



Obscura
Literary & Art Journal
13th Edition

Red Rocks Community College
13300 W. 6th Ave. Lakewood, CO 80228

Staff Notes

Emily Borden - Nonfiction Editor

“It is an ancient need to be told stories, but the story needs a great storyteller.” - Alan Rickman

Ashe DeMier - Design/Publication

“So long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters; and whether it matters for ages or only for hours, nobody can say.” - Virginia Woolf

Ben Glasscock - Design/Publication

“If you think you’re too old to Rock’n’Roll, then you are.” - Lemmy Killmister

Caroline Gonzalez - Marketing

“Know your limitations and your weakness.”
- Personal Motto

Cody Healy - Fiction Editor

“I fucked my way up to the top. This is my show.”
- Lana Del Rey

Daniel Herzog - Design/Publication

“I wish I could write as mysterious as a cat.”
- Edgar Allan Poe

Cecily Hill - Design/Publication

“The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid.”

- Jane Austen

Ernest Phillips - Marketing

“Carpe Diem ‘Seize the Day!’” - Personal Motto

Joel Pitzen - Communications

“Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative.”

- Oscar Wilde

Rachele Roman - Marketing

“Be Exceptional: Be What The Others Lack.”

- Personal Motto

Leodis Smith - Marketing

“Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right!” - Henry Ford

Kevin Stallsworth - Poetry Editor

“Look for something positive in each day, even if some days you have to look a little harder.” - Personal Motto

Cathryn Tafoya - Art Editor

“You are an aperture through which the universe is looking at and exploring itself.” - Alan W. Watts

Tanner Umbarger - Communications

“It is better to be high-spirited even though one makes more mistakes, than to be narrow-minded and all too prudent.” -Vincent Van Gough

Elyse Marsh - Senior Editor

“A blank piece of paper is God’s way of telling us how hard it is to be God.” - Sidney Sheldon

Leah Rogin-Roper - Senior Editor

“You must write, and read, as if your life depended on it.” - Adrienne Rich

In 2004, the Obscura club began meeting for the first time, drawn from quiet coffee shop corners, coming together to exhibit the creative work of Red Rocks Students. In the years since, with the help and guidance of mentors like Amy Braziller, Elyse Marsh, Leah Rogin-Roper and Paul Gallagher, Obscura has blossomed into one of the only student run literary magazines produced by a community college in the country. Now offered as an official class for credit, Obscura encourages students to foster connections with their peers, creating a community of artistic and literary individuals, by working with fellow staff and contributors to produce the magazine.

Obscura is highly competitive. We receive over a hundred submissions yearly that are meticulously evaluated for acceptance into the magazine. We take into consideration a range of criteria, from the technical to the emotional. This year's staff passionately debated numerous pieces, many of which did not make the cut. However, we are confident that you will enjoy the selections in our 2016 issue of Obscura, possibly even enough to submit some of your own work for the next issue.

Students interested in becoming part of next year's staff can enroll in the "ENG 231 Literary Magazine" class in the Spring 2017 semester.

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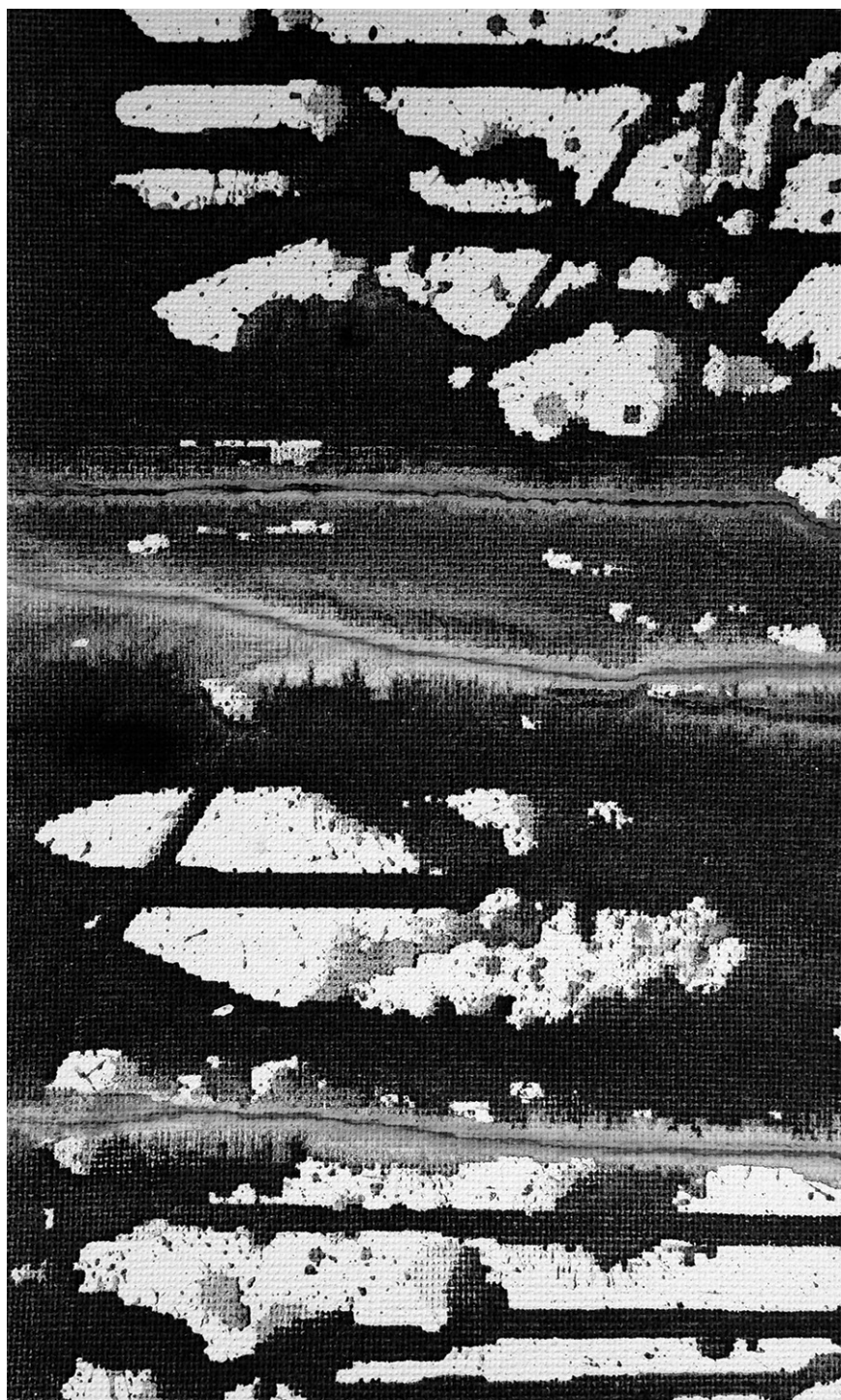
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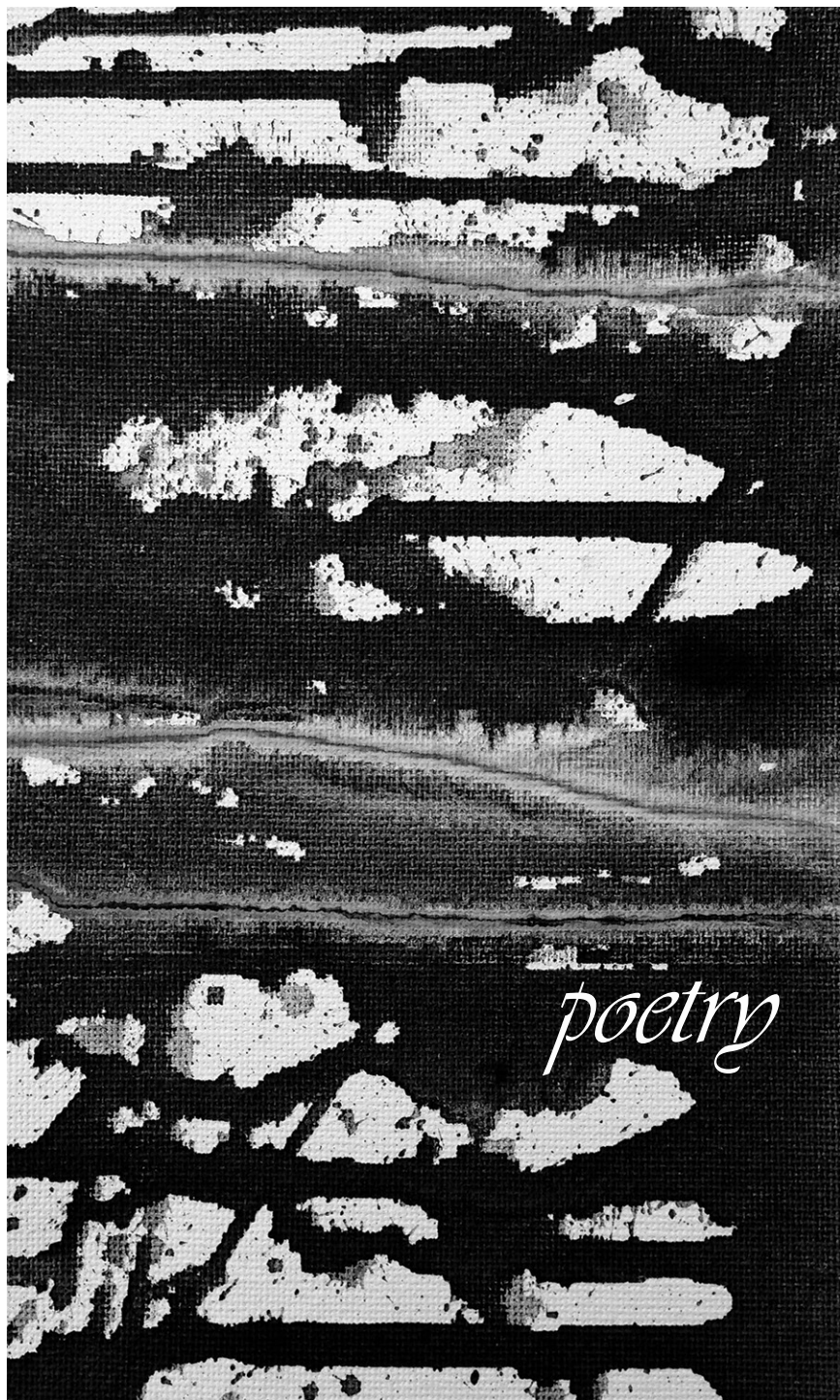
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Bending the Sky

Daniel Herzog

A lonely graveyard, spectral mist,
The two, entwined and hidden, kissed,
Away from eyes that watched with care,
They snuck away upon a dare;
And so, once more, the two at play,
Knew not the advent of dismay,
Saw not the earth beneath their feet,
Rise up, with arms, prepared to greet,
The evening air, to hunt for prey,
Find shelter now before the day;
But mainly feed, the instant urge,
To gratify, to cleanse and purge;
Foul stinking things, torn flesh and bone,
Fell on the two and dragged them prone,
The eyeballs first, so sweet the taste,
A juicy treat, no fuss, no waste...
Then sickening the sound of teeth
As slipped the two laid bare beneath;
And sated hence they slipped away,
Beneath the soil now greeting day.

The Tree of Time

Rachel Rockenfeller

An old birch tree standing on the hill overlooking the
gentle sea
Here it waits for the sun to descend into rosy surf tipped
with silver foam
Watching for ships to grace the horizon with billowing sails
and stories of adventure
Its golden leaves dancing to the waltz of the ocean waves
Here it stands alone and strong
The grief and happiness of many lifetimes show on the
bark of its body
The scars of lovers; the hopeful dreams of forgotten years
Everyone who visits this tree is subject to time's judgment
Each leaves this life, but their story remains
All recorded on the many branches of the tree

Weary sailors of the world visit this ancient tree
Each to add his name to the long history written on the
tree's body
Here it stands for all eternity waiting and watching for new
knowledge
Gaining wisdom and recording time from all those who
visit it
No one has ever lived long enough to tell of the tree's
existence
They have all forgotten
For no one can ever remember a tree that exists in perfect
harmony with time
It represents time with all its happiness and sorrows

It stands alone waiting for someone to keep it company
Here to smile, to weep, to love
It waits for when time no longer needs its existence
Here till time ceases to matter
When the sun and moon are no longer needed to give light
Until the sea swallows the land and all its affluence
Until the earth and sky once more unite
When the earth once again becomes balanced
And man will no longer grow old
Here till everything is put to right
A world where Heaven is no longer a dream, but a reality

Withering Roses

Kelli Kraynie

The fragile Rose,
Unable to evade wilting;
As time goes;
Although sad, the world will keep spinning

On that fateful eve
They are surrounding;
As loved ones bereave,
For the heart that stopped pounding.

It's never easy to face your worst fears
In the presence of prying eyes,
To bury a child in its first few years;
A part of you inevitably dies.

That part may never revive;
However, the memory will survive.

Leaving It All on the Field

Matt Wagner

In a life, full of fastballs
You were a curveball
Unlike anything
I had ever seen
You caught me off guard

But still I managed
To give you
My best efforts

In hopes that you would become
My first homerun

But all that ever amounted
Was me striking out

Maybe next time.

The Traveler's Creed

Lauren Vieira

When asked, the leopard fails to name her home;
For home implies a peaceful state to rest.
But rest allows the night to wet its toes,
And so the constant movement suits her best.
I wonder if the leopard ever aches,
When weary paws long for that healing breeze,
For shelter that remains there 'til she wakes,
Allowing her to travel on with ease?
So then I ask the sparrow how she copes
With this ordeal, the creeping of the night.
If tragedy should raze her precious home,
Would Mother Bird remain or flee in fright?

But this erratic life we *choose* to lead
A home in state of flux—the travelers' creed.

Your Hands

Hannah Thomas

When I think too long, on you and
The wrinkles in your face, just like the canyons and desert
mesas and rolling hills;
The mountains whisper your name in my ear whenever I
pass through;
My heart overflows for you.

You, and the way you cut a pear—just so, and slow.
The way your hands move and the way you move your
hands

And the way your hand moves the pear—just so.
Your hands, that have painted countless strokes
And molded so much clay and written all your words.
Your hands, that have spent each day creating something
new,
and it shows.

