

The Mantees

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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 Liberal Arts.

Visit www.the-manatee.net for information, submission guidelines, and news. We also sell past and present issues there for sublimely eccentric prices.

The Manatees

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Editor's Note

The Manatee is two! Finally, it's reaching the age where it doesn't soil itself anymore, and has now taken to scribbling all over the walls with permanent markers and smashing our fine china. Before we know it, our little literary magazine will be stealing our cars to go out drinking and bringing home pierced, chain-smoking girlfriends we disapprove of. Such is life.

The number of submissions this year dwarfed last year's—which at the time seemed pretty intimidating—and again we were forced to reject a lot of good work even as we crammed more pages into the book to accommodate it. I think you'll appreciate the work we did this year, as we have some pieces of writing and photography here that truly kick ass, from Mayra Gomez's plunge into the mind of a killer in "Calculated" to Mckendy Fils-Aimé's epic meditation on blood in "Heritage," Dillon St. Jean's absurdly entertaining "Catapultboy," and Melissa Hurley's subtle "Cold Chai" (winning story in *Amoskeag's* SNHU Student Writing Contest).

Within this book you'll find the following phrases: "She has the best shirt potatoes I have ever seen," "Boneless, Homeless, and Friendly," "Dr. Paul J. LeBlanc, pan-dimensional devourer of galaxies," "many older crones did I attract," "sp4rked a phat blunt," and "I am determined to slice off the part of me that makes me a man." You'll just have to read on if you ever want to get your head around those.

I owe thanks to several people in the SNHU community. *The Manatee's* faculty advisor and patron saint, Professor Diane Les Becquets, consistently goes to heroic lengths to clear a path to publication for us, and this year, with the help of President LeBlanc, she somehow procured a budget for us out of *literally nowhere*. I don't want to know how she did it, but I'm grateful. Professor Tracy Dow lent her time and Graphic Design expertise to help us make the book not look like ass. Professor Allison Cummings, editor of *The Manatee's* BFF journal *Amoskeag*, showed me everything I needed to know about editing a magazine. Every artist and editorial board member deserves a round of applause, but Dillon St. Jean deserves special thanks for producing this year's majestic cover (plus the sketches) on a ludicrously unfeasable emergency timetable. And for going well out of her way to get these books ordered year after year, I want to thank Jackie Hickox in SLA.

Since I'll be graduating this May, this will be my last year as editor. I pass *The Manatee* into the capable and farm-worn hands of freshman Nicole Escobar, who has been an enormous help this year in doing all the work I didn't want to do. I know there'll be a hell of a book to read in 2010, and I for one am looking forward to picking it up.

- Ian Nicholas

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Calculated

Mayra Gomez

I'm a simple man. I do not have an eye for anything remotely creative. Everything to me is effortless; I could gun down a man in public without my temples pulsing.

My mother and father, if I can paint this picture correctly, looked like a married couple out of Pleasantville. Not only do I want to note the similarity in appearance, I also want to say that they did live their lives by fifties standards. Except of course that my mother worked as a nurse. Other than that, my father was a general surgeon who worked alongside my mother. Or if I want to keep the idea going, *she* worked alongside my father.

As they worked, I would spend my evenings after school at home alone. Even though my parents insisted, at the age of seven, I did not believe in babysitters. So, each evening that I was without my parents, I would imagine what it was like for my father to perform surgeries on sleeping bodies. Of course I never believed he ever had more fun with them than I did. I was a spoiled child, so when my father brought me home the photos of the bodies lying on the tables exposed, it was just another way of saying I love you. Of course it didn't matter that these pictures were invading people's privacy, and I'm sure against the law, because my parents just convinced themselves I would grow up to be just like them. I would save lives one day, not take them.

As I gathered up the photos and laid them out on my bed, I always imagined myself standing over the bodies in

the pictures, carefully carving away at their exterior flesh with my fingers. Then ruthlessly I would play with their insides. I was careful to enjoy the touch of each organ. There were not that many, because I never liked to go below the liver and stomach. I held no desire for intestines, or an appendix and colon. But, the lungs were my favorite. The fact that they were beneath the rib cage excited me. I loved the idea of breaking the ribs in order to reach what was beneath them. However, as a child it would piss me off when I thought I could not hold the lungs in my hands like I wanted to, because air would make them move. I only favored them when they were still. I went through a stage where I would picture taking a knife to every breathing human. You would think the heart would bother me as well, but that never worried me. If they aren't breathing, then their heart will not beat.

I grew out of my stage of rage, but my love for the human anatomy grew deeper. I focused solely on the insides of people. Of course in the beginning, I had only my mother to turn my attention to, because I wasn't the type of child to concern myself with friends. I never understood why people looked to create that kind of relationship with a stranger. Then again, I could hardly live up to the standards of the fifties, where I was supposed to be the perfect child, with his hair combed over, his clothes ironed, and who ate a breakfast of waffles, eggs, bacon, sausage, and toast which was prepared by his perfectly polished mother. However, if you've forgotten, my mother had a job, a job that paid for my corn flakes. But, before I met my perfect match, my mother was my first love and it didn't matter to me that she didn't stay in her place at home.

I followed her almost everywhere she went. I would be by her side while she conversed with neighbors, went over patient notes, and I stuck especially close while she bathed. Starting at the age of two and until I was five years old, she would bring me into the shower with her. She would massage shampoo into my hair, and as it sat, she would begin to wash her own. Then, she would return to me and rinse the shampoo out. A silent warmth would grow in my chest every time she was careful with her hands. She always made sure they were there to block the water from running down my opened eyes. I also recall that they were never rough with my skin, but delicate as they lathered me in soap. After our shower, she would have us step out, as she refilled the tub with warm suds. I would then sit across from her, my tush floating slightly above the plastic. She read me children's stories in the bath, and I would grow jealous of my mother. It wasn't a negative jealousy, but an appreciative one. She had ageless skin that even the water couldn't wrinkle, and she was a woman. Her breasts were carefully constructed to fit her small frame. And as I think of her vagina, slowly shifting below the bath water, I am determined to slice off the part of me that makes me a man.

But as I grew older, I studied my mother enough to get my father's attention. He found out that on days he was away, my mother and I would spend the night together. "Sleepovers" she called them when he confronted her about it. But he wasn't fond of his son admiring his own mother. He worried she was keeping me too close. He didn't believe mother and son should be best friends. I knew this because he battled these worries with my mother at night in their bedroom. This didn't leave any marks on me as a person,

and I continued doing these things with my mother all the way through high school. But it stopped after my senior year of high school because I had gone away to attend college, and when I returned I moved out and began working. My mother and I just faded. And then, a few months after my twenty-eighth birthday, I met Grecian.

Stephen Grecian was his full name, and I have to say we never actually met. I had been working at the hospital for about two years as a general surgeon, and the privacy of others was still ignored by my co-workers and me, as we exchanged details on patients. It was the fifth of August when my fellow co-worker spoke to me about Grecian's health. "Superior health," he said. "That man won't die for years." Those words, although I'd heard them before, never caught my ear as they did then. Maybe it was because that week, I had been growing annoyed with bodies coming in and out of my operating room needing to be fixed. I began to hate the entire purpose of my job. So I couldn't help but begin to imagine what his insides must feel like.

So, after gathering more personal information, I stood on the corner of his building, yes, *his* very own building, and waited for him there. I wanted to put a face on this superior healthy being. *The Daily* newspaper described the business owner as callous. Oh how my love grew deeper then. The article went on,

This morning, Stephan Grecian and Saint Anne's Orphanage closed the deal that will give Grecian ownership of the decaying building. Orphanages in East County that are already overcrowded are taking in all the orphans. Grecian has not commented on his vision for the newly bought building. However, we do know that he does not plan to rebuild or fix it for all those children.

I was in love with the man that was just like me: a simple, cold man. My mother would be proud, because I followed him as closely as I had once followed her. I waited in the background of his life for three years as he worked and slept. He was rather boring, but it was the healthy meals that kept me near him, and the working-out. Oh yes, the way he would sweat after he had disciplined his body made me want to pull out the pulsing veins in his neck. So I continued to stalk him and dream about him. But there came the day that my dreams were not enough, and I began to feel the reality of the distance between us. So I took it into my own hands to make sure that he knew what my hands felt like inside his skin.

I chose to do it when I felt I would have the energy to tackle a man of his stature. I didn't want to feel myself breaking a sweat or trying too hard. Staying in control was crucial. I soiled a washcloth with chloroform and walked up behind him on a Saturday night after eight. I followed him five minutes down the road from his building to his apartment. As he reached into his pocket for his keys, I slipped quickly behind him. I pressed one hand firmly on his left shoulder, pushing him onto his knees, while my other hand gripped his face. The chloroform dripped down my palm and into his mouth.

I dragged him into his apartment before any old ladies decided to peek through their blinds. However, I didn't worry too much over the idea that someone would see me; the neighborhood had a fashion of being in bed and asleep by seven thirty. After dragging him past the hallway entrance and into the kitchen, I was surprised to find I wasn't

quite as exhausted as I'd expected to be, and so I proceeded to lay him down on the kitchen table.

In order to fulfill an old childhood fantasy, I split Grecian's neck open with the careful use of a scalpel. Initially that killed him. At that moment, I remembered the way my father used to spoil me, but when I became too close with my mother, he would look at me as if there was something wrong with me. Something he couldn't quite touch, something so deep inside that he could only reach it by first cutting me up with his scissors. Of course he always dismissed it, because my mother always made the argument that there was nothing wrong with a boy that was just a tad more feminine than usual. Just like there was nothing wrong with being a working mother in the fifties. "We aren't the poster family, love," she'd always say. "We aren't the Parker family."

I had been caught up for so long in this memory that I nearly forgot about Grecian's body lying before me. When his anatomy came back into view, I began to feel anxious, nervous over the sudden thought that I wasn't going to go on. But, I was pleased to realize it was only a quick period of insanity as I cut open his chest cavity.

I slowly peeled back the thick layers of skin on each side. There in front of me, his bare insides glared. I took a hammer and slammed into his shiny white-boned ribs. I let the pieces fall onto his organs. But, as I reached for the lungs, I saw that his insides resembled the torn up, messy family portrait above my fireplace. The stomach was made up of what looked like dead worms. The intestines had turned almost unrecognizable, with only a few ripples still twisting about. I had shattered the ribs, instead of carefully

chipping away at them. I hadn't even placed my left hand underneath the bones to catch them before they fell onto the lungs. So now the lungs were punctured and bleeding out. White fragments floated along in the red river.

As the memory replayed in my mind, the complexity of the heart began to make itself known. It lay in the stranger's body, distant and unmoving. And although I had fantasized about what his organs would feel like in my palms and between my fingers, I dared not touch them, because that was when I realized Grecian wasn't callous or simple, at least not like I was. Instead he was human, full of reasons why he turned out the way he did.

The Only Beautiful Thing

Alicia Beane

For my sister Danielle

You paint a pretty picture
Just like you paint your wooden face
So in colorful disguises
You can hide the truth.
The truth,
I know
Better than a brush stroke,
That you looked at her,
Your masterpiece,
And walked away
But not before tearing at it
Spitting, cursing,
Splattering it with black paint
Until you made her unrecognizable.
Oh, did I see you smile?
What have you done?
You destroyed the only
Beautiful thing you've ever had.
And your jealousy
And embarrassment
That you could never add
Up to her
Made your eyes to stones
And your heart to glass.
One day it will smash! smash! smash!
When you look inside yourself

And see the abstract in you—
The terrible, twisted truth—
That without you
She became more beautiful.
She took that mess you
Gave her and
With some paint,
 Some love,
 Some glue,
Restored herself,
Became brand new,
And she is the better one
 Because she got away from you.

"Days of Summer" by Amanda Walley



The Old Man

Kevin Woods

As Jimmy washed his hands, he shook his head at the new automatic sinks that had been installed at the Crown Bar. *What a load of shite. We managed just fine by turning the tap on and off in my day*, he thought. Shaking his hands of the excess water, he glanced up at his appearance in the mirror before him. A seventy-three-year-old man with a thick white moustache and ruddy complexion, wearing a green sweater-vest and white polo shirt, looked back at him. Straightening his hair carefully he gave himself a wink and a wry smile. “You’ve still got it, pal,” he said.

Jimmy ambled toward his usual table in the back corner of the dimly lit room. It was just after six o’clock on Friday and the place was already busy with people enjoying shaking off the shackles of work. He stood still for a moment basking in the atmosphere of the packed pub. He loved the steady thrum of conversation, the clinking of glasses being picked up and set down, and the laughter emanating from various spots throughout the place. People were enjoying their poison of choice with many puffing away on cigarettes or cigars, creating a thick layer of smoke that loitered around the ceiling of the establishment. Jimmy took a deep inhale, allowing his nostrils to fill with the wonderful aroma of the alcohol mingled with the smoke, before letting out a long satisfied sigh and moving on.

He approached the round table where his friends Tommy and Bill were still sitting talking animatedly and sipping at their beers. Tommy was short and chubby with

rosy cheeks and a shiny bald head. Jimmy often told him that his diminished eyesight was a direct result of being subjected to the glare of the thing. Bill on the other hand was reasonably tall but had a rather pronounced hunch and never left the house without his trademark porkpie hat. Bill thought the hat made him look distinguished. Jimmy thought it made him look like a tit but was glad he wore it if only for the comedy value.

"So, how did it go, Jimmy boy?" asked Tommy, turning to face him as he approached.

"Mission accomplished, captain," Jimmy replied, standing to attention, his hand shooting to his forehead in a dignified salute. "The snake is drained, and I am ready for another pint."

"Snake's drained my arse," said Bill, thrusting an accusing finger at Jimmy. "You were in there for damn near ten minutes."

"So?" said Jimmy.

"So . . . you were clearly carvin' up some furniture, weren't you," said Bill.

"What are you bletherin' on about now, you old woman . . . carvin' up what?" said Jimmy, a scowl spreading across his face.

"Carving up a couple of stools you old bastard!" shouted Bill, breaking into a fit of laughter. Jimmy and Tommy joined in, Jimmy giving Bill a playful hit across the back of the head before sinking into his seat at the worn oak table.

It was always the same with Bill and Tommy. Jokes and banter aplenty. They had all been friends since before Jimmy could remember, born and raised in Perth on the same block

as each other. They'd gone to school together, worked together down the coal mine before retirement, and had been coming to the Crown together for nigh on forty-five years.

"Right, who's ready for another one before Bill slays us with any more of his razor sharp wit," asked Jimmy. The other two nodded in unison. *Bloody hell, you don't have to offer these two a free pint twice*, he thought as he signalled to Jill the barmaid, who bustled over to them, weaving through the clutter of bodies and chairs.

"What can I get you fine gents?" asked Jill, sweeping her long blonde hair out of her blue eyes with a graceful flick of her left hand and flashing a dazzling smile.

"Could I trouble you for two pints of velvet and a pint of bitter, my dear?" Jimmy asked.

"Of course, Jim, it would be no trouble at all."

"You're a star, sweetheart."

"And you are just the nicest old gent in here, Jim."

"I try, darling, I try," replied Jim, theatrically waving the compliment off. The old men watched Jill walk away as she fought her way back over to the bar to get them their drinks.

"Do you know what I love the most about Jill?" asked Tommy as Jill disappeared behind the bar. The other two looked over at him. "She has the best shirt potatoes I have ever seen. I mean seriously superb top balls."

"She does that, Tommy my lad, but I'm going to have to disagree with you and give my vote to her arse," said Jimmy glancing over his shoulder to see if Jill was on her way back yet. "I'm telling you, you could crack a walnut on that thing. Honestly, if I was ten years younger I'd be climbing all over

it.” The laughter subsided just as Jill returned to the table carrying their drinks on a round black tray.

“There we go, gents,” she said, placing each drink down in front of its respective owner.

“You are an angel, my dear,” thanked Jimmy.

“And you are truly a group of lovely men,” she replied giving them a cheerful wave as she went to deal with more thirsty customers.

