4-19-2016

The Promethean, Bluebird Whiskey (2015-2016)

English Department
Concordia University - Portland

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean

Part of the Fiction Commons, Nonfiction Commons, Photography Commons, and the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation
Department, English (2016) "The Promethean, Bluebird Whiskey (2015-2016)," The Promethean: Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 1. Available at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol24/iss1/1

This Issue is brought to you for free and open access by CU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Promethean by an authorized administrator of CU Commons. For more information, please contact libraryadmin@cu-portland.edu.
Department: The Promethean, Bluebird Whiskey (2015-2016)
EDITORIAL STAFF:
Managing Editor   Haley Bucher

Student Editors
Mariah Barcinas
Blue Braun
Cheri Brisendine
Jalyn Gilmore
Mary Ellen Gross
Racann Bauer
Josey Meats
Stephen Newhall
Karish Pangilinan
Emily Ponce
Jordan Schmedake
Hana Whisman
McKenna Stocker
Ashley Aczon
Tyler Lamott

Faculty Advisor   Dr. Kimberly Knutsen

The Promethean is an annual journal of the College of Theology, Arts, 
& Sciences of Concordia University-Portland. The publication of The Promethean is made possible with funding from the Associated Students of Concordia University (ASCU). The content is chosen by a staff of student editors. The opinions expressed in the journal do not necessarily reflect those of the College of Theology, Arts, & Sciences, ASCU, or The Promethean staff. All works are copyrighted.

Manuscript submissions and correspondence can be sent electronically to promethean@cu-portland.edu. Since The Promethean uses a blind review process, contributor’s names should not appear on their manuscripts; instead they should be included in an accompanying email.

Please visit our website at http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/
Bird at Sunset

*Jordan Schmedake*
Bluebird Whiskey

The short stories, poems, and photographs featured in the journal come from a variety of talented individuals, and I thank every contributor and staff member of The Promethean for making Bluebird Whiskey possible.

On behalf of the diligent Dr. Kim Knutsen and Sonja Baumeister, the student editors and contributors, and myself, I present this year's issue of the The Promethean, Bluebird Whiskey.

Haley Bucher, Managing Editor
CONTENTS

Pg 4 Bird at Sunset                       Jordan Schmedake
Pg 8 Ghosts                              Amber Reeves
Pg 10 Dead Tree Silhouette              Cheri Brisendine
Pg 11 Peanut Butter                      Tyler Lamott
Pg 12 “Write About the Silence”          Kathryn Willoughby
Pg 13 Oceanside Winds                    Cheri Brisendine
Pg 14 Pirate’s Treasure                  Jordan Schmedake
Pg 15 Tropical Honeymoon                 Jordan Schmedake
Pg 16 Shattered                          Hana Whisman
Pg 17 Why?                               Anonymous
Pg 18 Maypole                            Jessy Shiroma
Pg 22 Mirrors                            Tyler Menzies
Pg 25 Sitting on Harvard Street          Analeigh Enriquez
Pg 26 A Letter to My Body                Anonymous
Pg 27 Haystack Rock                      Cheri Brisendine
Pg 28 Summer Strip                       Jessica Jensen
Pg 30 Downtown Castle                    Cheri Brisendine
Pg 30 My Mother’s Eyes                   Cheri Brisendine
Pg 31 Pink Lemonade                      Josey Meats
Pg 33 Pink Rose                          Cheri Brisendine
Pg 34 Go Ahead                           Blue Braun
Pg 35 White Rose                         Cheri Brisendine
Pg 36 Dewey Leaf                         Cheri Brisendine
Pg 37 I Will Not Come Quietly           Cheri Brisendine
Pg 38 Losing Sucks                       Ana Delgadillo
Pg 40 Depression Is...                   Hana Whisman
Pg 43 Punch Bowl Hike                    Cheri Brisendine
Pg 44 The Little Tea Cup                 Emily Heinsen
Pg 45 Crackie                            Cheri Brisendine
Pg 46 Dad                                Cheri Brisendine
Pg 47 Close Up of a Bee                  Cheri Brisendine
Pg 48 Where I’m From                     Jordan Schmedake
Pg 49 Grass Cat                          Cheri Brisendine
Pg 49 Lilac Dragon                       Mary Ellen Nicole

Published by CU Commons, 2016
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Haloperidol</td>
<td>Kathryn Willoughby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>The Price of Freedom</td>
<td>Cheri Brisendine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Pine Tree Bowl</td>
<td>Cheri Brisendine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Hamsters Go To Heaven</td>
<td>Ana Delgadillo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Broken Tail</td>
<td>Cheri Brisendine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>The Answers</td>
<td>Cheri Brisendine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>A Haiku: Finding Light in the Darkness (Photo)</td>
<td>Missie Yamamura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>A Piece of God for Safekeeping</td>
<td>Jalyn Gilmore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Sleeping Tripod</td>
<td>Cheri Brisendine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Darkness has swallowed up the night; a stagnant, crushing kind of dark, the kind that convinces you the world has gone mute. It presses against your eardrums, your chest, makes you shrink into yourself out of fear of what could be just outside your reach. I swear I can hear my heartbeat thumping against my ribs, beating out a bassline that reverberates through the trees. I close my eyes and will it to be quiet before some predator arrives and swallows me whole, drawn out by the raw smell of fear I’m sure must be emanating from my pores. It is the witching hour; the time when the ghosts and ghouls come out to play, dancing through the trees just outside of the peripherals. It must be a new moon, or a cloudy night, because not a single beam of light comes through the canopy of trees above me.

I am crouched on the damp ground just off a roughly-beaten path. My breath comes out in clouds against the frigid autumn air. I was walking down the path, eyes suspiciously scanning my surroundings, when a crashing of branches ahead urged me to dive into the underbrush.

There shouldn’t be anyone else out here. It is after closing time at the Halloween park where I work; the actors are either gone or leaving. I came out here to lay the groundwork for a prank for the next day—small stick dolls tied together with twine strewn around the woods, just like in The Blair Witch Project. Something to give my coworkers a little scare. Typical good, wholesome fun at the park. John, my partner in life as well as mischief, is back by the bonfire, making sure no one else enters the woods and catches me in the act.

Another branch breaks; I can’t tell if the sound has moved closer or further from the last. Everyone is convinced this place is haunted, and I can’t say with complete certainty that they’re wrong. Not that I particularly believe in ghosts, but… sometimes things happen in the middle of the night that you can’t quite explain. Movement in the trees, a noise that somehow sounds just like a laugh. Or that uncanny feeling that someone is watching.
Something is watching.

It’s waiting, just down the trail. I can’t shake the feeling, but no matter how hard I squint against the darkness, I can’t make anything out beyond the trees with their reaching branches. They shift slowly in the breeze, creaking against one another, rustling in gentle tones that send shivers down my spine. I know that in these woods I am invisible. I’m decked out in black from head to toe, only a sliver of my face visible through the large scarf draped around my head and shoulders. But still, I can’t shake that feeling that something knows I’m here.

The actors think that these woods used to be home to a boy. Everyone claims to see him at one point, dressed in a red hoodie and darting through the trees before they get a good look at him. His history is up for debate, some claiming he was murdered here, others that he was simply a vagrant whose ghost got stuck with the others that roam the property. Truth be told, most of the recent sightings have been set up by myself and John. All it took was a few grainy home videos and “sightings” starring our roommate dressed in a red hoodie. Hysteria is shockingly easy to manufacture.

I stand up slowly, realizing how funny it is that I have managed to scare myself with my own pranks. Besides, the woods are full of animals, especially after the park has shut down for the night. I take in a deep breath, exhale slowly. The smell of wet leaves and distant smoke hangs heavy in my lungs. I only have two more stick dolls left to hang before I can slip back out of the trees unnoticed. I throw one into the tree I was just crouching behind, then turn back to the path.

I manage two steps before a chill pierces my chest and paralyzes my legs.

There is something up ahead. A large mass, just off the side of the trail. I blink hard, look again. Still there. My first thought is that I’ve been caught by another actor. Play it cool. I smile nervously, offer a small wave, and stare directly at them to say okay, you got me.

A gust of wind blows down the path, bringing the trees to life once more. The mass shifts, just barely. I take a step back, my heart now crawling its way into my throat. This is it. I’ve finally been caught.
by the ghosts I’ve been masquerading as these past few months. I should have known better, should have toed the line between mockery and reverence of the park’s spirits more carefully. The other actors were always telling me that I’d come to believe the stories sooner or later.

