

The Manatee

Spring 2008

What Is This Nonsense

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, excerpts, and news. We also sell copies of the book there for the sublimely eccentric price of \$7.07.

The Manatees

Editor: Ian Nicholas

Editorial Board: Vincent Casciato
Joshua Dick
Tara Junkins
Myriam Labbe

Art: Melissa Ngai

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Diane Les Becquets

Editor's Note

Back in the fall, when Professor Diane Les Becquets asked me if I'd be interested in starting a student literary journal, I had one of those Moments of Clarity *The New Yorker* is so crazy about. I'd always wished there'd been a student literary journal on campus I could mess around with, but starting one myself had never occurred to me. That's what professors are for, I guess: telling us what to do and then kicking us in the ass when we slow down.

Early on I wasn't exactly Optimism J. Aplomb on the whole thing (I had no funding, no means of printing, and no idea of how many submissions I'd get), but after I enlisted some fellow English majors to help me out, things started to come together. It was a magic moment when the first submissions began to roll in . . . and in and in. And in. Early on, I'd thought of "success" as ending up with enough material to fill a standard 100-page journal. As it turned out, we ran out of space pretty quickly and had to turn away a lot of very good work.

This whole thing was winged just about as thoroughly as it's possible to wing a thing, but somehow we stuck the landing, and dang, we got some great stuff along the way. I'm going to tell you now, the phrase "earthy passion" appears at least once within these pages, and possibly more. If that doesn't sell you, you can't be sold.

All right, it's thankin' time. None of this would have been possible without Professor Les Becquets and Dr. Allison Cummings, since besides chucking me into this,

they also did so much administrative legwork that I've begun to suspect they're robots sent from the future. Nor would you be holding an actual book right now if Dean Karen Erickson of the School of Liberal Arts hadn't stepped in to provide ample funding at a time when our publishing prospects amounted to hijacking the computer lab and distributing a few badly-bundled piles of literary paper around campus. And when we were most lost, Barbara Yoder, Dean Fred Lord, Heather Lorenz, Professor Harry Umen, and Kathy Growney all lent helping hands to keep this going. Thanks to all, and thanks also to everyone who submitted—this would be one boring book without you.

I hope you enjoy the inaugural issue of *The Manatee*, and you stick around for next year's issue (keep checking www.the-manatee.net for news). The jury's still out on whether our funding will remain after the School of Liberal Arts people notice their budget is being funneled into printing books depicting the school mascot riding a manatee, but it's like that Emerson dude said: what manatees lie behind us and what manatees lie before us are tiny matters compared to what manatees lie within us.

Or something like that.

- Ian Nicholas

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100 Words to You

Kimberly A. McLaughlin

A greeting.

A farewell.

The time we first shed tears
Beneath a firefly-sprinkled October sky.

It's of the memories we shared

Of good.

Of bad.

The time we danced barefoot
In the middle of the yellow-lined road
Under the streetlight.

It's of the emotions that we felt

Love.

Hate.

The time of our first fight
When I chucked that fragile apple-green lamp
At your head, as you yelled.

It's the time we spent together

Yesterday.

Tomorrow.

The time we walked hands intertwined
Into the roaring, sunset colored waves.

This is a hundred words to you.

Evening at the Piggly Wiggly

Joanna Gelinas

I walked into a small local bar called Piggly Wiggly and wondered who on God's green earth came up with that name. As I crossed through the overcrowded area, I tried not to elbow any of the patrons. At first I was a little self-conscious about the cow shit stench that was reeking from every little pore on my body. Then I realized where I was. I took a quick look around at all the other guys in the bar that looked and smelled worse than I did and I was sure that most of them hadn't even spent the day shoveling cow dung in the blistering sun like I had. After a day like that, I needed to get away from the ranch.

Even though it was only seven p.m., everyone there was already piss-drunk, from the guys playing Texas Hold Em in the corner to the other groups of guys trying to line dance their way into the young waitresses' pants. I took my seat at the bar between some old guy who had passed out and possibly wet himself and a middle-aged guy who was grinning like a jack o' lantern, missing teeth and all.

"What can I get y'all?" the bartender asked as he wobbled over.

"I'll just have a Coke," I said, knowing I could have gotten a drink and that I could have used some rum in that Coke, but also knowing the trouble I could get into with Ms. Condley, my probation officer.

The round bartender brought my drink over and stumbled off to serve his other, drunker customers. I wasn't much in a mood to socialize. I just wanted a little relaxation

and time to myself away from the ranch for a few hours. I know a bar really isn't the kind of place one goes for peace and relaxation, but anything was better than sitting alone in my room all night.

"Hey, I know you," said the inebriated middle-aged man on my right. "You're Billy the Kidd. I read all about you in the paper this morning," he said, slurring his words and nearly falling off of his barstool.

"You got that right," I said, grinning like a fool and giving him a wink. I didn't see any harm in agreeing with the guy. He was trashed. He would either forget the conversation completely or be telling his friends a funny-ass story tomorrow. "But just make sure to keep that between the two of us. I wouldn't want anyone in here to find out and get the law involved," I said quietly.

"Oh no Mr. Kidd," he whispered. "I won't tell a soul. I know you're trying to hide out and I res . . . " He tried to finish, but passed out on the bar before he got a chance. Now, I was sitting between two guys who had passed out, but figured at least it would be a little quieter from here on out.

I swiveled my barstool and decided to face the rest of the crowd. Most were sitting at tables and some of the braver and drunker ones were trying to dance. I wasn't much of a dancer, especially when it came to those ridiculous hillbilly line dances. The best part was the guys thought they were so manly and cool with their legs kicking up this way and that, smiling like idiots and grabbing onto their belt buckles. The worst part was the girls loved it. They drooled all over the guy who knew all the steps, kicks, and twirls. What a riot! Girls whooping and cheering for those

fools, wishing that one of them would twirl her around and then take her home to make a real woman out of her. I just couldn't believe it.

After I got my fill of watching those line dancing monkeys, I turned my stool back around to face the bar and see if one of the sleeping guys had woken up. I was about to order another drink when I was interrupted.

"What's your name cowboy?" I heard a sweet little voice say as a hand was placed on my shoulder. "You wanna dance?"

I turned back around to see who was asking. She was a cute blonde, about 5'5", with big brown eyes and nice curves. When I say nice curves, I mean nice tits. She was older than me and had no clue that I was only seventeen years old.

"Name's Archie," I said, giving her a nod. "And you are?"

"I'm Marissa," she said with a smile.

"Why you asking me to dance?" I asked, trying to act smooth.

"Well I saw you watching the other guys out there and I figured you might want to join in," she said, putting her hand on my leg.

"I'm not much of a dancer, sorry," I said, hoping she would ask me to buy her a drink instead and then wondering where she would sit.

"Fine," she said, moving in closer. "If you don't wanna dance you can buy me a drink then."

"That's fine by me, but where are you going to sit?"

Marissa hesitated for a second, then pushed the middle-aged guy right off of the stool and took his seat. He really

didn't seem to mind—hell, he didn't even wake up. I figured she had earned a drink for that, so I ordered two rum and Cokes. I knew one drink wouldn't hurt, plus Marissa was about one drink away from throwing her inhibitions to the wind and I liked the odds of that.



“Guitar” by Shelly Petry

The Good Child

Nate Boesch

John sat on the deck, surveying the countryside. He had built the deck on the back of the house for moments like these, moments that requested a somber, quiet atmosphere. From here he saw the rocky ridge at the base of the horizon protruding far into the skyline while casting a shadow down along the plain, which gradually became his yard. The clouds above were gray and sat suspended over his plot of land, refusing to yield to the surrounding blue. He never would have had a moment like this had he built the deck facing the road. He'd have to put up with the constant passing of neighbors offering queer, flick-wristed waves as they drove home, their SUVs spewing up dust as they passed. Thank God.

The sliding glass door slid open behind him: his wife. John didn't turn. He felt her hands rest on his shoulders as she leaned over near his ear. "Come in, dinner's waiting. So is Mark," she coaxed. Her voice, although pleading, held a hint of demand. Before too long it would give way to anger and then exasperation. So it went.

"You're being unreasonable," she said.

"Not yet." John stared ahead.

"Darlin', you know it was an accident. Mark's been beating himself up hard enough already. You know how he is."

"I don't need to be reminded how he is. I know perfectly well how he is."

"Hun, you've been pouting long enough. I understand, we both do, that you feel it harder than any of us. But you have to understand; we all loved him, he was a great dog. The best. But what happened was an accident and you can't blame Mark. I won't let you."

Her hands lifted off John's shoulders, indicating to her husband she was through with niceties, which was fine with him. She only used words like "hun" and "darlin" when explaining herself in the wake of some error on her behalf. He had no idea why she was defending Mark. But he expected nothing different, which was why he sat outside brooding rather than venting to her three days ago when he should have. But no good would have come from it. He knew she would have stood against him, making him out to be the bad guy, just as she was doing now. Who knew what conversations had transpired between Mark and her prior to her coming out and trying to reconcile things for their son. It was pathetic. Mark was waiting, she had said. Bullshit. *He* was waiting. After mumbling a lame sorry following the incident, Mark hadn't spoken to him. One apology was all he got for the death of his dog, Bailey. *His* dog. If his wife had trained it, putting all the work into it, maybe she would have understood. He stood and turned around.

"Mary, if he wants to straighten things up, he can man up and come talk to me. I'm not going to be the one to settle this. If he hadn't sped into the driveway like I've told him not to, this never would have happened. And I don't want to hear you argue for him. He's a big boy." He maintained an even level of voice; he'd been ready for this conversation, knowing it was bound to happen ever since he saw the

reprimanding look his wife gave him when he sent Mark's friends home the day it happened.

"Are you actually sad that Bailey's dead or just pissed at your son?" She spat out the word *son*, almost making it sound sarcastic. He figured that was exactly the effect she wanted. She was pulling the "bad father" card. God, he hated when she did that. Mark stays quiet for a few days and the blame automatically falls on him. Every. Fucking. Time. She had fed him some bullshit about neglect the day before. He figured she got it from one of those therapy books she'd taken to reading lately. He wasn't going to fall for it. Insolence was insolence was insolence. There was no other way around it. She was becoming frantic now. He wondered why the fuck she even got involved; it was between a father and a son.

"You haven't talked to him in three days, John . . . three days!"

"*He* ran over the fucking dog, Mary, not me! Not me, Mary, you got that?" He jabbed his finger in the direction of Mark's room, roaring now.

With tears welling in her eyes, she turned and headed inside. "Goddamn you," she said through gritted teeth before shutting the sliding-glass door. "Goddamn you."

Having the deck to himself again, John turned and rested his elbows on the railing, looking out at the country once more. She'd settle down. She always had before. His son would come around and see his father's point of view as well; it's what good children did.

Proud Mary

Bill Sinclair

He tore feverishly at her bodice, ripping it off her sweat-drenched body. Having just bought the bodice, this really bummed her out. Still, she wanted more than anything to be devoured by his earthy passion. Unfortunately the idea of saying “devour me with your earthy passion” crept her out, so instead she murmured “Hum daddy bow-wow.” He had no idea what she was talking about and found himself wondering whether it was positive verbal feedback in regards to his foreplay technique, or signs of early-onset dementia. He went with positive feedback because the notion of making love to a woman who would soon be drooling into a cup was not terribly arousing. Not un-doable, but not a big turn on either. Thus resolved, he threw her to the bed, missing high and to the right. Her head careened off the night stand, somehow turning on the clock radio to an easy listening station. Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Proud Mary” was playing, but just the nice and easy part. They paused briefly to check for signs of a concussion. Not knowing what those signs might be they decided to forge ahead and make love as if they’d never made love before, as if it were the first time. And so they did. They made love in a hurry and badly. Afterwards, she wondered how she could have been foolish enough to leave a good job in the city, working for the man every night and day.

Lucy Ann

Myriam Labbe

Neil had always been able to see ghosts from the time he had been very small. As a young child he had explained to his mother that “all sorts of people” had been visiting him late at night. What he could not explain was the fact that these ghosts always had wounds on them.

“Pretty lady had a hole right here and it was all red around!” he said to his mother one day when he was about three, gesturing to an area near his heart. His mother was busy shuffling through paperwork at her desk, the metal chain on her reading glasses glittering in the light of the small lamp. She was only half listening.

“That’s nice sweetie,” she said absently.

Neil stomped his foot. “Momma listen!”

“Mommy’s busy, sweetheart,” she said. “Mommy has a lot of grown up work to do for tomorrow.”

Neil began to wail. “Momma LISTEN!” he screamed. His mother put down her paperwork and said to him, “That’s nice honey. You saw a pretty lady with a red dress. Now go play, Mommy’s busy.” Neil tried to explain to her that it wasn’t a dress but he couldn’t find the words. He screamed until his mother gave him a few hard spanks and placed him into bed for the night.

That was the last time he ever tried to tell his mother about his visitors at night. And in the meantime the ghosts kept coming. When he was older he began to realize that they were no longer alive, but they still acted as if they were.

Several of them talked to Neil as if he weren't there. Some of the women screamed terrible things that Neil couldn't understand. Sometimes large men would cry like babies and wave their hands at Neil, calling for "a fucking piece to put me out of my goddamn misery," or "gimme my crack. You bastard, I gave you the money now gimme my fucking drugs!" Whenever the ghosts would visit him Neil would crawl under his covers and hide, shaking and whimpering until the screaming stopped. Sometimes he would call out for his mother, who would stroke his forehead and hum softly to him until he fell asleep.

Neil started school at a place called Holy Family Academy when he was five. The room he was shown into was filled with desks with small chairs behind them and cartoon drawings of letters, numbers and shapes on the walls. Other children his age sat behind their desks, two to each, with a nametag on their shirts. Neil glanced shyly at them before picking a spot near the front of the classroom. Nobody else came near him.

His teacher was an old nun who took delight in teaching her young charges about hell. She pointed with the end of a yardstick toward a drawing of hell, where souls screamed and writhed in flames while a demon wearing a crown and carrying a trident laughed. The drawing frightened every child in the class and several girls looked teary-eyed. Next to it was a drawing of heaven, where an old man sat on a magnificent gold throne surrounded by angels on clouds. The angels blew trumpets or strummed harps.

Sister Clarence had white hair, curled with a curling iron, and wore a tan pantsuit with leather shoes. Both the pantsuit and shoes were at least twenty years out of date.

She smelled of roses but her perfume was applied in such liberal amounts that she was enveloped in a cloud that was slightly nauseating. With a yardstick she slapped the drawing of hell and said, "All bad little boys and girls go here. If you do not follow the Ten Commandments, if you use the Lord's name in vain, if you do not go to Church on Sunday, if you dare to go with people who do not accept Jesus as your savior then you will go straight to here!" She slapped the drawing of heaven next. "But if you're very good and if you do as you're told then you will go here. You have a choice, children. All people go to either heaven or hell as soon as they die."

"No they don't," said Neil. "Some of them come to my room at night."

At this announcement the room broke out into whispers and giggles. Sister Clarence stared at him.

"That's nonsense," she said. "All people immediately go to heaven or hell when they die."

"No they don't," insisted Neil, who said it loudly. "They visit me. Big men and kids my age. Sometimes women like my mom, who say all sorts of bad things." He glanced at Sister Clarence and feeling brave, he continued. "What's a cock? Sometimes they say that and they say 'fuck' too."

