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2012

# *MANASTASH*

THE STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE OF  
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

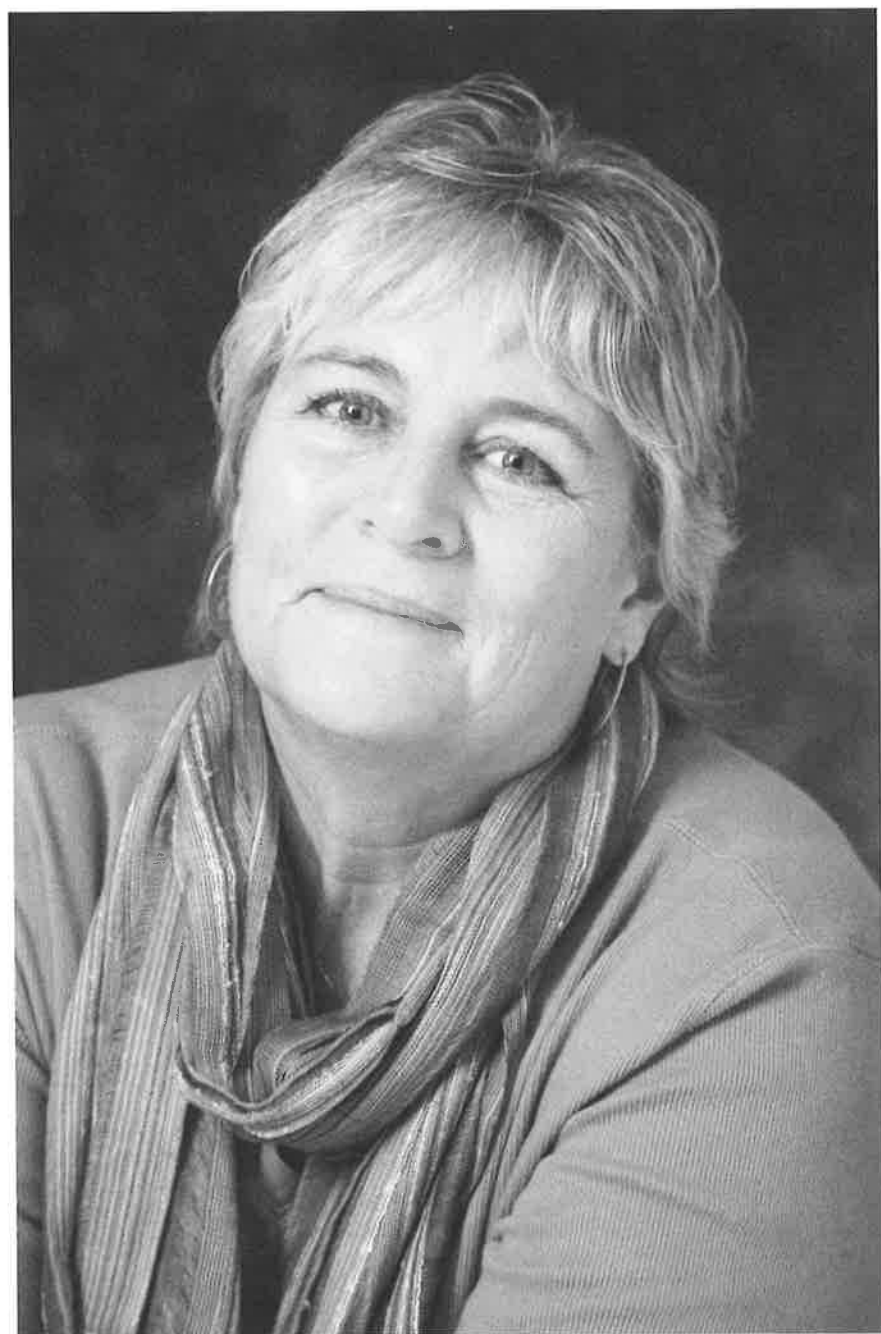


*Manastash*

*Volume 22*

*Spring 2012*

**IN MEMORY OF  
JUDITH KLECK POWELL**



## EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 22nd volume of *Manastash*, the student literary journal of Central Washington University (CWU). Within these pages, you will find some of the best poetry, prose, and artwork created by CWU's 2012 students. You will also find iconic works written by Judy Kleck Powell, a CWU Professor of English and a talented writer, who died on February 9, 2012.

### *Creating Manastash 2012*

With only a single quarter to work, it was challenging to give each submitted piece fair consideration while also preparing selected pieces for publication. All selection and editing work was done by the English 485: Manastash Editing class, which in 2012 consisted of 16 students and a faculty advisor.

You may notice that some of the pieces in this journal were written by members of the Manastash staff. All students enrolled at CWU during fall and winter 2012 were invited to submit their work. The editing staff received copies of each submission with all elements that identified the authors removed. Each editor also refrained from discussing or voting on his/her own work, and the voting was handled anonymously through ballots tallied by the faculty advisor.

### *Trevor Penland - Rising Poet*

With the Manastash's blind process, you can imagine the editing staff's surprise when we discovered eight selected poems were by the same author—Trevor Penland. Trevor is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in English (Literature) at CWU. In 2011, Trevor received the Betty E. Evans Award for Achievement in Creative Writing for his poem "Cassandra to Her Brothers," which also appears in this volume.

## *The Life of Judith Kleck Powell*

Judy was 61 years old and had taught at CWU for over two decades before she died of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Judy's literary achievements include two chapbooks – *Winter Fruit* and *Culling the Petals* – as well as a blog “In Dog Years, I'm Dead” about living with ALS ([www.judithkpowell.com](http://www.judithkpowell.com)).

On behalf of the 2012 Manastash editors, please read on. We worked to honor Judy's memory and compiled the best literary and artistic pieces CWU students had to offer. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did.

Sincerely,  
Patrick Hasseries  
on behalf of the  
Manastash Editorial Staff

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# STILLNESS

*By Crystal Sauby*

When she tells me she loves me, Sarah whispers, as usual, as if she's afraid that someone will hear her, even though we're alone. Our heads rest on the same pillow, and we face each other. Our hair is tangled together, her shining black strands mingling with my shorter coppery curls. The sun is setting, and a last gleam glints through the blinds, patching onto the jumbled blankets that cover us. Her house is silent. There is only this room and the two of us.

For long careful moments I lie unmoving, pretending that it will always be like this. That she is mine, that this is our life. Her fingers are warm in mine and I clutch them, as if that would keep her locked into this moment. She smiles, the tiny mole by her lip immediately in my vision, and kisses my forehead, brushing my bangs from my eyes.

Then abruptly the silence splinters. Her phone jingles from the nightstand and she snatches it up, turning it off before it can wake the baby. She checks the message, then gets up and begins to dress.

"Ben's on his way home," she says. I sigh and sit up, gathering my own clothes from the floor. "Don't forget your socks," she teases.

"I won't." I put them on first, turning away so she can't see my face. Her words sting. I did leave a sock behind once, a plain black knee sock. Sarah eventually found it under her dresser, but she was so afraid that Ben would find it first. She worried too much about one sock, a sock similar to at least two of her own pairs. I know we have to be careful. I have that fact shoved in my face every time she makes sure the blinds are closed before kissing me, but she makes the same joke every week.

I step into my skirt and pull my sweater over my head. Sarah goes into the bathroom, shutting the door softly behind her. Still, after only a scant space of seconds, a sleepy wail erupts from the other bedroom. I hear, or perhaps imagine, Sarah's sigh from behind the door. Jane only fell asleep an hour ago. "I'll get her," I call, checking the bedroom quickly. Sarah has straightened the covers, and there is no sign left of us.

Jane's room is dark. A faint scent of diapers punctuates the closeness of the room. On my way to the crib, I nearly trip over a pile of damp laundry. The anxious sobs quiet to whimpers as I lean over, pulling Jane

up into my arms. She cuddles against my shoulder, and I hold her tightly as I navigate around another laundry pile to the recliner, swaying slightly to keep Jane calm. I push yet another pile, blankets this time, from the chair and sit down, wrinkling my nose at the soured-milk smell that the blankets have left behind.

Jane's little body, encased in a fleece sleeper, is warm against me. I rock her softly, whispering songs through her occasional sniffles. The leg I'm using to rock the chair is just beginning to ache when she quiets completely, her face calm in sleep once again. I continue to hold her, not wanting to wake her up by putting her back in the crib too soon. My own eyes are heavy, and I close them, shifting in the chair so my neck doesn't cramp. Jane cried most of the afternoon, and although we only took turns walking her around the room, I feel as if I've walked miles my voice is rough from singing.

Sarah's footsteps sound outside the door, and then I hear dishes rattling in the kitchen. A door shuts and heavier footsteps cross the room. Ben is back.

Keeping Jane as still as possible, I rise and walk her back to the crib, set her down inside, and tuck her stuffed giraffe under her arm. She squeezes it tightly in her sleep. I leave the room, trying not to make any noise.

Ben is in the kitchen, kissing Sarah. I look down, toying with the button on my sweater, until I hear the refrigerator open and close. Coke in hand, Ben settles in front of his computer, loading World of Warcraft. A heavy smell of car oil hangs in the air. After four years as a mechanic, the stink of grease has worked into his skin. He waves as I pass on my way to the kitchen. "Hey, Felicity."

"Hi," I reply, with a brief, fake smile. I don't like Ben because Sarah chose him over me. Ben turns back to his game. He hasn't bothered to change out of his uniform, and his thick hair is matted and damp from his cap, which is crumpled on the coffee table. The coffee table is piled so high with junk mail, dirty dishes and baby toys that I can't actually see the table anymore. I itch to tidy the room, but I can't think where I would begin.

Sarah is washing dishes. She slams the pots together and tosses the silverware into the dish drainer, being as loud as she can without breaking anything. She punctuates the noise with exaggerated splashes

that soak the kitchen counter and floor. We both know that Ben won't move until Jane wakes up, when he will hold her on a pillow in his lap, still playing, until she is hungry or needs to be changed. Then he will pass her back to Sarah, his parenting done for the night.

"Do you want me to help you with dinner?" I stand plates up on the rack to dry.

"No, I think we're just going to have the rest of the spaghetti I made yesterday." Sarah drains what little is left of the soapy water.

"Do you need some help with laundry before I leave?" Two large baskets overflow with dirty socks, wet towels and nursing bras onto the living room floor.

"No, Ben said he's going to do some tonight." She rolls her eyes. "He said that last night, too." She makes a face. "It really stinks in here, doesn't it?"

"It's not too bad," I lie. She half-smiles in my direction. "Do you need anything else?"

"I'm okay." She tries to smile again, but her face crumples and I want to cry. I catch her hand in mine and press it, my eyes telegraphing what I can't say aloud: I love you, I'm sorry, Leave him and come live with me.

"Bring your laundry when you come next week, so you won't have to drag Jane to the laundromat."

"I might," she agrees. She won't.

"You're still coming over, right?"

"Yes, of course," she promises, and I let go of her hand and gather my things.

Jane begins to cry again as I leave. Through the door, I hear Ben call, "Babe, she's awake," and I kick his car as I pass it. I never hear him say Sarah's name. It's always "babe" or "Mama". I hate both of those names, but Sarah thinks they're cute.

I turn my car on and wait. I have imagined a barely-plausible scene: some night, Sarah will have had enough. She will rush out with Jane, climb into my car and tell me to take her away from this crap apartment and her slob of a husband. Ben will stand in the doorway, too stunned to speak. I doubt he's ever imagined that his wife's best friend is also her secret girlfriend.