The mass seems to be growing, or maybe just moving. My gut screams at me to turn and run down the path, but my legs are still frozen and I know that I’m not a very proficient runner. I’d be down before I made it five steps in any direction. Slowly, I reach towards my back pocket, where my phone is waiting with the flashlight I’m sure will save my life—or at least let me die knowing whose ghost I’ve pissed off.

There is another crash and a sudden thumping on the hard ground, coming right towards me. I bolt, a small shriek escaping as I turn—

—and run smack into another body with a hard thud.

I let out another shriek and suddenly there is a glow stick in my face. It’s John, looking half-confused and mostly amused.

“I came back to make sure the ghosts didn’t get you.”

I don’t answer, just grab his hand and take off at a brisk pace in the opposite direction, out of the woods and away from darkness that almost had me.

**Dead Tree Silhouette**

*Cheri Brisendine*
Peanut Butter
Tyler Lamott

I awoke to the smell of peanut butter. Thick globs dripped from the ceiling. It was everywhere. I set my feet on the floor, or at least I tried. There was only peanut butter, and it oozed through my toes. I attempted to crawl to safety.

When I got out of my room, I stood up and immediately fell back down. I was a puppy who hadn’t grown into his legs. If it was chunky I could have gained some traction, but this was that oily all-natural stuff, no way I could walk correctly. After hours of slips and falls I made it over to Jacob’s room. I pounded on the door.

“Are you okay man? What is happening?!”

Muffled screams emanated from behind the door. I had to force it open. On the other side was a carpet of peanut butter two feet thick. A cement truck was parked outside his window, pouring gallons of peanut butter into the room. Jacob’s lone arm protruded out from the ocean of peanut butter. If only he had heeded my advice and invested in a proper bed frame. Jacob and his paper-thin mattress never stood a chance. He continued to scream, but I left him there. I wanted to help him, but I also really wanted his cat, Mittens, who stood atop the golden sea pawing at my hand. Mittens climbed on to my shoulder, and we left Jacob to die.

1st Place in Our Writing Contest
Notes from our judge: Peanut Butter is such an unexpected piece. The first sentence, "I awoke to the smell of peanut butter" could take the reader in any direction, yet the one the author chose feels like something out of a Tim Burton movie. The author’s language is both simple and vivid; a refreshing experience that both puzzles and shocks the reader. While a brief glimpse into a startling sight, the author expertly gives readers all of the necessary details. Even details that one would not have even considered. The imagery enhancing the plotline is what sets this particular story apart. “Peanut Butter” finally leaves readers finding both the horror and hilarity of the narrator’s final decision, yet could this be a hint of satire at how the death of humans does not affect people as much as the death of an animal? It is a testament to the creativity of humans.

Peanut Butter
Tyler Lamott

I awoke to the smell of peanut butter. Thick globs dripped from the ceiling. It was everywhere. I set my feet on the floor, or at least I tried. There was only peanut butter, and it oozed through my toes. I attempted to crawl to safety.

When I got out of my room, I stood up and immediately fell back down. I was a puppy who hadn’t grown into his legs. If it was chunky I could have gained some traction, but this was that oily all-natural stuff, no way I could walk correctly. After hours of slips and falls I made it over to Jacob’s room. I pounded on the door.

“Are you okay man? What is happening?!”

Muffled screams emanated from behind the door. I had to open it. On the other side was a carpet of peanut butter two feet thick. A cement truck was parked outside his window, pouring gallons of peanut butter into the room. Jacob’s lone arm protruded out from the ocean of peanut butter. If only he had heeded my advice and invested in a proper bed frame. Jacob and his paper-thin mattress never stood a chance. He continued to scream, but I left him there. I wanted to help him, but I also really wanted his cat, Mittens, who stood atop the golden sea pawing at my hand. Mittens climbed on to my shoulder, and we left Jacob to die.
“Write About the Silence”
Kathryn Willoughby

(Edit: Removed at author's request.)
Oceanside Winds
Cheri Brisendine
Pirate’s Treasure

Jordan Schmedake

A pirate’s life for me
   It would seem
   Is exactly the life
   I’d like mine to be
   Foraging oceans
   Drinking rum potions
   Sailing beyond horizons
   To God-forsaken islands
Where treasures of silver and gold reside
   Waiting for centuries, side by side
   Venturing the Seven Seas
   Tasting the crisp, salty breeze
   Drifting through almighty waves
Witnessing the beauty of He who saves
   Living by an honorable code
   Forever traveling the liquid road
Ending the days with hues of orange and blue
Oh, what I’d give to be one of the lucky few
Tropical Honeymoon
Jordan Schmedake
Shattered
Hana Whisman

Crunch, soft.
Little pockets of icy snow pop under my foot. In the dead forest, the noise blooms.
I glance upward at the sound bouncing through the shredded trees.
My antlers, like branches, tangle the breeze and make it whistle softly.

Crunch, stealth.
A larger popping pocket of snow, above me, somewhere.
I catch a whiff of . . . something sour. Like a dead carcass, hollowed out by little claws and excrement left to rot.
But less aggressive. And more foreign.

Crunch, quick.
I swing my head to my other side, antlers weighing down my wooly neck. I glance up, through black eyes and snow-scarred lashes.
A tuft of lavender peeks through the snow to caress my slender leg.

Crunch, scrape, swoop.
I see it. It has an antler of its own—straight like a frozen stem, gleaming like a frosty puddle.
It raises its horn to the forest . . . to me. The wind caresses its strange fur and it is at last still.

Flash, crack.
A beam like lightning a crash like thunder a thud like pelting hailstones.

Flash, crash.
A light like springtime the ground like bedtime a black like winter’s night.
Why?

Anonymous

Why?
Such a short question with infinite answers;
Mijo, mom isn’t coming home tonight;
Why?
Yet that was a question I already knew the answer to;
My father’s face looked to have fallen downward deep into a world of despondency;
He was gone.
Everything.
Everything cheerful, positive and warm about him had gone away;
He was silent, and did not answer my question.
I knew…
The look in his eyes, his body, the way he held himself;
He was broken.
And I too had become broken.
My mother died that day;
Why?
Maypole
Jessy Shiroma

“We gather here today to honor Soldier 54313009 and ultimately present him, for his outstanding valor and service, the title of the Red Eagle.”

Mechanical applause.

President’s shrill, metallic voice from the speakers overhead echoed off of the cracked sepia ground. The sound jutted off into the grey sky. Antsy and sweating under the drowning heat waves, the crowd shuffled quietly. To the helicopters above, they sat like a thick sea of poppy seeds organized on the flattened desert ground of what used to be, many years ago, a place called Michigan. Each genderless individual wore a sleek black coat and was void of hair. Each had green eyes, slender waists, and stood at 2 meters tall. Each genderless mannequin stood shoulder to shoulder in a tight circular formation, surrounding the stage. From the stage, the sea of humans went on for several kilometers. No one spoke. No one blinked.

The only human who looked different was President. On stage, he stroked his feathery brown hair in between words. He donned an antique white tuxedo and smiled behind the titanium podium. On this particular day, President had declared a mass celebration for an honorary individual who had proved his excellence in the war.

They needed to identify him. They needed to celebrate him.

“54313009, you have served us well. Ameriga would like to thank you and honor you for your bravery and outstanding duty. You will be remembered.”

President turned to look at the crowd. He smiled again. With a biologically engineered arm of muscle, he motioned to an armed guard. Five more joined, and surrounded 54313009. 54313009 let his head fall and held his arms out. Without any verbal instruction, he began to undress completely. He stood next to President, and began to
undress in front of the indiscernible citizens. Finally, he placed his shoes on the edge of the stage at the foot of President’s podium. It was getting hotter, and his neck began to sweat. He bowed.

The first guard placed two gloved hands on 54313009’s shoulders and nudged him down to his knees. No one noticed that the guard seemed to whisper something into the soldier’s ear before pushing him down further. 54313009 focused on the ground. Arms to his naked sides, he lay prostrate on the silver stage, waiting. Waiting, like the thirsty earth had been waiting for rain for over 200 years now.

President nodded and pushed a small button on the side of his podium. The stage groaned and started to shift. A tall black pole sprouted from the center. Like an ancient flagpole, it rose higher and higher, establishing itself as the only contrast to the bitter, flat terrain. Twenty meters high, it stood like a cursed thorn. Upon reaching maximum height, it released long white streamers and four black chains into the windless air. The brazen chains repelled downward, surrounding 54313009 with four massive hooks.

He shuddered.

The ribbons looked on.

