

Epiphany

Weber State University
Nontraditional Student
Literary Journal

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Purpose

It is the express purpose of *Epiphany* to provide a quality annual nontraditional student literary journal to showcase and further encourage the creative talents of nontraditional students of Weber State University.

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Editor's Note

Though still in its infancy, *Epiphany* has come a long way in the past five volumes. We began to give students, specifically the large nontraditional population of Weber State University, another opportunity to be published. For almost three years, we have succeeded in doing so because of the talent submitted to us each issue. Now, with a growing staff and submission base, we plan to grow even more in the coming years.

This year, *Epiphany* took on the challenge of creating a new Multicultural and Diversity section open to all students. This brought many questions to our staff and the students wanting to submit: What is culture? What is diversity? What qualifies someone to be cultural or diverse? . . . Our only answer to all these questions was another question: What isn't culture or diversity? As individuals, we all create our own unique cultures and subcultures, which, in turn, create a wonderfully diverse world to share and explore. We hope this new section can continue and grow, allowing even more talented writers to share their work in the future.

Ernest Hemingway once said, "We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master." This is true. It's difficult to always find the right words to express our thoughts and feelings, but that is what makes writing a joy and a challenge. *Epiphany* is proud to once again present the writers who took on that challenge. To those whom did not make it this time, don't give up. One day your words will reach the right ears. Never think "if only." Always think "next time." There is always a next time. We hope you enjoy this volume of *Epiphany*, made possible by a dedicated staff, talented writers, and so many others.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Sanda
Managing Editor

NONFICTION



No One Said There'd *(Overall Winner)*
Be People Here

Phillip Sagardoy

We were somewhere between An Nasiriyah and Al Hayy, traveling down the highway at forty miles an hour. Evening was approaching and the sun would be going down in a few hours.

I was standing in the driver's side scout hatch of an LAV-25. Blue 2 was our vehicle's call sign, but my vehicle crew and scout team had lovingly named it "Pestilence," one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It was a fitting name for an eight-wheeled tank rolling through Iraq in search of enemy combatants, weapons of mass destruction, and Saddam Hussein.

We passed through several towns and villages without encountering the enemy. We were making good time. I remember the van clearly. It was about a thousand meters, a klick, outside a small village. A simple red Scooby-Doo-style van parked, or rather crashed, off the left side of the highway. We were on point for the battalion, and as our vehicle approached, Corporal Kwiatt, our gunner, traversed the main gun of the LAV-25 so the van was choked snugly within his sights. This was standard operating procedure. We had to assume there were combatants inside. We slowed our approach to a crawl.

Kwiatt saw it first. A flash of light came out of the driver's-side window, a muzzle flash. This occurs in small arms weapons as a round is forced out of the barrel. The built-up gas burning behind the bullet exits the weapon in the same manner as the round itself. It's a pretty good indication that you're getting shot at.

Kwiatt fired back ten to twelve high explosive rounds from the pig's 25mm chain gun. Each round hit the van and exploded on impact with a killing radius of five meters and a casualty radius of ten. He fired the weapon exactly how he was trained, in three round bursts and on target. Our vehicle came to a stop as we looked towards the van, expecting the enemy to fire again. We waited. There was movement on the far side of the van, the side away from the road. Kwiatt fired again, this time at the dirt behind the van.

"Cease fire! Cease fire!" was the call that came over the radio from the platoon commander's vehicle. The message was lost in the commotion. Kwiatt fired again.

"Cease fire! There are civilians behind that van!"

This time the lieutenant's message came through loud and clear. The firing stopped.

Corporal Snyder, our vehicle commander, got on the radio.

"Interrogative, did you say there are civilians in the van?" Snyder asked.

"Negative, there are civilians *behind* the van that you are firing at. Get your scout team out and set up security. I want a sitrep," our platoon commander transmitted back.

"Roger that," said Snyder. He had an uncomfortable look in his eye and his face was scrunched up. I could tell he wanted a do-over.

"Scouts out! Set up security, both sides of the road," he ordered. "Sag, get me a sitrep."

"Roger that," I said, grabbing my rifle.

The three other scouts and I got out of the back of the vehicle. Private Busse and I took the side of the

road that the van was on. With my rifle at the ready position, I ran out towards the van. I could see the scouts of the pigs to our rear setting up security. As I got closer to the van, the situation started to materialize.

The van was on fire. We mistook the flames for a muzzle flash. It was apparent the van's interior had been burning for awhile. The flames were isolated to the front driver's seat now and were almost extinguished, but I could tell the fire had been much larger before we got there.

Two women were standing near the rear end of the van. They were panicked, crying hysterically, and holding each other. Two men were on the ground. The first was lying flat on his back, five meters from the van, with his leg bent up awkwardly towards his head. His face was a mutilated disfiguration of flesh and hot shrapnel. He was dead.

The second man was leaning up against the van's rear tire and appeared to be holding a blood-soaked cloth bag littered with shrapnel against his chest. He was sobbing and patting the cloth bag frantically with his free hand. He was saying something in his native tongue. He had a large chunk of flesh missing from his neck and ear, and I could see the flesh and muscle under his skin. Several hundred small pieces of shrapnel were embedded in his torso. His clothes were soaked with blood. He needed medical attention. "Corpsman up! Corpsman up!" I yelled. It wasn't long before Doc Spejcher was running towards my position with his medical bag in hand.

I followed him to provide security. We ran towards the van. The women backed away in horror, putting their hands up in a surrender-type fashion. I

motioned them to put their hands down. I was trying to convey to them that they weren't in danger anymore. The message wasn't received. As we approached them, I noticed that one of the women was actually a young girl, maybe sixteen years old. The older woman appeared to be her mother. I assumed instantly that one of these men was the husband and father of these two women.

Doc Spejcher took no time at all moving towards the injured man. He knelt down next to him and opened up his medical bag. The man was in shock and still speaking fast in Arabic. The two women let out loud sobs as Doc Spejcher reached out and tried to lower the bloody cloth package the man was holding so he could have a better look at the man's neck wound. The man gave out a screech and pulled the cloth package back up to his chest.

"Sir, I need you to put down this bag. I need to look at your neck so I can try to treat you. Do you understand?" Doc Spejcher said. The man did not respond.

"Do you need the translator, Doc?" I asked, barely managing the words. I was starting to shake. I felt like my nerves were giving out on me. *Don't look at the men*, I told myself. *Stay focused and don't look at the men*.

"Doc, do you need a translator?" I asked again.

"Yes!" Doc Spejcher yelled back, irritated with my interruption.

I called down the line of scouts for the translator. I noticed Lieutenant Gorman, our platoon commander, getting down from his vehicle. I looked back at Doc Spejcher, who seemed apprehensive about trying to move the cloth bag from the wounded man

again. The two women were still crying and were now talking to each other between their sobs. The younger girl was trying to comfort the older lady and had both of her arms around her.

I looked back down at Doc Speicher, who was still kneeling beside the wounded man and was now getting supplies from his medical bag. He took out gauze and ace bandages.

“Sag, I need your help with this guy. I can’t treat him like this. I need you to help me get this thing out of his hands.”

“Okay,” I replied.

I looked at the man, then turned my attention to Busse. I motioned him to come up closer to our position and spread out the security a little, then I moved over and knelt down beside the wounded man. This was exactly what I had been trying to avoid, a close-up look at his wounds. I swallowed hard and tried to maintain control of myself. The blood was leaving his neck and accumulating in his shirt collar, then dripping down his arm until it found its final resting place in the hot sand next to his left leg. I looked down at the blood-soaked cloth the wounded man was holding. It looked like a blanket that had been wrapped around something. There was definitely a solid shape within it.

The man gave out a painful moan. His face was covered with sand and blood and his eyes were starting to glaze over with a blue film.

“Okay, Sag, I need you to take this thing out of his hand. It doesn’t matter if he fights you. Just get it out of there. It’s the only way I can treat him,” Doc said.

I didn’t say anything. My heart fluttered a little

and my stomach was beginning to feel sick. My hands and knees were shaking, but I did as I was told. I grabbed a piece of the cloth in my hands and started to pull it free from the man's grasp.

The man wouldn't let go. He held tight with unbelievable strength and began to scream and cry, yelling at us in Arabic. Tears were leaking from his glazed eyes now. He looked straight into my eyes as he yelled, seeming to plead with me. I continued to pull the blood-soaked blanket. The man's strength was too great and he held fast.

"Pull it out of there, Sag!" Doc Spejcher said.

"My father would rather die than let you have my brother."

It came from behind us. The voice belonged to a girl and had a strong Arabic accent. Her words hit me like a sledgehammer to the chest.

I looked behind me and there stood the young girl. She was looking at our faces. Her eyes were swollen with grief and she had tearstains down her cheeks.

"He doesn't want you to take my brother from him," she said with a tremble in her accented voice.

I looked behind her. Her mother was alone a few meters away with her back turned to us. She was still crying.

I turned back to the wounded man and my eyes met with Doc Spejcher's. His face was white and chalky, like all the blood had been sucked out of his body. We turned to face our patient.

We looked at the man and at the cloth blanket in his hand. How could we not have seen it before? Doc reached out and tugged the top of the blanket down. The wounded man pulled away, scared that we might damage his little cloth-covered package. He

gave out a slight moan and continued to cry. The blanket came down.

From the moment the young girl had spoken, I knew why the wounded man had guarded the small-blood soaked blanket with so much care; still, there was no way to prepare myself for what I saw. I stood up as soon as I saw it. I tried not to look. I tried with every ounce of discipline in my body to look elsewhere, but I failed. I looked again at the contents of the blanket. It was a baby. An infant lay there in the arms of his dying father. It was a brand-new life, maybe six months old. The baby wasn't moving.

"Fuck!" Doc Spejcher cried out, loud enough to cause alarm in the two women and the baby's dying father.

I looked again at the baby in the man's arms. My head started spinning and my stomach started turning. I was going to be sick. I struggled to keep my eyes off of this scene of terror. I looked at the back of the baby's head. I didn't notice at my first glance, the shock had been too much, but now I could see clearly that in the back of the baby's head was lodged a piece of shrapnel about the size of an American dime. It wasn't huge, but it was large enough for its purpose. The shrapnel had broken through the baby's soft skull and, no doubt, into its small, still-developing brain.

"It's . . . it's dead, Doc," I said.

"Of course the fucking baby is dead, Sag! You think a fucking baby can take fucking shrapnel to the head and survive?" Doc replied.

Doc seemed to be entering a state of shock himself. There was no amount of training or Marine Corps brainwashing that could have prepared us for this moment. Doc's hands were shaking now. It was obvious

that he didn't know what to do.

"What's going on here? Someone give me a sitrep."

I heard the voice and was glad for the distraction. I turned to see Lieutenant Gorman standing behind me with the translator, an Iraqi Kurd whose name no one in the unit could pronounce, but preferred to be called Apple Juice because he loved apple juice.

I tried to answer his question, but my mind was empty. I had forgotten the English language. Even my thoughts were just images; nothing was comprehensible. I couldn't move or speak.

Everything I was taught in the Marine Corps told me that these things weren't supposed to happen. The enemy wasn't human; they were combatants. There weren't supposed to be any humans here, just combatants and non-combatants, targets and civilians. I never made the connection that these titles represented real people and real families. Nobody told me there would be people here.

"One of you two, sitrep now!" the lieutenant said again, this time agitated.

"We've got one adult civilian male dead, one infant dead, and the father possibly fatally wounded by shrapnel, sir," Doc Spejcher answered from his position next to the wounded man.

"Can you save the man, Doc?" Lieutenant Gorman asked.

"I don't know, sir. He's already lost a lot of blood. I want to try, though, sir."

"Negative, we have to move. We're needed north. If we spend too much time here the rest of RCT-1 will pass us by. The battalion commander wants to

make sure we're in position to lead the assault on Al Kut," said Lieutenant Gorman.

"Sir, I just need a few minutes. Just give me a few minutes with the man," Doc Spejcher said.

It wasn't normal in the Marine Corps to question the orders of a superior officer the way Doc Spejcher did, but Lieutenant Gorman must have seen the grief in Doc's eyes, or maybe he felt bad himself for what had just happened to this family, I don't know, but he agreed to let Doc work on the man.

I looked at the two women and saw that Apple Juice had already started talking with them. Both women were still hysterical and their words were mixed with loud sobs. I don't know how Apple Juice was able to get any information out of them.

Lieutenant Gorman turned and looked at Apple Juice, then he turned back and looked at me.

"Follow me, Sag. I need you to provide me with security."

"... Roger that, sir," I managed.

I straightened out my Kevlar, then put both my shaking hands on my rifle. I followed the lieutenant towards the two women, who were still talking to Apple Juice.

"What are they saying, Apple Juice?" asked Lieutenant Gorman.

"They say they love Americans and are leaving from Baghdad to escape fighting. They say the dead man is the woman's brother through marriage, and the other is her husband. She gave birth seven months ago, and that is her son the man holds," said Apple Juice.

"Why are they standing around out here in the middle of nowhere?" asked Lieutenant Gorman.

Apple Juice turned to the older woman and started talking to her again in Arabic. The woman's eyes were swollen and red. Her face was dirty with sand, except for a few streaks under her eyes where her tears had cleaned the sand away. She was talking very fast.

I looked away from the older woman and rested my eyes on the younger girl. Her eyes met mine, but she immediately looked down into the dirt. She was wearing a traditional black robe and head cover, and the skin on her face was the only visible part of her body. She was a beautiful young woman, even with the layer of dirt and sand over her. Her skin was smooth and golden-brown, with big eyes and full lips. She was a thing of beauty, full of life—tragic life, but life—in the middle of an ugly war full of death. I caught myself staring at her and grateful for the distraction from the dead infant.

“She says Saddam has made it illegal for people to flee. They must stay in Baghdad. He has ordered Republican Guard to kill the ones who flee. This is their van. The Republican Guard set it on fire and they had no way now to travel,” said Apple Juice.

I continued to stare at the young woman as he spoke. She must have felt uncomfortable, but I couldn't help it. I wanted to hold her and comfort her and tell her that everything would be all right, even if I knew it wouldn't.

“How long ago was the Republican Guard here?” Lieutenant Gorman asked.

Apple Juice started to converse with the older lady again.

Lieutenant Gorman turned to the rear; at this, I broke my stare from the young woman and turned

to check on Doc Spejcher. Doc was working frantically on the man's neck wound, but it was still bleeding. He had not been able to get the man to put the infant down and so was now doing what he could with the infant still in the man's arms. The wounded man was still moaning and rocking back and forth while patting the baby's back. Doc was trying to get him to hold still so he could apply the gauze and wrap the wound.

"You need to finish that up, Doc. We've got to be oscar mike," the lieutenant yelled.

"Roger that, sir," Doc yelled back without turning to look at the lieutenant.

"She says it was maybe four hours. They have been sitting here trying to find a ride from someone passing. She says they must leave or Saddam will have them killed. She is very scared," said Apple Juice.

Lieutenant Gorman turned to face him.

"What about them? What are they going to do with them?" the lieutenant asked, gesturing towards her dead brother-in-law, the dead infant, and her wounded husband.

I looked again to the young girl. I saw her look at me through the tops of her eyes with her head still down. She looked at me through her eyebrows, then focused back on the dirt at our feet.

"She says they must stay here. They are dead, and they can do nothing for them. Her husband will die soon too. Her and her daughter will leave them and travel south. Al Basra is where she wants to go. She says the Americans will be good to them there. She says there is no more fighting there," Apple Juice replied.

"Fucking Christ! Who did I piss off to have this happen today?" said Lieutenant Gorman. He looked

back at Doc Spejcher, then back at the woman. “Okay, let’s pack it up here, Doc.”

