

TEMPER

THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH
LITERARY REVIEW

SINCE 1971



TEMPER₂₀₁₂

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TEMPER₂₀₁₂

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Dedication

Temper 2012 is dedicated to Emeritus Professor Alan Rosen, who launched *Temper* in 1971.

Temper is published by the English Department at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. *Temper* invites submissions of fiction, creative non-fiction, one-act plays, and poetry of general interest. Submissions from current students are accepted during an advertised window each spring. Correspondence may be addressed to temper@umassd.edu.

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Editor's Note

Dear *Temper* Reader,

I'm pleased to welcome you to the inaugural digital issue of *Temper*—the literary review of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. *Temper* has published student's work since 1971 in print format. The move to digital publication allows us to share more examples of high-quality literary work with a larger audience.

A very special thanks to the *Temper* Editorial Board for their time, dedication, and hard work from start to finish.

On behalf of the *Temper* Editorial Board, I'd like to thank everyone who submitted pieces for consideration for publication, as well as the *Temper* manuscript review panel for their efforts.

We appreciate the support of *Temper*'s faculty advisors, Dr. James Bobrick and Dr. Jerry Blitefield. We also wish to recognize the assistance of John Hoey, Don King, and Dr. Anthony Arrigo.

Please enjoy this issue of *Temper*!

Sincerely,

Cassandra Quillen
Temper 2012, Editor-in-Chief
M.A. in Professional Writing Program

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

The Swan Call

Ray Richard

The cramped Cessna paused at the end of the runway while the pilot adjusted his goggles and my grandfather handed new binoculars to all four passengers. The engine screamed, the plane lurched forward and the Great Swan Hunt began.

A sturdy late-summer breeze buffeted the plane as we swept wide over the wetlands and summer cottages of Marshfield, Massachusetts. Five binoculars panned the ground as the pilot executed a close flight over the South River marsh. My father sighted two white bodies floating side-by-side, but they were only Styrofoam cooler pieces. On the next pass, we only saw a few seagulls. The pilot rubbed his whiskers and signaled that he would try again. On our third pass, down in the reeds, behind the downtown clothing store, we saw Romeo nuzzle Juliet's neck.

In February 1969, a nasty late-winter storm led to the escape of my grandfather's two prized swans. Several months later, he mobilized a few boats, an airplane, and a host of relatives to find the elusive pair. After we sighted the escapees, the pilot radioed to a retrieval team that included my sister and her friend. After sloshing through marsh muck and intermittent mosquito trenches, they guided the wayward swans into the calm water of our aviary pond and shut the gate.

As domestic swans, law required that Romeo and Juliet were rendered unable to fly before my grandfather acquired them. In this process, called pinioning, wing tenons are severed, and this reduces the swan's flight capability to several feet, keeping the birds within the pen unless a storm or irresponsible adult opens the gate.

My grandfather, a successful businessman who owned three homes and two black Lincolns, collected swans. Construction on his aviary began in 1960 when he split his compound into two terraces. The new lower level contained the aviary and a fresh water pond next to a two-thousand acre marsh. A large chain link fence kept grandchildren out of the pond and the swans in. On the upper level, the screened Summerhouse provided an ideal perch for swan viewing.

I must confess that my grandfather had an odd streak. He had the means to collect art or gold jewelry, but he chose swans and other exotic waterfowl. He didn't gamble, drink, swear or miss church on Sunday. Instead, he hunted Everglades rattlesnakes, traveled to Mexico alone, and talked to his swans. His adventurous spirit and deep avian respect mirrored behavioral tendencies prevalent in the Irish.

Somewhere in every Irishman or woman's DNA lay a few molecules of deoxyribonucleic acid bursting with quirk, wit and stubbornness. I have deep experience dealing with relatives loaded with these traits and I've developed my own remedies. I learned to negate stubbornness by using the theory of oppositeness. In short, when asking a relative to make a decision, I suggest a position. They respond with the opposite of my position, which is my preferred position. This theory works well with paint choices and funeral home selection.

I've abandoned my efforts to temper Irish quirk in my family. It's a waste of time trying to convert my relatives into conventional citizens capable of sensible decision making. I saw what my common-sense grandmother endured with my grandfather. For example, he named his Dalmatian *Spinach* and his Labrador *Cabbage* because he enjoyed hearing his grandchildren yell the dogs name when they escaped. The aviary and its associated quirkiness caused problems when my grandfather stubbornly refused to moderate his bird socializing and reduce the substantial investment maintaining the bird preserve.

I wonder if his swan affinity had a deeper origin. In Irish folklore, swans conveyed Celtic chieftain souls to the afterlife. Some believed that swans could induce sleep in humans. Swans also had a literary connection; Celtic poets wore swan skin and feather cloaks. In County Mayo, my grandfather's ancestral home, the souls of virtuous maidens were thought to reside in swans. His father immigrated from Ireland, and I'm sure he told tales of the swan to his son. This may explain why I often heard him walking through the aviary, in the middle of the night, talking to Romeo and Juliet.

In his article *The Symbolism of the Swan and the Goose*, Edward Armstrong describes how ancient Irish literature assigns deep significance to the swan: They were eaten during wedding feasts and their images were found on ancient pottery and art work. Swan images usually included a chain that signified power and

wealth. Anne Ross, in her article *Chain Symbolism in Pagan Celtic Culture*, confirms swans prominence in Celtic art, history and folklore. Ross states that the study of the swan: "...will provide an understanding to the religious bearing of the Celtic people."

* * *

Swans are native to Eurasia. Common North American species include trumpeter swans, found in the western states; mute swans, an east coast variety, and tundra swans found in Canada and Alaska. Trumpeter and tundra swans have black beaks and mute swans have bright orange beaks that look like smiles. Black swans are native to Australia and New Zealand.

Estate and park caretakers introduced swan pairs to America in the 19th century. Although they are revered for their regal bearing and beauty, they can attack and kill geese or other swans during mating season. They usually pair for life, although "divorces" have occurred. A male swan is called a pen, a female a cob, and young swans are cygnets. Mature swans can weigh thirty pounds, with an eight-foot wingspan. Ornithologists consider swans intelligent birds with long memories: If you abuse a swan, they won't forget.

I know that they have long memories. I fed Romeo and Juliet boxes and boxes of old lettuce donated by a local supermarket. I carefully placed the lettuce in piles and removed the boxes. They showed their appreciation by waddling over to me when I appeared with the lettuce boxes. The swans didn't like my irresponsible uncle who tossed the boxes over the fence and let the birds extract the lettuce; One day he acquired a bloody swan peck on his hand.

Swans are regarded as predatory birds known to harass other native waterfowl during mating season. They have killed geese who ventured into their territory during breeding season. While looking for placid swan images, I found a video taken by a nature photographer that showed one swan try to drown another swan. The film began with two swans circling around each other on a perfect summer day. When one swan drifted over toward the pond bank, the other swan jumped on its back. Within a few seconds, the trespasser's body and head were forced underwater by the mother swan. To avoid a drowning, the filmmaker had to grab a tree bough and beat the aggressor swan until the trespasser surfaced and retreated with many ruffled feathers.

The British royalty owns all wild mute swans in England. Every year, the

monarchy performs the Swan Upping, or swan census, on the Thames River. The ceremony dates back to the 12th century, when the monarchy wanted to insure a steady supply of swans for royal banquets. Swans are no longer eaten, but this tradition continues.

After Romeo and Juliet returned to the cage, my grandfather celebrated by acquiring two black swans, and the swan pairs peacefully shared the pond for five years. After my grandfather died, my aunts and uncles converted his large fortune into no fortune then misfortune. I moved away from the compound and when I returned a year later the aviary gates were open, the cages ripped, the feed shed window broken and the pond water clear. My uncle said that someone let all the birds out and he remains the only suspect.

The aviary and birds are long gone but the compound remains in our family. While recently cleaning brush from the marsh bank I looked toward the swan pond, now filled with weeds, and thought about Romeo and Juliet, the wayward swans whose adventures landed on the pages of the *Boston Globe*. If you now walk through the great South River salt marsh, look over in the reeds near where Feinberg's Clothing Store once stood. You'll see Romeo and Juliet's descendents rubbing necks while bobbing around the reeds.

Ray Richard of Sagamore Beach, Massachusetts completed the M.A. program in Professional Writing in 2012.

Isolation

Annie O'Toole-Bolthrunis

All locked wards are different, and yet, they are all the same.

You will be led into a room. The room will have two beds, two dressers, a single institution chair for the visitor who will come but won't be allowed in the room. Sometimes the nurses will sit in the chair. It's a metal chair, padded, but not enough to make it comfortable. You will use it to separate your dirty laundry from the clean.

There's a window by one of the beds. You are not assigned to this bed. Your bed is closest to the door. The glass of the window is waxed over so it obscures the view outside and it is always, always locked. You will ask the orderlies, beg the orderlies, to open the window, just a crack because hospital thermostats are eternally set to eighty degrees, but the orderly will just smile and say he can't do that. If he's nice, he'll explain he would if he could but there's a special key and he doesn't have access to it. If he's not nice, he'll just smirk and shake his head before walking out of the room.

There is a common room. It will be high school cafeteria big, large enough for twenty or thirty people to sit in, with rows of cafeteria style tables, an out-of-date television in a corner, surrounded by comfortable chairs. There will be a woman, an old woman, in her eighties, who always sits in front of the television wearing a knit hat. She spends every day staring at the television screen. The woman will never speak unless someone changes the channel and then she will scream and scream so loud that the entire floor comes to see what's happening, even those who are sleeping off their drug-stupors in their bedrooms. Everyone is trying to maintain control, however they can, even though it's all been taken.

There is a medicine counter. At the medicine counter, there is a Dutch-style door where the top and bottom half can swing open either independently from each other or as one. The only time they swing open together is when one of the RNs is leaving for her shift or arriving for another. Otherwise, only the top part will be open. At morning and nighttime vitals the window will be crowded with people waiting for their meds. You are never one of those people. You will

hang back until someone forces you forward to the overweight, smiling nurse who will hand you a Dixie cup full of pills. She will watch while you put them in your mouth. She will watch while you swallow. She will ask you to lift your tongue so she can see that you are not storing your pills, saving them to trade with another patient. She will not explain what the meds are or what they do. She will tell you to ask your psychiatrist.

You supposedly have a psychiatrist, but you will only see him once or twice in the five to twelve days that you are here. He will be responsible for your meds and your discharge, but he only meets with you for a few minutes a couple of times. You wonder how he knows what to give you and when to let you out if he never talks to you and never meets your eyes, but usually the psychiatrist will be nice. You will tell him about school and he will smile wistfully, look at the diplomas on his wall. He will tell you not to give up, take your meds, quit smoking, you will be okay.

This is an empty promise. He is the only one who tells you you will be okay. The ones who see you the most, the counselors and group leaders; the other patients, they all know. They all know that you are destined to a life of bouncing back and forth between the real world and the surreal world of locked psychiatric wards. He tells you you will be okay, but hands you literature that says that you are living with a lifelong illness. Possibly a chronic illness. The chronic part depends on you, but the suicide rate in patients with your illness (Bipolar, Type I) are 30-40% higher than the general population. They tell you this to scare you. You find it comforting. At least you're not the only one who has decided that not-living might be better than living-like-this.

Your days are all the same. Someone wakes you up, too early. 6, 7am. You don't sleep when you're at home but in the hospital it seems like you are never really awake and at night you are dead to the world. You shuffle down the hall. They check your blood pressure, heart rate, temperature. They never tell you the results and they turn the monitor so you can't see. You will not understand this but you are too tired to ask and they are too busy to answer. You will be ushered to the med window where you will go through the routine of telling the nurse your name, having her scan your ID bracelet. This is protocol, but it adds to the feeling that you've been stripped of any identity other than "sick." Other than "Patient." Other than "Lost Cause."

She will give you a cup of pills and a cup of water and you will swallow the pills and lift your tongue. You will ask for Claritin because the stuffiness and dust in the ward are disturbing your allergies. You will be told the nurse will check with the doctor. You probably won't get your Claritin and you will spend the next few days compulsively blowing your nose and shooting daggers from your eyes at the med nurse even though it isn't her fault. *It's protocol.*

The rest of the day is spent in “groups” where you pretend to be empowered through painting wooden jewelry boxes and pretend to be relaxed while pretending to meditate. A man wearing crocs and a ponytail will play a cassette tape in the ancient boom-box and try to guide you on a journey. *You're on the beach. Reach out and touch the sand. Is it warm and dry? Does it sift through your fingers? Is it cool and damp and hard? Can you hear the waves? Walk out into the water, feel the water lapping at your toes. Look out at the horizon...* And you will close your eyes and pretend that you're following along but you're only in this group because if you go to groups you get released faster. It's all a game; a giant game of pretend,. The hospital is only a mock version of Alice's Wonderland, through the looking glass where nothing makes sense but everything makes perfect sense all at the same time.

There are other patients. You will form cliques. The eighth floor of the hospital is like another version of high-school – the addicts hang out together, the manics hang out together, and the people who are incapable of speech, they sit in front of the television together. You will float from clique to clique, the allusive patient who doesn't fit in anywhere. Not tough enough or addicted enough for the addicts, not somber enough for the depressed people, too lucid for the small group in front of the television, and too over educated for the whole lot. You will sit with the same people at meals and listen to them gossip, but mostly you will read. Books have always been there, and in the real-or-not-real world of the hospital, escaping to the definite not-real is instinctive. So you read. Harry Potter.

You will have a roommate, and you will pretend to like each other even though you are both miserable and have no way to define the word “like,” especially in the context of another human being. You are too busy being broken by the medicine, the therapy, the endless, oppressive heat, to form feelings for another person. The hospital does this so they can build you back up as a “normal” person. Instead it merely makes you feel dehumanized.

Finally, after eight? Ten? Fourteen? days, the psychiatrist tells you you can leave. You have been “stabilized.” You have be taken off the old meds, the ones that didn't work, and weaned onto new meds, which you will almost immediately stop taking when you get home. You will sign your name on the line that states that the doctors and nurses told you everything you need to know about your illness but were afraid to ask. They will let your harried looking mother and father carry your overnight bags through the three locking doors and into the elevator which can only be activated by someone with a key. When you get to the car, you will cut your ID bracelet, the first sign that you are finally born again.

Annie O'Toole-Bolthrunis of Nahant, Massachusetts is a graduate student in the M.A. in Professional Writing program.

January 16, 2011

Stevy Mae Allen

Today is the 33rd anniversary of your birth. Although I feel like we have known each other since origin, I still had over a month before I was brought head first into this world. We have such a connection, I wonder if you heard or sensed my scream when I first gulped the pungent hospital air? Who knew after years and years of us having an indestructible bond, you would break it? I think you knew. Somewhere deep inside you knew because early on you made mention of our future. Or actually, lack of a future.

When we finally met for the first time in this lifetime, we were about 12 years old. One of my earliest memories of you was when we were in class and everyone was quiet doing their work. I went up to the teacher to ask a question. As I went back to my desk I was looking in my book instead of where I was going, and managed to step into the garbage can, fall over, and roll in front of the whole class with the garbage can stuck to my foot. As a typical 12 year-old girl, I was very sensitive and got embarrassed easily. You were sitting in the front row and we made eye contact. You laughed, but it wasn't at me, it was because it was funny. I could see the kindness in your eyes and it made me laugh too because you were right – it was funny.

Right from the beginning, I could tell you everything openly and honestly. You never judged or criticized, just listened and hugged. You always made me feel so special with your thoughtful presents, phone calls just to say hello, and unconditional love. You were wise beyond your years and took such good care of me. Like the time when we were in high school and you were worried about me and my home life. You took your mom's truck and we ran away from Michigan to Florida. Never mind that we only made it to Ohio and drove home the next day. On the ride back the clouds were in rows of long skinny streaks in the sunny winter sky. I took pictures of them. Later we compared my photo to the Flaming Lips album cover.

Do you remember when I was 17 and got my tattoo with your initial in it? I told you that I didn't see it as permanent and I would get it removed someday. Now it's someday. But I can't. I can't get it removed because I feel like it's all I have left of you. It's one of the few tangible memories I have of you and I'm lucky

enough to have it with me constantly. So often I will look at it and remember pieces of our life together.

Even in our 20s when we lived on opposite coasts of the country our bond was unbreakable. We each kept phone card companies in business and gave up precious sleep just to spend time together the only way we could. I loved your stories about work and your daily bus ride. You loved to hear the East Warren train through the phone because it reminded you of where I was, your hometown. Where we met and grew up together.

I look at your Facebook page and wonder why I'm not in more photos. Where was I at that time? Or did you delete all the photos I was in because I went to Japan and left you behind? You told me that you were happy I was going and even said you were proud of me. I remember those words because I felt so happy to have your permission, support, respect, and admiration. I couldn't remember the last time someone told me they were proud of me. But as one year stretched into two, maybe you felt I abandoned you. I didn't. I would never do that.

In the beginning, when the pain of losing you was absolutely unbearable, I would cry almost constantly. As the years have gone by, I don't cry as often, but I still think of you at least once a day. Usually I think of the good things and smile. Our million late night talks with my head in your lap or yours in mine, your stories of your life, our childhood pranks, the last time I saw you. Often, it will be a smell that I can't place, but somehow brings you to mind. Your contagious laugh, warm genuine smile, your big heart. Sometimes I remember the bad things that still somehow bonded us even tighter. Like when your tear fell on my cheek as you told me about your mother's attempted suicide, when I knocked on your door and your sister told me you were at the hospital visiting our friends who were just badly injured in a car crash, the bunny you accidentally ran over with the lawnmower and cried about for days after burying it in your backyard. Since I don't cry about, or for you every day anymore, it's almost as if I save up my tears to burst out all at once for special occasions. Like today. They have been spending a lot of time getting ready for the big event and show up like unwanted guests to a party. The flood gates open and they crowd the place, take over and blur out everything else. The pain in my chest is partially from my heart breaking because I miss you so much, and partially because I can't breathe due to the non-stop deep sobs. It's been five and a half years and you still bring me to this. To lying on the floor in the fetal position in a puddle of tears.