Four guards grabbed a hook and yanked; one guard assigned to each limb. Without making eye contact, they sank the tips of each hook into 54313009’s body. Springs of crimson blood spurted onto the stage. Silent, 54313009 lay like a pierced keg of red wine shuddering in its own leaks. Struggling, the guards jabbed the fat barbs into his muscle. More guards lent their assistance. They thrust the four hooks through shoulders and hips until the curved tips peeped out like black horns on a gruesome back. Sopping and mangled, 54313009 was with four new limbs of chain. After the few minutes of struggle, the soldier was secured.
The first guard pulled out a piece of rolled tobacco and lit it. President walked over and took it. He placed it in between 54313009’s teeth. When 54313009 didn’t immediately bite down, President placed a hand on the soldier’s stark head and assisted him. President admired himself for his kindness. He walked back to his place.

Breathing heavily, a hot, dripping 54313009 was strewn up and ready for his commemoration.

“Ameriga, let us honor our valiant hero.”

“Ameriga, let us honor our valiant hero.”

“Ameriga, let us honor our valiant hero.”

Like a broken tape recording, the sentence echoed a deafening bellow. In a gust of wind, President’s cheery voice swept over the barren land, awakening the dead. The people stopped fidgeting. They looked up. Their eyes dilated at the sight of their bloodied champion.

Then they began to hum.

What rose from the diaphragms of each human welded itself into the sound of the next. The mass’s low hums swam into the darkened sky. Like a medley of a million singing earthly gongs, the sounds started softly. But soon the audible waves began to rise and crescendo. Within minutes the eerie sound resonated through the throats of each focused spectator.

The dark maypole began to grow once again. It rose several more meters into the air, lifting the soldier higher and higher. The ivory streamers fluttered under the moving air and tickled his lacerated back. The four chains creaked and groaned. The soldier closed his eyes. The black needle began to spin and faint trails of cigarette smoke left pencil marks in the air. Like an ancient carnival ride, the mangled soldier ascended into the air, and circled the stage slowly like
a wounded eagle. The eagle bore four small wings of tearing flesh and grimaced as he flew his lopsided journey over the crowd. Around he flew. Faster and faster, he sailed over the hums of the audience like a dizzy fly hovering over smoke. The white streamers violently whipped and chased each other like hundreds of snakes hanging from their tails.

President looked on.

Blood began to spew. The soldier’s insides sprinkled the hot earth and fell upon the thirsty people. A mangled arm hurled into the crowd. Another dangled from its disfigured mother; its umbilical cord stretched taut as the growing momentum pried it away. The soldier’s eyes rolled back.

The sea of prolonged hums warped into beastly cheers. The people began to whoop and jump. They flailed their arms and opened their hungry mouths wide like baby birds. The drought was over! They had been awakened. The blessed scent of blood made red clouds in the sky. They hugged and cheered and reveled under the scarlet mist.

For the first time in a long time, it had finally rained.
“Where are we going?”

“Anywhere.”

The words ring softly in my ears, echoing faintly before being drowned out by the distant whistle of a midnight train. The pallid moonlight casts a reflection upon the glass of a face I have yet to know. In the feeble light I cannot discern whether the tears within the image are merely rain upon the window or something more. I choke back the bitter thoughts, in some absurd fear that memories are lost through the tears that we shed.

Freedom is suffocating. Like an asylum of my own making, sterile and untarnished by the grit of life’s kiss. It buries me in excess, and leaves nothing but questions in its wake. Questions about who to be...what to do. I see a child who cannot decide, and so he goes to bed hungry for the night. I am so hungry.

In a moment of decision, I seize my only salvation. A small piece of metal, no more than a few inches long, sits cold and lifeless in my hand. With it I take control, and kindle within myself a passion I have scarcely felt before.

A stab,

A twist,

And fire ignites within my veins.

It is neither the first, nor the last time that I would speed through the still night with no destination in sight. The midnight roads are liberating, and I am only mildly disappointed that the torrential rain prevents me from wrapping myself in the cool night air. I pass streetlamps that shine with a stale yellow glow, and seem to radiate brighter with each passing pole. They are as good a measurement of distance as any, truthfully. I seek to put as much of it between myself and home. If only for the moment. And so the dim afterglow of the lights fades from my mirror, as I escape the city and drive into the night in a desperate search for anywhere, one last time.
The slick roads wind deep within the forest, and seem as though they may never end. Tonight I cannot stomach music. The world around me remains silent, and I am left with only the guttural murmurs of the engine to accompany me. Wiping blades keep a vigorous rhythm, like a heartbeat. I stare up at the towering pines as they carve the skyline into a celestial pathway, as much a reflection of my route as the misty road beneath.

Eventually I emerge from the trees and meet the night sky stretched out across the burnt forest remains. The land, once thick with life, lays black with ash. A small road that at one time served as a trailhead is where I come to rest. I twist the key and the car quickly winds down, as if drifting suddenly off to sleep. My lights extinguished, the night creeps in.

But I am restless, and my body longs to feel again. I rub the encroaching sleep from my eyes and pull my body from the car into the icy mountain rain. It is cold, and runs in droplets down the back of my neck. I shiver. The hood of my car is where I come to rest. I can feel the engine purr gently beneath the still-warm metal. I sigh as the numbness begins to melt away.

I look upwards at the night sky, realizing that such a sky has been seen many times before, and will be until each and every star fades in its time. But for now, it is my sky. The world around me lays empty, and I am undisturbed. The burden of my future is balanced by the power of my past, and for a moment I can see clearly enough to know that the dawn is not far below the horizon. Everything, all of this, sinks deep within my soul and helps me to feel once more. Neither happy, nor sad, but something indescribably close to both. The feeling of old memories, being packed and stored away in an increasingly crowded attic. Relieved of my fear of forgetting, by the knowledge that I never could.

I do not think of tomorrow. The tomorrow after tonight when I will return to my house and leave my soaking clothes upon the floor before retreating to bed and falling into a catatonic sleep. In the morning, I will awake and attempt to fit everything I need into a container that can be transported, until the day it can return to its
proper location. I wish, for a moment, that “I love you” was small enough to fit in the navy blue, mid-sized sedan sitting alone in the driveway. Until I realize that such a small amount would never do. But until then, I am here. Gazing into serenity atop the rain slick vessel of my deliverance.

The next day I begin my journey westward to the coast. I cling to feelings of livelihood, and weave them into the sights and sounds of summer, to be retrieved years later. Driving across the desert I look out my window and I can see the violet mountains roll by like waves upon the sea. They flow into valleys that shimmer and crack with dry, summer heat, and stretch between horizons like long-forgotten pages. I snake my way along rivers of words, but these pages are hollow and empty, filled only with the transient etchings of a story not yet written.

I continue my race against the sunset, turning pages of the American landscape and mulling Steinbeck between the radio pop songs. My destination creeps ever closer, and with it the boundless future. I could, perhaps, imagine what life will be like, but such fantasies are never close to the truth. Instead, I turn my mind one last time to what I leave behind. Only now realizing that the people we used to be inevitably fade into the people we become. Leaving us with nothing but memories, shining like rearview mirrors into our past. As if to serve as an eternal reminder that the roads behind us are the first to rise and meet the morning sun.
Sitting On Harvard Street

Analeigh Enriquez
A Letter to My Body

Dear eyes,
When people tell you you look just like your mother’s, take it as a compliment.

Dear nose,
Just because you’re “too narrow” and “too pointy” doesn’t mean you still don’t serve your purpose.

Dear lips,
You’re no less pure now than you were 5 ½ years ago when the first of many slutty boys pushed his against you.

Dear shoulders,
Stand up straight.

Dear back,
Thanks for bearing the weight of my sins.

Dear belly,
I’m sorry for all those sit-ups. Also, you’re welcome for all those sit-ups.

Dear booty,
Thanks for doing what you do.

Dear thighs,
Some things jiggle. Don’t worry about it.

Dear feet,
Thanks for carrying me places the rest of me didn’t want to go. Also, you look hella cute in those new boots.

Dear skin,
When people ask how you got those 4 too-straight scars on your forearm, remember your blemishes are not what define you.

Dear heart,
Shut up.
Dear brain,
Shut up.

Dear lungs,
Thanks for always breathing even when it feels like the hardest thing in the world.

Dear liver,
I'm sorry.

Dear heart,
We've had a rough go of it but I'd like to learn to trust each other again.

Dear brain,
Shut the fuck up.

Dear skin,
You don't need to prove how broken we feel inside.

Haystack Rock
Cheri Brisendine
The chipmunks broke me out of my funk. The whirling balls of fluff romped through the trees like first graders at a candy store. They were miniature, wild, and bold. I wanted to be a chipmunk too. Then no one could tell me what to do. But before I could run away to join their tree-top circus, they were gone, vanished into the nooks and crannies of the gnarled old oak tree in my backyard.

