



{ BeansSwitch }

Spring 2014

BEANSWITCH

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You surprise me even now.
I thought I knew your every thought by now.
But today you proved me wrong.

Just when I thought I was on my own,
I looked up and there you were.

I should have known.
You told me that day so long ago,
You'd stand by my side no matter what.

I should have known that today of all days,
You'd surprise me, in order to stand by my side.

The doctor smiled when he told us,
We should have many more days to stand together, after all.

As Always My Love

{ After All This Time }
Sheila Scott



Photography

{ So This is Love }
Christian Holland

{ My Thoughts & Experiences with Nature }

Todd Collins

Nature has not always been kind to me. It can sometimes be a crude and blunt reminder that all things pass, as in the case of my grandfather's garage; small, thin poison ivy vines creep over the exterior toward an unreachable sun, slowly reclaiming the foundation my fallen hero made a living on. That garage, like Grandpa, is dead now and it's only a matter of time before nature, like the Alzheimer's that took Grandpa's mind, brings it back to soil and rotten lumber. This is how I see nature now: a reality, no matter how cruel, that we all must face. Like the inevitable distance between you and a loved one, or death approaching every second of our short lives, some things just are. There was, however, a time when nature seemed less hostile. Bearing this in mind, I believe my level of maturity affected how I see nature and the things I could never control, no matter how hard I tried to.

As a young boy, I thought nature was a mysterious thing. Dad would take me and my sister to the park by the river to see the woodpeckers and squirrels. It was a mystical place far different than the suburbs of Camden. Tall, moss covered trees created a mesh ceiling of greenery above us, and tall hills teased at what could lie deeper in the forest. Dad would tell stories about things that lurked out there: Bigfoot, the Loch Ness monster, and even some ghosts still fighting for the Confederacy. The fires of my imagination burned wild and it was not long before the forests of Benton County became my favorite place to be. As I became older and could think for myself, the woods were a place to escape to when the burdens of life seemed to break my back. In my teenage years, when I was confused about something or had questions, I would go out into nature. It did not matter whether it was the park by the river or not. As long as I could not hear

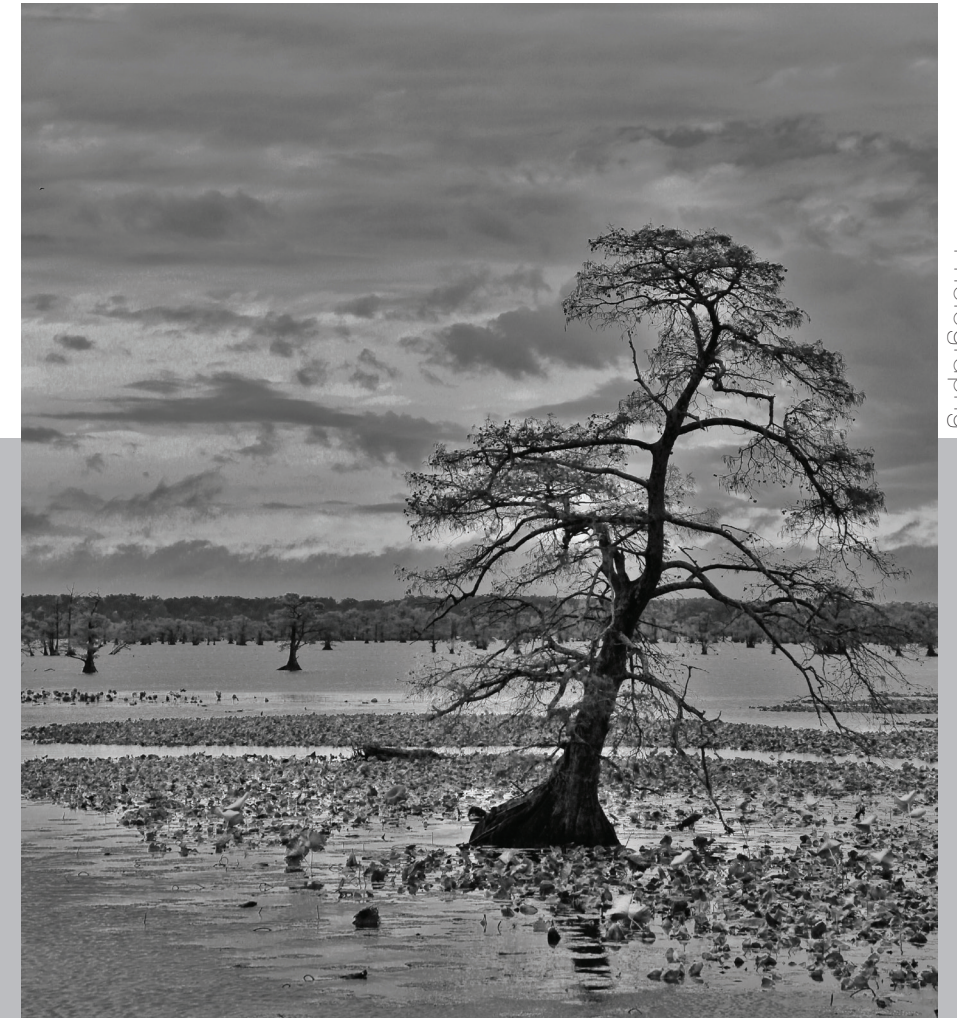
gasoline engines running or factories operating, I was at peace. During these times I would purposely get lost and talk to God. Of course, God never spoke back. However, whether God was there or not, nature had a voice of its own. During the Spring and Summer, birds sang quartets and streams ran freely over smooth stones and down long, veiny paths. During the hot days, cicadas would roar and at night crickets and frogs would lull my restless mind into tranquility.

The natural world outside the cities and towns I normally inhabited always seemed to take my side in any situation and comforted me when I needed it. However, nature and the natural state of things was not always kind. There have been times when I sought that same comfort and instead was faced with a bland and unsympathetic reality. At the age of sixteen, I found a newly hatched bird that had fallen out of a tree. The tree was too tall to climb, so I could not put the bird back in its nest. It just sat there on the ground, crying to me in an anguished voice that knocked my heart strings out of tune. Looking back on it, the whole thing seems ridiculous, like so many over-thought situations of my youth, but I guess caring for that bird was my way of showing that I could do something right. I, being sixteen years old, was plagued with an assortment of responsibility for things far beyond even what I can control now at twenty-two. I put the bird in a cage and took it to a tree house my Dad had built for me in the woods. I fed the bird worms that I found under logs, but it never stopped crying. I left for a few hours and came back to find it lying still. Guilt and remorse filled my consciousness. But, nature had a way of telling me not to hold on to these feelings as life is too short to be enjoyed conservatively.

At the age of seventeen I thought I had fully grown. In just one year I was going to be eighteen and would soon be going to college. The Summer before my Senior year of high school, I went on a church trip to the Buffalo River. The trip was mostly fun and it was a great way of experiencing nature first hand. The river was wild and fast, but seemed shallow and safe at the same time. All these securities disappeared around noon when I saw my friends swimming far away. I decided to tread the water to reach them, not realizing that they themselves were safe in the shallow end. The water was waist deep until I got twenty feet out, then, like my heart, I dropped off a cliff face in the water. Shock took over as I attempted to swim, but, not being a swimmer, the water

gradually crept over my neck and eventually my mouth. The current took me away like a kite whose string had been cut. I knew there was no going back, so I took note of the direction of my friends and used what energy I had left to attempt to reach them. Nevertheless, my lungs had tightened up and holding on to my breath was not an option. I began ingesting water and called out to them, but they just kept looking at each other with smiles and laughter, oblivious to my presence. At that moment, I convinced myself that it was the end. I imagined my body being found a day later, my skin a bluish tint and my mouth gaping open for that last moment of life. Suddenly an arm reached around me and began pulling me closer to the shore. A girl just happened to notice me flailing around like an idiot in the deep end. Soon after, my friends came to my side to aid me, but the event traumatized me for years to come. For the most part, I let go of my negative teenage thoughts and took one step closer to adulthood.

After all these experiences, I finally took a stand on nature that is still very dynamic and liable to change. As a child, nature seemed innocent and comforting. It became a safe escape in my teenage years, until it taught me how cruel and unemotional it can be. My stand on nature goes as follows: nature has no opinion. It has no feelings or biases. It is simply an undying force; an entity to be reckoned with. We can very well enjoy its offerings, but at the same time must respect its needs. When something naturally happens, like my grandfather's fatal disease, we have no choice but to accept it. Of course, we can always fight back, and maybe sometimes we will win, but there are certain things we cannot change and nature will bluntly let us know what is and what should never be. That does not go without saying that, if you can change something, never hesitate to do so. I believe we should shape the world to accommodate what we want whenever possible. However, when things are beyond our control, it is best to let them be. That is the lesson nature has taught me. Learning to accept that aspects of nature are beyond my control or understanding has helped me to take loads of responsibility off my shoulders and, ultimately, matured me into the person I am today. Nature may be a crude reminder at times, but it is nature.



Photography

{ Solo Cypress, Reelfoot Lake }
David Harold Sheridan



{ Autobots, Roll Out }

Sarah Martin

{ Tail Lights }

Belinda Baker

The man was walking quite a ways ahead of me and I was having a hard time catching up with him because he seemed to be in a real hurry. A majority of people are in a hurry in an airport though, so I didn't think he had noticed me trying to get a better look at his face or that he was hurrying to get away from me. I felt the urge to break into a trot, but I didn't want to draw the attention of the crowd of people around me, even if I could have found a way to weave through them without knocking into someone. And I definitely didn't want to scare the man or make him think I was stalking him. Although technically, I guess I was stalking him. I was running after him like I always had, which was crazy. Why in hell was I doing this?! Even if I did catch up to him and by some strange fluke he turned out to be Michael, what was I going to say to him? Knowing that he might only turn and walk away, or worse, say something back to me that would stab me in the heart. I pushed the thought away and decided I would worry about that later.

It seemed perfectly natural to spot him at an airport. Michael had always been fascinated by aviation and had even taken lessons and learned to fly small planes years ago.

I forged ahead, maneuvering my way through the crowd as quickly as I could, trying to keep my eyes on the back of his head. I was determined now to look him in the eyes, whoever he was. I had seen him first from the side and the resemblance struck me as remarkable. If this man wasn't Michael, he certainly could pass for his twin. He had the same square jawline that had always appeared to be clenched and set, ready to take a blow. The same clean-shaven, olive skin and sandy brown hair that was perfectly cut and slightly curly. The same general height and lean, athletic build, although this man looked older than Michael. Michael was older though. It had been ten years since I had seen him.

I had not been able to see his eyes. I would know for sure if I could look into his eyes. Michael's eyes were unmistakable. They were chameleon eyes which were sometimes green and other times blue, depending on the color of whatever shirt he was wearing. They were the color of the ocean and as fathomless. The last time I had looked into them, they were dead.

