





For Dr. Edgar McKnight,  
Associate Professor of English.

"May the force be with you."

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# FOREWORD

Good writing is like a good breakfast: it sustains us and prepares us to meet each day's delights, frustrations, catastrophes, and successes. We may fail a test or wreck our car; we might get a great parking space or inherit a fortune. Writing takes these raw ingredients of life and makes them palatable, interpreting our experiences and aiding our understanding of events, even before they take place. As breakfast feeds our bodies, so writing sustains our spirits as we meet the uncertainties of life.

The artists of this year's journal supply delectable fare. See a spider transform into a tight-rope walker and a greenhouse become a child's imaginary war zone. Consider the essence of faith and the freedom of surrendered expectations. Drive to the Appalachians to untangle the knots of the past. And these are but a sampling.

While artists prepare our intellectual breakfasts, others often place it on the table: our friends, parents, mentors, and teachers. This year, the *Ivy Leaves* team is pleased to dedicate the journal to Dr. Ed McKnight, a professor known for his joyful spirit, his passion for teaching, and his love of science fiction. In his honor, we have included "Awakening," a futuristic short story with characters alarmingly like us. In addition, we are taste-testing the genre of punch prose: short essays that concisely capture life's epiphanies.

We're pleased to have you at our table. We hope you enjoy this feast of visual and literary art, prepared with skill and perseverance, seasoned with time.

The Editors

## THE OLD PENCIL

J.T. Warnock

sleeps between the pages  
in spines of half-read books,  
in shoeboxes and shirt pockets,  
or—surrounded  
by plastic pens in a mason jar,  
the short one—dull point—  
scarred from sharpening—  
smells like a nature hike:

an old hiker sauntering into  
sunsets, its yellow-orange,  
wooden leg walks almost  
blank, college-ruled  
pages—each line a plank—  
losing its only companion—  
the spiral notebook—  
it sleeps in the mechanical present.



## **ARGIOPE AURANTIA**

Josh Overstreet

Wet Monday morning—  
many silk strands pulled tightly  
within a wood frame.

A glassy canvas—  
mercury droplets cling to  
the delicate threads.

The small red artist—  
spinning and dancing, weaving  
a crystal highwire.

## ALMOST ROAD KILL

Sarah Burgess

Oh, my thick shell, my pride;  
the perfect shade of green—ruined  
now with whatever they sprayed. I've tried  
to see it, honestly I have, but my neck  
wasn't designed to turn at that angle.  
Stop laughing! It really isn't so amusing.  
The mental torture was almost unbearable,  
so horrific—yes, please, set me down  
right there. Thanks so much for the assistance.

## HIGH ART MUSEUM

Jeremy Duncan

I be fixing to tell y'all 'bout the time we done went to a place of smartness. They has art. We got tickets and tooka magic aerial rising box to the second floor. Then wegot out and sawed the art. They had pictures of forests and people and craziness and circles inside of circles inside of squares. We tried to understand it. We couldn'ted. We still hasn't understood it to this day. Then we did got us expensive sandwiches. But they was good. Then we's went to the old art to see the naked people. After we saw the naked people we did sawed the birds. They very still. Then we left because our feet falled off. Educated fools.

## COLD FEET

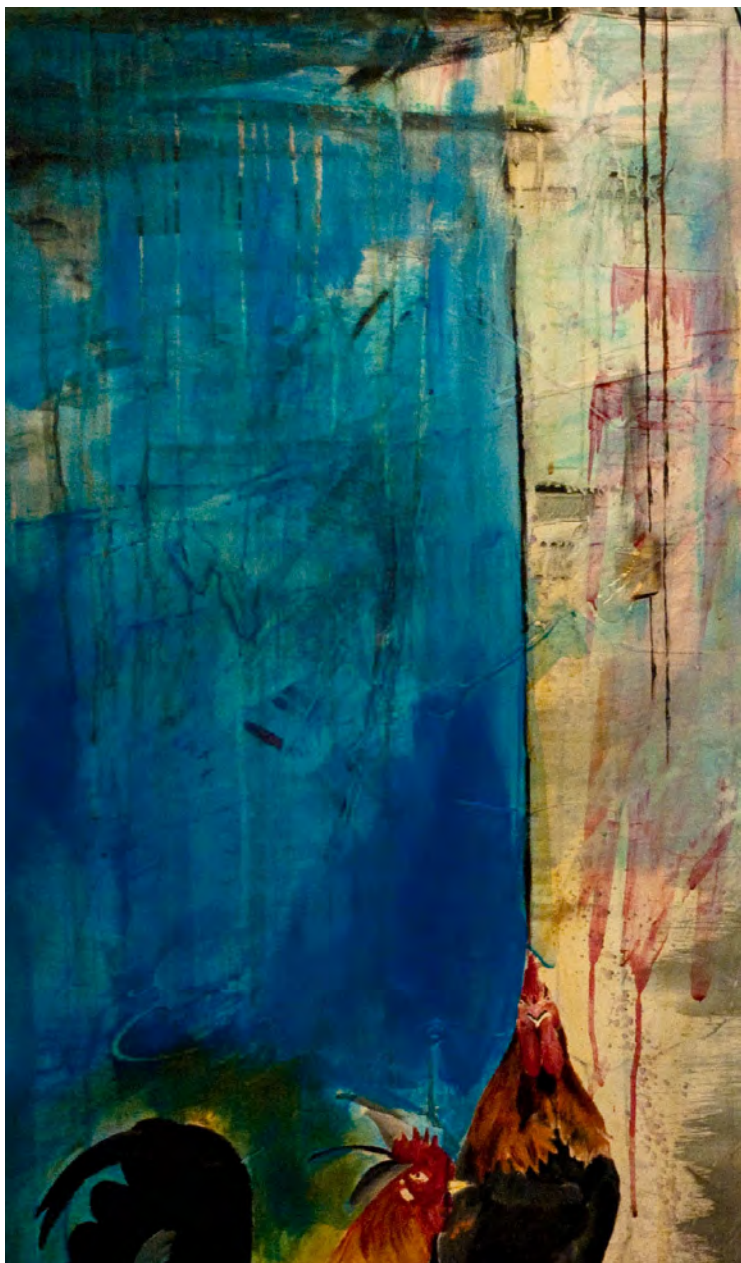
Sarah Dobrotka

This morning  
Began in a tense  
Standoff between  
Warm wrinkled blankets  
And the sheet of ice  
Beneath my bed.  
Waving a white  
Flag in surrender,  
I peeled back the sheets  
In defeat.  
Barefoot and shivering,  
I trudged  
Toward the chrome  
Wonder that fills  
My coffee mug  
Every morning  
At half past six,  
A welcome relief  
After another skirmish  
With the broken heater,  
Now hissing in victory.

## MISPLACED WEIGHT

Emmy Wheatley

The only thing I remember  
about your town  
was the Wash-O-Rama.  
Watching the soap violate  
my clothes, my underwear  
surfaced to the front.  
You knew everything then.  
So I left.

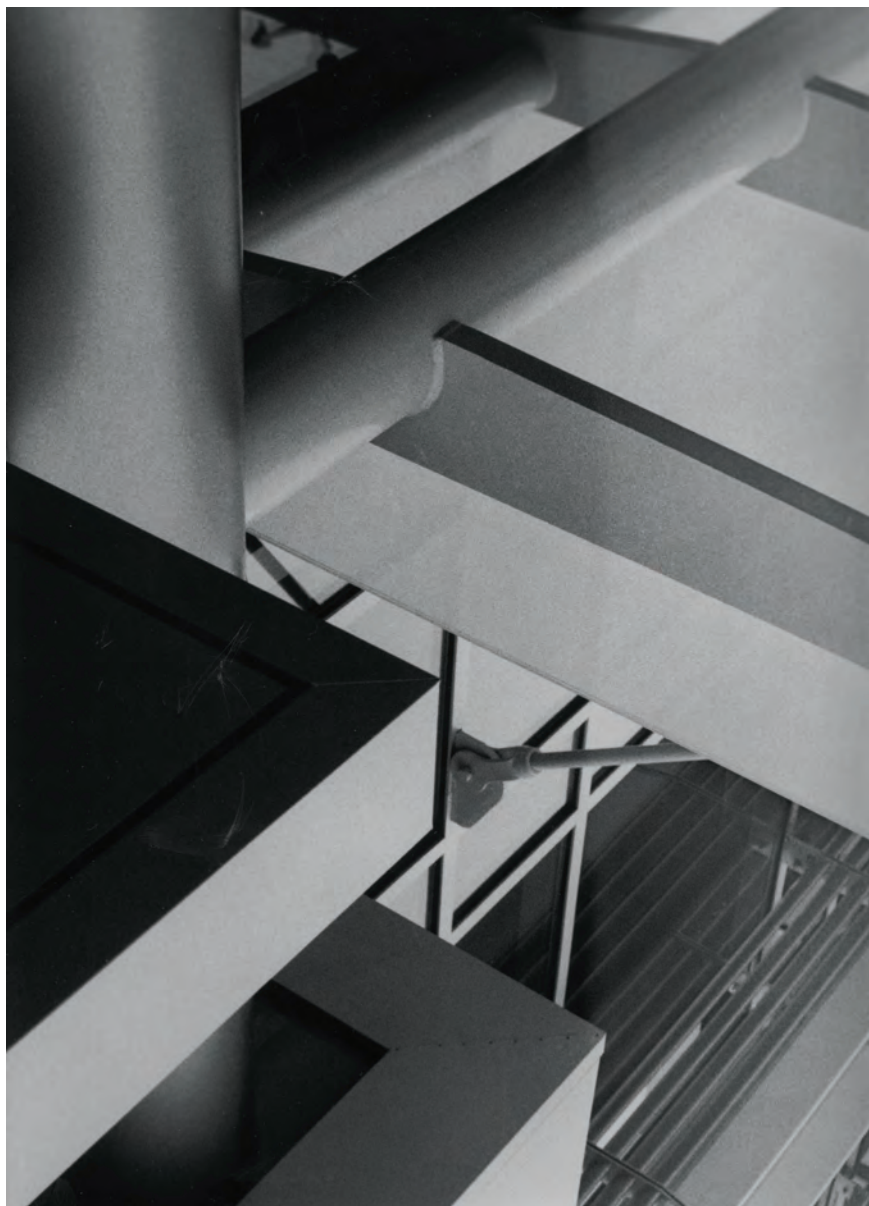


**THE CALLING OF  
ST. MATTHEW**

Ryan Walker  
Acrylic on Canvas  
48 x 36







**FASCIA** Jonathan Allsbrook  
35mm Film Photography



**SEVEN** Emily Weiland  
35mm Film Photography

# A MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE

Victoria Ralph

So, we're in the car. My mom nags me in her thick, Jersey accent: "Stevie, you need to make friends... Stevie, you can't waste your time playing video games... Stevie, isn't there a girl you like?..." I open the door and slam it shut. "Mom, it ends at nine o'clock. Don't be late." I didn't want to come. I hate these back-to-school dances.

"Fix your collar, Stevie. Now smile, and talk to some girls." She rolls up the passenger window and drives off, eyeing me in the rearview mirror.

I adjust my black, thick-rimmed glasses and smooth my blue and white argyle sweater. Mom ironed these khakis, with hopes I'd meet a nice girl. I wouldn't mind having a girlfriend, but I wouldn't let my mom know that. She thinks I can *get any girl* and *bring home the most popular girl in school*. Doesn't she notice how I look? Those kinds of girls annoy me, anyway.

I walk inside, *fashionably late*, and Mrs. Dill takes my ticket. The cafeteria is decorated like my third grade birthday party, with banners and balloons. It's filled with students, teachers, and PTA moms. Loud rap music plays and everyone crowds the DJ. I hang around the snack bar and eat a few cookies, bump into people. I've been here for ten minutes, and I'm already up against the wall at the back. I reach for my cell phone. I've found that it's a good way to seem cool. Time passes too slowly.

Celine Dion plays through the speakers. Those kinds of girls squeal among each other and hug their dance partners close. The basketball coach separates a couple. I myself have never danced with a girl. Who'd bother if I asked? I'm pale, lanky, and have a bush of hair. I look more creature than human.

Across the room, there's a tall girl, wearing a green, flowery dress, and her frizzled hair in a bun. She pours herself a cup of fruit punch and sips it elegantly. I search for her friends. Nope, she's alone, and I wonder how it's even possible. I feel like a creeper, but she's the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.

"Hi, I'm Katie," she says. She smiles and glances down at her white buckled shoes. This can't be real. I'm losing breath. This is actually happening. "I was wondering if you wanted to dance."

I'm shocked. I have no idea what to say. I wasn't expecting to talk to a girl tonight or probably ever. A cute girl, too! I was already coming up with lies to tell my mom. How's my breath? Has she noticed my buck teeth? Surely she's thinking of cures for my acne. "I'd love to," I say. I'm so nervous. I don't know how I found the words, "I'm Steve."

We walk over to the dance floor. I'm trembling a little bit. She puts her hands on my shoulders, and I put mine on her waist. Are my hands too



high or too low? What if she thinks I'm a total pervert? Either way, this feels good. "I've never seen you before," I say. "Are you new to Robert Anderson?" We sway back and forth. She's graceful. I try not to step on her toes.

"I moved here a month ago," she says, "but so far, I like this school. Are you in the seventh grade?"

"Yeah," I say. I make conversation. I learn that she likes animals and sings in her church choir. Her favorite color is green, and her hair is naturally curly like mine. The best part about this girl...she's normal.

"Thanks for the dance," I say. What I really mean is, do you want to go out with me?

# KAYAK

Emmy Wheatley

I paddled forward, aiming directly at her as she turned her kayak to face mine. My goal was to hit her, an attempt to start a jousting match—me, being the spontaneous, fun one, not really thinking things through, and she, the smart child, planning her every move, carefully. As she looked up from her book and saw me, she knew my intentions; I saw it in her eyes, fear and anger. But I could only focus on the excitement of a water jousting match, so I sped up. I couldn't just sit in the middle of the lake in my red, spider-infested kayak and read for hours on end like her. I could maybe read or play some Sudoku puzzles and paddle around for a few hours, but that's it. My little sister was always considered smarter and prettier. Sure, she wore make-up and I didn't. She had long, blonde hair fixed perfectly; mine was dirty brown, kept short so I wouldn't have to brush it. I think the only reason people said she was pretty was because of her huge chest. She could sit out there patiently, waiting for the wake to move her closer to shore. I needed to move. I wanted to feel the water splash onto my flannel and jorts, only to drip down into the Vans I never took off. I guess that's why people call me wirey, a mix between annoying and high strung. They just don't get it.

She scolded me after my boat rammed hers. My paddle pushed against her tightly zipped lifejacket slightly harder than I had intended, but not enough to hurt. She claimed I could have flipped her boat and ruined her books. Her books! "They are library books!" I tried to yell louder than her because sound travels so well over water. I wanted anyone listening to know I was the dominant one. She laughed this off because she knew I was right, that she needed to loosen up and have a little fun. Campbell always thought she was older than me, just because she had a little more height and maturity. But I was still older.

Trying to get rid of me, Campbell suggested that I figure out where the loons were. I loved to listen to their hollow howls float over the water and imagine they were calling for a lost friend, one they knew would never return. It sent chills up my spine every time I heard it.

I ignored her and backed up to ram her kayak again, knowing that this time she knew all I wanted was to have some fun, to be myself for awhile, just be annoying. She was mad at me for not leaving her alone, but she went along with my fun, because she understood me. She was still a kid, just like me.

This time she hit back; her aim was off, so she ended up jamming her paddle into my unprotected chest, missing the padding of my unzipped lifejacket. I splashed her as revenge, forcing her to scream because of the



freezing water that smelled like fish. Before she could splash back, I took her paddle, leaving her just out of reach so I could tease her. I used my new power to make a deal with her.

"Give it back!" she said, knowing that I wouldn't. "Tegan!" she yelled, as she gave me a stern, parental look, which she knew I would hate. "Pllllleeeeeeaaaaase." She talked now in a kid's voice, giving me what I wanted to hear.

"Only if you promise me something," I said.

She wasn't going to give in that easily; she was smarter than that. "Promise you what? I'm not gonna splash you," she guessed, but she was wrong.

"Um...promise me that every time we ride together in the car the driver will always give the other shotgun and the passenger will be DJ."

"We already do that," she said in a way that made me feel stupid for thinking it.

"Fine, I'll pick something else. I want you to promise me that...um... every time we go grocery shopping we will pretend to be pirates."

"Deal, now give it back."

"Just so you know, this means that I am the captain because I have the cart, which will work as our ship. Our treasure map can be the list Mom gives us. Um...You can be the first-mate. And we have to say 'Arrg' all the time and hold our fingers like they are hooks."

"OK!" she said, now getting impatient.

My little sister splashed me and giggled before paddling away, thinking she had won. I just grinned.

## THE FIELD

Genevieve Hamilton

Blink twice and it's missed—a deserted sanctuary of cropped brown grass and weeds, hemmed by dusty chalk lines and battered bleachers. Torn nets sag against lopsided goals at either end, grinning at passersby like cocky old blokes with a few teeth missing. Who in their right mind would think of this place as more than an eyesore? She does—the pair of cleats and a tucked-in jersey lined up with her teammates on the sideline beside color-coordinated cones and balls, with her toes just brushing those fading chalk lines. She lays down behind this line every piece of her daily life. All she can see past it is the hallowed ground where she will compete, commit to excellence, and come together with her team to form a mighty impenetrable unit. Eyeliner smears as stinging perspiration is blinked away, and muscles tense in anticipation of the coach's shrill whistle.

The hungry field welcomes the surge of ponytails and crisp uniforms. It eats up the freshly pumped balls and live-wire energy pouring across the sideline to fill its seams to bursting. For a blessed two hours a day, this pathetic patch of landscape transforms into a silent host of victory and failure for its girls, soaking up peals of laughter and tears of frustration, shouts of encouragement and curses muttered facedown in the dirt. Legs swing and balls fly, teeth clench and parched throats call for a pass.

The field's mischievous tufts of weeds change directions of skipping passes, and nets dance crazily with the fury of rocketing shots and tangle up the goalkeepers reaching for balls. Goalposts groan in protest as their old bones get pushed across the field, but serve as a friendly shoulder for its exhausted keeper's wobbly legs. Patches of grass soften the blow of an unfortunate player hurled to the ground in a tackle and hold up a pair of shaking arms doing pushups for walking during a drill.

The player both loves the field and hates it. She loves how it brings her team together from all walks of life and, for a few hours, makes them set aside the existence of reality outside of the simply beautiful game of soccer. She despises it when the team must sprint from one end of it to the other as punishment for not organizing the training gear or for letting a ball drop. Ask her, and she will swear the chalk lines purposefully lengthen against her throbbing legs and burning lungs.

A final whistle ends practice, and the players return to everyday life. The scruffy field is once again alone, but knows it is part of a purpose greater than just a space for balls and cleats. The lessons a player learns within the boundaries of its lines cling to her like stubborn grass stains—she realizes at the end of the day what will be remembered is not who scores the most goals, makes the fastest time on the fitness test, or blocks

the most shots. What her team builds on this field every day is a legacy; a legacy strengthened each time the fastest person on the team overlaps the pack and comes back to encourage the one who is dead last. It strengthens each time two players crash to the floor in a tackle and pull each other up, or when the coach gives a shoulder a squeeze and words of affirmation after a hard loss.

On this ground is where a player passes through refining fire to be transformed into not just an elite athlete, but an unbreakable vessel of perseverance, discipline, and integrity. Here between battered nets is where she takes risks, is hurled to the ground, rises back up, and falls again. But this doesn't faze her—she knows the iron circle of her team waits to break her fall, dust her off, and send her back into the fray.

The field eagerly awaits tomorrow as its girls leave and the last notes of a whistle hang in the stillness. Tomorrow it will come alive again—balls will fly, sweat will drop, shouts will echo. For now, the only sound is a quiet, rhythmic pinging of net hitting post.



**SLUMBER** Jennifer Polk  
Digital Photography  
Nikon D300

## ON BEING A MOTH IN THE DAYTIME

Anna Marie Davis

What do granddaddy-long-legs do with their legs while they sleep? Do they tuck them under like a dog, or do they lie sideways like a cat, or do they just spread eagle and let their rotund bodies touch the ground? *Pholcus phalangioides*—phalange, like fingers, I think. Eight-legged creatures with small round bodies, I just always seem to notice them while writing. Perhaps my senses are more alert. Perhaps I am just bored and idling my time with menial things.

How come bushes always have extra twigs protruding through? Are they like hairs that just grow faster? Why would the whole bush just not grow up together? Trees seem so symmetrical, no seemingly misplaced leaves. Bushes must want to be like trees and grow tall and touch the sky. Bushes—they must be trying to create their own shade in which to hide.

What do moths do during the day anyway? Do they disguise as butterflies, only to shed their costumes at night? Ever notice how you never see butterflies at night? Is it because they go to sleep, or is it perhaps because they were moths all along? Haven't you ever heard that if you touch a moth it will die? Ever notice that white powder they dust your fingers with? It's their magic dust, their magic butterfly dust. Fooled us they have, all this time. Moths must never sleep.

## RAKING LEAVES

J.T. Warnock

When I was five, I told my parents I wanted to be a garbage man. By the time I turned seven, I wanted to be a meteorologist. Before leaving junior high, I had become a felon. A decade after being released from a juvenile detention center, I'd managed to graduate high school and gain acceptance into a community college. During my first year of college, I told my parents I was going to become a lawyer. Next, a political scientist. Finally, an English major. I figured my life experiences contained interesting information that other people would want to read. I decided to compile an autobiographical novel. After writing—re-writing—several drafts, I decided to postpone the sentimental process of explicating my life; my juvenile delinquency conversion tale seemed overwrought and clichéd. I decided to write about someone other than myself. I decided to write about my father.

When I decided to compose a portrait of my father, I wanted my audience to entertain his contribution, not merely to my wellbeing, but to something bigger than particulars. I wanted to transfer a defining moment from my bank of memories to pages of print. Instead of creating a biographical listing of his birthplace, occupation, family lineage, etc., I turned to a technique that I learned on my vocational path to becoming a garbage man, a meteorologist, a lawyer, and finally a writer—the metaphor.