My heart overflows for you.

You, and the way your house always smells the same, like
something

Fresh from the earth has just been prepared;
Like one thousand pots of coffee brewed;
Like so many meals imagined with your expert, artist's
hands.

I smell oils and pastels. Paint brushes and cloth and wax.
Canvas and charcoal.

Like my childhood, like the aroma of your soul, I imagine.
Every texture, every fragrance, every hue;
My heart overflows for you.

Who would I be if not for you?
So much of me was born from you
And how thankful am I to be a fraction of your being?
I cannot say because I cannot say how humble or grateful I
am to be;
A fraction of you.
My heart overflows for you.
The most inspiring woman had a daughter;
A most amazing woman—my mother.
Neither she, nor me, ever would be if not for you;
Giver of life—woman.
My heart overflows for you,
Grandmother.

Forever Alone

Robin Billings

Your soft face gently rubs against mine
Your tender touch warms my heart
Alas,
If only you were not a cat.

You wait for me by the door,
Your eyes light up like the stars
Alas,
If only you were not a cat.

You always seek to comfort me,
You never cease to adorn me with affection,
Alas,
Alas.

False Hope

Rikki Visser

It was like that song
We sang to in your car
Our voices flung out the windows
Serenading the passersby
But meant for ourselves, at least

I thought it was us.
Our dance echoed in the lyrics of young lovers
Summers and growing up
Together
Growing old together

But as the notes like my hopes
Built to a crescendo
The melody shifted
Cold air rushed in
And I was left with the feeling
Of your mindless, meaningless
Lips on my neck.

Replication

Katelynn Porter

Every stroke, every breath, every drop of energy spent
pouring my soul into one piece of art.

Every second of practice focused onto each pixel, each
movement of a pencil.

I've spent hours of my precious time trying to make even a
single eye look right.

I've spent thousands of days working on expression and
movement.

I spent hundreds of painstaking weeks on anatomy and
structure.

I've spent 19 years of my life getting here.

It only took you 10 seconds to call it your own.

You didn't draw this, this isn't yours, I didn't even draw this
for you.

This artwork has nothing to do with you. You weren't on
my mind when I made this.

Yet you have the audacity to stick your name on it.

You ask.

So what if people think I drew it? So what if I make a little
money from your hard work?

So what if you work your ass off to give birth to this only
to have it used by others?

I resort to tainting my best piece of artwork with my name,
to mark my territory.

I have to mark it and defile it so bums like you don't steal it
and call it yours.

But you always find a way.
You cut my creation up, mutilate it. Butcher it.
You change colors, you add *things* and *stuff*.
You take an arm and a leg with it. Often times, you also
take its heart.
I've had this idea since I was 8, and I finally have the skill
and soul and ability to make it real.
And you take it from me.

When I draw, I draw for me. Sometimes I even draw
myself, over and over again.
The form is simply different.

Dear Mrs. Klebold, I'm Sorry for Your Loss Zsariel Goreham

Dear Mrs. Klebold, I'm sorry for your loss.
I think in all the pain and hurt we may have forgotten the
cost.

Dear Mrs. Klebold, I'm so sorry for your pain
In all of the aftermath, the ugliness and the shame.
All of the character assassination and wretched laying of
blame.

Dear Mrs. Klebold, I'm amazed you weren't undone
With the merciless attacks on your character and the
sudden death of your son.
I know the world looked on in terror and needed someone
to hate
But we forgot you also lost a child and so much more on
that date

Dear Mrs. Klebold, I'm sorry for the rage, I'm sorry for the
sorrow, the hurt that can't be gauged.

Dear Mrs. Klebold, I'm sorry if it hasn't been said
But it's not your fault those children are all dead.

The Last Night

Kevin Stallsworth

Working an annoying day
He peers at the clock.

Always watching hands stand, staring back at fixed
positions,

As clatter of keyboards echo like an applause.

The sun falls gleaming its last warmth across the window,
As one by one they leave dragging soles against cement.

A bus crawls towards home holding him in its window
enclosure.

It passes homes with thoughts of the day's events to
ponder.

A smell of life in the air as grasses become damp.

Rain falls, sounding a drummer's rapid beat on the metal.

He drags off the bus in front of home,

Its eyes stare back at him like a soulless corpse.

The darkness shrouds him upon entering,

And groaning echoes the home.

He grasps a knife for defending,

Only viewing a glow that reaches like hands out a doorway.

His eyes observe an adulteress in action,

As his body shook violently, with one swift swing it silences
a life.

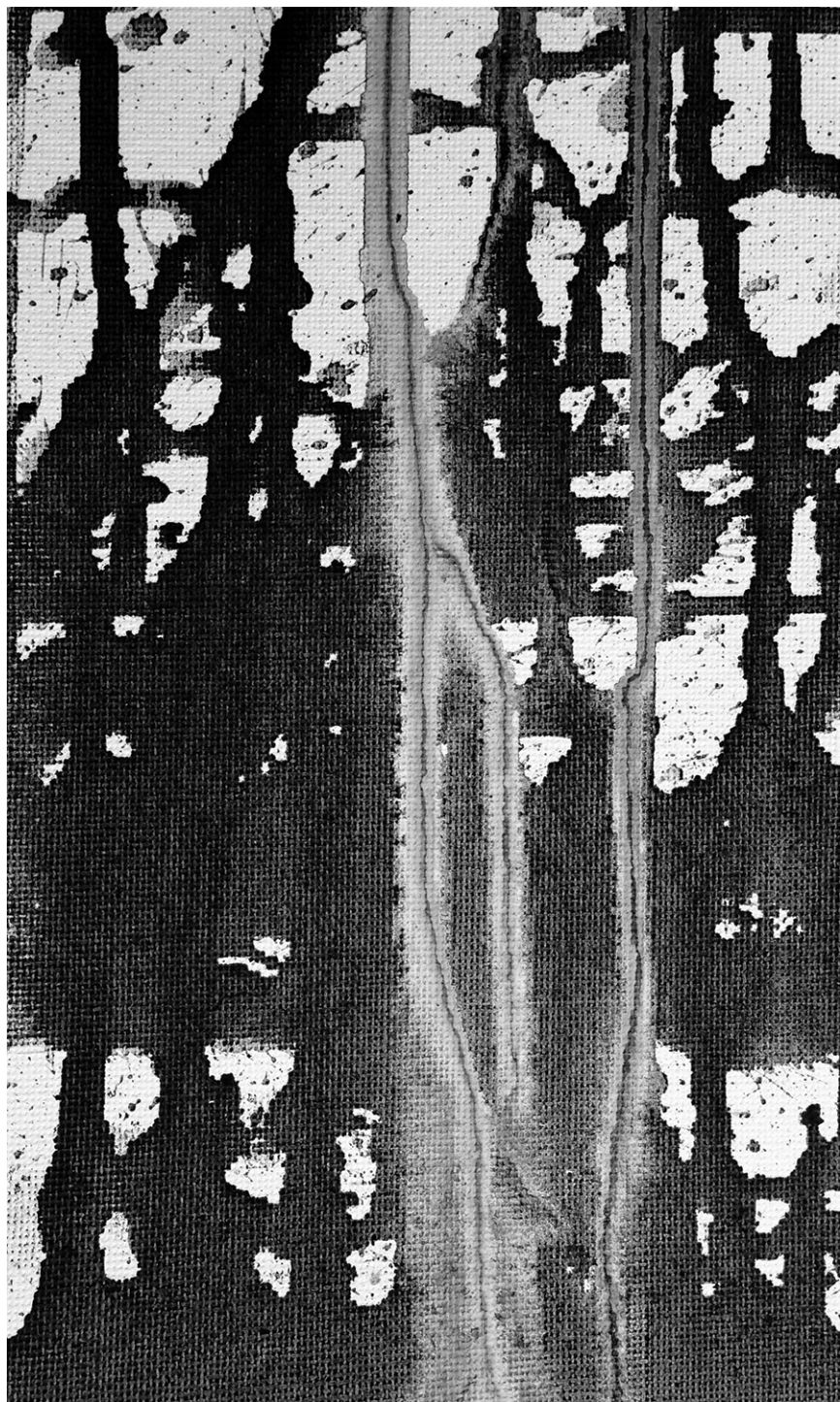
Red staining a carpet,

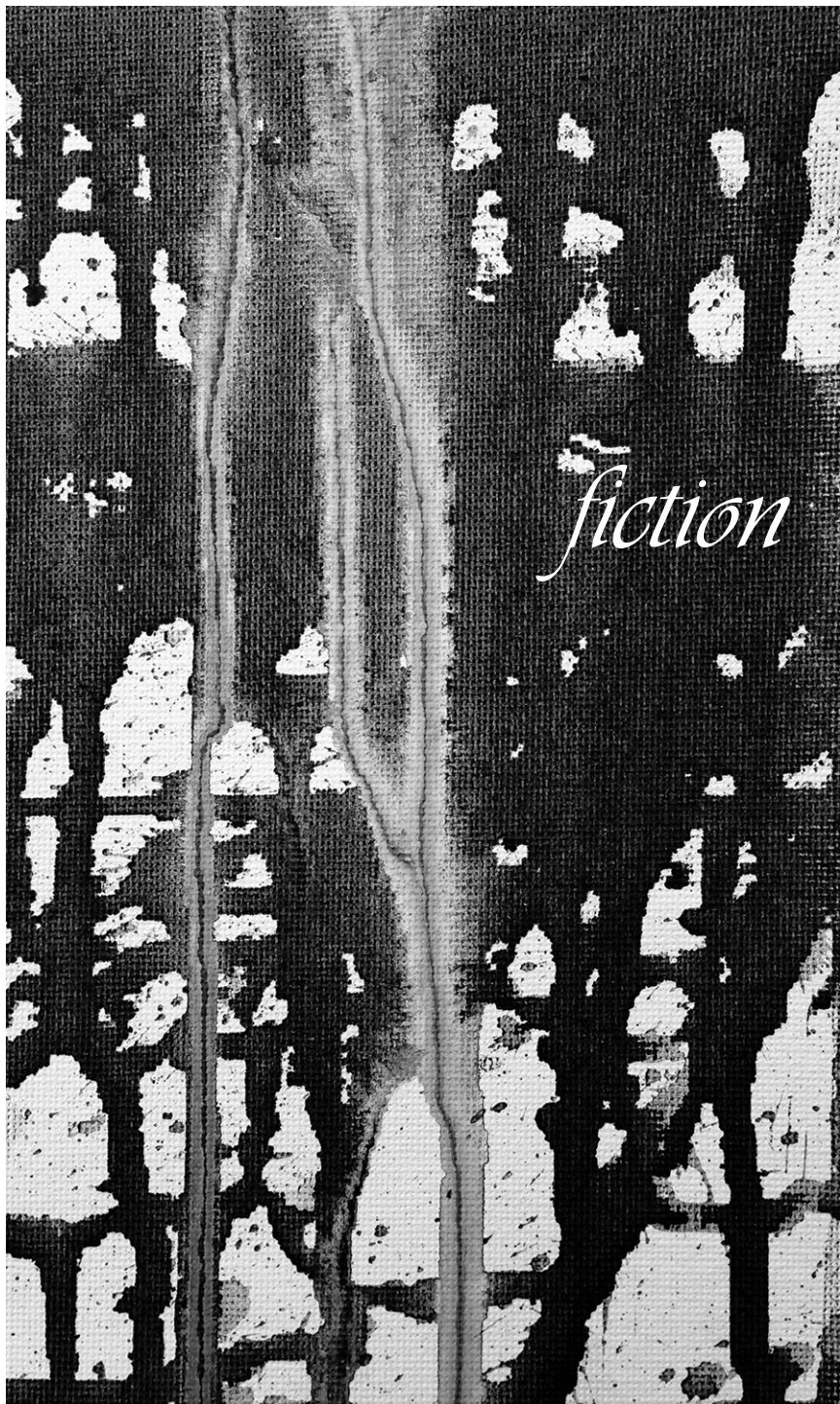
A corpse, looks blankly—as if frozen in time—peers at a
ceiling.

A reflection of white bouncing off a blade as the moon
shines,

It stands out of flesh like a stick in the mud.

Shouting of vulgarity bounces off the walls.
Crashing sounds echo into the corridor,
A lamp screaming its last breath, observing its shattered
body.
The walls hear tears wept and a broken heart.
Fists fly,
His wife strikes first cheek after cheek,
As he crashes into a closet.
Both parties advance.
Mirror only watches a boomstick becoming a tug a war.
With one sound,
Click.
The room is newly coated in red.





Shadows

Hannah Thomas

I got off the bus near the upper west side. It was late, the street lamps casting eerie pools of wavy, golden light on the abandoned sidewalks. Not wanting to draw attention to myself, I pulled my hood on and shoved my hands in balled fists into my pockets. I walked briskly and with deliberate, pounding steps, trying to give off an aura that said, “Don’t mess with me.” It wasn’t necessarily a bad neighborhood but evil isn’t prejudice. After a few blocks, I had the distinct and unshakable sensation that I was being followed. I halted, turning my head slightly, seeing nothing in my peripheral. Facing forward, I began walking again, quickening my pace, trying to maintain my appearance of confident control. The sensation persisted, and after much internal debate, I whipped around, ready to take on whatever bogie man was lurking behind me. Though when I steadied and realized who had been following me, my arms dropped, and my head fell forward, eyes staring dead ahead in confused disbelief.

Standing a few feet away from me, slightly masked in a sweeping shadow, was a giant Irish wolf hound. After holding my gaze for a moment, the dog looked away, and then slowly turned back at me. Head hanging low, he peered up at me with deep, sad, amber eyes. He was the color of a stormy night, his coat wet, like he’d been followed by the same rain cloud his whole life. Thumbs tucked in the straps of my backpack, I looked around, saying aloud to myself quietly, “Is this some kind of joke?”

While trying to decide what to do about my sodden

stalker, I remembered suddenly why I had been in a hurry to get home. Without thinking, I began walking again, my mind momentarily hi-jacked by distraction.

“Wait!” I thought. “The dog...” I turned back to find him sitting in the same spot, watching me patiently, like he knew something I didn’t.

