IVY LEAVES

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IVY LEAVES

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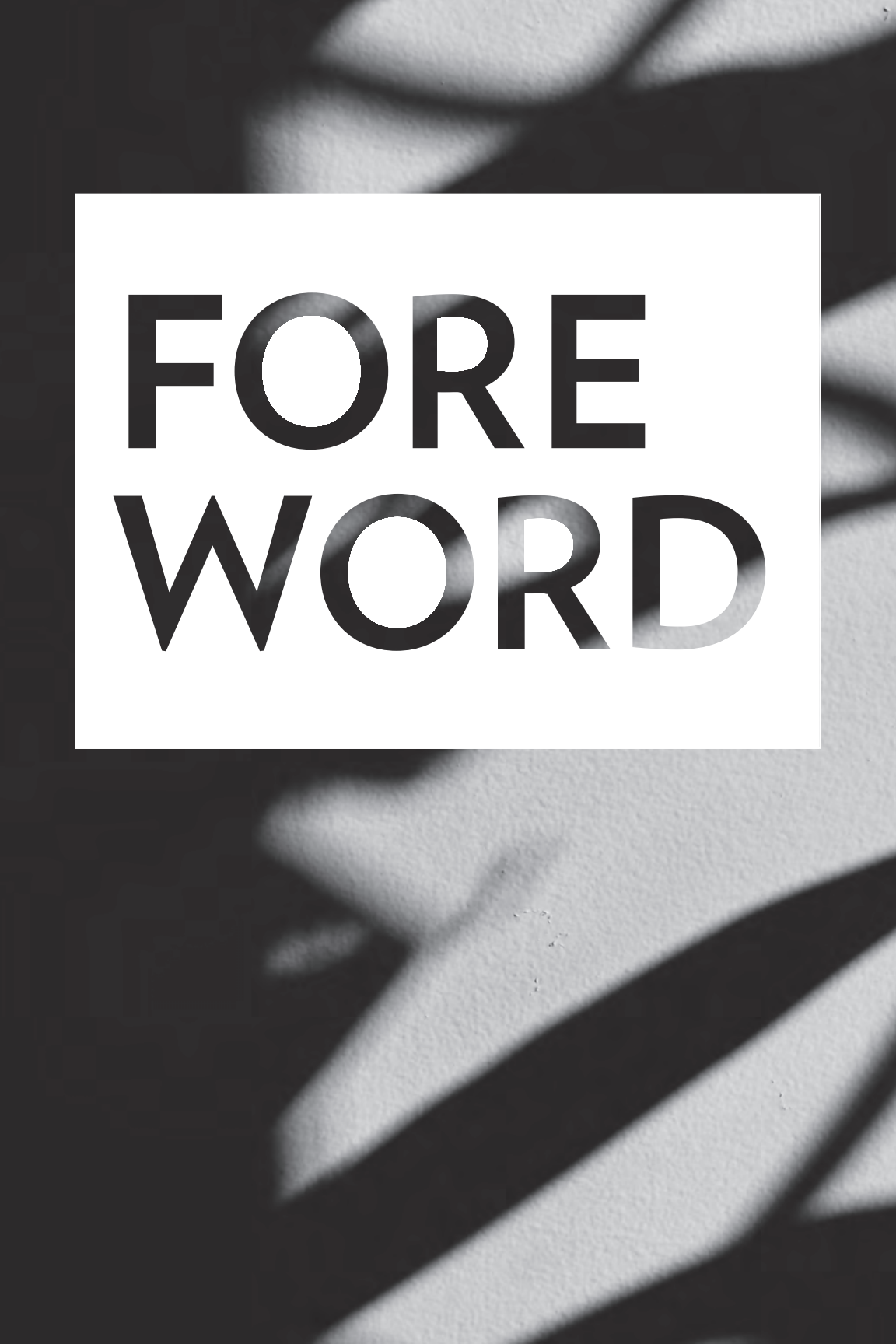

FORE
WORD

Where do you want to go? Let's set off.

Jump into *Ivy Leaves* and learn about places you've never seen and people you've never met. Go back to your childhood's mischievous ups and downs; only there can you understand, "I got away with it, the perfect crime, and then my mother came." Discover why a fast food toy makes a kid feel like a hero, a "huuurk-uh-leez."

Walk the halls of your old high school and contemplate homicide, inspired by the *swish swish* of the world's most annoying "Pants of Fury." Witness zombies with cell phones and how pen and paper transform into "White Paper Products and Octopus Ink." Go outside and pick up that lucky penny or lie on a "quilt of greens and blues." Put yourself in the position of a child dealing with the pain and fear of loss in "A Mouth of Sharp Teeth."

Or laugh with a seventy-six year old woman holding a Nerf gun. Lean against a lamppost while waiting for a ghost. Meet the featured writer, Emmy Wheatley, who dreams in stories. See life through the eyes of a deer in "Nature Film." Get to know Mrs. Muller and understand her mother's struggle as presented in the drama *Doubt*. Bake biscuits and envision a dinner with the disciples in "Sacraments."

Ivy leaves is like a pair of antlers: Art and literature, two sides of the creative coin that display the pride and growth of students at Anderson University. Every year, the editors of *Ivy Leaves* look for pieces that take us into the lives of others and reveal new perspectives. This year, we asked of every piece, "Does it take us somewhere?" Every page in this journal will take you somewhere. Every fresh idea, every colorful landscape, every line of clever language will move you. What are you waiting for? Get going. Read this.

Small Town Burn A Little Brighter

CHARLES B. CAMPBELL

They say small towns burn a little brighter,
and the air tastes more sweet,
that the electric hum of the city
is no place for flannel skinned boys like me,
but I have to say I disagree.

I've seen God in the quiet eyes of strangers,
and felt His skin on the bark of trees;
I've heard His voice whispering through the mountains,
and crashing beneath the tires on these old streets;
I've fallen in love in the backseats of cars,
and in fields of fertile green,
but despite it all none of these places have felt like home to me.

The Weight Of Words

CHARLES B. CAMPBELL

You once told me that my words
were warm, and butter yellow;
that like your morning cup of coffee
they were bold, but just as necessary.
I told you the things you wanted to hear,
but like the delicate strands of your auburn hair
my words are fragile—
they twist and knot and break.

Sun Hat

GENEVIEVE HAMILTON

It's miles from you to the pulpit.
Organ pipes sit stiff and somber
in brass uniforms suspended in silence,
their dusty throats beg for a chorus of song.

Stained wooden pews: teeth marks—
taste varnish, boredom, stack prayers to the rafters
and stuff in the plush pink cushion
a paper airplane—a tic-tac-toe battle
scrawled across its broken bulletin wing.

That tear in the thick carpet—
slip a finger to the stone-cold layer,
left to sit a century.
Battered broken backs of Bibles, of hymnals,
two-by-two take rest in rows on rows of pews
that break the backs of the congregation
and bring to life the sinner asleep.

Stare at the stained-glass brilliance
stretching floor to ceiling. Palm the window—
pretend a pulse beats beneath the
sun-baked swaths of shimmering color—
the sun hat beside you jingles her keys.

White Paper Products and Octopus Ink

CHRIS MAULDIN

Stars hung heavily from the mid-autumn sky,
so heavily, I'm amazed they hung there at all.
Clinging to oranges, then mauves, then blacks,
like tiny twinkling thumb tacks on ink soaked paper,
they pulled it, twirling it, always toward the horizon
and then I watched helplessly as one clung no more.

I lay on my quilt of greens and blues
and little fabric men depicting family moments passed.
I watched and I blinked and the star was gone,
fallen forever from that sky of swimming octopi.
I imagine, sometimes, a man with a quill,
scrawling stories in the multihued azure,
punctuating them with a gleam of starlight and then,
moving on to another, ending it just the same.

Home of a Salesman

JONATHAN KURTZ

Shoes stand in rows by the basement door,
empty spaces in the ranks filling
only at night. Blue chalk streaks the walls,
shooting stars above the forest of cue
sticks leaning in their racks, keeping vigil
over tranquil waters, the green lake
of the pool table. To the right, stools
surround the private bar, enthralled
by the Yuengling tap and humming wine cooler.

Stairs creak like the joints of old men,
though the office door opens without complaint.
The mahogany desk displays
its trophies: a pillar of human vertebrae
and the knob of an artificial knee, price tags
dangling from both. Sitting in audience
before them, the leather armchair bears
deep ravines in its hide, while elsewhere
the seats wear skin unmarked by labor.

Across the hall, sunlight in the bay window
creates luminescent moons that rattle in glass cages,
silver plates freshly polished by the maid
that sings softly to herself as she dusts
the oaken table supported by rearing lions.
On the wall, the Virgin watches with
compassion in her eyes, comfortable
in her place at the center of the house.

Alone
in the foyer
the grandfather clock
counts the time with hiccups, wondering
why the silence is so heavy.

ELLIE #1
by Julia Madden
35mm Film Photography, 5 x 5

Enigma

CARA DILLON

Penumbra. I pitch this term at my father in an attempt to find a word that he doesn't know. With a nonchalant wave of his hand and a furrowing of his wooly eyebrows, he rummages his brain for the definition. Pulchritude. Temerity. Egregious. He defines them for me like a parlor trick—sometimes hastily, sometimes after ruffling his hands through his dark hair as if to massage the meaning from his brain. I've seen him drop medical terminology, demonstrate flight patterns, discuss stock market trends, and explain music theory all over one cup of coffee. So his performance isn't unexpected in light of his formal education.

My father has accumulated degrees like women acquire shoes; he likes to have a few different ones just lying around, and it's a few more than he'd ever discuss in public. An entire wall in my parents' home is devoted to framed evidence of his achievements—diplomas, yes, but also certificates and awards from schools and societies with acronyms longer than my name. But his avarice for knowledge and endless ability to memorize facts aren't what I find most fascinating about him. Instead, it's the memories and stories my father has to push aside to unearth these gems.

I envision his mind like a room packed with overcrowded filing cabinets and endless stray papers and post-its coating every available surface. But he is aware of every line of every note, even the ones he's hidden in the deepest drawer. I'm certain of this, not because he has let these stories slip, but because I know that, even as his daughter, I still haven't heard every piece that he has tucked away.

I've spent much of my life trying to assemble a suitable image of my father, to label him with cliché adjectives that give me comfort and security. But he's never allowed that. As soon as I tried to brand him with a particular persona or even vocation, he would whip out some unknown tale from the recesses of his mind. I sat through dinner parties as a kid, hanging onto every word out of my father's mouth because I would learn more about him in that hour than I had for ten years prior. Some stories were extracted only for guests. For example, when he was a pilot in the Air Force, he ejected himself from an airplane…and *landed* on a telephone pole. He had to wait there, at the top of the pole, until the fire department brought their cherry picker to get him down.

The little that I know about his childhood makes me wonder how he survived even that. He broke both arms and multiple fingers. He and his cousins, on more than one occasion, stole sticks of dynamite from the coalmines to play with in the woods. They also darted through the woods shooting BB guns at one another. One instance awarded my father the smooth and perfectly circular scar he has on his leg. I noticed it as a child, but I wasn't told the tale until I was almost a teenager. My dad was so afraid to tell his grandmother he had been shot that he waited days, until it was infected,

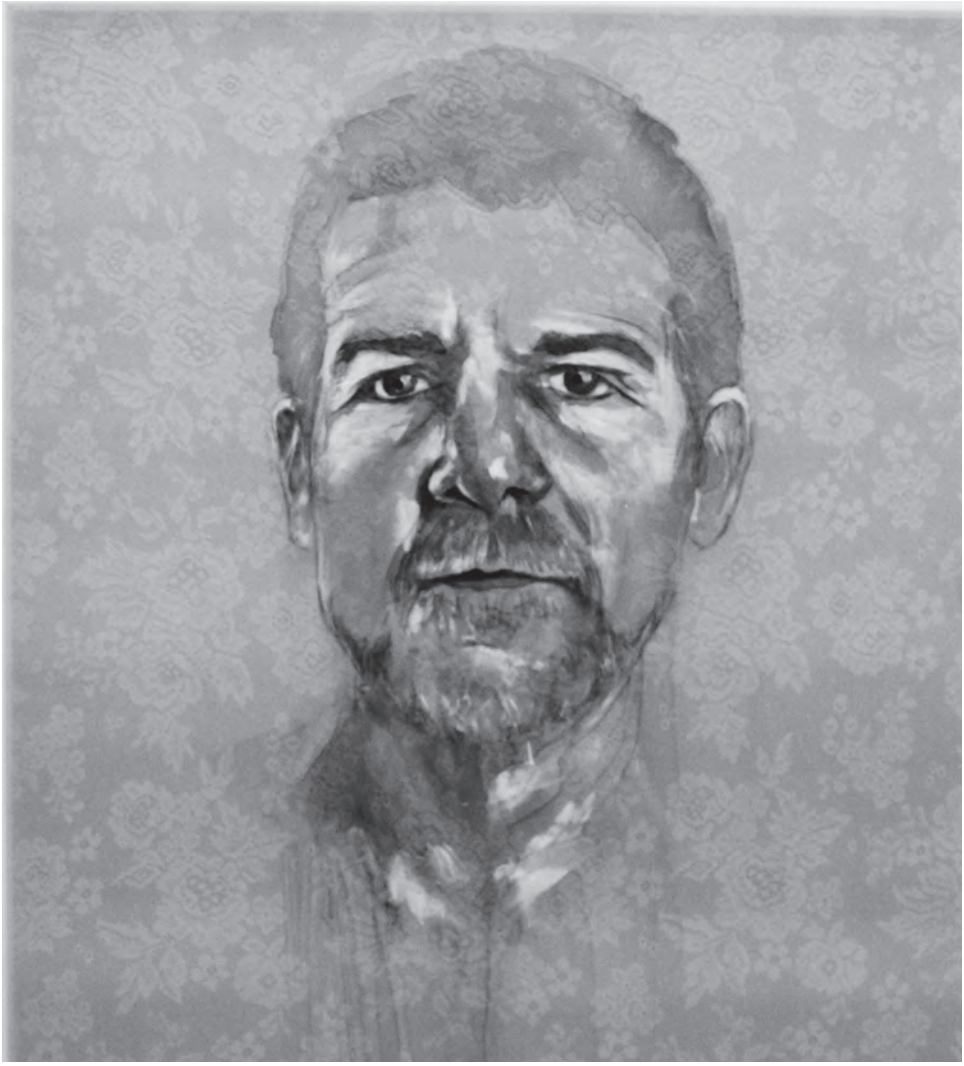
to tell her. The damage was so deep that to this day he has no feeling in that patch of un-pigmented skin.

When I proposed the idea of obtaining a tattoo to my parents, my mother's condemning glance at my father revealed another little-known tale. Under the coercion of older boys and the influence of some liquid encouragement, he acquired a tattoo on his arm around the age of fifteen. With long sleeves and sweatbands, he hid it from his grandmother, whom he lived with until college. He had it removed in his thirties. I knew my father in his thirties, but I don't remember ever seeing it. What else could he hiding behind his suit and tie?

My dad's college years have become increasingly unedited the older I've become. He lived on a single jar of peanut butter for three weeks. Halfway through the month, he ran out of bread, so he had friends steal crackers from the cafeteria for him. I recently complained to him about a student who didn't understand the definition of a silent library floor. He laughed to himself and unearthed another memory. Another student, engaged in his studies, complained that my father was being far too loud. The bookworm made such an ordeal out of the situation that my dad decided to teach him a lesson. My father, the man who constantly told me to "Leave your sister alone," covered the boy's car windshield with peanut butter. Apparently, peanut butter was a common theme during his undergraduate career.

But underneath the anecdotes of boyhood mistakes, the tales that he laughs to himself while confessing are the other memories. Before he was ten, he was adopted by his grandmother because of his troublesome home life. He remembers every detail of the night his father sat him down and told him that it would be better for my dad to live with her. During high school, after his grandfather passed away, he worked all night in the coalmines to support himself, and his grandmother. I listened earnestly the one time he recounted the day the police informed him that his grandfather died. He still graduated second in his high school class and was the first in his family to attend college. He was at the top of his medical school class, despite being the oldest student and having a five year old and a newborn at home. Those stories don't come up when company is over.

I think it's my own arrogance that is the problem. When I've convinced myself that I know him, that I've firmly fitted the last piece of information about him into place, he undermines such certainty. Shortly before his retirement from the military, we sat at Starbucks and I surveyed a list of places that he had been stationed over twenty-five years. Most of the locations I had lived in as well, but there was one, a few years before I was born, labeled "Classified." I questioned him about that. He nodded and smiled, assuring me that I would never know.



DAVID & DALE #2
by Ellie Youngs
Acrylic on Sheer Curtain

Birdcage

EMMY WHEATLEY

My first job as a live-in nurse was with Yams. At seventy-six, she refused to break a hip. She had been kicked out of every retirement community within an hour's drive of her two children. That's where I came in.

Her daughter was a strict, borderline obsessive-compulsive lady with three kids of her own and no room to take care of her mother. The son, Paul, was in his late thirties, I guessed, and handsome. He didn't talk much when they interviewed me for the position. His sister gripped his leg tight when he spoke, in an attempt to make him stop, as he told me about how his mom got kicked out of one of the nursing homes by tying electric wheelchairs together. They hired me almost immediately. I guess they were desperate. I was, too, so I moved in the next day. They had warned me that she had lost her mind, but I had no idea to what extent.

Most nurses were assigned to rich old people who couldn't cook for themselves or use the bathroom. I expected to see someone with shaky see-through hands dividing medicine into weekly pill containers. I assumed we would go to the park in the afternoons and work crossword puzzles. Watch the news. Eat with teeth that could be removed. Read books. Maybe even play some shuffleboard. She was not the helpless, old lady I expected.

To have a live-in nurse usually meant you were rich enough to die with some dignity and privacy. It could also mean that you were more or less abandoned, with no relatives to take care of you; that was the case with Yams. She might have been dying, but she gave no indication she was giving up. There was no time to look through her hands when you were busy making sure they weren't getting into any trouble. As part of my job, I would take her out of the house daily. I took her to coffee shops; she stole drinks off the counter when other people's orders were made. We went to the mall; she used the men's restroom. We went to Wal-Mart; she filled other people's carts with things and then wondered away like she was a lost old lady. I began to see why she was kicked out of so many retirement communities.

She was always busy living, as she called it.

The reason I was there was my husband—or ex-husband. I had recently been divorced from a coward of a man. He would rather not say anything than tell me he didn't love me anymore. He fell out of love. Or was never in it to start with. Yams knew all about love—about how you didn't need it. Her opinion was if you have it, good. If you don't, skip it. Yams said she would rather have an accomplice to get in trouble with, and if that person came with some free dinners and sex, it would be just fine with her.

I met my husband when I was twenty–eight, working in a hospital. He came in because he dislocated his shoulder in a car accident. He kept claiming that he wasn't going to cry and that he wasn't in any pain at all. I fell for his funny guy act. That was six years ago. I gave up my career and moved with him for his job.

Sent to live in a house too big for two. Sentenced to book clubs and neighborhood watch meetings. I missed taking care of people. Being needed, not just medically but for comfort.

I was needed now. My job was to be her accomplice.

One Tuesday I took her to the zoo. She described it as the zoo with an empty pirate ship in the center. It did not have elephants or lions or rhinos. We saw no gorillas or hippos. Upset and overheated, she lost it, jumped over the railing rather ungracefully and fed the giraffes pulled grass and cotton candy that I had bought her. I joined her because I couldn't or didn't want to stop her. Letting the blue tongue wrap around my wrist, I felt it pulling me, wanting me. Like a gentle handshake that I didn't yet understand. She felt it too. Between us no words were needed to describe the need for rebellion or the taste of freedom.

I didn't miss my husband like one is supposed to. I had found a life of my own, one filled with adventure. Everyday different, everyday filled with surprises that Yams seemed to understand more than I did.

The last day I spent with her we went to a neighborhood-wide family picnic in the park. It was sponsored by some school or church that I had found a flyer for, and suggested we go. First, she found the moon bounce, for children ten and under—and apparently her. Not only did she jump but she also knocked over kids. Some thought it was funny while others ran out crying, leaving their shoes unattended at the entrance. Next, she entered herself into a pie-eating contest. It was not just any pies but cherry. Hands behind her back, she went face first. The red worked its way into her glowing, white hair. She finally gave up and wiped her face off. Noticing the twelve year old next to her was still working on his pie, she flung bits of hers on him, trying to distract him. Then she got out her Nerf gun. I had to pull her away.

The scene was too public, too noticeable. You can't throw pie at a child and ruin moon bounces for several others. Police were called when she, covered in sticky red cherries, looking like a madwomen, ran around shooting dogs, mothers, and children. As harmless as Nerf guns are, they still had her arrested. She begged me not to tell her kids, but I had to tell them something. I couldn't control her anymore. When I bailed her out, I promised not to tell them she got arrested or about the pie incident. But I did call her daughter and explain that she had gotten worse and that she couldn't be taken out into public. I explained that I could no longer control her or keep her out of trouble. She was sent to a nursing home for the mentally unstable.

Three months after she was admitted, a package was shipped to me. Inside was her Nerf gun and a note that read, "They tried to take it away. Use it well." One month later, I received a call from her daughter saying she had died. She couldn't make it inside brick walls with strict rules, but she had put in her will that I was to get everything she left in what she called her "cell."

I went to the nursing home and was given a box full of her old stuff, nothing much but a helmet, some fishing wire, a few Ping-Pong balls, and a journal. I thought it was all junk till I read what she had been writing. It was an account of her life. The first page said, "Don't tell my children." She wrote about how she used to live in an apartment with three guys but worked it out so she could live there for free. She had been an alcoholic at one point. There were claims of her killing a bear and flying a plane. It was mentioned that she stole a car in college and that she had a tattoo that I never knew about.

I kept this journal as a reminder, maybe of her or of what it represented, just like I kept the Nerf gun. People have asked why I have the gun or told me I am too old for it. I simply shoot them till they go away.

Maybe I kept it because after she died, after I sat there in her old "cell," after reading her journal, looking at the bars on her windows, the plain white walls against the white bed sheets, after seeing the broken television, after the front doors closed and I realized a passcode was required to get anywhere, I felt trapped. The bathroom doors didn't exist. There was no way to see the sky or go outside. There were cameras everywhere.

I sat on the bed as the walls surrounded me. I couldn't have lived there.

No one could live there.

UNTITLED
by Rachel Clark
Silver Gelatin Print

The Beaver's Door

RACHEL BURNS

On the border where the Rodericks' property met the Worths', there ran a creek, wide and gold and alive between high clay banks. It never fully froze over in the winter, and in the spring it always ran high, tumbling over itself and occasionally overflowing into the surrounding forest. The summer was the only time that seemed to slow it. The Missouri sun heated it into a sort of lazy lassitude, and it crept like hot honey through the woods lining its banks. It was this creek that they were trying to dam. They were piling old logs and fallen limbs in the water haphazardly in the way that children do things with no real idea of how to do what they are trying to accomplish. It was the product of a few bored summer weeks that had turned into more habit than fun.