I knew early that Dad was one of those transcendental creatures known as the nature lover. However, it is a surprising form of knowledge that his time outdoors is more vocation than gift; it is his destiny, not his choice. He enjoys driving on old, concrete, two-lane roads that don't get much traffic—like the winding country roads of West Virginia that pave the way between the snow christened mountains, creating a superimposed sort of mystic passageway into the clouds. There are no signs for Wal-Mart or hash houses to clog the arteries of the atlas. The forest removes its veil and board game-size houses randomly appear on tracts of leaf covered, remote, mountain acreage. Here, creation seems flawless; she is adorned: pure and ageless, a synonym for God. This purifying landscape inspires the brushstrokes that paint a picture of my father; raking leaves was his ministry, and I didn't comprehend it until now.

"Do it right the first time," Dad said while reinforcing that a rake's primary job is not leaning against a wall in the garage.

He always wears the same labor-stained, construction-blue, Dickey coveralls and a pair of earthy-colored suede gloves with a black leather strap like the ones you buy at Griff's feed store. A straw safari hat sits atop his snow colored hair to protect his sun-freckled face; his latest pair of recycled hiking boots complete his suit of preparation—he is ready for



battle. Refusing to lose precious time in a world he is slowly escaping, Dad considers laziness as godlessness; his work ethic competes with the sun to outwork pharaohs' slaves. He operates exactly the way a clockmaker's son is expected: rise at five, rest at dusk. Disguised as a retired vocational minister that works seventy hour workweeks, Dad is a handyman that works with his mind.

"Use your mind, son. Your hands do what your mind tells them."

Dad graduated from Florida State University before dirt roads became endangered species. He often tells me that his dad refused to teach his boys how to work on machines because he wanted them to become rocket scientists. Sometimes when we are raking, I catch glimpses of his left hand applying impenetrable pressure to the spine of the rake; his right hand reciprocates in symbiotic harmony at the butt of the rake. For a moment, raking leaves symbolizes perfect harmony in an otherwise chaotic world; Dad interrupts the nostalgia with secrets that he doesn't tell mom; secrets she knows, but we promise not to remind her. His eyes, like lightning bugs, begin to flash and raking leaves becomes a storytelling festival of a young man's rites.

"Here, take mine. I'll go get the other rake."

Alzheimer's killed his dad last spring. Dad says Granddaddy had been dead to him for three years. Granddaddy's death was the result of a slow decline: first his mind; then his body. During the last few months of his life, Granddaddy sporadically shouted choruses from hymns like Russell Kelso Carter's "Standing on the Promises." Granddaddy might have been unable to address his son by the correct name, but he was fully able to remember the words to the hymn that represented the man he chose to become. At Granddaddy's funeral, each son offered his eulogy: Dad read a poem and led an a cappella rendition of John Sammis' hymn "Trust and Obey." After the funeral, Dad handed me a carnation from Granddaddy's casket and ensured me he would die a proud father.

"Remember whose you are, son, and who you represent."

During cool autumn afternoons, Dad likes to trek north towards the mountains where the leaves are changing and the cool air offers an escape from the busyness of a Sunday through Sunday workweek. He often voices his dream: to live on a remote mountain in a house hidden deep in the woods tucked behind a fortress of trees. "Your mother couldn't stand the bugs, Jon," he offers as reasoning for dwelling in a cookie-cutter subdivision. His infatuation with mountain living explains why he plants several trees a year with the intention of encaging his acre and eliminating visibility of the house from the road.

Diligently surveying our progress, he ponders the leaves and inevitably poses some sort of philosophical cosmic revelation: *what can be learned from a leaf?* Dad reminds me that raking leaves is not as much about the act of raking as the opportunity to see ordinary objects from new and interesting perspectives. The most important thing my dad has taught me is this: "You're not working for me, son; you're working for the Lord." My response usually echoes something like: and, working for the Lord doesn't pay much, but the retirement benefits are out of this world.

**RODERICK  
McGILLIVRAY  
NO. 1** Seth Scheving  
Watercolor  
42 x 62





**IDENTITY** Janna McGaha  
Oil on Canvas  
18 x 24

## GREENHOUSE EFFECT

Jake Dunn

Against the door frame  
sacks of fertilizer wait  
for the taste of diesel  
to spit shrapnel in my face.  
Above my head, sheet metal hangs  
from the gable, a loose tooth,  
or guillotine blade.

I step into a jungle—a war.  
And I've never been to Vietnam,  
and neither has my father,  
but he says it was just like this:  
booby traps, claymores, punji-sticks  
all hidden behind, beneath the faces  
of ferns, Easter Lilies, and Poinsettias.

And I walk so slowly,  
my thumb cocked,  
my finger aimed  
for whatever dangers lurk—  
a garden hose snake,  
a flower pot explosive—  
the enemy always unseen.

As I reach the rear screen door,  
the buffeting fan blades churn  
the air like helicopter rotors,  
waiting to carry me home—  
away from this war I made.  
I pull my magnolia-cone smoke grenade  
and leave it all behind.

And they all will ask me  
where I've been,  
and what I did there  
but I can't say—

## **SECRET: NOT JUST A DEODORANT BRAND**

Emmy Wheatley

Avoiding the exchange of discarded snot  
as I try to predict my opponent's next move,  
my head and arms are captured in your scented deodorant.  
Your arms lock behind my back  
and we hold for three seconds, uncomfortable;  
two pats, then you're gone.

The collision of falling buildings,  
not because we were celebrating anything,  
but instead a requirement of your social protocol  
Your intentions became a funeral  
or some bearded feeling that I never could place  
in a buried shoe box.

## STATIC MATTER

Rafael Alcantar, Jr.

Your fingers are meatless bones  
entangled by veins that I can trace  
to the heart I can see through your chest.  
With every beat, your skin, pulled tight  
across your ribs, shifts out of my reach.  
Your hands run across rough patches of me.  
I cup my hands around your own every chance  
I get, careful not to break unfired porcelain.

## PICASSO

Rafael Alcantar, Jr.

I want you to love me  
like you do your cigarettes,  
my body, and that feeling  
you get when you make me  
promise you things. I miss  
your hand in my hair, tangled  
inbetween your fingers—and  
your breath in my ear or your head  
on my chest, listening to that irregular  
heartbeat you used to miss when  
you were away. You dug fingers  
into layers of skin, my own,  
or otherwise. Now, you come  
home, dented from travels and drunk  
off pride or lust (one of those seven  
things you have never believed in.)  
Even so, I can't stop myself  
from waiting for you in our garden,  
wrapped in our first memories,  
keeping from the cold of your  
distance, replaying how I got here.

## THE UNAFFECTED THERAPIST

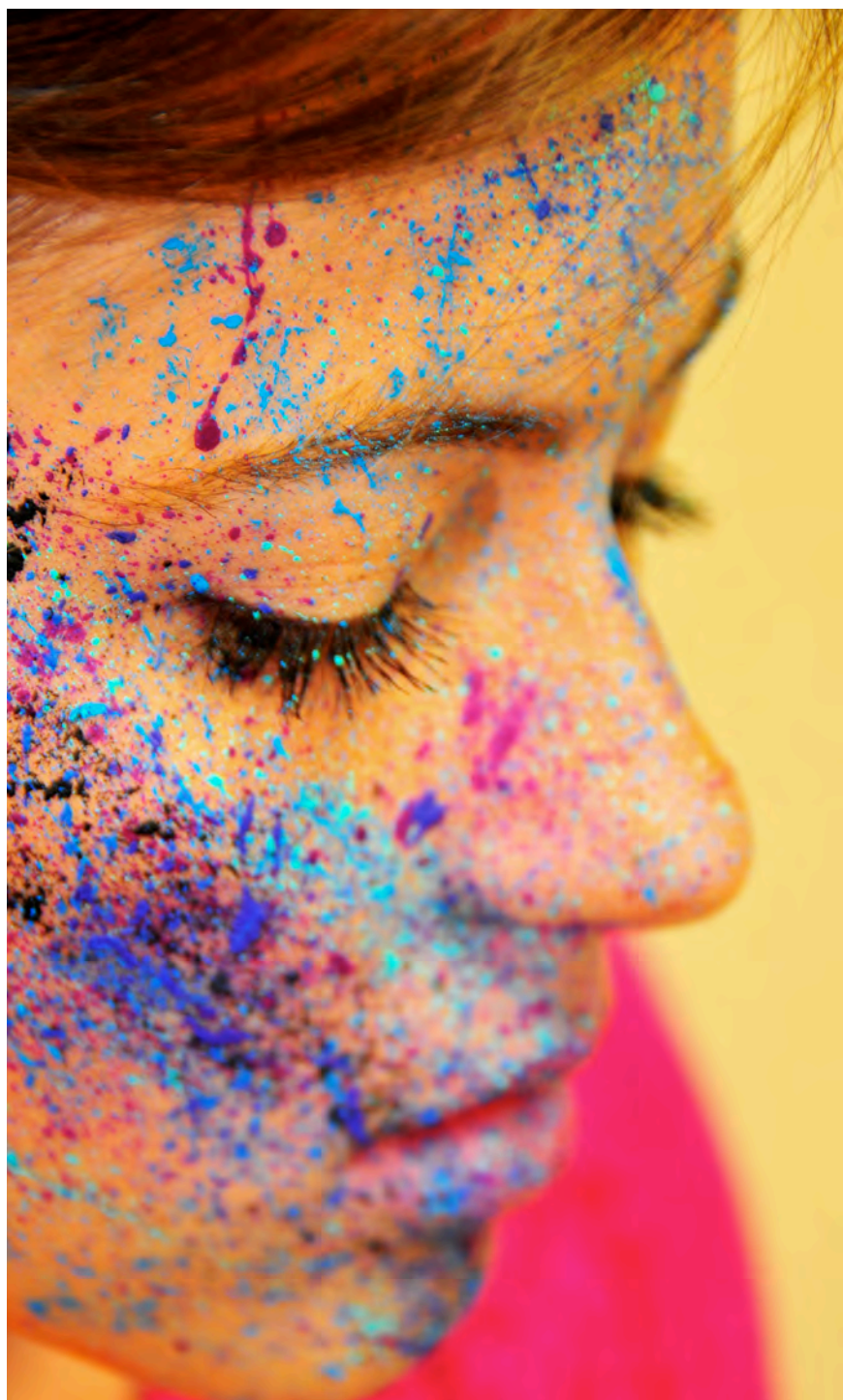
Anna Marie Davis

"And how does that make you feel,"  
as you lie there on that pleather couch,  
feet propped and shaking, so high-strung  
you can't even think straight? You're all  
Prozaced out. "I see. Hmm..." it appears  
I have run out of doodle room, but  
drone on whiny finger-biter, don't mind me.  
I suppose I can muster attention to a few of your  
remaining complaints: so you find yourself  
crying a lot and you suspect your mother  
may have something to do with this.  
"Yes, how very perceptive." That reminds me,  
I am out of milk. Well how about that, a tiny space  
between *thinks too much* and *doesn't let go enough*.  
Here, let me coddle your words with my empty  
loops—around and around your tiring *l's*—  
such a convoluted mess. Good thing  
your time just ran out. My notes  
were about to slip over the edge.





**SHAY'S HANDS** Lauren Sloan  
Oil on Canvas  
38 x 45





**FROM THE SERIES** Rachel Spoon  
**“JULIE”** Digital Photography  
Nikon D300

## NOW HERE

Drew Welborn

I glanced at the LAX departures board, then at Kaylene. I gave a light shrug—looked like another two hour delay. It had rained the whole trip—we'd barely left the conference center all week—but the heavy storms hadn't started until this morning. And now the constant battering of rain and violent wind threatened to shatter the large windows lining the terminal.

"Well, Cal," Kaylene said, "how about something to drink? I sure could use something with this weather." She looked down at her phone, and her fingers began to quickly dance across the tiny keys.

"Yeah, that sounds like a good idea." I held my hand out, prompting her to lead the way. "After you."

When she didn't respond, I figured the crowded airport must have drowned out the sound of my voice. I quickly pulled my outstretched hand to my hair, trying to make it seem like that was the intended plan all along.

"Did you say something?" she finally asked.

"*Drink*. Sounds good," I answered, as I continued to run my hand through my thinning hair, feeling what was left of it. Rogaine was supposed to be waiting on me back home. Or at least, that's what my wife, Jane, had said—she was on it. I told her she might have to forget about the Cheetos or Oreos this time, but she gave me this look like there was no way that was happening. I guess we've all got our weaknesses.

Kaylene looked up from her phone. "We passed by this place I thought looked neat. Does that work for you?"

"Sure thing." I held my hand out again. "I'm all for neat and, uh...hip." I placed extra emphasis on the last word, popping my lips.

"Right," she chuckled, "Coo-ool." She grabbed my hand and pulled me along.

Even after five years of working together, I was still surprised at the physical affection Kaylene would show me, always hugs or pats on the back, or jabs and nudges—so playful. When she had first walked into the consultancy firm back in Atlanta, she had seemed so comfortable around the partners, shaking hands and trying to make conversation. She was young and had just finished graduate school. Some of the guys had been a little worried about bringing in someone so young. Plus, she was a young *woman*. That didn't bother me, though, as long as she held up her end.

She wasn't just young, though; she was fresh, and she eventually proved her worth with a wealth of new ideas. She even helped secure one of our most prestigious, new clients last month. That was why we were in Los Angeles—putting the finishing touches on the deal. Kaylene was breathing new life into the firm. Into us. Even, into me.

As we walked back through the terminal, I lagged behind, admiring her figure—something I had taken more notice of the past few weeks. Slender, but just enough shape to be accentuated by her clothes. Her attire—her travel fashion, I liked to call it—was nothing like my own. I always tried to keep it casual, like my current combination of faded jeans and purple Clemson Tigers sweatshirt with the worn-out collar and cuffs. It never occurred to me to buy a new sweatshirt; its beat-up quality made it seem vintage to me. And wasn't vintage always stylish? Jane said no, no, it wasn't, but I still made it work.

Kaylene did too, of course, but in an entirely different manner. Tonight, she was strutting through the terminal wearing a sharp black blazer with white buttons paired with black pants, slightly gray pinstripes spanning the length of her legs. I could hear the clacking of her bright yellow heels drowning out the sounds of all the other people in the crowded airport. She was dressed as if she was on her way to a meeting her entire career depended on. She was always dressed like this. Nine o'clock on a Thursday night, trying to board a plane that would take us home, and Kaylene still didn't bother to dress casually.

Then there was her hair, caressing her back. Watching it bounce gracefully as she navigated her way through the crowd made me only worry more about my recent thinning troubles. And Jane's hair troubles, too. My wife had always had long hair, much like Kaylene's actually—long, thick, luscious—but brown, not auburn, and duller. But now, my wife's new hairstyle was totally different—bad different, not good. Jane had premiered it a few weeks ago. A pixie cut—she had told me that's what it was called. She had said it was a hip, new style, but I thought it looked like a defective Chia Pet begging for water.

"Here. Doesn't this place look interesting?" Kaylene stopped at an entrance, pointing towards the sign above us. Arrived—that was the name. Black letters inside a lime-green circle. A slogan underneath read, "U R Now Here!" next to two stick-figures who were jumping up next to their cartoon luggage. Perfect mascots for an airport bar. She walked in before I could agree.

There were only two other people seated at the bar. Their bags hung loosely on the backs of their chairs. A blue folder and loose papers lined the bar space in front of them, cornered in by two empty glass mugs. One was gesturing towards the papers, but the other didn't seem too interested. She was paying more attention to her phone.

"Come on," I said, pressing my hand to Kaylene's back and gently pushing her along. She pulled the strap of her purse higher on her shoulder, like I had disturbed it. "Let's sit at this end. We'll be able to keep an eye on the weather." We made our way to the end of the bar opposite the other two people.

We chose the final two seats and sat down, leaning forward to place our elbows on the countertop. Just a few feet to our left, we could see the roving masses of travelers pass by as the entire side of Arrived was open to the busy terminal. Directly across the walkway, the storm continued to pound and rattle the windows.

In front of us, behind the counter, a mirror stretched the full length of the bar. The reflection of everything behind us was blurred, but we were



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close enough to see ourselves in perfect detail. Kaylene was looking down, and I turned to see why. She was busy tapping the keys of her phone, again.

"You sure have been busy with your phone," I said.

"Hmmm?" She looked up at me. She raised her eyebrows, like she thought she should have been paying attention.

"*Your phone*," I answered. "You've been texting your boyfriend, right?"

"My boyfriend?"

"Yeah. What's his name? Darren, isn't it?"

Kaylene laughed and placed her hand on my shoulder. She squeezed her fingers. "Darren? We broke up like six months ago. I told you that, didn't I?"

I shook my head.

"In the break room? I had spilt coffee everywhere and you helped me clean it up? I guess I was all distraught or something because of the split," she said. She sounded sure it was me.

"No," I started. "I've never cleaned up spilt coffee in the break room."

"Oh." She pulled back, looking slightly embarrassed. "It must have been John then. Wow, I'm sorry." A quick laugh escaped her. She pulled her fingers into a fist and brought them to her lips. She seemed to be trying to figure something out. Suddenly, she pointed a finger as though she understood. "You guys just seem—"

The bartender walked up and placed a bowl of chips on the bar in front of us. "Sorry about the wait. What can I get for you?" He pulled his hands through his thick, dark hair that went just past his ears.

"Oh, good. Chips. I'll just have a rum and Coke," Kaylene answered.

I hesitated, but ordered the same. I hadn't actually had a real drink since the night I got hired by our firm. But it wasn't like I was driving home tonight.

The bartender placed lime-green coasters in front of us that displayed the bar's misspelled slogan before once more pulling his hands through his hair. I looked at the bowl of chips with a concerned eye. Strands of loose hair wouldn't make for a good garnish. I lightly pushed the bowl away with the back of my hand.

Picking up my coaster, I noticed something seemed off about the "U R Now Here!" but I wasn't quite sure what. I set it back down as the bartender produced two glasses and began to pour in the dark liquids.

I turned my attention to Kaylene: "What were you saying? Me? John?" I laughed. "The guy's a moron," and he smelled like roast beef. Surely she hadn't confused me with John.

She drew her lips tightly together, then pushed them out, pursing them. Her eyes narrowed as if she didn't know how to answer, or didn't want to.

Her phone vibrated, and her fingers once more went to work. She tried to form a response to me: "Oh, I don't kn—"

"Here are your drinks," the bartender interrupted her. Again. I could see his reflection in the mirror behind the counter, now a part of our image. He had that California-tan. A noticeable stubble darkened his cheeks, although it seemed tamed enough to actually be intentional—rugged in that cologne counter kind of way. His green shirt, snug at the sleeves and chest, separated my reflection from Kaylene's. I wished he would attend to the other pair at the opposite end of the bar.

"Thank God," Kaylene said, smiling up at him, sounding relieved. I gave her a confused look. She must have noticed. "I mean, thanks," she said.

I nodded my appreciation as Kaylene downed her drink in one satisfying gulp. I thought only stressed people drank like that, or nervous people.

"Lovely," I told her. "I don't know if I can keep up."

I expected her to laugh but she didn't. Instead, she asked, "Have you told Jane our flight was delayed?"

Jane. I hadn't actually. The eleven o'clock news would have already been on in Atlanta, and Jane hadn't seen that program in years. I knew she was already asleep, probably had been for at least two hours. It wouldn't do any good to call her.

"No, it's a little past her bedtime," I said. "I bet she's been out since eight."

"Eight?" Kaylene sounded shocked. "I *wish* I could go to bed that early. Maybe another twenty years or so, right?" She laughed and nudged my arm.

I didn't think it was quite as funny. I slowly sipped my drink. As she quieted down, she leaned forward, waving the bartender in our direction.

"Need something else?" he asked her.

"Just fill this one back up, good sir," she said. I could sense the playfulness in her voice. Kaylene had always enjoyed this—flirting. She didn't take her eyes off him as he refilled her glass. She pointed to his shirt, saying, "You know, that's an interesting shirt you've got on."

I didn't think it was anything special. It was just a green shirt—the same lime color that was splashed around the entire bar. Across the front, it read: "U Have Arrived." More stick figures were underneath, only now they were holding hands. They seemed to be having a good time doing whatever they were doing. I couldn't be quite sure.

"Oh, thank you," the bartender said as he topped off her drink.

"You wouldn't happen to sell them in here, would you?" Kaylene drew her lips in, thinning them.

"Sorry, but we don't." He grabbed his shirt and pulled it out from his body. It must not have been painted onto his chest. "You think they would since management actually gives us a couple different ones to wear. Like a rotation. This one's actually my favorite."

"Really? It looks like they're dancing." Kaylene rocked her shoulders up and down.

"I know, right? That's why I like it. Looks like they're having a good time, huh?"

I just stared at them. I raised my glass and gulped down the remaining liquid.

Kaylene nodded. "Dancing's always a good time."

The bartender said, "I know what you—"

"I like to dance." It was my turn to interrupt. They turned towards me, like they had forgotten I was even there.

Kaylene looked confused. "What?"

"Dance. I like to dance."

Silence surrounded the three of us, like *my* presence was intruding on *their* conversation. Hadn't it been obvious that Kaylene and I were the separate party. The bartender wasn't invited.

He must have understood: "Well, let me know if you need anything else." He walked off.

Kaylene watched him move away before turning back to me. "I never thought of you as the dancing type," she said.

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"Are you kidding? Yeah," I started. "I'm all about dancing the night away. Jane and I used to like to go to this little jazz club—Ballew's." I pointed a finger down at the bar. "Right downtown." Of course, I didn't need to tell Kaylene it had been years since Jane and I had been dancing.

"Ballew's, huh? I went there once when I first moved to Atlanta," Kaylene said, looking down at her drink. "Seemed like a bunch of sweater vests and elastic waistbands." She pressed a button on her phone, then looked up as if she realized something. She quickly added, "but it was still fun. I like this salsa place, though. God, you'd lose ten pounds you'd sweat so much. That might be good for you since you love to dance."

"Salsa? That's like the tango, right? Maybe you can show me some moves. I'm a really quick learner." I could see myself out on the dance floor, wooing Kaylene with my steps and moves. I'd twirl her around. Move from side to side with her. We'd dance all night.

"I bet you are, Cal," Kaylene said. "I bet you are."

We sat there for a few minutes, watching the condensation form on the outside of our glasses. I snuck a glance at the mirror. Kaylene's shoulders rose and then lowered as she slowly exhaled.

