

SPRING 2010



The Manatee

STORIES



POETRY



ESSAYS◆

PHOTOS

BY SNHU STUDENTS



WHAT'S THE MANATEE?

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

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PICTURE

NICOLE ESCOBAR

DARLA PACED AROUND THE KITCHEN. IN HER HANDS was a picture of her family, enjoying a day at the beach. Her son Joshua, age three in the picture, had been smiling that entire day. She couldn't remember a happier moment. That day couldn't have been more than a year ago. Suddenly there was a knock at the door causing Darla to spin around, eyes wide. She knew who it was, what they wanted. She placed the frame on the kitchen table and walked toward the entryway.

On the way to the door, she stopped at the mirror. The sight she took in was surprising. Her hair badly needed to be re-dyed; she could see the gray beneath the bottle auburn from the home coloring kit. There were pouches under her eyes, still blue-tinged despite all the makeup she had put on that morning. She straightened the collar on her blouse as she remembered the sunshine and warm sand on that perfect day.

Another knock on the door dragged Darla out of her memory. No need to dwell on the past, keep moving forward. She looked in the mirror one more time and decided that this was the best she could do. She walked to the door, trying to muster up the most nonchalant look possible.

"What took you so long?" Darla said, frustrated.

"It took a bit longer to close the shop than usual," Darla's husband, Tom, said. "Why didn't you open the door sooner it's freezing out here."

"Let's stop the small talk, get this over with," Darla said.

Tom pushed his way through the partially opened door, almost knocking Darla over. He walked over to the disassembled boxes leaning against the dining room table. "Are these all the boxes you got?" he asked.

"Do you need more?" asked Darla. She pulled at her skirt, trying to straighten the hem.

"You know, if I can't fit everything in these, I'll just be back."

"So be it," Darla said.

Tom walked into Joshua's room. As Darla moved to follow, Tom shut the door behind him. Darla turned around, heading towards the kitchen. With rigid movements, she turned on the kettle for tea.

Darla heard a bang coming from behind the door, but she continued to work, pulling two mugs from the cupboard. "Earl Grey, his favorite," she said, pulling down the ripped cardboard container.

Tom walked by, a box in his arms. "I don't want tea," he said.

Darla ignored him, as the kettle started to whine.

After choosing chamomile tea for herself, she poured water into both cups. As she lifted the hot liquids, she noticed a chip in Tom's. *Can't I do anything right?* she thought, placing the mug in the sink upside down. She watched the dark liquid run down the drain and pivoted to sit in the chair behind her.

"Was that the kettle whistling?" Tom asked coming down the hallway with a box.

"Yes, I made some tea," Darla said.

Tom went over to the table, where he leaned against the chair across from her. "Weren't you even going to offer me some?" he asked.

"You told me you didn't want any."

"It's rude not to at least offer something."

"Well, I didn't have a clean mug," Darla said.

Tom's gaze turned stony as he looked at Darla's face, "I'm out of boxes so I guess I'll have to get more at the store and come back tomorrow."

"There are more boxes in the hall closet."

Tom crossed the room back toward the hall and retrieved the rest of the boxes. "Why are you being so difficult?" he asked.

Darla picked a magazine up from the counter behind her, and flipped it open at random. It was one of Joshua's

Highlights. The page she had flicked opened to happened to be his favorite, the Hidden Pictures game.

Every month she and Joshua would play it together, taking turns finding an item. It was tradition and Darla couldn't help circling the first one she found with her finger, a balloon. She glanced across the table to the picture she had laid down, Joshua's smile, the smile that constantly floated into her mind, always at the worst moment. She reached across to take him into her arms. She sat there, trying not to break down yet, until Tom returned.

"Okay, I'm finished," Tom said, placing a box by the door. He plodded up behind Darla. "What's that you've got?"

"Just a picture. It's from when we went to the Cape for the day, remember?" Darla asked.

"Of course I remember."

"But do you remember how happy Josh was in all that sun? How he smiled the entire day?"

"It's not important what I remember," he said.

He reached over her shoulder and gripped the picture. Tom wrenched the frame out of her arms. Darla grabbed for it, but Tom was already walking away, towards the door.

"Wait, you forgot..." she said, as he slammed the door.

Darla tread towards the closet. She opened the door, crouched down, and reached into the back. Darla pulled out a package, wrapped and topped with a bow. She brought it with her to the door, and grabbed a sign and hammer from the table. Careful not to look at the objects in her hands, she turned the knob on the front door.

Darla walked to the curb. As she approached, her gaze landed on the boxes, which were overflowing. Her hand trembled slightly as she placed the gift gently atop the pile. Her eyes burned as she hammered the sign into the partially frozen soil, her breath fogging up in her face from the effort.

As she walked back to the house a car drove by slowly, no doubt reading the sign:

Free Children's Toys, Barely Used

THE MANATEE



SNOW AND SUN- SUZANNE LENTELL

WHAT COMES IN THE ABSENCE OF LOVE

RUDINE MANNING

"HERE IN OUR SLEEP THERE'S MORE TO THESE NIGHTMARES.

WILL SHE BEG FOR YOUR MERCY?" -2113

we tiptoe over shards of ocean tossed glass.
the nicks on the bottoms of our feet
sting when they meet the sea. the distant
screams of sirens are enough to send
us free falling into a trance – limbs flailing,
our hearts beating in our throats.

where we're going we don't need
roads. we'll flutter three inches above
the ground and when we wiggle our toes –
grains of sand will remind us that
once upon a time we were real.

NIGHT BLOOD
KIMBERLY McLAUGHLIN

IT WAS DARK WITH ONLY THE FLICKERING OF the dim oil lamps and the stars of heaven to light the otherwise gloomy gravel roads. There was no breath of the living, nor was there the pounding of nervous hearts or cautious steps; it was as if the darkness of the night was warding them off. There was one person, however, who seemed to welcome the night – William Harper.

He stood leaning against one of the roadside lamps, and if anyone else were around, it would seem as if he were trying to absorb the faint glow. He was dressed finely in a white button up shirt with a brown waistcoat over it, a black tailcoat left unbuttoned, and matching trousers. There was a black top hat placed upon his messy, cropped light brown hair and he wore shiny black leather shoes on his feet. He stood silently, impatiently waiting.

“Well, if it isn’t Mr. William Harper! It’s been awhile!” A deep, rich voice floated to his ears seconds before he saw another man emerging from the pitch-black alleyway in front of him. The man’s shoulder length, silky black hair was tied back by a brown leather band. His eyes were a beautiful but unnatural blue and seemed to send off a small voltage of electricity to anyone who met them.

William shivered.

“It’s about time you’ve arrived, Phineas.”

“I had an important meeting.”

William raised an eyebrow skeptically, “You still have blood on your lips – it’s running down your chin.” He pointed to his own to show Phineas where it was. Phineas laughed, wiping his chin with the back of his sleeve and leaving a trail of blood on the otherwise crisp white shirt. “Who did you feed from this time?”

“She was a pretty lass and tasted just as good as she looked. It was positively divine!” Phineas said delightedly, making over exaggerated hand motions with his gloved fingers flexing. His expression turned thoughtful. “Not as good as you were, though.”

William made a choked noise in the back of his throat before saying, “I’m sure you enjoyed it.”

“You should be happy you had the pleasure to be turned by me.”

“I find it hard to be so delighted,” William replied mockingly.

They were silent for awhile after that, only the darkness as company. Phineas started to sniff the air with a disgusted look on his handsome, porcelain face. He leaned closer to his conversation partner. “Rat again, William? Absolutely repulsive!”

“I just don’t think it’s right...to kill people.”

“It isn’t killing, my dear William. I think of it more as getting rid of the trash.”

William pushed himself from the lamppost furiously, his abnormal green eyes glowing eerily as he shouted, "How can you say that, Phineas? That they're just trash, unworthy of living? We're people too!"

Phineas laughed as if it was the most hilarious thing in the world to say, then placed his hand on his face and stared piercingly at William through the cracks of his parted fingers, "We're not people, William Harper. We're better."

William stared at him for a short while before breaking eye contact and focusing on the gravel at his feet, "Were you always such a monster?"

"I've no memory of a time where I wasn't." As if to convince William he was telling the truth, Phineas repeated, "I have no memory of a time where I wasn't."

William folded his arms as if trying to warm his icy cold skin. "I don't think I can travel with you anymore."

"Oh? And you think I would just let you go? Just like that?" Phineas questioned him in a teasing, yet unworried voice before moving over to William. With a cunning smile, Phineas cupped William's chin and raised it upward until William's green eyes met his blue. In a cold whisper, Phineas murmured, "There's no way I would let you leave me."

"I'll fight you if I have to, Phineas."

Phineas frowned and straightened himself to appear more intimidating. He released his companion's chin and moved his gloved hand upward to begin slowly stroking the

side of William's face. Though he may have taken the gesture as being affectionate had he not known Phineas, William found the smooth sensation of the glove against his skin concerning. It seemed odd that though they had traveled together for a hundred years, Phineas was still an enigma to him.

"You are one of the *changed*. You're no match for me."

"And just because you have the blue eyes of the *born* means nothing to me," William said frostily. "I hate no other person, no other vampire, no other blood sucking leech more than I hate you, and hate, Phineas, is one emotion that you should not underestimate."

"Emotions are useless, William Harper, and you are a fool to feel them."

"I am no more a fool than you are for damning your own feelings."

Phineas snarled viciously. "I'd watch what you say boy."

It was William's turn to laugh, though bitterly, before sighing, "I'm boy now, eh? I'm tired, Phineas, tired of being trapped here under your laws."

"I gave you eternal life. You should be forever grateful to me!"

"Grateful, you say? Grateful? For what? You ruined my life! I had a wife, a daughter and you slaughtered them mercilessly! I can't even walk in the sun's warmth! No, Phineas, I should not be grateful to you!"

Phineas' body stiffened as though he was ready to attack if need be. "They were holding you back," he growled.

"I loved them and you took them away from me to a place where I can't join them," William said bitterly. "I can never join them."

Phineas' posture untightened as the heat of the situation seemed to simmer down. He softly spoke. "Then stay with me, William. Stay with me forever."

Crimson trails started to flow rapidly down William's cheeks from his eyes and began dripping off his smooth, flawless skin onto the rough gravel road. "I can't bear to live with my family's murder a second longer; I've already been with you a hundred years too many."

Phineas clutched William's face with both of his hands smearing the blood tears all over it with his thumbs. With his nails digging slightly into William's cold flesh, he pleaded, "Please, please stay with me."

"I can't."

Phineas rattled the head in his grasp, knocking the black top hat from its perch on William's head to the gravel before releasing him in exasperation, "Leave me, then. I don't need an emotional fool such as you."

William smiled sorrowfully before replying, "That's the sad part: you will always remain alone. But I suppose that is the punishment for being born a monster." And with those parting words, William Harper left, leaving only his black top hat and a defeated Phineas in the fading lamp light.

