



volume
18

MANASTASH

2008



Jessica Pribula, *Change*. Graphite. (Cropped)

Front Cover: Heidi Ruff, *Raven and Moon*. Linoleum Print

Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present the eighteenth volume of Manastash, the literary arts magazine produced and created by Central Washington University students. Due to a record number of entries, we have expanded this year's Manastash publication to include more works of poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and art.

We would like to thank all of the artists who submitted their work. The staff enjoyed reading the large variety of entries and took great consideration in selecting the pieces for publication.

We hope that in reading this magazine you will be inspired to submit your own creative works to future issues of Manastash.

Sincerely,








Manastash staff

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Alpha Dog

Joanna Thomas

The dog leaps upon the ledge of bed, and
turns, in ever-tightening arcs, three times—
head to tail, tail to head, once more it spins—
as leaves and twigs and scattered barks of oak
and elm are tamped beneath its padded feet.
A sigh, a flop, as legs collapse—to rest,
to dream of teeth and fur, its canine mind
content, perhaps. In sleep, it curls its toes.

But this pine tapestry is woven on
a jacquard loom; the warp and woof of threads
entwine in copied shades of green and brown.
The man's voice is sharp. The dog obeys, slips
to the floor. Its tail wags a sorry thud.
“Keep off the bed, Dude.” A hand swipes at mud.



Mud Bombs

Melanie Lockhart

Arms open wide, I flew
into the living room like a
fighter jet. “ZOOM!” I traveled
around the room, dodging obstacles
along the way. The fiery red chair
failed to slow me down.
I moved through the flowing
curtains—a waterfall—and could see
the mighty TV. I took a sharp turn
around the bend, and then, a banging sound.
I crash landed in a heap on the couch.
Momma answered the door.
A tall, muscled man with a
dark scruffy beard towered
in the doorway.
Frank. The neighbor.
I went to the closet again
and grabbed my jacket—my armor.
I was a brave knight, a warrior
ready for battle.
I stepped outside. Thirty minutes
is all they needed to talk, she said.
The yard was full
of little green men—my army.
Always prepared, always waiting for
that moment when I called
on them to join me. I put them
in my pockets and ran to
the sandpit—the hideout.
I picked up the mud bomb, launched
it across the land before me,
angry at the enemy.
It exploded in the grass,
near yesterday’s blast, I hurried
across the battlefield, jumping
through puddles, dodging raindrop bullets.
I stopped in my tracks, peering through
the sliding glass door.

Momma was silent as she
straightened her skirt
and buttoned her blouse.
I would have to call on my army
again tomorrow.



And the Living Is Easy

Jessi Earleywine

I learned to play the harmonica when I was just seven years old. That was the same summer my older brother Nate forgot how to laugh. Maybe he was born to take things seriously, I don't know. If I look way back into the shadows of memory, I can see a young Nate walking down the hallway, shutting all the doors and jiggling every handle to make sure they were secure. And though I could count on him to faithfully clean our room, when he put away my complex dollhouse set-ups, I was known to throw a justifiable fit.

But after summer vacation at Aunt Terry's, he got worse—a watchdog, a worrier. When most older brothers were busy trying to get rid of their little siblings, my brother wouldn't leave me alone. He was my trusty, doting sidekick. He'd always try to hold my hand when we waited for the bus, he'd check my lunch bags to make sure I'd eaten everything after school, he watched me brush my teeth before bed. I couldn't seem to get rid of him. Mom says she regrets making him baby-sit all those years, but I think that something inside him was trying to make up for leaving me behind that summer of '81. But I'll never be sure.

It was quite a drive up to Aunt Terry's. Our Volkswagen Beetle had never been out of Portland that I know of, and there we were, climbing windy unpaved roads into the woods. The giant Columbia River had become a stream far below the last time I saw it, before it disappeared behind the trees entirely. In my memory, the baby was crying for half the trip. But I know that can't be true because she wasn't born yet.

I know this because Mom wasn't with James. She was still single—the whole reason for our trip. She wanted to work doubles at the hospital for a summer to catch up on the bills, and her sister had offered to watch us, the kids. We were in the way. Mom said she was doing this for us.

“We'll be able to do more fun things next year, like go to the zoo,” Mom

assured us. “And I can get you some new clothes. Won’t that be fun? Nate, you too— none of your pants are long enough anymore.” Of course, we never went to the Portland Zoo, because she met James from Lewiston, and we moved there the very next year.

I wasn’t worried about clothes or future vacations; the summer ahead held enough exciting prospects for me. For one thing, Aunt Terry had a daughter, Eby, who was just a year older than me. Also, I had never been to the country before, except a pumpkin patch on a school field trip. But here I was, on my way to hang out with a cousin, in the woods, for a whole summer. I was beside myself with anticipation and the drive was taking far too long.

Mom finally slowed the car to a stop in a gravel driveway that I had thought was another road. She sighed and extended her manicured nails over the steering wheel, pointing out the dusty windshield. “Well, there it is,” she said unnecessarily.

My first impression was that Aunt Terry must be rich. The tall, white house sat behind two enormous oak trees, the overgrown branches nearly covering the second story windows. A covered porch, half of which was screened in and the other half decorated with colorful glass baubles and wind chimes, extended the width of the house. Some of the white paint was chipping, the lattice work in front of the porch was missing a few pieces, and the lawn was mostly dirt. But to my eyes, the house was a mansion.

A shadowy figure emerged from the door and came out through the porch screen. Aunt Terry was a thin version of my mother, only taller and with longer, stringy hair. She made her way down the porch steps barefooted, waving at us with a lit cigarette.

“Lila,” she purred as she walked toward us. The sisters embraced, Mom in her blue cotton scrubs which she sometimes wore on her days off, and Aunt Terry in a flowing light brown summer dress covered in tiny flowers. I decided that Aunt Terry was much the more fashionable of the two.

“Okay, you kids grab your bags.” Mom leaned through the window. Her smile looked slightly tense, but I knew it was because her children had never been gone for longer than a few days. And she didn’t really like Uncle Ralph, so maybe she was just hoping we’d hurry up before he showed so she wouldn’t have to be polite to him.

Nate and I settled in at Aunt Terry’s just fine for the first couple weeks. Eby turned out to be a ghost—she stayed in her room listening to the radio and reading all the time. We only saw her at dinner. And Uncle Ralph was usually either gone or out fixing cars in the backyard. So Nate and I mostly played superheroes or The-Floor-is-Lava, just like at home. The only differences were that the blankets smelled like cat pee and nobody told us to pick up afterwards. Even Nate relaxed his rules.

“You kids should go outside and play,” Aunt Terry told us one sweltering day in July. We were sitting on our knees in the living room wolfing down our

sandwiches in front of a blank television screen. She stood in the doorway to the kitchen, one delicate arm across her waist and the other holding a cigarette. Her brown hair was up in a loose knot, wisps sticking to her forehead in the heat. "There's a breeze outside. I'll get Eby to show you around." She yelled her daughter's name down the hallway.

My cousin emerged with the same prairie skirt tucked under her armpits that she had been wearing for two days. "Ma, what am I gonna show them, the chickens?"

"Take them up to Old Clarence's or something." Aunt Terry wandered back into the kitchen.

Eby smiled shyly at me but avoided looking at Nate. Her dark brown hair reached the tips of her fingers and she let the front of it hide most of her round face like a curtain. "Old Clarence usually gives me Ho-Hos," she said as she led us out the door and across the gravel parking lot. She seemed livelier outside. We had all abandoned our shoes with the end of the school year, and the sharp pebbles barely tickled our calloused feet.

"He lives in that shack up there?" I asked. I had figured the red building on the hill overlooking the house to be some sort of garage.

"Yeah. He's Ralph's stepfather. And Ralph is mine!" She giggled at the connection and trotted like a horse around a mud puddle, then turned back to us and said conspiringly, "Old Clarence don't have electricity!"

Nate looked at me like he didn't believe it. I shrugged.

When we got to the shack Eby didn't even knock on the door; she just pushed it open and yelled, "Hallo!"

A man wearing overalls, and with white hair that floated out from his head like pulled-out cotton balls, limped into the room. "Hello, Eby. And who have we here?"

"Clarence," Eby said in a loud voice, "this is Nate and Lee."

He looked us up and down. "So you're Lila's kids. Freckles and all. But you, young man, you've got quite a head of red hair."

Nate scowled.

Eby whispered, "I think he meant it as a compliment."

Old Clarence turned to sit down on a piano bench, depositing his body carefully like it was marked 'Fragile' and belonged to somebody else.

I looked around the small, tidy room. One wall was taken up by a fancy couch, upholstered in red velvet. It had a fluffy curled armrest on one side and the back sloped down gradually to nothing on the other. The feet looked like lion's paws carved out of wood. I wanted to run and jump into the inviting tasseled throw pillows, but I restrained myself by wringing my hands.

"That's a chaise-longue," Old Clarence said. "G'head, sit down! That's all right. The only thing I won't tolerate sitting on my furniture is those damn cats!"

He turned to a dark wooden upright piano and ran a hand up the keys. His

fingers looked like ballerinas, filling the air with magic. “Needs to be tuned, I think. Can’t tell so much anymore.”

His living room was a treasure trove. Recalling the old posters and instruments hanging on his walls, old furniture, and glass lanterns lining the high windows, I can imagine an antique dealer would have swooned. I heard that Ralph sold it all in a garage sale when Old Clarence died.

Nate soon tired of looking at fancy old things, and he took his Ho-Ho and left politely. Eby had seen it all before, so she left soon after. But I stayed and begged Old Clarence to play more songs and show me more albums full of sepia-toned pictures. He was delighted to have someone to show off to. I reluctantly left at dusk, when I needed to fill my stomach with more than Hostess cakes.

“Come back anytime, Lea,” Clarence said. He called me “Lea” all summer, presumably because it sounded more like a girl’s name than Lee. I never told him he could just call me Merilee if it bothered him. Maybe it was out of respect, or maybe because I just took things as they came. But to this day I like it when people call me Lea by accident.

“Okay, Mr. Clarence.” I waved and ran off down the driveway for my dinner. When I reached the ratty yard, Uncle Ralph was walking around the side of the house with a tool box. He walked like a lion, his tan muscled arms swinging back and forth across his thin, slinking torso outlined in a white tank top. Brown hair flowed out from under a baseball cap and waved around his shoulders. A gold chain swung down over his hairless chest. I wondered why he wore a necklace to work on the cars. He set the toolbox down in the flower bed, right on top of a white chrysanthemum, and walked up the porch steps in front of me, not even noticing I was there. I had to catch the swinging screen door to keep it from hitting me in the face.

“Lee you’re always up at Mr. Clarence’s,” Nate complained to me one morning. “And Eby stays in her room all day.”

It seemed like nighttime in the house; the lights weren’t on and the rainy sky filtered sunlight into a grayness that darkened the lace curtains. The smells of incense, smoke, and cats were nauseating in the swampy air. I slumped down in the kitchen chair, stirring my cereal into a thick mush.

“Well, you can come with me, I don’t care.” I said to my spoon, too lazy to turn my head. “Old Clarence is teaching me to play the mouth harp.”

“Mouth harp? You mean harmonica.”

“That’s not what Old Clarence calls it.”

“Does he know you call him that?” Nate pulled out a chair and fell into it. “I’ve been going downstairs. That’s where Ralph is, when he’s not outside.”

“Ick. Uncle Ralph. He lets you down there?”

“Yeah, but it’s not too exciting. Just a lot of Tupperware and boxes, and it’s all closed off with curtains everywhere. But you shouldn’t say that about Uncle Ralph. He’s nice, at least to me”

I shrugged. “Bo-ring.” Normally I’d have been more easily amused, but the heat was pressing down on me.

“Maybe so, but everything’s boring here. I kind of want to go home.”

“Party pooper.” I pushed away my cereal and dove into his chest, tickling his ribs. He giggled and tickled me back. I squealed and jumped back to run away, but he was too quick. He was thirteen years old, and had arms and legs like a spider.

“Give! Give!” I screamed our code word for truce, mostly because we didn’t know the word “truce,” and collapsed on the linoleum floor laughing.

Nate stood up and flexed an arm like Popeye. “The winner as usual...”

“Gets to wash the dishes.” Aunt Terry walked in and dropped a wine glass into the sink. “I’m going to town today to get some groceries. You kids want anything?”

“Please, anything but Ho-Ho’s.” Nate winked at me. He was in big-brother mode again.

“Can I please have...mmm...green beans?” I asked, trying to impress her.

