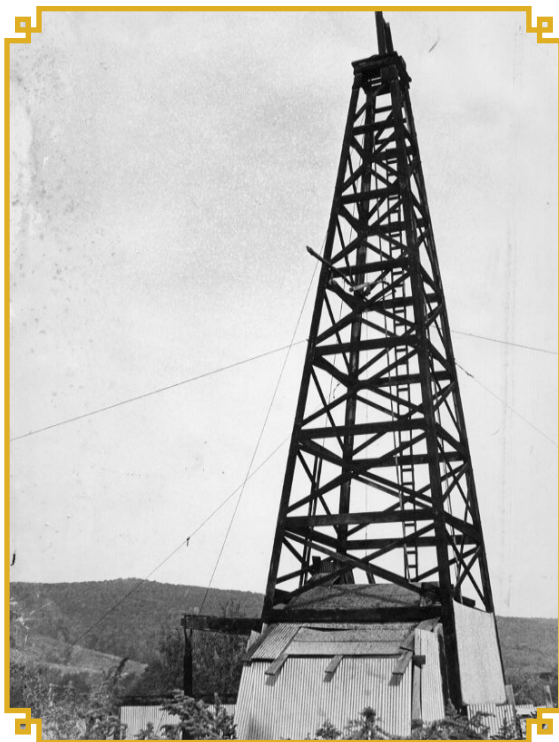




BAILY'S BEADS



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.

Cover: Bradford Streamline -*digital artwork*, Taylor Tarahteeff

Archival photographs provided by the Bradford Landmark Society

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.



Pollyannas Women's Band -Circa 1920

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
2017 First Place with special merit
2017 Best College Magazine Award
2018 First Place

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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EDITOR'S NOTE

Baily's Beads has played host to a variety of themes throughout the twenty-five years of its publication. We've seen time, comics, and nature all star as central visual symbols of the magazine. I was inspired to create in our 2020 edition something of a callback to the rich history of our region, school, and country. Fittingly, this is our *Roaring (20)20's* edition, celebrating the exciting and creative spirit of the new decade and its twentieth century counterpart. We entertained the idea of organizing the submissions by their relation to past, present, and future, but discovered that many pieces transcended just one era and spoke to many facets of our world.

Perhaps most noticeably, we've thrown the magazine back to the timeless visual language of Art Deco design, which can be found throughout, adding a playful historical flair to our pages. Also starring is a bevy of archival photographs donated by the incredible Bradford Landmark Society to give our readers a window into the McKean County of yesteryear. You may notice a particular abundance of trains in this edition, which is no accident, thanks to my passion for railroading. You can find this important historic technology in both of my submissions that were selected by our staff, as well as on our cover, which I created as a love letter to the streamlined travel posters of the 1930s.

The main act is of course the fantastic pieces submitted by our campus community and local individuals. This year we have another impressive lineup, with a huge selection of pieces that run the gamut in subject matter and craft. Included in this edition we have some ace poetry about life, psychology, love, and beautiful moments from the past. Additionally, there's a selection of speculative and realistic fiction pieces, a comedic satire, and a critical essay on artificial intelligence in literature and film. We round that off with some tunes you can give a listen to thanks to the magic of QR codes!

Pay special attention to the pages with black frames, as these indicate pieces that were submitted for our community contest. The guidelines were to create a piece of writing involving the history of our region, from any time. We were all blown away by the quality of pieces we received and the great amount of research our contestants poured into these works. Our top three selections are all celebrations of Bradford's oil

history and feature a creative nonfiction account of mysterious heartbeats in the hills, a fictional tale of the daring “moonlighters” in the 1800s, and a poem capturing the essence of living in the midst of that slick black gold.

Production of *Baily's Beads* occurs over the course of a full year, split between two semesters. I am very happy to say we have had another outstanding team who have put in many hours of work both in and outside of class to bring you this magazine. Everything we accept goes through our rigorous anonymous process that allows us to select the best works. The magazine production is overseen by writing program director Dr. Nancy McCabe, who has for many years assisted and instructed students on how to produce this nationally recognized magazine. Throughout the semester, we have had the chance to dig in deep with not only the selection of submitted work, but also an in-depth look at each piece during the editing phase, when we check grammar, spelling, and style.

The staff would like to give thanks to the people who make *Baily's Beads* happen! Of course, we thank our advisor and professor Dr. Nancy McCabe for the many months of guidance, as well as Professor Rick Minard, the art advisor for this year's publication, and Professor Anna Lemnitzer, who has advised in the past and has contributed plenty of help with the infamously finicky Adobe InDesign. Thanks goes to Dr. Josh Groffman, who gathered our music selections, and Professors Karen Bell, Catherine Kula, and Dr. Tracee Howell as well as the staff of the Writing Center for cosponsoring open mic events with us and for fostering confident writers. We could not have done it without Professor Jeff Guterman, Ms. Jennifer Spencer, and the division of Communications and the Arts here on campus. We thank the Academic Affairs office and Dean Steve Hardin for their continued support of *Baily's Beads*. Lastly, we thank Ferguson Printing of Salamanca, New York, who has been instrumental in bringing this publication to reality.

I hope you enjoy our 2020 edition of *Baily's Beads*, readers avid and new!

-Taylor Tarahteeff, Editor in Chief, Baily's Beads 2020

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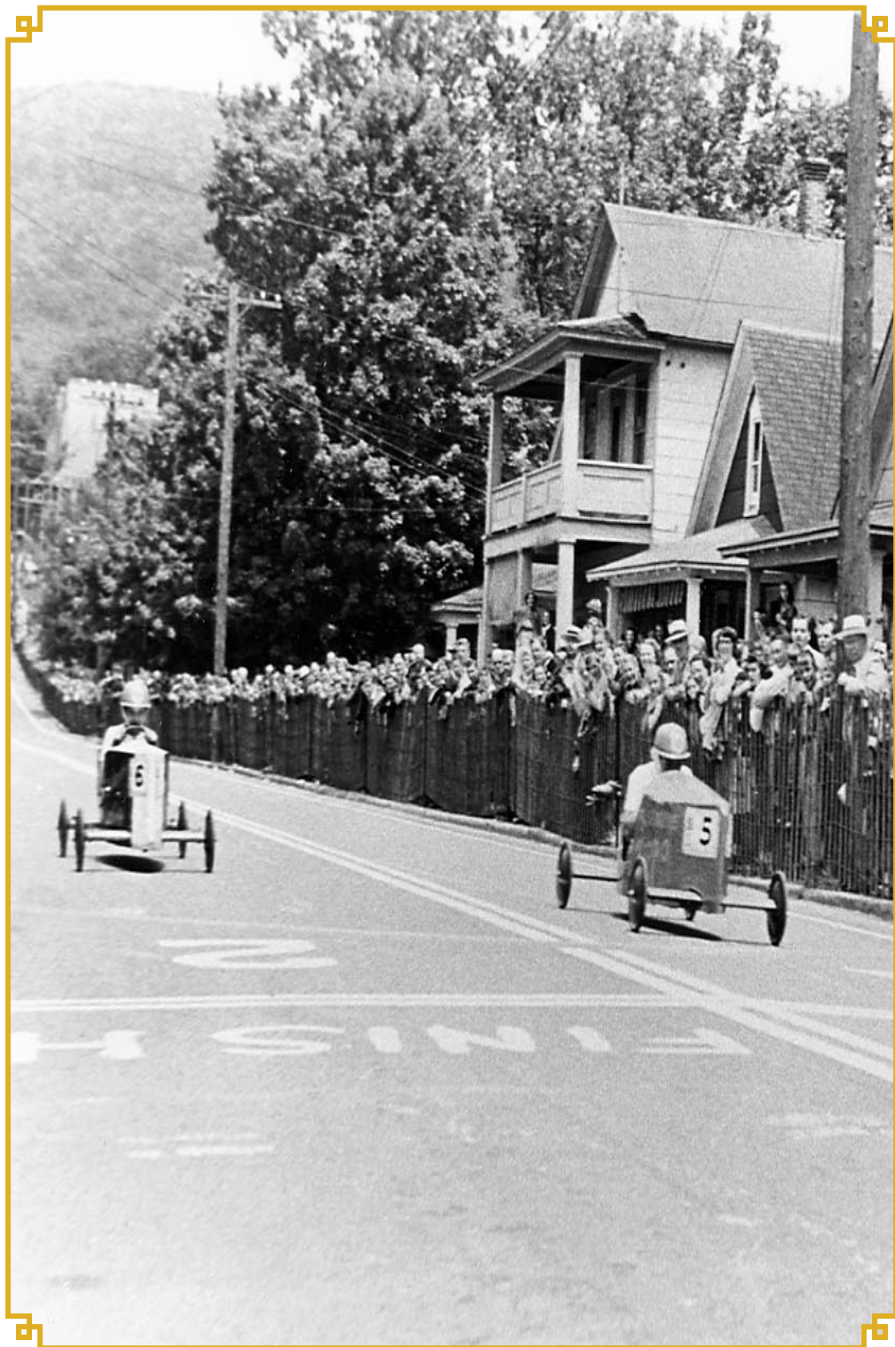
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Maple Syrup Ad -*Graphic Design*, Circa 1880



Soapbox Derby Racers -*photography*, Circa 1940

UNTANGLED

Katelyn Kimble

Our legs twist together on the velvety futon,
mimicking a tangled necklace.
Your blinds crack slightly,
allowing room for the tangerine sun
to melt your eyes into an azure air.

As I permit my eyes to drift into a dreamy state,
your nimble hands tug at the jewelry.
Meticulously they rage at the knot,
feeling accomplished only when we are released
from the other.



Bradford Landmark Throw Blanket -Design, Bradford Landmark Society

AT THE THROTTLE OF DIXIANA

Taylor Tarahteeff

Engine No.1, Dixiana, crept slowly along the steep hill, her five banana-slug-colored excursion cars wrapping and winding their way out behind. Thick clouds that rested upon the mountain peaks ran like liquid down grades and under trestles to pool among the dense foliage of the redwood forest. The fog and mist were accompanied by a biting cold, but we didn't notice. For inside the dark green cab, the three of us were warmed by a thundering inferno within Dixiana's firebox.

From my perch on the tender, the complexities of the engine's controls were laid out in my view. A wiry boy, Jackson, used his boot to kick the latch on the firebox door, which swung open with a squeak. The heat of a sun-soaked day burned back at us. He muttered something that was lost under the consistent hissing and mechanical report of the straining locomotive.

I remembered watching that fire jump to life hours earlier, when Jackson and I sat in the cold cab together. He told me that he was the new junior fireman for the train, in charge of building fires, not putting them out. Although I was there as a volunteer and visitor, I was already well aware of these details and acute in locomotive operations. I probed him on different facts and procedures and learned he was just about my age, training to be a full-time member of the engine staff. He boasted that he could drive the train and fire it at the same time. But all this confidence seemed to have faded once the engineer showed up and took the throttle.

We were on our way up the mountain to Bear Summit where the passengers could get off, stretch their legs, and catch some sweeping views of the coastline all the way out to Monterey. The engineer, a large older man named Frank, opened the throttle three notches and dropped the reverser one. Jackson turned to me with a face of panic as he threw himself into action, kicking the dampers

open and twisting the atomizer to build steam for the new rate of consumption. I noticed the water level dropping as a result, but I kept quiet.

“Taylor! My hands are full, we are low on water,” Jackson called to me over the droning engine. I hesitated, hoping he wasn’t asking for me to participate. My fear of messing up made my hands shake. He looked back at me again and I knew I had to help. I crossed the small space of the cab and conjured train knowledge in my mind, grabbing hold of the injector. I stuck my head out of the left window and turned the valve, watching as hot water poured onto the ballast beside the tracks. Satisfied with the flow, I opened a second valve and listened as the water was propelled into the boiler by superheated steam. Still rattled, I cursed my own inhibitions, wishing I’d had the courage to have stepped up on my own.

Within a couple of minutes, we crested the peak and steamed onto the level tracks of Bear Summit. Frank set the train brake and eased the throttle off as we silently slid on momentum. With a clank of couplers we were stopped, and three short whistles announced that passengers were free to get up.

We had a lunch of hamburgers packed in antique lunch tins, shooting the breeze and using the boilerface to heat the cold food. Frank stepped out of the cab to speak to someone who was waving vigorously from atop a truck at the far side of the summit.

“Someone he knows?” I asked, engine-heated burger in hand.

“I couldn’t tell you.” Jackson shrugged, distracted with his meal.

I looked to the large pressure gauge above the boiler. 155 psi. The safety valve would blow at 170. I gestured up at it with my burger. “Well, you might want to make a spot fire, you’re gonna pop if you keep building pressure.”

There was a noise from behind us.

“No, I’d keep a full barrel if I were you. Huge storm rolling in.” Casey clambered atop the tender and swung his legs over the edge to sit, his ginger swoop of hair covered by a conductor’s cap.

“Well, someone should go tell Frank.” Jackson thumbed the direction the engineer had gone. They both looked to me, and this

time I got the hint. I climbed out of the cab and onto the packed dirt ground. The summit was picturesque, with tall redwood trees framing a perfect view down the fragmented coast. I began my stroll, leaving the warmth of the engine and wading past families. Cutting into the dense foliage, I beelined to an old Union Pacific truck where Frank and a stranger talked intensely.

“We’ve got to get going, storm coming in,” I telegraphed.

Frank looked at me with sorrow.

“My—brother is in the hospital, I need to go see him now. I don’t think he has much time,” Frank choked.

I could only stammer, trying to fill the uncomfortable void with some kind of resolution. I thought back to that morning and my conversation with Jackson.

“Jackson says he can fire and drive. He’s really sure of it. You go to the hospital,” I said.

“Really? Well good, it would be have been selfish if I left and stranded these people in the rain.” Frank nodded, slowly looking at his engine and muttering what must have been a prayer for his brother, or perhaps for us, soon to be careening downhill in a hundred-ton pressurized deathtrap. I chose to leave the awkward exchange there and turned back into the woods, running to the train.

“All right, Jackson!” I exclaimed while pulling myself into the cab, relieved that I had found a solution. “Your time to shine, Frank needs you to double-man it back to the station.”

Jackson responded with a vacant stare.

“Uhhhh, a-about that—I was just showboating. I wasn’t serious,” he stammered. I felt my stomach drop. Casey shook his head.

“Well, if we don’t go now the safety will pop and conditions will be unsafe from the rain,” Casey said, standing up and giving the call to board. Jackson shook as he stepped up to the engineer position. I fought back my inhibitions as my eyes darted over the controls, urging my muscles to cooperate.

“I can drive, if you fire.” My voice wavered. My legs remained firm, not ready to accept the task I had just volunteered for.

Jackson looked relieved and nodded fervently, more than

ready to put his trust in me. I conjured as much confidence as I could and grabbed the throttle and reverser, finding my seat between the pipes. One sharp whistle later and it was time to go. I checked my pressure, my static-oiler, my air. I nodded at Jackson, who spun the handbrake off before regaining his pose at the fire. I pushed the reverser to full forward and eased the throttle open, choking it back when the wheels slipped. The big logging train slid into motion as pistons pumped and wheels turned.

“The way back is easier than the way up, no switchbacks,” Jackson informed me.

I nodded in time with the chuffs, twisting the break valve to engage as we rolled down the mountain.

“Yes, I’m going to be using the break primarily. When you hear the Westinghouse compressor kick on, you have to build steam or we will lose pressure.” I summoned strength in my command and took control of the situation.

The sixteen-mile return trip started rough, with the stilted communication between us allowing the engine to overpower our control. I wrestled with it, quadruple-tasking and barking out one-word orders which were executed swiftly.

Our symbiosis evolved as we recognized the gravity of this responsibility. Our task: persuade that barking, hissing beast to get us all home safely. My conviction infected Jackson, and together we regained control.

The engine would not wait for us; there was no time to be indecisive. And finally, as we pulled into a misty valley, the preserved logging town of Roaring Camp came into view. I yanked hard on the whistle, quilling the sweet tone with finesse.

We had done it. And as the rain began to sprinkle down, I breathed in the oily aroma of the locomotive and the fresh forest air, the whistle echoing back and forth across the basin. Jackson’s smile returned.

“Dude, this is my favorite part! We blowdown the boiler over the creek, makes a good show for the guests,” Jackson nearly sang.

“Might as well! We owe it to them after that near disaster!”

We swapped places, that tight space in the cab becoming a second home. I knelt down to grab hold of the train's slowdown lever, feeling her animalistic grumble. With a deliberate pull, the sky filled with superheated steam, cascading, churning, and rising with my spirits. The wall that for too long had barricaded my courage was finally blown down at the throttle of Dixiana.



B&K Railroad, Bradford PA -*postcard, circa 1910*



B&O Engine 5702 in Bradford -*photography Circa 1920*

HEARTBEATS

Anne Bouquin

First Place Winner

The pulsing sound telegraphed through the Bradford hills on misty mornings of my childhood: *tomma-tomma-tomma-tom-tom-tom-tom*. The rhythm paused a beat or two and then repeated over and over for most of an hour a few days a week. Floating in through the open window, the sound roused me from sleep like a gong rattled for morning reveille. On special mornings, more beating joined faintly from a distant hill: *tom-tom-tomma-tom-tom-tom*. The spirited rhythms sparked my imagination, forming the possibility of early natives beating drums on the hills from the distant past. Or, could it be a giant beating heart? Gradually the sun lit the dark corners of the morning and the songs of birds reached a crescendo. Then, as mysteriously as the beating started, it stopped.

One Saturday afternoon the pounding pulse drifted off the hill unexpectedly, and my dad grinned and offered to investigate the sound with me. The further we walked up the hill of our road, the louder the beating became, hammering on my chest with sharper percussions. Passing the last house and the end of the pavement, we stepped onto a well-worn path into the woods. Ahead of us, like a strange carnival funhouse, iron rods jiggled and bounced the long grass and knocked on trees as they danced to the rhythm of pounding.

We carefully stepped over the first rod, which marched raggedly in one direction and then ran back quickly across the path. We had to duck under the next couple of rods that shifted back and forth, swinging crazily through the woods on each side of us.

The shaded path threaded past trees and ferns, and finally we came to a long windowless tin house in a grass clearing that was brilliant in the afternoon sun. While we stood there, the banging pounding sound inside the house became soul-rattling as it echoed loudly inside my chest, vying with my own small heartbeat.

A wooden tank for water reached to the lower edge of the roof and was blackened by tar for waterproofing. A network of rods protruded from slits in the walls of the house, spreading out in a web on three sides, and they bounced in and out of the slits in rhythm to the pounding.

Later I'd find that each iron rod led to a rust-coated oil jack much deeper in the woods that seesawed silently up and down to the pulling of the rod.

A man was standing there who recognized my dad, and they shook hands and shouted into each other's cupped ears.

The trees and grass tossed in the breeze but were silenced by the deafening pounding. Soon the man, later known to me as Earl Duggan, motioned us into the tin house. Heat and a musty smell of machine oil enveloped us. A large rubber belt revolved and swung while the heads of gauges looked back at us in the dim light that entered through the doorway.

At the far end pulsed a titanic iron wheel, positioned like a table, that turned in short jerks like a cog in a watch. The rod lines were attached to the outer edge of the wheel, which pulled on the rod lines almost a quarter turn around, pulling the rods into the house a short span. Then, as the machinery paused, the wheel suddenly unwound and the rods bounced out through their slits like rubber bands shot all at once.

The thunder of the engine that heaved on the wheel was not as loud inside the building as it was on the outside. Pistons jumped, there were loud pops like shots of gunfire, the belt traveled to and from the engine to turn the wheel, and the engine shook with the force of great might. The sound of the shots bounced on the metal walls and were broadcast to the outside in an amplified engine staccato.

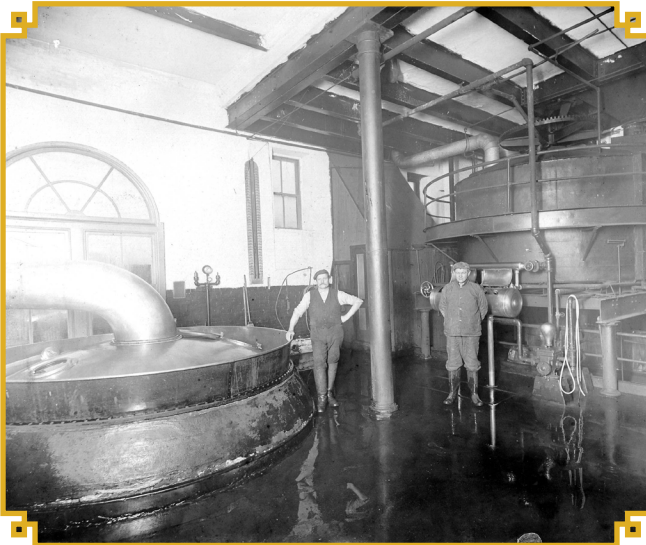
It was thrilling to be in the center of so much power and movement and sound, and the building certainly lived up to its name, powerhouse. After that, I would never again hear the pounding on the hill without an answering lurch of joy at the engine of a powerhouse beating once again.

Decades have passed and Earl Duggan and his engine are lost to time, heartbeats stilled forever. Oil production is now quietly electrified in oil jacks working automatically on timers. The new jacks sleep in the forest like giant leggy insects and suddenly spring to life, softly humming

their electrical boards and rocking in smooth motions as they suck the remains of long-dead creatures, turned to crude oil, out of the tomb of the earth. This leap of technology, however, can never be as magnificent as the mechanical powerhouses that once beat out their thunderous pulse over the hills.