“Well... c’mon then,” I called out, and he looked up at me as if to say, “I thought you’d never ask.”

He sprang from his spot on the cold, dark sidewalk and gently but deliberately sauntered over, planting himself at my side. I lifted my hand to the top of his head, which reached nearly to my chest. Holding my hand there, we stared at each other and I swear he knew my soul, and I his.

I decided two things in that moment: One, his name was Shadow and two, I didn’t care where he came from, or where he was going, he now belonged to me and me to him. I can’t explain it; a feeling overcame me like a deep, resounding truth, undeniable and old as time. He seemed to reach a very similar conclusion about me. A small and quickly squelched voice in my head suggested I drop him off at the pound, as it was highly unlikely that this dog did not, at some point, belong to someone else. I didn’t care. We headed home.

The brownstone was squeezed in between two others, both inhabited by occupants with the means to renovate and refurbish, like most other houses on my street. I, on the other hand, being a freelance writer and barely making enough to cover the property taxes, had let the dwelling fall into a slight state of disrepair. Vines crawled rebelliously up to the rafters, sprouting out of cracks, and winding around the rails outside the upstairs lancets. The gate hung crookedly on its hinges and creaked

like an old man trying to stand after sitting for too long. The small cobblestone path leading up to the front steps was covered in dead leaves and overgrown with sheet moss. The lamps left on in the front rooms emitted a soft orange glow from the windows, like the eyes of a Jack-o-lantern.

Shadow and I pushed through the protesting gate, climbed the slanted front steps, and then I saw it, sitting there unassumingly, bathed in the glow cast from the street lamp, like an unexpected visitor hiding in half-light. It was the package I had been waiting for weeks to arrive. A clue, so to speak, in a story I had been working on. Wrapped in crinkled brown butcher's paper and tied with frayed twine, the attached note warned ominously, "Open without delay."

I was beginning to think it was my lucky day. First, the arrival of Shadow, and now this package, a possible lead in a case that had been sucking me dry. I fished out an antiquated key from my coat pocket, unlocked the front door, and stepped inside, the wolf hound at my heels.

I set the parcel on the front table. Dropping my backpack to the floor, I yanked off my Doc Martins, and flung my coat on the stair banister. I hadn't been spending much time at home, only swinging by occasionally to change clothes or shower, in between pursuing dead end stories, running all over the city, often feeling like I was chasing streams of smoke. Evidence of my ghost was all over the house: coffee cups left half full on window sills, socks in crumpled piles at the base of the stairs, books in stacks all over the floor. I headed for the kitchen at the back of the main level. The floors creaked in greeting as I made my way down the ill-lit hall, tripping on the corner of a rug.

I pulled out a bottle of Scotch and poured myself a

drink, closing my eyes as I savored the warmth of the liquid as it crept down my throat, heating me from the inside out. I turned to find Shadow staring at me, incredulous.

“Don’t judge me,” I said to him, pulling a Turkish Royal from the pack of cigarettes I had hidden from myself the day before. Lighting it, I grabbed my Scotch and headed back to the front room. I turned on the gas fireplace, grabbed the package from the table by the door, and settled on the overstuffed couch.

“Okay, Shadow. Moment of truth.” Downing the rest of my drink, my cigarette abandoned, burning away in an ashtray on the coffee table in front of me, sending smoky spirals into the air, I gingerly tugged on the end of the twine encompassing the package.

Turns out, it was not the package I had been expecting. I pulled back the paper, which seemed to have been used many times before, and discovered a small wooden box, stained a deep cherry red, intricate engravings etched along the corners. Attached to the top was a small note, written on what appeared to be incredibly old parchment paper. Setting the box aside, I opened the note that had been carefully folded once down the middle. It read:

“Dear Miss Starwood,

I hope the hound has come to you in good health. Dear old chap has been searching for you high and low and has traveled a great distance to reach you. I’m afraid I can’t explain but don’t worry, the answers will come in time, as all things do.

Yours until the wolf cries again,

T.M.O.”

Baffled, I looked over at Shadow, who sat pensively at my feet. I set the note down on the coffee table, noticing

my cigarette had burned all the way down to the filter, a skeleton of ash it's only remnant. I turned back to the small wooden box, picking it up and slowly lifting the lid. Inside was nothing but an aged, tintype photograph, a moment captured in time on a thin sheet of metal, the image worn and weathered. I took it with me, hurriedly striding to the roll top desk in the library off the front room. Flipping on an old brass lamp, I rummaged through the bottom drawer of the desk for a magnifying glass. Holding it up to the light, picture revealed an image of a very young girl, her face solemn, though bright eyes reflected outward. Her dress was closely fitted to her torso, a white collar around her neck, sleeves pinched, and a skirt belling out to the ground. Her dark hair was parted down the middle and wound in tight ringlets above her ear. She sat on an old trunk, hands gracefully piled in her lap. Next to her sat an Irish wolf hound. He was the color of a stormy night, and he stared back at me from the picture that must have been taken over a hundred years ago. I stared at the image for several moments, my mind trying desperately to understand, grasping at any strand of reality because, I realized, as my heart began to pound wildly, the girl in the picture was me.

An Unfortunate Dream

Jessica Fisher

He jolted awake and clutched his heart with trembling hands. His breath came in heaves as he gulped the night air, shaking his head side to side as if that would make the nightmarish face disappear. The dream had been so vivid, he swore the creature . . . that *thing* . . . was real. He recalled its scorched hands reaching towards him, gripping his eyes and tearing them free. “It was only a dream,” he whispered to himself and pressed a few fingers against his eyelids to dispel all doubts. But all he felt were empty sockets.

Lessons

Emily Borden

The cold air tore at my cheeks on the hike up the mountain. It was just Nathan and me, like always. Our friends said we were mad to climb these peaks, but our gear made us unconquerable and we never had any kind of mishap. It's good to have a hobby together when every other part of the relationship is fucked. It gave us something to build, something to work on together. Looking back, we must have hated each other at that point, but we were too comfortable, and didn't want to leave each other for fear of the unknown.

“Do you think things can go back to how they were?” He asks me.

“What the hell are you talking about?” I was not in the mood for this conversation.

“I'm talking about us. You'd be lying if you said you were happy.”

“Jesus, Nathan. Are you really gonna do this now? Fine, you want me to be honest? I don't think we'll ever be more than content.” I thought this would shut him up; he was ruining my mood.

“How can you say that? We still love each other, right?” His pleading eyes didn't make me want to comfort him. He was being pathetic and it made me sick.

“The fact that you have to ask that should tell us both something. Look, I want to have a good day and a good climb. Let's just enjoy this; we'll talk about it later.”

“Fine, I'll stop. But you should know, Kaley, you only get what you give.”

I rolled my eyes and kept hiking up the trail. I don't know why he had to do this, every single climbing trip we went on. It's like he knows I can't escape him and his questions can't just go into the other room and avoid him.

We were silent the rest of the way. After Nate set the rope, I put on my harness and shoes and got mentally prepared. This was one of the riskier climbs I had done, but Nate had climbed up first to set the rope and said it was pretty straightforward as long as I stuck to the path.

At the very top I got this rush, like I do at the top of every climb. This feeling pushed all of the troubles out of my mind especially the ones involving my whiny boyfriend and his ridiculous worries. I tugged on my rope to let him know I was ready to come down. No answer. I was already so irritated with him. He knew that I didn't know how to belay myself down. It was just something I never bothered to learn. I felt safer with him controlling the rope.

“Nathan!”

Still no answer.

“Babe?”

Cautiously, I peer over the narrow ledge I'm standing tip-toed on. My boyfriend is nowhere to be seen, my rope tied off to a nearby tree.

I thought about what he said before about only getting what you give.

108

Zsariel Goreham

He opened the door the final time. 108, the one hundred and eighth time, and breathed a sigh. No one had interrupted him this time so he hadn't needed to start over. His mother should have known better by now, but she seemed to enjoy coming and starting a conversation while he meticulously scrubbed his hands or opened his door. This may have been an oversight on her part, but it felt a bit sadistic when the interruptions made it necessary to restart his count the seventh time. This time though, went uninterrupted. She had sent him in without asking for help with the groceries, something he couldn't remember ever happening in his 22 years at home. It felt odd, but being very logical, he deduced that it must be because the list was so short this time that he had only just filled one paper bag.

She had met him at the door and beckoned him in. He finished the 108th turn of the knob and stepped onto the first step down to his basement room. Suddenly he felt a strange shift and an unnatural give. The right side of the step gave way and he flew down the stairs slamming head first into the floor. He landed on the cold pavement, stunned, but unaware of the gravity of his injuries. Unaware until he felt the warmth of his blood begin to envelope his head, sticky and hot, pumping out alarmingly fast. He lay there completely immobile, aside from his racing mind. So this was what genuine fear felt like, wholly different than his anxiety addled compulsions. Altogether removed from anything he had ever experienced. He felt terrified.

He had always been so logical. Even in his compulsive behavior there was some lengthy logical explanation that justified the need to pull his right sock on first before any other item of clothing. He didn't feel he had OCD, or any mental issues, only that he was intelligent and methodical and more removed from emotion than most. Aside from his denial of his affliction, which he did indeed suffer from, he was incredibly smart. He was a genius really, and like many highly intelligent people, he was inept at socializing but was a brilliant problem solver. This was a problem he could not solve, he knew that, but as he lay drowning in his pooling blood, he wondered how this had come to pass. Not in the typical sorrowful way that people often wonder why they were singled out for tragedy, but in a quest for clarity, for a succinct answer to why he was laying on this bare concrete floor dying. He thought, in his strategic investigative way, about the stairs. They were only one year old, almost new, but installed long enough ago to see that they were sturdy and strong. The top stair had not broken; it had fallen in on one side as if not properly attached.

He knew that he was prone to paranoia; he had heard the children at school chide him and call him a psycho under their breath when he went. He saw the neighbors, the pity in their eyes when greeting his mother, but mostly he heard it from her. Not to him of course, but on her phone calls he heard through his vent. Lying on his bed, he could hear her complain that she didn't know what to do. That she felt exasperated and overwhelmed by his "problems." She had thought he would outgrow his ticks and find some independence. She would be frustrated by his pitiful need to step only on the white tiles, or whatever

of his compulsions she felt annoyed with that day. In speaking with him though, she never let on. She talked to him less these days but when she did, she was pleasant.

He longed for his bed now, and wished the last few minutes had gone differently. He began to cry, as the throbbing in his head was overwhelming. He tried to cry out but sputtered and could only utter a sickening blood choked gargle. He felt his consciousness slip and begin fading away. He felt guilty as his life flashed in pieces on the back of his eyelids. He was seized with guilt for his suspicion and paranoia. For all the little issues that made him such a nuisance. As he began to feel warmer and less in touch with the world around him, things went fuzzy and dark and he felt thankful for his mother and sad that she would have to see him this way. This may have been his first moment of genuine empathy, ironic in that it was moments before his last breath. The door into the basement creaked slowly open and he regained consciousness for the last time. He struggled to open his eyes, gummed shut with blood, for just long enough to see her crouch down to re-screw the bolts holding the top step. She then stood to make her panicked call while she calmly put away her groceries and he exhaled one last time.

A Man Walks Into a Bar

Hunter Sandoval

A man walked into a bar, the paleness of the snow abandoned behind him. “Today is the day! They finally got me going away!” the man yelled.

He sat on a stool by the corner and ordered a straight whiskey.

“Who’s finally getting you?” the bartender asked. The man took a long sip, and by the time he had finished, so too was his drink finished. “Another one.”

The bartender poured the man another drink, asking the same question. “Hey stranger, who’s finally getting you?”

“They all are. They’re coming for me. They say today is my day.”

“Is it your day?”

“They say they don’t know where it all began. They don’t know how it has all prolonged. But they sure are sure how it will end.”

The bartender picked up a dirty glass and began cleaning it. There wasn’t anybody else in the bar except for an old woman, who was sitting in the opposite corner, drunkenly stirring. “I think I’m gonna fall off—Barry, help me!”

“My name’s not Barry,” the bartender shouted back. “You’ve had too much to drink, old lady. Go to sleep!”

The stranger finished his drink and requested another one, this time a draught. “They’ve never trusted me. All through the years. Every life I’ve ever lived. It is always the same shit!”

The bartender gave the man his beer. “What’s your name, stranger?”

“Stranger. You can call me that.”

Stranger took the brew and cocked it back. He asked for another one. The bartender was hesitant, but the man seemed to be unaffected.

“Alright, Stranger. Who is trying to get you?”

“Everybody.” Stranger leaned forward, snickering. The bartender prepared his next drink.

“I’m not trying to get you, Stranger.”

“You are—you just don’t realize it. Even that bat of a woman there is trying to get me.”

She continued twisting in her seat, as if deaf or uninterested.

The bartender placed the beer on the table. The Stranger reached for it, but the bartender held it back. “I wanna know who’s coming for you. Cuz if they’re coming here, I may have a problem with that.”

“They’re already here.”

“Now, Stranger, I don’t wa—”

“It’s fine. Nobody is coming. You’ll be unaffected by all this. In fact, I’ll probably be leaving this place soon anyway.”

The bartender nodded uneasily, releasing Stranger’s beer. Stranger kicked it back with ease, then clapped his hands.

“Now, this next part is real tricky. Are you listening, barkeep?”

“Sure.”

“I need your biggest glass. You have one?”

The bartender was puzzled but perused his wares. He found an old goblet that would work fine. The

bartender was reluctant but interested. The Stranger spelled the recipe for him:

“I need a glass of your finest red wine. It has to be the finest. Have that separate. In the jug, I need two shots of bourbon, two shots of rye, two shots of scotch, two shots of tequila, a splash of vodka. Scrape off a handful of splinters from this wooden counter of yours. A scoop of dust; maybe some cobwebs. A pinch of ash from that fireplace there. A lit match. A drop of blood—”

The Stranger requisitioned a knife from the bartender and dragged it along the palm of his hand.

“A snowflake from outside. A pure one. A clump of dirt from outside as well. A slice of lemon, of lime, and orange. A dab of salt. Do you have grain alcohol? Put a generous dollop of that in. Sprinkle some sugar. And a Cross.”

