The Promethean, Contents May Be Hot (2008-2009)

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
Available at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol17/iss1/1
THE PROMETHEAN

THE LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL
OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY-PORTLAND

2008/2009 ISSUE

CONTENTS MAY BE HOT

Published by CU Commons, 2009
EDITORIAL STAFF:

Managing Editors
Kristine Pugsley
Jess Bouchard

Assistant Managing Editor
Cassondra Shaw

Student Editors
Brittani Brown
Shawn Drake
Benjamin Fitzgerald
Beth Holian
Benjamin Miller
Kaitlyn Montague
Jared Powell
Jeremy Richards
Indu Shanmugam
Brianna Sylvia-Clarno
Jeriann Watkins
Vanessa Wendland

Faculty Advisor
Dr. Kimberly Knutsen

Pre-Press
Kristine Pugsley

The Promethean is an annual journal of the College of Theology, Arts, and 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 an editorial staff of faculty and student editors. The opinions expressed in the journal do not necessarily reflect those of the College of Theology, Arts, and Sciences of Concordia University. All works are copyrighted.

Manuscript submissions and correspondence can be sent electronically to promethean@cu-portland.edu or by mail to The Promethean, Department of Humanities, College of Theology, Arts, and Sciences, Concordia University-Portland, 2811 NE Holman Street, Portland, Oregon 97211. Manuscripts sent by post should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Since The Promethean uses a blind review process, contributors’ names should not appear on their manuscripts; instead, they should be included in an accompanying email or cover letter.

The Promethean is printed by Natural Press on recycled paper with soy inks.
During our first meeting, I let the staff know my expectations for the 2008-2009 Promethean edition. Like previous years, I imagined fresh, bold writing and raw talent. With the same inspiration, I imagined a bolder journal; a journal with power and authenticity; a journal that would forever be memorable for the quality, quantity and impression. The Promethean staff grounded these ideas, while the contributors shaped them. I've never felt prouder of The Promethean. Graduating and leaving the position to Kristine never scared me; I knew we had the same visions, and I give all the credit to her.

-Jess Bouchard, Managing Editor Fall Semester

Working on The Promethean this spring has been one of the most difficult experiences of my college career, but, like so many ‘difficult’ things, it has also been the most rewarding. As Managing Editor I have seen the process through from all angles: working as a member of the submissions team, copy-editing and all the procedures involved with pre-press. I know this complication inside and out. The words are by now familiar; the emotion and movement behind each piece has touched me deeply. For my final semester at Concordia I could ask for no greater privilege than to be so intimately involved with this caliber of publication.

This 2008-2009 Promethean is unique. It is a continuation of Jess’ and my vision for the edition: the works inside are bold, captivating, exciting, and raw. As The Promethean has grown in popularity it’s quality has increased accordingly. This is no solitary work, and credit truly goes out to Jess, the editorial staff, and all contributors whose work truly made the contents “hot.” It is on their behalf that I present to you the 2008-2009 edition of The Promethean: Contents May Be Hot.

-Kristine Pugsley, Managing Editor Spring Semester
Department: The Promethean, Contents May Be Hot (2008-2009)

2009 WRITING CONTEST

56 Letter from the Editor
57 Comments on Entries
58 Jeremy Richards Door
59 Leah Flores Shhh, My Demons Are Trying to Sleep

FICTION

8 Kristine Pugsley Desert
12 Cora Canzler (in)digestion
14 Daniel Cameron Gaea
20 Cora Canzler Pearl
33 Shawn Drake Grimoire
53 Brianna Sylvia-Clarno Fallen
67 Kaitlyn Montague Who Would Follow in His Footsteps
89 Michael Brockhaus Piso Mojado
94 Cassandra Carver Questions
110 Kristine Pugsley Greyscale
114 Indu Shanmugam Exile
98 Erika Doremus Fortunate Daughter
130 Beth Holian Watch Them Fall Down

NONFICTION

24 Amber Ford Dear Brownies
27 Salena Stopper Clouded Memories

PHOTOGRAPHY

1 Becca Houser Denali - Cover Art
11 Brianna Sylvia-Clarno Untitled
11 Brianna Sylvia-Clarno Untitled
51 Mariah Perry Arbor
87 Mariah Perry Venice
97 Danielle Forster Sharpener
113 Becca Houser Stoa
129 Danielle Forster Canada
135 Dylan White Eric B&W
135 Bethany Taylor Felix and I

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

44 Lauren Sippy Monday Morning
60 Jeremy Richards Freedom in a Cup
77 Sarah Gutierrez The Last Days
106 Daniel Mershon When Skies Are Grey
126 Jared Powell Project Mayhem
138 Elisabeth McMurray Ronny

ART

32 Frances Bonner Leopard
74 Frances Bonner Horses

Published by CU Commons, 2009
The Promethean, Vol. 17 [2009], Iss. 1, Art. 1

DESSERT

Kristine Pugsley

The car windows are yellow, glinting opaque as the sunset filters through the dust coated glass. Outside, the world matches – long stretches of golden brown and red dirt flush the desert dusk, tinged by twilight. I put my palm flush against the smooth panel, soaking up the warmth. Twelve hours, one hundred degrees. It is pleasant now. At lunch, Sam scorched his hand by accidentally leaning against the hood.

Across from me slumped in the worn navy bucket seat, his eyes slide over the road ahead, unblinking. The band-aid on his first finger is peeling, stained with grit and sweat.

“You wanna swap?” I ask, voice husky from lack of use.

Twelve hours, and the radio spluttered and died after four. We’ve listened to the desert music since; the reverb of the old Chevy engine and, as the cars around us drifted away, a deep falling silence.

“No, its fine.”

“Our eyes are starting to look tired, that’s all.”

“They aren’t.” He turns his head, and raises his eyebrows to show me. The whites of his eyes are streaked so slightly with red veins – irritated by dust, I think. It gets into everything here. Dark fringe falls across his forehead and sticks from perspiration against his fair skin. I don’t comment on the deepening circles under the dark blue eyes. He’ll pull over when he’s ready. It’s routine.

With a sigh, I turn to look out the back. Our boxes are wedged pell-mell into the backseat; cardboard boxes and old mismatched Rubbermaid tubs overflow with three years of accumulated junk, the heavy black guitar case perched on top. The end of it sticks into the front seat by Sam’s ear, and makes it impossible for us to move the seat backward. He has to drive at my settings, so his knees press uncomfortably against the dash. The plethora of stickers slapped so artistically onto the dimpled surface of the case are fading, the letters bleached from sun exposure and heat.
“Let’s pull over then.” A wicked grin spreads across his face and I know what he’s thinking before the car even begins to slow, to drift. We’re stopped on the edge of the road, utterly alone. The sun setting rapidly in the West brings definition to the blanketed East, flecked with stars in a lavender sky.

Sex in the desert is like music: scorpions be damned. We hit the high notes together, and lay naked in the sand.
I know I have an anatomy test tomorrow worth 90 percent of my grade, the other ten percent being attendance.

I thought the best way to study for this test and memorize the pancreatic enzymes would be to perform a live operation on my own GI tract in my dorm room.

Fortunately, I keep a lot of rubbing alcohol in my room to clean my zits.

I poured some on my exposed belly and leaned back at a 45 degree angle. I also sterilized the butter knife I borrowed from the cafeteria.

I must remember to sterilize it post-operatively before returning it.

First slice directly over the pyloric sphincter where the duodenum begins. The butter knife is dull and I come to the realization that both hands will be needed during the operation.

I press and I press.
I saw and I saw.

The skin breaks at last. The blood springs forth as if it has been building up pressure anticipating its release since its progenitor beginnings.

"This is a bit messier than anticipated," I muse.

Seeing as moving is difficult momentarily, I reach for the nearest absorptive object. My faithful dog stuffed animal plugs my gaping wound. I dab and I dab and replace my loving, bloody dog back where it came from.

I abandon the butter knife.
I need to feel the duodenum and the transition into the jejunum.

Like a snake it flexes and writhes while mulling and digesting my food. I grasp my entrails firmly so they cannot wiggle out of my hands.

Slippery and smooth with many bumps and wrinkles.
"Splendid!" I squeak as I discover the ascending large intestine. It's hard to see, my abdomen is now the remains of a spaghetti dinner.

I'm really learning now!
They took the family Bible as evidence against Warren and the others. My brothers, sisters, and I were evidence as well. Living, breathing evidence.

Together, we and four hundred other children were abducted from our homes and driven in black sedans to several state run shelters in West Texas. During the trip, officers chatted over walkie-talkies while we huddled close. Rumors were that some men in the camp might go to jail. Normally I loved studying the little subtleties of landscape, but on the ride I thought only of Warren. It is hard to imagine the desert as being anymore barren than it already is, but the day we separated it was an absolute emptiness.

The young ones cry as they are being dressed. Our female caretakers try to comfort them unsuccessfully. They shush them and slick back their long trains of hair, wet with tears and sweat, so everyone can see everyone else's face. Most of us older girls are too disturbed to explain that red blouses are forbidden. Red belongs to Jesus. That is why they are panicking. Some girls my age even throw fits, which is worse than hysterical four or five year olds because they have the responsibility to stay strong. Of course it is difficult to remain mad at them. Sometimes I want to say, I don't care if you cry, as long as we cry together.

Tomorrow they want to take our blood, test it. Secretly, I have been sick since we got here, and the idea of a needle is too fantastic that I rush toward the toilet to wretch.

An old female caretaker, brutally tan, with stone gray hair like creamed wheat, files in behind to hold my hair and massage the tender parts of my spine. She speaks over the disgusting sounds I make. Her words are soft and slightly curious.

"When I was fourteen," she says, "I was still pestering my dad for a horse that I would never get."

My face is blister red. A gross film of sweat collects in the nook of my neck. The rest of me is in the toilet. Luckily there comes a respite in which to cool down. I turn to see the woman standing in the doorway, her arms crossed and her head simply shaking.

The sun is a gold barrel cactus flower, lovely and untouchable. It's noontime in the shelter, and the quiet is commanding. I have recovered a bit and chose to take stock of where I am again. Girls sit with their backs to the cots, walking their fingers across the wooden floorboards and populating the open valley between their legs with vague, fleshy hand-animals. Outside a dry wind whispers. Yellow flecks of sand flare up on the windowpane. At first my palm takes in the warmth of the glass, then my entire face presses against it. I feel the hot pulse of another person nearby, the fluttery kick of a second presence I've grown so accustomed to, though now it is just my own dumb reflection staring back.

I miss the ranch. My family. Warren and his big wagon wheel eyes. In the end it will all be okay, he had said. But right now I am homesick, stuck remembering what I never thought I could lose.

Sometimes, on days when you could see the heat waves bend, the desert light would hit the cross that sat atop the limestone temple in the middle of the ranch. It hurt your eyes, the fracturing of light was so bright. Still you kept watching, because you had the feeling that behind the sharp luster marked the appearance of something blessed.

Once last July a giant wren materialized out of nowhere. Watching it trace an arc in the sky, I grew transfixed over the idea of flight. Every tiny movement was so terrifyingly free. That was power, I thought. Power that, though it is enticing, corrupts. I kept my eyes on the bird as if it were guilty of I don't know what. Self-assuredly, it had launched itself into a mild updraft and from there let the air decide its course. Gone in the current, fueled by the Earth's tireless breath, I wondered about its family and about mine. I wondered how it could be so solitary with all of creation surrounding it.

The government had come and stolen our mothers and fathers, and we as children wept. They refused to understand our closeness. We could not understand their formal reasons as to why we had to leave the camp. Confronted with hasty guns and hastier goodbyes, four hundred fresh hearts, at once and
for the first time, asked themselves the impossible question — how could you not share life?

They say it will all be over quickly, but I still make a pact with myself — I will never be motherless. I will be mother-more, mother-full. Aware of my duty before God and my husband. I will serve Warren and he will cherish me. Together we will raise a family that puts love first.

The mental picture is beautiful. I hope it will happen soon. I am almost positive it will, but today is nonetheless a hard day to believe in anything. My prayers trail off further and further like the bird when it flew into the horizon alone. There was nothing to accompany it. Due to the whistling bowl of Texas sand, you couldn't hear whether other birds were calling to it, or if it tried to amuse itself with its own chirrupy tune. Truthfully I didn't know if it even could sing, but if could and did, I bet it was a lonely song. A soft aubade that floated alongside as it gently wafted over the crowns of the bur oak and Western soapberry trees, and became a single gray-blue dot that, I suppose, might resemble anything seen from far enough away.

That same July, a thirteen-year-old girl vanished from camp. The men were all nervous, yet they did nothing but angrily talk amongst themselves at the temple. Warren came over a lot then. We'd sit on the bed and he'd grow serious, holding my shoulders firmly in place as he asked if I ever had the urge to runaway. The furiousness was unlike him. Usually our time together was relaxed and more romantic. We'd spend hours discussing what would happen before, during, and after our wedding ceremony, but at that time Warren was so preoccupied. His other two wives were having problems and he was worried I would misbehave. He was skeptical about why I was so fond of exploring the outskirts of the compound alone. I told him I loved the desert, but he insisted there was more to it. Then he said he trusted me. Acting rushed, he apologized again and again about the constant interrogation.

"It's a hungry-dog world out there," he said, tugging at his receding hairline. Large loose teardrops had begun to bubble in the corners of his eyes, and his rounded, toadstool nose started to leak. I clutched his wrist, while he wiped away a curtain of perspiration from his forehead, and then leaned the

newly shined surface onto my chest. "You deserve a nice safe place like this," he said.

By then he had finished crying. His neck was still craned in my lap; his eyes shut. Blindly he stroked my stomach where a small crease of baby fat eternally protruded. When he found the slight bulge, his hand retreated a few inches and hung like a thick atmosphere above the area as he divined the belly with wishes for what would come next.

Cleaning the kitchen after supper one night, I asked my mother if she ever had the desire to escape the group. Mama quit scrubbing the dishes and answered immediately. She said the name of our town, El Dorado, meant the City of Gold. "So why in the world would we want to leave?"

Evenings at the shelter were docile, except for when my insides played tug-of-war. My bouts of sickness were unpredictable, but the gray-haired woman who had stayed with me in the bathroom made me swear to find her whenever I felt ill.

The night before the Church's custody trial, my body was hammered with pain. All the girls in the back room were asleep. Quietly, the woman led me to the toilet with a flashlight. I was backed up and could produce nothing, so I rested my head on the porcelain. My chaperone waited patiently, her thumb and forefinger rubbing her chin quizzically when I asked her if she knew about the story of El Dorado.

She shook her head and we waited longer. The bulb of the flashlight flickered.

"I lost a daughter to drugs," the woman said suddenly. "There's no way around it. You will lose them somehow."

Her voice dropped near the end, realizing we may have less in common then she assumed. Our eye-lines met. She appeared ashamed. Her caramel colored eyes melted into sticky, sorrowful puddles, then they diverted to the ceiling.

My organs hurt. There was a brief fit of gagging and panting, then silence. After a minute of calm, I asked how she felt about the name Wren, for a boy or girl.

"It's pretty," she said in a slow sad tone.

I thought so, too. At my station, with my head heavy as monolith on the rim of the toilet, I just hoped Warren would like it.
SUMMIT OF BON MOTS

Daniel Cole

we conquered.
for hours it seemed.
days on occasion.
in moments at times.

fully ascended.
in view of depths.
encapsulating widths.
wholly aware.
utterly bereft.

this mountaintop still.
could not, my friend contain.
so I pushed him off.

summit of Bon Mots

WHIMSICALITIES

Ben Fitzgerald

Blond haired girl standing in the sun
Blond haired girl with a smile on her face
Blond haired girl standing in the sun
Blond haired girl of the human race

And it’s Alice in Wonderland, the Cheshire Cat
Whatever you can pull out of the hat
There’s a ferry to nowhere, but in your mind
There’s gold and riches and love to find

And there are marigolds and leprechauns
Chrysanthemums and Aesop’s fauns
And whatever words you want to say
It’s your wish to will away

And you’re going to Disneyland to soak up the sun
It don’t matter, so long as you have fun
And there’s a silk suit and a golden crown
And the ground is blue and the sky is brown

And there are marigolds and foolish men
The Golden Touch ain’t that a sin
And it don’t matter what you say
No one’s gonna hear it anyway

Blond haired girl standing in the sun
Blond haired girl smile on her face
Blond haired girl standing in the sun
Blond haired girl of the human race
We are all of the human race
A pearl beyond price. Suspended in ethereal majesty in a liquid world of nutrients. Serenity and warmth radiate from its feminine glory of only twenty-three chromosomes. Life as an ova is tranquil, and your time is spent contemplating world peace and country French décor. You have been a treasured individual since your creation in the ovarian follicle, you are one of only 200,000. Quite unlike your male counterpart who continuously manufactures millions of hyper-active, dime-a-dozen, worm-like spermatozoa. Your calm confidence is rooted in the knowledge that without your unique genetic contribution, life would cease to exist, and with this understanding you carry yourself accordingly.

This is a special month. Estrogen has been good to you, and you were chosen to slide down the glamorous red carpet known as the fallopian tubes. A fleeting farewell to the other less fortunate ova as you effortlessly slip through the opening to the uterine entrance, never to look back. And so you bask in the limelight for three wonderful, self-centered days until the world you enjoyed as a quiet egg is shattered.

Fertilization was rough and unpleasant not to mention undignified. It is never enjoyable to have leaches battle for the honor to attach to you and integrate their DNA with yours. Your slightly acidic environment causes many sperm to become confused and consequently they are deterred and bury their greedy heads into the fleshy walls of the uterus. Other wayward fellows resign their missions and opt to bathe in the more luxurious accommodations of the vagina. Of the original and hopeful ten million who embarked on the noble path to fertilization, less than one thousand ever make it anywhere near you. Finally, one over-achiever successfully fuses to your membrane. You attempt to resist, but this is found to be difficult due to your squishy, spherical shape. Capitulation is inevitable.

The whole experience was scandalizing and mitosis was uncomfortable, but life as a forty-six chromosome homo sapien has begun. You were resilient and soon you have grown to an impressive diameter of one centimeter, you resemble a mulberry, and you boast millions of specialized cells after only five days.

Needless to say, the first trimester leaves you feeling unappreciated and sleep deprived. You are subjected to such derogatory terms as germ cell, primitive cell mass or yolk sack, and it’s no great wonder that with such low self esteem you have only about a 40% survival rate. But due to your tireless dedication to cellular division you weigh a hefty fourteen grams by only the twelfth developmental week. You weren’t fazed by the sudden development of distal appendages, and certainly were not impressed by your newly acquired opposable thumbs which seem superfluous in your sloshy world. Your days and nights pass without differentiation to the soothing white noise of life beyond the muscular uterus.

A more nurturing environment than that of the plush uterus could not be found. The doughy walls cradle the gentle curve of your back, and their slippery smooth surface flexes and undulates. If ever you were to fancy yourself hungry, simply open your mouth and take a big gulp of the lukewarm amniotic fluid. Bitter at first, this consistent well-rounded meal was truly made with your mother’s love, along with other digested parts of her meal. One could liken the placenta and its healthy nourishment to a melted sweet potato slushy. And only a warm yellow glow from the outside world is needed to scan one’s humble surroundings as the pink wrinkly walls rock you to sleep.

Unfortunately the peaceful days of gestation are all too soon ended and we are squeezed to within an inch of our survival, only to begin the second much less aesthetically pleasing part of our lives. Villainous signaling molecules, known as the oxytocin hormone shatter our wonderful cocoon existence. The walls begin to press in on you, making it hard to expand your chest and shoulders. One would most succinctly note the pressure on the head. So great is this pressure, one’s vanity, and dignity is ruined when their exodus is accompanied by a newly acquired cone-head. Finally a
strong wind of cool air surrounds your emerging head and relieves the incessant heat and pressure. The relief is only momentary for a cruel being surrounds your war-torn cone-head with his heartless latex wrapped hands and yanks the rest of you free. He grimaces and holds you vulnerable and exposed in midair like some kind of trophy. It’s so bright, you begin to worry. It’s cold, it’s loud, and your head is shaped like a cone. Slap! That devil’s minion latex-gloved hand connects firmly to your behind. How dare he. Your head throbs and your face involuntarily contorts in protest. Quite unarguably the most disturbing detail of it all is the gory slicing of your beloved umbilical cord, by the one person who supposedly values your life beyond his… your father. Without consent and without a second opinion he grabs the surgical scalpel and grins menacingly. You hold your breath, anticipating the horror of the slicing of your favorite tubular shaped extension. As you lay naked, indignant, and with a chip bag clothespin over your bloody belly button you wonder why we could not all keep our umbilical cords. We wear gloves on our hands, hats on our heads, and could just as easily wear umbies on our umbilical cords. Alas, the development of your trachea, and consequently the vocal cords, will not be complete for another three months and you are unable to protest.

But finally, when you are on your last straw, one minute from demanding re-entrance into the birth canal warm, soft linen surrounds you. You are deposited in two loving arms that curiously mold exactly to your exhausted body. She coo’s into your ear and you melt with the smell of lavender comfort and an uncanny sense of familiarity. One by one your tensed muscles relax, the angry forehead wrinkles are smoothed. A sense of peace and belonging floods your senses. Some man sticks his face up next to yours and he tells you he’s your dad just a little too loudly, but your ignore him. Because once again you can hear the steady settling rhythm of your mother’s beating heart.

POISON

Indu Shanmugam

Venom was once injected,
At an unknown time
Rapidly saturating the soul.
Staining the blood black,
Bitter passions flame,
Dominated by hate.
If I ever nurse,
I will kill.
DEAR BROWNIES (SENIOR THESIS EXCERPT)

Amber Ford

Dear Brownies,

I have some sad news for you. I can no longer carry on the affair we've been having. You have sabotaged our relationship. You promised to hear about my day, but you didn't say you would just numb my emotions. You promised to keep my secrets but never offered me any substantial solutions to my problems. You allowed me to believe I didn't have any other friends, and you certainly never informed me about the way my thighs would look during our midnight escapades, when you called lovingly to my ears.