THE MANATEE



BEACH- ALICIA BEANE

DARK EYES
TUDOR ENGLAND POEM
HEIDI CRUZ

BLEEDING INNOCENCE,
Lost years ago. The dark eyes-
Can he force the
Image he sees in them away?

Gold red locks become
Raven dark, the
Delicate neck seems
Scarred, a circle all around.

Sanguine tears frame
The child's eyes-
He wants to look away,
But this apparition
Locks him in place.

THE MANATEE

Her child, his child

Their child.

He can't have all of her,

Part of her belongs

To the guiltless ghost.

She smiles at him, with knowledge

Brimming in her once lively eyes,

Places a kiss on her beloved

Daughter's flushed face.

He blinks, there stands his daughter,

Smiling at him innocently,

With the spirit's enchanting eyes.

AGE
ALICIA BEANE

THE MORNING HELD its mystery
Its greyness kept me sleeping:
I slept much too long.
The mirrored sky was sinking down
I felt its weight upon me.
The clouds like veils push apart
Showing the gruesome heavens.
Winter is what summer was not:
The frozen kiss on the ground
Spreads like a disease.
Where do the birds fly?
They fly from troubles as I can not.
The wind tells me much of age:
How long he's been about.
I tremble with fear.
The worn earth may creak about

THE MANATEE

But still I could never understand
Age, as she does.
With seasons in
And seasons out
The earth, it seems the same to me.
But oh, the wind knows differently.

A FERTILE BALL OF DUNG
JULIE PAGE

SOMEWHERE INSIDE of me
there is a memory
of Sam and I climbing
the limestone and travertine
cliffs of Pamukkale. 5

Arguing.
Me pressing for love and he
grasping at freedom,
our notions of fulfillment clash
against a moonscape 10

of milky-turquoise pools of hot water
of such tingling beauty
I cannot describe that it shames us
to mar the Turkish chalk with our
misery. We rest 15

THE MANATEE

atop the strewn marble
of the ancient city of Hierapolis
and see two dung beetles rolling
a fibrous ball of feces,
a perfect sphere 20
many times their size.

An untroubled courtship.
Girl and boy rolling their tomorrows
in a straight line
their straight line 25
to protect

and to grow in its parameters.
Small souls in tandem
wheeling through tangles
of grasses, over 30
mountains of rocks, never
pushing or pulling too hard.

WOMEN OF THE *BLACK ART*
RUDINE MANNING

A WOMAN WHO WRITES feels too much

And we, Ms. Sexton, are proof.
As chaos rages in our fragile minds,
Fragments of meaning, of purpose
Fall at our feet:
We bend down to pick them up,
And in that moment there is
Peace.

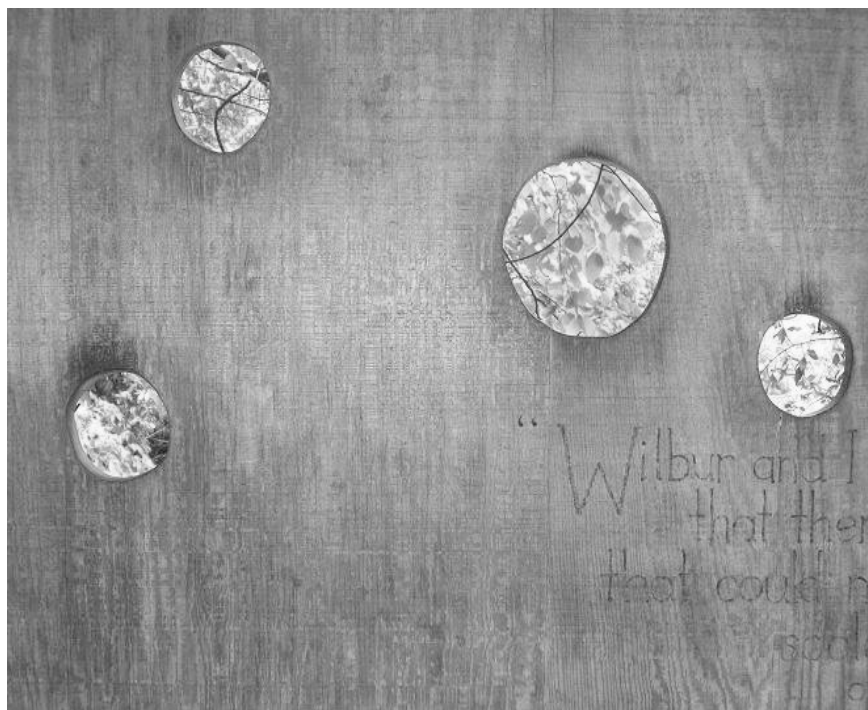
A man who writes knows too much

And he writes without reason
These men that think they've felt
Real pain, press pen to paper with ease
Shedding ink, not blood –
Like you and I.
Until its life or death for them,
Dear love, they have no idea at all.

Never loving ourselves,

The way we love the words that drip
From our finger tips.
Never needing anyone the way we need
The calm after the raging storm
That is who we are –
Who we have become.
Dear Love, we are
Women of the *black art*.

THE MANATEE



HOLY WOOD- ALICIA BEANE

PYRE

LOUIS BERCELI

THE SUN SANK AND IT WAS OUR PYRE. We SCREAMED and screamed until our throats were red with blood and we screamed a wordless plea to the plummeting light. We stood atop the peak without seeing one another. No hands were held, not anymore. The air was cool and crisp and salty but the joy had gone from it. We stood together yet so very alone and screamed the day to an end.

We came there armed with little more than devotion and hope. We followed Robert, the best among us, to that place in the sea. It was the last handful of land yet untouched by the savage machines of man and we meant to call it home. We stood on the shore laughing without end. We reveled in our solitude, we reveled in the endless possibility and the guarantee of a better tomorrow. Robert was silent and still as always but his joy was an older sort. We sank our teeth into his throat to drink of his wisdom.

The boat burned like a new sun. We stood on the sands and watched it glow and it was a second dawn to us. We laughed and shrieked and sang hymns to god. Robert held his hands out as if to embrace the flames. The land was our own and we had even conquered the night. We had brought the light of day to the darkest of realms.

Kyle had lived in the heart of our former nation since he was a boy and knew how to make the earth tremble and

sigh beneath his touch. He set to work gathering seeds and he strode into the thick of the woods as if he already knew the path. We all did. He vanished into the land's bounty like a phantom and we mumbled a small prayer for him. We had made the land our own and Kyle was to tame it.

Many among us knew the savage arts of architecture, that shameful craft from our old nation. They began to assemble a small fortress against the elements but were stopped by a wave of Robert's hand. The land was not to be marred by the old ways. We clasped hands as the sun set and sung a prayer to our god. Robert stood silent as always but bowed his head as if greeting a familiar friend.

The land was fertile to all hands but those of man. Kyle's efforts were for naught and the ground refused to yield anything we asked of it. We turned to Robert but he was without words. We foraged deep into the land, gathering rather than planting. If the land would not give then we would take. We still sang the old songs of hope and joy as we went. We sang them with a new tune and it was not to exult the heavens but to quiet the low whispers of fear.

Michael was the first to turn from us. He had brought with him a demon, hidden away from our probing eyes. His demon craved the nectars of the old world, the nectars he had sworn to abandon. He took to drinking the fermented juices of fruit, and became as one possessed. We set upon him as one and dragged him to the highest peak we could find. We bound him to a tree with vines and what little rope we had brought with us. He never howled as we had imagined, not even as the stones began to crack the inner workings of his body. We felt an unease as the last stone

flew and we could not quiet it with song.

It wasn't long before the land's bounty vanished. Our voyages into the thick forest were no longer guided by song. The trees were picked clean and the ground beneath our feet had nothing left to give. Despite Robert's laws, some of us gave chase to the fauna of our home. They were swift and we were slow and after a time we abandoned hopes of catching them.

The children soon turned from us as well. They gathered in secret and grew bold. They pined for the comforts of the old world, for plastic and neon and sweets. They grew slothful and rebellious and soon the nights were filled with their cries. We held councils, endless councils, but no deliberation quieted their cries. We tasted of Robert's wisdom but it had fled like the land's gifts. We took him to the peak and crucified him upon a crude construction of damp timber. A day later he came down from the peak with pleading eyes but we drove him off with stones and fists. That night the children were silenced and we ate without words, filling our bellies with the blood of our last hope.

The next day we found our tongues had forgotten the songs. We stood about on the sand and could not look at one another. A woman began to weep and we filled her mouth with sand until she was still. The sun began to sink and we rushed as one to the peak. We stood and howled long and loud. We roared our last song to the dying light. It was a wordless, bloody hymn, a prayer to a deaf god. We screamed and screamed our fruitless prayer and never expected an answer.

THE MANATEE

VALEDICTION

ALICIA BEANE

I GAVE UP ON YOU- LIKE A FOOL should do.

I let you go- a lost balloon.

Sometimes I try to catch your eye-

Put a hook in my own eye.

I see you and I wonder, maybe.

It is plausible- you and me.

But I lost my chance long ago-

I sold my ticket to your show.

ROSE
JOSEPH CUMMINGS

WARM FINGERS WRAP AROUND MY STEM AND PLUCK me from my brothers and sisters. The air is dry compared to the wet interior of the vase. A water-pick slips over the base of my stem and I am passed to another set of tender hands.

“It should fully bloom later today,” said the shop owner as she handed me to a young boy.

“Oh. Good. I was worried for a second there. Thank you again,” he said as he plucked me from her fingers.

“I hope you come again soon.” The woman said with a sly grin.

“Me too,” he said, mimicking the color of my petals with his cheeks.

“Come on Chris, we’re going to be late for school,” another boy said from the doorway of the flower shop.

“I’m coming,” Chris said as he paid the woman and walked away from the counter.

“I can’t believe we’re up so early.”

“Oh, be quiet Matt. You said that you would drive me.”

“Yeah, remind me not to do that again.”

The winter sky glows with the light of two worlds. In the west, the starry sky of night is clear and beautiful as a calm sea. In the East, the sky blossoms with the reds and pinks of the new light of day. Between the two, the boy holds me to the warm beating of his chest.

Matt climbed into the driver seat of the bug car and the one holding me climbed into the passenger seat.

A yawn came from the back seat as a girl with black hair sat up, "What took you guys so long?"

"Hey, blame him. He couldn't decide which one to get."

"Will you both be quiet? You volunteered to come, after all," Chris said as he looked out the window and cradled me in his lap.

"Yeah, I guess you have a point," Amie said. "So what kind of flower did you get?" she asked excitedly and reached over the seat, trying to grab at me.

"Hey!" Chris pulled away from her in an attempt the shield me from her crushing grasp. "Maybe if you calm down and ask nicely, I'll let you see it."

Amie sighed and sat back. "Okay, fine."

He lifted me up for her to see.

"Ah, you got her a rose. But it hasn't bloomed yet. I bet she will like it anyway. With how cute you are, I bet any

girl you gave a rose to would go out with you." Amie winked.