I have so many unanswered questions. Some are probably a bit more typical. After 16 years, how could you leave me? How could you leave me to feel this pain alone? Don't you remember all of our good times? Wasn't I good enough for you? Some may be a bit more morbid. What did you look like when she found you? What did the note say that you left? I never did read it. Why didn't you call me when you were feeling so down? Didn't you know I would have done anything for you? We could always sense each other's thoughts and feelings despite proximity. How didn't I intuitively know you needed me? I can feel you near me sometimes. Are you with me at other times that I don't know about? Did I let you down? Are you angry with me like I'm angry with you? I just recently heard that I could feel angry with you because I'm actually feeling guilty. That may be true. But don't you feel guilty too? You were selfish to leave me. Or is that just me being selfish now?

I wish you were here to have a beer with me to celebrate your birthday. Instead I'm alone, toasting to you while drinking my tears. Happy birthday, Bradley.

Stevy Mae Allen of New Bedford, Massachusetts and Auckland, New Zealand completed the graduate certificate in Professional Writing in 2012.

Global Acceptance in a Mug

Abby Ringiewicz

I have a tendency to drink a lot of coffee. Three cups in, I begin to vibrate into a caffeine-driven frenzy. Last fall I found myself drowning in a daily routine; I left my flat around eleven, planned to go to class for noon, and instead propped myself outside of the local cafe (emphasis on ‘calf,’ as the Brits pronounce it), sipping coffee for the ensuing hours. I had become a manic coffee drinker. Or a social whore — I couldn’t tell which.

I was living in London, attending “uni” (the British reference to “university”) and roaming nearby Europe as often as the impairing currency rate would allow. The go-getter American that had left Boston in September had fallen into a hole much deeper than anticipated. I now resembled a blasé Brit, drifting through the streets of London, in search of very little: good chums; good conversation; and a good kick of joe.

I first took notice of the trend in London and — like any admiring tourist — decided to join in. In the midst of tables, shielded by coffee cups, ash trays, stray papers, text books, and cell phones, me and my fellow students sat, drank, and puffed, consumed in our caffeine-driven banter. The underlying link to our table-convening socializing? Coffee. A need for caffeine can be appreciated by all, and it doesn’t take much to convince someone to gather ‘round a table, toss around ideas, and sip their preferred caffeinated beverage. Cafes usher people into social clumping, with the help of worn-in sofas and inclusive round tables. Eureka! It’s so simple.

In my eight-month trek around the Eastern Hemisphere, my love of coffee proved to be more than just *my* wallet-draining addiction — I had discovered the brew loved ‘round the world.

The trend continued as I made my way through Europe. Coffeehouses continued to serve me well in two ways: offering a cup of my beloved beverage and fellow coffee-seekers to revel with, tossing words back and forth. No need to worry about the culture, the people, or the language (although it does make conversation all the more rewarding) — people of the world love coffee, and people of the world share cafes as their caffeine addiction safe-houses.

Globally, ease of casual discourse is comforting, regardless of one's race, religion, age, culture, sex, political views, or iPhone/Android preference. As humans, we enjoy offhand conversation — whether stimulating or less than — and engage in it everyday. That organic, undemanding chitchat — for whatever reason — surfaces in cafes and coffeehouses, perhaps coinciding with society's blanketed love of caffeinated beverages and the animated effect it has on us.

In Rome, struggling with the sense of the Euro, the language, and my general direction, I came across a cafe-looking restaurant (we cafe-goers recognize the hubs). I managed to order a coffee with milk (“caffè con latte”), spilling all of my coins onto the counter with an ingenuous smile. The act resulted in a lovely conversation with an onlooking, perhaps sympathetic, customer, in a combination of his broken English and my shattered Italian ('shattered' being the key word).

While attempting to navigate ourselves through Berlin, a co-traveler and I found sanctuary in a coffeehouse, giving us time to rework our map route and, of course, regain our strength via 'kaffee.' We managed to decipher our way through a conversation with the friendly couple beside us, as they kindly drew directional arrows on our map, leading us through the better half of our day of sightseeing.

Mid-Parisian flight, I, once again (now questioning my ability to mute myself), fumbled into conversation with a lovely French woman over our complimentary hot beverage. We discussed Paris' weather, my studies, and her fixation on Victoria's Secret (something that American women hold over all others' heads).

Such a subtle, fluid, universal instrument will catch on fast if we aren't careful.

Abby Ringiewicz of Rehoboth, Massachusetts is an English major.

We Are Pilgrims

Ray Richard

A few weeks before Thanksgiving, the schools in my small home town near Boston covered their hallways with Pilgrim paraphernalia. Our November classes focused on these immigrants who landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620 after fleeing religious persecution in England.

My exposure to the Pilgrims began in kindergarten when our teacher dressed the boys in smocks and top hats and the girls in dresses like those seen later in the Broadway musical *Les Miserables*. The adults in the audience got a hoot when our class marched into the auditorium as Pilgrim Youth, and they cheered after Mikey and Joanie, dressed as John Alden and Priscilla Alden, squeaked a two-note, ten bar song.

Throughout grade school, our teachers taught us that 17th century Pilgrim families lived straight-laced lives in tidy little houses. We learned that Pilgrims feasted with Indians, prayed, farmed, hunted, prayed and prayed again. As we advanced through the grades, our art work evolved from crayoned Pilgrims to Plymouth Harbor water colors to portfolios full of Plymouth landmarks. In English class, we endured forced readings of *Pilgrims Progress*, a book that idolized Pilgrim society. I believed all the stories until a drizzly October day when my classmate, Johnny Ready, confronted a tour guide under the Pilgrim Rock columns.

Our school superintendent required that our class visit the Pilgrim landmarks in Plymouth, Massachusetts before we entered junior high school. Perhaps the superintendent thought that the trip would make us like model citizens, or he wanted to show us an alternative to the evil counterculture creeping into our lives from the Ed Sullivan Show and Tiger Beat magazine.

A few minutes after we packed into a school bus a teacher detailed our itinerary: We would first visit Plymouth Rock then tour the nearby Mayflower, a replica of the ship that transported the Pilgrims from England. We would conclude the day with a visit to Plimoth Plantation, a recreated Pilgrim village.

Our bus parked in downtown Plymouth in front of the massive granite columns

that shield Plymouth Rock. This edifice would look right parked next to the Greek Parthenon. John Alden, Priscilla Alden and Squanto, or should I say suburban adults dressed like them, escorted us to the shiny brass rail guarding a large granite chunk. In Hollywoodish Old English, John Alden described his voyage from England and the storms they encountered and the swill they ate during the trip that safely concluded when the tidy vessel Mayflower landed on the exact same rock located below us. A few seconds later, the school teachers, synthetic Pilgrims and Indian, and thirty captive school kids experienced catatonic shock when little Johnny yelled out: "How do you know that's the right rock?"

This was like asking the Pope if he is pro-choice. Our teacher/chaperone offered an immediate apology to the pseudos, who suddenly acted like trick-or-treaters touring on the wrong night. A shocked John Alden replied: "Young man, my fellow Pilgrims identified the granite rock in front of you as the famous Plymouth rock, known throughout the world." Johnny pointed toward the harbor filled with about ten-thousand granite rocks the same size or bigger than Plymouth Rock and said: "What about them rocks?" The tour concluded quickly thereafter and Johnny's question remained unanswered. On the walk over to the Mayflower the chaperone tactfully told us to shut our mouths during guided tours.

On the ride home I started to doubt the Pilgrim story. Things didn't add up. How did they chop wood and chase Indians while wearing starched smocks? How did they launder and starch their smocks when dry cleaning wasn't invented for another three hundred years? And what's with the high hats with the belt buckle tied to the front? Why do the women dress like my hippie neighbor with the ten boyfriends?

After high school I moved to my grandparent's farm located 14 miles north of Plymouth Harbor. The farm borders the homestead of Peregrine White, an original member of the Pilgrim Colony. The White homestead lawn includes a stone engraved with the words: "...He was born on the Mayflower. Here he spent the remainder of his days...."

I drove by this engraved rock every day. My thousand hours of Pilgrim indoctrination made me assume that Peregrine lived as a typical Pilgrim; a smock wearing, church-obsessed, Indian chasing (except for Thanksgiving day when they feasted together for a photo op) gentleman farmer with a boring lifestyle that would fit in the pages of Pilgrim's Progress.

A year ago, I researched the history of our farm. The Pilgrim Hall Museum in Plymouth is the main repository for Pilgrim historical documents. When I entered the building, a smock wearing dude pointed me toward several items owned by Peregrine White, including his original cradle. I asked for access to Peregrine White information and he suggested that I visit the museum website section dedicated to this subject.

The *Peregrine White in 17th Century Records* web pages contain historical text copied from original deeds, legal decisions, and newspapers. It includes references to White's birth, father's death, mother's remarriage, and his role in Plymouth Colony politics and militia. The first page reads like typical Pilgrim balderdash: He played by the rules, blah, blah, blah. Everything looked normal until I read the following court record:

6 March 1648-9 : *"Wee psent Peregrin White, and Sara, his wife, both of Marshfeild, for fornication before marriage or contract. Cleared by paying the fine." Records of Plymouth Colony, Vol. 2, p. 138.*

Twelve years of Pilgrim brainwashing shivered in my head. What's going on here? Peregrine White, a real-deal Pilgrim, had engaged in the aforementioned act, got caught, and had to pay a fine? Mrs. Smith never told our fourth grade class this story! My appall tempered when I recalled that I had engaged in the same activity in our guest cottage a hundred feet from the Peregrine White Homestead.

I read the next entry:

29 October 1649 : *"Presentments by the Grand Inquest." "Wee psent William Halloway and Peregrin White, both of Marshfeild, for fighting. Cleared, with admonission to take heed for the future." Records of Plymouth Colony, Vol. 2, p. 147.*

Peregrine was a genuine street fightin' man! Now that's my kind of people! Ready to jam over honor, principal or just for the sake of head-bashin'. I'd been there, while working as Boston nightclub doorman.

The next entry contained another eerie similarity:

9 June 1653 : *"Leiftenant white, for neglecting to giue speedy notice of danger when*

order sent vnto him by a maiestrate to that purpose, and for not conveying speedily a letter directed from the comissioners, videlecete, Mr Bradford and Mr Brown, the said Leiftenant white is fined fifteen shillings." Records of Plymouth Colony, Vol. 3, p. 37.

What a coincidence! Peregrine and I shared another trait: bungling paperwork. I've lost income tax forms, car registrations, checks, and numerous pieces of paper stamped: Important Document--Do Not Misplace.

The next entry reminded me of my role in a trespassing incident:

4 March 1673-4 : *"Isacke Little, in an action of the case, to the damage of thirty pound, for that the said Peregrine White, John Dingley, and Willam Foard, being assembled together since the twenty first day of December last past, did wrongfully enter intoand vpon the land of the said Isacke... Records of Plymouth Colony, Vol. 7, p. 189.*

At the bottom of the page, another similarity:

1698 [*Records of the First Church in Marshfield, Mass.*] : *"Capt Peregrine White the first born Child of New England born November 1620 was admitted into this Church May 22 1698 In the 78th Year of his age." Mayflower Descendant, Vol. 11, p. 38.*

Peregrine avoided church services just like me. He held out for 78 years before he joined a church; I'm still looking for the right one.

After a few hours exploring the Pilgrim history, I had to stop reading the court records. I found anecdotes of public drunkenness, philandering, assault and battery, land disputes, and theft. One entry described how one Pilgrim stole another Pilgrim's wife and the first husband didn't like it so he sued, just like the lover's triangle involving my next-door neighbors. The Pilgrim myth had evolved into a 17th century version of the randy soap opera *The Young and the Restless*. I had worked hard to maintain a conservative lifestyle and I couldn't read anymore about abhorrent Pilgrim behavior.

When I now drive by the Pilgrim statues bordering Plymouth's Main Street, I know that behind those carved faces and well-worn legends, they lived just like us.

Ray Richard of Sagamore Beach, Massachusetts completed the M.A. program in Professional Writing in 2012.

Buddy Blankie

Stevy Mae Allen

As the story goes, when I was born, I was carried out of the hospital in a blanket that was given to my mother at her baby shower. That cloudless day was blindingly bright due to everything being snow-covered from the recent storms. My mother snuggled her fluorescent orange-haired daughter deeper into the soft warm pastel pink and yellow colored blanket without knowing what an important part that simple bedding would play in her daughter's life.

As an only child, Buddy Blankie, as he became known as, was often my only playmate. I would talk to him and really believed he listened. He understood my worries, concerns, laughed with me, and he was always willing to play. I really believed that he was a living thing with feelings. This was exemplified on the day of Buddy Blankie's 'surgery.' Since my blankie and I were absolutely inseparable, by the time I was about 4 years old, he looked like he had been through a war. His edges were worn, holes were starting to form, and he was no longer colorful and pastel. He was more of a putty color from too many washings by my poor mother trying to keep up with the filth I gathered. At that time I also had a very small, well-worn, pastel yellow teddy bear with a little brown nose that I liked quite a bit, named Cuddles.

My aunt offered to remove the zipper on Blankie, which doubled as a weapon from a redheaded child with a bad temper, and put on a pocket to carry Cuddles in. I still remember the very long and serious 'conversation' I had with Buddy Blankie about his 'surgery.' I remember reassuring him it was what was best, it wouldn't hurt too much, it would be over quickly, it would be nice to carry Cuddles around too, and he would be happy with the changes afterwards. In my mind, he listened and understood and I really had comforted him. From there, I remember my aunt sitting at her sewing machine and 'operating' on Blankie as I sat next to her intently watching her every move. The result was a softer Blankie since the zipper was removed, and a dark green pouch the perfect size for Cuddles. We, Blankie and I, were quite satisfied with the results.

There are plenty of stories about the stress and inconvenience Blankie, and my attachment to him, had caused my family. Like the time we were on a road trip

and I forgot him at a restaurant on one of our stops. He wasn't discovered missing until we were two hours away from the restaurant. Apparently, my screaming was so bad and non-stop, that my family had to back-track, adding four hours to our trip, to retrieve Blankie.

Or there was the time he somehow didn't make it in my overnight bag when I visited my aunt and uncle. I couldn't sleep and cried all night instead. My cousins still laugh about it. My aunt and uncle still swear about it.

Throughout elementary school I would put him in my backpack and sneak over throughout the day to touch his thinning material and talk to him to make sure he was ok. I felt more content just knowing he was there. At about eight years old, I decided that I was a big kid and needed to stop sleeping with Blankie. It was my best effort, but still was impossible to not hold him and rub him against my lips while I feel asleep *every* night. By the time I was 13, I had weaned myself off of Blankie quite a bit, but still could not let go completely and I made a bracelet out of a piece of him that was permanently attached to my wrist. Throughout my teens, I would sleep with deteriorating Blankie whenever I was sad, sick, heart-broken, or facing a tough decision....which is more often than not with teenagers. Usually when I would wake up in the morning, there would be bits and pieces of his stuffing in my bed. Throwing away any part of Blankie would be sacrilege, so I started storing him, and his bits, in a bag.

In my 20s he was used quite a bit due to the stress of college and the end of a seven-year relationship with my high school sweetheart. He started to look like a deranged dish towel. His cotton was so worn you could see through almost every bit of him. Most of his stuffing had fallen out of the numerous holes that had formed, and was stored in the bag. Threads of all colors, blue, black, yellow, and orange were popping up out of him in various places where he was mended throughout the years, and his green pocket was starting to pill. Still, he came out anytime I needed him for a night of good rest.

Where is he now? I'm 32 years old and had moved eight hours away from my U.S. hometown for college, lived in Japan for a couple of years, and now am settled in New Zealand. Therefore, Buddy Blankie has become a world traveler. He always flies in my carry-on because no one else can be trusted to handle such precious cargo. His age is showing. He is grey and completely threadbare. He used to be a rectangle, but now he is more of a small square with a tail hanging down. His bag

has more of his stuffing in it than him. However, he has seen every good and bad thing in my life and if there were a fire, he would be the first thing I would grab. If I'm sick, sad, or worried I will pull him out to rub my lips against him just as I did when I was a child. Even as I'm typing this, his bag is an arm's length away to my right in my closet, just in case I should need him.

Stevy Mae Allen of New Bedford, Massachusetts and Auckland, New Zealand completed the graduate certificate in Professional Writing in 2012.

FICTION & SHORT STORIES

Memory

Nicole Dombrowski

Bob creaked the screen door open. Mike sat stiff in his wood rocking chair, patiently waiting.

“In here,” shouted Mike.

“You all set?” Bob asked as he scanned the room. The daylight showed the filth and dirt collected in neat dust bunnies blanketing the porcelain-tiled floor. The gleaming sun shed light on the brown and yellow stained ceiling, beginning to crack like brittle bones. Bob shivered with disgust “no one deserves to live like this” he thought. With a firm hand, Bob grabbed Mike’s elbow, supporting nearly all of his weight as Mike rose up to his feet.

The dashboard clock of Bob’s beat-up Volkswagen ticked a perfect heartbeat. Bob sighed with every turn he took. Although his vision was limited, Mike sat there with his hands folded gazing out the window.

“You nervous, Pop?” Bob asked.

“I just can’t wait for this to all be over so I can go home” moaned Mike. “You’re trying to send me to the looney bin, I just know it! You know, you don’t have to send me away yet, you’re getting everything once I’m gone anyways,” snapped Mike.

They pulled up to the hospital and Mike hesitantly unbuckled his seatbelt and waited for Bob to come around and help him out of the car. With a cane in one hand, Mike slowly dragged himself up to the doorway. Bob carried Mike’s bags, shadowing his every move to be sure to catch him if his 90-year-old-legs stumbled. They checked into the room and waited for a nurse to come interview Mike, avoiding one another’s eye contact.

There was a knock at the door.

“Hello, my name is Meghan and I just need to ask a couple of questions for your evaluation. How would you describe your eyesight, Mike?”

“I can barely see, everything looks like a silhouette and I can only see directly in front of me.”

“I see,” said Meghan, “Well we’ll help you to put eye drops in during your stay here and prepare you for your eye surgery in two weeks. I have a couple of more questions to ask you. Mike, do you know today’s date?”

“Um, erm, it’s a...” Mike paused, “it’s Monday.”

“Yes, but do you know the date?” asked Meghan.

“Yeah, um, hmm, February?” Mike replied.

It seemed like a lucky guess. “How about the year?” asked Meghan.

