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Purpose:
It is the express purpose of Epiphany to provide a quality bi-annual Nontraditional Student Literary Journal to showcase and further encourage the creative talents of nontraditional students of Weber State University.

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Assistant Editor: Tom Hughes
WSU Nontraditional Student Center Staff Advisor: Debbie Cragun
WSU English Department Liaison: Brad Roghaar

Special Thanks to:
Epiphany would like to thank all the Nontraditional Students who entered into the contest by submitting their finest work. Epiphany is made possible by your talent. Epiphany would also like to especially thank Debbie Cragun and Brad Roghaar for their support, patience and advice. Without you both, this wouldn’t be more than a dream. We especially would like to thank Weber State University Printing Services for making this possible. For all of you nontraditional student writers and poets, keep writing your passion. This is just the beginning of your journey. Thanks also to any and all who come into contact with this issue of Epiphany.

Please submit for the Spring Issue 2010.
Editor
Section
Rachel Cox, Editor in Chief:
Rachel Cox hails from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Writing has been her long-suffering, patient lover. She tried theater first, but found that writing was her one true love. She worked in the Writing Center for a year. Rachel won first place in the fiction category of the 2009 WSU College Writing Contest for her short story “One Leaf.” She will be graduating in Spring 2010 with a BA in English, Creative Writing Emphasis. At which time, she will turn right around and start her English Masters program. Rachel is currently writing a novel, and is deeply committed to finishing the monster by her graduation date. On the days that she gets too frustrated with the novel or when her characters just won’t cooperate, she writes short stories, poetry, a blog, journals, letters, and anything else in which pen and ink is involved.

Brianna Kent, Associate Editor:
Brianna Kent is a transplant from Colorado. She enjoys writing and has been published in a collection of poems A Surrender to the Moon, published in many issues of The Eagle Eye and written for 2 years for Black Forest News as a feature writer, and 1 year for The Tri-Lake Tribune. She was Editor in Chief of her high school newspaper and Editor of their literary magazine. Kent’s poetry has been used in classrooms in Colorado Springs for the past 2 years as a modern voice of medieval chivalry and it has additionally used as in a program for at risk children. She has read poetry and fiction for different audiences in Colorado, California and Utah over the past 14 years and even in Berlin, Germany. She continues to write poetry, short fiction and children’s novels.

Tom Hughes, Assistant Editor:
Tom is an English major with an emphasis in creative writing. He likes to dabble in poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. He has won first place in the WSU English Department’s writing contest in fiction, and also been published for poetry. For Tom, writing is about understanding one’s environment and then being able to interpret the environment however one sees it.
Epiphany Literary Journal started out as an experiment. It literally was an epiphany. As an English Major, Creative Writing Emphasis, I am naturally passionate about writing. I knew that there were other students out there who were also passionate about writing; students who had not yet found their voices. Through my job as Peer Advisor in the Nontraditional Student Center, I am committed to helping students excel and find their motivation to succeed. I tried to think of a way to blend my two passions of helping students and writing. Suddenly, there it was, staring me in the face. A nontraditional student literary journal. Of course!

Brianna and I fashioned this journal from our dreams of offering students a chance to be heard and a chance to be published. Publication is the dream of every budding author, after all.

I have so many people that I would personally like to thank for making this journal possible. People who may not even know the difference they’ve made. First and foremost, Debbie Cragun, the Nontraditional Student Center Coordinator, for her unfailing support. Debbie has helped me believe that anything is possible, not just for me or this journal, but for every student. I’d like to thank Kristi Meaders for thinking up the title of the journal itself and also for being patient enough to hear all of my ideas for creating this journal.

I would also like to personally thank the WSU English Department Faculty. Bri, Tom, and I practically spend our lives in Elizabeth Hall, and we owe so much to what we have learned from our English professors, specifically, but not limited to the following: Dr. Brad Roghaar, Dr. Judy Elsley, Dr. Sally Shigley, Dr. Scott Rogers, and Dr. Victoria Ramirez. Each of you have in some way or another made your mark on each of us, and, therefore, on Epiphany. You’ve inspired us to strive to be better writers. We have looked to y’all as teachers, mentors, and friends.

Last, but certainly not least, I have to thank the other two editors of this journal: Tom Hughes and Brianna Kent. Y’all jumped on board my crazy experiment with enthusiasm. You have both offered me your much needed expertise, support, grounding influence, and friendship. Epiphany never would have happened without Bri and Tom. We each brought our specialties to the table and balanced each other out.

I am so happy that our experiment worked. There were students who grabbed onto this opportunity and made their voices heard. Thank you. I am a better person for having read all of the submissions we received. Hopefully, you have benefitted from the writing experience. I have been inspired by the level of excellence produced by the nontraditional students of Weber State University.

I say to you all, continue to reach for your dreams and for the highest levels of your potential. Anything is possible. So, go out and have an epiphany today. After all, realism is for those who don’t know how to dream big!

Rachel Cox, Editor in Chief
Some say that time exists, but for me, I never notice. I follow the same routine everyday, but it makes my time all blend together. Actually, I am not sure if I even own any time. I never have any time to do what I want. It seems like it is always borrowed. I use at least eight hours from my boss, probably four hours for transportation, eating slips me a few minutes, but sleeping is very stingy with her time. The rest, I find myself staring into nothing. I don’t know if nothing owns any minutes, but if it does, it doesn’t share them with me.

Sleep, travel, work, sleep, travel, work, etc. This is my via. The only way that I know. I believe that it wasn’t always this way, but I am not sure if I remember. I have a colorful memory of my face, and I just recently painted a smile on it. But that memory has faded from brilliant rouge into soft sandstone. And like sandstone, it has weathered many years.

I have a name, but it is not really important. Oh, to some it must be, but for me? Well, let’s just call me Mistaken Identity. I have been a lot of different things, but like that sandstone, they have weathered away. Jobs come and go, and apartments change. They stay small and only support my habits to get up every day and follow the same routine that time allows me. I guess that I have lived in this place for almost a year now. I like this small apartment because it reminds me of myself – dark and dismal, but still enough elbow room. I don’t really feel gloomy or depressed so maybe dismal isn’t the right word. I have always had a difficult time choosing the right words to describe my feelings. I think that I try too hard to think of just the right words to put together, but they just come out gibberish. I am a master of gibberish, but I think that my native language has died out.

My apartment can be delightful at times, but as much time that I spend in it I really cannot describe it fully. I attempted to explain to you how my apartment looks, but again I cannot find the right words. But I can explain to you the most intriguing piece of the apartment. In the center there is a black spot. When I first moved in the spot was very tiny, almost as big as the head of a pin; very small right. It was kind of funny how I found it too. I was lying on the floor and like anytime I sit down with change in my pocket, it disappears. So there I was lying on my back and there went the change from my pocket. I sat there for a while telling myself that it wasn’t a big deal because I would find it again. So an hour later, I got up and looked down at my feet. I could see the two quarters, but the dime, the dime was doing something interesting. It was perfectly balanced on its edge. I couldn’t believe the odds that could allow the dime to balance perfectly, so I left it. I let it sit for a couple of days just watching to see when it would fall. The dime did fall, but not how I expected. The spot slowly grew into a hole in which the dime disappeared into.

Since the day that I lost that dime, the hole has swallowed up a shoe, a book, and all of the time that I borrowed before. It has grown into a foot wide circular gap. I can’t stop gazing at it. Let me try to find the right words to describe it for you – dark abysmal, manhole-ish, caverness, black. Yes, black is the right
word. The gap is black. For some reason, it calms me. I am not sure why, but when I gaze into its blackness, I feel black. Not the color of skin, but like the color black. I stare into the depth and feel nothing. I guess it is kind of like being completely in the dark and keeping your nose an inch away from the wall. You know that the wall is there, but you can’t see it. Yes, that is what it’s like. I know something is there, but I don’t know what. I just know that I am calm when I stare at it.

I once put my feet into it like someone would do to cool off in water. I couldn’t see my feet, but I knew that they were still there. Well, I think that they were. My friend’s cousin once stuck her feet into a pool that she couldn’t see the bottom of and something bit both feet off. Now I don’t know if that could happen to me, but I don’t know if I want to risk it. So now I keep my feet out of the hole.

* * *

It has been a month, I think. I really haven’t thought about time for a while now since the hole has grown. The hole has tripled in size and the apartment has only a foot’s worth of space around the walls. I have lost all of my things, but I didn’t really have very many things before - so it doesn’t really matter. I find myself grasping onto the wall like I am a jumper who is about to commit suicide from a twenty story building. The only difference is I am not suicidal, and I can’t see the bottom of my demise. Even though I can only lean against the walls in my small apartment, I am not worried. Things don’t seem to matter to me as much as they did before.

I find myself wondering if anyone else has a hole in their apartment, or am I special? If so, are their holes black too? Are they scared of their holes? These thoughts flutter through my head, but I think that they disappear into the hole because I don’t think about them for long. Soon I will become black and possibly become part of the hole. This may be the last gift that time gives to me, but I have to patiently wait for the moment.

I don’t think that things will change for me. No, they will only become black. They may fade like the sandstone, but I don’t know. All that I know is that I am standing in the corner of my apartment waiting to see how big the hole will become.
The soft dance of a feather,  
weaving and waving its way to the ground  

after—  
the delicate race of a tear,  
winding and whimpering to the floor  

after—  
almost saying yes,  
almost staying.  
Almost.  

Once I taught a fairy to sing,  
captured his tiny empurpled wing  
and upon his lips I placed a tear.  

Once upon a minute I sailed to sea  
and drew upon sedgy shores of green  
and died in the arms of Merlin—  

never wishing,  
never believing;  
ever  

before.  

The silky thread of a spider,  
pursuing and haunting her departures—  
before,  

the landing of an ice crystal,  
in the silence and softness of the wind.
Jerry sat dejectedly at the scrabble table in the common room of Pine Haven Assisted Living Facility. His scrabble partner, the Boy Scout Jeremy, had failed to show up for their weekly scrabble game. Jerry looked over the rims of his coke bottle glasses at Edna, his blue haired neighbor. She was sitting on the couch on the far side of the room, giving him the evil eye. Jerry ran his fingers nervously through the few hairs left on his head, and tried to look at Edna without her seeing.

Jerry had long since had affectionate feelings for Edna ever since she’d spilled her glass of orange juice down her hospital gown in the cafeteria, and he had handed her a napkin. From that moment on, Jerry was hooked. His love was thwarted, however, by Edna’s never ending devotion to her husband Walter, despite Walter’s untimely death one year after their marriage sixty years previously.

“Just ask her, stupid, the worst she can say is nothing,” Alfred, Jerry’s stuffed alligator was becoming impatient with this unrequited love.

“That’s not something you just go up and ask a person,” Jerry protested, covering Alfred with his greasy lunch napkin.

