



Spring 2012

BEAN SWITCH

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*COVER - "FORWARD" BY SARAH GRACE JAGGARS



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Workflows



Zack Nabors TRASH, COMPLETE TRASH

I haven't written a thing worth reading
since I began to care,
sending my work off here and there,
slowly losing any bit of a voice I had.
Bleeding out slowly to these savage animals

Sadly, they have turned the club on me,
beating me until my eyes swell like knots on a grapefruit

and for a time I gave in.
See, the worst thing a writer can ever do
is write to meet someone else's needs.

There is hardly a writer I've seen have any damned guts.
The guts to look at everything they've ever written
and say, "Most all of it...is complete shit!"
Rip it to shreds, every last line, every last word,
because if you can't have a voice
well, you might as well have some guts.

Donna Hacker **LOVE LOCKS**



Melanie O'Neil **THE ROAD**



About a half mile from the highway rests
What my grandfather called 'the secret field.'
A small circle, overgrown with natural growth,
Surrounded by the woods all-round but
With a trail that leads to his old plantation house;
I am young, the hawk soars above,
And I fear the mighty bird.
"Circle 'round. Throw the limbs in the woods;
That field must be controlled." I want
The minimum wage, but not the hawk haunted
Daydreams, nor the snake that
Slithers softly in the wild bluegrass,
And certainly not the assault of coyote;
He stalks me from the woods all-round.

Quiet is the tiny lot, I hear the effects
Of each gust of wind, it startles me each time,
Conspires against me and my work, sends
Dreadful thoughts that soar through my mind;
To be alone, so young, in the quiet, lazy heat;
To have the sun waste my youthful vigor, so that
When hawk soars low on those same gusts
I will merely surrender; lay my body down
In the tiny, woodland clearing, and feel
The dewy grass against my skin, while hawk
Goes about his natural duty.

Pretty in a picture, this field would be,
As though Shakura shined her radiance,
Cleared the foliage, and Tirawa set in motion
A tiny trickling stream, and lastly mother Gaia
Set up the ancient oaks, who's limbs have fallen
Into the clearing, who's limbs I must return.
But I, the pale blonde boy in the wild, know better,
My father cleared the circle, hacked each tree,
Cut it up and watched it burn, for many winters still.
That is why the hawk circles above, the snake
Slithers silently beside my foot, and coyote
Stalks me from the woods all-round.

Zach Dickson **BLACHNESS**



Marah Vogt **CASCADE**



Memories are a precious thing. They are what you hold onto when you're old and grey; your memories are what keep you going when times get rough. There is one special memory that I look to in times of need, and one special place that I go to for comfort.

.....

He called me late one night; too late for it to be just a normal phone call. I asked him what was wrong, and he said nothing. Then he laughed a deep barreled laugh that could roll on for hours. He was happy, that was for sure, and I had absolutely no idea what had made him that way. Whatever it was, I was glad he found it.

"Meet me in the meadow tomorrow. I want to see your face when I tell you this," he finally managed to say through his laughter.

I could almost feel the strength of his smile through the phone. It warmed me like the sun would when we were in our meadow the next day; the place of our first date and where he asked me to marry him, just a few short weeks before.

He was already there by the time I arrived. The trees were swaying back and forth in the gentle warm summer breeze. Light was shining all around him, making him look like he had a halo encircling him, but shadows covered his face because his head was bent down almost like he was praying. His head snapped up when he heard me approach. Once again, his smile almost blinded me.

"So you got me here, now what are you going to do?" I asked him with a slight uneasy grin on my face.

He pulled out a bottle of sparkling cider from the picnic basket and said, "We are going to celebrate!" Still unsure what we were celebrating, I sat down on the worn blanket he had laid out on the soft green grass.

"What is the occasion?" I laughed softly when he opened the cider and started to pour us a drink.

He leaned in and whispered in my ear, "I got in." Then he excitedly started pulling out sandwiches and paper plates, as though I knew exactly what he was talking about.

I back tracked my thoughts and asked, "You got into what?"

He stopped what he was doing and stared at me for a second. "You know what I got into. I've only been talking about it for the past month!"

I thought back through our conversations that past month and tried to figure out what he was talking about. We had talked about our futures together, what he wanted to do with his life... No, he can't be serious!

I stood up from the blanket in shock, “You can’t be serious? I thought you were kidding when you mentioned it before.” He stood up and started coming towards me.

“Why would I joke about something like this? It’s our future I just secured. We have a future now!” The meadow suddenly didn’t seem as warm and inviting. The breeze had turned colder, and the sun had slowly started creeping behind a cloud.

“This could kill our future! What if you don’t make it? I don’t know if I could take it...” I trailed off when I noticed something wet rolling down my face. Was it raining? No, I was crying. I hardly ever cry and I take great pride in it. Quickly, I turned my face away from him to hide my tears.

He was suddenly there pulling me towards him, making me look at him. “This is what I want to do with my life, with our life. Look at me.” I looked up at his face just as the sun came out from behind the clouds. It was so hard to look at his face with the light shining so brightly around it.

“I promise you right here and now that we will be together, no matter what happens to me. I will come home and start a family with you. When you start doubting that, I want you to think of this place, our meadow. Know that when you’re here I’m always with you.” All I could do is nod my head and pray that what he said was true.

.....

Now forty years later, I still come to this place to think and to pray. It’s where all of it began, the Meadow of Promise. I look across the rolling hills of green grass and feel content with my life and my memories.

“You know when ever I see you out here it still reminds me of that day.” I jumped and turned around and smiled at him. A little bit older and more worn, and one prosthetic leg later, they sent him back to me after three years protecting his country.

“Me too. It never seems to change, does it?” I smile as he wraps his arms around me and lays his head on my shoulder.

“No it doesn’t. I love you Andrea.”

“I love you too, James. Promise me one thing.”

“Anything.”

“Never let me forget you.”

“I promise.”

Kelsey Scarbrough **HAUNTED**



Zack Nabors CIGARETTE AND COFFEE GENERATION

We are the “Cigarette and Coffee Generation”
so we lurk about
tasting
like carpet.

Talking to other people
whom have never uttered
a syllable of originality.

Now, how does it taste now?

While wise words are being quoted
beside pictures in magazines and on
magazine covers, the cigarette burns close
on the coffee tables of our lovers,
though you are too stupid to notice
and too blind to see,
but is there a difference
between that unoriginal being and the laureate,
or have they lived identical lives like
mirror images dancing thoughtfully in a trance,
drinking the same damned coffee,
choking on the same cigarettes
that stain the same two fingers,
dreaming on the same magazine pages
that hold words of your favorite poet
and the poet who just died and the poet who is long dead
and there in those pages are those poets,
pictures of them at least, black and white,
smoke mucking the figure, holding a cup of coffee
and puffing on a well known cigarette.

Talking, Talking, Talking,
Talking
Tasting of carpet
and telling tales of that
generation,
a dreadful generation, who
only smoked
and drank that coffee.

Kristen Davis **THE DONUT SHOP**



Diane Shaw **Dawn to Dusk**



Jasmina Alagic **SELF PORTRAIT**



Love me while I'm still here...

I do not want to be memorialized in anyone's mind,

I do not want statues built for my achievements, nor billboards in the sky.

I am pushing hard every day to give you everything I think you are worth;

I hold the responsibilities of each of you in my heart, on my mind, but then you insist that I actually be responsible for all that you do, are, want and need.

I tire

I hurt

I am holding the ideals and responsibilities for our family,

I hold them for our home,

I take on the responsibilities of dealing with those who have business with our family as well.

I am tired

I am hurt

I feel alone

I work tirelessly toward the goals we have, singly or collectively,

I pick up, clean up, pay up, and put up...
with disrespect.

I tire quickly

I hurt terribly

I am so lonely...

See me and the dark circles beneath my eyes, bags forming.

Watch me stoop lower and lower as the pressure comes bearing down.

I am working, striving to be the best I can be for me, while never losing sight of all that you are.

I want to be everything for you,

I need to take care of me...

Why is everything mine? Why can you not see some small part you could play to lessen my burdens?

Am I not worthy?

Do I not take on the merits of humanness that would allow you to see me as someone who needs support and love just the same?
You hold dear those who have passed, and worry about those who are nearing the end.
I too, hold these same feelings and fears.
While pictures abound of others, I ask...
Do I not get to hold a place in your heart while I'm here?
Must I leave before you see the value of my heart and cherish that which I am to you?
Please, every day
Remember – do not memorialize me when I am gone...
Appreciate me while I am still here...

Kenny Williams **Women in Comics**



Son. And how can I reconcile the fact
That our home was not built upon a hill
But rather, upon the strife of brother blood?

Father. See how General Lee hangs
Across from the fire, and across from the owl
That watches the militant bigot day and night.

Son. Then why is he here? What purpose
Do the dead serve that cannot be reprinted
In a history book, or a family tree?