This will probably never happen, but it could. So I wait, while the cold crawls into me, clutching at my lungs, sharp from the inside out. When the car finally warms and I have thawed, I begin the long drive home.

I live an hour away. As I drive, I feel a familiar loneliness slip over me. I only see Sarah on Saturdays, and when I leave in the evening, the span of time stretching before me until I can see her again might as well be a year. I keep myself busy during the slow days, working behind the reference desk at the public library, helping patrons find books and use the computers.

Early most mornings, when the air is crisp and seizes my insides, I take photographs. My town is beautiful. There is a bridged river; a dilapidated and vacant train station, overgrown with weeds and currently covered with a light blanket of snow; and a windmill on a hill near the edge of town. But there are also shops and streetlights and old storefronts, so I have no lack of interesting things to photograph when the ache in my heart threatens to overwhelm me.

In the afternoons, I develop my photographs. The developer and fixer sting my nose and persist on my hands through many washings, but I don't mind. When the photograph emerges suddenly on the paper that was just blank, it's as magical as it was the first time I saw it, watching my father develop his own photographs when I was five.

My life is easy, and I should feel lucky. I'm only twenty-five, but I own my house: my father gave it to me when he remarried and moved in with his second wife. I love my job at the library, and it pays well enough that I only have to work eighteen hours a week to live comfortably. But I don't want to be happy without Sarah.

I pass the university that we both attended and turn my head to catch a fleeting glance of the park where we met, seven years ago. I had been wandering through the park, trying to find things to take pictures of for class, but it was getting late and I didn't have any ideas. I had three books in my bag, so I decided to shoot them instead, a boring picture in good lighting.

"Do you need some more books?" A girl had come up behind me while I was arranging the books to get the best light.

“Actually, if you have some, that would be great. I can put them here and block the shadows,” I said, turning to take the books. She was very pretty, and I was instantly self-conscious. I had been grubbing around in the park, wandering through trees and bushes and sitting in the dirt, and I was sure my jeans showed it. Her flowered sundress hung perfectly on her slender body, and her dark hair was piled on top of her head in an untidy knot. A sketchbook and embroidered silk bag rested near her feet.

She watched me as I arranged the books. One of the titles jumped out at me.

“Are you studying art, too?” she wanted to know.

“Yes, specializing in photography.” I knelt, then lay flat on the grass to get the lighting right. It wasn’t the greatest shot, just a bunch of artistically arranged books at the foot of a tree, but I kind of liked it. I took the picture.

“I’m Sarah,” she said as I handed back her books.

“I’m Felicity. I just read that book, too,” I said, tapping the top book on the stack. “I really liked it.”

“*A Great and Terrible Beauty*? It’s amazing, isn’t it?”

“Yes, only I have the same name as the mean girl,” I laughed.

“It’s such a pretty name, though. Are you going back to campus?” We had begun ambling back along the path.

“Yes, I have a paper to finish.” She was going back, too, so we walked together. We discovered that we were both freshmen and lived in neighboring dorms. She drew but was planning to major in art history. There was an easiness between us from that first moment, and when we reached my dorm, I hesitated as she turned to go. I wanted to say something to keep her from leaving, but I didn’t know what.

“You know, if you liked *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, I have some other books you might like,” she said, half-turning back towards me.

“Really? You’d let me borrow them? I’ve read all the books I brought with me already, and I haven’t had a chance to find the public library yet.”

“Don’t bother, it’s really small. I don’t mind lending you books. You take good care of your camera, so I’m sure you’d take care of books.”

Just don't leave them on the ground for very long if you decide to take more pictures." She grinned. "Come with me." I followed her to her dorm, happy to delay our goodbye.

We had similar schedules, so we began spending most of our spare time together. It was too much trouble to go home just for the weekend, so we only went home for vacations, spending the quiet weekends in each other's rooms instead, reading and trying on clothes. We wore the same size, and Sarah was always trying to get me to dress up in clothes from her amazing wardrobe and go into town with her. I never wanted to, but she kept pushing.

"You look so gorgeous," she insisted one night after zipping me into a dark green dress. I did like the dress. The short skirt was layered with asymmetric lace ruffles, and the strapless bodice fit perfectly. "Here, let me see your hair." Before I could protest, she pulled out the ponytail that kept my messy, too-bright curls out of my face and began to comb my hair out with her fingers.

"Your hair is awesome," she said.

"So is yours! It's so dark and straight." I sighed in envy and she laughed, still arranging my hair. She moved around to stand in front of me, pulling pieces forward over my shoulders. I stood very still, trying to ignore the tingling in my limbs.

"There," she said, adjusting one last piece. Her fingers followed it down my side, to my waist, and rested on my hip briefly before she snatched her hand back. Her cheeks flushed a faint pink, and she turned away, back to the mirror. "What do you think?"

"I do look good," I admitted. "But I don't want to go out."

"What? Why not?" Sarah looked upset, and I felt a little bad. "I thought we could go to a party one of my classmates is having, over in your dorm."

"Why? It's more fun to just hang out with you."

"Don't you want to meet people, though? Guys?" She persisted, and I looked down at the floor. My toenail polish had chipped, and I'd filled it in with glitter polish. I noticed that she'd done the same to hers.

"Not really," I said. "I don't like boys." Seconds passed, long and silent.

"That's all right," Sarah said, meeting my eyes in the mirror. She



turned to me and pushed a loose curl back behind my ear, her fingers lingering on my face.

Most of my memories of college feature Sarah. We shared a room for three years; after our first meeting, we were almost always together. My photography teacher forbade me from taking pictures of Sarah after I turned in four photographs of her in a row. We tried not to talk about what we'd do after graduation, since we knew we would have to separate for a while to find work.

But when I went home for spring break our senior year, my father told me he was finally marrying his girlfriend, Elizabeth. My mother had been killed in a car accident when I was in kindergarten, and it had taken my father five years to begin dating again. He'd met Elizabeth when I was in junior high, and they'd begun to date casually. He'd only admitted that their relationship had become serious just before I left for college, and I was surprised to come home to a nearly-empty house.

"Where's all your stuff?" I looked around, letting my bags fall to the hallway floor. Most of the living room furniture was gone. My bookshelves and the recliner that had been last year's Christmas present were there, and there was a new flat-screen TV in the entertainment center, but the sofa and armchairs were gone.

"I've been moving things to Elizabeth's house," my father said. "We're getting married in August. Want a sandwich?" He went back into the kitchen and I followed, eager for more information.

I congratulated him before asking the most important question. "You're not selling the house, are you?"

"No, I thought I'd give it to you." He smiled at me as he offered me a plate of club sandwich triangles and potato chips. "Weren't you and Sarah worried about finding a place to live? Elizabeth's house is perfect for the two of us, and I don't need the money from this house. So it's yours. But I want you to live in it, not sell it."

"I wouldn't," I assured him, pouring out my thanks as I crunched my chips and picked apart my sandwich, too excited to taste anything. As soon as my father left the room, I ran upstairs to call Sarah, and we spent hours planning the remodeling of our new home.

"I'll have to go back right after graduation and do some cleaning and get rid of the junk Dad left, but it shouldn't take that long," I told Sarah

when we were both back at school. "When I'm done, you can come, and then we can decide how to decorate," I rambled on even though it looked like Sarah wanted to say something, and she nodded and smiled with me, but she was quiet, not excited like she had been the week before.

When we said goodbye after graduation in our empty room, her face was blank, her kiss distant. I knew she still hadn't told her family about us, and I wondered if that was what she was thinking about, so I didn't ask. She promised to visit the next week, but she never came. I called her, but she didn't answer. I left worried, annoyed and finally furious messages on her voice mail. Finally, at the end of the week, I dug out her address from some Christmas pictures she'd sent me last year and drove two hours to her house. When I arrived, she was sitting on her front step, talking with a man our age. She was smiling, but the smile disappeared when she saw me walking up the driveway.

She jumped up to meet me. "Felicity! It's so good to see you. You should have let me know you were going to be in town." Sarah's voice was full of pretend cheerfulness; she spoke to me as if I were a classmate she barely knew. "Ben, this is Felicity, a friend from college."

I shook the hand Ben offered. "How do you know Sarah?"

"We went to high school together, and our parents go to the same church," he said, then turned to Sarah. "I'll be right back, and then we can go." He looked back at me, grinning. "We're going on our first date today. I tried to get her to go out with me all senior year, and she finally agreed, four years later."

"Oh, how nice," I said, glancing at Sarah in disbelief. Ben went inside, letting the screen slam behind him, I made a nasty face at his back, curling my lip. Sarah saw me and made a soft sound in her throat, something she did when upset.

I turned to her. "First date? Funny, I thought you were already dating someone."

She wouldn't meet my eyes. "Felicity, I'm sorry."

"You're sorry? Oh, okay. I feel better now." I kicked my foot against the porch post, sandals slapping against my feet. "I guess that's why you didn't answer my phone calls." I chewed the inside of my lip, waiting for her to say something. She didn't, so I went on. "We had a plan, Sarah!

You were supposed to visit, help me clean our house, but you never showed up, you never called. I thought something happened to you! But no, you're just cheating on me. You should have talked to me!"

"I've been busy," she began. She shook her long hair forward and piled it on top of her head, looking away from me.

"Too busy to break up with me?" I wiped my clammy palms on my blue lace dress, Sarah's favorite. My sandals were beaded green flats she had given me the year before, and I had worn my hair up, the way she liked it, with a few curls hanging loose in the back. When I left my house that morning, I had known that something was wrong, but I still dressed up for Sarah, as if that might fix things between us.

Sarah wore a short denim skirt, high-heeled sandals, and a clinging satin camisole, veering on the edge of tastefulness. She had never dressed like that in college.

"Couldn't you have just dumped me before we left school? You knew then, didn't you?"

"You were so happy. I didn't want to ruin it," she mumbled, still gazing into her neighbor's front yard.

"And you think this is better?"

She sighed and finally looked at me. "I really do love you, Felicity. But some of my high school friends are already married and having babies. I want to have a baby. And it would be hard, to be with you. My parents would be so angry."

"Then what was the point of our relationship?" I tried to keep my voice steady but it cracked with tears.

"Felicity," Sarah reached out to take my hand. I snatched it away.

"Don't touch me." I stared at her, memorizing her. I didn't think I would ever see her again. She put her hands behind her back, as if to keep from reaching toward me again, meeting my eyes without a word.

I turned and walked down the driveway as if nothing was wrong. In my car, I glanced back with my mirror. She still stood there, watching me drive away. When I was out of sight, I found an empty parking lot and cried.

Sarah married Ben later that year. She sent me a letter, but she didn't invite me to the wedding. When she found out she was pregnant, she sent me another letter.

“I miss you so much,” she said. “I want to see you. I’m happy with Ben, but a part of me still needs you. I wish there was some way we could have been together,” she wrote, as if circumstances other than Sarah had ended us. But I loved her still, and I called her as soon as I finished reading the letter. We met the next week and began a second, desperate love.

I knew it would end, eventually. She would never choose me over Ben.



Saturday, when the clock says 1, I know she isn’t coming. Her phone rings, and rings, and then goes straight to voicemail, after I’ve called three times. This time, I don’t go to her. The week drifts by in an anxious blur. I cling to a faint hope that she lost her phone, maybe forgot to pay her bill, and that she’ll come this Saturday. On Saturday morning, she still hasn’t answered my calls. I throw my phone at the wall, again and again, until it shatters. I fall back onto the bed and stare at the ruins of my phone, numb, until my eyelids grow heavy and drift shut.

