



ANTHOLOGY

Volume 17
A Publication of Tarleton State University



Anthology

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Students enrolled at Tarleton State University are invited to submit their work for publication consideration online at www.tarleton.edu/anthology.

Anthology accepts work throughout the calendar year and is published annually in April.

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Art in Online Gallery

These art pieces have been selected to appear in the 2010 – 2011, Volume 17 Gallery of Anthology and can be view online.

Backstage View
Tyler Atkins

Safe Harbor
Tayler Atkins

Swing Set
Tayler Atkins

Threshold
Tayler Atkins

All Aboard
Ashley Ayers

CR 251
Ashley Ayers

I Only Cheer
for Texans
Lillian Baird

Haze
Sarah Barmore

Munch
Sarah Barmore

Perch
Sarah Barmore

T-Rex
Sarah Barmore

Vanishing Point
Sarah Barmore

Mom's Trees
Jancie Bateman

Convicted
Melissa Bilby

Lead Us Not Into
Temptation, But
Deliver Us From Evil
Melissa Bilby

Trust
Melissa Bilby

Blossoming
Bettina Brown

Fields of Darkness
Bettina Brown

Fleeing
Bettina Brown

Journeys 01
Bettina Brown

Journeys 03
Bettina Brown

The Look
Bettina Brown

Musically Inclined
Bettina Brown

Musically Inclined 03
Bettina Brown

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Bettina Brown

Staircase to Nowhere
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Things Forgotten
Bettina Brown

Things Forgotten, 02
Bettina Brown

Winding Paths
Bettina Brown

Sacrifice
Jesse Butler

Independence?
Luis Cifuentes

Joy
Tonna Cowan

A Friend
Melissa Crosby

Horse
Melissa Crosby

Somewhere Far
Melissa Crosby

Ferocity
Amanda DeBusk

Subtlety
Amanda DeBusk

The Gymnast
Ed Eldridge

Powhatan
Ed Eldridge

Resort
Ed Eldridge

Uptown
Ed Eldridge

Blue Eyes
Morgan Mariah Emerson

Fence
Morgan Mariah Emerson

Red Tulip
Morgan Mariah Emerson

Sinking Sun
Morgan Mariah Emerson

Ruler
Mohd Fahad

Stranded
Mohd Fahad

Tweaked
Mohd Fahad

Dark and Light
Jessica Feith

Love Never Fails
Jessica Feith

The Tiny Road to Travel
Jade Fernberg

In Good Hands
Kayla Hall

Mmmhmm
Kayla Hall

Memorial Day
Megan Keough

La Casa di Nicolí Fechin
Mark Martin

San Geronimo
Pueblo Church

Mark Martin

Guanajuato, Mexico
Erica Martinez

Gato
Tracy Mays

Standoff
Tracy Mays

Friend Me?
Brittany McLemore

Reels
Brittany McLemore

Spring Again
Brittany McLemore

Le Tour Eiffel
Paris Picard

Bang
Bonnie Prejean

Elephant Ears
Bonnie Prejean

Looking Up
Bonnie Prejean

Lucky
Bonnie Prejean

Mooney
Bonnie Prejean

More Corn
Bonnie Prejean

Puzzling
Bonnie Prejean

Time Squad
Bonnie Prejean

Stairs in Granbury
Jessica Richardson

Subway
Jessica Richardson

Disturbed
Christopher Rushing

Koi
Christopher Rushing

Little Voice You Ignored
Christopher Rushing

Dawn Lyn Lane
Misti Schultz

Everything Rides on
Hope Now
Misti Schultz

Purple Gypsum
Misti Schultz

Lucky Strike
Eva Sepeda

Macro of Mantis
Eva Sepeda

Mammatus Clouds
Eva Sepeda

Manty's Acceptance
Speech

Eva Sepeda

The Mirror
Eva Sepeda

The Storm
Eva Sepeda

Texas Sunset
Eva Sepeda

Brain Food
Paula Smith

This Dress
Paula Smith

Waiting
Paula Smith

Psalms 62: 5-8
Lewis Straughter

Anthology 17

Editors' Choice Award

Our Editors' Choice Awards honor four individuals who have contributed outstanding works to this volume. The range of talent demonstrated by these students exemplifies the breadth of creativity at Tarleton State University.

OUTSTANDING POET:

Sarah Barmore

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTOR:

Christopher Rushing

With submissions accepted in art, poetry, and music

for **OUTSTANDING WORK OF ART:**

Lewis Straughter

With special recognition for "Word of Encouragement"

Creative Arts Day Speaker Rawlins Gilliland Creative Juices

*Rawlins Gilliland is a 7th generation Texan born and raised in Dallas by “sophisticated activist artists.” His life has paralleled presidential tenures: grade school, **Eisenhower**; high school, **Kennedy**; college, **Johnson**; hitchhiking around the world, **Nixon**; the “lost years,” **Ford**, National Endowment for the Arts Master Poet in Residence, **Carter**; Neiman Marcus Wardrobe Consultant Dallas TV series, **Reagan**; NM retail management, **G.H. Bush**, National Sales Director Neiman Marcus, **Clinton**: NPR commentator, **G.W. Bush**. **Obama** years; “A work in progress.” He threatens to write a book described as a Nobody’s memoirs’ chronicling an infinite litany of “alternative realities.”*

For a sample of Rawlins Gilliland’s NPR commentaries, visit kera.org and then type in “Gilliand” in the advanced byline search.

When I was asked to write about “creativity,” my first thought was, *That’s like writing about breathing* because I see being creative and being actively alive as one. Of course there is little that’s “creative” when navigating routine responsibilities in daily life. But in a more general approach to the thought of living, there is always the capacity to find creative survival in any human ritual.

Having been thirty-eight years old from the day I was born, I was fortunate to be raised in a home where creativity was environmental. In addition to having her degree in English (from Texas Women’s in Denton) and being a *Dallas Morning News* book columnist, my mother was a Julliard graduate classical pianist who eloped with my father, a very successful big band bassist, the morning after she saw him on Dallas’ Adolphus Hotel bandstand in 1936.

Throughout the early childhood 1950s, our East Dallas home was a nightly salon of artistic types of all stripes. It was not uncommon to see Mother on the piano and Dad on string bass while Peggy Lee, in town for an event, sang. All this as Tennessee Williams, visiting Dallas to premier his new plays

at the Margo Jones Theater, held a male SMU college student's hand in the corner. Watching adults and listening to their conversions fascinated me. Their nostalgic insight permeated my childhood psyche and made becoming a grown-up seemingly its own reward.

Despite this fascinating exposure to cosmopolitan sophistication, I also suffered a troubled childhood in ways that so many of us do; sexual identify issues with its isolating no-man's land limbo. Which, topical today, lead to many instances of bullying and, however briefly, self-destructive thoughts around 11. But fortunately, becoming a fearless clever thinker...a byproduct of creative thought processes and stimulating practices...made me the ultimate victor of any personal wars.

I realized at an early age that one's wits are a far more astute weapon than mindless victimization. Evidenced first when taking our final exams; I waited until the last question to turn to the boy seated next to me, someone who had made my life miserable throughout my teenage years, and screamed, "Stop asking me the answers." Actually he had said nothing, but he was promptly removed and flatly flunked. It was his lesson learned that no cobra could rival a creative-minded mongoose.