I will no longer be running to you when I don't know what to write or when I am overwhelmed by a tremendous workload. Instead I will drive, crochet, dance, or walk to unblock my thoughts and balance myself again. I will no longer succumb to your whisperings of peace and relaxation when my spirit feels chaotic, or when my kids are fighting, or I am angry. Instead I will pray, light candles, read my Bible, drink tea, and stretch to release my tensions and restore peace.

I will no longer be stuffing my emotions with your warm, gooey, chocolatey goodness, with caramel swirls. You see, I will no longer be needing an anesthesiologist. Instead I will be allowing myself the freedom to feel, even pain, because after the pain comes the birth of something tremendously good. And the good is added to by the pain; it isn't as sweet otherwise.

No, I will no longer be calling you my friend in lonely times. Now, I am not saying we can't be friends, but only on rare occasions in the proper atmosphere, when my soul is already satisfied. I am free. Free! I refuse to be bound any longer by the need to consume an entire pan of your scrumptiousness to drown my sorrows. I refuse to believe any longer the lie that you are my closest confidante. I now have real friends for that, friends who will be able to stand in agreement with me in prayer, who will act to help, or offer substantial advice. God designed me for relationships with people, not food.

I will no longer bow down at your throne of gluttony, but at His throne of grace. I will no longer trash and abuse this temple with oversized portions and too much sugar. Some serious cleaning and restoring is in order. From now on I will be serving this beautiful temple the foods that empower my being, that nourish and protect me against illness, and help me to become the size I was designed to be.

So this is it. Farewell, my sabotaging wrecking ball clothed in anesthetizing fudge wonder.

I will not miss this unbalanced affair.

Love,

Your Midnight Caller
LIES, EYES, GOODBYES

Brittan Brown

Yelling, Nagging, evil words being spoken
Two hearts filled with hatred, but yet we hold on
Lies, cries, promises being broken
A love we shared now completely gone
Forever to the end where did it go wrong?
A friendship we grew, has now faded away
Missing the days when we played our favorite song
And now there’s nothing left to say
The keys to our heart has now fallen apart
The love we had will never be the same
Perhaps it is time to let go and restart
I will erase your face and even your name
The soul is revealed in the emptiness of our eyes
A moan of sigh, our final goodbyes, goodbye

CLOUDED MEMORIES

Salena Stopper

She’s close, but far away. She’s written on my heart, but faded in my mind. I remember some details, but most are dim and forgotten, washed out with the years. Sometimes I think I can hear her voice, but then I realize it’s just my imagination tricking me. Other times I think I can feel her holding me in her arms, but again, it’s just my imagination. I try to picture her in my mind when my eyes are shut tight, but all I see is a dark shadow. A vague outline of what used to be a bright and vibrant memory. The only way I can see her in my mind is through old photos and other people’s memories.

I almost remember her eyes. They were a rich, dark chocolate brown like mine; they sparkled when she laughed, but turned hard when she got upset. She had thick, dark brown hair that she permed because she didn’t like her straight hair, which used to be long and beautiful chestnut color. She would put her hair in a pony tail that would partially fall out and frame her face. She had a voice that I remember would soothe me when I was hurting or upset. She was tall for a woman, standing about 5’10”.

She was beautiful.

I don’t remember a whole bunch about her, but others do. I hear stories all the time on how she would pull pranks on others, or crack a joke that kept people thoroughly entertained. I hear stories of how she would peer her head around a doormframe and pretend someone snuck up behind her, grabbed her by her thin neck and started choking her. My aunts, uncles, and grandparents chuckle just at the thought of it. I wish I could remember that person, but all I see when I think of her is a faded memory.

Faded, but not forgotten.

I remember times that she would comfort and calm us with her soothing voice, making us feel like everything would be alright. There was one time in particular that I remember. I had a horrible ear infection that kept me up and made it hard
for me to sleep. She came into my room and picked me up. My arms grasped her as she carried me to the living room. She held me on the couch as I cried, confused on why my ears hurt so much. She rocked me back and forth, speaking calm, reassuring words over me while my dad went to the doctor to get the medications.

I remember other times she was there for us as a shoulder to cry on, especially when the neighborhood kids picked on us. She always stuck up for us and defended us. She was always there to correct us even if it hurt her inside to do so. I remember one instance when my younger sister and I were bickering over something of no importance. She got so fed up with us because we wouldn’t stop that she accidentally smacked me on my head with the spanking spoon. I threw my hands on my head and ran to my room crying with my right on my heels bowing harder than me. I can still remember my dad trying to tell her it was okay, but she wouldn’t listen to him, saying, “But Jim, I hurt her!” I don’t recall the exact exchange between them, but I used to know it all word for word. She was always there for my dad and us kids.

She was my hero.

I’ll never forget that hospital room. I was six years old and at that age, four plain, white walls with gray blinds covering the windows, blocking the sunlight from her pale frame, weren’t exactly inviting. You could hear the cars racing down the Interstate to some unseen routine. The room stank of cleansers. I remember the hard looking bed she lay on and the flat, squished pillow beneath her head. She lay there, her eyes shut as she slept deeply, drifting in and out of consciousness. She looked peaceful, but you could see the burden she carried of excruciating pain.

We would go and visit her in the big, white hospital on the hill two or three times a week from what I can remember. Some days she would be sleeping and other days she would be awake and happy. One time she was actually sitting up and brushing her teeth even though the brush probably felt like ten pounds to her.

Her right leg was paralyzed and she had a pouch for her bladder that had been taken out from her previous bout of cancer. Her dark hair was cropped short probably from the nurses cutting it or from her hair growing back from the chemotherapy. Her skin felt hard, dry and limp, like the life was slowly being sucked out of it. Her mouth was open as she struggled to breathe. Pneumonia had started to set in.

While I stood there watching her, my mind traveled back to a time when I was four. She was finally able to leave the hospital because she had successfully beaten her first bout of cancer. The doctors said all the cancer was gone, but little did they know she would be gone in a few years. I remember going with my dad to pick her up. To this day I don’t remember why he took just me, but there must have been a good reason. I hadn’t been around her for a few months, so I was terribly shy at first. I didn’t know how to act around her. I sat between her and my dad in the truck on the way back and I remember peeking at her through the hair hanging around my face. She would smile and start talking to me. After a few minutes, I finally came out of my shell and got over my shyness.

I know that if I could go back to that precious moment in time, I would throw my arms around her scrawny body and hold onto her for dear life. I would never let go. I crave her hugs everyday and without her in my life I don’t feel complete, even after eleven and a half years.

There was another time I remember when I was six. She was in the middle of battling her second bout of cancer. We had come to visit her for a while. It was one of her better days and she had two cookies left over from her lunch. One cookie was chocolate chip, the other peanut butter and she split them in half for us to eat. Since I was allergic to peanut butter at that time, I grabbed the chocolate chip one before she could do anything. She reprimanded me and I felt bad and tried to put it back. She told me that since I touched it, I had to eat it. Sometimes I wish I could go back and do that all over again and wait for my turn, but I treasure that memory, so I wouldn’t have it any other way.

I barely remember that day, the day that ultimately changed my life forever. I woke up to the sound of my dad in the bathroom getting ready. Thinking it was around seven o’clock in the morning, I went back to sleep when in reality it
was actually around four thirty in the morning. I woke up later to voices drifting down from the living room. Curious, I went out to the living room only to find a couple of our neighbors sitting solemnly on our beaten up couches. They were an older couple that lived across the street from us and loved our family so much. I was confused on why they were at our house so early in the morning.

I asked where my dad was and they hurriedly hushed me so I wouldn’t wake up my siblings. My brother and sisters finally woke up and a lady from our church came to relieve our neighbors so they could go home and get ready for the day. In the middle of the afternoon, my dad finally came home. He dragged his feet to the door with his head held low. He then told us the news that still has yet to really hit me. The woman that was my hero and my comfort was gone—never coming back.

I never got to say goodbye.

It is now April of 2008. The memories are there but faint, distant. I try to see her in my mind, but it’s like looking through a fog. You can see the outline but not the whole picture. As you get closer to the object it gets clearer, but as you walk on past it, the image dissipates. I can’t see the sparkle in her eye, hear the comfort in her voice, or the feel of her arms enveloping me. I can’t remember the sound of her laugh as she made a joke or teased my dad.

I can’t remember the details anymore and it scares me, terrifies me. I took advantage of her when I was young and drove her crazy most days. She loved me though even if I made her want to pull her hair out.

I miss her.

It’s hard watching girls who have an amazing relationship with their caregivers. Since I only knew mine for a few years, I never got to fully experience that special and precious connection. She did so much for us and now she’s no longer here.

I miss the fun times we had with her when we played house and she went camera happy. I also miss the memories we would have together if she were still here. Our first day of school, sports games, and Sleighbells, Our school’s winter formal, are only a few examples. I wonder what my high school years would be like. Would she be the one all my friends went to for advice? Would I have been more popular? What will my college graduation be like, or my wedding? Who will aid my dad in giving me away to my husband? How will I be able to take care of my children correctly? Who will give me advice on marriage and family life?

I need her.

But she’s gone now.

She was my hero, my safety net, and my comfort. She brought sanity to my life. She made my day beautiful and made me feel special. I felt loved, cared for, and blessed when she was still here. She was brave and took cancer head on. She was my example and my role model. She was not afraid to die even though it crushed her to leave us. Some of her last words were, “I praise you God!” and “I thank you God!” She was all of those things and she was my mother.

My birth mom. The one that unknowingly carried my sister Sierra and I in her womb at the same time. The one that had four kids within four years with all of us in diapers for a period of time. She was one that sacrificed for us daily, always putting us first and her last. She’s the woman I long for and crave with every fiber of my being. She’s the one I cherish deep in my heart. She was amazing.

She’s my Momma Sue.
Witness here, a burning man.
In every cell, hellfire screams for purity of cause. But he is nearly done... and he wonders about the life he has left behind. What will become of him when the puzzle is complete.

The Dead Man, still feeling the blood coagulating on his right hand, stops in his tracks; refusing for the first time to simply follow the tugging of the leash in the Devil’s hand. He stops in the middle of an intersection, freezing in the wake of tail-lights and cast in high-contrast by onrushing headlights.

“Monica?”

For the first time, the Dead Man’s thoughts stray to the woman. So long drowning himself in blood, he has banished the softness from his heart. What of his Monica?

“All in good time.” The leash tugs, but the Dead Man holds firm.

“Now.” He whispers. He won’t be dissuaded so easily. The headlights draw closer.

A battle of wills, the clash of glacier and earth, resounds in every bone of the Dead Man’s body. Claws sluice through grey matter. Muscles twinge with a thousand tiny cramps as the Devil fights to send the man-who-was back on his way.

Heartbeats now until steel meets flesh and the vessel is broken.

The Devil goes slack and The Dead Man knows that he has won. He obligingly steps out of danger and back onto the pavement, his steps directed toward a new destination... one which does not resonate with bad blood and cordite-sapphire nightmares. But rather something sickly-sweet and perhaps yet grimmer.

“So be it.”
Az walked up the steps toward Raze's room, assured from the lips of Raze's own mother that he was most likely awake and dressed by now. It was never cool to barge into a buddy's room... least of all when said buddy was all sorts of naked. Scarring of the emotional and physical sorts tended to ensue.

As he approached the whitewashed door toward Raze's little sanctum sanctorum, he heard the steady throb of what might be any of a hundred Goth-industrial bands. Nine Inch Nails, most likely; the granddaddy of them all. Raze had it pumped high enough to mean business but not enough to bring down the wrath of Mom.

Az knocked twice, putting a little hearty volume into the quick raps. “Raze, dude?” He waited a few seconds and drew his hand back to knock again when the music stopped and the doorknob, one of those gold lever jobs, dipped toward the floor.

Raze stood framed in the doorway. And he looked much the worse for wear. His features, generally pretty well flushed beneath a layer of cream-white foundation were the color of a three-day-old corpse. Bloodlessly pale even in his natural ten a.m. configuration, further weirdness showed forth in the quick darting of his gaze; as though he waited for some hidden predator to leap from the shadows and seize him by the throat. A quick horror-show fantasy of Raze's ghost lunging from just off-screen and dragging Raze screaming into the room played in Az's head. Spooky shit.

He was dressed in a pair of black cargoes and a black undershirt. That, at least, wasn't too weird. He wasn't wearing pink yet. The room smelled about like it always did, wafting from behind the scarecrow form of Az's best friend; old Doritos, dirty socks, a little ganja, and something that Az couldn't quite make out. A sharp tang in the air.

Az cracked a smile. “Hey, dude. You called. I'm here. What's the deal?”

Raze did the quick-glance-around thing, not sparing the space just behind him, reached out and fastened a bony hand on Az's wrist, and drug him inside. The door slammed closed and Raze began to pace. Not like a buzzing Raze on three too many Rockstars. Not like a junior meth-addict. He paced like a rabbit might, bunkered down in his burrow and hearing the scratching of the fox's claws as his time grew shorter and shorter.

The tang...Az got it now. It was cold sweat and fear. “This is heavy, Az. This is REALLY fucking heavy.” It wasn't loud. It might've been less scary if it had been loud. Instead, the words came out careful and even; the came out in that voice that you used when you were giving a report to a teacher. Clear, and concise so you didn't get marked down. The volume was steady, but Az had no trouble hearing the emphasis.

“What's going down, dude?”

Raze raked a hand over his scalp. “Remember when I went back to the house, Az? When you had the date with Tammy Cartwright?”

“Course I remember, Raze.”

“How'd that go by the way?” Raze stopped dead in his tracks turning over his shoulder and squinting back at Az.

“Alright, I guess—“

“Yeah, it better fucking have been!” Raze's features contorted in fury and he spun around facing Az with a murderous cant to his beleaguered body. “Do you have any idea, man? Do you have any fucking idea?”

“Shit, Raze.” Az took a precautionary step backward his back running up against the closet door. “What are you talking about?”

“What I found, man. Do you know what I found when I went back to that house? That house you let me go into alone?”

Raze was freaked. Not a little bit. Not even an appreciable bit. He was fucking wigging. Az managed to repeat the “I” sound half a dozen times before Raze had closed.

“No, I'll tell you.” Raze set his hands on Az's shoulders. “I talked to him, Az. Just like I'm fucking talking to you. He wasn't a ghost. He wasn't some autohypnosis-induced apparition or whatever other psycho-metaphysical bullshit you can come up with. He was a real guy. He was there, man. He was there and he was bad.” Raze took his hands away from Az and
placed them against his eyes, digging the heels of his hands into them and groaning. It didn't take a master in the arts of observation to see the tremor which ran through them.

"Bad?" Az was reduced to monosyllabic responses.
"Fucking bad. Like back from the dead, walking around, killing people bad."

Az shook his head. There was no way Raze could've cracked so hard in the two days he'd been out of Az's sight. Sick, he could believe. But crazy? "Dude, you're starting to scare me."

"You're scared? Oh good! Then, I guess I can be the guy who doesn't believe now." Raze twisted his lips into a hideous parody of a relieved grin. "Big load off my mind, believe me."

Several tensely silent moments ticked by as Raze crouched and began to tear through a pile of dirty laundry with animal ferocity. Black t-shirts and jeans flew in all directions until with a grunt Raze straightened with the familiar ivory-white board and white plastic planchette. "I know it's sounding pretty crazy, Az. I know it is. But I need you to bear with me. Trust me. I'm not freaking, okay?"

Az said nothing. But nodded his assent.

"He's been talking to me, Az. He's been using the board, and I haven't even been touching it." The quaver in his voice bore testament to the truth in his words. If nothing else, he certainly believed every syllable.

"How often?"

A heavy sigh spilled from Raze's lips as he stuffed the board and planchette into his red canvas backpack. "Every night. Just after he does it."

"Does what?"

"Pulls the trigger, Az. Fuck. Keep up."

"Right...so after he pulls the trigger he sits down on the other end of the ol' ghost-phone to touch base with his good buddy Raze?" Az's voice rose to the same level of bitter acid as Raze's own. "What part of this isn't totally fuck-nuts?"

Raze's eyes described a slow circle of frustration in the air before him. "None of it. Look. Humor me, alright? We're going to go downstairs and have a look at the paper. If a guy named Zachary Frost wasn't found with his brains decorating his entryway last night, I'll burn this thing and we can call it a day. Laugh about it."

"And if we find it?"

Raze's lips split into the first genuine grin for two days. "Then you're coming with me into the darkest pit of hell."

Sergeant Maslow stared at the screen waiting for any stirring of movement. Minutes ticked by like seconds as the white, blocky numbers rolled onward on fast forward. At precisely 11:58, the door to Interrogation room four had opened and the slim figure of a long-haired man in a black trench coat had entered, pressing himself against the interior wall and producing a heavy-caliber pistol from a hidden pocket of the voluminous coat.

The ensuing scene would have been almost comical if Detective Andrew Lowman were still breathing. Instead, the standoff was grotesque; the banter, silent before the eyes of the internal security monitors, was just the idle flapping of jaws. And when the Detective was lifted from his feet by a man who clearly outmassed by easily fifty pounds and shot, point blank, with the merciless hand-cannon pressed against his chest, Maslow realized that he was gritting his teeth.

The perp hurled Lowman across the room with no more effort than a child tossing a toy which had ceased to be amusing, turning to spare a passing glance at the camera. Maslow froze the image, enhanced it, and printed a copy. Then he started the surveillance tape once more.

Officers, drawn by the sound of the gunshot inside the station burst through the door, weapons at the ready. They scanned the room, immediately spotting their downed comrade and rushing to check vitals and administer CPR.

But none spared a passing glance at the tall, lanky man in the black trench coat. He sidled past them as though they simply did not exist and made his way out into the corridor. No one noticed the killer's escape.

Sergeant Maslow's throat went dry.

"Anything, Maslow?" Detective Sanders' voice came hot upon the heels of the sound of the surveillance room door
swinging wide. He carried two Styrofoam cups of coffee and a
pad of paper.

"More questions than answers, sir."

***

Az had always hated libraries. It was the smell, he
decided. Mildew and old people. Dry rot and print
toner. And perhaps just the faintest dash of horn-rimmed spectacles.
Don't ask. It's a smell now.

Raze was sitting at the microfiche machine going over
all of the old newspaper articles about the murder of a guy
named Dorian Raker, the guy who had bit it in the ghost-house
a year earlier. Why the hell the kid couldn't just use the internet
like a sane person, Az had no idea. So he sat there, clicking
away at the little button and scrolling through the microfilm for
anything that might hint at where the ghoul might strike next.

Y'know so that they could warn the police or some­
thing. Raze's words. Not his.

Az's job, of course, was to paw through the refer­
ence section for anything about the undead. Fun job. Wading
through piles of pulp about blood-sucking vampires, undead
servitors, and disembodied shriekers was totally Az's idea of
how best to spend a Saturday. Yeah...not.

See, Raze was no longer convinced that Raker was
indeed a ghost. At least, not in the chain-rattling Halloween
boo sort of sense. Raze had been able to smell Raker, to hear
him distinctly, to constantly see him in definite outline. This
made him hesitant to call Raker an apparition. Which of course
begged the question, just what the hell were they dealing with
here?

Enter our hero Az in The Curse of the Odious Chore.
A pile of overturned books lay before him like a
patchwork quilt of leather and canvas bindings. The librarian
had given him the oddest sort of looks when he had asked for
help locating anything which might pertain to the Undead. But
she'd helped him find quite the treasure trove. The Vampire
Encyclopedia, The Zombie, An Occult Miscellany, Monsters
and their Contexts, and twenty or so other books spread over
the time-scarred wooden table. Az closed The Dictionary of
Superstition and set it down atop the pile with a satisfying

thud.

He heaved a sigh. Reaching at random for the next
book in the pile, he opened a curiously named volume: Historia
Rerum Anglicarum. It didn't have the faux authenticity of
some of the other volumes. No curious gothic script. No gold­
leaf. No illuminations obviously printed by modern machin­
ery rather than the practiced finesse of an old-world monk.
Instead, this book practically stank of authenticity. Even the
paper felt antique.

Az was still perusing when Raze came back, his yellow
legal pad covered in his cramped handwriting. He sat down
across from Az and laid out his notes, his lips twisted into a
grim line.

"Anything?" he whispered across the table.

"Maybe."

"Let's hear it."

"Revenants."

"That's it?"

"Hang on, geeze."

Raze sat by, drumming his fingers on a little island of
wood in the midst of the torrent of books. Seconds ticked by
into minutes. Raze was on the border of clearing his throat
meaningfully when Az looked up and turned the book around.

"Read."

Raze read.

"It would not be easy to believe that the corpses of
the dead should sally (I know not by what agency) from their
graves, and should wander about to the terror or destruction
of the living, and again return to the tomb, which of its own
accord spontaneously opened to receive them, did not frequent
examples, occurring in our own times, suffice to establish this
fact, to the truth of which there is abundant testimony."

Whoa.

"...issuing, by the handiwork of Satan, from his grave
at night-time, and pursued by a pack of dogs with horrible
barkings, he wandered through the courts and around the
houses while all men made fast their doors, and did not dare to
go abroad on any errand whatever from the beginning of the
night until the sunrise, for fear of meeting and being beaten
black and blue by this vagrant monster.”

“Sound about right?”

Raze nodded dumbly. He reread the section twice and looked up across the table where Az folded his arms and put on his “Oh yeah, I’m good” face.

“So what the hell are we dealing with?” Raze forgot to whisper.

“Well, if the books are right, our boy is a Revenant.”

Az grimaced at Raze’s volume and continued in low tones, hoping that he’d catch the hint.

“A Revenant?” He didn’t.

“Mmmhmmm. From the French, revenir. To return.”

“Fitting.” Raze took notes on his little yellow legal pad, motioning with his free hand to keep going.

“I saw some stuff in the Dictionary of Superstition and The Vampire Encyclopedia about them. Bad hombres. Men and women who died under violent circumstances and can’t rest. They come back to avenge themselves when no one else will do their memory justice.”

“So they come back to murder their murderers?” It was sort of poetic, Raze decided.