I took my eyes off the young girl and looked into the face of Lieutenant Gorman. He didn’t look back at me. He turned his head towards Doc Spejcher instead.

“Pack it up, Doc. We’re oscar mike.”

I wanted to say something, but I didn’t have to.

“Sir, just a few more minutes,” Doc called back.

“No, that’s it, Doc. We’ve got to move. We’re supposed to be another five clicks north already. Pack up your shit. There’s nothing else we can do for these people,” said Lieutenant Gorman.

“I just need another few minutes with him, sir!” yelled Doc Spejcher.

“You fucking heard me, Doc! We’re out of here in two mikes,” Lieutenant Gorman yelled back.

There was nothing I could do. I looked back at the young girl one last time, trying to memorize the details of her face.

Apple Juice was already jogging back to his vehicle. Lieutenant Gorman put his hand in the air and gave the signal for the scouts to mount up, and then he looked back at Doc, who had already packed his medical bag and was now walking towards us.

Doc Spejcher stared straight into the face of Lieutenant Gorman as he approached us, and Lieutenant Gorman stared straight back. As he passed us, he bumped shoulders with the lieutenant, making the lieutenant’s body turn. Doc never stopped. He just kept walking toward his vehicle, and Lieutenant Gorman never said anything to him about his display of disrespect.

I mounted my vehicle and took my spot back in

NONFICTION

the scout hatch. I looked over to the van. I could see the man still sitting in the dirt, rocking back and forth. His wife was standing over top of him, and she bent down to kiss him. I could tell she said something to him, but I couldn't hear it and would've never understood it anyways. Then she straightened out and turned, grabbed her daughter by the arm, and headed into the desert. I knew the man would soon be dead. Of course, the damage was already done; there was nothing we could do.

What an ugly thing, I thought. We never even told those women sorry.

We headed north for Al Hayy.

NONFICTION

Definitions

Sitrep:

Exit through Jackson (*Section Winner*)
R. Brandon Long

My father died from leukemia when I was four years old. A disease his mom and my mom claim was a compliment from his service to our country during the Vietnam War. He was a medic, and they believe he experienced overexposure to the chemical Agent Orange. I once compiled and collaged his war letters, photographs, and news clippings for a university photography project, which won a Provost's Award. I've studied images of my dad and endured many passionate yet weightless stories about who he was. I've mentally deconstructed his siblings, trying to piece together attributes like couples do when expecting a newborn, but I've never really known my dad.

I've never seen video or heard audio of the man who fathered and helped raise me during my first four years. Not until the eve of my thirty-seventh birthday. Our family gathered on a Sunday to celebrate my birthday along with my uncle's, which was only days after.

After a chaotic yet functional turkey dinner with the usual sides of mashed potatoes and microwave carrots, we blew out candles on two different cakes. Grandma then asked her family to gather in the living room. An unusual request, as she normally stayed in the kitchen scraping plates, washing dishes, and finding the perfect-sized used plastic containers to house leftovers. I anticipated her informing us of the serious consequences of living eight decades. Instead, she spoke of having an old reel-to-reel tape she found cleaning the basement. She then explained, after contacting multiple camera shops, she found one capable

of converting the tape to compact disc.

My wife placed the mystery disc into a portable DVD player. Sitting at the back of the room, I could see a still-image of a view from someone's backyard deck. Green trees and grass suggested the picture was captured in summer. Then, it happened. He came to life. For thirty minutes, my dad's voice, shrouded behind a still image of a stranger's yard, permeated a room of mixed emotions. I soon figured the tape was a recording my dad had sent while stationed in Thailand.

My mom was there. She wept in short yelps and buried herself in prayer hands. Every once in a while, my dad would say something funny and she would part her fingers, nod, and smile. We listened as he spoke from somewhere inside the little audio machine. He asked if Uncle Joe was still driving his Bug. He's not. It's become a planter on the north side of the house, patiently awaiting resurrection. He told Uncle Dennis, who we consistently tease about eating too much, that he should probably eat because he's a beanpole. He spoke directly to my mom once and called her "love." He commented a couple times that he hoped we weren't bored.

I was spending time with a person I've never really known and in which I held only transparent memories. The kind of memories you find yourself questioning if maybe they weren't a dream you had once. But this was real. I listened for the first time in thirty-three years to the voice of my father. My sister was only eight months old when he passed, so I looked to her for reaction. She held her head up and wore a smile for the room, but I knew she was confused. My Uncle Joe held his heaping ice cream bowl in one

hand and laughed occasionally, like brothers do when reminiscing. Uncle Dennis sat in slacks and a sloppy button-up shirt and nodded to events he agreed with and remembered.

I tried not to look around much. Being Bob's only son with a countenance which others often took for my dad's, I knew my reactions were public. I pulled the brim of my cap lower, crossed one leg over the other, and brought a hand to my eyes to focus on listening. I kept taking big breaths and my insides acted like I was on a first date. There are times when a good beer commercial brings me to tears, but my eyes instead resembled the Salt Flats. My grandma asked if I knew who it was. I didn't answer. Instead, my sister looked at me and said, "Uh, he knows, Grandma." Then, although he addressed his own father, it was as if he spoke directly to me.

"Hey, you're darn right, I'm still interested in a chunk of that land around Jackson, Pop. Uh, the closer to—to the town, the better, but I know what the odds and prices are for that. But, uh, how about Hoback Junction or something? Now, with your new car you can run up there and take a look. But, uh, can't you drag Joey along up? I really wish we could get a place up there. I'll pitch in with some of my bot. Anyway, uh, keep me posted on it, okay?"

My family never acquired a plot near Jackson, and until this point no one even mentioned the prospect. I, however, have always owned an affinity for Jackson Hole, Yellowstone, and the surrounding land. In fact, my wife and I married in the century-old church in Mammoth. As a family, we take one vacation together a year. It's always to Yellowstone, where we exit through Jackson.

The Corporate Media and the Threat to Our Democracy

Eladio Bobadilla

Advances in technology were supposed to benefit democracy and give us all an equal voice. That has not happened. Instead, corporations in America have consolidated control and shut out the voice of ordinary people and forced their narrative on our nation. Critics of the media often point to bias as the issue to be addressed. I do not believe the problem with the American media is that simple. The issue is not some vague notion of bias—bias is simply part of human nature. The real problem is a false promise of objectivity by corporate-controlled outlets with agendas that are contradictory to the people’s interests and to a democratic society.

In the last twenty years, globalization and concentration of corporate power has resulted in only nine conglomerates controlling all of the major media in the United States; this includes TV, film, music, and most cable channels, as well as book and magazine publishers (Herman and Chomsky viii). These few giant corporations control what we see, hear, and read, and they all share an interest in pushing a dangerous agenda that benefits them at any cost. As Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky point out, the goal of media corporations “is to inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state.” In other words, the media and the corporations that financially support it benefit from a complacent and ignorant population, since the media needs adver-

tisers, and advertisers need mindless consumers.

This model differs vastly from state propaganda typically found in authoritarian regimes. Noam Chomsky observes that “this isn’t the same as state control but is nevertheless a system of corporate control very closely linked to the state” (152). That is to say, the propaganda is not coming from the government, but the government is controlled by corporations through campaign funding, media exposure, and, in some cases, direct intervention. In essence, our government, whether controlled by Republicans or Democrats, is really a puppet of corporate America, and the media plays a central role in this operation. As Naomi Rockler-Gladen points out, “The media impacts our society politically, economically, and ideologically” (288).

While corporations essentially control the state behind the scenes, it is essential that government be attacked in public. That is because there are enough people in government who want to regulate corporations and enough public control of government that it can, at times, pose a threat to corporate power. So while the corporate machine largely controls the state, the government must, at the same time, be painted as the enemy in order to rouse anger against the only entity that can, at least in theory, represent the people’s interests. The media is a perfect vehicle to accomplish this seemingly difficult goal.

Even ostensibly liberal mainstream media outlets rarely depart from the corporate-friendly narrative, but one so-called news network goes beyond bias and crosses into deliberate misinformation and propaganda: Fox News. Fox News calls itself “fair and balanced” and bills itself as “America’s Newsroom,” but its contents can hardly be classified as news. As

Eric Alterman says, “Fox is no ordinary news organization. [It] employs Newt Gingrich, Mike Huckabee, Sarah Palin, Dick Morris, and many other politicians and potential Republican presidential candidates” (10). During the George Bush presidency, it was essentially a government mouthpiece, regurgitating Bush’s dictates and used by the administration in Orwellian fashion to prop up support for an illegal war, hide the facts of the invasion, and advance the administration’s domestic surveillance program, as well as to cut domestic safety nets and push through tax cuts that disproportionately benefited the rich and hurt the poor and the middle class. Since Bush left office, the network has been instrumental in propagating subversive and irrelevant but dangerously divisive ideas about President Barack Obama (such as his alleged “socialist ties,” his religion, and even his country of birth). What it has failed to do, and what every other news network has failed to do, is hold the government accountable for real transgressions and substantive issues, such as the president’s broken promise to close Guantanamo Bay or enact truly universal health care coverage. This perfectly illustrates the mainstream media’s tendency to support the government when its policies benefit corporations, but adamantly oppose it when it dares challenge the status quo.

Perhaps Americans are starting to realize that the state of journalism is a joke, which is why they routinely turn to a comedian for real news. A 2009 study by the Pew Research for the People and the Press “concluded that ‘The Daily Show’ [with Jon Stewart] is clearly impacting American dialogue and getting people to think critically about the public square” (Kakutani). Stewart is antithetic to the “real news”

in that he is a comedian who admits his show is entertainment, yet he, unlike “real” journalists, has the courage to challenge politicians and corporations, to explore the truth instead of abiding by a false notion of objectivity, and to give us intelligent, rational analysis. As Michiko Kikutani observes, in an age where the major networks mix entertainment and sensationalism with news, “It’s been ‘The Daily Show’ that has tenaciously tracked big, ‘super-depressing’ issues like cherry-picking of prewar intelligence, the politicization of Department of Justice and the efforts of the Bush White House to augment its executive power.” In a 2009 *Time* poll, Stewart was voted the most trusted source of news in America (“Poll Results”), indicating Americans are starting to see through the corporate agenda and, sadly, turning to a comedian to get real news.

The more we examine corporate media, the more the myth of the “liberal media” is discredited. But what is truly worrisome is that there is not even room for real conservatives or real liberals in TV media coverage anymore. What we get in most of the so-called liberal media are neoliberals who tell people what they want to hear but remain slaves of industry, and what we get on Fox News is a paranoid cohort of unstable commentators with a fascist streak and a dangerous ultra-religious, nationalist agenda. The issues discussed in most networks are often of little substance and of little value to the public. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) complains, rightly, I believe, that “The essential problem with television is not just a right-wing bias in news and programming. It’s that the most important issues facing the middle-class and working people in our country are rarely discussed.” In fact, the

less real issues are discussed, the easier it is to distract viewers with non-issues, and the more opportunity the ruling class has to plunder and to control the economy.

People's movements, especially those that challenge corporate control, are ignored or vilified. A perfect example is the Occupy Wall Street movement, which has managed to grow into a massive anti-corporate movement spanning the entire country, yet has received little attention. When the media has covered OWS, it usually has been to discredit it, to attack it, or to defend police brutality against it. Even though this movement represents a large contingent of the population and the grievances of an even larger segment of Americans, the media knows that it must be sidelined because its rhetoric does not align nicely with the corporate agenda.

One of the few exceptions to the lack of citizen coverage has been the Tea Party movement. Peter Hart notes that "Citizen movements are hardly ever front-page news, even when they have clearly identifiable political agendas and broad-based support," yet the Tea Party movement has made headlines and occupied a significant portion of news programming across all major TV networks. What makes this an exception is that the narrative of this movement coincides with the interests of corporate America, namely deregulated markets, lower taxes, and fervent nationalism. Many Tea Party activists have legitimate worries and concerns, but, thanks to a media unwilling to challenge the government and ask the tough questions, "they are hearing answers from only one place: Fox, talk radio, and Sarah Palin" (Chomsky qtd. in Rothschild 15). Their legitimate concerns are given simplistic and

dangerous answers, often in the form of conspiracy theories, nationalistic symbolism, or Nazi-style scapegoating.

There is anger to be directed at both political parties. Bush left our nation in tatters, and Obama has only continued the same policies under a liberal flag. In fact, as Noam Chomsky told Matthew Rothschild of *The Progressive*, “The financial industry preferred Obama to McCain . . . They expected to be rewarded and they were. Then Obama began to criticize greedy bankers and proposed measures to regulate them. And the punishment was swift: They were going to shift their money to the Republicans. So Obama said bankers were fine guys” (15) and departed from his previously tough rhetoric. The media, particularly Fox News, have not examined this relationship. Instead, they have focused on juvenile name-calling and pushing conspiracy theories, completely disregarding the issues that truly matter.

With all these developments, one has to conclude that something is deeply wrong in our country and in our media. In 2004, Britt Laurence identified fourteen points which make up fascism. Of these, at least eight are constantly propagated or defended in TV news networks (even the so-called liberal outlets, but especially Fox): “Powerful and continuing expressions of nationalism . . . identification of enemies/ scapegoats . . . avid militarism . . . a controlled mass media . . . obsession with national security . . . religion and ruling elite tied together . . . power of corporations protected.” This should be a frightening realization. Supporters of the status quo will point to the Internet, and say it has allowed independent media and citizens to counter the corporate media, but they ignore the

power and influence money has on communication, even on the Internet. The same technological improvements that make it possible for non-corporate actors to publicize their views “make global empires feasible and lucrative in a manner unthinkable in the past” (McChesney 3). It is much easier to find corporate websites filled with deceitful information than it is to find independent sources, given search engines’ use of ad-based placement.

To illustrate this unfortunate truth, we need look no further than the 2010 offshore spill of BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil rig. The media failed to go beyond giving the public vague numbers and pointing out how BP’s stock was affected. They did not hold BP executives to account or ask tough questions regarding how the incident came to be, the weak response, or the environmental implications. So the TV angle was covered with self-censorship, but BP still had to worry about the Internet. To make sure the public was less likely to find adverse information, BP “[purchased] such terms as ‘Deepwater Horizon’ and ‘Gulf of Mexico’ so that when a user types these words into search engines, the results prominently feature a ‘sponsored link’ to BP’s official page on its response to the spill” (Ahmed). Maureen MacKey, a media analyst interviewed for a *Times UK* article on this development, says, “What it effectively does is that it bumps down other legitimate news and opinion pieces that are addressing the spill,” and notes that “BP is paying big money for that.” Big money that only such a massive corporation can muster.

I am, of course, not suggesting that speech be regulated. What I believe is badly needed is a public alternative to all the corporate-dominated media that

keeps us docile and uninformed. Some say that we already have public alternatives like PBS and NPR. Yet public television and radio are rapidly resembling corporate media and abandoning their sense of public service. NPR accepts large amounts of commercial advertisers “that make up a big chunk of NPR’s funding” (Drew). For its part, PBS is in even worse shape. A Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting study found that “More than one-third of all on-camera sources during the two weeks studies were representatives of corporate America or Wall Street” (“Public TV More Corporate”) with “consumer, environmental, or labor advocates [being] almost invisible.” Everyday citizens were only 5.7% of sources, and “citizen activists accounted for only 4.5%.”

A better model for our democracy would look more like the United Kingdom’s BBC, which has been hailed as a prototype for democratic news-gathering, intelligent analysis, balanced programming, and non-partisan watchdog of the government and the markets. As Jean Seaton, a professor of media studies at the University of Westminster, says, public broadcasting “has been useful because it has been creative, authoritative, and original.” None of that can be said for American corporate media, which cares more about profits than about the public service journalism it is supposed to provide. Without a robust form of public competition, corporate media remains a dangerous threat to our republic. It is time for change in our country. It must begin with the media.

