METAPHOR

Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Journal
Metaphor is Weber State University’s undergraduate, interdisciplinary journal, in its thirty-third year of publication. The journal is staffed entirely by Weber State University students.

Metaphor accepts submissions in visual arts, poetry, fiction, academic literature, and performing arts from students of Weber State University, and selected pieces from national submissions to the National Undergraduate Literature Conference.

Publications in Metaphor are chosen through a blind submission process. The author, visual or performing artist of each piece is unknown until the piece is selected for publication.

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Acknowledgments

Like all good machines, the *Metaphor* is comprised of many small moving parts. If one gear gets stuck, jammed, cracked, or has any of a myriad of technical issues, the whole system suffers. I would like to thank everyone who helped us get this issue compiled, bound, and delivered.

*Drew Bingham*, our very patient Creative Director. I didn’t envy your part in this, but I am glad you were there to answer the call (and texts, e-mails, Facebook messages…)

*Brandon Petrizzo, Cindy Stokes*, and the staff in Printing and Art Services, for answering all our questions early enough for us to plan and get the journal in the hands of all our readers.

*Robin Scott, Kim Webb*, and the staff of the English Department, for helping advertise and directing students to our staff.

The Professors who helped promote and/or let us in their classrooms to talk about the journal. I would especially like to thank those in the Creative Writing Department for being some of our strongest advocates, especially *Dr. Herndon, Dr. Ramirez, Dr. Griffiths, Dr. Josephs, and Professor Stott* for always considering the importance of the *Metaphor* as a first publication for their students.

To the wonderful Senators in the WSUSA for their continued financial support, and for all the personal support from my leadership, committee members, and fellow Senators.

Our benevolent, fearless leader, *Jan Hamer*: you took a chance with me (and the *Metaphor* staff), and I am eternally grateful for the opportunity. Even when things seemed hopeless and lost, you were there to encourage me to look beyond the forest and get back on the adventure.

To all students who submitted a piece of their soul, thank you for having the courage to put your work out there.

And finally, a special shout out to the wonderful members of the *Metaphor* staff. To my Assistant Editor, *Emma C. Steuart*, thank you. You helped me shine, but also kept me on track (despite my many derailments). To the section editors, *Megan Olsen, Kelsy Thompson, and Carlee Nowling*, for stepping up when called upon. You women are amazing. To the staff itself for their enduring spirits, and for sharing their time from friends and family- I hope it was all worth it.
Why does the caged bird sing? Because it’s in a cage, and unless it learns how to say “get me out of here,” all it can do is sing. So why do we make art?

It is known that two people can look at the same thing and have two distinctly different views on its meaning. On the other hand, one artist can look at the same thing and have several distinctly different takes, and embrace the madness of every possibility. Creativity is a beauty, a bane, but most importantly, a benevolent curse.

For an artist, expression is that caged bird. It squawks, and if we respect it, we listen. We interpret how we feel and translate it into what our hands can make. We illustrate, write, and compose the most abstract of feelings into something real, and then we have to deal with its existence. Like Frankenstein’s creature, we have given life to lifelessness.

Making life and expressing life are not the same. There are many cages in which we can hide our creations. Because of pride or fear of rejection, we make it captive until we feel it is ready. Only we decide when that time comes, but in all reality, we are never ready but we still experience life. Art demands life, too. It needs to be expressed to the world, not just to an audience of its creator. To simply exist is by no means living. Open the cage and let it sing. Listen twice and feel the many different ways an experience can be understood.

I am glad to have had this opportunity to carry on the legacy of the Metaphor and to have served as the Editor-in-Chief, and like all great creators before me, let me say “it is alive.”

—Kyle Poppitz
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Poetry

Editor
Megan Olsen

Staff
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April Topham

This year we received many wonderful submissions. For the poetry staff this was an overwhelming blessing and a terrible curse. Poetry is one of the most challenging and subjective categories of the creative arts, because the use of it’s tools and devices can be shattered with the use of a word, or even a comma. Poetry is the foundation of prose, the meanings of songs, and even the punch line in your favorite commercial. It is everywhere we look. It consumes us on a subconscious level, yet when it grabs hold of us it consumes every ounce of our attention. In this moment we commune with something ethereal. This connection brings us into new experiences, revisited memories, or even a keener sense of perception. Poetry is also tedious. You must work within a small and structured space. There are many limitations to what you can say, which causes the poet to be meticulous with his or her choices. It is that gut feeling all poets get when they write down the perfect line or create the perfect metaphor. We commend all the poets who submitted and dedicate themselves to the craft. The selections of poetry published in this year’s journal were pieces that brought on all these experiences and more. Welcome to the poetry section, and happy reading.
Vikings

by Breeanna Huntsman

Where am I
Gran asks.
The thick black line
Is blurred between Sweden
And here,
Alzheimer’s has taken her
Away,
Back to Sweden
Within her own mind.

Vikings have taken her.
Strong
Brave men
Keep her safe.
Yet here
She still sits
With nurses
Pills
And questions.
The mystery
Of why she came
And who she left
Lost within.

I see her
Reflection
In my mirror.
Blue-eyed
Searching
For the flower
I wore
Around my neck
A stone petal
Missing,
The heirloom Faded
In time.
A flaming crown
Of bright candles
Flicker around my head.
A red sash
Of heart-stretched silk
Clings
To my waist.
Cooing
Like a child,
Gran takes
A ginger snap
From my tray.
The tradition
Of Santa Lucia
Firm in her grip.

Nielsen
A new name
She gave
My mother.
The first lost
As she crossed
The water.
She dropped it there
In a lock box
On the bottom
Of the ocean floor.
What it was
No one can tell.
Her Vikings
Never return.
Lying Shoes

by April Topham

With winter-softened feet we walked,
Shoeless and brave, on sun-hot
Sand, soles growing hard
And tough, our pain the dues we paid
For barefoot summers of clam shell drives

And mussel beds exposed by tides.
Invincible feet meant freedom
To roam unhindered, reckless
With impunity, opening our days
With sun and salt and wind.

I ran away and the world got cold
And hard. I wore shoes then,
They told me who I was. I trusted
Their stories, knowing somehow they lied.
But barefoot I was naked, no one.

I walked years and miles in those shoes
Hiding in their false invincibility,
Pretending freedom, always bound,
Trapped in my disguises, longing
For summer in the corners of my eyes.
Curious finally, I flew home,
A whim unplanned and sudden
And found me, waiting, barefoot
And unrepentant. I saw my future,
My past, illuminated in my mother.

Regrets lined her face, anger
Underlined her words. Strangled
By old shoes and the limits they enforced,
Her discontent, ripened into bitterness,
Searched for a target to blame.

Behind my smile I tried to breathe,
Bare feet leaning to the door.
I let out the breath I’d been holding
And the stranger that was me settled in
Evicting lies my shoes still tell.

I wear those shoes now, sometimes
Accepting the names they give me.
But even in winter, I dance barefoot
In the wind around my silent shoes,
Summer warming in my eyes.
Daughter of Whiskey Marriage

by Patrick Ramsay

One day the crying would stop. She would come to realize people were blind to the sad lines that had started living on her face. She would hear excuses without apologies from the same people who never stopped for a moment to listen. She would understand things no kid should grasp. She knew the brown glass bottle meant it was nap time for adults and she’d be making her own dinner. She grew up because she had to. She did not grow too heavy to be held, she felt too heavy to be held and no one cared to prove her wrong.
Ode to the Pillow Top Kings

by Patrick Ramsay

We built a world
within the walls of your apartment.
The bed was our castle,
and my god, we ruled the night.
Will you still call it my pillow,
The one that sleeps just to your right?
I wonder how long you'll let it linger,
my scent on those sheets;
how many times you will roll over
and reach for me asleep.
While I was trying to fit
the stars inside my pockets
to bring back home for you,
you let him fill my spot,
in the place for just us two.
You'll notice on the nightstand,
I've left a couple of constellations
and a half-drunk bottle of whiskey.
They're for tonight when you can't sleep
and you really start to miss me.
It's the end and if there's one thing I hope you learn:
you can't send smoke signal apologies
from a kingdom you let burn.
Lunchtime

by Megan Olsen

Half moon
teeth marks
from a
shaved crust.

Pincer fingers
holding
a ripened
blueberry.

She nibbles
alone and afraid.
Of what the others
have to say— in a
loud cafeteria of judgment.

Tears land on
honey
crusted lips.
Missing mom
and home.

Wanting the way
they used to play
at lunchtime.
High Dive

by Emma C. Miller

Sticky in Elkhart. Ice cream trucks couldn’t come fast enough. My sister and I went to the pool to harvest our tans, hoping the boys took notice.

Eleven months apart, near Irish twins. She was older. I was taller. I coveted her natural curls, but I had bigger eyes and the better boobs.

My sister headed for the high dive, plucking fear from her spandex wedgie. She cannonballed first, scoring high in style and speed.

Her eyes met mine, a silent cadence reeking of one-upmanship. Cold metal rungs seared the arches of my feet, climbing the ten foot death trap. My lungs fluttered. I opted for slender lines and little splash. Arms down. Feet together. Toes pointed.

I began my descent: one, two, double bounce, jump. The rebound of the board my fanfare. Everything else on pause.

The forceful entry flooded my nostrils, crowded my lungs, and stung my eyes. I bobbed to the surface. Four pairs of eyes directly on me.


I snatched up the suit strings, making their getaway in the ripples, refastened my modesty and headed to the snack-shack for nachos.
Snow Pony

by Emma C. Miller

Exploring the back woods of Grandpa’s ranch, the hum of cicadas settles in. I trek through dust of the German Dugway.


I look up, rewarded in the radiance of the sun. I breathe, flooding my lungs in Alp Lily, grateful for the reprieve. I negotiate the ebb and flow of jagged rock. Shallow breaths beg the edge for distance. Sweat trickles down my face, the salt sponging my lips, unable to exhale until reaching the bottom. It’s then I see her. The albino horse drinks from the mouth of Mink Creek.

I pause, giving her proper supplication. She drinks on.

Her white coat reflects her eyes. Shadows of another world. She nickers and nods before crossing the creek.

I nod in return, understanding only that there is something to be understood in the beauty of the snow pony. I contemplate the road before me. It should be enough. But it isn’t. I push through the heavy current, ignited by mud-flinging. I race to catch her, dodging clumps of clay. Heaving, I stop. She weaves through the trees, indulging me in her parade. She throws her head back and rears.

A running start for Midnight Mountain. Her white hair whips like a soldier waving her flag, and I swear, I can see her teeth.
My Strange Little Tankas

by Maddie White

Piano is one
Of those sounds, sweet when it plays.
Like juice with sugar,
Starlight dancing on your tongue,
The moon playing in your ears.
Fall leaves are for those
Who appreciate the crunch.
The sour taste of fall.
Pickles in a jar, lid tight.
Once released, the world renews.
They’re spinning petals.
Flowers, here today then gone,
Falling down as time falls down.
Circling like small, pretty hands,
Keeping time with their short lives.
Ultrasound

by Megan Olsen

Tender cloud
cradled in
her womb.
A mother’s
whooshing heartbeat
echoes through
the dark.

Static shapes
swim deep
inside her
quickened pulse.

The cloud churns
in the rippling darkness:

Morphing like a
nimbus’s edge,
a perfect profile.
A bulbous
fetal-forehead
forms.
Sloping gradually
then lifting,
as if the wind
has thrusted
the brim —

Molding
the cloud into
acute angles:
a nose, soft lips,
faint chin—

Shapeshifting more
with each lub dub
He shows
five fingers
waving and wiggling
Two legs
kicking open
wide.
Bed Heads

by Patrick Ramsay

Bare-bodied.
Warm on you,
warm on me.
Last night’s wine
still on our breath.
We woke before daylight.
November snow reaching
for the window sill.
Me reaching for you,
you reaching for me.
I begged the sun to hang
behind the mountains,
to stay low and lazy for a while;
so we could stay there,
low and lazy for a while.
Meaning

by Sam Bartholomew

Too often my search for meaning

discourages rather than fuels me.

I’m too focused on theme to enjoy novels

and too focused on purpose to enjoy life -

but for those rare moments when the world shrinks

and exists only in my arms or the walls of my home,

babbling, exploring, and grinning up at me.

Then I’m no longer searching,

either because I’m distracted or

because I am reminded.
I just miss you, that’s all

by Carter Lenox

I’ll remember that summer,
Every time I stood behind you with my arms wrapped around your waist.
I’d rest my lips on your cheek and you’d smile those little, secret smiles.
I didn’t have you home by curfew even once, you didn’t mind.

But each day I’d promise your father that you’d be home at midnight
And each night I was late.

He liked me anyway.

I’ll remember that autumn,

The days sitting at the end of the couch in your family room.

My legs would fall asleep because your head was resting on my lap
But I’d hold you for hours while we watched every season of Friends.
You’d run your fingers through my long hair, I’d bring you chai tea lattes
And help you take your pills.

You detested your pills.

I’ll remember that winter,

When the end of the couch turned to the edge of your hospital bed.
I’d stand beside you and squeeze your fragile hand just to maintain hope.
On good days, we’d speak in whispers about everything in the world
But most days you’d just sleep, then wake every hour or so and smile.
Those little, secret smiles.

I loved your secret smiles.

I’ll remember that spring,

When your lips went pale and your frail hand fell lifeless in my rough palms.
I didn’t move from your side because I didn’t know where to go

But you left me, you didn’t want to but you gave in and moved on

And I know I told you it was okay to let go but I lied.

I need you to stay here.

I hate being alone.

I’ll remember forever,

The times you’d comfort me and promise you’d never leave me behind.
But when night creeps in I fight this hole growing rampant inside me
And my weak sobbing turns to agonized screaming and begging God
That I won’t be alone like this forever, that I can just die.

And I know it’s not right.

I just miss you, that’s all.
Natural Mistake

by Sam Bartholomew

The most disorienting mistake

that people ever make

is brutishly resisting that

they are animals.

The second seems just as rational,

until it’s taken too far;

it’s that of insisting that

animals are all that people really are.
Expressions of fate fall
flat on a coarse black
and white pattern of
calculation. Ugly bricks are
layed carefully, too
beautifully to be defined as
a solution. She smiles
and the pattern
fails. Briefly pulling a spinning
mind into a reckless gyre of
euphoria. But the song keeps repeating-
Imperfectly Round

by Carlee Nowling

From knotted tree, insect mottled, early colored by Summer’s thirst.

Straight stem in salute, firmly attached from the black nodule where you were plucked.

Green transforms to golden not quite ready forcibly taken.

You didn’t offer your sweetness to the ground.

Something tasted you, anyway left a scar. The rough of wilderness

left you cell spotted, callused, where you once blossomed.

Equal in balance an ecosystem has no hierarchy it is we who place only the perfect

on supermarket selves
人生観 (Philosophy)

by Valerie L. Jacobson

福と平和
平和と福
愛と平和
福と愛

English Translation:

Philosophy

Happiness and Peace
Peace and Happiness
Love and Peace
Happiness and Love
Patience

by Amanda Lowder

One night I told thee
What I desired most.
It seemed only a faraway Elysium.
Many days had passed,
Until I only looked at the barren ground,
Away from that bestowed vision.
The answer came,
As a storm groped and clawed towards me.
I cried unto thee for sanctuary,
Underestimating my own strength.
Then a still small voice whispered,
“This is what you wanted.”
The tears stopped and the sunrise came.
That dream I once had,
Lighting the sky as noonday sun,
Became reality as promised.
I held on tight,
Through storm and wind and fear.
I saw my prayer unfold like
The rose waking to summer’s embrace,
And I remembered how patience rewards us.
Everyday

by Brittany Andreasen

How does pain feel?
abrasive cats tongue on my
(warm) rash covered skin, like mean-well love
that actually pricks for more than
just a moment, like exhaustion
behind never getting to feel love,
feel close, feel like
more like knowing that you have
to repeat everything else again
tomorrow.

and God, I’m always so tired.

Deep beneath that effervescent thrum
of a heartbeat, I can hear my list of
shit to do beneath my eyelids when I’m
trying to sleep at night. Wake up with
gritty guilt between my eyelashes and
it’s still suddenly morning and
it’s sad because I know I should keep
on – truckin’ – on, but all I can think is
that I have to come back and begin
again tomorrow.

and God I’m always so tired.

Allergenic, comforting, cat fur in my eyeballs,
stop/start purring like my heart beat,
I’m aching for a single forehead kiss
from my mother. For just a moment
pretend exhaustion doesn’t give me
a daily beating
because if I don’t get out of bed this
morning, the battle will be lost.

Pain feels like the lost battle.
Souvenir

by Maddisen Tingey

Isn’t it funny how one item purchased
In a tourist shop in a foreign land
While on a holiday
Becomes the merciless gym coach, commanding your memories
To race.

The mask leaning up against my picture frame
With its bells and glitter and deep, velvet red
Floral patterns and golden edges
And almond-shaped slits where the wearer’s eyes are free to gaze
Concealing the rest of her,
A curious mystery.

The mask pulls me
Back to Venice, the city with the aquatic roads.
Night Show

by Cassidy Johnson

A sheet of indigo spreads across the sky as the remaining smudges of twilight fade.

The clouds part, like curtains, revealing the Night’s opening act.

A sweet humming of violins and cellos seeps into the clear night air.

The Stars awaken from their daytime sleep and pirouette across the night sky like ballerinas performing on stage.

The Moon rises into view.

Her all-embracing splendor blankets her audience of sleeping dreamers tucked away in their beds; in the noiseless town below.

The town sleeps during the Night’s starry show. Shadows swallow the sleeping valley below.
Music

Editor
Emma C. Steuart

Staff
Randi Clawson
Nick Graham
Amy Kees
Lunden A. Millerberg
David F. Owens III
Lori Taylor

Music is…?
Music is organic. Music is language. Music is rhythm and tone. Music is fulfillment. Music is descriptive. Music is prescriptive. Music is influential. Music is the beauty of form, harmony and emotional expression. Music is the event that takes place between noise and silence.

In reality, music does not have any one concrete meaning. Music has been discovered in every known culture, both past and present. Confucius stated, “Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without.” Perhaps instead of asking what, we are better able to understand music when we ask why.