Father. A constant reminder, to judge
Your actions, to analyze and be compassionate;
The same reason your mother holds onto
The old newspapers, the faded photos.

Son. And how can I become a man
When the heroes of my generation, of every generation,
Are known only for wealth, women, and bloodshed?

Father. Remember how stars are born,
Remember Titus Andronicus, and most of all
Remember Sisyphus, not being fooled
By those who reconcile his misconduct.

Son. Neon lights buzz around me,
Like a peacock's squall in the dead-of-night
When everyone is watching Dave or Jay;
There exists no precious memory hour.

Father. Then follow the golden rule
And hope that I did not beget a sociopath,
For your mother would mourn, and your
Father would fall facedown in his failings.

Son. And when I am a man, when my loins
Produce a lion of Judah, how shall I help
Him to see the sensation of sight, and the
Likeness of his livelihood to you and me?

Father. If the beauty of our land still exists
Then he will not need a helping hand.

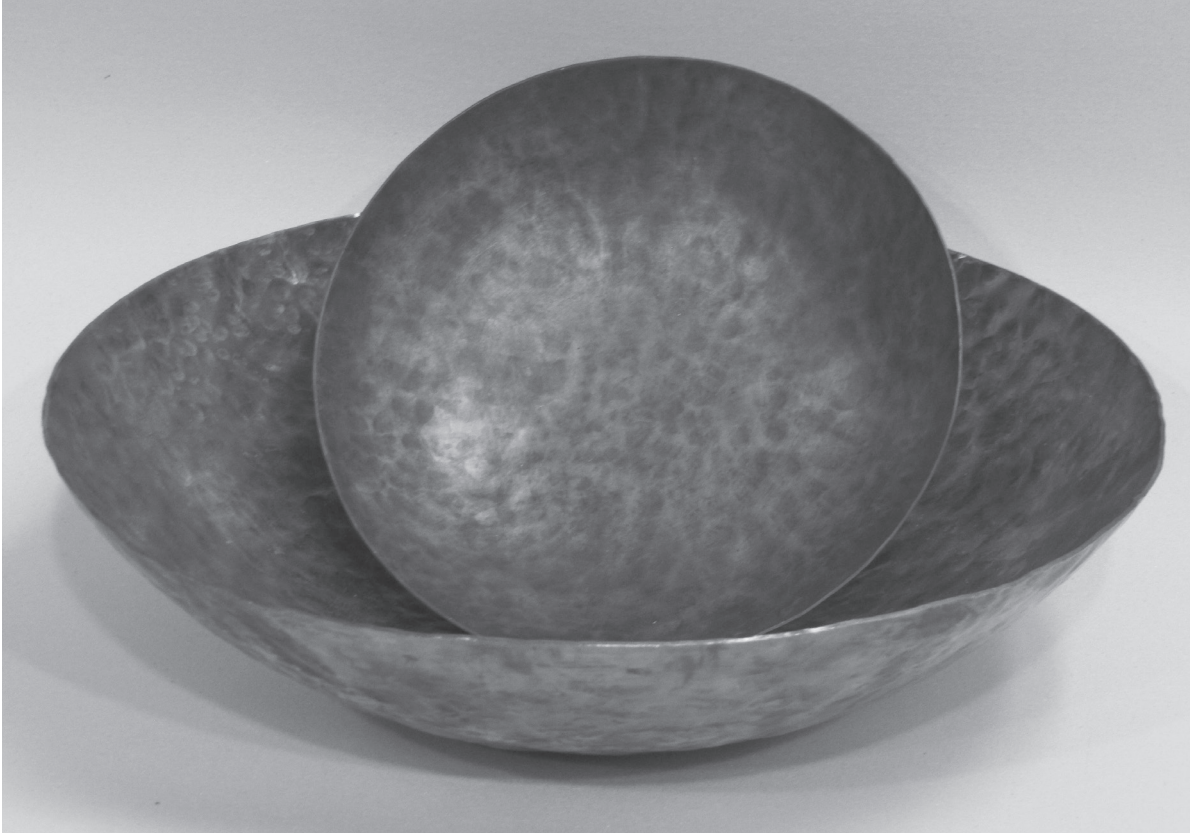
Lollie Adams **COCOA**



Marah Vogt **A PITCHER**



Landon Blakesley **METAL BOWLS 2**



Cody Jarman **WHAT THEY SAY**

They say the future is a matter uncertain
I prefer the guessing game
They say to keep my eggs in a row
but I'll take my chances just the same
They tell me I might not see tomorrow
I never cared much for reruns anyway
They tell me this world is fleeting
but I can't think of a reason to stay
They tell me there's no bridge between heaven and hell
but I always preferred to swim
they tell me an awful lot of things
but I'll keep ignoring them

Kayla Turner **GODDESS OF THE SEA**



I don't know why they left. They were never particularly attentive parents. Despite the small contribution on their part, my brother and I managed to survive this long. Their lack of care was disturbing. Often we wouldn't see either of them for several nights at a time and when they would appear, nothing would be brought to sustain us. They weren't abusive, at least not in a physical sense. Though, I will claim they were to anyone who asks. Never bothering to notice your own children or failing to provide any sort of care counts as abuse in my book. Kolden and I had to learn at a young age how to live on a small supply of food, how to ration and make what we had last as long as possible. If it hadn't been for my presence, Kolden never would have made it. Conversely, though, I believe that I have benefited from him just as much as he has from having me around. Boys my age who lived in one of the worst slums of the city were just beginning to involve themselves in drugs and act accordingly. Kolden probably never realized, but he kept me from falling into this trend. He came along six years after I did. From the moment my mother brought him home, I was the one in charge of his care. Before this, however, I had little warning of his arrival. My mother showed her face so seldom, that I was only able to catch a few glimpses of a pronounced stomach. I suspected what was to come, but having an infant dumped into my arms was still a surprise. I had to look at the tag from the hospital still tied around his wrist to learn his name. It seemed to fit perfectly with mine, Kolden and Kaisen.

"Hello my little brother." I smiled down at him. For the moment I was content with just looking. It hadn't yet occurred to me that his arrival would make my life all the more difficult. He then pulled one of his tiny hands out of the folds of the blanket. I waited for him to cry, but he remained silent. I then thought of the new responsibility that my parents had so easily passed along. All chances of survival he had depended solely on me.

Thinking back on it all now, I can't help but wonder why my mother even bothered with us. Why go through the trouble? She carried us around for nine months and then went through labor, which I'm sure was no walk in the park. And yet, after the entire ordeal she only cared long enough to name us. Often times I have wandered about this, searching for a motive she might have had. Perhaps she lacked the funds for an abortion or maybe they used us as tax-cuts (though I doubt they even bothered to file). I barely knew her, my own mother. My father was no better. Neither one seemed at all like parents. They were more like strangers who would occasionally show up in our house for less than a day at a time. Their business was certainly not to check up on us, and I never bothered to investigate what they did once they closed their bedroom door. I kept to myself during their little visits, though it

took some effort. Sometimes I wanted to scream at them, to demand that they pay attention to us, but I managed to keep my pride and not stoop that low. Such a fate seemed worse than the hunger gnawing at our guts even then.

As for Kolden, I kept him in check as best as I could considering his unique situation. I'm still not quite sure what is wrong with him, but something has definitely gone amiss in that blonde head of his. I first realized something was wrong when he was still very young. He was always jumpy, fearful of something that I could never see. At night when and if I ever managed to get him to sleep, I could tell that his slumber was tormented by nightmares. His face would twitch, and he could never remain still in the bed. Sometimes I would resort to lying in the floor so I could sleep for at least a few hours before morning, but I rarely even made it out of the bed. He would wake at my smallest movement, cling desperately and cry for me not to leave him. His behavior ranged beyond insomnia and near constant terror; sometimes he would become violent. I remember on one particular occasion, he began to retaliate against whatever was causing him such torment. We were having a meager dinner of cold soup I had just poured from the can. He seemed calm at first, swallowing small spoonfuls of the broth and avoiding the noodles, but out of nowhere and seemingly unprovoked, he leapt from his chair and tossed the bowl across the room. Promptly he snatched mine and flung it in the same direction. All of this was accompanied by his screaming.

"Leave me alone!! Go away!!" He spoke with such desperation. I was certain at that moment that he did actually see something even though I could not.

"Calm down, Kolden! There's nothing there!!" I yelled as I rushed to stop him.

Whatever he saw was more than the imaginary monster that children sometimes thought was hiding under the bed. Still, I knew it was only in his head. It was real to me only because he reacted so strongly during such fits. I reacted quickly in sake of his deteriorating mental state and the intact dishes remaining on the table. I tried to console him and convince him that whatever he saw wasn't there, that he was fine and perfectly safe. Gradually my efforts paid off. He calmed and apologized for the mess. Such fits of panic continued throughout his life, randomly reoccurring. Although it became progressively more difficult, I would pacify him eventually. Perhaps it was his volatile behavior that contributed to our abandonment. Yet, I put no blame on my brother. I know that he can't control himself. I'm not angry, just quietly bitter towards those who are at fault. The two people that brought us into this world should have taken care of us even if we were both mistakes. At the very least, they could have had the decency to give us away to someone who could have done a better job.