“What? To play scrabble? It’s not a proposal of marriage, you lunkhead,” Alfred couldn’t take this anymore. “Hey, Edna! Up for a game of scrabble before the nuptials?” Alfred yelled across the game room. Jerry nervously looked down, hoping that Edna’s hearing aid was turned off. What seemed like hours later, he looked up, and noticed that a faint smile had come across her lips, and a blush upon her cheeks.

“Give her seven letters; we’ve been through this!” Alfred was sure that Jerry didn’t listen to him half the time, and not just because of the dementia.

Edna shuffled across the room, pushing her tennis ball clad walker in front of her. Jerry could almost smell the lilac perfume and permanent solution emanating from her hair. She paused at Jerry’s table.

“What do I do? What do I do?” Jerry was frantic with anticipation.

“Run, Jerry,” Alfred the alligator exclaimed. “She’s a loony!”

“Excuse me,” Edna began tentatively. Jerry thought his heart would explode in his chest, sending pacemaker parts across the room.

“Yes,” he managed to say.

“Are you using this chair? My husband Walter and I would like to play a game of scrabble at the next table and we’re one chair short.”

“Run, Jerry,” Alfred the alligator exclaimed. “She’s a loony!”
Short Fiction
Paul’s hands gripped the man’s throat. With each passing second, the hands tightened, compressing the throat. With his fingers, Paul felt the blood pumping against the walls of the man’s veins. The blood hit harder than expected. Paul watched the desperation displayed on the man’s face. The face was red and saliva was everywhere around the mouth. The man kicked and flapped. He squirmed and twisted but inevitability was on Paul’s side.

Paul pinned the man’s arms with his knees to minimize his own injuries. He had three more inches and forty more pounds than the man. The man could do nothing as he thrust at final attempts for freedom. He looked straight up at his assailer, his workmate. He had been so surprised and panicked that he hadn’t thought why. Now he thought why. No answers.

Paul never smiled and the trend continued. With a sharp countenance, Paul dedicated himself to completing this task. This was a lesson, but for who? Life was escaping the man in his own apartment. His arms softly twitched and his legs gave their final kicks, the breathing stopped, and then the blood stopped pumping. Nothing, no more kicking or squirming.

Confident the lesson was over, Paul lifted the man’s head by the throat and let go. The head hit the wood floor and echoed. Paul put his hand on the head and used it to push himself up off the floor. He went over to the lamp lying on the floor. It surprised him that the light worked. Paul set the lamp upright and used its light to scan the room. The apartment was small. This wouldn’t be hard.

He went to the desk, the most logical choice. He ruffled papers and opened drawers with his gloved hands. Nothing. He looked a few more places then noticed the object on the kitchen table alongside work papers, a glass of water and a warm plate of spaghetti. He walked to the table and picked up the stapler to test it out. It still worked. He turned his head to look at a clock showing eight o’seven. He placed the stapler in his coat pocket and hurried to the door. Cracking the door to an empty apartment hall, he stepped out and closed the door behind him. Walking down two flights of stairs, Paul made his way to the lobby, unnoticed. He opened the front entrance and made his way out to the world, now raining.

Paul extended his hands and felt the rain trickle down his fingers to his palms and wrists. His hands were still gloved and the drops sliding down his fingers felt dull. After staring at the drops a moment, he shook them off and put his hands in his coat pockets to hide the latex. He began walking in the rain to his car. The thick rain came down hard. Water rushed through the streets and soaked everything around. It overfilled the rain gutters, spilling out into the yards and sidewalks. Paul’s dark-colored waterproof coat kept the water out.

A couple sharing an umbrella looked happy. Passing the couple, Paul produced a smile and nodded. They acknowledged and smiled back. He walked another block to his car. The meter read one minute. Just enough time, not a cent wasted. He opened the door and sat. Before starting the car, Paul took off the latex gloves and put them in the coat pocket without the stapler.
After pulling out of a parallel park, he carefully drove through the rain. His tires were well equipped to handle these conditions, their air pressure recently tested. Using his turn signal, he switched lanes. He signaled again and turned left. A woman in a car rode in the lane beside him. Without signaling, the woman cut in front of Paul, nearly clipping his fender. Paul pressed hard on the horn. “ Doesn’t she know how dangerous it is to drive in the rain? There’s no excuse for that kind of driving.” Paul’s engine revved and for a brief moment he thought to follow the woman to teach her driving etiquette. He glanced at the dashboard clock and looked again. No time. But this couldn’t be ignored. A lawless society wasn’t a society at all. He wrote down the license plate and turned down a street, leaving the women to her destination. With six minutes left, he pulled into the parking lot.

Paul parked his car and displayed the parking pass. The rain almost gave up but a few drops prevailed. He took his backpack from the trunk and made his way to the second floor to his class. Usually he was ten minutes early because he had a favorite seat, but today he entered the classroom exactly on time with a fear that the seat would be taken. Looking across the room, he noticed that the seat was vacant, so he made his way to the seat, took off his coat, hung it over the back of the chair and sat down. He took the stapler out of his coat pocket and placed it on his desk. Opening his backpack, he took out some papers and stapled them, the final touch of a homework assignment.

The professor showed up late every evening. This annoyed Paul, but he needed the professor. He waited. The professor came in seven minutes late and apologized. “It’s better to reform than repent.” The professor lectured and Paul listened intently. Even though the professor arrived late, Paul appreciated the lectures. After five minutes, a young man came in, brushed his wet coat up against Paul’s dry shirt and took the seat beside Paul. “The professor should close the door after class has started.” Paul refocused to the lesson.

“Hey,” the tardy man whispered to Paul.

Paul didn’t want to, but he peaked over at the man.

“I forgot a pen. Could I borrow one?”

Paul turned his head to the front and shut his eyes a moment. He breathed deep and shifted his lower jaw. Reaching down, he grabbed his backpack. Softly, he unzipped it and searched for his least favorite pen. Finding it, he handed the pen to the tardy man while keeping his head to the front of the class – where the teacher lectured. Paul continued listening to the professor, taking notes off the lecture.

“Hey,” the tardy man whispered again.

Paul glanced out the corner of his eye.

“Hey, this pen is blue. Blue will mess up my notes. Do you have a black pen?”

Paul’s eyes went sharp and his jaw stiffened. Forcing a small amount of air out his nose, he shook his head with quick short rotations, not taking his eyes off of the professor.
approached a lone car in the corner of the lot, Paul closed the gap. The gravel poorly lit and the clouds blocked the heavenly lights. The rain had died and the building without noticing this. Paul exited the building. The parking lot was quiet except for some distant cars. As they approached a lone car in the corner of the lot, Paul closed the gap. The gravel

That's when Paul left the classroom.

For the rest of the class Paul touched the gloves and wished they were new and of his fingers then jumped across the sleeve to the coat pocket. He put his hand behind, he found the bottom of his coat sleeve. He caressed the buttons. The tips of his fingers then jumped across the sleeve to the coat pocket. He put his hand inside the coat pocket and found the latex gloves waiting inside. The gloves were bunched up and with one hand, Paul loosed them. They were still new and still damp. With his fingers, Paul studied the texture of the gloves, wishing for them.

Looking around, he noticed people concentrating on the lecture but he couldn't join them. He needed something soothing, something to ground him. Reaching behind, he found the bottom of his coat sleeve. He caressed the buttons. The tips of his fingers then jumped across the sleeve to the coat pocket. He put his hand inside the coat pocket and found the latex gloves waiting inside. The gloves were bunched up and with one hand, Paul loosed them. They were still new and still damp. With his fingers, Paul studied the texture of the gloves, wishing for them. For the rest of the class Paul touched the gloves and wished.

The class ended without anymore chaos. Paul put his notes away in his backpack and placed his newly stapled homework assignment on the professor's desk. Paul kept track of the tardy student and watched as he left the classroom. That's when Paul left the classroom.

The tardy man walked ten seconds in front of Paul and he exited the building without noticing this. Paul exited the building. The parking lot was poorly lit and the clouds blocked the heavenly lights. The rain had died and the ground was drying. The lot was quiet except for some distant cars. As they approached a lone car in the corner of the lot, Paul closed the gap. The gravel
underfoot crackled and Paul felt the tardy man’s suspicion, but Paul stayed calm. As both men approached the vehicle, Paul reached into his coat pocket. He pulled out his latex gloves and put them on.
Every morning when Kate woke up it wasn’t because of the alarm clock or the sun shining in through the curtains. It was the sound of an infant child crying that would signal a new morning. Kate blinked, looking around the room, her head still spinning from various dreams she’d encountered throughout the night. It was hot in the apartment and the air conditioning was turned off.

Kate rolled out of the covers, sleepily walking to the bathroom rubbing her eyes. The baby’s voice was loud, just like every other day. As she brushed her teeth and used the dryer on her hair she could still hear the wailing until she left the house for work. The people in the apartment downstairs were an enigma to Kate. She had only bumped into the father on a few rare occasions and she had lived in the complex over a year. He would often take out the garbage and have a smoke, but Kate never saw the wife.

It could be a religious thing, Kate would think. Some people don’t want their wives out there in the real world. With advertisements and television, it’s a fodder for sexual exploitation. Yet, if he were gone all day at work, how did the woman grocery shop or run errands? There must be times when the wife would need something while the husband was at work and yet Kate never saw this woman. Not once.

In the evenings she would hear them yelling at one another. Not too loud, but loud enough that Kate could hear if she were in her bedroom rather than the living room. The speech was mostly deep; it rolled off the walls and reverberated in the ceilings. Occasionally Kate would hear the more gentle voice speak up before another rumble of the former would overpower it until it died out.

And yet the baby still wailed on. The kid had been born a month or two ago, so the possibility of still suffering from colic was unthinkable. That usually went away within a couple of weeks if the mother was feeding the child properly and monitoring her own diet. Or at least that is what little Kate knew about the subject, not being a mother herself. The woman downstairs must know better than she would and to offer any advice would be to offend. Kate didn’t want to offend her neighbors.

One day as Kate carried her clothes from the laundromat, she saw the husband in the driver’s seat of the family’s idle car. In the backseat, there was the beautiful child with a full head of hair and red cheeks. The baby was asleep. Although the peaceful nature of the baby surprised Kate, she attributed it to the vibrating engine of the car and smiled at the husband as she spoke through the open car window.

“What an adorable child. Is it a boy or a girl?” Kate said still beaming.

“A girl,” he said. His gaze stayed focused straight ahead as he put the car in gear and drove forward out of the parking lot.

That night when Kate desperately needed to fall asleep, a work presentation in the morning was the last thing on her mind. It was the incessant yells of that infant child. Kate finally gave in and took a sleeping pill, something that was rare for her.
“All I want is some peace and quiet!” Kate screamed the words into her pillow, more frustrated than ever. By the time the medication took effect, Kate was already dreaming of millions of floating babies, wailing around her, encircling her. The next day she asked her landlord if there was any way he could replace the insulation in her walls because they seemed paper thin. He said no.

“You’ll just have to get used to it. Some people are louder than others,” he said.

It seemed to Kate that the parents just put the little one in her crib when she was being such a fuss and hope that she quieted down on her own. When Kate went jogging one evening, the baby’s window was next to the front of the complex and it too yielded more screams and cries. Kate heard the parents arguing through the open window. “Just let her cry it out,” she heard the husband say.