“Uhh, nineteen, nineteen ninety-eight?” replied Mike.

“It’s 2012, corrected Meghan. But that’s okay! Thank you for your time gentlemen. Make yourself at home, Mike.”

“So, I have your house key and I’ll be sure to collect your mail and stay on top of your bills while you’re here” began Bob. “You know, there are a lot of friendly men in the lounge, you should go make conversation, Dad.”

“My son should be here any minute” interrupted Mike. “He’s really very smart. He’s a computer engineer. My, how he really made a great life for himself” Mike went on.

“Dad... it’s me. It’s Bob.” He looked at Mike and saw his confusion. “Look, I’m going to head out, I’ll give you a call tomorrow and check on you, okay?”

Bob walked out, powerless. He hoped the nurses would prevent him from going back home after his surgery but Mike’s stubbornness was the worst diagnosis.

Nicole Dombrowski, of Mansfield, Massachusetts is an English major.

For the Love of Cheese Bagels

Elise DePlanche

I stared at the bagel container in disbelief.

"No cheese bagels?" I asked the woman at the food stand.

"No. They don't come to this building anymore."

Plucking out a poppy seed bagel with disgust, my plot began to brew.

* * *

Peering over the corner of the roof, I waited with the crows in the early morning fog.

Then I heard the kitchen door squeal as three women guided breakfast-laden carts out onto the pavement. After a week of observation, I knew where each was bound.

Creeping along the roof with the quiet tenacity of a tree frog, I stopped at a carefully constructed obelisk of textbooks. I dried my sweaty palms as the women crossed through the building. When the wheels struck concrete once more, I launched the stack over the edge.

The women abandoned their carts to inspect the noise, and I dashed across the roof. After lowering myself down to a second-floor balcony, I made a calculated leap to the pavement and rolled. Heart pounding, I swapped the bagel bags. Then, slipping away with sleuth-like stealth, I concealed myself behind the staircase. My breath flew in so fast it tore up my lungs like fiberglass. But the burning was worth it. I would have a satisfactory breakfast once again.

* * *

"Are you going to do this every day?" my friend queries over lunch.

"I don't see why not."

"Well you could just grab one at the arts building on your way to class."

A long pause.

"Shut up, Dave."

Elise DePlanche of Berlin, Massachusetts is majoring in English and Psychology.

To Be in Her Shoes

Kirsten Bryan

Augustina shuffled through the card catalog. It should have been right on top. She removed the drawer completely from the wooden cabinet.

It must've fell.

She tilted her head as she reached into the dark cubby, grasping for what he promised he'd leave.

But there was no letter.

Though thirty years had passed, a middle-aged Augustina still longed for Antonio – her young, handsome love from long ago who didn't choose her.

"We met at the ice cream parlor. He was just the bee's knees! He insisted on paying for my cone," Augustina recalled to the stark white wall that stood solid as brick with a soft exterior.

"Ohh," she said in her most dramatic fashion, "he was just darling. But..." she paused, "he had another woman." Her eyes watered. Her mouth remained open. She shook her head from side-to-side and her short brunette locks swayed.

"Don't I look good as a blonde?"

Her quizzical eyes shifted to the wall, seeking approval.

"Well it was all the same," she shrugged. "He didn't want to be with *her* anyway. We used to sneak each other love letters through the library's card catalog y'know."

Augustina closed her eyes and nodded her head. She laughed uncontrollably, swaying from side-to-side. "Oh! It was the most whimsical of affairs!" She sighed heavily. "I just loved that man *Antonio*." Her voice drew out his name like a ballad.

"I know he wanted to marry me. He told me!" Augustina rocked back and forth. A heavy tear streamed from her left eye. She couldn't wipe it away. Her white coat restricted her movements.

“Ah!” She giggled, “Isn’t my hair just so long and marvelous?”

Augustina looked at the padded partition, waiting a few moments for a comment. Augustina’s smile quickly faded. Her eyebrows suddenly squirmed together.

“I told him I wanted to run away with him. I would’ve done anything for him- but no! He left with Olivia Nobel—that long-haired blonde from 6th Street.” Her voice quivered, “Oh to be in her shoes...”

Augustina’s upper body swayed in a circle as she sat on the floor. Her belted coat’s hardware rattled as she pushed her upper body onto the floor in one vigorous sweep.

“NO!!” She screamed frantically crying. A man hurried to Augustina’s metal door. He managed the lock and burst into the room. The man’s white coat floated through the air as he swooped to Augustina’s side and grabbed her shoulders.

“Miss,” he said through heavy breaths, “Can you tell me your name?”

Augustina’s face looked like war-paint made of tears.

She rolled her eyes and broke into hysterical laughter.

She lay struggling to find a neutral face. She focused her eyes on the man, narrowing in as if she squinted from a bright light. In a voice that did not sound like her own she said,

“Why...I’m Olivia Nobel.”

All the while the wall stood silent, padded to protect Augustina from self-harm.

Kirsten Bryan of Fall River, Massachusetts is an English major.

Looking Up

Billy Mitchell

That night I wandered through the city looking up—looking up at the buildings and their lights flashing slowly in and out, in and out; blurring against the stars that frothed against the night sky, floating through the 2 a.m. streets like a ghost, wondering what was going to happen, wondering where she was, and where I was. That night, I remember, I didn't know where I was. That was one thing I knew. I remember that.

I walked down the middle of some empty side street past a closed convenience store with writing written on the window in red chalk, and past a hundred stoops made of brick with nothing on them but bags of trash, or vines, or potted plants, or little lights. I remember seeing people on the stoops or in front of the apartments or on the streets; a girl dressed in red with messy lipstick smoking a cigarette yelling, a group of people laughing loudly about something I had missed, a girl sitting on the steps talking on her cell phone quietly with her head held in her hands, or a couple having a drunken argument. I don't remember if I said hello, or smiled or even acknowledged these people. I really hope I did. I'm sure they would have appreciated knowing there was someone in this sad city who would smile at them.

I remember seeing the park glowing in the distance in a dim blur, so I walked toward that, making my way across the now desolate streets under the traffic lights and the skyscrapers and airplanes. I walked underneath the Christmas lights strewn over the boughs of garland and pine trees, still left up from Christmas two weeks earlier. I remember thinking how sad and empty the lights looked now that their short-lived purpose was all used up and obsolete; like somehow they just didn't glow as bright as they did before Christmas. Those sad Christmas lights... somebody should really take them down, I thought.

I remember I didn't know how much time had passed, when I finally saw her across the street walking in the opposite direction as me, and in the opposite direction as the occasional car that passed blurry under the always-on lights of the city. I didn't call out to her, but turned around and followed parallel on the other side of the street. When I reached it, she stopped, turned her head, and

glanced back down the stretch of road, now vacant of cars and people. She looked with her clear eyes down the narrow city street, and then at me. I thought she was in a movie. I don't remember if I called out to her or not, but she saw me and smiled. I fought the urge to smile back, but couldn't, and did, but only for a few seconds.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she asked smiling, looking around at the buildings and holding out her hands to catch a snowflake. And then she looked down.

She looked so pretty that it made your stomach hurt. The kind of pretty that makes your nose itch and tingle and makes your eyes water. The kind that made you forget everything but feel everything all at once. I didn't look her right in her blue eyes; I couldn't. She was wearing a black dress. She must have been cold. It was freezing. It was January.

I remember I fought back a smile, and sort of shook my head and shrugged my shoulders, almost getting caught in her eyes. I realized I should answer.

"I've been wandering around..." That was all I could say. She stared down at the rocks and the salt on the sidewalk and over at the dirty snow pushed against the buildings, kicking a little piece of ice around –left then right, right then left— with her little feet. She moved her head as she followed the little piece of ice sliding across the uneven cobblestones of the sidewalk. She gave a slight smile. I thought I heard her singing, some strange melody that seemed familiar to me at that particular moment, but I'm still not sure. She looked up from the piece of ice and at me, smiled again, and watched her breath ascend as she exhaled into the frigid, sad air.

"It's funny how breath does that, isn't it...?" She looked back at me after her breath had disappeared. "I mean, you know...I know why it happens and everything, it's just...funny? Isn't it..." Her voice trailed off down the empty boulevards to a whisper, carried away by the rolling streets and sidewalks. She breathed out once more and watched it disappear again into the thin air; into the flecks of snow that fell. Into that thin, cold air that hurt your lungs when you let it in.

And I remember I just stared at her, but not her directly, but things around her. I remember thinking how ridiculous I must have looked to her just standing

there. So I reached out and lifted her hair with two fingers and let it fall, cold and smooth. She smiled nervously and looked down at the little piece of ice again.

“Your hair seems shorter now. Is it shorter?” I asked after a while. She didn’t seem to know how to respond. She just kept smiling and looking down and watching her breath. I remember wishing I’d never said anything at all.

I remember Sam coming from behind me and drunkenly play fighting with me, throwing his arms in the air and fake boxing around me in a cloud of gin and cologne.

“Where the hell were you, you son of a bitch?” he asked punching me playfully in the stomach. “We’ve been calling you, we thought you were lost for good.” He went to punch me again but stumbled on the ice and fell straight back. Everyone laughed at him, and I realized everyone else was with me, laughing. I don’t remember if I was though.

Then I remember getting into a car, or a taxi or something--I don’t remember who was driving—and staring out the window and trying to watch everything as it passed by, everything I had ever walked by and looked up at. I tried to look up now but everything went by too fast.

And then she was sitting next to me. I looked over at her and thought she was looking at me, so I turned my head and looked out the window again. We were stopped at a red light, and I was staring at a man holding flowers rapping on the window. He motioned for me to open the window, but I just stared at his cracked lips and dirty hands. “Five dollars,” he mouthed. “For my kids.” And we drove away.

But then I heard it. I heard her singing that melody again. And there were words this time.

“Come with me...” she sang, softly like water, over the hum of the night. I looked straight at you, but you stared straight ahead.

“Come with me...” you sang again, slower, and then you smiled at me. And I wanted to, more than anything.

But then you were gone, and I was alone again. Just like that, you were gone. So I kept looking up.

Billy Mitchell is an English major from Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Red Gingham (1948)

Adam Turner

It was the last day of school and I could hear the bees humming drunk on the June heat hugging the marigolds on the other side of the windows kept open in invitation to a breeze that wouldn't come. Miss McAfee was wearing a red gingham dress, like the oilcloth mom used to cover the table in the backyard when people came over in the summer but the pattern was finer and the light cotton swept about her knees like snow and rose petals when she walked. Miss McAfee was very pretty and all the boys in the class said that they were going to marry her. Molly said that she heard her mother say that Miss McAfee was married but nobody wanted to believe it so nobody did. Once at recess Jimmy and Ralph got into a fight about it. Jimmy was taller and bigger than Ralph and all the other boys and had wrists and knuckles knobby like an oak and one day at recess he walked up to Ralph when we were playing marbles and asked him if he liked Miss McAfee.

Ralph didn't say anything but just kept looking straight down at the ringer ready like a musket ball wadded and rammed down the barrel of his arm and lining up the shot that was going to knock one of the red marbles I got for my birthday out of the circle.

"Hey, you. I heard you like Miss McAfee" he said but Ralph didn't say anything, he just lined up the shot calm and cool and with a flick of his thumb and the clack of stone on glass one of my red marbles was his. He stood up smiling and was four or five inches shorter than Jimmy but just looked him square and said yes.

With a "Well you can't have her, she's mine" Jimmy pushed Ralph to the blacktop. Ralph dusted himself off and stood up back up and brushed the small bits of stone that stuck in the indentations they made in his hand out against his corduroys and then without warning Ralph punched Jimmy right in the jaw. It wasn't a very good punch because Ralph wasn't very big or strong and didn't know how but he punched him right there and nobody not even Jimmy knew what to do at first. Ralph got a split lip and black eye for it and both he and Jimmy had to stay after school every day for a month but we didn't look at Jimmy the same after that and he knew it and everybody knew that Ralph had taken something from him that day and always after that, which was in March, Jimmy was trying to get it back again.

It was the last day of school and Miss McAfee was giving us back our spelling tests and report cards near the end of the day and Jimmy and Kyle were

sniggering quietly in the back of the room while Miss McAfee was walking up and down the rows between the desks. Jimmy and Kyle sat beside each other and when Miss McAfee came to them Kyle started asking her questions and Jimmy used his ruler to slowly lift the airy fabric of the dress's hem. Kyle kept talking and Jimmy kept inching the end of the ruler up, up, and anyone who saw what was happening was pinned with the feeling that it was wrong to watch but worse to look away and Miss McAfee didn't notice until the hem of the dress had just passed the top of her stockings and in a violent swirl of confetti she struck Jimmy across the mouth and there was a sound like the erasers clapping after our multiplication tables that stayed in the air. The only thing that moved was the thin line of blood that started to trace its way from the corner of his lip down his face, too shocked even for tears.

Miss McAfee turned red as the red in her dress and hung her head to hide her face in her blonde hair and slowly walked to the front of the room and put the rest of the papers and report cards on her desk and stood at its corner for a what felt like too long and not a single person wanted to breathe. Some watched her and some watched the speck of blood roll unstopped down the point of Jimmy's chin and I thought I saw her keep in a shudder. Then she sat down and looked at us smiling weakly and said "Please get your papers on the way out, and enjoy your summers" and nobody moved at first and then one by one the students who already had their report cards crept along the edges of the room and burst out the door into the heat and the summer freedom and then the students who still had to get their report cards got up and delicately picked through the stack of papers for theirs and without saying anything left too. I was in the back of that line and I saw that Miss McAfee was biting the inside of her lip and that her eyes shined brighter than usual and while I waited for the other students I realized that I had never really looked at Miss McAfee's desk and that it was plain like an open field, not some desks I'd seen that have the mad clutter of a city, and that instead of a farmhouse there was a picture frame I had seen but didn't notice before. The line got shorter as the students got their papers and left quietly without saying goodbye or have a nice summer to Miss McAfee who was sitting with her hands folded in front of her and staring empty ahead. When I got to the desk mine were the only papers left and I took them and looked at her face but she didn't look back and I followed her eyes to the picture frame sitting on the empty field tall and thin like a grain silo because of its angle and I could make out a smudge of snow and rose petals and khaki.

Adam Turner is an English major from West Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

The End Has No End

Nicole Dombrowski

My heart dropped to my stomach, like the sinking of lead to the bottom of the ocean. My pulse vibrated in each of my ears as my vision blurred. My throat was so dry I could barely swallow my own saliva, let alone eject a huge scream. My eyes scanned down to his hand, tightly gripped around me. I wanted to run. His hand engulfed the width of my entire upper arm, his fingers sunk into my skin with a grip as tight as a boa constrictor about to devour his dinner. The walls of the car wavered; despite all of the windows I felt so confined, like I was suffocating. I felt so dizzy I wondered what he would do if I fainted. Maybe fainting would save me, I held my breath trying to increase my light-headedness, if I'm unconscious I won't feel him hurt me. I slowly pulled my eyes up, careful not to meet his. He kissed me hard and passionate, I didn't want to kiss back but my weakness prevailed. I still loved him.

I felt the thundercrack of the backside of his hand sweep my face. The sharp pang echoed like a screeching electric guitar. I kept my eyes closed and froze with my head down between my knees, afraid if I moved or said the wrong thing his hand would embrace me again with the pain of adoration. A tear streamed down my left cheek, cooling the sting of my scarlet red skin. He delicately stroked my face, catching my tears and flinging them away. In a whisper, "I love you," roared in my ears, and his breath healed my broken heart.

He finally unlocked the car doors and I followed him inside the apartment without hesitation. I sat straight up on the bed stiff as can be and paralyzed with fear, thinking about this stranger he had become. He left the room and showered. Not a word was spoken. We didn't talk much anymore. I used to confide in him about everything, he always understood exactly what I meant even though I've never been good with words, but maybe his nods of agreement were never that genuine. John always had trouble expressing himself; instead of asking me to go steady he just started calling me his girl. I began to like John's power over me; I've never been a decisive person so it was fitting to have someone call all the shots. Our relationship was convenient, until the first time I disagreed with him.

I know he loves me, and I know I'm all he has. He needs me to take care of him. The first time he hit me I was going to leave him, drop everything right where I was standing and get out of this toxic mess. John barricaded the door and got down on his knees promising he would never do it again, I really did believe him. But, just a few days later I forgot to call him back when I got off the closing shift at the diner. He showed up to my house and demanded I come out to *talk*. Every small slip up of an unanswered call or text, if I made other plans without asking him, if I got drunk with the girls and he wasn't there, all resulted in bruises and welts concealing my persona. I became a different person; I became John's punching bag of frustration with the rhythm of devoted affection. I was stuck with his powerful hold over me, gripping every last original thought and feeling in my head. I feared what he might do if I ever turned my back on him, not just to me but himself.

I thought back to when we first met and he still lived at home with his parents. His house was like the American Dream on the outside. A white picket fence guarded any visitors from making the mistake of stepping inside. The kitchen smelled of stale Chinese food and wet dog. The countertops were as stained as his Marlboro teeth and the cabinet paint peeled over like a bad onion.

It was a constant war inside that house. His parents screeched like sergeants about to bomb civilians. After all, that's what their kids were, innocent bystanders caught amidst a concluding battle of a civil war. Filth and garbage cover the dirt brown carpet, like laying a blanket over a crime scene. No one questions the original color of that rug, for it hadn't been seen since happier days, if you could even call them that. The family's home turned rapidly into the paradise of an addict's meth lab, and white powder snowed over the last family photo ever taken.

We both avoid thinking about the first day I met his family back in '02. I arrived on a sunny July afternoon wearing my white sundress I had bought for the occasion. I expected to have a short introduction to his parents and then sneak off to be alone, we were always alone, I was used to that. But, instead of shaking my hand, his father painted his teeth green with the tablets he placed on his tongue. I held John's hand as we sat in the living room and listened to the shattering of glass dinner plates and chairs crashing into the walls. Next thing we heard was the clap of his father's hand on his mother's porcelain skin. She tumbled down the front stairs like a tornado furiously taking vengeance out on a

neighborhood. Sirens rang; John and I never went back to that house, and I'm pretty sure he never went back to that memory.

