Editor’s Note

I am not particularly fond of birds, but I like the idea of them, which is why I decided this year’s theme for the journal would be “Flight.” To me, this means three things. First, flight is the idea of taking off from one level to another, higher level. In my metaphor-prone mind, I see writers as people who take their ideas from the ground up. It’s a cliché, but the sky really is the limit. The second meaning of flight—and this one is much more personal to me—is the idea of flying away, of leaving one place and moving on to another. I graduate this May, and I couldn’t think of a better way to describe leaving Widener other than flying high.

Finally, I see flight, and in particular the birds on the cover, as a flock of artists. The people who have worked on this book and who are published in it are amazing. I couldn’t have asked for a better team. I see this group of people—these editors, writers, and artists—as a flock. Artists need to stand together, to build each other up. Collaboration and support are two things that are very important to me, and I think the birds on the cover really hold that meaning.

I want to thank a giant list of people now, so bear with me. First and foremost, my staff. It’s been a great year, and I know that you are all probably sick of my endless emails. However, I hope you know that I enjoyed working with each one of you, and I am so grateful to have had your talents on this staff. I want to thank our advisors, Dr. Kenneth Pobo and Jeannine McKnight. Both of your guidance throughout the *Widener Ink* process (and your guidance throughout my time at Widener) has been more than helpful to me. Thank you so much.

Erik Bjorken deserves all the flowers in the world. He designed the cover, which was a huge load off of my shoulders. I am eternally indebted to you, sir. Thanks a million times over. I want to give a special thanks to Debbie Perreca and Melanie Franz for their help on the design and layout side of the process. I would also like to thank Lone Brick Theatre and Maria Klecko for their help in producing our promotional podcast. That was totally awesome. Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their support. It’s not every day your child decides to pursue novel writing as a career. I would not be here today if it wasn’t for them and their undying and unyeilding support. Happy reading!

Editor-in-Chief

Autumn Heisler
Widener Ink is Widener University’s student-operated print journal. The mission of *Widener Ink* is to celebrate diversity through artistic expression by welcoming and embracing writers from all backgrounds and interests. *Widener Ink* does not accept submissions from non-Widener University students.

This journal is a compilation of Widener University student fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, drama, and art. It does not represent Widener University’s opinions and/or viewpoints. The content of *Widener Ink* is the work of the individual writers and may not be reproduced without expressed written consent. The editorial staff of *Widener Ink* reserves the right to make any grammatical and formatting corrections it deems necessary.
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College Fridays
Taylor Brown

The fellowship of chin to bowl:
my knees on the cold tile—
flushing away any semblance of soul.

The night guards go on patrol,
a blind eye to the teenage lifestyle—
the fellowship of chin to bowl.

The door opens to usher in the mold
of those that chose to stand trial—
flushing away any semblance of soul.

The cups are thrust and hold
an unknown concoction of frat guy’s guile—
the fellowship of chin to bowl.

The music booms and extols
the behavior that only leads to bile—
flushing away any semblance of soul.

I know my place in the whole,
but still I’ll stay awhile—
the fellowship of chin to bowl
flushing away any semblance of soul.
Sarah tried to ignore her twisted frown in the dark window as she focused on the twinkling red and green lights. Of course they had to choose the only diner facing a field and not a busy street. Of course they had to be seated under the air vent, and Sarah was without her cardigan. Of course the diner had to be out of apple pie.

“Sarah, will you please look at me?” Bobby pleaded as he reached his hand across the table, but she quickly pulled her hand to her lap, avoiding his gaze. He let out a huff of annoyance and sipped at his coffee. She couldn’t understand how Bobby drank coffee, black coffee especially, and at all hours of the day, yet he could sleep a solid eight hours whenever he wanted to. Sarah was a tea person, and by that she meant tea is tolerable once four packets of sugar are dumped in and the liquid is lukewarm. Bobby always said to her that she wasn’t living if she couldn’t appreciate a “good cup of joe” at two in the morning. In turn, Sarah retorted that if she was up at two in the morning then she was, in fact, living.

“I didn’t mean to catch you off guard, okay?” Bobby tried again, running his fingers through his styled, suspiciously black hair. When Sarah first met him she could have sworn it was dyed since no one could have hair that black, but he assured her that it was natural. His word didn’t matter though, because for months she would scrutinize his hair, checking to see if the roots continued to match the rest.

Lost in that memory, Sarah wound up doing what she vowed she wouldn’t do—look at Bobby; she knew she couldn’t contain herself if she did look at him. Bobby, noticing what and where she was looking, smirked, momentarily amused by Sarah’s train of thought. “I’m not going gray, am I?” Bobby joked.

Shaking her head slightly and blinking into focus, she pointed a glare at the smartass. “You’re going bald, actually.”

Bobby faked a gasp and brought a hand up to head, patting down the strands. “Oh no! Looks like I’ll have to invest in some Rogaine.” Sarah scoffed and turned her head back to the window, trying to fight the smirk that threatened to appear on her face. There’s no way she would give Bobby that satisfaction.
So many times Bobby got the satisfaction of Sarah’s smirk, her laugh, her appreciation of his jokes. So many occasions of lying on the floors of their apartments, books scattered and forgotten in place of their various conversations, of thoughts never admitted but feelings expressed, smiles shared. So many occasions of actions that won’t be forgotten anytime soon.

“I’m not going to apologize, you know, because I do,” Bobby stated after a few moments, trying to make eye contact through Sarah’s copper hair. Sarah rolled her eyes. Apologize, of course he would say that. Typically, Sarah would be the one saying she wouldn’t apologize; she was always so stubborn, too much for her own good, really. Bobby should have known how she would take this; it was silly of him to think otherwise.

A tick of silence fell between the two, the sounds of silverware clinking against plates and the diner’s cash register dinging in the background. Sarah thought back to the last time they were at this diner, a little past one in the morning, buzzed from just seeing a concert, Bobby pumping his veins with coffee, Sarah munching at a slice of apple pie. It seemed that they always found themselves at diners, and Sarah wasn’t complaining. She loved the charm of the secluded booths and cheap food at all hours of the night. Almost as if they entered a scene in a movie about two young adults finding their place in the world.

“All that I ask is that you really look at me, okay?” Bobby tried again, his hands hugging the mug of coffee in front of him. Sarah let out a sigh, turning her head to meet his gaze. Bobby’s amber-brown eyes pleaded with her, a look Sarah didn’t see often. Bobby’s eyes often looked thoughtful or calculating. He mostly looked at Sarah with amusement or adoration, and only on some occasions—like when it was four in the morning and the world was being tough and they were out of coffee—were they sad. But now, with his eyes wide, eyebrows furrowed at the center, mouth quirked downward, Sarah realized he might actually be worried.

Sarah reached her hand across the table to gently stroke his fingers curled around the mug, shaking her head slightly, keeping her eyes on the napkin dispenser. She spoke slowly, “You’re so cheesy, and I’m mad at you for putting me in this situation, but, I love you too, loser.”
The Noisy Neighbors

Emily DeFreitas

Characters

KARLY is a college junior and a feminist.

LAURA is a college sophomore who is deeply involved in her relationship with Ben. She has a challenging chemistry test in the morning and has been unable to study until the start of the play.

BEN is Karly’s ex and Laura’s current boyfriend and abuser. He is more manipulative and emotionally abusive than physically, but he makes life difficult for Laura.

Setting

A college dormitory at 1 A.M. The stage is split down the middle, with KARLY’s dorm room stage left, and LAURA’s stage right. Each room is decorated differently per the girls’ different tastes. There is no connecting door between the two as they are not roommates; they’re only neighbors. The door to each bedroom leading to their dormitory hallway is along the back of the stage. Because of this, whenever characters go out into the “hallway,” they are not visible to the audience.

The curtains open revealing LAURA staring at a textbook on her bed and KARLY at her desk, typing furiously.

KARLY: (Reading what she’s written.) Noah, of The Notebook, is at times a textbook example of a manipulator. Early in the film, he threatens suicide to make Allie to go out with him and twists the scene with lines like “I don’t want any favors” to get Allie to say that she not only will go out with him but also wants to. She’s responding out of fear.

BEN: (Knocking on the door to LAURA’s room.) Laura! (He knocks again.) Hey, Laura, come on. I said I was sorry. I need you, Laura.

KARLY hears BEN knocking and glares at the wall separating the two rooms.
LAURA: *(Getting up from her bed.)* I’m coming! *(Opens the door and gives BEN a hug.)* Look, you were right. It was my fault. I’m sorry.

BEN: OK. You know it hurts me when you do that. I’m not sure I can keep going like this much longer.

LAURA: Don’t say that—you’ve made it this far. *(Long pause.)* Listen, Ben, I have a test…

BEN: I did too. I failed, and I feel awful about it. I can’t do anything right.

LAURA: Ben! That’s not true. It’s going to be OK. I’d like to talk about this. I really want to. I haven’t been able to study much though, and… *(BEN sinks to the floor and covers his face with his hands.)* No, Ben, I’m sorry! It’s going to be OK.

LAURA rubs BEN’s back and kisses his forehead.

BEN: *(Without revealing his face.)* No, it’s not! People always say that, but things never work out for me. *(BEN reaches over and puts a hand on LAURA’s thigh.)* They never do.

KARLY: *(Pausing her typing again to read.)* The way he asks her out should not be portrayed as a sign of a happy relationship but rather as a sign of bad things to come. *(LAURA kisses BEN gently. BEN kisses her back with force, crushing her to him. She keeps her eyes open, staring at her chemistry text book.)* Someone who is willing to manipulate just for a date is probably willing to manipulate to prevent rejection in other forms too, including sexual rejection.

LAURA: Look, Ben, I want to cheer you up. But this test...

BEN: It’s OK.

LAURA: It is?

BEN: I shouldn’t expect you to be there for me. That’s not fair. Most people aren’t there anyway, so why should you be?
LAURA: Ben, that’s—

BEN: Fuck off. (He stomps out of the room and slams the door.)

LAURA: Ben! (LAURA follows him out and the door slams again. The audience can no longer see LAURA and BEN, but their voices are loud.) I’m so sorry, Ben. Please, come back. I can study later. This is more important.

BEN: Then put your book away, and listen to me!

KARLY gets up and throws up her hands. She puts on a set of headphones.

LAURA: I will, I promise. Just come back.

BEN: You do this all the time. You ignore me right when I need you. This isn’t going to work if you keep on doing this. I’ve put up with you for a while, but not everyone would.

LAURA: I know. It’s stupid of me to be so selfish. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me. It won’t happen again. You have my full attention.

BEN: All right, but I don’t want to see your textbook.

LAURA: OK. OK, I’ll put it away.

BEN: Right now.

LAURA: I’m working on it!

LAURA and BEN both return to the room, and the door slams again behind them. KARLY jumps up at the sound, removes her headphones, and exits her room into the hallway. She knocks on LAURA’s door.

KARLY: I’m working on a paper, guys. Could you keep it down?

LAURA: (Shouting) Sure, sorry about that!
KARLY returns to her room and reads over what she’s written. While KARLY is talking, LAURA and BEN move to the bed and sit together.

KARLY: A manipulator is completely self-absorbed and has no regard for the other person’s needs, feelings, or problems. He or she has to have attention at all times. There is no such thing as healthy manipulation in a relationship. Allie is right to reject Noah initially for his reckless, inconsiderate attempt to ask her out.

LAURA: So... tell me about your test. What happened?

BEN: It was horrible. I definitely failed.

LAURA: Did you get to study at all?

BEN: I’m not lazy! I studied. None of it made sense though, and I spent the whole class trying to read Nancy’s paper. I don’t get why the girl engineers always know their shit, but they do.

LAURA: Maybe you could ask her to help you study for the next one?

BEN: It wouldn’t work. She hates me. Everyone hates me.

LAURA: That’s not true. I like you. I like you a lot.

BEN: No, maybe a little. You’re always studying though. You never pay any attention to me.

LAURA: That’s not true!

LAURA kisses BEN while KARLY reads.

KARLY: Worse, it is easy to mistake manipulation for passion, which the writers of *The Notebook* seem to do over and over again. While it is true that even the best couples fight, their fights do not look like this. Couples in healthy relationships do not have a fight every time they see each other. I’ve seen...
KARLY backspaces. BEN throws himself on top of LAURA, and they roll off the bed, dropping behind it, no longer visible to the audience.

LAURA: Ben! (LAURA sits up and is visible to the audience again.)

BEN: What?

LAURA: Not tonight, OK? Can we just talk about what’s upsetting you? I want to, it’s just...

BEN: All you care about is that goddamn test.

LAURA: Ben! If I fail this one, I might fail the class, and it’s not offered for another two years.

BEN: So? You’ll still be going here.

LAURA: It’s a prerequisite for half my classes next semester!

BEN: Take it over the summer then.

LAURA: I’m working full time then. Ben, I’m not going to fail this course, because I didn’t study when I could have.

KARLY has been listening and walks to the door, grasping the handle, then returns to her seat as if she’s changed her mind about something. She reads.

KARLY: The scariest part is that when that happens to a person, he or she often does not see what is happening. It can take something big to jolt you out of it, to break the cycle of manipulation. (Beat.) Damn it. Stupid second person. (KARLY backspaces.)

BEN stands up and pulls out a pocket knife. He holds his wrist out and presses the knife to it without drawing blood.

LAURA: Ben, please! Don’t! I’m sorry. I’m so so sorry. I know you need me. Please. I’m sorry!
BEN: It fucking hurts to be ignored like this, Laura!

LAURA: I don’t want to hurt you. I really don’t. Please, put that away.

BEN: Why should I?

LAURA: Because you’re hurting yourself! Here, I’ll take it. (LAURA tries to take the knife from BEN, who holds on tightly to it.) Let go!

BEN: No! It’s mine. (They wrestle briefly.) Get off, you stupid bitch! (BEN shoves her to the floor with force.)

LAURA: OW! BEN! Please, I’m sorry!

KARLY stands up again. She exits her room and the audience hears her knock on LAURA’s door.

LAURA: Sorry! Are we being too loud?

KARLY: Yes. Can you open the door?

BEN: Don’t open it.

KARLY: I’m getting the RA if you don’t.

BEN: Shut up. (To LAURA) She’s just jealous.

KARLY: Want me to skip the RA and go straight to campus safety? (LAURA opens the door, and KARLY holds it open with her foot.) Laura, you can come study in my room. My roommate’s over at her boyfriend’s. She won’t mind if you use her desk.

BEN: Fuck off, bitch.

KARLY: No, YOU fuck off! Don’t think you can do this to me one year, and then turn around a year later and act the same way with someone else, especially someone who lives next door, who I know, deserves better.
BEN: You miss me, don’t you? You’re jealous.

KARLY: No, I’m not jealous. Actually, I feel sorry for you, Laura. You deserve better than this jerk. Has he threatened to kill himself yet? Has he told you he’s depressed, and then tried to have sex with you, and then made you feel too guilty to say no? Does he make you text him during class and get angry when you don’t text back, even if you have a test that day? Does he make you feel guilty for taking care of yourself? Trust me, I’m glad I’m not dating that asshole anymore. You know, he used to pretend he was going to cut himself in front of me. He never actually did it, though.

BEN grabs his backpack from the floor and slips past KARLY, out the door.

KARLY: (Cont’d., laughing) That’s right. Leave. Get the fuck out of here!

LAURA: He’ll come back.

KARLY: I know. That’s why I’m calling the RA. Why don’t you study in my room? I’m working on a paper anyway, so I’ll stay out of your hair.

LAURA: Um... I guess I could for a little while. Thanks, Karly.

They walk to KARLY’s room and sit down to do their separate work. BEN bangs on the door.

BEN: Laura? I know you’re in there. I’m not leaving ‘til you come out. (He bangs again.)

KARLY: (Taking out her phone.) Maybe we should just go straight to campus safety.

LAURA: No! It’ll be OK. Let me talk to him.

KARLY: That’s what he wants. Don’t give him that.

BEN: (Bangs again.) Don’t do this to me, Laura. Please. I love you. I’ll be so good to you, I promise.
LAURA: *(Stands up and looks at the door.)* You don’t understand—he’s depressed.

KARLY: Depressed, my ass! Did you not hear what I said a minute ago? He did the exact same thing to me. Said he was depressed. Said he had suicidal thoughts. Said he cut himself when he was sad. I knew real people with actual depression who actually did real self harm. I saw their cuts. I never saw a single scratch on him, and we were dating. It’s not like he was hiding it under something.

LAURA: What if you’re wrong, though? What if he really is depressed, and the one time no one’s there for him he... he doesn’t make it.

KARLY: Do you want to study for that test of yours or not?

BEN: I just want to see your beautiful face one more time, Laura. I’ll let you study, I promise.

KARLY: He’s lying.

LAURA: *(Starts to cry.)* What do I do?

KARLY: You can spend the night in here if it makes you feel safer. If he knocks again, I’m happy to call campus safety. Do what’s best for you for once, OK? I heard you earlier. It sounds like you really need to study. *(BEN knocks again. KARLY shouts.)* I’M CALLING CAMPUS SAFETY. *(KARLY dials her phone.)*

BEN: Shit!

LAURA: Are you sure? Why not just try the RA first?

KARLY: That’s who I’m actually calling. He stopped though, didn’t he? Let me worry about him, OK? Take care of yourself for a little while.

LAURA: *(Nods shakily.)* I’ll try.

END
Sarmassophobia
Sierra Offutt

(n.) An irrational fear of dating

I put men on pedestals—more like tightropes than wooden blocks—destined to fall, with no safety net below; only solid, bone-shattering reality.
After brushing her teeth and washing her face, Meg glanced at her contact lenses. They were encased in a bubbly substance that sanitized them after each day’s wear. She took the contacts out one at a time. They curled upwards. Their side views were like a half moon, transparent, on her fingertip. The contact hugged her eye when she inserted it. When she looked at herself in the mirror, she smiled at the sharp image looking back at her.

As a young adult, Meg fusses about the days when her eyes hurt from the contacts. She’d wear her black thick-rimmed glasses with a scowl on her face, no matter how many times her boyfriend told her she looked beautiful in them. That was how they first met. She hated the contraption that looped behind her ears and lay across the bridge of her nose. She felt as though her eyes were seat-belted in for a long ride.