Perhaps they weren’t feeding her enough. Maybe they didn’t have enough money to buy food, that is if the little one was on formula instead of breast milk. Or perhaps the mother was not eating enough and this affected the child’s behavior. The walls would reveal the meals of the adjoining apartments and while most people ate three meals a day, this family only seemed to cook one in the evenings when it rose up through the rafters to Kate’s nose. She thought about knocking on the door and giving the family a gift basket full of fresh fruits and vegetables and some homemade bread. But she didn’t want to offend them by prying into their business.

One evening as Kate sat out on the patio reading a book, the husband emerged to have a smoke. As he lit up, Kate tried to make friendly conversation.

“How is that little girl of yours doing?” she asked.

“Fine,” he said.

“How old is she now?” Kate pried a little further.

“Two months,” he said.

“Is she sick? She seems to be upset a lot. Sometimes I hear her cry,” Kate said.

“Oh really? Sorry about that. I’ll have to mention something to my wife,” he said as he put out the half used cigarette and turned back towards the complex.

“She really has a good set of lungs. Maybe she will be a singer someday,” Kate joked as he walked away.

Kate worried that maybe she had offended him. He stopped the conversation so short and didn’t want to reciprocate. She didn’t want to cause any problems. That night she heard the wife crying along with the baby. Kate finally gave in around three a.m. and took another sleeping pill in order to muffle the sobbing.

For the next few days Kate didn’t hear any crying. Not from the mother or the child. She didn’t see the husband and the family’s car was rarely in their parking spot. Then one day she saw the woman emerge from her door as Kate was going up the stairs to her apartment. The woman had red circles around her eyes...
and seemed lost in a daze. She looked at Kate through a misty glare and then sharply looked away.

“Hi, I’m Kate. I don’t think we’ve met,” she said extending her hand to the woman. There was no reply.

The woman continued to stare at her. Kate’s hand hung in the space between them. She hurriedly jerked it back to her side.

“How is that cute little baby of yours?” Kate said trying to be polite and avoid further embarrassment.

“I think you are mistaken. We don’t have a baby,” the woman said. Her bloodshot eyes bore into Kate’s. Kate was perplexed.

“Really? I’ve heard her every day. That is impossible. I even spoke to your husband and we talked about your baby,” Kate continued.

“I’m afraid you are wrong,” the woman replied as she turned back inside the apartment and slammed the door. Kate stood on the stoop, utterly confused and petrified for a moment.

“Wait, I saw her! I saw her in the car that day…” Kate said to the closed door. She ashamedly slumped up the stairs and into her own apartment before softly shutting the door. So much for being neighborly. These people must be furious with her.

That night it wasn’t the crying that kept Kate awake, it was the silence. It was the eerie dead silence that invaded her room and surrounded her. She shuddered underneath the covers. She started thinking how she could make amends, fix the situation. She just wanted to be friendly, but it had turned out bad. Served her right for meddling in other people’s business, Kate thought.

As she looked out her window into the black sky she heard the door downstairs open and shut. It was the front door of her neighbor’s apartment. Someone’s footsteps went down the wood steps to the concrete and walked slowly towards the parking lot. Kate sat up and looked out into the night. The husband was taking the garbage out. He carried two black bags, one filled tight with loads of garbage, the sound of bottles clanking in the bottom and cans crunching with his every step. Yet the other bag was hardly full. Just the very bottom carried a weight while the rest of the bag was loose and slack at the top.

Kate watched as the man leaned into the green dumpster to place the lean bag at the bottom while he moved his arms around arranging things before flinging the full bag onto the top of the pile. He wiped his hands on his plaid shirt and quietly walked back into his apartment. Kate leaned back in bed just in time to avoid his vision dart towards her window. She didn’t sleep a wink that night.

The next day she hurriedly got ready for work and ran out the door, spilling her coffee on the way to her car. When she returned that evening there was a moving truck sitting outside the complex. But it wasn’t loading, it was unloading. New neighbors carried pillows and boxes, chairs and couches up the stairs into the apartment. Kate had not seen the old neighbors move out. She would have heard the baby wailing all the way to the car. Her only reaction was to look at the big green dumpster, which had been emptied that morning.
When she questioned the landlord, the old man said they had left during the day time while Kate was at work. He found last month’s rent and a letter in the deposit slot of his door. Kate asked him if he knew their forwarding address. He said no. There was no trace of them. The apartment had been completely empty, well almost empty. He opened his hand to reveal a tiny pink bow. The kind that Moms would place on their infant’s head with a little bit of clear jelly to make it stick. Kate stared at the bow in horror.

“Now you can get some peace and quiet, that will be nice,” the landlord said with a smile as he placed the bow into her palm.
The sun dropped lower on the horizon, sinking ever closer to the ship waiting on the quay wall. The ship that would take him home. With Eveline. All his life he had dreamed of a home, a family. Life in the orphanage had been horrific, but he had escaped from that brutality to sea. It had not been easy. At first he had simply worked for his meager wage, spent little for he had no one to spend it on, no friends to spend it with. When he had earned the position of cabin boy to Captain Dawson, things changed. Throughout the Captain’s cabins were portraits of his family—the Captain, resplendent in his military finest and a beautiful woman in a flowing wedding gown. The Captain and his wife, with her pale curls caught up under a fashionable little hat, a baby in her arms. The Captain seated with a tiny girl on his knee gazing adoringly up at him and a sturdy boy with a mischievous grin at his side. And a photo of a house. Tall and elegant with friendly windows and a welcoming front step, this house drew him in, captured his imagination.

To live in such a house! To have a family such as this—bright eyed and smiling, waiting for him to come home from sea. In the evening Captain Dawson would tell him stories of his youth, of how he had worked to save enough to marry his sweetheart, to buy her a house. He admitted that it was a small house, with a small yard, and he could have easily bought her a larger one, but she loved that house. She loved to walk the little balcony on the rooftop to watch his ship come home to port. She loved the front gate with its wisteria arbor. She loved the big tree in the back that the children could climb. He would laugh and say that she would die in that house. Always there was laughter when he spoke of home. And Frank began to dream of that same kind of home.

One day, late in the year and during the hurricane season, his ship had ported in Buenos Ayres. Over the years he had learned the local Portuguese and loved the excitement of this port city. As he wandered the streets not far from his boarding house he had come upon a little tree lined avenue. He decided to walk down this lane, for it seemed to welcome him. He looked around as he walked and suddenly, directly across from where he stood, was the house. It was not small, but neither was it large. It was set back from the street, with a wide veranda and large windows. It had a little wrought iron fence all along the yard with roses and a great tree for shade. Impulsively he crossed the street and knocked on the door. His knock was answered by a smiling young man who threw the door wide and welcomed him in. It seemed that he had been waiting for an estate agent. This had been his mother’s house, but she had decided to return to England and wanted to sell it. She was not worried about the price; she simply wanted to be done with it. Frank walked away that afternoon poorer by half of all he had saved from his many years at sea, but the owner of a beautiful house, a house he would make a home. He had installed an older couple to be caretakers there while he was away at sea, but he knew that one day, he would fill that house with a family.
And then he had met Eveline. From the first greeting on that street in front of the boarding house he had been drawn to her. Oh, there had been many a young woman over the years, but Eveline was different. When she smiled her face lit up and her laugh melted his heart. He knew that she was fond of him, that when her father objected to their courting she had come in defiance of him, but he loved her. She was so lost, so emotionally drained by the life that she lived and demands of her job, her family, that it was as if she had walled herself away from the world. He wanted to change that, to protect her, to give her all that he had—to open the world to her. He was confident that in time, away from the constraints of Irish society, away from the strain of her family, her fondness would bloom into love. They could be happy.

Now, as the evening began to settle in around him at this bustling queue for the boats, he began to worry that she would not come. He was asking so much of her, to leave behind all she knew, her country, her family, all that was familiar. She had seemed hesitant at first about the idea of running away together. Her father would never consent and so he knew that this was the only way, and yet…

She had hesitated. Fear gripped his heart. What if she did not come? Suddenly, there she was. In his joy to see her there he swept her into his embrace and kissed her hair. Taking her by the hand he told her that they must be quick now to the boats if they were to make the passage. She mumbled something that he could not quite catch as he pulled her along through the queue. He urged her to hurry so that they would not miss their passage. As they heard the bell sound with last call he tried to quicken their pace, but she stopped. He turned to see her clinging to the palisade, heard her crying in an anguished lament, “No! No! No! It is impossible!”

“Eveline!” The fear gripped his heart again. “Evvy!” As he looked into her eyes he knew. She would not come. She had not come. He stepped beyond the barrier. “Please, Evvy, come with me!” The boat handlers were urging him to hurry now. “Please…” It was no use. He could see that. The wall was there, between them, solid, formidable, impossible for him to scale. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition. His heart breaking, he let go of her hand.
Nate looked like an average boy. Hazel eyes complemented wavy brown hair, which lay beyond his earlobes. He refused to cut it, crying out in pain when it was forced upon him. It was similar to his fingernails, but this claim was much easier to believe. Each time his mom tried cutting his nails as a sleeping baby, he’d startle awake, crying. So they matched his hair; longer than normal for a boy, and often the inspiration for teasing. He stumbled as he walked on creaking legs. The doctor called them “loose joints; perhaps he’ll outgrow them.” His V-shaped body was like a weight-lifter yet he was unable to coordinate his muscles to perform any graceful movement. Being unstable on your feet is common with Autism, even when you’re high-functioning like Nate.

His IQ was quite high, his vocabulary eloquent, and his ability to retain knowledge of animals was computer-like. Eventually, other sensory enhancements emerged. The vacuum “whined” across carpet and pencils “screeched” across paper. Even whispering hurt his ears. Nate could decipher whispered words from fifty feet away with his back turned - so he wasn’t reading lips. This interfered with his school attendance since children often whispered during class. He couldn’t concentrate on his coursework while minuscule noises overwhelmed him. Homeschooling prevented this assault of stimulation and his home was very accommodating.

He liked staying home because he “didn’t really like people, anyhow.” The only sensory invasion at home was during mealtime. Breakfast and lunch were alright, but dinner was often a cooked meal. Garlic chicken and garden salad with ranch dressing or Pot roast with rosemary potatoes. The mixture of smells sliced through his haven - unlike cold food which seemed to be stationary. He would often sit near his open bedroom window with a fan blowing “the disgusting air out.” Family dinners together were forgotten.

He didn’t sleep easily. A supplement of Melatonin and medication induced him into a slumber with resistance. 300 thread-count sheets or lower would irritate him awake, like a Prince on a Pea. Mellow music from his iPod would finally lull him into restless slumber. By early afternoon, he’d wake up grumbling and grouchy. Unless he ate within an hour of waking, hypoglycemia made a monster out of him; tantrumming and punching holes in the walls.

The day appeared stretched out before him. First homework, maybe some online gaming, and then nothing to experience but boredom.

