The Scarab

Edition XXVII
April 2009

Eyes by Elisha Gallegos
The Scarab

The annual OCU anthology of prose, poetry, and artwork

Edition XXVII

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The Scarab is not responsible for returning submitted work. All submissions are subject to editing.
# Table of Contents

**Poetry**
- When I’m Sitting in Class by Zoe Miles .................................................. 7
- Supernova by Nicole Fancher ................................................................. 8
- A Dream I Had When I Was Six Years Old by Nicole Fancher ...................... 9
- Fairies and Dreams by Najah Hylton ....................................................... 10
- There Are Gaps Between the Stars by Angela Dockrey ............................... 11
- First Kiss Kelsey Nagel ........................................................................ 12
- The Ocean’s Gift by Brittney May .......................................................... 13
- Promises by Andrew Tolly ..................................................................... 14
- Dark Woman Amrish Sengupta ............................................................ 16
- Synapse by Stacey Lloyd ...................................................................... 17
- Love, Be Not Stored by Jonathan Richey ............................................... 17
- First Readings – Impressions by Regan Markley ...................................... 18
- Still She Smiled by Stacey Lloyd .......................................................... 20
- Homeward by Kate Stringer ................................................................. 21
- My Dearest Nimue by Amanda Doerr ................................................... 22
- Let the Tears Go by Abigail Keegan ..................................................... 23
- Terminal by Ronnie Shaw .................................................................... 24
- Last Request by Andrew Tolly ............................................................. 25
- Hello Depression by Amanda Doerr ..................................................... 26
- Some Choices Are Never Easy by Amanda Doerr .................................... 27
- (Object Relations) In the House of Here and Now by Abigail Keegan ...... 28
- Girl at Twelve, High Tea at the Peninsula Kowloon, HK by Regan Markley 30
- Imagine by Zoe Miles .......................................................................... 31
- The Women of Lorestan by Zahra Karimipour ....................................... 32
- Be Bold by Andrew Tolly ................................................................. 34
- Black Curse by Shana Barrett ............................................................... 35
- The Patchwork Woman by Kate Stringer ............................................... 36
- Yellow Plastic Raft by Zoe Miles ........................................................... 37
- Irony by Zoe Miles .............................................................................. 38
- Plastic by Andrew Tolly ........................................................................ 38
- Someone You Know by Chandra Kroll ................................................. 39
- The Eyes of a Prophet by Andrew Tolly ............................................... 40
- The Raven and Crone by Amanda Doerr .............................................. 41
- And They Said by Najah Hylton .......................................................... 42
- Carrying Weight by Zoe Miles ............................................................ 44
- Stepping Out by Zoe Miles ................................................................. 44
Star Grass by Abigail Keegan ................................................................. 45
Spotting Dogs by Abigail Keegan .......................................................... 46
A Day’s Drive by Zoe Miles ................................................................. 47

**Fiction**
Grace by Brent Cockerham ................................................................. 49
Bad Movie by Brandon Stauffer .......................................................... 55
The Constant Companion by Brandon Stauffer .................................... 59
The Somnambulist by Brandon Stauffer .............................................. 63
The Glass House by Stacey Lloyd ....................................................... 67
The Little Piano Player by Stacey Lloyd .............................................. 68
The Parable of a Good Student by Stacey Lloyd ................................. 69

**Nonfiction**
Acadian Aberration by Elizabeth Newby ............................................. 71
No *Auf Wiedersehen* for Me by Becca Kreitman ................................ 77
Untitled by Brittney May ..................................................................... 83
Vicky by Brandon Stauffer .................................................................. 88
The Forgotten Visit by Amy Henninger .............................................. 92

**Artwork & Photography**
*Eyes* by Elisha Gallegos
*Am I Beautiful*/ by Mingwei Zhang
Untitled by Mingwei Zhang
Untitled by Mingwei Zhang
*Imagine* by Lauren Byrd
Untitled by Hyejin Lee
Untitled by XinYu Wang
*Scottish Story* by Jenna Shatto
*Huanggushu Waterfall* by Mingwei Zhang
*Empty* by Dawn Grooms
*Autumn* by XinYu Wang
*Miracle* by Minwei Zhang
*Still Life* by Elisha Gallegos
*Love Story* by Jenna Shatto
*NYC Taxi and Tulips* by Lauren Byrd
Deck of Cards by Jenna Shatto
April in Paris by Jenna Shatto
Sun:Rain by Gregory Brindley
Field of Tulips by Jenna Shatto
Venetian Sunset by Jenna Shatto
Rest by Dawn Grooms
Father and Son by XinYu Wang
Columbus by Jenna Shatto
Lonely Musician by Jenna Shatto
The Way to Heaven by Mingwei Zhang
Afternoon in Paris by Jenna Shatto
Belgian Shops by Jenna Shatto
Ancient by Mingwei Zhang
Untitled by Mingwei Zhang
Baishu River by Mingwei Zhang
Ancient Street by Mingwei Zhang
The Infamous Cabaret by Jenna Shatto
Untitled by Mingwei Zhang
Untitled by Mingwei Zhang
Lobster Boats on Winter Break by Cotey Bowman
Sunny by Dawn Grooms
Sun Bathing by Dawn Grooms
Sing a Song of Sixpence by Amanda Doerr
Catch a Dream by Amanda Doerr
Vintage by Dawn Grooms
Dog in Osaka by Mingwei Zhang
Paris Ferris Wheel by Lauren Byrd
Chair by Elisha Gallegos
Around the Campfire by Amanda Doerr
For the Birds by Jenna Shatto
Downtown Reflection by Gregory Brindley
2408 by Dawn Grooms
One by Dawn Grooms
Untitled by Mingwei Zhang
The Pharmacist by Amanda Doerr
The Ranch by Amanda Doerr

Contributors..................................................................................................................98
Am I Beautiful/ by Mingwei Zhang
When I'm Sitting in Class

By Zoe Miles

("I hear my being dance from ear to ear" taken from Theodore Roethke's "The Waking")

The right hand poised with pencil
attentive, shifting wight centers
to my elbow on faux marble desk
top. Utensil does work across the
page
while I listen to breath roll
through my chest. In: it hurries
along, tickling my deep parts where
princesses play. And out: it wanders into
the room's florescent lighting whose
buzzes accompany Dr. Droning

But then.
You inanely lay your arm by
mine. And I thank the ribbons width
of me that knows your warmth hugging my
skin. It stirs to embrace fingers, ears, waken
stomach butterflies, spead like comfort
cocoa on cold lips bitten by chill. I hear
my being dance from ear to ear,

anticipating that you'll take the
warmth from the armrest.

But you don't.
And neither do I.

And the butterflies bump against my stomach walls.
SUPERNova


By Nicole Fancher

A star
is a body
that at some
time in its life
generates its light
and heat by nuclear
reactions, specifically by
the fusion of hydrogen into
helium under conditions of enormous temperature and density. When hydrogen atoms merge to create the next heavier element, helium, mass is lost, the mass (M) converted to energy (E) through Einstein's famous equation E = mc squared, where "c" is the speed of light. The Sun is powered by hydrogen fusion, as are many of the other stars you see at night. The fusion does not take place throughout the star, but only in its deep interior, in its core where it is hot enough. The temperature at the center of the Sun is 15.6 million degrees Kelvin, and the density is 14 times that of lead. About 40% of the mass of the Sun, occupying about 30% of the radius, is capable of fusing hydrogen. Even under these extreme conditions, the Sun is still burning through its fuel.
A Dream I Had When I Was Six Years Old
By Nicole Fancher

It was almost completely black, inside this cave of chocolate.
My mother and I were traveling along the dark passageways when all of a sudden we came to a pool.
And, without hesitation, I knew what happens to those who drink from this chocolate pool. They become monsters. m&m monsters, to be exact.
It sounds funny, but it was terrifying.
My mother bent down to take a drink and I tried to stop her.
I said Mom no don’t you’ll turn into a monster.
But she didn’t listen and took a drink and changed into a monster and chased me and made me drink from the pool and I became a monster too.
Fairies and Dreams
By Najah Hylton

When the first baby laughed
The laugh shattered and became one million
dreams.
Those dreams grew souls
And flew away on fairy wings.
Those fairies hid themselves
In that place where awake meets asleep,
That place where animals talk, mermaids exist,
And you love only what you can keep.
The fairies live there with
Santa Claus and his elves.
They nurture our dreams for us
Until we learn to cherish them ourselves.
They are guarded by angels
And fed from the hand of God Himself.

In reminiscence of J.M. Barrie's words,
People know such a lot now.
They don’t believe in fairies or dreams
Because they can’t see the why or the how.
So everyday,
With every breath of innocence lost
A pixie weeps
And a fairy lies down to die –
That’s what our lack of faith costs.

Every time we choose being smart
Over being happy
A mythical creature draws its last breath.
And each moment we work
Because we’re too old to play
Something beautiful succumbs to death.
Each time we opt out of dancing
Because there are more important things to do,
A dream latches itself onto someone else,
Onto someone who’s braver than you.

I don’t know what this might mean for all of you,
But I want my newborn cousins
To grow up in a world where dreams come true.
I’m praying that they live in a nation
Where the ends aren’t discredited by the means,
Where someone is brave enough
To stand for a change in which we can believe.
I pray that they grow up in a place
Where the only limit to what they can achieve
Is the maximum height
To which their dreams can reach.

I guess I’m just begging you
To protect the fragile things,
The unseen creatures
Flitting around on moth wings.
It’s not too late to have faith
Just because you’re a grown woman or man.
If you still want to believe in fairies and dreams
All you have to do is clap your hands.
There are Gaps Between the Stars
By Angela Dockrey

there are gaps between the stars that we
(woman and man)
want so badly to overcome we leap great leaps
(of logic)
delve deep depths into the earth
(to fuel)
calculate, and build machines to calculate
(our compatibilities)
how frightening, the emptiness
(between us)
how frightening, the possibility
(the gap)
that it is an impossibility
(both in macrospace and microspace)
how frightening, the thought
(between two stars)
that it is not
(?impossible)

Untitled by Hyejin Lee
First Kiss
By Kelsey Nagel

The smooth leather envelops us as we envelop each other. The lack of space between us grows and I can feel his breath on my neck, a sensation I can't help but love, creeping all across my skin.

Blood races thru veins under skin, drawing us in and pulling us together like magnets towards a love unlike any other. The pulse quickens in my neck and the feeling in my heart grows, the fear, the joy, the curiosity grows. As sparks dance on our skin, the hair rises on my neck and the world is made up of only us. We are lost in each other. I am alone with my new love.

My new and terrifying love that courses thru me as my anticipation grows. It becomes clear I will never want another to touch my skin now that this current hums between us. His hand tangles in the hair at my neck gently pressing and persuading my neck and all that follows to meet my love. Then there is nothing between us. No distance, no air. And trust grows so that with every brush of lips and skin I am already craving another, and I silently plead for another as my fingertips brush his neck, trembling over the softness of his skin. Our thoughts echo the sound of love created, that with each moment grows until it has surrounded us, and all we can see is the love that swiftly and eternally grows as he and I forever become us.

Untitled by XinYu Wang
The Ocean’s Gift

By Brittney May

Take my heart with a grain of sand, and throw it unto the shore.

It will glisten in the midnight, becoming pure with serenity.

But just as any other, nothing exquisite, the ocean swept it away.

As a grain of salt here again, can my love be foretold?

Gather the sand, take my love, the oceans great gift, behold!

Scottish Story by Jenna Shatto

Huanggushu Waterfall by Mingwei Zhang
Promises
By Andrew Tolly

I pour crystals down a drain
And watch the image fade.
Time tries to made amends but finds itself betrayed.
A knock rings out on hollow door
Thread-barren, the one who calls
The door swings wide, but once inside
Is answered by empty walls
Dark Woman

By Amrish Sengupta

Behold the field of cinnamon and salt, fountain of galaxies.
You are my treasure map’s compass,
the Sacajawear-what-you-want of my eyes.
Your arteries carry the art of rivers
twisting and twirling, returning to their genesis.
On the map: X Marks The Spot
where your genes lie awake,
home of two treasure pieces—
One for us, one for the worldphool.

