. Who didn't clean up the mess from lunch? I didn't. Who didn't put the clothes in the dryer? I didn't. Who didn't put

a new gallon of milk in the refrigerator? It was me.

Then I block everything out. I block out the lectures I get because I didn't do this or that. I block out the pity as they tell me why they don't have time to do it because they don't have a spouse to help them get it all done. Divorce is learning that divorce is an excuse for everything.

Divorce is being the middleman. The middleman never wins. I go to my mom's and she tells me one thing. Then my dad tells me another thing – which has nothing to do with what Mom already told me. But when I get back, she says, "Don't you remember? I already told you last week."

The truth is, I don't remember. I forget who said what when. Even though I have to remember to clean up my mess from lunch and get a new gallon of milk out if I empty it and pack my clothes for the weekend and bring back every single thing I packed, I also have to remember what they said. I try to explain, "I'm just a kid. How can I remember all of this?" Trust me, you learn. You learn to remember everything because divorce is remembering.

I will always remember that divorce is separation, schedules, repetition, packing, fighting, blaming, excuses, being the middleman, never winning, forgetting, then always remembering. Divorce is a finished puzzle with one missing piece. I look at the hole where the table shows through, but I can't remember where I dropped the missing piece. I can't remember because I have so much else to remember. Instead I remember everything that I don't want to. I try so hard to find it. I have already blamed myself, but that didn't help. I just want it to be complete.

Divorce is realizing that it will never be complete again. So I pick up the puzzle and put it away with the piece missing, and I deal with never having that piece again. ♦



Photo by Haley Dennis, Greenwood Village, CO

The middleman never wins

Good-Bye, American Dream

by Lauren Wagner, Ceresco, NE

When I was little, my parents and I lived in a restored log cabin. We were there for a full year while construction workers worked around us, tearing down walls and putting up new ones. One time, when the cabin was almost finished, my parents slept in a bedroom that was missing a wall. Only a thin blue tarp kept them inside. I always wondered what would have happened if my mother was a sleepwalker and walked right off the edge. It always seemed so strange to me to live in an incomplete house.

Of course, that was back when most things were complete. I had two parents who loved each other, a sister who was cute as a button, and two dogs that ran around happily. They call that a nuclear family.

I lived inside the American dream for the first nine years of my life, and it was wonderful. At five, six, seven, or nine, you don't realize how lucky you are. Now as I look back, my childhood was so blissful I swear it could have

been a dream. The sunlight hit my room as I woke up slowly, then ran down the stairs. In the kitchen I would find my dad grinding coffee beans.

"I see you," he would sing-song, his back still turned. "You aren't the quietest person in the world, you know. Have you ever smelled this before? Take a sniff, little one."

I could have dreamt smelling the dark scent of the coffee, dipping my nose so far into the bag it left brown residue on the tip. I could have dreamt the way my mother would descend the stairs in an oversized T-shirt and shorts, her hair a mess, and the way she touched my dad on the shoulder as she wrinkled her nose at the coffee.

"It smells so good," she teased, "but tastes like butt."

"You said butt!" my sister would yelp at the counter, her mouth stuffed with cereal.

"BUTT! BUTT! BUTT!" we would yell together, my dad joining in and my mother smiling, rolling her eyes.

Summers were full of swimming lessons, fast food at Sonic, fishing in the pond, and seeing my grandparents. They would come down from Cape Cod and stay in our guest room. They loved each other like my parents did – two generations of nuclear family.

I remember so many inside jokes and fun times during those nine years. I remember thinking my family was so close that we could never break apart. At six, I didn't know that "marriage" didn't mean

"forever."

My dad videotaped every Christmas, every Thanksgiving, every birthday. He videotaped the woodpile fire, building the barn when I was born, and getting his first grill. He videotaped his toes, my stuffed animals, and every Mother's Day. Now that I have about a hundred

converted VHS-to-CD discs, I watch them when I'm feeling nostalgic. I see all these memories and feel sad that I didn't realize how idyllic my childhood was before it was gone for good.

"You won't ever get divorced, will you?" I asked my mom and dad one afternoon. I was probably five. They looked up from their TV show and stared at me like I was insane.

"Of course not, sweetie. Why would you ask that?" my mom said.

"Because at school Alena said everyone's parents get divorced."

"It's not true, not for most people," my dad said without looking away from the TV.

"Promise you won't?" I whispered. They must have heard something in my voice because they both looked at me at the same time with their full attention.

"Promise," they said in unison. They weren't lying at the time.

How long does the American dream last? Could you live inside it your whole life? If anyone ever has, I hope they know how lucky they are. ♦

My family was so close we could never break apart

We drove around, looking at houses. My eyes stayed dry the entire time. I've always expected the worst to happen, so I can't say I wasn't prepared. My resolve hardened the more we looked. I felt like a machine – cold, hard, incapable of emotion. I assumed I was broken, like a battery-powered doll that had stopped talking back, stopped walking, stopped having life. I was just a shell with pretty clothes, fancy hair, and a painted-on face. I was breathing and talking, but if someone had asked me to put on a smile, I don't think I could have done it.

"Your dad doesn't know about any of this," she said. "Don't tell him,



Art by Aicha El Alaoui, Rabat, Morocco

okay?" I nodded once, and that was it; we were partners in crime.

"Mom?" I'd asked one night at dinner six years before. "Are you and dad ever gonna get divorced?"

She looked at me as if I had just said I didn't like chicken nuggets anymore. "Of course not!" she said, aghast. "Why would you ask that?"

"I dunno." I shrugged. "Lots of kids' parents are divorced."

"That'll never happen to us, honey," she assured me. "You dad and I love each other very much."

They say the past comes back to haunt you. I didn't remember that conversation until my mom started driving the wrong way home after picking me up from dance practice. I was 16 but just as innocent as I'd been over half a decade before.

"I've been looking at houses," she slowly said. "I'm moving out of your dad's."

*She's been looking at houses ...
She's moving out ... We're moving out*

... I'm moving out. Oh God, I'm moving out of my house. I'm going to be living in a new place – without Dad!

Not a speck of my inner turmoil was reflected on my face.

The next day I went through my routine on autopilot. I am a quiet person, so it wasn't remarkable for me not to say much. It wasn't until sixth period at school that I realized I hadn't turned into a complete robot. Of course calculus hadn't been on my mind the night before, and it showed in my difficulty with the simple homework we'd been assigned. After going through multiple problems, I still wasn't getting it. I wasn't the only one, but my struggle was out of the ordinary.

Another girl, nice enough if just a little snooty, teasingly joked, "I don't understand why *you're* having such a problem!"

Any kind of witty, sarcastic comeback fizzled out of my imagination. I gave her a tight-lipped smile that probably more closely resembled a deranged grin. I turned back to the front, keeping my eyes on my sloppy homework. The numbers blurred.

So my tear ducts still worked.

You don't have parents who can't stand to be in the same room as each other! I yelled at the ignorant girl telepathically. You didn't go house hunting last night! The trunk of your car isn't stuffed with supplies for a new house, smuggled from the cupboards before your dad got home! That's what my problem is! Shut up, shut up, shut up!

The rest of the year went downhill. My mom moved out in late October, and I followed her two weeks later. I didn't see my dad most nights during those two weeks, but I heard him come home late, detained by a meeting or a night out drinking. He would already be gone by the time I got up in the morning. After school I went to see my mom. The house I grew up in wasn't home without her. Yet the new house she was living in, with its bare white walls and gaping windows, wasn't home either. For those two weeks, I didn't have a home, only two houses.

By mid-November my stress and exhaustion, coupled with the impending winter, got to me. I contracted pneumonia and mononucleosis. I ended up in the hospital, dehydrated and suffering from a fever that peaked at 106, and got out just in time for Thanksgiving.

Two months later, exams were upon me. I studied hard for my five AP classes but ended up getting bumped out of the exhausting race for valedictorian. School pressed on me like a

heavy weight. I wanted nothing more than to crumble under its strain. Some nights I'd ignore my bag full of homework that everyone else had turned in yesterday. Test grades turned ugly. So did my attitude.

Independence and continuous disappointment caused me to shy away from asking anyone for comfort, even though that was exactly what I needed. I was tired of being my mom's rock, so I wouldn't go to her. The last thing I wanted was pity, so I kept my mouth shut around friends. My dad and I weren't on speaking terms. My sister was away at college, and it just didn't seem right talking about it over the phone. I curled into myself.

Of course, I couldn't shut down without anybody noticing. My mom hovered. Friends prodded, asking me what was wrong almost daily. My nana suggested I see a therapist. I in-

Oh God, I'm moving out of my house

sisted I was fine. I was always "fine." There wasn't time not to be.

I gradually adapted to my new living quarters. I got comfortable being uncomfortable in my own bed those first few nights, alone in a foreign room. I slept like I was in a hotel, restless and eager to return home. When I ventured into my old room a couple weeks later to retrieve some forgotten clothes, a shocking feeling of uneasiness washed over me. This was no longer my room. This was a stranger's room, an innocent little girl's.

Now I feel as though life is getting back to normal – a new normal. I'm stronger than ever, and more mature. Years from now, maybe I'll be sitting with my daughter at our kitchen table, eating chicken nuggets, and she'll ask if her father and I will stay together forever. What will my answer be?

"Don't count on it, honey."

I don't believe in the word "never" anymore. ♦

Divorcing Dad

by Andrianna Peters,
Plainfield, IL

When I was younger, I didn't always understand what was going on and why it was happening. I heard the terrifying screams and crying but couldn't understand what they were about.

When my parents got divorced, I thought I was alone. I would go to my friends' houses, and both their parents would be around. Everyone would eat dinner together or play games, and I would sit there dreaming about being part of a family like that. My family was so torn apart, and I didn't know why. I just wanted to have a normal life.

The judge gave my mom custody, and my father was allowed visitation on Wednesdays and every other weekend. Over time, my two siblings and I started seeing our dad less. By the time I was 11, I had developed a hatred for him. He told us that he didn't need us anymore. "I have two new kids who are better than you," he said. Those words haunt me to this day.

When I got home that night, I raced up to my room and slammed the door so hard you could feel the foundation shake. I blocked his number from my phone and deleted all his pictures. I wanted no reminder of him in my life. I couldn't even bring myself to call him Dad. I referred to him by his first name, as though he was a stranger.

I thought the divorce would end my parents' issues, but 12 years later it seems like they bicker more than when they were married. Once a month my mom is in court fighting for child support and insurance for us. If I get sick I can't go to the doctor because we have no insurance. It hurts so

much to know that my father knows this but does nothing.

After 15 months of going to court and not getting him to pay any child support, my mom, her lawyer, and the judge had finally had enough. They took the man who was once my father away in handcuffs. It was one of those moments that is so unimaginable you feel like it can't be happening.

My stomach dropped. I thought I was living in a nightmare when he said, "Hi, Nana," and reached out to hug me. Questions ran through my mind: *How'd he get out of jail? What is he doing at a high school football game?* He looked so different – receding hairline, new glasses, and a huge beer gut. As I made my way back to my seat, I felt nauseated. I wanted to sink into the ground.

When my mom came to pick me up, she knew immediately that something was wrong. After I told her, she said simply, "Don't worry about it. Just get over it." How could I get over this? My father left my life and told me to leave his, and now he suddenly wanted me back? How could I ever trust him again?

I sat in my room for hours thinking about what my mom had said, when, out of nowhere, it clicked. It finally made sense to me how she managed to stay strong through everything. She didn't allow what was happening to get to her. My mom wasn't going to let my father ruin her life, and I shouldn't either. Although there may be bad things in life, there are also good. I just have to give the good the power to overcome the bad. ♦

I thought the divorce would end my parents' issues

Afterlife

by Ana Lucia Hormel, Tempe, AZ

My first home is haunted. Sometimes I see my parents carrying my stroller over the pebbles onto a pathway between two tall palm trees, up three steps, and through our front door. Sometimes I see my face pressed against the window, pigtails high up on my head fastened by red bobbles, watching my dad move out. Once I watched a cordial interaction between my mother and father as they traded me, their daughter, from one set of hands to another for a weekend visit after the divorce.

I drive by the familiar architecture of my past every chance I can. When I am in a hurry, a quick turn of the head suffices, but if time allows, I stop the car and let my mind wander. The people who live there now eat, sleep, and talk amongst ghosts they do not even know exist. The differences between our home and their home are infinite, from the name on the rusted black mailbox and the toothbrushes that line the medicine cabinet to the white paint that covers the sun, moon, and clouds in what was once my room.

Some things remain the same, though. The mesquite tree planted when I was born shades the backyard. Scars from lightning storms decorate its bark, but it is still there, alive and growing. Inside these walls the same concert plays. The vents whisper cool air. A familiar sigh escapes from a particular floorboard in the front room, no matter how gentle the footstep. The lulling sound of the train rocks the windows. The ghosts are constant, too. They drift from room to room, filtering time and keeping record. The past will always remain.

Since we moved six years ago, I have had many homes. My father has taught me the art of change – moving from one place to the next, making plans only to watch them fade into nothingness. But with my mother, our house in the desert is one I can imagine filling with as many ghosts as my first home. While it is not my childhood home, it is the

only home my two much younger half-siblings have known. It is the home of my young adulthood. Instead of taking my first steps there, I took my first hesitant drive. The streets of this neighborhood are the ones that I mechanically maneuvered throughout my four years of high school. The bedroom has kept me company through late-night homework assignments and the constant heartache of growing up.

Here I am, now, in a transitory place. I sit in a room that I will never again live in after this school year. I will return to the steady

home of my mother and the shifting house

of my father this summer knowing I will never live in either again. More than anything, this constant state of temporary has allowed me a release. Transition propels my life forward. It gives me no

choice but to face the fact that everything will leave a trace. I am forced to overpower my ghosts.

Yet my ability wavers. Some days I torture myself with detailed recollections, and my ghosts become the only companions I desire. Too often, I allow myself to sink into memory. I let it seep into wherever I am, and my interactions become distracted and half-hearted.

Despite these fluctuations, I am coming to understand that when it comes to the past and its opposite, the future, I do not need to choose one over the other. This is why the present exists; it is a mediator between the two. There is no need to “never look back” – as I have tried and failed to do many times. It would be impossible to gain wisdom without reflecting on the past. Yet the times when I get caught in the past and neglect the future, when I obsess over days that seem happier in retrospect, can

My first home is haunted



Photo by Anissia White, Bronx, NY

stall my progress and take me away from potential productivity.

I don't berate myself for visiting with my ghosts. Flashbacks are inevitable, and when I'm in a strong state of mind and stay aware of the future, they can even prove helpful. Taking this attitude allows ghosts to become not sad mirages but content ones that encourage movement forward. The challenge is to maintain the harmony between past, present, and future. That's easier said than done. I struggle with it every day.

Much of life is beyond our control – the speed of time's passage into the future, for instance – so taking advantage of the “now” is important. I have lived in the past. I used to allow myself to be its victim. Today, and I hope tomorrow, I will keep practicing the ability to control my place in time. Visits to my first home will consist not of forlorn glances, but of grateful ones. My car will slow on the worn street, and I will let the sounds of my haunted house inside. They will be there, my ghosts. I will wave to them, saying neither hello nor good-bye, and I will smile. Then I will continue my afterlife. ♦



Art by Brenna Costello, Louisville, CO

Are You My Father?

by Talitha Degraff, Far Rockaway, NY

Our daddies are
Men pumping gas at Shell or Exxon
The mailman leaving letters
In the rain
Did you
Leave something else in the rain
Seventeen years ago
Men
Working for FedEx or UPS
Dropping off the greatest
Deliveries
Were you there for my delivery
Typing letters and fielding
Questions
In large offices
Shouting “Objection”
And
“Answer the question, sir”
Did you or did you not
Leave that baby
Fatherless
Do you plead guilty
Or was it by reason of insanity
Men
Racing in light-up cars

Locking hands behind backs
Hearts behind bars
You have the
Right to remain silent
You have
One phone call
But what is your number
Were you that Con-Edison man
Who fixed the lines last week
The garbage collectors
The landscapers in charge of lawn upkeep
A pastor or deacon at a Baptist church
Preaching God's Word and
Was it His Will or was that
Sin too forgiven
Of
Seventeen years ago
Contractors building skyscrapers
Professors teaching adults
Things they want to know
Scientists in lab coats
And
Doctors in white
Men
Men
Butchering meat in the deli

Plumbers connecting pipes like Flow Free
Jehovah's Witness come
Knocking on the door
Men
Searching around in the hardware store
“Hi, Daddy”
Which one is you?
You could be any
Man
Lying on the subway
Begging for quarters
Rummaging through remains of
Someone's lunch
Men
Flipping burgers and pizza dough
Editing magazines
And
Publishing their own
Men
Standing on tile
Trying to scratch out a name
For themselves
Do you know
My
Name? ♦

Nate's Hockey Dreams

by Connor Butterfield, Stratford, CT

If Nate Mastrony got his wish today, he would be the youngest player in the NHL. He would play for the New York Rangers and take the number 18 away from Marc Staal. Nate would be the new starting right wing, win Rookie of the Year and Player of the Year, and send Martin St. Louis into retirement. He'd get the biggest contract in the NHL and never have to worry about money ever again. He and his dad would live in the nicest bachelor pad in New York City, and he'd buy his dad a fast car — maybe a helicopter, like the one his dad flew in Iraq. He could have unlimited sleepovers and stay up 'til the break of dawn playing floor hockey and drinking Capri-Sun with friends. At the end of Nate's rookie year, the Rangers would win the Stanley Cup thanks to his game-winning goal in the final seconds. The lamp would light and the crowd would go crazy. Nate would be a superstar.

Nate Mastrony is 12 years old, stands four feet two inches, and weighs 70 pounds; doctors are concerned about his growth. A blue Minot hockey hat always hides his thin blond hair. He has a small face, skinny nose, blue eyes, and a mouth that can be heard from miles around. When he smiles, dimples appear, and his ears move up and down. Nate's shirt size is a youth medium, and he always wears his favorite Harvard hockey T-shirt.

Nate has had many challenges in his life. When he was born, he was given growth hormones because his doctors were afraid that he was too small to survive. When Nate was nine and living in North Dakota, all of his belongings were destroyed in a flood. He was sad about losing his toys, but he was even sadder about losing his beloved hockey equipment. He decided to collect cans and eventually earned enough money to buy new equipment.

Then, when Nate was 10, his mom left his family and moved to Detroit.

His father, Paul, was granted full custody. Paul was an officer in the Air Force, stationed at the Minot, North Dakota, air base where he and Nate lived in a small house.

"The house was full of hockey equipment and other basic necessities, but it was missing the most important thing," Nate told me.

"What's that?" I asked.

"My family. Ever since my mom left, it [was] only me and my dad. I missed my grandparents and cousins."

When you first meet Nate and Paul, you can tell how close they are. For Halloween Nate dressed up as his dad; he wore an old Yankees hat and his Minot hockey jacket, the same one his dad has. You may wonder why someone so small loves a physical sport like hockey. The answer is simple: to be like his dad. While serving his country, Paul also played minor league hockey, but the military's demanding schedule forced him to give it up. As one of Nate's hockey coaches, he taught Nate everything he knows. Nate plays with the same fast-paced style as his dad.

Thanks to having a dad in the military and playing on a premier hockey team, Nate has traveled the hockey world from Canada to Texas, from California to New York, and everywhere in between.

"What's your favorite movie to watch on a long car ride?" I asked.

"Miracle," he told me.

"How about your favorite food for a long hockey trip?"

"A box of chocolate chip cookies."

"Aren't you afraid of getting fat?"

"Nope. I'll just skate it off."

Nate and Paul lived in North Dakota until Nate was 11. Paul decided to retire from the Air Force and move back to his hometown of Stratford, Connecticut, where Nate's grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousins live.

Moving is hard, but it's especially hard when you move to a new town three days into the school year and don't know anyone. At the local school, Nate became the new kid. It's easy to get picked on when you are new to a school, especially when you are small. "I can't lift weights because I haven't hit puberty yet," Nate told me. "It doesn't matter, though, because hockey made me tough."

Not only is Nate the new kid in school, he is also the new kid on the hockey team. I went to one of Nate's first games and could tell he misses having his dad as the coach. Instead of looking at his new coach for advice, Nate would look at his dad in the bleachers.

Another challenge Nate faces today is Spanish class. "Why do you think you're failing Spanish?" I asked.

"Because I just moved from North Dakota! There are no Mexicans in North Dakota," he said jokingly.

When I went over to Nate's house,

I noticed he'd put a yellow Post-It on his desk that said "*Necesito jugar hockey*," which means "I need to play hockey." That Post-It is a reminder that he needs to keep his grades up to play.

Through all of his challenges Nate always turns to hockey. When I asked him why he loves it so much, he gave me an answer that was wiser than his years. "I can escape completely. When I play, it's just me and the ice. The best feeling in the world is skating through a defense and scoring when the whole game they are trash-talking about my size. When I score, [people] forget that I am small. All that they think is, *Damn, this kid is good.*"

In hockey, every time a goal is scored, a red lamp lights up. For Nate, scoring a goal isn't just a stat, it's a statement. Being the smallest and youngest kid on a team isn't easy, but also being one of the best players on the team is extremely hard. The last thing Nate hears before every game is his dad yelling from the bleachers, "Go light the lamp, Nate!" ♦

"When I score, people forget that I am small"

Wrestling

by Levi McBride, Pasco, WA

I bounce up and down, trying to relax and mentally prepare for battle, for my opponent. When the match before mine reaches the third round, I approach the mat. I am ready.

I run my hands along the straps of my headgear and shoes to make sure they're secured. Then I fearlessly march onto the mat and await the referee to appoint me a red or green ankle bracelet. I step into the inner circle and shake my opponent's hand. I can hear the crowd screaming at the top of their lungs, but my headgear and my thoughts begin to drown the noise out of my ears and my mind. All I'm focused on is beating my opponent.

The whistle blows. I attack. Head snap, to a single, to a double, to a high crotch. I try not to give him any space or time to breathe. As soon as I finish a single-leg takedown, I attack on top, controlling him, riding him out and throwing a half or arm bar to pry him to his back.

My opponent is beginning to break down on bottom; he is bunched up like a turtle trying not to be turned. I finally turn him. Now his shoulders are parallel to the mat. I'm getting back points and am close to pinning him when the ref blows the whistle. Round one is over.

The ref flips the coin, and it's my choice. I defer. My opponent chooses down, and I cover. I look up at the ref,

ready to wrestle on the blow of the whistle. I break him down immediately as he tries to scramble away. He can't.

By the end of the second round, my opponent finally gets an escape followed by a quick shot. He headbutts me, and I taste metallic blood from my lip. This only fuels my anger. I still have the major, ahead by eight points, and my coaches encourage me to choose down for the third round. I try to catch my breath before signaling down with my finger to the ref. As soon as the whistle blows, I'm

up and free. Then I go back into attack mode, setting up any possible shot. I look at the clock, which is counting down from 10. I know I have won this match.

When the clock hits zero, I am relieved, because I know as soon as those six minutes are over there is nothing else I need to do. I shake the hand of the opposing coaches, then high-five my coaches and sign on the dotted line at the head table to confirm my win.

As long as I can tell myself that I didn't give up and I used everything in me, every ounce of energy and determination on the mat, then I am content. Every competitor has morning practices, everyone lifts, everyone does cardio, everyone works on their technique, but the one thing that separates the great wrestlers from the average is their heart. ♦

I go back into attack mode



Photo by Regan Connaire, Chestertown, MD

Tom Selders: A Mayor for All the People

2015 winning essay by Matthew Waltman, Tenafly, NJ

Immigration reform is one of the most contentious issues in America today, provoking angry debates in Congress, fueling tension in town hall meetings across the country, and even dividing families. In 2007, as the battle over immigration reform played out in Congress, Tom Selders, the Republican mayor of Greeley, Colorado, put a local face on the issue. Selders spoke out on Capitol Hill about the devastating effect of an immigration raid at a Greeley meatpacking plant and urged Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform. As a result, he faced a backlash of criticism at home. Selders knew his public stance on immigration was politically risky, particularly since he was seeking reelection in the upcoming mayoral race. Nonetheless, as an elected official, he felt an obligation to advocate for all the people of Greeley, especially those who otherwise would have no voice (Bernuth)*. Like the courageous senators in *Profiles in Courage*, Selders was willing to “sacrifice all – including his own career – for” his principles and the greater good (Kennedy 7).

A lifelong Republican from a

conservative town, Selders may seem an unlikely advocate for immigration reform. He admits that while growing up on the affluent west side of Greeley, he rarely ventured into the working class Latino neighborhoods on the east side of town. As mayor, however, Selders was determined to meet with community groups from all parts of Greeley to ensure he was representing the interests of all residents, regardless of race, class, or nationality (Riccardi). In December 2006, Selders learned that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents had raided the Swift & Company meatpacking plant – Greeley’s largest employer – and arrested 262 undocumented workers as part of a multi-city enforcement action known as “Operation Wagon Train” (Perl 88). Eyewitnesses reported that those detained were “treated like animals” (Cooper). They were handcuffed and shackled, denied access to food, water, and bathrooms, and were not allowed to

contact their families (“ICE”).

Shortly after the raid, many of those arrested were deported. Others remained in legal limbo for more than a year awaiting a hearing (Warner). On the day of the raid, more than 200 Greeley children returned home to find one or both parents gone (Lofholm). Selders sympathized with

He took a stand in favor of a more humane immigration policy

the children, who were “devastated by their parents being arrested and detained,” but he initially did not speak out (Riccardi). When John F. Kennedy first entered Congress, he was told that “the way to get along is

to go along” (Kennedy 4). These words were equally applicable to the situation in Greeley, where local leaders faced pressure to not “rock the boat” by taking positions contrary to the prevailing political sentiment (Thompson). However, as more details emerged about the raid and as community relations degenerated over the immigration issue, Selders knew he could not remain silent. He denounced the inhumane treatment of those arrested. “People with leg irons and handcuffs – was that really necessary?” he asked. “Is this what our country is about?” (qtd. in Olinger).

In May 2007, Selders traveled to Washington, D.C., to speak to Congressional lobbyists about the impact of the raid on immigrant families and the community (Delgado). He recognized his actions would be unpopular with those who had helped Greeley earn its reputation as “a GOP stronghold” (Cooper).

Yet he also knew that promoting the dignity of all residents, especially those he “felt had not been well represented,” was the “right thing to do” (qtd. in Bernuth). Selders also hoped to prompt meaningful debate about immigration

reform and move the discussion past divisive, partisan bickering and toward constructive solutions (Selders). In *Profiles in Courage*, Kennedy commended elected officials who had the courage to break with their parties and place “their convictions ahead of their careers” (206). By taking a stand in favor of a more humane immigration policy, Selders did just that.

In the wake of his trip, Selders faced tremendous political repercussions. He was vilified on local talk radio (Riccardi), and received angry emails and “more hate calls than I care to mention” (qtd. in Quintero).

