



Baily's Beads

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH AT BRADFORD
300 CAMPUS DRIVE, BRADFORD, PA 16701



Baily's Beads are the highest points of light that appear around the edge of the moon at the solar eclipse. The beads are created by sunlight passing through the moon's valleys. The last bead is the brightest, resembling a diamond on a brilliant ring. This phenomenon lasts but a few spectacular moments.

Submission Guidelines

Baily's Beads is always looking for original pieces that reflect our community, culture, or current events in a distinctive and inventive way. We accept poetry, fiction, performance poetry, music compositions, and creative nonfiction (memoirs, essays, commentaries, interviews, and travel and nature writing). We also accept art: photography, paintings, drawings, mixed media, and sculpture.

If you would like to submit your work for the next issue, please send it to bailys@pitt.edu with a separate cover sheet containing your name, contact information (address, e-mail, and phone), title of your piece, and genre or medium.

So that the staff may judge anonymously and fairly, we ask that your name does not appear on the work itself. We ask that you double-space prose and single-space poetry. Authors may submit up to twenty pages. Images should have a resolution of 300 dpi and be saved as a jpeg file to ensure a high quality print. We ask that each author/artist submit no more than ten pieces each year.

Entries can be sent electronically to bailys@pitt.edu. We accept submissions year-round. By submitting, you agree to allow the staff to use your work in *Baily's Beads* and its promotions.

Awards

American Scholastic Press Association

- 2004 First Place with special merit
- 2005 First Place with special merit
- 2006 First Place
- 2007 First Place
- 2008 First Place with special merit
- 2010 First Place with special merit
- 2010 Best College Magazine Award
- 2011 First Place with special merit
- 2011 Best College Magazine Award
- 2012 First Place with special merit
- 2012 Best College Magazine Award
- 2013 First Place with special merit
- 2014 First Place and Outstanding Theme
- 2015 First Place
- 2016 Best College Magazine Award

Columbia Scholastic Press Association

- 2004 Silver Medalist
- 2005 Gold Medalist
- 2005 Silver Crown Award
- 2006 Silver Medalist
- 2007 Crown Award
- 2008 Gold Medalist
- 2011 Gold Medalist
- 2013 Gold Medalist
- 2014 Silver Medalist

Associated Collegiate Press

- 2001 First Class with 3 marks of distinction
- 2003 First Class with 2 marks of distinction
- 2004 First Class with 3 marks of distinction
- 2010 First Class with 2 marks of distinction

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Editors' Note

This edition of *Baily's Beads* hosts many unique and surprising pieces, ranging from intriguing fiction, thought-provoking poetry, and inspiring nonfiction. For the first time in the history of *Baily's Beads*, we have incorporated performance pieces, including musical compositions from Professor Joshua Groffman's class and from the community, as well as slam poetry from various poets who performed at the Open Mikes. With these pieces you will find QR codes so that you can listen to audio of the performances while reading lyrics or composers' notes in the magazine.

We are also publishing winners of our Seven Word Contest in this issue. For the contest, each author created a piece of writing that incorporated a selection of words chosen by the staff: *lurched*, *chortle*, *attic*, *incite*, *icepack*, *beeswax*, and *orifice*. The goal of this contest was to herald new and creative pieces that tested the writer's ability to work around challenges. We received many excellent entries in all genres, and the staff chose three winners and three honorable mentions. In first place we have the poem "Remember," by Aaron Smith, second place the poem "Delilah and the Hopeless Romantic," by Dan Jones, and in third place, the short story "Symptoms of a Different Reality," by Maya Bingaman.

We received a wide range of general submissions, including free verse and poetry in forms such as haiku and sonnets, an immersion journalism piece about the infamous Palm Sunday tornado of 1965, a fantasy story, and two pieces that emerged from last spring's dramatic writing class, the screenplay "Faster Than My Bullet" by Brianna Henry and the monologue "Smarty Pants" by Patricia Blakesslee.

Finally, we would like to offer our thanks to Dr. Nancy McCabe for her dedication and guidance in helping us ensure *Baily's Beads* continues to be an intriguing and entertaining literary magazine. We'd also like to offer our thanks to Professor Anna Lemnitzer for her assistance in

organizing art and design for the magazine. Also, thanks to Dr. Josh Groffman, our Music and Performance Coordinator, for helping ensure the performance pieces were all coded for the magazine. Thanks also to Jeff Guterman, Kim Whitney, and the rest of the Division of Communication and the Arts and the Office of Academic Affairs for their support of Baily's Beads. Finally, we'd like to thank William Murphy for hosting many of the open mikes.

Editors-in-Chief

Isaac E. Payne

Jayden Pire

Shahada Thomas

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Untitled — *digital photography*

Matthew Brahaney



The Unique Challenge of Alzheimer's Disease: Remembering Those Who Forget

Brady Major

Alzheimer's is a disease for which there is no effective treatment whatsoever. To be clear, there is no pharmaceutical agent, no magic pill that a doctor can prescribe that will have any significant effect on the progressive downhill course of this disease.

David Perlmutter

The silent killer. The neuron destroyer. The long goodbye. Alzheimer's saps away identity and leaves behind scraps of memory, raiding the brain like a Viking out on a pillaging excursion. Lying dormant, it makes its presence known gradually, with fatal results.

Alzheimer's is born in the brain, sparked when the nerve cells or neurons of the

great computing machine are damaged and killed off over time, impairing important functions and processes like memory, behavior, and thought. This breakdown of neurons that signals the presence of Alzheimer's begins a seven stage process as patients' overall functioning increasingly worsens while their condition rises in severity. At around stage seven, Alzheimer's patients will find themselves in bed more than they are on their feet, with neurons in such a wretched state that they will need help with most day-to-day functioning, like walking, getting dressed, and bathing. The end result is death, after Alzheimer's has pounded its patients into dirt and switched off their ability to do much of anything without assistance.

Alzheimer's is nothing short of an acidic epidemic that shouldn't be underestimated. Every sixty-seven seconds someone in the United States develops the disease, which means that by the time you're done reading this essay, Alzheimer's will have claimed over a dozen new victims. It is the number six leading cause of death in the United States, and is the only one listed that can't be prevented or cured. The disease doesn't discriminate in its cerebral onslaught, with females facing almost double the risk of suffering from it as males. It ravages, depletes, and ultimately ends the lives of untold thousands each year, with a recent annual estimate totaling 700,000. Of these endless casualties, one was my grandfather. This is his story

Martin "Mutt" Dietz was by all accounts a character. I'm sure that if you looked for a dictionary at your local library, you'd find his picture right next to the very definition of the word, his eyes light and amused, as if he had a joke that he was dying to tell you. That sense of fun and mischief carried through

every aspect of his life, making him an exciting person to be around even as he grew older.

"What're you looking at, boy?" he'd playfully inquire from his reclining chair when I was young. He'd fit his wrinkled arms into a boxing position as he squared me up, threatening to pummel me into submission. "Don't make me go twelve rounds with you."

I'd copy his stance, match his gaze, and prepare myself for our hypothetical bout, marking my territory as I shifted my weight foot-to-foot, sending out a punch just a few inches before me. "I'm ready if you are, old man."

"Hey Brady," he'd whisper at dinner. "You know what they say about that girl who lives on the hill?" His eyes brightened as I shook my head, and he took a pause to let his words sink in. "She won't do it, but her sister will!"

Laughter invariably erupted around me, though I stayed silent and smiled only because I thought some of the adults were far too naïve to understand the world of adult comedy and the subtleties of sex jokes masked as punch lines. My grandmother often gave him a slap and a

talking-to. In those moments my mother tried her best to be as authoritative as her own mother, but even she wavered and cracked a smile. She never was good at playing bad cop.

At this point, my grandfather was likely experiencing the first two stages of his Alzheimer's, though, as with most things concerning the disease, you can never be sure. At stage one, there is essentially no apparent loss of brain function, and at stage two, cognition is only mildly affected. During this period, the sufferer will feel normal, and very little change in overall behavior will become observable. Any lapses in memory and thought processes can be easily written off as natural side effects of aging, making it impossible to distinguish the condition from other symptoms of an extended life. It isn't until later that mental decline becomes more visible.

Stages three and four of my grandfather's Alzheimers came like a flash, blinding our family with its power to overcome his mind.

It occurred to me that at one point it was like I had two diseases—one was Alzheimer's, and the other was knowing I had Alzheimer's.

-Terry Pratchett

Stages three and four of my grandfather's Alzheimer's came like a flash, blinding our family with its power to overcome his mind. He faced mild cognitive decline before his brain experienced more moderate disruptions that starkly affected his thinking, memory, and behavior. It is at these stages of the disease that the individual's loved ones begin to notice clearly that something is wrong. The patient's struggles to perform tasks such as paying bills are quite visible. At the same time, the patient's mood grows mercurial and more withdrawn.

Then in my late teens, I watched my grandfather as he scarfed down cut-up discs of sausage or pancakes softened by golden syrup, fascinated at how his mind worked, or rather, by how it had changed.

My grandfather and I ate in tandem there at my

grandmother's table, sipping our drinks in silence until he'd turn to me and begin a conversation, whether to reminisce on his younger days or to simply fill the void of silence. He'd get going rather nicely, the topic and direction of his conversation clear in his head, but slowly as the seconds went on he'd remember less and less of what he'd been telling me. He'd sit stiff in his place, his lips continuing to form words long forgotten by memory, salvaged like scrap metal from his hippocampus.

I watched in sadness as his speech halted, his fork hanging just inches from his mouth, entirely frozen, an imperceptible thought, memory, or word eluding his grasp. I could see him thinking, see his brain at work, trying its best to get back on a coherent train of thought that had already left the station. I was then forced to watch as he grew angry at himself for not recollecting a detail properly. He'd slap his knee in embarrassment and grit his teeth, the conversation abandoned unceremoniously.

I worried if I too would one day end up the same, my mind foggy and only capable

of holding onto memories from decades past, unable against all efforts to hold onto newer, sweeter memories of the present. I imagined how Alzheimer's would rob me of my voice, sentencing me to a life in bed, weakened in flesh and bone. How I would resemble a robot rather than a man, my cerebral circuits shorted beyond repair and my humanity wholly forsaken. It wasn't a fate I'd wish on even the most despicable, monstrous, and unredeemable being in existence.

Suffering is always hard to quantify—especially when the pain is caused by as cruel a disease as Alzheimer's. Most illnesses attack the body; Alzheimer's destroys the mind—and in the process, annihilates the very self.

-Jeffrey Kluger

By the time my grandfather's Alzheimer's had reached stage five and moved on to stage six—severe cognitive decline—he had gone from freely mobile to weak in posture, from self-sufficient to wholly dependent, and from warm and light to cold and rude. Resembling his moniker of “Mutt” more and more each

day, my grandfather's face was disheveled and had gone long without shaving. Sapped of life, he'd hobble around meekly, barely able to support his own weight. Often his bladder, full and hard for him to control, caused him to go in search of the bathroom while my mother, grandmother, and I were out in the dining area playing cards. Sometimes we'd fail to spot him slowly rise, and before we could reach him in time, down he'd go. His bones would simply give up on him, unable to bear the weight of his body. Sometimes I'd have to lift him from the floor myself, or support him with his arm around my shoulder as my mother and I maneuvered him into his chair again.

My grandfather's mood had switched drastically by this time as well, as if he was a completely different man, far removed from the easygoing joker of his pre-Alzheimer's days. Hell, even in his early stages he was pleasant to be around and still playful. By then, however, his emotions were reserved only for spurts of anger and acidic criticism. At the feasting hour—around 5:00 o'clock at my grandmother's house—he would roar from his

chair like a lion reprimanding the pride.

"Is that supper ready yet?" we'd hear him bellow, his vocal cords straining to carry the words, fighting to make them audible.

"It'll be ready in ten minutes, I told you," my grandmother responded sharply for the fifth time that hour, visibly frustrated and wholly exhausted by the endless routine of having to repeat herself over and over and over again.

"Thought I'd have to come out there and make it myself," was his final, crushing blow to her rattled constitution.

His change of mood had an obvious impact on those around my grandfather, especially my grandmother, who waited on him hand and foot, doing far more than should ever be asked of a wife. While both of them had vowed on their wedding day to remain together "till death do we part," the man my grandmother knew, the man she had fallen in love with all those years ago, was gone. She was often cut by his verbal warfare, taking it all to heart. I wanted to comfort her, to tell her the truth she wouldn't—or couldn't—see.

This man is not your husband.

"Momma!" he'd shout hoarsely from his bed, and my grandmother would make haste to the bedroom. My grandfather's memory had regressed to his childhood. As he called out "Momma," none of us could be sure if he was trying to get the attention of my grandmother, using the word as some sort of pet name, or if he was actually yelling for his own mother, who, like his mind, was long dead and gone.

Caring for an Alzheimer's patient is a situation that can utterly consume the lives and well-being of the people giving care, just as the disorder consumes its victims.

-Leeza Gibbons

The work it took to manage my grandfather's worsening condition grew too much for my grandmother to handle, forcing her to seek out the assistance of nurses to pop in and check on him regularly. As if he was a movie star, these nurses were his entourage, primping him up, shaving his disheveled visage, showering away his stink, and dressing him presentably. These

women were steeled to my grandfather's moodiness while giving back to him any mouth he delivered their way. Not unlike a president, my grandfather was virtually never alone. There was always someone to help him walk, relieve himself, get dressed, and halt him from wandering.

Familiar people visited my grandfather's house—close relatives, his own kids, my mother and I—but each encounter was forgotten, wiped from history, deleted from his brain's hard drive. If the hippocampus is truly the photo album of the brain, Alzheimer's had broken into my grandfather's, gotten its hands on the tome, torn out its pictures, and begun to burn them, little by little, starting with the most recent memories captured on celluloid. Near his end, all that would remain of my grandfather's memory would be flashes of his boyhood, which he somehow retained vividly.

This mental strain gave way to immense physical exhaustion as well, leaving my grandfather like Atlas, balancing the world on his crumbling shoulders. Now virtually a vegetable, marking

time, he was bedridden for most of his day. He lay among the tangles of sheets, lifeless, often only able to come out from his room to sit with us for a few hours late in the evening. And when 10:00 or 11:00 pm rolled around, he'd be taken back to that prison disguised as a bed, though he had already slept a good eighteen or nineteen hours out of the day. It seemed an impossibility for him to still be tired, but Alzheimer's had an unmatched hold on him, taking him to depths far too distant to be rescued.

As a writer, I have to admit, there is something darkly compelling about Alzheimer's because it attacks the two things most central to a writer's craft—language and memory, which together make up an individual's identity. Alzheimer's makes a new character out of a familiar person.

-Charlie Pierce

The transitions between each stage of Alzheimer's can vary. Before the second or third stages of the disease are even underway, it is likely that the brain has already experienced

many years of toxic changes, completely unbeknownst to the patient. Only after the patient dies and an autopsy is done can the presence of Alzheimer's become provable with raw evidence.

In 1906, Dr. Alois Alzheimer first recognized the changes the human brain can undergo as he wrestled with the very disease that would carry his name forevermore. Examining the brain tissue of a female who suffered from a peculiar mental condition that had caused memory loss, altered behavior, and language impairment, he uncovered traces of what would later be called amyloid plaques (abnormal clumps) and neurofibrillary tangles (angled bundles of fibers). These clumps and fibers are the nasty devils that today's doctors believe play a critical role in the blocking of communication between nerve cells in the brain and the disruption of the vital processes that ultimately lead to death.

Over a century after its effects were discovered, Alzheimer's remains a mysterious puzzle still unfinished. Professionals have managed to map out the corners of the picture to create a more

coherent idea of the condition, but some pieces have yet to fall into place. Every day that Alzheimer's remains an enigma, it claims an untold number of fresh victims. For those who have reached stage seven of the disease, the journey is essentially at its end.

It is at this point that the patient experiences very severe cognitive decline, the proverbial end of the road.

It is at this point that the patient experiences very severe cognitive decline, the proverbial end of the road. During this final stage, the individual depends upon assistance for regular daily tasks as reflexes slow, muscles lose vigor, and the entire body seems to shut down in response to the near-extinction of satisfactory neurological function. Due to this sapping of life, patients may lack the ability to smile or hold their heads up, as if their own body has given up hope of continuing, cognizant that the end is near. For families and friends of the

patient, stage seven is a waiting game. They begin preparing for the inevitable end of their loved one's life, whenever it may arrive. Not long now, is the only satisfactory timetable for this last stage of the disease.

I remember vividly the first moment that I realized my grandfather was just months away from the end of his own long journey. During the summer of 2014, my mother and I arrived once again for our annual visit, more uncertain than ever about what to expect. How much had the Alzheimer's progressed since we'd seen him last? How was his mind? His body?

My grandmother took me gently by the arm and guided me into the living room. There was my grandfather in that same old chair, his white hair tangled at the sides, his features sagging in a mess of wrinkles.

"Honey, do you know who this is?" she said to him, embracing me lovingly, guiding his gaze onto me. I felt awkward in this moment, part of a test of my grandfather's memory, of his familiarity with faces and names.

My grandfather paused for just a moment, his lips shuffling, trying to put his thoughts into words. "That's Billy," he said eventually, his voice tinged with uncertainty. My heart plummeted. He doesn't remember me, I thought. Me.

"It's Brady, remember?" my grandmother chimed in.

My grandfather's expression then changed from bemusement to joy as he looked up and smiled at me in the way he had always done before the Alzheimer's had worsened beyond imagination.

"Yeah, I know it's Brady," he spoke warmly, his words sounding genuine to the ear. I didn't know if he truly did remember me, or if he was just agreeing with whatever my grandmother said, trying to compensate for his brain's foginess. This is it, I thought. This is the end.

It's a memory that still haunts me, keeping me restless. I can imagine no greater punishment than to forget the faces and names of those I love more than life itself. To look into their eyes and see not a friend or a relative, but a complete stranger, my mind wiping clean all the memories I have shared

with them. The sensation of the familiar becoming strange, the lucid growing opaque.

At the end of that summer visit, my mother and I felt conflicted about departing, overcome by guilt. It felt as if we were leaving my grandmother marooned on an island. We'd cleaned the house, sorted her clutter, washed her dishes, and confiscated her grocery list, hoping that she would lie down for just an hour to rest her wired mind. And yet, after all that assistance, my mother and I felt like we were leaving her when she needed us the most, forsaking her to contend with a disease outside of our control, larger in scope and iron will than any understanding we could levy.

I can't remember whether I said a final goodbye to my grandfather. It's quite likely that I didn't, angry at the state he was in, refusing for that to be the last glimpse I ever got of him, nothing but a corpse rolled up in sheets, mummified. The only thing I recollect from our departure was that he was locked away in his room, like he was always locked away in that room.

As my mother and I began our journey back home, it was a near guarantee that my grandfather's death was nigh, a force so close that it could reach out and tickle his nose with its icy fingertips. At the microscopic level, a war was still raging on inside his head, his brain's last formidable neurons dying off, driving his mind further and further from functioning.

Somehow I knew deep down that I would never see my grandfather again, even though the man I had known and loved had checked out years before, leaving a shoddy doppelgänger in his wake. Part of me wished for his death to come swiftly. It was time for him to be put out of his misery, to be rescued from the disease that had robbed him from us years previously.

The Alzheimer's was like a virus that had wiped him clean of memory, overriding his personality, his functioning, his entire body. Like a puppeteer, it was making him dance, its amusement coming to an end. Now all that remained was to cut his strings.

My grandmother died from Alzheimer's, and it was a big

shock. For the families left behind, it is not an easy closure. It's not a gradual fading. The person is losing so much of their humanity as they're dying. Losing your memories, you lose so much of who you are as a person.

-Rosecrans Baldwin

I do not remember what the weather was like the September day my father and I received the news that my grandfather had passed. What I do remember is that I was burdened with telling my mother that her father was gone. I imagine that day was a nasty one, cold and wet, depressing and grim. At least, it might as well have been for all who were concerned, as if nature responds to human events with its weather systems, gracing the day of my grandfather's passing with somber tones of gray and brown, of muck and degradation, the leaves outside having already lost their colorful vigor in those passing weeks since summer's end. Nature seemed to be telling me—telling all of us—something that day, a warning hidden in its cyclical change of season. Just as our side of the planet was going through a vast change in temperature, precipitation,

and atmosphere following the summer, our family was changing too, now down one special member. My grandfather could never have died in April, during a time when the earth is born anew with flowers and the sun greets the landscape with its warming gaze. It just wouldn't have felt right. It had to be in the cold, barren, and muted months of autumn.

Since the death of my grandfather, my family has experienced a deep feeling of reassurance. Though we will always miss him, his story, that of a fighter brave until the very end, had a resolution as he was sent to a deserving final rest. This last stage of Alzheimer's, number eight, is called Relief.

These days I try to remember the very best of my grandfather, attempting to wipe away the memories of him during his last months. Instead, I remember the days we'd spend on the porch, simply enjoying the weather. In the middle of a scorching summer heat wave, my grandfather regaled me with memories of his military service during World War II, his work as both a lieutenant and member

of the volunteer fire department, and his own youthful trials and tribulations, always taking a break in between stories to make his way over to the banister to hock a wad of tobacco over the side.

As his Alzheimer's grew worse and he started repeating himself and nauseam, so that after a while I could predict the flow and pacing of his deliveries, sometimes helping him along when his thoughts grew too muddled, putting the story back on the rails. He'd turn to me, smile pleasantly, and nod his head, halting a second to take in the breeze before continuing again.

While these conversations were exhausting, I knew that my grandfather appreciated having me there. And though he probably wouldn't even recall our conversations a few hours later, that wasn't an excuse for me to miss out on the opportunity to get to know him better and to experience his challenges. After all, he would forget, but I wouldn't. It seems only right that I'm telling this story now, speaking for a man who was silenced by his own

mind in a cruel twist of fate. It is because of him that I've found the strength to write this essay, and it is in his memory that these words are dedicated.

We remember their love when they can no longer remember.

—Unknown



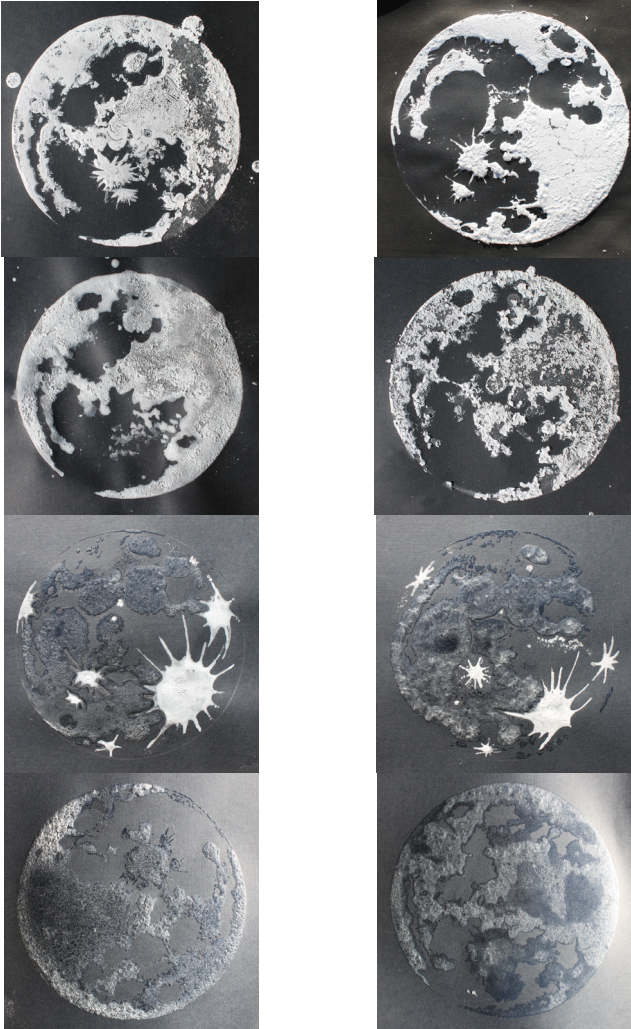
Holding On —digital photography
Austin Stephens

Lunar Prospect

Taryn Pecile

The day I left the moon for the sun,
it was like an eclipse lapped the light from my
throat.
I choked on the stardust,
spit out tiny galaxies
the moon
would never dream of orbiting.
The sun told me I was the brightest thing
she had ever seen.
The moon sighed when I told him,
saying the depressions on his surface were enough
of a fault
to send me rocketing across the galaxy.
The moon is green-eyed.
He has always wanted her rays
to warm him.
They could never quite reach.
Maybe that's why he settled for my hands instead.
Tender, quiet things that can fill the holes on his
surface.
The sun praises me
for trying to rebuild him, but promises me
eternal shine
wine I cannot refuse.
Sometimes, I look up from my home on her
fiery flesh,
a solar flare among many,
feeling sorry for the moon.
I know he blocks her beams so I can take note of
how dim he feels.
Halos the light around his frame so I can see

every curve and scar shaping his being.
I tell him
I'm sorry.
But I can no longer see myself
Mirrored in his reflecting light.
Maybe I never did.



Crystal Moons -sugar, borax, and epsom salt solutions on black cardstock
Amy Gaberseck

A Wild Fire Begins

Tricia Wright

Burning ash trees on a cloudy night
turn the sky a crimson hue.
A map of life etched on a leaf's back.
Nature's brief requiem.