"Oh, shut up," Chris said as he turned and sat properly in his seat.

"Awww, he's blushing," Matt said. Both he and Amie laughed.

Chris hid his face with his long hair, "Shut up, you two."

"How are you going to make me?" Amie teased.

The boy was silent, giving Amie no answer.

Amie leaned forward behind Chris and asked, "You really love her already, don't you?" She sounded almost disappointed.

"Yeah, I think so," Chris said, his eyes were busy examining the curve of each of my leaves and his fingers were busy caressing my bud, memorizing the softness of my leaves.

Amie wrapped her arms around his shoulders, "What if she doesn't feel the same?"

Chris let out a sigh, "Then I'll continue to be a hopeless romantic."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You know, no one has ever asked... It means that, though I live to make one special someone happy, I don't

have a special someone. It means that I want to have a romantic relationship but I can't because I have no one like that in my life. That's why I'm so picky when it comes to girls. I'm looking for someone who is going to be like that. I'm hoping Lauren will."

Amie fell quiet, her chin resting against the seat and her head leaning against his, "That's so sad."

"Well, that's why we need to get him a girl," Matt said.

Amie smiled and nodded, "Yeah, I guess that's why we're driving him around so early in the morning."

"We? Aren't I doing all the driving?"

"Yeah, but I'm keeping him company."

"I could have done that without you in the car."

"Oh yeah? Well, why have you said so little?"

"I haven't said anything because you were talking too much."

"Hey! I was not talking too much. Chris, I wasn't talking too much, was I?"

Chris laughed and shook his head at the pouting puppy dog face that Amie was making, "No, no, you weren't talking too much."

"Good!"

Matt pulled up in front of the student building, "Time to get out," he said. "I need to get to class, so hurry up."

Amie and Chris got out quickly.

"Have fun cooking!" Amie said before shutting her door. Then she grabbed Chris by the wrist and started dragging him towards the building, "Come on. You're late too."

"Will you stop dragging me around?" Chris said as he followed her into the building.

"Okay, but only because we're here," Amie said before she pushed him towards the counter and walked off to sit at a nearby table.

Lauren was sitting at her computer, an apple red Mac with some stickers on it. She looked tired, and stressed with bags beneath her eyes.

He stood there and we watched her for a few moments.

She looked up at us. "Hey Chris," she said with a smile so radiant that it made the dark spots beneath her eyes almost disappear. "How's it going?"

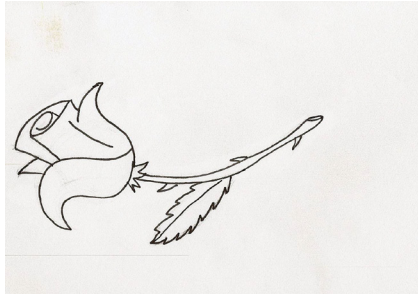
"Hey Lauren. It's all right. A bit early though," Chris said, trying not to blush, not yet at least.

"Heh, yeah. Oh, who's the flower for?"

THE MANATEE

Chris laughed softly, "I'll give you one guess." He said and reached out to her, offering me to her with warm hands.

I bloom slowly as my stem is passed from warm hands to tender fingers.



THE BEDROOM LADDER

ALORA HEFFERNAN

"I STILL SAY YOU SHOULD DRIVE BACK tomorrow," Jen's voice carried loudly through the phone speaker. There was loud music and shouting in the background.

Emmy held the cell phone away from her ear, "Jen. Jen. Stop shouting. What did you say? Are you at a party already?"

"Yeah, sorry we were passing a bar. We're walking over to Sam's," said Jen. "He's having a huge party off campus. Remember, it's that one you're missing? I'm going over early with Ally to help set up."

"Oh," said Emmy. She kicked at a pile of leaves on the sidewalk; she didn't want to get into it again with Jen. She was clearly still mad that Emmy had left her alone for Halloween.

"Come on, Emmy. You can't miss all of Halloween weekend. Tonight is only the pre-game and it's going to be amazing. Kylie won't care if you leave Bella with the Reeses for a few hours. She wants you to have fun, too."

Emmy looked at the house in front of her. Bella, her niece, was standing on the porch digging through a candy bucket with the younger of the Reese children. Mrs. Reese was trying to move them onto the next house.

THE MANATEE

"I'm not letting my sister take an hour and a half cab ride. That's just a waste," Emmy said to Jen.

"Uh-huh. Cause no one else could pick her up... By the way, how's Jake?" Jen was obsessed. She thought the only reason Emmy went home was to see Jake, the Reeses' oldest son. Jen just didn't get that Emmy owed this to Kylie.

"Wouldn't know. Haven't seen him," Emmy snapped into the phone.

"Oh. Looking forward to dinner tomorrow?"

Mrs. Reese made a 'family' dinner on the days that Kylie came home from her business trips, and yes, attendance was mandatory. The only exception was Emmy and only if she was at school.

"Shut up, Jen. Look, I'll think about driving back early. I've got to go, though, we're leaving the street."

"Kay, fine, I'll talk to you later. Have fun trick-or-treating."

"Later, and hey, be safe," Emmy hung up the phone and joined her little group.

•

Emmy locked the door and shut off the porch light. She started to go upstairs to her bedroom but remembered that the pizza was still out on the counter. Emmy went back downstairs to the kitchen. Of course there was no tinfoil. Kylie rarely remembered that kind of stuff. She was so busy

running the auction house, she was a microwavable or pre-cooked kind of mom. Emmy had done the cooking for most of the last five years.

Emmy was rummaging in the drawers trying to come up with Tupperware when she came across an old packet of Sears *Picture Me* portraits. She opened them carefully. She could remember the day they had them taken. It'd been her mom and Emaline's brilliant idea to get their families together and do photos. Emmy was named after her mother's best friend, Emaline Reese. Emmy flipped carefully through the first set. A family portrait. They were the same as the picture hanging in the living room and on her dorm wall. The next set was of all the kids. Then the last pictures were of her parents and Mr. & Mrs. Reese. Her parents had been dead before they'd gotten the pictures back.

Kylie had changed careers when she'd become Emmy's guardian. Giving up on her master's degree and taking a job at an auction house in the city had allowed them to stay in town. It also gave Kylie the bonus of working mostly from home. She ran the auction house now but it meant a lot of traveling.

Emmy put the pictures back in the drawer and shoved the whole pizza box in the fridge. She wasn't going to think about her parents tonight.

Emmy was heading upstairs to her room when she heard a car door shut outside. She walked to the bay window that looked out on the street. She pulled the curtain aside just in time to see a pair of sneakers disappearing over

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the fence to the backyard, and Sarah Casey's black Chevy Cobalt pull away. Emmy shook her head and let the curtain fall back into place.

She hesitated at the window for about ten seconds before letting out a sigh and slipping through the house to the back door. She pulled it open and walked out onto the deck. She could see him slinking up the back path to his house. She hesitated again, thinking he probably deserved the worst. Who was she kidding? She wasn't going to let him get in trouble. She owed him as much as Kylie.

Emmy let the door shut loud enough for him to hear it. She smiled a little victory smile as he jumped and spun around. It took him a minute to see her leaning against the railing. When he did, the panic left his face, and he walked over to the fence that divided their backyards. Emmy couldn't see his eyes yet, but she knew the exact way his smile was making them twinkle.

"Well, aren't you up late," Jake said, leaning against the fence. He made it look casual even though it was probably poking him in the chest. That would be the stupid must-look-cool-at-all-costs attitude.

She arched an eyebrow, "Am I? Well, then aren't you?" she asked back. She caught the flash of his white teeth.

"Good point," he said. He pulled himself up and over the fence before dropping to her backyard.

"It's locked already. She set the timer, and she took the key from under the mat," Emmy said as he walked

towards her. Mrs. Reese had installed an automatically locking, home security device last summer after a few too many of Jake's late nights.

"Damn!" Jake swore, turning to look at the back of his dark house.

"Can you blame her? I can't remember the last weekend when you were in at a decent hour. The rule was simple, Jake. They pay for college and buy you a car to commute, and you be home by curfew. She has your little brother and sister to think about. They can't have you stumbling in at all hours." God, she sounded like a mother.

Emmy couldn't help but follow his fingers as he ran them through his hair. It was dark brown and curly. He kept it short. She remembered his fingers wrapped around hers at her parents' funeral. They were images she could never leave behind.

Jake smiled his devil smile. Emmy groaned. He was on the deck now inches from her and she could see the glint in his crystal blue eyes.

"How does she know I wasn't in before the timer?" he asked, still smiling.

"Oh, you can't be serious!"

"Of course I am, Emmy."

"Jake, why can't you just spend a few nights at home? Or if you're determined to go out, then STAY OUT!" She

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caught herself. She was nearly shouting. What was that? Was she jealous? Emmy thought about Sarah Casey. She had a big nose and too many freckles. Oh boy. She was jealous. She could never tell Jen. She'd never hear the end of it.

"Because this is stupid! It's not like I'm drunk or anything," Jake was raging.

"Tonight," she said under her breath. What was this? Since when did she frown upon drinking?

"Hey, when I'm out partying, I stay out," he fought back.

"Yeah, that's right, I forgot you only come home when you're out wooing women," she retorted. GOD. Now she'd done it. Jake stared at her. Hard. "Where did you hide your car anyway?" she said attempting to sound neutral again.

He stopped staring at her and grinned. "In front of yours, of course."

She snorted. Of course he was using her driveway to hide his car. Jake's eyes flicked up past her head to the bedroom window on the side of the house.

"No. Don't even think about it."

"Come on, Emmy. I know Bella's asleep or you wouldn't be out here, so no one will ever know," he cajoled. "Unless you'd rather I stayed here. I could sleep on the couch." He was joking, but Emmy thought about it for just a bit too long. Jake was staring at her again.

"Ugh," she groaned again and turned to walk into the house. Really, she gave in too easy. Jake followed, and they both slipped quietly through the house and upstairs. Neither of them needed lights. They had taken this trip too many times to count. They walked through her bedroom to the window seat. Jake quickly pulled up the seat and pulled out the folded up fire ladder. Jake's mom had bought them for all the upstairs rooms in both their houses. She was terrified there would be a fire and someone would get stuck.

Emmy opened the window. "Did you even leave the window unlocked?" she asked as Jake slipped out onto the roof below.

"Better than that, it's open," he said as he balanced the ladder against the side and helped Emmy step out onto the roof. Of course he left it open. The jackass probably had this as a contingency plan, especially after the last fight with his parents about coming into late.

"This is the last time, Jake. Seriously! You need to grow up." Who was she kidding? She was going to keep sneaking him in as long as he kept staying out.

When Kylie bought the house for her and Emmy five years ago, Emmy and Jake had been sophomores in high school. Kylie had bought the house because it was next door to the Reeses who had been their parents' best friends. It had taken Jake all of an hour to figure out that the roof under Emmy's bedroom was ten feet from his bedroom

THE MANATEE

window. They could climb onto the porch and down. They'd used the fire ladders as a go between for the two of them to sneak in and out ever since.