The day was bright and solidly hot, and the boy was resting on the bank in the ample shade of a sycamore. He dangled a foot from the edge and watched the dragonflies dipping in and out of the shadows.

"Sam."

A dragonfly zipped close to his face, hovered in front of his nose for a moment, then zoomed away. He felt the tiny wind of its wings on his cheek.

"Sam."

He pressed his toe into the creek's surface. The heat seemed to put a skin on the water. He imagined that he could feel it bend and shift under his foot.

"Sam! Are you listening?"

He liked Phyllis well enough for a girl, but there were moments that he wished she could just be less of one.

"I found a stick."

Sam didn't even bother turning around. "Yep. The woods are full of them." He heard her huff and smiled.

"I mean I found a *good* stick. I can't lift it though."

"Hang on a second." He got up and brushed the clay from the backs of his legs, then straightened and looked to where she was standing.

Phyllis pointed at a fallen limb covered with a healthy crop of mushrooms. "That one."

The log was easily as big as Sam was, and undoubtedly much heavier. He knew he couldn't lift it even if Phyllis helped. "Maybe we should leave that one be, Phyll. There's probably a giant fuzzy-leg spider under it."

Phyllis cocked an eyebrow. "I've never heard of fuzzy-leg spiders."

"*Giant* fuzzy-leg spiders. They're huge. And they bite. They're in the third book."

Sam had won Phyllis' respect through his possession of a trio of dusty old animal encyclopedias that he claimed to have read. It wasn't a complete lie. He had read the first and second volumes that covered mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish. Insects didn't interest him, but Phyllis trusted his knowledge implicitly.

"Are their legs really fuzzy?"

"*So* fuzzy. Like sheep legs."

Curiosity began to win her over. "I want to see."

"But...um..." Sam floundered about for the worst spider attribute he could possibly think of. "They have twelve legs instead of eight."

Phyllis hopped onto a boulder, staring intently at the underside of the log where it disappeared into the leaves. "Never mind," she said. "I don't want to see."

"We'll find another one without spiders. Come on."

Phyllis stepped down from her rock, making a wide circle around the log as she followed. They worked for another half an hour or so, finding sticks, carrying sticks, throwing sticks onto the pile. The limbs were beginning to poke through the surface of the water. The fact that it wasn't actually slowing the flow of the creek at all didn't concern Sam as much as the hope that Phyllis wouldn't notice and make him help her rearrange it.

"If we finish the dam, maybe beavers will move in," Phyllis piped from behind him.

"The book said beavers like to build their own dams," Sam said, picking up a branch.

"When Daddy built a shed, a family of possums moved in. They made a nest in our wheelbarrow. We had to call a man to come and get them out." Phyllis snapped a branch in half and tossed it aside. "Not really sure what he did with them."

"Beavers are a lot pickier than possums," Sam said. "And they can smell human hands."

"In the water?"

Sam grunted noncommittally and handed her his stick. Phyllis took it with a frown. "I don't know how a beaver dam could be better than a human one. They don't even have thumbs."

She sounded disappointed, so Sam decided to be generous. "Well, the book says beavers sometimes can't smell very well. So maybe if we leave it in the water for a while, they'll come."

She brightened at this. "Maybe if we put a door in the side, they'll burrow a tunnel the rest of the way inside."

"Why do you want beavers to move in so much?" grumped Sam. "They're just big rats with tennis racquet tails."

Phyllis smiled. "I've never seen a beaver before," she said wistfully. "I just like animals is all."

Sam sighed. "How are we going to put a door in it?"

"You could swim to the bottom and move some sticks around. That'd give them a head start on it at least."

"The hell I could! I've never touched the bottom before. Liam's never even touched the bottom." His brother was in the eighth grade and was held in high esteem by Phyllis as being better at everything than Sam.

"Just try, Sam. Please?"

And somehow, when she had that certain look on her face, it was almost impossible to say no to her. Cursing under his breath, he trudged back towards the creek. Phyllis followed gleefully, carrying her sticks. Sam took off his glasses and set them carefully on a flat rock. Pulling his shirt over his head, he tossed it on the grass. He walked to the edge of the bank and peered into the green depths. The water looked a lot less inviting than when he had just been dipping his toes.

"It looks cold," he muttered.

"Sam, it's July."

He leaned over, trying to see the bottom. "Water's colder the deeper it is."

"Oh. Is that in the book too?"

He glanced at her. There was no trace of guile in her expression, but the corner of her lip was twitching slightly. *Humph.*

He held his breath and jumped.

The warmth shocked him more than cold would have. It was nearly suffocating. For one uneasy moment he felt as though he was swimming in blood. He came up spluttering. Through the water in his ears he could faintly hear Phyllis laughing. Everything was blurry. He swam the few feet to where the monstrous pile of sticks began. "How far down should the door be?" he asked.

"You're so *pale*," giggled Phyllis.

"Shut up or I won't do it."

"I think they come up through the bottom, don't they?"

Sam looked down, but all he could see was his own shaky reflection and the branches of the trees overhead. He did look a little pasty.

"Just dive and see if you can touch the bottom."

Sam inhaled deeply and let himself sink below the surface. He felt his way down the dam to the base of the pile where the sticks sat nestled into the mud.

Before him was a massive nest of various logs and limbs tossed, pushed, or rolled into the water. He could dimly see the outlines where the sticks crossed and tangled. He had never really considered the amount of wood they had needed to gather to make it to the surface. He reached out and pulled experimentally on a branch. It stayed firmly in place. He pushed off from the bottom and kicked to the surface. "I can't move it!" he yelled.

"What?"

"I can't —" he coughed creek water out of his mouth. "I can't move any of them. They're wedged too tightly together."

"Try wiggling it!"

Sam held onto the side of the pile. "I don't think it's going to work, Phyll."

"Just one more time? Please?"

That face. Damn it.

Under he went again, once more feeling his way down the tangled branches to the bottom. He opened his eyes and looked through the murk for a likely stick. He picked one protruding a little farther than the rest and yanked on it. It shifted a little. He grabbed it in both hands and wiggled it back and forth. Gradually it came free, leaving a small hollow behind. He tossed it aside and reached for another, pulling it loose. The third one came out easily with the extra space. He was reaching inside for another one when he heard a dull scraping noise from above. Sam looked up to see the descending log right before it landed lengthwise on his stomach and pushed him down into the silt. A swirl of grit puffed up from the impact, filling his eyes. He squeezed them shut and shoved blindly against the wood, but it was saturated from weeks of sitting underwater. Pushing his feet against the mud, he tried to scoot out from underneath. The log had him pinned securely against the creek bed. He scrabbled in a panic at the bark with his fingernails, air streaming in frantic bubbles from his nose and mouth. He opened his eyes and strained to see the light above him. It was dark, so dark and his chest was on fire. *I don't want to die.* The last few bubbles escaped from his lips, and he could swear the weight on his stomach disappeared as everything went dark.

Sam was dead.

He had to be.

But why was Phyllis with him?

She was kneeling by his side, hitting him between the shoulder blades and screaming his name. Why was she hitting him? And suddenly his body

rolled and pitched, quite beyond his control, and he vomited what seemed like half the creek onto the shore. He inhaled deeply and the pain was like fire in his lungs but he didn't care because he could feel the prickle of the grass on his chest as he shivered and the warmth of the sun on his back easing the cold and he was safe and alive, and these were good things to be, even if he did wish Phyllis would stop screaming. Coughing, he rolled onto his side. His chest hurt less with each breath. "Phyll…"

"Oh, *Sam*." She collapsed next to him, hair plastered in wet ropes against her face and neck. "I thought you were dead."

They lay like that for a few minutes under the old sycamore. Sam's shivers grew less violent, and finally he could breathe with some regularity.

"Can you sit up?"

Sam propped himself up on his elbows. "I think so." He hoisted himself up into a sitting position and winced at the sudden pain in his head. "Everything's blurry."

"You took your glasses off, remember?" She tried to smile and failed miserably.

Sam looked down and saw red on his hands. His blood. Not his blood. Hers. Some of her fingernails were gone, the nail beds torn and bleeding. "Does that hurt?"

"Does what hurt?"

He touched her hand, and she looked down and saw the state of her fingers.

"Oh," she said matter-of-factly. "Gross."

"Does it hurt?"

"No. I hadn't even noticed. I guess some of them came off when I was trying to move the log." She looked back at him and gasped. "Sam…"

"What?"

"Your head."

Sam brought his hand to his forehead and hissed at the sting of his fingers on raw skin. "It's just a scrape. It's not bleeding too bad."

She giggled absurdly. "I rolled the log over your head."

"Geez, Phyll," Sam laughed weakly. "Some rescuer you are."

She half-smiled, then put a hand over her mouth as her eyes filled with tears.

"Hey. No. Stop that. I don't need more water."

Phyllis took a shuddering breath and tried to hold her face still, but broke into sobs nonetheless. Sam patted his hands together nervously, watching her cry. Finally he reached out and touched her arm. "It's okay. Really. It's not your fault."

She rubbed her eyes and gathered herself as best as she could. She took his hand and squeezed it. "Sorry. You scared me is all."

Sam squeezed back. He sighed and looked at their pile of sticks. "I guess we won't get any beavers moving in."

"It's okay," she said with a sniff. "I'm sorry I made you almost die."

"It's all right." He moved the wet hair from her face and smiled. "Just don't make a habit of it."

She smiled grudgingly and shoved him. "Jerk."

He took her bloody hand in his, and they watched the dragonflies as the water flowed green and gold away under the trees.

WHISPERED DUPLICITY & SELF-PORTRAIT
by Naomi Nakazato
Silver Gelatin Print

Maliaphobia

KAITLIN DIFFENDERFER

I'm one of those people who read the dictionary with their Sunday coffee instead of the newspaper. The sheer number of words in the English language is astonishing. There are 171,476 current words in the Oxford English dictionary, but they keep forgetting to add the words I come up with on my own every day (Oxford Dictionaries). Yesterday I called some woman walking down the street befrazzled, because she was covered in sequins as if she'd violently attacked every article of clothing she owned with a Bedazzler, but she looked terribly confused and her hair was sticking out in every direction. Hence, she was befrazzled.

One word by itself carries little meaning, but combined with others the possibilities are limitless. Take, for example, the word "glasses." By itself, it just means a frame containing glass lenses enabling the presumably vision impaired wearer to see (unless the wearer happens to be a hipster, and then they're really just a fashion accessory). Satirist Dorothy Parker saw glasses as an entirely more complex word, with implications far beyond those on the page of her dictionary. "Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses," she said (The Quotations Page). Wait a minute...if dear old Dorothy is right, does that mean women like me are meant to be forever alone? Oh, dear, and here we were thinking single was just a temporary state, one that a man with similar ocular fallacies would come along and change, just as soon as he finished taping his metal frames back together. But wait, why do I need a man to make passes at me and my glasses? Isn't it okay to just be me, looking out at the world through some custom built lenses and enjoying my own company? I love my glasses, and am vain enough to believe I make glasses hot, but according to Dorothy, I'm about five years away from becoming an old maid.

My mother is a woman with an extensive knowledge of words, but seems to have no idea how to string them together into anything resembling the English language. This morning, she was attempting to inform my oldest friend that I would most likely remain local upon graduation, but instead sent her a message saying, "I believe Kaitlin will be staying loco for a while." I was quite offended. "Really, Mom?" I asked. "Did you HAVE to tell Kimmy you thought my crazy was permanent?" She laughed so hard at her mistake she couldn't type out a coherent correction, or speak a sensible apology. By some mistake of God, I inherited this inability to speak. At work a few weeks ago I attempted to compliment my boss's shirt, but my mouth neglected to include the "r" when I spoke. When she began to laugh, I was stumped until a coworker managed to explain my mistake through her tearful giggles. Sadly, this is not the first time I have inadvertently cursed at a completely inappropriate person. I confuse swear words with normal words on a very embarrassingly regular basis. This particular quality is probably not going on God's "pro's" list on whether or not he'll let me into Heaven.

I am a huge fan of David Sedaris, and his mastery of opposite synonyms. In *When You Are Engulfed in Flames*, he talks about being a hobo for Halloween when he was a child (Sedaris). He briefly touches on the difference between a hobo and a homeless person, and it gets me thinking every time. Hobo is really just a word for an adult with a highly adventurous, childlike spirit, who refuses to come inside after a good play in the mud. A homeless person is entirely different. Homeless people are to be pitied and looked down on. We are meant to DO something about them, because we have homes and therefore are more fortunate. Nobody DOES something about a hobo. They're amusing characters, figures we allow our children to dress up as for Halloween. You don't see anybody telling their son to dress up as a homeless person. That would be offensive. But how different are the words, really? They both refer to someone who is lacking a permanent place to live, probably wearing the same clothes for a week or more, most likely smelling highly unpleasant, and probably carrying all of their worldly belongings in very small packages. Why are they so different? Words.

Words like "ubiquitous" and "undoing" are about as comforting as words get. They are the chai latte of language. It's not like U is a particularly lovely letter to look at or write, and its sound isn't all that appealing on its own. But when you speak a word that starts with U, you will always sound suave and sexy. Maybe that's why I love U words. I'm very often awkward and stumble over words starting with hard consonants, but when I say a U word I sound downright lovely. Elegant, even. I aspire to elegance, but my lack of coordination and skill in speaking to strangers makes elegance a little bit difficult to achieve. U words are elegant in nature. I don't have to aspire to them, I can just speak one and suddenly transform into Grace Kelly. U words are magical.

Words that start with the letter "pu" are the opposite of smooth. P-U words sound crass and explode out of the mouth with no dignity whatsoever. Pudding is one of those awful words. The P at the start is terribly abrasive, and the double d's in the middle; are like twin punches to the gut. My delicate little U is reduced to a strange gust of air through the vocal chords, a burst of unpleasant sound stuck in between two harsh companions. Pudding is just an awful word, so awful that every time I say it I begin to laugh at its sheer hideousness. It's the Bearded Lady of English, fun to see once but honestly just disturbing after that.

I love the intense emotional impact words can have. The words "snake" and "wig" send chills down my spine. "Snake" is simply referred to as "the S word" in my family. Everyone who knows me is aware that even the mention of the slithering disgrace to Mother Nature will have me awake for three days straight trying to avoid a nightmare. "Wig" is not as terrifying as "snake" but easily raises each tiny hair on the nape of my neck. I do not appreciate hair that is not firmly attached to its owner. I ordinarily have a very strong stomach, but when I see hair on the floor, a plate, or a chair, or anywhere it doesn't naturally belong, my stomach churns violently. I must use every ounce of self-control to force my last meal to stay in place. Wigs are the very height of the horror that is unattached hair. They are collections of grotesque strands all put together so that one can pretend to have hair that isn't naturally on his or her head. It's disturbing, really, that we as a society would allow such an invention to continue to exist. We're worrying about greenhouse gasses and world peace, but meanwhile, people are actually making a living by putting together unnatural webs of detached hairs for people to put on their heads! What fresh hell is this? I can't imagine

what would become of me should I one day need chemotherapy. A wig on top of my head would have me so afraid I wouldn't even be able to contemplate my own potential demise. There's even a word for my fear of wigs: maliaphobia (A to Z List of Phobias). What a pretty word it is. Isn't it a shame that such a word could not exist if we lived in a world without wigs?

Words inspire happy emotions as well. Look at the word "lovely." It flows so delicately off the tongue, rolling like a soft wave on a bright sunny day. When someone tells me I am lovely, my cheeks flush cranberry red with pleasure. Beautiful is generic, something you say when you just feel like impressing someone. Pretty is just a word you can throw around like a tennis ball for a puppy. It's nice, and playful, but not exactly rich in meaning. Anything can be pretty. But lovely...now that is another matter. Lovely is still be considered lovely. Awful women with no morals or sense of compassion can be beautiful women, but they are incapable of becoming lovely. A lovely person must be kind, gentle, warm, and pure in heart. It doesn't get better than being called lovely. That word will fill my heart with joy and pride in who I have become as a person. What more can one want than to be lovely?

When words flow out of my mouth, the sensation of my lips moving to the rhythm of my voice gives me great satisfaction. These occasions on which my words glide delicately off of my tongue are few and far between. More often than not, they get lost on the journey from my brain to the outside world. It's as though my words are reading a map to get where they are going, but the map is ten years old and came from the convenience store where that gangbanger got shot last year. Even still, I like the way it feels when I stumble over my words. I tend to speak very quickly, my lips struggling to keep up with the speed of my thoughts. Whether my words are lost or my mouth not fast enough to release them, I love the way it feels to speak. The motion of my lips, smooth or awkward, is delicious.

Every morning as a child, I would recite the Pledge of Allegiance with my classmates. We were all saying the same thing, and though it didn't mean much to us at the time, we were repeating a message of unity. When I attended a summer class program at Savannah College of Art and Design before my junior year of high school, the girls on my hall and I were assigned the group title of "Red Hot Chili Peppers." One of our first tasks as a team was to create a cheer to the rhythm of one of the band's hits. Five years later I still remember the words, "Can't stop, addicted to the Red Hots! This life is more than just an art camp!" We sang to the tune of the original "Can't Stop" as loud as we could and performed a less than age appropriate dance to go with it, which our marijuana-fueled camp counselor choreographed. I had hardly anything in common with those girls, except for a love of art. My roommate was a trust fund fashionista from New York City, and the girl who lived three rooms down was a junkie from London with hair that was half black and half Clemson orange. I was just a quiet girl from a small Southern town who liked to spend her Friday nights at home with a book or a canvas and paints. I stayed at the edges of the room when our whole group got together. But when we were writing that ridiculous cheer, hoping the seven or eight boys who weren't gay would notice us, we were equals. I was just as cool as they were, and they were just as weird as me.

When my grandfather hears the word "homosexual," he is instantly cold. To him, it is unnatural, something to be shunned as though we were all living in the Amish country. To me, it doesn't mean much of anything. People are people, and I'm not entirely concerned with who ends up in whose bed at night. It's a subject my grandfather and I can never discuss. Cultures are massively

divided by words. The first time I went to Montreal, I was overwhelmed by the differences between French and English words. Everything I heard sounded dirty, and I kept whispering to my mother, "I think that man said a bad word." When she told me he was just speaking French, I somehow understood that French was just a way grownups could swear without kids knowing it, and was afraid to learn the language lest my innocence be corrupted by its hidden evils.

When I was three, my father was twenty five, and had a very colorful and not very well filtered vocabulary. We were driving to my grandparent's house one afternoon and another driver cut Dad off. He responded less than eloquently, with expletives dominating his name-calling. I stared at him in utter amazement, and exclaimed, "Daddy! How did you know that man's name?" For the next two years I truly believed my dad was magic, and knew people's names just by looking at them. A few years later, when I was fourteen, I was given the Daughters of the American Revolution Award for Academic Excellence, DAR for short. There was a big ceremony where I was given a plaque, and had to get dressed up and have my picture in the newspaper. I was so proud. After the award ceremony, my dad and I took our four wheelers into the woods behind our house to play. I have never been good at directions—I missed my turn on the way to work from school last week, a drive I've been making for almost two years—and found myself distracted by the changing leaves in the woods. Dad, however, was focused on the adrenaline pumping in his veins from our jumps over logs and small hills. He continued down the trail, but I stopped moving to stare at the wild oaks surrounding me. As I regained my awareness of the vehicle resting between my legs, and the sound of my father revving his engine, I realized I didn't know where on Earth I was. I knew if I could find the river I would know where I was at, but I didn't see it anywhere. "Dad! Where's the river?" I yelled. He doubled over laughing and pointed right over my shoulder. I turned around to find that I was about three feet away from the riverbank. "Oh," I muttered, defeated. Dad, still panting and giggling, said, "Are you sure you didn't just get the Dumb-A Redneck award?" The acronym that had before made me so proud now brought a flush of shame to my cheeks. I have never asked my father for directions again.

I am hard pressed to think of anything that fascinates me more than words. I devour books, sometimes so lost in my reading I forget to go to sleep until an hour before I have to wake. Writing words down, whether for an essay or in the margins of my notebooks as I pretend to listen to a lecture, is one of my favorite activities. Typing words and writing them are very different. Typing is cold and calculated, but writing is soothing and whimsical. I have recurring cysts on the tendons of my right wrist from drawing and writing all the time. A stack of six dictionaries holds a place of honor on top of one of my three bookshelves. Words are my dearest friends, my comfort in good times and bad. When I try to imagine anything I value more, I find...I suddenly have no words.