I heard the water shut off. I walked down the hallway, long and narrow. The walls waved in and out like the ripples of a pond. And here I walked, alone, shrinking, as if I were small, quiet as a mouse. Under the doorway I would sneak, and pass by the dirt from his feet. I am as important as a pebble from the sole of his shoe. I looked up and there he stood, twenty-five feet tall, proud with his chest out. I reached my arms up to him, but the image in the mirror distracted him. He began to grin his cheesy car salesman smile as he buttoned up dress shirt. He glanced at the mirror one last time and smoothed out his bushy brow as he stepped right over me on his way out.

Silence filled the apartment. I tip-toed and peaked out the window watching him step into a cab. I had to break free. My body convulsed with resentment, I wanted to hate him but something inside me wouldn't let me. I had to break away. With a deep breath, I picked up his brown box from under the bed and pulled out his beloved pouch of white particles. I laid it out in three perfectly parallel lines on the bedside table and breathed in his insanity. I struck a match and lit his only picture of us. I laid down flat on my back on his side of the bed, I thought to myself, "And with this flame, my soul is free. You could have been the death of me." As I closed my eyes I clenched the burnt ash of our relationship tucked neatly into his satchel.

Nicole Dombrowski, of Mansfield, Massachusetts is an English major.

Dinner at Olive Garden

Elise DePlanche

He scoops some fettuccini, and I study the scattered tribes of acne inhabiting his face. His greasy hair is parted to the side, and he's dug up a nice button-down. The shirt can't disguise his floppy stomach, but I appreciate the effort.

It's the only thing that's making me feel like this date might go well. He hasn't been staring down my dress the way my nerdy dates always do, and he hasn't been looking nervous. He must be noticing the pound I gained this week.

"What do you want to do after school?" he asks, corralling pasta around his plate.

"I'm not sure, but it'll be award-winning."

"Wow. That's a pretty high goal."

"Yeah...I'm pretty awesome at nursing."

I stare at my tortellini so my pupils don't whisper that I'm not a nursing major. I'm not an anything major, currently.

"Do you have any siblings?" he asks.

"I have two sisters," I say, flipping my hair as if I have a habit of it. Guys seem to like that. "But don't get any ideas; they're not as awesome as me."

I laugh, and it sounds like a sitcom sound effect.

"I wasn't getting any ideas," he says, leaning back in his chair with this look I can't read. I want to stare at my tortellini again, but guys hate that. They like confident girls, or so says Cosmo.

"You know, for a nerd you've got some good social skills," I say.

His confusion brings his caterpillar brows so close together they look like a unibrow. "Thanks?"

"You're welcome."

The waitress comes over with her golden skin and tiny waist, and leans over my date.

"Ready for the check?"

"Yes please," he smiles, round face upturned.

He hasn't smiled at me that way all night. If I can't even win over some pathetic nerd, how am I supposed to get a regular guy? I'm just no good at this.

I adjust my dress, feeling my boobs bounce in the double push-up bra. I hop a little for extra effect. Confident girl, confident girl.

“So look,” I say, staring him down, “I think we should hang out at my place after this. You know, have some drinks.”

“I think it’s a little soon for that,” he says, stroking a scruffy almost-beard.

“You know I’m asking you to mess around, right?”

“Yes! Oh my God...” He leans his forehead into his hand. “I’m not *stupid*. You’re very cute, but you’ve been talking down to me all night, and I just want this date to be over.”

I can feel tears forming, but I tell myself to stop so I don’t look totally pathetic. No guy turns down sex because the girl’s rude.

“Well...I didn’t like you anyways.”

“Thanks,” he says.

Elise DePlanche of Berlin, Massachusetts is majoring in English and Psychology.

I've A Notion...

GBXR

Behind me is the major entirety of a dissonant—yet loving—kingdom known as 'Earth'. It has over two-hundred thousand different colors, more than three million distinct kinds of animal life, and an infinite number of entirely free wills.

Some of these spirits are attempting to follow the divine plan (read: fate). I am one of these spirits. Walking this path is profoundly difficult—at the same time—immeasurably fulfilling. As challenging as it is to move forward virtuously in each moment, I am grateful for my sturdy disposition to advance. I also appreciate the blessings; the discernible hints.

I have explored this country once or thrice, my hands gripping the mane of an aggressive, sophisticated, and exquisite dragon-like colt. Its skeleton, muscle, skin and sinew are constructed of refined light. It is held together by a clear, ethereal membrane of divine consciousness.

It stands at my shoulder now.

In form, the 'Earth' nation can be broken down into two simple and individual pulses—one negative—and the other positive. All objects—whether material or immaterial—can be seen and understood as either, in this unsystematic context. Nevertheless, each may also have an intrinsic polarity assigned to it for ease.

I am standing at the last corner of a cliff, whose edges converge at my feet, staring outwardly into oblivion—the universe. Its movements are at times chaotic, at others ordered—at all times blissful.

It is in flux, finding stasis and instability at whim.

Do not get me wrong, it can be frightening sometimes. The luminous bodies of the heavens... burn out on occasion. Now and then, planets can lose their capacity to sustain life. Forms billions of times more epic than ourselves can be crushed by black holes into united matter and light. Yet, here I find also the most honest forms of beauty. Here I find also the most magnificent manifestations of the beatific. These present themselves in various ways—Massive, hyperactive plasma-beings shooting across the cosmos at perplexing rates. Singularly magnetic stars spinning at paces beyond our comprehension, fusing into a relatively minuscule and dense collaborative of matter.

This is the universe, the most noble and unlimited consciousness. Honestly, I am ready to leap into it head first. I am ready to drift off into its wide reaches until I find a locale, one which is entirely new and unconquered by my self.

Then there is life.

In conjunction with all of this, we find ourselves reasonable and intuitive—capable, sentient beings. We drink water. We live. By our infinite wills of spirit, mind, body and emotion—we live.

Existence. Aren't you curious about its point? To me, the interesting truth of it is that the ultimate power of the first, whole spirit can be seen—virtually without limit—in each and every... thing. Every. Damn. Particle.

The first spirit—last known intact as the timelessness of the big bang—lives, expanding throughout the pandemonium. Throughout the farthest extensions of space. Our soul atoms are infinitesimal parts of that massive superego. Our only purposes are to create; the more artistic and intelligible the creation, the more moving. The more gravity it has. I imagine that there are beings more colossal and wise—conscious—than we will ever manage to be here. I also submit that we may be able to move on and become spirits such as these.

How may we? By the virtuous, the logical, the intuitive and the aesthetic—ultimately, by the positive and the self-reliant motions of our egos.

By succumbing to our ids sparingly, if at all.

I am a soldier of the Sun who is living as I take my last step out of the darkness—a darkness whose moon is accompanied by the baying of wolves. Whose moonlight creates jagged shadows.

My head is on the other side of the barrier. The notable difference is the presence of the sun, which is radiating knowledge. It is a clear day of light. Everything is good, simply understood.

I am suspended just part of the way between a most inky night and a very luminous day.

The fine, ephemeral veil which bisects my being is a link to eternity. It is something supernatural. Something pleromatic. Divine.

I want to explain my present self a bit more:

I am only a singular being of animated, eternal light.

I have a body of bone and tissue. This form has grown from the earth—as do all plants—and is infinitely more massive than my true being. I give it motion.

I think with my mind. Surprising, yeah? This is where my abilities are deciphered, and then acted upon by my free will. I form ideas.

I feel things right at the center of my consciousness, my chest. My heart. I

listen to my intuition, the voice of fate.

I will my thoughts into being. I bolster those who are weak, as best that I may sustain them, simply by living powerfully.

I analyze all life, since it is all sacred. Each small piece is multifaceted. Each part is mysterious. I am curious.

I weigh the options carefully, thinking about the effects of each. There is no action without reaction.

I desire to explore, and to do so often. A journeying spirit asks me to traverse the spectrums.

I see the light of positivity. Never may I live without hope.

I use material things for good. Concrete knowledge is also foundational to this concept. Give me truth.

I know that we are all equal, regardless of our beliefs or manifestation. We are only different to keep things interesting.

I believe that there are mysteries out there, things to imagine that have not been, and things which are that we have not imagined.

I create.

GBXR is an English major from New Bedford, Massachusetts.

MacGuffin

Matthew Costa

The human mind is far more complex than many seem to believe, except when caught in the path of a high caliber bullet.

Leland Walsh hated complexity, and to him the inner machinations of the brain were among the most infuriating elements of mankind. Among the fragile tissue and pulsating neurons, emotions and memories quietly brew in the crimson lined darkness, mingling and intertwining, frequently coming to light at the most inopportune of times as if only to wreak havoc on the soul of the proprietor. For most, opportunity and optimism help cast out these melancholic burdens that plague so many of our sleepless nights. For Walsh, hope now lay permanently locked in a safe within his own mind, the seals welded shut, the lights left out, never to be illuminated again so long as his brain could function.

Walsh's body slammed hard against the side of the table. His left hand shot down and braced for impact, his sweaty palm sliding over the mahogany and clasp a letter opener in the process. His assailant grabbed a vase off a nearby shelf and hurled it at him. Walsh took the hit across his right shoulder and charged, hacking with the blade and connecting with the killer's chest.

There was blood.

The man spiraled to the floor, clutching the wound and screaming. Walsh rotated the blade, the end now pointing towards the floor, and moved toward his injured opponent.

Glass shattered. A hole appeared through the rear window of the hotel room, then on either side of Walsh's head.

Blood cascaded across the wall and coated the door. The German's body collapsed and hit the tile floor hard. There was silence.

Brett Wright staggered to his feet and studied the macabre scene with fascination. Panting, his hand slid down and passed across his chest. The fingers then gradually lifted up in front of his eyes.

Bastard.

Wright looked at the body with resentment, trying to calm down. His heart was begging to be let out of his chest, slamming relentlessly against his rib cage every half second. He wiped the sweat off his brow as a shiver passed down the column of his spine.

He turned to the east window of the tiny room and peered into the cool night sky, his eyes scaling the edifice of a modern office building across the street.

In one of the upper windows of the imposing structure, a small, blue orb of light winked at him.

She was heading to the car.

Wright quickly moved to the body, which was slowly being framed by a thick, dark lake of blood, and set about searching the man's pockets.

Where is it?

Wright's hands expertly frisked the body as the blood continued to spread. Working in intelligence conditions the mind for the sadistic and gruesome, however feeling up a corpse was something Wright still had a hard time stomaching. He found what he was looking for in the left front pocket of the man's dress shirt. He pocketed the object himself, stood, and took one last look at the body.

Brett Wright opened the blood stained door and quietly slipped out.

Making his way quickly down the hall, Wright's ears pricked up, concerned as to whether the occupants of the other rooms had been disturbed by the violent scuffle that had just ended a few doors down. A woman's elongated snore escaped the key hole of room 432. The remainder of the floor was silent. Wright entered the elevator at the end of the corridor and pushed "1."

As the lift began its descent, Wright checked his leather strapped wrist watch. It was half past two in the morning. Paris had treated him well, but this evening's events had been more than enough to motivate him to head back to Maryland.

The elevator doors slid open. Wright stepped into the gilded lobby and strolled out onto the wide concrete steps that descended to the sidewalk and the main road. It was a cool, comfortable night. Wright took a deep breath, felt the air fill his lungs, held it, and then quickly exhaled. He then moved in front of a backlit transit map of the city that was positioned by the road and stared absently into it, paying no mind to the vast array of complex lines but to the icy, ironic figure that reflected back at him.

Brett Wright was just under six feet in height, of slim build, and wore a black fleece jacket with khaki pants that lead down to his brown loafers. His hair and eyes were also of brown complexion, while his lightly tanned skin showed signs of aging. At 34 he was not yet an old man, but he never believed he'd live to see the sunny beaches of Fort Lauderdale or the rolling green fairways of Castle, Ireland anyway. He smiled grimly to himself and turned his attention back to the street.

A black Audi A6 was slowly making it's way toward him. The car came to a halt below a street lamp a few yards from where he stood. As he approached, the

driver rolled down the window. Even in the warm lighting, her normally tanned face looked pale, her typically immaculate brown hair frizzy, and the deep pupils enveloped by her stark blue iris' dilated and panicked. Wright gave a weak grin.

"Could have gone worse," he said.

Jess Snow looked at him with tears welling in her eyes. These were not tears of remorse or concern, however, and Wright knew it. She was angry. Her voice fought for control, "We weren't supposed to have a body count on this op. What the hell-"

"You know what, I'm going to stop you right there," he walked around the hood of the car and opened the passenger side door, "This wasn't an *op*, remember? More of an errand than anything else. It may even be beneficial to call this a working vacation." Stepping into the vehicle, he felt his muscles relax as his body settled into the firm leather seat. He continued, "Besides," he dug into his pocket and extracted the small plastic bag he had recovered from the body. His companion stared at the jagged silhouette inside the package, her grip on the steering wheel tightening. Wright watched as her knuckles gradually turned white.

"Errand?" She said quietly, "*We tracked down a German-American hit man in Paris.*"

"No need to remind me," muttered Wright, his hand cupping the blood seeping from the fresh wound on his chest.

"Let's look at the events that have transpired since the discovery of his location."

"For whose benefit?"

"You stripped the key card to the hotel room he was in from that security officer you choked out in the lobby. That's one."

"Jess we really don't have time."

"Two, you strolled through the door to that room as if it were your own, unconcerned as to who or what may be waiting for you on the other side."

"Ok, to be fair I did knock, Jess-"

"Three, you were ambushed within seconds of entering that damn room due to that very carelessness."

"Since I don't like repeating myself reference point two. For God's sake-"

"Four, you got stabbed with an eight inch combat knife within moments of engaging him."

"It was a letter opener, actually, but I understand the confusion, it was dark-"

“-forcing me to shoot him in the side of the face to prevent him from carving your heart out.”

“You’re selling yourself short. It was his temple you hit. A fine display of marksmanship, though the overall effect was a bit disturbing. Most would have aimed for the chest which is odd. You weren’t trying to show off for me, were you?”

“And you still think that this is *just* an errand?”

“You didn’t answer.”

“Brett.”

“Yes, an errand.”

“Like groceries?”

“Equally tedious. Jess, I really think we should go.”

“All for that? Look,” for a moment the tension left her face, her eyes focusing for the first time on the gash across Brett’s chest, “I know it’s important to you, I know it’s a secret, but can you please at least give me an idea of why it’s so important? I think I’ve earned that right.”

“You have and I will but not here.”

“Why the hell *not* here?”

Wright said nothing. His eyes stared tensely at her chest. Her head quickly snapped down. A tiny red dot was hovering around her heart.

Her foot slammed down on the accelerator. Four bullets collided with the windscreen, the headrest just behind her skull exploding as it was punctured with lead. Glass flew into her hair and face as Wright dropped down beside her, gritting his teeth as blood poured from the open wound on his chest. Adrenaline surged through Wright’s veins, numbing the pain and focusing his mind, his right hand snapping out instinctively and grabbing hold of the steering wheel as the Audi charged away from the hotel and onto the freshly paved road.

Bullets penetrated the rear windows and cut through moon roof, the powerful engine of the Audi screaming as the car tore down the clean pavement. Jess swore as she sat back up and seized control of the steering wheel from Brett, changing gears as she brought the vehicle back under control. Beside her, she heard a clip being loaded into a pistol and a round entering the chamber of the weapon. A window was being rolled down. Her eyes shot to the rearview mirror. Two black SUVs were now in pursuit. Two gunmen emerged from the sides of the vehicles, the barrels of their rifles erupting. Jess snapped her head to the right just as the rearview mirror was clipped by one of the assailant’s rounds. She hooked the car left onto another side road and then immediately right onto the broad expanse of *L’Avenue des Champs Elysees*. Ahead of her, the magnificent *Arc*

de Triumph rose in the distance, illuminated by brilliant lights and surrounded by a whirlpool of fast moving vehicles, their headlamps a streaking blur of bright yellow and neon blue. She looked into the rearview mirror and saw two black SUVs in pursuit. To her left, gunshots erupted from her passenger's weapon as he leaned out of the window, the metallic click of each spent round exiting the chamber rattling her insides more than the eruption emanating from the muzzle.

Her eardrums exploded as automatic weapons from both vehicles behind them lit up the back end of the car. There was a deafening *pop*, followed by another, the back of the car dropped and Jess suddenly lost control, the Audi hooking hard to the left, about to collide with a row of parked cars. Her eyes shot to the passenger seat. Brett was gone.

The airbag deployed.

The lights went out.

Brett Wright rolled across the pavement and snapped to his feet, his ears ringing, the gash across his chest bleeding profusely. He sprinted toward the row of parked cars and vaulted over the hood of a sedan as the Audi crashed several feet away, the row of vehicles absorbing a staggering amount of firepower as he took shelter behind one of the tires. The firing stopped as the two SUVs came to a halt on the other side of the makeshift barrier. Wright heard doors open and footsteps hustle onto the pavement. He took two quick breaths and shot up.

Three men were sprinting to the wrecked Audi on his left, two more were covering them from the SUVs. Wright felt his trigger finger twitch, the pistol fired, and as the two sentries by the vehicles dropped he was already turning to the other three men. His body rolled over the hood of the sedan as he fired his weapon, dropping two more of his assailants in the process. His feet landed back on the ground and he leveled his pistol, carefully approaching the wrecked car. The airbag on the driver's side had been deployed and he could see Jess lying limp in the seat.

He moved slowly, his shoes stepping across shattered glass and bits of paint and metal. His eyes narrowed down the sights. In the distance, sirens began to sound.

Where is he?

With a shard of glass collected from the ground, Wright punctured a hole in the airbag. His two fingers immediately shot to her throat. He felt a pulse.

"Don't breathe," said a voice from behind.

Wright froze, his hand not moving from his companion's neck.

“Where is it?” said the voice. It sounded German, but he couldn’t be sure. Wright’s eyes didn’t shift away from Jess. Her pulse calmed his nerves and cleared his mind. He smiled.

“You’re new to this, aren’t you?” said Wright, “There’s a whole dynamic to this interaction. Unfortunately for you, you’re on the wrong side of it. This conversation regrettably ends with a 9mm casing coated in your brain tissue.” Wright’s neck was struck with a strong blow from behind and he dropped. A gun erupted and he instinctively rolled up against the side of the car. He heard a body drop behind him. For a moment he remained still. He then shifted onto his back and looked up. The crescent moon that had been hovering unobtrusively overhead was no longer visible. A 9mm pistol was extended from the inside of the car and blocked out the light. Wright grinned.