One is ours,

The other mine.

The rest rests.
Love Be Not Stored
By Jonathan Richey

Love be not stored,
For no amount of preservatives laced
Can stop this feeling being defaced
By the evermarching ravage of time
The crippling yellowing decay.

Love be not stored,
No bank can give or lend
Give interest, capital in the end,
And no one spares the fool a dime
Of love who leaves it in.

Love be not stored,
Then give it away,
Don’t attempt to save,
Leave it untouched for another day,
Who knows how long love will stay,
Use it, admire it, give it while you have it,
But never assume that love will remain.

Synapse.
By Stacey Lloyd

God’s love is like a synapse between the nerves.
A channel of connection flowing from the brain to the extremities.

Love Story
by Jenna Shatto
First Readings - Impressions  
By Regan Markley

I wonder how you stand so still before the shifting audience, your mouth full of words painstakingly scribed after midnight while I breathed deep between the linens you bought. Those nights I sat with you at the claw-foot table, unable to pull my eyes from the pages before you like a horse freezes before bolting. Now, your voice fills bitter amazement, treble that pipes from your throat, loops back to the table you crouched beneath as a child, writing fear of swift revenge from the deep-belted voice if you did not sing for company. You reached high notes on command, hissing with strain to not be seen like the lace beneath women's skirts. The smoking-deep voice you loved despite the welts left on your backside invaded our bed, kept my hand entwined with yours, tucked me in close to the length of your spine. But here, I spy on those who may whisper while you read.

NYC Taxi and Tulips by Lauren Byrd
Our shoulders convulse when our eyes meet
over strange heads, yours drop quickly back
to the text before you. Mine follow to your hands
clamped to the podium's grainy veneer. Words stay
smooth, roll clean from your teeth. I remember
cradling those hands, keeping them safe from leering
eyes that would steal the sheets on frigid nights or leave
you alone to answer sleep-ripping calls.

Later, over Teriyaki, our fingers wrap round
amber bottles for balance. Slick glances wind
through cracks in our dissection of the man who hit
on you, my nerves that streaked over the waiting
silence as you thumbed through your latest book,
you hadn't decided what to read and I was anxious -
this my first reading of you. You drive us home below
the limit, tracing the yellow lines as you had my breast last night.

I watch your hand palm the wheel, stretching delicate,
reach for the other, examine it in mine. This one,
honeysuckle smooth, slashes men cleanly, lays waste
to tall trees, holds cigarettes, sends longing down wires.
Still She Smiled
By Stacey Lloyd

He loved it when she wore the dress.
It glistened in the moonlight.
It framed her small body.
Beautiful.

He loved her hair.
Done up tightly with curls.
Glistening in the sunlight.
Beautiful.

She hated that dress.
Bruises line her ribcage from the tight bodice.
The lining rubbed against her skin.
Repulsive.

She hated to wear her hair that way.
Done up so tight, her head ached.
When undone pieces fell out in her brush.
Repulsive.

Still she wore the dress.
Still she put her hair up.
Still she hurt.
Still she smiled.
Homeward
By Kate Stringer

Alone in a wood on a wind-chilled night,
And icy for my isolation
The wicked, mocking Mistral trills his song,
Howling in satisfaction.
Blades of winter slice my skin
Treachery
As wheedling paths do twist and fall away
Reflections dark, transgressions past
And love turns, hissing, into sin.
Frozen fire
Stinging lips, and eyes, and souls and
memory
Enveloped, thick in bitterness
To sympathize with Death.

Then all at once I heard your low, sweet voice
As you, in shadow, whispered through the leaves
Your tender tones resound and I rejoice,
My being knowing peace from your reprieve.
Your arms reached from the trees to keep me close,
My face, touched by your moonbeam kiss, made warm
Through countless diamond eyes new hope arose
No longer did I feel alone, but home.
Belov’d, my home is only where you dwell
Your ever-present heart most dear, most pure
For as we walked I felt my courage swell
My mind at rest, my footsteps strong and sure.
Though Winter once had held me in her thrall,
It seemed now I could feel no chill at all.
My Dearest Nimue

By Amanda Doerr

I saw my future on the river’s edge
Doomed I was by your lovely smile
As long as I gave you knowledge
I could call you mine for a while

Such talent, such power, such grace
In one so petite and so young
A mind that could match mine in a race
To no one else could my heart belong

After all my years of loneliness
Can one blame me for my greed?
Or my hope when I knew it was hopeless
Even cursed seers need to believe

The day will come when you will tire
Of this old wizard’s attentions
My wisdom you will no more require
And I bring you only aggravation

Then you will set a trap for me
To imprison me in the depths of a tree
And I will walk into it unhesitatingly

Field of Tulips by Jenna Shatto
Let the Tears Go
By Abigail Keegan

In the quiet where even the fan sound
slows down to zero
so that time and decibels cease to collide,
no one knocks on the door,
no footsteps on the floor shake
the ground of thoughts from under me.

I find a secret pen from in an old drawer,
draw my tears on soft paper,
roll them into a ball, and like an old
Jazz singer tossing notes about,
I let them go, I let them go
and no harm will come from them.
Terminal  
By Ronnie Shaw

Diagnosis  – not good.  
Prognosis  – no better.  
Treatment  – we’ve tried.  
Still we don’t heal together.

Cautery. Lancet.  
Painful the cure.  
Wounds deep and vital,  
Resist and endure.

For wounds of the soul  
And wounds of the heart,  
Respond not as flesh,  
Demand divine art.

Kindness. Forgiveness.  
Are balms which may heal.  
Infernal afflictions  
That torture and kill

This union, this marriage,  
This friendship, so queer.  
Once healed, be watchful,  
Lest wounds reappear.

Work hard together.  
Laugh, sing, dance, and cry.  
Hold close together.  
Pray. Live. ’Til we die.
Last Request
By Andrew Tolly

Dear Sir,

Why am I dying? What did I do to you?
I followed all of your wishes and held them sacredly true.
Dear Sir, I really do not know why you will not write.
I don’t mean to be rude, Sir. I do not wish a fight.
I ask you only: please, sir, please review my case.
If you find a fault there, then I will efface.
But seriously, sir, I doubt it. I work hard to keep my peace.
If you choose to let me go, my devotion will not cease.
If you choose to come anon, please don’t take my cat.
He too has done nothing wrong. I can attest to that.
If you do decide to come, let me wear my tie.
It is a rare occasion for someone to die.
Stay off the rug; take off your shoes; and mind the chandelier.
If you could I much prefer not to be greeted in fear.
One last thing, for me sir, please dress all in black
And for goodness sake don’t take me from the bac...
I woke Friday morning feeling alright. This was a relief - I'd been tossing and turning hours after my bunkmates drifted off Thursday night. Eventually, my anxious heart found a humble peace from the endless and earnest petitions for forgiveness I made to the God of the Universe. But I knew my reputation would be harder to assuage. God would wipe away the eternal stain of my sin. As Thursday night drifted away, I slowly accepted that I didn't have anywhere to turn for help with the mess I'd made on earth.

I sat with the counselors at lunch Thursday. They smiled a lot, I tried to fit in. Then Steph called something "fruitful", and I lost it. I'm not really sure why that hit me so hard - it was probably the third time I'd heard it that day, but then again it was the only time I'd heard it in a real conversation. Maybe it was just that when these people talked from the heart, they sounded like sermons. But unlike any sermon I'd ever heard, they sounded - real. I felt like I'd never heard something so honest. But when they looked at me, the honesty disappeared. As hard as they tried to look accepting, I couldn't buy it. They didn't hate me, far from it, but I did disappoint them. Three days ago, I'd been earnest, honest, loving, caring, pure, and righteous. But now they didn't see anything but a defiled temple. Something for pitying, and not much else. The sinking feeling that started with their honesty only got worse when they started to play pretend for me. I excused myself from the table and went to my quiet time early, walking to the lightly wooded far side of the lake where I tried to take a short nap. Soon, I was woken by music echoing across the lake, announcing ten minutes until the start of Chapel. I made it just in time to sit in the middle of the kids with poor hygiene and social skills. Before I even realized I wasn't listening to a word of the sermon, I was chastising myself for inattention.
I had woken Thursday morning wanting to put everything behind me, but Wednesday night my muscles ached to be angry. All day long I’d seen eyes averted, heard wordless whispers cut short when I walked near, I knew they all knew, and I knew there was no way to make them understand. I’d lost my best friend and my whole entourage in one stupid act. My heart slowed, my blood pulled out of my biceps, it felt like a slow and willing paralysis. My mind screamed, “FIGHT!! FIGHT!!”, to no avail. I heard nothing but a placid in and out - the breathing of my peers, asleep in the bunks around me and as my body filled with lead, I yelled all the louder in my head. It didn’t occur to me then, but my body was probably just trying to preserve itself. It knew the only person I really wanted to hurt was myself.

Wednesday afternoon I sat in the pool gazebo across from a small group of girls, thinking some friendly talk would do me some good. At the very least, it would distract me. Whenever I thought of something clever, I’d try to join the conversation, but they wouldn’t acknowledge a word I said. I would have left, but shortly some more boys joined us. It didn’t escape my notice that they sat directly between me and the girls, to the girls’ visible relief. But at least the boys would make eye contact with me every now and then, and laugh at some of my jokes.

After quiet time on the third day, Heather came to me in tears. Mascara dripped pitifully down her face. We walked behind the cabins, facing the athletic field, a place I felt sufficiently private, yet not intimate in the slightest. She was grateful, I imagined, for my selfless thoughtfulness. A dark curl, frizzy from daily swimming and hard water showers, fell past her face. When I tried to hug her, she forcefully pushed me back. Roughly whipping her hair back behind her ear, she still said nothing, but looked at me. We spoke with our eyes,
Hello Depression
By Amanda Doerr

Hello there.
I know, we've already met.
In fact, we've been together most of my life.
But I decided it was time for a formal introduction.

You see, I've been operating under a pretext,
The idea that I would one day be free of you.
All I had to do is find the right things to think,
And get the right type of help and support.

But you would just wait until I let my defenses down.
Ambushing me like a tiger in wait.
Giving me a double blow. Sending me into a spiral.
Causing me to doubt my abilities to deal with you.

I've finally accepted that you are a part of me.
That when I fail, it isn't because I am a loser.
It's because you are hard-wired into me.
Through genetics, trauma and happenstance.

Even though you are part of me—you are not me.
I just wanted to make that clear.
Those thoughts or doom and despair are not mine.
They are you speaking to me.

And that's all right.
You can speak to me.
Because when you speak,
I have forgotten something.

However, I have the final word.
Things are never as bad as you say they are.
I want to make sure you know that.
It is time I give you credit for your ideas.

So, here's the head up.
I'm not going to play your games.
We will have to work together instead.
Trust me. It's better this way.

Columbus by Jenna Shatto
Some Choices are Never Easy

By Amanda Doerr

A wise man once told me
That you won't always have the luxury
Of choosing the lesser evil in life
Sometimes amid the strife
The only choice you can make
Is to decide which mistake
You can live with

Damned if you don't, damned if you do
People will stand and revile you
Not understanding what odds you faced
Having never been in your place
Throwing your reputation into the hands of Fate
While the flames of Hell lick at the gates
From the widening rift

Standing bloodied, standing strong
You pray they will see that they were wrong
Standing tall, standing bruised
You cringed at the thought of being misused
Standing on the edge of Hell
You contemplate you position well
Like a sailor left adrift

The only hope for your repast
Is to remember that this too shall pass
(Object Relations)
In the House of Here and Now
By Abigail Keegan

Hands wave good-bye
As signs we will meet again,

States I thought lost
Have returned to me,

The chosen coffee cup
In the house of here and now

Of every person reveals
The patterns of our lives

Are ever-widening
Circles of repetition.

Sounds of ice-assaulted trees
Snapping like bones every few

Minutes while I’m on the porch, and
Inside holding tight to a turquoise cup,

I know the breaking goes on every-
where.
You can pick up loose flaps of roof

Or bricks pulled from houses
By frozen, heavy electrical wires,
In every corner of the house
Shiftings, settlings, wood swellings,

Even passing through doorways
Make the body mindful.