She didn’t seem to notice. “You kids like Otter Pops? Those are nice; I can just throw them in the freezer out back and you can grab them whenever you want.” Aunt Terry had a way of talking that sounded like sifted sugar—a little raspy from the cigarettes, a little lazy, but sweet. She floated around the kitchen, looking in her tall stuffed cupboards and taking silent inventory.

Nate and I didn’t know what Otter Pops were, so we mumbled our ascent to avoid being embarrassed. Just then, Eby wandered down the hall, this time fully dressed. Her Saltwater sandals clicked on the floor.

“Ma, can I go to town with you?”

“Hon, why don’t you stay with the kids?”

Eby jumped up and down, her stomach bouncing right through her thin pearl snap shirt. “Mo-o-om. Last time you said I could go with you! You promised.”

Uncle Ralph stood in the doorway. “For Chrissake, let her go to town with you. And take this other one.” He motioned toward me with a greasy wrench before setting it on the counter. “No wonder your daughter’s in the retard classes, you keep her holed up here all the time.”

She ignored him, so he walked up and stared her in the face. “Or were you planning something else too?”

“Oh Ralph, give it a rest. The kids are here.”

He leaned forward until his nose was a few inches from hers. “Whore.”

Aunt Terry stared back at him for a few moments before lighting another cig. After a pause, she exhaled and looked out at the rain. Ralph gave up and got a beer from the fridge.

She watched him leave before saying, “Eby, why don’t you show Nate how to put in a movie? After you get that working you can come with me. Comb your hair, too.” She tapped the cigarette in the sink and watched them leave, then turned and smiled at me like I was an afterthought. “Old Clarence must enjoy having you here.

He's a nice man. Nice man. If only he had raised Ralph."

I smiled shyly and nodded.

"Don't ask him about war, though; he'll go on for hours."

For some reason I woke up before dawn one morning and tiptoed down the stairs to a quiet house. It was still dreary outside, but no rain streaked the windows or pounded the walls. Eby's door was shut. The house was filled with the eerie blue light of the moon.

I wandered into the kitchen, humming a song that Old Clarence had shown me three days before. Absent-mindedly, I was breathing in and out while I hummed, in time with the half and whole notes just like I was playing a harmonica. I thought I was alone, but while reaching for the fridge door I noticed the glowing red tip of Aunt Terry's cigarette in the living room. I held my breath and could hear her hushed voice—she was on the phone and hadn't noticed my presence.

Even at seven years old, I could tell something was wrong. There are moments when a child is nothing but a little adult. I tiptoed to the door frame to listen.

"I don't know why, he didn't say. Probably just homesick." Her legs were crossed, and she was bending forward like an origami swan. Strangely enough, she seemed to be rubbing her ankles.

"Oh, she's welcome to stay. No, no—it's no problem."

I felt my stomach drop.

"Lila, hon, I told you...yes, she's getting along with Eby fine. Well, I don't think those so-called experts know the first thing about kids. She's perfectly smart, just a little shy. Lee has been wonderful. Yes, they're both fine. They've been up at Old Clarence's a lot."

This was news to me. I was at Old Clarence's most days, but Eby and Nate had stayed clear.

"Oh, that son of a bitch is gone all the time. Working on the cars, who knows what else. No, Nate's not in his hair. He seems to have taken a liking to him."

She took a drag while my mother's voice leaked through the receiver. "Oh, Rick used to get homesick too. Remember the terrible moods? And Nate acts a lot like Rick. I'd rather not deal with it. No, that's not what...I'm just saying it'd be for the best."

A pause, then, "Tomorrow."

Without realizing it, I let out a whimper.

Aunt Terry sat up and met my gaze just as the clouds broke and blue light flooded into the room. The bags under her eyes were the most prominent feature on her face. Then I noticed that she hadn't been rubbing her ankles all along—my brother lay in a blanketed heap on the floor sleeping, and she'd been patting his shoulders soothingly.

"Lila, listen, can I call you back? Lee's downstairs." She hung up the phone

and approached me with a hug. "Sweetie, everything will be all right."

Since she suggested it, I wondered if there was a reason I should be worrying. Was Nate really going home? Was Mom angry? I stared at the floor until I realized that I was crying. Sobs shook my body and my nose ran as freely as my tears.

"Tsh...shhh..." Aunt Terry stood up and scooped me into her arms, although I was half her weight. She carried me into the living room, pacing until I was done sobbing out loud, and carefully laid me on the couch. The evening was warm, but I pulled the afghan from the back of the couch and sobbed into it. I felt cold.

When I woke up, the sun was beating through the tall living room window, making a dusty yellow spotlight that found Nate in the rocking chair. His duffel bag was at his feet, and he was staring at the rug as though hypnotized.

Feeling refreshed and new, and maybe a little hopeful, I jumped up and giggled. "Nate, Nate, always late!"

He kept staring at the carpet.

"Nate, don't go." I charged him and grabbed his ribs to tickle attack.

The chair swung wildly and he had to stick his feet out to keep us upright. He shrugged me away with his arms. "Quit touching me!"

"Sorry. Sorry, Nate." I stepped back and brushed my hair out of my face. Strands of it were still stuck to my cheeks where tears had dried.

He ignored my apology and stared at the rug again, so I stomped toward the door. "I'm going to see Old Clarence, and you can't come!" I yelled. After pausing for a second—long enough to find out that Nate wasn't coming after me—I resumed my march. When Clarence woke up about an hour later he found me laying in his chaise-longue, sobbing into one of his satin tasseled pillows.

Aunt Terry took Nate to town that day to meet Mom at the gas station. They had decided that I was having too much fun at Aunt Terry's to disturb me, and that if Mom came up to the house I would get homesick too.

The rest of my summer passed without a ripple. Eby warmed up to me after Nate left so I didn't miss him much after the first week or so. She let me play Lego Land and read her magazines. She even took to leaving her roomful of cooling fans behind to show me around. "No Trespassing" signs meant nothing to her, fences even less, so we would pack a lunch and grab an Otter Pop and leave for entire afternoons. Nobody seemed to care where we went. Aunt Terry's car was often gone and I didn't see much of Uncle Ralph. I'm not even sure if we had stayed at the house there would've been any adult supervision at all. I only went to Old Clarence's a few more times that I remember. He gave me an old family picture that was not of my ancestors, and a red lacquered harmonica. I saved the picture but accidentally stepped on the harmonica when I was eleven. I bet if I tried I could still play pretty well.

The August days were roasting, which pleased me because I swam in the

creek in just my swimsuit and would run around for the rest of the afternoon air drying. When the nights got cooler Eby let me borrow one of her Mom's old prairie skirts, which I wore like a beach towel under my arms just like she did. I felt like I had gained a sister. The only troubling part of my summer of easy living was the crawdads. I never saw one, but they lurked in the mud and would grab my toes if I wasn't careful.

Nate called me at least once a week for the rest of the summer. Maybe he missed me; more likely he was checking up on me. With Nate, worrying and caring were close to the same thing. But he never teased. And when I returned home for the fall he seemed so much older.

For many years I avoided the subject of why he left. At the age of seven a girl tends to blame everything on herself. But years later it became apparent to me that I was not the reason, so I finally asked him about it one day. It was his graduation ceremony, almost a year exactly before he died in a car crash, and I was the same age that he had been that summer at our aunt's five years ago. I figured he could tell me; I was pretty much grown up.

"Hey Nate, what made you leave that summer anyway?"

"What," Nate scowled, brushing imaginary lint off his purple gown, "which summer?"

He was a horrible actor, but I humored him. "You know, the only summer you left. From Aunt Terry's house. Come on."

His faced changed then, from annoyed big brother to kind mentor. At least I thought it did; the sun was directly above his head, and I was a good foot shorter than him, so all I could see was the dark hollows and white cheeks of a stage mask, framed by a graduation cap and red hair like a halo. "Merilee, that was a long time ago."

I expected him to quit then, to stare off into space like he usually did when he was done socializing, but for some reason he felt talkative. "You know, not everything there was as great as you seem to think."

"What do you mean?"

"You idolized those people. And they're not so great."

"You mean Aunt Terry and that guy from down the road? Everybody knew about that; big deal." I actually hadn't found out until later, but I wanted to seem sophisticated.

"Well, it's not a small deal." His face darkened. "Anyway, that's not it."

I hushed my voice and whispered, "You mean, all the weed?"

"Grow up, Lee."

I leaned back, feeling as though I'd been slapped.

He softened his voice. "Look, Aunt Terry was never home. Eby was a weirdo..." his voice trailed off.

"Yeah, so?"

He took off his cap and turned it between his hands. "And didn't you ever go downstairs?"

I shrugged. "I just stay outta other people's stuff I guess." I thought of Old Clarence and knew that wasn't true. I guess I was just lucky in choosing my friends.

Something in his face shifted. "Well, keep it that way." He smiled thinly and hit me in the stomach with his cap, a gesture that meant we were through talking.

"You'll tell me your version of the summer someday," I teased. But he never did.



Grandpa's Teenage Sonnet

Josh McKimmy

He grew as gas was thirty-seven cents;
a nickel got a pickled pig's hoofed foot
hand-fished from layers of grime. Each day was spent
juggling work and school 'cause culture put
soft pressure on you then, a two door car
meant honest money, true moms sewed the clothes
and families always owned the back lot farm.
Like films, with Elvis and Holly's rock and roll
they'd jog across the county line, bootleg
from older dealers' booze and smoke like icons,
look cool for gals, James Dean back home before they
could know. As Grandpa's eyes became this epoch,
he felt that over skillet rabbit sizzling
American again, stood there as something.



First Autumn

Andy Burt

September holds its breath.
We watched the walnut tree in our backyard begin to change
its colors – the leaves turned dry and stale,
my father standing under them. Somewhere
in his heart, the smoldering, slow burn
of autumn was beginning to take hold,
was tracing rings of smoke around his mind.

October blows the leaves off the trees.
The dizziness of falling down,
the pounding of the heart that drove
my father somewhere far away.
We rake the leaves up into piles – mother, sister,
me, outside among the cold, the clouds of breath,
the falling leaves, I close my eyes and see
myself standing underneath an empty tree when I was nine: first autumn–
first that I remember. And my father with his rake in hand
asking whether I will jump in.

The suffocating world turns pale.
We watched the first leaves falling
from the walnut tree – all flame and branches
and the swing my father made from rope.
Through the kitchen window I saw
my father in the twilight; his face
was pale and full of lines
like December through the branches
of a walnut tree.



A Tale of Brothers

Jamie McIntyre

A raven cried outside Jin's window, one piercing staccato shriek after another, too quick for Jin to catch his breath in between. He counted the calls. Ichi, ni, san, shi. The raven grew quiet before it could issue a fifth. Jin frowned, aware of the stigma associated with the number four, but young enough to ignore it. Shi for death and shi for four were two completely different kanji, anyway.

Shifting comfortably between his two brothers, Jin opened his eyes and rolled onto his stomach, fingers curling sleepily around the hem of the mosquito net barrier that was found beneath his pillow. The frayed edges were plasticky and difficult to grip with his already moist fingertips, and as Jin stretched, his hands slid against the green mesh barrier. Outside the open doors of the brothers' bedroom, the sun was just beginning to cut its way through the thick line of trees that bordered the Doto's yard, though the world seemed to have already awoken with the raven's strange omen.

At eleven, Jin was the oldest of three boys. His family, farmers from the Wakayama district of Japan, worked a series of rice paddies on the edge of a forest in the country. It was a short walk to the nearest town, and when school was in session, Jin would take his brothers to the train station and ride into Kinokawa. There, he and his youngest brother, Jun, would attend classes at the primary school. Shigeru, their older brother, would spend the day with his private tutor.

Jin yawned and stretched again, turning to pillow his head in the crook of one arm as he studied the sleeping form of the family's middle child. Shigeru was small for his age, and pale for their family. Skin even paler while his features were relaxed in sleep, he almost appeared ghostly. It was oddly fitting for the young boy, though – had even turned into a nickname for him in school.

It was that first year that their parents had made the mistake of sending Jin and Shigeru to school together. At six, Shigeru had hardly fit in physically with his classmates, looking more like a three year old than one that should have been attending school. In Japan, where fitting in is a necessity to success, Shigeru couldn't have been more misplaced. Even Jin suffered the effects of his brother's immediate outcast status.

"He's your brother, Doto?" a friend had asked him after the students had returned from lunch, "he looks like a baby. My sister says he can't even talk!"

He's not mine, Jin had wanted to say, though instead had kept silent.