Nonetheless, without the slightest hint they left. At first I wasn't alarmed. It was common, so I didn't suspect anything. This time, however, they never returned. We waited for nearly a month.

Eventually I resorted to venturing inside of their bedroom, which I always made a point to avoid. When the food supply diminished completely, I abandoned my childish code and ransacked the room, searching quite desperately for something, anything that could be of use. They left nothing behind for us, no money, no food, nothing. No clothing in the dressers or closet. The bed was even stripped of the sheets. Only the bare, poorly made furniture remained.

“We’ll be okay without them; we always have been.” I tried to comfort Kolden once the reality of the situation had finally sunk in.

“Okay, big brother.” His response had been soft as he huddled against me, clinging to my leg as he often did.

I knew that he was more worried about things that I couldn’t protect him from. All the concern for our survival was placed on my shoulders. Although the burden had always been there, it suddenly felt heavier and harder to bear. We were out of food, but I was used to begging to get what we needed. What worried me most was the house. Even though our parents rarely bothered to stop by the hovel, I knew they at least paid the rent. A rather grimy landlord showed up from time to time. He would try to badger me into collecting the money from the adults, but I did nothing to help. I didn’t talk to the people, and I surely wasn’t going to break my vow to get payment for someone else. The idea to oblige the man and ask had crossed my mind. Though it wouldn’t be for his benefit. I would collect the money and use it to buy food. Yet these thoughts never amounted to anything. I didn’t want to speak to them, and I convinced myself that they wouldn’t trust me with a dime, even if it was meant for someone else.

I should have gone through with it. I could have had a small amount of cash saved that could benefit us now. In the back of my mind I always knew that they would leave us. Yet, I was foolish and did nothing to prepare. I pull Kolden closer, his frail body cold, but I try to offer him what little warmth I have. Overhead the clouds look darker than usual. It is only a slight difference, one hard to notice if you haven’t spent your entire life in the city looking up at the sky. I can tell that rain is threatening to spill from the clouds and force the two of us to take shelter. I look away, willing the bad weather to move on. We’ve been without shelter since we had to leave the house months ago. When they first left, I tried to get a job, but no one in the area would hire a scrawny lower class fifteen year old. I probably wouldn’t have been able to work more than a few hours at a time, even if I had managed to get a job. I couldn’t leave Kolden alone. He can’t be away from me for longer than a few minutes. After our parents left, he became even more dependent on me. I had to quit school, become just another drop out.

Without a job, I couldn't provide the rent to the greasy man, and he forced us to leave. I didn't even put up a fight; I just walked out with Kolden at my side. The place had been the only home we had for our entire lives, yet it was easy to leave. I knew perfectly well that it would be harder once we left, but a part of me was glad to get out of the place. Since then we've been traveling throughout the expansive city, trying to scrape by with what funds I manage to pickpocket. It was a skill that I should have learned early in my life because of the neighborhood we grew up in, but I never really bothered to take it up back then. I did, however, pay attention to what my friends were doing. I use what I remember to snatch a few wallets whenever I can and take the cash to buy food. Even though it should be easy, given how crowded the streets are during the day, my hard work doesn't always pay off. People are smart enough to look out for kids like me. Once they spot my filthy clothing and gaunt face, they immediately walk in the opposite direction. If that isn't possible because of the crowded sidewalks, they plant a firm hand on their pockets or clutch their purses a little tighter. What I do gather comes mostly from tourists or new folk, not used to the ways of a large, overflowing city.

We have been to a few soup kitchens, though only stopping by long enough to get a warm meal. Kolden doesn't like being around so many people, but when one is in the area I can't pass up the opportunity for free food. Homeless shelters, however, are a different story. As with any expansive city, there have and always will be those less fortunate lacking a proper place to live. I have put a lot of thought into the matter, but I have yet to convince myself to seek the help. Though I'm not below begging from time to time, I hate the thought of living in one of the squalid shelters. Kolden agrees with me, although his reasons aren't for pride like mine. For the same reason we don't travel on the streets often during the day, he doesn't want to go to a shelter packed to the brim with people, even if they are in the same plight as us. Large gatherings of people frighten him, so I try not to force him to do something that will cause a breakdown. He's only ever been comfortable around me. Before we hit the streets and he was more stable, I could convince him to go to school. Recently, however, he is terrified of even small groups of people. I keep the option in mind as a last resort. With each day that passes without improvement, I find myself considering it even more. For the time being, though, I continue to save Kolden from the traumatic experience.

I glance down to my brother and inevitably notice that his ribs are just visible beneath the fabric of his sullied shirt. His face appears sunken as he sleeps, though I wager that I look worse. When we have food, almost all of it goes to Kolden. I eat as little as possible, just enough to keep me going. I focus upon the sky, trying to distract myself. Our funds are low, my brother is on the brink of starvation, and I'm even worse off physically than he is.

“Dammit.” A drop of water strikes my face.

“Kaisen..” he mumbles.

Reacting instantly, I tug him closer now that he’s awake, trying to ignore how faint his voice sounds. The rain picks up, within seconds we are drenched. With one last glare at the darkened sky, I stand and wait for Kolden to climb onto my back. Despite being nine years old, he’s so small and thin that I can easily lift him. Holding onto him tightly, I scan our dismal surroundings. All around us are ugly high brick and concrete backsides of walls that are hidden from the public. Over the years grime and dirt have crawled onto the once clean surfaces, but the owners don’t mind. After all, the filth is only noticed by those who walk through the back alleys or collect the trash filled dumpsters. I trudge through the downpour, hoping to come across an abandoned building or at the very least a sturdy cardboard box. After searching for nearly half an hour, I thankfully come across the former. The windows are broken and the door missing, but at least it is empty and the leaks from the roof are easy to avoid.

Stepping over the broken bottles and empty cans, I head to a corner away from the storefront. It is evident that other people have inhabited the place before, but at the moment it appears empty. I check the back rooms first, making sure that we are indeed alone. Kolden whimpers into my back, his sobs muffled. I know what he is saying without even hearing the full extent of his words. Lately he has been telling me about the things that bother him. I’ve come to think of them as hallucinations, embodied forms of creatures that lurk in his imagination. He never describes their physical appearances to me, but often talks about their actions and intentions. He cries that they are trying to get him, to take him away from me. Sometimes he confides that they even tell him to do things, bad things that would hurt me. I have stopped trying to convince him that none of it is real. Instead I encourage him to ignore them and everything they say. I can’t tell if it is paying off, though. The longer we are out here, struggling to survive, the worse he becomes. Before our abandonment, his episodes were rare. Now their frequency is increasing. A day hardly passes without him pitching a fit. I don’t try to comfort him this time. I know it won’t do any good. He is afraid of the vacant shop, but I’m not going out in the rain to look for somewhere else to stay for the night.

Keeping my arm wrapped firmly around him, I wait for his sobs to subside and sleep to come again, at least for him. At night I stay awake and keep watch to make sure nothing happens to Kolden. It wasn’t very hard to adjust to such a small amount of sleep. Even before we left the house, my sleeping patterns were as irregular and minute as my food intake. Yet the days have been taking their toll, I can feel exhaustion tugging at my mind, but I try to fight it off. Lately Kolden’s attacks have been

more frequent, especially at night. Snapping out of a surely nightmare filled sleep, he often resorts to violence and lashes out at the unseen. It's becoming harder to restrain him. I believe that he is starting to lose what little grasp on reality he ever had. I glance down at Kolden, checking to see if he is out yet. His red rimmed eyes are closed and breathing still. I feel my eyes fall shut. Immediately I snap them open, hoping to fight off the urge.

Feeling a weight on my stomach, I jerk awake, panic striking. Instantly I notice that Kolden is on top of me holding something in his hand. I only have enough time to catch a glimpse of its jagged shape before he brings it down upon my forehead, leaving behind a deep and stinging cut. The blood gushes forth, bringing an onslaught of pain and anger.