Occasionally I can still hear a powerhouse from the end of the Tuna Trail, near the state line. It is far away and hauntingly faint, but the engine still beats an irregular rhythm. The distance makes it sound like a stick beating on an empty tin can, but it is a welcome sound and I always pause to listen.

An independent oil man is standing by the engine, first to massage it back to life, and later to still the beating to silence when the oil is pumped off. Someday the two of them will also fade away, forgotten relics of a time when man and machine were a team of hearts.



Bradford Brewery -*photography*, Circa 1909



SPO Power -*photography*, Submitted by Anne Bouquin

SIBLING RIBALDRY

Rick Frederick

I didn't mean to run over her. I really didn't.

One minute I was looking at the rear camera picture and everything was perfectly clear. Then I looked up to make sure I was missing my wife's car beside me, since I had to turn the wheel sharply to get out around her. When I glanced back down, it was still clear, so I gunned it. I saw a flash of red on the screen, then heard a *thunk* at the same time I felt a little resistance in the rear. I jammed on the brakes and got out.

"Jesus Christ, you ran right over her. I think she's dead. Get over here. Help me." This was all said in a rush by my wife, Penny, as she leaned over the inert body of her sister.

The Ford 150 with extended rear cab and four-wheel drive 350-horsepower with the heavy-duty drive train apparently does a pretty good job on people it runs over, if the dead sister was any indication. I'd seen the damage it did to a 140-pound buck, but that also left some marks on the truck. The dead sister hardly made a dent. Although, when I looked a little closer, there was a spot on the bumper I didn't see right off the bat.

"What are you looking at your silly goddamn truck for, Henry?" said the wife. "We need to do something about Jenny."

I suggested we try to pick her up and throw her in the bed, but that would have been a chore, since Jenny had been packing on the pounds since she came to live with us, and I'm not sure Penny and I could have lugged her over the tailgate. That winch attachment might have been pretty attractive about now, but I'd saved a few bucks by leaving it off.

Anyway, it turned out that's not what Penny had in mind. She thought we should seek medical help.

"Medical help!" says I. "Medical help? Don't you see she's dead? We don't need some idiot in one of those goofy EMT outfits to

tell us that. And if we did get the so-called experts out here to tell us what we already know, what would happen then? All sorts of questions and accusations. Hell, with my record, I'd probably even get locked up."

"Maybe you should."

"What in the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You never did like my sister, especially since she came out here to live with us. Maybe you killed her on purpose."

Now that was just about the dumbest thing I'd ever heard, though considering the source, you'd have to travel pretty far down the stupid string to get all the way to the end. It was true; I never did care for her sister because she treated my wife like crap. I thought she was an asshole and that's how I generally referred to her, and we didn't have much to do with her except for a couple of hours a year when we travelled the ten hours back home to see the few friends we had left there. Then about a year ago she started acting crazy and couldn't take care of herself, so Penny decided she had to come out here where we could take care of her. Dementia, some doctor back there said, and suggested she belonged in a nursing home, but nobody had the money for that so she moved into our basement. She went straight from asshole to idiot and I couldn't stand her either way. Now she was dead, I wasn't so thrilled with her either.

"Well then, what do you suggest we do? You killed her so you figure it out."

It wasn't exactly a no-brainer, but I didn't think it took a whole lot of brains to figure out either. "We bury her and don't tell anybody about this."

"Oh that's brilliant. What about all the people at the funeral home and such. Don't you think they might let on that she's dead and got run over by a pickup truck?"

"I don't think you're getting the gist of what I'm saying here, Penny. When I said we bury her, I meant we, you and me, bury her. We don't call up any funeral home or anyplace else."

Penny gave this some thought. I could tell her brain was filtering it through because she got that look on her face that she gets when she's thinking, like the one Beezo, our old Rottweiler, used to

get when he was looking for a place to crap.

“There’s lots of people that know she’s here with us. What do we tell them when they ask about her?”

“Tell them she went back to Iowa. We can make up some story about her getting on some assistance program and getting in the county home back where she’s from. We’ll just take the truck and leave town for a couple of days and tell everybody we took her back.”

“What about folks back there? They’ll know she isn’t there. What if somebody went to visit her at the county home and found out she wasn’t there?”

“Think about it, Penny. You don’t have any close family there, just a few cousins who never had much to do with each other, so they’re not going to worry about her. And she hasn’t had any real friends for years—she locked herself away from everybody and turned into a hermit after she lost her job, and that was, what? Ten years ago? If anybody back there asks, we’ll tell them she got pneumonia or something and died. We had a simple graveside service and that was it. There’s nobody back there who gives enough of a shit to check up on it.”

The wife’s face took on that serious thinking look again while she digested my proposition. Finally, just before smoke started blowing out of her ears, she seemed about ready to go along with it. Then a cloud appeared over the whole thing.

“But where do we bury her?”

“That should be a simple thing,” I told her, waving my arm to indicate all the space behind me. “We’ve got almost three acres here, and most of it’s wooded. I don’t think we’ll have any trouble finding a nice spot. Someplace pleasant even, with a view of the hills.” I thought that last part would fix it, since Penny was always reminding her sister how much prettier it was out here than back home.

“Oh no,” the wife said. “I’m not about to have my own sister killed on my own property and then buried there too. I’ve seen those programs on television. Somebody will find her and dig her up for sure. Then where will we be? They’ll think we killed her on purpose. No. I’ll not have it.”

I could tell her mind was set and when that happens, no

matter how far off the mark she is, no matter how mired in misperception, she's impossible to budge. But I had to make one small attempt.

"I don't see how anybody could find her, if nobody was looking for her. The way I see it, nobody will know she was missing, so there'd be no reason to go around trying to dig her up."

"Don't you ever pay attention to those TV programs, you idiot? Some guy's walking his dog years from now, the dog digs up a bone, turns out to be human. Or some contractor starts digging for a new development, discovers a body. It literally happens every day. And I'm not having it happen to me. No sir."

"How about this? We don't bury the body whole. We cut it up some—I could get some acid and dissolve parts of it, we could pulverize the bones out back in the workshop, maybe burn some parts in my old coal stove."

"What? For God's sake, we're talking about my sister here—you're not going to go cutting her up and burning her and, what—pulverizing her? Absolutely not!"

"I suppose the chipper's out of the question then," I said, and turned to walk away before a wave of wifely wrath hurricaned me over.

I went to the barn—actually just an overgrown shed—where we keep tools and such. I dug out the wheelbarrow and some old planks I'd used years ago for scaffolding when I painted the house. Penny was right behind me and I had her wheel the barrow while I carried the heavy pieces of wood over to where her sister lay.

"She hasn't moved," Penny said.

"You find that in dead people a lot," I said, trying to be agreeable.

I tilted the wheelbarrow down near her head and we managed to pull her up some, then get the wheelbarrow upright with most of her in it. I made a sort of ramp to the truck bed with the planks. Using all my strength and with a (very) little help from Penny, I managed to pull the wheelbarrow up into the back of the truck. I dumped the body, turned the barrow over next to it, and slid the wood planks into the bed, figuring we'd need the rig for the next

phase of what was turning into an adventure.

I covered the whole thing with an old tarp I used for hauling. When I stood back and looked at it, it resembled a dead body with an overturned wheelbarrow next to it covered by a tarp. Fortunately, it was fall and I had just raked the leaves off the yard into a big pile which I hadn't yet bagged. I pulled the truck next to the pile and threw about half the leaves into the back. Now the whole thing resembled a guy driving around in his truck with a pile of leaves in the back. I sent Penny for a couple of shovels and some rope while I loaded a half dozen concrete blocks, and we were ready for whatever the evening might bring.

I took off without much of a notion about where we might end up.

"Where are we going?" asked Penny.

"I thought we'd drive around a bit, look for some inspiration."

"That's just great. You have no idea where we're going with a dead body in the back."

"I have some idea. I saw a movie once where they buried a guy in a cornfield. They put him down deep enough that he wouldn't get plowed up the next year, so there was no way anyone would find him."

"So do you know of any good cornfields around here where we can actually dig down six feet in the rocky clay without heavy equipment and without anybody spotting us and asking what the hell we think we're doing?"

"We could say we were trying out some new experimental fertilizer—Jennymeal, we could call it, and maybe get a patent if she pushed up a really special patch of corn."

"Not funny."

We didn't talk for a while. I just drove. I had a couple of ideas, but I wasn't kidding about hoping for some inspiration. After a while, we hit a road that paralleled the fork of a branch of a famous river that flowed through the county. Down by the water, the soil was rich, dark, and relatively free of the heavy clay that marked most of the county. In other words, soil you could dig down in without the aid of heavy machinery. Dusk was just setting in, so I looked for a place

where we could pull off and dig without being too obvious. After about a mile and a half, I found just the spot. A slight track led from the roadway next to a copse of trees to a low spot a dozen feet from the water. It was a level place partly shielded from the road by the trees—about as private a burial spot as we were likely to get.

I took one shovel and handed the other one to Penny.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” she asked.

I thought of about half a dozen replies that would make me feel better and piss her off a whole lot. Discretion won out.

“I thought with both of us digging, we could get through faster and have less of a chance of being spotted.”

“You killed her, and this whole burial thing was your plan, so I think you should step up and take the responsibility,” she said. “Besides, I have to go pee. I’m going to check out those woods.” She turned and walked toward the trees, dragging her shovel behind her.

Digging the hole wasn’t really very hard work. Once I cut through the top grassy layer, the ground was soft and I got a rhythm going. I figured four feet or so should do the trick, and I got more than halfway there without hitting any large rocks or roots. I was humming right along and thinking about home and a shower and a glass of something alcoholic when a high-pitched male voice a few feet behind me shouted:

“Reach for the sky, mister.”

Reach for the sky? Who the fuck says that? That’s the kind of thing you might hear on one of those old TV Westerns from the 1950s that they show on TV Land. I was so busy thinking about this that I just stood there with my hands on the shovel until I heard that ominous sound of a shotgun being cocked. I dropped the shovel and reached for the sky.

“Now turn around.”

I did as he asked. Here was this sawed-off little old asshole holding a shotgun as long as he was tall. He might have looked ridiculous, but he didn’t look humorous, since from where I was standing the double barrels pointed at me looked large enough to shoot cannonballs.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he demanded.

“Digging a hole.”

“I can see that, smartass. What do you plan on putting in it?”

“I hit a deer back on the road. It’s there in my truck bed. I thought I’d bury it here.”

“Bullshit. Nobody does that.”

I knew it was pretty lame, but it’s all I could come up with on the spur of the moment. I racked my brain but nothing else was coming. It was probably my imagination, but I thought I could see his fingers whitening on the shotgun trigger.

“Well, I—”

Metal hit bone with a solid whack and the old geezer fell to his knees, then toppled halfway into my partly-dug hole with the shotgun firmly tucked under him. Penny stood with her shovel held in both hands like a baseball bat and gazed down at him.

“Is he dead? He looks dead. I didn’t mean to kill him, just knock him out.”

There looked to be a solid dent in his right temple. I couldn’t find a pulse in his neck and he didn’t seem to be breathing.

“Pretty sure he’s dead,” I reported.

“Now what?”

“Well, we’ve got a good hole going here. Why don’t we just work a little longer and make it a double? You can help, by the way, since, you know, the old man is sort of your responsibility.”

We’d hardly started to dig when we heard someone yelling on the other side of the woods.

“Clay, where are you? Harry’s ready to go in.” A dog I imagined to be Harry let out a loud big-dog bark.

“No time for digging,” I said. “You take the shovels and the shotgun.”

I handed my shovel to Jenny and dragged the old man from the edge of the hole where we’d laid him. She stowed the gun in the cab and the tools in the bed and helped me drag the corpse up beside them. Fortunately, the old man was short and slender and weighed next to nothing. I pulled an edge of the tarp over him, scattered a few leaves over the lot, and started the truck. It was pretty dark, but there was just enough light to make out the track back to the road without

turning on my headlights. We crept up to the road and drove slowly away, leaving the lights off until we rounded the next bend.

“That was close,” the wife said. “Any other grand ideas?”

Just the one. You could shut the fuck up so I can have a coherent thought.

“No, dear. Not right off hand—you?”

“No.”

“Well, I was thinking. You know how Jenny always said she liked living at the lake?”

“Yes, and I think that’s when she was the happiest I’ve ever known her. Just after she married that son-of-a-bitch Randolph, before he started fooling around on her.”

This was pretty much a common theme in Penny’s family—Jenny was going along fine until her life was ruined by that son-of-a-bitch Randolph. I never knew if Randolph was his first name or his last. Hell, for all I knew his first name was son-of-a-bitch. All I knew was that he was long gone when I started dating Penny.

“Right. So, I was thinking, maybe we could bury her, sort of, in the water. I brought some rope and some concrete blocks—I think I have enough for the old jasper with the shotgun, too.”

“Wait, wait, wait—Jenny was deathly afraid of the water. She never knew how to swim.”

“But you just said—”

“I said she was happy living at the lake. They actually didn’t live right on the lake, but one lane over. They had this cute little cottage and a couple of nice neighbors. But she didn’t have anything to do with the water. She hated it.”

“Well, look. Maybe we can sink the old geezer somewhere while we try to figure out what to do with Jenny. It’s probably best to separate the bodies anyway, in case one of them pops up sometime.”

“Okay, but where can you go? We don’t have a boat to get out in the river, and it’s not deep enough close to the banks.”

“I was thinking maybe the reservoir.”

“Same problem there,” said Penny. “We still don’t have a boat to get out to the deep parts, and it’s real shallow at the boat launch where you can drive down in.”

“Which leaves only one solution,” says I, with a note of triumph. “We drop him off the bridge.”

I had some time to think about technique as we drove the twenty miles to the reservoir. The route we were going to follow was full of curves and hills, which limited visibility until it straightened out for about a quarter mile-long bridge just above the dam that created the reservoir. It was after dark and there was no visible traffic, but we'd have to do the job quickly before someone did come along. *Take the scenic drive along the reservoir and watch people dump bodies off the bridge* just wouldn't work.

I pulled over just before the bridge and told Penny to get into the driver's seat while I got in the back of the truck. I gave her specific directions: “Drive slowly across the bridge. When you get to the other side, drive into the Visitors' Parking area and turn around. Make sure no one is coming. Then drive slowly back across and stop about in the middle—I'll tap on the window.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I'm going to tie the concrete blocks onto the bodies with the rope. Then when you stop, I'll just give the old heave-ho and we're halfway home.”

“*Bodies?* Did you say *bodies*, as in more than one?”

“No, no—did I say bodies? No, of course, I just meant the one—the old man.”

Shit shit shit. Of course, I had meant to dump them both and claim later that Jenny slipped or something. “Just the old man,” I reiterated and climbed into the truck bed. Then I made a terrific discovery. The “rope” that Penny brought from the barn was actually a bungee cord. I had visions of the old man hung up on the bridge popping up and down like a yo-yo. If I wasn't getting so desperate by then, I probably would have laughed my ass off. Maybe later. I tied the cord the best I could under the old man's arms and attached the other end of the thing to three of the blocks, hoping I still had enough strength to launch them out of the truck.

Penny was nearing the parking lot just as I finished, and turned to head back the way we came. Still no sign of anyone on the bridge, and the night was cloudy and dark. She slowed down as we

neared the middle. Hot damn! We were set!

The night's stillness was shattered by that single whoop that cops make with their sirens when they're trying to get your attention. The flashing red and white lights made the dark night come alive with the unearthly glow that the policeman's light bar always signals, an indication that someone's in trouble. That someone looked to be me, as I stood on the bed of the truck holding three concrete blocks balanced on the side of the truck with a bungee cord attached to a dead body under a tarp.

"What you got there, sir?" A state cop started walking toward me. As he got closer, I could see it was Dave Hochstein, the younger brother of a guy I went to school with. The Hochstein I knew was an asshole and I'd heard his brother was an even bigger one. He walked past the tailgate and partway up to the driver's window, flashing a light in the direction of the driver's seat.

"Hey, it's Dave Hochstein, isn't it? It's me, Henry Lapp—I went to school with your brother Bob. That's my wife Penny driving."

He directed the flashlight toward me, where I stood still stupidly holding the blocks attached to the cord attached to the body.

"Uh-huh," he said. "What the heck are you doing up here on the bridge?"

"Well, that's a good question, now isn't it?"

"Sure is. You going to answer it? What are you doing with those blocks?"

I had an inspiration.

"You see, these blocks are attached to this bungee cord. I decided to try bungee jumping and my wife told me I was crazy and it wasn't safe. So I told her I'd prove it was. I've got about 75 pounds of concrete blocks attached to the cord. Thought I'd throw it off the bridge and test the cord, then add a few more blocks until I get close to my weight."

"You got it attached to the truck bed somehow, under that tarp?"

"Yeah," I said. "But look, it's getting late and this was a dumb idea. We'd best just be getting home." I started to put the blocks down into the truck bed.

“No, wait a minute. Hell, there’s nobody around and my lights will ensure that nobody comes along and rear-ends you. Why don’t you go ahead and push those blocks on over and let’s see what happens.”

I knew what would happen. I’d shove the blocks over and a dead body would fly up from under the tarp and go sailing over the bridge. And I’d go to prison for the rest of my natural life. Then I noticed that Penny had gotten out of the truck and was standing a few steps behind the trooper. She was holding the shotgun. Maybe she could create a diversion and I could fly the old man off while the cop wasn’t looking.

“You need a hand with the blocks?” he asked.

Penny looked hard at the shotgun. She’s never fired one before—nor any kind of gun, as far as I knew—and she probably couldn’t figure out how to do it right. She sort of shrugged her shoulders and gripped the double barrels in both hands. She took a step toward the trooper.

“Well go on. What are you waiting for? You need me to climb up and give you a hand?”

“No, no, I’m just making sure everything’s attached just right. I think it’s a go. IT’S A GO!” I was hoping that Penny got the message and figured that whatever the hell she was going to do she needed to do right now.

The wooden stock of the shotgun made a noise like an ax hitting a tree when it whacked into the back of Dave Hochstein’s head. He went down hard, but Penny wasn’t sure he was out, so she whacked him a couple more to be sure. I was kind of thinking if I started a softball team next summer, I’d want her on my side. While she still had the adrenaline rush going, I had her help me get his body up in the truck with the others. I pitched the shotgun over the bridge rail.

“Wouldn’t this be a good place to dump him?” Penny asked.

“Not enough time,” I said. “Someone could come along any second before we get the blocks on him. Better to take him along.” The keys were in the ignition and I started it up while Penny climbed in with me.

“This has been some night. I think we should head for home.”

I agreed. “We can sort things out tomorrow. These three aren’t going anywhere.”

As I drove home, I couldn’t help but think that burying all three on our property was the only solution. I didn’t know for sure how I was going to sell it to Penny, but I had the night to think it over.

As we pulled into our drive, she said, “Why don’t you let me out at the house and go ahead and put the truck in the barn. It should be safe there for the night, then tomorrow after supper we can head out again. I was thinking maybe the state park, but I’m sure you’ll come up with something by then. As long as it’s far away from here.”

This seemed to be the final word. I let her off at the house as she requested. As she walked around behind the truck, I put it in drive to pull ahead, but something slipped or got stuck or somehow went terribly wrong as I gunned it into reverse.

I didn’t mean to run over her. I really didn’t.



Cars Lined Up -*photography*, Circa 1930

PUMPJACK SHACKS

Bill Wilson

There's talk of an energy renaissance,
with promises anew of a secure and bountiful future.
Madison Avenue, meet Wall Street.

Yet here in the northern Appalachians,
ancient hills hold relics of past campaigns,
hiding our history buried deep within the ground.

Pumpjack shacks.

Rusted metal huts cloaked in brush and brambles,
battered sheds shielding bore holes left for dead.
Frayed power lines hang from massive motors aching
to have another go, driving V-belts,
turning gears, pushing shafts, cranks, and rods,
lifting rock-filled counter-weighted wooden boxes,
forcing the bridle up and down and up and down,
machinery squeaking, straining, and coaxing
the rock and sands to surrender their treasure.

Inside, a spectral breeze blows through
hollow window frames, carrying whispers
of roughnecks who made the oil patch
their field of dreams:

strong men who worked the land and left
behind scriptures of their toil,
these ghostly tombstones covering crypts
of earthly riches, sucked up and swept away
by a nation's unquenchable thirst.

THE MAKING OF ME

Brianna Henry

we are a wilted rose
in a dusty vase
on the cracked marble countertop
of an abandoned house
with gray paint chipping
off rotting slats of lumber

we are roadkill
smooshed into the pavement
by thick tires of a careless car
going far too fast around a curve
without time to stop
recklessly crushing innocence

you are fire
and we are
charred remains of the house we built
that you destroyed in a fit of rage
with sledgehammer fists
and gasoline words

we are dead
you are to blame
I am stronger
the death of us
is the beginning of me

BYE-BYE BROWN GIRL

Desiree Maxwell

“Bye-Bye Brown Girl,” the headliner reads and the audience shake off the stress and the discomfort of having to let me into their world.

They don’t say anything, they forget my presence. The crowd boos me and proclaims a good riddance to me and my untamed mane, my sweatpants, my loud voice that speaks of disappointment, injustice, mistreatment.

Goodbye with my unapologetic tone that does nothing but disagree and criticize your world.

This thick skin is tired of having others cut at me from all angles in this small world.

You’re not ready for me.

