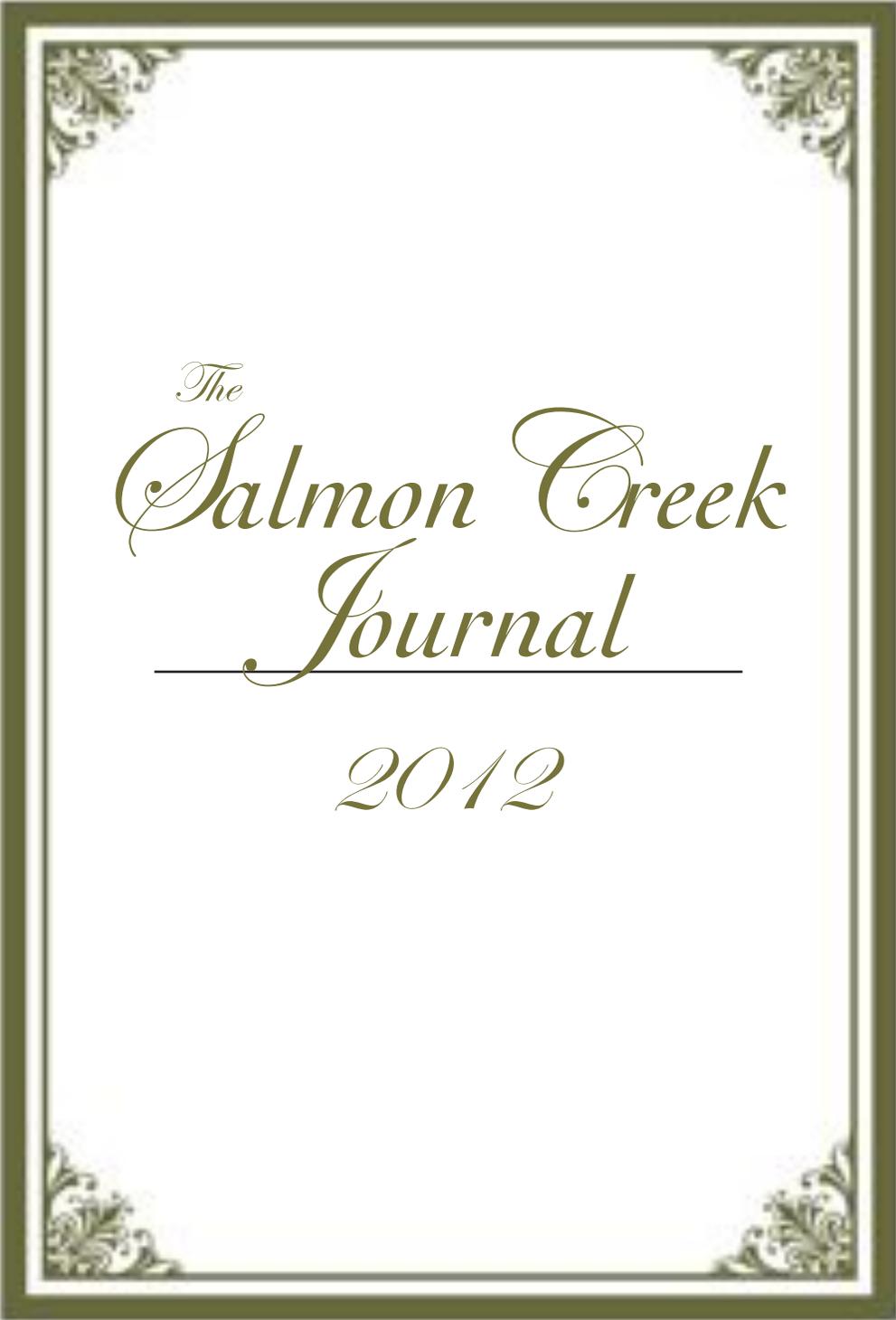


The
Salmon
Creek
Journal

2012



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Washington State University Vancouver

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In addition, thank you to all the students, staff, faculty, and alumni of the Washington State University Vancouver community who submitted their works to the journal this year. This publication would not be possible without your contributions.

*L*etter from the Editor

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the 2012 edition of the Salmon Creek Journal. This year, the journal has taken on a look of classic antiquity, an heirloom feel and dynamic, to accentuate its long-standing presence at Washington State University Vancouver. As we worked through our design process, we took great care in understanding the history of the publication and the changes it has seen over its lifetime.

It comes as a surprise to many that the Salmon Creek Journal has been in publication steadily since 1997. In the years since its inauguration, it has transformed from a small club publication to a recognized media entity on campus, has adopted new categories to highlight a vastly complex array of literary and visual art forms, and has progressed as a quality means for our campus community, past and present, to express their creativity in a way which otherwise would go unnoticed.

Without a doubt, the changing staff, submissions, and atmosphere of creating this publication influence the way in which it reveals itself. However, a consistency can be found in this edition, one of intertwining content and design in a seamless binding of memory and history. Many of the works featured in this journal expound on memory; ways of dealing with internal conflict, remembering situations of the past, and finding strength in moving forward.

This edition was created with all the heartfelt sincerity that is seen through each individual piece featured. Our staff acknowledges the significant role each submitter plays in making the journal's presence that of quality and pride. Without the effort of each contributor, whether a staff member, a submitter or a supporter, the journal would not be possible. We thoroughly enjoyed every moment of watching the works unfold and the journal being created to spotlight the artistry of our campus community. We sincerely hope that you will take pleasure in viewing each individual piece in this edition and appreciate the time and dedication this work exemplifies. Time is forcing a perpetual forward momentum, but in works such as this, we hope to exhibit the importance of remembering our past footsteps to guide all of our future journeys.

With Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Lawrence". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "K" and "L" being significantly larger and more decorative than the rest of the letters.

Kimberly Lawrence

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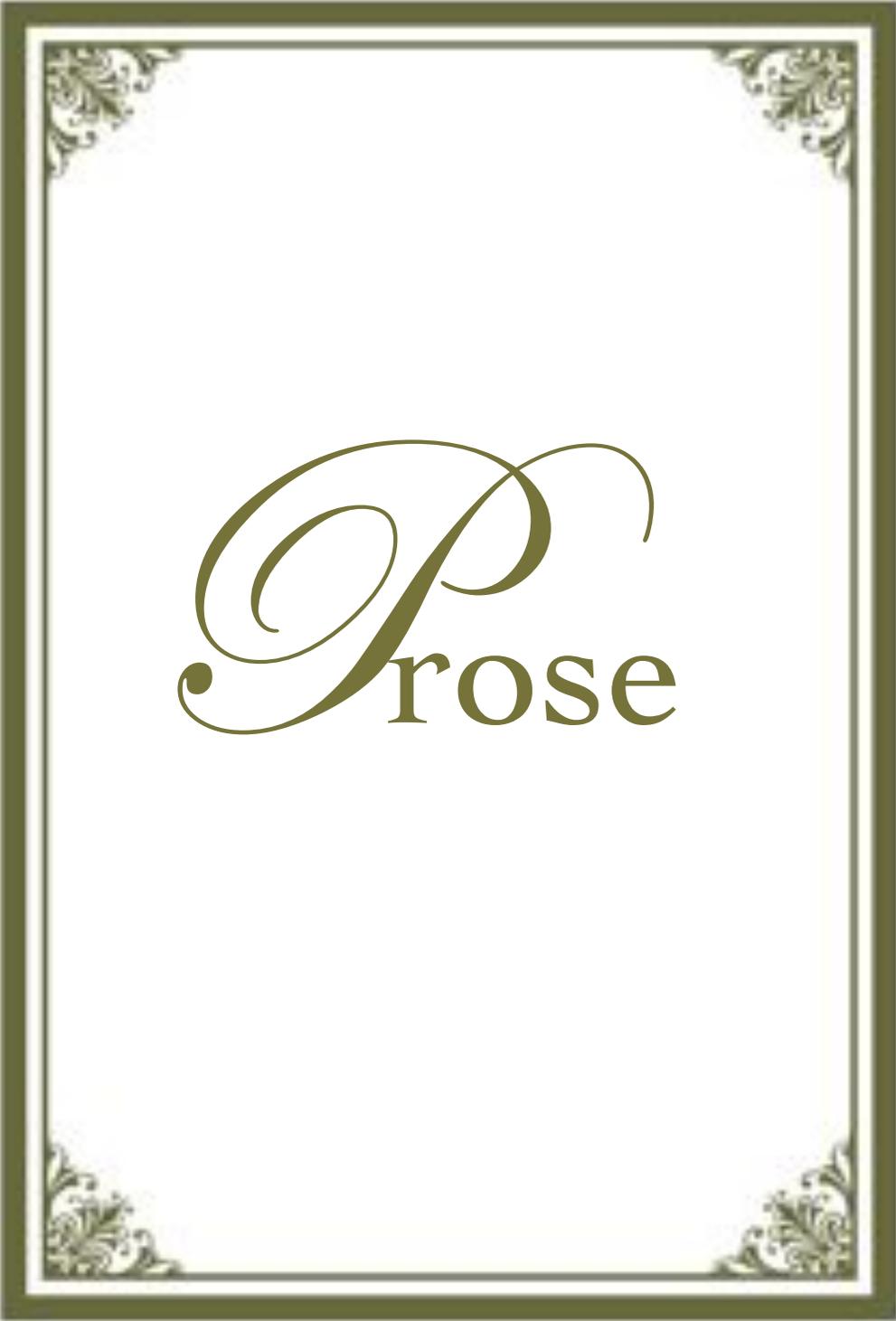
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*P*rose

★ The Highest Point

By Kelly Schrock

Everything is boiling.

I'm standing under the glaring fluorescent lights of the gas station and watching the digital numbers click up out of my bank account and into my gas tank. It's like watching modern alchemy at work. The metal nozzle is cold in my hand. It has absorbed no warmth from the hundreds before me who held it briefly in their hands, watching the dollar figures of their lives tick away into their gas tanks.

Rain drums on the overhang. Water blows off in noisy sheets with every gust of wind. I lean against my car, and listen to the fury of the storm.

Five months ago I sweated under the blistering gaze of the sun. It beat against the bodies of the graduates, cooking in their gowns. Mothers fanned themselves with folded programs. Children whined and turned into Jell-O in their seats.

On the stage I was blinded. I walked across the wooden floorboards in a haze, shook the nice man's hand, had my picture taken, and was out of the crowd's gaze as quickly as I had entered.

"Congratulations," Everyone told me.

They patted my back, eyes wrinkled with adoration.

Seconds later came the question, "What are you going to do now?"

I shook my head, or shrugged, or laughed. I tried not to feel the weight of the thousands of dollars I owed, or make any outward display of the indecision gnawing in my belly. Doubts clung invisibly into my back, whispering dark reminders of my failures lurking around the corner.

I felt none of the pride, none of the relief, I had expected to feel in finally completing my Bachelor's degree.

I slide back into the dry heat of my car. The gas tank is now full, my bank account having been sufficiently drained.



I click the car lighter into place, waiting for it to pop out, glowing ember orange. I blow on my hands until they no longer ache from the cold. The heater rattles.

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles of plastic floats in the ocean. I shove the cigarette in my mouth, sucking in air as I light the end, and the plastic bobs and dips with the gentle ocean current.

A month ago I was riding my bike.

It was one of those last warm days before autumn spills into wet, cold, winter. I was running late for work, straining against the pedals and my own tar-lined lungs. I was trying to forget the things my boyfriend at the time had said to me.

We fought almost nightly. Through the fights, we'd resolve it, sort of.

With every new fight I felt each past attack and encroachment of the relationship afresh. I wanted to scream at him, "Look what you've done! Can't you see how broken I've become?"

Every time he'd only say that he couldn't see why I was bringing up the past. "I'm different now," he'd say.

We had stayed up late, yelling and crying. I pressed snooze too many times and was late for my shitty job at the dog kennel.

Even with my degree, it was the only place that hired me.

They didn't ask a word about my education, except if I planned to return to school. My new boss seemed relieved when I said no, I was done with school.

They're burning off the thousands of barrels of oil in the Gulf of Mexico. Birds choke on the fumes.

Porpoises shake and spasm and roll in their death throes.

People say every bird, every sea creature that comes through that patch of water is in danger for its life.

I'm driving east through the rain, to the mountains.

My windshield wipers do little to combat the torrents of water hitting the windshield. They squeal in protest every time they drag across the wet glass.

The highway is slick with standing water. I need to get new tires. They're bald, nearly cracking. My car pulls to the right every time it hydroplanes.

Passing a semi-truck is a near-death experience.

A month ago I was on my bike, trying to forget. Trying to forget the pictures my boyfriend had taken of my friends, the five or six porn videos currently downloading every time I asked to use his laptop, the way he used “Bitch” as a term of endearment. I huffed and puffed on my bike, nose cold and red in the chill of the morning air, desperate to forget every joke he made about a celebrity’s tits. The same celebrities and starlets I knew he had folders of pictures devoted to on his computer. I was trying not to think about his friends who had their own folders, full of pictures stolen from social networking accounts.

It was a sunny morning.

I tried to focus every atom of my being into a leaf, into my legs churning wheels. Slowly, I began to find my calm.

As I focused on my breathing, it became less ragged. I breathed in and out in slow, deep breaths.

There was a cat lying dead on its side on the edge of the road. Its black fur was wet and matted from the recent rain. Its guts had been forced through its rectum during its unfortunate final encounter with a car. Entrails lay shining, like delicate pink birthday balloons, on the asphalt.

I turned my head from the cat, ashamed by the nakedness of death.

The lolling pink tongue pointed at me like an accusatory finger from the row of sharp, white teeth.

I drive past dull, dirty towns and cities. Motel signs with blinking Ts offer me no promises of comfort.

I’m getting into the foothills of the mountains, while children in distant, invisible countries play in piles of trash. Women pick through the rubble.

All the papers I wrote while going to school had such quiet thesis arguments. The importance of Queequeg’s relationship with Ishmael. Ecotheology in Linda Hogan’s works. The use of color in Kew Gardens.

Outside my small metal casket, the wind roars. I wonder about the recent storms in the Midwest, and feel my foot press harder on the gas pedal.