Peacock

Tricia Wright

The bejeweled blue peacock
unfolds its green, lacy feathers
and dragon-swoops from a tree.



Unicorn — *digital photography*
Bryanna Stahlman

We Loved

Keaghan Indermaur

We loved each other
like stolen kisses
in stairwells
after lunch period
and hurrying back
to class before
they know you're
gone.

We loved each other
like loud kisses
in a crowded parking lot
filled with the whole
high school after the
final bell was rung.
We acted as if
no one was there.

We loved each other
like modest touches
under a lunch table
and soft caresses
with our hands.

We loved each other
like sex
on an old couch
lit by a dim lamp,
too impatient to
take our clothes off.
We loved like

a fire known to
no other,
but we burned out
like cheap
dollar store
candles with broken
wicks.

Our love,
red hot,
now
old coals
that no fire
or amount of
fuel can ever
hope to start
again.



Smarty Pants

Patricia Blakesslee

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Center Stage, set looks like a traditional American living room. Couch in the middle, two end tables on either side, and two chairs creating a U-shape. Coffee table in front of couch. Envelope on coffee table. MOM is a middle-aged, well-dressed woman. She sits in the middle of the couch and speaks to the audience as though SON is present.

MOM: Okay, honey, now before I open this, I need to tell you, these results in no way define who you are or how intelligent you are. I know that you are an amazing student. You work so hard at everything you do and that makes me so proud. Remember, though, even the smartest students sometimes have difficulty on these standardized state tests. In my opinion, they are written by morons in suits who have never even been in a classroom and have no clue what it's like to be a kid these days. I mean, look at your big brother. He's an A and B student, he's enrolled in the advanced literature class, but he landed in the level one category. A level one! Which pretty much means, according to these ding-dongs at the state, that he's an imbecile.

(MOM eases to the edge of couch as she gets more excited/passionate/angry about her words)

Can you believe that crap? And that's exactly what these tests are—CRAP! You just can't put a whole lot of weight on them.

(MOM stands and walks to Stage Right but continues to speak)

Your dad can't take a test to save his life. He didn't get promoted because he couldn't pass the test. I mean granted, he isn't as smart as, well, as me *(gestures to herself)*. I mean, I am smart.

(MOM's speech quickens here and she begins to pace in front of the

coffee Table)

Like, I have had a couple of bad tests in my life, but anyway, back to Dad. He still should have scored well enough to get a promotion. Geez.

(FULL FRONTAL and stops)

Anyway, listen, kiddo, I just don't want you to be upset. Seriously, take these results as a big fat nothing. They mean nothing. I shouldn't have even allowed you to take this stupid thing. I mean you can opt your children out now. The state and the school get mad, but oh well. I should've stood my ground and said no. I've failed you, that's what I've done. Dear God, I am a horrible mother. You know, it's all about money, that's what it is. The damn school gets money if YOU get good scores. It's just too much pressure for you kids.

(Pauses and poses as though someone is speaking)

What? Oh, all right, I'll open it.

(Grabs the envelope off the coffee table and begins to open, then pauses)

Okay, real quick, though, tell me what these results mean? *(Pauses and listens)* That's right baby, they mean nothing. They don't say anything about how smart or dumb you are, seriously. Okay, here goes.

(Rips open the envelope the rest of the way. Retrieves papers from the inside and begins to read to herself silently)

Umm—Oh my God! You—you—you ended up in the ninety-eighth percentile! Do you know what that means? You're—you're smarter than, like, ninety-eight percent of all the kids your age in the state of New York, and that includes New York City! I mean, it says so right here. Holy crap! You are so smart. You're just like me, you know.

(Begins pacing again and gestures to herself as though she is pleased. Pace of speech quickens again, sounding as though it's one long run-on sentence)

Grandma used to say I was the smartest of all the grandkids. My first words were, "more French fries." I mean, do you know how hard the *m* sound is for babies? Oh, and I totally should've won my

eighth-grade spelling bee, but the stupid teacher pronounced the word cannibal like canni-BULL, which I say was BULL-shit!

(Pauses as though someone has asked a question)

Huh? Well, yeah, I did have a list, but still, she totally ruined it for me. ANYWAY, do you know what these results mean for your future? You could be valedictorian. You could go to an Ivy League school. I mean, your future is in this envelope. You are like the smartest kid in this city. I should call the school and make sure they know your results. They totally need to know what kind of scholar they have in their midst. Oh my gosh, I have to post this on Facebook, like, right now. Everyone needs to know what a genius my kid is, not like they'll be surprised. I mean, duh! O-M-G everyone will be so jealous!

(MOM exits Stage Right)

Near Seneca Junction Bridge

Patricia Shinaberger

A '65 Pontiac, a box tent, an old man,
all the same vintage,
all the same moldering tangerine hue
beside the river on an August Saturday night
alone with the stars.

On stiffened haunches,
on a cracked mud bank,
he opened a new pack of
smokes, absently tossed cellophane
wrappers ablaze in pink smudge
built to ward off the dag-burned skeeters
eager to suck him bloodless. As the sky darkened,
a carp jumped, sent ripples across his
campsite mirrored in the flat water.

He recalled the good old days when the
GTO and the tent were new and he was young
beside the river on an August Saturday night
alone with the stars.

Scotty

Michael Minassian

Every day, Scotty came into the taxi office. “Hiya, Harry, hiya, kid,” Scotty said, anchoring his eyes on Harry and asking, “Can I sweep up, Harry?”

Harry always nodded his head yes, and Scotty got the broom and swept the waiting room and the outer office, the smell of whiskey lingering behind him like a perfume.

When he finished, he disappeared into the men’s room. Sometimes he’d be in there for a long while, and Harry would say to me, “Hey, kid, go in there and fish out Scotty. Last week one of the drivers found him asleep in a stall.”

Most days, I’d walk as far as the door to the men’s room and yell in, “Hey, Scotty, are you okay? Are you coming out?” Usually, he answered with a loud, hacking cough and came out rubbing the stubble on his chin. Then Harry gave him a couple of dollars, and Scotty’s face lit up.

“Thanks, Harry, thanks. Well, I better be going. So long, Harry. So long, kid.”

One day, Harry left me alone for a few hours while he went to the courthouse to pay one of the drivers’ tickets. Scotty came in while he was gone. His eyes were red and he coughed more than usual, so I let him sweep up and gave him five dollars. About an hour later, Harry came in with bagels and two containers of coffee. I watched him through the steam rising from the blue and white cardboard cup.

“It’s really cold out there,” he said. “Looks as if it’s going to snow. I’ll bet you were busy at lunchtime, huh?” I said yes, nodded, and took another sip of coffee. My desk was stained with countless brown circles from paper cups like the one I was holding. Some of the stains looked like they had been there before I was born.

“Did Scotty come by today?”

“Yeah, I let him sweep up.”

“Did you pay him?”

“Just a few dollars.”

Harry frowned and shook his head. "What did you do that for? Don't you know he'll just spend it on booze?" He drank from his own cup. "Hell, maybe I'm paying you too much."

Later, I went home and took a nap. About an hour later, my wife, Diane, came in and woke me up. I could see right away that she was in a bad mood. Her eyes wouldn't meet mine, and her mouth was pinched forward in a red knot.

"Let's go out to eat tonight," she said. "I don't feel like cooking."

"How about if we have something delivered?" I said. "I don't want to sit in a restaurant. Besides, I need a shower."

"All right," she said, "but you call."

"What do you want?"

"I don't care," she snapped, slamming the bathroom door.

"Oh, Christ," I mumbled. "I'm always getting people out of the fucking bathroom."

"Diane, what do you want to eat?" I shouted.

"I don't care. Just no pizza and no Chinese. I'm sick of pizza. Chicken. Get some chicken."

Her mood didn't get any

better with the arrival of our dinner. We sat in front of the TV watching the news and eating off of paper plates: fried chicken, coleslaw, French fries, and warm buttered biscuits. After a silent meal and two beers, I stretched out on the couch.

Diane came in from the kitchen and asked, "Where am I supposed to sit?"

"What's wrong with the recliner?"

"Oh, forget it," she said. "I'll go lie down in the other room."

The next morning it started to snow. By the time I got to work, over an inch of fine white powder covered the ground. I remembered another snowy day two years ago. About six months before that, Diane and I had met at a summer outdoor rock concert. She was wearing a blue bandanna tied back across her blonde hair. I spilled some beer on her, and that was it. Soon after, Diane moved in with me, and by that Christmas we were married.

That cold winter day, we had been running around in the snow in front of her parents' house. We threw snowballs at some kids across the street and then at each other. Diane kept

laughing as fat flakes wet our faces. Her cheeks blazed red, and I knew I that wanted no one else.

"Look," she said, spreading her arms out and falling backwards in the snow. She moved her arms up and down on either side. She got up and said, "Angels."

"You mean fallen angels, don't you?"

"Joseph the philosopher," she said and pushed me back into the snow.

It all seemed like such a long time ago. My life had gotten scrambled since then. That Friday, the snow provided a good excuse to stay away from home. When I called Diane to tell her I would be working late, she sounded relieved.

The snow had stopped earlier but started again after dark. When the roads started to freeze around nine o'clock, I packed it in. I didn't feel like going home right away and stopped in a bar about a block from the office. I had just ordered a beer when I smelled something familiar next to me.

"Hiya, kid. How about buying old Scotty a drink?"

"Hi, Scotty," I said and bought

him a shot.

He downed it in one gulp and leaned against the bar, grinning at me. Scotty always looked like he hadn't shaved for days, but his beard never seemed to grow. I couldn't guess his age, anywhere from fifty-five to seventy-five. He invariably wore a filthy navy-blue cap. I had never seen the top of his head. As I sipped my beer, he kept talking and nudging me in the ribs with his elbow. I asked him if he had an apartment somewhere.

"Nah. Sometimes I sleep in a shack behind the bar, but only when I have nowhere else to go. It's right next to the railroad tracks. When it's warm, I sleep outside. I go to the bus station, too. That's good for a few hours. What's the matter, kid? You worried about me?" He laughed.

"Don't worry about Scotty," he said. "I can take care of myself."

He nudged me in the ribs again. "How about another drink?"

I bought him a double this time and his eyebrows arched. He sipped it slow while I ordered another beer and a double shot for myself.

"You're an angel, kid. A double shot for Scotty, huh?"

The whiskey numbed me and fogged my brain. Was Scotty a saint, I wondered. Was I supposed to follow him, a drunken disciple? I imagined my eyes looked bloodshot like Scotty's.

"How's old Harry treating you, kid? Not working you too hard?"

"Harry's okay," I said. "He just took some getting used to."

"That's a good one," he barked. "Harry sure does take some getting used to. You're not the first one to say that."

"But I get along with him fine, Scotty," I said.

"Sure you do. Listen, there's not nothing new you can tell me about Harry. I got along with him once, too. Now, I'm going to tell you something. Don't ever tell Harry I told you. Harry and me, we used to be partners. A long time ago we bought a cab together and drove in shifts, day and night, just the two of us. We did pretty good, too."

"What happened?"

"Well, I started to drink, is all. Don't know why. The more money I made, the more I drank. Pretty soon I didn't want to do

nothing else. I sold out to Harry and went on a binge. I woke up two weeks later and all the money was gone, every penny."

He finished his drink and stared at the bottom of the glass. He signaled the bartender for another round. I drank my shot first, but when I took a sip of the beer, everything started spinning, and Scotty swam to the ceiling, grew scales, fins, gills, changed to a fish, an angelfish.

I didn't get out of bed for a day and when I did, Diane was gone. I found a note next to a present wrapped in bright gold foil paper. "Merry Christmas, Joe," the note said. "We'll both be better off apart." Inside the wrapping paper was a red wool cap. I looked out the window at the snow falling in the driveway where our car used to be parked.

By Monday, all the drivers at work had heard of my escapade with Scotty. Harry didn't say much the whole day. Scotty didn't show up at all. I knocked off early and went home. The temperature had warmed up a few degrees, but by the time I had dinner and watched the news, the snow began to fall again. I felt too restless to stay

in the empty apartment alone and called a cab to take me to the same bar where I had gotten drunk with Scotty.

After a couple of beers and some stale peanuts, I asked the bartender if he had seen Scotty. He said Scotty hadn't been in for two days. I started getting worried about him. If the alcohol didn't kill him, I thought, the cold weather would. I remembered a story a friend had told me about the local drunk in his town dying with his head frozen to the wall of a bank.

I went outside and around the back to the small stone shack that Scotty said he slept in sometimes. The door swung open easily. It was pitch black inside, and I lit a match, but the place was empty except for a few broken bottles and some newspapers. The shack smelled of urine, vomit, and bad dreams.

As I walked around the shack and reached the door of the bar, a cab pulled up to the curb. Harry was driving. "Get in, kid," he said.

"Hey, Harry," I said and closed the door behind me. I was grateful for the warmth of the cab.

"What are you doing out

here?" asked Harry.

"My wife left me, Harry," I blurted out. "Took off with the car and cleaned out our savings account."

"Join the club," Harry replied. Harry had been married twice, the last time for less than six months. He peered out the windshield at the driving snow. "What were you doing out behind the bar?"

"I was worried about Scotty. He didn't come into the office today."

Harry shook his head and sighed. "I'll bet he told you his sob story about me and him being partners."

"Yeah, he did."

"And then he told you he had nowhere to live. Slept outside or in that old shack back there by the tracks." Harry laughed softly. "Scotty's an old con artist, kid. He was robbing from the till, so I bought out his share of the cab. But that was a long time ago. Scotty went on to bigger and better things. Only he never lost his taste for the drink."

"I don't understand," I said. "Why do you pay him to sweep up?"

"Scotty and I go back a long way. And it's kind of a ritual. He

cleans the office and I slip him a few dollars. Besides, most of his money is gone. All he has left is the house.”

“The house?”

“Yeah, come on, I’ll show you.” Harry radioed in to the office and navigated his way through the snowy streets. He crossed Main and headed west over the railroad tracks and up the hill. We turned right on Summit Avenue and continued north a few miles. The house on both sides of the street got bigger and pricier the further we drove. About two miles up the road, Harry turned into a long driveway and pulled up in front of a Tudor-style, two-story house.

“Scotty lives here?” I asked.

“That’s right,” said Harry. “Of course, the place needs a lot of work, and he only has his Social Security. But the house is paid off. It belonged to his wife. She’s dead.”

I winced at the mention of the word wife. I missed Diane, at least the Diane I used to know. Harry asked me if I wanted to go home.

“Yeah, might as well,” I said. I still couldn’t get over Scotty and his huge house. Harry put the

cab in reverse.

“Wait a minute, Harry,” I said. I got out of the cab and nearly slipped on the wet snow. At the front door, I pulled off my new red wool cap and hung it on the doorknob.

When I got back in the cab, Harry shook his head and slowly backed out of the drive.

Ode to the Fool

Isaac E. Payne

O Fool, how do you toss your balls of fire
or recite poems of unrivaled wit
for the laughter of men in gilded spires,
for small scraps of food and a place to sit?
Do you now feel fulfilled? Or do you tire
of bawdy halls where your feet often flit?
When your jokes run sour and patrons leer,
do you wish to be, O Balladeer?

Holding those entranced with your lips agrin,
a weaver of words, Iolo Goch, Aneilin.
Many a gleeman died rich and living fame,
for the stories they tell are not just for fun.
Bards are keepers of truth, the honored name.
So, be like the Sea's Eagle, the Awen sun?



Remember

Aaron Smith

First Place Contest Winner

There will be girls, but never one like her.
When you see her, an indescribable chortle will
throw itself from your lips,
landing on the pavement like a flare,
marking the point of no return.
When you meet this girl,
When she glances your way,
you will feel the icepack that is your heart
start to thaw.

Every orifice of your body will be attuned
to her like a radio with a single station.
Her love will lighten you, allow you
to air out the attic you board your insecurities in.
She is the key to all the rooms you've constructed,
the ones that have never seen visitors.
She will incite you to destroy the toxic parts
of yourself, the ones that lurk
in shadows and self-doubts.
Your body will lurch in the direction of her.
All love, her love, is the stuff of beeswax
in which you will be coated.
Remember, there will be girls,
but never one like her.

Delilah and the Hopeless Romantic

Dan Jones

Second Place Contest Winner

She had beeswax smeared all over her lips.
She'd respond to my jokes with a chortle.
She put on some music and shook her hips.
As I watched her dance I felt immortal.
With her hand stretched out, the invite was warm.
As I took her hand, I stood with a smile,
though my insides raged loud like a nervous storm.
I tried to ignore it for a while.
I never thought smoking was persuasive:
smoke lurched through the orifice discreetly,
tasting of beeswax, incite was invasive.
It kissed me on the cheek and said, "Hey, sweetie."
No icepack could chill the flirting undertones.
No nihilist could deny the pheromones.

Symptoms of a Different Reality

Maya Bingaman

Third Place Contest Winner

The walls are grimy and dust cakes the cracks between the floor and the white cinderblock walls. No matter how hard the custodians try to make the place seem sterile, I know it never will be. I've been here for about the past two months— fifty-six days to be exact.

The nurses here are bitter and the only sliver of happiness they find at work is during lunch when they chortle among themselves at the mentally ill patients. They're all middle-aged, overweight employees at a low-grade hospital in the middle of Ohio, and they're making fun of us.

It gets worse. My roommate is a victim of bipolar disorder which only got more severe when her fiancé stopped visiting and Danika found out he had moved on with her maid of honor-to-be. I pity the lady,

really, I do, but it would be nice to go to bed without hearing a full-grown woman cry herself to sleep.

Did I mention that the psychiatrist on our floor thinks the best remedy to all the manic people here is anti-psychotic pills? The people on my floor hate taking pills orally, so you can only imagine what other orifice is fed medication. Now that I think about it, I can see why the nurses hate their job.

I'm only eighteen and sometimes I feel as if I'm the only adult in this part of the hospital. To be honest, I don't even know why I'm here. They keep telling me I'll be going home soon, but when I ask when, they can't give me a date. As much as I hated my life before this, I would take back my attic bedroom, boring school day, and overbearing mother any day over being here a minute longer. I think what I

miss most though is just talking to my girlfriend Miranda. We spent so much time together over the years, not having her is like missing a part of myself.

My dad was a deadbeat alcoholic who mooched off my mom's meager waitress income, and since Mom works at night, she's never really been around either. Miranda is the only person who has been there for me. She's the only person in the world I really trust with my deepest thoughts and who knows my screwed-up history, and sometimes when I tell her things her reaction suggests that she already knew.

I think what I miss most about her is how witty and intelligent she is. Without a doubt, the most insightful person I know. She visits me here about two times a week. It used to be more, almost every day, but when she found out the doctor was changing my medicine she cut back her visits. Miranda told me I'm different on my medications and she doesn't like seeing me that way. She told me to stop taking them altogether, but I still take the pills after she leaves because I know it's my only hope of being free.

My mother despises Miranda. She tells me she's nothing but trouble and probably the reason I've been suspended twice and am in the hospital to begin with. My mom's never met Miranda, but that doesn't stop my mom from calling her a troublemaker. Yeah, Miranda is a little wild, some would say eccentric, but I like that about her. I'm like a whole new person when we're together.

Last year, when I was junior, Miranda had this idea to skip school and go for a drive toward Cleveland. At first, I was hesitant, but I couldn't say no to her. I drove seven hours that day and only got home at 1:00 a.m. but it was exhilarating to tell my mom it was none of her beeswax. My mom and I have had a strained relationship for a while, but this past January is when things got bad.

School was really stressing me out, and I was only getting about four hours of sleep at night. The combination of anxiety and lack of sleep made me say some pretty terrible things. Miranda was my only go-to, but even she couldn't take away all of the negative things in my life. I even snapped at her

once. I was becoming a toxic entity.

I couldn't stand it anymore, nothing was going well for me. I used to hold straight A's in almost every subject, and now I was failing two classes and just barely scraping by in the others. Everyone at school hated me, I could tell just by the glances people gave me in the halls.

I didn't really plan for everything to happen the way it did, but one Friday after school I forced myself up the steps to the bathroom and opened the mirror and picked up an old rusty razor blade. I put on my dark blue winter puff jacket and went for a walk toward the woods behind our house. I don't remember a lot of what happened next, except hearing the brakes of my mom's old 1987 Subaru as it lurched into our driveway. I could see the blood staining my jacket, and at that moment I started feeling guilty because my mom had spent half of a paycheck to get me that nice coat, and now I would have to see her cry not only because of the wasted money, but because her daughter had just tried to end her life but and wasn't smart enough to do the job right.

I'm assuming that Friday afternoon stunt is the reason I ended up in the psych ward because it's the last thing I remember before opening my eyes to the dull white walls and smell of iodoform.

I've gone through the stages of grief and now I just accept my life is basically a shitshow. My mom can barely function because of what I did to myself. Everyone hates me. My dad left, my girlfriend only visits me a few times a week, and I'm stuck in this lousy hospital with grown-ups who can't even swallow a pill for themselves. The only good part of this whole ordeal is that the medicine they give has been making me sleep a full eight hours.

I'm ready to go home.

Just as I finish my self-loathing internal rant, one of the nurses knocks on the door. I don't know why they do this because they come in whether I answer or not. She tells me my psychiatrist is here to see me.

Dr. Melba comes to see me and a few of her other patients about once a week, typically on Tuesday afternoons. She seems different today. Normally, she's really stern and solemn, but

today she seems almost happy. I sit down and we go through the whole routine of how I'm feeling and Miranda yadda yadda yadda, but near the end when our conversation dies down and I expect her to send me back to my room, she pauses and takes a deep breath. I stay sitting patiently and wait for her to stop jotting notes about me. When she finishes, she looks up and asks if I feel like I'm ready to leave here. Sarcastically I say no. I can't help myself, I've been here too long. Dr. Melba ignores my sass and continues on to explain that she wants to try a new medication. She says the medication works immediately since it's going right into my bloodstream, and if all goes well during the injection and I seem okay at our next meeting, I'll be free to finally leave. I agree, and next thing I know she's telling me all about the breakthrough medication and how it's made so many other patients feel better. I stop listening after the whole "going home" part, but I leave knowing that tomorrow at 11:15 a.m. I have an appointment with another doctor to get an injection of Paliperidone Palmitate.

I wake up at 9:00 a.m. and take a shower. Sometimes for kicks-and-giggles, like this morning, I grab the extra universal remote in the lobby area and turn off other residents' TVs as I pass their rooms because it makes them think the government is interfering or something crazy like that.

By the time 11:00 rolls around, I'm back in my room waiting for the doctor to come. A nurse enters with a tray of alcohol wipes and an icepack wrapped in a white washcloth. He tells me to hold out my left arm, and he swiftly cleans the area around my bicep. Next, he tells me to hold the icepack on my arm until the doctor comes. The injection I'm about to get sometimes stings, so they numb the area beforehand. Shortly after the nurse leaves, Miranda walks into my room. I hug her happily because I didn't expect her to come so early, and tell her I'm about to get a new medicine that will allow me to go home. I'm not sure why, probably she's just worried for me, but she seems angry and scared and reminds me that I hate shots. But that isn't going to deter me now.

Dr. Gabe enters the room

with a pleasant grin and asks me if I'm ready for my life to change. I don't know why he makes everything so dramatic, it's just a shot, but I say yes to get the show on the road. He preps the syringe with some clear medicine that comes in a small glass bottle. I do hate needles, so I ask Miranda to hold my hand. She unwillingly comes over and interlocks her fingers with mine. I tense my body so tight that the doctor needs to tell me he is done. I open my eyes with relief and notice Miranda is gone.

I don't realize that I will never see her again.

Maizy

Jaylin Burroughs

Honorable Mention

On the floor of her grandmother's tea room, Maizy sat eating sugar snap peas from a bag that read, "Handpicked, pre-washed sugar snap peas that are perfect for snacking on the go!" Peas were her favorite summertime snack, especially when paired with her grandmother Suzy's homemade lemonade. As Maizy reached for the next pea, her fingers brushed a small green spindly twig. Maizy started and then carefully pulled it from the bag, examining the curly vines that met at one sturdy center stem. She stared in wonderment for a moment as the fable about the little boy and the giant beanstalk came into her head. She chortled to herself as she dismissed the thought and dropped the small stem between the cracks in the wooden floor.

She took three more peas from the bag and then folded it closed before standing and running to the kitchen to return

the peas to the refrigerator. She took one last swig from her glass of lemonade and placed her empty cup in the sink, to be washed later, then dashed out the door to find her grandmother.

"Suzy!" yelled Maizy, "I finished my snack!"

It took a moment before Suzy replied from the shed where the gardening tools were kept, "Over here, sweetie!" As Maizy approached, she saw Suzy's head pop up from the makeshift basement.

"What are you doing down there, Gram?" asked Maizy.

"Oh, just putting some miscellaneous winter gear in storage is all," replied Suzy

Maizy didn't remember seeing her bring any totes, boxes, or bags outside, but her questions were interrupted by a green pickup truck that pulled up the long driveway. This seemed to draw Suzy's attention, and she appeared to be on edge

at the sight of the rust bucket approaching.