Sweat had broken out on my forehead and neck and my hair was plastered to my face as I hauled my rolling bag beside me, stacked with my overnight bag and laptop case. My purse was strung over one shoulder and hung diagonally across my body in front of me under my coat, which I had unbuttoned, but unfortunately, I had not removed. I had kept it on because I normally froze in airports and on planes. I also had not removed my scarf and I felt sweat trickle from my neck down the center of my back. I reached up with my free hand and jerked the scarf free from my neck and dropped it unceremoniously beside me down to the floor, a motion that none of the people around me paused to notice. I could not afford the time it would take to stop and stuff the scarf into my bag. I berated myself briefly for not checking the big rolling bag. I hadn't wanted to wait at the other end for my luggage to appear on the belt, which I knew from personal experience could take eons. However, I had not counted on the possibility that I would be chasing a man through the airport. That thought had not occurred to me.

The faster I tried to navigate through the throng of people, the faster the man seemed to move. He had the advantage of not having a rolling bag. He carried a single black duffle bag and he adeptly made his way down the crowded corridor. I made quick mental notes about the people around him because I couldn't always keep him in my sight. Every few seconds I caught a quick glimpse of his shirt, which was a blue plaid, or his shoes, which were expensive white running shoes. Michael always wore running shoes. It was his trademark apparel. He was a runner. Or at least he was back then. I could keep sight of his shoes easier than his head because as short as I am, I was not able to see over the people around me or him. Also, the shoes were white in the mass of dark clothing and shoes. It was winter and it was a weekday. There were black business shoes and dark boots for the most part, so his white shoes shone like a neon sign. I moved along as quickly as I could, glancing ahead to keep the shoes in sight every few seconds. I lost them for a moment and I began to

panic, now aggressively shoving my way through the thick crowd of people around me, as I muttered, "excuse me...excuse me...excuse me..." Where had all these people come from?! Surely, all of them were not going to the same gate!

This scene, of me hustling my way through the airport, jogged a memory of an old rental car commercial from years ago. The vision in my mind was of O.J. Simpson, sprinting through an airport. I couldn't remember exactly why he had been running . . . was it to catch a plane or to get to his rental car? It certainly wasn't to catch up with a stranger who looked remarkably like a person he had once adored.

The thought occurred to me that I was probably going to miss my flight because of this wild goose chase. How would I explain that to my boss who would be waiting at the airport in Dallas to pick me up? "Oh, sorry Sandeep... I know I'm a half a day late. But, I spotted this stranger in the airport in Memphis and then I decided to chase him down and..." It didn't matter. I would just have to pay the fee to reschedule my flight and come up with a viable excuse later. I was on a mission now and I was powerless to stop myself.

There were signs up high that indicated an upcoming intersection. I didn't have a clue which way he would go, of course, but I would have to guess in the next three seconds. If I forked the wrong way, I would not be able to see him and I would most likely lose him before I could get myself and my bag turned around in this mass of people. I went with my instinct (who knew I had an instinct for stalking?) and bore to the right, along with about half of the people surrounding me. Suddenly, there was an opening in the line of sight between us. For the first time, I was able to see his whole body, head to toe. He was wearing some kind of harness or pack which crisscrossed on his back and over his shoulders. At first, I thought it looked like a holster for a gun, like the cops on television always wore hidden underneath their jackets, but that couldn't possibly be right. Surely, in our post 9/11 society it was illegal to carry a firearm in an airport unless you were security personnel or a member of the Secret Service... Then, I saw it. The harness he wore housed a camera which was securely positioned against his chest. This was no run-of-the-mill camera from Wal-Mart. This was a professional camera. There were other compartments on the apparatus strapped around his body, which I guessed held lenses or batteries or other photographic equipment.

I knew then that he was Michael. I had still not been able to look into his eyes, but the

uncanny resemblance, the running shoes, and the camera left me with little doubt. Michael had been an avid and gifted amateur photographer. He had approached the hobby like he approached everything else he undertook, in his signature “all-or-nothing” style. He was one of those people who achieved excellence in everything he tried. Or, if he did not believe he could achieve excellence, he would not try at all.

Images of his photographs flashed through my mind like a slideshow. Close-ups of vibrantly colored flowers, birds, and trees were his favorites. He had given me a beautiful shot of a single red rose petal, which he had signed and framed and presented to me on my thirtieth birthday. It was my favorite piece of art and it still hung on my office wall.

It made perfect sense that Michael was at the airport. He had obviously combined his aptitude for photography with his love of planes.

The hallway became wider up ahead with a moving walkway on either side, going in opposite directions. I knew Michael would go through the center of the hallway and would not take the moving walkway. He would consider its use to be reserved for elderly people who had trouble walking long distances or parents who were travelling with small children. I thought if I took it might give me a chance to gain on him, but as I looked ahead to try and gauge if I would be able to maneuver around the people who were already on the walkway, allowing the conveyor to move them along instead of walking on it, I quickly saw that I might be able to get myself around them, but there was no way I would be able to get the rolling bag through. I couldn't pick the damned thing up and carry it in my arms because it weighed about as much as me, not to mention how I would possibly hang on to the smaller bag and my laptop. I cursed myself for my lifelong practice of over-packing. My bag contained enough clothes for a week when I was only scheduled to be gone for three days. When Michael and I had travelled together in the past, he would pick up my bag to load or unload it and he would not comment, but he would only look at me quizzically, trying to figure out why I did it.

He turned to enter a gated section that contained a bank of empty seats that were lined up against a glass wall that looked out over the tarmac. If I followed him into the area, he would easily be able to see me, so I walked into the section directly across the wide corridor. I parked my bag in front of an empty seat where I would have a good view of him, and where I would still be partially hidden from his view by a half wall that separated the area. I

took off my coat and sat in the seat next to my bag to watch him. He dropped his duffle into one of the seats nearest the glass wall and he instantly unsnapped the camera from the harness on his chest with obvious practiced skill. He pulled open a Velcro-ed compartment and removed a long lens, which he attached to the camera. He aimed the camera toward the glass wall and then he began to focus the lens on the planes, in their various stages of being loaded, or farther away, approaching the runway to line up and take off.

I watched his every move, observing every detail. He looked relaxed and in his element as he moved gracefully, the camera appearing to be just another obedient working appendage of his body. It felt natural for me to watch him. I had watched him in action for so many years. I had been his biggest fan.

The lines at the corners of his eyes were deeper and his dark blonde hair had a slight sheen of gray at his temples. He wasn't smiling, but his face held the rapt expression of the complete satisfaction of one who is pursuing a passion. He was totally engrossed in what he was doing. I wondered then if he had focused his camera on me and photographed me while I watched him, if my face would have had that same expression.

After he had taken copious photographs of the scene outside the window, he removed the lens from the camera and stowed his gear back inside the compartments on the harness.

This was the moment when I would have to make a choice. Either I was going to continue to follow him through the airport to wherever he was headed next, or I was going to approach him and speak to him. There was a third choice, I realized. I could simply let him go.

The pain I had dreaded and postponed struck me in the chest. I had promised myself if I ever got the opportunity to look him in the eyes and tell him I still loved and missed him, I would seize it. Yet, here he was and here I was. I was less than forty feet away from him and I was paralyzed with fear to confront him. Because as much as I didn't want it to be true, I knew what his answer would be to my question. It would be the same answer he had given me ten years ago. That was another thing you could count on about Michael. He didn't change his mind.

He had packed up his gear, but instead of leaving the area, he sat down in the seat next to his duffle bag and stared intently through the glass at the movement of the planes outside. For a long time. . . (How long?). . . I watched him watch the planes.

The area began to fill up with travelers then, who were checking in at the desk and finding seats to wait to board their flight. Michael removed his duffle from the seat next to him to make room for an older gentleman to sit. He smiled at the man and brushed off the plastic seat with his hand while he offered it. The two of them began to have a conversation, looking out of the glass and pointing and talking animatedly about the planes. Michael's face was serious in one moment, sharing his encyclopedic knowledge about the planes with the man, and then like a little boy in the next moment, experiencing the wonder of his first sight of a plane, grinning at the older man.

He excused himself and walked to the desk and checked in with the agent there. I scanned the digital readout that hung behind the desk and read that the flight was an International flight to Madrid and it was scheduled to leave in thirty minutes.

How many times during the last ten years had I dreamed of this moment? How many hours had I spent mentally rehearsing what I would say to him, in case I ever got the opportunity? All I had to do was to manage to get up the courage to walk over there, but as hard as I tried to force my body to rise from my seat, everything in me resisted.

I had been mostly successful at vanquishing him from my daily thoughts for these past few years. Then, there were the moments when his absence from my life felt like a fresh, new cut again. When my first short story had gotten published, I had popped the cork on a bottle of champagne I had been saving for a special occasion. I had poured myself a glass and as I had watched the bubbles rise to the surface, I had thought about how proud Michael would have been of me, if he had known. He would have read my story and told me he enjoyed it, and I would have pretended to believe him, although I would have known deep down that he really hadn't. Michael's idea of leisure reading consisted of scientific works about the history and evolution of electricity, or technical volumes about his beloved planes, or some other practical subject he deemed worthy of study. Once, he had decided to learn to identify every tree that grew in North America. After he had conquered that, it seemed only natural to him that he should learn to identify all the birds, too. For him,

reading fiction would be a waste of his time; time that could have been better spent learning something valuable and useful.

The agent at the desk announced that boarding would now begin for the flight to Madrid. The people in the area began to form a line and Michael joined them. He held his duffle bag with his left hand and he had his boarding pass and I.D. in his right hand, ready to present to the agent. He had put on a leather jacket.

This would be my last chance to approach him. In just a couple of minutes, he would be disappearing through the entryway into the passage that led to the plane. I rose from my seat, not bothering to get my bags or coat, and I walked across the expanse between us. I could hear my heart beating inside my chest. I made my way around the line of travelers and I came up on his left side, a couple of feet behind him.

"Michael," I quietly spoke his name. He turned toward the sound of my voice and saw me. There was not even a glimmer of shock or surprise in his expression. It was as if he had known I had been there watching him all along. We stood like that for a moment, each waiting for the other to say something. The lines I had rehearsed so many times in my mind evaporated, and like a bad actor who has missed her cue, I froze. Finally, I said, "I am so happy that you are going to Madrid. You always wanted to see Spain."

"Madrid's International airport receives more than one thousand flights weekly from all over the world and there are seventy-three museums in the city that cover all fields of human knowledge," he replied.

"Wow. That should keep you busy for a while..." I said, stating the obvious, a habit which had been one of Michael's pet peeves. In his efficient use of language, Michael did not believe one should waste words.

He didn't respond but I knew it was because I had not asked him a question.

The line of people waiting to board was growing shorter as the agent checked I.D.'s and scanned their boarding passes, ushering them through quickly. Michael turned to check the progress of the line and spoke then without turning to look at me. "I have to go now." He said it as if it were something that he said to me every day.

"Michael, you have to forgive me," I blurted out. "Whatever I did that was so unforgivable, you have to forgive me."

"Okay," he replied.

"When you come back from Spain, will you call me? Could we just spend some time together?" I heard the pleading in my voice and I fought back hot tears that were spilling out of my eyes.