At every turning point, Life,
Like an armchair with a book,

You have beckoned to us
With a coffee cup in your hand

Or in a friend’s hand until
We can do nothing but accept.

Now in the snow of Ohio,
In frozen lakes of Oklahoma,

Or seventy years before the first arm
On a saguaro cactus rises in Arizona,

While evergreen arms shelter walking
Paths from the rains of Oregon,

Growth rings and death in the book
Of trees find us. Over and over we keep

Finding hands waving good-bye, states
we thought lost, returned to us.
Girl at Twelve, High Tea at the Peninsula
Kowloon, HK

By Regan Markley

Up two flights of stairs, gold-vaulted ceilings invite Mother and me to inspect from thirty feet below. The glass walls stretch, revealing Queens Harbor and Hong Kong's mainland, its narrow alleys hiding bamboo birdcages and black market Chanel. It seems

I alone am unnerved by the heavy tradition steeped in cream and gold lame linen and silk - even the marble floors bear ten-carat chosen for its darker sheen.

The maitre 'd escorts us to low-slung chairs. I sit bolt straight, legs neatly crossed, eyeing the women around me, imitating.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ankles crossed} \\
\text{hands folded in lap} \\
\text{soft voice, softer laugh} \\
\text{smile pinned precisely} \\
\text{(no braces showing)}
\end{align*}
\]

I dip into Earl Grey (the only one I recognize); oaken flavor wades into my nostrils and eyes. The woman at the next table swirls lemon into her cup; across the way, another pours milk. Mother's neck flushes as I follow suit only to see the milk curdle. I slide my cup and saucer away, lower my eyes to study hands that don't seem my own winding tightly in my lap. Our waiter quietly slips fresh tea in front of me, disappears with my unsightly faux pas,

\[
\text{his quick smile forgives my ways.}
\]
Imagine
By Zoey Miles

I want
to write stories.
I want words to fly off
of my pen that entice the mind's
senses.

Afternoon in Paris by Jenna Shatto
The Woman of “Lorestan”*  
By Zahra Karimipour

You sit on the ground  
Under you lying the threadbare, aged Lorestani* rug  
Alive in orange red, in paisleys of darkened green and blue  
Manifesting the gravels underneath.  
It is no soft surface.

The wall of the room you face.  
It is an old wall, a cracked wall  
Manifesting the damp for years at the root.

The wall shows years in turquoise blue  
Like the walls in Taos Pueblo homes.  
An alcove plastered on the wall, holding an old oil lamp,  
The sole ornament of your rugged, yet lively dwelling.

You sit on the ground  
Your skirt, an umbrella of Blue, orange, yellow, and green, a tenacious sphere.  
Your vest is of black taffeta worn on The tight red blouse with pale ruffles,  
On which falls your translucent pink headscarf tightened at your young chin.

You are the strength of Lorestan!  
With firm brownish skin as soft as your horse’s fur,  
Shining, strong eyes, strong brows, lips,  
And hands.

And your loom stands tall upon which your hand moves  
Like those of Orpheus’ at the harp  
To weave colored dreams unto the rug.

You are a weaver,  
In silence weaving magic.  
Are these magnificent Hues and shapes  
The tongue of your soul, impregnating with life  
My bare floors?

Are you Athena, the adroit weaver  
Whom no others could rival?  
Has your loom become your voice?  
Are you speaking your life story in the threads
Walked on heedlessly?

Are you the divine Penelope? Does your tapestry
Weave magic to restore faith?

You sit for hours on end
To weave destiny,
Your immortal tale,
To adorn countless homes
Aware or immersed in oblivion
Of what your toil truly is.

Yet in the blue and mauve hues of my rug
I see your strong hands, Orpheus-like,
Little by little,
Weaving colorful threads into the designs
Reminding me incessantly of your days and nights
At the loom
And the child turning inside of you
Destined to become a weaver like you.

*Lorestan is a province, west of Iran.
*Lorestani means belonging to Lorestan

The poem reminisces about the time my family visited the village “Ghela Maziar” near Boroujerd- in Lorestan- where I was born and spent my childhood years. This weaver, who lived in that village, stands in my memory in her colorful, humble home, but in her greatest artistic moments.
Be Bold
By Andrew Tolly

Humorous yet
Unassuming
Many paths
All-consuming
Not all finished some resuming

Imperfect serenity
Summarizing infinity

When it doubt
Hail the past
Arc the angle
Tear the cast

Infer all you do not know

Aim for the stars
Mold your soul
Black Curse
By Shana Barrett

You can go ahead and call me that
Believe, I’ve been called worse
You seem to think that just because my skin is black
I suffer from a curse
But I think that I am beautiful
And you can’t change my mind

You have tried to fill my mind
With the ideology that
I am the opposite of what is beautiful
Of all the choices that you have, I am worse
I am not a blessing, but a curse
All because my skin is black

Imagine clouds in the sky, hanging dark and black
Bringing melancholy thoughts to your mind
It’s symbolic of a constant reminder of your so-called curse
When you feel this low, you think that
It can’t possibly get any worse
You start to believe that nothing in your world is capable of being beautiful

You begin to realize that the world is not so beautiful
You begin to see that there is no gray, just white…and black
Even though you thought it couldn’t, things do get worse
You are so baffled in the corners of your mind
Because you can’t fathom the fact that
To many, you are not a blessing, just a curse

Even though it makes your blood boil, you cannot holler, fuss, nor curse
Because you feel you’re not beautiful
And you know that
You have to carry yourself a certain way because your skin is black
They judge you based on your color, and expect you not to mind
And they leave to wonder what defines worse

Are you really the definition of worse?
Do you bring bad luck about because of your curse?
Are you really incapable of having a competent mind?
Do your physical features scream the opposite of beautiful?
Hmm, I bet it takes a lot for you to imagine that

This is something that I don’t have to imagine. What I deal with is far worse
Yet, I stand proud because I am black and I know it is not a curse
I am as a flower, delicate and beautiful and you still can’t change my mind.
The Patchwork Woman
By Kate Stringer

I am nothing but a frame
A scarecrow in the wind
A puzzle with the pieces half missing

I am the master magician
Taking words and gestures
Empty promises and half-sighs
Fashioning them into
I love-yous and hellos.

I am the beggar-woman—
Seen and unseen,
Soliciting a pittance
For a litany of woes.

With these things I gather,
I stitch with silken threads
Desperately I grab square pegs
And jam them, with abandon,
Into round holes.

I am the patchwork woman
Sad to see, and badly sewn.
Yellow Plastic Raft
By Zoe Miles

My arms weep. The man river dampens my hair, waves beating my paddle in opposition, water hijacking my yellow, plastic raft. I turn a circle, a circle, a circle, a circle—head succumbing nausea torrents, dizzy awakenings. I push. It pushes. I fight harder. It fights back. I scream; thoughts, words, desires, emotions, all want to dive into the river and leave me behind. My head sees them swim away from me in backstrokes.

Give Up.

No. Cold holds my captive fingers manipulating and entering. Fatigue explodes into burning tears on cheeks. I holler, the stubborn brute won’t leave me alone. Yellow, plastic raft holds more water than me and one of us must go. Right, left, right, left, my stick moving side to side to push me along. I go no where—a circle, a circle, a circle.

Just let me float you.

A circle, a circle, a circle.

You can’t do this anymore.

Bitter pangs distress my arms and, for a moment, the fighting stops. And I travel. I laugh at the cold waves the still bite my paddle. In glory, my eyes lift beyond me to behold rock racing toward my yellow, plastic raft.

Give in.

The rock dives beneath my yellow, plastic raft catapulting me into the water. I am carried by the stream. I see thoughts, words, desires; emotions all dive into the river and leave me behind. My eyes see them swim away from me in backstrokes. The illusionary cold is warmth of the sun’s reflection on the still waters that caress my arms as we move as one down the elating river.

Thank you, says Poetry.
Irony
By Zoe Miles

A shiny car flies through streets of suburbia wanting to be a millionaire.

Fatted calf on bun, with side of deep fried crack. Deal or no deal?

Seeing starving worlds outside of ignorance, I am the weakest link.

College degrees and colorful resumes. You're fired!

Fast paced lives living, no time to sniff the rose. I want off the island.

Plastic
By Andrew Tolly

I am not plastic
I am not a bi-product of the world around me.
I am not see-through, as the Devil and the liars around me.
I bleed.
I grow stronger.
I am not plastic.
Someone You Know
By Chandra Kroll

Sometimes I wonder how we get to where we are today.
With all the pain and suffering that sometimes makes us not want to live another day

Working hard to do the right thing
Sometimes wondering if there even is such a thing

So much we don’t deserve and take for granted
If only we would spend more time sharing and helping those who are saddened

So long and hard we work, even with all the wrath
Then moments occur without discourse that let us know we are on the right path

Along with pain brings wisdom afield
To share with those around us and pass on blessings with high yield.

Living day to day is all we can do.
The question is how much is each day worth and what you bring not what it’s to you

Scrounging each day to pay the bills and afford food to eat...
Then something happens extraordinaire that knocks you off your feet

A miracle one may say or what luck or chance
However with faith in hand one ought to know it’s beyond circumstance

What a gift to be relieved
But more the joy to be valued and to believe.
The Eyes of a Prophet
By Andrew Tolly

My eyes see visions
My mouth speaks truths
My heart beats hope
My ears hear lies
My feet make paths
My hands break walls
My soul dances
The Raven and Crone

By Amanda Doerr

The Raven stares down from the cool marbled ledge
Her eyes see the faint light from the Crone's face
The ancestor walks the path behind the hedge
Change is in the wind and it echoes through space

Her eyes see the faint light from the Crone's face
The Future has spoken - the time for renewal is at hand
Change is in the wind and it echoes through space
Father Time's hand readies the hour glass to up-end

The Future has spoken - the time for renewal is at hand
With confidence the Raven takes to the night air
Father Time's hand readies the hour glass to up-end
Now is the moment the ancestors have worked to prepare

With confidence the Raven takes to the night air
With insight gained from reflection and introspection
Now is the moment the ancestors have worked to prepare
The Sands of Time, long settled, wait for agitation

With insight gained from reflection and introspection
The Forces of Creation hum in the background
The Sands of Time, long settled, wait for agitation
The hand turns the hour glass, the sky becomes land

The Forces of Creation hum in the background
Reborned the Muses of Inspiration and Imagination
The hand turns the hour glass, the sky becomes land
The Cosmos sings in joyful celebration

Reborned the Muses of Inspiration and Imagination
The deed done, the mysterious Raven lands again
The Cosmos sings in joyful celebration
The Crone nods - it has gone as planned

The deed done, the mysterious Raven lands again
She stares down from the cool marbled ledge
The Crone nods - it has gone as planned
The ancestor walks the path behind the hedge
And They Said
By Najah Hylton

Lately I don’t feel anything unless it’s Poetry.
Prose can sway me on a good day,
But these days it has to rhyme.
Or it has to at least step in time
if it’s going to have an effect on my mind.

There are no tears I have to wipe,
No emotion at all in fact,
except for that which flows forth through Words.
I cannot tell you where it hurts
because I’m not quite sure it does.
There is only the agony of lyric Poetry.
There is no bitterness, no hatred.
I’m too enthralled by and caught up in
the story, the tale of love imagined
and lost.

Your eyes dance in the moonlight.
Your body is the flame by which my soul fire ignites.
Your kiss is like life and death
all rolled into one feather-light touch.
But your gaze is barely fit to look at the Words on the page.
Your body can’t keep the beat the Lines have loosed upon this stage.
And your mouth would be stepping out of bounds
if it tried to wrap around this Poem.
This is true Beauty, true Love.
Now I believe in God, in Words.

They were there in the beginning.
They are the Force through which the world was formed.
They are the Man through which the world was warned.
And They are the Cross with which the world is adorned.
They said “Let there be poetry” and They were born.
Today I cry.
Today I write.
Today I read, lying alone, just me.
The rain is pounding on the windows and roof.
God, the Big Man in the sky, is holding Himself aloof.
There is no One to come to the rescue.
But the God of Poetry is proving Themself true.