Some accused him of wanting to turn Greeley into a sanctuary for illegal immigrants. Others called him “traitor scum” and derisively asked, “Have you thought about running for mayor of your favorite country, Mexico?” (“Swift Justice”). There were threats of a recall petition and demands that Selders withdraw his reelection bid (“Residents”). But Selders refused to be intimidated. “When you get elected to a job like mayor,” he said, “you deal with controversy” (qtd. in Villegas).

During Selders’ reelection campaign, his challenger blasted his stance on immigration, and members of his own party actively campaigned against him (Boyle). Selders was also the target of hateful campaign mailings by anonymous groups. One accused him of advocating “instant U.S. citizenship” for undocumented workers (“Greeley”). Another claimed Selders was soft on “gangs, crimes and illegals” (Louis-Sanchez).

In the end, Selders’ refusal to “compromise away his principles” (Kennedy 11) on immigration cost him the election (“Greeley”). The *Los Angeles Times* called Selders’ defeat “a cautionary tale of the politics of illegal immigration,” which, to some, showed “how a good man trying to do the right thing was taken down by the forces of intolerance” (Riccardi). Following his defeat, Selders was asked if he would speak out again, knowing the political consequences. “I’d do it again in a heartbeat because it was the right thing to do and it needed to be done,” he replied. “[I]llegal people who are here are still human beings.

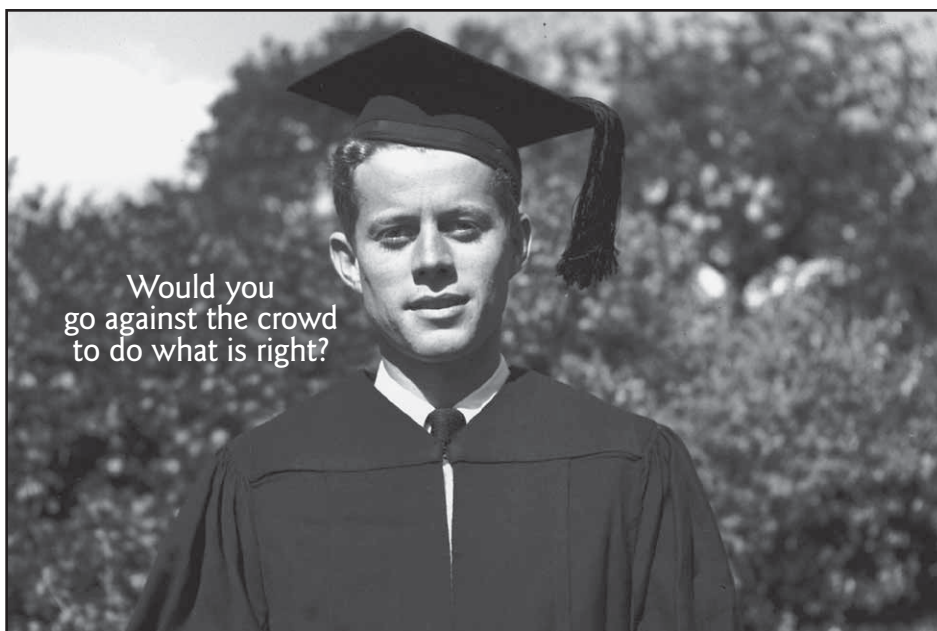
They deserve at least the dignity of being treated with respect” (qtd. in Bernuth).

Today, America finds itself at a crossroads as it grapples with the question of what type of nation it aspires to be. Does it want to be a country

that deprives individuals of their basic human rights simply because of their immigrant status? Tom Selders courageously said no. By taking a stand in favor of immigration reform and the basic dignity and humanity of all people, Selders did more than exemplify political courage: he showed what it means to be an American and uphold the values that we, as a nation of immigrants, should hold dear. ♦

* For the complete essay, including the bibliography, visit the Profile in Courage Essay Contest at jfklibrary.org.

He was willing to sacrifice all for his principles and the greater good



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Medford, MA: Tufts University is a highly ranked private institution in Medford, Massachusetts. Although its setting is suburban, students are only 20 minutes from Boston by subway. It's five miles or less from destinations such as Davis Square, Boston Common, the Museum of Fine Arts, Fenway Park, and Logan Airport.

Tufts offers a variety of resources and learning experiences to its 5,180 undergraduate students.

Its two undergraduate schools – the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering – offer a combined 150 majors and minors. Aside from certain distribution requirements, students have the freedom of double majoring or minoring in completely different fields at both schools so they can design a curriculum that suits their unique interests.

Since Tufts values a well-rounded liberal arts education, offering 200 courses from Feminist Philosophy to Medieval Architecture, it requires students to complete two classes in each of the core subjects: Social Sciences, Physical Sciences, Arts, Humanities, and Math.

One of Tufts' strongest subjects is International Relations. Tufts students take what they learn in the classroom and apply it in the real world to broaden their global perspective and create social impact. Tufts offers 10 study abroad programs at locations

including Chile, China, England, France, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, Japan, and Spain. In addition, there are hundreds of approved locations offered by non-Tufts programs that allow students to travel elsewhere. Tufts also has a 1+4 program during which admitted students can gain a year of service experience at domestic and international sites before returning for their regular four years.

Students get the most out of their experience at Tufts with small classes and engaging professors. The student-faculty ratio is 9:1, and the average class size is just 20 students. All classes are taught by professors, not graduate students or teacher assistants. Professors at Tufts really want to connect with their students on a personal level. Current undergraduates at the university recall

professors inviting them to performances of the Boston Symphony, on walks through campus, or to their office just to talk. The library's café offers free coffee to professors and students who meet there to chat.

Unlike many universities, Tufts allows students to engage in their own research starting freshman year. The college encourages interdisciplinary learning so students can combine different fields and explore the gray areas between separate complex ideas. For example, one student recalls writing a 20-page research paper in her economics class about the

relationship between fluctuations in the economy and traffic accidents.

Tufts offers a diverse student body with 25 percent students of color, 12 percent international students, and representation from all 50 states. These students participate in over 300 student organizations, and about a quarter are involved in Greek life. One perk of attending Tufts is access to excellent campus food that is ranked #13 by Princeton Review. Tufts constantly adds new options to the menu and will accommodate any dietary restriction.

Admission to Tufts University is highly competitive, with only a 16 percent acceptance rate for the incoming class in 2016. The university looks for students who challenge themselves academically, have high standardized test scores, and demonstrate the kind of passionate personality that fits the university's ideals. While the average cost of attendance is over \$65,000, the university is able to meet 100 percent of a student's demonstrated need with generous financial aid.

Tufts students are passionate, intellectually curious individuals who love being challenged by their classes, their fellow students, their professors, and the multitude of opportunities provided by the university. At the same time, they are part of a vibrant community that will no doubt create an unforgettable learning experience. ♦

by Margaret Liu, Westborough, MA

Encourages interdisciplinary learning

Enjoy the freedom of exploring a bustling city



Photo by Danielle Mikaelian, Westlake Village, CA

University OF Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, PA: College can be a very intimidating prospect. I am well aware that it is important for me to put myself out there to get an idea of what I am looking for in a university, so I have begun to visit colleges and meet their gymnastics coaches. Doing so has allowed me to determine what each school has to offer. Most recently, I visited the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

When I arrived, I was immediately awestruck by the beauty of the campus. On each street corner stands an old, historical building that adds to the elegance and nostalgia of the university. Additionally, Penn is located in a city, which I find to be a very attractive quality. However, unlike many city schools, the University of Pennsylvania is not scattered all around the city.

Instead, there is one central location in an area of Philadelphia called University City. This allows students to have a traditional college experience complete with a "campus feel," while also enjoying the freedom of exploring a bustling city.

Not only is the scenery beautiful, but the University of Pennsylvania is also one of the most prestigious colleges in the country. With exceptional academics and a 10 percent acceptance rate, Penn ranks eighth out of the hundreds of universities in the United States. These statistics are part of what makes Penn so supremely appealing. Although being accepted by such an esteemed

school is no easy task, thousands of applicants hope to be a part of the lucky 10 percent each year.

In addition to its aesthetic beauty and academic prestige, the University of Pennsylvania offers a vast range of courses that cater to almost any interest. Additionally, contrary to popular belief, clubs, sports, and social outings play a large role in students' lives. I talked to a sophomore who stated, "Being a student here at Penn does require many hours of hard work and studying, but over the course of these past two years I have made close friendships, joined the club soccer team and a sorority, and even got a job." Penn students inevitably spend the occasional long

night in the library, but most are able to achieve a healthy balance between schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and maintaining a social life.

In starting the process of furthering my education, I have become aware of many aspects that will make me the happiest. By making this stride toward bettering myself, I realize what I must accomplish in terms of both academics and athletics in order to be accepted by my top choices. Like many high school students, I feel as though college is a lifetime away, but I know that in order to have a successful future and accomplish all that I hope, I must take the initiative now to visit colleges. ♦

by Isabella Even-Chen, Franklin Lakes, NJ

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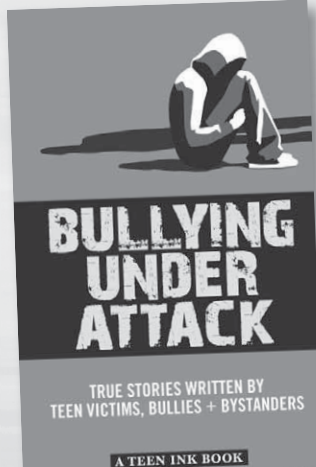
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Father on Board

by Alex Helm, Double Oak, TX

Senior Matthew M. sat in a chair next to the hospital bed of his girlfriend of two years, junior Chloe F. Both their moms were in the small white room too, eagerly anticipating the news that they'd waited 16 weeks for.

Finally, the ultrasound results were announced.

It was a boy.

Tears streamed down everyone's faces. Matt rested his hand gently on Chloe's belly.

A boy, he thought. I'm having a boy.

Matt, who I've known since second grade, never expected to be a teenage father. He and Chloe met through ROTC and both planned to join the military after high school. Matt wanted to be in the Air Force or the Army. Chloe wanted to be a pilot.

But all that changed when Chloe realized she was pregnant.

"I cried," she says, remembering that time. "I just cried."

Matt knew he wouldn't be one of those guys who just leaves once he gets a girl pregnant. He had to stay and raise his son. He wanted to stay.

"Guys who don't stay with women when they get pregnant are pathetic," Matt says. "It's a terrible thing. No girl should have to raise a child without the dad's help."

So Matt and Chloe decided to finish high school at the Lewisville Learning Center. Matt graduated in

early February, and Chloe is finishing up both her junior and senior classes. She'll graduate at the end of this school year. Then they'll find jobs to save money for the baby, whom they've named Keane.

"Joining the military is something I could still do because it would support Chloe and the baby," Matt says. "It's a job. Plus we'd get housing and the benefits that go along with it."

But Chloe has had to give up her dream of being a pilot. Instead, she wants to become a neonatal nurse and work with infants.

"That was always the second job [I had in mind], even before I found out I was pregnant," Chloe says.

Their academic and military pursuits aren't the only thing they've had to give up. The two have already had to alter their everyday lives for their son. Matt's closet is stuffed with baby supplies – bibs, blankets, clothes, and diapers. He also turned in his Mustang for a more family-friendly Jeep Wrangler that can fit a car seat. Plus he works almost every day at Lowe's to save money for their son.

Chloe had to give up a lot too. A big portion of her room has been taken over by baby supplies and a crib. But her mother has helped her get used to the changes.

"She was there for me," Chloe says. "She didn't scream when she realized [I was pregnant]. She understood and was willing to help."

When the time is right, the couple hope to get married. But they don't pretend that getting there will be easy.

"It'll start off rough because we don't live together yet and neither of us has a full-time job to make all the money we need," Matt says. "But as we get older and the years go by, we'll both be working full-time and get money and have our own place, and it'll get easier."

While parts of this process have been extremely overwhelming for the couple, there have also been exciting parts. Every time they left the hospital after a prenatal appointment, Matt and Chloe knew a bit more about their unborn son.

"When I first heard his heartbeat, I was beyond happy and couldn't stop smiling," Matt says. "I was so overjoyed to know he had a healthy heartbeat. Same with the ultrasound. I couldn't stop smiling and couldn't take my eyes off the screen. I just wanted to look at him all day."

During the last month of the pregnancy, Chloe was having more aches and pains. They knew that it was almost time for their son to be born.

"You go the whole first eight

months and you're like, 'Okay, we're having a baby,'" Matt says. "But then the last month gets here and you're like, 'This is real!'"

This realization came to them on Chloe's birthday, January 16. As Matt was leaving school, he got a call. Chloe didn't feel well. The pain got worse, and Matt rushed her to the hospital.

"I just tried to be as calm as I could be to keep her calm," Matt says.

Although it ended up being a false alarm, the two knew that the time was coming. Finally, on February 12, they got to meet Keane.

"It was going really well until the umbilical cord got wrapped around his neck," Matt says. "So that led to a cesarean section. [But Chloe] handled everything great and was very strong through it all."

For the past few weeks, they've spent a lot of time getting used to being a family. Keane is healthy, and Matt and Chloe are learning how to care for their son.

They know that now they'll be spending most of their time with Keane. They know that they'll have to give up even more of their lives. But they said they wouldn't take back what happened. To them, courage is key for anyone in their situation.

"They have to stay strong," Matt says. "They can't separate from each other. They have to do it for the baby." ♦

"No girl should have to raise a child without the dad's help"

The Power of the Teenage Girl

by Dana Kaufhold, Havertown, PA

I believe in the power of the teenage girl.

I don't believe that the world is as bad as everyone says. I don't believe that the news is an accurate representation of the world. Yes, of course there are terrorists, robbers, rapists, and murderers. And yes, it's important to know about it. But there's so much more good in the world than we hear about. And you can find it in a group most people overlook: teenage girls.

Teenage girls are some of the nicest people you will ever meet, I swear. We get a bad rep for being gossipy,

which I'll admit can be true. But I've seen so much good from teenage girls that never gets talked about.

We will offer each other sips of anything we're drinking, no questions asked. We share our food and our clothes. We give compliments like they cost nothing, because they do. We give our friends makeovers and back rubs and hairdos. It's expected that we'll spend endless hours talking about whomever our female friends have a crush on, and we do it with gladness. If a friend is feeling sad or upset, we make it our mission to cheer her up. We love harder, laugh longer, and cry louder than any other group of people on Earth.

So why are we the ones who get made fun of?

Teenage girls probably, for others, bring to mind images of a girl taking a selfie, or crying over One Direction, or dressing "inappropriately." Every time a teenage girl makes something and puts it out in the world, especially on the Internet, others are desperate to crush it with ugly words. They act as though her opinion doesn't matter. How dare she think and grow up and be a girl all at the same time?

If a girl cries over a boy who doesn't love her back, she's seen as desperate. If a girl rejects a boy she doesn't love, she's considered shallow. If a girl has sex, she gets called ugly names and you can't hang out with

her. If she doesn't, then she's no fun and why would you want to hang out with her? If she's really skinny, people think she's trying too hard, but if she has even an ounce of fat on her, then she's disgusting and must not care about her body. The paradoxes are endless and depressing. The world has it out for the teenage girl tooth, nail, and keyboard.

And still, if you run out of feminine supplies, no matter who you ask, any girl will give you what she has. We divide bills and responsibilities as easily as possible. I've had countless girls give me their last pencil or the hair tie off their wrist. We help each other out and lift each other up, which is good, because everyone else seems to be trying to tear us down.

So, yes, I believe in the power of the teenage girl. I believe in the 21st-century ideals being challenged by girls who dare to love themselves enough to take pictures of themselves. I believe in making the people who run our society angry and confused because we're daring to take the world by storm. I believe in the incredible courage girls are showing every day, despite the obstacles set up to stop them. I believe in laughing until you cry and crying without shame. I believe in us. ♦

Why are we the ones who get made fun of?



Photo by Mary Kelleher, Santa Rosa, CA

What's Behind Police Brutality?

by Bhargavi Garimella, San Jose, CA

You have certainly heard about the protests occurring in places like Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland. Racial inequality is a rising issue in our country. But the root of the problem I believe? Police brutality. Today's media has been publicizing more and more cases of police abusing citizens, violating their constitutional rights. In order to solve this critical problem, all members of the police force should be required to take yearly psychological examinations to determine whether they are mentally fit to carry weapons and to have the freedom to use them.

Officers' mentalities play a large role in how they react to different situations. Seeing themselves as victims of circumstance allows officers to disengage themselves from moral responsibility for their actions. Darren Wilson, the cop who fatally shot Michael Brown, may have unconsciously used victim-of-circumstance thinking in his official testimony. According to the court transcript, Wilson said he wanted to keep Brown "contained" until support arrived. He said that he'd believed that if he could buy 30 seconds before other officers arrived, they could "make the arrest, nothing happens, and we are all good." Wilson thought that he had done as much as he was able to in that incident.

In his article "Understanding the Psychology of Police Misconduct" in *Police Chief Magazine*, Brian D. Fitch, PhD, writes that "regardless of the context, these officers excuse their conduct by alleging that they had no alternative but to act unethically." Psychological examinations can determine whether

Officers see themselves as victims of circumstance

er officers would cast themselves as victims or as actors, and therefore prevent misconduct like what happened in Brown's death.

On November 22, 2014, a 12-year-old black boy named Tamir Rice was shot dead in a city park by Officer Timothy Loehmann. It was reported that Rice was reaching into his waistband, and the officer thought that the child was going to shoot civilians. Later it was discovered that Rice had been armed with only an airsoft toy gun. A boy – almost the same age as many of the readers of this magazine – was shot to death by an officer for possessing a toy gun.

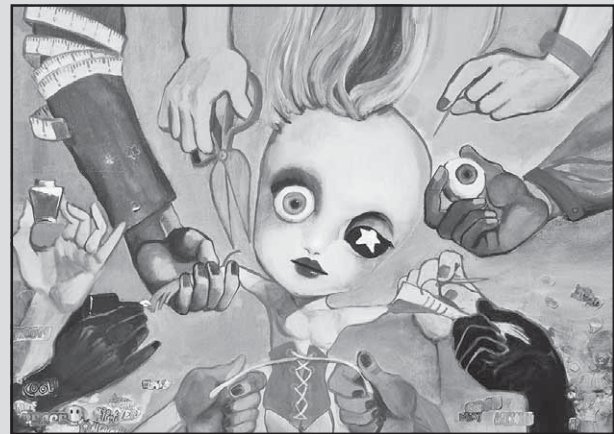
But there is more to the situation. Before joining the police force in Cleveland, Timothy Loehmann worked for another Ohio police force. There, he was deemed an emotionally unstable recruit and labeled unfit for duty. The police report stated

that Loehmann's behavior "leads one to believe that he would not be able to substantially cope, or make good decisions, during or resulting from any other stressful situation." If Loehmann was emotionally unstable and unfit for duty, why was he allowed to get a job in a different police department? If this report of Loehmann's mental state had been used to disqualify him from joining the police in Cleveland, a child's life could have been spared.

Some argue that the incidents that have been erupting in the media are isolated, unfortunate examples of police brutality, and

that in reality, police relations with racial minorities are dramatized by the media. However, police brutality is not rare. The media is barely covering the surface of police abuse. Police departments are not required to report cases of abuse at the federal level. Because of this, police brutality could be a much more common problem than we think.

No matter how remote these cases may seem, as a society and a democracy, we must value each life as important. In order to thrive, we must act before brutality happens. Requiring officers to have a mental assessment could prevent these tragic incidents. Should we stand back and watch, or do something to fix this problem? When we look back at the cases of police brutality that the media recounts, we know they are not the first, but we need to do everything we can to make sure they are the last. ♦



Art by Sangeun Lee, Gainesville, FL

I Hate the Internet

by "Evan,"
Bogotá, Colombia

Almost anyone will tell you that the Internet is a wonderful tool that connects the world. It brings people together. It gives us a voice and a place to share our opinions. Here is my opinion: the Internet divides us more than it brings us together.

Let's say you take 50 people – all of whom think that Ebola was manufactured by the Obama administration in order to kill conservative voters so they can't oppose the communist dictatorship he has turned the United States into – and locked them all in the same room. They would spend a lot of time agreeing with each other and perpetuating their own craziness. If someone were to slip an opposing opinion under the door, it would be ripped apart by the hivemind. It works the same way as an angry mob bent on burning a witch alive: A small group of people with the most vocal opinions speak for the majority, and the mob mentality replaces rational thought.

This is what happens every day in thousands of online communities. Let's say I'm an avid hip-hop fan, and I stumble my way onto reddit.com/r/hiphopheads. After just a few minutes of browsing, I find that this community adores Kanye West. Threads with titles like "Who, in your opinion, is the greatest of all time?" or "What artist changed your life with a single album?" all have Kanye at the top. Underneath you can read comments from hundreds of

It divides us more than it brings us together

people saying how much they agree. Of course, anyone who doesn't agree has either been downvoted to oblivion or had their comment removed by the moderators. However, the exact opposite will happen if you find yourself on /r/music where they detest Kanye with a passion. Personally, I don't love Kanye's music, but I don't hate it either. But my opinion won't be heard in either of these communities.

Try searching YouTube for a video related to any religious faith. If you scroll down and read the comments, I guarantee you will find an argument turned flamewar, where users have escalated from debating religion with strangers to insulting each other with slurs and pointing out grammatical mistakes. Because people can be anonymous behind a keyboard, many feel free to write whatever comes directly from their brain, no matter how crazy or rude it might be.

On the Internet, you have two options no matter where you are. Like or dislike. Upvote or downvote. Funny or die. You must either agree 100 percent with what someone has written or tell them they're too stupid to live. The Internet is so polarizing because it promotes a culture where everything is black and white: Everyone who agrees with me is my friend; anyone who doesn't is my enemy. How can we expect to get along if the central question that tears society apart is whether or not "Yeezus" was a good album? ♦

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Hate,
Because he likes mean girls.

I drank in one last glance
At my illustration in the mirror,
And, with my backpack
And a smile of authenticity,
Continued out the door.

by Savanna Roberts, Louisville, KY

The Bhajan

by Ujjwal Khanal, Kathmandu, Nepal

The village reeks of arsenic-mixed well water, patterned goats, and loneliness. Very unlike our buzzing hometown, almost no one in this village is younger than 50. The town of Bargachhi, Nepal, has been this way – empty, desolate, and in desperate need of youthful minds – ever since our parents left here for “opportunities.” At least, that’s what my siblings and I used to think.

Spending the summer with our grandparents was not exactly at the top of our wishlists, but when our parents started showering us with buttered words and emotional blackmail (which they have mastered over the years), there was simply no arguing. The bus dropped us off in the middle of the highway. With our giant bags and city looks we made our way toward our grandparents’ small cottage by the side of the gravel road.

The climate in southeastern Nepal is usually hot enough to make you sweat even in the evenings, but that day thick cottony clouds prevented the heat from penetrating, and a fresh breeze kept us moving. The sight was a typical rural scene in the northern plains of the Ganges River: emerald green rice fields stretching as far as the eye could see, tiny cottages made of wood and roofed with tin, and carefree buffaloes resting by the side of the road.

The people here were obviously not accustomed to seeing teenagers roaming the streets, but we didn’t mind being stared at by locals. Some stopped us to ask about our parents (whom they had not seen

for ages), and some even offered us evening tea. Finally, we reached the small red cottage behind the green yards – our home for the summer.

Our grandparents had already prepared dinner. After ceremonial *namaskars*, we had Grandma’s wonderful rice and lentils, grown in their fields. After dinner, Jaswi helped Grandma with the dishes, while Ravi and I followed Grandpa to the front yard.

The moon had already risen; it cast a pale silver glow on the tin sheets covering the cow sheds. A full moon indicated that it was a *Bhajan* evening, meaning the villagers would gather and sing religious hymns for hours. We adjusted straw carpets called *sukuls* around the yard, and after a lot of suppressed swearing and praying, we managed to start a fire in the yard, careful not to let it torch the soft grass.

Despite our enthusiasm during the preparations, however, we were not looking forward to the hymns.

Slowly, the villagers began pouring in. Clad in exotic shades of red and green, the old men and women settled onto the little carpets we’d arranged for them, uttering soft Vedic verses. Some, in their hurry, had not even bothered to lock their houses; theft was not a concern here.

The holy sound of chanted “*aums*” blended with the cool air, a sign that the little concert was about to begin. My cousins and I prepared ourselves for hours of boredom. After all, none of us could recognize a single word in Sanskrit, and we assumed that all the hymns would be sung in the ancient

*The holy sound
blended with
the cool air*

language.

Grandma began the first song. To our great astonishment, it was in Nepali, our mother tongue. The melodious song was about Lord Shiva, the natural force for welfare and destruction, according to Hindu beliefs. The words, voiced with honesty and experience, cast soft blame on him for not causing rains soon enough, very much in the way parents scold naughty children. The next song was for Krishna, another revered deity of Hindus, teasing him about his affair with his girlfriend Radha.

As we listened, the songs began to sound more and more familiar until we finally came to another delightful realization: these hymns were, in fact, pop tunes that we all had on our cell phones! The lyrics, of course, had been cleverly replaced by our grandparents. The hymns suddenly became much more enjoyable, and Jaswi even joined the old women in their dance. The passion, creativity, and unfathomable energy these seniors possessed in their weathered bodies made us realize how age, indeed, is just a number. The words kept swimming through the cool night breeze for hours until finally the villagers began to leave for their houses. They would contain their excitement and vibrant aura until the next full moon.

As we helped Grandpa put away the *sukuls*, he complimented us on our energy; he confessed that he hadn’t expected us to participate in the Bhajan at all. We only smiled, and even as the fatigue in our bodies finally took us to bed that night, our hearts were full with sheer happiness. ♦

Turkish Summers

by Carla Kay, Madison, CT

I sweat and swelter in the 100-degree Mediterranean sunshine, with no air conditioning to come to the rescue. One fleeting hour of weak Internet signal a day entertains me and my four younger cousins. My only other companions are big, dark, hairy men smoking cigarettes and conservatively covered women sipping tea. This is how I have spent half my summers for the past 16 years.

I grew up in a Turkish-American

household, in a culture much different from that of my peers from the Connecticut shoreline, the majority of whom are white and upper middle class. I am fluent in English, Turkish, and French, and instead of eating at fast-food chains, I opt for my mother’s huge home-cooked Turkish meals. Meats, olive oil, thick sauces, and spices make up the core of my diet. Every other year, my grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles visit my family here in Connecticut, and

then we go to Turkey alternate summers.

I have spent many of these visits in Marmaris, a rural village on the coast of the Mediterranean. Over the years, Marmaris has become a center of tourism; it seems to be especially attractive to Nordic Europeans traveling en masse, who bounce from one cheap night club to the next. For native families like mine, this is a great source of annoyance.