"I won't be coming back from Spain. I am going to live there now." He said it as a matter of fact, as if people routinely decided to move to foreign countries.

"Oh. Wow. Okay." I spoke the words barely above a whisper as I could no longer trust my voice.

"Okay then." He was telling me goodbye now. And this time, I would no longer be able to deny that the goodbye meant forever.

"Michael, you are my only brother. I am your sister, for god's sake. My DNA is closer to yours than any other human on the planet." My desperation punctuated every word.

"Yes. That is true." He replied in a monotone.

"Let me come to Spain to visit you. Please don't walk out of my life forever." I knew this was my final chance to reach him and I wrapped my hand around his arm, not wanting to let go.

"I will be backpacking all over the country for the first few months and then I am going to see Germany. You know our paternal great-grandparents came to America from Germany in 1878."

"Yes. I know." At a loss now, I was out of words. (The irony of that did not escape me. Words were the tools of my trade and how I made a living. Yet, in his presence, whatever command of the English language I had attained did not avail itself to me.)

The agent at the desk announced final boarding for the flight to Madrid. Michael looked down at my hand, which was still clutching his arm, and I let go.

With that one small movement, I finally let him go.

Without another word, he left my side and began to walk toward the agent. He never looked back.

I watched him go through the entrance into the jetway that led to his plane until he rounded a bend and I could no longer see him. I walked over to the glass wall and watched his plane as they finished boarding and then taxied out to the runway for takeoff. I stayed there, just breathing, until the tail lights disappeared into the clouds.

{ Bored Games }

James Payne

I shall not play another bored game
No Trouble, no Sorry
No - Shoot - I missed that ladder!
the board is a bore
both deep and hollow.

Monopoly ends when
I'm forced to roll the dice.
Staggering through defeat,
Too few grins at the table.

I cannot settle Catan
hexed by alliances
and loss of friends
A lifetime to acquire
each lost within the hour
"This is fun", they say
as we squabble rule and power

This Operation won't Break the Ice
Can You Guess Who
scarcely scrabbles?

A pit too deep
beneath the chill
Only felt on sharp shoulders

I shall not play another bored game
each one its own Mousetrap
giving no Clue in Life.
Hungry children rest
on a boarded edifice
hungrily Mad-Gabbing
"What's Candy Land?"

The world goes on
mashing the Hungry,
Hungry Hippo- crypts
that turn into beds of
Apples to Apples,
and dust to dust



{ Longing for the Savannah }

Rachel Brown

{ The Various Fatalities of the Cat }

Liz Cox

Splat!
The cat got hit by a bat!
Oh, drat.
Whose cat was that?

Man!
The cat got hit by a van.
He got crushed like a can.
At least he didn't get sucked into a fan.

Crap!
The cat walked into a trap.
Guess he needed a map.
What a mishap.

Yikes!
The cat got hit by a bike.
The kid was just a little tyke.
At least there were no spikes.

Dang!
A snake bit the cat with his fangs.
The cat was in a rival gang.
Now his ear just hangs.

Eek!
The cat ate the bird's beak.
His intestines started to leak.
Now he really reeks.

Yuck!
The cat got hit by a truck.
He landed in a puddle of muck.
What terrible luck.

Whoa!
The cat got hit by an arrow.
His heart rate became slow.
Who shot him, we'll never know.

Wow!
The cat got caught in a plow.
The farmer didn't hear him meow.
The cat's dead now.

{ Wedding Jitters }

Kaitlan Keel

"Come on, Luke. Pull yourself together," I said as my trembling fingers fumbled with my tie.

I never thought I would be this nervous on my wedding day. After all, I'm the one who proposed. Shouldn't I be a little more confident?

"It's going to be great Luke," my father reassured me as he placed his proud hand on my shoulder.

"I know, Dad, but I don't know what's come over me."

He smiled and patted my shoulder again, this time with a little more humor.

"My boy, nervous on his wedding day- what happened to all that confidence?" he laughed.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know, I distinctly remember a certain someone coming home from a date not too long ago and telling me that he didn't care what I thought. He'd met the person he was gonna marry."

I smiled at the memory. Even though he thought we were too young, he gave us his blessing. He seemed to understand that sometimes you just know.

"Now get over yourself and get out there. You don't wanna be the one responsible for this thing startin late, trust me."

"I know, Dad. I just need to take a few more deep breaths to clear my head"

"You have the rest of your life to clear your head. Now is the time to get married. You may not realize it now, but you're about as ready as anyone has ever been."

His confidence in me was exactly what I needed. Now I remembered why, despite our differences, I chose my dad to be my best man.

"I guess it's now or never," I said as I took one final deep breath.

As I stood by the altar, I had to reassure myself yet again. Even though I knew Erin was just as thrilled about our nuptials as I was, I couldn't help but pray that the feeling remained. I had never given my heart to anyone before, and I was about to give it to someone forever. It was definitely the moment of truth.

As the music began, it all became real. It was finally happening. All of my hopes and dreams were about to come true. My life could finally begin. I wasn't quite ready for the overwhelming feeling that came over me, but as the doors opened and the crowd watched, I locked eyes with the love of my life. In that moment I became whole. Erin was a vision in a white tux, and I was proud to say he'd be mine forever.

{ Early Morning Negotiations with My Hair }

Andi Fisher

You uncompromising congress, will you not make up your mind?
Are you curly, straight, or wavy? Messy, greasy, flat or fried?
You won't come when I call you, you decline to sit and stay,
You gobble up my combs and clips, you're never well-behaved.
You're a hazardous appendage and won't hesitate to strike
Any unassuming victim that happens to pass by.
Your wiry spawn torment me, haunt me, clog up every drain.
You're the bane of my existence, you unruly copper mane.



Photography

{ Cold Blooded Killer }

Melanie O'Neil

Perhaps by chance it is a season
to encounter much chaos and strife
or maybe, in fact, there is a reason
like the balancing of one's life.

To head steadfast into the storm
looking forgotten demons in the face
with head held high in regal form
pushing hard to keep the pace.

It seems a folly to even try
though pushing on undaunted
we often sit and ponder why...
questions leaving us haunted.

Perhaps it is not for us to know
- our minds perpetual bane -
or maybe simply a chance to grow
as we live upon this plane.

{ A Sonnet on Struggle }

Jennifer Parrish

{ De Rerum Natura }

William Patrick Bishop

It's a great sticking point with me that the "great outdoors" is divided up into its many, silent and uncaring, dirty pieces. I'd really like nothing more than our anthropomorphic tendencies to actually be made manifest so that I could shake hands with ole' mom nature, pull a branch off of one of her oh-so-sacred trees and whop the ancient crone in her tree hugging ass.

Let me introduce you to one of the ironies of my nature experience: I'm a fairly good swimmer; I hate being wet. I hate how each piece of the experience builds: the rocks under your feet as you hit bottom (which of course quite sharply bring to mind the notion that you are out of your depth), the inevitable inhale that accompanies a stabbed foot (which handily reminds you that, yes, you are out of an intended environment). All of this can only be made worse if an actual aquatic denizen decides to either start a morning brunch with your floundering ass or just put you out of your ridiculous misery. These, and more besides, roll together and crash over you like the waves you are trying to doggy paddle through while you struggle to remember the butterfly-breast-side-stroke mumbo jumbo your parents paid too much money to have someone teach you in an effort to make you into the next Michael (or Michele) Phelps ignoring, of course, that no one knew who the hell Michael Phelps was twenty years ago.

I'm sorry if you expected a joyous romp down memory lane filled with squirrels who sing and the pastel colored trees of your VHS memories. Mine is a cautionary tale the message of which should be obvious to anyone who has watched National Geographic for more than five minutes: the natural world is one of struggle. Now you may say: "You don't get chased by cheetahs because you're not a gazelle, or, at the very least, you don't

do anything to habitually anger cheetahs.” This is true. That for a great many things to live another great many things must die is equally true. That two objects cannot occupy the same area, and the idyllic and beautiful bounty of nature will violently remove you from where it currently strives to be is, likewise, not false. This argument to save your life and explain this author’s relationship to things that don’t involve air conditioning begins in paradise.

To save some time we’ll hop in in medias res: I’d gone to Hawaii (the biggest Island, mind) over the Thanksgiving holiday during my junior year of high school. This trip was, rather unfortunately, business instead of pleasure; I was to make speeches, but that’s another matter that would only cover up this tale of man versus wild (no relation to the Bear Grylls “adventure” program). Before the orating was to begin, the requisite tourist mumbo jumbo simply had to be inflicted on the poor residents of that beautiful postcard (I mean island). One such activity that was simply out of the question to miss was the viewing of blow holes which, no jokes here, operate pretty much as you would think they would operate: water is forced through a channel in rock under the surface and it “blows” through an exposed hole above ground. The effect is quite moist. The particular blow hole our tiny tourist traffic decided to experience was just next to a cliff and carved into volcanic rock. We oohed and ahhed over the effect we’d created between squelching hands as children, only, this time it was different because we’d paid seven hundred dollars round trip to see it. Quite according to the make-up of my brain chemistry at that stage in my life (read: foolish adolescence coupled with attractive girls looking on), I decided to actually experience this effect for myself. Ever the instigator I extolled the virtues of my plan as it formed to the other thrill seekers among us; it worked (I was there to make speeches after all). We hoped the guard rail and made the short leap to the volcanic rock. It turns out that volcanic rock is actually more akin to volcanic glass; as soon as the first “blow” blew, I was knocked from my feet. At this point in time, quite according to the make-up of oceans, and gravity and whatever else, a wave rolled into the small spire of volcanic rock/glass/death trap. This sent me sliding toward the edge onto which I managed to secure purchase at the cost of cut hands drenched in salt water. Only the timely intervention of my giant friend hauling me bodily from the Big Island’s murderous (and damp) clutches

saved me from plummeting into the ocean water below which, I can only guess, would have ended in my death (for the purposes of this story, we will settle for death). But the tale of my aquatic adventures isn’t finished.

Lest you start thinking that the constructs of manmade mimicry which ape but never duplicate nature are safe: you should reevaluate the component parts of the chosen recreational pursuit in question. Take, for example, the swimming pool. How can all of the dangers above described (blow holes, waves et cetera) exist as part of that safe, purposefully manufactured environment? They can, and they do. The essential components of my youthfully impetuous beach nightmare are present and accounted for in any swimming excursion. These are, namely, water and the human tendency to do stupid things for stupid reasons. We and our constructs are part of nature technically, so this more than counts as a dangerous piece of the outside world. The composition of a swimming pool (again, water) is made all the worse by way of man’s intervention. Yes, the chemicals that are added for your benefit actually do benefit you by killing the harmful pool born bacteria sluiced off of the heretofore unwashed masses. They also burn your eyes, nose and throat when you find yourself submerged and confused as to the direction you are supposed to struggle toward. This is only compounded if you are six years old and have only recently been enjoying the single aquatic pursuit that doesn’t involve actually touching the water: floating on various inflatable water devices. Yes, this happened to yours truly. Doing my best impression of what Michael Phelps’ Fear and Loathing Olympic practices must have looked like, I simply slipped under the water and didn’t return to the surface (if you don’t count my flailing feet and hands escaping from cold, chemically impending doom every now and again). I had just lost balance while floating on the pool float, its promise of dry safety overruled by its composition of cheap Chinese made plastic (which is slippery when wet, but I was six so cut me some slack). I came to coughing up water as the life guard stared at me asking unceremoniously and quite unnecessarily if I was “ok.” These have been but two examples involving naught but Poseidon’s element.