Sunday morning I wake up late. The living room is still cluttered with Jane’s toys. I gather them one by one, tossing them into the playpen. When the floor is cleared of rattles, squishy blocks and board books, I drag the playpen into the guest room and slam the door. I take my camera and leave, to be somewhere Sarah has never been. I end up on the bridge, staring down at the ice underneath. Its frozen beauty calms me and I lean on the rail, looking down, until I can no longer feel my hands or my heart.

When I get home, I call my father. “She did it again,” I tell him, and then my tears break free.

“Oh, Felicity, darling,” he starts, but I can tell he doesn’t know what else to say. He mumbles consolations while I cry for a few minutes, and then he begins to speak over my sobs, telling me about Elizabeth’s garden and the golden retriever puppies they’ve just adopted, Merry and Pippin. His rough voice soothes me, and I calm down, sniffing as I laugh at his puppy stories. Merry likes to chew underwear, and Pippin snatches tissues from the box, carrying them behind the couch to eat them, he tells me.

“So, about Sarah,” he says, and I sigh.

When Sarah and I reunited, he warned me to be careful. “I had to take you to Hawaii to get your mind off that girl the first time, and I can’t afford another trip right now,” he told me. I know I deserve an “I told you so,” but I don’t want to hear it.

“What is it about her?” He wants to know. “It seems to me that she’s chosen the life she wants.”

“But I was part of that life, for a while, and we were happy.”

“Maybe, but was that really the right thing for either of you? She’s married. It’s her decision to have an affair, but were you satisfied with that relationship?”

“No,” I admit. I hated that Sarah wasn’t all mine, like she had been in college.

“What about that other girl you dated? What was her name? Annabelle?”

“Annemarie,” I correct. Even though my father can’t see me, I shrug. “We didn’t really have that much in common.” I had met Annemarie at the library, and we dated for a few months. We’d had enough in common, but I gave up because she wasn’t Sarah. She couldn’t quote lines from books we both loved, couldn’t understand why I could go out in the freezing morning to photograph a river laced in ice, and then say it was too cold to tour the bars downtown that same night. Once I woke from a sad dream of Sarah leaving me. I reached across the bed, to reassure myself that she was still there, and found Annemarie. The next morning I dumped her. I have never told this to my father, so now I only say, “She wasn’t Sarah.”

“You need to move on,” he says, blunt as always. “Find a new girlfriend. Give Annemarie a call.” I stifle my sigh. He should know that cute blonde girls don’t sit around waiting for their ex-girlfriends to finally get over past relationships.

And I’m still not over Sarah, despite the difficulty of our relationship. My life stretches out before me, weeks of lonely Saturdays on which I will not see Sarah, will not hold Jane. Like eternity, it’s a concept I can’t completely grasp, and suddenly I don’t want to talk anymore. I tell my father I have to get ready for work and promise to come over for dinner next week.

I snap my new phone shut and pull my legs up, curling into my chair by the window where I can see thick snow clouds gather low in the sky.

Weeks pass. I've been lonely before, but to have a second chance at even a brief happiness squashed so abruptly has changed me. At work, I'm distracted and direct patrons to the wrong shelves, or delete their documents when I'm supposed to print them. At night, I flip from TV channel to TV channel and then start over when I've reached the end, as if I could unlock a secret channel that would bring Sarah back.

I didn't think it would end like this. I thought that someday Ben would find out and forbid Sarah from seeing me again, or that Sarah might even tell him about us. I wanted her to tell Ben, wanted Ben to make her choose, so she would be faced with the reality of our affair. But being a secret was better than being nothing at all.

My loneliness colors my dreams, and I wake often in the night with a vague uneasy feeling that keeps me from sleeping again until morning. After one restless night, I wake up, damp with tears and sweat. I shower and rip off the bed sheets and fall back on the bare mattress, curling up under my favorite fleece blanket.

When I wake again, sunset gilds my room. My arm is asleep, pressed underneath my side. I turn and stretch, closing my eyes again. Then I hear footsteps coming toward me through my open bedroom door.

"Felicity?" Her voice is uncertain. Sarah is here, in my house. I wonder if I am still dreaming, then remember that she has a key.

I hear a gentle thump, and Jane mumbles sleepily from somewhere nearby.

"Why are you here?" I ask, sitting up. I'm not ready to forgive her yet.

Sarah doesn't answer immediately. She sits on my bed, rocking Jane's car seat with her foot. Jane is wearing an outfit I bought her, a romper with flowers and bunnies. Her hands move as her eyes flutter open and closed, and I smile down at her.

"Jane cried for hours," she says eventually. "She's getting more teeth. Ben had to work an extra hour. When he finally got home, he said one of his coworkers was having a bachelor party and he wouldn't be home until late." She picks at the fabric of her jeans with a fingernail. "I was so upset. So I packed, and when he got home, I left."

“Is that it? You’re just mad he went partying? Did you even tell him about me?”

She looks down, which is answer enough. I should be angry, but resignation is what thuds, sullen, in my heart.

“These last two weeks, I’ve missed you so much. I don’t want to lose you again.” Her eyes plead with me.

“You never lost me,” I remind her. “You left me.”

“I know.” She is crying now. “I’m sorry,” she sobs, and I forgive her. I can’t stand to see her cry.

Jane is asleep again, and I draw Sarah down beside me. She pulls me close, until I have no space left to breathe. Our whispers warm the air as she traces the line of my cheek with her finger, touching my freckles one by one, just like she always did before. Somewhere within me, shoved far aside, is the knowledge that Sarah will leave again. But right now, she is here, and she is mine.



**“LONELY”**

*Katie Berberik*



# PANTOU(MOM)

*By Alyssa Foland*

In the middle of the night  
her baby howls a piercing cry,  
swaddled and beautiful,  
beckoning her to the blue room.

Her baby howls a piercing cry  
over and over again  
beckoning her to the blue room,  
and the cries stop.

Over and over again  
she walks the hall to her baby  
and the cries stop,  
but in an hour they will be back.

She walks the hall to her baby  
with bottle in hand to stop the cries,  
but in an hour they will be back,  
and she must try something else.

With bottle in hand to stop the cries—  
her baby is not silenced,  
and she must try something else:  
pacifier, changing, lullaby?

Her baby is not silenced.  
She calls her own mother for advice:  
pacifier, changing, lullaby?  
The questions ring in her head.

She calls her own mother for advice;  
what else can a new mother do?  
The questions ring in her head.  
And the cries continue.

What else can a new mother do?  
Bloodshot eyes, no sleep.  
And the cries continue  
In the middle of the night.

# CLASSROOM COMPANION

*By Erick Borst*

Under the desk, conceal it he tries,  
afraid of the peer's wondering eyes.  
With his practiced hand he means  
to readjust it with pocket of the jeans.

Before he gets the chance to budge,  
the teacher gives a forceful nudge  
and asks him to get in front of class,  
which will reveal his snake in the grass.

"No teacher please," the boy starts to say,  
"I simply don't feel all that good today."  
But that excuse simply will not work  
because the teacher is kind of a jerk.

So just when the boy is sure he is finished,  
his unwelcome friend begins to diminish.

## 18<sup>TH</sup> STREET

*By Landon Garcia*

There is a deli that lies  
between every apartment  
in this dry cow town,  
an oasis where blood turns to wine—  
no belief required.

Sixteen dollars for five liters:  
sun-kissed grapes infuse belief alone  
from arid climates so similar  
though the cows less noticeable.

Let this bring you to next Wednesday  
as labels promise places across the sea,  
suggest greener grasses

through purple-lipped conviction,  
learning to be alone in good company—  
magical intentions spare every obstacle  
aside from a sign erected to guide a stranger's path.

Rebelling at the crossroads of every decision,  
seeking to forge a middle path,  
you amble blurredly in boldness  
until ill fortune crashes against your forehead—  
life's punishment for marred vision  
and indecision.

Those signposts are real.

## TENDING

*By Cassandra Nilsen*

We always referred to it as the barn, the kids and I. It never felt like home. From a distance it had the desired rustic charm of an old barn. Situated out on the flats of Conway, a tiny town with one city street and miles of farms, it stood strong, surrounded by corn fields and the winding Skagit River, set against the backdrop of Mount Baker shimmering with snow and the most spectacular golden-pink sunrises one could ever find. But up close, its strong veneer was reduced to shivering weakness. Cracked and faded paint spotted the outer walls, and cobwebs clung to the overhang, nearly as thick as the roof itself. The barn creaked with age, and an outbuilding stuck in an exaggerated lean gave evidence of flooding only two years prior.

Inside, the three floors of the converted barn held three separate apartments. Ours was situated on the middle floor between the pounding of the tenants above us and late-night laughter of the renters below. The four of us lived in a tiny corner of the barn, approximately 500 square feet, with two bedrooms, a square fixed between them generously called a living room, part of a kitchen, and a temperamental bathroom. Light fixtures flickered when we turned them on, threatening to leave us half in the dark, while outlets sometimes sparked and shorted out the apartment. During the colder seasons, when we came within a foot of the walls, we could feel the outside air. The glass whistled and shook while the wind blew our curtains through the closed windows. Our only heat source was a wood stove; and with paper-thin surroundings giving our heat away, we were cold to the bone. But this home was what I could afford.



I remember the first night there, staying up to fight against the frigid air, trying to keep us warm. Boxes still occupied much of the limited space as I knelt down on the chilly wood floor carefully crumpling newspaper, hoping not to disturb my little girl and her two older brothers just a few feet away in their beds. I placed the paper balls in the center of the stove and strategically set strips of kindling into a tepee surrounding the pile. The lighter's blue flame caught the edge of the

paper, melting it into the fire as it spread quickly beneath the kindling, catching splintered fragments of the tepee and crackling its way to the top. I'd lit the inside of the stove! In excitement, I reached for two logs from the stack of firewood next to me and crisscrossed them over the tepee, flattening my premature success to smoke. I leaned in to blow at the base, attempting to revive the flames, at first too harshly so that bits of burned-white paper blew about, then ever so gently as if blowing bubbles. Neither method worked. Sitting back on my heels, I tilted my head at this mystery and then repeated my previous steps, hoping somehow the flames would take hold and do their job, but they wimped out. On this icy cold November night, I sat staring into the hollow wood stove. How could it be that a forest could so easily catch fire while I could not even keep a small flame burning?

Rummaging through boxes yet to be unpacked, I found extra blankets and took three into the kids' room. Reaching first to the top bunk, I placed my hand on my oldest son's back, tiptoeing closer to listen for his rhythmic breath. I then tossed the extra blanket up like a matador to get it over the railing and onto his sleeping body before bending over the bottom bunk to tend to my middle son, adding a kiss on his cheek since I could still reach him. Once he was tucked under his extra blanket, I took a few steps to the other side of the room where my daughter was sleeping in her crib, knees tucked under her belly pushing her bum into the air. None of her blankets still covered her, so I brought them up to the middle of her back and placed the extra on top of those. She squirmed into the warmth as I rubbed her back. Before leaving the room, I stood still in its chilly silence and touched my daughter's nose to see if it was as cold as my own. Yes. Frustrated and guilty, I returned to the wood stove to fight the night for heat.

This time I crumpled newspaper less cautiously than before, determined not to feel regret. At least we were living on our own now, not homelessly crammed into one upstairs bedroom in another family's home. I wanted to be proud of getting us this far after losing the life we had and the physical comforts within it. But I also knew we were here because of the choice I made to take us out of that life—the only life my kids had known and the one I refused to take back.