The liquid hand soap in his mouth tasted terrible but Sister Clarence's scraping out the soap with the edge of a paper towel was worse. Neil cried and Sister Clarence slapped him around the head before sending him off to the principal's office for swearing. The principal sent him off to class with a stern warning never to swear again and not to make up stories.

Nobody wanted to sit by him for the rest of the year except for one girl named Lucy Ann. Lucy Ann had curly brown pigtails and loved to wear purple dresses. She sat down next to Neil at lunch and pulled a peanut butter sandwich out of her Barbie lunchbox. Neil pulled out a sad looking, half squashed bologna and mustard sandwich and frowned at it, eying the chocolate cupcake that Lucy Ann also pulled out.

"You want it?" she said. "Here you go." And she passed it over to Neil, who laid aside his bologna sandwich and gobbled it up.

"Thanks," said Neil with a mouthful of cupcake. "Trade you this pudding for that sandwich."

"Okay. I hate peanut butter anyway," said Lucy Ann. She pushed the sandwich at Neil, who pushed the pudding at Lucy Ann. She grabbed up the plastic spoon that Neil also pushed at her and tore off the lid of the pudding cup, licking it with pleasure.

That was the beginning of a long friendship, with the simple sharing of a chocolate cupcake. Most of the other boys and girls stayed away from each other as they grew older, but not Neil and Lucy Ann. They were inseparable. One thing Neil couldn't help noticing, though, was the fact that Lucy Ann liked to wear dresses or shirts with long sleeves and sometimes would wince in pain when Neil would touch her arm. But Neil never asked and Lucy Ann never told him what was wrong. He was also never invited to her house even though he asked many times. Lucy Ann would always tell him that her mom said no or her dad was busy. Eventually, Neil stopped asking.

A few years later, the summer when they were both ten years old, Neil and Lucy Ann were sitting next to a pond not too far from their house on a dock. Neil was practicing skipping stones across the pond and Lucy Ann was sitting glumly on the edge of the dock, her feet swinging in the water, the drops sparkling like gems in the light of the setting sun.

“What’s wrong, Lucy Ann?” asked Neil when she hadn’t spoken for nearly a half an hour.

Lucy Ann sighed. “Can you keep a secret?” she asked. When Neil nodded, she rolled up the edge of her shirt and showed Neil her stomach. Black and blue bruises spiraled in the middle of the smooth white skin of her stomach. “My dad did that.”

“Why?” asked Neil, putting the stone aside and running a finger lightly over the day old bruise.

Lucy Ann shrugged. “It doesn’t matter. He gets mad sometimes and fights with Mom and me. I’m kinda used to it by now.”

“But why? Your dad seems like a good guy,” said Neil. “At least, he goes to church every Sunday and works hard at putting out the newspaper every day.”

Lucy Ann laughed, tears rolling down her cheek. “If you only knew what he’s like at home you wouldn’t think he was such a nice guy,” she said. Neil was bursting with a thousand questions and wanted to ask them all, but the expression on Lucy Ann’s face told him the matter was closed.

The next year Lucy Ann moved away. Neil grew up and graduated high school before he saw Lucy Ann again. It was a chance meeting at the mall, near the restrooms. He

recognized her instantly even though she was a few years older and her hair had grown past her waist. Neil immediately noticed the sparkling ring on her left hand and complimented it.

"Yeah," said Lucy Ann, staring at it with an expression that was half pride, half a sort of sadness. "Can you believe it?" She patted her belly. "But this is why. It's my first. Mom said it was a good idea to get married before it was born so we went down to the courthouse."

'Oh. Congrats," said Neil. A man bounded up behind Lucy Ann, and adjusted his zipper. He was a thin wiry blonde man with a Confederate flag tattoo on his left bicep and a wifebeater. He was tanned and looked distinctly older than Lucy Ann. He wore a red baseball cap on backwards and chewed gum. "Who's this?" he demanded.

"This is Neil, darling," said Lucy Ann with a hint of fear in her voice. "He was an old childhood friend."

"What did I tell you about meeting friends at the mall, hon?" said Lucy Ann's husband with a hint of poison in his voice. "Huh? Am I getting to be not good enough for you?"

"Wait just a second . . ." said Neil, but the thin man shot a look of venom at Neil. "It was nice meeting you," he said brusquely before wrapping a hand around Lucy Ann's shoulders and steering her away.

"It was nice seeing you again," called Lucy Ann over her shoulder. Neil contemplated following them for a few minutes but his cell phone rang. His girlfriend's tire was flat and she was in a panic, would he come to fix it now please? Because oh my God she was late for class and her professor would murder her because this was the second time in two weeks her car had broken down and he thought she was

lying and just oh my God he hated her. The rest of the day caught up with Neil, driving the thought of Lucy Ann out of his mind.

It was a while before he saw her again. This time her belly was obviously swollen with pregnancy. Neil was sitting at the park with his lunch on break from working across the street at the car dealership. On his lap he had arranged a turkey sandwich on his left knee and a bag of potato chips and a bottle of water on his right knee. Neil had just taken a bite out of the sandwich when he felt a sudden breeze and heard Lucy Ann's voice behind him. She sat primly on the bench next to him and looked at him with wide eyes.

"Hellogh," said Neil with a mouthful of turkey sandwich. He swallowed and grinned at her. She did not return his smile. "What's wrong?"

"Oh . . . not much," said Lucy Ann. "My husband is with another woman right now and I'm out taking a stroll. I thought about killing him but it's not what I should do."

"He with another woman?" gasped Neil and Lucy Ann nodded.

"Yeah. He did that before we were married, but with the baby on the way my mom forced him to do the right thing. Not like he ever did, anyway, because he still went after anything in a skirt and I guess he'll still do it when we're old and gray."

"Lucy Ann, it's none of my business but your husband seems like he's a jerk," said Neil, reaching out a hand to her. "I could be wrong, but . . ." A sudden breeze lifted a smaller lock of hair from her temple, revealing the hole on the side

of her head which leaked a crimson stream. Neil stared at her in shock.

"I know," said Lucy Ann. "I had bad taste in men." She smiled. "My dad would beat the both of us. I guess I looked for the same kind of guy." Lucy Ann smiled sadly. "My husband got tired of me yesterday telling him I knew what he was doing and that I wanted a divorce. So it just . . . happened." And Lucy Ann began to fade around the edges.

"Wait!" called Neil, but she was gone. All that was left was the breeze and the world around him. Neil gently reached out a hand and grabbed a fistful of air from where Lucy Ann had been a moment before. Then he laid aside his lunch and wept.

Neil never saw another spirit again until the day he died.



“New York City” by Shelly Petry

Intangible

Mckendy Fils-Aime

My essence has become the wind.

It leaves your presence and blows into the direction that I desire.

Only, I know where I'm going and where I've gone.

I've run through dark alleys, absorbing a bit of their sinister cores.

I've wafted through shady pubs with abstract artists, breathing inspiration into me.

And though they've given me so much, I've returned nothing.

Instead, I have taken from them the sustenance that they need.

I've brought them closer to death.

I don't regret my actions for they are what have kept me alive for so long.

I only wish that there was another way.

I wish that inspiration came from within but it I've realized that it doesn't.

I've found that there's nothing to draw upon because I don't know who I am anymore.

My mind has become intangible.

Antidepressants Are Causing More Harm Than Good

Ashley Fandrich

Since antidepressants were introduced to the market decades ago, they are being prescribed more and more every day. Although taking a pill may seem like the easiest solution to problems such as depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, bulimia nervosa and general anxiety, there is no magical cure. While many people are showing some improvement on this medication, antidepressants are causing more harm than good in the majority of patients to whom they are prescribed. Terrible physical side effects, suicidal thoughts, and withdrawal symptoms occur more often than the drug companies want to admit. Also, because antidepressants are fairly new, the long-term effects are unknown, and could very well be severely harmful.

The British Medical Association has said that “a review of studies on these drugs found that in many cases they were only slightly more effective than placebos for treating depressed youth and that they had many serious side effects” (Joueidini, Jon N et al. 1). Even if antidepressants do help adults in some cases, the side effects can sometimes be worse than the actual problem that existed in the first place.

In the article “Can Antidepressants Cause Suicide?” from Scientific American Mind, Hal Arkowitz and Scott O. Lilienfeld say that antidepressants can cause worsening depression, thoughts of suicide, or actual attempts at

suicide. Other symptoms include “anxiety, agitation, panic attacks, insomnia, irritability, hostility, impulsivity, severe restlessness, hypomania and mania” (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld 81). Doctors would be more intelligent to recommend psychotherapy to their patients before resorting to these drugs. However, many antidepressant companies are biasing their results, making their products look much safer than they really are (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld).

Paul Raeburn, another writer for Scientific American Mind, brings up the effects of antidepressants in those who are still growing in his article “KIDS ON MEDS; Trouble Ahead.” Antidepressants affect the levels of serotonin in the brain, and “drugs that alter serotonin during developmental years could alter brain function in unpredictable ways” (Raeburn 37). Thomas Laughren, head of the FDA’s psychiatric drug evaluation, says, “That’s one of the problems with the use of drugs in kids: we don’t know the long-term risks.” Amir Raz, a professor of clinical neuroscience, says, “exposure to antidepressants may affect or influence the wiring of the brain, especially when it comes to certain elements that have to do with stress, emotion and the regulation of these.” That is very scary, considering 1.5 million Americans under the age of eighteen are taking antidepressants (Raeburn).

Tara Parker-Pope, writer for The Wall Street Journal, focuses on the emotional side effects of antidepressants in her article. While on this medication, “brain transmitters that are supposed to carry dopamine around the brain, appear to end up carrying serotonin as well” (Parker-Pope 3). This may cause some serious side effects. A report in 2002, from The International Journal of Neuropsychophar-

macology, said that eighty percent of patients on serotonin drugs found it hard to cry, worry, become angry, or even care about anyone's feelings. It is almost as if many of the patients become completely emotionless. It is obvious that if one becomes emotionless due to antidepressants, his relationships will suffer greatly. "Patients need to be aware of how the drugs can affect emotions, sex drive and relationships" (Parker-Pope 1).

The makers of Prozac, Eli Lilly and Company, even admit that their drug can cause nausea, difficulty sleeping, drowsiness, nervousness, weakness, loss of appetite, tremors, dry mouth, sweating, decreased sex drive, impotence, and yawning. Those taking the drug may also experience "sudden changes in mood, behaviors, thoughts or feelings" (Eli Lilly and Company). Prozac, one of the most common antidepressants, came out in 1986 (Eli Lilly and Company). That is only twenty-one years ago. Therefore, we still have yet to see the long-term effects of taking Prozac. Patients and doctors have no idea if any side effects are going to occur thirty or so years after taking this drug.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness discusses other side effects of antidepressants on their website. According to them, if antidepressants are taken by a woman while she is pregnant, her baby is six times as likely to be born with persistent pulmonary hypertension of the newborn (PPHN) than a baby born to a mother who did not take antidepressants. "Babies born with PPHN have abnormal blood flow through the heart and lungs and do not get enough oxygen to their bodies. Babies with PPHN can be very sick and may die" (National Alliance on Mental Illness 1).

The National Alliance on Mental Illness also brings up the fact that depression is a part of Bipolar Disorder, and some patients who take antidepressants may be at risk for “switching from depression into mania” (NAMI 3). The purpose of antidepressants is not to trade one illness for another. The purpose is to make existing problems decrease, and have patients feeling better. However, this is not what is currently happening. Some patients are feeling worse, developing new problems, and possibly causing unknown future damage to their bodies.

Though these side effects are bad enough, the worst and most controversial side effects of antidepressants have not even been mentioned yet. Many studies have linked antidepressants to suicide and suicidal thoughts, causing many to reconsider taking this type of drug.

Hal Arkowitz and Scott O. Lilienfeld approach this subject in their article. They say that “Research and clinical observations over the past twenty years have raised concerns that these drugs produce suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and possibly even suicide” (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld 80). Studies published by the Food and Drug Administration conclude that subjects under the age of eighteen are twice as likely to have suicidal thoughts and attempt suicide while taking antidepressants than subjects under the age of eighteen who are on a placebo. “These findings point to the drug as the cause of the increased suicidality rather than depression” (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld 80). After these studies, the FDA put a “black box warning” on all antidepressants in 2004 to warn patients of the extreme side effects the drugs may cause (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld).

The article, “Antidepressants May Cause Suicide and Violent Behavior in Children and Teenagers,” written by Rob Waters, gives many examples to support the link between suicide and antidepressants. In 1991, it was reported to the FDA that there were 350 cases of suicide in patients on Prozac. This is only what was reported, and the number could very well be higher. Waters provides many specific examples of suicides while one is on an antidepressant. A seventeen-year-old girl named Julie Woodward started taking fifty milligrams of Zoloft, and within one week she hung herself in the garage. In 1996, Reynaldo Lacuzong drowned his two children in a bathtub, along with himself. This was only three days after he had started taking the antidepressant Paxil. The most extreme example Waters gives is Joseph Wesbecker’s story. In 1989, “Joseph Wesbecker went on a shooting frenzy, killing nine fellow workers of a Louisville, Kentucky, printing plant before turning the gun on himself” (Waters 5). Wesbecker just happened to be taking Prozac at the time of this incident. These are very extreme cases, but Waters claims that some patients may react to antidepressants simply by welcoming death (Waters).

Robert McGough, writer for The Wall Street Journal, says that “One theory is that antidepressants may relieve the lethargy and enervation of depression before they relieve the feeling of hopelessness, leaving a window of vulnerability for patients” (McGough 3).

Along with causing physical side effects, and even suicide or suicidal thoughts, antidepressants also cause terrible withdrawal symptoms when a patient is ready to stop taking the drug. Therefore it is both miserable to be on

the drug, and it is also miserable to get off of the drug. It is a lose-lose situation that millions of people will have to deal with sooner or later.

Hal Arkowitz and Scott O. Lilienfeld say that “Stopping antidepressants abruptly can trigger an array of distressing symptoms, including dizziness, nausea, headache, fatigue, anxiety, irritability and sadness, to name just a few” (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld 82). These symptoms are just as bad as the physical side effects antidepressants can cause in the first place. Also, forty percent of patients experience at least one relapse after the medication is discontinued (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld). Many patients taking antidepressants may be stuck with the drugs and their side effects for life.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness warns “Do not stop taking fluoxetine or change your dose without talking to your healthcare provider first” (NAMI 3). Fluoxetine is the generic brand for Prozac, a very common antidepressant, as mentioned before. The article says that stopping the medication can cause nightmares, headaches, paresthesias, and many other side effects (National Alliance on Mental Illness 3). Why would patients want to experience any of the side effects of withdrawal from this drug? The side effects while on the drug are bad enough. Hopefully, knowing these things will scare some people away from taking the antidepressants in the first place. The medical world still has many flaws to fix.

Rob Waters’s article, in The San Francisco Chronicle, contains a quote about Paxil, an antidepressant, from Karen Barth. The attorney with Baum-Hedlund says that “Paxil has been linked to more reports of withdrawal symptoms than any other drug in clinical history” (Waters 10). Consi-

dering how many drugs are on the market, and how many of them have terrible withdrawal symptoms, this is very scary. Of all the drugs prescribed in the medical world, Paxil, a simple antidepressant, causes the most withdrawal symptoms.