The Stranger reached for his own neck, pulling forth a shiny pendant. He dropped it into the drink. As he did, the liquid around it sizzled.

“And before I drink this concoction, I need you to—well, are you Catholic?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, well, I need you to repeat the Hail Mary ten times. That’s all.”

The bartender stood there silent. The Stranger smiled. It was obvious he’s ordered this sort of thing before, and had gotten the same response.

While waiting for the bartender to recite his prayers, the Stranger turned his direction toward the old lady. “Hey Miss, are you okay?”

“I’m fine and dandy, young man, quit bothering me!”

“Why do you spin so much?”

“Who the hell told you I was spinning? I’ve never spun a day in my life!”

“You’ve never even turned?”

“Nope! Fine sir, I have been moving the same direction, facing the same way, for damn near *all* of my life. The only time I can remember that I did anything else was the day I was born—and that’s only because the damn doctor twirled me around to spank my behind!”

The Stranger laughed. He was very amused by this old woman. Then he requested that the bartender shake his drink up, making sure its ingredients blend together.

The bartender swished all the flavorful toxins together. Stranger pulled a cigarette from his jacket, asking if he could smoke. The bartender assured him.

It was an old, French cigarette. It had a purple label across the filter.

“What kind of cigarette is that?” inquired the bartender.

“It’s a French-made. The tobacco is laced in wine, and the paper is smeared in cream.”

“That sounds absolutely disgusting.”

Stranger kept puffing, quite fast. After he finished that one, he had another. By the time the bartender was through shaking Stranger’s convoluted order together, he’d smoked at least nine cigarettes.

“Here’s your drink, Stranger,” the bartender passed him the potion with two hands. “What do you call this sort of drink?”

“*Man of Nails*. They say that if anyone can drink this, they could probably drink a handful of nails and keep ‘em down. Not that I’ve ever drank nails.”

The Stranger paused before lifting the goblet to his lips.

“Here’s your wine,” the bartender said. Stranger swung the glass, pouring the wine over his head, drenching his hair and face.

The Stranger closed his eyes and waited.

After a few moments, he thanked the bartender. Then he drowned himself in this enormous drink. One gulp. The old lady had stopped moving, aghast at how the Stranger was able to consume such a vile swill. The bartender, too, seemed unnerved. Stranger completed it in an instant, placing the goblet back on the table. He exhaled. Then he wiped his lips dry.

“Today is the day,” Stranger said. “If anybody comes looking for me, they’ll find me with God.”

The Stranger got up, but instead of staggering, managed to exit from the bar in a straight line. He vanished into the snow.

The bartender shrugged. “What the hell was that all about?”

The old woman got up herself, stumbling toward him.

“That young man is on his way,” she spat. “I came for him, but I was scared. Now, I’ll just have to settle for you.”

A Bad Kind of Alone

Lauren Vieira

“I couldn’t possibly remember all the times he hurt me,” I tried to recount to Dr. Hanson. Her gaze was one of pity, sympathetic to the trauma that physical pain would inflict on a grade school girl. She prodded, “I want you to think of one of the most humiliating instances, for me. I want you to go back to that place and tell me as many details as you can. I want to know what you were smelling, what you were hearing, what you were doing with your hands... Anything.”

It took me a moment to shuffle through the fluff and all of the memories I’d purposely pushed aside. I remembered my long, tangled hair that I would avoid brushing for fear of the pulling. My mother would construct a quick braid that disguised the flyways and secure it near the bottom of my back. I smelled the resin on the gym floor, and recalled the way we used to follow the red painted lines of the Cardinals logo, heel-to-toe, heel-to-toe, a line of nine-year-olds on a cathartic train across the wooden floorboards and past the wall of bleachers.

I never used to lead, but I wouldn’t follow, either. I would start at the opposite end and make it a game to run into the train of girls about to cross my path. Sometimes they would call me “stupid” but I still thought it was funny. I amused myself, and I was fine alone.

It was my ninth Halloween. The year before, I was grapes. I wore a green outfit and my mother meticulously pinned purple balloons all over my sweater. It took the

whole morning. I used to think my dog was psychic. I remember catching his thoughts that day while he eyed our work: “You’re going to fall down the stairs and pop all of them.” My Sam, the pillar of wisdom.

I couldn’t sit down in class, which was fine since I hated to be sitting, anyway. I fell down at recess, and broke most of my grapes. I recall being told my costume was “dumb anyway,” but I didn’t care, because I was proud of myself, and I was fine alone.

This year, I wanted to be another weird thing, so I chose to be a milk carton. My mother suggested my face be the missing child on the side, and we set to work constructing something wearable out of a piece of broken down cardboard that my parents procured from their garage. I was 2% milk, Lucerne, like the brand they served at lunch, and was missing since 7/20/1996, my sixth birthday. I made a hole at the top instead of the side because the box was so big that I couldn’t carry it with my arms. I drew the silliest face I could in the “missing” square. It was brilliant and weird, and not what the “popular” girls were doing, and I was proud of my creativity, because I amused myself, and I was fine alone.

“I think the worst thing he ever did happened on Halloween in fourth grade,” I started. “We were about to have a full-school costume parade in the gym, and his name was right after mine, so he was behind me. He wore a ghoulish mask that blocked his face. He was a year older than me, held back in kindergarten because of behavioral issues. I remember that part.”

I remembered how the space of my costume took up two people. It was so big that I kept my arms inside the box, or else you could see only from my elbow to my

fingertips. They stuck straight out to my sides like tree branches, and I felt more like a robot than a dairy product. My costume was big, but others were bigger.

“William kept saying, ‘Move it, fatty,’ and I would just keep walking, because I was taught to be the better person, and couldn’t turn around without hitting everyone around me with my milk box, anyway. There were 400 children. I had friends who were twins, and together they made the front and back half of a dragon. Their costume was bigger. One of the older kids was an inflatable sumo wrestler, again bigger than my costume. And still, every few minutes I would hear, ‘Move it, fatty,’ and would feel a little push that lunged me forward into the rest of the line.”

But I tried to ignore him.

“But I tried to ignore him.”

I remember the zigzagging pattern of students all across the gym, parading our costumes with our teachers in the lead. “While we were walking in our lines, we got to the middle of the gym, and William pushed me hard. A teacher saw, finally, and scolded him in passing, saying, ‘Excuse me? That’s not very nice. Say you’re sorry.’ But he didn’t, because she was gone a second later since she was leading her class.

“William said, ‘You got me yelled at, stupid fatty,’ and I turned around to say I was sorry.”

But he grabbed the end of my braid. He yanked my hair as hard as he could. I paused for a moment before I relayed this to Dr. Hanson.

“He grabbed the end of my braid and yanked my hair so hard that I crashed into the ground, box and all. The hole for my neck cut my skin. I slammed my head on the floor, and the cardboard choked me. He crumpled the

corner of my costume.”

I kept apologizing, over and over and over. “I told him, ‘I said I was sorry! I said it! You didn’t have to do that!’ and I cried, right there on the floor of the gym, with 400 kids watching me, flailing around in my milk box, and there was blood all over my neck and turning my turtleneck red. I was really skinny so my shoulders, hips, and spine all developed bruises, and one of the bones in my hip fractured. My principle and two teachers helped get me out of my milk carton and carried me to the office. She got blood on her shirt and was wiping herself as she called my mother to come pick me up. My mom bought me ice cream and took me to the doctor to make sure my head was okay and schedule a time the next morning to take care of my fragile broken hip. Then she made my brothers share their Halloween candy with me because I couldn’t go trick-or-treating. They didn’t mind, and gave me most of it because they didn’t like to see me hurt.”

That moment made me feel totally alone. So, that was the worst thing William ever did to me. I had forgotten it all. On purpose.

“So...that was the worst thing William ever did to me.”

Dr. Hanson gave me the pity stare again and I watched her lip twitch. She nodded her head as if to say, “Yes, I acknowledge.” Dr. Hanson had the ability to show miraculous empathy in her aging face, perhaps because she had young children of her own and the gruesome world of abusive men, catty women, and bully children cast its shadow of worry onto her conscience.

“Can I tell you something else?” There was another piece to that story that *didn’t* matter.

“Of course.”

I spilled the rest of my thoughts to Dr. Hanson.

“The next week, we were in after-school care together and he came over while I was playing with a younger kid, I was teaching him to use Lincoln Logs. And he came over and dumped a big cookie tin full of Legos all over where we were working. And...” I hesitated. “And, I picked up the cookie tin and just hit him on the head as hard as I could, and it made him fall over. He was taller than me so I mostly got his forehead. But, he fell over, and then he laid there for a while, and I ran upstairs to the principle to tell her what I did. Then my mom picked me up and I never got in trouble for it. My instincts told me that if I didn’t make him stop messing with me now, he would hurt me worse, so I hurt him, and then I felt guilty but pretended I didn’t.”

Her eyes grew and then looked down onto her notebook, and then back at me. Then she proceeded, “Did he ever hurt you again after that, Lauren?”

“I don’t think so... I don’t know. I don’t remember.”

“Well, that is much more than an afterthought and I’m glad you told me. Everything that you felt during that moment was valid and deserves to be acknowledged. I think this is a good stopping point. I’m going to mull this over for your session on Thursday and we’ll discuss it more, then. Have a good day, Lauren.” I thanked her and drove back to college, where “alone” had become a safe haven, and William was last night’s bath water.

I arrived Thursday with no expectations. I was an adult and put the pettiness of my childhood behind me. I was over it. But, I actually felt bad for William, because perhaps he didn’t know any better. I pictured all of the

situations that would make him such a rotten child. Maybe his father abused him. I'd never met his father, or mother for that matter. What if he didn't have a mother? What if he was an orphan? Maybe he was raised by grandparents who couldn't control him. What if he DID have parents, and they were both alcoholics? It didn't matter, because I wasn't that kind of alone any more, and I was over it.

Dr. Hanson greeted me at the door and ushered me into my favorite red chaise lounge in her room. Our guided meditation filled my senses with the scent of lavender and the chill of eucalyptus. I never noticed the animals around her room. The octopus- master of escape, survival, and adaption. He was hanging on the back of her door, beckoning my attention. The baby wolf, sitting alone, relaxed, in front of a wall of trees, questioning the photographer with all the curiosity its little body possessed. He earned a spot on Dr. Hanson's desk, facing both women. The wolf, the quiet warrior. Loyal and ferocious. I found a hawk, next, the predator, made of fierce instincts and perseverance. He sat on the wooden bookcase, blending into Dr. Hanson's brick walls. And gosh, she had a collie like my Sam on her desk. I wonder if her Sam was a wise old sage like mine. I'd never noticed them all before, yet there they all were, every sign of "letting go" and "looking inward" that a therapist's office should possess.

She sighed as she leaned against her big arm rest. "Well, I have some news for you. It's neither good nor bad for you, it just is. Are you ready?" I nodded. "I did some research on William. Did you know his dad was a pastor at Corpus Christi Church?" I made a face like a lemon. "Yeah, that's what I thought, too. Interesting he would lead mass at a rival school and then send his son to yours." I snorted as

I remembered many victorious soccer games against them, but then Dr. Hanson continued. “And Lauren, you were right. I just want you to know that all of the feelings you described, your gut instincts about him that we’ve discussed in other sessions, you were right. It’s important to know that as a child, you were absolutely correct, and you built a defense system around him. And you were right.”

“Lauren, a couple years ago when he was 19, he was put in jail for sexually abusing a child. He got out when he was 21 and you were 20. And then somehow, he managed to find a wife. But then, Lauren, he hurt her. She ran away from him, and he tracked her down and beat her until she was almost dead. He stabbed her, Lauren.” She saw the horror and bulging eyes on my face and calmed me down, “But she didn’t die, she’s okay now. But then, Lauren, when he was arrested again, he was sentenced to six years.”

She paused to let me process the validation and hurt that I had suppressed and carried for over 15 years, but not before she finished. “Lauren, only a month and a half ago, one little tiny month and a half ago, he was beaten and killed in prison for being a child abuser. He picked the wrong fight, and they killed him.” I watched her Sam, the wise old sage, and he watched me.

“I knew I was right,” was all I could muster. It wasn’t justice.

For some reason, I hurt for him. I don’t know why, and he certainly didn’t deserve it, but I hurt for him. I wanted to believe in karma, or the Threefold Law, or John 3:16 in that moment, but mostly I was just sad. It didn’t feel like I was right. I couldn’t decide what to feel, so I chose to not feel anything.

“Can I take a nap?”

She nodded.

The last time I hated someone, I had to take a nap. It was an ordeal. And now, the first time I'd faced those demons and confronted the boy I used to hate, even through this roundabout way, it was to let him go. And to hurt for him, because I got out alive. I dreamed about how I was fine, but he ended up alone.

For the Love of Milkshakes

Chris Lee

A woman can be a dangerous thing for a man. Add a few tears and a sad story and stand back as the world moves. Some would think the love a man might have for women is a weakness, but any man worth his testosterone would say that it is from the dearest of them that he finds the best of himself.

It should be made a cardinal sin to make a girl cry, especially the little ones, and an unjust penance for any who must bear witness. I saw my little sister cry. I had even caused it at times myself, and were I a better man I would have kicked my own ass on principle. However, I am her brother and it would be unnatural if we had always gotten along. Not to mention, and I can't stress this enough, it was my goddamn muffin in the first place!

Carrying on.

At the time, I was pushing seventeen years of age, with one year left of high school. My little sister was still a kid of ten years and wanted nothing more than to hang out with her big brother. Her name was Barbara, but I called her Barbie, if for no other reason than to piss off our mother, who absolutely hated the name Barbie. I got away with it while the rest of the world would have burned at her feet because, and I quote, "You are the first born and heir to the throne of this vast empire of middle class Americana. And we both know your father isn't going to mow the damn lawn." She was a sweetheart, my mother.

Barbie was short and lean, bordering on lanky, like most girls are when they are right in the transition window

between little kid and pubescent harpy. She would leave her long brown hair mostly unkempt, and she always wore dresses or skirts because she claimed pants were, “askew.”