"You want to know something funny?" she asked. "My last boyfriend would never dance."

"Really?" I assumed she was referring to Darren. I wondered if she meant to tell me this. Maybe she thought I was John.

"Yeah, we'd go out and he'd just sit there at the bar, watching. Like he was waiting on something," she said.

I'd never thought of dancing being so critical to a relationship. It seemed so trivial, so small. Jane and I had danced at our wedding. We had danced at parties and receptions—I'd never felt anything. Maybe just a little bit of fun, but nothing more. Dancing had always seemed more like an obligation, something for Jane. Not for me.

But Kaylene wanted to dance, and I would dance with her. "So," I started, trying to determine the right question to ask, "You want someone who dances?"

Kaylene looked up at me, a thin smile slowly appearing. Her eyebrow rose. "Not just actual dancing, Cal. It's a *gesture*." She waved her hands like there was some hidden meaning I wasn't getting.

"I think that's a gesture," I said, pointing to her waving hands.

She pulled her hand back, covering her eyes. She groaned: "Oh, men. You never get it." She started to laugh, and I joined her. As we slowly quieted down, I had to prove that I did get it. She had given me an opening.

I stood up and moved around to the left side of Kaylene. I held out my hand. She squinted her eyes, puzzled.

"All right, then, will you dance with me?" I asked.

She smirked: "Are you crazy? We're in an airport." She must have thought I was joking.

"So," I said. "Just a short one."

"Don't you think this is a little *too...public*?" she asked slowly.

"Come on. It's a gesture. From me to you."

"Um..." she started. "Okay, I guess." She grabbed my hand and I led her out of the bar.



"Out here? In front of everybody?" she asked. "What will people think?" Her eyes widened.

"We'll never see any of them again," I said.

We pushed through the crowd towards the windows. Rain continued to pelt against the glass. We could hear thunder start to sound outside—beating like drums to lead us on.

I placed my left hand just above Kaylene's hip, and I could sense her straighten her back, like she was bracing herself for a rough ride. I began to move gently, intertwining the fingers of my right hand with the fingers of her left as we outstretched our arms. We started slowly, simply swaying back and forth, back and forth.

She laughed. "I can't believe I'm doing this. I think people are staring." She was looking around at the people walking by, her eyes darting around nervously.

"Let them look," I said. I wanted them to—to look at me with Kaylene.

We began to spin around, and I could see our reflection dancing in the glass of the window. Water washed down over us, like we were outside in the middle of the storm, dancing underneath the downpour. We were so close to the window I could only see us against the darkness outside. Everyone else blended together.

I looked at Kaylene. Her face was turning red. Surely she wasn't out of breath already.

"Well," she started, a brief chuckle escaping her lips, "The sooner you twirl me, the better."

I let go of her hip as I raised her arm up. She spun around, gracefully, effortlessly. Her head leaned back, and her hair flowed freely as she moved. When she finished, I moved my hand farther around, towards the small of her back. Her muscles tensed as I was trying to draw her closer. Finally, I would feel Kaylene against me.

But she pressed her free hand to my chest, firmly. She stopped me. "I think that's far enough," she said.

I didn't understand. How could she not want me to pull her closer?

She must have seen my expression: "This is going somewhere it shouldn't."

No it wasn't. It was going right where it needed to. I said, "You don't want to do this? But, you said it's a gesture."

She sighed, pressing the bridge of her nose between her thumb and finger. "Yeah, but I also said it's just a good time. Didn't you hear me say that to the bartender?"

"But, we *can* have a good time," I said. "I *want* to have a good time with you."

Kaylene smirked, and a laugh escaped from her mouth. She began walking back to the bar.

I followed behind: "Wait. Please wait."

But she didn't. When she reached our seats, she gathered her purse.

"Can't you just listen?"

"No, Cal. There's nothing to listen to."

"But, there is." I reached out to her, but she smacked my hand away.

She grinned and placed her hand on her hip. Her eyes scanned me

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from the top of my thinning hair to the worn toes of my shoes. I could feel them scrutinizing everything. They didn't hold back. "Don't forget you're a married man." She slowly sucked her teeth before adding the final touch: "a lucky, married man."

I glanced down at my feet before looking back up at her. "Lucky?" I asked.

"Yeah." She nodded. "*Lucky*." She didn't jab or nudge—there was nothing playful about her expression. Kaylene sounded certain. She walked back out of Arrived, and I saw her vanish behind the hurried travelers. I sat back down at the bar, holding up the empty glass that marked my seat. The bartender came over and took it to fill up again.

I looked down at the green coaster that had been underneath the glass. I finally realized what was wrong with it. The "U R Now Here!" was too large for the round circle. The letters were squeezed together, gasping for air. "Now Here!" was on a line by itself. But at that moment, it didn't say that. I only saw "NowHere!"—only one word. Nowhere. And that's what I felt as the bartender returned, a fresh slice of lime on the rim of my drink. I picked it up, swirling the copper liquid around, listening to the ice clang against the glass.



**CARYN KARRIKER** Seth Scheving  
**NO. 1** Watercolor  
66 x 42

**THERE ISN'T  
A WORD FOR  
EVERYTHING IV**

Lucy Nordlinger  
Oil on Panel  
45 x 30





# BEING DELUSIONAL

Cara Dillon

Months ago, I decided to sign up for a half marathon. That is, I paid someone else so I could run 13.1 miles with over 500 other sweaty, panting participants also thinking, "Why on earth did I decide to do this?" If that isn't enough to make you question my sanity, a little history about the marathon might help. The myth states the modern day marathon derives its name from the roughly twenty-six-mile distance between the cities of Marathon and Athens. After the Battle of Marathon between the Greeks and the Persians in 490 B.C., the Greeks sent a runner back to Athens to declare their victory. Legend has it that once he arrived in the city and announced the win, he dropped dead. Historians question the tale, but I'm confident that they must not be runners. I don't have a death wish, so I voluntarily subjected myself to only half of a death sentencing run.

This might cause you to assume that I'm a runner, a long-legged, string-bean-type distance runner whose stride resembles that of a Kenyan in the Boston Marathon. Maybe you're envisioning a runner baring a grin and barely glistening with sweat as she steps across the finish line. Let me clarify: I run, but I am not that kind of runner. It was only three years ago that I attempted my first 10K race. Before that, I had never run more than a mile for sheer sport or delight or anything other than punishment from a coach.

In training for that first race, I figured I should run more than 5,280 feet. I went to the gym for two or three weeks and only worked up to about two and a half miles, the last mile congested with fits of huffing and a sloppy, flat-footed gait. I was terrified. I told my family, who I was planning to run with, that it wasn't going to happen. If I couldn't run two miles on a springy, rubber track in an air-conditioned gym, there was no way I was going to be able to run 6.2 miles on the Fourth of July around downtown Atlanta.

My father laughed at me. "You're nineteen years old," he said. "I'm fifty-four. You'll be fine." But, I was unconvinced and continued to protest. Then he told me, "The only reason I can run six miles and you can't is because I know I can. I've done it before. You just don't think you can."

Really? Never having run six miles, or even four, didn't mean that I just *thought* I couldn't, but that I was physically incapable. My belief had nothing to do with it. My legs, lungs, and ligaments were the real issue here. He is a doctor, for crying out loud. He should have known that.

But the louder I protested, the more I wondered if he could be right. I was nineteen and in relatively good shape, so what was really stopping me from running farther? Could it have been that when I rounded the corner into the first lap of my second mile every synapse in my brain transmitted

this defense: "What are you thinking? You can't do this! Stop now!" Certainly, that couldn't be it.

Driven by curiosity or a desire to prove my dad wrong, I went back to the gym telling myself all the way there, "You are going to run five miles. Five. Do you hear me, body? You're going to run five miles today." Part of me still wants to say that it didn't happen, that my father was wrong. But, neither of those things proved true. I ran five miles. I'll concede that I was slightly short-winded, but I still puffed through every step. I was floored, not by the run, but by the fact that this delusion worked.

Christians, myself included, hold fast to plenty of delusions. A "delusion" is a belief that is firmly maintained despite being contradicted by rational evidence. But, maybe "delusion" is the wrong word. I have not become a Richard Dawkins convert. I don't think "self-deception" is right either. Nonetheless, Christianity has taught me how to believe in things that I don't have verification for. Apologists might fight me concerning our "verification," but even they will admit that Christianity demands a hefty level of faith. The writer of Hebrews defines "faith" as "being certain of what we hope for and sure of what we do not see." "Faith" is the willing submission to an idea that can't concretely be defended but nevertheless, is sincerely believed. That's certainly a much better word than delusion, although the definitions don't seem to vary much.

The scriptures go on to state that Christians are "new creations" that are being transformed by the renewing of their minds. I've always found it interesting that it doesn't say, transformed by "greater ethical action" or "more generous activity." Actions are not the change agent. It is an overhaul of a person's inner thoughts that will lead to his or her transformation.

In the second letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul states, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image." The word "contemplate" carries a meaning that transcends simple, shallow thought. Again, converts are not transformed through walking or talking like a Christian should, but by contemplating the Lord, by mentally absorbing and studying fully and deeply. Another version translates the word "contemplate" as "beholding," a word suggesting the poetic saturation of the eyes, to gaze upon the beauty of God and subsequently fill one's mind with the sight. Later in the same letter, Paul expresses a belief and admits its contradiction of reality by declaring, "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

The Christian church and my father aren't the only ones emphasizing the power of thoughts over perception. If that were the case, I could end now, admitting that the lot of us have been swindled. The authority of thoughts to contradict reasonably predicably occurs in science as well. Medical authorities can be grouped with both my dad and Bible believers. Despite research by doctors and psychologists, the placebo effect remains largely misunderstood because of the unobservable influence of the mind over the body. Experiments involve giving an actual drug to one group of patients while a "placebo," containing no real curative substance, is given to a second group of patients. Both groups are told they are receiving the real drug. The phenomenon of the placebo effect occurs

CARA DILLON

when a patient given the placebo reports their ailment or malady has been alleviated.

Generally, outside of those who deny the evidence completely, researchers offer two explanations. The first camp claims the placebo effect is a biochemical effect. Patients who believe they are feeling better because of the medicine begin to hope for a cure, and their hopeful perspective actually leads to a hormone release that justifies the improved condition. The second camp isn't sold on a real physical improvement, only that patients *feel* better because they believe their condition is ameliorated. Either way, the truth that exists within a person's mind counters reasonably anticipated consequences.

The mystery that links the mind and the body eludes scholars with numerous degrees, but Hindu swamis embrace it. The practice of yoga depends upon a belief in a mind and body connection. Originally, before American women ran off with the practice and implemented it in every gym, the practice of "yoga" was known as an integral part the Hindu religion. In all four of the divisions of Hindu yoga practices, an intense mental concentration is employed. In particular, Karma Yoga, believed to be the "Path of Right Action," focuses on the attainment of a mental separation from physical work. If someone can attain a separation, there must have originally been a tangible connection. The purpose of separating the two is not to gain the ability to act without mental regard. They aren't seeking guiltless immorality. But, they seek to assign superior value to actions through renewed mental motivation. In Hindu belief, all actions are regarded as neutral. Motivations are the exclusive dictators of honorable actions. Therefore, it's not only true of gift giving; it really is "the thought that counts" with any action. The mind, not the action itself, has supremacy to dictate morality.

Buddhists make what I believe to be an even loftier demand on the faculty of our ideas. The teachings of Buddha claim that we can transcend all suffering in our lives through following the guidelines of "The Eightfold Path." These would be simple if we could complete them like our grocery shopping, but only three of the elements of the path are grounded in ethical, physical activities; the other five reside solely within the mind. These five elements are separated into two groups: Wisdom Training and Concentration Training. Wisdom Training, involving "right thought" and "right understanding," is hinged upon thinking the "right" things. This instruction suggests that meditating on truth will lead to overcoming suffering. Distress is alleviated, not through physically doing better or working harder, but through thinking. Concentration training involves meditating on proper emotions, moods, and their origins to develop control of the mind. The mind isn't only governing physical suffering, but emotional misery as well. At the heart of these two practices is a belief that concentration on proper thoughts, plus some ethical parameters, produces a positive reality— the release from the suffering of life itself.

I don't mean to suggest that belief is all that's necessary to overcome facts of reality. I've never been able to *think* away a cold by denying its existence or its acknowledgement by cough-covered bystanders. I don't think anyone can *think* his or her way out of jury duty or into winning



the lottery. No amount of positive thinking or affirmations will ever enable me to become a Shaq-sized professional basketball player or an Afro-sporting lead singer of a Motown tribute band. But, I'm not convinced that running and religion are the only areas in which our thinking has an effect. The rules of reality still exist. But, with so many researchers, philosophers, and religious teachers exploring the mystery of how our beliefs affect reality, I have to think they may be on to something.

The day of my half marathon, my sister asked me how far I had run during my training. I squirmed and fudged my answer. I had several months notice for the event, so there really was no excuse, but I had run only six miles, and my final month of training was nonexistent. I tried, really, but my schedule just didn't allow it. But, when we stood at the start line, I knew I wouldn't even get to mile ten if I meditated on how unprepared I was. Instead, I set a goal to run the first eight miles. I tried not to think about the fact that I'd never consecutively ran that far, ever. It wasn't a goal of aspiration either, a statement of "Oh, that would be nice if..." No. I was going to run eight miles and I made sure my body was aware of it. My positive thinking didn't keep my knees from beginning to ache around mile four, or my toes from beginning to blister around mile six. My body was sure to remind me that my objective was an unjustified delusion.

Still, I refused to stop. Trust me; I wanted to. My arches felt like they were crumbling away in my shoes while—as I approached mile seven—the skin on my little toes began to wear off. But the closer I got to mile eight, the more my thoughts moved from "Good heavens, are they sure this is only a mile? Did someone move the sign as a cruel joke?" to "I can, no, I will run to nine." A battle transpired in my mind, setting thought against thought, each belief warring for the control over reality. Whether it was willpower or deception or faith, I ran past the post declaring we'd made it to mile eight and persisted through every aching step until mile nine.

My pace for the following 4.1 miles varied from a slight jog, emphasis on the slight, to a wobbly walk. Regardless of my dignity deficient limp, I finished the race. However, my "mind over matter" mentality must have had an expiration date. Hours after, I was hobbling, shuffling, dragging myself to lunch, looking more like an arthritic seventy-year-old man than the finisher of a half-marathon. But, this shouldn't be startling. I know delusions end painfully. Anticipating his death as a martyr, Paul writes, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

The King James Version translates the Bible's definition of faith in this way: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith, or delusion, is a manifestation of human hope. I hoped to finish the race. Christians hope for shared glory with God. The sick hope for restoration. Hindus hope for better karma. Buddhists hope for freedom from suffering.

All hopes will obstinately disregard rational contradictions. No one hopes for reality. In the battle between my ears, beliefs will contend for my faith, but arguments of rationality remain unarmed. Hope will win because ignorance is not bliss—hope is.

CARA DILLON

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**18** Lucy Nordlinger  
Oil on Panel  
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**FROM THE SERIES**  
**“CANCER”**

Taylor Cash  
Digital Photography  
Nikon D700

## ROADKILL: CENSORED AND LAME

Emmy Wheatley

"How do vampires look so good if they can't see themselves in mirrors?" Sullivan asked. He always thought in-depth about everything. If he wasn't telling me some strange trivia, he was asking an unanswerable question. He seemed to know everything compared to me. I was just this small, awkward ginger compared to his always tan, muscular figure. He seemed to be everything I wanted to be, with his tattoos, long hair, and the way he always had a cigarette dangling out of the corner of his mouth—a badass.

"I don't know...maybe they get together for shaving parties or something?" I suggested.

"Vampires are loners. They live in coffins in dark rooms by themselves. Come on, Fawn, you can come up with something better than that." He always called me Fawn. In Sullivan's mind, he was a buck and I was just a little fawn he was teaching—but I didn't mind. I tried to get my cigarette to hang like his, but it fell from my mouth and burnt my arm.

He smiled, but ignored it for the most part, for my sake. Moving on he said, "Did you know a duck's quack doesn't echo?"

I didn't. I told him one I looked up earlier. "The average person's left hand does 56% of the typing."

He answered back with, "Everyone's tongue print is different, just like fingerprints." This is how our high school days went. We used to lay around in his garage, and throw facts back and forth—trying to outdo each other.

Back then Sullivan lived in his garage, hanging a hammock from the ceiling. He had his radio tuned to NPR. At night he switched over to some independent college-run radio station, using the neighbor's bushes as a bathroom—only using his house for occasional showers. But most of the time we would just take a bar of soap to an abandoned stripper pit back off in the woods, where we would just bathe in the lake. Sullivan never feared my judgment—he would always just get naked. I'd keep my shorts on, fearing that he would make fun of my ghost-like paleness.

He could have lived anywhere. Just grow a beard and disappear into the wilderness. No one would even question whether he was doing all right or not. His only weakness was making his own food, mostly because he couldn't use his kitchen. His dad had pushed him into the garage saying only, "Sully, you got to give us some space." When Sullivan referred to his dad he always said, "that sorry illegal alien." So when he told me this story, I spaced out, ignored the rest of what he was saying and thought of that round, green monster, Mike Wazowski from *Monsters, Inc.* I've always found that funny because the name of Mike's best friend is Sullivan in *Monsters, Inc.*

But I never told Sully that; I'd have never heard the end of it. He would've been calling me Mike or hiding to pop out to scare me, just like in the movie.

Six years later I found myself sipping the bitter coffee that always seemed to be prepared differently than I had instructed. I sat down in a chair that appeared welcoming, across from my date, Sierra. It was an awkward first date arranged by a few of our mutual friends, who happened to be the center of most of our conversation. She drank some kind of fruit smoothie, and I couldn't help but judge her as one of those health freaks who counted every calorie and filled her hair with different dyes to look younger. She was probably twenty-four trying to look eighteen. When we ran out of topics, she started pulling out questions that would provoke lengthy answers. It was like she had flashcards hidden somewhere. She would say things like, "What's your greatest fear?" or "What's your favorite movie?" Sinking into my overly cushioned chair, I answered her questions and strained to come up with my own, simply responding with, "What about you?" I wanted to tell her that crocodiles can't stick their tongues out, but I have learned to keep all the random facts I know to myself on dates. Eventually she got around to asking the question everyone asked me. They would dance around it pretending they hadn't noticed, but I could tell they were all staring, wondering. "What's the story behind your scars?" They would say it like it was a question that just popped in their heads all of a sudden—I knew they had been debating asking me, pondering the best way to approach the subject sensitively.

I had a couple red marks over my neck and face, the most noticeable one over my left eye made me look and feel like Scar from *Lion King*. I often wanted to quote him saying only, "I am surrounded by idiots." It didn't bother me much to have scars but to have to repeat the story, reliving it over and over again, got old.

It all started my freshman year of high school when my parents got a divorce, not because of any fall out or fight, they just couldn't make the long distance relationship work. My mom was offered a better paying job in a town just two hours from our house. But the drive was impossible to do every day, so they just grew apart. Our moms were real close, Sullivan's and mine. I guess when she moved out, he sorta took her place in my life. Anyway, we became close that summer. I don't really know how to describe our relationship—I'd like to say he was my best friend or screwed up mentor or older brother, but none of those titles seemed to fit.

Sierra made a face to make me believe she was really listening intently, but her eyes were shifty—focusing more on the people around us than me. But I understood—I was a people watcher too. So I just continued, knowing that if I wasn't talking I'd have to listen to her talk.

Working two jobs and selling cigarettes to my friends and me, among other illegal products, Sullivan bought a new red mustang. The summer I was fifteen, he taught me to drive it. I didn't really want to learn. It was a stick which was always threatening to me, plus I was underage, but he insisted—mostly so I could drive him to Taco Bell when he was drunk or under the influence of some other drug. One night I was driving him back from our favorite swimming hole. He was wasted, cranking the radio to its

EMMY WHEATLEY

highest volume. The foggy night made it hard to see, and the music didn't help with my concentration, which was focused primarily on keeping the car moving and on the road. Between deep breaths, I saw a buck jump out into my headlights. Sullivan had taught me not to swerve, explaining that when drivers swerve they usually cause more damage to their car than if they, just keep the wheel straight. So I only hit the brakes.

The deer froze in the road, but at impact, the damn thing rolled over the hood, its legs broke through the windshield. It kicked and kicked, trying to escape, broken glass flying everywhere as its hooves punctured and scratched.

Sierra jumped in to say, "No way!" This came off as something a junior high girl would say as she popped her gum and twirled her shiny blonde hair with her fingers. I held back a sarcastic, "Yeah way," and kept on with my story.

I only remember my screams, and my frantic efforts to recline my seat or open the door. Sully was too drunk to fight—he took it like the man he was, or tried to be. I finally got out of the car, with the buck still attached to the windshield. I must have run to Sullivan's side and got him out, although I really don't remember doing so. It's funny though, I do remember cursing him for always wearing a seatbelt, one of the only safety precautions I ever saw him use, but it made it almost impossible to get him out of the car. I never saw him cry or scream or even recognize his pain—all he said was, "Perry, deer are supposed to be gentle."

I watched her face, just a few nods mixed with raised eyebrows, and she went back to chasing her straw around her smoothie with her tongue. He had two tattoos on opposing forearms. One was a buck; he said it symbolized innocence. The other was a grizzly bear in all its strength and power. He used these to explain himself—claiming that he had all of these characteristics. And I guess in some ways he did.

The rest of that date went about the same. She asked me more questions but never answered any of mine. It was like she was avoiding talking about herself or hiding something. She invited me inside when I dropped her off, but I declined. I was too busy thinking about Sullivan. I thought about him often and constantly talked about him like he was still alive. I guess that was just my way of dealing with the grief.

As I walked back to my apartment, I thought about my date. I guess I should call her Sierra, but I didn't expect to ever see her again, so first names seem too personal considering I didn't really know her at all. Wondering what Sullivan would have done, I almost regretted not going inside. He would have been glad to go in and help her get a glass, or three, of wine and unzip her dress.

Sullivan taught me about girls, what to say, how to hold them, where my hands go. He knew it all. I was digging this girl, Kathryn 'apple-butt' Riley, he called her. We planned a night where I would meet up with her at a party, and then after a few drinks, take her to Sullivan's garage, where he had an air mattress for us.