I, myself, am on the antidepressant Prozac. Although the drug was slightly helpful at first, it has caused me nothing but problems for me in the past few years. I suffer from many of the side effects, including anxiety, agitation and irritability. However, when I have attempted to wean myself off of the drug, terrible side effects became much more noticeable. My parents can tell if I stop taking my medication within one week. They say I act crazy, get very angry, and am completely irrational. I am now stuck taking Prozac, most likely for the majority of my life. To be on the drug or off of the drug is miserable. I believe I also suffer from more depression than I ever did before this medication. I was put on Prozac for an eating disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder. However, I have shown no improvement in either area while taking Prozac. This antidepressant has been of no help to me. If anything, it has caused me great trouble in life. I wish I never had started taking an antidepressant.

With so many physical side effects, withdrawal symptoms, and even the potential to cause suicide, antidepressants have not made a good impression at all. However, they are still being prescribed to millions of people, many of whom do not even need them. Doctors should be looking for a new alternative for treating their patients, instead of giving them this perceived “quick fix.” This “quick fix” is ruining lives and actually bringing death to some. If antide-

pressants refuse to leave the market, something should at least be drastically changed with the chemical components, in order to make them safer and more effective. Right now they are anything but safe and effective. For the time being, antidepressants are causing much more damage than help for those who are taking them.

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Cinderella Wishes and Casablanca Dreams

Rudine Manning

When will I speak of stolen glances
Awkward silences
Love notes with feelings to match?
Long walks and longer talks
Never wanting them to end?
When will I write of hearts in one piece
On our sleeves and in our throats
Breaths taken away and feeling higher than the sky
When will I have my Cinderella wishes and Casablanca
dreams?
When will I speak of hearts in the sand
Sunset gazing nights
Stolen kisses and hugs that seem to last forever?
When will I write of hearts beating
Hand in hand
Our fingers intertwined as we run together?
When will I write of comfort and joy
tears wiped away
whispered words that make things better?
When will I know smiles instead of frowns
Laughs instead of cries
When will I have my Cinderella wishes and Casablanca
dreams?



“Mari Umen” by Courtney Tosches

Party

J.D. James

The kid was waiting outside, feeling more and more awkward as he felt the minutes tick away. It would be no problem, she said. There'll be tons of people at my party, there'll be people lined up at the door, she said. Someone will let you in, she said. Where was the line of people now? He had walked all that way just to have his premonitions of disappointment be proven right in front of him.

He began pondering heading back (seriously this time) when he saw someone he barely recognized enter the building and snuck in after him. It didn't take him long to find the party—it was the loudest room on the floor.

Upon entering he wasn't sure which hit him first. Immediate regret for even opening the door, or that horrible combination smell of Axe and cheap booze. He sincerely hoped nobody lit a match—they could easily take out the whole dorm on fumes alone. His thumb absentmindedly stroked the lighter inside his pocket.

"Hey you made it! Have a drink!" was the first thing that people said with the realization of his presence. There were only about three friends out of the crowd of forty or fifty people tightly packed into these three tiny rooms that constituted an apartment. Yet the rest seemed to know his name, despite a vague recall of indifference or dislike that he had for the remainder. He was not just a duck out of water, he was a catfish on the moon.

“I can’t, I’m fasting.” Which he then had to follow with, “I’m not religious—just a personal test of character and will.” Their encouragement did not end, however, and he ended up putting off many a stumbling drunk. He was fairly certain that his perceived rudeness would very quickly disappear from their memory by morning.

He eventually saw the friend who wanted him to come. “I had to sneak in here like a freaking criminal!” he shouted in her ear over the terribly dull, offensive and blaring music. “I was left just waiting outside. People were looking at me like a god damn creep waiting to jump somebody.”

Her reply was, “Glad you made it!” He seriously doubted anything had gotten through to her. As usual.

He nodded awkwardly and off-beat to the songs he had never heard before, which was all of them. He knew the DJ and loathed him immensely. He had a brief vision of bashing his head into the turntable and jabbing the needle through his skull while playing a personal favorite. He was sure such behavior would not go over well.

His only response to such situations was to hang back and inevitably fail at small talk to anyone who attempted it, which he did spectacularly. One girl came up and said her name was Kira. “Cool,” he replied. “Did you know that means killer in Japanese?” She smiled nervously and then left hurriedly. He was left laughing at how badly he had done. He had assumed she had seen an anime series that he had, because she looked the type, but she had not and thus made him look like somewhat of a psycho. The only thing he could do was laugh at his misfortunes, for he had learned not to take them too seriously.

He spent the rest of the time trying to figure out human social behavior, but was left clueless. He didn't understand why such semi-decent chicks turned into such stooges with just a drop of alcohol. Girls who he would normally respect were out there dancing like sluts to wildly sexist lyrics. One song verbatim was, "You're a crazy bitch, but I like the way you fuck me." Yeah, he'd try that one some time in class. Just lean over and say, "Hey, I completely hate you, but you look like you can ride a dick." He'd get a lawsuit, but this dumbfuck singing it gets a multi-platinum record deal. All the kid wanted was some consistency in the world, which was becoming harder and harder to find.

When the fridge was out of A&W, he figured it was time to step. A girl who he disliked grabbed his arm and told him not to go.

"Don't worry," he said, "I'm just going to hit the john."

"When you get back, we should dance."

"Sure," he replied as she disappeared into the mass of bodies heaving in the dark.

When he opened the door, he relished the wind passing through him. He breathed in deeply and let it in his chest. He began walking back to his place of residence, paused and searched his pockets. Out came a cigarette pack and a lighter. "Oh well," he sighed as he lit up. He took a drag, breaking the fast. The smoke wafted up into the air along with all his broken promises.

The Best Day, That Led to the Worst Night of My Life

Donald Walton

The early autumn sun was playing peek-a-boo with the Texas horizon, and it was so hot that my sweat was drying as soon as it dripped to the ground. This was going to be a good day. Little did I know that it would end up being the longest day of my life. I had no clue that before I would go to sleep my dad would be gone, and my world would be hurled into a tumble and flopped on its back.

It was September fifteenth, and the Texas sun was blistering at an unusually hellish 106 degrees. My dad, uncle, and I got into our rented Excursion and tore away from San Antonio Regional Airport. My dad was still kind of mad at the airlines for throwing our rifle cases around like they were garbage. We got on the interstate and headed southwest toward the Schmidt Double T Ranch, which was nestled in a little town called Menard. The drive was uneventful, minus the small doe that basically ran under the truck. The locals at a corner store told us that everyone around there bought special bumpers for their trucks because so many deer got hit there.

We arrived at the iron gates of the ranch around noon and pushed the call box so the owner could come and get us. Tim Schmidt, the owner, brought us to the most beautiful and enormous log cabin that I have ever seen. We went inside and settled into our rooms. We were dreadfully tired

so we took what the guides called a “siesta.” I was woken up by loud yelling and banging. I went into the common area, and found a guy with shampoo in his hair and nothing on his body, being revived from getting knocked out. The man’s name was Chase and he and his four buddies from Georgia had flown up earlier that morning for a week of hunting. One of the guides asked him why the hell he came running out of the bathroom. He told the guide that a scorpion had crawled out of the shower drain. It was at that moment that I decided I would not be showering in the lodge.

We all put on our camouflage and scent-blocker, grabbed our rifles, and headed out for the first night’s hunt. I was hunting deer, and most other big game at that time, with my left handed, bolt action, .300 caliber, Short Magnum Browning Rifle. I used a Leupold 10X40 scope that my dad had gotten me for my sixteenth birthday, just a little over a month earlier. The day before we departed we took the four rifles we would be bringing with us to a firing range and made sure they were all sighted in. I put four shots in a two inch radius at 200 yards, which was no small feat.

I arrived at the stand with my special guide for the week, Tim Schmidt. We then clambered up into the shooting shack. The air was buzzing with bugs, and the ground was covered in an ugly plant called prickly pear, which is a low-lying type of cactus. I took out *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* by Stephen King and started reading. A few does and undersized bucks arrived shortly after us and began foraging in the food plot we were overlooking. Tim had set up a 200-square-yard field of clover, one of deer’s favorite foods. Two huge flocks of turkeys came gobbling in and I

kind of relaxed because, if they were loud enough they would block some of our noise.

Around quarter past seven, I put my book away because it was getting hard to read. When I looked up from my back pack I saw a monster of a rack moving through the small group of mesquite trees to my right. Now I'm not a religious man by any means, but I instantly started praying to anyone who would listen, for two things: that I would get a shot at this buck, and that I would drill him right in the center of his front shoulder. The buck took the longest five minutes to come out into the field. There was just barely light enough to shoot.

Tim ranged him at 150 yards. I slowly lifted my rifle and set it on the sandbag on the window sill of the shack. I put my crosshairs about four inches below the top of his back, in the center of his front shoulder. I slowly clicked off the safety and gently began to squeeze the trigger. BANG! I was still looking through my scope and I saw the enormous mass of brown fur flop to the ground hard. Tim told me it was a great shot, as I chambered another round just in case he got back up. This was just a force of habit because we both knew he wouldn't get back up. We waited about five minutes and then climbed out of the shack.

The walk to the deer took what seemed to be three centuries. I couldn't believe my eyes; the closer I got the more enormous he grew. Tim got to the deer and told me it was probably one of the best deer he has seen this season. I counted twelve points. He had a beautiful drop tine which went straight down between the brow tine and the head. My shot went through both of his lungs and his heart, the

perfect trio in shooting. Tim disemboweled the deer, and we hefted him into the truck.

We started driving back, ecstatic, replaying the night in our minds. As we came around the last curve in the road we noticed flashing red lights at the lodge. As we got closer we discovered that the lights belonged to an ambulance. We parked, hopped out, and jogged over to Carroll Schmidt, Tim's wife who was talking to the paramedics. When I made eye contact with Carroll I instantly knew something was wrong, and it had to do with me. She gently put her hand on my shoulder and told me that my dad had had an accident. She said that he was getting out of his shooting shack and his hands slipped off and he fell. Then she said that wasn't the problem, the problem was that when he fell his chest immediately started burning. The paramedics said he'd had a heart attack. Carroll said that he was not conscious but the other ambulance that showed up first took him to town. I instantly started crying and pacing. I asked where my uncle Reggie was, and Carroll told me that he rode with my dad in the first ambulance. The paramedic said that I could ride with them and they would take me to the hospital.

I got in the ambulance and started calling my uncle Reggie's cell phone, but it had no signal. I asked the paramedic how far away the hospital was, and he told me it was about an hour away. The first ambulance was driving to the helipad in town, and the helicopter would get him there in less than twenty minutes. I asked the paramedic Craig if he knew how my dad was now, and he said last that he heard they were using the paddles to revive him. Instantly a new, bigger batch of tears welled up. I started calling Reggie

again, but still he didn't have signal. I asked Craig what the number was to the hospital. A very deep-voiced woman with a heavy Texas accent answered in a very boring tone, "Mason Hospital emergency room." I very quickly asked if the helicopter carrying my dad had arrived yet, she replied that he had, and he was revived and stabilized on the way there. Ten tons of weight instantly jumped off my chest.

We got to the hospital and I went into his room in the I.C.U. He was sleeping but the steady beeping and the series of spikes on the monitor warmed my heart. I called my mom and sat with my dad and uncle for two days straight until he was fully conscious and alert. After Tim picked us up from the hospital we went back to the lodge and my dad went to sleep. The following day my dad woke up at about one p.m. and wanted to see my monster buck. That night my dad and uncle went out hunting for the last night of our stay. They both harvested gigantic bucks. My dad shot an eleven pointer that scored 160 points on the Boone and Crocket scale, and Uncle Reggie shot his first deer, a nice eight pointer.

Through this experience I came to find that no matter how good of a time you are having, it can be switched and flipped to become equally as bad. I also realized that, maybe the good don't always die young. I think that for some reason the powers that be didn't want to ruin our hunt, so to sort of repay us for hurting my dad, we all scored beautiful bucks. The trip turned out to be quite the adventure that we will definitely always remember.

Ugly Duckling

Kelly Nash

Elementary school, classmates or a firing squad
Little girls twirl their hair
Reign with fists of fury
She didn't have the right thing
Didn't look the right
Didn't act the right

She committed a crime
They put her against a wall
Shots firing, gun shells flying
When it was over, she lay there dying
She had almost bled to death
When the teacher told her to get back to her seat

Three Staples

Dillon St. Jean

Pretty much everyone who reads comic books knows that it takes three staples to hold together a single issue. One at the top, one at the bottom, and one in the middle. All of your favorite books bound together by tiny pieces of metal. The only problem is that if you don't have all three, the pages are going to flop and bend like a son of a bitch. If you collect them, well, you are completely screwed. I know a lot of collectors, and if a comic can't function like it's supposed to, it isn't exactly a desired commodity. You need three staples. I at least know that much.

"Lonny," said D.K. from the back, "I need you to help me bring up the new issues. We still have a lot of boxes to unload." D.K. wanted to get everything set up appropriately before the store opened because it was one of the rare times that we got our shipment before ten o'clock. I looked at the clock and noticed that it was only 9:43.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" I asked him. He suddenly sighed and marched in from the back room. He slammed the box into my arms and turned away, walking toward the shelves near the front door. I peeled open the box and began taking the issues out in stacks, sorting through all of them and putting them into alphabetical order. *Action Comics*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Batman*, and so forth. I hate sorting out the issues when I can't read them. Luckily that's what the workday is for. D.K. began to unpack a box he had taken out earlier and started placing

hardcover books on the display shelf. The shelf kept drawing my attention to the orange wanted sign on the window. Its presence was actually starting to get to me. As much as I hated it, D.K. was right when he said we needed to hire someone new to be able to run everything we had going on.

D.K. and I had been working at the comic book shop since our senior year of high school. Our boss was named Han, and he had hired us when we needed money to go to a big comic book show in Boston. We loved working for him because he never really minded us slacking off throughout the day. The only problem that ever arose was D.K. getting caught drinking at work. Han was upset with him, but refused to fire him. Instead, he decided to guide D.K. more and taught him much more about how to run the store as a whole. We had all become really close friends, and after four years working for him, we had become fully content with where we were in life. I had still been working on my writing; I even started to put out a comic book along with an artist I had met in college. For a while, things had been really good. One day in March, Han came to us and told us that he was going to be selling the store, because he and his long-time girlfriend were going to be getting married and move down to New Jersey. It hurt us a bit, mostly because we didn't know what we were going to do. Luckily, Han had turned D.K. into a take-charge kind of guy, and he brought up the idea that we could buy the store. We both took out large loans, and we both even dropped out of college to use the remaining tuition to pay for the store. From that point on the both of us owned the store, but we both were deeply in debt.

It was almost ten o'clock when I had finished putting all of the new comics in order on the wall shelf. Back on my little bar stool behind the counter, I finally managed to begin reading the books I collect. Only five pages into the newest *Detective Comics*, I looked up and noticed that there was a girl standing on the other side of the front door. She had her hands behind her back and was smiling at me.

"D.K., there's a girl at the door," I said.

"Then why don't you let her in, Lonny?" said D.K.

I threw my arms down in frustration and walked over to let her in. I contemplated playing a little game of 'Gate-man of the Emerald City,' but decided that D.K. might not appreciate my Oz references. I opened the door and she ducked in quickly.

"Uh, hey," she said, "my name is May. I'm here to apply for the job." I looked back over at the help wanted sign, and then back at her. She seemed to be confused by my expression, because I too had a great deal of confusion. I never expected a girl to come in for the job, let alone a girl that was actually kind of cute and a little perky. At the time, however, her appearance didn't even register with me because I was too busy thinking about what I would say to her to get her to leave. I never really wanted another person to be working at the store, but D.K. said he had figured everything out, and that having another person working would actually help when we made our expansions down in the basement. He promised me that rather than lose money paying an employee, we would actually make a profit.