“Will you eat some breakfast now?” His mom suggested after being awake for two hours.

Hazel eyes peered out over bronze rimmed glasses into her identical ones.

Squinting, he yelled, “I hate you!” Then he threw his GameBoy at the ground, not caring whether it broke as much as the glorious release of built-up feelings.
Slamming his bedroom door, this exclamation point was felt through the attic and into the foundation. Thwack! Boom! Objects in his room were there for breaking. Books and coins became missiles against the wounded walls.

As he came back to himself, Nate looked around for a soothing attraction; something normal to connect him to this existence. TV, iPod, DVD, or GameBoy. *Nothing!* He plopped down at his art desk and began a new watercolor. Three paintings later: equilibrium’s obtained. Art is his peace. He’s in his element surrounded by paint, pens, or markers. Like an archer, his focus while calm results with specific success. A filing cabinet in the den was filled with images he’d imagined during hours of drawing, sculpting, and painting.

Walking into his mother’s room with a hopeful look of sorrow, he handed her his recent piece and asked: “Did you know that the Giant Salamander is five feet long? It lives in China and they believe it brings good luck.”

Her smile reflected in his eyes. She understood that his brain was different from other children. “No, I didn’t know that. What color is it?”

As Nate explained his knowledge of various creatures, his eyes glittered with excitement. Passion liberated his voice, increasing his confidence. While he was calm, she guided him into the kitchen to eat a bowl of Cheerios.

“Someday, Mom, I’m gonna move to Alaska and run a rehab center for injured and abandoned animals.”

She had tried to support his love for animals with various pets throughout his life: fish, birds, several types of dogs, even a chinchilla.

“I know you will. You’re gonna help so many of them. Which ones do you wanna work with first?”

He chattered like a parakeet, naming all the types of animals he would save.

“Bald Eagles, polar bears, walrus, dolphins…” And he was happy for the moment.

Nate’s counselor suggested that he needed some social contact to help him adjust in the real world. Despite his misanthropic feelings, he sometimes went to Boy Scouts or the local Middle School’s dance. Unfortunately, this usually lowered his self-esteem; people just didn’t understand his uniqueness. Most of his interaction with others was online. Nate considered this equal to any personal relationship. His mom did what she could to help him adjust to his differently-abled life, but without the money for intense early intervention, she was losing ground fast.

According to Nate’s counselor, the suicide rate for children with Autism increases according to their higher function. The general consensus is that higher functioning allows them to comprehend their differences more clearly; and to complete this final task. They found Nate in the garage the morning after his online girlfriend broke up with him. He’d snuck his mother’s car keys after she went to bed and Nate had the first full night sleep since he was born. At least that’s what his mom kept telling herself. She didn’t want to believe that his life
was “a waste” as the judgmental people around her had suggested. She made Nate a silent promise that she would prove to the world that he’d had a purpose. She slowly built up the courage to go through his things, beginning with his filing cabinet of art.

Approximately 15,000 pieces of art were stuffed in the filing cabinet. Nate hadn’t shown her all of them; often preferring privacy for his personal creations. As she sorted through them, she discovered he’d repeated a design in many sizes, using various mediums, from the age of four. It was a beautiful symbol of curves and lines, always the same, as if it haunted him. Their Maltese, Angel, had died of cancer when he was four; causing Nate to cry himself to sleep for a long time. She wondered, Perhaps the trauma had created an obsession or ruminations for Nate, as was often the case when he was adjusting to change. Transitioning through change was one of the most challenging parts of his life.

Choosing the best piece for entry in a contest at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was going to be difficult. Knowing that the repetitive symbol must have been important to Nate she wanted to find the perfect piece and so she decided on a sculpture. Realizing that his hands had touched and molded the clay, she cried over submitting it to the committee...letting it go felt like losing him again. Her promise to him gave her courage and she allowed one of the judges to procure it; then anxiously awaited their decision.

When Nate won the Newcomer Award for Budding Artists, his mom never imagined that this ironic title would mean so little. Sure, it shut the mouths of those ignorant observers of his life. But everyone was surprised how it would change the world. Nate’s mom got the call a month after his sculpture was put on display.

A leading oncologist, who was working on a solution to cancer, took a break to attend the museum so he could return to his work with a fresh perspective. As he walked toward Nate’s sculpture, the hairs on the back of his neck stood up; his breath shortened. The theorems, genetic testing, and diagrams of the last twenty years congealed before his eyes. He rushed back to his lab and began testing. It worked!

The oncologist tracked down the artist’s information and called his mother. He explained his success to Nate’s mother, mentioning he wanted permission to use Nate’s name for the discovery. Her ears throbbed as blood pounded through the veins in her head and her mind flashed back to little Nathan, age four. Angel was very protective of him and had always slept at the foot of his bed. In fact, Angel hardly left his side from the day he was born. Remembering that Nathan would sit and stare at Angel, as if in a trance, caused her to conclude that he must have seen more than normal eyes could. His other exaggerated senses were obvious. She’d never considered that his sight was also superior since he’d never complained that his eyes hurt.

The weight of the memory overwhelmed her; she recalled how Nathan was adamant that their dog had “little halos around her...like an Angel.” He would comment each day on how “shiny and playful” they were. She’d never
dreamed he actually saw something! Perhaps his sensory amplification allowed him to see microscopic cells in the air above Angel. He had stopped talking about the little halos a few weeks before their dog died. Nate’s mom would never know for sure. The one thing she did know was that his purpose in his short life had outshined anything she could have imagined. He was not the overwhelmed, worthless child that most people had imagined. Nate had seen what no one else could…and through his art, he revealed the cure for cancer.
Flash Fiction
I have always loved fast sports cars and today was a perfect day to take a drive in my convertible. I was looking forward to the sun in my face and the wind blowing in my hair. After buckling myself in, I looked over my left shoulder to make sure everything was clear. Then, I pressed down on the accelerator and felt the power of the engine.

Excitement shot through my veins as I felt the car surge forward. I didn’t mind it when a car passed me. However, a feeling a dread soon overcame me. Some idiot in a blue car was tailgating me. I swerved to the right to give him the opportunity to pass me. Instead, he rear ended me, causing me to momentarily lose control. Quickly I regained control, and, careful not to overcorrect, I veered to the left. There was no place to pull over so I continued driving.

With limited room on my left, the idiot passed me and cut me off as he pulled in front of me, just missing my front left bumper by mere inches. Road rage overcame me. Slaloming through the traffic, I caught up with him and returned his bad behavior by cutting him off on the right as he did me. Heated words were exchanged as I yelled over to him, “How do you like a taste of your own medicine?”

Evidently he did not approve of my actions; he flipped me off as he stomped on his accelerator. This time, instead of cutting me off, he cut sharply into my left side. The jerk hit my front fender which sent me into a spin. “Smart ass,” I mumbled as I struggled to regain control to catch up to him. I was determined not to let him get away with hitting my car.

Mere minutes seemed like hours as we battled each other, neither one of us giving ground to the other. Just as I was about to make another daring move, the carnival worker turned off the power to the bumper cars and my son and I glided to a stop, laughing.
The room was filled with boxes, swap meet furniture and various paint brushes that had never been washed out. Bill stepped in the humid space, dropping his long trench on the old rocking chair. Was she back yet? Based on the aroma, he couldn’t tell. Usually she’d be concocting a new version of curry. He was sick of curry.

Then he heard her over in the corner on the bed, sobbing quietly. This wasn’t helping. If only she would take some credit. Someone had to take the L-train in the freezing rain to the office every morning. Someone had to pay the bills.

She clawed at her stomach, the hot tears coming down her dirty cheeks. She hadn’t left the bed yet and it was five thirty in the evening.

“No curry today?” he said. She didn’t answer. She used to be so beautiful. Bill considered going next door to the neighbor’s flat. He didn’t know any of their names, but he was sure they’d be more pleasant. Mostly he just wanted to run away.

“Your shirt is undone at the bottom, did you notice that?” she said, looking up at him, her face almost on fire. “Hopefully it wasn’t like that all day,” she continued. He wanted to slap her so hard. He wasn’t completely stupid. How many apologies did it take? No matter what he said she would still have suspicions. She stood up, her black lingerie still clinging on, her artist’s feet splattered in oils of red and orange.

“Look, I didn’t really have a choice. We can’t afford it. You need to get over yourself. That’s all there is,” his voice was so quiet it was barely audible. She kept sobbing, her arms wrapped around her stomach, the newly hollowed place. He walked over to the stove, lifting the lid to the pot encrusted in day’s old red rice. It looked too similar to blood. He was disgusted. She had lost her mind. That was that. It was over and he couldn’t stay a minute longer. He glared at her as he walked towards the door grabbing his belongings and struggling with the lock. He didn’t hear the last words.

“I would have named him after you.”
There it was, the first splash, then tiny droplets discoloring the old wooden porch. With the syncopated cadence came the soft whisper of wind tugging at leaves, reaching, seeking out the secret places of the yard. I’d known it would come; I’d felt it in the afternoon stillness, seen it in the gray, leaden sky, smelled it on the breeze. Rain.

I stepped off the porch, just a pace or two, and onto the grass, cool and curling about my bare feet, and stood; face raised, eyes closed, arms outstretched. A torrent of individuals, each drop’s touch soothed and cooled my hot skin, gathered to flow in rivulets through my now sodden and curling hair.

Behind me, he began to laugh. Taking hold of my wet, outstretched hand, he pulled me into his embrace, one hand brushing my unruly curls away from my forehead as he gazed into my eyes, a mischievous smile playing about his lips. “May I?” He asked as his hand at my waist pressed me close and we began to sway in tempo with the wind kissed trees. Across the grass we moved, unmindful of the wet, the cold, the coming dark. There was only now, this moment, and the two of us, dancing to the rhythm of our hearts in the gentle summer rain.
Justice moves swiftly when there is no one to speak for the accused.

Animal control shows up at the front door just two days after it happened: two men, armed with a court order and enough protection and equipment to wrestle a bear. Diane isn't surprised, as she had been told by the officer at the hospital to expect this, but she has yet to wrap her head around it.

"Where is the animal, ma'am?" one of them asks.

"In the backyard—in the dog run. He has been since it happened."

"Is it muzzled?"

"No."

The man asking the questions looks at the other, who walks back to the truck. Diane and the first man stand on either side of the open doorway in awkward silence, she twisting the doorknob back and forth, he rocking slightly on his heels. The second man returns with a large steel muzzle. The first man resumes his duty as spokesperson. "Would you please take us to the animal?"

She turns and walks toward the back door. The two men follow, leaving the door open. They are almost at the back door when she suggests, "Why don't you let me go get him? He might not let you leash him."

The two men look at each other, silently debate the matter for a moment, before the spokesman responds, "Are you confident that the animal will not harm you?"

"Oh, no, Barney would never hurt me." But Barney did hurt Steve, and we never thought he would do that. Even so, even with her husband in the hospital recovering from surgery to save his right hand and forearm, she is still unafraid of Barney. She knows that Barney would never hurt her.