It is moments like these
when I’m wading Page by Page through Infinite Divinity,
Limitless Power and Possibility,
It's moments like these when I believe in Poetry.
Omid, a poet friend, asked the world to create for him a new God.
But he has. I did. Poets always are.
Every new Poem is God hiding in that moment.
Every time you put pen to paper it is really God speaking.
The worlds you create in your mind are the options
that could have been the universe in which we live.
God created Their image and wrote it on the hearts of humankind.
But evil tried to ruin it, so They rewrote Themself
to perfection on the Tablet of our minds.
This is my garden of Eden.
Here there is no good fruit or bad,
No right, no wrong,
No white, no black.
Here there is only God and us
And we and They say it’s good and enough.
Carrying Weight
By Zoe Miles

Brown eyes stare, 
their green spark extinguished. 
Wrinkling stress lines 
lie weary on the brow.

Lips chapped and crackled, 
begging for living water. 
eyelids droop, dragging 
through the finish.

I ache for laughter, 
sunlight. To see 
shining knowledge depths 
in a face drawn, 
sucked of vigor.

Carrying their tired bags, 
my eyes lift themselves from the 
glass.

Seeing the underneath of covers, 
they wait to greet the morning.

Stepping Out
By Zoe Miles

outside in bright 
sunlight

my eyes work to 
focus

seeing the majestic 
beauty

of my blue Wednesday 
morning.

I'm alive.
STAR GRASS
By Abigail Keegan

Stars grow at tips of dried,
frozen grass.
   Just so,
in the cold,
slow gifts

allow energies
extravagant ends.
Spotting Dogs
By Abigail Keegan

One of our dogs has spots,
the other not, but
the one upon his bum.
The whole world rolls on
about them, spots and dots
showering stars and flowers
glowing and bowing,
eyes glowing, connecting,
smiling or rejecting
all the silly little lines between.

Sing a Song of Sixpence by Amanda Doerr

Catch a Dream by Amanda Doerr
A Day’s Drive
By Zoe Miles

Two tongues dry in bursts of wind, eyeing town. Eager ears wave wildly, flapping hi-hellos to flying cars going like the minds of Daisy Wonder Dog and Dolly the Daring: a team of slobberly kisses, loving wishes leap to lick the danger away. On car rides, the weaving traffic lives, unknowing the honor of the traveling duo. Bark.

Vintage by Dawn Grooms

Dog in Osaka by Mingwei Zhang
Fiction

Paris Ferris Wheel by Lauren Byrd
53
It wasn't until Friday – the very last day - that he finally asked me about it.

He caught me on the way out of chapel, said he wanted to know how I was getting along. We made small talk as we walked around to the back of the building, where we sat on some flat rocks by the chimney facade. I finally felt like I was pulling off a believable smile.

"I just want to know why."

The ground beneath gave way, the air was gone from my lungs, but I wrestled my face into the blankest expression I could muster. I avoided eye contact tried to imagine my frozen gaze burning through his counselor's shirt, but his words swiftly pierced a tender, hidden pressure point in my psyche, and the world was hidden behind a curtain of burning tears. I couldn't remember the last time I cried. With what willpower I could muster, I groped the darkness of my frustration for an answer. Not the answer to Jeff's question, but the why it hurt me so much. I'd been asking myself the same question every day, but it never affected me like this.

In chapel earlier, I had listened with all my will, aching with guilt, sore heart tugged everywhere and nowhere. I imagined what it would be like on that final day. I imagined imagining. I wanted to care so badly. I knew two masters. I knew no one could love two masters. I wondered if I could love either one.
I don't even know what to think anymore.

I know.

We began to talk, but our eyes still said more.

"Don't blame yourself for this."

Did we really do anything wrong?

"What are you saying? It's my fault. The only people involved were me and you, and you wouldn't have --"

"Simon…"

I think I might know.

You might know what?

"Heather, if it was any other boy."

"Who cares? It wasn't, it was you, and me, and..."

Can I trust you?

Of course, yes.

I'm just so mad at myself.

I love you.

Please, don't.

I know."

"I wish I could help you, but I can't even help myself."

But I love you.

How can this be so simple for you?
"I know."

I slumped over toward the ground, away from her.

"We can’t be around each other anymore, not the way we were."

"Yes, yes, we need time apart if we’re going to grow through this."

- Why must I love you?

- Why must you?

"Thank you for talking with me about this."

"Heather, I'm so sorry about this all. I'm so sorry talking is all I can do."

- I must.

- Then why mustn't I?

"That’s not your fault."

- Because one of us has to be mature.

It was at orientation Monday morning that I first saw her, but I didn’t formally meet her until shortly after we moved into our cabins. She was a friend of Esther's from school. I had never been that good friends with Esther, but she wanted everyone to love her, particularly boys, which combined with her uninspiring, undeveloped figure to make an acquaintance supremely approachable. When Esther introduced us Heather parted her lips in a shy smile and slightly arched a tender eyebrow. We restlessly fidgeted on tree stumps circling a blackened fire pit as Esther's imposing social presence conducted us briskly through friendly jokes and small talk. When we stood to go to chapel, I stood up straight, self-consciously filling my whole height,
not slumping for the first time that day. She smiled and took my arm, with Esther on her other side, and the three of us skipped across the soccer field together, laughing. Meanwhile I tried to focus all my observational energy on the inches of forearm she brushed against, and tried to hold in my heart the feeling of her light, thin wrist against my awkward, gangly teenage form.

Monday ended with a late night swim. Dancing light from below tinted laughing faces above teenage boys' hairless chests and girls' mandatory modesty t-shirts, almost all of which were white, and by this time transparently clinging to hidden bodies and swimsuits in a most immodest way. The warm water embraced me and teased my longish summer hair as I dove toward her legs. So far I had done little but watch and laugh, but now I was beginning to feel more confident. My hands slipped around her smooth ankles, I heard a muffled giggling scream filter through the water, and I opened my eyes to her blurry, backlit figure crashing backwards away from me, vague showers of white bubbles shooting toward the surface from behind her billowing shirt as a wave of long black hair flipped forward, encircling her face. I surfaced and helped her up, laughing. She fell back a second in a prolonged nervous giggle, still holding my hand. The instant she was on her feet she jerked my hand, and I instinctively fell in and out of a quick friendly hug. Back at a distance and still caught off guard, I hesitated a half second as her green eyes bloomed. As suddenly as our awkward flirtation had begun, we moved on, returning to the safer laughter of old friends and old jokes. The evening ended without interruption, and I found myself awake long after the rest of my cabin, unable to think of anything but that brief glance.
“I really wouldn't do that if I were you,” he said as he crashed through the oversized wooden double doors of Judge Krill's chambers. “It might be very bad for business.”

Krill turned away from the girl he was molesting to admire the girl's boyfriend, the hero, for making it past his overly extravagant phalanx of personal bodyguards. He had thought them quite invincible, what with the blinding drugs they were on to take away all thoughts except obey and fight for him. Krill was impressed and he said so.

“I'm impressed.”

“This has gone on for too long,” said the hero, tearing off what was left of his shirt to expose his blood and sweat soaked pectorals, rippling in all the fury of strained musculature. He was confident, but he also knew the judge's extensive history: 15 years in KGB, 12 more in American Special Forces, and now, head of both the judge's seat in the highest court in the land and the most powerful and ruthless crime syndicate in the world. Krill may look old, but you could guarantee the dude still packed a punch; you may not be able to see it, but beneath those black robes stood a body carved out of pure rock. The countless henchmen were nothing compared to Krill. They had all attacked him clumsily and always one at a time, consistently. They watched friend after friend fall in the heat of battle, but insisted on waiting their turn to take their vengeance. In addition, the drugs generally made them make poor choices. They were easy. Krill would be harder.

Judge Krill's chambers were a little on the gaudy side: mahogany everywhere, curtains flapping in a slight breeze coming from somewhere, a large open wood floor, swords on the wall, a globe the size of a small cottage, various other obstacles lay strewn about the room. Gaudy, but
he could afford it. Up till now, only the hero stood between him and world domination through
drug trafficking and assassinations of the line of presidential succession. He had killed the
President and the Vice, now all that was left was the Speaker. And once the Speaker was dead,
it would be over. Which is why he now had her tied up in his chambers. The one flaw in his
plan was this hero, an ex-New York detective who had recently been a top Presidential body-
guard, and who was dating the Speaker of the House. He was there for the presidential hit, and
he soon put all the pieces together through an arduous process of ass-kicking and evidence col-
lecting. He now had enough evidence to bring down Krill, but that was never going to happen.
So he'd have to bring him down some other way. And that other way was killing Krill, hard.
Krill turned his back on the hero to remove his robes, exposing a smart suit and tie, then he
turned back around and attempted one final option before killing the hero -
“You must be an amazing fighter,” he said. “But before you start throwing fists at me, I want
you to think about something, namely what are you fighting for?”
“For freedom, for democracy…”
“But what does that mean? Freedom... Democracy... Love... they're all just words. Words ex-
pressing concepts. Concepts which really mean nothing. Can't you see?”
The hero looked incredulous.
“The things that really mean something are the vices: money, power, sex,” as he said this, he
brushed a hand against the Speaker's cheek. “We're not so different, you and I. We both fight
for something. Our ideologies. Our worldviews. We both fight to keep our world from crum-
bling around us. We fight to maintain what we believe to be necessary.”
He looked pensive, but still angry.
“The truth is, I'm getting old. After I've instated my empire, I will probably not last very much
longer, and I need someone to be an heir. I need someone with ideologies, someone who's not afraid to fight, someone who will protect my empire. Someone like... you.”

“But why would anyone want to protect an empire of crime?”

“Don't you see? Joining the world into one world order is an end to war! To Hunger! To Strife! We can fix the epidemics in the nations with low GDP's because we can share GDP's! The third world will join with the first and we'll change it. We'll make it better! More beautiful!”

“But at what cost?”

“A few lives here and there of mostly corrupt politicians. But these lives pale in comparison to the lives we'll save! Can't you see it? A bright, new future.”

The hero paused to think. His next line better be a zinger.

“When President Michaelson stood on the docks in Brooklyn and looked out at the harbor, he pointed to Lady Liberty,” the hero spoke calmly and airily, “and he said, 'This nation was built on her, and on the promise of her.' The idea that people can be free, to live, to breath, to love. That's what freedom means. And also he was my father.” It wasn't the best line in the world, but at least he got everything in there.

Infuriated, Krill tried one more time.

“JOIN ME!”

“Join yourself in hell!”

With this, they launched into a brilliant trade of fists and kicks, each placing their attacks in a well-coordinated, nearly choreographed manner. Punches were blocked, landed, and returned. Grapples ended in a man being thrown like a horseshoe at whatever was around them. They took down the swords and began sword-fighting with the proficiency of old pros.

After a good couple of minutes of intense fighting, neither side gaining much ground on the
other, Krill finally decided to try the fighting style he was best at: dirty fighting. He ran over to
the Speaker and held her with his saber at her throat. The hero stopped cold.

“Who's got the upper hand now?” said the judge maniacally. “Put down your sword.”

The hero thought for a moment before deciding to throw his sword at the judge in one last at-
tempt to save the world. It went whizzing over his right shoulder. The judge laughed insanely,
but then he heard the sound of the giant globe rolling towards him. The hero had thrown the
sword into the globe, loosening it from its moorings and sending it crashing down towards
Krill. As Krill turned to see his fate and feel the crushing weight of the world, the hero leaped
up and pushed the Speaker out of harm's way, getting his ankle caught slightly beneath the roll-
ing globe and instantly breaking his foot. But at least it was all over now.

In excruciating pain, he crawled over to his girlfriend and loosened her ropes with his good
hand. She embraced him and kissed him hard to show her appreciation, then she picked him up
and helped him hobble out the oversized wooden double doors of the judge's chambers. Out
into the sunlight of glorious American freedom, the gloriously bright future, and a huge crowd
which had gathered just outside the doors.