My eyes see nothing but the future, ears hear nothing but the truth you don’t seem to sense, but all five of mine have felt displaced during this performance.

They’re tired. Tired of feeling like they don’t belong.

My ears are filled with the hurtful slurs of being a black bitch and talking too much.

My eyes are tired of seeing people look down on me.

My tongue is tired of having to defend my body, protect my presence, prove my intelligence, and repeat any of this.

In Act One

you speak of foolishness, bigotry, ignorance, my tongue no longer willing to endure this disgusting slob of

trash.

You mix vegetables, rude slurs, and hurtful gossip,
then put it into a fryer that can
dissolve me and my dreams completely,
call it a meal
and expect for it to be appetizing, easy to swallow.

In Act Two

my nostrils have to smell the stench of your cigarettes,
intolerance, your half-assed apologies
and yet you still stick your nose up at me
like you're proud of this establishment you have built
that somehow makes my blood boil,
my teeth clench.

I can feel your prejudice tear at my leather skin,
my senses scream displacement
but you believe I'm so far beneath you.

All you hear are my complaints,
all you know is my sadness.

You don't know about my late nights
when I do nothing but dedicate myself
to understand your law, your world, your practices.
You're not there as I learn your strengths,
your people, your town.

It's amazing what happens in a day, a week, a year
but right now in this moment I'm saying goodbye.
I'm saying goodbye to the voice that is hurt, disappointed,
and confused, my mind no longer in a frenzy,
my thoughts much more mature
and willing to bid adieu to this, to you.

Today I woke up.

In a week I will pack my things.

In a month I will have built bridges in relationships
that built cinderblock walls to keep me out.

In a year you will have forgotten about me.

You will put on your camo hoodie, your thick blue jeans,
New Balance sneakers, and go about your day.
You are who you are, and I will be who I was born to be.
I was born into this. Born into this tawny skin
that refuses to go unnoticed. This voice
so entangled in emotion,
my words get lost in their meaning,
born a woman way too proud to let another speak for me
or have a mic handicap the fire within myself,
and I'm proud of the parts of me that
I cannot and will not change.

I will have regretted nothing as I have tried in the past
to talk to you, get to know you, and spend time with you.
You will not have regretted never giving me a chance,
getting to know who I am.
By then you will have forgotten I existed
as nothing more than another brown girl
saying goodbye.

It's a struggle to survive that binds us all.
A common loss of purpose in a world that cuts at hopes and
dreams,
chews up ambition, and makes the truth hard to swallow.
It's our memory that we take pride in
as we store these moments and hold them close,
praying someone out there remembers us.

And I am tired of acting.
I'm tired of pretending that I am appeased.
My misery is no longer a show and I'm closing the curtains.

CONCERTO

Carol Newman

With only Vivaldi and a hundred violin strings
for company, I've driven eighty miles one way,
four times, the roads strewn with snow like ashes.
It's January-cold, subzero. Along the Bayfront Connector,
the wind blows in off the lake, hammers the

parking garage and burns my face red like a mask.
Down two hallways, somewhere past the second red circle,
my husband slides down the hospital monitor.
I track his arrivals and departures, pre-op, surgery,
post-op, recovery. Something crashes to the floor, a metallic

clang, a loud laugh, a sob. I think of all that can be broken,
what can be fixed, what is thrown away, and how marriage
is just one repair after another, a constant salvaging.
I drive home with Vivaldi, the swell of the strings
filling the car, neon lights blinking on all across the city.



Bradford Public Library -*photography*, Circa 1900

SUNSET PRK

Kenneth Reilly

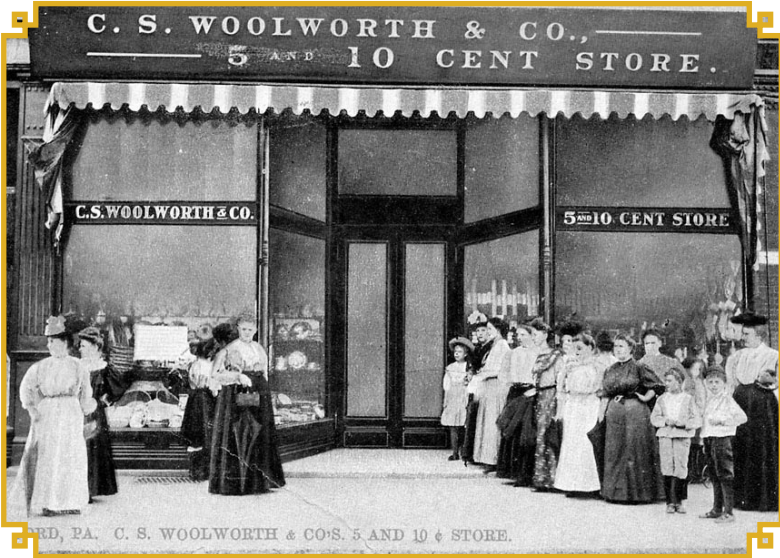
I wear my fucked up Converse
The rubber bottoms bounce on the concrete
The rust on the BQE never gleam in the sunlight
An olive-colored puddle lies still
Cars zoom past me over the speed limit
Two men talk in rapid Spanish
A woman speaks Chinese on the phone
The rabbi gets into his Honda

Cracks web the sidewalk
A new apartment building is under construction
The hot sun melts the plastic garbage bags
An artisanal brewery just celebrated their first anniversary
The schools don't have funding
The Pomona Grads just launched their start-up
Across the street, pot smokers hold onto metal bars
They open a park on the bay with views of the skyline
They just closed the free rehabilitation clinic
to open a bakery

My Sunset is changing
But it's still yellow as it sinks beyond New York Harbor

At night, it's quiet unlike before
No more bangs or pows
No more Merengue blasting out of the pink row houses
No more fights below my third-floor bedroom
But the lights from passing cars

still shine through my windows
The B11 still rumbles down my block
It's the last remaining noise on my urban sound
machine



Woolworth Five & Dime -*photography*, Circa 1910

BLACK GOLD

Angela Nuzzo

Second Place Winner

The smell of it is in my lungs,
in my veins, in my memories.
I have breathed it in deeply
since I was a child
and over the decades it has
soaked into my being.
Back then, the odor was heavy,
hanging in the air like a perfume
only the earth could procure.
It surrounded our house
as the goldenrod did,
mingling its scent
with the flowering fields.
Our walks up Glycerin Road
revealed open pools of brown goo,
autumn leaves stuck to the surface,
bugs landing with no hope of escape.
The pipes crisscrossing our hill
were still in use back then,
chugging back and forth, barking
out the language familiar
only in oil country.
Visitors experienced the unique flavor
of the water from our well,
but only in the driest summers
could we taste the deep and murky dregs
pulled up from the rock pool.
For years now the hills have been silent,

and that certain smell has faded.
The rusting tanks
stand abandoned in the fields
and the jacks wait quiet.
There are laws now forcing landowners
to pull pipes and plug old oil wells.
And so, acre by acre,
my thoughts are displaced
and the landscape
of that pungent odor is changed forever.
But I can still sense it lingering,
having been breathed into my heart.



Oil Derricks -photography, Circa 1890

CAT

Patricia Shinaberger

My sister Mickey visited a few days after I had moved into the only house on a dirt road a mile from the highway. She must have heard my tirade of cussing as I opened the kitchen utensil drawer and found mouse poop again.

“It’s a nice house,” she said, “but I can’t believe you want to live way out here in the sticks with no neighbors.”

“Larry doesn’t like the thought of having neighbors too close. He always says that he wanted to live in a house where his dog can run loose, and where he can set up a pistol range, and where he can pee off the porch if he takes a mind to do so.”

“If you are going to live out here in the sticks, you are going to need a mouser,” said my practical, pet-loving mom a few days later when she arrived with a tiny gray furball in hand.

I timidly held the kitten up to show Larry as he stood on a tall ladder painting the eaves of our three-story house. “Mom says that he is an outside cat and that he will grow up to be a good mouser.”

“Oh yeah,” said Larry, rolling his eyes.

But it was grumpy old Larry who fed Cat later that day and held him on his lap that evening after supper. Cat was home.

On his weekly visit, Larry’s father brought chicken livers and beef kidneys, saying, “If you are going to have a cat, it might as well be a big cat.”

Cat grew to be enormous, weighing about thirteen pounds, with thick two-inch-long hair in shades of gray and black. Since he was a good hunter, he often got burrs or “stick tights” in his fur. He purred appreciatively when he was brushed. Once, when he got entangled in a large burdock, I had to cut off the matted hair on both sides of his torso, revealing pure white skin.

I never named or bonded with Cat. We had a not-quite-love/not-quite-hate relationship. I could cuss at him or sing him love

songs; it never really affected him one way or another. However, Larry's teenage nephews, who often pushed my sensibility limits with their gross teenage humor, dreamed up the name of Fart Blossom Haze. Soon his whole family adopted the moniker.

"What is your cat's name?" asked the vet's assistant.

Oh no, I thought, but I recovered with, "His name is Flower Blossom Haze."

"A most unusual name," said the assistant.

"Yes it is."

Cat was diagnosed with hairballs. It took three people to administer the cure: one to hold his front legs, one to hold his back legs, and one to squeeze his cheeks so that his mouth popped open, allowing the mineral oil to be poured in. He did finally learn to take the dose mixed in his food, and before very long he was his old, independent self.

Larry decided to go back to school. For a whole year, we left home every Sunday night and returned on Friday night. Cat, with the accommodation of a basement window-door, was left to fend for himself. He opened his door with a paw and stepped onto a platform as the door closed behind him. He jumped to the top of the clothes dryer and then to the basement floor where his kibble and water dishes were placed. He had a bed near the water heater and a litter box that he chose to not use; he was, after all, an outside cat.

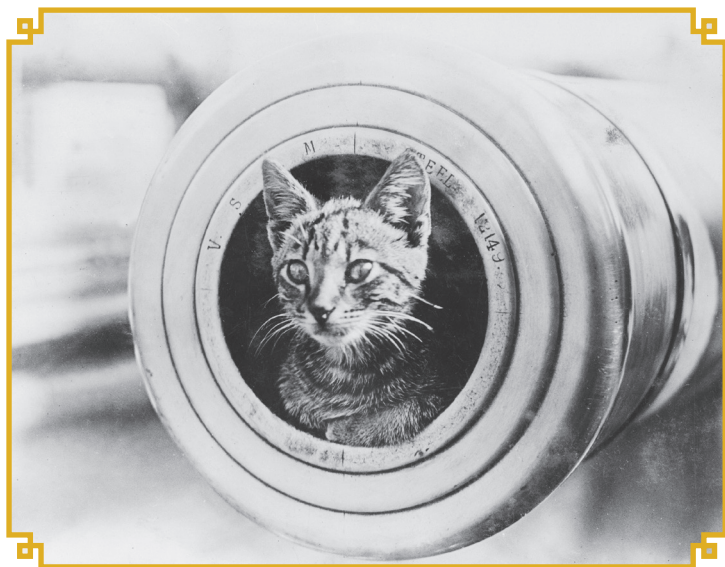
When Larry and I returned full-time to our house, our seven-year marriage began to fall apart. Larry often arrived home late after I was sleeping. He spent weekends at his family's hunting camp, where he eventually moved during the Thanksgiving weekend.

I was really lonely, especially in the evenings. All my friends and sisters were busy with their children. We couldn't get television reception, so I read a lot, including the bodice rippers of that decade, and the brand new *Ms. Magazine* that always made Larry nervous. I listened to John Denver albums on the stereo and sewed outfits for my five sisters' children. Cat "helped" me sew. He was attracted to the crinkling sound of the paper patterns as they were pinned to the fabric spread out on the dining room table. He'd roll on his back on

the paper, then walk back and forth cocking his ears and sniffing as if it held elusive prey. Once he annoyed me so much that I scooped him up and dumped him out the front door and onto the porch so that I could get some work done. He merely ran to his window door and beat me back to the dining room table. He also liked to stand behind the sewing machine head and watch the needle go up and down. He would try to pounce on the needle. Fortunately, it never caught him.

I had time to think about what I wanted for my life. I had always admired the cute apartment of Marlo Thomas on *That Girl*. I vowed to find a similar apartment and to enroll in at least one college class right after the holidays. On Christmas Day, I stood at the front door, watching Cat walk up the long sidewalk, then cross the dirt road into the forest. I never saw him again.

After seven years together, we were both moving away from that lonely house in the sticks on the dirt road a mile from the highway.



Cat in pipe -photography, Unknown Era

GASLIGHT

Les Buhite

Gaslighting . . . is a form of psychological abuse in which a victim is manipulated into doubting their own memory, perception and sanity. Instances may range from the denial by an abuser that previous abusive incidents ever occurred, up to the staging of bizarre events by the abuser with the intention of disorienting the victim. The term owes its origin to the 1938 play Gas Light and has been used in clinical and research literature. – Wikipedia

have you been the lighter?
 tell me you've explored
 that strange addictive magic

a dimming of the lights
 a flicker in the flame
 a susurrative spark of less-than-truth

a kindling of the glamor
 a ripple in the mirror
 a world slipping away

and the lit:

did you sense the change?
 did you recognize the mist?
 when did you decide?

(yes, you did decide.)

when did you decide to trust the tide
to drop your sails
and drift upon that great unsteady sea

illuminated by a thin unsteady flame
in a cracked and sooted globe?
you flit between shadow and a dream

dancing with the phantoms
on a vast fragmenting mirror
in the stateroom of a schooner made of glass

suspecting, fearing, daring not to try
but any time on any day
you can blow the gaslight out

(but you won't.)



Zippo Lighter Ad -Circa 1948

OH DEAR

Ja'aden Humphries-Randolph

Oh dear, things get better with time
like the process of a tick removal.
I bet you dont get those often.

Oh dear, the prairie holds no quarrel with you
but maybe the loss of trees does.
You still breathe well.

Oh deer,
the headlights are your only surprise,
for you hear the steps of humans before the trigger is pulled.
Yet you run into cars.



Train Wreck -Circa 1921

AN OCCURRENCE AT REYNARD RIVER BRIDGE

Taylor Tarahteeff

October 13th, 1862

Brigadier General McCall,

The border area of Reynard River remains held without conflict, and we have companies on guard around the clock. Reconnaissance suggests that locals avoid the region for a myriad of reasons not unwarranted, ranging from fierce animals and at one point, natives. We are not bothered by such disturbances.

Construction in the meantime continues vehemently. My men, many of whom seldom attended school, are surprising both me and each other at the ferocity and preciseness of their construction.

Morale, however, flutters in the 13th, for we have lost three in accidents (which plague any great human effort). You should expect the first train loads of men and munitions to reinforce the rest of the Brigade in no more than three weeks' time.

The area I have selected for the bridge is two hundred feet east of the position recommended by the Engineer's Corp. As I understand, this was to be the original position in the Corp's attempt at this venture due to the strong footing available for pylons. However, what damned this attempt was the two imposing berms poised on both sides of the plunge. Instead of taking the weeks extra to fortify site two as recommended, I took it upon myself to solve the issue of these berms, which I've had my men fragment with explosives and later excavate and grade. There will be two thousand feet more of tracks in exchange for precious time, which would have otherwise been sunk into the depths of that ravine.

I am not one to retreat when faced with adversity, be that on the fields of war, or against the hard earth of nature herself.

We shall parley when Richmond burns.

*Godspeed,
Colonel Shepp P. Shepp*

Shepp “Perseverance” Parnell, or Percy, as the men called him, was no stranger to trial. His enthusiasm, intelligence, and what some might call headstrong nature had resulted in numerous strategic victories in the early part of the war. Though controversially costly, these battles secured his place as an important and reliable asset to the Armies of the Union. Even within the smoky confines of his canvas tent, the battles raged on in a distant part of his mind.

Shepp was hunched over a drafting desk, tucking his completed letter into a crisp envelope. He raised his tall form from his stoop and grabbed a cord of wax, heating it over a candle which telegraphed a flickering light onto his face. He was handsome, with a perpetually young complexion that his fanciful handlebar moustache did little to hide. His swept-back jet-black hair was covered by his dress cap, and his slender form was accentuated by his muted blue uniform. He removed the wax from the heat and pooled it on the flap of the envelope, quickly stamping the hot liquid with his seal. He collected the letter and began a strange rhythmic walk to the mouth of the tent. His artificial lower leg remained a distant reminder of the cost of his grand schemes and offenses, but he did not dwell on such sacrifices. Progress did not pity the weak. He shoved through the heavy flaps of the hut and into the crisp fall evening, scanning the many pointed tents for his attendant.

“Johnson?” Shepp barked as his eyes adjusted to the soft evening light, which blanketed the camp as the sun retreated.

“Yes sir, Percy?” A young boy in uniform jumped up from an adjacent table and gave a mechanical salute.

“At ease, I need you to run this in to Calloway, have it sent over

to Washington, the office knows the particulars.” Shepp handed off the letter.

“Yes sir!”

Shepp watched the boy collect the letter into his satchel and make off for the horses.

Shepp expanded his lungs as he savored the familiar smoky smell of the camp. He decided to walk today and meandered through the woods, his strut broken and heavy.

The site was poised on the bluffs of the Calloway Ravine, a sheer vertical face cut into the mountain where the river roared beneath. The ravine served as a physical boundary between Kentucky and Tennessee and would have been an impractical place for a crossing if not for the presence of two railroads running along either side of the gorge. With the Army’s push into Tennessee, support by rail became a paramount consideration. The most direct route would be to connect the two rail lines with a bridge, a simple idea in concept, but one which became complicated due to the treachery of the region which drove many engineers to other, less confounding professions.

Shepp however was overjoyed to take on the project. Yet another chance to surmount the impossible and prove his prowess to the naysayers, whatever the cost. The commands to secure the region were easy, and the project would be a great engineering puzzle. He mulled over the plans as he crested the summit of the hill where their camp sat nestled. Here a view of the works was clear and spectacular. The bridge was taking form, the pylons already rising from the stone banks of the river. The four-hundred-foot span would be crossed in no time at all at this rate. On either side of the ravine, little shapes of soldiers buzzed about, operating simple cranes and hanging suspended off the side of the cliffs like blue spiders. The work locomotive shunted wagons of ballast and boards between the fresh cutaways, coughing out a black plume of smoke from its diamond funnel. The explosive excavation to flatten the banks out had been messy, with dirt, mud, and fleshy animal bits flowering into the air and raining down on the crew with each blast. But the new retaining walls and temporary structures shaped the untamed region into a pleasing picture of progress. Shepp waved down to a familiar face as he carefully stepped his way onto

the rail line.

“Mr. Larson, I take it things are progressing well down here?” Shepp began his walk toward the junction that led into the cutaway.

“Absolutely, sir, there are two companies of men working today on either side of the bridge as you instructed. We expect to complete the scaffolding in a day’s time and the real bones can go up. I take it the people of Tennessee will not interfere again.”

Shepp stopped his shamle and gazed down into the ravine where, not two days ago, the suspension rigging had been mysteriously undone, sending three suspended soldiers to their deaths at the bottom of the plunge.

“Well, we have yet to find the scum who committed the act, but we have made our presence known. I’ve sent Taylor’s company out to occupy the nearest settlement. We cannot hide on this mountain and expect to have control over the region.” Shepp let his sentence trail as he pulled his eyes off the river and continued into the new cutaway.

“Did you see these saboteurs, sir? My scouts still report there was no visible activity at the perimeter at the time,” Larson said carefully.

Shepp narrowed his eyes in annoyance at Larson’s air of distrust. “If you must know, I saw movement in the woods on the Kentucky side. A mass of grey just beyond the far berms there. Those greybacks are mighty foolish to run about the woods in uniform. And must I remind you—bracings do not undo themselves Lieutenant, so it’s either rebel sabotage, or your company’s incompetence. Take your pick.”

Shepp left the conversation and passed through the timber-lined walls of the berm cutaway and onto the edge of the cliff, where the bridge superstructure stretched across the mild river. The other side of the ravine showed a similar cutaway, where a group of men were finishing up the first twenty feet of bedding with help from the camp’s locomotive.

The crisp evening melted into twilight and work lanterns slowly twinkled on. The frame of the bridge became a span of fireflies. Because construction continued around the clock, the next company would come to relieve the working men soon, and a new guard would swap to watch the perimeter. Shepp took little time for pleasures, yet always found this scene to be sublime.

The pinpricks of lantern light shuffled down the pylons to reflect out over the river like stars as the men descended from suspension. Beyond the ridge, the bright glow of the camp spawned embers of light which meandered their way to the site to relieve the previous company. At the same time, out in the trees, a sweep of men fanned to the outer perches of the area while campfires ignited. This great migration of troops, of orders executed and the play of light, was always deeply calming to Shepp. There was beauty in wartime.

After checking with the relief lieutenant, Shepp began his hike back to camp. His temples throbbed, and his breathing became laborious as he stomped his way up the wet leaf-covered trail. He paused a moment to look out at the bridge. The far-off call of orders and hammering of nails echoed through the valley over the ever-churning river.

Then, a flash of movement caught his weary eyes: a shimmering distortion in the treeline across the ravine. His heartbeat quickened as adrenaline ignited his senses. He peered into the darkened wood, where bushes rustled and something large moved.

“Company! Fall into rank! Movement!” Shepp screamed down the hill. There was a whistle and acknowledgement from the standing lieutenant as men shuffled around and readied rifles. Shepp barreled down the hillside through the brush as fast as his one and a half legs could run. He charged through the cutaway to the wooden platforms where men stood in formation. The movement on the mountainside undulated.