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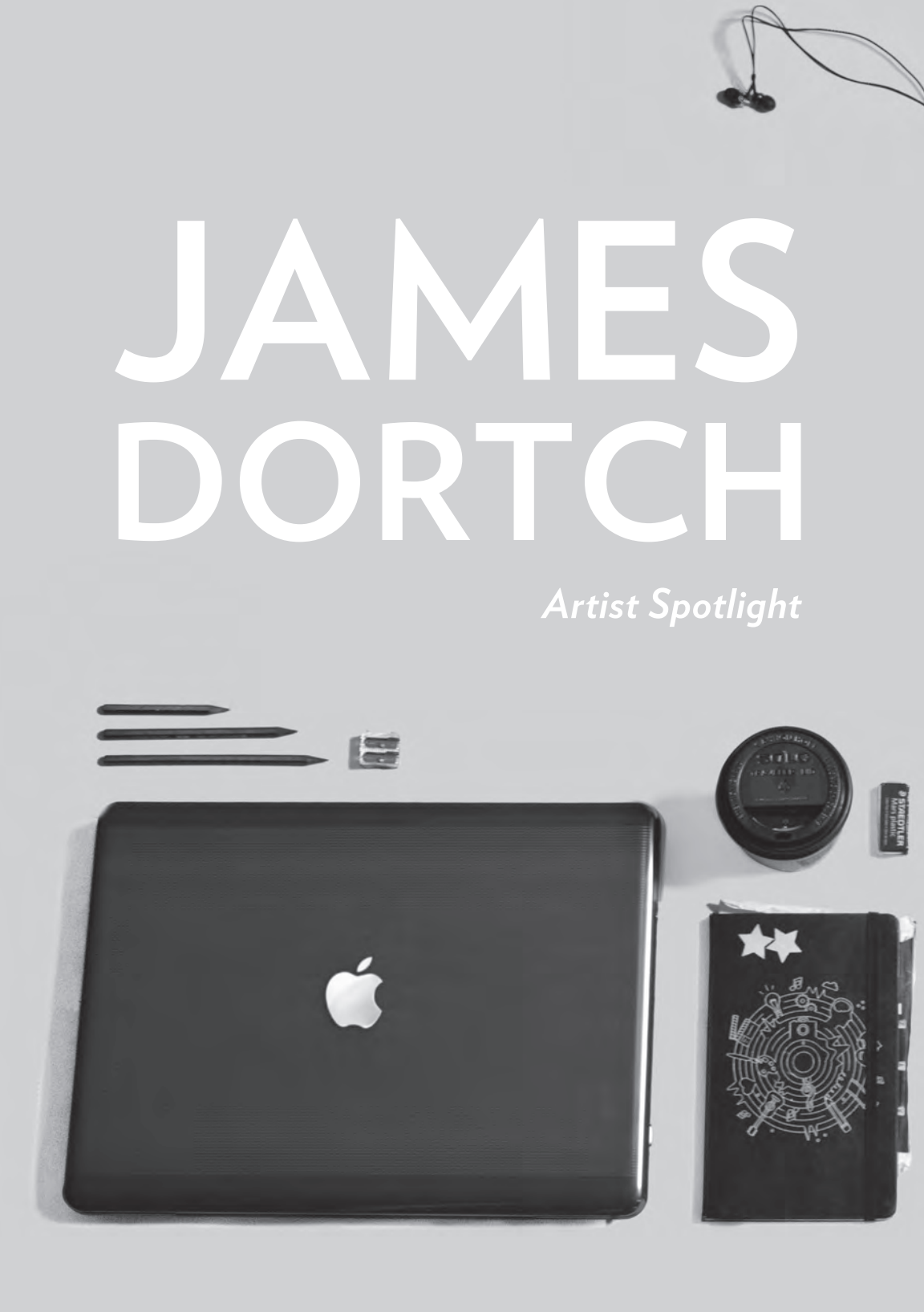
JAMES DORTCH

Artist Spotlight



THE ELEMENT OF CHANCE
WRITTEN BY JOY HILLER

James Dortch can be classified as one of the most cantankerous and hard-working students in the Visual Arts Department. As a Senior with a double concentration in Graphic Design and Painting/Drawing, James is guaranteed to provide perceptive feedback and encouragement via his mantra "I'll sleep when I'm dead." James brings attention to the seemingly mundane objects and experiences in everyday life that most people overlook by depicting them in a way that seems otherworldly. Much of his inspiration comes from the realms of film, comic books, graphic novels and the ideas of Will Isner and Robert Crumb.

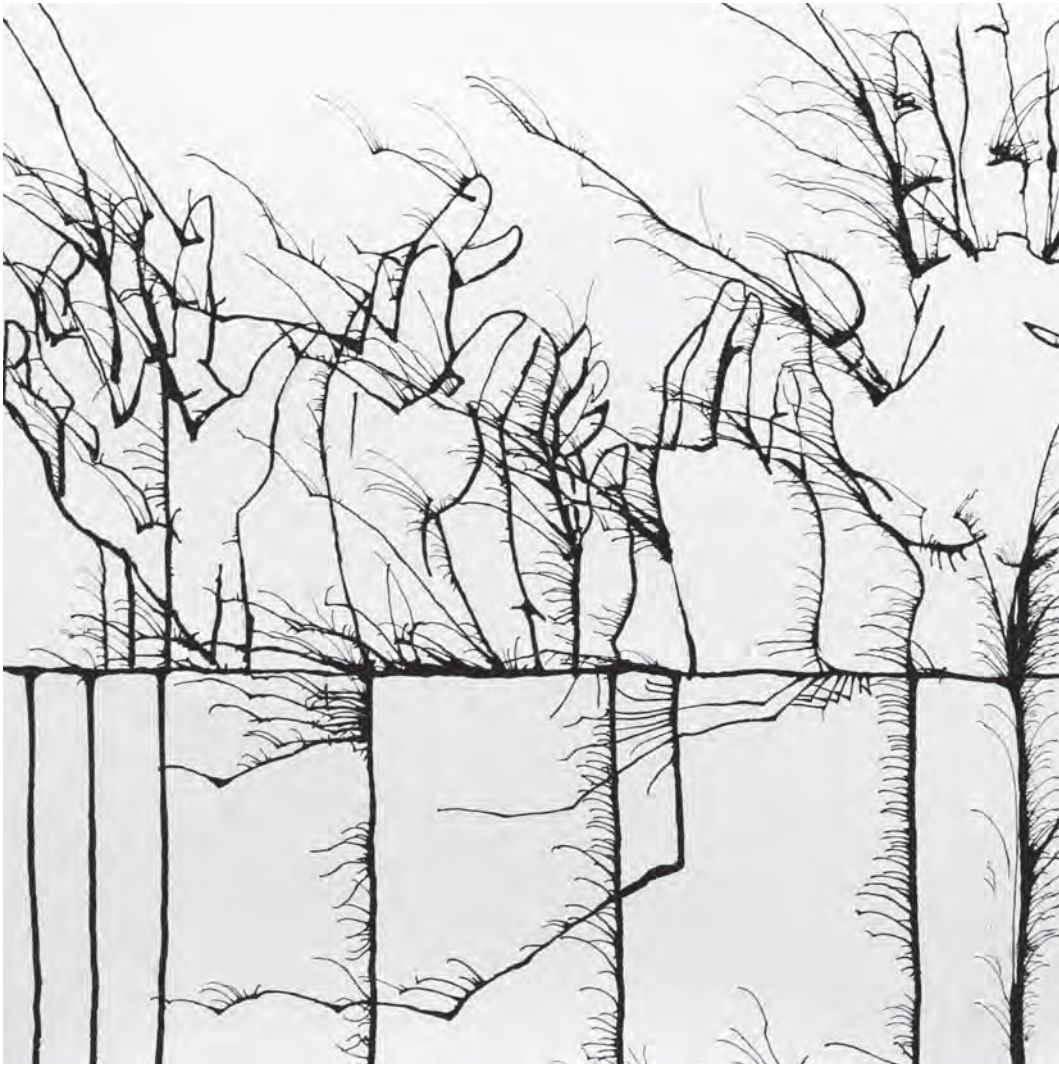
James strives to create a completely unique illustrative style through the implementation of ink. Originally, he used a traditional brush technique, but one day everything changed when he accidentally spilled ink on his hand.

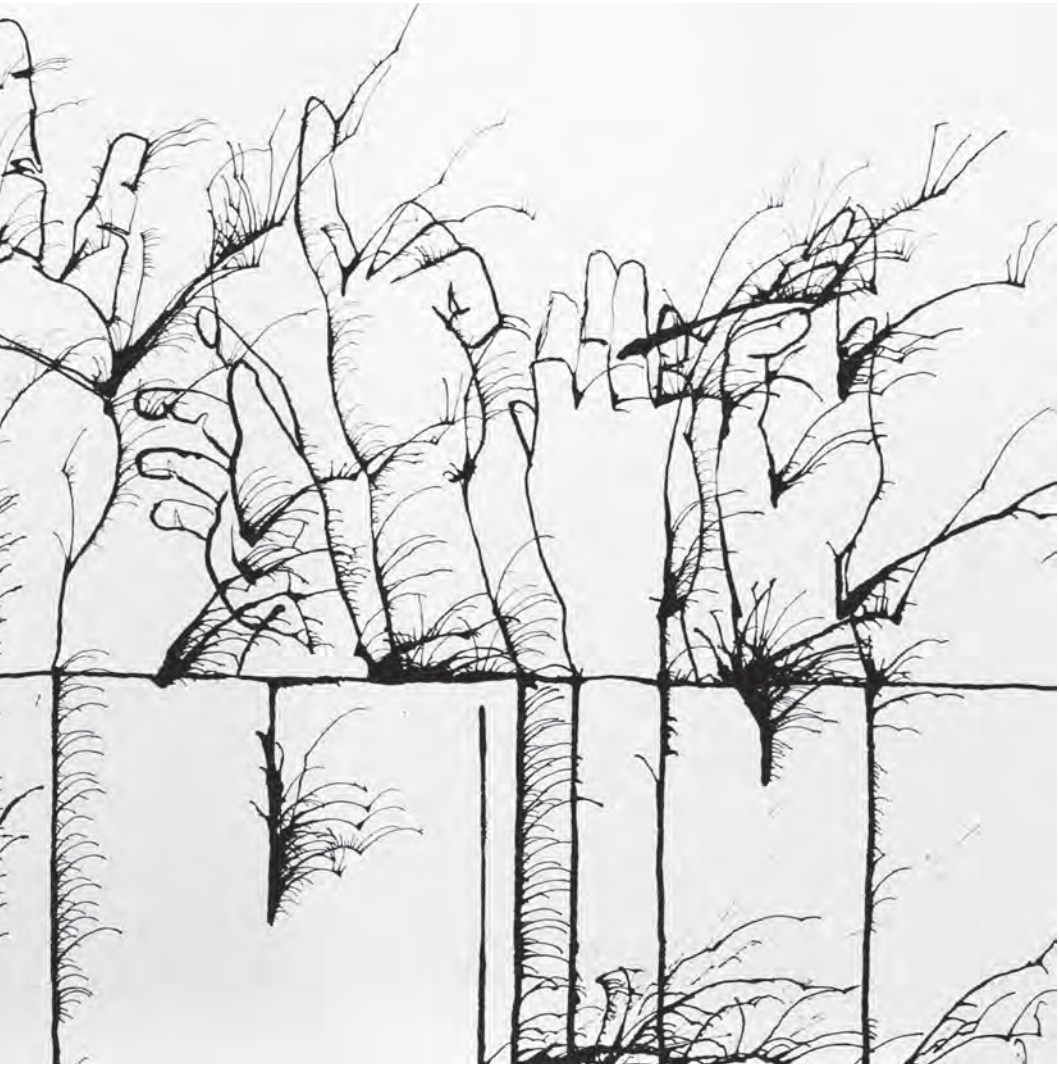
"Seeing how the ink ran through the wrinkles in my hand really peeked my interest in finding a different way to use line. I just so happened to have ink and a dropper nearby and just began drawing with them. Over the course of a year, I was able to build my technique and create a strong process in which I would have a vision for what I wanted but could still be surprised in the end based on the element of chance." James evokes chance even further by blowing on pools of ink. By implementing this technique in his artistic experiment, he maintains creative control while adding dependent variables such as the temperature's relation to how the ink flows.

"I've been realizing and understanding more about how the outside elements affect my work instead of how I affect my work. When I draw a scene I portray things that I know will be covered up. Deep within these pieces are moments that are completely hidden. I take the time to do them even though I know they are going to go away. My pieces relate to the style of Neo-Cubism in terms of how the drips break up the form and flatten the image. They play with the viewer's perception of reality—they'll get completely lost in the image as they get closer to it. As they step away from it everything changes and a recognizable image can be seen."

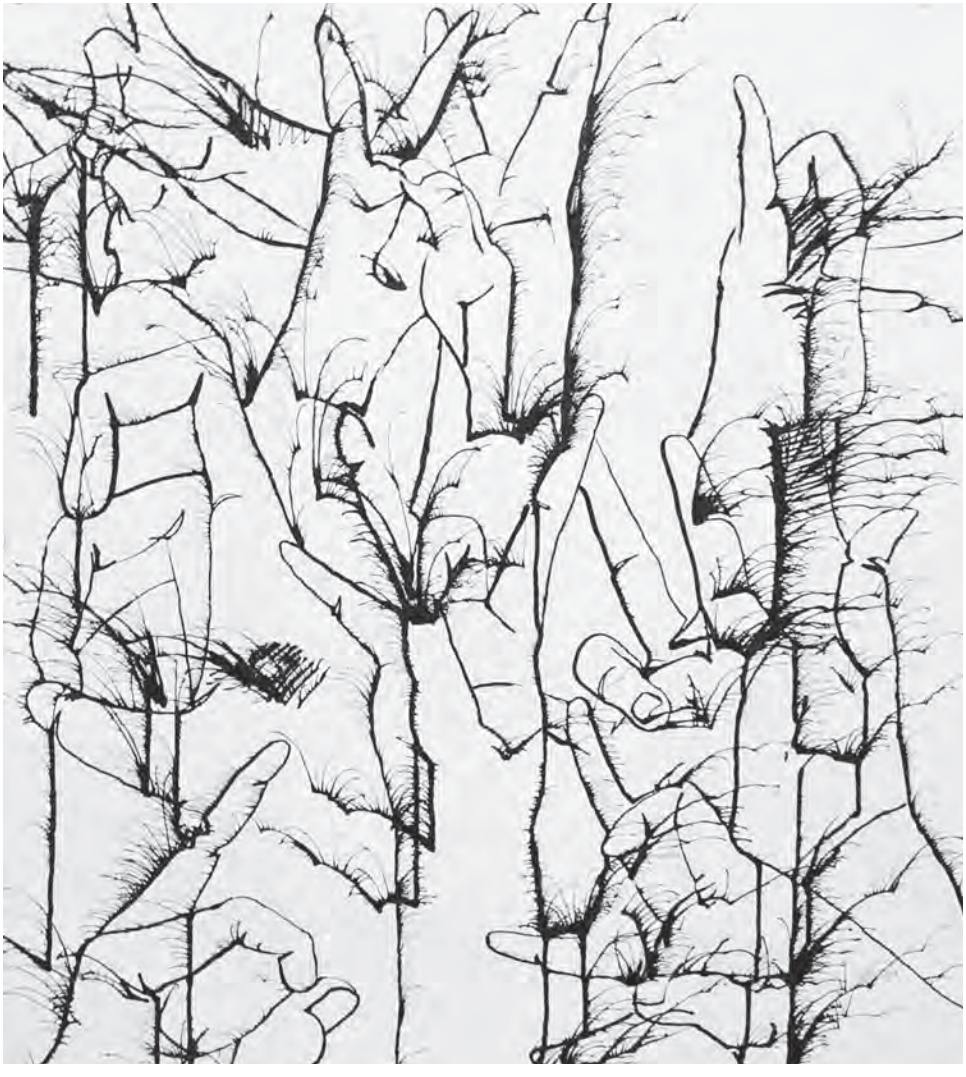
James Dortch is an innovative painter whose work and experimentation has yielded a completely new technique. As he continues to focus on experimental development, James looks forward to further developing his unique style in the pursuit of a graduate degree.


TYPO
GRAPHY BOOKS





FINAL DINNER
by James Dortch
India Ink



TWO FIGURES & HOUSTON
by James Dortch
India Ink

Vexation

EMMY WHEATLEY

You overflowed burnt orange
onto the ground, down the creases
of the sidewalk, the curb, and into the drain.

I surrendered white rags to clean
your mess, but they were stained
and thrown away with no hope for future life.

Your voice echoed
into the emptiness of red cups
and was never heard

as the thirst we could no longer quench
cut us off
from the things we had in common.

I ripped out my pulse and sold it
in individual cups
at my corner Kool-Aid stand.

the missing head of apollo

JT WARNOCK

in Miller's painting,
i see *Apollo's torso*,
and half a man
wheels a wheelbarrow
off the canvas.

it could be his head
rolling away
mixed with kittling
and potato dust,
but the wheelbarrow
is empty,

and Apollo's head
cannot change your life.

PURGATORY
by Sarah Leugemors
Digital Photography

I Copied Your Poems

EMMY WHEATLEY

I copied your poems,
or a version of you
that's typed on paper.
So what if I traced your vertebrae
and used the outline of your scars.
It's not art I want to replicate,
only letters I use to represent
the skin pulled tight
across my ribs.

Updates

JONATHAN KURTZ

On the walk from Accounting to my dorm
I saw a figure on the tennis courts
shrouded by a hood and shambling toward me
on legs without knees and with arms outstretched,
hands grasping—hungering for my flesh, I was sure.
It stumbled with an expletive and I realized
that I watched a boy with fingers and eyes
glued to a cell phone.

ANNIE
by Julia Madden
35mm Film Photography, 5 x 5

Entertaining Angels

MARGARET B. HAYES

He sits on the curb at the supermarket
looking about as bedraggled as the old
checkered wool cap that covers his head,
feet stretched out before him,
pure white socks pulled up over
his pants legs, white as
his unshaven whiskers
like specks of paint spilled
across his face.
He speaks rapidly and his
big hands move erratically
from side to side as he explains
something to the ones
seated on each side of him—
ones I cannot see.
Who am I to say he's alone?

Childhood Morality

JONATHAN KURTZ

I baked the thermometer in the toaster
and fooled my mother with the results.
She left me home alone to battle
the monsters of my mind.
My plastic sword slaughtered shadows
and shattered the lamp—
an accident,
but,
if you ask my mother,
a freak one.
I accused the daycare toddler
of breaking the black queen
of the marble chess set
to pieces,
though the fault was mine.
The worst
was when I filched the five
dollars from my brother's room,
only because I thought it unreasonable
that he
be wealthier
than me.
A wicked life,
it seemed sensible
at the time.

A Mouth of Sharp Teeth

HUNTER BURTON

Roy was crying, and it was all right to cry. Niles had been his favorite uncle, after all. He had really loved him, and now he was gone. Family and friends, strangers even, were gathered at the canopied gravesite, milling, sitting, and now on their feet to listen to the pastor speak. Roy's father stood up straight, his gaze fixed on the casket ready to be lowered into the ground. Jack, his little brother, who couldn't grasp what was going on, was still sitting in his chair, between Roy and their father.

Roy didn't even think Jack really knew who Niles was, or that he would remember him later. Their father looked like he was thinking. Most likely, he was thinking that the whole process was too wasteful. Most likely, he would have had Niles burnt and put into a jar, if it had been his decision to make. His father was always talking about waste and wastefulness. Everything in life was too wasteful. Roy didn't need this, Jack didn't need that. As long as they could live with what they had, they didn't need anything else.

Jack was looking at Roy, like young children do, as he had been for a while now. He probably wasn't aware that he was staring, but it was annoying. Roy wanted Jack to care that his favorite uncle was dead. He wanted his father to cry so he wouldn't feel foolish for doing so himself.

Roy reached over and pulled on his father's sleeve. The coat itself was old, but his father didn't need a new one. Roy's was small on him; it had fit a year ago, when they had gone to another funeral, but now it was tight. Of course, he didn't need a new one. It was still a good coat.

His father broke the gaze he had been holding on the coffin and looked down at his son. The pastor finished speaking. Roy hadn't even noticed that he was speaking in the first place. He looked over as the casket began to be lowered into the grave. His father turned his head back to watch.

Suddenly, Roy couldn't help it. He let out a small gasp of a cry and immediately felt embarrassed. He couldn't watch, so he walked away. His feet shuffled quickly beneath him as he passed rows of chairs, friends, and relatives, his eyes on the ground in front of him. Once he passed the last row, he began to run toward the woods. He spotted a trail and followed it. He had to get away from the funeral. He had to get away from the dead body that used to be his uncle. He had to get away from his oblivious brother and his silent father.

A few minutes later, he slowed down. He didn't know how he would explain why he had run away to his father or anyone else that had noticed. He just knew that he was afraid of death, and he felt its presence surrounding the funeral. He kept thinking about the possibility that, at any time, it could be anyone else being lowered into the ground. It could be his father. It could be him. And it was bad enough that Niles, who had once made Roy happy, was gone.

A warm wind combed through his hair and brushed its fingers across his cheeks. The trees overhead embraced, shedding layers of leaves as they

rustled against one another. They fell around Roy as the tears ran down his face to his chin, where they slipped off in a haste to meet the ground. His throat felt warm and swollen as the saliva ran down his tongue, and his chest was tight with sorrow and grief. As the breeze caressed his skin, a chill sent shivers through his nerves, and it felt better to cry.

He stood there for some time, looking up at the canopy above him, looking down at his shoes and watching his tears until they hit the bed of leaves below. A few yards away, the trees ended where a creek had formed, the shallow water lapping over small stones as it rushed past. It looked narrow enough to jump across, but Roy was afraid to try, so he stood planted, hoping that the grass and the dying leaves would bury him like a soft pile of blankets.

He felt strange, as if he wasn't the only one in the woods. Had his father followed him? No. There was no sound other than the breeze. He peered out through the trees at two hills that looked almost symmetrical, a small meadow filling the gap between them. The late morning sky cast short, thin shadows from the trees, reaching out toward the hills.

Suddenly, all was silent, and that made him nervous. He had forgotten his distress, looking out at the hills, and now his eyes felt so dry that he was scared to blink, as if they would burst into a powder if he did. But as he looked over the hills, and saw a shape floating above them, he couldn't blink. His heart began to beat heavily, and his legs went numb. His mouth parted uncontrollably, his rosy cheeks drooping on either side.

It was black or, at least, its surface had been coated in something that made it appear black. It was domed, like an upright umbrella without its handle. And it was metal, rivets marking its surface, but there were no visible openings, no windows. It was maybe fifteen feet long, about half as tall, and it was still. It didn't move. There was no rotation, no propeller to keep it steady in the air. All was silent.

Roy felt panic rise in his chest, but he couldn't move. He stood there, transfixed by this object, unable to break away. It was as if it could see him. It wasn't just an object; the floating black mass had a presence, and it was evil. It had come just as his uncle had passed, just as Roy was feeling afraid and alone, and he knew it.

He finally remembered to breathe, inhaling a quick gust of air. He closed his eyes for a moment, hoping for the object to disappear, but when he opened them again, it was in the same place in the sky, unmoving. He slowly brought his hands up to his face and covered his eyes, peering through his fingers, hoping he could trick the object into believing he wasn't watching so it would leave him alone. But it was still. Suddenly, he wished he was in bed, lying beneath the covers, so he could pull them over his head and become invisible. He could hear the rushing water of the creek again, and the leaves rustling in the trees, and he knew it was real.

And so he ran. He ran as fast as he could, down the trail he had followed. It seemed to take a lifetime. He jumped over stumps and exposed roots, expecting to look up and see the mass hovering over him, with a mouth of sharp teeth, coming closer to eat him up. He imagined it hovering over him and shining a bright light, like in the movies, and being sucked up by a beam. He imagined what might be inside. Would there be aliens, green and lanky, with huge black eyes and tiny nostrils? Would they speak in clicks and squeaks, or would they speak English? Would he be tortured? Taken and never returned?

He watched the trees go by on either side. The ground passed in a blur, a mixture of brown and green. Was that pounding his footsteps, or his heart? He wanted to close his eyes and wake up in bed, the sunlight slipping through his blinds, the dust in the air visible as it passed through the tiny streaks of light. He imagined the warmth of the carpet, lying on his stomach and peering through the cracks of the blinds at the sky beyond. He imagined his father's voice, calling him into the kitchen for lunch, and his brother's laugh from the other room. But he was running, his feet carrying him faster than he knew they were capable of moving. All he could hear was the heavy pounding and the wind rushing past.