Chair by Elisha Gallegos
The Constant Companion

By Brandon Stauffer

Writer's block.

I had a friend who used to call it “Writer's Herpes,” because just when you need it least, it'll re-surface making it impossible to sell yourself. I thought that was pretty catchy. Clever. So now, these days I say I've got herpes and it's a little inside joke with myself.

I've got herpes, but really I have writer's block. Sores in my mind keeping me from writing anything of any substance down.

I sold a story to some British copycat of the New Yorker when I was 20. It was some short I had written in high school about girls and how if a girl acts like a guy, they're considered “skanky.” My English teacher told me it was insightful, but I was just writing what I knew: I see myself naked in the mirror and revel in the fact that I have boobs, I think about sex so many times a day it's hard to believe I could find time to study, I'm forward and aggressive and I never fit in with other girls. They all called me skanky.

I wrote this down, and it was published in a widely circulated British rag. This is what people want to read these days: the mindless musings of a horny 16 year old American girl in a medium sized town. Nothing special, nothing real, nothing to change the world, just the way my body works. I thought writing was an art, but it's really just pencils, paper, and hormones.

Herpes hits you when you've had too much. The same with writer's block. You're exposed to too much, it all hits you at once and clogs the pipes. You're left staring at blank pieces of paper wondering where all the insight you were planning on spilling on the world has gone and why
it's not writing itself down in front of you.

You light a cigarette and look out the window of your 21st floor apartment, paid for by Daddy's money because you were meant for higher things than real work, and you look out at the city that you've become a part of. Assimilated.

In college, English-Literature Bachelor's track, they teach you words to better express yourself, but all they do is – what's the word? Obfuscate? - congeal and coagulate until you can't even find the right words even to say how you feel about a puppy staring up at you. A good vocabulary can make you cynical if used correctly.

They teach you that behind every piece of good writing is the hidden, deeper meaning that you're supposed to derive, implicit. That writing speaks of the author's psychology. Bad writing, however, speaks of psychology too: the psychology of needing to make money. Needing to see your words in print to relieve your narcissism. Needing to die, but not having the guts to kill yourself, so you kill off your characters. The one that looks just like you, with her blond hair, long hairless legs, and melancholy demeanor.

Kill her off. Give her cancer from that cigarette. Throw her from the window of her 21st floor apartment. Blow her up. Use your imagination, but just kill her. Then you'll be free.

I was looking at one of the millions of reports that come through my office and find their way to my desk when Charlie Dawn came in with a question. His hair was all sorts of brown and fell over his left eye, lending him a mysterious aura. You could tell that beneath his shirt and tie was a body of pure muscle. And here he was in my office needing my help.

“Yes, Charlie?” I said, setting the report on top of the pile to give him my full attention. I wonder if I was being obvious, if he could tell how badly I needed him, right there, on the desk,
right now.

“Ma'am,” he said, always the gentleman, “I need you to confirm...”

“Stop right there and kiss me.”

So he did, and if it wasn't obvious before, it was plain to see now.

My romance novels were all cries for help. The hidden message, behind the writing of what I know women want to read, is me screaming, “I have nothing to say! Why am I still alive, let alone writing for a living?” But if worded correctly, cries for help can pay the bills. I had sold and presold hundreds of Charlie Dawn and the boss stories. Women ate the first few up, fanmail coast-to-coast all saying, “I wish my husband could be like Charlie,” or, “I wish I was as strong a woman as the boss.”

The boss has remained unnamed, but I always write in the first person. I might as well just sub my name throughout the story. Not that it's a memoir, but rather a fictional resignation to be nothing. “As strong a woman as the boss”? The boss whose only business seems to be to fornicate with an underling? It's a miserable existence just writing about her. But this is me: the miserable, herpes-ridden, used up, nothing at the top of the ladder. The reports are fanmail, and I used to give each a brief look over, but now they just pass from one side of the desk to the other, and thence to a dumpster in the back. Thank you, secretary (who is, by the way, a man).

In college, they taught me that every novel is essentially a memoir because it's all about perspective: no one but Joan Didion could have written *Play It As It Lies*, no one but Ken Kesey could have put down *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The books were reflections of the people, even if it was a fictional story. In a book, you are, “peering into the soul of another person,
personified in the main character.” It was all bullshit, but I guess I'm finding out it's all right. Every cheap romantic line I put down was still coming out of my mind, whether I thought it was stupid or not. So now I'm the romance goddess.

I've come such a long way since high school. When I wrote respectable things. So what if they were juvenile and stupid, they were still things. Now I write pages and pages of nothing. I look at the blank pages filled with words and wonder where all my real thoughts went.

Gin and cigarettes taste like cancer.

Writer's block is worse than death because of the very fact that you're still living. You still have to see the world move around you, while you're stuck. Paralyzed.

Convoluted! That's the word I was looking for earlier when I was talking about vocabulary making things worse. It “convolutes” things. All these words and nothing to express with them. If only I knew less, if only it was like high school, where my joy was in the fact that I'm a woman with a sleek and sexy body. If only I were just a body again, instead of a mind. Then something of substance would come to me without me even having to think about it.

But I am thinking about it. I'm thinking about how my typewriter yells at me when I'm drunk. I'm thinking about how stupid women with no selves read my books. I'm thinking about how I can't kill off the character that looks like me, she's locked into a 70 book deal with Random House. Even if I killed myself off, she's still on contract, and I would live on in vile, stupid infamy. Screwing Charlie Dawn on the desk in hundreds of different ways. Screwing my married secretary.
Writer's block is just like herpes. My friend's coinage is apt because, like herpes, it never leaves you alone. Even when it's not technically present, it's still there hiding just beneath the surface, looking for the opportunity of another outbreak.

“Stop right there and kiss me, Charlie.” Being the gentleman, he obliged, and we made love right there.

The Somnambulist
By Brandon Stauffer

We had been married for years, happily, lovingly, and simply married. We would go to work - he at the library, me teaching high schoolers proper grammar usage and writing skills - then we would come home and see each other and be overwhelmed with the happiness that comes with knowing that all day, all this person wanted was to see you. We would watch obscure movies while drinking red wine and eating macaroni and cheese before falling asleep on the couch in each other's arms. We really had a beautiful relationship that, in my mind, completed us as people.

But lately he's developed a habit of disappearing. Not literally disappearing into thin air, but more like mentally vanishing, like taking a leave of absence from reality. He's still here, but he's not on the same plane with me anymore. I think it started when we were both 28 years old.

I came home from work, but he wasn't anywhere to be found. I figured he was going to be
home later, so I cooked macaroni and cheese for both of us because that's what we had Friday nights, but he still didn't show up. Worried, I decided to see if his car had shown up yet, and strangely enough, it had. It was sitting in our driveway in all of its blue and chrome glory, present and imposing, intimidating because it had apparently driven itself into the driveway because my husband was missing completely. In a fit, I leaped out the door to see if I could find him, and I doubt that I ever would have if it weren't for his shoes and socks tossed haphazardly at the foot of our tree. I looked upwards to find him curled up on a high branch with his pants rolled up staring intently at a book. I called his name, but he didn't respond, so I ran to the foot of the tree to get closer. All it did was make me feel farther, more distant than before. He was so high up through a bramble of barren branches, farther away from me than the sky. I called his name a few more times, but no answer, so I decided to climb up after him.

I worked my way up the tree, cutting myself here, scratching myself there, slipping, tripping, nearly falling time and time again, but I struggled on with determination to reach my husband somehow. Soon, I was within feet of him. I could reach out and grab the book away from him. But there was something in his eyes: an intensity that seemed alien and far out of place, which I had never seen before. I reached out and touched his leg, whispering his name while I did it. When he looked up from the book, he was at first shocked to see me. Or rather scared, his glance held more fear than surprise. What's more, it seemed to be fear of me, not of heights or location.

My first impression had been that he had for some reason climbed up there specifically to read, but reading the book was only a part of his state. Really he was all things entwined together: reading a tattered copy of Once and Future King, not wearing shoes or socks, being at this altitude in this tree specifically, ignoring me, and whatever else was going through is mind. Elimi-
nate one, and the rest comes crashing down.

He started shaking with fear, and when I reached out to help him, he cringed, sliding farther away from me. I watched him fall from the top of our tree through all the helpless branches and straight to the ground, where his leg broke from the fall.

When he woke up in the hospital, he said he didn't remember any of what I said he had done. He didn't remember being in the tree or falling out of it, just driving home from the library and waking up in the hospital. The doctor listened almost half-heartedly to the report, then decided that my husband was probably sleepwalking.

“But he's never sleepwalked before. Why should he start now?” The doctor replied that there could be any number of reasons for it. Stress. Family history. General confusion. Any number of reasons. Then he left the room so my husband could heal.

That was the first time I saw it: him living a distant and separate life, living a dream. But it hasn't been the last time. I see him lost and far away all the time, sitting on our porch, on the couch, even driving in the car. He adopts a calm but severe look which doesn't exist in the real world, but somehow does in his world. He seems to look through me. Not constantly, but many times. And there's nothing I can do about it. And I feel helpless.

But more than that, I feel left behind.

I see him perched high in the tree, or playing in the playground, completely unaware of what he's doing, and I imagine his freedom. The world peels away leaving only him and his imagination and what he wants to do, and it embraces him. But he always goes alone. He never takes me with him. And I can't help wishing that I was sick like him, that I was degenerating slowly in my mind like he is so I could join him, if only once.

Instead, he sits beside me, miles away from where I am. And I know that if I touch him, he
would wake up. So I don't. I watch him live in his world from mine, and pray that he comes back, if only to say hello.

_Around the Campfire_ by Amanda Doerr
The Glass House
By Stacey Lloyd

A man walked quietly by the sea everyday. His head down….he walked. People at the beach
gawked and questioned his intensive search for something. The man would occasionally bend
down and graze his hand over the sand, until he picked up a dark, shiny crystal which he then
placed in his coat pocket and made then made his way back into town.

“Foolish man”, said an onlooker. “Does he not realize that these beach crystals have little value.
He is searching for no good reason each day. What a waste.”

A woman overheard this comment and challenged the on-looking man. “Some of us have noth-
ing”, she said, “We must search for small treasures wherever they may lye.”

The next day the onlooker’s curiosity got the best of him, so he followed the searching man
back home once he had grazed the beach. The man walked through the city and then continued
down a beaten path. The walk turned into a hike, and the hike turned into a full fledged journey
until the onlooker finally spotted something in the distance.

“Surely this can not be this simple man’s home” thought the onlooker as he gazed upon a tow-
ering structure that glistened in the distance. It was the greatest structure he had ever seen. The
onlooker pondered upon the master of this fine castle..

Meanwhile the glass collector made his way up the path to the house. A woman approached
coming from inside. When she reached the man, she gave him a kiss saying “praise be for an-
other day of blessings.”

The master and his wife walked into their home made entirely of crystal. Praise be.
The Parable of the Good Student

By Stacey Lloyd

He spent hours each night researching and trying to understand. He thought logically and thoroughly upon the subject until finally his eyes began to flutter with exhaustion and he fell asleep with books in hand.

She was never prepared and never ready for the day ahead. Papers sprawled upon her bedroom floor; she went out at night and retired early. She wasn’t necessarily a bad student, but she chose fellowship over study.

This brother and sister pair had little in common. They fought about everything and did not seek to understand one another. The brother considered himself superior because of his academic record, while the girl settled for being happy with herself and where she was.

One day after a long drawn out fight, the brother and sister marched down the stairs to allow their parents to settle the dispute.

“Mother”, called out the son, “Is it not true that I have a greater knowledge than my sister? Look at her grades. She doesn’t study. How can you put up with her laziness in academic rigor?”

“My son”, responded the mother. “You have been fooled, for you’re sister in fact is the smarter, but when she begins to compare herself to your success, then the roles are reversed.”
The Little Piano Player
By Stacey Lloyd

The Little girl sat down at the piano bench. She could close her eyes and see the notes float across a midnight sky. Colors matched the tonality and her head swayed back and forth as she considered each note. Her mind was that of a prodigy. She knew exactly what notes would compliment each other, and what notes would create exactly enough dissonance to make the hairs stand up on one’s arm.