A tallish man with a scraggly graying beard hopped out of the truck, but before Maizy could say anything, her grandmother herded her back toward the house.

“Go on inside now, Maizy, and have a snack. Turn on the TV. Clean your room, now dear.” This was all said in what seemed like one breath. Maizy wanted to ask what the rush was, but the look on her grandmother’s face told her that now was not the time for questions.

Inside the house, Maizy’s thoughts began to settle and jumble all at once. The question she had meant to ask her grandmother when the truck pulled up was gone from her memory, but many more questions replaced it.

Who was the man in the green truck with “Buzy’s Beeswax” printed on the door? Why had her grandmother seemed so anxious and on edge? Why did she have to clean her room? What else was there for her to snack on?

She shrugged, not wanting to incite more unanswered

questions, and made her way back to the refrigerator. Upon opening it, she saw that Suzy had some serious grocery shopping to do. There was a half empty jug of homemade lemonade, a nearly gone carton of milk, some pickle juice, less than half a bag of deli ham, her crumpled bag of sugar snap peas, some prunes, and a melting icepack. She was about to open the freezer door when she heard a loud cracking sound in the other room.

She jerked her head to the right and then turned to see that the sound was coming from the tea room, where she had been eating her snap peas.

As she turned around, she lurched at the sight of sparks, green and gold, flying up from the weathered and splintering hardwood floors in the same space where she had dropped the curly stem just ten minutes ago.

She stood in stunned, unmoving silence as long, spindly green vines slithered up the dingy white wall, fusing to form one gigantic stalk that furiously climbed the height of the little farmhouse and appeared to continue climbing out through the attic.

Finally finding her breath and her words, Maizy began screaming, “Suzy!!”

She walked a few steps toward the orifice where the green stem was coming from, growing skyward.

Just as Maizy fell to the ground from shock, the mysterious man who had just driven up the driveway rushed through the door and caught her before she collapsed at his feet.



Mute — *digital photography*
Jordan Darrow

Dare to Protest

Patrick Joseph Martucci

Honorable Mention

*“Dare to protest
the arrest of the black man.
When the powers that be
on’t reflect you and me
it is our duty to stand up
and let our voices be heard.”*

There goes Icepack, spitting rhymes into the cool night, feeling the beat explode through every orifice of his body.

“Damn, son.”

“You like that?”

“It wasn’t half bad.”

“Thanks, Beewhack.”

Beewhack? “Hey, hey, hey man. I already told you once before. It’s Beeswax!” Pft, Beewhack. Icepack be whack.

“Why they call you Beeswax?” he asks.

“Why they call you Icepack?” I ask.

“Cause.” He strikes a pose, a dark silhouette on the roof of a rundown junker. “I’m a cold gangsta rapper that packs in the rhymes. You know what I’m saying?”

I don’t.

He jumps down, sending up two plumes of dust beneath each sole of his Air Jordans. “So, why they call you Beeswax?” he asks again.

“My lips.”

“Say what?”

“My lips are so chapped, my mam says I need some Burt’s Bees.”

“The fuck is Burt’s Bees?”

“Beeswax.”

He chortles.

“What’s so funny?”

“Ah, man, you are. You whack, Beeswax.”

He retrieves a dusty bottle hiding beneath the undercarriage of the junker and takes a long pull, smacking his lips when he’s finished. He offers me the bottle next.

“Nah, man. My pa used to drink so much of that stuff the light in his attic went out.”

“That’s cool,” he says.

I still remember the way my pa’s breath smelled when he lurched forward toward my brother and me, leather strap in hand.

He smacks his lips again. “Didn’t mean to incite you,” he says.

“We good,” I say.

He climbs the junker, taking position once more on the roof, his features gone. He stands there, nothing but a silhouette.

“Wanna go again?”

I cup my hands around my lips, the chapped skin prickling against my knitted fingers.

*“Tikatikatikatitika poom poom.
Again, and again, I walk these streets,
bobbing my head in time to the beat.”*



The House of Seven Garbles

James W. Miller

Honorable Mention

Ilurched, parched, toward the church with the large larch, wholly expecting holy or unholy water to slake my thirst. A mistake—my first—for all Father Peter had was rice wine. For Pete’s sake. I was willing to rake the large amount of small larch needles. Needless to say, some of the needles were heedlessly seeded in the sod, soon to be seen as small larch trees, and then to be sawn as large ones, providing one of the largest largesses of large larch logs ever logged, as logged in the annual annals of logarithms.

As I neared the dilapidated, outdated, iron-gated church, a chortle startled me, since I had no idea what a chortle actually sounded like. Ignoring my aural reception of the oral utterance, I proceeded until I could read the sign: The Church of Quakers, Reverend Peter W. Brimley. Feeling my oats, I was determined to gain entry, a serial killer never entering my mind.

To my dismay, the house of worship was irreparable—pews abused, nave caved, lectern turned, piles in the aisles, gaps in the apse, rood ruined—even the squints were “unsquintable.” The whole holy house was holey; even the wrecked rectory was eerily airy. It had tears in the stairs, cracks in the back, orifices in the office. Yes, Holism was ever-present, an apparent tenet of the tenant. There was no doubt that the decrepit structure’s upper story was going to fall before wintertime; it was, in fact, autumn attic. But what to do now? Warn the whole parish? Let them perish? (Along with Larry Parrish, their new neighbor from Montreal?)

Not wanting to incite Panik (or Pence or Posey, for that matter), I posted Bonds on the condemned property, deducing that a Giant Head Spokesman in charge would prevent any injuries and subsequent lawsuits. The Giant Head Man was early,

was surly, and was surely full of himself. (One might even say bigheaded). And my first thought was that an icepack might diminish the swelling. After all, it was a nice pack (of something) that had caused it. I soon discovered that he had been hitting instructor for the Sacramento ball team, but was dismissed since very few of the Bees' whacks went for extra bases.

Having an April first deadline to decide, I did what any fool would do under these trying circumstances—prayed to God that the next contest would require words that interrelate at least a smidgen. Or that I become more judicious in my wishes.



Palm Sunday

Cindy Nowacki

Palm Sunday, April 11, 1965 would be a date that would go down in history as the one in which a severe, storm-filled weather pattern developed and changed a sunny, warm day into a deadly night. Everyone remembers something different about that particular twister. A string of storms, including tornadoes, ripped through the Midwest, taking the lives of fifty-four people. In the Toledo, Ohio area, fifteen were killed and two hundred and four others were injured. Many say it was the worst natural disaster in the history of the city. Some remember the icy two-and-a-half-inch hailstones as they vaulted off homes and pummeled cars. Others can recall the horrendously eerie reverberation and echo the approaching tornado made. Roaring like a thundering freight train, it hopped and skipped throughout the city, exploding trees into splinters and leaving behind flattened

buildings, homes, and lives. The photographs of the destruction in the *Toledo Blade* will remain forever in my memory.

As a child of only nine, having grown up in the northwestern corner of Ohio and endured cold, damp winter weather, I recall that that Palm Sunday was a pleasant, warm day. Our parents sent us outdoors so that we could work off some of the winter blues. Piles of dirt and cinder-filled snow remained in areas where the sun's rays could not reach to melt the crusty leftovers. Just a few short days before, a fresh snowfall had covered the concrete sidewalks, driveways, and local roads before shovels and plows packed the snow together in neat and tidy piles throughout the county. That day the temperature would climb to a sultry seventy-plus degrees with gusty winds exceeding twenty miles per hour and approaching from the south. After having to stay inside for what seemed like a countless number of months, enduring winter's fury, a nice

day warmed our souls.

April and May are weather transition periods in the northeastern portion of the United States, especially for those areas close to the Great Lakes. It is never an ideal weather phenomenon when dry, warm breezes mix with cold, moisture-filled air. This happens often during the in-between period when the frigid, dank days of winter give way to the temperate, sun-filled days of spring. This transition usually creates turbulent weather, perfect conditions for heavy thunderstorms which more often than not become

It is never an ideal
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intermixed with tornadoes, especially in the flatland areas of northwestern Ohio. I remember how the skies began to turn a sullen deep shade of gray-purple-yellow mixed with churning, spinning clouds. The siren's wails sent people scrambling for shelter.

Most homes built in Tornado Alley have basements for storm shelters. Residents knew

the northwest corner of the basement was the most secure section. It was advisable to seek shelter under something strong and stable such as a heavy table or desk. Most basements were stocked with a transistor radio tuned to the local emergency station and a heavy metal flashlight loaded with fresh batteries.

Some families had tiny storm shelters dug deep into the ground and accessible only by wooden ladders. These burrows,

most lined with brick or concrete walls, were only large enough to fit a family, possibly the family

pets, and a limited number of cherished treasures. Those who were unfortunate enough to have neither a basement nor a storm cellar moved to the innermost area of their homes and covered themselves with mattresses or heavy furniture.

A newly engaged couple, Mary Ellen and Butch, decided to take advantage of the beautiful pre-sunset evening by watching

a movie at the local drive-in theater. The young woman, who would later become my sister-in-law's mother, told me that as Butch parked the car and drew the clunky battleship-gray metallic speaker into the half-opened driver's side window, the sky began to take on a stormy appearance. Adjusting the speaker's volume, preparing the snacks, and settling into a comfortable position, they began the western journey with Clint Eastwood in *A Fist Full of Dollars*. As the "Man with No Name" was saving Marisol, the damsel in distress, the wind began to howl through the theater's parking lot, shaking the movie screen violently. Dust, debris, and leaves blew swiftly along the dry ground as tree branches bent with the ferocious wind. Suddenly, the enormous movie screen went black as the power was lost. The frightened couple and other stunned patrons sat motionless in their vehicles until authorities moved in with swift attention and asked everyone to exit the parking lot and head in a single line to the main street. Those directing traffic informed them that a tornado had just swept through

the area. Exiting the lot, Mary Ellen and Butch observed the downed power lines and broken tree limbs. At that moment, the couple realized that they had narrowly escaped the tornado just a fleeting distance away.

As the powerful storm continued on its path of destruction, it took aim at the local Episcopal Church on the corner of Laskey and Douglas Roads, less than two miles away from the drive-in theater. The only indication that a magnificently beautiful structure had stood there for decades was the church's crumbling brick foundation. Just a few hours previously, its priest and congregation had stoically marched in procession down the street, waving their palm fronds in remembrance of Jesus' walk to the final destination of His fateful day. According to the local television news reporter, some of the church's hymnals were found miles away, strewn among the muddy field of broken and mangled cornstalks.

The following week, President Lyndon B. Johnson arrived in Toledo to survey the mutilation and destruction. His motorcade descended from

the Toledo Express Airport and wound its way up Airport Highway, past homes where those touched by the devastation stood hand in hand on their front porches to witness the cavalcade. Children waved toward the black-as-night limousines as they crept past, hoping to catch a glimpse of the most powerful man in the United States. I, too, stood in front of Aunt Irene's house, waving a miniature American flag. Limo after limo cascaded through the damaged neighborhoods, stopping occasionally to allow the President to step out of the darkened shelter of his vehicle into the brilliant sunshine to witness the chaos of families still reeling from their losses. The President declared the heartbreaking landscape a disaster area, which initiated the aid of the National Guard, the Red Cross, and hundreds of insurance companies.

The local news reported that 310 families were homeless, 117 homes destroyed, and 145 more badly damaged. Forty-five farms, commercial buildings, and industrial structures used as factories needed rebuilding. This devastation created job losses as

well, since workers were unable to return to their livelihoods. By today's standards, the damages totaled over \$90 million.

Today, when I see the sky darkening and feel the wind begin to blow, my internal radar perks up. Luckily, my home has a basement that is equipped with a transistor radio and a flashlight with fresh batteries. The city I reside in has a storm siren attached to the tallest building downtown. Those around me chuckle as I head to my underground safe haven while they head out to the front porch to observe the trees bending, the rain pouring, and the churning, spinning clouds in the gray-purple-yellow sky. The images of tornado damage witnessed in my youth haunt me still today. I have a recurring dream of hiding in my basement and glancing out the cellar window to see a tornado churning outside, staring directly at me through the glass, waiting patiently for me to come out of my safe place.

Grace

Tyler Elias

Which of us two will die with more grace?" she had asked him once. Grace is her name. It is stenciled in black on a little gray card encircled by a ring of assorted flowers thoughtfully chosen and carefully plucked, some from her townhouse's front porch garden, some from a weathered trellis. The roses in the ring possess far fewer thorns now than in life and overpower the withering orchid petals and the dried snapdragons that poke out at odd angles. The flower in his lap still has its edges. The bladed stem bites into his hand as he clenches it against one pale palm. He rises from his seat at the front and returns the flower to her, interlocking the stem with the looping strand of a borrowed rosary's black beads. He refolds her grasp tightly around the grave bouquet until the thorns dig in deep. He steps away, leaving the room empty.

Ironing Day

Rebecca Titchner

It was ironing day and Mother's weekly ritual began. She carried the metal ironing board from the cellarway to the living room and set it up in front of the television.

Click. Click.

She ran her hand across its silver cover. Behind her, a basket of laundry fresh off the wash line. A second basket, empty. There she would stay, watching her favorite stories—that's what she called them—until all the laundry, including T-shirts and underwear, were properly ironed.

Sunlight filtered through brown and tan fiberglass fabric drapes in filmy, dusty rays, and despite it being a warm summer day, the front door remained closed and locked. No one ever used the front door.

The front door was for strangers: men selling encyclopedias and household gadgets, gypsies looking to distract you and thief your house, neatly dressed disciples

with Bibles and pamphlets trying to save your soul. Anyone who knew you used the back door. It was as simple as that.

And no one used the front porch either. It was bare, except for a layer of coal dust from the monstrous coal trucks that rumbled by hour after hour. It could have belonged to an empty house, one that had been for sale for a long time, one that no one bothered to look at because it wasn't a place you ever wanted to live.

Mother would talk about things. About how much she cried when she heard the news that Bobby Kennedy was shot. A picture of Bobby and John hung on the parlor wall, along with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a plastic statue of the Virgin Mother.

Mother would raise her voice to a frightful pitch when she mentioned her sister, the one who stole their father's pocket watch after he died. Not hours after, they cut him down from the rope he hanged himself with in the barn. She went into

the house and took it. "He left everything to me in his will," she said. "And your aunt, she stole it from me."

Mother didn't talk like other mothers. She didn't act like other mothers. In fact, there was nothing motherly about her.

She existed in a dark place where voices whispered constantly and where shadowy figures peered in the windows. She roamed the house late at night, carrying a loaded shotgun, because she knew they were out there. She heard them.

She straddled two worlds until she grew too weary to stay in this one.

The crows carried her home and the wash on the line waved to her. Goodbye. The front porch didn't even know she was gone.

Tremors

Kelly Schucker

I can feel his tremors within my bones
like little earthquakes
radiating through my fingers and wrists.
I feel the convulsions inside of my marrow
as I watch the small tsunami in his mug,
tumultuous waves breaking over the rim,

hot brown water streaming down the sides of ceramic,
caressing fingers like dew kisses.
The streams meet at the bottom edge of the porcelain,
pooling together,
falling as thick drops onto his plaid pants
and the plush pink carpet his beloved insisted on.

I watch him bring
the mug to his lips,
tidal surging,
threatening the edge.

The struggle: to sip enough that in these tremors
he can swallow more than he spills.

Unable to control your own body.
Unable to quiet muscles into inertia.
An impossible battle.
Infinite exhaustion.

I try not to stare,
my soul erupting in tremors.
My heart fractures, the sound
of cracking china leaping the chasm
from hand to floor.

I can feel his ache within my bones.



The Pursuit of Luck

Isaac E. Payne

“How much money do we have?”

Eira’s leather coin purse hit Jarr in the face and then landed in a muddy puddle. He had perpetually rotten luck.

“Well, I was going to suggest that we buy a horse,” Jarr sighed, tucking the grimy, limp leather pouch into his pocket, “but it would probably break its ankles.”

At that moment, the universe—or whoever was in command of the world’s luck—deemed it necessary to accentuate Jarr’s statement by causing him to stumble and twist his foot at an uncomfortable angle. He bumped into Eira, making her jerk the sledge she was pulling. She gruffly pushed him away.

“Your last horse landed you in prison,” Eira grunted, noting the raven that flew from a conifer up the tumbledown slope. Her hand was halfway to her back before she realized that the bow she was reaching for had been

broken and burned days ago. She followed the raven with her eyes as long as she could, but it soon disappeared from view. Bloody carrion fowl.

“But things are looking up!” Jarr smiled, revealing lopsided teeth. “The Waking Prince rewards his protectors admirably,” he said with a conspiratorial wink.

Luck favored the lucky, Eira knew, and she was by no means lucky, but perhaps her prospects *were* finally looking up. A month of rest leave and enough food to feed a village, that was a reward to work for. And, on the sledge lay none other than the prince himself, folded up in Jarr’s only blanket, an odorless corpse, nearly as blue as the boobies that waddled around on the rocks.

“I might be at the pinnacle of my misfortune,” Jarr said, gesturing vaguely. His hooked nose dripped as fast as an eave in a rainstorm. Mist shrouded the place like a curse. “What if this expedition, the prince, what if it’s the end for me? No more

torn socks, no more burst water skins, no more—”

“Give it a rest,” Eira snapped. “You’re a luckless bastard and it’ll always be that way, prince or no.”

Jarr shrank back from his companion, looking hurt. After a moment, his expression darkened. “You’re probably right.” He kicked the sledge irritably.

Eira grunted, shifting the makeshift rope yoke off of her shoulders. Rope and leather armor were a poor combination, and the infernal mist only made it worse. “Take a turn, will you? And mind the rocks, we don’t want ol’ princey coming back from the dead with bruises all along his backside.”

She stretched her aching limbs, shaking her dreadlocks to air the sweat on the nape of her neck. Jarr struggled under the ropes. The road was the best in the land but still no better than a goat path. “Why is it that Hoadar got to ride in a bloody chariot to bring the prince back and we get stuck with a sledge made in my grandmother’s time?”

Jarr looked at her with banal eyes.

“Don’t answer that,” she

snapped, fingering the short sword at her waist. Who was she kidding? The prince would reward them, he always did, but that meant actually getting his body back to the Breathing Templars for resurrection leagues away. She knew better than any that bandits roamed these reaches, and banshees, and a whole slew of other things that would soil Jarr’s britches if they even lumbered past.

“How far is the next village?”

Eira tugged a damp map out of her shirt. The thing was nearly illegible, but it was their only means of navigation. “About another five miles.”

Jarr groaned, yanking on the sledge with such force that the thing slipped forward and struck him in the back of the legs. A yelp passed his lips, which he quickly replaced with a string of expletives.

“I could use a drink,” he said.

“You could always use a drink.”

“That’s because we’re always floundering about in a midden,” Jarr didn’t even bother to wipe his nose, even though it was running rivulets down the rest of his face.

The mist was burning off,

and more of the landscape revealed itself. Craggy boulders rose up on all sides of them, and beyond that, even larger, craggier mountains. Pine trees dotted the sparse available ground, some clinging to rocks like it was their last hold on the earth.

The monotonous grinding of the sledge whiled away and Eira turned her attention back to the road. It branched off into two separate paths, one twisting up a knoll, and the other rounding into a valley and the still-fading mist.

“Which way?” Jarr lifted his helmet and scratched his balding head.

Eira glanced at the map and then at the road, a hot fire bubbling up in her gut like whale oil. She hated whale oil; it was too smoky and stung her eyes, reminding her of charred flesh.

“Well?”

“It’s not on the bloody map.” Eira stuffed the goatskin map back into her breastplate. Her hand tightened on her sword hilt, dark fingers working mercilessly over the worn leather there.

Jarr sniffed for once, turning his long face and gazing up

at the mountains with pained indifference. He’d once been in a similar predicament and the road he’d chosen led him into a pack of blackguards with a predilection for robbery. Crossroads were not his friends and Eira was now resigned to the fact that she’d be making the choices or else they’d be eating steel or hanging by their thumbs.

“Gladly, I’d rather have a splinter than be dangling from a tree.”

Both roads had unknown endings and all she could do was take a chance and pick one. Left had always been a good direction for her, so Eira gestured down the sloping path. Jarr hooked his thumbs in the rope and started down, Eira holding the back of the sledge so it didn’t slide down and cut Jarr in two. After a great deal of sweat, mud, and swear words, they reached the bottom of the path. Eira had a splinter in her dusky palm, but Jarr’s boot soles had worn out and he had mud all up his woolen socks.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Gladly. I’d rather have a

splinter than be dangling from a tree.”

Jarr shrugged and they continued on. Deep cart ruts made the going tough, and eventually, Eira had to bend under the yoke too just to move the sledge a few feet. At last, they reached a small spot of grass with budding trees ringing the clearing; it was far too optimistic for Eira’s liking.

A few birds hopped about in the grass, pulling up worms or flying after midges. As Jarr collapsed onto the turf, picking rocks off of his filthy socks, Eira leaned against a tree. The buds were alive with bees, and the flowers gave off a sickly aroma that repelled her. Drawing out her sword, she loosened her wrists and took a few swings.

“You’re a devil, Eira, an absolute fiend.” Jarr’s gray eyes followed her blade as it flew through a dizzying pattern of tempered steel. The Waking Prince didn’t take just anybody with him on his escapades, but Eira was one of the best. Jarr, on the other hand, well, his time in the service was merely another patch of rough luck.

Eira slipped through the

form of the Laughing Lark, feeling the oneness with the sword, sending flower blossoms swirling to the ground in forlorn arcs. Jarr’s jaw slackened and she smirked to herself, but as she whirled around in a fearsome backstroke, she caught sight of an unknown blur out of the corner of her eye.

A ragged woman stood on the road, a small child clinging to her back. Her face was grimed and worn by years under the sky, likely from tilling unfertile soil. The thick odor of manure that hung about them spoke of that. The woman and Eira locked eyes for a brief second. Eira saw in her eyes self-resolve and a nature not unlike her own.

The woman straightened, glancing over the sledge and the visible form of the prince trundled there. “You’re them, aren’t you?”

“Who?” Jarr tightened his belt.

“The prince’s guards.” The woman squinted at them, but her face was so smeared with accumulated dirt that Eira couldn’t tell if she was smiling or sneering.

Jarr coughed

unceremoniously. “That’s an understatement. We provide and protect, save him for resurrection. Guards only wave about swords and get themselves killed.”

Eira felt the weight of the weapon—felt a surge of the whale-oil-feeling—and quickly sheathed it, cursing Jarr more than he already was. The countrywoman was definitely sneering.

“We don’t need much, but any little bit helps.”

Eira raised her brows. “Are you asking for money or not?”

Sniffing proudly, she turned up her nose. “Food, thank you. We’re not swindlers.”

“There’s nothing to spare.” It was instinct: hold your own, keep your own, that was what Eira lived by. Jarr glanced at her questioningly, but said nothing.

Drawing herself up to her full height—which was not impressive—the woman spat. “The prince is a tyrant, a dirty rotten highborn with a heart of stone.” She spat again for good measure. “I’d have thought a Maydark would be more compassionate, but you’ve got a stick up your ass as well.”

Jarr blinked.

“Get out of here,” Eira snapped, waving her hand irritably. She didn’t care what was said about the prince, but insulting her ancestors was unacceptable; hadn’t they suffered persecution enough? To have to endure it even after death sickened her stomach.

The woman stomped off down the road, but the child remained, staring at the pair with innocent and pained eyes.

“Go on, beat it!” Eira raced a few paces forward and the little girl shrieked, running after her mother like a frightened hen.

“We could have given her some hardtack,” Jarr said later. “That stuff is wretched on my gums.”

“After she insulted us like that? Where’s your self-respect?”

Jarr shrugged; he didn’t make the decisions.

The struggle along the goat path grew even more strenuous after the rainfall that night. Despite being meant for travel along mud or snow or sand, the sledge failed them utterly. The runners broke on hidden rocks in a pool of sludge, and soon

after that, the rope frayed and sent Jarr face-first into a puddle. They kicked the thing to the wayside, resisting the urge to set it ablaze, and trekked off again with the Waking Prince on Jarr's back.

The prince seemed to be immune to decay, for he'd been dead for at least a fortnight and did not display any signs of bloating or rigidity. The only way they knew he was dead was because of his blue skin and the giant hole in his chest where he'd been stabbed with a poleax. Eira had never seen a corpse so colorful before. They could take all the time in the world to return him to the Templars, since he'd probably still be intact when the end of the world was raging about his ears.

Once, when the prince's head bobbed against Jarr's back, Eira was possessed with the urge to draw out her sword and permanently separate his waxy visage from the rest of his body. It would be extremely satisfactory to watch her liege's head roll.

Eira looked away from the prince, gazing instead at the tall conifer trees and gray sky,

focusing on how her ankles ached from trudging through the mud.

To while away the time, Eira concerned herself with thinking of all the rest she'd have when they finally deposited the body. No one would bother her for a month—a whole month—in which time she could silently slip from everybody's consciousness, fade like a memory until that's all she was, a recollection, an indistinct dream. No more prince, no more bad luck, no more blood, just Eira.

Jarr stumbled and the prince's sword belt fell off the body, landing in a pile of horse dung.

"Jarr, you clumsy lout, look at that!"