Her fingers tapped the light-switch off on her way out. Her bare feet softly padded against the dark Brazilian hardwood floor in their bedroom. Meg’s gaze fell onto Leo’s body in bed, spread out so that he took up all the space. He looked so peaceful; she couldn’t help but stare.

“Hi?”

The voice was deep and quiet, and the question had to be repeated about three times before she realized she was being addressed. Her eyes shot up over the top of her David Nicholls novel. Snowflakes powdered his hair; his cheeks and nose were spotted with red from the cold outside, but his eyes were eager, alight with humor. Meg placed her book down with a shy smile, “Oh, hi. Sorry! Am I in your way?”

“What are you doing reading a novel in the travel section?” With his hands in his pockets, he pushed them outwards so that his jacket flared out like a cape.

From her small, shy smile slowly surfaced a cheeky grin. “Do you have a problem with that?”

“Would you like to grab some coffee?”

“Do I really have a choice?”
September 19, 2013

His dark lashes fluttered, igniting a thrill within her that made her scurry away into the walk-in closet. But when she reappeared, carrying her shoes so as to not make a sound, she found Leo propped up in bed already. His eyes scanned her body from toe to face. Meg lowered her eyes to the ground. “Sorry, honey. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“You didn’t. I was already awake.”

“Oh.” She slipped her shoes on, the heels clicking in place as she righted herself. “I was going to head to the library. You want to come?”

“You’re going to the library dressed like that?”

“I just felt like dressing up.”

“Huh. You never dress up for me.”

“That’s not true,” she lied. Feeling the heat rise to her cheeks, she walked closer to her exit. She heard his weight shift in bed, the pounding of his feet following her down the steps.

“When will you be back?” he asked.

Meg turned to face him but looked at the painting hanging in the hallway behind his earlobe. Leo painted it. Leo used to accompany her to the library. Leo did a lot of things before becoming what he became. “For lunch, definitely. Maybe you’ll whip up something nice!”

“It’s Saturday, my day off. Wouldn’t you rather eat out?”

“I would suggest you meet me at a restaurant, but you always say that nowhere measures up to your place.”

“I’ll just get a salad. And drown the disgusting taste with bottles of wine.”

She felt his smile; he was trying to lighten the mood. But this was just not the way. Her body went rigid, her gaze turned to the window. “You know wine is not the answer.”

“Come on, Meg. Two years already. Two years sober. When will you stop hanging it over my head?”

“When you stop hanging it over mine.”

January 18, 2006

Coffee turned to dinner, which then turned to drinks and salsa. Leo led her by the hand onto the crowded dance floor. Eyes glared at their bumping bodies. They were stiff where everyone else was fluid, commanding the space with swirls and dips. Meg swayed innocently with Leo after a few failed
attempts at salsa. They backed themselves up into a corner where they were out of the way.

Her arms looped around his neck, his hands on her sides. She looked out at everyone else and then tipped her head back to catch his gaze. “Why do we suck so much!?”

“If someone hadn’t insisted on going home to change out of her glasses, maybe we would be experts right now.”

“I don’t think so. We’re hopeless either way.”

His hands snaked up her arms and gently removed her hands from his shoulders. He led her back to the bar. “This is something that I think we both know how to do.” Limes were placed into the palms of their hands, and Leo shook some salt over his hand.

Her eyes widened and a laugh erupted from her. “Tequila shots?”

“Why not? Loosen up, Meg.”

September 19, 2013

Meg returned from the library promptly at lunchtime, like she said. Her eyes itched, as if begging her to take off her contacts. She was surprised to enter a house filled with the aroma of pasta. “Leo?” Her fingers felt along the pale yellow walls as she made her way into the kitchen. She passed the dining room, their wedding china set placed on two square place mats. A small trace of a smile began to form on her face. However, when she rounded the corner and found him slumped by the stove with an empty bottle of Merlot in his hands, her face dropped.

He looked up at her, but all she could stare at was the bottle in his hands. His voice pleaded, “Why don’t you look at me anymore?”

She saw. Through her blurring vision, she saw it. She saw the months of rehabilitation. She saw the lies and setbacks. She saw the day he really let go. The day they found out she couldn’t conceive. Meg saw it all. Meg dropped to her knees and sat down next to him. She willed her eyes to look at his face; she forced her hand to take his in hers and with a heavy heart she whispered, “I’m looking.”
A Holding Hand

Carolyn Lodge

Your hands look lonely.
I’ve seen their perfect match.
I see them every time
you look my way,
catch my eye.
I look down
and I sit there blushing,
wondering.
Do you think
my hands
look lonely too?

Beadwork

Nick Demberger
“Mrs. Coldwell, Anna, I would like you to take a look at this footage and listen to this audio recording, and tell me what we are watching. Do you recognize these people?”

“Yes. That’s my husband and his... mistress.”

“What are they doing here?”

Henry was nervous. It was an excited nervousness, but he was still nervous. She was going to be here soon. His lover was going to be here soon. Everything had to be perfect. This was the first time she would be over to his home. The home he should be sharing with his wife. But his wife was out of town for the weekend, leaving him to enjoy some time alone. Henry hated being alone.

The doorbell rang. There she was, staring back at him when he opened the door, a coy smile playing on her lips. Her beauty froze Henry for a moment, and he just stood there, mouth open, eyes like a deer caught in the headlights of a car.

“May I come in?” Her words were so innocent that they awoke him from his trance. Henry stepped aside, allowing Christina to enter past him. She smiled, taking in the entire apartment, nodding her approval. He smirked, gently sliding her out of her coat, sneaking a few kisses onto her neck as he did so.

“Please, come sit,” he said, pulling out a chair at the dining room table for her. She took it eagerly, eyeing the place settings that were laid out for the two of them. “How was your day?” he asked, resting his elbows on the table, allowing him to lean closer to her, his nostrils getting a whiff of her floral perfume. He sighed in contentment as she giggled.

“You know how my day was, silly. We work together. Your desk is a mere ten feet from mine. I saw you eyeing me the entire workday. I doubt you were able to get any work done,” she smiled, her eyes lighting up when she teased him. He smiled sheepishly when he realized he was caught.

“I can’t help it. You’re just so gorgeous!” He smiled, scooping her up suddenly into his lap, attacking her with kisses. She squirmed and tried to push away from him.
“No, stop it! Dinner first. We can do this later!” Her cries finally got him to stop, and she returned to her own chair, wheezing and gasping for breath. Henry suddenly got up and grabbed the dinner from the kitchen. He placed the spaghetti and garlic bread on the table and scooped some onto his plate. He smiled, watching her do the same. Being polite, he waited until she was ready to begin before he started eating.

“Wait! We must say grace,” Christina insisted, placing her hand on his, his fork halfway between the plate and his mouth. He was surprised that a woman who was with a cheating man was into religion, but he obliged.

After dinner they retired to the living room. Christina acted incredibly giggly as she sipped her third glass of wine.

“Hey, Henry, what did ya’ get me for our three-month anniversary?” she asked, smiling as she rocked closer to him. His eyes widened in a panic, but he hid it from her. He took a deep breath and pushed her off of him.

“It’s in my room, sweetheart. I’ll be right back. I just need to grab it,” he said. He rushed into the bedroom and quickly rifled through his wife’s jewelry box, searching for something that he could give to his girlfriend. He smiled when he found a diamond necklace.

“Anna never wears this anymore; she won’t even realize it’s gone.” Proud of himself, Henry returned to the living room. “Close your eyes sweetheart.” He smiled, coming around behind the couch and clasping it onto Christina’s dainty neck. It rested beautifully on her collarbone. It looked far better on her than it ever did on his wife. Christina jumped up in excitement, and as she did so, she dropped her glass on the ground. It shattered as she rushed to the bathroom to look in the mirror. Henry followed, leaning against the doorframe.

“Oh my love, it’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen!” She ran into his arms, attacking him with kisses. He hoisted her up, brought her into the hallway, and pushed her against the wall, the kisses deepening as they went. They both pulled away, taking a moment to breathe. “Bedroom?” she asked. He smirked and nodded, carrying her into the bedroom he shared with his wife. Henry threw Christina onto the bed and pounced.

Anna turned the key in the front door and opened it slowly. She crept inside, trying not to make any sound. She knew her husband was here, and she knew he had company. She wasn’t stupid, and her husband wasn’t smart. Anna knew exactly what was up. Now this was finally their time to get caught. Anna crept into the kitchen and silently checked the video cameras she placed there. They were all still on. She played back the last hour, able to see Henry
and his mistress canoodling over dinner. She almost wanted to vomit, but she held it in. Anna had a plan. She needed answers. Anna crept quietly through the house, able to hear the moans and grunts as she walked past the bedroom. Anna shuddered as she headed towards the living room. Her shoe crushed a piece of glass on the ground, and she stopped to pick it up. Anna smirked, clutching the shard in her hand as she finally took a deep breath and went to the bedroom door.

Anna burst the door open with a power only an angry wife could possess. The two of them shot up in the bed, scrambling to cover their naked bodies with blankets. Henry jumped out of the bed and moved to the far wall. Christina stayed in the bed. With Anna standing where she was in the doorway, their bodies created a triangle.

“Anna, darling... you’re back early!” Henry stuttered. He slid a pair of pants on and went over to try to embrace his wife. She pushed away, fuming now.

“You’re caught in bed with another woman, and that’s all you can say to me? What the hell are you doing, Henry? Who is this tramp?” Anna was shrieking now, her voice cracked as she yelled. Her whole body was shaking as she stared at him. “Answer me, goddammit!” Henry couldn’t find the words to speak, so Anna pushed past him and went to confront Christina. “Who are you?” she hissed, her face inches away from Christina’s.

“I—I’m Christina, Henry’s girlfriend.” She stammered, now on the verge of tears.

“His girlfriend? Really? Well, do you know who I am? I’m his wife!” she said, staring at the woman still huddled under the blankets on the bed. That’s when her eyes caught sight of the necklace. “What is this? Why are you wearing this?” Anna yanked on the chain around Christina’s neck, bringing the woman it was attached to with her.

“Henry... Henry bought it for me. It’s an anniversary present,” Christina whispered, pulling Anna’s hand off of her.

“This is mine. Henry, you gave her *my* necklace?” Anna was even angrier than before.

Everything went red.

When Anna could see clearly again, Christina was limp, lying on the bed in a pool of her own blood. The glass shard in Anna’s hand was covered in blood as well. She glanced at Henry, whose eyes were wide in a mix of fear and horror. Anna then pushed Christina off the bed, breaking the triangle they were standing in.
“Why, Henry? Why don’t you love me anymore?” Anna whimpered, falling to her knees as she started to sob. Henry slid beside her and gently rubbed her back as he slid his phone out of his pocket. As Anna cried, he quietly called 911, hoping they could track his phone to find their location.

“Shh, sweetheart. I do still love you. I’ll always love you. I’m sorry for everything. But Christina is gone now. We can start fresh. We can rekindle this love, together. Somewhere else. You’ve always said you wanted to move somewhere warm. Let’s move to Florida. Let’s start over,” Henry was saying anything he could just to stay alive. Anna smiled, seeming to believe it. She moved closer to him, as if to embrace him, but instead she jabbed the glass shard into his neck. Anna shrieked, stabbing him over and over again. Then she fled, scrambling out the window and down the fire escape. She ran from the apartment as sirens were heard on the street.

* 

“Mrs. Coldwell, we have enough evidence to convict you right now of your actions. If you just confess, we may be able to come up with a plea bargain.”

Anna nodded, a small smile appearing on her face as she tried to word what she wanted to say next.

“I confess to murdering both my husband, Henry Coldwell, and his mistress, Christina Hapshere, but they deserved what they got. No one cheats on Anna Coldwell and gets away with it.
Characters

STEVE BROOK—Male in his late 20s at a business convention. In a committed five-year relationship and is constantly checking his phone expecting an angry call.

JADE BLECK—Confident prostitute in mid-20s in a black dress with a black silhouette, walking with more stride and seen sitting with her legs open.

BUSINESS MAN #2—Another male in late 20s who shares a similar appearance to STEVE.

Setting
A good quality hotel bar. The front of the bar faces the audience. Stools are placed in the front of it. STEVE sits in the front of the bar with a cosmopolitan. JADE noticing STEVE from afar, walks up to right next to STEVE, holding her drink. They make awkward eye contact. A phone rings. STEVE answers the phone.

STEVE (To phone.): Hey babe... What? (Pause.) Look I’m sorry that I didn’t call you. I got caught up with work and other things... I know you miss me; I miss you too... I had to talk with the executives and... you know... make connections... Well I’m sorry if that excuse isn’t good enough for you... You need to calm down!... Well maybe if you could trust me, we wouldn’t have these arguments... Hello?

STEVE *angrily hangs up his phone and takes a sip of his Cosmo.*

JADE: (To STEVE.) Can you keep it down over there, Carrie Bradshaw?

STEVE: Excuse me?

JADE: What kind of man orders the same drink from Sex in the City?
STEVE: There’s nothing wrong with me drinking a cosmopolitan. It’s totally acceptable for men to drink them.

JADE: Whatever you say, Carrie Bradshaw.

STEVE: (Sarcastic laugh.) Oh very funny, lady. I’ll have you know that I love drinking cosmos, and I am 100% male.

JADE: There’s also a 100% chance that you won’t get laid drinking one of those.

STEVE: For your information, lady...

JADE: You can stop calling me lady; my name is Jade.

STEVE: Well then for your information, Jade, I have a girlfriend.

JADE: Oh, so that was the broad who was giving you an earful before.

STEVE: (Deeply offended.) Woah there, that is the love of my life you are talking about! She is no broad. I’ve been dating her for the past five years. Well five and a half since last Tuesday.

JADE: (Sarcastically.) Awh that’s cute. Did she make you memorize the date?

STEVE: No! I chose to remember.

JADE: Bullshit. You know what? I bet she’s the one who makes you drink those cosmopolitans. (STEVE remains silent. He looks down and sighs.) Oh my God! I was right. She does make you drink them!

STEVE: No she doesn’t make me drink them. I drink them because I enjoy them, but she did introduce me to them.

JADE: Sounds like she’s got you by the balls.
STEVE: What? No! What the hell are you talking about? And who the hell are you to talk about my relationship like that.

JADE: Hey, I call it like I see it. And it looks like she’s got a firm grip on those testicles of yours.

*Phone rings.*

STEVE: Hold on. (STEVE picks up the phone, and JADE leans in close to eavesdrop.)

STEVE: *(To phone.)* Hey, babe... What? *(Pause.)*

JADE: *(Laughing.)* Uh oh! Somebody is up past their curfew!

STEVE: *(To JADE.)* Shut up! *(To phone.)* What... Oh it’s just some girl at the bar... No I’m not with her... No I’m not cheating on you.

JADE takes the phone from STEVE.

JADE: *(To the phone.)* Hey I have a question for you, girlfriend. What color leash do you keep this guy on? Is it black, or is it bright and colorful like the cosmos you make him drink?

STEVE: What are you doing? Stop!

JADE: *(To STEVE.)* Wow, quite the mouth on this one!

STEVE rips the phone out of JADE’s hands.

STEVE: Oh my god, babe, I’m so sorry! She just took the phone out of my hands; you have to believe me, babe. Please!... Hello?

STEVE angrily hangs up his phone and takes a sip of his Cosmo.

JADE: I wonder if she’s the kinky type who puts spikes on that brightly colored leash.
STEVE: Look, lady, this is crazy. I don’t know you, and I don’t want to talk to you. All you’ve done so far is ridicule me for my drink and make fun of my relationship. You clearly don’t respect me, so why don’t you back off?

JADE: Hey I’m just having fun.

STEVE: What kind of sick person are you?

JADE: What kind of sick person gives her boyfriend a curfew? I mean it seems like she needs to be in your business 24/7. Look, I know you don’t know me, but I’ve seen girls do this to guys, and I think it’s wrong.

STEVE: Well if you ask me, I’d say you’re just a jealous broad who can’t get a relationship herself, which forces you to criticize every relationship you see just so you can feel a little better about yourself.

JADE: You want to know what I think?

STEVE: What?

JADE: I think that you are a giant pussy. There should be a limit on the amount of shit a man takes from his girl. You, my friend, have let your woman walk all over you. And you know what’s sick? I think you get off on it.

STEVE: (Angrily) You listen here, Jade, and you listen good. I am no pussy. I’m a man! A grown-ass adult! I make my own decisions!

JADE: Oh really?

STEVE: Yeah!

JADE: Then prove it.

STEVE: How do you expect me to do that?

JADE hands STEVE her drink.
JADE: Drink this.

STEVE: Why should I listen to you?

JADE: Because whipped men drink what their girlfriends drink. Real men drink whatever they want.

STEVE: Fine give me that.

STEVE forcefully grabs her drink. He quickly drinks it and almost gags afterward. JADE giggles.

STEVE: What was that?

JADE: Whisky. I’m assuming you’ve never had it before.

STEVE’s phone rings again.

STEVE: You’ve got to be kidding me. Again?

STEVE takes his phone out and begins to walk out the bar, until JADE stops him and holds a card.

JADE: Hey if you ever want to get your manhood back, give me a call.

JADE slides the card in his front pocket. STEVE continues out the door. Once STEVE leaves, JADE notices BUSINESS MAN #2 walking up to the bar with a cosmopolitan in one hand and his phone in the other, yelling at his girlfriend on the other end. JADE takes her drink over in his direction.

JADE: (To BUSINESS MAN #2.) Nice drink there, Carrie Bradshaw.

END
The Illegitimate Yearning

Alan Parkerson

What can the Parrot hope to say,
To the Cardinal of which it is enamored?
Possibly, he could fly to where she lay,
And recite the literature he has mastered.
Perhaps some romance from Shakespeare.
Maybe some wit from Twain.
I bet he’ll get close and squawk into her ear,
And hope she won’t dismiss him once again.
But he is by nature annoying; that is his way.
In the end it matters not the repertoire he has gathered.
So what can the Parrot hope to say,
To the Cardinal of which it is enamored?
Oh how fruitless it seems when you see the bird,
Attempting to express his heart through rhyme and word.
But Then Again

I ran a girl out of my school once. I don’t feel an ounce of remorse or regret. Not one bad feeling comes to me as I think about that moment I heard she wouldn’t return the following year. It was like when you watch your Christmas lights get turned on: one moment you’re blank and neutral and the next—you’re bright enough to blind someone, full of pure happiness. That was me. Completely beaming with happiness, knowing I finally got rid of her after three years. It’s one of my better accomplishments.