The hours rolled on and soon empty pint glasses dominated the circular table that hosted the three old men. Jimmy looked around the small smoky pub and noticed the numbers of patrons was dwindling. Pulling out his reading glasses Jimmy squinted at the gold wrist watch he’d been presented upon retirement, trying to make out the hands. *Quarter of eleven . . . well I suppose the fun’s got to end sometime.*

*

Jimmy stood before the cobbled path that led to his front door.

“All right lads, remember, game faces on, and same again tomorrow night,” Jimmy said. With a nod and a brief wave the other two departed. The cold night air washed over Jimmy as he traversed the small distance to the front door and entered. He carefully took off his black lace-up shoes and placed them in the rack before making his way to the kitchen. As he had expected, his wife was wearing her thick purple housecoat and sitting at the kitchen table, her steel-grey hair up in rollers. She began drumming her fingers on the table as he walked in.

“So what time do you call this?” she demanded.

"Well, darling, you see, Tommy was feeling a wee bit down. He's been having some trouble with the missus," replied Jimmy, allowing a sombre expression to spread across his features and adopting a soft tone befitting of a funeral. "He wanted to stay and talk, and I just didn't feel right leaving him there to drink alone." He cast his eyes down to the floor and stooped his head hoping this would convey a sense of regret and melancholy. Chancing a furtive look up at his wife he saw her expression soften.

"Oh, Jim," she said. "All you do is think about other people. You're a good man."

"I try, darling, I try," said Jimmy, pulling her up from the chair and into a gentle embrace. Pressing home his advantage, he continued, "Unfortunately, I think Tommy's going to want some company again tomorrow. It's not easy being a good friend. He could talk the hind leg off a donkey, that man."

"Yes dear, of course. If you must, you must."

Jimmy caught his reflection in the kitchen window as he hugged his wife. He gave himself a wink. *You've still got it, pal.*

Breathing

Joshua Dick

As a kid he tried to match his mother's breathing. After a nightmare or during a lazy Sunday afternoon he'd lay next to her while she was sleeping, and then mimic her breathing pattern. He watched her sternum rise and made his do the same. Rise, fall. Rise, fall. He believed this would connect them. The breathing, he assumed, would confuse the Spirit, keeping it from taking her. The boy thought that shared breathing would result in shared souls and that He would be forced to take both instead of one. Sadly, this did not work and he was left breathing in her pattern.

Now, when his daughter runs to him in the night, afraid of the monsters under her bed, he listens. He listens even after she is asleep to match his breathing to hers. If she should die before she wakes, he prayed the Lord *his* soul to take. This time the trick worked. The daughter was left to breathe in her own rhythm.

Bullies

Mckendy Fils-Aimé

They ride on the backs of giant doves,
clip their wings and watch them
dive earthward.

They're like fleas nestled in between
hairs, waiting to disease jump onto
someone.

In these halls, they live paraphrased existences.
They read after-school specials like they're acrostic,
trying to find epiphanies in between breaks.
Such is expected from mongrels of earth, the
seeds of criminals.

They've lived in homes with backhanded
"I love yous" and dream of absentee fathers.
Good childhoods hide under their beds, like
kind monsters, like bogeymen of serenity.

They've forgotten the rules of nature: that some
creatures are bound to live in mud.
Do not let the stagnation of your heartbeat
try to tame these birds.
While you keep yourself in filth, others search
for sky puzzles.
That is their fate.
It's not your right to stop them from flying.

Dissonance

Myriam Labbe

Alanis's voice was like the palm she was pressing secretly into Anne's hand. Her warm soprano wrapped itself around Anne's alto, singing the harmony of the song they had written with such sweetness that Anne felt her heart twist. Anne's palm opened. She entwined her fingers around Alanis's hand and her voice around the descant. Alanis's voice skipped upward by thirds, Anne's following it, like a girl chasing a butterfly. Both girls closed their eyes in the pleasure of the song and of the feel of their hands together.

Jeremy, who had been singing the tenor part behind them, stopped and made a small choking noise. Anne and Alanis continued on for a few bars before realizing what had happened. Anne dropped Alanis's hand like it was a lit coal. But it was too late—the damage had been done. Jeremy stormed off the stage and out of the lecture hall, not even pausing by his chair to collect his notebooks. Professor Cooper and the rest of the class stared at the two girls in shock. Whispers fluttered like moths around the hall.

"I'm going to check on him," Anne whispered and stepped off the stage, leaving Alanis exposed up front.

"Jeremy!" she called as soon as she was out of the lecture hall. She looked around frantically. She had a hunch that he would be heading toward the Conservatory's main auditorium to listen to the violins, so she went to the right and jogged out of the building toward the back of campus.

She plowed through the doors of the music hall and took the stairs to the balcony two at a time.

As she expected, Jeremy was standing near the edge of the balcony, toying with the necklace she had given him and appearing half-absorbed in the sounds of the string orchestra below that was practicing the opening movement of Beethoven's *Ninth*.

"Jeremy," she said, taking a step forward.

He turned toward her, his eyes clouded over. "Why didn't you tell me?" he whispered.

"Because I didn't want to hurt you," Anne said, tucking a strand of brown hair behind her ear. She heard the orchestra below beginning the first few notes of the movement, soft at first.

"And you don't call this being hurt?" he said sarcastically, still keeping his voice low enough so that Anne had to strain to hear him over the swelling music. Anne wished that Jeremy was the type to yell and scream instead of being the calm-voiced man that he was now. Maybe then she would be less afraid to touch him, to whisper how sorry she was. But the words wouldn't come. "Professor Cooper wants you to come back to finish the song with us," Anne said lamely.

Jeremy turned away. "No. I don't care if we get an F. I'm not going back there." His fingers went to the clasp of his necklace. He pulled it off and handed it to Anne, the ends swinging free. "Take it," he said, and clomped down the stairs.

Anne fingered the Celtic knot pendant as she walked back toward Professor Cooper's class. She thought about her and Jeremy. How could she have allowed herself to get this

involved with a man she barely loved and doubted that she ever could? It had been a year and a half since he had smiled at her across the hallway at school, one year since they had gotten involved, and nine months since she had felt anything remotely close to resembling love or passion for him in her heart. She had fallen for him because of his smile at first, which was as infectious as a child's. She had felt butterflies in her stomach those first few weeks. But those butterflies had evaporated as the months wore on. They had kissed, made love, chatted half-casually about marriage, but Anne couldn't bring herself to admit that she didn't love Jeremy. Yet she forced herself to believe that the rapidly cooling affection she felt was really true love, and went through the motions of being a girlfriend. Someday, she had promised herself, she would get the courage to break up with him. If not today, then the next day, or the next.

But there was one thing she could not deny—her love for Alanis.

Anne had always been attracted to girls subconsciously but tried to squash the feeling by dating boys. Anne didn't even remember why Alanis had caught her eye to begin with, but Anne knew that the feeling she had this time was different. This feeling didn't limp along like a whipped puppy. This feeling came charging in like a bull mastiff and settled itself comfortably somewhere in the middle of her heart. Alanis had long, dark hair which she usually kept braided down her back and exuded a kind of confidence about her sexuality that Anne found herself drawn to almost immediately. Alanis ignored the jeers of the freshmen boys sitting on the stone wall near the student center and walked

past with her head held high while Anne followed, hunched over like she was ready to melt into the ground. When they kissed for the first time, Anne had felt the sparks. Anne had found herself continually lying to Jeremy about the time she and Alanis spent together, insisting that they were “just friends” when in reality they had become lovers. Jeremy had accepted Anne’s explanations with no hint of skepticism, which had made Anne feel terrible. But there was no denying the fact that Anne loved Alanis like she couldn’t with Jeremy.

Anne went back into the lecture hall and sat next to Alanis, who had yielded the stage to a trio of brunette girls. The girls were singing a dizzying, fast-paced song that was leaving all of them breathless with ridiculously fast quarter rests and eighth notes. Anne felt her eyelids twitch in pain as their voices rose higher and higher before they spun off into sudden silence. Light, scattered applause followed.

“What did you do?” Alanis whispered into Anne’s ear.

Anne said nothing but placed the pendant firmly into Alanis’s hands. The antiqued silver color seemed wrong for Alanis’s milky coffee-colored skin. Alanis tried to press the pendant back into Anne’s hands but Anne crossed her arms over her chest and shook her head.

“It’s over,” said Anne, trying to keep the tears from spilling out.

Alanis sighed and brushed aside Anne’s hair from the nape of her neck. Tenderly she fastened Jeremy’s pendant around Anne’s neck. Anne left it there, too discouraged to push it aside. They listened to the rest of the songs in silence.



"Thumbelina's View" by Alicia Beane

Flame

Heidi Cruz

People usually cry at their spouse's funeral. I did not. Actually, my dear Matt had been cremated, and I imagined how the flames must have licked up, rising higher as his body fed the fire. I was not one to cry in public, not even at the memorial service for the man I had loved. Our life together had been intertwined with horses, even from the moment we had met. Even in the moment of his death, nearly all the events of our lives, both the happy and sad, had been connected somehow to the animal that had captivated our hearts, goals, and dreams.

Thinking of the flames reminds me of the first time we met fifteen years earlier. It was at the Arabian breeding farm where he was a trainer and I had just been hired as a lowly stable hand at the magnificent Moonlight Arabians Breeding Farm. All day I was mucking stalls, sweeping, feeding the horses, rotating them in the stalls, cleaning tack, or getting one horse or another ready for the trainers. By the end of each day I was sweaty, my blond hair clung to my dirt smeared face, and my jeans and plaid shirt were decorated with horse dirt, slime, stall shavings, and even manure.

The problem in Matt's string of horses that he was training was a four-year-old chestnut stallion that had been named Rain Lightning's Flame, called Flame for short. He was a handful, a willful, spirited young stallion that was ready to challenge anyone or anything, including older stallions if the chance ever came. He fought to keep any form of tack against his body, and seemed just about deter-

mined to kill any trainer that even tried to bring a bridle or saddle anywhere near his body. His last trainer had been gravely injured, from what I had heard from some of the other stable hands talking. I was a young nobody at seventeen years of age who still had to prove I could train horses. I had been ordered to stay away from Flame. The owner Michael Stone had told me Flame “is more than you can handle, Brittany.” Yet I knew I could tame him, even if it was just by a bit. I knew I at least could gain his trust.

It started off innocently enough, with me giving him treats, which he eagerly accepted and showed gratitude for by blowing softly out of his nose. I never came to his stall or stall with a crop, or anything that was meant to go on a horse. He liked that I was gentle and quiet and that I never tried to do anything to him. It was hard, sneaking around to spend time with him, because if I was caught I would put my job in jeopardy, and I desperately needed the job. I lived in a small cottage on the outskirts of the property; I had left home, and had no desire to return where my parents would ridicule me for failure and to tell me that I should give up on my horse dream.

“That’s a good boy,” I said to Flame. He stood perfectly still as I slowly opened up his stall door. It was the first time I had attempted to go into the stall with him. I had bits of apple in my pocket, and he smelled them because I saw his lip quivers in anticipation.

He seemed interested that I was going into his stall, but he wasn’t agitated as when other people, including Matt, went into his stall. I knew Flame had been agitated greatly that day, because Matt had tried to get him to accept the bit, which Flame had violently fought against being in his

mouth. He had succeeded, because fifteen minutes later, Matt had returned him to his stall with a defeated look on his face.

"That's a good boy," I said to him again, closing the door behind me. "See? No bridle, not even a halter. I just want to pet you; you'll like that won't you?"

Flame's ears pricked in the direction of my voice. He seemed calmed by it, so I decided to keep on talking as I proceeded to rub my hands all over his body. I wanted him to know he could trust me even more, trust my touch.

"You're scared of tack, aren't you? You never had anyone to care about you specifically. They don't understand why you're scared. I don't really know either, but I do know that if someone would just spend enough time with you and gain your complete trust, you wouldn't be so scared when they approached you with a bridle or saddle. You might be scared, but you wouldn't run away, because you'd know that person loved you and would never hurt you." I placed my hands on his neck.

I ran my hands over his neck, toward his chest, sides, and his back. I rubbed him in small circular motions with my finger tips, and I could tell he was starting to relax. His head began to droop downwards, his ears still pricked toward my voice. It was a magical moment, because I had gained his trust, I believed I could eventually bring him to accept tack and a rider, even if it did take a while.

Suddenly Flame's ears pricked forward, and I was immediately alert. I heard the voices of Matt and Mr. Stone outside the barn. They were talking softly, but I could still hear what they were saying, especially since it was dead

quiet in the barn while most of the other horses were chewing their hay or dozing off.

"You were highly recommended," Mr. Stone was saying to Matt, "and you have done a wonderful job training the horses so far, except for Flame. He has made no progress at all. He has good bloodlines; I intended to use him as a future breeding stallion. Unless he proves himself in the show ring, what good will he be? Nobody wants to breed their mares to a crazed stallion that has never been ridden or in the show ring. I assigned you to train him because I believed you could. Should I begin to look for a new trainer for him?"

"No, Mr. Stone," Matt replied. "I can train him with a little more time. Perhaps a few more weeks will bring a change between us. It has been a short while yet, I need to gain his trust more. I think I rushed him when I was trying to get him to take the bit and bridle today. What I'm saying, sir, is that Flame's training will take much more time than I originally anticipated." His voice seemed to become softer toward the end.

"So!" I whispered to Flame. "The fools realize at last that Matt cannot train you without gaining your total trust! But what Mr. Stone doesn't know is that you already trust me. He wants you in the ring or out competing in endurance races as soon as you're properly trained. What a pair we could make!"

Flame had one ear pricked toward me, the other toward the barn door where the voices had been coming from. I heard the sound of boots on cobblestones, and I assumed that both Matt and Mr. Stone had departed. Suddenly Flame

snorted, and the barn door slid open, and the light above Flame's door became a spotlight. I had been caught by Matt.

Flame's irritation or fear of Matt was greater than ever, and he immediately began to panic, rushing toward his stall door and back again. I tried to stay out of his way, but he ended up stepping on my foot. I cried out, as he put his full weight down, and I pushed against him. He moved over, and I was able to pull my foot free. Flame was sweating, his ears pushed back and his teeth bared.

"Get out of there quick, you idiot!" Matt said to me, grabbing a halter. "I'll try to restrain him."

"No I won't," I said to Matt, putting a hand out to touch Flame's neck. "You don't need to do anything for me or to Flame. I am perfectly capable of getting this horse calmed down and exiting the stall myself."

"What the hell did you do to him?" Matt demanded, still holding the halter where Flame could clearly see it. "He was freaking out! Still is!"

"I haven't done anything to him," I replied, starting to massage Flame with the circular motion of my hands again. "It's whatever you did to him today, or tried to force him to do. Apparently he's afraid of you and hasn't forgiven you for whatever you've done. Now put that halter away and step away from the stall. I'll get Flame calmed down and come out after that. Then I want to talk to you."

Matt was a young man, probably around twenty-three, and I could tell he probably wasn't used to being told what to do by a young woman. Begrudgingly he put the halter back on its hook and backed away toward the other end of the barn. The further away Matt was, the calmer Flame became, but he remained alert.

"That's a good boy, Flame," I crooned to him, giving him the apples from my pocket, which he quickly accepted, one of his ears still pointed in Matt's direction.

I opened the stall door just enough for me to squeeze through, just in case Flame tried to make a great escape. I backed out and closed his stall door and bolted it. Flame walked up toward the door and put his head over and rubbed his nose against my shoulder. I rubbed his forehead as he dribbled apple juice over my shoulder.

"Stay there and be quiet, Flame. I'll bring more tomorrow." I quietly walked down toward the back aisle of the barn where Matt stood near the tack room.

Matt was sitting down on a bale of hay which had been left near the doorway, with his hands on his head, staring down onto the floor. Though it was dark in the barn, there was enough light coming from the windows and the light down the aisle to see he had a look of both astonishment and puzzlement.

I had never formally met him, and had only seen him about. I had gotten a few of his horses ready a couple of times, but other than that I had never exchanged more than a few words over which horse I should have ready next. There was an awkward silence as I stood there, waiting for him to say something.

"How the hell did you ever get that stallion to stand so calmly for you?" he finally asked. "I've been trying different stuff for weeks, and nothing helped. He freaked out every time he saw any piece of tack coming toward him. He's edgy and hardly even tolerates me touching him. But here you are sneaking around the barn in the middle of the night and have him as tamed as a housecat."

