

The Paper Lantern

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The Last Poem

by Jordan Schouweiler

My first kiss with Love was bitter.
It managed to lie with passion
and the soft touch of fingers
until I had somehow lost my disbelief in it.
My first kiss with Love spoke to me with tongue,
"Look silly girl,
I am real.
I am so close.
I am on your own hands."
My first kiss with Love mocked me
with lonely nights and passions
that I could not fulfill.
My first kiss with Love was empty.
I let it touch me with selfish hands.
And every lonely night I said to myself
"I am sorry that I am not what you want, Love."
This is the last poem I will write about you."
But I would wake up the next morning
with the smell of Love in my hair
and write another.

Untitled
by Allison Wolpers



The Balsawood Box

by Stephen Dodds

My kitchen is a rather modest affair. It is small, rectangular and has barely enough room for a fridge and the cooker, which stand side by side. The most joyful thing about my kitchen is a small side table, which sits underneath the window. This window allows plenty of light to enter the kitchen. It also allows decent ventilation and allows me a pretty view of the copious trees in the yard behind my apartment building. There are oaks and poplars in the yard, which are homes to a variety of creatures such as squirrels, birds of several varieties. I see woodpeckers, finches and an occasional eagle and beneath the oak tree's sturdy foundation, there lives a resident chipmunk. Soaking up such views from the table is one of the small pleasures about living in a small apartment complex.

At the left hand corner of the table sits a small balsawood box. Despite its simple appearance, this balsa box holds a special place on the table and in my life. It contains half a dozen or so letters from various countries across the globe. Letters I have received but that I have yet to answer. I am a writer. Writers write, so why do I feel so isolated and unable to pick up the pen or pound away on the keyboard? As I hold each of these envelopes or reread each of the letters they contain, all kinds of tactile and cerebral pleasures surge through my mind as I am magically transported to new and different worlds. Some I know intimately; others I can still only dream of.

The penmanship on some envelopes is very skillful, something I rarely get from letters received within the United States, though my friend in Denver has a rather distinctive curly style of writing, which I am sure she reserves just for me, her adopted brother. What is captivating about the contents of these letters is not always the news they contain, or the fact that some of the senders I have known for over a quarter of a century, but the sense of mystery about those miniature windows that are always neatly stuck on the top right hand corner of the envelopes. It is there the mysteries begin. Why do we put the stamp there in the first place? I know the real reason why only Great Britain does not put its name of stamps issued there. For those who do not know, it is because it was in Great Britain that postage stamps were first introduced to the world, so there was no

need to emblazon a country of origin on what was, after all, a domestic service. Originally, the person receiving the postcard (which most letters were in those days) had to pay the mail carrier. So many people simply read the back of the postcard and refused to accept it, giving reasons such as “I don’t know this person” or “This addressee doesn’t live here,” so the mail carrier would have to take it back to the post office, meaning that no one was paid for their services. It was then that it became custom to pay to send the letters instead of receive them, then it did not matter if you refused the letter or not.

It’s just a stamp, isn’t it? On the contrary, it is a fine miniature piece of art that should be enlarged to wall-sized paintings in order to let its true value be seen. Some stamps are deceptively simple like the one I see from Scotland; it shows just the Queen’s head in left profile and the price of £1.33 over a tartan background. Let it carry you away as you imagine the swirling kilts of the rowdy Scotsmen as they fought battle against their *auld enemy*, the English. Imagine the beauty of the highlands. Imagine the skirl of the bagpipes playing as the mist rolls over those ancient hills. Do you see what I mean by magical transportation? Other stamps are rather complex, with cartoon characters of children’s stories like *Alice in Wonderland*. Large as life there sits Alice herself, the flamingo, with which she played croquet, the hedgehogs and the playing cards that doubled over as hoops. One of Germany’s stamps today has the simple picture of a purple flower not unlike a dandelion head, while another has a colorful fall picture of an ancient beachside forest. The third of my letters from Germany has a scenic picture of a long modern bridge, which apparently is celebrating its 50th year of service. I wonder if it shows one of the bridges that I drove across when I spent a month in Germany last year. Perhaps it is, but perhaps not. Finland’s stamp shows a cartoonish old man playing the accordion, as he appears to be strolling in a wood of silver-barked trees. While these and more offer continual delights, France’s stamps, as well as France herself, always seems to disappoint me. In my balsawood box there are two letters from France. The stamp on the first has a generic young female’s face; she reminds me quite possibly of Fantine from *Les Misérables*, but I am not certain. The second stamp is even blander, printed in pale pastels. Compared to the other stamps, it is a soulless label with paper airplanes on it overprinted with IP,

(meaning Prioritaire Internationale) 0,98 EUR. It's about as exciting as my grocery list or as they say in France, C'est la vie!

While each of these hand-written letters brings news from all these different places, I am entertained, not only by the messages in these missives, but by my own interpretations of the people and places resonating from the stamps which adorn each of the letters. These stamps are magical windows to my imagination, taking me to bright and exciting places beyond my kitchen table. It's just an ordinary balsawood box on an ordinary table, but the memories and the magic inside are wonderful!

Shimmer

by M.E. Scoonover-Nelson

The sunlight captures the blue shimmering on your skin.
Lazy from the sun's rays, you float through the water in no direction.
The warm liquid envelops your sleek body as you spin.

The clear water parts without a splash as you surface, gasping,
before diving down.
As you flutter through crystalline water, colored plants offer leafy
protection.
The sunlight captures the blue shimmering on your skin.

You hover near the surface, yet the water pushes you to the gravel.
Eddies drift you to the glass; her face watches you with affection.
She stares with bright eyes and a grin.

You twist and twirl showing off your feathery crown.
Her eyes roam over every inch of you in an inspection.
The sun captures the blue shimmering in your skin.

After several seconds, she moves away; you droop down.
Outside the glass, you spot the treat selection.
You leap and prance making the water jostle; she drops one in.

You gobble the treat as she laughs, thinking you an adorable clown.
From the red bridge, you watch the outside world in reflection.
The sunlight captures the blue shimmering on your skin.
You flex your blue scales around your aquarium with your feathery
tailfin.

2AM in the Afternoon

by Jordan Schouweiler

We are driving in your car and
it reminds me
of first dates, expectations, the way
comfort slips in unknowingly
through cracks between teeth, in the space
of silence between us while we sleep.

You are playing
one of your favorite songs over the radio
and my dear, I am trying my hardest
to listen, but I keep getting so distracted
by the sky –
usually the sky is quiet,
today it is loud; today it is everywhere.
The heat of the sun is bending down,
resting its palm against my cheek,
whispering stories in my ear, it tells me
to never confuse it with anyone else, tells me
I am a river, you are the earth, tells me
neither of us
are the sun, neither of us
are the sky, asks me
why we walk around smiling as if we are.

Usually the sky is warm, soft
much like the palm of your hand.
Today it seems bitter; today it is being honest.
I squint at the sun, tell it
that sometimes your hands look more like the sunset
than the sky does while its falling asleep.
It asks me if that is the truth
or if I have only just realized how many sunsets
I have already missed, asks me
if I am only just confusing your love
with my poems, asks
do you see a sunset, or do you see
what you want to?

The song you are playing, it is sleepy
sounds like something you would listen to at 2AM
to help you fall asleep
after a night full of caffeine pills
taken much too late to be considered sanity.
The sky- it reminds me that sometimes
I wake up next to you, startled by dreams
I do not remember,
you seem too close, and our bed
is heavy with worry.

With eyes closed,
you are less solid,
the sky
is just as dense.

Passed-By

by Grace Schulze

There sat the pine chair
missing its back left leg
Next to the empty bus stop
where the bus wandered by three times each day
In the cool wind the Indian grass bent,
but it gave the chair no refuge from the sun's rays
The bus sign was rusted and
the chair was warped from the rain
Few people waited there
by this discarded chair
No one would come to rest on it
No one would come by to repair
Those who crossed its path
acted like they had not time to care
A night thief would not bother with it,
the chair was not worth the toll
Not a soul complained it was there and
No city workers came to clean it up

Hardly would one believe this musty item,
was once in a warm dining hall
Where it would sit a family member and
smell the gentle warmth of a meal
There it had concealment by a roof
from the weather of the seasons.

Then the nail came loose and
the crack appeared in the base
There was a snap
that took it off its feet
How much fault or sin the chair had
it did not know for sure?
The family decided the chair was a loss,
so they took it where those who unravel go
in a woodpile where it lay like a forgotten soul
where a truck steered by Charon came,
to carry the chair to its final abode,
but it fell off at a bus stop

that needed a new bench
for the few people who waited
for their ride to bring them back home.

Walking Art
By Kimber Wolf

I have a few moments in my life I wish I could go back and do over. One of these would be the time I convinced all of my friends to throw snowballs at my grade school crush and everyone got the “would you jump off a bridge for her” speech. A question I get asked all of the time is, “Do you regret any of your tattoos?” The answer is no, I don’t. Most of the time I get asked this by older clients at my job as a cosmetologist. I once had a man motion up and down with his finger pointing at me and say, “Don’t you think you went a little overboard with that?” On multiple other occasions I’ve gotten the comment, “You are so pretty, why would you do that to yourself?” I usually just give these people my well practiced “evil eye” that I perfected as a teenager. I don’t feel like I have to explain myself to anyone. People that do not have tattoos don’t seem to grasp the concept that tattoos have meaning to the person who got them.

I don’t regret my tattoos because I got them in the moment to signify something. I have stories behind every tattoo. I can see how if someone got a tattoo on a whim, or picked it off of the wall art in the tattoo shop (Jesus dunking a basketball is one my artist always teases he’ll do for free from the religious section of prints) they may regret the decision later. Most of mine I have gotten to help get me through a rough time as a type of therapy. I usually find myself in a tattoo shop when I need to relieve some stress. The first time I sat down to get a tattoo I was eighteen years old. Marilyn Monroe’s signature was going to be tattooed across the top of my foot. I was beyond nervous and my palms were sweaty. I could smell the cleaning supplies and the black rubber gloves the artist snapped on. The machine started to buzz; the adrenaline pumped through me sending an exciting electric energy everywhere in my body. Then, as the needle touched skin, I relaxed and enjoyed the sensation. Ever since that first time I have been addicted and my artist has turned into my therapist.

Depending on the location on your body, the pain is either excruciating or tickles. A few summers ago I got bees tattooed above my knees; it felt like scratching a sunburn. When I had my ribs tattooed it was a mix between someone running razor blades through my skin and being tickled to the point of crying. The oddest feeling was when I got the number thirteen behind my ear. It felt like nothing at first but all of a sudden I was laughing, getting jolts all

through my right side and struggling to stay still. As odd as it sounds, I love this feeling. It's a safe release for all of my pent up energy (rage, sadness, overwhelming joy). Whatever the significance of the new tattoo, it usually corresponds with a strong feeling. I find sitting down for a tattoo and making something beautiful out of a loss, or even a good time very beneficial.

I have used this release for my heartache after many losses. I have two butterflies on the inside of my wrist that represent my Grandma and Aunt who both passed from cancer. After my Grandmother passed from her lung cancer, we went through her jewelry. I found this really pretty necklace with a small silver butterfly on it. I kept looking at it and my Aunt, who later died of brain cancer, is the one who told me I should have the necklace since I liked it so much. When my aunt died from cancer, a few years after my grandma, I always wore that necklace. I decided to get two of the exact same butterflies from the outline of the necklace's butterfly tattooed for them. My best friend Lacey and I designed a friendship tattoo with a skeleton key saying, "Be Still My Soul." Kari Jobe is a Christian rock singer that we started listening to right before she was in a fatal car accident. The song "Be Still My Soul" was our favorite. We never got a chance to get the tattoo before she was taken by her accident. I went and got the tattoo with her initials hidden inside a few weeks after her funeral last November. Losing Lacey was so unexpected. She was my secret keeper. I felt like parts of me died with her. Things nobody would ever know about me were gone. It helped me grieve to sit down and get permanent pieces for these loved ones. I feel like a part of them is always with me now.

Tattoos I have gotten for late family and friends are very significant to me. The other tattoos that I have may not be as meaningful but still hold much significance. I have a whole sleeve of tattoos dedicated to fifties and sixties movies. This is my favorite time era; I love the music but most of all the style. Everyone was always so put together with their makeup, hair, dresses, suits, heels, not to mention the amazing cars. On my right arm the sleeve is made up of three portraits, a broken pearl necklace, perfume bottle, movie reel, and lipstick. Audrey Hepburn graces the upper part of my arm along with my cat, Socks, that I had for sixteen years. I got this to mimic the "Breakfast at Tiffany's" movie cover. James Dean is forever on my forearm, looking handsome in an ornate picture frame. Marilyn

Monroe is inside my forearm exactly as depicted in an iconic photo; this portrait is the one most people recognize. Marilyn Monroe is perceived as this flighty blonde who used sex to succeed. That is not at all what I see. This girl made herself from a nobody into a somebody while fighting many demons, some her own and some people. I have a quote of hers on my side: "If I'd have observed all the rules, I'd never have gotten anywhere." The place where I ended my sleeve was on my hand where it says, "The End." At the end of every classic movie, "The End" scrolls across the screen in an elegant cursive. I thought that was a fitting way to end my tattoo sleeve commemorating these movies.