The best way I can describe this girl is as the female version of Jabba the Hutt. And that’s not even an exaggeration. She had the same disgusting squinty eyes, as if she were staring into a light that was invisible to the rest of us. Her face looked like it was swollen from the Mike Tyson left hook I always wanted to give her. The only thing that ever held me back from doing it was the fear of my hand getting stuck in that mound of silly putty she called a face. I always used to find myself frowning at her as she went about whatever irrelevant stupidity she was up to at that particular moment. “Why do you look like that?” I’d think, only to remember seconds later that I don’t really give a crap. Her appearance wasn’t the reason I hated her with everything in me; it was just a bonus that she was hideous.

When someone is on my bad side—in Lady Jabba’s case, when they cross a line that can never be redrawn—everything they do just puts a coin in my “I-hate-you” jar. After the incident, she couldn’t breathe without getting a murderous glare from me. I started to notice how loudly she’d yawn. The way she held her Vienna-sausage pinky out when she picked something up. The way she mumbled when she talked. The mumbling really got under my skin. “Excuse me?” I’d snap. “I can’t hear you.” She just continued to act like her voice volume was on three, and she’d lost the remote to turn it up. But minutes later, when she was talking to whoever felt sorry enough for her to spare a couple seconds of conversation, I’d hear her laughing. Laughing. If there was one thing that made me want to pluck each of my eyelashes out, it was that girl’s laugh. It was nothing short of a blender trying to turn marbles into a smoothie.

I hear stories about her life now, and I’m utterly delighted to say she’s a train wreck. And she isn’t a normal train wreck either, like those kids who get tattoos and piercings to upset their parents. She was an ideal MTV train
wreck as it was on its way to the primetime TV premiere—and I loved every second of it. There were stories about how she practically killed a person, how she was pregnant, how she was one of those psycho girlfriends. The list just goes on and on. I lived to hear about her disgraceful life.

Some say I “bullied” Lady Jabba, that I should’ve forgiven and forgotten. They say, “You didn’t actually have to run her out of the school” and “You held that grudge for three years?” And to that I say, “Hell yeah, I did.” Who cares if they say she had a stomach tumor? What does that have to do with me? Nothing. From sixth to eighth grade, I made sure Lady Jabba knew how much I hated her, that she knew she was the Bane to my Batman.

Perhaps I could’ve showed a little mercy.

Yeah, maybe I didn’t need to make sure I threw the ball at her face whenever we played dodge ball in PE. Maybe it wasn’t completely necessary for me to stare imaginary daggers at her so hard that she couldn’t help but keep her distance from me. And maybe “I hate you” isn’t the best substitute for “good morning…”

…but then again, no one disrespects my dead mother and gets away with it.
I was in Brick, New Jersey, four days until I was supposed to start my new journey at a brand new school. I was sound asleep next to my boyfriend, Michael, at his house. We’re both heavy sleepers; we sleep through our alarms, phone calls, the whole nine yards, but tonight... tonight was different.

It was early, way too early for anyone to actually be awake and functioning, yet I was receiving a call, from Mommom (my dad’s mother), who was someone I only ever spoke to for a few short minutes on the phone. At this hour, I wanted nothing to do with her, so I ignored her call with Mike egging me on in the background to come back to bed. I crawled into the baby blue jersey-knit sheets, but I couldn’t fall back asleep, I knew there had to be a reason she was calling; I just couldn’t imagine anything that would be so important that she was awake at three o’clock in the morning.

After the events of last night, I wanted nothing to do with my dad’s side of the family. My dad and I had just gotten in an awful fight. Granted, we never got along in the first place. We were too similar to get along; we’ve never agreed on a single thing my entire life, and we’ve never had those precious father-daughter moments that everyone always talks about. When I was in eighth grade, he didn’t want to dance with me at my formal. He complained a lot about money and being controlled by his parents, yet that was what he was doing to me. I was trying to be my own person, spread my wings and fly out of the nest. He and his family were keeping me back in their little town that they controlled. I was stuck in a never-ending trap that I never thought I would get out of. We had gotten into one of our famous screaming matches as we closed up the ice cream shop one night. I was screaming that since my parents got divorced, my mother had done everything for me. She had paid for a car, tuition, and anything I needed, while my father sat on his lazy ass and didn’t do a damn thing. He argued that my mother transformed me into a “young lady” that he didn’t even recognize. I said simply that I was getting out and that he shouldn’t have been jealous that he never could get out of their control. We didn’t speak again.

After I ignored Mommom’s call, I laid in bed thinking about everything that could be happening in my small town about 30 minutes south of me.
I couldn’t think of a single thing. I rolled onto my side, staring blankly at the black screen on my phone when it lit up again, showing my mommom’s phone number; I knew I had to answer it.

“Ammanda, honey,” she paused, and I wondered why she had called me honey. She had just fired me from the family business after the screaming match with my father. Why was she sounding so endearing? “I need you to get in contact with your mother for me. Get her to call me this moment.”

“Alright,” I said as I hung up the phone, and I stared at the screen for a moment. Mike came up behind me and asked if everything was alright. I didn’t know how to answer him. “I’ve got to call my mom.”

“She’s not going to be up, babe; just call her in the morning,” he answered, pulling me back into bed, but I knew that wasn’t true. I knew she would be up; it was the connection my mom and I have.

She picked up after the first ring.

“Ammanda, why are you calling at this hour? Is everything okay?” she answered nervously.

“Mommom called. She wants you to call her right now.” My mom never answered me, never gave me a sign that she had gotten my message. She hung up the phone, and I waited.

Mike was getting up behind me, getting dressed, because he knew something was wrong, and I just sat there on the edge of the bed. I knew something was wrong too, but I couldn’t imagine what it was. Tears rolled out of my eyes and splashed on the hardwood floor in Mike’s room. What was going on?

The phone rang again moments later; it was my mom. I answered the phone.

“Look, Ammanda, there is no other way to say this but, your dad is going to die. Tonight.” Tears poured out of my eyes. Mike ran to me wrapping his arms around me. He was dressed and ready to go. I thought, You’re not coming with me, stupid.

“Ammanda, honey, Mike needs to drive you here now.” She hung up the phone; my first thought went to my little sister, who was at my dad’s house all by herself wondering when her daddy was going to come home from the hospital. I cried more.

Mike ran into his dad’s room as I got changed into my clothes, and before I knew it, we were out the door in his car, and he was driving me home.
3:45 A.M.

We were driving so quickly, running red lights, doing 90 MPH down Parkway South, trying to get me home and to the hospital as soon as possible. When we reached exit 74, a state trooper pulled us over. I don’t remember much of that drive home, but I remember Mike pulling the car over, getting out his license and registration.

“Do you know why I pulled you over tonight, young man,” the trooper asked.

“Yes, I know. I was going well over the speed limit but...”

The trooper cut Mike off, “Ma’am, are you okay?” he asked, looking at me through the window. “Sir, is she okay?” he asked Mike.

“Her dad is dying. We just got the call from her mom, and I’m trying to get her to the hospital as fast as possible. We need to get to exit 63; they don’t know how much time he has left.”

“Okay, sir. We’re going to get you there real fast, ma’am. Follow me.” The trooper did something that I’ve never seen in person before. You see it in movies and television, but this stuff never happens in real life. He was off in a sprint to his car, his lights and sirens on. Mike was close behind him.

I was told later on that we hit a speed of a hundred, the trooper escorting us all the way to the hospital and telling me he wished the best for my family and me.

4:00 A.M.

My little sister Krystyn and Mom were crying when they met me at the emergency room doors. Krystyn was close to my dad, even after the divorce. They enjoyed nice dinners, movies, plays, and the whole nine yards together. It angered me that she and my dad got along so well, but I felt no jealousy at that moment; there was no way that I could.

We ran, faster than I’ve ever run before to the emergency room that he was in. My mommom and my great grandmother were in the room with my aunt Patty, who was my mommom’s best friend, but more like a sister.

“Amanda...” was all that Mommom could say to me. She knew about the fight my dad and I had only a few nights before. We left on bad terms, never saying “I love you” or “I’m sorry,” and I felt like the worst daughter in the world. There my father was lying unconscious and unaware that I was even around him, and he was going to leave this world thinking that his eldest daughter, his princess, didn’t love him.
“We’ll give you two some time,” Mommom said, and with that everyone left the room. It was my dad and me.

I don’t remember exactly what I said. I don’t remember the wording or how many times I said that I was sorry for everything. I don’t remember the times I held his hand. I don’t remember how many times the thought ran through my head that he couldn’t hear me, that this was all for nothing, and that he was going to die with him thinking I hated him.

5:00 A.M.

They had kicked us out to do more tests to see what went wrong. His hernia had come back, and he had surgery again two nights before and had been recovering nicely. He would have been released the following day. Now all of a sudden his liver was failing, and there was no way to stop it from completely shutting down. He was going to die; now it was just a matter of time.

5:30 A.M.

They let us back in the room for a little while. I remember looking around the room at all the details of each nook and cranny of that horrible room. I remember the clock had oversized hands, making it easier to read. I remember each time I looked at that clock I thought how I’d never forget the time that it read. I remember seeing my mommom sitting in that ratty old blue chair. It was plastic with half of the back piece missing. The parts on the floor looked like mice had nibbled it on. My great grandmother was standing over my father, holding his hand, whispering for him to come back to us, although he wasn’t even gone yet. Patty was standing next to Mommom, rubbing her back, trying to console her as her tears flew fast onto the ground, creating a puddle around her white Sketchers. My mom was between my sister and me, rubbing our backs and repeatedly kissing our heads, trying to console, but knowing there was nothing she could say to make us feel any better. Krystyn was gripping my dad’s hand so tightly, trying to tell him we were there. I was rubbing his hair. It was streaked with gray. He used to dye it, but he must have not had the time. He was 42, and his hair was as soft as always, and it just smelt like home, like the ocean, like the smell of his Nautica cologne. The room was painted an obnoxious white color, and when I looked at the table I almost threw up. There was blood everywhere. I later found out the blood was what he had thrown up.
Did he think of my sister and me? Did he think about all the things he would miss? My sister’s high school graduation, my college graduation, my sister’s college graduation, both of us getting married and having children of our own... did those thoughts run through his mind as he saw that first drop of blood?

6:45 A.M.

The time after I thought about the blood is a blur—I don’t remember anything. We were in and out for code blues; he died, and they brought him back. No one was ready to let him go yet. The doctors let us know that he couldn’t feel a thing anymore. That he was gone—his body lived through the machines.

9:00 A.M.

Mommom kept him alive so we could stand around the room and look at my already half-dead father. The hardest moment of my life was talking to someone that was already gone and never coming back. My mom, sister, and I went down to the cafeteria; we needed coffee. It had already been a long morning. I called Mike; he arrived with blankets and sweatshirts.

A code blue went off.

We ran faster than before, faster than I’ve ever sprinted before in my life, faster than the best sprinter on our high school track team.

The doctors pulled us all out. I remember what they said perfectly: “He’s gone. The only thing that is keeping him alive are those machines. It’s up to you; we can get him back, or you can let him go. His liver just can’t hold on anymore.”

“Amanda,” said my mommom, “you’re the next of kin. It’s your decision.” MY DECISION? Mike held my hand. This was a joke, right?

I looked to my sister who said to me, “It’s time to let Daddy go.” Though the voice that left her lips sounded mature, she looked younger again, like she was five. Her hair brushed her face in a way that made her look so much smaller than she was. I grabbed her and pulled her close as we walked together to say goodbye one more time. We kissed his forehead and said our goodbyes.

He smelt like home still. He looked like the man that had raised me to be an individual. He was dressed in a hospital gown but wore his favorite black Nike sweatpants underneath and his white Nike socks that I had grown up
folding and putting together for him. He was the father I always remember, but it was hard seeing him hooked up to all these machines that were holding him together.

We walked out, they shut the curtains, and it was done. We heard the machine go into a monotone beep, and that was it. He was gone. His heart had stopped, the blood running through his veins had stopped, and my father was gone.
There is nothing like losing a friend.  
Except losing a brother.  
We didn’t have the same parents.  
The English language doesn’t have a name for what we were.

We were friends before I even started going to school.  
You were in Pre-K since you were two years older.

Trick-or-treating wasn’t really your thing  
but you went with me one year when I had no one to go with.  
You always did those kinds of things. You always had my back.

We were supposed to have gray beards watching our grandsons box each other.  
Now all I can see is what I imagine you saw  
when you realized you only had seconds to live.

My parents didn’t tell me when it happened.  
I found out after my last final was over, Friday, December 12, 2014.  
One month later.  
The last time someone close to me died while I was in school, I failed out.  
That’s why they didn’t tell me.

I don’t watch TV, I’m not on social media, I haven’t been home, and I haven’t been in contact with anyone, so I had no way of knowing.  
I can’t help but cover my face with my hands as I cry, clinch my fists, and curse God for taking you.

My father didn’t know how to tell me.  
I played a guessing game as he struggled to tell me.  
All he could say was, “Something happened to someone we know.”
I picture what your reaction would’ve been if your dad told you I was shot.

Then I start to cry again.

You kept saying you were going to come back to New Jersey, eventually.
Now it’s too late for eventually.
It’s too late for everything.
Our Home
Cynthia Germany

I opened the screen door of my house in Newtown Square. The door creaked as it had many times before, but today it didn’t sound the same. I walked across the wooded porch as I had done many mornings to catch the bus at the end of the road. This morning I was not happy. There was a spirit of sadness that filled our home.

My family usually gathered over the weekends, celebrating with festive parties. But not this weekend; this weekend my parents were sad. My brothers and sisters were sad. My father, who was usually a strong man though small in stature, felt the loss of my sister but was still able to maintain a strong composure for our family.

My mother was inconsolable and not able to make arrangements for the service and burial. My baby sister, Sylvia, had lived for three days and just stopped breathing. We were all devastated. I had my first serious conversation with God in our home. I went upstairs and looked out of the window of the playroom and up at the sky. I asked God why he took my sister and realized for the first time that you did not have to be an old person to die. There was a lot of sadness that week in our home. We lived on a great farm, and it will always be my favorite place to have lived. Family and friends gathered, and I felt a sense of closeness in my family I had not felt before the day of my sister’s wake.

In those days the funeral took place in the home. My sister was laid in a small white coffin, dressed in all white. She looked like a beautiful doll. Our family and friends were all dressed in black. The crying and mourning, all sounds of grief, were not what I was used to hearing or seeing. I was glad when everything was over. My mom returned home from the hospital a few days later with the picture in her hand that my father had given to her, because my mom was not strong enough to attend my sister’s funeral. I was in kindergarten at the time, yet I still remember that period of mourning and healing. After the funeral, after the family had returned to their homes, my mother walked through that door with a smile on her face, and I knew everything would be alright.
Death Took Five
Amanda Joseph

Deep down he knew who we were. Forgotten.
An illness that had taken him away from us. Captured.
We traveled far to see him, to be with him. Family.
One.

Smoke filled the air. Muddled.
“I’m afraid to leave!” a voice spoke out. Shaken.
“It’s not his time!” a voice screamed. Deliberations.
He looked to me, and a tear slipped from his eye. Alone.
Two.

The dark storm reigned. Triggered.
People were fleeing, but not these two. Tormented.
They were in darkness and alone for days. Horrible.
They walked outside and everything was gone. Disappeared.
Three.

The second youngest of them and the closest person to us. Vanished.
We were left completely alone again. Petrified.
Wandering confused to why this has happened again. Stranded.
He was no longer here. “Goodbye.”
Four.

Graduating senior class of 2013. College-bound.
“Don’t forget to live life,” he spoke at graduation. Honesty.
“Live life to the fullest,” they now say. Heartbroken.
Saturday night 3:45. “Love,” he said. Last moment.
Five.

The five men whom we had loved the most. Departed.
They were angels sent to touch our lives. Eternity.
Their time too short on Earth with us.
We are afraid to be alone.
There has become too much emptiness.
For my Grandfather—
Kelsey Styles

Graying skin retouched, 
colored over like the wedding photos:  
1963. 
Like the Westerns he watched 
every day of the week. 
Re-colored dusty horizons, 
heavy golden powder 
on his cheeks.  
Wearing that same button down 
I’d seen him in a thousand times over— 
something Wyatt Earp might don 
on his day off.  
Should’ve buried him in his recliner, 
the way his hands crossed over 
his chest so peacefully, 
and his eyes looked like he’d just 
nodded off 
in the middle of a late-night special.  
Not that he’d ever miss 
an episode of Alaska: The Last Frontier.  
His gun case remains locked up 
at home, unable to assist 
in the afterlife.  
Maybe God will have guns. 
Maybe the game will be fair.  
He went so simply, in his sleep.  
Didn’t even flinch when  
the Lord called him home.  
It was me who wasn’t ready 
when the casket began to close, 
and they buried his Technicolor face.
“Talia! Oh my God! Talia!”

My mother’s screeching startled me from the back porch swing, almost causing me to fall down to the chipped, pale green, and wooden planks. More chaotic screaming and shouts were heard from inside the house as I righted myself, dropping my copy of *Oedipus Rex*, and rushed in through the screen door. I followed the sounds of panic through the house until I found myself in the kitchen. I paused to register the sight in front of me.

Blood. Drops of blood splattered the white porcelain floor. The black kitchen chairs were thrown in disarray, one having already crashed downwards. Dishes and silverware scattered across the table and floor. And my mother cradling my younger sister Talia in her arms on the ground, pressing a darkly stained cloth to her face as my father roughly spoke into his cell phone.

“I was just outside...” I felt myself suddenly saying, trying to grasp the scene in front of me but unable to move a muscle. My sister Talia, only nine years old, sunflower dress stained with drops of blood, her mouth set in a wailing grimace. My mother desperately holding the now red cloth to Talia’s eye, shushing her daughter’s tears. My father, half turned away from the scene, brow set at a dangerous angle as he spoke in the phone, hopefully calling for an ambulance.

“Kevin, please, get me a towel,” my mother spoke in a cracked voice, running her free hand through Talia’s hair.