"Maybe he likes women better," I said sarcastically, picking bits of hay off of my shirt.

"Damn, I'm being serious here! How did you do that?"

"By sneaking around for weeks, spending time alone with him, talking to him, bringing his food to him, and just plain trying to get his trust," I said. "Something I thought any good trainer would've seen. That what Flame needed was a human he could trust—a friend. That it's going to take time to get him trained, unlike most horses."

"I am a good trainer!" he said, raising his head to look at me.

It was the first time I had ever really looked at him, especially in his eyes. They were blue, but at night they seemed to have changed color to a misty grey-blue. I found myself studying his handsome face, which was tanned from hours of outdoor work. He had a baby face though, with dark brown hair, which I found extremely attractive. I felt the blood rush to my face.

"I'd be a good one too if Mr. Stone just gave me the chance," I blurted out.

Why the hell had I said that? For some reason I felt compelled to tell this man what I really wanted to do on this breeding farm. Even more specifically, I wanted to train Flame. No, I *needed* to train Flame because he trusted me and there was something between us as horse and human. I believed the bond between us could bring in the blue ribbons.

Matt looked at me, smiling. "I hardly know you, but your name is Brittany? I usually don't go on the edge and trust anyone on the spot. But you Brittany, what I saw there with Flame was amazing. I'll talk to Mr. Stone on your

behalf. I'll tell him I've seen you work some of the horses and that I think you could be of assistance with Flame."

My heart jumped with joy. Matt, the trainer of Flame, was not only going to cover my butt so I wouldn't lose my job, but he was also going to recommend that I help train Flame! For a moment, I thought I was actually going to cry, something I never did in front of other people. One tear did squeeze out as I tried to will them not to come out.

"Hey Britney, why should a pretty girl like you cry?" Matt said, smiling at me. "Especially when you're going to get to train a horse with a handsome young trainer like myself."

"I don't cry in front of people, only horses," I said.

"Flame will be the best stallion this farm has ever seen, and it will be thanks to you."

"You mean because of you," he said, holding his hand out for me to shake, which I did.

I think we both knew from that moment that handshake was going to eventually turn into a wedding kiss. Flame became an undefeated endurance racer on the local and national levels at the shows, thanks to Matt's and my gentle training methods. By the time he was six years old, he was booked for the breeding season. We worked at Moonlight Arabian Breeding Farm for a few more years until we opened up our own breeding stable.

The memorial service is almost over. His urn is decorated with galloping Arabians. One of them looks like Flame. Another looks like Flame's grand colt, the one Matt was riding when he fell off and struck his temple, accidentally killed by a grandson of the horse we had trained together to

become a champion. The ironic thing, the colt's name is Flame's Ashes.

We are tied together by horses, even by his death. Flame's Ashes is at our barn, scared and confused about what has become of his rider, his friend, and master. When I go home tonight, it will just be me and the horses. There I will cry, in front of them, and no one else.

Blizzard

Cassandra Levesque

Whirling, swirling, snow.
Biting cold and howling wind,
Snowdrifts everywhere.
Beautiful but dangerous,
Most wonderful thing of all.

The storm dragon's flight.
She howls over the land,
Snow and ice swirl down.
One flap sends the wind whirling,
Under her wings, a storm brews.

Little birds on the wing.
Search for a protective place,
Escape from the storm.
One, then others, find a tree,
A place of shelter, they're safe.

Flakes drift down from the sky.
Peacefully land, piling up,
Cover the leaf-covered ground.
Ice crystals formed in the sky,
Unique bits of shimmery white.

I Hate Your Blog

Michael Roscoe



10:22a - *I hate your blog.*

I hate your blog, emo kid. I hate how it reads like a noir detective novel, except the crime is against you, and the perpetrator is the world. I hate how you described battle of the bands at your high school as a "show." I hate the pictures you post, zoomed in, bangs hanging over half your face, captioned "silent tearz." I didn't read your latest post about the horrible reality of your middle-class adolescent life that "no1 eaven noes." I didn't read the post before that about you chewing a couple of your younger brother's Ritalin, or the one before that about you spending your mother's money at Hot Topic. I hate how your blog loops Panic at the Disco. The last thing I read before deleting you from every conceivable facet of my online life was a first-person account of what it would be like if you drowned in the middle of the ocean "until the last star fades."

I hate your blog, overly enthusiastic girl. I hate how your grammar usage consists of ellipses and three sequential exclamation points. I hate how you neglect to use the space key. I wouldn't read your blog anyway, but the fact of the matter is I actually lack the ability to read eight or nine sentences strung together, frequently without spaces, punctuated only by "... so ... ya!!!" I hate the pictures you post, zoomed in, bangs hanging over half your face, captioned

“kyuutie.” I didn’t read your latest post where you wrote about people you don’t know as though they’re your best friends, because you saw them at the supermarket that day. I didn’t read the one before that where you refer to yourself in the third person while relating the day’s events. That isn’t cute, it’s neurotic. I hate how your blog loops Kelly Clarkson. I hate how you’re probably not eighteen, but the “a” of your “a/s/l” claims that you are twenty-one.

I hate your blog, white kid who listens to hip hop. I hate how you end every sentence addressing the Internet as “son.” I hate how you pretend being delivered in the hospital of a large municipal means you’re “from” there. I hate the pictures you post, zoomed in, hat brim hanging over half your face, captioned “g4ngsta.” I didn’t read your latest post about your “sic rhymes” or the one shortly before that about how you “sp4rked a phat blunt.” I didn’t even watch the YouTube video of that freestyle you did in honor of 2Pac. I hate how your blog loops DMX. I hate your fro; it’s not because you’re Jewish, it’s because you try to pick it.

I hate your blog. It’s not a journal. It isn’t personal. It’s a soapbox. What’s worse, it isn’t even a soapbox for *you*. It’s a soapbox for a persona you’ve constructed whose sole purpose is absorbing the reactions of others. It’s incredibly pretentious. It’s like you think there is someone, anyone, who wants to know what you’re thinking when you aren’t thinking anything. Every time I read it, it is like putting my forehead to a cheese grater.

current mood:  — Angry

current music: Foreigner — cold as ice.mp3

Cold Chai

Melissa Hurley

“Ma’am?” Paula, who had been daydreaming in the long Starbucks line, turned her head and focused on the pimple-faced teenage boy standing behind the counter. She hadn’t even noticed that it was her turn to order.

“Oh, sorry. I’ll have a tall chai latte.” *God I hate being called Ma’am*, she thought to herself as she waited for her drink. *It makes me feel so old*. When her beverage was ready, she carried it over to a corner of the shop where there were two empty chairs and a table. The chai was too hot to drink at the moment, so she set it down and let her mind wander once again. *I wonder what he’s going to be like. He seemed like a nice guy online. Maybe this could be the one*. She took a sip of her chai and felt a rush of pain as it burnt her tongue.

Placing the drink back on the table, she looked down at her outfit, making sure that she had not accidentally spilt anything on herself. She smoothed out her khaki knee-length skirt and peered down at her chocolate-brown flats, which were starting to look worn from wear. This didn’t bother Paula; it just made them more comfortable. When she was younger she had worn heels, but more out of obligation than out of personal choice. Now at the age of forty-eight she felt it wasn’t worth the pain anymore. A tasteful brown cardigan covered her torso and just a bit of a pale yellow t-shirt peeked out around her neck. It was an outfit straight out of a J.C. Penney catalogue. Her long blonde hair was tied back in a neat low ponytail. Though she usually wore

her hair in this manner, there was extra meaning behind it today. Dangling from her ears were tiny gold jingle bells. Her blind date would be looking for them when he came to find her. Of course, he would be carrying a bell as well. It had been their plan to use this prop to identify each other.

Paula glanced at her watch. It was 6:51 p.m. She was early. In approximately ten minutes he would be arriving. Just thinking of the idea made her heartbeat quicken. She could feel a swell of warmth attack her face and felt flustered. *What am I doing getting myself involved in online dating services? There has to be a more logical way to meet a guy.* Yet as this thought hit her, she instantly rejected it. For years she had found herself searching for Mr. Right, and it was getting old. She was getting old. The word “Ma’am” haunted her mind once again. *Okay, so maybe he’s not going to be the one. But what harm is there in meeting him? Maybe I’ll at least make a new friend.*

The word “friend” almost made her cringe. She thought of all the friends she already had. Most of them were either in marriages or at least relationships, leaving Paula to fend for herself. It was no fun being the only single one among friends. Dinners were always awkward when they were all coupled up. Everyone seemed settled with their lives, which made it harder for Paula to deal with the fact that she was alone. It was rare for her friends to go out with her anymore in search for men, and it was no fun for her to go by herself. That would only worsen the loneliness that she constantly felt. It was all of this that had led her to the Internet in the first place.

One depressing Friday night, watching a movie alone in her apartment, she had a breakdown. She couldn’t take the

lonesomeness any longer. Without even thinking, she had sat at her computer, pulled up a site that she had seen advertised on television, and before she could second-guess herself, she had set up a profile. The next day, when she had realized what she had done, she rushed to the computer and found that she had already received several matches. Intrigued at the fact that she might actually find love through the Internet, she contacted a few that seemed interesting. Eventually, one of them stood out. His name was Robert. His profile described him as "a simple man dedicated to his pet turtle and his manager position at Barnes & Noble." He had won Paula's heart by quoting lines from some of her favorite children's books. Something about the line "I'll teach you to jump on the wind's back, and away we go," from Peter Pan had encouraged her to ask him out.

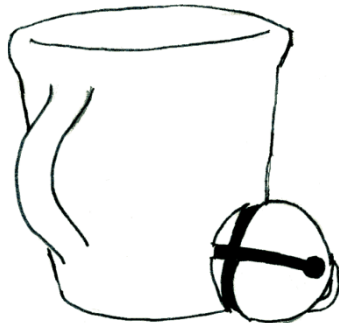
Forcing herself to focus on the coffee shop, Paula attempted to bring her mind back to the present situation. *What's wrong with a new friend? He could at least take away some of the loneliness. Clearly he doesn't have a girlfriend tying him down. Or maybe we might get involved, and even if it is not meant to be, it's certainly better than what I have now.* Feeling a little more at ease, she took a sip of her chai. *Ahh, just right.*

Peering around the room, Paula was still unable to identify a man with a bell. Surely such a sight would stand out. Her watch now read 7:03 p.m. She found herself glancing about the room from man to man, curious if one of them might be her date. They had never exchanged photos, which she was beginning to think was a mistake. A mangy-looking guy with torn, dirty clothes entered through the doorway. *Oh no.* His hair was scruffy and his face was covered in thick uneven stubble. *Please don't let him have a bell,* she thought to

herself as she watched him retrieve his drink. But before she could worry anymore he had left the building.

What on earth did I get myself into? I know practically nothing about this guy. For all I know he could be some murderer or rapist! For several more minutes she let her mind fight off more dreadful circumstances. Paula managed to handle most of her fears with grace, until one thought hit her like a bullet. *What if I am being stood up? What if he took one look at me and turned away?* It was now 7:12 p.m. She could only wait for him for so long. *I really can't handle more rejection. If he's not here in a few minutes, I'm done.* Those minutes passed and Paula prepared herself to accept the fact that he wasn't showing up. *It was a stupid idea to begin with. I should have gotten rid of that profile as soon as I had created it.* She grabbed the cup of chai off of the table and took another sip. It had started to cool, no longer very appetizing.

Her watch read 7:17 p.m. as she stood up and put on her coat. She started for the door, tossing her cold chai in the trash. Taking long, hurried strides, she nearly knocked over a man who was rushing to get inside. In her dash to get as far away from the Starbucks as possible, Paula didn't notice the sound of a bell jingling as it hit the ground.



Old Ladies Keep Hitting on Me (and it sucks >_<)

Melissa Ngai



I'm but sixteen, and she's twice that, at least,
And every day she says to me, "Young man!
You are for my old eyes a handsome feast;
I have to keep you!" 'Twas from that I ran,
But many older crones did I attract
Through means well-known to them but not to me.
I wish their sight would not stay so intact,
Or that they'd get a clue and leave me be!
I say I have a girlfriend that's my age,
But all those crones keep clam'ring day and night

Like squawking birds inside a gilded cage.
Yet they know not my latest plan for flight.
When next I walk along their road, with her,
My girl, I'll be; those crones, we should deter.

Thursday

Alicia Beane

Robert's only tough decision each day would be to wear either a blue or gray suit. Having only bought black ties, he never needed to choose otherwise. After this one small choice, Robert's wardrobe needed no further thought.

Despite being a man of only thirty-five, deep lines were sneaking across his forehead and inching away from his eyes. The only part of his face still holding the look of youth was his lips, but only because a smile rarely appeared. Mostly he held them in an almost stern pout, as if he were deep in concentration over something extremely puzzling.

His once-startling blue eyes had become faded, as if clouds had settled in front of them. One could not really even see the blue, or even distinguish the color of his eyes at all. For his hair, he simply brushed it over to one side, giving him the look of a child going to church on Easter Sunday. Robert only viewed his own reflection on the way to work while passing a window or on the black screen of his computer.

Robert's job consumed most of his time. Starting out as an assistant at Hanson, Bridgett, Marcus, Vlahos, & Rudy, he had managed to work all hours of the day for years, losing the few friends he had to get in extra time at the office, eventually and successfully making partner.

His days usually played out the same: alarm clock at 5:30 a.m., hot shower, coffee, perhaps two cups if he was really tired, cab ride downtown, elevator to the 11th floor,

and then work, work, work. He knew nothing else but paperwork, phone calls, tiled floors, and caffeine. Robert didn't see himself as a difficult person. He was one-layered; what was there was nothing deeper than a cup of coffee.

*

It was a Thursday. He had woken up early, for some reason, perhaps the rain. His shower was just as hot as usual, and his coffee woke him up enough to get him to work.

As he entered the building from the bustling Chicago street, the familiar smell of the freshly cleaned floor welcomed him, though it was mixed with the dewy smell of his damp suit coat. There appeared to be a commotion in the lobby. A large group of people was waiting by the elevators. Robert held his briefcase tighter in his hand, slightly annoyed that he would have to wait longer for his ride up to his office. He even contemplated taking the stairs.

Luckily, people were squeezing in together, making the wait not so long. Robert managed to get onto the third elevator, along with some other men in suits. Right before the doors closed, an older man swept around the corner, holding out a hand to stop the doors from shutting, while saying, "Come on, Peter, get in."

The person to whom the older man spoke trudged in beside him. Robert raised his eyebrows slightly, taken aback by the young boy who had entered the elevator. He could not have been any older than twelve. He was dressed just like the man he was with, who Robert took to be the boy's father. The boy looked out of place, sloppily stuffed in a suit and tie that he kept tugging on, as if it were choking him.

The father, noticing him fussing with his tie, automatically grabbed his son's arm and angrily yanked it down. He then began to whisper to the boy, though Robert could hear.

"Peter! What did I tell you? You're ruining that suit, and do you know how much it cost me? Do you want to embarrass me?"

The father sighed, then, while clenching his entire face, looked sideways toward nothing, as if he was too disappointed to even acknowledge his son, who was now staring at the floor.

The father continued.

"This is *your* day, Peter. Your day to figure out what career you want for the rest of your life. And don't tell me that you *really* think that the major leagues are going to show up asking to sign you. It's time for you to grow up, be a man."

The father looked down at his son as if he were a dog and quickly added, "But I don't think you can do that."

Robert suddenly felt very warm, though it was less crowded. Beads of sweat were starting to collect along his wrinkled forehead. He shifted awkwardly.

The father and son were standing side by side. The son looked very small. The father's hair was peppered and half-gone and his suit looked about twenty years old, though perfectly ironed, as though the man never did anything in it but stand as a statue. Robert could not see their faces, for their backs were toward him.

Apparently the father and son were getting off on the 10th floor. The doors separated and as they did, two men walked by holding an oversized mirror, most likely for the new bathrooms that were being installed.