“Met your quota for killed henchmen yet, my dear?”

“Nice line,” Jess pulled herself out of the window and dropped on to the pavement in front of Brett, who was still on his back. She looked down at him, her long, dark brown hair framing the sides of her face and falling to her chest, her right hand resting carelessly on her hip while the left dangled freely, the pistol still clutched in her hand. Wright smiled.

“If I didn’t have a flesh wound.”

“Not now,” she said with a hint of affection. She helped him up and they made their way toward one the SUVs. The key was still in the ignition.

Brett Wright eased the large vehicle onto the bustling rotary and began his competition for space with the other drivers, he caught Jess’ eye out of the corner of his own. He grinned.

“So,” he said.

“So,” replied Jess.

In the distance, the Eiffel Tower loomed over the warmly lit cityscape, it’s ugly steel girders drenched in a beautiful coat of yellow light as the occupants of the city below slumbered in peace, dreaming within a dream.

“Can I know what it is?” Jess asked.

Wright reached into his pocket and pulled out the small plastic bag. He smiled, and turned to her.

“Does it matter?”

Matthew Costa is a History major from Mattapoisett, Massachusetts.

Tanny

Amanda F. Maier

I wasn't really fond of going on a work assignment to Africa for two weeks, but the pay bonus was great and the experience of it seemed interesting enough. Work sent me, Project Manager Harvey DeLano, to manage the artist panel for our animation studio. The artists were to travel to Africa to study the landscape and animals up-close for the company's upcoming movie. My job was to work with the research center we were staying at to make sure the artists got where they needed to be and send updates back to the States. I'm not a cultured man and the only animals I'm fond of are domesticated. I didn't know what to expect.

While the artists "oohed" and "aahed" over the landscape the moment we stepped off the flimsy plane, I was trying to pace my breathing after inhaling the hot African air. The black tar of the runway it was like facing an oven. I must have squinted for two hours straight because I got a headache, but that could have been the non-stop chatter of the artists cooing over the landscape like it was a baby. They ignored me, which was preferable.

Our living quarters were only a few steps above sleeping outside. It was still uncomfortably warm, but bearable. The artists set up their art supplies and talked how they hoped their pastels wouldn't melt. Well, turns out the research center only counted the artists, not me, so we were a bed short. I was led to a more secluded living area which was fine by me. They called it a room; I called it a hut made out of brick. But at least it was in the shady area and I was told the numerous blowing fans make it tolerable.

"You might have a visitor tonight, my friend." One of the African research workers told me as he brought my bags in. "Some dogs call the center home; it's fenced off and safe after all. One of them comes by here each day, a tan old girl. I think we had a biologist live in this house for at least a year and they really took a liking to each other, but of course the biologist had to leave eventually. But the dog still stays."

A dog? Good, a domesticated animal and some company; I wasn't very close with the artists. I was told the center was lion proof. That's all I needed to know. As I unpacked I heard a shrilling cry from far away outside.

"That the dog?" I joked.

"Nah, that's a vulture." He grinned at me and waved his hand. "If you aren't sick they have no business with you."

“Well I don’t have any business with them.” I shook out my ironed shirts and flattened the travel wrinkles.

“There’s a slaughterhouse a couple miles away. They’re attracted to it so we see them time and again.”

Great. Death on my doorstep.

That night after I set up an appointment for the artists, I was greeted by a sweet old dog enjoying the cool cement of my steps. She was a skinny old lab mix the same color as the savannah grass, with a white chin from old age. When she saw me approach she strained to stand on her aching legs, but managed to wag her tail with tired ease. I gave her some water and let her sleep by my door.

The next day was the first trip with the artists and our field guide to check out the scenery. The guide talked about hyenas on the bumpy Jeep ride out of the center which made my note taking difficult. He seemed knowledgeable so we were in good hands. When the rough ride got too much I put the notebook down and finally looked at the landscape. I’m not much of a nature-freak, but I would have to be crazy not to be impressed by the scenery. I was thinking like one of those philosophical artists as I noticed the details.

The savannah was a perfect painting without a flaw. The sky was one brilliant shade of blue and the sun was like a brilliant god, overseeing each animal’s struggle to survive. We got out of the Jeep and walked through the grass. It sounded as if I was wearing swishy gym pants as we brushed through.

One of the artists paused and pointed in the distance. “Woah! Check that out over there!” We all stood next to him to get a better look at the commotion of squabbles and flying feathers.

Once I saw what it was, I saw the tear in this painting, the splotch of paint, the accidental smear of the artist: vile vultures. We watched them eat some poor animal the artists were probably meant to sketch. The birds were demons on Earth feasting away on flesh in such an unnatural way. More loathsome than the wicked hyenas, the vultures could literally smell death and would harass the sick. That’s what our guide said at least.

The birds’ feathers were crusted and mangled with blood from last week’s meal. Their beaks stained a swirl of red and orange with dried bits of gore. And their eyes: black and soulless. When feeding, they were constantly shrilling and beating their wings, but when waiting for death they were as silent as the night. They were barbarians without order, pride, or decency. In the delicate circle of life, they were the garbage crew. Feeding on the entrails of animals, they were literally grown and made from waste, and it showed.

“I’m gonna be sick.” I said half laughing, walking toward the Jeep. “Let’s go see some fuzzy meerkats or something.”

The group readily agreed and we drove off to see more noble creatures. The next week went by without much incident, other than the occasional shrill of a vulture near my hut or a house. Tanny, (I asked the office secretary if the dog had a name, she didn’t, so I was uncreative and called her Tanny) took a liking to me too. I’d play fetch with her to take a break from my reports and emails. The artists were too outgoing for my liking, so it was just me and Tanny after a long day. She couldn’t run much with her aches, but it made her happy to have a few throws.

I heard Tanny barking one morning by the house, which was weird since she only comes by in the evenings. I got right out of bed to investigate so the dirt was hot on my feet and the sun made it hard to see.

“What is it?” I called out to the dog as walked by the house. It didn’t take long to get my answer. I looked up to where she was barking...a vulture taunting her from the tree.

“Shoo! Get out of here!” I yelled and Tanny barked, but the vulture just shrieked at us in response. I threw a rock. The vulture didn’t like that and flew off. I looked back at Tanny and she didn’t look so good. She seemed slower and only took a few laps of water.

“Probably tired from barking at it, eh girl?” I pet her until she fell asleep and head out for the day. I noticed the vulture in the tree every so often the days after that. It creeped me out, but I eventually ran out of rocks and Tanny stopped barking at it.

On the second week I went out another time with the artists and guide to a lion reserve. On the way the guide told us how balanced the ecosystem was here. The predators hunted at different intervals, the giraffes, elephants and antelope at different heights so there was always enough food for the herbivores. Stuff like that.

“What about the scummy animals?” I said. I didn’t participate much but wondered about the vultures. “Mosquitoes, hyenas, termites,...vultures. What do they contribute?”

“Every creature has a place. The mosquitoes are food to the bats, the termites food for lizards. The-“

“I say just let ‘em go extinct. The world could use less malaria.” I laugh, no one else does. I keep my mouth shut after that.

Tanny wasn’t by my door that night, but the vulture was. I shooed it off and looked around, but figured I shouldn’t waste my time looking for a dog

without an owner so I went to bed. But when another day passed and no one saw her, I asked around but no one had seen her. I decided to take a look around the perimeter of the research center.

The fence wasn't as sturdy as they made it out to be. It was just thin barbed-wire with gaps in some places. I could see my house from where I was and noticed the damn bird wasn't hanging around it. Then I heard the shrilling of a vulture a past the fence. I felt compelled to check it out.

It flew off as soon as it saw me. Definitely the same one. Then I noticed her...or what was left of her. I looked away immediately. I'll save you the details, because I couldn't look. Tanny, the poor old girl gave in to her old age while out on a day's journey. I hadn't cried in forever, but I'm not ashamed I shed tears for that dog. I was covering her up with old branches when I heard the vulture cry out by my house. Immediately I thought of Tanny harassed in her final hour, circled by vultures who sensed she was ill. I darted back to the house.

"Screw off, you filthy animal!" I found another rock and chucked it at it. It hit the tree. The vulture flew down. "Stay away from me!" My face was hotter than the afternoons in the savannah. I kicked dirt clumps and wish I had wings to chase the damn thing down. Then I saw it, it had a nest up there. Vulture spawn.

I climbed up to the roof and stood on a branch. The nest was a crudely made thing of sticks and Tanny's own shed fur! Two speckled demon bird eggs were in it. I saw the vulture circle the air ready to attack me. I quickly took an egg and threw it as far as I could. I threw the second one and watched it smash into the ground. Then I pushed the nest off the branch.

I climbed down and wiped my eyes with my sleeve. The vulture shrieked and landed by the first egg. I looked down and saw the smashed one by my side, but it wasn't just a yolk. There was a chick. A gooey, tiny, big-headed chick. An animal I just killed.

I looked up and saw the vulture take off with its baby in its beak, letting nothing go to waste in this ecosystem.

Amanda F. Maier is an English major from Carver, Massachusetts.

The Shed

Brad Costa

It was a shed, not a house, but if Uncle Keith wanted to call it a house then it was a house.

I remember walking around the landlord's raised ranch and stumbling through the snow to the front door, my father's big hand knocking on the thin wood. My eyes were level with the door knob; it was all scratched up from missed entries.

Eventually Pops grabbed the brass handle and twisted. Unlocked.

It was a small shed, but had been split into two tiny rooms. One only held a toilet. The other had a rusted-out stove, a fold out table, an old wash sink, a cot that was occupied, and a window that was broken, allowing the wind to come inside and rustle the emptiness.

Keith was lying on top of his sheets, naked except a holy pair of briefs.

My father went to shake the man awake while I sat down on a wobbly stool next to the table. Uncle's heroin works were still lying there, and my father looked around for something to cover them with before I would see them. He found nothing and just went over and zipped the kit up, trying to be inconspicuous. "At least he remembered to take off the tie-up this time," he said with a forced chuckle.

I tried hard not to look at the shell of a man laying there, the nods slowly wearing off as he tried to wake. I looked at everything else: the grease under the stove that was a clear fire hazard, caked on from the last addict to rent this cheap room and probably the addict before that; the calendar that was dated back two months, a pretty woman on some far-off beach staring down at the ugly scene; that bathroom that was covered with mold (I decided to hold my bladder); the little sink that he apparently used to wash clothes.

"Keith, where are the rest of your clothes? These are all wet." My father struggled with his brother.

I looked at the cowboy boots sitting next to the front door caked with dirt and mud, at the light hanging by a wire from the ceiling that was black and burnt out, a stack of CD's that still had the security devices on them, the carpet that was covered with half-smoked cigarettes aligned perfectly with burn holes as if the smoker had dropped them halfway through and forgotten all about the craving.

"Come on Keith. You have to get up and eat something."

I turned to him. My father had decided the wet clothes were good enough, but they were still dirty. He looked haggard. He coughed and pulled a pack of cigarettes out from under the cot. He felt around in his pockets for a lighter until my father pulled one out and lit the tobacco for him.

He coughed again, this time expelling smoke and looked into my eyes; I glared back at empty holes. “Hey kid, how are you doing?”

I didn’t respond. I had found a walking, talking drug; the man had been left behind.

Brad Costa is an English major from Swansea, Massachusetts.

The Beckoning Darkness

Ryan Carreiro

The day was June 13th 2003.

It was around 3 am when my friend and I realized what had transpired. It was only three hours previous that the world went silent all of a sudden. We were sitting in my living room when it happened. Cars stopped driving with people in them, electrical devices shut down and locked and the sky was filled with flying birds...or at least that was what they seemed like at the time.

The world seemed like someone pressed the pause button and did not let go. The first signs came at 11:30 pm June 12th. My television started changing channels on its own and continued running though the 600s. This seemed strange so I lifted the remote and tried to change the channels on my own but to no effect. At 11:50 it stopped on channel 663 showing what first started as static but kept fading in and out to a female face covered in a black/red liquid. The liquid was also pouring from its closed eyes and from its nostrils but at the time it was facing to the side. We were so horrified we could not move from the couch, we just sat and watched as the face began to turn towards us. As it turned it opened its mouth letting the liquid pour freely over its chin and neck while garbled speech came from it. When it had turned completely forward it said "Your time has come". It reared its head back and let out a bone chilling scream that sounded as if it were drowning and then the screen went black and silent but only for a moment, just enough for us to think it was gone. As soon as it was gone the tv flickered back on to a blank white screen, the time was 11:59 pm. It started to go to static and white noise with the face blinking in and out but the worst part was that it was getting bigger, or closer. We backed further into the couch and our lights went out leaving the only light to be the tv. Right when the face had gotten right up to the screen where only its pouring eyes could be seen they snapped open wide as can be revealing empty soulless black irises, that was when the clock struck midnight. At the first tone of, midnight the tv started to ooze out the black red liquid onto the floor and every tone there after more and more would spill out, as if it was bleeding like her, or rather, its eyes. At the sixth tone the tv went black but still was showing light but at the eleventh tone a sound like a blade slicing through flesh was heard. Then at the twelfth and a ragged hand covered in

the liquid tore out of the tv and at us and all went black.

I woke up three hours later which is where the story began. It was pitch black outside save for the moonlight coming through the now open front door. The most confusing part was when I first opened my eyes I saw that I was right in front of the open door rather than sitting on my couch. Hell, the couch wasn't even there anymore. I looked left and right but all I could see was darkness. My friend was out on the porch looking up at the sky. When I was more aware I noticed that the hardwood that was my floor was now wet and squishy. I pulled out my house keys which had a flashlight on it and shined it at the floor. What I saw horrified me. The black red liquid that I saw last time my eyes were open covered the floor. But what was worse was that the floor was now shredded flesh and the liquid was seeping out of it. I felt the floor pulse and shift and I jumped to my feet screaming bloody murder and dove out of the house onto the porch where my friend still stood staring up at the sky. The door slammed shut behind me and the sound of a muffled heartbeat could be heard coming from inside. I was breathing heavy and had my hands on my knees staring at the ground, the moonlight was just enough to see it. Then a droplet of something fell right in front of my eyes into a pool of the black red liquid that was forming. I looked up and saw the liquid was dripping from my friend's chin. I stood up quickly and grabbed hold of him screaming if he was ok and why he wouldn't speak. He slowly turned his head to face mine. The liquid was pouring out of his nose and left eye which was closed, the other was wide open and the pupil dilated. He spoke to me. "She told me..." he paused and it was like he was suddenly aware what had happened. Fear was showing in his face and his body began to shake violently. He went limp and fell to the ground. I tried to soften his fall but it was so sudden I didn't know what to do. "I remember everything" he said through convulsed breaths. "I remember the woman in the picture. I remember her beckoning me with each gaze." He turned his face to me "She was calling me..." He went silent.

I stood back up after placing him on our porch bench. I looked up to the sky to see what he was staring at before and that's when I saw them. They looked like giant black storks flying through the skies, yet they were too big to be just birds. The sounds of their collective flapping were like that of a...heartbeat. The house shook behind me suddenly as if it were lurching towards me. It sounded like someone was slamming on my front door from the inside with a fleshy object. I started to back up down the front steps. The sound was heard again this time louder. Every step I took down the sound repeated until it was deafening and

went over the sound of the flapping wings. When I reached the bottom of the steps and went onto the sidewalk my front door shuttered and exploded open. What I saw there I will never forget. It was the woman from the tv. Her eyes were now glowing red and her hair was covering her face. Rags were all that was covering her torso. She was at least seven feet tall and skinny as a twig but I was still frightened of her. The black red liquid was pouring from her wide open eyes, her nose and mouth were shroud in darkness and I could not see if the liquid came from there as well, but the sheer amount that was dripping down her chin was evidence enough. The liquid was starting to pour out of the open door and onto the porch. I wanted to go grab my friend but I was so scared my legs refused to move...that was until she took a step out of the house. One long arm grabbed onto the door frame and one foot stepped out of the door and when her foot touched the porch veins spider webbed out from her body all over the porch. The veins moved over the wood and onto the stairs they were like streams of the liquid running out from her. She took another step and this time her mouth opened and again that horrible scream came out. Before I could give her another look I had turned and was running straight down my street, eyes closed and bare feet smacking against the cold concrete.

I ran until I couldn't see my house behind me, yet, I could still hear those horrible screams running right through my body. I finally slowed to a stop holding my knees again breathing heavy. I looked up and there was nothing, only stalled cars with people slouched over their steering wheels. No one running in the streets, not even the sound of the flapping birds above could be heard anymore. Just complete silence...and darkness. Luckily the moon was still leading my way. I approached the first car I saw closest to me. There was a woman face first into her steering wheel inside. I wondered if she was ok so I got closer to the car. Right when I brought my hand to knock on the window I pulled back as fast as I could and looked down at my hand. The car was burning hot yet it was not giving off any heat. While I was looking at my burned hand from the corner of my eye I saw the woman start to sit up. I looked up and yelled if she was ok. She did not answer. I asked again. Again no answer, then as sudden as it could have been she snapped her head towards me. Her face was torn to pieces, eyes wide blaring red and the black red liquid was pouring from her wounds and eyes. I started to back up slowly; again I was struck with fear and unable to run. She raised a hand to the wheel of the car and the other to the window pushing her palm to the glass. In the back seat of the car three more sets of the glowing eyes snapped open and were staring right at me. The sounds of the birds were heard again above. I

quickly looked to the skies and there they were as if they were following these people. I looked back to the car just in time to see the woman's arm had pushed through the window as if it were water, it was covered in scars and was torn open pulsing out the liquid. I jumped back as it went to grab me. I turned to run when I saw and elongated shadow wash over me, not far down the road was the woman in rags screaming louder than ever. My heart raced, I saw a side street and headed right for it without looking back again at the car and woman.