Think of a song you truly love-- the song that gets played over and over on your playlist. Do you remember where you were when you first heard it or when you fell in love with it? Does hearing that song trigger the memory of what your life was like at that very moment? You didn’t fall in love with the song because it was just “pretty.” You were vulnerable to how the music made you feel or how the lyrics resonated with what was going on in your life.

Composers experience this same vulnerability when they write. One cannot create music if he does not know himself. To compose music is to give a piece of oneself.

The Metaphor staff is grateful to the composers who chose to share a piece of themselves with us. They have allowed us to put their submissions online. Please read their summaries and visit www.weber.edu/metaphor for free downloads of their songs.
Terminal Anxiety

by J. Taylor Arnold

Terminal Anxiety is the first movement in a three-movement piece called “Scherzoso Strings in D Minor.”

This was written after I finished my last theory class on tonal music theory. I wanted to see if I could take everything I learned for the last three semesters and emulate the sounds of the classical era, in particular, Beethoven.

The piece utilizes a minor second frequently, like Beethoven’s 5th symphony. However, it’s the thick texture that is most reminiscent of Beethoven. Terminal Anxiety sounds like a fugue, but it is not a true fugue. It’s more of a round, with each instrument repeating the opening theme and then expanding on it. At two points in the piece, each voice is playing separate and unique melodies. In theory, one could listen to it four times and hear a different melody every time.

I am currently studying composition under the direction of Dr. Thomas Root, and plan to pursue the study of composition at graduate school.

Africana Groove

by Andrew Stapley

I am an Instrumental Music Education major here at Weber, specializing in the French horn. I started writing Africana Groove in spring semester 2014. At the time I was taking a world music class and playing with the WSU Percussion Ensemble. In these classes I learned about African musical culture and a little bit about how to play African hand drums. In writing this piece, I implemented some traditional rhythms and sounds, as well as the feeling of community that is a big part of traditional African music performance.
Sometimes we wish we were like heroes in stories. But we’re all heroes in our own story.

Music has always been a huge part of my life. After taking piano lessons for two years I decided I didn’t like other people telling me what to play so I quit lessons and taught myself to play the songs I liked. I’ve played the piano for thirteen years, but only recently got involved in writing my own music after taking a songwriting class at Weber State University. I like to write songs about characters going through different problems--depression, bad relationships, loneliness, etc.-- and then showing them moving forward despite those problems. I want my songs to uplift and give people hope to face their own difficulties with a positive attitude.

What I’ve Seen

Written by Kyle Poppitz and Megan Olsen
Performed by Jonali

Statement:

Like many people who become callous through unpleasant circumstances, she doesn’t like to be seen as weak or fragile. She’s hardened, but there are delicate parts that need to be felt, too. Wanting to open up to people so they can hear her story, she is asking anyone who will listen to look into her eyes to see what’s buried deeper. It is important to look confident, especially when feeling vulnerable at the same time.

About the Artists

“What I’ve seen” is a collaboration between three distinctly unique individuals. Kyle Poppitz is a fiction writer, Megan Olsen is a poet, and Jonali is a singer/song writer. For Megan, this was an opportunity to broadened her talents, which helped her appreciation for music as a whole. For Kyle, this was an experiment in trying something new. Jonali is a local talent that performs with her band, Barbaloot Suitz.
Nonfiction

Editor
Carlee Nowling

Staff
Micah Shay Bayles
Randi Clawson
Lunden A. Millerberg
Eric B. Murdock
Emma C. Steuart
April Topham

Nonfiction is a branch of literature that deals not in fanciful worlds created in a writer’s mind, or a unique character created out of ether, but instead shows the reader how to look at everyday reality and everyday people in a new and powerful way. Whether reading academic papers, scientific articles, autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, essays, magazine articles, or even your textbook, Nonfiction opens our eyes to the world around us. Nonfiction can inform, persuade, compel, and move us. Nonfiction can ignite the sleeping mind and can start social movements and revolutions. It can ask powerful questions, and can take us on philosophical and spiritual journeys. Nonfiction can give us a deep insight into the lives and minds of others and can give us a more meaningful and personal view of history.

It is for these reasons and many others that Nonfiction has grown in popularity and is an ever-expanding genre of literature.

This year Metaphor received a variety of submissions showcasing the depth and diversity that Nonfiction writings can have. It was truly difficult to decide which pieces to showcase. The Nonfiction staff thanks all the authors of these pieces who were willing to share their memories, their opinions, their research and their time with us. It was truly an honor.
I'm not happy, and it's my own fault. This is what I get for never knowing when to just shut up. Here I am, all alone, and all I can see in any direction are rocks, and sage, and cactus, and the occasional scraggly pine tree. I really mean that – nothing else. It's like being on the moon. The sun is white hot in an impossibly blue sky, making everything seem a little blurred and surreal. The sage – miles and miles of it – looks dusted in powder, and at the horizon it seems to turn blue so I can't tell where it ends and sky begins. The few trees are twisted and bent and dusty like the sage. And everywhere are the rocks; great lumps all pale and grey, and long flat black slabs dotted with cactus. The sweat is starting to drip off my nose and burn my eyes; I taste salt and the tinny flavor of panic. I'm afraid to look back. I think they're watching me. I should start walking, but I don't know where to go. I expected some sort of sign, something to guide me, not this alien landscape, or the heat. I feel faint from the heat, and fear. Maybe I'm dehydrated. Maybe I'll die here. I tell myself to stop being silly; I've only been standing here for ten minutes.

It all started with Mark making wild extravagant claims about my super powers as he introduced me to David: “This is April. She can find anything.”

“Really? Where are my bullets?” The way his eyes lit up I knew it wasn’t bullets he wanted me to find. It was a test. I answered anyway, my first mistake.

“In your garage, in the back, behind a blue tub.”

And so they were. It doesn’t always work but when it does it’s a bit freaky.

The next thing I knew, a map of the western states was on my lap and I was looking for something worth getting. I made an x on the map – x is for treasure right? – and my fate was sealed. I made more x’s on more and more detailed maps, zooming in on my “something interesting.” David had dollar signs in his eyes, thinking Spanish gold or Indian silver, and that just made me nervous. But I knew there was something there so I stuck with it.
On a bright warm August morning, we loaded camping gear, shovels, the GPS with my x entered, and thirteen kids into David’s suburban and off we went. Five hours later, five long hours of driving on bumpy dusty dirt roads, five very long hours of driving in a tiny suburban with thirteen kids telling jokes, we arrived at my x. David pulled over to the side of the road, looked at the GPS and said, “There it is. Go get it.” He handed me a shovel and my backpack and went to set up camp with the kids.

Now I’m looking “there” and can feel my eyes getting big. My heart is sinking, and I want to be anywhere but here. Who knew that one itty bitty little x could take up so much space. I goes on forever.

There’s nothing else to do but resign myself to the fear of failure, to the heat and the blazing desert sun, and to the vastness of this space. My shoulders sag as I sigh. I mutter “Okay, let’s go get it.” I see, now that I’m giving in to the experience, the harsh beauty of this place. Absorbing the stillness, I hear a song in the distant wind. As my panic subsides, I reason that the worst that can happen, besides heat stroke, is that we have a fun campout and go home empty handed. Besides, I put the x here because I know there is something here. Now all I have to do is find it.

I start walking, slowly at first, hesitant and unsure, then faster as something seems to pull me in one direction. I hear a shout from David, something about finally moving. The sound carries well here but I ignore him. I walk in a straight line, climbing over rocks instead of going around, noticing in a detached way that I’m accumulating cactus needles on the sides of my shoes and the hem of my jeans. After what seems like an eternity, but is probably only half an hour, I stop. I seem to have arrived. As I look around, I see nothing different. There is an expectant hush but all I can do is stand there in bewilderment. “Okay, I’m here,” I whisper, not wanting to disturb the silence, “Now what?” But no one answers. I wander in small circles, looking for something, not wanting to leave, curiosity holding me. I see a rock and pick it up distractedly – I collect rocks and this one is pretty, and feels soft as I hold it. Then it occurs to me that it isn’t just pretty, it’s beautiful, and there’s something odd about it. I’ve collected rocks for many years, and studied geology, and this rock isn’t “right.” It has the feel of obsidian, but is a milky translucent, filled with rainbows and flashes of fire.

Noticing that there’s a big piece sticking out of the ground, I sit down, pull my rock pick out of my backpack and start trying to dig the piece
out. Chips fly everywhere and they sparkle like diamonds in the sun. As I dig, I start seeing beautiful red pieces and I get excited thinking that I’ve found rubies until I see the blood running off my hand. The chips are razor sharp. Then I start to feel a sharp tingling feeling as I sit there too, and for a second I wonder if maybe I’ve disturbed some ancient alien spacecraft – I’ve been listening to David’s wild speculations for five hours and it’s warped my normally sensible brain. I think it was Einstein though who said that the simplest explanation is usually correct, and the simplest explanation is that, in my haste to dig up the rock, I sat down on a cactus.

After many hours of exploring, two years of fun campouts, and many intimate moments with the ever-present cactus, we have a huge collection of pieces, but we still don’t know what it is made of. It’s been intensively tested at the National Synchrotron Light Source at Brookhaven Labs in New York, where things can be measured that can’t be measured anywhere else in the world. It’s also been around the world to a network of dealers and gemologists and private labs. They call it the impossible rock. It’s technically some sort of quartz, but distorted, the crystals warped by intense heat and pressure. Polished, it has stars and moons, and flashes of a coppery and blue fire. All the experts say, on first look, “Are you sure this is quartz? It can’t be.” Then they say there’s no way it could have come from the place it did – there’s nowhere in the U. S. that has the geology to support it. But here it is, my impossible rock.

However it turns out, the experience changed me. I still don’t know how or why I was led to this rock. I actually did find it by putting an x on a map, and that blows my mind, especially when I consider that, judging by the number of days I spent walking and not finding another rock like it, this could be the only one, and what shows of it is only the size of my dining room. I’ve developed a respect for my “super power” and use it more confidently and much more privately. There is so much about this world that I can’t even comprehend, and I’ve been privileged to have a tiny glimpse into something extraordinary. They say you can’t see the face of God and live, and I’m still alive, but I feel like I’ve seen at least a part of God – maybe his knee – and as I go about my fairly normal and sometimes mundane life, I touch the rock I carry with me, and I am suddenly aware of extraordinary possibilities, of the fact that I am a part of an immense universe, and that like my little rock, maybe I am also unique and beautiful and totally impossible.
Mitten Made Memories

by Haille Van Patten

I remember being able to point out my hometown on my palm.

I remember growing up in Michigan. The winters were cold and white, while the summers were humid. As a child, I didn’t think much about the impact these drastic weather conditions had on my appearance. My hair was always wild with a dash of frizz. Of course, in my true nature I did not care about what people thought of me. In the winter, my dad would haul our purple sled out from the garage and accompany my sister and I to the local park; pulling us the entire way. Michigan always had the best snow, and lots of it. Winters did not disappoint the children, who preferred to spend their days on the hillside sledding, as opposed to in school practicing long division.

I remember music and it’s everlasting impact on my upbringing. Being the spawn of a drummer and pianist made me the perfect candidate for a unique form of daycare. My mother never hired a nanny, thus forcing me to spend my mornings on a college campus with her. Everywhere I went I heard music.

I remember the old boom box nestled in the corner of my bedroom – it’s radio station always set to AM 910.

I remember holding conversations with students much older than I. My five-year-old self, eager to make new friends among those listed on my mother’s attendance sheet.

I remember random faces telling my mother I was advanced for my age.
I remember not seeing my dad for more than a few hours every day. Working early in the mornings to late afternoons. My sister and I began growing closer with our mother.

I remember only having one car, and waking up at three o’clock in the morning to drive my dad to work. In order to make the car ride more bearable, my mother would sometimes drive thru Dunkin Donuts on our way home. My childhood was never full of many sweets, so this excited my sister and I.

I remember raising money on the side of the road – selling lemon-ade to my neighbors at twenty-five cents a Dixie cup. Summers were sometimes unbearably hot, making quality business for my sister and I. Of course, in our part of town, my parents demanded to supervise our stand. *It’s for your own safety*, they’d always tell me.

I remember that some of the inhabitants of Grand Rapids were not the nicest of people. They would look at my family in the way one stares at a crossword puzzle when the answers don’t immediately come to mind. We were the odd family on the block – the white family - the only family that didn’t have ferocious dogs to chase after the mailman. All we had to offer was a rundown minivan and the sound of classical music slipping through our windows.

I remember learning to play the piano and quickly giving it up, much to my mother’s dismay.

I remember getting the flu for the first time. My mom and dad carried me into the emergency room, my fever pushing 104. That was the day I ruined my favorite pair of sandals with vomit. When the nurse came in to draw my blood, she turned to me and told me *it won’t be all that bad*, right before she blew my vein – a scar I would always keep.

I remember all of the people, scurrying like mice in different directions. My mother frantically guided me to the car. We raced home to beat the storm. That was my first and only encounter with a tornado. I learned to deal with the storms in the mitten state. Even though the thunder rolled louder than a tympani drum in the last few seconds of a symphony piece, I found comfort in the noise.
I remember waiting up for the noise of my mom’s car pulling into the driveway. Knowing she was home and safe always helped me sleep.

I remember not understanding why we had to leave. Walking across the street to my friend’s house to tell her I would be moving away. My parents had an interesting way of breaking the news to us. One day, in the middle of everything, we learned about how the house was up for sale. That white sign that tortured my eyes as it sat in our front yard. For days I prayed that no one would be interested, that we wouldn’t be forced to leave. As many times later to come, my prayers were not answered. Two weeks later we were packed and leaving. Saying good-bye to my home was difficult, especially at only ten years old.

I remember the rock at the end of the driveway that would trip be every time I attempted to roller blade.

I remember the brown fence that separated our house from our neighbor’s.

I remember the Kilimanjaro color our house was painted.

I remember 1416 Thomas Street.
Inches Matter: Hollywood’s Leading Role in Disordered Eating

by Simeon Sharp

Appearing in a semi-lit room casting an ill-omened shadow, a makeshift noose constructed of a yellow cloth tape-measure symbolically hangs. Regardless of the sullen phrase printed on the bottom in bold black lettering, “Nearly 25% of those who diet will develop partial or full syndrome eating disorders,” the undertaking to comprehend the poster’s message sans phrase remains effortless. However, the simple statement is in fact a dramatic addition to the over-all message. The audience is given a single statistical percentage in order to further drive the message home. In essence, the numerical value adds a face to a very troubling disease. Statistically speaking, one out of every four people suffers from this debilitating and life-threatening disorder. They are our sisters, our mothers; our sons and fathers.

The poster was created for an eating-disorder awareness campaign by the Fashion Institute of Technology Counseling Center. Their message is simple yet challenging: spread public awareness of eating disorders and promote healthy lifestyles via thought-provoking imagery. Eating disorders are not a fad diet or experimentation on losing weight; rather, they are serious multifaceted psychological disorders from which it can take many years to recover. According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services:

A person with anorexia nervosa, often called anorexia, has an intense fear of gaining weight. Someone with anorexia thinks about food a lot and limits the food she or he eats, even though she or he is too thin. Anorexia is more than just a problem with food. It’s a way of using food or starving oneself to feel more in control of life and to ease tension, anger, and anxiety. Most people with anorexia are female (Services, 2014).

Although the symptoms, conditions, and even treatment and recovery of eating disorder subjects all appear to remain relatively similar,
there is one thing that doctors and psychologists cannot determine: a clear cause. Eating disorders are a product of a complicated interaction of biological, psychological, and social aspects. Simply put, there are far too many variables and factors that play a role. Nevertheless, main fears regarding weight and body shape play a part in all eating disorders. The actual source seems to result from many dynamics comprising of cultural and family pressures as well as personality disorders. With all that said, one cannot deny the significant amount of influential material hemorrhaging from American media outlets, namely, Hollywood. When over eighty percent of Americans watch roughly three hours of television daily, refuting the media’s part in perpetuating image disorders becomes virtually impossible (Statistics, 2013).

As earlier noted, there is no single cause of body dissatisfaction or disordered eating. However, abundant research exists indicating that Hollywood does indeed contribute a large amount to serious image conditions. Take for example a few statistics and facts examined by Rader Programs, an eating disorder treatment program:

• 73% of teenage girls who abuse diet pills and 79% of teenage girls who self-purge frequently read women’s fitness and health magazines.
• According to a study from the University of Central Florida, nearly 50% of girls aged three to six were already concerned about their weight.
• Four out of five women in the U.S. are unhappy with their appearance.
• 25% of Playboy centerfold models meet the criteria to be considered anorexic.
• The average U.S. model weighs 117 lbs. and is 5’11 while the average U.S. woman weighs 140 lbs. and is 5’4.
• A People magazine survey showed that 80% of female respondents felt that women in movies and television programs made them feel insecure about their bodies.
• The rate of eating disorders in Fiji surged following the introduction of Western television programming (Programs, 2014)

American media has a tendency to present women and men far skinnier than the average person as beautiful, fit, and ordinary. The same can be said regarding animation, video games, and excessive amount of comics. Presently, Hollywood outrageously appears to believe that borderline anorexic is the zenith of beauty. The result is that the audiences, and especially men, will not watch anything with an action
role lest the protagonist meets those aforementioned ideals. Actual realism holds absolutely zero credibility when noticing the innumerable things commonly presented in movies/television shows that have no bearing in reality.

Hollywood is no stranger to those who believe that their very careers depend upon their compliance to an absolutely harmful lifestyle. Female beauty standards determined by the public have been considerably altered over the past hundred years. Although an individual’s worth has undeniably been placed on their appearance, the preferred standard continues to evolve.