A root sticking out of the earth, damnably placed by nature itself, caught one of his shoes by the toe, and suddenly, he was thrust forward, into the ground. The tumble after the trip seemed to pass in slow motion, every bump a new disappointment. In a matter of seconds, Roy was sprawled out in the dirt, a plume of dust floating into the air. His breath failed him; the air in his lungs felt trapped. And then he remembered how to cry. It came out in gasps, a vicious sucking in of dust and oxygen. He couldn't produce a noise; it caught in the back of his throat. He had to close his eyes. If he couldn't see what happened next, it wouldn't be so terrifying. He knew that the black dome would come to take him. He had failed to escape, and now he was done.

But the seconds passed, the gasps continued, and he was still lying in the dirt. He opened his eyes to a bright image of spinning trees. Was he being lifted toward the craft by a beam of light? It took a moment for the trees to come into focus, the sun above peeking in through the branches. Roy released the sweetest sigh of relief he had felt in his short life, and pushed himself up onto his elbows.

His relief was quickly washed away when he saw the damage that had been done to his old funeral suit. The hard contact with the ground had not only ripped out a button, but had torn a hole in his pants. His black shoes, which had not been completely clean before, were now scuffed to an unpresentable degree. He didn't even know grass stains could show on black clothing, but they covered the suit in skid marks. And everything was coated in a fine layer of dirt and dust. He felt a pain in his shoulder; he hoped he hadn't broken anything. He lifted his hands, palms raw from the attempt to catch himself in the fall, and felt his cheek, which was stinging from a small scrape. His head suddenly hurt. Didn't people go into comas from being hit hard on the head? He knew he'd be bruised up pretty badly.

The worst part about it was that he'd have to face his father looking like he'd just rolled down one of those hills. "What a waste," his father would say. "That suit could have lasted another year. We could have donated it, and someone else may have been able to wear it." How would he explain it? And why wasn't he back on his feet, running as fast as he could?

He stood up quickly, but, somehow, he felt safe. There was a presence earlier, as he watched the shape float in the air. He had felt an indescribable fear and panic, like it had been induced by the thing itself. Now, he just felt the scrapes and bruises he had acquired in his tumble to escape it. He waited a moment,

thinking that it might suddenly appear, but the seconds passed and he felt the same. He bent down and dusted himself off as well as he could. The scuffs on his shoes and the stains on his clothes couldn't be helped. And then he trudged off in the direction of the cemetery.

As the number of trees began to thin, he knew he was close to the edge of the forest. It wasn't dark beneath the trees, but he had forgotten the comfort of the warmth from direct sunlight. Its rays crept through the gaps in the branches, placing the tips of their fingers against the back of his neck and head. He could feel his hair beginning to absorb the heat, and he patted the top of his head like he always did after being under the sun for a few minutes. It was a comfort to his scraped palms, like holding a bundle of warm sheets just after they come out of the dryer.

Through the bark and the leaves, he saw distant tombstones. He saw his father's graying hair and his little brother, still sitting in the chair beside him. The crowd had dispersed for the most part, but his father remained, along with a few other relatives. He recognized his uncle Thomas for his round shape and his skinny wife by his side. Their son, his cousin Dennis, only a few months old, slept silently in his mother's arms. There were a few people he didn't recognize, standing and looking at the mound of dirt that had buried Niles in six feet of earth and grime.

One of the unknown spectators slowly made his way to Roy's father. He was dressed in a nice black suit, his shoes still shiny, his hair combed and slicked back. He had a thin moustache bordering his upper lip, and a pair of thick-rimmed glasses low on his nose. He extended a hand to Roy's father, who looked up after a few absent-minded moments and accepted the gesture. The stranger put his other hand on his father's shoulder and said a few words. Then he looked down at Jack, small in his chair, and smiled for a moment, before walking away toward the parking lot.

Roy stood at the edge of the trees, watching his frozen father, his eyes on the grave. He couldn't tell if he was thinking or simply standing there. What would he tell him when he asked where he had been? How would he explain the condition he was in? He realized then that he had already decided not to tell him about the black, metal shape in the sky. His father didn't believe in things he couldn't see. He had explained to Roy at an early age that he could believe what he chose to believe, but his father didn't believe in monsters or ghosts. He didn't believe in God either, in a heaven or a hell. Roy wasn't sure that he did either. But he did believe—no, he knew—that what he had seen over the hills was real. He could feel it there, watching him. But he couldn't explain something like that to his father.

He would never tell his father. He would never tell anyone. It wasn't something he felt that he could describe to another person, and he knew that even if he did, no one would believe him. It was one of the things you heard about, but you never knew anyone who had experienced it. He suddenly knew that he was alone in this, but he didn't want to be. He wanted to talk about it, to figure out what it was and what it wanted. He wanted to meet people that would believe him. There had to be people that really believed in these incidents, in these flying presences. He would find them some day. He would figure it out.

The grass raked up against the toes of his shoes. He kept his eyes down as he trudged toward his father. His knees hurt from the fall; they seemed to creak and swell with each step. His cheek felt swollen from the scrape. He knew he looked like he'd gotten into a fight with a wild animal, or with Mother Nature herself.

Jack was standing up in his chair, watching him come closer, not smiling or laughing, but simply watching as he always did. His father noticed that Jack was turned around and looked to find Roy walking toward him with dirt covering his pants and scratches on his face. He sighed. There was no rushing over to ask if Roy was okay. He waited for Roy to approach before asking what happened to him. Roy said he had gone into the woods because he couldn't be around the grave anymore, and that he had fallen from a ledge. He told him he was sorry, and his father told him he understood. What he understood, Roy didn't know, but he accepted it. His father told him it was time to go home. Roy looked at his uncle's grave, fresh dirt packed into the earth, and said a silent goodbye.

He spent the ride home watching out the window, scanning the horizon for a black shape. He knew it was out there somewhere, and he was afraid of it, but he wanted to see it again. He wanted to know where it came from. He wanted to know why.

ANNUNCIATION
by Iina Kobayashi
Acrylic Paint, Molding Paste, Paper on Canvas

Behind the Headline

JONATHAN KURTZ

"Where is she?" he demanded, throwing open a door and nearly knocking over a nurse in the process. He didn't notice. Or care.

"Hunter—" his wife began, putting a hand to his chest as if it could stop him.

"Where is she?" he repeated.

Without another word, she pointed to a door down the hall. Hunter made for the door immediately, pushing aside nurses, doctors, and anyone else who happened to be foolish enough to stay in his path. He might have earned more than a few dark looks and even started a fight or two if everyone in the place didn't already understand where he was coming from—or, rather, where he was going. He didn't stop moving until he came to the door—and froze. He stared at the chrome handle, finally starting to feel the terror that had wrapped its numbing fingers around him when his wife called him four hours ago, though normally the drive took six. He hated his job for keeping him so far away, though the deeply buried rational part of his mind knew it had been nothing but good to him for all these years. He hated this door for how small and scared it made him feel. He reached forward, fingers stopping short of the knob. Steeling himself, Hunter took a deep breath and turned the handle, quietly letting himself in.

And there she was. She slept peacefully, white sheets drawn up to her chest, rising and falling with her slow breathing. Hunter relaxed for a moment at the sight, but then tensed when he saw the mass of bandages covering the left side of her face and then the telltale lumps in the sheets where her other wounds were. Her beautiful, corn-silk blonde hair spread around her head like a halo, interrupted only where it had been shaved away so the doctors could operate. Tubes and wires strung from her arms and forehead, machines beeping and whirring in the silence.

Hunter rushed forward, hastily wiping his eyes so he could see his daughter clearly.

"My little girl..." he said, voice cracking. He touched her hand with shaking fingers. Her skin felt cold.

"She's stable for now," said the doctor on the other side of the bed.

Hunter looked up. He hadn't noticed him. "What?"

"She's stable," the doctor said again. "You have a tough daughter here, sir. She took three bullets to the abdomen and another clipped her skull."

Hunter shuddered, gripping his daughter's hand. She didn't respond.

"We did everything we could," the doctor continued. "There's still some risk, and we're not sure yet how much damage was done to her brain, but there's a chance she'll make a full recovery."

Hunter found himself grabbing the doctor by the front of his scrubs. "How much of a chance?" he growled.

"A reasonable one," the doctor said, gently extricating himself from

Hunter's grip. "I'll leave you alone."

Hunter held himself together until the doctor was gone, then stepped back and fell against the wall, sliding to the floor with tears soaking into his beard. He felt his wife sit down beside him, taking his arm. Hunter didn't look at her, refusing to take his eyes off his daughter.

"She made us proud," Jenny said quietly. "They said she was hurt trying to protect the children."

Hunter laughed, a broken, rasping sound. "My little girl," he said. "Always the stubborn one."

They held each other for a long time after that, neither speaking. Finally, Hunter stirred.

"This is the kind of thing that's supposed to happen to somebody else," he whispered.

"That's the thing," Jenny replied in kind, shaking in his arms. "We're all somebody else to everybody else."

"Mr. Daniels, Linda Wise from Fox News. Could you tell us—"

"Get out of the way," Hunter snarled, shoving past her into the hospital. She replied, but Hunter didn't hear it as he entered the building and fumed his way through the halls and up the elevator. He didn't stop until he entered his daughter's room. She still hadn't stirred. Some of the anger draining away at the sight of her, Hunter sat the vase of yellow flowers on the table next to the bed.

"I brought you daisies," he said to her. "Your favorite."

Her eyelids didn't even flicker. Hunter sighed and threw himself down in the chair, dropping his head into his hands.

"Maybe they'll help," Jenny said, putting her hands on his shoulders.

"They won't," Hunter said bitterly. "It was stupid, getting them. Pointless."

Jenny didn't respond to that. After a moment, she said, "I saw those reporters."

"Sticking their noses where they aren't wanted." He threw the newspaper on the floor. "We made the front page."

"Lauren's a hero. Of course she did."

Hunter picked up the paper and handed it to her. "Read it." The paper crinkled as she took and opened it. Hunter watched his daughter sleep as Jenny read.

When she finished, Jenny tossed the paper into the wastebasket and turned to him. "Hunter..."

"How dare they?" Hunter said in a dangerous voice, rising from his chair. "How dare they take this tragedy and turn it into... into..." He struggled to find the words. "Into their next paycheck! How dare they use my daughter's sacrifice to push their political agendas?!" He slammed his fist into the wall.

Jenny said nothing as Hunter leaned against the wall, breathing hard, his heart pounding. "Sandy Hook and now this… What's the world coming to, Jenny? She's just a preschool teacher. Just…"

Jenny laid a hand on his face. "Just a brave young woman that happens to be your daughter."

Hunter nodded and looked over at Lauren. She slept on undisturbed, breathing too slow and face too still.

"She's not going to wake up, is she?" he asked.

"I don't know," Jenny said, laying her head on his shoulder.

Hunter pulled her close, muffling her prayers with his chest. They stayed like that until a doctor ushered them from the room, muttering something about visiting hours. Looking back over his shoulder, Hunter stared at his daughter's too-pale face until the door clicked shut between them.

SELF-PORTRAIT #5
by Ellie Youngs
Acrylic on Sheer Curtain

Mrs. Muller

ARIELLE COULTER

I went to see Donald's principal today. Called on Monday sayin' she needed to talk to me and my husband. I started to worry; it's been about four months since Donald started goin' to the private Catholic school a few blocks over. His daddy didn't want him to go there, said them white boys would tear him apart. I knew being the only colored in that place would be a challenge for anyone, especially a twelve-year-old boy, but I knew he could do it and would do it. That is the best school we got 'round here, and the best chance to get Donald in a good high school, probably the only chance. I took on cleaning houses in the white neighborhood cross town to help pay for tuition. Fifteen houses barely covers it but the little extra I get gets put away for college. I told Sister that I would have to get back to her. I can't just not show up to a job—finding whites willing to pay decent is hard enough as it is. I called Mrs. Wilson—she's the youngest lady I work for; her hate don't run as deep. I didn't ask for the day off, you never do that. I just asked if I could come in a few hours late. She got children, she understand this type of thing; her Benjamin gets in his own trouble at school. I asked for more time than I needed cause I knew whatever I asked for she would subtract some. Ended up with just enough time.

Called the principal back and told her when to expect me. I talked like both my husband and me was coming, but even before I asked him I knew he wouldn't. He beat the hell out of Donald last night; I didn't step in like I done before, cause I knew that would only make it worse. The bruises he gave me last week was just starting to fade from where I stepped in for Donald after he had told us he had got kicked off the altar boys at the church cause he was caught drinking altar wine. My husband still got a knot on his head from where I hit him with his beer bottle. I paid for it when he come to bed that night.

When I walked into the principal's office I was prepared to fight for my son to stay there, to vouch for whatever it was that was done. I was real tense until she told me that nothing stood in the way of Donald graduating with his class. That's when I knew she wasn't planning to kick him out so I relaxed; I knew I could handle whatever it was she had to tell me. Nothing could have prepared me for what she told me next. That sister nun told me that that priest may have been touching my boy. "May have" cause there ain't no evidence to prove it but she said she knows for sure. I can't count on one hand the number of times my blood turned to ice—it ain't a pleasant feeling. It took me all of five seconds to get real defensive. I told her that ain't my son's fault, I don't know why she even called me when it had nothing to do with my son. She kept going on about how this priest is educated and after the boys. I have never met anyone so shy-like, acting like I don't understand the kind of thing she was talking about. Oh I knew all right, I knew better than anyone. I know what it's like to be young and scared, to have someone you know and trust tell you things and do things to you and tell you to keep it "our little secret."

But as I thought back to Donald's behavior in the last couple of months, I didn't see anything that concerned me. Then I remembered Donald is not like other little boys. My momma says he's got too much sugar in his water. He's one of those kinds of boys. Maybe, but he need to go to high school. If his smile came easier, maybe it was just because he finally had someone other than me who cared about him and was showing him some kindness and attention. That woman had no real evidence. Donald looks up to this man and he needs someone to give him his time. What was I supposed to do in that situation? I taught my son how to take the good and leave the bad; he knows how to do that. Some things are not black and white. It's just until June.

The Neighborhood Is Bleeding

CHARLES B. CAMPBELL

In the buildings to the left of my family's, lived an elderly German woman named Gerta, my grandmother, a divorced black woman, and a lady from New York who was diagnosed with borderline schizophrenia. My grandmother's friend Louise, and my aunt and uncle lived in the apartment buildings to the right of ours.

Both of my parents had to work full time in order to support my brother and I, so we spent a lot of our time visiting with my grandmother and her friend Louise. On many of these visits, the other women from the neighborhood would hang around Louise's apartment to drink beer and socialize. For the most part, I just played in the front yard and listened to all of the neighborhood women talk.

My grandmother and the other elderly women of the neighborhood were always together telling stories. I remember always being interested in whatever it was that they had to say, especially when they discussed things from before I was born. One day in particular, I recall them talking about the racism and segregation that had occurred in my hometown during the 1950's and 60's. When I asked my grandmother what they were talking about, she explained to me that segregation was when black people and white people couldn't be in the same place or use the same things at the same time.

Whenever I asked her why, she replied, "Because people were different in those days. They hated what they were told to hate and were afraid of people who looked or acted differently than they did."

My Uncle and his wife were a young interracial couple—he was white, while she was part black and Native American. My aunt Tonya's daughter was also mixed as a result of her former husband. When my grandmother told me about segregation, I immediately thought of them, so I asked if people like them would have also been considered "different." Her friends and her all nodded in agreement, giving me a unanimous "yes." They also told me, however, that people like Louise and Gerta were also discriminated against when they were younger.

I remember being very confused at the time because both miss Louise and Gerta were white. My grandmother was a very intuitive woman, so when I looked at her in confusion she told me that Louise was considered different because of a disease she called polio.

"When she and I were kids, people weren't as understanding about people that look or walk a little but different than they do. Gerta was born in Germany and moved here during the Second World War."

I didn't know much about Germans or WWII, so I asked Gerta why any of this mattered. She told me that during World War II America and Germany had been enemies, and that she had escaped from Germany during the war because she didn't share the beliefs of a man called Hitler or his Gestapo army.

According to Gerta, many Germans, like herself, were opposed to Hitler, but to speak against him would have been dangerous.

"America was a safer place during that time, but I still had to be careful. Most people didn't understand that not all Germans were Nazis, and even many years after the war people looked upon my heritage poorly. She said that because of her nationality, many people refused to see her as anything more than a "child of Hitler."

The four of them spent the next several hours talking about racism and equality. After listening to a few more of their stories, I began to better understand the situation. It was about that time when the schizophrenic woman that lived a few buildings down came walking past us. She was on her way to check her mailbox and, as usual, she was speaking gibberish to herself. Normally, I didn't pay attention when this woman passed by, but this particular instance was different. She wasn't doing anything incredibly strange, but I remember overhearing my grandmother whispering to the other woman.

"She's an odd one. The way that she talks to herself really creeps me out," I heard my grandmother say.

"Yeah," said Louise, "I don't like the thought of her being around our grandchildren. It just doesn't seem safe to me."

OMEN
by Sarah Leugemors
Digital Photography

Hooked

EMMY WHEATLEY

I walked alongside my brother after getting groceries. We were headed back to the cabin on Lake Placid where our family was staying for a week. Walking wasn't our first option, but our car got a flat tire because some careless person dropped a nail—luckily we found it. The best part of the whole story is that we were in Hayward, Wisconsin, where there is almost no cell phone service until you reach town, which was at least four miles back. All I could think about were the childhood sermons my dad regularly preached about not talking to strangers or hitchhiking, so...it seemed like a perfect day for a walk. Being someone who doesn't like to complain, I went ahead and took the endless hills and fresh bloody blisters as sightseeing. It was just another opportunity to slow down and see the landscape in a new way, a great way to start a vacation. After calling my dad from town to respectfully remind him of his intelligence when he took out the spare tire to make room for my mom's bike, he picked us up, got a new tire in town, and we drove back to change it.

When we returned to the maroon suburban that had been cooking in the sun for hours, we noticed one door was open. My dad, disappointed in his children's ability to remember to lock the doors, teased us intensely for being so stupid—this was payback for having pointed out his own mistake of leaving out the spare tire. When we assured him that we had locked the doors, we were close enough to see what had actually taken place. Apparently, a black bear had been nearby when we left the car with newly purchased food inside; it smelled the groceries and decided to break our window and open the door to eat everything. With beer cans and Doritos surrounding his feet, my dad stood in shock.

"I told you I locked the doors," my brother said as he lit up a cigarette. He knew that the urge to smoke was something my dad had trouble resisting but he did it anyway. Never knowing when to shut up, he kept talking. "I bet we would have been better off if we left them unlocked. Then some homeless guy would be happy instead of some dumb bear." I shot him a look to let him know to keep quiet, or at least try and keep quieter.

Afterwards, we headed back to the auto shop cramming my brother, Miles, and me in the front seat of Mr. Wilson's truck—which was littered with sunflower seeds. Mr. Wilson is our neighbor, who we rent a boat from every time we visit. He has a huge lodge and three cabins that he rents out to families with crying babies, or men who don't know better than to not gut their fish on the dining room table, but the auto shop was not the place my dad wanted to be. As a helicopter mechanic, he knew how to fix everything but just didn't have the tools. I wanted to fix it on my own too. We had a car in our garage at home that we had been rebuilding an engine together for the last year. I always enjoyed working with my hands and getting dirty. My mom never approved. She wanted to see me sewing but I had no interest in wearing dresses and tea parties. Turns out, the Suburban's window needed replacing, and the door needed

reattaching, so my dad sent me to the store for duct tape to fix the seats. I took Miles with me because I didn't want him to become the target of my dad's rage or give my dad any cigarettes. I left my brother outside of the hardware store to smoke. He began talking to some homeless man with fewer than five teeth—I counted. Miles could never keep his mouth shut. I guess the rule about not talking to strangers only applied to me.

The store looked like a typical shop for Hayward. A family run place with pegboard walls, shelves no higher than five and a half feet, and candy that looked two years old in glass cases on the checkout counter. I got the duct tape, and I thought to get bug spray even though it wasn't on the list. When I got outside my brother had moved from talking to the homeless man to the guy collecting carts. He waved me over because I was standing at a distance trying to take in the situation and guess the age of the cart guy. I couldn't help but notice he was pretty good looking. His green flannel over a white V-neck surprised me because you don't see those much in Hayward, showing me he hadn't always lived here and had style. He had dark brown scruff, which meant he wasn't too young. After introducing me to Wade, my brother talked for what seemed like twenty minutes, not really letting anyone get a word in. But Wade was patient with my brother. Finally, my brother stepped away to smoke again; not wanting to make me smell bad, he gave me a few feet for safety, giving me the opportunity to talk with Wade.

As soon as he opened his mouth, I could tell he was a tool. He was nineteen and he bragged about how he was such a great lumberjack, and that he was training for the lumberjack competition for next year. "I'm pretty much a rebel around here. My dad just wants me to run his hardware store. Who wants to do that? I work with a chainsaw, putting on a little show for my fans. I'm practically famous." I struggled to talk about myself and felt judged every time I opened my mouth. Not only from him but also like my mom could hear us. My mom was the type to have perfection in body, mind, and that tiny black thing she called a heart or soul. She worked out daily and ate food that looked like blended road kill with celery stuck in it. Her wardrobe was filled with dresses and blouses. T-shirts weren't an option and sweatpants didn't even exist. She went to church on Sundays, like tomorrow. And if she missed it because we were out of town she would still wear her Sunday best and act like she was a saint. Going around asking people how they were doing then wait for a long answer other than good. She would stand there and just bat her eyelashes till you said something she could give you advice on, using Jesus' name at least once to prove her point.

I guess Wade felt bad for us, so he invited us to the Musky Festival going on the next night. I had been to the Festival a few times. It's just a bunch of fishermen telling tales of catches they had made, and bars with cheap priced drinks, mixed with streets filled with artist of some kind trying to sell whatever they had whittled or sewn. I told my brother I didn't want to go but he insisted that he had to get out of that cabin, explaining that it was Mom's church day.

We accepted the invitation and asked our dad before we realized that we had no car. Our Suburban wouldn't be fixed for another three or four days, but I knew we would find a way to get there. We dragged our father away from the auto shop full of greasy men. He said they were trying to make up things wrong with our car. We went to get bait, something he didn't need but always liked to have. On the way he called my mom. "A bear broke in. Yeah, it was a black bear. Ate everything...Hell, I don't know if your jump rope is ok." I could hear her screaming on the other end. It wasn't anything new. I was used to it. The plan was always to keep my mouth shut. My brother usually took

the brunt of the anger when they weren't yelling at each other. He was an easy target and was probably doing something to deserve it. He got a tattoo when he wasn't supposed to, started doing drugs, then transitioned into selling them, dropped out of college, and moved in with his drug dealing friend. Yeah, he deserved it. "I'm getting it fixed, ok? Get off me. I don't know when I'll be home. No, I have to go. We are getting bait. Yes, I am getting more beer." He always hung up before saying goodbye. It was his favorite way to get on my mom's nerves. It just wasn't polite to hang up like that, she'd say. My mom was big into manners. I could never get the hang of them. I'd rather be fishing or working on a car with my dad.