That first summer, Jake had left his window open every night. Emmy couldn't even remember all the times she'd woken up crying in the middle of the night and slipped across the ladder to Jake's room. He'd always wake up the second her foot hit the floor. He would usually slide over and give up his pillow. Sometimes he'd talk or play the guitar until she fell asleep. Other nights she'd wake up from a bad dream and Jake would already be halfway across the ladder before she reached the window. He'd sit in her room and comfort her until she stopped seeing the image of her parents' bodies.

Jake was a steady presence that summer. He never mentioned her late night breakdowns. Not to his mom or Emmy's sister; Kylie wouldn't have handled it well. She was already so stressed from taking her last semester of courses online and making enough money. Emmy never wanted to make thing worse for Kylie. She'd given up school and her internships to make sure Emmy wouldn't have to transfer high schools or leave her friends.

Emmy came back to the present as Jake shoved the ladder through his window. Emmy held on to her end as he scampered across it like a trapeze artist. When he reached

the other side he squeezed in the window and turned around.

“I’ll take the ladder and bring it back tomorrow,” he said. Emmy let it go as he pulled it through his window. “Now get back in the house,” he said, winking.

“Excuse me? Who’s the responsible one?” she asked.

Emmy could feel Jake’s eyes follow her as she walked back across the roof and climbed in the window. She turned and looked back as she reached it.

“Good night,” she said.

“Good night, Emmy. You’re the best. I love you,” he said as he shut the window.

“Yeah, I love you too,” she said. Only, she realized, she meant it.

GREEK REGRETS
McKENDY FILS-AIME

I

THE DARKNESS GROWS, VEILING this body
Your pupils expand with approach, a black sunrise.
I have burned organs, given them to little fingers.
In the morning, cast my liver into nostalgia.
Repeat.

II

Weight breaks shoulder blades, carving cupid into bone.
Joints not squeaking, collect dust,
adding more to the world.
With globe reflecting eyes, you smile.
The pressure is exquisite.

III

Your throat collapsed onto this knife,

spilled blood in the ocean's mouth.
Poseidon's gut grumbled, your flesh, his meal.
When fragility is common, I will come with two coins,
choke Lethe's water from you.

IV

I watch you from afar, not touching branches,
letting zephyr carry tears, water you into flesh.
An eternity's worth may bring you back, but
these sun charred hands miss your skin,
miss the chase.

V

I dreamt of you with corpses as cushions,
sleeping in beds made of bones.
Every moment without you,
a thousand of my cells die.

THE MANATEE

Tell your lover that theft is a crime.

VI

The venom stole you into Hades.

I played with callused fingers,
mourned for your return, lost you again.

My chest is an empty pantheon,
where women beat faith.



KEROUAC'S GRAVE- LOUIS BERCELI

THE MANATEE

FALLEN
JACLYN BLUTE

WAITING FOR YOU
Knowing full well
It's only a matter of time

Time we spent together was
Fun while it lasted
But we are waning

There's a reason it's called
Falling in love
You've fallen
For something you think is better

Better than stale snacks at midnight
Shared over secrets and inside jokes

Laughter and special stories weaved

Between the two of us

No space for that anymore

You've fallen away from me

Toward his arms

His lips

His eyes

His life

You'll say I do

And I'll say goodbye

Here's to hoping

You might miss me

THE MANATEE

ESCAPE

ALICIA BEANE

I PACK MY bags
And leave again
I'm here I'm there
You're everywhere.
The carousel
Keeps s p i n n i n g
Away from you
But a turn
And then, there
You are again.
May it be
In the waves of the sea
You will be the water,
Or hidden
Deep inside a cave,

ALICIA BEANE- ESCAPE

You'll be the air I breathe.

Escape from you?

(a boomerang

A heat-seeking gun)

I'm always on the run.

WALKING
LOUIS BERCELI

WALKING ALWAYS MEANT CHANGE TO ME WHEN I was growing up. When I first went walking with my mother, I found streets and houses that I never knew existed, feeling like an explorer discovering exotic, distant realms. I went on those voyages with my mother as often as I could, not because I enjoyed the actual walking but rather to take another trip into foreign locales. There was no distance too far for me, as the experience of finding some new land was worth every ounce of exhaustion.

Later on, walking became an act of rebellion. When I was no more than nine years old, I decided to walk as far as I could within one half hour, before my parents noticed I was gone. First, I walked a mile from my house, stopping only when my watch hit the fifteen minute mark. I didn't find anything all that exciting, just some distant neighborhoods, but I had made a decision that I would never turn back from. I had gone further than I ever had before, and vowed to do so again. That night I dreamed of becoming lost in the woods, miles and miles away from home with no way to return. I woke up in a panic the next morning, but continues with my daily missions all the same. Over a period of about four days, I went further and further, running at top speed to reach a new destination before time

ran out. I never really got that far, but my sense of accomplishment was always great nonetheless.

My favorite part of those walks was roaming the trails. It turned out that the land around my neighborhood had sported an extensive web of bike paths for years, hidden just behind the woods' edge under everyone's noses. A short stroll beneath the power lines could turn into a long meandering odyssey deep into the forest, always adding the risk of getting lost to my daily journey. I would take off down one of these trails at a breakneck pace, dodging roots and rocks as I stumbled as far along the path as I could before time ran out. Deep in the woods, I found abandoned shacks, shopping carts, forgotten industrial machinery. I imagine to the people who lived alongside these relics, they were little more than a nuisance in dire need of cleaning. To me, however, they were the equivalent of finding Stonehenge in my backyard. Everything I found held some magic to me back then.

One day, I intentionally left my watch at home and went further than ever before. Utilizing my vague sense of direction, I walked four neighborhoods away to a friend's house. As many times before, the distance wasn't that much, but more important was the accomplishment. I had gone further than ever, and had done it all on my own. I called my house from my friend's phone to tell my parents what I had done, and an irreversible line was crossed. I had given myself permission to act on my own, and would carry that sense of personal power with me through the rest of my life. Refusing to be driven home, I was finally given permission

to walk back. It took me about forty-five minutes to finally return, but every triumphant second felt like it stretched for ages. Many people talk about finally feeling their freedom when they first get their driver's license, but I felt it for the first time far before I ever laid hands on a steering wheel.

Later on, when I was around sixteen years old, walking became a way of telling the future. My parents were secretly going through marital troubles, a situation that I only heard about when I walked with my mother. On the surface, their marriage seemed to be doing fine, although admittedly punctuated by frequent fighting, but it wasn't until I began walking with my mother that I realized what was happening under the surface. The fights that I fell asleep hearing were never actually resolved as I assumed, but pushed the marriage closer and closer to its end. I used to listen quietly as the parent I walked with vented their frustration, nodding and agreeing with everything they said. If it weren't for those walks, I'm not sure how I would have handled the divorce when it finally happened. I was mostly relieved when I heard the news.

After my father moved out and the house became eerily quiet, I used to take those long walks alone. Some days I would walk for hours with no destination in mind, just walking for the sake of walking. I knew every tree, rock and pond within five miles of my house after a while, and I watched as houses were bought, sold and built. Trees disappeared, dams broke, new roads were cut into the forest and paved, and I watched it all.

Before their marriage finally fell apart, walking served one last purpose for me. Constantly fighting with my parents over issues as trivial as my clothing to as serious as my substance abuse, I would frequently leave the house and walk for hours and hours with no real destination in mind, just a determination to walk. I discovered that my town's network of trails was far larger and more intricate than I'd ever thought before. Walking deep into the woods, I almost rediscovered the sense of wonder from when I was younger. I would wander under power lines, walk abandoned bike trails no longer maintained after decades of decay. My old favorite paths were overgrown with weeds, the old abandoned shacks littered with condoms and cigarette butts, but if I walked far and long enough I could always rediscover some new wonder.

One night, I walked the farthest of my entire life. In the wake of some meaningless fight with my parents, I started walking and found I couldn't stop. I wandered the old trails until the mosquitoes became too much to bear, then returned to the main roads. That night, around three in the morning, I found that the old familiar roads had become new again, somehow. One road in particular I'll always remember, one of the few roads in town that didn't have street lights. As I made my way down the stretch of badly maintained pavement, the only available light came from the TVs in each house, each and every one tuned to Jerry Springer. It was a typical episode, 'Secretly Transsexual Husband Sleeps with Wife's Mother,' but to me there was no TV. I walked down that road bathed in bluish light, guided

by two rows of glowing blue lanterns lighting my way into the dark. I had taken one last walk into those strange new lands.

Now, I have a car. I don't fight with my parents anymore, and there isn't much left to discover. To travel from one point to another can be accomplished on a whim with minimal effort, and gives no real sense of accomplishment as a reward. I've walked every conceivable route by my house, found every hidden trail and clearing. There isn't much left to discover by walking, but if I close my eyes I can still see those bluish lanterns, lighting my way into the dark.

MERCY
DOMINIC RUGOLETTI

TWENTY YEARS OF SOLITUDE WEIGHED DOWN ON me. I was four hundred pounds of rejection. Live bait for ridicule and distanced whispers, I was the pale worm in the puddle that people splashed their heels on. I looked at myself in a mirror and saw gristle. A container of run-off from meats, squeezed dry. A jar of fat left on your kitchen counter. I was a reminder of what people did not want to be. And it was time to change.

When my aunt noticed how much of me was missing, she told one of her friends who worked at the local newspaper who, the next day, interviewed me. My story, *'20 y/o sheds 250 lbs in 9 months'* made the front page. I was interviewed for two more newspapers, and before I could say I lost my gallbladder, I was being asked to do interviews on talk shows and cable news networks. I went on the April Meriwether show to share with the country what April called an uplifting story, full of perseverance. She said my story would provide hope to millions.

After the April Meriwether show, a man offered me the chance to tell my weight loss story across the country. He said he'd pay big, so I agreed to tour for a year. I preached my diet story to sad and lonely men and women in theaters, church reception halls, and hospital cafeterias after the cancer support groups and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. I met a journalist who offered to write a book about me when the tour was over. He said I would receive

sixty percent of the money made on the book, no catch. One year later, I was holding up my pants, smiling on the cover of my book, *Motivation and Effective Dieting*.

For the next few years, my book met the hands of dieters around the world faster than it could collect dust on a shelf. *Motivation and Effective Dieting* made record sales, surpassing *The Life of Harold Gardner* and *Evening Light*. Companies requested me to market their products in television commercials. Even movie producers called, asking if I would be their star in upcoming films, such as *The Sketchbook*, and *Possibly, Perhaps*. Millions of people from all lengths of the earth were sending me letters with photos of themselves to show and tell me how much weight they had lost.

Camera lights flashed wherever I went. I was on the covers of magazines, and I made guest appearances on television shows. My life only got better when at twenty-five years old, I was kissed for the first time by the brightest, most wonderful, Dalmatia. One year later, as wedding bells rang, I needed nothing more.