"Do you have a resume?" I asked her. She quickly pulled out a manila envelope which held a large resume, entailing her jobs as a babysitter, at a Wendy's, and at an

arcade just outside of town. She had a number of positive recommendations. As I pretended to read through the documents, she continued to smile her positive little smile at me. I turned and walked back to the counter as she followed me. I placed her resume down and looked directly at her. "Well, your prior work experience doesn't really matter all that much. What matters is just how well you do for comic books. Let me guess, you've never read a comic book before?"

"Actually, I read a lot of comic books," she said. "I like *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Justice Society*, *Fables*, and *Scott Pilgrim*. You know, just to name a few."

"Yeah, just to name a few." My disdain for May was palpable, and it was only because she symbolized a type of change. I didn't want someone new to come in and cause me all sorts of unnecessary grief. There was absolutely nothing wrong with her, and she and I shared a number of our favorite books. However, I was still furious. She was intruding on my life and my business, and I didn't like it. "Well, I'm sorry May, but that sign you saw on the door was supposed to be taken down. The position has already been filled." Her spirit was in the process of being crushed, because she appeared to want the job a great deal. She turned to walk toward the door as D.K. came to the front of the store and saw her.

"Hey, Lonny, I was just putting all of the boxes out to the trash," he said. He then looked at May inquisitively. "Hello. Can I help you?" I began to look away as she spoke, because I knew it was going to lead to trouble.

"Oh . . . no." she said. "I was just here to apply for the job, but I didn't know the position had been filled." D.K. just

stared at her blankly without saying a word for a solid eight seconds. As he stood there, I reached out from behind him and I nudged his shoulder. It was just enough to shake him out of his frozen state and get him talking again.

“Uh, wait. What? No it hasn’t. Who said that?” He then looked back at me, as I was pretending to read one of my comics. “Damn it Lonny.” He then turned back around to May and said “We haven’t filled the position yet.” He picked up her resume, flipped through it, and placed it down. “Well, you’re hired.” I was taken by surprise a bit, because he hardly read anything and was already prepared to make a judgment call. I did the same thing, but still, his choice surprised me. May began to jump up and down and clap her hands. She ran over to D.K. and hugged him, forcing him to become flustered and nervous. As I looked at his face and how nervous and red he was becoming, something had become obvious to me.

He liked her.

It bothered me a bit that he had immediately taken such an interest in the girl. My discomfort had been even stronger due to how much I had been enforcing a ‘get back into the dating field’ idea whenever I would talk to him. I was totally fine with D.K. taking a new interest in dating, but I took a serious issue with it when it posed a threat to the pleasant little status quo that had formed around me. The change that came along with Han moving away was a big enough issue for me. The last thing I needed was another huge workplace change. I liked things just the way that they were.

D.K. turned and looked at me like I was an idiot. May looked up at him and asked, “So when can I start?”

"How about today?" he asked. She nodded and grinned widely. He asked her to go downstairs and get him his notebook. Quickly she ran to the stairs and headed down. Meanwhile, D.K. was already headed toward me looking angry. "What in the hell is the matter with you, Lonny? You know we need someone new in here."

"What's the matter with me?" I said in shocked response. "What's the matter with you? You didn't even really look at her resume. For all you know she used to drown orphans in the river."

"That's impossible," he said. "First of all, I can't see there being high demand for that profession. Secondly, I'm trying to do what's right for the store! Once we get the basement set up for card game tournaments, we'll be making a much larger sum of money overall. Kids in this neighborhood love playing those damn card games we keep on display."

"But you haven't even thought about how I feel about that. You know I hate the kids in this neighborhood. That brat Terry Evans broke the window that one time."

"I still maintain that you did that," he said. Everything he could have done to show that he was disappointed in me was being used at full force. The was the folding of the arms. The furrowing of his brow. All of the classics where there, and it was clear he felt that I had done wrong. There was not much more that I could do to convince him that my intentions were honest and pure, because he knew that they were so obviously not. "Look, I don't really understand why you don't want this new girl working here. If it's because you're afraid hiring someone new will wind up costing us more money than we'll make, I promise, I have done the

math. We will be making a whole hell of a lot more money when we start charging for tournaments and all that. Trust me, with the amount of kids that come here every day, buy their cards and just leave? I know we can be making a whole lot more doing this.” D.K. patted me on the shoulder a couple times and walked away. May ran back up the stairs with his notebook, and he went into his long explanation to her about his tournament idea. I leaned against the counter and continued my sulking. I wanted the comic book store to remain a comic book store, and I didn’t want the shop to become something impersonal. D.K. and I worked hard to keep the store up and running, and for me it was fun. Spending all day with my best friend had been an important facet of my life.

The day went on in that pattern. May went over and flipped the closed sign to the open sign, forcing us to begin the work day. I made my murmured little quips about how we were apparently hiring her to be an assistant, but it was just low enough that no one heard me. Sadly, many of the customers we got were incredibly difficult to talk to. One of the first people to walk into the shop was a man named Jared, who would walk around the store and talk on his cell phone while reading comic books he had no intention to pay for. He would then come over to me and ask questions about the most trivial and inconsequential things he could possibly think of. It took everything I had in my body to not wrap the cord of our phone around his neck and pull tight.

May and D.K. talked for about an hour straight. They spoke about how Frank Miller writes, and then about how Jim Lee draws. I had never heard a discussion about anything involving Batman come to so much of an agreement. It

could have been that I had already taken issue with May, but to me, it did not seem that she had been doing all that much. She obviously needed time to learn exactly what she needed to do every day, but the way I viewed it was that she was learning a job that a chimp could have easily done. I tried to listen more closely to what D.K. had been saying to her, and all I could really gather was that he said a few things that made her laugh. More and more often I was distracted by the ignorant customers that would approach me and contribute to the horrible day I was having. There were a couple of teenagers that gave me a hard time about the new issue of *Wonder Woman* and who draws it. Then I was forced to suffer through an older woman who asked me if there were any good books for her grandson that didn't focus too much on 'the female anatomy,' because after all, he was only a college freshman. I struggled through just about everything I could stand until I was approached by my least-favorite type of person: the high and mighty 'graphic novel' fan.

The high and mighty graphic novel fan is someone who not only uses the term 'graphic novel,' which in itself is not an issue, but also specifically uses the term to distance himself from traditional comic book fans. He feels he has somehow gained a greater position in life because he doesn't read comics from the big two companies, Marvel and DC. He approached the counter and looked at me with such a powerful form of smugness, I was surprised he was able to form full sentences. People like him have developed such big heads due to their 'independence' in the field of what they read that the stitches along their hairline can be seen tightening to hold their skull together. We both stared

at each other with obvious disgust. “So, do you people have any actually interesting graphic novels here?” he asked.

“Well,” I began, “I suppose if you were willing to pull your head out of your ass, I could get you a copy of *Astonishing X-Men*.”

“And if you were to grow up you’d realize that the X-Men is something to grow out of when you start using multiple syllables.” I attempted to get another shot in, but he refused to stop talking. The further he reached into his insults, the harder each one of them struck. He not only insulted my tastes, but he insulted my intelligence, my way of life, and even came close to questioning my humanity. He just kept going, for about two minutes straight. Every time I tried to get a word in, he would interrupt me and keep hitting me with insults. I clenched the glass part of the counter and tightened my teeth together. The more he spoke, the more furious I became. He then wrapped up his longwinded assault on my enjoyment of comic books with, “So, do you have anything to say, or should I take this as you admitting you were wrong to offer me complete trash?” Just as I raised my head to respond, I realized that I was drawing a blank. I had absolutely nothing. Usually I could come up with a good enough insult that I could at least get someone like him to rush out the door in a huff, but absolutely nothing came to me. I looked at him, and he was already developing a victory smirk. As I could tell I had somehow been defeated, May suddenly appeared from my right side like a guardian angel.

“I have something to say,” she said. “How about you either stop being such a smug jackass and buy a real comic for once in your miserable high-and-mighty life, or you just

walk outside and see if you can get hit by a bus in the next five minutes. Maybe then you can be taken to a comic book shop that's willing to put up with your ignorance. Either that or an emergency room, but saving your life really wouldn't be worth it, now would it? So go. Take your spiteful demeanor and leave before we call some of the creepy costume kids we get at the shows to come by and rub up against you. Go on!"

I was speechless, and so was he. Abruptly he turned and walked out as fast as possible. As May laughed about how well she had told him off, I stood there with my mouth hanging open in complete amazement. She had singlehandedly come to my rescue and completely demolished the confidence of an arrogant fool. Everything that she hadn't done that had bothered me prior to the event was completely forgiven as I smiled wide at her.

"May, that was amazing!" I said to her. Oddly enough, I heard it echoed as I said it. From behind the shelves, D.K. swung around and smiled at May.

"Hey May, you can take your lunch break now if you want," said D.K. She agreed and went around to the back. D.K. looked at me almost as smugly as the guy who had just walked out. "See that? Isn't she great? I told you that hiring her would be good for the store. I mean, she so obviously pulled your ass out of the fire right there."

"All right, all right. I get it, she's really cool and she'll be fun to hang with during the week."

D.K. looked at me and noticed I was still bothered a bit. "Okay, what is your problem, man? This is so obviously upsetting you."

"I don't want all sorts of crap to change between us." As I said this, D.K. leaned back and his eyes bugged out. "Shut up, man, you know what I mean. I was happy when it was you, me, and Han, but then Han took off. But still, I'm dealing with that, and I really like running the store with you. But if we start making changes like this, and increasing business, then we might end up being more like business partners than friends, and I'll end up hating working here."

D.K. stood there and looked at me with concern. It was clear he needed to choose his next words to me carefully, and to tell me something that would ease my many fears of change in my life. With a great deal of confidence, he opened his mouth and said to me, "Lonny, you sound really gay right now."

"Wait, what?" I asked him, because his comment had taken me by surprise. He was wincing at me, almost as though he was struggling to comprehend what was wrong with me in general. "No I'm not gay! I just feel hate the idea that things will get too different between us here at work. Aside from the work thing, you can go straight to hell for all I care."

D.K. smirked and laughed a bit, then pushed my shoulder enough to make me stagger away a bit. "I'm kidding! Look, Lonny, things always change. But you have to see that every aspect of this is for the best. May is really cool, and with her helping out, our business will grow and we'll make more money." I was about to interject with another question when he smacked my raised hand away and pointed at me. "Trust me, this comic book store will never be anything other than a fun place to work, but we need another person working in the store."

"I get it. I know, it'll be fine." We both remained silent for a while and stood behind the counter. I flipped through my stack of new comics and D.K. flipped through his. "So, are you going to ask her out today or what?" D.K. looked at me with total surprise and became a bit flustered. He didn't really know exactly what to say about that, but his inability to answer proved to me enough that he was planning on asking her out. If anything, at that point I had been hoping that he would, because I knew it would make him happy, and that was all that really mattered.

From around the shelves again came May, who was holding a brown paper bag that appeared to be leaking from the bottom. "My juice box popped open and ruined my turkey sandwich," she said. I immediately reached under the counter and pulled out a small cooler that we usually keep our lunches in. I pulled out a chicken sandwich and a ginger ale and handed them to her. She smiled and began to eat the sandwich as the three of us stood there behind the counter. I felt good about everything in general, which completely turned the rest of my day around. We spent the rest of the day simply hanging out and reading comics. May spent the majority of the day playing with a model sword that we kept in a display by the wall. D.K. and I spent some time trying to explain to kids how the card game tournaments would work. We even got a visit from the artist for the comic book I had been writing, and he spent some time talking with us about maybe selling the book in the store. For the majority of the day I experienced a huge amount of changes, and yet I didn't really feel any discomfort. I had found a nice balance for the rest of the day. I realized that no

matter what changes would happen in my life, they would not matter.

I have had a large number of comic books throughout my life, and every single issue that I have that is done in the traditional layout needs three staples for it to function. Without those three staples working together, pages would be everywhere and it would just be total chaos. The only real way that you can have a single issue work is to have three staples working together to hold it together. Luckily, our store finally had its own three staples, and I was all right with it. I came to the understanding that throughout the day I had been incredibly selfish in not wanting the store to change in any way. As time passes, things often have to change to improve. Having May there with is good for everyone. Together, the three of us can manage the store to be something great; something that we all love. I at least know that much.



“Overshadowed” by Kimberly A. McLaughlin

Tabooshba

Melissa Ngai

Beware the one they call Tabooshba, son!
When it comes through that dimenchamul, flee!
Leave not an open door or it will run
And steal you like it did the Tum Tum tree.
If pulled into a fight with it, take out
Our treasured Baavoo Wand and stand your ground!
A special strength to it, the goddess gave
To us one winter day ten years ago.
Raise up the wand to make a high-pitched wave!
Take the road, if you must, but please lie low.
Though many tried to fight the beast before,
It's best you stay excluded from our lore!

One of Many Mistakes

Tara Junkins

It's dark. I can't see anything. My mind is racing. I sit there in the hollow of my room, rocking back and forth. The events of the past week flash before me like a type of slideshow playing inside my mind. Last Saturday, I thought my life was ideal. And now, now it had all come to a screeching halt.

His name is Ace. That's right, Ace. He told me that it translates into "first rate," which is the perfect name for him. Then he told me that my name, which is Elena, means "beautiful." That was the line he used to try to woo me. And let me tell you, it worked. Because he also told me that my name fits me completely. No one had ever told me I was even *attractive* before, never mind beautiful. I was always just reduced to the "girl next door," the "best friend," not the "beautiful" girl. It shocked me completely. All the boys I knew were not even remotely attracted to me in that sense. They never said I was ugly, but I wasn't quite girlfriend material for them.

For the next few glorious weeks, I saw Ace after school. He didn't go to Samson High, but he came there to see me when school was out. Ace was home-schooled, and already about to graduate. He was seventeen years old, a supposed-to-be junior in high school, like me, and he was about to graduate. I envied him for that. I had to endure another year and a half before I graduated. But he told me that sometimes

it got lonely being home-schooled because there weren't any other students his age around during the day, so he had to just hang out alone until school ended, waiting for all of his friends to get out of classes before he could do anything fun.

When the bell rang, I would go to my locker and get my stuff, then rush out to the parking lot. There he would be, standing outside his car with that crooked smile of his that made all the girls swoon—and wish they were me. He greeted me with open arms, waiting for a giant hug and then opened the door for me when our embrace had ended and it was time to go. We would drive away, aware of all the people back at the school staring at us with awe, and in many cases, envy. Everyone wanted to be friends with Ace Bailey. Many wanted to be *more* than friends with him. He was just that kind of guy. Cool, and somehow unapproachable though he was nice to everyone. It made me feel good. I was never the type of person that people envied. And when I was with Ace, they did. Especially the girls. They wanted to be with him in the car instead of me, whether they had boyfriends or not.

He always took me somewhere that was in the town, but that I'd never really looked at the way he did. He told me all the time that there were things all around me that I didn't really see. I just took them for granted because they were there. And he was right. I didn't see things for what they were. Especially Ace Bailey.

I remember it exactly, like it just happened, even though it kind of just did. But two days does not mean an hour or five minutes. People can forget things easily in that amount of time. And I'm one of those people. I forget things

very quickly. It's crazy. But this . . . this I don't know if I can ever forget.