"Dammit Kolden!!" I yell, trying to wipe the blood from my eye but only make it worse. One eye temporary blind, I move to push him off, but he follows up with another attack, swiping at me with the shard of glass gripped in his tiny hand. He adds several more gashes before I manage to take hold of him by the arms. Blood dripping from my head and arms, I pin my brother to the floor, yelling all the while for him to stop even though the weapon is already gone from his hand. Suddenly I am furious with him, the pain and stinging in my eye only fueling my rage. For my entire life I have given everything to him, keeping nothing for myself. Yet this is how I am repaid? Unable to hold back, I slam his skinny body repeatedly against the filthy tiles. Before I can cause anymore damage, his sobs break my lapse of madness, and I finally stop. For the first time in my life, I stare down upon his face, riddled with pain and fear caused not by an imaginary foe but by my own hand. I step back and look away from him, his expression unbearable. The occasional whimper of my name is thrown in between his sobs, but I don't move to offer comfort. I can't get the look he gave me out of my mind. I've seen it so many times before during one of his attacks. My role in Kolden's life is not only that of a provider. More importantly I have always been his protector. The one who is supposed to rid away his torment, but suddenly I am the source.

Staggering out of the rundown building, I leave him there alone on the floor, curled amid the trash. I can't do it anymore. I promised to always look after him, but I have failed. Since his arrival in the hell hole we once called home, I was the one in charge of his care. Perhaps I could have held the job if we hadn't been forced to leave, but no longer am I up to the task. I can only do so much as a brother, look over him and offer him what little food we have. I realize now how much more he needs. There is something wrong with him, something that I will never be able to fix. There's only one thing I can do for him now. Though guilt slows my pace, I continue on through the rain toward the main stream of the city.

I slump into an empty phone booth, probably one of the few left in the world, with no bother of a line. Searching my pockets, by some miracle I am able to provide the correct change and slowly punch three of the silver keys. A woman answers after only two rings. Her voice shakes me from my trance-like state. Still I pause for a moment, holding the phone loosely against my bloodstained ear. My gaze is cast out, staring past the glass window into the rain pounding upon the thin roof. This is for the best.

“Hello? 911, what is your emergency?” she asks again.

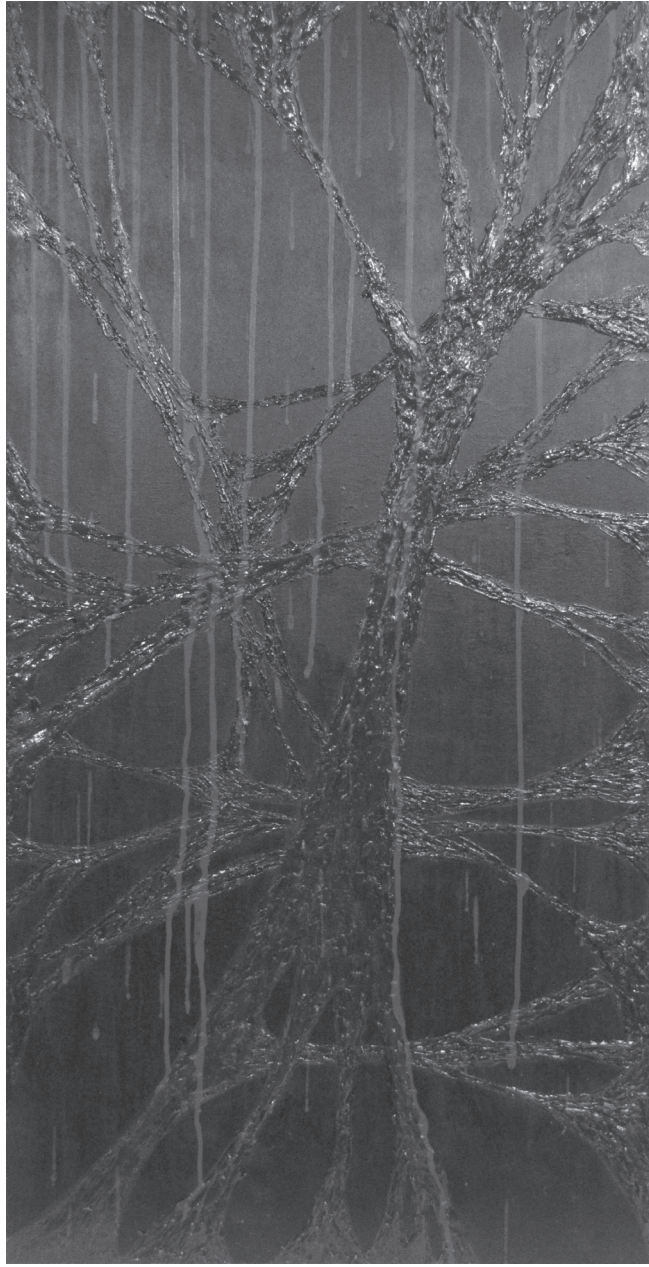
My grip tightens. I repeat to myself, this is for the best. “There’s a boy in an abandoned shop close to here. He may be hurt, but he needs mental help, as well. He’s only nine years old. I can’t take care of him any longer, and his parents are gone. Please send someone to help,” I reply finally before the woman grows too impatient. Before hanging up, I provide her with the names of the businesses lining the street near the payphone. They’ll find him and take him somewhere he can get proper care. Maybe an orphanage so he can find a real family. Perhaps that’s all he needs to improve, a stable and reliable life. I doubt it is that simple. A mental hospital of some sort would probably benefit him more than anything. I only hope that he isn’t beyond repair, that he can enjoy the rest of his life instead of each day being a fear ridden nightmare.

My legs feel weak as I wait. Even though the rain washed away most of it, blood is still pouring from the wound above my eye. I consider taking my shirt off to sop it up, but I need to be able to leave without being noticed once the cops show up. I stick around long enough to see them arrive, a single car with the lights flashing in the gloom of the night. The uniformed man disappears into the ally with a flashlight trained in the direction of the shop I just fled. Kolden is probably still there, crying on the floor where I left him. I debate on whether or not to stay long enough to see him one last time, but I think it would be harder that way. I walk out and allow the cold rain to wash away the evidence of my wounds. My feet carry me away while my mind is crawling with thoughts of my brother, not those of how I left him but how he used to be.

“Will we always be together, big brother?” he often asked.

“Of course, Kolden,” I would always reply.

Landon Blakesley **INSIDE VIEW**



Anna Tankersley **United We STAND**

This is a dedication to all those who risk their lives so we can have freedom in our country.
This is for those that have served, are serving and will serve.

Blood drips
Scarlet and gold
Eagles stand, wings apart
Our globe, forever anchored strong
Soldiers
Celebrate birth November 10th
Semper Fidelis calls
The proud, the few
Marines