The dead cat’s body arched like an arrow pointing across the street to a field of grass. The vibrant green of the grass’ last struggle for life before giving into the cold of winter was almost enough to hurt my eyes. I had heard of people who were depressed after watching this year’s latest hit science fiction

movie. Their lives simply weren't as visually pleasing as the one composed for the big screen. Drug stores were selling HD sunglasses-- as seen on TV.

The field was almost blinding. The blades of grass shone like individual jewels, the dew of the morning catching and reflecting the sun's early morning light. The grass looked soft as velvet. The sky was wide open, tinged with pink from the rising sun.

Swallows twirled and dove over the grass, singing songs of the rain. A red-winged black bird cried out from a nearby copse of trees and I thought that maybe the cat had chosen this place as his final resting spot.

I'm driving up the mountain, trying to forget all the pressure I felt to do well in school, to go to college and get good grades and make something of myself.

I've always liked learning, and I'm a naturally adept student. The years of trudging through my Bachelor's program had worn on. I worked part time jobs to barely pay for the bills I somehow managed to have even though I lived with my parents, feeling the guilt stacked daily, brick by brick, on my tired back.

Every bite of food I consumed, I felt that I owed back.

Every class I didn't like, every C I earned, felt like a failure.

Since high school I had been taking college classes, never taking a break. People asked me why, what it is I was going to school for, and I didn't know what to say.

"I can't fail my class this quarter."

"Why?"

"Guilt."

"About what?"

And there would be no answer. How can I explain the millstone of expectations? How can I tell them how tired I was of carrying the thousands of dollars of debt clinging to my back?

I have little job experience, outside of the service industry.

Businesses are wary of hiring students. Especially in This Economy.

Land fills pile up with garbage daily. As if we could bury our shame of plastic packaging, poisonous electronics that are designed to break, to become waste.

I wonder where the last Western Black Rhinoceros are hiding.

On that crisp fall morning I gazed out at the field and reflected on whether or not the cat decided to die there. It really wasn't such a bad spot. Geese flying overhead called out a greeting to the world.

I'm dragging my rattling car and my bruised soul up the mountainside, mourning the stolen mountaintops in Appalachia.

The lights of the city look so small from up here. In the city, life is bleached to a deathly pallor by their pale fluorescent imitation of moonlight. From the mountain highway, they look almost like the stars stolen from city eyes.

I had once driven this same path early one morning. The sunrise lit up the whole sky. The distant city looked remote and innocent then, bathed in the soft pink light. It looked faultless. Or at least forgivable.

A month ago I was standing on the pedals of my bike, urging my body and my bike forward, trying to not feel anything for the dead cat. Trying not to feel anything about my disintegrating relationship.

Distracted by death, I didn't notice the screw resting innocently in my path.

My back tire was completely flat after three full rotations.

I'm almost to my destination.

I light up a cigarette and roll down the window, letting the storm wash over me.

I wanted to rail against my fate. The cat, the tire, the screw, they were all blameless. I was the only constant. I sat on the side of the road, digging in my back pack for tire levers and my patch kit, spitting and cursing.

A truck rumbled by. I glanced up in time to see a middle-aged, silver-bearded driver watching me as he sped away.

When the truck had passed, I stared at the field. Droplets of dew sparkled in the morning light like diamonds.

I remembered again the notion that the cat had chosen this field as his final resting place, and applauded his choice as I lay down in the field. I stared up at the clear sky, feeling the cold of the droplets soak into my clothes and cool the sweat on my back. I watched the swallows perform their acrobatics, and began to laugh. A crow perched in a nearby tree joined in, cackling and clacking his beak.

I let the wind cool my hot cheeks. The rain song of the swallows swept away my pain.

Night is folding toward morning. I know I'm about to come to the curve where every few months I read about someone losing control of their vehicle and tipping over the edge of the mountain. The grey rock gives way here suddenly, dropping almost four thousand feet to the river far below. There are four or five little white crosses adorned with wreaths of plastic flowers and moldy teddy bears. After each death, official warnings crop up in local papers urging drivers to practice caution. The quarter of a mile arriving to the curve is rife with yellow signs warning danger and sharp turns.

But I know – sometimes it's a choice.

I know that from here the sunrise is the most beautiful I have ever seen. The river shines like a silver wedding band far below. Like a strand of diamonds. The earth seems to unfold itself beneath this cliff. Not far ahead is an official look-out point. From there fields like postage stamps and miniature train set houses rest, still as sleeping children, far below. One can't see the chains that come with living in these scaled-down circles of warmth, smoke puffing from chimneys.

The sun peeks over the city on the horizon. Inky black buildings embedded with imitation stars.

Trees all around are bathed in the morning mist. They are twisted and beautiful from lives of struggle against the wind and the rain on this mountain's edge. A red-winged black bird sings, and a blue heron flies, stately and slow, overhead. The skyline is on fire with the rising sun. It almost looks like the distant city is burning.

The crosses glow pale in the early morning light, and I wonder how many of them have chosen this resting place.

I let go of the wheel, screaming with laughter. I'm howling like a dog.

I hold my life in my hand for one brief moment-- and I let it go.

Like the Dew on the Mountain

By Jenelle Rose

The table lay set with a white tablecloth, yellow daisies embroidered along the edge. Pink bowls held the appropriate assortment of foods: fried chicken, mashed potatoes, jello salad, green beans. At the center, a rhubarb pie basked in the place of glory, accompanied by half a gallon of ice cream. And sitting there waiting for her...

She gasped and nearly choked on a mouthful of air. “Wh- what are you doing here?”

His smile was the same, with the same craggy lines creasing his forehead, and the not-quite wicked twinkle in his eyes. “I came to have lunch with you. Is that alright?”

“Of course! But I thought-”

“Let’s not talk about that right now. Sit down. The food’s getting cold.”

Obediently, she sank to her chair. He served her nimbly, his sturdy hands darting from bowl to bowl, piling on the chow. “You’re too thin,” he explained, dropping the loaded plate before her. This quickness wasn’t like him; at least, hadn’t been like him, before he... left. Still, he looked the same. Glasses took up a good quarter of his face, magnifying blue eyes. Stiff grey hair stood at attention, perhaps influenced by the army crew-cut. The nose bent with a rakish air, from where he broke it as a young man. The ears leaned hesitantly away from his head. It was impossible, but it had to be...

“I didn’t know you could come back, Grandpa.”

He licked his lips, and suddenly, busily, helped himself to the green beans. “Well, I haven’t come back exactly. I can’t actually stay.”

Nodding, she felt oddly calm and accepting. “I know you can’t.”

“There’s a –a gulf between... Well, they’re separate worlds. And time is short.”

“Mom figured you were with Uncle Chuck for awhile. Is that why we didn’t see you?”

“I did spend some time with him, yes.” He sighed. “There’s a rough road ahead for him.”

“What do you mean by ‘rough?’ ”

Shaking his head, he turned his attention to the green beans. “Oh no. I can’t go spilling secrets now, can I?”

“I suppose that’s only fair,” she conceded. Before, green beans had always been a struggle for him. Now he stabbed with military precision, skewering each forkful with a muted glee.

“Of course it’s fair! My generation had to struggle and make their own mistakes. I see no reason why yours shouldn’t have to suffer as well.”

“I’d prefer to do it without the Nazi part.”

“Ha. Wouldn’t we all,” he snorted. “Thing is, you don’t get to chose. The universe chooses for you, and you just do the best with what you’re given.”

“How? How can I make it work when I don’t know what I’ve got?”

“You sure don’t! You think things are bad, try growing up in the Great Depression!”

She gave a mock-glower. “You always play that card. Always. What am I supposed to do with that? ‘No, eating grass couldn’t possibly be worse than what I’m living through?’ Obviously it is. ...I just don’t know what to do with myself. I got nothing.”

“You got a brain, and you got opportunity. You don’t have to answer to me, girl. Use what you have, and you’ll find where you’re supposed to be.”

“But it’s so-”

“You whining? Eat your chicken.”

Obediently, she grabbed drumstick and bit down. The crisp skin contrasted nicely with greasy meat inside, as comfortable as yin and yang. Chicken needed hot oil, and secret spices, and fattening breading—it was a fact of life. “Fred Meyer’s?” she guessed.

“Are you joking?” he scoffed. “Albertson’s. That’s where I always get my chicken.”

They passed the time in silence for a while, the air filled with nothing but the scrape of forks against ceramic and undainty chomping. When he paused to serve the pie, she finally dared to ask her question. “Grandpa?”

He grunted, focused on his knife. Pie was a very serious business for him, nearly as serious as ice cream. The sky was blue, water was wet, and Grandpa always had a gallon of Umpqua Vanilla Ice Cream in his freezer.

She waited until he handed her a dessert-laden plate. “What’s it like? Over there?”

He froze a moment, and then determinedly served himself. “I’m not going to tell you. I can’t.”

“Oh.” She paused. “It’s not allowed?”

“Not... exactly. I can’t say...much. But love continues beyond the border,” he said desperately. “I need you to understand that. Do you? I still love you, even though...”

“I love you too. I think about you every day.”

“Every day?” he asked incredulously.

“It’s only been a month,” she trembled.

He threw his eyes to the table, casting around for some distraction. “Try some viilia,” he coaxed, seizing a pitcher. “It’ll put hair on your chest.”

“I don’t need hair there. Besides, I don’t like viilia.”

“I kept hoping you’d change your mind,” he confessed. “One glass? Just to make sure?”

She sighed and took a glass of the thick, sour liquid. “Bottom’s up,” she toasted, and chugged it quickly so she didn’t have to taste the fermented milk.

At the end she stuck out her tongue like an infant. “There. Happy?” He frowned at the table, clearly worlds away. “Grandpa?”

Startled, his eyes jumped back to her face, where he took note of the lines. “Every day is too much,” he declared. “Once a week, maybe. Once a month. Think about me when you eat a piece of berry pie, when you see a yellow rose. Once and awhile.”

When I hear children beg for their grandpa’s stories. When I watch them sit in their grandpa’s laps. When I smell a piece of leather. The thump of a watermelon. Vanilla ice cream. Mole traps. A grey fisherman’s hat. Silence with birdsong. Raking leaves. Riding the lawnmower. Dahlias. Napping with an open mouth. The comics. Callused hands. Metal puzzles. Jigsaw puzzles. Vitamins. Rat terriers. Orange cats. Poetry: The Owl and the Pussy-cat, Horatio at the Bridge, Will You Love Me When I am Old?

“I’m sorry I didn’t learn more poems, Grandpa. I know you tried to teach me.”

“Some things you teach yourself. Others can’t be taught.” He smiled.

“More pie?”

She nodded: “Please.”

“So what have you been doing with yourself?”

“School, mostly. And I got a job. I make cookies.” She ran her finger up and down the tablecloth.

“Boyfriend?”

“No.”

“Any... prospects?”

“Grandpa!”

“Hey, in my condition I have to ask straight out. I might not get another chance.”

“Guilt me into confessions, why don’t you?” she huffed. “Fine. Of the grand total of two I was mildly interested in, one’s engaged and the other ran off to North Dakota.”

“Good land there.” He nodded sagely, and then noticed her glare. “Someone else will come along,” he placated.

“When? All my friends are falling in love, Grandpa. I want so badly to- But there’s no one.”

“Just wait then. Look at me. I met Milly when I was eighty.”

“But I don’t want to wait until I’m eighty. And you met Grandma when you were eighteen!”

“Everything happens in its time. Be patient.”

Now she teared up. “I wanted you to be at my wedding, Grandpa, when I had one. I wanted you to see me get married.”

The light caught his eye. “I’ll be there. Me and your Grandma. You just won’t see us.”

Her eyes grew wide. “Is Grandma ...here somewhere?”

“No. Not this time.”

“I haven’t seen her in a long time.”

“We can’t always choose where we go.”

“And you don’t come very often.”

“No.” He rose now. “I have to leave soon.”

She bit her lip. “Will I see you again?”

“I don’t know.”

Standing up, her chair fell over. Traditionally they engaged in the one-armed hug, appropriate for Sunday clothes. Now she pressed herself into his chest, smelling Old Spice and the faint hint of garden dirt, feeling his solidness and warmth of the blood –or -or whatever coursing through his body.

He opened his mouth to say something and then –then

A harsh jangle of canned music:

Good morning; the time is now 7:01. The news is next.

And she woke up to another day.

Causatum

By Linda Augustine

Her eyes snapped open, wide—taking in the darkness around her. Soon she realized that she was lying safely in her bed, not on the snowy roadside of her dream. She took a deep breath and tried to calm her galloping heart.

For several nights she had endured slight variations of the same dream. She was riding in the cab of a U-Haul truck. Her husband was driving and her two boys—six-week-old Jamie and eighteen-month-old Shane—were sleeping as the vehicle, heavy with all of their earthly possessions, slowly trundled up a mountainside interstate. It was dark, maybe twilight, and snowing, so visibility was compromised at best. The farther up the mountain they drove, the worse the weather became. Close to the top, driving conditions were nearly white-out.

She nervously scanned out her window, and while for some reason the road ahead was always obscured—she could clearly see that to the side the road quickly fell away revealing steep canyons or rocky cliffs. Each time the tires slipped on the ice which was steadily overtaking the road surface, she was sure they would glide off the road and plummet into the treacherous mountain's gullet.

When her little family finally crested the mountain, she could see the downhill road, which revealed a long steep grade. Beautiful ice-kissed cedars and towering firs covered the snowy white surroundings. Any artist would have appreciated the scene. About halfway down, following the contour of the land, the road veered sharply to the left. Driving this picturesque roadway was not as pleasant as the scenery. The icy surface interfered with the sureness of their descent. With each little slip, her panic increased ten fold. She couldn't imagine how her husband was able to handle the stress.

The first night she dreamed the truck lost its traction and slid off the road at the bend. As they moved closer to the turn, she yelled at him to turn the wheel. He yelled back, "I am! It's just not working. We're sliding on ice."

She instinctively kicked at the floor with her "braking" foot and then, when

faced with the inevitable, tried to brace herself to protect the babies as best she could. The truck left the road with the front right tire hitting snowdrifts first. This resulted in a sort of spin, with the back end of the truck gaining momentum on the ice. When those tires hit off road, the truck began to tumble. The next few seconds produced a hideous montage of sounds: torn metal, breaking glass, her husband's screams, her screams--then cold, blowing wind and quiet. Gradually, as if from very far away, she heard a baby cry. She knew it was her six-week-old son. She could hear, but she could not move or speak. She couldn't see anything but snow right in front of her face. She could do nothing!