The first man hands her the muzzle, which she takes and heads outside, leaving the two men standing between the family room and the kitchen. Diane is still outside when Kevin comes down the stairs and into the kitchen. The small eleven-year-old boy sees the two men and stands there in confusion until he sees his mom bring the muzzled dog into the house.

"No! You can't do this! This isn't fair!"

"I'm sorry, Kevin, but we can't keep Barney. Not after what he did to your dad."

"It wasn't Barney's fault! Tell them!"

The first man looks at Diane expectantly, but she doesn't respond, so he simply takes the leash from her and hands her a small stack of papers. "Ma'am, this will explain everything. The court order is on top; if you should disagree with the court, you have three days to file an appeal. There's information on how to file an appeal right here. Do you have any questions?" She shakes her head.

The men start to leave, Barney following obediently behind, his head and tail down, his eyes full of shame and understanding. Kevin throws himself at the dog:

"No! He's a good dog! The best dog ever!" He buries his head into Barney's neck and wraps his arms firmly around the dog's middle. Barney reaches
his tongue around the bars of the muzzle and licks at Kevin’s tears. The second man gently pries Kevin off of the dog and turns the boy over to his mother. The two men take the dog and leave quickly, the front door snapping shut.

"I hate you I hate you I hate you!" Kevin yells, twisting out of his mother’s arms. "Why didn’t you tell them? It wasn’t Barney’s fault! He was doing what he was supposed to do! He was just protecting you! He’s a good dog!" He runs upstairs. Diane hears the slam of his bedroom door.

Diane sits down on one of the bar stools and puts her cheek on the cool granite of the kitchen counter. The tears come slowly at first, but soon she is letting out loud, mournful wails. She is going to miss Barney.
What is that smell? My eyes shift left, then right. Is it the creepy 40-year-old pedophile or the 786 pound woman with man hands? I’m going to say the woman. I’ll bet she has purple carpets in her house. Please let me be next. Turning up my iPod, I slouch deeper into my chair. Could $55.00 a week be worth it? Of course it is. I wish they would just take my plasma and pay up. Ironic that I would rather be sitting in a frigid room and siphoned with a needle by what is probably a professional heroin addict, than sit sandwiched between Big Bertha and Merv the Perv. What on earth is that wretched smell? My eyes plead with the receptionist. Me next. I’m begging you.

“Amber?”

Praise the Lord. I turn to retrieve my bag off the back of my chair. Bertha grins farewell. No teeth. Splendid.

Makin’ a List, and Checkin’ it Twice

With Jake’s tiny hand in mine, we enter the epitome of holiday chaos. Red and green tinsel line the store windows, songs of reindeer blare from the speakers, and oversized paper snowflakes hang from the ceiling. As we stroll to the heart of the mall, I glance down and wink at Jake. His unsure face offers a concerned grin. We join the line and wait our turn to meet an overweight man dressed in red velvet, accessorized with a false beard and jingle bells. Jake’s four-year-old hand perspires as we inch our way closer to Santa. Finally we reach the red and white striped candy cane signifying Jake as the next visitor of Santa’s lap. Astonishingly, Jake bursts into tears. Bending over, I pick him up and inquire about his sudden fear. As I wipe fresh moisture from his cheeks he replies, “Oh Mom, I just can’t lie to Santa. I’ve been a bad boy!”
It was her shoes that caught my eye - black sneakers with turquoise and black laces. Someone had taken the time to weave the laces over and under each other until a black and blue checkered pattern lay across the tongue of the shoe. It was fascinating. The most intricate thing I had ever done to a shoe lace was to tie it in a double knotted bow in my hair for a Halloween costume.

"I like your shoes," I said. "How long did it take you to do the laces?"

"Forever!" She smiled.

I'll never regret asking her the question. She didn't offer any other information about the technical difficulties of weaving 100% cotton shoe laces into sneakers. She didn't divulge her name or where she was from or where she was going or if she was in love at that very moment. A possibility that would explain the playful curves of her rounded, petal-glossed lips.

I found myself stealing glances of her beautiful face. I didn't want her to think I was strange. But, more importantly, I didn't want her to be mindful of herself in trying to keep up a conversation with a perfect stranger on the bus. Her face reminded me of the Arctic north. Her skin was as pale as polar bear fur, but freckled. Not the permanent, sun-damaged sort of freckles, but the kind that twinkle and dance like stars when something amusing flashed across her thoughts. And some memory, somewhere, was very amusing.

Her mouth, with lips so full that only ripe plums could be used in comparison, kept flickering into a smile so engaging I ignored the double piercing of silver beneath her lower lip. Had her smile not been so charming, her eyes would have taken my attention away from this show of rebellion. There were two blue crystals, as sharp as ice set inside the black frames of her thick unmascara-ed lashes. I wished she would gaze back at me. I wanted to see her story, but she kept her secret delights to herself.

Her high cheek bones and strong chin remind me of my own face - how much mine is the opposite, with its long, straight lines. I quickly scanned the other faces on the bus to see if any others mimicked her features. Of course, there was no one like her. I felt glad I had raised my eyes above her interesting laces - that I was left wondering whose love stories had woven to create such a face.
Non-Fiction
She couldn’t help but chuckle at the irony. 10:11 am. Less than 24 hours ago she never would have dreamt being caught in this place. Alex glances to the bathroom door. A cupboard squeaks open; drawers slide closed. Silence. The shower hisses and spatters to life. She estimates ten more minutes of privacy, and reaches for her Blackberry. Unsure, she clears her throat and hits speed-dial one, connecting her to her best friend.

“Hello?” comes the receiver.

“Guess where I am,” she dares Danielle.

“At work?”

“Not exactly.”

“Where else would you be?”

“At Blake’s kitchen table eating pancakes.”

“ALEX! Why would you do that to yourself? How did you end up there? After all the things he said to you yesterday, begging you to come see him so he could have a ‘last go around’ with Alex…” Rubbing her bloodshot eyes and drawing hearts in the excess syrup on her plate, Alex listens to Danielle’s rant.

“…his comments were inappropriate. You know you shouldn’t be there. How did you end up there?” Silence.

“Hello?” Danielle questions.

“For now. You should probably explain.”

“If you hadn’t flown off the handle I would have been able to a while ago. Last night I drove down here with Makelle. She was whining about having to drive down alone, and when I told her I had today off she basically packed my bag. I came down, met some guys, watched The Hills, and called it a night around two. I woke up this morning to a text from Mr. Jerk asking what I was up to. I told him I was asleep in the apartment across the street. I thought he was going to have an anxiety attack, Danielle. He turns into Mr. Nice Guy asking if--”

“This still hasn’t explained to me why you even went over there.”

“I’m getting there, calm down. He said he was making pancakes and I was starving, as always. Makelle had class this morning, so I used my power for evil and flirted until he offered to feed me. He caved after about two seconds. I wonder if Andrea knows how ‘loyal’ he is.”

“Or isn’t.”

“Gosh I know. The second I walked in the door he couldn’t keep his hands to himself. I feel bad for her. I have no intention of helping him cheat though Danielle I swear it. I just…”

The bathroom door swings open and a nearly naked Blake exits, shielded only by a towel. He glances over to Alex. He eyes the phone at her ear, winks,

“Sorry,” she breathes, “He just got out of the shower, and I didn’t want him to hear me. Anyway, I should probably go before he comes back.”
“Alex, don’t be stupid. He only wants to hit it and quit it. Leave. Now.”
“I will. Right after I finish these pancakes. Please don’t give me your ‘I can’t believe how stupid you’re being’ sigh. I’ll call you later.”
“Fine.”

Alex shoves her phone in her pocket as she feels his hands on her shoulders. She turns her head and smiles. Her smile fades and the all too familiar tightening quenches in her stomach. She remembers what heartache feels like. Her stomach begs her to leave. She knows he doesn’t deserve her attention, nor in reality did he really even care about her. This was merely a spontaneous meeting between what once were intimate friends. He leans in slowly and whispers in her ear.

“I’ve missed you. I think about you all the time.” Warm breath teases her cheek. His finger traces her spine. Her defenses fade, and she turns to face him completely, allowing him to place his oversized arms around her waist.

“I’ve missed you too,” Alex sighs, and with a hint of mocking flirtation she drones, “So, how is Andrea?”
In Greek mythology, Prometheus, the “god of forethought and crafty counsel,” is charged with making men (but not women) out of clay (“Prometheus”). Unfortunately, when he is done, Zeus is not impressed. When Zeus’s gifts are distributed to the newly created animals and men, Prometheus sees that the animals are adequately provided for, but “man was [left] naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed” (Plato).

Prometheus pities the mortals. He decides to do things to improve their lives and bring them hope. In doing so, he oversteps his bounds and steals from heaven. First, he tricks “the gods out of the best portion of the sacrificial feast” and gives it to the men (“Promethius”). Next, he pilfers wisdom in the arts from Hephaestus and Athena so he can teach science and letters to his creations. He invents ships and chariots for their use. Then he takes over the domains of other gods: He does Herme’s duties by delivering horses (created by Poseidon) and oxen to help mankind with their labors. He also teaches them to use medicine, which is the stewardship of the Theoi Iatrikoi; how to read the future, which is Nereus’s responsibility; and even instructs men in metallurgy, the domain of Daktyloi and Kouretes (“Prometheus,” “Hermes,” “Theoi Iatrikoi,” “Nereus,” “Daktyloi”). But did Prometheus perform this service simply to benefit mortals? No. We see this as Prometheus brags about his accomplishments: “[Men] were witless before[,] and I made them have sense and endowed them with reason. . . . Hear the sum of the whole matter in the compass of one brief word—every art possessed by man comes from Prometheus” (Aeschylus). Prometheus, by helping men, has set himself up to be man’s greatest god. By reaching beyond the mark, he upsets the natural balance, and becomes a threat to the other gods.

Angered by Prometheus’s hubris, Zeus withholds fire from mankind; but Prometheus steals it and delivers it to them hidden inside a fennel stalk. Zeus punishes Prometheus’s rebellion by arresting him, chaining him to a stake, and
then having an eagle eat out his regenerating liver every day. Zeus also creates Pandora, the first woman, “as a means to deliver misfortune into the house of man” (“Prometheus”). He sends her to earth with a storage jar filled with dubious gifts—evil spirits that cause disease and death (ibid., “Pandora”). Thus, Prometheus’s desire to help mankind results in tragedy both for himself and for those he loves: He receives a sentence of endless, excruciating pain while the men he created are beset with calamities.

Just as Prometheus steals knowledge, power, and fire from Zeus and the other gods, Frankenstein, in essence, steals the knowledge and power to create life from Shelley’s Christian God. Like Prometheus, Frankenstein’s initial motivation was pure: “I have... benevolent intentions, and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice, and make myself useful to my fellow-beings” (Shelley 117). His chief interest in science is to pursue two of the grand dreams of the ancient alchemists: He wants to find the “philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life” so he can “banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death” (ibid. 69). In short, he wants to find the “cause of life” (ibid. 79). He believes these discoveries will benefit the entire human race.