Another quote that I have is from Lady GaGa, "We are not just art for Michelangelo to carve. He can't rewrite the agro of my furied heart." Music is a huge part of my life. I have been singing since I was six years old when my mom put me into voice lessons. I would sing any chance I got. My parents had to make up rules like, "no singing at the supper table," because I would drive my sister nuts. I'm obsessed with Lady GaGa because every lyric she belts out or outfit she wears has a deeper meaning than meets the eye. She has shaped the way that I view a lot of things in my life. I always walked to my own drum but her music makes me feel stronger while doing so. She is a fierce woman who is not afraid to be herself. She dresses wacky, yes, but she also stands up for what she believes in just by putting on those crazy outfits every day. She is a person that I aspire to be more like.

My Grandma, Aunt, Lacey, Marilyn Monroe, and Lady Gaga are with me everyday. Yes, they are on my body because I made a permanent decision to put them there. However, they are also in my mind every day pushing me to be better. I will never regret any of the tattoos that I have. I made conscious decisions to get them all to help me cope and to remind me to be myself. When someone tells me they regret a tattoo of their own and want to change it I always ask them, "Why? Wasn't that exactly what you wanted in the moment? Even if you regret it it's still a part of your personal history. Why would you want to change that?" The people who don't have tattoos and ask me why I have them may never understand. I don't expect them to. I always tell my mom it's a lifestyle. People who have them have this unspoken understanding amongst themselves. I know that, while some people think my tattoos are a mistake, they are not and they

make me... me! I can't wait till the next time I sit down to get some permanent art and I hear the tattoo gun humming to life.

It Is 4AM And I Am Not Sleeping
by Samuel Howard

It Is 4 o'clock I am not sleeping
my head is a methlab

my head is remembering everyone dies
remembering their deaths specifically
person by person, all at once
and not just people i've known

my head is a Firestone tire
in 2003

my head hates concrete poems
and in the most masochistic move ever
forced my hands to write one

my head is my mother when i was 17
it tells me to wake up
when i don't want to
but instead of 7AM my head decides 230AM
my head is thinking of all the things i've never done

Chained

by Grace Schulze

On the edge of the roof with a scowl,
the gargoyle a force of command,

has desire to be high in the clouds

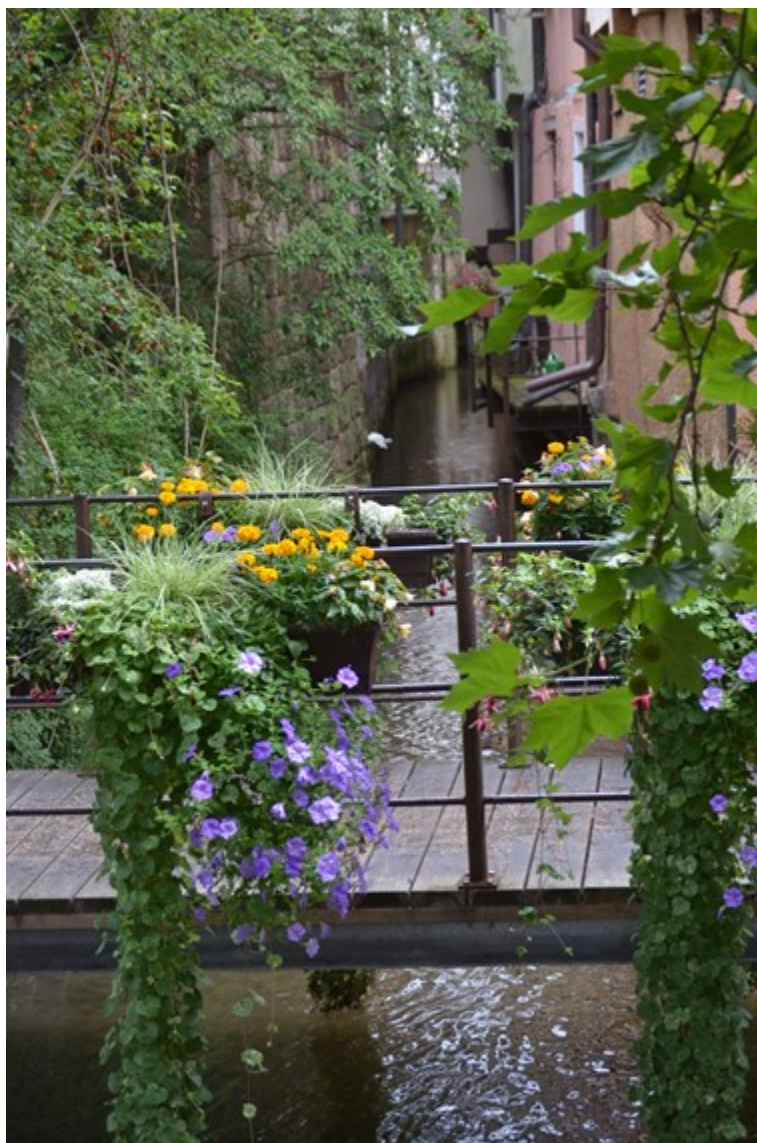
Farewell Jennie

by Karen Wallace

Celebrate a life of love,
Mourn the loss of a friend.
Rejoice for God's loving arms around her,
Grieve for us left behind.
Exult in freedom from pain and suffering,
Lament for words left unsaid, deeds left undone.
Breathe, I forgot how to breathe, all I breathe in is sorrow
Cry, I cry a river of tears
I hear her voice in my heart say
Please stop, don't cry for me
I am free, I love you, I miss you but I will always be there
In your heart, in your smile, you will know I am near
When the breeze ruffles your hair
When you hear a bird singing
When sunlight warms your face
I will warm your heart
I'll be there always, I'll never leave you
You may not see me but trust in the Lord
I'll be watching with Jesus until I meet you back home.

Little River & Bridge (Germany)

by Stephen Dodds



My First Typewriter

by Stephen Dodds

Today many writers rely on their keyboards. Today, the keyboard looks very different. Phones and computers alike seem to have a variety of keyboards. Today, they range from the slide out kind or the digital on-screen kind, where you need a stylus, or the dexterity of a concert pianist's fingers to navigate its keys to the kind that resembles an actual typewriter. Today, keyboards are much smaller than they were.

I had often coveted the bright black and red Remington that I saw in the store window display as a youth, but now I remember how different it was to my first typewriter, which was nothing like the sleek, shiny mechanical marvel I coveted. My first typewriter was an electronic one. It was a Canon Typestar. It was a small rectangle, an inch high and barely bigger than a paperback book, and about the size of a mini laptop.

Thirty years ago, when I lived in the English city of Walsall, in the West Midlands, I was a qualified nurse, and was a staff nurse in an Elderly person's Severely Mental Illness unit, known as Bloxwich Hospital. I was on my way there one damp Sunday morning, I did not have a car in those days, and being a Sunday, there were very few buses, so I chose to walk. It was less than a mile from my home to the hospital and I knew it would not take very long.

The air was crisp and the sidewalks were shining from the overnight rains, which had stopped by then. It was six thirty in the morning, and the season was changing from summer to fall. The sun was beginning its daily climb towards its zenith and was only just peeking over the rooftops so I did not need the benefit of the street lamps to light my way. I glimpsed a brief sight of something lying in the roadside gutter. At first, I thought it was five pound note. As I got closer, it became apparent that it was the wrong color, five pound notes are blue, this wasn't. Was it a ten, I wondered. Ten pound notes are red. This one wasn't. Closer and closer, I strode towards my find. I could see from twenty paces that it was indeed not a five or a ten. I thought perhaps that owing to its purple coloring it might be a twenty. I was happy to see that it was in fact a brand new, but

somewhat soggy twenty. I smiled at my good fortune. I gave no thought to whoever had lost it – perhaps after last night enjoying a few drinks, someone had mistakenly thrown it away thinking it was trash. Ha, serve them right for being a litter-lout. Perhaps it was someone’s cigarette money – again I had no concern, for their loss was evidently my gain. I took the view that I was helping them quit their unhealthy habit.

I put that unused, wet twenty in my pocket and continued on my way to work, thinking about what I would do with it. As it was football season, and I liked to go to an occasional game to see my hometown team play, I decided that I would go to see them play at nearby Coventry City, a city a few miles away. I was born and raised in Sunderland and had followed the fortunes (well mostly failing fortunes) of Sunderland A.F.C., for many years, but since I left Sunderland, I found I was only able to see occasional games in the flesh. Despite increasing television coverage and radio commentary, as any fan of any sport will tell you, there is no substitute for actually being at the game.

Living in the Midlands was actually a good place to live, as there were plenty of opportunities to see my team in action as they were in the same division as Coventry, in addition there were games in other close cities like Wolverhampton and Birmingham, where hallowed teams like Aston Villa, Birmingham City and West Bromwich Albion all played. The game at Coventry City was coming up in a month or so, so I decided I would use the twenty pounds to go and watch that game.

The day of the game came around and I went with some hope for a decent afternoon’s entertainment. The weather was not particularly good that Saturday afternoon, as it was chilly and wet. The game was equal to the weather in its dullness, but Sunderland did manage to get a rare away victory in winning the game by one goal to nil. It was an important win as it eased our relegation worries for a week at least. Both sides were in the relegation dogfight and were both very near the bottom three places in the league, which would mean demotion to the next level. That season we managed to avoid the drop.

One of Britain’s national newspapers, The News of the World, had a partnership with electronics manufacturer Canon. In their

partnership with the newspaper, Canon would invite fans who went to any of their Canon-sponsored games, to nominate their man of the match (or MVP). Along with the nomination readers had to submit reasons, using less than twenty five words for their choice and if the representatives of the newspaper and Canon chose that entry, they would reward the reader who made the submission with a flashy brand new electronic typewriter.

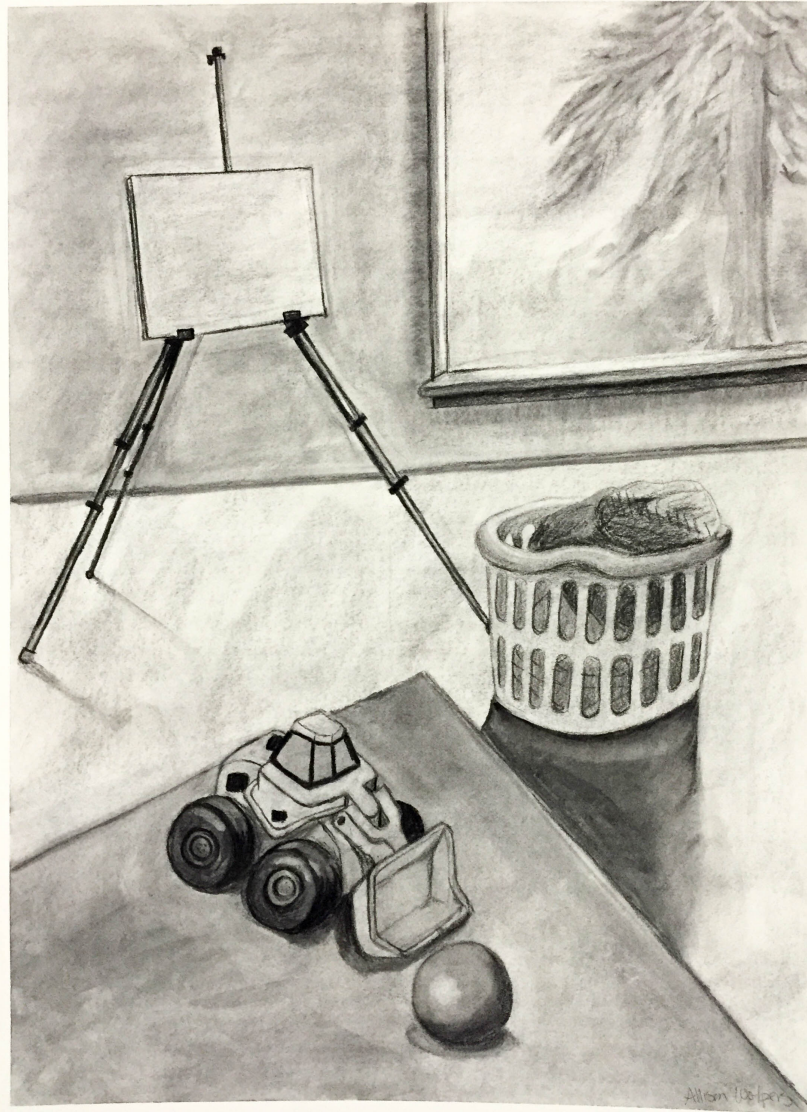
I nominated my team's goalkeeper, as he was the best player on the field and did everything asked of him, making several vital saves, thus preventing the Coventry team from scoring. I sent off my postcard containing my reasons, and I simply said that "Chris Turner, the Sunderland keeper was the one bright spark in an otherwise drab encounter." Seeing my home address as fairly close to the home side, the selection panel assumed I was a Coventry City fan, and had no idea that I was actually a Sunderland fan, and they said that "Sportsmanship like that deserves its reward."