My mom has been summering in Marmaris since she was a child, in order to take care of her grandparents and work in her grandfather’s restaurant, which still stands on the same street it did 40 years ago. My family can unanimously call Marmaris our *memleketi* (hometown).

Together, we break Ramadan with gourmet Turkish buffets in the middle of the night. We maintain traditions including removing our shoes when entering a house. If I don’t kiss an elder’s hand in greeting or serve my grandparents tea at the end of the night, I am scolded. We go sailing in the clear turquoise waters of the Mediterranean and endlessly argue over Turkish politics, with contributions from even the youngest in the family. We return to Marmaris not to

vacation, but to rekindle the traditions of our large Turkish family.

Though my language fluency always returns within a few days of my arrival, I have never been able to rid myself of the culture shock I experience in Turkey. Compared to the United States, it is a relatively underdeveloped country. The bustling cities of Istanbul and Ankara can be compared to New York City, but the rest of the country tends to lag behind in technological advances.

The image of my six young cousins rushing to gather around the family iPad for an hour once a day continues to remind me of how fortunate I am to have grown up with two completely distinct cultures. When I walk into

any social setting in my Connecticut hometown, I see children bent over their personal electronic devices, disengaged from the events surrounding them. Taking a break from the comparatively prosperous and egotistical culture of the “American dreamers” has given me a point of view on life that I would not have otherwise. I’m aware of societal differences around the world, which helps me open my mind to new ideas. ♦

*We sail in the
clear, turquoise
Mediterranean*



Photo by Mikaela Byers, Santa Cruz, CA

Peeling Tomatoes

by Emmaline Keene, Enfield, NH

The kitchen was bustling – almost chaotic. I could handle the squawking parrot, the blaring news, the chicken being butchered, and the countless animals running around. What I couldn't handle – or even comprehend – was the rapid Spanish flying back and forth across the room. I sat there with sweaty hands and butterflies in my stomach, worrying about how I would survive the next two weeks.

My new Bolivian family was big, loud, and friendly. My host mother, Doña Josefa, and my host sister, Roxanna, were preparing a huge lunch of fried plantains, chicken, and potatoes. I was perched on the edge of my chair, feeling nervous and lost. Everything was so new, and

it was all happening too fast. My homestay family peppered me with questions and listened patiently while I answered in my mediocre Spanish. It was the first hour of what would be a 12-day stay, and they were eager to know everything about me.

Feeling bad that I was just sitting there, I asked what I could do to help. I was handed a tomato and told to peel and cut it. There was only one problem: I had never peeled a tomato before. In the United States I had always just washed them and cut them up. I struggled to remove the peel and ended up with a ball of red mush. My homestay mother noticed my failure, picked up the next tomato, and peeled it flawlessly in five seconds flat, the bright strips of skin curling onto the

faded blue tablecloth. Seeing my shocked face, she muttered, “*Vas a aprender.*” (You will learn.) I doubted that.

Over the next several days, I became more comfortable in my new home. I genuinely laughed at the jokes my family made, instead of smiling and hoping I looked convincing. We had in-depth conversations, and I began to understand the nuances of their Spanish.

Roxanna and I grew close. We braided each other's hair, went to the market to buy the week's groceries, watched telenovelas, and sat on each other's laps while riding in packed *trufis* (fixed-route taxis). My new family affectionately called me *Emmita* (a Spanish nickname for Emma). I became a part of their lives, even though we had so little in common.

One morning, over our typical breakfast of bread, jam, and lukewarm coffee, my homestay father asked if I missed my family. I told him that I did. He smiled his toothless grin and said, “*Somos tu familia ahora.*” Lying in bed that night, I realized what he had said: “We are your family now.” Those words made me feel like I had found a home in this foreign place.

Each day, I helped prepare lunch and dinner, which usually involved peeling tomatoes. I progressively got better and better. One day, we were making my favorite soup, and I was peeling tomatoes. Roxanna looked over at me and exclaimed “*¡Estás aprendiendo!*” (You are learning!) It may seem silly, but I felt proud that she had noticed my improvement.

On my second to last day, I managed to peel a tomato in one continuous strip. What would seem like a petty achievement to most made me grin with accomplishment. I held it up for my family to see and they all laughed and smiled that I had finally done what had looked so difficult to me on my first day.

Saying good-bye to my host family was so hard. They had allowed me into their lives, and we had shared so much early morning *café y pan*, late night *arroz con leche*, countless meals, and soccer games under the stars. I am eternally grateful to them for embracing me and my awkward Spanish. Those 12 days made me realize that you don't need to speak the same language in order to truly connect with another person. We are all human, and all it took was a tomato to make me realize that. ♦

My homestay family peppered me with questions



Photo by Sharon Pantano, Medford, NJ

Swampland

by Jordan Wyble, Tickfaw, LA

The taste of dew hangs in the air. The rising fog is cut by the rays of a new day. The still water is fresh and filled with life. Suddenly the green water is disturbed by an aluminum skiff. It plows through the shallows on its daily route into the deep abyss of the never-ending Louisiana swampland.

Quiet. Still. Peaceful.

Only occasional ripples disturb the glasslike surface. The rush of wind on the wings of a great blue heron sends it gliding across the natural mirror, then out of sight.

**Quiet.
Still.
Peaceful.**

A sudden splash disturbs the swamp like a skipping stone, then another. The meek mullet is silenced by a quick blow from a shadowy figure. A fawn laps water on the bank until the shriek of a far-off bobcat catching its prey sends the baby scuttling back to the safety of the hollows. The squeal of a boar finalizes the relentless pursuit of the ancient alligator.

Quiet. Still. Peaceful.

The ever-watchful eagle gazes across its territory from a high perch in a windblown cypress. The only trace of anything alive is the occasional swirl of water from a surfacing blue catfish.

As the shadows grow old, the wise owl lets out his call to arouse the other night prowlers. The green water is disturbed by an aluminum skiff plowing through the shallows back home from the deep abyss of the never-ending Louisiana swampland.

Quiet. Still. Peaceful. ♦

In Mexico

In Mexico, some people's idea of heaven is a concrete hut that won't let the rain fall on the sleeping bodies below.

In Mexico, only a few miles divide the people with manicured fingers, pool houses, and Gucci bags from the ones with ragged shoes, a hole for a toilet, and only the foul taste of their breath in their empty stomachs. In Mexico, you get used to the hungry eyes. In Mexico, eating in the outside part of a restaurant means having to face the kids asking for just a little piece of your food.

In Mexico, kids are made of bones, women are made of tears, and men are made of too many hours beneath the menacing heat from the sun. In Mexico, old ladies asleep on the street are mistaken for trash bags.

And still, what pride it is that the richest man in the world is Mexican, right?

In Mexico, we are taught to always keep our eyes on the ground, to obey. We are taught that

it is not our place to whine or complain or ask for a country that does not treat its people like pawns in a game.

In Mexico, when someone says your name, you answer with “Mande,” meaning “Lead,” meaning “I am your servant,” meaning “I can do nothing but follow.”

In Mexico, we are taught to cover the cracks in the dining table with placemats.

To pretend it is not falling apart beneath us. In Mexico, we say “I want to go do community service in Africa. They are so poor over there.”

In Mexico, we don't know the “in between.” We have the billionaires and we have the extreme hunger-naires.

In Mexico, I learned how to expertly avert my eyes from the man in rags holding an empty cup at me, and how to pretend I don't have change when children made of dirt tap on the car window.

In Mexico, we learn to fit ourselves in pocket holes. Always silenced. Always shrunk.

by Alejandra Márquez, Monterrey, Mexico

Fun Facts About Pride & Prejudice

by Helen Hu, Darien, IL

Here's a fact you already know: *Pride and Prejudice* is a book by Jane Austen. It was adapted into a movie in 2005. The movie starred Keira Knightley. She looked very pretty.

Here's a fact you may know: Dictionary.com defines "prejudice" as "any preconceived opinion or feeling, either favorable or unfavorable." Apparently that is the second most popular definition of the word.

A fun fact about prejudice: When humans survived basically on berries and grass – instead of high-fructose syrup and electronic stimulation – they required intuition to quickly decide what was dangerous and what was not. The humans who decided the quickest were the most likely to survive.

A fun fact about evolution: The humans who survived passed down those quick decision-making skills to their offspring, along with the knowledge of which berries to eat and which grasses to grow. Because they had preconceived feelings that warned them of danger, and because those feelings were usually accurate, those kids were not gored by wild boars or harmed by poisonous plants. They survived too.

Here's a fun fact about you: You know that a chair is a chair. Chairs come in many shapes and designs. Some don't have legs. Some look like eggs. Some are elaborate. Some are very simple. But you see any one of them, and you think *chair*. It is a "preconceived opinion or feeling." You got that from your parents.

Here's a fun fact about first impressions: You can form a first impression of someone in one-tenth of

a second. That fact is from Wikipedia. People like to say that Wikipedia can be wrong. People also like to say that Wikipedia can be right. It depends on their first impression of Wikipedia. It also depends on their preconceived opinion of the general intelligence of humans and their consequent ability to add to a free encyclopedia. They got that from their parents.

Here's a fun fact about parents: Some parents see a weird chair and think *chair*. Some parents see their daughter's boyfriend and think *threat*. Some parents see modern art and think *trash*. Some parents see a black man and think *danger*.

Some parents see a homeless person and think *burden*. Some parents see a hijab and think *terrorist*. They got that from their parents.

Here's a fun fact about race: Different skin tones developed due to different exposure to sunlight and UV rays. Exposure to sunlight depends on the latitude where you live. Skin tone is passed down through evolution. We get it from our parents.

Here's a not-so-fun fact about bullying: In the United States, one out of four kids are bullied. That fact is from bullyingstatistics.org. It is the first result when you type "bullying statistics" into Google. Why are the ones out of four being

bullied? Sometimes it's their personality. Sometimes it's their race. Sometimes it's their first impression. Sometimes it's a "preconceived opinion or feeling." Maybe they got it from their parents.

Here's a fact about pride: It's one of the seven sins. Dictionary.com says that it is "the state or feeling of being proud." That is the second most popular definition of the word. Many kids don't tell people that they are being bullied because of pride.

Here's a fact about being proud: Dictionary.com says that "proud" means "having or showing self-respect or self-esteem." That is the third most popular definition of the word. Humans want to be proud of themselves. And they want others to be proud of them.

Here's a fact you already know: A cycle is like a circle. It does not end. There is a water cycle and a nitrogen cycle and a carbon cycle and a bicycle. In cycles, things go around and around. Here is a cycle of sadness: In the first half of the cycle, a human uses his "preconceived feeling or opinion,



Art by Leah Choe, Burke, VA

either favorable or unfavorable" to judge another so that he can have a higher chance of surviving. The "preconceived feeling" is wrong. The wronged human is sad because that "preconceived feeling" made the first human treat her badly, which affected her "self-respect or self-esteem." She has trouble attaining "the state or feeling of being proud."

Here's a not-so-fun fact about pride: The most popular definition of "pride" on Dictionary.com is very long. It says "pride" is "a high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc." In the second half of the cycle of sadness, the wronged human wishes to regain "the state or feeling of being proud." She creates an "unfavorable," "preconceived feeling or opinion" about another human to attain "a high or inordinate opinion of [her] ... superiority." And the cycle repeats. It does not end.

Here's a fun fact about cycles: A cycle will end if it is not sustainable. If the water is taken away, the water cycle will end. If the "preconceived feeling or opinion, either favorable or unfavorable," is taken away, the cycle of prejudice will end.

Here's a fun fact about humans: Humans no longer need to eat berries and grass to stay alive. They are not in dire danger of being gored by wild boars or poisoned by wild plants, because there are tastier things to eat, like high-fructose corn syrup. They survive easily.

Here's another fun fact about humans: There are things that humans got from their parents, that their parents got from their parents, that their parents got from their parents and so on. Humans don't need some of those things anymore. One of those things is a tail bone. One of those things is that antique vase in your basement. One of those things is "any preconceived opinion or feeling, either favorable or unfavorable" about other groups of people.

Here's a fun fact: In the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, it takes a long time for the main characters to fall in love. The main characters have time. They got it from their parents. It takes a long time for them to see each other and think *love*.

Here are a couple of facts: "Pride and Prejudice" is a movie that was a story first. Some stories embody ideals. It's okay to be idealistic. You get it from your parents. Humans shouldn't eat too much high-fructose corn syrup or grass. It's okay to leave behind some of the things your parents' parents' parents passed down to you, especially if those things hurt others. ♦

You can form a first impression in one-tenth of a second

Leering

by Freda Sciarappa, New Orleans, LA

I walked down the damp sidewalk to my friend's house, stepping to the beat of my headphones. I was almost there when I heard a long honk from a car. It sounded broken and old, and when I turned I saw a man who fit the same description. The smirk on his face made my stomach turn and my feet stumble out of rhythm.

Sweetheart. Nice ass. His words followed me along with his car. I was 14. I walked the wrong way down a one-way street to escape his pursuit.

When I got to my friend's house I told her the story, almost in tears. I was scared. She laughed and said I should be happy that I already attracted attention, like it was a blessing to be followed by a man more than twice my age. She said I should have said thank you and moved along. If only she knew that my knees were shaking and my breath was caught in my lungs.

I tried to imagine turning and saying thank you to the man, his twisted smile and proud eyes gleaming as he leered at my body. I clutched the chair as my friend talked about how jealous she was. I wanted to leave, but I felt paralyzed by the idea that the man was out there, that any man or woman could be like him. We turned on the television and never talked about it again. But it happened again, then again, and again, each time flooding me with a mixture of shame and fear. I told myself that I shouldn't walk alone, that I needed a man with me, that my body put me in danger.

I realize now, but wish someone had told me then, that it was not my fault. That what happened had nothing to do with how I dressed. That my body did not define me. That I have control. That I should not say thank you when people objectify me. ♦

Fashion Show Fund-Raiser

by Rebecca Reich, New York, NY

Yves Saint Laurent once said, “I have always believed that fashion was not only to make women more beautiful, but also to reassure them, give them confidence.” This quote came to life for me when I organized a community service event for young girls called Empowerment Through Fashion. I have always loved clothes and fashion, but I had never thought about how that passion could help others. That all changed last August as I was putting the clothes I had outgrown into a bag to donate. As I folded the clothes, I remembered how, as a little girl, I loved to play dress-up and “fashion show,” taking everything out of my closet and walking down a pretend runway. Suddenly, I had an idea.



Photo by MollyKate Cline, Powell, OH

Through a family friend, I was introduced to the Greater Chinatown Community Association (GCCA). Their mission is to provide services to the Chinese-American community, especially new immigrants and the elderly. Through the GCCA, people in need get access to adult education and medical care. Even mundane activities like taking a subway or filling out forms can be difficult for someone coming from a different culture. The GCCA and its volunteers offer those in the Chinatown community tools to help them assimilate. Perhaps the most important services offered are friendship, support, and companionship.

The first person I met was Vivian Lo, the secretary of the GCCA’s board of directors. Vivian was instrumental in helping me translate my idea into action. She was enthusiastic about the fashion show fund-raiser, and convinced others at the GCCA it was worthwhile.

For the event, I solicited new and like-new clothing from friends and local stores. I sent countless e-mails and posted numerous requests on social media. As the donations were delivered, I kept a detailed spreadsheet of sizes and descriptions. Since I’d sell whatever was not worn in the fashion show, I came up with prices for everything.

Then I worked with the GCCA to find girls to participate in the fashion show. An added enticement (other than the excitement of walking the runway) was that each girl could keep the clothes she modeled. To address the empowerment piece of the event, the GCCA and I invited a group of career women to provide information and advice for the girls. Among the panelists was a judge, an investment banker, an architect, a magazine publisher, and an actor.

The event was held in December on a very rainy

Sunday in a church auditorium. I got there early and, with a team of volunteers, decorated the room and set up chairs and tables. The models had a quick dress rehearsal, and volunteers did their hair and makeup.

The girls modeled 25 different looks ranging from jean shorts to evening wear. After the fashion show, everyone shopped, networked, and snacked on baked goods. About 150 people attended the event, and we raised over \$3,500: the operating budget of the GCCA for one year.

Learning about the GCCA and the problems faced by new immigrants in the Chinese community was very meaningful to me. I loved being able to take my passion for fashion and share it with other girls. When I look back on the months I spent preparing for the event, working with the GCCA, and organizing the details, I realize how much time I have to give to others. It made me want to do more for people who need help.

For me, the best part of this experience was when the models came to my house for a fitting a few weeks before the event. Sometimes the girls tried on four or five outfits before finding one they wanted to model. And when they found it, you could see their faces light up. As I looked at the clothes strewn about and the girls practicing their walk down the runway, I realized that my childhood game of “fashion show” had become a reality, and in the process, had truly benefited a group in need. ♦



Each girl could keep the clothes she modeled

Thirsty for Redemption

by Michael Baker, Clinton, CT

Standing knee-deep in empty soda cans, beer bottles, and broken glass, I found myself exhausted to the point of collapse. Separating glass from plastic from aluminum in the middle of a dew-covered field was the last place I wanted to be early on a Sunday morning following a long weekend of marching and performing.

Annual fife and drum musters always meant that I could play the fife and enjoy time with long-distance friends. Musters provided a diversion from the mundane schedule of practices and performances across the Northeast; however, I always had to keep in mind the work in store for me and members of the Green Team during the close of every muster weekend. Each year we collected hundreds of recyclable cans and bottles to raise money. Volunteering as a member of the Green Team meant hours of separation, redemption, and general chaos.

Gloves may have protected our hands

from cuts, but nothing prevented the warm, sticky beer and soda from coating our feet, legs, and arms. Separation continued for another hour; it consisted of not only separating the recyclables, but also removing the soaking wet trash and numerous shards of glass just waiting to slice someone’s fingers.

We jammed bottle after bottle into the machines

Eventually we divided into two groups. “You guys take the non-deposit bottles down the street to the liquor store to organize them, and our group will run down to the grocery store to start returning ours,” I said. Our group trucked bagged recyclables to the grocery store while the others took on the task of categorizing non-redeemable bottles by their distributors.

At the grocery store, we dumped bag after bag into grocery carts and created an assembly line. Carts moved into the redemption center, and recyclables were redeemed. As soon as one cart was emptied, it was replaced with another.

Returning the bottles seemed to take

a millennium. We reached into the carts over and over, tediously jamming bottle after bottle into their designated machines. Every couple of minutes, a new problem presented itself; machines were full, malfunctioning, or unable to accept certain brands.

On more than a few occasions, we had to press the button for assistance. Every time, the cheerful young woman who came jokingly asked, “How may I assist you?” Rejects found a new home in the emptied bags we tied to the handle of each grocery cart in order to prevent further confusion. Persistence was the key to finishing the process. Many of the volunteers eventually had to leave or became too exhausted to continue.

As the last can was redeemed, I hurriedly counted the redemption slips. Our total rose higher and

higher until I announced: \$445! Everyone, including me, let out a sigh of relief.

Collectively, with determination and several hundred cans and bottles, we raised enough money to send at least one kid to Jr. Fife and Drum Camp. Knowing that six hours of work amounted to an opportunity for an underprivileged child to develop his or her musical ability was reward enough for the time, effort, and mess. ♦



Photo by Sarah Dalglish, Boulder, CO

PS3, PS4, XBOX, PC

The Evil Within

The survival horror genre has seen some bright lights but has since faded from popular interest and been overshadowed by modern-day shooters. Publisher Bethesda Softworks and the developers at Tango Gameworks have challenged that trend with “The Evil Within,” director Shinji Mikami’s dream project that hearkens back to the roots of survival horror.

The story centers on Sebastian Castellanos, a cop investigating a series of grisly murders at Beacon Mental Hospital. While looking at the tapes, he is knocked unconscious and enters a twisted world filled with zombie-like creatures and countless other horrific monsters. Sebastian (and therefore, you) must use strategy to uncover the evil within.

The biggest plus of the game is the atmosphere and environment, which is littered with dark, isolated hallways and rare but effective jump scares. It is truly a return to form for survival horror games, as most have degraded to pure action shooters. This game requires cleverness, as ammunition is scarce. It puts you in a position of true fear as you have to figure out the best way to clear a room or defeat one of the game’s infuriating bosses without wasting hard-earned ammo.

The best and only way to play is at night, lights off, shades closed, and the volume up. The combination of visual

and sound design is above phenomenal, mixing gruesome imagery and twisted enemies with terrifying sound effects and a disturbing soundtrack.

Another huge plus of the game is the controls, which feel like they jumped straight out of “Resident Evil.” While some may complain about the similarities, it does provide a sense of familiarity with the game. If you don’t know traditional “RE” controls, there is a two-minute tutorial.

The difficulty of this game is both a big plus and a minus. “The Evil Within” is unrelenting. At times when I seemed to have the upper hand, the game’s non-player characters got in the way and caused me to die. While the bosses are fantastic and terrifying, they’re also nearly impossible to beat. This means a lot of casual gamers will



Unrelenting

be frustrated.

Also, the frame rate is shoddy. The game runs in 30 frames per second, which is modest for current-gen systems. With next-gen consoles running at 60 frames per second, the graphics on PS4 or Xbox One will seem far worse than they actually are.

“The Evil Within” is still a fantastic game. The negatives are overshadowed by the visual aesthetics and the incredible sound design. This will make a great gift for any horror fan. ♦

by Ayinde Roberts,
Owings Mills, MD

PC

Misao

You know that girl in your class who has no friends and gets bullied all the time? She’s been missing for three months. In class, you can almost swear you hear her voice calling, “Find me.” Later, as you’re waiting for the final bell and your friend is chattering, you hear your classmates discussing the missing girl and joking about a curse. You hear her voice again: “Find me save me find me save me.” Then you hear nothing but your own screaming as you fall into an abyss.

This is the start of the amazing RPG horror game “Misao.” Like many RPG horror games, you play as a young girl in a supernatural situation who has to go through trials in order to escape. But

in “Misao,” the horror doesn’t come from the things trying to kill you. The real horror is the discovery of what happened to the game’s title character. Saying any more would be a spoiler, so that’s all you get.



Delightfully creepy

Like most RPGs, the game is very pixelated. But that doesn’t lessen the atmosphere in the least. The player’s constant fear of being attacked makes this game delightfully creepy.

I highly recommend “Misao,” but it definitely isn’t for everyone. If you are easily triggered by scenes of intense bullying or gore, I don’t recommend it for you. ♦

by Lorena Hoggard,
Paragould, AR

XBOX, PC

Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth

Why can’t any survival horror game be original anymore? Except for a few, most are generic and derivative. So when one comes along that does things differently, you have to stop and take notice.

One such game is “Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth,” released in 2005 for the Xbox and 2006 for the PC. It’s one of a few games based on the works of author H. P. Lovecraft, such as the Chaosium RPG “Call of Cthulhu.” The highly original gameplay mixes puzzles, stealth, shooting, survival horror, and detective work.

Graphically, “Dark Corners of the Earth” holds up pretty well. It perfectly creates a 1900s setting. From the dirty halls of Arkham Asylum to the ominous town of Innsmouth, it breathes authenticity and keeps a looming dread throughout the entire game. However, after 10 years, some cracks in the visual quality really show. The lip-syncing is pretty bad at times, and the frame rate can get choppy on the Xbox.

Sound-wise, “Dark Corners of the Earth” excels. Weapons sound authentic and reasonably powerful, the creatures sound creepy, wind howls, and the temples near the end are full of sanity-draining chanting. There’s some appropriately timed, pulse-pounding and dread-inducing background music, as well as some songs from the time period. The voice acting has a B-movie feel at times but gets the job done.

“Dark Corners of the Earth” follows Jack Walters, a former Boston detective involved in a raid on a cult headquarters. After encountering monstrous acts and weird creatures, Jack succumbs to madness, and is committed to Arkham Asylum for six years. Once released, he becomes a private detective



and suffers amnesia of parts of his former life. He gets a call to investigate a missing person’s case in the nearby town of Innsmouth. When Jack arrives, he sees that the town is isolated, with mysterious, unfriendly inhabitants. He ends up digging too deep and discovers more than he bargained for.

It’s a brilliant adaptation of the story “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” which is something fans will appreciate. But it’s also easy to approach for those who aren’t familiar with the story or H. P. Lovecraft in general. It makes nice twists and turns without ever becoming unexplainable or ridiculous.

What also helps the story and presentation is the overall atmosphere of the game. It starts off properly mysterious, with a building tone that becomes downright terrifying. Sure, there are some jump scares, but most of the horror comes from the unseen and unexplained.

The game play is an interesting mix of elements. “Dark Corners of the Earth” starts in the adventure game mindset, with the player exploring Innsmouth and finding documents that give detailed back story. The game then switches gears to stealth: the player avoids the townsfolk and solves puzzles. After this, the game switches to a first-person shooter, while still using adventure and stealth elements.

“Dark Corners of the Earth” really makes the player want to replay the game. It is full of scattered documents that flesh out the story. There are four different difficulty modes, which unlock as you beat the previous mode.

Now, while all of this may sound incredible, “Dark Corners of the Earth” has a number of problems that may turn off some. It’s extremely complex, so it can be tough to figure out what you’re supposed to do. Patient players won’t have an issue, but those looking to focus on the story may find that using a guide online will help. Players will find that the shooting and stealth aren’t as polished as they could be. Finally, the game has a few bugs. Most are harmless, but there’s one that can actually render the game unfinishable. This can be fixed with help of a fan-made patch.

Most, if not all, of these issues can be overlooked, given the quality of the game overall. “Dark Corners of the Earth” is original, creative, polished, and captivating. A lot of love was put into the project, and you really can tell. There are rumors that the PC port was even finished by a single employee in the midnight hours, which is a kind of love you don’t typically see from developers.

While not perfect technically, “Dark Corners of the Earth” is an underappreciated masterpiece, and one of those games that should be experienced. Not just played, but experienced. Just be patient and keep an open mind. ♦

by Ian Obst, Florissant, MO

Walking the Halls with Cancer

by Eva Berezovsky, Minnetonka, MN

The summer before her freshman year of high school, Pia Phillips noticed a strange lump in her neck. Never imagining it might be dangerous, it went straight to the back of her school-filled mind. After a biopsy, Pia found out the shattering news: She had cancer.

Hodgkin's lymphoma is a disease of the lymphatic system, which is part of the immune system. It's one of the most curable cancers, but that doesn't mean it wasn't an arduous experience.

"The fact that I had cancer hit me a month after I overcame it all," Pia reveals. "I was in the middle of studying, and I just broke down. I knew about what I had, but I just couldn't get myself to believe it prior to that moment. High school had distracted me from reality." She couldn't get herself to imagine the endless hours she'd be spending in a hospital room, or the painful headaches, nausea, and discomfort she'd endure. She really

couldn't imagine possibly losing her life.