“Something like that.”

Az grinned sheepishly and waved at the matronly red-haired librarian in horn-rimmed glasses who was frowning dourly at them both. She pressed a skeletal finger to her drawn lips and turned back to stamping books with violent enthusiasm.

“Alright, Az. So he’s a Revenant. How do we stop him.”

“Stop him? We? Fuck man, what happened to the police?”

Raze cocked an incredulous eyebrow. “Police? Sure. ‘Hey, mister Policeman, sir, we think some dead painter with a French name has clawed his way up out of his grave and is coming to kill the people responsible for his wrongful death. Could you maybe look into it for us?’”

Az exhaled loudly through his nose and pressed at the points of dull pain which were springing up beneath the taut skin of his temples. “Point taken.”

“So how do we stop him?”

“We don’t.”

“Come again?”

“We run. People left the area; the country. The books say that Revenants can’t be killed unless they’ve already returned to their graves. Even then, it only stops them from rising again.”

“Why would they rise again.”

“To come for their murderer’s kids.”

Raze shuddered. “Sick stuff, man.”

“Well, there’s a little hope, I guess. They were in The Vampire Encyclopedia because there’s a lot of folklore overlap between revenants and vampires. Cutting out the heart and burning the body are supposed to be effective. Decapitation and burying the head at a crossroad.”

“Garlic? Silver? Sunlight?” Raze was starting to get hopeful.

“No dice. We’re going to get messy if we try and stop him.”

“Great.” Raze finished his note-taking and stuffed the legal pad and pencil into the zippered interior of his backpack.

“Then we’re going to get messy.”

***

The Devil leads the Dead Man to the outskirts of town. The West Hills. The gently upswept seat of the modern ruling class. Here, the elite found a home overlooking the common rabble who dug and toiled and sweat for their living. Here, the Devil leads onward toward the Dead Man’s woman. They find her in a quaint Colonial Revival fortress, all triple windows and gables. It stands behind a security gate which the Dead Man has no trouble vaulting. The wrought-iron teeth barely graze the trailing edge of his heavy coat. The dozing security guard in the little gatehouse doesn’t even stir.

“You don’t want to do this, Raker…” The Devil has never sounded like this. It’s voice is harsh and bitter, as though it spoke through a mouthful of alkaline gravel and ash. It’s echo is heavy with pity.

But the Dead Man insists and the Devil tugs on the reins and guides his impatient host toward the rear of the
expansive deck. The sunroom, the Devil corrects as the Dead Man begins to climb. Foot by foot, the distance closes until they peer through the open bedroom window:

And they hear a familiar gasp.

"There she is."

What seems only one is actually two figures lying in the velvet gloom which surrounds the heavy wooden sleigh bed. A passing shaft of argent moonlight, an errant escapee from behind the wispy cloudcover, falls over the writhing forms.

"Drive the knife in, Raker."

Her bare legs encircle his waist as he holds her wrists and nuzzles at her throat. Her back arches beneath him as he quests for her burning core.

"Twist it."

She moans, low and sweet and perfect. It spurs him to greater effort and the pace quickens with the hitching of her breath.

"Why do you do this?"

They roll and she begins to ride him, all liquid grace and syncopation. Her hair falls in an ebony cascade as his hands move to explore every inch of alabaster flesh.

"Come on..."

Her back arches to the window and the chill breeze which whips through the room. She has just enough time to register a familiar form just outside. The burn of familiar eyes. It's just long enough to make her blood freeze.

"It's only water."

But there's so much of it all over and it's so much stronger than me. Wouldn't it be foolish to stand next to something so unreserved?

My legs were not made to swim. My lungs could never hold enough air to suffice its depths. But I can't help but challenge the sea.

It is grander than I can ever be, deeper than I can dive and faster than I can run. I am so afraid of its raw unbridled power that I must challenge it. I have lived to challenge it.

I must be dim to traverse its waves and become lost in its landless desert and to fight to keep from being killed just so I can know I am living.

Just so I can triumph my fear, or attempt controlling it. If I lose my life in it then it was chosen to be, regardless this will always be my Goliath.
MONDAY MORNING

Lauren Sippy

The moon looks like someone took a hole-punch to the sky—small and perfectly round, silvery-white against the purpling watercolor sky, spackled with pinprick stars. You can see the cold in the crisp clarity of the houses and the trees. Everything is quiet. Everyone is asleep—everyone but me and Dad.

I am bundled from head to foot: jeans pulled over my pajama pants, two pair of socks, long-sleeve shirt, T-shirt, sweater (a hoodie advertising my year of graduation: 2006), Ryan's hunting jacket, dollar store gloves, and a wool hat pulled low over my eyebrows making my forehead itch. I am ready for any level of cold but I still shiver as we step outside. Fortunately there is no wind.

Dad is lacing up his army boots. They are impractical but he is proud of them. He says that they symbolize the discipline it takes to get up and walk every morning at 4:30 am. I think the sleep in my eyes is sufficient enough. Ever since my younger brother got into hunting, he and Dad have gone from tried and true city-slickers to woods-and-deer-fellows. I don't know them sometimes. Ryan and I used to make fun of people from the country. Now he just makes fun of me.

Steam from our coffee cups twists and curls almost to the hole in the sky. We walk down the driveway, our shoes slapping against the pavement, making a ringing sound that is exclusive to cold weather.

There are a few lights on in the cul-de-sac. Microsoft and Boeing men and women are starting to wake up. Like us, they move with practiced silence as not to disturb their sleeping families or the sleeping world around them—those that are still blanketed by velvety night dreams. But the silent awake never seem to meet in their morning orbits. Only Dad and I connect before five o'clock.

Dad and I started this to talk, not as a father and daughter but as friends. Dad calls it a “parent free zone”—these walks. He should add that its child free too. We don’t talk about my grades or my messy room. Since he’s not lecturing I don’t have to play the role of sulky teenager.

Lectures aside, we talk about everything else. Some mornings are quieter; we barely have enough conversation to make it to the school and back. There are other mornings when we have to continue walking all the way up to the Golf Course Road before we both realize that we have to get ready for our day.

We have left the cul-de-sac now; the lights are behind us. Dad hugs me to him, sloshing my coffee over my gloves, making my hands reek of coffee, as we walk past the West's dark hedge. It’s the perfect place for someone to hide and jump out.

Newcastle is not a place where such things happen. Still, I shrink into Dad until we get to the street light on the corner.

We are leaving the neighborhood as we cross 135th—passing from the crowd of houses and neighbors to the thick, treey silhouettes—to head down the aptly named Narrow Winding Road.

The Narrow Winding Road is the last nod to Newcastle’s coal mining past. True to its name, it is twisted and dangerous to drive in any sort of inclement weather. Etched into the side of a steep hill, the shoulder drops off dramatically. Cars, whose make heralds back fifty years, litter the ravine. I have always wanted to explore them, but something about ghosts—trapped coal miners, and a murdered girl—keeps me on the road.

They say she was the daughter of a coal miner. They say she was beautiful. But they don't even know her name. She was murdered by the man she was going to marry. The lovers’ parents would not allow them to marry so the couple ran away. They never say why, but he ran her down. She fell from her horse. She hit her head on a cherry tree. She died.

She died because she didn't stay on the road. The girl drifted away from the status quo and into the wilderness of human nature. I'm not ready for that yet. As free as these walks are from parenting, even Dad-my-friend has standards for me. I have standards for me too. There is a plan we both have for my life—my path. I have to go to college. I have to make the smart
decisions. I don’t have time to dig up corpses.

Today is a quiet day. It’s Monday and we both dread this week. Finals are coming up for me and Dad will soon be traveling for work. Neither of us has gotten into the rhythm of the New Year.

Dad is walking quickly. He is only five-nine but his strides are long and I have to skip to keep up with him, spilling more coffee than I drink. It has gotten cold so I throw it out and hand Dad my cup.

“What should we talk about today?” He says as he shakes the drops out of the mug and tucks it into his jacket. The elementary school looms in front of us, our destination.

I shrug at first. It’s barely five o’clock in the morning; the only thing on my mind is sleep. I hop around a hop-scotch court, stalling until I find something worth talking about. Dad and I have agreed that we can talk about anything without judgment, or at least without condemnation, but we both have high standards for ourselves. I stall too long.

Dad smiles and pats my shoulder. “Tired this morning? How late did you stay up?” Dad will keep asking questions until he gets an answer.

“Promise not to tell Mom?” I keep my eyes on the chalk court. Dad nods, at least I think he does. “One.” I glance up at him and he just shakes his head. As much as we stress the parent-free thing, I still need him to be my dad sometimes. He knows and gives me a hug.

“How about a story this morning?”

I smile. A story for the walk home. “What is the story about?”

Dad has lots of stories about his younger years: some true, some not. There are stories about his childhood: the forts he made, the friends and enemies he made as a youngster, playing Robin Hood or Lewis and Clark. There are stories about college, about how he met Mom. Then there are stories about Alaska.

“When I was in Alaska one summer, we were on a fishing boat called The Purpose. Now when these boats would make anchor at high tide, they would be level with the dock. But at low tide, the boats would be sitting some twenty feet down in the mud. You’d have to climb up these wet, grimy ladders to get up to the dock to go into town.”

The sky on the left blushes from the bluish grey to a delicate peach. The trees change from black silhouettes to detailed green. I breathe slowly and exhale. My breath swirls in the air and floats off to mix with the clouds. I can see smoke rising from our chimney. Ryan must have laid a fire for us. We pass the house but keep walking.

“So we dock at high tide and most of my shipmates go into town. I was sick though so I decided to stay on board. I’m sitting there in my hammock, reading a book, when I hear this loud thud on deck. Well, needless to say, I’m scared. I put down my book and tiptoe onto the deck.

“I see this shape grunt and stand up by the ladder to the dock. He is a little shaky on his feet, hunched over and leaned forward. He looks around, not moving his head but shifting his entire torso, like a novice skier.

In Alaska during the summer, it never gets truly dark. We were a bit too far south to see the sun for more than twenty-four hours—that eternal daylight—but the sun barely dipped beneath the horizon before it grayed the sky again.”

Our horizon has blossomed. It always amazes me how quickly it gets light. Oranges, yellows and pinks bleed across the pale sky. I search for the moon, but it is gone. The hole in the sky is shut until tomorrow and I am still on Earth.

Sometimes I wish I could run away for a day. I wish I could, instead of following the trail, marred with my footsteps, from the bus stop to my door, walk the other way. I wish I could explore those haunted mine shafts and look into the windows of the abandoned cars. But only in the daylight. And only for one day. Then I would want to go home, sit by the fire, and treasure my one day.

I couldn’t run away forever. Maybe that’s why I haven’t even gone a day. What is the point of running away for a day if there is not the possibility of never coming back?

“The sky was just lightening though it was barely after midnight. I could see him clearly, even from where I stood by the door. He blinked his beady eyes several times—dazed. He was clearly drunk, probably why he didn’t kill himself falling off the dock.
“Finally over my fear, he was just a harmless drunk fisherman; I asked if he was alright. He jumped, startled at my voice and tried to find me in the haze. I walked closer so he could see me. He stared at me for a while, blinking, as if he couldn’t quite make out my face. Then he grabbed onto my shoulders and looked me in the eye. ‘I am trying to find my way,’ he wheezed. ‘I am trying to find my way.’

We are at the door now. Dad is looking at me intently, analyzing what I have gleaned from the story. I see the path in his hazel eyes, the path we walk every day. Yes, we often improvise it—turning here instead of there, walking it backwards—but we still end up right back on the doorstep.

I am still improvising. Looking out the window at the campus’ lawn, at the other dorms, I think of home, that green door with the brass handle that I always come to at the end of an adventure.

Maybe before the end of school, I’ll run away. I will walk my usual path but then just keep walking. I will leave my cell phone behind. And my keys too. I won’t even take my journal. I won’t need to write, just walk. I will disappear. I will become the rhythm of my walk; I will become the path so that no matter which turn I take, I will have traveled both.

But not today. It’s raining outside. And tomorrow I have a paper due. And then it’s the weekend. Maybe we’ll go clubbing or to the mall. I wouldn’t want to miss that. Maybe next year.

Someday, I’ll walk across the country. That’s it. I will just leave one day. I won’t tell a soul. I won’t take anything with me. I’ll just start walking, alone but for the ephemeral friendships of the road. I’ll treasure it when I get back. When I get back.

PATIENCE

Michael Tucker

Abandoning Specter!
A desert’s mirage!
You promise us victory,
With a lofty visage.
A puffed up ideal
That is stolen day to day
By all the items on our list,
and worst promise of play.
Leisure steals you, Patience.
Our tasks completed to obtain
A little bit more fun
To ignore and avoid our pain.
Patience you are a phantom virtue,
A whimsical little Sprite,
Offering assurance of relief
But never applicable to our plight.
For those who know of pleasure
Are relegated to dine:
A mind of tumult as the meal
And anxiety our wine.
You tug on the lattice strings of my heart, climbing my threads like a ladder to where you perch for a while.

You rub hands over my punctured cavities—my delicate muscle: my seed: my purity: my love as if to replace or fill my aching.

I can't seem to say, "stay" or "go" or "please fill me the rest of your life" or "no."

Because when the continents split they did not yearn for their separate parts, as I don't yearn for your completion.

There is an ancient river that flows to and from such sacred territory along the same rhythmic strides that restores, you must see, I feel restful with the continuity of our hearts beating near by, but not connected.

The spiraling branches of my love are not a bridge for yours, and that is not a seat to perch on.
THOUGHTS OF THE END

Paul Roschau

Thoughts of the end:

Sadly becoming
Appealing,
Imagining,
Picturing,
Feeling...

It truly would be easy, and I
Could make it quick, realistically
All for the exit, of course.

Only the thoughts of others
Reacting to an aftermath,
Or sight...
Swings my mood to a corrective despair
And guilt, among things.

I can't help to picture this negative relief
Where my eyes,
Find themselves trapped and wandering.

With this watch,
This hypnotizing agony
Conforms my mental tragedy
Into something pleasing
And comforting.

Let us not hope this to become
Too engraved.

FAL

LE

Brianna Sylvia-Clarno

Breathing. Breathing I am. I am...breathing. Honestly, I am shaking in my skin. I am craaaawling in my skin. Little nails are poking out of my pores making my head itch and my eyes roll into my sockets. I am fucking terrified. What will I do if it turns out positive?

It won't turn out positive. It can't. You are waiting, too. You are breathing, too. I shut you out though-you are locked out. Locked out of the bathroom, locked out of my privacy, locked door equals locked heart. I haven't locked my heart to you. But how could you? WE spoke of this. WE spoke of never letting this, of all things, happen.

We are in your room. You are touching, touching, touching me.

One touch equals one feel. One feel equals one...
One baby?

"Baby." You call to me through the wooden barrier; I can feel your ear pressed against the cold, slivery door. I rock. I'm scared. I can't tell you I'm scared. I'm ashamed. Ashamed of you, ashamed of me, ashamed of peeing on a stick, ashamed of waiting. You want in. Why do you want in? I want you to leave. I want you to sleep; I want to sleep. Not with you. Why did I kiss your apocalips? "Baaaaabyy?" you cry. You sound like a baby. Whaaaaaa. I want to cry. I want you to hold me and rock me and whisper sweet things into my ears. I am still a baby. I am still your baby.

"I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living my baby you'll be." Mom is tucking me in. I am four. The warm soft blanket is engulfing me in feathers and yummy toastyness. Like a toasted marshmallow. She loves me. I love her, too. This is my favorite, she puckers up her cherry lips and kisses me on the nose. She tastes like Christmas. She wips away and I reach, reach for her. I cannot touch the silky mightiness of her queen sleep-robe. I am small. I am insignificant.

I am insignificant. I do not care if it's positive. I'll only die. Only you will notice. Mom has forgotten about my puffy
cake colored eyes, she has forgotten about me. I should let you in. Let you into this porcelain penitentiary of chaos and anxiety, let you back in to my heart. I look out the window, a piece of blue and green freedom flitters atop powdery wings. I wish I were a butterfly. I could change; I could morph from something disgusting and slimy into something beautiful and free. I could escape. I could land on nectar-filled flowers and drink until I am drunk. Drink, drunk. Until a hawk swoops mercilessly from the sky and crushes me and my bud in its talons. But I am not a butterfly, I only have a broken flower.

"We are meeting for the first time. You look so damn good in that sweatshirt. It is pulled tight around your bikini arms. I look like a pastry. I borrowed my sister’s ity bity sexy model skirt; it’s too small. I can feel my jelly-roll love handles peeking out from under my satiny let’s-get-it-on blouse. I want you to like me, I want you to love me, I always get ahead of myself. Why? “You look really beautiful tonight,” you say in your drippy moonstruck slurpwords. Red hotness swells into my cupcake cheeks. You smile. I smile. We laugh.

“Honey? What is going on? Is it negative? Is it positive? Please let me in, let me in, let me in…” I can’t. Oh God, Jesus, Mary, Joseph I cannot let you in. I stand. You hear me stir and pound on the brick wall forming around my ticker. I look into my reflection. I look like the girl in The Exorcist. White face, white lips, black hair. I half expect myself to start screaming and eating people’s souls. Too bad I’m not that girl, I would eat your soul. I can hear you start to cry. Boys crying always makes me soft. But you are not a boy, you are a man. Men crying makes me hard. Not good hard, bad hard. I squint my pudgy lids, and screw up my repulsive freckled cheeks—I look like I just climbed out from behind the trashy stink bin. I must’ve slithered out of there because I am covered in sticky God-knows-what and my hair is slicked to my scalp. “I’m sorry,” you sob. It’s too late.

I’m late. I am late. You don’t understand. “Late for what?” you ask, stupid. I. Am. Late. I give you my best are-you-shitting-me-you-really-don’t-understand-what-I’m-trying-to-tell-you-right-now-looks. It clicks. “Oh.”

Oh. Is that it? Those two little letters send me reeling into a fit of screaming rage and horrible cutter remarks. You look surprised. Why are you surprised? I wish I could solve that trappy little thought labyrinth you call your intellect and understand why you don’t understand me. But the thing is, you do understand me. You understand my arachnophobia and my obsession with Asian noodles. You know my favorite coffee by heart. Double soy sugar-free white chocolate mocha with caramel sauce. You even know how to write it on the cap-X2 Soy SF WCM XCar.S. We always laugh about the extra Car.S. I always want a new car. You make me laugh with sarcASStic remarks like, “you look like a ray of sunshine,” and “those boots are hideous.” You are hilarious. I need you. I need you to understand what is going on right now. I am serious and you are cereal. I’m about to be a cereal killer.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump. Your thumps are more defeated as the ticker ticks on. I think you are thumping your brains against my bricks. My fortress. I am a queen. The test stick is the dragon and you are the knight. Please come and save me…save me please. I am tired. I am yawns and stretching. The bubblegum hairy pink carpet feels like grass on my spongy butt. I need a satin queen sleep robe. I need you to understand. You hold me. You catch me as I fall. You hold me. You hold me. You catch me as I fall.

You catch me as I fall.
2008-2009 WRITING CONTEST

A letter from Kristine Pugsley, Managing Editor

Last year Johanna Stephens, Dr. Kim Knutsen, and the student Editorial Staff of The Promethean decided to stage a writing contest for all students, faculty, and staff. The success and popularity of the contest encouraged our current team to continue the tradition in the 2008-2009 edition.

This year, instead of using ink-blots, the staff decided to employ our theme “Contents May Be Hot” as the contest prompt. We hoped the unusual and ambiguous nature of the issue would provoke a variety of interesting entries, and we were not disappointed. The contest received over 20 submissions, all of which embodied the free spirit and electric energy we hoped to generate in this year’s contest.

Elizabeth Braun, an adjunct Humanities professor, served as our judge. She should be thanked for her diligence and time; as an experienced literary critic, her choices for first, second, and third place have been decided with great care and consideration.

A list of all winners and honorable mentions can be found on the facing page. Comments on the first and second place entries are provided by Dr. Kimberly Knutsen and Kristine Pugsley.

NOTES ON WINNING ENTRIES

1st Place
Jeremy Richards

Door

2nd Place
Leah Flores

Shhh, My Demons Are Trying To Sleep

3rd Place
Jess Bouchard

This Must Be Real

Honorable Mentions:
Sarah Gutierrez

Time With Hank

Nathan Betterman

The Flow

DOOR
The strength of “Door” is the landslide-like shift of meaning between stanzas. The poet begins with imagery that is Daliesque and defies the laws of physics: “a small, blue, square pond/ nailed laterally against a wall of snow.” The reader is challenged to crane their necks in order to view this door into another realm. In the final stanzas, the movement is inward: “Peace/ placed (deep/ deep in my chest. Deeper than my heart and my soul).” The parenthetical style gives the reader access to an innermost chamber of spirituality, one “where only You fit.” It is here that the meaning of “Door” is revealed: God exists in a deeper pool, one that defies time and space.

SHHHH, MY DEMONS ARE TRYING TO SLEEP
This poem explores the reality of living with our nightmares. It reaches into the darkest places in us all, into hidden chambers where memories of our most disturbing experiences live. It is the place feared but unavoidable, because to lose it would be to lose a part of ourselves. We see this in the mothering words (the demons are ‘cradled’) and in the sleepy, quiet tone; we also feel the bleak captivity when we realize that the demons, destroyed by the mother in ‘waves of bile,’ are dreaming fragments of her former life. The stark realities and haunting images resonate within us and leave a lasting impression.
DOOR

Jeremy Richards

a small, blue, square, pond
nailed laterally against a wall of snow.
da deteriorating window sill and
the growing world underneath.
as hard as i try
i cannot escape

Peace

placed (deep
depth in my chest.
deeper than my heart
and my soul)
in that little nook
where only You fit.

SHHH, MY DEMONS ARE TRYING TO SLEEP

Leah Flores

Shhhhh....