The next night, the dream's ascent was just as scary. Cresting the mountain revealed the same beautiful but deadly roadway. In this night's version, as the truck inched down the mountain, the children—sensing the gravity of the situation and their parent's tension—added to the chaos with a crying competition. Each boy tried to outdo the howls of his brother, resulting in crushing pressure on the driver's nerves as he tried to control the vehicle. Soon adults succumbed to their anxieties and began yelling at each other and at the bend the whole mess tumbled down the mountainside. This time, just cold, no cries, just cold.

Sometimes her dream would end with one child, alone amidst the rubble. Once she saw a wolf appear out of the wilderness and move cautiously toward her crying toddler. One night after the wreck, she viewed the entire scene from above—a helicopter version—and she saw all family members, including her, lying still on the ground.

The first time she dreamt this vision, she rationally analyzed her situation: People dream about things they think about, worry about. She and her husband were preparing to move from Kansas City to Portland. Her husband was to begin a job right after New Year's, so they planned to be on the road December 20th. Allowing four days on the road, this timing would give them a full week to settle in before Mitch started his job. Their only true concern was the weather, particularly through the mountains. They had been watching every weather report with rapt attention.

But she hadn't obsessed about it. In fact, the second night she had this dream, she again dismissed it. But the third night made her quite uneasy. She tried to allay any subconscious fears by pouring over their plans, making lists and trying to prepare for every possible contingency.

As their departure date approached, her anxiety from this recurrent nightmare increased. She told no one about it, however. It was so irrational, and Mitch had enough to worry about. She wouldn't add to his stress by sharing the fabrications of a dream.

With great interest they both watched the weather report that tracked what was predicted to be the season's worst storm in decades developing out of the Pacific. After several systems converged just off the coast, the expected path would put the gigantic storm right over St. Louis on the day they planned to depart.

"It should pass over before we head out. That'll give a couple of days for the mountain roads to be cleared. We'll be fine." Mitch grabbed her hand in reassurance. "Let's get that truck packed!"

But the storm didn't behave as predicted. It built into a whopper, just like every weatherman foretold. But it didn't speed across the country. In fact, it stalled over the Rockies, dumping tons of snow and ice, closing highways and airports, and stranding many holiday travelers.

"You know," said Mitch after watching the five o'clock weather report on the 19th, "we've already celebrated Christmas with the folks. We're ready to go, but we can wait a few more days. We don't have to be there until the first. The truck's ready to go. Let's ask your folks or mine if we can stay a few nights with them and let the roads out west clear a little before we head out. What do you think?"

She thought it sounded like a great idea. And so did her mom. Not wanting her grandbabies to move thousands of miles away anyway, Mom was thrilled with the prospect of forty-eight bonus hours to play with them. The guest rooms were readied and the early holiday atmosphere continued for the next two days.

The morning of the 22nd was sunny and warm. The boys were batted down in the truck cab and a cooler with provisions installed on the passenger's floor. With Mitch at the wheel, the truck trundled off, with the little family waving enthusiastic good-byes. After only twenty minutes on I-70, both children, lulled by the drone of highway tires, fell blissfully asleep. Their new life was really beginning.

As they drove along at a top speed of 50 mph, she and Mitch were animated in sharing their prospective visions for the future. They reminisced about how they met and what plans they had made in the beginning of their union,

how they never expected to be heading off to the great Northwest. They laughed at their apprehension about two babies on such a trip. “This will be a breeze! They’ll sleep right through.”

But neither one of them ran that through to logical conclusion: If the babies are sleeping the entire day, they will be up and hungry the entire night. And that’s exactly what happened.

As exhausting as their first full ten hours of driving were, the weary travelers had not experienced the depths of fatigue yet. After a full ten hours of howling babies AND of no sleep through the night, she and Mitch couldn’t wait to get the children back in their car seats the next morning. The truck engine had its desired effect and the babies immediately fell silent.

“Can you drive, Mitch? I know we planned to switch days, but I’ve got to get some sleep.” She had taken the lion’s share of night duty, so Mitch agreed to drive as long as he could. He’d shoot for lunch break, and then she could drive.

She was awakened by his hand gently shaking her shoulder. The truck was parked in the lot of a huge truck stop. Mitch hadn’t turned the engine off yet. As her head was clearing, he asked her, “Are you ready for this?” She smiled and nodded her head. He smiled and ceremoniously turned the key and the engine fell silent. Within seconds first one, then the other boy opened his eyes and the baby began yowling for lunch. The parents looked at each other and started laughing.

Mitch grabbed Shane and let him run around in a little circle there beside the truck in the parking lot. When Jamie was bundled for outside travel, the little family walked together into the diner and ordered the meatloaf luncheon special. Shane had too much pent up energy to sit in the booth, so Mitch put him on the floor and began following him as the child ventured around the aisles and into the gift shop. She hurried to un-bundle the baby and offer a bottle to satisfy his constant wailing.

Soon with lunch behind them, the truck gassed up and Mitch settling in on the passenger’s side, she started the truck engine and within two minutes was on the interstate, with three snoozing passengers. She was so tired. A little conversation would have been a nice distraction. But she knew Mitch was just as tired and he would need to sleep in preparation for the evening ordeal. She would be pretty worthless by then.

She turned north onto I-25 out of Denver. At Cheyenne she turned west

onto I-84 and found the mountain roads quite clear and pleasant. She pushed on into the evening. Finally, feeling like a desert wanderer finding an oasis, she pulled into the welcoming parking lot of the huge truck stop at Little America, Wyoming. She slept like the dead, oblivious to anything around her.

The next morning, she volunteered to drive, since Mitch had corralled the children all night. Surprisingly, the roads continued to be clear and traffic was not too bad. Their strategy to wait a few days before beginning the journey seemed to be a good one.

The day was something of a blur, a blur of steady traffic, spectacular scenery and sleeping family. She realized that night, after their quick drive-thru dinner, the only thing she really remembered of the day was seeing a mere glimpse of the Great Salt Lake. She wasn't even sure where they were as they unpacked the kids at a Holiday Inn. Twin Falls? No, Boise. Had she seen that sign or had they passed through? She didn't care. A shower and clean sheets were her only interests.

She discovered she was too tired to sleep. Try as she might, she just couldn't shake that buzzing feeling that kept her from relaxing. "Hon, you go ahead and sleep. I'm wide awake." She saw Mitch was quite willing, as he asked her, "You sure?"

"Yes, please. Do you want to get a separate room? That way the kids won't bother you."

"Nah, no. I'll be fine. Thank you." Blowing a kiss her way, he folded himself into one of the double beds and placed a pillow over his head. Yep, she was on her own.

Around 4 am the boys were both sleeping. She leaned back in the chair by the double bed they slept on and was asleep within minutes. She dreamed her terrible dream and as the dream truck began to slide, she heard her six-week-old from far away, whimpering little half cries. Her waking brain took over as she understood the cries were authentic and real life. Jamie was gearing up for a full blown bawl, so she quickly picked him up, prepared his bottle and settled him before Shane or her husband were disturbed.

A well-rested Mitch was ready to drive the next morning. "Hey, if we're really lucky, we can make it all the way into Portland by tonight. I'll see if I can get the weather." He flicked on the TV, but couldn't find a forecast. She moved through the checkout and breakfast at half speed, like floating through a movie. As they got into the cab, Mitch looked over at her and laughed.

“Babe, I love you, but you look terrible. Grab the pillow and get some sleep. And by the way, Merry Christmas.” She wasn’t going to argue a bit. Sleep sounded like a great Christmas gift.

She slept until the truck stopped in Baker. They couldn’t tell if it was going to rain or snow. The sky was very dark, though. More bad weather was on the horizon. Lunch consisted of cooler food: cheese, crackers, apples. Not very many places open on Christmas. As long as the food kept coming, the boys were happy to stay in the truck.

After their brief respite and the truck replenished as well, Mitch started the engine and navigated back onto the freeway. Within minutes, she was asleep again, snoring softly.

From deep in her sleep she heard Mitch say something. She opened her eyes and could see that they were in a raging snow storm. Then she noticed the flashing red light illuminating the cab in spurts. “What’s happened?”

“Oh, man. I hope I can pull this thing over. It started snowing about an hour ago, but it didn’t seem bad, so I kept going but, man... This is nasty.”

“And the policeman?”

“I don’t know.” Mitch was able to stop the truck by gently sliding into the grassy snow. The state trooper pulled in behind the truck, got out of his car and ran to the front of the truck to survey the occupants. He stepped over to Mitch’s window and Mitch rolled it down.

“I don’t know how you got here, but the interstate is closed due to the weather. Have you noticed there’s a blizzard going on? Didn’t you see there weren’t any other cars on the road?”

The trooper angrily pulled the top of his coat together at his throat, then continued.

“Pendleton is the next town. Pull out there and stay off the road until it is open again. And be careful.” With that, he ran back to his car and got inside. He pulled his car out onto the interstate, then executed a 180 turn and drove down the mountain, going the wrong way.

Mitch’s eyes widened as he witnessed the trooper’s maneuver. “I hope nobody else is coming up the mountain. There must be a turn out somewhere close.”

Shaking her head in agreement, she tried to show her support for Mitch. “Jeez. I think it was extremely stupid of him to make us stop under these weather conditions, just to yell at us.” She was beginning to see their predicament.

ment clearly. Luckily, Mitch had never turned the engine off and the boys were sleeping through all of this.

“Stupid, just stupid,” Mitch muttered under his breath. She wasn’t quite sure what he meant. Was he blaming himself for being on the road? Did he know the interstate was officially closed?

After a tentative start, the truck continued lumbering up the mountain-side, sliding a little now and then. With every inch of progress, it seemed the weather tripled its iniquitous outpouring. It was slow going. The atmosphere in the cab of the truck was impossibly tense. She wanted to scream, but stayed the impulse. The windshield wipers were going double time. Even so, visibility was difficult.

As the truck slowly crested the rise they’d been battling, she held her breath. Her eyes widened. Her heart started pounding. She couldn’t believe what she saw. Spread out in panoramic view was the beautiful downhill mountain road-side of her dreams.

“Oh, man...” Mitch was worried. “That’s steep and does the road turn there?”

“Yes,” she almost whispered. She didn’t want to add one speck of stress or tension to the situation. But everything under her skin was silently screaming, “No! No! NO!” She’d seen this stretch of the road at least a dozen times and not one outcome had been good. She sucked in her lips. Her hands were making fists, her nails digging into her palms. Should she ...no, she wouldn’t say a thing.

Tears welled up in her eyes as the truck approached the spot in her dreams where the uncontrollable slide started. She didn’t dare move a muscle. Mitch whispered another, “Man...” as he lightly braked the hulking vehicle. Ice and brakes were not good together, but what else could he do? They had to slow to follow that bend. She wanted to close her eyes, but couldn’t look away. Tears quietly dropped down her cheeks.

She slowly turned her head to look at Mitch. She did not want to distract him, but she wanted to take a last look at him. His gaze was locked on the road in front of him. She looked at her boys, innocently oblivious, peaceful. She blinked out several tears, then turned her eyes back to the ominous road ahead.

She was suddenly hyper-aware of her surroundings. Every detail was the same as her dream: the furiously flapping windshield wipers, the number and type of trees in front of them, the drop off beside them, and the downhill

grade ahead of them. How could that be?

She exhaled quietly and quickly drew in another breath. The truck was turning with the road. A few little slides escaped Mitch's control, but only momentarily. He navigated past the dreaded bend and continued slowly but surely down the mountain. When they had passed out of the danger zone of her dreams, she turned her face away from Mitch, pretending to look out the side window. She wiped the tears from her cheeks, twice. Tears of fear, then tears of relief.

Mitch didn't begin breathing regularly until they safely reached the first exit. A little six unit motel boasted clean rooms for rent, blue neon barely visible through the snowfall. He pulled into the small parking lot and without ceremony, turned the key so the engine quieted. He then put both hands on the steering wheel and lowered his forehead to rest against it.

"Jesus."

After a little silence, she said, "You did a great job, Mitch. I couldn't have done that. Thank you, sweetie. Really. Really."

Mitch raised his head and looked at her, but before he could say anything, Shane began to fidget in his car seat. The baby opened his eyes, too, and began his warm-up whining.

The parents exchanged a meaningful look. Smiling, Mitch said, "You stay here. I'll go get a room," and was out the door.

As she watched him walk across the lot toward the motel office, she wondered if she would tell Mitch about her dreams. She decided not to. There was no point now.

What she didn't know was that at that same moment, Mitch was trying to decide if he would tell her about his dreams. He also decided not to. What was the point?

Talking to Fish

By Kameron Franklin

The driveway hid behind a curve in the road. There was no sign, or if there was, the overgrown bushes and thick trunks of the few towering evergreens that bordered the property obscured it. Lips pinched in frustration, I stamped on the brake pedal, then darted a glance in the rear view mirror. The empty road stretching behind me relieved my embarrassment. I eased into the driveway, searching for confirmation that this was the place. The building resembled an old ranch-style motel, the ones that lounge beside rural highways, waiting for travelers too tired to push through the night. It straddled the meager parking lot in an L-shape, large windows with air conditioning units sitting below them spaced evenly along the brick walls. All that was missing were the numbered doors.

I parked the car and looked cautiously at the sky. The pavement still held puddles from morning showers and the grey winter clouds overhead promised more. They made good on that threat as soon as I got out. Bumping the car door shut with my hip, I forsook an umbrella and dashed to the double doors that marked the entrance. As they closed behind me, I shed my coat and brushed the beads of water off before draping it over my forearm. Ducking into a nearby restroom, I dug into my purse and produced a small hairbrush, returning it after a few strokes through my hair.

Should I be here? I don't even really know her and I doubt she remembers me. What do I say?

Back in the lobby, an empty desk sat to the left of the restroom. The murmur of voices echoed from down either end of the hallway that ran past the entrance. I glanced both ways, my eyes following the white horizontal line that split the baby blue covering both walls and ceiling. I saw several people dressed in a variety of scrubs--solid colors or playful patterns like balloons or teddy bears that reminded me of pajama tops--circled around a countertop at the far end of the left hallway. I made my way to them, heels clicking on the bleached-white vinyl floor.