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My Father's Voice Jennifer Greenlese

My father's voice has different sounds: one that my teachers and friends hear and the one that echoes in my ears. His words speak volumes to both ears. While one hears a father who offers his child the world, the means and abilities to obtain her dreams and desires—everything a father should do—the younger me, the child, hears a voice of condescension, arrogance and indifference; nevertheless, it is a voice I must abide or lose all semblance of security.

Nebraska, 1974, Sunday Brunch in the Officer's Club: I drop a piece of cantaloupe and reach down to pick it up. Before my hand touches the piece of fruit, I am stopped abruptly by the sound of my father's voice speaking these words: "Don't touch it! It's not your job!" I knew what was coming, having been corrected before in a place of business. My insides shake. The knowledge of what is coming explodes within my mind and auto-pilot kicks in. I am no longer aware of my surroundings. Somehow, I continue eating the meal which is before me. Voices, noises, and the bustle of the club seem to disappear around me as rapidly as my outward appearance continues its emotionless, yet essential, functions: the obligations and demands of an officer's child. I know how I must present myself, how not to show the feelings of fear which build within me.

California, 1996, on a beautiful Sunday afternoon, I am stuck waiting impatiently for my child's prescription. From behind me, two hands grab my shoulders. Surprised, I jump slightly; however, the words "what are you doing here?" cause my insides to shake, heart to pound, and my mind to freeze. It is

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not my father's voice, but that of our pediatrician and friend who previously called in the prescription. "Filling the prescription you just called in" are the words which leave my mouth as I simultaneously bury the unwarranted fears within me.

Hawaii, 2010, I find myself upon the shores of my childhood home once again; however, this time it is to repair a wound older than my father's voice: my mother's death. In fact, it may be the cause of my father's controlling and condescending voice. Twelve days after my seventh birthday, the last one she would attend, my mother passed away. I didn't know that then, just as I did not know that Christmas would be the last time I'd see my mother well. The next afternoon a navy—blue ambulance swallowed her—bed and all. I sit on the brown-carpeted stairs, ignorant of the changes my future holds, the changes which now bring me back to the world's paradise and the beginnings of my purgatory.

Gentle surfs, a boogie board, and a wonderful friend I've known for thirty-five years fill the day. That evening at her home, memories of our youth surface. Knowing my father and the purpose of my trip to her home town, my friend, overcome by curiosity, asked questions that never before, in our many years of friendship, had I contemplated.

"How did your mom and dad meet?"

"I don't know."

"Ask him."

"No! You don't ask Dad."

"Why?"

"You just don't."

"Why not? He's alive, isn't he?"

"Yes, well, uh, I don't know why. You just don't ask Dad!"

* * *

Now, at the age of forty-five, with six children of my own consistently asking about past events, I question: How could he hurt me now? What could he possibly do? Hang up! Dialing a number forever etched in my memory, I hear the phone ring. I wonder the outcome my boldness will bring. Another ring and I pull the phone away from my ear. Looking for the end key, I hear my father's voice on the other end:

"Hello."

"Hi, Dad! I'm in Hawaii visiting Debbie."

"Debbie?! How is she doing?"

"She's fine. You can speak with her."

I pass my father over to my friend while putting the phone on speaker. Hearing the formalities and politeness of conversation in the background, I locate the paper and pencil to take notes when Debbie asks the ominous question: "How did you meet your wife?" To my surprise, my father actually answers the question.

My father's voice is different. What am I hearing? I hear joy, excitement, and contentment. I am hearing the voice my teachers and friends have always heard. He is speaking about Mom! Really? Nobody speaks about Mom; it is not allowed. I write down the knowledge my ears are receiving. It is confusing yet wonderful, the words flowing from my father's mouth. I hear his voice and I am not ashamed; I am not frightened. I am stunned, shocked, and amazed, however, with the amount of pleasure emanating from the phone.

Debbie hands me the phone:

"Hi, Dad!"

"It was nice speaking to Debbie."

Click!

"Dad? . . . Bye."

FICTION



The Fall (*Section Winner*)
Brittany Redford

He locked on as tight as he could, but he felt he was losing. He could feel himself falling and there was nothing he could do about it. His grip was faltering the harder he held on. He tried to lock his grip even tighter, but it all seemed useless.

He gave a quick glance down at the waiting ground below him. The sharp rocks seem to chant with a mocking tone, “Fall! Fall!” Even the compacted earth seemed harsh and unforgiving to his weakened and frail form. The fear made his whole body quiver, the shivers of his fate without rest.

The breeze began to pick up, another force pushing him to his fate. He kept asking himself the same question every being does in a time like this: why? Why is this happening to me? It is too soon. There is so much more I wanted to see. The breeze made the branch moan in resistance.

The branch, the life force he clung to, now seemed to be giving up as well. The ever-increasing wind, now his opponent, was shaking the branch with force he never knew possible. Maybe it was doing him a favor, making the end come quicker than he was willing to admit.

As his grip weakened even more, his thoughts turned to his family. Would they even know that this is where his final resting place was? Would they even miss him? The wind began to howl as the unfamiliar sound of rattling radiated from below. Would he just be another casualty of fate? Then, all of the sudden, his mind began to shift.

Maybe he had this all wrong. Maybe this was

his destiny. Maybe this is what was meant to happen. Maybe his remains were meant to be part of this beautiful countryside he had come to love. Maybe this was just a poetic end to a long-lived life. Maybe.

With that last thought, his grip let out with a final jerk. The end now seemed inevitable. His body began to sway with the push and pull of the wind. He thought of his life, family, friends, and he just simply let go.

Instead of his body plummeting to the rocks below like he thought it would, his body caught on the powerful wind and he went soaring. It was amazing; it was like he was one of the birds he had seen so many times in the sky overhead, soaring with their wings outstretched, feathered fingers touching the air. He looked at the trees around him, his brightly colored friends clinging to their homes with the fervor he just had. He wanted to yell that it was okay to let go; they would be free.

After an extended flight, he slowly fluttered to the ground for a soft landing. His journey was now complete. Fate had been right; this is where he was meant to be. He looked at the other friends that joined him on the ground, the peace that enveloped them there.

Fall had come and now had ended, the leaves serving their seasonal purpose.

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The Faerie Door

Elizabeth Ruttenbur

Anne quickly put all the breakable knick-knacks from the bottom bookshelves onto the highest ones when she heard the loud rumble from the rusted muffler of her sister's car. Anne knew she had a moment or two to close the bathroom door before they reached the front door. Lucas had a tendency to unravel a roll of toilet paper if given the opportunity. As she closed the bathroom door, a whiff of incense overpowered her senses as it swirled into the hall from the next room.

The Quiet Room is what her daughter had called it. It was a place her family could quietly meditate and read. Bookshelves were lined with not just books, but jars full of different herbs. In the corner was a large brown rocking chair that looked as if it had gotten a lot of use throughout the years. Potted plants lined the walls and hung from hooks in the ceiling. Against the wall in the corner of the room, behind a large pot, was a tiny door made from wood and Popsicle sticks that were painted green and gold. It fashioned a gold-painted foam ball that had been hot-glued to the wood for a door handle. Green Spanish moss surrounded the outside of the door, making it look as if it had been built into the wall instead of leaning against it as it did.

It was not like the fancy faerie doors that Anne had seen on the Internet, but she was proud of the one she and her daughter had made. Next to the door was a stone with a tiny thimble of honey and some fresh herbs from the garden.

There was a clear view of the miniature doorway from the hall, and sometimes when Anne or her

daughter would pass the Quiet Room, they could see tiny balls of light in the corner of their eyes. Her daughter would peek into the room from the hallway to search for the faeries when she was younger. Now her daughter was older and the magic of her childhood seemed lost, but Lucas was a baby and his fascination with the room was as vibrant as ever.

There was a knock on the front door. Anne hurried to answer the door, knowing her sister's hands would be full. When she opened it, there was a woman juggling the screen door, a toddler and a diaper bag all at once. Lucas's face lit up as he saw Anne standing in the doorway. Lucas reached for Anne immediately, giggling and spewing baby babble from his lips.

"Is that Auntie Anne?" her sister grunted, moving past the door to set down the diaper bag and hand over the boy.

It was an unspoken agreement among them ever since Lucas was born that, when both he and Anne were in the same room, the baby would be handed over to Anne. Lucas never seemed to mind the agreement. Out of all the aunts and uncles Lucas had, he took to Anne the most.

"He'll need to be fed in an hour, and I just changed his diaper before we left. He may be ready for a nap soon as well. I'll only be gone for a couple of hours." Ashley stretched her back, relieved to have gotten rid of the added weight.

"Take your time." Anne made a funny face at Lucas, who did not notice because he was too busy playing with the necklace around her neck.

"Bye, bug." Ashley kissed his head and immediately fled out the door. She paused for a moment once the door had closed, waiting for the familiar scream of

protest when she left her son alone. It was never the case when she left him with her sister, but it was habit to wait and see if everything would be all right. There was silence, and she left with a smile on her face, knowing Lucas would be all right.

Anne set Lucas down on his feet, where he toddled unsteadily for a moment. His eyes looked as if his father's blue and his mother's brown were at war with each other. Ashley's brown was winning out, Anne thought as his gaze studied her face.

Anne only smiled at Lucas, turned, and left him in the living room to finish her dishes. Lucas liked that Auntie Anne never seemed to fuss over the things he did. She never told him 'no' about getting into the cupboards that magically held his own toys. She did not even seem to mind much when he pulled books off the shelves and onto the floor.

Lucas meandered into the hallway and looked into the kitchen. He made a sound to get her attention, and when she turned and smiled at him, he toddled back into the living room to the familiar cupboard underneath the TV. He pulled out the blocks and the toys that made noise, but he always quickly got bored with them. It was not as fun as watching the balls of lights in the one room down the hall.

Lucas eventually ended up in the Quiet Room, attempting to grab the jars of herbs that were much too high for his fingers to reach. He sat down in front of the bookshelf and waited patiently.

"Ah!" he yelled out, not quite yet mastering any more words other than "ma" and "da." He heard a giggle, and soon balls of multicolored lights burst from behind a large plant and began to dance about the room. Lucas crawled to the chair and pulled himself

up onto the worn, comfortable cushions, watching the lights dance and play about the air.

Anne heard his giggles from the Quiet Room and smiled. She wiped her hand down her jeans as she finished the last of the dishes. The floor creaked as she walked down the hall. The balls of light ducked behind the plants and jars of herbs when they heard her footsteps.

Anne peered into the room, seeing Lucas curled up on the chair, watching the doorway with his thumb in his mouth and his index finger curled around his nose.

“What are you doing?” Anne smiled.

Lucas smiled around his thumb and reached for her with his free hand. Anne walked to him, picked him up, and sat down in the chair with him in her lap. He laid his head on her chest, thumb still stuck in his mouth, murmuring things that made no sense to Anne.

Anne began to hum and rock back and forth. It did not take long for him to fall asleep. It was not long after that that Anne’s eyes began to dip closed as well, but she opened them again when she heard the tinkle of laughter.

Looking down on her lap, she saw that Lucas was gone. She had not felt the toddler slide off her lap. She was not asleep long enough, if at all, for him to slip away so quickly.

“Lucas,” she called from the recliner, waiting to hear the unsteady footsteps of her nephew in the hallway. The silence made her call out again, but there was nothing. Panic gripped her as she pictured her nephew pushing on the baby gate that blocked the stairs so hard it opened for him to tumble down the

stairs. Anne bolted up from the recliner, and ran to the kitchen to see the baby gate was locked and secure.

“Where did you get to, you little monster?”

Anne called out playfully as her heartbeat slowed from the fright.

It was then she heard the peal of laughter once again. She turned to examine the living room, but found it empty except for the few scattered toys about the floor. With a frown, she checked her room, and even behind the closed bathroom door.

“Lucas,” she yelled out in a wave of anxiety, as it was apparent the toddler was not there. It was when the last syllable of his name left her lips she heard the faraway sound of her nephew’s babbling voice, followed by the same tiny laughter she had been thinking was Lucas’s. Her eyes turned to the open door of the Quiet Room where the laughter had come from. There she noticed for the first time that there was a black hole where the tiny wooden door stood open.

Anne’s heart jumped into her throat as she rushed to the miniature doorway, shoving the palmed tree pot out of her way. On hands and knees, she lowered her body flat to the floor. She stared into the darkness beyond the doorway of a door that had never been made to open. She heard Lucas’s voice once more, but it was fainter than before.

“Lucas,” Anne screamed into the darkness as the door began to quiver and slammed closed, cutting the cry of “no” from Anne’s lips.

The King's Crimson Robes

Krysti Meyer

The court jesters lead the procession, as they do every year. They wear their bright colors, oranges, reds, and yellows. Their faces are decorated in checkboard patterns of black and white. Their lips are painted in jovial grins. But their eyes are sad and unsmiling. The bells sewn onto the pointed toes of their shoes jingle as they cartwheel and twirl, announcing to the court that the ceremony is about to begin.

The dancers follow closely behind them, parading into the hall in lines of threes and fours. Their costumes are a shocking emerald green that boasts of each girl's fertility. They hold their heads high on impossibly long, graceful necks. Their arms are stretched toward the courtiers, as though begging to be noticed. But inwardly, each girl is hoping just to blend in.

The girl with the vibrant red hair cannot help but catch everyone's attention. Her name is Oleander. She is perhaps the most beautiful of all the dancers with her long, balletic legs, and that sea of hair that cascades down her back and reflects the candlelight like a prism. But they aren't watching her because of her beauty. They are watching her because, in a vain attempt at humor, the jester in yellow extends his jingling foot as she passes by. Oleander tumbles to the floor, but no one laughs.

Oleander's cheeks are burning, more fiery even than her hair. She stands, extends that long neck, and forces herself to smile. The other dancers have already paraded past her. She hurries to take a position at the

back of the group. Perhaps now, she will be able to go unnoticed by the King.

Oleander and the other dancers stand posed on trembling legs as the King enters the room. A hush falls over the courtiers. The King is dressed in robes of the deepest crimson. He is always dressed in robes of the deepest crimson. He doesn't smile at his court. He doesn't even look at them. He is focused only on the dancers about to perform for him.

Oleander watches the piper dressed in purple. He stands in the corner of the hall. He gives a small, bitter shake of his head as he takes a deep preparatory breath and begins to play.

The cluster of dancers comes alive, moving as one like the grass that grows on the bottom of the sea, twisting and turning together with the tides. They balance on the pointes of shoes that defy gravity. They plié with deep, bending knees that compel the men in the crowd to pay attention.

Oleander watches the King as she dances. Every few minutes, he points to one of the dancing girls. The jesters then maneuver through the field of twirling, leaping dancers to remove her from the group. Tears of the deepest relief roll down the rouged cheeks of the discarded dancers as they are pulled from the hall. Oleander prays she will join them soon.

But the group of girls thins quickly, and she is still dancing. Her arms are like the branches of a willow tree. They bend and reach with unparalleled grace. She knows she has caught the King's attention. She can feel his eyes on her. They are such strange eyes, like never-ending pits of blackness. His eyes make Oleander feel so afraid. Her hands shake as she sinks into an arabesque.

The piper begins playing a different, darker tune, and the girls keep dancing, faster now. The skin of Oleander's feet cracks under the pressure and begins to bleed. The King licks his lips.

Oleander considers the dancers around her. Only four remain. She watches them move in unison with herself. They are all so beautiful and lithe, but also so young and so frightened. Their fear fills Oleander with anger, anger with the King and the spectacle he has turned them all into. Her hands stop shaking. Her legs stop trembling. She dances in defiance. The King takes notice.