He brought me to Perkins Hill. I didn't know what he had planned for us, but I thought he just wanted to talk or something. Boy, was I wrong. After he parked the car, he turned and looked at me.

"Elena," he said, "we've been talking a lot lately. You're beautiful and smart, and funny. People don't give you enough credit. Everyone just thinks of you as their best friend. No one thinks of you the way I do."

I swallowed. Hard. I knew I wanted to hear those words, but now that they were actually out, floating around in the small space of the car around us, they didn't sound so perfect.

Okay, yes they did, but it would have been easier to think about if they didn't. I fell for it, though, and when he looked at me with those clear blue eyes, I just melted. Then he leaned in and kissed me. I let him. Why wouldn't I? This was Ace Bailey, the guy that everyone at Samson High drooled over, whether they had boyfriends or not. And I really liked him. And I wanted him to like me, too. It was the kind of thing I'd dreamed about but thought would never happen—would never even be *possible*—and now it was, it was real, it was happening. And I liked it. I wanted it. Finally, he pulled away and caressed my cheek.

"What do you think?" he asked me.

I blushed. "About what?"

"Well, about this," he said and kissed me once more. When he pulled away, I answered him.

"I like it," I said, "it feels . . . right."

He smiled that crooked smile. “Yeah, it is,” he said and leaned back in again. This time, I kissed him first. He delved deeper, and I let him slip his tongue in my mouth. It was wet, but not gross and slimy like some of the other boys I’d kissed when I was younger. Then, I felt his hands around my back. He eased them down toward my butt, and I let them stay there. But they didn’t for very long. They came back up my back, and then around to my breasts. I wasn’t sure what I should do, let them stay there, or ask him to stop. But then I just let them stay, because they weren’t in my shirt or anything, so I figured there was no harm being done . . . until they did go in my shirt. And by then, I was so confused and happy that I didn’t know what to do.

I was not ready to be sexual with him. I really liked him, but it hadn’t been long enough, and we weren’t even together . . . I mean, like *going out* together. It’s not like I’m strictly religious, or anything, and I never really decided I was going to wait until marriage, but I at least wanted to wait for the right person. I wanted to be in love. I wanted to be loved, and to *know* for sure that I was loved. I didn’t want to have any doubts. I wanted to be ready. But his hands just kept moving. From my breasts to the crotch of my jeans. I was getting really sweaty and nervous. I didn’t know how to stop him. But then, I just did.

“Ace, wait,” I said, moving away from him a little. “I . . . I really like you and all, but . . . I’m not ready for this. I’m not ready for sex.”

He sat up. “It’s okay,” he said.

“Really?” I smiled. He understood!

“It’s not a big deal, Elena.” He was sounding more and more understanding.

"I mean . . . it's not like I have a disease or anything. And I have condoms. Don't worry about it." He leaned back in to kiss me. I pulled away. He *didn't* get it.

"No, that's not what I meant, Ace," I said, getting up and skirting away from him. "I meant . . . well, I'm not ready emotionally. I want it to be special. I want to be in love, and I want to be loved back. I want it to be with someone I can trust, someone who wants to be with me for *more* than just sex."

He looked at me wildly, angrily.

"What? You think I'm just some guy who's looking for someone to screw and then dump? Have you even been *listening* to me these past few days? I *do* love you, Elena. I wouldn't do this with someone I didn't love. I'm not that type of guy. Why do you think I have all those girls after me, and I don't give them the time of day? It's not because I'm a jerk, or any other reason, but because I don't want them!"

"But how can you love me? You don't even know me." I said this quietly, not looking at him. It was the last thing I said to him.

He started up the car and drove me home, fuming silently. I didn't understand any of it. How could someone like Ace Bailey love a girl like me? I'm not anything special. But he must not have thought that because when I was getting out of the car, he looked at me and said,

"I meant it."

I ignored him, my heart beating as hard as it was, and forced myself to go inside. I don't really know what my problem was. I *wanted* to be loved. So why was I walking away from this? I guess maybe part of it was the fact that

when I told him I wasn't ready, he didn't listen. But then . . . I think that if I gave him a chance he might have understood. If he really did love me, that is. And when I think of the way he got mad at me when he thought I was accusing him of being just another one of those guys who use girls for sex, I realize that he really must love me, or at the very least truly believe that he does.

Anyway, now I am alone again. And miserable. I want to tell him I'm sorry, I want to tell him that we can try. I want to try. But he hasn't answered his cell phone. I don't know what to do. I think he's avoiding me. I'd ask to use one of my friends' cell phones to call him and see if he answers, but they're all mad at me for not hanging out with them or calling them all week, so I can't do that . . . I just don't know what I should do. That's why I'm sitting in my room, thinking about all these events, and how much my life has changed in so little time. I want everything back. I want my friends back, and I want Ace back. I really think I could love him. But I don't know how I can fix it. Maybe I should just give him some time, and he'll come back to me when he's ready to. Until then, I will sit here. In the dark. And even with the lightning flashing through my window and into my room all around me and giving everything a horrible light that makes me want to run away and scream, I won't. Because I need to think some more. I need to fix things. I really hope I can fix things. This is just another one of my very many mistakes.

I know there will be many, many more in the future, and there were many in the past, little ones, and big ones. But it just seems worse right now because I've never had *this*

happen before. I've never had someone like me or talk to me or treat me the way Ace does, as if he doesn't care about anyone else at all as long as I am there. It makes me wonder what he's doing right now, and if he'll call me. I've also never had my friends mad at me for ditching them before. I'd never had anyone to ditch them *for* before. It's funny, really, because they've done the same thing to me before and I never got mad. I'm a very understanding person. And I knew that they were with someone they really liked, and they deserved to be happy, so I just felt happy for them. How come nothing you do is ever right? How come if you give everyone the break you think they deserve, they turn around and get mad at you for the same thing that you didn't get mad at them for?

Man, nothing really makes sense right now. I'm lost. But it's okay. I will figure it out sometime soon. I will figure it out as I sit here in my room, alone, in the dark, with the lightning flashing in my window and the thunder booming outside, and my head going crazy with all the thoughts inside of it. I hope I can fix this. Just another one of my many mistakes.



“Stop Light” by Shelly Petry

The Plight

Vincent Casciato

You can't close your eyes forever.

Henderson finished his night shift at the round-the-clock convenience store, and after waiting ten minutes for that damned kid Billy to relieve him, he grabbed his coat and stepped out into the city air.

The avenue was all bright lights from street lamps and traffic signals; cars knifed busily in both directions as faceless pedestrians, braced in their coats, walked in shadows on the sidewalks to indeterminable places. A bus roared by as he turned a corner to avoid the hustle and bustle, the exhaust pluming the air and making him gag.

Pollution, he thought somberly as he continued the path, is everywhere. It's the reason why the stars aren't visible and the sky always appears to be charcoal-gray at night. Shouldn't it be a lustrous black, dotted with tiny white jewels? Instead, we have smog, an unavoidable issue, tucked away in a stack of problems that they tell us are being addressed but keeps growing and threatens to tumble.

He was shaken out of his thoughts as a blackened figure, arms outstretched, approached his line of sight on the dark street. It was too late to make other plans. The figure trotted up and revealed itself.

He staggered backwards, startled, as a filthy man in threadbare clothes and a raggedy beard held a tin can just inches from his face. "Spare a little change?" he asked gruffly.

Henderson pulled the collar of his coat to his nose and tried not to gag. He sidestepped and continued to walk, this time more briskly. Never sure of what to do in those situations, they always made him feel more uncomfortable than afraid. Usually, he thought, they remained stationed to their walls. He wished he had remembered not to make eye contact.

Just ignore them, he told himself as he passed graffitied gates of storefronts and uncertain alleys. Why not? Everybody else does. But then again, that's exactly the problem. Before we know it there will be one on every street corner. They're multiplying, he thought, just like the rats. That was another problem in itself. They too prowled the streets at night, seeking shelter in alleys, sleeping under trash. What's the solution?

He passed a clearing that was the park and the foggy downtown skyline dominated the background. He shuddered at the sight. The skyscrapers loomed high in the air, so far and yet so close, their bold features casting an overpowering yet unsettling presence in the dismal night.

The park, he could tell through the gates, was littered so badly that he was almost appalled. Even now, on the sidewalk, the slight breeze rolled a soda bottle by his feet. Despite the trash can a few yards away, he kicked it off the curb.

The wind picked up again as the cacophony of leaves and newspapers swirled angrily in the air.

He walked two more blocks, turned another corner, and was glad to be approaching his neighborhood. He wanted to run to his familiar shelter, to bolt the door, to hide under the bed.

A new café had opened nearby, the kind that magnetized lazy yuppies to its outdoor wrought-iron chairs and oversized cups of herbal tea. There they sat, despite the cold, with their ponytails and tight, pretentious clothing: everything fit the stereotypes so well. A young professional in a rustic colored jacket gripped his acoustic guitar—undoubtedly his bread and butter—while making sarcastic inside jokes to a short-haired college type with dark frames and a rainbow sweater. Two bicycles were leaned against the establishment.

I must have not been paying attention when this peculiar breed of underachievers paved their way into society, he thought. I suppose they're the millennium's answer to the hippies of past times. Where did they come from, and what do they stand for? He resented how they always seemed to have too much time on their hands. They're a passive race, a separate species. They don't know what it's like to work their fingers to bone, to fight for something, to have it hard like everybody else. They sit and mind their own business, sure, but they symbolize something. Indolence?

Today's generation is so languid, he decided. They know there are problems everywhere but don't lift a finger to work toward a solution. All of us, we depend on the hope that others will change the world for us, that others will lend a hand. Meanwhile, we go to our mindless jobs, buy material objects to serve as substitutes for happiness, eat junk and admire the false idols on television. We pollute the air, we pollute the water, we grow fat and stupid and lazy—because we just don't care—and one day, as the world is still

burning, we'll be the reason why it collapses. We *are* the problem.

Stuffing his hands into his pockets and stiffening his shoulders in response to the cold, he passed the faces of silent houses, coverers of infidelity, domestic abuse, alienation, and apathy. I need to re-evaluate my place in these matters, he told himself. It's important that I owe myself that much. But right now, I'm too tired and beaten down to think straight. A long nap will do me some favor.

Just then, as the street once again became dark, he saw a commotion about half a block ahead of him on the sidewalk. It appeared that a man in a long coat was trying hard to pull something from the hands of a much smaller woman. Her purse? His fist was tightly wrapped around her coat as the other yanked the object. He kept screaming for her to shut up.

Aside from Henderson, there was no one else on the street.

He took a long swallow as his chest ached, his feet turning numb with apprehension.

The old lady wailed as she shrank to the ground, the object now successfully torn from her grasp. Her assailant stomped heavily on her body and bolted deeper into the night.

Concealed in shadows, a pair of eyes could only close.

Constrictions

Celena Knowlton

Trying not to move
I cannot make any inclination
That I feel
Emotion.
I must be wary
For there is a price to pay.

Don't breathe so hard to
Make his arm twitch as
It lays heavy on your abdomen.
Don't cry so hard so that he feels
The wet sheets beside him.
Don't love so hard
So you don't make a scene.
Don't be so crude
When talking with such tone.
You don't want to upset him.
Don't talk so loud
So you don't offend him.
Don't keep your dignity
So he doesn't leave you
Or find someone new.

You're supposed to be forgiving,
Patient and sweet—
Maybe even kiss his feet.
Then one day you'll wake up in a bind

And you'll have to leave it all behind
Everything you've created in your mind
Of a life pictured so neat and
Divine
Has faded
And turned to rust
Because you didn't make a fuss.
All that you held dear—
Gone
Because of the unjust fear
To live.

Your consequence of your life
Is one that you will never forgive—
Of being such a good girl,
And being afraid
To live.

Elites vs. Brutes: The Fight Between the Civil and the Uncivil

J.D. James

Ever since man was created he has been in a never-ending struggle with nature. He deemed things that pleased him as civilized and things he didn't as uncivilized. As man progressed he developed more sophisticated methods of labeling things he saw. The best of the best were called "elites." These were men that were above the norm in chivalry, wealth, and power. The worst of the worst were called "brutes." These were creatures with the most disgusting, vile, and violent tendencies.

But man is not content with fighting with nature alone. As man spread all over the globe so did his hatred of his fellow man. In order to rationalize his hatred, his enemies were seen as the beasts he had faced before. "Uncivilized, inhuman, and brutes" he called them as the elites attempted to cleanse the world of impurity.

However, this battle among the elites is so strong that it takes place inside man himself. Man, after all is a part of nature. Unlike all of his outside foes, he cannot get rid of this dark side that's as a part of him as his limbs. The only options to face this brutal madness is try to tuck it away and ignore it, or let it take control and run wild like all those that he has fought so hard against.

Man vs. Nature

Gilgamesh, the earliest piece of literature that has been found (circa 2,500 B.C.E.) has a protagonist that is described as almost more than human. In the prologue, Gilgamesh the king is represented as being created with absolute perfection: “When the God’s created Gilgamesh, they gave him a perfect body. Shamash the glorious sun gave him beauty, Adad the god of the storm endowed him with courage, the great gods made his beauty perfect, surpassing all others, terrifying like a great wild bull” (“Gilgamesh” 13). Clearly he is no ordinary man; he is an elite.

Gilgamesh’s natural foes are just that, nature. Gilgamesh becomes so elitist in his superiority over man that even his own people pray for the gods to create his equal. The gods’ reply is life’s purest form, Enkidu:

She [Aruru, goddess of creation] dipped her hands in water and pinched off clay, she let it fall in the wilderness, and noble Enkidu was created. There was virtue in him . . . he had long hair like a woman’s; it waved like the hair of Nisaba, the goddess of corn. His body was covered with matted hair like Samuqan’s, the god of cattle. He was innocent of mankind; he knew nothing of the cultivated land. (pg. 14)

Enkidu’s creation is described very differently than Gilgamesh’s, despite the fact that they are created as equals. Whereas Gilgamesh is described as being better than all others, Enkidu is depicted as simply pure, innocent and the combination of all things natural.

Sure enough, the civilized men soon grow upset and fearful of such a natural uncontrolled force in their midst:

"He [Enkidu] ranges over the hills with wild beasts and eats grass; he ranges through your land and comes down to the wells. I am afraid and dare not go near him. He fills in the pits which I dig and tears up my traps set for game; he helps the beasts escape and now they slip through my fingers" ("Gilgamesh" 14). Such an uncivilized brute cannot be tamed by a mere man; it has to be done by elite such as Gilgamesh.

The hunters go to Gilgamesh expecting him to use his might as ruler to conquer such a brute, but instead he uses his superior wisdom. He sends what ultimately domesticates any man, a woman. But even the woman cannot fully bring Enkidu into human submission. It is Gilgamesh the elite himself who penultimately civilizes the brute Enkidu by beating him in battle.

Gilgamesh represents man at his best, Enkidu nature's purest creation. In the end, it is man who wins over nature. But Gilgamesh doesn't only beat Enkidu in physical combat, he domesticates Enkidu making him become his best friend, almost as if he were a dog. Man still does this today. Virtually every animal and beast found on earth from dog to lion and kitten to tiger have been subdued by humans. Some of these creatures are even expected to do tricks on command for nothing more than our amusement.