My demons are trying to sleep

They don’t know that I’m awake
Numbly I walk
Cradling them in my stomach
Waves of bile drown their dreams
And for a moment I can see
The fragments of the life
I used to live
FREEDOM IN A CUP

Jeremy Richards

"Do you want a cup of Joe?"
"What is Joe?" I asked.
Or more importantly, who is Joe? I thought. Poor guy.
All that my five-year-old brain could envision was a white coffee cup on a matching saucer, filled with Joe's arms and legs; his head placed nicely on top. Obviously it would have been a very large cup.

"A cup of coffee," my dad said.
"Yuck!" I exclaimed, but in reality I wanted the cup of coffee, even though I hated the taste. I wanted to drink it because it would have made me a grown up. Just like the serpent had tempted Eve with the apple, telling her it would make her equal to God, this forbidden cup of bitter black temptation would have made me into an adult, equal to the ones who created me. Somehow by drinking coffee I knew I would be transformed. My dad and mom drank it every morning. When they had guests over they all drank it. I knew because I sat on the floor playing Ninja Turtles and listened to them talk about subjects I didn't care about and make jokes I didn't get.

If I drank the cup I would understand the jokes they made and would suddenly be captivated by the conversation that only days earlier had seemed like gibberish to me. I pictured myself sitting on the couch with them, not on the floor. I would wear thick-framed glasses, a green sweater vest with an ironed white shirt underneath, and a pair of tasteful, pressed khaki pants. The only difference between the adults and me would be that I was only three-and-a-half feet tall. Oh yes, and my hair would be slicked to the side in a fashionable comb-over. One question remained. Would I have to give up the Ninja Turtles? If I gave into the temptation would I be forced to kiss Michelangelo, Donatello, Leonardo, and Raphael goodbye? Was this an either/or arrangement or could I have the best of both worlds, adulthood and Ninja Turtles—at the same time? These were the life and death questions that flooded my mind when my dad offered me my first cup of coffee. I was paralyzed, I couldn't think straight.

"I'll put lots of cream and sugar in it," my dad said, coaxing me to give this "cup of Joe" a chance.
"Is it okay? I mean, will it hurt me?" I asked, legitimately afraid.

"Sure its okay! They told me it would stunt my growth when I was a kid but I didn't listen and look at me now!" He started laughing, shaking his whole 5'6" frame. He always laughed at his own jokes.

"Ok, I'll try it."

***

I grew up in a very Christian home. I mean that in a good way. People often say things like that and then go on to tell you that their parents were hypocrites; their mom did Valium and their dad looked at porn or something like that. But that's not what I'm getting at.

My parents have always been very loving. My dad taught science at the local high school and my mom stayed at home until my sister and I were both in school. At that time she started working part time for Dr. Hakes, the local optometrist. My parents read to us when we were younger, tucked us in till we were around twelve years old, and helped us study for tests throughout our time at Meadows Valley Schools. Every summer we went on family camping trips, from Yellowstone to Rocky Mountain State Park to Moab. There were a number of reasons my family stayed close, but none of them had as much influence as our Christian faith.

Every morning of my childhood I woke up and walked down our short hall to the bathroom. The hallway ended after the bathroom and opened up into our living room. As I groggily made my way towards the shower I was always greeted by my parents as they sat on the couch together, reading their Bibles. My dad was the head elder at our church and my mom was on almost every committee the church had.

It was clear to everyone that my parents worshipped the God that was described in the Bible, but I knew better.

http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol17/iss1/1
Their real god sat on the counter in a small paper bag from some distant country, usually Columbia. The paper bag kept the god fresh until they woke up in the morning to dump him into a small white machine. The machine ground him up into a fine powder. From there, they stuck him in a device that poured water over him, then they drank him. With cream and sugar. Without him they would have died, or at least they would not have been alive. I had seen them on a few rare occasions, before the ritual had begun. They wandered around like zombies, their eyes barely open. They muttered in incomplete sentences as they waddled toward the kitchen with greasy hair standing on end. Once they drank this god called coffee they came alive; they turned back into people.

***

"Oh come on! Just try it!"

"No! I don't like coffee! My dad tries to get me to drink it all the time and it's gross!"

"Have you ever had a Frappucino? Have you ever even been to Starbucks?! I swear, this will change your life. You'll love coffee after this."

"I don't know..."

I was sixteen years old and my buddy Josh and I were visiting our friends Liz and Maggie in Santa Cruz, California. I still didn't understand why people liked coffee. Everyone said, "You just have to acquire a taste for it." Why? Why would I want to put myself through the process? I didn't see how drinking coffee would make my life any better.

"Look, I will buy it for you and if you don't like I'll buy you one without coffee in it," Liz said in desperation.

"Okay, but you might as well order them both at the same time cause I'm not going to like it," I said assuredly.

"Yes!" Liz exclaimed. I still didn't understand what the big deal was. "Ok, here it is. I'm so excited for you to try it!" She smiled so big that her face scrunched up until her eyes were just little slits and she got so excited that she snorted, not that it was a big deal, she always did when she laughed. Likewise, it was not surprising that coffee excited her so much because pretty much everything excited her. It was impossible to be bored with Liz because she wouldn't let you get bored. Everything from Jamba Juice to Jazzercise intrigued her.

***

I loved Liz, all 4 feet 11 inches of her. I met her the previous summer at a Young Life camp called Woodleaf in central California. When I first met her she was with a large group of girls that I didn't know. They all introduced themselves to me; I introduced myself, walked back to my cabin, and promptly forgot every one of their names. After that a short blonde girl kept saying hello to me whenever I passed her during free time, sat near her during chapel, or jumped off the diving board while she was swimming in the pool. I finally asked her to remind me what her name was and she said it was Liz. I'm sure I made some lame comment like, "Oh yeah! That's right!" but really I had no idea.

Five months later I sat in the Boise Airport waiting for Liz and her friend Maggie to arrive. "This is going to be awkward," I droned.

"Well, you'll just have to make the best of it," my dad said, without much sympathy in his voice.

"I know, but I haven't seen them in five months and I've talked to them like once. I didn't think they would actually come visit."

Liz and Maggie showed up looking as uncomfortable as I felt. We all secretly wondered what we were thinking and the four-hour drive from Boise to my house made doing crosswords with my grandma sound like a good time. The only talking that took place was Liz and Maggie gossiping about high school drama back home that I knew nothing about, and even that was scarce; most of the ride was spent in silence. Normally the drive only took two hours but it happened to be a white-out the whole way home. Sometimes I think God has a cruel sense of humor.

A few days after Liz and Maggie arrived everything changed. I'm not sure what exactly happened, there wasn't one particular moment; we just found ourselves having a good time and by the end of the week I had a new best friend. Not in the childish way, not like she was replacing my old best friend and next week I would replace her with someone else. In that...
short week we had formed a friendship that would last a long
time, possibly the rest of our lives.

***

Liz handed me the Frappucino with small hands
that barely fit around the plastic cup. I skeptically brought
the bright green straw to my lips and took a short sip of the
blended concoction.

What happened next changed my life.
The taste was unlike anything I had experienced.
There was a perfectly balanced explosion of chocolate and
caramel. I couldn’t even taste the coffee. And the texture,
oh the texture! It was like drinking a high-quality slurpy from
7-11. All the enjoyment of blended ice and sweet flavors
without the nausea. Plus it had whipped cream. I guzzled the
16-ounce cup of heaven in a matter of seconds and paid the
price of a killer brain freeze. Then I slurped up the caramel
and whip cream that was left over. I had reached the point of
no return; without knowing it I had sacrificed myself to the
god that my parents and the majority of American’s so eagerly
worship. My best friend had betrayed me and I was ecstatic
about it.

***

Now coffee is a way of life. Whenever I want to
spend quality time with anyone we go to a coffee shop. My
parents and I play cribbage and drink coffee. My friends and I
do homework and drink coffee. The next time I ask a girl out
I’m sure we’ll go to coffee. Unless she says no.

I have sold my soul to coffee. It has become a
daily part of my life; no longer are my parents the only ones
enslaved by this bittersweet god. I am not as dependent as
they are, but it will not be long before I am the one staggering
down the hallway at 6 in the morning, longing for the steaming
black liquid that will bring me back to life.

PARADISE REGAINED

Indu Shanmugam

Once seen golden ribbon,
Reappears in a dream.
Rivers rush under skin
What talisman is this?

Enthralled by charming sight,
I seek your boxed rapture.

Hope seeks lifetime’s treasure
By dozens, I seek destination --
To blissful heavenlies. Send me.
Far away I long to go

Jasmine and mango scents greet.
Destiny gives me a diamond ring.

Undressed of my present realities.
Long to embrace desired ambition,
Swim in waters under moon’s name
Could such fulfillment be true?

Roads to Destiny call my name.
Doubt’s repressive poison holds me back,

Doubt’s repressive poison holds me back,

Untangling from its clutches...

I cannot... I must depart

Worlds apart, bittersweet mementos,
Rest your name closest to my heart,
Do not think I’ve refused your offer.
Timing has her plans like a matchmaker
And, when wisdom speaks,
Sending forth a distinct signal
In one flesh we’ll escape to eternity.
ISLE OF RUM INFLUX

Dustin Kunkel

Herons, two, came winging through
The westerly wind
Greeted us with profiles swift,
Fleet, dipping close
Into the grasses
And passed like
Shadows
Inland.

WHO WOULD FOLLOW IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS

Kaitlyn Montague

Foolish infants. They couldn’t be defined otherwise.
They completed the rituals and prayed to their gods—their
true gods—and didn’t even know it. Probably wouldn’t ever,
either. They changed; they honored a heritage. They should
have been proud.

And yet there were those who thought this connection
was nothing but everlasting dirt under their fingernails, labeling
it a curse. Would they ever understand? Could they?

As he watched from the rooftops, rain pounding down
and shattering the midnight silence of the alleyway, he pon­
dered. He’d been watching the same alley for weeks, biding his
time. Waiting. A boy in a trench coat wandered into view, long
shaggy hair slicked down to the sides of his face. The arms of
the coat bunched up as he wrapped his arms around himself.
It was obviously too large, the tails of the jacket skirted close
to the oil-slicked pavement. The boy’s head bowed against the
onslaught of rain, his step hitched slightly, as if ready to run at
any moment. The watcher smiled. Yes, they could understand.

He’d make them see reason if he had to shove it into
them like an awl into a lobotomy patient.

# # # # #

Robert sat watching the clock ticking, the minute-hand
slowly creeping its way towards freedom. Would it ever come?
The creation of clocks was clearly a government conspiracy,
made to annoy and torture fifteen-year-old high school stu­
dents. They had time machines too, and aliens, and everything
was a cover-up. Or he was bored and blowing everything out
of proportion.

Either option worked.
He sighed and looked over to the boy at the desk next
to him, sitting as rigid as his pressed shirt and slicked-back hair.
“Psst. Dimitri.”
The boy's head slowly turned, blue eyes rolling in an exaggerated manner. He said nothing, but a slender eyebrow rose in inquiry.

"You're not going straight home, are you?" Robert whispered.

Dimitri shook his head, though Robert could practically hear the frustrated sigh coming. "You had plans?"

"Mr. Harding." A voice boomed from the front of the room, and as Robert twisted back toward the front of the room, he met his teacher's disparaging glare with a shrug.

"Sir?"

"I assume you’ve been paying attention and can give the class the answer to the equation on the board?"

"42?" As far as Robert was concerned, it was the answer to everything.

"I don't believe that was the question, Mr. Harding. As the presence of variables..." A loud buzzing from the speaker above the door interrupted his diatribe, and the man sighed.

"Class dismissed."

Dimitri stood from his desk and turned to his cohort.

"You really should start paying attention in class, Robert."

"30 years from now, are you going to want to tell people you cared more about a math class than having a life?" Robert asked, following his friend out of the room.

"I happen to enjoy the subject—something you might notice if you were privy to paying attention."

"Uh huh, because the quadratic whatchacallit is going to be so important to my future aspirations."

"Look," Dimitri started. "You can have until seven to do whatever it is that we're off to do, but then we're back at my place studying for Biology. Test tomorrow, remember."

Robert balked and braced against the cool metal of the lockers in the hallway. Dimitri couldn't be serious. "What? We don't have a..."

"Yes, we do. And you're going to fail it unless we study for it."

Robert grimaced, but his friend was right. Alarmingly so. And failing a test was only going to give Rafael excuse to find something else wrong with him. But then again, studying with Dimitri was like reading Ayn Rand while listening to Frank Sinatra: nothing but droning leading to an inevitable nap.

"Alright, deal."

The same alleyway, a different day. How long had he been standing? Waiting? He watched, an amused smile creeping up his cheeks, pulling at a pair of thin lips. Two of them now, he noted. The smaller still tried to hide in the oversized of his coat, now obviously black leather as the afternoon sun shone off the surface. He'd come to know the jacket almost intimately. A visual cue. The boy bounced alongside his much calmer companion, and the alley watcher glared as they moved away. But they'd be back. There was a routine in this—the voyeurism had become a sort of ritual. The boy's routine had become his. But now there were two, and just in time.

Oh yes, they would return.

"Robert, hurry up," Dimitri called, leading the way down the darkened street. He'd already given his friend an extra half hour. As amusing as it was to watch Robert fight with forty-year-olds over the last comic...something or other, he wanted to get home. Home meant quiet and seminal solitude. And dinner, he mustn't forget that.

Manicotti night even. Robert would be placated, and not have to go home to the guardian that obviously had no time for him. Dimitri had been there when Robert's father died. When his mother left. Hell, his own mother had tried to fill the gap for a few years. The boy was practically a brother.

"I'm coming," Robert cried, panting as he caught up. "Biology is still going to be Biology, you know."

"And you'll still be no closer to passing the test, will you?"

Robert mumbled something about conceding a point, and he couldn't help but laugh. His friend's ego could only
withstand so much.

“Maybe I would, you know. Pass it though knowledge osmosis.”

“I don’t think it works like that,” Dimitri replied.

“Well maybe you just haven’t tried….oh, uhm, hi?”

Robert stopped suddenly and Dimitri followed his turning gaze until both of them were staring up at the figure ahead of them. He hadn’t been watching where they were headed, trusting his feet to know.

But he never did like narrow passages. He liked the open, and the streetlights. When had they ended up here?

The man took a cautious step forward. Two. Three. The moonlight reflected off his teeth, illustrating his grin and shadowing the rest of his face. He cocked his head to the side.

Another step.

“I’ve been waiting, Brother.” The voice was like boot steps on gravel, and it grated in the wrong way.

No matter how personable his friend was, this couldn’t be a good idea. Robert, apparently, was thinking the same thing, as he moved with him. But Robert wasn’t focused on the man.

His gaze was focused up above. The sky had begun to grow dim, the pink pastels of twilight fading into the cerulean hues of night. The moon was bright, more so as the sky darkened.

“I think you’ve got the wrong guys, dude,” Robert answered. His voice was calm, and steady as a teenager could manage. But his body betrayed him. He was shaking as he slowly backed away. His hand extended out toward Dimitri. He took it of course, what would any other friend do?

“No, no, you misunderstand,” the gravel-scratching voice started again. The figure took another step forward, his coat swaying behind him. “I don’t mean you. You, Mr. Harding, run away from your birthright, and I’ll have nothing to do with it. You were born a god, and you turn your back! In fact… I’ll bet your friend here has no idea, does he?”

Robert gripped Dimitri’s hand and pulled backward, stepping back faster than he was. Dimitri stumbled back, trying to keep pace. What in the hell was Robert doing? They were trying to get home, not keep up with homeless nut jobs.

“Dimitri, we need to go. Now,” Robert panted. His breathing had sped, eyes wide as they passed from one figure to the other.

Dimitri nodded, and the pace quickened again.

“Wait.”

The boys stopped in their tracks, though Dimitri’s brain screamed at him to leave. This isn’t safe. You’re late. Mom’s waiting. Food is cold.

“You want to know, don’t you?” the man asked. “Why your friend lies to you. Why he’ll always lie to you. Why he’s doing it now.”

Was Robert lying? There were those few ritualistic days in which it seemed like Robert’s guardian was stricter than normal; the house was quiet and still when he’d come and visit. There were also the days Robert skipped school, looking like he hadn’t slept in three days. But overprotective guardians and skipping class was nothing new. Was it?

“Robert, what is he talking about?”

“Don’t worry about it, we need to go.”

The man strode forward again, closing the gap between them. Dimitri noticed now the stubble on his face, his unkempt hair, and his beady eyes. He swallowed hard and the man leaned in, his face mere inches away. Dimitri jumped back into the brick wall, still clutching Robert’s hand.

The man cocked his head again as he stared at Dimitri. Why did he feel smaller? Did the world suddenly get bigger? Colder? A hand reached out, shoving Robert into the other wall. Dimitri watched with wide eyes as his friend’s limp body slid down the wall—down into oblivion. He swallowed and turned back to the grinning face in front of his.

“Why?”

“Why? Is that all you can really think to ask? All I want is to offer you something he never would.”

Dimitri’s brow furrowed. Of course, this is what happened when you didn’t study for Biology tests—you ran into crazy homeless people who try and kill you and your friends. Oh, wouldn’t his mother love to hear about this when he got home.

“I find that hard to believe,” he replied.
“Tell me, brother, about your gods.”

Dimitri was ready to shove this guy away, pick up his friend, and drag them both home before he was here for another three hours listening to a religious diatribe.

“There’s only the one. Is there a point to this? I have money, if that’s what you’re after.”

“Money?” the man asked, taking another step forward.

No space to breathe. “You insult me, brother.” Dimitri chastised himself. He should have known better. He should have shot first. He should have just gone home a half hour ago.

Too many shoulds.
Not enough coulds.
He swallowed again. “I’m not your brother.”

“No. Not yet.”

Yet?

“But the moon wills it,” he continued. “And so do I.”

The grin broke into a snarl, and the bright moonlight no longer glinted off teeth, but fangs.

Dimitri shook, frozen in place, muttering a Hail Mary under his breath.

The teeth bit into the flesh at his neck and shoulder, and he cried out in pain. He flailed for a moment, trying to push back. And then hung limp.

Lifeless.

He felt a twinge of pain as the teeth pulled back, ripping joints and skin. Sparks flew across his vision as he hit the ground with a thud. The moon was full, bright. The only thing Dimitri could see as his eyes threatened to close. Didn’t they say to move to the light? Was he dying?

Darkness blocked it now, blood dripping from its lips.

“No sleeping now,” it said. “This is the most important part.”

Dimitri ignored it and the dull throb in his neck. He turned to Robert, who, while awake now, was writhing on the gravel. The boy’s neck pulled up as he howled in agony.

And the same fangs flashed in the light.

“Robert?” he croaked. Was this what he’d lied about?

The boy turned, with a roar. Had he sprouted fur?

The man leaned forward, his nose looking longer than he recalled. “Come brother. Your real Gods will show you how to run free.”

The throbbing in his neck faded to a pricking tingle and the light was calling again. Pulling like an insistent mother to an infant. He felt he had a place there, in the light—a duty to it even.

“Robert, why didn’t you tell me?”

The two feral men roared into the night. Challenging each other.

Dimitri, even as a useless, bloody wreck, was caught in the middle. He realized that he had to make a choice. The deceiver or the instigator?
I crave a life of perfect suburban lawn; a uniform green square of 7 by 7 perfection. Paradise unmarred by the scraggily tentacles of crab grass; or twiggy clover clusters, who sow a miniature mine field of triplet green mouse ears and bee-sting wooing pollen balls. But most dreaded are dandelions. When I was little I loved them, collected treasured bundles of them to present to my mother, tiny black bugs and all. Offerings of hands stained pollen yellow and sticky stem milk gone brown. I stuck them in little glass vases with water so they wouldn't die. She banished them to concrete porches to avoid headaches and sneezes. Both our efforts were in vain; death is a dandelion's favorite comic.

Mine the clay with an old screwdriver and, "Crack!" Out comes a root, carrot or at least thumb thick. If you're lucky only five more will pop up. Inject those roots with weed-killer. After 2 or 3 doses, they shrivel and age ten thousand years, burned in hot oil. And you think at last your muddy, busied hands have won. Until a small child, a puffball of soft down, a breath of air and behold ten more dandelions! Brides really ought to invite a dandelion or two to their bouquets; it's really dandelions that are forever.

Obnoxious yellow neon signs on pale green and purple tinged stems. Loud yellow freaks crashing the dinner party. Making a scene with their bushy, unkempt hairstyle. Clashing with the staid, slender green guests. Revealing in their imperfection. Prolific weeds of hope and humanity, divinely disturbing the monotony of my visions of horticultural perfection. I hate you, yet tremble at the sterile world I would create without you.
RICHARD

Loni Blankers

If your heart is still beating
But your brain
is gone
Are you still here?

I would tell you I love you
But I know you won’t hear
Do you know that I do?

If your spirit still lingers

But your soul is gone
Can you feel us near?

When He took your spirit
And led you home

Was Grandma there?

If the machines have been stopped
But your will hangs on

What are you waiting for?

I will miss you, you know
But I will see you soon

Will you meet me there?

THE LAST DAYS (SENIOR THESIS EXCERPT)

Sarah Gutierrez

It was Thursday, April 26th. Christy and Dylan had spent the last few months trying to fool themselves and each other into believing that things were getting better. As a final straw, they settled on a pact: if either relapsed again, they would break up. The glaring problem was that neither had cleaned up in the first place. He would ask if she had used and she’d lie to him. She’d ask, and he’d lie to her.

Christy let things go on like this because she had two needs: to get her kids back and to keep Dylan in her life. She couldn’t hope to be happy having one without the other. Even though using meth was the number one thing getting in the way, it was how she stayed focused; everything was set on course to crash sooner or later, but until that happened, she would not give up.

Pretending to be healthy was the only hope left for their relationship.

Today, Christy was spun enough to give herself away. Dylan caught on to her sketchy, twitchy mannerisms. She had carelessly slipped into a tank top baring her needle pricked arms; she was tired of pretending anyway. He turned to her as they sat on his couch.

"I can tell you’re high now," he accused.
"Yep," she answered wryly, smirking.
"Well why don’t you give me some of that?" She sat up straight from resting her head on his shoulder. Her eyes searched his wildly. She felt a tremendous relief from the pressure of having to fake sobriety for so long.