Eric Smith **The Evils I Have Done**



Haylee Hearn **LADY AUTUMN**



Melanie O'Neil **JORDAN**



Terran Qualls **WALK IN THE NIGHT**



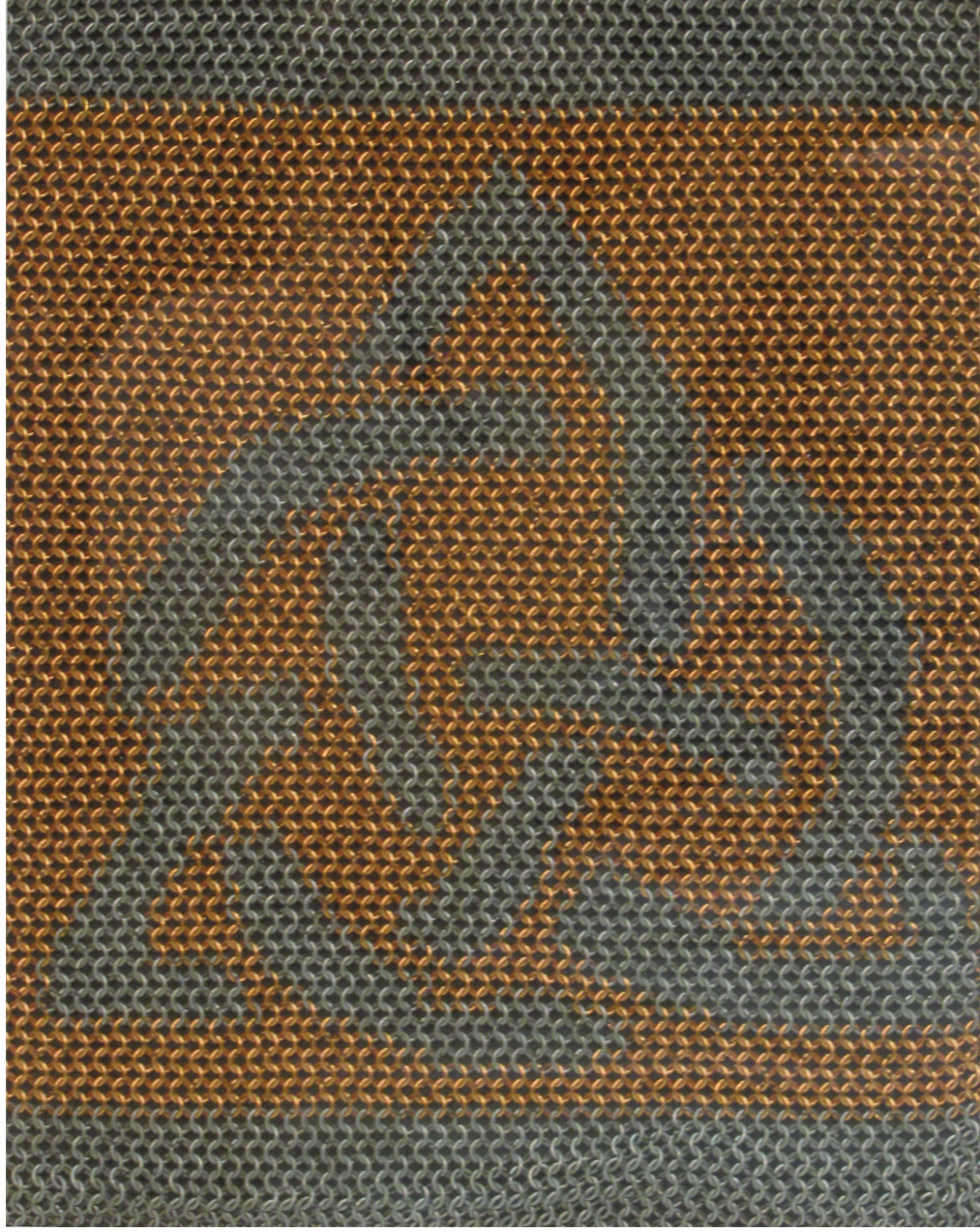
Emily Smith **OUR TWILIGHT**



Lorrin Cupp **CONCERT OF A LIFETIME**



Landon Blakesley **CELTIC KNOT**





The stage is set, the path is lit,
The flames are glowing, red and growing.
The warriors rise, remnants of
Forgotten times, when moons were seen
In favor of ultraviolet beams:
Their skin droops low, faded smiles
Sag to the boards, and yet we cheer,
You and I, one night akin,
So as to vanquish, hand in hand,
The cosmic trickery of our time.
Round and round we slowly tread,
The fire's growing, orange and dim.

As they bow, the bone creaks drone
Ushered through darkening twilight.
And so we cheer, you and I,
While gathering up our finite sacrifice.
"Stranger! Stranger! Strangers
All!" One points and shouts,
Out to us all, and yet we cheer,
Worship our heroes, and begin
The weighing of the sacrifice:
The mighty miracle of need.
Round and round we slowly tread,
The fire's shrinking, orange and dim.

We pray to the forces of benevolence,
We beg for compassion, mercy,
We hope for the day, that inevitable day,
When death should rear its ugly head

That you and I will take our places
On that bloodless ceremonial stage.
And for now we honor heroes, those who
Have fought the good fight of eternal life,
And hope our sacrifices
Paved the path of resurrection
With gold, god and glory.
Round and round we slowly tread,
The fire's shrinking, orange and grim.

The balding heads bow a final time,
The walkers halt, the ouroboros stopped,
So one steps forth upon the stage
And widens her dropping, gyring gaze.
"Thank you! Thank you! Strangers all!
That I should dance, my eternal dance,
On some future, unknown day..."
The cheering stops, we soon depart,
Having realized we stepped too far
Toward the lion of Judah's throne.
The sun will rise, the sun will set,
And we will again select
Warriors for next year's twilight ritual.
Round and round we slowly tread,
The fires are gone, grim and dead.

Danielle Osborne **SERENITY**



Kenny Williams Too Much To Do

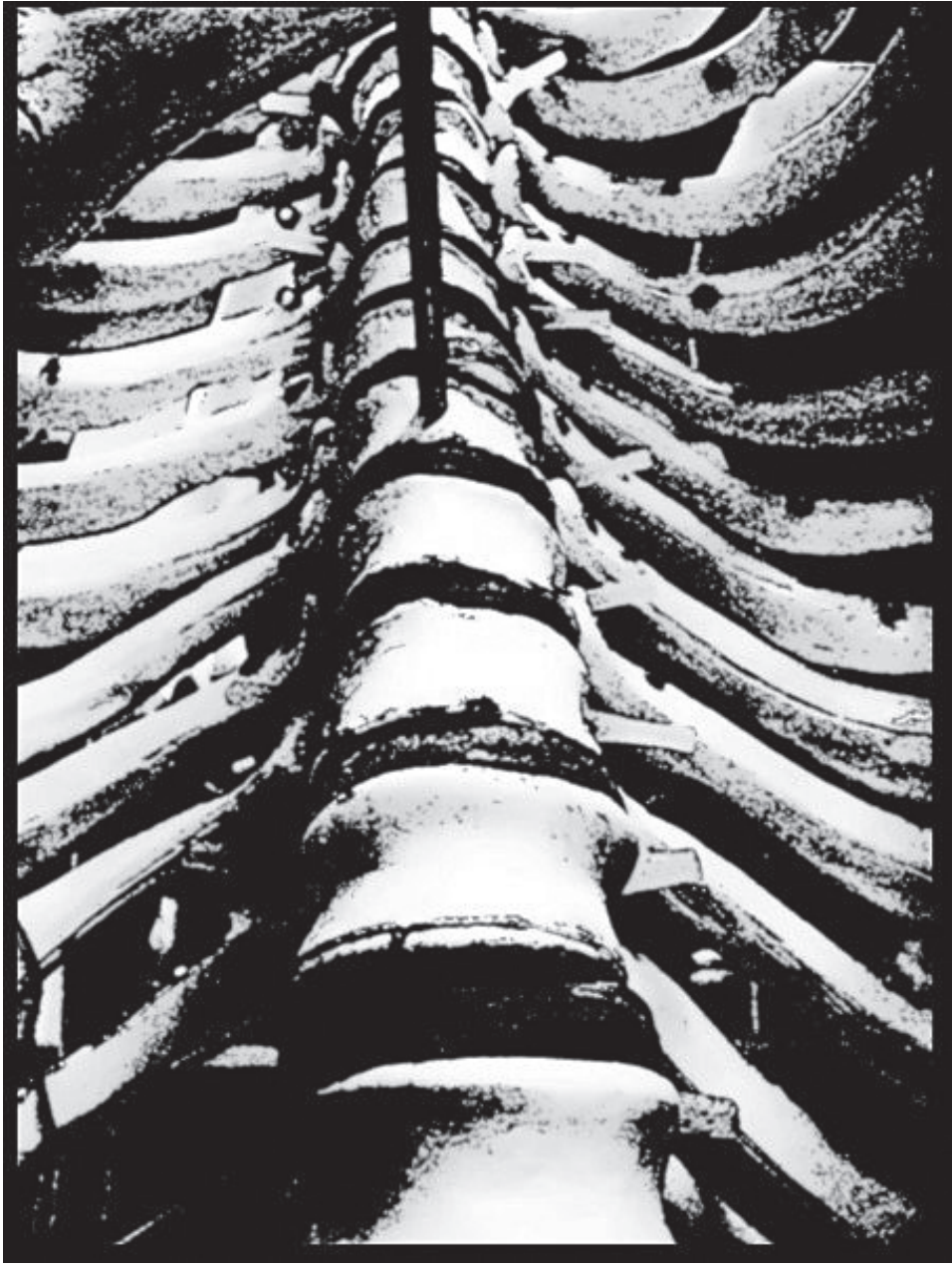


GHOST

Anna Tankersley

Fingers move
So softly
Chills travel up
Your arm down
Your spine
Crinkling
Your toes
Does that tickle?
You laugh
No
It feels good
Air light finger
Tips trace lines
Over your body
All familiar
Lines I trace
Every night
Every morning
So I'll never
Forget

Morgan Lyons-Sabados **SHELTON**



Caitlin Hoffa **SELF PORTRAIT**



50

Roses are red and violets are blue,
But their beauty's nothing compared to you.

Its funny how beauty is often not seen,
How it's hidden away in the foliage and green.
But as the sun comes out and begins to show,
How beauty blooms to let the world know.

Now flowers are pretty, and the outside is clear.
But it's the inside that matters; it's what makes the veneer.
And bloom as it does, to pass right on through,
That foliage and green... that beauty's in you

Not noticed at first but as time comes and goes,
It outshines the beauty of any one rose.
It surpasses the slender and elegant form,
That roses and violets all take as their norm.

And throughout the years and the endless days,
That beauty takes a form, it transforms the sun rays.
And though old now it is the beauties still there,
In every leaf, every branch, and in every pear...

So as with each sweet fruit that comes from our life,
May it ripen and grow, eternally rife.

Caitlen Hall **POETIC MYSTERY**



Melanie O'Neil **BEE SWAH**



Rebecca Nowak **OUT OF AFRICA**

Heat
Shimmers in the air
Of infinite
Grasslands of the Savannah

Far roar
Drums
Watch out, elephant
Yonder

With our guns we
Sneak in the bush
Looking out for
Beasts

Crack
What do I hear? A
Lion? A
Savage? Comrades,

Get ready to
Defend yourselves, to
Kill the foe
Fire! But

Not the wild soul
Do I spy, instead a
Sweet voice calling
Boys, it's dinner time!