The truth was, though, that Shigeru could do much more than talk, and seemed completely impervious to the jabs and barbs that were constantly thrown at him in classes. Jin himself was hardly aware of his brother's success in school until

the first reports had come from teachers, a month into the year. So bright, the reports said, but his social status is worrying. He doesn't fit in.

"Maybe you could help him, Jin," their mother said one night at dinner as she laid out bowls of steaming miso soup, "he could help you with your math – you're struggling, aren't you?"

It had gone on like that for almost two tedious years, right up until the family had made enough money to afford a tutor. Jin, instead of being freed from his social stigma as the freak's older brother, was suddenly cast a new one as the boy first in birth, but second in brains.

There was a soft, loose groan from behind Jin's turned back, and blankets that he had thrown aside during the hot summer not rubbed like a cat against the material of his tank top. Jun was half-awake now; Jin could feel his small fingers poking their way through his hair, tugging for attention. It always seemed that the brother he was looking at wasn't interested, and with another look thrown towards Shigeru's sleeping form, Jin realigned himself for the one that was.

"Morning," he said, watching the pile of four-year-old rub his eyes imprecisely. A line of sunlight streaked its way over the bridge of Jun's nose and halted at his chin, in ineffective staple.

"Can we go to the lake today?" he asked, roughly kicking at a blanket that was holding his small legs hostage. "For fish."

Jin considered this request, though not for long. It was going to be another hot day, and since it was Sunday and they had no school, the lake would be a perfect place to spend it. There would be no complaints from their mother as long as they brought something home for dinner.

"Yeah, sure," Jin said, "wake Shige up."

Delighted, Jun further tangled himself in the blankets he had earlier sought to dispel, and ended up thrown halfway over Jin in his haste to reach the slumbering Shigeru. What followed was a half-hearted, sleep brotherly struggle: Jin poking and tickling as Jun squirmed and squealed, never quite reaching their older brother despite being so close.

"Shige!" Jun wailed through laughter and tears, "Shige wake up!"

Jin was just turning to plow his squirrely brother into Shigeru when the latter's dark eyes snapped open, gaze perfectly focused and still on Jin's own.

"I am," he said, his voice quiet and hollow, though its calmness seemed to placate Jun. It certainly stilled Jin's movements, though Shigeru had often had that unnaturally chilling affect on him. This time, though, it seemed as if the whole world had quieted. Even the sunlight had stopped its crawl up Shigeru's bare legs.

Jin nodded and brushed a chunk of hair out of his eyes, one arm still around Jun. Beside him, the four-year-old swallowed once before his mouth found his thumb, a nervous habit no one had ever tried to break. To be the third child in this family was to have free reign over your own body.

"Let's get breakfast," Jin said.

The dirt road that led to the lake was crusted and dry, had been for a good month before. Dust trailed in the wake of the three boys as they followed the beaten earth as it cut its way through land that grew marshier with each step. Trees hung their weighted branches overhead, reeds dipped heavily under a light film of dust and wavered sluggishly to and fro in the wind. Bullfrogs shouted out a discordant melody, quieting only when the eager Jun skipped too far ahead and startled them into silence. Jin and Shigeru hung back, silent for different reasons.

Shigeru was reading a book. It was one that Jin had never seen around the house before and that he had surely gotten from school, but even the author was unfamiliar to the boy. It wasn't a child's book – the lettering was deep silver, with harsh angles nothing at all like the bubbly font used for books boys Shigeru's age should be reading. But then, Shigeru hadn't read those kind of books for a long time, and he'd almost been reading as long as Jin, two years his senior.

Jin bit back a sigh and pulled his hands into the pockets of his shorts. "What's that?" he asked, nodding to the book. Shigeru merely looked up, eyes solemnly drifting up to meet Jin's, though they barely stayed there long before they were back at the book.

"A book," he answered in his quiet way. Jin's shoulders tensed and he looked off down the path, hair bristling.

Shigeru had been born a genius, and it seemed like nothing ever let Jin forget it. If it wasn't his parents or the chatter at school or Shige himself, it was Jin's own restless mind attaching causticity to everything Shigeru ever did or said. Jin wasn't even sure that Shigeru had meant anything by his comment; more often than not it seemed that the younger boy had no concept of social grace, couldn't empathize with people. It was what made him so different; what had set him apart in class more than his genius.

Jin began to trail behind and watched Shigeru's back slowly depart. In the distance, Jun was bent over the road poking at something with a stick. Shigeru skirted around him as he passed, eyes never shifting from his book.

"Look at it," Jun said as Jin approached. He had a fuzzy caterpillar on a stick; it was inching its way toward his hand.

"Put it back, Jun. It belongs in the road."

"Like we belong in the house?"

"Like we belong in school," Jin said, crouching to take a closer look. Jun had a hard time learning without examples – without analogies. Since Shigeru had never taken an interest, Jin was determined to make Jun his project. The project that Shigeru never could have been.

"What if the caterpillar's like Shige?" Jun asked. He stroked a small finger along the caterpillar's back, and they both watched it arch up, completely natural. There was a silence and Jun sniffed.

"It's not," Jin said, standing up and kicking a rock away from them. "It's normal. Now put it back."

“It would be lucky to be Shige,” Jun murmured, rocking on his heels once before he returned the stick back to the road, skipped up to Jin, and took his hand. “Let’s go!”

“Tch,” Jin snorted, “go on.” He watched Jun skip off at twice the pace of his own, and glanced back just in time to see a raven capture the caterpillar in its beak and hop away.

Jin could remember the first time that he’d come to this lake with his father. He’d been five and Shigeru had been three. It had been a day much like the one they were currently chasing, one that had set the tune for all these other days. The rainy ones, the sunny ones. All the days to follow.

The three of them had sat out on the long dock in the sunlight as their father demonstrated how to bait a line. It had been one of the few times that Shigeru’s eyes had been bright with interest, though he had oddly never excelled at fishing. In all their time together, Jin didn’t think Shigeru had caught a single fish – though back then, it didn’t stop him from trying.

As Shigeru had stood on the dock that day, hair glinting in the sunlight as his small fingers worked to tame a twisting worm, their father had drawn Jin away from the scene, had put a hand on his shoulder.

“You’re to look after Shigeru,” he’d said, and then, “Your brother is special.”

Such a line had been twisted over the years as the boys grew and Jin saw just how special. Their father had been right, but instead of creating a tight iron bond between them, he’d forged a wall. Jin, who as the eldest should have been the award-winner, was shuffled off into second place. Second place, behind the boy who rarely talked and could relate to no one. The boy who had no strength, but the one who Jin could never guide. He had wanted to be Shigeru’s leader.

It was hard not to think about those kinds of things when Jin looked at Shigeru now, even as he baited a line for Jun and helped him cast. What had once been difficult had finally been mastered, even a hook and bait were not free from Shigeru’s perfection. But Shigeru was Jin’s brother, his brother, and though there was no outright animosity between them, the bitterness Jin felt at too many unspecific things was impossible to get rid of. He wanted Shigeru to fish, not just help Jun and walk away. He wanted Shigeru to ask Jin to help him find a spot, not creep his way onto the dock and turn away from him, the useless brother.

Much like that first day, the sun shone on the dock where Shigeru was seated, clearly no intention of fishing. The water of the lake was calm aside from the small ripples of fish coming to the surface, and Jin stared across it for a long while before turning to bait his own line.

“Jin! Jin!” Jun called excitedly as Jin squatted before his tackle box, his back turned to the young boy. “I got something! Shige! Shige! Come look at my fish!”

Jin snorted softly, turning his head to glance at his youngest brother, “Just start reeling the line.” He could see it pulled taut, though the angle of his view was bad and Jun kept hopping up and down and disturbing his sight.

“What should I do Jin? Should I pull?”

“Just give it to me, stupid, you’re gonna lose it!” Jin growled, leaning forward to snatch the pole away from his youngest brother.

There was a sudden horrifying crack just as Jin’s fingers closed around Jun’s, and then a splash, dull and muted that followed. The ripples that spread from the tugging line were intercepted by a series of larger, quicker ones from further out in the lake. Jin looked up, afraid of what he might see.

“Where’s Shigeru?” he whispered to Jun, throat tight. Jun had dropped his pole, fish forgotten. It jerked suddenly into the lake, and in that same moment, the surface broke again. Shigeru coming up for air.

There was no sign of the dock where he’d been sitting moments before. Rotten from years of use and lack of care, it had collapsed into the water. The force of the fall had broken the planks apart from one another, and they drifted slowly away from Shigeru’s flailing form.

“Jin! Do something...do something...!” Jun pleaded, scrambling forward to cling at Jin’s clothing. His face was drawn and panicked, eyes wide as a character from the cartoons he liked to watch, shining like the sun that glinted off the lake. “Shige can’t swim...”

Jin couldn’t get his legs to move. His fingers closed numbly on Jun’s fists as they pulled and pushed as his shirt. Jin swayed, but couldn’t move.

Scream, Shige –scream, damnit, his mind begged, eyes fixed on the lake as Shigeru disappeared again. Why, why aren’t you screaming for me?

But then, why wasn’t Jin moving? Why had he left the caterpillar? Had the ravens called three times, or four? He couldn’t remember. He couldn’t.

“Jin!” Jun cried.

Move. Move. Your brother is drowning. Move. His legs were leaden. He was a tree, even the wind could not have moved him. Shigeru broke the surface again, body hardly shooting out of the water at all this time, and then disappeared.

“Jin!”

Time stopped, and the ripples of the lake slowly but surely wore themselves out.

Later, when the adults had come and taken Shigeru’s body from the lake, Jin fell asleep in the weak embrace of his mother’s arms. Skin stiff from a reaction too delayed to be of any use, he’d dreamed of Shigeru’s body laid flat on a futon in an empty room. Through the paper doors, he could hear the adults muttering about loss, and though he and the dead body were the only ones in the room, Jin could feel their eyes and judgments seeping in, oozing through the floorboards.

“I just wanted you to ask,” he said in the darkness, far enough away from Shigeru that he felt like he could. After a few moments’ hesitation, he approached the body and tried to combat the pressure in his nose, behind his eyes. He smoothed a fold out of Shigeru’s white clothing, as he’d seen his mother do. “Shige...” he whispered, eyes going to his brother’s face.

Shigeru’s eyes were open.

Jin woke up screaming, startling his mother and the others that were gathered in the room as he grasped at the warm, dry folds he'd previously been stroking.

"What is it?" his mother gasped out as Jin struggled to pull away from her. Jun's head rose from the other side of the couch, and he rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"His eyes! Shigeru's eyes, are they closed? Are they closed?"

Suddenly, she pulled him close, held him tight against her chest. Shigeru felt the warm drip of sorrow seep into his hair as she rocked against him.

"They're closed, Jin...they're closed. He won't take you with him. You're right here."

When the moon rose high enough to see by, Jin snuck away from the house and back to the lake. He watched the moon shimmer across its slowly shifting surface, and pulled his clothing off and pushed it into the lake's water. He jumped in, naked, and swam to the spot where Shigeru had drowned. He held his breath and floated, floated for hours. He thought about ravens and caterpillars, and Shigeru's dead, dead eyes. But he didn't drown.

He wasn't drowning, at all.



White Fragments

Rachel Pybon

death vehicle

the chinese
never buy
white cars

I was the only white girl in class

they would call me vanilla
and say fuck you
and laugh

Hindu, past tense

the brides wear white back home and so did I
to your funeral
and all the women sat to the left
men, to the right
and your smiling picture,
center, next to your ashes
and the beat-beat of the tablahs
can you hear it?
and on and on

ghost

I went white from the he didn't make it
they said I looked pale
and laid me down
hush

yoga teacher

close your eyes and think of nothing but
pure whiteness
and I did and now,
due to fog
I cannot get out

whitening lotion: eighteen Singapore dollars

they asked me
what products do you use?
how do you stay so white?
and I said genetics
and I said for free



Apology

Ben McSpadden

“Come back here later,” you said
in that way that added silently
and not for coffee.

And I’m sorry.
I meant to come back,
but when I got home

all I really wanted to do was
get stoned, masturbate
and read Kurt Vonnegut.

Even then, that good and solid
utilitarian desire
proved to be too strong

because I napped instead,
and dreamed of a world
without scratches.



Mizuko Kuyo

Andy Burt

*“Not until the hells are emptied will I become a Buddha;
Not until all beings are saved will I certify to Bodhi.”*

--Jizo Bodhisattva,
Guardian of Children
Who Die Prematurely

You started slowly to exist, flowing
into every part of me. You

were a silver waterfall between the separate
worlds of am and will be. I

felt your warm electric current
run between us like a river

Without form there is no content....