Even though I heard the request, and it made perfect sense, my body wouldn’t move. “What happened?” I asked in a whisper.

“Just get a damn towel!” My father barked snapping his phone shut and giving me a pointed glare. My eyes flickered from him, to my mother, and then Talia before I ran out of the room and down the hall to the linen closet. I heard angry whispering as I retrieved the new towel, and I noticed there were a few drops of blood on the hallway floor.

“The ambulance will be here soon, okay?!” my father shouted at my mother as I re-entered the kitchen. His face was red, hair disheveled, as he stared down at my mother who set him with a cold glare. I had never seen him like this before, but something prodded at my memory to suggest otherwise.
I ignored the unsettling silence, making Talia my priority as I went to my mother and gave her the towel. As she switched the cloths, I saw the full damage of Talia’s face. There was a large, mangled slash across what was her left eye but now an unidentifiable mess of skin and gushing blood. I took Talia’s cold hand in mine as our mother cooed her. Then I turned to look at my father who was pacing by the kitchen sink, kicking at silverware. I noticed his fingers were stained red, blood splattered against his white polo shirt.

“What happened?” I asked briskly. There was no way Talia could have accidently done this to herself. There was no way. She always behaved, never once running in the house. But no one answered me. Only Talia’s quiet sobs reverberated through the kitchen.

I noticed the bloody knife amongst the silverware my father was kicking at. I noticed his blank stare as his fingers twitched. I noticed my mother refusing to look in his direction. I noticed the hand print on Talia’s upper arm. Sirens in the distance echoed through the entire house. But it didn’t feel like a home anymore. Tension and a sense of distrust filled the air as my father avoided looking at us, rubbing the back of his neck in an agitated manner. As we heard the ambulance pull into the driveway my mother suddenly looked up at my father.

“Get out.”
Deception  
Carolyn Lodge

She had these big brown eyes
warm, light and airy.
They pulled you in
closer
and closer—
Until
you got sucked into the blackness
of their core.

Joker  Microsoft Paint
Blaze Wasserleben
The house at 33 Maple Street is candy colored. Blue and pink with scalloped siding, as if a tiny little gingerbread family lived in it. Petunias and gardenias planted in perfect little rows in the happy yellow flower boxes along the windows. Two white rocking chairs sway in the wind on either side of the door with the heart-shaped knocker. There’s nothing strange about this house.

There’s nothing strange about this house except the lack of birds in the trees on the warm, sunny spring day. The way that the leaves floating through the air seem to avoid 33 Maple at all costs, even if it means they will fall to the ground. The large, beautiful windows always seem to have a tiny face peering out of them that disappears the second you look directly at it.

There’s nothing strange about this house, Mae White attempted to convince herself as she slowed her car on the quaint street around 33 Maple. A curious housewife was watching from a few houses down, pretending to take a break from her chalk drawings on the sidewalk with her towheaded son. Mae took a breath and let the car idle, then dialed her supervisor.

“I’m at the Desjardin’s house.”
“Okay. Are you stalling?”
“What do you mean am I stalling?”
“Call if you need me.”
“Why? Is something expected to go wrong?”
“White,” his voice had turned angry and sharp. “You wanted this case. Get on with it!”

The phone cut off. Mae sighed and looked back at the woman across the street, who had gone back to coloring on the sidewalk with her little boy but was still watching out of the corner of her eye. Mae pulled the Desjardin folder out of her backpack and skimmed the pages again quickly.

**Father perished during the pregnancy of child... Mother (Alex) put in institution for remainder of pregnancy... Extended family expressing concern for mental well being of Alex... Child born healthy... No problems until January 2014...**
Alex called expressing concerns about child’s (Hannah’s) imaginary friend.

Mae knew Alex Desjardin; she was a lovely woman who’d had a bit of a rough pregnancy. Her supervisor was wary about Alex, however, which is why he made sure that Mae was making a house call today. He said that Alex’s tone of voice was strange when she called in.

“Who calls their social worker about a kid’s imaginary friend?” he’d asked right after he hung up the phone with Alex. “Every kid has a goddamned imaginary friend.” He’d grumbled at Mae as she told him she would help make sure this family got on their feet. She would help them, she promised.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on her window. She jumped, but it was simply the housewife, undoubtedly coming to stick her nose into business that she shouldn’t. It happened almost every time she made a house call, and every housewife had the same attitude as the last. Mae rolled down the window, and the overpowering scent of Chanel No. 5 crept in with the warm wind.

“How can I help...?”
“Ma’am, I want to know what you’re doing sitting in your car.”
“My name is Mae White. I...”
“Are you looking for something? Possibly an unattended child?” the woman’s tone turned haughty, and Mae’s face grew warm.
“That’s a bit presumptuous, don’t you think?”
“Well, a mother can only be so careful when strangers come around, sitting in cars and watching the daily goings-on.”
“As I said, I’m Mae White, and I’m just here to see Alex and Hannah Desjardin.”

The woman’s eyes narrowed. “Why are you seeing them?”
“Well, Ms...”
“Frantz. Janet Frantz.”
“Well, Ms. Frantz, the best thing about the United States is that I don’t have to tell you.”
Janet looked as though she’d been slapped. “Excuse me?”
“I don’t have to tell you why I’m visiting Alex and Hannah. So I’d appreciate you going back to your unattended child.”

Janet stood up and smoothed her hair back, exhaling slowly. “I’ve already written down your plate numbers.”
“Well I hope it wasn’t in chalk; it’s supposed to rain soon.”

Janet Frantz clenched her fists so hard her knuckles turned white, then she turned on her heel and retreated to her picket-fenced front yard. Mae shook her head and gathered her backpack. As she walked onto the porch, a sudden chill came over her body. Something wasn’t right, her whole being screamed at her, but she ignored it. Her job was to help people, and that’s what she would do. Besides, she could name a thousand times her intuition had been wrong. She rang the doorbell.

The door opened, and a sleepy Alex peered out through the tiniest crack.

“Hi, Mae.”

“Hi, Alex, I’m here to check up on you and Hannah. Can I come in?”

Alex’s eyes widened. “Jim didn’t say that someone was stopping by.”

“Didn’t he? Oh, well, he was pretty worried about you; he wanted to send someone to make sure everything was okay.”

“You shouldn’t be here, Mae.”

“Pardon?”

“You can’t be here. I won’t let you.”

Mae breathed out slowly. This had happened to her before, but never with someone like Alex. “Just for a bit, Alex? I wanted to have a sit down with you and Hannah.”

Alex’s eyes widened and she began to back away. “No, Mae, you can’t.”

“Alex, I’m coming in.”

Alex looked as though she was going to protest but backed up and opened the door. The house was beautiful inside, with old wooden floors and chandeliers that twinkled. Alex had always taken very good care of it. Mae inwardly took a moment to be relieved; she was thankful that everything was as normal in the house as it had been a few years ago when she’d first visited.

“Alright, can we sit down in the kitchen?”

Alex nodded, staring at the floor.

“Is Hannah upstairs?”

“She’s out back,” Alex whispered. “We don’t need to get her yet.”

“That’s fine. I wanted to talk to you alone for a bit.”

Alex led Mae into the kitchen, brightly lit with yellow walls and curtains and a giant window looking into the backyard. Hannah was playing on the swing set, her mop of red curls bouncing with the rhythm of her swinging. Alex fiddled slowly with the coffee maker, and Mae twiddled the wedding ring
on her finger. The smell of coffee filled the kitchen, and Alex sat down across from Mae, a tight smile stretching across her face.

“So Alex, how have things been?”
“Fine.”
“How’s your job at Martin’s?”
“Pretty good.”
“How’s Hannah doing in school?”
Alex swallowed and looked at her hands.
“Is she not doing well?”
“She hasn’t gone.”
“What do you mean?”

Alex leaned across the table and grabbed Mae’s hands. “Mae, you have to listen to me. Something is wrong with her. That’s not my little girl.”

“She’s at a difficult age. I understand that it can be hard, but you need to get her to school, seeing her friends.”
“No, whatever is out there,” Alex gestured her head to the backyard, “is not my baby. You have to hear me out.”

Mae squeezed Alex’s hands and then slowly nodded. “Okay, tell me what happened.”

Alex’s shoulders relaxed and a ghost of a smile crossed her lips. This was good, Mae thought to herself, if Alex was relaxed she would be more likely to explain what was really going on.

**Mother claims that child has been talking to imaginary friend... imaginary friend tells child to do/say things...**
**Mother claims that child comes into her room and watches her sleep...**

“I told her to go back to bed one night she came in. As she was leaving, she turned to look at me, and her eyes just looked... different.”
“What?”
“She laughed at me, but it wasn’t her voice. It was a man’s.”
“Are you sure you were awake? It wasn’t a dream?”
“Wide awake. And she just turned around and left, laughing in that man’s voice. Nothing happened for a few days after that. I assumed she just was talking to a new imaginary friend. But then, she started telling me the things that he would say to her.”
“Her imaginary friend?”
“Yeah. She calls him Lucy but said he’s a boy. She told me that he told her... that he told her...” Alex began to tear up, and Mae moved closer to her, putting her arm around Alex’s shoulders.
“Hannah said that Lucy told her to hurt me, hurt me so bad that I don’t get in the way.”

**Mother claims that child cannot leave house to go anywhere...**

Alex began to sob harder and put her head onto Mae’s shoulder.
“Last week, when Hannah tried to go to school, she got to the end of the yard and wasn’t able to leave. Whenever she got to the street, she got pulled back, like she was on a leash. She told me Lucy had to teach her from now on.”
Mae took a deep breath and held onto Alex. There was no easy way to tell her that Jim would insist she be sent back to an institution.
“But that’s not even the worst part,” Alex sniffed. “She doesn’t walk anymore.”
“She just stays in her room? Sitting down? She’s outside right now. She looks fine.”

**Mother claims that child does not walk but hovers a few inches above the ground...**

“Alex, this all sounds, it just... seems a little far-fetched.”
Alex’s head snapped up to look into Mae’s eyes. “Yeah? Look outside. Watch her swing.”
Mae nodded slowly, then looked out the window. Hannah was swinging idly, smiling and chattering on to herself. With every downward swing, her hair flew up behind her, and she turned her face to the sun with every upward swing. Mae watched her for a moment, appalled that Alex could be rejecting her daughter like this, wondering what happened that made Alex go off her rocker. Mae was making an internal list of how not to treat the child that would one day grow inside her, where to send Alex to get help and Hannah to stay, when she looked closer at the little girl on the swing. She wasn’t moving. She wasn’t pumping her legs or moving her arms, just sitting. She took a step closer to the window and saw that the back of her dress dented in with every swing; someone was pushing her. But no one was outside with her.
“You see it, don’t you?” Alex spat from the table. “Now sit here and tell me that you don’t believe me. Kids can’t swing without moving.”

Mae’s heart began to beat faster. Something was clearly wrong here. “Alex, I’m going to talk to Hannah.”

“You’d better watch out, then.” Alex’s tone had turned bitter and angry. “I know she still likes me. I don’t want to know what she would do if she didn’t like someone.”

* 

2 Corinthians 11:14

“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

* 

Mae shook her head and started out the back door into the yard. “I’ll be right back, Alex.”

“Let’s hope so.”

Mae opened the door into the sunny backyard. She walked slowly towards Hannah who was grinning at her. The little girl was beautiful, growing up just like her mother, but something about her grin was different than the last time Mae had seen her. It made her insides lurch.

“Miss Mae! Is that you?” Hannah yelled from the swing.

“Hey there, Hannah! It’s been so long!” Mae exhaled and calmed down. Hannah seemed perfectly normal. She walked closer and noticed that Hannah was muttering and giggling to herself.

“...no Lucy, I can’t do that!”

“Who are you talking to, Hannah?”

“My friend Lucy. He’s real silly.”

“Lucy isn’t really a boy’s name Hannah. That’s kind of silly.”

The swing stopped dead in its tracks, no loss of momentum. It was as if Hannah had hit a concrete wall. “That’s not nice, Miss Mae.”

“I’m sorry, Hannah. I didn’t mean to hurt Lucy’s feelings.”

Hannah looked around the yard, then she shook her head. “No, Lucy, that’s not how it goes.”

“What did he say, Hannah?”

“Well, Lucy’s teaching me these things. He taught me the Golden Rule and some old things called proverbs!”

“That’s nice of him!”

“It sure is! So I taught him one: don’t talk to strangers.”

“Does Lucy talk to strangers a lot?”
Hannah’s curls bounced as she nodded. “Yeah, lots of different people. He wants me to talk to some too, so I told him why you don’t do that.”

“That’s very smart of you, Hannah.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think he listened to me, ’cause he just said he wanted me to kill the stranger.”

Mae’s heart felt like it stopped. “What?”

“Yeah, but I told him you’re not a stranger. He doesn’t like you, though.”

“Why not?”

Hannah stopped and seemed to be listening again to whatever had spoken to her. “He says you’re a whore bitch, and you should leave and not talk to Alex again.”

Mae backed up a little bit, but Hannah was getting off the swing. Sure enough, she was floating, toes dragging on the ground.

“I want to talk to Hannah,” Mae screamed, and the little girl dropped gracefully to the ground. Her eyes seemed to clear and she smiled at Mae.

“What, Miss Mae?”

Hannah spoke in a calm voice, and seemed unharmed. As she continued to smile at Mae and wait for an answer, her hair slowly began to braid itself. Flowers floated from around the yard and wove themselves into the long curls that escaped the braid.

“Who’s Lucy? How did you meet him?” Mae asked gently, hoping that Hannah would be the one to answer her. Hannah smiled dreamily, her hair still being braided, and began to explain about the man that had come to her in the garden months ago.

“He told me don’t be afraid; he lives here,” Hannah smiled and touched the completed braid that lay down her back. “But he doesn’t like you here.”

Mae took a small step backward, and Hannah slowly began to rise off the ground again. “Why do I have to leave? Is Lucy making you say—”

“Mae,” Hannah spoke, but in a male voice this time, “leave before we make you.”

Mae turned on her heels and ran out through the gate as fast as her feet could take her. She didn’t dare look back, but she could hear Hannah following her, laughing in the man’s voice that belonged to whatever was in the little girl’s body. She locked her car doors and drove for 20 minutes before she stopped to call Jim. Jim didn’t believe her; no one would. Mae resigned that afternoon and left town, never again trying to help those who couldn’t be helped.
1 Peter 5:8
Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Haunted View Photography
Taylor Blum
Thoughts
Carolyn Lodge

Character
WOMAN

Playwright’s Note
The scene begins with the character as a young girl. Throughout the scene, she grows older. This is distinguished by her voice.

WOMAN: I used to love the church bells. They were good background noise to the voice in my head. You know? How you hear your voice in your head when you think things? That one. I like to think. There’s just so much to think about. Thinking about thinking, like what I’m doing right now. Is there a word for that? I don’t think so, but I can think of one so then there is one! Well, at least for me there would be.

It’s weird how that works. People can think things then make them happen. Or they can think about something so much they believe it’s real. Other people call it imagination, and Daddy says some people are crazy, but it could be real to the person who thinks it. And why should we tell them no? What’s the point of thinking if you can’t be yourself even in your own head? If you can’t make things real with thoughts? People always say to “think about it.” Whatever you do, if someone else thinks it’s a bad idea they tell you to think about it first! So is thinking good or bad? I like to think about that.

My sister used to tell me that. “Never make a rash decision,” she’d say. “Always think about what you’re doing before you do it.” But then I’d ask her questions, and she’d tell me that I think too much sometimes. Can you think too much? I don’t think so. But maybe you can think too hard. I don’t know. I miss my sister. She used to love the church bells too... I hear them so often now, she would love it. Ever since she’s been gone they’ve been ringing a lot. Like all the time. I hear them everywhere, at any time of the day...

Or maybe I just think I hear them. I like the sound. Maybe the songs just get stuck in my head.

I think about my sister a lot, too. I think about when she used to sit in the front yard with me, every summer day, so we could listen to the church bells at the end of the day. She was always home by 3 P.M., so even if she went somewhere she would come home with plenty of time to spare. So we listened
to the bells every day. Well, almost every day. One day the clock struck three times and she wasn’t home yet, so I sat out in the yard and waited for Daddy to come home with my big sister. But then I saw Mom run out of the house and get in the car. Where was she going? Was she crying? Mom and Dad called it an accident. My big brother called it a crash. What was I supposed to think? I didn’t. I just listened to the bells by myself.

A transition of tone and movement, more serious, representing the character at an older age.

WOMAN: (Cont’d.) I was only ten when my sister died in that accident; she was only fifteen. I was just a little girl. What was I supposed to think? She was the only thing I knew.

Things only went downhill with her death. My father developed depression. He had it for a long time. He’s not with us anymore... I’d prefer not to talk about it. My brother was a Marine. Good guy. Well he went back into combat and... (Hesitates, as though she hears something, haunted.) And it’s safe to say I’ve heard a lot of church bells the past few years. (Beat.) But I’m fine. I keep it all in my head.

I still think a lot. Not about a lot of things... I just think about my family. What once was, what it could be now if they were all here. My sister would be a psychiatrist. She was always concerned with the way people think and what the mind was capable of doing to a person. She was cautious about over thinking things, said that it could mess with your head. I drove her crazy. We’d sit outside listening to the church bells, and I’d always ask her questions... (Again, she hears something) What do you think they mean? What do you think the church bells are saying? What do you think they mean to other people? (Gets progressively angrier, more paranoid with each question.) Do you think they mean anything? Do other people hear them all the time? Do you hear them? What do they mean to you? What are they saying to you? Why are they so loud? Why won’t they stop?! STOP! STOP! I hate those church bells! I hate those fucking church bells! What do they want from me? Why won’t they leave me alone? I just want some peace for once! They won’t stop calling to me. I CAN HEAR YOU. (She collapses to the floor, hugging her knees, breathing heavily and shaking. Pause.) Bells. Bells, church bells. They... they want... want, what... want me. Next. Me next... I’m next.

END
Losing my mind
Taylor Brown

My mind wanders
On the banks of insanity
The fluid rises above my eyes
Distorting the view of all that matters

On the banks of insanity
The pools of people gather
Distorting the view of all that matters
Perception drips through the cracks

The pools of people gather
The fluid rises above my eyes
Perception drips through cracks
My mind wanders—

Overpass Photography
Taylor Blum
As an active member and graduate of Drug Abuse Resistance Education, I have an expressed aversion toward any alcoholic beverages. D.A.R.E. was prominent in shaping my childhood, along with my father’s issues. He has been struggling with his alcohol addiction for as long as I can remember. In my freshman year of high school, my hatred for alcohol became permanent.

