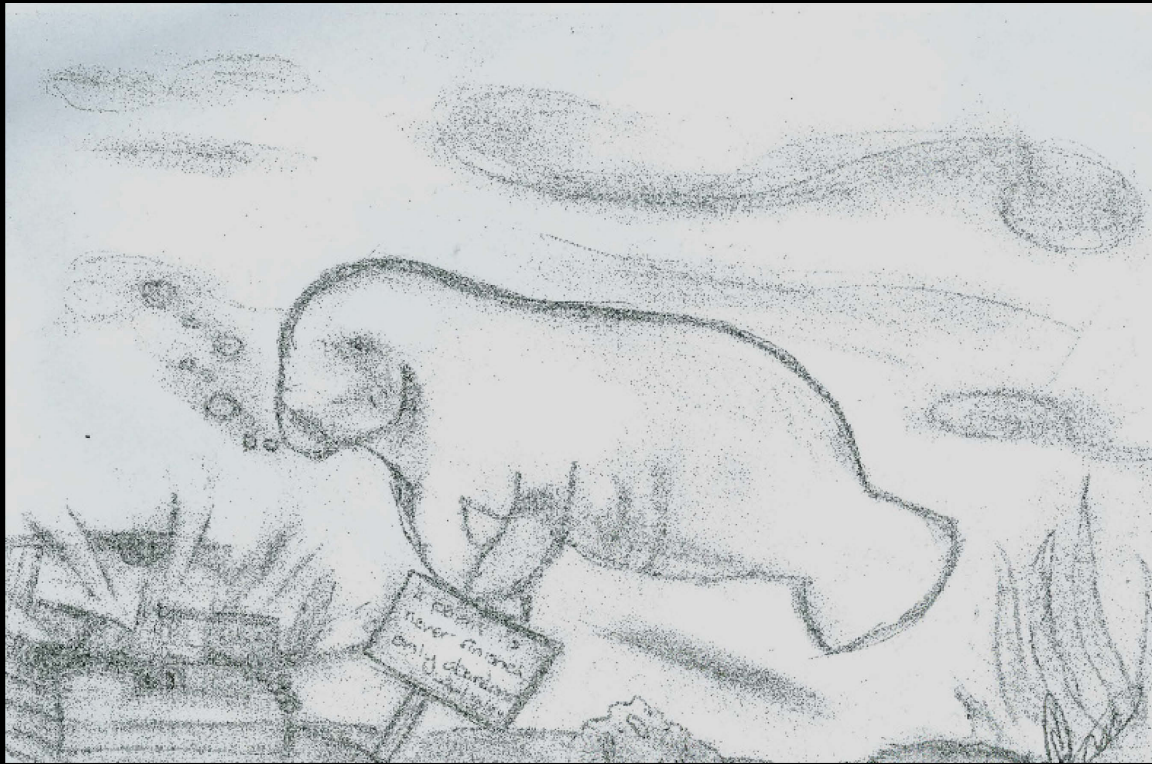


The Manatee



Stories.Poetry.Essays.Artwork.
By SNHU Students



Fifth Annual
Spring 2012

The Manatee

Copyright 2012 edited by Nicole Escobar

Layout by Nicole Escobar

Front cover design by Kassandra Meehan

Back cover design by Brandon Barney

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Published by Town & Country Reprographics

230 North Main St.

Concord, NH 03301

603.226.2828

WHAT'S THE MANATEE?

The Manatee is a literary journal run by the students of Southern New Hampshire University. We publish the best short fiction, poetry, essays, photos, and artwork of SNHU students, and we're able to do it with generous funding from the awesome people in the School of Arts and Sciences

Visit <http://it.snhu.edu/themanatee/> for information, submission guidelines, and news.

THE MANATEES

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EDITOR'S FINAL NOTE

And with this fifth issue, I say goodbye to Southern New Hampshire University and *The Manatee*. After three years as Chief Editor, I will miss it terribly. All those memories, both the rewarding and the agonizing ones. My first year with the disastrous time with the first publishing company; all those formatting errors made me want to cry. Luckily we found a publisher in Concord to save us with some fast printing, and we have used them for the two years since then.

All the changes that have happened since I first took over my sophomore year, from a new website that we do not have to pay for, to a school email account and blackboard page. Having my hand in every detail, from the call for submissions to the artwork and layout, beginning, middle, and end. It is because of this journal and the wonderful feeling I get seeing something I worked so hard on come out in print that I chose to pursue a future in publishing. I was truly blessed when I was given the opportunity so many years ago to take this journal over and find my dream career path.

Next year we will gain two new, wonderfully talented and ambitious Editors. I have found two very competent and detail-oriented students to take my place next year. Brandon Barney created the back cover and formatted the poem in this book, which is designed like a receipt, a work of art all by itself. Kristie Mahoney did the copyediting to practice for her job next year. They both did amazing jobs at putting my mind at ease about leaving something so

important to me to the next generation of undergraduate students.

This year's journal has amazed me in so many ways. It has more poetry than I ever thought I would see in its pages, some great submissions from people in every year of school, from freshmen to PhD students, and some stories that literally moved me to tears with their emotional truths. In these pages you will find an epic tale of another world, dead pets come back to life, love at first sight, and references to children's television shows. You will read stories about the birth of a baby alpaca, and life in the old-fashioned Deep South. I am proud to say that we have some of the best pieces that I have seen or read, and I am happy that I got to be the one to prepare these great displays of imagination for everyone to see.

Thank you all for keeping this journal running, especially to everyone in the School of Arts and Science office for paying for *The Manatee's* publication, Town & Country Reprographics for printing copies for us, everyone involved in the editorial board who helped me pick the pieces to go in the journal, Alora Heffernan for keeping me grounded and sane, Diane Les Becquets, Julie Baker, and Allison Cummings for being my helpful and always encouraging advisors. All of you have helped to make this journal great, I appreciate it more than I can say.

I will be sad to leave this journal behind, but I hope that with new editors will come even more changes and growth for an even better journal for everyone to enjoy.

Nicole Escobar, Spring 2012

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YOU'RE A WORK IN PROGRESS

DAHVIN GREENFIELD

You're a work in progress.

I'll call you "project number one."

You're filed under September -

The year is irrelevant.

I hate writing you in pen and

Using a pencil is useless -

I never want an excuse to erase.

I greet you once the sun has dropped

And spread its shadow, with a red pen.

A glass of wine sits between us. You've

Always been up for some new ink.

The Manatee

I'll cross out constants like they're eyes;

Add in words like they're beauty.

Your face: indented white space.

Your body: the words.

My pencil: a needle.

I'll prick your frame, beneath

Each wrinkle of text, till

Words - body-burrowed - bleed

To the neck of this page.

Let my lead soak,

The tip's now wet and writes like pen.

COUNTING VANITY PLATES ON THE WAY HOME

COLLEEN DECOURCY

I can still see blue eyes
Walking back, he held my hand
Teasing me, yet protecting me
Pavement rolling below our shoes, shoes
Faded black, fabric boots and
Tired, tea-stain colored shoes
He is focused and scattered
Practicing vocals, singing
This gravelly voice
That even Tom Waits would envy
And with him my fears were buried
Taught me to wonder, to listen
To live this moment - before the rest take over -
Yes, he loved me
And I can still see - what distance cannot steal -
A best friend
And his vibrantly pale
Calming, inescapable
Blue eyes

BETWEEN THE LIONS

SUSAN GRANT

Leo and his brother stand guard
At the gate,
Staunch and still, they patiently wait.

Beyond, a ponderous descent
Of granite stair
And onward to the heavens there

Round the bend, meandering far,
The essence beguiles.
Step softly through the chamomile

Follow the path near the glen where
Magnolia permeates
The weighted air so concentrate.

Time has flown and skipped away, but,
Excuse my words, so damn crass...
This garden truly is the cat's ass!



LEO AND HIS BROTHER-SUSAN GRANT

LOST IN THE DARK

STEPHEN LOWTHER

On a lonely highway, east of Omaha, I sat in a car seat, my foot on the gas just enough to maintain seventy-five miles per hour. I was the human cruise control. My friend Justin sat next to me, asleep, drooling on the passenger window, his furry black hair a pillow against the cold glass. The clock on the dash read two-thirty. I looked outside. Nothing but white lines flew beneath the grill of Justin's pickup truck. The landscape of the Carolinas was completely shrouded in early morning darkness.

That lonely highway we were on was actually Interstate 95, a long and wide stretch of road that runs from Canada, down the east coast, all the way to Miami, Florida, and was well peppered with gas stations, restaurants, and convenient off ramps and rest stops. Our trip was the third of three annual pilgrimages to Florida to visit family, although it was the first time we decided to drive Justin's blue pickup truck. Now, by blue, I don't mean metallic blue, or chrome blue, or any other kind of snazzy masculine blue. By blue I mean the kind no self-respecting man should ever proudly own: baby blue.

Sometime before three, I glanced down at the fuel

gauge. It was a little under a quarter. Enough for another hundred miles, but we made it a habit of filling up on a quarter in case we ran into traffic or had to run from the cops. I caught a glimpse of a GAS 24/7 on a passing sign and decided that it was time.

I back-handed Justin on his chest. His face shook, and he rumbled to life. After a yawn he said, "What's up?"

"I'm stopping for gas," I said.

He cracked his knuckles and made an uncomfortable grunt, "Oh... shit."

"Huh?" is all I replied, still focused on the road. I faced him for a moment, just long enough to catch his meaning.

"Dude, hold it. I'm pulling off at the next exit." I said.

As if on cue, the next exit appeared out of oblivion. I turned the wheel and took the off ramp. Justin mumbled profanities aloud as though it would prolong his bowel control.

We pulled to the end of the off ramp. On the right-hand side of the road was one of those rusted navy blue highway signs that listed all the food, gas, and hotels in the area. The only thing listed in the gas section was a faded icon: MOBIL. We turned right. We drove down a lonelier and darker sub-highway. Justin was breathing like he was in

labor, but I was too focused on the road to care. The hair on my arm pricked up. I knew what that meant. My senses were heightening. I was growing uneasy. I didn't mind plundering through the darkness, so long as it's on an interstate, but there... getting lost there, without a GPS, would have been a true nightmare.

We travelled a mile or so before we saw a light in the distance. As we got closer, we realized what the light was. In the middle of a vast and vacant lot, sat one gas pump. Above it was a small rusted overhang with a lamp shining down, creating an ominous oasis of light. The light flickered occasionally. There is an unwritten rule somewhere that *says for ambience purposes, all solitary lights in vacant lots must flicker*. About fifty feet from the lonesome pump was an attendant's shack with a sign on the side that said 24 Hour Service. However, the inside of the shack, like our surroundings, was completely dark.

Uneasiness fully consumed me. I glanced over at Justin. I could tell he was feeling the same way. I hoped desperately that he would belay his pressing biological concerns, but hope wasn't enough.

"Dude, I'm sorry, but I got to go, man. It's urgent." His voice was genuine in a sort of desperate way.

I drove in a circle around the lot three times before I finally pulled up to the lone pump. Justin seeped out of the passenger side as soon as I put the truck in park.

"I'll be fast," he glanced over at the vacant shack and looked back at me, "You can count on that."

He waddled off. I walked around to the pump and pulled out my wallet. Holding my debit card in hand, I looked at the transaction keypad. It was an ancient calculator. Most of the numbers were faded beyond recognition, and instead of a swiping your card like most 21st century gas station consoles, there was an insertion slot, like an ATM. I held my card out. I paused.

"Insert Here," it said.

I stepped back. It did say INSERT HERE under the slot, but it didn't actually say it. Did I speak aloud unknowingly? I shivered. It was cold. Eerily cold, especially for an August night in the South. I put my card back in my wallet. When I looked down, I noticed how cracked the pavement was. Weeds were bursting through tiny unrepaired crevices, crevices which covered the lot like a checkerboard. This place hadn't been maintained in at least a year, maybe more.

I glanced up at the fluorescent light. Why did this light still work? I knew fluorescent bulbs lasted forever, but surely someone should have removed (or stolen) this one by now. As I gazed at the flickering light, I noticed the inside was littered with black specks. They were dead insects. Ones that had met their end trying to perch on the liquid hot

bulbs.

“Wrong turn.”

My heart leapt. I swung around with a force so fast it dizzied me. No one was there. The close proximity of the light toyed with my natural night vision, masking anything beyond thirty feet from where I stood. I thought about saying ‘hello?’, but chose against it. *I’ve been driving for fifteen hours*, I thought. *I’m just a little delirious. I’ll let Justin drive at the next station.*

An unexpected gust of wind slapped me in the back, wrapped itself around me, before rattling around the gas pump, and then taking off into the darkness. I paused for a long time. I opened my wallet and slid my debit card back into its slot. I didn’t feel like inserting my card here anymore. I longed to be out of the woods and back on I-95.

“Time to go!” a voice shouted at me.

My heart spiked. I stood still for a moment, incapable of movement, gazing out into the masked darkness. My hands were clenched white, my breathing nonexistent. For the longest moment I stood still, watching, waiting, until finally, I saw Justin emerge from the darkness. His face was pale, and he walked swiftly.

“You good?” I asked, breathless, but relieved.

“Yeah. Let’s go, please,” was all he said.

He hopped into the truck and clicked his seatbelt in before I could respond. The wind howled at me from the darkness, threatening its return. I jumped into the driver’s seat and turned the key. The engine flared. I stomped on the gas before even buckling my seat belt. The tires slid for a moment. We peeled out of the lot. The tree branches on each side of the road grabbed at us as we roared by. The wind cascaded the side doors as we sped back towards the Interstate, the dim flickering light growing smaller in the rear view mirror, until at last, it was consumed by the darkness. After a mile or so, we turned back onto I-95 heading south.