In that life, we had a nice, three-bedroom home in a cul-de-sac with

modern conveniences such as a dishwasher and a laundry room, heat that started with the flip of a switch, a fenced yard, and neighborhood friends for the kids to play with. But just as the barn's distant charm was deceiving, so was the exterior of our lives. Over the years I tolerated the cruelty of my husband as best I could, but when I saw the impact of his treatment on our children, I knew it had to stop. Seeing their pain gave me confidence in my decision, and I took the steps required to divorce our lives, navigating the legal system to ensure protection when necessary. It felt good finally to have taken a stand. However, on this night in the barn, confidence in my decision wavered, and I found it difficult to recall what I had to be proud of. Maybe my kids would never understand that even this barn was better than before.

Exhaustion stung my eyes as I stared blankly at the fourth or fifth crackling tepee. Unaware of the time or what to do next, I stood up to make sure the flue was open, then took another blanket from the bottom of the box, threw it around my shoulders, and sat back down on the floor to observe. I decided it must have been my timing. I was putting the firewood on before the flame was ready. This time I carefully watched the tepee as it slowly fell over the burning paper. If I waited too long the kindling would burn up; if I put the firewood on too soon the flame would burn out. When a hint of warmth reached the tip of my nose and each piece of kindling had an established flame, I added just one log to the fire. My hands gathered the blanket beneath my chin as I blew at the base, taking note of the sparks that needed encouragement. This time I blew as if extinguishing the flames atop a row of birthday candles. It worked! Ironic. The flames matured, reaching around the log like arms around an old friend; the sparks below rose to flames in a gust of powerful heat!

HEAT!

I smiled in triumph and let the fire warm my face for a few moments before placing a second log across the first. I closed the doors, spun the draft knobs open, moved to my oversized red chair, and waited. Through the small openings in the draft knobs, I watched in horror as the flames faded to darkness. A whimper escaped my lips and my head fell to the arm of the chair. I wanted to give up.

With blurry eyes and trembling hands I did again what I had done

before, what I had been doing all night long. Step by step, I moved methodically, trying to be patient in case the fire could sense my desperation. It was nearing 4:00 a.m. and

I  
just  
wanted  
the fire  
to burn.

This time, the dancing flames grew stronger as I watched them behind the knobs. The temperature gauge on the chimney rose out of the white and into the yellow! I added another two logs and shut the doors again, listening with relief to the roaring fire within. Having met failure face-to-face, I knew this time it was real and allowed myself to curl up in my red chair, soon lulled to sleep by the peaceful crackles and steady warmth of my hard-earned victory.

With experience, I would discover that placing the kindling like Lincoln Logs over a plateau of newspaper would work better for this wood stove, and that a bellows would keep me from nearly passing out trying to grow a flame. I would learn that barometric pressure impacted how well the fire would burn, and with too much wind, a fire wasn't worth building at all. I would find myself timing our schedules as best I could around the building and maintaining of a good fire, defeated when we returned at night to our apartment feeling colder inside than it was outside. Fire would become central to our existence—its value equal to that of food and water, proof that we could make it.

Only a couple hours after I fell asleep, my daughter called to me from her crib—time to get up. I shuffled into the cool room and took her sleepy body into my arms, letting her mold into my chest and shoulder. She mumbled something about juice from beneath her hair as I carried her out of the bedroom, leaving the door wide open this time to allow the heat to move further in. The creak of the handle got her attention as I stopped to check the fire and she lifted her head off my shoulder to watch, the wood now eaten away by hungry flames sputtering for more. She slumped herself over the arm of my chair when I set her down, mesmerized by the fire. I added two more logs to the charred remains and closed the doors, as if there was nothing to it.



She couldn't have known what that night took out of me and she didn't need. I picked her up again, held her in one arm and pointed with the other on our way to the kitchen.

“Look, baby,” I whispered. “Mommy built us a fire.”



**“UNTITLED”**

*Brockton Bensch*

## 15 JULY 1099—JERUSALEM

*By Trevor Penland*

The sun went down hours ago but the stones  
beneath me still burn, distorting my sight.  
My boots are soaked through,  
the rings of my chainmail encrusted  
with blood.

I can still taste that familiar iron tang, splatters  
from my victims' necks into my open mouth.  
I cannot sleep, though the city has quieted. Walking  
through the life-drenched streets, I hear  
laughter, song, worship where four hours earlier  
I heard screams, last breaths, metal-on-metal.

I have taken my filthy armor off,  
left my sword behind,  
torn the cross from my breast.  
Cloaked, I cannot be recognized for the power I am:  
Godfrey of Bouillon.<sup>1</sup>

I pass men on the streets: that one looks like the Saracen<sup>2</sup>  
who nearly cut my ear off, that one like the Greek Christian  
I killed for three bundles of wheat. I reach the Temple Mount  
and stand outside the al-Aqsa mosque<sup>3</sup>, admiring  
the beauty, the holiness. The moon glints off the gold dome.  
Words are stolen from my swollen, desert-dried tongue.  
Others pass by, mocking, throwing stones, pissing on its walls.  
I leave with them, making my way to the Holy Sepulcher.<sup>4</sup>

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1 A Frankish knight whose army was the first to overtake Jerusalem's walls.

2 A blanket term used to describe the Muslim forces opposing the crusaders.

3 An ancient Islamic mosque and the site of a massacre during the First Crusade.

4 The purported burial site of Christ, and the goal of the First Crusade.

I think about the Saracens I killed today,  
the look in their eyes,  
screams in their own tongue.

I pass the lifeless Saracen hanging on a cross  
outside the Sepulcher, hung there by my orders.

I glance at his face as I pass: bearded, dark-skinned, bruised.  
Faithful to his God until the end. Inside, I kneel  
at the altar, the white carving of Christ  
on the cross before me. I gaze upon him in worship:  
bearded, marble-skinned, bruised.

## 10 MAY 1933—BERLIN

*By Trevor Penland*

The pages gradually curl and turn black  
before they ignite in white heat.

The smoke reaches out, slowly caressing,  
wrapping its dark fingers around my wrists,

as if to pull me toward the heat and flames.  
I stand, frozen despite the fire and the bodies

pressed against me. I cannot bring my arm  
to yield my books to the devouring blaze.

Maybe I never intended to. The crowd  
around me, drenched in hatred, screams

dead words that drop to the ground,  
leaving bruises everywhere.

They throw more books upon the pyre—  
Brecht and Bebel, Marx and Hemingway—

and I am reminded of a story I heard  
when I was younger: while Romans burned

the Torah and a young rabbi for inciting  
rebellion, he cried, “The pages may burn,

but the words fly free!” As I watch smoke  
and words float up from the fire, they seem

to live anew, shrouded in grey vapor,  
ominous shapes of history not yet made,

drifting on a wind blowing westward.



**"HONEY BUN HIDEOUT"**

*Cheri Schafer*

# VICTORIAN HOUSE APT.

*By Marcus Mead*

living room  
bookshelf  
birdcage  
twin bed  
table  
bay windows  
birch trees.  
small steps  
quiet trips  
easy dinners  
green themes  
stored shoes  
parking lot.  
your closet  
my closet  
our bed.  
my reading  
your reading  
my leaving  
your cleaning.  
dark lights  
bright tv  
slow hands  
heavy breaths.  
no problems  
eyes looking  
teeth showing.  
hard wishes  
balked whispers  
heart poundings.  
raised box spring  
we are small closets  
usually following

friendly boozing  
easing logic.  
every night a  
heavy blanket  
background noise  
forward pressing.  
drip coffee  
bread bowls  
dark beer  
our love  
all nights.



## ILLUSIONS

*By Dillon Trethewey*

“Think of a card,” the magician said, “any card.”

“Any card?” I asked.

“Any one of the fifty-two.” He raised the deck in his hand and waggled it in front of me.

I thought for a moment, a face card appeared in my mind, a feminine face clutching small flowers with three petals each.

“Got it?” the magician asked.

“Got it,” I said.

The magician shuffled the cards, pouring cards from the bottom of the deck and placing them on top. The “Hindu Shuffle,” it was called.

He did this three times, his eyes never leaving mine, then he smiled, split the deck in two with roughly half the cards in each hand, and flipped a card from his left hand into the air, catching it face up on the pile in his right hand. He held it out to me to inspect, his eyes as bright as his smile.

It was a three of diamonds.

I shook my head, “Nope.”

The magician shrugged, “Of course not,” he said, “but someday I’ll get someone and it’ll be amazing.”

I laughed as he reassembled the deck.

I should clarify. I didn’t know if the man was actually a magician, but I had seen David Copperfield in Vegas once with some friends, and this guy reminded me of him. Not physically, of course, but they had similar posture, and their smiles could have been copied and pasted. But where Copperfield might have worn a suit and tie; this man could have been one bad restaurant tip away from being a homeless man.

I was riding the 43 bus home from the University District late at night, and he sat across from me and produced a deck of cards. He had informed me, without my asking him, that he was occasionally a stage magician. I told him he didn’t look much like one; he told me that I clearly didn’t know what a stage magician looked like.

“We aren’t all glitz and tailcoats,” he said, “magic is about making people see things that aren’t there.”

He was doing a good job, because I looked him up and down again and still didn't see a magician.

He flipped the three of diamonds facedown into the deck and reshuffled.

"Where are you headed?" he asked.

"Home," I said.

He raised an eyebrow from where he sat across the aisle from me, "You sound disappointed," he said.

I looked over at him. Was I that transparent?

"I thought you were going to a second job," he said, "the way you sighed when you sat down, like an old man. You weren't any happier on the bus than you were waiting for it. To me, that means you're dreading your destination. Where do you work?"

"Barnes and Noble," I said, "In the U-Village."

The magician nodded, "I know that store," he said, "they have a little more soul than most of those places. You like working there?"

"Absolutely," I said, "I get to spend my entire day surrounded by every great old writers, and some of the better new ones as well."

"Glad to hear it," the magician said, "most people hate their jobs. You're lucky to have one you enjoy. What's at home?"

I had been smiling for a few moments while I remembered the stacks of great books. Now my face fell, and he saw it.

"I'm sorry," he said, "it's a personal question."

"No," I said, "it's fine, I guess. I don't really care."

The magician waited for me to continue, sitting back and shuffling his cards.

"My girlfriend has been on my case to switch careers." I said after a moment, "She keeps saying that bookstores are on their way out and that I should get something more stable, but I love books, and the library can't pay our bills the way B&N can."

The magician nodded, "What does *she* do?"

"She sells things on eBay and Craigslist." The magician snorted. "Yeah, last month we were behind on the rent. 'Business is slow' she told me. So she talked me into selling one of my older books. A collection of Kipling short stories, second edition. She sold it on Craigslist for \$45. I looked it up afterward; the thing was worth several *times* that to the

right people. The woman has no appreciation for culture.”

The magician’s face had turned to outrage when I told him the selling price. Now it was impassive again, “Why don’t you leave her?”

I examined my shoulder bag, “And throw her out into the street with all her useless crap? I can’t do that.”

The magician grimaced and glanced around the bus, it was nearly one in the morning and the cabin was almost empty. This was probably the 43’s last run of the night, or its first of the day.

“You two sound like a couple that needs to relax a little,” he said smiling at me the way he smiled when he was doing his “trick.” He reached into his grimy jacket and pulled out a surprisingly clean business card, “why don’t you bring this...”