Frankenstein’s aspirations are not completely altruistic, however. He also wants to achieve these breakthroughs for the “glory that would attend the discovery” (ibid. 69). His pure desires become further polluted when M. Krempe ridicules the philosophies that Frankenstein treasures. Krempe’s condemnation makes Frankenstein defensive, eager to prove that he is right. M. Waldman unwittingly feeds into this vain attitude when he acknowledges that the ancient alchemists had some merit since “modern philosophers were indebted [to them] for most of the foundations of their knowledge” (ibid. 76). As Frankenstein furthers his studies and explores “every branch of natural philosophy,” he becomes blinded by his ambition to distinguish himself by making a scientific breakthrough (ibid. 77, 239). He soon forgets his original purpose—to be useful to mankind—and begins to pursue science for its own sake (ibid. 78).

After two years of intense labor, Frankenstein discovers how to generate life by “bestow[ing] animation upon lifeless matter” (ibid. 80). Thus, he takes a step into God’s domain—a place that, because of his insufficient mortal wisdom, he is not prepared to handle. In the flush of his discovery, Frankenstein becomes “insensible to the charms of nature” (ibid. 83). This indifference is another turning point. Here, nature represents the safe parameters of knowledge ordained by God. By becoming disconnected from nature and its peace, Frankenstein becomes detached from its protections. To make things worse, he sets aside his natural affections for family and friends; this act reflects his growing indifference to mankind. Instead, he focuses on “that great object”—“the creation of a human being”—and his ambitions morph into something worse (ibid. 81, 83). His aim is no longer the blessing of mankind or even gaining accolades for his scientific discovery. Now his ambition is to be venerated by his creations: “A new species
would bless me as its creator and source, many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” (ibid. 82). He has become like Prometheus, focused on his own glory.

Since godlike glory is now his primary motivation, Frankenstein is unconcerned about his new human’s needs and makes no preparations for his success; he thinks only of himself. When his creation comes to life, Frankenstein immediately abandons it, thus neglecting the tutoring and nurturing it needs in order to survive and thrive mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Unlike Prometheus, Frankenstein does nothing to improve the life of this new man.

Frankenstein knows better. Raised a member of the upper class, he knows his duty; the lower classes (personified by Justine, a servant whom his family brings into their circle) are to be accepted, taught and treated with dignity (ibid. 91-92). It is his noblesse oblige to treat all lower humans with respect and give them opportunities for success. When his creation confronts him on Monte Blanc, he reminds Frankenstein: “Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam” (ibid. 126). He tells Frankenstein that he ought to perform his equitable duties as creator by providing justice, clemency, affection, and training (ibid. 126). But Frankenstein not only neglects this obligation, he also strips the title human being from his creation and replaces it with monstrous labels: creature, daemon, Devil, and monster (ibid. 125-26).

From the time of the creature’s animation, Shelley exhibits the consequences of pride and aspiring to mimic God’s creative power; all embody intense suffering. First, a man creature is formed who, because of Frankenstein’s neglect, has no chance for happiness or acceptance into the human family. He is wretched, hated, and “miserable above all living things” (ibid. 125). In his pain, the creature vows revenge against Frankenstein and declares war on the human species (ibid. 161). Second, by claiming God’s right to create life, Frankenstein creates his own Pandora (the creature) and opens her box of illness and death. He suffers, first with fear, then with illness, anger, and remorse. Like Prometheus, he feels he is “chained in an eternal hell” (ibid. 233). He eventually dies under the weight of his guilt. The last consequence is that innocents also suffer. Those who love Frankenstein worry about him; they agonize over his illnesses and distress. Worse, Frankenstein’s brother William, his best friend, and his wife are murdered by his creature. Justine and his father also die as a result of Frankenstein’s choices—Justine is unjustly tried and executed for William’s murder; his father dies of a broken heart caused by the deaths of his loved ones. Frankenstein knows too well who is to blame—through his creation, he is the agent of death and misery. He says, “I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as [murder]... [I felt that] my own spirit [was] let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (ibid. 104).
Through Frankenstein’s deathbed conversations with Robert Walton, who is also pursuing scientific discoveries, Shelley speaks against the folly of vain aspirations and emphasizes the need to keep knowledge acquisition within nature’s bounds: Frankenstein says, “Seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition. ever be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries” (Shelley 239). He urges Walton to “Learn from [him] . . . how dangerous is the acquisition of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (Shelley 81).

Thus, through the tragedy of Frankenstein, which parallels that of Prometheus, Shelley teaches us to avoid hubris and overstepping our bounds. She shows the dire consequences of mocking God by reaching into his domain. When, through our pride, we use knowledge and power beyond our ken and comprehension, we do it at our peril and at the peril of those we love.

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As I enter the building, the doors behind me close with the quiet click of the automatic locks.

Lucille is walking fast on her toes as usual, looking like she is in a hurry to be somewhere.

She is tall, slender, and appears very physically fit. Her graying hair sticks straight up at odd angles. Lucille has on at least three different layers of shirts and a blue button up sweater; the sweater is on up-side down with the neck down by her waist. Her sweats are poking out the top of jeans that are about six inches too short. I greet her with a smile and a warm hello. She squints her eyes, trying to figure out who I am, then scurries down the hall without any reply. I guess by Lucille’s appearance that one of the new nurse’s aides is on shift this morning.

Lizzie, an aide, pokes her head out of Beth’s room, looking perplexed. I ask her if I can help. She shakes her head in dismay. “Beth’s clothes are missing. I had them out on the bed ready for when she finished in the bathroom. They’re gone.”

“By chance was it a blue sweater, jeans, and a light blue shirt?” Lizzie gives me a puzzled look.

I point down to the end of the hall where Lucille is now coming back towards us. She has a new addition to her outfit, a towel across her shoulders on top of the up-side-down blue sweater.

Lizzie says, “I heard she was fast and to not leave any clothing items out, but I didn’t realize how speedy she really is.”

I corner Lucille as she comes past and tell her that I will help her with her sweater, and start to remove her outside layer of clothing. Lucille is very cooperative and helps me take off the sweater, jeans, and extra shirt. I tell her “Thank you,” and she walks speedily back down the hall on her toes.

Twenty Alzheimer patients are on this unit. The entire unit has special accommodations for Lucille. When she first arrived, she traveled from room to room putting on clothing, towels, flowers, anything she could find. The maintenance engineer figured out a wonderful way to help us maintain order in the closets and drawers of the unit; every dresser and closet has holes drilled into the sides with a wood dowel inserted into each hole. The dowel needs to be removed from the side before any drawer or closet can be opened. His creativity greatly assists in Lucille’s happiness and our sanity.

We tried to contain her in a chair or in a small area, but she got agitated and upset. We do not have enough staff to walk with her continually, so the unit has been fixed to accommodate her. Lucille is perfectly steady on her feet, and there isn’t any reason to not let her walk. She walks in circles around and around the unit for hours on end with no sign of fatigue.

In her younger years, Lucille was a model and fashion designer. She loved clothing and getting dressed up. This fetish is one of the small parts of her identity that she has been able to hang on to. She doesn’t remember her family.
most of the time and she rarely actually says anything. She just likes to get dressed and walk. Any clothing, anytime, anywhere, will be added to what she is wearing, if she can get to them. We all, including her family, are just thankful that she is not concerned with taking clothes off, only with putting them on.

The Alzheimer’s unit is set up in a circle with the nurses’ station in the center and residents’ rooms on the outside of the circle. On one end is an area for visiting or sitting. The area is comfortable with couches, a piano and several nice chairs. The other end includes the dining area for the residents.

In the sitting and dining area Lucille’s family and the other residents’ families are often found sitting and chatting with each other. Lucille is rarely in her room because when she is not sleeping she is walking. Her two daughters, son and husband take turns or come together to be with her every evening. They had a hard time placing her in the unit. They were very tired and physically worn out when they made the decision to have her live here, but she needs twenty-four hour surveillance to keep her safe.

Lucille cannot stay focused long enough to finish a meal, so they patiently follow her as she walks, carrying her plate of food and feeding her on the go. They comb her hair, tenderly rub her shoulders, and endlessly tell her about her grandchildren and what is going on in their lives. She occasionally lets her husband hold her hand as they walk. He kisses her good bye; once in a while she smiles, but shows no other response.

Lucille’s daughter says, “I am angry. Mom gave to others and loved others. She was so smart and beautiful. Now I would rather her die than to ever go through this disease. Whenever I forget anything, I go into a spin. The fear is large! The answers are few.”

Another time a family member says, “What can I tell anyone in this situation? Just to face the truth. The person you loved will not be back. It is not your fault. I wear a ring on my index finger that says ‘Accept.’ I look at it often. Every little change in my mom upsets me. I have to always let it go.”

With time, some families appear more at peace and relaxed as they come for their visits. Perhaps they have accepted that they cannot change the Alzheimer’s diagnosis and the erasing identity of their loved one.

Buzz, Pop. The locks release so a visiting family member may leave; the doors behind him close, the locks give a quiet Click.
Like many people, I have had a wide variety of jobs. Employment opportunities were very limited in the small Iowa town of West Burlington, where I grew up. From my pre-teens to my teenage years I mowed lawns, shoveled snow, and babysat whenever I could. I also spend many spring and summer nights catching and selling night crawlers to the local bait farm. Still, I wanted to earn more money and the only way to do that was to “farm out” like a lot of my friends did.

Every July, local corn seed companies, such as Funk Brothers, would hire bus loads of 14 and 15 year olds for two weeks to detassel corn. Since most businesses would not hire anyone under the age of 16 this gave younger kids an opportunity to earn some money.

In the summer of 1972, against my parent’s wishes, I signed up. It’s not that my parents were against me working, they didn’t feel it was a proper job for a young lady. At the time I thought it sounded pretty easy. Just grab the golden tassel on top of the corn stalk and pull it off. It wasn’t until I got to the corn field I learned the rest of the story.

As my dad would say, I had to get up with the chickens, which meant at 5:00 am, to get a quick breakfast before the two mile walk to where an old school bus was to pick up the “crew.” We were told we needed to bring a sack lunch, a canteen filled with water, suntan lotion (these were the days before sun block), and had been warned to wear heavy long pants and a long sleeve shirt.

While waiting for the bus to pick us up I listened to others who had experience detasseling. Suddenly, it wasn’t as easy as it sounded. Our work day would begin around 7a.m. when the bus dropped us off at a farm 20 to 30 miles away. Often the bus was not to leave us off next to the field where we were to work so we would have to crawl under the barbed wire fence and walk to the field where the detasseling was to be done. Sometimes this meant walking through a pasture filled with tall, itchy weeds, such as poison ivy, and irritable cows.

Once we got to the fields we learned why we had to get up as early start. During the summer the temperature rose very quickly, easily reaching over 100°. Typically, corn is planted 4 to 6 inches apart, with rows being planted 2 to 3 feet apart, depending on the seed planter. Because the corn stalks are tall and planted close together, they trap the morning dew, creating sauna-like humidity. It was not uncommon for a field to reach the temperature of 120°.