Once we were on the interstate, my feet eased, allowing the gas pedal a temporary respite from the floorboards. My blood flow slowed as uneasiness diffused from my body.

After a few minutes, Justin exhaled. He must’ve glanced over at the fuel gauge, because he said, “You didn’t get gas?”

“No. I didn’t feel comfortable there. We’ll stop at the next one.”

“Good,” he replied. He was quiet for a moment, as though embarrassed, then finished with, “I still have to shit.”

"You didn't go back there?" I asked.

He shook his head, "No. When I grabbed the door handle, it was freezing. Totally caught me off guard."

"Was it locked?" I asked.

He paused, and then said, "No. It wasn't."

This took me aback. I shuddered to think how long my eyes were off the road. "You didn't go in, did you?" I asked.

He shook his head again, "No. I opened it for just a second, but when I did, a cold breeze rushed out," he paused, "Made me forget why I was even there." His face was plastered with sincerity.

I believed him. The white lines on the road flashed by as we plunged on into the night. Several minutes passed in silence. I thought about how we had nothing but a map and cell phones. No GPS, no directions. We'd come several hundred miles so far in one piece, but back there, only a mile off the interstate, our journey felt quite different. We didn't feel like two pioneers trailblazing our way through the night. We felt like two children lost in the dark.

"I'm glad you didn't go in," I said.

"Me too," he replied.

We tore on into the night, quiet, and contemplative. One last question perplexed me however, so I spoke. "Justin," I began. I saw his head turn and look at me. I kept looking forward at the road.

"What's up?" he replied,

"Why'd you yell 'Time to Go!' back there?"

He didn't respond. After a moment, all he said was, "I didn't."

MACARONI & CHEESE

CHERYL NELSON-OBRIEN

It's Friday night
and Mom and Dad are going out.
Cousin Brenda's here to sit.
Last week it was ravioli but tonight is special
because the warm aroma of macaroni & cheese fills the
kitchen.
I ignore the implications of its yellow caution light color
as I slide through rich creaminess,
the occasional green pea dotting its lush valleys,
and the hollow tubes fitting the fork tines
like the fingers of debutantes dressed up in velvety gloves,
trembling slightly as they wait to be introduced
in a magical moment of sheer cheesy bliss.

AFTER THE FLOOD

BRYNN GESTEWITZ

I.

Quiet, the rivers of my heart
Focal point of splendor and amusement
Indefinitely trapped in a falling-dream,
Leaping out of my skin,
Like a snake
Swing,
Amidst the pollen and dust,
Breathing frivolously
Lie, in the grass and count the leaves
Never looking down at ugly feet

Feel fierce and folly,
Sophomoric and proud
Indelible in an unrestrained reality,
Full is the fight
It comes and goes at will

II.

Quiet, the rivers of my heart
Receded but strong
Outlines on the bank,
Mark movement
Across time the knowing
What you were,

The Manatee

And where,
Revel in accomplishment of strength
Undeniable the feat
And earned pride,
Undulating wide eyes
Gaze upon the white tips of rippled water

III.

Quiet, the rivers of my heart
Stepping stones bridge the hollow spaces

Binge on impulse
Purge disappointment and regret
All over my face
Like soap residue,
Left behind from a weekend with hard water
New water only cleans the surface

A withering white iris,
Baking in the sun and heat
Finite with resolution,
Becomes grey,
Dry,
And flakes apart with the slightest touch

IV.

Quiet, the rivers of my heart
A bed of sand with slight reference to direction,
Stepping stones have weathered,
And I,
With vague resemblance of something that,


After the Flood

Was once
Moves mindlessly,
Unmotivated and void
Still is the earth, and,
Still are intentions,
Which slip away undetected

HANDS

A MEMOIR

CASSANDRA SHAWVER

 used to be disappointed in my hands. They had never touched another's life, never gone out of their way to make a change, and never really made any kind of difference. Not only that, but they are small, and I'm not just being critical of myself. When I was thirteen, I broke my finger in a rope swing accident. As the doctor examined my x-rays, I saw him tilt his head to the side, as though examining something odd. He looked at me, and said:

"Your hands have stopped growing. In fact, I would say they stopped growing a while ago."

I felt my mouth turn into a frown. I already had a difficult time with simple tasks (such as eating an apple), and on top of that I still had about four more inches to grow.

"Really? How can you tell?" My mom asked.

The doctor pointed to several parts on the x-ray, but I don't exactly recall what he said. As his voice droned on the background, I found myself simply staring at my hands (my left one mostly, as it was not wrapped in a splint), and felt a small sigh escaping from my lips.

Oh well, I thought, I suppose we all have our quirks.

Six years later, I was leaning against a wire livestock fence in my backyard, straining to see around the corner. My alpaca, Athena, was about to give birth to her first baby. We were all standing there: my sister, my parents, a couple of friends who just happened to be there at the time, and myself. Normally, alpaca births happen so quickly that it is

Hands

almost impossible to catch one in the act. My hands gripped the fence, my knuckles aching from holding on too hard. We were terrified that something might go wrong, especially since this was Athena's first. If all went well, and the baby survived, I would be the one to name it.

I heard my mom gasp, and she pointed to Athena. She had started pushing. I held my breath, sending out a silent prayer that all would go well. The baby's nose emerged, and I shocked myself on the electric wire from leaning forward too far. I cursed myself as my arm started convulsing, but was too focused on the birth to pay it much mind. Another minute passed, and one of the baby's legs flung out, dangling comically over its flopping head. I wrung my hands in worry; the head and both front feet were supposed to come out together. The baby shook its head and started crying. My heart nearly stopped. If it was aware, then its umbilical cord was already cut; it needed to come out soon or it wouldn't be able to breathe. My mom and I exchanged glances, and I saw that she was unsure if she should interfere. Five more minutes passed, and there was no change. The baby's other leg never emerged. Fear pulsed like ice through my veins, and I knew that we were running out of time. I looked at my mom again, and I saw her slipping latex gloves over her hands.

"Steve, help me," She said to my dad, and the two of them approached the exhausted mother.

My dad wrapped his arms around her neck, keeping her in place, while my mom approached the baby. If either of them were going to survive, the baby's other foot was going to have to come out. Mom turned her back on me, blocking my view, and I stood on my toes to catch a glimpse.

"Cassie, relax," my little sister scolded. "Everything is going to be fine."

I ignored her. Several more minutes passed, and I

saw my mom take a step away.

"I can't fit, Steve. My hands are too damn big. I can't get past my knuckles." She was desperately trying to conceal the panic in her voice, but without much success. Mom turned to us, and I could see in her eyes that she had lost hope.

I looked at my own hands, and felt my stomach twist. They were so freakishly small, but maybe they were small enough. I looked at my mom, and lifted my hands. "Let me try," I said.

Her eyes fell upon my upraised fingers, and a small spark lit her eyes. She nodded. Taking a fresh pair of gloves, I pulled them over my hands, trying not to smirk as I did so. Even though the gloves were "one size fits all," they were extremely loose.

Mom took Athena's head, though the poor animal was too exhausted to put up much of a fight. I came up to the baby, lifting its small head out of the way. It snorted at my touch, and I felt my throat tighten. I felt around the opening, and slipped my hands in. I was up to my wrists in moments. Athena moaned in pain.

"I'm sorry, honey," I said, feeling around, trying to find the baby's chest. I had hoped that the leg was just caught in the opening, but I realized then that it wasn't going to be that easy. The baby's other leg was folded against its chest, and though I felt for it, I couldn't find the foot.

Crap, I thought. My heart was beating at a manic rate, and the adrenaline coursing through my blood made my body feel light, but I could feel the dread beginning to form in my chest, hardening like lead in my lungs.

"God, she's going down," my mom said, and I pulled my hands out just before Athena collapsed to the ground, her sides heaving. Mom held onto her neck, stroked her soft

fiber, and cooed softly into her ear. I brushed my chin against my arm, ridding myself of the drop of sweat that lingered there, and knelt on the ground. I moved the protesting baby's head again, and sunk my hands back into the mother. I found the warm, slick leg again, and followed it down the length of the baby's chest, and I got stuck. I took out my right hand, and felt my left slide down further, my fingers grasping around the baby's little foot. Not wanting to waste any more time, I started pulling, and my toils were rewarded when I felt the leg beginning to bend into the proper position. Athena's muscles twitched in pain, and I found myself spitting out apologies. I felt the leg bend into a ninety-degree angle when it got stuck again, and this time, I couldn't move it. My hands were too weak.

"Guys, we're losing Athena," Mom said, and I looked up. Her long neck was draped over my mom's shoulder, and I could see by the strain in my mom's arms that she was desperately trying keep the alpaca's head up, without much success. Anger boiled in my chest: at my weak little hands, at the baby's damn leg, at life in general. Why couldn't anything just go right, just once? In that moment, my sister ran up to us, a phone in her hand.

"It's the vet," she told us, "He said to try pushing the baby back in."

We all exchanged looks. My dad came up beside me, and gently took hold of the baby's neck and leg. As he started pushing, I felt the foot coming loose. The lead in my chest started melting, and I pulled the leg a little straighter. So close.

"Just a little more!" I shouted, and suddenly the leg straightened, and I watched in amazement as the small appendage flung out. Air escaped from my lungs and I gave a wretched cry. "I got it!"

Athena was too far gone to finish the birth, so my dad

once again took hold of the baby's legs, and pulled. He slid out in seconds. A small cry pealed from my throat, and the relief spread to my fingertips. Mom gently loosened her hold on Athena, and the animal's head sank to the ground. Her sides heaved in and out, but her eyes had brightened, the worst of the pain having left her. Mom handed me a towel, smiling wider than I had ever seen her.

"Go ahead," she said, "Dry him off."

I crawled over to the little baby, who was presently rolling around in the hay, trying to get his feet under himself. I took the squirming thing into my arms, rubbing the towel over his slimy body, peeling the sac off of his caramel-colored hide. I felt my throat tighten, and my eyes filled with tears, though none of them fell. The little creature rested his head on my arm, grunting softly. I couldn't wipe the grin from my face.

Then all the reindeer loved him, I thought.

Mom checked the baby over. He was, in fact, a little boy.

"Zeus!" I said, shouting his name a little louder than I intended. Everyone laughed. I looked over at Athena again. She was still lying down, but her head was up, and she was staring straight at the baby in my arms. Then, as though she was never tired in the first place, she stood, and walked right over to us. She sniffed the baby over, as though trying to understand what he was. I was pleased by her reaction.

"All right," Mom said, opening the gate, "Bring him into the barn so the two of them can bond."

I nodded, gathering Zeus into my arms. He squirmed and grunted, trying to escape from me. I carried him into the barn, looking over my shoulder. Mom haltered Athena so she could lead her into the barn as well, but Athena followed me with no difficulty, trying to keep the baby in her sights.

I placed Zeus on the floor of an empty stall, and

Hands

smiled as he started rolling around in the shavings. As I crouched beside the baby, I felt something gently touch my hair. I looked up to see Athena's face inches away from mine. She sniffed me again and stared at me for several moments before kneeling beside Zeus. I know that she was just making sure I wasn't hurting him, but I like to think that she was thanking me.

I stood, backing out of the stall, and Mom's hand gripped my shoulder.

"I'm so proud of you," she said, grinning, "You never gave up."

I smiled, but I didn't respond. Had I given up, they both would have died, and there was no way I would have been able to live with myself. I looked at my hands, still covered in fluid, and couldn't help but smile. I peeled off the gloves, staring at the slightly wrinkled flesh underneath. It was then that I realized I was shaking. My mom followed my gaze, and she took my hand in hers. Though I am larger than her in body, my hand was dwarfed by hers. She grinned, stroking my little fingers.

"You see?" she said, smirking, "Everything has a purpose."

I grinned. She had told me the same thing many times in the past, but I had never listened to her. My hands were small, and there was nothing else to it. But I realized that if my hands had continued growing, had they been a normal size, I would have been useless that day. As I watched the new mother tend to her young, I knew that I could not scorn my hands again. Without them, a day of celebration would have become a day of tragedy.

The Manatee



ALPACA-CASSANDRA SHAWVER

I AM SO GLAD

DAHVIN GREENFIELD

Rolls off your tongue, bungee
jumps from your chapped lips,
limbos beneath our line
of communication, climbs
up my arm, squat-jumps
off my shoulder onto my
hoop earring where it sits
and waits, swinging back and forth,
because it's not what I want to hear.

THE DRIFTING SOUL

TANYA COLUMB

Do not mourn me when I am dead for I will see you all.
May God take care of each and every one of you through this
daunting call.
In death, I shall find peace with love and look upon you with
my loving eyes,
I will whisper soft, sweet words to you when I hear your
cries.
My love will forever be with you in every memory we have
shared,
But for now I must go darling for your time can not be
spared.
With your pain and sorrow I will slowly drift away,
Taking unto me your lonely heart's dismay.

MARCH 11, 2011

SUSAN GRANT

I.

Suddenly still, all went
Silent. *Where have the herons
Gone?* A bewildered voice broke
The quiet. Not one in sight. Almond
Eyes moved their focus out beyond

The beach. *Oh God*, she
Whispered. Eyes wide.
The tiny hairs moved
in rapid unison
behind her neck.

II

A wall of water encroached
The shore. The sight of seven
Meters seemed so surreal. Unable
To fathom the force before
Him, from his 5th floor window

Minori dropped his jaw. He
Remembered seeing a
film once. 'The Perfect Storm'
didn't do this justice. When would
the director call for 'action'?

III

At last Akira's young students were
Reading quietly in their seats. They

The Manatee

Had engulfed the classroom
With their endless energy, filling
Every crack and cubby with its

Entirety. Thank God it had finally
Ebbbed and they were settled. This
Ephemeral calm was a well-deserved
Break. She sat back and took in the
Eerie silence, touched by their innocence.