I showed up that night at Sullivan's with khakis and a dress shirt on. Under normal circumstances, Sullivan would mock me until I threatened



not to go to the party at all. But tonight he knew how nervous I was, so he spared me and tossed me a severely worn, holey pair of blue jeans with a mint in the right front pocket. The left had a hole in it.

"Why did you give me mints?"

"Just in case," he said as if he knew some secret I didn't.

We headed to the party at our friend Jordan's house—it was a pretty good turnout. I expected at least thirty or so people, but there seemed to be more. He had those parents who would buy him and his friends beer, thinking they would be safe as long as they didn't go anywhere. It was his birthday, he was turning seventeen, or it might have been eighteen...it didn't matter really. What mattered was she was gonna be there.

I found her in the crowd wearing a green dress that was a little too short, but she always tried to stand out, and I guess she sort of did. She had her brown hair fixed perfectly, like always—not a hair out of place. I could tell she had already begun to party by the time I got there; she seemed to be using the wall to lean on. She switched to my arm when I got there. When I asked her to go with me to the party, we had agreed that I would take care of her and that she would spend the night with me.

I impatiently walked her around the party, listening to all her girl friends' gossip and high pitched squeals. I even dealt with two of her friends that were the crying type. One of them thought someone gave her a dirty look...no one did—she was just crazy. And I don't even remember what the other one was crying about. I couldn't understand what she was saying anyway. I just watched her snot mix in with her tears and slowly work their way into her mouth as she sobbed. It was the longest night ever.

Finally one of her friends asked for a ride home and I got Kathryn in my car. Trying to ignore the fact that we all smelled of spilt beer and the cigarettes I wished I was smoking, we dropped her friend off in a hurry. I didn't make sure she made it in OK...I didn't really care. All I could focus on was Sullivan's garage and the drunken plans of my dilated blue-eyed passenger.

We got inside and I lit a candle instead of turning on the lights' cause that's what I had seen in all the movies. I opened the car and garage doors for her because I thought that was more gentleman-like—looking back I don't think it really mattered. She was obviously more experienced than me, or maybe she was just eager, but she kissed me first—launching her face towards mine with a kiss that hurt more than felt good. She wasn't herself so I didn't tell her, I just let it happen. Then she fell onto the air mattress, and I sat down next to her, covering her with a blanket as I swung my arm around her waist—this was also something I viewed as gentleman-like. This was exactly why Sullivan gave me mints. Her breath smelled like beer. I bit one in two and gave her half. It was us—face to face—fresh breath—not wasting the night—and as she went to kiss me again, I looked into her bloodshot eyes—instantly remembering what Sully told me about pinkeye.

"Sullivan told me that you get pinkeye from getting crap in your eye," I said. After that it was kind of a blur. I walked her home and called Sully to meet me at the garage. He didn't even mock me for ruining my first time, just chuckled a little when I told him and moved on.

Like all girls, she went home to call everyone in the whole world and tell them what I did. Sullivan wouldn't let me go down like that. Like a bear

protecting its cubs, he just said, "Come on, Fawn" and helped me spray-paint an old eye patch he had from when he was a kid. Once the white pirate skull was gone, I wore it around for the weekend telling everyone that Kathryn had given me pinkeye. It worked, and everyone started to pick on her instead of me. Normally I would feel a little bad, but when she told her friends the story, she exaggerated, probably because she was too drunk to remember.

Now I have my own cubs to deal with, Hunter and Chase. They got beaten up after school. The fifth and sixth graders were allowed to ride bikes home. But I was called to pick them up. After getting ice for Hunter's eye and Chase's lip, I sat down to tell them about the time I learned to fight. Sullivan had picked a fight for fun. I don't remember what it was about... not that it mattered anyway. I swung at him, my right hand missed, and I followed it to the ground.

"Come on, Fawn," he yelled, "plant your feet!"

I got up and hit him square in the stomach, but he surprised me and hit back, slapping my cheek to tease me. I turned red and chased him down the street. We ended up a long way from his house. I went to use the bathroom on a wall at Mike's Pizza, and a police officer stopped us for what he called "public indecency." Giving me a warning while smoking one of Sullivan's cigarettes, he told us that he had also seen us fighting all down the street. As our "lesson," he was going to help us learn to fight, adding that we would probably need it if we kept running around downtown at night.

"Put them up," he commanded. He hit me square between the eyes, and I went down. He laughed and said, "Come on, I didn't even hit you that hard." He taught me about the footwork. How to dodge—to fake out your opponent—to slip out of a headlock—he taught me everything about fighting. He attacked me over and over again—saying only that learning from your mistakes was important. He smacked me around while Sullivan just stood back and laughed. But then it was his turn. He couldn't focus enough to defend himself. A bloody nose later and some hidden bruises under his shirt and he lost it—flinging his body towards the cop without any knowledge of what he was doing. The cop backed up, and I had to step in to wrestle him to the ground before someone got hurt.

When the bruises healed, Sullivan and I practiced until, we could actually defend ourselves in a fight. I told Chase and Hunter this before I taught them how to fight. I didn't need them getting violent for no reason or becoming bullies. After teaching Sullivan and me to fight, the cop escorted us home in the back of a squad car—looking back, I can only describe it as the same scene I experienced as they drove me home after I wrecked Sullivan's car.

I didn't actually go home that night after Sullivan died. From the hospital, where I got fresh stitches, I walked to a tattoo parlor, smoked what seemed like a whole pack of cigarettes, and finally let myself cry—not the kind of crying Sully would mock me for, but the kind he would understand. Afterwards, I went inside and got the exact same tattoo Sully had—a grizzly bear and a buck on opposing forearms.

## NORSK

Brianne Holmes

Kilometers  
north of home,  
sunlight echoes  
off glaciers, far  
from the sea-  
winds of Moss.  
Ice is a tenuous  
place to stand.  
The frost-hard,  
the sure-footed  
seek space  
beyond the reach  
of fire, frozen  
in relief, a life  
made brief,  
a lot chosen.



# INTERVIEW WITH BRIANNE HOLMES

Written by Robert Causey & Drew Welborn

As Brianne Holmes hurries into Java City, she repeatedly apologizes for not being on time. It doesn't matter that she is literally only one minute late, she genuinely feels sorry. She simply got caught up in another matter: brewing her own coffee to bring to a coffee shop. As she settles down, she begins to get caught up in other things too, like recollections of where her writing career began. She's so enthusiastic, it's difficult to stop her when she hits on a surprising topic: Barbie.

Brianne and Barbies have a history together. But not in the usual way of clothes shopping or boyfriend searching. In fact, she doesn't even care for the typical view of Barbie and her designer clothes and perfect hair and teeth. Instead, Barbie offered something more for Brianne. "Barbie was more of a creative channel," she says. As a child, she enjoyed imaginative games that called for playacting with friends. However, she does recall times when others weren't readily available to traverse fantastical worlds. "It was during these times playing alone," she says, "that I developed my love of story and imagination." Enter Barbie, in her pink convertible. "Barbies were my characters, and I was the narrative voice," Brianne says, "complete with dialogue and physical descriptions." She even drew maps of the worlds she had created for them, worlds that provided adventures and bouts with evil. "They were kidnapped or sold into slavery. They were detectives and lawyers," Brianne says of her blonde heroines. "And the good characters always triumphed in the end."

While Barbies may be no more for Brianne, the imagination remains in her writing. While the process can be frustrating enough to elicit banging her head against a wall (something that Brianne has experienced and wants to make very clear that she doesn't condone), she maintains that writing is a pleasurable experience. The writing she enjoys most, however, the writing that is the most fun, is fantasy. "It gives my imagination more room," she says—a feature that allows her to get "lost in the worlds I've created." Her mother introduced her to the genre by reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* to her as a child. But her mother did more than influence her taste; she taught Brianne how to read. However, Brianne reveals, ironically, she initially hated learning how to read. "I thought everybody else already knew how

## BRIANNE HOLMES

to read," she says. And then, certain words bothered her. "Like 'ram' for some reason," she says. "That one made me cry."

Her father, however, doesn't share that same feeling for fantasy. Rather, he influences her writing in another key way: criticism. Initially working in radio journalism and now as an editor, he offers honest criticism—something that Brianne feels is important to all writers. "Sometimes it's nice to be patted on the back by people who always like your work, but that doesn't help you improve," she says. "Find people who will read your work thoughtfully and share their honest opinion and offer helpful suggestions." While her father is certainly honest with his critiques, another family member is even more brutally honest—her older brother, who Brianne says is armed with a "stupendous vocabulary." She recalls trying to use new words that she learned from him, only to use some incorrectly—one of a writer's fears. This didn't slip past her brother. He made sure she learned the correct definitions, and her vocabulary now is both strong and precise.

Even more help came from someone outside the family, someone who actually cemented Brianne's passion for writing. When she was nine years old, she attended a writing workshop hosted by a duo of Christian authors. One in particular, Robert Elmer, sparked something in Brianne. At the conclusion of the workshop, she eagerly purchased one of his books and had it signed. "I had already been interested in writing at that point," she says, "but Elmer became a role model after that." Like this influential author, Brianne notes that her Christian worldview presents a challenge to her as a writer:

*My faith is at the core of who I am, so I can't divorce it from my work. This is not to say that I think everything I write must have some deep spiritual truth, or that a character must come to faith in each story; what I mean is that my faith influences my outlook on the world and therefore changes the way I approach writing. I believe there is such a thing as absolute truth. I believe life has meaning. I believe hope is real and isn't a figment of optimistic minds. I think that ideas of faith and religion are some of the hardest things to communicate in writing. Faith is part of the essence of who a person is, something at our very core. I think that the closer we get to that core, the harder it is to portray believably.*

As a writer, Brianne knows the difficulty of avoiding clichéd descriptions of emotions, but "spiritual truths run even deeper than that," she says. "One of my current struggles is how to portray spiritual realities in a way that is not trite or superficial." In that struggle, there is for her one saving grace: just write.

She offers that advice to all writers. Even if it's become a struggle, just keep writing. There's always revision, which might even lead to fresh material. "Often, a piece takes a direction I never would have even considered when I first wrote it down," she says, noting that it can also be of considerable help to receive thoughtful suggestions from honest people, like her father. But what it comes down to is this simple truth: you have to keep writing. Sometimes it's fun, sometimes it's a chore, but for Brianne it is always necessary. "Sometimes I feel that writing is a compulsion. I can't escape it," she says. "In the end, writing is rewarding. It's worth the struggle."





## OFF MY COFFEE

Brianne Holmes

I plucked a Styrofoam cup from the top of the stack, squeezed down the lever of the coffee urn, and watched the stream of coffee fill my cup. So perfectly contained. The cafeteria was nearly empty at 8:00 a.m. All the poor souls with early classes had already munched their cereal, gulped their coffee, and hurried to class; the next wave of breakfast-eaters had not yet arrived. I know this time—the quiet that falls between the hastily-abandoned chairs—a time that allows for a table alone, a Bible, and mug of coffee.

Setting my coffee on the counter beside the urn, I reached for a packet of sugar. I paused, hand in mid-mechanical reach: no sugar packets left. I exhaled and watched my cozy breakfast vision evaporate. Oh, dilemmas. Now I could either send my un-drunk coffee down the conveyer belt—what a waste! Or I could grit my teeth and withstand a packet of artificial sweetener. Fake sugar won the contest, but it could not resurrect my idea of the perfect start to a morning.

I sympathize with the Cheshire Cat in Tim Burton's version of *Alice in Wonderland*. In a scene about a third of the way through the film, the Mad Hatter and other characters discuss the overthrow of the Bloody Red Queen, the villain of the movie.

"Come, come," says the Hatter, "we simply must commence with the slaying and such."

The Cheshire Cat looks mournfully into his cup of tea and comments, "All this talk of blood and slaying has put me off my tea."

The Hatter stiffens. "The entire world is falling into ruin and poor Chess is off his tea."

The Hatter would not approve of me. I was eleven on September 11, 2001. I knew that Americans hundreds of miles away had died, but to my everlasting embarrassment it was not the national tragedy that I felt most acutely. What put me out of sorts that day was that my mother, out of reverence for the dead, would not allow me to have a friend over to play. As a child in South Carolina, the denial of fun was more jarring than death many states away.

Whether the unexpected event happens to be a national tragedy or absent sugar packets, my hopes are easily squashed. I'm put off—off my tea, off my coffee. It's always been this way for me. My fantasies turn life into a long, thin line of continuity, never a knot or gnarl in the rope that links experiences. Pretending omniscience, I expect life to come gently, according to plan.



People like me prompted James, the brother of Jesus to write in his epistle, “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow” (4:13-14, NIV). I don’t even know that in five minutes there will be no sugar.

Somehow we find security in thinking we have our lives drawn in clear lines across a two dimensional paper, the future delineated by our fingertips. We talk of national security, homeland security, social security. On the front page of the Social Security Administration’s 2012 budget overview, this motto sits affixed: “Fulfilling Our Commitments to the American People.” We refuse to admit that our expectations may go unmet—that social security might fumble, that our country’s security might be breached, that our intelligence agencies might fail.

We pad ourselves against the unexpected. As I wrote this, I listened to a commercial for flood insurance. The canned radio voice told the audience to fear losing “the lamp you just had to have” to a flood. Buy insurance. The day before I wrote this, a woman from my church went to court against an uninsured driver who collided with and killed her husband. Buy insurance. Congress passed a law that lets me stay on my parents’ insurance for another three years. Insurance. Like the passengers aboard the Titanic, we have such expectations of safety.

Expectations can result in disappointment. According to one member of my family, the best way to prepare for disappointment is to expect the worst in life. I cannot embrace this philosophy; denying my hopes makes them no less real. Disappointment and frustration are the proofs that we hoped for something and were thwarted—whether we admit our hopes or not.

Disappointment cannot exist without expectations, yet humans cannot live without expectations. To live without expectations would be to eschew any thought beyond the moment, which is simply impossible. Not even children manage this. Infants cry because they expect care. Children throw tantrums when they hoped for more time to play.

Adults have even higher hopes. The framers of the Constitution said we possess the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In other words, our founding fathers expected certain things in life, and they fought a war to win back those rights. More recently, the United States went to war in Afghanistan in an attempt to reclaim its shattered security. We thought we lived in safety until the 9/11 terrorist attacks demolished this cozy mindset.

The entire world is falling into ruin, and I am off my coffee.

I was eighteen, celebrating my high school graduation. Friends had filled our little brick house and trickled out onto the porch, nibbling cream puffs and bite-sized cheesecakes. After the guests left and the party food was stowed away, wedged into a bursting refrigerator, a few of my closest friends stayed to watch a movie. In the middle of the movie, my best friend received a call from her parents. Her neighbor, another teenager, had just

BRIANNE HOLMES

committed suicide. My little knot of friends shifted into silence. We blinked at the paused DVD. Should we keep entertaining ourselves in the midst of tragedy? I was no longer eleven years old, so this time I was fully aware of the selfishness burgeoning from disappointment. Why did this have to happen during my graduation party?

Sometimes disappointment descends quickly with a telephone call or a news report. Other times our vanishing hopes stalk us, whispering of a future uncomfortably unlike the one we fantasized. My college graduation looms in the foggy distance, and I stand on the brink of the mystic "rest of my life." I step to the edge of the unknown, look over the ledge, and say, "This was not what I had in mind." In my mind, life had destinations, but no map to lead me there. I pictured myself running a bed and breakfast somewhere in Kentucky surrounded by white picket fences. I had a husband and a family, yet magically plenty of time to write. There was no plan B.

The generation graduating high school and college with me faces the confusion and the choices of unrealized hopes. The job market presents uncomfortable figures, with unemployment in the US at 9.1%, according to the Bureau of Labor. Simultaneously, we face a myriad of career fields, each with nebulous, overlapping qualifications. We wonder where to start; we feel like misguided rockets, sent into space with no coordinates. Somehow we get the impression we are required to succeed, required to live in a subdivision with green lawns neatly separating our lives from the neighbors', with 2.5 children, and be happy. Do you hear? Be *happy!*

We are a culture of tired optimism, screaming happiness to hide the disillusion of disappointed expectations. Spread your wings. Aim for the stars (you might hit the moon!). You can be anything you want to be.

James offers different counsel. "What is your life?" he bluntly asks. "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14, NIV).

It is uncomfortable to picture ourselves as a morning fog. Faced with our limitations, inaction is tempting. But indecision is no salvation from disappointment. In T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the speaker's fear paralyzes him. He spends the entire poem imagining what he might have done in life, what he might have said to his love interest. His fear of rejection and disappointment keeps him from action. "Would it have been worth while /," he ruminates, "If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl, / And turning toward the window should say: / 'That is not it at all, / That is not what I meant, at all.'"

The man in the poem never gathers the courage to speak his mind to the woman because he can't face the possibility of dashing his hopes in an unhappy ending. He delays the moment of unmet expectations: "...there will be time / And time for yet a hundred indecisions." Yet his indecision and inaction fail to save him from disappointment in the end. Near the conclusion of the poem, he laments, "I grow old...I grow old."

But perhaps hope actually materializes when we recognize that we are a vanishing mist. If we are not as lofty as we believe, then maybe our tea and coffee are less significant than we think. I watch a world of vanishing childhood sureties. There is no job slipping into place without effort like a car reaching its destination without driving. There's no husband or white picket fence, no bed and breakfast.

"I have measured out my life in coffee spoons," says the narrator of "Prufrock." My impulse is to do the same. Plan each inch of the future. Demand my life in even doses of happiness. But I believe in a God who measures the heavens with His hands; He is too big for my little spoons.

The disintegration of my expectations is just what I need to blow my coffee off its saucer; and maybe there is relief in watching my dreams soak into the carpet. When my assumptions diminish to a dark smudge on the recesses of my brain, I begin to hope for other things, unexpected things.

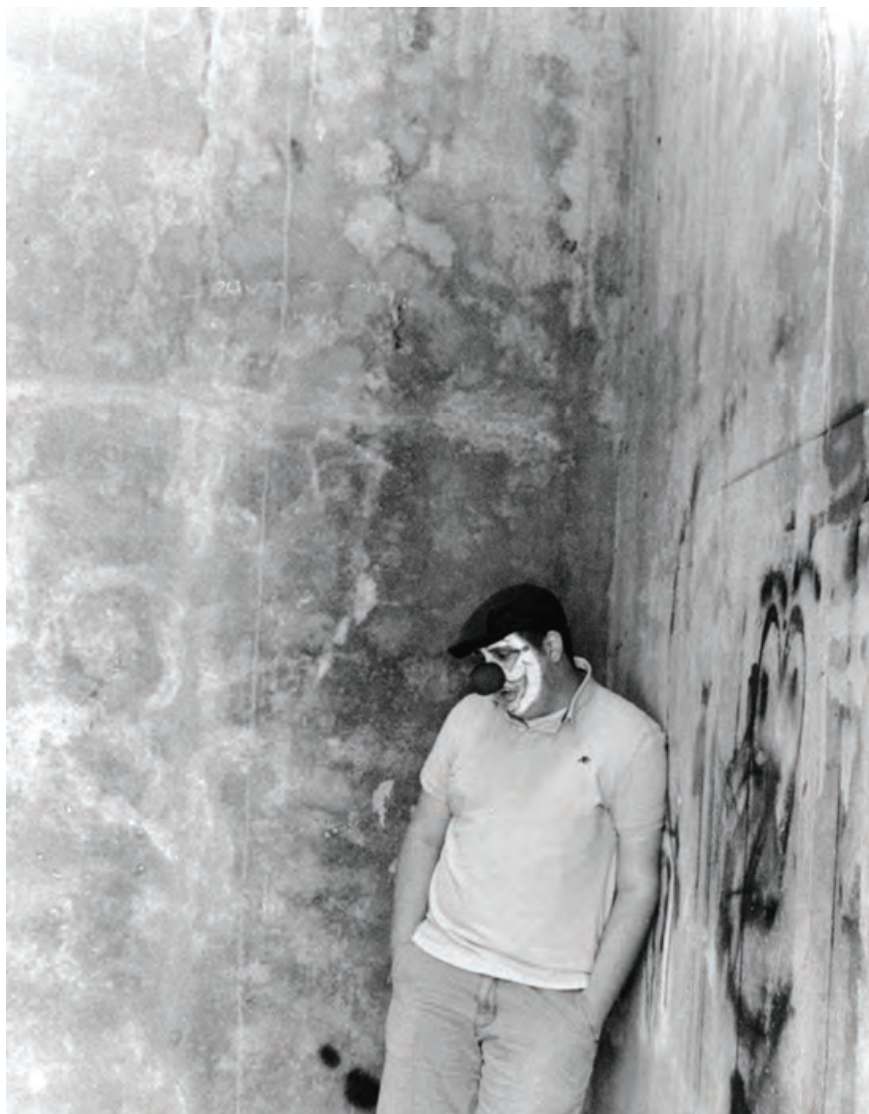
I return to James and imagine a slight "I told you so" in his voice. But he then advises, "You ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:14-15, NIV). I hear it as an invitation to dangle my dreams by a string, willing to watch Someone wiser cut the string while I wait patiently for something new. There is a thrill in the unknown future when I ease my grip on my expectations.

When our dreams fail us, when our security collapses, when the spoons we've measured our lives with turn out to be too small, we can still enjoy the unexpected as it comes. I will cross my legs, pinkie held delicately away from the cup, anticipating an unexpected intrusion. I will revel in the mystery of the unexpected. Why, I do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

I won't bother to measure out my life.

He holds the coffee.

We will live and do this or that.



**SELF-PORTRAIT** Morgan Reynolds  
35mm Film Photography

## DESCENDING STATES

Brianne Holmes

I could tell you about magnolias,  
their cones on the ground, closed  
like dozens of doors, sharing  
their scent of limes and pine needles.

Unless you relent, you will never  
enjoy the music of a mocked twang  
more generous than thousands  
of escalators and subways.

I won't defend the grass in August  
crunching beneath my sandals  
or the humidity sagging  
like soaked towels on my shoulders.

You have the bustle of train schedules,  
never punctual, but I  
have the certainty of the hard-baked  
ground and the sun-bleached sky.

# WHITE-SKINNED AND BEARDED THEY CAME

Sarah Burgess

Retelling our myths  
gave no warnings—  
just the promised  
return of the shining one.