The “unborn child” can’t exist
so I will call you what you are: fetus.

Still, for those two months you
felt like life beginning

to fill up, your vibrant tide
transcending any language.

Then, in my eighth week, walking to the subway, I felt it snap....

It felt like falling, like something
sinking down inside of me. You

lost your grip and slipped back
to the place you came from.

In the place I come from, no one talks
about the thing you have become. No one

can name you in my native tongue.
Can something like you have a name?

In Japanese it is “mizuko...”

“Water Child,” you were a dream.
How is it that you never were,

but still I feel this loss, like
the weight of heavy stones.

The statues were offerings to Jizo....

They say you cannot cross the river
on your own. I have asked the bodhisattva

with his staff that opens up the doors
of hell to find you on the riverbank,

to hide you in his robes. He will teach
you to recite the lotus sutra.

But there were so many things I couldn't know....

I know that it is suffering, this place,
this sea that presses down on me

and you. I know that we
are here because we cling to one another.

Life clings to life like water clings to water
pouring from a pitcher to a glass.

The connection I felt was unanticipated....



Cigarettes

Andy Burt

By ten o'clock, she was already on her second cigarette. Normally, she tried not to smoke more than a few a day; in fact she had been trying to quit, but she still kept a pack hidden in the back of a drawer in the kitchen – out of sight, out of mind. She drew in a searing puff of smoke and held it in, pressed the play button on the answering machine, then exhaled a long, shaky sigh. She placed her elbows on the counter and pressed the pads of her fingers into her forehead. Closing her eyes tightly, she waited for the message to play.

“Hi Em, this is your brother. Hey, I’m going to be in town tomorrow. I’m heading over to Everett. I know a guy who lives over there who’s going to let me stay at his place for a while. Anyway, I thought maybe I’ll stop by and see how you and Tom are doing. Alright, I’ll see you. Take care. Bye.”

Emily didn’t open her eyes until she began to feel the heat from the cigarette scorching her fingers. She put it out in the ashtray next to the phone. She slid the door to the back balcony open to let in some fresh air. Tom would throw a fit when he found out she was smoking in the house. He was always saying that if she wanted to pollute her own lungs, that was fine, but she didn’t have to stink up the whole house. At the moment, though, she wasn’t very much concerned with what Tom thought about her smoking. She only wished that he was home.

The call had come earlier while she had been in the shower. She hadn’t heard the phone ring, and there was no one to pick it up. Tom had already left for work. Emily didn’t work on Fridays, so she was normally home alone those mornings. Usually she liked the time she had to herself, enjoying the rare quiet before starting the weekly chores of shopping and running errands, but not today. She was desperate for someone to talk to, someone to disturb the heavy weight of silence that followed when the answering machine stopped playing. Somehow she wanted to hear the message again, even though it would have been the third time, because she didn’t think it could be real, because she didn’t know what else to do, because she wanted to hear anything but that terrible silence.

She grabbed the ashtray and the cigarettes from the counter and walked out onto the balcony. The apartment was on the second story. Emily was glad; she liked being high up and looking down on the patchwork quilt of rooftops in the mobile home community behind their apartment building. She set the ashtray on the balcony railing and took out another cigarette. She lit it, drawing in deeply and watching the slow smoke rise and curl in the air.

Emily hadn’t heard from Chris in over a year. The last time they’d spoken, Chris had threatened her. Emily had just gotten home from work when Chris knocked

on the door. When she answered and saw him stand there, she was shocked by how thin and tired he looked. She invited him to come in and sit down. He was pale and sick looking. He said he hadn't slept for almost a week. He said he had something big to tell her.

"Me and this friend of mine came up with an idea to make some money," he said, "but we need a little cash to get it going."

Emily tried to hide the mocking tone in her voice, "What's this plan?"

Chris leaned in and lowered his voice, "I invented this new kind of engine, see. It runs on magnets. It doesn't need any kind fuel, and it'll run forever," Chris grinned. The smile was crooked and unnaturally broad. It made his eyes cross and his head list to the side. Emily felt as if that grin was pulling her stomach inside out. Chris was getting excited. His voice rose in pitch and volume as he described his invention. He said it would end world hunger. He said it would make them all rich. Emily's discomfort rose as Chris's voice grew louder and more insistent.

"Of course, this is all just on paper right now, but I've got it all worked out and it'll run. It'll run. And all I need is about a thousand dollars or so to hire a lawyer and get a patent."

"A thousand! Chris, you can't spend that much money!"

Chris's expression fell from excitement to confusion to anger. "Yes I can. I don't think you understand how important this is." He stood up so fast he knocked over his chair. He fumed and paced from room to room, exclaiming that he would never give her a dime if she ever needed money. He raved about brotherly love and hellfire.

Before he left, Chris looked Emily straight in the eye and said "You watch yourself." Then he slammed the door so hard that Emily felt the entire building shudder. Now, more than a year later, Emily could still feel the floorboards shaking under her feet.

Later that afternoon, Emily pulled into the apartment complex parking lot with a trunkful of groceries. She had been gone for hours. It was almost four o'clock. Tom would be home soon. Emily took the various plastic bags from the trunk and carried them up the steep concrete stairs to her door. She had to set the bags down to unlock it. For a moment she paused. She knew there wouldn't be anybody on the other side of the door, but she couldn't help the knot forming in her stomach. She opened the door quickly, banging it loudly against the inside wall. Somehow, the sound made her feel more comfortable. She felt stupid for letting her nerves make her so jumpy. Inside, the apartment was dark and silent. Emily set the bags down on the kitchen counter and started filling the cupboards with the things she had bought. But the silence was getting to her. It was ringing in her ears. She could feel the quiet radiating out from all the empty rooms. It made her skin itch. She finished putting the groceries away and stuffed the bags in the cupboard under the sink. Somewhere outside, a dog was barking. Unable to handle the silence any longer, she turned on the TV in the living room and turned the volume up loud. Back in the kitchen, she

started putting away the dishes from the washer.

When she heard the front door open, Emily nearly dropped the stack of plates she was holding before she realized it was just Tom home from work. She quickly placed the plates in the cupboard and ran to meet Tom in the entryway. He kissed her. She wrapped her arms desperately around him. He asked her if she was alright, and she said yes, she was just glad he was home. Then she told him about the message on the answering machine.

“Why is he coming here?” Tom asked.

“I don’t know. How should I know?” Emily went back to the dishes, “He just said he was going to be in town. What is that supposed to mean anyway? Why wouldn’t he come here?”

“Nothing. I don’t know,” by now, Tom had disappeared to the bedroom.

Emily called after him, “I thought we could give him a little money.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s my brother, Tom, and he doesn’t have anything.”

“Fine, whatever. I don’t think you should, though.”

“I know you don’t.” Now Tom was in the bathroom. He closed the door. Emily turned off the TV, then finished putting away the dishes. In a moment, she heard the shower running. Emily was glad that Tom hadn’t seemed to smell the cigarettes she’d had earlier. She wanted another one badly, but didn’t dare smoke it while Tom was present. She didn’t want him to know she was smoking again. She leaned against the counter and chewed on her thumbnail.

Emily wasn’t sure exactly when the breakdown had started. Chris had been very private person. If he was ever upset, he usually kept it to himself. He was always cheerful, but ever since college, there had seemed to be a weight on him. In his sophomore year, he nearly drowned in the Snohomish River. He had been there with his friend Dennis. The river was choked with logs destined for the nearby lumberyard. The friends decided they would try to cross the river by walking over the logs. Half-way across, Chris slipped and fell into the water. The logs above him closed together. He couldn’t find a space between them big enough to pull himself through. He managed to thrust one hand out of the water, which Dennis was able to take. He hoisted Chris back onto the log, and the two made their way to the other side.

Soon after that, Emily began to notice the change that was slowly taking hold of Chris. He would call to tell her how he didn’t sleep at night, so he took a lot of naps during the day. After college, he took an office job with a paper manufacturer. After four years, he was fired for testing positive for marijuana in a random workplace drug screen. He had a hard time finding work after that. He finally ended up delivering mail for the post office. When he called or visited, he never said explicitly that he was disappointed, but he complained about his work. At Emily’s apartment, he always fell asleep in an armchair in the living room during the day.

In August of ’81, their mother developed lung cancer. Chris and Emily were

both at her bedside when she died. Emily held her hand. Chris stared at the floor. Emily remembered not seeing Chris cry even one tear. He left the hospital as soon as he could. Later, Emily drove to his house. She wanted to talk. She found Chris asleep on his couch, clutching a small green pillow. Eight years later, their father died. This time, Emily drove Chris home. She stayed with him as he spent the night awake and crying.

Chris continued to have trouble at work. Eventually, he lost his job for threatening his boss. He talked to Emily less and less, and when he did, he sounded nervous. He gathered debt and had to sell his house. Emily and Tom let him stay in the extra room in their apartment. Then one day he just left. On a Tuesday afternoon, he left a note on the kitchen table, took his things and drove away while Emily and Tom were both at work. Two weeks later, Chris called Emily from the Chelan County jail. He had left a bag of pot sitting on the dash of his van, which a police officer had seen in a parking lot. Emily bailed him out, but he refused to move back in.

Tom always got up early on Saturdays to jog, so Emily was not surprised the next morning that he was already gone when she woke up. She threw on a pair of sweat pants and an oversized tee shirt and shuffled to the kitchen to scrounge up something for breakfast. She was rummaging through the refrigerator when she heard the knock at the door. She froze. It had to be Chris. She felt her hand tremble. She had hoped Tom would be there when Chris arrived. She needed Tom to stand behind her, to hold her up. And she hadn't expected Chris to come so early.

She went to the door, took a deep breath, and turned the knob. The man on the other side was Chris, but hardly the Chris Emily remembered. He wasn't pale or cross-eyed. He needed a shave, but his clothes looked clean and his posture was relaxed. He even looked like he may have gained a little weight. When he said hello, his voice wasn't anxious or restrained. She invited him in. As he stepped through the doorway, he said he couldn't stay long. He had to be back at the station in time to catch the next bus. Emily asked him all the usual questions – how had he been, what had he been up to? He told her very plainly that he had been in jail, that he was going to go stay with a friend for a while now that he was out.

“I brought some things for you,” he said as he dug his hands into his jacket pockets. “Just some candy and stuff.”

“Oh. Thank you,” Emily stifled a snicker as she accepted the large handful of candy bars and crackers. She set them on the kitchen table. Chris asked if Tom was home. Emily said no, he'd just missed him. She agreed to tell Tom that Chris said hi. Chris glanced at the clock and said that he had to leave if he was going to walk to the bus station. Emily offered to drive him, but he declined. He opened the door, said goodbye, then pulled the door softly closed behind him.

When he was gone, Emily slumped in a chair at the kitchen table, surveyed Chris's strange offering, the small pile of assorted snacks sitting on the table. She tried to imagine the process of thought that made Chris want to bring such a pathetic gift. She closed her eyes. The morning sun poured through the window and splashed

across her face. She could see it with her eyes closed. She pictured the bright rays falling on the candy bars – their gold and silver wrappers glinting like some kind of treasure in the sun. It was beautiful.

Emily stood up, opened her eyes and walked to the drawer where the cigarettes were hidden. She took out the pack and the lighter and ashtray, then sat back down. She sat where she could see the door. She lit a cigarette. She smiled. When Tom came home, he would see. She wanted him to see.



Slack

Jessi Earleywine

She boards the bus slowly,
and like a bird with no branch
looks around for a seat.
I hear the driver tell her
she just lost her arm.
No, yarn;
the hissing door fooled me.

He opens it again
to the gray air of Portland
and the woman leans forward,
fishing the pavement, reeling in line
hand over hand.

We all watch like islands
without moving our faces.

In the absence of progress,
I build her an apartment
on the first floor
somewhere
near a check cashing place.
Her cat doesn't know
of its ancestral jungle.
The photos
under a reading lamp
are not of her children.

She keeps reeling in yarn,
and every inch gathered
sends more trailing away.
But she's afraid to step off,
afraid to be told she must wait.

Her pale hands pass over themselves
as though unweaving a web
while the driver

quietly drums his fingers
on the lever that closes the door.

The yellow plastic bag
that hangs from her elbow
makes a sound like thin water
as it swings in and out,
rocking and pulling her body
toward the edge of the steps.
She keeps hoping
to find the end.

And we all wait like islands,
never moving our faces.