In 2009, sometime around mid-October, I was designing a visual project for Spanish class. The project was to create an image of a dream house, while listing special items in both English and Spanish. My project was going to guarantee a passing grade; I felt pride in designing a beautifully drawn house with interesting items I would wish to possess: an aquarium, a recliner, and a giant flat-screen television, while putting tags with their English and Spanish names. In the middle of planning, the peace and quiet of my drawing was interrupted.

I turned my head to the left. When I asked what was wrong, my father became incoherent. His entire body shook as he started shaking on the kitchen table. He breathed a continuous wheezing hiss as though he were shot in the heart, and he began foaming at the mouth. His eyes stared at the ceiling fan’s light. When he attempted to stand up, he seemed to be reaching up to the heavens. He fell down to the wooden floor. The rabid-looking man fell flat on his back as he fought what possessed him. He vibrated like a colony of bees trying to generate heat to stay warm.

When I came to my father’s aid, I tried waving my hand in front of his eyes, but he lost his ability to pay attention. I gently slapped his face for ten minutes, which felt more like a full hour; I hopelessly tried to help my father but to no avail. Eventually, he came through and regained control of his body, but his speech and coordination were out of order. I still feared something was wrong, but the idea of calling emergency services was too risky; I didn’t want to be perceived as a rebellious prankster wishing to insult the law for entertainment, or worse still, held responsible and arrested for my father’s problem.

Instead of calling the authorities, I ran outside into the uncertainty of the darkness, making it to the house of his closest friend, Joe. The house lights were on, so I knocked urgently, but the door was locked and nobody answered. Feeling ignored, I ran back to the house, then I ran to my friend
Mikey’s home across my street and knocked on the door, pacing every ten seconds, until I finally received an answer. I asked Mikey if I could see his father John and explained the situation about my father. He allowed me in and I told John that my father fainted, but his eyes were open and he was making disturbing sounds. When we returned to my house, my father appeared to be in perfect condition. When I told him what I witnessed, he denied everything that I said and sent John away, assuring him that nothing bad happened.

When my mother and sister came home, I tried to describe what happened to dad, but my sister Sam couldn’t understand my story about fainting with open eyes. My mother was more perceptive and took over my shift of watching over my father.

Not until the spring of 2010 did I have to relive this event once again. What made this time different was that there were witnesses. My aunt was around to call 911, something I was hesitant to do the first time, fearing that emergency services would believe I was lying to seek enjoyment out of their responses. To this day, my mother has never forgiven my father for missing my fifteenth birthday. That’s when I learned what my father endured: alcohol withdrawal. Which forced him into a seizure.
The Accident Poem

Alan Parkerson

The wedding I was going to was canceled,  
So now I’m free.

Road Block  Photography

Taylor Blum
An Evening Prayer

Eric Bihlear

I scream love, you scream liar.
Like a mantis savoring its lover’s last thought
I am strangled.
I am preyed and I pray the past doesn’t eat me.
That it stay my shadow,
Dark and transparent,
Present, yet always behind me.
I pray and I beg
That my apologies will stick
To the grasping fibers about to rip
My head from my neck
My thoughts from my actions
And my words—
My ever-flowing adolescent words—
I pray that I choke
Long before I bleed out
Headless from your guillotine.
It is currently 25,000 years before Christ, and the World is in the grip of an Ice Age. The continents look almost exactly the same as they would in the modern era, but there are major differences: the growth of the icecaps has been so drastic that the sea levels have dropped; as a result of the water being stored in the polar regions, Eurasia and North America have been connected by a piece of land rising out of the water, known as the Bering land bridge, attaching Alaska to Siberia.

With the dropping water levels, huge expanses of forest have been reduced to pockets of trees, with most of them concentrated near bodies of water. The elephants and buffalo that have migrated to the steppes have grown hairier in response to the chilling grip of the tundra they feed off of. The buffalo, now known as bison, have grown so much hair, their faces and shoulders are concealed by thick fur coats. Three species exist: the European Wisent, the American Bison, and the Steppe Bison, which have populations spanning in both Eurasia and America. The fluffy elephants have taken the same evolutionary makeovers: massive shoulder humps and thick coats of hair, along with short tails and small triangular ears to trap in heat, and formidable curving tusks. These shaggy elephants are called mammoths, and they, along with other tundra animals, have spread everywhere from the west of Europe to the east of Asia and into North America. Mammoths roam the world in huge numbers with a steady supply of grasses, lichens, mosses, and sedges; the huge Northern plains have even been named the Mammoth Steppes in their honor.

Woolly mammoths, like their elephant ancestors, are nomadic creatures that roam the enormous expanses of grassland in herds, eating an average of 180 to 200 kilograms of grass per day. They have astounding memory abilities, able to remember environments, traumatic events, even the faces of their long-lost relatives. When a mammoth reaches the age of fifteen, the only things that can threaten it are starvation, frostbite, or human hunting parties. The most vulnerable time for a mammoth is its first year; many yearlings don’t live past their first winter. The only protection they have is the affection of their family group.

One herd of mammoths is in a sorry state. This herd is led by the matriarch, who is 60 years old, and it is comprised of seven other adult females, two
adolescent females, an adolescent male, and two female calves. The youngest female of the herd, Mahala, is lucky to have survived the winter. At about 500 pounds, she is healthy in weight, but as a result of the freezing temperatures, two other calves, Mahala’s cousins, have died over winter. Mahala was born two years ago in the spring, but she had few playmates other than the female calf Mallory, her four-year-old cousin, who is nearly twice Mahala’s size. Though interaction with her mother, aunts, and grandmother is essential, interaction with her peers is also important for her social development.

The herd has members take turns to accompany her. The carcasses attract clouds of crows, ravens, turkey vultures, and a pair of teratornis, a bird of prey similar to a condor and the largest aerial carnivore since the time of the dinosaurs. The smell has also attracted a specialized land-dwelling scavenger, the formidable short-faced bear, sometimes called the bulldog bear. This nightmarish beast’s front legs are longer than the rear legs, giving it a sloping posture like a hyena. Its paws are as wide as baseball mitts, tipped with grim reaper-like claws, and its jaws are capable of smashing the bones of a mammoth to consume the marrow within. However, the bear is a pure scavenger, a relatively lightweight and build for its size, making it incapable of fighting animals more than five times its weight. This won’t help it when faced with two protective mammoths. None of the scavengers can get through the protective strength of the mammoths and thus abandon the untouchable buffet.

For a whole day, each herd member took shifts standing watch over the dead bodies, while the rest of the family grazed, keeping in touch with low-frequency calls that run through the ground over distances. Some gathered branches and sticks. On the last night, having collected nearly half a ton of branches, the matriarch grabs the biggest branch with her trunk and digs under the grass, exposing the soil beneath. The herd members assist her in lifting the grass off the ground and start digging. The combined efforts of the family have created a pit bigger than two mammoth calves. The adults of the herd gently surround the dead calves and lift each one with their trunks into the pit. Before they bury the calves, all of the herd members touch them with their trunks, once again rumbling in grief. The herd then trumpets in chorus, before kicking the dirt back onto the ground, covering the mound with branches, grass, and leaves. With the funeral over, the herd moves.

*  

It is May, and spring has come late once again. The temperature is about 65 degrees Fahrenheit, but this has barely thawed out the dormant vegetation.
With two infant mammoths slaughtered by the unforgiving winter, the childless mothers have gone into heat again. The resident alpha male of the herd, Bruno, can tell by the smell of their urine that they are ready to mate. He is nearly a third bigger than the matriarch and possesses a pair of looped tusks curving inward and crossing asymmetrically. He, along with the matriarch, chased the young male of the herd away, an instinctive tradition that prevents inbreeding within the herd.

At this point, Mahala’s mother is urging her daughter to eat the grass rather than suckle for milk. Mahala struggles for a few minutes to pull the grass with her trunk. When she gets a clump of grass big enough, she puts it in her mouth to chew. The texture is rough and slippery, but her baby molars will soon get used to eating the grass. She spends three hours eating grass to adjust to the sour taste. When she is finally able to eat grass thoroughly, she will be weaned from her mother’s milk altogether.

After four hours of eating, Mahala wants to play with Mallory, but the juvenile female is eating. Mahala decides to leave the herd to explore her surroundings. There’s a herd of Yukon Wild Horses; they are maroon colored on top, cream colored below, and have stockier bodies than domestic horses from the modern era. The head stallion keeps a wary eye on his surroundings to keep the herd safe. A sea of caribou comes out of the horizon up North, mowing down every blade of grass they walk over. There is also a group of about forty Steppe Bison. The herd is led by Bunyan, the alpha male, but he has a group of subordinate males that support him in protecting the herd. One of the females has isolated herself from the herd and lies down. A lustrous mass suddenly pops out from behind her. For ten minutes, the bison cow lies motionless but gets back up. She turns around to chew on the shiny mass, revealing a bison calf. She imprints on her mother, mooing for her attention. Her mother licks the amniotic fluid off of her daughter, Babette. Her coat turns from wet brown to a clean orange color, making her resemble a robust doe.

Mahala watches as Babette practices standing, but the bison calf still has to get used to holding her own weight. She eventually gets the hang of it, and her mother rewards her with milk. As the calf suckles, her mother takes notice of Mahala watching. The cow stamps her feet as a warning. Bunyan takes notice of the mammoth calf as well and comes to defend his mate and daughter. He approaches the mammoth, scratching the ground with his hooves. Mahala turns and runs as fast as she can, but before the bison bull can follow, the sound of the horses whinnying causes both of them to stop. They turn to
notice the horses fleeing in alarm, and the rest of the herd gathers together to protect the young. Bunyan leads Babette and her mother back to the herd.

A massive pale-brown cat comes running and leaps onto a bison cow but falls off, leaving ten scratches on the sides. A second cat rushes toward another bison, which barely dodges the sharp horns. The cats regroup to face the bison. The calves are grouped in the center of the herd, while the adult bulls and cows face the cats. They are American lions, one quarter larger than their cousins in Africa, with the musculature of a tiger and with coats resembling a mix of cougar and African lion. The cows and calves flee while Bunyan and five other males face the lionesses. Mahala can feel the ground shake from 20 meters away as the evacuating bison run in the opposite direction. A third lioness springs from its hiding spot when a bison charges through the grass. While her pridemates fight, she takes notice of Mahala.

Mahala runs away, trumpeting for help from her mother. The lioness stalks her, easily keeping pace with her but notices her mother racing towards them. She leaps onto Mahala, wrestling her to the ground and sinking her claws into her fur, but the struggling mammoth whacks the lioness with her trunk and kicks the lioness in the chest, stunning her. By the time the lioness recovers, she is rammed by the tusks and trunk of Mahala’s mother. She helps her daughter to her feet and the two rejoin the herd. The lion retreats, with a limp in her left front paw. Her claws only poked Mahala’s skin, mostly ripping off some fur; Mahala is lucky she didn’t get her throat ripped out. As they rejoin the herd, Mahala’s mother feels a pain in her tail and hind quarters and bellows. She turns around, scaring two lionesses away. One of them has a piece of her tail in its mouth. Mahala and the herd look to see that her mother’s tail has been bitten off, leaving a stump tipped with some blood. Fortunately, mammoth tails have no purpose anyway, and the wound will heal.

The next day, the mammoth herd continues to feed on the plains. The warmer weather has caused them to involuntarily shed their fur to prevent overheating. Flowering plants such as dandelions have begun to bloom. Along with the blooming plants, insects have come back: butterflies, bees, and flies. Unfortunately, there are also swarms of mosquitoes, horseflies, and other biting insects. The grazing herds provide a feast for the blood-sucking insects, but the mammoths with molted fur are irresistible; even Bruno is too distracted to mate with the remaining female. The herd’s migratory route has led them to a forest island next to a pond connected to Lake Winnipeg. The mammoths approach the shore of the pond, each sucking up some muddy
water with their trunks and spraying it on themselves. The muddy water showers over them as they snort it out. Mahala and Mallory find the activity fun and spray each other.

Mahala snorts out the last of the mud in her trunk and lies down to rest. She lies in the center of the herd as they graze, not having to worry about any flies biting her in her sleep. The Alpha male is too occupied with other business than mating, having to settle a dominance dispute with a small group of bachelor bull mammoths seeking the females. The mammoths feed on the grass not too far from the pond with less irritation by the insects. The steppe bison later arrive to the lake, with the same mission as the mammoths: to wallow in mud to keep insects from biting them. The matriarch keeps a wary eye on them as the herd grazes. Bunyan also keeps his eyes on the mammoth herd, knowing that while they have the advantage of numbers, an angry mammoth has great size. Both herbivores are known for aggressive and paranoid temperaments, and neither species is willing to trust each other.

After a half-hour nap, Mahala is awoken by a distress call. She notices that her herd has moved 20 meters from her resting spot. She also notices some splashing in the muddy pond. Babette is struggling to get out of the pond, squealing for her mother to help her. The anxious cow can only stand and watch from the shore of the pond, unable to pull her daughter out. Mahala knows that her herd won’t make the situation their business unless one of their own is in danger. She sprints to the stressed-out bison. Babette’s mother focuses so much on her drowning daughter, that she doesn’t even take notice of the mammoth calf. Mahala runs into the pond, feigning danger in the hopes that her herd will come to rescue her. The mammoths take notice and drop what they’re eating to rescue Mahala. She splashes with her trunk and bobs her head to appear to be drowning, but she realizes that she really has become stuck, because the muddy water is drenching her coat so much that it weighs her down, even with her molted fur.

The mammoth herd comes to the shore of the pond, with Mahala’s mother scaring Babette’s mother away. The matriarch scans the water to assess the situation, noticing a second body struggling next to Mahala. She puts her front legs into the water to feel its depth until she is close enough to reach Mahala. Mahala calms down when the matriarch pets her and makes a rumbling purr. She lowers her head and slides her right tusk under Mahala’s neck and lassos her trunk around her, towing the baby mammoth out of the pond, and Mahala, still soaked, rejoins with her mother. The matriarch hasn’t
forgotten Babette, the bison calf, and she returns to assist. She carries the smaller animal in her tusks, pulling her out of the lake. Babette is still struggling, frightened at the massive white tusks carrying her. The matriarch puts the bison calf down gently on the ground, and Babette shakes her fur coat before sprinting back to rejoin her mother. The mother bison’s grief is replaced with joy, and she nuzzles the jumpy calf.

The matriarch is confused about why she rescued an animal that wasn’t her own. Mahala pushes her family aside to acquaint herself with Babette, but she is stopped by her mother. The matriarch doesn’t scare the bison away, but the reunited mother and calf leave to rejoin their herd. Mahala’s mother blows on her daughter with her trunk to help dry her coat.

* It has been one week after Mahala and Babette have been rescued from drowning. Patches of wildflowers carpet the southern reaches of the Mammoth Steppes: corn-cockles, dandelions, foxgloves, goldenrod, marigolds, and poppies. Some animals find the blossoms palpable. The remaining receptive female has mated with Bruno, who has abandoned the herd and moved on in search of other females in heat, leaving the herd to care for the future arrivals, each of which will be due in 22 months.

The mammoths have journeyed away from the muddy pond to graze on the rainbow-colored pastures. The steppe bison herd is still grazing nearby. After Mahala has had her fill, she explores the area around her but takes the most interest in the bison herd. She takes notice of Babette walking around the meadow, but she appears lonely with most of her hungry playmates not in the mood for fun. She stands still upon seeing Mahala, looking curious. Mahala slowly approaches the bison calf calmly. Babette gallops up to Mahala, stumps her front legs and runs in a circle back to her. She stands parallel toward the mammoth, smelling her side. Mahala pats Babette on her back with her trunk, spooking the young bison into galloping away. Mahala can’t keep up with the bison and decides to leave and tempt Mallory to play. Babette comes galloping back, runs in front of Mahala, and grunts. She falls to the ground and rolls in a patch of dirt, and Mahala does the same. They bathe in the dust for about five minutes, until Babette attempts to urge Mahala to play tag. The two animals speak different body languages, but they can tell from one another’s reactions that they are enjoying one another’s company.

Mallory has taken notice, but she trumpets aggressively in an effort to scare the bison calf away. The young mammoth tries to stop her cousin, but Mallory
focuses on scaring Babette, charging towards her, even though she can’t outrun the bison. The bison calf only continues to frolic around the mammoths for a while, preventing them from returning to the herd. Suddenly, she stops to sniff the air, looking nervous. Mallory trumpets at the bison, and Babette gallops in the direction of her herd, squealing in alarm. Mallory even chases the bison to make sure that she doesn’t come back. Before she can return to escort her cousin back to the mammoth herd, Mallory is pounced on by a bear-shaped figure that leaps out of a flower bush, orange-tan on top and cream white on its belly with a faded pattern of leopard-like brown spots on its back.

Mallory screams as she is assaulted by the beast; Mahala doesn’t stay to watch or help, fearing for her own life and calling to her mother and the herd for help. Mallory’s screams eventually cease within seconds, and Mahala turns around to see what happened. Mallory lies motionless and the head of the beast is revealed as he stare at the mammoth with its piercing yellow eyes and dilating pupils. Blood is all over its lips and tips its fluffy white cheeks. The most striking feature is its pair of knife-shaped canines sticking out of its mouth. It’s a saber-tooth cat named Slash, and he killed the mammoth, using his teeth to slit her throat and crush her windpipe. He roars at Mahala, who has realized too late she has run in the opposite direction of her herd. The path to the other mammoths is blocked by two more saber-toothed cats. They close in on the mammoth, but Bunyan, the alpha male bison, comes to her rescue, encouraging the mammoth without getting too far ahead. Meanwhile, three other bison bulls block the path of the saber-toothed cats, bellowing and challenging them to fight.