What, then, are you to do about your position in the cosmos? You can’t be a couch potato forever; you’ll need to at least walk to the mailbox. Yes, it is possible that the

Disneyesque landscape could turn feral while you're leaving your trash for the city sanitation employees or that primal forces could literally sweep you off of your feet as my unfortunate example has shown. But it's not all bad. You may not be able to revoke your place in the planetary hierarchy, but you can still enjoy the challenge of what it throws at you. If you enjoy the burn after running a thousand miles every morning as you plan for the next "whatever" K like all fulfilled weekend warriors, you can enjoy struggling to break the surface after undertow sucks you down. If you like attempting to pick up things that are increasingly filled with more metal, you can like beating off sharks and howler monkeys. You can see where I am going with this. All of the activities we enjoy as weekend or after work pursuits we can enjoy as the truest version that they copy; we can find a commonplace with our prehistorical relatives. What more is there to being human than the motto of Survivor? I say "nay" to all of the metaphysical mumbo jumbo and espouse true outlasting and outwitting. If everything is out to kill you, you might as well be a man or woman about it. Go big or go home (read: drown or be chewed on by hippopotamuses). I may hate nature and its antagonistic relationship with me, but I'll be damned if I'm not going to live my life. And that requires walking through nature to get there. If you're lucky you may even get to experience your struggle in a little slice of paradise. At least there will be something beautiful and exotic to look at as you write your death haiku.

{ A Fine Frenzy }

Ashley Gross

Under cold sheets
we fumble.
Hands
explore in kaleidoscopic light.
Tan lamp on a window sill
blinds him.

Him
my beacon in frigid winter nights.

Hot breath
arousing life into these bones.
His lips
igniting, burning.
A fire.
A frenzy.

{ **HEADLINE: Bombs in Boston** }

{ (A Strange Love Indeed) }

Maggi Mayo

The evolution of our revolution,
The conscripted search for restitution,
Terrorizes our bold generation
Unaffected by "mass annihilation,"
Unsettled by bombs in Boston.

Forced is the slow, smokeless burning of decay
By way of exhibitionist foreplay.
Erecting Nebuchadnezzian monoliths
Equivocally bisecting raw ravishments.
Electing bombs in Boston.

"Because I said so"'s stinging tautology
Lays bare eerily whitewashed autonomy,
Mirror reflect fraternal, shining slaughter,
Unmasking the phantom Gradian fodder.
Broadcasted bombs in Boston.

I long to move away.. from hissing... crackling... lies....
Rage! Do not go gentle into that good night!
Pardon? You say you want a revolution?
Do you know where to find a real solution?
Bombs in Boston.

The shining "morning star" reveries our Revelation,
Or is that smothering from infinite, prognosticated conflagration?

WE are the World--
It was NOT death--
Class one regeneration--
Riots and bombs--
In Boston.

A Lesson Before Dying anyone?

As ravens flutter through the air
 On wings so plush and smooth.
 Their briefest sight conjures your hair
 Which, midnight black, didst move.
 And streaming on upon the gust
 Those fleece like strands did glide.
 I envy that, like others lust
 For they are by your side
 I turn the mem'ry back around,
 Reflecting what I see,
 And let my fancy go abound
 And then come back to me.
 I let her float upon the air
 And dance through this night's snow.
 For, when she returns, it is rare
 If she does not bestow
 Me with dainties from all the earth-
 So fresh and ripe and pure.
 As good as any new-loves birth
 Yet, promised to endure.
 I turn the mem'ry round once more,
 To see what I espy.
 Seeing all I did once adore
 Prolongs that last goodbye.
 And while it lingers in this frame
 This picture breaks my heart.
 But as I touch it with this flame,
 So does my pain depart.

{ The Picture James Hardin }

{ Comfort Cody Jarman }

Fluorescent shadows outline shabby prints –
 something sterile in the air.
 Fluorescent lights damn living magazines –
 a proxy pretends to care.

 Petty pastels, and hotel furniture –
 part the living and the dead.
 Reapers clad in colorful scrubs –
 like Charon lead the dead.

 Pity, pain, and bad news –
 a hint of life's last stand.
 Something cold, and unforgiving –
 like the touch of a doctor's hand.

Once upon a time,
not too long ago,
there lived a hollow boy with hollow bones.
Hollow smiles, hollow eyes,
hollow fingers, and toes,
but most of all, he had a hollow soul.

You may not know him,
he wasn't well known.
I pity the boy with the hollow bones.

He had no one left, or so he believed,
while he laid on his bed, his phone started to ring.
He couldn't get up, since before she could call,
the hollow boy took a knife, and ended it all.

What the boy didn't know was that someone was there,
to tell him she loved him, to tell him she cared.

She called barely too late, and wouldn't you know,
She became the girl with hollow bones.

{ Hollow Bones
William Jones }



Acrylic on Masonite

{ Spare Change
Zachariah Dickson }



{ Hiding Place
Beth A. Crocker }



{ All Eyes on Me
Melanie O'Neil }



{ Russia, Ballet, and Color
Memori DePriest }



{ Running Through the Fields
Zachary Robinson }



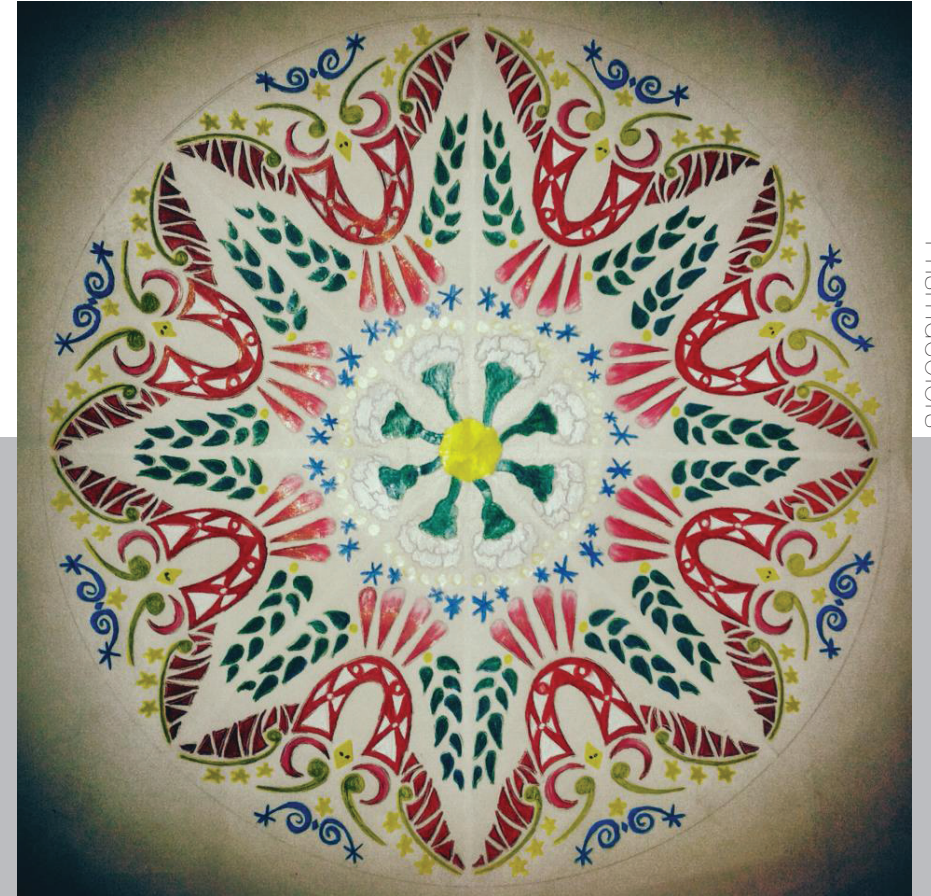
{ Something Real
Jami Miller }



{ The Son
Alex Tatjana }



{ Noah's Deluge 5
Alex Tatjana }



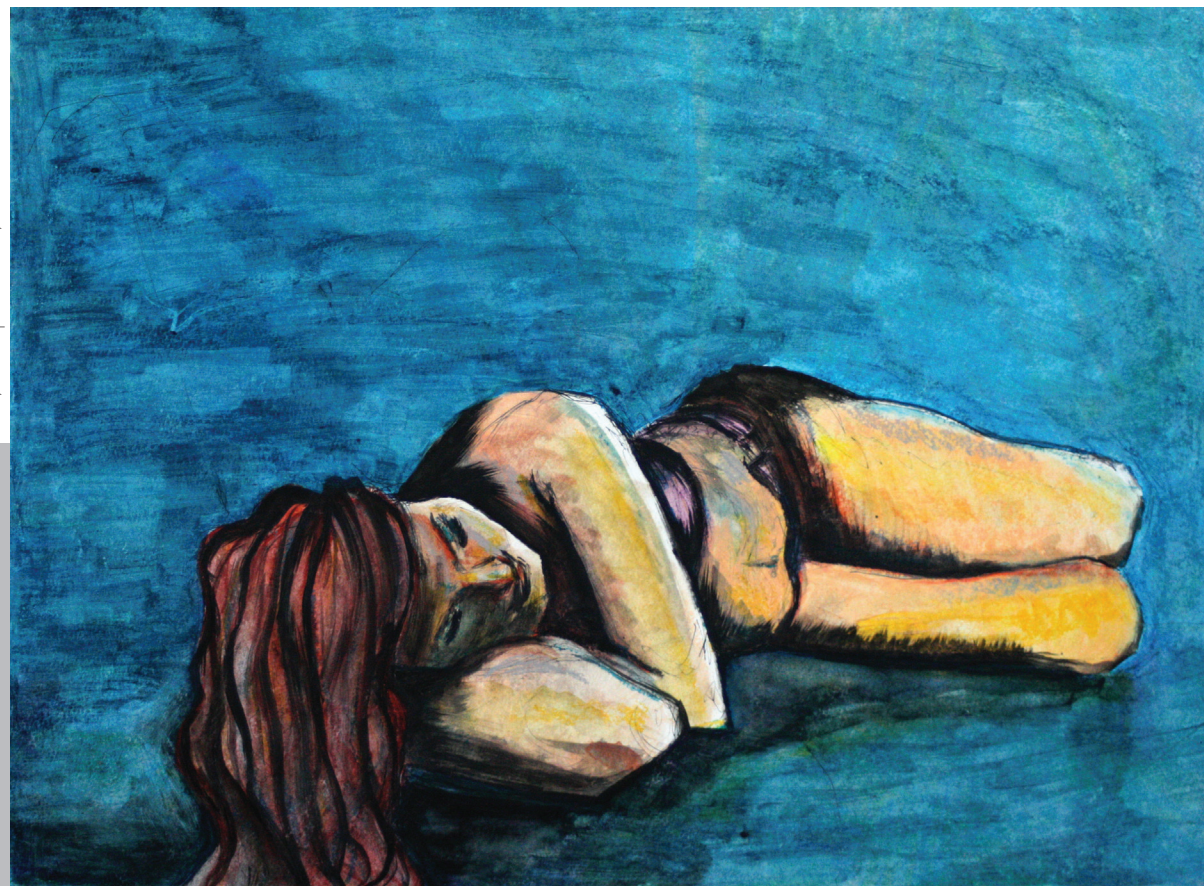
{ Sisterhood
Sarah Martin }



{ The Great Wall
Summer Bradley }



{ Before the Blood Moon
Michael May }



{ Warmth of Solitude }

Nathan Tyler Allen

{ Claiming Myself }

Toshya Leonard

It was a hot day. I remember the sweltering heat because I remember wearing my orange striped shorts. Better yet, I remember the way my thighs rolled over when I sat down on the leather car seat. And I recall crossing my legs so that the cellulite was less noticeable.