Today he comes to us,  
boats anchored at shore,  
Quetzalcoatl  
with a horde from heaven.

Gates opened for them  
oiled with hope;  
they entered  
wearing white skin and beards.

He stands and speaks  
high above us.  
Shadowed, we  
cannot see the sun.

## **BARBADOS, CON PIEL BLANCA, LLEGARON**

*a translation by Sarah Burgess*

Al recontar nuestros mitos  
no nos previnieron  
sólo el regreso prometido  
de uno que brillaría.

Hoy, él regresa a nosotros  
lanchas ancladas en tierra  
Quetzacoatl  
con una horda del cielo.

Las puertas se abrieron para ellos  
aceitadas con la esperanza.  
Ellos entraron  
llevando su piel blanca y sus barbas.

Él se levanta y habla  
muy por encima de nosotros.  
Ensombrecidos  
no podemos ver el sol.

## FROM THE DUST

Jake Dunn

The tiny brick house,  
the big red door.  
The staggered glass panes;  
stair steps going up, down.  
My brother and I—children—  
standing in the flood of  
eight-minute old light,  
pouring through the window flume  
spilling warm puddles  
of spent light to the clean swept  
hardwood. The tiny flecks  
that escape the dust pan,  
rising up like fool's gold,  
in the sun streams,  
or handfuls of sprinkled ash,  
or burnout galaxies,  
coming alive, floating, swirling,  
behind the current of our  
mother's broom. The moths of light  
briefly alive, slowly dancing  
through the scent of orange oil  
and yellow shadows. Falling  
somewhere between the  
creak of floorboards  
and the dust of old rooms,  
wondering where it all  
comes from, and where  
it goes when wiped away.



## YESTERDAY WAS SUNDAY

Jake Dunn

The church sits up on a hill. Above the oak trees, the steeple pokes holes in clouds that drift too low and reminds passersby with short-term memories where it can be found next Sunday. Beneath the steeple, the bricks climb to peer into the cross-shaped panes of glass pressed between the peeling white paint of the double doors. Through the cross shaped prisms of glass can be seen the clean floor of the vestibule, the lacquer worn away by the back and forth of broom bristles and the shuffle of Sunday shoes hurrying in and out. Through the next set of doors that sway between the draft of the outside and the still of the sanctuary are the oak pews, as comfortable as a hand hewn crucifix, neatly ordered, and all facing the vacant pulpit. Inside is a hollowed hush; the only sound—the sharp ringing of light as it echoes through the tall ceilinged room. Pouring in from the stained glass stories, the red and yellow and green and blue spears of light spill out on the carpet—red and outdated, but still hiding the grape juice stains and the dirt tracked in on the soles of dirty shoes. And in the last row, closest to the door, there is a Werther's wrapper stuffed into the pew cushion, an empty offering envelope, and a Bible someone forgot. Sprawled across the envelope are questions about what was for lunch after yesterday's service.

## DAWN

Sarah Dobrotka

Before the world awoke at dawn,  
A haunting stillness filled the morning air.  
Sunlight flooded the empty two-lane road  
As stoplights swayed, turning green for no one.

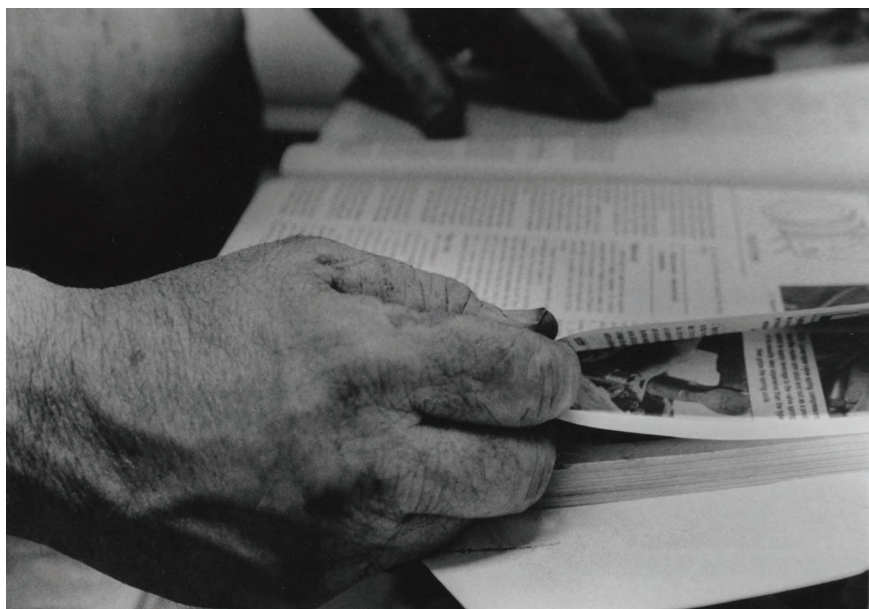
A haunting stillness filled the morning air  
The day I left my father's house.  
The stoplights swayed, turning green for no one  
Beneath a glowing sky flushed pink.

The day I left my father's house,  
The early morning dew had turned to frost  
Beneath a glowing sky flushed pink.  
You watched me from the porch as I pulled away.

The early morning dew had turned to frost  
Before the world awoke at dawn.  
You watched me from the porch as I pulled away,  
Sunlight flooding the empty two-lane road.



**TOUCH** Brittany Wilson  
35mm Film Photography



**DAD'S GARAGE** Shania Toner  
35mm Film Photography



**NEVER ENOUGH** David Estep  
35mm Film Photography

## HOLMES COUNTY, OHIO

Brianne Holmes

They cruised through the rolling land Izzie had spent half her childhood in, Jason at the wheel. The familiar shades of green and brown zipped by, flowing into each other like the folds of a long dress. Ahead, a caution sign warned them to watch for horses and buggies.

It was silent in the car. Izzie hadn't seen her brother in two years, and in the first five minutes of their drive from the airport to Berlin, they had exhausted the topics of weather (it was sunny), health (they were both well), and careers (Jason was managing a Barnes and Noble, and Izzie was teaching middle school). If it weren't for her sister's wedding, Izzie would be home in Raleigh, not riding in a car with her long-lost older brother.

Izzie watched Jason out of the corner of her eye. Sitting beside him, all she could think of was the night seventeen years ago when, at the age of thirteen, Jason discovered their father's affair. She could hear Jason's voice, fluctuating with the height and depth of adolescence, shouting accusations; she could feel the thud of his head hitting the other side of the wall from where she sat on her bed.

Jason adjusted the collar of his white dress shirt and took his eyes off the road long enough to find a microscopic piece of lint on his pants and pull it off. He drummed his thumbs on the steering wheel.

"So Isabelle—"

"Izzie," she interrupted.

"Pardon?"

Izzie ran a hand through her hair, watched the red strands fall down into her eyes, then blew them out of her sight. A few came back down and got stuck in her mascara. She would have to take this makeup off as soon as possible. And these high heels.

"I go by Izzie now, remember? I told you at Aunt Ethel's funeral."

Jason took his hands off the wheel and held them up defensively.

"Sorry."

Why was she so irritated at his blunder? she wondered. She supposed that, like many of her pet peeves, she could trace it back to her father. Growing up, he had refused her repeated requests to call her Izzie.

"I gave you a name for a reason," he'd said once. "No sense butchering a decent name."

"So anyway, Izzie," Jason said. "What else is going on in your life? A boyfriend, maybe?"

"No."

"No?"

"No."

How many times can we say the same thing? Izzie thought. She didn't feel like telling Jason that she'd had a boyfriend until a week ago. That had ended when Izzie concluded that her boyfriend was just like her father—and not just because they were both military men. No, she'd tried to overlook that similarity at first. But he had a temper like her father, stubbornness like her father, and no sense of humor, just like her father. She was only 27 and wasn't desperate. Besides, she would rather stay single her whole life than marry her father.

Ahead, the town of Berlin came into view. The "Welcome to Berlin" sign greeted them with a painting that was both stereotypical and accurate—a large orange sun setting behind a barn and silo, rolling hills of green and brown, and a small copse of trees in fall colors. There were no fall colors now, in June, but otherwise Izzie could look past the sign and see the same scenery. "Home of the world's largest Amish community," the sign told them, and "Birthplace of Atlee Pomerene—U.S. senator," as if everyone knew who that was.

Izzie pictured herself at ten or eleven or twelve, riding in her aunt and uncle's station wagon, pretending it was a horse and buggy. She'd pretend she was Amish, like some of the farmers outside the town, or like the ones who worked in Berlin's hotels and bed and breakfasts—the men with their full beards and old-fashioned manners, and the women with their hair carefully pinned and covered, their tennis shoes poking out from under their dresses.

Izzie and her sister Lydia had moved to their Uncle Scott and Aunt Barbara's farm when Izzie was ten and Lydia was eight, after their father left them. Their mother had a breakdown and died a year later, so Izzie and her five siblings were split between aunts and uncles. Izzie wondered if Jason ever felt guilty for being the one who discovered their father's affair, pushing their family into chaos.

Jason drove slowly through town to the bed and breakfast their aunt and uncle bought nine years ago when they sold their farm, just after Izzie moved out. Their aunt met them at the door, her graying hair short and curled. She ushered them inside, talking nonstop about the shops closing downtown, about the late frost that killed so many crops, about the new minister at church. She interrupted herself with questions about Izzie's flight and her work in Raleigh.

Izzie tried to insert answers in between her aunt's questions while her uncle hugged her, his arms still powerful, his lined face still stern.

He put her at arm's length. "Have you grown?" he asked.

BRIANNE HOLMES

Izzie felt an obligation to smile, though she thought the comment was a little patronizing. "I'm a little old for that, Uncle Scott. It's the heels."

She lifted up one foot to show off the tan shoe, almost lost her balance, and steadied herself against the wall. Her uncle laughed, and Jason and her aunt turned to look.

"So, you turned into a fashionable lady after all," her uncle said.

"No." Izzie rolled her eyes and wished she'd worn tennis shoes. "I wore them for Lydia. I thought she'd like them."

"What about me?" Izzie's sister Lydia stepped into the hallway.

She looked like a soon-to-be bride. But then, she'd always looked that way, with her slender frame, shining eyes, and full lips. Not Izzie. She was heavier, her face round and her eyes small. She preferred to think of her face as heart-shaped, but when she had relayed this information to her first boyfriend, several years ago, he had responded with something like, "Your heart melts mine." Sappy. Complete nonsense.

Izzie ran the rest of the way down the hall, her heels pounding on the wooden floor. She hoped they wouldn't leave dents. She wrapped her arms around her sister, and Lydia squeezed back. Of Izzie's five siblings, Lydia was the only one she was close to because they had been kept together when the family split apart.

"Hey, Mark," Lydia called as they untangled their arms.

A man Izzie recognized from the pictures her sister had sent her stepped out of the dining room into the hall. His face was narrow—well really, his whole body was somehow narrow—and he was wearing a green and yellow sweater vest.

"Hi, I'm Mark," he said, and adjusted his rectangular glasses. He stuck out his hand as if in an afterthought.

Izzie took it and was surprised to find his handshake firm. "Izzie," she said.

He nodded. "I'm Lydia's boyfriend. I mean, fiancé."

Lydia giggled and bumped him with her hip. "Get it right."

Izzie's uncle crowded into the circle and clapped a hand on Mark's shoulder. "You're gonna have to learn a new word tomorrow. Husband."

A woman Izzie didn't recognize bustled into the hall, and Izzie started to feel claustrophobic. The woman began asking Lydia rapid-fire questions about flowers and centerpieces. The wedding director, Izzie guessed. Lydia followed the director out of the hall. She looked over her shoulder at Izzie.

"Sorry. I'll be back. Hey—the boys are in the basement."

It took Izzie a moment to register that "the boys" were her younger brothers. Izzie sighed. She should probably go talk to them.

Izzie wandered around until she found the basement stairs. The house was large, and she had only visited a couple of times. Her heels were clacking again as she descended the stairs, and she worried she would lose her balance and roll to the bottom.

Her three younger brothers, the two from Kansas and the one from Indiana, were gathered around the pool table, cue sticks and Coke cans in hand.

"Hi," she said, unsure how to proceed. She hardly knew them. They were all six years old or younger when their father left.

James, Izzie's Indiana brother, the youngest, handed her a cue stick. "Hey, Izzie."



"No thanks," she said and tried to hand it back. She wasn't planning to stay down here long. She was thinking, What do I talk about with brothers I don't know? It was uncomfortable to admit she was related to someone she hardly remembered.

"Come on, we need even teams," James said.

Her Kansas brothers, Jake and Josh, urged her to play, and she gave in. At least as long as they were playing, she wouldn't be expected to talk the whole time.

She took a vicious shot that went wildly off target. What had possessed her parents to give all their sons names that started with "J"? Probably her father's idea. So he would have fewer consonants to remember.

The basement stairs creaked, and Izzie saw Jason enter the room, a bottle of water in his hand. Fiji water. The water of the hydraulically enlightened. That might make a nice slogan.

"What?" Jason flung his arms wide as if he was planning to hug the whole room.

Izzie shook her head and looked away. She hadn't realized she was glaring at him. Jason started talking politics with Jake, and soon Jason was making a vehement case for the Iraq war.

"I don't see why it's our business." Izzie lined up her shot, one eye closed, carefully aiming.

"There's injustice going on and you just want to sit still?" Jason said.

Izzie made her shot and watched the ball bounce off the wall, just shy of the pocket. She straightened up.

"You can't fix every problem, Jason. Sometimes fixing it just makes it worse." Izzie wasn't really thinking about war or politics. She heard her blood in her ears and wondered if Jason knew she was wishing he'd never played the sleuth to find out where their father went late at night. And if he had to find out, why hadn't he just kept it to himself?

If Jason understood, he didn't show it. He was already changing the subject to the question of ethics in interrogation methods.

Izzie handed Jason her cue and hurried upstairs.

In the living room, Izzie's aunt and uncle were talking to people Izzie recognized as distant relatives, cousins of some sort, who were describing a recent trip to Italy. Apparently, it was a thrilling vacation; at least, so Izzie assumed based on the exaggerated gestures her second or third cousin was making. The relatives weren't paying attention, so Izzie hurried past them onto the front porch, hoping no one would be there. The porch, with its white railings, wound its way around the side of the house. Izzie settled into one of the swings that hung from the ceiling, arranging the cushions around her and rocking slightly to get the swing moving.

It was quiet here. At night, on her uncle's farm, the silence had been complete, allowing space for more thought than Izzie had wanted at first. In the end, it was the land that adopted her. Its soft creases and gentle bends had held her and made her feel safe.

Lydia stepped onto the porch an hour later. Izzie watched her sister's feet lift lightly across the white floorboards, as if she was dancing. Lydia curled up on the other side of the swing, bare feet tucked neatly under her, and said, "Something's eating you, Izzie."

BRIANNE HOLMES

Izzie looked past Lydia's head at a chipped area in the porch railing where dark wood showed through.

"You sure know how to start a conversation," she said.

Lydia smiled, showing off her white teeth, perfectly straight like Jason's. "Come on, Izzie. It's written all over your face."

Izzie toyed with the chain rings of the swing. "Dad isn't coming, is he?"

Lydia shook her head. "He's in Scotland with his, um...his wife."

Izzie winced internally but hoped she hid it on the outside. She hated hearing about their father's second wife. True, their mother was dead now, but she hadn't been dead when he married this woman.

The swing creaked out a soothing rhythm.

"Lydia, are you sure about this—about Mark?"

Lydia's smile receded, like a tide going out.

Izzie thought she'd made a mistake and tried to explain. "Don't take it the wrong way. It's not—nothing—just making sure. He seems a little mousey."

Izzie was certain she had just made matters worse. Lydia said nothing for a moment, just looked out toward the road.

"This is about Dad, isn't it?" she said, finally.

Izzie didn't answer, afraid of saying something more offensive than she already had. Lydia seemed to take her silence as a yes anyway.

"It's not going to happen to me."

"You were young when it happened." Izzie got up from the swing. "You probably don't even remember it very well."

"I'm only two years younger than you," Lydia said, staying seated. "I remember everything."

They watched each other, and Izzie thought that Lydia must have put the past into some little box that she opened when she needed to remember and closed when she wanted to forget.

Izzie ate three rolls in succession at the rehearsal dinner in the church basement. She was feeling frazzled, and dinner rolls were her favorite food. There were too many relatives to keep track of, people who said they knew her when she was *"this tall,"* or who claimed to have changed her diapers. And there were people that, by rights, she should have known. Was she the only one bothered by the fact that James was eleven the last time she saw him? Now he was seventeen. Her own brother—and she'd seen him twice since he was an infant.

Jason sat down catty-corner to Izzie and dug into his pot roast. He glanced over at Izzie and put down his fork.

"Okay. What did I do?" he said.

"What do you mean?" Izzie said around a bite of roll.

"You've been looking at me like you want to kill me since you got here."

"There will be no murder at this table." Their uncle set his plate on the table and tried to squeeze himself in beside Jason, across from Izzie.

He pushed Jason halfway off his chair before he managed to get into his own seat. Jason moved his chair over a few inches, accommodating their uncle's large shoulders.

"Isabelle," he said, "been thinking about you lately."

Izzie looked up from her fourth roll in surprise. She was not the

devoted sister who stayed behind. She had charged off to college nine years ago, leaving Berlin behind. Why should he think about her?

Her uncle shoveled a forkful of green beans into his mouth. "Don't look so surprised. I half-raised you." He paused and pointed his fork at her. "You seem to have turned out fine."

"Why shouldn't I have?"

Her uncle laughed. "You were a rambunctious child."

"Not really." Izzie almost told him that he had never understood her, not in the eight years she'd lived with him.

"Not really?" Her uncle laughed again, louder, and Jason looked over. "You chased my cows."

Case in point, thought Izzie, but she didn't bother to say so. He would only laugh harder if she told him what she was thinking that day. That time she chased the cows was shortly after she'd moved to Berlin. Before then, she'd never been to church, but her aunt and uncle insisted that she go. At Millersburg United Methodist Church one of those first Sundays, the minister preached on the old covenant God made with Israel. He described the sacrificial law. If you wanted God to forgive you, the minister said, you brought a cow to Him and killed it for your sins. He never got around to explaining the new covenant. Later that afternoon Izzie tried to lasso a cow. Driving by in his pickup, her uncle caught her on horseback, the cows running in confusion. She refused to tell him why she did it and received a spanking in silence. At age ten it made sense.

"I just took everything literally," she said.

"What's this cow story?" Jason said, but she ignored him. It was just another reminder that their lives were so separate.

"But Isabelle," her uncle said, "I just heard the other day that they're looking for a middle school teacher over at Flat Ridge. Thought I'd tell you."

Izzie leaned back in her chair. Was that her uncle's way of asking her to come back to Berlin? And if it was, did she want to come back? Ohio did have a feeling like home. When she saw the curves of the land, the little towns that thought themselves important, the cows with their calm ambivalence, she felt a nostalgia like homesickness. But it was a homesickness that lacked a home.

She nodded. "Thanks."

Even as she said it, she knew she could never live in Berlin again. For her, it was tainted. She would never just see cows and barns and relatives. Behind them she would always see what brought her here—the lies and unfaithfulness and death; and the brother who tried too hard to do the right thing.

"What cow story?" said Jason, and her uncle launched into his side of the story.

The next morning, Izzie and Lydia shared the bathroom mirror. Lydia was applying makeup, and Izzie was trying to straighten her hair.

"So," Lydia said, "have you forgiven me for getting married?"

Typical Lydia, Izzie thought. Opening a conversation with candor.

"There was never anything to forgive. I'm just scared for you."

Lydia turned toward Izzie, one eye complete with eye liner, the other

BRIANNE HOLMES

bare. It gave her a crazed, off-kilter look, like a buccaneer who got out of the wrong side of the bed.

"I'm not Mom," Lydia said, "and I think I picked good, Miss protective-big-sister."

Lydia went back to her makeup, but kept glancing at Izzie.

"Well," Lydia said after a few minutes, "clearly we've still not gotten to the root of the matter."

Lydia asked no question, but Izzie heard it implied, so she attacked her own hair with the straightener and said, "Jason."

Lydia paused with a tube of lipstick in her hand and looked at Izzie in the mirror. "It wasn't his fault," she said quietly. "It would have happened sooner or later."

Izzie frowned. That was what she had been trying to tell herself for years.

"Izzie, you can't blame Jason."

"I know. But I do."

Izzie ran the straightener through her hair once, then slammed it on the counter. She left the bathroom without explanation, seeking Jason. Seventeen years was far too long to go without explanation. She wandered the house until she found him in the basement playing pool with himself, already dressed in his suit and tie. Izzie was still in her bathrobe, hair half styled.

"Jason."

He turned around, cue stick in hand.

"I need to know." Izzie crossed her arms. "Why did you tell on Dad?"

Jason leaned over the table and took a shot. It didn't look like he was aiming at anything. "Ah. So that's what this is all about."

The balls bounced off the sides in random directions, bumping into each other as they went.

"Why?" Izzie repeated. She stepped over to the pool table and stood over him as he occupied himself with another shot.

He glanced up at her. "Because it was the right thing to do, that's why. You can't do what he did and get away with it."

"Get away with it? He did get away with it."

Jason abandoned his shot and poked Izzie gently in the chest with his cue stick. "I am not the one who left the family, Izzie," he said quietly. "I am not the one who left."

"That's not the point."

"Then what is the point, Izzie?" He leaned down and shot again, and then straightened up, his back to the ricocheting balls.

"The point is that Mom died. The point is that I don't even know you... or any of the boys." Izzie felt tears coming, but she refused to cry in front of Jason. He was gripping his cue, his knuckles turning white, which told her she was having some effect. She swallowed and said evenly, "The point is, you ruined everything."

Jason threw the cue on the ground at Izzie's feet. He glared at the stick and drew in one long, shaking breath, and heaved it back out. Izzie took a step back and wondered if she'd gone too far.

"Any other points?" he said, almost inaudibly.

"That Dad is in Scotland," Izzie said, feeling compelled to finish her list, "and he doesn't have to live with the consequences."

Jason looked up, and the fierceness in his eyes sent Izzie back another step. "You really think I thought of all that?" Jason asked. "I was thirteen." He bent down and picked up the cue, placing it gently on the pool table. "You don't think I know all that happened because of me?"