Society witnessed a shift around the beginning of the twentieth century from a plump, voluptuous body to a rather slim and thin frame. Ironically, voluptuousness and sensuality was highly regarded in women up until the 1800’s. For example, no better sign of good health and socio-standing than for a female to carry a little extra weight on her body. According to author Mike Featherstone in his Consumer Culture and Postmodernism, “consumer culture began to shape the female body image through cosmetics, fashion, Hollywood, and advertisements” (Featherstone). Marilyn Monroe became the ideal women in the 1950’s, however, today she would most likely be considered overweight or bulky. At a time when the industry had great control of how the stars of the day were displayed, and anorexia was decades away from being classified as a mental disorder, information about celebrities and eating disorders were almost non-existent. In fact, it was only through the death of Karen Carpenter in 1983 that anorexia became widely talked about. Anorexia awareness and information increased significantly after Carpenter’s death, as did the enthusiasm of other celebrities to talk about the unrelenting grasp the disease had on them. For example, Sally Field began her three year affair with the disease at twenty, compelled, she said because “everybody then was Twiggy, except me. I felt immensely unattractive” (Rosen). Jane Fonda has recently confessed to suffering from decades of bulimia. She once stated that she would throw-up twenty times in a single day (Tanenbaum). As mentioned earlier, males are not immune either. Billy Bob Thornton claims that the sixty pounds he shed in the 1990’s was the result of disordered eating. “Frankly,” Thornton admits, “For a while there, I think I had a little mental problem.” “I got anorexic. Of course, I denied it to my girlfriend and everyone else who said I had an eating disorder” (Effron).
Sadly, the pressure to be skinny, youthful, and beautiful has existed in Hollywood, and therefore, the media for far too long. As a result, celebrity-based body-image judgments have inevitably oozed into society. The encouragement by the media and fashion industries alike on the propagation of eating disorders via unhealthy standards of fashion, beauty, and health cannot and should not be denied. Although complete blame cannot be levied onto a highly complex, albeit superficial industry built almost solely on a foundation of image worship, society cannot afford to stand idly by and continue to ignore the skeleton in the room. It is time that Hollywood takes responsibility and at least acknowledges the unhealthy dysfunction and attitude it is perpetuating. The media must begin aggressively combating the increasing body discontent in both men and women. Encouragement is needed for an informed public to strongly counter-act the effects of the media and Hollywood to improve body satisfaction and self-esteem. The Fashion Institute of Technology Counseling Center’s original intent when designing their creative tape-measure noose was to bring awareness to a dark and desperate illness. Shocking and macabre as the poster may be, it is a stark and much needed reminder of how deadly eating disorders truly are.

Work Cited


How did the conversation start? In an English class. We were loud. Mike, sure God did not exist, I, equally sure He did.

During break we debated God’s existence. We tried to drag our professor into the discussion. Professor James put up both hands, “I’m not getting into this. There’s no end to it.”

As students filed back in the room from break, we tabled the conversation.

After class Mike and I bantered as we walked in the cool night air toward the bronze statue of our college’s founder. We tried to offer proof to our differing beliefs. Under the white lamp light, we conceded a stalemate until another day.

I waved, “God loves you Mike!”
“Your God is an ass.” He replied.
“See you next Monday.”
“See ya.”

Mike and I met in a library study room. A sign on the wall screamed, “THIS AREA IS NOT SOUND PROOF. Please be respectful of others in the library.” I made a mental note, but never thought we’re too loud until the librarian entered, “We’ve had complaints about the noise in here. Can you keep it down?” Zealous to convince one another we failed to realize we were disturbing others.
Mike’s Story Part One

I grew up in a religious family, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We were so devout my mother drove an hour each way to church. Twice a year we would drive two hours from Crookston, Minnesota to Fargo, North Dakota for Stake Conference. As I got older, I went through the stages of the Mormon Priesthood and eventually went through the Mormon Temple.

Jennifer’s Story Part One

I didn’t grow up in a religious home. Jesus’ name rolled off my Dad’s lips as a curse word, never a prayer. We did not attend Sunday morning nor evening service. I’d never heard of mid-week Bible study and Vacation Bible School played no part in our summer. The stories of the Bible confused me. I thought Sodom and Gomorrah were people and that the disciples really drank blood dripping from the cross.

Mike Part Two

Christians claim miracles as proof of God; it doesn’t take much to Google a story of a person stricken with cancer and their miraculous healing after prayer. Most Christians call this a miracle. We know scientifically that cancer can go into remission naturally. Are there any documented cases of God healing an amputee? Down syndrome? Surely an all-loving, all-powerful God who can take away cancer, or heal the flu, can cause a limb to grow back. I would accept a limb growing back as a supernatural occurrence. Why hasn’t God done this to show his power?
Jennifer Part Two

One night, in a drunken rage, my father vowed to kill everyone in our house. I tried to bar his way to the room where he kept his loaded .45, but a scrawny twelve-year-old girl proved no match for a grown man. He grabbed me and twisted my arm behind my back. Pain shot from my wrist to my shoulder. His liquor tainted breath assaulted my senses, “I’m going to kill you too.” With murder on his mind, he tossed me into the wall. My mother came screaming from the kitchen, “Get them out of here!” I grabbed two of my brothers and ran. The first neighbor turned us away. Leaving the two boys with another neighbor, I hurried back for the third. I found my five-year-old brother standing in my parents’ doorway. He watched as my father leveled his .45 to my mother’s forehead and pulled the trigger. It didn’t go off. I grabbed my brother and fled. She should be dead. God was in that room. Science can argue it was adrenalin, endorphins, or my mind playing tricks on me, but I know it was God.

Mike Part Three

Most Christians are familiar with Romans 10:9 “because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” I’ve always seen this verse as problematic. Arrested in 1977, David Berkowitz, better known as The Son of Sam, murdered six people and wounded seven others. Berkowitz is serving six consecutive life sentences. In 1987 Berkowitz claimed he converted to Christianity, did as Romans 10:9 says, and secured his place in heaven.

In 2012, in a small village in rural Pakistan, two parents poured acid on their fifteen year old daughter for “eyeing a boy.” The girl died from
her injuries. Likely she never confessed Jesus is Lord and believed that God raised him from the dead. The verse in Romans declares she is in hell burning for eternity.

This is not a God of love or a God of justice. If this truly is the way God operates, then he is immoral. How fair is it to torture a child in hell for eternity?

When I ask Christians about this, many respond, “It’s not my place to judge.” They don’t know if the Muslim girl is in hell or not. Romans 10:9 is clear, anyone who dies a Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu or any other non-Jesus professing religion is forced to endure an eternity of torment. Some Christians will say that God makes exceptions for those who have never heard the Gospel. If this is true, what is the point of telling anyone?

**Jennifer Part Three**

Convinced God existed I went looking for Him. Hoping to find the deity powerful enough to put my life back together, I visited a local church. Dressed in blue jeans torn at the knee, a t-shirt and a ratty flannel for a jacket, I walked into the sanctuary. My stark contrast to the shiny shoes, expensive suits, flowery dresses and sparkling jewels proved too much to go unnoticed. People stared. At first I didn’t care, but after enough whispers, pointing, and shaking of heads I decided. If God’s people reflected Him, I didn’t want anything to do with them.

People tried to lead me to Christ. I refused. I didn’t want to become a hypocrite and liar. Christians say they love Jesus while worshiping Santa and the Easter Bunny. Why bother trying to live a godly life? With no rules and no requirements, I did exactly what I wanted. I shackled up with a guy, got pregnant, had an abortion. If hell existed, I deserved to go there. I paid for my ticket twice over. Anger clouded my life, forced my decisions, and tainted my relationships, but it kept me safe. Rage
forced down the hurt and helped me survive. I lived hardened on the outside while lost and hurting on the inside.

Mike Part Four

Walking out of a club downtown, I’m often asked the question, “Have you been saved?” My question is, “What do I need to be saved from?” “Your sin.” “Who defines what sin is?” Here’s the classic response, “God does.”

So, Christians are saying that God has to save me from himself? This is their claim, God sacrificed himself to himself to save the world from himself.

This conversation highlights why I am not a Christian. Each time I have this conversation I leave confused. I don’t understand how this God can be considered all-loving and all-powerful.

When I raise my objections to most Christians, they inevitably, after being defeated by every logical argument, tell me a story of how they found Jesus. Jesus got them off drugs. Jesus made them a better person. This doesn’t prove God or prove that Jesus is God. All this proves is that belief in God can make one a better person. I don’t dispute that. I have no objection that a false belief can make one a better person. As a kid, I hoped and believed in Santa Clause. I looked forward to him bringing me presents. This filled me with great joy. A false belief can be beneficial, but ultimately it’s still a false belief.

If somehow my spirit does survive after I die, and somehow I end up in the face of the Almighty Creator, I will ask, “Does the Bible represent your character?” and if He says, “Yes.” I will reply, “Put me as far away from you as possible. I want nothing to do with you.” According to the Hebrew Bible, God commits genocide, sends bears to eat children
who make fun of a prophet for being bald, orders women to marry their rapist, and condones owning slaves. If this is the God of the universe, He is not someone I find worthy of worship.

Jennifer Part Four

Living in Japan with my husband and two children I decided to take the children and return to America. My husband is good to me. He pays his bills, takes care of his kids, works hard, has integrity, and I like him, but I intended to leave him. Lonely and desperate I prayed, “If you’re real God, change my husband’s job so he can be home more.” God heard my prayers. He made changes. Not the changes I wanted.

I accepted an invitation from my husband’s co-worker to visit her church. I enjoyed Sunday School, which involved Bible study and history lessons. I skipped the actual service, that was too much singing and carrying on for me.

One Sunday morning, a little British lady came to sit by me. I knew what she wanted. She wanted to call me a sinner, I confronted her, “You think I’m a heathen.”

She shook her head, “I want you to have what I have.”

I looked deep into her eyes for traces of deceit. I saw none. Peace. Joy. Happiness. No lies. No hypocrisy. I waited for her to judge me, she didn’t. I sat in my torn jeans and messy t-shirt she looked at me with love. What happened next surprised me. As tears streamed down my face, I poured out my heart and confessed every sin I could remember. I asked Jesus to save me. A transformation I could not achieve on my own occurred. The hateful, miserable girl trapped inside of me was set free.

My husband began to attend church and the pastor asked him, “Why did you start coming to church?”

He replied, “My wife is so nice now, I had to come and see what
you were doing here.”

I love God and the changes He’s made in me. The transformation in my life and the ability to overcome and forgive prove to me God is real. I reconciled with my dad, which seemed impossible. In Matthew 19:26, Jesus said, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” I believe it. God healed my soul.

Our debate continues, but Mike and I agree on a few things. First, science is incapable of answering the question, is there a God. Second, Professor James is right. There is no end to the debate. Third, each of us is acting on faith, Mike that there is no God. Me, that there is. Our conclusion, each person must decide for themselves.
Laundry

by April Topham

I remember hanging diapers in the winter for my mother, those days where the damp cold goes through any amount of layers and into your bones. I was too short to comfortably reach the clothes line, and I couldn’t wear mittens and manipulate the clothespins, those old fashioned push-on ones, not the nice pinchy ones. My fingers got so cold I had trouble even holding onto the pins. I knew that later in the evening I’d be tearing them off the line and stacking them, frozen stiff as boards, to bring in for the night. They would be limp and heavy and still wet, with that faintly musty smell, in the morning when I would be hanging them out before school. This could go on for days. Tears would freeze on my cheeks, and my lips would be stiff and hard to move, and for brief moments I would hate my baby sister for needing diapers, and my mother for being too sick to do the laundry herself. And I made myself promises that when I grew up I would never do laundry in the winter.

Like many of my eight year old promises, it wasn’t kept.

As a new mother, with a husband in school and always broke, I found myself washing diapers in the bathtub and hanging them on the clothes line. In the winter. The dryness in Utah made it possible to get it done in one day instead of the week required in the humid New York climate, but it was still not fun, though I gained an insight into my mother and her life that I never had when I was eight. Contrarily, I missed stacking the frozen stiff diapers to bring inside. The thin fabric, translucent in its wetness, with the corners folded in frozen winks had always fascinated me. I was disappointed when it didn’t work in Utah.
Later, when I had more kids and no clothesline, and had acquired a washing machine of sorts, I would hang endless piles of diapers and baby clothes all over the house, where they would hang for days, the musty smell I hated ripening and seeping into everything. It was an old wringer washer; it would wash in the tub, then I would need to put everything through the wringer. This effectively removed buttons and bent snaps, but when used carefully, could eliminate the necessity of ironing. It also encouraged manual dexterity, with the threat of broken fingers.

When I finally got a real washer and a dryer, I thought I’d gone to heaven; the clothes came out fresh and warm, and I folded them in neat stacks that seemed to reach the ceiling. I would pull them out and bury my face in the pile, breathing in the smell of dryer sheets and warmed fabric. I wondered why anyone would prefer the stiffness, even when dry, and the smell of laundry dried outside. I loved the chugging of the washer as it worked and the purr of the dryer was beautiful. I was so happy not living in a house haunted by empty wet clothes strung everywhere. I got over it though, and laundry took over my life again in a different way – I had six kids by then, and made myself a promise that one day I would never do laundry. Ever.

Like so many of my promises, that one hasn’t been kept either.

But I’ve made a compromise. As my kids got older, I ruthlessly made them do their own laundry. And I learned from them.

My daughters sorted and ironed and hung carefully, treating their laundry with an almost religious care. They insisted on certain laundry soap and fabric softeners, and I learned to prefer the softness and smell of their clothes. The steam from the iron would fill the house with
the warm scents of the dryer sheets that tried to mimic laundry hung
outside in the sun. I didn’t feel the slightest bit of guilt for enjoying such
an unnatural thing. It was never musty in my house and that is what
mattered.

My sons taught me even more. They threw their clothes on the floor,
clean or dirty, and then dug through, sniffing to find the clean enough
ones. I really like the clean enough idea. It saves time. When they finally
did the washing, they would stuff the washer – no sorting necessary
– and wash it all at once. When I questioned the lack of whiteness in
their underwear, they shrugged; nobody saw it so they didn’t care. For
a person convinced that there was a Right Way (whether that was my
way or my mother’s way I wasn’t sure), that idea took time to assimilate,
but my laziness in doing laundry won.

Now laundry in my house is symbolic of the compromise I’ve made
with my life. There is no Right Way, there is just the Way That Works
For Now.

My laundry, finally, is a job I enjoy. I use the “dump it all in together”
system, because it’s simple, and it makes laundry an adventure. I have
gotten a lot of clothes that were the wrong colors, so I dye them. The
dye I’ve used runs a lot, so every time I take my clothes out of the dryer,
something is a different color. I get new clothes every week. If I don’t
like it, I just throw a bunch of stuff in the washer with a quart of bleach
and start over. I hang things in my trees in the summer sometimes to
get that sunny smell, but never ever in the winter.

I’ve finally gotten over hating laundry, and it doesn’t rule my life.
My promises are kept well enough and I’m satisfied.
I like to ask “why do we make art”, knowing fully that the question is incomplete, and the meaning behind the question is one that potentially evokes humor, but mostly conveys a sense of incompleteness.

Visual art and design helps connect the artist to others. We do this with the grace of god-like powers by simplifying the complex (and vice versa). We share our catharsis by making our statements known. It can tell a story, a moment, or an emotion, but it can also serve to feed the soul of both the artist and the audience. Art is essential to our individual and collective development because it relies on the abstract application of all our senses and meshes them to depict movement, rhythm, and feelings that are either intended or accidental. Because the medium can transcend language, it has the potential to broaden all perspectives. We put ourselves into every piece and ask it how it defines us.
Fools Gold

by Ashley Moyes
Enlightenment

by Valerie L. Jacobson
Roaches in Religion

by Joshua Petersen
Neon Dreams

by Ashley Moyes
Last Shot

by Joshua Petersen
Winding Path of Life

by Valerie L. Jacobson
What's a designer?

by Nam TranDang
Becoming the Forest

by Alyse Wall
The Great Salt Lake

by Bryce Johns
A Little Party Never Hurt Nobody

by Hailey Field
Faceless

by Drew K. Bingham
Self Portrait

by Hailey Field
Live well, laugh often, love much

by Nam TranDang
Lost Voyage

by Alyse Wall
Good Night

by Nam TranDang
I'm the Sweet Deal

by Melanie Mather
Untitled

by Hailey Field
Nhit Monkey

by Joshua Petersen
Voyage

by Tianna Nielsen
Cover Art Submissions

Every year, the cover of the *Metaphor* is designed by Weber students. Once we have the entries, the *Metaphor* staff makes its top selections. The three leading covers are then presented to the entirety of Weber State where they are voted on by the students.

We are proud of the number of students who submit every year and we feel it is important to recognize their efforts. A special thanks to the following students for participating in this year’s cover:

*Chelsea Maki (2), Drew K. Bingham*

*Garrison Conklin, Hailey Field (2), Jamie Campbell, Joshua Petersen*

*Kayleigh Jolley (2), Kelsi Quigley (2), Kelsie Fullmer*

*Kimberly Snow, Lichelle Jenkins, Mark Zigweid, Michelle Nelson (2)*

*Melanie Mather, Nic Bott, Shalynn Moser, Sydney Lovig, Thomas Garner*

*Tess Woodward (3)*
American novelist Mark Twain said, “It’s no wonder that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction has to make sense.” For many writers, fiction has to do more than just make sense. Fiction is a means of making sense of a senseless world. Fiction is the only medium in which every crisis and conflict has a resolution, in which characters learn from their mistakes and bad guys get what’s coming to them.

Not all fiction follows that pattern, but as fiction writers we can choose how to approach these situations. We have the power to craft meaning into the most confusing of narratives, something that we can only hope for in the real world. This year, *Metaphor* takes on timeless conflicts through beautifully flawed characters and compelling narratives. Not every story has a resolution, but all of them seek to give meaning to—and make sense of—being human.
To My Dearest: I’m Still Here

by Chelsea Maki

It was their anniversary. Like every morning when he woke, the first thing he saw was the crystal wind chime that hung on a hook by their window. It was a gift from his wife years ago. As the sun splashed onto the crystals, it left smudges of violet and cyan on the carpet. The rainbows danced around the floor and that’s how he knew that his beloved was there with him. The swirl of colors, he thought, were his wife’s footsteps now. Like a sloppy cursive, they told him that she was there and that she was not there. He wondered absently which he felt to be more true.