I looked forward to taking delivery of my brand new Canon Typestar electronic typewriter and had to wait a couple of weeks before it finally arrived. Once it did, I was a little excited but the excitement wore off quickly as I could not get the thing to work, so I had to return it and wait a little while for a replacement, which duly arrived but in good working order.

That was the only time I made the national newspapers, and so as Andy Warhol predicted, I'd have my fifteen minutes of fame, actually it was more like fifteen seconds, as that was how long it took to read the article.

Untitled

by Allison Wolpers



Silence

by Karen Wallace

Silence is screaming in my ears
What an awful sound to hear
It echoes through the halls
And bounces off the walls
And makes me crazy
Life is hazy

I wonder what to do now
I sit and ask myself how
I am to carry on
Now that they are gone
Why did they go
I don't know

Seven years I've heard the sound
Of a child's laughter all around
Off to a better life
With less stress and strife
And family all around
She's homeward bound

Home is where the heart resides
Where they are my heart abides
I am broken in two
I don't know what to do
Life is fading fast
Craving the past

Twice a year is not enough
Saving all that money is rough
Saving every dime I can
Change in the coffee can
A flight back home
No longer alone

I am not alone it's true
Together there is me and you
We love and live on
Our loved ones are gone
We do our best
An empty nest

This empty house is huge now
Bigger than it was some how
The silence echoes everywhere
I only sit and stare
At silent empty spaces
No more traces.

Interrupted

by M.E. Scoonover-Nelson

Running through the dark forest, he glances behind his shoulder.
The monster barrels over fallen trees, and snarls, flashing silver blades.

The boy whips around, feet pounding on the dirt.
A root leaps up from the damp ground, ensnaring his pale, sickly legs.

The monster roars, smelling victory; it's long, scaly legs poise to pounce.

Tired voices holler names from the second level; interrupting the chase.

Vibrations bouncing around the basement into the pastel bedroom.
Stone-like, I monitor the staircase for tromping footfalls;
the table is set at five fifty, dinner starts at six on the dot.
I've made my family wait; they can't be happy.
My mother shouts again, angrier than before.
Hardcover closes, freezing boy and beast.

As dinner drones on, my foot taps a jittery, irate, staccato on the linoleum tile.

My parents and brother talk of the ordinary
while I sit, crying for the extraordinary I deserted.

My family's tedious stories bore me.

The boy and monster, situated until my return, call out for me.

The talk of everyone's day prolongs the torturous
vapid dinner until I fear I shall die along with the boy.

My father frees my fidgeting body and I spring from the prison.

Mother clamps shackles back onto my legs with chores.

Dishes drop in the sink; food wrapped and thrown in the fridge.

My legs are released and freedom is mine at last.

Hasty goodbyes tossed over my shoulder;

I scamper down carpeted steps; the last two taken with a leap.

Book beckons as my bedroom door opens. I dive onto the bed.

My fingers turn to claws as I scratch the bedside shelf.

The boy has been abandoned far too long; I find what I left behind.

Cracked, flaking spine comforts my eager fingers;
Pages crinkle open; dry and musty scents fill my nostrils
as I seek the triangle corner I marked.
I relax into the corner of my bed, legs curling under me.
Once found bookmarked page is released as the story reopens.

I've kept the boy frozen too long; he seems to scream for freedom.
The monster smells victory and roars, its long, scaly legs poise to
pounce.
The boy looks up from the forest floor into the beast's dead eyes.
My brother's voice asks if I want dessert as I catapult into the story.
I cannot freeze the boy a second time.
I refuse to surrender this story until I am finished.

Untitled

by Graham McKee



Idle Rock

by David Krug

Why couldn't I have been a rock?
A rock bears no dreams,
Nor any ambitions.
Idle, oblivious to the world,
Its blind indifference detaches itself from thought,
As it awaits its obliteration.
It decays without fuss,
No place to be, no place to go,
Purpose being consumed by time.

Whispers of Discontent
by Karen Wallace

Whispers of discontent
Slither their way across closed minds
Insinuating their way into cracks and crevices
Ancient and rusty from disuse
They creep and crawl into tiny nooks and crannies
Forcing their way through
like weeds entwined in rocks on the cliff face
splitting the mind as the earth splits open
giving way to the relenting pressure
bursting through reason and rationality
bringing forth instincts long dormant
thought to be overcome
animal lust
blood lust
criminal acts in the heat of the moment
recrimination later, but too late
the deed is done
the damage has been wrought
no way to take back
grieve for a moment
of unbridled fury
the mind explodes
fragments into a million pieces
never to be whole again

Horse Power

by Jamie Scheffel

I was at the YMCA pounding away on an Octane Pro 5000 or something equivalent. My body was one of many strapped to a

machine with sleek dark curves. My limbs moved forcefully back and forth clinging to handles and pedals. Each limb alternated along a short track. I was lucky to be in good view of one of the fitness rooms along with a television. The television was set on a news channel; there's been another school shooting. We are no longer shocked by these occurrences. It's a part of living in America. A bit of roulette.

The fitness room was much more interesting to me. There was a class of silver seniors doing low-impact aerobics. I assumed it was low-impact; they had chairs nearby. But to my astonishment, they shimmied. They jumped to left and then to the right. They put their hands in the air. They brought it back. They dipped. Their feet padded lightly on the floor, a recursive motion without end until the building bass dropped and then they spread out into a freestyling Harlem shake. They were dancing to my music.

The Chemical Brothers filtered in through the thin wires of my headphones as I worked the machine and stared at little old ladies flashdancing. It was a pyroclastic flow of twisted melody, contorted funk, strong repetitive industrial drum, meditative chanting, ghostly vocals, a synthesized organ hum. I was sweating and my head was knocking to the image of harmoniously coordinated white Reeboks.

They continued their climb. They Zumba'd. They Tae-Bo'd. They did the Whip and Nae-Nae. They did the Dougie. They Hit the Quan. They went Gangnam Style. It didn't matter which way the beat went, they were right there with it. How could they know what I'm listening to and know it so well? If they really knew the music I attached to them, they probably wouldn't enjoy the electronic orchestra I synchronized to their dancing bodies.

When the class finished up, I finished up, too. They were my motivation; I'm fortunate I lasted as long as I did. As the door to the room opened wide and the group strode out strong as one, all I heard was a twisted melody, contorted funk, strong repetitive industrial drum, meditative chanting, ghostly vocals, and a synthesized organ hum.

The Place Between Lifetimes

by Aubrey Egeberg

The last breath escapes her lips,
She leaves her body
Returning to eternal bliss,
Free-floating endless energy of love and light
Invisible to see
Yet shining so bright.

This being returns to the cosmos above
Freed from the illusion,
Connected once more to all with love.

Here it rests at the place between lives
Too glorious and magical to attempt to describe
Reflecting and remembering the lessons just learned
Compiling a new list of lessons for the next return

Missed Messages

by Chris King

It was a particularly nondescript Wednesday night in campus apartment. My roommate, Jesus, was sitting with me on our ugly, brown, cracked-fake-leather couch, and laptops on the coffee table in front of us. The soft glow of a table lamp was all that illuminated the room, but it was all we needed. All was silent, save for the periodic mouse click and hurried typing of a keyboard.

This homework assignment wasn't going well at all, but after two hours of mindlessly grinding out line after line of Java code, I was ready to take a break. Heaving myself up, I made my way to the kitchen, where a pizza Lunchables and Mountain Dew were waiting for me. Scooping both out of the fridge, I plopped down onto the cushioned barstool—only to realize I forgot to grab my phone out of my room. I had to let it charge after going to class all day, while not actually looking at the professor for the majority of the time. I'm so glad I stopped bringing my phone to class after this mess of a semester.

Audibly sighing at the prospect of walking all of ten feet to my room, I dragged myself across the heavily worn carpet, opened the door, threw a t-shirt and pair of underwear aside, and grabbed my phone. Turning it on as I walked back to my food, Jesus called out to me.

“Uh, Chris? Have you seen your Facebook wall today?”

“Not since class got out at, like, three.”

“Shit, dude. Look at this.”

I felt confusion as I looked at the page. It was a post from the Iowa State Atheist and Agnostic Society (of which I was an active member), about a travelling preacher yelling at all of the hedonistic campus-dwellers that they were bound for Hell. Jesus pointed at a figure in an accompanying photo: myself, laughing, next to a buddy of mine holding an “Ask and Atheist” sign to the left of the red-faced Baptist. This alone wouldn't be an issue; I'm a closeted atheist to my parents, but they're so technologically illiterate that, unless something pops up directly onto their news feed, they won't be able to find out about me.

It's been made abundantly clear that any straying from Catholicism—even to different sects of Christianity—will result in being shunned from the family as an embarrassment, disownment, and inability to see my younger siblings (at least until they get older). My extended family isn't much better about this topic; they've already chosen to not invite one of my aunts to a family reunion for marrying a Lutheran man. The main thing I was worried about was losing the college fund my father has been saving up for me since I was born: \$62,000.

My phone buzzed, but I was too busy making sure I wouldn't be outed to my parents to check it.

Scrolling down further, he pointed out my name, which has been tagged with my photo. I could feel my heart pounding away, I was sweating through my shirt: pure, unbridled panic set in. I remembered my phone going off a second ago, but with this new addition I was almost too afraid to check it. Almost. I tried to rationalize the situation: they may have just been checking up on me, it could be to yell at me about that calculus exam I failed, or it could be someone else entirely.

The screen lit up. Twelve missed calls and ten messages from my mother and father. Swiping the screen to unlock it was one of the hardest things I have ever done. I went to check the messages my mother sent me first.

What the hell is this atheist shit call me asap

Christian, call me

How could you do this to us

We are so disappointed what have you done

Call me right now

I am talking to Wells Fargo taking away your college fund call me

I couldn't speak. I couldn't act. My hands moved with a phantom purpose, tapping and dragging the screen at random, directing my eyes to these words that I never thought I would see. "Disappointed" kept ringing in my head.

That Day

by Katherine Warren

I was sitting in my ninth grade civics class when all of a sudden there was a knock on the door and one of our paras (adult hall monitors) walked in and handed my teacher a slip of paper. The teacher then asked for me to get up and go with the para. Despite the fact that we were in high school, all of my classmates said “ooohh” just like in elementary. Of course I followed directions by getting up and following the para out of the room and into the hallway. They let me know that we were going to pick up a few more students before we go to the office.

I was at first curious, because I didn’t misbehave. I didn’t get into an argument or fight and I always tried not to say something that might hurt or offend someone. I tried very hard to think of what I could’ve done. As we started collecting people, I thought it was strange that we collected two more students but he hadn’t told them where we are going; he didn’t even say the office like he did when he came for me. I decided that he must have just meant the principal’s office.

We collected a few more students, walking through a few hallways I hadn’t even seen before. I still couldn’t think of a reason as to why I was there. Finally, we collected five more students and we headed to the office, only he didn’t turn to head to the principal’s office, he kept going straight until we reached a door. The plaque on the wall by the door said “Attendance Office,” which confused me because all I knew about it was that this must be where you go when you came in late to get a pass for class.

He told us to sit down and that there were some chairs by the secretary for all of us. However he told one of the girls to go into the office at the back of the hall. Of course this made me more confused, because I was the one who was collected first but I wasn’t going to be seen first. That meant they were probably going to go in alphabetical order, which means I was most likely going to be last.

I’ve heard that the negative anticipation of something is always worse than the experience itself. I was about to find out whether it was true or not. It only got worse as time passed watching some of the girls go in and come out looking all upset. I think the waiting was starting to get me. Time was moving so slowly, that the tick-tock of the clock no longer sounded like that. It sounded like it does in a

movie, when they exaggerate how slow it's going; it sounded more like a knock, knock.

My heart was pounding in my chest as if I was running for my life, but I was sitting still. Except for my leg that was trembling as hard as an earthquake and I wondered if it would ever stop its incessant movement. I was overheating. It felt like I was an inferno and yet I was still cool to the touch. Beads of cold sweat were running down my face and the clamminess was hard to take, but it was the clock that was almost too much to bear. The clock was moving in slow motion just to mock me, and every second felt like an hour sitting in that hard uncomfortable plastic chair. I'd never put much thought into the sound the cartoon character makes, the loud over-exaggerated gulp of air. I had never given much thought that is until that day, when every gulp of air I took sounded as obnoxious and offensive to my ears as they do in the cartoons or movies.