“Michelle,” I said.

“...lovely name, to my show downtown, my friends and I are set up in the Pike Place Market.”

I raised an eyebrow, it seemed a little suspicious. But the man was holding out the card with a look that bordered on desperation. I didn’t *have* to go.

“Alright,” I said, taking the card, “when do you guys start?”

“Fridays and Saturdays,” the magician said, sounding both happy and relieved, “we start at 11:00 sharp. Just show the card to the man at the door.”

I nodded, and wondered for the first time if the guy was on drugs. He looked as though he might need the money from the shows to score a hit. I was immediately uncomfortable.

At this moment, the magician pulled the cord to alert the driver that his stop was approaching. He put the cards away and got to his feet.

“Hang on,” I said, not sure I wanted to keep talking to him, but unable to stop myself, “I never got your name?”

“Indeed you did not,” he replied, his mischievous fake card trick smile back once more, “I learned a long time ago, Paul, that it’s a bad idea to ask for or give out names when you’re in my line of work. Next time, ask what someone *calls* themselves.”

The bus ground to a halt, and the doors were already closing with the magician outside when I realized that I had never told him my name either. I got up to look out the window, or maybe ask the driver to stop

so I could talk to him some more, but the bus was already away from the curb, and the magician had vanished into the overcast Seattle night.



"You're home late," Michelle said when I walked through the door to our apartment. We lived in an apartment building on East Thomas Street and 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

"You're up late," I said, usually she was asleep by this time.

She smiled as she answered, "I asked you first."

I couldn't help myself, I smiled back, "I took two shifts today," I said, "I figured the extra money couldn't hurt."

"I missed you" she said, handing me a glass of red wine, "I have a surprise."

I looked at the wine glass in surprise. Michelle rarely splurged like this, and she preferred white wine.

"What's the occasion?"

She pressed her lips to mine for several seconds, "You remember my friend, Janice?"

I sipped the wine, "Two-relationships-at-the-same-time-with-no-moral-qualms-Janice?"

"She's just free-spirited," she said.

"So're venereal diseases," I said.

"*Anyway!* I was chatting with her today and she mentioned that she knew a guy who collected books."

I lowered the wine glass, "What'd you do?"

"Nothing!" she said, "I just asked her to get him to drop me a line."

"Michelle..."

"I know how upset you were when we sold the last one," she said, "so I figured that if we're going to sell them, we might as well get the best price for them!"

I set down the wine glass, "Good thing I came home when I did," I said, "I wouldn't want to catch you boxing them *up*."

"Paul," she said, crossing her arms, "don't be like this."

"What if I wanted to sell your family photos?" I said, my voice rising.

"They're just taking up space," she said, "we're short of room as it is, and this guy is willing to pay top dollar for them!"

"They're *mine!*" I said, almost yelling.

“They’re *useless!*”

I set the wine glass down on the counter with enough force to send its contents cascading over the lip onto the countertop.

“I’m going to bed,” I said, “I’m tired.”

I walked into the bedroom and closed the door with a slam. I could see Michelle’s face as the door closed. She was looking at me the way she always looked at me when I didn’t want to do what she wanted. I was a problem now, a problem that needed to be solved, an equation that needed an answer. The problem with living with someone for over a year is that they know which buttons to push to make you move. She’d get her way, I knew, it was only a matter of time.

I turned off the light and fell onto the bed. Michelle wasn’t there yet. She wouldn’t come to bed until she knew I was asleep. I clicked off my lamp and stared into the darkness, my fatigue from work momentarily forgotten. My library stared back at me from one wall. It was probably worth a fortune; I couldn’t blame her for wanting to sell it. I’d been amassing the books since grade school, when I picked up a copy of C.S. Lewis’s *The Magician’s Nephew* at a garage sale for fifty cents. It wasn’t until that night that I discovered the author’s cursive scrawl on the title page; I knew immediately that I had myself a lifelong hobby.

That book was still up there somewhere, along with a dozen other rare manuscripts. A copy of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, copy written 1886, a Third Edition set of *The Lord of the Rings*, the collected works of Shakespeare, Hansbury, Milton, and Brontë. A core-sample of Western literature; the further down you went the farther back in time. The top shelves held modern authors—Gaiman, Palahniuk, and others. The bottom shelves held my copy of *Beowulf*, the works of Chaucer, and the plays of Ben Johnson. My pride and joy was a first edition copy of *Dune*, signed by Frank Herbert and given to me by my father in his Will. I was fairly certain that, if I ever had kids, I could start a fairly reasonable college fund by selling it.

And by this time next month, they’d all be gone. Some rich jerk was going to swindle my girlfriend out of a fortune, and I was going to be at work. She’d probably *wait* for me to be at work so she could sell everything at once. I grimaced, rolled over, and fell asleep without realizing it.



It took Michelle three days to convince me to sell my books. Her argument hinged on the undeniable fact that, if we could get good prices for them, we'd be living comfortably for the next year, if not more. By the time that money ran out, she said, her business would have taken off. The others, she said, I could either keep or sell to local bookstores, my choice. After I agreed, she smiled, kissed me, and told me that she'd handle everything.

She always "handled" everything.

Two days after that, when Michelle was telling me when the collector would be by to talk about pricing (I *would* be at work), I remembered the card the magician had given me. I couldn't tell you why I bothered suggesting it; maybe I wanted to contribute something, and this was all I could think of. For a moment she looked at me as though I was crazy, then shrugged.

"It'd be nice to celebrate," she said, "we haven't gone out together in a while."

I called my supervisor at B&N, Brian, and asked for Friday evening off. Brian and I were friends, and he said it'd be no problem.



"Are you *sure* about this, Paul?" Michelle asked, clutching my arm and looking anxious as we walked deeper into the market.

"Of course I am," I replied, although I wasn't, "it's all perfectly safe."

We had grabbed the 43 downtown at around 10:15. The weather was crisp and Michelle nearly tripped in her heels. She clung to my arm as we walked through the streets of downtown, and the streetlights bleached everything sulfur yellow.

The man at the door that the magician had mentioned turned out to be two men. One was a gorilla of a man. His black hair shaved close to his scalp, and he looked incongruous in an ill-fitting red suit. The other man was much smaller, with long greasy red hair and an immaculate, although clearly ancient, blue suit. Both of them stared impassively at us as we approached. And when I handed them the card, the big one took it, inspected both sides carefully, and then ate it. He nodded and opened the door for us; we entered, trying not to look scared.

The room we entered was a small, ill-lit space filled with circular tables and chairs. At one end, clearly assembled after the magician's

troupe had come there, was a stage, elevated perhaps two feet above the floor. I glanced at my watch, and then glanced at the other people in the room. Most of them looked like us, dressed nicely and slightly scared. A few of them appeared more comfortable. They were all dressed in street clothes, and looked around the room with detached disdain.

At exactly eleven o'clock, the few lights dimmed, and the floodlights on the stage lit up. A beautiful woman in a sequined bikini with a spidery tattoo up one leg clacked onto the stage and raised her arms to the predominantly male applause that greeted her. She smiled and motioned for silence. After a few catcalls, the room settled down.

"Thank you for coming," she called to us, "it is my great pleasure to introduce, returned from the darkest recesses of Peru, Cornelius the Luminous!"

"She has scars on her wrists," Michelle whispered to me as the crowd applauded. She was right.

He had shaved. He had also ditched the filthy jeans, T-shirt and coat for an equally filthy tux. He walked onto the stage, bowed to the audience and thanked the woman in the bikini, whom he called "Sammi the Sensational." The two of them engaged in a few minutes of scripted banter, and then he sent her offstage with a playful swat on the behind. Next to me Michelle sniffed.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I thank you again for coming to my humble performance. Tonight I hope to show you things you have never seen before in your lives, you may attempt to decipher them, if you wish, but I must stress that at no point in the future should you attempt to replicate the things you see here. They are not safe, and could result in harm to yourself and others. Do *not*, under *any* circumstances, approach the stage without my permission, I cannot guarantee your safety if you do so."

With that disclaimer, he commenced with the show. I don't remember everything he did that night; specifics drift in and out of my mind, and details change every time I think of them. Sometimes Sammi would be on stage with him, and the male attention in the room would swing to her, and then we'd be dazzled by whatever obvious piece of illusion Cornelius had done while she was up on stage smiling with the audience. Sometimes the scars on her wrists seemed glaringly obvious,

and I wondered why she was wearing that bikini.

I remember the way he took coins from the air. How he produced them from behind a volunteer's nose, or out of the light on the stage. He pretended to crush a pigeon in a metal cage, but brought it back to life for us. He even painted an amazing portrait of Sammi on a canvas she carried onto the stage. He never touched a brush, or the canvas for that matter.

Michelle watched the show, sipping a complimentary cocktail and getting less and less impressed. "It's in the table," she would say, "He stuffed it down his shirt. She's hiding it in between those fake tits of hers. *Mirrors.*"

The show lasted for a couple hours; we were all starting to feel a little sleepy when Cornelius woke us up with a bellow that echoed in that tiny room.

"For my next trick!" he shouted, "I shall need a *female* volunteer."

Some of the more inebriated men chortled while their dates scowled at them. No one raised her hand.

Cornelius' smile was perpetual, "Very well," he said, "then I shall be forced to select someone myself."

Sammi appeared on stage with a portable stage light, and panned it around the audience as Cornelius moved among us, scanning faces for whatever he was looking for. In retrospect, I wonder why he didn't simply use her; I suppose he wanted to prove a point.

"Ahhh," he said as the light turned towards us, "I think I've found my volunteer."

He held out his hand to Michelle, who shook her head.

"Come on," I whispered, drunker than I thought I was, "it's just one trick."

"I am *not* getting on stage with that girl," She hissed at me, nodding at Sammi.

"Don't be a prude," I said, "it's normal for these kinds of shows."

"She probably isn't legal," she said, "I bet he's got her hooked on something so she'll do whatever he wants."

"My dear?" Cornelius said, "the audience awaits, fame and renown are but a moment away. Take my hand, and join me in majesty."

Michelle didn't get up. She looked like she wanted to keep arguing



with me, or start yelling at the magician, before she could do anything, I spoke into her ear.

“Scared?”

She looked at me, fire in her eyes. If there was one way to force her hand, it was implying cowardice. I don’t know why I wanted her to go up on that stage, must have been the alcohol.

Michelle took Cornelius’ hand, stood up a little drunkenly, and walked with him to the front of the room.

Sammi put the light away, and my eyes began to readjust to the darkness around me. I could see that Michelle was drunk, and that it was only by an amazing effort of will that she hadn’t said something snide to the bikini-clad girl.

Cornelius began to talk to my girlfriend. I recognized it as the magician’s patter he had used during the show, light conversation to distract those watching. Cornelius was good at it, and when he gestured to the large, multi-lidded glass coffin that Sammi had discreetly maneuvered onto the stage, even Michelle was surprised.

The trunk sat onstage, situated a couple inches off the floor on a wheeled platform. It stood on its end, about the size of a man, and looked very old.

“The Casket of Things Unseen,” Cornelius boomed, “a gift from the Sultan of Morocco to my grandfather. My grandfather stunned and terrified audiences across Europe and North Africa, before dying under mysterious circumstances. It laid in darkness for decades, unused by my father, an accountant from Milwaukee, until I uncovered it three years ago after his death. If that man hadn’t ignored the warnings on that propane tank, I may never have found it.” We laughed, even Michelle.