Simply taming one of nature's brutes is not enough for Gilgamesh. In order for him to truly show his elite status he must go out and fight an even greater brute than Enkidu, if for no other reason than fame: "I will set up my name in the place where famous men are written, and where no man's name is written, yet I will raise a monument to the gods. Because of the evil that is in the land we will go to the forest

and destroy this evil; for in the forest lives Humbaba whose name is 'Hugeness,' a ferocious giant" ("Gilgamesh" 18). Despite the fact that Humbaba has done nothing to his people, Gilgamesh feels he still must go and kill the animal just to better his own status as elite.

Humbaba's powers are so mighty that just the thought of facing him terrifies Enkidu, who once embodied nature itself: "Enlil has appointed Humbaba to guard it [the forest] and armed him in sevenfold terrors, terrible to all flesh is Humbaba. When he roars it is like the torrent of the storm, his breath is like fire, and his jaws are death itself," ("Gilgamesh" 18). Clearly this is no simple beast; it is a brute with nothing but natural ferocity at his command to destroy all who oppose him.

Despite such a horrifying description, Gilgamesh is even more encouraged to go through with the journey. According to his logic, even if he doesn't beat the wild beast, just dying in combat with him should be enough to earn his title as an elite.

Man vs. Man

Man is not content with domination over nature alone; he must dominate other uncivilized men in order to make the world in his image. In Homer's great work *The Odyssey*, the elite Odysseus has to fight countless abominations of nature like the Cyclops to get to his beloved home Ithaca. Slaying these monsters is not enough for Odysseus to become a hero. He first has to deal with the barbarity of men.

When Odysseus gets home he is appalled to find that savages have laid waste to his kingdom. This time it is not evil creatures spawned from the gods that he must destroy but a hoard of men who have raped his land and pursued his wife. Only after these foes are brought to his justice can Odysseus live up to his status of elite.

Being stunned at this realization, he refuses to even accept the suitors as men. To calm himself of his rage he remembers of the monsters he has conquered before: "You've seen worse, that time the Cyclops like a rock slide ate your men while you looked on" (Homer 284). Despite the numerous analogies he could have made of the times he had spilled human blood on the Trojan battlefield, he chooses one of the biggest and atrocious brutes in existence. The Trojans at least had honor on the battlefield; these suitors had crept in while he was away and pillaged his city from the inside out. They have lost their manhood; now they are nothing but brutes.

Even in his prayers to the gods, Odysseus does not refer to them as men: "I am one man; how can I whip so many dogs?" (Homer 245). Athena, the goddess of wisdom responds, reminding him that he is no mere man: "Let it plain as day: if fifty bands of men surrounded us and every sword sang for your blood, you could make off still with their cows and sheep" (Homer 245). The gods have blessed Odysseus with strength, speed, and cleverness. It is his duty and honor to face such odds because he is the only one who can; that's what makes him an elite.

In order to infiltrate his manor without being seen, Athena disguises Odysseus as a beggar. The irony here is the suitors mistake the elite as nothing but an uncivilized

hobo. When Odysseus asks to take part in Penelope's contest in such a disguise, the leader of the suitors Antinoos mocks him for being unworthy, "You bleary vagabond, no rag of sense is left you: are you not coddled enough, at table taking meat with gentlemen, your betters, denied nothing, and listening to our talk? When have we let a tramp hear our talk?" (Homer 300). It is not Odysseus who does not belong, but Antinoos. A man who would lead such an unwanted group of brutes into another man's is not fit to even be in the presence of Odysseus.

When Odysseus does reveal himself, he doesn't kill them as men, but slays them like cattle. A humane death would be too good for them, "You yellow dogs, you thought I'd never make it home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder, twisted my maids to serve in your beds. You dared bid for my wife while I was still alive. Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide heaven, contempt for what men say of you hereafter. Your last hour has come. You die in blood" (Homer 304). In his final address, Odysseus declares how he has come on behalf of the gods to cleanse them of their uncivilized acts. He doesn't even dignify the suitors by calling them by name, or even calling them human. They are nothing but dirty evil animals and it is the elite Odysseus who defeats them.

It is not just Odysseus who has to demonize the enemy to rationalize defeating them, but it is a universal human trait. Every time man goes to fight and conquer another's land it is most important that the public sees them in the right and the others in the wrong. Even today's war in Iraq is validated by the guise of fighting global terror.

In a recent U.S. Army survey of the troops in Iraq, “About two-thirds of Marines and half the Army troops surveyed said they would not report a team member for mistreating a civilian or for destroying civilian property unnecessarily. Fewer than half of soldiers and Marines believed that non-combatants should be treated with dignity and respect” (Ricks). These soldiers do not see the people they are fighting as people; therefore it is okay to violate their rights and property. To them every Iraqi, insurgent or not, is nothing but a brute and it is their job as elites from America to keep them in line in any way necessary. Without this belief, if they doubt that they are in the right, then what purpose do they have being there?

Man vs. Self

No matter how many forces of nature are tamed, no matter how united or fragmented the races of man may become, there will still be a battle between the civil and the uncivil—the fight for a man’s soul. Whether we admit it or not, every person has a savage instinct that craves everything that society condemns: destruction, sex, blood and violence. The elite tries to suppress these urges within himself lest he become the thing that he has been fighting against ever since creation. He does not always succeed.

Sigmund Freud labeled our primal impulses as the id and the social order the superego and the ego which tries to balance the two. However, long before Freud trivialized the mind of man, there has been countless evidence of this battle happening in protagonists all across literature.

In the world famous book *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, an old man named Alonso Quijano gives into his id and ignores his superego when books of valor and glory lure him into a false sense of reality: “In short, our gentleman became so immersed in his reading that he spent whole nights from sundown to sunup and his days from dawn to dusk in poring over his books until finally from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind” (Cervantes 1529). He gives this identity a new name, Don Quixote. In Alonso Quijano’s case, his inner desires which are so clearly portrayed in books manifested and spread further and further in his mind until all sanity and civility had abandoned him.

The irony of it all is that Don Quixote while masquerading as an elite, is acting nothing less like a dumb brute. On his first outing he knocks one man unconscious and smashes the skull of another. His twisted mind rationalizes it as them going after his armor and steed, when really all they were doing were getting water (Cervantes). This is one of many incidents where Don Quixote terrorizes innocent people under the phony guise of justice. He continues this errant existence until his own mortality makes him face his wrongdoings.

On his deathbed, Alonso reawakens, disowns his past as Don Quixote and reclaims his soul in the name of righteousness:

I am no longer Don Quixote de la Mancha but Alonso Quijano whose mode of life won for him the name of ‘Good’ . . . for those profane stories dealing with knight-errantry are odious to me, and I realize how foolish I was and the danger I courted

in reading them; but I am in my right senses and abominate them. (Cervantes 1626)

The priest along with his friends and family rejoice in the fact that goodness has won Alonso's sanity so that he can die as a good man and not as that mad brute named Don Quixote.

However, not all are as fortunate as Don Quixote to have good win the battle for his existence. One year later comes a famous literary figure who had lost his soul to his evil side: Dr. Faustus. Dr. Faustus like Alonso Quijano spends most of his time studying books and stories. Unlike Alonso, Faustus is not looking for mere entertainment but ultimate power via knowledge. It is this lust for power which drives him into blaspheming Lord almighty and devoting his soul to Satan.

Throughout the play, an invisible good angel and evil angel try to persuade Faustus to follow the path of good or evil. These angels are very much a physical representation of Faustus's inner battle between the darkness and the light. Even after Faustus makes a deal with the devil, the good angel tries to save him by telling him to repent his sins to God and all will be forgiven: "Good Angel—Faustus repent; yet God will pity thee" (Marlowe 25). Eventually, the good angel gets through to Faustus and causes an attempt to repent: "Faustus—Ah Christ, my Savior, seek to save distressed Faustus' Soul" (Marlowe 27). When Lucifer hears the attempt, he visits Faustus himself to remind him of their contract: "Talk not of Paradise nor creation, but mark this show: talk of the devil and nothing else" (Marlowe 28). Faustus cowardly agrees and his soul falls further and

further into sin until the very end when his demons catch up with him (literally). All Faustus wanted was power, to rule and conquer with nobody standing in his way. But in the end it was his own deeds that lead to his downfall.

This internal struggle within oneself is being displayed more and more in today's media. In the hit anime *Bleach* the past three episodes have been the main character trying to beat his inner evil for control of his mind, body, and soul. The main plot for this summer's biggest blockbuster *Spider-Man 3* is the protagonist trying to fight against a newfound evil power within. The tag-line for the movie is, "How long can any man fight the darkness before he finds it in himself?" (*Spider-Man 3*). Clearly this reflects man's natural dark powers within clashing against man's instilled sense of civility.

Man has established his very existence on using civility and morality to dominate those who are uncivil and unclean. There is evidence of this in literature and media all over and is still being waged today. The battle is eternal; no matter how hard elites try they will never be able to have complete control over the brutes who live in nature, our fellow persons and even within ourselves. The best we can hope for is the balance to remain steady lest either side gain too much influence and overpower us all.

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“Leslie Ransome” by Courtney Tosches

The Wedding

Megan Grodotzke

Looking up at the Church, Green hesitated. A sense of unease washed over him and something made him pause. Looking at the exterior of the old, brick church, decorated with white roses and white streamers, Green let out a long, pent-up breath.

John was probably the closest thing to a friend he had. John was getting married to some chick he met a year ago and John had managed to track him down at his last job in Arizona and offer an invite.

Dressed in a suit that matched his long brown hair and his meager beard, Green slowly walked up to the massive wooden church doors. The strains of the organ were beginning to sound and the familiar rush of past memories ambushed him.

It brought him back to a day fourteen years earlier.

"Will you take this woman to be your wife, for better or worse?"

Barely hearing the priest, Green could not think of anything other than how beautiful Julie looked. Looking into her face, her pale blue eyes pierced him with a look that said, *I love you . . . forever.*

Looking into her eyes, he almost forgot to answer. She blinked, ending his daze and he muttered a gruff "*I do.*"

Shaking himself out of his reminiscence of that day so long ago, Green muttered with a frown, "Yeah, there goes forever . . ."

Pushing open the door of the church, he stepped into the holy sanctuary for the first time in fourteen years.

Looking around, Green shuddered with the familiar scent of musky, stale air that held a trace of incense.

Dreading his decision to attend already, he walked to the last pew and sat down with a thump. He looked about at the proceeding before him and took the time to take in his surroundings. It was a fairly small church, perhaps with twenty-five pews on each side with a small aisle in between. He couldn't help but feel claustrophobic. He had no desire to actually listen to the priest or the vows. He honestly couldn't care less.

Thinking that he hoped it would be over soon, he let his thoughts drift to the new construction job he would be working at. He had just come from Arizona and decided to stop in Oklahoma for the wedding on his way to North Carolina. He decided he needed a change of scenery. The West just was not cutting it for him anymore. He liked new experiences and he liked to be constantly on the move. Everything was just better that way.

Green was a loner by nature. His one attempt at a normal life failed miserably. One ex-wife and three kids later, he was regretting his stupidity and his naivety. His wife turned out to be a lying whore, and his kids didn't remember him. She left after the third kid and ran off with some scumbag she met at the doctor's office. It figures that she would find someone who was married and had four kids. As far as he was concerned, they deserved each other.

"Goddamnit," he swore.

Looking up, he noticed that heads had turned in his direction. Muttering an apology, he rubbed his cheek with

his hand, as if the wipe the strain off his face. Pissed at himself for thinking about them again, he tried to distract himself by watching John and his new bride. They had finally kissed and were about to make their way to the exit. Taking his chance, Green slipped out of the pew and hurried to the exit.

Taking a gulp of fresh air, he walked to the sidewalk and waited for the procession to emerge from the church doors. Seeing John and his girl with their damned foolish smiles made Green want to itch. He had learned that those sickening displays of happiness did nothing for his disposition.

John, seeing Green for the first time, raised his hand in salute and started to wander over, dragging his girl with him.

"Green, how you doing, buddy? I am so glad you could make it." Sharing a quick hug, he said, "I want to introduce you to the new Mrs. John Steel."

Looking at John's wife, he said, "It's a pleasure to meet you, ma'am. Congratulations."

John, giving Green a pat on the shoulder, asked, "So, you coming to the reception? It would be great if we could catch up . . . it's been a while."

Green, immediately picturing the long hours of annoying drunken guests, quickly said, "I'm sorry John but I've got to hit the road . . . my job calls . . . you know how it is."

"Oh . . . come on. You can spare a few hours . . ."

Looking at his watch, Green said, "Sorry, I really wish I could, but I need to drive to North Carolina in a limited time period. I just wanted to stop by and see how you were doing and congratulate you."

“Well I’m sorry to hear that, but maybe we can meet up soon. It’s been way too long.”

“Yeah, let’s do that. It was good to see you. Take care.”
Looking at the two of them, he wished them again congratulations.

Walking back to his car, Green thought to himself, *no more weddings*.

Graveyard Tales I

Kimberly A. McLaughlin

We would like to cordially invite you
On a very special trip,
To a place with rows of marble stone flowers
With names engraved upon their scarred surfaces,
Carved messages of love and good-bye.

To meet the many who reside there still today
Those who have kicked the bucket a long day past,
Maybe even buried freshly this morn.
Rotting now under the clammy ground
Like an old apple eaten by worms and other such things.

They are here to tell you different,
That they can still think, still share their tales.
Listen to their cries to be heard
To regrets and sorrows
Just listen closely; you will hear.

The pain of things left undone
The horrors of sins that won't wash away
Let them wrap you in a bony hug
As they shed hollow tears
From empty sockets that used to hold life.

So come with us,
Accept our kind invite
To the fields of the dead,

The land of eternal sleep,
Welcome to the graveyard.

Christmas Eve Dinner

Myriam Labbe

Note: This is chapter nine of the NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) novel I wrote for 2006 which was called The Diary. In the novel, a female college student discovers a novel at an antique store and accidentally releases the demon trapped inside. In the pages of the diary the student discovers that the woman who wrote the diary over a hundred years ago, a girl barely older than herself, also has problems with the demon. In this selection, the demon visits the student for the second time.

The next few days were spent in a whirlwind of shopping, tree buying and decorating, and baking, baking, baking. Estrella always appreciated my help in the kitchen. She was half Spanish, and loved to cook. And when I say, ‘loved,’ I don’t mean it lightly. She baked all the pies, and the traditional cakes and plum pudding (Dad insisted on a flaming plum pudding), but she baked *biscochitos*, flavored with anise seed so they had a slight licorice taste; and *suspiros*, Spanish meringue cookies, along with the traditional Christmas sugar cookies. Peyton and Melissa had fun helping me to decorate them. We spread red and green colored sugar on the reindeer and on the Christmas trees, and added in red-hot cinnamon candy for decoration. Then when they were done, we frosted them. Melissa frosted a Christmas tree pink.

“Melissa, you dummy, trees aren’t supposed to be pink!” Peyton said.

"And reindeer aren't supposed to be blue," I said to Peyton.

"He's not blue! He's a ninja reindeer!" Peyton said. "Lookit, he's got the face mask!"

"Very nice," I said. "Look, I made a polar bear!"

The next day, six days before Christmas, Dad went out early with Elliot to pick the Christmas tree. At around noon they came back, lugging a huge blue spruce, grunting as they hoisted it up in the foyer.

"Oh, terrific!" exclaimed Estrella, coming out from the kitchen, flour coating half her face. "Hold on, let me get the ornaments." She disappeared into the basement, with Rachel and Peggy.