I also learned after college (where I was an erratic student at best) when I began stowing away on planes to far-flung world destinations of choice, that the way one used language to communicate beyond routine dialog trumps how one might physically appear. This became clear when I convinced the Pan American travel agents that I was the son of their company's CEO, despite my being in torn jeans & a ripped tee shirt traveling with an army surplus store duffle bag. They not only put me on the plane without a ticket, they upgraded me to first class. Creative use of invented truth in order to get to Istanbul from San Francisco in 1973 was as valuable as it had been articulating bedrock truth in court as the sole prosecution witness at a capital offense murder trial when I turned 20 in 1964.

~~~

In 1976, I won one of the early artists in residence grants from the then fledgling National Endowment for the Arts. According

to the NEA guidelines, a state art council must match their funds. So I became the Master Poet of Alabama, a state about which I knew nothing. Never was being creative more critical as I began visiting public schools to conduct poetry workshops at all grade levels. Having neither experience as a teacher nor any credible credentials as a poet, I winged it to great success.

Creating a romantic aura in classroom visits, I drew on sensuous jazz for audio flavor while emphasizing the sound of the language over any word's certified "meaning." Getting children of all ages to write poetry struck me as easier than a chorus line of sirens seducing drunken sailors on shore leave. Music as the emotional soundtrack, words used for their color, making adult life seem absorbing; all this parlayed my childhood influences into a cultural dialect's native tongue. It was my idyllic paradise found to foment mental adventures in the minds of many young thinkers during those two unlikely years in Auburn-Opelika.

Inevitably, mature life intrudes on any vagabond iconoclast trajectories. So at one point in my interplanetary pursuits I spun into corporate orbit around luxury retailer Neiman Marcus. Throughout that nearly two-decade stint, I privately suffered, hoping to find creative satisfaction in a \$3000 suit no less enlightening than living in the nude Northern California commune tree house I'd called home a decade earlier.

But ultimately one can only creatively apply inventive thinking to something so long when the canvas being painted remains foreign matter. Being viewed and rewarded as "successful" certainly validates any visible enterprise, but it does nothing to fool one's inner sanctum soul where private regrets reside.

And so, as the 21st century approached, I made my exit for worlds unknown. Where money is always the issue but never the driving force. A new century where adversity sometimes has loomed larger than any childhood bully and yet, then as now, through sheer will of creative force I found happiness and vindication telling stories and sharing thoughts intimately to millions on National Public Radio.

So how did this unlikely course become charted? Via new age cyber creativity, of course. Infiltrating the internal NPR email

system in in 1999. Contacting the appalled NPR's executive producer Ellen Weiss, who at first shunned me but later emailed a quasi apologia, she clipped brusquely that "It (my submission) better be good, it better be brief and it better say something I haven't heard before."

To which I replied in wild-eyed panicked euphoria: "I am currently in mainland China helping a friend adopt an orphan Chinese girl. When I return in three weeks to the United States, I will swiftly sift my portfolio and select the piece I feel best suits your criteria."

In fact I was home and had written nothing for 20 years. So the invented story I told Ms. Weiss bought me time to write a piece that NPR did indeed record and air on *All Things Considered*.

I'd like to think it also made my feminist activist mother ...and probably her suffragette mother before her...smile from their graves to see their still-thirty-eight year old progeny's creative tale to a female editor spotlight, however peripherally, the plight of Chinese girls.

Sean Baldwin

## Shaken, Not Stirred

The sunlight hits every bottle,  
gently kissing them with warmth.  
Everything is cold and empty, only  
receiving life from a distant light.  
The martinis sit with  
dried up olives lying inside,  
a symbol of the anger and  
ending sadness of a desperate  
night. The shakers have  
been manhandled by those  
shouting and screaming.  
Actions fueled by anger  
and intoxication; nothing  
was safe from the shallow  
hatred. Some may forget  
what was said and others  
won't. But as the sunlight  
shines through and the  
screams fade into the  
walls, the only certainty  
is that once again more  
will be had and  
the party will continue  
anew.

Sarah Barmore

## Jenga

A conversation with you is like Jenga,  
Easy at first to spot the right thing to say,

“How are you?”

“How is work?”

But as the game continues,  
We inwardly tense with each nudge of a topic,

A thought,

A sentence,

Praying I don't choose the wrong piece,  
That you don't jostle our carefully worded stacking  
Our tower sways and threatens—

and

We mutually agree to silently slip from the table,  
Neither one of us able to bear the sound  
Of our crumbling friendship's final demolition.

Sarah Barmore

## Jigsaw

I watch his fingers caress the pieces—

Sliding along the straight edges,

Circling along the rounded—

I knew their pleasure.

I could imagine their sighs,

Their arching against his touch

Willing him to find their perfect fit—

The place they belong.

Sarah Barmore

## A Plant Poem

“Why don’t you write some poetry about plants?”  
He idly asked, tugging her loose strands.  
She laid her dirt-smudged chin in her reddened palms,  
Thoughtfully turning over his question.  
He watched her contemplate the grass, touch the trees,  
Meet the sun and clouds—then she responded—  
“Why rewrite poems, perfected by Nature,  
Already published on Earth’s green pages?”

Sarah Barmore

## Poor Worms

Drowned  
In the Earth,  
Baked  
In the Sun.

Sarah Barmore

## Spring Painting

She twists the leaves loose  
to grind them like powder—  
goldens, rusts, amarillos, orange—  
the earth is Her palette.  
Blooming sage and cicada wings,  
Whisper Her requests,  
“Come rain, sweet rain,  
Swirl thy hues,  
Diffuse thy colors!”  
She bleaches Her canvas,  
White as snow.  
The world eagerly stills,  
Curious  
for Her next Spring Painting.

Sarah Barmore  
Velcro

I hug my backside to the grass  
Thankful for my Velcro clothes  
That prevent me  
From falling into the sky.

Of my professor's voice.  
Then I fell asleep to  
The sound of his lecture.

Sarah Barmore  
Sheep

One sheep, two sheep  
Three sheep, four sheep—  
They pour from his mouth  
In a bleating stream.  
They romp through his beard  
And graze on his chin.  
I settle back in my chair  
And count the hoof pricks  
As they scamper across  
My forehead—  
Dancing in and out  
Of my professor's voice.  
Then I fell asleep to  
The sound of his lecture.



Bettina Brown

# Awake

*Breathe in deeply . . . breathe out slowly . . . breathe in deeply.*

Once again, despite the lulling instructions I have been repeating, my mind will not listen. My eyes pop open to stare into the darkness that they refuse to assimilate to. The sound of the whirling fan mixes with the hum of the radio, both of which meant to entice me into retiring. Neither one accomplish their goal. I try in vain to convince my mind to float into a slumbering state; however, it simply wants to float elsewhere. Faces and names, moments in time, words said; words not said; what-if, if-only, could have, should have, would have. It seems to have forgotten that ten hours ago it was too tired to operate, now overloaded by caffeine meant to induce a functioning state it is too wired to sleep. So instead, I think.

Each minute that passes is a minute I will lust after in the mid-afternoon with eyelids that will be as heavy as bad news at Christmas. My body has long since resigned itself, and here I lie, tucked in tight with the sheets to my neck. I toss, carefully, so as to not wake him; his breathing is steady and slow, and he is lost in the land that I cannot find. I snuggle in, fluff the pillow, and close my eyes. I pretend that I am asleep. I feel my consciousness start to fall deeper, deeper, and I disconnect from reality and drift toward the coveted prize. A jolt, then once again, the wide, open eyes probing the darkness around me. I sigh.

*Breathe out slowly . . . breathe in deeply . . . breathe out slowly . . .*

Bettina Brown

## Castles Made of Sand

You're shaking, trembling, quaking  
Trying desperately to retain an image of a pillar  
Tall, strong, proud  
But underneath the surface, your foundation is broken  
The walls you built are crumbling.  
Your façade is a quickly becoming transparent.  
Your weakness is beginning to show through your pride.  
Your grandeur is losing its pearly glow and becoming what is  
always was:

    An illusion.

Pulling one thread set about the unraveling of the whole  
tapestry.

I fear collapse is looming in the distance  
Thus completing your total self-destruction  
You hide it; you fight it,  
Yet from the outside looking in, it can't be denied.

Upon seeing the shattered remnants of glory  
I find that I am not angry, I am not happy.  
I don't rejoice in the wake of your demise  
Nor do I encourage it

I realize with startling clarity that you simply got lost  
somewhere along the way  
As we all do from time to time.  
For once, I feel the touch of sadness in seeing you this way  
Lost, broken, and a long way gone from what you once were.

Bettina Brown

## Déjà Vu

I think I may have seen your face before. It's striking me with such familiarity that I know our paths must have crossed once upon a time, even if only for the briefest of moments...

Maybe it was in that crowded airport, each of us rushing to make a flight. Perchance our eyes connected for one brief moment as we whirled past each other, heels clicking on the tiled terminal, two strangers headed to opposite sides of the world.

Maybe, I glanced your way at a corner café in Paris. You know, the one with the crème pastries, and quaint metal framework tables, and rows upon rows of coffee beans? I might have seen you while blowing the steam off my cup and pondering where to go next.

Maybe we passed each other in the midst of that hike in the mountains. You, coming down from where land collides with sky, eyes still foggy from the view. Meanwhile I was going up, anticipating how the blue depths would merge into the horizon and contemplating just how far one could see until all faded into nothingness.

Maybe I saw you last night, one conjured face out of the millions I've seen, pulled inexplicably from the vastness of my subconscious mind. With eyelids fluttering, perhaps I memorized your face, and embossed the shape of your nose and the curve of your brow into my mind, only to lose all but a vestige of it upon waking.

Bettina Brown

## Dreams

Murky, shadowed-filled voices; spinning, turning, churning; fade in and out, slowly.

Revolving images, not quite whole, changing, transforming, taking new shapes as I sleep.

Reality mixes with fantasy seamlessly—where does one end and the other begin?

Hundreds of moments, condensed and confined into one single instant, linger for a second before becoming lost in the crowd of faces that storm my mind.

They merge with conjured up pieces of fiction; nonsensical, rhythmical, poetic tall tales, sliding over one another in their quest to tell a story.

Haphazard and bent, disorienting—falling and rising up; where does this tale begin?

I awake.

Bettina Brown

## Ribbons of Life

It rises from the ashes

thin trails of smoke snaking lazily upward

with wisps and tendrils that swirl around in mad circles

as if eager to escape the ruins that gave birth to its existence

Its transparent haze, like phantom fingers,

search the air for something tangible to wrap its gray body around

and it seeks out a solid form to cover with its thick film

Its destination is vague, as is its journey,

as it traverses through the spaces and settles thickly in the air,

masking the evil in its intention and the haunting whispers of its being

Bettina Brown

## It Is Whatever You Say It Is

She found herself in a room with no windows and no doors. The walls were gray; the carpet was gray. It was as if all color had been vacuumed out of this *place*. She glanced around the wide room; its vastness was exacerbated by its emptiness. She did not know why or how she was here. She simply knew that she wanted, needed, to leave.

"Why do you want to leave? You just got here." His voice shook her, betraying her belief that she was alone and that her thoughts were secret.

She did not answer him; instead, she studied his unfamiliar frame. She did not know him, this man who appeared in closed rooms and could read thoughts. He was braced against the wall staring into a lone mirror. She took a step toward him before realizing that he had no reflection. She hesitated, not understanding what was happening.

"Where am I? What's with this house?"

"It's just a house; at one point, it was someone's home." As he spoke, faint traces of faces began to appear in the mirror. She whirled around, scanning the room, all the while knowing she would see no one. The faces in the mirror were now filling in, becoming an image, a reflection of a family. They were sitting around and laughing, bonding. She walked closer and peered into the scene. She felt as if she knew them, or was supposed to know them. While familiar, she couldn't place their faces. The room they were in was the same as the one she was in, except the mirror held happiness and a feeling of peace that did not translate.

Suddenly, a dark-haired girl paused, mid-laugh, and stared queerly into the mirror, at her. She frowned as if puzzled that a stranger was observing this personal, familial moment.

She backed away and looked to the man. "We should leave now."

He slowly pulled his gaze away from the people and fixed her with a very odd look. Left eyebrow raised, eyes knowing, and face ominous, he stepped toward her.

For the first time since being in the closed room, she felt panic. There was a feeling of uneasiness here within these walls, before this

man who studied her so intently. She felt her chest tighten, and a tremor went through her.

“Why? Are these people ghosts?” he asked, voice full of mirth.

She frowned, confused. “I don’t know; maybe.”

Suddenly his demeanor changed, and he collapsed into an air of melodrama. “Then leave we must! Let us go now!”

She stared at him, bewildered by his behavior, scared of the underlying tones being emitted by this colorless room. She glanced at the mirror only to see that the reflection was gone. The glass rippled as if it were a freshly disturbed pond. The ripples reached past the frame and flowed onto the gray, gray, walls, making them shiver and dance as if alive.

Without another word, she turned to run but found that her legs were heavy—too heavy. It was like walking in water against the current, and the effort only exhausted her. She kept moving, fighting every step of the way until suddenly her legs turned loose of their weight. She stumbled forward, falling and landing on her knees.

She knew without looking that the man was gone, and now a door appeared straight in front of her, mere feet away. She ran for it, glad to be free of the weight. However, a brief flash of color caught her eye, and she stopped. Chills pierced her, and her uneasiness began to permeate her entire body. Not only was it the only thing of color in this colorless world, but it was her thing. She turned to survey the room that had moments ago been empty and was sickened to see that it was now filled with her things. Her shoes, books, clothes, bed ... her life. It was all here, giving off a faint glow of color in this gray place.

“No, no, no. This is mine! Why is it here?” she looked to the door then back to her scattered belongings.

Frantically she raced around the room, gathering an armful of stuff, trying to hold as much as she could. She was in mid-stride back to the door when it opened. Sunlight poured in, and birds chirped as the room exploded with the color of it all. However, it was not enough to overcome the gray.

She stared in surprise at the faces that were lining up to stream into what had formerly been a closed room. There were so many people, all dressed in black, white, and gray. She was frozen until he appeared next to her again. “Do they look familiar to you?”

"Yes. I work with her. He was a friend of mine years ago." She pointed around the room at the people, some she knew, some she didn't. She turned to question him and sighed when he was no longer there. She did not like this man who came and went at will. She did not like this mysterious house, nor its rippling, gray walls. She dropped her possessions where she stood, but no one noticed.

That's when she saw it. The mirror was no longer a mirror at all, rather it appeared to be a rippling, black screen that faded to gray; the edges blended seamlessly into the wall.

She stood staring at all the people now crowding the room. "What is happening?" The crowd around her continued talking quietly. She heard snippets of conversations, disjointed, nonsensical streams of words.

"Didn't you get the memo? This is your surprise birthday party."

"It's not my birthday. Who are you? What's going on here?"

"Birthday or not, they are all here because of you."

"I want to leave. I have to leave." She was now shaking uncontrollably.

"You want to leave your party and all these people who are here for you? Your friends? Your family?"

"My family?" she scanned the room. "My family is not here."

"Yes, they are. You saw them through the mirror."

"That wasn't my family; that wasn't me." Was it?

Suddenly, she didn't know anymore. Everything was fading fast, becoming a whirling blur. She ran to the place where the mirror had been and pressed her hand against the ripples. A hum instantly began droning in her ears, and the ripples transferred from the wall to her wrist and up her arm causing a slight, but pleasurable vibration.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

She pulled her hand away, slowly, and immediately missed the feeling of ecstasy it had given her.

"Why?" she asked, eyes never leaving the wall.

"How did it feel?" He asked quietly, curiously.

"It was like being cold and standing in the sunshine, closing your eyes, and feeling the warm rays radiate through your skin all the way to your soul."

"That's beautiful," he stared at her in the odd way again, and she wondered, briefly, if she was supposed to know this man with the

intense gaze who lingered here in this peculiar place. "No one has ever described it like that before."

"Described what like that? The walls?"

Again the gaze, the eyes. He looked at her like he knew her. He read her thoughts. She stared openly at his face, her focus always being drawn back to his eyes.

"You can leave whenever you want. Just follow the ripples." He gestured to waving, dancing walls, giving her what she needed to know to do what she had wanted to do from the start.

She looked closely at the flowing current as it radiated from floor to ceiling. The urge to immerse herself into it was strong, and she stepped close, close enough to hear faint traces of a distant hum.

He put his hand on her arm, and she marveled at it. She did not feel fingers, skin, or his palm. Instead, it were as if a ring of air caressed her skin. "There is one thing you should know." He was leaning in close to her, seeming to whisper though his lips never moved. "Once you pass through these walls, you can never come back."

Finally, she understood. She looked at all the people; their faces were becoming more of a blur the closer she got to the wall. The books, shoes, and clothes, still in a heap where she left them, seemed to emit more of a gray hue, and he spoke what she already knew. "You can't take it with you."

She backed away from the low humming, putting space between her and what was now an intoxicating invitation. "What if I don't go?"

"Haven't you already decided?"

She nodded. Then slowly, somewhat eagerly, she moved forward. Her fingers grazed the surface, and the hum returned, louder now than before. Something akin to endorphins ran rampantly through her, and she looked back at him. Those eyes. That look. The way they pierced her so keenly. She wordlessly questioned him, having faith that somehow he would hear her whispered thoughts.

*I don't even know your name . . . do I?*

*It is whatever you say it is.*

It was overtaking her now. She felt herself slide into, and then through, the rippling, gray walls she had so greatly feared.

Suddenly, she was falling—peacefully, quietly. Brilliant colors and warmth surrounded her, and the last thing she saw were his eyes as he whispered goodbye.



Bettina Brown

## Tales of the Imagination

The screen door slammed shut with a loud crack. Bare feet ran down the porch, each child-sized footstep thudded noisily against the back porch. A loud thunk soon followed as Travis bounded off the porch steps with reckless abandon and infinite invincibility. Without hesitation, he jumped down into the dry creek bed that lay between his house and Dalton's. His dirt-covered feet danced nimbly down the old, familiar pathway as he dodged invisible monsters and fought with make-believe dragons. What kind of dangerous and thrilling adventures lay waiting under the dark canopy of trees?

Across the way, another screen door cracked shut and Dalton, as lively and imaginative as Travis, joined in the fight to save the beautiful princess who existed only in their minds. With two over-active imaginations at work, every shadow was a villain, and every tree trunk was a gangway to a ship.