I was running down 26th Street at this point and the screaming was once again getting further away. I was so thirsty and so tired from running. Luckily this street had a public park and I knew there was a water fountain there so I ran in. I slowed to a walk as I tried to catch my breath. The air here was stale and warm but at least those creatures were nowhere to be seen. The fountain seemed to have been here for years long past my time but still it was a saving grace at this point. I pressed down on the button and clear water came out of the spout. I sighed in relief that for once something was normal. I took a sip of the water and immediately spit it out. It tasted just like copper almost as if I was tasting, blood. The heartbeat of the birds started to rise in volume. My eyes opened wide as ever. I looked over to the sprinkler in the middle of the park where kids used to play in the summer. But it was not water that came out of it this time; it was that damn liquid like from all the people. Then the fountain started to bubble out the same liquid yet I was no longer pressing the button. I quickly turned to see the entrance to the park which was shroud in darkness while all I could see was piercing red eyes. Hundreds of them were at the entrance and behind them all was the woman from my house standing far taller than any man I had ever seen. Each step they took sent out the webs of liquid and as they reached the playground's slides and swings it enveloped them as well. The air was becoming more and more hot. As the webs washed over the swings they started to swing on their own. Then my friend's blackened body appeared on one of the swings swinging along. Eyes, nose, mouth all allowing the liquid to pour out and, worst of all, his eyes were looking right at me. They were accusing, they were terrifying.

The large group of them was getting closer to me. The sprinkler was starting to flood the grounds as the liquid was too thick to be absorbed or go down the drains. The fountain had long since over flown. The screaming of the woman was so piercing that my spine started to vibrate and chill. The air was so thick now it was started to get hard to breath. There was no place to run. I was being boxed in. They were only around 20 yards from me at this point. Someone was pushing through to the front of the group. I suddenly felt something warm

running down from my nose. I lifted my hand up and wiped it away and, to my horror and disbelief, my hand was covered in the black red liquid. I started getting a severe headache. I kept wiping it away from my face. The person who was trying to push through had gotten to the front, its eyes red as the others. It reached out a hand like it was beckoning towards me. I slowly started to back up until I reached a park bench and stumbled hitting my head on one of the metal arm rests. I was on the ground now in a daze. The air was getting hotter and I felt the liquid pouring out from my nose. I blinked a few times and looked up. The creature from the front of the group was right near me. Each time I opened my eyes it was closer. I could not see its face because of the darkness. Behind it the rest were screaming and walking towards me. Above the birds were circling the park. I opened my eyes once more and it...he was right in my face. The moonlight had lit him up. It was me. He...I...it started to crack a smile which started to tear his face until it almost reached his ears, a huge white toothy grin. Black and red running from his eyes and seeping through his teeth. My head fell backwards onto the ground with a slam. Last my eyes saw was his hand reaching out towards me, blackened and torn so badly as if something tried to rend the flesh from it. His hand met my face and I blacked out.

I woke up sitting on my couch. It was 11:29 pm and my friend was sitting next to me. "You fell asleep again" he said to me. That was when the tv began to flicker.

Ryan Carreiro of Everett, Massachusetts is majoring in Sociology and History.

One Point Five Seconds

Malini A. Frederick

...”and make sure you don’t use your phone while driving!” Jess’s mother was saying as she waved her daughter off in her new, or at least new to her, convertible. Jess waved back as she shifted from reverse into drive and let out a sigh of relief. Parents could be so overbearing. Only this morning, her mother had read aloud a newspaper article on the dangers of texting while driving. It had said that taking your eyes away from the road for just one point five seconds could result in losing control of your vehicle. The article had detailed some of the gorier ramifications of what it called “fatal behavior.” Jess had only half-listened to humor her mother while she nibbled her grapefruit.

As she turned off of her street, Jess’s Blackberry clonked, signaling a text message, and she couldn’t resist checking it. After all, it could be Matt. And she was sure she could do it in under one point five seconds, it would take hardly any time at all. She wasn’t even going to Facebook or anything; she was being very good. Unfortunately, it wasn’t Matt, but it was Linda, her best friend. Jess read the text. It said, “U on way yet?” Linda was so impatient. Even though this was going to be the first time both girls would be out in the car alone, Jess had said she’d be over by three-thirty, and it was only a little after three now. She accelerated slightly, typed a quick “Y,” and pressed “Send.” After all, it wasn’t really texting, it wasn’t even a full word. And it only took one point five seconds.

Jess fiddled with the radio to find a decent song. She stopped when she heard the slow, throaty voice of Brandy Soares, who had just made the Top Ten with her debut single, “I’m The Girl To Your Man.” It reminded her of her new, and secret boyfriend Matt. Jess hated to lie to her mother, but Matt was twenty, and at seventeen, Jess knew that neither of her parents would approve of the relationship, and no way was she going to lose the status of dating the oldest guy of all her friends. Besides, Matt was totally cute, and had a job and his own apartment. What more could a girl want? Matt also was one of the coolest people Jess had ever known, and he treated her like she was the most special

person on earth. It was a nice change from all those immature creeps in high school. Jess made sure the radio was on low enough that she could still hear if she got a text, because she was afraid she wouldn't feel the vibrate mode either as she whizzed along.

Her phone beeped again as if on cue, and she glanced down. "K," Linda had texted back. Jess smiled as she cruised along, thinking of how great her life was. Linda had been her best friend from the first day of kindergarten, and fortunately, she liked Matt a lot too. Jess had dated a couple of guys before that Linda didn't get on with and it really caused a lot of tension. She stopped for a red light, and even though she hadn't heard an alert, she couldn't help checking her phone again. She and Matt seldom went even an hour without texting each other. A car behind her honked, signaling that the light had changed to green and Jess hit the accelerator.

Even though she knew he was at work, Jess couldn't resist sending Matt an "I love you." She could do that quickly, surely in under one point five seconds. Plus, she had the phone right in front of her face, so she could watch the road and text at the same time. She hit "Send," but the phone slipped out of her hand. "Damn," Jess muttered. She knew getting it off the floor would be a pain, and yes, she had to admit, a tad dangerous. But she'd lean over quick; it would just take a second. She unbuckled her seatbelt, bent over and grabbed, but the slim phone slipped farther away on the passenger's side. She jerked her head up enough to clear the dashboard and check the road, then looked down again. This time she leaned over further. "Got it!" she breathed triumphantly, and sat up with relief.

Even though the text alert made visually checking the phone unnecessary, Jess couldn't resist glancing down every so often to see if the indicator light was on as she continued along the windy road. She softly laughed to herself, knowing that it wasn't insecurity that was making her check, but the excitement of new love. She thought of Matt's kisses from the other night, and how he had made her feel things she had never felt before. Grown-up things, that she thought she had felt before with Rob, her ex. But that was before she had met Matt, and knew what it

was truly like to feel that oneness. Finally, she heard the “clonk” of the text alert, and anxiously glanced at the screen. Linda again.

“What u wearin?” was her query. Linda hated to be over, or under dressed. But most of all, she hated if someone else had on a similar outfit, because she said it made it feel like she was a lame twin or something. Of course, Northfaces and Uggs didn’t count.

Jess groaned. She loved Linda, but she wished she had called her an hour ago before she left, so they could have discussed what they were wearing in detail. Boyfriend or no, it was important to always look your best at the mall. In between glances at the road, she texted, “Pnk ruffld shrt n leggings.” She had looked up between typing, so really, it wasn’t more than a second each time her eyes left the road. “K,” Linda sent again.

Jess hoped Linda wouldn’t keep her waiting forever while she finished getting ready. Unfortunately, Jess was one of those people who just could never be ready on time. Plus, Linda was into tons of eye makeup, and that really took a while. But she could hardly fault her friend; Linda had never had a real boyfriend, maybe she’d meet one at the mall this time.

“Clunk!” went her phone. This had to be Matt. She was almost at Linda’s anyway. Jess glanced down at the screen one last time as she came to a bend in the road and one point five seconds became eternity.

Malini A. Frederick is an English major from Dover, Massachusetts.

Dirty Deeds

Kirsten Bryan

I.

Humphrey Willard's recliner was once cushy. The burgundy corduroy stripes had begun fading at the chairs elbows and seat, turning the oversized piece of furniture into a pink tie-died looking thing. His large frame molded into it. The springs gasped as he sunk in like a missing puzzle piece.

Willard's arms were covered with long sprigs of hair resembling a field of wheat. His hands were large with protruding blue-green veins and his nails looked manicured.

In his long digits he held a yellow piece of paper with digitized numbers printed on it. He grasped the remote control which hugged the curve of his palm just so, and pressed the red button.

Martha Willard shuffled into the room. Her loose brown curls bounced with each step. "Is it time?" Her voice was soft yet deep and her brown eyes waited for an answer.

"Yes, come sit," said Humphrey who waved her in like an usher.

She lowered herself into the brown leather tufted couch, and the pairs of eyes stared at the huge flat-screen television, waiting for what was theirs.

"And tonight's Gemfield lottery winning numbers: 2, 1, 8, 5. Thank you all for playing and have a wonderful night."

Both Willard's locked eyes with each other and then their ticket.

"It's about damn time," said Humphrey.

"Maybe this time you'll get yourself a new recliner. That thing is starting to look like a big pile of insulation. You've been taking too much time off of work."

Martha smiled and nudged Humphrey's arm. He let out a chuckle.

The two rose from their seats and stood facing the recliner. Martha bent over and slapped the cushion twice. "This thing is done for." She forced her hand in between the cushion and the inner side of the chair. "Unbelievable" she said, shaking her head "you've got things living in here and everything."

When she pulled her hand from the inside of the chair, it held a My Little Pony figurine with a neon turquoise mane and tail.

II.

"Honey," said Katherine in her high-pitched voice. "You promised you would be at our appointment today. Please don't be late!"

Now that she was pregnant, she ceased using any singular subject pronouns. "I" was now "we" and "my" was now "our" to suggest the presence of the brewing baby.

She placed her hand on her large, round belly and Michael put his hand on top of hers. "I promise you...I'll be there," he said in his most charming voice.

"Yay!" said Katherine. She always managed to cheer about something each day, never letting go of those decade-old high school days filled with hair-ribbons and pleated skirts.

Michael hadn't changed much since his high school days either: most popular, now at the Gemfield Lottery offices; most handsome, to Katherine if no one else; and most likely to be rich...which had manifested within the last seven years as the leading statistician for Gemfield's Lottery headquarters.

"Look what I bought for her!" exclaimed Katherine, whose small polished hands grabbed Michael's lean, yet muscular arm. She led him into the glitzy nursery, complete with pressed linens and an overwhelming scene of pink. Katherine picked up a cream colored box and opened it to reveal a small gold bracelet with a pink teddy bear charm, sitting upon the velvet interior cushion.

"Her first piece of jewelry!" Katherine's flawless white teeth were straight out of a Colgate commercial. She beamed with an excitement that was always genuine. Michael smiled widely. He had always wanted to have a family with Katherine.

He took the jewelry box and then Katherine's hand. "I'm sure she'll love it," he said.

"She'll be a lucky girl." Katherine smirked. "Make sure you give her those winning lottery numbers when she grows up, huh?" She winked and flashed her toothy smile. Katherine always joked with him about "rigging the system."

The two kissed goodbye. "Don't be late!" shouted Katherine with a smile.

III.

"What time is it?" asked Humphrey.

"It is...," Martha checked her digital watch. "3:12," said Martha.

"Okay, Jane should be here from school in approximately three minutes. Christina and Brad left very specific instructions" said Humphrey who looked, puzzled, at the handwriting on the sheet of notebook paper.

"Yeah, I know. They dropped her and her stuff off here last night and there are My Little Ponies everywhere." She whined.

"You know- I can't believe they asked us to babysit from Thursday night to Sunday? Not to mention," she continued. "This is your first weekend off in a month. We were supposed to go out, remember that?"

Humphrey sighed, "I know but the Samson's just moved here and don't have any family nearby. And you know I have to work extra hours to try to get ahead at work, and not to mention get paid."

Martha shrugged. "You don't even like kids."

"It's my civic duty," mocked Humphrey, placing his right hand over his heart. "They trust me, I'm an officer." "Ok rookie," Martha rolled her eyes and smiled. "But you owe me."

IV.

Michael had been crunching numbers all afternoon. He knew he should have left

early enough to beat the after school traffic. His pink paisley tie flew over his shoulder as he hurried to his black Benz. He hated being late, especially for Katherine, and now, the baby.

His sleek luxury car navigated the small streets he knew so well. His forehead's pores began to overflow with perspiration. He heard his mobile phone's classic telephone ring, and knew it would be Katherine. The ring was faint as the engine stirred. Michael looked and felt around his car for the phone, bending over to the floor, all the while with his foot on the gas. He retrieved it from underneath the seat. As soon as he pressed the green button with the faded telephone graphic, the ringing stopped. The call had already ended.

It had been over thirty seconds before Michael look up at the road. When he did- there wasn't enough time to stop.

In the air flew a small My Little Pony light-up sneaker, its red light malfunctioning like a strobe as it touched down, unlaced.

Humphrey's head suddenly whipped to the right, his eyes beamed toward the window, breaking the stare between him and Martha.

"Did you hear that?" said Humphrey.

The kitchen clock read 3:15.

V.

Michael stood over the child's body, staring at her perfectly parted hair and blonde braids as she lay twisted on the cement. He held his hands on his forehead, fingers intertwined.

Humphrey's house door swung open. He scrambled out to the scene responsible for that awful screeching noise.

Martha hurried out of the doorway. She first saw the black car, then little Jane lying unresponsive on street, and Humphrey, running.

Humphrey took his veiny, red fist and swung a massive blow to Michael's head.

* * *

When Michael awoke, it was 4:03. Katherine's appointment was at three. His head felt disheveled and pounded like a bag of oranges churning in a dryer. On the left side of his temple, he felt a cold, direct pressure. His eyes opened and there stood Humphrey with his gun, provided by Gemfield's own police department.

Michael's eyes began to tear. "I'm so sorry," he wept. His tears weighed his once cheery cheeks down. "Don't do it!" screamed Martha who heard Humphrey's gun produce that clicking sound she recognized from the movies.

"Who are you?" he grunted at a weeping Michael. There was no white in Michael's eyes, just red. He looked at his shaking hands. His paisley tie was gone.

"Michael, I'm Michael Weller. I'm so sorry I, I-" Michael slurred his words. His body was in so much pain he thought it might just be easier to give up on breathing.

"Save it!" screamed Humphrey, whose mind paced. "Do you know trouble you've caused me?"

Michael's head fell into his hands. "I'm so sorry- your little girl."

Humphrey stopped pacing. "She wasn't mine you idiot. Do you understand how it looks to have a child die in your care!" Humphrey yelled. "You'll ruin my career with this scandal...unless I turn you in now."

Humphrey advanced towards Michael, reaching for his handcuffs.

"Wait, please, don't! I have a family now, I-I can't go to jail. I-I'll help you...If you let me go now," Michael pleaded "I can make it worth your while."

VI.

Ten years had passed since the day Gemfield erupted with the "Seven-year-old Jane Samson dies in hit-and-run" headlines. There hadn't been any leads since

the April 4th, 1995 tragedy.

The Samson's were devastated. The Gemfield police department couldn't produce any suspects. They soon moved in '97 to a town 60 miles north of Gemfield, to escape the loneliness location of that tragic accident.

* * *

Michael and Katherine's daughter, Breanne, had just turned 11.

Katherine rested her head on Michael's shoulder and the two sat closely together on their leather couch. She grabbed the remote and turned on the news.

"How about that?" asked Katherine. "When's the last time we watched the news?"

The Channel 2 newscaster's dramatically rhythmic voice introduced the night's top story.

"And we bring you a story of unlikely coincidence. Gemfield couple Humphrey and Martha Willard have been quite lucky- too lucky some speculate. The Willard's have reportedly won Gemfield's lottery three times within the past ten years. Lottery officials are beginning to grow suspicious as-

"Wow, honey," said Katherine. "That's pretty lucky, huh?"

Michael shrugged. His eyes moved about, he didn't want to lock eyes with Katherine even for a second. "Yeah, I guess... but it isn't impossible."

Katherine tilted her head to the side and then looked over at Michael.

"Well, I guess anything is possible but...what are the odds? People must be suspicious around the office. Is the lottery going to investigate?"

"Few people would be capable of infiltrating a lotto system." Michael spoke quickly. "I'm sure it's just chance."

Katherine stared at Michael. Her lips parted, but no words escaped.

The reporter continued describing the Willard's as "humble" despite earning "impressive winnings."

“The Willard’s didn’t pack up and leave as many lottery winners do, though their total winnings equate to well one million dollars. Humphrey Willard, a police officer, and Martha Willard, a homemaker, remain in their one-bedroom home. Officer Willard in the news earlier this week for re-opening the investigation of Jane Samson, Gemfield’s first documented child-murder case. He is being praised as a hometown hero for his efforts to seek justice.”

Michael’s heart fluttered at the sound of “re-opening.”

The screen cut to a press conference clip featuring Willard in full uniform. His voice was deep and stern. Michael wished to cover his eyes. He had not seen Humphrey as part of the agreement they worked out on that horrible day.

“We have new evidence in the April 4th, 1995 case of Jane Samson. We’ve been analyzing skid-marks, pieces of vehicle found at the scene and from analysis we know the vehicle was black. We are looking into records for cars that received body work on, or soon after the date of Jane Samson’s passing. We’re also suspecting a male as a paisley tie was recently found in the evidence storage. We’re confident we will be able to extract DNA from the evidence”

“Oh I remember that day,” Katherine sighed shaking her head. “That was the same day you got mugged honey, remember? You were black and blue! And you had to take the car in because you scraped it trying to get away. Oh what a day. And that poor little girl...”

Every speckle of life drained from Michael’s face.

Humphrey spoke directly to him.

Michael mentally rewound to the moment where he pled for his life. He asked to go free now, not forever.

He had been the most perfect pawn in Humphrey’s game to claim success and power. Michael had set Humphrey up with money, a heart-wrenching murder mystery, and the power to seal it all with an explosive conviction of a killer named Michael Weller.

Kirsten Bryan is an English major from Fall River, Massachusetts.

POETRY

Sharing Fire

Billy Mitchell

I saw a boy lean out of the crowd at the bus stop
and light a girl's cigarette with his own
breath.

They laughed at the strangeness.

Strangers

sharing fire in the daylight,
with no help from the haze of the night.

Then I saw them separate,
like notes on a scale,
and slip into the solidarity of the crowds.

But maybe they weren't strangers.

Maybe everyone shares a light from everyone else's breath,
and walk in opposite directions away.