Domestic Consideration

Rachel Pybon

I sometimes want to rent
spaces in other peoples'
poems because the
rooms I create on my own never seem to
fit right

I move from the yard to the basement

rearranging
furniture throwing away
what was refined and
is presently fusty
(wasn't that a part of me?)

my life is constantly taking
on a new shape I count
the holes in my ceiling
tiles attempting to find
patterns and I marvel at the
brittle appearance of the grey
branched winter trees in the yard

and it feels
good to have
something on to be
turned on with (because of)
you

to slurp the spilled whiskey from
the counter while pretending I'm
Anne Sexton and to do illicit
things with you in the
kitchen the warm scents
of cardamom and cinnamon and you
snug in my throat

and you me us we move on and on and on
and it is love



Jessica Pribula, *Walking After Midnight*. Graphite.



Moments

Stephanie Kirstein

“Tom lived a good life, a full life. We should be grateful for that.”

Christina listened as she stood apart from the crowd in the church’s fellowship hall, a spacious room of bland beige walls and blue-grey carpeting. Though the large windows against one wall cast bright rectangles of light across the floor, the day seemed very dark to Christina. The rest of the group stood in small clusters, speaking in hushed tones as they waited to enter the sanctuary. Christina’s head had been bent in determined contemplation of her shoes—black heels with rhinestones along the front—so that she wouldn’t be compelled to join in any conversations. She was just remembering that her father had often referred to these heels as “cheater shoes” because they made her appear taller than him. Funny what you remember, Christina had thought. Now, however, she looked up and scanned the room for the owner of the voice, a rush of pain and hot irritation rising up inside her. She found the

speaker standing by the wall, a squat, older woman with painted eyebrows and wavy orange-red hair. Christina recognized the woman as a friend of her grandmother's.

"And Christina had twenty years with her father," continued the woman, seemingly unconcerned with keeping her voice down. "That's a good, long time."

It's not enough, thought Christina angrily. She felt her stomach clench, and a hot prickling sensation stung the corners of her eyes. There's no such thing as enough.

"Christina."

She felt a warm hand on her shoulder. Tearing her eyes away from the old woman, Christina turned to see her mother, Marianne, standing beside her. Marianne was short and round-faced, with wavy brown hair that hung to her shoulders. Today Marianne wore a knee-length black dress and a string of off-white pearls that Tom had given her several anniversaries ago. Her eyes were red and overbright. Christina knew Marianne had been crying, and this knowledge made her eyes sting all the more.

"The pastor is ready," Marianne said quietly, her voice shaking.

Christina rubbed her eyes quickly with the back of her hand and nodded. She slipped her arm around her mother's, and together the two women walked in silence through the wide wooden doors that led to the sanctuary. Christina could hear the soft treading of dozens of footsteps as the rest of the solemn crowd followed in their wake.

Inside the sanctuary, Christina and Marianne stood for a moment at the end of the long aisle. The sanctuary had a high, vaulted ceiling with beams that soared skyward and then met at the peak, so the entire place looked like the upside down hull of a ship. Wooden pews stretched out on either side of the aisle that led up to the altar of dark polished wood and draped cloths. Behind the altar, a stained glass window rose up to the ceiling, bestowing rays of blue, red, and purple light on the sanctuary below.

Christina gazed at the luminous glass shapes, the colored light shining brightly in her eyes. As she watched, the colors stirred her memory and something lost in the back of her mind resurfaced.

"Can we do them now, Daddy?" asked Christina, peering over the edge of the pot. Several white eggs shook slightly in the rapidly boiling water.

"Not so close, honey," said Tom, glancing up quickly from his task of placing colored tablets in vinegar to make egg dye.

Christina took a baby step backward, away from the lit burner.

"Can we do them now?" she repeated, a trace of a whine evident in her voice. She bounced up and down and clutched her hands in front of her, pleading. To an eight-year-old, eggs always take too long to boil.

Tom looked at his daughter again.

"I'm afraid not, honey," he said apologetically. "They need a little longer."

Christina folded her arms across her chest and stuck out her lip.

"I want to color them now," she muttered, glaring mutinously at the uncooperative eggs.

"I know," said Tom soothingly. He dropped the last color tablet in a glass of vinegar and stirred it around, then turned to his daughter. "We have to be patient."

"I don't want to be patient."

Tom kneeled next to Christina and looked her in the eyes.

"I know," he said. "But the best things are worth waiting for."

When Christina continued to glare at the stove, Tom dipped his finger in a glass of egg dye and drew a line of bright pink on Christina's bare arm. She gasped, then giggled excitedly and hurried to dip her own finger in the dye.

When the eggs were finally cooked and dyed several minutes later, Tom and Christina both looked as though they had dunked themselves in the dye cups rather than the eggs. Tom picked Christina up in his arms.

"Let's get you cleaned up before your mom gets home, huh?" he said, smiling.

Marianne gently squeezed Christina's arm slightly, bringing her back to the present. Christina shook herself and continued to walk down the long church aisle. Christina was surprised to find herself smiling. She had not thought about that day of dyeing Easter eggs in years. As they drew closer to the altar, however, Christina's smile faded. She saw the small display set upon a white-clothed table in front of the altar. Though Christina knew what would be there without looking, for she had helped arrange it, she could not keep herself from gazing at it again. On the right-hand side of the small table lay a bouquet of flowers made up of white lilies and red roses. On the left side of the table stood a photo of Tom. He was just as Christina always pictured him in her mind: handsome, with fine brown hair, a thick graying beard, and the same large, hazel eyes that Christina had inherited. It had been taken before the surgeries, before Tom's beard had been shaved for radiation treatment, and before his face had been swollen by chemotherapy. Directly in the middle of the table was a simple box made of dark, polished wood—the urn that held Tom's ashes.

"It looks nice, doesn't it?" said Marianne softly.

Her eyes, like Christina's, were fixed on the table. Christina felt her throat tighten and her eyes begin to burn again as she sat beside her mother on the front pew. She tried to reply, but it felt as though something was caught in her throat. She nodded instead.

"I'm glad we decided on the roses," whispered Marianne. "I think—I think he would have liked them." A tear leaked from her eye and fell on her lap.

Christina nodded again. The roses were nice, and Christina knew exactly why her mother had decided to include them. Unbidden, another memory surfaced in Christina's mind.

"So," said Christina, sixteen years old and sitting in the passenger seat of the

car as her father drove, “how exactly are you going to get the roses into the house without her seeing them?”

“Hmm,” said Tom thoughtfully as he turned a corner, heading toward their house. “I don’t know. Swallow them?”

“Even if that were possible,” said Christina, “it would be too gross.” She contemplated the bouquet of roses in her lap. The plastic wrapping crinkled softly as the car drove over a bump in the road. “I don’t think I could hide them behind my back either.”

“Not unless this was a Bugs Bunny cartoon,” agreed Tom.

“Why did you get her flowers anyway?” asked Christina. “It’s not her birthday or anything.”

Tom shrugged.

“Your mother likes them,” he replied simply. “She deserves to have some pretty things she likes once in a while.”

Christina looked at her father and smiled slightly.

“Okay then,” she said, looking back at the roses. “Maybe you can distract her and I’ll bring them in.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Tom as he turned into their driveway.

Christina shook herself slightly, bringing her mind back to the present. She frowned, wondering why these memories should be coming to her now. Christina hadn’t thought about dyeing Easter eggs or bringing her mother flowers in years.

“Christina,” said a soft voice to Christina’s left.

Christina turned to see her cousin Lacey taking a seat on the pew next to her. Lacey’s usually vibrant style was toned down considerably today. Instead of bright colors, Lacey wore a long black skirt and a black v-neck top with long sleeves. Her usually bubbly personality was subdued as well. She sat quietly, with her legs crossed gracefully under the pew. Christina saw that Lacey was also finding it difficult to look away from the table in front of the altar. Lacey put a hand on her shoulder.

“I know this is probably a stupid question to ask,” said Lacey quietly, “but how are you?”

Christina considered the question. She felt a lump rise in her throat, making it difficult to speak, and the familiar prickling in her eyes returned. Christina gave Lacey a small, sad smile, and Lacey nodded.

“That’s what I thought,” said Lacey. She leaned over and embraced Christina tightly. Christina clung to the hug as her eyes surrendered and two hot tears fell down her cheeks and onto Lacey’s back.

After a moment Lacey broke the hug and pulled away, her hand holding on to Christina’s.

“Do you know what you’re going to say?” she asked gently.

Christina’s mind went immediately to the folded piece of paper in her left pocket. Her stomach tightened, but she nodded.

“Yes,” said Christina. “I wrote it last night.”

“Good,” said Lacey. “I have something for you.”

She released Christina’s hand and turned away to find something in her purse. Christina reached into her left pocket and pulled out the folded paper that contained her father’s eulogy. The straight, black type seemed cold and meaningless on the sheet of white paper. Christina had tried for hours to find the right words to say, the right story to tell, the right something that would explain who her father had been and how much he had meant to her, how the world now seemed to have a dark void where her father’s presence should be. No matter how hard she tried, her words failed her. Nothing she wrote seemed to be enough.

“Here it is,” said Lacey at last, turning back to Christina. In her outstretched hand laid a white handkerchief embroidered with purple flowers. Christina stared at it then looked up at Lacey who gave Christina a half-smile.

“Grandma asked me to give it to you,” said Lacey. “She said... well, she thought your would need it.”

Christina looked at the handkerchief again. Her grandmother had already buried a father and a husband. She understood, as much as anyone could understand, what this day would be like for Christina. Silently, Christina took the handkerchief and held it tightly in her hand, rubbing her thumb over the raised bumps of the embroidered flowers.

“Thank you.”

The soft whisper of voices coming from behind Christina told her that nearly everyone had filed into the sanctuary. The pastor walked up to the pulpit, and the voices quieted. The pastor began to speak, but Christina barely heard him. She continued to stare at her father’s urn and the photograph that stood next to it. As she did, one more memory filled her mind.

“Anything else you need, Dad?” Christina asked.

She picked up her father’s tray from his lap and moved it out of the way on the bedside table. He lay in his hospital bed and smiled at her, his face still swollen from chemotherapy.

“No, I’m fine,” said Tom. He patted the bed softly with his hand, the one that was receiving some type of liquid from the IV, and invited her to sit. Christina perched on the edge of the bed and laid her hand on her father’s.

“What is it?” she asked gently.

Tom shrugged.

“I just wanted you to sit by me.”

Christina leaned over and laid her head on his thin, wasted shoulder – a shoulder that had once been strong enough to hold a little girl high above a crowd.

“Ok, then, I’ll sit here.”

They sat quietly for a while. The only sounds were the soft beeps and whirs from various machines in the room and in the hallway. The golden afternoon light

shone in regular lines through the window blinds. Christina closed her eyes and listened to her father's gentle breathing. Tom reached for Christina's hand and held it.

"I love you," he said quietly.

Christina squeezed his hand.

"I love you too."

Christina's sight blurred and she was no longer able to keep her tears from falling freely. Though Christina was aware of the congregation around her singing, she could not bring herself to join in. When the voices faded away, the pastor took his place behind the pulpit. Through her tears, Christina heard him say her name. Marianne squeezed her daughter's hand, and Christina felt herself walk, as though in a trance, to the pulpit, her mind a confusion of memories and emotions.

Christina turned to face everyone gathered in the sanctuary. She stared back at them, her throat dry and her eyes wet. Numbly, Christina fumbled in her pocket for the piece of paper. She extracted it and smoothed it out on the pulpit in front of her. Staring at the words, she tried to make her mind and mouth work together and speak, but neither would obey her.

Christina looked back out at the pews full of people, all watching her expectantly. She thought of the memories that had unexpectedly come to her today. Suddenly, she knew what she wanted to say. Taking the paper and stuffing it unceremoniously back in her pocket, Christina began to speak.

"I've been wondering," she began, "how I could explain my father and how much he meant to me in just a few words. And now, I realize I can't."

Christina looked down at her hands for a moment, took a breath, and continued.

"Nothing I can say could come close to expressing what the love of a father means to a daughter. So much more would be left unsaid, more than I could ever relate to you in a lifetime. And that, I think, is how it should be, because it is these thousands of memories, of little moments, that make up the father that I knew. And it is these memories that will live on in me for the rest of my life."

Christina's tears were flowing freely again, and she made no effort to brush them away. Christina saw that, in the front pew of the church, her mother was crying too.

"I am blessed," she continued, "truly blessed, to have had Tom Hathaway for my father." Her voice broke, but she continued on. "And I will cherish my memories of him and the man he was for the rest of my life."