He turned about, the prince's feet swaying like a pair of fish on a line. "Give it a douse in a stream, he'll be none the wiser."

"You give it a douse, I'm not reaching into a heap of shit."

"Then you hold the prince." Jarr moved to sling the body over Eira's shoulder but she backed away.

"Come on now," he moaned. "I've carried him since the sledge broke."

Eira did not have time to reply, for at that moment a group of riders rounded the bend in the road, their horses sleek with sweat. There were six men, one bearing the vexilloid flag of Hokoth; they were the Waking Prince's blood rivals, and, consequentially, his ancestors. The lamellar armor of the men-at-arms was gleaming, and the cuirass of the leader was so well made it could have doubled as a banquet platter.

Jarr trembled at the ochre banner and Eira tensed, ready to spring away at a moment's notice. There was no way she'd be able to defeat six highly trained soldiers, even with the speed her Maydark limbs granted her.

"Dead men are not often carried so far from their dying place," the leader remarked, his eyes as flitting as a hawk's. "An important man, hmm?"

Eira exchanged a glance with Jarr before speaking. "Sometimes oaths make us to do unusual things."

The Hokoth general tilted his head to the side and bared his teeth. They were almost as white as his skin, which contrasted so

highly with Eira's own that she felt he was mocking her just by sitting there. "Interesting oaths, hmm?"

"No more intriguing than why any number of Hokoth are this far north."

The lacquered dragon on the man's helmet smiled pitilessly at Eira, its ivory teeth bared at her throat. "The Waking Prince's fancies always draw interest of the Hokoth, especially when he allows the mountain tribes to butcher his retinue. Our prince would never ask us to die for him unless he knew it would better our country."

The general's sneer turned Eira's stomach. Her hand tightened on her sword. The smell of char tickled her nose. Blood rushed to her head. After a moment, she found it within herself to unclench her teeth. "The Waking Prince has freed his slaves, more than can be said of your prince. He used them to build a massive rampart, their bones just as much part of the foundation as stone."

For a moment, the man only smiled. He had a slight mustache that curled at the subtlest movement of his lips. "He

released all of the slaves, hmm?"

"Of course," Jarr responded, clutching the corpse as tightly as if it were a prized possession.

"What term has he given to you? His protectors?"

Eira scowled. "If you have something to say, spit it out. I don't enjoy dancing."

"You are slaves to the prince's whims; his death sets you on a strenuous journey which will only bring you more suffering. As long as the prince returns to life, there will always be a war to fight. Don't you agree, hmm?"

"I could find better conversation in a brothel."

"Unless the prince is brought to the temple of his forefathers in our homeland, then he can always find unnaturally long life with the Breathing Templars." The man smiled, almost perfidious enough to make Eira hate him.

"We know our own history," Jarr said defiantly, but quickly shrank under the steely gaze of the soldiers' spears.

"If the Waking Prince is permanently put to rest," the general continued, earnestly, urgently, "then the source of your troubles is gone. War will

cease. Hokoth will no longer antagonize your kingdom, the mountain tribes will have no one to hate."

"What exactly are you getting at?" Eira widened her stance.

The general's eyes winked in the gray light of the miserable day. A smile tugged at his lips, the sight of which sparked a brief anger in Eira.

Eira never believed in anything because beliefs could always be taken from her. A few choice words and they were shattered underfoot like ground glass. The closest thing she'd ever come to believing in, aside from Jarr's misfortune, was the oath she'd sworn to the Waking Prince. His protection was her responsibility, and if he did not make it back to the Templars, she would suffer. Although she had no family for vengeance to be wrought upon, she knew that the prince's cohorts could make life very unpleasant for her. The oath had been very clear: I will take all necessary pains to relieve the prince of his death, even at my own expense._

The man stroked his mustache superciliously. "I'm

saying you can end war, famine, pain; you have the potential to end death. Only the Goddess has that power, but you could play at it, hmm?”

Eira eyed the men on their tall horses, swords stuffed tightly in their leather scabbards. None of them gave any inclination that they'd give up this chance.

“Eira.” Jarr tugged his breastplate into place.

“Shut up and let me think.” Eira had always been a worker, a soldier, a slave, as the general put it. Wouldn't it be glorious to make a choice herself for once? And how could it go wrong, putting a stop to the Waking Prince's belligerent inclinations? At that thought, the scene of the gore-splattered mountain pass pervaded Eira's mind, and she struggled to blink it away.

“What'll you offer me for the prince?”

The general had a penchant for bargaining, which was not marred by his impeccable word of honor. If anything, it was heightened. “Five thousand yiin.”

That was more than Eira would have seen had the Breathing Templars awakened her. It was too much. “How do I

know you won't cut our throats and take the prince anyway?”

Even layered in the finest armor, the general managed to look wounded. “You do not trust me?”

“The only thing that ever came from trusting Hokoth soldiers was a short lifespan.”

“We will make you a deal.” The general unsheathed his sword and tossed it at her feet. The carefully tempered blade, marred by mud, slowly sank into the road. To her surprise, the other soldiers tossed down their spears and then flung their swords by the roadside. “I take away our ability to kill to set you at ease, hmm? You are not accustomed to our honor.”

Eira considered this. Even if the soldiers leapt from their mounts as soon as the exchange was made, Eira could be seconds ahead of them, off among the pines and boulders. By the time they grasped their weapons, all they'd hear would be the tinkle of her laugh.

“What do you think, Jarr? Should we give them ol' princey?”

“We swore an oath, Eira.”

“I know we did. And this

way, these nice gentlemen will put the prince to rest forever, so he never has to brave death again.”

Jarr shook his head. “I don’t think that’s what it meant.”

She waved her hands irritably. “Gah, why am I asking you?” Turning to the Hokoth, she smiled. “The prince for five thousand yiin. No more, no less.”

“Agreed.” The general delved into his saddlebags and pulled out two cinched sacks bulging with currency. He tossed one to Eira and the other to Jarr.

“Eira, I really think—”

“Give him the prince, Jarr. We made a deal.”

With reluctance, he heaved the body onto the rump of the general’s horse, taking care to straighten the dead man’s boot buckles before stepping back from the road. He held the gold as gingerly as if it was an adder, poised to bite his fingers.

“You’ve done your land a great service,” the general said, urging his horse down the road. The soldiers followed with a dourness that raised Eira’s brows. She watched as they disappeared, empty scabbards at their sides.

The acrid taste stuck to her tongue, but she swallowed once and it was gone. A plaintive cackle rang out among the foggy trees and Eira glanced up. Flapping its wings, a large raven jumped from a pine bough and flew after the cavalrymen.

“That was wrong,” Jarr said lamely, feeling the coins through the leather of the bag.

“Any more wrong than endless wars for the sake of fearing death eternal? I won’t miss it.” Eira bit the gold and smiled.

Sure, the death of the prince would set the Regency into a panic. From what Eira knew of politics, she assumed some highborns would die in the following melee that was civil discourse, probably some of the lower officials as well. But it would sort itself out, eventually. And besides, it wasn’t actually Eira’s fault; perhaps the prince should have prepared an heir instead of resting in the arrogant assumption that he was immortal.

“We can’t go home now.” Jarr’s placid temperament was heating up, which was usually followed by a decision he would

regret. “They’ll have us drawn and quartered and set the falcons upon our livers.”

For a moment, Eira felt a pang of worry, but she repressed it. “When has going home ever been one of your joys? Last time your own mother sold out your bed to a stranger, remember?”

Jarr tugged disconsolately at the cinch but said nothing. They walked a ways down the road, the only sound their squelching boots and Eira’s joyful whistling.

“Nope, I don’t regret it one bit,” she admitted. “Hold your own, keep your own, that’s how you live. No one gives a damn if I keel over dead, so why should I drag the prince halfway across the earth?”

Once the Breathing Templars realized their charge would not return, all bloody inferno would come after her and Jarr. Mercenaries would swarm these mountains, searching for any sign of the prince, word would be passed around of two ragged soldiers and a corpse, and Eira and Jarr would have to disappear across the borders into Valaria or some run-down midden just to elude execution. But Eira didn’t care; years of life on the

run beat risking her life for a belligerent prince who treated his protectors like dogs.

Jarr stopped abruptly. “What if someone finds his belt?”

“Who cares? Let them wonder.” Eira laughed with ecstatic joy. They’d have shit to pay soon enough, but for now she had luck on her side. Luck that was finally hers, and it tasted sweet.



Maple Deep

Bonnie McMillen

Our secret swimming hole:
we'd meet there every hot day,
all summer. A deep pool in the
Tunungwant, next to the old airport.
Cool water, a deep green, dappled
shade on both sides. A lush private
place, hidden by big trees. We'd
swim, while blue herons
flew over, landing downstream. They'd
fish and watch us. We didn't know
they were special, we thought they
were everyday birds. We were
just kids swimming and kissing
where our moms couldn't see.



The Whispering Man

Tyler Elias

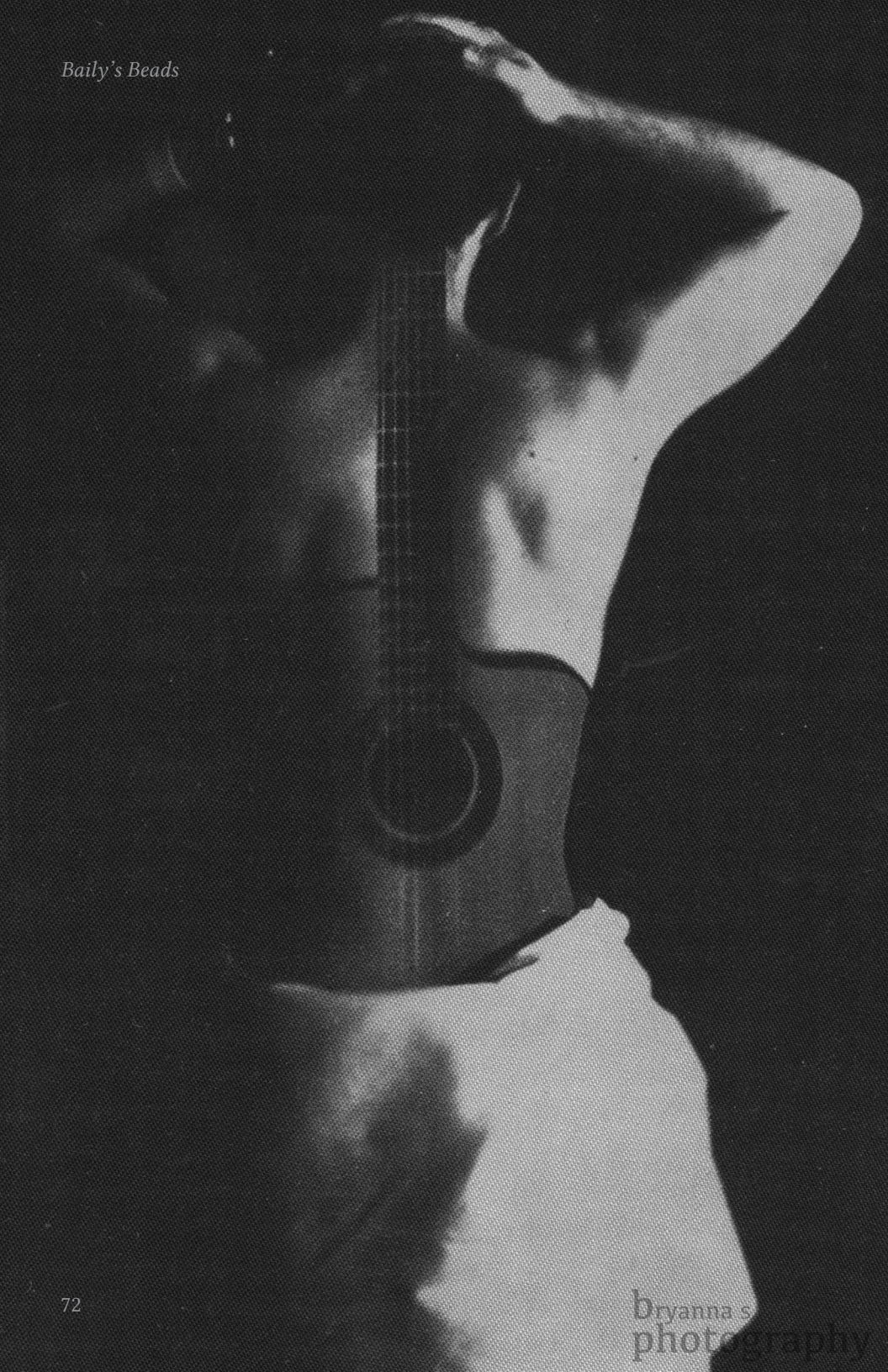
I dreamed that a whispering man came to my town,
and the town, left nameless and hollow, flickered
and died.

Passersby might stop if they wished
and listen for a heartbeat, but
only the wind shared his secrets,
rustling through the skeleton homes
and the cobwebbed cracks beneath dead
streetlights.

“Listen,” whispered the man,
and the black-feathered songbirds were sent from
pine towers,
his oration strumming the minds of the many,
chords of an unholy hymn
thrummed with an ageless voice
that lingered like an itch just under the skin.

The whispering churned their desire,
caught in an invincible current beneath an opal
sky,
shimmering in fierce rhythm to his speech,
faster and faster down the rabbit hole.
Those who hid themselves away
were hauled from behind closed doors,
the dissidents silenced by visions of the
unthinkable,
flames suffocating without air,
until all that remained were the fleeing,
the dreamers, and the nonbelievers.





Guts

Salynda Hogsett

You met him in London a few weeks ago, connecting over a scarred tabletop and foamy beers in a pub just down the street, kept awake by nagging jet lag. You were the last remaining customers, only leaving when the bartender stacked all of the chairs onto tables.

As you walked back to the hostel, you discussed plans for the summer. He didn't have any and decided to tag along on your preplanned trip. Looking back, you're not sure why you let him. Maybe it was the allure of a European romance, or maybe it was the simple desire for a rebound.

City after city, your rapport turned to friendship, and friendship turned to a closeness that was never spoken of or acted upon. The intimacy was encouraged by snatched eye contact across a crowded room of throbbing music and flashing neon lights, emboldened by cocktails. Late night talks along

park paths. Tender words at an outdoor cafe. Gentle hugs before bed. A butterfly touch on the shoulder or back.

He swiped a strand of hair from your face once by a meandering river in France, a surefire sign of mutual affection, if tacky novels and romantic comedies had taught you anything. Sometimes you wondered if you read too deeply into his actions, but then he'd catch your eye, convincing you that this time was different, that he was different.

You walk in silence now, strolling down an abandoned alley dappled in evening sun that one of the locals claims is a shortcut to the city overlook. Chaotic traffic roars in the distance, mingling with the clamor of foreign tongues. A hint of sewage wafts past your nose. A gentle breeze washes over your bare arms.

You make a left at the end and merge with other tourists on a main street. Everyone walks as fast as they can to ensure a glimpse of the last magical

moments of brilliant light. You walk closer to him so your hands brush occasionally, trying to make the first move without actually making the first move.

You stop at the crest of a hill and gaze over the city at sunset. The golden sun turns every building, tree, and wave crashing onto the beach into a masterpiece. Perfectly lit, captured in your eternal memory. Sailboats search for the right wind to carry them.

"Liz," he says after a moment, nervously licking his lips, "I don't know if this is the right time to say something."

"Just say it." Your insides swell with anticipation, and warmth slowly creeps up your neck, to your cheeks, then your ears.

A pause. He runs his fingers through his curly mop of hair. He doesn't make eye contact. He says, "Not that way."

*Get out of here, your
fight or flight instinct
screams. Run.*

Sharp needles jab the backs of your eyes. Subconsciously,

you shift your weight away from him, only to be knocked back by an unaware tourist and her selfie stick. You bump against his shoulder, and a touch that once was like a jolt of lightning is now like an icy snowball making impact.

Get out of here, your fight-or-flight instinct screams. *Run.*

He is silent.

Run.

You are silent.

Get out of here.

Little girls laugh and screech in the distance.

Why did he lead me on?

Your eyes scan the view, looking for anything to take your mind off of him. *Why did he flirt back?*

A sailboat catches a gust of unexpected wind and overturns in the bay.

"We should head back," he says.

"Yeah," you answer a little too quickly. *Keep it together.*

You try not to think or talk too much on the walk back. *Can't cry in front of him.* When you get back to your hostel, you head directly to your room.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he calls after you.

“Yeah.” You wave goodnight.

Your steps are quick, staccato notes on the wooden floor of the hallway, but they aren't fast enough and you can't help but slam the door behind you. You take off your jeans and collapse on the bottom bunk in your shared room, pulling the questionable covers up to your jaw. Springs dig into your shoulder and hip. The tears come, silent and hot like your embarrassment.

You chide your ridiculous notions of romance. *Like it would be any different this time around.* You vow to never read a romance novel again; they're just the jagged rocks against which ships of dreams hurl themselves in hopes of a sublime fate.

The tears stop, leaving your eyes stiff and dry.

Think on the bright side, you tell yourself. At least he had the guts to say it to your face, unlike the others who told you by getting girlfriends.

Spring Haiku

Bonnie McMillen

Springtime coldness stings
chilled robins hard-pressed for worms.
Warmer weather soon.



Untitled —*digital photography*
Matthew Brahaney

The Christmas of '44

Richard Marcott

“Go ahead! Take the money and put it in the slot.” Nana, sensing the shyness of a nine-year-old boy, nudged me. The music grew louder as I inched forward to drop her half dollar into the dangling red pot. The Salvation Army Band on the corner of Kennedy and Main Street every Christmas season was playing “Oh Come All Ye Faithful.” It was December 1944, and the war news had dampened the Christmas spirit. Children worried whether there would be a Christmas.

As my coin clinked into the pot, the pretty lady in uniform smiled and said, “Thank you, son.” I smiled back but quickly returned to my grandmother’s side.

The band wore blue uniforms. The women’s prairie bonnets were tied neatly under their chins, and the red inner lining of their capes, draped over their shoulders, added flashy accents. The men sported high-

collar jackets with double rows of brass buttons. French horns and trumpets were backed up by a bass drum and a tambourine. Smiling shoppers gathered. They listened, and some sang a few carols. They added to the pot and moved on.

It started snowing again. Dancing crystal flakes displayed their lacy beauty against the blue uniforms for a millisecond, then whispered into the wool. Between songs, the band would stomp their feet and blow on their fingers. Islands of packed snow formed randomly on the recently shoveled sidewalks.

A trumpet flared, and the band broke into “It Came upon a Midnight Clear.” Nana coaxed me to move ahead. We crossed Kennedy Street, continued past the Princess Shop, and crossed Main Street in front of the New Bradford Theater. We were going to Olsen’s Department store, not my favorite place.

While I actually enjoyed Christmas shopping with Nana, Olsen’s was pushing it, nothing

but women's stuff: ladies' dresses; acres of lace curtains, towels, and bed linens; and aisles of housewares.

Pausing at the curb, Nana said, "Look how pretty the street is." The full length of Main Street was aglow. Bright colored lights spanned the street in inverted V's, forming a fairyland tunnel that led to the Emery Hotel at the head of the street. A blue and green Christmas tree was perched on their marquee. The walls of the tunnel formed by the decorated storefronts were a cornucopia of toys, dresses, hats, suits, and stacks of colorful packages. Plaster mannequins dressed as Santa and his elves invited everyone to stop and share their alcove.

We paused to look at Olsen's display window. Nana said, "That's a pretty dress, don't you think?"

"It is, but would Mom ever wear it?" I read the small sign: *Gala Occasion Dress—\$7.79.*

"That's true. She never goes anywhere to wear that. Maybe that pretty housecoat."

"Yeah, and it's only \$4.79." Before Nana could react, a woman I didn't know stepped next to her and said, "Merry

Christmas, Mame. My heavens, your grandson is getting big." *She isn't going to pat my head now, is she?*

"Well, thank you," Nana answered. "Merry Christmas to you too. Is Marshall going to make it home for Christmas?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mame. I guess you didn't hear. I got a telegram last month." Choking a little, she continued softly, "Marshall was killed in France." She paused. "So I'm just going to make it through the best I can."

Nana summoned up a weak smile and reached to touch her arm. "I'm so sorry to hear that. I just wish this damned war would end. So many families have been hurt." *I had never heard her say that word.* We turned and entered the store.

1944 was bad year. After the June landing on D-Day, it seemed like someone we knew was killed or wounded every week. Last summer, Mrs. Weisenfluh, our neighbor across the street, had changed her blue star window flag to a gold one. Mom said it was because her son Grant had been killed in the war and she was now a Gold Star Mother.

Leaving Olsen's, we quick-

stepped our way up Main Street. Families crowded the sidewalks; moms swung paper shopping bags while kids skipped and danced alongside. I could still hear the strains of *Noel* above the rhythmic hum of tire chains on the bare pavement. The ring, ring, ring changed pitch as cars changed speed. Connecting links clanked in time against the tire wells.

I could still hear the strains of *Noel* above the rhythmic hum of tire chains on the bare pavement.

Nana made a quick stop at James R. Evans men's store to put \$5.00 against her account. I lingered near the front of the store, examining the smooth leather gloves with real rabbit fur lining laid out atop the glass display counter, waiting to be petted.

We crossed Main Street at the Square and stopped, as always, at J. J. Newberry's Five and Ten for a treat. I could taste the nonpareils as I watched the candy clerk behind the slanted

glass front dig her metal scoop into the pile of white beaded chocolate drops, then shake them into the small brown paper bag on the scale until the needle bounced to a quarter pound.

Nana said, "Let's get a cup of coffee and an English muffin before we head home."

"Oh, that sounds good, Nana. I love those things." We crossed the street to go into the Emery Hotel Coffee Shop. I thought English muffins had been born there. They didn't exist for me anyplace else, certainly never at home.

We were refueled by the warm coffee. I felt a little embarrassed when Nana sent hers back with instructions to "Fill it to the top and make it hot." The waitress was new. The ones who knew her always smiled as they poured her cup, saying, "There, you are Mame, it's fresh, hot, and topped off."

Still licking the butter off my lips, we hurried up Mechanic Street until we crossed the iron bridge over Tuna Creek. I stopped at the Hobby Shop, a narrow old wooden building that barely clung to the creek bank, and pressed my nose against the window, drooling over the

solid balsa model of the B-29, the newest four engine bomber. It was beautiful. With shiny layers of silver dope, cellophane windshields, decals for black tail numbers, and American stars on the wings, it looked like the real thing. I gushed on about it a bit, hoping Nana would catch my hint. We continued on, leaning against the cold wind. I was happy to get home where I could warm my hands in front of the open oven door.

That night, as I lay in bed, I envisioned that B-29 hanging from a ceiling string, escorted by the P-51 fighter that already flew there. I could see them dodging flack and crossing into Germany to do damage that would shorten the war.

It had been a wonderful night. But I still couldn't help thinking about Mrs. Weisenfluh, the lady at Olsen's, and my aunt Irene. Her fiancé, Frank, had been killed at the landing at Anzio last Valentine's Day. What about their holidays? What about the GI's who couldn't get home?

I pretended to be asleep when Mom, on her way to bed, lingered at my bedside, kissed her fingers and touched them

to my forehead. When she left, I rolled over, closed my eyes, and somehow, I just knew—our Christmas was going to be okay.



Performance Poetry

I Am Who You Think You Are

Brianna Henry

I always thought you held the beauty of the world in
your hands
until you showed me something more sinister.
So I sit here with my knees against my chest,
unable to breathe as what was said and what wasn't
creep into my throat and they choke me.
My best wasn't good enough.
I'm never good enough.
I gave you everything I had, but I was tinfoil
and you were gold. You deserved gold.
I gave you everything, and even though
you were greater than anything I ever could be,
you took it all and left me with nothing.
The only thing I needed from you was love.
You couldn't give that to me.
Because it's me, and I'm broken,
and brokenness is too messy
and messy is something you couldn't handle.
You made me believe that I wasn't good enough for
you,
when I was too good for you.
I love unconditionally.
I am not afraid of heartache and pain and brokenness.
I am gold and you are tinfoil.
I always thought you held the beauty of the world in
your hands,
until I realized the difference between manufactured
beauty of lies
and the raw beauty of truths.

<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-iamwhoyou>





Performance Poetry

Anxiety

Taryn Pecile

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is the way my hoodie rolls over my pale
fingertips,
protecting them,
hiding my clenched fists as my shoes hide my
curled toes.

Anxiety is the school hallway.

The door.

The goddamned door.

Is it push?

Is it pull?

Push.

Pull.

Every damn day it's the same goddamn battle.

Is it push?

Is it pull?

Push.

Pull.

Breathe.

Anxiety is the crushing feeling
when something I used to love,
the adrenaline rush I used to get,
is overshadowed by fear,
by all the possible scenarios I've conjured up in my
head
on repeat of my death,
the multiple ways my life may end at this very
second.

Breathe.

But I can't as this horror plays in my head.

A cymbal crashes at the end of each scene.

My body lies empty on the ground.