Billy Mitchell is an English major from Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Transition

Allison Hanna & J.P. Andreason

INHALATION: *verb*

Breathing in

Ex: the scent of her hair

And her kindness

b). A translation of anxiety to confidence.

Bits of lace from the sky.

From this place on my side, staring out at what seems like the lightest of light, dusty white seasons

PRECIPITATION: *verb*

When fortune sends you more than a cookie

Ex: snowfall

b). Tears of joy

From this place on my back, staring up at what seems like the highest of high cathedral tall ceilings

SYNCOPATION: *verb*

A stress of the weak beat

Ex: combined palpitations of hearts

And lips

Like watching the clouds,
the tip of my tongue searching out,
melting in a moment something one-of-its-kind.

NAVIGATION: *noun*

Finding your way

Ex: spending four years with the woman you love

Like holding in my mouth
a small, bright, secret sound,

salty soft wet and round,

practicing, practicing, practicing,
an exhalation.

Allison Hanna is an English major from Ashby, Massachusetts.

J.P. Andreason is an English major from Pepperell, Massachusetts.

The Frame
by Adam Turner

Her shoulder peeks
from behind the monitor, and
she holds one hand to her face,
hidden.

A curtain of maple brown curls
part sometimes,
as now with a yawn,
to show a brazen arch
of collarbone
and she's biting the nail
of her ring finger

(I imagine,

I

hope)

in an unconscious display
of girlish abandon

while my heart beats and seizes

with the slight

delicate

deliberate movements

of its manicured twin

on

the

mouse

Adam Turner is an English major from West Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

The Siren (or Drown With Me)

Kati Betrovski

I'm a siren; come drown with me

Let me drag your body down through the sea.

My scales of green, your flesh of white
Complement each other under the moon's blue light.
I'll supply you with bubbles so that you may breathe.

I'll extract oxygen from my underwater trees.

Don't gasp, don't splash, don't make a fuss.

You're afraid to die? I thought we had trust.

There's so much more to the ocean floor

Than sunken ships, I'll give you a tour.

I'm a siren; come drown with me.

Float in my water, feel completely free.

The deep dark water to the icy shores

Let it cleanse your every pore.

You heard my song, an unbreakable trance.

You should have steered clear, you had the chance.

You know my type, how sirens can be.

You heard the folklore, but you had to see.

You crashed your ship, you lost your crew.

Dear captain, what a fool are you.

Your soul belongs forever to the sea,

You'll live as sea foam, eternally.

I'm a siren; come drown with me.

Kati Betrovski is an English major.

God.

by K. Covino

lord of all air too thin to breathe
how i abhor the clouds
your castle's keep

for what variance is wisp-white
in a blue
blue world?

in lieu
i pray to
implode

and not to ramble along endless dusk dusted roads

send me inward instead
into the titanic nothingness
soul spiraling toward
dirt delving through
the core.

for
you would have me blindly
fly off
en route
to
the
horizon!

but even with Crane's man astride
who has long pursued the sky-land's divide

there is little luck that i would find
anything of truth to proclaim

our congregate chant
you lie! you lie!
would galvanize our heaven hungry minds
in that this journey of hopeless faith

isn't a waste
of dead end time

this is not
hope.
peace.
harmony.

thus clarity will be my divine
and by Reason restored shall shroud your skyline
so that i may seek rest far from halcyons on high
in the space of this flesh-bound human life.

-and forsaking all else-

i realize it's impossible
with this oedipal charge reignited
not to r e l a p s e :

mocked again by blue time
ticking beneath an iron sky

K. Covino is an English major from Hopedale, Massachusetts.

Monsters

Annie O'Toole-Bolthrunis

Slipping further into myself
like a glove lined with fur
warm around my fingers
re entering the womb
crawling back somewhere
where the monsters aren't
when you're young
monsters are beasts that
hide in the closet and
bare their fangs in the night
beating against the door
hoping to get out
and claw your little eyes out
when mommy and daddy are asleep
but monsters never disappear
they change
and evolve
their teeth become words
and their claws become memories
that you can't erase
despite your best efforts.
The monsters become
disappointment
and loneliness
and longing for something
that you can't define or describe
you just feel it in your bones
and you ache.
And all you want
is for the ache to go away
and to feel nothing
and you try
everything in your power

to feel that nothingness
to disappear
and become something else
(something more?)
and slowly
the monster you've been fearing
and searching your closets for
is you.
And you may place the blame
on other people
thinking that they have some
measure of control over
how you feel and react
and despite your best efforts
at the alternative
you have lost control and
surrendered yourself to the
violent hands of others.
And you flail
because you need something
that you can't grasp
a life preserver in the open ocean
a breath of air to the dying
things that you can never have.

Annie O'Toole-Bolthrunis of Nahant, Massachusetts is a graduate student in the Professional Writing program.

Precious

By Jess Ellis

Shaking, precarious
like a leaf on its way to the hard dirt
I tremble as you touch me
I'm fully yours alone

I'm desperate, seeking, for something
But I can't see it
I can only feel you
And it makes me feel like I'm
About to disappear.
A mind is a fragile thing.
If it snaps-- can it ever be repaired?
Can something so valuable
Be placed on some "to do" list
For when you get around to it?

I'm the first snowflake;
The winter air;
The frost on your windshield
That you wipe away
I'm erasing myself, slowly
Maybe you won't notice
But I pray that you will.

Jess Ellis is an English major from Westport, Massachusetts.

Cave Painting

Henry Amistadi

Had I the courage, oh how I would renounce you-
dead word!
lost to neo megatropolin visions of
mechanical waste filled robotic streets,
back alley caverns littered with the metal and plastic shrapnel of the past:
 byproduct of modern man's dragging tired feet
 burned in the abandoned trash fires of the millennium,
my cranium crashing through rusty propaganda barriers to truth,
land mines on the psyche triggered by the spitting verse, severed from reality
dripping from the lips of scholars of blood money,
poisonous sacrificial blood wine drowning lost scripture
old ink stained papyrus, history frozen in the grave,
and buried in the shadows of pillars and pedestals.

Language,
which is supposed to be the basis of all this;
poems, and writings, endless intellection, circles of talk, words
that lost roots in breathe
and cave echoes, booming bang of raw hide, hollow drum beat
flickering firelight on cavernous cave walls, chanting
holy grunt, projecting noise and light-
a beacon in lightless ancient night
 For ancestral dirty fingernails, ragged haired angelic bums,
 To convene,
 Planting the seeds of word, birth of language
 Crying creation onto the formless horizon.

Henry Amistadi of Groton, Massachusetts is a student in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program in Photography.

Beesely
Daniel Trenholme

The last dream I had was of myself
Sitting at my computer...
You came in the room
It was pleasant. Like you'd always been "here"
You tilted my head back and kissed me
Well, we kind of missed
But it's alright
We've been missing a lot over this last year
I picked you up and spun you around, proceeding to fall back on the bed
Passionately
Kissing...
Still kissing...
and then I remembered
Unfortunately,
while this was being written
that it was all a dream.

Daniel Trenholme is a Sociology major from Fall River, Massachusetts.

Fear
Stevy Mae Allen

The prickles in my underarms are from my adrenaline glands coming to life

They then turn on the faucets in my armpits releasing copious amounts of floral scent from my deodorant

There is a metallic taste in my mouth before it completely runs dry and my tongue sticks to the roof

The tingling flows down to my palms and the clamminess soon follows

Fight or flight

Fight or flight?

Fight or flight?!?!

Flight

But there's nowhere to go.

Stevy Mae Allen of New Bedford, Massachusetts and Auckland, New Zealand completed the graduate certificate in Professional Writing in 2012.

A New Love Poem

Elise DePlanche

They say
that writing is powerful
because it immortalizes the subject.
In just a few years
I've immortalized enough young men
to start a city-state.

But You have always been constant,
my love,
consistent in Your affections,
persistent in Your pursuit
of my full attention,
and I apologize
that You haven't had it
until now.

In all these years
I have never written You
a love poem.
I have meditated deeply
on the smell of some teen's sweater,
but I have yet
to sit in bed
daydreaming of a life with You.

The beauty of it is
that I love You more
than all the men
I've ever pined for,
I long for You
more than a sapling's roots
long for water,
pushing through desert sands,
relentless in their hunt

for beautiful, bountiful
life.
All things are beautiful
because You have made them so,
because You have made me
see them so,
because You love
to watch my love
for You grow.

You are beyond description
in my native tongue;
somehow I feel that
mon Dieu,
mon vie,
mon coeur
tells you better
what I mean.
My God,
my life,
my heart,
You are my everything.

Everything I have
I borrow from You,
down to
the very hours
of my life.

Like young Samuel,
stirred from his sleep,
I pray that You would “Speak,
Lord, for your
servant is listening.”

Elise DePlanche of Berlin, Massachusetts is majoring in English and Psychology.

Cycles

K. Covino

human life is a blood-drive.
healthy old rust-lung
sent to delve and toil 'til
his legs fail to support him.

"Well, what good is he then?"

reflect now on your best years:
you who shall remain a statistic on news-print,
you who fought the hours of a wage-less craft,
you who were once sure of your relevance in the universe,
against the odds, against enmity.

"Throw him in the pit with the rest of them."

here we watch the hopes and dreams of the milieu
seep into the soil, leaving only the faintest shadow of matter;
watch now as they drain from their vessels
in long shimmering threads: the coveted-self forgotten
and swallowed by the earth.

"He's gone to a better place now."

for this, our Reality, is the real realm
of seraphim saints and twisted tyrants.
we exist within a flux of entropy, seething
and stark mad for the pursuit of reason.
if you're truly wise then flee to that better place, but
expect not the warmth of a lover, nor the rush of the wind to greet you;
expect not the lofty conduit of Salvation, nor the charred mortar of Punishment;
expect not the form to which you've grown accustomed, nor the name
for all that is material must materially fade.
slam the door to the dark but know it makes little difference.

shift into cosmos, but do not fret.... do not fret.....

K. Covino is an English major from Hopedale, Massachusetts.

A Molting

Shannon Bayse

To be comfortable in one's skin cannot be perennial.
As years and experience add to a graying exoskeleton,
It will become too tight at some areas, as well as, too loose in others.
To change, to grow, is to molt.
A breaking down of one's own comfortable boundaries, to be temporarily replaced
by uncertain, uncomfortable, neophyte boundaries,
Not clear of how they should fit, or if they do at all.
As confidence persists, a more rigid sheath contours around an ever mercurial,
and ephemeral layer that soon will harbor security and deflect bemusement.

Shannon Bayse of Austinville, Virginia is a student in the PhD program in Marine Science and Technology.

Sanctuary

Ashley Nunez

Swirling winds and dancing leaves.
Grass shivering and branches whispering
Soft nothings to one another.
Quiet underbrush shimmers as moonlight filters through.
Fog twirls and slips in and out of the restful dead—
The dead leaves and plants,
Lost but not forgotten.
Moisture sticks to every plant there.

A glittering underworld
Primordial and graceful.
Only the wildlife and insects
Have ever crossed and slid through this realm
That time has forgotten.

Always cast in green light,
Deep tones of emerald, jade, azure, and ebony.
The ancient trees—
Old and powerful guardians—
Protect these depths from the harsh cruelty of the outside world.
Of mankind and their ephemeral whims.
Nothing here has been tainted.

Small cascading streams flow down smooth rocks
Into dazzlingly clear pools.
Rainwater collects and drips down out the sides
Wetting the undisturbed earth.
Small sounds echo around:
The slight splashing of rain from leaf to leaf,
Soft chirping of various forms of life,
Scuffing of small creatures,
All combine to create the sounds of life.
Nature.

Eternity.

Wisps of light flicker all around,
Every imaginable shade.
The scent upon the air,
Heavy with musky overlays,
Light flowery tones bloom in as the flowers do,
Rain mediates it,
The slight breeze blends it all together.

This world is cast in endless twilight
Hardly ever graced by the harsh side of the elements.
Neither the full loving gaze of the moon,
Nor the cruel relentless stare of the sun.
Stars do not twinkle their glimmering eyes upon it.
Nearly forgotten by all but whom it resides within.

The earth remembers it—
Cherishes it.
This sacred grove.
Respect for it has grown over time.
Nature knows.
The animals know.
The flora within sigh content knowing they are safe.
The fauna come to pay their respects
To it who has guarded them for so long.
The essence of life, nature, majesty—
All reside here.
In peace and solitude.
Their haven,
Sanctuary.

Ashley Nunez of Bellingham, Massachusetts is an English and Philosophy major with a minor in History.

My Dry Skin Cracks

Brooks King

My dry, cracked, skin splits
As a crooked smile stretches across my cheeks
My teeth are stained with nicotine and coffee
Black ink runs down my face in the form of blood and tears
Using my fingertip like a paintbrush I write these words
This ash tray day is a flowerpot
My love is a fertilizer
Hope is a seed tucked in between smoldering filters
Whiskey is the water that will make this little seed bloom
I'll climb the stalk to the sky and find the one it grew for

Brooks King is an English major from Marion, Massachusetts.

Façade

Marissa Matton

She takes her seat in the front.
No one knows the truth about
how she spent her night. All they
see is an eager thirst for
knowledge. With her nighttime sins
hidden, she sits up straighter
and plays pretend just like when
she was young. Instead of skirts
and crowns, a smile is used-
a smile so innocent,
to mask who she is inside.
Secrets kept hidden are her
indiscretions - but only
if she acts her part, pretends
as if she slept peacefully
all night rather than sending
him off to an early grave.

Marissa Matton is an English major from Fall River, Massachusetts.

Savior
Elise DePlanche

How do you tell someone
that they're the only reason
you haven't jumped off
that overpass yet?

How do you explain to someone
that you don't feel the same way
you did as a kid,
and that you want to get
more serious about things?

How do you tell your best friend
that you want to love Him
more deeply?

Luckily for me,
He already knows.

Elise DePlanche of Berlin, Massachusetts is majoring in English and Psychology.

Vixen

K. Covino

we happened in the white-space
and with those dead days she is now
contained-- distanced into art, perfectly structured
conceived informed by a nature too fleeting.
very carefully crafted her loose gown
long and small, a wild and precious thing
given to these lofty, lofty ends: to how
one arch curved into the other.

the exact nature of her shifts and changes,
of tangled emotions and a junked lover looking,
looking, looking for it—absconding through Petrarch
translations to europe in famous, rich, sonnet sequences:
o' politics and the art of love! i remember the passage,
a theme of *carpe diem* light and lively,
but having sold away a once treasured ingénue
to set this course for all wiles, always.
i see only her at the heart of it,
a range of perpetual pleasures
from first sitting to last departing.

K. Covino is an English major from Hopedale, Massachusetts.

To Live and Die in LA

Henry Amistadi

Impressions of a foreign world fly by,
images blur behind, end of the line
Norwalk Metro windows, inbound.

Compact slums, crumbling in on themselves
Empty streets, full of trash,
wasted brown grass, yards adorned with palm trees-
Their tropical symbolism lost to this potential paradise-
no coconuts in these palm trees,
no flashy skirts, umbrellas in drinks or palmy breeze.
Just torn sneakers dangling from telephone wires,
Fences fading in disrepair,
providing a false sense of fortification,
Pretending to keep anything out,
Yet at the same time succeeding in keeping their captives in.

The train passes under a tunnel,
and suddenly,
racing razor wire prison walls rise
surrounding us. Towering high above the train,
tangling metal silhouettes with the warm western sky.
twisting rust, metal, scrap heap closing in, climbing into the clouds,
tearing the sun from the sky and
locking it away in mighty high rise windows.

I blink, stop, think, and
realize this vision is not mine,
but reflecting from angry brown eyes,
tattooed scars, an artifact of this place;
a jagged stone hide, chiseled by time,
carved from this environment,
tinged with rust and dirt, from city earth.
Propped up on his bicycle, looking out the plexi-glass eyes of this speeding train
pressing against its closed door lips with defiant authority,

waiting to be spit back into his streets.

Henry Amistadi of Groton, Massachusetts is a student in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program in Photography.

A Parent's Tuition Song

J. Paul da Silva

From the moment of your debut
I knew right then you were true

Never to be 2nd best
Never to be forgot

As I held you in my arms
While Van serenaded in palms

I realized you are different
I realized you are unique

Now you are older and growing wiser
I can't help but try to hold on to the latter

But your space will prevail
But your hopes will win entail

I am here now and forever
Transcending all bonds of ether

Know you are wonderful
Know you are beautiful

I will be there in your inaugural
As I was in your arrival

Just as generations before
You are connected by law

To maintain the balance
To rain over the palace

Remember “to thy own self be true”
Search hard in time of need for fuel

For the journey is long
For the rewards will be born

Look inward in times of trouble
Search outward but enclosed in the bubble

Remember the past and navigate forward
Be in today and love shall reward

love in ways no words could ever describe ...
love in ways no words could ever describe ...

J. Paul da Silva of Tiverton, Rhode Island is in the PhD program in Education.

Iris

Adam Cataldo

White sun,
Blooming throughout
That darkest **night**.

Smoldering beneath those blue and silver orbs,
Stricken and furored by the intoxicating and churning
Opaque chasm.

Pressured and enwrapped by such fiery cosmos.
Spinning and spinning doth you pull closer on fine point,
Leaping into petalled pose.

Your deft, fragile extensions and lines -
Poise ascendant, firm and harmonizing
Amongst this constant continuum.

White sun,
Blooming and swaying into the dawn;
Radiantly reigning.

Adam Cataldo is an English major from Framingham, Massachusetts.

Activist

Brad Costa

We sit and pass rhetoric back and forth
along with tea-sticks
and my eyes are ablaze in wonder
at these souls before me who feel like I do,
who see the need for change like I do,
who can talk for hours with me about the world and its inhabitants
and I ask them
"So what are you going to DO about it?"

And they stare.