Sammi opened the lid to the coffin, and Cornelius gestured for Michelle to step inside. She hesitated, glancing in my direction, but I don’t think she could see me through the blazing lights on the stage. Cornelius held out a hand to help her into the trunk and, looking worried, she took it and stepped inside. Cornelius smiled as she did so, and for a moment I thought I saw a look of triumph in his eyes.

Then he closed and locked the lid, and Michelle entered the Casket of Things Unseen.

The trick was simple. Michelle went into the box, and Cornelius

pattered with the crowd. Michelle stood in the box, looking somewhat nervous, and we waited for something to happen.

Then she was gone. There was no flash of light, no flame, no noise. She was there one moment, and gone the next. Cornelius opened the Casket and stepped inside, demonstrating that it was empty. The crowd was silent, utterly stunned at the suddenness of the disappearance.

Cornelius stepped out of the Casket, and bowed to the silent audience.

"Thank you for coming," he said, his voice quiet, tired, "I hope you enjoyed yourselves, good night."

He walked off the stage, the lights dimmed, and the door we had come through was opened. People began to filter out, but I stayed where I was. Michelle still hadn't reappeared.

I continued to sit, in the dark, waiting for my girlfriend to return.

The room emptied, silence reigned for several minutes, and then Cornelius and Sammi came out of a back room. Cornelius was dressed once more in jeans and a T-shirt, and Sammi had lost the bikini in favor of similar clothes. I stood up and walked towards them, Cornelius saw me approach, and gestured to the hall. I shook my head, and he nodded to me.

"Darling," he said to Sammi, "would you mind waiting outside?"

She nodded and walked on, and Cornelius and I stood together, in the dark.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"A magician never reveals his secrets," Cornelius said.

I stepped towards him, my left hand clenched into a fist; my other hand clutching her purse, but even in the dark, his expression stopped me.

"That would be unwise," he said, his voice quiet in the small room, "walk with me, won't you?"

I followed him, my hand clenched into fists, through the twisting halls of the Pike Place Market.

"What have you done with her?" I asked.

"That's none of your concern," he replied.

"The hell it isn't! You just kidnapped my girlfriend! I'll call the police!"

"And tell them what?" Cornelius said, stopping and facing me, "that a

stage magician you met on a bus made your girlfriend disappear? What are you going to tell them when they ask for my name? Cornelius the Luminous?"

I opened my mouth to fire back, but no sound came out.

"That's what I thought," he said, "now, it's late, and Sammi and I have to be in Victoria by," he looked at his watch, "Monday. Why don't you go home, read one of your books, and tell something discouraging to the book collector?"

"You have to bring her back," I said, "this isn't right."

"I suppose not," the magician said, pushing open a door and crossing a deserted street, "but when you're working with magic, you don't always get what you want."

"Is she alright?"

"More or less," Cornelius replied.

We were outside now, across the street from the waterfront. Sammi waited under a streetlight and the sidewalks glistened with rainwater from the night. The magician stopped, turned to me, and gave me a card from his pocket. Then he walked to Sammi, put his arm around her waist, and walked away into the night.

I looked at the card he had given me; the Queen of Clubs stared back.

When I looked up again, "Cornelius" and "Sammi" were gone; I put the card in my pocket, and started to walk home.

## FOR ME

*By Justin Ruhe*

My senior year of high school was an exciting time as I sent off college applications and graduation invites. I was becoming an adult. Classes were easy, my GPA was a 3.7, and I could stay out later than ever before without getting in trouble for coming home too late. By my senior year, I had been in Seattle for two years, and I was just coming to the age where I could go to events downtown and have fun. Growing up in Cincinnati is like growing up without a downtown because of the crime that scares everyone away. Now that I lived near a much cleaner, safer downtown, I longed to explore the city—to find the best dance clubs, eat at the renowned local restaurants, and know about all the concerts and festivals. I began scouring the Internet on Thursdays for “upcoming events in Seattle this weekend,” or “dance clubs near Seattle,” and started driving downtown on the weekends to fulfill my metropolitan fantasies.

One day while I was at work, an older dark-haired woman pranced into the *Qdoba* I was working at. She was soaked from the heavy pitter patter that had been drumming at the window, and I greeted her by asking if she had been “singing and dancing in the rain.” The woman’s face flushed red under the cool damp mask of raindrops streaming down her face. While ordering a steaming hot plate of nachos, the woman explained to me that she was a dance instructor who gave salsa, swing, and blues dancing lessons at several clubs in Seattle. This time it was my face that lit up. Jessie gave me her card and later emailed me a list of her favorite dance clubs in Seattle and the best nights to go. The end of my senior year had just become more exciting. There was one problem, though.

For eleven months I had dated Marissa from my Spanish class. She was gorgeous, with curly dark hair, square *IZOD* glasses magnifying deep brown eyes, and an ice cream sweet smile. Marissa played the saxophone and drew her own comics during lunch. She quoted *Star Trek* frequently, took all advanced placement classes, and would occasionally shoot me this look in class, head turned slightly back and eyes drifting just over her glasses—sexy. Our relationship seemed flawless at first:

sending smiley face texts during the middle of the day, holding hands on the way to class, lying on the couch together on the weekends watching movies, eating sundaes at the local diner, and yes—endlessly kissing. The repetition became monotonous. I could now quote these movies and knew the menus from the small selection of restaurants we frequented. I always knew what to order before we arrived. Feeling restless, I began suggesting to Marissa that we go downtown for a night, out dancing, or even to a show of some sort. Marissa would smile and take my hand, asking if I wanted to watch another movie.

Friday nights I usually spent slinging tacos to under-appreciative customers, coming home around midnight, clothes covered in salsa stains and a fresh collection of grease burns. Saturday nights I would spend at Marissa's, crowded around the fifty-inch silver television with her family, our sweaty palms clasped together for hours at a time. Most of the time I was half-interested in the movie we were watching, usually some superhero tale Marissa and her Dad would bond over. I would pretend to watch the movie, gazing out the sliding glass door and into the backyard, slowly watching the sun sink and the day get shorter. When I came home that night, I looked at the email that Jessie had sent me.

“Hey, why don't we drive to the city this Friday, get dinner, look at the lights on the waterfront, and end up dancing somewhere?” My voice cracked a little raising the pitch of my voice in an attempt to sound convincing.

“It's just not my type of thing,” Marissa replied, giving me doe eyes.

The email from Jessie sat in my inbox, and mind, and it had been weeks since she sent it. The stagnant air of Marissa's living room, and the constant farting jokes that her dad shared with me began to seem unbearable. Restless and pinned down to the couch under Marissa's legs, listening to the narration from the endless soundtrack of superhero movie dialogue, I couldn't breathe. While we sat in the dark living room listening to the punching sounds of *Watchmen*, images ran through my mind: the skyline of Seattle, the click-clack of heels and dress shoes on hard wood floors, the bravado of a live trumpet, the taste of rich dark late-night espresso, and the warm thick city air.

“Ooh I love this part,” Marissa said as she squeezed my hand.

“Tuesday- Blues dancing at *Waits*” the email read. I set a date, requested the day off from work, and asked Marissa if she wanted to go. I knew what her answer was going to be before I asked, but strategically, asking was crucial.

“Justin, you know how I feel about going out dancing.”

Perfect, I thought, “Well I’m going to go without you then. This is something I want to do, and if you don’t want to go, I totally respect that, but I’m going on my own.” I had tried to sound like a caring boyfriend, that stupid slightly higher pitch. But at this point I didn’t care; I had made up my mind.

“Ok, I’ll go.”

I stood dumbfounded. Had Marissa really just agreed to go out dancing with me? After my momentary inability to speak, I hugged her tight. I knew she was doing this for me, but I hoped she’d have fun and that our date would inspire her to want to go out more often.

Muddy Waters’ husky voice and twangy guitar reverberated off the bathroom tiles. I pushed off the sink and spun a full 360 degrees in place. I had talked to Marissa earlier in the day and she had said she was still “game” to go out. I couldn’t help but dance while I got ready in front of the mirror. Purple button up BCBG shirt, grey slacks, dance shoes (that made the clicking sound) from homecoming, slicked back hair, and Burberry Cologne; I winked back at the brand new man in the mirror, “Damn Ladykiller.”

“Hey, you just about ready?” I called Marissa, trying unsuccessfully to hide the excitement in my voice.

“Hey,” she said quietly, followed by a long pause. “I don’t know if I want to go anymore, Justin,” she had transitioned to her cutesy voice. “Want to come over and watch a movie?”

I stood speechless staring down at my dress clothes. My heart had dropped inside my chest, and I felt my face flush. The thought of spending another night in Marissa’s hot living room seemed revolting. “I’m going out dancing,” I said. “And if you don’t want to go, that’s totally fine.”

“Fine, I’ll go” she said—short hard words: her bitchy voice. I could tell she didn’t want to go, and an image of her sulking against the wall of the dance floor, staring angrily at me, flashed into my head.

“No it’s ok. I’m gonna go alone.”

I drove down to Capitol Hill alone, my Chevrolet Corisica—Bad Ass Number 1—rolling down the highway. I felt a little unnerved rolling by numerous shady characters dressed in large puffy jackets and oversized sunglasses standing on the corners, but finally I reached my destination. A big red neon sign read *Waiids* in a classy cursive. My eyes widened with instantaneous love for the atmosphere. The club sat right against the street with a large elaborate patio in front. The patio was furnished by a large red plush couch with lavender pillows, a white wicker love seat, and a posh crème recliner. There were candles and ornate metallic lamps adorning the entrance, and over the top of the patio was a tiki ceiling held up by four large tiki posts. I handed the lady at the door five dollars and a student ID card, then strutted out onto the hardwood floor. The inside was even more opulent. Red-stringed lights hung around the walls, reflecting off the shiny hardwood floor, and metallic pieces of art decorated the walls.

All around stood women of all ages dressed in long skirts and extravagant earrings, strapless dresses, and high heels. They were all just waiting for men dressed in their best button-ups to come take them by the hand and lead them onto the floor. A guy and a girl dressed in all black strutted out to the center of the floor and clapped their hands, quieting down the large group of people in the club. The duo taught a brief lesson, how to roll the shoulder, basic positions, and how to “swing them hips.” The lesson played out like a game of Simon says between the instructors and the patrons, and I paid close attention because I had no idea what I was doing. Directly after the lesson, the place came alive with blues music and the shuffles of well-placed feet. My cheeks flushed red because my first few attempts to dance looked something like I was choreographing new moves from, like some horror sci-fi version of *Flashdance*. As I began to really listen to the music, however, my hips swayed with the down south rhythms. My feet were falling in the right places, and gaining confidence, I started dipping and spinning girls. I was intoxicated on the sweet swish of skirts and flip of the hair as a girl would dip down close to the floor, then get whisked back up. A smile on my face remained, and as my feet moved to the beat of the music with ever-gaining confidence, I felt a sense of self-worth and accomplishment

explode inside of me like rich oil bubbling to the surface after months of deep digging excavation. I imagined my skin stuck to the damp back of Marissa's couch, imprisoned under her legs, as I stared emptily at the television. I hadn't thought about her since I had arrived, and I quickly vanquished the thought from my mind, returning to my night on the town.