Robert looked up. There, looking back at him was a familiar face. His eyes that had once been a bright blue, cornered by endless lines, graying hair parted evenly to one side, flat and plastered on his head, a frown, like that of an old man awaiting his death, looked frozen upon his pale face. For a second, Robert was so startled he took a step back, almost crushing another suited man's black oxfords. It could not be possible: Robert had seen his own father staring back at him.

As the father and son began to step out of the elevator, Robert glanced once more at the passing mirror. He could finally see the father's face, profoundly wrinkled with an almost sinister glare coming from his gray eyes. And right before the door shut once again, part of the boy's reflection caught Robert's gaze. The boy's freckled nose was scrunched up in anger, and as if trying not to cry, his brilliant green eyes were glaring at nothing, the same nothing that his father was also burrowing his gaze at. And as the doors slid shut, Robert was sure he detected on that young boy's face the smallest wrinkle across his forehead.

Ding. The 11th floor. Robert took an extra second to gather himself before he stepped out of the elevator and walked to his office. His desk faced the window, which only showed the dark clouds and the rain that was scraping against the glass. Robert sat down automatically in his chair. Another day at the office. Hopefully, he thought, I won't have to wait long for the elevator anymore. The only problem Robert would have to think about was whether he should wear his blue suit or his gray suit tomorrow. It really was a tough choice.



Feroz Ilyas

Go the Extra Mile

Ian Nicholas

Modern historians have noted that the first reported sightings of Dr. Paul J. LeBlanc coincide with the mysterious disappearance of the Rapa'nui people of Easter Island, but no one knows why. In the year 912 A.D., he was spotted striding among the Moai sculptures by a passing Dutch fishing vessel, which took him onboard. Dr. LeBlanc spent the journey engaging in banter with the crew in fluent Dutch, and several sailors later reported that they never saw him sleep.

To recount Dr. LeBlanc's history following his arrival in Europe is to recount the modern history of the world—he has had a hand in every major event that has shaped the course of human progress in the last thousand years. He talked King John of England into signing the Magna Carta in 1215 A.D., ushering in an age of democracy, and his handwriting is so incredibly good that it reportedly gave Johannes Gutenberg the idea for the printing press.



In the fifteenth century, Dr. LeBlanc's interests turned to war. His moustache is not merely for aesthetics: its fibers serve as a super-powerful electromagnet, and he activated it on the battlefields of Agincourt to drag armored Frenchmen

by the thousand into the seething nuclear furnace of his digestive tract, winning the battle for the outnumbered English. Dr. LeBlanc later wrote of his experiences in the play *Henry V*.

After a struggling playwright by the name of William Shakespeare plagiarized his work, Dr. LeBlanc decided to shift his influence to the new world. It is commonly believed that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, but this is myth—in reality, the statesman's horse threw a shoe on the way to Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, and so Dr. LeBlanc assumed Jefferson's appearance and ghostwrote the document in his place. He refused to take credit for this.

After defeating the British in the American Revolution, Dr. LeBlanc disappeared into the Mojave Desert for several centuries. Many believed he had grown bored of the human race and moved on from our astral plane, while others suspected he was gathering a massive army to conquer the world. Most likely, he had simply melted back into the shadows to observe civilization develop without his influence, but the truth may never be known.

In any case, on July 7, 2003, the planets aligned, and like Cthulhu emerging from his slumber, Dr. LeBlanc levitated back out of the desert, across the country, and into Belknap Hall to assume the office of President of Southern New Hampshire University, where he remains to this day.

He is Dr. Paul J. LeBlanc, pan-dimensional devourer of galaxies, Machiavellian engineer of human existence, immortal overseer of the earth, and he has office hours from 11 to 1.

Loki's Trickery

Kimberly McLaughlin

I played with Loki
Tormenting the gods
With filthy tricks and deceit.

Now caught, poison drips
In our eyes from a snake
Suspended above, we rage in agony.

Save me!
Don't deliver me to Hel
As the earth shakes.

Fenrir fights with Gleipnir
Unable to break it—howling,
Still bound to the earth.

Jörmungandr coils
Choking the world,
Scales scraping and burning.

Save me!
Don't deliver me to Hel,
As the water separates.

Lightning strikes
Charring the ground,
Thor's hammer appeared.



The end grows ever near
As light recedes slowly,
Fighting is futile we taste defeat.

Save me!
Don't deliver me to Hel,
Loki has tricked me to my death.

Heritage

Mckendy Fils-Aimé

Sometimes, I hear solace echoing through shell bodies,
Begging to be the sparkle in our eyes.
Its burnt, disease-infected hands resemble those of drug
Addicts, slouched over in American flag spray painted
alleys.

We fool ourselves into believing that these beings have a
semblance of importance.
They're just phantoms, cutting up lines of life, inviting it
Into their atrophied insides.
What we know as secular are their still beating hearts
Wrapped in torn flags.

There are stars and stripes on my toothpaste and soap.
Every morning, I wake up and try to wash mahogany off
This skin.
When I brush my teeth, I scrub behind my molars,
Trying to erase the French from the back of my throat.

I want to forget that my mother's English is coated by
accent.
That she emigrated from Haiti and was destined
To wield swords soaked in "struggle."
When I was old enough, she put one in my hands, and told
me to fight!
I looked into her begging eyes and said "This is not my
battle!"

This ash-colored skin doesn't resonate with American slave narratives.

It secretly sings hymns made of French settlers and Caribbean Islands.

At night, I dream of palm trees and plantations; the foretelling of rebellion.

The footsteps of 5,000 slave troops remind me of my mother's teachings.

She tells me that my heart is made of sugar cane and shackles.

Her words are the iron in my system, the constant reminder of experience.

Her work-worn hands are scholarly, but I'm reluctant to acknowledge

Lessons learned.

I know better, but sometimes, I feel the need to wear the music of pop culture.

The reversed benedictions of pseudo-musicians echo in my mind.

Together, we make the ultimate song, with DJ America on production.

Her mixers slowly fuse our beliefs, so our twoness gets divided by itself

and we're left with one thin layer of patriotism.

I wish we were all this lucky.

Some of us are sculpted with cracked Hope Diamond eyes,
With postures leaning toward paychecks made of dirt.

We have destruction pressed against our throats,
but wear location as protection.
Rushing into things with kamikaze hearts is how we forget
that
our lives aren't Laguna Beach.
We will never know the feeling of success, but our
Onyx bodies want to reach for the sun.
We can't afford bootstraps so we're pulling ourselves up by
the
laces of our Nikes.

The rest of us stand at shorelines as water reaches for our
bodies.
We're called to this country by misguided demagogues
dealing hope.
Leaving the embrace of our lands, we wash up on American
soil.
We, the bastard children of sea gods, blindly search for false
dreams.
Poseidon's whispers try to seep truth into our ears, but
we're too damned to listen.

I'm no pagan, but gods have taught us to believe in
something.
Religion has been dethroned, so why not have faith in your
blood.
The history embedded in our genes is as important as our
limbs.
We must believe in something other than post-modern
charlatans, pretending to be artists.

Today, I stopped marching and found my solace.

Her name was Heritage.

I looked in the mirror and saw phantom arms wrapped
around me.

Her hands less drug addict and more scholarly.

I pressed my ears against her bosom, and listened to her
heart speak.

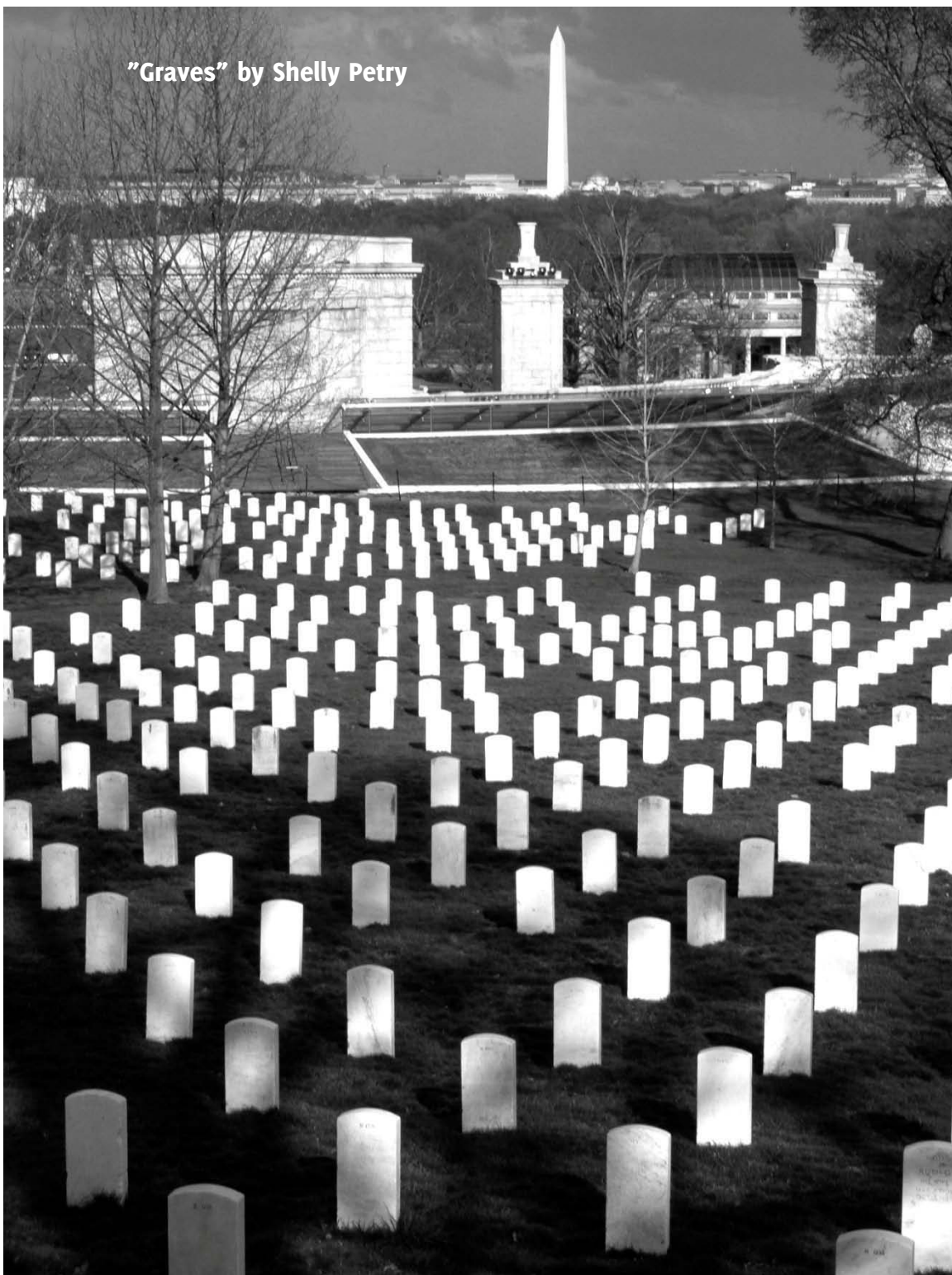
It whispered . . .

“We are all leaves in this tossed salad of a nation.

In 100 years, we’ll all be diced together and called unified.

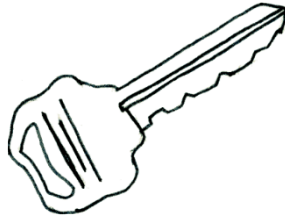
For now, the only differences between us are our roots.”

"Graves" by Shelly Petry



Say Goodbye

Susan Kovach



He opened the door to Amy's apartment. She had given him the spare key. As he entered the kitchen he saw her standing in front of the sink wearing only a pair of green boy-short underwear and a graying white tank top.

"Hi, Kyle," she said without turning around.

He laid a bag on the counter, filled with two chocolate-frosted donuts, her favorite, and flopped down on the old, itchy couch. He didn't need to respond. It was a comfortable silence. Watching her, he couldn't help but smile. Her shaggy brown hair stuck up in some places, reminding him that she just woke up.

He had known her for about five years now. They were best friends, although it had always been something a little more than that. It was complicated, yet a perfect situation for both of them. But something had changed in the past few weeks. He often thought about it while lying with her after making love, the two of them tangled in sweaty sheets in her bed. She didn't need to tell him she wanted to be his girlfriend. He knew her well enough to know without asking. In the past he didn't want to be tied down, although it

didn't really matter; it was always her he ran to. It wasn't until recently that he realized he wanted her all to himself.

He wanted to tell her this, but he didn't know how.

"So you wanna do something tonight?" he asked, picking imaginary lint off his faded blue shirt.

"I can't. I'm getting drinks later with someone from work," she said, drying a chipped white plate with care, her hair falling over her eyes.

"Oh, I thought Monica was out of town for the weekend."

"No. Not Monica." She hesitated. "Brad."

"Brad?" In his mind Kyle could immediately see Amy laughing with this Brad character, touching his arm, leaning into him, the way she did with Kyle whenever he said something funny. His face grew hot with jealousy.

"Who the hell is Brad?"

"I just told you, someone from work." Her voice was strained.

"Why would you go out with someone named . . . Brad?" He spit the name out, disgusted by the mere thought of it. He avoided her gaze. She slammed a cabinet door shut behind him.

"You know what, why wouldn't I? Honestly, what's fucking stopping me?" she emphasized the curse word, drilling the point into his head. She didn't have a reason not to go on a date; he never gave her one. They both knew this. Their eyes met. He turned away from her. The only sound was the faucet cascading water over dirty dishes. Out of the corner of his eye he saw her, one hand placed on the counter bracing herself, the other brushing a tear from her red cheeks. He hated to see her cry.

"I'm going to go with him, Kyle," she whispered.

Kyle stood up and shook the wrinkles out of his cargo shorts. "Yeah, well, then I guess I'm out of here. Later." He stormed from the apartment and slammed the door. As he walked away he heard her throw something against the wall, the pieces of glass crashing onto the kitchen tiles.

*

Kyle spent the rest of the day in his dark apartment. He kept the shades drawn. He watched football in the shadows for hours, yelling at the television. His voice echoed, a cruel reminder he was alone. He cradled his guitar, clumsily strumming the strings. He didn't play songs, just needed something to keep him busy, to keep his mind from wandering. The day turned to night without him realizing it. He checked his cell phone. There was no call from Amy, no messages. It was ten o'clock. He was worried. She should be home by now. He couldn't lose her. It may be too late. His head ached almost as much as his heart. He went to her.

*

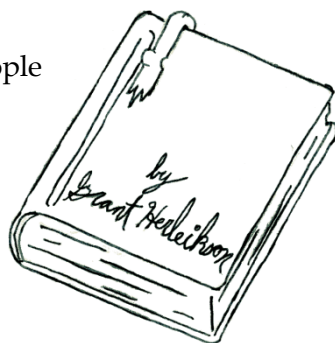
Kyle crept into her apartment as he had done many times before. He prayed she was home safe in bed. He stopped outside the bedroom door, which was slightly ajar. His heart pounded as if it might burst, scared that if he walked in the room he might see *his* girl embracing another man. Gently he pushed the door open. The creak of the hinges made her stir. She was alone. He exhaled, relieved. He stepped toward the bed and stumbled over her black

heels, the ones she loved so much. Her favorite jeans, the pair that hugged her curves perfectly, lay next to them, inside out and tousled. He slid off his jeans so they formed a pile next to hers. He crawled across the bed in his boxers and positioned himself behind her. He pulled her to him as close as he could. She was awake, but her eyes stayed closed as she turned her head toward his. Their lips met. Her mouth tasted like cranberry juice and vodka. His, like mint toothpaste.

Imaginary Book of Short Stories

Grant Herleikson

Causing Problems Cus I'm the Warden
Living in the Time of Zombies
Learning to Sprint Before You Can Walk
I Am My Own Printer
Aeronautics Anonymous
Indigenously Sold
Animals Writing Books About People
Too Lazy to Publish
Don't Show Up Randomly
Halfway Deep
Diamonds Cutting Diamonds
Boneless, Homeless, and Friendly
Verbal Vampire
Blasphemous Hole



American Deviant

Mayra Gomez

She awoke to find she had fallen asleep in the stranger's bed. The room engulfed her with a heavy guilt as she climbed out from under the matted sheets, and slid herself off the mattress. She took a long time to dress, as the cool air washed over her dampened body. She waited until the air took away the residue of sex before driving home.