When my daughter was born two years after my marriage, I stopped making public appearances. I stayed home so I could take care of my newborn. From being out of the limelight I noticeably gained some weight. Whenever I stepped outside to get the newspaper for myself, camera shutters clicked, rapid-fire. Lights flashed. I was starting a new life with regards to my family and not my appearance. I was criticized for my weight gain. All the success that I had

acquired didn't matter to me. I had my family and I needed nothing more.

One night, before bed, Dalmatia asked me if we could have a serious talk. So, I sat next to her on our bed and asked her what was on her mind.

"I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but I really think that you've changed."

I asked her what she meant.

She said, "I didn't know you would quit your diet as soon as we got married."

"Does it really matter?" I asked.

She slid her soft hand out of mine and got up to look at herself in the mirror. I told her how much I loved her and how much she meant to me. I got up and stood next to her, waiting for a response.

"Never mind," she said, flipping aside her bangs. "Good night." And she crawled into bed and shut off the lights.

Alone, staring at the mirror, I saw four hundred pounds of nothing, and so had everybody else.

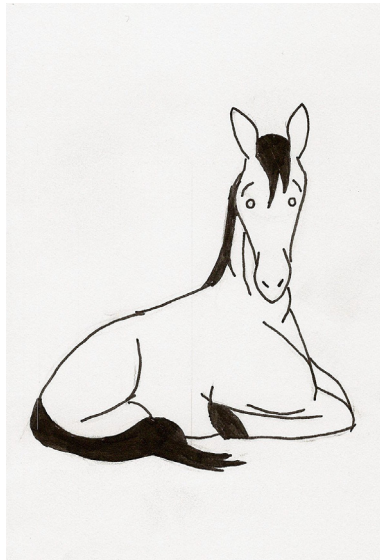
THE MANATEE



YELLOW FLOWERS- ALICIA BEANE

DELIVERY OF A FOAL
EMULATION OF SHAKESPEARE SONNET 18
HEIDI CRUZ

SHALL SHE GIVE BIRTH THIS silent summer night?
In her more lovely state she waits for dark:
Blades of pain she needs to bring him to sight
Her body's lease has all been too long marked.
Before her body had been all her own,
Her chestnut complexion often is dim
And he attacks her fair womb with fair stones
Nature's course has filled her body to the brim.
When last summer she conceived her first foal
She gained possession of a deep meaning,
Death shall not take her or the newborn's soul.
When eternal blood leads to the cleaning:
So long as the mare can breathe and can see
So long lives he until he can be free.



SAND CASTLES

ALICIA BEANE

"**D**ON'T YOU JUST LOVE this song?" Anna glanced over to her mother in the driver's seat. Her mother was bobbing her head slightly to the music with a smile like that of a Barbie doll placed on her tan face. She turned her head, her big, blonde hair waving back as she looked at Anna through oversized black Dior sunglasses.

Anna shrugged her naked shoulders in reply before turning to face out the passenger window. Her mother gave an airy laugh and went on mumbling the words of the song. The truth was Anna didn't even know the song. It was clearly in French and it reminded her of her mother's second husband, Pierre, who would annoyingly hold out her mother's name in an exaggerated way. She could still hear him now: "Chaaarlote!" Anna was glad when he ran off with one of her mother's friends.

Her mother's most recent husband, Bill, apparently only wanted her money and had just successfully put her through a torturous divorce. Anna was used to her mother's divorces by now. At the beginning of the separation were her mother's crying sessions, where Anna would blast Alanis Morissette and look through her old Teen Vogue magazines. During the divorces, her mother would have a sudden urge to shop and willingly allowed Anna to go with

her and choose any one item that she wanted. This time, Anna could find not one thing that she was interested in. She had held her mother's jacket while her mother tried on a hundred newer jackets. Anna breathed in her mother's scent from the jacket, longing to bottle it up.

Officially single once again, her mother packed up the car for the weekend and was now dragging Anna along with her out of the city and toward what her mother called her 'escape.' Anna remembered going to the beach house every summer, up until her tenth birthday. Her mother had met Bill right after and he didn't like to leave the city. Anna had been upset with the prospect of not going back to the freedom of the outdoors, but as she grew older, the beach house became a distant childhood memory. Driving there again felt like going back in time, only she wasn't getting any smaller and her mother didn't feel any closer.

As Anna looked out the window, she stared back at her reflection in the side view mirror. Her shoulder-length brown hair was being whipped around her face from the wind sneaking in through the open window. Anna could make out some of the freckles that crowded around her nose and on her cheeks, sure they were spreading more and more and would one day consume her entire face. Anna wished she could have skin like her mother's, free of freckles and perfectly clear like porcelain. The only aspect of Anna's appearance that Anna found remotely appealing about herself was her sun-kissed jade eyes, which she was told she got from her father.

After a long drive of listening to French music and her mother's heavenly laugh, Anna noticed they were approaching their street. Sunny Way only had about four or five beach houses, mainly because they were so big no more could fit in the area. Over the past six summers, the beach house was left alone with no visitors, just an empty box, a waste of space. They pulled up to the house, the rocks crunching like peanut shells under the tires. Her mother squealed with delight like a little girl.

"Let's wait to unpack the car, darling. I just want to lie out in the sun! Have a drink!" Her mother turned excitedly toward Anna with a huge smile. Anna agreed as she opened the door and stepped out into the heat.

They took along with them a lawn chair, a blanket, sunscreen, and a wicker picnic basket down the dozen wooden steps to the beach. As her mother set up her chair and blanket, Anna looked out at the ocean. The waves were creeping in big and fast, climbing up like a cat about to pounce and then smashing down upon the sand and shells. Anna had forgotten how afraid she had been of the vastness and depth of the ocean. The approaching waves were like warnings to stay away, but they also beckoned her to come in, pulling seaweed and foam back into the sea.

Anna tore her eyes away from the conflicting view and moved toward the blanket near her mother's feet. She felt as though her clothes were weighing her down, the heat thick and heavy, pushing in from every angle. She pulled off her purple tank top and jean shorts, having her bathing suit

already on underneath. Anna felt exposed like one of those baby trees planted in the cities on sidewalks that just seem so out of place and frail. Her small frame and tiny breasts made Anna appear like a child, though her feet had done a wonderful job growing, making her feel like a duck.

Anna plopped down on the blanket to lather herself with sunscreen. As she did, she glanced over at her mother. She was sitting on her lawn chair as if it were a throne, head tilted back, staring at the sun as if challenging it to give her a darker tan. She had already changed into her bathing suit as well, her white top emphasizing her large breasts more than usual. A second later she was reaching into the picnic basket and pulled out a bottle of wine. Anna had known, even from a young age, that there would be no food in that picnic basket.

When she was seven, she remembered that she had a fascination with making sand castles. One day at the beach house, she was kneeling close to the ground, scooping up lumps of damp sand with both hands, pressing on the coolness and shaping them into little mounds. Though it looked perhaps like a line of lumpy rocks, Anna smiled at them in admiration. She secretly dreamed of living in them, having floors of rough, damp dirt that would stick to her toes, the smell of salt forever in the air.

Over those past couple of days at the beach house, her mother had left her half-drunk wine bottles bunched together on the beach. She was holding a newly opened bottle in her hands, which she consumed happily. As she

lowered the bottle's mouth from her own, in one swift motion, she accidentally dropped it, its glass tipping over, clanking against the others like bowling pins. Their pale yellow contents came rushing down over the sand like a flood. Anna had jumped up out of the way as the rush of wine tore away at her sand castles, melting them down and pulling the sandy walls back into the taunting sea.

Her mother had sworn at the loss of her drink as Anna stared at the spot where her sand castles had just stood. Her mother, noticing her daughter's defeated look, simply said, "Oh, darling, they were only sand castles."

Having finished applying her sunscreen, Anna pulled herself away from her memory and moved to the edge of the blanket. Kneeling there, she began to dig her fingers into the moist sand. A pulse swept through her, a feeling that she could barely recall. Anna cocked her head up as she heard a seagull's cry above; her hands subconsciously creating hills with the sand.

Her mother sighed heavily with ease, "Ahh, don't you just love the ocean? It is always here, the one thing that won't ever leave me."

Anna turned toward her mother, noticing her fingers tighten their grip on the transparent green bottle. Anna couldn't see her mother's eyes, hidden behind her large shades. She seemed to be staring out at the ocean, lost in thoughts that only she would know.

Anna stood up abruptly and took a few steps toward

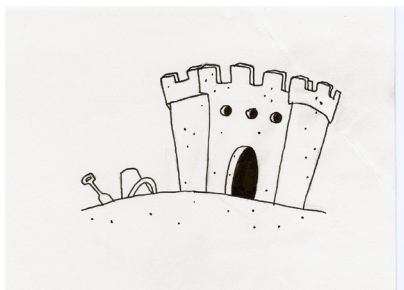
the shore, hands on her bony hips.

“So,” Anna asked her mother without turning her head, “How about a swim?”

“Oh darling,” her mother started, “You know I never go *in* the ocean.”

Anna’s arms fell to her sides as she inhaled the warm summer air. Her mother then began to laugh at the prospect of Anna’s question. Her mother’s laugh no longer sounded light and innocent, but hollow.

Anna then took confident steps toward the mouth of the sea, the waves crashing near her feet. The water’s coolness hit her with a shock, but eventually warmed her legs up to her thighs as she waded in deeper. She could hear her breath quicken, sounding like a heartbeat does through a stethoscope. She didn’t even close her eyes as she dove into the trembling ocean. The water stung her skin all over like tiny needles, and she felt her lungs longing for a breath. As she broke the boundary of air and water, her lips pulled into a smile. With her eyes closed, she fell in love with the red light from the sun that was dancing upon her face.



A REMINDER

MELISSA HURLEY

THE REFLECTION STARING BACK AT ME LOOKS NOTHING like it used to. The smooth tan skin that once covered my face is now pale and loose. My hair, which at one time cascaded down my back, is almost completely gone. All that is left is a thin layer of gray wisps sprouting out of the top of my head. It reminds me of freshly planted grass, just emerging from the soil. I grab my wig off the counter and carefully place it on, making sure that it is secure. Anyone can probably see it isn't real, but without it I look like some sort of decaying alien. The wig is more for everyone else than it is for me. I guess I've accepted my new self, or at least I can accept the fact that there's nothing I can do about it. But for everyone, else my baldness seems like a painful reminder of what I was and what I am to become. With the wig I can enjoy a conversation without having to watch people's eyes as they wander from my face to my bare head and back again.