It was close to midnight when people started to clear out of the club, and that's when I saw her, a tall blonde in a striking deep blue dress that matched the color of her eyes. I looked over at her, catching a smile. As I took her by the hand and led her to the floor, she told me her name was Erica. She was a year older than me and had been dancing at *Waits* only once before. Our bodies fell into a syncopated rhythm, and our limbs seemed part of a well-rehearsed schedule, falling right into place with the music. I dipped her down low, admiring how her long blonde hair swept just above the floor. Although we had never danced together, it felt as if we had been lifelong dance partners. We had both vacationed in Ireland, so we talked about our mutual love for a frothy-topped Guinness, the heavy rains on the southern peninsula, and how wild sheep look running down the lush green hills spread out all over the country. One song, two song, three songs, and we just continued to dance, never growing bored of the movements and smooth voice of Billie Holiday and various other blues artists. Towards the end of the night I hugged her goodbye and put her number in my phone, punctuating her name with a smiley face.

"Bad Ass Number 1" hummed over the city streets as I drove. I looked at the city skyline as I made my escape back towards the highway. A satisfied fatigue warmed the muscles of my body, and I hummed blues rhythms all the way home, the smile still stuck to my face. Marissa would be upset, but I didn't care. I had gone out and danced for me. I looked down at my phone, admiring the smiley face behind Erica's name. And the number of a beautiful girl? *Damn ladykiller.*



# THE ART OF EMBELLISHMENT

*By Trevor Penland*

*Exaggeration is truth that has lost its temper.*

—Kahlil Gibran

The first time, you hardly notice what happens,  
what shifts within.

You act without pause  
or second thought. The man stumbles,  
his groceries tumbling.  
You catch him before he falls.

He praises you,  
and something inside you is fed  
and likes the taste.

It wants more, that demanding child.

Of course, you can't resist.  
And why should you?  
After all, you're doing good,  
what should motives matter?

You return a dropped wallet,  
take an injured dog to a vet,  
save a drowning child,  
but nothing is enough.

The thing inside learns the art  
of embellishment,  
catching on fast, creating great works  
out of your small deeds,  
taking painting lessons at the local gallery  
of your imagination. Soon, you're  
on display at the Met.

You have lost control of the fiend,  
and it has lost its temper, wanting more.  
Snorting the coke-lines of praise,  
you see yourself in the mirror,  
wonder at how thin you have become.

# GREEN CARPET YOU

*By Marcus Mead*

i walked by  
 your old place yesterday.  
 i would sit inside  
 there and with  
 every passing car  
 every door slam  
 i hoped to hear the sound of your feet  
 up the front steps,  
 hear the front door.  
 id hope for you  
 your deepest stare  
 of flame  
 of mutinous fortune,  
 home from work  
 to dance elegantly with me  
 forever on your green carpet  
 with those dozens of  
 candles winking shadows,  
 your tarot cards laid out on the carpet in an arc  
 for you to look at while  
 i watched you look at them  
 and i never said it but  
 i always thought you were magic.  
 that winter we had it all  
 because the gypsy that god was  
 hung icicles from the eaves  
 that stretched for the ground  
 outstretched  
                   r e a c h i n g  
 but alas,  
 came up short and that god laughed  
 when they fell and crushed my car.  
 that winter we had it all

because we ate fresh food  
 and drank dark beer  
 and became how we did.  
 that winter we had it all  
 because bloom we did  
 folding open ourselves  
 in the coldest of nights;  
         our roots under  
 that one heavy blanket of linen soil  
 vibrating and reaching  
 to the other and each.  
 that winter we had it all  
 because that part of me  
 ive never  
 shown anyone  
 i showed you  
 repeatedly.

that winter we had it all.  
         but alas,  
 when the snow melted  
 away went the blankets,  
 the icicles.  
 away you went,  
 back home; school was out.  
 when you come back with the snow,  
 ill be shoveling the steps and  
 youll pick me up  
 out of habit  
 and ill let you i shouldnt but i swear i will.

# THE BRONZE SPIDER

*By Nick Cawley*

*An excerpt from the journals of Professor Yon Addair.*

The first shock I had upon setting foot on the Unknown Continent was that the toads were large – almost as big as a man. The second shock was that they were sapient and spoke fluent Kanian in a heavy Eastlander accent, so as to sound like the upper class. In fact they seemed to speak incessantly, as in the case of my companion, Toad. They seem to believe that having a name denotes special significance, so most of the population doesn't bother having one. I also believe they may have some trouble telling one another apart. An interesting society, to put it politely. The Toads have no buildings or cities. Rather, they seem to live out in the open in the coastal swamps. Given their natural toad-like intestinal fortitude and the warmth of the climate, they have no need of any sort of agriculture or economy. They seem to spend their spare time on finding new things to complain about and inventing pointless bureaucracy. In some ways, it would seem, they are a fairly advanced people.

My name is Professor Yon Addair, of the University of Ugenwe in the Baghane Empire, the first Kanian to hold such a position in the empire since the annexation of thirty years ago, a position of which I am immensely proud. I teach the study of savage or primitive cultures, as well as what I have learned of the Unknown Continent. When I first heard that Captain Colmbe was to lead an expedition to that land, I begged and pleaded to be brought along. After all, what is my duty if not to try and understand whatever uncivilized peoples may be living there? The expedition set out in three ships: The Ingenuity, The Empress' Favor, and The Blade of the East (a warship, just in case a show of force were to be necessary), all of which were ships of the newest design, made to be practically unsinkable. We set out in early fall, laden with supplies and crew, ready to chart out the Unknown Continent and claim it in the name of the Empire.

Naturally, all three ships were sunk just off the coast of the continent. I awoke that night to the crack of timber and the spray of the

sea as the ship I was on was torn apart. Gathering what I could of my books and other writing utensils, I ran to the lifeboats to discover they were all gone. As the ship shuddered and lurched again, I grabbed a spar of wood and heaved myself overboard. I do not know the exact cause of the destruction of the ships, having been asleep before they sunk, and concerned with other matters afterwards. However, I still maintain that they were sunk by some manner of creature, as even in the darkness, I could see some massive foul shape gliding through the water beneath the ships. I also believe that said creature may be the reason I am the only survivor, though I do not know why I was spared from whatever fate befell the rest of the crew.

That land, the Unknown Continent, is a place of manifold wonders, and in the time I spent shipwrecked there, I witnessed many of them. Toad and I both explored the land despite his constant complaints, and many of the details of my exploration can be found in the maps and journals I brought back with me. This story, however, concerns one wonder so singular that I feel that it must be known of before all others.

It was a sunny day with clement weather. Naturally, Toad hated it. "It is far too hot," he declared, "and the sun hurts my eyes."

"Yesterday it was overcast and you hated that, too," I reminded him. But Toad was and is impervious to reason and hates attempts to use it against him.

"Of course I did! It was dreadful! It was so cold and clammy, I almost thought I was home."

Traveling with him, I quickly learned not to speak to him about his home. He compared everything unfavorably to it, yet he always professed to hate it. I have recently come to the conclusion that the toad society has some formalized cultural dislike for everything, though I have not discovered the reason for this.

As we spoke, we climbed a grassy hill to get a view over the top of the surrounding jungle. At this point in the journey, we were far inland and long gone from the marshlands of the coasts. Reaching the top, we discovered that, from above, the jungle was a sea of vibrant green, speckled through with red, purple, and ochre. A sea in every sense of the word, really, as apart from the mountains and a few other hills, the jungle met the horizon in every distance.

“Wasteful garbage,” said my companion between wheezes, “No marshes, no swamps, and what right does any hill have to grow so tall?”

Before I could respond, I noticed an irregularity with one of the mountains ahead. “Toad, correct me if I’m wrong, but there seems to be a colossal pillar of copper angling out of that mountain.”

“You are wrong.”

“So is it some trick of the light, or a road, or—”

“It’s bronze.”

I spent some time watching Toad for any hint of a smile or laugh, but according to him, his people outlawed humor in all its forms centuries ago on account of the constant wars caused by it.

“Toad, do you know what it is?”

“It is a relic of the men like you who used to live in these lands.”

“Why would they build a pillar like that? What is it meant to be?”

“It is a symbol, Professor. A symbol of the hubris of men, who spend more time creating great monoliths than history books. Of men who consider architecture a substitute for civilized conduct. Of men who seek not enlightenment or harmony, but cruelty and domination.”

We spent some time staring at the pillar as I thought on his words. It seemed they were a people of great—

“Also it is a leg, not a pillar.”

“What?”

“It is the leg of a cyclopean city of clockwork mechanisms and machinery.”

As I stared at him, I began to perceive a faint grinding, shrieking noise, and the leg moved. It heaved itself up, and a cloud of dirt and dust wavered off it, obscuring it in a dingy cloud. It set down with a monumental bang and was soon joined by a noisy sibling. Then another, and another, until all eight legs stood in a ring around its tremendous, bulbous body. Even from that hill, I could see spires and towers on its back shifting and moving periodically, giving it the effect of being covered in living hairs.

“Behold, the Clockwork City. It moves like this sometimes, lumbering around the landscape unpopulated and useless.”

I watched the thing with a mixture of awe and terror as it started to lurch toward us, driving each leg into the earth before it, and shaking the earth with each step.

“Toad, how did the people of the Clockwork City die?”

“Hubris. The builders of the city did not account for so many people sharing so much bad air. If they had been smart, they would have realized it’s far better to just live in a swamp rather than waste so much time building a moving tombstone.”

It drew closer and I could see the vines, scars, and missing panels it had acquired through who knows how many centuries of wandering the jungle. Its body, I could now see, was speckled through with small windows and balconies. Scattered across its legs were tiny black lenses, which I could swear were actually turning themselves towards me.

By this point it was practically standing over me, blotting out the sun – which Toad naturally complained about – and filling the air with the reek of ancient metal. It shuddered and brought in its front legs, then knelt down so the body was next to the hill. A section opened, and a gangway the width of an imperial highway, covered in exquisite carvings, rolled out from the opening and settled gently down in front of my feet. The inside of it flared into light, revealing a long, massive hallway leading deep into the interior.

Toad shifted uncomfortably and croaked hugely. “I would not go in there, were I you,” he warned.

“Surely there can be no more disease in the city after all this time? As a man of science, it’s my duty to explore the city for posterity. Think of the possibilities of a machine exquisite as this! Perhaps your people may not have a use for it, but the empire could use things like this to maintain control in the outer territories, or as mobile estates for the nobility!”

“Well, then, by all means explore. But how do you know you will be able to leave? How quickly can you learn their language? How quickly can you learn the controls of the city? How do you know there are controls? How much food does this ancient abandoned city have for you to eat while you do all this? No, entering the city would be death. Perhaps, when you find your own people, you can return with supplies and explore it, but for right now you must not take the risk of entering this heap of scrap.”

I looked at the city, then back to Toad, and slowly, deliberately, put my foot on the gangway. I ascended the long road, taking a few



rubbings, which can be found in my supplementary journals, of the engravings on it as I went, while Toad followed reluctantly behind me. The hallway leading to the interior was massive, clearly meant to admit large amounts of traffic. Everywhere I looked there was glossy, expensive wood, and delicate gold filigree. Above, electric lights flickered dimly, bathing the hall in more gloom than light. More than anything else, however, I noticed the bodies. Even there in the hall, they were scattered across the road. Not as if they had been trying to escape, but as if they had simply laid down and died. Removed from the humid air of the jungle, they had mummified there beneath the flickering lights. As a man of science, I refused to let superstition delay me, and I pressed on.

The hall seemed to last forever and a day. There were occasional side passages, but they were mostly unlit, and the thought of entering them unnerved me. Eventually, however, we emerged into the central city – the massive, hollowed-out center of the spider. In all directions, the walls curved away, braced by walkways and lined with homes and stores. Lights glittered in every direction, not illuminating the space so much as creating a wall of shining stars. From far below us to far above us rose a massive spire, from which radiated gantries like the spokes of a wheel to the walkways of every level of the city.