She pulled into her driveway at half past five and walked into her house. She laid her jacket down on a chair and made her way to the stove to start dinner. As she set some water to boil, she took out the potatoes she had peeled the day before and dropped them in the pot. *Merrill will be home soon*, she thought. She decided that if he asked, she would tell him she had gotten a late start on cooking the chicken. Realizing that he'd care that dinner was late caused her to reminisce over how things used to be between them.

Married for six years, they had spent five of them indulged in each other. Every few months Merrill would take the day off to be with his wife, just because he missed her. But it wasn't only the days that he took off that had been full of excitement and love. They both had their moments of alluring the other to bed, or to the floor on random evenings as well. She mused over the memories of her and her husband's tender caresses, their assuring kisses, and how their bodies once eased together.

She felt a searing sting in her hands, and realized the boiling water had overflowed onto the stove and was now pouring down onto the oven's handle. Impassive, she

moved her hands away, and slid them under the faucet. The icy water pounded on her forming blisters, and evoked the memory of the night she saw her husband with another woman.

A publicity agent, Merrill had mentioned he would be meeting with a few clients that evening uptown at the restaurant Prime. She had noticed his phone on the floor near his side of the bed when she was picking up their dirty laundry. She decided since he had just left, she would bring it to him. When she reached the restaurant, she made it right inside the doors and stopped, because she noticed that only her husband and a young woman were occupying his table. The woman was ordering off the menu. Merrill seemed anxious as he played with his glass, but the woman's confidence exuded from her upright posture and high-chinned smile. She leaned in toward Merrill as she spoke.

Merrill's wife, with her eyes still caught on them, moved her way past the crowd waiting to be seated, and retreated back outside. She had a strong notion to go to the window and watch them, like those driving by watch a car accident. But the feeling went away, and before she made it to the window, her boldness was replaced with the fear of being seen. Then pride overcame her, and she walked away in a huff.

She spent the next three weeks curled up in her emotions. Devastated, she would go to her mother's, and wouldn't come home until the next night. Merrill would try to reach out to her, but that would just make her angry. She would proceed to shove him away and shoot him looks of protest. She never once mentioned what she had seen, but instead ran mad with her insecurities.

She took to other men's beds. She would meet these perfect strangers in the coffee shop, market, online. It would have surprised her that they had taken to sex so readily if she had at all been focused on them. But what occupied her mind was the idea that if she acted young, in the sense of being promiscuous and outlandish, her husband would stop seeing what she quickly grew to believe could be numerous women. The desire for her husband to only want her overcame her, and the constant juggle between what she and her husband used to have and what they now had drove her to her deviance. The good memories she and her husband had recently shared for years were constant reminders of what she wanted back.

So, she had slept with strange men in order to learn what they found pleasurable and satisfying versus what things repulsed them in bed. But soon after her first couple of sexual rendezvous with strangers, things had grown worse between her and her husband. Merrill had grown distant. He had stopped attempting to console her. Instead he grew tense toward his wife and isolated himself. The moments between her and her husband were no longer gentle ones; instead their sexual encounters were forced. She would wear nothing under her t-shirts, and sit on the counters, sprawl on the bed, lean on the wall, hoping to lure him in. But each time, the sex was coarse. They spent the time spitting out angry grunts while their bodies thudded together aggressively.

While recollecting the moments, she had mashed the potatoes, taken the chicken out of the oven, and had sliced the meat without any awareness that she had done so. She had been brought back to the present by the sound of Mer-

rill's keys turning in the lock. Merrill stood before her in the doorway.

His face showed deep lines of defeat that pulled at the corner of his eyes. It looked as if he were permanently begging for her through his gaze. Spellbound, she took a step back as he moved himself further into the room. He turned to her while taking off his jacket. "One of my clients is stopping by with her husband for dinner. I don't mean to spring this on you, but she was thinking of leaving the company, and so after I proposed she stay, I asked them to join us for dinner," he told her, his voice filled with apprehension. Still absorbed in his face, she told him she didn't mind, and that she had made plenty of food.

They set the table hastily, afraid their guests would catch them in the middle of preparing the table. When the blue sedan pulled into the driveway, Merrill's wife vaguely recognized it. It wasn't until she saw the lady that had been with her husband that night that she realized where she had seen it. Standing before the sink, she looked over her husband's shoulder as he welcomed their guests. Forcing herself from her position, Merrill's wife turned around, and laid her hands down on the counter. Her arms grew tense and she held on to the countertop for support. Her husband came behind her. "Honey, this is Marilyn and her husband David." Merrill's wife welcomed the introduction with a placid smile.

"Nice to meet you."

She drifted through the small talk, and the continuing conversation at dinner. Her thoughts dominated her body, causing it to grow lethargic. But, as she was scraping at chicken fat with her fork, her body froze at the following

words. “And do you remember our first meeting? We were the only ones there for almost two hours! The others had left late, and had gotten stuck in traffic. But when they did show, you handled yourself as if there had been no delay. And of course you had us all hooked,” Marilyn joked.

Stiff, Merrill’s wife’s hand held the fork in the air, and the rest of her body solidified into a stoic statue. Her husband’s eyes looked at her wearily. His head tilted awkwardly toward her, and she realized herself. She shifted in her chair, and smiled at the three faces before her. The dinner continued without any more interruptions. But as she listened, she glanced over at her husband repeatedly. Her eyes desperately sought out his face with the hope that she was just seeing things. That his eyes didn’t really hold the knowledge of what she had done, and weren’t filled with bitter pain and confusion. But each time his face revealed the same thing. He knew she had slept with other men. She struggled to sit still in her chair.

As her husband escorted their guests out, she placed the dishes in the sink. She watched as he closed the door, and made his way to the living room. She walked carefully toward him. He stood with his back to her, addressing the window. She wanted to wrap both her hands freely around him, but instead, she placed her fingertips on his shoulder. Paralyzed, he stood there unfazed. The weight of their distance pulled at her shoulders, and tore down her posture.

The Dolls

Nicole Escobar

As a child she was described as having a wild imagination, but Noel never saw it that way. Her “imaginary” friends were more real to her than anyone else. The voices in her head really did come from her dolls, and their eyes were always watching her every move, telling her how to act, what to think, when to breathe. Now her mother knew and Noel could see it in her eyes, the thought: *how did I not see this before?*

Although her mother was never a paranoid schizophrenic, she knew the symptoms. She was a psychologist who diagnosed people on a routine basis, so why was she so blind to her own daughter’s delusions? Was it really so hard to accept that her daughter was different from all the other children?

Noel knew that nothing would be the same. She no longer trusted herself, never could believe the thoughts in her head. Now that the medication had made her friends disappear, Noel felt so alone. The dolls sat lifeless on her shelf as Noel gazed intently at them, waiting for the voices to tell her what to do next. She sat there for hours until her mother finally took her by the hand and said, “They’re not going to talk to you anymore. Come on, it’s time for breakfast.”

"Magnolia" by Shelly Petry



Common Grounds

Joshua Dick

He saw her and she saw him. He sat on the couch across from her. They were too afraid to speak. Unsure what the reply of the other would be. Not even a greeting would be uttered. Just a constant observation of the other.

The first thing he had noticed about her was her hair. Yellow and curled, swept to one side. When she read the hair rested on her wrist, curling slightly on the book. She looked beautiful as she read. But he never said that. He never said anything.

Instead he got up to get food. He paused, wondering about his belongings: his coat, his bag. He wondered if they were going to be okay. He trusted her enough, but was still too afraid to speak. As if words would destroy the delicate balance of back-and-forth stares he felt fortunate enough to have. He liked looking at those cold blue eyes and he liked how they looked at him. Darting from the page now and again to evaluate his status. He assumed his belongings in good care and left.

*

He returned shortly. Sat back into the cocoon made by his coat wrapped around the sofa. She was still there. Going from reading the book to reading him. He wanted to know what was behind those eyes. He knew there was a great intellect. But he wondered what she thought of him. She

was a wolf while eating. Commencing in one act while staying aware of her surroundings. But she remained focused on him. The question was why.

Was she interested in him? He was interested in her. She was a she. That should've been enough. But he needed an aggressive she. A she to argue with. To debate, push, challenge him to something more. Your typical she did not get the job done. He rarely ever looked at shes. He knew that she was this kinda she. He just needed this she to say something. To speak, to engage him. Give him a chance to prove himself.

His guess was she felt the same way. She watched him like a cat watches a spider move. No like or dislike. Just curiosity. What was the function of such a creature? He couldn't answer. They shared the silence.

Facing Reality

Tara Junkins

“**T**hat’s a very pretty necklace you have on, Isabel.”

Isabel Matthews put her hand up to her neck absently and felt the cool silver chain that hung there. There was a small heart-shaped ruby enclosed in a white-gold frame hanging from the chain.

“Chris gave it to me,” she answered.

“Chris Delaney?”

“Yeah, who else?”

“I don’t know. I thought maybe your parents or an aunt or someone could have . . .”

“Or Dee.”

“What?”

“Deandra. She could have given it to me.”

“ . . . Yes, yes she could have.”

“Why are you just now commenting on my necklace? I’ve been wearing it for a while now.”

“I know. I just wanted to check once more who had given it to you.”

“I’ve already told you!” Isabel stood up angrily, yelling at her therapist. Her blue eyes were sparkling brilliantly, fierce. Her fire-red hair fell over her shoulders, in soft curls that bounced as she shook her head. Isabel couldn’t stand Dr. Wilson. He was always talking about the same stupid things. Why did she even have to be there in the stupid hospital? She didn’t feel sick, she felt fine. She missed Chris and Dee.

“Isabel, sit down, please,” Dr. Wilson said.

“Or what?” Isabel shot back. But it didn’t have much effect. Michael Wilson had amazing patience. He just looked at her, his light blue eyes boring into her behind his glasses, his hands folded neatly on his lap. She hated him and his stupid hands. They were always sitting there on his lap, neatly and patiently waiting for her to cooperate. She was tired of cooperating. Where did it get her? She was still here, still stuck in the same place, talking about the same things over and over. He never *listened* to her, not really. Why else would they be going through the same conversations? It was kind of creepy sometimes. She constantly had *déjà vu* because of this guy. And she always knew that it really *had* happened before, because Dr. Wilson liked to ask her the same questions and she always gave the same answers. Why would they change? What was he expecting from her? She glared at him. His clothes were wrinkled as usual, and his shock of black hair was combed neatly, making an odd and surprising contrast. Isabel suspected the hair was a toupee. He seemed too young to wear a toupee, as he was only in his early thirties, but the thought made her feel better in a petty way. *You deserve to have premature hair loss.* He was still waiting patiently.

Finally, Isabel sat back down.

“Why can’t I talk to them?”

“Talk to who?”

Isabel felt completely frustrated. Why must he always act so *stupid*, like he had no idea who she was talking about, when he *did*?

“Chris,” she said through clenched teeth. “Chris and Dee.”

"You can. Any time you want."

"No I can't. They can't reach me here. You guys are keeping them from me."

"Isabel, we do not restrict whom you can talk to or see unless they are potentially harmful."

"Then how come it's only my parents who call and visit me?"

"I don't know."

"Ugh!" Isabel threw herself back on the couch, for she had somehow ended up on the edge.

Dr. Wilson looked at his watch. "Isabel, I believe our session is over. I will speak to you tomorrow."

Isabel rolled her eyes. "Yeah, sure. Whatever." She got off the couch and opened the door. The nurse, named Jill, was waiting to escort her back to her room.

*

"Hey, Jill?" Isabel asked when she got back to her room.

"Yes, Honey?" Jill was nice. *She* listened to what Isabel had to say. Unlike that stupid doctor they kept making her see.

"Do I really have to go back there tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid you do, Is."

"But he isn't doing anything for me. All he does is ask questions and make me answer them. No, he doesn't even do that. If I refuse to answer him, he just sits there all silently until I finally give in."

Jill nodded. "Yes, our Dr. Wilson is a very patient man."

"He's a very *annoying* man."

"Well, Is, he does his job effectively."

Isabel snorted. “Effectively for who? Certainly not *me*,” She stopped to think, and then said, “Why am I in here, Jill? What did I do wrong?” Jill patted Isabel on the shoulder tenderly.

“We all ask that, Isabel. But the truth is, we have to answer it ourselves. It doesn’t matter what any one else says. The answers are inside our hearts. We just have to find them.”

Isabel scowled. She knew Jill was trying to help her, but it didn’t do much.

“Thanks anyway, Jill.”

Jill laughed lightly and bid Isabel a good day before she closed and locked the door behind her.

*

Isabel sat on her bed, trying to think. But she couldn’t do it. She had to write everything that was going on in her head down but she didn’t have anything to write it *with* and for some reason she was not allowed to have writing utensils in her room. She went over to the wall and pushed the buzzer.

“I want to go to the common room! I need to write!”

There was a click and then a voice: “Isabel, you are currently not allowed to be in the common room.”

“What? Why not?”

“Dr. Wilson would like to see you.”

“Ugh!” Isabel went and sat back down on her bed, heavily. Was once a day not enough anymore? Did he have to torture her every hour now? She just came from his office!

She was thinking this and getting progressively more irritated when Jill came to bring her to him.

"Let's go, Is," she said, unlocking the door and letting Isabel out.

"What now?" Isabel asked. Jill said nothing, just looked at her, a grim look on her face. Finally they reached the office. Jill started to leave, and then hesitated.

"Ya know," she said, "it's not always such a bad thing. Having someone want to talk to you this much. It might just mean he cares."

Isabel shrugged off her comment and went into the office.

*

"Hello, Isabel," Dr. Wilson said after Isabel closed the door behind her. She glared at him a little and sat down on the couch.

"Hi," she said in an unfriendly tone. She wanted a reaction out of him for once. She wanted him to lose his patience with her, to lecture her, to do anything but just sit there and ask the same questions requiring the same answers every time she came. She did think this time might be different than the others, since he called on her for the second time that day. But his face was just as unreadable as ever, so she still couldn't tell if he might have had something new to say. His hands. They were still resting folded in his lap. Isabel stared at those hands, anger rising from deep inside her. She threw herself onto the couch and decided to refuse to talk until he addressed her the way she wanted to be addressed. She would just glare at him. After a

few minutes, however, she gave up. It was no use. She was never going to get out of this place, not as long as this guy was her therapist. Neither he nor she was willing to budge his or her routine to make the other happy.

"Is there a special reason you have called me here, Dr. Wilson?" Isabel asked, feeling as if all energy had drained from her body. She missed Dee. She missed her best friend. She also missed Chris. Oh, how she missed Chris.

"Yes, there is. I was wondering if you have gotten in contact with Mr. Delaney or Miss Halliway."

Isabel stared at the doctor. "No," she said, through almost clenched teeth, "I have not."

"Have you tried?"

Isabel opened her mouth to answer when she realized that, in fact, she hadn't tried. Not in a few weeks. She had been so down about being locked up that she had forgotten, not about them, not at all, but forgotten that it took some effort to actually reach them. That it would take more than just *thinking* about them and missing them to hear from them. Chris and Dee loved her, but they were not able to reach her if she didn't reach them first. Especially since her parents seemed unwilling to tell them anything about where she was. Isabel thought that her parents blamed Deandra and Chris for her being in this place.

"I guess . . . I guess I haven't," she said quietly, looking at the floor.

Dr. Wilson smiled slightly. "It's okay, Isabel. I also wanted to talk to you about the relationship you have with your parents. Are things all right with them?" he asked. Isabel hesitated.

"Well . . . I love my parents, of course, but . . ."

"Sometimes it's difficult, because you feel they do not support you, am I right?"

"Yes," Isabel said, "they have started to tell me that I need to find new friends, and that maybe I should take a break from guys altogether. I don't know why. Every time we argue about it, I ask them what they have against Chris and Dee, but they never have a real answer for me. They just . . . tell me it'd be better if I found some new people to hang around with and refuse to talk about it any further. It's put a lot of stress on me, and it's made me despise them a little bit. I know they might not understand, but Chris and Dee are my best friends. I don't need anyone else, as long as I have them. But when I'm here . . . I don't have them. I don't have them, and I still don't have my parents. It's very lonely." Isabel had not expected to tell Dr. Wilson as much as she just did. She looked down at her hands and played with her fingers so as to avoid his gaze. She knew he was looking at her, she could feel it. And why not? She had just been more cooperative in the past two minutes than she had ever been. She wasn't sure what to say to him next; it wasn't as if she ever really said much to him at all. Now that she had, she didn't know whether she should keep going, or withhold again.