After my wig is in place, I let my arms fall to my sides. God, I never noticed how skinny they'd become. There's just a sagging layer of skin that covers up my bones. I'm a walking skeleton. I remember back to when I was younger and they were muscular and strong from years of softball. A lot of good that did me. Now I can barely lift myself out of a chair. Gazing back at my arms in the mirror, I notice the red and purple splotches decorating them. The bruises are yet

another reminder of what my life has become. Constant blood tests and chemo treatments keep me on a tight schedule. I can no longer make any plans without checking the calendar for doctor's appointments. And there is no way I can plan anything near a chemo session unless I want to be nauseated and sick for the event. Rubbing my arm and taking one final glance at the bathroom mirror, I turn and walk to my bedroom.

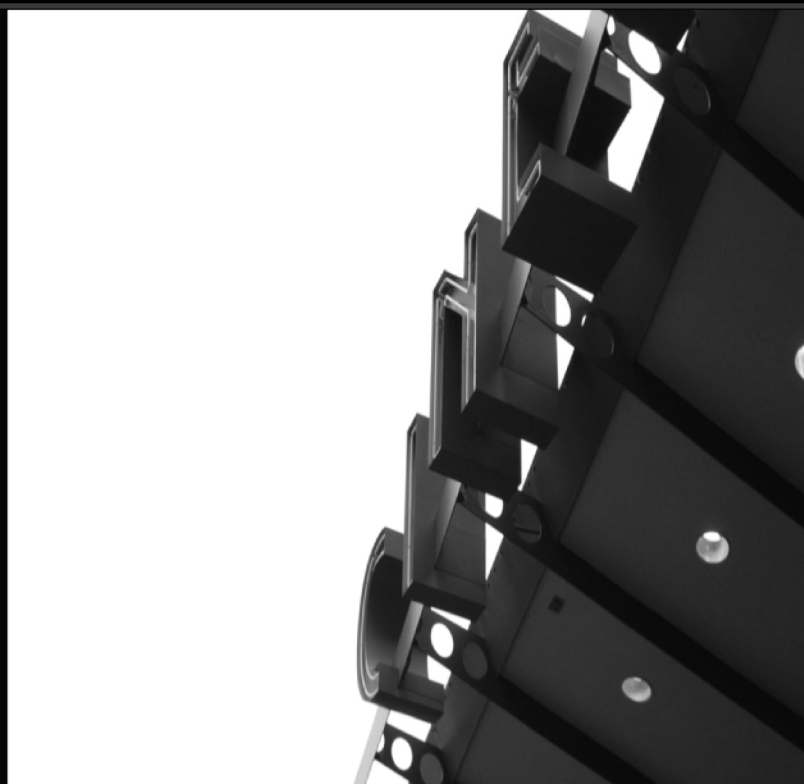
Exhausted, I ease myself onto the edge of my bed. Sitting there, I glance down at the digital clock on the nightstand. It reads 1:17 pm. How is it that I'm this tired so early? Not that I should be surprised. I'm tired all the time lately. Absentmindedly, I find myself staring at the frame which is set between the clock and a tissue box. Inside the wooden rectangle is a picture of James, my late husband. His face is young and smiling, reminding me of a happier time, before we grew old.

"Why did you have to go?" I whisper to the image, hoping for an answer. "I don't think I can do this anymore." Tears begin to trickle down my face. I wish he was still here. Maybe then I would have the strength to keep fighting.

For a few more minutes I remain on my bed. *Bzzzzz*. The doorbell. Grabbing a tissue, I use it to dry off my face. With effort I force myself up and head out of the room and down the hall. *Bzzzzz*. "I'm coming!" I yell back at the bell. I open the door to find my grandson Danny beaming up at me, with my daughter, Anne, behind him. "Well, hello there," I say to him.

“Hi, Grammy,” he cheers before racing past me and straight to the living room for the television and toys. *Ahh, to be young again*, I think to myself with a wistful grin. Turning my attention to my daughter who is still standing in the doorway, I notice her painted on smile. I lead her to the kitchen table where we can keep an eye on Danny. We sit down, and she starts telling me about her job, though I can’t focus on a word she says. Although she is trying to put up a brave front, I can hear the slightest quiver in her voice. She may be able to fake a smile, but I can see the sadness in her eyes. I remember the pain I went through when I had to watch my mother die. I can’t bear to watch my own daughter go through this same pain.

As she keeps talking, I turn to watch Danny. He is sitting on the floor in front of the TV. He already has a train track set up. There is some new cartoon on the television screen, not one that I’ve ever seen. Whatever it is, he seems to be enjoying it. His tiny little hands push the train around the track while he stares at the screen laughing. Watching him so cheerful and naïve causes me to smile. Something about him reminds me of my own youth. Suddenly a thought strikes me. *Who is going to explain to Danny what happens to me? What will his little face look like when he finds out he is never going to see his Grammy again?* My smile fades and I take one final look at Danny before turning back to Anne. This time I make an effort to listen to what she’s saying. By now she has stopped talking about her job and has moved onto a discussion about Danny’s kindergarten class. I smile at her and I notice that this time when she smiles it is genuine.



CINEMA- LOUIS BERCELI

SECRET SHAME

RUDINE MANNING

*"THE GREATEST FOES, AND WHOM WE MUST CHIEFLY COMBAT, ARE
WITHIN." CERVANTES*

It's the toughest battle I've ever fought. It's left me bleeding, writhing on the ground. As I hold on for dear life, the temptation of letting go becomes sweeter and sweeter. Crawling, clawing, I inch slowly toward something – anything and when I think I've got a slim chance, I feel a jarring pain – like the combination of a big, black boot and a swift kick to the face that leaves that metallic bloody taste coated on my tongue. I glance back and see the familiar in those blood stained boots – years of torment caked on at the toes – chipping away only when they meet my weakening bones. I push myself up on wobbling arms, shield my eyes from the flagrant light, look up, see myself, and wonder why.

TIL DEATH

LOUIS BERCELI

IT WAS SNOWING, OF COURSE. She was late as always. I think she did it on purpose. It was probably some half-hearted act of rebellion against punctuality, which she despised as much as pop music and genetically engineered produce. She had never been able to settle on just one cause to rally behind. Her politics were a chaotic assortment of minor annoyances elevated to the same status as threats to the human race. She once wore pins for every one of her causes. A cry against animal cruelty would sit next to a plea for Tibetan rights. Eventually they all vanished from her coats. Maybe she suddenly realized the ridiculousness of it all, that she had become a walking self-parody. Maybe she just ran out of room to pin them all.

The sounding of the door's bells announced her. She gave me a small nod as always and sat down. She was wearing a wool pea coat over a loose, fluttery skirt. It was the most conservative thing I'd ever seen her wear. It seemed like a betrayal somehow.

"How have you been?" she said.

"Can't complain."

I didn't mention business. That went without saying.

"The roads look pretty bad out there. You didn't drive, did you?" she said.

“No, that’s one of the hidden benefits of city living.”

“I haven’t seen any plows yet. You have to wonder where your taxes go.”

A gruff voice from the kitchen shouted “Amen, sister!” and we laughed indulgently.

Every year we met at the same table on the same day. Somehow the table was always empty when we came back. The same day every year the strangest snow fell for us in clumps the size of grapefruits. It was our own personal endless December. We had never formally arranged it, but nevertheless we found ourselves there every year. I’ve always been afraid to read too much into that. It was the table where we tried to finally kill whatever we had but only succeeded in putting it into a coma. Every year we met there to listen to the beeping of its heart monitor. We drank the same sludgy coffee and watched the same ponderous clumps of falling snow. They fell lazily from the sky like bodies sinking in the ocean. She drank her coffee black. I used to love that about her.

“Do we dare order anything to eat?” she said.

I waved my hand around the empty room for effect.

“I think we can trust public opinion there,” I said.

“I don’t know, I remember them having a decent cheesecake a while ago.”

“That’s because they didn’t make it. This sort of place

doesn't make their own dessert; they buy it from a catering company."

"I don't care where it comes from as long as it tastes all right."

"Shame on you, Cara. Whatever happened to supporting local business? The revolution must go on," I said, and waited for her to laugh. She never did.

She pulled a pack of cigarettes from her coat and set them on the table. She wouldn't smoke them, not since the ban, but she brought them out nonetheless. Maybe it was habit, maybe it was another protest. Surprisingly it was a major brand. She had always smoked organic, pesticide-free tobacco that tasted like burning cardboard to me. I doubt it ever made much of a difference to her health considering how many packs she went through every day. They were, I think, just another one of her protests, a flammable petition against the giants of the tobacco industry. I told her once that the same companies as the large brands made them and she seemed genuinely distraught for almost a week. She looked impossibly tired.

"So," she said. "Seen any movies lately?"

"No, I've been busy," I sighed.

"Work, huh?"

Shit. There it was.

We spoke in short, terse clips of conversation the day we broke it off, like characters from a Hemingway novel. I hadn't developed any real loathing for her yet. There was just the unshakable conviction that neither of us knew the other anymore. When she first sat down that day a bit of sun had snuck through the clouds and lit the snow with a blinding light. Her red hair and alabaster skin glowed along with it and for a moment she seemed the most beautiful girl in the world. A complete stranger.

"Yeah. Work."

"How's that going for you?"

She made no attempt to hide the animosity in her voice.

"It's going fine. We have this one client in Arizona that... oh, don't do this." I said.

"Don't do what?" she said, her voice molasses-sweet.

"Don't put on that act when we both know damn well what you're thinking."

"You never knew what I was thinking."

I had met Cara in a figure drawing class. The school's officially sanctioned classes were too infrequent for my taste so I looked elsewhere. I found a free class run by a few dropouts out of a rented loft downtown. No one had the money to hire models and so the students would all pose on

a rotating schedule. She happened to be on the pedestal when I first walked in. My art was complete shit that day. It seemed sacrilege to try and duplicate the perfection that sat under the warm glow of a skylight. Every stroke of graphite was a blasphemy. I wrestled with my pencil and sketched lazily, working up the courage to ask her out. I worried that it would be some unforgivable violation of the artistic code if I did. I would be seen as the worst kind of filth, a slimy deviant who sought to pervert the relationship between artist and subject.

“I used to know,” I said. This seemed to throw her off balance and for a moment she seemed almost vulnerable. Despite myself, I felt like it was a victory against her.

“Don’t,” she said.

We had a hell of a time, all those years ago. For countless afternoons we would lay intertwined in bed, talking endlessly about revolution. Ours wasn’t a political coup, it was artistic, literary, all abstractions and concepts. I don’t think we ever knew exactly what we were talking about, but that was of little importance. We were completely certain that we were on the cusp of something great. We could go on for hours and hours and hours driven by nothing but enthusiasm for ourselves, our ideas. I could lose myself in the song of her voice and the curves of her body. We worshipped each other like blood-drunk pagans through the warm glow of the afternoon into the secret hours of the night.

We grew lazy as artists. We spent so much time praising each other's art that we never learned anything. When one of us made something truly awful the other would laud it as a new style, a sign of artistic evolution that signified the birth of some new movement. Our grades suffered accordingly and the day came at last when we had to move on. She chose philosophy with a minor in women's studies. I chose advertising. I did so with no small amount of shame. Advertising represented everything we had railed against during those endless lifetimes in bed.