It was on a day early in a sweet home summer near the eastern coast of Long Island when I came home looking for my little Barbie, and found her in much distress. I had promised her the day before that when I knocked off of work for that day I would take her to get a milkshake at the downtown ice cream parlor. We had one closer by where she wouldn’t have had to wait for me to take her, but every once in a while she asked to go to the fancy one that had more than just the two basic flavors of vanilla and chocolate. She would say that it was because she loved spending time with me, but somehow I’m not sure she was telling me the whole truth. She was an absolute fiend for mint chocolate chip milkshakes. I feel this may have been a factor.

I found her crying on the floor in her room. This kind of behavior was very odd for Barbie as she was a generally happy girl and too strong to resort too quickly to tears. I walked past what I knew was her bed, but was more of a giant mountain of frilly froo froo décor, topped with more lace than any one person should be allowed, and sat down beside her.

“What seems to be the guff young miss?” I asked foppishly, trying to lighten her mood.

“Nothing,” she replied, sniffing her nose to keep it from running.

“I would never be the one to deny you the usefulness of lying with conviction, Little One, but it seems a mite excessive for you to think I would believe that whopper. So let’s cut the bull and spill the beans. Sound good?”

She gave a slight chuckle through the sniffles, which was the point of my whimsy, since she had always gotten a kick out of me talking to her like that. Even as young as she was, she didn't miss much of what was said around her. It was a topic of much amusement to the two of us when adults would speak of inappropriate things with her in earshot. They just assumed she was too young to know what they were saying. She wasn't.

"I can't tell you, it'll only upset you," she said as her crying began to subside.

"How so?" I asked.

"It's not a big deal, Anthony."

She would always use my full first name instead of the more common shortage of Tony, for reasons that were known only to her. I pressed.

"I can't take a girl out for milkshakes if she's just gonna look sad the whole time," I said, teasing her. "Maybe if you told me, I could do something to make it better?"

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"There's a clue," I said. "Hey, weren't you supposed to be helping Mom down at the store this morning? She always slips you a little cash if you do a good job. Did she stiff you or what?"

"No. She paid me two whole dollars so I could finally be the one to buy you a milkshake," she said. "And that's something to cry over?" I asked. "No," she paused. "Someone took it." An urge for violence welled up inside my head. I wasn't as quick to fight as some boys in the neighborhood might have been in those days, but there was no excuse for causing ill on my family. Especially not Barbie.

Chucky. Has to be Chucky, I thought.

Chucky was the neighborhood bully who was always too big and too dumb not to be a deviant. He was easily twice my size and wasn't afraid to use it. Like most bullies, he liked to keep a small group of hangers on. Mostly kids our age with the same broken tendencies and they were always around to pick up the wreckage left in his wake. Bunch of scavengers.

This would not do, but it had to wait. I had made a promise to Barbie, and I wasn't going to let Chucky rob her of her money and her milkshake in the same day. We took a few minutes on the floor in her room to calm ourselves down so we could move on and enjoy the rest of our day. And we did just that. I even got her an absurdly big cookie to go with her milkshake. Every sad little girl deserves an absurdly large cookie; it's why we fought for independence all those years ago.

Carrying on.

The next day I found Chucky. He was every bit as large as I pictured him to be in my head that morning. I tapped him on the shoulder and waited. It took me tapping him once more with insulting force for him to turn and lower his gaze to see who it was that had the balls to interrupt him.

"What, boy?" he boomed at me.

This was not going to end well for me. I shrugged mentally as there wasn't much else to be done at this point, so I spoke out, "You stole two dollars from my sister. Give it back."

"No, now piss off," replied Chucky.

The only advantage I had was his own arrogance. Without hesitation, and with every ounce of my weight and ability, I squared up and punched him as hard as I could

in the nose. I felt it break, like wet, soggy celery under my clenched fist. At first I wasn't sure what might have hurt worse, his nose or my hand. Either way my well-intended triumph was short lived. His small but fierce group of carrion had not been punched in the face, all that occupied their attention was me. They grabbed me before I could run. They held me down and laughed as Chucky beat me to his own satisfaction.

Carrying on.

I didn't know how long it took a broken nose to heal so my timing was pure guess work.

Almost two weeks later to the day, I took my still bruised and battered body on the hunt once again. Not much of a hunt since Chucky was a creature of habits. I found him easily enough, noticing with satisfaction that his nose was healing nicely. The black and reddish coloring under eyes was beginning to fade. This time I didn't even ask or give warning. I moved quickly, hanging close to the walls approaching his side at an angle. When I was close enough, I made an odd noise just loud enough to get him to turn ever so slightly. With the same force and zeal, I broke his nose again. The crunch of it wasn't as loud as the first time, but it made for a softer target. His face hurt more, I was sure of it. He and his friends wasted no time in giving me my return trip to Sleepy Town.

Carrying on.

More weeks go by this time. Not for his sake, but for mine. Catching a good, solid beating can ruin a good day. Catching two in quick succession can ruin a good month. They weren't as much of a deterrence as you might think, though, because my sister still didn't have her money back.

Eventually, I found Chucky again. And again he

wasn't hard to find. I was almost frustrated by having to always do this in the same spot. It became tedious, and almost embarrassing, to get a beating on top of old dried up stains of your own blood caused from previous engagements. This time, however, my small size and speed got the best of Chucky. I broke his nose again and ran. Chucky didn't even bother to try and chase me down. He did send his flock after me though, but I was faster. That round belonged to me.

Carrying on.

That game continued a few more times. Sometimes I would get away, sometimes I wouldn't. Sometimes I'd catch him without his friends, most times I didn't. I never pressed my luck by trying to get more than one swing in at a time. This was a war of strategy and longevity.

Months later I went looking for Chucky again. I have had my ass beat down over half a dozen times to the point where I had bruises on my bruises, and I'm pretty sure my nose has never looked quite the same since. Barbie kept trying to get me to stop and let it go. I couldn't.

She was crying because Chucky took money from her that she had earned for the purpose of buying me a milkshake. Did I need or even want a milkshake? Not really. At least not enough to keep catching a beating for it, but that wasn't really the point, now was it? Nope.

I found Chucky again, this time he saw me coming. I saw that he had seen me coming, and he saw that I had seen him see me coming. His nose was almost healed. I must break it.

As I got closer to him, he stopped me.

"God dammit Tony! Aren't you tired of getting your ass kicked over two dollars?" he asked, obviously not

wanting to get hit in the nose again.

“You stole it from my little sister,” I said.

“If I give you the two dollars back will you just leave me and my nose, the hell alone?”

“Sure thing,” I said. “Do you have it now?”

“No. But I will get it.”

He barely finished speaking before I broke his nose again, and ran away. Never trust a man who would steal from a ten-year-old girl to keep his word.

Carrying on.

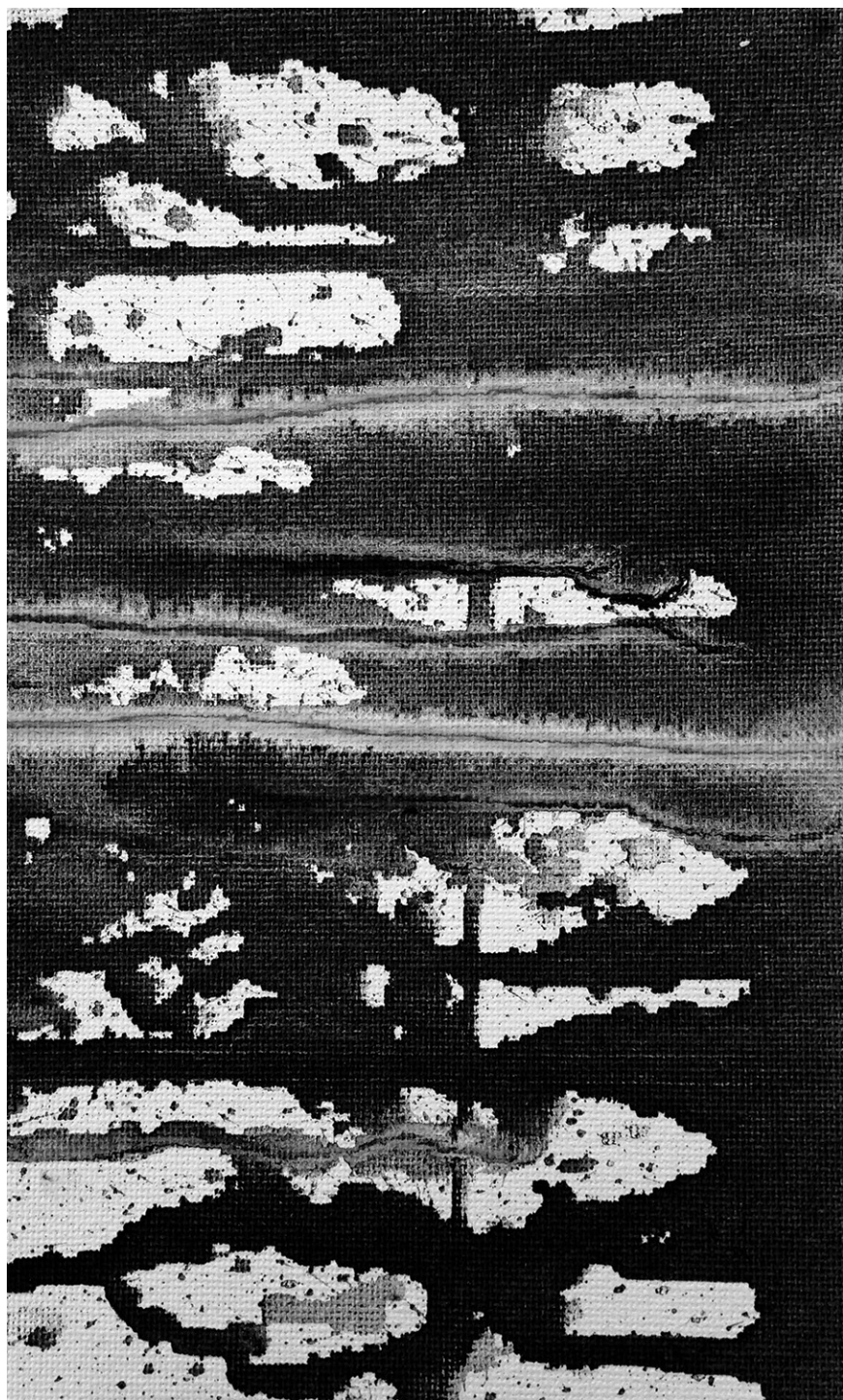
The next day Chucky came looking for me. I was walking my little sister to school when he came walking up to the both of us. It didn't seem as if he was coming for a fight, even he wouldn't start something close enough to Barbie that she might get hurt. He was a bully, not a monster, after all. He didn't say or do much of anything. Just handed two dollar bills to my sister, and walked off again. He looked slightly distraught, but that could have easily been the effect left by his poor nose on his poor face.

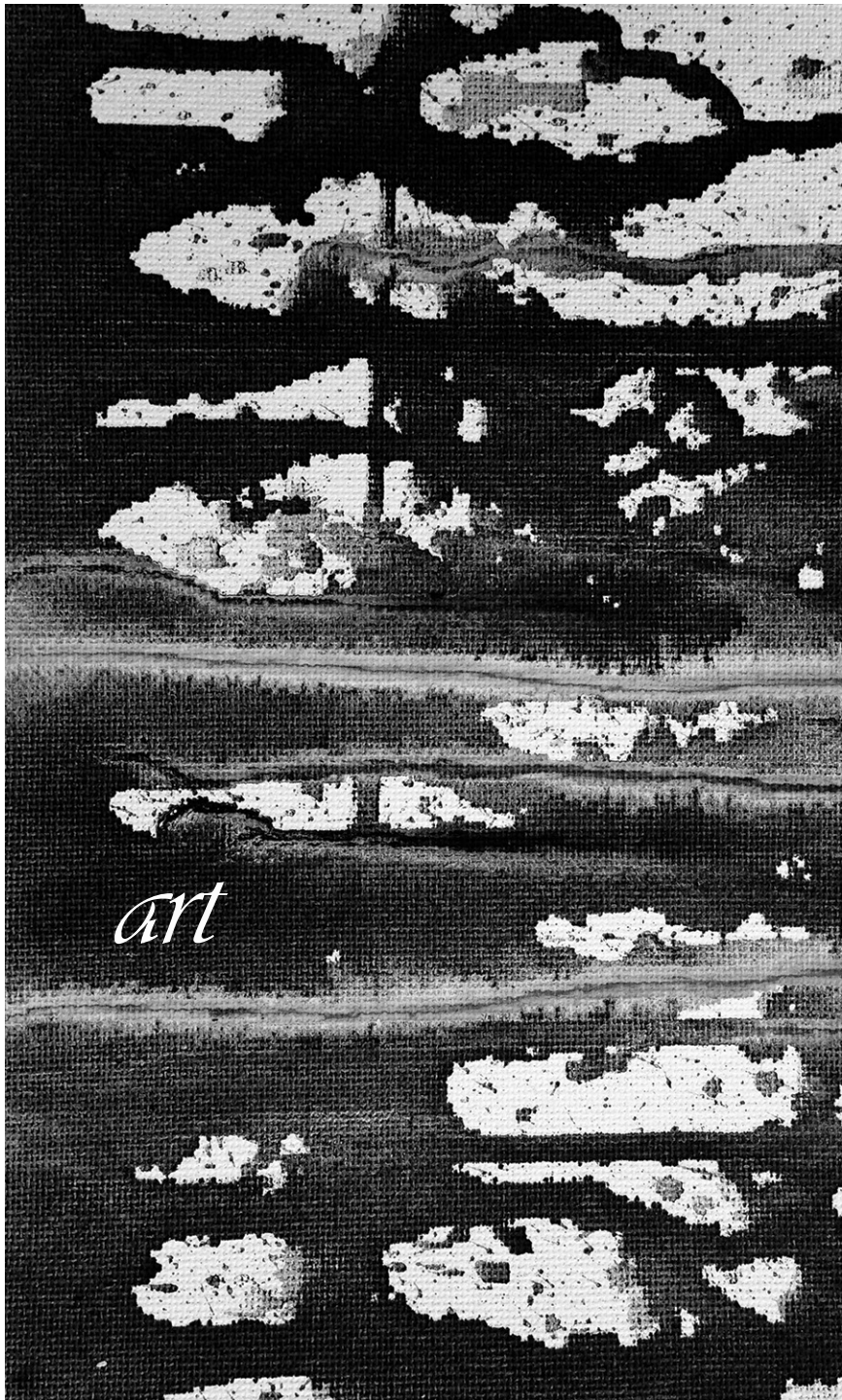
Barbie looked at the money not really sure what had just occurred. I still remember her face when she finally put the pieces together. She looked up and beamed a smile at me that could light up the darkest of hearts.