"Well," Dr. Wilson said after a few minutes of silence, "I believe that will be all for today."

Isabel looked up at him. "You mean, you don't want to keep me here, to talk about this more?" she asked. A hint of a smile formed on Dr. Wilson's lips.

"I don't want to *keep* you here ever, Isabel. You did your part at this session, so you are not required to stay any longer than you want to."

“Wait . . . so all this time, all I had to do was cooperate and talk to you to be able to leave?”

“That’s right. We do not force our patients to talk in therapy here. But if they do, they get much farther along in the process much faster.”

“Process?”

“Yes. The process of recovery. The process of release.”

*

When Jill came to get her, Isabel was in a much better mood. Jill looked at her, seeming a bit amused.

“Well,” she said, “it seems your meeting went well?”

Isabel smiled at Jill. “I just realized that being stubborn isn’t always the best way to handle things.”

Jill smiled and put her hand on her shoulder. “Good girl,” she said.

*

Isabel knew that something big had happened. *The process of release*. All she had to do was *cooperate*. He just wanted her to talk to him, and she would be free! Free to go back to her life as a writer, as a girlfriend, as a best friend. The thought comforted her. She went to bed well rested that night.

No Longer Them

Nicole Doane

She sits. The clock has just shown that it is now, officially twelve o'clock, the morning of her nineteenth birthday. Great, she thinks, how exciting. The celebrations have yet to start (if they start), and she sits in bed wondering not about how she will celebrate her birthday, but about him. Yes, the infamous "him." The common cliché, the boy who broke her heart, the one she still thinks about even though years separate them from the time when they were once in love. She sits and wonders, not just about how he is doing, but more importantly, whether he thinks about her too. She wonders where his thoughts are on this night. Does he remember that today is her birthday? Does he care? Does it matter really?

She gets up, and moves over to her desk and turns the small desk lamp on. Silently, hoping to not wake her roommate, she opens the top drawer. Inside are a mess of letters, a few books, some pictures, and various other nick-knacks kept stored away, without thought, for god knows how long. Probably since she moved into the dorm almost a year ago. She rummages around for a few seconds before finding it. There it is, right where she had placed it one year ago, beneath her battered copy of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. How ironic, she thinks, finding this underneath one of the most depressing novels in literary history, to date. It is a picture of them, when they used to be a "them," that is. It has been almost three and a half years since this picture was taken, framed, and given to her as a gift for their one-year anniver-

sary. Why is it that she still keeps this picture, she wonders. And why did she, on this night of all nights, decide to unbury the past from its proper place underneath Plath, and other collections long forgotten. She ponders these questions for a moment, but it is a fleeting one at that. Something has taken her over, and she knows that she has to see it through; whether the outcome be good, bad, or indifferent it is hers to come to. And so it goes, she thinks.

She takes hold of the picture, carefully grasping it with both hands, and tiptoes back to her bed. Luckily, her roommate is not a light sleeper, or she would have to deal with more than repressed memories tonight. Sitting now, her back up against the wall and the picture laying across her lap, she gazes down. There they are again. Happy, wistful, young, and “so in love”; it hurts just to remember the person she used to be. Some days she wondered if that person still existed.

She glances over at the clock—it is now 2:43 a.m. Where have the hours gone, she thinks, though she knows the answer to that question even before the thought fully takes form in her mind. It is him again. The memories, those feelings, that picture. Within an instant and without warning, every thought, memory, and emotion that she has harbored since that time many years ago comes crashing back into her life, like a wave breaking onto the shoreline; and she weeps silently. Feeling in this moment everything that she felt that night they broke up, the night that he became him and she became her, and they no longer were them.



Feroz Ilyas

I'm Sorry

Ashley Fandrich

I'm sorry I cause so much trouble
Always bringing so much stress
Why do you still stand by me
Even when I'm such a mess?

I'm sorry I ask for so much
Everything has a price
I have the things I need
But those new Altimas still look nice

I'm sorry I act like a typical woman
Never saying the things I mean
Maybe I watched too many movies
Or maybe I just want you to be part of my dream

I'm sorry I cause so much pain
It can be seen in everyone I know
Physical problems even arise
But sadly I have no other side to show

I'm sorry for my emotions
It's not your fault I'm mad
I take it out on the wrong people
I don't think I tried to make you feel bad

I'm sorry I always change
A new person wakes up every day

You stick with them for some reason
But when you ask, I don't know what to say

I'm sorry you betrayed me
Did the one thing I told you not to do
Everything just flew away
And yes, I'll miss it too

Say Goodbye to Hollywood

Vincent Casciato

A greasy Chicano in a wifebeater is scratching himself as he holds onto his grossly unsanitary hot dog wagon for support, its contents sprawled everywhere among stained cloths. Sitting across from me is a young man in a tight cheerleading outfit. He's all sweaty. He's accompanied by a fairly normal looking woman, which I haven't seen all night, and on her lap is a guy who's knocked out, wasted. I watch them as I ride the Metro from Hollywood/Highland to Del Mar. It's 1 a.m. and my first time in L.A.

I turn around in my seat and Batman and Robin are behind me, or rather, Lionel and his girlfriend Jen. Jen and I have been good friends for five years but first met this morning.

We've been message board and mail buddies for a long time so it made sense we would hang out during our stay in California. We're in the greater L.A. area for a horror movie convention of the *Halloween* series. Jen, who flew in from San Antonio, is soft-spoken, kind, and just as thrilled as I am to be here.

I had asked a hotel clerk if there was anything fun to do in town on Halloween, as I didn't want to spend all of my time doing just the convention. His eyes lit up as he excitedly told me, "You have to check out West Hollywood because every year the gays throw a big party in the streets. Everyone dresses up in costumes and has a ball. It's a lot of fun." He said it was the big thing to do on Halloween. When I

made sure that one didn't necessarily have to be gay in order to participate in the festivities, I was hooked.

We had to take a train and a subway, the latter extremely crowded. After all, it was Friday night in the L.A. area. Lionel was dressed as Batman but with Joker make-up and a note on his chest, a la a scene in the recent film. He had a miserable look on his face the whole time and that was the point. Everywhere, he received many looks and compliments that night for his creative variation. Between rides, a cop asked to take a picture with him. We were laughing as Jen decided to get in on the shot.

I didn't really know which subway stop to get off at, as the hotel's instructions were vague, so we were trying to figure it out. Jen was calm and patient and didn't seem to mind that we didn't know what we were doing. With each subway stop, a storm of costumed people flooded the platforms, the shrieks of excitement everywhere, and the underground sounded like a giant party. I knew we were getting closer.

A guy who knew about the event suggested we get off at Hollywood and Highland. The platform was mobbed as we struggled to stay together and push our way through a couple hundred people in disguise. I thought I was going to die on the million steps leading up to ground level because people were taking up the rails and there was pushing and commotion among the laughter.

Hollywood Boulevard felt like an enormous movie set. A loud hip-hop beat was coming from somewhere as I gazed at the tall palm trees, jumbo movie ads, and brightly-lit buildings. A helicopter was flying low, its spotlight scanning as thousands of people in various costumes swamped

the streets. Cops were on every corner with barricades and dogs.

We began to walk around, sticking close. Many were dressed as hookers, both sexes, clad in leather and walking in groups. When I asked an LAPD cop for directions, he said they were blocking part of the boulevard and suggested we take a detour through an alley. We walked with a small crowd through a steel-blue alley and it was the perfect place to lose your life. A man in a long black coat and gas mask was standing against a cracked wall. I started to panic when he caught sight of us and began to follow, whispering “Batman . . . Batman . . . ” I looked straight ahead, careful not to make eye contact with anyone, and couldn’t wait to get the hell out of there. As we left the alley and walked onto a busy sidewalk I let out a sigh of relief that we made it out all right.

There was a lot of variety in what we saw. Here an Edward Scissorhands, there a Heath Ledger’s Joker, but when we took another off-Hollywood detour, we saw a man walking stiffly in a blue outfit, white gloves, and a doughy, pale mask. As laughter ensued and pedestrians took pictures of one another, he walked through the dark. I didn’t like the way he was moving and the fact that he was alone. Then I couldn’t help but wonder if a truly dangerous person were among us—even if it wasn’t particularly him—and if one could easily get away with murder in this chaos. At the end of the street I made a point of watching him walk the other way.

We walked the mainstream areas for a while, looked at the Walk of Fame. The streets were littered. Jen and Lionel seemed to be enjoying themselves, pointing out various

things such as a trashy-looking strip club and the building where *Jimmy Kimmel Live* is filmed. There were plenty of diners and bars in the area but they were all closed, which didn't make sense to us. On the boulevard, however, there was one place that was literally wide open, like a stop on the boardwalk, that sold t-shirts and postcards. Jen and I decided to browse for souvenirs but ducked out when she spotted a giant rat on the ceiling.

As it approached 12 a.m. we decided to call it a night because transportation was soon to end. Running down a brightly lit yet half-empty subway station to catch the last ride, with echoed cries bouncing off the walls and sporadic masqueraders, we felt like we were escaping a sinking ship, but it was exciting. There was something thrilling about the fact that I was inexperienced in all of this.

On the subway car, the three of us have a good laugh as we reflect on our night. All of us are amazed we were actually in Hollywood, a place we associate with movies and glamour. And we've traveled a long way. Then we rest in silence, fatigued.

After the "hot dog vendor" leaves, a thunder of screaming erupts on the platform and an Asian man scrambles frantically inside, shouting obscenities as a tin can flies into the car, and he violently thrusts it back at someone on the platform. There's an uncertainty of panic and confusion as I fear that something very dangerous is about to go down. This man is going crazy. What if his opponent gets on board? It appears to be a hooker in a red dress who's yelling back. We don't know what happened.

Thankfully, the man calms down as we start to move again, and as my chest is beating, I look at my friend. The three of us are half-mortified, half-breaking out smiles.

I always wanted to visit the seedy underbelly of L.A., like Jen and I had read about in the horror novels that also sparked this quest, and witness some colorful characters. I'm glad I got to see some of this because I wanted my vacation to be more than just a Disney tourist experience. I wanted to take risks. It's not that I'm seeking danger; I just wanted a little adventure on top of the fun I was having with friends. The strange people and unorchestrated urban disarray I saw were a far cry from the normal, ordered life I am used to, and for that I was happy. Almost getting lost in one of the most dangerous cities, in the middle of the night, as a first-time traveler, on Halloween and Friday night, is something I won't forget.

I look at Jen and think about the things we do as *Halloween* fans, like traveling across the country to unite with other ones. We only know each other and are here because our favorite movie was released thirty years ago. It sounds dumb at first, but I'm reminded of everything you can build on top of this, such as friendships and crazy events.

The subway car glides, screeching when slowing. Outside the windows, blackness. I can't wait to step out into the cool night air and look at a palm tree. As the subway leaves Hollywood and we get closer to Pasadena I decide I'll come back one day.

Come My Sweetheart

Heidi Cruz

Come my sweetheart, my love
Overflows only for you
Come and be my little mistress
You'll love me in time too.

What!? You dare say nay?
You won't be my lover,
Goodbye I'll see you another day!

Come my sweetheart, I am tired
Of my aged wife, come
Say you'll be forever in my life
Help me through the mire.

What!? The church won't give in!
I want my divorce!
I am committing no sin!

Come my sweetheart, I'll get
My way, tonight we'll marry
Then in eight more months
We'll have ourselves a little Harry.

What!? The child is a female?
I want my son!
How could you fail?

Come my sweetheart, we'll try
To get us a boy this time
Soon, Elizabeth will have a brother
Then all will be fine.

What!? You have miscarried?
There is to be no lad
I'm starting to wish we had never married!

Come my sweetheart, we'll try
Once more for my son
It better happen now or else,
Then I'll have to run.

What!? The child born dead?
And a boy alas!
There's no more to be said.

Don't worry, come my sweetheart
The blade won't do too much,
Just cut off your head
Then all you'll be is dead.

Forever

Melissa Falcucci

*In the brightest hour of my darkest day
I realized what is wrong with me
Can't get over you. can't get through to you
It's been a helter-skelter romance from the start
Take these memories that are haunting me
Of a paper man cut into shreds by his own pair of scissors
He'll never forgive her . . . he'll never forgive her . . .*

The music streams from the speakers on the night stand by her bed. The volume is turned almost all the way down, yet the lyrics are as clear as day. She has listened to the song a million times before but today the words seem to come alive, dancing around, mocking her. She stands in front of her vanity, both hands grasping the wood. She leans into the mirror blinking her eyes slowly in an attempt to change what she sees. Her eyes are blood-red and sunken. With her left hand she rubs them, smudging black eyeliner to her hairline. She is exhausted.

It is already nine o'clock in the morning. She has to go. The mass is at 10:30 and she wants to walk the five miles to get there. She could use the time alone. "Melanie, are you ready?" her mom says, peeking her head into her daughter's bedroom. Making eye contact with her mother through her mirror, she says, "I want to walk." She lets her glances fall to her fingernails scraping small paint chips from her dresser. "I can go alone. I want to go alone." Without protest her mother vanishes from her doorway.

Alone again, Melanie throws her old tweed jacket on over her black sweater. Adjusting the collar of the jacket she examines herself in the mirror. She thinks to herself, *I look like grief*. She hates that her black clothes will make her emotions public. People will know. They will see right through her. She tugs at the buttons on her sleeves. She has to go; she doesn't want to be late. She grabs her iPod and hurries out of her house, not acknowledging her mother waiting by the front door.

Because days come and go but my feelings for you are forever
Because days come and go but my feelings for you are forever

"Forever" by Papa Roach blares on repeat. Even though cars speed by her, pushing air past her face, she can hear nothing of their engines and tires. She blocks the world out with her headphones. Walking as fast as she can without running, she makes her way to St. Mary's. One block from the church her pace slows drastically. She swallows, fighting back tears. She stops across the street from the church. She can see people parking their cars and entering. They are her friends and neighbors; she knows them all well. Yet their familiarity does nothing to comfort her.

As she enters the church her face suddenly feels hot. Her flesh feels like it's melting off her body. She takes off her jacket in an effort to relieve the feeling of suffocation. This is the last place she wants to be. Directly in front of her is a maple coffin covered in a sheet of flowers. Roses, lilies, mums, they all seem to be covering the fact that none of this is beautiful. To the right of the altar is a poster-size picture of a young man with dark hair and bright green eyes. Drap-

ing across the picture is a banner that says *Joseph Michael Allen*. Her knees shake under her body weight. Suddenly she can no longer stand. She sits in the last pew keeping her headphones in her ears.

*Sitting by a fire on a lonely night
Hanging over from another good time
With another girl . . . little dirty girl
You should listen to this story of a life
You're my heroine
In this moment I'm lonely
Fulfilling my darkest dreams
All these drugs all these women
I'm never forgiving . . . this broken heart of mine*

The mass proceeds as she expects. His brother gives a speech as his mother sits hunched over fighting back tears. The music blares in her ears.

*One last kiss
Before I go
Dry your tears
It is time to let you go*

She closes her eyes trying to remember Joe. Remember how things were.

Melanie met Joe her freshman year of high school. She was a library dweller and he was a class skipper. They were not what anyone expected. But they were best friends. He was her first love. She was his angel. Joe always told her she

saved him. What he didn't know was that he saved her as well. Together they went through abortions, addictions, and deaths. Together they changed into the people they would become. Lying in the field behind their high school they would discuss how lucky they were. "We will be together forever," he'd whisper in her ear. She would lie on his chest saying nothing. There was nothing to say. She knew he wasn't lying, and he knew she felt exactly the same.

They did not stay together forever as boyfriend and girlfriend. But they had been through too much together to remain apart. With a mixture of love and hatred, they continued to support one another. How can you leave someone who knows who you are and how you have become what you are?