"I wanna come too!" cried Peyton, running toward the door, but I seized the back of his shirt. "Hold on, Peyton. Let them take of it. You're too little, you'll probably get hurt."

He frowned at that. "But I'm not too little! I'm five! When will I not be too little?"

"When you're older," I said. "Wanna go for a piggy-back ride?" He hopped up onto my back and I carried him squealing around the foyer. When Melissa whined for a turn, I let Peyton down and carried her around, as the women returned with the ornaments. Then it was confusion for a while, what with keeping Melissa away from the ornaments and then only letting Peyton touch the unbreakable ones, as many of the ornaments were irreplaceable antiques. Those we put up top, and the unbreakable ones near the bottom. We strung lights through the tree, gold tinsel, the ornaments (Christmas horns, angels, lions, phoenixes, tigers, teddy bears, strange geometric shapes, all

in gold and red and the traditional crystal balls), bows, and I lifted Peyton up to put the star on top.

"Ready?" Dad asked, and hit the switch. The tree lit up, with many "ooohs" and "aaahs." Melissa and Peyton were enchanted. Then we began to decorate the house. We hung evergreen swags over the bottom of the stairs and threaded tinsel and white lights through the railing. Out came the mistletoe, and the wreaths for the front door. Fresh pine branches and fake snow were bought out, along with Peggy's Christmas Village, a set of tiny porcelain buildings which she placed in the dining room, well out of the children's reach. The traditional baskets of pine cones were put out, ropes of jingle bells, then stuffed Santa Clauses and polar bears and penguins and reindeer. Dad and Elliot went outside and began to hang the Christmas lights. Around the eaves of the roof went icicle shaped lights, and the edge of each floor.

"I wanna do that, too!" said Peyton. All of us nearly had to restrain the little guy to keep him from crawling up the ladder. Melissa was starting to get cold, so I bought her in, and missed the magic moment when Dad hit the switch and the lights went on. Estrella brought out hot chocolate for all—the proper kind, homemade with milk and cocoa powder and sugar, with marshmallows floating on top. I sipped my chocolate on the window seat of the living room, watching Dad and Peggy cuddling up in front of the fireplace. Peyton and Melissa were having a bath, then were going to be put to bed. By all accounts, everyone seemed content and happy, and new snow was falling outside, lending the street lights a soft romantic glow.

But what's the catch? I thought to myself as I sipped my chocolate. *Something is bound to happen soon, to destroy the happiness of everyone.*

In the six days that remained before Christmas, I bought Christmas presents for all at the nearby mall. Decorations, lights, and Christmas ornaments jostled for space on the walls with the signs for holiday sales and the Christmas muzak blasting. The shoppers bustled in and out of clothing stores, video game stores, jewelry stores, the toy stores, or the food court in a confusing stream of noise and sound. Kids screamed, shoppers jostled elbows. One little girl was having a meltdown in front of one of the toy stores because her father said “no” to buying her a new doll for that day. She screamed loud enough for me to have heard her half-way down the hall, and combined with the voices and arguments of the hundreds of people jammed into one small space, that was no small feat. I saw her, crying and stamping her feet and throwing her mittens at her father. Finally, he had had enough and slapped the poor child in the face. She screamed louder, and her father had to pick her up and carry her out of the mall. I shook my head.

Finally it was Christmas Eve. I had dressed for dinner in a dark red, strapless beaded evening gown, with my hair done up in a chignon with pearl pins and was on my bed calling Mom, as I usually did when I was spending the holidays with Dad. The phone rang five times with no answer, then Mom came on. “Hello?”

“Hey, Mom,” I said.

“Oh, hello,” she said. “You’re at your father’s house right now?”

“Yes,” I said.

"Oh. I'm sorry, but I have a roast in the oven right now. Bill's coming over." Bill was Mom's latest "flavor of the month." Typical rich man, perhaps looking for some action on the side.

"All right, Mom. I love you."

She hung up without saying goodbye. I set the phone down and said, "Merry Christmas, Mom" to it. Then I sighed. Mom had been working her way to university, her parents refusing to give her one penny toward it. She'd liked her life, had been young and beautiful. Then she'd met Dad. Not that Dad was a bad man, but with her getting pregnant with me, her entire life went on hold, indefinitely. Now she spent her time searching for rich men, while her beauty and her youth faded.

I turned toward the wall and sighed. The room got darker, then I felt a hand on my shoulder. "Are you sad, oh pretty one?"

Nonplussed, I turned around and saw the demon who had appeared to me in the library. I tried to scream, but he put his hand over my mouth. "Shush. I'm not going to hurt you."

I reached for the crucifix on the wall, but found myself unable to reach it. "That won't work," he said. "Now, you won't do anything rash like that again, will you?"

I backed away from him. "And how in the hell can I trust you? I peed my pants when I saw you in the school library last!"

The demon made a short bow. "I'm so sorry," he said.

"Why in the hell are you even out anyways?" I asked him. He pointed his thumb toward the diary, lying next to a cinnamon-scented candle, which was burning brightly. "I

can come out whenever I wish, if the person has something I want and there is water or a fire. I can maintain psychical shape, but this is so much easier."

"Then what is it that you want from me?" I said.

He smiled. "I can't tell you yet," he said. "But I need to break you first, much like poor, noxious Elizabeth."

"Dinner!" called Estrella from downstairs.

"Ah." He stood up and walked toward the door. I hurried after him. "What are you doing?"

He grinned at me, showing long pointed fangs. "Oh, going downstairs with you." He left, and headed down the stairs.

"Oh, shit," I said. I hitched up the skirt of the dress and rushed downstairs, cursing my high heels. The demon was simply walking slowly down the stairs, almost stately. I stared at him.

Peggy called my name and looked at me, puzzled. "Are you all right?"

I stared down at them all, gathered at the bottom of the stairs, and realized they couldn't see him. "Oh yes, I'm fine," I said. "I was just . . . ah . . . shocked by the beauty of the tree."

I slowly made my way down the stairs, just like the demon was doing. At the bottom, the demon made a mock bow and held out his arm. I ignored him, hooked arms with Elliot, and followed everyone into the formal dining room.

This room was kept closed until very important holidays or events were happening. Christmas being a big one, we opened it up. Estrella kept the real crystal chandelier dust-free, the elaborately carved mahogany table waxed and the real silverware was polished until it glowed. I had

helped her earlier with the polishing, knowing what a difficult job that was. The plates themselves were gorgeous. Royal Doulton antique china. The pattern was called "Madras" and featured a band of explorers on the near shore, under a palm tree and near a thicket of what was probably gardenias. On the far shore was a temple. There was a beautiful bridge with a covered gazebo, and a pagoda, with the curved roof, nestled in among a forest of trees. In the distance was a town, with the imperial palace rising above all. The sky had a few clouds. Around the edges of the plate were bouquets of flowers, and on the top and bottom of the rim was a picture of the palace. The set was very old, from at least 1900, and had been my great-grandmother's, who had passed it to my grandmother, and then to my father, her only child. I only saw these plates once every two years, whenever I spent the holidays with Dad.

I took my seat at the dining table after my father had taken his place. He uncorked a bottle of Chiraz and gently poured it into each of the adult's glasses, mine included. The wine glowed, almost like blood, just as deep as the color of the demon's skin. I sipped it, tasting a bit of black cherry and spice along with the familiar slight burn of the alcohol, and set it aside.

"Mommy, I want some too!" said Peyton, and Melissa said, "Me too!" Rachel sighed. "Sorry, guys, it's for grow-nups, k?"

The demon reached for my glass. I set my hand over the crystal, but the stem cracked under my hand, sending wine spreading in a deep red stain over the antique linen tablecloth.

"Shit," I swore, momentarily forgetting about the kids, swiping fruitlessly at the stain.

"Nevermind," Dad said. Estrella came in, bearing plates of mashed potatoes, spiced green beans, squash, corn, Swedish meatballs. Then she bore in a huge turkey, along with prime rib, and the prize, the spiced and glazed holiday ham, along with crusty rolls and herbed butter. For a few minutes, all was confusion as plates were being passed around, food ladled into it and passed around, rolls were dropped on the floor, butter was smeared onto plates. Then there was silence, while all of us ate. I had a bit of everything, and it was delicious. The beans were buttered, the squash had cinnamon and brown sugar in it, the potatoes were made with a bit of chicken broth and whole milk. All of the meat dripped delicious juices onto the plate, and I soaked all of it up with just a bit of the crusty roll.

"Estrella, mmm, you've outdone yourself this year," Peggy said. "I don't know if I'll be able to get out of this dress." She was wearing a dark blue velvet dress, almost skintight, with a brush train, and diamonds galore.

"Mmm, I concur," said Elliot, loosening a notch on his belt.

"There's dessert," Estrella said, clearing the plates. And there was. Pumpkin pie, pecan pie, peppermint cheesecake, ice creams, fruits and cheeses. Everyone groaned and protested, but still seemed to eat it all anyways.

Talk turned to Christmas. "Mommy, is Santa coming soon?" asked Peyton.

"Yes," said Rachel. "But don't forget, there wouldn't be a Christmas if it wasn't for the Baby Jesus."

Dad grunted. "It's crap," he said. "There was no Jesus, there is no God."

"Nevermind about your grandpa," said Rachel.

"What about demons, then?" I said, ignoring the hard stare the one next to me gave.

"I still don't see why you insist on such bullshit," said Elliot. "Science is proving again and again there is no God, there is no Jesus, and no such things as demons. And," he turned to his children, "no Santa."

The demon smiled at me and flicked his finger at Dad's chair. "Ooof!" he said as he went tumbling to the floor.

"What happened?" everyone asked, crowding around him. The demon flicked his finger again, causing Peggy's strapless dress to rip straight up the back. She shrieked and dashed from the room. The demon laughed.

"That's not funny," I said. He gripped my arm and pulled me up onto the table, then touched each of my shoes. They began to burn my feet. I screamed in pain and tried to remove them, but the more I struggled, the hotter they became. I danced around on the table, in and out of the antique plates and the dishes of food, screaming "OW OW OW OW OW OW!"

"What the hell's going on?" Elliot asked. The lights extinguished themselves, and Elliot screamed. "AAAAAH!" Then there came a huge growl, half animal, half human.

When the lights came back on, Elliot was pinned up against the window, shaking in fear. "Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God," he said over and over, as the demon advanced on him, leering. Then Elliot was picked up in midair, borne over our heads and crashed spread-eagled on the floor of the foyer.

"DADDY!" Peyton and Melissa screamed. The pain stopped. Elliot stood up and spat blood across the floor, along with some pieces of his teeth.

"What the fuck did you do that for?" I asked the demon.

"Who are you talking to?" Peggy asked, narrowing her eyes.

I swallowed. "Nobody, Peggy," I said.

"Liar." Her eyes flashed like the diamonds at her throat. Then they bugged out, as her necklace grew tighter around her throat. She rasped and choked, then fell to the floor, moaning in pain.

The demon grabbed my hand and led me upstairs, me screaming silently as every step caused me pain. He locked my bedroom door, then stuck a chair under the handle.

"Again, what are you doing?" I asked, furious. "You just terrorized my whole fucking family!"

He shrugged. "I always do that to those who merit punishment." He narrowed his eyes. "You still do believe in me, correct?"

"No shit, Sherlock," I said. "You're right there in front of me, AGH!" I pressed a hand to my cheek and felt blood. He had swiped me across the face with one impossibly long claw.

"I also don't tolerate rudeness," he said. "You will treat me with respect."

"While you're trying to break me to get what you want?" I said. "Why can't you just take it and leave me the hell alone?"

"It doesn't work that way," he said. "You need to be broken first. I can't just rip it from you."

"Rip *what* from me?" I said, pacing the room.

"I can't tell you, yet," he said. "But I'll be back, you mark my words." And with that, he faded into oblivion.

"You!" screamed Peggy from the other side of the door, banging on it. "I demand to know what the Christ you did!"

I opened the door. She seized my wrist and pulled me down the stairs again, into the dining room. Elliot was there, holding a linen napkin to his mouth to stop the bleeding. Everyone was pale and scared. Peggy all but threw me onto the chair.

"Well?" she barked. "What did you do?"

"I did nothing," I said.

"Bullshit!" she screamed. "You were talking to someone!"

What was I supposed to do? Tell them about the demon? I shook my head. "I wasn't."

"Peggy," Dad warned. "Don't you dare antagonize my daughter. It was just the wind."

"Yeah, sure, the wind," Elliot said, muffled because of the napkin. "Some sort of demon appears to me and throws me across the house."

"Demon?" The word hung in the air, scaring everyone. Then Peggy turned to me. "You talk to demons?"

Oh, shit. "He's been following me around," I said.

Peggy's jaw dropped. She seized the china crucifix in the china cabinet and thrust it into my face. "Get away from me!"

"Peggy!" Dad said. To me, he said, "Is this true?"

Again, what could I say? I nodded my head.

You could hear a pin drop. Then Dad said, very quietly, "Tie her up."

Ropes were dragged in from the garage, thick heavy ones, some of them slick with oil and dirt. I didn't struggle, didn't move as they tied me up. Peggy had found a bottle of holy water and dashed it into my eyes before anointing my face, my wrists, my ankles, the ropes and two silver bracelets, murmuring the "Our Father" the entire time, then placed the bracelets on my wrists. "For added protection," she said.

"How am I supposed to go to the bathroom?" I said.

"You can pee yourself for all I care," Rachel said, then added, "you whore of Satan."

Then they left me there, alone, in the dark, tied up so tight I could hardly breathe. I sighed. Oh what a predicament I was in, and I could see no way out of it.

Hello

Kelly Nash

A Cold Stone

Your address, your resting place
Mine

For now.

But you won't get up and walk away.
You are still.
I try to get close to you, I mimic you,
But I can't choke the life within me, and around me.
We sit in a place together,
Just like old friends.
I talk to you.

You listen and I begin to wonder where I am
I thought I heard an angel, I thought it was you.
Ugh, a chime, it's a chime.
I look behind to see you, but it's only a car rolling by.
Who is that? Is that you walking?
Oh my God

I'm alone.

Everything is hollow now.
Nothing on the inside,
Nothing below my feet.

I'm lost in the middle of nowhere
Only talking to myself.
I hate it when I come to visit you and

You're not home.

I'm upset now,
Putting order to the scattered landscape of your yard.
Can't you take care of this yourself?
It's simple.
You must not care about your guests
It's a mess.

Light your own candles.

Acknowledge me, please.
I can't keep giving if you won't give back.
No, no, no, no, no.
I'm just going crazy.
I can't continue to do this.

I can't visit you.

I'm going to go now.
I'm getting my things and leaving.
Damn it.
I just wanted to tell you this one thing, ugh.

Sorry I got mad.

You know what?

This is going to be okay.
It's not your fault at all.
Looks like someone is moving in next door,
I don't want to be in the way.

I'm going.

I won't cry right now.
That doesn't mean I don't love you.
I love you.
I promise I'll be with you when I find you,
But I've got to get the hell out of here.
I've got to go.

You're not here anyway.

Prisoner of My Mind

Ashley Fandrich

I never thought what started as an average fall day would forever change my life. Breaking out in a cold sweat, feeling dizzy and waking up on the ground with a terrible headache was not on my to-do list for the day. I should have seen it coming due to my reckless behavior, but somehow I did not. All I remember is waking up with my mom freaking out, trying to keep me conscious and alive.