Soon the little boys were high in the tree tops. Their suntanned arms were agile and wrapped around the limbs, and their small toes grasped the rough bark like monkeys. They became pirates voyaging across the mighty sea. Each gust of wind that rustled the leaves was a powerful wave with the potential to be a tempest. They plundered and pillaged, all the while talking pirate lingo and wearing eye patches.

After all the buried treasures were found, the two boys climbed higher and higher into the leaves, and when they finally reached the top of the tree, they sprouted wings and began to fly about in the sky. Their eagle wings flew them high over the earth; their houses sailed below them as small as dust specks. The tall tree that had been their ship just moments before was barely visible.

"Look at me!" Travis yelled as he flew on the wind and turned in circles.

"Oh yeah? Well, look at me!" Dalton yelled backed as he spun in a circle. The little boy eagle laughed merrily, but suddenly his laughter caught in his throat and he began a downward spiral back to Earth.

Thud! Dalton tumbled out of the tree and landed hard on the ground. But being the fearless and mighty warrior that he was, he

quickly sat up and held back his tears. Travis jumped down beside him, and soon the little boys were beginning a new imaginary game.

With sticks clanging and singing like swords, Dalton and Travis began dueling, medieval style. Their war cries were loud, and the startled birds darted away in a flutter of wings. Travis had almost defeated Dalton when all of a sudden a large wolf with rows and rows of sharp teeth crouched slowly out of the trees. Ominous clouds began to cover the sun, and Dalton and Travis stood very still. Immediately their swords turned into guns, and they began shooting at the creature. The wolf, however, was unfazed by their attempts to stop him, and he came closer and closer to where the two little boys stood. With a leap from his powerful hind legs, he attacked them and knocked them to the ground.

Gleeful laughter sprang up from the boys as the yellow lab lathered them with slobbery kisses.

"Dixie! Get off, Dixie! We shot you!" Travis laughed, trying to push his loyal friend off his chest. They rolled away from the soft-hearted creature and soon began a new game. Dixie was allowed to play with them, and she became the monster that had to suffer the blows of their swords, but for the attention and chance to guard her owner, she gladly joined in and even let out a growl and a few barks.

"C'mon, Travis, we've got to save the princess. She's locked in a castle dungeon in a far away land."

The two boys ran over the rocks and made their way to the railroad tracks where a cart was waiting, just for them. "All aboard!" Travis yelled. The sound of thunder rumbled across the sky, and the boys' courage grew. "We've got to hurry; the evil dragon is growling!"

They dove into the railway cart, and a large sail flapped in the wind over their heads to guide them. As soon as the boys were seated, the railway car sped off, riding down the tracks and over the sea. Before long, the boys came upon a man and woman carrying a suitcase waiting beside the tracks.

"Excuse me!" the man called out. "Are you going to the castle?"

"Yes sir!" Dalton replied. "We are going to save the princess!"

"Do you think we could have a ride on your magical car? We must reach the castle before dark."

"Climb aboard. It would honor us to have your company," Travis responded.

"Why do you think they want to go to the castle?" Dalton whispered.

"I bet they are spies from France. They look pretty suspicious to me," the boys stared at the couple for a moment. Lightning flashed across the sky, and sprinkles began to drop, slowly at first but then quickly gaining momentum.

"The dragon sent out a curse on us!" Travis yelled. He jumped out of the red Radio-Flyer, and the two cats that were sitting at his feet leapt out as well and ran behind the storage shed.

"There go our spies!" Dalton shouted, pointing his finger at the retreating backs of the furry creatures. A clothespin that was holding the white bed sheet on the clothing line slipped off as the wind picked up speed, and the sheet flew through the air and caught on the gate.

"And there goes our sail! We'll never reach the castle now!"

Bettina Brown

## Lily's Carousel

Kristen held the steering wheel tight in her hands as she focused every ounce of her attention on the road ahead. She had only had a few beers before leaving the party, yet it seemed to have a stronger effect on her than it normally did. She blinked the haze away as she glanced at the clock. Fifteen minutes until curfew. She pushed the car to a faster speed and the dirt road began to fly beneath the tires. It happened in an instant. For one split second she looked down in an attempt to unwrap gum. In that same split second a tree branch, larger than the Mustang she was driving appeared on the road, and before she could swerve or stop, it was hitting the bumper with a ferocious thud and loudly scraped along the undercarriage. Kristen gasped and then cursed before laughing at the limbs scattered the road behind her. At least it was just a harmless branch and not a deer. She took a breath to calm her nerves; however, it soon became apparent that the branch was not as harmless as she had originally thought. The service engine light flashed on her dash, and within seconds the Mustang quietly died and rolled to a stop.

Kristen stared in bewilderment at the dashboard, unaware of what her next move should be. She gazed into the darkness beyond her windows before peering at the dash once more. She switched the key to the off position and then tried to turn the motor back on. It sputtered briefly before giving a click, indicating its resistance to comply. She let out a heavy frustrated sigh as she dug through her bag in search of her cell phone. At long last she felt it at the bottom of the bag, buried underneath make-up, house keys, and a single pom-pom that was leftover from the pep-rally earlier that day. Her moment of victory was brief as she soon realized that her service was non-existent. Typical.

Kristen tried to turn the engine over one last time. Again, she was met only with the sound of a click and then silence. Seeing no other choice, she climbed out of the useless car and looked around for the nearest sign of light and life. There seemed to be nothing for miles. She tried to calculate how far back the party was five, ten miles at least. She decided her best bet would be to continue the way she had been going.

Much to her surprise, she only had to walk about hundred yards before the shroud of trees beside the road gave way to a small clearing with a little white house. Light streamed out the windows, and a single yellow bulb dangled over the porch. There was a garage to the right that housed an old blue truck and an even older black dog. The dog raised his head just slightly at the sight of Kristen before sinking back down into the dirt.

Despite the warmth that the house exuded, she hesitated at the end of the driveway. It was almost midnight, and though it was Friday, it still seemed late for a family to be awake. She opened her cell phone to find that she still lacked sufficient enough service to make a call or even send a text. There wasn't any other option so she took a deep breath and stepped onto the driveway. A loud creak to her right made her jump, and she laughed nervously when she saw that it was simply the loose hinge of a mailbox. She noted the three "fives" painted on the side.

She hurried through the yard and onto the porch where she knocked twice quickly on the wooden door. For a long minute nothing happened. Then the door slowly opened an inch and a tiny face peered out. Kristen smiled at the child as she wrapped her hands around her arms.

"Hi there, is your mommy and daddy home?" The blue eyes behind the door held curiosity for a moment before the little girl flung the door open excitedly.

"Are you here to play with me?" the girl's white-blond curls bounced on her head and her smile emphasized the red apple of her cheeks. She was wearing a long nightgown that grazed the floor, and as she spoke she twirled it just enough for it to sway around her toes. Inside the house, Kristen was surprised at the old shag carpet and the drab wallpaper. The living room was sparse, having only a couch and a wooden chair. On the floor in the corner the girl's toys were scattered everywhere. As she admired her head of ringlets, Kristen laughed at the child's enthusiasm.

"No sweetie, I need to use the phone. I had some car troubles," Kristen fidgeted on the doorstep as she peered into the house looking for an adult.

"I want you to play with me!" the girl laughed and goose bumps ran rampant over Kristen's arms. She fought hard to keep herself from shivering in the cold night air.

"Where are your parents? I really need to get home soon. It's late," she explained, but the child did not appear to be listening. Instead, she grabbed Kristen's hand and with a force that seemed impossible for her small frame, she tugged Kristen into the house.

"Please, please, please, won't you play with me?" The child pouted merrily and her eyes flashed. "I have my toys all set up and ready to play. All I need is a friend!" The girl giggled and the sound startled Kristen.

Suddenly Kristen felt uncomfortable. Why was this little girl awake at this hour? And where were her parents? The house was small, two bedrooms at the most, so there was no way they hadn't heard the knock at the door or the voice of a stranger in their home.

Kneeling down to the child's level, Kristen tried once more to figure out where the adults of the house were. "What's your name? I really need to get some help before I get in trouble. My parents will be worried about me." She wanted nothing more than to give up on the whole notion now. Something didn't seem right about the situation. However, as much as she wanted to leave, Kristen wasn't sure she could wrestle her hand out of the vise-like grip of the little girl.

As if reading her mind, the little girl squeezed tighter against Kristen's hand. As she tried to pull away, the girl seemed to have more strength than a small child should.

"My name is Lily." She loosened her hold on Kristen's hand and glanced across the room at a white door.

"Hi Lily, I'm Kristen. I really need to be leaving now. I just needed to use the phone. Please Lily, can you tell me where your parents are?" Kristen was beginning to wonder if the child had parents; however, for the first time, Lily responded to the question.

Her eyes dropped to the floor and the rosy excitement left her face. When she spoke, her voice was a whisper. "Mommy's in the bathtub. Daddy said she was very bad, like me."

Kristen stood abruptly and tried to move to the door, thoroughly shaken by Lily's words. However Lily maintained her grip on her hand, and before she could speak the door across the room opened and a tall man stepped out, shutting the door behind him.

"Lily let go of her!" The sudden command made Kristen jump in fear, and she began shaking uncontrollably. She had a feeling that she had made a mistake in coming here.

Lily quickly released her hand and hissed at her father as she began circling Kristen, and she stared in horror as the child transformed in front of her eyes.

“Leave her alone you evil little brat.” His voice was low and quiet, and despite his words his voice was not threatening. It seemed sadder than anything. Kristen glanced at him and noticed that his eyes were red rimmed, and tears appeared to be permanently settled onto the lower lid.

Lily laughed at him, a cold laugh that seemed too deep for a child. Kristen’s head was spinning and she wanted nothing more than to leave. Lily spun around the room, making her nightgown spin in circles around her ankles. When she stopped spinning she looked at Kristen. Gone was the twinkling blue, instead her eyes were now unnaturally dark. She smiled slowly, but like her laugh, it was not that of a child. She stared at Kristen while speaking to her father.

“But Daddy,” her voice had taken an edge that resembled nothing of the little girl who had first answered the door. “She came to play with *me*.”

Kristen found herself horrified by her words. Never before had the word “play” sounded more ominous. Despite her initial shock over the father’s words, she found herself wondering if perhaps he was right.

For the first time since entering the room, the man looked at her. He didn’t seem surprised by her presence, or annoyed, and despite the eerie tone of the room Kristen didn’t fear this man, at least not nearly as much as she had begun to fear Lily.

“I- I was at a party, and I hit a branch as I was coming home. Now my car won’t start. I just needed to use a phone. I didn’t mean to intrude,” she stammered quickly in explanation.

“A phone?” he appeared confused, disoriented even. “We don’t have a phone.” He didn’t further inquire; instead, he glanced down at Lily who had turned her attention to the toys on the floor. His eyebrows rose slightly, and his jaw dropped ever so discreetly. Kristen followed his gaze and felt her blood go cold.

In the middle of Lily’s toys there was carousal, or at least what used to be carousal. It had been stripped of its horses and carriages down to the revolving poles. On these poles Lily had tied her dolls by the neck with string. Their plastic eyes had been blackened with a pen, and their heads were bald from where she had sheared their hair. The

music from the carousal played quietly as the dolls spun around and around on their ride. The black eyes made Kristen nauseous, and Lily turned to give her a smile. Her eyes, however, were now very dark, and the blond curls that had first appeared beautiful now resembled long white snakes across Lily's back.

The man looked back at Kristen and his eyes held so much fear and sorrow that it was almost tangible. "Just give me a few minutes and I'll come look at your car. I'm pretty good with my hands." Tears rolled down his cheeks as he stared down at his fingers as if they would confirm his words.

Kristen looked down too and noticed that his hands were wet, as well as his shirt, and pants. His arms had long, deep, red scratches, beginning at the elbow and running to his wrist. Her breath caught in her throat and she looked at the door he had walked out of. She realized now that there was a vague sound of running water, and suddenly she was terrified.

"Please," his voice broke quietly, and with this one word he expressed more fear and pleading than his eyes ever could. "You need to leave. It's not safe here." He glanced quickly down at Lily to find her staring at him, eyes dark and angry. The scowl that covered her features had taken the last childlike traces from her face and transformed it into something sinister.

He stared at his daughter and tears were now streaming down his face. His voice was ragged, as if he were in pain, as he spoke to Kristen. "Try your car again, maybe it'll work this time."

Kristen had all she could take. She backed up slowly until she had crossed the threshold of the house.

"Yeah, maybe that's all it needs." The man and Lily were locked in a single gaze, and Kristen knew that neither had heard her. As she turned to flee the house, the man spoke quietly, his tears and sorrow even more evident.

"It's time for your bath Lily."

Kristen ran down the porch steps, through the yard, and down the driveway. She ran until her feet hit the gravel of the road, and even then she kept running. She ran until she was at her car, and within a second she was sliding safely inside. She breathed deeply, trying to calm her heart and her mind was spinning with all that had elapsed in the past five minutes. She put the key in the ignition, and to her relief and surprise, the engine roared to life. She dreaded driving past



the house again; she didn't want to see the lights or the child. She put the car in gear and resolved to speed past it as fast as she could.

However, when the clearing with the little house came into view, what she saw made her slam on her brakes, and the tires slide on the gravel.

The dog was no longer under the truck because there was no truck. Nor were there lights. The house which had mere moments ago been bright, lit-up, and inhabited, was now clearly and obviously long abandoned. Against her better judgment, Kristen turned into the driveway, her confusion and bafflement greater than her fear. She stared disbelieving as her headlights pierced through the shadows that hovered over the windows and settled around the dilapidated roof. The windows were broken out, and the shutters had all but fallen off. The porch roof had fallen in over the porch, and through the debris the front door stood wide open, revealing the looming emptiness inside the house. The garage was empty and missing one wall. Everything within the clearing had long since been decaying and abandoned.

She put the car in reverse and sped to the road. Impossible, she must have the wrong house; she must be confused. However the black mailbox stood leaning heavily to the left still held the faint outline of three fives, the same three fives that she had seen not more than twenty minutes ago.

Kristen stared at the house once more, not able to comprehend what was happening. She was shaking as she put the car in drive; however, once again the vehicle was not responding to her command. She pressed the gas pedal but there was nothing. Her dashboard was bright and every warning and signal was flashing, blinking, and dancing for her attention. She turned the ignition off, waited a minute, and then frantically tried to turn it back on. She was met with nothing but the same metallic click as the engine failed to engage.

She glanced at the house as small vestiges of panic began searing her mind, and her blood pounded her ears as a small golden glow of light appeared in the broken out window. She stared at it, fixated by the tiny flame, too afraid to look away. She tried to start the car again, never breaking her gaze from the pinprick of light that was gradually growing closer. It appeared to be hovering in the darkness, with nothing holding it and nothing sustaining it. It passed through the door, over the porch, and slowly yet steadily drew nearer to

Kristen where she sat helpless in the road. It flickered in the wind, yet it didn't go out. Kristen's heart was racing, and her hands were sweating. She was terrified to tear her eyes away from the strange sight, and she willed it to go away. Her attempts to restart the car were as furious and frequent as her prayers; however both were met with only the same unyielding click, click, click.

The flame was now a mere twenty feet away, and it flickered violently as the wind moaned and rushed through the clearing and wrapped around the car. Between the sound of the engine clicking and the racing of her own heart, Kristen heard a sound in the wind, so quiet and faint that at first she believed it to be nothing but the sound of her own imagination. However, as the wind grew stronger it rocked against the car and the house itself seemed to sway sadly in its grip. The worlds of the child now sailed free like the dead leaves that swirled through the cold night air.

"Won't you come play with me?" The question had barely registered in her mind before the sound of the engine firing up drowned it out. The flame twirled wildly in the wind and reflected off the blackened eye of the bound doll as it scraped along the gravel behind the Mustang. Then the flame was completely extinguished and gone in the night.

Bettina Brown

## Woman of the Desert

She sat staring at the emptiness surrounding her. It stretched endlessly before her, and the only shade for miles was hanging over her head. The barren land was as wrinkled as her skin, and suddenly she felt as old as the desert. For sixty years, she sat in this same spot under this solitary tree and gazed at the vast nothingness that was her life. There had been a time when mirages danced in the slim haze between the land and sky, but today there were none. When she was a younger woman, she used to fantasize about finding those elusive oasis, and more than once she gave serious thought to doing so—even while knowing that the relentless sun and merciless heat would claim her long before she could reach the misleading haven. Some days she would have preferred to die slowly in the land that was her prison. After all, it was better than dying slowly in the prison that was her home.

She turned her gaze to the small house that was nestled into the lone hill beside her tree. The porch sagged in the heat, and the shutters had paled to the color of the blowing sands. Why had he kept them here for so long? Despite her pleas for a normal home, a normal life, and a normal landscape, he had refused. His stubbornness had made her a calloused and hardened woman. She learned to live in the elements of the desert; somehow, she found a way to survive. Now he was gone; she was free to leave the place she had hated all her married life. Yet, here she was, dipping her toes in the small, almost empty pond, the only one around for miles. All the while she was drinking in the wide, open space of the desert that had never seemed quite so wide or open before. It was now, mere hours after his death, that she truly realized her predicament. She had loathed this God-forsaken land for so long, almost as long as she had loathed the man who kept her here. But some way, somehow, the desert had crept into her, and claimed her as its own. Like the desert, her skin was composed of the fiery sand; like the desert, her heart was full of nothing but teasing, lingering images that faded just when she believed she was close enough to grasp them.