“Milkshakes!” she exclaimed, jumping in my arms for a hug.

“Oh the things we do for milkshakes,” I replied, trying to keep her hug from the worst of my bruises.

My little sister's smile remained a part of her young face as we carried on.





art

Ferris Wheel

Heather Hanson



Our Lady
Heather Hanson



Bright Lights

Patience Miller



Trapped

Patience Miller



December

Joyce Prock



Untitled
Karri V.



Illuminating Emperors

Rachele Roman



Just a Girl

Cecily Hill



Untitled
Karri V.



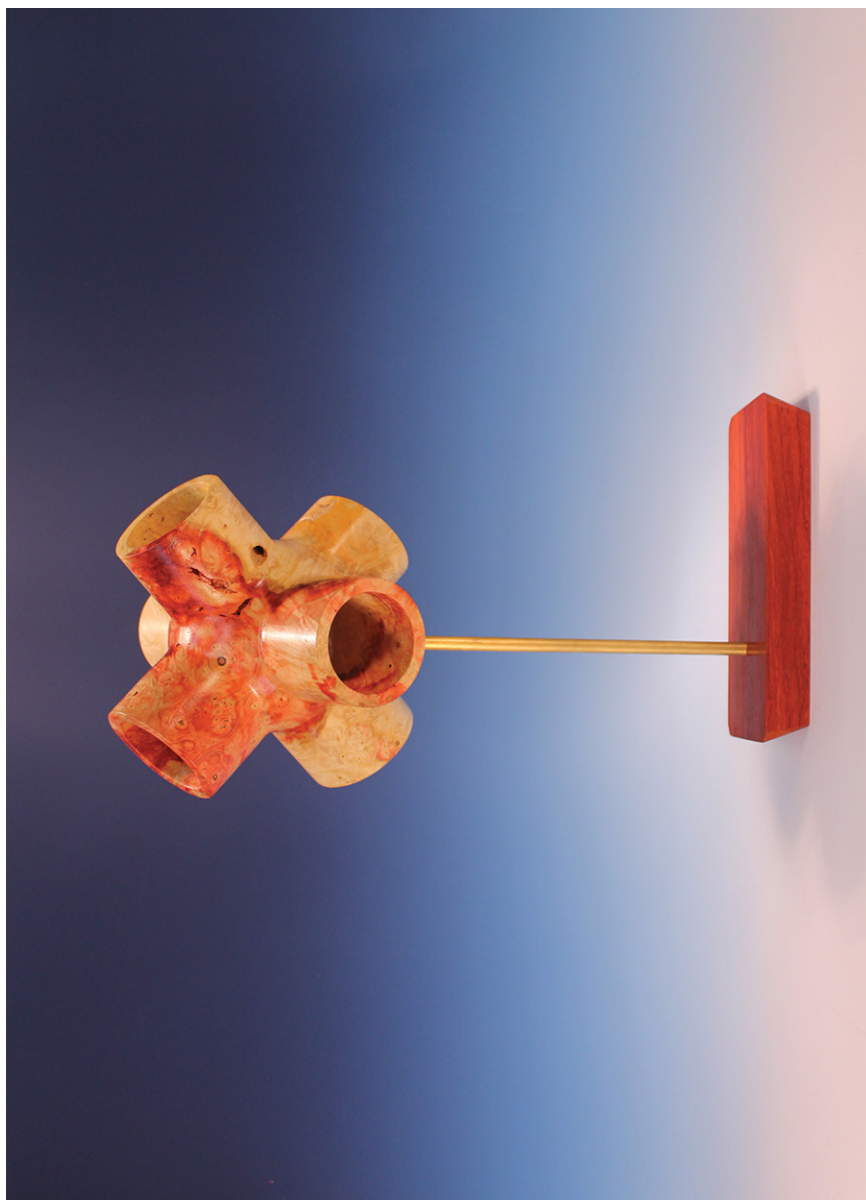
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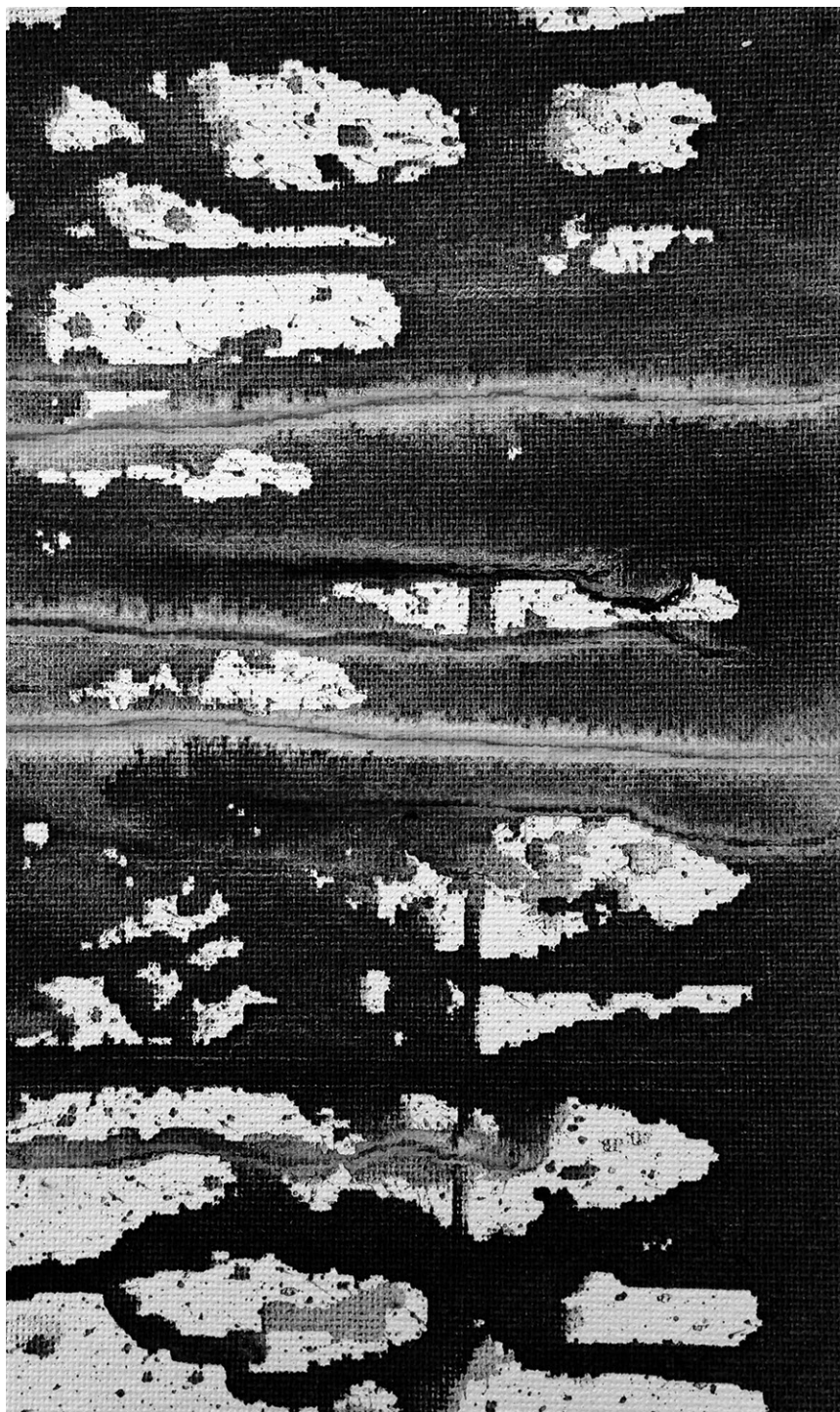
Karri V.



Mad Max

Michael Roper







nonfiction

Ending It

Michael Yeatts

It had taken about thirty minutes to hike to the top of the hill from the parking lot, but it was worth the walk. It was a pleasant summer morning. The sky was cloudless. It was warm, but not hot, and a cool breeze that seemed to only grace the top of the hill soothed our warm skin. Cross-legged, alone, and staring at the incredible view of Denver from our perch atop the hill, we sat together. It was early enough that the edifices of downtown eclipsed the rising sun from where we sat, and only gutting rays of light escaped the cover. Our hands were clamped together and rested on her lap. I remember looking at her. Hair like black silk. Skin a natural tan, blemished by acne. She turned her head towards me. Her face held an ancestry of southern China. She was beaming one of her genuine wry smiles. The beauty of it all weighed heavily on me. I wished I could be in that moment forever.

I burst through the thin wooden door clutching my nose. The bathroom was a mess. Toiletries and bath products were strewn about. Grime coated the tiles and the bath. The toilet's water was yellow, and rubbish littered the floor. I looked for tissues. None. I looked for toilet paper. Just the brown roll. On top of the sink sat a pile of brown napkins—the sort that you'd find at a fast food restaurant. I removed my hand from my nose. Like a faucet had just been turned on, blood flowed liberally from my nostril, coating the sink. I grabbed a handful of the brown napkins and brought them to my face in an attempt to stop the bleeding. I knew I wouldn't be able to do any better. I could already feel my motor skills declining. Anxiety and paranoia swelled in my chest. I looked up from the sink into a

smudged mirror that hung above the sink. My eyes were deeply bloodshot, betraying the fear and dread that lurked beneath. I knew it. I was going to die.

It was an odd sight to see something I regarded as beautiful in such an ugly pose. Tears streamed down her face, contorted into an expression of woe. She was kneeling on my bed. Her arm awkwardly held a knife that was poised on her neck. Between sobs that wracked her body, she screamed at me. She told me she hated me. She said she didn't want to live any more. She said it was my fault. To talk someone down from their ledge—to convince them to preserve their own mortality—is hard. More difficult when you're the reason they threaten to end it. But we both knew she didn't want to do it, and it wasn't long before we were embraced, crying and making shallow promises.

I didn't trust anyone out there. The party that raged on outside the bathroom door would be apathetic to my death, I knew. The anxiety and paranoia still escalated. A severe headache had developed in my head. The sounds of the party, the boom of the music, and a quick succession of bangs from upstairs gnawed at my mind. It felt like my head was going to explode. My vision began to spin, and I grabbed the sink in an attempt to stay up. The noise seemingly grew louder and louder. The scream of my headache grew with it. I was scared and miserable. The noise had grown to an almost unbearable volume. My vision shook. Then, everything seemed to change. The sounds of the party seemed to have coalesced into a slow booming like beats from a massive drum. The room still shook, but it was more a mellow sway now. My vision was covered in a smoothly alternating filter of oranges, reds, pinks, and yellows. Yet this new-found calm was still dreadful for me. An internal sense of immense terror was

more powerful than ever. So clear it was painful, I knew death was coming.

It had taken about thirty minutes to hike to the top of the hill from the parking lot. The view was the same. The weather wasn't bad. Cross-legged, alone, and staring ahead, we sat together. Our hands were to ourselves. The breeze wasn't there. There was a tension in the air, though. Neither of us wanted to apologize for what we said on the hike up. For the venom we spat. We thought coming back here might bring the good times back. At least for a bit. I looked at her. She looked at me. She wore a thin-lipped smile. A polite smile. A fake smile. The sort that declared resignation and defeat. It broke my heart.

Things started to change around me. At first, it was just undefinable objects dancing around my periphery. Then they crept into my center of vision. It was difficult to keep any lucidity. At some point I had lowered the ball of napkins from my face. Staring into the mirror, I could see that the area around my nose and mouth was a mask of wet crimson. My reflection, though, too-widely grinned at me with bloodstained teeth. The next thing I recall is being on the dirty floor. I knew they were hallucinations. I knew that in hours I would wake up, miserable as usual. My perception would be as sober as ever. Now, though, I was terrified. I could hardly move. The ominous feeling of impending death still lingered strong until the blackness inside me enveloped my vision.

You can only torture something for so long before it dies. We tried to make it work. I wanted what we had back. Months of searching in absence yielded nothing. She ended it. I didn't have the strength to. It was painful hearing those divergent words. It killed me, in a way. I wanted to forget. I tried to escape the pain externally. It only brought me more, I suppose.

Come morning I remember rising stiffly to the mirror. The blood on my face had dried and was flaking in tiny chips. Did I do this to myself for a punishment or as an escape? Both, maybe. It doesn't matter. I was still isolated surrounded by trashed acquaintances. I was still miserable in altered relief. Still missing her, all the same. Alone either way. I washed it off my face with water from the faucet. It was cleansing. In more ways than one, I think. I stumbled out of the bathroom, stepping over objects and occasionally people. Once I reached the front door, I left the place, but left more than it behind.

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It had taken about thirty minutes to hike to the top of the hill from the parking lot. Cross-legged, alone, and staring ahead, I sat. God, the view was still great. It wasn't the same being there. It would never be the same. Still, I was happy.

My Friend, My Enemy: Depression

Cody Healy

Depression is like an abusive lover: telling you lies, making you feel worthless, and tricking you into staying because it has been by your side. It slowly drags you down with its icy hands into an abyss that darkens with every inch. The light, your only hope and salvation, fades until it's a glimmer, then a speck, and finally nothing. An unnerving sense of calmness gradually wraps around you like a child wraps their blanket around themselves when scared. You feel like you are in an endless winter: no warmth, beauty, or light.

Depression is a strange thing. Although more than 350 million people globally suffer from it, it still is something many do not comprehend or accept as a real disease. When in a depressive state, I've heard people give me shitty advice like: "Get over it" or "Just don't be depressed." If depression was that easy to beat, I'm pretty sure I, and the other 350 million plus, would be walking on sunshine and smiling gaily.