I mean,

we can all agree that the state of humanity is not at its peak

and we can see that no matter who may disagree it's true that women are still
treated like second class citizens, and people of races other than white are still
third and fourth class citizens,

and we can see that the ghettos are turning into a bloody sea, a war torn block in
our very own country where bullets and payoffs account for more than hard work
and truth,

and we can all see that to make the presidency you only need the right friends and
money and spot on timing and it has little to do with personal conviction,

and we can all see that across this globe we've become an imperialistic entity
dividing brothers and sisters who must raise up arms to protect their home and
children yet we paint them as terrorists when which one of us would act any
differently,

and we can all see that people pray to the dollar and forget our age old prophecies about the man who thought of nothing but money and how he was consumed by it,

and we can all see that it is not about a man's mind and heart nor about a woman's personal interests and more about what can be seen just look at any magazine,

and we can all see that companies such as BP can pollute and kill and maim our planet and still be allowed to exist while if I smoke a single stick of tea I'm the enemy,

and we can all see that people only need something shiny to distract them while all this happens,

and we can all see that the racial radical tendencies of a governor from Texas should in fact hurt his campaign not bolster it,

and we can all see that even though we have proven over and over that some men on death row are innocent they are still put to death,

and we can all see that if you have enough influence you can get away with rape and murder,

and we can all see that it takes less money to educate about the problem than to fix the fucking problem but we still don't invest in prevention,

and we can all see that the world is asunder with grief and grime and the world is turning on a dime and that dime is powered by gasoline,

and we can all see that over the horizon is a bright day if you can see past the smog and the telephone wires,

and we can all see that public higher ed is dying underneath corporate bailouts, and we can all see that the homeless are growing in numbers and lacking in spirit because they have been crushed by the weight of our society,

and we can all see that Troy Davis was executed by the state on the supposed International Day of Peace,

and we can all see that Kelly Thomas was executed in the street by six cops who
walked away unscathed,
and we can all see that no one was claiming that Rodney King was a good man but
we were claiming that those cops should have suffered at least some time in jail,

and we can all see those four little girls in a basement,

and we can all see those ticking time-bombs of war across the globe,

and we can all see the bloody face of Emmett Till and how little has changed.

And they see this.
And I ask them what they are doing about it
and they cower in fear.

If you won't do anything
than these words are swept away by the wind
like the long trail of ash off a cigarette.

Action is the only way to beat apathy.

Brad Costa is an English major from Swansea, Massachusetts.

The Friend Zone

Tanisha Catule

Your countenance is dry and,
Your heart so stubborn to the
point where I want to revive
You. Tell You how My muscle
aches at the thought of You, of
Me. But bones of courage do
not exist beneath My skin,

so I wait, wait for You to
picture me as Your only
charm, but instead You cling to
her as I, cling to You. The
Friend Zone- foreign to My tongue,

oblivious to My thoughts,
mindful of You, careless to
her insufficient aura,
The Friend Zone- worthless concept!

Tanisha Catule is a Psychology major from East Orange, New Jersey.

Untitled
Shannon Bayse

Gazing upon this mirror now
Working hard to repress a scowl
And could this man be me, how?
I throw the towel, I throw the towel

What was, is no longer what's true
Look again; cannot it be you?
What once was red, has a new hue
What will be you, what will be you

What are these things I cannot see?
A glimpse of happiness I plea
In the reflection it not be
But within me, but within me

Shannon Bayse of Austinville, Virginia is a student in the PhD program in Marine Science and Technology.

Departure

Henry Amistadi

Truth be damned!
It's the hunt that counts.
And what more can I do
than pass through and march on-
chin up, into the face of the Void.

Nothing lays just out of reach yet
Reality mocks me from her fading shore;
“You'll never make it alone in the dark!
You're diving into the flood- I'm the Ark.
I gave you your start, I inspired your art,
and now you abandon me with broken heart.”

But waves rise
and block the last view of her beach,
give way to the Emptiness of open water
swirling all around,
burning spiral tides of fire,
yearning waves of sound
consuming her horizons-
 The whole world charred black, 'til
 blank slate wind blows the ash back to
Reveal what's behind
the closed door of mind's eye.

Henry Amistadi of Groton, Massachusetts is a student in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program in Photography.

Terminal

Billy Mitchell

The doctor drags into the waiting room and talks in black and white,
Over the hum of the color TV.

Where won't you make it to?
Where are you going?
It must be somewhere far away, I've never heard of it.
Do they let you bring anything with you?
I remember, when I began to remember things,
that I was only scared to die,
because I couldn't bring my stuffed rabbit with me.

What will you bring?
A new heart to replace yours that is hardened and broken?

Maybe you can't even bring yourself.
Maybe they'll stop you at the terminal door, and you'll say:
"I'm just trying to get through."
"To where?"
And you'll ask what's through the door.
"Nothing."
"And then?"
And they won't respond.
So you'll have to take your bags filled with stuffed rabbits
and wait in the cold terminal
wait for someone you know.
And they'll turn out the lights while you're sitting there,
as the nighttime cleaning staff shuffles in,
And vacuum under your chair and at your feet.

Billy Mitchell is an English major from Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Pepé

Duane M. Besso

After dawn, the god of war's all set just like the sun.
I know the battle just begun, but he already won.
His visage cold as stone even facing his daughter's pun.
Here's a well-trained Veteran warring with his grandson.

Deep meditation and absolutely no conversation,
Only a tinge of perspiration and palatable desperation.
This silent altercation has me deep in admiration.
Contemplation over our physical ancestral relation.

His eyes are mine despite the coke bottle aviators.
But his ears are too hairy, and skin's like an alligators.
His every move gets my heart going like defibrillators.
His ponies flex their horse power like accelerators.

Strategically he advances, fortifying my stronghold.
Forward prances, weakening my changes, he's so bold.
I'm falling to pieces, to knights, unable to uphold.
My bare white king cornered, ready to die, truth be told.

The robe he ports, leaves for only a crown on his head,
Probably why he attacks ruthlessly until my king's dead,
Not a cranium full of led, but laid on his side instead.
Barely brakes a mental sweet, cause, his mind's well fed.

A strong, thick hand jets across the board straight for me.
We shake over the battle-field, he does not boast in glory.
Instead he plays back the story to a move I made very early.
I beseech, he begins to teach, a valued lesson learned surly.

Duane M. Besso is a Psychology major from Wareham, Massachusetts.

Delight

Serena J. Rivera

Seething through trembling teeth,
I grin, bask in your pain,
full color. Like the sweltering
sun of a summer day,
I relish and recede.
I pray for tempests, tsunamis, tornados.
Some thunder would suffice.
Warm shadows tease and tickle,
my deliriously imaginative rancor,
fragmented
by piercingly blind bouts.
I glower.

Serena J. Rivera of Rahway, New Jersey is a graduate student in Portuguese Studies.

Driving Through New Spring

Tyler Ochs

At mercy of wheel and hand
White stripes are seconds from hours
Round minutes; passing on a
Modest pipe dream of springtime's
Budding youth, a bidding love
Blossoms and tempers turn ripe.

Dwellers weep with ambition
Killing caution in their wake.
Bloomers come 'round with bells
In step with returning birds.

Though I swim in the cellar
You still gleam when you barter.
True but so tired is the offer at hand,
Responses are broken in
From cold tacks against the skin.

The winter turned vincible
The blues will unsheathe to green

A slow burn in the night will
Turn a man cold in his sleep.

Tyler Ochs of Palmer, Massachusetts is an English major.

Got Class

Daniel Trenholme

I can't think of a better time to live
A better time to walk these halls
Hearing all the chatter that I permit to enter one ear
and then strongly force out the other ear
why are we all here?
I really don't know.
This never made much sense to me.
it just makes me really angry to realize
that growing up in poverty has led me here
for all of my work to be judged by you sanctimonious shit heads
who do not get the references, didn't do the homework
will never advance past the "job" that you all so desperately seek...
Maybe I'm just stuck here
in class
listening to this one person complain about how they just began working a full-
time job
I've been doing that for years.
I've been listening for too long.

Daniel Trenholme is a Sociology major from Fall River, Massachusetts.

Painfully Aching

Gerald D. Arneaud

Painfully aching
Slowly I'm breaking
How long will it take?

Impatiently waiting
Dreams of escaping
All for justice sake

I know why I'm here
I know where I'm going
Back home to where I'm loved

My dreams have been torn
So I will start sewing
Before I float up above

Look to the skies
As if you could fly
And soon your wings will sprout

If men told no lies
And were equal in size
The world would be different no doubt

The world would be different
But it stays the same

Painfully aching for change

Gerald D. Arneaud is a Psychology major from Boston, Massachusetts.

Hickies

by *Elise DePlanche*

“Geez, don’t you have
a turtleneck or something?”

It’s August, Mom.

And how could I put
that knitted nightmare
over my only way of saying
Screw you Jacob MacIntyre
and Eric Perroni
and Dave DeMone!
I am beautiful after all.

Elise DePlanche of Berlin, Massachusetts is majoring in Psychology and English.

The Music Box

Ashley Nunez

The tinkling chimes graced the world
Ere it was first bought and opened.
Brought into creation by a craftsman whom loved it—
Loved the mechanism, the sound.
All his hard work gone into this
Intricate tiny music box.
Then, he put it in his shop
Open and unabashedly playing—
To entice someone into purchase.
That little music box—
Oh! How elated she was when she was taken home
Under the guise of sincere devotion and attraction.

Yes, they loved her at first.
They played her all hours of the day
Then they played her as a lullaby in the night.
What joy she felt at being wanted so!
But twas not to last.

Soon, they kept her shut often,
Only opening her finely shaped lid
To display for others
The piece of junk they bought those years ago.

But she knew of no such evil disposition
And played till they prematurely shut her with a snap,
Only to hid her once more.
Soon they forgot altogether
Oh, how she despaired.

Her bright colors faded
Into dull cracked paint.
Her finely inlaid designs

Clogged with the dust of neglect.
All while she sat in silence.
Years later,
While looking through those solemn forgotten places,
She was found again.
Once opened,
Her music slowly wheezed to life
But was unlike the glory of before—
Too much dust in her inner workings.
They shut her lid—
For the final time—
And she died alone.
The song forever trapped inside.

Ashley Nunez of Bellingham, Massachusetts is an English and Philosophy major.

A Torch
Shannon Bayse

Through rigidity and single mindedness these bridges are burned.
Through spurts of gregarious, bombastic allure the foundation was laid.
This vassal took life within the period of flame
And what was left was pure bitter, accompanied by shame.

Shannon Bayse of Austinville, Virginia is a student in the PhD program in Marine Science and Technology.

Interracially Solid

Nia Barbosa

The last love my lifetime
Humbly holds my heart with
Open, considerate hands;
Managing mine with true care.
As times change, his love remains,
Smoldering behind blind eyes.

Past the pain, bringing hope,
He has lifted me; sky high.
In the eyes of tradition,
Lovers like us are a sin;
Infinitely placed aside
Political corruption;

Condemning our passion to
Reason. Our colors blend for
Eternity; Complements.
Everlasting commitment.
Devoted partners for life.

Nia Barbosa is a Marketing major from Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

Looking Back

Marissa Matton

She sits silently gazing down from the hilltop,
Her thoughts flowing like melodies from the jukeboxes
Of decades past when she used to dance away the night.

Tears threaten to fall, marking her eyes with a scintillance
As she starts to think back on questions age-old,
Dating back far older than this generation's machines.

As always the answers that await her are vague.
What happened to him, is what she wonders-
The man who never needed to entice her with jewels.

Her past mistakes shine brighter than the moon's glare.
The pain of not knowing brings her hands to her temples,
The tears finally flowing, soft and glittery.

All she has are the memories of a love far deeper than the Nile.

Marissa Matton is an English major from Fall River, Massachusetts.

Birthday Message

Stephen Walsh

i was curled up under my covers
head pushed deep into the pillow, holding me
i was smiling more than i'd like to admit
reading a message you'd just sent me
i had been ready to forget you, and i wanted
you to forget me
you didn't and in that moment i forget that
i had wanted you to forget.
these words and that warmth
i felt love
and an overwhelming urge for the screen to stay lit
it faded
my switch does not silence with such ease
my sheets fail me, as i lay awake
with a heart on track to explode
no one is going to see

you set all this in motion
an aching gut
uncomfortable, out of place
guidelines to destination no where
you're an hour behind me
maybe that means i'm dying faster
and you're living through things that have already passed me by
technology please filter out the things i can't process anymore
lean into me sleep, cradle me though i can't repay the favor

Stephen Walsh is an English major from Swampscott, Massachusetts.

Hold On

Brooks King

Hold on, really, just wait
I need some time to contemplate
This isn't what we agreed on
I didn't know that I could be wrong
I know that I'm to blame
But you should go just the same

Because tonight the bartender is my best friend
Because to you, I was a means to an end
You knew that I always wanted this
But I'm so unfamiliar with my own avarice
Your kiss was bliss but now it's sour
As jealousy refills my glass every half hour

We agreed on terms I want to take back
Because I feel the deck was stacked
My good nature is my awful crutch
My heart is too damn easy to touch
So please my dear, take your hand from my chest
You've made it clear that you know best

And maybe I do worry a bit too often
Thinking and dwelling that show no signs of stopping
But those bad habits have helped create me
And very seldom has it made others hate me

Brooks King is an English major from Marion, Massachusetts.

Untitled
Serena J. Rivera

We give and we give and
we do not want to give.
And we give. We are
the victims of the gift, giving.
Our bodies mold
to the extractions, filling craters
of false hopes, of bloated delusions.
We create cavities and canyons
penetrating the sparkling surface of film carvings. And cravings.

Salvation in the dusty eyes
of salvation, of rocky, bouldered zeniths.
What once was, what never will be.
We keep giving.

Serena J. Rivera of Rahway, New Jersey is a graduate student in Portuguese Studies.

Keeping Time

Elise DePlanche

Looking through old photographs,
I wonder how we should measure
the length of our time together—

Should we count the sneakers I've broken,
or use your haircuts as our token?
Perhaps places we've been,
or hemp necklaces you've worn thin.
Maybe places we've slept
or secrets we've kept.
Maybe best friends'
girlfriends,
or days in the park.

Maybe whispers in the dark,
about a future together,
in New England weather,
or California time,
or European climes,
with three sweet kids
drinking milk with chocolate syrup,
and I'm a writer,
or maybe a journalist,
or maybe a psychologist,
and you're an engineer,
or a carpenter,
or a naval captain.
We're still not clear,
but we'll wake up with each other
and with kisses daily smother
one another's lovely faces.
We'll have plenty of spaces

for instruments and records
and a game room with checkers
and a library of dusty books
by a sunny breakfast nook.
We'll be happy and blessed
in our cozy little next,
as we've said over and over again—

Maybe that's how I'll begin
to count how long
I've loved you.

Elise DePlanche of Berlin, Massachusetts is majoring in English and Psychology.

Wedding Song

Billy Mitchell

I can't remember—
this song.
How did it go?
One more time.
Slow or soft like Sunday, open pulsing organ? All packed up, ready to go.
Or running through city streets roaring
from airplanes, dragged for miles in a blue cab, and more miles hissing through
cigarette smoke.
Crashing through pharmacy aisles
Sifting through naked roads, sidewalks and raindrops
falling, falling, falling.
Or screaming through twenty-two dollar speakers,
unrecognizable.

Broken ocean why can't I hear your song anymore? Why won't you cry for me?
Why can I not see your eyes?
Solitary station, 3 am, you groan like you're lonely for something. Are you?
Your music sounds sad, like crying.
One more time, just one more.
Play it again.
It was supposed to be our wedding song,
but now I can hardly hear it anymore.

Billy Mitchell is an English major from Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Icy Beer

Brooks King

I remember this one guy that left an impression
Awhile back when I struggled with depression
The funny thing is I don't remember his voice or his face
How or when or if it even took place
I half believe it happened outside time and space
But the faceless stranger gave good advice
It went like this if I remember it right
"Never go out and search for something
Desperation sets in when you find nothing.
Searching slights you to settle for less
You'll get half of what you bargained for at best.
Don't believe me? Put it to the test.
Don't blame me when you're a fucked up mess"

After the strangers vulgar words
Everything took a turn for the worse
When it was over I came out on top
Nice guys finish first, but only if they get the drop

You don't need malice in your heart
But it helps you to get a head start
If you do you're just a rat in a race
If you run real fast you just might place

But despite all your rage
You're just a turn of a page
At least when it comes to your childish ways

I paint on a grin to hide my pain
This life of sin feels like disdain
I spend years thinking and then
I realize it's too late to amend

At the cost of my time loneliness sets in
I'm lost like a loser that's cast his last bet in
And it gets tough being optimistic
When I'm constantly surrounded by thoughts so sadistic
Trapped in my mind it feels like hell
I pray for a soul I wish I could sell
But instead it's just me alone
Clawing out of my devilish home
I count the minutes to day break
Hold my head high, my heart may break
And I decide I'd rather hide it with pride
Than accept my failure and take it in stride
When being feels so natural
Apologizing starts to sound factual
But the unreflected life ain't worth it
This unrespected strife is a bottomless pit
And to my surprise
After I've severed some ties
I'm the stranger saying these things
Unaware of the consequence it brings
Sharing my knowledge with those who don't want it
Sometimes it seems like I'm trying to flaunt it
But it's meant with totally modesty
A severing of truth sprinkled with honesty
Over a bed of cold hard fear
Wash it down with an icy beer

Brooks King is an English major from Marion, Massachusetts.

Child of the Instant Gratification Age

Bryan Darling

Dear Friend,

I'm a child of the Instant Gratification Age where everything's golden and nothing stays. Where news channels broadcast in screen bottom marquees and the same drugs are done by capitalists and commies. Where no one reads novels, page after page. And no one smiles without trying to get laid. Where its "I want my high and I want it now: from life or from drugs or I don't care how." No one is working to preserve what we've got. No one worries about what everyones forgot. It's all someone else's problems and fears and it's to be dealt with by our children or peers. I've got places to be and things to do. I really can't worry about what's bothering you. I can't even worry about what's bothering me. Not with all these loud noises and bright colors to see. I just go on living day in and day out never stepping out of line or stopping to shout. Never thinking that maybe it's time for reflection or that maybe this is just too much "perfection". I'd never question what's going on in my life and I don't even know that I could if I tried. I'm part of a world of superficial dumb cocks and we're all blowing E and smoking crack rocks. While others are starving and wasting away and wars are killing hundreds every day. I'm part of the problem without a solution and no ones left who will seek absolution. We're getting closer to empty or so says the gauge, but I don't care.

Love,

Child of the Instant Gratification Age

Bryan Darling is a Philosophy major from Wales, Massachusetts.

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