He knew that he’d miss her more today than any other day, even though missing her felt normal like a tick in his chest. He hoped that would fill each breath with the ghost of her name on this day. He shuffled into their kitchen and filled the sink with warm water and soap. The clink of wet dishes reminded him of her voice: high and wide and terribly nice. The sweet perfume of soap slurped at his elbows. It sounded like she was singing to him from the bottom of the sink. He hummed along with the sound.

He lifted his gaze out the window. The glass was freckled with water spots. It must have rained in the night. When his wife died, it had been raining. She had been driving in the dark and lost control of her car. He held her hand in the hospital and she told him about the rainbows on the oil slicks. But you can’t see rainbows in the dark, he said, and she smiled. Headlights shine like the sun sometimes, she replied. She had told him that she’d be back soon and closed her eyes.

The dish that was in his hand fell into the water with a slippery thunk. Before the impending sob could ravage his throat, he pulled a bottle of glass cleaner and a soft cloth from the cabinet above his head. He spritzed the solution onto the window and watched the sunlight warp the chemical streaks with rainbows. It comforted him to see the colors dance around his hand. He felt like she was there, writing him love letters. He wished that he knew how to reply.
Eight seconds on the clock. I climb over the railing and mount the bronco. It is a tough way to make a living, all right, but I have always known I wanted to be a cowboy. I remember peeking through the steel gate right before my first real ride. I was building confidence off of the crowd’s energy when I first laid eyes on her. I had never seen anything quite so beautiful. She was in a white sundress and her hair was in dark waves down her back. I had the best time of my life that night, winning my first riding competition and winning her heart afterward. We were inseparable after that.

The commentator begins to announce my ride as the final one of the night. San Antonio, Texas is one of the largest rodeo events in the United States. That means big money for the champion of each event. The flank strap on the bronc is pulled tight by someone behind me. I grip the rigging with one hand and place my feet into the correct position. They must remain over the break of the bronc’s shoulders until its front feet touch the ground on the first jump out of the chute. If I slip, I will be disqualified, and I cannot be disqualified. Not again. The gate flies open and the loud cheering of the crowd becomes yelling.

The dirt ground morphs into glossy white tile. It is littered with broken dishes, along with the faith she once had in me. The stack of unpaid bills on the table had made us both crazy with rage and disappointment. The bronc suddenly drops its shoulder, and I prepare myself for a jump or spin in that direction. Then, it immediately does the exact opposite. Seven seconds. I almost lose my grip, but regain control. If I am going to win, I have to stay focused. Bareback riding is the most physically demanding event in the rodeo. The bronco is the fastest and most powerful, and the riders in this event often suffer more abuse, endure the most injuries, and receive the most long term damage than those in any other event. I have worked hard to prepare my body for this event. My muscles are stretched to the limit, and my joints are pulled and pounded upon mercilessly. Six seconds. My free hand swings
rapidly like a lariat in pursuit of cattle. Each time the bronco bucks, I pull my knees up and place my spurs on its shoulders. As it descents, I straighten my legs and wait in anticipation of the next one.

The flashes of the rusted gates and the cheering crowd turns into our kitchen. I can see her, pressing against the countertop to support the weight of her newly rounded stomach. She is clutching on to the final foreclosure notice the bank had sent us that morning. *Five seconds.* My grip tightens. To earn the money-winning score, I must rely on more than just my strength. I am being judged on the technique in which my toes remain turned out while I am spurring. I must appear to be in control. *Four seconds.* The cheers of the crowd go up as the seconds on the clock go down, though it is the silence of the timer that screams the loudest. It is loud enough to echo my own thoughts, and just like that, I am home again.

The week after I had found out about the first pregnancy, the one she won’t talk about, I was thrown off the bronco. I flew through the air, and my spine collided with the steel gate. During my recovery, she lost the baby. The doctor told us there was nothing we could have done, and that these things just happen. She went through so much stress with my accident, all the while, working three jobs. I am convinced the stress is what caused the early contractions. It must have been. Weeks of silence followed that injury. I know the strength of bareback broncos is exceptional, and challenging them can be costly. We fight about this often. She needs me here, and so does the child she is carrying now. *Three seconds.* I am so close that I can taste the victory. It is sweet, almost like the ice cream we shared the night of our wedding. We had stayed up all night watching re-runs on the television and talking about our future together. There was so much hope in her eyes. I would do anything to see that look again. *Two seconds.* The rope comes out, ready to lasso the bronco. I am already smiling; it is the kind of smile that makes your cheeks sore. *One second.*

I made the whole eight seconds, and my scoring was near perfection. I won. Before I know it, I am off the bronc and I am running, past the cheering crowd, past the congratulations and the pats on the back. I keep running until I see her. She is standing there, just like she was the first night we met, with her dark hair in waves down her back. Only this time, her hand is lightly placed around her projected stomach, and her ring wrapped firmly around her finger. I watch as the hope returns in her eyes, lighting up her face. Eight seconds. I did it for her.
Peter had finally made up his mind; he was going to Los Angeles. Making that decision had been one of the hardest choices he’d made in his short, but promising career. His girlfriend had been offered a job with a prominent newspaper in LA. The idea of quitting his job and moving across the country had been a tough pill for him to swallow. He didn’t see himself as the kind of man who would quit his job and uproot his life just to follow a girl. Then again, she wasn’t just any girl. Six months earlier Camille had started looking for a new job, she’d sent her resume to newspapers across the county, and when she’d received the job offer in LA, she had jumped at the chance to go. The more excited she became over the idea, the more Peter realized she would be going with or without him.

She had tried to lure him with the promise of a mild winter and lots of time spent with her on the beach; the northeast could be so frigid. But as of yesterday she’d been unsuccessful. He remembered seeing the hurt in her eyes as she had pleaded with him, slowly wrapping her fingers around his. He felt torn. He hated the idea of a long distance relationship – they never worked out – and there was no way he was quitting his job without one waiting for him in LA. He’d sent out resumes of his own, hoping something would come up before she left.

That very morning his luck had changed. Staring back at him was the email he’d been waiting for. The prominent name of the law firm had caught his eye, and then the words seemed to leap off the page and burn themselves into his brain. The job offer was exactly what he needed; he was moving to LA with Camille.

As he drove silently in the dark, he savored the idea of the two of
them sipping champagne and watching the sun set over the ocean. Granted he didn’t like the fact that they would be leaving everything familiar behind, but this just might be what he needed if he wanted to make his mark on the world. Peter was practically busting at the seams wanting to tell her.

The job offer had been a real case of luck. It wasn’t even one of the companies he’d applied to. One of the partners at the law firm of Atwood and Burns, said he was a fellow college alumnus, proving the old adage that it truly was ‘who you knew.’ The offer was for an entry level attorney, but he knew it wouldn’t take long to quickly move up the ladder at the growing law firm. Since Camille didn’t know that he’d changed his mind about going, he had planned a special evening and was going to tell her tonight; actually, ‘ask her,’ would have been the correct thing to say.

The evening had turned cool, and dark shadows swirled around Peter’s sedan as he pulled onto the main street heading toward downtown. A shiver ran down Peter’s spine. He was preoccupied with the way his life had changed course so suddenly. He didn’t like to travel and despised moving.

*Almost there.* Peter thought. He was meeting Camille for a movie tonight and he was already late. An image of Camille three years ago appeared in his head; it was when he’d first met her. He had seen her at a local pub and by the end of the night he’d convinced her to have coffee with him the next day. They’d hit it off and the years had raced by in a blur.

He often wondered how he’d gotten to be so lucky in life.

People said that Peter had carried on his father’s good looks, but that was where the resemblance ended. He’d once angrily shouted at his mother that he was nothing like his cheating father. He was a teenager at the time and knew all about the affair his father had had. It was a childish reaction but the hurt and anger was only stoked by his own doubts and fears that maybe one day something would click and he would be like his father after all. His old doubts crept back into his head even now and he heard dark thoughts that he hadn’t allowed himself to think in a long while. They taunted him, *So much like your dad. They say the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. He was a real ladies’ man.* He glanced quickly in the rearview mirror and ran a strong hand through his wavy hair.

“*Oh Camille.*” He sighed. He needed to hurry, she would be
wondering where he was by now.

Pushing the doubts aside, Peter thought about their future and smiled at the idea of starting a family with her. He thought of the years that lay ahead: kids in school, soccer practice, vacations, the typical suburban activities.

Peter chuckled as he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small black box for one more look. He pressed the little gold button on the front and the lid popped open to reveal a lovely antique wedding ring. She’d be pleased, it had been in his family for generations, and she was a sucker for sentiment. From the moment he’d met her he knew that the ring would one day belong to her.

Bright lights flashed to his left and he caught a glimpse of the movie theater marquee, he jerked his head up, too late to see the light change. Barely a split second left to react as the driver in the massive truck coming from the other direction blasted through the intersection, Peter instinctively reached up to shield his face but the action was pointless. His foot frantically searched for the brake pedal as the truck slammed into the driver’s side, throwing Peter’s car off the pavement a few feet as it continued to push his car through the intersection. The scream of metal on metal was deafening and shards of glass flew around in a small storm threatening to cut anything in its path. If anyone hadn’t been looking at the accident with horror, they might have noticed the tiny flicker of gold that flashed silently out of Peter’s hand, through the car window and across the dark night sky. An antique ring longing to be worn landed with a faint jingle. And just like that, it was over. The bright light that was Peter’s future was suddenly switched off.

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She had just arrived at the historic downtown theater with a few minutes to spare. A few years ago during a job interview she had been asked to describe herself, and said that without a doubt, Camille Gram, was punctual. She twirled her car keys through slim fingers and wondered how much longer he’d be. Peter had called earlier that day and seemed to be in an exceptionally good mood when he had asked her what she’d like to do that evening, her choice. Since the office where she worked was located downtown it hadn’t taken long to mentally scroll through the list of possibilities. She knew Peter would probably like to go for dinner and drinks in the Hotel Parisio’s posh restaurant,
but since it was her choice, she’d opted for a late movie and a slice of pie, that was more her style. A new movie was showing tonight and Peter knew how much she liked a good horror show.

Peter had said he’d meet her in front of the theater and had quickly hung up, but not before she heard him say, “Love you babe!” It sent a thrill through her stomach every time he said it; she could mentally see his eyes twinkling and that brilliant smile of his. The two of them were good together. Peter was tall, athletic, knew how to dress, and was the first boyfriend who had taken her career seriously. He was the man with all the answers, whether it was cars, finance, politics, or the law, there wasn’t anything that he didn’t know.

Peter told her she was sharp, he said she saw everything, even the things people tried to hide. He joked that if he had all the answers then she had all the right questions; it was what made her such a great journalist. Tonight was nearing on their three year anniversary and the thought brought a slow smile that replaced the worry on he face. A glimmer of hope sparked in her mind and she dared to wonder if tonight he would propose. They had both dreaded the idea of a long distance relationship and it had become a tense issue that neither wanted to revisit. She quickly checked herself in the reflection of the theater’s glass double doors. She had on her usual business uniform of black pants and a black sweater. She would have liked to have been dressed in something that would have flattered her more, but she hadn’t had time to change.

Wanting to be ready, she bought their tickets to the movie *Doomsday*. With drinks and popcorn in hand she went to find two seats. She didn’t want anything to ruin this evening. The lights dimmed and she wondered again where he was. She was finding it hard not to get impatient; it wasn’t how she wanted to remember the night. The previews were over; there were a handful of movies that looked gruesome and helped to stir up the excited crowd.

There was a loud crash and everyone jumped, some snickered at the earsplitting effects. A high-speed car chase ensued between a shadowy terrorist and the FBI. Shots rang out, loudly and in deafening surround, a tire exploded and a cop car flipped several times in the air and crashed upside down with its tires still spinning.

*Pete shouldn’t be this late.*

Her palms started to sweat and the loud sound effects were putting her on edge. With each crash and explosion she grew more and
more uneasy.

_Something’s not right. Peter should be here._

She quickly checked her phone for a message, but found nothing. Muttering a few quick apologies she grabbed her purse from the seat next to her and made her way down the aisle. She heard a few comments but paid no attention, she couldn’t get outside fast enough. As she pushed through the doors into the hallway she focused on the bright green exit sign at the end. It was her beacon leading her back to the real world. She was no longer walking, she was running; bursting through the doors she found herself on the side street that faced the intersection directly next to the theater. The scene that assaulted her was the most surreal thing she had ever witnessed in her life. For a brief moment of horror she actually wondered if she was still inside watching the movie. From where she stood she could see a black sedan crushed sideways around a pole and a large truck buried up to its windshield into the driver’s side of what looked like Peter’s car. The last thing she remembered was screaming Peter’s name.

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Camille wondered why people always gave bad news by saying the strangest things? Things like, “I’m sorry, he didn’t make it,” it could be so confusing. What did they mean when they said he didn’t make it? She wondered why people didn’t just tell it like it was. “I’m sorry, Peter is dead.” That would have left out all confusion and gotten right to the heart of the matter. Peter was dead.

The rain had been drizzling off and on all morning long. How appropriate the rain, it was as if the heavens too were mourning a lost son. She sat in the front row between Peter’s mother and her own; her mother tightly held her hand and she could feel her warm fingers intertwined with her own. The minister gently spoke of things in heaven and of a life cut too short. According to the minister, Peter wanted everyone in attendance to honor him by finding their own purposes in life, to find what made them happy, and to be brave and strong for Peter.

_Funny_, she silently glared. _I must have missed the conversation you had with Peter earlier, how do you have any idea what he would want us to do?_ At least anger was a different emotion than the constant numbness she’d been feeling the last few days. As her eyes slowly made their way around the informal circle of family and friends she
was unable to focus on anyone in particular, and she marveled at how well the shock had gotten her through the last few days.

She remembered people using pleasant words when they told her of his death. It was their way of easing her into the grief that lay ahead. Instead of jumping into a frozen pool they were helping her slowly get in, helping her test the waters, one toe at a time.

“He must not have seen the light change.” In went a toe.

“The paramedics tried everything they could.” The icy water slid up to her ankle.

“He didn’t make it.” Her legs were freezing cold, water rising up to her waist, legs all but numb.

“The funeral will be in a couple of days.” The icy water raced from the waist right up to her shoulders.

“It’s a closed casket. You don’t want to remember him this way” By now her body was so cold and numb the last part didn’t seem to bother her as much as it should.

“You’re young, you’ll find someone else.” She’s under water, ears muffled to all the sounds outside, the icy fingers of shock stinging her face, burning her eyes, the pressure from the water pressing in all around her, suffocating every inch of her. Her mind whispered to her, it said “Take a breath, just one deep breath, it’s going to burn like hell and you just might not come out of it, you just might go under forever.”

That was what shock had been like, at least for her, although she couldn’t compare her experience to anyone else’s; she didn’t want to or need to. Back at the funeral for a brief moment she could see things clearly, and she had to admit that it was quite efficient, that icy cold black magic. But then her mind clouded over and she could no longer think rationally. She sat there only seeing the funeral from her own misery. All she knew was that Peter was dead, and she wished she were dead too.

A week had passed since the funeral and she had started a new routine; get dressed and sit in front of the TV and stare. Her work had told her to take off as much time as she needed and she had agreed to stay with her parents in her old room until she felt like going back to their place. She knew she needed to move on, snap out of it, let go of her old life and embrace the new one, but how?

She moved stiffly from the couch and made her way to the hall closet. Stupid cold weather, I should be somewhere warm and sunny. She vaguely remembered the job offer in LA. It seemed like ages ago,
but in reality it had been less than a month. The paper had called and she had to tell them about Peter’s death. The paper said that they would hold the job for another month and that was all they could do, after that they would need to fill the position.

The first night back in their apartment felt more like a test than comfort. She tried to keep her thoughts busy with small mindless tasks. She tidied up the small place, made out a short grocery list, and got all of her papers and clothes ready for work. It was too quiet so she turned on some music for background noise and made herself a drink.

She sat at the small kitchen table, but, try as she might, she couldn’t get herself to move. And then it started. The scene that she knew was inevitable crept over her. She had been avoiding it all day long, but if she didn’t allow this to happen now, it would happen sometime, and wasn’t it just better to get it over with, to just surrender and give in?

The feelings of loss, despair and hopelessness covered her like a heavy blanket. The weight was too much to bear. She slowly let her head fall forward and placed her cheek on the cool tabletop. A muffled sob broke free and the tears flowed, unhindered by the fact that her mother or father might hear and come to offer their support. She was alone.

She thought of Peter’s sweet face, what their future should have been, the job waiting for her in LA, the decision that needed to be made. Should she stay or should she go? She had questions, but where was Peter with his quick answers?

She had to get out, she had to walk. It wasn’t long before she found herself downtown, back in front of the theater. That terrible night washed over her in jolts and sharp images. She knew that if she stayed and gave up the job in LA she would be faced with a lifetime of pitying looks. How long would it take before they forgot? How long before she could forget? She didn’t want to carry around the pain forever. What if she ran into Peter’s mother? What about all the places they had gone together; all those familiar places that spoke of the times they’d been a couple, loving each other and laughing, and living. These places would continue to whisper to her, *Can you do it? Do you have the strength for this?*

She shuffled her foot and noticed a glimmer of light; she stopped and saw a pretty gold ring. Picking it up she slipped it into her pocket and slowly made her way home.
The Diary

by Erin Jewkes

SATURDAY: Jami. I can hardly stand to think the words, let alone write them down in permanent ink. Jami is gone. Aunt Clare found her this morning, dead in her bed. I don’t know how I’m going to live without her.

Dead in her bed. Just dead in her bed.

SUNDAY: They found an empty pill bottle under her bed. So that’s it, then. Suicide. What was going on at that stupid performing arts school? She never told me. This never would have happened if she had stayed at Belmont High with me, with our friends. Where I could see her every day. Why wouldn’t she tell me?

I tried to get her to come out with us on Friday night. She wouldn’t, and I could hear in her voice that something was wrong. She said it was just a fight with Aunt Clare, and I believed her. Why did I believe her?

WEDNESDAY: The stupid funeral was today. Everyone always says how beautiful the dead person is, and how they almost look like they were still alive, only sleeping or something. She didn’t look alive. She looked pale and pasty and dead. It was the first time in as long as I can remember that she wasn’t singing.

Poor Aunt Clare had everyone over to the house after. Mom said she tried to talk her out of it, but she wouldn’t listen.