IV

The 8.9 didn't take nearly as
Many as the ocean did. No one
Chose to take part in this water
Ballet but here they were swimming
United anyway. Bodies

Bobbing amongst what was once a
town. A mix of wood, plastic and flesh
floating through liquid space. All now left
along the Dali shoreline. Survivors looking
for their piece of puzzle.




CROCODILE SMILE-ANDREA THOMAS

THE TELL TALE VENT

A SNHU TALE OF GRANDEUR AND WOE

STEVE LOWTHER

 implore you! Listen! Hear me! Fully understand my reasons before you pass judgment. It is true, how nervous I am, how nervous it made me, but surely you will see. Insane, I am not! For those of you who know me, know that I am but a keen observer of the slightest of things, and that... that is where my transgressors have confused necessity with insanity! To not have acted would have been a crime unto itself!

There was a time, several years ago now, where I spent a night in a hospital. A dreadful evening it was indeed, but not for the reason one might assume. The injury itself was tolerable... it was the waiting which drove me... drove me to new heights of observation. Unbearable heights! For as I lay in those white cotton sheets, bland of all color and detail, up I stared at a ceiling vent. It was rectangular, and beige in color, covered in hundreds of tiny holes. Tiny Grates. Grates which moved. Morphed! And spun, incessantly, ceaselessly! Back and forth, between squares and circles. At first, it was, quite honestly, amusing. Stupendous. Delightful entertainment of the purest and most natural form. Then, as the night wore on, and my eyes grew more weary (or wearier, as some might say), it became, at first annoying, then later... maddening. On and

on they spiraled, they shifted! Squares. Circles. Squares. Circles.

“Ceiling vent!” I shouted, “Make up your fucking mind!”

Of course, a male nurse rushed in, wondering what the fuss was about. I shouted at him

“The Ceiling Grates! They taunt me! They change back and forth! A chameleon between circle and square!”

The nurse did what any rational nurse would do; he dismissed me as having some sort of nightmare. But no nightmare it was! The grates! They rotated! They morphed! This I swear, and swear I do, with all my heart and what credibility that may bring!

Now years ago this was, but those grates in the ceiling vent: to this day they haunt me. What were they? Circles or squares? And why, why did they change? For what purpose could that serve other than to taunt me, to enthrall me to the brink of madness? No, no no no no. Mad I am not. No, simply observant, that is all.

So it came to me, with great surprise when, upon entering a room on the third floor of Robert Frost Hall (my university’s most prestigious and utilized academic building), that there, in the ceiling above where I sat, was the ceiling vent. The same one. A rectangular sheet of metal, beige, with tiny holes throughout. Tiny grates. And they still spun. Still morphed, back and forth, circle to square, square to circle. On and on, with no sight in end! You can imagine the fear which first gripped me when I saw this. Then the questioning, then the wondering. Why? Why! What had I done, dear ceiling vent, to deserve your discriminating and

hallucinating laughter!

At first I thought my powers of observation were failing me. That I was seeing differently, or seeing simply what I wanted to. But day in and day out, through lecture and seminar, those grates danced for me, and it has grown to where I can no longer bear it. I had to discover why. There was surely a reason why!

You will note too, the detail with which I describe this to you. That is because my faculties, they are as acute as can be. I'm not vain enough to proclaim myself a superhuman, but my powers of observation are accurate to the microscopic level. Nothing evades me, and what I observe is as it appears. I am the embodiment of flawless empirical observation.

It happened one day when I had stayed after class to take a test I had missed. Of course, I missed this test only in order to stay after. You see now how everything is deliberate? Surely someone as deliberate as I cannot be labeled insane. Surely not.

As I walked past the room, I noticed it dark, void of life. I seized the moment. I opened the door, and in my head slipped. So silently, I wondered for a moment if I had even moved. The room was shadowy, but my power of sight is, like I've told you, matched only through modern machinery. And there was the vent, gazing at me, dancing, like it always had. For a moment I watched and squinted, testing my confidence. Were the grates really dancing, or was I just reliving a terrible memory? I entered the room and flicked the light on. I walked under the vent and stared up. For a moment, the grates stood still. An impending sense of dread and relief set in all at once. I was wrong, but my failure

meant the grates were in fact not the same ones from the hospital, and that I could now exist in peace.

But I wasn't wrong! The grates were merely taunting me, as they always did, for as I thought those very thoughts, they began to rattle. Rattle, like a metal snake slithering through a boiler. And they danced once again, between circles and squares. Like I was back in the bed, staring upwards, unable to move, helpless, capable of only watching. Well, ladies and gentlemen, that was enough! I would be a victim no longer! For up I stood on a nearby desk, and with a primal vigor rivaled only by cavemen, I yanked the vent from the ceiling and threw it upon the floor!

I gazed at the sheet of metal on the floor which had covered the vent. I walked over and held the metal to my face, looking, smelling, listening, tasting. Employing my excellent empirical skills. It tasted and sounded like metal, as did it smell. And the grates. They were... octagons. Octagons! Partly circles, partly squares! Ah, how irony twists its little blade! I was right! In both cases, I was right! They weren't circles, or squares; they were octagons! My senses of observation hadn't failed me in the slightest regard! In fact, they were so flawless that I could barely understand them! I stood back upon the desk, holding the sheet of metal in my hands. I wedged it back into the vent and stepped down. I gazed upward. I stared at the grates once again. They were octagons, as they always had been.

It was then that I, like you, undoubtedly thought that my story would be over. How wrong I was. For the next day in class, there I sat, beneath the very vent I'd yanked from the ceiling. At first, all was as it should be. Halfway through a lecture however, there was a tapping at our door. In walked a maintenance man in a blue jumpsuit. He conversed with

our professor. My heart raced. Occasionally they pointed to the vent. Were they on to me? They couldn't be. I looked up, seeing that the vent looked exactly as it should: covered in octagons. I smiled. My secret was safe.

Then the maintenance man walked beneath the vent. He stared up.

In the background, my professor said, "Sorry for the interruption class, but someone apparently vandalized this vent last night. He's just going to remove it from the room for now. By the way, if any of you know who did this, let Public Safety know."

The maintenance man pulled over a chair and stood upon it. Up he reached with his arms, but he was too short. Hah! I should help him, I thought. What better way to alleviate suspicion? Show that you are not responsible by directly partaking in the repair. You see again? Observation, deliberation, in its purest form. No such thing is possible from a mad man.

"Let me help you with that," I said to the man.

He smiled and said, "Sure thing," then stepped down.

Up I stepped onto the chair, and around the edges of the sheet of metal I wrapped my hands. I yanked once. The metal cover slipped from the ceiling. I smiled and handed it to the man.

Then I heard it. It was faint at first, like the tapping of a nail to a glass in another room. Then it grew louder, steadier, until at last, it was a metal snake slithering around inside a cauldron once more!

“Wonder how that happened,” the maintenance man said, staring up at the gaping hole in the ceiling. My heart rate grew louder and erratic. Sweat bubbled from my scalp and dripped down my face. The maintenance man and my professor conversed some more, but their voices faded into obscurity. All I could hear was that snake! That damn metal snake, slithering around, doing aerobics inside that damn boiler! I looked at the grates on the metal cover the maintenance man held, and there they were again! The circles! The squares! Spinning around, changing, like a chameleon in front of a beige sheet of grey! Circles! Squares! Circles! Squares! Octircles! Squaragons! What are they!

“I admit it!” I said, as I stood up in my desk, knocking it over, “Last night! I yanked the vent out of the damn ceiling! Now stop it! STOP IT! Stop the snake from slithering! Stop the grates from spinning!”

A SNHU interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”

SEPARATION

JESSICA SILVA

Inches turn to feet turn to yards turn to miles
They grow long and far, stretching from here to there
And I miss you like never before

I miss you over state lines
Over riverbanks and forests
I miss you over countries
Over coastlines and highways

Heart to heart
Mind to mind
Soul to soul
No longer face to face
Or hand to hand

I miss you over great big oceans
Stretching from here to there
And islands in between
No matter the lengths we are apart
You'll always be with me

Receipt from My Heart aka
Forget Your Ever-After

REGISTER: Chaos
CASHIER: Wrong Choice

Loyalty Card Number:
No longer valid

Real Gone	.This time
Years of Refusal	.To recognize me
QTY @ Too many to count	
You Are the Quarry	.But there's nothing of value the
Closing Time	.On this relationshi
Viva Hate	.And its target is you
Small Change	.Taking care of mys MAKE ONE GET 1 FOR RE

SUBTOTAL	.Targeted relationships
SALES TAX	.Time
TOTAL	.Fractured bonds

*** YOU SAVED Your. Pride ***	

AMOUNT TENDERED	
Cashed in	.Love
TOTAL PAYMENT	.One future
Change	
Cash	.Minimal
Total Change	.Heartbreak

TRANS: 08 1/In/A Million 12:00am

Save time on any well-used ego booster.
Offer valid through every Saturday night on
Participating shoulders only.
Broken hearts please use
Secret code ch0c01at3.

UNWANTED MERCHANDISE MAY BE RETURNED
OR EXCHANGED WITHIN 30 DAYS OF
FIRST KISS WITH ORIGINAL FEELINGS.
SARCASTIC MERCHANDISE MAY BE EXCHANGED,
FOR AN IMPROVED ITEM, WITHIN 30 DAYS OF
FIRST DATE WITH THE ORIGINAL VERDICT.
PRISSY AND STUBBORN DATES SEE LIST OF
JUSTIFICATIONS AND/OR ADDITIONAL LEVERAGE
FOR PERMANENT REPLACEMENT PLAN.

GIVE THANKS FOR EXCUSES AND WINE.

BLUE JEANS

JOANN CHANEY

Jason once calculated how much he would be paying in child support if he got a divorce, and he would have exactly seven hundred and thirty-three dollars left over for himself every month. He wouldn't be able to survive on seven hundred and thirty-three dollars a month, unless he planned on sleeping in the backseat of his car every night and washing his armpits in the bathroom sink at his office. But it wasn't just about the money. If they divorced, Krista would get the boys (although she would only want them if *he* wanted them, that's the kind of woman she is) and he would never get to see his sons. And he loved his boys.

So he didn't bring up divorce. Even though he'd been dog-tired of Krista's mealy mouth for the last five years, and they spent most nights completely ignoring each other, he kept his mouth shut. It was easier that way.

He'd been stopping at a coffee shop on the way to work every morning, a little place that looks like nothing more than a refrigerator box set up in the middle of a parking lot. But you can pull your car right up to this box and watch through the window as your coffee is being made. The coffee is overpriced and tastes like shit, and there aren't many choices--no venti mochaccinos or caramel frappe-whatsis. But the employees were all young women, and they were always in bikinis. It's all part of the concept to make the customer happy. It's like the barbershop Jason once

went to; where the stylists all worked completely topless. The girl who cut his hair had nipples that were very small and pink, and they looked like the Jujufruit candy he used to get at the movie theater when he was a kid. And once, the girl leaned over and pressed her breasts against the back of his neck as she trimmed the hair around his ears. Her breasts were small, but very, very warm, and the feel of them immediately gave him an erection. Luckily, he was covered in a black plastic cape, and the girl couldn't tell what she'd done to him.

Jason felt embarrassed each time he pulled up to the coffee stand, and he always wondered if there was some hidden camera and his face was being beamed all over the internet. He was afraid he might show up on a Google search some day or maybe on that show about child predators. Although he's pretty sure all of the girls are at least eighteen. Surely, the owner wouldn't hire anyone younger than that. He *thought*.

He's gone to this coffee shop every day for the past six weeks. He always paid cash. And he knew all of the girls. His favorite was Trixie, although that couldn't be her real name. Trixie is the kind of name reserved for strippers and hookers. (Not that he knew any strippers or hookers. Not personally, at least--except for that one time he was in Vegas and he videotaped his friend Brian having sex with a prostitute named Trixie. Although, it might have been Vicky. He couldn't remember. He didn't remember much at all from that night.)

Trixie always remembered how much sugar and cream he liked in his coffee, and she was always smiling, even at seven in the morning. She was not at all like Krista, who woke up unhappy and with a strange, sour smell

reeking from her pores, as if her body spent the night blasting out toxins. Trixie's body was tight and toned, and she never wore a bikini like all of the other girls did. Instead, she wore matching bra-and-panty sets, the kind Jason had seen in the Victoria's Secret catalog. Very lacy and very sexy.

One morning, when it was extremely cold outside (which made Jason feel sorry for the girls in the little coffee shop, but also very excited, because he could see how painfully hard their nipples were) Trixie handed him his coffee, and Jason made a smart-ass comment about the weather, which made her laugh.

"Have a great day, sweetie," she said. There was a tattoo on her left hip. It was small and blurred, just above the waistband of her panties, and the black ink had faded to a purplish color. He thought it said "five-by-five." He'd never been with a woman with a tattoo. He wondered what the words would feel like under his fingers. Under his tongue.

"Any plans for today?" Jason said, desperately trying to think of something, *anything*, so she'd keep the window open for just another minute and he could keep looking at her.

"Oh, the usual," she said, smiling. "I've got some errands to run tonight. Maybe I'll catch a movie."

He couldn't think of anything else to say, and there was a car idling behind him in the line by this time, so he left. She waved as he drove away. But he didn't go far. He parked his car at the far end of the lot, where he'd be far enough away to be discreet, but still have a decent view of the coffee shop.

Blue Jeans

He picked up his phone and called in sick to work, coughing a little to make it more believable. He hadn't called in sick once in the past three years, so his boss didn't care. And then he just *sat*. He watched the little shop, and occasionally he saw Trixie's head poke out the window with a coffee. He was sure something passed between them today, and her fingers brushed against his as she passed him the coffee. And there was a spark. Like an electric shock. He was sure of it.