Terran Qualls **STAIRWAY OF
ENLIGHTENMENT**



Taylor Dunlap **My Mind Says Hello**



Marah Vogt **L'ABSINTHE**

I opened the door to find Light stumbling in
drunk with fate

Regaining composure, it floods my studio
hitting an obstacle

It tries to climb the wooden mountain
but it needs my harness

Light reaches the vantage point
settling in on tight fabric
waiting for me to tuck it in

In a glass of poisonous drink, Light sleeps
Bright yellow on its deathbed

Sarah Williams **Slowing Down**

Time drags its feet nonchalantly through the
dusty road. The lump in my throat constricts my
air passage. I choke and try to
cry out.

The silent, black and white film is
rolling. In one instant the train
is closer and closer to crashing.

The sun is shining, but the
primitive projection displays an ominous day
where the color will never reach.

I watch in suspended horror as the
collision strikes in a hushed crunch.
The victimized passengers jerk forward
by the unstoppable.

I couldn't go slow enough fast enough.
Tears come to my eyes because I know
It will be different now.

Kelsey Scarbrough **F**ALLING OUT WITH Time



Lying there, all at once, in some sort of epiphany, the realization was upon him; undeniable, unforgiving, and gut wrenching indeed. Motionless he lay; the swelling in his throat was a result of what controlled his mind, taken over his soul and rendered him, here, motionless, yet dying to move, to break free, only he could not. Control was something of an illusion at this point, only in an illusion there's something usually seen, to believe whatever was wasn't. That hadn't been the case in a long, long, oh so long time, though. Nothing of any positive nature had been seen or heard of in his reasoning in so long, it had brought him here, numb and motionless.

Suddenly the convulsions from within came; they were the result of movement now, only undesired to say the least. Uncontrollably his knees slung towards his head and his head to his knees. He fought them, yet they continuously won; beat him as if they were Ali and he an unmentionable opponent to the great in his prime. His muscles tensed, his teeth clenched, and his insides churned against themselves, involuntarily torturing him for the torture he had caused them. He moaned out, fighting back tears, having what manhood he had left stand wobbly legged to the temptation that was to surrender to emotion and release the intense desire to completely give in and cry like the helpless childlike form he had been downtrodden to. Belittled he was, yet still the angst he had for himself, a mere shadow of the old him, fueled his only ability to hang on as his body, his temple, as it was crumbling before his eyes, every grain being grinded and chipped away. He bit down on the pillow, wrapped himself tight in the sheets and moaned out a searing sound of guttural anguish. It was so indescribable to anyone who had never felt it, this pain he had allowed to be created within. It conquered him in many ways, conquered who he once was, whom he once had the ability to be, but it was to hell with that now, though, because what was at stake was now so much more. It was dead set on taking his life entirely, no matter how hard he fought. Just like in any instance of life and death, though, even the weakest of animals have been known to chew off a limb if it means any degree of survival, if but only for one more day of life. For whatever god forsaken natural cause, just like an animal chewing on a limb, he wouldn't allow It to kill him despite that very well being Its desires. It was no notion, no mythological creature at all. It was consuming every ounce of him and intent on getting the last bit, never satisfied on what It had already taken, unforeseeable to ever being returned.

Hurting him with such maliciousness, controlling him like a puppet, It barely allowed him the ability for free thought outside the unimaginable agony he possessed. But as the shattered shards of what once was were being spun, thrown and stomped so violently within him, he, or rather It, did churn a thought, though none of real practical reason. In the immense magnitude of all that “wasn’t” him being brought so clearly to the light of day, the thought gave a slight degree of relief, helping fight back at the convulsions. It which had created so many thoughts before, was creating again. He thought, It made him think, “If I could just get high, this would all go away.”

Memori Depriest **ALICE IN WONDERLAND**
BY NUMBERS 4

"I don't want to go among mad people"



"We're all mad here."

Melanie O'Neil **Lumos**



Eric Smith **I AM SO SAD, SO VERY
VERY SAD**



All nine members of the gentlemen's club, an unofficial organization, yet one that held considerable influence in Notluf, Kentucky ever since the early nineties, rolled into the McDonald's parking lot while the sun continued to stay in its location, forcing Earth to slowly roll from her back to her stomach so that the nine men could enjoy a few rays of sunlight as they exited from two grey minivans. Dan, whose turn it was today to drive one of the vans and to buy the first round of coffee (Mike, the second driver, had the honor of buying the second round), led the procession of time-worn men into the restaurant by holding the door until each gentleman had entered, including the diabetic Felix who hobbled along in last place with the assistance of his walker. Once each gentleman entered, all nine of them stopped moving, stared at each other, their separate pairs of eyes allotting a brief moment for the examination of each member. They removed their hats and stood behind their respective chairs, each man claiming the same chair he had claimed since September 12th, 2001; the day they all withdrew their hats from the 'cesspool,' as Gene referred to it in the Herald, that is local politics. Dan withdrew himself from the table and headed over to the cashier line, waiting behind two farm-type men of round and rough build in overalls.

"\$9.54, Danny," a sharp featured, fiery-haired woman said as he approached the register. The woman gave a faint, crooked smile to Dan as he handed her a twenty. "Sure am sorry to hear about Peggy," she said, her long red hair blowing violently from the force of a small black fan that was placed on the ground so that she might not have to endure the full force of the hot May day.

"Don't be, Martha," Dan said to the small of her back as he grabbed his change from the counter. "Peg has pretty much gotten over it herself. The past is exactly what it is," he said as Martha turned around, placing the coffees into two four-count trays, and he finally returned Martha's awkward smile with one of his own, refusing to show his teeth. Dan wondered as to exactly how Martha had already heard about what happened; she wasn't one to bother with gossip, and she rarely kept up on the news. But, he supposed news as tragic as yesterday's news was bound to spread like wildfire across the tiny town.

"It's just not right. Picking on a woman in her condition; I hope that punk gets what's coming to him." Martha had walked from behind the counter with one of the trays while Dan secured his own cup and the second tray. "Gotta feel sorry for his parents, though. Good people."

"Yeah, they are." Dan hesitated for a moment and then caught up with Martha, the pair handing out coffees to the other eight gentlemen who sat down in their seats once a

drink had been handed to them. Once Dan handed the final drink to Gene, he circled around the table and stood for a brief moment behind his chair.

“Feel free to call, if you need somebody to talk to,” Martha whispered into his ear before turning sharply and returning back to her station. Dan quickly jerked his head to the side in time to see the vibrant red hair flee from his vision, trailing off like a side-winder flame following some spilled gasoline. Dan, his eyes clinging to the final inch of Martha’s hair, started to think about his high school days, about going to senior homecoming with her. Throughout his life he had pondered about what he might do if given a time-machine, so as to correct the mistakes of that evening; he thought about what could have been, how his life might have been. He remembered that he used to call her ‘Big Red,’ but now he only calls her Martha. Peggy was nowhere to be found.

“Grab your seat, Dan; our drinks will be cold as Korea before you know it.” Dan stared at Gene. He never remembered Korea being very cold, but Gene is the writer of the group after all, so Dan assumed the expression to be nothing more than a play on words. Still, he much preferred the expression ‘colder than a well digger’s butt in Idaho.’ Yes, that was his bread and butter.

Dan obliged the writer and lightly sat down in his seat, his mind still rattling from the conversation with Martha. The nine men continued sitting, staring at one another in awkward silence, their fingertips lightly tapping their coffee cups. Dan focused his eyes on Felix and cleared his throat, but Felix was preoccupied with whatever was outside the window. Dan cleared his throat a second time and almost went to speak, but for a brief moment he paused and wondered what might be going through Felix’s mind. He wondered how it felt to be as old as Felix; maybe Felix also had a ‘Big Red’ back in his day that his mind refused to let go of. The seven other men continued their coffee cup tapping rather harmoniously. “Felix,” Dan said at last. “It’s on you.” Felix slowly turned his body around in his chair and apologized to each member of the group separately.

“Truly sorry Robert... And you too, Karl... truly sorry.” Felix’s voice was nowhere clear as it used to be. Dan remembered Felix being able to summon down the wrath of God and the forgiveness of Christ all in one thirty minute sermon; now he could barely string together two sentences without mumbling or losing his place. If that’s what it’s like to be old...

“But yes, let us begin,” Felix clasped his hands together and bowed his head before the coffee, signaling the other eight men to do as such. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread...” Felix’s voice trailed off. Dan looked sorrowfully at the wrinkled face, the protruding belly, the false teeth, the glassy eyes; if the past is what it is, then the future... “Hrm, yes. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.”