We always bought our live bait at this shack that had a leaky tin roof and a serial killer feel to it. My dad swore it was the best place in town. It had rows of brown sinks with a single spotlight in each that showed you hundreds of tiny fish or worms swarming to the heat of the light. The room smelled like a seafood restaurant's garbage disposal and I loved it. Hooks of all different shapes surrounded the checkout counter near a rusty old man that probably had no sense of smell. You could find bait to catch almost anything in here. My mom came in here once and left immediately, shrieking at all the crawling, smelly, and dangerous things stuffed into one tiny room. I took comfort in the place.

We got our bait and picked up more groceries at the store then went home. I immediately showered and peeled the sunflower seeds off of my jeans, not because I cared but because my mom did. She looked at the whole mess and decided the most important thing was that I looked good. My dad sat stewing in his anger, about the car, the ruined vacation, and the fact that my mom was concerned about her jump rope and my looks. He slowly got worse as my mom ignored him.

I had my brother drag a kayak out for me. I wasn't allowed to do any heavy lifting—for some reason my mom decided that I was too dainty to handle it. I sat out in the water and chased loons, thinking about my mom. She wanted me to have on sandals with painted nails. She didn't get that I was different. Looking at my reflection in the water, I saw a distorted face with enlarged features, and a rippled appearance but it seemed right to me because nothing was as it appeared.

I heard Miles telling my parents about the Musky Festival and Wade. My family could never remember that you can hear everything over the water. My mom was basically already planning a wedding for Wade and me. She didn't know me, only that I wouldn't talk about it with her if she asked so she got her information from my brother. If she knew my opinion on it all, she wouldn't be calling it a date. And that was because it wasn't a date. It was my brother, Wade, and I hanging out. She didn't know Wade either.

The wake moved me closer to shore and I could smell my mom was cooking dinner. She was constantly in the kitchen. Pretty soon my dad came down to the dock and called me in. I did my best to paddle in with my weak girl arms. I guess I had been out there for a few hours but I couldn't tell. He put the boat up and said we were going to go fishing after we ate. I had no say in the matter.

At seven-thirty we packed the boat with our gear and headed out. The rules had been taught to me ever since I could be in a boat for more than an hour without having to go to the bathroom. No talking unless spoken to because even the fish can hear everything said across the water. Don't cast into the sticks—I get it stuck every time. No drinking until we catch something. We always packed one beer and one Dr. Pepper that sat back by the engine that had

to be earned—a reward for getting our first fish. We weren't great at fishing and didn't take it that serious, but we tried most nights. He wasn't catching anything. I knew that I had to make something happen or he was going to get frustrated, which is not really the attitude you want out of someone you're stuck in a tiny boat with. I could hear the anger in every cast. It echoed across the water. I could hear everything. The next few casts for both of us looked pathetic. Seaweed, seaweed. Stick. Lost my worm. Seaweed. Stuck on a log.

We moved farther down the shore to a point that jetted out making the water shallow so we could feel the top of the seaweed brush against the bottom of our boat. There was a tree on the edge with an eagle's nest in it and an old pirate flag someone thought should go there. I quit fishing with worms and moved to a bass lure, hoping to attract bigger fish. I threw it once and that's all I needed. The fish bit and sank. I fought it knowing that it was big. My dad coached me in how to reel it in which is as simple as rolling up a hose. Getting nervous that I could lose it and disappoint my dad, I stared at the darkness of the water as I reeled and he yelled. Finally I brought the fish to the surface, making it visible, and my dad's face brightened like he just discovered something new about me.

It was thirty-four inches of slim muscle flopping around in our boat. Its long nose and sharp teeth made it impossible to hold. We had forgotten our net. My dad was panicking trying to grab it and I worked my way to the front of the boat where I was just laughing. We finally had to cut the line and let it flop out of the boat because we couldn't go anywhere with it in the boat. My dad cut his hand and was bleeding, but he managed to hand me his beer and opened the Dr. Pepper for himself. As we headed back home, he smiled the whole way.

"Guess what your daughter caught?!" he yelled up to my mom.

"A man?" my mom said.

"Fine, guess what MY daughter caught? A tiger musky, thirty-five inches!" I'd never seen him this proud so I drank the beer he gave me even though it tasted like the fish pee I still had all over me. My mom, on the other hand, seemed to want to talk about Wade—I ignored her. Instead I went to bed thinking about my dad and my battle with my musky and the rusting hook we stuck in him that would eventually kill it.

The next morning, Miles and I went with my dad over to find Mr. Wilson. He was down by his second cabin, spraying for yellow jackets. My dad started bragging about my great catch, claiming it like it was his own by referring to me as his kid. Eventually my brother asked to borrow his truck to get to the Festival. He volunteered us to help him out if we could borrow it. He was a generous man and something always needed done around the resort, plus he already knew about Wade. My mom's big mouth over morning coffee on the porch let him hear more than he wanted know.

As we walked back to the cabin, I said, "It's not a date, Dad."

He only answered, "I know."

After lunch, my brother used milk jugs cut into scoops to bail out four different rowboats. I was told, by my mom, not to go with him; apparently it wasn't ladylike. But I said I was going to bring him something to drink as a trick to go help out. I didn't really even want to go to the Festival. I just wanted to be left alone. As I was throwing water, my brother told me about his plan to leave me alone with Wade because my mom had begged for it. I wanted to yell at him, saying that I didn't want to date that boy because it wasn't

a date, because it was what my mom wanted, because I didn't even know him. But I didn't because my parents could hear us talking over the water that could never keep a secret.

The rest of Sunday my dad called me Tiger Musky and my family played poker. My mom shot him a look when he used my new nickname to show her disapproval. I had heard them fighting last night. Now I knew what it was about. Apparently, she thought fishing was on the list of manly things I shouldn't be good at. My brother and my dad were pretty close in chips, but my brother ended up quitting because my mom kept sending what she thought were hidden messages to my dad about how mad she was.

"Of course kings beat queens." "Where are all the hearts at?" "You're such an ace."

My dad went on the smoke walk with my brother, and I took my mom out kayaking. I showed her where the loons lived, and we looked at some of the neater houses that bordered the lake. Because it was Sunday, she was obligated to give me advice. She chose the topic of boys and started talking about Jesus as the perfect boy then progressed to telling me about dates she went on as a girl. I just held in the puke bubbling in my throat.

When we got back inside, my dad gave me a look.

"It's not a date," I said again for my own benefit because no one believed me anyway.

"Calm down, Tiger," he said. "You're beautiful."

"Ah, sick. Come on Dad, quit it." He smiled and gave my shoulder a quick squeeze before walking away.

We met up with Wade in front of the old library that had been turned into an antique store. The street was closed off for street venders selling various things. Mounted fish, necklaces, paintings, wind chimes, etc. My brother stopped at some bar—I guess he saw cheap prices, but he had his phone, so Wade and I went ahead to check out the band that was playing at the festival. Wade bought me sarsaparilla from a street cart and we went to find my brother.

My brother had found a girl who would listen to him at the bar by then and was working on getting her number when we found him. We took a corner booth inside The Log Cabin Lodge, while we waited for my brother. As Wade checked out the girl my brother was talking with, he explained that he didn't want a woman to sew him quilts or sob on his shoulder. He wanted to be with someone independent and strong. After taking a long sip and looking around the room he added, "like you."

His story was crap and I was sick of all the pressure. And here was this jerk telling me lies about how he liked me. I just wanted someone to accept me for me. Then something weird happened, tears poured from my eyes—in this dark booth with this guy I had just met, and my brother just outside the building smoking with some girl with heart shaped pockets on the back of her pants.

Wade listened to me cry. When I finally stopped, he just looked at me with his big, blank eyes.

The next morning my dad asked how it went.

"He was using the wrong bait," I said. "I'm more fisherman than fish."

ELLIE #2
by Julia Madden
35mm Film Photography, 5 x 5

LYDIA GRACE #1
by Julia Madden
Digital Photography

EMMY WHEATLEY

Writer Spotlight

DREAMING IN STORIES
WRITTEN BY GENEVIEVE HAMILTON

Emmy Wheatley may be grown, but she refuses to ever really grow-up. As this interview begins, a smile tugs at the corner of her mouth; she's about to say something funny, let a rough gem slip by her jaunty lip ring. "I want this to illuminate how weird I am," she says. She grins and stretches her arms across the table at Chipotle, where she works. "I'm not a good dancer, so expressing myself through writing is where it's at." She sinks back in her chair and stuffs her hands in the pockets of a smart grey pea coat. On her wrist sits something like a watch, but a "watch" with no clock face. Instead, there's a tiny clear plastic shell, zippered at the top edge for easy entrance and egress—a tiny dinosaur resides there. I asked Emmy about *Yams*, a character in "Birdcage." She says, "I wanted to write a story about a lady who never gives up on childhood." Yams is seventy-six years old, shoots people who annoy her with a Nerf gun, and tries to win a pie-eating contest. She is the embodiment of childlike spirit. Yams still wears a backpack, and Emmy also loves backpacks. She also

acknowledges with pride that she and her sister still enjoy playing pirates, wearing capes. "I will always love to do childish things," she says.

A lot of Emmy's writing reflects her childhood. She was born in Naperville, Illinois, and then moved to Indiana when she was ten. Her parents, she says, are "always crazy fun people." Her dad sports pajama pants with robots on them, and he walks around the house making robot noises. "Every time I'm home, my dad and I try to out-annoy each other." Emmy's face gets serious. "I'm good at being annoying." Because her dad flew all over the place to repair the machines that make juice boxes, he was often home only on the weekend, but those weekends were valuable to her. Her poem, "You forgot my name, or maybe just me" recalls with affection the nicknames her father gave her, and the weight that small gifts like bunny slippers can carry in a child's heart. She folds her hands and leans forward. "My poems are more personal to me, my inner thoughts and emotions coming out." Emmy takes her time to choose her words. "It sounds cheesy, but poetry has to come from your heart." Her inspiration and the person who taught her to write poetry is her friend and fellow AU student Rafael Alcantar, Jr. Her poem "I Copied Your Poems" is written in honor of him. "He really taught me about descriptive poetry."

Emmy's writing represents not just the lightheartedness of childhood, but also the growing pains of adolescence. "A lot of my stories are coming of age stories because I like to write from the perspective of a child." She grins and shrugs. "Because I am still a child." She struggles to keep a straight face while her fellow Chipotle workers dance behind the counter to distract her. In fifty-five years, Emmy will *be* Yams.

Before she can say why she writes stories, she takes a moment to ponder. She adjusts the green knit cap on her short hair. "I dream in stories; I think in story form. I think the best way of expressing yourself is through stories." Although Emmy didn't like to read much as a kid, she did appreciate the comic adventures of Calvin and his stuffed tiger Hobbes. In college she has branched out to enjoy work from authors such as Denis Johnson and Tea Obreht. Her own writing is a learning experience for her; she tries to figure out how quirky individuals fit into the world, and it can be a learning experience for her readers as well. Her favorite part about writing is seeing the world through someone else's eyes. Her least favorite part? Proofreading. The part that means the most, because it's where the writing really happens? Revising.

"I love characters who are different," she says, "and I love to evaluate how they fit into society, and sometimes it's a mess, sometimes it's a birdcage." She is not going to stop wearing pirate capes and shooting Nerf guns, and she's okay with that, because she believes it makes her a better writer. "I like writing about rebels, and I like being a rebel," she says. Emmy brings a new voice to fiction that is playful and quirky, but laced with a maturity and compassion, fiction that takes adults back to the innocence and vulnerability of childhood to see what they missed.

As the interview draws to a close, Emmy's friends Rafael and Lucy arrive to wait for her. The three of them seem tight-knit, close, laughing easily and bouncing jokes off one another. Emmy may think she doesn't fit into some broader society, but she fits where it counts. And tonight, that means throwing her small body against the door of Chipotle to keep Rafael trapped inside. Side note: Emmy Wheatley is a legally certified clown, and she knows how to ride a unicycle.

PICKENS CHAPEL
by Jacob Mahaffey
Digital Photography

USA blues

JT WARNOCK

we couldn't imagine reality,
so we disconnected
when planes dropped
the Twin Towers—

we tuned in WNCW
to hear the War on Terror
end. Jimmy Scarborough
played live renditions
of "This Land is Your Land."

i lose poems

JT WARNOCK

i lost a poem in the
garage
and another in the
dining room
where an EF-5 hits
every week.
the sirens go off—
they scream.
it never matters how long
i wait
lost poems never come back
to me.

FORBEARANCE
by Sarah Leugemors
Digital Photography

Gums Bleed

EMMY WHEATLEY

Gums bleed as my jaw welds itself shut.
I don't say your name,
my eyes close to make up for the overwhelming
recognition of your scent.
Searching your stance for human features
left behind—I am distracted by smoke
consuming my lungs, sending memories
down my spine, stopping at every vertebrae
like a lump in your throat.
Exhaling heated breath, you mix into the air
that surrounds us. The nothingness I felt
on my skin warned me: you were never really there.

His Hands in His Pockets

CHRIS MAULDIN

I twiddle that twig we plucked from the tree line,
but I'd give it back, the leaves I plucked too,
should the forest give you back to me. Remember the birds?
You loved their song. You sang it back to them daily.
They miss you, you know? They miss your song, and
one sits beside me. He sits on a branch, his hands in his pockets
and waits.

Park Bench

CHRIS MAULDIN

"Would you like to hear a story?" the old man said as he shuffled the cards. His frail, wrinkled hands twirled together in dance, curling and bending, like a Russian ballerina, flourishing into a blur. The cards slid over one another, nestling between the others. The dance he was doing was beautiful. And then he stopped just as quickly as he began.

He slapped the cards down onto the table and stared up at me with eager eyes, waiting for me to say yes, though I wanted to say no.

I said yes.

"Great, great. Koi-Koi okay?"

"Excuse me?"

"Koi-Koi?" He nodded at the cards expectantly, as if I knew what Koi-koi was in the first place, or even what these cards were for that matter. They were smaller, thicker, not like the cards I'd seen growing up, but the man kept staring and I kept nodding and he began to deal.

Four to him. Four to me. Four in the middle. Four to him. Four to me. Four in the middle and then, as quickly as he shuffled, he threw a card down on one in the middle, drew one, and picked up another. I was lost and he kept nodding. I set a card down. He corrected it, and then he set a card down on one in the middle and took them too.

Okay, *what* was the point? Oh, yes. The story.

"So...your story?" I said.

"Ahh, yes yes yes," he said, drawing a card, setting it down on another in the middle, then taking both of them as well. "Ohp. Your turn."

I looked at my cards. I may very well have had a game-winning hand. Most likely I did, but I laid down a card, and it was the wrong move. He told me so. And then he proceeded to tell me a story about home. This man, this old man, this old man I just met in the park, telling me about his home. Not his home here, no. He told me about Japan, about his childhood. He told me about a tree outside his house that he could see from his window.

"You would call them cherry blossoms here, yes?"

Yes.

He told me about his mother and his father and how much they loved him. He loved them too. And then he told me about his later life as I continued to lose at...what was it called? Koi-Koi? I don't know. Maybe I was winning? But it certainly didn't look like it. He told me about moving to America and finding his wife.

She was like the cherry blossom outside his window. He told me that. And then he told me about how she died giving birth to their first and only son. The old man teared up, but he went on, taking card after card, yelling out "Koi-Koi!" at seemingly random times. I ducked low. The people of the park were staring.

The boy grew up well he said, a healthy young boy, and he loved so many things.

"His favorite game was Koi-Koi," he said.

"No kidding?" I replied. It wasn't sarcastic. I was genuinely interested, and I continued to listen. Then he teared up again.

He died in a car accident while playing outside.

"You remind me of him," he said, still slapping down cards. "Your looks anyway. That's why I pulled you over, but now, even more, you remind me of him."

My looks I thought. I looked like his son and now I was playing cards with a stranger. On this bench, in a park, in the middle of the city, I was playing Koi-Koi and the whole day I sat and we played.

Brown Paper Bags

CHRISTINA MARTIN

My father's father was a man of few words, a man of ball caps, slow moving steps, and heavy-lidded eyes that didn't always read us as well as they did newspapers and magazines. In my grandparent's kitchen, my grandfather always sat at the end of the bar, close to the wall. His chair was, like him, tall and bulky, but also stained and worn. As a child, I pressed my face to his chest and felt the security of his embrace running like heat all the way to my toes. I remember his half smile and wrinkles, but sometimes all I saw were my big eyes and gaping smile in the reflection of his glasses, large and round. Not until I was older did I associate his sweet sharp breath with the alcohol that he kept wrapped in brown paper bags. Not until I was older did I associate the cigarettes he held between his fingers with the strong scent of addiction that rose from his ashtray. He died when I was fifteen.

When I walked into the kitchen after that, I saw his empty chair tightly pushed under the counter. For a while, every time I returned, I half expected to see his green oxygen tank, the back of his blue shirt, and the smoke that always accompanied him. Then his wife, his widow, my grandmother, made changes. She remodeled her kitchen, and I feared that too much might be lost. The long bar is gone as are the old chairs, his chair, but I can still smell the lingering smoke from his ashtray.

LYDIA GRACE #2
by Julia Madden
Digital Photography

A Nature Film

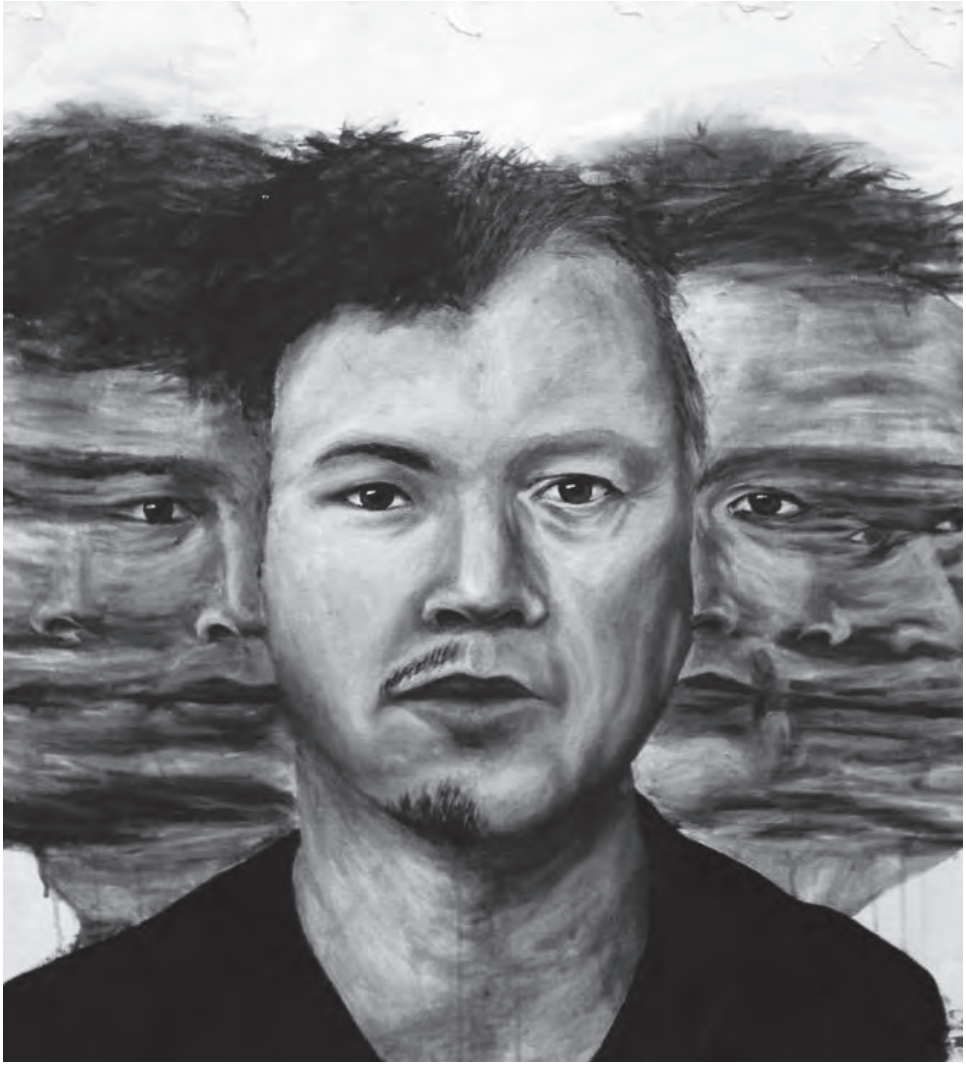
JORDAN SEARS

At the far end of the forest there was a factory. The smokestacks rose above the trees, puffing out a smoke that seemed to hold the trees at bay, hold them from growing any more. Under the light at the edge of the parking lot, a deer stood, its eyes fixed on the factory, its gaze finding its way to the front doors. A flock of blue collared men flew out the door, not a single one looking to the right or left. They had one mission—get back home before the sun came back up. The deer was familiar with their features, the way their heads tilted down, and the way their sleeves were coming unrolled. The deer came to this place each night curious as to what these men were, and why they always left this place.

The rattling of machines startled the deer. It took off into the woods, its shadow dancing where the darkness met the earth. The deer slowed down, as if hearing the birds and their song, and found the small patch of ground that had become its place to rest, the small place where its body had left its print. The deer had no pack, and no mate. Its antlers revealed scratches and cuts, marks of fights that never led to anything called dominance. The deer knelt, with its eyes wide, and drifted in and out of sleep as the moon gave way to the sun.

Night came again, and the deer meandered through the woods, picking at leaves that came off of broken branches. Slowly, it made its way toward the factory. A glow came from that direction, and no birds were singing. The wind picked up, and the deer stepped towards the glow. Between the trees, a burst of orange lit up the forest. The deer's fur shimmered silver and gold. At the edge of the woods, its eyes reflected the tower of heat. The deer turned its head, as if scanning the parking lot, watching as men fled the building, each screaming with their heads turned up. More men ran out of the factory as heat thickened the air and fire swallowed the building whole. Men with white collars flooded out other doors, covered in fire, their bodies rolling along the ground.

One man ran toward the deer, his body consumed by what looked like the sun. The deer watched intently. It had never seen fire. It had never seen panic. The man hit the asphalt, and before anyone came to him, his breath had escaped him. Sirens blared and whined, piercing the sound of voices screaming. Tonight, the deer wasn't startled by the noises made by men. It watched as men were carried into trucks, and as water was poured onto a building covered more in fire than in concrete. The deer watched as the building crashed down, its smokestacks cracking like branches from a tree. Smoke poured into the parking lot. The smoke took its time; the deer heard the sounds of men choking. The smoke cleared; the deer saw bodies and concrete. It saw the white in their faces, the blood on their clothes. The deer heard something. If you listened closely enough, you could hear men moaning, and birds singing softly, waiting for the sun to come up.