The XM radio station knew exactly what I was feeling. As my mother and I drove past the usual billboards for Big Macs and diet doctors, Matchbox 20 was singing about not being crazy, just unwell. And just like that, on a car ride home on the edge of Missouri in some orange striped shorts with the oil shining through my caked-on foundation, Rob Thomas' lyrics brought on my "come to Jesus" moment. That band, they understood.

"I'm not crazy/ I'm just a little unwell."

I was introduced to my sin when I turned 16. Pounds, calories, fat, carbs, and gluten were poisons to stay away from in high school. And the pretty girls knew exactly what to throw away from the brown bag specials that their mothers still lovingly packed for them. The popular girls at BHS consisted of a reigning Miss Teen Tennessee, a dance student, and a few other preps who always hid their Facebook photos from their parents since no mother or father would want to see their "princess" dressed as a French maid, passed out on some football player's bed. But despite all of the rumors that followed these girls through the hallways, I wanted what they had: I wanted to be skinny. So I started bingeing. But I was still a size nine at senior prom. I tried and tried and tried again, but nothing was working. Then college happened, and I began to create my own habits, away from home cooked meals and snobs at the lunch tables.

Of course, I knew better than to call it a disorder. I wasn't confused or mental; I knew what I was doing when I checked the back of every food item I contemplated purchasing. It was now an art: first check the calories, then the fat, and save the carbs for last. Simple mathematics and a little division guided me through each meal, which is quite ironic since algebra was never my strong suit. But to think that these equations added up to an eating disorder was absurd to me. I was not a size double-zero after all. I was a four. I had dropped from a nine to a four in less than a year, 140 pounds to 110, after taking a vow to not gain but rather lose the "freshmen 15" . . . and then some.

A friend of mine came to me with this weight loss proposal. Since she already worked out five to six days a week, I decided to join her. Don't get me wrong, she was not the cause of my disorder in any way. She actually just wanted us both to try out a healthier lifestyle. Our conversations would go as follows:

"I had a banana with peanut butter this morning instead of a candy bar."

"Well good for you girl! You know, I found some new exercises that I want to try at the gym tonight, but this month's squat challenge is making it hard to climb the stairs to my room."

"But you're going to love the results."

In looking back at my workout sessions with her, I realize I lied to an amazing friend. I wasn't living a healthy lifestyle to lose weight. I was eating morsels of meat with no bread and washing almonds down with Diet Coke. But wasn't weight loss valued in society? Wasn't that considered an accomplishment for people like Valerie Bertinelli and the latest contestants on *The Biggest Loser*? Why was I any different than them?

But it was on nights like this (which had become every night) that I realized why I was different: Because by not admitting that I preferred a soda to water or that I craved a midnight truffle blizzard from Dairy Queen, I was feeding the stereotypical "Barbie Doll" image in my head. I wasn't losing weight to gain a better self image, strength, or confidence. I mean sure, I wanted those beauty queens I graduated with to see that I was more than just a vulnerable cheat sheet, but when it all boiled down to pure reason, I was starving myself to become something I thought would be more mesmerizing than what I was. I wanted to impress out of looks alone. It was not about me but an image instead.

This truth became self evident in that car ride home. Something about my mother's tired silence and the lyrics behind that number one hit of the 2000s got me.

"All night/ hearing voices telling me that I should get some sleep/ Because tomorrow might be good for something/ Hold on/ Feeling like I'm headed for a breakdown/ And I've lost my mind."

And when I got home, I looked up "Unwell" by Matchbox 20 again, followed by "Beautiful Disaster" by Jon McLaughlin and "Hollywood's Not America" by Ferris. Though it might just seem as if I had the most depressing playlist in all of Newbern, Tennessee, I was merely finding truths in what I didn't have the courage to admit.

When I finished repeatedly listening to the words about hidden beauty and realizing unhealthy habits, I decided it was time to call my other half. His name is Tyler, and we had met in November of 2012. He charmed me with his southern drawl and side swept smile, and I was determined that even though he lived over 300 miles away from me, I was going to make him mine. So when my goal became a reality, text messages and phone calls started coming and going more frequently. And I enjoyed talking to him about how his day at work was, what he ate for lunch, and his favorite movies. But for some reason, our conversations would always turn sour when it came to my appearance.

Tyler would say something along the lines of, "I bet you looked great today baby."

My replies would vary, but consequently, they were always negative: "The horizontal stripes on my shirt made me look fat"; "My upper arms looked huge in the tank top I decided on wearing"; or "I just wore black so I'd stay unnoticeable."

To be honest, Tyler already knew that I had zero self confidence. I had already lost 15 pounds by the time I met him, yet I still held on to many insecurities. I had told him that I hated taking pictures of myself because of my acne; I admitted to him all of the characteristics of my polycystic ovarian syndrome (overproducing levels of testosterone); and I had even told him about the fact that I sometimes cried when he mentioned certain movie stars, because I knew I would never look anything like them.

There were also certain things I didn't admit to him because I didn't know if he would understand. There were times when I stood in front of the bathroom mirror and pulled at the fat on my stomach until my thumbs left bruises. I would sit up in my dorm at night

and do “chin-ups” to lose the fat under my face. I would also study celebrity sizes and measurements like they were college exam material to better weigh myself against the sexiest women on screen. It all sounds over dramatic and completely shallow, but this is the way my mind worked.

What made my insecurities even worse was the fact that Tyler was not attracted to the skinny women on screen. Like most other males in the United States population, he liked curves and preferred me at 125 pounds than the 110 I had become. I had lost all that was physically there in the first place. I had originally pictured myself with my original curves and just a flatter, ripped stomach. Instead, I found out that fat can be pulled from more places than just the stomach. But it was my decisions that made me who I was. I was the one who manipulated my body for some sort of fame I thought I deserved. Instead, I had created a wedge that was based on more than just sex appeal between a man I loved and a monster I was starving myself into. With all of the hostility I held against myself, Tyler could barely mention me in a conversation. But with all relationships, especially long distance ones, communication is key. So we would try to find ways around it. That’s when the days of my self-loathing turned into the weeks of mirror-image hell. Then finally, he told me to stop and stop for good.

“I can’t take any more of this! You’re beautiful, and everyone can see that except you because of what’s in your head! You’re so damn frustrating! You created this problem for yourself, so you can fix it! But I can’t deal with any more of this. This is what is going to cause us to break up, but you can’t even see that because the mirror is in your way!”

After this statement was made loud and clear, I tried my hardest to not talk about my appearance. But that night, I had to bring it up to bring forth the truth. Of course, I didn’t confront the demon that was my body image right away. The conversation started out like any other that we had:

“Hey Goose.” (He’d earned the nickname after a horrible inside joke about farm animals.)

“Hey babe. How was your day?”

“Good. Busy but good. What about yours?”

“Same here.”

“What are you doing?”

“Just laying here. What about you?”

“. . .Thinking.”

“About what?”

Then came the missile, flying out of my mouth with the equivalence of the nuclear power only Syria could claim.

“So, you know how I’ve been so hard on myself over the past months?”

I heard him sigh on the other end of the line. He probably thought I was going to pitch a fit over how I didn’t shape up to some girl at the gym or the fact that I got a dessert at dinner.

“It’s a disorder; I realize I have an eating disorder.”

There was silence on his end, and I was terrified of what he might think to say next. I mean, who would want to spend the next several months trying to force someone not to look at the back of the box on any certain foods? Who would want to be a crutch to someone whose problems were all in her head? And what kind of person was I for putting a man I loved through that?

Then, I heard the words that put the fire in me, the words that brought me my salvation:

“I’ll do whatever it takes to help you, baby. I’m not going anywhere. And I knew that you were strong enough all along; strong enough to admit to this and face it. You’re the strongest woman I know, and I’m still right here. And I will be until the end.”

My first reaction was to start bawling. Yeah, I cried like I had just watched the ending sequence to Titanic and The Notebook at the same time. And looking back now, I can see a love there that was greater than that of Rose and Jack’s or Allie and Noah’s.

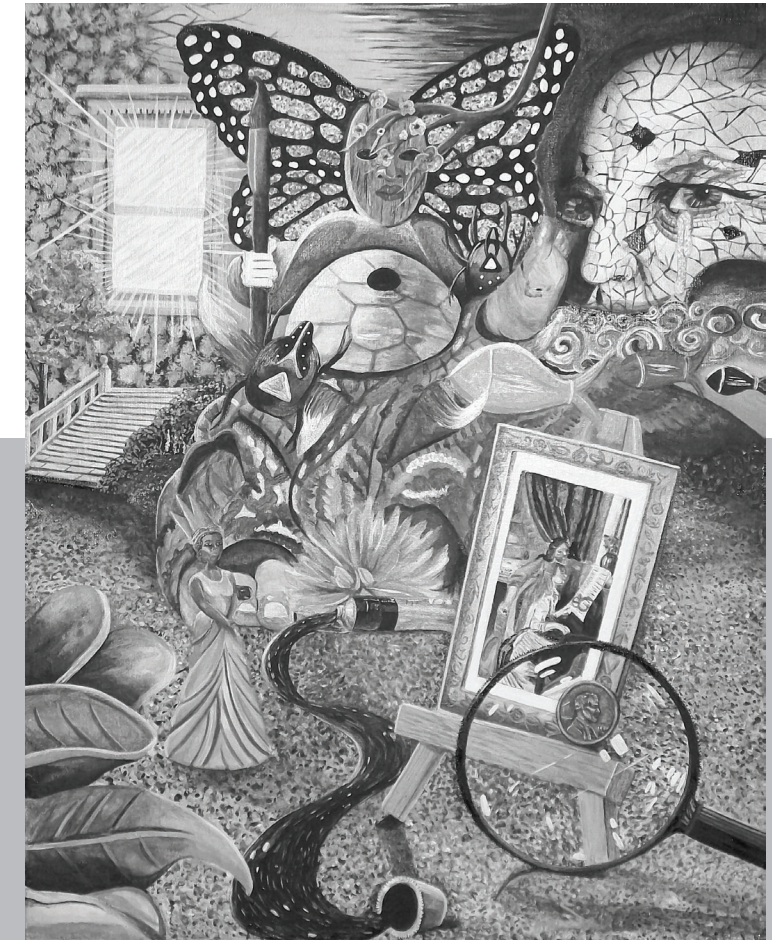
My second reaction was to think back to the beginning of our relationship. Tyler, in all his humility, admitted to me within a month of talking back and forth that he had a drug addiction. He relied on pills for his pain. And once he told me his secret, I helped him find a way out. It took months of understanding, playing Dr. Phil, and cutting out certain activities, but we were able to get him off of that crutch. And now, he was willing to help me in the very same way.