“Amen.” The nine kept their heads bowed for a moment, raised their coffees to their lips, and continued in a moment of silence. No one bothered to inform Felix that he had left out a part. Dan continued to stare at him; he wondered if he should tell Felix. No doubt he knows it; his mind will remember it either later today or tomorrow. Yes. Tomorrow we will get the full prayer, no point in reminding the old man that his mind is not quite what it used to be.

“So,” Mike said, getting the round of conversation started at the table. “I went to the high school yesterday to vote, and guess what?” All of the men stared at him, eager to see where his story might go, but none of them ventured a guess. “No bites? Well, I’ll tell you fine men anyway, being the captive audience you are and what not,” he jokingly dangled the keys to the van he drove this morning in front of his large, opal, grinning face. “Anyhow, I went to go vote yesterday at the school, walked up to precinct three as I always do, and kept telling Mrs. Charlotte, louder and louder each time, on account of her having a hearing aid and me assuming the reason she didn’t understand me was because of the aid, I kept telling poor Mrs. Charlotte to look under Democrat!” The whole table burst with laughter, Felix and Karl having to take a moment to regain some air once the laughter ended. “Well, of course she couldn’t find my name there, and there I was damn near yelling the word at her so loud that the entire school could hear it!” A second round of laughter ensued.

Dan remembered back to when Mike ran a sort of local campaign for Reagan back in the eighties, going door to door, asking people if they would prefer a pocket Bible or a Reagan pamphlet, and then shocking the individuals by saying how the two pieces of literature were one and the same. Mike continued the explanation of his joke, “When I ran for mayor in the nineties, I swapped my party to Democrat so as to get more votes, and there I had forgotten that I had swapped back after the tragic day.” All nine men took a brief moment to touch their hearts, completely shocked by how Mike could still keep them on their toes emotionally, laughing one minute, mourning the next; that was Mike.

Still in awe of the emotions triggered by Mike, the nine men sat for a few minutes in complete silence. One of them would occasionally shoot a glance at one of the hanging televisions in one of the corners of the restaurant to see Shep telling the viewers about how they aren’t as doomed as Glenn would lead them to believe. Dan liked Shep as much as he liked most news reporters, maybe more than most news reporters; he felt that Shep was one of the only honest men on television. Some mini-conversations had begun to sprout amongst groups of two or three of the men, Gene and Mike going back and forth about the deficit, trying to figure out ways to ensure that their children and grandchildren would be able to enjoy the same benefits that they were currently receiving.

They decided on mandatory drug testing for those wishing to acquire food stamps. Once the two had reached a decision, Mike took a moment to rise from his chair and ask, "Everyone ready for the second round?" Eight aging heads bobbed up and down in unison.

As per the usual routine, Steve, Robert, and Dan left their chairs and headed out the door, taking one step off the sidewalk and each pulling out a cigarette. Steve and Robert were cutting up about some 'punk' that played one day last week on Letterman. "A staircase of misinformation. Then he started singing about the weather channel," Steve said to Robert, both of them employing quizzical looks.

"Yeah, that doesn't make much sense," Robert said in reply. "What made even less sense to me was the way the singer looked. He looked dirty. If I was going to be on Dave, I would at least shower." "You got that right, friend. At least he'll never be on Jay. Jay wouldn't allow some kid like that on his show." Dan had a good laugh two months later when he was watching Jay; he knew the singer that the two were talking about; he had seen the band play throughout his years of staying up with Peggy and thumbing through the various late shows. Dan would always recline back in his chair, and Peggy would stretch out on the couch, occasionally falling asleep for fleeting minutes, only to wake up with a jerk and yell at Dan, demanding that he tell her where Charles is. Charles was her father; he had been dead for years.

Dan's mind returned to the song that Steve and Robert had talked about. They were now talking about the upcoming truck race at Kentucky Motor Speedway (Steve had tickets). Dan wondered why he had always hidden from the rain throughout his life, and then he remembered about the potential mess he would have to clean up when he got home. Then he thought about Martha again; the blazing hair would not stop haunting his mind. He slowly turned his head, masking it as a stretch, and looked through the window to see Mike walking beside Martha, each with a coffee tray in their hands, and Mike holding the single as well. The two were laughing about something, genuinely laughing; Dan could see the dimples sink in on Martha's face. He used to be able to make her laugh like that. Martha and Mike set down their trays, and Mike began to sit down, but before he glided into the chair, Martha lightly touched him on the shoulder while her back was turned to him. Mike acted as though he felt nothing.

"The bell tolled, Dan. Time to head back in." Steve and Robert had already put out their cigarettes and were walking toward the door. Dan followed suit. As the three approached the table, Dan could hear Eddie talking to Gene.

“Say Gene, did you bring that draft with you?” Eddie was a big man with a big voice. Dan was certain that the random people who kept walking in or out of the restaurant could hear every word that Eddie said. Not that Eddie was coarse; he would never make rude comments. Still, Dan wondered if the people could hear Eddie.

“Sure did buddy, care to hear it?” Eddie politely nodded his head. Gene fumbled about in his pocket for a moment and then withdrew a piece of paper. Gene took a moment to clear his throat, “Remember, this is a rough, unfinished draft. There will be something more substantial when I am finished.” Eddie nodded his head again, and so Gene began: “Before this article proceeds, let it be known that this document is for the eyes of future government employees of Notluf only, for it is to serve as a deterrent against crimes which have not yet been committed, though I fully believe that such heinous acts will be repeated if the security of our election polls is not strengthened and kept intact. Before the crime can be relayed in its entirety, you, future city employees, must understand the complete details of the aforementioned day. All sixteen election officials arrived at the high school gymnasium by twenty minutes after five, the criminal arriving five minutes after the scheduled arrival time of five and fifteen minutes. The day, therefore, began on a grim note, for the other fifteen workers had already begun to set up their precinct tables by the time the anarchist arrived. The people who worked that particular election asked that their names not appear in any records, though they did all agree that a rough physical description would be more than sufficient. Precinct number one consisted of one man, age seventy-four, and three women, ages fifty-nine, sixty-five, and sixty-eight. Precinct number two consisted of the criminal, as well as three women, ages sixty-nine, seventy-two, and eighty-one, the latter being an African American. Precinct number three consisted of one man, age eighty-one, and three women, ages eighty, eighty-three, and eighty-four. Precinct number four consisted of one man, age fifty-six, one boy, age eighteen, one girl (the sister of the anarchist), age twenty-four, and one woman, age sixty-seven. Thirteen of the workers are registered Democrats, two are registered Republicans, and the lawless one claimed that he is an independent voter, which is why he did not vote at the election in question. All fifteen workers agreed the acts of the criminal to be unlawful, though they decided to not press charges since such actions would lead to a federal inquiry.”

“That’s my introduction; I should have the whole thing finished tomorrow.” Eddie began to ask Gene some questions, but Dan’s mind was too far gone to comprehend any of them. It was Peggy who caused all of this uproar. It was she who couldn’t figure out how to vote, causing the boy to have to help her. She was the reason that Martha acted so awkwardly toward him earlier in

the morning. Dan was an assistant football coach a few years back when the boy played on the line. He was a decent-enough kid, but he broke a law. He broke a law so as to help Peggy. There would be another mess to clean up when Dan got home.

“Are you two talking about the McAlister boy who caused all that uproar yesterday?” Karl asked over the roar of breakfast customers who had begun to enter in greater numbers.

“Yeah, that’s right, Karl. Were you there when it happened?”

“Sure wasn’t. Wish I was, though, so I could’ve put that boy in his place. Shame such good parents produced a son like that. Back in my day we would have called him a Red.”

“Sure would have,” Earl said from the opposite end of the table. He nearly had to yell his two-cents so as to be heard over all the customers. “Those were the days, so long as you had nothing to hide, of course. We need a guy with a backbone like old Dick again.” Dan had gotten up from the table so as to avoid anyone asking him any questions about the details of yesterday. They were all too polite, they would never ask, but still he retreated from the table and picked up a Herald that had just been delivered in a bundle to the McDonalds. As soon as Dan picked it up, he started to set it down; on the cover was an article detailing yesterday’s event. Dan didn’t take Peggy to vote the day before; she had asked him the night before to take her rather than meeting up with the gentlemen’s club, and he said he would take her when he got home. Resolute, Peggy went by herself.