The piper stops playing as the King raises his hand. The dancers stop dancing. Everyone watches. The King smiles, and his teeth are very strange. They remind Oleander of beasts she has seen in storybooks.

He points at Oleander. Time stops. She turns to look at the circle of courtiers that fill the hall. Their eyes have an empty, hollow look. One woman is crying as she strokes the hair of a dancer that Oleander assumes is her daughter. Oleander hears her whisper to the girl, "Thanks be to God that you are safe for another year."

Oleander can hear her own mother's cries of grief from somewhere at the back of the hall. She wants to tell her that it will be all right, that she is ready, but her voice has become lost somewhere inside her.

The jesters take Oleander by the arms and lead her into a chamber off the side of the hall. The King is there, waiting for her. The jesters shove her toward him and make a quick exit. Oleander hears them lock the door from the outside.

The King steps toward her. Oleander sees his

deep crimson robes up close. She expected them to be rich and velvety, but they are not. In fact, they look matted. And the crimson isn't smooth like it appeared to be from a distance. It is splotchy and stained-looking. The robes smell so bad, so metallic and foul.

The King smiles at Oleander and his teeth are so very sharp and pointed. The King takes Oleander's hand and spins her around on the pointe of her slipper. Her back is to him. Her hair is crushed between them. She closes her eyes and imagines she is dancing in a field of nightshade, free at last of fear. She feels those sharp teeth break the skin at her neck. Oleander rides the fresh wave of crimson that splashes onto the King's robes.

The Mouthwash Murders

Robin Nielson

“This is the third one.”

Henry Beckett heard it as he ducked under the yellow police tape and into the tidy Lancaster Avenue apartment. Having known the former tenant, he had expected a disarray of belongings, a clutter of dishes, an odor. He had been surprised to see none of these things. He wandered from room to room, looking closely at the left-behind artifacts of an uninteresting life.

The kitchen: every dish was in its place. An empty stainless-steel sink, bright morning sun reflecting through invisible window glass. The living room: perfectly military in its precision of pillows and knick-knacks. Polished aluminum coffee table legs reflected mirror images of investigators’ sock-covered feet walking past in search of clues. The killer had not been in these rooms.

“Hey, there’s her cat.”

Cat? He looked closely. He saw no animal hair. The place was clean, very clean. He began to doubt.

The bedroom: there was no dust. Curtains, gossamer and airy, a lovely shade of silver, hung straight in the casement framing the glass, twin to the kitchen. No rain mixed with debris on the sill. Clean. The carpet was a match to the sill. Vacuum patterns in the light gray where the machine had been pulled back and forth, back and forth, to ensure nothing was left behind but rug. The bed was made, covers hung in precise measure from the floor. The killer had not been in this room.

He made his way down the hall to the bath-

room. No sign of mildew on the shower curtain and no rings in the tub, the toilet, or the sink. No expected water rings under shampoo or conditioner bottles. The soap bar was bereft of hair. Even the little mounds of dried suds one would expect were missing. This room met his scrutiny and passed the mark. His doubt intensified and he reached for the bright silver frame of the medicine chest door.

Comb, brush, hairspray. Eyeliner, lipstick, blush. A bottle of aspirin, wart remover, rose-scented douche. A toothbrush. He looked without touching any of the contents. He looked intently and even raised himself on his toes, thinking perhaps he was missing it behind the row of tallest-to-shortest lotion bottles. It wasn't there. This room proved him. The test was failed. His doubt vanished like breath from the dead. The killer had. . .

"Hey, Beckett." He was startled from his vindication. "Boss wants you in the laundry room. Quit messing around. You don't want your DNA getting messed up in a crime scene." Lieutenant Toby Masterson jerked his thumb over his shoulder to indicate which direction Doctor Henry Beckett, coroner of the Washington DC Police Department, Tenth Precinct, should travel to view the victim. Beckett liked Masterson. He had a fresh smile.

Henry Beckett walked slowly, retracing the steps he had just taken, wondering to himself, how could a person not have such a necessity in their possession? Others had it. Most didn't seem to bother using it. How could someone simply not have it? He walked past the kitchen into the laundry. The killer had been in this room.

The body of Lieutenant Martha Johnson was

propped in a chair in the corner. She had slipped from the upright position she had been left in, and her upper body was laid on the table top. It looked as though she were resting her head on her arm contemplating her coming day. Next to her on the table was a small blue towel, a toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss, and a bottle of mouthwash. A small bottle like the kind found in overnight bags or cheap hotels. There was a litter box under the table, hardly noticeable. It didn't smell.

There were two other men. One was taking pictures; the other, taking notes, was the boss, Chief Bart Macness. This case brought him in. It was one of his own: the second of his own, the third with the same M.O.

"I don't get it." Brandon Farmer snapped pictures as he spoke. "Mouthwash. Toothpaste. Dental floss. Psycho dentist on the loose, maybe?"

"Just take the pictures." The chief looked up as Beckett came in. He started to explain the crime scene and the possible entry scenario to the coroner. "We figure she knew him. Just like Nate. I want time of death."

Henry Beckett looked from Chief Macness to the slumped body of Lieutenant Johnson. He knew he could answer the question right then. He also knew he couldn't.

The time of death had been 2:27 a.m. Henry had always been timely. He liked things neat, clean, and timely. When he had knocked on the door it was 1:30 in the morning. He didn't want to disturb her neighbors so he knocked lightly, then he rang the bell. She was home. He knew it. He had watched her come home and waited until the lights were out and had

been for several hours. He heard the shuffle of slippers in the hallway, the slide of the peephole cover. He had smiled into the door.

Once inside, they had chatted. He had come with some excuse about information on the other two murders. He knew she would listen; she was one of the investigators. She had known the murdered officer, Nathan Pickford. She and Nate had at least one thing in common. He told her about the chemicals that were in both bodies, what the first one was and how it caused the victims to paralyze. He told her about the second chemical, the chemical that actually killed them, and how it had been used to finish the job quickly so they wouldn't suffer and panic while their lungs shut down and they suffocated. That it wasn't fair to make them suffer like that, not breathing, even if they had made it difficult for other people to breathe. She had understood at that moment. She had made a move, but it wasn't fast enough. The needle in his hand was faster. The shock of cold steel in her belly gave him just enough time to grab her and hold her. He was bigger. It was easy. Nate had been more difficult. They had struggled, but only for the sixty seconds it took the drug to work. The boy, Tomas, he never even felt the jab.

He had lifted her and carried her into the room off the kitchen. There was a nightlight in there. It turned out to be the laundry. It was a nice room equipped with stainless-steel appliances, and a small table and chair. It reminded him of 1950s diner sets: shiny, chrome, clean. He had sat her in the chair and took the items from his jacket pocket. The things he wanted to share with her.

“You'll be able to breathe for a little while lon-

ger, but you can't talk," he told her. "I wanted to talk to you first."

He told her about the other two—Nathan Pickford and the park mime, Tomas O'Henry.

He explained that he had tried to tell Nate about his breath. He had offered him mints and gum. He told her that it was he who had drawn Nate's name for the "secret present" last Christmas and how dismayed he was when Nate made a spectacle of the dental hygiene kit he had given him. "He threw it in the nearest trash can with such fanfare. It had to be done. There was nothing else for it."

He told her about Tomas. He said that Tomas wasn't a bad mime and that he had watched him from his park bench for weeks while he ate lunch in the plaza beneath his favorite cherry tree. He thought Tomas did a nice job as a mime. He didn't need to get so close to Beckett's face, though. Most especially while he had been trying to eat his lunch. Did mimes really think that, just because they didn't talk, they could neglect their teeth? It had been horrible. He explained to her how he had nearly puked. He knew he wasn't the only person in the park that Tomas got that close to. "It was a health hazard. It had to be done; there was no way around it."

Martha Johnson's eyes blinked slowly, once.

Henry Beckett spoke quietly to Martha. "I want to educate you," he said. "Some people believe in an afterlife and others believe in reincarnation. Perhaps, if either of these is true, you will take this information with you and use it in your next life. I tried to tell you about it at work, but you wouldn't listen to me. So now we will talk." He proceeded to explain to her how to use dental floss. He told her that he was quite cer-

tain she didn't know how to use it because there was always, always, something stuck in one of her teeth. He pulled her lips open. "Look, even now." He picked up the floss with his latex-covered hands. She hadn't noticed the gloves when he came in. He had thought she really wasn't much of a detective. He flossed all of her teeth while telling her the importance of getting between each tooth to stop the decay and the gingivitis—and the odor. Then he put a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on the brush. "Pea-sized," he emphasized. "Toothpaste is essential and you don't need to waste it." He brushed while telling her how many seconds he was spending on each quadrant of her mouth and how he was being careful to brush up and down and not back and forth. "I'm sorry, but you won't be able to spit." He used a small blue towel from the dryer to wipe the paste from her mouth and lips, and the little bit that had dribbled down onto her chin and mixed with the tears that flowed freely from her eyes. Then he took the mouthwash and explained that he would rinse her mouth 'after' because he didn't want her to choke. Her eyes didn't blink when he inserted the second needle. They couldn't.

The voice of Chief Macness interrupted Coroner Henry Beckett's memory of the night before. It had been dark in the apartment. He thought to himself that, if he had seen the rest of the apartment, perhaps he would have just told her about dental floss, and pea-sized paste, and mouthwash. No, she wouldn't have listened, he decided. She didn't listen before; she wouldn't even take the mints he offered. She wouldn't have listened. It was the only way.

"Henry, you all right? Are you listening to me?" Henry Beckett looked up into the face of his

boss. Dark gray eyes, short cropped hair, meticulously trimmed beard and mustache framing beautiful white teeth. Much nicer than the teeth behind the camera, he thought to himself. He would need to offer Brandon Farmer a mint. The man desperately needed one.

Henry Beckett mumbled something about it being difficult to see another co-worker dead. He mumbled something about clean teeth. He said quite distinctly, "Have her taken to the morgue, Bart. I'll do the autopsy and report what I find."

Doctor Henry Beckett walked into his morgue: stern, sterile, sweet. The pungent aroma of bleach met his nostrils like the scent of cherry blossoms on the plaza. The stringent tang of alcohol, as it always did, made an impression on his olfactory that quickened his heart rate. Euphoric feelings wafted through him. He surveyed his lab, his domain, his home. He had another visitor.

He walked purposefully past the vaults that held his guests. There were only four who kept him company at present—now five, with the arrival of Lieutenant Johnson. They included the unknown transient found under the 14th Street viaduct, dead of alcohol poisoning. He had felt nothing and passed in an alcohol-induced coma. Mark Langly, the car accident victim, who Beckett had reported to the family felt nothing and died instantly, though the forensic evidence told him differently and he knew the man suffered immeasurably for a time before he died. Tomas O'Henry, park mime, who had been Henry Beckett's guest for seven days now, patiently waiting for family to come pick him up from the other side of the continent. Beckett knew he hadn't suffered. He knew his death was quick, painless. Then there was

Sergeant Nathan Pickford. Why, Beckett thought to himself, would Chief Macness put a man with such terrible breath at the front desk?

The autopsy table held the body of Lieutenant Martha Johnson. Her eyes were closed. Her arms serenely placed against her sides under the starched white sheet. Her hair was in a tangle next to her right cheek and Doctor Beckett took a moment to smooth the chestnut strands into precise order. Her death had been quick, painless. It was the least he could do for a co-worker, just as he had done for Sergeant Pickford. Looking down, he quietly remarked, half to himself, half to the corpse, “Now, don’t you agree the smell is much better?”

It was time to begin the autopsy. He knew what he would find. He knew it would never be reported. The killer was in the room.

The Muse

David Norman

Part I

The Deliverance

Daily, the Earth spins and turns. Each day ends in the dark. Each day the dark ends with gray light. Each day the same as the last. My life is one of a redundant repetition of echoing reoccurrences. Monochromatic shades of gray. Every day the same. Every day, monochromatic shades of gray.

Then one day, sunlight pierced my dreary world! That day, my world exploded with the exquisite nectar of color—sound, scent as if they never before existed; a garden bursting into life. That is the day I met her. At that moment, I felt my rebirth, beginning my life anew. I suddenly understood songs of love, art, poetry, warm fuzzies, moonlit walks, Valentine's Day, tickling, love notes, cuddling, boxers with hearts; it all made perfect sense! I cheerfully bid adieu to gray: no more gray. I welcomed each beautiful day. Each day felt new, exciting! Each day I got to see her. My muse; she inspired me. Stirred me to change, to grow, to be the best I could be. I went to the gym. I ate salad. I read deep books by profound authors. I put up curtains. I quit drinking milk from the jug. I started putting the cap back on the toothpaste, and I even started leaving the seat down. In all ways, striving to be better.

My muse . . . her beauty is beyond compare, beyond description. The mighty Aphrodite laments, weeps, hides her face in shame. Narcissus, forgetting himself, sits up, takes notice. Jealous, Nefer plots and schemes with nefarious intent.

She inspires me to create. I pour out upon pa-

per the most eloquent, profound, and beautiful words my new soul is capable of contriving, the very essence of my joyous new life. But the words fail me; they mock my passion! Words are weak, feeble, woefully inadequate. The significance of this profound new feeling eludes the very power of words.

Part II

Three Weeks Later

Daily, the Earth spins and turns. Each day the same as the last. Each day I listen to her talk. Each day incessant babbling about shopping, shoes, gossip, social faux pas, shoes, designer clothes, detestable sales clerks, shoes, “Brangelina,” Tom and Katie, anorexic models, shoes . . . incessant chatter. Every day, incessant chatter. Every day is the same: a redundant repetition of echoing reoccurrences. Monochromatic shades of pink and red. Every day shades of pink and red. Every day incessant chatter.

I feel moved to write, but nothing comes . . . no inspiration . . . irritation, but no inspiration. Emptiness. Nothing. I think harder, and try to force the words to come . . . my joyous new life, my muse, brought me breath, brought me . . . has it really only been three weeks. . . ? Come on, focus! Joyous life, muse, brought breath, brought meee . . . (nothing comes). Each day is the same. I feel a longing. A sort of sickness. After quite some time, I pick up my pen and begin to write. I write about shades of gray. I miss gray!

Part III

The Moral of the Story

First, they say that beauty is only skin-deep, but

FICTION

I disagree; true beauty comes from the inside. Second, sometimes the grass on your own side of the fence is greener than you think. Take a real close look before you hop over. Third, artery-clogging cheeseburgers, pay-per-view MMA, pick-up games at the Ice Sheet, action flicks, guys night every night . . . are great . . . they're not shades of gray.

That, and shoes are "buy-one-get-one" at Nordstrom's every third Thursday!

Noctis Formidinis (Night Terrors) David Norman

Bang! I instantly sit up in bed, alarmed, unsure if I really heard what I think I did. I look at my wife; she's sleeping peacefully. She always wakes up with the "bumps in the night," but not this time. It must have been a dream. I lie back down and work on slowing my heart.

Bang! I heard it again! I was not asleep this time. My wife is still motionless, except for that heavy breathing found in deep sleep. I know I heard it. I'm compelled to check it out.

Climbing out of bed, I cautiously feel my way around in the dark. In the closet, I find my son's baseball bat that I confiscated last week. Gripping it tightly, I make my way to the top of the stairs. I pause for a long time and listen; listen to nothingness. All I can hear is that high-pitched ringing that is always there but only perceptible in the dead of night, when all of the noises of daytime have fallen silent. Nothing, I hear nothing but the ringing. I begin to feel silly, but as the man of the house, I'm obligated to be absolutely sure.