The daily struggle of hospital life, pain, sickness, and fear obviously wasn't easy, but what really hit Pia hard was losing her hair. Day after day we see people with bare heads on the street or at the grocery store, but we don't typically come across bald-headed peers in the school cafeteria. When she was told she'd lose her hair, Pia shed her first tears dedicated to cancer. "There was a big ball piling up inside of me, getting bigger and bigger," she says, "and when I found out I was going to lose my hair, the ball exploded, and so did I."

It's just hair, right? Not to Pia. When her hair vanished, so did her confidence. "I was scared to look like the complete opposite of a stereotypi-

cal perfect high school girl," she says. "At times I was more scared about my self-image than my well-being."

With cancer also came social struggles. Dealing with relationships in high school is hard enough, but having cancer made it even harder. Her

biggest concern, after her hair fell out, was sustaining relationships with her friends. She feared ugly stares at her bald head or glares at her in the halls, as if she were a walking disease. For the most part, her friends were faithful, but there were times when she was treated unnaturally. She felt that people tried to befriend her so they could say they were friends with a girl with cancer.

They say that a positive attitude leads to a positive outcome, and this was true in Pia's case. She had a rock-in' attitude through it all. Though peo-

ple treated her differently and she felt nauseous half the time, she remained positive. Because of her attitude, her struggles left her with a more appreciative perspective of life. She values life and doesn't waste a minute worrying about the little things.

Pia said that if she could talk to someone in her shoes, she would tell them four things. "First, you're going to have a kickass haircut. Second, it's super easy to shower without hair. Third, be positive and it will change everything. And lastly, don't let cancer control your life. It doesn't define who you are as a person."

Cancer in high school was a challenge, but it was nothing Pia couldn't tackle. She made it through the hair loss, the awkward friendship moments, the nausea, the painful days of missing school for chemotherapy, and everything in between. "Cherish your life more and live it well," Pia says. "Some people don't get the chance." ♦

"Cancer doesn't define who you are as a person"

My Green Revolution

by Angelina Lee, Naperville, IL

This kid eats anything. And everything.

There are a few reasons why. There is no way you can make me skip breakfast: it's either bus with breakfast or no bus at all. My skinny-girl crisis was resolved in prehistoric times; the few times I've missed meals were purely unintentional and resulted in great misery.

Blessed with limited allergies and a stomach like a bottomless iron pit, I like to pig out. I've been that kid who groans internally when dinner consists mostly of microwaved vegetables. And more vegetables. And some very old meat.

Those meals happened frequently when I was growing up. My parents were determined to feed me the right things the right way, no matter if I wanted to eat healthy or not. But I was deeply concerned about the frozen fish sticks going extinct in our fridge, and meeting our weekly quota of microwave ramen noodles in a cup. And after a while, my family's shopping list began to give in. The sweetened, fried, and processed goodies began to pop up in our pantry. Not a lot, but enough. And I barely noticed, since that was when my attention was sliding toward high school. It was all fine by me.

So what does it take to turn all of that around?

Less than you'd think.

In fact, there is a chance I'd never have faced this revelation at all. And as sad as this is to say, I would represent the bulk of American kids today and their eating mentality.

However, I have Netflix.

Most people use Netflix to watch intensely emotional films like "Lilo & Stitch," and I happen to be one of them. All the same, I decided to check out a friend's recommendation of "Plastic Paradise," a documentary about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. This person knew I had recently converted into an environmentalist nut and said I'd love it. Coinciden-

tally, it in turn inspired me to guilt-trip my English class with a speech about the evils of plastic.

But it also opened my eyes – wide. I was eager to eat up this strangely heavenly nonfiction, and the next thing on the list was "Hungry for Change," another highly rated documentary focused on the shocking truth about what makes Americans the fattest people on the planet. I was in. And that was when the magic blew me away.

I became obsessed. One of the main points of the documentary was the sugar in the foods we eat every day. While some teenagers might count the calories or carbs in their Mountain Dew, what they should really be concerned with is the sugar. All the carbs

we gobble up are eventually turned into sugar in our bloodstream, then stored as fat cells. Sugar matters, and not just for diabetics. The American Heart Association recommends limiting daily sugar intake to six teaspoons for women and nine for men to maintain long-term health. A typical 12 ounce can of soda contains about 10 teaspoons,

and some brands have even more. Gatorade, a "sports drink," has almost nine teaspoons of sugar per 20 ounce bottle. So much for dessert.

"Hungry for Change" pointed out that no matter how many versions of the iPhone 6 humans can produce in a year, we're still very much animals, and we're not eating what we should as a species. When people go on diets that starve them nutritionally, or rely on overprocessed food, their organs pay the price.

This hit home for me. I could count and count molecules of sugar, but facing the fact that this cheese sandwich does not remotely represent anything organic was a game changer. Suddenly, some things did

not look appetizing anymore. That pizza for dinner Sunday night? Crawling with scientifically perfected product. The fast-food fries looked too yellow. And the milk I was drinking was technically not milk anymore.

I got a sinking feeling as I watched my friends buy sugary 1% milk, sugary crusted chicken patties, sugary fries, sugary ketchup, and very sugary cookies for lunch. Practically every day. It didn't seem like anything I could say would sway my friends more than it would annoy them. But maybe this article will.

I am enchanted by the idea of simplifying my diet, and not just because of inherent laziness: what I eat is supposed to represent what it looked like while it was being grown, and that means showing a little leaf. A lot of green. And it doesn't feel like the government is making it easy to be healthy, in schools or out. But progress is being made to drive us in a healthier direction. And a lot of it starts, I think, with our own green revolutions. ♦

Sugar matters, and not just for diabetics



Photo by Talia Bernstein, Aptos, CA

Worlds • Porter Robinson

After the meteoric rise of electronic music dominated by oppressive bass and generic vocals, a break from the norm couldn't be more refreshing. Sadly, as the commercialization of electronic dance music, or EDM, began, the pounding beats supposed to keep you awake gradually devolved into humdrum sounds from any schmuck with a desire for fame.

Lazily scrolling Facebook one night, I saw a rare update from the artist Porter Robinson on my newsfeed. Robinson rode the EDM scene to initial success and a permanent spot in my iTunes playlist with his 2011 EP "Spitfire." In August 2014, he finally released his second album, "Worlds," after growing disillusioned with the stagnant EDM scene. Under the label Astralwerks, "Worlds" includes singles that sparked my interest such as "Sad Machine" and "Lionhearted."

I decided to consult my top musical authority, my sister. She called me "unhip" for not knowing sooner, then wholeheartedly vouched for the album, which I purchased. Could Robinson find uniqueness in the stale 4/4 electronic beat and pull it off well after his long hiatus? Would his music sound natural or more forced than the lyrics of "Summer" by Calvin Harris? Despite my pessimism, I had hope.



Built upon harmony rather than cacophony

Porter Robinson definitely talks big, but what spoke to me louder were the synthesized Japanese vocaloids in his American EDM album. I wasn't put off by the Japanese anime sounds in the last track, "Goodbye to a World"; the xylophones that replace generic beats drew me in. The bass supports instead of overwhelms the melody – and it all sounds natural and seamless, two traits that current EDM desperately needs.

The unforced, natural feel of "Worlds" is built upon harmony, rather than cacophony. Distinct rhythms and melodies drift throughout the tracks without being oppressed by the bass, and the well-crafted, abstract lyrics warrant various interpretations.

My sole criticism lies in how far Robinson pushed the envelope with the use of Japanese vocaloids and video game sounds. It feels like they were put there simply to distinguish his album from others, but superb lyrics and musical quality already set "Worlds" apart.

If you are tired of EDM, listen to "Worlds." If you want to get into EDM, listen to "Worlds." Heck, even if you listen to classical music, listen to "Worlds." Despite the EDM label, it's an album everyone can enjoy. It has already topped Billboard's US Dance/Electronic Albums.

The only things truly necessary to enjoy the album are an open mind and open ears. If you're still skeptical, you can check out this reclusive artist's Facebook page. Despite my frugality and initial pessimism, I can attest that buying "Worlds" was money well spent. ♦

by David Jin, La Cañada, CA

Traveller • Chris Stapleton

The year is 2015, and country music has lost its way, stranded on a one-way, one-lane road in uncharted territory. Stuck somewhere between pop and a hard place, the genre that I grew up with is experiencing an identity crisis, largely thanks to numerous figureheads handing the torch to some unsavory characters. The corporate Nashville machine, which of late has been solely concerned with cranking out one-trick ponies, is facing its lowest popularity since 2008, particularly among the 18-to-34 demographic that drove the "bro country" trend to its peak. That same demographic that launched rapid white bread acts to stardom is now abandoning the genre, leaving country music on a precipice.

I don't have an answer for country music's plight, but in light of long-time songwriter Chris Stapleton's first major-label release, I do have hope. I didn't know what to expect from "Traveller," given Stapleton's track record of writing mainstream fodder for acts such as Luke Bryan and Thomas Rhett. I was reluctant to give him my forgiveness for such transgressions, but forgive him I did, because every single song on "Traveller" shines.

Stapleton's cover of George Jones and David Allan Coe's song "Tennessee Whiskey" had the potential to be an ear-sore, but it's a masterpiece when Stapleton lets loose on the chorus in a deep, effectual way.

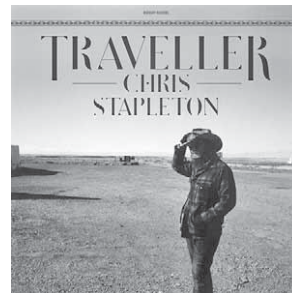
"Outlaw State of Mind" threatened to be an overplayed trope of the rebellion cliché that the likes of Eric Church

and Brantley Gilbert have beat half to death, but delightful instrumentals redeem what could have been a low point of this album. Stapleton's vocals, too, are a thing of beauty; their deep passion allays any doubt of his sincerity. This man is country music from his beard to his boots. Take a look at that beard if you haven't.

"Traveller" does have a smattering of Southern rock and a fleeting hint of soul, but this is the traditional country album that fans have been begging for.

Every track conveys Stapleton's talent, especially the live recording of "Sometimes I Cry," which ends with the cheering of fans in Nashville's famous Studio A.

There are other acts out there doing great things – Jason Isbell and Sturgill Simpson come to mind – but Stapleton and his glorious "Traveller" should and will give everyone pause. He



This man is country music from his beard to his boots

has the chops to help raise country music back to its former glory, what with his extensive experience in the music industry and time spent in bands such as Steeldrivers. At 37, Stapleton has traveled, performed, and written. He has seen it all, and that's reflected in his lyrics.

I hope that every "flavor of the week" artist in country music sets their bottle of Fireball and their cutoff shirts down for long enough to see that when the temporary fans have flocked to the next rising trend, true country fans and their artists will remain right here where we've been all along. ♦

by Liz Koehler, Sullivan, WI

The Wreckage of Stars • Black Crown Initiate

Whenever I hear new music, I ask myself: How original is it? What sets this band apart from all the others? Why should I spend my time listening to this album rather than one I already know and love? Many modern metal bands try to be original and bring something fresh and exciting to the table, and most fail. However, there are many exceptions, and without a doubt, Black Crown Initiate is one.

Hailing from Reading, Pennsylvania, and founded in 2012, Black Crown Initiate is a progressive death metal band unlike any other. Their most recent album, "The Wreckage of Stars," was released through eOne Entertainment last September. In the year since its release I've probably listened to the album in its entirety 20 times. It's just that good.

"The Wreckage of Stars" is filled with passion and emotion. It somehow manages to flawlessly blend beauty with rage. There are plenty of acoustic parts, which are quite abnormal in extreme metal, but in this album they add new layers of depth and diversity.

The first track, "A Great Mistake" (which is by no means a mistake of a song), has an acoustic intro that fits seamlessly with the crushing riffs and sheer brutality of the rest of the song. The composition is excellent, and nothing ever feels like it's out of place. After the song



Flawlessly blends beauty with rage

ends with the same acoustic passage it started with, the next track – "The Fractured One" – breaks through the peaceful quiet with an aggressive serenade of rapid double-bass drumming that will leave you in awe. One of the most memorable songs for me is "The Malignant." The masterful blast-beat drumming, especially in the intro and chorus, creates a catchy groove.

The vocals on this album are definitely unique, but that is in no way a bad thing. The angry Cookie Monster-style growls so typical of death metal are present through-

out, but Black Crown Initiate breaks boundaries by incorporating clean vocals as well. Normally, I would be turned off by the idea of clean singing in death metal, but somehow the band makes it fit so well that I can't imagine what "The Wreckage of Stars" would be without it.

I love this album with pretty much every fiber of my being. It is extremely rare to find metal that is so original and introspective. Even after hearing "The Wreckage of Stars" so many times, I have yet to grow tired of it. Black Crown Initiate continues to inspire me and keep me coming back for more. I urge you to listen to it yourself. You will not be disappointed. ♦

by Jordan Smith, Pittsburgh, PA

Unfriended

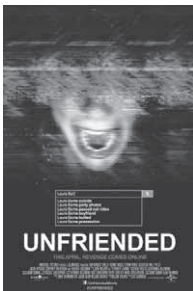
“Unfriended” is a micro-budget horror film that unravels in the place everyone loves to be: the Internet. As stupid as it sounds, it actually turns out to be legitimately terrifying.

“Unfriended” begins with a video about a girl named Laura (Heather Sossaman). Three days after the video goes viral, Laura commits suicide. Then, on the anniversary of her death, five teenagers on a Skype call get attacked by a supernatural force that seeks revenge for Laura. Again, I reiterate: this movie could have been dumb. But with the intense environment of a buggy Skype call combined with excellent sound design, “Unfriended” is a great horror flick.

What makes it work is the concept: the entire movie is on a laptop, which builds the fear really well. At times during the Skype calls, the call drops. Those moments are the most spine-tingling in the film. At other times the video freezes and the characters are constantly calling their names. This builds the tension, and when the scares happen, they are extremely effective.

The sound design gave me the same

chills as when I saw the first “Paranormal Activity” movie. The actors, for the roles they play, are fairly good. When they are scared, you feel it. When they suffer, it feels like genuine pain. When people die, it hurts. A lot. Young actors in horror movies are often there only for sex appeal, but there is little to none of that in this film.



Shining example of a new concept in horror

With all the good, however, comes the bad. And one of the biggest drawbacks is that the characters are not the smartest. The main female, Blaire (Shelley Hennig), might just be the dumbest woman on the planet, but every character has stupid moments. Some of the scares feel cheap and easy. Finally, the ending really brings the movie down. All of the deaths have a gritty feeling, but the last is unbelievably cliché.

Overall, despite the unsatisfactory ending and stupidity of the characters, “Unfriended” is a shining example of how a new concept in horror can be done very well. ♦

by Ayinde Roberts,
Owings Mills, MD

This film is rated R.

The Babadook

“The Babadook” redefines horror films with its simple scares and hauntingly beautiful storytelling. Praised at the Sundance Film Festival, “The Babadook” has taken horror deeper into the corners of the human mind. Not only does this Australian film have elements of a classic creature feature, like suspense and a boogiemon, it also deals with themes of grief and other psychological issues.

The film follows single mother Amelia (Essie Davis) as she tries to cope with her troubled son, Sam (Noah Wiseman), and the seven-year anniversary of her husband’s death. As Sam’s tantrums escalate, Amelia realizes they may be the result of a morbid children’s book, “Mister Babadook,” that mysteriously appeared on their doorstep. Sam is not only on edge at home, but also around his mother, who is steadily losing her own grip on reality.



Never loses its creep factor

The scares are real, but so are the emotions from Amelia and Sam. It’s the fear of losing a child or parent that drives the terror. Amelia’s and Sam’s perspectives as mother and son are what makes this film so mature in its execution. As the film delves into motifs of family, grief, and loneliness, it never loses its creep factor. The simple design of the Babadook monster is unsettlingly perfect. Although the creature’s top hat, cloak-like body and long fingers may sound corny, it’s everything but. The fact that anyone can conjure it up in their mind makes it haunting and all the more real.

I give “The Babadook” the highest rating possible. Director Jennifer Kent has created a new genre with this blend of supernatural scares and the chaos of parenthood. The ending is unpredictable and satisfying, reminding us that our demons never disappear entirely. ♦

by Julia Mogen, West Linn, OR

Ouija

“Ouija” will have you on the edge of your seat from the opening credits to the closing music. It takes the Ouija board’s spooky factor to a whole new level.

Directed by Stiles White, the talented director of “The Sixth Sense” and “Knowing,” this movie is about a girl named Debbie (Shelley Hennig) who dies for mysterious reasons. When her friends discover a Ouija board in Debbie’s bedroom,



I had to hold a friend's hand the whole time

Laine (Olivia Cooke) is eager to try to contact Debbie and find out the reason she passed away. The board answers Laine and her friends, who turn out not to be contacting Debbie, but someone else entirely.

This movie is one of my favorites. It kept me from going to the bathroom by myself, and I had to hold a friend’s hand the whole time. When Laine and her friends make contact with a presence from beyond the grave, they have to save their own lives and figure out who they are really speaking to.

The music in this film really paints the whole picture. Composer Anton Sanko makes the audience feel multiple emotions. The actors also did some phenomenal work. I felt as if I was right next to them. When they were scared, I was too.

This Halloween, if you want to experience some incredible acting along with a perfectly executed story, I recommend watching “Ouija.” Just make sure you’re not alone. ♦

by Jenna Lennop, Oshkosh, WI

Repo! The Genetic Opera

Everyone should add “Repo! The Genetic Opera” to their list of movies to watch this Halloween. This 2008 rock opera was directed by Darren Lynn Bousman, and stars acclaimed actors Alexa PenaVega (who our generation will remember as Carmen Cortez in the “Spy Kids” franchise), Paris Hilton, Anthony Head, and Terrance Zdunich. A grave robber acts as the narrator for this futuristic dystopian tale. Prepare to laugh, cry, and be horrified as the story of the dysfunctional yet lovable characters unfolds in the form of a gory musical.

In a future where organ failures are rampant and society is bent on shallow beauty, a dark shadow follows anyone who pays for an organ transplant. Organs can be purchased at GeneCo, a family-run business. It may save your life, but bloody strings are attached. If a patient cannot keep up payments, GeneCo’s repo man (Anthony Head) is sent to retrieve the organ by slicing it out with a horrifyingly large scalpel.

The film follows 17-year-old Shiloh (Alexa PenaVega), the daughter of the repo man, as she struggles to find who she is in a world filled with greed, corruption, and murder. With her mother dead and her overprotective father locking her inside her home, Shiloh fights for her freedom. Her father deals with the threat of exposing himself as the repo man to his fragile daughter. Even worse, he is employed by a greedy man and his bratty adult offspring, who are vying for the company their wealthy father will

leave behind. In addition to these stories, the tale of renowned singer Blind Mag (Sarah Brightman) is tied in to the death of Shiloh’s mother. All the while, an eerie band plays chillingly gorgeous music to illustrate the turmoil of the characters.

The Grave Robber (Terrance Zdunich) is one of the most intriguing characters. With no actual name, he is by far the most charismatic yet horrifying character. He robs graves to retrieve zydrite from the corpses, selling the glowing blue liquid on the black market as an addictive painkiller. In his interactions with Shiloh, he comes across as a flirtatious yet protective brother figure. The moral of the story is, whether you are morally just or corrupt, your genetics do not set your fate in stone. Shiloh does not have to follow in the footsteps of her father or the man he works for.



Entertaining and freaky in an endearing way

I highly recommend this movie to anyone who doesn’t mind blood, guts, and profanity. Any fan of “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” will find “Repo! The Genetic Opera” entertaining and freaky in an endearing sort of way. It has a perfect blend of heartless cynicism and comedy that straight horror films lack. It is a comedy, a tragedy, a Halloween flick, and a movie that can be watched any day of the year. ♦

Horror Picture Show” will find “Repo! The Genetic Opera” entertaining and freaky in an endearing sort of way. It has a perfect blend of heartless cynicism and comedy that straight horror films lack. It is a comedy, a tragedy, a Halloween flick, and a movie that can be watched any day of the year. ♦

by Taylor Godspeed, Chicago, IL

This film is rated R.

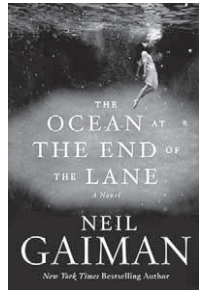
The Ocean at the End of the Lane

Neil Gaiman

The world of fantasy can be difficult to get into. For some of us, as we grow up the magic just isn't as convincing as it once was. Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is a short fantasy novel that succeeds beautifully in getting its readers absorbed in its universe. The story follows a boy (who remains nameless) who gets wrapped up in a horrible creature's plan to take over the world. He needs the help of three Hempstocks – a grandmother, a woman, and a young girl – who protect our world in their own cryptic ways. The four must work tirelessly and creatively to banish some truly scary monsters back to where they came from.

For me, fantasy is difficult to read; fake monsters on a page don't usually scare me, so it's hard to convince me the character is scared when I'm not. Although Gaiman's monsters seem simple, they actually freak me out. The main monster, a creepy nanny named Ursula, worms her way into the boy's family, tearing it up from the inside. This monster shows up in other visually monstrous forms and threatens to

kill the family and boy; the scariest part is that it reminds me of a person who breaks up families in real life. Ursula has an affair with the father and drives him to try to hurt his son. This is sadly a reality in some families, and that realism is Ursula's scariest attribute.



The seven-year-old narrator really sells this tale

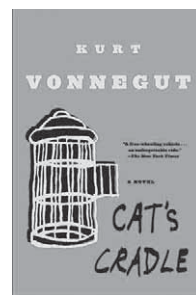
Part of the reason this story drew me in was the protagonist. The seven-year-old narrator is really what sells this tale. He experiences very real fears and feelings that children grow up with: not being listened to, not wanting to seek help for problems, and fear of change. His relatability is an effective hook that teleports me back to his age. Being able to see through his eyes into this elegant universe is an incredibly beautiful and important part of this story.

This book is short; I read it in one sitting. Of course, that also speaks to the fact that it is really good. Once you pick it up, you probably will not be able to put it down. Just be sure to keep your favorite teddy bear next to you when you go to sleep that night. ♦

by Caitlin Schaefer, Burien, WA

Cat's Cradle • Kurt Vonnegut

It's rare when a classic is both valid and interesting to teens today, but Kurt Vonnegut's satiric masterpiece *Cat's Cradle* definitely is. I expected to snooze through this book, but I read it in two sittings after hesitantly stopping to sleep at 3 a.m. First published in 1963, *Cat's Cradle* provided me with a new take on war and our developed world that is just as relevant today as it was during the birth of the atomic bomb.



Just as relevant today as it was in 1963

Cat's Cradle is a universal satire on science's role in war. The story revolves around a journalist and the adult children of Felix Hoenikker, father of the atomic bomb – as well as Angela, Newt, and Frank Hoenikker. The book details their collective journey to a small island in the Caribbean, deemed worthless by all who conquered it. The island is ruled by the religion of Bokononism, a series of universal truths, as well as the island's dictator. The book follows the demise of this dictator and the events triggered by his death.

Vonnegut uses Bokononism to illustrate his ideas about the world and humans' place in it. He shows us that inventions with innocent intentions can have dire consequences, and the importance of recognizing them. The first-person point of view allows you to be both a bystander and part of the events that take place over the course of the novel.

Cat's Cradle should be read by anyone ready to face the reality of human nature. This book forced me to see the larger world around me for the first time and to analyze the actions of those in power. Even if you snoozed through other famous satires commonly read in class, give this book a try. ♦

by Katie Krantz, Atlanta, GA

Speak • Laurie Halse Anderson

Talking. Such an easy task. We teach children how, only to tell them to be quiet. Every day we talk to strangers, friends, classmates, and parents. Whether in person, on the phone, through the television, or over the radio, talking seems essential. But what if you don't want to? Can you make it through life without saying a word? Melinda Sordino tries, for she cannot find the words to explain what happened to her.

As a middle school girl you dream of going to high school. Being a freshman sounds like the coolest thing in the world. When Melinda's group of friends is invited to an end-of-summer party, Melinda thinks this will be the perfect way to start high school. Yet at the party, Melinda meets It. It does the most unthinkable thing to Melinda, making her so scared she calls the cops. Now that she busted the party, everyone is mad at her. Her friends ditch her, and Melinda is stuck facing the rage of

the entire student body. This is when she decides to stop speaking.

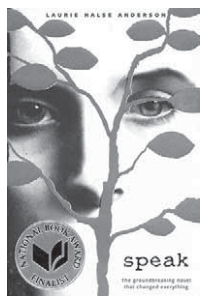
Melinda floats through high school biting her lips and skipping classes. When her parents are not yelling at each other they're yelling at her: "Why won't you speak?" they scold their mute daughter. If only

Melinda could tell them. She fails her courses including art, the class she consistently gets an A in. It is her art teacher who helps her to finally speak up – to tell everyone what It did to her.

Laurie Halse Anderson has written a truly perfect book. *Speak* deals with a difficult topic that no one wants to talk about, and we experience it through the victim's point of view. No one should ever

have to go through what Melinda did. She is a true role model for girls, as she survived the unthinkable and found her voice in the process. ♦

by Megan Ansems, Kentville, NS, Canada



A truly perfect book

Relish • Lucy Knisley

Part autobiography, part cookbook, Lucy Knisley's *Relish: My Life in the Kitchen* is perhaps one of the most eclectic books I've ever read. It might be the superior attitude held by more "refined" readers to shrug off such a book; it's just 165 pages and contains many pictures. I, however, was quite pleased to stoop below the line of "refinement." Believe me when I say this book is a real treat.

Within its colorful pages is the detailed life of its author, Lucy Knisley, who is just a little something of (or a lot of something of) a foodie. The photos of brightly colored sandwiches, steaks, and cheeses made my mouth water – Knisley's recipes are displayed phenomenally well. I'm still trying to fight the urge to bake all nine types of chocolate chip cookies that she describes, and eat them all at once.

But as I said, *Relish* isn't a simple cookbook. It tells a story, too – the story of a girl who grew up in the often enchanting streets of New York City. The story of the same girl who moved out to the country after her parents split in a nasty divorce. The story of a girl who goes to Mexico and Chicago and half a world away. It's a story that is not short on real moments, touching moments, funny moments, and everything in between. It talks to you as a person who's had some of the same experiences and feelings as Knisley, offering a departure from your grandma's sweet but robotic-sounding cookbook.

In the end, the uniqueness of *Relish: My Life in the Kitchen* gives it an edge. I can honestly say I've never read anything remotely like it, and I doubt I ever will. Knisley has a panache for food, travel, and connecting to the reader, and that's what makes this book stand out.