“There’s—there’s—” Shepp stammered, trying to figure how many men were hiding on the opposite bank. It was a large shape, maybe cavalry? “—cavalry! On the hillside!” He guessed.

The men turned to their lieutenant with faces of confusion, desiring a command.

“Take aim?” The lieutenant couldn’t hide his uncertainty as he looked to a wild-eyed Shepp. The men raised their rifles and aimed blindly into the opposing mountain. “Fire!”

In a crackling volley, the site became covered in a smokescreen of black powder smog. The men held their rifles true as the smoke slowly slid away to reveal the unchanged dark mountainside. There was silence only broken by the ever-constant splash of the river.

“Look!” A soldier shouted.

Shepp’s eyes darted into the distance. Beyond the rolling smoke was an arched silhouette heaving in the darkness. The cloud-suppressed moonlight seemed to illuminate the hints of a twisted canine face, inset with deep amber eyes.

Shepp jumped with surprise, trying to beat the implausible image out of his mind, watching as the shape was replaced with nothing more than an innocent rock formation. His attention was directed to what the soldier was actually pointing to. The camp’s locomotive thundered out of the darkness as it neared the end of the distant cutaway. It spewed smoke and steam as it chuffed noisily toward the terminus while frightened men ran from its approach.

The company, in organized rank, watched in horror from the safety of the opposite bank as two of the men were hit by the engine while the remaining four jumped off the end of the bridge. They were followed closely by the locomotive and its cars which tumbled and plunged off the edge in freefall.

Shepp watched in what felt like slow motion as the train disappeared into the dark structure of the bridge. There was a moment of suspense before the mighty crash of fracturing wood and twisting metal. No one spoke. The mighty roar of the Reynard River drowned their silence.



October 16th, 1862

Brigadier General McCall,

Progress on the bridge has been temporarily halted as we address the destruction caused by yet another sabotage attempt. This brings our total casualties to nine. It seems that we underestimated the Grey’s influence in this region; more and more it appears we have less control here than we once thought. I have no confirmed visuals on any potential groups, but

have myself seen their numbers and movement, albeit from great range and low visibility. I have sent a squad to locate their camps, as they must be somewhere close by. If all goes well, expect to hear from me when the bridge is complete.

*Godspeed,
Colonel Shepp. P. Parnell*



“Brave soldiers of the Pennsylvania 113th. I know that you have all given greatly for our nation. And I know also that you’ve served your companies and this regiment with loyalty and nobility in the numerous bloody battles we have won.”

Shepp stared out at the sea of faces before him. It was well into the night, and everyone was in an equal state of sleep-deprived misery. To make up for the setbacks, Shepp had worked his regiment overtime, and in his opinion, they all needed the morale-boosting effect of oration.

“For every victory,” he continued, “there is a cost. It is a simple rule of life, friends. You have all enlisted because you want to beat those rebels down. You want to protect your nation from these savage traitors. Am I right?”

Shepp gave pause and let the men hoot and holler in agreement. “And victory will get us there, men. Victory at any cost. Your families and children will remember the sacrifices—the cost of this freedom. We are stationed here with a deceptively simple task. But I compel you not to let your service to our nation waver. I expect—no, the nation expects—all of us to fight our hardest, whether it be to beat down the rebels or beat down Mother Nature herself! So, look at this task, this bridge, as a battle. One few will remember, but one you can hold closely to your hearts. For when you build that righteous span across the very heavens themselves, you will all be responsible for the victory at Richmond!”

Shepp stood gallantly as the group erupted in cheers. He drank in the patriotism and persistence of his men and cheered with them, his image flickering and wavering from the light of the campfires.

Later that night, in his tent set away from the encampment, Shepp relaxed. It was quiet thanks to his newly enforced surveillance hour, and only the muted hubbub of camp rose above the silence. Shepp lay in his cot, his false leg removed, reading over reports and news from the front line, among them, a message from his scouts on the possibility of a Confederate camp. He scanned the scrawl and wound his mustached face into a look of confusion.

“They must have moved before we could catch them,” Shepp mused to himself, disappointed that no trace had been found. He sat up and slid his leg stump into the socket on his prosthetic, strapping it up tightly. He was sore and irritated but chose not to dwell on himself. He grew tired of the dim interior of his tent, and he didn’t enjoy downtime, silence, or darkness. Such states only enabled him to slip into his mind where great questions about morality, death, and nature lay in wait.

A puzzle would raise his spirits. He would take the long path down to the river, where he could ponder a recovery strategy for the locomotive and formulate a plan for bridge repairs. Shepp fetched his hiking stick and spent the ten-minute walk whistling a flat tune to fill the empty air.

He was not surprised that he felt watched; guards were out everywhere. However, this felt different. Moonlight cut through tree branches and scattered blue shards of illumination across the ground, shimmering on the iron railroad. The steep, narrow trail from the tracks on the cliff to the riverbed below was harrowing in this weather, but Shepp pushed on. His walking stick jammed into the thick mud but stayed planted, sending him tumbling down the last ten feet and onto the rocky beach below.

“Confound it!” he shouted, reeling in pain and frustration.

From the bottom of the ravine, he could see the large swath of river that flowed down the gorge, the shadowy bridge looming above. It was strangely discomfiting. He noticed the odd way the water flowed over a particular boulder, like it was covered in ancient slimy moss. His lantern

had gone out, and he felt a sudden sting of unease, like the world was twisting around him.

The boulder-like disturbance in the water seemed to rise, dripping as limbs unfurled and deep glowing yellow orbs reflected over the wet shore. Shepp let out a yelp and flailed his arms across the rocks, trying to pull himself to his feet. He dared not look at the monstrosity, and his reality seemed to roll and rattle in its presence.

He stumbled to his broken stance, the feeling of something rushing toward him overwhelming his senses. A strong current of water swept his legs out from under him, throwing him into the cliff face.

Shepp thrashed around pointlessly until the flow receded and he lay gasping on the shore. He raised his head and scanned the moonlit area. No beast showed its presence. The swell of water had washed out a footer on the bridge, which sagged dangerously. But for once, Shepp didn't care about his project and instead limped up the ravine. It must have been his leg. A delirium conjured by that phantom limb. He had had bouts of it before, but nothing like this. He retrieved his stick from the mud and slogged, dripping and afraid, back to camp, lost in thoughts he'd long neglected.



October 21st, 1862

McCall,

The boys have reported that more damage has occurred at the Reynard River bridge. The reports state that the dam up in Calloway was damaged by an act of sabotage or otherwise, and a great swell of water has set us back yet again.

I must say—I believe there is something more going on, McCall. There is something I cannot describe which seeks to torment me and my work here

that is too real to be delirium. I have no clue as to the origin or intentions of such a beast, but I cannot allow it to distract from my—our—mission here. All of us. I've often asked myself if all this sacrifice is worth it—but what am I saying—of course it is! I will have to remain on watch for this creature, for I think once I kill it I will finally feel like the life I devoted to this war meant something—why am I writing all of this

Shepp grabbed the letter and tore it to pieces. “Nonsense! This is just nonsense. I have to focus on the end goal, none of this goddamned nonsense!” he grumbled, standing up from the desk and limping his way to a box at the foot of the cot.

After he dressed, he marched across the camp and down to the construction site. It was early, and only the morning guard were positioned at the site.

The great mouth of the chasm had now been roughly bridged after the numerous setbacks. The framing was complete, and a simple catwalk had been set up to cross back and forth over the impressive structure. They needed only to lay remaining rail and build the trusses above the track bed necessary to support the trainloads of men and munitions.

Shepp struggled down the hill and through the cutaway. He wanted to walk across his bridge. Men shuffled past him with heads hung low, casting unfavorable glances at Shepp. It was no secret that the regiment did not enjoy the work anymore nor the commands of a hero beyond his prime.

Shepp wrung his moustache distractedly as he hobbled across the pilings and onto the bridge, giving an indulgent smile as he meandered to the middle of the span and looked down the river. “Nonsense,” he repeated to himself.

In the forests, a squeaking bark crackled out in response, propelling his pulse into a waltz rhythm.

“Nonsense!” Shepp yelled out into the ravine. His men, who were relaxing in a loose guard formation, straightened up at the sudden outburst. The noise scraped across the valley again, this time accompanied

by a large darting shape breaking its way through the trees. Shepp spun and yelled to his men, "Get me a rifle, goddamnit—a rifle!"

The confused soldiers ran dutifully across the bridge to the colonel. Shepp snatched up the Springfield and brought it to his shoulder, tracing the path of the beast and cracking off a wild shot. Dissatisfied, he threw the rifle over the edge and plucked another from the next soldier.

"It's just a couple ca-yotes," one of them choked.

Shepp ignored him, eyes scanning the foggy distance where wet breathing echoed, sounding like a drowned man's last breath.

A hint of light appeared in the treeline, and Shepp wasted no time, squeezing the trigger and propelling a lead ball into the glow, which shattered and flickered out.

There was silence that was slowly replaced by the agonizing cries of a human. Lieutenant Larson, holding a shattered lantern, fell to his knees. Blood pooled from the bullet hole in his side as he slumped into unceremonious and unwarranted death.

Shepp stood paralyzed. Then he slowly turned to face equally concerned expressions, darkness framing them.

"Back to camp! All of you! Get away get away from this bridge, goddamnit!" Shepp barked, throwing the rifle at them. They turned and sprinted off, disappearing into the fog without protest.

Shepp stood in silence, staring at the disappearing forests as mist choked the region. He drew his Remington New Model Army revolver and waited in eerie silence.

The mighty river, whose churning seemed never to cease, fell quiet. A sickly sweet smell, like a primordial marsh, assailed his senses. In the dark distance, a different glow emerged: two golden points of light. The dirty breathing returned as a creature stalked out of the flowing fog. Shepp yelped and fell on his back, shaking so hard his vision wobbled and his courage melted away.

The beast was a fox as large as a locomotive. Its stark silver fur was wet and matted with mud, oil, and blood. The creature's limbs were long and lean, with two pointed ears spiking up from its canine head; and with each slimy breath, a pool of heavy fog swirled out of its razor-maw like

liquid. The hulking form was covered in spikes of splintered timbers and iron rails which impaled its back like arrows. A long tail batted the mist as it moved closer in a flowing smooth current uncharacteristic of any living creature. The deep amber eyes of the fox pierced the dim but produced no light. Most terrifying of all, it wore around its neck a band of corpses: nine soldiers in blue. The being crept closer, the bridge quaking from its flowing stride.

The pendant on its twisted necklace was Shepp P. Parnell's lost leg.



An Occurance at Reynard River Bridge -Taylor Tarahteeff, Digital Artwork

Shepp lay transfixed by the horror stalking toward him but snapped into motion in a fight for survival. He did not want to win, just to live. He raised his quivering hand and cocked the pistol, shooting the beast square in the forehead and creating a hole in the thing's frightful face. Muddy water poured out of the opening and the beast's jowls raised in a twisted smile.

"Wh—What are you, beast!" Shepp stammered.

Shepp let loose the remaining charges in his cylinder, blasting holes in the shank and throat of the being, which bled water and advanced unphased.

The fox and reality itself seemed to flutter like a lantern's light before appearing in front of Shepp at the same unfeasible moment. Shepp screamed, the creature closing its steaming maw to bite his remaining leg, rending it from his body.

Shepp quivered and whimpered as the bridge shook, the canine releasing a squeaking screech that rattled across the span. There was an explosive roar of liquid and the bridge fragmented, the fading consciousness of Shepp following shortly after. The men he'd lost in battle, the places he'd seen turned to ash, and the family he'd neglected all rose to his foremost thought for a fleeting moment before flickering into lifeless embers in a dead man's head.



Brigadier General McCall looked out from his wagon over the beautiful span of wood and iron arching across the gorge. The completion had taken months, with the salvage and cleanup of the Calloway Ravine delaying progress even further. This location was two miles east of Shepp's site. A safer proposition. McCall watched as a long train smoked its way through the trusses and into former Confederate country. His attendant hopped aboard the cart and they began the slow journey down the road along the river. They passed what was left of the former bridge, now only stacked stone pylons that had already been reclaimed by grass.

"So, what happened to Shepp anyways, if I may ask, General?" the wiry attendant chirped.

McCall sighed. "He was a man deranged, boy. By the time we got there the bridge was already out and he was lying on the shore missing both legs. Dead."

"Was it them Confederates, Sir?"

“No, all his doing. Doctors say it’s obvious he took his own leg, and there was plenty of blasting material to take down the bridge. No one was around to really say for sure. What compelled him, we may never know. Percy just couldn’t build that bridge with force. He didn’t want to admit he’d been bested by this Confederate land. I just hope he’s at peace.”

They rolled past the extinguished campfires and empty dirt plots as McCall pondered.

Unlike Shepp, McCall understood that nature was not the enemy. It did not care about their human conflicts, politics, or sensibilities. It simply carried on while the human world rumbled high above it, like the little silver fox with amber eyes he watched splash playfully along the banks of the Reynard River.



Bradford & Warren Railroad -Photography, Circa 1890

BEHOLD THE DESTROYER

Josh Hatcher

Great battle boat. Bobbing in the harbor.
Decommissioned after years of parading the seas.

The Germans,
the Japanese,
knew her power.
Thunder guns.
Torpedoes.

And a tight net of bullets to keep away
aircraft swarming like mosquitoes.

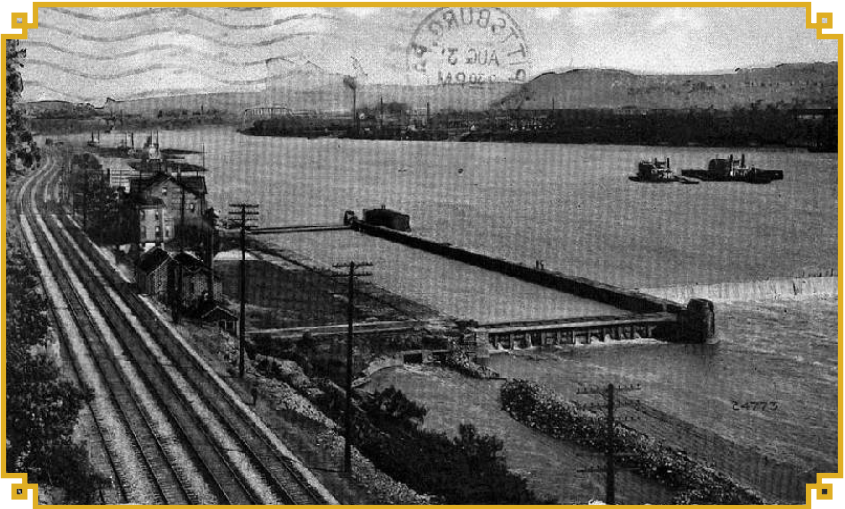
The Russians,
the Koreans,
they heard stories of her might.
Of her sisters.

She kept them at bay.

Iron floats like hope across the water.
Now she rocks gently
as schoolchildren learn about her days of valor.



Diesel Engine Hauling Freight -Photography, Circa 1960



Pittsburgh Locks and Keys -Photography, Circa 1909

MOONLIGHTERS

Lisa Chapman

Third Place Winner

If I had known how close I was to come to meeting God that day, I would have prepared myself. Surely, I would have confessed my many sins, given my team an extra measure of feed, and changed my socks. I am a teamster in the oil fields. The work is hard. The men are hard. The hours are long and the work tires me greatly.

Right now, 1880 in the year of our Lord, the Bradford oil field is producing 50,000 barrels a day from over 4,000 wells. The men with the brains have figured out where to find the oil, how deep to drill, which sands are most promising, and how best to get the oil up. The men with the money are buying leases and land like there is no tomorrow. Deals are brokered one day, and we go to work the next. All kinds of men are pouring into the county. Poke a hole in the ground and see if it will pay. Stay to work it or move on to another spot and poke another hole.

My name is Tom McHugh. I met my good friend Andy Chute on a well shoot on Kendall Creek. I saw a lanky fellow looking at the top of a sugar maple, one of the few tall trees left in this area.

“Looking for your hat, my good man?” I asked. We had just shot a modest gusher that afternoon. The roustabouts were getting ready to cap it.

“Not at all, the ruckus sent Mama Bruin and her cub running for cover. I think they are waiting to see what’s next! Andy Chute—” said the stranger, extending his hand. “I’m looking for John Daley, the boss of this crew.”

I walked Mr. Chute down the path to where John Daley was standing with another man in heady conversation. Introductions were made and I continued with my work.

As the day was winding down, I got the team ready for the return trip to camp. Millie and Marge were aging nags but still able to

put in a day's labor. I'm in the habit of talking sweetly to my nags. They are good listeners. "Okay, sweethearts, turn your tired rumps around." I slowly guided their progress to reverse direction on the narrow path. "Let's get your old bones back to the barn for some food and comfort."

It was several days later when I saw Andy again. He was making repairs on the line at the crown pulley that fed the drill bits into the wet hard-packed clay. The derrick was about eighty feet high. Mr. Chute navigated the top like he was walking on the ground.

"We've got a new man," John Daley said as he sauntered over.

"Seems a likable fellow," I said. "What's he working on up there?"

"We're looking at a way to streamline the operation. In fact, I need to talk to you about it. Let's take a walk."

We walked back down the road toward my wagon, exchanging pleasantries along the way. I got the sense that he was delaying the point of his conversation. Millie snorted her welcome and John clamped a beefy hand on my shoulder.

"The cost of those torpedoes is about as sky high as a Rixford gusher. That Roberts fella that holds the patent takes several hundred up front and a percentage when the well comes in. We could do better by finding another way to shoot, and Andy Chute is going to help us do that."

I nodded, not sure yet where this was going. I had heard of Mr. Roberts, a wealthy Titusville inventor and nitroglycerine supplier. He vigorously protected his patent and profits by pursuing moonlighters who achieved the same ends without his product.

"I'd like you to help us," John said. "Let's talk this over at my house, say eight o'clock, and Tom, I don't have to tell you this is not for advertisement. I've come to you because I trust you, so keep this under your hat for now."

I arrived at Mr. Daley's house on Barbour Street in Bradford at the appointed time on Saturday night. Mr. Chute was already seated at the dinner table along with a third gentleman, a Mr. Frederick Driebel. The two were discussing nitro.

Any man working on a rig was acquainted with the ferocity of

nitroglycerine. It was detonated by a jolt or hit to it which resulted in a shock wave of hot expanding gases capable of leaving your widow with no parts to bury.

Fred and Andy were discussing whether or not it was wise to pack it in ice. Nitro was more stable to transport if iced but also more unpredictable when it started to warm. Because of the dangers in moving it, the production was located near the oil field. Years earlier this was Titusville, seventy miles away and where Roberts' business is currently located. Manufacturing nitro and designing his patented "torpedo" made Edward A. L. Roberts a very wealthy man.

"Boys, we're working on a different plan to get this oil out of the ground," John began. "It's going to involve getting the nitro down the hole and banging it ourselves without blowing half our profits to the Roberts Company along with the gush. Others are doing it, and it involves taking more chances, but this business is all about taking a chance. Truth is it's very much the same kind of worry, just more of it. Now I'll lay out what we propose to do and you can be in or out, your own decision. I just need you to decide tonight."

As the talk progressed, I learned that we would be procuring, transporting, and setting our own nitro charges. All this was to be done in secrecy and in the dead of night. To top it off, Pinkerton detectives, hired by Roberts, were being paid well to bring moonlighters to justice. Fred Driebel would procure the nitroglycerine by unexplained means. He would deliver it to Bradford. Millie, Madge, and I would do the transport to the well site. Andy Chute would lower the charge.

"We'll make our own torpedoes," said Andy. "Using a well-sealed lead canister, we can achieve the same result. We aren't changing the method, just taking on the added challenge of shooting in the dark to get the slip on the Pinkertons. I don't have to tell you that we all have to work with kid gloves."

John Daley turned to me. "Tom, you've got to get the nitro from Bradford to the well site with your team. That means knowing where every rock and rut on your road is lurking. You'll have to pack the charge carefully to cushion it from bounces and jars and hide it well enough so no suspicions are raised. In addition to you

meeting the Almighty, should the charge blow, it will be immediately known that we are moonlighting. That will put an end to this crew's livelihood. Fred, Andy, same goes for you. From here on out, this is the only job you three do. There will be a handsome bonus and a break from the hard labor."

Mr. Daley gave us time to think. Fred was weighing the risk of buying and moving contraband. Andy was thinking about executing the explosion, and I was thinking about my wagon and my nags. Fred fed off the thrill of skirting the law. Andy was confident he could pull off the job. I was looking for relief for myself and two tired horses. All three of us were on board.

For the next few days we each worked on our own preparations. Andy was forming various sized lead canisters and go-devils to deliver the strike or jolt to provide detonation. I refitted my wagon with a false compartment lined with layers of sheepskin and fitted with leather straps that would prohibit movement of the containers.

When I had it ready for a test run, I packed three dozen eggs, individually wrapped and stowed in a box, then took them for a ride. After a couple of refinements, I felt I had a stable outfit. I knew full well that if I was wrong, there would be no second chances. The rest of John Daley's crew continued working on the Kendall Creek rig, which was modestly producing.

Our first shoot came about six weeks later at a site near Red Rock. Fred Driebel arranged to get the nitro to Bradford without incident. "Easy as cherry pie," he said. "No one was on to me as those Pinkerton boys have been chasing moonlighters further south."

I loaded my wagon with eggs again to take a few more runs to the new well site, and was pleased to find none broken. All agreed we were as ready as we were going to be.