Jason waited all day. He listened to the radio. Sometimes he fooled around with his phone and played games. But mostly, he watched for Trixie. He was not sure what he was waiting for, or what he planned on doing when Trixie left for the day. Once, he fell asleep and dreamed that he had Trixie tied up and bent over his knee, and he spanked her bottom with a leather belt until her ass was miserably red and she was crying so hard her makeup ran down her cheeks. When he woke up, he had a raging hard-on and his head was aching.

At three o'clock on the dot, Trixie walked out the back door of the trailer. She was all bundled up now, in loose blue jeans and a puffy coat. They were the kind of jeans Krista sometimes wore—the kind that come up to just below her tits and make her ass look about a mile wide. And her face was pink and bare of makeup, as if she just scrubbed it clean. He'd never seen Trixie like this. He never imagined she could look like this. It was like a slap in the face.

There was a car waiting, and Trixie opened the door and climbed in. Even from the other side of the parking lot, Jason could hear the screams of small children, and he

watched her lean over and lightly kiss the man behind the wheel. Her husband. Her kids in the backseat. He didn't know. He didn't know any of it.

As the car drove away, Jason tried to picture spanking Trixie again. But he couldn't. Now all he could see was her standing in front of a stove, mixing noodles and ground beef in a pan and wearing *the jeans*. It was those *jeans*, those damn jeans, more than anything, that made him feel sick to his stomach. It was the way they pooch out around the hips and stick out at the crotch and make a woman look so... so... *undesirable*.

It made him think of his wife.

Jason angrily cranked the key in his ignition and was just about to go home when he saw something moving in the window of the coffee shop. It was one of the other girls, Candi. He'd always liked her, too.

He turned off his car and waited.



LOVE LOCK BRIDGE-ALORA HEFFERNAN

HOMESICK FOR ANDROMEDA

CHERYL NELSON-OBRIEN

A line of black tea spins slowly to a stop
in a warm mocha cloud at the bottom of my mug
of chai latte. A gentle twirl starts it spinning again,
reigniting memories
of spiraling galaxies.

Oh, how I miss them.

DID I MISS SOMETHING?

STEVE LOWTHER

Ever walk into a room,
Moments after a joke; seeing all the
Smiling faces, staring, blandly,
Snidely, mocking you, gawking you,
Perhaps one so bold as to whisper?

I feel this, every moment,
Everywhere, the day over; an
Ignorant intruder, unwanted,
Too innocent to be excused, too menacing
To be reproached; so
I'm tolerated.

Silently I sit, and watch,
Dumbfounded, unsure,
Am I in the wrong place? or
Too removed from the trend to notice
There is one?

But stubbornly, I persist,
Or perhaps blindly? Regardless,
Should I concede, to the
Creed, that neither rhyme nor reason,
Need be a standard by which one ought
To appease?

The Manatee

But please, correct me if I'm wrong,
Which I am, but why, today, can we,
No longer rhyme, but ramble instead,
Mostly in vain, sometimes in glory,
And please, tell me when, and where

Did I miss something?

THE ETERNAL JOURNEY

CODY PAUL

Erozn walked purposefully through the blinding radiance of Light Realm. Wherever he looked, all his eyes could perceive was dazzling white light all around him. It seemed as though he was suspended in midair, though he felt solid ground under his feet. *I have not been here since childhood*, Erozn thought; *I had forgotten what it felt like to bathe in pure light*. Suddenly, a portal opened in front of him, and a woman stepped out, dressed in the similarly stunning white garments, the only difference was that hers was more of a dress; Erozn's was more of a trench coat.

The woman smiled as she spoke in a soft voice, "Erozn, I'm glad to see your mission was a success."

Erozn nodded, returning the smile, "Thank you mother. Is the light council ready for me?"

His mother hesitated for a moment before replying, "Yes, they are ready to speak to you... son, are you sure you wish to go through with this?"

"Yes," Erozn replied firmly, "I have never been so sure about anything in my entire life."

His mother sighed, "Very well. They await you through the portal." Erozn nodded again and without another word stepped through the portal.

He came out into almost the exact same scene, except now in a semi-circle around him were five tall pillars. At the top of each was a golden orb of light, each similar and yet different in shape.

“Ah, the prodigal son returns victorious from his long isolation on earth,” Spoke the orb directly in front of Erozn.

“You also managed to vanquish your brother as promised, very impressive,” said another orb to the far right.

“Indeed,” spoke another, this time to his far left, “Your exploits on the planet called Earth have been most satisfactory. We are eager to see how you perform on your next assignment.”

Erozn’s heart sank at those last words; if there was one thing he hated about talking to the council, it was that you could never get a word in until they were all done talking.

“Councilmen,” he began, “I have a request to make.”

“Oh, really?” replied the orb in front of him, “And what exactly would this request be?”

Erozn gathered all the conviction he could muster, “I wish to return to Earth and act as its protector.”

There was silence around the room, although none of the light council had any visible eyes, Erozn felt as though they were exchanging exasperated glances.

“Why exactly do you wish to return to such a weak planet, ruled by impulse-driven irrationals?”

“Because my mission was not a complete success,” Erozn responded immediately, knowing fully well that what he was saying wasn’t the whole truth, “True, I defeated Rezon and his wave of darkness, but nonetheless, darkness still has a hold there. I need to ensure that the innocent people there are protected from those influenced by Darkness.

“And what of the missions we need you for, Light Disciple?” asked the orb directly left of the center orb, “There are other worlds falling under Darkness’s control.”

“I am not the only light disciple at your disposal. Now that Rezon is gone; there is no reason why any task is beyond the others.”

There was silence again, and Erozn knew he had won that round, though it was not over yet.

“Is that the only reason why you wish to return to Earth?” asked the center orb, who usually did the most talking, “Or do you have a more personal reason for wanting to return?”

Erozn gulped, “It is one reason why I wish to return, not the only reason.”

“I thought so,” replied the center orb, “You do understand that we do not permit disciples to return to worlds that they have made personal connections to.”

“But this isn’t just any personal connection!” Erozn blurted out angrily, “And I do truly believe that Earth still needs my help! So please let me return to where my skills are really needed!”

Again, he was met with silence from the councilmen; they all seemed to be pondering what the right course of action was. "We understand that Earth is still in need of dire help," spoke the orb to his far right, "And if it was just this reason that was compelling you, then we would send you without hesitation."

"But your main drive for returning is personal, and for that we cannot let you go freely," finished the center orb. Erozn looked around at them all, not liking what he was hearing.

"To return to a world for a personal reason means one cannot come back into the Light Realm," continued the orb directly left of the center, "You must prove to us that such a reason is worth leaving this place forever."

Erozn nodded, "I understand. What must I do?"

"Are you familiar with the Valley of Trials?" asked the orb to his far left.

"I've heard of them," Erozn replied, realizing in an instant what he was in for.

"They are a series of trials designed solely to test your drive for leaving the Light Realm. If one's drive is not strong enough to make it through, then they fall into nothingness, neither able to go back to the Light Realm or return to their destination."

"Fair enough," Erozn replied mildly, "I can assure you, I will not fall."

The center orb actually laughed, "Do not be so sure of

yourself, Erozn, though indeed it is that exact confidence that will see you through to the other side."

"Where can I find the entrance?" asked Erozn, feeling strangely eager to begin the trials.

"Go to your mother," replied the center orb, "She will escort you to the entrance."

Erozn bowed low and without another word, departed back through the portal he had come through.

"Do you really think he can make it through?" asked the orb farthest to the right.

"Who knows," responded the orb directly left of the center, "It is an extremely long and difficult journey."

"If there is anyone who can best the Valley of Trials," interjected the center orb, "It is Erozn."

His mother greeted him as Erozn stepped back out of the portal, "So you plan on entering the valley?"

"Yes," replied Erozn, "It seems that is the only option left to me."

She sighed deeply, "Follow me then." Turning, she strode in the opposite direction, seeming to be going nowhere, but Erozn knew that was only the Light Realm. When one is surrounded by pure light, nothing seems to move. They walked for a long while until finally Erozn saw a black dot, standing out absurdly among the dazzling light. As they drew closer he realized it was another portal, inside he could only see a spiraling staircase, surrounded by

darkness.

His mother turned to him, "This is your last chance," she said gravely, "Once you're inside, whether you make it or fail, you will never be able to come back."

"I know, Mother," Erozn replied sadly, "And I'm sorry, after all those years of separation we're finally reunited only to be parted again permanently."

She gave him a watery smile, "My son," she replied, "You have become the strongest Light Disciple, the Light Realm has ever seen, and I couldn't be more proud. This is your choice to make, do what you feel you must."

Erozn smiled gratefully and embraced her, "Thank you, Mother."

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she squeezed him gently, then broke away, smiling encouragingly. "Now go, you have a long journey ahead of you."

Erozn nodded, and pulling his white hood up over his head, jumped into the portal.

The Trial of Endurance

Erozn landed on a glowing blue rectangular platform, looking down he saw the spiraling staircase he had seen in the portal. It stretched down into the darkness for as far as he could see. As soon as he had landed on the platform, darksouls—small imp-like creatures with scarlet eyes and black skin—began rising up from the stairs, blocking his descent. Erozn smiled to himself, *Well, if it isn't my old*

friends, he thought as he summoned his shimmering white sword Oathkeeper. *I figured I would see you again someday.* With that, he started his descent, easily slashing down the first two darksouls in his way, while blasting three more with beams of light, disintegrating them instantly.

Erozn sprinted downward further and further, eliminating any darksouls that tried to get in his way. There was no time where he was, but he felt like he had been on those stairs for an eternity. *Is this truly an eternal journey?* Erozn thought, as yet another darksoul leapt at him and he sliced it in half. *One that is impossible to reach the end of?* But then he shook himself. *I can't think like that. I can, and I will reach the end of these stairs.* So he ran down what soon became a hundred stairs, then a thousand, and then a million.

The only thing that kept him going was the thought of what awaited him back on Earth. It burned like a blazing fire in his mind. Any other being in the universe would have long since crumpled to the ground in defeat, but not Erozn. He would not stop running; he would not stop fighting, until he had reached his goal.

At long last, he saw another portal about three spirals down from where he was. Excitement flared inside, and he rushed forth with all the speed he could muster, whipping around the final bends. Darksouls began appearing in greater numbers but they were still no match for Erozn, who either blasted them with light or cut through them with Oathkeeper. He came around the final turn, and the portal still a good few meters away. Five darksouls arose out of the stairs just in front of the portal.

“You won’t stop me!” Erozn yelled as the first two leapt towards him. Planting his feet, he spun around and in one clean stroke cut through both of them. With his left hand he sent a brilliant beam of light at the third, dissolving it instantly. The last two came at him from the sides, ducking down until the darksouls past harmlessly over his head, Erozn sprung up and blasted them both with light. Erozn breathed deeply. That was it. No more darksouls sprang up at him.

He had passed the first trial. Feeling more confident than ever, Erozn strode through the waiting portal.

The Trial of Patience

Erozn stepped out onto a completely different scene. It looked as though he was back on Earth, though he knew he couldn’t be. A great clouded sky loomed over him and he seemed to be standing on a gigantic cliff. Looking over the edge, Erozn saw a great chasm, the bottom of which he could not see; only darkness stared back at him. Turning his attention forward he could faintly see another cliff, identical to the one he was standing on, miles away. On top of it, Erozn could just barely make out another portal, taunting him. *Great*, he thought bitterly, *how on Earth am I supposed to get across?*

Just as he thought this, a small circular slab of rock floated into view. It hovered a few feet away from where he was standing, and then slowly began to move back towards the opposite cliff. Reacting in an instant, Erozn leapt high into the air, landing perfectly on the floating rock. It was then he realized how slow this rock was moving. It inched across the abyss slower than a snail tied to a boulder. Erozn

had to try hard not to tap his foot impatiently. *Just breathe,* he thought, *getting frustrated won't make it go any faster.*

He sat cross-legged on the rough stone and began to meditate, shutting his eyes tightly. Instantly, his mind began reflecting on everything that had happened to him back on Earth. The memory of his dark brother Rezon flashed fiercely in his mind—how he had unleashed a wave of darkness upon the world, almost totally consuming it. Erozn had intervened just before Rezon was able to claim complete victory, and their battles had been ferocious. From the smallest town to the largest city the two had clashed repeatedly, leveling buildings and destroying bridges. Finally, after one extreme contest of power in outer space, the brothers faced each other in a final battle. Rezon, acting out of desperation, made a foolish move, costing him his life. Erozn stepped away the victor that day, only to be recalled immediately back to the Light Realm for further assignments.

Erozn brooded on all this while he slowly crossed the chasm, reliving every detail of his time on Earth. He thought about his reason for wanting to return, that bond that had been stronger than anything he had ever experienced before. He opened his eyes; the opposite cliff was only a few yards away and closing fast. Erozn straightened up immediately, and jumping off the rock, he practically hit the ground running. Without a second's hesitation, he rushed through the next portal, completing the second test.

The Trial of Intuition

Erozn stumbled out into a dark, cube-like room with

nothing in it; the only thing he could hear was a faint trickling sound. There was a cackle of evil laughter and out of nowhere, flames sprang up all around him.

“So, yet another disciple tries to return to a beloved world, hm?” Came a voice from nowhere and everywhere at the same time, “You’ll have to get through me: Pyron, fire demon of the nether world!”

With that last shout, Erozn saw a dark shape lunge out of the shadows at the far end, wielding great wheels of flame. Erozn barely had enough time to jump out of the way before the Pyron unleashed the fire, which jetted in wide arcs towards him. He had barely recovered before Pyron was on him again, sending more and more reels of flame at Erozn. *Man this guy is fast*, Erozn thought, astonished, as he just managed to avoid each blow, *I’d say he’d even give Rezon a run for his money*.