Every second moved tortuously slow. Every sound enhanced tenfold, the sound of the secretary with her scratching of pencil on paper, the rubbing of the eraser. The sound of her brushing the pencil and eraser shavings away like she was trying to attack the page repeatedly slapping it to rid herself of the remnants of what was once eraser. I kept my head down trying to keep my breathing under control. It was the phone that had me jerking my head up in shock. In that moment it was as loud as an air horn at volumes far higher than necessary. The office was wrought with noise, which only got worse when out from a corner office at the end of the hall came a girl crying. She was the second one out of the five girls ahead of me to come out like that. Of course none of this helped the knot in my stomach, which when we were first taken out of class started as an apprehensive group of butterflies but had since turned into an upset horde of pterodactyls.

I tried breathing deeply, taking a breath in and letting it out trying to stay calm, because now it was my turn. As soon as I thought that, I heard my name being called. It took everything in me not to get up and run in the opposite direction. As I walked down the hall, I noticed that the lights in the hallway were darker than in the waiting office. I couldn't help but feel like one of those girls in horror movies walking toward their doom. Logically, I knew that I was in school and should be safe, but all rational thought seemed to have left about the time the third girl went in. I finally made it to the door and saw

that there was a man sitting at a table in a crisp wrinkle-free, light purple, button down shirt and a cheap blue and purple striped tie. He told me to sit down, after that the next few minutes become a blur of his raised voice telling me I had missed too many days of school, nervous sweat, and a contract saying I wouldn't miss any more. I honestly can't tell you a thing the contract said. As soon as he said that I could leave once I signed it, I did. Then I got up and left the office as quickly as I could.

I started back to my civics class. I had almost got halfway when I realized two things. First, I had been running since I left the office. Second, I'd been crying and I didn't even know when I started. I just knew that things hadn't looked blurry until I stopped running. I took a few deep breaths, wiped my eyes and continued back to my class.

My teacher had been explaining a project we were about to start. She started passing out worksheets to the class and after she went around she stopped by my desk. She kneeled down to look me in the eye, put a hand on my arm and asked me if I wanted to go to the nurse. When she did, I noticed that had been shaking almost uncontrollably as if seizing. I thought about her question. No, no I didn't want to go to the nurse; I wanted to get the hell out of that building. I wanted to go home, but to do that I would need to go to the nurse's office and have my mother come pick me up. I was still in the same state by the time my mother came to get me over an hour later. When my mother came to get me, she took one look at me and decided to take me to our family doctor.

Once the doctor had run some tests, he told my mother that they had something that he believed would calm me down. In effort to keep me calm before the medicine kicked in, the nurses tried to make me comfortable. They turned the lights on low, and gave me a blanket. I lay there on the doctor's chair, wrapped up like a cocoon with one arm out, so I wouldn't have to let go of my mother's hand. She was holding my hand the entire time, squeezing it every few minutes to let me know that I was going to be okay.

I could hear the nurses softly speaking to me, but I wasn't listening. I was staring into space, as if I could escape to the deep recesses of my mind, in hopes of hiding myself away. I wasn't able to notice much of anything, except for my mother's hand in mine. My mother was my anchor. Strong, sturdy and the only thing that kept me from floating

away from myself and reality. She kept me grounded, from getting swept away by the tidal waves of thoughts going through my head.

It was forty-five minutes of agony, for me and my mother, before the medication took hold. I have no memory of what the pill or the doctor's office looked like. It was as if my mind deleted it all. The only thing I remember is my mother's grip on me, and I couldn't be any happier for that.

Chiseled Beauty

by Karen Wallace

A haunted look
She is exquisite beyond description
Her eyes no longer sparkle but reflect weariness
Cheekbones bereft of flesh
Lines etched deep by pain and fatigue
An obligatory smile
Fools those who don't see the soul
Hiding behind the eyes.
A thread of a whisper
Effort leads to exhaustion
Every hair in place
Coordinated in colors
Crisply ironed
Always a fashion statement no matter how weary.
Loveliness among the ashes
Ashes blow away in the wind
Leaving the chiseled beauty behind.

I am Driving You

by Samuel Howard

if you were a hitchhiker i would pick you up
and you would be cold and anxious
because i am foreign to you
and you only got in the car because you were desperate

we would drive for an hour in silence
and i would notice that you were beautiful
but in an unusual way that i couldn't place
and then you would turn to me and say, "thanks."

driving in the darkness you would trust me
and begin to tell me why you had to leave
i would listen and nod sympathetically, really listen
and then you would say we should stop at a liquor store at sun up

we wouldn't talk about me, only you
as you poured Smirnoff into orange Minute Maid
you would smile and say "thanks"
because i bought the Smirnoff and the Minute Maid and i am driving
you.

you would tell me where you were from
some provincial Midwest town, about your friends
how they encouraged you to leave him
and how you didn't and finally, you met me driving you.

and we would stop in St. Louis and look at the arch
i would ask whether we should go west
and you would smile and say, "you're driving me"
so we would take the 90 and you would drink and laugh.

somewhere in Utah you would become sullen
weary of me and my nodding and always listening
you would scowl and say "what the fuck is up with you?"
and i would be a little sad but remember that i am driving you.

you would want to stop at a motel
and i would say "ok" because it is night and it is black
the room would have two doubles
but you would ask to sleep with me because you trust me.

and the next day we would get up
but it wouldn't be the same and you would talk less
and drink more and become inquisitive
then you would ask "why the hell are you doing this?"
i would respond that i am driving you
but you would keep pressing and i would get anxious
i would turn to look at your unusual beauty
and respond with some clever statement about driving you.

First the seed, then the greed (say no to Monsanto et al)

by Stephen Dodds

Growth seasons come, they stay a while, then go
so bare earth yields itself to shades of green.
With sun and water comes the urge to grow
and make the fields alive with lustrous sheen.
Since Gregor Mendel, we've chosen our plants
based on hardiness and survival rates.
Modifying seeds costs a great expense:
Seed-bombs in Congress put food on our plates,
but even so, the message is misheard
when herbicides are our least known killer
because of how we interpret the word
attorneys declare there is no winner.
It's not rocket science, so save the seed
it makes more sense, so just kill off the greed.

Untitled

by Luke Broderick



Jennie's Story

by Karen Wallace

Jen sat in the padded chair by her patio door gazing out at the pond. She couldn't actually see the pond from her window. It was down a hill, but just knowing it was there let her see it in her mind's eye. She had seen the pond a thousand times; she could trace the shoreline in her mind as it wound itself into a corner and out of sight. She saw the cattails waving in the light spring breeze. Many times she had walked around the pond and behind the houses on the other side. She would not be walking anytime soon. She was so fatigued she could hardly lift her hand to her head to brush away her hair. She looked at her hand and did not recognize it nor could her brain relate what she was supposed to do with it. She laid it back down in her lap and raised her eyes to the window again. Even that was a chore. Every fiber within her was spent. She had nothing left. She felt like a husk, a shell wearing her face. She was not a quitter, but she wanted to throw her hands up in surrender and give into this beast, this monster cancer that had invaded her body. Or rather just lie quietly down and give up the ghost.

NO her mind screamed. I WILL BEAT THIS! She clenched her hand into a fist and pounded the arm of her chair. It was more like a soft thump, but it was all she had, and she would give it all as long as she had breath in her body!

Karen sat at her office computer working a call that had a lot of down time. She was always logged into Jen's caring bridge site hoping for updates throughout the day. A fresh journal entry popped up from Bill, Jen's husband she quickly read the update. Not a good day for her friend. Tears came without her notice as she read how this enemy-that is how she thought of this cancer, as the enemy- this enemy and the attempt at curing her took its toll on Jen. She was a tough farm girl and if anyone had the inner strength to pull through this on sheer will alone it was Jen. She had not seen Jen for a month now. She was not up to visitors. The cancer was in her throat, esophageal cancer, and her voice was nonexistent. She missed her friend so much, but most of all she wished there was more she could do. She knew Lisa, Jen's daughter was taking care of most things for

Jen, and Bill was her full time care giver and treatment partner. She felt so helpless and useless. Give her an enemy she could face and she would eliminate it from the earth to save her friend. But this enemy, this insidious cancer had its grip in her friend's body and there was nothing she could do to help. She wrote encouraging posts on caring bridge and sent big long emails until she learned that Jen didn't even have the strength to read. So she switched to leaving encouraging messages on her answering machine while she was gone to treatment. More than anything she wanted to see her friend, to smile and hold her hand and maybe cry with her. It was so frustrating to be able to do nothing. No meals, Jen can't eat and Bill eats like a mouse, no visits, Jen can't talk and feels she has to entertain if people come, no rides to treatments Bill wants to be with her which is as it should be, nothing but sit helplessly by while her friend suffered and fought off this enemy by herself, and to pray to God almighty for a healing miracle. Why not her? Why not a healing miracle for Jen? Surely God gives miracles to his faithful why not my friend Jen?

Bill contemplated his sleeping wife with a fondness born of years. 55 years she had been by his side. She took care of their home, raised their children, and worked as a nurse for most of those years. Always Jen was the strong one, the glue that kept things together sometimes by her strong will alone. Now she lay there spent, a helpless victim of this cancer that ravaged her body. No, she wasn't helpless; she fought with every ounce of strength she could muster, but her strength was waning, and everyday activities were becoming harder and harder for her to perform. Most of her days were spent in front of the television dozing, or by the window watching the birds by the pond. This seemed to distract her from her misery and even give her some pleasure. She was tickled by the cards and well wishes she received, but she could not summon the strength to respond to any of the missives. Her friends had to be satisfied by the updates he and Lisa posted on her caring bridge site. He shuffled past, brushing his hand lightly across her sleeping brow and went to prepare her next feeding. Due to the cancer in her throat she had not been able to eat, so she had a feeding tube, which he assisted her with 4 times a day. She said the formula reminded her of the calf replacer formula they used when she was a kid on the farm, the smell made her nauseous. She still managed to retain her sense of humor throughout all this.

Tears filled his eyes and he dropped heavily into a chair. He held his head in his hands and cried silently, so not to wake her.

Lisa sat in her car in her mom's driveway. She sobbed uncontrollably and pounded on her steering wheel. Why was this happening to her mom? Her mother was always everyone's rock. She took care of people not the other way around. Even with her first bout with cancer 4 years ago she was the rock that held everyone together through it. It was such a shock before when her mom had been diagnosed with cancer. But that cancer had been diagnosed early, and surgery and a few radiation treatments took care of that cancer and she had been cancer free ever since, until now. She pounded the steering wheel again needing an outlet for her anger. Mom had gone to a doctor over a year ago because she had been having trouble swallowing. She went through the proper procedures and had an endoscopy. During the procedure she said the doctor hit something in her throat that caused her extreme pain at the time. He went on to complete the procedure and his results were no further treatment needed. Lisa's suspicion was that he hit her mother's tumor that the tumor had been there back then and had been growing and spreading ever since. If that damn doctor had diagnosed her properly back then possibly this would have been taken care of before the cancer spread, and her mom would not be in stage three esophageal cancer. Since that procedure mom's swallowing had got worse, she couldn't get food down most of the time, and mucus was constantly a problem. She ate a lot of soup and smoothies. Over the months she went back to other doctors, she was referred to one and had to wait 7 weeks for an appointment. Lisa had tried to help, calling the doctors and insisting they get her mother in sooner. She was terribly worried. Mom had been losing weight due to her inability to swallow food. One specialist sent her to another, by the time the actual cancer diagnosis was made it had been over a year since the first endoscopy. Then there was a whirl of biopsies, feeding tubes and treatment plans. Now mom was receiving radiation 5 days a week and chemo once a week. Her normally robust mom was wiped out. Two weeks of treatments and she barely had enough energy to get through each day. All of her normal activities were suspended except one, she clung to her weekly trip to the beauty shop for a wash and set. As long as she had her hair she was going to continue her routine. Lisa smiled through her tears. Her mom was one tough cookie and she had the strength to make it through these

treatments, so Lisa would pray to God they worked and eradicated this cancer from her mom. A little miracle would be nice Lord she prayed. She dabbed her eyes and calmed herself. She had brought some funky purple nail polish today and was going to do mom's nails. She climbed out of her car and put on a bright smile just for her.