My nags were well rested, as was I, when I loaded up at four in the morning and started east to Red Rock. The road was mainly flat until the end, when a gentle climb took me to the top of the ridge. I took it slow and easy and arrived there in about two hours. The dawning light gave me some help on the climb to the top. Andy and a handful of men were there to greet me.

"Well done, Tom." Andy gave me that broad smile as I slowly descended from the wagon.

"Andrew," I said, "I am mighty glad to hand this off to you."

"Go think about how you'll spend that bonus money. I'll take it from here."

And that's the way it was for the rest of the summer. We each knew our duties and risks. As Andy explained it to me once, "You know, what I'm doing now is only slightly more dangerous than before. We still shoot the well with glycerin. Now, I package it. I don't have to worry if another man didn't do the job right. The guys wringing their hands are you and Driebel. He's always looking for Pinkertons, and you're always worrying about cracking an egg." He laughed.

That's how it was with Andy; he was cool-headed, methodical, a family man with a son and daughter at home. I asked him once why he didn't pick a safer line of work.

"I hate farming," he said. "I like the idea that with careful planning and brain work a man can tame a force of nature like glycerine. What Roberts is doing is wrong. His invention is all right but he shouldn't be squeezing profits from everybody dependent on it. I don't think I need to do this work to make him richer than King Midas."

Our last day together was a bright, slightly cool October day. The trees were gloriously aflame in reds and golds. A frost the night before left our tools and derrick damp and cold. We were to shoot a well near Rixford that morning. I had delivered the nitro safely. As was his habit, Andy told me and the others to step away as he began to carry the nitro to the hole. Very carefully he poured the oily liquid into his signature lead canisters and slowly lowered the charge.

Before the canister reached the right depth, I heard Andy shout, "Tom—run, for God's sake!"

The deafening roar and rending of the derrick are about all I remember. Fragments of wood and earth rained from the sky. I ran downhill toward taller trees at the bottom, which provided more protection. Once the terrible raining ceased, it was evident that Andy was gone—blown out of existence like an old dandelion head in a

gust of wind. Gone to heaven where good people go. My heart was heavy for days and many conversations with Millie and Madge left me with a wet face. I started looking for different work.



Well No. 105 -Late 19th Century

OKEECHOBEE SPRING

Carol Newman

In jasmine-scented air, a cormorant glides past me, takes possession of the dock. Palms silhouette the sky. An indigo bunting flash of blue and a sunrise stripe of gold the canal's length persuades, almost, that this could be paradise. And yet, I think of home where the creeks rise in April, their edges rimmed with ice; rock beds crystal clear mosaics. Where mornings in fog thick enough to taste, I walk through woods, search for columbine and trailing arbutus. I go down to the dark places at the edge of the stream, places where the earth is soft and easily bruised. Now, as foam collects in narrow spaces, the water trembles. Between dock and boat, hideous ripples flush out seaweed and teeming algae. From somewhere comes the smell of baking, something cinnamon, and at the edge of the water, two butterflies unite over a dead fish.

13 ISLAND LAKE

Cindy Nowacki

Grass grazed my feet
and sun tanned my face
as I remembered the lake
and our time spent together.

Sultry days brought
neighbors to the Rock for a swim.
At the Flats, anglers dropped
their lines in the cool water.

Black-and-white downy-feathered loons
cried out as they plunged
into the fog-blanketed lake
while the sun made its way past the horizon.

Sand warmed my feet,
and wind swirled through my hair
as we took leisurely strolls
on Grant Street.

Puzzle pieces we locked together
mirror the shimmering lake
awash with dampened loons
through the rain-speckled window.

THE PASSIVE EXISTENCE

Joel Austin

Breaking snow over desperate fires.
It falls again to be remade anew.
The cordial people of my greatest ire
have no way of knowing what to assume.

One day the fires will surely burn out,
and the snow will keep piling on the pyre.
They are unknowing of my fear about
how they could never know what I desire.

What can be done to stoke this hungry blaze?
For every time I strive the snow grows strong,
and I risk dying to survive the haze.
How is it I have even lived this long?

I want to feel the extreme heat again,
for it is too cold alone in my room.



House Destroyed in Storm - Circa 1919

STORM

Bill Wilson

Transformer toppled and tipped
upside down like a depth charge
dropped from above, dangling
from the maple limb.
Power pole snapped in two, bent
against taut wires straining
with the weight of fallen poplars
and the white birch ripped from the hillside
by snow, wind, and ice.
Eerie silence along the buried road
socked in and blocked by broken boughs.
Willing contractors and stymied utility men
unable to advance,
awaiting crews with chainsaws and plows
to carve a cavity through the wreckage.
Hushed home sheathed in winter's wrap,
water lugged from the brook, candles and flashlights
on standby for the long haul ahead.
No Wi-Fi, iPads, or Dish. No purring
of the fridge or forced air humming
through chilled ducts and silent grills.
Light a fire, feed the birds, walk the dog.
Survey the damage
and marvel in the beauty and weight of the storm.
Boil water to enjoy the instant fix. It's not eight o'clock
but time has stilled and it'll do for now.
Books, jigsaw puzzles,
conversations, and cozy blankets.
Civilization can wait a spell.
We're fine up here in the hollow.

MUSIC SELECTIONS



Jahmaal Buckley, Uncomfortable DAW

Note: I created this piece in a class I took called Digital Music Creation with Dr. Groffman (highly recommended). In this class we experimented with many different digital audio workstations such as Ableton, Reason, and Audacity. For this piece, I used Ableton Live because I was so uncomfortable using this DAW and I wanted to challenge myself for the final project. That is why I named this piece “Uncomfortable DAW.”



Isaiah Hatcher, Where Do We Go From Here?

Note: At the time of writing this song, I had just proposed to my now wife, so when I was looking for themes for the song the phrase “Where do we go from here?” came to my mind. I would love to work with Melody, my wife, on some lyrics and fine-tune this into a completed song someday.



Amber Houben, From Within

Note: This is a song I made in my Digital Music Creation course last year, titled “From Within.” I wanted it to be a mysterious, almost magical song, like something you would hear in a fantasy world. I used the music program Reason to create the main melody with instruments such as strings and synthesizers.

OLD OIL MEN

Isabelle Champlin

Honorable Mention

I love the way these old-timers talk. Even if you don't know your geological strata, you are not entirely lost trying to understand them. At the Fireside Pumpers breakfast meeting of the Penn Brad Oil Well Museum, they are talking about the Bradford Third Sand, and the Trenton Black River, the Chipmunk and pay-zones, and "chasing the reefs up there," and forty-barrel-a-day wells. They recall twelve-hour work days dressing tools, which means hand forge sharpening the drill bits on the oil rigs for the Kinzua Valley Chemical Company seventy years ago.

They are talking now about the Cooper Sands. The Cooper, the Warren Second, the Bradford Third, and the Balltown are all different petroleum-bearing sandstones. The men talk about wells that flowed a thousand barrels a day for two weeks. These wells are "flashy but don't have long legs," which means they produce dramatically at first with a spewing outflow but then the oil is all played out very quickly; the wells have no staying power. They are feminized, of course. Besides being "long-legged," they can be "whore-hearted," and they can be "shy." When one is just starting to blow, "she's coming to see us, boys."

Dick Morrison talks about working out in the woods all year round, drilling around the clock, in autumn rain or high summer. He says his nickname was "Dry Hole Dick from Kinzua Crick, but I sure saw my measure of wet." He had a partner named Everett, who is often in his stories. He is talking now about overshooting a well. It's dead-white winter, deep snow, bare trees. He and Everett have already dropped the heavy go-devil weight down the oil rig's metal-lined bore hole, which will smash into an explosive charge placed down there (the charge is nitroglycerine), and hopefully bring in a gusher. The men have jumped off the rig and placed themselves behind a couple of trees for protection while they wait for the go-devil to fall far, far

down to the bottom of the well and the well to blow.

There's a horrific huge whump sound and shuddering. Way too loud.

"Musta put in a little too much nitro."

No oil comes rushing up and out, but all the metal pipe casing does. The whole inside lining of the well has blown out. Whole sections of pipe come shooting straight up and then go falling off through the air.

"I had to change cherry trees several times," says Dick Morrison, because the huge twenty-one-foot-long sections of pipe casings have awesome unpredictable trajectories, flattening the forest when they land. "I looked for Everett, but he was faster than me. I just saw a little bitty Everett, his snow boots pumping hard. He was clean across the ice and not looking back."

The room full of old men is loud with laughter, heads shaking side to side, coffee cups rattling.

I enjoy old men like Dick Morrison with his easy chuckling laugh and slow walk. When his legs gave out, when he was about eighty-two, he took to a walking staff, one of the new lightweight aluminum ones. He is selling off his beautiful wooden and babiche snowshoes. He walked many miles in snowshoes in Canada, hunting bear, once for sixty-two days, "lost for most of the time, but it didn't matter none." In his small house in Marshburg, he has a full grown stuffed polar bear in his living room. He was once offered \$14,000 for it but he told the woman no, "Cause I'll never get to see another polar bear and this one I can see all day and sit down to dinner with it."

He had to give up his motorcycle. He was once the oldest licensed motorcyclist in Pennsylvania. He used to be a stunt rider in the 1940s, jumping his cycle over a Wagoneer school bus off a ramp made out of a barn door. He really knew cars, too. His dad, and then he, owned Morrison Motors, in the town of Corydon. They sold, among others, Tucker cars. "Lost another fortune on that one," he says.

He taught automotive mechanics to what he calls "the colored boys" at the Sugar Run Civilian Conservation Corps camp in 1936, in the Depression years. When he walked over the area of the camp

with my archaeology students and me, in 1999, it had reverted back to thick woods. Nothing much remained but crumbling slate walkways and postholes all buried under deep leaf litter. The white pine seedlings that had been planted along the entrance road had grown into enormous and overarching trees. But I knew he was seeing the camp in his mind's long-ago memory—seeing the long barracks and the mess hall and faintly smelling the food. “Best I ever ate up till then,” he said. “Wonderful turkey and gravy. We locals paid twenty-five cents a day to eat there.” Working on the oil rigs during the Depression, he was used to a lunch pail of cold beans with a slice of buttered bread on top for dessert.

He remembers in great detail. His father sold a Nash roadster to the CCC camp's Dr. Armentrough, who loaned it to the camp's army lieutenant, who wrecked it into a tree at the Scenic Tavern on the way to a Cab Calloway concert. The lieutenant died instantly. “I remember seeing these funny white things on the dash when my dad and I went to tow the car away. I asked my dad what they was. They was all his teeth, all broken off, and the windshield all smashed. There was never no seatbelts back then.”

He has that steel trap memory for his horses, too. Tom and Jerry were matched Belgians bought in Ohio in 1948 to haul pipe in the oil fields. Or for skidding the “dog house,” a tiny sheet metal cabin with a bunk and a little wood stove, out into the woods to an isolated rig. His horses were invaluable in the winter, he says, back when trucks could not start in the cold. The snow was hard-packed and perfect to slide stuff on top of, pulled by the huge patient knowledgeable animals.

He talks about whiffletrees and hames and traces, detailing how he would harness Tom and Jerry together every morning. “They always grazed together side by side in the pasture, as if still hitched. They died side by side too. Both died of being gored by the same bull, died within hours of each other. Tom on the near side in the belly, and Jerry on the off side, in the flank. Bull got between them, you see.” He loves all his horses still; so many years later, they are still vivid, unique, personable. Dick Morrison had a roan horse who would quit work right at four p.m., rest his chin on the other

teamster's neck, and "refuse to do nothing more."

At the Fireside Pumper's breakfast meeting, I notice the way these old men's hands are crooked, with swollen joints and big white scars. Some of the old-timers have fingers missing, mainly the thumbs or index fingers, mainly lost while trying to couple up (or uncouple) the metal rod lines to the pumping jacks.

To pump oil, the powerhouse engine is started up, and the huge band wheel moves each long metal live rod, about eight of them, in slow giant horizontal jerks back and forth. Each one has a metal loop at the end and has to be connected up to a different pull line. (The long rigid metal pull lines extend far out into the woods, where they can each pull/push a pumping jack back and forth, lifting the oil out of ground at the wellhead.) The J-hook end of each heavy metal pull line has to be physically held by one hand, while the other hand holds on to the neck of the loop of the wildly jerking live rod. You try to slip the J-hook into the open loop on the down stroke of the jerking movement. It is very dangerous, especially when uncoupling. If your hands aren't nimble, or strong enough, or if everything is icy, or slippery with oil, the force of the jerk could catch and crush a finger or thumb clean off.

Old oil men's hands are like a sailor's tattoos. They are reminders of places been, but instead of ports of call, they are places pumped. These men can point to a scar or a missing digit and tell you where it happened: Pigeon Run or up on Music Mountain. They point and say names like Kushequa, Songbird, Burning Well, Jo Jo. There are so many creeks around here named Pigeon Run, Cherry Run, Buck Run, and Wolf Run that the men often add on some more helpful information like "the Pigeon Run off of Sugar." The passenger pigeons are all long gone, and today Sugar Run is mostly under the water of the reservoir, but everyone knows the place.

Nowadays, people from distant cities come to the Allegheny National Forest to enjoy the quiet woods, hiking the North Country Trail up Sugar Run across a bridge near the locale of the Scenic Tavern, or they hike on the Morrison Trail, down Morrison Run. And the whole town of Corydon is gone, along with the towns called Morrison and Dewdrop and Kinzua. They were all bulldozed and

burned and drowned under the water of the reservoir, backed up from the damming of the Allegheny River in the 1960s.

I wish people could walk along with Dick Morrison himself, but he died in 2008 at the age of ninety-three. An era died with him, and also an independent attitude, an energetic work ethic, and a verbal facility that is rarely heard today. Nobody drills like that anymore with nitroglycerine or camps out at an eccentric wheel power for weeks on end in the winter woods. It's rare now to see old men's hands like his.



Trolley on Mainstreet -photography, Circa 1910



Heckel's Meat Market -*photography*, Circa 1900

TRANSPARENT

Les Buhite

JAQUES: God be wi' you. Let's meet as little as we can.

ORLANDO: I do desire we may be better strangers.—

Shakespeare As You Like It 3:2

In slender photon bubbles my old flame
 encourages admissions of despair,
 of melancholia, of private pain;
 she seems to watch behind a one-way mirror,
 patient as my broodings are exhumed.
 I don't quite understand this world we share—
 does she seek to heal our ancient wound,
 to seal our breach? But why does she entice
 confessions of my discontent? My moods
 elicit from her common-sense advice
 that's cheerful, practiced, easily seen through,
 too sterile on this cold soulless device,
 too facile, but perhaps I misconstrue.
 Why does her inner life remain taboo?

Perchance all our old ills are written new,
 though I've become the openhearted one.
 I've always been too easily seen through,
 and she was always quick to call me on
 my lies. But I no longer lie— at least
 not much— and she is now the one
 beclouding of her state, holding her peace,
 redirecting; always other subjects
 close at hand the closer I should reach

for her marrow, perhaps to recollect
that distant time when we shed tear for tear.
Her comments then become more circumspect,
her bubbles become small, then disappear.
We're better strangers with each passing year.



Bradford Flood, corner of the Holley Hotel -*photography*, Circa 1910



Bradford Flood, 1910, Center Street -*photography*, Circa 1910

I LOVE THIS SONG!

Josh Hatcher

Old music, shouting laughter, and our van on the highway.
Someone sings high harmonies, another calls
I love this song!

And the leaves flutter across the road in the breeze.

I can't believe it's already autumn.
Time moves fast.
The Earth is a little round rock skipping across the universe,
whizzing by as a little boy cheers,
Do it again Daddy!

And in a blink he is a man.

Moments like these, with a grocery store picnic
surrounded by squirrels and oak leaves,
are increasingly rare.

When will we all be together next?

When will today's hits be their Golden Oldies?

The universe
is a smooth pond interrupted by ripples.
And I want to count every ring and watch it sink,
savoring it. Holding it.

I remember this song. I love this one!

WINTER MORATORIUM

Cindy Nowacki

The robins of summer have flown away
 leaving behind the hearty blue jays
 who today have left their nests
 only long enough to seek their meals.

Scrawny tree branches battle the heavy load
 of newfallen snow.
 Crisp leaves cling to these appendages,
 trembling as winter's fierce winds
 attempt to dislodge them from their firm grip.

Rainwater in the nearby creek
 has ceased its babbling conversation
 until the thaw returns.
 Rosebuds appear wilted, sullen and lifeless.
 Shades of brown fill the face of each.

Winter—release your fury soon!
 Allow the resurrection of spring
 with the gift of new life
 for those who can dream and desire
 the warmth of the season.



Plow Engine Stuck In Snow Bank -*photography*, Circa 1910

UNCLE FRANK'S TIE AND MCKEAN COUNTY MEMORIES

Martha Rogus

Honorable Mention

I am from a family of McKean County kitchen-table storytellers where everything was a story, even daily activities. Getting out of bed in the morning could become fodder for tales with the right conditions for a beginning, middle, and end. Mostly the kitchen-table stories were pithy, and more times than not filled with laughter.

There was a time when my youngest sister and I were not allowed in the kitchen because the stories were not always appropriate for our young ears. Curious, we set up our pick-up sticks, Barbie dolls, and magic carpet rides next to the kitchen. We were shooed away. My older sister by seven years was allowed in and shared the good stories with us.

We lived in Warren, but my mother was from Bradford where her parents, Clinton and Vivien Sampson, and her brothers, Bruce and Bill Sampson, lived. Her parents, my grandparents, owned the house at 72 Davis Street that my grandmother's father had left to her when he died. He left a house in East Bradford on Main Street to my great-uncle Cyril Merkt, my grandma's brother. My grandparents' house on Davis Street is now gone. It was where the current Family Dollar plaza is now. We spent many weekends and holidays at those houses, but mostly the Davis Street home during the 1960s and 70s.

My grandpa gave us a quarter or half-dollar every time we visited. My mother rallied us to save the half-dollars, but we rarely listened and instead kept the corner store in business in the same way the men in my family kept the beer distributors and Moose Clubs happy. The closest corner store was the mom-and-pop shop at Miller and Davis near Hanley Park. Here you could buy combinations of a MAD Magazine, a comic book, candy bars, chewing gum, chips, pop, and penny candy with one

quarter. I can still recall the metal Stroehmann Sunbeam Bread signs on the screen door with the squeaky spring that stretched to open and slammed the door shut as kids filtered in and out. Good times. This also kept our dentists in business.

We went to the movies a lot in Bradford. The movie theater on Main Street is still there. For us it was the Saturday matinee, where I remember seeing the first *Planet of the Apes* movie, James Bond, some Disney movies, and romantic comedies. I later learned that one of my great-aunts and her husband owned the S.K. Tate Fur store across the street from the movie theater. The store is gone but the sign remains. We didn't shop there, but we did admire the furs in the windows and dreamed of living in Beverly Hills when we drove past.

We spent a lot of nice weather days at Hanley Park on the slides, swings, and teeter-totters. Sometimes we walked the sidewalk that ran alongside the fenced-in creek. Across the street from Hanley Park we dared to walk down the Davis Street firetruck access ramp to the cement-bottomed Tunungwant Creek where we cooled our feet, pushed our toes in the clay, or made mineral-rich clay sculptures. Now I wonder what health hazards that playing in the creek may have posed, but back then I didn't. We were just kids exploring, back in the day when you could do that sort of thing.

We also went to Callahan Park to swim in the pool. It was too far to walk, so our dad drove us there. One time my youngest sister and I left the pool early to explore the nearby stream for fossils before our dad came to pick us up. I found my very first fossil in that stream, and it was small enough to fit in my pocket. That same stream runs through the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, where I now teach college composition.

My grandparents and their neighbors didn't have grassy lawns and yard space, possibly because of the nearby industries and former oil refinery. I shudder to think why, but perhaps having a lawn was cost-prohibitive. We could see the grey sides of the factories looming behind the garage. Today's Google maps show the B&P Railroad tracks. but I don't recall ever hearing trains back then. The point is, there was no backyard, so we played out front if we wanted to be outside.

The front yard contained a thick, black metal pipe a foot off the

ground that served as a fence between the yard and tan herringbone brick sidewalk. We walked the pipe like a tightrope. A taller section of pipe, an upside-down U near the porch stairs, had most likely been a tie-up for the horse-powered ice deliveries. Our grandma told us about the blocks of ice, delivered by horse and buggy for the wooden ice box, which was what kept food cold before refrigerators and electricity. People also got their milk by horse and buggy, and she taught my youngest sister a song for an elementary school project. The song was called "The Milk Race" and the lyrics are hard to find now. It's a catchy song about a milk delivery horse that loses a race because the opponent yells, "Milk!"

We used that former horse tie-up, the upside-down U pipe, to do somersaults. I was stung by a bee on that once. The yellow bumblebee landed on the pipe, all cute and fuzzy. I'd never had a bee sting before and remember being curious what it felt like, so I put my hand on the bee and quickly found out. I was six years old, what can I say?

The grassless front yard came in handy that day. My grandma made a mud balm from the dusty dirt. It made me feel better because I got to play in mud a little bit, that one and only day on her turf. (Later on I became good at making mud pies with my friends in Warren at their houses, but that's another story.) Some of the sidewalk from Davis to Main Street was also lined with that same black pipe.