I rate it 4/5 stars. ♦

by Noah Lorey, Union Grove, WI



A real treat

The Butterfly Killer

by Kay Twichell, Coconut Creek, FL

fiction

Somehow, the bitter taste in his mouth never goes away, whether it's his first month on the case or his fifteenth. This time, the girl is Anna Marie Langston, a graduate student at the nearby university. Her skin, like every other victim in this god-awful nightmare, has been flayed open into symmetrical fourths, rib cage and the organs beneath exposed to the cooling air. Detective Wesley Perea takes another too-hot gulp of his coffee and curls his right hand into a fist. Behind him, the natural pandemonium of a crime scene ensues. Another one bites the dust, and the police force is kept in employment for a few more weeks.

But this has gone far past the need for a job. Wesley's supervisor always warns against getting attached to a case, especially a serial killer's, but it's inevitable. He's spent over a year chasing this man, this psychopath, and every new body is yet another failure. It's no longer his job to catch the killer: it's his duty.

A bead of coffee drips from the lid and burns Wesley's forefinger. Red wells up almost immediately.

"Jesus."

The pain brings him back to the moment. His nostrils fill with iron and pine. If nothing else, it's jarring enough to make him straighten his spine. The line of his shoulders smooths out in a carefully learned projection of confidence.

From Wesley's left comes a series of crunches, the subtle crush of leaves under boot, and his partner, Sergeant Johnny Cirillo, comes into view.

"Far from it, pal." Johnny's voice is rough from smoking. He's a good man, loud and happy, but the stench of death leaves no one untouched.

Working in homicide, too, has added a layer of exhaustion that seems foreign on Johnny's face. His hands are shoved in his coat pockets, collar turned up against the cold, and his shoulders are bunched up near his neck. Wesley grunts but doesn't say anything else, letting the background noise wash over them. They take in the scene.

Despite the blood and surrounding trees, it looks like something out of an art gallery. Langston's body lies flat on the ground, her filleted flesh stretched evenly over thin plastic rods. They are a butterfly's wings sprouting from her heart in every direction, detail etched into the underside of her skin. Next to her head is a painting of her in profile, torso splattered with red like a cypoccat Jackson Pollock. Back at the station, there's a cork board, overused and overworked, with copies of every painting to date. Threads of criss-crossing red and blue connect the portraits to the victims.

Wesley has learned to hate each new spool of string.

"Y'know, Wes," Johnny finally says after sipping his coffee, "it's the spitting image of her. You have to admit that the kid's got talent. Shame he's gotta accompany it with a body."

"I don't care how much talent he has, what he does isn't art. It's not even close."

Disgust is on the tip of his tongue, rising to the surface with another bout of fatigue. He brings his cup to his lips and sighs into the rim. A memory — one Wesley has never been able to escape — plays over again as he searches the victim's face. His mother's features overlay hers, blonde hair turning dark, skin becoming tan, eyes opening wider and lips growing larger. It's not her, and he knows this,

but one victim of a serial killer is like them all: cold and innocent and dead.

This girl had a family, parents, maybe siblings. She had friends and mentors; she had a life. It's his least favorite part, informing a victim's loved ones. Mothers cry, fathers clench their teeth, and brother and sisters and best friends collapse in on themselves. It's like watching a star explode and getting burned in the backlash. No one gets out unharmed.

No one, that is, except the killer. Who else would put on a false face? Who else would nod, awkward in his own skin, and return to work after the news? Who else would fall short of expressing shock, grief, anger? Someone who knew the victims, who interacts in the environment. Someone like prodigy art student Jason Dougall, the prime suspect since the first body was found.

Johnny can argue all he likes, point out other possible murderers and circumstantial evidence, but Wesley knows. It's something in the shift of Dougall's stance, the dart of his eyes; it's in the way he holds a scalpel as easily as he holds a paintbrush and how his sculptures are always perfect, always symmetrical. No one free of wrongdoing carries that sort of obsession with them and doesn't show signs. No one so carefully skirts around that compulsion without being consciously aware of its implications.

Dougall is smart, however, and all of Wesley's convictions would mean nothing in court. The paintings are never signed, never left with an identifying mark. And that has always bothered Wesley — that lack of precision, when everything else

is so pristine. It works away at the back of his mind, a slow burn that causes him to take a step closer to the painting. There's something off about this one.

A technician warns him not to disturb the body, but he's not paying attention to anything but the paint. Just under the acrylic sweep of Langston's chin, Wesley can see the irregularity. It's something new: a number. Ten numbers. Penciled in with a precision that the rest of the splatter pattern lacks.

Wesley rushes to the canvas, stumbling over yellow tape and cracked concrete. He can hear Johnny, who was knocked over in the sudden motion, shout at his back. It doesn't matter, though, because there are ten numbers. It's a signature, a sign: a set of three, a set of three, and a lone set of four. It's a familiar pattern, ingrained into Wesley's mind after hours of flipping through case files. He could recite the phone number in his sleep, if prompted.

His fingers fumble with the buttons, nails scrabbling for purchase over the screen. It only takes a minute for a name to pop up: Dougall. It's not just any number; it's the killer's. It has to be. It is. Wesley can hear someone's voice barking orders to the others, and hands make a grab for his shoulder, but his only focus is the phone.

This is it. This is what he's been waiting for. This is the proof they so desperately need.

He presses "call," and the line rings once, twice, a third time. Then there's a click.

Someone has picked up. The quiet is unexpected, and it crackles through the connection, complemented by the hush that has fallen behind him. The hand squeezing his arm slides off, returning to its owner's side. One of the officers whispers about him finally snapping, but his words sound more like an obligation than a crack.

Wesley breathes in. Dougall breathes out. He's just about to make a statement of some sort — say hello, maybe — but a soft voice cuts through the silence. It's as though he's discussing the weather, as though this is nothing but an ordinary call, and Wesley's blood runs cold.

"You've got a pretty sister, detective." ♦



Photo by Liz Goodwin, Dallas, TX

*This is the
proof they so
desperately need*

False Love

by Paige Newman,
London, England

Here, with him, in this house, there aren't any mirrors. That's okay, though, because he always makes me feel special. I don't have any need for reassurance. Even if I could see a reflection in the windows, I wouldn't need to look.

Sometimes when I'm here, with him, we leave this house. That's when I see my face everywhere, and I always look the same: happy, young, and fresh. The way he makes me feel — just like nothing has changed since we met.

When we are going out, he gently adjusts my sweater to cover the bruises. I rarely take that sweater off. It's my favorite, the one I was wearing when we met.

Here, with him, in this house. We return from a dark night of riding in his van and staring at all the virginal beauty the city has to offer. I fall asleep with my arms above my head and my feet tight, close together. Almost as close as I am to him.

I like being here, with him, in this house. We moved in together so quickly, I can't even remember how our relationship began. It's all been such a blur. I know that it happened when I was walking home from school one day. When I ask him about it, he says he remembers it clearly. He says I was alone and that he offered to carry my books. He says he had admired me for a long time.

Here, with him, in this house, I have suspicions that he's planning a surprise trip. He keeps a bag beside the camera monitor next to the door. Ready for a new adventure. A holiday would be nice, somewhere sunny, maybe. But I wouldn't want to be away for too long.

I like it here, with him, in this boarded-up house with no mirrors. Here, where I sleep vertically and bound. Here, where he has a camera watching. Here, where he keeps an escape bag by the door.

Yes. I like it here, with him, in this house. ♦

The Tunnel

by Max Firehammer, Missoula, MT

They all knew about the tunnel. Everyone in town knew about it. Knowing it was there was ordinary, common. Talking about it wasn't. Going into it – that was insane. Nobody quite remembered when or how the tunnel was built; no one even knew what it was for. It seemed as though it had always been there, an empty metal eye socket staring from the side of a mossy hill in the woods. It was covered in rust and verdigris, eight feet in diameter. The only reason it was still there was that no one wanted to go near it to close it up.

The reason Danny went to the tunnel was just as blurry and unknown. His memory was like a photo that'd had water spilled on it. Considering what happened, forgetting was good. He wanted to forget more.

There were three of them that night – himself, Cameron, and Audrey. Danny didn't want to go, but Audrey had insisted, and he always listened to her. He could never remember why.

It was June 26, 1987, around 11 at night. Danny's parents were on vacation. He was sitting like a half-melted candle in front of the television, hovering on the verge of sleep, when Audrey slammed the door in a flurry of staccato blows.

Danny's head jerked up. He went to the door, as the relentless knocking continued. "We have a bell, you know," he said.

Audrey was grinning from ear to ear, her black, tangled hair falling in her face. She laughed. "Yeah, but the bell wouldn't have woken you up. Got the flashlights?" The safety pins covering her intentionally slashed clothes glinted in the porch light.

"Just a minute." He rubbed his eyes and made his way to the hall closet. "Cam's coming, too, right?"

"He better be."

"I've only got two with batteries."

"Whatever. He can use my lighter. Let's go." She skipped to the car. Audrey's vehicle looked comically out of place in the pastel suburban neighborhood, with its scraped paint edged with rust, a plastic skeleton dangling from the rear-view mirror, and one of its tires resting on the curb. Danny chuckled as she revved up the engine.

"You look like Stephen King's Christmas tree," he said, glancing at her destroyed jeans and bleach-spattered Ramones shirt.

"Yeah, well, what if that's how I want to look? Besides, King's awesome."

"That's right. You saw 'The Shining' like ten times."

"It was good, but nothing like the book," she muttered. "Why does Cam have to live way the hell across town?"

Audrey turned a corner, and parked in front of a gray house with a chain-link fence around the yard.

"You go get him. The dog hates me," she said.

Danny walked through the overgrown lawn past a huge German shepherd tethered to a post. He rang the bell and waited. Cameron emerged in a tattered T-shirt and jeans, wearing an expression of mixed irritation and amusement.

"You woke me up, man."

"Sorry. Audrey told you last week, though. We're going out to the tunnel tonight."

"Oh, yeah. That. I'm surprised you showed up."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you walked out of 'Nightmare on Elm Street,' and you get really pale when anybody even mentions that movie. You're doing it right now. You

scare easy, Dan."

"This is different. There's nothing in that tunnel. Why should I be scared of an empty hole?"

"You sure about that?" Cameron asked, getting into the back seat.

"Don't do that," Danny snapped.

"What are you two bickering about?" Audrey asked.

"Apparently," said Cameron, grinning, "Danny Boy hasn't heard the stories."

"Better inform him," Audrey said, starting the car.

"Okay. So, they say the tunnel was built in the '60s by a cult, and they used to worship there, underground. A couple years later, they get caught doing stuff. Human sacrifice. All of them got the chair, but it didn't work right. When they tried to kill 'em, they caught fire, and the whole room stank like sulfur permanently. Soon after the cultists died, dead kids started turning up in the tunnel, two of them every year. One boy, one girl. Nobody figured it out, and nobody

would have anything to do with the tunnel. After a while, the cops just stopped going out there. They got reports every once in a while, people saying the woods around the place smelled like rotten meat, but they just ignore them. All the dead kids are probably still down there, and maybe something else is in there with them."

"Bull," Dan spat. Cam laughed hysterically.

"Maybe," Audrey said, "but it's pretty entertaining." She turned on the stereo. The Misfits blared from the speakers.

"Jesus," Cameron said with a look of mock horror. "Is that even singing?"

"My car, my tapes," Audrey replied. "Suck it up." She turned up the volume as they turned onto the highway. Other cars' headlights provided flashes of fuzzy orange illumination inside the vehicle, like gentle flashes of lightning. The skeleton hanging from the mirror moved like a hypnotist's pendulum as the rhythm of the wheels sent Dan halfway into a trance.

Fifteen minutes later, the car stopped, and he awoke with no memory of falling asleep.

"He lives!" Cameron said. "Okay, let's go."

Danny looked around. The car had stopped in a small clearing. The moon filtered down through a black filigree of branches, and damp leaves coated the ground.

It was cool outside, at almost midnight, and a breeze made the leaves shiver. Dan and Audrey switched on their flashlights, and suddenly, all three of them were staring into the wide, hollow mouth of the tunnel.

"Who's going first?" asked Audrey. "Because it's sure as hell not gonna be me."

They glanced at one another. The air was thick and oppressive with lazy nighttime heat.

"You've got a flashlight," Cameron said to Danny. "You and Audrey lead the way. I'll take up the rear and make sure nothing creeps up on us."

The last sentence was punctuated by a half-scoff, half-laugh from Audrey. "Okay," she said. "But if we turn around and you're not there, I'm not going back for you."

"Well, if you did, it'd already be too late." He widened his eyes like a drawing in *Tales from the Crypt*.

"We're going out to the tunnel tonight"



Art by Gabrielle Kolencik, Uniontown, PA

"Whatever. Let's just go," Dan muttered.

"All right!" Audrey exclaimed, and followed, Cameron trailing behind them.

The tunnel was far warmer than the open air outside. The floor was caked with mud and packed, wet leaves and declined gradually downward, deeper into the earth. Lukewarm water dripped from the ceiling, splashing and reverberating off the metal walls. A thick stench filled the stagnant air. Dust passed slowly through the flashlight beams.

"Well, this is disappointing," Dan said.

"We're not far enough in yet," Cameron replied.

"How far do you want to go? It smells nasty."

"Breathe through your mouth."

"No way. You think I want to taste that?"

"Guys ..." Audrey whispered. Neither of them heard her.

"Doesn't bother me."

"How could it not? Whole damn place stinks like rotten eggs."

"Guys!" Audrey repeated, louder. "Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Danny asked.

Audrey held a finger to her lips. She looked scared. He'd never seen her scared before. The tunnel suddenly felt cold. Cameron's expression shifted, too, his smirk fading. A moment passed. No one spoke or moved. They heard it.

"Mommy." It came from far away. Deep in the ground.

"What the hell?" Cameron breathed. "What is that?"

"Mommy, come back." It was louder this time.

"Audrey, this is some kind of joke, right?" Dan asked. She shook her head.

"What do we do?" she asked.

"Get out of here," Cameron replied. There was fear on his face. "I saw a gas station on the way here. We can call the cops."

"It sounds like a kid," Audrey whispered. "What if we abandon it here, and it dies?"

"I'm not going any further into this creepy-ass hole in the ground," Cam retorted. "This was your idea. You figure it out."

"Don't be like that," Dan said. "You wanted to come down here more than any of us. You don't get to bail just because you're scared. I say we go find the kid."

The call came again. Cam shivered then nodded.

Hands trembling, the three proceeded cautiously deeper into the tunnel. The voice was crying now, high-pitched infantile whimpers. As the noise reached his ears, Danny had a horrible thought. He remembered the stories he'd read about bush babies in Africa. He remembered how sometimes the primates' calls sounded like a child weeping. People would hear them and disappear into the wilderness on a futile search for a lost infant. ▶▶

"You don't get to bail just because you're scared"

The Borrowers

by Andy Spencer, Mount Dora, FL

Ya know that thing? The one that lives in that part of your house that makes you shudder – the part of your house that gives you the creeps and seems kinda off, though you have no clue why? The thing with baseball-sized glowing green eyes, like traffic lights, only a shade lighter? The thing completely made out of hair that can grotesquely mold into any form?

Ya know that thing that can't touch you until you lie down? (And, I mean, it's not like you can stand forever.) It knows when you lie down, and it emerges, carrying a certain dankness with it, and when it crawls under your door, it looks at you and smiles.

What the hell? All of a sudden it has a mouth, a toothless one that seems vaguely familiar. It stands at the foot of your bed staring and smiling, and eventually it lifts its arms, which are really just long tufts of matted, sloth-like hair.

Ya know that thing that looks straight into your eyes as it starts weaving its "arms" in between your toes? It's right around now that you realize you can't move. It sounds crazy, but you think it's the eyes – those huge (did they get bigger?), glowing emerald eyes, holding you down.

By now its "arms" have wrapped around your legs and waist; you can't feel anything from the hips down. (Is it taking your skin this time?) You

start having trouble breathing. It's those damn eyes again; they're weighing down on your lungs somehow.

Ya know that thing that continues wrapping its thick mesh around your body? Its "face" starts to join the rest of its ghastly hair wrapping around you. The only thing not covered now is your head and neck. The "face" starts sliding up, adjusting so it can look at you.

Ya know that thing that's an inch and a half from your face, its garish eyes staring into your frightened ones? A long thing starts moving out of its smile (a tongue, I guess), and as it's about to touch your nose it splits into four parts – one for each ear and both nostrils.

It voyages through your facial cavities, still staring, smiling. You feel its tongue on your brain; it almost tickles as it caresses each fold and wrinkle, leaving no part untouched. It wraps around you tighter and tighter still.

Ya know that thing that all at once pulls its tongues back into the smile that's evolved into a frown? Its eyes have lost that strange vigor they had just moments ago. It seems offended, almost.

Just when its hair gets so tight around you that you feel like you can't take another breath, two new

clumps of hair awaken from either side of you. Ya know that thing that forms these sort of makeshift hands with strange amounts of fingers? Then it starts to show off its new fingernails, oddly shaped and placed – more horrendous and terrifying than its hair, if that's possible. They aren't pointy, but they look sharp somehow ... and familiar.

You make your first movement in a long time – though you know it isn't your doing: your mouth snaps open.

It snaps open so wide you think your jaw might break. It doesn't. But you have no time to feel relieved, because it puts its grubby "hands" in your mouth and starts digging into your gums with what once were your fingernails to pull out all your teeth, one by one, and put them in its own mouth. You think it's the most painful thing you've ever experienced, but it isn't. Because this is normal.

Ya know that thing that comes back whenever it pleases and takes things from you? You have duplicates by the time morning comes, of course; it needs to cover its tracks. You don't remember anything about the previous night. That is, until it happens again ...

That's when it all floods back and you remember for a short time that

*You feel its
tongue on
your brain*

there's this thing that is stealing your parts, slowly trying to become you. Of course you don't know that thing that's taken your mouth or your teeth or your fingernails. It doesn't want you to remember, and so you don't.

But, doctor, I can't help but notice that your nose seems different today, a bit crooked. The other day I noticed your fingers seemed longer, bonier. You have one in your house (most people do), and if you'd just *listen* to me – if all of you would just *listen* to me – you could get away from it! I'm not crazy! It took my teeth! *It took my teeth!* ♦



Art by Misa Steinmetz, Bothell, WA

What if it wasn't a kid calling for its mother? What if it was something else?

He looked down and saw that his flashlight beam was dimming. Audrey's, too. He shook it slightly, and it flickered. The further they went, the deeper the puddles of brackish water became and the louder the crying got. It was so close that it seemed like the source should be right in front of them. They rounded a corner in the tunnel, and that was when they saw it.

Standing just around the bend was an emaciated, hairless dog. Its skin was pale and waxy. Its eyes were tiny pinpricks of red so deep they looked like twin droplets of deoxygenated blood. Its jaw hung open, revealing jagged teeth and a forked purple tongue.

"Mommy," it cried.

Audrey screamed. The flashlights went out. The dog's eyes glowed in the dark with a light that wasn't light. A color that human eyes weren't meant to see. Then the creature laughed. The sound was like teeth against a blackboard. They ran, staggering into one another in the dark, all three of them shouting at once.

"Oh my god," Cameron howled. "What is that thing?"

"It's not real. It's not real. It's not real," Audrey was chanting.

All Dan could think about was bush babies, crying in the night. He ran his hand along the wall as he scrambled along in the dark, trying to find his way. Looking over his shoulder, he saw the beast's eyes, so dark that they glowed.

"Save me, Mommy!" it wailed behind them. "Save me from the monsters!" It laughed again, and Danny felt a warm trickle escape his left ear. He saw a red-tinged light ahead and stumbled toward it.

The next thing Danny remembered was driving Audrey's car on the highway. Everything between that and the red light was a blank. Sometimes it came back in his nightmares. Images of blood and children burned black and the hollow light of the dog-thing's soulless eyes.

Audrey and Cameron were reported missing, and Dan was questioned for hours. Finally, the police accepted that he knew nothing and freed him.

One night, years later, he heard the beast calling, in the night. He got up, walked to his window, and opened the curtains. It was standing in his front yard, smiling, its grin stained crimson. He stared at it, looking into its dead eyes. Eyes the color of pain. Leaning closer to the window, he whispered something that he knew it heard.

"Please let me forget." ♦

*Audrey
screamed.
The flashlights
went out.*

Pinocchio

by Nithya Swaminathan,
Pleasanton, CA

He has two sons, carved out of a mother still as stone, soon enough that her veins still carried blood to her lips. The neighbors tell tales of the deadbirthed ones, earnestly convincing one another of how many horns the two devil children bear. The knife that summoned the two is kept in a drawer, along with a spool of thread and a needle.

They aren't like other children. In the mother's body there was one. The blade severed the single child into two halves, one slightly bigger than the other. They survive, two miracles, each with one arm, one eye, and half a heart. They live without a pair of lips, for those were butchered in their salvation.

He teaches them how to sew, how to carve, how to fashion elm into armchairs. They do not speak, only watch. Days tick by, kept time by cuckoo clocks made of oak. Life is routine until the eighth harvest moon.

The morning after, he looks at the smaller boy's hand, which displays only four fingers. The next day, the smaller child has three. The larger one whittles more deftly.

The smaller child's eye disappears the next week. Then his leg. Then his heart. He is reduced to a block of timber, a wooden top.

He can't do anything to stop the transfer, for he has known the time would come. The larger one has two pupils now, one on top of the other, a button. Ten fingers adorn his hand.

The larger child walks toward him. He sighs with exhaustion, forgets to sit up. The child opens the drawer, pulls out the knife and the needle and thread. The child cuts his lips off, clean, and sews them onto his own face.

His vision is fading. The child turns the doorknob, and before he becomes still as stone, the child whispers, "Look, Daddy. I'm a real boy now." ♦

Softly Stutters the Train

by Calico Nevada, Spring, TX

In the country of Argentina lay the Piclomayo River, and beside it was a town named Tontos Zorros Brujas, and in the town there was a boy on the roof of his house, staring at the stars and thinking malicious thoughts. Everyone around him was asleep, but the boy, who hated everything but mostly work and therefore hated the sun, preferred to stare into the dark shroud of night, preferred to count every diamond-colored sewing pin stuck in that cloth, preferred to let his eyelids droop with each number until they covered his chocolate-drop eyes like blankets – but that wasn't happening today. Instead, hatred and discontent surged through his blood, and the heat of the summer was making the bottoms of his feet itch, and the sky was covered in a mass of unmoving gray clouds; so the boy, Lucas Moreno, did the only thing he could. Sluggishly sitting up, Lucas rolled up the pink blanket underneath him and hopped down from the roof. He ran among the rows of pastel houses, the ones the government built before he was born, until he stopped at one that looked purple in the darkness but was lavender in the light of day.



Photo by Olivia Anderson, Lewes, DE

Lucas slipped to a window and knocked softly. A young boy's tired face pressed up against the glass. A barely audible sigh was heard as the boy opened the window.

"Basil, we're running away," said Lucas, his tired expression never faltering. Basil looked behind him, then outside at the clouds, and blinked slowly.

"Is there any possible way we can run away in the morning?" he inquired.

Lucas frowned. "No, we have to run away now."

Basil shuffled around in his darkened room, then climbed out the window, his school satchel slung across his back, and landed thumpish-

ly before his friend.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

Lucas laughed, imitating the tinkling of bells on a sparrow's wing.

"Away," he said. "But there's one more coming with us."

While Basil's mind went to wonderment and guessing, Lucas Moreno's mind went to the girl with ashes for eyes, the girl who spent her days at school dreaming she was singing on TV, the girl who did all her homework but not willingly. The girl was Veronica Valera, and she was beautiful, even at 3 o'clock in the morning when she appeared at the door of the yellow house her family had lived in before they were eaten by caimans.

"Veronica, we're running away,"

Lucas said, his eyes focused on hers.

"That's nice. Please be careful, I think, is that how it goes?" Veronica whispered groggily, wiping her eyes to prevent herself from falling back into a slumber on the spot.

"No, you're coming with us," answered Lucas.

"That's ... can't we do this in the morning? I like the idea of mornings."

"I also like the idea of mornings," said Basil, his confidence fading as

Lucas turned to stare his friend into sheepishness.

"No, we're going right now," Lucas said with an edge in his voice. "Pack your things, if you want to come."

"Okay," Veronica said, and went inside, collapsing on her bed and immediately falling into a deep sleep. After waiting for ten minutes, Basil and Lucas went inside with a bucket of water and poured it on her. She woke up steaming.

Twenty minutes later Lucas had beat up Veronica, who had in turn beat up Basil, who had cried so much that both Veronica and Lucas felt sorry enough to stop their squabbling and get back to running away. Lucas drew a map in the earth while explaining that in his nights alone he had sometimes heard a train go by, whistling itself hoarse. He assumed it was past the swamp to the south, away from the fields of sugarcane that grew further than the eye could see. If they could get onto the train, they could make it out of Tontos Zorros Brujas, out of the vicinity of the Piclomayo River, and out of Argentina.

The other children agreed. They began marching toward the edge of town, Lucas first, with a large stick, Veronica next, with an umbrella due to her concerns about the clouds, Basil last, satchel on his back, bucket

on his head.

They marched and marched under the light of the moon, through swamps filled with the dreaded caimans, through stretches of land that contained nothing but sand, between bloodstone hills and stretching trees, until it began to rain and thunder violently and all the children huddled under Veronica's umbrella. They walked like this until the rain ceased and Lucas's foot hit cold metal, causing him to yell in pain.

Careful inspection found train tracks, and behind the train tracks a building, presumably a station cloaked by the darkness. Lucas stepped up to it and knocked, entering after he heard no response. The flicking of a light switch revealed a dusty lobby. The walls were covered with posters showing train routes, but they were in a language that the children could not read. On the far right there sat a glass coffee table with several empty mugs on it, brown circles of residue remaining inside as a sort of grave. Around the table were several white leather couches, dusty, and a white fur carpet, also dusty.

On the far left there was a mahogany desk covered in papers and a typewriter. Separating these two was a wide flight of stairs leading up to a mysteriously shadowed second floor. Basil dove onto the couch, sending dust into the air. Lucas strutted over to the desk and sat down in the spinning chair, while Veronica began to climb the stairs.

"I'm going to find a bathroom," she said, and Lucas raised one hand in acknowledgment. At the top she found a long dark hall with a window in the distance. Her feet took her to the window, allowing her to see a bolt of lightning shoot down and pulverize a tree beyond the railroad tracks. Silently she counted the seconds until thunder would boom, quitting at a hundred and deciding silently that thunder doesn't always work that way.

Veronica opened the closest door and found herself in a luxurious white room containing a bed, a nightstand, and what was probably a lamp. The next five doors she opened all led to identical rooms. The sixth was a gray room with much complicated machinery and more railroad maps posted to the walls. There was a tiny gray bed that heaved, and when she inspected it, she realized it contained an old man who was clutching something red that glowed through his hands. Not once did it occur to her that this could be the stationmaster. She stared

at his hands for a while before leaving the room. The seventh door was to the bathroom, which did not contain a mirror. She returned to the lobby to find Basil and Lucas discussing the mystery of why they made children go to school.