Before Dan could decide as to whether or not he wanted to leave the newspaper alone, Robert had walked over in his direction, and his eyes instantly picked up on the front page headline: “Anarchy at the Primary Election.” Robert more or less took Dan’s spot from him and began to read the article to himself, nodding his head with vigor the whole time he read. “Gentlemen! Look at this, the McAlister boy wrote a letter of apology. Would everyone like to hear?” Seven heads nodded. Robert resumed his spot at the table, and so, too, did Earl and Karl, who had gone meandering about the restaurant, saying hello to everyone they knew. Dan stayed between the newspaper rack and his chair, not knowing where to go. “It’s in the letters to the editor section,” Robert said, and then continued to read the letter in its entirety: “Dear Mrs. Oliver, and the entire population of Notluf, I, Jesse McAlister, being of newly acquired sound body and mind, do hereby offer up my meager apologies to any parties which may have been offended, as well as the parties that are currently unaware of the events that transpired on Tuesday, May 17, 2011, by my actions, although I am fully aware that the apologies of a known sinner and conspirator against the government are of little to no value. I arrived at the conclusion some three hours after the election polls had closed that an apology would not be enough for the esteemed members of this city and thus enlisted myself to two-hundred hours of community service, for which I feel obligated to provide for the needs of any member of this

city. Therefore, I would like for any citizen who needs help with any project to telephone the home of my parents, Mr. and Mrs. McAlister, to request my services, whereby I will become contractually obligated to lend my body and strength to the fulfillment of said assignments. I feel as though this act will produce a complete renouncement of my sins; however, if any parties remain harmed by my actions, do telephone the aforementioned number and let me know, for I no longer feel the urge to harm any individual. Sincerely yours, Jesse McAlister.”

The entire table erupted in an uproar once Robert finished reading the letter. Someone made an anti-communist remark, another said that such an act is the very least that the boy could do, one more made a crack about liberal arts colleges, and several gentlemen issued forth some agitated grumbles. Dan stood his ground, between them and the newspapers. He started thinking about when he was young and he would stand in the rain, usually working on his parent’s farm, and the rain never bothered him; now he brings a coat and umbrella with him every time he leaves town. The breakfast customers had started to die down, so Martha retreated from her cage behind the counter and made her way over to the gentlemen’s table, quickly joining into the conversation at hand. Dan lost himself in the embers atop her head, and he suddenly felt swept away in the emotions that were overwhelming the restaurant. He thought about going over to Martha, and calling her ‘Big Red’ instead, and then apologizing for how he had acted back in high school. He knew divorce would be impossible, but he didn’t care; he could be sneaky. His thoughts drifted to various football games he played when he was a teenager. The field was drenched and muddy in spots; he and his team were in Louisville playing in the state tournament. It was only the first round of the tournament, but it was still important because no other team from Notluf had ever made it that far. Dan was the starting quarterback, had been since his freshman year; he was more or less a celebrity back in those days. Eight seconds on the clock. Yes. This is how he remembers it. Eight seconds on the clock, down by five, so a field goal would be useless. His team was on the twenty-two yard line, and he knew what he had to do. He knew what he had to do, and he screwed the pooch. He got nervous when he dropped back from the hike and was sacked by a three-hundred and forty-five pound high school boy. Yes. That is how he remembers it.

Suffering yet again from that same defeat, Dan realized he would never have the courage to talk to Martha, and so he went outside for a second smoke. He lit up the cigarette and took the longest drag imaginable; he wished he had some Scotch or Rum. About halfway through the cigarette, a blue Dodge Dakota came soaring into the parking lot, right past Dan. He looked up at the vehicle as it parked and watched as Jesse McAlister got out of the truck. He thought about running up to the kid and punching him in the jaw; he knew the sheriff wouldn’t do anything other than tell him to not do it

again, and Dan knew that once would be enough. His mind boiled over with rage and hatred; his vision was filled by long, flowing red hair that was being whipped about by some sort of hurricane, by some presence he had never been able to feel. The boy was slowly approaching him; he obviously recognized Dan and was wondering whether or not he should even bother getting breakfast this morning. Dan quickly darted his head around and looked through the window. Everyone was watching him, including Martha. She was making a rather disgusted face in the direction of Jesse, and some of the gentlemen had gotten up from their seats and headed to the door. But, they didn't go outside; they just waited in case Dan needed backup. Dan looked again at Martha's horrific gestures, her face all wrinkled up and her right hand on her hip in some sort of crouched over stance. Then he quickly remembered how he had lost her from his life. They had been dating for two weeks before the dance, and then, in a fit of aggression and stubbornness, he had lost her. She looked more alien than ever to him as he took one final look at her.

All the while Jesse had continued to slowly walk toward Dan, occasionally pulling out his cell phone and acting as though he had a text, which he would reply to by slowly hovering his fingers over random buttons. The boy was about two steps from Dan when he began to mutter an apology; something about compassion, something about mercy. Dan quickly slid his hand into his front pocket and withdrew the keys to his van. "Would you like to go get some breakfast somewhere else?" Jesse, stunned, stood unflinching for a moment before his mind could process the question. He then timidly nodded his head, not knowing if he should trust Dan or not, but also knowing that he did not want to face the angry mob. The two began to walk to the van. Once they both got in the front seats, Dan said, "The past is exactly what it is." He drove across the street to the Joe's diner and parked in the spot furthest from the door. "It's supposed to rain later, but I wouldn't mind the walk." Jesse nodded his head in agreement, and the two got out of the van and walked toward the wooden diner.

Dan took a seat at a table in the eastern corner. The window near the table depicted the McDonalds across the street. The waitress, a young blonde girl somewhere in her twenties, politely introduced herself as Mary and took the two orders. "Two coffees and two orders of pancakes. I'll have that out in a few minutes for you fellas."

"Thank you," they both said. Time began to march forward. Dan started asking Jesse about how he was doing in college, and then the conversation turned towards Jesse's days on the football team, and then Dan's days on the football team.

"While I was playing," Jesse said. "My dad would never be quiet about how great a quarterback you were. He used to say you could toss a ball eighty yards with two defensive ends coming at you. I

wish I had been able to play that well.” Dan told Jesse that he wasn’t bad, that it was hard to play line, especially with the overfed boys in the nearby towns and counties.

“Still, it’s a job that someone has to do. A quarterback ain’t much of anything without a good line to hide behind.” Jesse agreed. Jesse tried at one point to bring up yesterday’s events, but Dan politely shrugged it off with a smile; they had no need to discuss it. And so the two kept talking all morning and afternoon, about whatever came to their minds, which was mostly football. Dan covered the check sometime around five, and the two went their separate ways.

Once the earth had decided to roll from her stomach to her back, realizing that the sun never had and never would do anything for her out of politeness, Dan sat down on the couch next to Peggy. He briskly grabbed the remote and turned on the television to find Letterman. Dan casually reclined himself back on the couch and placed his arm behind his wife. He reflected upon the day’s events. How he could have clocked the boy and ran away with Martha, sweeping her away with his supposedly heroic actions; he could have been a hero. The gentlemen would have honored him for weeks to come, and he could have been happy with Martha. Instead, he was sitting the night away with Peggy, not in his chair, but on the couch with her. He stared intently upon her mix of black and grey hair, upon the wrinkled covered face, upon the cloudy brown eyes that, although he had not remembered them as such, seemed as bright as the northern star. He muted Dave for a moment and said, “Peggy, sweetheart, I love you.”

“Who are you?” She gave him a curious look out of the corner of her eye, exposing each and every one of his weaknesses with each passing second.

“It’s me... It’s your husband; it’s Daniel.” Tears began to swell up in his eyes as Peggy continued to judge him from the corner of her eye. Dan waited. He stayed on the couch all night until Peggy, about halfway through Letterman, placed her head on his shoulder and went to sleep.

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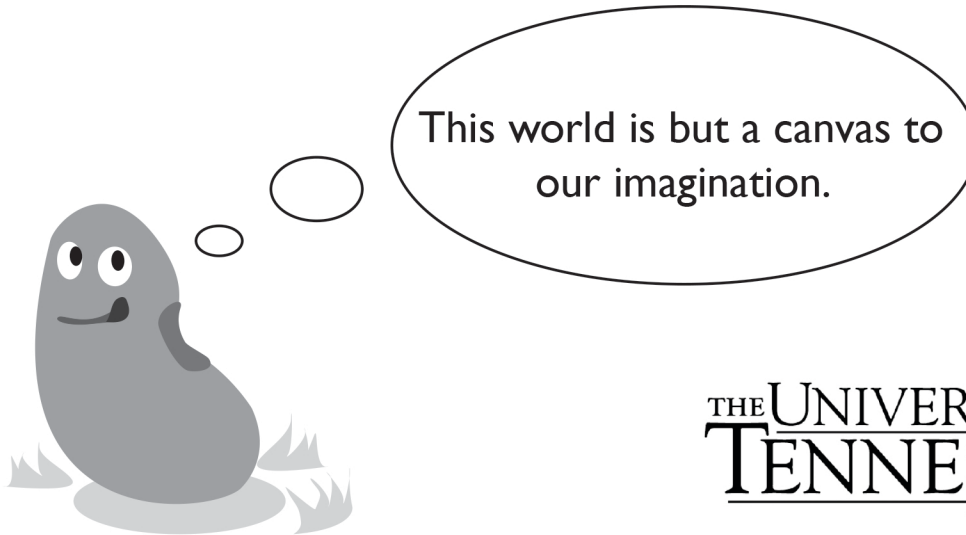
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