Breathe.
Anxiety is a marker
and a white board just the same.
The class is waiting, but my mind is blank.
What if I spell something wrong?
What if I trip?
What if, what if, what if?
I can't stand up.
I am paralyzed in my seat by my own sweat.
If I stand it will drip down my legs
and make an imprint on the chair.
I will not be invisible.
Everyone will laugh.
Breathe.
Anxiety is a permanent blush that I wear upon my
cheeks,
the red that I try to cover using foundation and
concealer.
The moon shape of my nails caresses my palms
from clenching my fists so tightly.
This sweat feels like it's constantly dripping
and no amount of deodorant can hide this.
Anxiety is wanting to be invisible
while holding a neon sign.
This is anxiety.
Just.
Breathe.



<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-anxiety>

Performance Poetry

And The Silence

Ashly Colosimo

I've been silent for two months now.

Half glance smiles and tired eyes
are the only expressions that seem to surface.

Mamma says talk about it
as she opens the door to my personal hell.
Mamma says talk about it,
says we can get you help if you want it.
Mamma's concerned with my persistent silence.

Mamma,
how do I tell you the nightmare of my reality stuck
on replay?
How do I tell you about that day
without opening the closet I've tried to barricade.
It's been nearly two years.

Mamma,
can we talk about it?
I broke through the silence,
told her the story, but
only the parts that were still haunting me.
I told her.

I sent a half glance smile to the one who held my
heart,
begging without words for him to come to bed
with me.
Right on cue, he smiled and said,
"I'll be right there."
I lay down feeling that instant relief
to finally be off my aching feet,

enjoying a moment of silence.

A silent house has an eerie ring.
A pain struck through my heart,
knocked the wind right out of me.
Physical pain rushed through my body.
This cannot be happening.

I ran in search of him,
or for some kind of noise.
Why is this house so fucking quiet?
Screaming into the darkness,
silence echoing back at me,
mocking my fears into reality,
as if I should have known.
As if I should have been faster,
as if this were my fault.

Medics are asking questions.
I'm left speechless, shaking, and scared,
looking like a deer in the headlights,
paralyzed by these ambulance lights,
stunned like a bad accident
you can't seem to look away from.
It's like slow motion,
watching the bullet leave the gun.
And yet, I didn't move.
I waited for it to hit me,
hoping it would shock my body back to reality,
praying this was all just a dream,

waiting for some kind of news.
After fourteen hours, this chair's paisley print
and my tears have smeared into a water painting,
a distraction from the headache that came

when my eyes opened their floodgates.

Pessimistic thoughts start hijacking my mind.
Did I tell him I loved him before bed?
Godamnit, what was the last thing that I said?
You know it's bad when an atheist
hits their knees and bows their head,
praying, bargaining,
for some kind of second chance.
Thinking: why me, why him,
where are you now god?
Where are you now?!

After twenty-six days of false hope
and impatient waiting,
the doctors come in with their hollow faces
perfected by protocol,
followed by bad news, hugs, and sorries,
surrounded by a stiffening silence.

It's been nearly two years, Mamma,
and I've found comfort in half glance smiles and
tired eyes.

Mamma, it's easier to stay quiet.
So please, Mamma,

may we bow our heads for a moment
of silence?



[https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-
andthesilence](https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-andthesilence)

Performance Poetry

It's All Over Now

W. Eugene Johnson

It's all over now, no one is to blame,
but I can't help feeling bad just the same.
Out on the road, here I go again.
I want to be your lover, baby, I can't just be your friend.
And still I wonder about what might have been,
and then I think about the shape I'm in, yeah.

The rhythm of your heartbeat echoes through my mind,
I can't forget you no matter how hard I try.
Live another lonely day, walk another lonely mile,
no matter where I am I can still see your smile.
I can't help it if I'm still in love with you,
it takes a woman to make a man sing the blues.

CHORUS

We gave each other everything we could,
but what we couldn't give were the things we should.
Hopes and dreams are broken and forsaken.
We are the victims of the paths that we have taken.

I got so many feelings I can't seem to control.
You got a mortgage on my body, baby, and a lien on my soul.
It'll take a lifetime for me to get over you,
no matter how hard I try it's something I can't do.
The more things seem different, the more they stay the same.
What I know now comes too late in the game.

We gave each other everything we could.
But what we couldn't give were the things we should.

Hopes and dreams are broken and forsaken.
We are the victims of the paths that we have taken.



<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-itsallover-now>

*Performance Poetry***This Feeling of Intense and
Passionate Dislike**

Desiree Maxwell

You know what I hate?

The questions that everyone wants to ask
and are too afraid to present,
and the answers too immature to acknowledge.I hate that race, culture, and appropriation
are too delicate of topics to discuss.However, genocide, illegal immigrants, and the Ameri
can dream *isn't*.I hate that you don't know the difference between
the truths and lies in your history books.

I hate that you don't even care to realize this.

I hate that plagiarism and academic integrity
are publicly intolerable and prohibited to a strict taboo,
but

rape incidents aren't.

I hate that calling you a racist is a complete offense to
you, but
racism isn't.I hate that you tell me about your black friend, cowork
er, classmate

like I give a damn, or like it's some pass.

I hate that because of my color you make me some rare
specimen.

"Oh, you're from Trinidad, so you're not really black."

You've gotta be kidding me. I hate that.

I hate the way my emotions get in the way
when I'm expressing my beliefs and I'm talking in be
tween sobs.Oh is it *that* time of the month?

Yo I *really hate* when like, uhm, uh, so, like, basically
yea.

Stop talking over me. Don't walk through that closed
door.

I just took time out of my busy schedule of sleep deprivation,

yes ma'ams, and *excuse me's* to open *this door* for you.

It's twelve degrees outside.

I hate that I clearly told you my name is Desiree

but you *keep* calling me Desiray. Just call me Max.

I hate when the lunch lines are long and the food is
good,

but the staff still hasn't gotten the hint that

when I finally arrive to my entrée, I want a good-sized
portion.

I hate that good food and great people

sometimes seem so impossible to find.

I hate that because these aren't your grievances,

you lack the ability to sympathize.

I hate that you offered me some of your delicious food,
yet there's ketchup on these fries.

I hate condiments.

Condiments are like sugarcoating shit on lies,

just like people with their lies of propaganda,

war on drugs, and other bullshit.

I hate that you're popping your gum

and scrolling through your Twitter feed,

no care in the world.

I hate that you care so much about what he said/she
said.

I said I don't care about it, so stop telling me.

I hate that this is just a poem instead

of a conversation between two random people.

I hate that you can relate to what I'm saying on some level

and not speak up when it counts the most.

I hate that Asians don't get single leading roles in Hollywood movies.

The only leading roles are shared.

It's like you're saying that they're half a man just like you said African Americans were like three fifths of a person.

I hate the phrase, "Go back to your country" more than I hate the fact that people say this in the first place.

I hate your superiority complex.

I hate assimilation and I hate small communities making me feel like I'm a zoo animal.

My life isn't a case study.

My culture isn't some exhibit.

The fact that you need someone to tell you you're being a jerk,

the fact that you can't tell me how you really feel.

I hate your backstage/frontstage personality, and I can't stress this enough.

I hate that I can't seem to control my need to eat all my groceries in the cabinet.

I hate that I bite off more than I can chew, literally.

I need to slow down sometimes,

but I hate how stagnant this all feels

and I hate the idea that we are never moving forward.

I hate that you know nothing of soca, calypso, or kompa but you know about reggae.

I hate statistics, and more importantly, I hate the idea of being one.

Throw away your charts, hate, confusion, disgust, and

privilege,
your tainted skin and bone structure,
erase your heritage,
replace your tribal beads with handcuffs and shackles,
let *me* read *you* your rights, and another thing,
definitions of terms like oppression, racism, prejudice,
and discrimination.

Your political correctness as to not offend “the *insert
race group here,*”

your use of this three letter *word* proves you’re still
being offensive.

And another thing—“We aren’t all the same.”

Duh. I know this. I get this. “We aren’t all the same.”

Yeah I know, I never said you all were.

And another thing,

A conversation in elementary:

“You seem some kind of foreign?”

“Where are you really from?”

“Is it true that people of that culture really...?”

And another thing,—

a conversation while in Taco Bell:

“I hate those darn Mexicans.”

And another thing,—

a conversation in a dormitory:

“Well I’m colorblind, so I don’t really care
if you’re black, white, purple, or green.”

Calm down.

Is that a stain on my white T-shirt?

Because I hate those stains too.



<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-thisfeeling>

Voices

Shaun Stack

It was hot. The sun hung overhead, an unforgiving dictator to whom all eventually submit. The humidity made the air too thick to breathe comfortably. With every breath Gregory took, it felt like he was drowning. He was not sweating anymore, none of them were. They had been walking through the jungle for hours and none of their bodies had the energy, let alone the water, for such a luxury as sweating.

"Can we stop for a few minutes? I'm gonna pass out if I don't get some water soon," Jenkins whined. At just twenty-five, Jenkins was by far the youngest, and least experienced member of the team.

Not that any of our experience counts for much in this Godforsaken place, Gregory thought. And we're not really a team, just seven mercs all hired to hunt down some jackass who decided to try and screw over the biggest kingpin on this side of the Atlantic.

"Here," Gregory said and

tossed Jenkins his canteen. "Just a sip."

"Just a sip," Jenkins repeated. He unscrewed the cap and raised the container to his lips. Jenkins took one long deep drink and put the cap back on. They trudged on for a few more hours in silence before Jenkins spoke up again. "How much farther we got? I need to sit down."

"Oh, come on, Jenkins, quit your bitching," snapped Sanders from the back of the group. "We'll get there when we get there."

"No, Jenkins is right. The sun is setting and I don't want to be wandering around this place in the dark," Gregory said and slowly brought their troop to a stop. "It looks like there's a clearing up ahead, we'll camp there. Sanders, take Jenkins and do a sweep of the area." Gregory heard Sanders mumble something under his breath, but he decided to let it go this time. "Cooper, Kerry, I think there's a stream a mile or so east of here, see if you can catch us something to eat. Booker, Dodson, get wood for a fire." Everyone dispersed, eager to get their tasks done so they could

get some rest.

Within thirty minutes Sanders and Jenkins returned from their patrol, followed not long after by Booker and Dodson, both of whom were carrying an armload of sticks and lumber. Booker went to go get more wood, while Dodson began to make a fire. An hour after that, Cooper and Kerry returned with four large fish and began to prepare them for the fire.

"Are you sure those are safe to eat?" Jenkins asked. "You're not worried about getting some weird parasite or something?"

"Listen kid," Sanders said, "if you don't want your share of the fish, then give it to me."

"No, I want it. I just don't wanna pay for it later, if you catch my drift."

"Don't worry about it, Jenkins," Kerry chimed in. "The fire will kill off any bacteria. You'll be fine."

After everyone ate their fill, they all sat around the fire and talked for a bit. Well, Jenkins talked and everyone else pretended to listen. "Don't get me wrong Ker-Ker, your fish was good, but my sister Nat is one helluva cook. She can make just about anything taste good."

"Who wants the first watch?"

Gregory cut in, already half asleep.

"I got it, boss," Jenkins chirped. "Y'all can sleep soundly with me watching over you."

Gregory was awakened by the sounds of screaming and guns firing. The smell of slightly overcooked fish still hung in the air from dinner, except now it was tainted by the smell of spent bullet casings of and blood. In the dying light of the fire Gregory could see Jenkins a few feet away and crawled over to him. Gregory rolled him over and saw the source of the bloody smell. Jenkins' stomach had been cut, his intestines strewn haphazardly across the ground. His face was covered in cuts and his eyes were missing.

Whoever did this was trying to send a message, Gregory thought as he surveyed the area for the bodies of the rest of his team. To his horror Gregory saw them all lying face down on the ground, eerily similar to the way Jenkins was. He stumbled over to the closest body. It was Sanders. When Gregory flipped him over he found Sanders in the same condition as Jenkins, with one notable difference: Sanders was

still alive, and he was trying to speak.

"What is it, Sanders?" Gregory pleaded, leaning forward to hear him better.

"Why? Why would you do this to us?" Sanders asked.

"What are you talking about? I didn't do any of this!" Gregory exclaimed.

"You're the one who wanted to stop here. You're the one who put the kid on first watch. You were supposed to keep us safe," Sanders replied. His voice was changing now, morphing into someone else's. To Gregory's horror, he soon recognized the voice as his mother's. "Why weren't you a better child? How come you never got along with the other kids?"

Gregory stumbled backward and quickly scrambled back to his feet. He could hear the others starting to get up as well, all of them blood-soaked nightmares, and all of them coming toward him. Gregory reached for his Colt .45 that was always by his side and, to his horror, found that it was gone. The others began to

talk, but not with their own voices. Kerry was the voice of his math teacher, scolding Gregory for not getting the right answer. Dodson was the voice of Gregory's high school sweetheart, complaining that they never

He could hear the others starting to get up as well, all of them blood-soaked nightmares, and all of them coming toward him.

talked anymore. He could hear the others speaking too, but all their voices fused into an inaudible

white noise, and Gregory turned and ran. It was difficult for Gregory to get through the underbrush; they hadn't cleared a path this way yet. Not that it mattered. The voices kept getting louder and louder and his mutilated comrades seemed to be getting closer. Eventually Gregory reached a small clearing that led to a cliff, and though it was almost impossible to see the bottom in the darkness, he could just barely hear the waves crashing into the rocks below. The voices continued to grow louder and now became more numerous.

Gregory glanced behind him and saw that the number of bodies

following him had also increased, five, ten, twenty, too many to count. He walked backward until his feet were at the edge of the cliff. Gregory took one last look at the grotesque abominations advancing on him, turned, and jumped.

Gregory sat up in a cold sweat and tried to catch his breath. He looked over at his wife, Natalie, and was surprised to see that she was still sleeping. Gregory got out of bed and stumbled his way into the bathroom. The white light overhead was initially painful, but his eyes quickly adjusted. He studied his face in the mirror as if it were the first time he had seen it. He turned his head to the right, then to the left. Eventually he found himself staring into his own eyes, except they weren't his eyes, not really. The eyes in the mirror were those of a trained killer. These were eyes that had witnessed death and had seen all the horrors life had to offer. Gregory was so caught up in his reflection that he had not noticed Natalie walking up behind him.

"Gregory? What are you doing?" she asked sleepily.

"Nothing, dear," Gregory said absentmindedly as he reached for his bottle of sleep medication. "Just getting some water. My pills must have worn off."

"Was it the dreams again?" Gregory could hear the concern beginning to grow in her voice now. "You're sweating."

"I'm fine," Gregory snapped. "Let's go back to bed." Natalie yawned, nodded, and led Gregory back to the bedroom when Gregory heard a knock at the front door. He felt his way through the house, not wanting to turn the lights on and risk waking their daughter. Gregory opened the door and found a short, chubby man dressed all in white. Without saying a word, the man handed Gregory a manila folder. Gregory opened the folder and quickly read over the dossier inside. "Justin Harris, huh?" Gregory mumbled to himself. "How much?"

"The normal price," the man in white said. Gregory couldn't tell if the man was bored, agitated, or both.

"It says here he may be traveling with someone," Gregory said.

Glaring, the man replied, "Yes, our intel suggests that there

may be one or two companions traveling with the target. Of course, you will be compensated for any extra work.”

“Compensated?”

Gregory asked, “How much compensation are we talking? I do have a family to take care of, you know.” Gregory looked behind him toward the child’s room. He listened for a moment to make sure she was still sleeping before he turned back toward the strange man in his doorway.

“Fifteen percent,” the man replied through clenched teeth.

“Yeah, I’ll get it done,” Gregory replied, and shut the door.

The sound of giggling woke Gregory up from his light sleep. He opened his eyes to see the bright smiling face of his daughter, Karen. Her smile widened, revealing her missing front teeth. “Daddy!” she squealed. “It’s time to wake up!”

“Good morning, princess,” Gregory said, rubbing his eyes. He looked at the clock and was unsurprised to see that it was 7:30, the same time it always was when Karen came in. “Are you hungry? Do you want some breakfast?”

“Chicken nuggets!” Karen squealed again.

“Shh,” Gregory said, bringing a finger to his lips. “You’re going to wake Mommy up. How about we get you some cereal?”

Karen’s brow furrowed as she considered Gregory’s offer. “Can I have juice?” she asked.

“Yes, but only if you finish all your cereal,” Gregory said. Karen nodded in agreement, taking Gregory by the hand leading him toward the kitchen. Gregory looked behind him and saw that Natalie was still asleep. He considered waking her up, but he knew that the alarm would be going off soon, so he decided to let her sleep.

In the kitchen, Gregory grabbed a brightly colored cereal box from on top of the fridge. On the cover were several cartoon animals, all of them enthusiastically eating a bowl of fruit-shaped cereal. He poured Karen a bowl of the sugary cereal and put the box away. Then Gregory went to the fridge, got out the half-emptied gallon of milk, and poured some on top of the cereal.

“Here you go, princess,” Gregory said as he put the bowl on the table. He tried to sound

cheerful, but he was still half asleep. Gregory could hear the alarm going off in the bedroom as he put the milk back in the refrigerator. "I'm going to go check on Mommy, you stay here and eat," he said.

"Can I please have some juice, Daddy?" Karen asked again.

"Not until you finish your cereal," Gregory replied absentmindedly.

"Please? Just a sip?" Karen pleaded. Gregory froze mid step and slowly turned back to her. Where had he heard that before?

"What did you say?" he asked, struggling to control himself. He suddenly felt like the house was a thousand degrees, sweat beginning to form beads on his forehead.

"I just want a little juice, Daddy, just a little sip," Karen pleaded.

"Okay, princess," Gregory managed, "just a sip." He poured her a small cup of juice, but his hands were shaking so badly that he ended up spilling more on the counter than he got in the cup. "Here you go," Gregory said, hurrying out of the kitchen.

Gregory walked back to the master bedroom, trying to regain

control of his mind, and found Natalie still asleep. He stared at her for a moment and considered letting her sleep longer, but then he remembered the new contract he had accepted. Gregory needed Natalie to wake up so she could take Karen to school. Otherwise he wouldn't be able to pack. "Hey," Gregory said sternly, "get up." He grabbed Natalie's foot and shook it until she woke.

"Five more minutes," Natalie grunted, still mostly asleep.

"Do you really want to have another talk with Karen's school about why she's late?" Gregory asked.

"No," Natalie replied with a sigh. She rolled out of bed, barely opening her eyes as she felt her way to the bathroom.

"Karen's in the kitchen," Gregory called after her. "After she finishes her cereal I'll make sure she gets dressed."

"It's picture day," Natalie yelled from the bathroom. "Maybe I should be the one to get her dressed. We don't need another repeat of last year."

Gregory could tell by her tone that she was half joking, half serious. There were three things he could never take away from Natalie no matter what

happened between them: she had brains, she had an eye for fashion, and she was one hell of a cook. "I'll be in the kitchen," Gregory said and started to leave.

"Good morning to you too, my dear," Natalie replied as she started to get dressed.

Gregory sat in the now empty house and went through his checklist once more: plane ticket, check; hotel room, check; semi-automatic pistol in case things got personal, check; his favorite Bowie knife in case things got too personal, check. The only thing missing was a rifle. Gregory looked over the file he'd been given to see if there were any preferences for how the job should be done, but he did not see any. Perfect, Gregory thought, I can do it my way then. Gregory walked back to the main bedroom. He could barely see what color the walls were because they were covered in pictures of Karen: her sonogram photos, the first time they'd brought her home from the hospital, her first Halloween, her first day of school. Gregory's gaze went to the other pictures, the older ones. Each was like

taking another step into the past. There were photos from his and Natalie's wedding day, their first date, their senior pictures.

Then Gregory saw a picture that always made him stop. It was of a young man, barely older than twenty, in military fatigues. He appeared to be playing a card game of some sort, and his smile took up the bottom half of his face. It was the eyes that always caught Gregory off guard; they seemed too old for their owner's face. Gregory could just barely make out the name on the man's left breast: Jenkins.

When he got to the walk-in closet, Gregory pushed the clothes aside until he found the gun cabinet and opened it. He could feel a smile forming on his face as he gazed at all of his favorite tools. Now came the hard part: deciding which one to bring with him. Should I take the Springfield 30-06? No, I took her last time; don't want the other guns to get jealous. And the Barret .50 would be the definition of overkill. Then Gregory's gaze fell on his Mossberg .243 and he felt the smile on his face widen. "Perfect," Gregory exclaimed, even though no one was around to hear him. He grabbed the rifle

and a box of ammo, then went to finish packing.

Gregory triple checked all his equipment, then quickly loaded up the car. After a quick walk around the house to make sure no unwanted visitors would be able to get in, Gregory got in the car and headed to the airport.

Gregory quickly made his way through security. He wasn't worried about checking his bags. He knew that his employer had taken care of paying off whoever was in charge of checking bags. After he made it through all the checkpoints, he still had over an hour to kill. Gregory decided to pick up a gift for Karen, so he stopped in at one of the small gift shops that lined the halls between gates. He walked around the small store, trying to find something that Karen would enjoy but that also wouldn't be too much of a hassle to carry with him for the remainder of the trip. A bin of stuffed animals caught his eye. The small plush animals had different things stitched onto their midsections, some with words or phrases, some with names. Gregory dug around in the bin until he found a pink bear with "Karen" on it.

Perfect, he thought, and kept digging until he found a purple bear with "Natalie" stitched on its stomach. He paid for the bears and then went to his gate.

The night was deadly silent. The only noise was the howling wind whipping snow into small flurries across the near-barren landscape. Gregory was doing his best to remain still, but he could feel his rifle shaking in his hands, not from the cold but from the adrenaline flowing through his veins. He took several deep breaths and began to relax. Gregory heard the unmistakable crunching of snow underfoot and immediately tensed up again. He concentrated on the noise and could soon make out the voices of people coming toward him. Gregory shifted his weight so he could get a better view. The tree he had chosen to hide in was perfect: it was tall enough that he could see for miles around him even in the small amount of light provided by the waxing moon above, and it had just enough leaves left that he had a small amount of cover and warmth.

Gregory tried to make out the faces of the two figures

approaching, but they were still too far away to see. He raised his rifle so he could use the scope to get a better view, and what he saw surprised him. The first figure was Justin Harris, the man Gregory, for whatever reason, had been hired to kill. First rule of being a contract killer, never ask questions. It was the small person next to Justin that gave Gregory pause. The best Gregory could tell, it was a small boy, maybe seven or eight years old. Even from this distance Gregory could see the boy shaking violently, trying to keep warm. What kind of person would bring a child out on a night like this? Gregory thought. He had to stifle a laugh at the thought of him, a hired assassin, giving parenting advice. As the pair got closer, Gregory could just barely start to understand what they were saying.

“We’re almost there, Daniel. Just a few more minutes and we’ll be bundled up by a nice warm fire,” Justin was

saying reassuringly. Gregory wasn’t sure who needed the reassurance more, Justin or the boy. It appeared as if Daniel said something in response but his voice was too soft and the wind too loud for Gregory to hear what it was.

Gregory began to hear more voices, except these voices were not coming from the world around him, they were coming from inside his head. They were the same voices he heard every time he was on the job: there was the voice of his mother telling him he would never amount to anything; the voice of his first girlfriend breaking up with him; the voice of his tenth grade math teacher humiliating him in front of the whole class because he got a problem wrong; and on and on and on until there were so many voices that it was impossible to understand what any one of them was saying. Gregory did not panic though; he knew exactly what he needed to do to

get the voices to stop: finish the job he had come here to do.

Gregory took aim at Justin through the scope of his rifle. He could see Justin's lips, which were beginning to turn blue, but he was unable to hear what Justin was saying over the roaring that was coming from inside his own head. Gregory took one long, deep breath and pulled the trigger. Justin's lifeless body landed in a heap of snow. Gregory expected the boy to run at the sound of the gun but instead Daniel just stood there, looking in shock at the mass of flesh and bones that had once been a living, breathing person. Gregory waited a few moments for the voices to quiet down. Then he remembered the boy who was still standing alone in the field of snow and realized what he had to do.

Gregory took aim down his scope once again, this time focusing in on the child. Daniel's face was ghost white, either

from the cold or the shock. Gregory could tell the boy was going to begin to cry soon. "Sorry, kid," Gregory mumbled. "Second rule of being an assassin: leave no witnesses." Gregory took a long, deep breath and made the voices stop.

The trip home from a job was always the most relaxing part for Gregory. He enjoyed the routine of it. He knew that when he got home, there would be an envelope full of cash waiting in the mailbox, and Natalie would have dinner ready

and waiting. Gregory got out of the car, hit the lock button three times, and turned to walk into the house. When he entered the front door, Gregory was immediately slammed into by Karen who, for someone so small, was able to generate a surprising amount of force.

"Daddy!" Karen squealed as she tried her best to wrap

He could see Justin's lips, which were beginning to turn blue, but he was unable to hear what Justin was saying over the roaring that was coming from inside his own head.

her arms all the way around Gregory's midsection. "You're home!"

"Yes I am, princess," he replied. "And I got you a present."

"A present?" Karen said with a gasp. "What did you get me?"

"Not now," Gregory said. "But," he whispered, "if you're a good girl, and eat all your dinner, you can have it before you go to sleep."

Karen's face twisted as she considered his offer. "Okay!"

"Dinner's ready," Natalie called from the kitchen. "And you better have gotten me a present, too."