ALCHEMY
by Staci Bobbin
Oil on Canvas

The Beau Monde of Aurora Keen

CARA DILLON

HIGH ART

She counted to thirty as she stood before each and every painting in the museum to make certain she stood at each one long enough, in case anyone else was counting. Making her way through the gallery, Aurora Keen slowed down as she approached each piece, circling the sculptures and stopping in front of the paintings.

She stayed longer in front of the pieces where others were already standing. She glanced at their expressions and evaluated them. She would adjust her thick lens-less frames, moving them up the bridge of her nose, as she watched the people and the paintings. She made an intentional effort to sigh contemplatively at varied intervals. Sometimes she would consider commenting to the stranger about the piece but surmised that most preferred shared silence. She wasn't sure what she would say anyway.

As she walked away, she would pull out her phone, as if to return a text message or check the time, but instead Google search the title of the piece. She read the Wikipedia articles about what they meant, in case someone asked her about it when she casually mentioned spending a lengthy afternoon in an art museum later to her classmates.

MOVEMENT

Aurora Keen drove a generic blue Honda Civic. It drove fine and helped her get around Charlotte but she was embarrassed to drive it. Instead, she had her eye on a Mercier fixed gear bike. She had spent her first semester of her sophomore year at college attempting to convince her parents of the benefits of a bike over a car. Her list of benefits included statistics about air pollution and money she would save on gas. Her parents thought the idea was impractical.

Following an entire summer of work at a local vegan restaurant, she finally bought the bike. After totaling the new shoes, bag, and jacket that she knew were necessary to bike all over town, they totaled over three months of gas money.

Six weeks after buying the bike, Aurora absentmindedly rode around the far side of campus. She suddenly found herself speeding down a hill with traffic on each side and pedestrians crowding the sidewalk. Without any breaks on her fixed gear bike, she crashed into both a woman and a fire hydrant. Aurora broke three toes but that was the least of the damage. A young man called an ambulance as another bystander checked on the woman lying on the sidewalk. She was taken to the hospital to ensure she didn't have a concussion or worse.

Aurora's bike wheel was bent so significantly that it was unrideable. She never got it fixed.

DYE

Aurora rarely went to the hairdresser. She found that the more unkempt she kept her hair, the more people noticed her nontraditional style. She tried to make sure it looked like she didn't try at all when she left the house each morning. But, on this day, she was keeping an appointment she had at the hairdresser for something new.

She showed the stylist picture after picture of celebrities and other nameless beautiful females from her Pinterest page with nearly identically colored hair. Their hair was darker until about midway from the roots, remaining untouched by the dye, before it became gradually lighter. Websites had called it "ombréd." The hairdresser praised Aurora for her unique style, as Aurora pushed the tens of photos into her purse. After the transformation was complete, she took eight photos of herself before she found the right one to instantly post onto the internet, even before paying the hairdresser.

Not only did her friends post comments on her photo and "like" it, but a number of friends even said something face to face. Samantha said that it was the best ombré job she had ever seen, which was quite a compliment considering that four of their friends had also gone to the same hairdresser to have their hair done the same way earlier that week.

The following weekend, Aurora went home to her parents' house to celebrate her father's birthday. Upon arrival, her mother immediately asked Aurora why she got her roots dyed so dark and said she hoped that Aurora only paid the hairdresser for half the price since she only did half of her job.

OUT

On a Saturday morning, Aurora used the GPS on her phone to find the Planned Parenthood nearest to her college campus. She didn't think she was pregnant but had fooled around with a boy the night before at a party and didn't want to take any chances. She didn't feel the need to get to know the boy and didn't want any reason to.

She sat in the waiting room with one other girl. Aurora wore the same outfit from the night before, a pair of black denim jeans, a vintage tee shirt, and lace-up boots. The girl across from her was wearing jeans and a cable knit sweater with her hair slicked back into a ponytail so you could see her oversized fake pearl earrings. The nurse called the other girl back while Aurora continued to wait in the waiting room.

Before Aurora received the pill she came for, the other girl walked back through the room. She was openly crying now, not simply blank faced like she was before. Now, since it was later in the morning, there were others in the waiting room, and they all silently watched her as she made her way to the door.

All Aurora could think about, after the girl was past her, was why someone would ever want to monogram her jeans' pockets as hers were. A week later she would joke with someone about the ridiculousness of monogrammed anything with this instance in mind.

RECOLLECT

Molly was Aurora's childhood friend. Aurora emphasized "childhood" when she'd mention Molly to others. While Aurora left for college and matured, involving herself with all the lifestyle changes that Thursday night parties and occasional recreational drug use involved, Molly didn't. Molly remained much the same, studying, volunteering at animal shelters and with old people, and even retaining a strict bedtime of eleven o'clock.

They'd meet up, once a year, in their hometown when they came home from college for Christmas break. Molly always seemed overeager to see Aurora. Aurora disdained their meetings but she knew that they would inevitably run into each other at the grocery store if she didn't. She was trying, simply in her own interest, to avoid that awkward encounter with her, or at least that's what she told people.

When they'd meet at Mud Pie, coffeehouse and bakery, the first hour would pass by slowly. They'd each bite their tongues to resist overstepping a new boundary that their contrasting lifestyles had created. Eventually, they'd settle on discussing their past life together. Distinct from years past, Molly had brought something with her to this particular meeting. She presented Aurora with a mix CD of songs they listened to in high school, music Aurora wouldn't be caught dead listening to now. Aurora accepted the CD with a smile, hugged Molly goodbye and, once closed into her car, threw the CD into the floorboard of the passenger seat.

STYLE

She moved through the racks at Goodwill slowly, seeing if there were any flannel shirts or jackets or well-worn tee shirts worth salvaging. Indicated not by sight but smell, a homeless man grabbed the very oversized flannel shirt that she had her eye on. She cursed her luck. Two minutes earlier and her shopping trip would have been complete.

Instead, she found a blue tee shirt with the picture of what looked like a kitten in a denim pocket on the shirt. She looked at it, considering whether or not it would be seen as ironic, then concluded that people might actually take it seriously. She didn't want to have to comment on how lame or awful it was every time she wore it, so, she put it back.

Soon after, she discovered an oversized sweater that Bill Cosby could have worn with pride. She purchased it for just short of three dollars. She felt confident wearing the sweater until the next week when a middle-aged man at the library complimented her on it. He was being authentic. She wasn't sure if she should say thank you or explain to him that she didn't even like it.

WORDS

Aurora didn't call it a blog. Her page was mostly posts of pictures anyway. A blog was mostly words. But, she did consider the people who followed her page friends. She even referred to them in conversation as such, saying things like, "My friend from Seattle," or "Someone I know in San Francisco." She liked to sound well-traveled.

After a particularly good day, Aurora actually wrote a post describing her day. As she reread it, however, it sounded mundane and conventional.

She deleted it. Then, following forty minutes of looking at 4x6 portrayals of other peoples' beautiful lives, she posted an ambiguous negative lyric from a popular song and a picture of herself looking bored. When it linked to her Facebook, her mother was the only person to comment on it. She was concerned.

EATS

Raine, Aurora's roommate, was a vegan, or at least that's what Aurora thought she was. Initially, she began eating "clean," removing all processed foods from their fridge and pantry, then she moved to becoming a vegetarian but now animal products were off limits as well. Once, Raine started to cry when Aurora made scrambled eggs for breakfast when they first moved in together. Raine grew her own vegetables on the small patio outside their apartment, which was nice, but she wouldn't allow Aurora to keep milk or butter in the fridge next to her tofu and sprouts. She was even on the fence about whether or not she thought it was suitable for Auora to keep honey in the cabinet.

Consequently, Aurora allowed Raine to prepare food for the both of them each night. She didn't think the food was bad, really. Raine was actually a decent cook, often making things like veggie burritos and homemade hummus. Sometimes though, Aurora couldn't recognize what was in her meals, which was probably for the best. One week, after their third night of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, Aurora wished she could just eat a box of Kraft macaroni and cheese but it wasn't the same with soymilk.

ROAST

Aurora often met with Samantha at Sweet Eugene's for coffee. There, they met Wren, who made the drinks. Wren wore cardigans, deep v-neck tee shirts and gloves with the fingers cut out of them. Sometimes he'd wear hats that made his decidedly messy and unwashed hair stick out from all sides. If they stayed there long enough, he'd talk about his chakra rocks and the podcasts about meditation he had been listening to by a man named Swami Ken.

Aurora always ordered chai tea but Sam would try whatever Wren decided to make. One week it was a doppio espresso, the next, a French press of Latin American coffee, then a pour over, and finally, siphoned coffee. Aurora commented that the siphon, with the Bunsen burner beneath it, looked like a science experiment. Wren and Sam continued to talk about the smell of the coffee and the coffee notes and the roasting method. Wren told Sam that he was actually roasting his own coffee now. The following week, he brought some for her to try. This time, they asked Aurora if she would like to try some as well. She obliged. By their instruction, she deeply inhaled with her nose over the edge of the cup before taking the first sip. They both eagerly awaited her verdict. She responded with "deep and smooth" and decided against telling them both that she preferred Starbucks.

REAL

The shoes she had been waiting for showed up on her doorstep in the familiar Amazon box. Aurora had seen a layout of a girl in the Urban Outfitters catalog wearing a pair of well worn, formerly white canvas Converse All Stars with dresses her grandmother probably wore in the 1950's. She ordered one of the dresses for much more than her grandma would have paid and intended to copy the look exactly with the help of these new shoes.

She took them from the box but, to her dismay, these shoes were still new looking, still crisp white. Not only had she just bought them, but they looked like they had just been bought. That wasn't the look.

The following day, as the trash truck made its way down her street and eventually discarded the shipping evidence of her new shoe purchase, Aurora scuffed her feet through the dirt, grass, and mud in the back yard, ensuring that no one else would know these shoes were ever clean or new.

COVER

Aurora spent most of her Christmas break not only listening to, but also singing along with the songs her former friend, Molly, had given her. Unlike the songs with ambiguous lyrics and foreign instruments or the other songs with only computerized rhythms that she and her friends fawned over, these songs held meaning and memories. She actually liked these songs. And not having to flip it over constantly, like the records that had come back en vogue, was a plus as well.

In an effort to reload her digital music library with these songs, she took the CD out of her car. She left it on the coffee table when the new film her roommate had rented distracted her. To her dismay, later that evening a number of her close friends would come by and notice the CD.

They came together at least weekly to drink cheap beer and talk. Conversations usually centered around new bands no one knew, the latest social cause they didn't have the money to give to, or dialogue was simply nonexistent as they looked at their phones and stalked the lives of people they didn't care enough to see or speak to. But tonight, with a CD of songs that were either not old or bad enough to even be considered hip or ironic and other artists who were simply too mainstream to care about anymore, the group couldn't ignore the contraband on the coffee table.

Sloane sarcastically accused Robert of owning the CD. Robert vehemently denied it, becoming slightly annoyed, not because Sloane believed the music was his, but because she would even think he'd still be so eco-hostile as to still use CDs. He proceeded to give her a lecture on how the production of one CD involved at least four slaves and killed most of the rainforest, too. She agreed and added that that was the same reason she was using only vintage cameras for her new independent photography business, despite the poor quality photographs they produced.

Aurora listened as the group berated whoever owned CDs and listened to such terrible music. When her roommate, Raine, asked if it was hers, Aurora insisted it wasn't and threw it into the trash with the empty PBR cans also on the table.

TORNADO
by Iina Kobayashi
Acrylic Painting, Molding Paste, Origami Paper, Newspaper on Canvas

You forgot my name, or maybe just me

EMMY WHEATLEY

Call me peanut
like you did before
expectations were too high
and Sunday dresses
fit just right.

Buy me bunny slippers
to make me grin
and teach you
about the person
I was yet to become.

Rock me to sleep
or comfort
so that I can get to know you
and the smell of grease
you represent.

Bark

EMMY WHEATLEY

Our lungs filled with different amounts of air—
we never breathed at the same pace.
Your eyes were still the color of bark
but my initials were no longer carved
into its side like they once were—
I never stopped looking.
Instead your focus was on the leaves,
the roots had stopped growing
as they hit dark pavement.
A parking lot filled with other cars
polluting the air, we both used to breathe
but never at the same pace.

APPLE ORCHARD IN THE SPRING
by Jonathan Allsbrook
Digital Photography

The Snowy Mound

CHRIS MAULDIN

A toothsome breeze of shepherd's pie
is lifted from a table near and, right
beside, a sweaty pint of amber
sits waiting to be downed. A dog
inside, a scruffy rug, lies before the hearth,
and patrons in high spirits scarcely
notice the falling flame. The publican tends
the fireplace, kindling the logs inside,
and high above the snowy mound–
a wafting smoke.

Bedlam

ANNETTE CARPENTER

It was an insane asylum imprisoning its lone patient.
A man played the role of the leering guard
and a little girl performed the part of the morose nurse
who was spat on and kicked by the patient.
The fetid stench of cat urine
hung
in the sunroom,
and stale cigarette smoke permeated
the worn couch cushions.

The kitchen had a film,
dust and grime,
bowls sitting out with
the crust of last week's briny Ramen water.
The petals and spines of the flowers on the lawn
bent toward the ground and averted their eyes.

The patient figured it out:
the pills didn't burn as much when
washed down with Grey Goose.
They made everything go away—
the voices, the panic, the

breathing.

Working Against You

EMMY WHEATLEY

Cuts on my hands remind me of working with you.
The ache in my back promises me warmth
but my break is cut short
as my cocked smile becomes damaged.
I hide in the dish pit from your heavy
breath weighing on the corners of your lips.

The space between your eyebrows thins
as lies decay my teeth,
"I'm sorry."

DEVOTIONAL
by Sarah Leugemors
Digital Photography

Pants of Fury

MATT REISER

Swish, swish, swish, swish, swish, swish, swish. The girl's windbreaker pants swish as she saunters along the halls of Boiling Springs High School in front of me as I try desperately to reach third period Geometry. *Swish, swish, swish, swish* goes the matching windbreaker jacket as her arms move back and forth in perfect synchronicity with her stride. As she continues to walk and that irritating sound continues to reverberate against my ear drums, I come to understand how women can drown their children because they won't stop crying, and how wives can kill their husbands because they put the ice cube tray back in the freezer with only one ice cube one too many times. *Swish, swish, swish, swish.* It took all my self-control not to just pummel this poor unsuspecting girl in front of me. I just walked behind her the whole time praying that anything would happen to her that would get that horrible cacophony to cease. I didn't care if she got hit by a car, or flattened by meteorites, or if God himself decided to strike her down with the kind of vengeance typically reserved for murderers, traitors and thieves; I just wanted that sound to STOP! *Swish, swish, swish, swish.*

As humans, it's part of our nature to reduce people to their most banal and irritating traits when it's convenient for us to do so. That guy on the interstate going ten miles under the speed limit in the fast lane isn't a guy who's low on gas, or someone who's lost and trying to find his way in a new place, or simply a guy having a bad day—he's a self-centered yutz who deserves a bacterial infection in his sensitive areas for driving like such a moron in the fast lane. Why is he doing this? Doesn't he know that the fast lane is for GOING FAST? Maybe if he were doing this in the slow lane, I could be a *little* forgiving, but *the fast lane? I'm* in the fast lane because I need to get to work *now*, because I'm running late and because I had to swing by Blockbuster earlier this morning to drop off *You, Me and Dupree* before I racked up any more late fees. If I'm late for my job one more time, I'll probably get fired. WHY DOESN'T THIS GUY GET THAT? *Swish, swish, swish, swish.* Meanwhile, the slow guy in the fast lane is probably thinking the same thing about me. He's probably thinking that I'm tailgating him because I'm a jerk who deserves to be mugged and dismembered by a traveling band of gypsies, rather than a fellow human being with problems and trials trying to simply get through the morning just like him.

I was curious about what causes this irritation-based dehumanization, and I found that when it comes to sounds at least, there is oddly enough a scientific name for the phenomenon. Misophonia is a hatred of certain sounds, and sufferers often find themselves having strong negative emotional reactions to repetitive sounds like pens clicking, heels tapping, keyboards clacking, dogs barking, and so-on and so-forth. So if you've ever wanted to stab your co-worker in the eye with an X-Acto knife because he won't stop

eating that bag of Cheetos so loud, you can thank Misophonia for that feeling. Not a lot is known about the condition, but it does seem to be most prevalent in places where people are in close proximity to each other for extended periods of time, such as small offices and apartments. I can vouch for this assessment, as I've lived with roommates who have done sound-related things that I never would have thought in my wildest dreams would irritate me, but over time mountains were made out of molehills, and I grew to hate them simply because of certain sounds they made. For example: I once threatened to tie a roommate to his bed and beat him *Full Metal Jacket* style, if he didn't stop popping his knuckles all day, everyday. I don't care how good a person you claim to be, most of you have been in a situation where a simple sound in an enclosed area has driven you to the brink of insanity, and then later when you try to explain it to another individual you sound like you belong in a straightjacket or one of those Hannibal Lector masks to keep you from biting anybody.

Maybe Misophonia and the general tendency to dehumanize others based on how much they irritate you is caused by some kind of leftover evolutionary instinct. Maybe when we hear Fran Drescher's voice or when the customer service rep on the phone tells us to disconnect the wireless router EVEN THOUGH WE TOLD HIM FIVE TIMES THAT WE'VE ALREADY TRIED THAT, it irritates us so deeply that it brings out the dumb cave-person inside of us, and all rational thought and decision-making ability go out the window. *Mongo hear squawking bird… bird make Mongo angry… Mongo kill bird… bird no anger Mongo anymore. Mongo hate swishy pants… Mongo kill swishy pants girl!* There is something oddly primal about our rage regarding our pet peeves, and perhaps it's like fight or flight or our need to care for our children even when they're smelly and dirty and generally unlikable people at times: it comes from evolution.

The problem with that caveman-like anger is that it often makes us look foolish and uncompassionate, and it can make us seem to be insensitive bullies to the other people in our lives. If the History Channel has taught me anything, it's that Neanderthals typically weren't a touchy-feely bunch. You never see a movie where one caveman gives another caveman a card after the second caveman's mother was mauled by a Mountain Lion. Their focus was typically on the survival of themselves, and perhaps that has carried over to us in an undesirable way.

On the other hand, though, maybe it isn't evolution that has made us this way; maybe it's our culture that has turned us into self-obsessed imbeciles who reduce people, infinite in their complexity, to a series of grating attributes that deserve no quarter. As Americans, we tend to place a very high importance on our individuality, and our rights as individuals. *How dare they tell me I can't*

buy assault weapons? I'm an American, and if I want to buy a gun that can mow down twenty people in five seconds and allow me to play Rambo in my back yard, I should be able to. I'M AN AMERICAN! When it comes to giving people rights we don't agree with, we even feel like it's our right to deny others those rights, simply because we don't like them. *How dare homosexuals want to marry? Don't they know I think it's wrong? I should have the right to have my beliefs enforced, even when the topic at hand doesn't directly concern me. I'M AN AMERICAN! Swish, swish, swish, swish.* Perhaps our American mindset—that our individual needs are more important than anyone else's—has caused us to overvalue our pet peeves, which in turn causes us to feel more aggressive than normal when one of the things that annoys us happens in our presence. Maybe they aren't just little irritating things to us; perhaps we feel like they threaten who we are as people.

There are other, more collectivistic cultures out there that I'm willing to bet don't have quite the anger issues over triviality that we do. Look at Japan, a culture so collectivistic that many workers refuse to accept salary raises unless every worker in their workplace gets one. I have a hard time imagining a Japanese man getting so angered with his coworker for shuffling his papers too loudly that he wanted to shove a chopstick down his throat, because feelings like that go against the collectivistic nature of their culture. Everything is for the betterment of the group, so if Jiro needs to shuffle his papers every once in a while for the workplace to continue functioning, more power to him. Or maybe they do get irritated at banality like we do, but are much too polite because of their society's values to ever verbalize their grievances the way that we do. I'm not Japanese, so all of this is purely speculative.

Perhaps there's a psychological reason for this behavior. Abraham Maslow described a hierarchy of needs that all humans need to satisfy to be content and happy in their lives. In Maslow's model, once a person fulfills one set of needs, they move onto the next set of needs and so on until they achieve what he called self-actualization. The first needs that must be met before any of the others are the physiological needs. These are all of the classic needs that pertain to any living being: breathing, food/water, sleep, excretion and sexual needs. Once physiological needs are met, the person then moves on to trying to fulfill their safety needs. Safety needs include safety of one's body, job, family, and property. Once our safety needs have been met, we can then work on meeting our esteem needs. Esteem needs include self-esteem, as well as any other needs pertaining to love and belonging. Once those esteem needs are met, individuals can work on their self-actualization needs, which primarily concern creativity, as well as morality, lack of prejudice and problem solving.

So with that knowledge of the hierarchy of needs in mind, is it possible that we as Americans respond in such a way to trivial nuisances in our lives because we have no physiological or safety-related problems to be angry about? I think it's safe to assume that most Americans who are reading this are pretty well off, and that you'd be hard pressed to name anyone in your personal circle who is having trouble finding their next meal, or a place to sleep for the night. So since our basic needs are met every day, and since anger is still a very human emotion that we don't simply stop experiencing once we reach a certain point in the hierarchy, does that mean that the things we get angry about become more and more trivial the better off we are? I'm sure that if you went to Uganda and gave all the people in a starving tribe a pair of windbreaker pants, not one of them would complain about the fact that they make a *swish, swish* sound and give them back. They would all, instead, probably be so grateful

that they'd hoist you onto their shoulders like you're Robin Williams at the end of *Dead Poet's Society* (again, all of this is purely speculative). Ugandans have real things to be angry about, like the lack of food in their village, and the fact that their life expectancy is incredibly short due to war, famine, disease, and a number of other social or personal ailments. Maybe it works this way: since we don't have those problems, but we still need on a primal physiological level to experience anger, we literally make stuff up to be angry about. Maybe we're privileged, spoiled, first-world divas, and perhaps that's why we get angry when the people around us wear too much perfume or gulp their soft drinks like an overheated water buffalo in the seat right next to us at the movie theater.