Maddie sat in her tiny dorm room staring vacantly out the small window. For the first time since she came to Argentina she was not made breathless by the spectacular view. Her gaze was inward as she contemplated going home. Her grandma was so sick, and it scared Maddie. She could hardly reconcile her tough hardy grandma with the posts she read on caring bridge. And the latest picture mom posted of her after she painted her nails a funky purple, behind the nails her grandma's eyes were sad, they didn't have the sparkle in them she was used to seeing always in those beautiful eyes. Her mom insisted that she stay and complete her scholarship. She promised her grandma would be there when she came home in 7 months. How could she know that for sure? There was no way she could be sure, not with cancer. Her grandma would tell her the same thing if she could talk, she could hear her voice in her mind saying *don't you dare come home, this is the opportunity of a lifetime for you I'll be here waiting for you when you come home in November, I promise, I'm going to kick this cancer's butt, you'll see, me and Jesus!* Maddie sobbed but smiled as she pictured her beautiful grandma shaking her finger under her nose and giving her one of those crushing bear hugs she was so good at. She would stay for now, but they better tell her if grandma got worse. She would never forgive them if her grandma died while she was in Argentina. She shuddered at the thought of losing her grandma. NO she'll beat this, she has to.

Pastor Josh sat at his desk watching the screen saver on his lap top flicker from picture to picture. His mind was a million miles away, so much was happening in his small church and he felt totally inadequate to deal with it all. They had just finished laying to rest a mother with 9 children who had passed from a long battle with cancer. Most of her children were grown, but they were still battling loss and confusion, and battling among each other as well. His heart broke for this family torn apart by their loss. And now there was Jen. Jen and Bill had been coming to Harbor for over 5 years now. They maintained the free room where goods were donated to be given

away to those in need. Bill organized and sang in the men's quartet. They gave generously of their time and were well loved by all in their small church family. Now Jen had been diagnosed with stage three esophageal cancer. Their little church community had been rocked by this diagnosis. He pounded his fist on his desk. He wished his dad were here so he could talk to him. He had always been able to explain about God's will and suffering among His people in a way that made sense. Josh did not feel he had the same level of understanding as his father had. He was so angry! He knew just because he was a Pastor and had his fancy degree in religious studies that this did not make it any easier to fathom our God and His will in this world. Good people suffered and died all the time, and evil flourished. His faith had been pushed to its limit with this one. But every time he felt that way he dug a little deeper into himself and came up with that mustard seed to cling to. He was surprised by the tear drops that landed on his clenched hands, and then he gave into them and wept.

Jennie lost her battle with cancer on June 30th 2015. After a three-month fight she had enough and laid her soul in the arms of Jesus.

A Life Changing Skittle by Madaline Jordan

Every Tuesday and Thursday I have three different classes from twelve-thirty to five-fifteen, and every Tuesday and Thursday, I meet the same challenge. During that time period, I always find myself wishing I had something to snack on. So before I get to school I stop at Casey's General Store. I've gone many days buying Pretzel M&M's, but have always known I was missing out on something. Out there, somewhere, was a better snack. A better taste. A better experience than my normal Pretzel M&Ms.

A girl in my class always seemed to bring Skittles in. I came to the realization that I didn't remember the last time I tasted Skittles. I knew that was going to be my next snack I was going to buy before going to my classes. Would Skittles be the snack I was searching for? Only time would tell. Skittles seemed like a viable option, but I knew grape and cherry were the only flavors I enjoyed. Would it be worth it to buy the entire package? The decision haunted me.

I made my way to Casey's that next Thursday and got my bag of Skittles. I debated it for a while knowing that I was only going to be eating the grape and cherry flavors, but I picked up the bag and headed out to class. As I got into my car, I knew it was going to be a good day. I had my bag of Skittles, my favorite song was on the radio, and it was beautiful out. I was singing away, and debating about just ripping the bag open. However, I knew I'd rather eat them in class and show off that I was eating Skittles.

As I sat down, I was beginning to make my plan of how I was going to eat my Skittles. No one ever enjoys the orange, lemon, and lime flavors. So I made my decision; I would try eating those ones first, then save the best for last. Just like when parents make their child eat their vegetables but have dessert after dinner. I was just doing the same thing, just with my Skittles.

So first I started with yellow, orange, and then green. However, something weird happened. Before starting on the green Skittles, I prepared myself to experience the gross artificial flavor of lime. I slowly put one up to my mouth, knowing I was going to eat it fast so I could get to the grape and cherry flavors, but that's not what happened. That's not what happened at all.

The moment was similar to when I get a gummy worm that is pink and yellow instead of pink and blue. The sort of disappointing feeling I get at the fact that there are such better flavors but I'm stuck eating

this one because I can't let it go to waste. It's not that the pink and yellow gummy worm tastes bad, just like the yellow and green Skittles don't taste bad. There are just better flavors that I could be eating.

So as I set the Skittle on my tongue, my tongue palette was picking up a different flavor. The flavor wasn't lime; I wasn't grossed out about it either. I was shocked. My first thought was that it was just an oops Skittle; that it was supposed to be in the tropical package, not the original. So I dug out another green Skittle and did the same thing, almost like I wanted my Skittle to taste like lime. However, I experienced the same taste. I instantly grabbed my bag of Skittles and looked at the back of the package. And there it was. The greatest thing a person could see.

Green apple.

Skittles lime flavor was eliminated. It was now green apple.

Why have I never been told this news? Why haven't Skittles wanted to announce this life-changing flavor? If I had known this news, I would've tried them a lot sooner. I felt like half of my year had been wasted. I spent my year eating M&M's and Snickers when I could've been eating green apple Skittles. It's just ridiculous if you ask me.

I immediately closed my bag to save the rest, just in case I would never find another bag. So I went around asking other people if they've known that Skittles made this change. No one else had heard about this either. So I went to the internet to check it out. People were writing the most hateful comments about Skittles. I read numerous comments like, "BRING BACK THE LIME" or "I haven't bought a bag of Skittles since they've made this change. I say, bring back the lime." How could people be saying this?

After almost half of my bag was gone, I realized I was doing it all wrong. Why was I still eating my green Skittle? I wanted to save those ones for last. So I ate my yellow and orange ones, then my purple, then my red. Then I ate what I had left of my green Skittles.

Every Tuesday and Thursday while I'm headed to school, I stop at Casey's General Store and grab a bag of Skittles. I now save my green Skittles for last. I now don't meet the same challenge that I had for three weeks. I know what I want, and what I'm getting. I couldn't be

any more grateful that Skittles had made this change. Now, I will wait until lemon is banana and orange is... just gone.

I still continue to eat my green Skittles and spread the word about this life changing moment that everyone can experience in their lives. I can only hope and wish that people will find the joy that I find while eating my green apple flavor Skittles.

Untitled
by Luke Broderick



The Stocker

by Conner Dolezal

All I was thinking about was how much I hated cardboard boxes. The bulk of my part-time job during my year off of school was made up of taking shit out of boxes and putting it on to store shelves. There were certainly worse things to get paid for, sure, but I had already clocked enough hours to appreciate how inefficient cardboard boxes were as a storage system. I mean, they're so ridiculous to open that there is an entire type of knife created for the sole purpose of cutting them open. And it's not like they're sturdy or environmentally friendly or aesthetically-pleasing or something like that. They're cheap and that's about it, and I bet they're not even that cheap.

But it was my job, and at the pay I was making combined with my other job at the movie theater, I could pay for my own phone bill and *eventually* buy a car and pay for the insurance, gas and maintenance. So I took the box cutter and cut open another box of soup cans to throw on the shelf. I had about 10 more 24-can boxes left to stock, and I almost missed her in my self-absorbed box rage. Earlier that day, I had seen a missing person poster posted by the store's front entrance of a 5'4", 140 pound seventeen year old white female with shoulder length dirty blonde hair, brown eyes and some kind of weird ear piercings. And then there she was, examining the ingredients on a can of wild rice soup.

My first thought was that I had been looking at cans too long, so I kind of ended up staring at her for a little bit to double check it was the same girl as in the poster without thinking about it. Plus, she was kind of really beautiful in a weirdly normal kind of way. After about 10 seconds and a close call on the eye contact, I went back to what I was doing and debated how to handle the situation. I didn't know if I should say something to her or just go straight to Security. It was really gnawing at me until I realized I didn't have a walkie-talkie on me and I'd have to find a store phone and call Security over the intercom if I wanted them to deal with it, which would be kind of awkward and more work anyway. Plus, she didn't look very kidnapped. She probably just ran away or something; it wouldn't weigh on my conscience if I ignored the situation.

“Do you know if you can eat this soup cold? Like, without microwaving it?” she asked me, holding a can of clam chowder shortly after I turned my attention away from her.

“Uh...” I was a bit taken aback and it took me a second to formulate actual words. “I don’t know. Do you want me to call my manager? I’m sure he’d know.”

“No! No, no that’s fine, I’m sure they’re fine cold. Thanks,” and then she started walking away, clearly a little anxious about talking to a manager. But now I was less of a bystander, hell, I could even get myself in trouble if I ignored the situation, so I had to say something.

“Hey, um, aren’t you... like... well, look, there’s a missing person sign by the entrance and, well, I’m like 95% sure it has a picture of you on it,” I stuttered out.

She didn’t reply but stared back at me with wide eyes, and that 95 was looking more like 100.

“Look, I don’t know exactly what’s going on in your life, and I don’t want to tell you how to live it or anything, but walking into a store with your face on a sign that says ‘MISSING’ is like, kind of a big thing,” I said, wavering a little less.

“It’s not that big of a thing, I’m sure that was just my dad blowing things out of proportion,” she said, and I gave a slight nod. She was dressed in what looked like expensive clothes, Coach handbag and all, and I instantly pictured a stereotype of a rich girl mad at her parents who ‘don’t understand her’. I couldn’t help but sympathize a little less.

“I don’t know your dad, but I’d be concerned too if my daughter was just gone one day.”

“No, you don’t. And it wasn’t like that. I told him I was leaving and staying with friends. He yelled at me and said ‘fine’ and I left and then the next day there’s missing signs all over town...” she started rubbing her forehead, clearly exasperated. When she moved her hand from in front of her face, she saw something behind me and her exasperation turned to anxiety.

“Please just don’t tell anyone you saw me or... whatever. How much longer are you working?” she said, looking back to me.

“About a half hour, forty-five minutes.”

“Can you leave early?”

I kind of laughed a little bit. “Have you ever had a job before?”

“I’m seventeen,” she said, and gave me a slight look as if to say ‘are you crazy’.

“Look, I can talk to you when you’re leaving if that’d make you feel better about it. I gotta go now though,” she said, and then a bit louder before she walked away “Thanks for your help, sir!” She was still holding the clam chowder soup.

I heard footsteps close behind me, and I turned and saw what startled her. One of my co-workers was walking up to me. I talked to him briefly, intentionally being short so I could get back to my work and hurry up and leave. When he finally shut up, I went back to the boxes. I put away some chicken noodle, some barley, some weird pot-pie soup, some cream of mushroom, and I started to get really pissed off about it again and pretty damn bitter about whatever thing I seemed to have been drawn into.

While I was walking out, I saw the runaway-rich-girl-whose-name-I-didn’t-know trying to check out, with the soup, a toothbrush, toothpaste, gum, saltines, some kind of expensive juice, protein bars, and probably a few other things I didn’t see. I didn’t make any of acknowledgement of her and I walked outside.

I debated whether or not I should stay and wait for her. It was taking her a bit of time just to check out and I didn’t really have a strong desire to miss my bus, which was supposed to arrive about fifteen minutes after I punched out. I also had a strong feeling that she wasn’t trying to explain her situation to me so I wouldn’t be worried, because that really didn’t add up. Why would someone trying not to be found wait around in close proximity to their own missing poster just to make a stranger less worried about their whereabouts? Maybe she *wanted* to be found, and that idea made me want to interact with her any more infinitely less. While I liked to think of myself as a kind, caring person, I was not excited to go out of my way and risk being late to my second job to listen to the problems of an angsty narcissistic teenager who had never had to worry about being late to any job. So I did the rational thing and walked to the bus stop.

I checked the time and it was 5:08. The bus was scheduled to show up at 5:15. The stop was actually empty for once, and I sat down on the bench, tapping my fingers on it in impatience. Two minutes passed and I was still thinking about the runaway-rich-girl-whose-name-I-didn't-know, and I started thinking about my own family. I had never met my father's parents, but I had always heard that they were pretty well-off and that they never talked to us because they were disappointed in him. Because they thought he was too young to be a father when my older sister was born. And because they didn't like that my mom's family were Mexican immigrants. So that's when I started second guessing myself. Obviously this girl wasn't a mother, but how did I know she wasn't in a comparable situation? If my dad had wanted someone to talk, I'd like to think I would've been there for him even if I had no idea who he was. But now I had another problem in that if I went back to see her now, I would surely miss the 5:15 bus and have to wait until 6:15. I just wanted to do the right thing, and I didn't want to be manipulated.

Finally committed to *some* decision, I walked back to the store and looked for her outside. She was nowhere to be found. I peered inside the doors, and she wasn't there either. I didn't see any cop cars, so that wasn't a concern. But regardless, she wasn't around and I was late now. I went inside a gas station near my workplace and bought a soda, then walked to a park to wait out the hour.