All at once, the desert seemed even harsher than ever; never before had it felt so lonely. She glanced once more toward the horizon and saw the glint and shimmer of a distant lake. She blinked, and in a flash, the lake was no longer there. For just a split second it appeared and beckoned her before releasing the cruel reality of the desert's infinite emptiness on her. She felt tears roll down her cheeks; silently, slowly they followed the path of wrinkles across her face before slipping to the cracked ground. The desert swallowed them, quickly erasing the small mark they had made in the sand, and for the first time in her life she couldn't deny that she and the desert were one.

Bettina Brown  
Stark Reality

Alone on the Kansas plains  
Nothing for miles around  
Save for the drifting snowflakes  
And haunting billows of smoke  
That rise lazily from the chimneys  
The grass and fields of  
Wheat resemble the state of my soul  
Slowly dying if not already dead  
Frost clings desperately to the last  
Remnant of life in this God forsaken land

Nothing moves except the wind  
Blustering and moaning about  
Eager to pass over this stretch  
Of emptiness and move on to  
Happier places where life still blossoms

Even the birds had the sense  
To go south before the darkness  
Of winter settled onto the plains  
I however did not realize how  
Long and lonely the winter could be

Nor did I imagine the toll it  
Would take on my soul or  
The very life within me  
So I stayed, alone, freezing  
fearing that the spring would never come

And in a sense it didn't  
The winter of the North lands  
Has not fully been shaken from my heart  
Despite the spring and summer  
That have passed

I will carry  
The darkness of the night forever  
And the frigid brush of wind  
That blew the snow and ice around  
To form a bond over my heart

Bettina Brown

## The Path

She stood still and numb, aware of everything that had led to this moment. It had been raining, he was in a hurry, and he never even saw the stop sign. In a moment, her life changed. In a flash, her path was altered, unless, of course, she chose to believe that what was happening in this moment was her path, and that what happened was simply part of the plan. In that case, her life had not really changed, just her perspective of it. These were the thoughts running through her mind as they lowered her husband's casket into the ground.

These were the thoughts she chose to dwell on, because the only other ones rolling through her mind were of the last few hours of her husband's life. Voices assaulted her and told her that she should be ashamed. However, she could not bring herself to feel that emotion now, just as she never could summon it before. The truth of it was, she was not ashamed. After all, it was her path. And that path had led to this moment, which would lead to the next moment, and so on. That is how paths worked, a sort of predestined journey that could rarely be altered or changed.

And so, as the sun shimmered high in the noon sky and the heat spread in waves and the coffin sat closed, she thought of everything but those last few hours.

She was in the mourner's garb; she had donned the face of a widow, but in her heart, grief was elusive. She could only think of the unwavering path. This is the way it must be, because this is the way it is. Some people might call her thinking logical; some might even agree with her reasoning, but she operated not out of logic or reason but out of the thought that this is how she always saw it ending.

That is not to say that her heart was cruel or her soul emotionless. She ached for the loss of a friend, a lover, and a good man. She wept when she heard the news, and for instant, brief as it was, her world crumbled. However, it always came back to the path.

The coffin began to lower into the ground with a metallic clink, and the baby in her womb leapt, as if knowing that this was the end of a journey. She clutched her stomach in an attempt to soothe her child, and at that moment tears finally began to fall. As she cried and

stroked her still small belly, the casket sank lower and lower until it was finally out of sight. This time, however, the tears were not for her husband. They were for her child. They were for her guilt. They were for the relief she felt when she realized that she would not have to tell her husband that her child was not his. And they were tears for herself, for a part of her had died with him and was now being buried as well.

After the mourners were gone and the cemetery had cleared, she found herself alone with the mound of dirt. It was then, only then, that she allowed herself to relive that day.

Sunlight streamed in through the curtained windows and fell on the bed, casting the sunlight in hues of red. *Like a scarlet letter*, she thought briefly with a smile, before taking in his form lying next to her. However, the smile did not last long, for she knew what she had to do. He was watching her as he usually did after they had made love, with fire and passion, and lusty appreciation. She usually reveled in his gaze, but now she squirmed.

"This is going to be the last time we can be together," she said in a rush, before she lost her nerve.

His eyes clouded, and his brow knit together. "Why? Is he getting suspicious?" His eyes took a playful hue, and for a moment she grinned. The forbidden fruit made it so much more desirable. But again she sobered.

"It's not that," she felt his confused look on her, and it suddenly hit her how much she was going to miss his blue eyes.

"Then what? The sex isn't good anymore?" He nudged her gently, knowing that wasn't it either.

She looked into his face and took in every line and every freckle. She memorized his lips and the shape of his nose. She searched his eyes in hoping to memorize his heart.

"I'm pregnant," she whispered. The thought brought waves of joy and warmth to her, and she refused to meet his eyes, for she knew she would be hurt by the look in them. He didn't want a baby, which is why they had been so careful, which is why she was saying goodbye.

After a silence that effectively wounded the connection between them, he managed to sputter, "Is it mine?"

She looked up sharply at his tone, which was not as rejecting as she had expected.

"Do you want it to be?" she asked tentatively, knowing that what he wanted couldn't change the facts.

For a moment he paused, and his reply caught her off guard.

"I don't know. If it means keeping you, then maybe."

She searched for something to say but found nothing that could convey what her heart was feeling. It couldn't possibly work; he couldn't want it. If he wanted it, then she would have to tell her husband that she had been unfaithful.

"So, is it?" his eyes searched hers desperately, and for a moment she almost got swept away. Then reality stepped in, and she remembered her plan.

"No, I'm sorry," she reached up to brush away a tear that was snaking down her face. He absorbed the news, and for a moment did not know whether to feel relief or disappointment. Instead of deciding, he gently pulled her to his chest and held her while they both cried. He knew it wasn't true just as much as she did; however, it was easier to pretend that it was. After the tears dried, his lips found hers, and once again, they made love like it was the first time.

He walked her to her car to say goodbye, as usual. But this time they both knew it was for good.

"It's been fun," he whispered as he brushed his finger against her cheek.

"And now it's over," she smiled faintly but without warmth or sincerity. All she knew was that she didn't want it to end this way.

He was silent a moment, and she knew he was thinking hard. Finally, he looked to the sky, then down to the dirt, and back to her eyes.

"A storm's coming," he motioned to the building clouds in the north. "Looks like it might get bad."

"Yeah, I know," she said without looking at the sky or the ground.

"Are you sure?" She knew what he was asking, and for a moment the truth almost ripped out of her. However, she was firm and resolute, though it killed her. She knew this was best. He didn't really want a child, and they both knew it. He was just caught up in the moment and dreading goodbye.

"Yeah," she whispered, the words barely forming.

"This doesn't have to be goodbye forever." Again he brushed her face gently. "My door's always open. I guarantee that I could never say No to you." Again, lust claimed his eyes, making them darker.



"I know," she smiled at him, and they stared at each other, sharing a moment beyond words. He leaned in and kissed her firmly on the lips, savoring her taste for the last time.

She didn't look in the rear view mirror as she drove out of his long driveway. She knew what she would see, and at that, she knew she wasn't strong enough to keep driving. His tall form, slightly lanky but strong, would be standing in the dust staring after her; the house that he built would be a silhouette against the southern sky, and the very heart that beat in her chest would be swaying on the porch swing, as if it belonged. So she didn't look back, for if she did she would realize how wrong it was to be leaving in the first place.

Her thoughts faded, and she slowly returned to the mound of dirt before her, and at that moment, grief and shame covered her like a blanket. She held them close, embraced them, and breathed them into her lungs. Then she took them as if they were tangible objects and pressed them into the dirt. She urged them to belong to the part of her that had died. And so they did.

Bettina Brown

## Recurring Torrents of Madness

The silence is broken by rubber tires droning loudly into the asphalt, as darkness lifts to reveal a sky full of a hundred shades of blue, aqua, and navy. The sun is brilliantly white and blinding to the naked eye. The road is long, smooth, and unbroken. Until now. The hill climbs higher, and upon cresting it I discover that it gives way into nothingness. Well, not quite. But unending, forever reaching, swirling, angry water might as well be nothingness. The tires no longer hum; they no longer find traction on the road. Instead they turn into anchors and with fearful force pull me from the bright, endless horizon. Doors lock, windows burst, water fills the cab surrounding me simultaneously in warmth and freezing cold. Before I can fathom an escape from the water filled coffin, I'm plunged into the liquid depths only to discover that it's nice here. At first. But with shocking fierceness, the water hits my lungs, burning and stinging from the inside out. I lunge, push, and finally free myself from what is surely a grave . . . only to tread the surface in mad circles, desperately trying to find the way out through which I entered the void. But there is nothing—no shore, no land, no road. Water is all I see; all I feel; all I breathe. It flows past me, around me, through me, soaking every inch before absorbing into my skin. It's pulsating with life and energy so strongly that it overpowers my own. I feel in it a power, a deep, churning strength that diminishes my ability to swim. I hear within it moans and weeps that haunt my mind and numb me to the thoughts of escape. My burning lungs give way to fear, and my fear gives way to panic. My body no longer treads the water, but instead it slowly begins to sink below. I cry out—only to take in more water. The more I try to swim, the faster I sink. No matter how urgently I claw at the wet walls around me, I find myself falling deeper and deeper into the abyss. The sunlight that was once blinding is now nothing but a

shimmering light in the distance that grows dimmer with each passing second. The sky settles over the top of the water and encloses me inside with its abundance of blue. The moans are silenced, and I hear nothing but the gurgled sounds of my own choking; I feel nothing but the water pressing in on me from all sides, even from within me. I wonder if I will ever reach the bottom of this vast, mystifying ocean, or if I will just continue sinking into this darkness forever. A flash erupts in my watery tomb as a tidal wave engulfs me, and I jerk to life and suck deeply into my lungs—air. Sweet, sustaining air. I gasp it in quickly, too quickly, and sputter violently. My greed for oxygen overwhelms me; I fixate on its journey of entering and leaving my body. In the stillness, the dream can faintly be heard fading into the darkness around me, as it silently lies in wait for the next time I sleep.



Amanda DeBusk  
Rhythm



Brianna McCabe  
Rorschach Ballet



Brianna McCabe

Female Figure

Kayla Cash

## Fisher's Lament

I noticed the man frowning  
at his small blue and yellow fish.  
I began to tug as I reeled in my catch.  
I noticed the man smiling  
at his small blue and yellow fish  
as he saw me and my dead crab.

Barrett Clifton

# Juvenile Myoclonic Epilepsy

I am not the master of my fate  
am not the boy I once knew.

I am not the victim of my condition  
am not the man who succumbs.

I am not the master of my body  
am not the spirit of fire I once thought.

I am not the victim of my tremors  
am not anything less than the pursuit of tranquility.

I am not the master of my life  
am not the soul trembling before death

I am JimMiE, though JimMiE will never be me.  
am the end, and the means, and JimMiE is naught but a reminder  
to stand again after the fall.

Jack Cormack

## Cowboy with No Cows

“The Palo Pinto Mountains are where beauty is created from the rough landscape. *Too bad this beauty is lost on rich people looking for a pretty view*, Tommy thought. Over the years since Tommy was born, a son of these hills, to the day he took over control of the Stuart Ranch lease, he had learned what it took to live and even prosper in a harsh environment. The Western Palo Pinto Mountains are closer to hills than mountains but are still breathtaking to visitors. Over the last thirty years as Ft. Worth and Dallas sprawled outwards, their influence came to blanket the small Palo Pinto County. Not too long ago, the only city people to come to this backwards county were a few deer hunters, happy for a deer lease on a ranch to kill a buck or two, but over the years the relationship between the city and country had strained, with new millionaires coming out and spending ridiculous amounts of money on land which more often than not led to less cattle and more high fences. This used to worry Tommy until it had happened to him. This week was the end of his lease, and with that, he would have to make room for the new owner, Doug Quickly. The thought of that lecherous old man putting his hands on what was rightfully Tommy’s disgusted him. Doug had been in this area for about ten years when he retired from his law practice and had bought a two section ranch with a tall hill right across from the Stuart Ranch headquarters. All of this time, he had lusted after the Stuart Ranch but had been unable to buy it due to the influence Tommy’s dad had over the owner. Now with Tommy’s father in the ground, Doug had quickly bought the famed ranch.

“Hey, Tom, what would you rather have, the Easley or the Hughes?”

The voice of his brother, Joe, woke Tommy from his thoughts. “Well, I want the Easley, but I will take the Hughes,” he replied. It truly didn’t matter to him which trailer he got now that he had one horse left to haul in the lonely sixteen-footer. As Joe started to hook up the Easley, Tommy noticed an old ranch truck approaching. It was Bob, the manager from the Twisted Creek ranch. Tommy had to stomach an ache when he saw all of the kaliche dust rolled up from



behind the clattering Chevy. It had been a long drought and dust blew all around even with no wind it seemed.

"Well, Bob, how are things going over at the Creek?"

Bob leaned back in his seat and pondered a moment before replying, "About the same; we could use some rain, but, oh well."

"Yes sir; well, I guess you won't have to be putting up with my cows getting on your place no more."

"Yeah, and I will probably get a new high border fence for no cost."

Tommy fingered the Trip Hopper feeder in the bed of the truck, pulling a cylindrical piece of cake out. It had always bothered him that they called these pieces *cubes* not *cylinders* or something else more reasonable.

"You know, it was a real shame seeing your old man waste away in the end; he was a good friend."

Tommy choked back bad memories, "I wonder what he would say to this."

"First off, he wouldn't blame you, and he wouldn't blame Doug. And second, he would probably go on up to the Spade, or Tongue River, or the Swinsons and start over."

"Yeah, I have a job offer from the Browns, but I'm not going to take it; it's too close to home."

As he stared at the empty pens, Bob replied, "I understand...It sure is sad to see a cowboy with no cows." Bob was silent for a minute, staring across the road to the cedar-covered hill that held Doug's house. "Just remember what your father would do, and you should be fine, son."

"Thanks, Bob, I appreciate you stopping by," Tommy replied.

Bob nodded as he started the tired, old truck back to the county road. Tommy was lost in thought again, *Yes, my dad would turn the other cheek, but can I?* This question rolled in his head over and over while he loaded the drip torches in the back of his truck. His gaze drew upon the hill with Doug's house; the hill was covered in cedar while at the base dead brush had been grubbed up and waited for a cleansing fire. The words from Bob kept echoing in his ear, *It sure is sad to see a cowboy with no cows.*

"Hey, I'm about to leave," shouted Joe from across the compound.

As Tommy ambled over, he could see his mother sitting in the front seat, and her frailness for some reason reminded him of his

schoolteachers' agreement that Tommy was not stupid but had stupid tendencies. This thought followed Tommy all the way to the truck.

"Y'all going to Abilene?"

"Yes sir; I have decided to take that internship at Cable and Shorner."

*Great. Another lawyer,* thought Tommy. "Well, it might be a while till I see y'all, so take care."

For the first time, concern crossed Joe's face, "You better stay out of trouble; I mean it."

Tommy smiled and nodded. Joe took this as the best answer he would get and then jumped into the truck. Tommy couldn't help but smile as they drove away, maybe it was because he was finally alone or that he knew his brother was going to end up at the top of the pile no matter where he was.

Sunset fell on Tommy while he loaded his horse, Biscuit, into the trailer. "Shoulda took the damn Easley," he muttered under his breath as he fought the locking mechanism. As Tommy drove up out of the headquarters he turned off his lights and pulled into Doug's ranch. With one free hand, he grabbed a drip torch and with the other, a matchbox. With the wind blowing up the hill, Tommy started lighting the brush piles. They caught fast and burned hot; it didn't take too long for the blaze to sweep to the live cedars on the hill. As each one caught, it exploded with a brilliant orange glow. Tommy watched the fire head up the hill quickly, too fast and ferocious for any man to stop now. As the house caught, Tommy turned away and slowly got into his truck and pulled back onto the county road.

About thirty miles down the interstate towards Arizona Tommy murmured, "A cowboy with no cows."



Jessica Gray

Bluff Dale Suspension Bridge



Whitney Landers

What's in the Past



Amanda DeBusk  
The Sound of Jazz



Amanda DeBusk  
Bringin' on the Bass

Zach Davis

# A Spark of Life

I don't even want to do this. It's complete bullshit. I mean, washing my sins away, being born again. How stupid can you be?"

"I don't know, Babe. Maybe it's not that bad. All they're really going to do is dunk you into some water and say a few prayers over you. You'll live."

"I know I'll live. I just have better things to do. I want to be back home at my Dad's house. I want to be with you."

"I want to be with you too, Babe. Just two more weeks and we'll be back together."

"God, I can't wait."

"Me either, Babe."

"Okay, I got to start getting ready, practice putting on my happy face. I love you."

"I love you, too. Call me tonight?"

"For sure."

She hung up the phone and began putting her dress on. She was about to start applying her usual amount of makeup when she recalled what she was getting ready for. She opted to put on a bit of eye makeup, or otherwise she was afraid it would all run and she would look bad. "It's not like I'm impressing anyone today. Just a bunch of old people."

She finished getting ready and went downstairs. Her mom was sitting at the table finishing up her coffee.

"Good morning, Sunshine."

"Morning, Mom."

"You hungry?"

"No. I think I'll wait until lunch. Are we still having everyone over?"

"Yep."

"Great." She sat down and took the last drink of her mother's coffee. Her mother glared at her for a second and then rolled her eyes.

"Well, let's get on our way. God knows it's embarrassing to be late there. They always stare at you when you walk in, like you're some murderer or something."

He was standing over the small pool at the front of the worship center. He noticed a bit of algae at the bottom. "I better clean that later on." He knelt down and reached to the side of the pool where he turned a switch. A slight humming sound came from the bottom of it. Then it went away. "If they would stop turning the pump off, then this wouldn't be an issue, now would it?"

He looked at his watch and realized what time it was. He quickly made his way down past the pews and to the door. He unlocked and propped them open. He then went into the lobby area, or "greeting room" as he like to refer to it, as and propped the front doors open. He waited for a few minutes as the congregation started to pour in. He greeted as many as he could.

"Good morning."

"Nice to see you."

"How is your granddaughter?"

"Mom, what time do you think this is going to be over?" She exhaled.