Mahala and the bison guarding her are suddenly ambushed by two more saber-toothed cats. Luckily, another bison gets in the way. Sandwiched by armed escorts, Mahala makes it to the bison herd, which has formed a ring with the adults facing out and the young in the center. The bison calves are excited by the action, but the adults use their size, strength, and numbers to guard them. Mahala is frightened and disturbed from the murder of her cousin, but Babette calms her down, standing next to her. The bison hold their formation and the fighting males regroup to accompany the ring of adults. Mahala can see the faces of the cats in the spaces between each bison as they angrily roar for easy pickings. However, the cats feel the ground tremble. The mammoth herd has come to Mahala’s rescue, and the cats retreat.

Mahala breaks away from the bison and embraces her mother. The bison herd breaks the ring altogether, and the lead female approaches Mahala to
sniff her. Mahala’s mother is about to make a trumpet sound to scare the animal away, but the matriarch stops her before she can do so. Babette comes to Mahala as well, treating her as a member of the bison herd. The matriarch leads all of the mammoths away to tend to Mallory’s corpse. The herd realizes there is nothing they can do but watch over her for hours throughout the night to make sure that the saber-toothed cats don’t return. Even the bison join to keep the mammoth herd company. By dawn, the herd leaves Mallory’s body, as she is too big for the herd to bury.

* 

Brought together by the attack by the saber-toothed cats, the mammoths and the bison have merged into a multi-species herd. Over the next four years, the herd has endured many long seasons of frigid cold, repelled predator attacks, and suffered no casualties. Mahala and Babette have not only grown up together, but they have also grown to know each other and learn each other’s body languages from playing their own games with each other. Babette has grown up faster than Mahala and now has a calf of her own. Mahala will not be ready to mate for years, but her baby cousins, one male and one female, who were born two years ago, will give her a chance to experience parenthood, as she frequently babysits them. Thanks to the cooperative relationship with the bison, the newest baby mammoths did not freeze to death with both the mammoths and the bison sharing body heat. Perhaps they will make a lasting friendship with Babette’s calves in the years to come.
Buffalo Field  Photography
Nick Demberger
Obscure Reality
Matthew Drake

The eyes of the tree
Store secrets and
Know the truth

All music originates
from the same sounds,
yet heard differently

The rain falls
off my shoulder
down into the earth

Beyoncé
Microsoft Paint
Blaze Wasserleben
The Clinic
Cynthia Germany

The day started just like any other normal day. Mom and Dad woke me up. We had breakfast, and I went outside to check the mini motor on my skateboard. Outside, I noticed my neighbor standing on her porch. She was very attractive and seemed to get younger every time I saw her. She had children much older than me, so how could she look younger than they did? I watched as she walked to the car and pushed her hair behind her ear. The ear started to peel and fell off in her hand. She immediately let her hair down, got into her car, and drove away quickly. I jumped on my skateboard and followed.

She went to a genetic research clinic located on the edge of town. I watched as she walked in the building, and I followed several steps behind. Fortunately, the doctor she was seeing was on the first floor. I peered in the window, my heart racing from seeing the ear in her hand. The doctor and my neighbor talked briefly, he gave her a pill, and she left. When she came out of the clinic, she was smiling, her ear was attached, and she looked normal as ever. I heard her tell the doctor “thank you” as she walked back to her car. I was in shock! What was going on? As I lingered, a man approached with the tip of his tongue missing. He also was given a pill, left smiling, and returned to his car.

I decided to look around. I entered the clinic through an open window. Once inside, I saw the receptionist desk with a sign saying: “Will return in 30 minutes.” Everyone had gone to take a break except for one doctor. I tiptoed quietly into the lab and positioned myself behind the counter. I watched as she looked through her microscope and gasped! She started dictating her notes, on an audio device.

“The formula we are using to eliminate the signs of aging has serious side effects. Every time a patient uses the formula they will lose something physical, then mental or emotional. Eventually, it will change how humans…” The doctor was interrupted by a dark figure who grabbed her from behind, covered her mouth with a white cloth, and lowered her to the floor. The dark menace removed the disc from the recorder, deleted all of the files, put the doctor over its shoulder, and walked out the back door as the staff returned from break, entering through the front door.
CHRISTINE is a fourteen-year-old Catholic school girl who talks very quickly and sounds anxious.

Setting
The chapel of a Catholic church with a traditional, screened-in, dimly lit confessional.

CHRISTINE: (Opens the door of the confessional and sits inside.) Bless me father, for I have sinned. My last confession was... I can’t remember. Maybe at Christmas. (Beat.) Where do I start? I usually just rattle off my “usual,” so I’ll get that done. I hurt my little sister—she keeps stealing my things. I disobeyed my parents and lied to them.

Does penance change for the same sins? If not, I’ll do the three Hail Marys you gave me last time for those, and that’ll cover it. I should probably pray a whole rosary for this big one though. Maybe ten. Mary would probably have a thing or two to say to me. I—(Inhales.) I said no to God. (Exhales.)

See, I really don’t want to be a nun, and Sister Regina told me that three out of every five good Catholic girls are called to religious life. She actually said it came from Father Anthony, but that doesn’t matter. The thing is, I tried to bargain with God, and I’m pretty sure that’s a sin, right? I said, look God, here’s the deal: I can’t be a nun. I really, really, really like boys. Like REALLY like boys. They’re hot, and I don’t think I’d make a good nun if I’m constantly looking at boys. So I can’t do it. And I won’t. I said I’ll be as good as possible if you just don’t make me a nun. Just send me a nice—preferably hot guy—to date before I’m done with high school, and that’s all I ask. I’ll be so good! I won’t even go to second base! I know that’s not how it works, though. I guess if He wants me to be a nun, I have to be.

How am I supposed to know, though? I mean, Sister Regina says God never calls people to do something they aren’t capable of, and I think I can’t be a nun, but maybe I could just barely scrape by. Would He still call me then? And how do you know you’re even getting called? Do you just wake up one day and say, “You know what’s black and white and holy all over? A nun! I should be one!” (Giggles for a long moment, slapping her knee.)
CHRISTINE: (Cont’d. A beat.) I guess that wasn’t that funny.

I thought I heard the call a few months ago, because I really thought about it. Like deeply. I figured, maybe if I weren’t cloistered—you know, if I didn’t have to hide in a building for the rest of my life like the nuns in The Sound of Music, and I could be like a Mother Theresa nun—they’re called “sisters,” right?—I could probably manage. I already do a lot of community service with school. Maybe I’d get to go to a remote country somewhere and teach kids how to read. That might be OK. I’d miss my friends though. And boys. I guess I kind of have a one-track mind when it comes to boys. I could probably manage that kind of life though. (Beat.)

I just wouldn’t be happy. I had to read some saints stories in theology class for Ms. Peterson, and I know St. Bernadette was told she wouldn’t be happy in this life or whatever. And I get it. Sometimes to be a saint you have to suffer. But I don’t care if I’m a saint. I want to be happy. I have plans for myself, and they involve me dating, getting married, and eventually having two boys. I’ve already picked the names: Peter and Jacob. And if it’s a girl, she’ll be Bella, end of discussion.

I’m just getting frustrated with this whole call thing. How am I supposed to know? They say the same thing about dating—you know, you just KNOW—and I thought I just KNEW three times in the last two years.

In the Saint Bernadette movie we watched, this priest told her she had to be a nun, and she couldn’t date a boy, because God wanted more from her. But what if he was lying or wrong, and God didn’t care one way or another? Is it a sin to think that? It’s just—I don’t want to be a nun unless it’s absolutely necessary. Maybe I’ll ask God to give me a sign. What do you think? That’s not a sin, is it? (Beat.) Father? (Beat.) Hello? (CHRISTINE exits the confessional and opens the door on the priest’s side, revealing that it’s empty.)

CHRISTINE: (Cont’d.) UGH! (She throws up her hands, then seems to change her mind, letting them drop. She looks upwards, towards the ceiling.) Is this a sign? (Her phone rings. She picks it up.) Adrian? No, I don’t know what the homework is. (Beat.) Yeah, we can still study on Friday. See you then! Bye! (She hangs up, smiles giddily at her phone and exits.)

END
Gravity of the Fire
Isaac Scott

Oh, Flame, feeding my desire
my emotions turn into dance;
my thoughts burn in your fire
pulling me to take a chance.

Old wounds still linger fresh
under the blinding light of your glow.
Untempered time yield them no rest.
Your intentions I do not know.

Shining in composed confidence
you flicker with the most elegant form;
tempting me to be your audience.
By your passionate drive, I warm.

Intuition should cause me to hesitate
but still your light is where I gravitate.
Symphony
Sierra Offutt

Rain falls like gentle fingers on piano keys,
slipping down the windows in little changing streams.
Now I’m alone with nature’s ancient melodies,

free to dance on tiptoe with her lyrical breeze,
so even when this old, empty pain makes me scream,

rain falls like gentle fingers on piano keys

to harmonize with violins in swaying trees.
An orchestra plays just beyond my struggling reach.
Now that I’m alone with nature’s ancient melodies,

I pirouette through flowers and grassy seas,
and just when I fear reality might try to intervene,

rain falls like gentle fingers on piano keys.
Now I’m alone with nature’s ancient melodies.

A Flower Photography
Nick Demberger
This is the story of a man named John.

John was a boring man of average height and weight. For a white male of 35, John looked utterly generic in every way. His dark hair was kept neat and short; his nails were kept in a similar fashion. Each and every single day he wore the same old outfit: a plain button-up shirt, an unremarkable tie, black pants, and matching shoes. He would leave his house at 7:15 A.M. on the dot, after a breakfast of Cheerios and a glass of water, hop into his simple gray Prius, and drive 45 minutes to his place of work every day. Even on weekends. There he would enter data on a computer for eight hours, taking a fifteen-minute lunch break at noon to eat a ham and cheese sandwich (made on white bread without any condiments). Leaving the office at 4:00 P.M., he would drive home, shower, prepare a dinner of yet another ham and cheese sandwich, and be in bed by 8:30 P.M. John had no family to speak of, all of his relatives either having died of old age or simply didn’t communicate with John anymore. He spent holidays alone or in his office.

Despite his bland life, John wasn’t upset. He had no desire for adventure, no need to mix things up. He was content simply being boring, going about his days uninterrupted. Not happy of course. But content nonetheless.

That is until one fateful fall day. As John sat down in the break room at noon to eat his sandwich and drink his water, he had no idea his life was about to change forever:

“Wait, what?” John asked of seemingly no one, setting down his sandwich. The break room was empty save for John, his sandwich, and the gentle hum of the staff fridge. He was alone, talking to no one.

“I’m not talking to no one,” John stated, feeling like he was losing his mind. “I’m talking to you, whoever you are. The guy narrating and passing judgment on my life. What is this?”

John stared at the ceiling expectantly, as if waiting for an answer from some deity. Of course there was no reply, as the room was clearly empty. No one for John to talk to, besides his sandwich, and that would be crazy. No crazier than talking to the ceiling but still something John wouldn’t want his coworkers to walk in on.

Glaring even harder at the ceiling, mad for some unknown reason, he cried, “No, I know I’m not crazy. You are narrating what I am doing. Clearly
you know something, so tell what the hell is going on!” There was still no reply to be had, as ceilings and ham sandwiches typically have very little to say when spoken to.

It was at this moment that one of John’s coworkers entered the room, a tall man by the name of Roger. Roger wore an outfit similar to John’s, however Roger pulled it off far better. Many of the women (and a few of the men) in the office considered him quite dashing with his rugged good looks and dirty blonde hair. “Hey John,” he greeted, moving toward the fridge to get his own lunch. “Were you talking to someone just now? I thought I heard you yell.”

“No, you aren’t getting out of this that easily!” John yelled, continuing to fume about something despite the presence of his coworker. “What the hell is going on?”

“Uh, John?” inquired Roger, looking to John with a measure of worry. Setting his chicken salad down on the counter next to some plastic utensils, Roger approached the seemingly deranged man screaming at the ceiling. “Who are you talking to? Is something wrong?”

John stood up now, growing more and more frustrated about... something. “Look, why won’t you just tell me? Who does it hurt? You control everything anyway, so it isn’t like I can stop whatever it is. I just want to know!” he ranted, clearly too impatient to just wait out the rest of the day and see where the story was going. No, John insisted on shouting at people who weren’t there, expecting answers he would not receive, while ignoring the concerned questions of his coworker. Clearly, John was an idiot.

“Hey, fuck you man!” John shouted stupidly, ignoring the incredulous looks of Roger. “Stop that! Stop insulting me! I’m not an idiot! I just asked you a freaking question! The polite thing to do would be to give a damn answer!”

It was at this moment that John, in a fit of madness, grabbed his ham sandwich and started smacking himself in the face with it, knocking himself to the ground.

“What the hell! Stop making me do shit!” John exclaimed, the sound distorted by the remains of the boring sandwich he kept slamming into his face.

Roger placed a gentle hand on John’s shoulder. His voice, filled with a mixture of worry and fear, tried to talk to his fallen associate. “Hey buddy, you’re scaring me a bit. Stay here. I’m gonna go find someone from HR. Maybe they can help you? Just... be calm okay?” With that, Roger ran out of the room in search of help, leaving John to club himself with his lunch.
Still not having learned that characters aren’t supposed to argue with their narrator, especially when that narrator is omniscient and can control their actions, John continued to yell at no one. “Great. Just fucking great. They’re going to fire me now, aren’t they? Are you happy now?” No response came of course, however John got the sense that the universe was oddly pleased at the predicament of this unruly man.

Roger came rushing back into the room, accompanied by the company’s human resources representative, a heavy-set woman in a suit. Her name was Lois.

“Here he is! He just started freaking out!” Roger explained, hoping beyond hope that Lois knew what to do, as he was completely at a loss.

Lois slowly approached the man punching himself with a mangled ham sandwich. Her hands reached toward him as a sign that she wanted to help.

“What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine! He is making me do this!” This statement from John was met with a look of confusion and concern.

“Who is making you do this? You have to help me help you, John.” As Lois continued to try to bring John back to reality, she was very aware that the rest of the office had begun to gather outside the break room, trying to figure out what the commotion was about. Roger was getting increasingly fidgety, clearly not wanting to be in the room but unable to leave through the people trying to peer through the doorway.

John, dropping the remains of his lunch, stood and moved towards Roger’s chicken salad. Opening up the container, the deranged man began smearing it all over his arms.

“It’s the narrator!” John shouted, trying to defend his utterly incomprehensible and fairly gross actions. “He is forcing me to do this! Can’t you hear him? You have to help me!”

Lois was becoming increasingly sure that she would be unable to help John. Despite having a degree in psychology, she was not qualified to handle whatever episode this man was having. Unfortunately, she still needed to get him somewhere so he could get some type of help.

Approaching John slowly, while also avoiding being splashed by his frantic application of chicken salad to his skin, Lois tried to get through to him once more.

“John, you need help, but I can’t give it to you.” Lois reached her hand
out slowly for him to take. “Come with me, okay? We can go and get the help you need.”

John reacted in a manner that, while unexpected, one might consider consistent with the episode he seemed to be having. He lunged for the utensils on the counter, coming away with a plastic spork. He brandished it in Lois’s direction, trying to keep her at bay.

“No! You don’t get it; I’m not crazy!” John shouted, looking the absolute craziest someone could possibly look. Wearing chicken salad tends to have that effect. “The narrator is doing all of this! I’m just a victim here!”

As he said this, the thought popped into John’s head that while he may not be entirely responsible for all the weirdness, this spork nonsense was his own brilliant idea.

Once again, John turned to the ceiling and began yelling. “No! Don’t you turn this back on me! You started this shit!” He began slashing at the air with his spork, trying to hit someone who did not exist. To everyone else it looked like he was attacking Lois.

Roger, thinking John had turned violent, pulled himself together and moved to subdue the man currently wearing his lunch, yelling for someone to call the police. They grappled for a moment before Lois stepped in as well, helping Roger wrestle John to the ground.

“No!” John pleaded. “You don’t get it! Don’t do this to me! It’s not my fault! Please! It’s the narrator! Get him, dammit!” John tried to bite Roger to free himself, needing to fight this imaginary antagonist he has deluded himself into believing existed. No sooner did he bite down, then Lois slammed the office coffeemaker into John’s head, knocking him unconscious.

* 

This is the story of a man named John.

John was a boring man of average height and weight. For a white male of 35, John looked utterly generic in every way. His dark hair was kept neat and short; his nails were kept in a similar fashion. Each and every single day he wore the same old outfit: a white straight jacket that bound his arms across his chest with fairly comfortable pants and socks but without any shoes. Every day John would wake up, be spoon fed breakfast, then at 7:15 A.M. he would spend 45 minutes inching from one corner of his padded cell to the one on the opposite side, then he’d sit down and stare at the wall for eight hours a day. At noon he would move to a third corner and sit for fifteen minutes
before going back to his starting corner. At 4:00 P.M. he would spend 45 minutes inching back to the corner where he slept. Someone would come to feed him, and by 8:30 P.M., John would be asleep. John had no family to speak of, all of his relatives either having died of old age or simply didn’t communicate with John anymore. He spent holidays alone in his corner, though one day a year, John would sit in the middle of his room and whisper threats to his ceiling.

Despite his bland life, John wasn’t upset. He had no desire for adventure, no need to mix things up. He was content simply being boring, going about his days uninterrupted. Not happy of course. But content nonetheless.
Veiled Alleys

Taylor Brown

Leadership demands control
as money tips the scale in favor of the pistol.

The crystal and bud demand addiction
as the shattered filter through their conviction.

Quality water demands fewer purchases
as leaks show the holes in our resources.

I demand answers
as my heart yearns for a worthy advancer—

willing to explain the neglected debris
left here by our maker.
ERIK is a 17-year-old high school student. He is not a popular kid and because of that, he gets bullied a lot. After seven years of suffering through it, Erik has finally snapped and decides to take drastic measures. He has a calm yet dark attitude through this whole scene.

ERIK walks into his room with a video camera in his hands. He places it on a tripod and pulls up a chair in front of it, lining it up so the chair is in the recording. He smiles, pressing “play” on the camera before sitting down. He takes a deep breath, smirks, and then starts to speak.

ERIK: Today is the day. Today is the day all of you motherfuckers will regret every second you made fun of me. (ERIK pauses and pulls out his backpack and unzips it, revealing a Smith and Wesson 9mm handgun. He plays with it in his hands briefly. ERIK stands and speaks this next part in a mocking tone.) You may be wondering why you’re watching this video and who I even am. I’m Erik Johnson, your classmate, and the reason for your death. (Beat.)