"Hullo," she said. "I'm back." Veronica sat on the couch close to Lucas and fiddled with the folds of her umbrella.

"Did you find anything interesting?" he inquired. The papers from the desk were now scattered around him.

"Not really. The bathroom didn't have any mirror in it."

"Well," Lucas said, sounding a bit like a caiman. "I think we should go exploring."

"There's not much exploring to do, Lucas, there are two floors. And one of them's just a lobby," she said. Basil nodded and pulled some apples out of his bag, along with a few sandwiches.

"So, do we just sit here until the train comes?" Lucas asked. Basil held out two sandwiches, and they took them from him forcefully.

"Yes. That's what we're going to do," Veronica said and bit into her sandwich, discovering it to contain nothing but butter and cheese. And so the three children sat in an almost empty phantom station, munching on homemade sandwiches, admiring the chandelier above their heads, unswinging, unmoving.

In the depths of hell the Devil sat on his throne, his head hung forlornly, his golden locks drooping in front of his eyes. Open books with singed edges were thrown across the floor of his throne room, two, maybe three hundred from varying generations. "I'm afraid of life," the Devil

whispered to no one; however, every demon and every human and everything in hell felt the whisper bouncing around in their heads, getting stuck in the murkiest parts, slipping through the wettest parts, ricocheting off the edges of the mind that

didn't contain any feelings at all.

Back at the station, the children had fallen asleep and the stationmaster had woken up. The old man wasn't that surprised to find three children in his lobby, as he could smell the runaway on them. The stench of uncertainty and regret was even greater, so the man, only eager for the souls of confident men, decided he would skip his meal tonight.

He went behind the stairs and unlocked a cupboard. In it there were buckets upon buckets of various things: enchanted rings, >>

If they could get onto the train, they could make it out of Argentina

I've been stuck in this sick game for days, maybe weeks. Always, constantly, trying to find an exit out of this terrifying world.

There were twelve of us when we first woke up in this dank hell. Now it's just me.

Today is the day I'm going to find a way out. I can feel it in my gut – almost taste it. I'm so hungry and tired my feet are dragging beneath me. My whole body is ready to collapse. But I need to get out. I can't give up. Not yet.

I can't stand the mossy walls or the moldy air. It's almost completely dark in this underground maze, except for a random flood light here and there. A pack of wild creatures prowls for its next victim. They are what took the others, if it was not suicide or insanity making them turn on one another.

I slowly take rights and lefts, mindful of my surroundings and of how loud it is each time my feet slap against the cracked stone floor. I can hear the distant growls and snorts of creatures sniffing out my scent. One howls. I know they're coming.

I hobble faster along the stone passageways, still trying to keep quiet. Panic is slowly inching its way down my throat, trying to get me to scream, to run, to do something other than slowly stumble along still conscious of the sounds I make.

My breathing gets heavier and dizziness sets in. Soon I hear the click of long sharp claws getting closer. The moans of the miserable beasts carry down the corridors.

A fast limp is all I can manage. The swishing of their fur is now audible. They are too close; the beasts will be on top of me in a moment. I need to run. My body resists as I try to pick up the pace.

Pain shoots through me. I have no energy left to burn.

I take another right, and suddenly I see a piercing bright light coming from what I assume is the exit, about a hundred feet away. I fill with joy, but it only lasts seconds as I realize there is sticky hot breath pounding down my neck. I risk a glance behind me – and my limbs go numb.

The terrifying beasts fill the corridor, large furry shoulders bumping as they try to reach the meal first. Their eyes are glazed over with hunger. At least a dozen are scrambling toward me, long claws scraping and tumbling over cracks in the stone.

The closest one snaps its slobbery jaws at me, showing its four-inch teeth. It growled as

it misses. Suddenly it lurches at me, claws extended, with what looks like pure humor and predation on its face. It's ready to gobble up the pride of catching me first. I try to run, but my frozen limbs are not quick enough.

The claws slice into my hip, cutting muscle and veins, scraping bone. I let out an ear-splitting scream and kick at the beast with newfound energy, adrenaline blocking out the pain. It releases me with a whine when I break its canine tooth. I scramble back up and try to run to the end of this horror.

The ground shakes beneath me as the monsters roar from their rage at their meal getting away. The beasts push aside the injured one and rush toward me. I trip and fall inches from the exit. My hips hit hard enough for black spots

to fade my vision. The pain is unbearable.

I scream as a monster digs its razor-sharp claws into me. Escape becomes impossible as the beast's claws rip through me. I cough up blood. His claws dig deep into my back, into my organs and lungs, breaking ribs as he presses into me and drags me backwards. I have lost. I'm going to die just feet from escape.

My victory has been stolen by the hunger of angry monsters, by certain death. As I take my last breath, I see my family and children pressing against guards, screaming, yelling, trying to help me. They have seen their beloved fall to this cruel, sick game. ♦

*I can hear
the creatures
sniffing out
my scent*



Art by Christy O'Neil, Lytham, England

enchanted weapons, enchanted hats. He pulled out a bucket containing a mass of moonstones that glowed pink like sunsets. The stationmaster chose three, blowing off the dust. As he placed the stones on the hearts of the slumbering children, they disappeared, leaving behind only an umbrella, a satchel, a large stick, and three almost-eaten sandwiches. In the distance, the stationmaster could hear the train whistling itself hoarse, like always.

The large, cacophonous charcoal machine came to a halt. Only two people got off – a man who looked like a badger, and a man who looked like a deer. They seemed to be arguing about the number of caimans in a nearby swamp. Entering the station, they met the old man, who talked to them for a while before slitting their throats and eating their souls. The train began to strut forward once more, and behind the wall of the building the stationmaster waved good-bye.

That morning, two children awoke in their beds and one awoke on the

roof of his pastel-colored house. All three were clutching moonstones close to their hearts, moonstones that turned black as soon as they were touched by the sun. Lucas, Basil, and Veronica met after school that day, but none of them could come up with any probable ideas how they ended up in their beds without walking home, or what the stones were.

Veronica did not remember most of that night since she was horribly groggy, and suggested that maybe they had simply all had the same dream. Basil, who was distressed that his school satchel was missing, assumed their belongings had been turned into stones

because they had tried to run away. Lucas didn't care about these theories, as he was still quite angry that they had ended up back home after all that journeying.

The sun was setting on a new night, casting the light of flamingo feathers over the three children. They buried their stones at the base of a lemon tree, which would die within a year. ♦

*He placed
the stones on
the hearts of
the children*

Blanketed With Snow

when the sun sets, she's all alone
gazing through the lace curtains, the sun bleeding through the sky
her pale fingers tightly curled in her lap. She can hear
her son calling her name from downstairs, his voice echoing hollowly.
her withered lips part, but her throat is shriveled and dry,
no melodies trickle from her lungs.
she brushes a coil of hair that has been blanketed with snow
with calloused hands that used to clumsily stumble over violin strings,
though the notes dancing in her head hum like a cello – his cello – his face –
scruffy black hair, like raven's feathers,
warmth, scorching like the sun –
it danced through the sky when she was with him,
hands interlocked, sitting on a hill,
the pungent smell of grass – of him – and the warmth of his shoulder – sharp –
they watched the sky light up with color. That was before
he flew away, his raven feathers stretching as his feet left the ground,
only to be battered down by the rain
feathers drenched,
soggy notes left on the edge of the lake like a trail of breadcrumbs leading
to somewhere only she knew
The hill was eerily quiet. It was spring,
but the birds had stopped singing. The sun stopped dancing and bled. It bled
with the thumping of her treacherous heart – her petty mind – her heaving frame
He was wrong.
The man downstairs bolts awake, eyes wide open.
by Truelian Lee, Ridgefield, CT

Alfie and the Little Blue Train

by Janie Felton, Viroqua, WI

The air sat motionless in his room. It lay on his bed, covering the rough wool blankets that Alfie would bury himself under at night. It sprawled across the rug and onto the dark wood floors. It hung off the walls as shadows danced across them. And the air brushed frigid up against the closed window, watching as Alfie played with Colin in the fort they had made, pillows and blankets strung across chairs in the middle of the room.

He heard a chair slide across the kitchen floor, someone getting up from the dining room table, followed by his mom's quick, worried footsteps. She often felt as if she were constantly running the distances of the house. His father, exasperated, was still sitting at the table, head buried in his hands.

Alfie ducked into the closet and quickly closed the door. Among piles of clothes and a few wayward hangers, darkness surrounded him. He could've sworn he heard Colin's voice somewhere amidst the mess. He listened intently and heard a deep growl. He thrashed about, kicking a shoe rack that housed one lonely pair of tennis shoes without laces and a pair of sandals when Alfie refused to wear socks. Monsters couldn't get to him if he kept kicking, hitting, thrashing.

The door flung open, letting light flood into the tiny closet. Alfie shielded his eyes and tried to control his feet that were now tangled in a sweater. He let out a guttural scream, trying to ward off whoever was pulling him, whatever monster had taken control over his knees.

His mother's petite hands almost closed completely around Alfie's skinny shins. She held them firmly, as the doctors had instructed her to. Alfie's arms were spastic, but as long as she restrained his legs, he could only cause harm to himself. His body seized up, and after what had seemed like decades, relaxed in exhaustion. He finally looked up to see his mother, arms trembling.

She slowly reached and touched Alfie's cheek. He curled into her lap and lay there a while before she carefully carried him into the bathroom.

Setting him on the bath mat, she turned to the medicine cabinet and filled a paper cup with water. She approached Alfie, kneeling down to his level, held him in one arm and placed the pill into his mouth.

Alfie didn't mind taking his vitamins. They didn't taste like anything as long as he didn't chew them, and he knew that they were special because his mom kept them on the top shelf in a bottle he couldn't open. Colin was jealous of Alfie's special vitamins, so he usually left when Alfie took them and didn't come back until morning.

Eloise carried Alfie to his bed. He nestled into the blankets and pulled them up to his chin, listening to his mother recite his favorite story. As Alfie drifted off, imagining a small blue train climbing a hill, birds singing in

trees, sunshine playing in fields of flowers, his mother slowly lifted herself from the bed. She walked softly, and when she reached the doorway turned off the light. A flood of relief passed over her as she saw Alfie's tiny body, calm, quiet, and deep in slumber.

She'd spent months at home with him when he was a newborn, and as much as it pained her to watch her baby growing older, it was remarkable to see the world through the eyes of someone so full of wonder and joy. While on maternity leave, she searched for a job with fewer hours or where she could work from home. When she landed a position in Michigan, she was thrilled.

After living there for just a few months, she met Dan in the grocery store. They dated for a year, taking Alfie on day trips, and going out to dinner. Dan moved in after they married that spring. Eloise felt weightless, each day a new adventure.

When Alfie turned six, he was frequently throwing fits of kicking, screaming, pushing. He began to hit himself, blaming it on "the other boy," even when the only person nearby was Eloise. He'd never even gone through the terrible twos, let alone thrown a full-fledged tantrum before. She took him to several doctors, all of whom assured her that it was a phase. The fits, however, just got worse.

Alfie began to wake at night, screaming and pulling his hair. He talked about the cats that lived under his bed and the monsters that watched him from his closet. He gave "the other boy" a name and Colin became a part of their family, someone who only Alfie could see, but who had to be acknowledged – at dinner, at

church, during bath and nap time.

Eloise and Dan tried to discourage Alfie from talking about Colin, but that only seemed to make matters worse. Alfie insisted that Colin have a place at the dinner table and that he be buckled in when they went anywhere in the car. One night, Alfie came to Eloise and whispered that Colin was scaring him. Suddenly, Alfie collapsed at her feet and began punching himself.

He yelled, "Colin, stop! No! Stop! Quit it!"

Dan, who came running, crouched and grabbed Alfie's tiny wrists. Eloise stifled his cries of panic as Alfie screamed, fighting Dan's powerful grip. Tears streamed down her face as she ran to get her keys and her coat. They loaded Alfie

into his car seat, and Eloise forced the small car through the mounting snow. Dan sat in the back next to Alfie, holding his hands tight.

They rushed to the hospital. Doctors, at first stunned by what seemed like a temper tantrum when Alfie was restrained, were shocked when Dan finally let go of Alfie's hands. Alfie's screams and pleas echoed down the hallways. The fluorescent lights cast shadows on Alfie's face as two nurses grabbed hold of him and put him on a gurney. The doctors asked if Dan's name was Colin, who Colin was, where Colin was. Eloise was practically shouting above the chaos, trying to explain the fits, the animals, the monsters, the hitting, and above all, Colin.

Alfie was taken into a room where nurses and doctors came in and out with tubes and vials of his blood, medicine to give him, and sedatives to keep calm him. Eloise sat in the waiting room, clutching Dan's hand just as Alfie had hours before. >>

Alfie's screams and pleas echoed down the hallways



Photo by Carol Carpenter, Cannon Falls, MN

Alfie, armed with a roll of wrapping paper, stood guard outside the fort while Colin prepared them for battle. Alfie fidgeted, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, occasionally bumping the cardboard tube against his pale, skinny legs. Alfie had been the one who decided to make a fort after the boys had eaten dinner. Colin, however, made sure Alfie did all the work and hit Alfie whenever he slowed down. That was why Alfie had to stand guard. Colin was always in charge.

Alfie's mom, Eloise, called Alfie to come brush his teeth. Colin didn't have a toothbrush, so Alfie told him to wait in their room. Colin kicked at the paper-thin walls between the bathroom and their bedroom as Alfie brushed.

"Quit it!" Alfie yelled, mouth full of toothpaste.

Colin kicked harder and harder, shaking the mirror on the bathroom wall. Alfie hit the knob of the faucet and shut off the water. He threw open the door, turned sharply and stomped into his room. Colin abruptly stopped kicking and was nowhere to be seen.

"Get out here!" yelled Alfie.

Silence lurked underneath the bed and taunted Alfie as he flung open his closet door. It hit the wall with a bang.

"Where are you?!" screamed Alfie.

Colin was always in charge



Art by Amanda Tonks, Draper, UT

Finally the nurses loaded Alfie, still drowsy, into a wheelchair. One of the head doctors asked Dan and Eloise to step into his office. The nurses wheeled Alfie down the hall. Dan and Eloise sat, holding hands, across from Dr. Ploer.

“Alfie’s case does interest me, and I’d like him to see Dr. Schefel later today if he’s up to it. Schefel is a colleague who specializes in neurological disorders, and I’m sure he’d be just as interested as I am.”

That afternoon, Alfie went to see Dr. Schefel.

Appointment after appointment, week after week, Alfie never improved. Eloise fell behind on work, and Dan picked up a lot of the slack at home. Finally, in February, Dr. Schefel explained exactly what they had discovered.

“First off, your son is exceptional. He tested higher than average in every cognitive area. Unfortunately, he is the exception to the rule in more ways than one. Originally, we were studying his actions with the presumption that Asperger’s was the most probable cause. However, his language abilities and motor skills are both average for a boy his age. Also, his social skills are normal. So we had to reexamine our initial diagnosis.

“Alfie has been having vivid hallucinations almost every time he comes to my office, which is something I am accustomed to in my work, but usually when treating adults. The characters he’s created have moral codes that they abide by, some bad, some good. They’re all objects or animals, except for Colin. Colin is more than an imaginary friend. Alfie truly believes that Colin is real, and has given him aggressive, devious characteristics. Alfie tells me that Colin makes him do ‘bad things’ and hits him. I’m not sure if Alfie is able to comprehend that these cats and monsters and Colin simply don’t exist for anyone but him.

“Mr. and Mrs. Corsch, after much deliberation, we believe that Alfie has early onset schizophrenia. It is extremely rare in children Alfie’s age, but not impossible. It has nothing to do with the way you raised him, nor could it have been predicted, so please do not blame yourselves. I’ve prescribed medication that we’re hoping will help, but as with most neurological disorders, it will probably take a few attempts to get it right.”

Of course, as time passed, and the shock of the diagnosis wore off. Eloise battled Alfie daily, fighting to

get him to take his pharmaceutical cocktail, which, at its worst point, consisted of four pills – and that was before he knew how to properly swallow a pill. Dan accompanied Eloise to training, where the doctors showed them how to defuse Alfie’s fits and restrain him when necessary.

Eloise sat on the edge of her bed in the dark, deep in thought. Dan was still in the kitchen, working on his third beer. She heard him get up and prayed he wouldn’t wake Alfie. Dan wasn’t one to get angry, but that didn’t mean he had been a loving husband lately. He often came home drunk, or stayed late at work to avoid coming home altogether. As Alfie got older, Eloise stayed up later, worked harder, and pushed for him to get better, futile as it seemed. Her time for Dan was less, which she knew.

Dan walked into the bedroom. He silently sat down next to Eloise, wrapped an arm around her, and whispered, “I’m sorry.”

He stood and reached underneath the bed, grasping his suitcase. He looked at Eloise. She was welling up. When he turned from her, she ran to him, flinging herself, begging him not to leave. She could not raise Alfie alone. Dan brushed past her. She pulled on his sleeve, sobbing for another chance. For him to stay.

Alfie appeared in the doorway of his room, watching the events unfold. In his state of confusion, hallucinations danced on the walls and disappeared again. He couldn’t make out what was happening. A small kitten leapt from his dad’s suitcase and hissed at him. Suitcase. Alfie ran to his father.

“Where are you going!” Alfie didn’t ask, he simply stated it, as though it was fact.

“I’m –” Dan glanced up at Eloise. Her eyes were puffy, begging him.

If not for her, then for Alfie.

“I’m leaving,” said Dan.

“Why?” asked Alfie. He shrank back, clinging to his mom. A bird flew across the hallway in front of him, fell to the ground and turned into a little blue train.

Dan looked at him intently. He finally bent on one knee, coming close to Alfie. Eloise put her hand on Alfie’s head.

“I need to take Colin away, Alfie. I have him here, in this suitcase. I need to take him far, far away so he can’t hurt you anymore.”

Alfie tried desperately to wrap his mind around his dad leaving and taking Colin away. It was so much to

think about, and Alfie was so sleepy.

“Are you sure?” Alfie asked.

“Yes, I have to, Alf. But if I take him away I can’t come back, so I need you to give me a hug good-bye and say good-bye to Colin, too.”

Alfie slowly walked toward Dan. This wasn’t what he signed up for, Eloise thought. But none of them had.

Alfie and Dan hugged, and Alfie patted the suitcase, saying good-bye to Colin. Dan turned Alfie around and told him to go back to bed. Alfie looked over his shoulder at Dan and the case one last time before going to his room. The springs of his bed

creaked as he crawled in.

Dan held Eloise in his arms. Alfie sat upright in bed and watched as they whispered to each other. Words swirled around in his head as he

fought off the drowsiness.

I love you ... maybe ... sometime ... I’m sorry ... I promise ... take care ... soon ... good-bye

came through the static of Alfie’s thoughts, yet it all seemed like a dream.

Alfie watched his mom and dad hug and his father

grasped the handle of the suitcase. Alfie’s eyelids slowly closed as his father walked down the hallway, hand in hand with Colin, chasing after the little blue train. ♦

Alfie patted the suitcase, saying good-bye to Colin

Finis

We slip away at midnight,
Through shadows thick as blood.
The night is all around us,
A dark, unsteady flood.
Our hopes grow thin, stretched between
Each footstep, every thud.
The darkness turns to silver,
To bronze to gold to mud.

I love your touch, the bloody rust
Your fingers leave behind
We hide in snares of leaves and hair,
Share solace that we find.
You turn to dust, a silent hush,
But I won’t look behind
For all that waits is shadows
And all we need is time.

We freeze hard, cold and scarred
as the mountains that we climb.
The moon caves in, it’s gone too thin,
Yet higher still we climb.
Wolves howl long, a different song
Than the one they sang before
The water washed away the snow
leaving a dark charred shore.

I kiss the shadows from your face,
the cobwebs from your hair.
We spin in constellations,
dusty snow and thin air.
We find hope in fire and rope.
At night we sleep in shells –
The husks of broken dreams
Combined with living hells.

Our stomachs twist a wild dance
That leaves my backbone bare.
We stumble for the sunlight
We gasp and choke for air.
I feel my bones, those heavy stones
That weigh me to the ground.
I wish to fly and not to die,
But to the earth I’m bound.

I remember you in sunlight
As the darkness fills my eyes
You tell me dreams of spring
But all I hear is lies.
I sink down, without a sound
Into the sullen earth.
You scream my name, a last refrain
I whisper what it’s worth.

by Irene Enlow, Pohang, So. Korea



Photo by Xavier Hernandez, Houston, TX

Blood Lust

by Irene Enlow, Pohang, South Korea

The man wriggles and screams in my hands as I hold him down. His neck pulses with his terror, and my mouth aches for the promise of that pulse. But this is not for me. This is for you. I look at you, cringing in the alley, cold and pale, tears running down your face.

“Do it,” I say. “You’ll have to eventually.”

I know you know it too. I know you’re hungry. The hunger comes often when you are cold. In the early days, before I was taught the way I am teaching you, I would scream from the hunger, biting my wrists in an agony of frustrated longing.

“Do it.”

You back away from me.

The man’s lips fumble beneath my hand in a prayer or a promise; it makes no difference which.

“No, no, please,” you plead.

There was a time when I would have reached into your mind and simply made you, but I can’t do that anymore.



Art by Katelynn Creech, Lake City, FL

I soften my voice. “This is what you wanted.” Your face crumples. “I-I didn’t know. I didn’t know. Please, please stop.”

I sigh in frustration and decide to end the man’s agony.

Your sobs sour the sweet as I squat in the alley.

“Come on,” I say when I’m done.

You come.

“I loved you. Why did you do this to me?”

“Because you asked me to,” I patiently remind you.

You sob harder. You cannot dispute this fact.

I wipe the blood from my mouth.

We awake with the sunset, lips dry and cracked, stomachs empty. You look at me, eyes all scabby with sleep, and run your tongue across your lips questioningly. I shake my head. It’s too soon. You knew that, but you had to ask. Even now I am winning. You cannot deny the hunger twisting in your belly. We make our way out of our earthen shelter, pushing up sod and earth until we are above ground.

I try to brush the dirt from your hair, but you flinch away, your inhibitions returning with the night. I shake my head, but I let you dust off your hair yourself. It is long and red, sleek like an exposed muscle. I always loved your hair.

“Sit down,” I say. I feel that somehow you have turned simple, become a child who must be guided through the world.

You sit.

I wonder if you are still afraid of me. You shouldn’t be. I’ve done my worst; you just don’t know that yet.

We watch the sun set. It is a brutal business, this dying of the light. There is blood in the sky, swirling and churning in delicious filth. It lingers long enough to make my stomach clench before the red of the sun seeps into the clouds and night falls in earnest.

You do not yet savor the thrill of the hunt

You stand up and go get your shoes, which you left behind as we fled from dawn’s light.

I watch you walk across the dry grass in your bare feet. Small and white as bone, your feet flinch against the hard stubble as if you were walking on hot coals.

I absently wonder why you took your shoes off at all. Perhaps your feet ached after the chase. Perhaps you wanted to feel the pain of the grass on your feet to know you were capable of still feeling something.

I want to tell you that you shouldn’t worry about feeling. That there is more to feel now than there ever was. But you still haven’t talked to me since I did what I did. I think you’re being childish, but I hold my tongue. I know you will talk to me eventually. You wouldn’t have stayed otherwise.

You lace your shoes carefully, like a child, your fingers numb with cold.

Again, I open my mouth to tell you that the cold is a small price to pay for the warmth of hot blood in your mouth, but I keep my silence. You do not yet savor the thrill of the hunt, the brush of flesh against your lips, the drunken euphoria of

liquid iron coursing down your throat. But you will.

The sun finally sets, and it is time to hunt. I rise, dusting off my jacket.

The city lights burn in the horizon, beckoning.

You sulk behind me as we walk through the busy streets. I make my way to the park. There is something dirty about eating in an alley, but nothing is more satisfying than supping in the dark grass under the moon.

Finally you speak.

“I thought you loved me.”

I snort.

“I thought you loved me. All those professions of adoration, your dedication. I’ve done nothing to you, but what you asked.”

I don’t tell you that you have done something far greater than what I have done to you. You have broken my heart, and I didn’t ask for that.

“I know,” you say softly, “but I didn’t realize it would be like this. So brutal, so cold.”

“You said you understood.”

“I thought I did.”

I turn to you.

“Be grateful,” I say. “Be grateful that at least someone tried to explain it to you. Be grateful that you brought this upon yourself. Two centuries ago, some blood-hungry demon left me for dead in a dirty corner, choking on my own blood. There was no one to coddle me through the cold, the hunger. Be grateful.”

I am angry. Angry that I believed your lies of love, angry that I shared my pain with you and all you can think about is yourself. I turn away from you. The shadows beckon me back into the blackness of the anonymous, unloved monster.

“Don’t you love me anymore?” I hate to plead, but the words spill unwanted from my cold lips.

“No.” You turn toward me, suddenly brutal. “I could never love a creature like you.”

I laugh in your face, my heart fracturing and crumbling until it is nothing. It takes a monster to know a monster, I realize. You never loved me, you only loved the alien mystery of me.

I turn from you, wordless, but you follow me. There is blood in the air, and you are hungry.

It takes me only a moment to realize I could never love a creature like you. ♦

Wet Leaves

by Melissa LaGore, Highland Heights, OH

Wet leaves slap my skin as I push past strings of broken branches, loosely tethered to the maples and oaks around them. My feet are struggling to grip the loose soil, mashing into pockets of mud, and slipping on wet, mossy rocks. This forest hasn’t been explored yet, hasn’t had trails dug into its face or streams carved in like the twisted smile of a jack-o’-lantern. It lies untouched outside an all-boys school – a natural prison for some, but an escape route for me.

I can feel my heart racing. Its voice screams in my ears, beating twice for every stride and reminding me to keep running. My university sweater is soaked with fear and dripping with sweat. I don’t dare look back, don’t dare pause for a second and wonder if they’re still after me.

Oh god, I can hear them now.

“You five go this way; we’ll go left. He’s around here somewhere.”

The unknown voice breaks through the stiff air like the crack of a wooden bat, a loud, shattering noise that demands attention. My pace quickens, but I don’t know how long I can keep running or how I’m going to find my way out of this northeastern jungle. My arms are already riddled with deep scratches and a ripened bruise – tokens from last night’s venture.

Suddenly, an unrecognizable voice breaks through the air: “Hey guys, the Dean will be really mad if we’re not back by 8. Forget Ben – you know he’ll be back by morning.”

I push on; they’re closer than I realized. I’m exhausted, but I need to go further to find a place to hide. I see a large oak – my perfect hiding spot. Crouching in the thick brush close to it, I catch the slightest view of Charlie’s dark curls bouncing away from where I stoop.

I see more now – one, two, three boys, all wearing crimson sweaters. They’re leaving, turning away and heading back for the school. I wait for them to vanish from my sight, for the minutes to pass until Tom begrudgingly follows, obviously discontented that he hasn’t had the chance to claw at my neck and bring me back to the headmaster like a bad puppy, beaten and worn.