With the unbearable heat and humidity one might be tempted to either roll up their sleeves or wear cooler clothing. However, the long pants and long sleeved shirts where worn for protection against the razor sharp edges of the leaves. Walking the rows during the detasseling process often left countless paper-like cuts on arms and throats. Sweat would run into these cuts, causing a burning sensation.

Sweat wasn’t the only thing to get into the cuts. Because the corn stalks were over six feet tall I would have to reach up and bend it over in order to grab the tassel. Moisture from the upper leaves would run into my face and down my neck, causing further irritation.
After the first day I began to wear a bandana tied around my neck. This not only offered me protection against the cuts, but allowed me a way to keep cooler by wetting it before I put it on.

The bandana, long sleeved shirts and jeans offered no protection against the rain. Like many other parts of the country, summer rains are often heavy and relentless. Wearing a poncho or any other rain gear would limit our mobility and were strongly discouraged. On days like these, I would not only get wet, but muddy also. My mud caked shoes and pants legs would get heavy and make walking hard. There was no one to complain to since we all were in the same situation.

Each hand was assigned a certain row. Six consecutive rows of corn would be detasseled, leaving the next two rows untouched, and repeating this pattern until the entire field was completed. While “city slickers” might think we were creating an interesting pattern in the field, we were actually altering the corn to make a hybrid seed corn. Since corn initially has both sexes, the tassel is removed on six of the rows making them female. The two remaining rows will become male corn. Hence, you could say we were pioneers in “genetic engineering.”

Because detasseling is a slow process, we often worked side by side, boys and girls together. To help pass the time we would share jokes and stories. The only time this became a problem was when nature called. Since farmers did not invest in “port-a-potties” for their crew we had to do the best we could. Often that meant letting your work-mates go on ahead while you lagged behind to take care of business, and hope you would not get caught by a member of the opposite gender. A day didn’t go by without someone getting caught with their pants down, but in reality there was no way around it. When you gotta go, you gotta go.

Besides the prospect of getting caught, there were other things you needed to be mindful of. Toilet paper was one of them. It goes without saying, everyone needed to bring their own. Because our bodies would be sweat soaked we had to wrap our toilet paper in plastic sandwich bags to keep it dry.

Other hazards included large spiders and snakes. Grass and garter snakes were very common, as were rattlesnakes. I found that I kept my feet moving they wouldn’t be a problem, but once I started to answer nature’s call I knew in my heart they would come slithering up to me and wrap themselves around my feet. I knew of one young girl who ran down the corn rows “half-mast” because she thought a snake was after her. I was terrified that might happen to me.

The days were not only hot and humid, but long as well. Our work days often started by 7 a.m. and ended when we boarded the bus at 4 p.m. We felt fortunate to get an hour lunch break. Instead of eating our lunch at the farmhouse we all sat at the edge of a drainage ditch, eating our meal with dirty hands and thinking nothing of it. If we ate quickly we would try to find shade under a tree and try to take a nap. As tired as I was, sleep rarely came to me since most of the kids would be laughing and carrying on.
With conditions such as those, it is no wonder that almost 50% of the kids quit within the first couple of days. Every night I’d walk home hot, sweaty, tired, and aching. Despite my long sleeves and bandana my arms and throat would be covered with small burning cuts. Even though I was hungry, I’d be too tired to eat. All I wanted was a long hot bath and to go to bed.

Looking back I believe it was my pride that prevented me from quitting. Although I needed the money, I wanted to prove to my parents, and to myself, that I could do it. And to think I did, for an unbelievable amount of $1.52 an hour!

And You thought You had a Bad Summer Job

Billie Quincy
I will never forget that day. I was only ten years old, and I was on my way to becoming a woman. It was just my mother and me, so I knew that this must be something spectacular. Growing up with six other kids in the house, all of them louder and more demanding than I was, I figured it had to be a special occasion for her to take only me. We parked in the multi-tiered parking garage and carefully traversed the narrow street in the crosswalk that led to The Bon. We were strangely quiet as we rode the escalator upstairs in the final leg of my journey from childhood to pubescence. We had reached the junior miss department, and we were there to purchase my first bra.

How is it possible that a couple of molded cups and elastic straps can be so symbolic? The first bra is somehow magical to the preteen girl who is so anxious to grow up. I recall thinking that day that this would be off the hook! I had recently had “the talk,” I naively thought I knew all a woman needed to know, although that whole baby-makin’ thing made me rather ill. Now that I knew the secrets of womanhood, I could get my ears pierced and get a bra…all in the same day! A bra is a rite of passage for a young girl, but it is more than a step toward adulthood. It is symbolic of the start of her evolution as a woman.

It had thin straps that couldn’t be adjusted, two small cotton triangles to cover the developing essentials, and a small, pink rosette on top of a white bow in the center. The purpose of this training bra wasn’t really to support anything. At ten, I had nothing to support, “just a couple of fried eggs, sunny side up,” as Grandma would say. That little bra had one purpose: to get me used to wearing a bra. It did more than that for me, though. I had always been the ultimate tomboy. I wore tee shirts and jeans with holes in the knee. I wore my hair in a low pony tail while the girls around me fluffed and shellacked their hair into submission. I wore ratty old sneakers and kicked some serious trash on the dodge ball court.

Once I got used to the bra, it became part of me. It altered how I saw myself. I wasn’t just Jules anymore—I was Jules in a bra. I still wanted to play dodge ball, but I wanted to make sure I looked pretty while doing it. There was a boy across the classroom that started to look at me. I wasn’t sure if he thought I was hot or if he could see it through my shirt, but I kind of liked attention from a boy. I put away my worn-in tee shirts and ripped up jeans. I started to wear my hair down and begged my mother to take me clothes shopping at the mall. I wanted to get my long hair cut into a chic bob I had seen the pages of some teen trash rag. My mother refused, telling me I was too young. I began to experiment with the finer art of hair styling, curling, teasing, and spraying my hair with such enthusiasm that I may have single-handedly caused the hole in the ozone layer.

Maybe the bra had nothing to do with all of those changes. Perhaps they coincided with the onset of puberty. I only know that how I saw myself changed dramatically once I wore those lacy cotton triangles under my shirt. It made all those changes we heard about in the fifth-grade “Maturation” program seem real, instead of just being a lame movie to mock once we got back to class. I had on a
Once I hit twelve, the boob gods benevolently bestowed me with some major bazombas. This is the term my twenty-two year old sister gave them, and she told me to be proud of them. Not many other girls are so blessed at an early age, she said. I was pleased with the progress of my development. I was 5’8”, taller than some of my teachers as I started junior high. I also proudly sported some major bazombas. Whee! I thought this would be an awesome year…until I got to junior high and realized that no one else had sprouted over the summer like I had. In my angst to fit in, I started wrapping my chest in ace bandages and wearing a sports bra to hide my goods, slouching to cover the great disparity in height between me and my classmates.

How had things changed so rapidly? I had progressed to bras with three different hooks in the back and adjustable straps. Just months before, I had been so proud to move up in the bra world, to get the fancier model. To a man, this would be the equivalent of moving up from a base model Hyundai to a fully loaded, 4x4 pickup. All the other girls still wore training bras, and I was beyond that. Like the average preteen, I wanted to fit in. I readily gave up the fancier model and tried to pretend I didn’t know what it was like to have it. I traded in the pickup for the Hyundai, giving up my own comfort for the sake of conformity. Time has a way of catching up even to the most stubborn pre-pubescent, however, and the boob fairy waved her wand over the other girls as the years passed. The sports bra was tucked away into the gym bag, but it took years for me to learn to stand a little taller.

As a sage senior in high school, I spouted off one day, in the presence of my mother, about how I was bored and wanted to try something daring. Cow tipping and shopping cart bombing just weren’t enough for me anymore. A week later, I came home from school and saw my mother sitting on a stool, leaning over the counter in the kitchen, flipping through a catalog. She was obviously waiting for me, something she never did, and she had a very pleased, self-satisfied grin on her face. “I went shopping today. There’s something for you on your bed.” I threw down my loaded backpack and ran down the stairs. Lying on my unmade bed were several pair of new cotton panties, and a black lace bra spread out nicely next to them.

“How’s that for daring?” my mother asked me. She had followed me downstairs. She was actually giggling; she was so pleased with herself. “Now you can never say I don’t buy you kinky underwear.” I’m sorry, come again? Did the phrase ‘kinky underwear’ really just come from my mother’s mouth? I had always assumed that my mother had a very Victorian attitude about sex, and the fact that she had seven kids provided an accurate count of how many times she and my father had (ahem!) done that. This incident immediately altered my perception of my mother. What kind of power did lingerie hold?

I wore that black lace bra under a white shirt and my black and red, officer’s cardigan sweater on game days at good old Weber High. I knew it...
showed, and I loved that I had the power to flaunt what I had, to tease others about what lie beneath. I loved the fact that preppy prudes looked at me with disdain and whispered as I passed. If only they knew how it felt to wear something just a little naughty! Not very naughty, of course—just enough to put a wicked grin on my face.

When I moved out on my own, I explored new options—more colors, floral patterns, different materials, underwire, matching bra and panty sets. There was a whole new world beyond the discount rack at Wal-Mart! Sometimes it’s necessary for a girl to go a little crazy before becoming a responsible young lady, and I was able to accomplish this in a safe, healthy, non-rebellious sort of way. Another girl might dye her hair, or get the cliché tattoo across her lower back, or pierce some unmentionable body part. I went bra shopping. Trips to Victoria’s Secret became one way of expressing myself.

I am a mother now. Currently, I wear an industrial-strength bra. For practical purposes, it has cups that unhook, providing easy access for my nursing child. It has wide straps and triple-hook closure for extra support. It epitomizes function over form. While the cups could easily be used as a water balloon launcher, and the straps are strong enough to be used in the lumberjacking industry, it serves one grand purpose: to hold ‘em high. As a nursing mother, my bra has become essential to my existence. I wear it day and night. I have three of the same kind. It is essential that this undergarment be comfortable and supportive. It is the one thing that will prevent my chest and my belly button from becoming intimate acquaintances in the future. Gravity is inevitable, and particularly unkind to The Ladies. Life on earth won’t screech to a halt if I sag, but why should I if I can avoid it?

A bra might seem like no big deal to some, a necessary evil to others, but it is a giant part of every woman’s daily existence. I am one who will never understand the logic of the bra burners. It literally becomes a woman’s second skin, cradling the two biggest differences between male and female. A man may never understand a woman having a relationship with her bra. When was the last time I met a guy who was emotionally attached to his boxers?

The bra serves a vital purpose to all women, from blushing girl first discovering the world of brassieres, to the nursing mother whose chest is so large it has its own magnetic field. Every kind of bra represents a different woman in a different stage of her life. Not bad for a couple of molded cups and a pair of elastic straps.
My bachelor’s degree in communications helped me get my first ‘real’ job out of college for Nationwide Insurance of Oregon and since graduation I’d been paying the bills by working in property and casualty insurance.