Graduation as Evolution

Sara LeRoux

-For Shaina

The walls rest bare where pictures once hung.
Nail holes harshly filled with texturing.

Brown splotched carpeting contains indents from furniture;
& the stain in the living room from your Crystal Lite spill lingers.

The hand-me-down stereo gently plays our burned CD, "Summer Sausage,"
while we laugh at the shit-show that was Memorial Day at Crescent Bar.

Your short hair is pulled up in a small clip, like always.
Only this month your hair is blonde, & so is mine.

I clean behind the refrigerator & find old cat toys & rusty pennies.
You stand where we've stood a thousand times & clean the bathroom mirror.

We spend the better part of a week cleaning & fixing the past
three years of dirt & smudges & holes.

The grey residue from using duct tape to adhere more pictures
to the hallway proves difficult to remove & peels off the white paint.

Our sanctuary of memories protecting us from the real world
has become as empty as the vodka bottle on our sticky kitchen counter.

The best advice we never took was to not roommate with your best friend
& here we stand, at the end of our journey, together.

I label the boxes lining the narrow hallway
containing my text books & clothes & photographs & life:

Wild Turkey,
Southern Comfort,
Red Rum,
Absolut.



The Christ Crowd

Ben MacSpadden

The Christ crowd nearly got me again today.

There I am minding my own business, just trying to walk to class. High as a kite. I'd smoked a couple joints before setting off on my academic endeavors, so I was having a very hard time focusing on getting to class on time.

I discovered the best way to keep pace was to think of as many Sousa marches I could remember, keeping step with the beat. I was excited about this class, or rather to be done with this class, because I had a coffee date scheduled with a friend afterwards.

My mind suddenly switched from thinking about Sousa to thinking about my coffee date. My body switched to auto-pilot as my brain conjured up vivid fantasies of kissing my friend, tasting the coffee on her breath.

"Excuse me."

My fantasy covers itself shyly in the back of my head as my attention switches to the two young women next to me. They weren't bad looking in their winter coats with their smiles set to stun. Caught in the nefarious smile rays, I slowed down and they smiled wider, asking "Would you like a candy cane?"

The girls indicated a card with the familiar Christmas treat fixed to it. While the offer seemed tempting initially, it was my experience as a college student that allowed me to fully understand what was going on here.

"Listen Bob, you don't mind if I call ya Bob right?" my internal translator Carny said to me in a voice that resembled a bourbon-powered chainsaw.

"You know you want this candy Bob, you want it bad. You can practically taste it you want it so bad. What about the card Bob? Well, these candy canes are special Bob. Not only will they satisfy your need for sweets, but these delightful confections will save your immortal soul, Bob! Ain't that somethin'?"

I quickly refused the candy, walking onwards and avoiding the annoying little card that praises the candy cane as some sort of new Christmas idol.

"The candy is shaped like a J, which stands for Jesus..." reads the card or my personal favorite part "The red stripes symbolize the blood Jesus shed as a sacrifice for you and me!"

Why can't a candy cane just be delicious any more?

The rest of my walk to class is spent feeling a bit miffed.

I really wanted that candy. If it just didn't entail having to glance at some piece of abhorrent Christian propaganda.

I can just imagine slowly sliding the candy cane into my mouth, whirling my tongue around the sweet tip.

I dig in my pocket, suddenly filled with the need to smoke a cigarette.



Baptism and Blasphemy

Amanda Ross

No Saints came marching in, only ranks of water,
wave upon unholy wave with destructive crest.
Deliver us from evil, our nuclear Father.

Innocent men, women, children left behind—tidal fodder—
defend their Parish, homes, magnolias, and all they possessed.
No Saints came marching in, only ranks of water.

Surrounded by a toxic sea, lies they cannot swallow.
The besieged city on CNN gained one nation's interest.
Deliver us from evil, our nuclear Father.

Tempers flare as temperatures grow even hotter.
The August stench of decay; no help is Congressed.
No Saints came marching in, only ranks of water.

The Big Easy is now a collective martyr.
Floating bloated bodies are finally laid to rest.
Deliver us from evil, our nuclear Father.

No homes for evacuees, lost sons and lost daughters;
insurance claims and letters left unaddressed.
No Saints came marching in, only ranks of water.
Deliver us from evil, our nuclear Father.



Ants Among Ants

Ryan Gorcester

The day before I turned a dozen
And gained responsibility and wisdom,
I was given a mission by my ill mom
To fetch a loaf of Edward's best.

I took a seat in the street
And found a little hole in concrete,
Someone else's city,
With segmented bodies and antennas.

My hand found a rock;
The same brick they used for their tiny home,
And I held it high in the sunlight
And felt a little like God.

It came crashing down,
Flattening a baker into the ground,
Taking its place in its own shadow,
Restoring a broken sidewalk to whole.

Then I fell from heaven with surprising force
As a rollerskater bumped into me.
The rock fell to the ground one last time,
Far from the little Ant City.

I ran across the street and through a door,
Greeted by a bell and the most wonderful smell.
I emptied my pockets into the baker's hand
And bought my mother some bread.

Again I passed the rock:
A heavily-trodden chunk of sidewalk,
A mess of insect blood and flesh;
Someone else's baker.

Leaving the ant of me breadless,
His sick mother sicker,

His little brother hungry,
His pantry emptier.

There is no more bread for them.
Even an ant of ants,
Whether he can or can't
Determines a family's fate.

I looked back to the shop;
He was still there, selling his bread.
I knew that I was such a fraud,
And I'm quite lucky I'm not God.



Stones of Resistance

Renaë Arndt

“Look at that, Sarah! Can you imagine? Miles and miles of concrete.”

Rick whistles in admiration as he spans the enormity of the Grand Coulee Dam towering overhead. He spins his reel until it clicks, and casts again into the black waters below. All is right with the world this morning as it is every morning that he fishes with his baby girl. As he methodically reels the spinner back to shore, Rick wonders how many bricks it would take to build a structure that high. He decides that he has laid that many bricks in his lifetime, maybe even more, by the feel of his permanently cracked and chalky hands.

Other than farming one summer for his neighbor Bob, masonry was all Rick Kessler knew when it came to the working world. The Kesslers have always been bricklayers, and with the exception of this last generation, the Kesslers still are. The smell of brick dust is like the smell of a home-cooked meal to this family, and the roughness of the hands of the other is unnoticeable when the men greet one another at family reunions. This last generation, however, is uninterested in masonry. They are an intellectual bunch. Of Rick’s nieces and nephews there is a real estate agent, a lawyer, a world traveler working at the moment in Nepal for Women’s Empowerment, a computer programmer, a chef, and a future nurse. Rick’s oldest daughter, Leanne, graduated with a degree in social work and moved away to change the world, one homeless case at a time. His other daughter, Sarah, is an English student at her dad’s Alma Mater. Rick takes particular pride in Sarah’s studies since they alleviate his fear of producing an adult like him, who can hardly read or write at a sixth grade level.

Sarah is home for the summer now, and Rick can finally relax with his baby close by. He loves hanging out with her after work, mocking quirky family members, and solving world problems. This summer she talks a lot about positive and negative reinforcement, Confucius, deconstructive criticism, and how the world is flat. He smiles at the big words she uses and how she won’t have to work with brick dust for the rest of her life. This is the girl who asked two years earlier, “Dad, why don’t I just bag this college crap and learn your business? We could work together and I’ll take it over.”

“No, no. We can maybe talk about that after you finish school. What about the teaching thing? You’ve always wanted to teach.” That is what he had said, but he was thinking about how he didn’t want his girls seeing or hearing the things he saw and heard every day on the job with the construction men.

This morning Sarah wants to discuss capitalism and the globalization of nothing. Being a small business owner and conservative himself, Rick loves listening to his daughter’s latest theories on economics and such, and so he settles in for a

nice dialogue.

“Dad, it’s Pandora’s box. Once it’s been opened, there’s no stopping the repercussions.”

“Well, that’s a little depressing. Hey, keep reeling. You won’t be catchin’ anything at that speed.” He casts again.

“All these corporations. They just keep expanding. They can’t stop or their stock holders will freak out. All the small businesses will be swallowed up and say goodbye to specialty shops and local business.”

“Well, Sar, I’m a business owner you know. I’m not too worried about all that.”

“Maybe you should be, Dad.”

“Just work hard and play hard Sar. Like I’ve always said, if you work harder, run faster, and go home later than the guy next to you, you’ll be fine.”

“What if I want to work with the person next to me? Competition kills community sometimes, and...”

Rick listens without hearing. He just smiles, loving the passion with which Sarah talks about the world and its issues. Someday she’ll see more, understand more. For now, she looks so cute, holding her fishing pole, spouting profundities, so tiny with the dam looming overhead. “Dad?”

“Yep?”

“Did you know that Spanish speaking countries have two words for fish?”

“Nope. How come?”

“Well, they call a live fish pez, and a dead fish is called a pescado. Unreal huh? How we use words to change our perspective about a single reality.”

“Well, I think I’ll be taking home some pescado tonight. How’s your line doing?” He wanted to get back to the fishing. Whenever she starts talking about words and around words, it just sounds like a bunch of nonsense to him and he starts to wonder what good that college fund is doing. He would rather think about fishing and the dam. That dam is quite the phenomenon, hundreds of tons of crushed rock and mud, cranking thousands of gallons of water through itself every day, providing power all over the country, holding back an incomprehensible force that causes the river in front of them to seem calm, serene, creating the perfect fishing hole this time of year.

“Dad, got one! What do I do?”

Rick runs over to instruct his daughter. They’ve gone fishing at least a hundred times before, but Sarah always needs help at this point. Sometimes it is as if she purposely didn’t learn stuff like this. He doesn’t mind though, and quickly coaches his daughter through the next steps. The look of the pole tells him it’s a big one. After a minute or so of intense struggle, the fish is finally visible among the rocks in the shallow.

“Sar, that’s huge. At least 22 inches, babe!”

The fish finally stops fighting, and Rick grabs the line to drag him onto the rocks. He doesn’t ask Sarah to do it. She never wants to touch the fish—loses interest

at this point, or something.

The fish was a beauty- twenty-four inches at least. They'll keep this one for sure. He smiles up at Sarah, but no similar emotion is painted on her face. Tears stream down her cheeks, which for some reason he suddenly realizes are far more defined than he remembered them being before. "Sarah, you all right?"

"Yeah, sorry, it's just, Dad? Well, why do we enjoy this? Look at the thing. He is suffering and it's our fault. Let's let him go."

"Sar, you know it can't feel anything. God made their cheeks numb, remember?"

"Come on, dad. Yeah, I'm sure their cheeks are numb just so we can torture them and scare them to death, right? Hurry, get the hook out."

Rick doesn't know exactly how to respond. He wants to laugh at the girl, but something stops him, some memory or some conglomeration of experiences. He remembers standing by his father's deathbed at thirteen. His dad calls him near, grabs his son's shirt with his once fearsomely strong fist, sniffs the air around him and calls, "Grace, come here. Your son is high." He remembers standing over his father's coffin, looking down at the sickly, pale face covered in makeup. He wants to cry, but not for his dad, but because he is angry at the undertaker who made his father look like an albino transvestite. He sees his older brother, then just seventeen, working before and after school trying to keep dad's masonry business alive. Randy was going to become a scientist and figure out what the black hole is and stuff like that. He ends up working for Uncle George, building chimneys and stone walls for the rest of his life.

The motorcycle Randy gave him for his sixteenth birthday feels like freedom on his un-calloused hands as he rides it across the college campus. Those security cops always tear up the landscape more than his little bike does. He remembers the absence of expression on his mom's face when the smoke from his dorm room envelopes her in the doorway. She walks in, places the homemade casserole and blackberry pie on the table, and walks out without a word. One quarter later, Rick's counselor asks him to leave the college. He's taking up a spot that someone else would actually care about, he explains.

"I played too much foosball," Rick later tells his daughters when they ask why he didn't finish college. "So, remember girls, work before play."

At the end of the day, Rick's encrusted hands, his eyes weeping mud, and his back telling him he's too old for this, serve as reminders of the importance of a college education. He had left college to work for his uncle, laying brick and stone, lifting brick and stone, tearing down and rebuilding stone wall after stone wall, each stone building a house of innocence for his daughters. Private schools, summer camps, sports programs, gymnastics, Kiwanis, nice friends, at sixteen, a safe and functional car, and now four years of college tuition. Yes, college is essential. Education will keep his daughters' hands clean.

"Sar, are you sure? You eat fish all the time, hon. And this is good eatin'

right here.”