Ever since I was ten, everyone thought I was just the nerdy kid with glasses. You all said I was too short; you all said I was too skinny. Elementary school kids are nasty, able to point out any small flaw found on the human body. You all make me feel like shit every single day of my life! (He takes a deep breath and rubs his temples.)

Some of you may be thinking, “I don’t even know you,” “I didn’t make fun of you.” (He jumps up.) WELL YOU DIDN’T STOP IT EITHER! (He pants, calming himself as he sits back down.)

It doesn’t even matter. It’s too late to defend yourselves, because after today none of you will be able to say another thing to me anymore. (Beat. ERIK seems to be in deep thought. He walks over to the mirror, posing with the gun in his hand, aiming it at the glass.)

Are you watching, Tommy Frederick? I made sure to send this video to you especially. You’ll be the first one to die. (Beat.)

You aren’t laughing at me now, are you? I hope you’re scared. Though I wonder if I should toy with you, make you beg for mercy first. Maybe
I’ll shoot your girlfriend first, make you watch it. Maybe you’ll start crying. That’ll be the icing on top of the cake. You’ll sob, your clothing stained from her blood. You’ll look up at me, maybe mouth the word “why,” and I’ll just chuckle and tell you that you brought it on yourself. (Beat.)

But it wasn’t just Tommy who has hurt me. Every single one of you has been mean to me. Every single one of you deserves to die. Every single person will die. Including me. (ERIK grabs the folded up piece of paper on his dresser. He throws it in his unmade bed, knowing his mother will eventually find it.)

Mom? If you see this, that’s my note. It’s in my bed. It explains everything. Why did you never help me, Mom? You saw me come home from school countless times sobbing, and you never asked. The only reason I’m not killing you is because I want you to change. I want you to change for Billy. My brother deserves a better mother than you are now, and I hope this is your wake-up call. (He sniffs but takes a moment to relax. Anger returns to his face.)

Everyone is getting this video during the assembly today. After the video ends, you’ll all have exactly one minute to run. It’ll be more fun for me that way. It’ll be like a game of cat and mouse. I’ll have the gun in my pocket. After the time is up, I’ll aim for the principal. I need to get him out of my way before the real fun can begin. After that I’ll just go wild. I have more ammo in my bag to make sure I can hit as many people as possible before the police arrive, because I know they will arrive. They always do, but I’ll be dead before they can take me to prison. I’ll make sure I have one bullet left for myself. (Longer beat.)

Good luck everyone. I’ll see you in hell. (He rises from his seat to turn off the recorder.)

END
Adam Butler of 18 West Violet caught Sarah Hann taking nudes through her open window. It was 10 o’clock at night. The lightbulb on her dresser left a halo around her naked, milky skin. Adam felt blood rush from his brain to his extremities. When her light went out at exactly 10:18 P.M., his wonderstruck eyes stared up at the void of his darkened ceiling. All he could see was her.

“I’m in love,” he said to Aaron while waiting on dewy grass for the bus to pull up. Aaron Black had been Adam’s best friend since the fourth grade, when Adam moved to West Violet, and Ms. Tyler made them sit alphabetically. Their initials were AB, they were A/B students, and their blood types were A and B+ respectively.

“Me too,” Aaron shrugged, “but sometimes I cheat on Ariana Grande with pizza, and then it just gets awkward.”

“I’m serious. There was this naked chick—”

“Hold the presses, man. You mean your little prepubescent balls have finally dropped from their abstinent Puritan heaven into the fiery redtube depths of hell? Sex-ed is next semester!”

“It wasn’t redtube,” Adam sluggd Aaron in the arm.

“Pornhub? 4chan? Don’t say 4chan, bro. I try to imagine Ariana Grande’s nudes were taken just for me.”

“No, I really saw a naked chick!”

“So 4chan.”

“Shut up. My neighbor left her blinds up after her shower, I guess.”

Adam lifted half a shoulder as if to prove his disinterest, but he couldn’t ignore the current zipping through his body.

“My boy. Daddy’s proud.”

“It was Sarah Hann.” Though she attended a Catholic school in the city, the boys of Alfred Kirk High School knew Sarah Hann. Three grades above Aaron and Adam, she was hot. An athlete; one who never

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1 In August 2014, anonymous hackers on 4chan allegedly leaked unsolicited nude photos of female celebrities. While some celebrities denied that the photos were of them, claiming someone had Photoshopped images, others admitted their authenticity.
skipped leg day. She was the kind of person who could only be spoken about with both of her names—like Johnny Depp or Iggy Azalea. She wasn’t just “Sarah.”

“Bro,” Aaron paused in momentary appreciation before jumping into talk of school, and do you think Mr. Harrington was really going to give a quiz today? Have you written the paper for English? I hope there is pizza for lunch.

As they grabbed milk cartons and cereal bowls in the lunch line, Aaron had an idea. “So I’ve decided I won’t believe you about the Sarah Hann thing until I get proof. Send me pictures.”

“She was taking nudes when I saw her. You want pictures of her taking pictures?”

“I want your pictures of her taking pictures for the pleasure of someone who is not me. Yes.”

“Bro, that’s screwed up.” Truth be told, Adam hadn’t even considered the idea of catching her taking nudes a second time. Okay, so he’d considered it. Never did he think it an actual possibility, the chance of her leaving blinds up again while wearing nothing but the skin she was born with.

Tonight he decided to test it out.

Around 9:53 P.M., he turned out his lights, jumped on the bed, and sprawled out, scrolling through his phone. At 10:32 P.M., the light in her room went on. Slinking from his seat, the teenager crept to the far window, gripping his phone. There she was, wrapped in a blue towel that held her body captive. He didn’t breathe until she let the towel drop and began eyeing herself in her mirror. As her phone rose up, so did his. His hand shook; she was actually facing him tonight. Last night he’d caught the tail end of her act. His eyes soaked up what he’d never have, almost forgetting his mission.

“Shit.” She was too far away in the frame. The muted light of her room wrapped her in a haze, leaving nothing but a fluorescent square surrounded by the black of night. So much for that.

Remembering his camera from sixth grade yearbook club, Adam leapt up to rummage through the drawer under his desk. Resurfacing with camera in hand, he rushed back to the window, heaving a sigh of relief when he saw that she was still there. Quickly he clicked the camera on, anxious he was running out of time. As it booted up, Sarah Hann slipped on her underwear (black lace, better than Adam could’ve imagined). The boy’s stomach dropped as silk slid against bare smooth skin, her back curled over like a ballerina.
Adam snapped the shot, and the camera flashed. The flash! He ducked briefly, fixing the settings. The picture was nothing but window glare. Sarah Hann was taking more pictures, now in her slinky Victoria Secret underwear. Adam clicked five hasty photos, then pulled away to see what he’d got.

Shutting his own blinds and flipping the light on, Adam pulled out his laptop and sent the pictures to “yahomeboy_”Aaron. He opened a file and looked through them himself, thanking the gods for blessing him with rich parents who bought Nikon cameras for Christmas. At 2x zoom, he eliminated the space between their windows. At 5x, Sarah Hann was the only object in the shot. By 10x zoom he’d hit the jackpot—her perfect, rosy, pixilated nipples.

His laptop blipped. “Nice,” Aaron IM’d back. There was no need to reply. Adam renounced the distractions of social media and spent the remainder of his night with Sarah Hann.

“I slept soooooooo well!” Aaron announced the next morning. “Those pictures you sent blew my mind, kinda like I wish she’d blow me. But hey, last night I took care of that on my own.” He grinned stupidly and nudged Adam in the arm. “Eh? Eh?”

Throughout the following day, a few of Adam’s friends waggled their eyes at him. A couple leered. Tom Spicer came up to Adam in the locker room before gym class and said he had no idea that Adam lived next door to Sarah Hann. Said that fact could easily make him the most popular boy in the freshmen class, and it’s insane how hot she is. Adam returned a tight-lipped smile and nod before pulling up his pants. So that’s what all the looks were about. He wondered how many girls knew. Maybe the entire school thought he was a dirty pervert by now.

Adam trudged through gym class. Not everyone who knew about the nudes would come up to him. How many people in this room alone had gotten the pictures? In the farthest corner of the room, two guys were looking at something on an iPhone and laughing. A ball hit Adam in the arm.

That Saturday night, Aaron came over. Dumping his overnight bag on Adam’s bed, he turned pointedly toward him and asked when she’d be out. “Usually between 9:30 and 10 P.M.,” Adam replied. The two played video games until then, setting up camp in front of the window. Adam didn’t mention that her blinds had been down the past few nights. It didn’t matter, however, because her light never came on. She wasn’t home. “D’ya think she’s at a party?” Adam pondered aloud.
“She’s hot. It’s Saturday night. Where else would she be?”

“If you say it like it’s that obvious, why did you insist on coming over?”

The pair was silent for a while. Then Adam remembered something. “Doesn’t Tom Spicer have a girlfriend?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Just wondering.” He and Aaron may have been looking at nudes, but at least they were single. If Adam had a girlfriend, this outlet wouldn’t be necessary to begin with. Maybe he wasn’t among the lowest of the low—yet.

That Monday, nobody spoke to him about it. Anna came up in second period, requesting notes she’d missed in math. There were no strange glances in between classes. He slapped hands with his friend Matt in the hallway.

By Thursday, however, Aaron needed new material. “Come on, bro. Doesn’t that camera have a video setting? I need more. Think of it as a science project—a case study on the jiggle velocity of boobs.” He persisted despite Adam’s explaining that he hadn’t seen Sarah since last Sunday. Aaron persisted through the weekend and over the course of the following week.

In psychology, Adam overheard two sophomores chastising Sarah Hann. *What a slut. I heard she sent nudes to, like, half the guys in her school. I heard she sent them to half the guys here.* He turned back to his textbook and tried to tune them out. Dopamine and—*Last weekend she—Dopamine and norepinephrine—and he was like—Dopamine and norepinephrine are associated with pleasure inside the brain. Tests have shown that these two areas light up when one is in love. Dopamine increases in response to things like drugs, sex...

After school, Adam stood in his kitchen, television on, making a ham and cheese sandwich. Sarah Hann was in her living room, standing at the sliding glass door. Dusk was falling and her silhouette was barely visible in the light, but Adam recognized it as her. Between the backyards separating them, he could see that she was yelling. One hand cupped her ear; the other flailed furiously up and down. From the counter, Adam watched her animated motions like a silent movie. Eventually he got bored and turned back to the TV.

Friday morning, a mousy, strawberry-blond named Eric stopped Adam on his way to class. Laughing, he held his phone up for Adam to see. The lock screen was a picture of Sarah Hann—one of the pictures Adam took. “Wait, wait,” Eric said when Adam turned away. The boy slid his thumb across the screen and showed the teen his wallpaper. It was another picture of Sarah, or perhaps one that Eric had zoomed in on.

“That’s not cool. What if someone sees?”
“Who hasn’t?” Eric, who’d finally composed himself, chuckled and ambled to class.

Tom Spicer sat alone at lunch.

As much as Adam hated to admit it, he too wanted more. The next time he caught Sarah Hann’s room aglow, he crouched under the window with his camera on the ledge and flipped its setting to video. His finger hovered above the silver record button, but he paused and decided to zoom in. Aaron’s needs could wait until his own had been dealt with.

The image was blurry around the edges, like a fog. Sarah Hann was a hazy dream. Tonight her body hid under a pink floral towel. Adam didn’t know bath towels could be patterned; his family always stocked solid reds and whites and yellows. She stopped at her desk, and he watched her type something into a blurred black box. The blonde backed up, threw down her towel, and started to dance. Adam nearly fell over. She twirled and twirled, like a figurine in a music box. She moved so gracefully that she managed to slip into clothes faster than even an aroused teenager could comprehend. (A reverse strip tease still has the words “strip” and “tease.”) Her skin shimmered under the Christmas lights strung around her room. Had those always been there? Against the far wall was a shelf of gold. Trophies.

Though she remained clueless, Adam suddenly felt embarrassed by his unzipped jeans and the glow of his camera radiating throughout the otherwise black room. He thought of her mother and her father and her younger brother who would be entering Alfred Kirk in a year or two. He thought of Aaron, who, unlike him, would have finished jerking off by now. He thought of Sarah’s entire life leading up to this situation and how hundreds of horny students had seen her curves enough times to trace them by memory. He wondered if her brother would find the pictures two years from now.

A churning developed in Adam’s stomach. He flew to the bathroom, fell over the toilet with an empty, open mouth. Gagging sounds escaped his throat. After five minutes of trying to vomit, the teen slugged back to his room. His eyes flicked toward the window, taking in her golden outline flowing around the room. Begrudgingly, he dropped the blinds, deciding she would be easier to ignore this way.

His eyes, once again, faced the ceiling.

Under the lights that seemed to reflect off every surface in her room, lights that bathed her in a rainbow spotlight, Sarah Hann danced on.
Keep Your Eyes on the Road

Alan Parkerson

On my way towards home,
Where I have my little life,
And my little problems.
I gazed upon a vacant lot.
“1.67 for gas,” the sign said.
A simpler time, surely,
Eight years ago.
No one had any problems then.
Closer to the Flame

Isaac Scott

I spiral in turbulent free fall
tempting my composure to collapse;
only to ignite passion’s call,
blinded to a new relapse.

From afar it seemed so clear
despite my own reservation.
Your fiery dance lights up the atmosphere.
A disguise for a new revelation.

True fire hidden beneath the flame,
burning blue like an alchemist’s athanor.
A new image to shatter a previous frame
illuminating insight to an unseen door.

New searing severity bids me to obviate;
while in gravity’s terminal pull, I do not deviate.
Winter

Dark settles in more quickly these days, Nathan Desm thought as he bent to pick up the paper. The plastic bag it came in was soaked from the afternoon rain. Wind had lashed at his house like a whip, leaving lines of black dirt streaked across his house. His home was small, one his father, Nathaniel Desm, had owned. Back then, there were many people coming in and out, laughing and sharing stories. Now it was just Nathan.

Across the street walked Nathan’s neighbor Jack, who began to wave to the old man. Instead of waiting for Jack to waltz right up to his stairs, (which the little imp was bounding forward to do), Nathan turned and shut his front door behind him.

He could still hear his other neighbor’s wind chimes violently clashing against each other next door. The weather was not going to stay calm long, and any hope that Nathan had of his evening stroll was lost due to Mother Nature... and Jack. He would have to stay content in his workshop instead. Luckily, working with sand was not just a job for him, although the profits were higher than he expected. A lot of people were interested in sand art. His sand art. He would spend days on one piece, perfecting the exact loop and swirl of every color. Of course, he could get one done in an hour, and his customers would be just fine with it. They’d never know the difference, because they did not understand the complexities of it, the way sand breathes.

Nathan threw the wet paper onto the kitchen counter on his way to the workshop. He could feel the weight of his 68 years as he sat down on his wooden stool. A strand of his long white hair fell out of his ponytail when he reached for an empty Coca-Cola bottle. Bottles were not big sellers, or even sellers at all, but those were easy and relaxing, especially after a stressful day cooped up inside.

Usually, Nathan would work on carving out a wooden-design base. For the four-by-six flat designs, he would use a very thin layer of sand, then he would spray it with adhesive to keep the sand in place, and top it with a glass cover. For three dimensional pieces—the most popular—he used moldable sand that enabled him to make many different designs. His bottle creations required loose sand and many different sizes of wooden tools.
Blue would be the best base, he decided. He filled the glass bottle with an inch of sand. Then he alternated with different shades of blue, and, every once in a while, a line of yellow. When he had the bottle filled halfway, he took one of his wooden picks and began to poke the sides downward, creating chasms. He guided the grains left, right, and around, until the bottom half of the bottle looked like the sand equivalent of Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. Gently, Nathan slipped a piece of thin rice paper on top. Next he began adding reds and oranges. The final product was a contrast of day and night.

The clock read 5:30 A.M. once he was done. He had spent seven hours on this bottle, something “normal people” would find funny. Those normal people, however, would be waking up now, heading off to their corporate jobs, sleep lagged and sandless.

* 

Sleep was an art of Nathan’s that he wished he could monopolize on, but sadly no one paid old men to nap. Hunger called him to the kitchen when he woke. Breakfast, or lunch at that point, was simple, and Nathan took it in his living room. He was a regular *National Geographic* watcher. The nature documentaries were interesting to him, especially those related to people. When the program finished, it was almost five. Nathan decided he wanted to make up for his evening stroll the day before and set out on leaving.

“Hey, Nathan!”

He wasn’t even off his porch when Jack came bounding up the three steps.

“Mr. Desm.” Nathan corrected.

“Oh... right. Sorry.” Jack’s ears turned pink. He was a young-looking man, like someone in his early twenties, but his hair was white. Not the dull shade that Nathan had, but a vibrant white that reminded the old man of glistening snow in the sun. Jack’s eyes were an opaque blue—one of the colors Nathan had used in his creation the night before.

“What do you want?”

Jack ran his hand through his hair. “Gee, I really just wanted to wish you a happy winter.”

He didn’t mean to do it, not really, but Nathan felt his eyelids squint into two judgmental slits. “Why?”

“Well, it is the first day of winter, and I thought you’d like to have some company, like your father used to.”

Nathan looked him up and down, taking in the man’s brightly colored
clothes, his straight posture, and the white smile on his face. “What’s so great about winter?”

“Well,” Jack started. Nathan worried that this was about to turn into a long spiel about snowball fights and Christmas and hot chocolate—all the season’s “typicals.”

“I’m not actually sure,” Jack finished. “I suppose I just like reasons to wish people a happy anything, so happy winter, Nathan!”

“Mr. Desm.”

“Oh, right! Well, I gotta get going. It’s been nice talking with you. I haven’t seen you in some time, Mr. D.” Jack hopped back down the stairs and started to head home, when he stopped in his tracks: “Oh! It’s the snow! I can’t wait for that first snowfall.”

And, as if on cue, three small, distinct flakes of snow floated out of the air in front of Nathan’s face. He turned around quickly, entered his house, and decided to go out later, when he usually walked, so as not to be bothered by anyone.