“Can you help me? I’m looking for Doris West’s room.”

One of the caretakers looked up from her paperwork and pointed just over my shoulder. “32.”

“Thank you.” I nodded and moved down the short hallway to the door indicated. A faux wood plate to the left of the door read “32.” Below it, white masking tape with the name “Doris West” scrawled in fat strokes of dark ink covered the slot where a nameplate belonged.

The door stood ajar, so I peeked in. Muted light from a curtained window in the far wall flowed over an occupied hospital bed that filled the center of the room. I recognized the face cradled by the pillows. White hair was pulled in tight, thin curls, barely hiding the scalp underneath. Her cheeks were round and fleshy still. Thick glasses rested just below the bridge of her nose. Her eyes were closed and her head lolled to one side. Wrinkled and bony hands lay over a chest that rose and fell rhythmically. I looked at my watch. It was one-forty-five.

I could still leave. No one would know. I didn’t tell anyone I was coming to visit. Besides, it looks like she’s sleeping.

I slunk back to the counter. “Is this not a good time for visiting? I mean, are they taking their naps or something?”

“Oh, no, it’s alright, sweetie. You go on in there. She’ll be glad to see you.”

I came fully inside this time, but paused in the entry way. The smell of disinfectant slid out from the gap under the door to my right and mingled with the odor of age that permeated the room. I moved to the bed, bent over, and whispered, “Hello, Doris?”

Her eyes fluttered open and she looked up at me, her brows furrowing. “Yes? Hello?”

“Hi, Doris. I don’t know if you remember me. I thought I’d come by and see how you were doing. They said you’d hurt your legs.” Both feet stuck out from underneath the blankets and were wrapped in hardened plaster, though the ends were cut away, revealing long, thick, yellowed nails.

“I do like visitors. I fell a little while ago. I’m only here while I heal, then I get to go back home.”

“Doris, I’m going to go get a chair. I’ll be right back.” Fortunately, shoved into the corner by the darkened television, the varnish worn off its armrests in spots and the fabric of its cushions thin enough in some places to expose the foam beneath, sat a vacant lounge chair. I draped my coat over the back of the

chair and maneuvered it to the head of the bed, right next to a nightstand upon which rested a small fishbowl, its golden occupant flitting around in response to the commotion.

“Oh, be careful of Goldie. My husband Will gave her to me to keep me company when he can’t visit.”

“I’m sorry, Doris.”

Incoherent mumbling drifted through the wall to fill the awkward silence.

“We’ve missed you at church.”

Doris squinted her eyes and shifted slightly in my direction. “Hmm?”

“Everyone at church wanted you to know how much they missed you,” I repeated.”

Oh, thank you. That’s nice. I haven’t been able to go to services because of my legs, but I plan to once they let me go home.”

“I’ll be sure to let everyone know. They’ll be glad to see you. I know how much you liked the singing.”

Am I lying? Everyone would be glad to see her. Everything else doesn’t matter.

“Oh, yes. I always enjoyed the singing. Do you like to sing?”

“I’ve played several instruments and sung in choirs growing up,” I replied. “My parents felt it was important that their kids had exposure to music.”

“I taught piano for a while after Will and I got married, to help make ends meet. The neighborhood kids would come over to the house for lessons.”

“I tried the piano, but ended up on the saxophone. Mom was kind of disappointed. She missed the sound of piano music playing in the house. I guess it reminded her of her childhood.”

“That’s nice. Isn’t that nice, Goldie?” Doris turned her head to stare at the fish. It hovered near her side of the bowl, one bulging eye aimed toward Doris as though returning her gaze with love while I felt the other pierce me with suspicion.

Why am I here? What am I expecting? Nothing’s going to change.

Goldie flicked her tail dismissively. I pressed on.

“You certainly look like they’re treating you well here.”

“They do their best, I suppose. Nobody treats me as good as Will, though.”

“If only there were more men like him. I haven’t had much luck.”

“Oh, don’t you fret,” Doris clucked. “You’re still young. You’ve got plenty of time.”

“That’s true, I guess. And I’ve got plenty going on right now. Finding ‘Mr.

Right' isn't high on my list."

"Well, don't be so busy that life passes you by."

I can do this. She seems fine. I don't know why Mom thought this would be so hard to do.

"Do you have any plans for the holidays, Doris?"

"Will and I will probably go out for Thanksgiving dinner. I don't cook much anymore," she chuckled.

I politely laughed back. "Saves time having to clean dishes. What about Christmas?"

"Oh, I don't know. Putting up decorations is so much work. I like listening to the carolers, though. I hope they come again this year."

"Christmas music is my favorite part of the season. That, and all the lights."

Doris started humming as I finished speaking. It sounded like "Silver Bells," but I couldn't quite make it out. Goldie blew bubbles to the beat.

"Time for your medicine," sang a pajama-wearing attendant as she bustled in with a laden tray. She set it in Doris's lap after raising the bed so that the old woman was now in a sitting position. Several small paper containers held a single pill each. The attendant poured water from a pitcher into a plastic cup and gave it to Doris. With an unsteady hand, she grasped each pill between her fingertips and raised them one by one to her lips. When the ritual was over, we were left alone again. I picked the conversation up where we left off.

"So, no plans to spend time with the family?"

"Will's all the family I've got left. He comes to visit me every day at two."

"You don't have any kids?" I couldn't keep the shock from my voice.

"Two boys, and a girl." Doris reached out a thin finger and stroked the fishbowl. "But they're gone now."

I—I don't believe it. Mom was right. I shouldn't have come. What do I do now?

A bent figure in a plaid bathrobe stumbled through the door, all angry mutters and thin strands of wild, white hair. Doris and I looked up, startled.

"C'mon, now. This ain't your room." Another attendant swooped in and steered the wanderer back out into the hall. I blinked before turning back to Doris.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Doris. I--I'll come visit you, if you'd like?"

"That's awfully sweet of you, dear. What do you think, Goldie?" She swung her head around to gaze at the fishbowl and its occupant.

I looked down to see Goldie accusing me with her bulbous glare.

It's not an empty promise. I will visit. I know it's a big commitment, but I want to do it.

“Great. You made a list for Santa yet?” I forced a smile.

“I just want to be with my Will. And Goldie, too.”

Goldie bobbed up and down.

I caught the squeal of rubber on vinyl from the hall just outside the door and spotted an old man shuffling behind his walker towards us. My watch read two o’clock.

“I’m here, my dear wife.” Will wheeled himself to the side of the bed and bent down to kiss her with puckered lips. His walker had a fold-down seat which he used after setting the brakes. “How have you been today?”

“I had a visitor today from church.” She motioned to me and I introduced myself.

“Hello, Grandpa.”

Will looked hurriedly at Doris, but she was humming to herself and seemed not to have noticed. He hobbled over to my side, supporting himself with the bed rail, and gave me a quick hug.

“Thanks for coming,” he whispered in my ear before returning to Doris. “I brought you a treat.” With a sly smile, Will reached into his coat pocket and brought out a folded napkin, which he then laid gently upon her chest. She carefully unwrapped the package, revealing three green olives, the red of pimentos peeking out the holes in the sides.

“Oh, my favorite,” she exclaimed.

“They don’t give her good food in this place,” Will confided to me as he stroked Doris’s hair.

“I’m glad somebody’s watching out for her. Doris told me you got her Goldie.”

“Yes, it was a birthday present. She likes fish. She used to keep a big tank of all sorts of colorful ones. We had to get rid of them, though, once it became too much work for us to maintain. The nurses here are nice enough to change the water in this little thing once a month.”

I watched Doris nibble at the olives with pleasure while Grandpa talked. I noticed his hands move from her head to her shoulder to her hand, never losing contact. Then I excused myself. This was their time, and I was invading.

“It was nice of you to visit, dear,” Doris said between bites.

“It was my pleasure. You both take care, now.”

“They changed bus schedules again,” I heard Will say as I walked out the door.

That wasn't so bad. At least she still has Grandpa and that fish.

I smiled.

And I'll be here, too.

Our Day Trip

By Kelly Schrock

We drove all night and into the early morning hours, stopping only to fill our gas tank and piss in ditches sprouting dry grass on the side of the road.

When we reached the ocean we left our muddy shoes in the car and stretched our legs across the cold sand. My hands were stiffly numb in yours, my feet raw and red.

When the first light of morning paled the stars you stopped. Your hands fell limp at your sides. Thinking you were watching the sunrise, I reached out to hold you, but suddenly you were taking off your jacket, your shirt, your pants. They dropped one by one to the ground. Your skin shone pale blue as you ran into the waves.

You never stopped-- didn't once look back.

I sat down in the rocky sand. Watched my breath hover in the morning air. The night before we had been lying in bed, my arms around you. The neighbor's dog was barking and I lay still, staring at the ceiling, listening to the rhythm of cars and canine. You turned your face to mine and said you wanted to see the ocean.

“Let's get away from here. We have just enough money.”

So we got in my car.

The sun rises, bleeding dusty rose into the sky, and I know you're not coming back. I fold your clothes, tuck them under my arm, and walk to my car.

Driving forlorn roads through dead, icy farmland I think of you. Swimming to a tropical island somewhere. Your body cold blue beneath the waves, light rippling on your naked skin. Your hair braided with seaweed and pearls.

I know you're gone, but I still see you lying in my bed, your voice warm in my ear as you whisper, "Let's run away."

Photographic Memory

By Taylor Turner

Click. The day we first met was 40 years, 2 months, 1 week, and 2 days ago. It was raining, hard. Even with Mrs. Farr’s Spanish vocal exercises echoing for all the class to repeat, the raindrops could still be heard above the classroom. Outside the classroom window, a woman in a long brown overcoat fumbled with her black umbrella until the wind finally turned it inside out. Furious water was running alongside the curbs, and I looked around to notice that many of the students were wearing boots. Only Kimberly Larson was wearing shoes, but I doubt that she wore them on account of style. I remember her parents were often dressed in rags at the PTA meetings my own parents went to. You walked into class 6 minutes after the tardy bell had rung, accompanied by a greasy, acne-infested sophomore Donny Fredrickson (he waited in the doorway to watch you walk all the way down the middle of the classroom, clearly admiring your backside. Mrs. Farr noticed and excused him, annoyed: “*Señor Fredrickson, gracias, vete! Ahora!*” He stood there, dumbfounded...she had to shoo him with an impatient flick of her wrists). In that moment, I specifically remember thanking the Lord Almighty for placing such a beautiful creature in the empty seat beside me. We were learning the difference between *ser* and *estar* that day. When you sat down next to me, I inaccurately introduced myself with “*Hola, estoy Mark!*” and Mrs. Farr promptly corrected me, saying “*Me llamo, Mark, me llamo!*” That’s when I heard you laugh for the first time, a surprisingly powerful laughter for such a dainty face. Your smile was confident. You responded, “*Hola Mark, mucho gusto!*” You brushed the long brown hair off of your forehead, a gesture I came to know so well. You came late, a week after school had started. It was our junior year. You came from Weiser, Idaho, away from an abusive father to live with your aunt and uncle. It smelled like hot dogs every day after school when we walked past the little stand on the way to your uncle’s house. But you never wanted to eat there, you told me every day that hotdogs were made out of “piggy leftovers” and I would laugh and the

fat man behind the stand would frown at us as we walked by. I remember the first day I met you, when you sat down beside me; you wore a bright yellow shirt that had “SMILE” painted onto it in big, curvy blue letters. You asked me where I got my shoes (the original Chuck Taylors, high top, black) and said, “Nice kicks, man!” The pencil you used that day was orange, with several teeth marks near the top where you often chose to bite down on when you gazed off into the classroom, far beyond the chalkboard and past Mrs. Farr’s Spanish rants. With this pencil you wrote your home telephone number down on a small piece of white, college ruled paper the size of my fist. It was the same number I would dial every day after school until graduation, when you moved into your first apartment on Baker Street. The piece of paper was torn from the purple notebook you always kept in your backpack. You folded that note 4 times and slipped it into the left pocket of the blue striped zipper sweatshirt I was wearing that day, the same one Mrs. Jenkin’s dog chewed up the following summer when we tried to steal the bottles of wine from her refrigerator in her garage.

Click, click. The day of your funeral was 3 years, 5 months, 2 weeks, and 4 days ago. Your uncle kept asking the people in the pews in front of him who had died. He coughed in big, awful hacks. The slideshow on screen made its rotation 5 times. 28 of the 57 pictures were of you and I. I wiped my eyes 38 times throughout the service, and blew my nose 7 times, with a total of 11 tissues used. The license number on the back of the hearse was 568-JCM. There were 23 flower arrangements laid on the podium behind your casket in the Church of the Brethren in Fruitland, Idaho. I made sure you were buried beside your aunt, two rows down from the cemetery’s east gate on the left side of the paved road. You lay in your casket, it was a dark mahogany with 16 ounce copper siding, rounded edges, silk lining, steel handles. 81 people sat in the church and 76 walked to the front to say goodbye to you for the last time. 63 joined us for the graveside service. I drank 6 beers, received 14 hugs, and ate 4 mini sandwiches with turkey and cheese and lettuce afterward. I pulled over onto the side of the road after leaving you at the graveyard, fearing I was in a bad state to drive home. I cried for 19 minutes straight. I brought my fists down on the steering wheel 13 times in anger and defeat.

Click. I chose not to walk in front of your casket to see you for the last time, because I wanted to remember you from 3 years, 5 months, 1 week, and 3 days ago. We lay in our bed, we lay happy, and we lay in love together.

The Ring

By Michael A. Berliner

Everyone who knows Dorothy May knows about her ring. If you ask her about it, she will show it to you. Dorothy May has had many rings in her life, but there is only one she has kept. She keeps it in a black velvet sack with an old mildewed pull string. When you ask to see it, her old wrinkled face tightens and youth kisses her cheeks with its arsenic lips. Her tiny feet jumble up and pop her small frame like a suppressed coil released as she fumbles along an old wooden staircase in a dank house. Her lily pale skin curls over her bones as she beckons you to hurry to the top of the stair. Each step will creak under the uneven pressure of her strides as she nearly misses steps in her excitement.

If you ask Dorothy May how she came by such an odd object as her ring, she will tell you of blackouts, and how when she was five she was arrested. She will giggle about how she and her older sister left the compound gates of Oak Ridge without their passes to visit a local General Store. She will tell you that they bought two pieces of licorice with a few coins they found in the road. She will also tell you that when they returned, the Military Police held them in a cold concrete room for three hours.