We didn't often walk to town, even though it was just around the corner, unless it was to see a movie. When my youngest sister and I were approaching our mid-teens, we did have permission to window shop one Sunday. Our mother told us to stay away from the building where Tullah Hanley practiced belly dancing and described which one it was. So again out of curiosity, my sister and I nonchalantly walked by and looked in the window to get to the bottom of what belly dancing was. Hanley saw us fogging up her window and walked toward us from the back room. She looked friendly and might have chatted with us if we hadn't run away. She was dressed in pretty flowing organza that caught in the breeze as she walked toward us. She wasn't dancing but was kind of floating.

Later I would learn what a character she was, and that her husband's brick business and construction work built the church we went to and several other Bradford buildings. Because of the Hanleys'

generosity, a beautiful library was built at the Pitt-Bradford campus.

Sadly and rather suddenly, my grandpa died of lung cancer when I was twelve. He had worked at Kendall Refinery and Dresser Industries as a pipefitter, and third shift at the DeSoto Motel on Main Street after he retired. One story he told was about working at the refinery, and I think he was living through these moments at the time of the telling. I remember being in the dining room at the time, since by then I was old enough to hear it for myself.

The blue-collars went on strike at the refinery, and he was one of them. Management desperately called the men in to work, which created a quandary for them. It was the quandary he focused on. A lot was going on. My grandma and grandpa both spoke in hushed tones about how people heckled the striking men parading the streets with protest signs. My grandparents were worried and for good reason. The men had bills to pay and were running out of money. Some men caved in because of financial pressure and crossed the picket line to go to work. That was despicable, you could tell by my grandparents' tone, because doing so labeled you a *scab* by your co-workers. You'd be a social outcast if you did that. They explained that management created the *scabs* to keep the company from *bleeding* because they didn't have enough help to keep things running and managements' wallets filled. My grandpa was hemophiliac, so I think those words really got to him. From my grandpa's point of view, being a *scab* meant you sold out your solidarity with your co-workers who you had to face on a daily basis. It meant you were giving up the fight for better working conditions. I remember how down he was about all of this. It was a tough time, no doubt. I don't think he ever went back there to work, and if he did, I'm sure either decision was heartbreaking.

My grandpa's retirement job at the DeSoto Motel in East Bradford was less stressful. He was a night manager and really liked it there, especially for breakfasts and coffee. We all ate there a few times, and the adults raved about the coffee's flavor. It wasn't bitter. Customers also got to witness history in the making. It was the first time they experienced a restaurant putting the whole carafe on the table. And that handsome carafe, a copper and black pitcher, kept the coffee hot like a thermos, to their astonishment. Up until then, coffee was served by the cup.

One time, both my sisters and I stopped in to see our grandpa at the DeSoto Motel as his shift was ending. He asked us, "What's the most money you've ever held in your hands?" Before we could come up with answers, he had us take turns holding a heavy metal box by the handle. After we passed it around, he said, "Now you know what three thousand dollars in cash and coins feels like." We all broke into smiles. He could make you feel like a million dollars with his magnanimous presence. And like my father, he never wasted words.

We spent many Easters and Christmases by first celebrating mass at St. Bernard's Catholic Church, then dinner at the Castle Restaurant in Olean, New York, just outside McKean County. It was at this restaurant that I found out what frog legs and baked Alaska tasted like. My mother shared the former and my grandpa the latter. I always ordered sea scallops. The restaurant itself looked like an actual castle, inside and out, and you were treated like royalty. The seven of us always had a big long table to ourselves in a red and purple dining room with a suit of arms in the corner and medieval replicas and flags on the walls. Sadly, the restaurant is gone. I have a matchbook replica, but that's it.

My grandma and mom usually prepared meals for us, but on holidays and Sundays after church, we ate together in restaurants. My grandma's mother was from Ireland, a Daugherty, and my grandpa's family was from Scotland a couple generations back. Sometimes their discussions mirrored two different cultures with a war history.

My grandmother was never afraid to voice her knowledge on any given topic. She was an avid fan of Rosie the Riveter and saved a newspaper article about her for us. She also liked reading *Look* and *Life* and high fashion magazines that she shared with us on visits. "What do you think of this haircut or this dress?" She would ask, pointing to *Vogue* models.

My grandma was all about women having the same rights as men, which made me think they already did at the time. She had a full-time job and proudly worked for Zippo Manufacturing on Barbour Street for over twenty-five years. Her job there was gluing motifs on lighters. She purchased a collection of lighters for herself and kept them in her jewelry box. She showed them to my sisters and me when we asked. My favorite was the silver lighter with a little red convertible, not embossed

but glued on the bottom half of the lighter. Attached to the top half of the lighter was a tiny little man in a sitting position wearing a black suit. When you opened the lighter, the tiny man and his legs came out of the red convertible, and they went back in when you closed it. I think that was her favorite, too.

Both of my grandparents liked technology. My grandma liked the space program and it was at their house that we watched the first man on the moon, Neil Armstrong, plant his foot and American flag fifty years ago. My grandpa enjoyed talking about space exploration but liked music better. He had a record player and a small collection of LPs he played for my mom. Sometimes he seemed like a big kid, the way he got excited about Ethel Merman, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, and Bobby Darin.

My grandpa could play our piano by ear and put down Bobby Darin's "Mack the Knife" on the keys error free. He also liked transistor radios and gave us each one that was four-inch-by-four-inches and ran on a battery; he thought that those radios were the best things ever invented. He was more excited about them than we were, but we thought they were pretty cool, too.

It's amazing where we are music-wise now, and I wonder what he would say about MP3 players and Sirius XM. I wonder what both of my grandparents would say about iPhones, Smart TVs, and CarPlay, as well as Alexa, Cortana, and Siri. And I wonder what my grandma would say about the space shuttles, Elon Musk, Tesla, and SpaceX.

Our ride between Warren and Bradford went through the Kinzua Valley, and I remember driving through what we called Ghost Town. I always felt so sad imagining the people who I had never seen being forced from their homes. To see Ghost Town was one thing, to understand flood control and power was another. The five-year-old in me worried about the kids, where they went, and why they left their bicycles behind on the front porches and their tire swings hanging from the trees. First came those abandoned houses, bicycles, and tire swings. Then the massacre of houses and trees, the erected cement pilings and labyrinth of scaffolding for the dam itself. Then the trickle of water, growing until the Allegheny River turned reservoir, finally reaching the treeline where the cutting stopped, the boats came to register and buy fuel, and the swimmers and picnickers

packed the beach. Paying an entry fee depended on who the president was. Some charged us to have our picnic on the now federally owned land, and others didn't.

Devil's Elbow is still there, the downward windy-twisty spiral that took your car to the valley floor but now stops at the water's edge. You can park and walk in. Some people swim there. A friend of mine dove in and broke his back because the water was too shallow. Another friend drowned after he yelled obscenities at a man who cut him off and the man punched him, knocking him into the water.

I do have happy memories of the reservoir with friends who took me boating, and I even learned how to drive and navigate a boat. I became a responsible boater as a teenager, and also camped and suntanned there with friends. But the sad memories can never be erased. Many of the people forced to move for the construction of the dam were transplanted to New York State in the region of the Seneca Resort & Casino. You know when you are on the highway portion that the Seneca own. The dam destroyed their culture to prevent flooding, create recreation, and develop the power grid. The McKean County border begins within view of the beach and marina on PA-59.

Our one and only family car, the red Chevy Station Wagon, didn't have air conditioning, so we travelled to Bradford with the windows down on hot summer days. Warren had oil and a refinery, and it was obvious that McKean County was a bustling epicenter filled with pockets of oil-drilling activity because you could smell it. My mother said it was "the smell of money." I remember the distinct odor near Custer City. Even the Tastee Freeze had a working pump-jack in the parking lot back in the day. We forgot about the smell when the Tastee Freeze ice cream hit our tongues after leaving my grandparents' house for the ride home.

In some parts of Bradford, you can smell oil. In fact, it was not uncommon to see working pump-jacks in people's front yards as well as along the country roads. With all that oil you need a railroad, which leads me to my Uncle Frank and the tie story.

My great-uncle Frank worked as a conductor for the Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad Company, which had a different name back then. I worked for the same railroad from 2000 to 2013 as a property manager

assistant in Warren. My mother told me the story when I started working there.

Uncle Frank worked the nightshift. His job was to ride the caboose, hanging off the side to spot any trouble ahead that the engineer might miss. He watched for things that might wander or encroach onto the tracks like cows, horses, sheep, chickens, automobiles, vegetation, water from flooding, and snow drifts. The conductor and engineer had a communication system that involved lanterns.

The railroad was much more dangerous back then than it is now. There were more deaths because safety wasn't practiced as well as it is today. Uncle Frank's wife, Aunt Noan, knew that and set a security check in place. Their house was on the hill facing the tracks, so it was the perfect setup. Frank blinked his lantern light as he rode by on the caboose every night to let her know he was still alive, and Aunt Noan blinked the porch light so he knew she saw him and that all was well with her. She waited for Frank's light religiously every night he worked.

One night, Frank didn't blink his lantern for Aunt Noan, so she feared the worst. She prayed as the hours went by, hoping the train was delayed and Frank was okay. She stayed up all night waiting for his train and lantern, but it never came. She dozed off in an easy chair near the front door. Finally at daybreak Frank came home and woke her up. He was shit-faced drunk.

"Oh thank God, I thought you were dead," she said.

"Hiya, Noanie, my lovely wife. Yes, it is I, your Frankie." She smelled the beer and whiskey on his breath.

"I was up all night, wondering what suit to bury you in."

"Oh Noanie." He weaved back and forth. "There was trouble, a track out of whack, we couldn't make our run and went to Salamanca instead." Salamanca was where the men went to drink. "Rest assured, I have some good news, Noanie. Look, a tie. It's lovely, don't you know?" Frank rubbed the tie smartly fixed around his neck.

Noanie moved closer, felt the tie, and scrutinized it.

"Wait here, Frank." She left the room a split second and came back with a puzzled look. She rubbed her chin and said, "Let me see that tie again." Frank stood firm and proudly rubbed the tie still knotted at his

throat.

“I can’t see it Frank, let me get a little closer.” Uncle Frank stood still as she moved in closer. Aunt Noan grabbed the tie near the knot and cut it off with a pair of scissors.

“That’s what I think of your tie, Frank,” she said.

I’m grateful for my Bradford family, these memories, and the McKean County spaces that allowed them to happen and in some cases, unravel.



Football Team -*photography*, Circa 1910



Beauty Pageant -photography, Circa 1950

THE POEM HUNTER

Patricia Shinaberger

“I’ll meet you at the summit in about two hours. I want to take my time and look for a poem. I know you want to ski longer and faster today,” I called to John.

“Okay,” he called back while bolting like a beagle off the leash on the first day of small game season, heading toward the Ridge Trail.

I was alone in this beautiful park with the perfect weather. The temperature was twenty-eight degrees, sunny with no wind.

I pushed off slowly, fully aware that my quickly approaching birthdate would end in zero— a significant zero.

Memories of sidestepping up hills and whooshing down the other sides, whooping with friends, sharing flasks of wine or ginger brandy, and the joy of sharing life in this wonderful park so close to our homes.

I wondered how many more times I would be able to enjoy these trails on a day as perfect as this one. I wanted to capture its essence as only a poem can do.

I step-glided along the ridge, making several stops to look for my poem.

I marveled at the blackness of the nude hardwood trees. I noticed the absence of bird chatter.

I held my face toward the sun to warm my cheekbones.
But the poem did not appear.

I panicked at the approach of the first downhill.
What if I fell and broke my hip?
I felt the disgust of the onlookers
as first responders loaded me onto a sled to pull me
to the warming hut to meet an ambulance.

I heard their voices murmuring,
“What’s this old woman doing out here on our trail?
She should be home minding her knitting.”

After a short prayer with mittened hands over my ears,
and a very deep breath,
I shoved off,
left ski in a track,
right ski in the snow bank,
shoulders hunched,
knees locked,
dragging my poles.
I somehow reached the bottom,
wobbly but upright.

It wasn’t pretty.

A trio of skiers stopped to check on me.
I assured them that I was okay,
just looking for a poem.

Their Alpha Male couldn’t move fast enough
to distance himself from a kooky poem hunter.

Other skiers stopped to rest and chat.
They laughed with me when I told them

I was looking for a poem.

They offered lines such as:

“Holy healing happiness of nature,”

and

“Wintery blue sky chasing away holiday blues.”

One even recited the first line of

Robert Frost’s “Stopping

by Woods on a Snowy Evening.”

It was fun, but there was still no poem for me.

Rounding a curve near the summit,

I came upon a harrowing mash of rented skis, poles,

multicolored jackets, enormous mittens, wool hats, and pigtailed girls,

four of them,

exclaiming that they would never make it down the hill alive.

They were going to walk back to the warming hut.

“Now wait a minute girls, hold your horses,” my mother’s voice streamed from my mouth.

“Everybody stand up straight and fall in line behind Miss Pink Hat.

This is what you are going to do:

Dust the snow off yourselves,

Put your hands through the straps on your poles.

Now set your skis in the tracks.

Breathe,

bend your knees,

lean slightly forward from your waist,

take another deep breath.
Now, one at a time, use your poles to shove off.”

And they did!

As I turned back toward the summit,
I heard happy girls celebrating with
hugs and high fives.

What had I done?
What right did I have
to boss those young ladies
when thirty minutes ago
I had barely made it down
a much shorter hill?

Suddenly I felt a laugh bubbling from my core.
The fear of the big birthday zero had
stolen my confidence to ski these familiar trails.

Directing the pigtailed girls
returned my confidence.

At the summit I called to John,
“I can still ski! I’ve found my woosh!”

I was so happy, I didn’t begrudge not finding my poem.

IF A HEN RUNS INTO YOUR HOUSE

Carol Newman

expect important visitors. That's not to say
the hen is unimportant with her speckled
breast and that dainty walk. She has access
to your house, after all, sauntering in
with sassy tail feathers, wings

just so, not a feather ruffled out of place,
clucking Attitude. On the island of Kaua'i,
hens roost under banyan trees and in tall grass
that undulates in constant spray-soaked wind,
rows of chicks behind them. All day long

polygamous roosters strut, crow from restaurant roofs,
wander through hotel lobbies. When tourists leave,
the fragrance of pikake and plumeria still
lingers in their hair. They take home with them their
memories of salubrious waterfalls, sun shining

through rain, the Queen's Bath at the end
of that perilous lava path, and the seagulls
against the sky at Kilauea Lighthouse.
But most of all, they remember the roosters
that crowed all night for the hens.

NAMES LIKE STRIPES: A REQUIEM FOR UNCLE LARRY

Josh Hatcher

Names like stripes
white on black
with the hollow sounds of
traffic through the trees.

The pebble-studded concrete
wet from shyly and slyly shed tears.
They are diluted with dew.

Here a brother
there a father
here my own great uncle
(I never knew you).

Graphite and paper to preserve
the hole that will remain forever.

Adrian L. Allen
What were your words that day?
Did you know you would give up the ghost
on the killing fields?
Did you know the jungle floor would be your last
bed?

Names like stripes.
White on black.



WWI Soldiers Leaving (Top) and Returning (Bottom) from Bradford
-photography, Circa 1917 & 1918

THE OLD FORT

Bill Wilson

Above the spring in the pines
stands the fort built by our sons
many years ago.

Transplanted planks from a fallen barn,
once used for childhood games
that grew into a refuge during
teenaged paintball skirmishes.

The fort remains,
timbers ready for the next generation,
but the boys have left for real battlefields now,
and we pray the most lethal things
to ever fly their way will be
gel-filled little balls in pastel colors.

VOICE OF THE VALLEY: AN EARLY HISTORY OF BRADFORD, PA

Angela Nuzzo

Honorable Mention

Down from the seven valleys, they're coming
with no roads to follow
and no signs to lead the way,
only faint trails left by Native people
whose hunting grounds this used to be.
Men in wagons,
their ox teams straining,
cleaving the forest
in search of a home,
New Englanders, mostly,
looking for adventure,
ready to conquer elements
to fulfill their dreams.

Their numbers are few now,
but this will not last long,
for they've spotted the treasure
that lies at my floor.
The Tununguant,
so named by Six Nations,
the wide-mouthed creek,
gives life to us all.

The men, with their axes,
stump-levers and hoes,
clear lots for their cabins
built out of pine.

Squared to fit
or chinked with red mud,
the massive logs
are thought only a nuisance.
Felled are the mighty
that stood for so long,
replaced by a farm
to grow turnips and corn.

Fetching the family
on a long journey northward,
the men return, and as they settle,
my future is born.
People named Melvin, Foster, and Pike
band together and they call me a township.
I am Bradford,
and am named so
because of where these families hail from.

As years pass,
more settlers pierce the forest
and emerge in my green valley.
They are a hardy lot and make do
with what surrounds them.
The flowing water provides a link
with the world downstream and distant.
In dugouts and bark canoes,
goods are taken
and news brought homeward.

The Tuna, so fondly called,
becomes a public highway.
And my quiet hills are soon transformed
in the era of pine and rafting.

Chestnut, maple, ash, and oak
are valued for their profit.
And the logs are cut
and skid down
until they reach the water.
Here, the timbers float along,
tied to one another,
until a raft of sixty feet
seeks out its destination.

More men are coming
and Littleton is the name they give
their tight-knit group of houses.
They build schools and churches
and rough-hewn roads.
A bridge is laid across the Tuna.
Lumber mills spring up like daisies
and run all night and day.
My pines are harvested without pause,
cut to boards and taken elsewhere.
Flat-bottom boats,
burdened with the weight
of my fallen comrades,
are poled down the stream
to deliver their cargo.

A man named Kingsbury
buys 50,000 of my acres.
He joins the lumber industry
and orders that the main street
be built around his mill pond.
His land holdings are dispersed
among the settlers,

who become permanent fixtures
in my long life.
They build the Old Red Store
and paint it with clay made
from my own hills.
A post office is planned
and the townspeople,
no longer content with being a little town,
agree to rename me Bradford.

A rumble in the distance
warns me that times are changing.
Dozens of my strong-willed brothers
travel for days away from me.
I am sad to see them go
and know that many
won't be coming home again.
But their cause is dear to them,
these Bucktails of McKean.

As war rages
in fields beyond my viewing,
new settlers begin trickling in
with eyes so bright and hungry.
They want to take from me
something I hold inside,
and for years they persist
with their poking and prodding.
The spring pole makes a few successful
on the outskirts of town,
but nothing can prepare me
for the grief that is in store.

Tracks are laid
through my dwindling forests
and hemlock is taken from me
by trainloads.

A commotion is rising
from my once quiet haven
and, suddenly, my black blood
roars into the sky.
I can feel it leaving me,
being pushed out by pressure.
And I wilt in upon myself
knowing what is to come.

Small tracks are being built
to haul the black gold.
The Peg-Leg creeps unsteadily onward.
People from everywhere
converge upon my valley
like locusts
descending from the sky.
Towns appear
where none should have to.
Tarport – the most wicked of all.

In just four years,
my beautiful village
grows from 500 to 4,000 people.
My slopes are stripped bare
of anything natural,
and derricks grow thick like the trees.
At night, the yellow dogs
light up my hillsides

as do, frequently, horrible fires.
All day there's the low slow
thunder of the bull wheels
pumping their echo into my soul.

I've become a city
with this influx of settlers
and I know not what to do.
Production peaks
at 10,000 oil wells,
60,000 barrels each day.

I grow weary now
and my body suffers.
I think back
and remember gentler times.
I hear children talking
of a wonder not distant,
a span of greatness
and magnitude
connecting two hills
across a deep valley,
a wide, quiet valley,
and I envy it its home.

But only for a moment,
for I relish what I've lived.
And I feel secure in my future
as it lies with my children.
Because I will always
take care of them
and they will look after me
as only family can.

WHAT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SCIENCE FICTION TEACHES US ABOUT HUMANITY

Isaac Payne

Surprisingly, the origins of artificial intelligence (AI) did not begin with the Turing test or John McCarthy's famous convention for computer scientists, but instead as far back as ancient Greece with stories of the inventors Hephaestus and Daedalus and their automatons. These creations were usually made with a single purpose and functioned as helpful companions or warriors, the ancient equivalent of today's robot vacuums. In Richard Lattimore's translation of Homer's *Iliad*, Hephaestus is described as having two golden handmaidens who possess "intelligence in their hearts" and seem to be used solely to support Hephaestus' old body (18, 136ff). However, these benevolent machines are few and far between in newer science fiction, replaced with destructive robot overlords, a trope that has only been around for about a hundred years after being first seen in Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* Following that, McCarthy hosted the Dartmouth Summer Research Conference on Artificial Intelligence in 1956, coined the term AI, and expressed his desires, as Daphne Koller states, for "AI to pass the Turing test," which is an exam used to determine whether or not computers are classified as intelligent (qtd. in Metz). The culture around robots and artificial intelligence has grown substantially, becoming a part of almost all modern science fiction literature. The idea of sentient robots has enamored science fiction writers for decades, spawning cult film classics like *Blade Runner* and *Terminator* as well as newer AI literature such as *All Systems Red* by Martha Wells and the film *Ex Machina*. In most of these realities—which are not that far from our own—the main question is, what makes humanity? What can make a machine "more human than human"? It is quite possible that

this subgenre of science fiction can teach us more about ourselves through the lens of those striving to be like us.