"Don't? That's all you can say?" I didn't know where my words came from. Some crack in the dam had finally widened enough for them to rush through.

"Don't, don't, don't, don't, don't." she chanted and shook her head.

"You're like a child, you know that?" I said.

"Great, the wise old Timothy has decided to grace me with his insight." she said.

"You just refuse to grow up and face things. We're adults now, Cara. Adults get jobs and try to go somewhere. They don't sit around quoting dead Russians and talking about paradigm shifts. We put away childish things and get used to being old and boring."

"You let yourself get old and boring. No one forced you. You know what? You're an emotional cripple and you're going to die alone."

“Not everyone can keep up with your mood swings,” I countered. “You should print out a schedule and save the rest of us a lot of headaches.”

“You think you’re the paragon of responsibility but you haven’t matured since high school. You’re a teenager with the best fake ID in the world.” she said.

“You think maturity and enthusiasm for Andrea Dworkin are the same thing.”

“Oh, are you going to try talking about Andrea Dworkin again? It would help if you’d actually read her and not just parrot back what your buddies told you.”

“You’re still so excited about that worthless degree of yours.”

Of course things fell apart back then. She never really commented on my major but I knew what I had done. I think we both realized what had happened when one morning we looked into each other’s eyes and had no idea what was hiding behind them. She wondered if I was seeing someone else. I wondered if we had ever really known each other. With all the facades peeled away at last, I had no idea who the woman sharing my bed really was.

“You measure success in paychecks,” she said. “How the hell can you call me a failure?”

“I’ve grown up and gone places, but you’re the same girl I met in that art class.” I said.

“You really think that’s a bad thing, don’t you?” she said softly.

She finished her coffee with a slurp, which was uncharacteristic of her. She always sipped it delicately, silently, with some measure of ceremony. I used to love that about her. She counted out a handful of ones and threw them carelessly on the table.

“Fuck you,” she said, and left with a swish of red hair.

Same time next year, I guess.

**I COULD DRIVE DOWN KNOX ROAD WITH TWO
GLASS EYES
JULIE PAGE**

I TURN RIGHT WHEN MY NOSTRILS start to sweat
at the place where that farmer
piles those cows
so tightly into that dilapidated little barn in the winter,
manure bulges through the window. 5
Imagine wanting to milk a cow
and having to dig out the teat?

My stomach sinks into a pothole,
and I hear tinkering hammers at the home
where somebody came and painted 10
swastikas all over their fence
a couple years back.
Don't know what that was about.
Were they the oppressors?
The oppressees? 15
It was a brand new fence; built it themselves.

A gust of Marlboro Red,
it must be the old guy who wears
an orange felt hat and smokes cigarettes
in his garage next to his boat all the time. 20
Never sits.
Sometimes he walks along Knox.
He smokes cigarettes and is concerned about his fitness.
He's a maverick. I like him.

THE MANATEE

I'm assaulted by the scent of a Bounce dryer sheet
at the house of the lady whose husband
looks like a washing machine--
turmoil with a big square head.
I know it is them because her house
always smells like Comet;
yard smells like Pine-Sol.
Smells too clean, like they are hiding something.

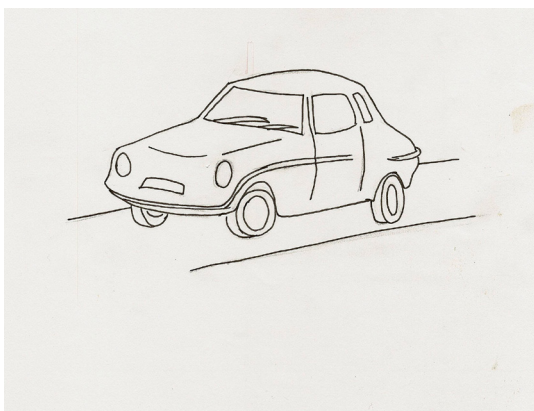
The light pizzicato hum of an expensive motor,
and I am near that smooth place with the extra carport.
Gentleman zipping on his Lawnmower Town Car, 35
probably mowing delicately around that plastic,
I mean, *resin* rock
he uses to disguise the well cap.
Plastic rock.
Plastic rock. 40
Never enough.

A puff of wind pushes me around at the house
with the lady who has twin babies
but is never home. Well, she is,
but her mother watches her kids. 45
She is busy decorating.
Front door is painted pink; shutters painted pink.
Husband painted pink.
She gets what she wants.

I feel the heat of the sun, like the sky opening, 50
and I bet that lady is there,

the big one in the wheelchair
who sits in the sun each day and drinks
out of one of those Big Gulps with a straw.
I think she is paralyzed from the neck down, 55
but I'm not sure.
She is probably smiling
because she is always smiling.
She smiles more than me.

I *know* Knox. 60



EDDIE LO

DILLON ST. JEAN

Eddie Lo was that Chinese kid that you always saw hanging around outside of Wayne's Stop-In, where everyone purchased their cherry ices and their packs of cigs. This morning, however, the kid stood at the corner of Patrick and Keene, on the sidewalk outside of some girl's house. He wore his hand-me-down red tracksuit jacket with the white stripes running down the sleeves. With his hands in the pockets of his jean shorts, he scuffed up his kicks against the concrete. The thinnest sliver of sunlight beamed through his rigid, black hair and glared off the thickness of his framed lenses. Eddie Lo had the presence of someone with the potential to be a fourteen-year-old legend.

In the halls at school, Eddie would strut through the crowds, doing his best not to flaunt his overwhelming presence. Sure, the majority of those around would scoff at how courageous he appeared, but the jealousy had to have been boiling over. He walked two steps ahead of a thick scent of Black Jaguar Number Seven: For Men. The bold aura stung the sinuses, likely from the overpowering mystery that Eddie exuded just about every day of his life of grandstanding and being what folks would call 'the man.' They didn't need to admit it for Eddie to know it was true.

Some of his friends from the school board gaming

club had gathered that there would be a party happening by the end of the week. It was information they'd not have been privy to had the gentlemen discussing it assumed that a couple of nerds with their faces stuffed in urinals were actually listening. Apparently there would be a rather intense soirée occurring at the corner of Patrick and Keene, wherein the most happening people would be meeting to celebrate a big move-in. People would have been desperate for Eddie Lo to make an appearance. He couldn't allow himself to disappoint all those adoring people whom he had never met.

There was much preparation that needed to be taken care of if Eddie was going to make the scene in any big way. He scoured his closet to find the nicest suit he owned, leading him to his older brother's Confirmation suit that was several sizes too large for him. A black clip on tie snapped over the top button of his pinstriped dress shirt, and his Canadian flag sneakers slipped over his feet. Coating himself in a thin layer of cheap cologne and working to press his tall wiry locks down, Eddie Lo felt that iron-clad armor of coolness encompass his entire body, from the edge of his glasses to the aglets of his shoelaces. He planned to make it to the party fashionably on-time.

By nine o'clock, the official start time of the event, Eddie Lo arrived and made his first attempt at the door. By nine forty-five, he gave it another go. At ten thirteen, a large enough group of fine women had clustered together that he could simply tuck himself in with them and fold his hair

down, praying he looked feminine enough at that moment to infiltrate the barricade. Finally, Eddie made his way to the center of the crowded home, which still looked fairly sparse. Just by looking around, he could tell that it was time for him to make a move at putting the eyes on him. Unfortunately, he had no certainty of how to do that.

After familiarizing himself with the blank wall of the living room, he finally took the initiative to cruise himself over to the kitchen. He finagled a distracted young man out of his freshly poured beer and quickly attempted to shoot it back. The coldness of it struck at his teeth, chilling the nerves and painning him as he attempted to guzzle the golden liquid unnoticed. Finishing the first drink, he waltzed over to pour himself another, followed by another, and another still. He could have been found out at any minute, forced out of the home by some who were put off by just how outstanding Eddie truly was in all his beer-swilling glory.

Stumbling about, Eddie took his half-empty cup and eventually found his way back to the living room. He released his composure to fall back into the couch, giving himself a moment to recuperate. Through his slightly blurred vision, he observed the staircase across the room. Unsteadily, the hostess of the party made her way down to her guests. She moved past a small gathering of jocks to where she was in Eddie's clear view. The blur broke away as he took in the image of her. Amidst the positive feedback she received of her celebration, Eddie caught her name.

Hannah.

Hannah was gorgeous. She had short, light brown hair that perfectly framed her pink cheeks. Her red plastic cup lifted to her full, cherry-stained lips to pour vodka over her tongue and send it coursing down her throat. A dribble of the liquid spilled upon her shirt; drops of alcohol staining over her pert chest. She lowered the cup down to her side once more and crept slowly.

She moved warily across the room over to where Eddie was sitting. After spinning around, she fell back and landed in the seat adjacent to him. Both intoxicated, Eddie spent several minutes just trying to get a sense of what was happening. As the two synchronized their gaze, he began bobbing his knee up and down anticipating whatever the next move would be. Hannah leaned in and began kissing him, with Eddie's eyes remaining open in disbelief. Eddie Lo was smooth, and he knew it.

Before such a heavy crowd was a beautiful girl making out with some kid in an oversized suit and a clip-on tie. Eddie felt the swell of pride the longer their lips entangled with each other. Soon that swell turned into a hurricane of churning intestines, quaking under the surface of his pinstriped dress shirt. He pushed his beautiful mistress away before the rush of acidic backfire surged up his throat and onto Hannah's shirt. She recoiled instantly; the stain of vomit splashed upon her chest. Before Eddie could do anything, Hannah had shambled away awkwardly, escaping the eyes of her peers. Meanwhile, Eddie Lo sat in disappointment as drops of rejected beer had fallen upon

his brother's suit. He looked at no one as he rushed out.

Eddie awoke in the morning to an ache in the front of his head and a sick feeling pounding away in his body. He was still in his brother's soiled suit, wrinkled from the bed. Trying to retain some of his suave and smooth persona, he removed the suit and hid it in between a pile of already dirty clothing. Hit the showers, then threw on his red tracksuit jacket, his jean shorts, and sneakers while heading out the door. Anything he could do to keep out of trouble with big brother.

Hoofing it to Patrick and Keene, he arrived for the sake of waiting for her. She had to have been in there. No one who had been vomited on in front of a crowd of people would be eager to show their face in public. So there he stood. On the sidewalk outside of some girl's house. Some girl he had vomited on, resulting in the most shameful moment in that bold little kid's life. But soon enough she would emerge from the home, or return to the home, and he could confront his terrible fate.

When a window on the second floor of the house cracked open, Eddie Lo stood tall. As tall as a fourteen-year-old man could stand. Hannah leaned over the sill in a pink tank top, with her hair hanging down over her barely-conscious eyes. Even hung over, she was the most stunningly beautiful girl Eddie had ever encountered.

"Can I help you?" she asked, seemingly unaware of who Eddie was at first.

“Hey,” he replied.