So what can we do to reduce this illogical anger, this tendency to dehumanize people because they do things that annoy us? One of the mantras they teach in Alcoholic's Anonymous is the line from Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer, "God grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change," and I think that's good advice that all of us can really take to heart when dealing with this specific kind of anger. You can't control the fact that the guy in the desk next to yours staples papers louder than most jet engines, or that Rhonda from HR laughs like a dying yak, but you can control how you react to those scenarios. You are the master of your own fate, as much as it might seem at times that the entire universe is conspiring against you; you have the power to choose to not be angry at banality if you really don't want to be. When you're late to work and are stuck behind a guy on a moped traveling the speed of a sloth with an Oxycodone problem, instead of freaking out and getting angry at the motorist in front of you, look within and see what you could have done to improve the situation on your end. You can't control the slow-moving island glacier in front of you, but you did have control over what time you left the house this morning, how many times you hit the snooze button on your alarm clock, and the fact that you probably shouldn't have even rented *You, Me and Dupree* to begin with (everyone told you it was a terrible movie, but *noooo,* you had to see it for yourself before you could pass judgment, and now that you have seen it, was it really worth all of this?). In a lot of these situations if there's anyone to be mad at, it's probably you, so just accept the fact that you're the schmuck causing the dilemma you're in, shrug it off and move on.

If all of the Zen advice fails, as it might, and you do find yourself becoming enraged by the guy snapping his gum *over and over and over* in line in front of you at the bank, just think what an outsider would think if you described the reason for your rage. I guarantee you that if you tell your friend that you want to slam your foot down the throat of Gum Guy because he won't stop snapping the Bazooka Joe in his mouth, your friend will look back at you with the kind of glazed over, vacant stare typically reserved for work-mandated productivity seminars and watching programming on the E! Network. In short, your friend will think it's a dumb story and that you need to quit being such a big baby. Before you grab his throat to shake the zombie look off his stupid face, take a breath, let it go. Besides, there are more important things to be angry about, like your brother-in-law. Isn't he just the worst?

WE ARE CONSTELLATIONS
by Naomi Nakazato
Graphite on Illustration Board

Buck Teeth

COURTNEY COUCH

The soil in Charleston, South Carolina, isn't the best for growing much of anything, I know that now. But the summer before my twelfth birthday, I wanted to prove to my mother that I had a green thumb. If I'm being completely honest, I actually wanted to prove to myself that I *wasn't* like my mother in that I *could* plant a living plant, you know, the ones that utilize photosynthesis, and keep it alive. As I grew up, my mother failed miserably every week at keeping her plants from turning brown.

"It's not that I can't, it's that the plants *won't*" was a common excuse. Many times, I would sit in the back of our mini-van with my sister in the parking lot of Lowe's and try to clear pieces of scrap paper, coat hangers, empty take-out boxes, and random jackets out of the trunk to make room for the potted plants. My mom would return to us and stuff as many pots of flowers in the back of the van as would fit. Sometimes, I would beg her to let me wander while she perused the aisles of Lowe's, and she would be only too happy to oblige. My sister and I would chase each other around the store, play hide and seek, or pretend to stuff each other inside of the display refrigerators a few times before it was time to rescue Mom from her daisies, or lilies, or rosebushes.

Mom had an affinity for roses, but the rosebush she planted one spring lasted a few weeks before turning a putrid shade of brown. She was heartbroken; my dad bought her a palmetto tree and planted it in the lefthand corner of our front yard as a "just because" present. For years, we lived in the brick house next to the cul-de-sac with "that weird, short palm tree in the front." My house was a landmark. Eventually, even that self-sustaining tree died, too, and had to be expensively uprooted. My dad claimed that was an "early birthday present" for Mom.

The older I grew, the harder I tried to be one step ahead of my parents. So, I went to work. I ransacked my dad's shed until I found what probably used to be a garden hoe, and I uprooted the soil next to our back fence. In the process, I accidentally unearthed two graves which belonged to my deceased hamsters, so I dug them a hole underneath my treehouse and said a quick prayer for their souls, since their original funeral consisted of my father stuffing their lifeless little bodies into Ziploc bags as I bawled my eyes out in a locked bathroom. If I had been as smart as I thought I was, I might have drawn a connection to the failed lives of my hamsters, who had both been named Jessie, and my gardening abilities. But I blamed their deaths on their own curiosity and not on my confidence in their ability to spelunk down the air conditioning shafts beneath our home. Dad says he came home from work that day to find that I had unscrewed the air vents and was sticking a hand towel down the vent and shrieking, "Climb back up, Jessie, for Pete's sake!"

Later, the summer of the tomatoes, I burst into Lowe's with the sole intention of buying everything my mother *never* bought for her plants. My dad found the essentials for tomato growth, like frames and seeds, while I tossed more extravagant items, like a dark blue watering can and a pink miniature shovel, into the cart. I found the gargantuan bags of potting soil in the porch area outside of Lowe's and chose the brand that my mom never touched. Once we threw the heavy bags into the back of Dad's F-150, I could feel my confidence peaking. I was determined to best Mom at this one thing: growing the best, shiniest, roundest, reddest tomatoes that Charleston had ever seen.

As I tilled the soil and planted the seeds, carefully and one by one, I would occasionally see Mom peek her nose between the window-blinds and watch me. *Studying my success*. Every morning, with an eye keeping lookout on the blinds, I would run outside to check on the little green spheres that were growing from the vine. The promise of huge red tomatoes was what kept me from snatching them off the vine at first appearance. With each day, I noticed them grow a little bit bigger, a little bit redder. I started bringing a ruler with me so I could measure my success.

One morning, a tomato was missing. Just one. Not a big deal. I'm a reasonable person. Two days later, I was missing two more. "They're not even red yet!" I whined to my dad later that afternoon. I was sure Mom was plucking them out of spite in the wee hours of the morning. Mom got up at five on most days because of her insomnia, which was a side effect of my sister's traumatic childbirth that had lingered. The medicine which Mom took every night lasted only eight hours, and she went to bed super-early. It wasn't uncommon for Mom to start yawning even while the sun was still high in the sky. I was positive that, if I got up early enough, I would be able to see my mother creeping through the backyard toward the tomatoes wearing a pair of white gloves like a jewelry thief.

I set the alarm on my nightstand to 4:30A.M. and waited. When the alarm finally beeped, I pressed "snooze," so it went off again five minutes later when I wasn't in the room. One of the drawbacks of sharing a room with my sister was that, more often than not, I was forced to be ultra-considerate and quiet while she was sawing logs. I tried. I grabbed a yellow Pelican flashlight from the drawer my dad had labeled "emergency" and traced my hand along the top of the mantle above the fireplace until I found the spare key to unlock the back door. I turned the key slowly, as if the culprit could hear the gears turning, and opened the door with a small creak. I didn't account for the motion-sensitive floodlight on my back porch, and once I set foot on the patio, the world around me was illuminated with a flash. That's when I saw the thief. The thief with buck teeth. My nemesis: the squirrel.

It had a perfectly round, small green tomato in its greedy little paws. I shouted "HEY!" and shook my flashlight angrily at him. I can only assume it was a *he* because males at that time had an affinity for taunting me. He wasn't fazed by my anger, flashlight, or unkind words. I fought the urge to use the flashlight as a bat and test the durability of his skull. I hesitated mostly because I was born clumsy, and the flashlight would most likely have tested the durability of *my* skull. I took one step too close, and the rodent, nestling the green tomato between his oversized teeth, hopped away on top of the wooden fence.

The following day consisted of Dad consoling me with phrases like "we've all got to eat," but we don't *all* have to eat other people's tomatoes. I so wanted to be better. I wanted to win the competition. I wanted to prove I had a green thumb, and that varmint wouldn't let me. No, I wouldn't be defeated. I couldn't succumb to weakness. I'm human. I have a soul. God gave me smarts, for Heaven's sake. I forgave my father for laughing at my turmoil and asked him to teach me how to shoot. He should have noticed a correlation, but his joy at his eleven year old daughter's interest in guns overpowered his good sense.

Dad took me to my best friend's farm, and her father brought her along for the ride, too. They taught us to shoot every gun in their arsenal, and once we left, I felt confident that the resemblance between Bruce Willis and my father was not coincidental. After my lesson, Dad showed me where we kept the shotgun and the shells that go inside it. He made me promise that, if there were ever an intruder in the house, I would shoot them if they came down the hallway toward me or my sister.

That night, I dreamed of men wearing all black being zipped into body bags after attempting to rob my mother of her extensive collection of diamond crowns. In my dream, my dad clapped me on my back and thanked me for being brave enough to pull the trigger when it counted. My mom thanked me for saving the crowns, since they truly belonged to Amelia Mignonette Thermopolis Renaldi, Princess of Genovia.

I'm not proud of what I did two nights later. It was late, and I didn't think it would make so much noise. The creaky floorboards underneath my parents' awful red carpet betrayed me as I was leaving their bedroom, shotgun in hand. My dad sat up abruptly in bed, fearing an intruder. But, no, when he turned on the light, he just saw his little girl toting a big gun, trying to hide the shotgun shells underneath her shirt. My punishment came in many forms. The most worst form of all was having to eat breakfast while watching through the windowpane as my nemesis, the squirrel, plucked another one of my precious tomatoes.

I never attempted to use the shotgun again, but I did try to make peace with my neighbor Shawn, who was a weapons enthusiast. He and I grew up on opposite sides of the street, in more ways than one. For instance, Shawn liked to experiment with drugs while I enjoyed sparring with lightsabers. Shawn liked to play video games on his Gameboy Advance while I preferred to pretend that my treehouse was a boxcar and my sister's name was Violet. Shawn and I never saw eye-to-eye, and, after his reaction to the death of my rabbit, I ended what remained of the friendship.

When Smudge, my beautiful Dutch rabbit, passed away, I cried for a solid afternoon. My mom made me go outside and get some fresh air, so I chose to ride my bike around the neighborhood and sob dramatically. Shawn's best friend had roaring red hair, and I can't remember his name for the life of me, but Shawn and Red decided that it would be hysterical if they threw carrots at my head every time I rode my bike past their front yard. In all reality, they

probably didn't draw the connection between carrots and my rabbit, but I couldn't forgive him for enjoying Smudge's death.

Until the squirrels started eating my precious tomatoes, that is. Shawn had a love for weapons, ranging from BB and paintball guns to swords and spears. I once spent an entire afternoon in my bedroom with headphones covering my sensitive ears because Shawn was roaming the streets of our neighborhood, blasting every road sign that he saw with paintballs. I had been thoroughly annoyed at the time, but now that I had a target in my mind's eye, I could picture the squirrel being pelted with red and blue paintballs and limping off behind a tree to save its life, leaving behind my glorious, rotund tomatoes.

Shawn wouldn't give up his gun to a "rookie," even though I explained to him that I had been thoroughly trained for mortal combat. I managed to convince him to spend an afternoon in my backyard, waiting for the culprit. We built a fort out of twigs, plastic chairs, and old blankets. Mom made us peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, but I was worried her presence would frighten the squirrel away, so I forced her to leave the sandwiches on the back porch and convinced Shawn to army-crawl to our food from the fort. After eating, I didn't let him talk to me much. I tricked him into thinking that I was going to give him a handsome reward for killing the pesky squirrel. A handsome reward for a boy his age would've been a kiss on the cheek or a five dollar bill. Unfortunately for him, the squirrel never appeared, so Shawn was never compensated.

The following morning, I dashed outside just in time to witness two squirrels carting off a gorgeous, ripe tomato. I threw a green frisbee at them. It got stuck near the top of the oak tree. I glowered and thought hard. There had to be a way. And then I remembered. The previous summer, my mother decided that she wanted to bird watch from our kitchen window. So, my dad obediently built her a little birdhouse and put the feed in the house every morning before work so that my mom could watch the birds while making breakfast. But squirrels in Charleston will eat just about anything, and they loved being able to nibble on the birdseed all day long. The squirrels usually climbed the pole, sat on the edge of the birdhouse, stuffed their cheeks to the brim with seeds, and then scampered up the nearest tree. It infuriated my mom. My dad's solution was to soak the pole with oil so that the squirrels would not be able to scale it. For a week straight, my sister and I laughed as we watched the squirrels try to climb up the slick pole to the birdhouse. They would normally make about three-quarters of the climb, and then run out of energy and slide backwards down the pole. Once they hit the ground, they would tumble a few times, then try to climb again.

But squirrels had nothing on me, so my mother said, as I soaked a hand towel in oil and greased every metal wire on that tomato cage. Sure enough, every time their little claws scrambled at the cage, they slipped and slid to defeat. I was proud. A can of WD40 and the collective wisdom of my parents' long lives, and I had bested a creature no bigger than my foot, a critter if you will with a brain smaller than my thumb. Victory was, as it often is, glorious. And short-lived. Ripening tomatoes grow too tall for cages, too heavy for vines. Simple gravity, maturity, brings them to earth. The last tomato of summer was red, huge. Beautiful. But as I reached for it, I heard a family of fiends laughing on fence posts, wiping their mouths, flicking away bits of red flesh. Turning the prize in my hand to reveal the underbelly, I saw a horrid, scarring bite made by tiny buck teeth. And worse? I heard my mother, leaning out the window over the porch, praising my efforts. She said she couldn't be prouder.

THE SOUL LOOKS SIDEWAYS & UNTITLED (EMMY)
by Naomi Nakazato
Silver Gelatin Print

And the Pen Came Too

CHRIS MAULDIN

I was, like most other children that day, excited. I rode in the back seat like I always did or, at least, as I had done of late. My mother, terrified of what she believed to be an imminent and quite fatal car accident, which never happened, placed me in the backseat after a story those stickers on the sun visors warn you about came true. Some boy, about my age, was devoured whole by the plastic marshmallow that was the passenger airbag in a rather forceful rear-ending with a mini van. It wasn't until I was a little older and a little more curious that I found out the boy came out of the accident okay, save for the massive bruise that colored his left eye. But my mom was still my mom after all, and I was fortunate enough not to be encased in a cocoon of bubble wrap every time I got into the car. Today, I hardly noticed. Today I was excited. Today was the first day of school.

Not only was it the first day of school, but it was the first day at a brand new school. In hindsight, it was strange that I wasn't nervous, given my present disposition to things like that. Perhaps it was because nearly everyone would be the new kid at school today, but I think I was just oblivious. As we pulled into the drop off circle, kids, bellies full of breakfast, some full of more than just one serving by the look of them, sprinted towards the front doors and I, of course, was eager to join them. I ran into the school, my book bag bouncing behind me, and I caught a glimpse of who would become my new best friend. I just didn't know it yet.

The first grade hallway was brighter than the rest of the school. Not only that, but it was somewhat isolated from it as well. Imagine the school being shaped like an "H."Then, imagine a lower case "L" being shoved into its side and, at the end of that long hallway, no less than a mile from any other grade, except for the second graders who were stuck further up the "L," were the first graders, eagerly awaiting a nap time that wasn't coming. The classrooms were well decorated, though they probably had to be to keep the kids who'd never gone to school for a full day from melting down when that moment came, as it always did.The desks were arranged in clusters of four and next to my desk sat the aforementioned soon-to-be best friend of mine, and he had what would soon bring about my greatest sin.

School supplies in grade school were a way of showing off our individuality. A boy at our cluster, who had a rather pronounced southern drawl, showed off his camouflage binder to the rest of us boys while the blonde haired girl on the other side of the room drew pictures with her glitter pens, which made her, without a doubt, the most envied of all the girls. I, on the other hand, brought out a rather humdrum assortment of binders that did *not* have pictures of cool looking cars or gross looking creatures and pens that didn't do anything to aid in a continuous quest of mine to make all my drawings sparkle. I was boring. I didn't have to tell anyone that; my school supplies

did it for me, but little did I know, my soon-to-be best friend would make up for my overflowing cup of mediocrity.

Out of his seemingly uninteresting book bag he pulled a pen, not unlike any other pen I'd ever seen. It was glossy black with a chrome clip and a rubbery grip with no indentations from his fingers, meaning it was unused and probably quite new and, while the outside of the pen was what brought our eyes to it, the inner workings were what kept them there. Pressing into what seemed like a random spot on the side of the pen, he, almost as if by a form of juvenile sorcery, caused a red beam to shoot out of the button that, on most pens, was used only to make the tip protract. Without a teacher present, it was all too easy for him to dart the beam, and the dot it formed on the wall, across the room. He shone it on the shirt of a nearby boy who, not unlike a cat, tried catching it in his hands with little success. The dot, after disappearing for a moment, showed up on a husky boy's butt as he, unaware of and uninterested in why the other kids were laughing, stood up to get something from his bag. After what seemed like a day's worth of entertainment, which was probably no more than thirty-seconds, the teacher entered the room, the children all quieted down and the pen sat, unattended, within my reach.

It took the better part of the morning. One attempt to seize the pen was cut short by an odd looking boy staring at me from across the room, and most other attempts faired about as well. The bell, which sounded less like a bell and more like the car horn of the furious man with the pick-up truck and the confederate flag that had dropped off the boy with the camouflage binder, signaled it was time for recess and that it was my chance to make my move. I snatched the pen up swiftly, as if there were any other way, shoved it deep down into my pocket, and followed my class to the playground.

In hindsight, I should be concerned. My cold, calculated heist was met with little remorse, and my playing with the boy, who was now seeping into the role that was my best friend, was borderline sociopathic, but I didn't care. After all, it was only day one and I was the coolest kid in school; everyone just didn't know it. The rest of the day consisted of my now best friend sobbing uncontrollably at the loss of his pen and me sneaking glances at it from under the table because, after all, I was an unfeeling friend and his tears, his cheap ploys to root out the thief, didn't work on me. Being his newly appointed best friend, however, I consoled him at the drop-off circle, which in the afternoon was now the pick-up circle, and when he left, I felt relieved. I got away with it, the perfect crime, and then my mother came. She helped me into the car, making sure I, her little angel, was secure in the back seat, safe from the monstrous airbag that I undoubtedly deserved and, before long, we left for home and the pen came too.

lines composed at Walden Pond

JT WARNOCK

i'll live in the woods
pitch my own tent—
i'll grow my own bushels
let God pay the rent.

instead of hearing voices
i hear songs—
instead of following
i find my way home.

i'll not be alone
when i'm by myself—
i'm surrounded by Nature
i count myself less.

the rocks on the river
are begging to breathe—
the longer i'm sitting
the less i want to leave.

September Cold

MARGARET B. HAYES

I am September cold,
useless as a tree
without arms,
spilled out
like the tide
on the sand,
seeking a place
of no return.

If there were words,
I would write them.
If there were music,
I would sing,
but in the rain
of dark September,
I flounder.
The mask called Death
comes between us.

Pretend it didn't happen,
that the road turns backward
and I can sing my song,
the one I lost,
and live as if
nothing's changed.

THE CANDLE & COMPLACENCY
by Alivia Chapla
India Ink

Lucky Penny

GENEVIEVE HAMILTON

Her feet fly beneath a swell of moon,
an infinite bowl of hushed night.
She inhales the delicious bite of frosted air—
her cheeks bloom.

Don't crush the porcelain shoulders floating through the fields
with the weight of your fears.
Give them all to the lucky penny in your fist
and throw them over your shoulder into the river.
She will tangle your heart in fragrant knots,
but let out a deep frosted breath;
keep your arms free to catch her.

here...to there

JT WARNOCK

students laugh when they see me
reading in the library,

sleeping in with Emerson,
Coach, Thoreau, and Dickinson.

i graduate this coming May—
what will my professors say,

by the grace of God, “he’s gone”
or Gradgrind: “he’s learned some”?

Sacraments

CARA DILLON

Each round of frozen dough lands with a dull thump when I toss it onto the cookie sheet. The dough is stiff and needs the flakes of freezer burn dusted from the outer surface. The Pillsbury package reads, "Bake biscuits at 350°F for 20 to 24 minutes." With six minutes remaining on my timer, the aroma from the buttermilk biscuits fills my empty house. I flip on the oven light and peer into the oven. The flaky white sides and toasted tops look so good that I can almost fool myself into believing they didn't come from a zipped freezer bag.

I admit that I didn't form the biscuits, but while they cook, I still persuade myself that I did *bake* them. I *prepared* the biscuits. Sure, I didn't open a single cabinet, but I gave rise to these biscuits and, at the end of it, I'll still have the same product. But a glance at the dough-deficient counter testifies against me. And when I open the oven to inhale the warm, deep smells of history and family and communion, instead I sense fraudulence. The buzz of the timer suggests that time is not the only thing that has slipped away.

I don't believe my grandmother is rolling over in her grave because I baked store-bought, flash-frozen buttermilk biscuits, but she would be floored to hear me argue that I "made" biscuits without a hand touching a teaspoon of flour. She made biscuits from scratch. On Saturday mornings, we made biscuits together. That is, I watched from the bar stool. She filled a mixing bowl with heaping cups of flour, but never measured—a feat I wouldn't recognize as impressive until years later. She whipped open cabinets and integrated the remaining dry ingredients: salt, baking powder, and baking soda. Next, she scooped out what can only be described as a generous glob of Crisco. Mamaw was of the generation that would fry chicken, grease cake pans, and fix squeaky hinges with that thick white cream from the blue canister. She blended the fat into the flour mixture with her delicate bare hands while preventing any of the compound to become caked onto her wedding ring.

Sometimes, she pulled me from the bar and, with the bowl in front of us, she let me stand in between her and the counter. Placing her hands over mine, we made a cavity in the middle of the flour. The pile of powder transformed into a hollow cup. She slowly poured the milk into the hollow as I, following the hand above mine, stirred and blended the walls of flour into the expanding milk puddle that somehow became dough. She dusted the linoleum worktable with fresh, powdery flour while I washed the sticky dough from my hands and arms. Then she folded and kneaded the dough into a manageable ball until we finally rolled out the dough together. I relished cutting out every perfect circle; she showed me how closely I could make each stamp of the cutter. I love the soft thud each round of dough made as we dropped and arranged them onto the baking sheet.

Thirty minutes later, the family came together to share the sacrament that is buttered biscuits and bacon and a crowded kitchen table full of laughter and remembrances. We took our time, we shared stories, we scrambled for strawberry preserves. We renewed and preserved the love we felt for each other, participating in a kind of communion that I recall, whenever I smell homemade buttermilk biscuits.

On Sunday mornings, we accompanied my grandparents to the Lily Dale Church of Christ, a two-minute drive or an eight-minute walk down the dirt road from their house. It was at this church that I first remember reading the phrase: "This do in remembrance of me," the words Jesus spoke to his disciples over bread and wine at his last supper. The words were carved into the table at the head of the church, to the right of the piano, and in front of the preacher's podium, on which the elements for communion resided.

The elements circulated the room on gold-finished plates, the bread and cups themselves ostensibly untouched by human hands. Clutched by each new set of hands, the cold plates made their way through the pews. Each congregant selected a pre-poured disposable cup of juice, just enough for one. In the other hand we each held a square, dime sized, machine-cut cracker that was taken out of a box only hours earlier. All of us focused our eyes forward or down in silence, avoiding the eyes of our neighbors. I stole glances at my parents next to me, hoping for some signal or indication of when I was to consume what. I watched them and others around us, their eyes closed as if in meditation, the cracker placed gently on the tongue, juice sipped, then a single swallow of them both before all eyes returned to the front of the church to resume business. I remember thinking that the whole procedure had gone by so quickly, I felt like I had missed it.