"It won't be that long, just a normal service. Look, there are your grandparents, talking to the Brother Mike." The two began to walk towards the front of the church. "He is so passionate about his ministry. You know, he started this church from the ground up. A true blessing."

"Good morning Brother Mike."

"Charlotte. So good to see you. Hey, Becky. Are you excited about today?"

"I sure am. I got up extra early this morning, too."

"Glad to hear it. I love seeing youth like yourself taking this next step. You're going to remember this day for the rest of your life. I know I remembered mine."

"Grandbaby, come here." She walked towards the older couple with the biggest smile she could muster up. She never really liked seeing her grandparents. They hugged her too much and smelt like old people. "Are you nervous?"

"A little. But I think I'll be okay."

"If y'all will please excuse us, Becky and I have to go to the front and get ready. If you want, you can wait with Becky in the back as I open the service."

"We'll just wait in the pews. We want to get some good pictures."

"Follow me, Becky."

The two walked into the worship center, up the pews, and towards the back of the room. They went through a door and into another room that looked like a dressing room. "You can change in here. I'll be back in few minutes." He walked out and went to the front of the congregation. "May we bow our heads in prayer."

She had changed into some jeans and a t-shirt and then put on a robe that had been laid out for her in back of the dressing room. She felt nervous all of a sudden. She didn't know why or really cared to know. She began to pace around the room. There were pictures on the wall of everyone who had been baptized before her. There were people of all ages. They were all wet in the pictures. "Great. I'm glad I didn't wear that much make-up. I hope what I do have on doesn't ruin."

The door opened, and Brother Mike walked though. She could hear the choir singing some hymn in the background. "We have a minute or two before we start. Do you have any questions for me?"

"Not really."

He smiled and then slipped on a robe similar to hers. "I'm really glad that you have decided to give your life to God. This is the best decision that you will ever make. If you don't mind my asking, what made you want to do this today?"

Her heart started to beat. She had no real answer other than that her mother told her to do this before her grandparents died. She tried not to look around. She tried to focus on him and think of something good. "I just felt that I have been getting in touch with my religious side lately, and I've been talking to God a lot also, so I figured now was the best time, ya know?"

"That's good. Like I said earlier, it's good to see someone your age take this next step in their life. Do you mind if we say a quick prayer before we go out there?"

"Not at all."

He had begun the prayer, and all she could think about was how much of a liar she was. She felt so bad for what she just did.

"... and may you watch over Becky and help guide her through this time in her life. Be with her as she makes these hard and life-changing decisions, and help her show her fellow youth how great your power is. In your Son's name we pray, amen."

"Ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

He smiled at her once again as he headed for the door. She was right behind him. As the two walked out and headed to the small pool, she noticed that her grandparents were smiling and had a camera ready to start taking pictures. Her mother had a half smile but wore the same placid look on her face as she always did. "If you just want to step down in there for me, I'll be right behind you."

She tensed up her shoulders as she stepped into the water. It was surprisingly cold.

"Yeah there isn't a heater, sorry."

"It's okay."

He stepped in behind and the two faced the congregation. "Today is a special day for the seventeen year-old Becky Rickman. She gave me a call last Tuesday and expressed to me how she wanted to be baptized. I was honored that she asked me to do this for her. I've known her for about four years now, and I hear about her every Sunday from her wonderful grandparents, John and Judy Slader.

He spoke more on how he knew Becky and her family and how proud he was of her. All Becky could think of was how cold the water was. She thought that it was getting even colder. She did, however, begin to feel bad for lying this whole time. She knew that she wasn't ready to take this step in her life. She believed in God and all but wasn't the best Christian in the world.

"Becky, because of the profession of faith that you have made in the Lord Jesus Christ, I am honored to baptize you, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." He covered her mouth and nose with her hand and dunked her into the water. Just at that moment when brought her back up to her feet, the water pump in the pool began to short out. A surge of electricity ran through pipes and into the pool.

A confused look came across Becky's face as Brother Mike began to convulse. His body started to tighten up. Becky gave out a blood-curdling scream as she swiftly jumped out of the small pool. His body ceased shaking and he fell limp, face first into the pool.

The whole congregation stood up and gasped.

"Some call 9-1-1!"

Becky's mother ran towards her with while tears fill her eyes.

Becky looked at the body in shock. The only thing that she could think was why. Why would this man, the man that was washing her sins away, be taken from this world? And why now? Why at that moment was he taken?



Zach Davis

## Vito's First Time

Vito had to sneak out of the back door so his Mom wouldn't see him. She would go crazy if she knew what her seventeen year-old boy was doing. It was times like these that he wished his Dad was around more, but he's hardly there anymore ever since he came back from Japan five years ago. His best friend, Mike, would always tell him that war changes people and that his old man will go back to normal, eventually.

Vito went to the train station and waited. He watched all the people wander by him. He wondered what it was like to be high class, like the stiff in the suit who was cradling his briefcase, or to be like the vagabond who begged on his knees to all that passed by. Vito had a sudden urge to be thankful for what little he did have in his life. The train started to board. As he moved towards the direction of the door, something brushed by his leg. He wasn't too concerned with the thing as much as he was with what he saw by his foot, a fifty-cent piece. He was ecstatic. He had been half a dollar short, but now he had all he needed. He boarded the train that led into sin city.

The train unloaded in a shady part of the city. He got off and headed towards downtown. The sky was slowing being covered by the rain clouds that had been plaguing the city for days. The temperature began to drop as he passed down the packed streets. He began to cradle his torso as he entered into the alley where his destination waited for him.

It was cold as hell in there, and the ground was still wet from the rain. Vito paced back and forth through the dingy alleyway. There was but one door and just two entryways from the busy New York streets on either side of the buildings. There wasn't much light because the evening sun was blacked out by the tall, surrounding buildings. However, some light did shine through the upper-level windows of the buildings. He stared around at the walls and ground. He noticed that the buildings were quite old because the bricks appeared to be worn down by the weather. All he could do was wait patiently on his one-dollar prize, which he could now afford. He had heard about her from Mike.

"It was money well spent, as sweet as an apple."

Those were the words that rang through Vito's ears. The wind started to cut through his old, faithful jacket, so he decided to stand by some trashcans that littered the alleyway to block him from the wind.

As he was on his way over, he started kicking around an old soup can that had been resting on the ground. He hurled it into the trashcans that were in front of him, and they made a blood-curdling hiss. He froze for a moment until a ragged, black creature came from around the trash. Its yellow eyes burned into his soul, hating him, judging him for what he had done. It stood there, back erect, guarding its beloved treasures of waste. It began to slowly prance across the alleyway. Vito's eyes followed as it crossed to the other side of the alley.

On the way, his eyes caught a red figure. There she was. Her red dress stood out on the grey background of the alleyway. Her hair was dark brown; she looked middle-aged, slightly worn out. She had green eyes and wore too much make up. Her lips wrinkled as she took her last drag from her cigarette. She then dropped the butt into the puddle at her feet. The flame died and made a slight hiss as it hit the water. Her heels clicked against the asphalt so elegantly. It was easy to tell that she was used to wearing them. It was even easier to tell that she was a veteran of her trade.

As she closed in on him, she reached into her bag and revealed a silver cigarette case with a red apple on the cover. She opened it, took out another cigarette, and held it between her forefinger and middle finger. She moved closer until she was now upon Vito.

"You got a light?"

Vito began desperately searching his pockets. He patted down each and every one until he remembered the match book, the one that he had swiped from his father's dresser, in his inside jacket pocket right above his heart. He presented it to her like a prize and with a look of nervous relief on his face. She placed the cigarette between her two supple, wrinkled lips and leaned closer towards Vito. He struck the match and cupped it with his hand to block out the wind. While he lit her cigarette, the woman held on tightly with her lips and sucked hard to ignite her smoke. While she was inhaling, Vito couldn't help but stare at her over-sized chest. He had never seen a woman's breast as big as hers. He now had all kinds of images in his head. Once the cigarette was lit, she stood up straight and took a long, slow drag. Vito stood as he watched her until the match burnt his fingertips. He

threw the match down into a puddle by his feet. It hissed as it hit the water and died out.

He looked back up at her to see a cloud of smoke pouring from her mouth. They locked eyes for a brief second while she began to take another drag. She began to look Vito up and down.

“So, what’ll it be kid?”

He paused with a dumbfounded look upon his face. He didn’t quite know what to say. His heart started to pound. She started to look at him strangely, and he wondered if she could hear his heart. He dreaded the fact that she could hear the thick beats that came from his chest. She stared at him with a face of confusion and boredom as she took another drag. Then he summed up the courage.

“My buddy Mike tells me that you’re the best and that I should come get a taste of what he’s havin’.”

A smile struck her wrinkled lips. “How much do ya got kid?”

“A dollar. Will that be enough?”

“For you, kid, it will be.” She threw down her cigarette and began to walk towards the single door. She opened it, put one foot in, and turned around towards Vito who was staring at her in awe. “You coming?”

He shook out of his trance and raced towards her with a half smile on his face.

As he entered through the door, the black cat that had plagued him before, ran in through his legs and into the darkness. The door slammed shut from the wind, and Vito looked up at the woman to see if she was as shocked as he was. She had no emotion; she had completely ignored the cat and door. She then flipped on a light, but the room was not bright. In fact, he could barely see. It was cold and had nothing in it but a stairway that went down. The woman headed down the stairs. Vito wondered how she didn’t hear the cat, but at this point, he didn’t care. He then started to wonder how she didn’t trip down the stairs but began to realize that this was not her first time down here. Neither said a word as they walked down. The woman didn’t need to say anything, and Vito was too nervous to say anything.

They reached the bottom. It was a dimly lit boiler room with a dusty smell and a cold concrete floor. The only things in there were a boiler and another stairway across the room that must have gone up into the building. Vito could tell that the boiler had not been turned on in some time because it was just as cold in there as it was

outside. He glanced around for a moment and then looked back at the woman. She had taken off her jacket and hung it on a hook that came out of the old brick wall. With her back facing towards him, she began to speak.

“Could you unzip me?”

“Uh, yeah.”

His voice was shaky. Vito had never been this nervous in his life. He had done hundreds of things worse than what he was about to do and was not once close to being this nervous. He reached up to the zipper at the top of her dress with his unstable hands and began to pull down. Once he got all the way down, he stepped back, and she let the dress fall to the floor. She turned around exposing her naked body, nothing on but those pair of heels. Vito had never seen a naked woman up close before. His heart was beating hard. The blood rushed throughout his body. He could feel his face flush.

“Take your clothes off.”

He then began frantically ripping his clothes away. He threw down his jacket, next his shirt. He unbuckled his pants as he struggled to kick his old shoes off. Within seconds, he had on nothing but his underwear and socks. He had his hands cupped around his crotch. He was embarrassed because he had never done this before, this ungodly act. The woman moved upon him. She took his hands and placed them on her chest. She then began to move her face closer to his. Vito shut his eyes tight. He was excited, proud at the fact that he was about to be a man. Their lips clashed. She her tongue moved like a snake in his mouth. He unexpectedly began to feel sick from the taste of cigarette smoke that came from her mouth. She pulled off him and stared with a hungry look.

“Lay down and take those off.”

He quickly pulled down his underwear and lay down on the freezing ground. His body tightened up as his bare skin touched to floor. She slowly got on top of him. Time seemed slowed down. There seemed to be minutes between every beat of his heart. She began to put him inside of her.

A new feeling hit Vito all of a sudden. He had never felt anything like this before. The warmth, the rush. She began to move back and forth on top of him making little to no sounds. Vito’s eyes were twitching. His whole body was in ecstasy. He moaned and groaned. It seemed like hours since they had started. He didn’t want this feeling to stop. Through all this, he felt something staring at him. He

happened to glance by the boiler where two eyes watched him. He didn't care what was happening at this point. Then it hit him. What is this? he thought. A new surge of feeling came to him. He yelled a sigh of relief as if he were letting go of something that he was holding on to. Then it was gone. Within an instant, he had finished. Those hours had been a second.

She sat on him for another moment and then got off. She went over to her dress and started to put it back on. Vito looked up at her.

"Was that it?"

She looked back. "Yeah, kid. That was it." She zipped her dress up and put on her jacket. This whole time Vito still lay down on his back, just staring at her. He thought it would be more. "Where's the money kid?" He pointed to his pants about five feet away from him where he had tossed them. She walked over to them and began to dig through his pockets. She pulled out two fifty-cent pieces. "Thanks kid. This is my alley, so if you ever want to come say hi just drop on by."

She gave him a quick wink and began to walk up the stairs. Vito still lay on his back, recalling everything that had just happened. She paused and looked back down at him. "Hit the lights on your way out."

He heard her heels thud up the stairs as she went away. Then the door opened and slammed shut. He looked over by the boiler and saw two yellow eyes staring at him, judging him.

Marsha Decker

## Salvation

Darkness moves with its demons baying  
She softly weeps and trembles to her core  
Whispered words spoken and she slips through the door  
Devils shimmer with their bodies swaying

Dancing and teasing, with passion unbound  
The moon rising above a forest pale  
Silver light becomes witness to her lonely trail  
The evil engulfs her with silence of sound

To give is to forget as she allows her mind to rest  
Her thoughts to wander to her freedom above  
Her soul soars high on the silver wings of a dove  
Her spirit withdraws as if a bridge recessed

Her body simply a vessel for his touch to bear  
Heaven's salvation the answer to her prayer

Marsha Decker

## Writing

I write, not for glory, not for fame, but for the heart of me.

for a soul once shackled and now set free.

for the beauty of the world, and in memory of pain.

for love's promise and pride's dedication, for passion's folly,  
and pleasure's blame.

for the music swells and the ocean dips, for the rustling  
leaves and the babbling brook.

for the singing birds and for the lowing cattle, for the soil's  
shelter and the rain's caress.

the mother's soft sigh and the child's infectious laughter, for  
a man's twinkling eye and for a friend's smile.

for the lonely tears and the crowded cheers, for the waking  
dreams and the golden rings.

for the Paradise Lost and the City of God, for the scent of a  
rose, and the gift of a horse.

for the faraway stars and the neighboring dust, for the  
imagination that soars and the spirit that stands.

Simply put, I write.



Melissa Crosby  
Man



Morgan Mariah Emerson

## Blue Eyes

Blue Eyes blue eyes searching a sea of faces but all they see are  
empty spaces pale eyes wander through the rows everyone  
wonders but nobody knows they look for a face they're looking  
for him but the more they search their hope grows more dim he  
didn't show up he isn't there he asked if it'd matter i said i didn't  
care but now i'm searching for his soft blue eyes i thought i saw  
them i saw only lies

Anna Félix

## The Blank Face

Burrowed among the blankets since before  
the sun came up . . . his eyes hardly blink at all.  
What began as a simple distraction  
Has devoured his whole consciousness.  
The slowly changing lights from image to pixels,  
losing momentum and killing the brain.  
Hearts have long since stopped their beating,  
too loud against the volume knob . . .

but there beneath the rumbling rage of  
feature films and high charisma  
set and bound to repress the senses,  
numb the pain.love.anger further to a  
state of bland escape, he has a sense of  
who he may have been before.  
Who he could become.

Anna Felix

# The Knight's Battle with Night

The nightmare:

He's always like this

Always that ominous figure in the snow

And tonight

He is Morpheus

He is the fearsome tormentor of my dreams

He is

Ruthless.

He fills my subconscious

With pieces of horrible memories

And rips open old scars he created.

The Blanket:

He's not always like this

Not always the eager protector bracing for a fight

But tonight,

He is Apollo

He is the mighty guardian of my heart

He is

Comforting.

He wraps his gracious arms

About my shuddering form

And gives me sanctuary.

Anna Felix

## Sanctuary Forgotten

The church stands tall, facing the sun as he lies down  
Upon his bed of mountains, hills, beasts, and trees.  
He peers over the forgotten form and out to far off seas  
Not noticing that lonely edifice bound by solemn mounds.  
The spirit of this once loved sanctuary has fled  
Seeking after those who consigned to oblivion  
A memory of golden pews, now bitter and rotten;  
A once grand and ardent piano, her strings now rusted.  
But oh, there was a time when these rafters did sing  
Hymns now quite as lost as those voices removed.  
Oh, how that jovial bell rang when hopefuls wed;  
Now silent, only wind bringing forth her ghostly ring.  
The stained eyes now vibrant in the last rays of light  
Shed shards of broken glass, like tears of shattered time.

Anna Felix

## Love of an Orchestra

I have music in my blood.  
The notes flow in my veins  
Piecing themselves into chords, riffs, and cheerful melodies.  
The tunes drift through my heart and back into my limbs  
Enriched.  
With every beat a new song begins  
And I can see mother's violin on the fire place,  
Father's bass near the book case, sissy's flute on the piano.  
One day, my piano. If I earn it.  
My heart beats.  
The songs surge back into my impatient fingertips.  
When. When I earn it.



Amanda DeBusk

Wild



Kayla Hall

Play?



Nicola Drosche Things to do in a Lobby



Emily Grace Hallgarth Tools of the Trade

Sean Fletcher

## Concrete Chameleon

I am the Concrete Chameleon

I blend in with the walls

You will not see me

Hear me

Know me

Sense me

Want me to be there

But. I. Am. There.

And it is as this Chameleon that I slowly crawl away

Until you see no difference.



Sean Fletcher

# The Legend of Briar Deep (Anne Marie)

In the far off English countryside  
In the province of Briar Deep  
There lived a maiden pretty and fair  
Known as Anne Marie

With a single look she'd melt men's hearts  
And turn their mouths to stone  
Except one man who stood apart  
Who simply went by "Rogue."

"He's no good," her parents cried  
"He's rotten to the core."  
But as their hate intensified  
She only loved him more.

By soft moonlight they kissed  
Held in eternal embrace  
While the wind softly hissed  
Across the silent glade.

"I must go," said the Rogue  
"For traveling's in my name,  