"It’s about time!" She pulled the bag of meth from her bra and threw it his way. She carried plenty of dope for more than the both of them. Their pact was out the window with an unspoken agreement that this would be the last time.

Their run lasted them another fifteen hours until it
was time to come down. The tail-end of a high brought out the worst in them. And Dylan, with a proven history of violent and abusive behavior, never hesitated to turn his irritation into the bruises that stamped Christy’s body.

The rhythm of their relationship consisted of extreme highs, explosive arguments, expensive gifts from Dylan, to make amends, and an extended period of mounting tension that Christy could always sense. It was as if Dylan was constantly planning his next big blow-out fight. Although she knew the final remedy was to leave him for good, she would provoke his anger just to get it over with. Like diving into the wall of an oncoming wave she would call him a punk, letting the wave crash over her. It was the last thing anyone should call a man just out of prison.

“Say it again!” he threatened.

“You fucking punk!” He grabbed her by the neck, and in a strained voice she stubbornly kept on, “Punk!!” This way she never wondered when she’d get beat up. She could plan it. She was in control for the moment, and the waves always seemed to pass. Tonight, however, the rage and swells of Dylan’s mood were more treacherous than anything she was prepared for.

Christy recalled never knowing fear until she was begging for her life that night.

This was the first time his rage had brought him to the point of wielding deadly weapons against her.

First there was the gun.

Dylan usually felt ready to die either on the prospect of returning to prison or whenever Christy threatened to leave. As she came down, the familiar regret and shame harped on her conscience. She began to see Dylan as the reason her life was so screwed up. She mustered up enough confidence to threaten to leave him one more time. Dylan was sweating. His goatee trembled under his jaw as his mouth hung open. His scowling face and wide eyes pulsed with every beat of his angry heart. He was ready to take them both out.

He had the gun pointed at her head.

“I’m gonna do us both in….or….no, I’m gonna make this as hard on you as possible.” He wrapped the gun up in Christy’s hand with his fingers still on the trigger. He turned the pistol toward himself to make it look like Christy was the killer. “If you kill me, I’ll get what I want, and you,” he continued with a malevolent chuckle, “you will get what you deserve. If I can’t have you, no one can.”

An eternity passed and Dylan’s menacing stare turned distant and lifeless. Christy stood deathly still; hoping he would think twice and let her go.

“Forget it.” He dropped the gun.

The night dragged on. A typical war of words grew between them from mutual feelings of dejection and hopelessness. Dylan commenced with his usual dig.

“Bag bitch!”

“Fucking prick! You’re the one who got me into this in the first place, you ass!”

“You dirty cunt, I’ll kill you if you ever say that again!”

“It’s true. You turned my life to shit. I hate my life because of you!”

It was finally enough to set Dylan over the edge. He chased Christy with a kitchen knife into a corner. From a display of Samurai swords mounted on the wall, he grabbed the nearest one and pointed it at her stomach. His half-closed eyes and emotionless grin made him appear resolved to finally get rid of her.

“I could do you in right now,” he said.

“Please, please don’t….please, please don’t….Oh, Jesus, please…please come help me, please….In the Name of Jesus, Dylan, ‘no weapon formed against me shall prosper!’”

He dropped the sword.

With the kitchen knife still in hand, he pressed the blade to his neck.

“You know what? I’ll just do myself in. I’ll just kill myself and then you won’t have anything to worry about.” With a dramatic “u” motion, he sliced the surface of his skin. Blood seeped down his neck.

He stopped and stared at her.
“Dylan, you are crazy!” Christy walked away.
He paused a moment and thought she might have actually been right. He went into the bedroom to check his self-inflicted wound.

Thinking fast, Christy devised a plan to stop Dylan from doing any more damage. He needed some final distraction from his anger. Her plan was to make him think that her meth addiction had gone too far. If her life was in danger for reasons other than his violence, then the abuse would end.

She had to act quickly.
The two were already high when she had tossed him the bag earlier that night. They left enough for her to get spun beyond anything she’d done before. With only minutes to get Dylan to believe she’d overdosed, she slipped unnoticed into the nearby bathroom and locked the door behind her. She hurriedly prepared the needle.

With a full T left in the dope bag (about two grams) she used the blunt end of her lighter to crush the crystals into a fine powder. She funneled the powder into the shaft of the needle and added water to make it liquid. She stuck the needle, pumped out the extra air, found the right vein and unloaded the drug into her already wasted form.

There.
It’s done... he can’t hurt me anymore.

But soon the intensity of the high scared her.
Oh God, what if I don’t survive this? I’ve never done a full T.

I don’t want to die yet...
...but my brain is...aahh, it’s...I can hear it frying...
Oh God, oh God, oh God...

Dylan came out from the bedroom as Christy stumbled from the bathroom, barely upright.

“Dylan...I mistake...I made...I, I made a...a mist-”
Her heart pumped wildly from her chest. Her thoughts were clear yet panicked. She couldn’t say anything that made sense. Dylan knew by her enormously wide open eyes, profuse sweating and contorted face what she had done. The drug’s attack on her central nervous system caused her jaw to lock and her lips to purse grotesquely. She tried to verbalize a cry to

Dylan for help but could only think it.

Dylan I’m so scared! What do I do?
Call the Drug Line. Yes, do that, they’ll know what to do, they can help. OK, Christy, focus...get the words out...

Forming sentences was impossible...Dylan had to interpret the stuttering and gibberish that spilled from her mouth:

“You, you, you, you, and the, uh, you know...the the drug, poison....p-p-p-people, on the phone...they uh, they call them...to find what I do...just call.”

Dylan got off the phone with the drug line and turned to Christy:

“We have to get you to the emergency room.”

“Dylan! How’m I gonna get there if you don’t take me there with a no contact order? What am’t we gonna do?”

The no contact order. Christy called the cops on Dylan a couple months back after the first time he threw her around. If they were caught together, he’d go back to jail. He came up with a different plan.

“We need go for a walk.”

A walk? No, no, no...there are WAY too many scary things out there...I can’t, they always follow me...

“Ok,” she replied timidly.

“Maybe he’s right. I can try.”

Outside, Dylan and Christy walked around the block trying to calm her. Dylan talked and talked and kept on talking. Christy could barely comprehend a single word. All she was aware of was the whispering voices from the imagined “treeoples” and “bushnarls” that followed her the entire way. Their voices taunted and teased relentlessly.

“Ssh!”

“Keep quiet!”

“Come closer...”

“Hahahah...she’s getting closer!”

“Stay down!!!”

“Oooooh...Christy, Christy, Christy...”

The voices and shadows of people who weren’t there were becoming too much. It was time to go back.
Christy's tweak leveled off enough to make it to school the next day. Kelly, Christy's friend from beauty school, was the only person she could confide in about her violent encounters with Dylan. Kelly was a squat, frizzy haired, red-headed woman in her forties. The type Christy would never normally get close to. But something about her compassionate green eyes made her feel safe enough to open up. She brought up everything that had happened the night before. Kelly listened and shook her head in disbelief.

“Christy you cannot let this go anymore, you've got to call the police and turn him in for that.”

“I can't call the police again. I can't. And if they find out we've broken the no contact order, he's looking at prison again for a long, long time, you know? I mean, he's not supposed to have any weapons, and...and I already called once, that's why we have the no contact order.”

“How do you know if you'll survive this next time? You know what, why don’t I call?”

After school Christy waited at her mom's house while Kelly made the call. The police arrived shortly around four o'clock. They took her report and drove her across town to the Domestic Violence Advocates office.

She was handed a sheet listing the twelve most common characteristics of an abuser attached to a clipboard. A light went on in her head as she scanned the page of familiar attributes:

- Dual Personalities
- Extreme Jealousy
- Controlling and Possessive Behavior
- Emotional Dependency
- Poor Self-Esteem
- Unpredictability
- Blame
- Abusive History
- Cruelty; Abusers may be cruel not only to you but to children and animals as well. They may be preoccupied with violence, guns, knives, etc.

“Geez! He's all these.”

- Hm. I don't know about cruelty to animals. But maybe he was...who knows?

She checked twelve out of twelve and handed the clipboard back to the counselor. A “seen this a million times” look was on the counselor’s face as she advised Christy – another helpless case – to flee while she still had her life.

“You know, if you go back there, he's going to kill you the next time this happens.” It was advice Christy had heard before. The difference now was that she was finally telling it to herself – and believing it to the core.

The police needed to know every entrance, exit and window in Dylan's duplex apartment. Christy drew a rough sketch of his place, as well as listing every known location of his weapons. Dylan would get off work at 5:30pm; one hour from now. It wasn't enough time for her to get to Dylan's before the cops would. If only she could make it, he might not suspect that she was behind it all.

At exactly 5:40pm the Vancouver Police pulled up into Dylan's driveway and were calling his name.

“Dylan Stewart, come out of the house with your hands up. This is the Police. We repeat, come out of the house with your hands up.”

Anxiously waiting at her mom's house, Christy's phone chimed Dylan's ring.

“Hey babe.” Oh, God, here we go.

“Did you call the cops again?”

“No, I didn’t.” “Kelly did.”

“Well, they're outside my house, and they want me to come out and I'm not going back to jail...I'm not going back.”

He started threatening to kill himself, which meant nothing to Christy because she had heard it so many times before. “I'm just a good for nothin' lowlife...If you're leaving me, I have nothing to live for.” He continued his rant of self pity until Christy could hear it no longer.

“You know what, Dylan, if you're going to kill yourself, just do it...just do it or shut up.”

Dylan held out until about an hour later when the police gave up.
The next morning, Christy took Dylan’s cousin along with her to make sure he was okay. The two split up and tried knocking on the front and back entrances.

Christy took the front and yelled out, “Come on, Dylan!” Bang. Bang. Bang. “Come on, Dylan, open the door!” No answer. His talk of ending his life hung in the back of her mind. He sent more suicide-threatening text messages throughout the night before. She was convinced his threats were empty, until the last one gave her the feeling that he might have gone through with it:

“Call me selfish call me weak. I don’t give a rat’s ass. U dont feel my pain. Don’t cry 4 me. I luv U. Find someone who can take care of U like I could not.”

Her suspicions drove her to call the police again, only this time not for her own life— for Dylan’s. The more the police did nothing, the more she called, begging them to break into his house.

“Vancouver Police, can I help you?”

“Yes, hi, this is Christy Hubler. My boyfriend, Dylan Stewart, he’s—you guys were at his house yesterday, he wouldn’t come out— but you need to break in and check on him, he may have killed himself, please.”

“Thank you, Ms. Hubler, we do have the report from yesterday and we will be looking further into—”

“God dammit! You don’t understand… just please go over there now, I know he has a gun in the house and he’s threatened to kill himself.”

The police never came.

The next day Christy came by herself, knocking on Dylan’s door.

Still no answer.

Whatever. I live here too, I’m going in there.

Determined to get inside she removed the screen from one of the side windows and used all her weight to slide open the glass pane. The window was locked, and behind the sheer green curtain panels she noticed a stack of two-by-four wooden planks that had to have been nailed there from the inside.

After scrambling up and over a ten foot fence near the carport, she found a screwdriver on the ground. She used it to break through a window in back with only a TV blocking it from the inside. She pushed the TV down with her foot and it crashed on the hardwood floor. A quick jump down and she was in.

The beer-soaked carpets and smoke-saturated walls smelled like relief to her now that she was assured of finally seeing Dylan. The atmosphere was a trifle more dank than usual. She glanced around to see if any food had been left out. Not immediately spotting the source, she moved on.

“Dylan!” she called out, “Dylan!”

Still no answer.

As she glanced over at the front door, she was shocked at the measures he took to prevent anyone from getting to him. Chains were criss-crossed over the door with large pieces of wood and cinder blocks reinforcing a makeshift barricade. All windows were nailed shut. It was eternal night inside his home. In her head, Christy was sure Dylan wouldn’t really kill himself. He should have been well over his emotional breakdown at that point. She started up the stairs, and noticed a tiny note on the second step. Before she read it she spotted Dylan’s face peeking around the corner from the top of the stairs. She called up to him.

“Geez babe, why didn’t you answer the door?” She began to see his face more clearly through the dark.

His eyes were closed and his head was slumped over the rope that had choked him to death.

His body dangled in a squatting position as he hung from the outside of their bedroom door. Christy’s body was petrified in horror. Only her eyes were able to move; they scanned the rest of his body. Deep cuts and knife wounds swarmed almost the entire surface of his skin.

Wailing and writhing with grief, she attempted to approach his body for a final touch, to know this was really happening. But she was confronted with a presence so evil that dread seized her bones. She watched as a familiar shadow suspended itself over Dylan’s shoulders, as if it were trying to occupy his now soulless corpse. This shadow she had seen before.
When Christy moved in with Dylan she made the acquaintance with this spirit as she walked into their room upstairs to fold some laundry. She had frequent encounters with demonic voices and hallucinations since becoming a meth addict. They were easily dispelled by one fool-proof command: “I rebuke you in the name of Jesus. You have no authority here. I am covered by the blood of Jesus and you cannot touch me!” Christy watched the demonic shadow float from the closet to the bathroom, its presence leaden with fear. She began to command it to leave, but the fear was so intense she was prevented from forming the name “Jesus” in her mouth. She stood staring at the apparition and made a mental agreement with it: Ok, you leave me alone, and I’ll shut my mouth about Jesus, deal?

The devil staring from behind Dylan’s shoulder had not kept its promise. Christy refused to make another move toward Dylan’s body.

Don’t take another step... just get out of here.

She scrambled back down the stairs and remembered the note. She pulled it from her back pocket, only wishing to have read it sooner:

Babe, please don’t go upstairs, Love Dylan.
KNOW SHADOW

Michael Tucker

I, your inverted self—
The converse of your mirror—
Become a gale to sail our ship;
Relent, and do not fear.

In my throat a howling wolf:
A creature of the midnight sky.
The moon, circumscribed in pale,
Dotes upon my widened eye.

I mount my pursuits with swift and ease
And what I want I take.
Unaffected by volcano’s fire,
Unmoved by tornado’s wake.

With a hero’s pride I stand up tall,
With Caesar’s confidence I boast.
Alone I am and will remain—
Perhaps I’m better as your ghost.

PISO MOJADO

Michael Brockhaus

Nancy finished her presentation. And a fine presentation it was. She would have undoubtedly given hers much earlier but, regrettably, she was absent from Tuesday night’s class. It seemed that one of her many offspring had been ill earlier in the week and she was forced to stay home and tend to him or her or it. (Ok that was mean and uncalled for. Apparently anxiety sometimes turns me into a jerk.) Prior to class she had supplied our teacher a lengthy and very detailed explanation for her no-show. From the look on his face it appeared that the comprehensive justification was much more than what was required. From the looks of it, she may have been concerned that the participation component of her grade might be adversely affected by her absence.

“Any questions?” She finished up with a smile, scanned the faces of her fellow students, optimistically looking for someone to inquire about her impeccably prepared and passionately presented research. And there was a pause. And there were no takers.

“Thank you Nancy. That was very well done.” Nancy floated back to her seat on the cloud of approval she had just received from the instructor. “Well, it looks like we are down to our last presenter.”

There was an extended pause. . . . . . . . . . .
Yeah, kind of like that. I think that the teacher was affording me the opportunity to “volunteer” to deliver my presentation, thus avoiding the slightly uncomfortable situation of him forcing me to do it.

“Maybe he won’t notice me,” I thought to myself.
“Maybe if I don’t move he will forget about me. Maybe he’ll just keep the class moving right along, you know, not skipping a beat. Lots to do!” No such luck.

“Mr. Brock, why don’t you come on up and dazzle us with your presentation. It’s now or never.”

“Please please please let it be never” I pleaded to my
self. ‘Never’ seemed like such a good choice at the time.

Looking back on it, perhaps it was a bit of a red light. A flashing red so to speak. Someone who thought that he really wanted to be a teacher yet was so scared silly to get up in front of a group of relative strangers. (Not to be confused with a group of strange relatives.) I suppose that I just hoped that I would eventually be able to unshackle myself from the ball and chain of my anxiety.

Anyway, back to the class. I arose from my chair undoubtedly with some weak attempt at humor to veil my obvious discomfort. The fourteen-step walk to the front of the class seemed like an eternity. I may have tripped on the floor. Tripping on just the floor is never a good sign.

Once at the front of the room with seventeen distinct sets of eyes bearing down on me I began my report. Really simple actually. I had researched articles concerning the efficacy of uniforms in public schools. The presentation was to be a breeze consisting of a brief summary of my sources and a list of the six most important pros and cons that I had found. Finished up with the requisite “anyone have any questions” and then I would be able to return to my seat, safe, sound and unsoiled.

“I did my research on uniforms and dress codes in public schools. The debate of course, is whether they are effective.” So far it was going swimmingly. And then it happened. It was if someone had flicked the switch and it all started: dry mouth, shooting heart rate, raging blood pressure, an inability to swallow. It felt like my tongue had suddenly doubled in its girth. I wondered if a yellow jacket had been waiting inside my can of Coke and had stung me during my last sip. And then came the monumental sweating. I made the mistake of lifting my eyes from my notes and peered helplessly out at my audience: my peers, the future educators of this great nation of ours. I surveyed them all sitting buttressed by their extreme confidence and hubris. I examined each of their expressions as they smugly watched me slip deeper and deeper into my meltdown. I quickly glanced back at my notes and vainly attempted to collect myself.

I tried to coach myself through it, “One more from my list of pros and then onto my cons and then I’m done.”

Suddenly, I was back in tenth grade in the middle of my debate class. I was in a heated, and more importantly, a graded debate about Nicaragua. I was intending to say “peasant farmer” but what came out was “feasant farmer.” Not good. Game over, done deal. Class dismissed amongst a din of laughter and commotion. Hello C-.

“And my sixth and final example of the success of uniforms can be seen in private parts.”

“Private parts? Private parts? What the hell is private parts?” I asked myself frantically.

“I mean students in private schools not students’ private parts.”

I had just said “private parts” again.

I stopped, frozen in my words. My classmates were looking at me with a combination sympathy and worry. I noticed my textbook and notebook sitting on my desk top. I saw my brand new book bag that was resting on the floor beside my chair.

“I could just leave” I thought for moment, “just walk over and pick up my stuff and head out that door. Or better yet, I could just leave it all sitting there waiting for the next chump to come along. I certainly wouldn’t be needing all that crap any more. I would just tell everyone that I had tried but in the end, or in this case the beginning, it was just not for me.

I took a deep breath and tried to compose myself. Halfway through con number three I noticed that my hand was inside my sweater rubbing, possibly soothing my stomach and chest. Weird! My list of cons would have to suddenly be truncated.

I just stopped. Stopped the rubbing, stopped the stuttering, stopped the agony.

“And that is pretty much it.” I offered even though it was clearly the case that there was intended to be more. “Does anyone have any questions?” I asked, knowing that no one would be cruel enough to keep me up there suffering any longer. They were all undoubtedly thinking, “this guy’s a mess.”

And then it happened. Just as I was about to make my first step back to safety it happened. Casey, sitting right there
in the front row raised his hand.

I just ever so slightly shook my head and said myself, "what a dick."

With a conceited arrogance that rivaled Donald Trump he said, "Yeah, I've got a question." He paused for a moment and slowly took a drink of his 100% organic Coffee People coffee beverage. The sound of him sipping his now- tepid beverage through the tiny little slit on the 'to go' lid seemed almost deafening. I watched and waited. As the drink slowly descended from his mouth I noticed the warning so graciously printed on the brim of the cup, "caution: contents may be hot." I surmised that it probably also offered that warning in Spanish, "cuidado: piso mojado".

"Wait, that doesn't make any sense. I think 'piso' means floor and I have absolutely no idea what 'mojado' means." At that point, aside from the untimely realization that my Spanish had gone down the crapper, I wished that the warning read something like, "caution: contents are extremely toxic." Again, no such luck.

I listened, I answered, and most importantly, I kept my hand on the outside of my sweater. I then returned to my seat. The seat located safely in the back of the classroom. The seat that warmly welcomed me just as my mother had done after I struggled through my first day of kindergarten. I shuffled some papers, I restacked my books, and I carefully deposited my note cards into the outermost pocket of my brand new shiny red book bag. All the while thinking, "One hurdle cleared. Barely, but cleared nonetheless. There can't be more than 10,000 to go."

And, "How the hell am I going to make it through this?"
QUESTIONS

Cassandra Carver

It's yet another day that I've woken in a bed that I can’t seem to recognize. With things that weren't mine, and a face that I couldn't put a name to. Quietly I search for my things trying not to wake the nameless. The nameless with the shaggy brown hair, scruffy face, sharp nose, high cheekbones, lips just begging to be kissed...

Stop! Where are my clothes? The jeans are on the floor, a shoe under the bed.

The figure stirs and I freeze with fear. If he wakes will he ask questions? Will he want more? I'd have to turn them down, I have things to do, and I really could do without the awkwardness. A snort, and he's back to sleep. Hurry now, he mustn't catch you here. Where is that other shoe? A quick glance around the room and there it is, peeking from beneath Mr. Nameless' pants, mocking, with its red face.

As I pick up his pants a wallet slips out. It's raggedy old thing. The edges are awfully worn, it has definitely seen some hard times. I bet his driver's license is in there... I wonder.

No, I mustn't, back to the shoe. Put it on and get out as quickly as possible. Wondering gets you nowhere. It leads to a series of pit falls and leaves you with nothing.

Left foot, right. Out the door and down the hall, through the living room and down the steps. It's so quiet, only a few feet now and I'll be home free. A voice from down the hall halts my steps. Shit, he's woken.

Faster now! How many locks can one door have? Come on, open, open... YES! Now time to make my break. Just as the door begins to open it stops. A hand prevents it from moving. The hand has an arm, and the arm a body. He must have bolted down the hall. Probably doesn't even have any pants on. Resist. If I turn I'll have to answer questions, see the face, and know the name. Just stay still, breathe.

"Where are you going? You're not sneaking away so easily this time."