I spouted the only words I could muster in all of my tears:

"Thank you Tyler. I'm glad to have you here beside me. I swear I won't be like this forever. I'll make it worth you staying."

The rest of the conversation revolved around how in love we were and how much we had already overcome. This sort of chat became something entirely new to the both of us. We had become used to fighting over whatever derogatory remark came out of my mouth, but now we had established that I was aware of what was wrong and ready to challenge my problem. And by acknowledging the elephant that had resided in our relationship for so long, I finally got to open my ears and hear a man tell me that I was the strongest woman he ever knew.

There is a certain level of confidence that comes from compliments of the opposite sex: a man can tell a woman that she is pretty, has nice legs, or is just damn sexy. But when a man tells a woman that she is strong, it makes her feel her most beautiful. I can say that with all honesty after the conversation that my boyfriend and I shared that night a few months ago. Furthermore, I can claim the strength that I possess with complete certainty because I faced a challenge that has claimed the lives of so many innocent women in this country. I admitted to my most dangerous fault and won the battle for my body. And now that I am healthy and fully aware of my body as it is, I can announce that I have never felt more beautiful.



Florjic on canvas

{ Amongst the Darkness in the Light }

Zachariah Dickson

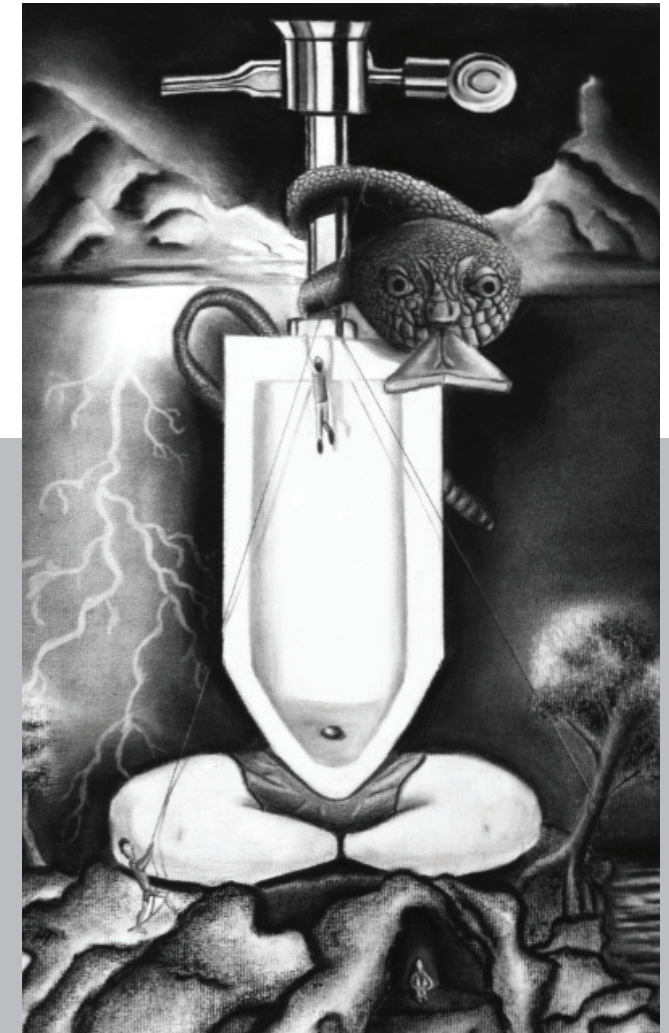
{ Ode to Truckers }

Liz Cox

Handlers of the wheel, carriers of bulk,
 you see miles of scenery all from afar.
 Towns, cities, courthouses and trailer parks,
 still-life pictures of places you pass by.
 But rare is your footprint
 on a muddy river bank,
 in a green patch of grass;
 wheels beneath your heels,
 between your feet and the ground.
 Mounds of weight behind you,
 unwrapped by people you'll never meet,
 replaced by a new load soon after.
 The road, not a means of travel,
 but a long hallway, room to room
 from interstate exits to Pilot stations,
 Chicago to Atlanta
 Tampa to Milwaukee
 Passing doorways, doors you never open.

Fast cars, speed demons
 whip around you like a practice cone
 impatiently waiting for packages
 eggs in the nest behind your trailer.
 Truckers, always leading
 big-rigs, eighteen-wheelers, semis,
 tractor-trailers, wiggle worms—

My dad's one of you now.
 I salute you.



Charcoal

{ Urinal of Terror }

Joey DeSantis

{Stilettos Jennifer Parrish}

There they are
sitting on the shelf
strange in their beauty
the black gleam
like a nightmare long forgotten.

Two perfect examples of
excruciating pain
pain that sears up
the shin bones
each time I wear them.

They look perfect with my tight black dress.

Adding just the
right touch
to an otherwise
colorless dreariness
they are utterly unique.

Five inch spikes
a zing of trepidation
resembling ice picks
with a deep red tint
that leave you questioning...

I am really the good girl I appear to be after all?

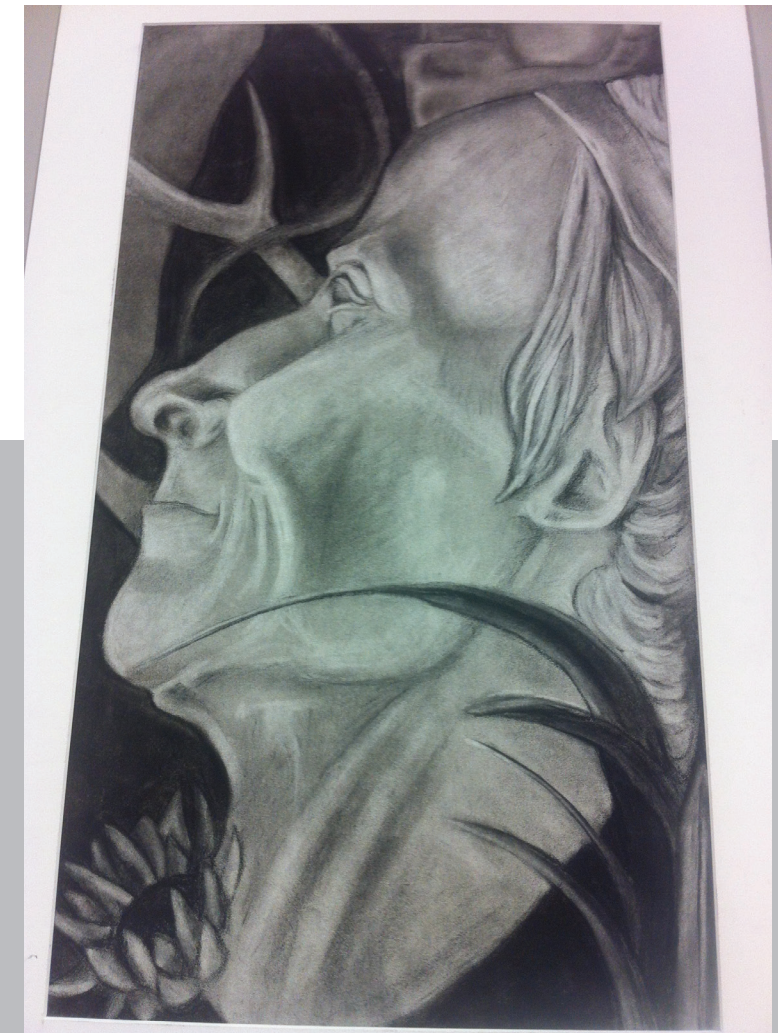
{Leaves and Trash William Jones}

A mass grave for the dead, who
chain smoke cigarettes to get high, who
suck cigars for a Colombian happy fix, who
glutton their fill of pudding at 3:00, who
take birth control for worry free fucks, who
walk in back alleys, searching for drugs and sex, who
throw syringes on sloppy sidewalks, who
speed through lives of decay and decadence, who
know nothing of a pile of leaves.

{ An Invocation of Blake's Orc }

Cody Jarman

come to me, oh Orc, crimson crowned,
 wreath me in your flame ever-burning.
 i have grown tired of this form and seek anew.
 purge me like a disease, set fire to my flesh
 burn out my impurities and inequities
 fill me with change and the roaring gears of revolution.
 build up a new Jerusalem in the seat of my spirit
 sling out the squalor that slips secretly through the streets of
 my soul,
 the spectres!
 fill me with your holy ghost and grant me grace,
 progress and change and a great flowing on.
 make me a mighty river
 changing with the ticking of time
 until all of me is in the sea
 and I am born again.



Charcoal

{ Contemplation }

Kayla Wright

{ Dying in Dystopia }

Michelle Wood

She looked at her lover's old shaving blade and then back down at her pills. "Antique" he used to say. "It's an antique." But looking around her cold, wet bathroom with tissue paper coating the floor, she realized that the only thing in here that was an antique was her, and she hadn't aged well. Once a prized commodity, her good reputation had dwindled into a wretched and sickly existence. She who was once a rare diamond had somehow lost her luster- her value- her need to live. That's all she had been doing recently- surviving, and no one cared. And she was right. No one did.

She wrapped his blade back into the red velvet cloth and patted it down into the torn remnants of the box it had come in. She slowly rose from her toilet seat and reached up to search for the blade's cubby. Nearly nothing in her flat had a special place- a rightful place-, but her blade did. And her pills. As she pulled out a piece of brick from the wall she had pried off decades ago, she placed her only treasure back into its secret spot and replaced the brick. As if by habit, the lady reached into her pocket to make sure her other treasure was in its rightful place too. She took out a small, silver capsule and shook it lightly. The sound made her uneasy.

As she turned away from the bathroom wall which hated her, the lady groped the trash mounds around her to find the path she used to get to the living room. She must page The Doctor. She must see him today. The large stacks of aqua dinners and paper towels and toilet rolls and insect bodies made a nice brace for her to use since walking here recently had become quite difficult for her. Maybe it was her age. Maybe it was her health. Or maybe it was the house... because as far as she knew, it hated her. But, who really knew? As she made her way into the living room which was also her bedroom since she didn't have

one, she took out her pill box and peered inside, just to be sure.