But I'll be back you can be sure,  
To hold you once again."

Heartbroken, she waited ten long years  
But he never did return  
And when she'd dried up all her tears  
She left us in this world

A short time passed, the Rogue came back  
With plans for them to wed  
But all his fancies turned to black  
When he found that she was dead

In anguish he ran out to the place  
Where they had used to kiss  
And as he lay sobbing in the glade  
He heard a familiar hiss

“The wind!” he cried, joyful now  
“I hear her in the breeze.”  
For in the silence he had heard  
His lovely Anne Marie  
He threw himself into the wind  
Never to be heard again.

And on some nights, often now  
If you are with your love  
You can hear the wind roll past  
Cooing softly as a dove

You can hear them laugh  
smile and kiss  
So happy they must be!

In the glade of that devilish Rogue  
And his lovely Anne Marie.

Sean Fletcher

## Perspective

*"There is no Good and Evil, only perspective."*

– Anonymous

The Good guys are coming. They're always after us. The base we're in, Fort Sinister, it won't hold for long, but long enough to get everyone out in one piece. I think. Was world domination really too much to ask for? A simple change of how things are run. You get a few people together that believe in the same thing you do and bam! Somebody is after you. But what do I know? I'm just a minion, a grunt below the Boss.

An intercom crackles above my head, and Boss's voice comes in very choppy and coarse thanks to the bombs they're dropping on our heads. Another bomb explodes and the ceiling feels like it's going to collapse on top of me.

"James! I need to see you in my office! Now!"

"Of course. I'll be there in a min—" My response is cut off as the intercom explodes in a shower of sparks. That's how the Good guys always do it. Bomb the living crap out of everything, and then move in to shoot anything that's still moving. And they call us the Bad guys. I throw on the rest of my battle suit and grab my rifle and wallet. I made sure to take the pictures of Stacy with me since it's pretty clear I'm not coming back. The hallway is deserted since everybody is trying to leave out the back. There's a good chance the Good guys had already sealed that off though.

I make my way down the stairs, past a couple of laboratories and into our main hanger. I see one of the engineers trying to help someone out from under the remains of a plane that had fallen on him.

"Help!" He sees me and I rush over. The man is barely alive. With a huge effort we manage to pull him out, but it doesn't look good. His ribs are crushed, and his legs look like some bad tortillas I ate once.

The mechanic glances around and points at a medical kit hanging on the wall.

"Bring that over!" I do so and he rummages through it, trying to find something to stop the bleeding. The crushed man begins to try and speak.

"Just—wheeze—leave me—wheeze--I'm not worth it."

"Shut up," the mechanic growls, "I ain't leaving ya—"

The crushed man coughs up blood, and his head shifts to the right as the light leaves his eyes.

"NO!" the mechanic throws the gauze down and shakes his fist at the rafters above. "Why can't you leave us alone!"

"Calm down," I say. "That's not going to help us. The others are already meeting in the west wing to go out the escape way. Head over and try to get yourself out."

He stares at me for a moment and then sees the captain badge pinned on my shoulder. "Of course, sir. I—I just lost it is all. I shouldn't have done that."

"You're human," I tell him simply. "You can't help it. Go."

Another large chunk from the ceiling falls, and the hanger door receives a large dent in it. Before long I'm tearing down the hallway towards Bosses room. Posters flash past me and I barely comprehend what they say.

*Join The Good Cause! Join For World Domination. World Inc.*

*Set A Better World For Those Around You, Industry Evil!*

*Buy Bonds, Support The Cause! Support Your Evil Army!*

The Good guys had destroyed all of those. *World Inc.* when this all started. *Industry Evil* only a year ago. The last one, *Evil Army*, I can remember well. The Good guys had cornered what was left of us in a civilian city. They didn't care who they hurt. I had only been infantry at the time. I can still hear the screams as the Good guys shot the women and children down; I don't remember how I escaped that slaughter. Sometimes I wonder how they justify themselves to their own nation. How they manage to excuse what they've done.

Stairs loom in front of me and I take them two at a time. At the top I see Butch, my second in command with his black goatee and playful face.

"There you are! I heard Boss has called you in."

"That's where I'm headed now. Listen, it's worse than everyone's saying. They're right on top of us," to emphasize my point another bomb hits and the building shakes. "Did you get Lucy out?"

Butch nodded. "Her and the kids moved two days ago. I thought something like this would happen."

“Good, get the men together in the front and then you disappear. You’ve got to take care of them. Promise?”

“James, I can’t do that! What about you? What about the men?”

“Promise?” Butch looks at me with wild eyes. Around us men are running left in right, securing weapons, destroying documents. We can’t leave the Good guys anything to work with.

Finally he nods. “Sure, James, I promise.” I pat him on the back and am off. At the end of the hall is Boss’s office. I don’t even bother to knock but instead walk straight in.

The place is a mess, and that’s coming from a slob like me. Only a frame of Boss’s evil mastermind grandfather still hangs on the wall. Everything else is burning in a pile in the middle.

“Everything must go,” Boss says from behind his desk, tossing another blueprint into the flames. He stands up. He’s a huge man. Huge shoulders, huge chin, and huge limbs. But he’s all muscle. A bunch of guys can attest to that when they get on his bad side.

“James, you know better than most about the situation we’re in. It’s more than bad, it’s a disaster. I don’t know how they found us—” he rubs his bloodshot eyes. “But none of that matters now. I think you know what I want you to do?”

“I have a good idea, “I say. “Wipe the main computer. Hold them off. Let everybody else get out.”

“I’m so sorry to do this to you, but your unit’s the only one that doesn’t have too many men dead. Is Stacy safe?”

“She’s moving right now. I made sure she’s fine.” Boss grins and puts one of his photographs into his massive breast pocket.

“Word is you’re going to be a daddy soon. The boy couldn’t have a finer father.” I can’t help but smile with him.

“Stacy told me she wants a girl,” I say “If—when--we succeed with world domination then I told her I’d get a castle if that were the case. Make her a princess.”

The smile has faded off of Boss’s face. “But they won’t let that happen. You try a few new ideas. Try to reason a little and nobody will give you a chance!” He slams his fist down on his desk and it nearly splits down the middle “They don’t even try and see what it could become.” I can see him through the firelight and watch as it reflects off the tears running down his cheeks. It’s hard to see Boss cry, the man who’s been the forefront of all we had done, all that we had planned to do.

"My dream." He sobs. "Those things I wanted for her and they killed them! I wish I could go back. Throw away all this stupid evil stuff."

The intercom on his desk comes alive, and I can hear shouting on the other end. Boss wipes the tears from his eyes and presses a button.

"Repeat front guard! Status!" There was the sound of gunfire and more men scream. "They've broken through the sentry posts! There's more than we thought! Ne—" It cuts off as more gunfire erupts in the background. Boss doesn't waste any time. Moving much faster than a man his size should, he pulls a ray gun from under his desk. There's a high-pitched whine as it charges.

"I'm going down there."

"Boss, you can't—"

"You do what I say and hold the last defense. They break through you they get to the rest of the base."

"Boss—"

"That's an order. Go!" And before I can say anything else, he's off down the hall. I waste no time in following close behind. I make it halfway down the hall before something feels weird. I stop along with a few other people beside me. There's no sound coming from above us. The Good guys were finished bombing and there's no doubt they're marching towards us right now.

"Everybody move!" I scream and everyone starts moving again, like a movie in fast-forward. People pile down the stairs. I take them two at a time and before long I was at the main computer room door.

"Password?" the female voice asks from somewhere above me.

"Malus," I state clearly and the door slides open. The computer room is huge. Boss had it transported from our original base before the Good Guys destroyed that, too. The arched ceiling is thick with pulsing blue wires, and the control desk had a single keyboard with one giant red eyeball looking at me.

"Greetings, Captain James. Have you come to wipe my memory?"

I nodded, too preoccupied with what the external cameras showed. Outside the walls the battle had begun. What little defenses we had left were being cut down left and right. I notice something up near the top of the screen.

"Computer, zoom on square seven." The computer whirrs, and soon I'm looking at a blown up image of one man. I know his type. The type that everything seems to turn out well for, the kind that

bullets can't touch and men, no matter how skilled they are, can't beat: the Good Guys' hero, their savior.

"Computer, " I nearly choke as I realize what that means. "Begin Erase sequence."

"Password."

Like a robot I type in the phrase Boss had given me.

*The Good and the Bad are one in the same.*

*They balance each other like teams in a game.*

*One cannot live while the other one dies*

*In both is peace that only balance can give*

*One's name is Good, the other one's Live.*

The moment I finish, the computer's eye dims, and I can hear the whirring as the motors began turning and grinding together. Pictures and graphs flash before me. Family gatherings, sports events. Times long before now.

I can't look at them any longer and I pull out my cell phone and dial. Already I can imagine the Good guys breaking in and I begin hurrying down the hall. On the other end I can hear the scared voice of Stacy pick up.

"James! Oh, I was so worried! Where are you? Everyone's leaving now."

"Listen, Stacy, just listen to me for a min—"

"You had better not be staying behind! Get out with everyone else!"

"Stacy I can't do that. I—just listen to me! None of this will do any good if you can't get yourself out! I'm going to stay behind and hold them off. I promise I will find you. Okay?"

There was silence on the other end, but I can hear her start to cry.

"Stacy," I say quietly. There are shouts downstairs, and I look towards the front room to see my men preparing barriers. There are loud bangs coming from the other side of the metal front door, but it holds for now. Butch has done a good job.

"Stacy I have to do this. Go on. I'll find you after all of this."

"Please," was all she whispered. I can tell someone else is there trying to comfort her.

"Take care of our baby. I'll be there when its born. Remember the castle I promised you. I love you." And then I hang up, more so to make sure she doesn't hear me crying. I unstrap the rifle from my back and make sure it's loaded before I head down to the front. When I arrive, all the men turn towards me. The room has gone deathly

silent save for the insistent pounding on the large door behind us. I walk around to look at all the men. Many of them are young, too young. But all of them have the same fire in their eyes, the same belief.

"Today," I begin. My voice echoes around us. I'm trying to make up something witty, but none of the speeches that Evil leaders in the past gave are coming to mind. "Today might be the end." A lot of them tense at that, but I don't care. I'm not giving them hope; I'm giving them reality.

"For some of you, that will be now, for others, later. But I want you to remember one thing. " The banging has increased, dents appear in the thick metal. "What those out there believe doesn't matter. What they see you as doesn't make a difference. We might be Evil but..." I pound my chest, "in here we are the same. We are human and that is something they can't take away!"

"For Evil!" One man shouts and the cry is taken up by the others.

"For Evil!" It echoes again off the room we're in. I scan their eager faces and my eyes catch someone who should not be here.

"Butch!" I hurry over to him and pull him aside while the men prop their rifles on the barriers. Apparently my pathetic pep talk has done the trick.

"What are you doing here?" I try and say quietly.

"My family's safe. You're not. There's no way I could leave you like this."

"Butch—"

"I'm not leaving. They'll be through in a few minutes anyway, so there's no point. I made sure Stacy was out, too." I look at his laughing eyes, his eager face.

"Where'd they go?" One of the men next to me asks. I notice the pounding has ceased. The large dents are still there, but whatever Good guys were on the other side have stopped.

"Maybe they gave up!" A younger man exclaims hopefully. "Those cowardly, stupid—"

A massive explosion rips me off my feet. To my right, Butch is looking up in a daze at the smoking hole that had been torn in the front door. The sunlight blinds me for a second, and then they're upon us.



Chloe Green

## My Last Excursion

It was an ordinary lynx, I guess if lynx were ordinarily seen. Except in this area, this lynx crouched precisely in the northern part of South America was far from home. Its long limbs, short tail, and fur filled ears was the only reason I identified it. Phenotypically it was a dead match, geographically a total mystery. She crouched over her den instinctively, protectively. I watched from the protruding rock where I stood. I had left my group at the camping site on our two week excursion in these parts of South America. As I stared into the face enveloping her auburn eyes I saw not fear, rage, or any of those typical reactions that could be expected from a species that hadn't been domesticated.

I was frozen, a lover a nature, I knew the extreme cost I would pay if any part of this moment were not absorbed. I reached for my camera to document her beauty, the strength this animal possessed, the ability to survive under circumstances she was created not to. Then, she did something entirely predictable; she dove into the den in a quick and fluid movement to escape the eternal frame my camera threatened to capture.

I left disappointed at the lack of evidence I was bringing back to camp. Most stories get bigger in the re-telling but there was no need for exaggeration with this particular incident. My fellow outdoorsmen were all amazed as we walked into town for a much needed good lunch. In town, I discovered I wasn't the only person to have viewed the beautifully, out-of-place creature. Flyers blanketed the town, or rather community, (everyone seemed related here) and there was heavy talk of the person to champion my precious lynx.

Incredibly disturbed, I tried to point out to one of the locals the extreme rarity of her existence in their area. Rather than obliterate her, try to make peace and co-exist here. Take

pictures, write articles, publicize sure, but don't harm her; she is now a precious gem to your country. His response was cold and not what I had hoped to hear. He babbled something about destroying crops; of course this wouldn't be about hunting. They didn't have sport hunting here like we did back home, instead they viewed this lynx as a knat, a pest, something to swat away from their productive land.

The next day was cooler. I decided to hike back up to that same rock where I had seen the lynx. My son came with me so the trip was much slower. He was tired before we were even half way there. "Daddy, my legs hurt," he kept saying. When we finally arrived I painted the picture for his young imagination. Vivid as it was, he had the most fun telling me all the possible stories as to why she decided to visit South America all the way from Canada and how she came about travelling, either by boat or his personal favorite, sneaking on an airplane. We didn't see her that day.

My son and I arrived back at camp and again, all the men and boys were ready for dinner. We made the long stroll back into town. As we passed through all the café's, convenient stores, and other small shops we came across an oddly crowded parking lot. It echoed loud voices all scrabbling to be heard over the other. Their trucks piled into each space without any cautiousness and unaware of invading the neighboring space; we decided to see what all the hoo-rah was about.

As we shouldered through the crowd, I held my son in my arms. We never made it to the front of the group, but the people were shouting their intentions so there was no reason to push forward. The group cried out a loud battle cry as each ego boasted of what could be. "Kill the lynx!" "Save your crops and animals!" The excitement in their voices made me angry. Killing for food, protection, or animals that harm your way of living is different than deliberately killing something before it is even guilty for anything. We unanimously left their vicious, blood-thirsty pep-rally.

After we had all finished dinner, the disturbing thoughts of the town's event that night had slowed, until we heard the deafening shot. It rang out loud, sharp, and somehow sounded victorious...for the hunter. My son's face was tilting up to face me, and then we heard the most horrific sound. Before she could let out her final cry, a last growl, there was another shot, followed by another, and yet still another. The shots that rang out after the first were painful, each stabbing deeper and deeper into my lungs. We never heard one sound from our beautiful lynx, not one noise was perceivable.

When we reached the parking lot, we heard the proud truck reeling to announce its prey. The hunters pulled into the parking lot, screaming, chanting, taunting. Before the truck completely stopped its passengers were already piling out. They reached into the bed and hurled the body that was once so majestic and mysterious to the ground where it lay awkwardly and partly dismantled. The crowd let out a roar of praise, yet my group sat silent.

My son rushed forward before I could reach him, squeezing into spaces far too small for me. He raced, paying no attention to those in the way to reach the lynx, our lynx that had amazed us both. I had already begun pushing forward claiming my son and calling his name. But it didn't matter. The crowd fell silent as my son reached the center where she lay. I stood on the inner edge. I watched his tiny hands reach out for her, and finally rest in her rugged fur. He sat there and cried.

When he turned to find me I stepped forward, knowing the rush of questions would flow after the tears. Instead, over the silent crowd, my son's voice spoke beyond its years, "they killed her because she didn't belong, right? Are they going for us next?"

Jessica Richardson  
First National Bank  
Stephenville



Lillian Baird

In Line to Age

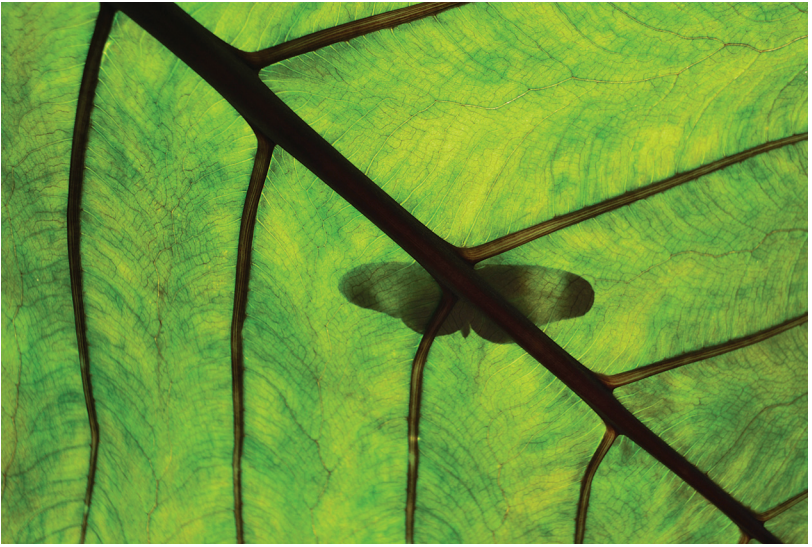


Taylor Atkins  
Fireworks Debris



Amanda DeBusk

Glance



Jancie Bateman

Shaded Reflections



Lewis Straughter  
Word of Encouragement



Sydee Scott  
Young Girl



Kellyn Reid  
Explosions  
in the Sky



Mark Martin  
Self in Taos



Mark Martin

Taos Pueblo Summer





Lilly Lovell  
Lilly Lizard



Misti Schultz

Long Talks in Elevation



Kim Kutch

Cloud Powell



Ed Eldridge  
Eiffel Tower  
Peek-a-Boo







Lilly Lovell  
Silver Lining



Brittany McLemore  
Guiding Light



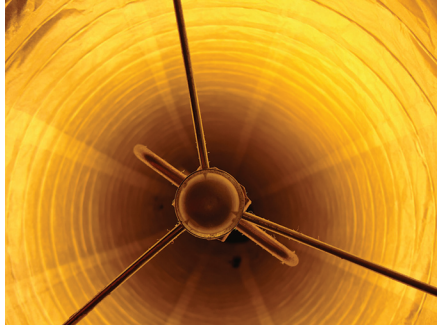
Kathryn Fritts  
Lost



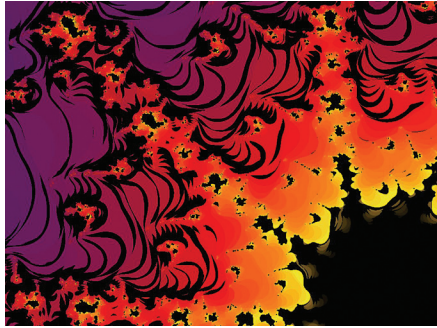
Emily Grace Hallgarth

Early Birds

Mohd Fahad  
Lamp



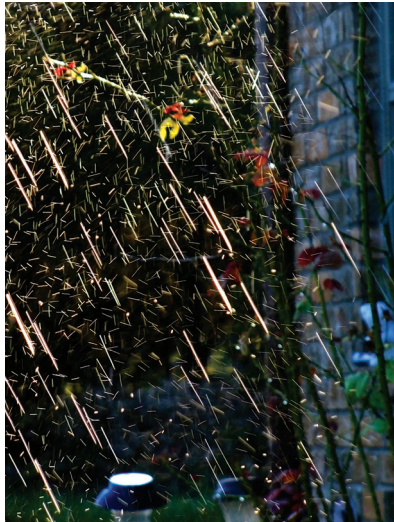
Jessica Richardson  
Boy with Bird



Kayla Cash

Sunrise

Eva Sepeda  
Darts of Water



Jennifer Howard  
The Last Letter

**Monday 20th, 8:00 am**

Dear Mario,

Please come to the castle. I have baked a cake for you.

Yours Truly: Princess Toadstool

*Peach*

**Monday 20th, 9:45 am**

Dear Mario,

I hope that this message reaches you in time. When I saw the royal messenger heading towards your house, I knew that I had to act quickly. The princess has probably invited you to her castle with the promise of sharing some sort of treat with her. A pie or cake perhaps?

Despite what you may think, the cake is a lie! I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, but Princess Peach has another motive for luring you to her castle today, and it's not for a roll between the royal bed sheets. What I'm trying to say is that princess Peach wants you dead, and I have the supporting evidence to back my claim.

Have you ever asked yourself, why am I her army of one? If not, you should. It's true that blondes have not always been the smartest, but c'mon! She has had plenty of time to figure out that her castle is in need of more security. She has an entire kingdom under her reign, and the only protection she has is an army of toadstools that do absolutely nothing! Instead of hiring body guards or training her army, she relies on her boyfriend. I guess she figures that as a plumber, you already deal with a lot of crud.



There was a time when Peach loved you. I'll admit that much. But the girl's affection wore off the more time she spent with Bowser. Think about it. Have you ever seen him actually hurt Peach? You're a nice guy and all, but Bowser doesn't need a Viagra mushroom to size up to her. Girls have a bad habit of falling for the bad guy. And you know what they say, once you go dinosaur...