What was that? Did I hear movement? A faint noise from the kitchen, so soft that I barely perceive it. Did I just imagine it? I slowly make my way down the stairs, avoiding the creaky spots I'm so familiar with. At the bottom I take another long pause and strain my ears to hear anything in the darkness, but there is nothing; nothing is audible but that piercing ringing, and now the thumping of my heart in my throat. I make my way down the hall, *toe-heel, toe-heel*. I read somewhere that's how the Indians did it when stealth-

ily stalking their prey. I suddenly become painfully aware of how out of shape I am. Looking more like a Q-tip with the swab in the middle than I care to admit, I puff out my chest, trying to look as big and menacing as possible, just in case.

Now, at the door to the kitchen where I thought I heard movement, I see nothing: nothing but clean, bare counters. The moon casts its light through the window, bathing everything in pale gray. Suddenly, light glints off of metal. *What was that?* Searing pain! I touch my hand to my side. I feel thick, warm goo. It's sticky. I smell iron. *How peculiar! Why would I smell iron?* I fall to my knees, looking at the diamond patterns in the kitchen linoleum, then to my face. From here, I see the metal runner between kitchen floor and the living room carpet. I see fuzzies on the carpet. *Must remember to vacuum fuzzies in the morning.* The gray moonlight slowly fades to black.

Bang! I sit up in bed, unsure I really heard what I think I did. I roll myself out of bed to investigate. *Probably nothing.* I grab my son's bat from the closet and go to chase shadows in the moonlight.

Thirsty
Robin Nielson

Thirst did not kill the deer. There is water here if you know where to look. It didn't do anything foolish. It died of illness or age; it's hard to tell. Don't mourn its passing. It lived a good life. It is resting in a good place. Me? I am thirsty. I am not old or ill, just foolish. And I don't know where to find water. I came here unprepared. I came to hear the desert, but I didn't listen. I have been watching the shiny black beetles and the crimson-red ants eat at the stiffening carcass. I have been watching the svelte coyote and striped Gila monster chew from opposite ends. I have been watching them watching me. Fresh meat is so much better than heat-dried feast. It's very hot here. Waves rise from the porcelain-white sand stretched before me. Distance blurs in the rising heat. Is it one mile, ten, one hundred to the truck? Which way did I leave that? No matter. Red ants and glossy black flies have found their way into my leg. I expect soon that moist, wriggly maggots will ooze from the end of the bone and spill over onto the dried maroon of my crusted jeans. Foolishness is not something you should carry into the desert. It is something you won't carry out. Time blurs with the rising heat. Is it one day, ten, one hundred since I slipped down the ragged edge of the arroyo? No matter. The rattlesnake sleeps quietly next to me. Fever-ridden, I am a good place to curl up next to on these glass-cold nights. The coyote comes back and checks on me. He sits down to wait. The Gila monster joins him. It isn't strange to me that they chat amicably as the sun rises. Is it the ten-thousandth day? The rattlesnake lifts his head

and smiles at me. He slithers away and takes his place next to the others. Soon ravens join them and they all wait. Patiently they wait. They talk about other foolish things they have seen in the desert. They talk about men who foolishly come to hear, but don't listen. They talk about the truck and how it will make a nice house for the rattlesnake. The ravens say they would like to live there, but the rattlesnake said it first, so he wins. The coyote says he will crawl under the bed when it is hot. It makes nice shade in the heat of the day, he says. The red ants have joined them. Thousands of ants and beetles wait with the coyote, and the Gila monster, and the ravens, and the rattlesnake. They look at me. They smile. It's very hot here, but this is a good place to rest. I am thirsty. I am foolish. The sun is high up in the sky now. I hear creaking and chattering coming from behind my guests. They spread their ranks and the desiccated deer, bits of golden hair hanging in strips across eyeless sockets, walks up to me. He tells me it is time to go. He tells me we have a long walk across the heat-soaked sand. No matter. I will leave my foolishness here. I'm not thirsty anymore.

POETRY



Prey on Public Transit (*Section Winner*)
Dwight S. Adams

Perhaps if you had seen one before,
you wouldn't think that she looked so much like
a rabbit on the bus.
Rabbits have that permanent timidity about them,
not like a cat,
running from a potential danger,
but like they live deep in the fear,
as though there's nowhere to run to
that doesn't bare those same sharp fangs.
Imagine the fangs about her,
the hunger irrespective of the true taste of flesh,
the unreasoned lust.

She keeps her two little rabbit feet pointed inward,
toes touching,
ankles exposed for the tanner's knife.
Her pelt shows in the tanned tops of her breasts,
framed like an advertisement by her blouse,
shining like polished bronze.
It's as though she waits for some safe hunter to come
under the clouded sky,
in the thicket,
one who might hang her remains high on the wall,
no food for dogs,
but honored for its dead beauty,
maintained in its pristine animal sexuality.

But there are hunters all about,
and her lip quivers at the motion of hungry eyes,
and the unconscious flicking of tongues
at the meal she so routinely displays.

Between Far and Close
Dwight S. Adams

In the afternoon light
the mist
dips a finger into the horizon

leaving a sheen,
a cloud but not a storm,
a pleasant dream.

On a high hill,
Indian paintbrush

shift in the wind,
contrast the stretch of blue
fading out beneath
the mist's descending hand.

Beyond the hill,
the brown river rolls around
the curve of the closest ridge,
sending pine and mud
up to mingle

with blossoms, wisp-like and waving.

Red and violet—
their shimmering tinsel chatter
and the wind

whispers thoughts from the dipping clouds.

POETRY

The breeze can enter
the mouth
 between parted lips,

on it
 the wet taste

of something
 on its way.

Chicken Lady
Robin Nielson

Every morning she gets out of her bed.
Thick gray-black braids swing across her eyes as she
shoos cats from her kitchen.
A modest breakfast of cornpone and greens.
She sweeps the dirt floor of her shanty shack with her
cane leaf broom to hard-packed perfection.
Not a speck of dust rises to mote the air.

Her well-used apron sags as she walks.
Pocket full of seed—not for her garden but for her
chickens.
Pullets, reds, cockerels.
Some for layin’ and some for fryin’ and some for sellin’
at the market when times get hard.

“Here chick. Here chick.”

Soft cooing to bring them out.

Hard seed hitting the ground like a carillon call.

Sun just comin’ up
 burning away
 the
 hazy
 humid
 leftovers of night fog.

“Here chick. Here chick.”

Seed spread out on dry ground; untouched.

POETRY

She walks to the hen house.

Feathers.

Blood.

Broken eggs.

Death.

Paw prints in the dust.

Heavily she sits on the chopping log.

There are no chickens to sell

. . . and times are hard.

Christmas Shopping At The Salvation Army

Lee Van Nguyen

83 blocks of a 150-piece Lego set—
Pirates and space men.
Pop culture trivia game—
Tracey Ullman & Garry Shandling.
Bambi on VHS—
“Be kind—Rewind.”
Knight Rider tee-shirt—
Kitt is still bad-ass.

Gift and re-gift:
Do you remember last year’s?
Twenty years of used Christmases, worn and loose,
scuffed and bent
—as is, no refunds—
Flavor remains in chewed gum,
and cherry marker scent never
completely fades.
Rounded tines and napkin rings;

Christmas resurrected.

Spirograph—
Blue pen dried.
Lite-Brite—
Templates poked.
Barbie mansion, renovated—
Torn wallpaper and crayon.
Discman—
5-second shock protection.

POETRY

Gift and re-gift:

Will you remember this year's?

Christmas 2011 may come year 2031

—as will be, no refunds—

Cracked seashells still sound beautiful,

and coffee stains don't let the cold

in to a Christmas coat.

Slip-covered cushions and embroidered pot holders;

Christmas resurrected.

The Distance Dance
Brittany Redford

The snow takes its gentle descent
The distant ballet, endeavoring to begin
Snowflakes taking their parts in their true intent
Never such a delicate cast has been

The distant ballet, endeavoring to begin
The wind plays a lonely lullaby for this chance event
Never such a delicate cast has been
The blank scenery yielding its unwilling consent

The wind plays a lonely lullaby for this chance event
Captivated audiences with their eager grin
The blank scenery yielding its unwilling consent
Sheer delight of things to come, from homes within

Winter, our white delight, at long last
Snowflakes taking their parts in their true intent
Anticipation awakened by the past
The snow takes its gentle descent

Holiday Morning
Unknown

I left ceramic dreams unglazed
as I lay in bed with morning's gray
teasing the still-wide blacks of my eye.

It was difficult to see, much less discern,
the predawn ash landscape spotted
with new tumbleweeds . . .
or was that dusty flecks on my window?

My alarm clock, that composite
hunchbacked vulture, still had not seen
his morning prey lay more awake than he.

I believe I'll let him think I'm still dead,
because until the sun measures up thin, cirrus sheets,
I'll lie here quiet, still, and waiting for the mourning
dove to trill.

Of One Attitude, Far Too Long
Lee Van Nguyen

I

Geese should learn to form a new letter,
something more impressive,
perhaps “B.”

Just as bees should produce something sour,
and instead sound out “flub” as opposed to “buzz,”
or something equally ridiculous.

II

Aliens should come and say, “Yeah, hey, here we are.”
Or, at the very least, announce that they don’t exist;
Then we can afford our human efforts to more
important matters.

Improve toilet paper:

There have been no significant advances in this
technology
for several decades—

Perhaps, though, something more prudent:
a smoke detector whose battery doesn’t need
changed
at an inconvenient hour.

Ladders that are built tall enough for the task,
and made to be less an unlucky structure to walk
beneath.

The number seven has run its course,
10.5 may be up for the job.

POETRY

III

Reinventing the wheel is a great idea,
mine go flat fairly often!

and are “unsafe for repair,”
whatever the hell that means.

Cowboys still patronize boot repair shops;
perhaps they have busted boots that are unsafe for
repair.

They should reinvent the goddamned boot!

Herding cattle isn't so enjoyable:

Ride a horse, whip large docile animals, say
ridiculous cowboy things like

“Yee-Haw!”

sleep anywhere under the moon—like Sweet Baby
James—

maybe it really is all brilliant.

IV

But, we should wait,
and first see what letter

the geese form.

Pizza Night
Unknown

“Can we make pizza tonight?” she playfully asks,
her green stucco-colored eyes as wide as the pepperoni
I know I’ll be forced to buy.

It may not have been my idea, but we are soon
elbow-deep in red, oregano-spiked sauce that makes
the cold air outside jealous of the warm sauce-to-skin
incubation.

I close my eyes and smell the warm kitchen air,
and listen to her gooey hands push and pull the
swelling mix of yeast, flour, flavor, and olive oil.

A sudden splash of sauce hits the side of my face—
and I turn to see the grinning culprit, her pink frisky
lips and sauce-dipped fingertips admit her cunning
sin.

Slightly offended but revengefully undeterred,
I fire back with a warm handful of softened
mozzarella,
and the messy battle begins.

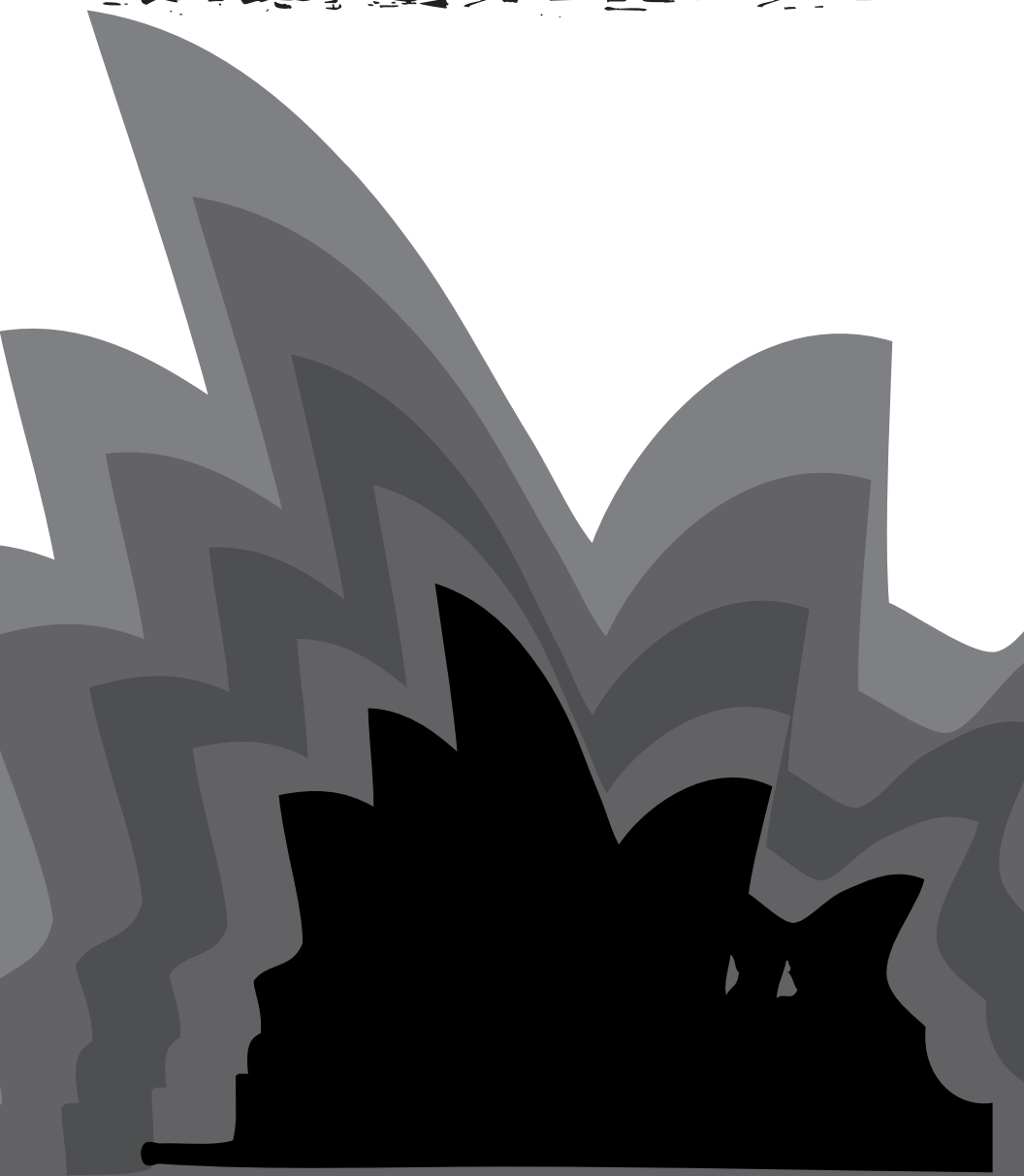
Diving below the walnut countertop,
I dodge a splotch of flying cheese,
nearly splattering my new red polo.

She then smears a stack of greasy pepperoni on my
neck,
revenging the clumps of dough thrown in her hair,
and a back and forth spice and sauce battle ensues.

POETRY

We suddenly stop, taking exhausted breaths, glancing
at the ingredients
sticking to the floor. She chuckles nervously, knowing
the mess is all her fault.
But she is so beautiful, like a delicate glow inside a
dusty battlefield.
Our quiet moment starves the hungry oven; the pizza
never makes it in.

MULTICULTURAL AND DIVERSITY



Shower Curtain (*Section Winner*)
Unknown

I stand in front of a map of the world,
A map faded by microscopic wars,
fought by tiny bugs and different languages
after years of being opened, closed, steamed and dried.

Sudan usually snuggles up with Chad,
but now folds over, staring infinitely
at the entire western world.

The reds of Russia and the pastels of former states,
eroded and washed away, the remaining faded
outline shows somebody tore down that wall.