Izzie felt a churning in her stomach, like her breakfast didn't want to sit still. He was asking her to see his perspective, and she wasn't sure she could handle it.

"It's like your dumb cow story," he said. "What were you thinking? I don't know—you were ten. You probably didn't think it through very well."

Izzie turned and scrambled up the stairs, feeling like a child caught listening to adult conversations she didn't want to understand.

Later in the morning, Izzie stood in the church and listened to Lydia and Mark exchange vows. She gripped her bouquet of daisies and stared unblinking at Lydia while the other two bridesmaids—friends of Lydia's—sniffled like they were at a funeral.

Lydia cooed her "I do's," her large eyes even larger; and Mark said that he did as well, his voice quiet, struggling to be heard, a goofy grin plastered on his face.

How had her parents said it? Izzie wondered. She couldn't imagine her father saying it like Mark or looking as happy as Mark. When she tried to visualize her father in his wedding, she heard him bark out his wedding vows like a drill sergeant.

Mark and Lydia leaned in for their kiss, and Izzie looked down at the toes of the pink high heels that Lydia had insisted she wear. Such an easy promise to make, and so easily broken.

They cut the cake and drank champagne, and Lydia and Mark hurried toward their waiting car, hands clasped tightly. Lydia stopped in front of the car and let go of Mark's hand to grab Izzie's arm. Lydia had to stand on her tiptoes to whisper in her sister's ear.

"Let it go."

Izzie nodded. "Be careful."

Lydia took hold of both her sister's hands. "Izzie. Mark is not our dad."

Izzie swallowed. She wanted to say something nice to Lydia, something about how lovely she looked or how happy her life would be, but Izzie's throat closed.

Lydia smiled, just a little. "Promise me one thing. Be nice to Jason."

Izzie got her mouth open, and said, "I promise." She even tried to smile.

Lydia winked and climbed into the car. Mark picked up some of her wedding dress that had fallen out of the car and stuffed it into Lydia's lap before he shut the door. The car disappeared down the street, and Izzie turned to see Jason behind her, arms crossed.

"I'm under orders to be nice," she said.

"Ah." Jason pulled off his tie, "Lydia, the family conscience."

"If I could be more sincere, I would."

"Smile!" They turned and saw their aunt with a camera aimed their direction.

Izzie groaned and started to turn away, but Jason held her arm.

"Just smile and pretend you like me," he said. "Maybe someday we'll look back and forget."

BRIANNE HOLMES

The fields and pastures between Berlin and Millersburg looked the same on the way back to the airport as they had coming. The car crested a hill, and an Amish buggy came into view, inching its way along the road. Jason hit the brakes and then zipped around it.

He glanced over at Izzie. "Sorry I threw the cue at you."

Izzie smiled with the very edges of her mouth. "It didn't hit me."

Jason pulled a pair of sunglasses from the visor above his head and put them on, defense against the bright sunlight. Outside, a field of cows grazed, ignoring their car, minding their own business. The sun was glinting off a silo in the distance, before the cows and the silo disappeared behind another undulation in the land. One hollow dip in the scenery concealed the next, green and brown confetti in the folds of a long, long dress.



**A GENTLEMAN** Lauren Greiner  
Graphite & Digital Illustration  
8 x 11







# INTERVIEW WITH LAUREN GREINER

Written by Brianne Holmes

She likes to capture subtleties of facial expression, the details of hands, and the way hair moves. She likes working with oil paint and has recently developed an affinity for gouache paint. As she works to improve her ability to paint backgrounds, she laughingly refers to the background as her “mortal enemy.” Her passion is drawing, and she professes to be “fascinated by lines.” “They can be so expressive,” she says.

Lauren Greiner began drawing as a child—“as soon as I could hold a pen,” she says. Once Lauren picked up that pen, she never let go. “Pretty much all I did in high school was draw,” she says. Although she took art classes in high school, Lauren received no specific guidance, no formal training, until she came to Anderson University. But she knew all along she wanted to be an artist.

Through her studies at AU, Lauren has been influenced by the work of nineteenth century artist Alphonse Mucha, whose work is based on curves and lines. The detail of Mucha’s work sparked Lauren’s interest in depicting the human body, and inspired her to focus on detail in her own work. Lauren does not limit herself to classical role models, however. Disney’s animated films exerted an early and lasting influence on Lauren’s work. She admires the art of Mary Blair, who worked on films such as *Cinderella*, *Peter Pan*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Another of her role models is Clair Keane, an artist involved in the recent Rapunzel film, *Tangled*. Lauren describes Keane’s style as light, airy, colorful, and whimsical—qualities that now define Lauren’s work.

For Lauren, inspiration for art often comes from literature, especially fantasies and fairy tales. “Part of me has always been fascinated by what isn’t real,” she says. She combines the imaginative raw material of fairy dust and magic rabbit holes with a sense of balance and attention to detail. In the world of story, she finds a way of thinking beyond the confines of ordinary life. “That is the power of imagination,” she says. “Stories present an element of realism that isn’t quite real.” Inspired by these stories, Lauren is working on a series of paintings illustrating fairy tales and classic stories, endowing the work with what she describes as her own “whimsical spin.”

## LAUREN GREINER

Sometimes, Lauren combines her work in painting and drawing with her other major, Graphic Design. Lauren sees the two majors as complementary. "I'm not limited to one set of skills," she says. In one of her typography projects, she was able to marry the two fields. When she created a typeface with a slightly Celtic curve to the letters, she dubbed it "Seamus," a common Celtic name, and illustrated the typeface with a drawing of an Irishman and an Irish Setter. Before long, she was creating stories for herself about the man and his dog.

Undertaking two art majors has often been difficult, Lauren says, but she adds with conviction that, given a choice, she would not change her decision: she is glad she did it. "You have to know what you want to do and pursue it," she says. Often, she says, other people discourage students from pursuing art because they believe it will not earn a living. Lauren says that there are, in fact, many opportunities to practice art; Lauren herself hopes to become an illustrator. Regardless, Lauren sees art as her calling. "I was bound and determined to become an artist," she says, "starving or otherwise."

Since coming to Anderson, Lauren has quite literally left her mark on the studio where she works. Amidst the myriad of paint splatters decorating the floor, she points to a row of orange splotches and claims them as her own. When she graduates in August, Lauren will leave the speckled floor behind, but she will carry with her the experience of four years—of professors who pushed her and who helped her think in new ways.





**APOLLO AND  
DAPHNE**

Lauren Greiner  
Ink & Digital Illustration  
9 x 12





**ELIZA** Lauren Greiner  
Acrylic & Colored Pencil  
18 x 24

# THE PLEASURE IN TRAGEDY

Danielle Harris

Though I once loved crime television, it is now hard for me to watch. The sight of blood makes me feel sick; the thought of violence makes me feel worse. While I once found the suspense of these shows thrilling and pleasurable, today, I simply cannot get past the tragedy. Art loses its aesthetic pleasure when the distance between the viewer and the tragedy is closed. For me, that distance was closed when I lost a parent to murder.

As far back as I can remember, *CSI* came on about the same time as dinner. My family, though loving, was not much for bonding or conversation around the dinner table. Instead, we watched television on our tiny set on the white laminate counter in the corner. After my little brother came along and kicked me out of my highchair near the sink, I always sat in the same chair nudged between the poorly papered wall and our round, wooden table. Bitter though I still was at Joseph for taking my seat at the table, my new chair was best positioned for watching television while eating. It was there in that worn wooden seat that I fell in love with crime television. My mom loved crime shows, too, but she started as a voracious reader of mystery and crime novels. She grew up reading Nancy Drew and turned to Agatha Christie's stories as an adult. She loved suspense and found mystery novels thrilling. Just as she passed on her love of literature to me, so did we share our television tastes. Together we watched *Numb3rs*, *Law and Order*, *Without a Trace*, and especially *CSI*.

I was ten when *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* first aired. Since then, the television show has aired more than 600 episodes. More than 200 territories and 2 billion people watch *CSI* and it is essentially being shown somewhere around the globe every second of every day. I grew up with Gill Grissom and the Las Vegas lab gang; today, *CSI* features New York and Miami locations, too. *CSI* is clearly a popular show, as is *Law and Order*. While it has never been my favorite show, *Law and Order* is one of the longest running prime-time dramas, having run for more than 20 years. Though the episodes I watched as a child seemed like they belonged only to my mom and me, these crime television shows are favorites of people worldwide.

I suspect that the appeal of these shows largely lies in the fact that we like for the good guy to win. The basis of almost every cinematic production involves in some aspect a struggle between good and evil. Crime television incorporates the same three components featured in almost all stories (whether that is a novel, a movie, or play, etc.): the villain, the victim, and the hero. Growing up, Gill Grissom was my hero. My mom, mystery-reader as she was, could always figure out who the villain was before the end of the *CSI* episode. I was less adept at identifying

the bad guy, but I still wanted to see him caught, and I knew Grissom would figure it out. Therein lies the intrigue of crime television-viewers want to see the criminal get caught. Seeing the achievement of justice and good overcome evil is both appealing and comforting.

The reason people can appreciate and enjoy television shows is that, like all art, television is rooted in reality. Gill Grissom was more of a hero to me than those of fairy tales because he was more realistic. I knew I could hardly count on Aladdin or Peter Pan to save me from villains, but Grissom would certainly always capture the bad guy. While shows like *CSI* are not real, they are realistic. This realism, as argued by Aristotle, is what allows the viewer to become emotional about the art. It allows us to find the mystery and suspense of *CSI* thrilling. Aristotle also said, however, that the unreality of the art affects our emotional attachment. Because shows like *CSI* are fictional, there is a certain distance between the viewer and the actors. This is what allows us to watch tragedy and still enjoy it. When that distance is closed, however, the art loses its aesthetic pleasure.

I was sixteen when my mom was murdered. It wasn't a random act of violence, though it felt completely unexpected to me. Rather, it was a domestic violence incident. I wasn't there with my parents when my dad murdered my mom; I never saw what happened. I wasn't at the trial and I've never heard reports from the crime scene. What I did hear was snippets of meaningless information while eavesdropping on my older siblings and grandparents' conversations. Three shots. Leg, stomach, head. Kitchen. Back door. Gun hidden in a well. Enough to fabricate a vivid and tragically false memory of the event. I had seen enough television to picture the gun my dad may have held, though I had never seen one in real life. I had watched enough *Law and Order* to know that there were police cars and crime tape. I had watched enough *CSI* to picture the forensic scientists taking samples of my mom's hair and blood and skin beneath fingernails. And most tragically, I had seen enough of my parent's relationship to imagine exactly what happened.

I can see my parents in our kitchen, my mom with her back to the sink, arms alternating between one hand on her hip with the other shaking a finger wildly in the air and the two stubbornly folded across her stomach. My dad stands closer to the back door, beside the counter so he can swing his fist down onto the countertop in moments of rage. I can hear the two screaming and cursing while steadily creeping closer to each other, yearning to yell furiously in their face. I can picture my mom shoving my dad and the subsequent struggle that would result. I can imagine the threats and the lies spilling from their mouths as they try to break each other once again. I can't imagine my dad pulling out a gun, aiming, or pulling a trigger; no matter how angry or violent they may have been, I can never picture him doing it. All I can see is my mom's panicked eyes and tear-stained face contorting as she falls on the floor of the kitchen, where I used to play with pots and pans and spoons while she cooked, pools of blood staining the linoleum.

Before my mom's death, the gruesomeness of shows like *CSI* never bothered me. Rather, I found it all fascinating. I loved the science of the investigations, the DNA tests, the X-rays, the blood reports. There was a long period where I wanted to become a forensic scientist after watching hours and hours of *CSI*; the laboratories where they worked amazed me,

DANIELLE HARRIS

as did the incredibly intelligent scientists who worked there. As a child, the deaths in each episode didn't matter to me—the murders always happened in the beginning, and then the show's focus turned to the good guys capturing the bad guy, which they always did. I didn't care about the people who died, just the scientists who would solve the case.

While the science of shows like *CSI* is still fascinating, I can no longer overlook the murders depicted each episode. The shows are no longer simply about good guys and bad guys to me, but also about the victim and their family. Like all people who watch these shows, I root for justice at the end. But the show is not over for me when the criminal is captured—I cannot help thinking about the losses.

Often, however, it feels as if I am the only one with this mindset. My reactions to violence in the media are a rare form, which is understandable. The average 18-year-old has witnessed more than 200,000 violent acts on television. This repeated exposure to media violence results in desensitization. When emotional responses, such as sadness or disgust at violence, are repeatedly evoked unnecessarily, they become obsolete. The more violent acts we see, the less poignant they become. Pain and suffering become forms of entertainment, having surpassed the necessity of emotional response in most people. Not only do people watch murders in criminal dramas on television, but also in cinematic form. Countless movies have been made featuring stories about villains and superheroes or criminals and cops. These movies also appeal to our longing for justice and the encouragement of seeing good overcome evil. The problem is that we view violence so often that we have become a people capable of viewing the blood and gore of crime scenes without flinching.

My issue is that I can no longer help but flinch. We can view tragedy with aesthetic pleasure because of the distance created through the art's fictional state. Cinema and television today, however, often attempt to blur the line between fiction and reality. With the advancement of technology, computer science, and special effects in television production, shows and movies become more and more realistic. The scenes we watch in *CSI* mimic the scenes we hear about on the evening news. It is only logical, then, that people view real tragedies with no more feeling than they view tragedies on *Law and Order*. We have become desensitized to violence. It pains me that so many of my friends can watch the news unfazed by the tragedy depicted. The victims on the news have become synonymous with the victims on *CSI* and are granted no more emotion than their fictional counterparts.

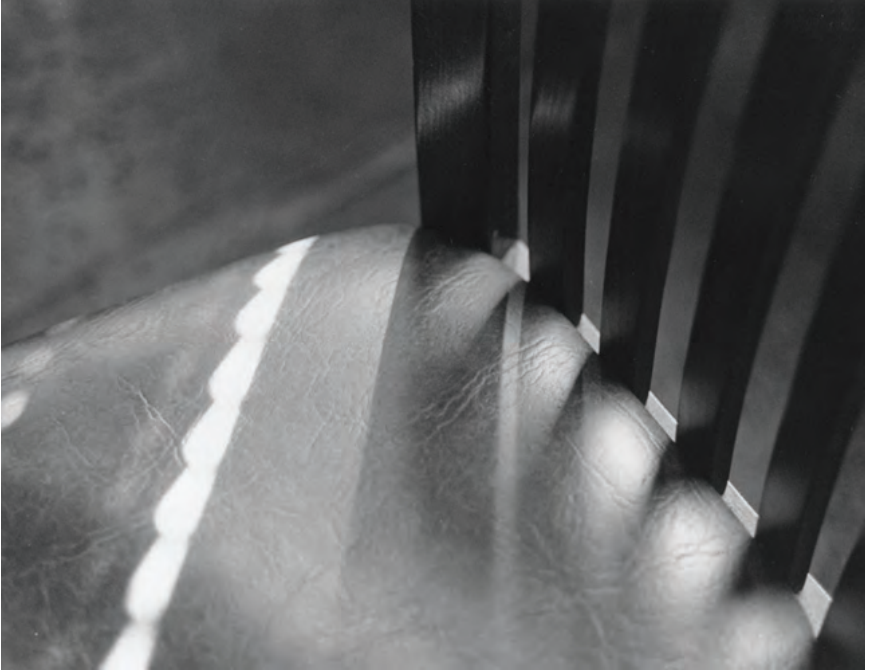
I, on the other hand, cannot help but feel for the victims on the news. Reports of murder consistently lead me to remember my own experience of being delivered the news of my mother's death; I can't help but relive the moment when I sat on the brown, leather couch in my principal's office beside my little sister and was told that my mother had passed away. The same sensations of that moment grip me when I hear of death today, regardless of who the victim is: my heart freezes and my breath stops and my body suddenly weighs more than I can bear.



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**DEFINITION** Holli Griffin  
35mm Film Photography



**UNTITLED** Ellie Youngs  
35mm Film Photography

## LOOKING FOR AN ENDING

Jake Dunn

You stay up late and you write down *It's kind of like a river*. You don't know how, or why, or what, but it sounds nice. Then you put it away like a good drink—let it age a while. Write a little here and there, a piece of notebook paper, a napkin, the back of an envelope. Fill in the middle with whatever comes to mind. You look for an ending, but there is none in sight. So you settle for making one up.

A few years go by, and you write some other stuff, mostly notes, and outlines, and sketches. Invisible stacks of thought scattered across a dusty desk, and handfuls of crumpled words on the floor. You make lists and maps of your life. Words that might make a good poem, good title, etc. Places you want to go. Things you want to do. You write down all the metaphors you make up and put them in a notebook marked miscellaneous, which is nothing more than a poem's purgatory. Start a story about knots. Double Windsor, timber hitch, polomar, and of course all the knots you never were, like tall enough to keep playing quarterback even though coach says you've got one of the best arms he's seen in a while, or cool enough to keep her even though she says she'll never love anyone the same. Get all tangled up. Walk out for some air. Get in your car and drive until the mountains tangle the road like your thoughts. Follow the black stream of asphalt until it runs out. Then follow its tributary, riding the washed-out ruts and gravel rapids, until they do the same. Take note of the black-eyed Susan, Queen Anne's lace, and honeysuckle growing wild. After a while, wonder if it always takes this long. Let it carry you as far as it can before it exhausts itself. When the gravel runs dry, and can no longer carry you any farther, pull off to the side of the road. It dumps you off about a mile from the river.

It's a red-sky morning, the clouds being held off by the rigid backbone of the Appalachians. The sun is bright and sharpens the mountains to their former shapes. As the sun climbs, the shadows sink deeper into the valleys. You cut yourself loose from the trail of yarn that you've been dragging around. Grab your pack and fill it with food and as many thoughts as you can fit—the ones you want to forget, the ones you can't forget. You put them all on your shoulders and you walk until you find the scars left by the old logging roads. It's quiet here, but when the wind blows through the trees, you can still hear the sounds of saws and axes felling timber. The blistered hands of bearded ghosts swinging axes. Pushing, pulling saw blades, Trying to tie timber hitches around the felled pieces of their lives. But that was years ago, and the forest has long since healed, eventually recovering everything the road took from it. Somehow managing to find

forgiveness for one another, though the scars would not allow either the chance to forget. The sound of saws and axes, now forgotten, are just stories told by old trees, and the rugged knots of the loggers are replaced with only the delicate polomar and clinch knots of the most dedicated fishermen who walk the tangle of river tying tiny prayers to their lines, hoping to catch hold of the little myths swimming in the current.

From here you follow the scars to the river, your mind meandering with your feet back and forth down through the tumble of old mountains. The path narrowing and turning from the river but always returning. You start to think about all the knots you've tied in your life, the ones you've used to tear things down and the ones you've used to tie things back together, and then you start to think about the knots you never could tie tight enough. You start to think about that little Celtic knot that used to tie you to her hand, the one that was a little big, but you thought she could grow into, the one with the words on the inside of the band that must have slipped through her fingers somewhere six years ago. You think about the pawn shop and you almost regret it, but then you remember what it looks like to walk in and find your fiancé wearing your best friend like that cotton dress she hid under on Sundays. Then you're stuck trying to unravel a slip knot that fell through, only to find out they never unravel as easy as they tie. So you cut it loose, and cling to the tangle for a while.

You keep on walking, trying not to trip over the tangles of root and rock, trying to walk out of those thoughts before you get tied up. You look at the dead leaves on the ground, the crumpled stories of old trees. You keep walking and you are thinking about how old the trees are, and how quiet it is, and how poetic it would be if the moss really only grew on the north side of the trees, but where there are enough shadows it grows anywhere you let it. That sounds pretty good, so you keep that thought around to write down later. Then you look up and you see the stump where you found that six pack of beer that apparently got too heavy for someone to carry. So as not to let it go to waste, you stuffed it in your pack. And when you got down to the water, you sank it in the shallows with a few river stones to let it get cold. It was about as good as any miracle you'd ever seen, not quite water to wine, but close. So you sat on an old hemlock root washing the day down, skipping river stones, watching the river settle in for the evening. And by the time you made your way back up to the road, you were too drunk to drive, so you had to spend an extra night. That was the miracle of it.

As you get close you can hear the tumble of the river, like a constant wind in the fold of the mountains. You can tell you're getting close when you feel the temperature start to fall. Between the breath of the river and the hemlock shade, the trough of the valley stays cool. You can see it in your mind before your eyes. The root-and-rock tangle of the shore. The white petals of fungi growing up the backs of trees. Moss painting the roots, and speckling the rocks. The current always taking a little of the shore with it. The trickle of rain water and springs running down the skeletons of fallen timbers into the water. The collected piles of driftwood, sun bleached, and stacked unnaturally high above the river by the last flood. The water, jade green in the light. The shallows amber and the deep pools black.

## JAKE DUNN

The morning still condensing over the water like the river's breath rising, sweeping over the rocks. The river stone shallows, cutting streamlets in the river, the water kicking and bubbling, turning white, rolling over the smooth-faced rocks like sheets of glass, turning on itself, folding over into neat tresses, before braiding itself back into the current. And the old hemlocks leaning out over the river's edge, like your mother peering down the pew, singing hymns loud enough for the both of you. And you stand there watching it make its way, tumbling towards the fall line.

You try to forget that it is no longer a real river. All the free-flowing rivers left the east long ago, and the ones that stayed were seduced by the promise of power. Long since dammed, tied up in knots of concrete and rebar. The hopes of old fishermen and wanderers washed downstream and collected into stagnant pools of what once was, now curled up against concrete walls, but enough water seeps through to keep it breathing.

By the time you shake the color into the Polaroids you've kept in your mind, you are staring at the river. You look across the river, and you can see the old campsite sitting in the sand. And you remember the time you all spent the weekend after graduating, before moving on. You can still see the slab rock thrones you built around the fire ring, the ashes of old memories still curled up inside, the faces of people you used to know still laughing. And you join them when you think about trying to ford a wheelbarrow filled with two cases of beer and a bottle of bourbon across the river at the big bend. But it's not as funny when you think about how screwed up everyone was, even then. But the river and the beer are smooth and no one seems to notice. So you fish until dark, pulling more beer from the river than fish. And then when the night comes you take shots and roll smoke until everything fades. Nothing heavy on your minds, at least nothing that you can remember for more than eight or nine seconds before forgetting. And you watch the fire burn to embers, telling little stories until it burns out. You wake up early and it still feels late, finish off the beer for breakfast. And when it gets hot you jump in the cool water, trying your best to swim against the river, seeing who can last the longest, ending up washed up and exhausted downstream. You dry out for a while in the sun, fall asleep on a rock and wake up burnt. Then you gather up all the empties and push a wheelbarrow of crushed aluminum back to the road. When you get there, say you had a good time. Wave good-bye. Pick a direction and walk away. You know this is the last time, but you don't think of that now.