Between my bad marriage and having two babies, my career included taking payments, listening to people complain about the price of insurance and arguing with deadbeats about their cancelled policies.

Trying frantically to stay afloat while married to a gambling addict, I padded my paychecks selling some insurance via the brutal cold call.

It was boring as hell and pointless, but I needed to work and once you’ve had a couple years of experience, it’s not hard to find.

Finally the marriage became unbearable. I took my little boys and left.

After moving to Utah, I looked for work in the up-until-then reliable world of property and casualty insurance. I was shocked at the low pay and even after that became less shocking, I couldn’t seem to get hired.

I eventually landed a part-time job in an established State Farm agent’s office. I was 34 years old and the youngest “girl” in the office. However, I took it gratefully.

Part-time at $11 an hour did not even come close to covering my expenses.

While sobbing to a sympathetic friend about my situation she suggested that I could substitute teach. That was a flexible, high-demand, decent-paying job.

So I tried my hand at substitute teaching in the Ogden City School District and I absolutely hated it. Hated it.

Now is it November, the present moment when misery and uncertainty look to be my only long-term goals.

On a gloomy (my favorite kind) Saturday morning, I take my kids to a free art project at Weber State University. The kids get to make turkeys and I get to brood.

While on the campus, I let them play around and I start thinking about going back to school.

I don’t know what program to pursue, certainly NOT teaching, but here was a perfectly respectable university just blocks from my house. I could go to school, but for what?

I would wait for inspiration,

I don’t know how soon it will come.

After my kids go to bed Sunday night, I am steeling myself for another week of crappy jobs with crappy pay while cruising on-line job postings.

The best jobs I’m qualified for were paying about $14 an hour. That’s not good enough.

I start looking at jobs I’m not qualified for - engineering jobs paying $30 an hour, nursing jobs paying $18 an hour, occupational therapist, paying $25 per hour.

What is this occupational therapist thing?
I read the job description and think, “This is something I could do.” I look it up on the US bureau of labor website and like what I see: The demand for occupational therapists is going up and the wage was a livable one.

This is sounding good, so what kind of training do I need?

A master’s degree is required.

And what does that entail?

Three years of grad school.

That’s ok I’m not doing anything else, I can go to grad school.

Inspiration had struck; it took me to the car, buckled me in and told me to get comfortable because it was going to be a long ride.

The road before me straightened out, it didn’t get any shorter, but it got smoother and wider and the exits contained friendly fast-food signs rather than deserted and deteriorating rest stops.

Earning a master’s in occupational therapy isn’t quite as simple as it first sounded. I have to take two years worth of undergrad pre-requisites and I need some heavy-duty math classes.

My time commitment went from 3 to 5 years and I still had to take some heavy duty math classes. Did I mention the math classes?

As a communications major, I avoided math and barely passed the one math class required for graduation. I hated math and I always told myself I could never understand math—it was math.

Sitting at my kitchen table several nights later, agonizing about the math classes, the voice in my head said, “It’s not that you can’t do it, it’s that you don’t like to do it.”

I could do it. It wouldn’t be fun or easy, but I could do it.

And what about the enormous debt I would incur? How could I pay all of life’s expenses on a student’s salary? No voice answered this time, but I felt at peace. My classes started on January 5th.

I found my direction and my life’s work. I am on the right course and things will work out, I will get what I need and I will succeed. I will.

You will, too.
Poetry
Ethereal tones streak across the floor
Faintly touching the sleek sheath of skin
Flitting like fluttering white moths
Infinitely delicate, riddled with perfection
Flowing faultless, a methodical like figure
On an airy surface, world forming, flexing
Nimble minx of a feral fantasy
Future of the dawn
Triumphant like the morn
Why do I love bowling?

Smooth, clean and waxed,
the wood calls to me;

victory is
innocent

and
defeat
never
long—
holes
in the
of the
released
every
slow
steady
pace,
from
crash,
about
the sea,
ready


When shall I strike?
You held my hand
When I was small
And I look up miles to you.
You knew everything—

And you loved me.
I grew too old
To hold your hand,
I knew everything—
But you still loved me.

Now here I am,
Small hands to hold
Who worship the ground I walk on,
I don’t know anything—
But you still love me.

I look at you
You look at me,
The miles so short between us,
We’ve both so much to learn—
And you still love me.
What do we know of poverty?
Our jeans are designed foolishly;
fashion supporting foolery.
“The center set will pay money,”
the upper classmen say, to those
who sustain holes in souls and clothes.

For we, the middle class, will buy
our way to find the where and why
birth brings us into no man’s land
where down can’t go and up can’t stand.

What do we know of poverty?
Food’s a common commodity.
Our class makes mediocrity.
Extremes expressed recessively.

What do we know of surpluses?
Nothing, life simply sequences.
From pay check to pay check we trod.
We till the land that’s not our sod,
with hopes to earn enough someday
to achieve dreams we’ve put at bay.

What do we know of surpluses?
Bread slices our sacrifices
and lays upon our table tops
mocking our empty pocket slots.

So searching we continue on
to find a hope that we belong
with something bigger than ourselves
We look and pray to God, Himself.

We ask to find where we fit in.
Not realizing the greater sin
lies in the lack of love and trust.
For humans did and do and must
exist as elements and souls,
contributing to greater wholes.
it isn't the bump of the bus
or the way piano melodies play
ear drums
or the hummingbird soft sunshine
fluttering on faces
that makes me smile

my enamored
mind, an
opulent,
redolent, reproduction of
you

behind
closed eyes
closed doors
closed curtains
my senses are wide open
and breathing you
in
Too much for some not enough for others,
Let’s walk down into the pastures little deer,
Don’t shy away with your soft gentle tears,
Our mother wants us to feast from her gift,
Don’t shy away little one your soul she will lift,
Too much for some.

Too much for some not enough for others,
I have come to run with the strength of the bears,
To fly like an eagle to learn from the ancients,
To sit at the fire to wait with patience.
Brother pushes and says your eyes are not like ours,
Be gone with your water these are not your wars.
Not enough for others.

Too much for some not enough for others,
I feel the water run through my rivers,
It is a call from the ancients who now delivers,
I hear them whisper do not let the others,
Know that we sand with you our happy hunting ground brother.
It doesn’t matter whether accepted by others,
Knowing who I am, I want to love all my brothers.
I sit here in the quiet
Longing for someone to kiss
My heart begins to riot
Screaming soundless into the abyss
Dreaming beneath the shade of trees
The sun high and hot for late June
Tender young rose buds looking like peas
Will shrivel and fade like a prune
I wade into lake of shining crystal
Seeking relief from scorching sand bar
Leaving behind concealed pistol
And dusty old tuneless guitar
Deviation from life over brooded
Destruction is circumstance concluded
While living my life in denial
I’ve wasted away-suffocating all my hopes and dreams
so many stories to unfold
yet so many left untold

I lay in the dark shadows of my mind
alone, naked, and all exposed
haunting even my memories
leaving what’s left of me
ever so empty.
Hidden scars
are the sacrifices I pay
for my sorrows,
still the blood red tears
drip
slowly down my arm.
Suddenly amongst the storm
a dream awoke me inside
a deep voice softly spoke
with such profound meaning
saying, “Child
come walk with me
step out from behind those trees
shrouded with fear.
Open your eyes
and gaze upon the quite night sky.
Happiness lies where sleepy shadows rise.
Release your anger.
Free your hate.
Embrace the love that echoes
through the night.”

It surprises me
the hell I bring upon myself.
The demons I create
when the world lives each new day
I lay my body to sleep.
Now the sun has risen
welcoming life to live again
I finally feel ready to let the past go
to be
the one I’ve always dreamt myself to be
It’s time to be me.
the baton taps
for silence,
creates a breathless stir

and I am up

hands beat percussion
on my chest,
attempting to awake
the squeezebox
strapped within and
break free
the bellows that won’t
(bellow)

sustained fermata
hold hold hold hold

attack the phrase!

reeds wheeze in frenetic
double-time meter
in the key of g
(for gasp, if you must know)

I spin
and drop
a note

will there be a second verse?
Death – all around Us,
Yet hidden from Our view.
Or is Our nature such,
Shut Our eyes is what We do?
Many lives go missing,
One by one, one by two.

In the barren wasteland,
That We call Our home,
We bury nature's fairness,
Forest to road, Our path is shown.
Many beauties go missing,
That took many years to have grown.

Please take a minute,
Let's open Our eyes,
To behold the trees,
Our neighbors, the skies.
Because just around the corner,
Your death lies.
I’ve got five minutes before the end. My hand shakes as I flick the lighter—the only light in the room. I lick my lips and stamp a cigarette. This drool DNA will be the only identity in four minutes thirty seconds. I flick out the floating moss filming the top of my whiskey and it dries before I finish my sip.

Four minutes. My severed fingers tap impatiently on the moldy bar top, warped behind the dirty glass mug. The skeleton of the bartender is still stooped over a half-full pitcher of some American brew of maggots, one four-fingered skeletal hand still resting on the beer faucet handle. I take my nub fist and smash one of my pregnant, impatient fingers. It explodes across the wood in an array of bright colors.

Three minutes before these words disintegrate. Harvey lay at my feet with blood on her snout, her back feet twitching as she is eaten from the inside. I pick another tick from my tongue and it laughs in tick-tock rhythm. Its little face is a flashing sign, YOU’RE FUCKED.

I drop it in my glass and watch it burn alive. I rub my own pregnant belly and feel the stillness, the death. I grab the stool to rearrange my misaligned body, and my hand grazes the scabs of my caked blood under my seat. Monster, the thing inside me would have said, is a synonym for mother. In times like this, in a world created by one stupid mistake, I have one minute to reveal the truth.

One minute.

I have enough time to finish the mold in my glass, drop the cigarette on Harvey, a tribute, grab the limp vine of a shotgun, and reach for the door just as it busts open-

Insert the big bang.
Place the rich Queen
Beneath the spade King
Hang the Jack of Clubs from her gem.
Dress up the Ten of Hearts
To the Nine's black-tie.
Decorate with cherry Eight
And charcoal Seven in the end.
Trap the bloody Six and
Punish the dirty Five with
The firebrand of Four.
Grow a walnut Three on that tree
Coupled with a Valentine Two.
End it with the sad and lonely Ace
Then start all over anew.
The arch of the foot
is like the bend in the pelvis,
smooth, silken trail of nerves
pointing skyward,
above the head, delicately rotating.
Her arms raise, hands poise, eyes close
feeling through the melody
as a swimmer in the sea, swaying.
Voluptuous movements,
twirl and twist and undulate, panting.
Scent of sweat and fire.
Keening cry, sharp as the wind
hair sweeping the air, a pale fishnet.
Painted toes enchanting the floor upon
which they balance.
The Earth spins on the axis of her hips.
She is the music, a bright array of
rhythms and motion in a trance
with the Universe, enraptured.
The manifestation of passion.