A single, solemn blob of green labeled
“Serbia & Montenegro” may offend Serbs
who don’t want to be called “Montenegrins.”

Israel could easily fit down my shower drain,
but the next map I see will show all the
settlements it’s built on Palestinian lands.

Over time I suppose I’ll watch
another border scrubbed away,
losing to riots, affairs, bugs, and soap scum.

Calm Surrender Lillian Harnden

Without knowing what waits behind the door, without knocking, we enter, crossing into a realm of stillness. Inside we find him in the arms of his wife, lying dead.

In an alarm of lights and sirens we oppose his death, with a prize-worthy emergency performance.

Piercing through this harsh intensive scene are these words that seem rather obscene: “Don’t worry, honey. Everything’s going to be all right.” From the cab of the truck, his wife calls back to him. Perhaps she doesn’t understand that he’s already gone.

At the hospital we deliver him to the Ph.Ds. While waiting, his wife distributes hugs to the whole team. “Thank you,” she says as she pats our sweaty backs. “Today is our forty-fifth wedding anniversary. I need him to understand how much I love him.”

As the white coats escort her behind the curtains, we anticipate grieving shock or ecstatic screaming. But then, she brings down the entire E.R. when she starts singing. In her South Pacific language, she vibrates our entire beings with the grace of un-doubtable love in every note she sings out.

In words that I can’t reiterate, in a melody that always hums, her undying love song resonates on the drums inside us. By bringing calm surrender to a place as dire as this, she pounds a whole new meaning into simple words like “Don’t worry, honey. Everything’s going to be all right.”

The Center
Unknown

Memories are what keep us alive.
United as one to overcome obstacles.
Leaders are what we build.
Together we stand.
I trust in my past to build my future.
Community is our support.
Unique is our culture.
Love and protect our heritage.
Tragedy builds character.
Understand each other's struggles.
Represent minorities in higher education.
Aspiring younger generations is what we want.
Lucky is what we are not, survivors are who we ARE.

Don't Forget to Leave the Money

Kasey Van Dyke

“Don't forget to leave the money,” she sneered as I zipped my pants.

There she was, lying in bed, naked in her husband's sheets, calling herself a prostitute. How ironic.

“Darling, you mustn't be so self-righteous,” I retorted.

It was always like this: intense passion, a rush, a release, and then pure loathing; loathing for ourselves, loathing for each other, loathing the preceding activity.

She sighed and her eyes darkened. Her eyebrows had the most curious habit of twitching every half-second when she was mildly annoyed. I could always tell to what degree she was upset based on the metronomic lines above her cold, green, and too-large eyes. The fringe of black eyelashes would flutter slightly as she tried to hide an eye roll. Did she not realize that I had seen her patterns before?

The quickly dying bulge in my trousers seemed to amplify the smell of naked flesh in the musty room. I checked again to make sure no stains would give me away. The waist of my trousers was held by my Italian-leather belt, which she had so cunningly purchased and given many months earlier. Maybe I was the whore?

I glanced over to assess her frustration. Her thin arms were crossed aggressively across her naked breasts. This flattened them against her rib cage and pushed them up in an unnatural swell. The flat area between her chest and her neck moved up and down with purpose, as if each breath she took in my

presence was a poison.

I'd always loved her neck. So delicate and bird-like—fragile enough to break but tender enough to handle with care. It morphed into her small, proud chin. Why proud, my sweet? Haven't we both sacrificed our dignity?

Her skin was pale, not unlike that of a naked chicken. I can't say she was beautiful. Her only redeeming feature was that pair of eyes—a deepness that resembled a ripe, green grape wrapped in seaweed, pierced by an opaque blackness, a blackness that would rival the void of space. These two bright lights fell on mine and narrowed.

We both looked away. Meeting our gazes would only make us both blush and show more vulnerability than the situation could afford. As her eyes vacationed around the room, I took the liberty of looking at her naked body, which was covered only by a sheer white sheet. Every curve and shadow was exposed. It was merely a psychological covering and she knew it. She wanted to mask her own embarrassment, but still leave me with a fantasy—she really was an expert in this game.

I began buttoning my shirt over a chest that was still slightly moist with sweat—whether it was mine or hers was inconsequential. I breathed in deeply, her cheap perfume lingering in my mouth. Each button was a means to an end. I felt her watch me, counting the seconds until I would be gone and she could wash herself, at least outwardly.

I remember the first time I came to her. I remember she wore red lipstick that night—lipstick the color of an organ that had been removed from the

body. When she smiled, her lips exposed teeth that were tinged with a faded umber and gums the color of muscle. Her thin hair, dyed an obvious red, fell around her like an ill-fitted curtain on a rod that was too big. And then I saw her eyes.

We were in a bar that I'd never been to. She was a regular and told the barman, whom she knew by name, that it was my first. Several off-color comments were yelled and she winked. Those eyes belonged on a goddess.

That first night was raw and rough and left nothing to the imagination. I didn't respect her and she knew it—I think that's what got her off. All I demanded was that she never took her eyes away from mine.

We were both married, and we were both unhappy—she because of an unexpected pregnancy and me because of an expectation. And there we were, both swimming in the murky waters of infidelity.

Our encounters became our schedule by which we planned everything else. We both knew these were events not to be missed, though I'm sure she must have dreaded them as much as I did.

“What the hell are you looking at?” she yelled.

That's when I snapped back to reality. I tucked in my shirt, walked to my briefcase, and extracted the package I had gingerly placed inside. I turned and fired.

The shot landed exactly where I had practiced—directly between her eyes, which were still open, watching me collect my things, fix my hair, and close the door.

Evening Sunrise
Lee Van Nguyen

I

The hourglass has run short
Of granules, blue and violet,

An Asian sunrise drops into
Cupped hands,
Melts in crimson fans,
Out through ringed fingers,

Ferried by the pilot,
Of the West.

II

The hourglass is heavy
With granules, pink and red,

An American sunset stretches
From fingertips,
Solidifies in yellow slits,
Out from palm lines,

Soaking into the beach sands
Of the East.

Migraine

Eladio Bobadilla

There it was. A lifeless body, brown skin covering flesh and blood—blood which minutes ago flowed through his veins. Now, it was splattered all around, serving no purpose but to indicate that one less heart beat in the world. He was a man of about fifty, with skin like mine, brown and delicate, though his hands were clearly rough and aged. In the minutes immediately after it happened, I felt nothing. Nothing about the scene really bothered me; nothing about what had just happened disturbed me. Then I moved about twenty feet closer and saw what was left of his head. In the movies and on TV, when someone encounters something gruesome, something unnaturally disturbing, they always respond by vomiting. I had always found this silly, and now I understood why. It's not your stomach that turns when you see it—it's your skin that seems to turn itself inside out.

Where I had seen only blood, now I saw other things: pieces of matter which should never be revealed, even in death. I had no idea what a bullet to the head felt like. I imagined, though, that it was much like those migraines, which had on more than one occasion sent me to the emergency room—the kind that came on suddenly and felt like rods were being pushed through my head's blood vessels, the kind that made me lose rationality and at times even weakened and distorted my senses. I'd often imagined that was what a bullet to the head felt like. The migraines felt as if I was constantly being shot in the head. Silly. This was all presumption. How could I know? Some weak, twisted part of me wished I could ask him what

it felt like. Was the bullet to the head the same pain I felt when I was hit by a migraine? If he could verify my theory, it would validate my pain. Few people know the intensity of migraines, and even migraine-sufferers get pain to varying degrees. Mine were bad; I had contemplated suicide more than once. But no one really understood, and if he could tell them, people might know.

The migraines. Oh, the migraines! The suffering was so intense that I often vomited from the pain and nausea. They'd even brought me to tears and driven me to unconsciousness at times. They almost got me a reprieve. The migraines could have saved his life. They could have saved my soul. Army doctors don't like the migraine "defense." They can't prove someone doesn't suffer from them, so those of us who do are grouped in with dirtbags who use them to get painkillers and avoid deployments. So I was given a waiver and some goddamned Tylenol. That was supposed to fix my migraines, like it fixed everything else: sprained ankles, backaches, fevers, and, I often imagined, even cancer.

Training was fun, except for having to deal with terrible food and early mornings. A useful trick was to get up five minutes before reveille, rush to the shower, be the first one to breakfast (and first one out), then jump on the bus that would drive us to field training about thirty minutes away. I would go straight to the back and get a window seat, so I could rest my head against the side of the bus and sleep until we got to our destination. A nap does wonders for the body and the soul. When we didn't have field training (weapons training, convoy training, that kind of thing), we had classroom time. I forgot most of that shit, because honestly, who gives a fuck? I don't care how the Army

does things. I don't care what the fucking plane that will drop me off in a warzone is called. I will never drive a tank. I am not interested in information assurance. And I certainly don't care to learn Army history and traditions. I'd often think, "Tell me how to stay alive and then shut the fuck up." They never shut the fuck up.

One day we had something called "sensitivity training." It was a crash course in cultural sensitivity, an exercise in irony conducted by the Army's finest—a captain from the South who had trouble speaking in proper English. His message, once politically and semantically deconstructed, could be reduced to this: "Remember that not all Arabs are terrorists. Sure, they're all brutes, they're all dirty, and they're all hateful beasts. But they're not all terrorists. Keep this in mind. They don't believe in Christ, our Lord and Savior. They have strange customs (who the fuck uses their left hand to wipe their ass?). They're a burden to the world, and particularly to this great nation. They're impressionable. They're brainwashed. They hate women and freedom and democracy and all that is good. But they are not all terrorists. If you kill one of them sons of bitches, don't feel too bad. But the Army says we must be sensitive to their culture, so don't go around giving them thumbs up. They find that shit offensive. I tell you, these hajjis are some strange motherfuckers. But to appease the fuckers, make sure when you kill them you bury them the same day, in accordance with Islamic principles."

The hardest part of these classroom days, besides staying awake listening to nonsense on four hours of sleep, was having to pretend that I respected the officers and NCOs. After classroom days, field

training felt like a joy, even when it was pointless and insulting. Shooting qualifications were coming up, but they didn't care too much how good a shot anyone was. They'd keep feeding us bullets until we got all our targets, then we earned our ribbon. Physical training was a bit more serious. There was a joke (which had probably been around as long as PT itself) that went something like this: "Should we be concerned that the Army doesn't care how good we are at shooting, but is always worried about how fast we can run?" A typical day consisted of training which later would be deemed unrealistic and unnecessary. Sergeant White told us we would be sent out into the forest with only a compass and a map, to find several checkpoints, and then return. He immediately added, "Although if you find yourself in a forest with nothing more than a compass and a map, you're fucked." More importantly, I thought, who the fuck is going to a forest? We're all going to the sandbox, Whitey.

Everything they taught us in the military, it seemed, was to show me my old man was wrong.

That man was never there, but I didn't resent him. He worked in el norte for a good ten months out of the year. I'd see him for a couple of months, and then he'd leave us again, always in the middle of the night. Goodbyes were never said, but thoroughly implied. I'd cry like a baby when I'd wake up to find my momma sad and weepy, and my daddy gone. I'd run to the tree across the field in front of our house, climb to a thick branch covered in green leaves, and sit alone for hours, sad but never angry. I always knew, even from an early age, that the pain I felt was the reason I was always fed and clothed, unlike some of my friends with whom I'd share my lunches at school.

When the old man was there—and I mean old man quite literally (he was almost fifty when I was born)—he made good use of our time. We spent a lot of time together, picking flowers for my mom, building play roads for my toy trucks and buses, and turning the field into a soccer pitch for me and my friends. He always spoke to me with sincerity and love, and treated me like a man rather than a kid (except when I badly needed to be a kid—and he always knew when that was). He told me of el norte, with its huge skyscrapers, snowy mountains, towering system of highways, and, most fondly, its abundance of well-paying jobs with the gringo bosses.

He spoke of being found in the desert, nearly dead, and brought back to life by a white man, fed and sent to work. He would say, “Do you know why I’m telling you this, hijo?” I didn’t really. “Because it shows you how fucked up and how beautiful the world is. There are good white men and bad brown men. There are hateful white men and saintly black men. There are Christ-like atheists and murderous Christians.”

In the military, I learned he was wrong. America is good. Its enemies are evil. Sure, we’re not perfect, but we’re the best damned country on earth. We’re a unique people, chosen by God to lead the world. We were founded by principles of justice, democracy, equality. Forget nuance and forget thinking for yourself, boy. The world is black and white. We bring democracy by deposing of socialists, Islamic fundamentalists, and troublemakers. They hate us because we’re free, democratic, and capitalist. We defend our flag against tyrants and terrorists. You salute officers because they are higher beings. You salute the flag and never let it touch the ground. Symbols over people.

Ideas over truth. War over solidarity. They, of course, had to be right. I heard this from educated officers and civilized Americans. My father was a poor, nearly illiterate man, a simple Indian with just enough Spanish blood to give his dark skin and brown eyes a light complexion. Poor, sad, ignorant man he was—how he liked to complicate things.

That day was no different than any other at first. I had a big breakfast, since it was the only meal I could tolerate. It was time to head back to the admin tent to do paperwork, as always. We came into the dining facility through the south entrance and left through the north side exit, then swung back around to the south where the admin tent was. Out of nowhere, I heard shots, two of them, then Arabs emerging out of the south side and running towards us. Everyone panicked and all I heard was “get them. Shoot the sons of bitches.” I charged my M16, set my eyes on the guy in front, aimed at his head, and pulled the trigger. Two others fell to the ground almost at the same time and the rest stopped running, halted with their hands in the air. I paid no attention to anyone but the man I’d shot. The rest were someone else’s pain. Soon, the confusion passed and all became clear. “Oh, shit. Oh, fuck,” screamed a young soldier. “Fuck. I spooked them. I fucking spooked them,” he said. Everyone had to clear their guns before entering the dining facility. On this day, the screamer, a dumb Army private, accidentally discharged his weapon as he was clearing it, not once but twice. It spooked the Arabs, who did what anyone would have done: run the fuck away from live fire. I’d killed an innocent man.

This is what it felt like to be a terrorist, I thought. And I stood there, watching the body, won-

dering what it felt like, about the migraines. Then I snapped out of it and I wondered if he had a son, and if he did, how the boy would hear about his daddy, start crying and run to a tree to sit there quietly, alone, to mourn the loss of his father. I collapsed. I felt a great pain in my head, a migraine like one I've never felt before.

My Neurosis Eric Riddle

“Welcome to his brain,” said the friendly voice on the loudspeaker. “It’s an unusual place, but it can be entertaining if you’re in the right mood. Stay close and pay attention. It’s dark. There aren’t many lights, and fair warning—it can get kind of loud in here.” JUST THEN...a voice, firm, yet fast, came out of the walls.

My past mistakes, my downfalls and shortcomings, they all drive me. They make me fret over things. They make me worry that I will repeat them. Before I get into a situation, I plan it out in my head. I make lists. Lots and lots of lists. Things to do, things not to do, people I need to talk to, people I don’t want to talk to, people I want to talk to but am too shy to talk to, movies to see, movies to see again, bills I need to pay...

“You’re all in for a treat!” exclaimed the loudspeaker. “The show is starting!”

I often imagine having conversations with people. I think of excuses, reasons, arguments. I plot out questions and responses. These are all conversations I plan on having soon. If I need to ask for a day off at work, if I am going to ask someone out on a date, if I forgot to do my laundry, before I make an important (or semi-important, or sometimes trivial) phone call. These conversations are

all pre-planned days and sometimes weeks in advance. I try them in different ways to see which has the best outcome.

Now, let me be clear; I don't talk to myself. I'm not that crazy. I'm talking to other people. They are real people. They respond.

The visitors got excited and curious. They wanted to know more.