Now entertainment-less, I had to find another way to pass the time. “Go outside and play. Look how beautiful and sunny it is!” my mom said. I knew it wasn’t a choice. I had been exiled. I was about to go pick herbs and hunt for lizards by the rosemary bush, when my cat Bando brushed up against my legs, purring like a sports car. His tail whipping back and forth, he ceremoniously dropped a wet bundle of fur at my feet.

All thoughts of herb picking flew from my mind. I looked on in horror as he batted around the tiny, limp animal. My cat taunted it, waiting until he thought it was free before dragging it back. I was torn. My mom had always said that if the cat caught anything, we should leave it. But I’d never seen him with anything that was still alive. Usually, the only sign that he’d caught something was a pair of shiny, glistening entrails left on the back doorstep. I let out a gasp, realizing that if I didn’t step in, my bold, wild and free kin would become that wet pile of entrails. Quick as a flash, I darted my hand between my cat and his prey. The chipmunk stared up at me and seemed to give me a look of camaraderie. Then it ran up my pants.

I shrieked as the liberated chipmunk scuffled around in my jeans. It was tunneling higher and higher up my leg. I started to panic. I wanted to run and scream and, above all, get it away from me. I realized that movement might make it want to bite me so I burst into tears. What if I got rabies?

Big fat tears dropped down my face onto the scorched grass. I was in exile, and still mad at my mom for making me leave the house so I couldn’t ask for help. There was no one to save me. My
world narrowed down to a fine point. I had two choices. I must either rid myself of this chipmunk or die, foaming at the mouth in front of the herb garden.

My hands gripped my leg, blocking the progress of the now hated rodent. Bando prowled around me with a vengeance, yowling and trying to get back his conquest. The sun shone maliciously, making me sweat for a solution.

I sat there in limbo for hours. The sun beat down, the cat circled, and the chipmunk increased his efforts to worm his way up my jeans. Any moment now, he could sink his little teeth into my leg. I was desperate, but I had the inklings of a plan. Should I do it? What if the neighbors saw? All I knew was that I had to get it out. There was only one option left to me. I would have to take off my pants.

Keeping my hand pressed firmly against my jeans, I scooted my leg out from the chipmunk’s grasp. Its tiny claws skinned my leg. Bando sniffed all around me, stalking the air for traces of his prey. I carefully wriggled and writhed, ever so carefully sliding off my pants. Almost there. An inch left. I was free! The hated animal zipped out of my jeans like a bolt of lightning. I silently cheered for Bando to catch it.
Downtown Castle

Cheri Brisendine

My Mother’s Eyes

Cheri Brisendine
Love. Sacrifice. Devotion. People wander through their ordinary lives believing these things don’t exist; but, as your final breath escapes your lips you realize they do. And like that, you are saved.

A marriage ripped apart by countless hospitalizations and numerous suicide attempts is transcended by a primal instinct to survive. The relationship between my grandmother and grandfather has been my single greatest influence in life. The moment that defines their impact on me occurred twenty years before I was born.

High school sweethearts, Bill Allen and Evelyn Kidwell married at the age of eighteen in an apple orchard a week before he shipped out with the navy. Through the course of the next sixty-five years, the marriage would produce seven kids, ten grandkids, and countless pets. It would seem this true blue American family was living the dream. Too bad nightmares are dreams too.

The events that unfolded in the fall of 1972 changed the course of the family’s life. Two years prior to the horrific events, my grandmother was hospitalized after a major psychotic episode and diagnosed with manic-depression (more commonly known as bipolar disorder). For decades, the story was told through a scar that is deeply carved into Evelyn’s arm.

I was seven when I first noticed the thin, pink flesh that ran up my grandma’s arm. Being the curious little kid I was, I asked my mom about it, and after four or five tries, she finally told me the awful truth.

It was fall 1972, and my mother was in the third grade, my uncle one year ahead, and my aunt one year behind. They would walk home during lunch every day. Yet, unlike any other day, this day would change their lives forever. They got home and my mother and her brother immediately went to fix lunch. My Aunt Leslie went to find my grandmother.

When Leslie entered the bedroom that day she saw something that no child should ever see. She found her own mother in a pool of blood with her stomach ripped open by a gunshot.
My mother describes the next twenty-four hours as a blur. My uncle took charge of the situation and moved her and my aunt to the neighbor’s house. He called 911 and stayed with my grandmother until the ambulance arrived. Word spread like wildfire, but my grandfather was one of the last to get the news. He immediately went to the hospital.

It is here that the defining moment of my grandparents’ influence can be found, not only in the actions of the day, but in the actions that took place as the years went on and they struggled with a new, unpredictable life.

My grandfather was an alcoholic, but when this terrifying gift came into the family, he realized his selfishness and quit drinking. Forty years he has sacrificed for my grandmother, and she to her best ability has tried to live a normal life as a loving mother and grandmother. Actions like these are the air in the lungs of the animals that seek to break down the walls that restrict and define us. An action that chooses love, regardless of a condition or diagnosis.

* 

During my sophomore year, my world turned upside down. For sixteen years there had been a sickness growing inside of me. One that made a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven. It was first diagnosed as major depressive disorder. It was a misdiagnosis, but that’s what my dumbass doctor said when he put me on a little blue pill called Zoloft. Soon after, I started to experience delusions and hallucinations, also known as psychosis. I made impulsive decisions that I’m still regretting, like quitting the drama club and joining debate. Smoke alarms began to talk to me. In my head, everyone was out to get me.

Turns out I’m bipolar, and unfortunately, it often takes a period of psychosis to discover this. I have an unseen and unspoken connection to my grandmother and what happened nearly forty-five years ago. While she and I are in different mental states, we both know that there is no such thing as a normal day. But I, being myself (and that self beholden to medicine, therapy, and the choice to love unconditionally), can say better us than you.
Life is hard. Mental illnesses suck, I’m not going to lie, but like everything else they cannot be defined by stereotypes or stigmas. I have ventured to the limitless corners of the mind, the place where you draw your last breath. Deep. Slow. Realizing that what goes unseen—love, sacrifice, devotion—is worth living for, and what you see is not.

And like that, you are saved.

**Pink Rose**

*Cheri Brisendine*
This random guy that I don’t really know is vomiting in my kitchen sink… I don’t think anything of it. This is what I expect of him.

The second time he vomits, his puke looks like Funfetti sprinkles and cake batter. How jealous I am of him. I think I heard from someone before that when he feels upset, sad, infuriated or something else, the feelings can come out of him, while mine will forever stay where they are, inside of me, never to come out. But I don’t remember who I heard it from. The puke is bubbling in the sink, rising as intensely as lava.

After the third time he pukes, I know he is revived.

“Who are you?” I ask.

“Whoever you want me to be,” he says, wiping his mouth with a paper towel. This random guy, who I don’t really know, or maybe I do, has red hair, short and flowing like small waves on the beach—waves that can’t really do damage, but take some sand with them. For some odd reason, he is wearing just a purple speedo.

“I’m going to watch TV with August now, in your room…. Is that ok?”

“Excuse me?”

“With August, August Dawkins,” he elaborates, swinging one arm to the side, avoiding eye contact with me. This doesn’t make any sense… August is dead. August died on December 12, around 5 P.M. August has been dead for two months and eleven days.

“Go ahead, tell August I said hi,” I reply. “And that I love her.” The random redhead guy flashes his teeth: dented and complicated like a white rosebud… He skips to my room, his movements reminding me of a pixie fairy.

Nothing can be real.

I listen to 2004 Usher while cleaning up the puke—it smells of rotten eggs and disappointment. Feelings are so ugly, I guess. Mine would be worse than his Funfetti vomit; mine would resemble a
sewer. A sewer of all my frustration. And I don’t want to be jealous anymore. So I go to the bathroom and sit down, head inches away from the toilet (it looks like a mouth…hissing), and think about how disturbing it is that August left me here. I don’t even know I am upset. Then I think about clouds, and how when they cry they replenish the soil. And of random redhead guy puking, and after, his face lit up brighter than Times Square. I don’t need to be jealous, so I release the sewer. August’s joyful laugh echoes in the background, or maybe it doesn’t.

White Rose
Cheri Brisendine
Dewey Leaf

Cheri Brisendine
I Will Not Come Quietly

Cheri Brisendine

His question,
one I knew was
coming
waits in the hot,
sweet air.

I close my eyes and see
a forest of skeletons
reaching for my skirt,
demanding what I do not want
to give.