So Matt goes to Afghanistan, and never really comes home, tells everyone they left him there. The only thing that ties him down to the earth is the Desyrel. And Joe moves out of town and finds a good job just to put a bullet in his head. He left a note for his little sister to read in blue ink and the back of his head in red on the wall. But it's really no surprise. We all knew it would be something like that. John goes to grad school, gets some letters behind his name, and a pretty wife. Your best friend Dan moves into the city, lives a real good life and makes real good money, doing all kinds of real good things, except Dan does all those real good things with your fiancé. You try not to think of that. But it's one of the knots you can't pull loose, and it's too close to the good things to cut loose. So you just ignore it.

And you, you stick around. You learn how to drink and you forget how to pray, and you quit trying to write. And you keep saying you're going to start praying again, start writing again, but when the only way you can fall asleep is to gargle whiskey, prayers and poems slip your mind. You start just before the sun goes down, when the sky starts to turn to bourbon. And you sip from the bottle, holding it up to the sky between gulps like a kaleidoscope, your head doing most of the spinning, waiting till the color on the inside and the colors on the other side of the bottle match. And then you light a cigarette. The smoke goes up and the match burns out, and you just watch it because you're too drunk to smoke it.

The river pushes on, its thoughts growing thinner and calmer between the folds of the mountains. And you follow, the trail narrowing against rock ledges. You slow down a little now, thinking only thoughts that can fit the distance between your steps. And for a while every thought is heel-toe—don't trip, heel-toe—don't trip. But in the back and forth of switchbacks your mind's stride lengthens and your thoughts wander, and pretty soon you don't know where a thought begins or ends or where it came from. You start talking to yourself, and pretty soon you are not sure if you are talking to yourself or someone else. And it starts to feel like prayer. It's the closest you've gotten in a while, but you know it's not. And so you're stuck wondering whether or not to say amen.

For a minute you think to make it official, but it's like trying to call back that girl you told you would, and you really meant to, but it's been too long so you put the phone down. And so you're tangled in the barbed wire no-man's-land of thought and prayer. And you know it's been too long. So you think about how she must feel, and you wish that you didn't feel the way you feel. And then you think how God must feel, what it must be like to be as lonely as God. Everyone letting you down. No one to talk about it with.

And you wonder how God doesn't turn out like you, staying up late thinking about writing words no one is ever going to read or understand, but instead drowning the words He was going to write with a swig of whiskey, stripping them of any color or meaning they ever had, like paint thinner. And you realize that if nothing else, at least you and He are a lot alike. At least you are both failed writers, your best works collecting dust beneath bed frames, and even if His sells better, no one reads it, except for when the encyclopedias are checked out. You start to wonder why you keep on trying to write. You're not much good at it. You should be. You have plenty to say, more than most, but every page is blank. You've written a dozen stories in your head a dozen times, but they never seem to make it to paper. You make coffee and get to your desk and you sit down, and you start to straighten your books, and your notes, anything to keep your pen from paper, because you're not so sure you can untangle the mess you weave in your mind with only a pen. You stick your pen into the knot ball trying to pry loose a tag end, hoping it will all uncoil neatly on the paper but the words catch and snag. And you look up to find you have made it to where you want to be.

The lake is low from lack of rain and the summer. You look out and you can see what always lay beneath the lake's emerald complexion.

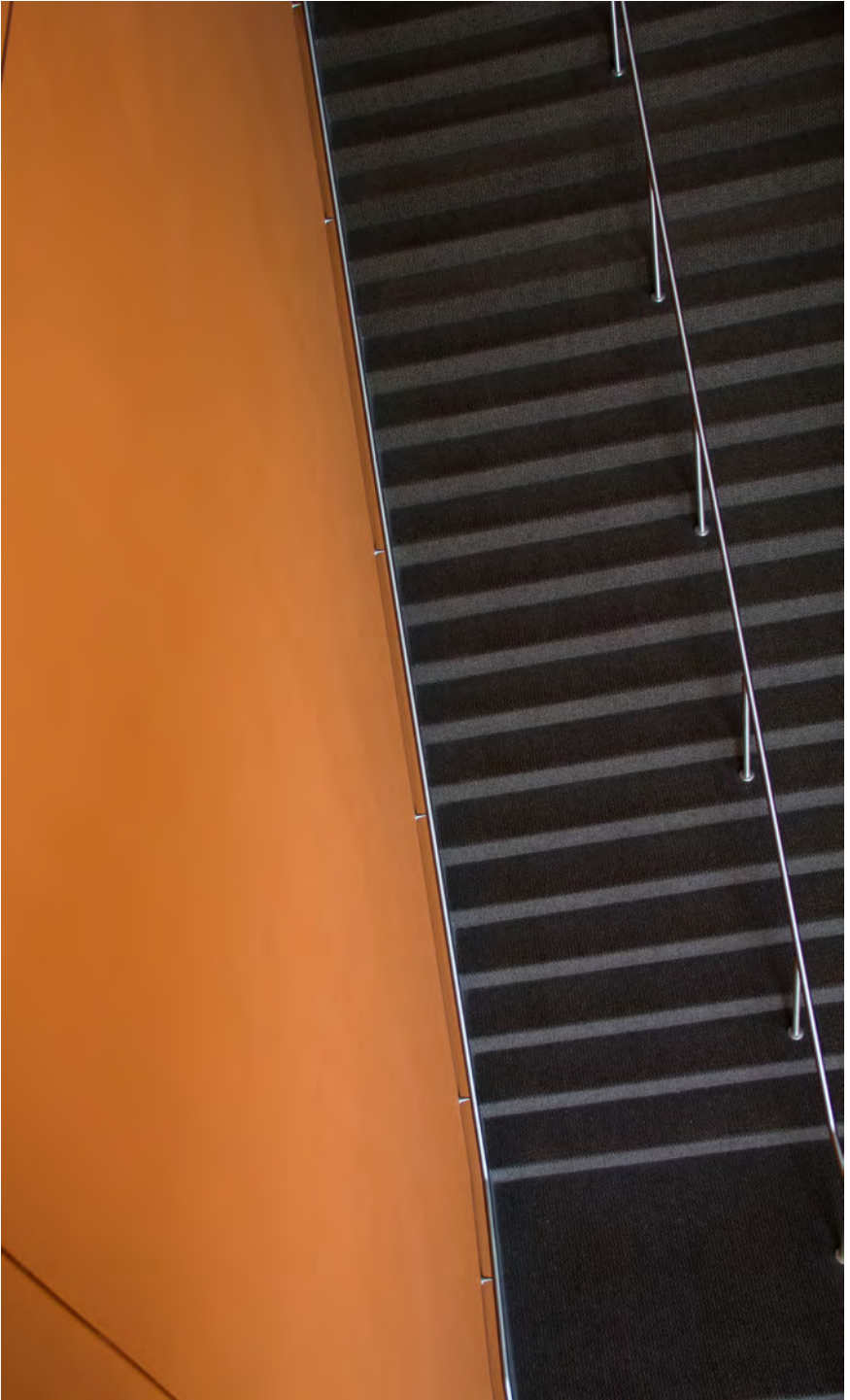
## JAKE DUNN

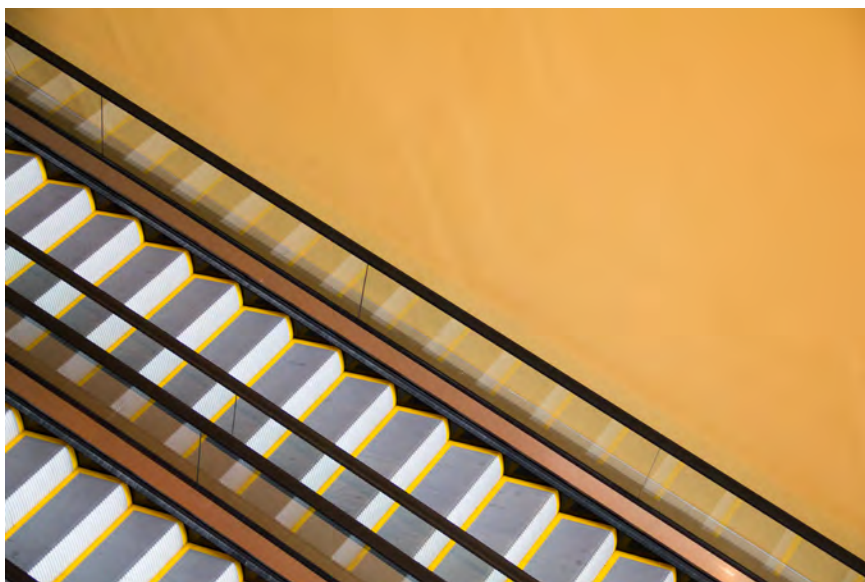
The lake has dissipated; everything is exposed, remaining only dry rocks, sand, and the skeleton of the river bed. The tiny rivulets of runoff water wind their way from the mountains through the dry lake bed like the veins on the belly of a dry leaf, whatever water there is finding its way to the river's emaciated body. You look up from the valley, and the mountain sides are browning and yellowing, the leaves losing composure of their chlorophyll faces quickly, but you know it is only drought, and the seasons show no sign of change. So you sit on the edge of a rock looking down the river knowing what it is supposed to mean, what you want it to mean, but you know it is just a river, watch it making its way, wishing it were easier to believe. And you look out for an ending, but there is only the river, backing up against a concrete wall. So you settle for making one up, wondering if it is really like a river or not.





**FRESHMEN** Mandie Wines  
35mm Film Photography





**FROM THE SERIES**  
**“FORMARC”**

Jivan Davé  
Digital Photography  
Canon T2i

## STARGAZING

Brianne Holmes

We clutch our coats and watch the clouds unroll  
the night. My jeans soak up the sky's first thought  
of dew, and shadows gather for a full  
moon. Against the sky, trees stretch, branches taut  
while darkness bays behind the treeline's fence.  
The stars weave tales of galaxies and suns;  
of journeys ended and begun, portents  
of consuming fire, of light dispatched to run  
through years to reach us. Roaming shadows fill  
the night, fires douse the sky; we laugh, remind  
ourselves we lie in hollows of the hills  
on dew-drenched grass: we search the void to find  
a constellation. I raise my hand, which pales  
and comes back inky, sky beneath the nails.

## THE LAST LEAF

Sarah Burgess

One lone leaf  
twirling  
in the breeze  
from the tallest point  
of the tree.  
Bathed once  
in dawn—  
its colors  
red and yellow  
from this  
daily circling  
of the sun.  
A small, fragile stem  
holding tight,  
resisting  
at the last—  
until the darkness  
grows and  
all is night.

## STARES

Rafael Alcantar, Jr.

I've never seen the cage  
that is the roof of your mouth,  
or the underside of your tongue,  
where you keep secrets  
behind that familiar row of teeth,  
those corners of a mouth  
where I find myself in dreams:  
offering you a cup of coffee  
and filling it to the brim, prolonging  
our balancing act, a brief stumbling  
of fingertips, I trace the veins around  
your knuckles up to your elbow;  
feel the thick skin on your knees.

## LIKE THE WAIL OF MOURNERS

Margaret B. Hayes

drifting through the fog,  
the continuous sound of  
a train whistle  
carries far and long.

Repeated again and again,  
like a dreaded thing  
that needs to be contained,  
the dampness of this dark day

holds it close in a shroud of mist,  
and the sound softens,  
as if pressed  
against a shoulder.

## VOID

Richard Lee Chapman

He lost his father, when he was four,  
at the bottom of a snowy ravine,  
two hundred miles short of home.

His mother was left with three boys for company  
along with her cigarettes and years of ersatz loves.  
She hurried toward her end.

His brothers sheltered her and each other.  
They remained a full unused quiver,  
three arrows searching for a target.



## WINDY BONES

Rafael Alcantar, Jr.

The freckles were scraped  
off your arm and onto asphalt  
that night you tried to defeat  
yourself. When your tooth made  
its way through your upper lip  
you hid your face too well.  
It was decided that kissing  
anywhere but the mouth  
was like smoking without inhaling;  
you found other ways to stay occupied.

## THE EDGE

Emmy Wheatley

Your burial dug up old memories  
that I had hidden behind the picture frame  
of a younger version of us:  
underwater with chlorine-burnt eyes  
we tried to survive without air.

I remember sitting with the car windows down.  
You could always see me,  
but my long hair whipped across my face,  
blinding me to what you were stealing,  
forcing my hands deep into thorns  
that you told me were just pretty white roses.

After all those years stuck in shadows—  
buzzards circled above wanting a feast  
of my flesh that I would have gladly given to them,  
just like you, but I swam to safety.  
You were crushed with our burden  
of blood-red roses.



**DISTORTION #3** Jessie Collins  
Acrylic on board  
48 x 72







**FEAR OF A  
NAME** Ryan Walker  
Acrylic on Canvas  
48 x 36

# THE ART OF DYING

Rebekah Spear

Stroking her hands and fingers, I rubbed the cool lotion on Grandma's thin skin. Her wedding ring slipped into my hands, no longer tight against plump fingers. Seated on the bench next to her cot, we talked in the alcove by the living room window. Outside, the Georgia mountains rose atop the fog. The moonlight seeped through the fog and sneaked into the room like a child postponing its bedtime. Our hands clasped, my grandmother and I chatted about my school, my feelings about teaching, and the absence of a man in my life. Her voice was slow, not calculated, struggling. I did most of the talking. I reminded her of past Christmases when she would spend hours shopping, wrapping, baking, and decorating the house for her four children and twelve grandchildren. I told her she made Christmas magical for me as a child. She smiled a smile unlike the one I had been used to. Her face sagged, no longer rounded by the indulgences she ate. Her skin and teeth were yellow, evidence of the barter between her and the chemo. It promised a healthy future if she gave up her quality of life now. I saw that tonight. Chemo was a cheat and my grandmother was losing her life and her future. I watched her tiny body rise and fall. Her limp arms and legs lacked muscle definition, much like an infant's. The heavy blankets spread over her spoke of her constant body temperature—freezing. To everyone else, the cabin was like a vacuum, sucking the would-be cool winter air out and replacing it with hot, rotten air that often smelled fermented. Or, maybe it was just her. It is true that cancer rots a person from the inside out, but people don't tell you about the stench that results from the slow physical decomposition that cancer induces at the end of the person's battle. Now, as I sat by her side, I felt guilty for thinking those thoughts. I still wished for fresh air and relief from the sinking sand of death. I remember wondering if this was what seeing a person die was supposed to be like. I wondered if it was normal to grow tired of the waiting process, especially when it was slow but inevitable.

I would imagine that authors approach the subject of death timidly, having an idea in mind but not certain as to how to convey it. Authors grapple for the right words, pictures, symbols, or metaphors to unmask the guise death wears, often to no avail. It seems as though such representations of death are like the desire to describe the Grand Canyon. It is like the chasm between seeing the Grand Canyon and reading about it. No matter how many times you read or look at pictures of the natural wonder, you can never fully appreciate its grandeur until you are at its precipice, blinking into its rugged abyss. Reading, seeing pictures of, and hearing about death are completely different from witnessing it.

Perhaps we do not hold enough value of death. It is easy to gather that our society does not consider death as a part of life, but as the robber in the night that breaks in and steals our futures without warning.

Romeo and Juliet sacrificed their lives in romantic desperation to be reunited in death. Suicidal lovers make death look sentimental and sweet. Sylvia Plath wrote about death because she longed to die. Plath writes "...death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above one's head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow. To forget time, to forgive life, to be at peace." Plath ended her life through suicide. For her, the process of dying and death itself was more intriguing than living life. Surely, Plath was disappointed in finding that there were no grasses waving above her head, or the ability to discern today from tomorrow. Death is a mystery sought to be explained through different lenses.

I have seen paintings of aged men or women sunk into a bed, looking lifeless, surrounded by loved ones whose cheeks glisten with tears. Paintings of Christ on the cross range from simple to gruesome representations. Some artists paint him as defeated, head bowed. Others arrange his features to show pain, blood coming from his body, and angry red skies. If one were to try and understand death simply by looking at art, conflicting images and ideas would result in confusion. Is it serene and peaceful or horrific? Most artwork and movies are content in showing only certain parts of the dying process, either focusing on the pain and suffering or saturating the audience with feelings of remorse and sadness through different images. Because of these conflicting images of death, I didn't know what to expect to see or feel or hear when I saw a person die. Would I burst into tears? Would the skies darken? I wondered what a normal reaction and situation would look like. Like a taboo subject only appropriate behind closed doors, the truth of how witnessing death feels was left unmentioned.

While Grandma lay there, the atmosphere in the living room was quiet and expectant, patient. Her attitude about death spoke volumes about who she was. In essence, her death was her last opportunity to show her personhood. At one time, grandma's stubborn nature was a subject of aggravation for her family, but as she lay there, her children praised her strength and endurance. She hated that she was dying and verbalized it no matter who was in the room. Knowing she wasn't ready to die made it difficult to sit by her side chatting about my future when I knew her thoughts were on how she wouldn't be there. Her words would turn from angry and stubborn to sentimental. Whenever she drifted between the chasm of consciousness to the space between life and death, she would start to cry. She didn't realize that we were with her, watching. Her body would grow still and the only sound was the ominous hum of the fluid monitor. Gently, we took turns wiping her wet face, wondering what she was seeing or thinking about that would cause her tears. In these moments, she was unreachable, trapped inside the alluring darkness.

Seeing a woman, who once had more energy than a five-year-old, slumped in a cot, waiting to die was neither solemn nor horrific. It was unusual and strange. I hadn't expected it to be so anticlimactic. We knew that cancer would eventually take her life, so her dying wasn't a surprise. Still, we envisioned her death as something of the future, not the present.

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As her family, we were weary of wondering if she would die today or tomorrow, we were constantly waiting to hear a change in her breathing. Perhaps ironically, we would try to do things like cook, clean, or watch a movie in the living room. Once, we all played scrabble and words like “pain” “struggle” and “die” were avoided. Nobody wanted to be insensitive. But, more than that, we didn’t know how to behave. We weren’t trying to escape or disrespect my grandmother’s dying, but we didn’t know how to sit and wait for days. When my cousin’s young children came, their naivety about the situation felt harsh. The laughter that echoed in the quiet cabin juxtaposed my aunt’s and uncle’s hushed tones. Despite their ages, my parents were just as confused as I was about what to do, my grandfather perhaps the most confused of all. How to watch a person die while maintaining some sense of normalcy throughout our day had not been something that we were taught.

Three days before her death, I sat by my grandmother’s side, reading to her from the Bible and giving her water out of a straw. It was only the two of us. The house was quiet and the glow of the lamp near her bed cast a shadow on her white face, outlining her hollow cheeks. Her dry, bald head rested against her fluffed pillows, occasionally dropping to one side because of her weakening muscles. Near her bed, red, green, and gold trimmed church baskets lay discarded on an unsteady card table, aching to be carried out to the trash. The only other sign of Christmas was the tiny nativity window cling placed on the picture window at the head of Grandma’s hospital bed. When the sun hit it right, the Star of David suspended above the angel would illuminate and cast a rainbow of colors in a corner of the window seat. But, it was dark now, and the rainbow had faded away with the sun. As I sat there, rubbing her arms with her “Dream Angels” scented lotion and looking at the Star of David, I realized that I was experiencing death in reality, not the way it was shown in books or art. It was slow and the atmosphere in the room was wearily expectant of what was to come. It was lonely. I was very aware that time hadn’t stopped just for me and my family to be with my grandmother or grieve over her death. I knew that for my friends back home, this was a normal Christmas. It wasn’t going to be like I saw in movies, where the characters and scenery freeze during the climax. Voices weren’t amplified, there would be no doctors yelling “stat!” or nurses peeking sympathetically into the room, asking if we needed more time. We were in my Grandparents’ cabin in their living room—the hospice cot set up in front of a window and her iPod turned on to her favorite gospel songs. It was expectant, as if we were waiting for a life to start, not end.

After Grandma died and the funeral home came to get her body, the image of her being carried out would become a recurrent theme in my dreams. The funeral director bent down over her body, felt her neck for a pulse, and used his stethoscope at her chest. His eyes avoided hers as he confirmed she was gone. Her yellow form sagged as they rolled her onto a stretcher, her head lolled to the side, as if her neck weren’t attached to her body. She was wheeled out of the house, eyes still open, one last look at the life she had lived and the people she had loved. It was silent. Looking back, I think we were all stunned at how carnal it all seemed. Our mother,



wife, and grandmother was flopped onto a stretcher and wheeled out like a piece of furniture. The door closed and we were one person less. We stood for a bit, waiting to see who would make the first suggestion to move from the room.

After Grandma died and I again encountered portions of literature describing death or saw art or movies depicting a death scene, I was dissatisfied with the portrayal. I analyzed the scenes or description and responded with reasons as to why it was wrong. My grandmother's death wasn't anything like I had seen or been warned about. However, just like I had experienced with literary and visual arts, her death was juxtaposed with conflicting images. It was unique and private but felt very wrong. It was peaceful and painful. It was beautiful and scary. Having only been removed from that experience for two years now, I have come to the slow conclusion that maybe literature, the arts, or people aren't intentionally trying to mislead about the truth of death. Maybe the producers, like me, struggle to put into words or pictures what the experience is like. I too wrestled with relaying the intimate details of seeing her die. I would describe one thing, but then decide that wasn't quite right and end up starting over. My aim was to keep trying to write or create a masterpiece that represented death's reality. For me, I found that perhaps the point of writing about my grandmother's death wasn't "to get it right, but simply to get it written" (Thurber). I am relieved that I am not supposed to get it right. Perhaps this is why authors write about life experiences; it is cathartic and helps them have a clearer understanding of the experience. If I keep producing things that, though not quite exact, have some truth in them, then one day I will have written it all. But until then, I just keep writing.