When no one was looking I sneaked upstairs to the bathroom and pulled her diary out from where it was taped under the sink. I know I should have told Aunt Clare about it, but instead I brought it home. I just needed a little piece of her with me for a while. Only now I can’t
make myself open it. It’s sitting next to me on the bed right now. But I can’t even touch it.

THURSDAY: This morning when I went to the closet to get dressed I saw the sweater she lent me on New Year’s Eve. I was stupid and didn’t even bring a jacket to the party. I thought it would mess up the “little black dress” look. She told me I was an idiot before we even left the house. But she still let me wear her sweater later when I got cold. I could never remember to return it. Guess it doesn’t matter now. But it made me think of her, and suddenly I missed her so bad I couldn’t stand it, so I grabbed her diary and started reading. That was three hours ago. And I still miss her so bad.

FRIDAY: I’m almost halfway through the diary already.
She talked about the disaster of a double date we went on last year, when those two artsy guys from her school took us ice skating. She never mentioned to them that we had both taken lessons for years, and these guys, well…I said they were artsy, right? We ended up skating circles while they sat on a bench with hot chocolates all night. Wusses.
She talked about last summer when I broke my wrist and couldn’t do anything fun, so she sat at my house for three months reading old Nancy Drew books with me, like we used to when we were little.
She said she hated my new haircut.
I had to stop reading, because if I read the whole thing, then it will be over. I’ll just think about this stuff for a while.

SUNDAY: I couldn’t stand it, I had to keep reading. I probably should have started at the end, to see if she said anything about why she did this. It’s not like she left a note or anything. But I wanted to remember her for a while, before I read about when everything went wrong. What went wrong?
I’m trying to pace myself, so I can make the diary last as long as possible. We’ll see how long I can hold out.
Mom went to see Aunt Clare today. She said Clare was crying and crying and couldn’t stop. It was all I could do to keep myself from calling her up to tell her about the diary right then. Not yet. Soon, just not yet.

MONDAY: I went back to school today for the first time since it happened. It was weird and terrible. Everyone kept looking at me with
these puppy dog eyes, and whenever someone spoke to me they touched my arm. They all knew her, before she changed schools, and nobody – not a single person – mentioned her all day. Funny, that just made me think about her more.

TUESDAY: The diary has started mentioning a guy named Rhett. Not mentioning, more like talking about non-stop. I was her best friend and she never even said the name Rhett to me, not when she talked about her new friends, or when she told me who was in her classes, or when we went through last year’s yearbook to rank all the cutest guys. But the diary says they went on dates. And kissed. And talked on the phone every night. There’s a rose petal pressed in between two of the pages. I never saw any roses in her room.

WEDNESDAY: I don’t think I like this guy, Rhett. She keeps gushing about him all over the pages, but he seems kind of…creepy. She thought it was cute that he was jealous, but I think it’s possessive. She says how sweet it was that he drove home behind her “just to make sure she gets there safe.” Sounds weird to me. The last couple pages mentioned that he’s trying to get her to have sex with him, but she’s not sure. I wonder if she ever did. I thought she would have told me about it if she’d done it.

THURSDAY: I can’t keep myself from reading now. It drives me crazy that I have to go to school all day, instead of staying here with the diary. I’m getting close to the end now, and I don’t know if I can stand to finish. It’ll be like losing her all over again. But also, it will mean that I might find out why she did this. I have to know, but I don’t want to.

I can tell by the dates at the top of the pages that what I’m reading is several months after she met Rhett. It’s so strange, she doesn’t mention him anymore, but I can tell he’s still there, like he’s lurking in the background of everything she writes. The entries have become melancholy, and I can tell that something happened, but she doesn’t say what. She doesn’t write anymore about how much she loves that stupid school, or wanting to sing on Broadway, or even fighting with her mom. It’s like she’s writing all these words, but not really saying anything at all.
FRIDAY: I can’t read anymore. I’m on the second-to-last page of curly-cue writing and heart-dotted “i’s,” and I can’t make myself turn the page. The last thing I read was labeled “Wednesday.” Just two days before she did it. It’s strange. We’ve been best friends since birth. We’re blood related, and heart related, and I can hear the pain in her writing now. But I have no idea why, and she never gave me any clue. Every day on the phone with her, every day we talked. We saw each other several times a week. I should have seen what was wrong, should have heard it in her tone and the way her words deflated on the last syllable. But I didn’t. And that’s on me.

SATURDAY:
Rhett.
I swear on her grave, before the end of today, he will wish I’d never read that last page.
One of us will be seeing Jami before the sun rises.
The wind was blowing at increasingly high speeds, seeming to
cut the girls cheeks and whip her dark hair into her eyes with every
gust. She tipped her head towards the ground, pulling her scarf over
her face in an effort to block the chill. Leaves swirled around her feet
in brilliant hues of orange, tossed throughout the air by unseen waves.
She grasped the edge of the bench, one hand on either side of her,
and she clung to it as if it were a life raft in the middle of a tempest.
Everything around the girl was in a flurry of motion; branches were
swaying, the wind blowing, and clouds gathering above her, even the
ground seemed to tip beneath her. She felt as though the only steady
thing in her life was the simple wrought iron bench she rested on, so
she clung to it for dear life.

Slowly, she opened her eyes, not even realizing that she had shut
them. Minutes seemed to be crawling by slower than usual. Even though
it took every ounce of determination she had, she released her hold
on the bench and reached into the pocket of her thick coat, pulling out
an unopened letter. Breathing became foreign as her numb fingers
fumbled to pry open the unwanted envelope. The diamond on her left
hand caught in the sparse sunlight as she pulled the letter out, throwing
rainbows out in each direction. After a shaky breath she finally unfolded
the thin piece of paper and began to read.

The words on the page read exactly as she had always dreamed
of, although it was more a nightmare than a dream, and she knew that
she couldn't pinch herself and wake up. “Missing in Action” read clearly
three lines from the top. A single tear stained her cheek as her world,
that before had seemed to be teetering on the edge of chaos, had now
completely crumbled around her feet.
She smoked two packs a day, not that it helped. All her smoking did was stain her fingers a sickly yellow and give her teeth a wooden complexion.

Bianca put her cigarette out in the crystal tray near her bathroom sink. In the ashes she saw her smudged reflection: a tar smeared mess buried under the embers of the last loosie in her pack. With a heavy exhale, Bianca pushed the remaining smoke out of her lungs.

She dropped her robe on the ceramic tile floor and stepped on the scale. The numbers calibrated before her, dropping first from ninety-three to ninety-one, finally settling on eighty-nine pounds.

“How many ounces,” she wondered.

Her reflection in the mirror said it all: she was a blob. She was 5’4” and an ungodly mess from head to toe. It had to be all that hair. Despite having shaved her arms, legs, pubes and pits, it was her long golden hair that was weighting her down. She thought it could have been her heavy, heaving breasts that anchored her down. Could she get them reduced from a B-cup to an A-cup?

There were four pounds on her that absolutely had to go but she didn’t know from where. Her hands caressed the sharp edges of her body. She loved the tingle of her fingertips across her ribs and the feeling she got when she stroked her palm above her hips, but when her hand crept up her midriff, she felt the bump. When her eyes made contact with the gelatinous mass that was her stomach, she saw it for what it was: a pot-bellied pit. Her navel protruded out like a stem on the gourd that was her guts.

“I don’t need you,” she said.

Her fingers crept in her mouth and she gnawed. How much more could she bite them? Every nibble was one more bit of her she didn’t
have to heft around. Her fingers were tough, chipped and worn. She had picked off each cuticle, savoring the sting of fresh skin peeling just below the first knuckle. Bloodied red crescents nested above the scrapped nails she so desperately needed short.

Bianca felt the knot in her belly clench. It was time to start the day. She used to wake up and go for a morning jog but the exercise made her toned. While she admitted it made her look good, it also made her eat more, and that meant she was getting more chunk on her already husky frame. Exercise was a paradox, but when she found out muscle was heavier than fat, that settled it for her: no more jogging, no more Pilates.

As Bianca shambled to the table to pour her morning cup of zero-calorie juice she had spiked with water, her craving returned. Another morning cigarette would edge her appetite. After all, that was the only reason she started smoking. Her fidgeting hands fumbled around in her purse as she searched through the clumps of wet tissues. Her hand grazed past a rubber grip and plastic orange bottles filled with her breakfast. She reached it: her menthol smokes and lighter.

She flicked the lighter. Her lips caressed the filter, tongue tasting the bitterness of the cigarette. Another flick. A flash and then a smoldering trail of smoke wafted off. Light crackling of the burning tobacco unknotted the fist in her stomach as she took in her breakfast puff. Her shoulders rolled back with each slow drag.

Calm.

The plastic bottles piled on the counter as she emptied the top contents of her purse. Each childproof cap was busted at the notches so she didn’t have to fight for her pills. A handful of vitamins and other supplements consisting of fat burners, appetite suppressants and headache relief were popped in her mouth. The pharmaceutical bolus washed down in her gullet with a single gulp. She smacked her lips. The mineral aftertaste lingered. She wanted another cigarette.

Bianca swiped her phone. Four unread messages from the other girls at the club. Each of them told her to skip work. “Eat something, bitch” Chastity wrote. “Girl, you skinny.”

“I saw your ‘lunch’. We need to talk. Call me.” Bethanie wrote. Bethanie attached a picture of Crystal Light and cotton balls. Bianca had read something online models did to maintain their perfect physiques. All she had to do was dip a few cotton balls in the drink and she’d be fine for a few hours.
Bianca thought she could trust Bethanie. Bethanie probably already blabbed to the other dancers. Chastity wanted her gone and this so-called “eating disorder” would be reason enough to bench her for a while. Who was Chastity to say she had a disorder? Chastity snorted coke off various body parts of men. That bitch had a bloody nose more than once on stage, but she never got benched.

“At least what I put in my body goes in my mouth,” Bianca said, rubbing the tip of her nose.

Her phone rattled in her palm. The club owner was calling her.

With a right swipe on her touch screen, Bianca answered in her fading wisp of a voice. “Hey.”

“Baby,” he started, “baby, you got the girls concerned. And the men aren’t tipping. Girl, you got a problem.”

Chastity. That whore. The drug fueled bitch.

“I don’t have a problem.”

“What’s the matter with you and food?”

Bianca froze.

“We found your stash. It ain’t healthy, baby. You ain’t healthy. You got to get help. You got to take control of this.”

He spoke more and more, saying something about there not being room on the stage if she didn’t clean up her act. Bianca didn’t have to get clean. Chastity was the one with the problem. She was the only one skiing to work on fresh powder every night. What the Hell did he mean when he said “there wasn’t room on the stage”? 

“I’m trying, ok?”

“Bianca, give it a month. You’ll be better for it.”

Her knuckles whitened. “There’s plenty of room for me. I’m not as fat as they all say I am.” Bianca paused. “Why, I lost half a pound this week alone.”

The line went silent. She could hear him breathing. Fingers tapped on the other line. Murmers in the back of his office filtered though the phone. He wasn’t alone. Those skanks were trying to get rid of her. That’s what those private meetings in the Champagne room were all about.

“Please, just go eat something.”

Bastard.

“You don’t give a good god damn about anyone, do you?”

Bianca thumbed the screen, killing the call. She pitched the phone at the wall, cracking it down the middle. She stomped down repeatedly
on mobile, cursing out the names of her boss and the other girls. All of them bitches, whores, and skanks.

The pill bottles hit the wall next like little medicinal grenades. Bianca looked at her reflection in the microwave. They were all right. She lost it. The skin under her chin looked like a gizzard. She was twenty-three and already had a turkey neck. She saw the bags under her eyes: dark and puffy rings with crow’s feet scrawled on the side of her head. Her hair was mess, like a pile of dirty, shit-stained hay.

“I’m hideous.”

An erratic, shallow breath followed by a chain of steady, panicked gulps. How could she have been so blind for so long? How could she have ever believed she was pretty? It was pity she got to work on stage. Every tip was just some poor slob hoping to make her feel better. All those lap dances weren’t meant for the men, they were just being polite for her sake.

“I don’t need any of this.”

Her hands fumbled in her purse again. She reached past the pack of condoms and tissues. She felt the rubber grip again and stopped.

The purse dropped to the floor and in her hand was a .38 Special Double-Action LCR. The black revolver rotated in her hand. “You want me to eat something?”

Her thumb pulled back on the hammer, cylinder rotating the next round in the chamber. “Fine,” she muffled as the barrel was placed between her lips. She tasted the bitter residue on the barrel and jerked the trigger.

Flash.

The bullet ripped past the muscles in her jaw and she hit the ground.

Flash.

The world faded.

It was her last meal.
Pain throbbed hard at the back of my skull as I stepped out into bright daylight and stinking air. My head spun in the heat, and I almost regretted drinking so much last night. Almost, but drinking was the only thing that helped me forget.

“Hey Johnny!” As I turned to see our drummer Burt I couldn’t help but feel a smile tug at my lips, despite the ever present dull ache in my chest. He ran up to me from across the street, dodging cars. I shook my head at him. Burt had always been like that, consumed with his own vitality and absolutely assured that nothing would ever harm him in a lasting way.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing? You ever hear of a god-damned crosswalk? Not ten feet down the road!” I said it fiercely, but the smile that continued to tug at my lips took most of the heat out of my admonition.

He bent over panting for breath. Finally he got up, dusted himself off, and drew himself to his full height. He bowed to me in a ridiculous mockery of formality, and announced “I, fair gentleman, have procured for us a paying gig.”

“Oh really?” I didn’t doubt that he had scheduled a gig, but Burt wasn’t terribly attentive to detail and I had my doubts about how much ‘paying’ would happen. “And where would this gig be, good squire?” I continued, matching him. It had always been this way between us. No matter how angry, sad, or frustrated I became, he could get me out of my funk with a witty phrase.

“Squire? Really man? Ouch.” He said half seriously with a slight chuckle under his gruff, deep voice. “It’s at Jeff’s Jazz Joint, man.”
The triple J was a new place, and I had heard mixed reviews. It was in a better part of town, but hadn't quite made it on the local scene. It made sense that they would want a local group to help build their reputation. “Why are they interested in us, and what are they willing to pay?”

“Well, um… they were really more interested in you. They want you to come in and play some for their happy hour, maybe some blues. They won’t pay you tonight, but they’ll let you put out a hat for tips and if it goes right they might line up more gigs for the whole band.”

“No.” I said, shaking my head sharply once, my voice full of hurt. “Burt, you know I don’t play alone anymore. That part of me died with Sarah and you know it.” Saying her name hurt me just like it always did, the pain a sharp throb.

“Aw come on! It’s been two years! It’ll buy you drinks and pay our rent. Plus it could lead to bigger and better things. We need this.”

He said this with such longing that I started to seriously consider it. After a moment something inside of my heart flexed beyond breaking and broke. Maybe I finally wanted more than panhandling, begging, and drinking. Maybe I really am ready to move forward with my life, and finally sing the songs that ring through my head keeping me awake long after sane people have gone to bed.

Five o’clock hits, and I climb the stairs to the small stage in the dimmest corner of the bar. It smells like yesterdays beer and last nights sweat, the clamour of the small crowd as they refill old drinks or order new ones slowly fades as I continue onto the stage. I can hear my heart pumping in my head, until I sit down, open my case and the whole world quiets. This is how it always is before I play, roiling nerves and fear until I open my case, and then silence and the quiet confidence that is born of loving repetition.

From the first moment I pick up my lady and feel her smooth cool metal in my hands, I can feel the music in her. She lends my hands a sensual and loving rhythm as they lovingly stroke, caress, and assemble the bright brass into an instrument.

My heart speeds up, excitement replacing nervousness and making my hands shake. I take a moment to steady them by flexing my fingers against the keys. Finally my sax is assembled, burnished and glowing softly in the dim red light of the bar.

Looking up at the crowd around the small stage, we’re ready. I take a deep breath as my fingers flutter gently once more on the keys. I hold
for a moment about what to play, and decide that it doesn’t matter, so long as it carries my emotion.

I breathe, the vibrations numbing my lips. She plays a note that says sad. She whispers quietly of things too painful for words, speaking softly of coming home from a gig to a broken lock, and a shattered life. She shouts of loss, the anger of having half of your soul ripped from you.

Her melody shifts, and she sings of swimming in a lazy river. Seeing her brilliant smile for the first time. We sing of joyously falling into the gray depths of her eyes and of floating there, never wanting to come out. I sing the smell of her hair filling me as I fall asleep next to her.

Finally, my lady whispers a goodbye that I could never bring myself to say. I look out at the crowd as they applaud, and find Burt standing there. Tears stream down his face, but he smiles at me and nods. It is a silent acknowledgement of shared pain and healing. I return his nod, silently letting go.
Sonny was getting old. She slept a little more now, curled around herself in the patch of sunlight that fell through the long windows of the upstairs room. Each morning I filled her dish with food and lay it on the kitchen floor where it sat untouched until the next morning. She found little interest in staying outside longer than it took to relieve herself. This had been going on for weeks, but I wasn’t prepared to face the reality of what it all meant. I didn’t want to believe that my once springy little maltese-toy poodle-chihuahua- whatever the hell else was mixed in that mutt, was dying. I didn’t want to believe the reason she no longer skipped to the front door to greet me was that she was too frail and sickly to care. I tried not to notice her hair becoming dull and brittle, or how her skin sagged around her bones. But reality has a way of finding a person through even the thickest cloak of denial.

I came home from the University library late on a Tuesday night, mentally exhausted from hours of studying for my Human Anatomy final. My mother was kneeling over the small heap of brown and white fur whimpering on the living room floor.

“What’s going on mom?” I asked, trying to keep my voice soft and even so as to not add additional panic to the already intense energy of the room.

My mother looked up at me, her eyes wide with terror, like a child who just woke from a bad dream. I was all too familiar with that look. It pissed me off because I knew it meant that I would now have to play the role of the parent again, and she would be a helpless little girl.

“Sonny’s sick or something,” She said. “She’s been oozing black tarish blood from her bottom all over the house. At first I was angry with
her, thinking she messed on the floor to avoid going out in the rain. I just don't know what to do with her.”