When denied, the skeletons
are angry.
They try to rip and tear
at my innocence.
I scream and run
and they still reach and
grab for me.
I am surrounded.

I open my eyes and
his eyes wait, expectantly.

“No,” I whisper.
Unlike the skeletons,
he listens,
does not force it.

He nods.
He leaves.

My tears come quietly, unobtrusively.
Yet I am glad that
I did not.
2nd Place in Our Writing Contest

Notes from our judge: The plotline of Losing Sucks demonstrates a wonderful story arc, which immediately sparks the reader's interest. So often one hears or reads stories about sports being the perfect metaphor for life, and through the author's transitions, plot, and imagery the reader feels the impact and the horror of watching one's teammate and friend get hurt and being utterly helpless on the sidelines. The importance of a story is demonstrated through the author's ability in making it tangible for readers to both understand and relate to in some form; a skill that this author clearly demonstrates. “Losing Sucks” demonstrates not only all the necessary tools for a story, but the heart of what life is about - losing does suck, but we keep going because we have no other option.

Losing Sucks
Ana Delgadillo

My high school team had made it to the state playoffs my freshmen year. Unfortunately, two games before the playoffs, I broke my ankle. I had gone up for a header and got bumped on the way down causing me to land funny. I could feel the entire outside of my ankle land flat on the ground. POP! and I was out for at least six weeks. So I got to be team cheerleader during the state playoffs. But I wasn't the only cheerleader. There were three juniors who were our own Timbers Army. War paint on the face, a banana suit (our colors were yellow and purple), kilts, and drums. They were our only student fans.

It was almost the end of the first half and the game had hit a boring spell. The first twenty minutes were a bit crazy because one of our two seniors got a red card fifteen minutes into the game and she was easily our best defender. So we were screwed, but we put up a nasty fight against the lumberjacks from Bonney Lake. These girls were monsters, big and tall trees. But all the adrenaline and excitement from the beginning wore off.

We were just passing the ball around trying to find a way to the goal when my friend Emily made a cutting run and got the ball right in front of the goal. Bonney Lake's brick giant came lumbering
out to try to stop Emily’s shot. I looked around at our bench as I was hobbling with my boot and yelling for Emily. I could see our fans – the Scotsman, the warrior Indian, and the banana – jumping up and down with their arms in the air, cheering her on.

And then a scream. And then silence.

My friend that I’d known since I was three was on the ground screaming and crying and then went into shock. The brick wall goalkeeper was scootching as far away from Emily as she could. I was on the other side of the field and I could see almost everyone on the field look as if they were going to throw up. The only one who didn’t was one of our juniors, Eden, who went over to check on Emily. She yelled for our coach to come over, and I could see Emily’s mom book it down the stairs from the stands.

I saw Emily’s mom on the phone, and Eden came over asking for blankets, coats, anything to cover her.

“She broke her leg. I went to lift her leg up and her leg just dropped off from the middle of her shin. I need the med bag.”

I would’ve run over if I didn’t have my stupid boot. I had known her the longest out of everyone, and I was sidelined from helping her. I called my dad to tell him Emily broke her leg (he has coached her since she was eight.) Our team stood in a circle holding hands, tears welling up in our eyes, waiting for the ambulance.

When the medics crossed the field with the gurney, Emily had been lying there for half an hour. Not much to do about a broken leg other than trying not to move it and keep her from seeing it. The medics hauled her on the gurney and slowly pushed her out of the stadium. As she passed by, she gave a small wave and meek smile towards our team. Even with the morphine injections they gave her, she was sane enough to see that it hurt us to see her rolling off the field as much as it hurt her to be broken. She signaled to us to finish the game with all of our good legs, but we didn’t have enough heart left to get a win for her.

We lost. And all we could do to keep our minds off Emily was sing karaoke on the bus ride home. We knew that’s what Emily would be doing if she was with us instead of getting a rod that could predict stormy weather rammed up her shin.
Depression Is . . .

Senior Thesis Excerpt

Hana Whisman

Depression

Depression is the black poison running through my veins. It seeps into my skin when I’m idle and suffocates my senses. When I crawl into bed, when I drag myself up, when I lose attention in class, it pours into me and contaminates every inch of my body.

I have to let it out of my veins. I have to cut myself open.


Sometimes it sounds like some other voices I’ve heard.

Whether screeching or hissing, it always slithers out when I set it free.

A blade. A knife. A razor. A goddamn pencil. Anything will do. All that matters is that I bleed and that it hurts.

The pain satisfies the voices and the blood lets them crawl out of my skin.

I used to wonder how anyone could harbor so much self-hatred so as to permanently scar herself.

But now I know it’s mostly about the scars.

They are comfort. They are proof. Proof that my body is real and my life is real. Proof that the poison is gone. For now.

Depression is four trails of blood. They’re parallel. They’re perfect.

***

Wet & Dry

I can divide my depression into two forms: “wet” and “dry.”
Wet depression is just as it sounds: blubbery and drippy.

Wet depression is what happens late at night or alone in a bathroom stall.

It’s shaking and sobbing.

It’s crying so hard my shirt sleeve is drenched with tears and snot and my back is dripping with sweat.

Wet depression is the damp mist of an inhaler when I’m crying so hard I stop breathing.

It’s matching wine and blood stains.

This is the depression others can see. They can feel it. They can feel my tears and my tremors.

Wet depression is the rarer form, for me.

Dry depression is invisible. It’s staring at a wall. It’s lying in bed. It’s floating through the day.

Dry depression is baring teeth in the place of a smile. It’s laughter that echoes. It’s the “Everything’s fine” I’m obligated to heave up.

Dry depression is using every ounce of my power to put one foot in front of the other to walk to class.

Dry depression is spending the entire car ride convincing my eyelids to stay open and my foot from shoving down on the gas pedal.

It’s the casual thoughts of death that occupy every cavity of my brain while my body maneuvers through my obligations.

It’s wondering how people can care about . . . anything. It’s wondering if anyone else is faking the same as I am . . .

And wondering, if they are, why the fuck do we keep bothering with the lie?

***

Recovery

Recovery is an even scarier place.
It's waking up in the morning and everything seems alright—but you know it won’t last.

It’s waking up another morning wishing you were dead, and wondering if this relapse will last a moment or a lifetime.

At least when you’re depressed, you know you cannot possibly sink any lower.

But in recovery, the possibility of falling yet again is omnipresent.

It’s wondering whether you feel better because you’ve found true happiness or because the chemicals you put in your mouth every day have finally reached your brain.

It’s spending every day hoping that tomorrow will be better than today, then spending all day convincing yourself that it won’t be.

It’s the hope that even if today and tomorrow and next week and next year are bleak and miserable, maybe in a decade you’ll be in the mood to be alive.

It’s allowing the same hope that betrays me every morning that I wake up beckoning death to rule my day and lead me to a less-miserable tomorrow.
Punch Bowl Hike

Cheri Brisendine
I sit here and pour hot tea into my favorite tea cup. I add so much cream and sugar the tea is just a subtle complement to the sweetened cream. I sip the hot liquid and floods of memories enter into my mind, and I’m reminded of fond days with my grandparents.

We’re all sitting in their living room. It’s three in the afternoon on a beautiful summer day. The little tea cups sit on the tray waiting to be filled with the rich calming liquid. It’s a tradition; every day at three we have a cup of tea. My grandparents call it “Tea Time,” and it is one of my favorite parts about visiting them. I have to wait to be served tea, for I’m too young and clumsy to lift the delicate tea pot. After my grandmother has poured me my tea, I get my own milk and sugar. After I’m done with the task of sweetening my tea, it’s basically sweet milk, but it’s perfect to me. I look outside to my grandmother’s garden. She’s an award winning gardener. I love each flower. Their sweet smelling nectar reminds me of spring. Springtime is a wonderful time. There is so much life around, so much beauty. It is one of my favorite times of the year. Whenever I walk by a flower I must bend down and smell it. It gives me great joy.

My freshman year of college. The flowers are all in bloom and there are so many kinds I have never seen before. I drag my roommate on walks each night. We walk for hours and each time I pass a flower I bend down and smell it. Their aromas fill my lungs with life. These walks help us get out and see new things.

Walking is one of my favorite things. To explore, to be outside, to see the world around me, gives me life. I never like walking when I’m at home. There is nothing to see, only fields of wheat. At school when I go for walks there are houses, dogs, flowers, and people to see. It still amazes me when we walk back to the school and see that big brick building with the Concordia sign in front of it, that I am lucky enough to be a part of this.
We walk by a mother with a child, and I think back to when I was young, when I could be anything, and I look to that building and know I would rather be here doing what I am than doing anything else.