Erozn jumped all around the small room, with a tongue of flames always licking at his heel. He couldn’t even get close enough to launch a counterattack without being almost engulfed. Finally, Erozn landed on the ground and had to lean way back to avoid a blast of flame. Before he could recover, however, a second blast was on its way and it slammed straight into his chest, knocking him clear into wall behind him. Erozn let out a grunt of pain and fell to his knees, managing to break the remainder of his fall with his hands.

“Ha!” Pyron shouted in triumph, “Ready to give in, Light Disciple?”

Erozn’s eyes blazed with a sudden fire, “Never,” he spat,

and waited in his crouched position for the attack he knew was coming. Sure enough, Pyron raised a huge wall of fire that filled half the room and sent it rolling at Erozn, who took one deep breath and then jumped. Rising up almost to the ceiling he shot one pure blast of light energy straight at Pyron, who did nothing to avoid the attack. The beam of light hit him square in the head, and passed harmlessly through, scorching the ground behind him.

Erozn's eyes widened in horror and Pyron let out another evil laugh, "Did you really think your powers would have any effect on me here? You're in my world now! Nothing can bring me down!"

No, Erozn thought hurriedly, as he began evading giant balls of fire again, *the council created this world, and you, this is just another test. Come on, Erozn, think! Think! What would be the logical way to get rid of fire!* Then it hit him like a lightning bolt and he strained his ears for that trickling sound he had heard earlier. There it was again, a faint dribbling noise coming from somewhere in the room. Erozn looked around desperately for any sign of water, and caught sight of a small hole on the far side of the room, where a tiny stream of water was leaking out.

He shot light out of his feet, rocketing himself towards the source of water. Sensing that Pyron was right behind him, Erozn picked up his speed, heading straight for the wall. In one fluid motion, he summoned Oathkeeper and stuck it into the tiny hole. Whipping around he slashed Oathkeeper's drenched tip, straight across Pyron's face. The fire demon screamed in agony and crashed, writhing, to the ground. Within moments, his whole body began to dissolve

until there was nothing left but ash. Erozn breathed a sigh of relief as a portal opened in front of him.

I did it, he thought wearily, I past the third test. Stealing himself for whatever was to come, Erozn stepped through the next portal.

The Trial of Desire

Erozn landed on the last thing he expected: sand. Looking around in amazement, he saw that he was standing on a beach, but not just any beach—it was his favorite beach back on Earth. Most of his cherished memories had taken place right here. A warm ocean breeze tugged at his hood, which he threw back immediately, breathing in the salty sea air. Erozn hadn't felt so refreshed in a very long time. He flopped down on the soft sand, relaxing his tense muscles with a sigh of relief. *I remember always thinking one could just lie here all day without a care in the world, he thought contently, I did so myself many times.*

A white fog slowly crept into the corner of his vision, but Erozn ignored it, he was too satisfied to care about anything. He felt sleepy; the battle with Pyron had wearied him. *I always wanted to come here when I was tired, no matter what I was doing. It was always the best place on Earth.* Erozn closed his eyes, the white fog didn't go away, instead it slowly grew, covering most of his remaining vision.

Erozn smiled, realizing what was happening; *But, he thought, and the mist froze, this isn't the same. This place is missing something, the one thing I hold dearest to my heart. Without it, this beach could never be right and what it is*

missing is back on Earth, waiting on the real beach. That is where I wish to return to, more than anything. The white fog vanished instantly and Erozn opened his eyes. There, hovering out over the water was the fourth portal. Looking inside it, Erozn saw the exact same beach he was standing on, only in the portal, a girl was sitting on the beach, hugging her knees to her chest.

He leapt to his feet immediately, grinning broadly, "Yes!" he shouted gleefully, "I made it through! I'm heading back to Earth!" Without a backwards glance, Erozn jumped clear over the water and vanished into the portal, thus becoming the first ever to complete the valley of trials.

Erozn appeared directly above the water, with a cry of shock he fell with a huge splash straight into it. He resurfaced spluttering and gasping, looking around wildly for what he had seen in the portal.

"Erozn!" Came an all too familiar shout from behind him. Erozn's face broke into an excited smile, whipping around, he saw her—tall and lean, with flowing brown hair and brilliant blue eyes.

"Emma!" He yelled back, bursting with emotion he struck out hard for the shore, his powerful arms making quick work of the distance. Emma ran, splashing into the water, meeting him where the water was just about waste height. She jumped straight into his arms and they spun around laughing until Erozn slipped and they both fell with another splash back into the water.

Crawling to shallow water, Erozn collapsed onto his back, with half of his body still in the water. Emma came and

slumped down on him, still laughing.

They looked into each other's eyes then, smiling tenderly, "You came back," Emma whispered softly, tears beginning to slide down her face.

Erozn wiped them away gently with one hand, squeezing her gently with the other, "I told you I would," he replied just as softly, "a Light Disciple never breaks his word."

Emma laughed, "After a year of waiting I was beginning to think you had."

"A year?" Erozn exclaimed in amazement, "Was it really that long?"

"Yes silly! Where have you been?" she asked jokingly.

"It's a long story," Erozn laughed, "I'm just happy to be back."

"So am I," Emma whispered, stroking his hair affectionately, "now we can get back to where we left off..."

Erozn wrapped both his arms around her, kissing her forehead, "with pleasure."

GREEN

JESSICA SILVA

Lilac spots glisten under the warm lights
They dance on fingertips and across
The slender white keys with black strips
Each one sings sympathetically beside the voice
It is drained of all energy and beauty, the voice
Not like it once was before
It trembles in its own nervousness
In its own unnoticed presence
It is alone, like it has been for years
All its life, in fact, unnoticed

HOMOGENOUS TENDENCIES

BRYNN GESTEWITZ

The letters on the page are pronounced
Merely symbols of what needs to be said,
Although despised

Created by language in general,
Is meaningless and monotonous
Meaning forged into existence by the thoughts of another
Made whole by sand and earth,
Deposited by thousands of
years
Matter and life, destined to be something far less substantial
Than what came before,
This is the nature of things
To go from real to unnatural to real again
Abstractions decoded in the mind

Meaning is substantial in itself and as they have transcribed
The message into something artificial,
It is understood
How ill and manifested it is
And we revel every minute of it

Time to break away and feel it slip through the cracks
Like the sand that lies lapped on a beach
Pushed and prodded from the will of the water

Homogenous Tendencies

All is one and nothing is the same
To take the essence of a thing is to change it,
We say for the better,
Another of our demented perceptions
Take what is said and distort it the way it was meant
Practicality is homogenous but fascination is sublime

Thousands of years have come and gone
It is the nature of things,
And so it will always be
Take it for what it is, and turn it over like the letter
One turns over in the hand of indignatio



EIFFEL TOWER-ALORA HEFFERNAN

THE PIXIE DUST WORE OFF

COLLEEN DECOURCY

It's just a matter of time
Time, it seems, matters
Growing silence in a pot
One you thought was dry.
Writing your name over -
Like it could make a difference -
And erase what Time thought mattered.

Hanging on anyway
Though time speaks otherwise,
And this is ridiculous.
Stairwell conversation
I can't quite hear from up here.
You told me to hang on -
The kind of thing that lasts.
Why can't I find the same faith?
I thought I prided myself in this.
Shadows of how I once believed
Once upon a time.

MARLINA
SUSAN GRANT

How shall I hold my soul that it does not touch yours?
Briefest of joys, our life together.
Silently keeping the secret of your birth.
And what was lost?
Because as all things

Have their explanations, true or false,
A part of it artificial and preserved,
And a part born in a blur of loss and change.
Moving her hand in mine. As I try

To think the pain I never saw.
Of memory gains and fails
Like surf had not been sad at all, or was all a dream.

STRANGER-HANGOVER

DAHVIN GREENFIELD

It's raining cats and dogs and I don't want to leave my bed. My pillow smells like French fries and the empty Burger King bag is still at the foot of my bed. My class starts in twenty minutes; I won't have time to take a shower. I don't even want to try brushing out my hair. Last night, I pulled it back in a bun that has now been flattened by my pillow. One strand of hair escaped the hair tie's grasp and has fallen in front of my eye. The end is frayed and curling upward.

I wanted to pop in to the salon after I got off of work last night, but my car was turning into a carcass. Sometimes I blast my radio – even if I don't like the song – just to blare out my back tires screeching at each stop and timing belt squealing at each turn, moaning as the engine revs.

On my way home from work, I stopped at the gas station. I pulled up to the fifth pump, put the car in park, and took out my debit card, turning off my car. Looking through my windshield, I saw a girl walk out of the convenience store with a cup of coffee with no cover. She was wearing a pair of red heels. Her hair was black and pulled back into a bun; bangs were pinned to the side with a red barrette. I wondered if she matched on purpose. She walked over to pump number six where a green Honda Civic idled. With the driver-side door opened, she leaned in and switched her engine off. While leaning in, she lifted her right foot up slightly, bending her knee. I could see up her blue mini skirt;

she was wearing pink panties. As she started pumping her gas, I stepped out of my car. I had just gotten out of work twenty minutes ago. I was wearing black slacks, black flats and a black blouse (Victoria's Secret is so strict).

She opened her gas tank, grabbed the nozzle and pressed the button for Supreme. She must have paid for her gas and coffee at once. She stuck the nozzle into her gas tank's opening, squeezed the lever, rolled her hip to the left – bending her knee and sipping her coffee. After having her upper lip marked with foam, I realized that she was probably drinking a cappuccino (after sizing-up her waistline, she didn't seem like a latte-drinker). The foam dripped off her lip onto her chin. She licked her upper lip and rubbed off the rest with the back of her sleeve. Lowering her sleeve from her mouth, she looked up at me, twitched her right eyebrow and smiled. I lowered my eyes and bit down on my bottom lip before looking back at her and smiling without showing my teeth. She smiled again, showing her teeth.

Now I have ten minutes before my class starts. I'm done brushing my teeth – I've spit in the sink – and I'm reaching for a towel to wipe my mouth. Still staring in the mirror, with towel in hand, I see a watered-down line of tooth paste trace my upper lip and vertically down my chin like a goatee.

I smile.

I smile, thinking about the chick at the gas station. Smiling, thinking that we are no different.

THE CHOICE

TANYA COLUMB

Two men are chosen to hold her heart,
One will conquer the other torn apart.
One with love, who eternally gives,
The other with death and darkness that lives.
To choose in the moment can lead to despair,
While time and thought leads to care.
Moment by moment time moves on,
She must choose her chosen one.
To have and to hold or to change her life,
She must decide, it's her only strife.
She faces her struggle with heartbreak and love,
To find the men she feels unworthy of.
The look in their eyes as she settles near,
The heartbeat inside of her, screaming in fear.
The decision lies now on the tip of her tongue,
To move forward with her life or forever stay young.

LUST
CYNTHIA ROBY

When your lust is done with me
I'm gonna need a hearse.
I'm tired
dry.
You have twisted and turned my hips
bent my back
held my wrist
pushed and pulled and
stretched my thighs
loved me in every which way a woman can be put
and then some more.

What kinda man loves a woman so hard
so rough
yet so good?
I really don't wanna know.
Hush up and give me more.



FOOT AND PAW-ANDREA THOMAS

BERYL

CHERYL NELSON-OBRIEN

She comes from a world
of bumbershoots and davenport.
A good Christian woman doing her duty
by easing suffering in the world.
She keeps a watchful eye out her kitchen window
for those lost souls who appear out of nowhere
to get free food at the Dumpster Diner.
And, if a cat's truly blessed, in her estimation,
a box to sleep in that keeps them warm.

She catches them,
only Carnac the Magnificent knows how –
given the gray patches she misses when she colors her hair,
even though her eyes are large behind wing-tipped glasses,
which are nowhere to be found when she needs them.

Beryl

But still, with or without them, she bumps into furniture
and usually misses the step down from her apartment door.

But she always catches her cat.

Here she comes again,
wearing the same old ratty brown coat
with the dog-eared fox collar flapping loose on one side,
and always buttoned tight, no matter the season.

Crossing the street, she smiles imperviously
while car horns blare and drivers curse,
as she coos and gurgles to her latest victim.

Perhaps she is divinely guided...
or perhaps “divine guidance” is nothing more
than throwing boxes into the dumpster
that smell suspiciously of catnip.
But the end always justifies the means,
does it not, since another lost soul
will soon be in a better place.

CALL ME LUCK

BRANDON BARNEY

I had always been the lucky one; the one who could turn a card, flip a coin, or gamble everything, and always win. I had won card games, bets, draws... you name it. I felt invincible, and everyone said luck was always on my side. That's what I thought too.

"Heads or tails?" I asked the kid sitting across from me. Everyone was gathered around, waiting for my inevitable win, and his loss. The kid must have known he was being hustled, but you feel invincible when you're young. He sat there, staring me down, and then transfixed his gaze on the coin on the table. It had been flipped so many times that the edges were worn, and the faces on the coin were worn away. Its soft golden glow on the table felt comforting, and yet eerie. So much of a man's future depended on the small golden disk.

"Young man, don't you know that this man is the luckiest guy around? No way are you going to win this bet." The bartender said, walking over. I watched as sweat gathered on the kid's brow, furrowed in deep concentration.

"Just watch," the kid said, and then turned to me, "Tails, old man. Get ready to lose your money."

I just smiled and handed the coin to him. He had a grin growing on his face.

"Here, you flip it."

Smiling, he took it from me and flipped it in the air. I closed my eyes, waiting for the gasp from the gathered crowd, the shouts of anger and accusations of cheating that would come from the kid sitting across from me. I heard him

smack the coin onto his hand. The crowd gasped, and I waited a moment longer for the kid's reaction.