So that was the smell stinging my nostrils when I walked through the door, warm and wet like sour milk and boiled eggs. *No, not now,* I thought. *Please, I can't lose her now.* I knelt down next to my little dog and rested her head in my lap. “Shh, Sonny, it’s going to be okay,” I whispered, as I stroked her head.

“Mom, could you grab a towel?”

My mother disappeared into the bathroom and after a moment, emerged with a light blue hand towel that she dropped on my lap. I wrapped Sonny in the towel and for a few minutes, cradled her in my arms as you would with a newborn baby. I spoke softly to her in words I thought would sound reassuring or comforting, but felt helpless knowing she didn’t understand and that every word was a lie anyway. After a moment I stood up, carried Sonny to the old wooden rocker that sat in the corner of the living room and gently laid her on the pink floral cushion.

“I’m going to call a vet,” I said.

My mother waved her hand in a fluttering motion that seemed to indicate that her part was done, then turned, and left the room.

My father brought Sonny home on a whim when she was just a puppy. He acted on impulse but with reason that stemmed from his understanding of my childhood loneliness. As usual, I was absorbed in play on the back lawn that day, this time meticulously arranging my family of Barbie dolls and plastic tea cups, when I heard him whisper my name. I turned around to find my father crouching on the grass behind me, his large hands holding tightly to a ball of white curls.

“Dad!” My eyes widened as I realized what it was that he held so tightly to. I looked up at him. He smiled, his blue eyes shining like glass marbles in the sun. He set the pup down on the patch of lawn between us. The little dog sniffed and bit at the tall blades of grass with vigorous curiosity.

“I thought we could use one of these,” He said, grinning. Sonny had found her way to my Barbie picnic now, nudging each doll with her nose until it toppled over.

“I love her.” I said.

The sudden thought of what my mom’s reaction would be stabbed through the beauty of the moment. A lump began to form in my throat. “What about mom?” I asked. “Is she going to let us keep her?”
I knew my mother wouldn’t be happy about my father going over her head like that, and he would be in for a long night of listening to her shout. She would probably bring up his gambling again, though it had been two years since he quit the habit and it had nothing to do with buying a puppy, she would bring it up just to hurt him. Then mother would cry and accuse him of not loving her, of not thinking of her happiness. I would be hiding in the closet in my room, holding the puppy. I would let her chew on the strings of my sweatshirt and wander among the shoes until the yelling subsided.

“Don’t worry about your mother.” He said with a tight smile, “I can handle her.” But I could tell he was bracing himself for the battle too.

Except for an occasional whimper from under the soft towel wrapped around my frail dog, the ride to the clinic was silent. Each time she cried, I reached a hand through the folds of the towel and stroked her head, feeling the curve of her skull protruding through her warm skin.

“It’s okay, It’s going to be alright,” I said over and over again with a shaking voice and wondering if I was trying to soothe her nerves or deny the truth I knew. It wasn’t going to be okay. Sonny was dying, and she would be taking a part of me with her.

“Katie, could you pass me another bulb from that bag?” My father motioned toward the brown, burlap sack that lay a few yards from where he knelt over the flower bed stretching across the front of the house. I crept over to the bag and cupped a frozen hand around one of the muddy bulbs.

“Why do we have to plant these now? It’s freezing out here.” I whined.

“Because the tulip bulb needs to hibernate under the soil throughout the winter to nourish the roots as it grows.”

My father found great peace in gardening. My peace was found in watching his strong hands work the soil. But burying tulip bulbs was not something I enjoyed. The fall breeze seeped through my sweater and bit at my skin. The frozen soil stung my hands as I swept mounds of it over the little round graves.

“Knowing these bulbs are planted out here gives you something to look forward to,” He said.

“I usually forget all about them until I see them start to come up in April,” I said. The words sounded a little more bitter than I had meant them to.
“It Doesn’t matter. They’re here anyway whether you forget them or not. In the spring you will remember this moment here in the fall, when the bulb made you its promise to bloom.” He paused, and an amused expression passed over his red face. With a light chuckle he added, “So what we’re doing here is burying promises.” I never understood his sense of humor.

“It’s not much of a promise dad, sometimes they don’t bloom at all.” I said.

My father patted the last mound with his trowel and rocked back on his heels.

“You’re right, sometimes if the winter is too harsh, they freeze and die.”

For a moment he stared absently into the distance; lost in his thoughts. When he noticed I was watching him, his face lightened and his smile returned. “In that case,” he said, “you just have to appreciate the memory you made planting them in the freezing cold with your dad.” He laughed.

The only animal hospital in town with an after-hours clinic was a small brick building that sat, barely noticed, between K-mart and a shady looking Mexican restaurant with a name I couldn’t pronounce. The walls of the examination room were papered in faded orange and green flowers and the countertops were covered in cheap vinyl the color of pea soup. The vet was a scruffy looking man, the kind you would expect to find working in an auto shop, not an animal hospital. His long gray hair was gathered into a thick ponytail that hung between his broad shoulders. The sharp angles of his face were accentuated by a strip of dark stubble stretched across it. His nails were clean but hastily trimmed and sunk deep into the jagged beds of his fat sausage-like fingers. But his voice was unexpectedly soft as he introduced himself, and his handshake was gentle. He looked strong and kind. He made me feel safe.

I stood next to the steele examination table, gently squeezing one of Sonny’s small paws as the doctor began the examination. My eyes darted anxiously from the doctor’s scrutinizing gaze pouring over my little dog, to his strong hands combing through her hair, and probing her glands.

My mother stood in the corner of the room with her arms folded and tucked under her large sagging breasts. She watched, distant and
removed in the safety of her corner. The doctor leaned over the table and pressed his hands firmly against the metal surface.

“Sonny is suffering from internal bleeding.” He said. “You might consider surgery, but in a dog this old, I wouldn’t recommend it.”

An electricity ran through my body. My head felt light and dizzy; my knees trembled.

“What would you recommend?” I asked.

The doctor let out a deep sigh and stepped back toward the counter behind the examination table. He stared intently in my eyes, then turned to my mother.

“We could put her down,” he said. His tone was gentle but deliberate. “It would be a relatively painless procedure. She would just go to sleep. She would go peacefully.”

I looked back at my mother.

“It’s your choice Katie,” She said. “We will do whatever you think is best.”

I should have known she would leave me alone with this choice, but I hated her for it anyway. I turned to face the doctor again. He gazed back at me. His eyes filled with compassion.

“I think it would be your best option at this point,” he said softly. He was probably breaking some code of Veterinary ethic by offering such a blunt opinion, but it was a relief to pass the burden of such a large decision onto a stronger back.

I nodded slightly. “Okay.” I said. He turned back to my mother for confirmation.

“Okay. Okay.” She said quietly.

Some people keep a vivid recollection of life-changing events catalogued in their minds like a movie you can turn on and watch from start to finish and in perfect color. I, on the other hand, remember very little about the day my father died. The memory is a series of random, fragmented scenes, and faceless characters scattered and out of sequence in my mind. Almost unreal. I remember how the police officer who delivered the news of the crash hooked his thumbs around his belt as he spoke to my mother. I remember my stomach sinking and rising at the same time. My mother’s legs buckling and falling to the porch.

I remember how no one stopped me as I ran to the bathroom and locked myself inside to cry alone. I remember seeing my father’s shaving brush on the bathroom shelf, and the split-second memory of watching
him lather his face with foaming soap. I remember how the soft plush of the bathroom rug felt against my cheek as I curled my body into it, and how helpless I felt as I lay there alone on the floor, and the soft prickle of the shaving brush as I turned it over and over in my hand.

My mother left the room, red faced and choking back sobs, before the doctor administered the injection. I wouldn’t let Sonny die alone. I wrapped one arm around her middle and rubbed her back with my hand. I told her that her pain would soon be gone. I gripped her paw tightly between my fingers as the doctor inserted the needle under the skin and into the vein. I held her until her shaking body went still and the light left her eyes. I was no longer brave or strong. I didn’t care to be. My head fell over her body and sobs rolled up from deep within my chest.

I found my mother sitting on a plastic chair in the waiting room, her hands twisting anxiously in her lap. She looked like she wanted to say something but didn’t know how.

“Let’s go home.” I said.

Without a word, my mother stood up and walked out to the car. I sunk into the passenger’s seat and pressed my temple against the cold window as my mother wound through the empty streets toward our home. I could see my own reflection in the window, dark and shadowy and overlain with the colorful reflections of traffic lights.

My mother pulled into the drive and turned off the engine. Neither of us moved or spoke. We just sat silently next to each other and let the calm of the night wash over us. Finally my mother’s voice broke through the silence.

“I should have been there,” She said.

I stared out over the small stretch of lawn in front of the house to my father’s flower bed.

“I don’t think we’ll get any tulips this year,” I said.
Devil's Food

by Sophie Stanley

You’re at the party, the great banquet of edible delectables only a few yards from your grasp. Your eyes immediately pass the tree-like stems of broccoli, the cauliflower brains, and the sugar snap peas that don’t seem to taste a bit like the sugar they advertise. Your eyes alight on the chocolate cake, the heavenly mountain of floury, chocolaty goodness, the thousands of melted chocolate chips glinting wickedly at you, tempting you, enticing you, calling to you. Of course, she isn’t going to take a bite of the devil, nor is he. The demon is avoided like the plague, the disease that will add a few pounds of fat to your already muffin-topped physique.

You talk to familiar faces, all with self-righteous, self-conscious vegetables scattered on their plates, trying to look like the essence of health and well-being. You pull some vegetables onto your plate as well, everyone around you, including yourself, discernibly evading the chocolate fiend. When nobody is looking, you glance at the cake, wishing, begging, dreaming that you won’t be the first one to take a piece. You resist the itch to take the knife and slice into the moist object of desire, walking back to the pretend vegetable-loving phonies.

You speak of old school nerds, times of melancholy, misery, and massive amounts of homework, and of the hot, strutting jocks that seemed cool even when they wore black socks with Crocs. The Prince of Chocolate calls to you, urging you to come to the dark side, whispering velvety, sugar-coated words that muddle your brain and make you uncomfortable. Satan wins.

You slide the knife into the cocoa-infested, egg-beaten mass of glory, the spongy specimen springing back in a satisfying, slavering sort of way. Your acquaintances pause and then indulge in the sweet
stuff themselves. Both ease and guilt fill the room, and you begin to laugh normally with your friends; after all, when everybody is bad, you can relate to one another, and when you can relate to one another, you can hold fantastic conversations. You relish the thick, fluffy texture that enters your mouth, your brain delighting in the sugar-molecules that give you a much needed high, the flavors exploding and then evaporating in your mouth. The whole rest of the night is light and breezy, and your stomach is content with holding the Devil.

You stand on the scale the next day; it reads two pounds heavier. You groan with annoyance. How could you have given into temptation? How could you not resist the evil darts that were purposed to add another inch of fat to your already out-of-control body? Don’t you realize that if you keep eating out of habit, you’ll never look like that stick-thin model on the newest cover of Vogue? You walk into the kitchen, determined to change your unruly customs when your eyes glide over to the leftovers of the cake sitting on the kitchen counter. And the tempting, seductive voices begin to call to you all over again.
Tides of A Quiet Morning

by Keith Jeffery

There's a peaceful sensation in the deepest tides of a quiet morning. The sun slowly awakens, brighter and warmer as it appears before us. The air is still, and the cold of night is relenting to the embrace of life and light.

It was early on a morning as this a young man sat on a bench out front of a happy little gas station smoking a long cigarette and sipping down a crisp Dr. Pepper. He had a thoughtful look on his face as he took in a deep, full drag, and slowly exhaled the swirling smoke into the air. He watched as the smoke danced and pulsed into the void of the sky above. He took some comfort in watching it fume then slowly dissipate to only a memory. He sat for quite some time looking trapped in his own mind, trapped in thought. Cars drove past in quite a hurry to get to wherever they needed to be. He would watch, smoke, sip, and think. Every once in a while a car would pull up to the station and he would observe the driver.

He would try to form a life story of each driver based on their cars, clothes, hair, and most of all the expressions written on their faces as they made the short trip from their cars to the door of the gas station. He knew that his perceptions of them were shallow compared to their very real and complicated lives.

A very noisy, very orange jeep pulled up and its driver, an older man, hopped out. With a happy pep in his step, the older man walked past Spencer, issuing a silent smile, then entered the station. As he had done dozens of times before, Spencer, observed the older man, and sized up his life in the few moments he had to collect everything he could about this perfectly happy man. From the loud, orange jeep he
assumed the older man was someone lively, someone who remained active and enjoyed driving through the mountains or the desert on the weekends. He wore pastel cargo shorts (as if anyone could really use all those pockets and not have their pants fall down). His shirt resembled a shirt that he saw rich guys wear. His shoes were sneakers that suggested, yet again that he was an active individual. His hair was done in a neat comb-over which complimented his salt and pepper hair. He seemed to be the confident type, as he still cared for his appearance, even if he wasn't going out or seeing anyone. He did his hair simply because it made him feel special.

Next and most important was the expression on his face that would present a small history of his life and what emotions he was feeling this particular morning. He held a warm and inviting smile that sat naturally under his combed mustache. This smile suggested he was more than ready to say hello. His eyes twinkled, implying that he was happy to be anywhere, and like most older men, his eyes contained a flicker of hard lessons learned. And thus began Spencer's speculation of the older man's life:

He was a man of humble beginnings and worked his way up to a comfortable living that gave him an air of confidence. He was proud of whatever he owned and took great care to maintain it. He was probably the kind of man that if you mowed his lawn, he would inspect your work and give you a quarter, a slap on the back, and say “good job, same time next week”. He likely had a few kids and a lovely wife who he had fallen in love with in high school and have remained that “cute couple” ever since. He definitely had a daughter. Maybe it was the softness in his face that expressed that he had been “daddy” to a young girl. His daughter probably felt totally comfortable telling him everything, particularly her disappointments with boys. All in all, he was a nice man.

By the time Spencer had formed all this, the older man had exited the Station and Spencer was readying himself for the uncomfortable eye contact and phony smile. He started his trip to his jeep and walked right by Spencer giving him a warm smile and a nice hello, Spencer returned the courtesy and waited for him to walk out of sight, but that didn't happen. He stopped in front of Spencer and gave him a look as if he was seeing an old family picture. Spencer reconnected eye contact and waited for a statement.

“Oh so your one of those guys that needs a smoke and a drink to start his morning, huh?”
He said with a look of amusement and joy on his face, as if he found something terribly funny about a man sitting on a bench smoking in the morning. Surprised by this odd statement and unsure what he wanted, Spencer let out an awkward laugh and replied

“Yes sir”.

Spencer hoped this was the end of this encounter, but it appeared that he was in the mood for a conversation.

“So what you smoking there son?”

“um…they’re…ah… Marlboro Blacks?”

“Ah, I can remember back in the day when I used to smoke. Gave it up though; took too much livin’ out of me. Life’s worth sacrifices.”

A thought had been circling Spencer’s mind for about a month. This thought refused to leave the forefront of his mind. It shook everything in his life and left him in a state of emotionless drift. “What makes all the bad in this life, all the hardship I go through worth it? Have I ever really felt happy without the looming tower of failure or dissatisfaction?” it was an inescapable question that felt as though needed to be answered before life could move on.

This thought occurred to Spencer and pushed him to ask the old man. Normally Spencer would never ask personal questions to anyone, let alone a total stranger, but he was already uncomfortable and looking for a way to either end this conversation or get some amusement out of it. Spencer saw two things happening: either he would be knocked down a few pegs, at least enough for Spencer to leave with that, or he would answer his question with some thought behind it and Spencer could use it for a good laugh later. It was either leave or make something of the stupidly uncomfortable situation he found himself in. So he asked.

“I’ll make you a deal, I’ll give you one of my smokes if you answer a question for me.”

The older man looked a little thrown back by the offer. He sat down on the bench across from Spencer and, with a curious look on his face, replied,

“Okay, hand me a smoke”.

Spencer raised an eyebrow, pulled one cigarette out along with his lighter and handed them over. He looked at the cigarette with a serious look on his face, as if he was revisiting something. He brought the cigarette up to his lips and lit the end. He took in an impressively
long drag, closed his eyes, and exhaled through his nostrils.

“So what’s the question?”

“What in this life has made the hard times worth it?”

The older man blinked several times, took another long drag, and let out a couple hearty chuckles.

“That’s a hell of a question”

He said while adjusting himself on the bench apparently setting in for a long chat. Spencer didn’t move, waiting to see what exactly his response would be. Spencer was glad that he had put the older man on the spot.

The cheerful man was now caught in serious consideration of something massive—his whole life. Something between a frown and a smirk now sat on his face. Spencer continued to sit perfectly still. He looked up again at Spencer, a lit cigarette in one hand and a Dr. Pepper in the other.

“You know that’s not a very easy question to answer son” He finally said.

“You took the cigarette didn’t you?” Spencer snapped.

“I didn’t say I wasn’t going to answer it, you have to understand, but I’ll give you the best answer I can I guess”

Spencer saw this as his way of telling him he was about to give a short response. His finger began to thump up and down on the table; tap, tap, tap. He had definitely gotten himself hooked onto this young man more than he had expected. He thought hard and for quite some time, letting out a “hmm” every once and a while as he fought for the right words to sum up something so huge.

After some time of silence, he finally began.

“I guess most people would say it’s the fighting, the bad times that wake you up to the good things. It’s the drop of rain in the desert you’ve been praying for. They would say it’s the silver lining that shows some good in everything. But I know you’ve probably heard all that stuff before”

“For me it’s been a little different. Have you ever felt the heartbeat of a girl, crushed and needing only your words to save her? Have you ever felt like there weren’t enough tears to show how you’ve really felt? Have you ever held your little girl in your arms and known deep down in your heart that your role in life had changed forever? You can’t look at life as moments of desperation and prayers answered. I guess you’re really asking me what’s kept me moving, well it’s not nature, or god, or even the happiest of memories. No, it’s something much simpler.”
He stopped, and both men took drags on their cigarettes.

“My father once told me that life is all up and down, a man must find the middle and hold on to his own truth. I guess that makes more sense than ever looking back over my life.”