Crackie

Cheri Brisendine
Dad

Cheri Brisendine

The crack of the belt against my spine makes me wince but I don’t scream out. I learned a long time ago that the more I scream my pain the more there is. If I take his beating quietly it does not last. One last crack of belt buckle on flesh and he kicks me away.

When I was young, I was full of hate and venom and bloodlust for my old man. After all the whippings, after all the knuckles against my chin, covering up his abuse so my teachers didn’t ask too many questions, after all that, how could I not hate the sadistic bastard.

But then there was a slip, a simple little line to make me feel small while he kicked me in the stomach: “You think this is bad, boy, you should’ve met my pa.” And I realized that my old man’s old man had done this exact thing to him. He had beaten him every day, beaten the love and the tenderness out of him, beat him into
the hateful, violent person that is
my father. His father poisoned him
and my father let it poison him,
his life, his decisions,
his relationship with me,
his one and only son.

So now, I take it quietly,
slowly counting down the days
until I am free of his
torture, his never-ending
struggle to get back at his dad.
And I will not let it poison me.
I will not let his vendetta
ruin my life. I will
let the pain go in and quickly out,
and when I get away,
I will stay away and I will be
free and strong.
Finally.

Close Up of a Bee
Cheri Brisendine
Where I’m From

Jordan Schmedake

I am from hobbits with magical rings,
children living in boxcars,
stupid smelly buses.

I am from barbecued turkeys cooked on a crisp, autumn day,
bell peppers and hummus platters,
peanut butter toast and frozen waffles in the afternoon.

I am from this little light of mine that I’m gonna let shine,
St. John Baptist de La Salle who prays for us,
Hail Marys and Our Fathers strung on a rosary.

I am from blackberry bushes so thick that spooky, thorny tunnels
have been cut through them,
creaky, plastic play structures,
colorfully painted birdhouses hanging on the branches of the cherry tree.

I am from loving parents to everyone but each other,
quiet dinners and loud silence,
broken homes built on broken values.

I am from Queen’s “Fat Bottomed Girls,”
loud, heavy-breasted, dark skinned, red wine-drinking women,
holidays hosted in houses too small to hold the energy of my female-dominant family.

I am from laughter and sadness,
an orange tree in an apple orchard,
branches that are clothed with winter frost.
Grass Cat
*Cheri Brisendine*

Lilac Dragon
*Mary Ellen Nicole Gross*
Haloperidol

Kathryn Willoughby

It is breakfast, or lunch, or snack, or Ensure supplement time. I have been sitting at this table in this hospital since the day my mother was born. The wood chair with its crisp edges has gone soft. It is tired, I am tired, the nurse near me sighs so I know she’s tired, too. I have been crying since my grandmother took her first steps, so I don’t notice until my fifth sip of the ironclad nutritional supplement. I set the Styrofoam cup down softly. With my hands two pounds lighter, I discover I do not have hands. Did I ever have hands? I wipe my eyes until dry. I cannot feel the stretch and pull of my fingers. My nerves have gone soft. But that’s not what has me scared. I cannot see my hands.

When I was in the first grade, it was discovered that I needed glasses. I wasn’t doing well on the weekly spelling quizzes, and I was a know-it-all, so Mrs. Duvall knew something was wrong. The optometrist was that cheesy kind of doctor. I was precocious enough to hate him for patronizing me. (But, yes, I did take the smiley-face sticker. Sue me, I was six.)

I climbed into the leather chair and lined my eyes up to the kaleidoscope of lenses. It is always the same: there is a yellow, one story house on a green hill with a blue sky. Then, there is a red dot on a dirt path, receding to the horizon. And then, what is expected from sitcoms: the letters. They show you five small letters, which always include C and V, say “clearer” or “less clear,” and you’re done. I had never met a test I didn’t desperately want to ace, so I took my time on this, trying to figure out what the right answer was. I knew I was smart. I wanted to be smart enough to know all the letters, no matter how blurry they were. I wanted to be superhuman. Naturally, my first pair were wiry, blue, and not the right prescription.

The culprit is haloperidol, but I am too frothy to see this yet. My vision is going and I didn’t even get to say goodbye. The images in front of me recede to a few colors – the mustard walls, the mahogany floors, and something somewhere is white. In my time at the Department: The Promethean, Bluebird Whiskey (2015-2016)
Sheppard Pratt Mental Health System, the clock on the north wall had become my friend. Halfway through my stay, I couldn’t handle the possibility of eating any more (drink three Ensures in one day and then judge me.) Because of this, I was a permanent fixture at the south table, the “fuck your insolence, time to snap out of your long-term psychiatric disease that has plagued you since childhood” table. It was the table for glaring nurses, for sighs and eye-rolls.

But, from my seat, I could see the clock. It was white, basic, and I made a game with it. I would sob until I felt I could sob no longer, and then I would see how long I had been crying for. At some point, I figured, the nurses had to understand I wasn’t going to drink another ounce, and they should let me get up. I found 10:30 (an hour after breakfast finished) to be the cut-off point. The nurse would just be sick of me. (Unless, it was Ashley. Ashley was the devil. One time, a person with an eating disorder punched Ashley in the face, and she went into psychiatric nursing as part of her revenge plan. Probably.)

But now my vision is disappearing. The clock is receding into the horizon like the red dot. Soon, the white color of it is gone. I should be panicked, but my nerves are watered down.

My in-patient psychiatrist was just as sick of my “rebellion” as the nurses, and so she had me taking haloperidol before every meal. Sedate me and force-feed me. Haloperidol is not a medication for anxiety, you see – it’s an anti-psychotic, the kind that makes you easily controlled. I am being muted into obedience. My eyes turn feathery, and I melt.

At some point later, I am told I “did a good job” – for once, they got me to finish my drink.
The Price of Freedom
Cheri Brisendine

My heart beats
with the drums.
I close my eyes to soothing hums
but I’m aware as the room heats.

At first, only a warm tickle
licks up my skin
and I stifle a morbid grin
and I remember how life is so fickle.

But then it begins to burn,
and I begin to heal
and I love the way it feels
because I can never learn.

Unfortunately, the feelings fade.
The lovely warmth begins to leave
and, sadly, I can breathe
and I realize that I’ve been made.

Medical lights flicker above me
and the pain is so terribly bright
and now I see an otherworldly light, so white
and I smirk because I might be free.
Beauty

Anonymous

What other body parts
Can I pierce with metal?
Inject with ink?
Run my blade along?
I want to poison my mind
With alcohol instead of
Scary thoughts
And turn pain into beauty
Gemstones
Pictures
A few drops of blood

Pine Tree Bowl

Cheri Brisendine
She was a soft tan with curious eyes. Exactly like her sister. There was no way I could have separated them – that was just too cruel. Even if they couldn’t speak to me and were small, I knew they would blame me somehow for being lonely and breaking up their family.

So, I decided to let the little guys stay together and spend the few extra dollars for two hamsters instead of one. I figured they seemed to like each other so they would be fine in a cage meant for one. These hamsters were my first real pets that I bought and was responsible for. I had one before named Orio, but I got it from my sister’s friend who decided to retire as a fifth grade pet owner. So I nobly saved the old black-and-white rodent from ruin. She was already old when I got her so when she passed, my hamster craze was only beginning. This time, I got to pick out my hamsters and pay for them with my own babysitting money. My parents decided that as a sixth-almost-seventh grader, I could be trusted with a living mammal as long as it didn’t reproduce.

I named them Snickers and Nutter Butter because I felt I had to honor their fallen kin, Orio, by giving them junk food names. For the next two years, they were exceptional pets. They ate and drank when they were supposed to, they got their daily exercise on the wheel, and they never complained if I hadn’t cleaned the cage for a few weeks. I was proud that they had accepted me as their owner by not biting me or fighting with each other or running on the squeaky, plastic wheel in the middle of the night. I would even give them the hamster equivalent of the Medal of Honor for not attacking my brother when he death-gripped them. One time, my brother literally squeezed the pee out of Snickers. My brother also knew how to open the cage, so I would occasionally come into my room with him double-fisting my hamsters. He loved how silky and small they were and that they didn’t argue against him holding them like stress balls.
Sadly, they were small, domesticated pets and did not have the longevity of beta fish. As the two year mark rolled closer, I could tell they were less mobile and slept more. The way they would crawl around the cage reminded me of two old best friends shuffling with canes in the park of their childhood, chatting about the golden days when they could move better and eat anything they wanted. Two old best friends knowing it was the last of their days together, walking along the cardboardy bedding, passing their purple igloo and the green wire fence surrounding their only home.