When I got there I saw her again. She was sitting on a bench, reading a book and drinking the juice she had just bought. I stood there a moment until she looked up and saw me, and then I walked over to her.

"Hey, um, it took me a little longer than I thought it would to finish what I was doing at work," I said nervously as she marked her page and set the book aside.

"I saw you walk out, it's fine. It was wrong of me to try to include you in my problems," she said in a voice that was edging a little close to tears, and she obviously didn't believe what she was saying. I wasn't sure if I did either.

"No, *I'm* sorry. You offered to do your best to make me less worried about you, and I walked away. That was wrong."

"If I'm being honest, I... I wanted someone to talk to about it. For my own sake. I'm sorry, it's just you were kind to me and you know, didn't call security or whatever."

"Well it's good to talk about problems," I said, trying to make her feel better more than anything. "Please don't take this the wrong way though, but do you not have anyone else to talk to? What about the friends you're staying with?"

She laughed a small laugh, but I could see tears forming. "I'm not. I did last night but... well all my friend's parents know my parents. And none of them care enough to take me in. My best friend's mom told her to not even talk to me!"

"Has she ignored you?"

"So far."

"Well, wait, what's so bad about living at your parents' house?"

"Do you know what I was fighting with my parents about before I left?" she asked, now through tears.

"No."

"I didn't do well enough on the ACT. It was the second time I took and I only got a 23."

"Don't take this the wrong way, but... so what? I'm pretty sure that's above average anyways," I said, and I wasn't just being comforting. That was a few points better than I even got and I certainly didn't leave the house because of it.

"Exactly! It shouldn't have mattered. But my dad told me I was a disappointment, and of course he told me he wished I was more like my sister. And it's like that, everyday. He's always telling me that I'm not as good as my sister, not as smart, not as kind, not as pretty. And my mother goes along with him! So I left! And then, when I was at your store, my card got declined, so all I could buy was this juice!" she sobbed out, swinging the juice as she mentioned it. "I don't know, do your parents ever do shit like that?"

"Um..." I started. They didn't. "No. Well, have you ever talked to a professional about any of that?"

"Professional what?"

“Like, psychologist or psychiatrist sort of person.”

“Oh, no! That’s weakness to them. Having issues or worries is just another imperfection,” she said, crying even more now. I just kind of stared, maybe more uncomfortably than I should’ve. I didn’t know what to tell her, and I couldn’t completely trust someone who couldn’t trust their closest friends. I was the worst person she could cry for help to, but I wanted to help her. So I did the only things I really could. I gave her the number and address for a teen shelter, the number for a psychiatrist, my bus schedule, and \$5 in change. I wished her the best of luck and sent her on her way. Then I began the long walk to the movie theater.

Forest Fires

by Jordan Schouweiler

across the border in Canada, forests are burning,
here the air is thick, the moon is glowing, orange.

here our lungs breath heavy, mine ask me
what is wrong, I tell them not to worry, that
they are safe, that they are just fine.
but I spend the night mourning the trees,
they say they may be burning till fall.

not long before the news and smoke
of the burning trees had traveled here,
I planted a seed in the feet of a young girl,
who spoke of the trees as if
they were her own.

I told her, "darling, these hands, these
fingers, this body- use them gently,
they are all that is yours."

Bruised Little Lives

by Karen Wallace

Penny and her friend Molly always got off the bus together. Molly's mom kept an eye on Penny until her mother got home from work. Molly would skip down the street to her front door. Penny would struggle to keep up with her, she didn't skip, skipping was for happy little girls and Penny was not happy. She liked going to Molly's though. Her house was a cheerful place. Her house was big and clean and sparkly, like a storybook house.

Molly's mommy was always home to greet them. She smelled like sunshine and cookies. That's because she was always baking cookies for Molly and her brothers. Penny got to have cookies with them too! There were never cookies at Penny's house. Mommy didn't have time to make cookies, she was always working or if she wasn't working she was sick. Molly's mommy was never sick, and never sad like her mommy was.

"Hi girls. How was school today?" Mama Laura asked. She told Penny to call her Mama Laura, not Mrs. Jenkins.

"It was great, Mama" Molly replied.

"I bet you girls are ready for some cookies and milk."

"Yum"

"What about you Penny?" Penny nodded shyly. Mama Laura looked at her with care and concern. She took a hold of Penny's arm where the fresh bruises showed on her pale skin. Penny winced.

"What happened to your arm Penny?" Mama Laura asked.

"I fell over the wheelbarrow in my backyard," Penny tried to pull away but Mama Laura gently held on. She pushed up Penny's sleeve and gasped at the size of the bruise. Penny jerked her arm away this time and pushed her sleeve back down.

"Are you sure that's all that happened? Penny has someone hurt you? You can tell me."

"No, Ma'am. I fell just like I said," Penny insisted. Mama Laura shook her head and got the girls some warm cookies and milk. Just then Mr. Jenkins came striding through the back door.

“Do I smell cookies?” he asked hopefully.

“Daddy” squealed Molly, she jumped up and launched herself into her daddy’s arms. He hugged her close, kissed the top of her head and deposited her back on her chair.

“Hello Penny, how are you today?” He asked. Penny had automatically hunched over to make herself as small as possible when he came in. Slowly, she raised her face and looked in to his smiling eyes.

“Fine thank you” she replied softly. Mr. Jenkins reached out to pat her on the head. Penny automatically flinched away from the contact. He looked at his wife as he reached for some cookies. She shook her head and gave a small shrug.

Just then, Molly’s older brothers came tumbling in. Penny watched as they were greeted warmly and also served cookies and milk. The family all sat around the table talking and laughing. Penny felt completely out of place. As soon as she was done with her cookie, she rose slowly and told Molly she had best go home. Everyone said their goodbyes to her and she left through the kitchen door. She shuffled slowly down the street toward her own house. She couldn’t help but notice the difference between her house and Molly’s. Molly’s house had a pretty garden and lots of trees and flowers. There was a swing in the tree that Molly’s dad had hung for them and even a tree house! Her house looked sad and dirty. No one cared about the yard. It was full of weeds and not a flower to be seen.

Just as Penny walked up the steps to the front door, she saw her mommy trudging down the street. Penny’s mommy’s name was Jasmine. Her bus dropped her off at a station a few blocks away and by the time she got home, she was very tired from the walk. Penny waited at the door for her mommy.

“Hi Penny, did you just get home?”

“Yes mommy.”

“Come on then, we have some chores to take care of before your father gets home.” Penny flinched just at the mentioning of her daddy. Jasmine noticed it and placed a soft hand on her daughter’s arm. Penny made a whimpering sound and pulled away. Jasmine sighed and opened the front door. Penny couldn’t help but notice the difference between her broken-down house and Molly’s sparkling

shiny home as she ran up the creaky old stairs. She ducked into her little room and threw herself on the threadbare quilt.

Jenny jumped when she heard the front door slam. He was home, and she began to shake. Her skin prickled in waves of horror and dread. Would he be mad today? There was no telling until the first blow fell. She picked up Mr. Sunshine her raggedy old teddy, crawled under her bed and began to whisper him a story.

“Once upon a time there was a beautiful little girl named Molly. She lived in a pretty house with a white picket fence with the nicest mommy and daddy in the whole world. Every day when Molly came home from school, her mommy gave her cookies and milk and helped her with her homework at the kitchen table. The nice mommy was always happy and smiling, never sad or scared. She always smelled like fresh flowers, never like old socks and stinky beer. After homework was done Molly would run out to her big beautiful green yard, never up to her tiny stuffy bedroom to hide under the bed. She would swing on the tire swing that hung from the tree where the nice daddy had hung it. When she heard her daddy’s car drive up, she ran to the front yard and jumped into the nice daddy’s arms. He was so happy to see his little girl because he loved her very much. The nice daddy would hug her and ask her how her day was, not yell at her to get out of his way and kick her when she didn’t move fast enough. He would hold her hand and they would go into to the warm kitchen where the nice mommy was waiting with a happy smile and dinner on the table that looked and smelled delicious, not old bread with cold hot dogs and creamed corn. They would sit down to a happy dinner, not scream and yell at each other.”

“Penny get down here right now!” Her daddy sounded mad.

Penny crawled out from under the little bed and tucked Mr. Sunshine carefully back under after giving him a wet kiss. She wiped her face dry, rubbed her hand gently over her bruised arm and slowly reluctantly crept down the stairs. Just as she reached the bottom of the stairs she remembered she had not done her chores. Her daddy was waiting, slapping his belt against the palm of his hand. Penny felt waves of fear course through her body and she broke out in a cold sweat.

“You forgot your chores,” her daddy snarled. Penny nodded looking at the faded carpet.

“Look at me when I talk to you,” he roared. Penny’s head slowly rose and she tried to look her daddy in the eye like he told her. She saw the first lash coming before it struck her across her back. She could not help the scream that escaped.

“Shut up,” he thundered. The belt came around again and struck her across her thighs. Penny looked across the room in her mother’s swollen eyes before she fell to the floor.

Untitled
by Allison Wolpers



Suitcase

by Jamie Scheffel

I once got myself a room at the Ambassador Hotel in Milwaukee. It was an attractive building although not in a particularly great part of

town. I was there for a funeral and I packed only black things-- *everything* was black. I hadn't noticed it until I zipped open my suitcase for the first time; down to my underwear, down to my socks-- black. I came for a funeral yet it was no less bizarre to see the inside of my suitcase a portable omen, an inescapable black hole.

I stayed put most of the time because well, first off, it was only Milwaukee, and secondly, because it was an exceptional room—for me it was. I'm not that hard to appease, but this was clearly a step up from a two-star chain hotel. The room had generous square footing and wide windows. No tacky masterpieces or aggravating wallpapers hung on the walls; you know the kind, they imprint on your mind like a scar long after you've checked out. Best Western artwork scars. I still reflect back to one abstract piece that I was sure was a clothes line of hanging granny panties. Here, I was saved from any variation of *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

The hotel itself had a certain old world feel. The lobby glowed with shiny black and white floors, decorated columns and crown molding. The hallways were tall and narrow, the elevator lifted clumsily. It was built in 1928, and remodeled since, but not at the expense of its vintage class-- it still had it. It didn't matter what fly-over city I was in. I made myself comfortable with a vodka tonic and watched the cable channels I didn't get at home. I wasn't leaving the Ambassador unless it was to go pay my respects.

So delighted I was with the hotel and my room that I took pictures—just look at my cell phone: there's the lobby, the hallway, my door, my bed. I lingered in the halls outside of my room and made my way through the bar. People enjoyed themselves, clinking glasses and shrieking with drunk laughter.

As I approached the front to go back to my room I must have looked lost. I looked at the ceiling like one might look at the stars, taking in the totality and ambience of the cathedral structure. Because of my erratic wandering, the front desk lady, friendly and concerned, engaged me with visitor's brochures, a way to bring me back down to earth. There was Lake Michigan, and Lake Michigan was very nice she said, one of the Great Lakes of course, and there's even kite flying because it's always windy by the lake. There was Miller Park if I wanted to see a baseball game. It was that time of year and just my luck there was a game tomorrow night, but I told her I wasn't a

baseball fan which wasn't entirely true. I had collected baseball cards as a little girl. I wasn't here for fun, I explained, I was here for a funeral and it didn't seem right to exploit the circumstances of my visit. She said if I changed my mind there was also the Milwaukee Art Museum or a brewery that was only a short walking distance from here. I said "No, thank you. I'm not much of a drinker" which wasn't entirely true either; I thought for a moment about the bottle I left out on the coffee table and wished I had put the "Do Not Disturb" sign out.

The front desk lady engaged me further, but by now I was inching away; I wanted to run up to my room and put out the sign. Trying to be polite I resisted the urge to cut her short and make a mad dash. She was just getting going, chatty with special hotel FYI and I, in response went *uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh* with a quick matching head nod. She went on: JFK spoke at the United Chemical Workers Convention here in 1960. *Uh-huh, uh-huh*. The Beatles spent a night in 1964. *Uh-huh, uh-huh*. Jeffrey Dahmer . . . say what? She had my attention then.

The front desk lady said this was where Jeffrey Dahmer murdered one of his victims. In 1987, after a long intermission of nine years he took victim number two, maybe in my same room. The unfortunate man was number two of seventeen victims. Dahmer was just warming up in a murder spree that would last another four years and would defy humanity and make us question it. She said he stuffed victim number two's lifeless body into a suitcase and checked-out. He didn't remember what he did to him, but he did nonetheless, and he took care of the rest in his grandma's basement, where he lived for some time before grandma kicked him out because of the smell.

That's how the front desk lady sent me on my way. The hotel instantly lost its comfort and appeal. I was no longer meandering through the halls or studying its architecture. It was obvious why it was remodeled, an attempt to wash the dark incident away. And might I add they were successful. Had the front desk lady not told me I would have stayed in my fog of marvel until I left. Why should I feel so comfortable in a place of death?