"It's a loaded coin, I swear it. This man is a cheater. I'm not giving up my money to this guy!"

The crowd started hooting and I heard chairs getting knocked over. I opened my eyes as everyone tried to get a better look at how the kid was reacting. I looked back to see three men restraining the boy and the bartender pushing my earnings over to me. I held up my hand and the bartender stopped.

"He's done it again!" someone in the crowd yelled. The crowd got even louder.

"Wait," I said, and everyone in the room stopped, focusing on me.

"Everyone deserves a second chance, right?" The kid nodded vigorously, and everyone else in the room started murmuring amongst themselves. By now there was a small crowd gathered on the street, looking in from the window. I pulled a deck of cards from my pocket.

"Kid, I'll give you one more chance. In my hand I have a standard deck, and inside the deck I added a joker. Here's the bet, I bet within five card draws, a joker will be drawn. You can pick someone here to shuffle, and another to draw the cards, or you can draw them yourself if you prefer. If you lose, however, my prize is doubled, and you leave this town. If you win, I'll give you everything I own."

The kid's eyes widened at this, he knew I owned the best property in the town. The kid nodded at me, and accepted.

"First things first: put your money on the table."

The kid leered at me, but did as I said.

"Why don't you put your bet up?"

"I never put mine up, because I never lose. Here's the deck. Who's shuffling?" Just as I said this, I noticed a man in

a long black coat and a large brimmed hat walk in. I watched him as he walked over to the bar and motioned to the bartender that he wanted a drink.

"I want him!" The kid said, pointing to the man. The man just turned in the kid's direction, and turned back, talking to the bartender. The bartender held up his hand and the man looked offended.

"Sir, would you mind coming over here for a second? We have a bet to settle," I said. The man looked even more upset, but got up and came over.

"What seems to be the issue?" he said, anger bubbling up in his voice.

"This kid here has requested that you shuffle the deck for us. If you wish, I'll pay for your drink if you do it."

The man's lips twitched, "No need, but sure, I'll shuffle your deck for you."

"I want him to draw the cards too."

I focused my gaze on the kid, as he spoke up, and then turned back to the man. I raised my eyebrows in question and the man nodded in assent.

"Sure, I'll do that too. What seems to be the bet?" He asked this as I handed the deck to him. The man started shuffling as I started to explain.

"Simple game, fifty-two standard cards plus a joker, if he gets a joker within five draws, I win."

The man nodded.

"Sounds interesting. Cards are shuffled. Want me to draw them now?" The man said, turning to the kid.

"Do it. This old man here is going to owe me a lot of money after this bet." The man nodded as he drew five cards, laying them flat on the table. He flipped the first one over.

"Four of spades," he said, and then flipping the next card over, he said, "Three of diamonds." Everyone waited for

the outcome, yet I knew there was no risk. "Two of clubs." He looked up at the two of us, giving us only a short glance each. Something was off about this man, but I ignored the feeling.

"Ace of hearts," He said and the kid started grabbing the table, waiting for the final card to be drawn.

"How lucky are you feeling, boy?"

"Pretty damn lucky," he said. I turned to the man and nodded, motioning with my hand to flip the next card. He flipped it and there was a collective gasp in the room.

"Joker," the man said. The boy got that look on his face, the look of a man who has just lost everything, and knows nothing of what to do next. It was agony, mixed with indecision, and despair. Then he tensed up, ready to lunge for me, when the bartender hit him over the head, knocking him out.

"It's always easier if they're out cold. Can someone help me bring him home and explain what happened? I'm sure we can work out somewhere for him to go, maybe the next town over." As a couple of men picked the kid up off the floor, the crowd outside dispersed and everyone inside the bar went back to their prior conversations, casually sipping their beers, or making bets on their individual card games. The man took off his brimmed hat and I saw that he had deep black hair, it was all slicked back.

"You seem like you're a pretty lucky man." He took the drink the bartender was offering to him. I took mine from the bartender too and handed him the money for them both before he walked off and helped the men take the kid out and down the street.

"I am a pretty lucky man, I would say, and so would these folk. I think they'd say that I am the luckiest man in this town."

"Would you say luck is on your side, perhaps?" I

considered this for a moment. I looked around the bar, and then at my bag hanging from my chair, holding only a small part of my day's winnings.

"Yeah, I guess so," I said, and the man smiled, as he tilted his head downwards I thought I saw something glint in his eye, something almost... unnatural.

"So what would you say if I had a bet of my own for you?"

"Well, I would say you are a fool."

"I am no fool. I just like taking a risk. Here's the bet, in my hand I have three cards." He pulled his hand from his pocket and laid the cards on the table. "One is a jack, one is a queen, and one is a king. The problem is, two are hearts, and one is a spade. Here's the bet, I want you to guess which one is the spade."

I mulled this over for a second, and a thought popped into my head. "What if I win?"

"Well, if you win, I will make you the richest man in the world."

"I don't believe you," I said, "How could you make me the richest man in the world?"

"I have... connections, you could say."

"Say I believe you, what if I lose?"

"Well, I would say, if you lose, you agree to work for me, no questions asked."

"What do you mean 'work for you'?"

"As I said, no questions asked."

I sat there, thinking for a long time, sipping from my glass, watching the ice inside melt.

"I will accept your bet, but first, sir, why don't you tell me your name?"

"Call me Luck."

"You're joking, right?" The man didn't smile, nor did

he give any hint that he was humored in any way. "You're serious?" The man nodded.

"Okay," I said, contemplating the three cards before me. "The Jack is the spade."

The man's eyes widened slightly, and he nodded. "You are correct."

"Where's my money?" I asked, getting straight to the point.

"Before we get to that, how about one more? I've heard a few people around town saying you're into second chances. So, here is my proposal. This time, if you lose, you work for me, as my right-hand man."

"And if I win?"

"You need not concern yourself with that." He chuckled.

"It seems to me that you are in no position to be cocky. What if I win?"

"I will give you influence like you've never known." He chuckled again.

"You sound like you've had far more than just that beer to drink." He sat there, like stone, not showing any reaction to my words. "Okay, what's the new bet?"

"Flip over the heart, and the diamond, leaving the spade facedown."

I nodded. Flipping over the middle card, I found that it was a heart.

"One down." The man said, a smile forming on his face.

There were two cards left, a 50/50 chance, but I always won. I put my hand over the right card and watched his face as it twitched slightly, the corners of his lips curling upwards. I flipped the leftmost card over and gasped in shock. It was the jack of spades. I sat back in my chair.

"You may know that some people think of a shovel when they hear the word spade. A spade is, in a way, symbolic. It is used after death to bury the remains of the dead." The man's eyes seemed to flicker, and I felt sweat beading on my brow. "You see, the job I have for you, is... special." He picked up his hat, putting it back on his head. "I truly am Luck; some others have a different name for me. You might recognize the name Lucifer, perhaps."

"Luck is your nickname," I said, my jaw dropping slightly.

"Exactly, now I have a problem. It's getting kind of busy. I came here, exactly for you. Seeing as I have let you be so 'lucky' for so long, it is now your job to be my right hand man."

The man walked out, leaving me speechless. I left the bar, hoping to go home, and find that everything was just a dream. Instead, I realized home no longer existed. What happened was real, and so were the consequences.

Some people just tell me my story is about a twist of fate, an unlucky day. I laugh at them for this. I let them relish in this thought, letting them believe I don't exist, that they're hallucinating. However, at the end of the day, when they ask my name with their final breath, I watch them waste away, dying beneath my touch, as I say.

"Call me Fate."

THEN WHAT SHOULD I CALL YOU?

COLLEEN DECOURCY

But you called me sweetheart
And I could not turn
A longing, desperate
I meant to run, but

Sweet you remain
Hearts you claim
Once in time
Sweetheart was my name

Yesterday's crumpled shirt
Pulled over your head
Smoothed slowly
Hands worn with memory

Lips may part – no sound
Heart gaping open
Pleas unrecognized – no words
To take you back

A precious mess
Lend me
Your sweet heart
To mend

But please don't
Call me
Sweetheart
Again

BY AND BY

SUSAN GRANT

By and by
We all come to know
What is the purpose
Of this sojourn.

We all come to know
The answered riddles
Of this sojourn
Toward a life illuminated.

The answered riddles
And whispered regrets
Toward a life illuminated
Are but a part of our journey.

By and By

And whispered regrets,
Perhaps ephemeral,
Are but a part of our journey
Toward higher ground.

Perhaps ephemeral
Laments show us
Toward higher ground
Of salvation.

Laments show us
What is the purpose
Of salvation
By and by.

The Manatee



GARDENS-ALORA HEFFERNAN



29

JEDIDIAH KIRCHNER

I hope you learned your lesson. No one should have that many Shirley Temples. You're lucky you passed out on your side or I'd have a dead son instead of a soiled rug.

You threw up on your 29 costume too. I put it in the washer, against my better judgment: I wanted to burn it.

I didn't get it at first, your artwork. It seemed pointless - just different 29s from different angles. It didn't tell a story or even represent anything, besides 29, whatever that meant. To me it's the number between 28 and 30. When I asked you what it meant, you'd change the subject.

For awhile I thought it was one of those memes, like Andre the Giant. But it seemed too common; there are 29s everywhere, calendars, phone books, elevators. Then I thought it was mathematical, so I asked your calculus teacher. He said it had no significance.

Finally, I Googled it.

I'll admit I was shocked. I know kids are into weird stuff; I was too in my day. My dad never understood it, but he accepted it. When you were born I said I'd do the same. Whether my son was gay, a communist, a rockabilly - I'd live with his choice. But this? This violates every rule I was raised by. I can't believe it's not outlawed.

Still, I tried to be accepting. I didn't say a word when you wore your costume to the company picnic, although my coworkers' laughter really put the knife in me. I even hung some of your art on the fridge, even though it's been giving me nightmares.

Maybe I've been a bad father. I know your binge was in response to tonight's fight. When your mom and I divorced I vowed to stop drinking. Now I remember why. That drawing on the fridge meant a lot to you, as hard as

that is for me to grasp, and I shouldn't have destroyed it.

I just miss how it was before. Remember when I used to take you to the zoo? It wasn't much, but it was something. You always loved the animals, except the crocodiles; you thought they were monsters. One day the zookeeper made a joke about throwing kids to the crocodiles and you started crying. I told him to apologize and when he didn't I punched him in the mouth. I promised that day I'd always protect you from monsters.

What ever happened to those days? We used to talk all the time. Now you come home and go straight to your room. At night I hear you video-chatting with your online friends. They sound like people I'd like to punch, but what can I do?

I think I know what happened. Monsters got my son after all.

Anyway, I just want you to know I'm sorry for tonight, for leaving your mom, for not spending more time together, but most of all, for breaking my promise.

I guess that's it. I'm glad you're okay. And that you're still passed out, or this would be a lot harder."

He left the room. I heard a gunshot.

TWO HAIKU

DAHVIN GREENFIELD

I.

Your black ball point pen
Danced in my palm: twisted some
Cursive, I love you.

II.

The broken boom box
Drooled cassette tapes' intestines
In the dining room.

GUTTER MIND

STEVE LOWTHER

W

hen I first started, it was hard. Some would scream. Others would cry. Some would try to plead or bargain. A few even tried to escape, but usually by then I'd pumped full of the shit already and they'd be off to la-la-land. I felt bad at the beginning, but it was my job, you know? Man's got to make a living.

After a while though, something changed. I just stopped caring. The screaming, the crying, the pleading; it all just started to mean nothing. It became routine. They started to become paychecks instead of people. Just means to a fat wallet or eating out on the weekend.

It was like that for awhile. Couple months. A year or two maybe. If you asked me how many there were over the course, I couldn't tell you. Hundreds. Maybe thousands. Most of them scratched and clawed, like the one before, but all just as futile. I once wondered why I always got the scratchers and the claws, but it's simple really. I was good, and cheap. The best around for the price I charged. Most professionals in my field charged double for the same service. But I wasn't one for small talk amongst my clients, so referral business never took off. No, I was stuck in a niche. The best, but cheapest around. My job was my job, so, that's just the way it stayed.

I can remember one though, very unlike the rest. She was a little girl. Younger than most. Short brown hair, big fat dimples. She must have been six, not even. Anyhow, I

noticed she was unusually quiet beforehand. When I looked at her face, she wasn't just quiet. She was smiling. Every child before her was a screamer, or a crier. This made me smile. I slid my gloves on as I spoke to her.

"Everything okay?"

She nodded, her smile only growing wider. I spoke again, as I polished off some of my various tools-of-the-trade on a table in front of me.

"You're not afraid, I see. I'm impressed."

Her cheeks perked up even more. Her head tilted sideways, and without so much as a hiccup, she said in a gleeful little voice:

"I'm not afraid of the dentist."

The Manatee



GRAFFITI FOR JULIET-ALORA HEFFERNAN

NORMALCY PLUNGE

BRYNN GESTEWITZ

On the edge of the cliff, with the transparent face
Deciding upon generated validity and
Sardonically enjoying aspirations of others wanting
To understand the illusion of lust

The void is reality with no nucleus
Neutral without central ground
Comfort exists with created lives, but
The abyss calls in your presence

Determined, demented, proactive screams
The mundane transformed to unbalanced will,
Weightlessness, and
Now is the time.

ROADKILL, RESURRECTED

LAURELYN ESTES

I woke to a weight pinning down the blankets in front of my stomach. I blinked some of the sleep from my eyes. My arms trapped under the covers, I shifted—but the weight didn't move.

A sickening odor choked me—the reek of wet dirt and rot—and I knew what was in bed with me.