It was near the end of my eighth grade year when the day came for the first one to pass. Snickers hadn't eaten for a few days and hadn't moved from her spot just outside the purple igloo since I had left for school that day. Sensing she would die in the middle of the night, I gently picked her up, feeling the rapid flutter of her heart, and brought her to my cheek. I remember her fur had stayed just as fuzzy as the day I got her, her little claws grasped my fingers like a final handshake between long time partners. I whispered, “Goodbye, sleep tight” in her tear-shaped ear. The purple igloo seemed like the best resting place I could give her – the soft purple light filtering through the plastic seemed soothing, and it was the closest thing to a bed she had. There was no way of telling how Nutter Butter would react to finding her sister resting in peace, but I would see in the morning. I went to bed, resting myself for the inevitable morning.

I woke up the next day and decided I couldn't bear seeing my dead hamster until just before I was going to school; that way I would have a convincing reason not to cry. I hated crying and found ways to avoid it at all costs. I did what anyone else would do when they knew they'd receive bad news: went on with my routine in the hopes that it would stay normal. Bathroom, eat, brush, contacts, deodorant, hair. Then I had to enter my room to get dressed. It was like going into the basement when all the lights are off and the washing machine blinks and makes unearthly noises. My heart beat faster, I could feel the sweat on my palms, and I held my breath. As slowly as I could, I painfully pulled my school uniform from my closet – purposefully flip-flopping between pants or skort, sweatshirt or no sweatshirt. At last, I couldn't avoid the dreaded coffin where my Snickers lay.
The pin was out and the door crashed down. Nutter Butter wandered around the water feeder, not seeming to notice the bulging eyes searching for Snickers nor the giant hand reaching for the top of the purple igloo. The giant suddenly sucked out all the air in the cage as it saw Snickers.

Goose bumps scurried from my hand to my entire body. I gasped, and then in disbelief I squeaked out, “Omgad!” My little sister, Lili, came over to see what was happening and why I was frozen. Processing Lili’s approach took me too long. I couldn’t snap out of it fast enough to push her away, shield her eyes, anything to stop her from seeing too much. But it was too late. She had seen. And she screamed bloody murder.

_Half my hamster’s face was gone._

I can still see the pink ragged flesh lining the center of the skull. The skull was an egg white. The eye socket was gaping at me. The sharp teeth were all visible, with the tendons lining them. I could see part of the brain and a bit of muscle still clinging to the lifeless head. I knew only one thing could have done it: Snickers’ own sister, Nutter Butter.

I quickly covered the body up with the igloo and raced to find a suitable casket for my half-eaten hamster. The best I could do was an old cellphone box. I put some bedding in it and stuffed Snickers in, gnawed face down. Finding some Scotch tape, I wrapped the box round and round until I was sure there was no way for my partly consumed hamster to fall out.

I only told my best friend and mom that day about my cannibal hamster and the grisly death or cruel autopsy she had performed on her sister. I still hadn’t decided if I should feed the cannibal or not, but decided she would die soon anyway, hopefully from guilt, or the ghost of Snickers would emerge from the flesh in Nutter Butter’s stomach and devour her from the inside. I was enraged that I had placed Nutter Butter as the one to watch over Snickers’ last minutes on earth. I purposefully didn’t pay attention to Nutter Butter after that and have no recollection when she died because I couldn’t have cared less.
I did give Snickers a solemn, beautiful burial wedged between my neighbor’s fence and our rhododendrons. I used an old 9/11 cross as her headstone, now hidden by the overgrown grass that has crept under the fence.

A few years back, I found a single white flower growing over Snickers’ grave. I had buried Nutter Butter next to Snickers, but it was an unceremonious body dump. I think the white flower was Snickers’ symbol of forgiveness, that I should respect Nutter Butter too. After all, they were sisters. Maybe it was just a big toothy goodbye kiss.

Broken Tail
Cheri Brisendine
The Answers
Cheri Brisendine

When I was young,
I asked, “What?”
and my head was
filled with simplicity.

As I grew,
the question transformed
to “How?”
and my head was filled
with a little more complexity.

And now I am old,
and I ask, “Why?”
and my head is filled with
such obscurity
that I die.

The end.
A Haiku: Finding Light in the Darkness
Missie Yamamura

Daylight savings time.
It blankets my sanity.
Summer dreams a daze.
A Piece of God for Safekeeping

Jalyn Gilmore

Margaret sat at the kitchen table with a drink in one hand and a magazine in the other. She downed the rest of her drink, then poured herself another. Was this the second or the third? The fourth? She took a swig and the bitter whisky burned the back of her throat on the way down. Strangely, she liked the tingling sensation it left behind after it was gone. She wiped a bit of sweat from her forehead and leaned back in her chair holding her drink up to the pitiful kitchen lamp, watching two water droplets race from the brim of her glass toward the bottom. Margaret tipped her head back and finished it off.

She heard the keys in the door down the hall and her mother's heavy footsteps. She watched her mother's eyes slide from the half-empty bottle to the completely empty glass in front of her. Margaret waited.

Lorraine didn't speak. Instead, flinging her purse onto the back of the chair opposite Margaret, she took a seat, then lit a cigarette and took a small drag, something she hadn't done since Margaret

3rd Place in Our Writing Contest

Notes from our judge: The relationship between a mother and daughter is one that is constantly shifting between bumps and smooth patches. In A Piece of God for Safekeeping the author demonstrates both how young children observe more than their parents would wish and how more often than not a parent must face their mistakes and humanity in the eyes of their adult child. It is a relationship that demonstrates the raw, imperfect, great and terrible beauty that is humanity. Throughout the piece the author shows how even the smallest details can reveal all the truths humans attempt to hide about themselves. By using lines such as "They drank in a silence so complete noise could only tiptoe around them," the reader gets a glimpse into how tense Margaret and Loraine's relationship has always been. The author's use of shifting between references to the past and the effect they have on the present demonstrates the power of every moment, every decision.

A Piece of God for Safekeeping

Jalyn Gilmore

Margaret sat at the kitchen table with a drink in one hand and a magazine in the other. She downed the rest of her drink, then poured herself another. Was this the second or the third? The fourth? She took a swig and the bitter whisky burned the back of her throat on the way down. Strangely, she liked the tingling sensation it left behind after it was gone. She wiped a bit of sweat from her forehead and leaned back in her chair holding her drink up to the pitiful kitchen lamp, watching two water droplets race from the brim of her glass toward the bottom. Margaret tipped her head back and finished it off.

She heard the keys in the door down the hall and her mother's heavy footsteps. She watched her mother's eyes slide from the half-empty bottle to the completely empty glass in front of her. Margaret waited.

Lorraine didn't speak. Instead, flinging her purse onto the back of the chair opposite Margaret, she took a seat, then lit a cigarette and took a small drag, something she hadn't done since Margaret
was a sophomore in high school. Finally Loraine said, “What are you reading?”

“I dunno.”
“How many drinks have you had?”
“I dunno.”
“You know you’re not old enough to drink, yeah?”
“I know.”
Loraine smirked. “Mind if I join you?”
Margaret made a theatric sweep over the table.
Loraine’s smirk persisted as she poured herself a drink. They drank in silence for a long while. Neither made any attempt at eye contact. Maybe they didn’t know how anymore. With enough time people lose words they thought they once owned. They drank in a silence so complete noise could only tiptoe between them here and there, as glassware against a wooden table, and the tick-tock-tick-tock on the wall, and turning magazine pages.
Loraine suddenly slapped her glass down with a gruff, “This isn’t how I thought things should be.”
Margaret peered at her mother. “What?”
“It’s not like I planned for things to turn out this way. It just happened.”
Margaret must have had more to drink than she thought. Her words stumbled over her tongue and spilled onto the table. “I never even...just...what?”
Loraine took another drag, much longer this time. “It’s just sometimes you get dealt a hand and you play it.”
“What in the hell are you talking about?”
Loraine felt her bottom lip quiver and the familiar sharp sting in the corners of her eyes. “Your dad was a good man, he just wasn’t...” she scrubbed her fingers through her hair, “this wasn’t what I wanted.”
Margaret stared at her mother, as if all it took to understand a person was a long, patient examination, like people kept their answers inked out on their skin. Finally she said, “Then what did you want?”
“I don’t know I—”
“What did you want?”
Lorraine said nothing.
“Go on, say it. What did you want?”
Lorraine lifted an eyebrow with that familiar set of her jaw.
“Alright. Fine. I didn’t want this. I didn’t want to be stuck in this ass end of town widowed with three kids.” She waved her hand around the kitchen. “I wanted more than this.”