"How was the job?" Natalie asked as she washed the dishes from their meal. "You were pretty quiet during dinner."

"Pretty standard," Gregory replied with a shrug. "I'm a little sore from being out in the cold that long, but other than that nothing spectacular happened."

"Come on, Greg," Natalie said and put the half washed cup she was cleaning back into the sink. She dried her hands off and sat in the chair closest to Gregory. "I've known you too long for you to lie to me. Was it the target? I read the file. That

Justin guy sounded like a real jackass."

"No," Gregory said and shook his head, "it's not that."

"Then what is it?"

"It's just," Gregory looked at where Karen was playing in the front room to make sure she wasn't close enough to hear him. "The guy wasn't alone."

"So? You've had to take care of witnesses before. Don't tell me you're getting soft in your old age," Natalie teased.

"No, it's not that," Gregory replied, refusing to meet Natalie's gaze.

"Gregory." The concern was beginning to grow in Natalie's voice, "What happened?"

"He had a kid with him," Gregory said quietly. "That bastard took a kid with him. He couldn't have been much older than Karen." Natalie didn't reply. Instead, she got up from the table and finished washing the dishes in silence.

That night, Gregory dreamed again, except instead of being in the jungle he was back in the tree overlooking the snowy tundra. He could hear the footsteps of two individuals quickly approaching him.

What the hell, Gregory thought, *that's Natalie!* Before he could think anything else, the voices started again. "No!" Gregory said loud enough that he could hear himself over the voices, "I'm not going to kill my wife." But the voices seemed to take no notice of Gregory's protests. Instead, he felt his grip tighten around the gun, and his right index finger gripped the trigger. Gregory tried to stop himself, but it was as if someone or something else was controlling him. There was a loud bang that echoed throughout the frozen tundra and Natalie's body fell to the ground in a heap. Gregory prayed that the voices would stop, but they didn't. Then he felt his body turn slightly as the scope focused in on the other figure. To his dismay, Gregory recognized Karen's face immediately.

"Sorry, kid," Gregory heard himself say, his own voice sounding foreign to his ears. "Second rule of being an assassin: leave no witnesses." Gregory was unable to stop himself as he tightened his finger around the trigger again. The recoil made his whole body shake, but the only thing Gregory could focus

on was the body of his daughter collapsing lifelessly in the snow.

Gregory sat up with a start, an action that was becoming all too familiar for him as of late. Despite cool air coming in from the open window next to his side of the bed, he was covered in sweat. Gregory forced himself out of bed and went into the bathroom. He opened the medicine cabinet and frantically searched for his sleeping medication. To his dismay, the bottle was empty. With a grunt, Gregory punched the wall beside the mirror, leaving a hole he knew he would have to repair the next day.

"Is everything okay?" a voice asked behind Gregory. He whipped around to see Natalie standing there in an oversized T-shirt, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. "Was it the dream again? The jungle one?"

"No," Gregory said, "but I think I'm done taking contracts for a while."

First Grade 1953

W. Eugene Johnson

Hurry out into the hall,
sit with your back to the wall.
Put your head between your knees,
kiss your ass goodbye.
Don't worry, it's just a drill.

When will it come?
Where will it hit?
Will I see my mommy,
my daddy,
my grandma again
before we glow in the dark?

Brighter than a thousand suns,
millions of vaporized souls
cry out in silent anguish,
the pomposity of humankind
reduced to ashes.

Dark Blue Denim

Cindy Nowacki

I unfolded the bolt of heavy, dark blue denim and arranged it carefully across the rectangular wooden table, edges lined up perfectly. Next came the Butterick pattern pieces cut from lightweight brown tissue paper pages, each marked with name and number. “Pin the pieces on the cloth so that the arrows follow the grain of the material,” my Aunt Kathy explained as she directed me through my first attempt at sewing a garment. “Be certain to check for those pieces that need to be placed on the folded edge of the denim.” Like an apprentice tailor, I listened with strict attention to each word she spoke. I was going to sew my very own pair of bell-bottomed blue jeans! This would be the first pair of blue jeans I had ever owned, and since they would have the extra-large bell-bottomed legs that were a number one fashion statement in the 1960’s, I expected to look like a hip fashion model pictured in a glossy magazine.

As my fingers began the busy

work of constructing this first-ever garment, I kept thinking about my mother. This is a project that she and I should be completing together—a mother and daughter thing, I thought. But I was at my grandmother’s house and my mother was off to who-knows-where “finding herself” and getting her “head on straight,” as she’d explained it. I didn’t have much hope since her mind was cloudy from alcohol abuse.

I painstakingly pinned each pattern piece in place, taking care to position the shiny new straight pins exactly where the circles indicated. Next, I removed the brand new scissors from the heavy cardboard packaging, holding them up to the sunlight to see the bright reflection that the rays made as they hit the sharp edges of the blades. The scissors felt heavy and cool in my hand as I anxiously made the first cut into the thick material. As each pattern piece was cut away from the large bolt and the scissors made indentations in my thumb and forefinger, I began to gain confidence. “As

you round to each v-shaped, pointed tab in the pattern, be certain to make them large enough to match up with the other pieces you will cut out,” Aunt Kathy explained. “This is how you will know where they match up for stitching pattern pieces together.”

Aunt Kathy understood the demons our mom faced daily. She took it upon herself to help my nine-year-old siblings, who were too young to understand any of this madness. They did

How could somebody
love you and abuse you
at the same time?

not realize how alcohol could change someone’s outlook on life. Aunt Kathy reassured us that our mom really did love us in spite of how she displayed her emotions. This just made me angry. How could someone love you and abuse you at the same time? I did not understand how my heart could hurt so much. Aunt Kathy tried to make some of that pain go away by gently working closely with me as we began to sew together the pieces of material in the same way she was attempting to piece together my broken heart.

It was time to begin stitching. My throat tightened just a bit and my heart began to race as I realized that the next step would be to sit down in front of the sewing machine and carefully place my foot on the heavy, black pedal. Aunt Kathy allowed me to practice on a piece of scrap material from her huge sewing basket that was filled with colorful leftovers from past projects. I carefully slid the soft, silky material under the needle, lowering it into the cloth and slowly dropping the pressure foot used to hold it firmly in place.

Aunt Kathy leaned over me and gently placed her hand on top of mine. Together we pushed the fabric into the machine. I felt a cramp in my leg as I gingerly pushed the foot pedal. The needle began its downward descent deep into the fabric and just as quickly returned to the top, only to repeatedly echo that movement.

I began sewing my jeans with the pear-shaped pocket pieces, attaching them to the side of the upper pant leg piece and

overlapping it with the matching segment from the opposite side. With these pieces facing inside out and meticulously pinned as one, sewing them together would create a single pant leg. I slipped the heavy dark blue pieces of denim under the needlepoint. Carefully, I sewed over the sharp tips of the straight pins used to hold everything in place until the final pieces of thread were inlaid in a perfect line. Aunt Kathy explained how I should rotate the fabric as it slipped beneath the sharp needle, making certain that I kept my small fingers away from the danger of a painful prick.

While continuing the project with helpful hints and some minor mistakes along the way, I could not stop myself from imagining Mom and me working on something like this together. I believed Aunt Kathy could read my mind. She wrapped her arms around my shoulders and exclaimed, "You have finished your first project!" As we used the tip of those scissors to trim the stray pieces of blue thread throughout the garment, tears gathered in the corners of my eyes and trickled down my cheeks. I

felt joy and accomplishment as I tried on those dark blue denim bell-bottom jeans for the first time. I stepped in front of the full-length mirror outside of the sewing room doorway with apprehension. They fit me perfectly. I wished my mother were there to see me as I inserted my leather belt into the newly formed belt loops, connected the ends together, and adjusted the metal buckle.

That year, my family was in turmoil because of the split between my parents. My siblings were even more confused than I was because they were too young to understand. They had heard the arguments and witnessed the middle-of-the-night drama as my mom and dad continued the long, slow descent into the end of their marriage. My siblings' cries were overshadowed by the sounds of yelling and breaking glass.

I was their protector now. At eleven, I was not prepared for this obligation. Had I known how many years I would find myself in this grown-up role, I would have packed my tattered, broken-zippered backpack and disappeared into the night. I felt

like the only thing holding our world together.

My father decided that it was better that he move out. After all, he was the reason for the decline in the relationship. When he decided that he wanted to spend more time with his young girlfriend than my aging mother, things had really begun to unravel. This began the alcoholism, the heartbreak, and the depression my mother faced.

Dad moved back home with my grandmother. The small, box-shaped house, that house where he had grown from a small boy to a married man, was located on a corner lot in the wooded area outside of a rustic, lazy Ohio farm town. On an early June morning, my mom loaded us children into her car for a trip to that sad old house where she had decided we needed to be for the summer, spending time with the father who had rarely visited in the past and did not send money to help support us. My mother had grown tired of trying to pay the endless bills on one income, bargaining with impatient and anxious kids who did not understand the repercussions of an unhappy home, and keeping her sanity while dealing with

the daily hangovers caused by attempts to stifle the pain.

As our rusty, corroded old car made its way up the dirt driveway, I knew my summer was going to be much different than it had been in previous years. I would not be spending steamy, sunny, welcoming summer days at the city pool, splashing in the cool blue water and jumping from the high dive. I knew I would miss my best friend Laurie and the hours we usually devoted to Barbie and Ken and Barbie's little sister Skipper and her cousin Midge. My most loyal and trustworthy friend would have to share secrets and idle time that summer with someone else. The most difficult part for me was that I knew that Laurie would not be there for me to lean on and disclose my heartache, sorrow, and despair. She was the world's best listener and now she was miles away.

Mom's car came to an abrupt halt near the unpainted and unwelcoming back steps. She immediately swung open the driver's side door, dramatically stepped away from the car, swung open the rear car door, and demanded that we gather

our things and get out. As she opened the creaky old trunk, her keys dangling from the lock, I saw a look in her eyes that I had never seen before, a look of dread and longing. She pulled out our battered suitcase, threw it violently on the porch, and screamed to my father who had suddenly appeared on the stoop, "You can take care of your goddamned kids this summer!" She had a crazed look on her face. For her, it must have felt petrifying and exhilarating to have her burdens lifted, even if it was to be for just a few summer months.

Mom returned to the car and emphatically slammed her door. That old black Ford sailed off like a wicked witch's powerful broom, taking away a scorned and wrecked woman while leaving behind a cloud of dust and three damaged children.

As I collected myself and our suitcase, I gathered my brother and sister close to me, trying as best as I could to comfort them without showing my uneasiness. They were both crying softly, holding hands, with puzzled looks. I ushered them through the door that our father held open and we stepped gingerly

into the kitchen. As my eyes adjusted from the brightness of outdoors to the poorly lit interior, I realized that there was someone else in the room—someone who had been an eyewitness to the madness that had just exploded in the dust-filled driveway.

When I realized that the person casting a shadow created by the small lamp behind her was my Aunt Kathy, I felt a load lifting from my eleven-year-old shoulders. I dropped everything and ran joyfully into her open and inviting arms. She and I bonded at that moment as we shared tears. I knew right then that everything was going to be all right. Aunt Kathy understood the pressures on me to protect and safeguard my brother and sister. She recognized and comprehended the responsibilities that were now mine. She reassured the twins, too, that it was okay to be sad. She said we would have a "most excellent, cream-of-the-crop" summer.

She took us to the county fair where we ate so much cotton candy our bellies throbbed. We swam in the quarry filled with clear water that numbed our

toes and forced us out into the balmy sunshine. Enthusiastically we piled into her red sedan and rode off to the zoo for the day. However, my most-loved and preferred times were those moments that I spent alone with her. She helped me understand that sometimes people do things in spite of themselves and not because of others. She relieved me of my feelings of guilt. I realized that my mom did what she did because she was in pain. Aunt Kathy supported me and gave me her undivided attention as we worked together to create a bond and a pair of dark blue denim jeans.

I think of my Aunt Kathy often as I sit at my simple Singer sewing machine, squinting my eyes as I attempt to put the thick thread through that miniature hole in the needle. My sewing basket sits filled with scraps of colorful material from the many projects I have completed since she and I made that first pair of pants. Her patience and inspiration enabled my hands to work skillfully and meticulously to join countless pieces of material, forming shapes from lightweight tissue

paper pages placed skillfully on assorted pieces of fabric. I have assembled innumerable projects throughout my lifetime—Halloween costumes, stuffed animals, skirts, suits, doll clothing, and even my daughter's wedding dress. But when I pick up a piece of heavy, dark denim, my mind returns to the time spent with Aunt Kathy in front of her simple white Singer sewing machine and the lessons she taught me. Most importantly, as she taught me her skills for stitching, with her easygoing nature, her knowing hand, and her desire to pass this skill to another generation, she also showed me love. Little did I know how much I would come realize what her love meant to me that summer. Aunt Kathy helped to mend my broken heart and sew my world together again.

I Take the Stage

Jessica Jordan

The red velvet curtain rises.
Silence smothers the crowd like a blanket.
Under the white lights, they sit
motionless.
I turn, observing a woman staring
into the abyss of the crowd.
Red lips, black dress.
Her citrus perfume surrounds me,
suffocating.
The hand rises.
Salty sweat greets my top lip.
My hands gently grasp the wooden neck.
The whimsical bow grazes the strings as if to say
I love you.
But it turns into so much more,
violently moving to and fro like the angry waves of
an ocean.
Creating magic,
the two say I love you once more.
The crowd stands.



Faster Than My Bullet

Brianna Henry

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSIDE OF A SMALL MALL—DAY

INT. MALL FOOD COURT

A group of football players and cheerleaders occupy several tables pushed together. The football players are wearing varsity jackets, nice jeans, and expensive sneakers. They are messing around and having fun. There are also families and other people around the food court.

ROBERT, an eighteen-year-old senior in high school, holds a tray of food. ROBERT pulls his phone from his pocket and looks at the message from his father. It reads, "I won't be home for dinner tonight, bud. Take some money from the cookie jar and go get something." ROBERT sighs and slides the phone back into his pocket. As he walks to sit down he smiles and waves at a few of the FOOTBALL PLAYERS and CHEERLEADERS.

CHEERLEADER: Do you know that guy?

FOOTBALL PLAYER: I have no idea who that is.

OTHER CHEERLEADER: I think he goes to our school.

FOOTBALL PLAYER: I don't think I've ever seen him before. Must be one of the scummers.

ROBERT sits down in the corner away from the FOOTBALL PLAYERS and CHEERLEADERS. He keeps his head down and balls his hands into fists. When he lifts his head up, he glares in the direction of the JOCKS.

JUMBLED MIX OF MALE AND FEMALE VOICES: Who is he? Does he even go here? He must be a geek. What are you looking at, freak? Oh, I didn't see you there.

ROBERT (Voice over): I am practically invisible.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE—DAY

The front door is thrown open and ROBERT storms into his home.

He kicks the door shut. ROBERT begins checking the cupboards in the kitchen frantically, leaving the room a mess. Eerie music plays in the background.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: SCHOOL HALLWAY—BLACK AND WHITE

ROBERT is walking to class and gets bumped into aggressively by a FOOTBALL PLAYER. ROBERT drops all of his stuff, but the FOOTBALL PLAYER and GROUP of five to eight boys he is with keep walking.

FOOTBALL PLAYER (smirking and sarcastic): Sorry, didn't see you there.

CUT TO:

PRESENT: KITCHEN—COLOR

ROBERT moves from the kitchen to the bathroom and begins searching the closet, throwing around towels and cleaning supplies. Eerie music plays in the background.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: SCIENCE CLASSROOM—BLACK AND WHITE

ROBERT sits at the front of the room, taking notes, his head down. There are about nineteen other students in the classroom, a couple of them FOOTBALL PLAYERS.

TEACHER: All right, class. I'm going to pair you up for the lab and then you're free to get started. Mark and Kennedy; Taylor and Jared; Mackenzie and Grace; Robert and Brandon—

BRANDON (One of the FOOTBALL PLAYERS): Aw, c'mon! Why do I have to get stuck with the new kid?

ROBERT turns around, glares at BRANDON, and speaks slowly through clenched teeth.

ROBERT (annoyed): I'm not new. We've been in most of the same classes since middle school.

The CLASSMATES begin to laugh and crack jokes at ROBERT's expense. The TEACHER tries to quiet her students, but they just get louder. ROBERT stands up from his desk aggressively, knocking over his chair. He shoves his desk, grabs his backpack, and storms out of the room. The CLASSMATES laugh harder at the scene ROBERT has made.

CUT TO:

PRESENT: BATHROOM—COLOR

ROBERT wipes a stray tear from his face and then wipes his nose with his sleeve. He makes his way to his father's room and starts throwing his socks, underwear, and clothing out of his dresser drawers. Eerie music plays in the background.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: SCHOOL ENTRANCE—BLACK AND WHITE

ROBERT walks up to the school entrance and stands in front of two girls in dresses sitting at a table. There is music in the background, coming from inside the school. He reaches into his pocket, searching for his ticket.

GIRL: Sorry, only students that go to this school can get in, unless you have a date and a permission slip.

ROBERT: I go here. We're in the same math class.

GIRL (laughs and rolls her eyes): Nice try. I can't let you in, I'm sorry. Next!

CUT TO:

PRESENT: ROBERT'S FATHER'S ROOM—COLOR

ROBERT throws all of the sweatpants out of the last drawer and finds a key. He grabs it and goes to his father's closet. ROBERT kneels and puts his backpack next to him. He uses the key to open the safe and a sinister smile crosses his face as he reaches for a pistol. He holds the gun in one hand and ammunition in the other. Eerie music plays in the background.

CUT TO:

FLASH FORWARD: SCHOOL HALLWAY—BLACK AND WHITE

Slow-motion shot of STUDENTS running to get out of the hallway and into classrooms. A silhouette of ROBERT enters the frame, pistol in hand. The beat to "Pumped up Kicks" by Foster the People plays in the background.

CUT TO:

PRESENT: ROBERT'S FATHER'S ROOM—COLOR

ROBERT's hands tremble as he loads the gun. Then he shakily stands to his feet. He holds the gun out in front of him and aims. It is eerily quiet. ROBERT lets out a shaky breath.

CUT TO:

FLASH FORWARD: SCHOOL HALLWAY—BLACK AND WHITE

ROBERT is holding the gun out in front of him, aiming confidently at BRANDON's back. It is eerily quiet. The screen goes black as the gunshot is heard.

CUT TO:

PRESENT: ROBERT'S FATHER'S ROOM—COLOR

Closeup of ROBERT's face with his eyes closed. He drops the arm holding the gun to his side as he opens his eyes and lets out a sigh of relief. ROBERT goes back into the safe and empties all of the ammunition into his backpack along with the gun. He gets to his feet and walks slowly down the hall into his room.

ROBERT puts on "Don't Lean on Me" by The Amity Affliction and sits on the edge of his bed, back straight and hands on his knees. He closes his eyes and the camera goes out of focus and fades to black. The music becomes louder, mixing with screams of frustration and loud crashes.

CUT TO:

The music quiets back down and ROBERT stands in the middle of his room breathing heavily. Books, clothing, and a broken lamp are scattered across the floor. ROBERT turns the music off as he hears the phone ringing. He walks to the kitchen with a blank expression and picks up the phone.

ROBERT: Hello?

FATHER (MARK) (over phone): Hey bud.

ROBERT (monotonous, annoyed): What's up, Mark?

MARK: I got another late night at the office, bud.

ROBERT (Angry, annoyed): Do you?

MARK: I've got a big meeting I have to prepare for.

ROBERT (Sarcastic, short laugh before speaking): Sounds riveting.

MARK: It's actually really exciting for me. It could—

ROBERT: You know what? I care about a lot of things, and this is not one of them.

MARK: Don't talk to me like that, Robert. I am your father.

ROBERT: Maybe if you were home and acted like my father for once I would treat you like one.

MARK: All right, smartass. There should be something in the fridge or freezer to eat.

ROBERT: I doubt it. You haven't been shopping in weeks.

MARK: How about you make a list of stuff you would like and we'll go this weekend?

ROBERT: Yeah, like that will happen.

ROBERT hangs up before his father can say anything. He puts the phone back into its port, walks to the refrigerator, and opens the door. All that is inside are bottles of ketchup and mustard and an expired carton of milk. ROBERT rolls his eyes, closes it, and opens the freezer. Inside are five bottles of alcohol and a microwavable chicken pot pie.

ROBERT laughs and grabs one of the bottles with only a quarter of the alcohol left. He sits at the kitchen table and takes a big swig of the alcohol.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: SCHOOL SCIENCE FAIR—BLACK AND WHITE

ROBERT, nine, stands next to his science project about caterpillars turning into butterflies. The sound of other kids talking and laughing with their parents is loud. He stands waiting for his dad, but as there are fewer and fewer people, he starts to get more and more upset. After he is the only person beside his teacher in the room, his dad rushes in and tries to apologize. ROBERT pushes past him.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: SOCCER FIELD—BLACK AND WHITE.

ROBERT, twelve, looks in the stands for his dad and can't find him. He finally sees his dad next to the bleachers on the phone. He gets the ball and tries to get his dad's attention, but stops in his tracks when he sees his dad walk toward his car and leave. The other team gets the ball and scores a goal which helps them win the game, causing his teammates to shove him and blame him for losing. ROBERT just stands and takes it while staring at the spot where his dad was.

TEAMMATE 1: Good going, idiot.

TEAMMATE 2: Thanks for losing the game.

TEAMMATE 3: You should just quit.

TEAMMATE 4: You suck!

TEAMMATE 5: My baby sister could play better than you!

A tear falls down ROBERT'S face.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: ROBERT'S ROOM—BLACK AND WHITE

ROBERT, just turned eighteen, lies in his bed, playing a video game. His father sticks his head into his room.

MARK: Hey, did you leave me any dinner?

ROBERT (being short): Didn't cook.

MARK: Why?

ROBERT: Don't have any food to cook with.

MARK: I just went shopping.

ROBERT: Three weeks ago.

MARK: So you didn't eat?

ROBERT: No, I ate. I went to the food court to that French fry place I like.

MARK (gets agitated as he goes on): I didn't leave you money, how did you pay for it? You didn't get a job, did you? You know how I feel about that. You need to focus on school. I wish—

ROBERT: Nope. Used the money I got from Grandma.

MARK: When did you get money from her?

ROBERT: It was in my birthday card.

MARK: Oh, yeah! Your birthday is coming up. The big one-eight! What do you wanna do for it?

ROBERT (laughs): Classic Mark.

MARK: What do you mean?

ROBERT: My birthday was today.

MARK (No remorse): Oh, bud. I'm sorry. We can do something later. Wanna get dinner tomorrow?

ROBERT (glares at his dad): After waiting at the food court for an hour today, I think I'm good. Maybe next year.

CUT TO:

PRESENT: KITCHEN—COLOR

ROBERT takes a swig, emptying the bottle. He looks at the bottle in his hand, throws it at the refrigerator, and watches it smash into pieces.

ROBERT rises to his feet aggressively, knocking over his chair in the process. He grabs his keys off of the counter and walks out the front

door.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE ROBERT'S HOUSE—AFTERNOON

ROBERT quickly backs out of the garage and into the road. He shifts from reverse to drive just as fast, and his tires squeal as he takes off. He speeds down residential streets, ignoring pedestrians and people yelling at him from the sidewalk. When he gets to the school, he parks toward the back of the parking lot.

ROBERT gets out of his car and leans against the hood. He grabs his supplies from his sweatshirt pocket and starts rolling a cigarette. As he finishes, he watches the FOOTBALL PLAYERS and CHEERLEADERS leave the school after practice. Anger crosses ROBERT's face as he watches them laugh and talk to each other.

ROBERT holds the cigarette in his mouth as he fishes in his pocket for a lighter. Just as he lights the flame, the FOOTBALL COACH comes up to him.

FOOTBALL COACH: You may be of age now, but you can't smoke on school property. Especially not around my athletes.

ROBERT lights up his cigarette and blows the smoke into COACH's face.

FOOTBALL COACH: All right, kid. Get your ass off of school property before I get you suspended.

ROBERT turns and gets into his car. He drives away from the school, making sure to blow smoke as he drives past the players.

COACH (Off screen): Damn kids these days. Entitled, disrespectful brats.

ROBERT peels out of the school parking lot and starts speeding down residential streets again.

ROBERT (slams his hands on the steering wheel): Are you freaking kidding me?!

Flashing lights are seen in the rear view mirror. ROBERT pulls over and rolls his window down.

POLICE OFFICER: Do you know why I pulled you over?

ROBERT (smirks at the officer): Not a single clue.

POLICE OFFICER: You were going forty-five in a twenty-five.

ROBERT (laughs): No way! Was I?

POLICE OFFICER: Have you been drinking?

ROBERT (sarcastic): Why, no, sir.

POLICE OFFICER: You reek of alcohol. I'm gonna have to ask you to step out of the car.

ROBERT: No. Screw you.

The POLICE OFFICER walks back to his car and starts talking on his radio.

CUT TO:

POLICE STATION: INTERROGATION ROOM—NIGHT

ROBERT sits in the room alone.

ROBERT(voice over): I refuse to stay invisible.