These beautiful images however filled her mind and heart but had no place in the silence surrounding her. Her small crippled hands reached out to play, but she had no feeling in her fingers. So she sat up from the bench and whispered softly, “How lucky I am to have a mind to hear the music, and thoughts vivid enough to see the notes. I am truly blessed.”
Non-Fiction

Downtown Reflection by Gregory Brindley

73
Acadian Aberration

By Elizabeth Newby

My Grandmother entered the living room with her brittle hair arranged in a damp, matted ball atop her head. “If I don’t comb my hair after I bathe, it has more body,” she explained. “Yes, Grandma. Those dreadlocks are quite becoming. They’re all the rage in the luxury retirement homes back in Oklahoma,” was what I wanted to reply. But I abstained.

I sat immobile on her wicker couch, the kind that straddles the line between what is appropriate for the home and the patio, surrounded by five toy-sized poodles. They stared at me with big black eyes, waiting to enter their screeching, wailing, and barking chorus when I moved the slightest muscle. They sported matching eye crusts on the sides of their noses, as if to signify some sort of vicious, puppy gang. “Yo. I capped three sparrows in the backyard to earn these marks,” was the message I got from Sparky in the corner. I combated his subtle—and somewhat fictional—attack with my best Marlon Brando impersonation, as if to say, “Your eye crusts don’t scare me.”

Along with being the godfather of the poodle mafia, my grandmother spends most of her time in a court of law. She is seventy-five years old and still maintains a full-time court reporting position. I don’t know how she gets up to go to work everyday with those brittle bones and cataracts. She must take some really good multivitamins. Usually, my trips from Oklahoma City to New Iberia, Louisiana consist of me sitting with the ever-increasing number of animals while she types away at her computer. I can only handle a few days of torture from the puppy gang until I succeed in convincing her to take me to visit the rest of my unconventional family. This trip, it only took me two days to con my poor, old grandmother into leaving her beloved dogs and work. We filled some industrial-sized storage bins with dog food and water and
packed up the car for a road trip (Normally, it takes approximately an hour and a half to drive from New Iberia to Baton Rogue, but with my grandmother behind the wheel, the journey is easily classified as a road trip).

We left New Iberia at daybreak to arrive at my Aunt Jimi’s apartment complex just in time to watch the sun set in the horizon. Contrary to popular belief, my grandmother did not name my aunt “Jimi” because she is a pot-smoking hippie. She is a bible-beating Baptist. She merely found the unique spelling intriguing. The female lawyer Jimi—not the male guitarist Jimi—greeted us at the door along with her three overly energetic sons. We sat for a few hours drinking iced tea and catching up on family gossip.

“Is Clyde still in Jail?”

“Yeah, but we’re trying to pull a few strings with Judge Fungi to get him out early.”

“Judge Fungus is among us.’ The smart bailiff that uttered those words when introducing him to the court didn’t last long.”

“Remember when Clyde brought home that alligator while it was still alive?”

“Remember when Clyde brought home that wild boar while it was still alive?”

“Yeah, I do. I kind of hope he stays in jail.”

Jimi’s oldest son Robert convinced his mother to let us go to the movies despite his recent grounding. “Mom, those weren’t illegal substances. I’m just fond of rolling my own cigarettes. It’s a lost art. Besides, we’ll leave as soon as the movie is over,” he pleads. “Okay, but call me when you get there,” she submits. I climbed into the passenger seat of my cousin’s ’94 Dodge Neon through the broken window. “Sorry the door doesn’t work. I guess you could have come in on this side, but I just like to watch people try to get in through the window. This fat guy I know got stuck one time.” I tried to ignore my cousin’s comment and focused my atten-
tion on the shiny, new stereo in the car’s dash. Considering the dilapidated state of the rest of the car, this stereo struck me as oddly out of place.

“Hey, Rob. Where did you get that stereo?” I inquired.

“Oh, that? I stole it in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Everyone else was stealing things. I didn’t want to feel left out,” he replied, nonchalantly.

“Can you get me one of those?”

“I’ll see what I can do. We’re going to go um . . . visit some people about some . . . stuff, and then we’ll go get ice cream because I’m usually craving some ice cream after I uh . . . visit people,” Robert said nervously.

“I thought we were going to the movies?” I asked, somewhat confused.

“Screw the movies.”

After ice cream, we went to Uncle John and Aunt Lou Ann’s humble abode. Robert banged on the door. “Lllleeeetttttmmmeeeeeeiiinnnnnn!‖ he wailed, as if he were at the brink of death on this lazy evening. “Cccoooommmemeeooonnnnn! I havvveElizzzzzzza-bethhhhhwwwitttthmeeethhhiisssstttimmmmmeeel!” The dead bolt slowly turned and a single eye appeared as the door inched open. Suddenly, the door opened wide. “Elizabeth! I didn’t realize you had arrived already,” Uncle John said warmly. My grandmother wasn’t as creative when naming my eldest uncle. His name is “John Smith.” My cousin Robert strolled into the house and quickly made himself at home by serving himself a large helping of the gumbo simmering on the stove. John was infuriated, “Robert! Put that back! I’m taking that to work tomorrow!” “Jeeeesus, Uncle John. I’m staaaarving. Why don’t you show some hospitality? We’re family,” Robert said as he emptied hot sauce onto my uncle’s specialty. I’m not a fan
of controversy, so I quickly tried to change the subject, “Where’s Jake?” I asked. John said after a long and drawn out sigh, “He’s in his room on the computer.”

As far back as I can remember visiting Louisiana, my cousin Jake has been in his room on the computer. When he was a fetus in his mother’s womb, he was somehow in his room on the computer. I went to knock on the social butterfly’s door, “Jake? Are you alive?” “No,” I heard him say faintly. I took his response as an indirect invitation inside and slowly opened the door to insure protection from some unknown figure lurking in the artificially illuminated glow of the cluttered bedroom. The only sign of former life was a dried-up fish tank covered in green algae crust. I think it dated back to the Mesozoic Era, probably the Cretaceous period. I retreated my gaze to the computer desk, but to my sheer and utter amazement, Jake wasn’t there. I wasn’t quite sure how to respond to this phenomenon. I left the abandoned wilderness and walked back to the kitchen in a state of shock.

“Jake’s um . . . not . . . there,” I managed to say as I announced my discovery to the rest of the world.

“What!” was the simultaneous dumbfounded response of my Cousin Robert and Uncle John.

“How could this be? He’s always there. He doesn’t have any real friends,” my Uncle John said as he stared at the kitchen counter in a state of deep contemplation.

“What are real friends?” I asked quite concerned.

“Friends that aren’t from the Internet or fictitious,” John replied.

“Wow,” said Robert “Your son’s a real winner.”

We stood there for a moment in silence as we thought of what to do. Kidnapping was a legitimate concern. Alien abduction also crossed my mind when we heard the front door creak
open. Jake walked in the kitchen and poured himself a glass of water.

“Where were you?” asked my uncle.

“Outside.”

Man, things had changed since my last visit.

A day had passed since the frightening incident with Jake, and my Aunt Jimi and I were left alone in her apartment. Her children had gone with their dad to Lafayette for the night. Grandmother had gone back to New Iberia to check up on the mafia. “Do you want to go with me and some of my colleagues from work to dinner tonight?” she asked, out of the blue. I anxiously replied, “Of course. That sounds great.” Finally, this trip to Louisiana would be worthwhile. My Aunt Jimi works at a prominent law firm in Baton Rouge. Since it has always been a dream of mine to go to law school, this would be a prime opportunity for me to observe the life of lawyer, firsthand. After styling my hair a la Hilary Rodham Clinton, I put on my most conservative cardigan and pearls. I looked as though I had escaped from high tea mid tiny, triangle-shaped cucumber sandwich. It was perfect. I only hoped that I could add something witty and intelligent to the conversation.

The night did not go as I had anticipated. I was blindsided by Louisiana’s finest. Wit and intelligence should have been the least of my concerns. The topic of conversation at the “restaurant”—if complimentary corn nuts and pretzels count as an entrée—consisted of three, and only three, things: the intricacies of the female sexual anatomy, the common love of deer hunting, and the wonders of pot smoking—which seems to be a reoccurring theme. I cracked a “That’s what she said” joke that was the highlight of the evening. I didn’t think that would come in handy past high school. Boy, was I wrong. Thank you, immature tendencies. Now, I’m
among “who’s who” of Louisiana’s legal elite. At the end of the night, I couldn’t help but think solemnly to my self, “Is this my fate?”

Tomorrow, I would be boarding the plane back to Okie town.

I couldn’t wait.
No *Auf Wiedersehen* for Me

By, Becca Kreitman

It was September 15, 1999, and my family had recently finished moving into our new house in Plano, Texas. Granted, it was only about five minutes away from our old house, but it was still a pretty big change.

Aunt Karen was in town for a few days. She came to the Dallas area every month to attend business meetings. This time she decided to extend her trip by a day because Grandpa Jack was due to arrive the next day. He was driving from his girlfriend’s house in Detroit. We were all so excited—he hadn’t seen our new house yet and my mom had hurried to get the guest room decorated and ready for him. He was also bringing down some family artifacts, and my mom was thrilled that he would be delivering the family grandfather clock that had been passed down through several generations. She had grown up with the clock in her childhood home and had always enjoyed it. My mom already had the perfect spot ready for it in an empty area by the staircase.

We had an early dinner that night, as I had to leave for my rehearsal for “The Wizard of Oz” at the local children’s theater, where I was playing the role of the Tin Man. We ate pepperoni pizza from Mama’s Pizza that night. We always ate it on Aunt Karen’s last night with us. Although, I can’t say that I have ever consumed Mama’s Pizza since that night.

I was helping my mom clean up after dinner. We were listening to and half-watching the evening news.

The doorbell rang.

My dad went to answer the door. My mom and I glanced out of the kitchen to see who was parked out in front of the house. We saw a police car.
Not understanding why a police officer would be on our doorstep, we joined my dad in
the foyer. I went and sat on the front steps of the staircase with my six-year-old brother, Brady,
while my mom walked over to stand with my dad. Aunt Karen soon joined them. A police offi-
cer had never come to our house before, so we were very curious as to why one would be there
now.

The police officer at the door was a large man with dark brown hair and he was wearing
glasses. He asked my parents if we knew a man named Jack O’Brien. “Yes, he’s my father,” my
mother replied. “Well, ma’am, you might want to call this number. He’s been in an accident,”
the officer said as he handed her a yellow slip of paper. “Is he all right?” my mom and aunt
asked, frantic. “I honestly don’t know. You’ll have to call this number and they’ll give you
more information.”

After he left, my family and I rushed to the kitchen. My dad grabbed the phone and di-
aled the phone number given to my mom by the cop. She said that she couldn’t bring herself to
call the number, so she made my dad call it instead. My mom and I sat down at the table across
from my dad. Aunt Karen and Brady were standing behind us.

While on hold, my dad informed us that he was talking to a police station in some po-
dunk town in Kentucky. My dad started talking to the police officer and was receiving informa-
tion regarding the car accident. He relayed it to the rest of us, and said, “He was on the high-
way, lost control, and went off of the road. No other vehicles were involved. They can’t give
me anymore details right now until they further examine the vehicle.”

My mom told my dad to ask the question we all desperately wanted to know the answer
to. “Is he alive?”

My dad asked the police officer on the line. And then he closed his eyes and shook his
head.

We were all in shock. My mom screamed. Aunt Karen collapsed. Brady ran upstairs to his room.

I sat at the kitchen table. I didn’t cry. I was sitting in complete and utter shock. Grandpa Jack was gone. All that was running through my mind was that I would never again hear his cheery voice when I answered his phone call. “Hi Rebecca! This is your Grandpa Jack! How are you today?” I would only hear it in my dreams; from now on it would only be a memory.

After he hung up with the police station in Kentucky, I watched my dad run to my mom and comfort her. She was in hysterics and could hardly hold herself up. Aunt Karen was near her, on her knees, with her face in her hands, sobbing uncontrollably.