I wait and count the seconds, minutes, hours – however long it takes until I know they’re gone. I stand up and lean against a tree to empty my shoe of dirt and rocks, a collection I’ve formed since this morning. I gaze into the trees around me, thinking about my next move and the future that lies beyond. But my thoughts are shattered when I hear a crunch of leaves behind me and Tom’s greedy laugh. My head bows. My getaway has failed. It’s over. ♦

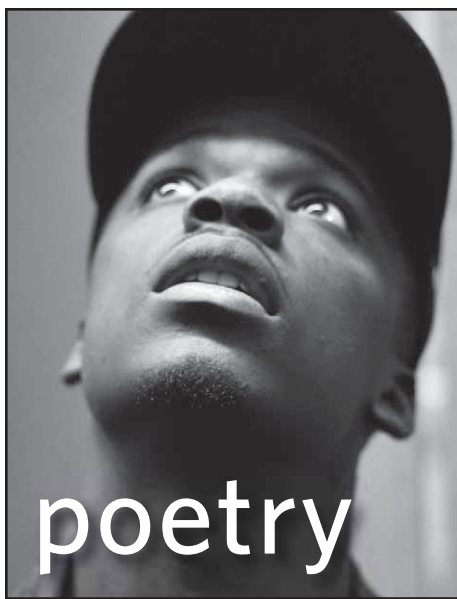


Photo by Walter Bloxton, Houston, TX

Listening to *Ondine* on the Interstate

My mind was cruising down the highway when *Ondine* came on the High Plains Public Radio.

Gaspard de la Nuit

The water nymph's song sprang from a waterfall, cascading from an invisible pianist's hand out of the car speakers.

There were oceans of grass and telephone poles for trees. The air conditioner could be the silky lake breeze.

But I only had to close my eyes, and

The asphalt road melted into watery hair, The sun's rays paled into lunar glow clear. Notes hung like icicles, only to fall – Glimmering, shimmering, that nymphal call –

Into the half-stagnant lake of my mind, Spreading lucidity, only to find The mystery of the nymph herself: That splashing, delving, taunting figure, elf Of the waters, yielding dolphin-like grace, Resurfacing with bright smiles on her face, And dark eyes winking, flutter of lashes, Gone under again, firework of splashes That sent my boat lulling up and down ... up and down

the highway

as the sun brought the Kansas flatland back under my eyelids.

The mellow voice on the radio praised Ravel's genius and mentioned the pianist's name.

High Plains Public Radio

The recording was made in some auditorium a couple of years ago.

On the other side of I-70 is Colorado green. Perhaps I'll find *Ondine* there.

by Guanghao Yu, Prairie Village, KS

The Outline

I looked in the mirror today
And there was an outline I had never
seen before
Something so delicate
And so faint
That traced my entire frame
I couldn't decide if I liked it
And if I liked the way it tickled my flesh,
the way it filled my veins and senses
It hurt me when I didn't know if the
light was beautiful
Or if it was burning me alive

by Teresa Botts, Charlotte, NC

Beginnings

a latin root unfurls
a single spore,
mycelia like threatening cotton
fibers of words
cognate upon cognate
the breeze is a fluid, you know,
sings among the trees
a forest grows

by Olivia Arthur, Camarillo, CA

Sustenance

You filled my mouth with yours.
Pardon me, you were delicious.
But did I really need an appetizer
For him?
He was the 5-star meal of my existence
And you? You were just the hors d'oeuvres.
Tiding me over until he came along.

I'm sorry that our broken pottery
Did not make a complete set. I tried.
I took Superglue from under the side
of the bed
That you had slept on,
Pieced them together carefully.
But there were holes that couldn't
be mended,
Pieces that didn't line up.

Love, if we were to only consume
each other,
How fast would we have burned out?
He let me slowly feast upon him,
while you –
You, my dear, had me ravenous.

by Courtney Walters, Houghton, NY

dead in your arms

Expect to find the dead
lying dead in your arms
whilst you're at work
writing fiction
finding beauty from the ashes
turning nothing into something
raw and unrelenting

turn me into a stranger
something into nothing
a sulky teen
who sucks her cheeks
walking in triangles
bare feet

by Merveille Nsumbu, Fulham, England

Sleepless Sleep

I look upon the northern meadow
The horizon a painting
The forest a cavalcade of music
The hums and chirps and bellows
To hear, I strain
The sun melting on the mountains
The stars; cork in black and blue water
The butter melts and all cork arisen
The spooky, melancholy, rich sounds
Enveloping me in a strange deep sleep
Where your dreams are not dreams
But hidden in the thoughts of the past
Something only those behind you
experienced
A delve into the past
A dip into better, scarier times
A swim into what was.

by Ramon Fonseca, Hemet, CA

Pipeline Mast

Sun don't reach here, boy,
Ain't no shine 'round these parts, boy;
Need'a get used to gloom.

Sun won't reach here, boy,
You best forget those dreams,
Those butterfly dreams.

Those city-boy things,
Grass ain't greener 'round here, boy;
They make mockery ...

Of pipe dreams over here.
Happily ever after ...
Actually turns to

Half mast to full blown,
Plans rolled up into bottles,
Letters ain't here, boy.

Kids here kicked to curb,
Like scurvy-ridden pups or ...
Kittens spitting foam.

Sun don't reach here, boy,
You better get used to moon.
Flashing lights never good.

Don't you mistake those lights for the flag,
They mean anything but freedom,
You better hope they're not taking daddy
this time,

You better believe they taking someone's
daddy.

I hope he doesn't smell like he'll run.
If pigs smell bacon, they eager beavers
on the trigger.

You get out of here with that hunger, boy,
We only eating on the 1st and 15th,
Deck leaving us living check to check,

You better check your head,
You think writing will make it better?
They don't let you grow here.

They'll cut you down real quick,
Didn't you hear, Bob?
Before you spread the spore of hope

You'll get burned down,
So quit that poet talk.
Quit those big city dreams.

by Carlos Reyes, Orlando, FL

how to get rid of someone

1.
how to get rid of someone:
you take your hands and you squeeze all
of their juices out
and wring yourself clean until the rain
soaks you up again
and forces it out of you.
why does the sky make
us sad, why does it make
what it does, why do i try to
define my problems and i

2.
how to get rid of someone:
gouge their eyes out and scream to bleed out
their voice and cry until they leave
and then you wonder why and you realize
that all

3.
of your flaws were fatal ones
how to get rid of someone:
kill them
with kindness
or maybe with a hair straightener
or a blow dryer
or a pillow
or your soft
babylike
crumbling
fingernails
in their sleep
and then off yourself too, because you feel
too bad

4.
how to get rid of someone:
love them with everything you have

by Veronika Gillespie, Pittsburgh, PA

All-Purpose Lover

The first was a woman
who reminded me of butterscotch,
who called me every night to promise me
that I was enough,
to thank me for not dying back in
grade school.
They said we love you for who you are.
Then it was a man
who tasted of Sunday mornings and
endless piles of poetry
and they said oh, so you've changed
your mind.

I told them it was more that he would rest
his hands upon my waist and say
this is yours, but, god, it means the world
to me you share.

So they scream selfish! selfish! selfish!
Choose! choose! choose!
If I do not exist, how can you promise,
then, that love is all-inclusive?
I'm confused? I have never once mistaken
butterscotch for liquor,
nor Sunday mornings a cure for sadness.
I swing both ways? No, I slam like a
bird into glass, come up bloodied,
and cry myself to sleep,
but I cannot see why it matters,
when to love is to love is to love is to love
and I love and I love and I love and I love.

by Clare Heywood, Concord, MA

Propriety

I can still remember the subway platform.
And I can still taste the burn marks on
my lips
From when I spewed the all of the fire
of my desire
Into your ear so that you could look
back at me
And tell me everything I wanted to hear.
But in my indignant lonely stride I
realized that
No matter how hard you fight for empathy
A romantic can only have so much sincerity
When they exclusively donate to their
own charity.
Because the mornings stay so woefully
the same,
And the cravings still take over and remain,
and I'll
Complain ... to every skeleton with an
eardrum
Or any gossip so deprived of these
nauseating flings that
They'll drop everything just to sit down
next to you and feel some.

I'll tell them about how I sat with you
at the piano,
And you vibrated the strings with the tips
of your fingers
And sight read the chart, leaving me
desperate to tell you
Everything I felt but having no idea
where to start,
And as sparks of what could be filled the air
they did as sparks do and soon couldn't be
seen anywhere,
and now two weeks after the affair I can feel
the flesh around my teeth begin to tear,
when I think about what it meant to lie in
bed and twirl your hair,

Because now you're inviting my friend
over to learn origami, and it
Won't be long before you learn the tucks
and folds of each other
But it gets worse when I bring this all to
my dad, and he says
Nate, I don't understand why you can't be
mad, and I told him
Yes, I may have felt her caress, and yes,
it was only a week later
That I saw the hand of another man
in hers, but it
Makes sense if you allow me to put it
in context.

It is luminous when rejected men are
dripping in hubris,
Because how the f*** is a woman supposed
to live her life constantly
Ducking the elated egos of men?
Though this may not be the fifties, men are
introducing a new form of propriety.
One that runs on an engine of shame, and
comes with a cannon to displace the
blame.
But even though the modern man with a
broken heart is never willing to
compromise, it will never be the
responsibility of a woman to make sure
that their suitors don't over-romanticize.

by "Nate," New York, NY

Archangel

His reflection was there again,
In the back of the dancing
Light
And dust
Sifting through the space between my teeth
And his lungs:
The man with the blue eyes.

We
Giddy with the soft boredom
Of oneness
Stood mourning beside Nelly's painting –
She was so young, basking in our vague
sadness, and
Ripe with sibilant, insisting
Pastels.

Close, I knew the way he
Touched;
The way he moved and breathed
Was saintly, triumphant, with no
Agony, and catching ...
Soggy dim lights smoothed
The corners of that raw, trembling
Grin
From the bow of his mouth.

by Melissa Padron, Grassy Creek, NC

He Told Me About the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders

Mother says,
"You're a pretty little thing.
Don't go around frowning so much."
The puddles keep getting bigger and bigger
As I cross the road.
My knees are red and scabbed.
They cave into themselves like loveseat
cushions
Whenever I poke them.
The spot between my eyebrows hurts,
But I can't get it to shift up.
The rain soaks through my boots.
You can't stop ruining my night.

by Emily Xu, Brooklyn, NY

denizen

bustling in the streets
are living poetry,
beautiful contradictions,
and human art galleries.

this city is a canvas.
paint it
with salient reds and soothing blues.
your voice is your instrument, so let it
resound
louder than the honks of the traffic,
louder than the rustling of the trees,
louder than the songs on the radio that stick
onto your brain,
tattooed temporarily.
glass breaks, castles crumble,
but the city is alive, perpetually,
permanently.

by Somya Jain, San Ramon, CA

Space Boy

He took a bite out of the moon.
He didn't like the taste.
So he hung it back in the sky.

He nibbled on the sun.
The heat
that spread through his body was too much
to take.

He popped Pluto in his mouth like
a gumball
to soothe the heat of the sun.
But he just became numb.

He climbed on the rings of Saturn
and sat on Jupiter.
He was spinning around and around.

Earth was his basketball
and space his playground.

by Nadaa Hussein, Bradenton, FL

They Say the City Doesn't Feel Holy Anymore

Dear Jerusalem.
Monet painted eyes.
Honey skin. Honey hair.
Bones like a cross.
Bones like a mother who has labored over
something sacred.

When you told me your name,
I could hear the ocean, another girl's call
to prayer.
It's the alias of holy places.

I wonder now if that means you left the
wailing wall of your lungs behind.
Maybe you only took what you could
run with.

I imagine your bones. Your sunset skin.
Your hiding name.

When I think of you you are always just
beyond the rocks.
You are on the shores of your heart,
It was too heavy for your bones to take
with them.
There is no prayer on your salt pillar lips.

by Maia Irwin, Keaau, HI



Photo by Taylor Fox, Huntington, NY

Born Blind

i was born blind:
i fumbled with
my comprehension
letting it ooze through my fingers
like the play dough
that swam in the aging lines of my hands
and could be found dried up
mingling in between the secrets of
my grouting
avoidance was welcomed by distance.
What was left untouched
stayed impalpable to my brain
Where there was pain i was out of sight

when they told me i was beautiful
i didn't question their authority
because what i saw of myself
was a reflection of my intellectuality
i felt the way my fingers folded through
my hair
and that's how i decided to feel about myself
soft and loved

My eyes grew shaded by the simplicity of
black and white
which held its controversies concealed
inside a wrapped present,
which arrived
with all my other birthday presents that year.
With the gift of vision
I was cursed
I was crowned with the power to
differentiate, dissect, dilute, dispose
of my purity.
This knowledge came
like a yearly visit to the doctor,
but it infected instead of wrapping
all of my loose ends in an fresh ace bandage
it was as lost as my metrocard,
which is floating freely
in the filth of the subways never ending
intermingling paths.

When they told me I was beautiful,
I turned in the direction of my frameless
mirror
swinging on back of my bedroom door,
My door stayed open often.
Not so I could be reminded of the melody
that slides in the molding of my house,
but so I could be blind again:
just for a moment

My eyesight proceeds to neutralize
following the path into normality.
I was no longer "special"
My eyes now cling
to the curves and colors of humanity.
Just like everyone else's.

I remind myself
I was born blind but
If this is coming of age
I want to go back.

by Julia Longo, Brooklyn, NY

Silken

You seem like freshly sewn silk cloth,
slipping like cool water over your bones,
filling you out and making you gorgeous.

by Ruth Oppenheimer,
Castro Valley, CA

Unexpected

It is the things you cannot see coming
That are strong enough to kill you.
What limits us? Is it the fact that we believe
What is considered the norm,
And not try to rise above it?

I witnessed what I once thought was a
Superficial world exiting amidst a
Terrorizing reality, and
I couldn't move.
Sleek sharks floated around,
Graceful terrifying beings.

Lost, I felt lost among them,
A bundle of messed-up emotions.
Reality appeared distorted by the
imperfections of my senses.
But I know I saw those sharks in the forest.
And I know you won't understand,
Doctor.

by Maryam Hosain,
Sydney, Australia

Water Me Old Lady

God
I don't really like how I'm associated
with old ladies
with cats
with old cat ladies.

Read this
I think it's the first time
that an orchid
has ever spoken up.

If you win the spelling bee
you get me
you get me
if you can spell
"p-a-l-e-o-a-n-t-h-r-o-p-o-l-o-g-i-c-a-l"

Water me
old lady
old lady
old lady ...

by Liam Miyar-Mullan,
San Francisco, CA

Full Moon Feather Dance

Gold finches dwell
In her aurelian tinsel hair,

Nomad of enchanted wood,
Her glass slippers, adorned in glittering
geodes,
Leave no footprints in virgin earth.

Raven whisperer,
Her sugar voice simmers and erupts
from pulsing lungs,
Lifting their feathers up, up,
Then down.

Swooping toward long toes of hemlock
That weave in and out of dirt
Beneath yellow chanterelle ball gowns.

by Juliana Stikons,
Ringoies, NJ



Art by Chloena Garrett, Colorado City, TX

Almost Eclipsed

these monsters
trace the edges of skulls,
unholy fingers slide over the craters and
in between fresh dents; permanent scars
that speak the promise of faults
and document a fall from more than just
higher ground, the
nebulas became bitter with their passing.
one wrong slip of underlings
and bone chips away at masters' hands,
they clip to the ground, claim
to have drowned under the pressure of
an ocean of broken ankles.
ivory's sick little brother
peels back all that is left, too barren
to be called a skeleton.
damaged organs wither away
without the protection of its cages,
eulogies took a back burner and ran cold.
a prophecy of "dust to dust"
these brains and hearts fulfilled,
they carry no peace.

There is a kingdom that
houses Children of Light.
And Heaven rains truth on their tongues,
graces their throats.
Unjaded vein outlines the crown
of a head to its temple. Untouched.
It follows the path of a shoulder
kissed by collarbone. Pure,
as unimpeachable as, but less naive than
history's lost Juliet.
These soles have never known soil,
but the world knows this celestial body.
It is found on the shores of Hope.
Yes, the world has heard sweet voices
fall like cotton on ash
beside ordinary things.
It can bless the eve
before Eden was lost with
golden vows of scales unturned.

enemies, strong as shadows,
want to win this War with crooked faces;
gnash their alligator teeth
and send all that was ever good
running to the day before time.

There is a great hand
holding up these spines.
There is a great face, an eternal force,
reflecting off these grateful lives.
The War is won.
This skin tastes like victory and
earth is screaming for you to come home.

by Chinasa Okezie, Hayward, CA

The Storm

Huddling inside while
The dismal storm rages on
Reminds us we're safe.

by Lauren Pinchuk,
Dubuque, IA

4:53 p.m. at the stoplight

A woman with dark red hair
Cropped short sits
In a dusty black car and a mustard yellow
turtleneck.
Her earrings are hammered copper squares,
Their varnish worn off, leaving the
exposed metal
Green and naked underneath.
Her eyes are smudged with liner,
Her breath low as
She hums the words to the radio song.

A woman with wildly long blonde hair
Sits in a faded jeep, her features
Angular, austere,
Her eyes with a welcoming twinkle.
Her lips are pursed in concentration
As three children scream and kick
each other's knees
While sucking their sticky fingers
In the far backseat.
A young girl smiles at me from inside
the greasy window,
Her hair just as her mother's
Her eyes wild with enthusiasm and sweet,
Youthful excitement for whatever lies at
the end
Of her journey.
Around the girl's lips is a Popsicle stain
of deep purpley grape.

The stoplight clicks from yellow to
green, and both cars are gone in a
second of exhaust.
I am left alone to ponder my glance into
these lives
And continue to my destination
Along the winding pavement.

by Elaina Sassine,
Rancho Sante Fe, CA

writing

i write because
i want to feel time
grasp its shapeless form
to press it like flowers
between words
so that each fleeting
passion is caught
so that each heartbreak is fresh
and the anguish still overwhelming
i write because i want to feel time
grab it by the throat
so maybe it will pause for a moment or two
to capture the life in your eyes
and stare at them just a bit longer
They set my soul on fire.

by Stacy Martinez,
Fayetteville, NC

Lightfast

A quality of expensive paints,
The ability to retain color after years of sun
To hold fast to their name
Forever red, forever young
Van Gogh's oils fade to blue
In the yellow house
With the lavender room.

Cadmium and phthalo
Bismuth and alizarian
Dioxzine and chromium
Quinacridone and indanthrene
Oxide and ochre
Heavy and slow.

by Priscilla Rapp,
Niverville, NY

Suburban Pyrotechnics

You were fourteen when you realized
that the fireworks were made up.

You had seen them once a decade ago,
the shimmering greens, the bleeding reds,
the white-gold drops of concentrated light
that rained from the night sky
in choreographed showers
and vanished
quietly
just before they reached the edge
of your striped wool picnic blanket
that you had spread so carefully
in the grass of the public park.
You had felt the pressure in your chest,
the rattle in your bones.
That night was real, yes,
as real as the jagged columns of smoke
that hung in the air when the show was over.
The world enchanted you back then.

Do you remember all the times you
heard them?
Muffled bangs in the distance,
two or three nights a week.
"It's fireworks,"
your parents murmured, and you
believed them.
You were impressionable, a Play-Doh heart
between Popsicle stick ribs.

Do you remember how sick you felt
when you had your epiphany?
How stupid you had been, how optimistic.
Nothing could have been more obvious.
The random timing, your parents' sad eyes,
the fact that you lived not even a mile away
from the worst neighborhood in Chicago.
You heard them in March.
No one lights fireworks in March.

But when your out-of-town friend visited
for dinner,
and she heard the sound of distant gunshots,
and she turned to you with questions on
her lips,
you leaned close,
pulled her thick wool sweater up over
her eyes,
and whispered,
"It's fireworks."

by Grace Coberly, Oak Park, IL

Treatment Target

that Thursday
(I'm
still
here)
was treatment target group.
You got honor roll
and was handed one of Mother's warm
gingersnap cookies
three hours before bed.
that Thursday,
(Where are you?)
I got
evaluated
and was asked if I liked to drink warm milk
to calm me down.
I guess I failed that one.

that Thursday,
(Why?)
I was handed a pill pouch and put to sleep
three hours before you.
Around midnight,
(flower?)
with your eyes closed,
you swore you were thinking about me.

During some hour of the late night and
early morning,
(Will you still be there?)
I got a new roommate
and was kept awake
by her mother
crying at the end of my bed.
Seven and a half hours later,
my math teacher pulled back the covers,
and saw me in my pajamas.
It was around seven hours past midnight,
and you wondered whether I would be
coming home the following Wednesday.
(I'm sorry)
It was seven thirty in the morning on a
windy Friday in April;
you shaved your legs in the shower
applied a warm vanilla body wash,
and swayed to your favorite song while
driving to school.
(I swear I died)
It was seven thirty in the morning on a
windy Friday in April;
some b****
stole my toothbrush and my last golf pencil,
and I cried myself dry in the waiting room.
(Always!)

by "Nora," Hastings-on-Hudson, NY

Highway

The sunlight dances on the crackled
dark gray asphalt, sparkling as it bounces off
the windshield – a halo
of light streaming across the listless trees
that have
clung to the thread of warmth in
the bitter winter –
waking the wilted grass, which springs up,
bleached lively green stalks that sway with
the wind, which hums with exultation,
rifling her hair with
kindred fingers, tangling the strands into
thousands
of interwoven knots –
As the car speeds down the lane.

by Truelian Lee, Ridgefield, CT

Drifter

Our water-logged, world-weary
eyes become set on the horizon ahead.
Hold strong, hold fast
stay hard on that line!
Tacking and jibing, forward and aft
brings about an unsettling shiver.

Creaks of old timber,
complaining of the night's long strain,
cruise along and break at the helm with
a stormy spray.
Ropes pull, winds rustle,
the midnight hurtles on.

Black and blue,
overhead and underfoot,
drag her down to the depths
and lock her away from the world.

Stories set to sail
change with the tides.
The only indication of what was lost
floats onshore alongside the foam
in the form of bone-like beams,
and taken home as keepsakes.

by Lauren Mercuri, Gilford, NH

Identity

the sun streaked her fingertips across glass
clouds and
left behind those familiar prints of amber yet
i was never allowed to leave my fingerprints
on the glass table.

i was fascinated with
those swirling markings of identification,
those simple patterns that reminded you that
it was okay to be different.
today Miss Cook told us that we were all
unique snowflakes.
of course, in Florida, it never snowed but
she said
that the only difference between
snowflakes and raindrops were that
raindrops became puddles instead of
snow angels.
she said, "look, no two fingerprints
are the same."
so i compared my fingers with those of a
dark-skinned kid who was held back in
kindergarten
twice and with
a Muslim boy who, when i met him,
taught me that earth's arms cradled
way more religions besides
Judaism and Christianity.

i think i then decided that
i wanted to leave my imprint on the world.
i got home.
black coffee bubbled in the kitchen
along with
a boiling conversation in the dining room.
i sat down at the table for dinner,
streaked my fingertips across the top,
hoping for
a lasting impression.

i guess the sun was more privileged than i,
because my prints were wiped clean
immediately.

by Hannah Butcher,
Lake Worth, FL

There Was a Rumba Playing

There was a rumba playing
in the restaurant you took me –
where the menus were stained
with grease, and men with slick
voices talked of home-before-Castro
and cigar smoke made
my throat burn.

There was a rumba playing
when a man who did not ask
our names placed a plastic basket
of chips before us. He brought us
drinks with salt on the rims
without asking about our parents,
and when you touched my thigh
beneath the table
he pretended not to see.

There was a rumba playing
and we leaned back in the black
leather seats, where we were
invisible, and you put your
arm around me and you
whispered, soft like the edges
of a lace fan, that I was
your-baby-girl.

There was a rumba playing
but you did not
ask me to dance. You
kissed my lips, my neck –
you slid the strap of my dress
off of my shoulder. I bit my lip
but you did not
ask my permission.

There was a rumba playing
not from a band, but from a
radio behind the counter.
You did not
tell me you loved me. You
said nothing, but smiled
and smoked the cigars
your father told you not to.

by Sarah Benson,
Lorton, VA

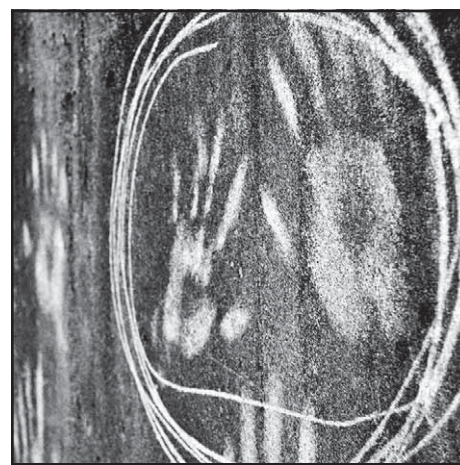


Photo by Nicole Kean, Oroville, CA

Easy to get, huh?

if i'm a locked door
i'd keep myself shut and leave
the key on the porch

by John Michael Londres,
Iloilo, Philippines

parallels

when we ran side by side for a while
and then woke
your face something ancient when your eyes
were closed I did not want them to open;
i saw the other worlds you went to when
they did.

when the gods of your best chance
abandoned you and left you to your own
devices you turned to me:
a solution.

when you were god, and you were the
best chance, when i needed no solution
i was yours.

when we ran side by side and then
turned away
and both fell to our knees.

by Morgan Chesley,
Kasilof, AK

Stage Lights Low

Backs against rough cement
rubbing away from the stone in bent-folder
creases
eyes and skin dimmed in the darkness
a maestro's pit without an orchestra,
and your hand draws a violinist's bow
across my own
runs pianist fingers through my hair
a melody of soft and stable fifths and
stacked chords
like felt hats on a table.

Conductor's voice raises his hands in an arc
signaling a glorious pause
and you hold me in a fermata, crescendo
of breath
and he leans forward to catch my lips with
his, a parametric curve
pulling me closer at gaining speed as
seconds pass
and moments you wish you could freeze
don't reach critical mass.

Notes are floating, resting on my eardrums
and plucking my heartstrings
I fell ice-skating
the year before I met you. Did
you know?

I hit the ice and saw my face reflected in it
and there was something yet to be there.
The river was frozen until spring, when it
thawed and the fish jumped for the clouds
and in the morning the clouds lowered to
meet them in a fog, just close enough to
brush with scaled fins or gloved fingers
wafting in and out of vision.

If I was a river, I would white-water raft
myself away.

If I were of stone, I would bend into an
unbreakably porous statue.

If I were of anything, nothing would ever
see me again.