If you ask Dorothy May about her ring, she will take you to an old chestnut jewelry box below a black and white picture of a young aviator and his plane. She will cross her arms against her chest and tell you how her father lost a day's work to retrieve her and her sister from military custody. She will then remove a sliding drawer from the undercarriage of the jewelry box. She will place the drawer on her white hand-quilted bedspread, and kneel before it as a little girl, rolling her thumbs along the edges of the velvet sack.

If you ask Dorothy May to show you her ring, she will smile showing all her sharp coffee stained teeth. She will pour the contents carefully from her bag into her palm. She will hold it up, and you will see an old rusted bolt nut the diameter of a grape. She will roll the piece of metal into her palm. She will hold it up, and you will see an old rusted bolt nut the diameter of a grape. She will roll

the piece of metal in her hand, and tell you how it contributed to the end of the war.

If you ask Dorothy May about her father, she will tell you about the ring. “Daddy,” Dorothy May will say, “was smart; he was a blacksmith before the Depression. With his last dollar and the pink slip of his Ford, Daddy won twenty acres and a whiskey-still up in the Smokey Mountains with a one in a million straight flush. During prohibition, he ran moonshine into Knoxville in that Model A. Daddy always said he could feel when the weather was right for winning.” Dorothy May will blush, proudly. Her pale skin will turn crimson from the giddy air filling her lungs. Then her starry hair will soften, loosening out the dust of age, and expose her deep obsidian locks when she says, “when the war came, Daddy sold the cabin and moved us to a trailer in Oak Ridge when he got a job at the Clinton Engineering Works filing bolts for the calutrons.”

If you ask Dorothy May about her ring, she will show you a rusted bolt nut the diameter of a grape. She will tell you that it is the most precious thing she owns. She will tell you that her father had made it out of a mistakenly sized nut from the casing of a calutron. She will explain how the Clinton Engineering Works filled the rural sky with a sharp penetrating light that could be seen twenty miles away in Knoxville; yet, did not exist on any map. She will tell you of how she was not allowed to go near the fences where the Military Police patrolled with dogs and machineguns. She will tell you about the gun towers. She will mention how the hair on her neck filled with electricity as the shadow lurking snipers aimed their rifle barrels at her playing too close to the barbwire kissed fences. But most of all, she will tell you of the humming concrete factory complexes, and how the K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant stood along side the Clinch River as grand as Solomon’s temple, stretching a half mile with cold white brick and steel. She will hesitate a moment on the memory before telling you that her father never worked there; instead, she will tell you of the sound of labor at all hours of the night from inside the Y-12 plant. She will recall how unlike K-25, the Y-12 plant used large silver magnets and tubes to enrich uranium.

If you ask Dorothy May about the old ugly bolt nut, she will tell you how her father worked in complete secrecy. She will say, “Daddy never talked about what he was doing, because I don’t think he knew. They’d have shot him if he

did.” She will recall a sign she read aloud when she learned to read, *what you see here, what you hear here, what you do here, when you leave here, let it stay here*. Then she will let you hold the dirty bolt nut. The heavy sterling silver will be warm from the heat of her palms. If you rub a thumb along the tarnished edges, you will see a black engraving of a dragon concealed amid a plume of dark blue sterling silver rust. And if you look close enough, you might notice how the dragon seems to be tickling a nail against its own tail.

As you hold Dorothy May’s ring, you will notice that amongst her collection of knick-knacks there is a poster above the jewelry box. At first, you would have thought nothing of it. You would have thought that it was just another photograph of an aviator and his plane; but upon further inspection, you will see *Enola Gay* in crooked black lettering on the fuselage. And then you will feel all the terror of the atomic world condense into the palm of your hand.

“My ring is made of sterling silver,” Dorothy May will boast. “Daddy gave all five of us girls one for Christmas. He didn’t have any money. Our rings came from the scraps of Little Boy’s calutrons. This one’s mine.”

Shoplifted

By Keith Lloyd

My home town is not a big city, though I remember a time when it was much smaller. There used to be many open fields filled with tall grass and the occasional hectare of Douglas fir forest, but which are now paved over with shopping malls and big box stores, chain restaurants and parking lots. Before I knew anything about supermarkets or supercenters, my mother would take me down to the local grocery store that had maybe eight aisles, but managed to have everything our household needed. As small as this store was, the candy aisle was to my young mind a kind of malted-Mecca, a nougat-Nirvana, a taffy-Timbuktu.

At five years old I had already spent 260 Sundays learning that I was a sinner and that only Jesus could save me. I understood that theft was wrong, but only as an abstract concept; I had never tested the theory that those who steal are punished and so the reality of crime was not strong enough to overpower temptation. As an adult I forgot just how huge everything looks when you are only three feet tall. It took having a son of my own to realize that the rows of sweets that I so casually stroll by must seem like a Grand Canyon of candied bliss to him.

Forgive me for being sentimental, but this was also a time when a child could let go of their mothers hand and not have an Amber alert sounded. My mother thought nothing of my leaving her side while she examined which bag of beans was the better deal. Little did she know that I was facing down the demon of desire two aisles over. There were no cameras, no loss prevention associates, only one concave mirror in the corner so that the cashier could keep an eye on the drunks who came in for liquor and would take any opportunity to sneak a can of beer into their coat-pocket.

Like the great walls of the Columbia Gorge, the shelves of aisle four rose up on both sides of me. On each layer was a different brightly-packaged confection. Should I take a sucker? Just one? How many could I stuff into my coat without drawing my mother's suspicion? Oh, but here was a packet of candied

cigarettes which actually “smoke” when you chew ‘em—how cool would that be to show my friends that I was a thief and a smoker? Maybe I should grab a candy Mom and Dad won’t buy me because it’s too expensive...ah, here we go: Big League Chew. I’ll look just like a baseball player with a wad of shredded purple gum tucked into my cheek. I grabbed two, one for both of my biggest pockets, and strolled off to find my mom. She had moved on to the meat section where the chill from the open-air coolers caused me to shiver. I thrust my hands into my coat pockets and gripped their treasured contents.

This particular store had been built in the mid-1960’s to accommodate the new sprawl of ranch homes that began popping up on the East side of town. The walls were lined with dark-wood paneling, and the floors were a burnt-umber linoleum tile. The fixtures in the meat, dairy, and frozen food section were olive colored and lined in metallic chrome. As we shopped I noticed that my eyes were level with the lip of the meat counter. I could see my distorted-self looking back at me, and feeling chagrined by my reflection’s judgmental look, I endeavored to avert my gaze.

“I just need to get some milk and we’ll be done,” my mother informed me. She opened the fridge and a blast of cool, heavy air hit my face. The transparent door became foggy and showed the dozens of fingerprints on the glass from other would-be milk purchasers. My mother grabbed a couple gallons of whole milk. When she let go of the door it swung closed as quickly and effortlessly as if gravity was calling it back to earth. A short sucking sound as the rubber of the door sealed itself to the door jamb caused me to shudder. Something about that hissing slurp made me think about whether the Holy Ghost, which my Sunday School Teacher kept talking about, was not in some way inside this store, watching from the other side of that refrigerator glass, or worse yet, inside of me and taking note of my misdeed. I began to fear that Mr. Holy Ghost was going to tattle on me to God and Jesus Christ.

While I was experiencing this spiritual crisis my mother was already half-way finished checking out. She bade me come over before the cashier finished ringing up the cart. “Why don’t you run over to the candy aisle and get you and your brother and sister a treat for being good,” she offered. Under normal circumstances this sort of offer would have sent me skipping to pick out the most expensive and delicious candy for myself and maybe a trifle for my younger siblings. My hands were frozen to the packets of soft, chewy gum in my pockets as if I was already dead and rigor mortis had set in. This was a way

out of my dilemma, however; I could nonchalantly saunter over to the candy aisle pick out one candy each for my brother and sister, and then play off my earlier attempt at thievery as my legitimate candy choice. But I couldn't move.

I'm not sure how much time elapsed, but eventually my mother turned around once the cart was empty of groceries expecting me to hand her three treats—what she saw must have caused her to doubt the mental soundness of her eldest son. “Well, where's the candy?” she asked pertly. I trippingly responded that I couldn't find anything I wanted. “What about your brother and sister?” she replied, but I was saved from having to manufacture a reply when the store-clerk read off the total. She paid in cash and while pushing our cart out to the car muttered, “Oh well, don't say I never offer you kids anything nice.”

It was an uncharacteristically clear and sunny fall day. A dozen billowy white clouds bedecked a crisp blue sky and a cool breeze brought the sweet smell of falling leaves to my nostrils. I climbed into the front seat of my parent's tan Ford LTD. Inside I could see my breath as it slowly fogged up the windows. A loud thump signaled that my Mother had finished loading the groceries into the trunk. The next sound I heard was the jingle of her keys as she pulled them from her purse.

My sweaty hands were still deep in my coat pockets. After buckling me in she noticed. “Why do you still have your hands in your pockets, sweetie?” she asked concernedly. “Are you cold? You're not getting sick are you?” I couldn't bring myself to confess my crime, nor could I force my hands to relinquish their vice-like grip. I could see the suspicion come into my mother's steely blue eyes. She let out wincing gasp when she pulled my left hand out of its pocket and saw the now mangled bag of bubble gum locked in its grasp. “Let me see your other hand,” she ordered, and when I obeyed she let fall a pair of oaths against my misdeed. “Why? Why would you steal this candy? Didn't I offer to buy you some? Or did you just want it for yourself and nobody else? I didn't think you could be so selfish. I certainly didn't raise you that way...” and the lecture continued thusly until my eyes stung with tears and my jaw and cheeks ached from sobbing.

My mother dragged me back into the store to confess my crime and vow that I would never steal again. The cashier didn't look that exasperated that I had stolen a dollar's worth of candy, but he put on a good show of scolding me for breaking the law and saying that in the Middle East if you got caught

stealing they chopped off your hands. His grisly admonition couldn't have the effect he or my Mom wanted as I had already conceded the baseness of my soul and was offering silent prayers to God to forgive me of this heinous act which I vowed never to repeat. My mother paid for both packages of gum and led me out to the car with her hand gripping the nape of my neck. The car ride home was made in heavy silence, only the rumble of the engine and my occasional sniffing serving as interruptions.

My mother gave my brother and sister the gum which I had hoped to devour by myself and I was sent to my room to await my Father's punishment. Before crawling into bed I knelt and prayed for the hundredth time of that hour that Heavenly Father wouldn't forsake my soul. Nestling into my blankets, I quickly surrendered to sleep. I awoke to find my Father sitting at my feet watching me sleep. The trails of tears had dried into little lines of salt on my face which he wiped away and tussled my hair. "Son, you know what you did was wrong," he began, "no spanking or yelling is going to make you understand any better than your own conscience." There was a short silence where he and I just looked at each other before he continued: "There will be a lot of things in this life that you'll want but can't have; if you work hard and earn them, though, they will mean a lot more to you than if they were just handed to you, or worse, you just took them." Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a package of Big League Chew and set it down in front of me. He winked at me and then stood up. "Don't tell Mom," he whispered, and then walked out of the room.

That was the best damn bubble gum I've ever had.

Solace

By Kimberly Lawrence

As she feels her way up the stairwell, her fingers glide over the all too familiar cracked and uneven glaze on the railing. Each step holds a slowly creeping momentum from wary to a stronger sense of confidence. As this momentum picks up, so does the frequency of each action and the height of each foot off the stair below. A smirk of acknowledgement creeps across an otherwise blank expression moments before she places her foot on a board that whimpers a small shrill squeal. As she reaches the peak of the climb, her fingers gracefully bounce from the railings curved coupling to the textured drywall and partially peeled and chipping layers of dingy paint. In such a narrow hall, she keeps a close distance to the wall on her right, never letting her fingers leave the surface of the barrier which, to many offers a sense of claustrophobic bounds, but to her a calm and serene comfort. Every day, the same familiar journey, her fingertips grazing the same textural map.

She pauses only for a moment, and instinctively reaches out to grasp the cold metallic knob directly in front of her well traveled fingertips. With a firm turn and a gentle push, the door creaks open and a rush of light enters the hallway. She forges through the doorframe with an urgency but stops just as quickly, on the balls of her feet, as the light fully envelopes her presence. With the sun streaming through the large east facing windows, every particle in the air is illuminated like a dazzling ember from a smoldering fire. She does not turn around to close the entry door, but merely reaches behind her and gives its edge a quick and firm nudge. With a resonating slam, she has reached her place of nirvana. Without hesitation, she slides the large bag from her shoulder and follows it down to the floor. Unlacing her shoes with one hand, she reaches into the duffel's wide opening and lifts a pair of well worn shoes, adequate only for this particular room. As she slides her feet into their tight casing, and wraps the soft satin ties around her ankles, she feels as though she is dawning her most intimate and alluring item, the kind to be hidden, buried in a top drawer of a dresser. Rolling each muscle to warm and energize her

every fiber, she feels the sun on her back as she gently presses her toe boxes into the chalky frame to her right. Moving with fluid confidence and consistency, she arches to the ground, gently feels each button on the small stereo, and presses play. Three deep breaths as she soars towards the adjoining south wall and she gently exhales as she gracefully stretches her seemingly endless leg across the barre.

Song after song of classical fluidity, Pachabel, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin; movement after movement of pirouettes, arabesques, chassés, fondus, développés, and then a leap, full of grace, elegance, decadence as she soars above the floor, across the sunlit windows feeling warmth spread over her skin and through her soul. As her foot and toes land gently and almost silently on the floor, she holds her position, frozen in an enigmatic poise. Then, with an abrupt squeal the mixed tape gave a short amount of feedback, and the stereo clicked off. After a deep breath of finality, a graceful jog brought the ballerina directly to the stereo and the position where she had begun in this room. Sitting exactly where she had before, she proceeded to untie the satin and slip her feet out of their familiar forms and into their casual home in sneakers. She gently wraps the satin ties around the worn and chalked pointe shoes and places them lovingly into the open duffel. With swift movement, she removes her tape from the stereo, and as she clicks the door of the tape deck shut, she hears the giggles and chatter of children entering the building. With a slam of the door on the street, she takes one more deep breath, wipes the sweat from her brow, and zips her duffel closed.