"One," she thought. "Just one." Looking inside, she could see one fluffy, powdery pill, and, as if the pill would disappear magically before her eyes, she snatched it up and swallowed it without any water. But, that's how it normally was, because water wasn't easy to come by nowadays. It's true now and unavoidable. She must call The Doctor. Rummaging through the piles of filth accumulated over the years, she dug through the masses until she reached her phone wall, a new invention sent out by the Reform. Being unfree isn't easy. She quickly looked down the list of buttons she had until she found the one that had "Doc" written underneath. She braced herself and stiffened then pressed the button firmly, and the button lit up.

"Patron 123624 seeking... The Doctor... appointment made for the... November 2nd Year 3023 At 8:00 P.M.... Thank you for using our automated system." The voiced that filled her apartment crushed her feeling of solitude, and the volume of Patron 123624's automated phone wall pierced the forgiving silence she had made for herself. She wondered if her neighbors above or below her could hear. Then she wondered if she had neighbors below or above her. And then what they thought about her. The latter made her sick to her stomach, and Patron 123624 realized she hadn't eaten today.

"Can't take pills on an empty stomach, silly," she thought. She turned away from her phone wall which hated her and went towards her dusty, drab freezer box which wasn't really in the kitchen but in the living room, because it was really all the same room. She lifted the lid and peered inside. One aqua dinner left. She began to tear up. She pulled out her last aqua dinner and made her way over to the sanitation dryer, another invention of the Reform, so she could get some water. She strategically placed her aqua dinner on a mound of trash in between the sanitation dryer and the newly enforced water ration dispenser and waited for the instructions.

"Good evening, Patron 123624. Please place your hands under your sanitation dryer," the automatic voice said. This voice, unlike the phone box, was gurgled, quite, and distorted. It had been well used unlike her phone wall. Patron 123624 placed her hands under the dryer and moved her face away from the gust gas that was dispelled from the dryer. Her efforts, like always, were useless, and she began to smell the same pungent odor like every day

since. After the gas stopped, Patron 123624 lunged for her aqua dinner and made it just in time to her water ration dispenser's nozzle to see a small, tear drop size water droplet land on her dinner. "Thank you for using our sanitation dryer, Patron 123624. Enjoy your water ration." A water droplet- that was all she got, but that was all she needed. Her dehydrated mix-mash of vegetarian cuisine quickly morphed into a smashy, yet edible quality. Her water ration dispenser hated her, but she had made it to it, this time, to be able to eat. She was satisfied.

To Patron 123624, her most favorite time of the day was now. She made her way to the only window in her whole apartment which landed perfectly above her pull-out couch which just stayed pulled-out. She brushed some piles of meal containers and flyers off her bed and drew to the window like a moth to the flame. Letting her aqua meal rest on her knees, she searched out the window for her favorite color flyers and watched the fantastic lights as they whizzed by at the speed of light. She shoveled the mashy, dripping food in her mouth with her hand, never taking her eyes off the sky. "That has to be my favorite thing about the Reform so far," she thought. "Getting to see the flyers." She tried hard to squint her eyes and see if she could find the faces of the people driving the flyers. This always proved difficult since they went so fast, but, every once in a while, Patron 123624 would find a beautiful face. Beautiful people always rode in flyers. The lights, the food, the faces, the cold room- all these things excited her, and she began to sweat. She then wondered if she could capture the moisture on her forehead. This way she didn't have to use her water ration dispenser. She kept looking out the window ever searching for the beautiful faces until she landed on a face very hideous. Her own. Her reflection.

"It is rotten," she thought. The face she had once had before the war before the Reform before her sickness it was beautiful, but this, this was not a face of anyone she knew or even wanted to know. She wanted a face that could be in a flyer. Where had the time gone she thought? Her dull skin had wrinkled and drooped so low that the bags under her eyes pulled her skin so far down that her sockets looked skeletal and unreal. Her nose which had always been drawn up in the sweetest ski-jump was now grey and knobby. She looked at her hair which used to hold thick, dark brown locks but now was spiked and chopped off in clumps. It was brittle and frail like her whole body looked. When had she gotten so thin? When did she

become so sickly looking? This was the Reform's fault, she thought. If not for their rations, war, inventions, and disease, she'd still be beautiful. Wouldn't she?

Patron 123624 looked up at her phone wall which always told the exact time. It read 7:23. She didn't have much time if she was to meet The Doctor. She threw her food, still very much left, onto her bed and went for her shoes, wherever they were. How was she even going to pay him this time she thought. A thought that made her euphoric feeling of being in a flyer undergo a transformation. Dread, pure dread. She wondered what he would want from her this time with his beady eyes and his wandering hands. This feeling made her want to barf. Or was it the aqua dinner? She didn't know. It didn't matter. She had to have those pills, those life-saving pills. That was that, and there wasn't anything else to it. They would make her beautiful again. They always made her beautiful. They were always the answer to everything. They were her most faithful friend. Them, and the blade.

When she finally found her shoes, it was 7:48. "Time to go," she thought, and went toward her curfew counter. She stood in front of a large door and placed her hand on the center pad. "Curfew boundaries for... Patron 123624 are... 7:48 to... 8:28... the weather is 42 degrees... and cloudy... Thank you for using our automated system." She pulled her hand away from the pad and almost immediately the door to the unforgiving outside was open to her. The cold breeze met her first, and she remembered how much she hated the outdoors and how much the outdoors hated her.

She took the walk she had taken a million times before but each time she took it something new popped up. Something she hadn't noticed before. "Reform," she thought and spat at the ground which, like her apartment, was also covered in filth. The first wave of the Reform brought in new taxis that were completely driverless. It was supposed to change the driving/riding experience; however, it did not. Patron 123624 remembered seeing the news how all those 'safe' vehicles had been taken off the street because so many people wanted to commit suicide after the war. All someone had to do was say that they wanted to go off the Brooklyn Bridge, and that's all someone needs to do to make a huge car pile-up cause someone shot off the Brooklyn Bridge in a yellow, driverless taxi. It wasn't pretty. Closed down that bridge for good in 3010. The Reform told everyone, though, that it was the public's fault those cars were defective. If it hadn't been for people trying to find a way out of Reformation,

then there would have been nothing wrong with those cars. Didn't matter, though, cause it didn't end there.

Next, she remembered was the dog extermination. So many people couldn't afford to keep dogs in their apartments after everything was rationed unless they put their canine companions into dog fights. Most killed their dogs not wanting to see them tortured in a dog pit; however, the rest took dog fighting to a disgusting extreme. "Those dogs got evil real fast," she thought, "even the cute ones." When most of the dogs began turning on their owners and killing people, the GRS (Government Reformation Squad) stepped in and massacred them all, but they left the cats. Cats didn't do anything. It made people so mad to see how our country could just do whatever they wanted. It didn't need to be accepted or even make sense. They were going to kill those canines and that was all there was to it. Everyone went on a riot when it happened. Burned down buildings, destroyed property, even a few squadrons were attacked, thus the Reform's robodog was invented to be a sustainable substitute. Only problem is they are worse than the domestic dogs were. "And, you can't kill them," Patron 123624 thought as she shuddered against the cold.

The only invention worth liking was the flyers. Shiny, colorful flying vehicles that hummed in the skyline and zipped and snaked in between buildings now long dilapidated or abandoned. Patron 123624 raised her head to the sky and felt the cold breeze hit her in the face. She closed her eyes and remembered back when her long hair would whip around her in a crazy, beautiful frenzy. "Pills," she thought. "I just need those pills, and things will get back to the way they use to be."

She remained close to the buildings so that her presence would go unnoticed to any angry, ownerless robodogs scurrying about, and she held herself tight to suffocate any cold chills that remained from the breeze. She walked quickly to avoid any undesirables, like herself, that may be wandering the street looking for money or water; however, there was no one tonight. Just her. She was close to her destination as she rounded the corner and entered into an alley way filled with the smells of cat urine, trash, and the defeat of America. As she made her way to the dead end, she could see the old, familiar sign above the doorway that read: Pharmaceutical Depository. She held her breath, a habit that made her feel safe, and made her presence on the outside of the door known. The sound of knocking

rapped against the door and filled the night with a rhythmic noise, and the door opened, qjar.

Patron 123624 let herself wander inside the dark building as usual. Although the darkness allowed no vision, she was already knew where to go and left the entrance and headed straight back towards what she knew was a raised counter with cigar butts coating the surface. She felt her way in the dark carefully extending her arms out to the sides to direct her path in case she went too far left or right. She began to feel a little paranoid, and, like a bad habit, clutched her pill case. Empty.

"Looks like yah ran out," said a voice in the darkness. Patron whirled around in circles trying to find the voice but the dark, black room gave nothing away. "This what you're lookin for?" the voice said. And, Patron 123624 could hear the comforting sound of the rattling of several pills dancing around in a metal container.

"Yes," she said sheepishly.

From where she stood alone in the center of the room, she could hear the rustling of papers and debris as the man with the voice came nearer to her. "Doctor?" she asked.

"Oh, yeah. That's right. I'm the 'Doctor', aren't I? Well either way to you, you want your pills, and I want my fill. Got it?"

Patron 123624 was suddenly grabbed and groped. Her eyes wouldn't adjust, but the breath of cigarettes and rotting teeth on her neck didn't keep her in the dark for long. She knew what was about to happen. As her felt her in the dark, her hands began to caress his body. He was bulbous with meaty sausage fingers and rolls around his midsection. She went in and out of his clothes judiciously. She was searching not for him but for her life savers. As she made her way in and out of his tight pockets, seemingly unbeknownst by the ravaging beast, Patron 123624 finally grabbed hold to a small container too small to be for anything else except pills. In a flash, she snatched the pills out of his back pocket and ran for the door, but to no avail. The Doctor was behind her, and, with all of his strength he pounced on her like a lion in heat. She hit the cement floor hard with a crackle that reverberated in the echoed room, and her flyers began to race in her vision, the only light she had been able to see in here. Suddenly, the Doctor was on top of her holding her arms down and trying to rip off her already tattered clothes. This is how it usually went for Patron 123624, but tonight, tonight would be different.

As the Doctor was finishing with her clothes, the overweight man still straddling her leaned up out of breath to catch a moment of reprieve until he would do her in. Patron 123624 was overcome with urgency, and, with something metallic in her hand, leaned up with him in an embrace. Patron 123624 couldn't see anything, but she could feel hot liquid pour down her face and neck then onto her stomach. She choked on the liquid which was teeming with a copper flavor, and she began to hear gurgling that sounded like if her sanitation dryer was talking to her underwater. For a few moments, the Doctor sat upright, groin to groin, before slowly descending to the ground beside her. She could hear crunches and snaps when he hit the pavement, and, as she sat upright for what seemed like hours, she could hear him softly take his last burbled breaths.

Next thing Patron 123624 knew, she was on her way back to her apartment. She was running, but she didn't know why. Her heart pounding in her chest told her to "Keep going, Keep going" so she did. It wasn't long before she made it to her door, and she placed her hand on the pad in the center to be checked in by the curfew counter. "Unreadable," it said.