But the fact of the matter is, she knows they can never be together as long as you are in the picture. You're the most talked about man in the galaxy. Everyone likes you. If the princess even tries to dump you, she'll get a bad rep for the rest of her life. And Peach can use all the good publicity she can get. I mean, how many people do you know that just go on and on about how wonderful she is? Yeah. That's what I thought. Nothing!

So Bowser and the princess came up with a solution to their problem. She would continue to get "kidnapped" by Bowser, therein, throwing you into every deadly scenario imaginable in the hopes that you will die. Once dead, there would be no one to save her, and she would be free to live forever in his kingdom. The Toadstool Kingdom would just assume that she was forced to marry him and continue to follow her and Bowser's direction.

I've been watching you risk your life for Princess Peach ever since we met, and what have you gotten in return? A handful of kisses? What in the hell is that all about? She treats you bad and doesn't even have the guts to say she's through. And you two have been together for how many years? Most women would have demanded a ring by now, but the lack thereof suits her just fine.

Look Mario, you could do so much better than her. Drop the dumb blonde and find yourself a nice person to spend the rest of your life with. One who isn't trying to have you killed. Someone who truly cares about you and will support you for a change. Someone like... me.

Yes, Mario. I am in love with you. I knew it the first time I carried you through the forest. How you caressed me as we leapt through the air. The way it feels to be mounted by you sends chills down my back just thinking about it. Yes! I love you. And if you do not feel the same, then I understand, and will not bring it up again. But if you are reading this and you feel the same for me as I do for you, I'm yours! Run to me my darling! I'll be here.

Sincerely:

*JOSHI*

P.S. And I baked you a cake.

Jennifer Howard

## Peeing in the Pool

At the ripe old age of ten, it's all about who you know. The country club hosted the only community pool in town, and it was something to mention when making new friends. Everyone knew that when someone was a member, this person was capable of taking you with them as a guest to the pool. When temperatures average about 95–100 degrees, swimming pools are the closest things to heaven.

I was quite popular, you might say. At least that's what I thought every year when the days got hotter. Come summer time, my calendar would be loaded with kids who wanted to go to the pool with me. We would load up in the Suburban with every pool toy known to man. Noodles, floaties, sharks, tubes, sinkable, water balls, water blasters, goggles, and even a few Barbies would all make the pilgrimage to the country club, where we would brave the scolding black tar parking lot and drag everything into the gate.

The pool was divided into two segments: the big pool and the kid pool. The big pool started at about 3 feet and had a maximum depth of 8 feet. To this day, I remember that I could smell the chlorine way before we even got through the gate. And it was always frigid. On days where the temperatures were in the 90s to 100s, that water remained in the 30s.

This is where the kid pool comes into play. With its constant temperature of about 76 degrees, we would take turns jumping into the deep end of the big pool and then run back to the kid pool to warm up. The temperature change felt amazing, and I didn't understand why no one ever just sat in the kid pool. The chlorine smell wasn't as strong there either. So that made it all the more attractive to my ten year old eye.

On that day, I had chosen Alice Caperton to be my guest. She was notably the most popular girl in our class, and for her to want to play with me was my shot at true fame. It didn't matter how

she had tormented me in the past or called me names in front of the entire class. She wanted to be my friend now. Actually, she had called to invite me to take her to the pool. I was certain that she had truly changed and was not as mean as I had thought. She had even brought me a Popsicle to eat on the way there.

When we arrived, we were still talking and giggling when she spotted some of her friends. They instantly gathered around Alice, pushing me aside like they did in school. Still, I did my best to act “cool” as I walked quietly behind the group, and we carefully entered the water. There was no splashing, no dunking, and no sign of them ever wanting to swim. I was left to play by myself as they talked about boys and which ones they planned on marrying. Alice had already decided that she was marrying Billy and was on to planning the honeymoon.

Instead of talking about them, I met up with some of the guys from our school, and we started playing games. The girls watched from the shallow end so as to not seem too amused by our fun. It was sometime into our fourth round of sharks and minnows that I announced I had to leave the game for a bathroom break. The boys just stared at me before informing me of the ways of the world.

“You don’t have to walk to the bathroom. Just go to the kid pool. That’s what we do!”

I was dumb struck by this new bit of information. I can pee in the pool? I had never explored such a thought and decided it was worth trying. One of the guys, Billy, came with me as we walked over and sat in the kid pool. He watched me closely and talked me through the process with great consideration to detail.

“Just make it look like you’re just sitting there. You know? Like you’re just over here to sit and warm up.”

I felt my heart beat in my throat as I looked over to the others watching from a distance. All the boys had lined up along the rope. On their faces, they displayed genuine encouragement. All waiving and mouthing the words, “You can do it.” Alice and the other girls were also staring intently at the two of us. I had remembered her saying on the car ride up that she had a major

crush on Billy, and now I saw how she had lit up when he was at the pool.

Billy continued to stare. His green eyes seemed to try and will me to pee, as if eyes could do that. He was focused.

"Stop that." I ordered.

"Why?"

I don't know. It's just weird."

"Do you want me to hold your hand?"

"No!" I cried. "Just stop staring at me. I can't do it while you're looking."

Billy looked away for a moment before turning to me again.

"Do you want me to tickle you?"

"What?"

He scooted closer. "Tickle. It might make you pee."

"No! No thanks. Just stop staring."

"Oh," he looked away. "Sorry."

He reached for my hand anyway. I think it was more for him than me. He was pretty nervous, too since it was my first time, and he didn't want me to be alone. None the less, I was glad he was beside me. Besides, we were too young to think of how creepy the whole scenario was. So I closed my eyes, released my muscles and did what my momma told me not to do. I was peeing in the pool.

I opened my eyes to see Billy staring me down again, wanting so badly to ask if I had done it yet. I simply smiled and nodded. He smiled back and gave the others the thumbs up sign. "That was so cool!" I squealed as we walked back to the big pool, still hand in hand, and smiling the entire way.

The guys accepted me as one of their own, asking me if I was scared or if I had thought of backing out. "No, no" was all I said, and we high fived and hugged before taking our places back at the game. I looked over my shoulder at Alice to boast of my most recent achievement, knowing that she would have to find me worthy of joining her club now. But instead, I found her and the other girls giggling. Then they pointed and I knew they were laughing at me.

"I'm not riding home with a girl who pees in pools!" she yelled so everyone could hear. "I'm going home with clean girls who aren't so dumb!"

I was crushed. Hearing her words, the entire pool community had their eyes on me. Billy and the rest of the boys turned and joined in on the fun of ridiculing me to the point of tears. They would later say that they told me to do it, so they could make fun of me. Whatever would make them look best. I went home crying, re-thinking every friendship I ever had.

As I grew older, this event stuck in my memory as a lesson about popularity and friendship. I decided that popularity was not for me if it involved making fun of others just to build up your ego. Many of the boys have since then apologized for their actions that day. Even Billy told me how sorry he was that he didn't stand up for me. Though Alice and I never spoke much after that, I cannot help but wonder about her actions. But then I stick to my conclusion that I made that night after returning home from the pool. Alice may have thought she had it all, but she never got to hold Billy's hand for moral support when she first peed in the pool.

Seth Jones

## Spoiled Milk

The girl stepped out of the black sedan and onto the parking lot of the convenience store. The cool air felt good against her white skin. She adjusted the hem of her knee-high skirt and the garments beneath as she exchanged pleasantries with the man driving. She closed the door and placed the folded bills he'd given her into a small shoulder purse and entered the store. The sedan drove away. It was late at night.

The clerk watched as she entered the store. He had seen her before. He was wiping the counter as she entered. He said hello. She repeated the pleasantry and asked for a pack of filtered cigarettes.

"Slow night?" the girl asked.

"Five fifty," the clerk said. "Up and down, you know."

She recalled the folded bills from her small shoulder purse and passed the clerk a ten.

"What about you?" the clerk asked, not looking up from the register where he was making change.

"So, so," she said, taking the change from his outstretched hand.

"A woman came in earlier and griped about buying bad milk here," the clerk said. "She left it in a parked car for too long and it spoiled. How is that my fault?"

The girl shrugged.

"She should have known better than to leave milk in a car," the clerk said. "Milk spoils in hot cars."

*It depends how long it's in there, she thought.* The girl retrieved the cigarettes from the counter. "Thanks," she said.

"How much longer are you working tonight?" the clerk asked the girl. "The store closes in six minutes. I can give you a ride home."

She considered it for a second and said, "No, thanks. I think I'll walk."

Seth Jones

## The Winds Always Blow

The room they occupied in the small hospital was white. There were two patient rooms in the building. The hospital was in the arid Southwest. The dry wind blew outside.

Lying in the bed, the man looked at the whiteness and sterility of the room. "This is a far cry from the bar," he said.

The son woke from his chair and asked, "What did you say, Dad?"

"I was commenting on how this room is so far from Mickey's Pub," the man said.

"Yeah, I guess so," was returned.

The man looked at one of his hands at the spider-like blood veins. He articulated his fingers and closed them into a light fist and reopened them and played them gently like a piano. His tendons and hand bones moving made the vessels shift and change. When he stopped the spider web returned.

They heard laughter and commotion outside of the white room. The man looked away from his hand and towards the sound and motioned with his head.

"Go see what that is about," the man said to the son.

The son left and then returned and said, "The Mexican couple in the other room just had a baby. The whole family is in there. Must be twelve of them."

"Is it a boy?" The man asked.

"I dunno. But I heard one of the girls say 'hermanito'. So I'm guessing it is," the son said.

The man shifted in the bed and licked and sucked at his parched lips.

"You talk to the doctor?" The man asked gruffly.

"Yeah," he replied.

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said the vomiting and weakness and not eating is probably from cirrhosis," the son said. "Said you have jaundice, too. That's why you look like a malaria victim. He said you drink too much."

The man looked out the window at the dry and sterile desert.

"But they are running tests, and he said they'll know more tomorrow," the son continued.



The man lay there and thought for a moment about the past and the present. He was still looking out the window. Outside was dry, and the wind blew.

"Well," the man said, "That's that."

The son put his hand on the man's leg covered by the white sheet.

The man looked away from the window and at his leg.

"I'll drink to that," the man said looking back out into the desert.

"Dad, this isn't a time to joke," the son complained.

"Who's joking? I'm in need of a better venue," the man said.

"Besides, this place is too bright. It hurts my eyes. Let's get out of this dump. I saw a place in town. I'll buy the first round."

With his outstretched hand, he made a motion as though he was holding a glass and rattling phantom ice cubes.

"But the doctor said..."

"Fuck the doctor," the man said curtly. He paused and then said, "It is what it is." He smiled.

The son looked away from the man and out the window at the terra where the winds blow the red dirt, and sun dries the pools after the rain. The son breathed and thought silently.

The wind will always blow the terra. It always has. It always will.

The son wept inwardly and thought, It is what it is.

He did not understand.

"Okay," he said. "Let's go."

Ashley Larry  
The Conductor

He stands on a black  
box with the key  
that starts this symphony

Seven hundred eyes  
on his black tailored suit  
anxiously awaiting  
“Hungarians Dance”

Eyes wide they  
wait. Last year his heart  
stopped beating. His rhythm  
started after the red and blue  
shocked his body back to life.

The wooden stick drops  
down. Tranquility waltzes  
through the grand hall.

Kalie Larson

## Army Boots

His boot polish was always her favorite.  
The smell reminded her of  
Of guns, of war and of tanks.  
All sorts of things  
Other girls knew nothing about.

He'd sit on the couch  
Dazzling in black,  
In greens and in browns.  
Possessing that sparkle  
Other girls knew nothing about.

She'd sit on the floor  
Cross legged and polishing,  
Until those boots were like stars.  
Relishing in being allowed to do something  
Other girls knew nothing about.

Then off he always went.  
Again and again. Until those  
Black boots turned to sand.  
Never needing the polish, or the skill  
Other girls knew nothing about.

As she stands there in her own two boots,  
She finds comfort in the smell of that polish.  
And in guns, in war and in tanks.  
And all sorts of things  
Other girls know nothing about.

Will Mayfield  
Letters with H

Goodbye! Adios! Chao, ma'e!

W: Are you there, H?

H: Yep.

W: Have you grown?

H: Yes, a garden.

W: Write much?

H: Escribo.

W: Film?

H: People are like in film. They act out life.

W: Have you learned?

(frustration)

(envy)

(tired) (confused)

H: ...

(peace)

(rain)...(clarity)

W: See you soon.

H: I hope so.

W: Do you eat?

H: There is a river, need to build a fishing pole.

W: Have you found love?

H: Land.

W: Coffee?

(black)

H: Beans.

(brown)

W: Feliz Cumpleaños.

H: Thanks.

H: ...

W: Poems?

H: Here's one. Or two.

W: H?

H: Yea?

W: Take care of yourself.

H: (Poem)

Will Mayfield

Working in the Review

Department of

*America's Funniest Home Videos*

David Hume and I are the front-line reviewers.

A "mindless" job throwing away sex and obscenity,  
a filter for joke videos and stupid teenagers  
and faked funny  
and plain fucking  
unhumorous.

We aren't the "real" judges. We don't have degrees in Humor  
Studies.

We aren't comedians.

We sit and screen and scream and cry and scoff.

Do we laugh?

Have we lost our humor?

What passes, what fails?

Are we mindless rats?

Are we jaded?

Do you think I am funny?

Does it depend on my gender?

Will we still be able to laugh in a few more years?

Is taste in humor a psychological phenomenon?

Is beauty?

We shift the film into bins marked:

SEX

PANTS FALLING DOWN

LANGUAGE

ANIMALS  
KIDS  
TRIPPING

David is from Scotland. He didn't pass a hilarious video once that ended up being a finalist for the \$100,000 Prize. It was some kid faking a Scottish accent. That's why there are two of us. We keep each other in check.

Pants fall down in every conceivable situation: weddings, funerals, school; children, working people, the educated and the simple, the old and the unassuming. An entire circle of life in falling pants.

Clips with guns generally don't pass.  
The video featuring a piece of roadkill does not pass.  
It isn't funny.  
The teenagers throwing fruit at strangers does not pass.  
It isn't funny. This is America.  
It's not fucking funny!

And your asshole isn't funny!

It isn't funny.

IT ISN'T FUCKING FUNNY AMERICA!

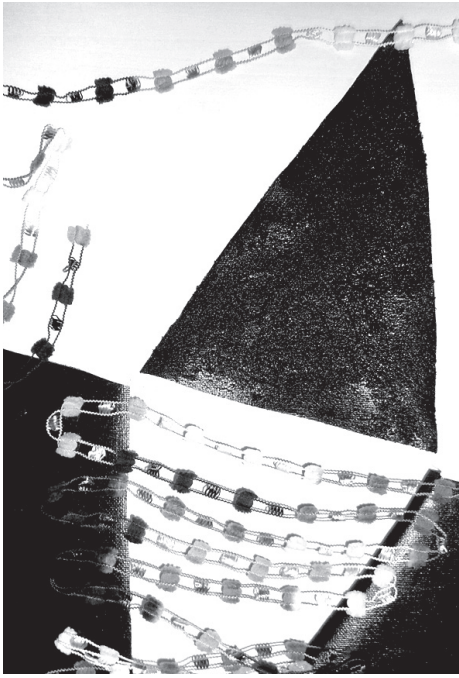
Will Mayfield  
Joseph's Poem

*Recently a friend of mine named Joseph was coaxed into such a sharing mood that he presented this poem to me. I share it with you here:*

Driving ten hours a week,  
ten hours closer to death,  
desensitized to waking  
in a metal death box,  
sunset in the rearview,  
clouds don't need to be painted  
oils—  
the sky already looks like  
oils.

Fire red, fucking silly,  
did you ever wonder  
if there's a thought out there,  
so beautiful it would  
kill you?  
A thought so perfect it  
would **pop** your brain,  
send you straight  
into immortality,  
infamy.  
Do you think it is there?  
Have you wondered so since you were a child?  
Would it stop time,  
just before the brain is  
thrown into the logical blender?  
It is surely an explanation,  
so simple,  
that every bit of thinking  
would come to the fore,  
never think again of hunger,  
movement, bowels or growing,  
all for a thought  
bigger than death,  
bigger than human.

*Ever since, I have regarded him with much suspicion.*



Lilly Lovell  
Negative



Eva Sepeda  
Dee





Lillian Baird  
Southern Girl



Megan Keough

Sunbathing

Chelsea Nunley

## Firestorm

Strike the match.

Slowly release it from your grip.

Let it hit the ground and topple,  
like dropping an ink pen on the hard floor.

Watch the horizon in front of you.

Watch as the grass before your eyes  
starts to smoke and catch the flame.

The fire is engulfing the landscape.

It rages at the trees,  
wrapping their roots in its wrath.

The field is blazing,  
completely consumed with a red-orange fury.

It glows fiercely in your eyes as you stare.

The glare on your face grows  
as you turn to walk away.

The firestorm you started ignites the entire scene.

Chelsea Nunley

## A Moment in Time

Motionless,

Stand-still,

Still-life.

Not lifeless, but life paused.

Paused in time.

Time caught in a photograph.

Photographs painted with diligence.

Time spent on a timeless scene:

Scenes of fruits on a counter in a dream,

Dreams of youth and fruitful things.

You might be motionless if you came across such an  
eloquent scene.

Where orange slices are hung against the wall,

And lime halves stacked on top of each other,

Oh, why don't they fall?

Time stuck in a stand-still,

For even just a moment,

A moment in time,

But time is not an endless thing.

Chelsea Nunley  
Superheros Aren't Real

Don't act like you're such a hero.  
You did nothing extraordinary.  
You're actually closer to zero.  
I don't feel at all secure; I feel wary.  
You didn't save the day.  
Stop flashing your smile for the paparazzi.  
This must be an awfully directed play.  
You pretend like you've got moxie.  
Take off your stupid costume;  
It's time for you to reinvent.  
Superman may be your nom de plume,  
But you're only nerdy Clark Kent.  
You can't save me; you're so vain.  
I only look at you with disdain.

Raelin Ogle

## Crazy to Say Goodbye

The happy couple sat at the long dinner table, Kitty and John, each on the opposite end looking at each other through the molded candles and caked-on cob webs. Kitty looked over at her husband as if trying to transmit a signal and started to have a conversation with John in her head. *Your hair is full of knotted up silk, matted to your head. Your eyes have been closed for weeks now. Dear, you really should take a shower; your body is beginning to smell like two rotten eggs being fried on the stove. I know you have been sick, but you are beginning to turn a pale purple. You don't need to worry; I will take care of you. I told you I would never let go, and I won't. Come, Dear let me wash your hair.*

The elderly woman was dressed in a light blue night gown that gracefully floated across the aged oak floor; her long crystal locks fell across her brittle and crooked shoulders. She reached up with her long, bony fingers, gathered her hair into a tight bun, and twisted a long knitting needle deep into it to hold the locks off her wrinkled neck. The kids down the block say that she is a witch, and maybe she is. She walks with a limp and wears black shoes. It seems that the maker of her eyes pulled out the plug and let the color drain out because all that was left from her bright blue eyes was a washed-out gray. Her nose was long and ended at a point, and her lips were thin and always tightly pressed together as if they were looking for the lost solids that used to sit comfortably on her gums. Her body has shrunk over the years, and now her back has hunched over. She walks as if each step sends sharp pains into her bones, but she still remains proud. Her mind seems to be locked up in a world long forgotten. Kitty walked into her out-dated kitchen and picked up the silver bowl sitting on the wash table. She made her way to the screen door, slowly, one step at a time. Walking down the crumbling steps she looked around seeing a blur of greens, blues, and browns. She could faintly make out the handle to the manual water pump but remembered the beaten down dirt path that led to it. After painstakingly pumping the water into the wash bowl, the woman carried the bowl back into the house. She sat it on the stove, until steam started to rise towards the