As she stands and shoulders her bag, the door bursts open with ten small tutu-ed creatures bustling and giggling as they fill the room with noise and lively energy. Behind them, a woman not much older than herself approaches the ballerina. “Hey, hope we didn’t get here too early today. Did you get the chance to finish your routine?”

“As always, you’ve got perfect timing. Enjoy the lesson today, the girls look full of jitters,” she says as she moves her way to the door.

“You sure you’re ok to get out of here? It’s getting pretty cold and the roads are still slick from the morning frost...” a concerned tone in the teacher’s voice is acknowledged with a wave of the ballerina’s hand.

“I’ve done this through enough winters to know the slick spots on the street. Thanks though. I’ll hear you tomorrow,” the ballerina says with a smirk.

“Alright, *see* you tomorrow, too,” with a knowing friendly tone in her voice,

the ballet teacher is whisked away by three of the little tutu-ed ballerinas eager and tugging on her sleeves.

As she closes the studio door behind her, she smiles and shakes her head. Thinking back to when she was young and eager to dance, just like all of those little girls, but never confident enough to do so, always afraid that her desire would be one more place she would fall. With a chuckle and a smile across her face, she begins her descent on the stairs. Being sure to keep her fingertips adhered to the surface of the peeling chipped paint, then the cracked glazed handrail, she gently places one foot after the other, resuming her careful trepidation. As she gets her feet on the first floor, she sets down her duffel and feels her way along the wall to the coat rack. She puts her arms through the thick wool pea coat, feeling her fingers down the edges and gently buttoning each fasten. She grabs the scarf from the same hook and wraps it around her neck and over her head, covering her haphazard bun. Then, feeling lower on the coat rack, she finds her last belonging in the umbrella storage. Lifting it out of its resting place, she secures its strap around her right wrist, and hoists her duffel back onto her left shoulder.

Feeling for the cold metal doorknob, she pulls the door open and is assaulted with harsh cold wind and the sounds of a busy city during its morning commute. She feels the closeness of bodies brushing by the threshold, and waits until she senses a clearing in the sidewalk. Then, with a deep breath, she steps off the landing of her place of solace and into the reality that still shocks her daily. Through the car horns and din of people talking, the most resonant sound she hears is the subtle tap, tap, tap of her guide stick leading her in a clear path she is unable to see.

Hide Away Jesus

By Dillan Simmons

One time me and Jill Lucas met Jesus. We were in a bar outside of Billings Montana. When we walked in I was looking at a big pair of antlers rotting on the wall and Jill Lucas said “I think that’s Jesus.” Sure enough he was there plopped down on a creaky stool. As we walked up he was passing time slipping a quarter through the hole in his hand and me and Jill Lucas sat at a table behind him. He had eyes like a kind old woman and you could tell he was thinking nice thoughts. I expected him to be a loud mouth but he only spoke up once to mention a good fishing spot he knew, then he left. Not in a show off kind of way, he just took his jacket off the hook, wagged his hand at us and went out the door. It was a good night. Later me and Jill won fifty bucks in a honky-tonk dance and drove down the highway tipsy and huddled close in the front seat of the pickup. Thinking about old Jesus and looking out the window at starts kicked across the sky.

Selkie

By Isabela J. Oliveira

She shows up at my door one day, out of the blue. It's been raining something awful, enough to drown her in her own clothes, and her hair hangs like seaweed on the beach, tangled and still framing her face in a way that makes my breath hitch in my throat. She's a selkie who managed to escape, who found her misplaced skin under the floorboards behind the sofa, tossed there in some random way, and somehow for some reason, she's back on the doorstep of my apartment. Selkies aren't meant to come back. They're meant to be in the ocean, living their lives, doing something much more important than showing up at my door, looking at me with round, dark, liquid eyes that weld me to the spot.

And then her hand is pushing open the door, rivulets forming from the water running down her face and hair. She is a sea storm incarnated, pushing her waves beneath my door and sloshing her way onto my hallway rug, and putting her hand on my shoulder. Her hand is on my shoulder. What do I do? I can't move. I still can't— she doesn't let me think, she just pushes and tugs at the same time, and I'm tripping over my own goddamn feet in an attempt to stay afloat, but no, she is pushing and pulling me over and over, looking at me with those eyes that could drown sailors, and I'm tripping all over myself until she backs me up into the kitchen counter and I find salvation.

“Where the fuck have you been?” I ask, teeth gritting in an effort to stay sane while she pushes up against me, making my hip grind uncomfortably into the edge of the counter.

“Where do you think?” She smiles, moves closer. Her dripping hair seems to make her face look larger. There's nothing else for me to look at. And I can't seem to remember how to breathe anymore. I try to focus on the table behind her, set with one plate, one cup, no lipstick on the rim because I haven't bothered in a long time. My food is cooling rapidly and the pain in my stomach is returning like the twinge of an ulcer.

“That isn’t an answer!” I narrow my eyes. “I’ve waited for you, you know?” I try to squirm out of her grasp, but I’m finally caught in the riptide of her arms and there’s nothing I can do but go along with it. She smiles wider and her mouth is suddenly on my neck and I melt under her touch. I’m sinking and I can’t—

All right.

I’ll forget.

Diana's Children

By John Wolf

Kendrick sat down on the dewy grass, enjoying the cold dots on his bare legs, and stretched. The years had paid off he thought with a smile. His back went nearly parallel with his knees. He rose up feeling the kinks of his spine fall back into place. While Kendrick folded one leg under his toned body he leaned back his head and stared at the sky. The early morning held no clouds but unexpected warmth. A good day for running.

He brought his gaze back down and watched the milling crowds before him. An ocean of pink swarmed on the spring grass. At the fringe of the pink clad crowd, runners stood in line outside of the shirt tent. They entered in plaid, forest green, or any multitude of colors then left pink. Kendrick picked at his own new shirt. The fresh collar bit at the back of his neck. The hill Kendrick laid on was dotted with small groups of men. All the women went from the tent to the water coolers. Great high stone cylinders, almost as tall as the women standing next to them. He never saw water coolers like that before. The way the women guzzled the liquid from their stone cups, Kendrick wouldn't be surprised if they were all throwing up half a mile into the run.

This early in the year, the trails so wet, the race would be hard enough. He could hardly believe how many other people showed up. The "Diana's Children Run" didn't seem to have much strength in advertising. If Kendrick hadn't stopped on that street corner he might never have noticed the ratty and tattered flier stapled to a light pole. The name didn't click with him either, but one charity run was like all the rest. It would have been easier to just write a check for whatever the cause. The cause had little to do with it. The same probably went for the other clusters of people milling around on the grass. Even with all his running, the circuit training, and all the dieting middle age was starting to eat away at Kendrick. The jeans fit a little tighter; the aches in his knees lasted longer. The running would peter out eventually; he knew it just happened to men his age.

The stretching done, Kendrick stood and caught a glimpse of the stage un-

derneath the “Diana’s Children” banner. Underneath the sign stood a woman. Kendrick took one look and knew her running days were far from over. Tall, trimmed stomach and hips over long lithe legs. Her jet black hair snaked down her back in a glossy ponytail, shockingly dark against her milky skin. She was a goddess. She stepped forward and the crowd surged in a mass of shuffling feet to meet her at the crest of the hill. The pack of runners morphed around Kendrick, swallowing him. Once surrounded he noticed all of the other beautiful toned bodies around him. The other men disappeared in the midst of the delicate faces. The crowd, and Kendrick with it, halted when a short pitch of feedback stabbed the air. Then the goddess spoke.

“Welcome,” she said. Her voiced hummed cool and smooth as Kendrick somehow knew it would. “Sisters, daughters, this is our greatest day.” The crowd gave out a cheer that shook Kendrick’s teeth. “This is the day we can unite and cherish this life we have. As one group! As one family! As one spirit!” The crowds yell of response rolled through the air like a tidal wave. Kendrick smiled a little at that. Another wave of yells roared forward and the chanting began.

“Di-an-ah! Di-an-ah!” The crowd shouted in one high feminine voice. Between each chant Kendrick heard those around him take a deep breath of air. A feeling Kendrick thought beyond men his age stirred in his loins. “It is time for us to unite in the spirit of nature, for Diana,” the goddess on stage resumed, “to the starting line!” The crowd moved again, shuffling together across the field like some ageless behemoth’s single massive foot. Kendrick moved with the others and thought about the woman on stage and the banner above her. He wondered just who their Diana was. A child stricken with some disease, perhaps an old woman who gave her whole life to charity. Kendrick shrugged the thought away. He didn’t make it a habit to attend charity runs but he’d been to a few. A lot of them were named after people long gone.

The crowd came to a stop under a stand of poplar. The masses thinned out to form a staggered line giving Kendrick a view of the land before him. The poplar gave way to healthier stands of other trees. A river cut through the woods and out into a wide flat meadow just north of the trees. Kendrick could hardly make out the trail amid it all, but he knew it had to come out somewhere near the tree line. A break in the meadow below revealed the faintest of trails and within the tall grass. At the center like a beacon stood a white tent. The finish line couldn’t be that close, not even in a half-marathon. Maybe it just

looked shorter or-

The announcer leapt up from the crowd onto the lowest hanging branch with nimbleness that sent envy through Kendrick's mind. "It is our time, time for the children, time for Diana!" Kendrick groaned as the women in the crowd gave another series of radical whoops. The crowd was pushing and straining now, threatening to stampede. He expected the AK-47's and red berets to start flashing out any second. The women continued shouting and jumping, Kendrick caught sight of another man further on down the line. The man's bulk, nearly about to make a desperate break from under his pink shirt, made Kendrick want to gag. Sweat glistened across the man's forehead, and a dark t-shaped stain was already forming on the front of his shirt. The man met Kendrick's gaze, smiled, and then turned his eyes back to the subject at hand. Kendrick followed the man's look to the petite blonde in a pink shirt and almost unbelievably tight running shorts. His pecker fluttered. Kendrick wondered how he hadn't found out about this run earlier. He figured the other man had caught hold of a flier like the one he had, most likely on the man's way out of his favorite bar and grill.

"Are you ready?" She screamed from atop the tree ripping Kendrick's thoughts away from his and the fat man's common interest. The crowd's response almost deafened him. She held up her hand and Kendrick began to control his breathing. "One!" He let his arms go loose, became aware of his breathing. "Two!" A few high steps, letting the blood flow in and around. "Three!"

With a feeling Kendrick always associated with rocket fuel, his body churned in a rhythmic and practiced way sending him down the path. The blur of pink nearly knocked him flat on his ass. Each second a woman sprinted past him, feet flying up into the air, arms pumping wildly. Kendrick slowed and stared in disbelief. They all sprinted madly down the trail and out of sight. Only a few spots of pink still clung to the horizon. A heavy thump on his back and the fat man pushed by with a handful of other men. The knock brought him back; his focus took aim on the horizon and on the finish line somewhere below.

The breathing rhythm took control; his body began to work like a well-used machine. Left leg forward, right arm to chest level, push off left leg, right leg comes forward- How could they just sprint off like that? No form, no style, just running off like a pack of frenzied animals. Kendrick felt his age then, and while his pace remained steady, his heart lacked spirit. He told himself he

didn't care who won, this event felt more like a pep rally than a race, but the sight of so much fervor emasculated him. Neutered flashed across his mind in bright pink letters. Kendrick entered the shaded woods.

The tunnel of trees made the going easier. Kendrick smiled between breaths and quickened his pace. A new rush of wind through his ears almost masked the screaming. He looked down the small hill off the side of the trail. The only sounds now the beating of his heart in time with his breathing. Then the scream, wild and frenzied, came again. The sheer blow of emotion behind it sent Kendrick away from the edge. Somewhere below the scream came again accompanied by the crashing of underbrush. The quickest hint of pink flitted through the dark woods. Kendrick back pedaled faster. The screaming ceased and a possum came up over the edge of the hill onto the trail.

The mangy animal turned and hissed at Kendrick through needled teeth. The alien black eyes and mottled fur sent a ripple of revulsion through him and he retreated. The possum resumed running across the path, making for the second patch of woods on the other side. The petite blonde with the perfect ass burst from the woods before the animal made it to safety. She flew by Kendrick not seeming to notice him at all even when she pushed him to the ground. His arms pin wheeled, struck only air, and down he went. The rough landing sent a shock coursing up Kendrick's tailbone to his dazed mind. In a flash of bright pink the blonde fell upon the possum. The animal shrieked and screeched but then turned silent and feebly struggled against her. The blonde sank her teeth into the possum's belly and pulled up a string of organs in her mouth. Kendrick's breakfast wove its way back up from his stomach. Blood gushed out of the possum's flayed belly and onto the bark dust to steam in the morning air, all sounds of screaming now replaced by hungry munching and the dead reflexive thudding of the possum's tail on the ground.

Kendrick's self control dissolved and he let out a scream of his own. The blonde's eyes met his own. She turned from her meal and roared at Kendrick revealing her perfect teeth covered in crimson and bits of fur. The feral sound chipped away at his civilized mind and he scrambled back on the trail, legs splaying under him. She lunged but he gave a frightened kick in her jaw. Kendrick rose and ran, sprinted, dashed down the trail seeking anyone who could help make sense of this sunlit nightmare. Soon he heard the forest become a mass of screams. To his left two women ran down a deer, tackled it to the ground, and ripped it apart with manicured nails. Up ahead the fat man

screamed and clung to a branch while women below shredded his dangling legs.

Kendrick kept running, ignored the thickening smell of blood rising in the air, his form slipping away to pure action. He thought of the meadow, of the tent he saw there, how a phone would be there. Kendrick didn't realize he slowed down until the crazed breathing warmed his neck and hands gripped his shirt. The fabric tightened across his chest and he stumbled. Animalistic panic made him turn to face his attacker. A teenage girl clawing for his eyes. There came a moment of resistance, the shirt tugged, the girl's hands peeled away some skin on his back. He prayed to a god long forgotten and his prayer was answered with ripping fabric. Kendrick let loose another burst of energy and he sprinted for the opening in the trees ahead. It was not just the entrance to the meadow, it was an escape hatch.