“Dad, don’t you see how unjust it all is?! He’s suffocating. Hurry!” Her voice sounds like that of a child, conflicting with the figure of a woman that he has unexpectedly found before him.

“Alright, alright. Whatever you say.” Rick works the hook out of the fish, which it had unfortunately swallowed. Throwing back the best catch of the vacation because of some idealistic banter is unbelievable. Despite her otherwise consistent and logical nature, Sarah had been known to cry at random. One Saturday, when she was about ten, she had cried because her big sister kept blocking her shot on the basketball court. Rick had taken Leann aside and asked her to let Sarah win the next game. She did. The crying stopped.

As the last hook comes loose, the blood scurries along the crevices of his hands, and he feels something. His face twists with the emotion resulting from an attempt to identify, harness, accept it. He felt it before when his dad died and no tears were shed, and his best friend Bruce was there sitting beside him; his best friend with the perfect family, the perfect life. It was in his mom’s dejected face when he told her college was for the birds. He felt it whisper on the phone line that brought the news of his old friend’s suicide just five years before. Something like shame, pride, jealousy, and rightness. His fingers grip tighter around the fish with each contradiction of this jumbled state of mind, and he reaches for a rock to smash its head. Maybe Sarah should do it...

“Dad, you’re going to let it go, right?”

With a panicked expression, his eyes scour the face of this child above him, then scale the dam behind her: the dam of crushed stone and mud that holds back a force larger than its structure yet subject to it in place and time. Maybe, at the end of the day when pros and cons are weighed, that dam is a good thing. Maybe.

“Yeah, right. I was just...” He mumbles some excuse for the past few seconds and tosses the trout into the shallows. It floats on its side for a few seconds. Damn you! Get out of here! As quickly as the thought of killing it flashes through Rick’s mind, the fish flips and kicks back into the murky waters below.



Witches' Brew

Renae Arndt

UV rays play tricks on two rusty heads
hovering over mom's cooking bowl
as aged trees overhead drip
their golden leaves of knowledge.

Twenty slimy fingers plunge its depths.
Swamp stench, mud, dead bugs, weeds, rotten berries.
The slow scraping, splashing, stirring echoes
with grave eccentricity.

"This potion will render us invincible!"
A red tongue whispers through its gap-filled smile.
Sunlight dances, unashamed,
on the giggling heads, trembling with an innocence
that hides the shiver snaking down their spines.

The bigger one puckers and sips at the enchanted potion
Heaving a sigh of sudden
Illumination. But it is only pretend.
"More weeds," she dictates, until,

"Girls, time for school." Pants rustle, shoes scamper.
The little one knocks the cauldron down,
Its secrets safely seeping into the vulnerable soil
To be picked, sniffed, tasted another day.

A bell shrills, and crooked, wrinkly fingers
dole out yellow-tinted paper that reads:
"Food for Thought." Heads hover.
Fluorescent lights toss glares of subtlety on each.



I Found Myself, Walking...

Brennan Grass

I found myself,
walking,
through a forest, dark and aged.
Green life everywhere,
dripping with water and rain,
and I thought how natural this place is,
and untamed.

I found myself,
walking,
through a desert, dry and cracked.
Dust drifting through the air,
sun radiating downward with fire and flame,
and I thought how natural this place is,
and untamed.

I found myself,
walking,
Through a city, stark and tall.
People surrounding me,
thick atmosphere, no room at all.
I heard only noise, industrial strain,
and I thought how natural this place is,
and untamed.



Songs Are Like Tattoos (A Love Poem For Joni Mitchell)

Jessi Earleywine

I am a lady of this cold, wide canyon
and the coat I wear is a second-hand one.
Groceries burst forth from plastic bags
as I turn the key to my apartment door,
my hands still etched deep
from carrying such a load, so far:

tomatoes, soy milk, cans of beans—
I'm always running behind the times
and I need something luxurious
to guard my psyche from this January wind.
So I press “play” and soon her voice,
delicate, pure, and all over the place,

like tiny hammers hurled at beveled mirrors
echoes through this empty room
with conversations thirty-five years old.
I open and close cupboard doors,
shuffle across cold tiles, stack books and papers
in a Friday-night haphazard way,

Imagining Joni gazing out a high-rise window
with her high-brow face and translucent skin
dreaming of another place and time,
just like me. She feels the dark, cold current
beneath the Blue Atlantic; she wonders
who in the world she might be.

But that spoiled bitch. She had it all—
grand piano, four or five octaves; the guitar-
like waif with legs and teeth and stardust
golden hair. She was born at the right time,
friend to so many luminaries,
yet there to watch so many fall away.

What time is ever right, anyway? I suffer

from the same wanderlust, the same propensity
to see myself through sad windows.

Part of her lyrics do pour out of me
from time to time. But now the music
quickens. Her voice is laughing.

I stand and start to twirl across linoleum,
sailing away with that dizzy dancing feeling,
ignoring winter's silent trap
of low and heavy fog—
the hoarfrost on dead branches soon will melt
and I feel like I'm just being born.



When Sam Calls

Heather Elliot

The television is turned down,
and the dogs are put outside.
My mother stops folding clothes,
and my father tries to finish
his Western novel

When Sam calls.

My older brother Patrick bolts
out of the house and into his car.
Patrick has a girlfriend and she is the
Miss Caldwell Rodeo Princess! Her life
is his personal escape. He's not there

When Sam calls.

My little sister Jill is the first to talk,
giggling, while exchanging jokes,
light-heartedness back and forth
with my brother. Her innocence
is captivating

When Sam calls.

I hear my brother Sam on the other line
talking with me like everything is okay.
Sam's letters written from jail
are the sadness in his voice.
He is good at pretending

When Sam calls.

I hear my mother crying. She has
spoken to my brother, alone
in her bedroom with the door closed.
She blames herself for his choices.
She is reminded of past regret

When Sam calls.

Hunting, blowing up projectiles and causing mischief, my younger brother Robbie unravels the latest gossip, planning for when Sam gets out. Four wheeling, target shooting, and mudding all in one day. Robbie's focus is on the future

When Sam calls.

My father can't handle the reality of his son in jail. He is trapped into believing that Sam is away at summer camp, speaking to him briefly for a few minutes, reaching back for the Western novel, my father has found HIS personal escape. He is also good at pretending

When Sam calls.

Time itself stands silently still for Sam while we share our lives with him over the phone, sending out different messages, hopefully not seen over the fine circular lines. But someday, we will talk about how life changed

When Sam called.



Intimacy

Ross Sauby

When Richard saw his stepfather roll up the long, gravel driveway in his worn, dust colored SUV he felt himself submerged in a familiar feeling of uneasiness. His mother had already been home for half an hour after getting off from the hospital at 5pm; Richard had come straight home from middle school after 3pm. Richard hated the early evening. The stove eagerly belched waves of unseen heat, making the three-bedroom home warm and stuffy. It was a typical school night in spring, and with the sun rapidly descending, Richard felt the rest of the world closing off from him. He peered out the front window as the baby pine trees lining the walkway and all the rest of the outside was coated in a layer of smothering gold. Richard left for his room before his stepfather came inside.

Shortly after putting on his headphones, Richard felt a tremor through the wall; he knew that the front door had been slammed. He turned up the volume on his CD player, but only made it through a couple songs before he could hear voices over the music. He turned the volume dial higher, so high it hurt his ears, but still shouting invaded the song and his head. He shut his eyes and lay on his bed, hoping to barricade himself from everything outside of his room.

Richard nearly made it through all of the CD when he heard his mother knock at the door and say that dinner was ready. He wasn't sure when the voices had stopped. Richard found his mother at the kitchen table; his father was sitting in the adjacent living room before the TV. Richard sat before a prepared plate of pork chops and salad. He frowned at the red cabbage hidden amongst the lettuce. Richard could hear reports of various sporting events filter into the dining room.

"Can you turn that down?" his mother said, annoyed.

"I can barely hear it as it is." Richard's stepfather replied.

"I want to eat dinner in peace. There's a TV in our room."

"I'm already relaxing; I've had a long day."

"So have I."

"I don't see what the big deal is—"

"The deal is that you are so ornery!" his mother spun in her chair to face the living room. Richard felt hot. He rose from the table, his wooden chair scraping against the linoleum floor. He made it to the entrance of the hallway when his mother stopped him.

"Richard, sit back down."

"Why?" Richard asked quietly.

"Because I told you to." Richard made no effort to return. The hallway felt so much cooler than the kitchen.

“Richard.”

“I’ll come back, I will... when you’re done.”

“What did you say? When I’m done? Richard, sit down, now.”

“No, I—”

“Richard!” His mother shot up, and grabbed him by the arm, hard. Richard made a surprised yelp and jerked away from the sudden pain. He didn’t see it clearly, but he knew his mother held on, and felt a sudden sting across his cheek as he was slapped. He heard his father yell something from the other room. The TV suddenly grew louder. Richard’s mother told him to go to his room, and spun towards the living room with fire in her step.

Richard let his fingertips run over the pulsing patch of nerves and skin where his mother had struck him. He hadn’t had time to inspect himself in a mirror when he fled the home and his quarreling parents, so he didn’t know if his cheek looked as battered as it felt. He imagined an angry red ring formed just under his eye. It shimmered with blue and green shades and bulged boldly, squeezing his eyelid. If someone saw it, Richard would merely face forward, ignore both observer and wound. He would be tough like that, he thought. At the moment, though, he was sure no one was looking and cupped his hand over his face.

The strike had come as a shock to Richard. He had never seen his mother hit anyone, not even when his brother was still alive, and Richard had always thought that his little brother was a brat. He decided that he’d go for a walk to any place away from his house and found himself following the same route he took to school. The hill Richard plodded up was still well illuminated because of the stubborn spring sun. As Richard reached its apex he had a clear view of the center of the small city. There were a number of crucifixes rising into the air. As there were few large buildings, usually only church steeples rose high enough to rival the several story tall maple trees and blue pines that dotted the suburban landscape. He could also see the elementary school’s massive brick chimney jutting from the sea of low homes and dense plants. Richard could never remember seeing smoke rise from the tower, even when he attended there, and figured it wasn’t used anymore.

Richard reached down to retie his high-top tennis shoes. The shoes had frayed threads and a thinning sole, but Richard continued to wear them anyway because they were a present from his dad. His father had continued to live in the little town for a while after the divorce but told Richard that he would be leaving for good. When Richard asked where he was going and if he’d see him again, his father gestured vaguely northward in reply to the first question, and then he said,

“If you want something bad enough, it’ll be yours.”

He gave Richard the shoes a couple days before leaving. They were white and blue lace ups, named after some basketball player that Richard had never heard of since he was more of a baseball fan. They were a bit too large for Richard, but so fancy that he knew they were probably the most expensive gift his dad had ever gotten

anybody. His dad's dirty blue 1990 Camry was packed to the brim with clothing, small furniture and other practical items. His large, black tool set was nestled in the back seat, cushioned by an array of old blankets. Richard sat outside his dad's one bedroom, brown house with weathered shingles and an unkempt yard.

"Your mom should be here soon." He said as he started his car by leaning in the driver side window. Before stepping in the car, Richard's dad kissed him on the forehead and looked him in the eyes. Richard watched his father's shoulder-length, brown hair sway lazily in the early evening air. His expression was neither happy nor sad, and it seemed to Richard like his face was being burned into his father's memory. His dad stood slowly.

"Never dare not to hope." He said quickly, pausing awkwardly as he heard his own words. He shook his head and stepped in the car.

"That's that then." He muttered, and then his voice became the low whine of an engine and rattling gravel as the Camry sped off the driveway and down the suburban street. Richard watched as the car shrunk away, and squinted so even the horizon receded with its dark form. He kept watching even after his father was long gone. He felt blank, as if he were just an observer.

As Richard laced up his shoes he heard a mewl. He glanced to the edge of the sidewalk and found an orange tabby emerging from the low, thirsty hedges. Richard thought it had pretty green eyes that made him think of marbles. He also noticed how thin its fur was. Richard could easily see the animal's spine poking up through patches of light hair like small stones in dry weeds. The tabby's little voice rang in Richard's ears again, and the boy knew the cat was hungry. He squatted before the animal with an outstretched hand. The cat rubbed his face along Richard's fingers, and the boy pet him, all the while conscious of the tabby's thin body. The tabby's purr was weak, and each breath tapered off with a low squeak. Richard felt guilty for not having any food to offer. He hated to see the tabby hungry, and formed a list in his head as he jogged back the way he'd come.