“That’s why you stayed out longer on Thursdays when you didn’t think Dad noticed?” Margaret’s voice was heavier and thicker than the night air. She kept her eyes on her mother, but Loraine stared into her glass. Margaret sighed and sat back. “Alright, let me ask you this: did you ever really love Dad?”

For the first time all evening, or for the first time since Henry died, Loraine met her daughter’s eyes, met them with such sincerity she couldn’t have manufactured it even under the most sober conditions. “Of course I loved—”

“Did you love him?”
Margaret’s words hung in the dinky kitchen in the sweltering July heat. They slithered up Loraine’s hands, over her wedding ring, and into her mouth. She nearly choked on her tongue. “I don’t know.”

Suddenly Margaret felt the heat nestled around them. She felt her thighs sticking together and the single bead of sweat running down her back. Her eyes never left her mother, but she couldn’t see her, only a woman she had known for the last twenty years.

Again Loraine scrubbed her fingers through her hair. Again the words evaporated from her lips into the summer air. She shifted under her daughter’s relentless eyes, finally realizing that they were in fact her own. Margaret always looked like her father, but Loraine knew those eyes; she knew that crinkle in the brow. She knew that face because she’d seen it in the mirror enough times. “Well, what do you want me to say, huh, Margaret?” She spat the name out like spoiled vinegar. “What do you want me to say?”

“I don’t want you to say anything. Nothing at all.”
Lorraine chuckled. “Oh really? Nothing at all, huh? And what do you know? What the hell do you know about me?”
Margaret leaned forward slowly with her elbows on the table. She seemed like she might vomit, or maybe that was just how she looked these days, like she was always on the verge of spilling everything all over the place. “I know you, mother.” She stood up carefully and staggered to her mother, bracing herself with one hand on the table. “I know you. I know how Dad worked every day for you—for us—and that just wasn’t enough for you.” Her shoulder began to shake but she leaned over Loraine.

“So you got it all figured out, huh?” Loraine, who always seemed to be twice her size on any other day, shrank down to about half her normal size.

“I know you, mother,” Margaret continued undaunted. “I know that Dad trusted you. Because you were his wife.” Her voice was ragged and raspy. Tears stung her eyes but they didn’t dare fall. “Was he worth it? Oh, I hope he was. I hope every night you didn’t come home to us was a night well spent. I hope he gave you everything Dad couldn’t… I hope you found what you were looking for.”

Loraine met Margaret’s eyes. They were hard and dense like old lead bullets. Loraine knew Margaret was fighting back tears with every inch of her body. It was like that time she was in second grade and a boy in class lopped off a chunk of her hair. Her teacher was impressed Margaret didn’t cry and Margaret had said, Mommy says don’t cry in front of people you hate.

No, Loraine had said, don’t cry in front of people you don’t like. Same thing, she wailed.

And as Margaret stormed out of the room and out of the house wiping her cheek, Loraine wondered where she was going and who would see those fresh tears.

If anyone at all.

http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol24/iss1/1
Contributors

Hana Whisman is a senior English major and Spanish minor. She was born and raised, and currently lives, in Milwaukie, Oregon just outside the city. Her favorite hobbies are walking her puppy, eating steak dinners, and watching Parks and Rec and The Office. She plans to write a bestselling novel, have 4 kids, and retire a millionaire by age 30. Her pet-peeves include fat-free brownies and writing third-person bios.

Blue Braun is currently a sophomore at Concordia University. She is an English major and a social work minor. Some of her interests include: creative writing, Frank Ocean, understanding the true meaning behind postmodern society and observing the success or failures of relationships. She hopes to be a social worker and a successful published writer in the near future. Lastly, the most important thing in her life is trying to remain happy and funny, because that’s important.

Ana Delgadillo is a sophomore studying Psychology with a minor in History. Her cooking abilities: “I tried to make ramen in the coffee pot and I broke everything” (Andy Dwyer). Favorite sports moment: Marshawn Lynch’s Beast Quake run. Dream car: a DeLorean that travels through time. Dream car: a DeLorean that travels through time. Life goal: “Would I rather be feared than loved? Easy, both. I want people to be afraid of how much they love me” (Michael Scott).

Tyler Lamott is a senior studying English at Concordia University. When he isn’t busy slaving away on his novel, The Master of Photography II: Ride the Walrus, he can be found on his front porch sipping a tall glass of chocolate milk while throwing sharp rocks at his neighbor’s car. His hobbies include milk sipping, rock throwing, and petting small animals.

Missie Rie Yamamura calls the garden isle of Oahu her home. She is in her second year of studying secondary education with a minor in psychology. In her free time, she enjoys independent
reading, knitting, creating jewelry, and hiking. She finds inspiration for her writing in her childhood experiences, nature, and her ongoing adventures in the Pacific Northwest. Missie’s writing experience consists of daily journaling and her most recent endeavor of starting a lifestyle blog.

Ana Enriquez was born and raised in the heart of Seattle. Currently attending Concordia University, Ana became interested in photography while in high school. Her photographs have been featured in various publications and museums. With a teaching career in her future, Ana hopes to one day incorporate photography into her curriculum to provide her students with the same outlet of expression and unique art form that she has enjoyed.

Cheri Brisendine is an English major enjoying her first year at Concordia. She likes writing, reading, and pretty much everything that being an English major entails. She is also obsessed with coffee, dogs, and ice cream. Other than reading and writing, she spends her free time watching movies, exploring Concordia’s surrounding neighborhood on foot, and taking pictures of things that interest her, primarily nature.

Jessica Jensen is a sophomore. In addition to classes, she runs on the school’s cross country and track and field teams, even though she’s not very fast. Her motivation for running is so she can eat lots of food. She loves food. Some of her hobbies are collecting waffle irons, memorizing trivia, and extra-easy code-breaking.

Jordan Schmedake is a senior studying English. She aims to pursue a career in writing, but is hoping life leads her to many exciting and different job opportunities. She is a Portland native, and is looking forward to exploring cities with fewer hipsters while she travels with her husband, who is an Air Force pilot. This introvert is often found at home playing board games with family, buried in a book, or watching Netflix.
Jalyn Gilmore is a novice writer searching for a purpose. She’s not sure what that is yet, but the more she writes, the closer she gets to learning what that is. When she is not sleeping or reading or drinking too much coffee, she is usually writing. It’s not a hobby so much as a means of self-maintenance. The more she writes, the saner she stays. One day she hopes to master the art of letting her writing guide her into a new way of life. Until then, she will remain a tired, disgruntled college student desperately paying off her student loan debt.

Emily Heinsen is a junior here at Concordia. She is currently in the biology program and plans on going to medical school after graduating. She wrote this story for her grandparents who are very important to her and taught her to appreciate the delicate taste of tea.

Josey Meats is a freshman at Concordia University. He is studying humanities and has hopes of going to law school, but life is an open book. He owes his life to the people who have always been there, namely his mother, who gave him life not only once but multiple times.

Kathryn Willoughby is probably drinking tea right now. She goes by Ryn and is easily identified by her pink hair and enthusiasm for How I Met Your Mother.

Amber Reeves is a sophomore English major and transplant from the great Mitten state. In her spare time, she enjoys writing poetry and sharing animal videos on Facebook. You can often find her petting dogs on the green. She recently became the proud mother of a beautiful cat named Gayle.

Tyler Menzies is a third year student here at Concordia University, and is pursuing a degree in Psychology. Although this is his first submission to The Promethean, he enjoys writing poetry and other creative works from time to time. When not overwhelmed by school work, Tyler enjoys cooking, singing and playing video games. Not at the same time, however, as that (while impressive) would be messy and extremely dangerous.
Mary Gross is an English Literature major and a Psychology minor currently experiencing her very first year at Concordia University. She likes traveling, photography, writing, reading, watching movies, and geeking out over Game of Thrones. She is originally from a small town in Montana but is absolutely loving her time spent living in Portland. Things like Salt and Straw, Powell’s Bookstore, and Townshend’s Tea Company really strike her fancy.

Jessy Shiroma is a sophomore majoring in Secondary Education with an English Endorsement. She is from Honolulu, Hawaii and graduated from Moanalua High School in 2014. Jessy hopes to become a high school English teacher and one day live in New Zealand. In her free time, Jessy likes to go to the beach, make jewelry, watch “The Office,” eat sunflower seeds, and play with her dog and tortoise.

Sleeping Tripod
Cheri Brisendine
THE PROMETHEAN is a publication of the Associated Students of Concordia University-Portland and the College of Theology, Arts & Sciences.

Cover art by Cheri Brisendine