The thing about depression is that it's hard to tell when someone has it because we disguise ourselves. When you have depression, a mask is the only way you try to get through the day and not feel like you're annoying those around you. The mask I wear is that of a happy-go-lucky guy. I am happy a lot of times, but there's an internal sadness that I try to keep locked up in my mind, fearing that showing it would be a sign of weakness. And maybe, if I try to suppress the sadness, even though I know it won't, the sorrow will go away.

Numerous things have unfortunately helped

contribute to my depression: Bullying, death, and low self-esteem. The one that mainly caused me to spiral into a deep set of melancholy was my struggle to accept my sexuality.

When I began to question who I was, I was lost. The idea that I could love and be attracted to someone of the same sex terrified me to the point where I couldn't face watching TV or going out in public, in case I saw someone I found attractive. I felt alone, disgusted, and hated myself. I felt like I was a character in a werewolf movie, slowly transforming into something that I couldn't control. Being shunned by society and seen as a freak and dangerous. I tried hard to repress and oppress myself. Even though my mother told my sister and me throughout the years that she would love us no matter what we did or who we loved, I felt as if no one would accept or love me.

I became a Victorian-era porcelain doll: hollow, inanimate, and cracked. An empty shell that would finally wither into dust as soon as the wind blew. My stomach was full, yet empty all at once. My food sat on the plate, waiting to be eaten, but never to be touched. My face grew haggard, eyes barely opened with half crop circles clinging under them.

I was like an unborn child and my bed was a womb, a confined, yet warm and safe, area that protected and shielded me from the world outside.

Eventually I grew tired of seeing my mother (the greatest person in my life) feel powerless and saddened because she couldn't help me. I grew tired of being tired. I grew tired of feeling like I was fucking stark raving mad! I knew that the only way I could overcome my depression was with therapy... and some good, prescribed drugs.

Through therapy, I began to slowly climb out of my

depression. I was still afraid to admit to my sexuality. But gradually, at the pace of a snail, I began to accept myself. I realized that I shouldn't be afraid of who I am because I was born this way. Some may disagree and think I'm going through a phase, seeking attention, or that gays have infiltrated my brain and planted a microchip or some kind of organism to control my mind. Whatever the case may be, it's who I am.

What may sound bizarre is if I could somehow go back in time and have a cure for depression, I wouldn't take it. Even though melancholia is a hellish nightmare that you almost can never wake up from, it is also the most beautiful dream I can have. I know that may sound strange, but without depression, I wouldn't be able to see the world in a different perspective. My depression had opened my eyes and showed me the struggles others go through. If I never suffered from my depression, I would have lost my cousin to suicide. I never pride myself in anything, but at that moment, when he said I was strong and that I saved his life, I felt amazing. Most of all, what I'm truly thankful for about my depression, and why I love it, is that it brought me the most beautiful person in my life, my best friend. Together, we had helped pull each other out of our depression.

When the mythical bird, the phoenix, dies, its body is consumed by fire, only to be resurrected from its own ashes. Through therapy, friends, family, and acceptance—I became a phoenix. I rose from the ashes of my depression anew. Of course, like anyone with depression, I have relapses. The relapses can be caused by the thought that I have no friends, by the idea that I'll never be loved and I will always be alone. But I keep thinking of the phoenix.

They will die and be reborn. That's how my depression is, like a phoenix's life. I climb out of my short relapses by reminding myself of all the people I have in my life. I stop and remind myself that I may be on my own, but I'm never alone. These thoughts help me become emotionally and mentally strong. I will keep growing stronger with each time I "die" and rise again.

The Squirrel Paradox

Tony Wright

The sound of giggling mixed with mewling terror is what drew me from my house. It was a sound that I couldn't ignore. The noise came from the backyard, but I couldn't see the cause from inside my home. Armed with the power of annoyance, I'd been deeply into a good book when the sounds disturbed my reading, I opened the door and stepped out.

In my backyard was a strange boy, around twelve years old. He had a long stick in his hand, about two inches thick where he gripped it, that he was using to poke at a squirrel. The squirrel was crying in pain and terror, clawing itself along the ground with its forelimbs. Its back was obviously broken and its hind legs dragged uselessly. The boy poked at the squirrel, giggling in glee as it cried out. And that's when my annoyance turned to white hot fury in less than a heartbeat.

A few running steps took me across the yard in a nearly silent charge. The boy sensed the approaching danger and looked up at me, terror shining in his eyes an instant before my fist crushed his nose, knocking him back and down. The kid was fast though, scrambling to his feet and lunging towards the back fence before I could grab him. I didn't bother to give chase. The sight of crimson streaking his pale, freckled skin cooled my rage as quickly as his cruelty had inflamed it. The kid flipped over the low back fence and staggered off. It was the first and last time I ever saw him.

I could hear the squirrel panting in the sudden quiet.

It whimpered in pain as it continued crawling away. It was dying and we both knew it, but it was fighting with its last breath and I wondered idly if I'd have the courage to keep fighting if I were in the squirrel's position.

Being fifteen, I didn't have access to a firearm, sword or even a knife outside of the kitchen. So I went to the garage, grabbed up a shovel and walked back to the suffering animal. I stood over the squirrel and raised the shovel, prepared to strike. It stopped moving and looked up at me, the silence disturbed only by its thin panting. I saw understanding in its eyes and it relaxed a bit, laying its head on the ground, neck outstretched. We both knew what had to be done. The blade of the shovel, dull as it was, severed the squirrel's head in one strike, sinking a few inches into dusty ground that quickly turned to viscous mud. I buried the squirrel under a paving stone in my mom's flower garden.

Once the job was done I calmly went back inside, washed up, and returned to my book. The incident didn't bother me and I haven't really given it much thought since that day. It's just a memory of something that happened. I never told my mom or anyone else. I never felt a need to. To me the incident was just a random thing that happened. Even now, writing about it, I feel nothing.

What does that say about me? That I'm callous and cold? We are talking about a squirrel here, but would I have felt different if it was a cat, dog, or monkey? I was in my own backyard, so if it was a child I could have called for help, and most likely the kid would have lived. But what if I'd come across a young child like this while alone in the wilderness? Would I have been able to end the child's suffering, even if begged? Or would I selfishly make the

child suffer and die slowly because I couldn't bring myself to kill another person? And that hesitance, that reluctance to kill, is that due to my own morals or fear of reprisal from the law?

Anyone can kill in self-defense or defense of another. War is a kill-or-be-killed environment where trained soldiers fight and even then, they do a lot not to kill anyone. Most people who have killed suffer some form of PTSD, a volatile mixture of nightmares, guilt, and regret. So could I kill someone in cold blood if it was needed? If the child in the wilderness was already dying and there was nothing that I could do to save them, could I end their suffering? And if I did, how would it make me feel? Would I be wracked with guilt and suffer nightmares or would I accept it as something that needed to be done as easily as I had with the squirrel?

What if it was a bad person, like a serial killer or rapist on death row? Would that change things for me? Would killing the child, an act of mercy, bother me more or less than killing someone unfit to live in our society? Would it bother me to kill a man who kidnapped, raped and tortured six women like Gary Heidnik? What about Benjamin Atkins, who raped and strangled eleven women in Michigan? Would I have any regret ending Robert Berdella's life knowing that he had kidnapped, sexually tortured and dismembered six men in Kansas City? I don't think so.

Looking deep inside myself, I can say with conviction that removing these men wouldn't bother me. Like the squirrel, it's a job that needs to be done. They've earned their death, several times over. However, I think that ending the child's suffering would. I think that despite the

fact that it's an act of mercy, just as with the squirrel, killing the child would haunt me. Not out of guilt or because I'd second-guess myself, but because the child didn't deserve this fate. The child is an innocent, and to me, innocents shouldn't have to suffer and die.

How would you deal with these questions of morality and ethics? Put yourself in my place and picture the suffering squirrel. Imagine that you're alone in the wilderness and come across a hurt and dying child with no resources to help you. Could you end their suffering? And is there a difference between killing as an act of mercy and removing life as a job that needs to be done? One benefits only the suffering individual, while the other benefits all of society. How does being an instrument of death affect you as an individual?

Jameisha's War

Ashish Acharya

Jameisha stared at her phone for the 37th time and sighed in vain. There were no new texts. Her mind roamed back to the first time she had ever met Rello. He was so kind, and he cared about her feelings. He was willing to do whatever it took to win her over, and win her he did. Maybe that was the problem.

It was 2:30 at night. Hadn't he said that he was going to come pick her up 2 hours ago? Where is he now? Should she call him? Pfft... what's the use? She thought. He always had an excuse handy. What if he gets mad? She would not want a repeat performance of what happened last time. Rello flared his nostrils in anger and squinted his eyes as if trying to suppress what was clearly there. Jameisha slowly started walking back into a corner. Like a wolf tracking its prey she knew he sensed her fear, and it did nothing but enrage him. He grabbed her by her hair and yelled,

“Where do you think you're going missy?” His eyes had a crazy spark as he back-handed her to the ground...

Back in the present it was night again. So soon? Jameisha had always struggled with the dark. Perhaps because every single memory of her childhood seemed to be dark. As if locked away behind steel and stone in the deepest reaches of her mind. “No, Rob! No, don't!” She remembers screaming helplessly looking for her mother to save her from her step dad. Her real dad was long dead, and the only remaining remnant of her dad was the golden ring he gave her. At times like this she would hold on to the

ring and cry until her heart was satisfied by the tears. It was all she could do. Her mom was never on her side. Instead of saving her from her monstrous stepdad she would only place more blame on Jameisha, as if she was seducing him, and beat her for trying to take away her husband.

The last thing she remembered was blacking out from the blows owned by her mom. She didn't know why her mom had been so cruel to her lately. Rough patch? Growing insecurity? Slowly she opened her eyes and felt a queasy feeling. She ran to the bathroom as fast as her sleepy legs could carry her, and hurled her guts out. Could it be? Oh no, she was pregnant. By her stepdad of all people. After that day it was a routine. She would come back from school, her mom would beat her until she could feel her belly no more, and she would pass to a dark oblivion of nothingness. She would wake up to her mother screaming in her face, "You fat, ugly bitch! You don't help me with any housework, and now you think you can sleep? Get your ass up, and cook me dinner." Afraid her mother might beat her even more if she refused, she would gather what lingering strength she could muster, and go into the kitchen to prepare dinner.

As for that baby: it was long gone. No abortion needed. Her mother kicked that child out of her stomach. She forced gallons of liquor down her throat until one day Jameisha just bled the baby out. Clear as the last five agonizing minutes the memory came to her. She was in the bath tub when she saw blood and bits begin to bob in the water. It wasn't long until the entire tub turned red with chunks that blocked the drain. She staggered out of the porcelain grave trailing crimson as she frantically cupped the pieces in her hand and flushed it down the toilet. Was

that her baby? It was too late to save it now. Did she even want to save the baby she never asked for from the man she never wished to call father? She had no idea.

Jameisha snapped out of her haze and looked at her phone again. No calls or texts, and it was 3:30 in the morning now. She finally decided to call Rello. The phone rang; once, twice, and now thrice. It went to voicemail. She called him again but still no answer. Sighing, for what seemed like the hundredth time now, she decided to go back inside her house. However, the knob didn't turn under the twist and grip of her hand. Her mother had locked it from inside, and Jameisha didn't have a key to her own house. She looked around unsure of what to do. It was late at night, and if she tried waking her mother a beating was sure to follow. Slowly she trudged her way to the backyard and laid on the floor. She closed her eyes, and slipped off to a dreamland. It was the only place where she found a loving mother and a respectful boyfriend.

An irritating buzz roused her from slumber. She looked to the side to find her phone ringing. She was almost surprised to see "Rello" on the screen. It was 8 in the morning, what did he want? She picked up the phone. "Hey baby. What you doing?"

Is he serious right now? He stood her up last night, and had her waiting for 3 hours in the dark without any explanation. She had to sleep outside in the bitter night wind with junkies prowling the streets. What if one of them had decided to snatch her, had his way with her, or worse? She tried speaking, but what could she really say?

"I want to see you tonight," he said. Jameisha would have laughed if her throat wasn't seized by the greater fear of his rage.

“Weren’t you supposed to come pick me up last night?” she asked trying to sound sincere rather than accusing.

“No, baby. I never said I was going to come over,” he blatantly denied it. It was going to be her words against his. Rello was the type who seemed incapable of admitting to any faults, so it was useless to even bring up last night. With a sigh, Jameisha just let it go. Lately, that’s all that she seemed to be doing in this relationship: sighing.

Rello wanted to see her, and she couldn’t deny that she wanted to see him too. When she agreed to meet him he said he would come pick her up at 10 that night. For some reason he never saw her during the day. There was always the voice of suspicion echoing in the back of her mind, but Jameisha knew better than to say something without evidence.

It was night again. A Chevy pulled up to her driveway, and she knew it was Rello. Hopping in she smiled at him hoping for a reaction, yet all his face portrayed was a blank canvas. With a bottle of Ciroc in one hand and a blunt in the other he was, as always, intoxicated and high. Even his name was Rello. She should have gotten the hint.

The drive to his house was silent. He didn’t ask her how she was, how her day went, or if she was hungry. Growing up she was beaten every time she asked for something. Eventually the voice seemed to be pounded out of her throat. It just wasn’t in her nature to ask people for anything anymore. No matter how bad she needed it, her voice would remain as it was in this moment.

As soon as they stepped into his house he began undressing her. In her mind they were making love. In his mind? Who knows what he thought. It wasn’t long before

she was lying naked on his bed holding herself. She looked over to find him fast asleep on his own side of the bed. She couldn't help the hurt she felt for falling for a man who didn't even try to catch her. She held her father's ring, and let the pressure from her eyes embrace the salty pain as the only comfort she would experience tonight. Meanwhile, Rello slept peacefully through her silent tears.

The next morning he rose with no emotion, and drove her straight to her house. No "good morning, beautiful", no kisses, no hugs, and no breakfast. Jameisha had convinced herself that all men were the same. After all, none of them had ever brought her flowers, celebrated her birthday, told her that they loved her, or even took her out on a proper date. Cold, selfish, and emotionally unavailable was the only kind of men she ever knew. She crossed the threshold to her house thanking the god above that her mom had left the door open. She really was in no mood for her mother's drama again. She closed the door quietly behind her, and tiptoed into the house. A few steps in, and there she was. Her mother was waiting on her. Jameisha felt her heart sink to her stomach like a nine pound hammer. A few punches, a couple kicks, a little hair pulling, and a lot of cussing later she realized the painful truth. She had become used to it. There was no pain. There were no tears. There was only an overwhelming sensation of complete numbness.