When he arrived home he saw that his stepfather's car was gone. His mom hadn't been single for long after the divorce. Richard's stepfather insisted he call him "dad", which Richard did, but as seldom as possible. Richard felt awkwardness with his stepfather. Richard opened the front door as quietly as he could. He heard muttered curses over the spray of water, and found that his mother was in the shower. Dinner was still on the table, resting on chipped ceramic plates. Richard noticed an open wine bottle also sitting on the table, the subtle scent of alcohol wafting about the muggy room.

As Richard poked through the refrigerator he remembered how his brother, Nathan, used to play with the icemaker. Though too short to reach the button, Nathan would always find a way to extend his reach, with the old ladle and its burnt handle, or the chewed up ruler on the counter. Nathan would bat at the machine until he hit it just right, causing chunks of ice to drop from the door. The cubes would hit the ground and shatter, sending shards of ice up into the air like sparks from fireworks.

Nathan would dance about, giddy as if the icemaker was a coin spewing slot machine. Richard had always thought Nathan was annoying, but as he collected leftover turkey and a cup of milk, he found he kind of missed him. He would have liked to take him to see the tabby, to get him away from the house with its stuffy corridors, its conversations laced with apprehension.

Richard made his way back to the bushes at the bottom of the hill as quickly as he could. He'd nearly dropped the cup twice before he arrived. The tabby emerged from his shelter, squeaking eagerly in what Richard thought were earnest attempts to greet him. Richard sat again with the cat; he wondered where its voice had gone. As he unwrapped the chicken covered in tinfoil, he realized he hadn't brought a bowl. He knew the cat couldn't reach the milk in the tall, half empty glass, so he poured a little bit of it on the sidewalk, carefully pooling it together. He laid bits of chicken near the milk, and the tabby sniffed at the food.

A smile crawled across Richard's face as his guest began nibbling at the chicken. The ragged tabby started slowly at first, but was soon munching noisily. It lapped up milk from the sidewalk until white droplets clung to its whiskers. The little animal licked its lips as it looked up from its meal. Richard found himself staring at its amber eyes. They were bright and saturated, reminiscent of how Richard used to draw the sun in elementary school, circled the same spot on the open white paper with his crayon again and again, until it was full and satisfied.

Richard stroked the tabby's head when he felt it swallow; it was a labored effort that caused the animal's little body to tremble. Richard was worried that the food may be too big, and he began tearing it into smaller pieces when he heard a little cough. They were quiet at first, barely above the noise of a pebble dropped on ice, but soon they became more frequent. The tabby took a few paces back as another convulsion caused his head to shake. Its little mouth opened and a hoarse sound escaped its lips. Tiny coughs wracked its tiny body. Richard could do nothing as he watched the tabby shudder; each little noise seemed to Richard to snap a thread that held the animal up. Its legs soon buckled and the tabby rested on its side. For what seemed like forever to Richard, the tabby lay on the ground, shaking lightly. Richard lay there with the animal, stroking it as gently as he could.

He cursed himself for making the tabby sick, for not bringing the right food, for not getting there fast enough, for not being able to do anything but watch. He imagined himself as an angel, who would reach beyond the tabby's skin, message life into its heart, beyond its flesh, fill its life with time. Its breath came increasingly slowly. Richard looked on wordlessly. Tears dripped from his chin and fell on the tabby's fur, but they only moistened what they touched. He knew that he couldn't tear his eyes away, that he would watch over the little life until the end.

Richard stood before a freshly dug hole in his backyard. In the grave were his shoes and room for a little body. He stared out at the setting sun as he scooped up the bundled up tabby. Richard decided the tabby was a boy, and found his body light as light. A brilliant scarlet flooded the sky. Richard had seen hundreds of skies like

this, and knew then that the tabby, that everyone saw the same sky. He clutched the tabby as close to himself as possible, as if the slightest breeze would tear him from his hands, as if the slightest falter would break him. It was as close as he could be to him, ever. It was no further than he'd ever be from anyone.



Listening Piece

Rachel Pybon

I can't seem to open your swollen door
a rec(tangled) outline, luminous
in the old hallway
and I trudge through the ice
and things left unsaid
the floor – the old bones – sloping
making me panic just a little
(gravity happens, yes)

since I can't melt myself into your cracks,
maybe I'll slide something underneath.

I will record my
screams and the flowers
opening the intensely windy
daylight the blood rushing out of
my head and my hands pretending
oh they are pretending to touch you

I will use the tape as ribbon
and wrap up my feverish intentions
shiny and black,

silent.

I hope this reaches you.

when I was nine I had the sneaking suspicion

that it wasn't coffee my mother was having
with the bald man who smelled like V8
indeed, I heard the tell-tale rustling
and the breathing patterns in the dark
I was standing at the top of the stairs
the first floor below, dimly lit,
foreign somehow because
the dents my father created in his chair
had puffed back into place.

this was supposed to be some kind of poem about
the secret things I do in the dark
and the hidden places in which I exist
but I suppose now it's turned into a poem about
those rectangles of light coming from the impassioned darkness,
and the ways in which I attempt to preserve what it is that I love.

perhaps one day it will all fall down.
or rise again. yes. rising sounds much better.



My Valentine

Sara LeRoux

The native lupine doesn't begin to flower until late May,
until the weather stays warm & the rains stop.

A dozen purple florets on a single stem,
& dark green finger-like leaves.

That's when I'll spread her ashes on the hillside,
when the lupine is in full bloom & the birds singing.

I'll climb the hill that we always sat on.
Just outside of camp, we had to cross a barbed wire fence to reach.

I'll sit under the old ponderosa pine as we did years ago
& watch the breeze dance through the bear grass.

I remember growing up with her; my best friend.
In her paw prints were my young foot prints.

I remember running with her through the meadow, bending the flowers
& sleeping together by the fireplace at my dad's house.

I remember her waiting for me at the bus stop,
& how we used to race each other home.

& I remember driving an hour & a half in the rain
on Valentine's Day my senior year of college

to hold her & kiss her goodbye
while she was put to sleep.

I thought, that's when I'll spread her ashes,
late May, when the lupine is blooming & the birds singing.

She can sit on our hillside, her nose pointed upwards into the wind,
& watch the bear grass while it ripples in the breeze.

& remember the times we ran,
bending the flowers.

2008 Production

contributor bios



ARNDT, RENAE is currently studying English/Language Arts Education at Central Washington University. She grew up in the Northwest and loves everything that entails. Things that make her smile include unpredictable people, closet guitar playing, and discovering that the most profound is often quite simple.

BURT, ANDY is eating a really delicious turkey sandwich while he considers what to say about himself. He is surprised by how much he is enjoying this sandwich. Really, it's good. So good.

EARLYWINE (NELSON), JESSI is a writing and art student at Central. She enjoys live music, heirloom tomatoes, and the company of dogs, among other things. Her poem "Songs are Like Tattoos" contains at least 13 quotes or allusions to lyrics by Joni Mitchell.

ELLIOT, HEATHER is graduating this spring with a degree in Public Relations, and a minor in Creative Writing. She loves Hello Kitty and pink sunsets, and cannot wait to intern for the Yakima Greenway Foundation. Someday, she would love to visit Europe and ride in a hot air balloon.

GORCHESTER, RYAN is from Federal Way, WA, and has always loved reading and writing. He's 20 years old and is wondering whether he wants to study music, film, or English. In second grade, he entertained his classmates by reading Animorphs books aloud.

GRASS, BRENNAN was born in Topeka Kansas, October 11, 1983, and has since lived for several years in both Corvallis, Oregon, and Walla Walla, Washington. He is currently classified as a transfer student or Junior at Central Washington University as an English Major in the Writing Specialization. He aims to create literature and poetry that has "a life of its own" that has many different and potentially conflicting interpretations. His primary goal is to inspire those who read his writing to think deeply and reflect philosophically about life and the world while they simultaneously have fun.

KIRSTEIN, STEPHANIE is a junior English major and Theatre Arts minor who loves writing, reading, and all things related to the arts. Stephanie grew up on Camp Foster, a military base on Okinawa, Japan, and now lives close to family here in Washington. Stephanie would like to dedicate her short story "Moments" to the memory of her father, Edward Kirstein.

LEROUX, SARA has often been described as ‘hillbilly fabulous’ from her beloved roommate. No longer living in amazing E-town, where she lived and leaves some of her best memories, she is currently teaching high school English on the West Side. When asked for a piece of wisdom on leaving behind some of the best times in her life, Sara states that, ‘it’s okay to look back, but don’t stare.’

LOCKHART, MELANIE is a senior at Central Washington University, pursuing a degree in print journalism with a minor in creative writing. She has enjoyed writing since she was five and is excited to see where her thoughts may take her in the future.

MACSPADDEN, BEN might seem like your typical fedora-wearing dandy, but there are many sparkling facets to his visage. He was probably a carny in a previous life, but that doesn’t mean he smells like cabbage. When he cannot be found holed up in his apartment embracing his first pressings of Frank Zappa albums, he plays a mean violin in the cheery psychedelic Ellensburg folk band, The Shrieking Eels.

MCINTYRE, JAMIE is a Writing Specialization major who enjoys the rain in North Bend and prefers cozy days spent indoors. She loves her hamster, her nieces, and her friends...and perhaps just a bit of writing on the side.

MCKIMMY, JOSH: Pompous About the Authors makes Josh McKimmy puke; and he believes that laughter and comedy are the true messiahs.

PRIBULA, JESSICA: Originally from Northwest Minnesota, Jessica received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of North Dakota in 2005 with an emphasis in fibers. Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Fine Art in painting and drawing at Central Washington University. The images reproduced here are drawings from Central created during Jessica’s first month in Washington as a way for her to become acquainted with her new surroundings. Although much of Jessica’s work is representational, she is also exploring Expressionism in order to develop a cohesive body of work that incorporates elements of her past and present.

PYBON, RACHEL believes in the formidable benevolent power of Grateful Dead bootlegs, veganism, good beer, vinyl, trees, and forgotten sixties garage bands. She sings and plays the Egyptian tablah for The Shrieking Eels, which is a rustic and fun-loving local Ellensburg band. It was Rachel’s cheesy seventh grade fantasy to be the only girl in an all guy band. Now, instead of singing into a hairbrush, she sings into a real microphone and people actually applaud for her, much to her amazement.

ROSS, AMANDA: I have two nicknames (that I am willing to admit to): Ol’ Iron Pants and Eagle Ears; the stories behind the names are extremely interesting (take my word for it), but I haven’t the space to elaborate. My interests are eclectic: painting,

traveling, playing music, hiking, reading, making up new words, kicking balls (make of this what you will), writing... I am a selfish writer, meaning that I typically don't intend to share my work with others (especially my crappy poetry); however, I've made a rare exception for you.

RUFF, HEIDI lives in the worlds in her head. Her drive for all things creative directs everything she does. Although art of various media is her best form of expression, writing also holds a dear place in her heart. Most of her inspiration comes from Industrial, German Synthpop, and Gothic music. (Given the chance, Heidi would probably live at the concert venue El Corazón in Seattle.) Heidi is pursuing majors in Graphic Design and Writing. She hopes to become a freelance illustrator and designer upon graduating.

SAUBY, ROSS: Since Ross seems to have fallen off the face of the Earth, he was not available for comment, but his peers on the Manastash Staff agree that his writing is superb. According to Heidi Ruff, Ross' use of imagery and metaphor are particularly good, which makes reading his work a pleasure. She can also vouch for Ross' artistic skills based on the few classes she's had with him.

THOMAS, JOANNA is a Humanities major, learning about the world through art, literature, history, and philosophy. When she's not reading, she makes art in her studio/residence, located in Ellensburg's Dogtown district, on the other side of the railroad tracks. In the winter, she sometimes allows the dog to sleep on her bed.

2008 Production

Manastash Staff



AYERS, DANIEL

BURT, ANDY

ENDERS, DEL

GRASS, BRENNAN

HARPEL, DAMIAN

HENYAN, BEV

JUSTUS, KATHERINE

KING, JASON

LAMON, KELSEY

NELSON, JESSI

PERRYEA, GREG

PYBON, RACHEL

RIORDAN, MOLLY

RUFF, HEIDI

SMITH, MONICA

WOOD, ANDREA

NORRIS, LISA (FACULTY ADVISOR [LAYOUT & DESIGN])

WHITCOMB, KATHY (FACULTY ADVISOR [EDITORIAL])



Jessica Pribula, *Late September*. Graphite.
Back Cover: Heidi Ruff, *Raven and Tree*. Adobe Illustrator.



CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Layout and Design by Heidi Ruff