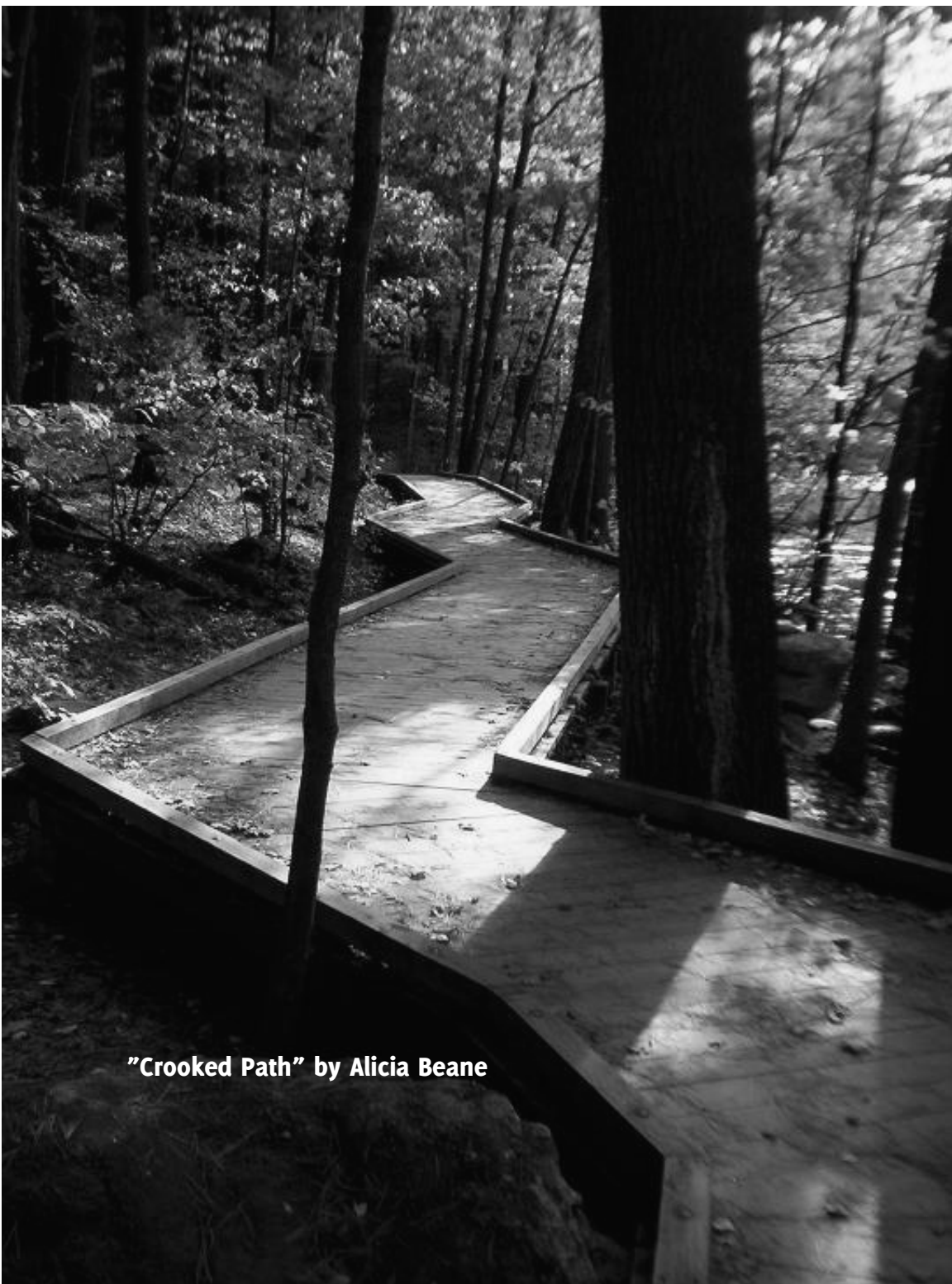
The mass ends, and she attempts to leave the pew. She is immersed in a sea of bodies. Looking at the floor she sees black shoes, socks, and heels rushing past one another. No one seems to notice her and this suits her. The music flooding her mind makes her feel translucent. The procession heads to the cemetery across the street. She waits on the church stairs for the coffin to be carried to the grave site. She watches from a distance as the priest prays and the coffin is lowered into the damp earth. Tears glide down her face and her neck one by one. The cool air dries them leaving small amounts of salt on her skin. She notices Sarah, Joe's current girlfriend, standing in the front of the crowd. She is wearing a short black dress much too short for a funeral. Melanie has never officially met her before, but she knows who she is. Joe's mother rests her hand on Sarah's shoulder in an attempt to calm her exaggerated cries. Melanie's glance meets Joe's mother's for just a second. In that moment his mother

nods slightly and removes her hand from Sarah's shoulder, returning back to her seat next to her son's grave. Melanie's tears become a steady stream.

She stands on the stairs for an hour. No one remains when she finally finds the strength to cross the street. Each step she takes is labored and awkward. Her mind and body seem to be working against one another. She wants to run away. She wants to just lie down on the ground and sleep. Sleep forever. Yet she moves closer and closer to the grave marker. She stands a foot in front of the granite stone, placing one hand on its cool surface. The music still playing:

*One last kiss
Before I go
Dry your tears
It is time to let you go
One last kiss*

She can no longer see clearly. She takes a deep breath and lets her arms fall forward. She glances toward the ground. "Because days come and go, but my feelings for you are forever," she whispers. And with that she finds her composure and lifts her head. Walking away proves to be harder than the walk to the site. She feels a tug at her heart. It is a pull so strong she can barely breathe. She knows walking away will make things permanent. She closes her eyes, imagining leaving part of her soul behind.



"Crooked Path" by Alicia Beane

Butterflies

Kimberly McLaughlin

Butterflies,
I remember how we used to
Crush them in our fists
Watching as their damaged wings
Flickered in despair between the cracks
Of our knuckles,
Yet instead of feeling any sense of remorse
We felt a kinship in their suffering.

Keep Moving

Kevin Woods

Now in his late sixties, John Jordan had a rather ruddy complexion, keen grey eyes that peered from beneath bushy protruding eyebrows, and a shock of white hair that sprouted wildly in all directions as if looking to escape from his scalp. He surveyed his new lodgings fondly. John was the proud new owner of a somewhat rundown cottage in the East Midlands, on the outskirts of Cornwall. The young estate agent, displaying, John had thought, rather comical expressions of adoration and respect for the old place, presented the venue as 'having a rustic charm befitting of such a country gent'. *Where do they get this bullshit from?* John had mused. Despite his dim view of the agent's theatrics, John had needed little persuasion.

Since *it* had happened, the well of memories which existed in his previous dwelling had only served to torture him. This new abode seemed much more adequate to his needs. *It was quite a charming place after all*, he thought. The thick wooden beams that supported the thatched roof, the ornate antique stove that presided over the kitchen, not to mention the crumbling red brick walls that enclosed it all. *Yes, this is as good a place as any.*

John spent most of that day immersed in the task of unpacking his many belongings and organizing them in such a way so as to complement the quirks of the place. The movers had piled all the furniture in the living room in a confused mess, while the carefully labelled boxes dominated the hall of the rickety old cottage. The boxes were stacked

one on top of the other in a way that seemed to defy gravity. He had half a mind to leave them there but, as he told himself, they wouldn't move themselves.

After much toil in the sea of boxes, a weary but satisfied John collapsed into his leather-winged armchair which had been angled facing the fireplace. He absentmindedly spun the cracked, yellowing globe that stood upon a table which he had fashioned from a pile of dusty leather-bound textbooks, acquired courtesy of his years spent as a geography professor. John's eyes were fixed upon an object sitting on the floor at the far end of the room. An old, beautifully crafted wooden box with a rose emblem set into the lid.

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair and worked his fingers through his hair compulsively. Standing up, John walked over to the liquor cabinet and poured himself a large whiskey. Leaning against the wall he sipped at his drink, savouring the rich flavour, and continued contemplating the box. Tentatively, he moved closer, noting the familiar smell of varnish tugging at his consciousness as memories stirred, overlapping each other.

He poured himself another drink and drained his glass in one long draft before grabbing up an old blanket and roughly shoving the bottle of whiskey into his pocket. He then walked determinedly over to where the box lay, snatched it up, and trudged through the hall and out of the front door.

He settled himself down on the little white bench that leaned against the outer wall of the cottage. John placed the box carefully on his lap, wrapped the blanket around his shoulders, and retrieved the bottle from his pocket, taking a swig before resting it on the bench beside him. The site

looked out onto a field where a solitary gnarled old oak tree stood alone, creaking ominously as the wind blew around it. The sky was overcast and bleak; rain looked imminent.

John ran his hand deliberately over the surface of the wood. With a heavy sigh he opened the box. Inside lay a delicate gold ring, a bundle of letters wrapped in a rubber band and a single photograph held within a silver frame. John felt grief stab at his heart, a pain which seemed to be both dulled and magnified simultaneously by the alcohol coursing through his veins.

John picked up the picture and stared at it with watery eyes. He and his wife Miriam looked up at him, their wedding day preserved forever in a photograph. There she stood in her white dress, her dark locks falling elegantly around her face and a smile playing across her ruby-red lips. And there he was, ever so much younger and grinning stupidly, amazed that he was married. John remembered that day like it was yesterday. How they'd laughed, the subtle scent of jasmine that had emanated from her, and the way her eyes had sparkled as they had taken to the floor for the first time as man and wife. He remembered with a pang of guilt the apprehension he had felt in the hours leading up to the ceremony, how he had considered calling it off. Most vividly he remembered the vows where they had promised to love and to hold each other 'til death parted them. But death had parted them, and she was gone. His wife of forty-three years had passed quietly in her sleep nearly a year earlier.

Pulling his mind back to the present John set the picture back in the box and pulled out the letters. He pressed them to his nose smelling the thick parchment on which the let-

ters were written. He could almost smell the jasmine scent they had once held. At the age of eighteen, still in the courtship period, John had been called up to perform his compulsory year of national service. He had been posted in Dortmund, Germany, much to the distress of the young Miriam, but she had written him a letter every week that he was away. Regret welled up inside John as his thoughts strayed to the local girl with whom he'd had a brief fling during this year. He had been young and foolish. With the encouragement of his friends, and more than a few pints of beer, he had offered to buy a young blond barmaid a drink. With the alcohol flowing freely, one thing had led to another, and John had not slept alone that night. Waking the next day, entwined with this stranger, he remembered feeling foul and unwholesome. Distraught, he had explained to the poor girl his situation, and it had ended there. *God, I didn't even deserve Miriam*, he thought ruefully. The knowledge of what he had done had long haunted John's conscience, but he had never told a soul about it, least of all Miriam. It would have tainted her view of him, perhaps irreparably, and John couldn't have borne that.

He replaced the letters carefully back in the box and took out the final nostalgic artifact. The thin gold band that had been Miriam's wedding ring. John placed it on the end of his index finger and gazed at it avidly. *She wore this every day for the forty-three years we were married*, reflected John.

He felt his head quiet and his heart ache as he fingered the ring. He picked up the bottle of whiskey and began to consume the fiery liquid, welcoming the oblivion which would surely come. Through glazed eyes, John watched the

old tree continue to sway in the wind, longing for the morning when the box would be closed.

The Grief of Judas Iscariot

Mckendy Fils-Aimé

When they struck the first piece of iron into your wrists, you reached out for the hands of god.

Although god is omniscient, he wouldn't have descended from heaven to stop such a prophecy.

You must have forgotten this.

We all wrote of how you died.

Your body was bound in all directions while the sun beat on your chest like drums.

Your arms played with Eurus and Zephyr, as your feet looked downward.

Priests of dying ways wanted you silenced, so they made you royalty.

They gleefully donned you with a thorn-filled crown, making you the king of their heretics.

In truth you were the archetype of purity.

Your blood was the innocence needed to heal this dying world, so you let them spill it.

You were the only son, and as expected, you shined incredibly bright.



You were the messiah; the chosen one.

Those loyal to you named you perfection.

But your life was the opposing force to perfect.

As tragedy descended upon you, no servant or ally was

there to aid you.

I remember when I last saw you.

I gave you a cold kiss, which left behind an imprint of
misfortune.

This led the pawns of ecclesiastic kings to arrest you.

You were outnumbered in this game of chess, but you knew
that.

You told us about it during our last supper.

An ambiguous crowd of believers watched you leave this
mortal plane.

There were people with death-loving grins on their faces,
waiting

for the end of this false prophet.

They wanted to go about their lives and pray to their Heras
and Zeuses.

There were your followers, hoping that their newly
discovered god

would help you.

They were willing to fight for their convictions in order to
secure a

place in heaven.

And then there was me.

Shame had wrapped around my neck and left me swinging.

This madness was my fault, so I chose death as my
punishment.

Christ, you were not deserving of such a fate.

It should've been me.

Not you.

I should've been on that cross, wrists
nailed with sin, bleeding guilt on unforgiving
sands.

Instead, I chose to leave this flesh that I once called my own.
Now I watch eleven other men ride down the path
called history, as they brand me with the mark traitor.
Their truths spill onto papyrus, becoming immortalized.
Their muddled perceptions have left my legacy tainted.

You can wipe away the ink, but this role is already
scorched into my skin.
They say that while you tried for peace, I let silver coins
 dance
around my thoughts.
Their stories claim that the devil entered me, filled my veins
 with fire, and
burned my morals away, leaving only greed.

I watch the folly of these grown men and cry silver tears.
I am not golden enough to retaliate against such
 child-hearted ones.
This is what has become of me.
Like the destruction of great monuments, faith in my name
 is tragic.
People once proudly called me Judas, but now they only
 hope
that I asked for forgiveness.
And I did.
In the name of the father . . . and of the son.



"Yar" by Kimberly McLaughlin

One Beautiful Wave

Alicia Beane

The truth in the matter is
There's no truth at all.
Nothing behind this wall
Makes any sense.
I've been around long enough
To see the waves come in
Then rush back out,
But all along never
Return any treasures
That the depths of the ocean
Keep locked away,
Buried from the sun,
Moon, and every star.
Waves are nothing
But waves.
The moonlight may
Cause them to wink
At the beaches'
Salty sand,
But no more than
A wave it becomes.
I've tried to take
Waves in my hand
And build them a home
Inside my anxious heart.
But so quickly they slipped
Past my fingertips.

I should have known
Waves could not be tamed.
The ocean's not one who
Easily lets go of her
Dreams, the pieces
Of her soul.
But I can not blame her.
I now stare at those waves,
Wearing my heart
On my sleeve,
The wind shall catch it,
Swing it around on
The breeze until
It lands on the surface
Of one beautiful wave;
Glistening and silent,
Moving in slowly
Then crashing back out,
Cradling along with it
My precious old heart.
Only there will it be
Safely guarded by she
Who does not easily
Let go or give in
To every poor lover's whim.

"Cherry Blossom" by Shelly Petry



Catapultboy

Dillon St. Jean

Ben picked at the chipped wood on the corner of his desk as the clock ticked away. He continuously scraped his thumbnail across the split spots as his class slowly dragged along, sapping the life out of him until he was sure it would leave him only a dried, withered husk of a nine-year-old. The only thing that could stir him from near-unconsciousness was the crack and fizzle of the intercom.

"Boys and girls," said the husky, middle-aged voice of the principal, "I have a little announcement for you. Tomorrow, due to minor time constraints in our construction, we will need to extend your midday recess by a half-hour. That is all."

The third-grader's eyelids cracked open as he pulled his head up from his desk. He twitched as the possibility drove through his mind at breakneck speed. His eyes darted back and forth, and his grin broke through one side of his mouth. Ben's best friend Tuck looked over at him inquisitively.

"Ben," he began, "what is it?"

"Tomorrow," he replied. "I'm going to do it tomorrow."

*

In the bathroom the next day, Tuck and his friend Spenser were standing by the sinks. Tuck looked in the mirror to wipe a small stain off of his cheek, while Spenser perpetually paced back and forth. "I just don't understand

what you're saying," said Spenser. "What is it Ben is going to do?"

"He wouldn't tell me," said Tuck. He leaned against the cool porcelain of the sink as he spoke. "He told me he'd be here in a little bit to explain it."