If I was a river, I'd run to you

for surely

this is all

that bliss is.

by Naomi Simpson,
Tucson, AZ

Techie Haiku

Terms and conditions
the world's most common lie
check yes, I agree.

by Morgan Merbeth, Sussex, WI

alleyways

We run down the empty alleyways
the cold wind tousling our damp hair
the smell of cigarettes
and rain, clinging to our
warm bodies, we laugh,
eyes flash in the
moonlight that
shines above
us.

by Lucia Bianchi, St. Helena, CA

3 Poems of Apology

I: Dad

I, probably, should have
Apologized
Two or three times before.
Life moves so fast
And I, well,
I grew up
And moved on
And simply just forgot.
I'm sorry I took down
My pigtailed
And ripped off
The streamers from my bike.
I'm sorry I let the world
tell me who to be.
I'm sorry
I'm no longer your little girl.
I fear –
I'm no longer me.

II: God

Thousands of years before me
You laid out the rules
And I, a simple know-it-all,
Have done what should never be done.
I used your commandments
As a checklist.
I've lied, sworn, idolized, cheated, stolen
I've made my mother cry
I've made my father turn away.
Thou shall not murder
Does it count if it's me?
I'm running away
You'll find me hanging
But not hanging on.
I won't sin anymore
I'm sorry.

III: Two-Year-Old Me

I'm sorry for damaging
Your porcelain skin.
I'm sorry for cutting off your hair
And dyeing it over and over and over
Trying to change
I'm sorry I wasn't good enough
I'm sorry I didn't laugh that often
And I'm sorry I loved too much.
I'm sorry I forgot to protect you
I'm sorry I forgot to love you
I'm sorry I forgot to remember you.

by Hannah Cabral, Ormond Beach, FL

What Is Free

"The worst things in life come free,
Because the best are usually taken."
With that, she closed the book.
Her eyes like fire.
Hands trembled malignly.
Two hearts laid on the table.
One gun sat halcyon in the drawer.
Screams deafen children's ears,
But nobody apprehends the silence.

by Kirsten Dalley,
Bishop's Falls, NL, Canada



Photo by Georgia Walters,
Beckenham, England

It Happens

So much changes in a year.
Snow melts into a slow drip drip drip
that erodes into spring
and it swells into some sort of scab
you can't stop picking, or
that won't stop picking you.
It pushes your ribcage out
and tears the soft underbelly
of a comfort since lost.

Rushing all too soon into summer
and everything stops.
Because there are cotton candy clouds,
and smiling children with popsicle lipstick,
and past-bedtime bags under their eyes.

But there isn't anything,
and it falls apart soundlessly.
The trees in the forest
that fell when no one could hear,
will lose their leaves soon ... sorry.
Fall is a slow explosion
of all there ever was.
Leaves die, trees die,
people die too.

And it's this unstoppable lava of time,
that moves so slowly,
yet no person on this godforsaken earth
could catch it.
It just trudges into
winter trenches and
we all sleep.

Winter's broken fingers
try to fix the broken mess
their snow created,
yet frosted windows and inviting lights
do nothing to conceal
the agony of the end,
the pain in yet another new year,
as the snow melts.

by Graci Homany, Chagrin Falls, OH

We Search

We search for wi-fi hotspots
everywhere we go.
But some people
search the end of the world and beyond
for a hot meal.

by JP Saroya, Edmonton, AB, Canada

Slacker's Lament

I can look for a better way to say it,
or I can say it simply.
I'M BORED.
Bored with searching and finding and
losing and life,
bored with looking for a better way to say
the things in my mind,
and bored with looking for hidden,
true beauty
among the dryness of my modern life and
computer light.

Oh. And the construction and earthworks.
I tire of the dirt
and decay and decay and decay
that starts from birth and continues on
in life,
extending into some dumb kid's decaying
words.

yet, it –
the beauty – exists.
just not most of the time.
Most of time it's this.
too tired to dream or think,
while my soul sits surrounded by the
midnight and shagginess and
sickness
So I write. Because why not.
I write though I know there is nothing
to find.

Nothing here
but digital notes, random minds,
nebulous neurons and the strings that
they ride.
Strings that connect nothings to
not-much-maybes,
roads ending in culdesacs.

Yet I still try to rhyme.
I guess the answer deals with time –
I have plenty of it
and I'm wasting it while fearfully waiting
to die.
Additionally, we're all looking for patterns
in this poor patchwork
made by a madman or a monster or nothing
but the
driest of science
(like it has been foretold in the DVDs they
pop in at school.
the ones where the twitching rationalists
compare Bor's boorish experiment to
vintage video games,
so the cool kids think they're chill
[and so is science!].
Though, if that's science, I no longer
can consider myself a man of
objectivity and earth.)

To continue with earlier assertions,
now recalled,
I'm also bored of repeated words.
Such as:
"Why
so bored with life, son?"

If the random world offers us each a
personal refrain,
this is the one I hear.
If I was meaner I'd say "neither of us
know life, maybe.
And in a worst-case scenario,
my simple, easy dreams are no better
than yours,
you sicko."

So, to repeat,
I AM BORED.
I long for the trees and the cold winter wind
ripping into my flesh,
as I lie under fresh deer furs, still slicked
with frozen fat,
and touch someone else's skin,
feel the curve of their back,
swallow their rich scent and find no
boredom in that,
while hoping neither of us ever decays
or ages,
or at least never ages into something
sunken and strange,
while wind whistles through the cave
and I try to find contentment in the stars
and their endless reign
over the night, until time collapses
and all that was birthed is returned to the
oblivion or greatness whence it came.

but no, not that.
it's not that way.
and best leave words like "whence" to
Wordsworth and the dead-breed,
so elevated in their simplicity.
Don't want to sound like a parody of
your average dewy-eyed
boy-"poet" with his dreams and dramas.

But I truly do want that wild wind
to blow in my heart and on my skin.
I want emotion,
because I'm bored with misplaced cynicism,
and bored of being civilized.

Such senseless, weak words
I write.
A moan would contain more heavenly depth.
I'll turn to the stars and exhale all my breath
in a wordless song and then breathe in
the night deeply.
I'll never be of bored of fresh air,
only breathing
and its maddening motion and steadiness
when stuck in this, comfortable, though
shabbily furnished room,
with the rabbit-eared tv and chipped
wardrobe,
in the throne that I was tied into by no one
but everyone.
Oh, boring world!

by "John," Shavertown, PA

Mastery

It's a game of mastery
with cue cards of
equations, calculations
for perfection.
Here, in the cluster of
aspiration and ambition of
raw-boned, slender smile.
Better the bruise
leaping into lengths of fantasy.

by Megan Tyler,
Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Inspiration

Dreaming in the dark,
half delirious with sleep,
I begin to write.

by Cianna Choo, Yardley, PA

Who Will Cry for the Raven?

Sunshine sauntered across the sky,
kissing the leaves,
eagerly lined up along the road
in anticipation of her lips.
Blushing green,
myself among them.

When I saw it.

Just wings folded back
like unopened love letters.
Feathers
reflecting the light
like a pile of hairs huddled on the floor
of the barber shop.
Legs splayed.

Maybe he'd been setting off
to find his Canaan of milk and honey,
his Asia of silk and spices,
his America of opportunities.

Or maybe she'd been a 'flyin'
to that nest of twigs and bark,
little girls' bright pink hair ribbons and
plastic party streamers,
where her three little chicks are waiting still.

When that unprecedented gust of wind,
that gory rush of rain,
uncontrollable peals of laughter,
iridescent ichor of pain ...

My uncle once told me
We all go from one place to another.

No matter if
you're a billionaire or a beggar
a tycoon or a typhoon
an elephant or an eggplant
a human or a raven.

Some of us just reach the destination faster,
Some of us easier.
Some of us wish we weren't on this road,
Some wish the road wasn't so rocky,
Some wish the road wasn't so long.
Some of us get there by climbing and
clinging with our cut and callused fingers,
Some are carried on others' backs,
or more often,
the Feet of Fate.

I wanted to ask the raven,
neither buried in wood nor Earth
nor cradled in flames.

Not to be written eulogies,
not to be stay alive in thoughts and prayers,
not to be laid among flowers nor tears
of gold and silver and every other color ...

But I turned my cheek away,
from that he or she,
cold meat, rotten over, on the rain-patched
pavement
and offered it, instead, to the smiling sun.

by Nicole Kim, San Jose, CA

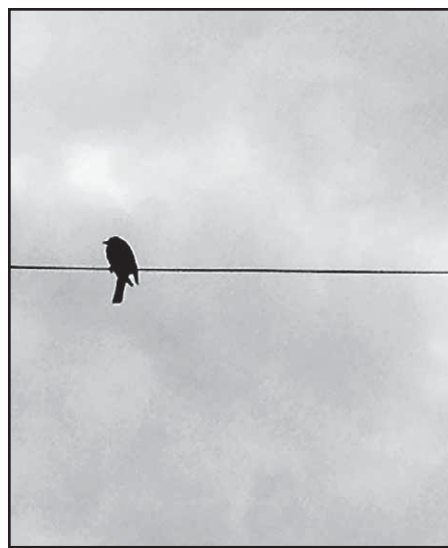


Photo by Kaitlyn Snedeker, Centerville, OH

I believed daisies grew from gutters

september was the storm that ripped
through my ribcage
and you were my favorite tune to hum
back then,
back when after you left
I used to trap myself behind the glass
to move
the hands of the clock
believing I could resist time if I just
pushed hard enough

then it was july and the tick-tock fought me
while for the first time I fought
for a breath of stale air that
tasted like nostalgia
and uncertainty
and worst of all, you

yesterday when I wiped my finger across
the banister
a layer of memories crumpled beneath
my fingertips but
I bit my tongue before I could lick the
dust because
it is better to bleed in my mouth than
in my heart

if time doesn't stop for the greatest of
the living then
why should it stop for the already
deceased, so
it is almost september again
which marks the anniversary of the death
of what could have been
and I promise you,
I am no longer thinking about us tomorrow

by Rebecca Tseng,
Taipei, Taiwan

Why I Wear Long Sleeves

I try to hide
The stripes on my sleeves
Because if they see
They won't ask if I'm okay
They'll tell me to stop
They'll tell me to smile
But they won't give me any reason to.

by "Eileen," Littleton, CO

Canoeing

The summer after you died,
I wanted to jump
out of a canoe.
I swear I saw reflections
in the water of the broken
toy accordion you smashed
against my wall, the mountain dew
stains on your carpet,
and wrinkled monopoly money.
I mistook the wind
for your crackled megaphone voice,
dry from smoking god-only-knows-what.
My fingernails dug
into my skin, and my arms bled
the ink of your handwritten,
unfinished short stories.
I come from a family
of writers, drug addicts,
and healthcare professionals.
I wonder if other families
have daughters who want to jump
out of canoes.

by Courtney Cox, Nicholasville, KY

Deliberate

The way my father's fingers
rise and fall with the grave
of a bobbing sun
as he crafts a pie crust
that will soon fall apart;

the singular purple stroke
dripping with pride
that she spends 257 breaths
dusting across the canvas;
your words,
expertly cut from sapphires
with subtle edges
that embed themselves in my skin
as you meticulously lay out
all the reasons we will not last
the same way you drape my dresses
across the polka-dot armchair
that bears witness in the corner of the room.

Everything so planned,
so precise,
that I cannot stop a surge of respect
from curling my toes
as I watch the doors
close
with me behind them.

by Sarah Bridgeport, Columbus, OH

dad, do you know I'm here?

he stays in the basement
for hours at a time,
abusing his eyes
with the white glare
of an ipad,
abusing his lungs
with clouds of black
until
secondhand smoke
has become
my oxygen

by Emily Xu, Brooklyn, NY

The Phantom Girl

It's now 9:02 and the blue bubble,
lonely, surrounded
by an infinite sea of
blank space, is waiting
for the phantom girl's response.
Waiting to see her blonde hair,
so blonde it's as if the sun reached down
and licked it,
streaming over her shoulders
down her terracotta back,
her slate blue eyes
rustic and industrial,
her cherry nails,
the paint freshly dried.
Waiting to feel her small warm hands
sliding down my back,
her pale pink lips
brushing against mine,
letting me taste the mint gum
she had chewed on the train earlier,

It's now 9:03, and the blue bubble still
sits alone.
There had been some hope this time,
but now I can feel her summer blonde hair
coiling itself around my neck,
like a snake around a tree,
squeezing until the last
breath of optimism escapes my bloated lips.

by Caleb Miller,
Brooklyn, NY

For My Heart

Don't worry if the roof will cave in
above you,
or the rotted floors crumple beneath
your feet.
Allow the portraits to remain crooked,
Pristine, beautiful, perfect lies that they are.
While the harsh, malevolent, vicious truth
still walks upon the earth, buried
under suppressed memories.
No adhesive can mend what's broken
from the start.
Walk out into the light and keep walking.
Don't think. Don't pause. Just go.
Don't even say goodbye.
Allow time to smooth away scars,
invading the
dust and shadows that have gathered in
your heart.
Learn to trust and love again.
Quit agonizing over fractured emotions,
painful memories,
the screaming, shouting, angry words;
or if anything in your life is going right.
Except your vigor. And your loves.
Explore your heart – decide first what's
inside it,
then pursue it with a passion.
Don't look back on what will never change
or grieve for what never was.
New memories and dreams will fill
these cracks.
Accept life as it is, and take it as it
comes through
your open door to gather on your couch,
Waiting patiently for you to heal, as it
reminds you
that you're loved.

by Angela Solon, Springfield, IL

Abecedarian

Astoria-bound
C-train,
down east by the railroad tracks.
Falling far.
Gates open.
Heaven comes down,
illuminating tomorrows that
just never came.

Kites ceased flight,
lowering themselves in
miserable knowledge that
never has become forever.

Oblivion lost, mourning becomes
profound for the kings and
queens of nothing,
raising up to be
something. They never got a chance,
those
unhinged souls.
Vagabonds,
X-ed out by the future.
Your Astoria-bound C-train did not
ever leave its
zone.

by Kinsley Prendergast,
Mebane, NC

Lighter

ignite me and I will dance,
yearning for your propane, before I
flicker in favor – your catalyst,
I recoil from your heavy hand,
forged in your grip, for I am the
inferno, I covet your flick – my
companion in misdeed, to burn
and wither away the devil in between
your lips, plead to void me free
from this thrill and I will glint in recital,
set aside my vices, for you are raveled –
my pine for destruction from your thumb
on the silver spark wheel that is my spine,
in this detriment, kindle the
fuel with lament, once the ashes
fade.

by Brianna Zuniga,
Royal Palm Beach, FL

girlhood

This shop is full of Charlottes and Emmas
And I can see that their fingernails are
bleeding
But most are only watching their pink
lips move
Their skin is made of cream and porcelain
I wonder when they lost the moon dust that
filled the gaps in their bones
And when they traded rubies for black eyes
And how no one can see the dreams that
leak from their ears
It's hard to comprehend how oblivion is no
match to a painted face
How they don't see underneath
Under their fabric of being
What they're hiding when heads are turned
And the city is quiet

by Caja Leshinger, Bayport, NY

movie star

He tugged the flower crown from her head
and it
caught on her hair
twisting and tangling and
not at all like the movies,
and she smiled
a few strands of hair lighter and eyes a few
shades brighter and maybe she wasn't
meant to be a movie anyway.

by Anima Shrestha, Lilburn, GA

Marine Metamorphosis

Its chains and locks,

A dominating embargo.

The rejection of joy.

Its cold, metal links,
Void of bliss.

An azure cocoon in shackles.

I knew metal to have no color.
A slight nuance in the blinding luster,
A frozen reflection of emotion.

A new sound; the chains begin to unravel.
A subtle polyphony,
Dissonant wind.

Within the steel, muffled voices.
A mad man's symphony,
Razing all but sadness.

From the chains,
Grotesque, blue wings.
Sorrowful, marine metamorphosis.

The distorted faces,
Painted on the wings,
Cry for retribution.

by William Choi, La Canada, CA

Good-bye, Sun

When the sun rose that morning,
I told you, then and there,
That my lips were poison,
That my venom would leak,
Dripping down your tongue and staining
Every last organ in your body;
And what did you do about my warnings?
You took me into your arms
And you held me
Kept me warm,
Wrestling with my dark side until
Dusk set in
And the winds started to blow,
Softly and first, growing more violent
With every passing cloud
Until one just blew a bit too fast,
Too far,
Swallowing the sun.

I'm still waiting for tomorrow morning,
But night's smoky blanket
Is as stubborn and greedy as me:
She doesn't want to share the sun –
I suppose I don't deserve him anyway.

by Camelia Alikashani,
No. Vancouver, BC, Canada

in late hours

my thoughts tonight
are equal parts arresting
and demanding,
matching the shrill of silence
in my ears and the cold elegance that

I've learned to call the sound
of my pulse, rushing harshly past
my ears which I clamp tightly to this pillow
that is never you.

i stare up at the ceiling and start
to feel hollow, as if all I am amounts
to bones and this ache that has become
so natural to my brain that I almost
can't notice.

Around 3 the sky becomes brown,
polluted with light. Something wanted to rob
my view of the stars, the only thing that I
sometimes believe you can see too.

Every time I swallow there is a fist at
my throat,
and I'm aware of hands that aren't yours,
pressing deep into the curvature of my spine
to make my muscles ache, and paralyze me
until morning.

I haven't told you that
we'll have cotton sheets
when we live together.
They're light. Did you realize
I can't sleep without blankets?

Exposed skin in late hours
has always made me scared,
as if fabric simply protects me
from what lives in the absence of light,
and the absence of you.

I haven't told you that
I'm embarrassed about my collarbones
but in the late hours before I knew you
I wished someone could love them for me,
just like I've always loved the curvature
of shoulder blades.

I haven't told you that
with the right words
my stomach twists
and I can't help but let myself
love you, despite how guarded
I used to be.

I lie here painfully,
juggling ideas of bare legs tangled
in cotton sheets, your lips
by my collarbones, and mine
exploring your shoulders.

by Haley Boyer, Windsor, CT



Photo by Dyllen Nellis, Los Angeles, CA

The Descent

I think I know the ending:
There's a fire I can't explain.
An intense heat, smoke like a sheet
Over streets that haven't seen rain.

I see the life descending,
The breath that whistles away.
Safe and sound becomes destruction bound
And no one wants to stay.

And this is our decline,
Hiding in the dark.
The rain falls and the thunder calls
As the sky begins to part.

I think now is the time
We accept what we have done.
A final cry, a burnt-out sky
Until the pain is gone.

by Miah Owens, Shrewsbury, England

Under the Veil

straight smoothed silken hair:
a veil for the chaos that's
dancing under there

by Rhianna Vergeer, Washington, DC

Replacements

i.
In Tokushima,
sudachi swells after rain,
lemon scent imbues.

ii.
Naka River runs
outpacing taupe panthers to
sea finish line.

iii.
In Tokushima,
tall edifices replace
pink cherry blossoms.

by Lisa Zou, Chandler, AZ

Reasons Why It's Hard to Call

Look, you're
too cute for words.
Too easy to please,
too hard to appease
Too hot
too cool
Too embarrassing
for school
Too much awkward
too much drama
too much headache
too much llama (what?)
too much honey I can't see
why you'd do that to me
too much you too much me too much for me
Too unnecessary.
Too cowardly.
To like you so much
my chest aches
(but maybe that's my asthma, or a panic
attack coming on).

by "Rose," Castro Valley, CA

Hello

Take it.
Take it all,
And act as if you haven't already.
You can pretend as if you don't ignore me,
But I know the truth.
We used to talk until 3 a.m.
About nothing.
Now, the phone feels heavy in my hand.
I don't even remember
How to say
Hello

by Kylie Doupnik, Harvard, NE

Collision

I remember the colors:
crimson dancing with electric blue;
every shade in between expanding
like ink petals blooming in water.
(Such a psychedelic consommé it was)
Rich mauve seeps out;
melts into rivulets of deepening ocher,
branching into skeletal fingers that
reach toward me.
Sunshine
(her favorite)
of a freshly concave metal surface
speckled with scarlet
glinting in the evening light
Her breath flows in webs of smoke
and spirit.
It's beautiful to look at
the way the waning sunlight lights
her hair in embers
The way the green in her eyes greets
the blue of the sky
And I saw my reflection in the glassy
surface.
Mauve keeps flowing
over her scarlet head,
enveloping her in effervescence
and her blue-jeaned legs sigh and embrace
the glittering cement
I stood there
eyes chasing her shadow as it shrank
with the sun
Orbs of light flashed in the corners of
my eye and
unfamiliar frequencies greeted my ears
and I still see her but
all I can remember now is the colors.

by Deana Zhu, Ann Arbor, MI

Dreamer

When the world is snatched,
From beneath a mother's feet,
She falls.
And a man loses hope,
When he stumbles.
But when a child has no instrument,
They sing
And when they have nothing to their name,
They dream
When they have no knowledge,
They learn
And when they have no books,
They think themselves
To sleep.

by Ellanora Lerner, New London, CT

Petals

A blessing in disguise or a curse upon
a platter?
I tried to find a reason but the reason
didn't matter
As I searched my soul lurched, cartwheeled
across the table
I find myself swimming, drowning more
than I am able
A poplar tree plays like rough ocean waves
in the wind
The grass is getting weary, more gray as
I begin
to find pieces in my eyelids, in cabinet
drawers across the room
The most dangerous of poisons were
your petals in bloom

by Sabrina St Angelo,
Niagara Falls, ON, Canada



Photo by Yasmin Gulec, Istanbul, Turkey

Teenage Anthem

Our frontal lobes
Are still developing
And we will sleep when we are dead
Dipping pizza rolls in Nutella
We are invincible
At the moment
Vaguely aware
Of the looming future
Before us
Hitting the town
With our amazing metabolisms
And good skin
Forever sticking with friends
And skipping out
On education
Every now and again
Passionate and emotional
Always in the moment
We do what we want
Starry nights
Bridge graffiti
Sweaty soccer games
Windows down
And music on
We may be irrational
But at least we aren't afraid
To live

by Stella Rounsefell, Aiken, SC

Silence

What used to be light and breezy, like
warm summer kisses, like cool white
stones and ivy walks
Turns
its face to look at me
Turns
so I can see every freckle on its lips
and in its eyes
Turns
and grabs me with its sticky fingers
(fingers I used to adore more than yours)
They push me down in the cold
You see me scream
But your stone is pulled back by its cracks

by Maya Kuchan, Palo Alto, CA

Goldfish

Between my sore fingerbeds lies
The twitching stitching
Of what I made of today.
I love my lace dress
Yet my stomach aches with uncertainty
I tip backwards on my one-inch heels
I will never get old enough to stop playing
Stumbling
And catching myself
Like a fish in the pond
But I'm always thrown back.

I pull the fabric down
Afraid to show my dry knees
Afraid to show the parts of me –
As I turn, I do not
Twirl
I am hurled
Thrown into a circle of
Pinches and pokes

My wrist is dangled in the air
The fishermen gasp
I drown in the salty sea of their laughs
Each one piercing my back like
Harpoons
But I am no Moby Dick

I am left to pull back my hair and walk away
Tracing the lace
As I nervously wait
For someone to accept every part of me

Maybe that's what hurts most
That even this beautiful dress
Cannot make a beautiful me.

by Grace Brodeen, Jacksonville, FL

Petty Dislikes

I do not like loose change
Or when apples make my hand sticky
I hate being hot
And taking showers early in the morning
I despise alarms
And over-frosted cupcakes
I think cran-apple juice is too sweet
And never liked scrambled eggs
Hangnails drive me crazy
And cough medicine tastes like metal
My hair is impossible to keep tangle-free
And neon yellow makes me cringe
And I think
That's all right

by Liliana Tomlinson, Camarillo, CA

A Shaft of Ash

I remember her hair –
Limp like the sky had licked it dry.
I remember ellipse moon fingernails,
Straying from her face, awry.

I remember dove eyes riveted to my own,
Those pale doves in mid-flight.
A face that shadowed its past,
Hands that held me, she held me tight.

She shut her eyes, and I shut mine.

Nine years old, it was in a shaft of ash.
Not a floor above, not a floor below.
Just a button to be home,
One more blink – she would know.

But the lift, it stopped, and hark –
For a man to walk.

In he came, a nameless name.
It was dark, but darkness talks.

An offer for food, was it?
She jerked no, the shaft did too,
dismembered.

His eyes leered close, their color –
Deep, dark, bruised – she still remembered.

Doves flutter open.
She gasps, fazed,
For a moment.
“Go on,” I say, painfully hazed.

She closed her eyes, and I close mine.

An obfuscous blur,
From there on out.
A “scream,” a “shout,”
A helpless bout.

To a corridor on the bottom floor,
Where shadows strip the tiles.
He did the same,
Beat, abused, hurt; nobody to dial.

She winced now, pulled away.
My touch for the thief's, she mistakes.
For he took what she prizes now,
Innocence, with its pearly wisps –
all was plagued.

So as the elevator panel startled 0, rather red,
The shaft opened us to the world.
And her eyes, they shrink, redolent of a day
When she could do nothing to stop the
violence hurled.

And I remember clasping her shaking back.
I remember telling her,
“You're safe. You're safe.
There's no one when there's Mother.”

But she remembers most of all.
She remembers knowing nothing at all.
Even when the world was in tumult,
The child, she was a child, after all.

She remembers the shaft of ash.
She remembers that everything was stolen.
For when she tries to shut her eyes,
The world – it pries them open.

by Meha Srivastav, Milwaukee, WI

Departure

A tree in summer:
The trunk of a U-Haul truck,
I never said “bye.”

by Hayat Cherif, Louisville, KY



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THE BEAST OF CRETACEA

Master storyteller Todd Strasser reimagines the classic tale of *Moby-Dick* as set in the future—and takes readers on an epic sci-fi adventure.

A distant planet.
A fearsome beast.
An epic sci-fi adventure.

THE BEAST OF CRETACEA

TODD STRASSER

When seventeen-year-old Ishmael wakes up from stasis aboard the *Pequod*, he is amazed by how different this planet is from the dirty, dying, Shroud-covered Earth he left behind. But Ishmael isn't on Cretacea to marvel at the fresh air, sunshine, and endless blue ocean. He's here to work, risking his life to hunt down great ocean-dwelling beasts to harvest and send back to the resource-depleted Earth. Even though easy prey abounds, time and again the chase boat crews are ordered to ignore it in order to pursue the elusive Great Terrafin. It's rumored that the ship's captain, Ahab, lost his leg to the beast years ago, and that he's now consumed by revenge. But there may be more to Captain Ahab's obsession. Dark secrets and dangerous exploits swirl around the pursuit of the beast, and Ishmael must do his best to survive—if he can.

TODD STRASSER is the internationally best-selling author of numerous books for children and teens, including *Fallout* and the classics *The Wave* and *Give a Boy a Gun*, which are taught in classrooms around the world. Todd Strasser lives in New York.

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