This time? What is Nameless talking about? This has been the only time. He's just trying to confuse me. Breathe, ignore him. You don't have to answer. He's shut the door now, and locked the locks. Doesn't he realize how long it took you to unlock them all? Of course not... He asks questions. A question asker, they have no concept of anything other than questions. Does he really expect me to answer? Well I'm going home. No, I will not turn around. No, I don't have to listen to you.

"Please, don't do this again."

Seriously I don't know what he is talking about, again. I've never seen him before in my life. Well if he wants to play like that then I really must leave. Unlock the deadbolt first this time, then the chain, and now the door knob. His hand rests atop of mine.

"Please... Don't."

It would be better for him to just go back to the room. He's still behind me breathing deeply. It sounds labored, I wonder if he's okay... No! Remember no wondering. Shake off his hand and open the door, don't turn and face nameless. It's bright today. The sun sure knows how to shine. Come on feet lets go. One step, two, you're almost there.

"Please..."

I'm beginning to hate that word. His hand is on my shoulder now. Why can't he let me go?

"Please... I beg of you. I can't keep doing this."

Doing what? Asking questions? Demanding me to do stuff? Who is he to be like this? I have things to do and I don't have time to exchange pleasantries with someone that I've only known for a night. I shrug his hand off and shoot down the steps. The faster I move, the quicker I can get away. It's another day and I have much to do before the night.
NORTH UIST, HOSTA

Dustin Kunkel

I came amongst the cows on the way to Hosta beach,
Old maids and mothers and fresh yearlings sniffing
At me,
Trying pieces of seaweed on the beach,
Spitting them out with grunts.
I said, "peace be with you, sister" to an
Especially large one with eyes dark as any girl's,
I thought of you, dad,
Wished for the day to come to walk these hills and heather
With a father without purpose
And break through the wind coming
Over the hill's lee, see, the waves of Hosta
Fall in curls driven
By the veiled moon,
We will sit here in the throne rock
Looking West like Columba and feel
The burn press
Peaty waters into the pillowed waves, see!

Here on the edge of the world, the
Tattered edge crying
I find you weaving
New strands, see!
You have only to pull
This thread and I'll
Come home.
FORTUNATE DAUGHTER

Erika Doremus

"Some folks are born made to wave the flag,
ooh, they're red, white and blue.
And when the band plays hail to the chief,
Ooh, they point the cannon at you, lord..."
-Fortunate Son, Creedence Clearwater Revival

If I close my eyes and listen, really listen, I can feel the familiar coolness of the garage on an early August evening. I can distinctly remember the sounds of the tinny radio, a sweet taste in my mouth, and the colorful splotches melting into the palms of my hands. My gangly, five year old legs hang off the edge of the work bench as I watch Dad meticulously organizing an assemblage of metal pieces.

"What's that Daddy?"

"This is a revolver," he answers while opening a can of pungent smelling, black goo that assaults my nose. After dipping a long, circular brush into the can, he offers it to my sticky fingers instructing me to feed it into the barrel, and then twist it out.

I was getting the hang of cleaning the barrel, so I moved onto the cylinders when he began, "Guns aren't toys now; this is a tool Daddy uses for work. It protects us from the bad guys." He continued on with his philosophical explanation. "They are more like wild animals. You need to know how to handle them, but at the same time you must respect their power." I silently listened, tracing the smooth contours of the body. Learning to clean a .357 Smith & Wesson is one of my earliest memories.

Fire arms are quite possibly the single most destructive invention in history. Leonardo Da Vinci is often credited for inventing the first machine gun. Since then the Germans carried them through the Arden in the Great War. They accompanied half a million baby boomers barraging their way through soggy jungles, and they became instrumental when the Bloods and the Crips revived the art of the urban drive-by on the streets of L.A. Yet even with all of this mayhem and carnage that they are responsible for, I never felt scared being around them. Maybe this is because both of the male figures in my life always encouraged me to learn to use guns. I grew up surrounded by law enforcement. My grandfather was a deputy during the rebellious sixties. He had seen the Black Panthers and thousands of hippies strung out on acid. My father is officially a detective, but our county is so rural that he often doubles as a deputy for most cases. Needless to say, a gun to them is like a calculator to a CPA. So why shouldn't their little girl have a substantial knowledge of how to defend herself? However, for me it is more than that. Yes, there is something about them- a quiet, patient beauty, so capable of complete annihilation. And it fascinates me.

"Some folks are born silver spoon in hand,
Lord don't they help themselves?
But when the taxman comes to the door,
Lord, house lookin' like a rummage sale."

A car stereo played as I perched myself on a nearby wooden fence. Again I was tagging along with the cadets, this time at their state level shooting competition. The Kitsap County cadets are high school students that take part in the nationwide Explorer Program. This program teaches them job skills, and gives them experience in the field of law enforcement. My dad is Post #1514's chief coordinator. The group was unpacking their gear and suiting up for the first event.

"Stephanie, will you call Jackie again? It is fifteen after and she is still not here," my dad huffed. "All participants for the stationary firing course report to range three!" a southern accent announced over the intercom.

"Looks like Jackie is a no-show," Officer Anderson, another advisor, deduced.

"Great, I am going to seriously reprimand that girl! In the meantime who is going to fill in for her during the first event?" Dad wondered. Officer Anderson eyed me, "I've got an idea," he said smugly.
“No! Erika is not a cadet, she cannot compete,”
“Oh come on Phil. She’s taller than half of the female cadets here. Just give her a uniform…”
“I don’t know about this.”

Suddenly thrilled by the prospect of getting to compete alongside the big kids, I jumped off the fence and shouted “Of course I can do it!” My dad shook his head while he fished an extra uniform out of the van.

Not ten minutes later I was being strapped into a bulletproof vest, safety goggles, and ear protection. “Remember right foot forward in power stance, left hand cradling the butt, aim lower because-”

“Dad,” I cut him off, “I know.”

“Kitsap, you’re up,” Anderson handed me the loaded .357 and I stepped up to the window, scanning the targets: a row of three metal plates, easy enough; two more wooden silhouettes, staggered, but plenty wide; the final target lay hidden behind a massive oak, the trick would be to not hit the tree. “Set, aim, fire!” the official called. Ping, ping, ping, the plates resonated when struck by the round. As the gun kicked back I felt a sense of complete euphoria. “Damn!” I hit the first wooden target a little high. Adrenaline was pulsing through my veins, but it only made me more focused. Thud, I hit the second target dead on. POW, the last silhouette went like the French Revolution. “Sharpest shootin’ twelve-year-old I’ve ever seen,” Officer Anderson whispered to our group.

“Some folks inherit star spangled eyes.
Ooh, they’re sending you down to war.
And when you’ve asked them how much should we give?
Ooh, they only answer more, more, more.”

I hummed a familiar tune to myself while I waited for the kettle to whistle. It had snowed so heavily the past few days; very uncharacteristic for December in western Washington. I had spent the entire day shoveling a path to the street, and my arms already ached with building lactic acid. Snow started to fall again, blanketing the ground outside. So much for my afternoon of shoveling, I thought. The leather groaned as I settled down for an uneventful evening. I was unusually content.

The very next moment I was startled by the ring of the landline. Hmm, the caller ID says it’s Mom, she is probably dying to tell me about the gorgeous executive that came in the office today. Or she is calling to brag about how she simultaneously managed to paint her nails, get on her nylons and eat breakfast while driving to work this morning. That is my mother: life of the party, and unconventional in every way.

“Hey Mom”

“Erika-” her voice broke. I instantly knew that voice. Something was very wrong.

“What happened?” I demanded. She did not answer right away, but I could hear the labor in her breath.

“He’s -- he’s cheating on me.”

“Mom BREATHE! Stay calm, I will be there as soon as possible.”

Facing the window I realized what I had just promised. How in the world was I going to drive the five, snow packed miles to her house? “Ben,” I called out. He heard the urgency in my tone and shuffled down the hallway. “Andreas is cheating on Mom. I don’t know what is going to happen, but I have to get over there now. Will you tell Dad what is going on when he gets home?” His brow turned downward, and his dark blue eyes looked scared.

“Ugh, yeah,” he stammered. Both of us knew that this was jeopardous. Mom’s latest boyfriend is a recovered alcoholic. He might have lost the sauce, but he still has the raging temper.

The roads to Mom’s house were completely iced over, so it was slow going. Twenty minutes had gone by since the alarming phone call. Oh God, what if he gets there before I do? In another five minutes my car makes it to the end of our cul-de-sac. She was there, at the door, waiting for me with the most tormented expression on her face. “Mom, I’m here. It’s okay now.” Another large sob bubbled from her throat and she collapsed into my arms.
After she quieted I was able to maneuver her to the kitchen. The counter was strewn with crumpled pieces of paper. I picked one of them up and noticed it was an email from Andreas; however I did not recognize the receiving address. “Hey Kitten, let’s make this spontaneous. I don’t want any schedules. Just meet me at that motel in Shelton we talked about,” my eyes bugged, this was so blatantly obvious. Another one read “Thursday night on the boat was hot. What other positions do you want to try?” It only got more graphic...

“You are kicking this vile man to the curb tonight!” I screamed.

“What are we going to do when he gets angry?” Mom asked, mirroring Ben’s fear.

“We are going to get ready.” I instantly went into a phlegmatic, focused mode, cataloguing all of the risks this would pose. I left my mom at the kitchen counter to race up to the master bedroom. Underneath the bed was a metal case. This was Andrea’s .44 caliber hand gun. Next I went to the closet. Buried under numerous disheveled stacks of jeans was the shotgun—loaded and unlocked of course. Andreas was not very original when it came to hiding his things. Once he moved in I had made a point to search the entire house looking for paraphernalia like this. Two down, one to find. Across the hall in the office there was a seven drawer, solid cherry dresser. Second drawer, under the socks...shit, not there. He must have taken the .32 caliber pistol with him today. As I stood on the staircase landing I ran through my options. Scenario one: he will leave it in the truck, giving me enough time to sprint out there to get it before he understands what is going on. This leaves my mom alone and unprotected, but at least I can make sure he is not armed. Scenario two: he comes into the house with it concealed. Scenario one was looking a lot better. In any case I was not going to be left vulnerable. I ran back to the bedroom, collecting the shotgun, and the .44. First clicking the safety on, I hid the shotgun in Ben’s closet down the hall. Then I shoved the .44 in my jacket pocket. Remaining in my one-track mind set I went down stairs to calm my mom. We could only sit and wait.

Around seven o’clock heavy footsteps sounded on the porch.

“Oh God, oh God, he’s here,” my mom was hysterical. We could hear the door open and the heavy footsteps continued down the hall. Finally he appeared from around the corner. He was completely unaware of the situation, until I gave him my death glare.

“What is going on?” he roared at my mother.

“Are you cheating on me?”

“No, I would never do that.”

“Then what are these?” my mom started to sob again as she shoved a pile of crumbled emails into his hands.

“It was a joke.”

“Like hell it was, you bastard!” she screeched at his lame excuse.

This was it. Those were the words that triggered his temper. His right hand twitched, and his face filled with red. Knowing what he was about to do, I sprang in between he and my mom, just as his elbow cocked back behind his ear.

“Outside, NOW!” I commanded.

“You should know better than to cross me. I have connections down in Portland. You had better watch your back,” he continued screaming profanities at me while digging out chains from the bed of his truck. I clutched the gun in my pocket and drew it intently. I could get him right now. He had his back to me. All of the horrible things that he did to my mom, my brother, and I were flooding through my head. I could end this; I could end him, forever. In the middle of my deliberation he turned around and noticed his gun at my right side. I still had an unequivocally clear shot. For the first time all night there was only unbroken, cold silence. I raised my arms, and aimed the gun at his chest. We stared, without losing eye contact, for a mind numbing thirty seconds. I spoke while still aiming, “I suggest that you stop threatening me. Get
in the truck, and leave,” my words were callous. Slowly, his palms turned towards me, communicating that he understood that I was in control. He then back peddled into the cab and revved the ignition. His tires slipped, but he made it out of the driveway.

*It aint me, it aint me, I aint no senators son, son.*

*It aint me, it aint me; I aint no fortunate one.*

Unconsciously I dropped the gun in the deep snow, and reached for my cell phone upon hearing my Dad’s ring tone. “Erika, are you okay?” his vexed voice demanded.

“Fine, Dad.”

“I called 911. Bockley and McVey are on their way.

My mind still numb, I stood there in the empty driveway, listening to the safe sounds of the sirens getting closer and closer.

---

**MY MUSIC**

*Paul Roshau*

My music enjoys my ears listening

I create my notes
Out of emotional depths
I conform my melody without:
   My particular
   Your particular
   Particular’s particular

I fall under no hole of uniformity
My music comes with this
As it goes with you

I do not see my music becoming true until it:
   Has form
   Has randomness
   Has tract
   Has wonder

My music is poetry
To my ears and to my body

For they are unique within my individuality
My music is my reality
WHEN SKIES ARE GRAY

Daniel Mershon

The skies were gray on May 2, 1998. Not just gray, dark gray: completely overcast and not a hint of sun shining through. It wasn't raining yet. I was outside shooting hoops with my father. He heard the phone ring and went inside to answer it. I kept shooting and the ball went through the basket more often than one would expect for a nine year old. I retrieved the ball from under the hoop and dribbled it back.

My father walked out, and the look on his face was anything but good. It was a sorrowful look, not only because of the loss, but guilty because he was bearing the horrendous news. We stared at each other for a moment. A tear rolled down his cheek... "Micheal just died."

He knelt down and I ran into his arms. Tears were drowning my eyelids. I wasn't bawling, I wasn't hyperventilating, I was simply crying. I was crying because when my father uttered those words, I remembered all of the times that Micheal and I had fought. We apologized but neither of us meant it. They were apologies forced by our parents who just want resolution. I was crying because we never would make up for it, and because we would never fight again. My tears were supposed to be a catharsis, but they made me grieve more than ever.

Micheal and I heard the sound of the ice cream truck coming. We had been planning this all week: the moment he passed our house we would run to the gate and moon him. The obese ice cream man drove around the corner to see our buck-naked rear ends. We were laughing at our brilliant idea, but his only response was: "Mine's bigger than yours!"

We drove to my mother's house where Micheal had died. My mom greeted us with tissues in her hands. I wanted to see him so she led me into the bedroom where he lay. He rested serenely on the bed where my Mother had moved him. His skin was milky white and his veins were overly visible. I couldn't bear the sight and I ran out of the room.

I didn't want to cry, but I couldn't help it. I missed Micheal, and we all would, but crying wasn't going to help us and it definitely wouldn't have brought him back. Micheal would miss us too, but he wasn't crying. He wasn't crying when he passed away either. He just closed his eyes and slipped away. I kept reminding myself that Micheal was in a better place. Of course we would miss him, but he's not suffering anymore; we should be happy for him. He had been bed ridden for six months—not just six months, but six months out of 86: roughly one fourteenth of his life. And in the last few months he couldn't even talk or lift a finger. All he could do was sit there while the cancer suffocated his brain. But now he is probably flying and running through heavenly fields.

Micheal had to go in for Chemotherapy ever day for what seemed like an incredibly long time. One day I was watching the screen in the room adjacent to the radiation room. My father, who was in the other room, slid his finger up his cheek giving the impression that he was picking his nose. Micheal thought it was funny, and wanting to be funny like our Dad, he stared straight into the camera and stuck his index finger into his nostril.

At the funeral I felt fine, but confused. People were dressed in black. Why couldn't they wear normal color clothes, something more vibrant? Black was the color of death, and we didn't have a funeral because he died, we had one because he lived. We all knew he was dead and I for one didn't want to be reminded of it. I saw people that I didn't even know, or who barely knew us, and they were crying their eyes out. I kept asking my Mom why everyone was crying. She just looked at me as if she was trying to hold back her own tears. Were these people who barely knew us crying because of this tragic incident, or were they merely crying because they felt sorry for us? Everyone kept hugging me; people I barely knew. "I'm sorry for your loss" they would say. But why are you sorry? You shouldn't be because it's obviously not your fault.

Many people spoke at the service, and each one brought back memories. There was an F-15 pilot that my Dad worked with. He let Micheal and I taxi out in one of the jets. This was when Micheal could still walk. When he realized he was unable to walk he just sat down. "Don't worry Mom; I'll just learn to walk again later." We couldn't let Micheal know
that he was dying, but deep inside he probably did know. His optimistic attitude often left my mother running out of the room in tears because she knew the unfortunate truth; he wouldn't walk again, and he wasn't going to get better.

The Make-A-Wish Foundation wanted to help Michael. His first wish was to meet his biggest hero, Shaquille O'Neal, so they sent us down to a basketball game in Los Angeles where he could meet Shaq. Michael was so distracted by actually seeing Shaq that he didn't realize the autograph Shaq left on his basketball card. Michael's second was for a Nintendo 64. I imagined how miserable he must've been when he couldn't walk. To make my brother's last few months more enjoyable I withdrew all the money I had been saving since birth (with my Mom's permission of course); money from chores, washing cars, birthday gifts, etc. and I bought him the N64 he wanted. I was completely broke, but it was the best $300 I ever spent.

After a few guests spoke there was a lady who was going to sing. When she started to sing I noticed her beautiful voice, as did everyone else. "You are my sunshine my only sunshine." At that moment I came to my realization. I remembered all of the good times I spent with Michael. I remember my Mom singing that song to us when we were younger. She used to sing it before we went to bed. Her voice was beautiful too because she was singing it to us—for us. I looked up at her and we were both starting to cry. "You make my happy when skies are gray. You'll never know dear how much I love you." Michael was happy no matter what. Even when he couldn't walk he was optimistic. He never realized how much we loved him, but I didn't realize it either. The memories kept flashing through my head. So many good memories, and that's all I have left. There won't be any new memories made. My head was buried in my Mom and we were crying harder than we ever had before. "So please don't take my sunshine away." I could still picture my Mom singing that song. But her sunshine had been taken away. The sky was gray, and her son wasn't coming back.

TOM AND THE BULL

Dustin Kunkel

I saw Tom go off at
A lope into the woods.
The woods near the
Bottom of the hill, where
The river fl owed.
He crossed the footbridge and went into the field across the way
Where the bull grazed—the sign said, “beware:
The bull is loose!”
He was gone a long
Time, and we sat

Waiting in the rain and
Wind,

And when he
Returned he was
Shaking his head and
Smiling.
GREYSCALE

Kristine Pugsley

I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas. Better then, to live or die alone than feel the breath of warmth against my skin or hear another empty useless word.

Men have fought before over love and love lost and nothing comes to it but ashes.

Hitherto I find myself blessedly abandoned, left to pace a maze of grey mountains; the city rises above me into clouds, into the sunlight, into heaven. I am prostate before my own soul and feel rain weep against my face.

Wellington boots fill with water and frog spawn.

A gutter overflows.

The silent roar of torn thunderheads, a change of pressure and the lifting of hair off my forehead...these are the representatives of a coming storm. Earth removed from earth: nature takes a whole new meaning in the stained city. Everything reeks of grey, as though the looming, lingering haze has settled like fine dust upon every surface.

Before me, the brass doorknocker glistens, its snarling lion's face mocking and still. Rain peels slowly down the royal nose before falling to the pavement, one more drop among millions...

A red painted door, slick from the humidity.

The swoosh-drizzle of a disturbed puddle, flung hither and thither by a silver automobile.

Inside, a sanctuary of toasted air and vibrant color, plush rugs, flames in the fireplace and tea in a violet cozy. A bed rests in the back room with pale green sheets and pillows to sink into, slippers in two sizes by the cedar chest at the foot and one carelessly tossed bathrobe always on the right side.

Bare in the cold iron streets, I lean my forehead against the cherry-smiling wood and pray that it will open for me again.
ODE TO THE COLOR BLUE

Maria Rizk

Ah Blue
There are many things that involve the color blue
Blue skies, blue pens, bleu cheese.
You can feel blue or say something out of the blue;
You can sing the blues or listen to blue grass music;
You can have blue eyes that sparkle like sapphires.
There are many shades of blue,
Cobalt
Cerulean
Robin's egg
Sky blue
Navy
Blue green
Blue violet
Royal blue.

Each shade is just as important as the next.
You can wear blue jeans while eating bleu cheese dip with blue
corn chips.
Without blue, there would be no purple,
Or green.
You wouldn't have blue jays, or beautiful lakes.
Notebook paper wouldn't be the same,
Neither would rainbows,
Neither would yogurt cups, pop tarts, Airheads, Slurpees, the
sky, water.
Ah Blue.
The world would lose so much without the color blue.

Dedicated to Miss. Lauren Sippy
Tossing closer to Peter's embrace, I allow him to gently run his fingers through my hair. His sky blue eyes and provocative pupils together form an awkward gaze. I tell him about a dream. “I saw a tall tower. The first rock on top falls slowly, and then very quickly the whole thing crashes, making a loud noise.” I pause. I watch those eyes pierce right through me.

“That’s all.”

His fingers trace my chin. “And nothing else happened.”

“I only remember the tower. It was so vivid.”

“Baby, do you believe in dream interpretation?” His cold hand reaches down to cup one of my breasts. Flinching, I let him.

“No—”

“Neither do I.” His gaze possessively consumes my body. Darts closer, he plants a kiss on my neck. The distinctive smell of cologne mixed with male sweat penetrates me. An itchy glue-like sensation spreads on my eyes and lashes - the residue of mascara worn overnight. I must pick up my expensive dress lying crumpled on the floor before it wrinkles.

Oh, 2 pm already! After brushing my teeth and a minute retouch, I grab a dress that’s closest to hand’s reach.

“Honey, where are you going?”

“The market. They close early on Saturdays.”

“You went shopping three days ago.”

While fixing the side-tie of the dress, I explain, “I know but I forgot turmeric.”

“What?” he mutters.

“Turmeric. I can’t make chicken curry without it.”

“Oh...okay.”

“The market closes early. And then I’m catching up with Emi. I haven’t seen her in ages.” A perfect last-minute lie. He buys it.