Once she had returned to her room, she found herself standing in front of the mirror examining her wounds with the same blank face she'd seen on Rello a hundred times. She dropped her gaze to the hand that bore her father's ring and realized with a panic that it was no longer wrapped around her finger. She knew exactly where

she had left it. That ring was the most valued possession of hers. It was the only thing she really cared for anymore, and she had to regain what was lost. She called Rello, repeatedly, but he didn't pick up. She left him voicemails and texts saying she needed her ring, but he never replied. She tried calling him again, but it went straight to voicemail. Did he block her number? Days passed by with no texts or calls from him. With no other options at her disposal, she decided to go up to his house unannounced.

A quick call to a friend, and she had a ride. Jameisha anxiously paced in her room waiting. Soon the horn of a car sounded on the street, and she ran out of the house to the parked car. When her friend pulled into Rello's driveway, she paused for a moment. She was no stranger to these windows and wooden beams, but why did this time feel different? Maybe it was simply because she was uninvited.

Three knocks at the door and a woman answered. She had a baby in her arms who looked strikingly similar to Rello. For a moment time appeared to stand still. She looked up at the woman who had just opened the door. It felt like the world was passing in slow motion. She could feel her heart beating inside her chest. With a frown on the stranger's face and a young baby on her hip, the woman continued to stare at Jameisha.

Finally finding her voice, Jameisha asked, "Are you his sister?" She already knew the answer was not one she wanted to hear.

"No, I'm Tamika, his fiancé. This is our baby. Who are you?"

The tables had turned, and it was now Jameisha's turn to speak for her relationship with Rello. She looked at

Tamika's hand, and there gleaming in the setting sun she saw her father's ring gracing this stranger's finger. After every missed call, every ignored text, and every emotionless night Jameisha wasn't even surprised. What surprised her, was the inferno in her heart. There comes a time when enough is enough, and she had plenty of fuel bottled for the blaze to come.

Knitting and So On...

Emily Borden

Against the frozen backdrop of the winter of '99, my grandmother taught me how to knit, our huge bay window framing the snow-capped neighborhood. I had just moved in with her and my father and she hadn't been prepared to raise another child at the age of 79. She looked at me the way one would look at a homeless dog left out in the snow. *What do I do with it?* I was always kept busy with various arts and crafts. *Idle hands...* she would say.

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My grandmother's hands once manufactured chemical weapons during the war. She had worked for an aircraft assembly plant prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor; a real life Rosie the Riveter. She had the most beautiful hands, my aunt once told me. They were strong but feminine and her skin a Spanish brown; they were made for detailed work. At the height of WWII, the United States Army purchased over 17,000 acres of land in Commerce City dubbing it the Rocky Mountain Arsenal where my grandmother along with many others in the work force would soon toil on a very different assembly line. There they manufactured white phosphorus, mustard gas, napalm. Words that don't scare my generation but are enough to put a chill down the spines of our parents and grandparents, reminding them of the invasiveness and bloodshed and loss of a war they thought could never reach them.

Today, the words "Wildlife Refuge" are tacked on to the end of the arsenal's already obtrusive name; ironically

considered to be one of the most polluted pieces of land in the United States. I wonder what my grandmother thought of this; the place that produced weapons to kill by the thousands now being protected in the name of local flora and fauna. I wonder how she felt about her job, about riding the bus from Englewood to Commerce City and back again, coming home from such a place and cooking dinner for her children, knitting socks for her brothers overseas at war, and praying to our all mighty Lord and Savior that everything would turn out all right in the end. Your hands can be used for many things ...*they are the devil's playground*, she would say. I wonder what her hands would tell me now, safe and cold beneath layers of veteran cemetery earth.

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I was quiet those first few weeks, responding with nods and glances instead of vocabulary. My grandmother and I were sitting, very quiet, watching the snow fall and suddenly she got up and went to her bedroom. She returned with a few brightly colored yarns and a pair of plastic knitting needles. She showed me the basics, wrapping her soft hands, now covered in wrinkles and age spots, around mine and moving them in ways awkward to my normal muscle memory. Learning to knit is hard at first, like learning to write with your non-dominant hand. *In through the front door, run around the back, out through the window, off jumps Jack.* She had me memorize this poem to remember the steps of the knit stitch; placing the needle into the stitch, wrapping the yarn around, pulling the yarn through, taking the stitch off of the needle. I mastered the basics that first day and I could tell that I impressed her, a feat I don't think I ever accomplished again.

My very first knitting project was a scarf. White yarn with little rainbow sprinkle-like speckles. I worked on it constantly, hour after hour. And day after day, I saw the news articles and TV reports, already forgetting what my role was in that story. Already forgetting why I just moved in with my grandmother and ghost father. Age seven, sole witness in a murder investigation. My family had requested that my name be kept out of the media. And so it was reported, *Woman shot and killed by erratic ex-boyfriend outside of her townhouse*, like any other story. But the missing element was the most important: *Young girl sees mother shot to death after school*. Apart from my counselor, no one brought it up to me. Deep down I think they believed I was ok, because I was young, because I would forget. I could see the wonder in my father's eyes like he wished to ask. But no one ever talked about it. Not once.

So I just kept knitting, and watching television shows, and taking time off from school. I liked how knitting made me concentrate, the movements of my hands a rhythmic hypnosis to my cluttered brain. Pulling the yarn through each stitch, new stitches being born from the row below them like the days that seemed to slip through each other not really differentiating until eventually they built up in neat little rows of weeks, months, Sunday masses, and family movie nights. And all of them without the brightly colored Sun of my mother's presence.

I became numb to the world around me. The only things that existed were here in my new house, my new room, with my new toys. I was given everything I wanted, later to be labeled spoiled by friends who would never understand the implications of buying your children's love. I became so numb that even though I knew my mother

was dead, it never quite hit me the way you would think. It felt more like she was on an extended vacation, extended indefinitely. I tried to tell my family that I was okay, even though they never asked. The rule in this house was that if we pretend something didn't happen then that means it didn't happen.

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There were very few pictures of my mother in the house and it just now became clear to me why I was scolded for getting into her picture albums in the closet. They didn't want me to be sad, but what made me sad was forgetting my mother's tired smile, or the slight sadness in her voice when she would sing "You Are My Sunshine" to put me to sleep. I was haunted by her expression the night that she died. The memory was already tattered pieces, my subconscious trying to protect my delicate child mind from trauma. But I remember the look of shock on her face when we saw her ex-boyfriend waiting for us on the sidewalk outside of our townhouse. Like she had just had ice water thrown in her exhausted face; and I had never seen anyone so scared. I wanted it to not be true. I prayed so hard to a God I already wasn't sure about; bargaining my life for hers in the quiet space beneath my covers, vowing that I would never do anything bad again and that I was sorry. The guilt stole my childhood. I went from seven to twenty-five in the span of a few weeks; a child's mind simply cannot feel such an emotion, it must grow and adapt.

And so I grew and adapted. I became tough and strong like my father appeared to be, never daring to tell him my anxieties about God or the desire to know why he needed my mother more than I did. Even at my

young age I could tell that my father felt the guilt too. He blamed himself for my mother's death, thinking that if he wouldn't have divorced her then she would have never met *that psycho ex-boyfriend of hers*. But all his hands knew were tough metals, electricity, and industrial machinery, working graveyard shift as an air compressor tech at the Denver Mint. He didn't understand the courage in expressing your feelings, instead believing that the real bravery was in toughing it out.

But this created a new form of demon, one worse than guilt. I could hear the two of them, him and his demon, in the locked bathroom late at night when he thought I was sleeping. When I found syringes and powdered-sugar-that-was-not-powdered-sugar in his room, I didn't tell anyone. I felt sorry for my father and his pain. I didn't know how to help him. One night I was up late still working on that scarf, listening to my father crying cautiously in the bathroom. I got up and knocked on the door, and surprisingly he let me in. I knew he was coming down from his high pretty hard; it looked like the stash was all used up, like candy wrappers littering the floor. I sat on the counter with my knitting in hand and we both cried silently, still not mentioning the rupture we both felt in our hearts. That was the last time I saw tears slip past my father's eyelids.

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We became separate after that, he told me how much I reminded him of her, how much I looked like her and that it made him sad. Sometimes I wished I had a different face because he quit coming home right after work and hid in the garage on his days off. The space between us grew wider, my grandmother with her signature way of acting

like nothing was ever amiss. She shielded herself from any troubles with a soft blanket of indifference. I began to feel as if I didn't exist in their reality. My dad in addiction's bottomless well, my grandmother in post WWII, and me, still stuck on that sidewalk with my mother, holding her red hands. In the end, I watched a lot of Lifetime movies with my grandmother, ate homemade cookies and knit, knit, knit. I thought maybe I could knit myself away, become lost in the repetition, nothing else mattering, my hands turned into machines that I controlled. By the time I finished that first scarf, it was too long for even my father to wear.

Contributors' Notes

Robin Billings - Such cat, such wow. My cat is not impressed that this was published, but it doesn't involve food or the neighborhood squirrel, so don't take it personally. He has promised to lay on this year's copy of *Obscura*, however. Sir Fluffy McWhiner Paws aka Mufasa is very pleased that he has this opportunity.

Emily Borden - The best part of writing creative nonfiction is that it provides you with an opportunity to take an experience outside of yourself and really analyze it from all angles. It can be an important part of healing which I discovered while writing "Knitting and So On..." helping me to soothe the inner child that was fighting to break free of her past.

Heather Hanson - Often works of opportunity, my photography is inspired by the mundane and happenstance. Focusing on iconography, while applying the principles of light, composition, and chance, I work to express the life in familiar objects. In "Our Lady," the contrast of the dark with falling snow, and the bright, pink, plastic flowers is dichotomous. "Ferris Wheel"'s stylized hues give reference to vintage postcards of amusement parks near the sea. Atmospheric elements facilitate a sense of place and time.

Cody Healy - Cody Healy is an aspiring writer who loves to write fiction. In his first semester his English teacher, Kyle Whitecotton, had his class write a personal essay about themselves; the only thing Cody could think of writing about was his struggles through depression and his sexuality. Cody's teacher encouraged him to submit to Obscura. Cody hopes that his creative nonfiction will help those who are also coming to terms with their sexuality.

Cecily Hill - Cecily Hill is currently attending Red Rocks Community College in her first year out of high school. She is constantly searching for new inspirations and expressing her passion through painting. "Just a Girl" is a nod to Gwen Stefani and the case of equality, painted in the 40s pin up style Cecily admires so much and aspires to master.

Kelli Krayne - Be kind, because you will never know the path that the person next to you has had to walk. As an author, I hope to continue this success with my other works, thank you all for being a part of that.

Rachel Rockenfeller - The inspiration behind "Tree of Time" is the idea that time is a mysterious thing that we acknowledge the effects of, but never truly understand. Trees are a perfect symbol for time because people often carve important moments into trees. I thought that an eternal tree would symbolize the mysteries of time and the memories of moments

that will exist for eternity while evoking emotion and the imagination of readers.

Rachele Roman - Right now, Rachele Roman is working on a General Associates of Arts. She has lived in Evergreen, Colorado for 20 years and says she loves everything about Colorado. Emperor Penguins are her favorite animal and she is proud of the turnout of this first try at painting this piece, “Illuminating Emperors”. One goal Rachele plans to pursue is blogging or writing in a magazine about health-related topics. This includes carcinogens in cosmetics and beauty products, unnecessary additives in our food and other health controversies.

Michael Roper - Michael Roper is a woodworker/wood artist who teaches woodturning the Fine Woodworking Department at Red Rocks Community College. He is also a student in the Spring 2016 sculpture class experimenting with new mediums and techniques. The piece “Mad Max” is a sculptural woodturning. It is a tubular form done with multi-axis woodturning techniques. It is made of local Colorado Flamed Box Elder Burl and it sits on a base of brass and Padauk.

Kevin Stallsworth - When I first tried creating this piece, I would say that it took a bit of time thinking what I wanted to say along with how I wanted to implement imagery into my poem. I had played around with it for a few days trying to make it

flow well. My hopes for this poem was to show how I love using personification as well as showing a scene that is mysterious.

Lauren Vieira - “The Travelers’ Creed” addresses the nexus (and inner turmoil) of wanderlust—the discomfort that comes with both excitement and vulnerability. It was important for me to try to tackle these conflicts in a tangible way, in order to set it aside and stay present. I hope this resonates with other travelers as we continue to explore. “The Bad Kind Of Alone” was a way to memorialize a time in my life that I used to try to repress. The catharsis of its closure was an outlet I hadn’t experimented with, but wish I had sooner. I hope by explaining to the reader the process of “letting go” through this piece, that they may become more perceptive to others who may be carrying the same burdens that I did.

Tony Wright - Tony Wright is an aspiring author working on a nursing program here at Red Rocks. The “Squirrel Paradox” was based on a real event and was originally written as a reaction paper for Psych 101 with Dr. Elizabeth James. While the paper is more philosophical than psychological, it touches on how we react to differing situations and whether we can put the needs of others above our own desires.

Michael Yeatts - Michael Yeatts wrote “Ending It” as part of a creative nonfiction assignment at Red Rocks Community College. With little else to say, he hopes you both enjoy and are critical of the piece.

Submission Guidelines

Contributors must be Red Rocks Community College students at time of submission. Each student may submit up to a total of 3 pieces.

We accept:

Fiction/Nonfiction up to 5,000 words

Poetry up to two pages

Art of any kind (painting, drawing, sculpture, jewelry etc.)

All written works must be in .doc or .docx files, single spaced with 12 point font

All art must be submitted as a .pdf with the highest quality image possible.

We do not accept any copyrighted work.

*Please send all submissions to
rrccobscura@gmail.com*

Acknowledgements

*Printer: The Digital Frontier
RRCC English Department
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