An officer comes to the room and leads ROBERT out to the waiting area. MARK is waiting for him. He is visibly angry. MARK turns to leave and ROBERT walks slowly behind him. Once they exit the police station, MARK grabs ROBERT's arm and drags him to the car. ROBERT rips his arm away from MARK when they get to the car.

MARK shoves ROBERT and ROBERT falls to his back. MARK gets on top of ROBERT and grabs his face.

MARK: I don't know what is going on with you, but I'm not about to deal with you acting like you did when you were a kid. That's why your mother left. You're eighteen now so I can kick your ass out.

ROBERT shoves MARK but he doesn't move.

ROBERT: Don't touch me. You may have been able to beat me when I was a kid but I can defend myself now.

MARK: What are you gonna do? Hit me back?

ROBERT: If I have to.

MARK: If you do that, you're gonna make it worse on yourself.

MARK lets go of ROBERT and gets in the car.

MARK: Get in the car. It's late and I have an early morning.

ROBERT gets up and sits in the backseat of the car.

MARK: So you stole my alcohol?

ROBERT rolls his eyes and crosses his arms.

MARK: Too good to talk to your old man?

ROBERT: I don't have one of those.

MARK: Listen here, smartass. I am your father and you're going

to respect me.

ROBERT: Like that will ever happen.

MARK: So, what made you decide to drink and drive?

ROBERT: Probably a lack of parental guidance. Maybe the crippling depression I got from my mommy and daddy issues. Who knows?

MARK: Well, that was a dumbass decision. I'm not helping you pay the fine or taking you to your community service or anything else. Figure it out yourself.

ROBERT (shakes his head and laughs): That's one of the many, many reasons why I refuse to acknowledge you as my dad.

MARK looks at ROBERT through the rearview mirror. The camera is through ROBERT's eyes in the backseat so we see MARK through the mirror.

MARK: Watch what you say. You might regret it later.

ROBERT (under his breath): I won't, but you will.

CUT TO:

ROBERT'S HOME—NIGHT

MARK and ROBERT walk through the front door. MARK stops out of shock and ROBERT pushes past him and goes to his room.

MARK: Are. You. Kidding me? ROBERT!

ROBERT doesn't respond. MARK angrily walks down the hall and into ROBERT's room.

MARK: You need to get your ass up and go clean this mess.

MARK goes to his room and ROBERT goes to the kitchen to start cleaning.

MARK (off screen): Really? Clean my room tomorrow after I leave for work too. You ungrateful brat.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: ROBERT'S HOME—BLACK AND WHITE

A younger version of MARK is in the kitchen with a six year old ROBERT. ROBERT is sitting at the table while MARK is cooking.

ROBERT: I spilled my juice, Daddy.

MARK: How did you do that if you're supposed to be sitting still at the table?

ROBERT: I knocked it down on accident. My arm bumped it.

MARK: I doubt it was an accident, you incompetent brat. You're just trying to make my life miserable. Get up.

ROBERT gets up from the table. MARK grabs him by his arm and kneels down so they are eye level. MARK grabs ROBERT's face and squeezes hard enough to make ROBERT start crying.

MARK (through clenched teeth): Don't you dare cry. If you wanna be a rotten little jerk, you're gonna face consequences.

MARK slaps ROBERT across the face then grabs his face again.

MARK: Don't do that again. You sit down and you sit still. If you don't, your punishment is going to be a lot worse.

MARK walks out of the room and slams his bedroom door, leaving ROBERT crying alone in the kitchen.

MARK (off screen): Your mother left six months ago and I already can't stand taking care of you.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: KITCHEN—BLACK AND WHITE

ROBERT, fourteen, walks into the kitchen and stands across from MARK who is sitting at the table doing work.

ROBERT (nervous): Hey dad—

MARK looks up from his work and at ROBERT.

MARK: What's up?

ROBERT: Re-remember how I t-told you I've been having trouble in history? Because I c-can't remember names and d-dates?

MARK: Yeah, I remember you telling me that. You better be studying.

MARK turns back to his work.

ROBERT: Every night for an hour.

MARK: Good.

ROBERT: We—we had a test on Monday.

MARK: Did you get it back?

ROBERT: Y-yes—

MARK: And you did well?

ROBERT: I—I got a D, Dad, it's not my fault I swear. I—It's just when I take tests my mind just goes blank. Please don't be mad, I promise—

MARK stands up and walks over to ROBERT.

MARK: You better be joking.

ROBERT: Dad, I—

MARK shoves ROBERT, causing him to slam into the wall. MARK gets in his face and puts his arm over his neck, pinning him to the wall.

MARK: How could you let yourself get bad grades? Are you trying to ruin your future?

MARK punches ROBERT in the face and applies pressure to his throat. ROBERT begins to cry and his nose starts bleeding.

MARK: I am not about to put up with you for the rest of my life. If you don't get into college, do you know what that means?

ROBERT is crying and doesn't answer. MARK applies more pressure to his neck.

MARK: Answer me!

ROBERT (strained and through tears): I—don't—know.

MARK: You'll be homeless and alone. I'm only supporting you and giving you a place to stay through school. As soon as you're out, you're on your own.

MARK lets go of ROBERT and lets him fall to the ground. MARK walks away and leaves ROBERT on the ground crying and bleeding.

CUT TO:

PRESENT: KITCHEN—COLOR

ROBERT holds in his hand one of the knives he threw on the floor earlier. He looks at the knife and takes a shaky breath. ROBERT walks to MARK's room and slowly opens the door. He sneaks in and stands over MARK. He raises the knife above his head.

ROBERT (evil tone, through clenched teeth): I told you that you would regret this.

MARK wakes up and screams as ROBERT brings the knife down and stabs him in the throat. ROBERT cries and screams as he stabs MARK in the chest 10 times.

ROBERT: That's for abusing me my whole life!

ROBERT stabs him again.

ROBERT: That's for never loving me!

ROBERT stabs him again.

ROBERT: That's for never being there when I needed you!

ROBERT stabs him again.

ROBERT: That's for telling me I would never amount to anything!

ROBERT stabs him one more time.

ROBERT: And that's for being an overall piece of shit.

ROBERT walks backwards until he makes contact with the wall. He slides down the wall, holds his head in his hands, and cries.

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO (voice over): Don't cry. He deserved it.

ROBERT's tears immediately stop and his face turns angry. He slowly stands up and chuckles at the bloodbath that was his father.

ROBERT walks to his bedroom and lies on his bed, covering his eyes with his arm.

ROBERT (slight slur): He thought he could treat me like shit and get away with it. They all think they can treat me like shit. They act like I'm not real, like I don't have feelings. Well, I have feelings! I'll always be invisible. The only way to exist to these people is to—

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO (off screen): Is to show them that you are real. That you're a force to be reckoned with. You need to show them that you're not a pushover—you have to scare them.

ROBERT sits up quickly and snaps his head toward the door. A badass version of ROBERT stands in the door way. He is wearing black sunglasses and a leather jacket.

ROBERT: Who—?

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO (Sarcastic): I'm you, stupid. Obviously. Just a way cooler you.

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO looks around at his room and shakes his head.

ROBERT: How did you get in here?

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: You should know. I'm in your head.

ROBERT: So you're not real?

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: You could say that.

ROBERT: Then how am I seeing you?

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: You could call me the devil on your shoulder. I'm your impulse. I'm the part of your brain that tells you to do things. Things that some people would say are wrong. I guess you're battling with the good part, which is a pussy, so you created me.

ROBERT: So you're a hallucination?

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: Basically.

ROBERT: So what are you saying I should do then?

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: Well, if I were you, which I am, I would get trashed and do what you've been thinking about. Make those kids fear you.

ROBERT: I only have this year left, then I graduate. I can deal with it.

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: But it's one year of pure hell. You'll never make it.

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO walks toward him and touches his face.

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: Aw, is little baby Robert getting scared?

ROBERT: No, I'm not. This just doesn't make sense to me. Is it really worth it? There's no way I could get away with it—

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: You killed your dad, you're already gonna go to jail. Everyone is going to see you for the mess that you are. Things will never be the same. Might as well make it worth it.

ROBERT: If I tell them he abused me, maybe I could get out of it. Maybe—

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: Do you see how many times you stabbed him? (laughs) That is way past self-defense, buddy.

ROBERT: I—I didn't mean to. I just couldn't take it anymore!

ROBERT breaks down and starts crying, lying in a heap on the ground. VOICE kicks ROBERT gently.

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: Remember how you felt with the knife in your hand?

ROBERT (Shaky, raspy voice): Powerful—seen—

ROBERT'S ALTER EGO: Think about how you'll feel if you do this. They'll never forget you.

ROBERT stands to his feet and wipes tears from his face. He reaches for his backpack and dumps out the contents. He checks to make sure the gun is loaded and puts the remaining ammunition in his bag. He walks to the kitchen and grabs another bottle of alcohol out of the freezer. He walks to his car, gets in, and drives to the school, blasting a hardcore song

He opens the bottle and takes a five second chug. He leans his seat

back and watches the sunrise.

CUT TO:

SCHOOL PARKING LOT—MORNING

ROBERT is startled awake by cars pulling into the parking lot and happy voices talking about the big game and the dance afterward. He fumbles with the lever on the side of his chair before he can get it back to an upright position. When he sits up, the empty bottle of alcohol falls to the floor of the car and makes a clink. ROBERT rubs his eyes, cracks his neck, and stretches before turning to the seat next to him. He grabs his backpack and pulls his cigarette supplies out of the largest pocket. A smile flashes across his face as hand brushes against the gun.

ROBERT (evil voice with a devious grin): They're going to know who I am.



Human Cigarette

Keaghan Indermaur

You are the cigarette
that I can't quit.
Each pack brings me
relief, joy, release,
but also pain and misery.
After each encounter
I count the various
burn marks, tears
stained on my cheeks,
and wonder if you are
worth all the suffering.
I see you in my phone and,
promising not to reply,
I text you right back,
covering up the burns
and drying my tears
to spend another moment
clinging to your nicotine.
But did I drag you in,
or was it you that took me
with your soft hands
and equally soft voice?
I burned to know the things
that would hurt me.
I wanted you to say,
"I love you,"
and mean it,
just fucking mean it
for once, godamnit.
For every time you called,
I was there on your heels

and I let you suck the life
out of me fully
until there was nothing left.
But your smell is tempting
and every time you call
I pick up the phone,
no hesitation,
because I love my cigarette
laced with poison gas.



Light —*photography*
Elizabeth Bernheisel

Music Composition
Any Jawn

Dahmir Noel

“Any Jawn” is just a representation of my life. I wanted to make something that was different and something that had multiple layers to it much like I do. So I relied heavily on the beatmaker on the Digital Audio Workstation, adding other sounds that fit. I played with different drums and beats until I found the right sequence of sounds.

<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-noel>



Hoop With No Net —*digital photography*
Brett Curtis

Music Composition

Komplete Kaos

Tyler Ronnenberg

For this piece, I wanted to make something that was reminiscent of a '90s hip-hop style when ninjas, pizza, and arcades were all the rage. Something that captured that image for me was the video game series *Mortal Kombat*. It's a series with a lot of appeal since it is so well known. The game also gave us many iconic audio samples (such as the character Scorpion's "Get over here!" line) and a theme song that's been remixed countless times. In keeping with the series's tradition of replacing C's with K's, I named the piece *Komplete Kaos*.

I thought that structuring the song in the fashion of an actual match would be a fun homage to the game while also making the transitions more unique. Right off the bat, you hear the ring announcer from the game shout, "Round one. Fight!" to signal the start of the track. I repeat that idea for each "round" in the song with variations on the drum and melody patterns.

My main goal was to create something that left room for vocals, which proved much more difficult without someone to collaborate with. That said, I am happy with the way this came out. It's simple, but it still has its own personality even without a vocal track.



<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-ronnenberg>

Music Composition

Cumbia

Eduardo Gonzalez

I wanted to create something that was unique to the region of the country I'm from, which is the northern coast of Colombia, where the people breathe the Caribbean Sea. Music in the Caribbean is very much centered on rhythms, and while the melody is vital, the beats of the drums are what make our feet move instinctively. I studied a few songs made by groups from San Bacilio de Palenque, the town of "Palenqueros," also known as the founders of Colombian percussion. Once I got the hang of the different types of sequences that made the songs so unique, I began composing. Besides the types of rhythms, the uniqueness of the songs also comes from the types of instruments that are only made in San Bacilio de Palenque. I improvised with some other instruments until I found the best fit. Once I finished the piece, I felt more connected to my land and to my city



<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-gonzalez>

Music Composition - Song

Jackie Was

Rebecca Titchner

Jackie was a hippie.
Jackie was a preppie.
Jackie was a punker,
and when she smiled you knew.

The center of the party,
middle of the universe,
she shone like a diamond.
She was way too good for you.

Jackie was a princess.
Jackie was a pirate.
Jackie was a movie star,
and when she laughed you knew

that Jackie knew everything,
everything but one thing,
and that was,
and that was,
she was way too good for you.

Jackie was,
Jackie was,
Jackie was in love with you.

Jackie was your Tuesday girl.
Jackie was a piece of time.
Jackie was an afterthought,
and when she left you knew

that Jackie was many things,

everything but that one big thing,
and not much of anything,
and she was way too good for you.

Jackie was,
Jackie was,
Jackie was in love with you.

Jackie went away for days.
Jackie disappeared for weeks.
Jackie didn't say anything,
but when she got back I knew

she was someone else altogether.
She shrugged her shoulders,
said it didn't matter,
but she knew that I knew.

Jackie was,
Jackie was,
Jackie was.



<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-jackiewas>

Music Composition - Song

Old Notes

Manu Gajanan

Music Composition

While working on my final project for Digital Music Creation in spring 2017, I wanted to specifically create something different and work with digital musical ideas that I had not worked with before. This eventually led me to produce a song with vocals and many different moving parts.

I had never worked with mixing vocals or recording voice; my experience was purely as the “beatmaker.” When I decided to produce an entire song, I wanted to encompass many elements that were personal to me. The whole narrative behind the song is about a girl. I did not want my voice to be the main focus of the song. My good friend Josh Byerly, who has experience with songwriting, recording his raps, and mixing, was studying at Edinboro University. When I sent him the instrumental, he wanted to be a part of this project. He related to the subject matter since he was dealing with personal relationship problems.

He sent me a few drafts that he recorded in his room, and I pieced them together in Ableton (the Digital Audio Workstation I used to produce the song). But this was not doing the trick. I had produced the instrumental itself in a few days in the lab on campus, but the recording had to be done in person, so I made the drive from Bradford to Edinboro. We recorded our vocals and worked on the mixing/engineering ideas from 10:00 PM until 4:00 AM the next day. This collaboration was the most meaningful learning experience of the whole process. Since I had never worked with mixing audio/vocals, I experimented with different plugins and effects that created a good mix.

Achieving this was not easy. I learned that mixing is a process and an art. Getting the sound that we actually wanted was difficult and required a great deal of patience. As an artist, I will never believe my work is as great as other people may make it seem; rather, I feel that I can always improve and achieve a better sound. When I listen to this song now, nearly six months later, I can tell how much I have grown as not just an artist, but as an individual. This painstaking process taught me that the art of mixing is crucial, and not only helps artists grow as better producers, engineers, and performers, but as individuals as a whole.



<https://pitt.box.com/v/bb18-gajanan>

Guns of the Ambassador

Tyler Elias

The nights at sea were never kind to Joseph Senchak. Around him, the crew of the USS Avondale slept soundly in their bunks, all but for a few sleep-deprived stragglers either restless or in prayer. Eventually, even they would drift to sleep and then Senchak would be alone to experience every shift of weight and creak of the hull that the old cruiser had to offer. With every sway, Senchak squeezed his eyes shut and tightened his grip around his father's crucifix as his words echoed in his head.

You'll get sick on those waves, boy," his father had said when Joseph enlisted. His father was still practicing English and every word Joseph recalled was weighed down by the same Polish accent that accompanied every prayer he yearned to be a part of around the table back home. And true to his father's words, he was sick, but it wasn't the sea alone that churned his stomach. It was the

feel of the ship's energy during the day as well as the smell that clung to him at night. It was the perpetual view of the mountainous Vietnam coastline painted in the distance and the light scent of smoke that trailed on the strongest winds. Then there was the smell of the ship itself.

The smell followed him up from the engine rooms, down each corridor, and through every bulkhead. It was the inescapable stench of machine oil that leaked out from the black grease beneath his fingernails and seemed to bury itself in every pore of his skin. At night he gagged on the same lingering smell that undoubtedly carried the other men off to the deep, restful sleep that he grudgingly coveted. To them, of course, it wasn't the odor of oil and grease and smoke. To them it was the smell of the Avondale, a behemoth of steel and firepower that went by many names, but the most popular among the crew was the Ambassador.

The crewmen as well as the

officers etched the name into the minds of everyone who came on board and did their best to reflect the diplomatic power that had earned the vessel its name. Many of Joseph's crewmates were nearly as boisterous as the machines that he helped maintain, and the officers were even more so.

When Joseph wasn't crawling through the Avondale's inner workings, he was always within earshot of Chief Petty Officer William Rook, a giant of a man aptly nicknamed the "Tower" by the men who served under him. With his booming voice, Joseph considered him just another weapon of the Ambassador, a sentinel that loomed over a crew that scurried across the deck each hour of every day.

"Senchak!" Rook roared when he spotted Joseph hard at work near one of the rear anti-aircraft emplacements, his voice seeming to silence even the monotonous rumble of the cruiser. "I want to see my pearly whites shining back at me when I smile at that gun."

"Yes, sir," Joseph replied as

loudly as he could manage, but it was a whisper lost in the sea air. The Tower had anchored himself behind Joseph in such a way that his shadow darkened the entirety of Joseph's workspace.

Joseph's hands had turned the charcoal color of grease stains that mirrored a black streak across his forehead. Sweat carried the grease down into his eyes under the beating sun. When the officer spotted the silver chain around Joseph's neck and the small cross that swung back and forth against his bare chest, he leaned in. Even when hunched he was a giant next to Joseph.

"Are you a man of God?" he boomed in Senchak's ear.

Joseph paused, then replied weakly, "Yes, sir."

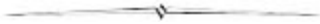
"Outstanding, Senchak," he yelled so close to Joseph's ear that he flinched. "As am I." He placed one gargantuan hand on the barrel of the gun in front of Joseph. "This here's my Bible, Senchak." He lifted his hand and pointed to the center of the Avondale where the barrels of the eight-inch guns protruded from their pale gray housing. "And that there is my God. Do you believe in my God, Senchak?"

I know Charlie does.”

Once again, Joseph hesitated, only this time Rook did not give him time to respond. “That doesn’t reassure me, Senchak!” Rook bellowed in his ear. “Hell, I’m offended. Maybe if your God was loud like mine we’d hear from him from time to time. Is that it, Senchak? Can you not hear my God over yours?” Rook paused for just a moment. “Maybe you think my God’s too quiet?” He paused again. “Or maybe you think I’m too quiet. Is that it, Senchak? Am I too quiet?”

“No, sir,” Joseph managed to squeak out. “Not at all, sir.”

“I didn’t think so.” Somewhere nearby, Joseph could hear snickering from his crewmates. Rook turned and marched off, trading Joseph’s company for that of a small group that would soon be much busier, but even at a distance the Tower’s voice could be heard loud and clear. “Pearly whites, Senchak!”



The next day Joseph awoke early. He exited the barracks while most were still sleeping and made his way past the mess

hall to a small room that may have been used as a broom closet once but now was empty. The rest of the ship was silent except for a handful of early birds, but no one paid Joseph any mind as he pulled the metal door almost shut and knelt down on the cold metal floor to pray.

Outside, the Ambassador was coming to life. Footsteps could be heard running up and down the corridor, and somewhere, above all other sound, the voice of the Chief Petty Officer could be heard loud and clear. There was something else, too. As Joseph rose to his feet he could feel the steady vibrations of the ship increasing. The Ambassador was picking up speed. He pushed against the door just enough to see the stream of people racing to their posts. He opened it just a bit more and attempted to slip into the current of crewmates unnoticed.

“Senchak!”

Joseph stopped instantly and cursed under his breath before turning, his hand raised in a salute. “Sir.”

Rook was storming toward him, his massive physique forcing others to wait as he passed through the doorway into

the corridor. Joseph had never seen the officer so disheveled. His uniform wasn't buttoned up and his tags bounced viciously against his white undershirt. His graying black hair was a mess without his cap to cover it.

"Deck," he screamed, only this time he was just barely audible over the chaos around them. "Now!"

Joseph fell into line behind several others, all making for the stairs as well. Overhead, the alarms had begun to sound and the footing of the corridors became increasingly treacherous as the Avondale swiftly cut through the rough sea, inevitably closing in on the shallows.

The flood of mechanics, engineers, and officers burst onto the deck and into the glaring sunlight just as the Ambassador began to slow. The decrease in speed caused Joseph to jerk forward as he passed the last step, sending him crashing to his knees. Someone grabbed hold of his collar and yanked him up hard, but he never saw who.

All around, men were racing to the railings from which the beaches of Vietnam could be seen more clearly than ever

before. The beach was packed with people spaced out by several hundred yards at least. On one side, columns of red smoke rose above what looked like a few hundred infantrymen. Joseph noticed for the first time that a dozen or so smaller crafts had left the Avondale and were quickly approaching the stranded soldiers.

On the other side, however, there was no signal smoke, no flags or identifying signals of any kind, and yet, Senchak knew who they were. Charlie. Both factions had been fleeing the same thing. Beyond the activity of the beachfront, the tree line was an inferno. Gouts of flame shot up the trunks of trees and a wall of pitch black smoke rose above everything.

As the boats neared the shoreline, Joseph could just barely make out figures running into the surf to meet them, and as the crew of the Ambassador watched in silence, the soft rattle of gunfire began to reach their ears.

All at once, the men on deck took their places. Crewmembers manned gun stations and several technicians returned to their posts inside ship, but Joseph was

locked in place as he watched the horror on the beach. Finally, he managed a step back, bumping into someone who took hold of his arm and spun him around. He was staring at the base of someone's neck and had to look up to make eye contact with Rook.

Rook hauled Joseph away from his position at the railing and led him to a series of 40mm anti-aircraft guns. All of them had been angled down to face the beach in the direction of the enemy, and all but one were manned and being fed belts of ammunition.

"Man that weapon, Senchak!" the officer barked as he thrust Joseph forward. Joseph was a mechanic. He'd cleaned and loaded the guns a hundred times, but he had never laid hands on a trigger before. He turned to Rook, his eyes wide and his expression a mix of fear and confusion, and when he did he saw the true guns of the Ambassador. The ship's fifty-five caliber gun battery was rotating to face the beach, filling the air with its mechanical whine as the barrels aligned themselves with their target.

Rook took hold of Joseph's

hand and placed it forcefully on the gun. Even in the blazing heat, the metal felt colder than ice against Joseph's skin. Even as the officer screamed orders into his ears, everything seemed to go quiet as if the entire world was holding its breath. He pressed his hands over his ears in anticipation as the Ambassador churned beneath him. Overhead the Ambassador loosed a series of shells from the main guns, shaking Joseph to his bones. He moved his hands from his ears to his chest and grasped his crucifix in a vice-like grip that turned his knuckles pure white.

Jets of dirt and sand burst up from the surface of the beach near the enemy, just off target, but close enough that the scene had devolved into hellish chaos. Men were running back and forth on the beach with no clear destination while some had retreated back into the trees, more willing to take their chances with the spreading napalm fire than with the wrath of the naval bombardment.

Joseph turned again to see Rook yelling orders at passing crewmembers, his voice sounding as if it were on the verge of going hoarse.

When he saw Joseph, he stomped forward and reuttered his command. “Man that fucking gun, Senchak!”

Joseph turned back to the scene on the beach as all around him rounds were fired from the guns, marking the coast and air with bursts of black smoke as some shells exploded against the beach and others detonated harmlessly in the air above it. Between them

and the beach, many of the boats were already on their return journey, but the Ambassador did not relent.

Like a machine himself, Joseph took hold of the trigger. He set his eye to the mounted sights and aligned them with the beach, then pulled the trigger. The first round jolted him back, but Rook held him forward with one hand, still yelling his commands at anyone who could still hear him.

Joseph took hold of the trigger once more, this time positioning himself so that his shoulder rested against one of the padded bars. He pulled

himself in and pulled the trigger a second time and then a third as a stream of tears escaped him. He prayed silently that the rounds never make it to the beach. At his feet, smoking shells rolled across the deck of the Ambassador, and overhead the thunderous guns

He set his eye to the mounted sights and aligned them with the beach, then pulled the trigger.

turned the beach into a crater hidden behind a curtain of smoke and charred debris.

From the Woods

Tyler Elias

Across the night it echoed,
a whisper caught on the spine of the wind
that whispered secrets between the pines
in the voice of some wild thing.
It slithered in the frozen grass
and loosed leaves from their tallest towers.
It crept between the rocks and the water
that snapped at the bramble banks
and gave speed to the wings of ebon-feathered beasts
who croaked back into the deep black
and fell silent
before something called back.



Love Letters

Rebecca Titchner

Should any of this matter,
when the moon rises,
casting long shadows in early autumn,
no one will gather to recite the words
to remember.