His heart broke pace for a second when a woman sprinted across the trail on all fours and disappeared into the trees. The ferocious howls and panicked screaming from the trail behind pushed him forward with the last of his strength. He stumbled through the grass and to the white tent ahead. The long grass painted his bare chest with dew as he pushed through towards the entrance. Inside the tent he saw the announcer, the goddess. She knelt at the center of the tent with her back to him. Kendrick rushed to her, took her by the shoulders. Her hands flew up to Kendrick's, seized him by the wrists, and flung him to the ground.

While Kendrick gasped for the air just knocked out of him he looked up at her. From this position she looked like a giant. Her eyes almost seemed to spark with a feral blaze. A sharp cry of fear and panic shot from the woods but broke off. The goddess stared at Kendrick.

"How dare you put your hands on me," she said in the same powerful permeating voice from before. Now Kendrick saw the bloodied remains of a man in tattered jogging shorts at the base of the small shrine in the back. "This is not meant for your eyes." Kendrick feebly rose to his feet while the goddess continued, "Yet, there you always are."

Kendrick back stepped out of the tent. She followed. "Nothing seems to change. You men must always have just one look, and they are always there to worship Diana."

"Di-an-ah! Di-an-ah!" She walked past Kendrick to greet her worshippers with arms raised to the sky. Kendrick shook his head, blinked, but spring

flowers definitely emerged out of her footprints. The chanting continued, rising in fervor with each word. “Di-an-ah! Di-an-ah!” All women went to their knees, scratching at the ground. Kendrick thought they might be praying to Diana, to the Goddess, but he soon didn’t care. The bloodied figures scrambled on all fours past their Goddess sending the delicate spring flowers flying.

For a brief horrible moment Kendrick found his legs stiff with terror and confusion. He could only watch them bound towards him, eyes still glowing with the crazed intensity of the possessed. Then with a scream of equal animalistic frenzy, Kendrick ran from the tent and further into the meadow. He paid little attention to the scattered bones half-hidden throughout the tall grass at his feet. All thoughts of age, sex appeal, or power vanished in a rush of adrenaline. Kendrick only dashed through the meadow like the spring deer, the children of Diana the wolves.

Product of Our Fathers

By Dillan Simmons

It's at this exact moment, the same ten stool bar, Georgie eyeing his drink, the bartender watching the TV, that you realize everyone is a product of their fathers. Fathers who made things hell for everyone. Fathers like yours and Georgies. Fathers who left school for logging, and ran the soft bellies of fiberglass boats they stole into sharp shorelines of the Columbia after too much drinking. Fathers that got in fist fights with little league coaches, and spent more time at burnt out places like this place than at home. Those fathers.

"Lets get out of here" you say to Georgie

"Now?" Georgie says "Do what? It's hardly eleven."

Your pulling on your jacket and Georgie grunts, eyes you, and tilts back his drink, a local specialty that's nameless and tastes like gunpowder. Georgie gives your goodbyes to the tiny bartender and the two of you walk out the door. Outside it's cold and a dust of snow has fallen on Main Street, which is lit up in a couple places.

"What are we doing?" Georgie says

"Going home," you say, "I'm sick of this shit"

"Fuck ---" Georgie's thinking hard about it "It's never bad people get run-down by people like us out driving, it's always kids or old men out to get their papers. We ought to stay" Georgie says.

You spit and tighten your eyes in your face, a trick you learned from your father. "You see any fucking kids out here, Georgie?" you ask. "Besides I'm not drunk," you say.

Sparse cars patched in snow line the street like hibernating animals.

You and Georgie get in your tired sedan and you have to work the key in the ignition a while, the wipers still bunching snow off the windshield when

you pull out. An old Neil Young song is playing on the radio and Georgie mumbles along with it in exactly the same way you'd heard your father repeat the lines a long time ago. It's a long drive, and once you hit the little town's edges, trees plug up where the moons coming through the sky. Your mind swings on and off the road, before slipping for just seconds back to warm thoughts of a high school sweetheart that left a long time ago. A high school sweetheart you smoked uneven joints with and made love to on the long shallow backseat. Your head resting gently on the curve between her neck and shoulder, listening to light syllables, her arms draped around you, ...and this is when you hit it. Dug deep in a memory, you hit it going about 35 on a piney road caught between the slopes of two hills on the way home. When it hits, it rolls up and over and you pull the car to the side of the road. Georgie lets out a low, hollow "Jesus" and the two of you get out, sparse damp snows falling in the woods.

The thing is about thirty steps back in the ditch and despite the fact it's dying, it tries hard to raise itself up. You look at Georgie and he lets a long breath roll out in the cold. The two of you start walking forward in a one-sided standoff, wet snow soaking into your sneakers and an acoustic melody coming out of the car. When you get up to it, the big thing tries hard to get up out of the ditch but it doesn't move much. You and Georgie look at it for a long time and it looks right back, its wide eyes like holes in the ground. It sits there just like a man would sit, its three pronged feet curled up in tight fists and a hard pant coming out of its cruel-looking mouth. No cars come by. The two of you notice the snow building up on it and you can't leave it the way it is. You give it one more look, its cruel features, like an old man busted and covered with feathers. Your foot barely covers the head and you feel its little vase of a skull under the thin sole of your sneaker crunch down like a stale loaf of bread under your pressure. When you lift the owl off the ground he's warm and you and Georgie go and lay him under a big pine tree out of view of the road.

"I didn't know they have tongues like that," Georgie says

"We've all got tongues like that" you say.

The two of you trudge back to the car rubbing your hands, your feet wet and the car still playing music. Georgie looks at you over the roof like he's gonna say something but stops, looks past you towards the woods and gets in the car. When you sit down you catch your eyes in the rearview mirror before the dome light clicks out. They're big and tired and for that split second staring down at yourself, the snow closed down around the car, you know everything.

The Funeral

By Marites Castro

We went to a funeral of a young girl. I cannot remember whether it was in a house or a church. What I remember most is that she was not much older than me—perhaps she was ten years old. She was not in a casket. She was laid on a large table which had a solid white cloth and simple lace on top of it. The girl was beautifully dressed in a long white gown which reached down to her ankles. She looked peaceful with her hands folded on top of her stomach.

At first I was scared. Then I realized it was daytime and most of the creatures to be scared of as far as I knew walked in the night. Also, there were many people there and they didn't seem to be running or scared. I walked around the table looking at her and I noticed that she was not wearing any socks or shoes. I looked closely at her feet and saw a couple of ants walking slowly on the bottom of her foot, then to her toes. I thought, "Should I remove the ants? Am I allowed to touch her? I don't think she could feel that." I was hesitant and somewhat fearful. Then I saw the ants crawled up to her leg. By that time, even if I wanted to remove the ants, I did not think it was a good idea to put my hand inside her clothes. So I walked away slowly and quietly.

Stomachache

By Marites Castro

One day I had a stomachache. I talked to someone in the neighborhood who said that she knew the reason and the solution for my stomachache. She said the reason was because someone stared at me intently and somehow gave me what they called the “evil eyes.” The solution she insisted was for me to go to the person who gave it to me. Then the person has to spit on his or her finger and then apply the spit on my stomach. So I started thinking of all the people I met that day but I couldn’t remember who stared at me intently and gave me the “evil eyes.” Then again, if I did find out who gave it to me I wouldn’t go back to that person. I preferred staying away from people who gave other people their “evil eyes.” In time, my stomachache went away.



Visual
Arts



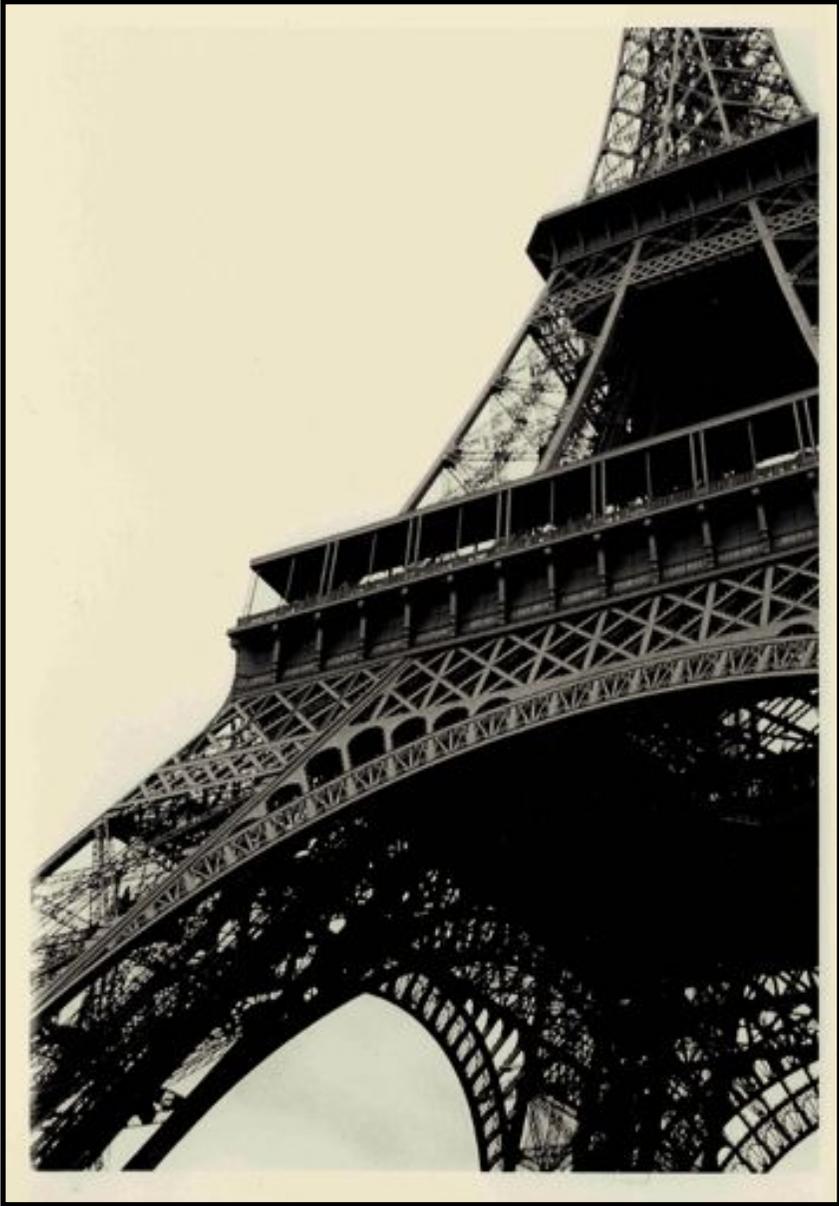
✳ Cuddle Boats

By Megan Trevarthen

Mt. Hood

By Faun Scurlock





Eiffel Tower

By Kimberly Lawrence

Color Tap at Stanford

By Gan Yu





And Down We Go

By Alexandria Chaudoin

Falling

By Isabela J. Oliveira





A Blush of Spring

By Katrina Long

Reach

By Alexandria Chaudoin





Heads at Munsterbasilika-Bonn

By Kimberly Lawrence

Nightly Descent

By Katrina Long





Poetry

✳ Dear Dá

By Alexandra Mackey

You little golfer
You hum-drum man
Whittler of reedy sticks and
iron.

You've hit your balls
From that father green,
that pagan
green eyed dream.

You used to sit in your
amber pulpit and drink
mugs of dirt,
and fill the high ceilings with
that dry laughter drum.

The old beat, and cough
up lungs of smoke, and coal,
and peels of potatoes
which you have swallowed
to stop up the holes
built with lye and cardamom.

Your blue-bell woman sunk beneath
the hills of the vampire women,
left you bare breasted and small,
her red-silk strands tied up with twine
and left on the kitchen table
under a gold ring and a marbled heart-stone

You old bag-of-bones
you just sit
lamenting the good days,
like you are dead already.

You just sit and tell the story of
the sideways trees on that tall
verdant hill, the only place
Sol would touch,
a story I've heard a-hundred
times, like a worker's drone.

These days you sit in your leather throne,
and throw down glasses
of clear acetone-paint thinner,
and see nothing.

You speak in consonants,
and wave around those meaty paws,
but you are not speaking to me,
you haven't said a word in years.

When people ask,
I say
he's gone to live with the pig-people,
he's been boiled down and distilled
into brown-barrel moonshine,
one last payment to those
toothless hoakies,
to whom you sold your health,
heart, liver and spleen.

You left nothing for me,
where am I to step when your footsteps have spilled over
with fetid liquids?

You've drunk away my tears like wicked saccharin
and moaned for more.

I've no more tears
only this loose skin
these empty bones
and a clean liver;
where did you go?

You are not the man
who somersaulted me over
one knee,
or brought me statues
of ash carved into
bears and wolves
and deer.

You've thrown your brain
down a dark stair
and forgotten your children
there at the bottom.

You sad little man,
you squat potato,
I've lost my dá.

I've called off the
search Scotland,
and left my lips
on the blarney stone,
like a scab on
your little potato head.

Everything

By Meagan Lobnitz

Do you see that woman,
Standing in flowers cast by shadow in light-
about my frame, my same, my height

What do you notice
Of her countenance and self
She is...you know.

She is with women and of women both
She lives with (those) women, sleeps with them
(sex) She kisses them, hugs them
Cooks with them, cleans with them
Plots with them, plans with them
She thinks of them, believes in them
Fights with them, eats with them, breathes with them
Loves them.

Do you see that woman,
Standing in the shadows cast by light and flowers-
who shares my passions, reads, and talks to me for hours

What, about her, do you notice
Or pretend not to see
She is...you know.

She grew up in a rough place, the origin of women
and she lives with prophecy and memory
She lives with women as woman and more
Pieces we don't understand, but carefully regard.

She lives with women as woman and more
Pieces we don't understand, but carefully regard.

She kisses, and hugs
Cooks with us, cleans with us
Plots with us, plans with us
Thinks of us, laughs with us, plays with us.
Fights with us, eats with us, breathes with us-
Loves us.

She is...she is my mother. She is...you know; everything.