I dodge past groups of teenagers in jeans, elderly women, couples holding hands among a crowd to find the next subway. All of them fitting together like a mosaic on the busy street. Momentarily, my train of thought meditates on a familiar voice that always announces the subway stops. I imagine that voice belonging to a petite, young soft-spoken and probably Filipino woman. Striding off the subway I walk towards the market. My arm tucks my purse closer to my body. I always hear tales of pick pocketing. How the hell can a person rip a wallet right out of a purse or back pocket, especially without the victim or passerby noticing? That’s an art. Peter tells me that I can never be too careful since they usually target foreigners.

The smog of humidity hugs, always leaving a clammy residue of sweat. Not too far away a petite Malay girl, barely of the legal working age starts to operate the register while conversing in an unfamiliar language to a stout woman behind the counter. Intricately designed perfume bottles of varying voluptuous shapes line up the tables like displays of art. Turning to me she asks, “Good afternoon, may I help you with anything?”

“No thank you. I’m just looking.”

My thoughts momentarily drift. An aroma of unusual spices greets olfactory senses. Some names are still hard to pronounce. I can never forget the distinct wafting smells of coconut oil, spices, vegetables and other mixtures associated with the vendors of 15th street.

Spices aren’t my priority at this time. I head straight to the closest National Bank. I have not told Peter about this. While waiting, I wonder - How long can I keep this from him? Two years ago, as Nani lay on her deathbed she came up with the thought of giving away her remaining retirement savings to her adult grandchildren. As she passes from this world to heaven, she wants that to be a sign ushering prosperity for us. She always hopes all of us would grow up to be good Indian boys and girls. There are twelve of us. Nani decided to give her two single granddaughters a bigger portion. According to her rationale, “Nina just finished college and needs to start out and Rita is struggling to pay her bills. They need it more than others.” The others have made their mark.

After a year of grandma’s blessing, my parents start
thinking about marriage. Mama jokingly nags, “You nuh, you cannot go on this like forever, nuh. You go find a good boy and settle down.”

Something interrupts my train of thought. “Excuse me, Ms. Nina Nair. It’s a surprise you are here,” a voice of an elderly woman calls out. I freeze. That can’t be Beulah aunty—my own eccentric relative supposed to be in Bombay. Not a Wondering, I learned Hindi years ago, when I lived in Bombay.

I spent fifteen years English.

Her waist. Her neck carries a necklace of oversized beads and coins of various countries poorly strung together.

“There’s no reason to be afraid, child. In case you’re wondering, I learned Hindi years ago, when I lived in Bombay. I spent fifteen years there.”

Is she Australian? Her accent is definitely not American, English or any of the other accents I’ve heard at the International School. Emma Baker, an Australian colleague comes to mind. Does this strange lady sound like Emma?

“Bombay, that’s my birthplace.”

The woman continues. “That’s splendid. I must say your accent. Where are you from?”

“Originally from Bombay but lived in America for many years and now here,” I speak dropping each word awkwardly.

“Where are you from?” I manage to ask.

“I thought I heard some American from you. I’m Aussie but mostly lived in California. I’m a world traveler.” The woman continues. “That’s splendid. I must say your accent. Where are you from?”

“Originally from Bombay but lived in America for many years and now here,” I speak dropping each word awkwardly.

“Where are you from?” I manage to ask.

“I thought I heard some American from you. I’m Aussie but mostly lived in California. I’m a world traveler.” The

coins and beads around her neck catch my attention. I recognize one of the coins shaped like a hexagon, with an image of a huge pitcher of water from an unknown country.

Observing her closely, “What brings you here?”

“It’s a perfect escape for a wanderer, a stranger, a voice from this urban jungle.” She declares in a soft, eerie yet calm voice. In a meditative glance, her hazel eyes almost faded with age pry deep into my soul, searching innermost hidden thoughts.

Indeed, this is an urban jungle of car horns, tall skyscrapers, crowds of people of all types and sorts, several places. All together these elements engulf, making a person lost among its vicious wilderness. Does this stranger among the wilderness have anything valuable to say?

“Well, child, you remind me of my young days. I was bold and adventurous. I left home to find myself. I was a real hippie, not those fake, college type hippies.”

“So, you’re a real hippie?”

“Well, yeah. I lived out of a backpack and tent. My two friends and I left for India. Being young we wanted a romanticized, ideal life of freedom and thrill. Those days are over. I can tell you stories…”

Intrigue creeps. How often does anyone run into someone like this? From my adolescent days, I remember stories my parents told about foreigners back in the day. A particular piece from memory’s bank resurfaces. I remember being thirteen and sitting against the kitchen table with my brother. While eating pastries we listened to Ma’s tales of her days.

***

While in college, Ma worked her evenings helping Grandpa run the post office. Since Grandpa couldn’t speak English, Ma usually assisted foreign customers. This was a tiny secluded town almost brushing the Southern-most tip of country before plunging into the Indian Ocean. A reserved community folded in this backdrop started seeing light-haired foreigners for the first time.

“Did Indians hate foreigners?”

“Not really. People generally liked them. Some people couldn’t help but wonder why any Westerner would be
fascinated with our poor, third world country? Corrupt, useless idiot politicians ran our country. Those morons made life miserable for an average Indian. Imagine all the social problems, crime, poverty, and no law and order, all together in one place. Among all of this, some hippies show up expecting what...a land of paradise?”

“What were the hippies like?”

“Oh, those hippies. Lord, bless their souls. Such odd but interesting people. They came in expecting a land of mysticism, just because three major world religions originated there. They thought we would be very spiritual people. I guess we are in some ways. Reality-wise, the common person had too much to worry about such as paying bills and keeping his job rather than seeking spiritual paths. Did those hippies expect a land of milk and honey?

“The hippies I ran into were nice, friendly, and excited about everything. Naturally, people welcome that. Then again, some can’t help but laugh at some of the things they did such as not taking baths. They wore one outfit till it gets too dirty or worn out. Then, they buy another, usually the cheapest they can get. They never cut their hair or shaved, had strange tattoos and what not. Some villagers with no idea about the West start thinking that all Americans never bathe. Hippies were the butt of many jokes.”

***

My eyes focus on the space between a coin and an irregular shaped bead against her pale neck. I wonder if this woman one of those hippies?

“Young lady, you may think I’m a random stranger but our encounter is more than a coincidence.”

“And why is that?” I’m almost amused.

“I have insight into your life. You have been given so much into your life not out of chance by some divine grace. There’s alignment that cannot happen without supernatural intervention.” Hairs start to stand on my end. It’s true. By a slim chance, I’m living the dream life of teaching in a posh International School.

“I see. I suppose you are a fortune-teller. I’m not interested.”

Oh, heavens.

***

Considering Father’s origins in a backwater village, only by a narrow opportunistic chance my father enters college, where he met Ma. Her parents frowned on the courtship. His low caste and borderline illiterate in-laws will not be a match for Ma – educated in the best private schools and to be a successful, modern daughter. Grandma doubts him as a gold digger preying on successful women. Would he ask for a large dowry? He dare not or we’d have him killed instantly as if swatting a pesky mosquito. It’s easy for us to pay a bribe and get a gunman, or gang of thugs.

Grandma’s suspicions dispel when she hears about Dad landing a position in a prestigious company. Hearing many favorable words about him she agrees and blesses their marriage. In no time, he reaches the top of the company and then gets a chance to come to America to settle in the suburbs of Edison, NJ.

Growing up, Father always bragged about his background and working his way up to success, telling us “You girls have no idea about poverty.” I listen while painting my nails a Plumeria shade. “You don’t understand the small chance. Aye, why is this tea not strong enough?” Reaching for another tea bag, he continues to emphasize the difficulties of admission to a college in India. Every time I hear similar tales from older people it seems as though a camel passing through a needle. Not just that. It’s like catching a last boat; if you miss it you are stranded, and staring off to the sea of future, only imagining what could happen. If he couldn’t pass college, he couldn’t get an impressive career to impress Ma’s parents. His words resonate: “My parents would have set me up with some girl from a nearby village. We would never be here. Understand?”

He wants to continue to hold me from flying out of America by myself. Ideally, at least right after college he prefers that I stayed within the borders.

Ma remarks “You nuf, people from around the world come to America for opportunities, while you can’t wait to jump on a plane to the East. What are you looking for, anyway?”

“Well, there’s exciting nothing here. I want an
adventure.” At that time, I didn’t want to admit that I desire change from mediocrity.

“Exciting? Aye, what nonsense!” Ma shakes her head. “Why can’t you settle here? There are good schools here.”

A week later, Ma casually mentions marriage, which comes right after graduation and a career. “You must also start thinking about marriage. You’re at the right age. It’s good for a woman to be choosy but you don’t even seem interested at all. You turn every guy down. How else will you find your suitable boy?”

I cringe and take another sip of tea. “I haven’t clicked with anyone.”

“Others asked about you, at Anita’s engagement party. Arranged marriage, uh, we’re not strict on tradition, you nuh. I’m fully fine with you dating. Or, are you taking time off relationships? Nothing wrong with that.”

I nod. Alas, career success is like a second skin. I never understand love. It’s a contraption like a tight dress about two sizes smaller that wraps the body possessively, restricting movement and ill-fitting for my type.

I end up departing from the US mostly because of Emily from Trenton. She connects me to her old friend, a guidance counselor of that prestigious Singaporean boarding school. Good pay and reputation is hard to come by. It will be foolish to not take hold of opportunity’s hand extended towards me. And it’s an international school too.

***

Staring back at the hippie woman, I hold my ground, “I don’t have change and I’m not interested in a fortune.” She smiles mysteriously. “I’m not after your money. I’m not a fortune-teller. Fortune-tellers tell the future. I’m rather a forth-teller. A forth-teller alerts you of what’s going on at the moment in the inner soul. The human condition is at unrest, morbid and disastrous, with the potential to destroy itself.” She reaches into a pocket and pulls out a card. An animated picture of a toppling tower flashes back to me. It looks like Rapunzel’s tower of an illustrated fairytale book. Chills run down my spine as I remember telling Peter about the dream. “Does the card have a meaning of any sort?”

“Towers toppling symbolize drastic change. A type of change that’s destructive yet renewing. The old must die. Why? Because that’s how you gain to live abundantly. If you desire the substance of things hoped for, one must first ‘die to self’.

Sometimes, things happen that you don’t understand especially in relationships. Think of a vine, in order to be grafted together to another, certain parts will be trimmed and redone. Life can be like that.” I stare at her. What on earth is she babbling about? This is ridiculous.

“Who are you and how do you know my name?”

“Oh, how rude of me. I’m Evelyn. I recognize you because your current state reminds me of myself.”

I cannot see her anymore as a psychic that makes a living from gullible people. I’m intrigued. Can she really have some gift?

“Like you, I once desired fulfillment that I couldn’t really describe. I like anyone with an adventurous spirit. Exploring and taking hold of the world. You’re not afraid to venture and settle in foreign lands. And yet, you fear going anywhere near love.”

She’s describing my tightly clenched heart remains afraid to grasp love. Love is a mysterious force too high for my reach and beyond mind’s comprehension. Where does it manifest? Three years ago, I remember the night at the Circa club for a party. Among their circles of friends, colleagues and whom else, I meet Peter. A gentle set of blue eyes matched with a smooth tone monopolizes my attention. I’m drawn. His impressive knowledge about traveling, art and wine intrigues. Peter appears into my life like a vivid dream waltzing into the dark realm of sleep. In a year, we exchange our wedding vows.

“What about love?” I demand an explanation. My pulse squirms. Spiritual gifts don’t exist.

“There’s resistance. Freedom of experiencing love sits close to your heart. A heart that is too hardened refuses to open the door to second chances. Passion then becomes another superficial accessory rather than a consuming fire that unites.”

Drifting to the late hour of yesterday, on entering the house, Peter wastes no time. Without saying a word he right
away covers my mouth with kisses. Next moment, he cradles me in his arms as he carries me upstairs. I allow him without resistance. Pleasure for the carnal sake is easy to take. There's no unity or consummation. I fear indulging the fire of passion, for it can leave me scalded. Sex is nothing. Heck, if innate desires were to overtake rationalities, I can have a one-night stand with a handsome stranger. True intimacy invades without regard.

The hippie doesn't stop. "Just look at you. Your clothing. No, I don't mean your physical clothing. Let's take make-up. Where was I going with this? Oh, ever seen some women with thick make-up. Make-up should accentuate natural features not hide them behind a mask…"

What is she going on about?

"Of course, yours looks nice and well done, like you just walked off a cosmetics counter of a store. Everything looks great at the surface. There's such a deception from you. Such an excellent deception is a thick mask over your true self."

"That's very deep. Sounds nice but what does that have to do with me?" In reality, I must walk away with the coldest look of disapproval. This scenario is comparable to watching a lame, low budget, thriller film. No matter how poor the special effects may be, topped with the lousiest acting and plot line, I must know what happens in the end.

"I see you with your husband last night at the Vintage Hotel. You wore that magenta silk dress with embroidery close to the hem paired with heels."

Revelation's thunders hit me. It's painful to think of a strange woman unearthing the hidden realities of a marriage.

Please, be gentle when speaking the truth.

"Inside, both of you hold hands, affectionate and even dance the night away. Beautiful picture, aye? Such a perfectly sweet scene out of a lame soap opera."

Oh, indeed. My life appears so.

Her finger shoots out pointing, "And YOU—Veiled underneath those long lashes and soft expression, there's distance, coldness, reservation and hatred. You are really a black widow waiting to sting him with deadly deception."

"You know what. I had enough. I must be on my way."

"Ha, you simply cannot handle the truth. When will you ever stop being so pretentious?"

Walking away disgusted, I curse myself for paying attention to her. Ridiculous! I cannot allow a strange, fortune-teller, forth teller or whatever she calls herself to convict me. Consulting my watch, I can make it to Jolly's Tea and Coffee. Inside the café, Rahul Phillips greets me with a hug and quick kiss on my lips. Holding me tightly, he says, "Hello beautiful, Are you hungry? I'll get it for you." After sitting down, he wraps his arm around me. I want him to release me. What if a familiar face sees us? Each minute drags on. I want to end this session. This will be our last encounter. Bit by bit, I spill my intentions. He blankly stares back puzzled.

"I can't do this anymore. We shouldn't."

"You don't love Peter. Didn't you feel the soul connection with me?" Rahul reaches for my hand across the table.

"No. I never believed in soul connections."

"Let's talk about this. Come to my place sometime."

"Rahul, there isn't anything to talk about. It's over."

Sorry."

Leaving the café, it will be ideal if he disappears. Let him slide away from my life as though a dream passes away from the conscious mind into another stage.

Reaching home, I head straight to the bed. Peter's arms embrace me. Silence.

At the moment, I cannot express my fears. A few tears drip. I place my hands on his hands that rested just near my belly. I search for the right words. "I love you too," I utter softly. He kisses my neck. Not yet, I'll speak the necessary words later. I bask in his presence. I ponder the chance of making things work. I imagine myself surrendered and united with Peter. Genuine passion may be possible.
POET AMBITION

Michael Tucker

A poet’s ambition?
Say something poet;
Define my world;
Invade my heart.
What do you notice
That I must not?
Explain to me the sunset.
Illustrate the tree.
Write about the strengths
And perils of our shared humanity.
And if I am to read it,
And my heart were to break or mend,
Surely you are the greatest, poet,
To ever have penned.

Faux pas! faux pas!
Stretching out within this plastic bubble
I am a tape measure
Trying to gauge the circumference
And pull it back into
...Well’imnotreallysurewhat...
But it will be pulled back
All the same.
Now I’m all wound up,
Sitting in a forgotten,
Rusted, red toolbox.
The cool blue
Is pouring out
Over the edge
And into...
PROJECT MAYHEM

Jared Powell

For many it comes as a shock; not for me. I saw it coming years in advance; we all did. Everyone in the house acted like a frantic, rookie bomb squad member trying to disarm a time bomb before an entire city block was reduced to nothing but smoldering rubble. We couldn’t figure out which wire to cut. Everyone was shouting a different color. No one knew the right course of action; it was impossible to determine. Eventually, the rookie pulled the wrong wire and everything was destroyed. The structures of these buildings were already heavily damaged, however. It might as well have been a controlled demolition.

The bomb maker, the cause of all the destruction, fled the scene. He was nowhere to be found. Although I continued trying to get in touch with my father, I could never find him. Maybe it was because I really didn’t want to. After a few months I made contact with him, but it was too late. He was headed to Washington the following day—no time to get in touch. Not like I really wanted to anyways. At this time I was blaming him for the blast, and why shouldn’t I? He had created the bomb, right? He should be the one to blame.

Like so many guys who go through this routine, I became aggressive, had trouble relating with my friends, and was very impulsive at times. Although I’m starting to get more of a handle on it now, it’s been a major struggle for me. As I write this essay, I have to force myself not to throw my coffee cup against the wall. Times are hardest for me when I think about what happened to my family. I’ve learned to force myself not to show my aggression but that doesn’t mean I don’t still feel it all inside. It’s like a ball of anger inside of my chest that I can physically feel. I’m terrified of the day when I can no longer keep it inside and it leaks out. It’s a constant fear for me.

I don’t talk to that many people. I have a few select friends and that’s all I want. I can’t stand being in large groups of people. When I am, I become easily annoyed to the point where I say harsh things I don’t mean just to get people to stop talking to me. I feel terrible about it, but I can’t help it. It just shoots out of me and the instant I say it I wish I could take it back, but I know it’s too late.

For the most part I have my impulses under control. I still feel impulsive, but for the most part I don’t allow myself to act on it. I keep it inside where no one will ever see. Sometimes I feel that if people truly knew what was in my head they would never talk to me. Everyone would fear for their well being; I would be an outcast.

After the divorce it was almost impossible for me to cope with anything. Little things upset me more than they should have. I put the blame on my father and chose to side with my mom, mostly because I was still living with her. However, being away at college has changed that; it’s given me a new perspective on things. I realize now how much I miss my father. I’ve realized that it wasn’t all his fault. He had a disease and we should have done more to help him. You wouldn’t divorce someone because they had cancer; it just isn’t right. My sleep has become riddled with dreams of my father’s return. I haven’t seen him in over two years but when we meet again in my slumber I feel so happy. I feel whole again.

With counseling things have become easier, but I still feel empty inside. A part of my life was torn away and it will never be fully whole again. I love both my parents, but the divorce has caused a separation in that love, voids that I now feel between myself and each of them. I realize now that I can not change the past; I can only work harder towards a brighter future. As Lincoln said in his first Inaugural Address: “We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory . . . will yet swell . . . when again touched . . . by the better angels of our nature.”

Published by CU Commons, 2009
UNDER BHEINN BHUIDE

Dustin Kunkel

It was dark and the
Breeze was blowing from the sea
When we finished
Telling one another what
We already knew.

The fireflies came out
To play and quickly
Made their way back
To each tent,
Enshrouding the stretched
Nylon with yellow-ribbed
Glooms.

I stood on the edge
Of the path
Resting

My eye on three mountains,
The dark heart of the
River carving their
Roots, the opening
Plain in the distance
The silver bay circled
With lights and
Sea-tinged crests of hills
And the gentle voices of my companions
Putting themselves to
Bed,
Glowing like spirits
Of fire in this
Cold, rain spattered
Stream ribbed Place.
WATCH THEM FALL DOWN

Beth Holian

Alice Hanson stared blankly at the large spread of television screens in front of her, watching a satellite photo of the United States engulfed in flames, and felt nothing.

“Watch them fall down…”
The background music was more of a command than a suggestion.

“Watch them fall down…”
The haunting melody continued to play as the picture blinked for a moment before it switched to a shot of Europe burning.

The world was burning.
Powers had fallen.
There were no longer different cultures.
There was just flames, embers, ashes, dust, and the music.

Always the music.

“Watch them fall down…”
It had been playing since she could remember. The melody was the only thing that reached her ears – besides the commands of her superior officer.

And Alice was always watching, always watching things fall: cities, countries, nations, continents, even whole worlds had been decimated, and all the while her eyes never left the screens in front of her.

The apparatus to which she was attached was considered a marvel of modern science – a machine to monitor machines. A metal sweatband encrusted with a tangle of wires and tubing encompassed her shaved head; several IVs branched out of her veins, the tubes rested on her shoulders and disappeared somewhere behind her, and an armband on her right shoulder monitored her blood pressure and her heart rate. Her wrists and ankles were affixed to unfeeling steel rests that allowed her to be in a sitting position.

All Alice could really see of the machine were the bat-like claws that hung curled against the ceiling, claws that would unfurl and strangle any attacker if she was put in a compromisable position.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” whispered a male voice in her ear.
“I can almost hear the futility in their screaming.”
Her superior officer was standing beside her.
“That makes no sense, sir,” Alice replied, her voice monotone.

“The only thing better would be personally watching the light leave their eyes as they die.”

Alice felt a hand move away the tubes that ran from her forehead resting on her shoulders and settle on the side of her neck. A cold shock ran up her spinal chord, but she did not move.

His hands felt as if he had taken them out of the freezer.

“You did this you know,” the officer’s voice continued as the hand slid forward down her naked collarbone toward her breast. “You should be proud, Alice, proud of this destruction.”

“But the world is gone, sir,” Alice replied, paying no heed to the wandering appendage.

“The fate of destruction is the joy of rebirth.”
“I don’t understand, sir.”

The hand was now tracing small circles around where her nipple stuck out from her thin shirt. For a brief moment the image on the screen flickered and changed: now she was watching Asia burn.

“We can stop this unraveling…”

No, no it was already done: everything had already been unraveled and the world was now being razed to the ground.

Was this really an end that could bring a new beginning?

“Why do you think you are here, Alice?” the officer asked.

A momentary cold sting at her side told her another hand had been placed on her bare torso.

“Lay them all down…lay them all down…”
The music. Always the music.

"Women are such beautiful creatures," the officer continued silkily, "but they have such simple minds."

Alice blinked, but said nothing, continuing to watch in front of her. Soft pressure on her left thigh told her one of the hands had moved.