“You know, I had a friend growing up named Rick, and his father was something of a novelist drinker. I heard that his dad beat him, his little sister, and his mother. All I really know was that Rick would show up to school every once and a while with a black eye or a couple bruises. But really it was his demeanor that got to me the most. He looked defeated and ashamed. So where was the silver lining for him? What prayers of his were answered? All he really had was the ability to wait for it to be over.”

Spencer looked down at the table realizing that this conversation wasn’t going to be something to get a good chuckle out of later.

“So Rick grew up, moved out and leads a normal life now. He definitely didn’t have an easy time letting go of his anger but he’s a nice guy. He told me one time that he had a lot of fantasies about killing his father growing up, but he had to wait for the right time. Obviously he never did it, but I think it was the dream of one day being free that kept him going, kept him here. Have you ever felt like that, like all you could do was wait?”

He paused, to see what kind of response he would get from Spencer. Spencer tried to speak, but his throat refused to let anything out. Instead, he simply nodded and flashed a smile, as if to say he understood.

“Cuz god knows it’s not about being perfect.” He sighed.

“I was married once before. It only lasted two years, but I sure learned fast and hard how difficult being married is. Her name was Catheryn. Cat was her pet name of course. We met in high school and quickly fell in love. It seems so obvious now that we weren’t going to make it far, but back then I wouldn’t have traded her for the world. Other than her looks and spirited personality, her troubled life was what drew me to her I guess, she hadn’t had a very easy life (not that anyone can say their life’s been easy, but you know what I mean). So she would come to me for help and it felt pretty good to have someone see me as their savior. I hadn’t really realized that feeling could go away. We both graduated and quickly moved in together. We got married about a year into college, and things seemed to be like a dream.”

“I think I had such big hopes for my future, that I left my little family life in the back of my mind. Honesty, I was really just thinking about
myself. This went on for a while, and soon I started to invest my time elsewhere. It started out really innocent, just little dinners that I reassured myself didn’t mean anything, but those little secret pleasures grew till…well…Yeah. You get the idea. I was a selfish prick. I think I wanted her to find out, but now I can see I just didn’t have the balls to face the one person who was supposed to get the best out of me. That was such a long time ago. When I look back, I don’t see the things she did, I see the things I did. When you look back over your life, the things other people do won’t be as important to you as how you responded to those things. That’s a simple truth to remember.” he finally looked back up at Spencer with resolve in his eyes.

“Back when me and my current wife Mare were first married, we had a little girl. She was born sickly. The doctors knew that it would be a miracle if she lived, but they tried not to show it. There wasn’t anything they could do for her. They left me and Mare alone in our room as she slipped away. I can remember just holding her, praying for something that wouldn’t come. I could feel her tiny heart beat slowly grow fainter and fainter. I couldn’t breathe. All the hopes, all the emotions I was going through stopped when that fragile heart died away.” He cleared his throat.

“We named her Marry, god you should have seen her big, bright green eyes. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything more beautiful.” A tear rolled down his cheek, which he quickly wiped away. “Mare had been so excited, we both were. What do you say to someone so hurt, someone so crushed?”

He sat up and reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. He opened it, then pulled out a tiny patient identification wristband. It was aged, but you could still see clearly the name “Joe, Marry”. The older man held on to it tightly, then put it away. Then he pulled out a little picture of three kids, all sitting next to each other with cheesy smiles on their faces in their Sunday best. There was one boy and two girls. One of the girls was 12, the other 10, and the boy was 8 when the picture was taken.

“They’re all grown up and moved out now, but we still stay in touch as much as their lives permit. I’ll have a grandson soon.”

“When we lost Marry, the only thing I found was my truth. Mare was devastated and she needed me there more than ever. As much as I hurt and as much as I wanted to let go, not being there for her would have been much worse. I found some comfort in focusing on Mare instead
of myself, so I stayed. You can look for deep and profound reasons to look at life as half full but honestly, it can be just as simple as someone needing your love.”

“I guess when I’m gone, my family will miss and remember me. People will look back over my life and see good things and bad things, but I look back and I see the struggle to find the truth, but I’ve always found it. I’ve always found the simple reasons to look for the next day. But I’ll let you figure that one out.”

He put his cigarette out on the table and watched the smoke dance and pulse into the void of the sky. He let out a final, slow puff of smoke, then flicked the butt into the air.

“Thanks for the smoke”.

He walked over to his jeep with a steady stride and opened the door. Spencer looked over to see if it was really over, to see if that was all that was going to be said. He gave Spencer a smile and a nod of reassurance, then hopped into his jeep and drove away.

Once the orange jeep was out of sight, Spencer looked over at the burn mark on the table then to his hands. He sat there for quite some time, waiting for the silence to straighten out his thoughts. Eventually he got up, put his cigarette out in the little ash tray, threw away his Dr. Pepper, walked over to his car, got in, and drove down the road. As he was driving he was trying to sort through it all. He stopped; he realized they hadn’t even exchanged names. He thought about it for some time then he came to a realization that set his mind at ease and kept on driving with a grin on his face. Maybe it was better that they hadn’t exchanged names, maybe it meant more that way. He may not have understood all that the older man had said to him, but he was sure he could find his own truth. Today his truth was that you can never tell what will be brought to you in the deepest tides of a quiet morning.
Weber State University is the only university in the nation to host a literature conference for undergraduate writing. 2015 marks the 30th year in which Weber State has welcomed undergraduate students from across the nation, as well as respected guest authors. Students who attend are given the opportunity to read personal works, as well as listen to the works of their peers. The National Undergraduate Literature Conference fosters the spirit of creativity, the love of literature, and the passion for these craft. NULC proves that these are universal truths, and Metaphor is proud to showcase the talents of our fellow undergraduates.
Riley exited the school, making her way down the steps. One foot in front of the other, concentrating on her breathing so she wouldn’t break out into a run. Just breathe. Breathing was good.

Her older brother was standing in a huddle with the other seniors while they waited for the bus. One of them was showing the others something on his phone, and they were all making the appropriate noises of awe and envy. Riley skirted around them and kept walking down the street. She didn’t want to deal with her brother right now—or his questions once he saw her face. Resentfulness bubbled in her throat as she fought to keep from running, wishing she’d handled things better.

Riley had never spoken to the teacher like that before. For six years of elementary, three years of middle school and two years of high school she’d followed instructions, raised her hand before speaking, and turned her assignments in on time. She’d behaved just like she was supposed to. She’d been good.

She recalled the conversation she’d just had and resentment clawed the inside of her throat.

“Riley,” Ms. Newberry had explained, “I’m afraid there’s no question about it. The book is on the curriculum, so you have to read it.”

Ms. Angela Newberry in her mid-thirties and liked to think of herself as the kind of teacher who was “hip” and “in touch” with her students. Riley thought that the fact that Ms. Newberry still used the word “hip” spoke volumes about the difference between perceptions and reality, but had kept her mouth shut. It wasn’t like Ms. Newberry had been trying to be insensitive—not that the thought helped much.

By the time Riley got halfway down the street of the first neighborhood
the resentment had boiled itself into a hard lump in the bottom of her stomach. The houses here were generally white or some pleasing pastel color, the lawns manicured with uniform cement walkways. They always looked empty, like soulless skeletons bleached white by the unrelenting sun. Each one was almost exactly the same as its neighbor, a parade of robots clothed in cheap white lace. She wondered what the owners had done to earn the lavish, if heartless, homes. It reminded her of how she’d tried bargaining with her teacher.

That had failed epically.

“But I’ll read another book,” she had said. “One that deals with the same themes. *Huckleberry Finn*, maybe?”

Ms. Newberry had shaken her head like a metronome. “*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a classic for many reasons, Riley. There’s no substitute for a book, especially one of this quality. It’s an American classic for good reason.”

Jane Austen was a British classic and the Brontë sisters didn’t like her. People were allowed to not like books for perfectly legitimate reasons.

Riley recalled how she had felt herself trembling, feeling like she was struggling to keep her head above something deep and dark and airless. She had clasped her hands together and counted silently.

“I know what happens,” she’d said. “I know the entire story. I know all the parallels and paradigm shifts and metaphors. I don’t have to read it if I already got the message, do I?”

“Using Spark Notes is not reading the book,” Ms. Newberry had replied.

Walking through the neighborhood, Riley ran her tongue over the torn skin on the inside of her cheek where she’d bitten it—she’d heard that mantra plenty of times over the semester, but never directed at her. She paused to lean against one of the picket fences, continuing to investigate the torn cheek with her tongue. It didn’t feel too bad, but she knew it was going to keep irritating her until it healed. In retrospect, her reply to Mrs. Newberry’s little intonation wasn’t the most mature response:

“But it’s boring!”

Probably not the best thing to say, but she’d needed to end the conversation and get out of there. Her hands had started trembling again. She’d tried counting again, but that time it hadn’t worked. Riley gripped the picket fence tightly in remembrance. Her nails digging into
the worn wood felt like her teacher’s reply.

“That hasn’t stopped you before,” Ms. Newberry had replied. “Look, Riley, we all have a book that we dislike for whatever reason. Mine was 1984. But it’s important to read these books and articulate just what it is we dislike, and why it has such meaning for other people. We can’t stay in our comfort zones or we’ll never learn anything, just like Scout.”

“I already got through the first three chapters. Isn’t that enough?”

“I’m not going to bother replying to that, Riley. You know the answer.”

Of course she knew the answer—she’d known this was a losing battle when she’d started it. But she’d had to try, didn’t she? She’d had to try because the more she’d thought about it the harder her hands shook. She’d tried to focus on her breathing, but all she could manage were shallow breaths. She felt like she was drowning, trying to siphon oxygen from the oppressive liquid. It wasn’t the first time she’d had something akin to a panic attack, but she still hated having them in front of other people—especially when the pity started creeping into their eyes.

“Is there anything else I can do? If I refuse to do the assignment, is there extra credit I can use to make up for it?”

Ms. Newberry had frowned. It had brought out the lines around her mouth, making her look about ten years older. “Well, not really. Not turning in the assignment will affect your grade, and there’s not enough extra credit offered to cover the points you’ll have lost.”

At that point, she’d almost been ready to cut her losses. Riley released the piece of fence in her hand, resuming her walk. She should have known that if bargaining didn’t work, then pleading certainly wouldn’t. Her voice sounded pathetic even in her own memory.

By the time she reached the second neighborhood, the resentment had bubbled away—as had the drowning sensation. It left her feeling washed up and wrung out. The houses here were older and of varying sizes, but generally smaller than the ones of the previous neighborhood. A few needed painting and one had a porch that sagged dangerously, but they breathed. Some squatted, some stood, some leaned, all of them sprawling across their lots like they owned them. They were worn and weathered but they’d stood the test of time and seemed proud for it. Riley studied the houses, pausing now and then to get a closer look. How long would it take them to rot away? How long would it take them to collapse and die?

The little sigh that Ms. Newberry had given rang in her ears, which seemed strange for such a quiet noise.
“Riley, what are you so afraid of?”
“I’m not afraid.”

Unless fear was freezing water in her veins and an ice cube in her throat, in which case…

“Really, Riley, I don’t understand. I gave the assignment two weeks ago and you’re just coming to me now?”

Riley hadn’t had an answer for that. She’d lowered her head to stare at the floor, wishing that it were water that could swallow her up. She’d regretted ever speaking up at all. She could have just cheated, gone onto a website or something.

“Besides, I thought this book would be right up your alley.”
“So did my dad.”

The response had been automatic, the words falling out before she could clamp her mouth shut. The recollection made Riley kick at a tree a little harder than necessary, stubbing her toe. She glared at the plant and kept walking.

The neighborhood ended in a highway overpass, marking the town’s transition from suburbia to commercial buildings. The cars rushed loudly overhead, making it impossible to think. She crossed underneath, the sour smell of trash and discarded food barely even registering in her nose after wading through it so many times. She exited out the other side to pass the new outlet mall. It had sprung up in the last year, the shining buildings taking the place of the old muddy lot. It hurt her eyes to look at it for too long, and a lump formed in her throat. She walked past quickly. Riley lowered her eyes to the ground as she passed the mall, just as she’d lowered her eyes to the floor in the classroom.

At least her outburst had earned her Ms. Newberry’s shock.

“Well, then.”

Her teacher—so proud of her unflappable nature—had seemed to be completely at a loss. Riley had kept staring at the floor. The pity was undoubtedly in Ms. Newberry’s eyes now, shiny and indulging and wrong. Remembering it gave her another thrill of anger and Riley paused at the street corner, the outlet mall flickering in the corner of her eye.

“I’m sorry, Riley.”

That had been when breathing had become difficult again. As she waited for the light to change, Riley wondered if her panic attacks were really what drowning felt like.

“This is an important book, Riley. I can’t change the assignment for you. But life is full of difficult things.”
She knew that. She’d known it just like she’d known what the answer would be. The battle had been lost before it had even begun. She’d mouthed the next words along with Ms. Newberry:

“It’s like playing in the shallows your entire life otherwise. We have to wade out into the ocean, to challenge ourselves in order to live up to all of our potential.”

Her hands had stopped trembling, but she had kept staring at the floor. Eye contact would have been dangerous.

“I’ll give you an extension until next Friday, but I do expect that report turned in. And if you want to talk about it—about anything—I’m here.”

She’d hated her teacher in that moment.

About a block past the mall, Riley reached a small church. It had a thin, tall steeple and windows painted with green trim, with an old-fashioned graveyard on the right side that wrapped around the back. It was one of the family-oriented, non-denominational churches. She remembered attending it every Sunday when she was little but had stopped going a few years ago. Idly, she wondered if the pastor still remembered her.

She entered the churchyard through the side gate, the lump in her throat thickening. Picking her way through the various headstones was always an adventure. Some were well kept, but many were in a state of disrepair. A few—usually the newer ones—had flowers in front of them. Some of the flowers had faded or turned brown but the stones still stood, faceless and imposing. The one she stopped in front of had been there for a few years. It was smooth and made of white marble, and there was a slightly wilted bouquet of daises lying in front of it. The carving read:

_In Loving Memory of Thomas O’Brien
1968-2011_

“People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for.”

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

Her father had chosen the first quote, back when he’d first gotten sick. Her mother had chosen the second. It sounded like something her father would say.

Riley pulled _To Kill a Mockingbird_ out of her backpack. It had lain untouched on her bookshelf in her room, bookmark at the beginning of chapter four, for three years. It had gathered dust in its time there, and
she’d had to wipe off the cover before placing it in her backpack that morning. She cleared her throat to try and work past the lump, but her voice still cracked when she spoke.

“We started the story together,” she said, “So we’re going to finish it together.”

She sat down, cross-legged, and opened the book. The smell of the pages hit her, assaulting her senses with memories of late nights curled up in her father’s lap, her head snuggled against his chest as she let his voice and the words wash over her and sweep her out into fantastical lands.

“The remainder of my schooldays were no more auspicious than the first,” She began. “Indeed, they were an endless Project…”

A few tears splashed onto the pages, but she kept on reading, wading out into the deep waters.
A soft susurrus of a sound. Susurrus—a word all yellow and orange and brown and too light. A fitting word to describe the gentle brush of the student’s shoe against her trouser leg. It was driving Benjy mad where he was seated beside her. He wanted to scream, wanted to cry. That wouldn’t do, though. Can’t scream or cry in the middle of class, he had been told. Shh-shh-shh went the girl’s shoe. Yellow and orange and brown. Such a soft sound. Too soft. Sickeningly soft. It drowned out everything else, even the professor’s voice. Sus-sus-susurrus. He couldn’t stand it as an edge of undefined panic began to creep in.

Benjy reached over and tapped the girl’s shoulder. “Would you mind stopping that noise?” he asked, pointing down toward her shoe. “Please,” he added, because he had been reminded time and again about manners. His therapist back home would be proud.

The girl gave a tight smile and ceased the movement. Benjy let out a relieved sigh and smiled back. He was glad that the pain was over and that she wasn’t upset about having to stop. Maybe they could even be friends, he mused. She had smiled at him, and Benjy knew that smiling was a sign of friendliness. They would be friends, he decided.

Now that the deafening noise had stopped, he could finally hear the professor enough to participate again. Benjy made a joke pertaining to the organic molecules they were learning about, and his classmates laughed along beside him. Not the girl next to him, though. Benjy wondered whether or not she had much of a sense of humor at all. Well, no matter. A sense of humor wasn’t vital to a friendship, he didn’t think.

He steeled himself to talk to her when the class period ended. “I’m Benjamin,” he said, “but you may call me Benjy or Ben.”
Her lip turned up a bit, but Benjy figured that it was probably an attempt at a smile. “Jenny,” she said as she packed up her things. “Nice to meet you, Jenny.”

She gave that little smile again, the same one as from before. “Yeah.” She zipped her bag shut and started inching toward the door. “Organic chemistry is really interesting, don’t you think? I’ve done a lot of research on it since starting this class. My real passion is for studying wildlife, but organic chemistry is pretty interesting, too. I’ve learned all sorts of things about it, and I’ve gone in to talk to Dr. Breeds about it several times this week.”

“Yeah, that’s great,” Jenny said flatly. “Listen, I’ve got to go.” And she didn’t wait for him to say goodbye before she pushed her way out of the classroom.

Attn: Student Disability Services

To Whom It May Concern:

I’m writing to you in regard to my son, Benjamin Cadmon, who just enrolled at your university. Benjamin is very good at taking exams and quizzes in the time allotted for other students, so I’m not requesting that he receive an extension on those things. Rather, I was told to inform the Student Disability Services of additional consideration my son might require.

Three guys approached Benjy as he was packing up his things. “Great humor today, Ben,” one of them said. Then, he glanced between the other two, and all three of them started laughing again.

Benjy beamed, proud that he had been able to earn the amusement of his classmates. “It was funny enough that you’re all still laughing about it,” he pointed out, smiling even wider. He truly must have been very witty.

Another guy slapped him on the shoulder, which Benjy understood to be another friendly gesture. He was making friends all over the place today. “Yeah, Ben,” the man said, “that’s why we’re laughing.” And the chuckles continued.