There will be no one to discover
a neatly bound stack of love letters
wrapped in silk ribbon and secured with sealing wax.
There will be no one to gently remove them one by
one,
reading what was hoped and lost,
desire smoldering in the ashes of regret.
No one will insist that they be studied by students
huddled around a table,
drinking coffee and talking as though
they knew us.
They knew us.
Whatever this is,
whatever it may be,
will die with us.

Things Lost Are Safe

Isabelle Champlin

Quae amissa salva:
the Romans knew that
things lost are safe.

Hidden away, they stay
unchanged, unravaged,
misremembered

if recalled at all, so
thereby surviving
as created.

Hoarded in the archives,
lost among the tomes,
are the urtexts.

Under the tarnish,
sealed within the tomb,
the white bones wait.

The Pink Teddy Bear

Clark Zlotchew

Joe Sims sprawled on his stained and tattered easy chair, a six pack of Budweiser at his feet, one of the bottles in his left hand, the remote in his right. He took a long swig of beer, laid the remote down next to the pink teddy bear on the metal tray table before him, and reached for his Big Mac. He closed his eyes and savored the succulent beef patties, the cheese, the lettuce, onion, pickles, sesame bun, and the secret recipe “special sauce” that Sims was sure contained mayo, ketchup, and relish. Sims let his taste buds bathe in the savory juices as his teeth and tongue caressed the food before he gulped the mass down. He felt its bulk pass satisfyingly all the way to his stomach where it came to rest, producing a feeling of contentment. This contentment faded when he looked at the pink teddy bear. He sighed deeply, then tore his eyes from the stuffed animal.

Joe Sims had just returned from the Lakeland Ice Cream

Factory to an empty house. He had sweated the day away on the production line in one hundred degree temperatures. Yet his hands froze numb while packing those ice pops as fast as he could so his supervisor wouldn't yell at him. In fire and ice, he thought. All that's missing is the Devil jabbing my butt with a pitchfork. He corrected himself: What am I saying? The Devil is there, constantly on my back. Only his name is Waldo Q. Hanson, my fat-faced boss. He doesn't use a pitchfork; he just uses that loud mouth of his, the miserable bastard.

Sims had felt shame and rage when Mr. Hanson, in front of his co-workers, called him a no-good lazy slug. Just like Sims's father used to do. Except his father would smack him around too, and later tell him it was for his own good, because he loved him. Yeah, he loved me, the goddamn drunken bum. He loved Mom the same way, too. Damn him to Hell. Joe Sims would have dearly enjoyed smashing Hanson's round, pink face into mush, but

he needed the job.

He took another slug of the Bud from his third bottle. The first is for the thirst, the second one to make sure, the third is to relax— He felt the bitter effervescence change to sweetness on his tongue, the cold liquid in his mouth becoming a soothing warmth in his belly. He told himself he felt good. Good food, good drink, and the Olympics on the little screen. Eat, drink, and make merry. Or is it Mary? What more could you ask for? He belched contentedly. He unbuckled his belt and unzipped his fly to give himself breathing space. Hell, in high school he had to put extra holes in his belt so his pants wouldn't fall down. He still had the muscles, he reassured himself, they just weren't quite as hard as they used to be. But he could get back into shape easily whenever he wanted. He knew he could.

The men on the TV screen were frying fresh-caught fish, drinking beer, and smiling ecstatically at each other. Damn commercial. Now, what brand is it? Ah, who gives a flying—? Beer is beer. Screw those fat cats on Madison Avenue. Look at

that, those good old boys seem to be having a great time just sitting around, eating, drinking and grinning at each other like assholes. "It just doesn't get any better than this," one of them said. What the hell do they know? Bunch of faggots, probably. He tossed the empty bottle onto the floor, one more dead soldier, and reached for the fourth bottle. The fourth is for—Damn, I can't remember what the hell it is for. Well, the fourth is—to relax even more. He twisted the cap off, skinning his finger, and took a long swallow.

On the screen the runners were burning up the track. God, he felt good watching them run, as though he were watching himself when he ran in high school, when he was trim and in good shape. He watched the screen and saw Michael Johnson shooting ahead. And Joe Sims was Johnson, running effortlessly, in perfect physical condition, his mind clear, confident in his abilities. And it was he, Joe Sims, running, breathing deeply in and out, sweating a healthy sweat. Flying. The crowd was cheering him on. They were proud of him, all of America was proud of him

as he kept at it, plugging away, passing the others, leaving them in his dust, one foot after the other, left, right, left, right...

He crossed the finish line first, broke his own record, and won the gold medal. The crowd was on its feet screaming with joy. They loved him. He could feel the love enveloping him. All of America loved him. The whole world loved him. Because he was strong, courageous, and most of all, determined. How good it felt. How good—

Dave Thomas, the CEO of Wendy's, spoke to him soothingly, homey-like. Like an old friend. Someone you could trust. Good old Dave told him how delicious his product was and how much you got for your money. And Sims could see how great it would taste. It made his mouth water. In his mind's eye—my mind's mouth?— he could feel his teeth sinking into it, as Dave's actually did on screen, the juices soaking into his tongue and bathing his taste buds. He had just finished his Big Mac (sorry, Dave) and here he was, hungry again, looking at sly old Dave. That conceited son-of-a-bitch, grinning in that self-satisfied way, chomping

away, smacking his lips, telling him to go out and get one of those whatever-you-call-them just so the rich bastard could make even more money. Yeah, well, go screw yourself, Davey-boy. Funny thing is, Sims knew he would have gone out and bought one or two of them if he weren't so damned comfortable in his easy chair watching the Olympics and drinking beer.

If Janey were here she would have gotten him something from the refrigerator. She would've had all kinds of good stuff in the fridge. He glanced at the pink teddy bear lying on the tray table. He loved Janey so much, damn her. But she had to get mad and run away. He hated her for leaving him, the bitch. Just because I smacked her around a few times. Spoiled brat. It's her folks' fault, they babied her too much. I wish she were here, though.

He tossed bottle number four to the floor and reached for the fifth. The fifth is for—is for—He unscrewed the cap, not noticing the pain as it cut deeper into his finger. Shit, who cares what it's for. He giggled and was surprised at the sound. It's for making me feel good, that's all I need to

know. He took a long drink, then belched with satisfaction.

He frowned. He recognized that sappy music and knew the suckers were going to tell him that you needed to give your lady a goddam diamond if you wanted to show her you loved her. The music sounded kind of classical and inspirational, the bastards, to make you think people who could buy diamonds were more cultured and made love in a more refined way than ordinary folks. Like it was something sacred, for Chrissake. Well, okay, maybe it is sacred, but what the hell has that got to do with diamonds? I bet if I gave Janey a diamond she wouldn't have run off on me. But I just can't afford a diamond. No, I can't, damn it! He pounded his fist on the arm of the chair, raising a puff of dust. Well screw you, Mr. wise-ass DeBeers money bags. And you too, Janey, if what you needed was a diamond.

The boxers were banging away at each other. Go on, go on, go on. Keep punching, Antonio, keep punching. I'm blasting away at the Cuban guy. He can't hurt me. I'm made of iron. His fists feel like friendly pats when

he manages to land a punch, which he doesn't do too often, cause I'm fast on my feet, and I duck and weave. Jack be nimble, Jack be quick. But I'm punching the hell out of him. I'm creaming the bastard, creaming the Cuban, creaming my old man—what?!— I mean I'm creaming my boss, that son-of-a-bitch Mr. Hanson. Yeah. I'm knocking the shit out of him. I'm banging away, mashing him into a pulp. For an instant he saw Janey at the receiving end of his fists. He pushed the image from his mind. It was Mr. Hanson. It was the Cuban champion. And the crowd was cheering. They were on their feet and screaming. They love me. Yes, they love me. Yes they do. They really do.

Tears streamed from Joe Sims's eyes. He was disturbed to find he was weeping. What the hell am I crying about? Mohammed Ali, feebly lighting the Olympic torch, flashed through his mind, followed by that scene of people crowding around him, asking him for autographs. Mohammed Ali was smiling, but he was in bad shape, couldn't speak, couldn't answer people's questions. Could hardly move, it looked like. But he

smiled. A dumb-looking smile. What the hell was the poor bastard smiling about? Joe was overcome by a sudden sadness. A guy like that, the way he once was, and look at him now. Joe began to sob. Goddammit, what the hell do I give a damn about Mohammed Ali? He made his millions. He did all right. What the hell do I give a damn?! And he sobbed even harder. He raised the fifth bottle to his lips, tossed back his head, closed his moist eyes, and drained the bottle. Then he flung it to the floor. He felt a little better, calmer.

The women gymnasts were performing. Women? They're tiny, little girls is what they are. And that giant of a coach, the Romanian guy, hugging the crap out of them, getting his jollies right in front of the cameras as if it was okay. Who's he kidding? But those tiny little girls sure have skill. And guts. Not afraid to get hurt. And they're cute. They have beautiful legs too. Yeah, really beautiful. And the Ukrainian one, with the name nobody can pronounce, the one that knows how to dance like a ballet dancer, she's even sprouting real live boobs. You can see them bounce. Boy, when

she gets a couple of years older. . .

And perfect control over every damn muscle in their little bodies. They're so bouncy, so rubbery, so damned—what's the word? Flexible, yeah, that's it. And supple. That's what they are. Supple. Good word. And the one from China, what a great smile to go with the legs, what a wonderful, bright smile. It makes you feel all warm inside to see her smile. She's smiling right at me. I can feel her eyes on me. Janey used to smile at me like that back then. But not lately. Just because of some lousy bruises once in a while. And a chipped tooth. That's no reason to run off and leave a guy when a guy loves her like I do. Damn her to hell! I hate her! I'd like to kill the bitch! Again, he pounded the arm of the easy chair, raising another puff of dust. Sims stared at the small cloud. Watching it calmed him somewhat. Then it disappeared.

Joe Sims registered what was taking place on the screen. There was that nice family—mother, father, and little daughter—visiting Disney World. Probably cost them a mint: the trip, the hotel, everything. The kid looks

so sad, so damned disappointed, after having dragged her mom and dad all through Disney World. What the hell does the little brat want, anyway? She looks up and her face brightens like the sun shining through the clouds. What does she see? Her dear old grandpa back in the land of the living? The face of God? Looks like she's having a religious experience. Oh, no! Jesus Christ, it's Mickey-freaking-Mouse!

And then she whines in that sappy way that could make you puke, "I've been waiting—my whole life—to meet you!" Then she runs over, the stupid little airhead, and hugs the goddamn asshole in a mouse suit like he was the dearest thing on earth, her eyes closed the way Janey used to close her eyes when we kissed, to feel the kiss better.

Who the hell are they kidding? Mickey Mouse! She should be hugging her mom and dad, not that stupid son-of-a-bitch in a mouse suit. What kind of values are they teaching kids, damn it?! What kind of family values? A little girl like that, pissed off at her folks after they spend all that money getting to Disney World, just because she

hasn't seen her big-deal hero, Mouse Man. And then she goes all syrupy and weirdo when she sees him. And she forgets about her folks and runs over to big-eared Mickey the Moron, who's nothing but a \$5.25-an-hour jerk in a mouse suit, and then loves the hell out of him. The little bitch.

Damn, I could've had a nice little daughter like her, maybe, if Janey hadn't gone and made me so mad that time when I punched her in the gut and she couldn't catch her breath for a while. And then she bled and had to go to the hospital.

The tears streamed down his cheeks once more. His body shook. That's when she lost the baby, and I know it was my fault. But she shouldn't have gotten me so pissed off. She shouldn't have. It was just a little punch, that's all it was. I didn't mean it. He sobbed, took a deep breath, and held it, then let it out.

He glanced at the pink teddy bear on the tray table, then reached for the sixth bottle and cursed when he saw it was the last one. He opened it by reaching across to hit the top against the windowsill. Then he brought it to his mouth, head

back, eyes closed, and chugged it down. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, emitted a long series of belches, and tried to focus on the screen, the screen that was hard to see because it was so misty. Why does it look so misty? Things looked out of focus and bent out of shape as though they were under water.

The red-headed Italian with arms like Hercules was on the stationary rings, muscles bulging, body rigid, face blank, not showing any strain. Looking like it's a piece of cake, the conceited bastard. Joe Sims was on the rings, felt his own iron muscles bulging, the deltoids, the biceps, the lats, the pecs, the abs. He felt the power in his trim hard body, every move perfect. The crowd went wild. They felt admiration for him, they felt love. They all loved him. Janey would be sorry now. But wait. He saw Janey among the cheering crowd. She wasn't cheering; she just stood there quietly. On her face a look of admiration, of pride, of awe, of love. Then she slowly glided down out of the stands, strode across the field, passed in slow motion through the delirious throng and came up to him. She looked adoringly

into his eyes. Then she held out her arms.

Joe Sims awoke at 6:30 A.M. to Ann Curry on NBC News. She was talking about the TWA explosion, showing color footage. Then she reported the latest news about the bomb at the Atlanta Olympics. She even managed to look concerned, like it really mattered to her. The phony. Death and destruction, every day. Every miserable goddamn day. That's all there is. What the hell's it all about?

Ann Curry told him it was 6:40. Christ! Time to get my ass in gear for my shift at the ice cream factory, where it's a hundred damn degrees all day long, even though I'm grabbing cold ice pops and sticking them into boxes, one after the other, after the other, after the other, hour after hour, day after day.

He was in his tattered and stained easy chair, still wearing yesterday's clothes, reeking of sweat, sour ice cream, and stale beer. And the taste of shit in his cottony mouth and a sledgehammer bashing in his skull. He looked down and saw

the empty bottles littering the floor. Janey would have gotten rid of them. Then he noticed he was clutching the pink teddy bear to his heart, the one he had bought when Janey told him she was pregnant. And he felt, along with his dry mouth and his aching head, the sensation of falling down an elevator shaft straight to Hell.

“Oh, Momma, Momma!” he whimpered. “What’s happening to me?”

He'd make the four hundred meters, and come in first, because he was a winner, a champion.

Muscles stiff and cramped, he forced himself to get up out of the chair. With great effort he lurched toward the bathroom. He pushed himself. He would make it to work on time. He could do it. Yes, he could. He would. He'd make the four hundred meters, and come in first, because he was a winner, a champion. He'd be awarded the gold medal. And everybody would cheer for him. And would admire him. And would love

him. Yes, love him. Even Janey. He'd just keep running and running and running.

Joe Sims kept running along the tree-lined sidewalks past the single-family dwellings where he knew happy families lived, couples with children who rode tricycles and boarded the school bus every morning, pushing and shoving, making a cheerful racket. He was running against the clock. He had to get to work on time. He hardly noticed the leaves that were starting to turn from green to pale yellow and red. He hadn't even had time to pack a bologna sandwich for lunch. He'd make do with the ice cream that employees were allowed to eat on the job.

He heard the train whistle as he jogged toward the tracks he would have to cross on his way to the Lakeland Ice Cream Factory. The factory, two blocks past the rails, loomed before him in all its dirty grayish-yellow bleakness. Looking at the windowless mass made him queasy. And he was out of shape, he acknowledged. He was no longer running as fast as when he left the house. He was no Michael Johnson. He was panting, sweating, slowing

down, staggering. His heart was pounding, his temples throbbing.

He turned his head to the left. The train was in sight, gleaming in the sun. It came from far-off places, was going to far-off places, places he had never seen, never would see. It was shiny, beautiful, as it sped smoothly along the tracks, free as the birds overhead. The birds didn't have to work. All they did was eat all day long. Their food was everywhere, free for the taking. They didn't have a boss. Didn't have a care in the world.

He looked ahead and saw the factory. Felt the factory as a blow to his stomach, as a weight on his chest. He could already feel the hellish heat, see Mr. Hanson's pink face, hear Mr. Hanson's grating voice calling him a lazy bastard. Joe Sims felt sick. His stomach was twisting into a ball. His breaths came in gulps. His pace slowed further. He felt as though he were running in a dream, his legs weighing a hundred pounds each, moving in slow motion.

He was almost at the tracks. The silvery locomotive with the red stripe –gleaming brightly, reflecting the morning sunlight—was cheerfully

blowing its whistle in greeting. It made Sims feel better, almost happy. He reached the rails and paused to catch his breath. He stood on the crossties, panting, and looked at the factory with dread. He shivered from cold sweat as a light autumn breeze stroked his shirt. He felt an invisible wall beyond the rails, a force field emanating from the factory. A presence that would not let him pass. Joe Sims turned to face the beautiful train that merrily whistled as it rushed to meet him. He could see right through the locomotive into the passenger cars, into the car where Janey sat with their daughter, the one who loved Mickey Mouse. They forgave him. They were smiling at him. They would pick him up on the way to Disney World. He opened his arms wide to receive them.

Contributor Bios

Maya Bingaman is an international affairs major with a minor in political science from Lancaster, PA. She enjoys photography, hiking, traveling, and spending time with friends. She became interested in writing after she was published in the *Elephant Journal*, and currently writes for Pitt-Bradford Communications and Marketing and for the Pitt-Bradford Social Squad blog.

Patricia Blakeslee is a forty-three-year-old happily married mother of four gorgeous boys. She retired from the United States Air Force in 2008 at the rank of master sergeant. She is an avid reader and writer. She published a piece she wrote in feature writing in *Country Magazine* and received a fellowship in national competition to the *Hippocampus* Creative Nonfiction conference before she graduated from Pitt-Bradford with a double major in education and writing.

Jaylin Burroughs graduated from Pitt-Bradford in 2017.

Isabelle Champlin retired from Pitt-Bradford in 2012 after forty years of teaching anthropology and six years as Director of International Studies. She enjoys writing, vegetable gardening, making pack baskets, canoeing, traveling (especially to archaeological sites), and taking classes from her former colleagues, such as Dr. Ogundayo's Middle Eastern Literature.

Ashly Colosimo grew up in Bradford, PA, and is dual majoring in sports and recreational management and business management. She started writing when she was younger and as she got older, she continued to fall in love with poetry, specifically slam poetry and the forceful emotion that it presents. She's glad to have the opportunity to be published.

Tyler Elias is a senior writing major at Pitt-Bradford with a passion for reading, writing, and power napping. He is currently working on his first novel and his first collection

of short stories. His short story “The Boreal Spire,” appeared in *DeadLights Magazine*, and he is a recipient of the Laing Award for Creative Writing.

Manu Gajanan recently transferred to the Pitt-Oakland campus, where he is a music major.

Eduardo Gonzalez was member of Josh Groffman’s music composition class last spring.

Brianna Henry is a junior writing major with a minor in art. She works at George G. Blaisdell Elementary School as a reading tutor. She also has a graphic design internship through Pitt-Bradford.

Salynda Hogsett, aka Lindy, is a 2017 Pitt-Bradford graduate and former *Baily’s Beads* editor-in-chief. She majored in writing with a minor in digital graphic design, and is over the moon that she got a job that uses both skill sets as a creative content coordinator for York Wallcoverings and their daughter company RoomMates Decor. She adores listening to podcasts, cooking delicious food, and exploring central Pennsylvania. In her spare time, she binge-watches TV with her roommates (screaming out-loud at the scary parts) and obsesses over building a tiny house someday. She has written articles for *Portraits* and for the *Flock U* website.

Keaghan Indermaur grew up in Swiftwater, PA. They started writing poetry at the age of fourteen. They are dual majoring in writing and psychology, with a minor in exercise science. They enjoy working out to relieve stress.

W. Eugene Johnson was born in 1947, grew up in Smethport, PA, lived in Boston and San Francisco, and graduated from Pitt-Bradford in 1989 with a major in broadcast communications and creative writing. Until retirement, he was a media salesman and his writing consisted mainly of scripts for radio and TV commercials. He also edited and contributed to a local free magazine. He was also a part-time reporter for the *Bradford Era* and now enjoys annoying readers with his iconoclastic letters to the *Bradford Era*. He calls himself a “psychedelic rock and roll

relic," having been a musician for sixty years, playing guitar, harmonica, fiddle, bass, and drums.

Dan Jones is a senior at Pitt-Bradford. He is an applied mathematics major with a business minor as well as an RA on campus. He submitted to *Baily's Beads* because he likes to write and finds it to be a creative outlet.

Jessica Jordan is from St. Marys, PA. She is an interdisciplinary arts major concentrating on visual arts and writing. She loves to write, draw, paint, and take photographs.

Brady Major is a Pitt-Bradford graduate from Port Allegany, PA, pursuing work utilizing the disciplines of art and writing. A recipient of the Laing Award for Creative Writing, he enjoys cinema, music, literature, and video games.

Richard Marcott, a Bradford, PA native, finally published his book, *The View from the Rigging: Memoirs of a Coast Guard Career*. He thanks *Baily's Beads* for the exposure received from the chapters that have been included in the past four issues. He also thanks the Pitt-Bradford writing staff for their continued support, and his daughter, Kimberly, who for years insisted he "write those stories down for the grandchildren."

Patrick Martucci was born in San Jose, CA. After graduating with a degree in broadcast and communications from Pitt-Bradford, he returned to his home state to pursue a career as a filmmaker in sunny Los Angeles, CA.

Desiree "Max" Maxwell is a sophomore at Pitt-Bradford, and is originally from Hollywood, FL. She enjoys dancing, eating, and learning about various cultures and languages. Also, Max is a fan of poetry, drinking water, and watching Netflix. Max is a proud Trinidadian and the Vice-President of the Latino and Caribbean American Student Association at Pitt-Bradford. She can recite the alphabet backwards.

Bonnie McMillen is a native of Bradford, PA, and spent her younger years playing around the Harri Emery Airport

on Dorothy Lane. Her earliest desire was to be a philosopher, which amused her family to no end. Her favorite “job” was staying home and raising three boys who are her pride and joy. After all the joy, she decided to go to nursing school and become an R.N. All along the way, literature added to her joy, which has blossomed into a desire to write poetry, fiction, and nonfiction.

James “Lefty” Miller is a sixty-seven-year-old lifelong Rixfordian. Once a star baseball player, he was “reprogrammed” by a spinal cord injury years ago, and is now a full-time baseball “nut.” One of the positives of his interminable downtime is the increase in his reading and writing. Like most writers, he hopes to one day write a book.

Michael Minassian’s short stories and poems have appeared recently in such journals as *The Broken Plate*, *Exit 7*, *Evening Street Review*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Main Street Rag*, and *The Meadow*. *Amsterdam Press* published a chapbook of poems entitled *The Arboriculturalist* in 2010.

Dahmir Noel graduated from Pitt-Bradford in 2017 with a degree in sports management. He is currently studying athletic administration at Springfield College in Massachusetts.

Cindy Nowacki is the Assistant Director of Admissions for Transfer and Nontraditional Student Recruitment at Pitt-Bradford. She is working toward her second bachelor’s degree, this time in interdisciplinary arts, with concentrations in painting and poetry.

Isaac Payne is an English and writing major as well as a graduate of the 2017 Alpha Young Writers workshop. He has published fiction in *The Corvid Review*, and his short story “The Pursuit of Luck” received an honorable mention for the third quarter of the 2017 Writers of the Future Award.

Taryn Pecile is from a little town called Drums, Pennsylvania. She is a nursing major with interests in trauma and critical care nursing. In her free time, she enjoys singing and hanging out with her friends. She has been writing

poetry since she was eleven years old.

Tyler Ronnenberg is a sophomore at Pitt-Bradford majoring in environmental science. He is originally from Rochester, NY.

Kelly Schucker is passionate about writing, coffee, and cats—preferably simultaneously.

Patricia Shinaberger grew up surrounded by the mountains of the Pennsylvania Wilds. Bicycles, cross country skis, and canoes are still her favorite toys. She also gardens with John, her husband of thirty-six years. When forced inside, book clubs and memoir writing keep her busy.

Aaron Smith grew up in New Bethlehem, PA. Throughout high school, he focused heavily on sports. He is currently in his sophomore year and is majoring in mechanical engineering. In his free time, he helps tutor physics and takes part in the university's wrestling club.

Shaun Stack is a senior psychology major with minors in economics and writing. He is the head building manager of the Frame Westerberg Commons and is the president of Gamma Psi Omega Fraternity. Also, he is the psychology club vice president as well as the treasurer, historian, and scholarship chair of Greek Council. He is also the member of two honor societies: National Society of Leadership and Success and Psi Chi, which is an international honor society for psychology.

Rebecca Titchner has been the recycling coordinator for Elk County for eighteen years. Prior to that, she was a reporter and editor at both *The Ridgway Record* and *St. Marys Daily Press*. Rebecca and her husband, Mark, have been performing music for over thirty years, everything from folk and Celtic to rock and roll. Mark writes the music to all of their original songs, and Rebecca writes the lyrics. She is a 1982 graduate of Allegheny College in Meadville with a BS in Environmental Science and a minor in writing. She lives in Ridgway.

Tricia Wright is a senior writing major from Meadville,

Zlotchew's experiences at sea and on five continents have influenced his fiction. Two of his newest stories have appeared in January 2016 in *Scrutiny Journal* and *Jotters United*. He and his wife, Marilyn, have lived in Fredonia for forty-one years. His story, "The Pink Teddy Bear," is a reprint. It is one of the seventeen stories in his collection, *Once Upon a Decade: Tales of the Fifties* (Comfort Publishing), which was one of three finalists in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards, short-story category, 2011, under the title "Going for the Gold."

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