Spring

The street that Nathan lived on was long and straight, leading up to a cul du sac, and housed eight homes. They were older homes, each unique in its own way. Jack’s bushes held numerous crystal ornaments, which Nathan hoped he would take down this year. Christmas decorations were gaudy and over-the-top even when they were allowed. Ren Thermouta adorned her stone exterior with flowers. Many, many flowers. The Cottontails also enjoyed a flower arrangement here and there, but they were mostly interested in showing off their figurines: glass ducks, ceramic rabbits, and porcelain squirrels. Tim Hatfeer liked simple. His blue tinted siding was all the decoration he needed. Nathan liked that about Tim.

Nathan’s white-walled abode stood beside Ren Thermouta and the Trais residence. The Trais’s were interesting to Nathan, although he tried very hard not to bother with them. They had an excessive amount of wind chimes hanging from every rafter of their wooden porch. The chimes tinkled all the time, even in the lightest of breezes. It drove Nathan mad.

At that moment, young Esther Trais was running around hitting every chime with her small hands. She appeared to be a child around four or five years old, but because she was tall enough to hit most of the chimes on her tiptoes, he concluded that six would be a generous guess.
Nathan turned his face away from the porch as he passed. His walk would not be interrupted that evening, especially now that the weather was significantly warmer, and the lightning bugs were just starting to glow. He wanted to catch a few, because he had recently worked with glow-in-the-dark sands.

It made him feel ridiculous, though: an old man reaching toward the sky, grasping at little light-up bugs?

“You want a jar, mister?” There was a tug on his sleeve. Reluctantly, Nathan’s head dropped to see the cherub-like face of Esther Trais. Her mouth opened again, words spilling out. “I’ve got loads of mason jars in my room, mister. Although they might die ‘cause there’s no air holes and stuff.”

He blinked twice, each time Esther’s face remained the same: pink chubby cheeks, gaping mouth displaying two lost front teeth, bright blue eyes clear as glass watching his face.

“No.” He turned on his heel toward home. The dusk air grew warmer around his face and ears.

“Ya sure?” She cut in front of him, her blonde curls bouncing as she skipped steps to keep up. “Cause you looked like you were gonna catch some bugs, and I don’t mind sharing.”

“I’m quite content without one.” He paused for a moment right in front of his doorsteps. “And my name is Mr. Desm to you. Good evening.”

Nathan’s eyes strained. Mixing red and yellow proved to be a letdown; red did not glow like yellow glowed. The green sands he owned were too dark and only brought the luster of the piece down as well.

After working in the dark for hours, he thought that he was starting to see things: out of the corner of his right eye were two floating lights dancing in a small circle about two feet off the ground. Nathan turned his head.

“Hullo again.”

Nathan had no idea that it could ever rain small grains of rainbow sand, but in the few moments after the little voice spoke, the sand flew up and poured back down. He suspected that the sand stuck in his hair like it did Esther’s. He reached for the desk lamp.

“What are you doing?” His own voice flared.

“I brought you lightning bugs.” She placed the Mason jar atop the counter. Her hands swooped down to the floor, scooping up the ruined material of his life’s work.
“How’d you get in here, Esther?”
“I knocked and then I let myself in through the window ‘cause the door was locked, and I knew you didn’t have lightning bugs.”
“That’s illegal!” He practically shouted, but her face didn’t even flinch.
“Really?”
“I—” He paused. Esther was wearing the same dress from before, and her hair was covered in sand now. Her cheeks had dirt on them, as did her hands. The lightning bugs, though they glowed, looked a bit limp. One had stopped flying altogether. He looked at her face again, the glass-blue eyes still watching him. “How do you not know that entering a person’s home through the window is illegal?”
“I guess ‘cause I’ve done it before to other people and they don’t seem to mind much.” She turned, grabbing an old, broken stool and pulling it over to his work bench.
“What are you doing?”
“I wanna see—” She started to climb on top of the stool, “—I wanna see the lightning bugs and the sand.”
“No,” he picked her up, lacing his arms beneath her armpits. “You need to go home.”
“Why?”
What he wanted to say, he could never say out loud to a child.
“Could I please watch you, Mr. Desm, sir. I promise I won’t never break in again if you let me stay now. You can even keep my Mason jar!”
Of all the hardships Nathan had encountered while working in his shop, a small girl was probably the most stressful. He knew he could easily tell her to get out and leave him alone. He also knew that in her mind nothing was wrong. To her, he was another chime to hit around, waiting to see what sound he’d make.
“Look.” He placed her back atop her stool. “If I show you what I’m doing, will you promise to never break into anyone’s house again? Especially mine?”
Her vigorous head nodding was enough for him. He gathered two more bags of glow-in-the-dark sand from the shelf and brought them to the table. Nathan placed the lightning bugs in between the two of them and turned off the light. A small light remained in front of them, dimly glowing in the dark. Esther drew in a breath and released it in a quiet “wow.”
“I work with sand.” At first he let himself escape into the piece, but then
Esther asked him question after question. He began narrating his every move, punctuating each grain of sand with a word of guidance. Esther leaned in closer to him, their arms touching slightly. For a moment, Nathan was taken back to when his own father taught him this special trade.

The clock read 11:45 P.M.
“Let’s get you home.”
“Okay,” Esther yawned. “That was loads of fun.”

Summer

The doorbell blared through the room, interrupting the National Geographic Nathan had just settled down to watch. It was one about the sleeping patterns of people around the world, and they had just introduced animals into the program. Nathan was quite interested in the nocturnal seabird of Alaska. This visitor would have to wait.

However, the visitor did not understand the pressing matters of nocturnal animals in far-off places. The bell rang again and again, and Nathan cursed at his choice of doorbell. It was an obnoxious tone, one that reminded him of the buzzers on game shows, like “Double Whammy”—something he avoided watching at all costs.

His bones stiffened together from the sudden movement off the couch, and he spent another buzz from the doorbell getting himself together. He hobbled over to the door, half expecting Esther waiting for him like she had done so many times since that first night. He had, on occasion, let her in. They worked in the shop once more, but all the other times he simply gave the young girl a pat on the head and a small piece of sand art. But it was not Esther this time.

On the other side, Ren Thermouta stood, her brown skin shiny with sweat, and her arms filled with large sunflowers.
“Hello, Nate!”
“Nathan.” He corrected.
She bumped right past him and into his home. “You got any vases in your kitchen?”
“Excuse me, Ren, but—” He attempted to stop her, but she was too quick for him. The twenty- or thirty-something looking woman was inside his home, sashaying into his kitchen like she did it every day of her life.

In the kitchen, Ren rumbled around, looking for a vase, no doubt. The pile of sunflowers found their way onto the island where four newspapers sat,
still wrapped in their plastic shells, cicadas waiting to shed. And speaking of cicadas…

“Ren, I’m in the middle of something. What do you want?”

She paused, smiling a big, white, and toothy smile. Her petite hands held a glass vase. “I’m sure you are, Nate—”

“—Nathan—”

“—But everyone’s got time for free flowers.” She placed the sunflowers into the container and ran them under the sink water.

“What if I have no interest in flowers, Ren? What if I would much rather have time to myself?”

“Oh hush up. You’re always in here by yourself, and I have way too many flowers for my own good.” She approached him now. “You should come over sometime, Nate, and help me out in my garden. Or you could let me plant some in your own yard. Brighten up the place. Your father used to love springtime azaleas.”

She headed toward the door, her purple sundress flowing behind her. “It’s Nathan!”

The next day, Ren arrived with daffodils. She brought her own vase and placed them beside the sunflowers. Each day for a week she brought more flowers, each time entering his home, each time mentioning planting more in his bare, unused yard.

Finally, he let her.

“What—what are you doing?!” He was down his front steps in seconds. “That is perfectly good grass you are tearing up.”

“Relax! I’m planting some nice fall plants underneath your window for good reason.” Ren stood from her bent position, dirt rubbed up along her bare, lean arms. “When you open your window, the sweet scent of chrysanthemum will blow in with the breeze.”

“I don’t open my windows.”

She rested her hand against her hip, a smile playing on her lips. “Yes you do. I know you do. Don’t act all high and mighty with me, Nate.”

Nathan. He corrected in his head.

“Besides,” Ren stooped back down, her shovel connecting with the ground. “If you don’t like them, you can always try a lilac bush in the spring. Those are magnificent. Now get over here and help me, will you?”

As his knees touched the soft ground, his lips began to curl into a smile. He felt a chuckle—a silent one—causing his lungs to vibrate inside his chest.
Ren was a force onto nature all her own, and Nathan really admired her for it. Of course, he’d never tell her that.

Fall

Tonight was no ordinary stroll for Nathan, and he was still uncertain how he felt.

Esther was bouncing up and down as she walked, pulling on his right arm—the one he had offered her just moments before. The Cottontails were having a celebration for harvest time, like they did every year, and Esther had begged him to go. When he had shown up at her door, she squealed. He had been certain then that this might actually be a night he would enjoy. The air was brisk and smelled sweet.

“Nathan! Nathan! Nathan!” She sang out, pointing to the decorations at the end of the block. Pastel pink, blue, yellow, and purple ribbons adorned the lawn. There were bright lights on behind the house where the neighborhood had gathered. As he and Esther rounded the corner to the backyard, Nathan saw the gaudy, awful décor that was the Cottontail way: Easter eggs. Everywhere.

His eyes rolled. Esther, on the other hand, was already off, picking up the various ones in the yard. With her gone, Nathan did not know what to do. He stepped to the side, clasping his hands, feeling tiny grains of various sands still attached to his fingers.

“Hello, Mr. Desm,” a familiar voice came from behind.

“Hello there, Mr. Frost.” He turned to his blue-eyed companion. “What’s with the formalities?”

“Um—” Jack’s head turned to the side. “I thought you preferred Mr. Desm...”

The two stood in a silence that was neither awkward nor pleasant. Nathan, despite the truth in Jack’s words, did not want to openly admit to this winter-loving man that his mind had simply changed.

Jack finally broke the quiet. “Well, anyways, Nathan, uh, Peter had me come over here to ask if you were planning on working with your sand tonight.”

“What? Of course not. I’m here, aren’t I?”

“Great! We didn’t want anyone falling asleep tonight!” Jack wrapped his arms around Nathan in a big hug. Nathan kept his arms at his side.
A soft paw broke their hug. Peter Cottontail, a two-foot tall rabbit with glasses and a sweater vest, welcomed Nathan. “I’m surprised you’re here, but naturally I am grateful. Would you like some punch?”

“No, I’m good.” And then couldn’t resist. “You do realize that it’s not Easter.”

Peter chuckled. “I’m well aware. I just don’t have many other decorations lying about.” He turned around. “Oh, look, Nature’s about to give her speech.”

Nathan’s eyes landed on Ren, standing between Mrs. Cottontail and Father Time. She was dressed in a bright yellow dress, a beautiful waterfall of fabric. In her hand, she held a cup, which she raised above everyone’s heads. Her smile was brighter than any sunshine.

“A toast!” She said.

There were quiet hush sounds made amongst the neighbors. Ren continued. “We had such a wonderful year! Great work to everyone. The world is still in balance, and the harvest looks promising. Thank you for all your hard work. Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

Her eyes landed on Nathan now. She walked over to him, head held high, her eyes shining. “I’m so glad you came.”

She handed him a glass of punch. “Well, with Esther at my home every other night, I really had no choice.”

“Yes you did.” Together they looked at the young girl. “You really made her year, teaching her and all.”

Nathan shrugged it off. Esther had found herself at his workbench more nights a week than he was there himself. Which was saying something. He had found a quiet calm in having the Child of Spring watching him. He was much more precise in his movements. Esther even created many marvelous pieces. “She’s a natural.”

“We had a bet last fall,” Ren began. “Not many people thought you would ever talk with us again, not after your father passed.”

“I never see any of you.” He retorted. He didn’t even know why he felt defensive about it. He knew they were right though, and he was the one cooped up at night when everyone was asleep. But he was doing his job, the one his father left him, and during the day he was sleeping, away from the world. “I suppose I forgot what company was like.”
“Do you like it now?”
Ren’s question felt so loaded that Nathan could not find the words to answer it. Yes would imply he was okay having people in and out of his home day in and day out. A “no” would do the same, only with a no they would be trying to turn it into a yes.

“Nathan!” Esther pulled on his sleeve, distracting him. He looked at her. “Look what I learned how to do.”
She raised her hands as if in prayer in front of her face. When her palms opened, a small white pansy began to bloom.

“Well, that’s mighty nice,” Nathan said.
“IT’s for you,” Esther handed it to him. “I’m making more.”

As the girl ran off, Nathan turned to Ren. “Yes, I do like it. Very much so.”

* 

The sun was just rising when Nathan shut the front door behind him. The walls were welcoming but in a new way. These walls would soon have new faces between them. There would be laughter and storytelling like there was before.

Nathan entered his workshop, ready to begin. The sun may have been rising, but there was still sand to be sculpted. After all, humans still need about eight hours of sleep each night. And who better to help them out than the sandman.
Ray Charles  Microsoft Paint
Blaze Wasserleben
Biographies

Richard Allexander Bethke is a sophomore psychology student from West Deptford, New Jersey. When he isn’t gaming, writing, or working on schoolwork, he can be found practicing his evil laugh and developing an elaborate plan for world domination.

Eric Bihlear is a junior who is double majoring in finance and international business. He plays on the Widener men’s soccer team and sings in the university’s chorale.

Taylor Blum is a freshman studying English and creative writing. She has been writing and creating stories ever since she can remember and hopes to one day become a published author.

Taylor Brown is a sophomore English major with two minors in environmental science and environmental studies. Her life is headed in many directions, but her love of writing will carry through to the end. Hopefully, by the end, she can say that she became a scholar of herself: knowing what it means and how it feels to be completely whole.

Emily DeFreitas is a senior English and creative writing major from central New Jersey. In addition to being on the staff of Widener Ink, she is editor-in-chief of The Blue Route. When she isn’t writing or editing, she enjoys reading, singing, painting, and playing the violin.

Nicolas Demberger is a senior computer information systems major from Wilmington, Delaware. He likes taking pictures, and he has enjoyed being a part of the production of Widener Ink.

Matthew Drake is a junior biology/pre-PT major with a minor in creative writing from Morristown, New Jersey. He is also a member of the Widener men’s lacrosse team.

Péter Finta is a computer science major with interests in art, math, and flight. Active in his high school’s robotics club, he applied the skills
he learned there to his interest in flight, building a radio control tricopter—a type of drone—with which he captured the featured image in this publication. Last summer, while visiting his family in Hungary, he used his tricopter to capture aerial footage of his aunt’s orchard.

Devon Fiore is a senior communication studies major with a minor in creative writing. She enjoys red lipstick, horror, yoga, and pretending that she doesn’t have to be an “adult” when she graduates in the near future. She tries to be tough, even though she struggles to open most heavy doors. She hopes to go into screenwriting so that one day she can attend the Oscars and meet Alec Baldwin.

Cynthia Germany was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, and lived on a farm in Newtown Square. Her family traveled with her father while he worked for the race track exercising and caring for horses. They finally settled in Chester, Pennsylvania, where Cynthia started reading and later became interested in writing.

Autumn Heisler is a senior creative writing and English dual major from Allentown, Pennsylvania. She can still remember the first story she wrote at the age of six depicting a much crueler Candyland than the children’s game portrayed. She has always had a fascination with the legend behind the Sandman, and she hopes readers have enjoyed her version of the tale.

Taylor Jones is the Creature skilled in all forms of contending.

Amanda Joseph is a sophomore creative writing and English dual major, and she enjoys writing more than anything in the world. She’s always had a passion for taking random notes and ideas and creating them into something wonderful and different. She found her passion for writing when she was a freshman in high school, and one day she hopes to live out her dream of becoming an author. She wants to help teens and young adults fall back in love with reading by touching their lives and creating a bond between reader and character that can affect the lives of people around the world.
David Kelly comes from Norwood, Pennsylvania, and was educated in the Interboro School District. He is a sophomore and a full-time student who is currently searching for a major, and while he was hoping to lean toward a field that could help him find a career in paleontology, he’s convinced that he should major in creative writing. He considers himself to be very skilled with writing, and he’s been writing a fictional dinosaur novel since his senior year of high school. When he’s not writing, he’ll spend his time drawing, watching TV, and reading articles about prehistoric life, because they, dinosaurs especially, are a big part of David’s life.

Carolyn Lodge is a sophomore mechanical engineering student. She is part of the HPGE, and she participates in both the FreshBaked and Lone Brick Theatre companies at Widener.

Treasure Love is a freshman at Widener University, and she wrote “...But Then Again” about a girl she really hates.

Sierra Offutt picked up a pen at the age of seven and never put it down. She now splits her time between writing, her fraternity—Theta Delta Sigma Society, Inc.—and being an avid overachiever with three majors in psychology, creative writing, and English.

Alan Parkerson is an indecisive English major who is currently having an existential crisis every other Tuesday. But he thinks that is what college is for, so maybe that isn’t such a bad thing? Or is it? Oh Christ. Oh jeez.

Isaac Scott served five years in the Marines Corps before attending Widener to study accounting. He would like to thank his English professor, Chris Murphy, for his guidance and encouragement in submitting these pieces.

Kelsey Styles is a sophomore communications studies/creative writing double major. Her interests include cats and genetically engineered super soldiers.
Veronica Vasquez is graduating in May, and though she is leaving, she has definitely made her mark. By being a part of Widener Ink and being involved in both English and creative writing, she grew from playing with writing to actually gaining the courage to publish some of her work.

Kimberly Vogel is a senior communication studies major. She enjoys writing when she has some free time from her sorority, theater, choir, and dance. She just wishes that she got involved with Widener Ink sooner.

Blaze Wasserleben is a certified special education and early childhood education teacher who attended a graduate program at Widener University. During his fall semester he committed most of his time to his studies and coaching with the MAC Champions and Elite Eight Finalist Widener football program. Blaze hopes to one day create an art studio that provides quality productions priced for the average consumer. He believes that art conveys multiple powerful messages that should be enjoyed by all. Those interested in acquiring custom portraits can contact Blaze via email: bwasserleben@gmail.com.

Kayla Wettlaufer is an undecided freshman who is in the process of declaring a double major of social work and criminal justice. Photography is one of her many hobbies, and she has been taking pictures for quite some time now. This is her first time being published in Widener Ink, and she could not be more excited.