When I entered my room, it all felt wrong. Housekeeping made up the room a little while I was gone; my bottle was still on the coffee

table. Perhaps she knew I would need it later. I went over to my suitcase full of late premonition and got dressed. Time to go pay my last respects.

Trash Chutes

by Samuel Howard

i want to paint pictures of fish
fat fish pulled into boats by fat people
i want to go back in time and place
rewrite all of Nirvana's songs

before Kurt Cobain
it would save his life, i think
because i can handle fame, i think.

i want pretty girls to look at me
and talk to me and be impressed by what i have to say
about David Foster Wallace
not *Infinite Jest* but the short stories
and say "Sam, that's brilliant"
really meaning it though.

i want to write *Under the Volcano*
but for the disillusioned 20-something
and never have to work again
but continue working despite this
never publishing anything
so when i die the critics will say that i'm a humble genius.

i want my ex-girlfriend to still love me
and this time i want to realize it and understand why
i want to clean my apartment
but there must be 1000 bottles
and i do not want these other tenants
to hear me dumping them down the trash chute.

i want to be happy
but for the right reasons
and maybe when i am i will stop wasting ink, filling pages
but maybe that would make me wholly unhappy
i wanted to write a poem that i liked
and i did that.

The Seed of Infidelity

by Rachel Ruddies

He came in from work late. It was the first time Thomas had ever been late coming home. Cassie was in the kitchen of their small one bedroom apartment warming up his plate. The meal wasn't anything special. It was takeout that she had picked up for dinner. They have only been together for two years and they both worked jobs.

“You're home later than usual tonight.” She said as she slid the plate across the counter to him as he sat down at the bar where they were forced to eat since a kitchen table wouldn't fit properly in their tiny apartment.

“Yeah, Nate had some tire problem I helped him out with.” He said as he removed the plastic wrap from his plate.

This is how it started for the newlywed couple that eventually fell into secrecy, silence and misery. He ended up coming home late more nights with more excuses. She became more unsure of his excuses and insecure in the relationship. Many nights ended in arguments that left her crying on her pillow. Six months have passed.

“Why are you late tonight? Let me guess! Brad ran out of gas, and you needed to run him to the station, and then back to his car to fill it up? How is that for a fucking excuse tonight?” Cassie yelled as he entered the door two hours past the time he was meant to be home.

“Oh and if you expect dinner you can look in the trashcan for it because that is where it is!” she stormed by him going into the bedroom slamming the door.

He placed his coat on the rack. He glanced at the bedroom. He was tempted to go in there and try to make things better. Tonight however he didn't give a damn what she thought. He walked into the kitchen to grab a bite to eat. He wasn't in there for any more than five minutes and Cassie storms in.

“Just come out and tell me what whore you are fucking behind my back Thomas! Be a man! Don't insult me this way. I'm not a moron. I smell the bitch on your shirts when I wash them. I just want you to be straight with me so we can move on however we should move on.” Tears were streaming from her eyes.

“I don't know what else to say to you Cassie. I'm not with any other woman. You are just paranoid and this shit about smelling another woman is in your head! I am however getting tired of getting this type of treatment when I come home from you night after night.” He slammed the plate down on the counter and stormed off into the bathroom.

“Hey don't walk away from me! I am not just going to go cry into my pillow again and just pretend nothing is going on. I won't play stupid

any longer. I want you to tell me the truth!" She yelled outside the bathroom door crying.

She thought to herself about what would she do if he actually did tell her the truth. She convinced herself that if he didn't admit it then there was always that chance he wasn't having an affair. That justified her staying. She needed to stay now she thought. How would she raise a baby by herself she thought.

Deep down she had hoped he'd deny it once more. She knew it was stupid. She knew she looked like a clown. What else could she do though she thought? She was going to have a baby in nine months to care for. Do that alone? She wasn't so sure she could.

She slid down the door with her back to land softly seated on the carpet. "Thomas you need to be honest with me. All I ask is for some respect. Respect includes honesty...." She wiped her cheeks but the tears still fell from her eyes. She refused to tell him about the child she carried.

Suddenly you heard Pocket Full of Sunshine ringing from her cell phone.

"Hi mom, no, it's OK, you didn't interrupt anything here. Sure, I'll be right over." Closing her phone and placing it back in its holder she ran her hands through her hair.

She tilted her head back to rest it on the bathroom door. "I'm going over to moms. She needs me over there. You want to come with me?" she asked hoping he'd say no.

It was silent. She sat for a moment waiting for an answer but the silence lingered.

"Thomas! You could at least acknowledge me!" she yelled as she rose to her feet.

She attempted to open the door but it was locked. That was unusual she thought to herself as she attempted once more to open the door. Sweat began to break out on her skin between her breasts.

"Thomas! Open up in there! What are you hiding?" she said as she pounded the door demanding that he either answer or open the door. Still there was no sound. There was no flush from the toilet. The water wasn't running. She began to panic.

She grabbed her cell phone from its holder and opened it frantically. She was trying anxiously to dial 911 with tears streaming from her eyes. The numbers were blurry.

"911 Operator, what's the emergency?"

"Oh my God! My husband has locked himself in our bathroom and he won't respond. I can't get in. He's been in there for almost an hour now." Cassie said hysterically. "I need help! I can't get in!" She screamed into the phone as she was trying to budge the door open with all her body weight. "Thomas! Answer me!"

"Ma'am I need you to stay calm and tell me what your location is." The operator said sternly.

"213 Fraternity Lane. Send someone quick." Her voice quivered.

"Ma'am I need you to stay on the phone with me until help arrives."

"Oh my God...." Cassie's voice was weakened and her mind raced with thoughts.

What has he done? I know what he's done! What have you done Thomas? She slid down the door once more and rested her head on her knees with the phone to her right ear. Her other hand held her hair back out of her face.

Suddenly there was knocking at the door. "Whitewater Fire Department, someone call for help?"

She closed her cell phone and ran to the door to let them in. She pointed to the bathroom door as she explained what was going on, "My husband locked himself in there an hour ago. We were arguing and he went in and I can't get in. He won't answer" she was crying and shaking while she was telling the men the situation.

"Ma'am my name is Eddie let me take you down to the lobby while my two partners work to get your husband out of the bathroom." The man took her gently by the arm. Eddie knew all too well what this call was going to end with. He knew it was best to get her to the lobby.

"I want to be here with my husband when they get in. I want to know what is going on." She said defiantly to the gentleman.

"Ma'am we have communication open with our radios so you'll know what is going on. It will be better for my partners if you are down in

the lobby out of the way while they work.” He said still holding her arm.

She nodded and they went to the lobby. She pulled her cell phone out and called her mom. They had a very close relationship. Her mom was her best friend.

“Mom, I need you right now. Thomas locked himself in the bathroom and the firemen are here to get him out. I don’t know what he’s done mom. Please come...” she said in a low tone standing in the lobby looking at the floor.

She hadn’t told her mom about the baby yet. She planned to tell her soon before this all happened with Thomas.

Cassie was watching out the glass windows waiting to see her mom. Every minute felt like a lifetime to her standing there. She loved Thomas but was not in love with him anymore and now she was even more confused than she was before. Why would he do such a thing? She knew what he had done upstairs in that cold small bathroom. The relationship had problems but she wanted to figure out what to do about those problems with Thomas. She knew though that with what Thomas had done upstairs he had solved the problems on his own. He has created a new set of problems that Cassie would have to solve on her own.

Her mom was walking up the sidewalk towards the entrance. Cassie rushed to open the door for her. They embraced each other tight. An ambulance suddenly pulled up to the entrance and a group of EMT’s rushed past them. Cassie and her mom moved inside holding hands watched them go upstairs.

Her mom, Carla, glanced over to Cassie with a sorrowful look in her eyes. She tightened her grip holding her daughters’ hand.

“What exactly is going on here?” her mom asked as she took her other hand in hers and faced her.

Crying, Cassie tried to explain it to her, “Mom, Thomas and I were arguing again about my mistrust. I was demanding he tell me the truth about his affair because I know he’s cheating.” She sighed, “After I talked to you on the phone I told him I was coming to see you and that is when I realized he had locked himself in the bathroom. When I didn’t get any reply or heard no noise I called 911” She fell

into her mother's arms and whimpered like she had done so many times as a child.

The thing is she felt like a child. She wasn't sure what to do about the baby and Thomas. She was scared on both accounts. She wanted her mom to make the decisions and solve the problems for her like she had done throughout her childhood years. She needed to find strength.

Carla pulled Cassie off her shoulder and pulled her chin up making eye contact.

"You need to see what is going on from the EMT's. Get a hold of yourself now. Go upstairs and demand they tell you what is going on. I'll stay right here I promise." She kissed Cassie on the cheek and released her.

Cassie wiped her face and straightened her shirt out. She went upstairs to the apartment on the second floor. The apartment was crawling with firemen and ambulance workers. She saw Thomas lying on the bathroom floor with a couple EMT's overtop him. Obviously they were trying to revive him she thought. He had committed suicide. She felt her heart in her throat when a fireman gently grabbed her by the arm.

Turning to face him she said with an unyielding voice, "I want to know how my husband is! I have a right to know what is going on here in my home!" She pulled her arm out of his grip forcefully.

She took a few steps toward the bathroom and they covered Thomas with a white sheet and took him from the apartment. Cassie fell to her knees and screeched. She tilted her head to the ceiling holding her hands out.

"Oh God..." her face fell into her palms and she wept there on the floor of their small one bedroom apartment. She glanced over and noticed a note lying on the floor. She picked it up and began to read it to herself, "Cassie, I never wanted to hurt you but having a child with any other woman other than you isn't something I can bare. I hope you can forgive me and find happiness you've always deserved. Love, Thomas."

Untitled

by Graham McKee



Anchors Aweigh to My Heart

by Karen Wallace

I was 18 in '54 and having the time of my life. I was going to community college and it was possibly the best experience of my life so far. I loved sports, and they had all kinds of girls programs at Cal Allen community college. My best friend Juanita was attending with me and together we were a force of nature, ready to take the world by storm.

I was brought up in the Methodist church, our attendance as a family had been sporadic at best, but lately Mama had been taking lessons with the Mormon missionaries. She had been attending the local Mormon Church and taking me Kay and with her. Daddy just harrumphed when Mama mentioned him coming with them and continued to take no active interest in religion of any kind. Of course Juanita came too, we were inseparable.

It was a particularly beautiful Sunday morning and we were on our way to Corpus Christie where the local Mormon Church was located. Sunlight sparkled off the water causing eyes to tear up as we crossed the bridge to Padre Island. Navy ships gleamed in the harbor below us.

“Look there’s a new battleship just arrived” Kay exclaimed.

“How do you know it’s new?” I asked curious how my little sister could possibly know that.

“Lizzie and I came to the beach yesterday, we saw it sail in!”

“Groovy!” it was always fun to watch the big ships sail in.

“That means a new crop of sailors.” Juanita giggled. I gave her a stern look,

“We don’t date sailors, we aren’t that kind of girls” I said firmly.

“That was last year, when we were still in High School; we’re college women now, we can date sailors if we want.”

“Well I won’t, they’re obnoxious and only after one thing. Besides, my daddy would pitch a fit if brought home a sailor” I insisted. Juanita just rolled her eyes at me.

“It’s not like there are any other guys to date around here, we only had three guys in our class, and two of them are spoken for.”

“There are lots of boys at the college.”

“Who wants a boy, I’m ready for a real man!” Kay giggled at this remark.

“Watch what you say in front of the children.”

“I’m not a child, ya’ll don’t treat me like one!” Kay was fifteen and very sensitive about still being too young for many things including dating.

“I’m sorry Kay, but Juanita shouldn’t talk like that at all, it makes her sound loose.” Just then we arrived at church, Kay went to join her friends and Juanita and I hurried off to the bathroom to freshen up. As I was coming out of the bathroom I collided with someone and was almost knocked off my feet. Strong hands caught me and set me upright and I found myself looking into the most beautiful blue eyes I had ever seen. I was mesmerized, so much so that I did not even notice the white uniform.

“Are you okay?”

“I think so” I replied, in my head I was thinking, *no I’ve just fallen head over heels.*

“My name’s Dean” he smiled, he had the most amazing smile.

“Um, Louise.”

“Nice to meet you um Louise” he smiled that dazzling smile again and my heart was lost. I blushed and looked down. That was when I noticed the uniform. My heart sunk to my toes. He’s a sailor. I thought to myself. Just then Juanita shoved her way between us.

“Hi my name is Juanita; pleased to meet you I’m sure.” She batted her eyes in a flirty way and I felt a flash of jealousy instantly heat my face. He was a sailor! How could that dazzling smile and those beautiful eyes belong to a sailor? He gave a small bow in Juanita’s direction but his eyes never left mine.

“We need to go sit down, excuse up please.” I grabbed Juanita’s arm and hauled her into the chapel.