Benjy wasn’t sure why this man felt the need to reiterate once more what had caused their amusement, but he let it go. Some people, he knew, were a bit socially awkward sometimes. That was what his therapist had called him—socially awkward—but before he’d left for college, she’d told him that she was very pleased at the improvements
he’d made on that front. Perhaps he ought to recommend her services to this particular classmate.

Before he got the chance, one of them said, “See you around,” and then the three guys were off.

As he trekked through the snow on the way back to his dorm, he pulled out his phone and called his mother, as he did after the last class of every day.

“Benjy, hi,” she greeted, and Benjy couldn’t tell if she was pleased or exhausted.

“Hi, Mom. You’ll never guess what happened today. I made four friends in one class. Dad told me that you worried I would have a hard time making friends, but everyone here likes me, I think. Today in my chemistry class I made a joke that everybody laughed at. See, Mom? I’m doing really well.” He smiled, waiting expectantly for his mother to congratulate him.

There was a slight pause before she said, “I’m so happy to hear that, honey. You certainly are a funny one.”

Benjy’s smile grew. “I know.”

He’s gotten better at managing the social aspects of his condition, but I do insist that, if possible, he be paired with considerate and patient students when working on group projects and the like.

I would also request that his professors be made aware of the full scope of his condition. He occasionally will talk out of turn during class, and I’ll not tolerate any of your professors chastising him for that. He’s working on it on his own, but he might be discouraged from talking at all if attacked for it. Ensure that that doesn’t happen.

Jenny shoved her tray down onto the table. The soup she had gotten sloshed over the side of the bowl.

“Rough day?” Rebecca asked with a smirk.

Jenny heaved a sigh. “You have no idea. Lab took forever this morning, and then after that, I was stuck sitting next to Weird Ben for an entire hour. Do you know what it’s like sitting next to Weird Ben for an hour?”

Kelsey laughed from the other end of the table. “I know; I saw that. He asked you to stop tapping your foot, right?” Jenny nodded. There was a pause. “Why?”

“How the hell should I know?” Jenny shot back. “He just told me to
stop making ‘that noise’ and then pointed down toward my foot.” Benjy’s please went unreported.

Rebecca patted Jenny’s arm in sympathy. “Once, I got assigned to be in a group with him for a project, and he spent the entire meeting time talking to me about squirrels.”

Recognition sparked to life in Jenny’s features. “Oh, yeah,” she said excitedly. “He was talking about that today, too. Said that organic chemistry was super interesting but he liked wildlife more, or something like that.”


“ Weird Ben,” Rebecca and Jenny replied.

Asperger’s Syndrome is part of who my son is, but it doesn’t define his worth. He should be treated with as much respect as any other student.

If you have any further questions regarding my son’s condition, you may contact me with the email or phone number you have on file.

Thank you for your time,

John Cadmon

Jenny didn’t sit next to him in class after that. Benjy wasn’t too upset about it, though. After all, he had plenty of other friends to talk to.
Doors.

That was what the man was obsessed with. Big ones, small ones, French ones, ones I’m not even sure had a root of origin other than this house. He was mad. Not angry mad. He was a lunatic. He always had a hammer in his hand, and nails wedged between his teeth ready to be used. And when I say always, I mean always. At three in the morning I would be awoken by a loud crash in the downstairs’ hall.

“Mr. Duderstadt, are you okay?” I called over the banister from upstairs. I used to go all the way down to see what had happened. Now I just checked to see if the old geezer was alright.

“Fit as a fiddle!” he called back upbeat, just as usual. “Just dropped my hammer!”

I rubbed my eyes and went back to bed. By now, I had gotten used to most of the noises that emanated from all corners of the house day and night. Sounds like hand-sawing and hammering were beginning to become unnoticeable, but if a door hit the floor, the old man knocking a hole in the wall, or a latter clattered against a wall, I had to roll over and cover my ears with my pillow.

It wasn’t my house. I just needed a place to stay that wouldn’t cost me an arm and a leg. Being a young adult living on my own, I ate ramen most nights in any cheap apartment I could get until that apartment jacked up the rent. If I didn’t have to eat, it would have been manageable, but even ramen requires some amount of sacrifice. Mr. Duderstadt was just an old man offering a place to live. Personally, I just think he was lonely. Despite his twinge of insanity, he was just like anyone else and needed someone to interact with. The man didn’t even have a dog. But the moment I met him I knew I would never forget him.
His house was a few miles out of town and was charming in an old fashioned way. It looked more closely related to a plantation mansion, but was homier. It had three stories, and it was a sunny yellow color with white trimming. The paint was chipping by now, but it gave the place a more rustic, soft feel. I was prepared to live under harsh conditions, but this house looked promisingly comfortable.

When I knocked on the door I heard something that sounded like tools drop to the wooden floor. Heavy boots came trotting down the hall and the door flew wide open. Mr. Duderstadt was an old man with a deep farmers’ tan, though I never in my entire stay saw him work long hours outside. His beard was long and white, but he was in no way feeble. His wrinkled arms were toned with muscle under his old, thick skin. He wore a faded and worn denim shirt and jeans, heavy work boots, wore a gimme cap backwards. When he saw me, he had a wondering sparkle in his eyes.

“Ah, come in, Kid. I’ll show ‘em to ya,” he said when I explained that I was responding to his advertisement. He waved the hammer in his hand, motioning for me to enter. I admit, I did so with much caution.

I followed him down the hall, and the first thing I noticed was what I would soon discover was my new landlord’s hobby. Many doors lined the hall, and they were all very different from one another. Three would be next to each other with no spaces between the doorframes, while the ones across the hall would open in opposite directs, mirroring each other when opened. That was just the beginning: I looked down and saw a tiny door that had to go to an old mouse hole in the wall. Then, I looked up and saw that one door was set in the ceiling. It had hinges, a door nob, and a knocker that perpetually hung perpendicular to the door thanks to gravity. I was beginning to think this was a nuthouse or something.

He took me up the stairs, which had about as many doors as steps-some actually in the steps - to the third story, which was the attic. Two identical doors stood next to each other in the hall Mr. Duderstadt said he wanted to rent. He opened the one on the far side from the stairs and led me inside.

The rooms were clean and lit from the windows and skylight. I would have a bedroom with a decent sized closet, something of a living room, and a bathroom, each room being more spacious than any of my old apartments. He even had them furnished. A bed and dresser were in the bedroom, and a desk, an old denim couch, a couple lamps, and a
rough coffee table were in the living room. All the while, a few carpets thinly padded the floors. Out of curiosity, I looked where that second door in the hall was supposed to be, but all I saw was pristine wall and a light socket.

“Th’ kitchen’s downstairs,” Mr. Duderstadt commented after he had showed me all that was to be seen. “This house wasn’t exactly built for tenants, but these rooms are comfortable enough.”

Of course, I took them right on the spot and paid the man. He asked if I needed any help moving in, which I did not. I only had a suitcase of cloths, some sheets, a toothbrush, an archaic car to my name.

That was the first night I heard the noises. Like I said, I hardly notice them anymore. Now I just go down stairs the morning after and see what new project had been started, finished, or both. He worked incredibly fast to put in new doors. I often would see him toddle off to the basement, bring up a new door with wood for the frames, and seem to just pick a spot at whim. Sometimes, I would keep him company and chat with him: he seemed to enjoy that.

“Kid, let me tell you something,” the old man would say as he marked a board with the pencil he kept behind his ear. “I know this all looks odd around here, and don’t you go toning down what you think to spare my feelings. I’ve felt enough in my time to take a different perspective. But this is how I see it. You gotta build a door to walk through it.”

Other times I would fix him some food for whatever meal it might be. I was not the best cook, but he ate it all like he had never had such cuisine in his life. It did not matter if it was pasta, a sandwich, or a bowl of condensed soup with a box of saltine crackers. He would conclude each meal or snack with “God, that’s good stuff.”

His latest project, the one he woke me by dropping a hammer, I found out the next morning, was to the kitchen. I paused before I stepped through the real door and noted the new one next to it. This new one was upside down with the handle at chest level. After living with Duderstadt for a while now, I knew some doors, like the doubled one to my room, only opened up to sealed walls. However, I decided to try to open this one. I turned the high nob and pushed. Then, I stumbled into the kitchen, finding Mr. Duderstadt seated at the small table reading the newspaper and nibbling on a piece of buttered toast.

“G’morning,” he nodded to me as I pulled myself up from my ungraceful entrance.

Our mornings varied from door to door, but this manner was very
typical. Meaning, every new door I found caused some variation in my morning. One morning I fell through the second story from the second door he decided to install into the floor. That day I had to take off sick from work with a sprained ankle. On the other hand, on most days I would get my coffee and a bite to eat before going to work. He would do the same before he hopped back to his hobby.

As the years went by, he barely aged a day while the doors filled the house. I learned some things of carpentry from him, along with the riddles he would talk. I spent many nights trying to untie their meanings, but it was hard to say if he was saying something legitimately wise or if he really was just a crazy old man saying things like, “watch what door you open, kid. You never know where you might end up, if you go anywhere at all!”, or “never think about what door you want to open, Kid. It just might change it’s mind about you.”

I was his tenant for more than ten years, and Mr. Duderstadt never stopped saying these things, right up to the end of his life. In fact, when I took him into the hospital, he was contemplating the automatic doors, saying, “if they open themselves, where is the fun of going through them?” He never told me he was sick, though he must have been for a long time. I guess I already knew, the way he would break into coughing fits or have dizzy spells every once in a while. I certainly must have known when these symptoms got worse. But he was Mr. Duderstadt. He was the crazy old man that never got hurt when he fell or would belly laugh when he hit his thumb with the hammer. “What is victory with out a little sting, aye, kid?” he would say. Everybody comes across a person that seems so timeless that they seem to have the energy to live forever. These people should live forever. The world would be a better place if they did. Unfortunately, even they have to pass on and leave others behind to understand what their life meant.

He was in his hospital bed and I was in the chair beside him, keeping him company, like I had done increasingly so over the time I had known him. Or maybe he was keeping me company. Lines like that always got blurred with him. Even now, he was the one telling jokes and I was the one asking questions.

After a hearty laugh, Mr. Duderstadt let out a content sigh of relief. “Kid,” he said to me. “Go over there and get my wallet out of my pants, will you?”

I did as I was told and handed him the worn leather wallet. He unfolded it, slipped his boney finger into one of the pockets, and pulled
out an old-fashioned key. He then tossed the wallet on the floor and showed me the key as if it were some precious gem. “This I have been saving up, but I think it has other plans. I want you to have it.”

He handed it to me, and I took it. “Where does it go?” I asked.

“Ah, that’s the beauty of it. It goes to the only door in the house that has never been opened.”

“Which one is that, though?”

He laughed his jovial bellow. “What’s the fun if you already know, kid? You know how doors work. The best ones to walk through are the ones you have no idea where they lead.”

Yes, that irked me somewhat, but I was more intrigued than anything. This key was almost a physical representation of any riddle he had ever told me, so I slipped it into my pocket with the satisfaction that the man had not lost his gift for confusing me.

Not an hour later, Mr. Duderstadt breathed his last laugh. I immediately seized his hand, grasping for that sturdy, steady, confident hold of his, but it was gone, lost to the world for eternity. I felt my eyes swell and the blood rush away from me as everything went cold. Everything except for the key: that was burning in my pocket.

I mourned for the man. No more hammering echoed through the house, and cold pasta lost the sparkling taste it had with Mr. Duderstadt’s laugh for seasoning. He was the closest thing I had to family and the only mentor I can ever remember having in my life.

Apparently, he considered me his family too, as he left everything that was his to me in his will. The house was legally mine, as well as every door that was in it. I found out that he had an outrageous sum of money, which was how he was able to pursue his hobby so passionately without interruption. I looked at the accounts and had no idea what I was going to do with that money. It made me crack a smile to think that he probably didn’t know what to do with any of it either.

I sat in his chair in the kitchen. It was always the same one for him: by the window on the chair that wobbled just enough to lean back on while reading the paper. The key was in in my hand as I toyed with it, pondering which door it might go to. I tried every single one I knew of in the house, even the ones that were in the ceiling. The attempt to use the key in one ended with me opening the door before inserting the key, finding myself dangling from the door nob. I shook my head, congratulating Mr. Duderstadt on his unsolvable puzzle he left me.

Several days later, I was busying myself around the rooms of the
house, figuring out what there was for the sake of knowing what I now had. I found myself in the basement, expecting to find a pile of unhung doors and frames. I was dumbstruck, then, when I saw that only one door was left, propped up against the wall, ready to be moved upstairs. On the ground next to it was the wood for the frame, all measured and cut, along with the door hardware, a can of nails, and all of his tools.

He only had one more door.

With no clear reasoning in my head, I brought the door out of the basement, picked a random spot on a rare, unused patch of wall somewhere on the second story, and began making to clatter that Mr. Duderstadt used to produce. I don’t remember when I started, how long it took, or even when I finished, but I was diligent. I measured and drilled and cut and hammered for hours, not noticing if I sweat or got hungry. I found myself chuckling when I bashed my fingers, and I was whistling a familiar tune.

With the satisfaction of the clank of the hammer as it drilled the last hinge pin into place, I smiled and stood back, letting the door swing close with a solid “click.” I sighed in relief and reached back out to turn the nob.

But the door would not open. Some how the lock was put in place, probably when I installed the hardware. I felt like an idiot, especially when no key was found with the door.

Ah, but Mr. Duderstadt had given me a key! This door was the only door that had never been opened because it had not been placed yet! Just as he had told me, you have to build a door to walk through it.

I inserted the key, and by no surprise, it caught, letting the door open with a gentle turn of the nob. I stepped through the threshold that I had built, not knowing what lay on the other side.
My Name

by Sarah Eis- Patrick Henry College

I'll never be Mexican.
I'm too white.
There's too much American in me.
I can't play soccer,
My blood isn't picante,
My family speaks no Spanish.
    I'll never be Mexican.

I'll never be American.
My soul is too tan.
There's too much Mexican in me.
My blood is red, but not white
    Or blue
I speak too much Spanish.
    I'll never be American.

I can't be Chicana.
I don't have the sass,
The confidence,
The brazen certainty.
I don't have the bloodlines.
    I can't be Chicana.

Is there a word for people
    Like me?
American—that is, immigrant—
By blood, but Mexican
In love, in culture, in hope.
A misplaced child, a lost
Toy or tool or indefinable
Something—
Or (I hope) someone.
What is my word?
What is my name?
Who am I?
I feel subtle stirrings deep within me
almost imperceptible, I disregard them—

Then a stronger thump-thump
reveals that inside my little sea swims a child.

*Do I have a monster growing inside of me?*

My snakes sense no danger,
they hang quietly

For the first time, since I drowned in despair
hope springs from my broken heart.

Sick again—
My body wrenches in tortuous pain.

I vomit into the sea.

I curl into the fetal position
on the cold hard ground.

I imagine the child in my blood
formed in a moment of passion
and curse the moment when red juice ran
and I met the God that mutilated my virtue.

I dream of a hero come to liberate me
to let my child spring from my body

His feet are prosperous wings
that free my soul. His hands hold a shield;
I see my reflection
not the beast of serpents I have become.

When I wake, I weep and whimper
realizing that my child may never be free--
he and I imprisoned together in this carcass.

I lie in the recesses of the cave
but can’t shake the feeling that eyes are watching me.

A flash of light. I raise my head and see nothing.
Yet I move towards the mouth of the cave.

Floating in the air, a shiny shield,
the reflection from my dream.

Mesmerized, I stare into my honey eyes
until I hear the slice of metal through the air.

Beads of crimson fall to the ground.
My spirit escapes from its corporal prison.

Alabaster wings emerge from cerise droplets
unfolding tentatively, revealing exquisite beauty.

Flowing like a waterfall over a stream bed
the mane shimmers like sunlight on diamonds.

His pearl white coat glistens as he takes his first steps,
muscles rippling with unknown strength.

Blinking, he steps out of the shadows
unfurling his majestic wings, ready to fly.
Canning Peaches with Grandma

by Beth Palmer- Brigham Young University

Scalding water coaxes protective skins to surrender.
Golden globes sliced in half fill empty jars with life preserved.

Working side by side our elbows bump against each other, our voices intertwined with stories shared.

Light pushes in through the window warming our juice-covered hands. In flickers I see my mother’s face in hers.

The lines in her face are only shadows of what it was like to raise seven kids with her Tommy gone.

She has a God-given knee and a new one a fake god tried to give her. That one makes her sit down.
“It’s hell being old” she laughs
but reality stops it,
pushes it back into her
and makes her sigh instead

I want to reach out and heal,
but the power isn’t in me
So I wash the dishes.

Jars cover the counter.
Our work together is done
and unfinished.
We say goodbye.

One day (I’m sure it will be cold)
There will be a funeral and tears.
But I won’t say goodbye.

Our goodbye is a kiss
on the forehead,
a treasure from the pantry,
a pair of mended jeans,
and a jar of blushing peaches.
Renga of Detritus

by Jessica Wingert- Principia College

peach-colored rose petals
outlined in red falling
soundlessly

on her pillow the scents
of roses and mint leaves mingling

green peppermint tea gone
tepid in a black mug
ringed with hidden stains

the shadows beneath his cheekbones
crepuscular in the shallow moonlight

the aura of lamplight
a soft nugget
of melted caramel

her memories tinted
in warm hues of light
the metal glint of an anvil
bolted to the table by a fuzzy finger
of golden sunlight

a yellow cat’s eye marble
somersaulting across the pockmarked dirt

earth quaking in China and then
the flap of a butterfly’s
wings beside me

the wind’s ear turned to catch
the rushing words of the river

“jsem vyhledověla”
breathed urgently into
the fine warmth of his ear

tiny holes pinpointed in earlobes
hungering for the taste of gold
Scarecrow

by Cindy Fuhrman- University of Idaho

I dreamed I was sleeping
in an old farmhouse, in
a big brass bed, near an
open eight-pane window.

Moonlight so bright it pushed
shades into the room.

Outside I heard a voice
I rose from flowered sheets
and stood in white cotton gown
behind the screenless dormer.

You stood in my garden
by the rhubarb patch,
bare feet in damp soil, hands
planted in your pockets.

I wanted you to come in.
You shook your head and said
you only needed to know for certain
I am still here.