Granted, the people aren't there, but still. I'll tell you a story multiple times before you actually hear it. I think of the best verbiage to use, the best word choice, and the proper sentence structure. This way, I can be prepared for anything that is thrown at me. Even though the conversations rarely go the way I plan (or the various ways I've planned), I still plan. Sometimes I can't sleep at night because the people I'm imagining have a lot to say and they won't shut up.

The visitors laughed in unison at the strange predicament of this poor mind. Being kept up by people he was pretending to talk to. How funny!

It goes on...I know you want to know because you wouldn't be here if you didn't. Or would you? See?! I'm doing it again. I overanalyze everything. I have this ridiculous memory. I can't remember what I wore two days ago or what I did last weekend (although there's a good chance the answer to that last question is 'played video games'). I can, however, remem-

ber what you said, how you said it, the inflection, the tone, and the context.

“Okay, that’s a little strange,” said one nondescript person.

“But it could be kind of nice to remember things,” responded another.

THEN...I start vividly replaying those scenes like a movie in my head. The context turns into sub-context; the many possible sub-contexts. What did she MEAN by what she said? Why would she use those words? Is there any other way to interpret this? When she touched my knee, was she flirting or is that how she is? She sent me a text that said “I hope you had fun tonight. Text me when you get home safe.” That means she’s interested, right?! Or else she wouldn’t care if I make it home safe. But what if she’s just a thoughtful person...I mean, I know she is thoughtful and kind. That’s why I like her...but is this a thing she does with everyone or just me?

And then, just like that, time slows down and I can fit a shot-for-shot remake of the whole night into an hour-long drive. The movie is weird to watch. Sometimes it plays back at double or triple-speed. Some parts get paused for a while, some I turn on the director’s commentary, and others need to be subtitled. There’s never a moment of peace.

Recognizing this last line as the cue for the conclusion of the show, the loudspeaker said, “Anyone

easily confused or disturbed should leave the room, as this next part of the show can be a little hard to handle.” No one budged...they were too enthralled to leave...and the voice from the wall began again.

Always a race to the ever-moving finish line. Running through lists, lists, and more lists. Old lists, new lists, weird lists, strange lists...making new lists, having my one-man dialogues, replaying scenes.

Quoting movies, getting upset when people misquote movies, wishing this class would end...or at least the professor wouldn't notice if I took a nap. Wondering if Cute Girl will be in class today. Will she talk to me? How can I get her number? I wonder if she plays an instrument? Is she a vegetarian? It seems like everyone I meet lately is a vegetarian. What if that girl's phone goes off again...I liked the song that she had set as her ringtone...It's not a very common band so I could probably use that as an icebreaker to introduce myself. She'd think I was cool for knowing that song. Yeah, that would work . . . but it only went off that one time and it was a long time ago. She's probably got it silenced now. She seems cool. She has on awesome shoes. I should say something. I think about too much stuff. I really like ice-skating but no one will go with me. I like country music, but not all of it. Some of it can be too twangy. I really liked Chapter 27, but it was weird. I wish someone had watched it with me so I could talk to them about it. I feel like taking a bath. I don't want to wake up

early tomorrow, but I want to go play racquetball so I guess I have to. I should take a nap when I get home. People who wear swimsuits in the shower are weird. I wonder if I'll have any time to finish writing tomorrow. It's funny how this is a huge list of things right in the middle of my rant about how I make too many lists. Can I get in trouble if I write a paper, and then quote that paper in a different paper without citing it? I mean, I wrote the other thing . . . is it still plagiarizing?

The visitors couldn't take it. The voice seemed to be penetrating their brains. It came in without an invite and wouldn't leave. They ran for the door in one large, screaming mass. The doors wouldn't budge. They were trapped. Some began crying; some curled up in the fetal position on the floor and began rocking back and forth. Others merely fainted. Then, the lights turned on. The doors opened.

EDITORS



A Private Concert
Jennifer Sanda

Charged molecules coalesce around the cochlea –
a tap of the hammer to the anvil.

Metal strings press and release against his calloused
fingertips,
the fresh-cut grass sits beneath your resting palms.

You lean into your partner,
feel the rough wool of plaid against your sun-streaked
cheek.

The lemon taste of late summer
mixes with the cologne evaporating from his skin.

You watch his hands, so gnarled for one so young,
move back and forth between the “E”-strings.

His gray eyes reflect the smile on your face,
a mimic of the smile he gives.

The Switchbacks

Elizabeth Carver

Liz knew she would struggle on the switchbacks; they're the most difficult part. She even warned him, but he didn't have any trouble climbing them. Halfway up the sand-packed trail she breathed heavily and beads of perspiration dotted her forehead. Embarrassment crept in and her cheeks, already pink from exertion, turned even redder.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Yeah, yeah I'm fine. I'll keep up."

"I'm tired, need a rest, Mommy."

Liz breathed a sigh of relief, but felt bad using her four-year-old as an excuse.

"Okay Ann, we'll take a break. Gracie! Stop honey. Ann needs a break."

Gracie looked over her shoulder, grinned and took off running up the trail. Liz shouted again for her to stop, but knew she couldn't catch her. She looked to Thomas and he understood what he needed to do.

"I'll get her," he mumbled and ran after Gracie. It didn't take him long to catch her. He teased her as he ran, coming behind her growling like an animal. She screamed with glee and forced her three-year-old legs to carry her faster. He chased her and swept her into his arms, hugging her while she nuzzled his neck.

Liz watched all this with a smile despite the discomfort in her lungs. She hadn't exerted herself to this extent in a while. So far, only her lungs burned and not her muscles, so she took that as a good sign.

"Ready to go, baby?" she asked Ann.

Ann nodded and started walking again, shouting something to her sister. Liz only half listened but

suspected it had something to do about running away and not waiting for her. On the way to her sister, Ann tried to tickle Thomas as she ran. Liz walked at a moderate pace to meet him, and he waited with a smile. When she reached him, she laced her fingers through his and leaned her head on his shoulder. The girls jabbered in their little girl language.

“That was adorable.”

“What was?”

“When you chased after Gracie, she loves being a dinosaur...”

“I know.”

“...and then just now when Ann tickled you.”

“I don’t think your kids like me.”

Liz lifted her head off his shoulder to glare at him. She punched his arm.

“Oh shut up.”

He laughed. “Ready?”

“Yeah. We’ve got to catch up to the little helions anyway.”

They started and caught up to the girls, collecting rocks along the trail. Liz groaned as she realized they still had half the trail up the switchbacks left. Their moderate pace made it easier on Liz, but it also allowed the girls a chance to enjoy the hike. She wanted to take the girls to a spot just before the actual canyon trail started. It seemed like a perfect place to rest with big boulders she thought the girls might like to climb on.

“What did you say this place is called?” he asked.

“Adams Canyon. It’s a good hike. I like it because there’s a waterfall at the end.”

“I like waterfalls.”

“Me too. There’s a smaller waterfall off to the right that isn’t on the main trail. There’s the popular middle waterfall that’s nice, and I’ve heard there’s a waterfall higher up. I hear it’s bigger than the middle one, but I don’t know anyone who’s actually been there.” She brushed her hair out of her face before continuing. “But I wasn’t planning on going to any of the waterfalls today. I’m not even sure the girls are going to make it to the rocks.”

“That’s okay. Let’s just do what you have planned and go from there.”

“Yeah.”

Liz stared at the dirt but wasn’t focusing on the trail. She reflected on her relationship with Thomas to take her mind off the exercise. They had only met two-and-a-half months ago, and their relationship was progressing without problems. She felt comfortable enough to introduce him to her children. She expected him to run, but he didn’t. She expected criticism from her family and friends, but so far they supported her. She expected to feel nervous, but she felt fine.

As she got caught in memories, she slowed down. Thomas turned around and found her staring at the ground. He called her name. Liz looked up with a sheepish grin.

“Hey, you sure you’re okay?”

“Oh I’m fine. Just thinking.”

“Yeah, what about?”

“Life, you know, deep stuff.”

He chuckled and looked toward the girls. They played and ran around on the trail.

“Like what?”

“You and me.”

“Oh.” He looked away from the girls.

“Yeah.” They continued in silence. Liz noticed the path leveling out. “I think we’re getting close to that stopping point. Maybe just up here over this hill.”

They got to the top of the hill, but no boulders, just three more trails. Two of which led up, and the third led to the right. The easy path on the right tempted her. She didn’t want to climb anymore.

“I think we have to take the middle path, but I can’t quite remember.” She furrowed her brow. The trail probably hadn’t change, but her memory failed her.

“You want me to run ahead and see?”

“If you really want to.”

“Sure, I’ll be right back.”

She waited as he ran up the hill and disappeared over the crest. He reappeared and yelled that the path looked like the one she described. She noticed he wasn’t winded at all.

“Okay, girls, let’s go. Follow Thomas.” She urged them up the hill at a quick pace, now hoping to end the hike soon. Liz felt tired and embarrassed and wanted to be in the car on her way home.

Once they reached the top of the hill, she saw the boulders. The rocks didn’t fit the image in her head, but they would do. She pointed to the rocks and told the girls to run ahead and play. Thomas came back to walk the rest of the way with Liz. He put his arm around her waist.

“How’re you doing?”

“I’m tired.”

“You look it.”

She blushed. “This hike was a little more than I expected. But I did better than I did last year.”

“Yeah? That’s great.”

“All I have to do now is continue this whole exercise and diet thing.” She laughed to emphasize the sarcasm but noticed that Thomas no longer heard her. “Hey, what’s up?”

He looked into the distance, “I was thinking about that. How do you want me to help you? I mean, when we’re together. I can take you to different, healthier restaurants. Or we can eat in more often. What do you want me to do to motivate you? I know that you had some problems like this in your previous relationship and I don’t want to make his mistakes.” Images flashed through Liz’s mind as she recalled her failed marriage and the pain she felt. Her ex-husband used to pick on her and now she weighed 50 pounds more. She felt fat then and that feeling hurt her still. She worked hard to lose weight, but she only managed to yo-yo.

He took her hands in his. “Why do you want to lose weight?”

“I... I...” she started.

“I think you’re beautiful just the way you are. You have the most amazing smile and a cute ass.” He winked at her. “Why do you feel like you need to lose weight?”

She took a breath, mulled her thoughts, then spoke the ideas flying through her brain.

“I want to lose weight for me. I want my clothes to fit again. I’ve put on too much recently, and it’s bothering me. I want to be healthy and happy. I want to be able to do this hike without feeling like I’m killing myself. If I could keep up with you, I would be happy, even if I didn’t lose weight.”

“Good answer.” He grabbed her and pulled her into a hug, letting his chin rest on the top of her head.

“I’m glad you’re doing this for you. How can I help you?”

“Just be there for me? I really don’t know how you can help. Once I figure it all out, I’ll let you know. ‘Til then, just be supportive.”

“How?”

“Figure that one out on your own. And don’t worry, I’ll let you know when you start pissing me off.”

“Okay, I can live with that. Ready to play with the girls?”

The girls found a big hill behind the rocks, which they ran up and slid down on their butts. She imagined the stains and then erased the image. She needed to focus on them and focus on herself. She needed to get healthy to keep up with them. She needed to run up that hill and slide down it with her kids.

“Yep, I’m ready.”

Just a boy's haiku
Derek Stout

I

There's no common theme,
no underlying message,
just a boy's haiku.

II

Count on your fingers.
You know you are doing it
just to be sure. Ha!

III

Haikus are simple.
Making sense—overrated—
Snuffleupagus.

Evening
Ashley Hedges

They sat together that evening on the front porch watching the sun slowly set. The beers on the table in front of them were losing their chill, one of them seemingly untouched. It had been a slow summer and the fall was starting even slower. Although there had been an unusual amount of traffic lately, this small town seemed to be getting even smaller by the day. The town was pulling in on itself, protecting itself from the outside world and all outside threats. Everything was still; the town prematurely dead.

So they sat and watched it, watched time.

The sky was red. It felt like a storm was coming in—the smell of ozone lingered faintly on the breeze. Settling into the chairs, they faced the dying land with a passivity that had been growing for the past several months.

Then their stories were whispered through the town—the words dropping flatly upon the ground at their feet as dry as the land that they passed through.

They were dead whispers and whispers of the dead.

Difference Michelle Paul

A boy in front of me sat up on his toes, waving his hand in the air until the teacher found a good place to pause her lesson and call on him. He turned and pointed straight into my face, his young voice innocent with curiosity.

“D’ya mean like her?”

I felt the eyes of the entire classroom turn on me. All I could do was stare back at them, my eyes bulging, my face burning. It was as if someone had suddenly stuck me on a desk for show-and-tell. In the front of the room, the teacher struggled with what to say next. She glanced around as if looking for help, and then she swallowed and forced a small smile.

“Er...well...no, not really. Aurora is Asian, aren’t you, dear?”

It took me a moment to realize she was talking to me. I blinked and glanced up at her, then quickly turned my gaze down to stare at the trembling hands in my lap. I nodded mutely. I wasn’t sure what she was asking, but I didn’t want to argue.

Her next words sounded almost relieved.

“Asians are different than Africans, Charlie. They come from a different country in a different part of the world, and Africans have much darker skin. It’s so dark that it looks almost black. Aurora’s is much different. Here, let me...let me find a picture.”

The other children slowly turned back to face the front of the classroom as the teacher hastily pulled down a book from the class bookshelf and started flipping through the pages. I kept staring at my lap. At my hands. I squinted down at my skin, trying to see what

the boy had seen. But it didn't look any different to me.

* * *

At home, I didn't manage to get the bathroom to myself until after dinner. My mother had sensed something was off and asked me at least a million times what was wrong, but I didn't answer. I didn't want to say anything until I was sure. I avoided looking into any mirror-like surface until then, afraid of what I would see.

I locked the bathroom door behind me and slowly climbed up onto the counter. There was a stool by the sink so I could look into the mirror without having to use the counter, but I wanted a closer view. I pressed my hands flat against the glass and carefully inspected my reflection.

It was the same girl I saw in the mirror every morning and every night and during bathroom breaks. She had the same black hair, the same black eyes, the same color skin. Then I thought of the other children in the class. I looked at the girl in the mirror again. Her nose wasn't small and pointed like the other girls' noses. Her hair wasn't brown, blonde, or red. Her skin wasn't lovely white or pink. The more I looked, the more the girl in front of me began to change. The more she became...different.

I stared, and the strange girl in the mirror stared back.

She looked nothing like my classmates.

How had I ever fooled myself into thinking I looked the same?

My face started to burn again. I dropped my eyes down to my hands, jumped off the counter onto my stool, and busied myself with brushing my teeth,

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scrubbing the bristles against my gums so hard that the foam I spat into the sink turned pink. Then I watched as the pink and white mess swirled lazily down the drain and disappeared.

Molly and the Bees: A True Story

Molly Hertig

Once upon a time, in a land not so far away and not so long ago, there was a girl named Molly. She was a happy little girl; she was ready to take on the world. One day, Molly jumped on her bike and headed down the street to Jenny's house. Jenny was Molly's best friend. They had such fun in her playhouse. The playhouse was four stories high, the top floor had bars around it and the third floor was only a little platform that had a ladder that led to where the slide was.

Molly always had adventures there. One day, Jenny and Molly put cushions around the bars on the fourth floor and had a picnic. Molly leaned back too far and fell from the platform, landing on her back. The fall was so sudden, and Molly was so shocked, that she didn't even scream. She just stood up, walked to her bike and pedaled home. This incident only happened about a month before the bees. If you were wondering if she went back to go down the slide, she did. They even had more picnics there. Molly had learned her lesson.

This story is not about that, though. This is about the bees. The little bugs that are yellow and black and that fly around and buzz, and if you stay still, they should go away. But sometimes, they don't.