I didn’t want to cry. I didn’t want to be comforted. I just wanted to hide. I needed to get away from my terribly hurt and upset family. I was young—I couldn’t comfort them as they needed to be comforted. My father was still alive, so there wasn’t much I could say to my mom and Aunt Karen.

So I ran up to my room and sat in my closet. I soon realized that I had perched myself on top of something. I pulled out the book I had sat on by accident. It was a book about Irish Christmases that Grandpa Jack had brought back from Ireland for me. It had pictures and details of their holiday festivities and was very colorful and fun to look at. He had been visiting Ireland about a year before. I remembered him showing me his pictures from the trip. The rolling green hills and the precious little houses took my breath away.

Before I knew it, I was crying my eyes out. I could feel him near me, and I realized that I did not want him to leave me. He may have physically left me, but I knew that he would never leave my heart; I would not let him. I decided not to tell my family about what had happened to
me in my closet. I guess I felt that it was too special of a moment between Grandpa Jack and me to share.

After what felt like forever, I stepped outside of my closet and walked out of my room. Brady was sitting at the top of the staircase by himself. We have always had a very close relationship. I went and sat down next to him. He put his head on my shoulder and tears began to run down his cheeks; it was almost as if each tear was racing to see which one could get to his chin first.

“Becca, why did this happen to us?” he asked, “Why did this happen to Grandpa? I don’t think anyone could want him more than we do.” I didn’t know what to say. I was only nine years old. I didn’t have all of the answers. After a few minutes of silence, he whispered, “I miss him.” “I miss him, too,” I said.

A little later, my dad came looking for us. He sat with us on the stairs and just held us. He told us that the next several days were going to be especially hard on Mom. Her mother, Grandpa Jack’s wife, our Babcia, had died when I was two years old. Both of her parents were now gone, and Dad told us that we needed to be strong for her. And Brady and I needed our dad to be strong for us, too.

He took us downstairs and that’s when I saw her. My mom was just staring out the window. I walked over to her and gave her a big hug. Like an infant, she collapsed into me and began sobbing uncontrollably. She kept saying things like, “He wasn’t ready to die—it wasn’t his time yet,” and “What am I supposed to do without him?”

Obviously, I had no answers for her. So I just hugged her. At the time I felt like there wasn’t anything else I could do to help her. It was very difficult to see her in such pain.

I looked over to the empty space by the staircase. There would not be a beautiful grand-
father clock situated there anytime soon.

My dad made a few phone calls regarding the wake and the funeral, and reserved a space and time for each.

About an hour later Aunt Karen and my parents began making all of the obligatory phone calls. My mom and Aunt Karen each went through two boxes of tissues in the matter of an hour. Hence, my dad ended up making most of the phone calls. He pretty much said the same thing over and over again, “Hi _____, Jack died in a car accident today. We don’t know much detail, but he went off of the highway in Kentucky. The wake will be next Tuesday evening and the funeral is going to be on Wednesday. There is a hotel, the Candlewood Suites, just down the street from us. You can make reservations there if you are planning on attending. If you don’t mind, could you please call _____? Thank you… Karen is here… Thank you, I will.”

There was nothing for me to do, so I decided to go to sleep. I didn’t even say good night to anyone.

I went upstairs and got ready for bed and put in a CD that Grandpa Jack had bought for me at the Bavarian Grill during his last visit. We always went there when he was in town, as he deeply enjoyed eating German cuisine. This specific restaurant also had a German house band that always dressed up in lederhosen. Their lederhosen were not as intricate as the ones I had seen in The Sound of Music, in fact this lederhosen was an ugly mustard color. The last time we had been there they were selling CDs, and Grandpa Jack and I had had such fun dancing together to their music that he bought their CD for me.

It made me smile when I put it on that night, for I remembered what a wonderful time we had and how ridiculous Grandpa Jack looked trying to do all of the German dance steps. He would flap his arms all over the place, like a baby bird learning to take flight, but I don’t think
that those arm movements are supposed to be included in traditional German folk dancing. He certainly made a fool out of himself! He tried to teach me a few steps, but I had some problems picking them up—they’re very difficult! I recalled he and I doing the Chicken Dance together and him grabbing a chicken hat from the band’s basket and placing it on my head. I then grabbed one for him and placed it on his head. We were quite a pair, and we had so much fun in those ugly little chicken hats, even if we did look ridiculous!

I hadn’t been in my bed for very long when Brady knocked on my bedroom door. He poked his head in and asked if he could sleep with me; he didn’t want to be alone. I didn’t want to be alone either, so I told him to climb on in.

We didn’t speak. We both just stared up at the ceiling in silence, listening to the German music echo through my room and praying for the terrible night to finally come to an end.
Ring. Ring. Ring. “Hello?” I was greeted with a very exciting acknowledgement, “Britt-NAAY!!” “Hey Jordan, what’s up?” I yelled to my mom, “Mama, its Jordie!” I ran around the house with a smile stretched across the room. It had been two months since I last spoke with my long lost companion. Jordan's mom got a really good job at a bank in Daytona, Florida. She had to leave the summer right before our first day of junior high. I was sad when she left and did not get to experience such an important day with me. It seemed as if I had to give a detailed account of every event that had taken place in the entire month of school.

She had missed out on plenty of moments, here in Arkansas. As if she could possibly forget about the crazy individuals that she left, I informed her of the little social issues that were still were taking place. Kya had a huge crush on Jam, but Jam had a thing for Ashley Jones. Seville fell at lunch and decided to switch schools. I made captain of the junior varsity track team. For every one of my somewhat unnecessary accounts, Jordan had an even more ridiculous story to match. Her adventures on the beach and dangerous expeditions in her new neighborhood were always more thrilling than anything I had done. She still amazed me, even when she was hundreds of miles away. It was hard to believe that my best friend, since second grade, was not here with me.

After sharing the moments on the phone, we refused to spend another minute apart. The bottle that we had buried under the tree by the track field was definitely not the last memoir we would leave on this earth.

It was amazing what a little begging by two “partners in crime”, as my mother would call us, did. Convincing my mom to let me go wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. With a
little help from Jordan's mom, and lots of begging from two whining little girls, my mom bought my ticket for $70 bucks, and that was that. That ticket to Daytona, Florida, was the start of a trip that I would remember for a lifetime.

I left my house with one bag of clothes, a disposable camera, and a back pack full of goodies which I specially chose to accommodate the day long drive. My mom dropped me off a couple of miles down the street, at Miss Joyce’s house; Jordan’s grandmother. I was ready for the longest bus ride of my life. Bus stations were pretty creepy, but I was close to Miss Joyce, quite like my own grandmother. I felt safe with her. I could tell my mom was afraid for me to ride on a bus. She really wanted me to have a good time with Jordan, because she knew how much it meant to me, so she swallowed her fear and hugged me good-bye.

During the twelve hour ride, I gazed out the window imagining all the fun I would have when I arrived. It was my first trip to the beach, so I imagined the soft white sand and the blue water, but I was more excited about seeing my best bud!

When I arrived in Daytona, it was about five in the morning. I had changed from an ecstatic and anxious best bud, to a tired and drowsy passenger. I dragged my quilt and bags off of the bus and just as I began to dial the pre-fix of my calling card….. “There she is!!” I quickly glanced out of the window beside the booth, and there was Jordan, Danielle, her older sister who straddled on the same level of maturity that we did, and Darrel, Jordan’s dad.

Jordan was standing there with her corn rolls and Bugs Bunny over-ralls. She was petite and quite the tomboy, with the scarred knees to show it. She played sports her whole life, and she never seemed interested in lip gloss, or the color pink. The worlds biggest Michael Jordan fan, and there she stood with a Chicago Bulls cap. Jordan and I seemed to be complete opposites, but even in friendship, opposites attract.
We ran to each other and embraced as if we had waited eternity for this moment. The encounter wouldn’t have been official, if we didn’t go through our very own specialized handshake. We made it up in 2nd grade and occasionally updated when necessary. We started with three twirls of the thumb, and then added the fist pound twice, eventually we added a few dance moves, and that year we ended it with a hip bump that left our pelvises sore the whole trip!

As we pulled up to the house, I was astonished. “This is your house?” When Jordan lived in the same town as me, our houses were pretty much the same, no garage, three bedrooms, and one bathroom. As I walked in the house, Jordan began the tour of what was my two week fun house.

There were two major floors of her house and two sub-floors. The Two major floors were like huge rooms, a fancy living area with the island bar and kitchen, and a floor with all the bedrooms. The subfloors were where we had the most fun. In the basement we watched old videos of when we were younger, playing patty cake and missing teeth. We also watched a video that Jordan, Danielle, and I made pretending to be our favorite singers. In the video, we did an impression of our favorite Aaliyah song, "Are you that somebody". I was Aaliyah, the singer, and Jordan was Timbaland, the rapper. The roles fit us well, I was the glamour girl, and Jordan was the tomboy, so she rapped. I pranced in the camera while Jordan hyped up in the background. The memories brought laughter and joy. The shrieking, boastful, melody of all of our unique laughs was heard through the whole house.

At night we ate snacks and had lotion fights in Jordan’s room. Jordan was always dragging me into things fun and dangerous. I always doubted whether I should do some things. My mom would have had a fit if she knew about the time we snuck into the sand factory or rode her go cart off of a ramp in an alley. But there was something about each adventure that made
me so happy to have a person like Jordan in my life.

The days and nights spent at Jordan’s house were fun and outrageous. We stayed up late and woke up even later. After breakfast, we got dressed to Michael Jackson’s Greatest Hits blasting from Jordan’s boom box. I honestly thought that Jordan and Danielle believed they were additions to the Jackson Five. They paraded around the room dancing and taunting me to join. They actually managed to get me dancing, and we ended up making a routine to Janet Jackson in the basement.

Jordan told me stories about the beach, but her descriptions failed to capture the essence of the beautiful feeling it would bring to my spirit. Jordan’s dad said to me gesturing down at the sand we walked on, “Brittney, maybe you should have worn your flip flops.” As I peered down, I my heart seemed to jump out of my chest, “Ahh…oh my gosh!!” I ran around throwing my hands in the air, as little clear crabs squirmed around at our feet. “Don’t worry, they’re scared of you, just come on!” Jordan grabbed me and drug me across the sand to the tide. As I stood before the tide gazing at the ocean that never ended, Jordan and Danielle ran into the wa-

ter. “Come on Brittney!!”

When the tide receded I began to walk into the water, but as each wave brought the tide back, I ran back onto the dry sand. For some reason, I was afraid that some unknown species would wash up and sting me.

As Jordan and Danielle went farther and farther out in the ocean, I stood on the shore in my pink polka-dot bikini and shimmering cotton candy lip gloss; admiring what a beautiful job I had done painting my toes purple. It took begging and a whopping lie from Jordan, about a 30 mile electric fence that kept sharks away to finally get me in the water. When I got in, we wrestled until the salt in my eyes was unbearable. We left the beach exhausted, and headed for the
boardwalk.

It was like the fair, but this wasn’t a once a year event, Jordan could experience this everyday! We played games in the arcade all night, and watched in awe as a man did tricks with fire! Jordan took me to the Candy Shop; fresh salt water taffy being made right before my eyes. Funnel cakes, candy apples, cotton candy, what better place was there for two best friends. When Jordan only had three bucks left from the allowance she had been saving for months, we went to a photo booth. Jordan rambled on and on about how wrinkled her dollars were, and kicked the machine for not accepting them. I reapplied my lip-gloss, fixed my hair, and chuckled at her impatience.

As the camera snapped, Jordie and I embraced each other and gave the camera all the personality and energy that we had left; I puckered my lips and blew kisses while Jordan made fierce growling faces. The pictures printed, and we stood there laughing at each other. No matter what the occasion or where the location, we were two of a kind; and the two of us walked along the beach under the moonlit Daytona sky.
Last weekend was one of the most interesting of my life. First my hard drive crashed and I was forced to use my limited computer knowledge to repair it to avoid buying a new one, since I am broke to the point that bums should be giving me money out of pity. A three day project which ended in success I am happy to say.