“What’s the matter with you?” she whispered as we sat down. “He’s dreamy!”

“He’s a sailor!” I whispered back fiercely. Just then he walked past us to a row ahead where some more sailors were seated. He smiled as he walked past and I felt myself blushing again. This just would not do. I was not a loose woman! I did not date sailors! The other girls talked about times they had with some of the sailors and that talk embarrassed me!

I found my eyes drifting to the back of his head throughout the service. I didn’t hear one word spoken during the meeting. When the service was over I watched him approach Mr. Taylor, the organist and he got into an animated conversation with him. Juanita hung

back but I grabbed her arm and rushed her out.

“What’s the rush?”

“I need to find Kay and get home. Mama is fixing a big dinner and she needs our help”

“Why don’t you invite your sailor friend, he didn’t even notice, me, he couldn’t take his eyes off you” she teased.

“Just come on, let’s go.” For the next week all I could think about was a dazzling smile and a pair of dreamy blue eyes. I couldn’t wait for Sunday to come!

听妈妈的话¹

by Leia Liang

¹ Listen to mama’s words

One cold, winter day, my mom came home from work with a sharp pain in her abdomen. She tried to hide it, but I saw the grimace on her face as she dragged her feet to her room to change. Her face looked pale. She gasped for air as she tried to continue her work. I begged her to let me drive her to the hospital but she refused. She took some painkillers and continued her daily routine of cooking for my dad.

My mother grew up during the Cultural Revolution in a small village in Goaming, China. Having been from a descendent of a wealthy family, my grandpa got persecuted for owning land during this time of communism. With my grandpa in jail and all their money and land taken away, my grandma was the only person with a stable income. Living in a little village with houses the size of a modern living room my grandma worked as much as she could to feed her four little daughters. My mom's oldest sister died of leukemia when she was only 18 due to the lack of money for treatment. Since my grandma worked so hard, my mom was in charge of taking care of her two younger sisters and her grandma. My mom would tell me stories about the troubles she had when she was a kid.

我十岁的时候，就挑水上山还自己煮饭.我跟你的阿姨们只有豆腐乳跟白饭当晚餐吃.你是很幸运的小孩，三餐都有得吃。²

I was in my room when I heard her scream out in pain. I rushed into the living room where I found her on the couch. Being the strong woman she was, she didn't want me to tell anyone. She was scared of being a bother. After arguing with her, I decided to call my brother. He rushed over to our house and drove my mom to the ER. Later that night, I was in my room cuddling with blankets and skyping with my best friend Jen on my bed. We were both doing our left over homework from winter break. My brother called and said the emergency room doctors did a CT scan and found several tumors in her abdomen. As my eyes started tearing up, I remembered the past when my dad had cancer. He went into remission with the consequence of turning blind. Chills went down my back as I pictured my mom going through the same mess.

² I learned how to carry water up the mountains and cook when I was only 10. Your aunts and I only had fermented tofu and rice for dinner. You are a fortunate child for having all three meals.

Bundled up in a pink sweater and two pairs of sweatpants, my mom walked through the front door and sat down on the couch and sighed. She had just come back from her first chemotherapy session.

我正在打仗中，而且相信我会获胜。³

A couple hours later, the problems began. She began to throw up and her hands were sensitive to the cold. When she tried to reach for food in the refrigerator, she immediately cringed as her hands felt pins and needles. My brother desperately tried to cook her different meals to see what she could eat but her taste buds changed every minute. Although it was rough, when she could, she still tried to cook and clean for us like we were still her babies. She promised me that before she died, she would teach me how to cook authentic Chinese meals.

One day in the summer, she taught me how to make noodle soup for my dad. As I got out a cutting board and knife, she gave me instructions. First, you cut and wash the vegetables. In this case, it was Bok Choy, a type of Chinese cabbage. She taught me to cut each plant into four pieces so it would be easier to wash the center. As I cut the Bok Choy, she filled half the pot with water and added oil and salt.

你在切菜的时候，可以同时煮开水，这样可以省时间。⁴

After I finished washing the vegetables, she suddenly ran to the bathroom looking pale and sick. I was worried but the water was boiling, so I used my common sense and put the Bok Choy in the water. She came back minutes later looking tired with a grimace of pain on her face but she instantly yelled at me for not putting ginger in the water first. I looked at her with amazement, wondering how she still had so much energy to yell at me and continue cooking. She told me to put the precooked noodles in after the vegetables boiled and it would be done.

My mom was very particular about teaching me things. On one of her better days in the summer, she woke me up extra early.

起床了，我想要教你怎么样换机油。⁵

³ I'm fighting in a war and I will win it.

⁴ You should boil the water while cutting the vegetables in order to save time.

I got up, went upstairs and brushed my teeth in annoyance. We drove to the BP gas station by my grandma's house and she had me walk up to one of the employees and ask for an oil change with her. We waiting in the tiny cramped gas station as they changed my car's oil. As I fidgeted in my seat, I asked my mom if we could get picked up by my brother.

你要有点耐心等等我。⁶

Little did I know that she just wanted to spend more time with me. Even when she had that grimace on her face from pain, everything she did was for me. She had a lesson behind every little thing.

Before the diagnosis, she worked constantly to take care of my brother and me. My dad didn't have a job because he was blind, so my mom often worked overtime. She worked thirteen hour shifts five days a week making airplane food for a company called Skychef. When she came home at 1 PM, she quickly heated up rice for my dad and cooked him some soup and meat. This usually took one or two hours. After she was done cooking and eating, she took a shower and collapsed on the couch in her pajamas.

I remember when I was little, she often laid on the couch and listened to me play piano. Back then, I had only mastered one song, "River Flows in You", by Yiruma. That was her favorite song. She fell asleep peacefully listening to me play. A couple hours later, she would get up and continue to cook again for my dad and me. After she ate, she slept again and prepared to wake up for work. Her life was a rough routine.

During her second round of chemotherapy, I truly realized how hard things were for her. Two months on one type of chemo, she went from an average weight to a woman I barely recognized. She became so sick that she was too scared to eat anything. Her face dented in, and every bone on her body showed her skeleton. With not enough nutrients in her body to hold water in her blood vessels, her feet swelled up, and fluid built up in her lungs, making it hard to breathe. She still woke early and secretly washed dishes before my brother woke up. She yelled at us whenever we tried to stop her.

⁵ Get up, I want to teach you how to get your oil changed.

⁶ Just be patient and wait with me.

我要煮菜整理房间，这样我会觉得比较好。⁷

On September 2, 2015, my mom woke up in the middle of the night moaning in pain and banging on the wall. My brother instantly woke up and tried to get my mom in the car to go to the ER. She collapsed and had no strength so my brother called 911. My brother thought that she was only having a phase of pain. He didn't wake me up to go with him. Hours later, I woke up from a text from my brother: "Wake up and come to the hospital, mom is in pain and needs emotional support." I started to shake. I got dressed and ran to my car.

As I got out of the car in the hospital parking ramp, my aunt ran toward me from the emergency room entrance. She was crying and her eyes were red from rubbing them. She wouldn't tell me anything but I could tell that something was severely wrong. Entering the emergency room, I saw my mom lying on a bed. She was barely breathing. She looked pale and bony. Tubes and wires covered her body. I immediately started sobbing.

The doctor gave us the option to continue treatments or dose her with pain medication. Then she suddenly became responsive again. She yelled at us and said she needed water. She fought us and took off the oxygen mask.

“繚線，”⁸ she called my sister-in-law when she tried to put the mask back on her.

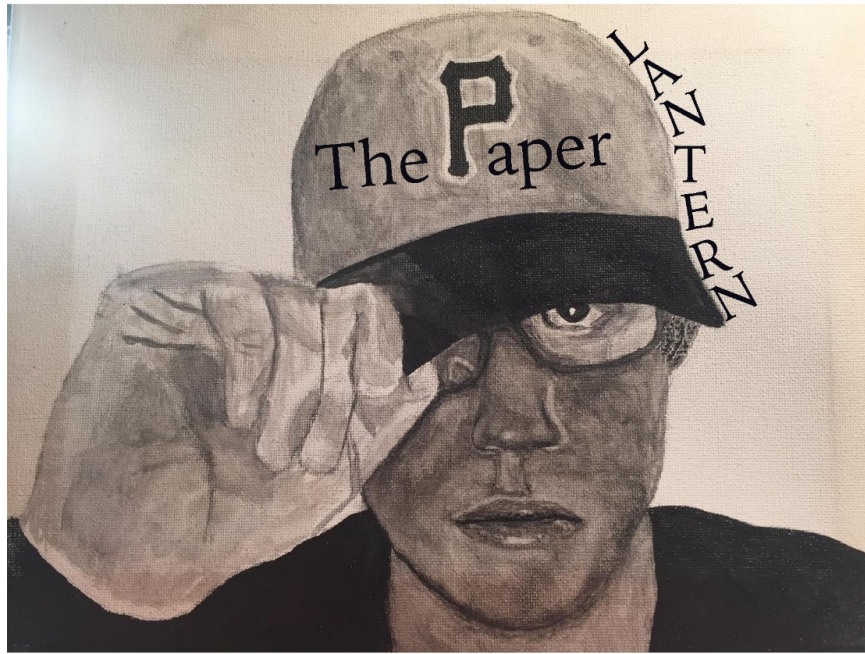
We put some lip balm on her lips and she fell back asleep, but this time she didn't wake up. We stood by her side and kissed her good-bye as she took her last breath. The grimace on her face was finally gone and we could tell that she wasn't in pain anymore.

Untitled

by Luke Broderick

⁷ I need to cook and clean to feel better about myself.

⁸ Stupid



Contributor's Notes

Luke Broderick

Stephen Dodds is a second time around student at Normandale Community College. This time he is undergoing an AFA in creative writing, following his AA in Communications.

Conner Dolezal is a first-year student at Normandale, although he was here full-time as a PSEO student last year.

Aubrey Egeberg is a creative, passionate student who dreams of pursuing a degree in sustainability and saving the world. Her motto, "Be all the wonderful things you wish to see in the world, be yourself, be love."

Samuel Howard says, "Dogs are cool, man. I really like dogs and I wish I had three more dogs."

Madaline Jordan is a sophomore at Normandale Community College. She is an Elementary Education major that finds joy by working with little kids and loves to see their lights click on when they figure out how to solve a problem, pronounce a big word, etc.

Chris King is a former chemical engineering and computer science student who is switching to Journalism at the University of Minnesota in Fall 2016.

Graham McKee

Rachel Ruddies was born in 1978 in Shelby, Ohio and has lived in Minnesota for 17 years. She has been driving school bus for Carver County since 2012, which inspired her to enroll into Normandale Community College where she is currently working on her AS in Elementary Education. She enjoys writing in her spare time.

Jamie Scheffel wrote these pieces in Matt Mauch's memoir writing class in the fall semester of 2015. She is finishing up her AFA in creative writing and then looks forward to transferring to get her BFA in creative writing at either Hamline or Augsburg next year. She'd like to say "HI" to her daughter, Jasmine! Thanks for reading.

Jordan Schouweiler is a poet who writes too much about the sky and people who don't deserve it.

Grace Schulze is pursuing an AFA degree in Creative Writing at Normandale Community College. She is a Minnesota native currently living in Bloomington.

M.E. Scoonover-Nelson is working on her A.A. degree during her third semester at Normandale. She plans to transfer to a four-year college to study English and History. She loves creative writing and is an avid reader. She is also the President of the Creative Writing Club. She has numerous story ideas floating around in her head and hopes to finish one of them and get it published one day. She loves creating stories and poems that transport the readers to another place or time, away from ordinary life to somewhere more fantastical.

Karen Wallace is a Utahan transplanted to Minnesota trying to bloom where I've been planted, a student in the art of writing and life.

Katherine Warren is a freshman at Normandale Community College. She enjoys art in many forms including writing, photography, drawing, and baking. She has passion for several subjects. She is not yet sure what she wants to do in life but for now is content just living in the moment.

Kimber Wolf is in her first year at Normandale. She is majoring in Psychology. She loves writing, singing, camping and watching Netflix with her two cats. She was a cosmetologist for five years and is enjoying being back at school.

Allison Wolpers

The Paper Lantern is the student literary journal of Normandale Community College, 9700 France Ave. So., Bloomington, MN 55431. It is edited by members of the Creative Writing Club. The project is made possible by the Normandale Student Life Activity Fee.

Officers and the following members of the Spring 2015 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

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Front Cover: "????," by Luke Broderick

Back Cover: "????" by Luke Broderick

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2016 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously and acceptance is based on literary merit.

Works in all genres of creative writing (poetry, fiction, memoir, short plays, etc.) are considered, with a limit of 1000 words for poetry and 2500 words for prose and drama. Multiple submissions accepted. Submission is open to registered NCC students only via the online service, Submittable, a free and easy way for writers to submit work to a variety of publications.

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