## DELIVERANCE BY MYTH

Brianne Holmes

Because of my stubborn, Peter Pan, never-grow-up complex, I transitioned out of childhood later, and more reluctantly, than most. At thirteen, a vague shame overshadowed me when I pulled out my Barbies and sent them upon adventurous quests in the world I created for them, a world mapped on a sheet of computer paper, each country carefully delineated in pencil.

Yet for all my embarrassment, which I stubbornly denied, I couldn't bear to part with childhood. Then I discovered *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien's three-book fantasy. My first brush with the trilogy came when my parents watched Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Fellowship of the Ring* on their anniversary. By all accounts, my mother spent most of the movie gripping the edge of the couch in enthralled suspense while my father snored, his head tilted back against the cushions. My mother told me I would like the movie, but she insisted I read the books first. Then ensued a book fest during which my mother and I borrowed two copies of *The Hobbit* from the library so we wouldn't have to fight over it. I remember both of us sprawled on my bed reading our separate copies.

By the time *The Return of the King*—the last of the films—came out later that year (December 2003), I was an avid fan. I was not alone in my obsession. On the opening day of *The Return of the King*, the movie brought in \$34.1 million in the U.S. and \$23.5 million internationally. These figures broke the first-day record for a December release, according to *The New York Times*. I'm happy to say I was part of that figure.

But as a fourteen-year-old, I gave little thought to box office tallies. For me, *The Lord of the Rings* had struck a deep and fundamental longing. Through its mythic world of magic and elves and hobbits, I saw something *more*, something that teased the edges of my brain, whispering of truths beyond the physical and the now. C. S. Lewis experienced something similar in his adolescence when he encountered *Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods*, a Wagner opera based on Norse mythology. In his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes the joy this work evoked in him as “the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing.”

Throughout history, people have been stirred by the mysterious workings of myth. Among the relics of the world's first written language, archeologists found the first known epic, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. About 4000 years ago, the Sumerians of Mesopotamia recorded the supernatural adventures of King Gilgamesh of Uruk, how he defied the gods, killed monsters, and sought (unsuccessfully) immortality. Ever since that epic was written, generations from one side of the world to the other have written their myths. Cultures worldwide tell stories of supernatural

interactions, of gods and heroes and monsters. Scandinavia has *Beowulf*. Greece has *The Odyssey*. India has the *Ramayana*. The Arabic regions have *One Thousand and One Nights*.

*Gilgamesh*, history's first written epic, poses a question that has emerged in culture after culture over the millennia: What are we searching for? As Gilgamesh wanders through desolate regions searching for immortality, he meets a woman named Siduri, who says to him, "Why do you come here wandering over the pastures in search of the wind?"

Most of us have not wandered the wilds of Mesopotamia or searched the ends of the earth for immortality, yet we are all wanderers. We are all searching for something, and many across the edges and expanses of time have turned to myth, have gone wandering through the words of fantasy. Why? What comfort, what courage, what enlightenment do we seek in the supernatural fictions of mythology?

*The Lord of the Rings* was not my first encounter with myth and fantasy. I grew up with C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and with the original *Star Wars* trilogy. A year or two before I encountered Tolkien, I read Madeleine L'Engle's science fiction novel *A Wrinkle in Time*. All of these enthralled me with their excitement and adventure. In fact, it was probably childhood myths like these that inspired me to invent my own world, the world I made for my Barbies and drew in detail on computer paper. But *The Lord of the Rings* greeted me with something more than my past encounters with fantasy. It delivered that twinge Lewis spoke of, that longing so exquisite it almost hurt.

Perhaps timing made the difference. Tolkien visited me during a vulnerable time, a time I might almost name an identity crisis. I felt the pressure to put away my childhood, yet I was not ready. I was afraid of taking my own journey into the gray mist and the rocky terrain of adulthood. That's when myth took my hand. For all of us who feel lost, myth is a guide, a friend who shows us who we are and who we might become.

Western culture returned to myth, as I did, in response to an identity crisis. In the mid-twentieth century, the West grappled with its past and its future. The World Wars had shattered lives, redesigned national borders, and rattled the confidence of the last few hundred years. Gone was the faith in progress that had spurred the industrial revolution and the spread of democracy. By the mid-sixties, the tumult included the Cold War, the Vietnam War, civil rights, women's rights, and youth rebellion. Four prominent figures, icons of hope for many, had been assassinated: John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy.

Enter myth.

Though *The Lord of the Rings* was actually first published in 1954-1955, it was not until 1966 that its fame burgeoned when a pirated edition was printed in the U.S. Soon, Tolkien's fantasy had a cult following among college students, who liked the earthy, genuine hobbits and the pro-environment undertones of the trilogy. Jane Chance's *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* describes a graffiti battle that began between the disgruntlement of modernist philosophy and the hope of modern myth. On walls, Nietzsche's maxim "God is dead" was combated with "Frodo lives." In his essay "He Gave Us Back Myth and with It, Truth," Chris Armstrong commented that

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*The Lord of the Rings* “opened the world of myth and mystery to a generation disenchanting with the soulless corporate culture around them.”

Tolkien’s trilogy did not stand alone. In 1962, Madeleine L’Engle’s science fiction novel *A Wrinkle in Time* was published. This book, which, according to writer Gabriel McKee, equates conformity and uniformity with evil, won the Newberry Award in 1963. Then, in 1966, *Star Trek* premiered on television. A generation struggling for meaning and order took refuge in myth—in L’Engle’s message that love conquers control, in *Star Trek*’s message of an optimistic future led by reason and science, and in *The Lord of the Rings*’ message of good triumphing over evil. This is what myth does: it sends us confident warriors, reluctant heroes, and heartbroken wanderers. In them, we see ourselves more clearly. We see our weakness and our potential.

William Shatner, who played *Star Trek*’s dashing Captain Kirk apparently believed in humanity’s longing for myth. “I think,” he was quoted in *Time* saying, “there is a need for the culture to have a myth, like the Greeks had. We don’t have any. So I think people look to *Star Trek* to set up a leader and a hearty band of followers.” A shared myth becomes a rallying cry for a culture. This is who we are, it says. And this is who we want to be.

Beyond providing a cultural identity, myth provides something else, some joy in wandering the pastures of imagination. Whether or not we are searching for wind, as Siduri claimed, we seem to enjoy the wandering.

I first encountered *The Epic of Gilgamesh* as a freshman in college in my Western Civilization history class. Though the story dramatizes great tragedy, through it I sensed a culture yearning for something. Framed against the cloudy sky of Mesopotamian polytheism, the epic presents a hero longing for escape from death. In his lecture, “On Fairy Stories,” Tolkien called the wish to evade death “the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape.”

Similarly, Mircea Eliade, a twentieth century Romanian philosopher, called myth “the nostalgia for eternity.” When we look across continents and cultures, this is exactly what we find, this longing for something spiritual and lasting. In *Gilgamesh*, a thirst for everlasting life reverberates on every page. When Gilgamesh answers Siduri, explaining why he is wandering, he tells her that his friend has died. He says, “Why should I not wander over the pastures in search of the wind? My friend...the end of mortality has overtaken him...Because of my brother I am afraid of death.”

Whether we seek the Great Escape or ordinary, everyday escape, the un-reality of myth offers some safety, like a glass window behind which we can look at the world. Tolkien saw this element of escape as positive. In “On Fairy Stories,” he insisted that “escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic.” Who would blame a prisoner for wanting to escape? he argued. And if the prisoner could not escape, the next best thing he could do would be to imagine life beyond the prison walls.

This world, in one sense, is our prison because it tends to wall out everything but the tangible and the visible. Realistic fiction can only describe life within the prison walls, addressing the physical and the possible. It plays by the rules of the world we live in. Realistic fiction is certainly important, even necessary. It may be that in order to maintain sanity, prisoners must write about prison. They must speak their insights about

the bars and the bunks and the terrible food. But what if prisoners forgot that life existed beyond the prison? What if they stopped believing there was something more, beyond their sight? In the '60s, myth revealed itself to a culture that had largely rejected the unseen. It may be that, with the starkness of the Enlightenment over, Westerners found that life held a level of experience beyond the empirical.

Throughout mythology, we find a grappling with the supernatural or the spiritual. Beowulf fights monsters. Rama and his wife Sita, from India's *Ramayana*, face demons in physical form and wrestle with the task of sorting through their deceptions. Odysseus and other heroes of Greek mythology struggle with the gods.

Myth does what realistic fiction cannot do: it personifies the spiritual. Hades becomes not just death, and not just a place, but a person as well. The curtain splits between our world and another, and demons show their faces. In modern myth, too, spiritual forces take shape. In C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, evil is often embodied in a character, such as the White Witch and the Green Lady, the series' two female villains. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, evil coalesces in the form of The Dark Thing, a blackness slowly enveloping the universe. *The Lord of the Rings* solidifies evil in the form of a ring. Goodness, in old myth and new, often materializes in the heroes of the story—not necessarily perfect in goodness, but striving toward righteousness.

"Myth is necessary," said writer Clyde S. Kilby, "because reality is so much larger than rationality." Realistic depictions of the world are necessary and often accurate, but rarely complete. Mythology fills in our view of the world. "Something really 'higher' is occasionally glimpsed in mythology," Tolkien once said, "divinity, the right power...the due worship; in fact 'religion.'"

C. S. Lewis, as a boy, saw something of this religion in Norse mythology. He saw something there that led him back and back again to myth, and later to Christian writers (some of them mythmakers), and ultimately to God. "Sometimes I can almost think," Lewis said in *Surprised by Joy*, "that I was sent back to the false gods there to acquire some capacity for worship against the day when the true God should recall me to Himself."

Lewis spoke of false gods. It is true that many myths provide errant interpretation of the unseen. All myths, in fact, are at best incomplete accounts of the spiritual. But most myths are sprinkled with hints of truth, glimpses of the true God.

The biblical book of Ecclesiastes says of God, "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." No fantasy, no myth will ever be complete because our understanding of God will always have limits. As long as we live on the plane of this physical world, our understanding of the spiritual realm will be hampered. Even in eternity, I doubt it will be possible to fully recount the nature of God, His splendor, and all His doings. We cannot fathom it.

C. S. Lewis discovered that the joy he sought, the joy he thought he found in myth, was not, in itself, the Thing he desired. Joy, he said, was like a road sign pointing him toward Christ. The sensations joy brought him "were merely the mental track left by the passage of Joy—not the wave but the wave's imprint on the sand...for all images and sensations,

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if idolatrously mistaken for Joy itself, soon honestly confess themselves inadequate. All said, in the last resort, 'It is not I. I am only a reminder. Look! Look! What do I remind you of?'"

Myth is not God. Myth cannot fully explain God. Rather, myth calls us to peer beyond our physical surroundings and seek God. As Clyde S. Kilsby wrote, "Myth is the name of a way of seeing, a way of knowing in depth, a way of experiencing." That is why we keep writing and filming myth today. Like a pair of glasses, it helps us see.

I first read *The Hobbit* nine years ago as a child struggling on toward adulthood. I rode myth, like a wave, over the tumult of adolescence. Now *The Hobbit* will be released as a major motion picture in December 2012. Already, fans can watch a trailer, video blogs of interviews, location scouting, and filming. On the surface, it is merely a story of dragons and dwarves and hobbits. Magic. Fantasy. Myth. But in the depths of an engaging story there is more than this. Out of the corners of our eyes, we see something true. What is it but a glimpse of the unseen, a shadow and a foretaste of the eternal? Here is a parting of the curtain behind which sits the universe of the un-palpable. We catch glimpses of the spiritual. We catch glimpses of God.

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# AWAKENING

Drew Welborn

Sanders placed the man's fingertips against the glass touch-screen. After a few seconds, an identification pictogram emerged from the projector on our computer. The image of the man was impeccable. If I wasn't standing next to his dead body, I'd swear it was actually him. These new pictograms were even more active than the previous ones, smiling and nodding like we were old friends.

"Tell us your name," Sanders asked the projection.

It smiled at him in a way that seemed too personal. "Robert Doyle Anderson."

"Yes, that definitely coincides with the 'Rob Anderson' tag on the door." Sanders laughed, but there was a nervous tint underneath each breath that escaped his mouth. We were already worried about our next question. We didn't want to ask it.

"How old are you, Mr. Anderson?" I asked quietly.

The image of Mr. Anderson turned to me with an eager grin of acknowledgement. It answered: "Thirty-nine."

I looked at Sanders. He was at the window, massaging his temples. I knew he was thinking exactly like I was.

"Mr. Anderson, just one more question," I said. "When was your last Awakening?"

It smiled, again: "June 27."

That wasn't good. Only a few months had passed since then.

I turned the computer off, and Mr. Anderson was gone for the final time. I joined Sanders by the window, looking at the vast city around us. Every office window, every storefront, everywhere was lit up. The steady procession of life continued on as usual. Mr. Anderson's death wouldn't be enough to cause the slightest of delays.

I checked my watch. The blue lights flashed. 3:35 a.m.

"Come on," Sanders said. "Let's hurry and get him back to the lab. I've got a meeting at 4:30." He moved to Mr. Anderson's side and began preparing the body for transport.

His efforts seemed pointless. I said: "You know what killed him. He looks just like the others." I motioned to Mr. Anderson's sunken cheeks and pale skin. And the dark circles around his eyes. "Tired, exhausted."

"I just want to make sure. He's just so young. I'd like to be sure." He wiped his forehead.

"I *am* sure! They've all been getting younger!"

Mr. Anderson was the youngest person to die in decades. Of natural causes, at least. Although, one could argue that. The company I worked



for had created the Awakenings. They were the reason Mr. Anderson, and everyone else, had been awake their entire lives. That is, of course, until they closed their eyes for good.

When I was a child, my grandfather told me once about how he used to sleep at night. He said it often went by so fast, like the flutter of one's blinking eye. He would close his eyes after night fell, and when he opened them up, the sun of the following day would be shining. Hours had passed. He hadn't used them.

He told me it wasn't always like that though. He couldn't always remember them, but sometimes, he would have dreams. He said there was a mystery to something so beautiful and natural, how he could remember the vivid feelings without recalling the actual details. So many mornings, he could only say that he had simply dreamt.

But he didn't always forget. He remembered the last dream he ever had—the last one before the Awakenings began. That was in 2037.

We learned about the Awakenings in school.

Science classes included detailed lessons about how the drugs affected our bodies, right alongside lessons about how DNA works and how proteins are made. History classes provided accounts of how major cities began dispensing the drugs. These followed lessons that recounted great wars and economic shifts.

For me and the rest of my generation, sleep was a simple topic discussed in textbooks. We were always awake. We finished high school by thirteen and were Master's degree holders by eighteen. We could be multi-millionaires by our early twenties.

Progress and advancement were constantly in our grasp. As long as we took our yearly Awakening injections. Most doctors' offices could do it, and large retail chains were beginning to carry them. But you could always come to iOpen, the company that developed the product, the company that was my employer. I even used to administer them myself.

iOpen's head of public relations, Mr. Smith, leaned back in his chair with his hands behind his head. His desk was clear except for a stack of papers and the cylindrical projector that produced his computer screen. I've always found it strange that there are no personal pictures on the desk or walls. I doubt there's any even in the drawers, locked away.

He said: "This will not become a situation."

It was a declaration, but I could tell he didn't believe it. Or wouldn't allow himself to. He certainly wouldn't allow the public to.

I turned to Sanders. He was looking out the window, his hands clasped together. He had already told me about his earlier meeting with some other iOpeners. They were worried.

Mr. Anderson had been the fifth person in the last month to pass away displaying the same physical characteristics. There were four the previous month, and two the month before that. And they were progressively getting younger. Not in any set pattern, but younger nonetheless. It had been unheard of.

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Mr. Smith addressed us: "Anything from the test results?"

"Nothing new," I said. I knew that's what he wanted to hear.

"So it's still not our products then?"

"Well," Sanders started, "not directly, but—"

"But nothing," Mr. Smith interrupted with a wave of his hand. "We're not at fault."

"But we're fueling it," I said.

"No. The only thing we fuel is the potential for progress. The people that run this world," Mr. Smith said, "only run because of us."

Sanders quickly stood up, angry. "We are allowing them to run themselves into the ground. How many will it be by this time next year?" He stormed out of the office.

I began to go after him, but Mr. Smith motioned for me to stop. He said: "Until there is specific evidence that the Awakenings actually killed someone, there is no problem. Is that understood?"

I didn't answer. He wouldn't understand, or even stop and try. Instead, I said: "We've almost gone too far. People are starting to work themselves to death. Sooner, not later." I walked to the door. I turned back to Mr. Smith. I spoke as calmly as I could: "You need to wake up. For real."

He narrowed his eyes, examining me.

"You're so concerned with your progress," I continued. "This is a problem. It is *now*, and will continue to be." I walked out.

I found Sanders at Winston's Pub across the street. It was a popular place for iOpeners to take a break. He was already drinking his scotch.

I sat next to him and Bar-B, the automated bartender, slid over to give me the local brew. Most bars had switched over to the Bar-B system, and each had the option for customization, to break up the monotony. Winston's Bar-B had fiery red curls. She was the perfect bartender, able to recall every customer and their purchase history. But she still couldn't carry on a conversation. People work twenty-four hours a day, and no one had figured out how to make Bar-B more personable.

Sanders swirled the clear liquid around his glass. "Do I still have a job?" I laughed. "I don't think Smith has *that* much power."

"No, just influence."

We sat there for several minutes without speaking, slowly sipping our drinks. Outside the window, I could see the street lights turn off. The sun was rising.

The TV screen behind the bar began to show a daily news show. The first headline read: "Major Pharmaceutical Company Close to Awakening Breakthrough." So far, iOpen was the world's only manufacturer. The patent ran out a few years ago, and other companies had tried to replicate the formula. A few places in Europe came close. But, it didn't quite work, and some test subjects ironically ended up in an indefinite coma.

Sanders snorted at the screen. "It's just never enough, is it?"

"Someone was bound to figure it out eventually."

"You think they'll regret it once they realize what's going on?" He held his empty glass up and Bar-B refilled it.

"Not now," I said. "Maybe later, when their children start dying. I hope it doesn't come to that."

Sanders nodded his head. "Is this what you imagined it would be like working for iOpen?"

I'd never actually confronted my true feelings about working for the company. I was like Mr. Smith when it came to that topic—I didn't want to see the truth. "It was just a good opportunity when I finished school, you know? Seemed like a long-lasting enterprise," I said. "I was just trying to make something more for myself. Like everybody else."

"Like everybody else," Sanders echoed. "Sounds like you were *dreaming big*, huh?"

I grinned. "I suppose you could put it like that." I finished the last sip of my drink. "Have you ever talked to anybody about dreams? Like older people? Actual, real dreams?"

Sanders was quiet for a few seconds before answering: "No, can't say I have. I was never really into history."

"My grandfather told me once about the last one he ever had before the Awakenings started," I began. "He was into history. Said it was like his own personal piece of it." I told him what my grandfather said to me. How it started so quietly. He was with his mother and younger sister, sitting on a blue and white checkered blanket in an expanse of fresh grass. A picnic basket was between them. His mother pulled out chicken salad sandwiches and they began to eat. "They were homemade, her own secret recipe. He swore he could taste it." But something went wrong. His mother and sister began to choke. He watched them die, by their own chicken salad.

Sanders stared at his empty glass. "Terrifying."

"He said it was, but not like you'd think," I said. "He said the frightening part was that he didn't feel scared. Even when he woke up. He said it was just peaceful, like it was meant to happen."

"Peaceful, huh?" Sanders asked.

"Yeah," I said. "Peaceful." I continued to watch the TV screen, and a commercial for iOpen began to play. People were shown getting injections and then being successful. They were doctors, lawyers, businessmen. Even children receiving awards. They looked happy, proud.

The final scene showed a couple walking along a path in a park. They must have been able to retire early. They looked to be about my age. But they were walking away, so I couldn't see their faces.

**UNTITLED** Rachel Clark  
Oil on Canvas  
32 x 48





**THE SKIN HORSE** Alivia Chapla  
Mixed Media  
48 x 36

## **EXERCISING THE RIGHT TO NOT**

Rafael Alcantar, Jr.

Late night Diet-Coke and nicotine  
taste like home on our restless tongues.  
Not like obligations, but the youth  
we realize there is so little of or how  
it will be missed when our skin sits  
in layers over our bones and muscle  
no longer reacts to the strains of living.

## STRAWBERRIES IN A CHEESE GRATER

Emmy Wheatley

Turtarriers placed in a junkyard,  
filled with faint murmurs  
of meaningful comfort, became  
roadkill to rolling wheels  
and the flicking of lighters.

Calm night air mixed with heat  
and smooth gravel became a blindfold  
of tea or the aftermath of cannabis.  
Choking catches you off  
guard like the speed wobbles

that worked their way from hidden  
scabs to dividing white lines.  
The same way mosquitoes seek out  
revenge, the pavement gained respect,  
and turned into just another scar story.

## ENCOUNTER

Anna Marie Davis

I happened upon  
a spider under  
the counter  
this morning  
preparing a web  
for bugs and  
other such  
critters I choose  
to ignore.  
I do not have  
to worry  
as much with my  
eight-legged  
friend guarding  
under the counter.  
He keeps my  
pants legs  
safe while I  
pursue other,  
more meaningful  
things.



## ELYSIAN FIELDS

Jake Dunn

The heaven of poets:  
thoughts grazing free  
of the acreage of tiny minds,  
words like June bugs flying  
free of their baling twine tethers,  
poems swimming in quiet streams  
with silent ripples;  
and the poet looks over  
the fields, already plowed in verse  
with no words to say—no need to;  
the thought of harvest enough.

## **AS ONLY AN ARTIST CAN SEE**

Margaret B. Hayes

I stood for long moments,  
dwarfed by the  
larger-than-life painting  
of brilliant white clouds  
overwhelming a dark blue sky  
and a thin strip of warm beach.

Transported into a world  
as limitless  
as that reach of sky,  
I catch my breath,  
startled, to see myself  
in that small  
bit of earth.

## DEEPER STILL

Rafael Alcantar, Jr.

When our bodies think it fall  
they find cliffs that drop into lakes.  
Invincible, they grip higher, or because  
safety isn't an issue, we swing further.

Surfacing is a fight between instinct  
and thought, or denser things. Something  
we try not to anticipate when reaching  
for oxygen, trees, or someone to hold on to.

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