In 1920, the Czech writer Karel Čapek published his play *R.U.R.*—Rossum’s Universal Robots—introducing the term *robot* into our lexicon. The term originated from the Old Slavonic word *rabota*, meaning “servitude of forced labor,” and in Czech is *roboti* (“Science Diction”). The robots featured in *R.U.R.* are not the typical mechanical oddities that readers might think; they are more along the lines of biotechnology, replications of humans. Despite the depictions in the performances—which show the robots as coated in metal armor with the typical stiff movements—there are various places in the play where they are said to be very human like. In the first act, the general manager, Domain, welcomes Helena to the factory, saying that it is “where people are made,” and later, one of the characters is revealed to be a robot, to much surprise, because she was indistinguishable from humans (Čapek 3). Earlier in the same scene, Domain had referred to these people in such a way that implied they were cargo, much the way slave owners might have described their workers. Even though these robots bear all the semblance and intelligence of humans, “lack[ing] nothing but a soul,” their humanity is thrown into turmoil because they are oppressed by their makers.

Čapek pioneers the idea that artificially created humanoids might have feelings and the potential for human thought processes. At the end of the play, the robots have taken over the world, but are unable to reproduce or construct new robots. However, a robot based on the human character Helena and another robot named Primus come to the conclusion that they “belong to one another,” having somehow discovered emotions and fallen in love (104). Earlier in the act, the robot Radius explains that the robots have attained humanity, or an accurate imitation of humanity, because they “have read books. We have studied science and the arts. The Robots have achieved human culture” (95).

As intriguing as this is, the notion that biologically or mechanically engineered entities can learn to become capable of

emotion and human thought is no longer that far from reality. Modern advancements in have led to deep-learning AI that cannot only create their own problem-solving algorithms but can learn to mimic human emotion. Mark Riedl, a professor from Georgia Tech with a specialization in AI systems, has been gradually teaching AI common sense and ethics using stories. Much like *R.U.R.*, Reidl is utilizing culture instead of code to teach AI, which has both problems and benefits:

When we talk about teaching robots ethics, we're really asking how we help robots avoid conflict with society and culture at large.... The more an AI system or a robot can understand the values of the people that it's interacting with, the less conflict there'll be [and] the more understanding and useful it'll be to humans. (qtd in Conn)

And yet, if AI are capable of learning from stories and culture, who is to say that once out on the market, they cannot consume media that prompts them to despise humanity? In *R.U.R.*, the culture of “slaughter and domination” instigates the robots to destroy humankind (Čapek 94). Examining these sources has only seemed to raise more questions: If AI can learn, who determines what they learn, and how much? Is it wrong to treat AI like lesser beings even though they have human mental faculties? These questions prompt a closer examination of another piece of robot literature that has become an integral component of the sub-genre: the movie *Blade Runner*.

Blade Runner—which is loosely based on Philip K. Dick's science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*—was released in 1982 and has been considered a “reflective meditation on what it means to be human” (Abadzis). It throws into question whether genetically modified humans can attain a higher level of humanity than those born human. Throughout the movie, the audience follows the protagonist, Deckard, whose grim disposition is perhaps more than just a “general discontent” and could be the result of his being a Replicant. Ridley Scott, director of the 1982 film, is adamant that “the entire story doesn't work if Deckard is human,”

and yet there is solid evidence that Deckard is indeed human, both in story flaws and the levels of humanity displayed in the actual Replicants (Jagernaut). Near the beginning of the movie, Deckard learns that the Replicant Rachel is the first model to have been given artificial memories, making her believe that she is human. However, if the theory about Deckard being a Replicant is true, it would make him the first model with fake memories—evident by the unicorn scene—throwing the chronology for a loop. In addition to the technical aspect of this theory, if Deckard was a Replicant, it would defeat the entire purpose of the film, which is “how we treat each other, our hubris and our compassion, or lack of it...becoming human, [and] the changing nature of humanity,” all of which does not work unless there is the dichotomy between the Replicants and their counterpart, Deckard (Abadzis).

Keeping with the idea that Deckard is a human, the actions of Roy Batty and the other Replicants carry more weight because they are inherently far more human-like than Deckard’s, whose stoic demeanor paints him as lacking almost all emotion. Batty has far more compassion for his fellow Replicants than Deckard has for his fellow humans, and when Deckard is about to die, Batty realizes the worth in his life as well, saving him from his doom. Essentially, the roles are reversed, where androids feel more emotion than the actual humans, and the humans are plagued by disregard and lack empathy. These dynamics are useless if Deckard is a Replicant, because it would make his grim outlook more out of place, and the idea of becoming “more human than human” would be thrown to the breeze. So, an answer seems to be that humanity is achieved through experience as well as through culture, as seen in *R.U.R.*, but that its attainment is subject to opinion since humanity is a universal concept, with requirements that can be debated.

In tandem with these assumptions, the *Blade Runner* sequel *Blade Runner: 2049* toys with the idea of birth memories and whether or not humanity is something one can achieve as well as be born with. The main conflict of *Blade Runner: 2049* is not the Replicant-hunting that its predecessor hosts, but the search for a child, and

ultimately, humanity. The protagonist, the blade runner K, is thrown into a race to find the live-birthed child of the Replicant Rachel while at the same time dredging through his childhood memories. The dynamic that throws this conflict for a loop is the fact that K himself is a Replicant who is unsure whether or not he is the android child of Deckard and Rachel, which he is not. This fact—that the Nexus-9 androids are capable of hunting their own kind without breaking stride—seems to support a theory that Deckard could have been a Replicant, a theory that remains intentionally ambiguous.

And yet, K is infinitely more human than Deckard is, from his heartbreaking love for the hologram Joi to his sense of duty. Even though K comes to find his memories are replications of the real child's memories, “K's implanted memories and experiences make him as much Rachel and Deckard's child as their biological daughter Ana. He is an adopted son, fighting for the freedom of a father and sister, martyring himself for family,” which is perhaps the most human thing of all (Hodges). In the original *Blade Runner*, Deckard is not shown as having any familial relationships, and even though K does not either, he knows deep down that fighting—and eventually dying—for Deckard and his daughter is right. This display of sheer human devotion breaks down any barrier that separated Replicant from human, at least for K, and teaches us that above all, being human is about being loyal and standing up for the core of our existence, which is—or at least should be—emotional connections. But as compelling as K's “cybernetic evolution” is, it is not the only arc dripping with humanity in *Blade Runner: 2049* (Hodges).

K's counterpart, Luv, the headstrong and infinitely more complex henchwoman for Niander Wallace, shows viewers what it means to be struggling with demons while embracing the more human desire for good. The first glimpse of her humanity comes when Wallace murders a newborn Replicant because it is barren. It is quite clear that Luv feels love, or at least sympathy, for her kin and displays “very human tears” when they die (Hodges). This is an interesting contrast to K, who comes to the realization that saving one family is better than having none himself. Luv, who is a slave of

her position, a trapped android, has a deeper connection to other Replicants as they are her stand-in family, displaying far more emotion at their deaths. It is arguable that “no other main character shares Luv’s empathy,” perhaps because the human characters echo the blunt, grim dispositions of the original film, or because the protagonist is a trained Replicant killer (Hodges). Both like and unlike K, she lives a tragic existence, trapped in a life of murder—sometimes of her own species—but displays what so many viewers can relate to: intention. She intends for good to occur, believing in Wallace’s vision of a great society, but she is chained into an oppressive system like many of us in today’s society. She is a killer, not by choice but by circumstance, which brings us our next case study, *Ex Machina*, a film in which the android kills out of necessity and perhaps a small amount of revenge.

In the 2014 film directed by Alex Garland, the CEO of a successful search engine company creates an android capable of human thought processes and brings a young coder named Caleb Smith to administer a Turing test to determine if the android is intelligent. During his time with the android, Ava, Caleb soon realizes that she is very intelligent and capable of so much more than mundane human thought. She is smart enough to know that she is a robot and that she is being tested, yet she decides to ask Caleb questions. Ava is perhaps one of the most intriguing AI examined in this paper, namely because of her intricacies and the nuances that make her seem largely human despite the fact that until the very end of the film, she looks just like a machine. At one point, she displays romantic emotions for Caleb and seeking to impress him, dresses up as a woman. While she does this, she does not speak, but we see much humanity in this short scene. Ava takes time to look at all of her clothes, picking them out carefully and putting them on even more carefully. She has influences, much like anyone, evident by the images of celebrities in her private space and the way that she copies their hairstyles. This in particular is a very good play at humanity on Ava’s part, as it shows an understanding of the human condition: discontent with one’s image, the attempt to imitate people we admire,

and a need for reassurance. She asks Caleb, “Are you attracted to me?” Much to his dismay, he is attracted to her but unsure what saying so will do to her programming. Ava recognizes this, commenting on his microexpressions and his hesitation. Perhaps she is sincere, or more likely she is manipulating him. Her response raises the question of whether androids are fundamentally mechanical, capable of feeling infatuation, or merely mimicking human responses?

Eventually, Caleb realizes that Nathan, the android’s creator, has made countless other robots and abused them physically, and is planning on erasing Ava’s consciousness in order to make a newer model. Caleb decides to help Ava escape, but when speaking with Nathan, he comes to the conclusion that Ava has used him. She has played with his emotions in order to escape Nathan and the prison he created for her. That, above all, is what defines Ava’s humanity. From the very beginning, she has seen a chance to escape and decides to manipulate Caleb’s feelings in order to achieve her goals. Ava understands that to meet her needs, she must create a bond of trust with Caleb; and to actually be free, she will need to break that bond. Isn’t that ultimately human: building something up only to break it down and start again?

What solidifies the blow even more is the fact that when confronted by Nathan, she—along with the help of one of his sex robots—kills him. Perhaps this is simply a fight or flight response, or perhaps she legitimately feels hatred for him and wants revenge for his treatment of her. Either way, Ava executes her plan to its fullest, and even when Caleb screams and begs her to let him out of the compound, she does not pay any attention to him. While she exhibits human responses and thought processes, she is still very much a machine in the way that her cold nature takes over when she achieves what she wants. At least in humans—decent humans—there is a hint of remorse and guilt, but with Ava there is nothing, which separates her from reaching the ideal of “more human than human.”

Now we move to our final case study, an actual death bot, designed for killing but content with indulging in human media. Published in May 2017, Martha Wells’s *All Systems Red* merges AI

science fiction with an upbeat tone, offering a unique view into the growing humanity of the main character known to readers only as Murderbot. In the beginning of the novella, readers learn that the protagonist is a genetically and technologically modified security unit who has successfully broken its computer link to its creator. Another very important aspect we see in this character is its dry, brutally honest narrative:

I could have become a mass murderer after I hacked my governor module, but then I realized I could access the combined feed of entertainment channels carried on the company satellites. . . . As a heartless killing machine, I was a terrible failure. (Wells, 9)

Murderbot's brush with humanity occurs with its consumption of mortal media as well as its awareness of its appearance, but its main connection with its creators is the fact that it realizes its shortcomings. The bot was designed to be a destructive force used for protecting miners in foreign environments, but once it hacks its system, it becomes lazy, which is, while perhaps painful to admit, very human. On multiple occasions, Murderbot describes instances where it did not perform up to standards simply because it couldn't be bothered, such as how it doesn't "care much about who my clients are or what they're trying to accomplish." At the same time, it is very concerned with its job: "I've got four perfectly good humans here and I didn't want them to get killed . . . It's not like I cared about them personally, but it would look bad on my record, and my record was already pretty terrible" (25, 60). This is one of the profound ways that Wells portrays her AI to seem less like technology and more like a living being. How more human can one be than caring about one's job while hating it at the same time? The conventional means of displaying the humanity of AI is through emotions—love, hate, sorrow, etc.—but for Murderbot, the defining characteristics of its humanity are smaller things that everyone can relate to on some level.

For example, Murderbot's consumption of media is one that perhaps every reader can understand, as they themselves are indulging in entertainment while reading the book. The reference

to media alone is so human that for a while, it is possible to forget that the narrator is part machine, part regenerative organic material. Do we not reference our new favorite television show an excessive amount, or compare our friends to the characters? This device in particular roots Murderbot among the most notably human AI in literature today. It understands human connections enough to make comparisons between what's acted and what's not, to puzzle out why the portrayal of humanity is often not the real humanity we see. And more than this, Murderbot relates to the modern human in that we are not always driven by the need for sex, for closeness. While watching a serial—which Murderbot consumes religiously—it “fast forwards through a sex scene,” saying that “I think that even if I did have sex-related parts I would find them boring” (36). This observation rings true for those of us who dislike the hyper sexualization of media, desiring a good plot and fleshed-out characters. And speaking of body parts, Murderbot is a very self-conscious AI, often hiding its face from the humans it guards, overcome with an intense feeling of discomfort. At one point, when asked why Murderbot doesn't like people looking at it, it replies, “You don't need to look at me. I'm not a sexbot.” This is just another example of Murderbot's brutal honesty and its resignation to being unattractive while acknowledging that it's not supposed to be something beautiful if its capable of killing (106). Even in this, we can see a human reaction, with the realization that people are nosy and prejudiced; self-consciousness is yet another singly human trait. The complexity of Murderbot is fleshed out with fine, distilled details in under two hundred pages.

Perhaps as a whole, AI science fiction merely intrigues us, working with our fears and our desires for bigger, better, smarter tech. Or perhaps it is just simply a reflection of our religious ideals, a way to assert our dominance over other creatures. However, there are far too many layers for these assumptions to hold the entire truth. Pulling back the rough outer film of this cybernetic onion, we surpass the flash and bang of destructive robot porn and delve into the intricacies of becoming something more. In most science fiction, the

android begins to think like a human when its technology becomes too advanced, when it has been around human influences for too long. Rarely is the android created with these thinking capacities built in. Even today, AI—like Google voice recognition, self-driving cars, and even Netflix’s watch-next algorithms—are equipped with deep learning which allows them to “develop autonomous, self-teaching systems” that mimic human neural systems, sometimes baffling their programmers (Marr). Programs like these reflect the most humanity because learning is an intrinsically human characteristic. Humans are always educating themselves and others, and engaging in the same processes brings machines one step closer to the creatures they mimic. The computer scientist Mark Riedl seeks to teach AI using stories that show them morals and ethics while omitting negative characteristics. Yet, as seen in *R.U.R.*, sometimes reading is not the only way that AI can learn; they also gain knowledge from watching society and observing humans. And, as simple as it seems, AI in science fiction often mimic unideal traits or deem humans to be oppressive creators, prompting our destruction.

However, this too is a superficial layer of the metaphorical onion. Why does artificial intelligence feel the desire to become more human or affirm its emotional capacity? And the next logical question is, what is humanity? Simply put, it is our values, ethics, and choices. The word *humanity* comes from the *Latin humanitas*, which was first used by Cicero to “describe good people, that is to say ‘civilized’ human beings” or essentially represent the values of benevolence and “justice” (Behling). For AI to want to replicate human emotional responses indicates a level of need, of inadequacy, within its self-created programming. In *K*, the desire for connectivity through family leads him through his journey of self-discovery, but while he discovers his origins, he also develops a sense of duty to family, even though he does not initially have one. That, perhaps, is one of the most profound human responses found in artificial intelligence. And yet, it is what makes AI creatures so dangerous.

At the heart of our great vegetable lies not the machine, but the human. We have become Hephaestus, Rossum, and even

Pygmalion; we have sought to create life through means beyond reproduction, and we have raised all these questions. Kevin Kelly, author of the essay “The AI Cargo Cult” theorizes that “artificial intelligence is a religious idea,” and perhaps he is not too far from the truth (Gray, Herbison). Through AI, we feed our power-complex with the creation of an almost-human, pure and simple. But in studies into the replication of neural networks, it is clear that our fascination with AI comes from our curiosity to better understand human cognition in relation to ourselves. What AI science fiction does is function as a medium for experimentation, an open sandbox where discoveries can be made. It couples the literary tradition of self-exploration with a progressive idea, a sub-human character that acts as a foil for our strengths and our flaws. AI in fiction show us what we strive to be and what we despise at the same time. Simply put, manufactured intelligences are extensions for us to understand our own mortality, our own humanity. K, Helena and Primus, Ava, Murderbot: they are characters learning about their humanity, which is what connects them to readers so well. We are not born with humanity; no one is. We learn it through experiences. From the first moment a baby opens her eyes and sees her mother’s smile, to the first time she feels the wind, she develops connection with the world. Ultimately, AI science fiction shows us reflections of ourselves, ones that are seeking meaning and what it is to be “more human than human.”



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LAURIE'S PARADISE

Cindy Nowacki

Gold embers
jump from the water's edge
as the sun melts below the darkened horizon.

The low tide pulls floating colors
gently to the sandy shoreline
as nightfall creeps
over the seaside.

Shimmering colors
change as quickly as they appear.
Pinks and oranges swirl together
to reach up and touch the purples and blues.

Stop to absorb this blessing
within the splendor of Laurie's paradise.



Seneca Family -photography

LEAVES ON WATER

Carol Newman

Summer always seemed to last longer in the town where I grew up. Mornings we woke to cacophonous birdsong, a strip of sunlight, and

dust rising from the floor like a dry mist. Memories float in like leaves on water. *My sister swimming, her hair spread out like ribbons.*

My brother dives, comes up bleeding. And there you are again in that fancy pink coat, the one that swings out in back, your hair black and shiny.

It was all as predictable as spaghetti every Thursday. The same arguments over whose turn it was to wash the dishes, rules laid down like roadblocks,

only small rebellions, all of us planning an early escape. *The car lurching forward, tires spinning too slowly on their rims, and you driving*

with two feet, searching for a clutch that isn't there. Me screaming, seeing for the first time that the erosion had already begun.

THE LAST OF THE OLD TIME RIG BUILDERS

Denise Seagren-Peterson

Honorable Mention

When most people turn sixty-five, they plan on retiring and taking it easy. They spend days reading the newspaper, taking afternoon naps, and enjoying time with the grandkids. There are leisure walks, if weather permits, and traveling the country, if money permits. Few would ever think of constructing a seventy-two-foot wooden oil derrick. But then Carl Seagren, better known as “Red,” wasn’t like most people.

Carl was built as solid as a tree and as unwavering as a rock. He had the “Seagren” nose and high defined cheekbones. His determined eyes told you he meant business, and few had the courage to challenge him. He was a handsome man in his younger days, and the years were fair to him as he aged.

It was 1969 when the Bradford District Grade Crude Oil Association and members of the Desk and Derrick Club spearheaded a project to create a fully functioning oil rig and museum in remembrance of the town’s rich oil history. Many men had made their fortunes by “shooting a well” and striking “liquid gold” back in the day. These men were the forerunners and the backbones of the oil industry. They deserved to be honored and their legacies preserved, and the Penn-Brad Historical Oil Well and Museum was the means to make that happen. The central feature of the museum was the rig that would demonstrate how oil was drilled from the ground almost a century ago.

One of the first tasks was to find someone who could still build a standard rig. In 1969, it was becoming a lost art. People weren’t building rigs anymore. That’s where Carl “Red” Seagren came in. He was considered the last of the old time rig builders and

the perfect choice to supervise the construction. Just being a rigger held a sense of pride. It took a special type of man with a steady hand and foot who could brave the dangerous height to build such a contraption.

For Carl, who teamed up with his brother, Art, the work wasn't an issue. The two rose to the challenge. Day after day, they climbed the derrick ladder, screwing metal bolts into hand-hewn timbers hoisted from the ground to create the towering oil scaffold. There was an art to constructing a rig to its exact dimensions and installing its equipment to their proper fittings. Carl and his brother employed their past carpentry and engineering skills to get the rig up and running. After all, they were building a machine, not a structure.

At the height of the oil boom, a four-man team could build a derrick in a matter of four short days and tear it down just as quickly after a well was shot and an oil pump took over. It took Carl and his brother longer than four days to construct the derrick, and no one judged them for it.

The project was completed in 1970. Jim Bryner, chairman of the museum, presented Carl with a plaque in honor of his hard work and dedication. Dressed in a dark suit jacket, hat, and tie, Carl accepted as his family proudly looked on. It was the last rig he ever built.

However, Carl's rigging knowledge was forced out of retirement again in the summer of 1998 when a tornado tore through the museum, destroying the rig. As the structure lay in ruins, with timbers skewed throughout the valley, a group of museum supporters came together and made plans to rebuild. It wasn't an easy task. The rig was a mangled mess. To preserve its history, it needed to be constructed true to the past.

Carl came to the meeting with a wooden replica of an oil derrick to offer guidance and support in the rebuild. He was remembered as saying, "I'm ninety-three years old and I'm not building it again." The meeting erupted in laughter. Although I wasn't there, I cannot help but wonder if there was a part of Carl that would have liked to give it just one more go-round if he could.

A year later, after numerous donations and a lot of hard work, a new drilling rig and museum opened to the public and still stands today. In the back of the museum, past the souvenir shop, antique fire engine, vintage tools, and oil equipment, is a wall of pictures of prominent men in the oil industry. My great-uncle Carl's picture proudly hangs among them. May he always be remembered as The Last of the Old Time Rig Builders.



Crude Unit 3 -*photography*, Circa 1985



French Bakery 24th Anniversary-*photography,*

THE SOLITARY MONARCH

Bill Wilson

So rare nowadays, it surprises and bounces
along the breeze, floating away
as we sip South American coffee on our porch.
I look to my wife, and she to me, at once
we startle and ask together, "Is that a Monarch?"
As if cued, it flitters back into view,
an erratic, delicate aviator, exquisite
orange stained-glass wings, black veins
encased in stippled black and white frames,
possibly drawn to the aroma of its winter range,
but more likely a caffeine-free vagrant
struggling to locate its extirpated kin.