My eyes found the shadowed form in the near-complete darkness of the room and my heart sped up at the knowing but not being able to see. The knowing lent images, filling in gaps more gruesome than vague sight could accomplish. In my mind, the black form crouched on the covers and it sat with the weight of its own pelt and gravity peeling away from its body. The skin slipped free, slick and oily, slimy with congealed fluids that even now were sinking through the bedclothes, reaching poisoned fingers towards my own skin.

I lay there, heart thumping as my eyes adjusted, imagining horrible things to go with that nightmarish odor as Boe's form became slowly clearer to me—still, thankfully, in the shape of a solid cat.

Murky yellow-green eyes stared back at me from the scraggly hair of its face, still stiff with grave dirt and the grime of the road. It sat there, pressed against my stomach as it used to sleep against me when it was alive—as if nothing had happened—but it was there in the cloud covering those eyes. Only now it wasn't sleeping. In fact,

since it'd come back, I'd not once seen it sleep. And now, whatever it was, it wasn't *alive*.

I remembered how he'd looked when I saw him the first time after I'd buried him, lurching drunkenly towards me as if his limbs were still stiff with traces of rigor mortis. He'd moved like a machine that's parts had begun to fail and could only move in jerky, jagged movements. He'd staggered stiffly towards me with none of the smooth grace cats were known for. His white coat had been ratty with dried fluids—blood, being one, matting his ruff where the truck's tire had crushed him until his skin had split apart from the pressure and spilled his organs in a steaming and shining mess on the shoulder of Route 4. That gaping wound had been nowhere in evidence as he tottered up the driveway, but the dried blood and grave dirt were. He looked like what he was—roadkill resurrected. Gunk congealed at the corners of his eyes, nose, and mouth. Yellowing green eyes had fixed on me as he'd weaved his way up the driveway to where I'd stood transfixed with fear on the doorstep and watched Death coming for me. Those same milky eyes fixed on me now as I lay frozen in bed, smelling rot and wet earth and other things I have no name for. As he'd neared where I stood, the sickening scent of the grave reached out to me. The stench filled the room even now, sealing us together as if we were in a crypt rather than a bedroom, buried again, but this time—together.

All the moisture had gone from my mouth and throat and I swallowed dryly. I was careful freeing my arm from the blankets—I didn't want to disturb it and stir whatever thoughts lurked behind those foggy eyes. The blankets were tight over me, pinned both by my weight and Boe's. Pulling my arm out felt uncomfortably like trying to pull out of my

own skin and for a frightening minute I thought back to the terrifying creature rotting on my covers.

My arm was covered in gooseflesh before it was even fully exposed.

Slowly, so as not to startle the creature curled against my stomach, I reached my hand towards it, shaking.

There was no reaction in those milky eyes, no break from the unnatural stillness of its seat.

Crusty fur, better now called bristles, scraped against the pads of my fingers. I smoothed it down in a single, careful stroke and froze. When he didn't react, I continued to pet him.

Beneath his matted fur his skin was cold. The sensation seemed to seep through my fingertips and creep up my arm towards my heart, slowly killing my own warmth. I shivered but continued to pet him, rubbing his ears like he'd liked since he was a kitten. But the ears, like his skin, like so much else about him—were wrong. Just cold flaps of flesh. Those milky eyes shrunk down into slits and a rattling purr grated out of him—the first noise he'd made since he came back.

I stilled immediately and the noise cut off. His eyes began to open back up again, those horrible, dead eyes, and I instinctively started rubbing again the way you instinctively avoided a horse with its ears laid flat and teeth bared. Those eyes fell shut again, faster and fully, and the purr began again. But it was nothing like the purr he'd had when he was alive. This one was thick and wet and raised the hairs on the back of my neck and sped my pulse. It rattled out of him as if

something that had been broken when the car hit him had been badly repaired before he returned.

I scratched my fingers down his jagged spine to his rump and the purr continued in its rattling way. His bones stretched his skin in sharp relief in a way they hadn't when he was alive, as if by dying he'd lost something physically as well as spiritually. I made a mental note to feed him extra tomorrow although since he'd come back his diet had switched from Meow Mix to Fresh Kill in the hot and steaming version. He brought them back and I'd find feathers, whole wings, tails of all kinds, bones, or whole bodies... as if he'd waited for me before he began to eat. Sometimes he brought them back alive. I'd see them there, ripped open, heart red and shiny and beating in open air, their eyes wide, chest fluttering in final, shock-filled breaths with Boe's filmy eyes staring over it at me. Over the few days he'd been back he'd left me enough bones to build forts with or even an endless number of cairns and crosses. Sometimes it seemed he didn't even leave behind the bones. Yesterday I saw him licking a bloodstain on the ground with nothing left to tell me of its origin. Those seemed to be the only two things I saw him do now—eat—and watch me. And when he did them simultaneously I felt a worm of fear twist in my stomach.

Maybe I'd go to the pet store and purchase some of the live rats they sold for snakes and bring them back for him. I'd even set them free in front of him so he could enjoy the hunt before the kill. Maybe if he saw me sacrificing something living for him, he'd forgive the way I dumped him in the ground after he died.

If I tried to brush the grave dirt from his coat, would the fur fall from his dead skin in clumps or would the skin itself pull apart from my ministrations? If he was a dog, I'd try and bathe him but I doubted dying had had any effect on his preference for water. Despite the languidness that had come with his resurrection, I wasn't willing to try the water and test the sharpness of his claws or teeth against my still-living skin.

When I got tired of holding my arm suspended above him, I let it lower, slowly, to drape over him. My skin crawled as his stiff fur scratched and folded under my arm—but he didn't react. I circled my fingers on his side against that cold and dirty skin. His eyes were fully shut now and I let mine close, too. Holding the cold cat against me with the smell of wet dirt and death heavy in my nose, I thought that this wasn't so bad. Yeah, Boe had obviously... *changed* with his dying, but some small part of my cat was still the same. He still chose to curl against me, so something of him had to still be there behind the cloud covering his once-bright eyes. I could get used to the smell like I could get used to cigarette smoke or anything.

I wasn't as afraid of the thing in the dark, not now that I'd reached out and touched it. And it was the same and altogether different as when I'd first picked up kitten Boe from the wiggling litter six years ago.

Now, mouth dry, heart pounding, I'd reached into the darkness for the waiting beast. And when sleep crept up on me, I let myself be led into the darkness, lulled by the death rattle that was now my cat's purr.

NICOTINE NIGHTS

COLLEEN DeCOURCY

Broken cigarettes
Like the music I was living in
And without you

Why should I continue to hope?
I know I am leaving the music
Falling, falling

Broken cigarettes littering the ground
In a faded black jacket
Hair grown long you stand there

I never knew and
Things get hard to understand
Just zip up your jacket and tie your shoes

Stitched and sewn
I wanted to try
Living in music

Water makes memories
It does not wash them away
I am leaving

The grey in my sweater
Littered by ashes
Cigarettes I broke

Replaying one song
Forever
And without you



CATHEDRAL-ALORA HEFFERNAN

CHIVALRY LIVES

MEGAN KIDDER

The lights reflected perfectly off of Aubrey's skin. She would close her almond eyes and look to her lap as she blushed, a defense mechanism she must've picked up long before she met me. Past the voluminous row of black lashes that decorated her eyelids, her candy apple lips curved into a smirk.

"Oh, Jack." She would laugh through her nose, refusing to look up at me.

"Oh, Aubrey, my darling Aubrey," I would rest my grin on my fist.

She didn't answer aloud when I would say this. The perfectly sculpted arch in her dark eyebrow would lift itself to tell me how nonsensical I was. And I was, only for her.

"Tuna steak? Medium?" asked the waiter, clad in a black tie. Tonight was surely a black tie affair, but it was also a rare occurrence that should only be bestowed upon a man once in his life--should he be lucky enough to find his own Aubrey.

The way her dress sat upon her shoulders was a sight for lover's eyes. It was a fitted, light pink satin wonder. Sleeveless, the straps were ornate with glittering gems. Her pronounced collarbone peeked through olive skin as she moved about her dinner. The fabric curved appropriately over her breasts, sitting atop an equally ornate belt. She was

as absolutely radiant as the day I'd met her.

I remember the way I saw the sun shine through Aubrey's decadent auburn hair. It was deep like an October afternoon. Fall was my favorite season.

"Oops, I'm sorry." The giggle in her voice awakened me as I nearly collided with her.

"Oh no, pardon me," I had said.

"But you were here first. That was rude of me." She looked down at her nude heels, only a few shades lighter than her skin.

"No worries, ladies first, right?" I was vomiting ignorance and I couldn't plug the flow. My maroon cotton t-shirt suddenly felt itchy as I watched her kindly accept and step in front of me. I watched her hair again, glistening in the fluorescent lights of the coffee shop. She craned her neck, studying the menu; I would later discover she would search the boards only to purchase her regular choice.

After a few moments, she looked over her shoulder and said, "Thank you for being a gentleman."

It was in that moment that I noticed her eyes, pieces of golden honey, speckled and bright. I could only muster enough courage to reply with an acknowledging nod. When she turned around, every cell in my body wanted to see those eyes again, if not for the rest of my life then just for a mere instant so I could have a mental picture of the most beautiful thing I'd ever encountered to save to memory.

"Say." I side stepped to her, stopping her from reaching the barista behind the sticky marble counter.

Shocked, but intrigued, she waited for me to continue. I must have looked like a fool but she made it so easy to.

"Let me buy your coffee," I said. She spun the costume jewelry ring on her right middle finger, patience poured from her demeanor but she still did not answer.

Today, she will tell you she was too taken aback to agree to a strange man buying her latte, but I know deep down Audrey was just testing the waters before she stuck her feet in.

"I am a gentleman, after all." I extended my arm toward the cash register. The employees and customers grumpily awaiting their caffeine had no sympathy for my boldness but she didn't seem to mind.

"Okay." She nodded slowly and grinned, finding amusement in her morning routine suitor. I remember wondering if this happened to her often. Were those eyes colored contacts? Did she wear that grey pencil skirt for free coffees? She was either an angel or a genius. After four delightful years I have discovered she is both.

"I would love to drink this coffee with you, sir." I can still hear the sound of her mellifluous voice that day. "But I have to get to work."

"I understand," I said.

"I work at Canopy Publishing," she told me, eager to win my trust, it seemed.

"That's good." She amused me above all else. "Well,

then you simply owe me, madam."

"Owe you?" She asked, placing a dramatic hand upon her chest. "Has chivalry died?"

I loved her and I hadn't even learned her name.

"Haven't you heard, dear?" I asked. "Women were granted the right to vote."

"Well, I'll be." She slapped a hand on her hip and shook her head, highlights gleaming as she frowned. "I'm Aubrey Cooper."

"Jack McDell," I extended my hand.

"What do I owe you?" She shook my hand, the first time we'd ever touched.

"Accompany me to dinner tomorrow if you aren't too busy with your job?" I asked.

"I can do that," she said. "I'm majoring in journalism. I know, bad idea, but if cute knights like you keep buying me caffeinated beverages and food then maybe I won't starve to death."

"Surely not a pretty lady like yourself," I said.

The rest was history. Six fights, four years, one apartment, and countless instances of lovemaking later, we sat together at the fanciest restaurant in town. The same place, same table, I took her to the night after we met.

"Darling, I am taking you out to celebrate your

article," I grabbed her by the waist as we slow danced in our kitchen. It was a spur of the moment decision to buy the ring, but I had known it was what I wanted since the moment I'd laid eyes on her.

At the restaurant I watched her as she cut into her lemon and basil chicken, unaware of my churning mind. She didn't see the tear welling up in the corner of my eye as I imagined what our children would look like.

"Oh, sweetheart, you *must* try this." She held out her fork to me. "It's to die for." She giggled at her own fake rich woman accent as I took the chicken from her fork.

"Aubrey?" I looked at her like I'd never needed her so badly.

"Jack?" She put her full fork back down on her plate with a dainty cling. "Are you all right?"

"Much better than that," I said as I took her smooth hand in mine. "I'm much better than that."

"Then what is it?" She asked. "The bathroom is in the back on the left."

"No, no, it's not that." I laughed, fighting back tears of prominent joy.

"I'm just going down the list starting with the most frequent," she said, picking up her fork again.

"Aubrey, you have beautiful hair." I was equivalent to a baboon in that moment. I suppose I am not the only man to feel so in those precious seconds that begin the rest of it all.

"Why I could say the same for you," she said. "Are you okay?"

"That's the first thing I noticed about you, the first thing I saw, rather. But then, I was taken aback by the beauty of your eyes. They are the absolute most breathtaking sight I have ever seen and when they looked at me for the first time, I knew. I knew in that instant that I wanted to wake up to those eyes every morning. I wanted to wipe tears from them. I wanted them to glare at me when I'd done something wrong. I wanted to watch them sparkle when you laughed. I wanted to remember how gorgeous they were when your lids were closed." I felt the world stand still as I babbled my way into my main speech. I hadn't said a thing I had planned to say, but I knew it would still be perfect. She had mist in her eyes as she followed every word I said cautiously and caringly.

"Jack, darling," she tried teasing me.

We were both fighting back tears as I slid closer to her.

"So, I guess what I'm trying to tell you, or ask you, is Aubrey Cooper, will you let me look at those gorgeous eyes whenever I feel like it? Will you let me be the first thing you see in the morning? Will you let me stop them from crying? Will you laugh with me so I can watch them gleam with delight? Will you glower at me when I've unintentionally hurt you? Will you look at no one the way you look at me for the rest of our lives?" One knee of my dress slacks was nestled into the expensive decorative carpet of the restaurant.

Tears were running down her cheeks, over her smile.

Her hand shook in mine as I reached into my pocket.

The silver band was dressed in diamonds. A square cut gleamed in the light as Aubrey searched for the official question to answer.

"Aubrey, will you marry me?" I asked.