Then my dad wanted me to drive two and a half hours through the wretched Oklahoma terrain to help him plant this year's wheat crop, something he has never asked of me and even swore not to ask of me and which is made all the more ridiculous by the soaring gas prices and my aforementioned poverty.

Then I helped my best friend pack things into a U-Haul so that she could drive away and out of my life. Unthinkingly. Just trying to be a nice guy. I help her desert me. What was I thinking? Why would I facilitate my best friend's departure?

The rest of my weekend has been filled with her absence. She was someone very special to me, a confidante, a pal, a buddy with whom worry and dreariness sort of melted. When we occupied the same room, the only other thing that could fit was our love of each other's company.

I don't want to be misunderstood, here. She's happily entrenched in a long-term relationship, and the thought of her leaving him for me never crossed our minds. It just wasn't like that for us, we were a different kind of close, not the kind that really would or could work in a boy-friend-girlfriend setting. And I think of all the things about her, it's that particular closeness that only we shared that I'm going to miss the most.

Our love for each other's company. Just hanging out in the morning eating grapefruit smothered
in sugar while her bird, a slightly vocal cockatiel named CeeCee who happened to adore me, hovered overhead, perched on the ceiling fan and looking down at us like she was waiting for some sort of signal to come join. Just forcing her to watch my hideous cartoons and comedy shows and read my sadistic comics and tolerate my general malaise. Just following her around while she was taking pictures and occasionally stealing her camera to capture my own bits of art. Just laughing about McCain. Laughing about Obama. Laughing about laughing about McCain and Obama.

Even our hideous and stubborn discourse on the nature of satire, which ended in nothing but hard disagreement. These things, all of them. I'm going to miss the hell out of her.

When I met her, I was just starting college. A good Christian boy from a good Christian town. My eccentricities were on full blast to preserve my fragile frame, my own personal security blanket. Most people remember me as the guy who pointed to his nipple and said that he was from there (my right arm extended out made a crude, impromptu image of Oklahoma: the arm forming the panhandle, and my body, the rest of the state. My hometown is located roughly above the right nipple), but she remembers me as the guy who wanted to see a dead hobo in a fountain. This, as is often recounted, is her first real memory of meeting me.

Basically, to explain my dead hobo thing: All too recently, a hobo had been found dead in this fountain we passed by on the way to a school outing. I remarked on the morbid romanticism of a dead hobo in this gaudy fountain, saying it was picturesque or something to that effect. The instant reaction was, my what a strange person. Most everyone else cut my chances of being friends off right there, but for some reason, she didn't.

We started spending more and more time together, me and my polar opposite. I was a good Christian boy, she a good Atheist girl; my dad raised beef and I was ravenously carnivorous,
she on the other hand was violently vegetarian; I was morose and morbid, and she was happy and life-loving. Polar in so many ways, but our friendship really worked.

After the first year, I made lots of mistakes and we ended up drifting for a year, but we came back together very soon, started hanging out again, even moved in next door to each other so we could wake up, walk to class, come home, and eat breakfast and talk about how ridiculous our teacher was. Then we might pack up her cameras and go hiking (which I had hitherto detested) or go to this crazy hotel liquidation store on 23rd.

This store is filled with insanity and repetition. Walking around in there is like walking through a surrealist film, couches on top of couches, rooms full of thousands of copies of the same painting, a large wooden fish attached to a tacky light up tableau waterfall which altogether looked like it had spent some time in a Chinese buffet restaurant. There's a look to it, a feel that is entirely indescribable. There was also a cement room with walls lined with the X-bottoms of chairs, stacked to the ceilings, and the light flickered like some horror movie. The room itself looked like it might have been used for interrogation by the intensely foreign owner who was not a little frightening. Here she took some amazing photographs of various things. They looked like fallen Roman pillars.

I spent Saturday morning packing her things and moving them out, piece by piece she emptied her apartment. The couch I had so often passed out on, the table we would eat apple pancakes at, the desk where we would watch new installments of The Onion News Network. Everything left for the van and I was left behind to vacuum.

And my best friend was gone.

It later dawned on me that I would have to do this more and more as I grew older. That people will come and go from my life and that I will have to pack their things for them, because I'm a
good guy and that's what I do. My buddies will get married and leave me behind holding the 
bag as they move on to a more fulfilling relationship with a spouse, and I'll help set up their 
new home. And then one day, they'll start dying and I'll go to their funerals. Everything I will 
ever get close to will leave me behind: friends, family, children. They will all go on to some-
thing better than I can give them. Just like my cat, who also left this weekend to find a better 
life far away from me. No one stays, everyone leaves.

And I'm sure there are people who feel the same way about me.
The Forgotten Visit

By Amy Henninger

I had woken up that morning so early that you could barely tell if the sun was setting or if it was rising. I had to stop and think for a moment if it was really the next day. It had been a rough couple of months and a scheduled visit with my Daddy was all that I needed to fill the hole that had grown in my stomach. I couldn't stop staring out the window at the sky. It made me think of the lucky rocks I would find that had black and grey, and coral and white speckles in them. The ones you thought just might be worth something. This day was going to be perfect. How could you wake up to such a beautiful sight and have it not be special? Even after 25 years, my memory remains so clear.

A bitter divorce had been unfolding in my home this past year. The screams that came from my mother beyond my bedroom door along with sounds of objects being thrown up against the wall seemed comforting compared to my father's voice that was no longer heard. I don't know what was worse for me, the not knowing of what had happened on those loud frightful nights or being the eight year old little girl who still thought her father could do no wrong that no longer came to tuck her in at night.

I had been waiting, what seemed like "forever" for my Dad to come take me away. My mom and my older sister, who was 12 at the time, just didn't understand how much I wanted this. I needed him to take me away. I used to tell myself that "They were probably the reason he had left in the first place". He wanted to still be there, but my mother wouldn't let him. My sister always took her side. Not me! All I needed was my Dad! We understood each other! We accepted each other for who we were! We would have been inseparable if they hadn't screwed it up! I would have left too! Why can't they just accept him for who he is?
I used to wear Dad's old softball t-shirts to bed almost every night. This is a ritual that started as far back as I can remember, even before my Dad left. I would lie around Saturday mornings watching cartoons with my knees tucked up underneath my "oversized pajamas" with my arms wrapped around them. The only thing you could see was my head peering out through the hole. Mom would always have to holler for at least an hour for me to get off of the couch and get dressed.

Not today!

I was dressed in my best clothes, my teeth were brushed and I was eating breakfast before the cartoons even came on TV. My Dad was not going to have to wait for me. What if he decided to pick me early and I wasn't ready? I wasn't taking any chances! I even decided to clean my bedroom this morning to past the time. Any other morning, I would close my bedroom door and clean "just enough" not to get grounded. My bed would be somewhat made, but if you were to pull back my comforter you would find that the sheets were all bunched up underneath. My stuffed animals would hide all of the unevenness of the covers. Anything that happened to be on the floor got shoved under the bed. Dirty clothes would get placed in the most perfect way that if you were to come in and "inspect" from the doorway, they couldn't be seen.

Not today!

He might want to make sure that I have been listening to my mom while he has been away. Today I cleaned with my door open! I wanted to make sure that I could hear him if he came. My bed looked like I was living in the army barracks. I bet that if I would have measured the distance of the covers to the floor, it would have been exactly the same from the foot of the bed to the head. It was the best made bed ever. The stuffed animals were placed perfectly. The biggest stuffed animals, which included bears, dolls, lions and anything else that was massive to my
small sized body were placed against the wall on my bed. The medium and smaller ones were laid accordingly in front of them. These ranged from kittens, frogs, and even those cute fluffy ones that you couldn’t quite tell what they actually were. You know the ones that could pass for a cat, bear, mouse, or possibly even a combination of all 3. I made sure they were all looking straight forward. I must have rearranged them for at least an hour to get them just right. Everything that had been under my bed was now either thrown away or put in its place. For a moment, I crawled underneath and laid there reading what "part #" the bed frame was labeled to be. My dresser drawers were filled with folded clothes that were exactly where they were intended to be. He was going to be so proud.

By this time my mom and sister were up and around. When my mom would walk by my room, she would stop and silently stare at me with eyes of concern. I didn't understand. One day she is screaming at me to "stop being lazy and clean my room the right way" and today she is looking at me as if I am about to find out that my freaking cat has been run over by a car or something. I think she is just crazy. No wonder Dad had to go, she has lost her mind. Maybe if she wasn’t so negative about everything then bad things wouldn't happen. My sister has been making it a point to make a comment every time she walks by. "It's a miracle! Pigpen has decided to clean her sty". I swear that if I could have poked her eyes out without getting I trouble I would’ve done it. I bit my tongue and stared down at the floor and yelled at my sister to get ready! "Dad's coming to pick us up today, we can't make him wait!" Her response to this was “Sure he is. We'll see!” She never believed a word he said. He always did what he said he was going to do. Unless, of course something happened that would keep him from his promises.

When he gets here, me and him should just leave without her. We don’t need either of them anyways. Lunch time had rolled around and Mom asked what we were hungry for. I still don’t
understand why she ever bothered asking, she would just end up making whatever she felt like making! Today it was PBJ sandwiches. I was so anxious for my Dad to come that after each bite that I took, I would run to look out the window. Just in case!

After I was finished, I decided to wait for him on the front porch steps. This way, if he somehow forgot where we lived, he would see me waiting! I sat there on the cold concrete steps that had been shaded by the roof. I took my socks and shoes off and put my feet on the sun warmed sidewalk. An ant hill happened to be close by that gave me entertainment in between the cars passing. I watched them crawl over to me with curiosity and fear. They must have realized that I was harmless and actually enjoying them because they soon brought their family. They crawled on my feet and legs and I liked it. My new friends and I watched every car intensely that passed by my house just in case he got a ride from someone else. Each approaching car would give me excitement, until it would go by and my I would see that my father was not in it. Four had passed. I was still waiting…

The traffic had started to slow down and the sidewalk was becoming just as cold as the concrete steps. The ants were retreating back into their home.

My sister brought a plate of dinner out to me and said “Mom said you need to come in soon”. I took the plate and laid it beside me without saying a word. I didn’t have much of an appetite.

“He’s not coming you know!” she said. “Quit wasting your time.”

“Shut Up! I hate you!” She got up and walked inside after my response, which kind of surprised me because she always had to have the last word.

Two more hours and I was still waiting.

The street lights had come on and the few cars that would go by were almost impossible to see who was inside of them because of the dark. What if he couldn’t see me? I got up to turn the
porch light on. I could see my mother watching me from the window with that same pitiful look on her face that she had when I was cleaning my room that morning. Why is she staring at me like that? What is wrong with her?

Before I could figure out an answer, she was standing beside me on the porch. I didn’t even acknowledge her when she came out. She said that it was late and that I needed to come inside and get ready for bed. I told her No! “Dad will be here soon and if I go inside he won’t know I am here!”

She responded that she didn’t think my Dad was coming. After the two of us going back and forth arguing about me coming in, she bent over and picked me up. I fought her with everything I had. I grabbed the door frame trying to stop her from taking me inside but my little arms couldn’t stop both of us from going through.

I was crying so hard that I felt like I couldn’t breathe. Why is she doing this? I wanted to ask her but I couldn’t catch my breath. After she put me down, I ran into my room and slammed the door. My stuffed animals that had been so perfectly placed on my bed were being thrown all over my room as I sobbed. I did this until my body wouldn’t let me do it anymore. The exhaustion was taking over. I took off my clothes and put on my “oversized pajamas” from the night before. I crawled into my bed and buried my face in his shirt just trying to smell him.

I heard my bedroom door open but pretended to be asleep. I felt her climb in bed beside me. She stroked my bangs away from eyes and placed her cheek on mine. Her face was as salty and wet as mine was. She whispered I love you so much and I am sorry for your day! You could hear her voice crack while she spoke.

I felt a sense of calmness come over me as I drifted off to sleep and thought to myself, maybe Dad meant tomorrow…….
Contributors