Eventually I was able to sit up and realize something strange had happened. My mom told me that I had passed out and hit my head on the TV stand. That explained the excruciating headache I had woken up with. While all this had happened, my mom had been calling doctors like crazy trying to get me help immediately. Now that I was awake, she started to force-feed me protein and ask me all kinds of crazy questions. I did not realize why this was such a big deal and I kept telling her that I would be okay.

My mom didn't buy it. She drove me to the doctor's office right away in a panic that I was going to die. I was asked what seemed like hundreds of questions by a doctor whose face I can't even remember. After hearing my answers, she came to the conclusion that I suffered from a severe eating disorder. This was no shock to me or my mom. We had both been aware of that fact for months. I was forced to get blood work done immediately to determine how bad my condition was. At the time, I had no idea of how much damage I had really done to myself.

It was a good thing that they caught me when I passed out that day because my potassium level was at 2.3. An average human being has a potassium level of 3.5 at the very minimum. When this level drops, one's body, and especially one's heart, is in great danger. If one's potassium level drops down to 2.5 or below, it is considered to be a terminal case.

After hearing this news, I was rushed immediately to the hospital. It took hours to put an IV in my arm due to extreme dehydration. I was then sent to stay in the Intensive Care Unit but did not understand why. I felt absolutely fine and told that to every nurse there. In my mind, I did not belong with the dying patients who were screaming in rooms nearby. I didn't need constant attention or blood taken out of my body every four hours.

Of course, no one took my word on it and I was trapped in a hospital bed for a two-night stay. There, staying alive was more important than my comfort. I was completely miserable and just wanted to go home and live my life how I had before. I was given reading material to learn about my disease as if I were stupid and had no idea what was wrong with me. They even sent a psychiatrist into my room to tell me all about my condition. I knew everything that came out of his mouth, yet he still treated me as if I was an idiot. I told him I was willing to change, having no idea if I really was. At the time, I would have said anything to get out of that prison they called a hospital. Luckily, the psychiatrist believed me and decided I would not have to be sent to an in-patient hospital for a long term stay.

Eventually my potassium level went up and I was free to go. I told myself I would never go to the hospital again,

thinking about how miserable those two nights had been. My mom drove me home and my life went on, just a little differently than it had been before.

Since then, I have returned to the hospital many times for the same exact reason. I did not learn my lesson. I only learned to cheat the system by changing my diet and taking many vitamins before any blood work is done. My problems affect me every day of my life, even if it is just the voices in my head telling me not to eat or the extreme anxiety I get around food. I know that I will have these thoughts in my head for the rest of my life, no matter how healthy I get. It drives me crazy. I've seen many doctors and therapists and have to continue doing so to get my medication. No professional has ever said a thing that helped me and my weekly appointments are just a waste of my parents' money. I just want a doctor to hand me my prescription and stop nagging me every week.

I have to wonder how my life would have turned out if things had gone differently. I could have died that day, or soon after, if my mom hadn't been there when I passed out. I didn't believe my body was at risk and would have kept the passing out to myself if I was alone when it happened. I also wonder what my life would be like if I had never gotten myself into this whole mess. I could be living a normal life right now. I would be staying sane without taking seven pills a day, eating like an average person and not visiting doctors more regularly than my parents. However, this is not the case. I got myself into this torturous situation and all I can do is hope that one day I can get myself out.

A Dance with Fate

Kimberly A. McLaughlin

If you would be so kind to fate
Would you allow her this last dance?
Waltz with her in your embrace to heaven's gate?
For this time now is your last chance.

Heels clicking against a cloud floor
Allow her to guide you through time
Follow her lead hand over past scores
Let yourself hear the music clock's chimes.

Let her lead you to the angel's voices
Spinning toward the night of day
Throw away all your past choices
Join the never-ending dance of may.

Twirl around let your wings spread wide
For when fate asks to dance, you cannot hide.

Farewell

J.D. James

It was only after he realized that a chick was a potential for intercourse did things get weird. It wasn't the fact that they were girls—he had grown up in a family with just sisters. On top of that some of his closest friends were lesbians. No, it wasn't the fact that she had a vagina and he, a penis. The realization of the possibility of the two ever coming together. That's what usually ruined everything.

He was not a smooth guy, and never pretended to be. He wasn't a hopeless romantic either. The constant trend of missed opportunities and bungled failures pretty much made him blind to any sort of healthy relationship. Only occasionally, after being friends with a real interesting chick the idea of love would hit him like a brick and derail any good things he had going for himself. He would try to be all natural and uncaring, when really he just came off nervous and attentive. He knew it too, but that never stopped it from happening.

"Are you ready for break yet?" she asked him during a lull in class.

"No," he replied and then felt the need to qualify with: "I think of here as a break from home. Home is boring." What he really meant was that she wasn't there, at home.

"That's too bad," she said. "I can't wait to get outta here so I can just hang with the family." He observed through her almost hourly contact with her parents that she had a deep family connection. His awful family relations, almost always

ending up in threats mixed with yelling, almost made him hate her. Almost.

"I'm gonna skip Shakespeare," she said. "I've made every single class and it's about time I used one of my absences." He wished he hadn't already used his two allowed absences. Not so he could leave early—he was getting picked up hours later, class or no class—but just so he had some free time to pack, play games, watch TV, just generally lounge around. Shakespeare wasn't even worth attending most days, especially not on the day right before break.

"Looks like you'll have a rough time heading out," he said, nodding toward the window. The snow had been steadily increasing. As she turned to look, he got a great view of her neck and imagined kissing it first thing after waking up next to her on a Sunday morning, their bodies keeping each other warm despite the winter cold.

"I know, I hope it lets up. It's gonna be a two-hour drive with *good* traffic."

"All right, be sure to turn in your papers before leaving," interrupted the professor. He was able to time getting up so that they were both exiting at the same time.

"So I guess this is goodbye til we get back." Wow. Good one, he thought. Real fucking brilliant.

"Yep," she replied. Awkward silence. He worried that suspicions about him would be brewing in her head.

Opening the door into the parking lot, they were forced to part ways. "Farewell," she said nonchalantly.

He put his back to her and heard the crunch of her footsteps fade away into the snow. "Remember," she said just loud enough for him to hear her. He turned around, his

imagination running wild with the things he hoped she would say like “I’ll always love you” or “you’ll be mine forever.” Instead it was “You didn’t see me.” She was just concerned that the professor in the next class would find her absence insulting. “Of course,” he replied, nodding and smiling. All he was concerned about was letting love slip away, again and again.

“Little Supporter” by Courtney Tosches



Hallie

Vincent Casciato

Hallie shoved a few plastic bags of clothes into the mouth that was the back of the van and hastily slammed the door shut. Wasting no time, she flew back into the house and sprinted the staircase into the children's room. She pulled drawers and scanned for anything that she might have overlooked; moving on, she reached her own bedroom in five steps and grabbed some of her belongings. She only wanted enough to get by; she was more concerned about getting everything that the children needed. Hallie rapidly pulled garments from the tops of drawers while crouched on the floor; surprised at her own speed and using unfamiliar muscles in her swift and spastic efforts, she shoved the contents into another bag and most of the clothes toppled over and unfolded themselves instead of actually getting inside. She glanced at her watch, cursing, and panicked that time was running out.

After knotting three bags of her own clothes, she ran past the landing and threw them down the stairs as if dropping bombs. She could hear the children playing with building blocks in the living room. She stopped in the bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet, grabbing the most fundamental contents and throwing them into yet another bag. Then she made a mad dash into the hallway and down the landing.

Reflexively, she glanced once more at the wristwatch: 5:05. Dammit, she thought, that's twenty minutes if I'm lucky. There's still a lot to do. Instead of running back and

forth from the car, I'll just bring everything to the center of the floor and pack it when we're ready to go.

"Lindsey, honey, put your blocks in here." She withdrew another bag and handed it to her eldest, a six-year-old girl who was exchanging building blocks with her younger brother Jeremy. "Put all of your toys in here. Just your favorite ones. And do it now. Do it now."

Hallie ran into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator, just grabbing the first items she saw and practically throwing them onto the counter. *I wish I didn't make up my mind so late.* Here, some cold cuts, there, some peanut butter and jelly—the kids will eat this, she thought. She grabbed sliced bread, crackers, cookies, and bananas from the corner. Jeremy would cry if she didn't have cookies. She grabbed some juice boxes from the refrigerator and placed all of the food into Lindsey's backpack.

She didn't want to spare a second, but the wristwatch was beckoning her. 5:07.

In the next few minutes, more bags piled on the living room floor. The children were unperturbed.

"Lindsey! I told you to put your toys in this bag," Hallie said. Then she scolded herself for leaving her three- and six-year-olds with a plastic bag. It didn't occur to her until now.

"Here," she said, "I'll take care of it."

"Mommy!"

"Not now, Lindsey." She impatiently filled it with the blocks and cursed as one fell from her trembling hand, then added some puzzles and children's books. It made her think about the photo albums. *Maybe not enough time.*

Not thinking about the order of things, Hallie lifted some bags and retreated to the van. She had parked it right

on the lawn outside the house. The chilliness of the wintry air nipped at her face and hands as they trembled. The sun had begun to make its descent to welcome in the night.

I've got clothes, I've got medicine, toys, food, toiletries . . . am I missing anything? Hallie wondered. If there's anything else, we can get it on the road. I'll stop at the ATM and withdraw the maximum amount. Good to have cash on hand. Yes.

She went back in the house. 5:19.

"Lindsey, put your coat on. It's cold outside. And get your brother's coat. Where is he?"

"I think he's in the other room, Mommy. Look what I drew!"

"Later! Go find him! I'm going to put the rest of the bags into the trunk. Put your coat on, and put his coat on."

"Where are we going? We just got home from school."

"Honey, we don't have any time to waste. Go find your brother. Jeremy!"

Hallie threw her jacket around her and slipped on her gloves. *The steering wheel will be freezing . . .*

She threw the last of the bags into the back of the van, along with a photo album. Closing the door for the final time, she noticed a face in the window across the street. A neighbor, watching, with an inquisitive face. *Go away!*

"Honey, wait here while I find your brother. Jeremy!" She dashed into the den, then the kitchen. Jeremy was too small to climb the stairs, so she didn't bother.

It was only a minute! How far could he have gotten?

Christ, the bathroom, she thought. There was a powder room in the den. *Maybe Jeremy crawled in there.*

She ran back into the room, and sure enough, he was quietly sitting on the floor.

"Honey, what are you *doing*?" She reached out her gloved hands and scooped him up.

"Come on, children. Into the van."

Before she turned the front door knob, the sound of a nearby vehicle pulling into the driveway. Tires slowing down.

The sun had dropped.

Hallie was shaken, defeated, gripping Lindsey's hand. Jeremy, why did you have to go and hide?

At the doorway, Hallie concentrated on the sound of the car and what the next sounds would be. Then there was the faint but unmistakable whirl of the garage door. The driver made preparations to take it into the garage.

One . . . Two . . . Three . . . "Let's go!" Hallie held the baby tight in her arms and pulled on Lindsey's sleeve. She guided her daughter to the backseat and placed the baby in her arms. She planned to stop the van a quarter mile down to properly place him in the baby-seat. In the meantime, Lindsey would just have to hold him.

She slammed the door and got into the driver's seat. *I'm not going to make it.*

The outline of a figure was emerging from the opening of the garage.

Her shaky hands plugged the keys into the ignition. She held the brake and shifted the vehicle into D, then fed the accelerator.

The van took off down the road with great force, the power of the vehicle and the escape steadily putting her at

ease. In the rearview mirror, the house shrank until it was a tiny white dot, and disappeared from the landscape.

Contributors

Nate Boesch is a freshman transfer from the University of Vermont majoring in Creative Writing/English. He has lived in Colorado until a little over a year ago and now lives in Concord, NH.

Vincent Casciato is a Junior and a Creative Writing major who writes fiction, particularly about the hopelessness of the individual and horror. He is currently a member of the editorial board for *The Manatee*.

Ashley Fandrich is a freshman who currently does not have an official major, but is considering psychology and a minor pre-law. She plans on going to grad school for psychology or going to law school.

Mckendy Fils-Aime is an Information Technology major. In his free time he teaches and takes karate and writes. He has been writing for about five years, and during that time it has become a passion of his.

Joanna Gelinas is a senior Communications major with a minor in Public Relations. Her interests include reading, writing, spending time with her boyfriend and friends, movies, music, and traveling.

Megan Grodotzke is a senior. She was born and raised on Long Island, New York, and upon graduation plans to go to

grad-school to get her MA in London Studies. She enjoys reading, music, and traveling.

Tara Junkins is a freshman majoring in Creative Writing.

J.D. James (AKA: J.D., Head of Student Literacy, Marksman, Big Dog, Professor Dick, and The Man) is one cool cat whose pool-playing skills are unrivaled by mere mortals. Other skills include the following: writing, comedy, gaming, reading, getting people to get him free food, and dancing. He has an untouchable personal style that knows no bounds. It's okay to be intimidated by his greatness, many are.

Celena Knowlton is a senior psychology major. Her hometown is Agawam, Massachusetts, where she lives with her mother and sixteen-year-old brother, Matt. Her hobbies and interests are listening to music, being with friends and family, writing, sketching and painting, teaching children, learning about the human mind and condition, helping people, and running. She aspires someday to obtain a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing and become a published Creative Writing professor.

Myriam Labbe is a sophomore in Creative Writing who enjoys writing fiction, especially horror. She has won the National Novel Writing Month two years running, and serves on the editorial board of *The Manatee*.

Rudine Manning is a junior in Creative Writing and English.

Kimberly A. McLaughlin is a freshman in the culinary arts/baking and pastry program. She started getting into poetry in her senior year of high school, thanks to her British literature class. She read tons of poetry by British authors and all of them were very inspiring. It made her want to write her own poems. She has been writing basically non-stop since then and is constantly looking for inspiration for new writings in everything.

Kelly Nash is a junior majoring in English Language and Literature who enjoys writing short stories. She transferred from Grand Rapids Community College in Grand Rapids, MI, where she edited for the art/literary magazine *Display*. She wants to be an editor for a mainstream magazine in the future. Her interests include fishing, swimming, boxing, weightlifting, rollerskating, papier-mâché, singing, sidewalk chalk, and acoustic guitar.

Melissa Ngai is a third-year student majoring in Creative Writing. Outside of writing, she enjoys drawing, reading, and playing the occasional video game.

Shelly Petry is a junior at SNHU studying political science. Shelly loves to garden and check out concerts in the local music scene. Eventually, she would like to work for an organization dedicated to protecting the environment.

William Richard Sinclair III, also known simply as Bill, is a prominent figure in SNHU folklore and is said to reside in the upper parts of the west side of campus. Bill is described as a bipedal hominid between 5 and 5-1/2 feet tall, and covered in dark brown hair. Our knowledge of Bill is comprised solely of a few hazy Facebook pictures and his various short bits of writing, and although his existence is widely discounted by leading authorities many students as well as the Billing Offices at SNHU fully believe in the existence of this short furry creature.

Dillon St. Jean is a sophomore and a Creative Writing major currently working on multiple projects he hopes to eventually have published, including a screenplay and a comic book series. He enjoys his writing a great deal and hopes to use it for a future career.

Courtney Tosches is a senior anticipating a BA in Graphic Design.

Donald Walton is a freshman who resides in Hooksett, New Hampshire. He is eighteen years old and is currently majoring in Business Administration. He has hunted big game his entire life and it is his favorite thing to do. He enjoys hunting, fishing, hiking, football, spending time with his five dogs, writing, and reading novels.