The bathroom door slammed open as Ben rushed in with a large rolled-up piece of paper in his hands. An aviator hat and a pair of goggles rested upon his head; the brown leather flaps brushed against his cheeks as he walked. He immediately dropped down onto the bathroom floor and unfurled a set of blueprints. "This is what I want to do today," said Ben. He dragged his hands along the paper to straighten it out as best as he could, holding onto the corners to keep it open. It was covered in a number of cartoons done in white crayon, illustrating a throng of different features that could be found in the play yard of the school. There were the two seesaws, located right next to the monkey bars. On the monkey bars was a large illustration of a boy with several bags, while a number of small children were drawn around the seesaw with a set of ropes wrapped around the end of it. Tuck and Spenser were quick to crouch down near Ben as Spenser adjusted his glasses to get a clearer look.

"What is all this?" asked Spenser, already tracing the drawings with his index finger. "I don't really understand."

"I want to catapult myself," said Ben. "As far as I can go."

Ben's grandfather had been a fighter pilot in World War II. He would always tell Ben stories about the things he had done in the war, despite the protests from his parents that Ben was too young to hear them. After all, how else would

the boy learn to get the drop on a Nazi? All of the stories would leave Ben entranced by the prospect of flight. His grandfather had made it seem so wonderful, to fly through the air entirely free. He taught him a lot about how to appreciate the journey of his life, rather than to focus all his attention on the end result. When he gave his grandson his own set of goggles and a hat, Ben had decided that he should do whatever he could to fly.

The three boys spent the rest of the early morning going over Ben's plans. They would need the support of a large number of the third-grade boys. None of the girls were to be let in on the project, at Ben's request. At the beginning of recess, Tuck would sneak into the supply closet of the gym and smuggle out four jump-ropes. Each of them would be tied around the seesaw closest to the monkey bars, with a boy on each side ready to pull. On the monkey bars would be a very specific boy: Patrick Sullivan, aka Fat Pat. Fat Pat was the largest boy in the third grade, and not just because he had been held back once. He was incredibly heavy, meaning that anyone who shared the seesaw with him would be in serious danger. Ben's plan was to take several backpacks, load them with textbooks, and have Fat Pat hold them to bolster his weight. It was then that he would jump onto the seesaw, followed by the other boys pulling down on it as hard as possible. With any luck, Ben would shoot off the spraypainted wooden seat like a rocket, jettisoned into the sky.

"This is dangerous, Ben," said Spenser. "You could get hurt doing this."

Spenser was the smartest boy in the third grade. He could take tests with his eyes closed and get A's every time.

That's why Ben needed him to make sense of everything. Tuck was primarily there to rally their classmates and to act as moral support, being the boy who knew just about everyone. Without his best friend at his side, it was unlikely that Ben would be able to make the shot.

"Spenser," began Ben, "I'm going to need you to make sure this is all possible."

"Oh it's definitely possible. Trust me, I have faith that you can do this, but you haven't drawn anything to cover your landing." Spenser circled a blank spot on the page.

"The landing doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does, actually," said Tuck. "It matters quite a bit."

"Trust me, the landing doesn't matter." Ben turned and walked out of the bathroom, readjusting the goggles that rested on his forehead. Tuck and Spenser looked at each other nervously as Ben strutted through the hall.

*

The day moved on casually. Ben managed to sit through his first two classes, but was impatient all throughout. His legs jostled as he stared at the clock. Notes were passed in just about every third-grade class informing them of the plan, with small copies of the blueprints sketched on the other side. By then it was public knowledge to all the third-grade boys, but to no one else. Tuck had been assembling the strongest boys in the third grade, while Spenser drew a small pile of mats on the blueprints. According to the math he had done, Ben would probably land in that spot. *Probably*. Spenser was, after all, only a third-grader,

which justified the uncertainty he had voiced to everyone involved. Every boy was prepared to put together the plan just as recess began. Tuck was the loudest, most attention-grabbing boy in their age group. There was a problem, however, when May found a dirty, trampled note on the floor of the social studies class.

May was an auburn-haired third-grader who absolutely loved Ben. He was her favorite subject. Unfortunately the header of the note she had found, reading “Ben’s Astounding Catapult Launch,” caused her to go into a panic. At the sound of the school bell, she was already off running. Meanwhile, Tuck was already talking with Patrick, who was sitting on a bench quietly, sipping his apple juice.

“Come on, Fa—*Pat* . . . ” said Tuck, cautiously, “we need you to do this with us.” Patrick looked up at Tuck like a puppy dog and mumbled something indecipherable. “What’s that? Speak up.”

“You guys are always so mean to me,” said Patrick. “You call me dumb and fat all the time.”

“Oh come on, not all the time. Besides, you’re not dumb. You got held back in the first grade, that doesn’t mean anything.”

Patrick remained silent and sipped from his straw some more.

“If you do this, we’ll all go hang out after school.”

At that, Patrick’s eyes lit up and he stood up straight, towering over Tuck. He was also the *tallest* boy in the third grade.

Recess had begun. Ben stood at the seesaw, just fantasizing about what it would be like as he soared through the air. He moved over and sat himself down upon the rigid

wood, positioning himself like a small fighter pilot. It promised to be the greatest moment of his life up until then. He was lost in his world until May swept across the hot top over to Ben.

"Ben!" she shouted. "You can't do this! You could get killed, or worse!"

"I'm not afraid," said Ben, calmly. His gaze was still fixed on the cloud-speckled blue of the sky. "Besides, there's nothing you can do to stop me."

"What if I were to tell you that I loved you?"

"As if that meant something to me."

"Then what if I were to tell one of the teachers?"

"Well, then I would never love you in return." Ben folded his arms and tilted his head away from her in contempt. She gasped and rushed to his side.

"You don't mean it!" she shouted.

"Try me," he boasted. May was incapable of movement. She gazed into his paralyzing eyes and was left absolutely motionless.

"All right, fine," she said. "But just be sure your landing goes well."

"The landing doesn't matter."

May turned and stormed away in a huff, leaving Ben to fantasize about his amazing journey once more.

*

The plan was in action. Tuck and Spenser had snuck into the gym while Patrick distracted any and all adults with a fake leg pain. Following the blueprints' design, the boys grabbed just enough jump-ropes and a couple of blue mats

from the gym. They dragged the torn, dirty mats across the pavement and dropped them to the side. After wrapping the ropes around the end of the seesaw, they went back to position the mats. Ben remained seated, at that point reading an issue of *The Flash*. He chuckled as he flipped the pages, and his friends did their best to ensure his safety. As the boys shifted the mats around, taking their best guess at where they belonged, May came running up to them in a fast-forwarded frenzy.

"You two need to do something," she said.

"We are," said Spenser. "We're rearranging these mats to keep Ben from killing himself."

"Well, you aren't doing a very good job. Look at this, he's probably going to land much farther back than that! And you'll need more mats! He'll break his legs on just this!"

Spenser turned to Tuck, who was doing his best to line up one of the padded pieces of fabric parallel to the painted lines on the pavement. "May thinks we need more mats."

"Tell her she's stupid," said Tuck, without even diverting focus.

"May, you're stupid," said Spenser, pushing up his glasses at her distress. Once again, she was left with nothing to do but storm away in disappointment. It wasn't until she was out of earshot that they continued their conversation.

"Do you think we might need some more mats?" asked Tuck.

"Yeah, probably," said Spenser. The two then headed back out to remedy the situation.

Patrick was already back to the adults. This time, it was a claim of a big bruise on his back sustained from being hit

with a tennis ball at maximum velocity. Tuck and Spenser took a number of the boys back into the gym to retrieve more padding. They grabbed seven, just to be sure they had a respectable stack. The boys heaved them all into a pile on a spot where Spenser guessed Ben might land, possibly. Maybe. Sort of. Several third-graders were already loading up their backpacks with their heaviest books, and Patrick was beginning his climb up the monkey bars. It was just about that time.

*

There wasn't much time left of recess. Despite being an extended period, it had taken the boys a bit of time to get everything done under the noses of authority figures. Ben remained on his seat, with his arms extended, pretending he was an airplane. He could already feel the wind rush by him as he fantasized about his flight. Fortunately, just about everything was set in place. Patrick sat at the top of the monkey bars, planting his feet against the steel in preparation of his jump. A number of boys were standing at the sides of the seesaw, gripping the jump-ropes tightly. It was up to Tuck and Spenser to take one last shot at explaining to Ben just how dangerous it was going to be.

"Ben," began Tuck, "I don't think you should do this. I mean, if you got hurt, we'd all be in trouble. A lot of trouble."

"We've put out as many mats as we can," said Spenser, "but we can't really tell where you're gonna land. What if you go sideways? Or flip backwards?"

Ben looked at both of them with frustration. "The landing doesn't matter, I don't care about it. I know what I'm doing."

The idea that Ben had any semblance of knowledge as to what he was doing was ridiculous. He had never even attempted anything like it before, and knew nothing of what to do. Judging from the way he had been positioning himself on the seat was proof enough that he was completely unprepared for whatever would happen next. Ben didn't care. His grandfather had taught him to be braver than that.

The two sighed and left Ben to his own personal preparations. Everything was ready. Ben positioned himself on the seat carefully. He pulled the goggles down over his eyes and crouched onto the end, gripping the metal bar in front of him tightly. "All right," he shouted to his crew, "let's go!"

"Wait!" There was a cry from a small group of spectators of every grade. Pushing through the crowd of children was May, who was running up to Ben's side.

"What do you want, May? I'm doing this. You can't stop me."

"But what if you die?"

"I'm not going to die from doing this, May, I'm only nine."

May looked down as her cheeks tightened in disappointment. Before Ben could say anything to make her feel any better, she quickly kissed him on the cheek. Ben conorted in revulsion and used his shirt to scrub his face. May smiled a bit before backing away. Shaking his head, Ben fixed his placement and looked up to Patrick, prepared to give his signal.

The fear that Tuck, Spenser, and May had each been feeling seemed to have extended to the young spectators. They talked amongst themselves, mostly wondering what Ben's parents would say, or what they would tell the teachers after he landed flat on the pavement. Everyone was obsessed with what would happen at the end. The potential for harm was too great. Not a soul could watch comfortably, but none of them would pull their attention away.

Ben's hand raised up in the air as Patrick waited for his cue. Just the bold anticipation of Ben's expression was enough to give Patrick confidence he had never had. With a smirk he stood up straight at the end of the monkey bars and gripped his bags tightly. He leaped from the rusty construct and hit the opposite end of the seesaw with his stomach. It was then that the other boys added their little extra as they pulled down on the jump-ropes. All of it came together to send Ben careening through the sky.

He flew through the open air. The cool wind breezed against his face as the glare of the sunlight shot across his goggles. A smile broke free on his face as he positioned himself like a superhero. Ben was free. It was more than just the crowd watching him at that point. Everyone in the yard had turned their gaze to watch Ben fly. Even the teachers, who were supposed to be focused on preventing things such as this, had peered around the building and watched in awe as Ben glided out in the open. Every other feeling the spectators had burned away as Ben eclipsed the sun.

Contributors

Alicia Beane is a junior majoring in English/Lit. She won the student poetry contest run by *Amoskeag*, SNHU's faculty-run journal, in both 2008 and 2009.

Vincent Casciato is a Creative Writing major and a senior in college. He likes to write about characters in situations beyond their control. His interests include traveling, movies, and nature/scenery.

Heidi Cruz is a junior majoring in Creative Writing. Horses and Tudor England are her main interests.

Joshua Dick is the master of awkward, the prophet of destruction, and that-kid-in-a-bathrobe. He is rumored to have spawned from the inferno during some point in the mid 13th century, although he is said not to have taken physical form until 1986. Hindus speak of him as bad karma incarnate, burdened with the sins of humanity and doling out subtle punishments for bad deeds. The Aztecs predict that in the year 2012 he will abandon his bodily form, showing the world the entirety of its sin, thus destroying the human race to create a purer form of existence. Some herald this event, others fear it. He also likes to play Call of Duty 4.

Nicole Doane is a sophomore majoring in English Language and Literature. She is fascinated by much of literature and

spends a great deal of time attempting to expand her knowledge on the subject.

Nicole Escobar is a freshman who's majoring in something having to do with liberal arts and writing, and next year she will be dictator of *The Manatee*. She spends her free time being sure that the universe has a center (since she is the center) and insulting people every ten seconds without their knowledge. If you received a nasty rejection letter this year, she probably sent it.

Melissa Falcucci is a junior majoring in International Business with a Creative Writing minor. She is a dancer for the Manchester Millrats, a basketball team in NH. She has been dancing since she was two and hopes to someday dance for a professional national sports team. She wants to work for *Vogue* someday. And she would love to move to Italy after college.

Ashley Fandrich is a sophomore majoring in Psychology with a minor in Sociology.

Mckendy Fils-Aimé is a brother of four, a lover of none, and a friend to man. He enjoys writing, watching movies, the arts. On most days, you'll find him eating pop-tarts or writing a poem; never both at the same time. He plans on getting a Bachelor's degree in English at SNHU within the next couple of years. What he'll do with that piece of paper remains undecided. Perhaps he'll invest it in this thing called a "Master's Degree." More than likely, not.

Mayra Gomez is a sophomore majoring in Creative Writing.

Grant Weston Herleikson is from Eastford, CT, and works as a professional alligator wrestler. He loves cooking, sleeping, eating, and Phi Delta Theta. Also “music is life.”

Melissa Hurley is a sophomore in Creative Writing.

Feroz Ilyas is a transfer student from Malaysia who is currently majoring in Business Studies (IT Concentration). He loves art, but since he can barely even draw a straight line, he takes pictures. Photography is his art, his expression, his passion. A photograph can say what we can't say with words. He always has his camera hanging around his neck. So, if you see him around, smile.

Tara Junkins enjoys reading and writing in her spare time. She also enjoys watching *Scrubs*; Zach Braff owns and they never should have ended it.

Susan Kovach is a senior with an individually designed major with a concentration in Art History and an English/Literature Minor. She loves writing, however, and would like to pursue it more after she graduates.

Myriam Labbe is a junior at SNHU and a Creative Writing major, and contributor to the “Manchester Diaries” column of the newly published *Manchester Magazine*. She enjoys reading, writing short stories, creating rosaries and prayer beads, and baking.

Cassandra Levesque is a freshman majoring in Creative Writing and Procrastination. She once took over the world from her fortress in Antarctica, but no one noticed . . . Her amazing penguin army was overlooked while people spazzed over butterflies flapping their wings to create waves of mass destruction.

Kimberly McLaughlin is a sophomore who recently changed her major from culinary arts to creative writing. She started getting into poetry in her senior year of high school, thanks to her British literature class. She read tons of poetry by British authors and all of them were very inspiring. It made her want to write her own poems. She has been writing basically nonstop since then and is constantly looking for inspiration for new writings in everything.

Melissa Ngai is a senior majoring in Creative Writing. While she has written poetry for *The Manatee*, she considers herself more of a fiction writer. There are rumours that she battles the Justice League and other assorted groups of Big Damn Heroes amidst the gang wars of New York, but she refuses to comment on the subject.

Ian Nicholas is totally pumped at his audacity in putting his own story in the book he's editing.

Shelly Petry is a senior and a political science major. She enjoys learning about the world and photographing it.

Michael Roscoe steals a little of your shampoo in a Dixie cup every night and smears it on the inside of his pillow case.

Dillon St. Jean is a junior creative writing major at SNHU, and the Creative Editor for the SNHU newspaper, *The Observer*. He's currently working on a novel and a few other things here and there.



Amanda Walley is currently a first-year MFA student at SNHU. In 2007 she completed her Bachelor's in Psychology. Her artistic outlets include Ballroom and Latin dancing and writing in various genres, predominantly fiction. Recently she has found photography as a new outlet to silently express to others what and how she sees the world. She was born and raised in Mississippi, but is proud to call New Hampshire home for the last four years.

Kevin Woods, nicknamed Woodsy, was born and bred in Aberdeen, Scotland. He came to America to play soccer and to earn a business degree. Quite inadvertently he discovered his passion to write and has enjoyed indulging himself since.