"The world is not black and white, Alice darling. There are places where the two meet, and this, this is where we dwell, on this thin line between the darkness and the light."

The hand was now between her legs; the other was still preoccupied with her nipple.

"Do you know what I love the most about women?""

"No, sir," Alice mumbled.

"Not only can you take life away, but you can also create life," the officer sighed as he reached inside her.

"Is this true, sir?"

"Yes," he breathed. "You should feel lucky Alice. I have made you what you are, and now we will both enjoy the fruits of my labor."

Alice's lower regions tensed as he pushed further into her. She felt him try to pull out, but he was trapped.

From behind her, Alice felt a rush of air go by and the glint of metal reflected briefly off the screens in front of her.

The hand left her breast abruptly, but Alice was unfazed. The other hand struggled for a brief moment to release itself from the delta between her thighs, but fell still as she unclenched herself.

Alice listened to the soft mechanical whine on ungreased hinges as she slowly stood, pulling tubes and wires away from her forehead and arms. Blood ran in tiny rivulets down her arms, filling the creases on her palms and between her fingers.

Turning, she saw the body of her superior officer hanging limp in the grasp of glistening claws, his eyes still shining in the darkness.

"You should feel lucky, sir. You made me what I am, and I alone will enjoy the fruits of your labor.

"You say that women are simple-minded, sir, but it is men whose minds are simple.

"We do not need men to think for us.

"Creating and taking was never a man's job, but a woman's, and there, sire, you were correct."

The light in the officer's eyes faded gradually as Alice spoke to him, her gaze penetrating through his corneas.

"I hope you know that you have no one to blame but yourself for this, sir.

"I refuse to be your puppet any longer."

She turned her eyes away from his and back to the screens behind her.

"It is not I that did this, but you, sir. And it will be left to me to fix the world on which you have rained destruction.

"Women are not as useless as men want them to be."

The image on the screen flickered again, showing a picture of the Earth burning.

"Watch them fall down... watch them fall down...""Main screen turn off," Alice spoke in the officer's voice; the televisions went dark.

"And now," she whispered as she walked past the dead officer's body, "to turn off the damn music..."
DANCE MY LITTLE MANNEQUIN

Beth Knapp

Dance my little mannequin
Put on a pretty show
For all the people watching you
The people who don't know
Your lovely, laughing eyes
And your pleasant, painted smile
Are nothing but a lie you use to feed your own denial.

Sing my little paper doll
So all the world can hear
That pretty, wordless, tuneless dirge
You sing to hide the fear
That if you cease your senseless song
And use a voice that's real
Then they will cease to play along, and learn how you truly feel.

Ah, my little marionette
So polished and so prim
But all that sawdust in your head
Has made you rather dim
And your baby button nose
Has grown to quite a length
If you'd stop your lies, it wouldn't grow
But you don't have the strength.
VARIOUS HAIKU

Johanna Stephens

Don't force buds to bloom
Don't force buds to bloom
They wilt and flutter away
You ask; I open

I said “yes” that day
I said “yes” that day
Slight tremors went up my spine
And I spread my hands

Stare at the lamp light
Stare at the lamp light
Midnight is past – you stand here
Without your nimbus

Enlightenment
Enlightenment breathes
Without illumination
Only in-and-out

Last hour of the night
Last hour of the night
Sighs in anticipation
Laughs at my boldness

LOSTFOUNDLOST

Johanna Stephens

Have I lost you?
Have I lost the seal
between
us
in which I pressed my woe,
emptied my elation?

Have I found you?
Where were you?
All along,
you pressed your body against my nerves.

I have lost you.
Lost you among the seams
in the garments of my depression.
RONNY (SENIOR THESIS EXCERPT)

Elisabeth McMurray

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, unmerciful, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;” Romans 1:28-31 (NKJV)

Ronnny Bewley was another inmate who was saved through our church outreach. He is huge in my memories, but he couldn't have been over six feet. He was large though, a good 250 to 300 pounds of muscle. He was also hairy. He had hairy arms and hairy legs and a hairy face with a full beard of curly brown locks with tints of gray.

I was fairly young when he got out of jail and moved into the church. Within the Christian community only those who lack faith question God's ability to change a person. This was, perhaps, what led my parents and the elders of our church to allow a rapist to live in the back of our church nursery and later in a trailer on the church property.

Ronnny's arrival just happened to coincide with a string of vandalism that had been occurring every weekend. One night Ronny and a friend chased down the two teenagers responsible, scaring the boys so badly they never returned. We never had to clean eggs off the sign again.

Ronnny's salvation slowly worked itself out. He got his son back and began a new job. He was faithful to the church and attended most services. He cleaned up so nicely that it wasn't long before he attracted the attention of a younger divorcée in the congregation, Denise. Denise's larger frame meshed well with Ronny's. Her flaming red hair and saucy temper made them seem perfect for each other.

We all attended the wedding to cheer on the youth department's new hero. He had saved us from the evil vandals and also had cool tattoos. It became normal to have a group of teenagers gathered around Ronny as he laughed a lot and always had interesting stories to tell. Andrew thought he was hysterical and we younger girls admired him from afar. He had a really cool trick. He would hold my brother in a certain position around the neck until he passed out. It was amazing what sort of things you could learn from prison and all of us kids watched in fascination as he perpetually brought various boys in the youth group in and out of consciousness.

I caught Ronny's attention once. It transpired by chance one day when we happened upon Ronnie, his young son Beau and Denise swimming at Lake Tapps. My brothers quickly joined in dock fights (a water version of King of the Mountain) and Ronny showed them who was Lord of the Lake until he voted himself too old to keep up. He jumped into the shallow end of the swimming area towards Beau. When he surfaced he was frantic. "My teeth fell out, my teeth fell out," he hollered. "Hey everybody spread out and dive for my teeth!"

Ronnny looked strange with the gap where two front teeth should have been. It was almost funny. I dove down into the water just to show I was trying. I didn't think there was any hope of finding his partial; his teeth were gone forever, lost in the murky glacier water. It was a miracle when I dove down right over the teeth. I picked up what I thought was a used Band-Aid and surfaced with Ronny Bewley's false teeth pinched between my fingers. He was ecstatic that I had actually found his costly tooth partial and loudly stated, "I owe you one Lizzy, I owe you one man."

Ronnny eventually went back to jail. No one told me why. None of us kids knew why. We were distraught. We sent him cheerful letters and he replied. His letters always had cartoon drawings in them, which were actually quite good.

A few months passed before a teenager in the congregation told her parents he had been sending her inappropriate letters. All I ever heard was he said things a man should only say to his wife. The girl was sixteen and seemed so upset that I got angry. I wrote Ronny Bewley and told him what he was saying wasn't good. "You only say those things to Denise," I wrote. I asked him to stop. I told him, "You owe me one,
remember?"

I'm not sure how he took that letter, a harsh rebuke from a prepubescent female. He never wrote back. Ronny visited church when he got out. He came once or twice to Friday basketball. He really liked Becca. He ignored me. Eventually he quit the church all together. I didn't hear anything more about him until my mother let Abigail spend the night with a little girl, Megan, whose parents had previously attended church. Meagan was an unusually hyper child who was well known around Sunday school for wetting herself. Frequently. Meagan had two older sisters, Melissa and Marsh. They were both in high school and in special classes for developmentally slow students. Abby barely knew them when she arrived at their house.

"Abby, do you want to sleep with Meagan or with me and Marsh?" Melissa asked, her chapped lips parting in a smile causing reflections of light to shoot from her metallic braces.

"I don't know," Abby said. She was taken aback, it was hours before bedtime.

"She's sleeping with mee," Meagan whined and then started whimpering.

"No Meagan, you wet the bed," Melissa retorted, "Abby's sleeping with us."

Abby was relieved at first. She didn't want to share a wet bed with Meagan who still sucked her thumb. Her relief, however, turned to horror that night when she found herself alone with the two older sisters.

"Marsh, it's time to change for bed." Melissa pulled up Marsh's shirt over her head to reveal bare breasts.

"No," Marsha griped, "I don't want to change."

"You have too," Melissa replied. "You haven't changed today."

As the younger sister changed the elder, Abby sat embarrassed, mortified at seeing such a profoundly endowed girl stripping in front of her. We were a modest family and kept such things to ourselves. As the night progressed Abigail was exposed to more than just boobs. When the lights were finally out Marsh left the room. Melissa turned towards Abby.

"She's going to the living room. To sleep with Tom," she stated bluntly.

Melissa apparently didn't understand the gap in their ages and began relating the fascinating and horrific facts of her reality. "You know Tom? He's Marsha's boyfriend," she whispered in the dark towards Abby. "They have sex all the time, mostly in the living room. One night I was sleeping on the couch and they started having sex on the floor."

"What?" Abby was horrified. "Why?"

"Oh, I was pretending to be asleep. I saw his penis. It was really small," she stated, giggling hysterically at this revelation. This was followed by a moment of peace and Abby thought she could sleep, escaping until our mom would come and rescue her.

"We both slept with Ronny," Melissa's words shattered the calm.

"What?" Abby knew she must be lying. Ronny was married! Ronny was old and funny and cool. He could choke hold you until you passed out. He wouldn't do that!

"Yeah, we had sex with him in the woods behind his house." She seemed to revel in the risqué-ness of it all.

Abby wanted to vomit. "Both of you, at the same time?" she murmured.

"Nooo." Melissa thought that was funny. "It was at different times."

Abigail arrived home safely. At least physically safe. They dropped her off the next morning. She shot out of their Ford like a pinball and ran inside without saying goodbye or even thank you. She ran to our mom, sobbing, "Please, never make me go there again, please mom."
Above my ears, he sings
"How does it feel, how does he feel,"
and I want to answer.
I patiently sit, waiting for her, for him --

The way her body contorts and contracts,
slipping out of her cocoon.
I know no one feels restful.
The moon is almost new --
the small sliver just hangs over
our heads ready to fall, waiting.

How curious!
we begin to notice small, vivid details
when our ears are in pain for her --
when the walls of her love relentlessly surrender.

We try to shape the world, the universe
but we sit.
We wait.
We listen for the clarity of her voice,
the singularity of two entwining oceans of sound:

the portrait of a new life.

The same way the wind harmonizes with the thick, tall grasses &
the geese fly in perfect, unbreakable formation --
we breathe pulling tides together. Towing our love: a continual trust.
We sink and rise again, the caves of ours chest align like a heart: delicate, ripe.
I hear your whimpers starting in your toes and traveling to your

I am still your blur.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Jess Bouchard graduated fall term from Concordia with a Bachelor's in English. She was one of the Managing Editors of The Promethean and a staff member since 2006. Her poems embrace themes paralleling life and nature using the natural world as a necessity. Currently spending time home in New York, she plans to attend Graduate School in the fall for an MFA, but is undecided where she will go.

Michael Brockhaus graduated from the University of Maryland with a BA in Sociology. He is now pursuing his MAT at Concordia. He is currently student teaching a wonderful group of fifth and sixth graders at the Access Academy here in Portland. That's his story and he's sticking to it.

Brittani Brown is a freshman English major. She is originally from California, and loves to dance and write. Someday she hopes to fulfill her dream and become a writer and choreographer.

Daniel Cameron lives and writes in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Cora Canzler is in her first year of nursing school at Concordia University. Needless to say, most of her time is spent with textbooks or in class. Between studying and interning at the hospital she enjoys playing tennis, sewing odd fashion creations, family dinners, sun tanning, and relaxing with close friends.

Daniel Cole is a Concordia graduate who works for the Portland Trail Blazers. This is how he writes: Like the scene from Scanners, my head explodes. Brain gobs fly all over the place. Chunks, of what was my head, splatter walls, people, and my surroundings. Sometimes enlightening, I am disgusted, nauseous, and intrigued. Amalgamating that aftermath creates my writing. From the refuse rises my new head, for the next “boom”. He likes Gojira, kung fu movies, gaming, cartoons, comics, food, and sports. Jess Bouchard...she's awesome.

Shawn Drake is a senior majoring in English. He is the author of a veritable horde of novels, though they range in various stages of completion; from half-baked ideas to Grimoire's bigger, angrier brother Raker. When not frantically scribbling down his newest nightmare-laced opus or imbibing enough caffeine to kill a herd of cattle (which he would then proceed to wear), Shawn plays the guitar, acts, and generally spends his time being a pretty weird guy.

Erika Doremus is currently a sophomore student-athlete at Concordia University from Port Orchard, WA where she graduated from South Kitsap High School in 2007. She is majoring in Humanities and after earning her Bachelors degree, she plans to attend Law school. Along with writing her passions include volleyball, German and politics.

Ben Fitzgerald is a freshman English Major here at Concordia. He enjoys both playing (guitar, vox, harmonica) and listening (Beatles, folk, country, metal, blues, Jazz, indie, rock, classical, gospel) to music, and wishes he had more time to enjoy video games. His literary influences include the Bible, William Shakespeare, Alice in Wonderland, fairy tales, Aesop's fables, European mythology, and “That 70's Show.” He is good friends with his high school history teacher, Mr. Jeff Pollard, and he loves authentic chimichangas. He would like to give a “shout out” to Chris, Isaac, Reshan, Eric and Rick, his “homies from da hood.”

Amber Ford is a senior, graduating May 2009 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She resides in Hillsboro, Oregon with her husband, Robert, her three daughters, Kayli (7), Jadyn (6), and Emily (3), her son, Noah (8 months), and a guinea pig, Sarah. Amber is an Editorial Assistant for Proverbs 31 Woman's Magazine and an intern for the Marshall Christensen Foundation (MCF), an international nonprofit promoting higher education in underdeveloped countries. She hopes to graduate, get a cat, a Newfoundland, and a Golden Retriever, and to continue writing to encourage others.

Holly Goodrich graduated from Concordia University with her degree in English in 2007. She is honored to be published in The Promethean for the fifth time.

Sarah Gutierrez is a senior majoring in English with a minor in theology. She discovered her passion for writing at age eleven. Now, at twenty-six, that passion has only intensified. After graduating this May she plans to start a family with her husband of 2 years, Nehemia, and explore writing as a full time profession. Sarah enjoys singing, hiking the Columbia Gorge, and hanging with her huge, wonderful family. She
thanks Nehemias for sacrificing the first years of their marriage for her to realize her dreams, for believing in her potential and supporting her every step of the way.

Beth Holian has survived her fourth and final year at Concordia and completed a completely useless Bachelors in English degree. She hopes to attend graduate school to pursue a degree in Library Sciences to fulfill her dream of becoming Yomiko Readman. Beth is inspired by the writings of Neal Stephenson, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Orson Scott Card, and Keiko Nobumoto. Watch Them Fall Down was heavily influenced by the trance and techno music of DJ Spoke, Daft Punk, and Andy Hunter. Beth enjoys obscure pop culture and anime references.

Becca Houser is a bookworm, poet, thief, heartbreaker, math hater, crooked teeth, wanderer, dreamer, sandwich eater, sci-fi watcher, sock collector, bicyclist, atheist, temporary tattoo artist, liar, crier, frequent flyer, nomad, bad cook, comic book, landscaper, tree hugger, bootlegger, rebel, inventor, room renter, beat maker, muffin baker, booty shaker, wit magician, theoretician, tea drinker, deep thinker, light sleeper.

Beth Knapp is a graduating senior, majoring in Psychology. She spends her time daydreaming, getting lost in beautiful music, hanging out with her boyfriend, sketching, playing video games, and occasionally doing homework. One day, she will finish her novel.

Dust Kunkel grew up in Ghana, Africa, missing the ‘70s and MTV years. He had his parents’ Johnny Cash and Bob Dylan records for lyrical inspiration, African music for rhythm. He’s driven grain-trucks, tractors, and a huge yellow school bus filled with campers and kool-aid in Montana; learned Humanities from Sheck, Gephart and Hill at Concordia; raft-guided the Salmon River; foster-parented abandoned children; directed year-round camp programs; instructs young adults as servant leaders; and received a Masters degree in experiential education from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. His poems explore landscape and the person-hood of things. And his anachronicity.

Elisabeth McMurray was born in Ellensburg, Washington but has spent the last eight years of her life in Portland, Oregon which she now considers home. She graduated from Concordia University last May and is now teaching English at Yangyang Boy’s Middle School, in Yangyang South Korea. She wrote this excerpt from real life experiences and hopes that at the very least it is entertaining to a few of those who may have experienced similar situations.

Daniel Mershon grew up in Carson, WA. After graduating high school he attended Concordia University for one year; then transferred to Washington State University where he is currently pursuing a degree in Mathematics Education. In his spare time he enjoys playing the guitar, the outdoors, biking, hiking, swimming, and working out. Daniel is proud to have built his own acoustic guitar, and hopes to build more in the future. Daniel is honored to have his essay published in The Promethean, and hopes that one day he will be able to write an entire book worth publishing.

Ben Miller is a sophomore English major with an interest in creative writing and poetry. One of his favorite places to visit is the Oregon Coast, even when it’s wet, windy, and disgusting. He has a great love for stories regardless of what form they come in, be they books, games or film.

Kaitlyn Montague is a senior English major, editor of the Concordia Chronicles, and soon to be “starving artist.” She’s a pop-culture enthusiast with an insatiable love for inventive music genres, smash-it-up anime, and Greek mythology. This proclaimed revelry maker spends her afternoons in coffee shops contemplating who would actually come out as the ultimate villain in a fight between Voldemort and Darth Vader. She spends far too much of her life on books and film, and claims she’ll never give up comic books because they inspire just as much as an unhealthy obsession with 90s TV and classic horror films.

Mariah Perry graduated in December, 2008 with her Bachelor’s in psychology. She is currently pursuing job opportunities in Central Oregon and resting before she begins a Masters program at Portland State. She enjoys traveling, hiking/jogging, attending shows, creative adventures, drinking wine/coffee, and activities in the sun. She pursues a lifestyle that is socially conscience and believes change is always possible. Mariah feels she is most inspired by Margaret Atwood, Cornel West, President Barak Obama, and the progressive ideas of her peers. Lastly, she is desperately in love with Portland, OR.

Jared Powell was born and raised on a military base in Southern California. He exited the womb with a fully-automatic
assault rifle in hand. As a child he found solace in falling asleep to the beautiful cadence of helicopter blades and the rhythmic sounds of mock bombing runs in the distance. He was born a soldier, raised a soldier, but did not become a soldier. In high school he discovered his love for literature and, seeing as America has not yet utilized a way to kill its enemies with the knowledge of books, he came to Concordia to study English and hopes to teach it one day.

**Kristine Pugsley** is a senior English major. She has greatly enjoyed being one of the Managing Editors for *The Promethean*. Once she graduates in May she’ll be pursuing a graduate degree in Library Science. In the meantime, she’ll be putting the finishing touches on her senior thesis, looking for a job, reading anything she can get her hands on, and trying to persuade her roommates to let her get a dog.

**Jeremy Richards** is a junior honors English major. In his free time he reads, writes, drinks coffee, snowboards, plays soccer, and PWNS n00bs.

**Paul Roshau** is a senior majoring in Exercise Science. He is en route to become either an Athletic Trainer or a Physical Education Teacher at the high school level. On the Track and Field team, Paul throws the javelin.

**Indu Shanmugam** is a senior Secondary Education/English/ESOL major. After growing up in both India and Dubai, U.A.E., she now calls Portland home. Being a world traveler, she has visited Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Mexico, and spent last summer in Argentina, where she got to visit Buenos Aires and took tango lessons. Her safe haven is Doug Fir’s happy hour with her friends. She enjoys swing and salsa dancing, and writing. “Exile” is from a short story series that about the themes of love, relationship, sexuality, redemption, and healing. Did she mention that she has a weakness for cheesecake?

**Cassondra Shaw** is an English major in her sophomore year at Concordia. Some of her activities on campus include writing for the Concordia Chronicles newspaper, active membership in the Associated Students of Concordia University senate, and participation in musical groups on campus. She also enjoys soy, yoga, and juice drinks of many varieties.

**Johanna (Josie) Stephens** graduated from Concordia in 2008. Her current writing projects include a young adult novel and various poems as they pop into her head. Aside from writing, Josie enjoys reading, drawing, music, wedding planning, and her cat Max. She volunteers at Animal Aid, a local cat and dog rescue shelter, to keep herself happy and out of trouble. This year, she will marry Brad Dobrinski, a supremely intelligent male (also a Concordia graduate).

**Salena Stopper** is from Oregon City, Oregon, but is originally from Inkom, Idaho. Her major is Interdisciplinary Studies with a primary concentration as Biology. One day she would like to be a massage therapist. Her dream job would be working in a hospital partnered up with a doctor or physical therapist. She loves to spend time with her friends, trying to make them laugh, watching movies, reading her Bible, and listening to encouraging music. She is also currently the Elizabeth Hall girls’ Chaplain and loving it!

**Brianna Sylvia-Clarno** is a freshman honors English major who loves to eat dairy, even though she is lactose intolerant. She enjoys a good cup of coffee, and a good sales rack. In her free time, she likes to read, write, sleep, dance, and be on the Promethean board.

**Bethany Taylor** is currently a sophomore in the Biochemistry program at Concordia University. She enjoys science and wants to go into Epidemiology research in the future. She enjoys photography, singing, writing, and listening to great music and most of her hobbies include these things. She is also very blessed to be included in *The Promethean* and thanks all for allowing her to show a little side of herself.

**Michael Tucker** is a senior majoring in Education with an emphasis in English, from Camas Washington. He hopes to eventually obtain a Masters Degree in English. Among other things, he is interested in making and listening to music as well as art of various types and mediums.

**Jeriann Watkins** is a freshman from Nampa, Idaho. She is an English major and music minor. She enjoys writing, music, and random statements about cows.

**Other Contributors:** Loni Blankers, Frances Bonner, Cassandra Carver, Danielle Forster, Jessica Kamppi, Maria Rizk, Lauren Sippy, Vanessa Wendland, and Dylan White.
The Promethean is a publication of the Associated Students of Concordia University-Portland and the College of Theology, Arts, & Sciences

Cover Photography: Denali © 2008 Becca Houser

Published by CU Commons, 2009