Now, a decade later, if I decide my carelessly cooked chicken, my box of macaroni and cheese, and my can of green beans deserve the accompaniment of a biscuit, I rummage around in my freezer, jerk open a zip-lock bag, and plop one, maybe two, rounds of rigid dough onto a pan and shove them into a preheated oven to enjoy them alone at the small table in my kitchen or on the sofa in front of my television. I divorce the product from the sacrament, the communion, the meaning. I don't measure, I don't add a pinch and a half of salt or any leavening agent; I don't blend ingredients with any form of fat, animal or vegetable. I keep my hands clean, my time short, my engagement brief. I don't honor my grandmother or all those Saturday mornings by performing the ritual that she took the time to teach me. And, above all else, I share the experience with no one.

And churches today have emaciated their ritual further as well: the Lord's Supper in individual packets, Eucharist packages akin to the Ritz cheese and cracker sets with the red plastic spreader or Dunkaroos that I packed in my

lunch as a kid. The communion cup is sealed with plastic wrap; atop it sits the paper-thin communion cracker likewise protected by plastic wrap. What can it mean when our sacraments are reduced to snack food? We no longer break bread together, share a cup, recollect together, commune. Is this "fellowship" in three quick and easy steps?

Maybe it's easier or maybe it's safer. We can't risk spreading the germs of an entire congregation around anymore. Who can believe that some Catholic churches still take that risk in this day and age? Maybe it's quicker, more efficient like my biscuits. Or, maybe we've simply forgotten what the original act looked like. I'm sure Leonardo da Vinci didn't mean to disillusion us with his painting of The Last Supper, but even that looks more like a business meeting to me than a celebration of a Jewish feast.

I envision a table, only about knee-height at most, surrounded with deep-hued cushions. The dark room is lit by oil lamps shining on the faces of Jesus and his companions as they face each other, see each other. They sit cross-legged under the table, close enough to rub shoulders and smell the men on their right and left. Their well-traveled feet are clean and damp because Jesus just washed them. The table holds more than just a cup of wine and a loaf of bread; after all, this was the Passover Feast. They eat like men who have spent nearly every moment of three years together, with no pretense. They eat with their hands, their fingers becoming covered by the residue of their meal; and maybe they even chew with their mouths open. James and John, the "Sons of Thunder" as Jesus named them, always seemed to me like the type who would lack table manners. I'm also guilty of picturing Judas stealing from Peter's plate while he wasn't looking.

After the meal they recline at the table, maybe the same way we do after Thanksgiving supper. I wish I could imagine their conversation before he begins the ritual, but all I can guess is that Jesus had to quiet their rowdy chatter. Then, he takes a whole piece of flat bread into his rough, calloused hands, pulling off piece after piece and passing them to his friends. Next, he takes his cup of wine, the one he had been drinking from the entire meal, and passes it to them to share with him. He passes it first to John, the Beloved disciple. I imagine the disciple's hands brushing each other's as they pass the bread and the cup around the table. Each companion holds it in his sticky hands and touches his very own lips to a cup their God and their friends drank from. Few things in life seem more intimate.

Pillsbury or scratch made. Snack cracker and grape juice or bread and wine. It doesn't matter. The vulnerability and intimacy of communing together is the blessing. A shared meal in Jesus' day was not just an invitation to eat but to participate in fellowship. It was a request for relationship, allowing another into your life. It was intimate. Today, even if we do sit with other believers to eat, we're too busy checking our phones—to peek into the virtual lives of those who are absent—to look into the eyes of the person sitting next to us. I like to recall that Jesus was a man, willing to get dirty and be with people, so willing that he was accused of being a glutton and a drunk. I need to remember that when I take the time, when my fingers are still coated with sticky dough, and I watch friends partake of their first homemade biscuits, I am partaking in something sacred.

FINAL REST
by Shaina Toner
Holga Alternative Photography

Lightning Bolts on Fine China

JORDAN SEARS

I never expected to walk into a fast food restaurant and leave with something mundane that feels special to me. I mean it's a McDonalds. It's fast, and it's food. It's forgettable. Now I'm sure people could describe outrageous events that took place inside a fast food restaurant, but I'm not talking about robberies, shootings, or alien invasions. I'm simply talking about remembering something ordinary.

I was with my mom, in Kentucky, and I was six. McDonalds was a usual stop. I liked chicken nuggets. What little kid doesn't like chicken nuggets? It is a sworn oath in a child's philosophy to like junk food, especially anything that has sugar in it or comes from a fast restaurant. So as usual, I got a kid's meal with chicken nuggets. But then came a surprise.

The thirty-eight year old man behind the register asked me a question. "Hey little man, do you want a toy or a Hercules plate?" But, that's the formal version. The name Hercules sounded more like "huurk-uh-leeez" when he pronounced it so that's how I say it.

But his question left me silent; I had a choice and no idea what to do with it. I loved the toys, but what was this Hercules plate all about? I had seen the Disney movie, and Hercules was a manly guy. I wanted to be a manly guy, but I was short. But I could have gotten the furry toy too. It was like trying to decide what power ranger I was going to be when I played with my neighbors—blue or red. I always just sat in the background though and chose to be the blue ranger because I guessed that every other guy surely wanted to have a ponytail and red pants. This choice seemed harder, though, and my mom saw the look on my face; I was perplexed. Thank goodness that my sweet mother loved me, though, because she gave me the world's best advice, and I like to think that she knew it too.

She said to me, "If you get the plate, you can put your chicken nuggets on it."

I could. I could really put my chicken nuggets on that plate. It was like I had just struck gold inside of the McDonalds, and my mom just helped invest it into the stock market. This plate was in for the long haul, and I knew it was an investment. And I had made the right choice, according to my mom, and the man at the register. He affirmed it by telling me, "good choice little man." I had become a man that day, even if I was a little one.

And I was learning a life lesson that day too. Sure, I could have gotten the toy and had tons of fun, even more fun than I would have with my plate, but it was fleeting. The trash would have been home for that toy no later than twenty-four hours after I had gotten it. And who's to say I would have even kept it that long? No, I chose the plate over the furry little purple monster. And I think that's what fleeting pleasure looks like to me now—a furry little purple monster.

But I chose the plate, the plate that carries the god of thunder as its star—Zeus. It didn't even have Hercules on it, but someone even greater—the god of gods. I knew it was meant to be my plate—lightning bolts and all. Zeus has served a greater service and has also served my chicken nuggets for the past fourteen years.

HONOR TO JAKUCHU
by Iina Kobayashi
Acylic Painting, Molding Paste, Origami Paper on Canvas

Lined Paper Lamppost

CHRIS MAULDIN

The cold rain pattered against the metal hull of the car as it sat steaming in the ditch. Isaac, half-soaked and half-lost on this backwoods highway, squatted in the mud by the front left wheel well, whacking his shoe against the wheel as he did. He was steaming too. Get out of town, that's the ticket. Rent a car, head upstate, take in an Apple Festival for crying out loud. Now this. He could hear the rain, the pit-pats of tiny, stifled chimes, as Annie used to say. Perfect. Every tiny splash a wistful whisper, and he didn't know a tire iron from a tire jack and not a soul around for miles. Isaac looked down at his mud-splattered shirt which became splattered even more with each subsequent whack at the wheel-twisted-beyond-reason and groaned like a man gritting his teeth to keep from screaming. It was the groan of a man to whom bad things had happened and who wished, quite simply, for this day to be done.

Isaac wiped his palms on his shirt, over and over, wanting nothing more than to clean the mud that was dotting it, but with each swipe downward, the dots turned to blotches and the blotches to smears and before he realized what it was he was doing, the mess was messier than before.

"Having trouble there?" a voice called out from the road behind him. Isaac stiffened. Ice cubes ran single file down his spine. When he heard footsteps coming closer, he waved his hand just above his shoulder and spoke. "I'm good," he said. He braced himself against the fender and turned as he stood, slipping his muddied shoe back on. "Or maybe not," he said, shrugging toward the wreck. "Looks bad, doesn't it?"

The man before him was older, seventy, or just shy of it by Isaac's guess. He stood about a head taller than Isaac, with the posture of a military man and the frame of a twig. He reminded Isaac of his grandfather who passed away when he was four. A ghastly old man with sunken eyes and drooping skin that hung from his bones like wet cloth. This old guy, fortunately, was not so far gone. He wore a shirt that said *Clemens' Auto Repair* on the left breast and behind him, a large truck with a towing mechanism on the back sat with the same words printed on the door.

"Casper T. Clemens," he said.

"Isaac." He extended his hand.

Mr. Clemens, smiling through his mustache, held up his palms and shook his head. They were worn and dirty, with grease thrown in for good measure. "Don't want to get your hands dirtier than they already are. What say we get that baby out of there?"

Baby? "Right. Actually, it won't–"

"Start?" Mr. Clemens hopped down into the ditch, popping the hood for a better look. He leaned in and began to tinker around.

"I slid off the road back–" Isaac held the last word out as he waved his finger at a spot about fifty feet behind him where water was rushing over

the street. "–there."

Mr. Clemens leaned up, looking to where Isaac was pointing, scratching the roots of his wintry beard as he did.

"Funny. You're the second one today," he said.

"I'm sorry?"

Mr. Clemens tucked his head down into the engine again, speaking once more as he did. Isaac heard muffled words he couldn't make out about a man who also had...done something too? Isaac wasn't sure. Had he slid off the road? He safely guessed yes, but then, he heard the word "festival" and he cut Mr. Clemens off.

"Wait," Isaac began. "You said festival, right? The Apple Festival in Athney? Is that what you're talking about?"

Mr. Clemens let the hood slam shut. "The very same," he said. He lifted his chin slightly higher, an air of pride wafting about him. "Why? Is that where you were headed?"

"It was, actually, before all this happened."

"Well, you're in luck. I was just on the way back into town myself. But–" Mr Clemens walked toward Isaac and then passed him, heading back toward his truck.

"We'll have to tow your car."

"Are you sure there's nothing we can–"

"Nope, she's beat all to hell." Mr. Clemens hopped up into his truck. "Let's go."

It was a minute or two before the rain stopped falling. It was another minute or two before the sun tentatively emerged from behind the clouds and the other minutes onward, the minutes of the drive, which numbered thirty minutes at most, were passed in silence as the gilded strands of sunlight fell upon the surrounding countryside. Upstate New York. Fall colors. This was how he chose to get away? He could almost feel Annie's breath against his cheek, her head on his shoulder. He wanted to bang his head against the window or throw himself from the truck.

Mr. Clemens fished a lone cigarette out of his front shirt pocket and flipped open his vintage Zippo. Maybe not vintage as in retro, Isaac thought, so much as a WWII souvenir. How do these guys survive?

"Care for a square?" Mr. Clemens reached for a dashboard cubbyhole as they pulled into town. "I've got more."

"I'm sorry?" Isaac asked. "A square?"

"A square. A square," he said, shaking the cigarette in his hand. "A cigarette."

"Oh," said Isaac, putting his hands up in front of him, shaking his head as he did. "No thank you. I don't smoke." But he did, at one point, for a while anyway, and if Mr. Clemens pushed it on him, he might just pick it up again.

Mr. Clemens didn't.

They pulled into Athney, a dozen or so homes and a dozen other buildings. But it was the festival that had cars on the street and pedestrians crowding the sidewalks. Banners, stitched in reds and yellows, danced as they hung from rooftop to rooftop and flags, decorated with apples and trees, waved at the pair as they passed. All manner of people, in all manner of sizes, walked and talked and laughed as they passed, some playing games, some eating food and, from the window Mr. Clemens had open to let his smoke billow up and drift out, Isaac could faintly smell apples and cinnamon, saturated, of course, with the smell of cigarette smoke.

The truck stopped next to The Diner, and Isaac got out, glancing back when he heard the passenger window rolling down. Mr. Clemens told him where his auto shop was (on the next street over) and that he should simply stop by when the festival wound down. His car, guaranteed, would be ready. Maybe it was the Mayberry feel, the out of time and place spirit of a town with benches around a tiny green and apple-cheeked kids running loose fearlessly, but Isaac almost believed him.

Isaac took a booth by the window, ordered some pie–apple, how could he not?— and settled in to wait, wait for the car, wait for the good feeling he was supposed to get by getting out more. He watched the festival outside and on the other side of the street, on the sidewalk, by a lamppost, a little girl stood, all by herself. She wore an old coat that was much too big for a girl her size and it hung, quite loosely, on her tiny frame. A scarf was wrapped firmly around her neck. She wore jeans that were too big, begrimed with all sorts of brown colored smudges, and she wore no shoes, which Isaac found odd, but the oddest thing of all was the fact that she wouldn't stop watching him. She stood by the lamppost, still as the lamppost, on the other side of the street. And she watched him.

"Anything else, sweetheart?" said a voice from behind him. Isaac turned to see the waitress, Dolores, pulling her notepad from her front pocket again, as if he might order a meal to chase the enormous slab of pie that still sat on his plate.

"Yes," he said. "Water." And my wife. Annie would have loved the pie and the banners and the plastic plates. Annie would have loved Dolores, standing there smiling with her pencil at the ready. Annie loved all sorts of people, all sorts of impossible things. Accordion music and nighttime train rides, paper airplanes and windmills. "And coffee," he added. "A cup of coffee."

Dolores walked away, her shoes pattering against the checkerboard tile. Isaac turned back toward the window and the little girl outside who was still watching him as people passed by.

When Dolores returned with the drinks and another place setting, she said, "Her name's Anslie."

Isaac placed his hand in front of his mouth to try to swallow and speak at the same time. "Why is she watching me?"

"It isn't you, sweetheart. She watches everyone who comes through here."

"Any reason why?" Isaac said, shoveling pie into his mouth.

Dolores looked from the second place setting to him. "You're not expecting anybody," she said.

He shook his head and pulled the coffee closer. Dolores sat down across from him. "Reason doesn't have anything to do with it, sweetheart." She looked out the window at the girl. "Have you ever met someone who...just does things?"

Isaac set down the fork on his empty plate. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Dolores sighed, rubbing her knee with her hands. "Anslie makes up stories. You might say she lies–to everybody, but especially to strangers,

people who don't know better, you might say. We know she's lying when she opens her mouth. She just doesn't come around anymore."

"What about her parents?"

"They died. At least the mother did anyway. Passed of some illness two, maybe three, years ago."

Isaac wiped his mouth with his napkin, cleared his throat. "Well, I mean, you know, that sucks. Right?"

Dolores laughed. "I'd say. But what can you do? The dad left not long after his wife died. Left the girl here and told her he'd be back, but he never came back. Some have their theories. I think he just drank too much and ran off the road somewhere in the woods."

Isaac glanced out the window to find the girl, Anslie, still there, still watching. She *looked* like an orphan. From a movie. Tattered clothes, dirty face. It was uncanny, almost stupidly eerie. "Where does she live?" he asked.

"Orphanage." Dolores pointed off to some place behind which Isaac assumed was its general direction. "If you ask me, there's something screwy going on there. She was such a sweet girl once, before all this, but—" She paused, lifting herself from the table. "I don't know anymore."

Later, Isaac wandered from booth to booth, listening to the sound of live amateur jazz toward the end of the street. He stopped at a booth with apples on a stick, but the apples were all crusty and brown, like spherical fried chicken.

"Um," Isaac began, pointing at the apples. "What are these?"

"Fried Apples," the vendor said. He was a big man. And happy. He didn't stop smiling. He leaned in close, putting his hand up as if he were telling a secret. "We batter them in our own secret batter and deep fry them. Simple as that."

"Oh," Isaac said, "nice." He turned away smiling, shaking his head as if to say *imagine that*, and there she was–the little girl, Anslie, looking up at him, still and translucent as a marble waif. He saw himself in her eyes, or imagined he did, and suddenly he felt himself grown up, *adult* in all the fullness of the word. Responsible. The kind of man to put women first, and children. "Hello," he said, his voice deeper, more sonorous, than usual, "Hello."

Anslie giggled as if she could see right through him. "Hi."

Isaac almost giggled too. He felt silly now, light. "Hi. Is your name Shadow?"

"No!" She was laughing now. "Why?"

Isaac laughed, too. "Well, you're close enough to step on, and every step I take, you take. I think your name *must* be Shadow."

"It isn't," she said, "it's Anslie!" She reached for his hand. "Is *your* name Shadow?"

"Could be, but most people call me Isaac." He squeezed the warm, sticky hand. "Do you like chicken-fried apple-on-a-stick? Can you even believe such a thing?"

"What about ghosts? There's a ghost here."

"A what?" A clown on a giant unicycle rolled by, bunches of cotton candy bouquets in each hand. To their right, folks lined up to buy local crafts, oil paintings of Athney in all seasons, yard art made from garden tools, quilts depicting Thanksgiving with a Pilgrim's Progress-Norman Rockwell twist. Ghosts? Why not? He maneuvered them to a bench with a clear view of the festivities. Sure. He could believe anything.

"What kind of ghost?" Isaac asked, in a feigned sense of fright.

"It's a woman. She walks all over town looking for her husband, but everyone knows the husband's lost in the woods somewhere. He left when she died and he never came back and now she's all alone and, and, and here's the worst part,

they have a daughter who can't find either of them."

"A daughter? Really? And she lives here?"

She squinted her eyes and pursed her lips. "Mmmm...yes and no. She's dead too and she's looking for her mother."

Isaac could smell the bubbling apple skins and the sickening sweet burn of spinning cotton candy. Saliva came to his mouth as if he might be sick. "Why can't she find her mother?" Isaac asked.

The little girl looked confused. "What?"

"Well," Isaac began. "If they're the only two ghosts in town, why do you think the daughter can't find the mother?"

"Hmm." She smiled. "That's a good point. No one's ever asked me that before. You're different, Mr. Isaac."

"Well, I–"

"No!" she exclaimed. "You are different." She stopped and reached up, grabbing Isaac's collar with her hands, pulling him close as best as she could. "Have you ever seen a ghost before, Mr. Isaac?"

Isaac straightened up. He didn't know what to say, but his mouth began to speak on its own. "I–" he began, waving his hand in front of his face, as if what he was about to say was absurd.

"What? What?" She was swinging her feet beneath her as she sat.

"Well," he began, stopping and turning toward her. "I come from the city, New York City. Did you know that?" She shook her head with a smile. "Well," he got low, his eyes widening. "Did you know there is a ghost in New York City too?"

"Nuh-uh?" she said, with her mouth hanging open. "Really?"

"Mhm," said Isaac with a confident nod. "She's a woman just like your–" He almost slipped. "Like the *little girl's* mom."

"So why is she still in the city?"

"Well," Isaac began with a hand on his chin. "She really loves the city, but there's a problem."

"What is it?"

"Her husband sees her everywhere he looks."

Anslie continued smiling. "What's wrong with that?"

"Well, he *sees* her everywhere, but—" Isaac looked out across the tiny green, above the tents and food trailers, beyond the laughing moms and dads and teenagers and couples standing close deciding what to buy or where to eat or when to go home. He shrugged. "It's not like, I mean, they can't go to a movie together."

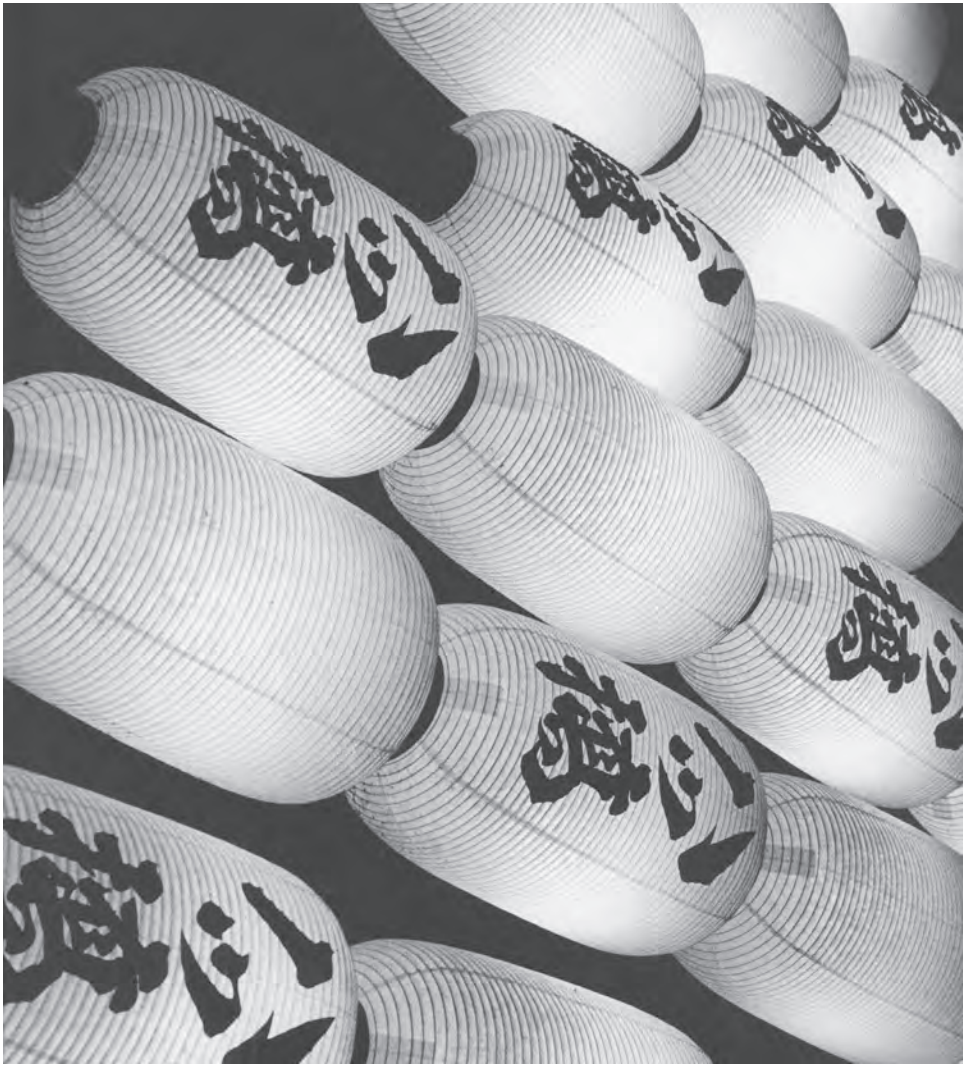
The little girl tilted her head from side to side, as if weighing ideas. Isaac could see her thinking. "Sucks, doesn't it?" he said.

"I wish I could see my mom."

Isaac squeezed his clasped hands between his knees. "I know."

Anslie's eyes were shining. "He can see her *everywhere*?"

Isaac swallowed hard and nodded. Everywhere and forever, or so it seemed as night descended and lampposts came on and the green filled with dancing.



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NOTES

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