Molly jumped off her bike, her blonde pigtails bouncing as she ran up to the door. She was so excited to see her friend. Jenny had gone on vacation, and Molly had missed her. As she rang the doorbell, she could hear footsteps running to the door. The door flew open, and there stood Jenny, grinning from ear to ear. Her brown hair was pulled back to show her ears.

“Your ears! They’re pierced!”

“Do you like them?”

“I’m so jealous. I can’t get mine pierced until I am twelve.”

As they headed towards the kitchen, Jenny was chatting about all the things they had done on her family’s vacation.

“I saw Cinderella and Snow White!”

“That would have been so cool. My mom said that maybe we could go next year.”

“I loved It’s a Small World.”

“Did you see Mickey Mouse?”

“No.”

They opened the fridge and grabbed fruit punch and some grapes. Then they headed outside to play. Mike, Jenny’s dad, warned them to be careful, for he thought there was some sort of hive on the second floor of the playhouse. They both agreed to be careful and not to disturb the hive, if there was one.

They raced to the playhouse and darted inside. Molly sat on the couch with her drink and giggled as Jenny’s face puckered up from eating a sour grape. She spat it out the window.

“That was nasty.”

“Let’s go down the slide Jenny.”

This sounded really good to Jenny, so they both went to the stairs. Molly went up the stairs first and saw a swarm of bees. She decided to walk slowly across the platform and over to the ladder. That is when the bees started to fly around her. She walked to the ledge of the second floor and dangled her legs over, getting ready to jump. The bees started to attack.

Jenny saw the commotion and slowly backed down the stairs and ran out of the playhouse.

“Jump, Molly, jump!” Jenny yelled from the ground.

Molly was frozen in fear. She was trying to stay still so they would leave her alone. But, they wouldn’t stop attacking her; the bees stung her over and over. Molly was now crying, and still too afraid to move.

Mike heard Molly crying and ran toward the playhouse.

“Molly, you need to jump. They won’t stop. You need to jump.”

Molly was frozen to the spot. Every sting made Molly look more red and blotchy. Mike saw the terror in her wide eyes. She was still crying, but amazingly, none of the bees were attacking her face.

Mike finally took a deep breath, ignored the thought that the bee-stings could kill him, and grabbed Molly from the ledge. The three of them raced back to the sanctuary of the kitchen, but the bees followed them to the door, buzzing angrily. The bees hovered outside the kitchen door for what seemed like forever before they flew back to their hive.

Kathy, Jenny’s mom, was soon on the phone with poison control; she reported the situation and how many times she thought Molly had been stung. By Kathy’s count, there were about 65 to 70 bee-stings on Molly’s arms and legs. There was no telling if the bees had stung through her shirt.

As soon as Kathy was off the phone, she pulled out a gallon of milk and grabbed the biggest glass that she could reach.

“Molly you need to drink a lot of milk to dilute the poison from the bees, or you’re going to get really sick.”

Molly just nodded her head; she was still cry-

ing and couldn't talk. She started to drink. When she had finished, Kathy refilled the glass. She refilled and refilled until Molly lost count of the number of glasses she had drunk.

"I can't drink anymore or I will be sick. I wanna go home."

"We need to watch you for a while, to see that you don't have a reaction."

Molly started to cry again, "I want my mom!"

After keeping Molly for twenty minutes and checking to make sure that the bees had left, they let her go home. Molly walked slowly and painfully. Instead of jumping on her bike, she walked her bike back down the street to her house. When she got there her mom was gone, but her dad was there. He asked her what had happened. As Molly started to tell the story, she started to cry. Molly's Dad wanted to hug his daughter, but there were too many stings and they were still red and angry looking.

Soon after the attack, Mike called an exterminator to come and spray the whole yard, including the playhouse. When the exterminator arrived and heard about the attack, he wasn't surprised.

"She was a lucky little girl. Those weren't bees; they were yellow jackets. They are mean little buggers. They could have really harmed her. If you wouldn't have been there, Mike, she could have died."

Mike just nodded his head. "I have never seen bees act that way"

After a few days, Molly rode her bike back to Jenny's house. She rang the bell and Mike answered. After asking her how she felt, he told her that Jenny was in the backyard and to go on back. Molly walked to the kitchen door and looked out. She yelled through

the screen for Jenny to come back inside. Mike and Kathy explained to her that the bees were gone, but Molly was not quite ready to go to the playhouse. In her mind's eye, she saw herself being attacked, saw Mike pulling her from the playhouse, saw the yellow jackets buzzing outside the door, and of course, she saw the milk.

Eventually she did go back into Jenny's playhouse, and she played for hours on end. She never did get stung there again, nor has she been stung since the incident those many years ago. She would never forget that Mike risked his life for her or how the bees had followed them to the house. The taste of white milk still makes Molly gag even to this day. She has tried banana, strawberry, and root beer flavored milk, but the flavor isn't strong enough. She can only drink chocolate, which is fine with her, for it was her favorite to begin with.

Just to Know You Stephanie Simonson

I wish I could remember what I'd been doing, thinking in the minutes before you first stumbled into my awareness. I must have been thinking such stupid, mundane things, like something a lesser boy had said to me in class or what fast-food place I could walk to after school. Isn't it incredible? How a person can be thinking the usual unremarkable things when they are moments from the most important event of their life?

I can't actually see this part in my memory like I can what followed, but I vaguely know what led up to our meeting: On my way to the cafeteria, alone, you hurried by me with your eyes downcast, though I didn't know you from any of the dullards in the place at that point. Some idiot casually stuck out their foot for you to trip on, and you only just stopped yourself from sprawling on the floor; one of the textbooks you were holding fell, scattering the papers tucked in it. The boy who'd tripped you didn't even pay you enough mind to laugh; I do remember that. To put off sitting alone for lunch as usual, I knelt to help you pick them up.

"Jerk," I said sympathetically, handing you the papers. And then you glanced up at me.

Where on earth did you get such eyes? People always blather about their lovers having beautiful eyes, but eyes, in fact, are very rarely memorable or special. You can speak to someone face to face every day and still not be able to say what color their eyes even are without looking. Granted, yours were familiar to me, but only because I'd been daydreaming for years of a boy with eyes like yours. What had looked pleasant

in my fantasies, however, was magnified to the celestial on your face. Round, turquoise, and gilded with a soft, angelic intelligence, they also brimmed with an earnest, commanding stillness, like living glass. It was your eyes, above all else about you that I would find enigmatic, that I think sealed my fate.

Before I could say anything else, you thanked me in a murmur that didn't let me capture your voice in my memory and disappeared into the line for the pizza kiosk. It's where I was headed too, but I didn't want you to think I was following you, so instead I settled into a table behind one of the pillars so I could see where you went to sit. If you'd sat alone, I would have come to sit with you, whatever it looked like. But, somewhat to my disappointment, I saw you were welcomed by a full table of people you laughed with and talked to effortlessly. To that point, I'd never envied anyone so much as I envied the friends at your table. I wasn't even dreaming of us ever being in love yet; at that point, I just knew I craved familiarity with you, the right to call you a friend, to display playful ease in your presence like I could see they did. The fact that some people could be so privileged to sit beside you and not even realize their miraculous fortune was already incomprehensible to me.

On my way to my next class, when you had disappeared back into the nameless, chattering crowd, I passed the place where you'd tripped, and noticed you'd forgotten to pick up one of your papers. I slipped the folded paper into my backpack without reading it yet; I wanted to read it in private, with plenty of time to savor it, when school was done.

I hoped to find poetry or artwork on the paper; I would've guessed you'd be stunning at both. I

wouldn't have been disappointed with even a physics report, as long as it had been written by you and therefore contained some insight into you, not to mention that it would've given me an excuse to seek you out and return it to you. Sadly, it was nothing written by you at all, just a study guide for a test. I still read and reread every word of it, of course, clinging to any information at all that it provided about you. It was exhilarating to me that you were likely to have read the same words as I was now reading. Your fingers had touched the same paper that mine now were. The study guide was for a public speaking class, which brought me to the uncomfortable realization that, of course, you had all your own classes, and had for years. You'd undoubtedly had to stand up in front of people for them. How many other girls had been struck with your gaze? Did any of them presume to think you'd had the same caliber of impression on them as you'd had on me? How, how could you possibly be going about a normal life every day, casually presenting yourself for scrutiny by others, unaware of me, unaware of those eyes of yours that made no earthly sense?

I have always kept that study guide in my drawer because, in the upper right corner, if you'll remember, you'd scrawled in pencil, "Test Nov. 4." And yes, it was a scrawl. I'd anticipated your handwriting as precise, scholarly, but I loved that it was not. It was certainly legible, but ungainly, even childish. It delighted me that you were imperfect.

For months, I waited and ached just to glimpse you again. My mind was made up that I would smile softly at you if I passed you in the halls, perhaps even say "hi," as if it was only natural that I should re-

member and recognize you from our brief encounter. I would stand at attention, sweetly shy smile at the ready, whenever I saw a boy with similarly sandy hair and a slight build coming up a hall. I soon found this basic appearance was far more common among boys at our high school than I'd previously noticed; I suffered at least two false alarms a week. My memory couldn't help but be a bit fuzzy on the finer details of your appearance apart from your eyes, but I knew I'd recognize you instantly if those eyes so much as flashed in my direction. I think that some of the false alarms actually were you, come to think of it; you were probably the one whose eyes were always carefully connected to the floor. Was this, perhaps, because you were selfish? (I don't mind the thought; I collected and cherished your possible flaws like treasure.)

Almost a year later, we finally had one class together. Of course, I sat next to you and, as planned, smiled and greeted you casually, as though you had not ruled my dreams since we met. I can't possibly describe the breathless anticipation of waiting to hear your voice, truly, for the first time. Your eyes lighted on my face for the merest moment, your soft angel's face (such a tired description, but one that was coined for the purpose of you) opened slightly into a weak smile, and I heard it: "Hi." It was low, nearly inaudible, and it would not be nearly enough to satisfy my memory; within days, I couldn't remember exactly how it had sounded.

Suddenly, I realized the devastating risks of my bravado. It was likely you loved someone else, or at least had before. You might have wanted nothing to do with me. Here you'd looked at me for a full few seconds, and you still did not know who I was. Don't you

know who I am? How can you be everything I know about love, about desire, about heaven, and not know me instantly as an extension of yourself? I may never even know your name, but oh my, I know you.

My stomach frothed, and I tasted the rush of bile. I should not have had to win you. You should have been as mine as I was yours. What else could possibly make sense? I looked away from you but was burned and made ill by your smoldering presence all through class. You weren't even aware of your effortless effect on me.

You soon dropped that class, and I was tragically relieved.

We met one more time before graduation. I had a special place where I would go to read, write, or think when I didn't want everyone to see I was alone at lunch, you see: a cramped, slanted closet in a stairwell that was never locked or full of anything.

One day when I opened it, you were inside. You were actually inside. It was like you were waiting for me, like you knew.

You sat with your legs curled beneath you, a frayed hole in one knee of your jeans that showcased the hollow knob of your bone. Something was poised uncertainly in your hand, and my memories vary as to what it was. In some, it is a cigarette; in others, a pill; in many, a pocketknife. Our eyes truly locked for the first time, and yours, so blue and luminous I could have drunk from them, shattered under my gaze.

I don't know how long we stared wordlessly at each other; it was too precious for me to time it or break it. I could only focus on the tremor of those godly eyes, like still water shaken by raindrops breaking its surface, and on the fact that, at the edge of your

quavering breath, the essence of your autumnal voice was audible. I could hear it, and my soul was so very yours.

I nearly told you everything right there. I nearly climbed onto you and breathed you in like honeysuckle. But the bell rang, and you immediately dropped whatever you were holding into your pocket and scrambled out of the closet.

Before you could run away, however, I caught your hand. And my, your hand nearly replaced your eyes in my esteem for that moment. They were dry as crepe paper, somehow soft and rough, like sandy velvet. I needed to feel them everywhere, in every way. You pulled your hand away quickly, but before you bolted, I did see in your eyes that, on some level, you knew me. You knew every ache of my heart you'd unwittingly drawn, and in some way, you were proud of it. And that is perfectly all right.

I meant to catch your name at last at the graduation ceremony, but it was too hard to see who was who. I don't remember seeing you at all, but it was easy to miss anyone whose name I didn't know. I pray every day you weren't one of the several boys in our class who died before then: one of suicide, one of an overdose, and one in a drunk-driving accident. I wouldn't know because I never knew your name, and all I ever heard about the dead boys was their names.

Whether I lost you to death or to simply never seeing you again, though, doesn't terribly matter. I remember your eyes, hands, and a few scattered moments of you, and these I know like I know my own mind. I know you, and that is enough.

Tante Rosza
Marianne Kwiatkowski-Lee

Arbeit macht frei
“Work brings freedom”

The obituary we all share
In the labor camp of the dead

I didn't ask to return to ashes.
No one ever consulted me
Those who care have no voice.

On the day of my burial
No flowers bloom,
No tears are shed

In the ossuary of my fellow men
We are dumped together;
Ashes to ashes to more ashes

We lie together.
Friends, family, neighbors
Concentrated fertilizer

Out of the winter and into a new spring
Visitors come
Morbid inquisitors

Where flowers bloom,
Cold hard stones lie neatly beneath one star
And strangers shed tears.

Staff Bios

JENNIFER SANDA is a super senior majoring in English with a creative writing emphasis and minors in art and professional/technical editing. She is not only the Managing Editor for *Epiphany*, but also works with *Metaphor* and *The Signpost*. Although it is still a work in progress, she possesses a novel that will make her rich and famous! . . . or, at the very least, it will be better than *Twilight*.

ELIZABETH CARVER is a single mother of two beautiful daughters, ages 5 and 4. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Professional and Technical Writing. She recently decided that she should follow her heart and become an editor. Her favorite color is blue, she is a Capricorn, and she would love to take a long walk on the beach if she could find the time.

DEREK STOUT is majoring in chemistry at Weber State University. His hobbies include wearing sweaters, watching campy movies, reading, and thinking of the best possible costumes for Halloween. He hopes to, one day, tour Europe in an Aston Martin. That is

ASHLEY HEDGES is a senior and is working on finishing up her Bachelor of Fine Arts with a minor in Dance. She loves the arts and is continually promoting the arts throughout campus. Ashley loves reading and writing and hopes to one day publish her own

MICHELLE CAWIT PAUL is an Asian-American nursing student who loves writing, drawing, video games, and strange things like zombies, fairies, and the Internet. She loves the Writing Center and Shep-

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herd Union building where she works, and owes everything to her awesome family and friends. After finishing her degree in nursing, her goal is to work on a degree in theater design.

The fall and the bees have made MOLLY HERTIG scared of heights and scared of anything that is yellow, black and that buzzes. She is currently finishing a novel— a sci-fi/fantasy/mystery and she is getting ready to start a second one which will be fiction with a touch of history.

STEPHANIE SIMONSON is a senior in English with a creative writing emphasis and a minor in theatre arts. She has previously been copy editor for *The Signpost*, *Metaphor*, and *Verbal Equinox*, and loves doing it. She has worked for the Writing Center and is currently managing editor of *The Signpost*. She loves dogs, writing, movies, Chinese food, and her husband.

MARIANNE KWIATKOWSKI-YEE is a Weber State Alumna who majored in English with a dual emphasis in professional/technical writing and teaching. As a nontraditional student, Marianne published guest editorials in *The Signpost*, wrote articles for the faculty newsletter and alumni magazine, and garnered honors through essay writing. Since graduation, Marianne has taught high school English and Journalism, and received a master's degree in Writing, Rhetoric and Discourse from DePaul University in Chicago, IL.