As Hannah looked down, her eyes widened when she gazed upon the confident face of Eddie Lo.

“Oh, it’s you. Did you come here to puke on my pants?”

“Nah,” he said with a smirk, “I actually came by to see how your shirt was holding up.”

Her expression moved from tense to relaxed as she let slip a couple of small laughs.

“Yeah, well, I don’t think it’s ever going to be the same.”

“My condolences.”

Hannah made a smirk to match Eddie’s, while Eddie himself considered his next move. Fortune favored the bold, and Eddie Lo was looking to be favored.

“So hey,” Eddie pushed, “I was thinking that after last night you might be kind of hungry. What do you say to coming with me to Wayne’s Stop-In? I understand they make breakfast burritos that are secretly the food of the gods.”

“Wait, that’s where I know you from!” she exclaimed. “You’re that kid that always hangs around outside of Wayne’s!”

It was in that moment that things got tense. It was all riding on the type of reputation Eddie had established. Just as he desired to be a fourteen-year-old legend, he could have just as easily been kidding himself the entire time. Had he been familiar enough with the phrase “delusions of grandeur” he’d have certainly been obsessing over it in those few seconds.

“Sure,” she replied, “what the hell, I have nothing else to do today besides clean up, and I’m damn sure not doing that any time soon. Besides, you do owe me at *least* one breakfast burrito.”

That was it. All Eddie Lo needed to hear was that this girl would enjoy a mighty fine breakfast burrito, and that she wouldn’t mind being around him while she ate it. Because as you all know, Eddie Lo is the man, and he was smooth enough to bring some girl to Wayne’s Stop-In, where everyone purchased their cherry ices, their packs of cigs, and their mighty fine breakfast burritos.



BEACH FENCE- ALICIA BEANE

HOW TO COOK A TEENAGE GIRL JULIE PAGE

First get your cut, nice and lean. Pick a fresh one. Make sure the sun is hot and lay the meat on her back into a lawn chair—	5
Spread the tight young flesh, lengthening each limb. Don't worry if she squeals. Like a lobster before it is dropped in boiling water, the fussing is <i>temporary</i> .	10
Dress her with baby oil and set the timer for at least 6 hours. Remember burnt is okay, it will just enhance the flavor of the meat. A crispy girl,	15
layered with oil, has a nice fatty taste, even if she is not fat. If she thinks she is fat (which she probably does), her mindset will make her more absorbent.	20
Encourage her to try cigarettes. Camel Light, or for a touch of rosemary, try Newport Light. For a deep-smoked flavor, make sure she inhales deeply	25

and often. In addition,
try offering her marijuana;
it mellows the product,
loosening the meat,
making it tender. 30

Flip her on her side after each hour
for 30 minutes. This ensures even baking.
Spread the legs
to ensure that the inner part,
as well as the top outer part, of the thighs 35
are equally crispy.

Make sure to move the legs
every so often. Every part of her
needs to be cooked thoroughly.
Alternate sides frequently. 40

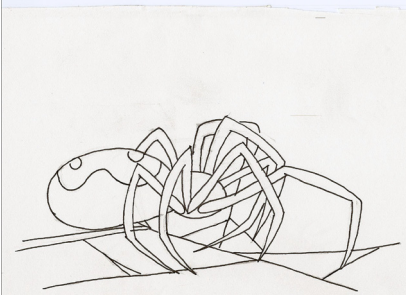
Oftentimes, a girl can be somewhat dry
and lifeless. Try a little wine;
it enhances the flavor--
adds dimension to the product.
It is best to apply this generously; 45
alcohol evaporates
and needs to be re-added
as the cooking temperature increases.

Keep her sauced.
Makes for happy meat. 50

When the cooking is complete,
garnish festively.
Serve with spirits and various recreational drugs.
This dish is a hit with many young men.

SPIDER'S STICKYWEB

ALICIA BEANE



I have seen the way
A spider takes its prey—
Quickly, sudden,
No way to escape.
(Just as you have done.)

A moth, let's say,
A quiet fool,
Its wings too free
Is snatched by
The spider's stickyweb.
(Just as I have done.)
That spider,
Glowing with triumph,
Circles and spins

Traps those wings
In its tangled webs.
(Just as you have done.)
That moth cannot
Escape now,
Victimized by its own
Stupidity,
Too trusting of beautiful things.
(Just as I have done.)
The spider has got it,
Then sinks in its teeth,
Makes the kill.
(Just as you have done.)
(I had no time to turn and run.)
You were the death of me.

THE MANATEE



SURFER- SUZANNE LENTELL

CREATION MYTH

McKENDY FILS-AIME

My sisters like to ask lots of questions.

Where is the sun from?

Why are bugs so small?

Is the moon made out of cheese?

I parry their inquiries with
subject changes or poking, whichever
is most effective at keeping
them from the science of reality.

Maturity is an arithmetic children learn
slowly,
every problem brings them to closer to
adulthood.

The calculus of growing up should be
approached cautiously.

Telling two seven year olds about the

THE MANATEE

chemistry behind the
sun is like giving an English major a math test,
confusing.

This is why I keep honesty out of some
conversations,
not letting the truth act as a pickaxe, chipping
away
innocence coating their skin.

When they ask "Where do babies come from?"

I am shocked, as if the question is a bullet
introducing itself to my abdomen.

For a second, I'm filled with honesty that
comes with the approach of death. I consider
telling them the truth,

about their birth, that hot, bright morning
in June 2002, how the doctor cut our mother
open and
pulled them out screaming, the hospital light
expanding

their pupils like blooming daisies,
its rays caressing the petals of their irises.

I decide not to, hiding my deepest
parts away, like a tulip. Instead, I tell them a
story,
not of the stork variety or one involving birds
and bees. I sit both of them down and say,
"Girls, listen. Sometimes god disperses himself
throughout
nature, the birds, the trees, the rivers, the
animals are all him,
he becomes apart of everything, everything
except for people.
Instead, he chooses to watch us from the eyes
of a forest, feel us through
the skin of a meadow, listen to us from the
ears of a mountain.
He sews the threads of our joy, weaving them
together, making the purist thing on earth.

THE MANATEE

This is what we call a baby."

With faces full of revelation and halos in their
throats

they both angelically say "Ohhhhhhhh...."

I ponder the absurdity of my story,
secretly hoping its taught them to value life.

There is no telling when the defense of this
fantasy will rupture,

when lessons of sex and biology will bruise
dream clouds,

when a girl becomes less princess and more
bitch.

As my sisters learn to be breasts and curves, I
will tell them

the truth, call them over and say

"Look.

God doesn't sew and he's probably not one
with everything.

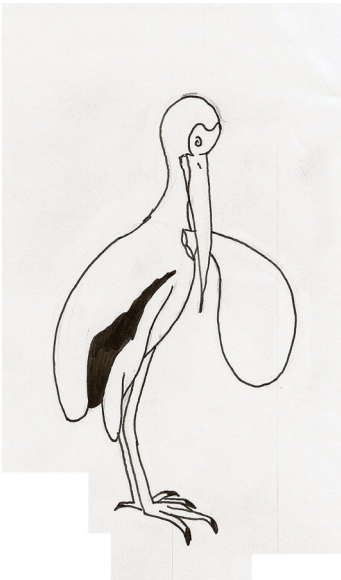
He might be hiding in a puppy's eyelids, he
might not.

I don't know

What I do know is, he helped make you.

Sometime ago, when I was a little older than
you are now, your parents met.

A divine DJ sampled the song of their hearts
and made you.



You are the remix, the
photograph of a passion
created years ago.

Never let people treat you
like 8 tracks, know you as
still-life,

see you as hips. You are
more human than that.

You are so much more.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alicia Beane is a senior at SNHU. In the past four years she has won the Amoskeag Poetry contest two years in a row, had poems, stories, and photography published in *The Manatee*, and contributed poetry to *The Observer*. This was her second year on the editorial board for *The Manatee*. She hopes to pursue editing and publishing in the future, as well as continuing her journey to publishing her poetry in a collection.

Louis Berceli is the inevitable result of a poorly funded public school system.

Jaclyn Blute is a creative writing major in her first year. She has had one poem published internationally and had a few poems in her high school literary magazine. She was on the Newspaper and Yearbook staff for Londonderry High School as well as here at SNHU.

Heidi Cruz is a senior graduating from SNHU in 2010 with her degree in Creative Writing. She spends most of her time writing, reading,



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horseback riding and watching anime. Her goal is to someday write a novel involving unicorns that becomes as popular as *The Last Unicorn*, her favorite novel.

Joseph Cummings likes sword play, especially while pretending to be Captain Hook. When he's not doing that he's making grand gestures towards the women in his life, including his mother.

Nicole Escobar born and raised in the sticks of New Hampshire. Trying to pursue a writing career at SNHU she has only tried to jump out a window once. Spends most of her days reading, writing, watching TV, and yelling "Oy with the poodles already!"

McKendy Fils-Aime is from the Bronx. Pretty much lived in a cardboard box, which is where his poetry comes from. He always got yelled at for writing on the walls, until he moved to Manchester and into an actual building. Now he spends his time at Taco Bell writing his poetry on the wrappers of his tacos.

Alora Heffernan born and raised a Masshole, though she doesn't know it, Alora is a Creative Writing major with a minor in Fine Arts, and History even though she won't declare it. She thinks she's awesome because part of her tattoo became the back cover for this journal.

Melissa Hurley is a junior majoring in Creative Writing. She is the captain of the Women's Cross Country team at SNHU and won the student fiction contest run by Amoskeag in 2009. In the future she hopes to pursue a career as a librarian.

Suzanne Lentell is photography editor of *The Observer*, when she's not taking photos or writing articles for the paper she is enjoying the outdoors, including hugging trees.

Rudine Manning is a senior Creative Writing student at Southern New Hampshire University. She aspires to win a Pulitzer Prize, and become one of the literary elite. Until then she stands on the fringes of life.

Kimberly McLaughlin is a Creative Writing Major with a minor in History. She likes dark colors and shiny things and her head is always in the clouds.

Julie Page once dropped out of university and traveled across the world to catch a Kiwi. She caught him, and now they are on the journey of raising two young daughters. She is currently recapturing her English degree at SNHU. As she discovers language and literature, her findings are helping her to learn to write poems. These pursuits make her very happy.

Dominic Rugoletti is a sophomore at Southern New Hampshire University. He wants to hone his craft in art and writing to express himself effectively and touch people's lives. Dominic's work has been featured in the McNinch Art Gallery for the Fictionable Worlds Project in March 2010.

Dillon St. Jean has been creative editor for the SNHU *Observer*, President of the SNHU Creative Writing Club, and protector of a bottle with a miniature vampire in it. Next to that bottle he keeps a box of mermaid scales, a cursed monkey's paw, and a silver dollar that lets you see through walls. He is a senior, a writer of a number of different styles, and creator of worlds. Also, if you go back to the cover, you'll notice that he did the illustration. Looks good, right?