Croquet Players -photography, Circa 1900

SEASHELLS

Shahada Thomas

I pounded my fist against Elise’s cold apartment door. It was one in the morning, and it would be a miracle if she wasn’t already asleep. I heard a muffled groan and some shuffling before a light in her living room clicked on. I waited outside the door impatiently, the wind nipping at my skin. It was the middle of winter, and I’d left the house without my jacket. I knocked on the door again. “Elise, open up, it’s me.”

The door flew open. “Andrea,” Elise stood there wrapped in a satin robe, her curly hair pinned up, a confused look on her face. “What are you doing here?”

I pushed past her and made my way into her living room. Sitting on the couch, I grabbed the remote, turning the television on. Elise snatched the remote out of my hand and shut the television back off.

“Andrea,” she started. “I’m going to ask you one more time. What are you doing here?”

“I ran away,” I said.

Elise sighed and rubbed her temple. “Andrea, you can’t keep doing this. You’re going to make me lose my job. Why did you run away?”

“Because.”

“Because what?”

I didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to talk about it. They didn’t care about me or any of the other kids they hosted either. They just wanted the money. Being tossed around the system, you see a lot of people who make a living off of having foster children. They’ll have eight children, a bunch of bunk beds, and a ton of cash.

Robert and Stacey were my most recent foster parents, and my least favorite. They had six foster children including me, and they loved to put on the big happy family act. They wanted us to call them Mom and Dad, but I would never. They figured if they acted like they loved us, we wouldn’t tell our social workers we wanted to be moved. I hated being

there. I didn't need or want them to be my parents. I already had parents, and it was only a matter of time before I was living with them again.

Elise got up from her spot on the couch and grabbed her coat off the rack. "I'm taking you home. Now. Come on, let's go."

"Wait, wait, wait," I said. "Just let me stay the night, and I'll go back with you first thing in the morning."

"Andrea, you know I can't do that. I'm calling Robert to let him know I have you and I'm on the way."

"You can't do that."

"Andrea."

"Look, I'll tell you what happened. I've been writing letters to my mom."

"You know she's not supposed to be contacting you."

"She's not, I'm writing her. I haven't gotten any back. I just wanted to let her know that I was still waiting for her and still rooting for her." My voice was cracking, and I could feel my breath becoming more uneven. I needed to calm down. "But I found out that Stacey has been taking my letters out of the mailbox before they go out. My relationship with my mom is none of her business."

"Andrea, it is. She's your foster mother. And you already know you can't have any contact with her. Stacey was just following the rules."

"She had no right—"

"Enough already. I'm going to call Stacey and Robert. Wait right here." Elise disappeared into her bedroom and came out a few minutes later. "I just finished talking to Stacey. You can stay here tonight, but I'm taking you back first thing in the morning."

"Fine," I huffed. Elise placed her coat back on the rack and went to a hallway closet to get me a blanket and a pillow.

"Go to sleep, we have to wake up early." Elise went back into her own room, leaving me in the living room alone.

The next morning, Elise and I ate a quick breakfast before getting in the car.

"Robert and Stacey are good people," Elise said as we waited for a light to change. "I know you're having a hard time accepting it, but I tried my best to find you a good family."

“I already have a family.”

“Andrea, it’s been seven years already, you need to let go.”

“Of my mother? You’re delusional, Elise.”

“You’re fifteen now. Even if your mother were to get clean, by the time she finishes rehab and is able to provide a stable household, you’ll be eighteen.”

“I don’t want to talk about this right now. You’re my social worker, not my counselor.”

Elise looked like she had something to say but thankfully, she bit her tongue. I was sick of hearing the same things from Elise. She was great, and always there when I needed her, but she always tried to push me to let go of my mother. I couldn’t, I wouldn’t. She was my mother for Christ’s sake. She was sick, she could get better. She just needed some support.

My mother hadn’t been the same since my father left. He was our rock, and when he decided he wanted to go, he packed his bags and left us to fend for ourselves. I remember my mother lying in bed with her head in her hands, violently sobbing.

“When’s Daddy coming home,” I’d ask, tugging at her shirt sleeve. For a moment, she would glance up at me, her eyes bloodshot, cheeks puffy, lips swollen. Then she would go back to crying, leaving me wondering if I’d done something wrong. I asked her every day, and she never answered me.

Eventually the crying stopped, and she’d leave her room again. A few months later, my mother started hanging out with a man named Dan. He always kept a lit cigarette in his hand, even when he wasn’t smoking it. Occasionally, I’d catch my mother taking a long drag and sighing, continuing to fill the room with clouds of smoke.

The longer my mother was with Dan, the less interest she had in me. She no longer sat outside on the porch, showering me with hugs, kisses, and questions about my day. She didn’t eat dinner at the table with me. I couldn’t even get her to glance at the pictures I’d make in class.

Soon, it seemed like she forgot I existed. One day I missed the bus, so the school called my mom to pick me up. After hours of waiting, the resource officer drove me home. When we got there, we found my mom passed out in the bathroom. Her lips were chapped and white, her

face sunken. I hadn't noticed before, but she was bone thin. She was lying there, fitting easily in the space between the bathtub and the toilet. The floor around her was littered with small plastic bags.

I screamed, and the resource officer covered my eyes and pulled me out of the bathroom. I thought my mother was dead. I peeked my head around the wall to look at my mother's lifeless body. Crouched down beside her with two fingers pressed into her neck, the resource officer spoke into a phone, talking to the dispatcher.

"Yes, she has a pulse. No, I don't know how long she's been out. There's a child here, she doesn't have anywhere else to go."

An ambulance arrived on the scene shortly after. The paramedics placed my mother on the stretcher. One of the police officers came and talked to me.

"Your mommy is a little sick right now, so we're going to take you somewhere safe until she gets better, all right?"

I didn't say anything. I just nodded. The officer smiled at me, ruffled my hair, and helped me into his car. I stared out the window as we drove away from the house, remembering my mother before she met Dan, before my father left. My family wasn't very religious, but I intertwined my fingers, squeezed my eyes shut real tight, and begged God to let things go back to the way they were.

I never saw that house again.

When we finally arrived at Stacey's house, Elise got out of the car to talk to her. I walked past them and started getting ready for school. I was already late, but there was no way I was going to sit in the house with Stacey all day. As I packed my book bag, Stacey knocked on my door.

"Andrea, can I talk to you?"

I sighed. "Look, if you want me to apologize for running away or whatever, then I'm sorry."

"No, that's not it." She came all the way into the room and sat on my bed. "I know you want to speak to your mother, but that's not the way to do it. If you want to talk to her, we should do it the right way through the courts. Robert and I want to do whatever we can to help you adjust and feel comfortable."

“Stacey, that’s great and all, but I have to get to school.” I tossed my backpack over my shoulder and rushed out of the house before Stacey had a chance to stop me.

After school, I reluctantly went back to my foster parents’ house. As much as I hated it there, I knew I couldn’t keep running away. When I got back, Robert was still at work and Stacey was at the grocery store with the three youngest kids, Michael, Ben, and Julie. The other two foster children who lived there were around my age.

Tre was seventeen and planning to go off to college in a year. He’d lived with Robert and Stacey since he was ten, after his parents died in a car accident. He didn’t talk about them often because he said it hurt too much. I understood that. My parents were alive and I didn’t like talking about them. Despite having such a sad history, Tre always tried his hardest. He was the student body president, he received many academic honors, and he was captain of the basketball team. Any college that wasn’t already looking for him to join its medical or engineering program was begging him to play basketball.

When he’d tell me about basketball, his lips curled into a big grin and his russet eyes lit up. “When the ball is in my hand, I feel unstoppable,” he’d say, pretending to dribble the imaginary basketball around the kitchen before throwing his arms in the air like he was shooting a basket. Tre was convinced that if he could play in college, he would have no problem going pro. Sometimes, to cheer me up, he’d challenge me to games of H-O-R-S-E. Even though I wasn’t athletic at all, playing with Tre always seemed to take my mind off everything that was bothering me. He even let me win once or twice.

No matter what, he always had someone else in mind, and I admired that about him.

Imani was the other foster child, and we were the same age. She had only lived with Robert and Stacey for two years. She was previously being raised by her grandmother, but once her grandmother passed, she was put into the system with the rest of us. Despite dealing with so much so young, she too was happy living with Robert and Stacey.

Sometimes I’d come home to find her in deep conversation with

Stacey. They'd spend hours talking and giggling like young school girls. It was a wonder they didn't paint each other's fingernails and braid each other's hair.

"You get used to their chipper," Imani told me whenever I complained about it. I always rolled my eyes at her. I'd been living there for five months and I still wasn't used to it. I never would get used to it. Not as long as I could still remember the days when my mother, my father, and I were all one happy family. I would kill to have that back.

When there was nothing to do after school, I enjoyed going into the backyard and staring up at the sky. I loved the way the soft grass tickled my skin and the earthy musk of mud filled my nose. It reminded me of planting flowers with my father in the spring time. Each year a few weeks before Mother's Day, my father and I hopped into his sedan and made our way down to a local gardening shop.

We'd head over to the flower section and he'd tell me, "You have to pick out the prettiest flowers for Mommy." And like clockwork, I'd skip straight to the begonias because I knew they were her favorite.

We spent a lot of time in that garden, him doing all the work, me threading my fingers through loose piles of soil. After planting the begonias I'd picked and the lilies that he'd wanted, we'd go back inside to see my mother in the kitchen smiling at us with a pitcher of fresh lemonade. When the flowers began to bloom in May, my mother sat outside on a lawn chair and watched me while I ran through the yard, the sun caressing my cinnamon skin, the grass tickling my feet and the sweet smell of begonias wafting around me.

One day, as I lay in the grass, Imani came and sat beside me. "What are you doing out here," she asked.

"Reminiscing."

"So doing nothing."

"Reminiscing is something."

"All right, now quit lying around doing nothing and come help me with my hair."

The sun was already beginning to vanish behind the horizon, and soon mosquitoes would bite at my flesh, leaving me itchy and irritated, so I

decided to take her up on her offer.

After dinner, Imani and I spent the evening putting bantu knots in each other's hair. As my fingers weaved hair, twisting up pieces until they knotted together, I admired how pretty she was. Her tight curls were colored a deep shade of blue that complemented her copper-colored skin. Imani wasn't one of those girls who needed makeup, but she wore it anyway. She often complained about how major makeup brands were tailored to white girls, and she'd stand on her soapbox preaching about how she was going to make makeup for everyone. I never really paid much attention to her rants, but I still enjoyed chatting with her. We shared a room, and she was very easy to get along with. Most nights we stayed up later than everyone else watching movies and talking about school, boys, and our lives.

"Don't you ever miss your grandmother?" I asked as I brought my knees to my chest and squeezed the carpet with my toes. Imani rolled over so she was lying on her back and looking up at the ceiling.

"I miss her every day."

"Then how can you sit idly by while Robert and Stacey try to replace her?"

"Look Drea, I know what you're going through. When my grandmother first got diagnosed with Alzheimer's, we pretended like it wasn't real. That actually worked for a while. And then one day I came home from school and my grandmother had no clue where she was. We'd moved into a new place a couple months prior to her diagnosis, and that day she freaked out because she didn't remember getting a new house. She tried to go back to our old place, and someone called the cops on her. Shortly after, I got a social worker. I spent the next year watching my grandmother deteriorate. It was miserable. She went from being the spunky old woman that I knew to an entirely different person. When she finally died, I was sad, but I was relieved because she didn't have to suffer anymore. I love my grandmother to death. No one could ever replace her. The only way they could is if I allowed them to."

I didn't ask her anything else after that. We just climbed into bed and watched *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* until we drifted off to sleep.

When it was time for another appointment with Elise, I dreaded it. It wasn't that I was afraid, but Elise had a tendency to nag me, and the last thing I wanted was to be lectured about writing to my mom. When I arrived at Elise's office, she was waiting along with a man I'd never seen before.

"Hi Andrea, how have you been?" The man extended his hand to me.

"Um, who is this?" I leaned away. The man had pasty white skin and was balding. His mustache was littered with gray hairs, and his glasses were larger than any I'd seen before. I'd dealt with a lot of creepy caseworkers over the years, but he was definitely the creepiest.

Elise smiled at the man and gave me a look suggesting that I was being rude. "This is Dr. Thornton. He's a counselor here. He specializes in trauma and grief."

"What are you talking about?" I was already seeing a therapist once a week and I didn't need to start seeing another.

This time it was Dr. Thornton who spoke. "I'd like to have this conversation somewhere more private."

Elise nodded, and we walked down the hallway into her office. It was neat and well-decorated. I always felt cozy and comfortable there. Elise sat down on one of the chairs beside me while Dr. Thornton half-sat on her desk with a file tucked under his shoulder. He examined it for a moment and looked back up at Elise. She sighed and nodded.

"Can someone just tell me what's going on here? I'm a big girl, I can handle it. Is this another one of those 'Drea, just give up on hope' things, or am I moving to another place or getting a new social worker or what?"

"Andrea," Elise paused. She took a moment to gather her thoughts before speaking again. "Your mother died this morning. She was in the hospital, they tried to stabilize her, she slipped into a coma and didn't make it."

"What?" I choked. "I know you guys want me to let go, but this is kind of sick." I was fighting back the tears.

Dr. Thornton placed a hand on my shoulder. "Andrea, I know this is a lot to tell you all at once, but we wouldn't lie to you."

I shrugged his hand off of me and jumped out of my seat. "How

dare you!”

“Andrea, wait—” Elise stood up and tried to grab my hand, but I snatched it away.

“You guys don’t get to come in here and tell me this like it isn’t what you wanted. You’ve always wanted this.” There was no holding back the tears. They rushed down my face, scorching my cheeks. My legs began to feel like Jell-O before caving in on me. My entire body was numb, and my mind was blank. My mother was gone.

I don’t know how long I sat there on those cold wooden floors in Elise’s office sobbing uncontrollably. I felt Tre come in and give me a hug. I just sobbed harder into his chest. My head was spinning, and everyone’s voices sounded distant and muffled. My chest tightened and it became harder and harder to breathe. I could faintly hear Tre calling my name before everything went blank.

I woke up in my room. The curtains were open and the light from the moon crept through the window. My head was hurting, and the events of the afternoon seemed like a blur. I thought about my mother some more and the tears started to flow again. This time they were violent, but they wouldn’t stop. My chest still ached, and my stomach was turning. Finding out that my mom died was miserable, but finding out that it was from an overdose made it even worse.

I couldn’t understand why she hadn’t fought to get better. Why, after years of being apart from me, was she still not clean? She let her addiction consume her life and any chance of us being a family along with it. I wanted to be angry at her. To hate her for not loving me enough to get better. For not trying hard enough to keep me. For having me in the first place. I tried so hard to hate her to make it easier, but I couldn’t. Even though everything was her fault, I still loved her. I was pathetic.

Stacey came in while I was awake and set a glass of water and a plate of food on my nightstand. I turned my back to her. I couldn’t look at her. I hated her too. If she’d let me, I would have at least been able to see my mom before she died. Or at least my mom would have heard from me. I wanted to believe that one of my letters might have saved her.

I would have yelled at Stacey, but I couldn’t form the words. My

throat was dry, and my lips were chapped. I could barely breathe, let alone speak. So, I just lay there and cried while Stacey rubbed circles on my back. She didn't try to say anything, she just sat there.

She came to check on me a few times through the night. I couldn't sleep, so I saw her every time. Imani and Julie must have been sleeping somewhere else because they didn't come in the room at all that night.

I was supposed to go to school in the morning, but I couldn't find the strength to get out of bed. I lay there for a few days. Eventually Elise came over to talk to me. My mother didn't have any family, so she wasn't able to have a funeral. Instead she was cremated. Elise gave my mother's ashes to me, as well as a few of her other belongings. I held them and cried some more. I wanted so badly to go back to all the precious memories I'd shared with her. Back when things seemed perfect. But that was impossible. I couldn't reverse time and I couldn't hope to make new memories. I felt empty, numb.

It felt like weeks had gone by before I finally had the courage to leave my room and venture out into the real world again. Locking myself in my room wasn't helping me. I was too consumed with my own thoughts. And if I continued to miss school, they'd have to hold me back a year.

All of my teachers were very sympathetic. On my first day back, I got pulled aside by every one of them, getting the same cliché statements. "I know this must be hard for you. Take your time with everything. If you need anything, just let me know."

I didn't need or want a pity party from anyone. I wanted everyone to pretend like nothing had happened so I could too. I didn't need the constant reminders about what I was going through or the fact that I didn't have a family. I was fine just going through the motions and pretending like everything was all right.

Shortly after deciding to go back to school, I had regular meetings with Dr. Thornton. We'd meet every Monday morning in the school counselor's office. We never talked about my mother, only about other trivial things like what life was like at Stacey and Robert's house or how I felt about the school I was in. My answers were just as generic as his questions. I usually responded with a brief "it's all right," or "it's okay," or "I don't mind it."

It wasn't that I was specifically trying to get him to leave me alone, but I didn't know how I felt about anything anymore. For years, I'd kept up my guard around my foster families. I felt that if I enjoyed myself while I was there, then I would be betraying my mother. But my mother was gone now. Who would I be betraying by giving the family a chance? I knew Imani cared about me. I knew Tre did too. And even Stacey, as much as I hated to admit it, was worried about me.

After school, I got a call from Elise asking if I had any free time because she wanted to speak to me. She'd come to the house a few times in the past few weeks to make sure that I was eating properly and that I would start attending school soon, but we hadn't really had a chance to discuss everything that was going on. I felt that Elise was someone I could rely on when it came to sorting out what was going on in my head.

She picked me up and we went downtown to one of my favorite ice cream shops. Elise got herself triple fudge chocolate ice cream and adorned it with a mountain of brownie pieces and Snickers chunks. I kept it simple and got vanilla with too many sprinkles. We sat across from each other at a booth away from other people so we could talk privately.

"How has school been going?" Elise asked, popping a scoop of ice cream and brownie in her mouth.

I swirled my spoon around the ice cream, watching the colors from the sprinkles mix into it and turn it from a frosty white to a very pale pink. "It's all right. I have a lot of work to catch up on and my teachers are treating me like I'm on suicide watch or something. I can't even sigh without them thinking I should talk to the counselor."

"Well, they just want to make sure you're doing all right. You are really young and most people would have trouble handling the loss of a loved one even in their adult life."

"Lately, I've been feeling like my mom didn't care about me at all."

"You know that's not true."

I gripped the paper cup holding my ice cream a little tighter. "If that's not true, then why didn't she ever come back for me? Why didn't she try harder?"

"Your mom tried hard. She attempted rehab programs so many times. But she was too far gone. She just didn't have the kind of support

that she needed.”

I swallowed back the tears again. I could feel my body trembling. “Why wasn’t I good enough? Why couldn’t she love me enough to fix it?” I wiped away the few tears that escaped.

Elise was quiet for a moment. Her lips pursed into a thin line before she let out a sigh. “It was about three or four years ago at a court hearing when they decided to take away your mother’s parental rights. After a few failed attempts at rehab and missing multiple court hearings, they thought it would be in your best interest if you were placed in a home that loved and cared about you. A safe environment where you could move on and be happy. Most of the time when parents get their rights taken away, they go ballistic. Even when they know that they can’t provide for their children, they selfishly ask for another chance, knowing they won’t put in the work. When your mom heard the outcome, she didn’t get upset. She didn’t get angry and start yelling like so many other parents would have. She knew that she wasn’t going to get clean. She knew she wasn’t going to be able to provide the life for you that you deserved.”

I couldn’t hold back the tears anymore. I buried my face in the palms of my hands and let it all out. All of the emotions I’d been holding back seemed to wash over me at once, and I didn’t know if I would be able to get it together. Elise got up from across the table and slid into the other side of the booth with me. She wrapped her arms around me, bringing me close to her, and I started crying harder.

“Why does it hurt so bad?” I questioned in between sobs.

Elise rubbed small circles in my back and cooed in my ear until I calmed down. When my breathing finally started to even out again, Elise told me that she had somewhere else she wanted to take me. We left the ice cream parlor and got into the car. The sun was beginning to set, turning the sky a beautiful amber color. As we drove, the street, the trees, the cars, all began to blur and melt into one another. My eyelids were getting heavy, and before I knew it, I was falling asleep.

By the time I woke up, we had already arrived at our destination. The sun was nearly gone, giving way to a deep purple color, chasing away the glistening gold light into the furthest corners of the sky. We were at the beach. The same beach I’d visited with my mother when she was

doing well in her rehabilitation programs. We'd run along the shoreline barefoot, our feet sinking beneath the wet sand, waves knocking against our ankles. I took off my sneakers, placing them in the car before I headed toward the water. A small wave washed over the tips of my toes and I winced. The water was much colder than it had been so many summers ago when my mother and I had filled up buckets of water to make sand castles. It was like those moments had happened a lifetime ago.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned to see Tre and Imani standing beside me. Elise must have called them while we were in the car. Neither one of them said anything. Tre smiled and handed me my mother's urn. I looked at Elise. Her arms were folded across her chest. She had a look in her eyes. I knew what she wanted me to do. I needed to let go.

I traced my fingers across the urn, noting the lack of any design. Just a simple brass urn. No engravings, no images, nothing. Nobody in the entire world thought anything of her except me. No matter what she'd done or hadn't done for me, I was always going to love her. And no matter who else I let in my heart, there would always be a special place for her.

I untwisted the top of the urn and released the contents into the waves splashing against the shore. Imani and Tre wrapped their arms around me, and then Elise joined in as well. Tears began to swell in my eyes as the small bones and ashes sank and dissolved in the water.



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