Patron 123624 eyes got big, and she thought for a moment that she had missed curfew and the squadrons would come looking for her. In horror, Patron 123624 threw herself through her only window and landed on sharp glass, aqua dinner boxes, and her pull-out couch. In a frenzied daze, she went to take her pills to calm her down, to make her pretty, to fix her problems, to help her live, and she found that when her hands met to open the box there was soft, metal clink. She looked down and suddenly realized her red-stained hands were both holding something. She had her pills in one hand and some other item in the other. She slowly turned her hand with the mysterious object over only to see her beloved treasure was not safe in its hiding spot.

Her palms began to sweat and her breath became shortened. She was so confused. She ran to the bathroom along the cleanish path between the mounds of garbage and, once she entered, saw that her brick was not there. A red velvet swatch and torn tattered box lay in the floor. Patron 123624 went back to her hand with her lover's razor and then to her other hand with her new beloved, her pills. She knew what she had to do.

Gripping the metal pill box tightly, she finally pried it open and, seeing the many white, cloudy spheres, took them all one by one. Her throat dry from the powder and lack of water

couldn't speak the words she wanted to say. Words that would be her last. She made her way back into her living room and stumbled along the shattered glass to get to her pull-out. Resting on the opposite side she normally sat, Patron 123624 began looking for her flyers and slowly raised her razor to her face. "The pills know what they are doing," she said and hot lava began to pool in her wrinkles and drip down her face. She could feel no pain, only the steam of hot fluid hitting her cold, hateful apartment. Peering at her reflection, she could see herself slicing away the years, the hurt, the ugly from her face, and the euphoric feeling of doing something for once instead of just talking about it filled her heart with joy. She smiled, and as she smiled red ribbons ran into her mouth and the taste of copper again filled her. When she was done and her face was complete, she wobbled slowly back to her bathroom. She wrapped her razor, now soaked in blood, into its red velvet swatch which hid the truth of her actions. She then laid it back into its tattered box and stretched to put it back into its cubby above her. But, her foot buckled beneath her, and before her open, distorted, bloody face hit her bathroom, she was gone. Another death in dystopia.

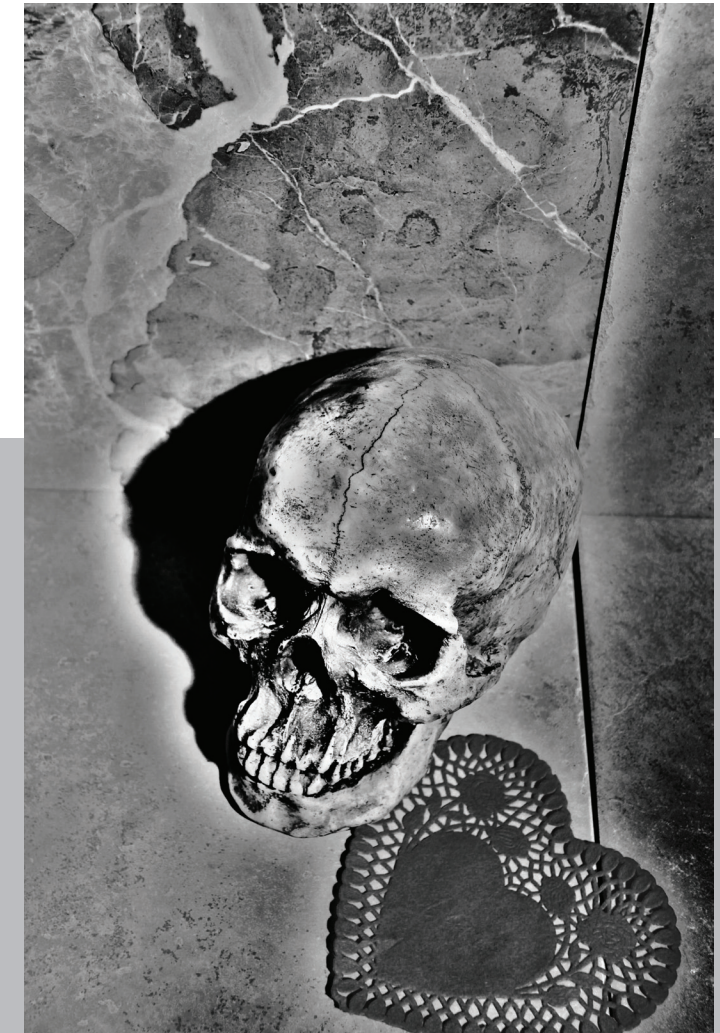
In 2013, a young girl dies, face mutilated. Police officers fill her apartment with flashes from their cameras and yellow police tape. They find two separate traces of blood. One which is hers and one which they will find is a man who has been murdered. A police officer looks at the cut-up face of the beautiful, young girl and sighs. He wonders why anyone would choose a life like this. The officer looks around the apartment and sees crazily strewn drawings and writings on the walls with words like "sanitation" and "phone wall" above them. He gets upset and thinks about his only child who is off at college and hopes she doesn't fall into this lifestyle. He goes back to his car and begins his report:

"5 November 2013. 9:35 a.m. White female deceased in apartment 123 at 624 E. Former's Avenue. Cause of death: suicide/under investigation. Name: Jane Doe. Age: approximately 26. Meth found at scene of crime."

{Camp Andi Fisher}

Empty colored marker words
Construction paper correspondence
Forbidden Facebook friend requests
And a pink slip of foreboding
M&Ms and cheddar corn puffs
Pad me from the truth
That a certain Tracy Chapman song
Makes me cry for you
Does the painted pony sob at night?
Afraid to be exposed?
'cause she hasn't sent a letter back
And it's not because she knows

Smile, girly, smile
And I'll come back next May
We'll be secret buddies
Doesn't matter what they say



Photography

{Love & Death David Harold Sheridan}

{ Brilliantly Missing }

Maggie Mayo }

Wherefore art thou, Death, must you come on swift wings to claim swift lives?
Is your thirst and hunger by Time neither quenched nor satisfied?
Innocent Infancy stolen while ignorant idiocracy spared..
The image of that beautiful face is almost more than I can bear.

That face. His face. This product of MY being. Perfect. In every way.
Except one tragic thing—

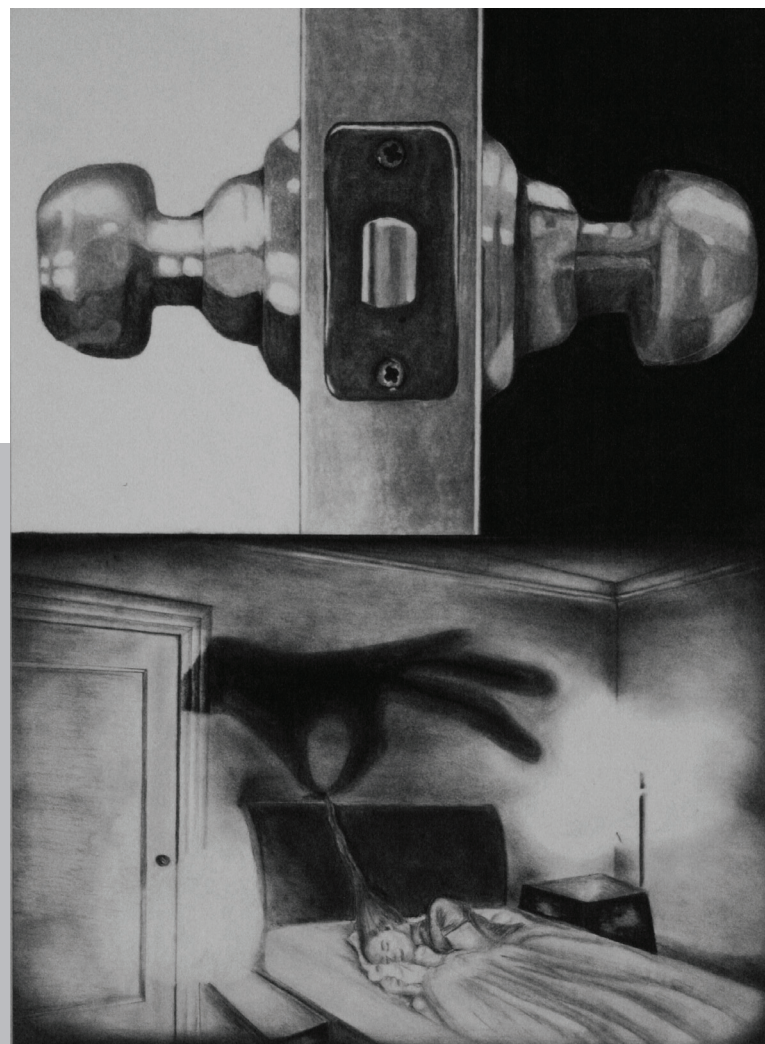
My child .. There he lay still – a sweet smile, divine, held for me alone – in that standing
moment.. a flash of flawlessness..
For his life I would gladly have traded my own, but the Fates have chosen for me this
endless coiling and twining that looms overhead, holding my very soul at its mercy..
As he was cradled in my arms, the safety of maternal care,
I not only felt the cold, but a deep, desolate despair.

My powerless and writhing anguish had no hope of blessed salvation or relief
Because that face — his. face — had only his mother by his side to guide, and
confide and grow.. grow... to grow is such a funny thing... grotesque darkness slithering
in and stealing my long-awaited treasure.. stolen from my most sacred hiding place..
stolen my sanity.. and self..
Since that solitary moment when I was able to gaze down upon your profoundly perfect
face – darling one – I feel I am lost.. misplaced...

Perpetually beaten by the pendulum of Time that holds you just out of reach... So I shall
sit upon this old grey stone, alone; I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed,

My eye sits vigilantly fixed on the horizon, watching for the dawn of the day when I may
cradle you in my arms and you will stay with me... We will explore the Pearly Gates
and streets of gold, hand in hand, living out our grand and blissful eternity.. together...

Aye. Ne'er shall I forget, for your brilliantly missing face is thought of in every
single breath.



{ Nightly Horrors
Amber Gentry }

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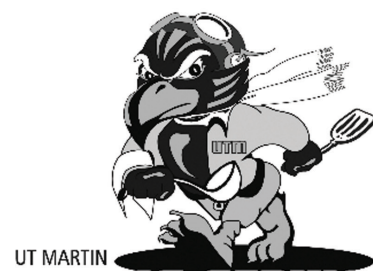
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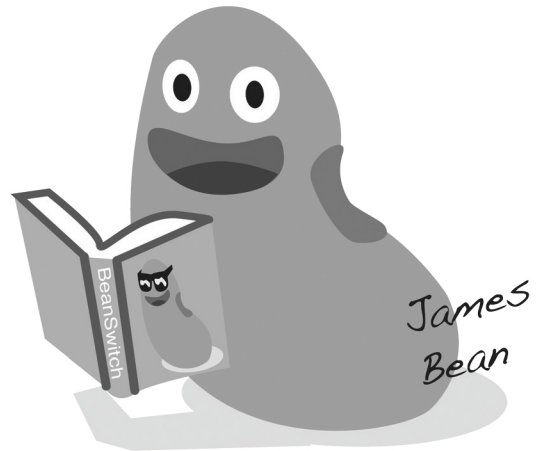
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