Invasion

By Taylor Turner

The ground is falling beneath your feet.
Be still in your movements; be quick in your thoughts
Hold on to what awakens you the most
As the world itself falls asleep.
Now is the time; free your guilt from the shackles of your crippling consciousness
Allow your worry to retire with the floating debris
In one swallowing gulp.
Pay no attention to the fear that swells through your veins
As every source of light ceases to be.
Close your eyes, or don't,
And bring forth the brightest illumination that your memory can find
Watch it rise upon a notional horizon,
And bask in its eternal sunshine.
Let the hot rays engulf your spirit as the surrounding landscape crumbles
Into a massive heap of wishes that never came true.
Now is the time; remember the sound of rolling waves
Let them wash over the rumble of tectonic plates breaking in place.
Savor the taste of a lover's tongue
While you bite down on the grit of the earth.
Consent to your heart's monstrous beat, and realize
That this is exactly where you need to be
As the ground is falling beneath your feet.

Estella

By Jabari Abrams

Of all the elements I long for in this kingdom --
the most is fire,
To burn, to catch aflame, to feel the passion --
the fire would be worth it all.

I would have this fire balance my earth,
to warm my cold soil.
To be near is not enough,
But to be consumed, engulfed and scarred is worth the price --
It would be worth the forest fire that may come.
In passion, pain, and pleasure --
to become lost in translation.

Fire's sharp knives are tossed,
The cuts will be counted, oiled, and reopened with abandon.
I would have Aries laugh and Tarsus morn --
at my reckless entry into the flame once again.

In this kingdom, fire warms our hearths,
serves our meals, brings light to our night.
But I, the fool, want to dance with fire --
Knowing that only those who care to be burned have walked my
path.
Oh Gaia! Your daughter has beguiled me!
with light and shadow, fire and spirit!

Of all the elements I long for in this kingdom the most is fire.

Hot Ambition

By Dillan Simmons

It can be night or day,
if it's night
raccoons mess with the garbage,
if it's day
everything's dead in the heat.
The tiny house is always still,
pale.
The tall stone barn
jaded and proud
waits to come down.
Your brother's tired sedan sits in it,
the cracks in its leather smell of high school sweethearts.

All the ground is dips and craters
which wear down the struts and transmissions
of everything,
the work lingers under greasy fingernails.
Bills pile up and the sink, toilet, and dishes double
as ashtrays.
The cellar doorway has caved in on itself, and left
the stairway down a mystery.

You know it all,
the dial tone of the telephone in your ear
the shadow of a locust tree
big and dead in the driveway.

The Dyslexic

By Alisha Briggs

b's are d's
w's are m's
p's are q's
y's are u's
and S's are 3's

Ueay, thi3 i3 mhat bysleixc i3,
pue3tion3?

Early Anticipation

By Emily Ostrowski

As the drip, drip, drip
imbues the pot
with strength I'm sure I'll need.
My fingers fuss,
tap, frantically
in frustration.

Just like the night
we stole sips of cheap wine
to fight the tremble in our bellies,
that flew up into our hearts,
and rattled our ribs,
as we sat
on that worn sofa,
checkered and faded,
with too many juice stains.

My parents
kept it up in the den.
It was good for watching TV.

We inched closer.
Your fingers crept
like the tide
as it sneaks to shore.
I braced myself,
and waited for the splash to come.

Waiting for a Finch

By Teresa Lane

I've seen him, the songbird, the seed-gatherer, the Finch.
I heard him and followed and was cursed.
Finches don't curse but their love does. Their songs do.
Finches will capture pretty maidens from the forest and eat their hearts.
Finches don't ask for a maiden's love, they don't wait for it.

Finches don't wait, they only take and leave.

I introduced myself, *Hello, Finch, I am nothing but a small nymph.*
I followed him. The path was short and steep.
I felt my heart, I felt it through my hands and there it was.
I held my own heart and followed the Finch into a cage.
He left me there and there I waited.

I cried, *Dearest, where did you go?*
But the Finch did not respond.

I cried, *Dearest, why did you leave?*
The Finch simply said, *To gather seeds.*
Yet he came back with none.

I cried. I cried but the Finch did not know.
I tried to keep my heart warm with what the Finch brought back,
it was not much.
I drew the sun and showed him but he did not look.
I loved him but not the cage.

I tried giving.
I gave him what was left,
eventually the heart from my hands.
The Finch did not notice.

I spent days in the cage, cold, nothing to hold,
no maiden bow and arrow,
no dragon to ride home.

I stayed, yet the Finch did not notice.
I lost everything but hope,
And then that too left.

The Finch disappeared for days on end.
I called for him but he never came.
You can't call a songbird, the songbird will call you.
He never did.

tap.tap.tap.tap.tap.

By Isabela J. Oliveira

My fingers curl.
I tap them, keeping
perfectly timed rhythm on
the chair's arm.

I stop. I resist.

Tap.

I touch my hair.
Just once. I swear.
No - not once,
lots of times.

Gotta stay symmetrical.

Tap. Tap.

I touch my face with
one index finger.
I hold back. A few labored minutes
later - I brush my skin
with the other hand.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

I picture my mother dying
by breaking her neck on the
open kitchen drawer. I close
the drawer softly. I wipe down
the counter. Better.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.

There is something hiding
in my closet. It wants to kill
me. I check in on it
five times. I sleep,
facing the firmly shut door.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.

I resist.

I breathe five breaths.

Tap.

Fukushima

By Linda Augustine

Nine Point

Oh, Sister Fuji...

I watch and my heart crumbles.

My sadness streams like pyroclastic mud.

My old scars, which now define my uniquely stunted profile,

were once considered earth-shaking,

but now seem meager next to your ordeal.

Your face remains the beauty

even as your body is defiled

by God and man.

My precious mirror—

My shadow of twin serenity—

For you my tears flow like glacial ice.

This day my sorrow knows no bound.

El ángel disfrazado

By María Lee-López

En este hermoso país
hay ángeles por todos lados
para contrarrestar la furia
de oscuros y de malvados
uno disfrazado de homeless
me ayudó con mis ensayos
y me enseñó en segundos
los conocimientos básicos
tenía una barba muy blanca
y sus ojos azulados
cuando encontraron los míos
por un laberinto entramos
pero yo tan distraída
y miedosa con mi ensayo
olvidé al ayudante
mientras escribía el relato
y cuando terminé
ya el ángel había volado
desde entonces yo lo busco
entre los de Down Town

Mamma Says

By Tamasen Tervo

He died
I don't understand

Mamma says
God has His plan
He makes
Daisies
From the dirt

I miss him so

You will
Never forget
But rain must come
In the desert
To make things grow

What about when
I told him to go away
And made him cry
I'll never forget
That

Mamma says
That grass grows
New again
After fires

What will I do without him

God will hold you
Water always trickles
Down
To fill the cracks

I sit on the tire swing
And stare
At the sunset

In Name Only

By Meagan Lobnitz

I thought I caught a whiff
of his smoky breath
in the wind I choked on,
and then I knew
This wasn't my air to breathe at all.

the wave

By Isabela J. Oliveira

a man once tried
to capture the ocean,
tried to make it
huddle in a quiet,

sleeping hunk of copper.
he tried and failed.
it kneaded in on
itself in rumbling anger,

a quivering green mass.
the man nudged it
and it recoiled, only
to change course, mutate

into its true form -
a roiling white-capped wave
that bent over him,
to drag him out

to
the
infinite
calm.

Para ti...

By Mayra Najera

Sólo quiero que quieras estar conmigo, a mi alrededor, cerca de mí

Te amo y estoy sufriendo más de lo que sabes

Quizá lo que más me duele es mi incapacidad de expresión

Ni todo el lenguaje del mundo me es suficiente

Para contarte de éste dolor y de ésta angustia

O quizá el miedo de decir en voz alta lo que llevo dentro me detiene

¿Acaso no soy lo que esperabas?

Dime como serlo

Dime lo que necesitas de mi, lo que quieres que yo cambie

Haría cualquier cosa por sentir tu amor, que realmente me amas

La sal de mis lagrimas arde mientras corre por mi cara,

Como si mi rostro fuera formada por un millón de heridas abiertas

Mi corazón está herido y solo tu tienes el poder de sanarlo

Sólo quiero que quieras estar conmigo, a mi alrededor, cerca de mí

Te amo y estoy sufriendo más de lo que sabes

Untitled

By Kelly Schrock

I.

Somewhere a car alarm goes off
We both find ourselves glancing vaguely in its direction
knowing we will be hearing its mechanical cursing
until the battery dies.

I hitch up my back pack,
take your hand.
and we walk downtown
to find a meal.

The storefronts are filled with dust
and broken mannequins—
arms bent at impossible angles
naked, empty eyes staring somewhere over our shoulders.

We reach the closest Fred Meyers
automatic doors have long ceased to open for us
So we go through the back doors,
the ones that say:
Emergency exit. Alarm will sound.

The alarm doesn't sound anymore.

Distantly, faintly
the car bleats its death rattles
a mechanical cry for help
we both know will never come.

This store is nearly empty of food,
we'll have to start frequenting somewhere else,
or this winter will be long
and hungry.

We pick through the broken glass and toppled shelves
to find some cans that aren't too dented
I pick Chunky Soup: Creamy Clam Chowder
you pick a can of beans, and a couple of Styrofoam cups of
soup.

The car alarm is our companion on the walk home
a scream welling— discordant, insistent,
beckoning us home like a siren song.
I find myself wishing I had picked up cigarettes.

We marvel at the blackberry bush
that has taken over the Wells Fargo
and the pack of feral cats
living in the Hilton.

We return to the home we have settled down in
at first we liked the jacuzzi tub
and spacious walk-in closet.
Those things have lost their appeal.

We stay because we're used to it.
We heat up the soup and some water on our camp stove
and share the green beans
in silence.

Somewhere,
the car alarm howls into the empty night
lower, softer notes now
like a record played on too low of speed.

I've run out of books to read,
and you've filled every wall in this house with your paintings.
As the sun sets,
we realize we have nothing left to do.

So we sleep, the car alarm singing us a lullaby.
I hope the damn thing dies before morning.

II.

The long, cold winter
left you with a limp
from when you slipped on ice
going to get firewood

We have teeth like sailors,
bleeding gums
from the lack of limes, lemons
fresh fruit

We laugh at our own scars and crippled bodies,
But sometimes we wonder,
if it would really be so bad
had we not survived.

the stores are all out of
edible food
the cans have all been smashed
the boxes chewed on by rats.

Spring comes at last
the ice melts,
and the buds form on
the naked branches.

The ground finally thaws enough
to till
and I start work on that garden
I talked about all winter.

Using that yellowed,
dog-eared book
from the library
you do your best to forage

But neither of us could get
a taste for
choke cherries, Oregon grapes
or thistle root

we gnaw on them anyway
too stupid, too scared
to let our bodies
just quit.

Like the old man down the road
with all his guns
and that dog he loved so much
who lived off his body

until it was too spoiled
by grubs and mold to gnaw anymore.

We dug him a grave
beneath the oak tree
to remind ourselves
there is a way out.

Bad Noise

By Dillan Simmons

The taxidermist is thinking of the girl he knew long ago, her round nude figure clouding his thoughts. Fabricating blood red faces on long dead creatures. The little town surrounded by a sea of wheat that comes down and comes back every year. The tiny rooms, old rooms, old houses. Loaded guns next to bed stands, denim, and private breakdowns in smoke lined bathrooms. Your hundred pound heart trying to stir up a dying pit fire with empty beer cans. The coals starring you down, old wood that burns black and smells like asphalt. The pastors rousing speeches “even this hollow church will be washed away” he claims. His daughter sits there chewing on her lip looking out the window. It ends with amen and the men and women stand, you thinking what hell must look like, filing out the door, where young kids on bikes are pedaling out of town.

Consider the Apple

By E. Regina McMenomy

Did Eve consider the apple
before she took the first bite?
Did she weigh it in her hand
ponder its smooth red surface
rub her thumb over it
before she plunged her teeth into its flesh?

Or was it a green apple?
Hard and grainy, difficult to chew
stinging her tongue.
Did she spit it out, repulsed by the
bitter nature of green?

Or did she dive in?
Grabbing the first one she saw
feeling its juice burst forth
bubbling at the corners of her mouth.
Did her tongue linger there
savoring its sudden sweetness?

Perhaps it was yellow.
The skin gives beneath her teeth
with barely a protest, and the honey
like meat slips down her throat.
Did she lick the white flesh
feeling over the ridges left by her teeth
wondering what other flesh she might taste?

Maybe it was pink.
With a tart skin and crisp sweet body,
tasting of cool nights and warm days.
Confused by the combination
did she abandon her endeavor
after a single bite?

Or did she eat the core?
Not knowing to stop at the seeds
they snap beneath the pressure.
Did she wonder if this was the means to procreation
take the apple, eat the seed, and one becomes two?
In her primal heart she would know
Adam's rib was the myth
she was created to destroy.

A Spirit (Of Female or Gin)

By Teresa Lane

My body's that of the primordial serpent,
sinful sweet and sour,
corrupt and calling calling
calling for you
while I'm damnable and undressing.

This tongue's curved like glass,
twisted like these trappings,
metals and jewels and me—
all stripped of my underthings.

You drink from my cup,
you take my hands and descend.

We deprave, crave,
philander, grip and hold

and I ravish. I ravish you—
leave you sleeping in the night,
naked yet still lascivious.

I leave you bad, the best kind of unholy.

Tithonus

By Alexandra Mackey

I saw the trees breathing,
 You had left,
buttoned and combed to work
and left me lying on the bed.

After you left I played a game,
 I pretended I had become
 part of the bedsheet.
It started with the window,
 its seams had melded
 into the wall behind it,
the air seemed to puff in,
like puffer-fish belly skin,
 but it wasn't the air,
 It was the trees.

Their verdant masses expanded
 and stretched before me
like a big tent circus show.

I might be a shadow,
 we are so small,
 like ants,
 but the ants always seem
like they have someplace to go.
Maybe I am more like the Cicada.

I watched a nature show where they said the cicada
lays dormant beneath the earth,
or in hollow trunks
for thirteen years
before a great feast,
they just exhale in plumes of beating wings
and consume vast fields of wheat.

Imagine witnessing that great migration,
standing on the edge of that field
and seeing nothing
but black dew eyes.

What would it be like to lay dormant all that time,
like an extended hibernation,
like some kind of Tithonus trick;
Immortality under Zeus' big nose,
the sleep of youth.
We'd gorge ourselves for months
on meats and breads
and go to bed looking like pink balloons.
Imagine the silence of a city in complete idleness.

I fear we'd be the last two awake in the world,
I just couldn't take the two of us
lying side by side
like a Tweedle Dee
and Tweedle Dum freak show.

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