She looked into her lap like a million times before. Her black eyelashes now sleek and wet from the tears. Her cheeks flushed and she put her hands on my shoulders and leaned toward me.

She whispered the answer in my ear.

D-BLOCK
DAHVIN GREENFIELD

Listen:
my index fingers on the table -
tap, tap, tap -
sound like drum sticks.
Sit across from me.
Legs-crossed, I drum roll
on my sole with my indexes,
pointers, pointing at you.
Look at me.

Legs uncrossed, chin up,
hands scavenge front
pockets, I raise my right
eyebrow.
Yes?

Your eyes lower,
mine do too. Our
gaze meets beneath my desk,
above my untied sneakers, between
my ripped denim knee caps,
amongst the five-fingered
scavenger. One hand slips
out and skims my bangs.
You smile.

My pencil somersaults
and twists like a pole dancer
in the space
between my thumb and pointer.
You trace your palm's life-span
in red pen.

Class begins.

SNOWFLAKES

JESSICA SILVA

"S
ophie?"

A little girl with dark, curly hair blinked once. She did not dare look away from the window, where she watched every miniscule flake of snow flutter down from the clouds. Each piece of snow swayed from side to side before it settled down on the ground below. Though the old yellow grass was still visible next to the chalky black road, it seemed that the snow would blanket the floor in a matter of seconds. As one snowflake after another made its journey to the ground, the smile on Sophie's face grew.

"Sophie?" A tall man repeated himself. He reached over to place his heavy hand on Sophie's small shoulder. He brushed a few strands of her hair to the side and crouched next to her.

"Wook at the snow-fakes, Papa. Wook how many there are."

In the reflection of the clear window, Sophie's brown eyes lit up. She jabbed her finger against the window to point out the very obvious snowflakes, leaving a smudged fingerprint. The velvety green dress she wore imitated each movement she made as she danced back and forth along the windowsill.

The man said nothing in return, but rubbed his hand up and down Sophie's back. While she remained enthralled

by the soon-to-be winter wonderland, the man watched his little girl. His own brown eyes seemed dull and lifeless, even as he watched magic unfold before him.

At one point in time, his hair matched the color of Sophie's. It was as if someone had trekked through a field of coffee plants and collected only the darkest and richest of coffee beans, before crushing them all up and sprinkling them over Sophie and her father's heads. Now, the crisp brown had faded, and bits of gray hair took their place. Despite his weathered appearance, the man had barely made it through his thirties.

"Why don't we go upstairs and see Mama?"

"We can go see Mama?" Sophie's eyes tore away from the window and met her father's. "Mama woves snow-fakes!" As she spoke, her eyes continued to sparkle, and Sophie bounced up and down.

After standing back up and stretching his legs out, Sophie's father took her hand and led her to the staircase near the front door. The heels of her black leather dress shoes clicked on the hardwood floor with each step.

"We have to be quiet, though," Her father whispered. He put his index finger up to his lips and watched Sophie copy his simple movement. "Mama's still very tired."

Sophie's father let go of Sophie's hand when she reached for the handrail. She tried to wrap her hand around the railing, but it just lay on top since her hands were not big enough to reach all the way around. She put her left foot onto the first step, followed carefully by her right foot. Each time she advanced to a new step, Sophie's hand slid further upward on the handrail, keeping her balanced. Close behind, her father ascended the stairs at the same cautious pace.

Snowflakes

When they reached the top of the stairs, Sophie proudly turned around to smile at her father. Once she saw that he smiled back, she turned around and walked toward the closed door on the left of the hallway. Again, she looked back at her father for approval. He nodded, and Sophie pushed open the wooden door. The hinges creaked quietly, and light from the hallway spilled into the room.

On the bed against the wall to the right, a woman lay entangled in a mess of gray sheets and yellow blankets. Sophie tiptoed over to the edge of the bed and leaned over to tap the woman's arm.

"Mama?"

The woman's eyes fluttered open and a weak smile spread across her face. "Hello, angel," she said. She slowly hoisted herself up so she was leaning against the frame of the bed, and patted the blankets. "Come sit up here with Mama."

Sophie climbed onto the bed and nestled herself into the nook between her mother's arm and left side. Her mother, who was a pale woman with a number of faded freckles and soft green eyes, continued to smile. Her skin lay loosely over her body, allowing some of her bones to protrude.

"Mama, there's snow-fakes outside," Sophie said.

"Snowflakes already? Wow. Are they big ones or little ones?"

"Both!"

"Oh, my. I see they've come just in time for Christmas."

"Can Santa come if there's snow-fakes?" Concern fell

over Sophie's face. She looked up to her mother for a reassuring response.

"Of course, my little angel. Santa will always come, as long as you've been a good girl."

"I was good this year, right Mama?"

"Yes, you were," She smiled at Sophie, and looked over to her husband.

From the edge of the room, the tall man leaned against the doorframe. He watched his little girl settle in next to her fading mother. The bags under his eyes seemed dark and heavy. He did not smile.

"Papa, can we show Mama the snow-fakes?"

Sophie's father straightened up and walked toward the window across from the bed. "We sure can, Miss Soph." He pulled up the blinds on the window as he spoke.

The pale blue walls seemed nearly white in the newly present light. The sun was starting to get low in the sky, but the snow made it seem very bright out still. No one said anything, not even Sophie. In the time it had taken to come upstairs and into the small bedroom, the ground had become covered in a thin layer of snow. It shone from the ground and reflected the light off of the branches of the pine trees.

In bed, Sophie's mother shifted uncomfortably, disrupting the silence.

"Sophie, why don't we go back downstairs and let Mama have her rest?"

Sophie leaned into her mother's side and stretched one of her arms across her mother's stomach. "I want to stay

with Mama," she whined.

"Give Mama a big hug and a kiss goodnight."

Sophie hugged her mother tightly. Even with her short arms, Sophie could almost wrap them all the way around her mother's body. She held on for minutes, as her mother tried to hug her back with the same strength.

"It's time to go," Sophie's father continued.

Reluctantly, Sophie loosened her grip. She kneeled on the blankets and stretched up to give her mother a big kiss on the lips. Once she climbed off the bed, she walked toward the door. While she waited, she watched her father lean down to give her mother another big hug and a kiss on the lips as well. Seconds later, he joined Sophie next to the door. She was looking down at her black shoes, digging the toes into the floor.

"Hey, Sophie."

Sophie looked up at her mother.

"Those are the prettiest, and biggest snowflakes I've ever seen. Thank you for showing them to me. They'll always be my favorite."

As she held the bottom edges of her green dress, Sophie twirled from side to side and beamed a toothy smile at her mother. "Me too," she replied.

"I love you, Sophie."

"I wove you, Mama."

The Manatee

HAIKU
SUSAN GRANT

Sleeping buds awake
Ecstatic in their glory
Bursting into life



ROUNABOUT-ALORA HEFFERNAN

SALLIS, MISSISSIPPI

CYNTHIA ROBY

In Sallis, Miss. a girl could have a baby with her daddy. If she wants to. Mae Ellen did. Grown folks say the baby crazy, Mae Ellen say it just won't shut up. She gave it whiskey one time; it slept for two whole days. Mae Ellen did too. She was tired from bein' a mama. My cousin told me that. The baby's eyes be set real wide apart. Old folks say that's on account of the baby daddy bein' a drinkin' man. His head big too, cause it's filled up with the devil's thoughts. Incest babies be crazy evil, my cousin say.

In Sallis, Miss. a girl could have a boyfriend that was her uncle, too. If she wants to. Josephine did. Grown folks say that man a dog; that he needs a good killin'. My cousin say she seen the two of them in the Colored balcony at the picture show. He was touchin' and kissin' and feelin' Josephine up. She was all froze like a zombie, my cousin said. I don't know why Josie didn't like it. I mean, if somebody does it good and then buys you dresses and stuff like he do, you oughta smile.

In Sallis, Miss. a boy could do his business with a school teacher. If he wants to. Junebug did. Grown folks say he mannish, that he gets his way with women just like his daddy. But his daddy was shot dead in front o' ever'body outside the juke joint, on account of one of them women already havin' a man. That's what my cousin said, on account of she know ever'body's dirty laundry. But folks say Junebug be followin' his daddy footsteps. Do that mean he gonna' be shot dead too? It's done been rumored that he already got a baby by Miss Mae Ella. Don't do nuthin' for it. Can't do nuthin' for it. Just brags about being wit' women

folk. Yep, somebody's fo sho gonna shoot him up good 'n dead.

In Sallis, Miss. a man can whoop up on a woman. If he wants to. And can't nobody say nothing 'bout what they seent. Mr. Cleon did it. Grown folks say it's grown folks business and some women don't ack right. Mr. Cleon's wife, she gots lazy one time and didn't have his white shirt ironed. He beat her with the ironing board. Her face swole up real bad, like the bees done had at her, and she didn't leave the house for a month. When her face looked good again, she shot him up four times then wrapped the iron cord round his neck. She made him dead. Then she run off from Sallis, Miss. wit' a high-yella man that treat her right. My cousin say that that man was waitin' in his car the whole time she was givin' Mr. Cleon a killin'. Ain't nobody seed her since. Ain't nobody tellin' if they did.

In Sallis, Miss. a girl sometimes just needs to git on. If she hafta. All this incest, cheatin', beatin', killin' and grown folks rigmarole. That's 'xactly what my cousin say: rigmarole. She left and gone to Memphis last month. Already she know people and all 'bout what they doing. Mama say I have to git on too, on account of Mr. Wheeler. He be the old man who work at the cemetery. Gave me a pearl necklace and then did his grown folks business on top o' me. He grunted a lot and he smelled bad, too. Like old people and tobacco snuff. I wanted him to hurry up and finish sos I could breathe. But I had my fingers on my pearl necklace the whole time. It's pretty fo sho. I hafta ax my cousin if she thanks it be real.

I'm pregnant now. In Sallis, Miss., young girls hafta git on when they bellies swell. Otherwise, you can't get no husband on account of you been ruined, like Mae Ellen.

"So long, Sallis, Miss." That's 'xactly what my cousin said when she gots on that Greyhound bus.

CONTRIBUTORS

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JOANN CHANEY is just wrapping up her senior year at SNHU. She's majoring in Creative Writing, and plans to move on to an MFA program in the spring. She is a writer, and hopes to one day write fiction full time. Her work is represented by Kirsten Neuhaus Literary Agency, and her novel SECRET HEART is currently out on submission to publishers.

CHERYL NELSON-OBRIEN is a senior at SNHU, majoring in Creative Writing & English.

TANYA COLUMB is a senior in the undergraduate education program. She loves writing and reading poetry because the feelings behind the words are universal. This is the first time she is submitting her work to this Literary Journal.

BRYNN GESTEWITZ is a PhD candidate in the field of International Business at SNHU, with a specialization in International Strategy. While she loves the study of business, Brynn is eclectic in her outside activities and finds writing poetry to be a much needed release from stress. She feels it is important to engage both the logical left and the creative right sides of the brain for balance and stability in the everyday entanglements of life. Aside from creative writing, Brynn enjoys painting, singing, and spending time with family. Brynn has been previously published in the Henniker Review and is currently in the process of co-authoring an International Strategy textbook with members of the International Business Department.

Contributors

COLLEEN DECOURCY is a sophomore this year at Southern New Hampshire University. She is a Creative Writing major.

SUSAN GRANT is a full time commuter student here at SNHU. She is in her second year (Sophomore) and is a Graphic Design major. Inspired into creative writing last year, she is currently finishing up a Fiction Writing workshop and will be taking the Non-Fiction Writing workshop in the Spring session... just loving it!

CYNTHIA ROBY is a Creative Writing - English major (online, semester 5). Her goal is to earn an MFA in creative writing, teach at the university level, and publish her work.

MEGAN KIDDER is a junior in the Creative Writing program here at SNHU. She is also co-editor in chief of SNHU's newspaper.

STEPHEN LOWTHER is a Junior Creative Writing - English Major. He likes long walks on the beach after reading "Nausea" by Camus, and sparring with inflatable weapons (or dolls). He is also possessed by an intergalactic traveler named "Bob". That is all.

CODY PAUL is a freshmen and a creative writing major.

CASSANDRA SHAWVER is a Creative Writing Major at SNHU. She is a sophomore at SNHU, and as her piece will show you, she's greatly involved with animals (she has about 25 pets, mostly farm animals), and she especially loves the alpacas.

BRANDON BARNEY is a Creative Writing/Literature dual major in his Junior year, enrolled in the 3-2 program. He is one of the co-editors (in training) for The Manatee, and is a book reviewer for goodbookalert.blogspot.com

DAHVIN GREENFIELD is a freshman Creative Writing major.

He attended a boarding school for the arts - Walnut Hill - in Natick, MA, sophomore through senior year as a writing and publishing major. Even though he had three straight years of intense training in all genres of writing, he still loves it and cannot wait to learn more! This past season he was a screenplay judge for the NH Film Festival and plans to be one again for this year.

ANDREA THOMAS, a soon to be graduate with a degree in history. When she is not reading or watching every movie she can get her hands on she is playing with her dog, Sirius Black.

JESSICA SILVA is a big-hearted, animal-loving, music and thunderstorm enthusiast who loves to travel. She is also a sophomore in the Creative Writing program at SNHU. As far back as she can remember, she's always loved to write. It's one of the very few things she has been able to picture herself doing for the rest of her life. Sometimes her writing reflects certain parts of her life, and sometimes the stories and characters are simply creations of her mind.

LAURELYN ESTES is a senior studying Creative Writing. She is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta, the New Hampshire Writers' Project, and Romance Writers of America.

ALORA HEFFERNAN is a senior in the Creative Writing program at SNHU. This is her third and final year as a contributor to *The Manatee*. She recently discovered the joy of photography while satisfying her love of travel in Europe.

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