heavens. Kitty threw an old, thin cloth into the water and walked back into the dining room. She sat next to her husband, and the chair creaked with a decomposing screech. Kitty stuck her hand into the wash bowl, and let it sit in the warm water. Wringing out the cloth she started to slowly wash John's face. Kitty was expecting him to curse at her for embarrassing him in front of their guests, but he didn't. He just sat there in a frozen silence. After finishing her task, Kitty tossed the dingy water outside on the over-grown grass as if to say, *Here. Here is your poison.* She sat the bowl back on the table and walked up the soft stairs. Reaching the top, Kitty walked over to the mirror. She gazed deep into the reflection as if not looking at her own but one hidden deep in the past.

*Ring... Ring...* "Come on, Mom. . . . Answer the phone. Doctor, no one is picking up."

"Miss Jenkins, I need you to calm down. Was there anyone taking care of your parents while you were on vacation?"

"No. Susie, the girl down the road, was supposed to check in on them, but she said Mom, I mean Kitty, looked fine."

"What about Mr. Jenkins?"

"She said he was sitting at the dinner table. She said Dad never moved the whole time while she was there," Miss Jenkins said with a slight quiver in her voice as if she were concealing a consuming terror.

"So, have you contacted the police?"

"Of course not. What am I supposed to tell them, that I left my 98 year-old mother by herself to take care of my father who has been so sick that he would die if not in constant care?"

"Okay, okay, good point. Calm down. Meet me at the airport at five, and we will go find your parents together."

"Are you sure you can do that, Doctor?"

"Don't mention it."

As she hung up the phone, Miss Jenkins began to pace around her Beverly Hills home. *What if that old bag forgot who she was, where she was at, and killed Dad because she thought he was an intruder? No, don't think like that. She has the most severe case of Alzheimer's, but she would never kill Dad, would she?* Miss Jenkins, trying to suppress the questions popping up in her conscience, remembered her mission to

get to the airport. She ran up the stairs taking two at a time, and when each foot hit the sturdy stair, she gained momentum.

Waking up from her endless sleep, Kitty looked around and saw the moth-eaten curtains. It seemed the place where she chose to rest was decaying in time. To try to figure out where she was, Kitty sat up and walked down the soft crumbling stairs. Reaching the first floor, she looked around. She saw footprints leading into the house from a screen door. They could not be a man's print but possibly a woman's or child's. She looked up and saw spider webs reaching down at her. She felt her body cringe and could not hold in a terrified scream. She ran down the hall until she was in the kitchen. She saw one of the burners was red with heat. She rushed over to the stove and turned the knob. Looking around, she saw an open doorway. She walked through it, seeing the room was styled Victorian, and the splendid decorations made the dining room seem like a step into the past. It was filled with dust but still felt so familiar. She walked over to the long oak table and looked at the clumpy liquid in the Champaign glass. Kitty felt her stomach lurch as if trying to jump out of her throat. She then followed the spider webs until her vision landed on a figure sitting in the darkness. She called out to the creature, but no response was given. She picked up a candle off the center of the table, found a match, and lit it. A breeze from the window sent the smell of death right into Kitty's nostril, and this time she was not able to control her disgusted stomach. After vomiting up stomach acid for about fifteen minutes, she fell to the ground with exhaustion. She took the candle and walked towards the creature in the darkness. Approaching with caution, the woman let the light trace the outline of a man. She called out to him, but again no answer. She approached closer and recognized a forgotten familiar face.

"John? John is that you?" Kitty asked with slight fear penetrating her voice. There was still no reply, and she began to lose control. Her mind started to spin in different time periods until it landed with a thump. Finally, her mind stopped running away from her.

"Mom? Mom, are you here?" Miss Jinkins could not help but let the panic in her voice show.

"Mrs. Jinkins? This is Doctor Jacobes. Are you in there?" Still no answer was returned.

"Mom, we are coming in." Miss Jenkins took a step towards the house, and Dr. Jacobes followed close behind. Looking through the screen, she reached for the cold, metal handle and pulled the door open slowly. She walked inside the door and turned to Dr. Jacobes. "I'll look upstairs; you try the downstairs," she said with force and control.

"Okay, yell if you find anything."

"Okay. You do the same."

After searching through all of the bedrooms, she heard the doctor's terrified scream. "MISS JINKINS. . . Miss Jenkins, get down here quick!" It seemed she turned on a dime and flew down the rotting stairs. When she reached the dust-covered floor with a slight thud, she never stopped running and followed the doctor's voice. When she reached the door to the dining room, she stopped dead in her tracks. She saw the horrifying scene that would haunt her dreams for the rest of her life. Her father sat at the head of the table, and her mother was swimming in her own blood. The doctor confirmed that both were dead. He told Miss Jenkins, judging by the skin color, temperature, and feel of the skin, that her father had to be dead at least two weeks. Her mother, on the other hand, has only been dead for about twenty-four hours. Miss Jenkins fell to her knees with a flood of tears flowing out of her eyes like the Mississippi River after a heavy rain. Doctor Jacobes tried to comfort the distressed woman, but only her final words gave her the courage to leave. "I guess I was crazy to say goodbye, and my mother was crazy to let go."



Raelin Ogle  
The Lesson

I remember the feel of my grandmother's lace.  
Old, brittle, and soft  
Its once pure white a now faint splash of yellow.

I remember watching my grandmother's hands  
move to-and-fro with the needle  
like a constant flowing stream—her hands moved.  
Creating wonderfully beautiful  
delicate pieces of art.

One day I asked my grandmother to teach me her skill.  
Hour after hour I tried to mimic grandmother's hands  
their fluidity and grace.  
But no matter how I practiced and attempted her craft  
the grace in my hands did not create the same beauty.

Frustration clouded my eyes as I was thinking of giving up my task.  
Face in hands I let my frustration flow onto the delicate lace pattern  
Grandmother entered the room—looking herself delicate and soft  
Her eyes set on me, her hand rested on my head.  
She asked me "Why do you cry child?"  
I just looked up and replied "My lace is not as beautiful as your  
many patterns."

Grandmother raised my chin and kissed me on the forehead.  
"Dear child, don't you know . . ."  
She ran her fingers over my design.  
"What makes this beautiful are its imperfections."  
And then she patted my hand and left the room.

I looked at my lace holding it gently in my hands.  
Letting my eyes wander down the neatly looped lace.  
Its imperfections make it *beautiful*.

Carolyn Ordiway Thiem

## Waking Dreams

In my dream

I am walking past rows  
and rows and rows of stalls  
broken, used, occupied  
locked

the pressing need rises.

Nature is calling.

the urge becomes more  
than a faint whisper  
or reminder.

I am taunted

by a chorus of water filling pots like wedding bells  
as it hits the bleached white porcelain.

it wakes me.

I rush to my bathroom,  
but the dream  
still haunts me.

Marcus Parks

# I Am the Ghost

I am the ghost  
I am what used to be  
I am drifting endlessly  
I am the ghost

I am the shadow  
Ever watching over you  
Protecting you, through and through  
I am the shadow

I am the echo  
Echo of words spoken to lost lovers  
The silent scream of the bride turned widow  
The last goodbye before the sun dips low  
I am the echo

I am the memory  
Always in your thoughts  
When you are dreaming  
You will think of me  
I am the ghost

Rhyland Pittenger  
Silence

I've been waiting, my friend,  
for the day you arrive  
when the traffic halts  
with the ticking of time  
when the rain stops pounding  
and the thunder has faded  
when no one says a word  
for there's no word to be stated  
when no wind howls  
nor coyote, nor wolf  
when reception is lost  
and TV's had enough.  
I've been waiting, my friend,  
for you to arrive  
to sort out my thoughts,  
for they clutter my mind  
to bring us what peace  
or what horrors you will  
to offer us comfort in  
a world full of filth  
to lay us down  
humbled and taught  
to teach us the lesson  
that humanity forgot.  
I've been waiting, my friend,  
for you to arrive  
for Silence to set in  
to destroy or revive.

Alycia Pruitt

## Courage

His hands are aching, the cracks running so deep.  
The blood flows from him,  
the red stains beginning to seep.  
Seep into the worn and tattered shirt,  
his back and feet torn to pieces.  
The dark flesh permanently scarred,  
deeply imbedded creases.  
Creases impressed upon him by the whip,  
the whip the ivory man uses as force,  
out of fear,  
Fear of the unknown, the uncertainty of a  
Man.

Jessica Richardson  
The Machine

*For Pete, Still missed everyday. We love you.*

Chills overwhelmed me as I trudged through the marked door. His body lay on the paper-lined hospital bed, flesh flushed with an off-purple color that accented the swelling caused by the trapped fluids. He was not yet dead, but I saw that he was anxiously knocking at the Reaper's door. I held his hand (already stiff with the cold that walked side by side with death) and his skin felt like a tight balloon and was unnerving to the touch. He did not move, blink or think; he lost those abilities in the wreck. The only life-like feature that he still possessed was the capability to breathe, and that was the only thing that let me look at him with hope. But even his breathing—robotic and uninterrupted—left doubt to whether or now he was living. His chest moved up and down repeatedly in rhythm with the giant machine to his right. Wires and cords linked him to this device that, through him, sounded like something from Star Wars. This machine was supposed to be a miracle worker, a life saver, keeping those we love alive when they should be dead. But when I took the time to evaluate the situation, I sadly realized that this machine was not truly saving his life, it was only postponing his inevitable death. He was not breathing at all, the machine was breathing for him. After this epiphany, I no longer watched with hope, but with sorrow and sympathy. We were just holding him here for our own comfort, and he was already late for an appointment with God. This machine, a simple appliance controlled by a switch and plug, was not really a miracle from above. It was only a tool made for our own consolation and last farewells before we let go of his hands and watch his surrendered chest stop rising and falling with the rhythm of synthetic life.

## Christopher Rushing Tides

Said the Ocean to the Moon,  
"You move me,  
But only in my dreams do we touch."  
I once thought myself as the ocean,  
And I dreamt you as the moon.  
From the heavens you'd call my name,  
You'd croon, and I'd lose my mind.

I was wrong,  
but so were you.  
I'm adrift in a cardboard box,  
gazing at you, still up at you.  
I may be sinking in all of my bitter recall,  
Drowning in Sangria seas,  
Lost among waves of inconsequent dreams,  
But redemption that comes with the tide  
Promises leave from the night and from  
Your echo of stars and their light.

It's all pointless percussion, words that mean nothing,  
But heal to be heard, it heals to be heard.  
You'll always be present like fear in the heavens  
'Cause your love was absurd, it always returns,  
Blending the days between sober and thirsty,  
The brightest thing in every night sky.  
I know why  
The Moon and the Ocean are so far apart  
Said the Moon to the Ocean,  
"I don't want your heart,  
And I'm taking back mine."

# TIDES

SCORE

Written: CHRISTOPHER RUSHING  
Composed: CHRISTOPHER RUSHING

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

VOCALS

AC.GTR.

Vox.

Said - The O-Cean ... For the moon,

AC.GTR.

Vox.

you move w/ ... but only in my dreams do we

AC.GTR.

Vox.

Touch. I once thought  
Myself as the ocean  
And I dreamt you  
AS THE MOON

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Listen to "Tides" at <http://www.tarleton.edu/anthology>

2011, Vol. 17



Cynthia Robinson  
Lust and Fuss

Hearts racing  
Bones shaking  
Skin crawling  
Breath taking  
Looks as a Greek Goddess  
Perfect  
Flawless  
Mysterious  
Dangerous  
Fights like a Hunger Lioness  
Makes you think  
Makes you quake  
With fear  
Reels you in  
Tears you limb from limb

Cole Schneider  
Jerky

The squirrel considered himself a fine, proud specimen of his species. He had a particularly bushy tale and a wonderfully shiny red coat. Of course, the squirrel didn't know he was called "the squirrel," he just knew himself as "Steve." He was also very confident in his reasoning ability, having never been captured or even hurt by a predator. You see, Steve realized a long time ago that you have to wait until the slow, albeit deadly, giants were gone to try and steal their food. Steve actually learned this lesson while his brother, who was also named Steve, got hit with an arrow while rushing away from a pack, laden with a small baggie of nuts. Steve didn't see Steve too often these days, but the thought didn't really bother him too much.

Steve watched the slow giant, who was covered in shiny skin, amble away from his pack. Steve loved shiny things, but he won't let that distract him from his objective. The giant was obviously trying to trick him, but Steve would never let that happen. Steve chattered mirthfully as he watched the shiny giant lumber through the trees and out of sight.

Steve shot forward instantly, excited to finally reach his quarry after an almost unbearable three minutes of waiting. Steve hated waiting, but he knew this would be worth it. Steve climbed up the side of the pack and scrambled through the opening on the side. There, he found his prize, an enormous chunk of jerky. Steve lugged the jerky out of the pack and began to descend to the ground when he was flying. Steve was confused. Why was he flying? He looked around to find his answer and dropped his prized jerky in astonishment.

Clayton hated his parents. They were always trying to stifle his freedom when he was obviously meant to fly! He wasn't some hatchling anymore, and all his brothers and sisters had long since left the nest. Clayton knew he was the favorite, and his parents treated him as such. Maybe they were afraid to become empty nesters, like the Pattersons. Whatever the case, Clayton was fed up. He and his girlfriend had flown the coop two days ago, but since then she had

left him for some douche-bag of a Bald Eagle. Clayton didn't care. He could make it on his own, easily.

Although he was hungry, he hadn't eaten since his parents last fed him. He never really learned how to hunt and always relied on his more-than-stupid father to bring home food. But hunting couldn't be too hard. You just grabbed some small creature and popped it in your mouth, right? His gizzard was churning. Just thinking about food made it worse. What Clayton would give for just one succulent, tender, morsel of—

A squirrel! There, on the ground, in that clearing! Clayton just had to dive and it was his! He plummeted towards the earth, eager to snatch his prey. He was inches away from the creature, when it darted out towards a back pack in the clearing. Clayton caught himself on a bush and ricocheted back out to the pack, but the squirrel was gone. Then it popped back out of the pack, holding a slab of meat. Clayton was ecstatic and grabbed the squirrel by its tail. He took off and felt his load lessen greatly when the squirrel dropped the meat in shock. Clayton was so happy, he'd done it! He was almost out of the clearing when he felt a stitch in his side. Before he knew it, he was falling, very much in pain.

The knight was dying. He'd been trekking for the better part of an afternoon from his defeat at meadow knoll. He knew he was lost in these woods, when he came to a landmark, the Clearing with One Boulder! He hurried over to the boulder and set his pack down upon it. He was really dying and walked over to the nearest tree to relieve himself. That felt much better, and he ambled back to his pack when he saw a squirrel sitting beside it, holding his jerky. Then a hawk swooped out from across the clearing and grabbed the squirrel, which was still holding his jerky. He sprinted over to his pack and grabbed his bow and an arrow as the hawk was escaping the clearing. The knight needed that jerky and wasn't about to let some hawk rob him blind. He released the arrow just as the squirrel dropped the jerky, and the arrow struck true, right in the side of the hawk. The hawk managed to glide down and crumple in the clearing. The knight grabbed the squirrel and wrung his neck before making sure the hawk was dead. He strapped both onto his back and continued his hike homeward.

The park ranger had just finished overseeing a LARPing match that was scheduled to take place in his woods. It had almost gone off without a hitch if it weren't for that one stupid boy who had shown up with a real bow and broad-head arrows covered in aluminum foil for armor. The park ranger just sent him home and watched him stalk off down the path to the parking lot. The ranger was making the trip himself when he saw the boy ahead of him. He must have gotten lost in the woods because everyone else had long since gone home. The boy had something tied to his back pack, and the park ranger jogged to get a closer look.

It was as he feared; the boy had a red-tailed hawk dangling on his back.

"Stop!" the ranger shouted, "you're under arrest for poaching. Please cooperate and come quietly."

As his response, the boy turned and launched an arrow at him. The park ranger dove out of the way and drew his handgun.

"Stand down, son. You don't have to go through with this." Another arrow flew and lodged itself into the tree above the ranger's head.

The ranger stepped out, and the boy pulled back another arrow. This time, the arrow flew straight and true, and as it slashed the ranger's jugular, he squeezed off one shot. It hit the kid right between the eyes, which was not where the ranger was aiming.

Paula Smith

## My Song

Head to the pillow  
Hear the music  
Listen to the subconscious lullaby.  
Notes from your past  
Lyrics of your future  
Sleep with the possibilities.

Paula Smith

## Six

The window was just my height.  
It was my station, my post.  
With black eyes and a nervous stomach, I waited.  
And waited. And waited.  
I waited for you.

## Editors

**Stacy Diane Coggins** is a senior at Tarleton where she is majoring in Public Relations and Event Management. She is combining her background in technical writing, education, art, public speaking, and volunteering to pursue a career which helps those who do not have a voice tell their story to those who need to hear it. She enjoys and is looking forward to helping causes, organizations, businesses, and non-profits create beneficial change in society by promotions, educational events, fundraisers, and storytelling.

**Jahmical Dawes** is a senior at Tarleton where he is pursuing a degree in fashion merchandising. He has aspirations of running his own sneaker shop. He is a connoisseur of sneaks, bikes, cardigans, caps, specs, and decks (long boards). He has enjoyed communing with the other editors and will cherish these memories FOR-E-VER! He bids you adieu trusting that you'll keep it cope (copacetic that is).

**Carlos Figueroa** is a 21 year-old history major graduating in the summer 2011. After graduation, Carlos plans either going to law school or going for a master's degree in history at Tarleton State University. His current interests include reading history, being online, painting, drawing, and playing chess. He also hopes to learn how to play the Theremin someday. Carlos enjoys spending time with his wife and friends doing fun activities such as playing hacky sack or soccer tennis.

**Samantha Griggs** is a senior majoring in English. After a summer abroad studying in London at the Queen Mary, Samantha fell in love with international studies. A semester later, she studied in Paris, France at L'institut Catholique de Paris studying intensive French. She plans to take the road less travelled, bravely taking chances that others fear never conforming to the standard orthodox of a suburban life. She loves Oscar Wilde.

## Publication Directors

**Benni Konvicka** and **Marilyn Robitaille** are professors in the Department of English and Languages. They have been co-publication directors of *Anthology* for the last fifteen years. Since founding the journal with students Jimmy Hood and Cris Edwards in 1995, they have read hundreds, maybe thousands, of submissions and worked with student editors from a variety of majors.

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We chose the flower motif for the cover because of the etymology of *Anthology*. The word *Anthology* comes from the Greek words *anthos* (flowers) and *legein* (gather). The definition, according to our dictionary, is a collection of prose, poetry, and visual arts.

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