Within the spire itself were banks of switches and buttons, each throwing or pushing itself respectively. At the very top, in a giant room filled with dust, sat a single, lonely corpse in a massive throne of switches and buttons. Even in death, its fingers gripped the arms of that chair as if it feared being dislodged from its place of duty. Before the corpse was a single, massive plate of glass that, by some means unknown to me, displayed letters in an unfamiliar language.

“It means auto,” said Toad, breaking his uncharacteristic silence.

“You know their language?”

“No. They speak Language, so I understand them, the same way I understand you.”

After a moment of silence, I noted a small locket on the ground. A tiny thing of gold chain and brushed silver casing. When I opened it, a tiny, tinny tune played and within was a photograph of a beautiful woman in full, living, color. I noted the blue of her eyes, and the purple

of her dress, and marveled at their contrast with her dusky skin and black hair. The whole city groaned as I shut it, and Toad and I decided to leave posthaste.

We ran as fast as we could down the spiral steps of the spire, then down the path out the gangway through which we had entered. A part of me felt sorry that I had not managed to take the time to provide a proper burial for the people of the city. By the time we reached the gangway, it had begun to recede, and a leap was necessary to reach the ground. No problem for Toad, of course, but for a moment I feared I had broken a leg.

We stared at the Clockwork City, waiting for it to leave, but it didn't move. It seemed to hesitate and wait there, unsure of what had happened. Toad and I went down the hill, and the city stomped along after us. We returned to our camp some ways away and it followed us, periodically placing the entrance next to me whenever I would get too far away. That night we slept under its massive bulk, the side of the colossal city nearest to us tinged red by the light of our fire. That night I awoke to find the body part of the city sat down next to us, the body forming a divot in the earth beside us and the legs splayed out through the trees and underbrush. In the morning, we awoke to the cacophony of its limbs heaving the city back into the air.

It never tried to harm us or force me into it once more the entire time it followed us (two months, by my estimation), though it did try to trick me into entering it sometimes by suddenly putting the gangway directly in our path. A few times it defended us from jungle predators and local savages by scaring them off or kicking them away (a gruesome sight, to be sure). In time I managed to make a basic translation of the elaborate figures on the gangway, which you can find in my journals from my time on the continent. It seemed a lonely thing, though Toad explained to me it doesn't actually have emotions on account of it just being a machine.

When we reached the edge of the jungle, it stopped following us. We could still see it standing there at the very edge of the tree-line watching us, but it would not move beyond that point. In all probability, since we came back by a different route, it is still there waiting for us.

Throughout my entire journey and every so often after it, I find

my mind wandering back to the city. I never saw it again during the entirety of my journey, but I know it must be somewhere in that jungle, stomping around and searching for its people. There are times when I question my own senses. Sometimes I wonder if I had not simply dreamed these events, or hallucinated them. When I feel like that, it slows me to a stop, and I question everything I know. Then, I pull out the locket and listen to its song.

## MR. BOO AND THE SISTERS TWO

*By Patrick Hasserles*

Maddy slumped down into her booster seat with a scowl. Several strands of her blonde hair, bleached platinum by the summer sun, escaped from her fuchsia headband. She glared at her baby sister, Abby, who was bawling in the next seat over. Buster, the Boston terrier, was pawing at his sensitive ears below Maddy's feet and howling in tune with Abby's cries.

It wasn't enough for Abby to ruin the entire week; she had to turn Fast Food Friday into a nightmare as well. It was the one day that Maddy got to eat out. It was supposed to be a happy occasion, especially since today Maddy was also having her friends Agatha and Kimiko over for dinner and her father was getting back from his business trip. The day was supposed to be great, but at the moment, Maddy felt like she hated everything—her mother, the heat, the sun glaring through the window, her mom's minivan and its broken air-conditioner, but most of all, Abby.

Maddy put on her white and purple striped sunglasses, wishing they would block out heat as well as light.

"Mom, make Abby be quiet!" Maddy whined.

"She's tired, hungry, and teething, Maddy," her mother replied. "And someone threw out all of her car snacks."

"I told you, Mr. Boo did it!"

"Madeline Anne DeVoy, you're eight years old! Mr. Boo isn't real and you can't keep blaming him for your actions."

Maddy wrapped her violet satin shawl around her thin arms and tried to hide. Her mother never listened and was always quick to use Maddy's full name. The ghost-like cat responsible for Maddy's problems was floating in the front passenger seat, pointing at her and snickering. Mr. Boo had been Maddy's best friend for years, and he'd always been nice to her. That is, until Abby was born.

Mr. Boo didn't like Abby. He was jealous of the attention she got and took every opportunity to bully her in one way or another. Of course, Maddy's parents couldn't see Mr. Boo and didn't believe that he existed, so they blamed her for Mr. Boo's naughtiness. As it became more and more apparent that Abby wasn't going anywhere, Mr. Boo was also getting worse.

The sounds of a sliding glass window and crinkling paper bags signaled the arrival of Maddy's favorite meal. She sat up excitedly and clapped her hands. The scent of fries, cheese, and grilled meat was already filling the minivan.

"Yay!" Maddy exclaimed as her mother handed back a brightly colored box marked with a golden M.

"Please give your sister a fry before you start," Maddy's mother requested.

"Ch'yah," Maddy replied using her best valley girl accent while rolling her eyes. She handed a fry to the nuisance next to her, whose cries halted with the new distraction and promise of food. Abby continued to shudder and gurgle as she considered the small, warm object she was now holding. Maddy thought her sister looked like King Kong from the black and white movie she had watched with her dad. Abby was a dumb gorilla squeezing its fragile yellow captive nearly to the point of breaking, stupidly considering whether the object was food, a new toy, or both. Abby even had that messy black hair, unlike Maddy and her mom, who had silky blonde hair.

The minivan creaked as Maddy's mother shifted gears and drove back into the strip mall parking lot. Starbucks was right next door, and with it, the promise of Maddy's tall caramel steamer. Fast Food Friday was one of the few things Maddy and her mother used to do with just the two of them. But despite the unwelcome newcomer, it was still one of the best parts of the week.

Buster, the black and white puppy at Maddy's feet, had stopped howling at the same time that Abby had stopped crying. One of his paws now pressed down on Maddy's shoe as he licked at her leg. His bulging, expectant eyes told her that he wanted a treat. One of Abby's fries fell out of Maddy's hand and was gone before it hit the floor of the minivan. The only hint of what had just happened was a split-second chomp. Maddy's mother was too busy ordering their drinks and didn't seem to notice. A smile grew on Maddy's face, and Mr. Boo moved to sit next to her. Buster claimed another fry. Then another.

The unique and familiar scent of Starbucks poured into the minivan as Maddy's mother handed back a white cup wrapped in a brown cardboard sleeve.

“Can I get you anything else, Ms. Hilton?” her mother asked, taking a sip of her own caramel Frappuccino.

“Nope, I’m good,” Maddy replied, pulling her hair back into place before taking a sip from the steaming spout of her cup. Maddy’s mother laughed.

“You better marry well, child.”

“I’m too expensive,” Maddy replied in a sing-song voice.

Maddy’s mother shook her head. “I swear the stork got lost on his way to L.A.”

Abby’s gorilla face began to crinkle just as the minivan left the parking lot. She had finished her fry and now stared at her empty hand as if surprised that there wasn’t anything in it. The crying started again.

“Maddy, could you give your sister another fry, please?” her mother asked.

“They’re all gone,” Maddy replied.

“What?!”

Buster let out a loud hack and began heaving.

“Maddy, did you feed your sister’s fries to the dog?”

“Mr. Boo did it!” Maddy shouted, pointing to the cat sitting next to her. Mr. Boo smiled, blew a raspberry at Maddy, and disappeared. Great, she thought, he’d gotten her in trouble again. Maddy would definitely have to scold him later.

“Damn it, Madeline! What is the matter with you?” her mother screamed. The shouting made Abby cry even louder. “You have a sister now and can’t always be the center of attention. You need to grow up and take some responsibility for your actions. Abby has needs and you wouldn’t be so miserable right now if you would just stop trying to sabotage her.”

The minivan took a hasty left turn and pulled back into the strip mall’s parking lot. Maddy slumped down and started pouting. Her back was sweaty and sticking to the seat. She wanted to get moving so that the wind could cool her off. Buster continued hacking and now Abby was screaming to the point of choking. What Maddy’s mother had said was outrageous. It wasn’t Maddy’s fault that her life was miserable. Everything was fine until Abby was born and Mr. Boo started acting up.

It wasn't her fault the past week had been so terrible. Maddy had been perfectly well-behaved. It was Mr. Boo who'd done everything.

"Maddy, if this behavior doesn't stop we're not doing Fast Food Friday anymore," her mother stated, reaching back to hand Abby a fry. She then gave the rest of the small bag to Maddy. "Now you'll feed these to your sister or else you'll spend the evening in the guest room. You won't be able to play with Agatha or Kimiko, and I'll be sure to tell them that it's because you were acting unladylike."

Maddy glared at her mother and took the fries. The woman knew exactly how to get to her. Telling Agatha and Kimiko that Maddy had been acting unladylike was about the worst thing she could do. Maddy's father was an international businessman, and ever since he had brought back a book about the Victorian Era from England, Maddy and her friends had taken to acting like proper ladies.

With her reputation as a lady on the line, Maddy made certain that as soon as Abby finished one fry another was at the ready. The little monster just sat there gnawing on her food, coating her hand in fry bits and drool, not caring how the fries magically appeared so long as they kept coming. It was amazing that such a tiny nuisance could be such a big problem. Maddy didn't blame Mr. Boo for hating Abby, but she was tired of getting in trouble for his actions.

Wednesday had been the worst...

Last Wednesday, Maddy's baton class was having tryouts for the Fourth of July parade. Mr. Boo suggested the new lipstick that he had found would be a sure-fire way for her to stand out. Then, while Maddy was applying some eye shadow to go with her lips, Mr. Boo knocked the lipstick onto the floor, where Buster took the opportunity to attack it.

"Do you wanna be pretty too, Buster?" Maddy had asked. Buster responded with perked-up ears and a slight turn of his head. Maddy and Mr. Boo took that as a yes. Mr. Boo decorated Buster with the lipstick – which Maddy figured had been ruined by dog slobber anyway – highlighting Buster's muzzle and drawing patterns in his white areas.

"Madeline Anne DeVoy!" her mother screamed from down the stairs. Mr. Boo's ears drooped like a cat about to get smacked for being naughty. He quickly disappeared. Afraid of what Mr. Boo had done this time, Maddy chose not to respond. Footsteps soon thundered up

the hardwood staircase. Not wanting her mother to see Buster, Maddy stepped out of her room and shut the door.

“Madeline, I’m not even going to ask because I know you’re the only person who would have poured out all of Abby’s milk bottles.”

“Mr. Boo di—”

“I don’t want to hear about Mr. Boo!” her mother interjected. “I don’t have the time or the milk in me right now to refill those bottles,” she continued, grabbing her chest for emphasis. “Now if your sister wants milk, she’s going to have to drink formula. You know how sensitive her stomach is! I’m telling Mrs. Velasquez to have you change all of Abby’s diapers until I get ho—oh, oh good lord!”

Maddy’s mother paused, her eyes widening, and Maddy felt a surge of fear.

“Is that my Dior lipstick you’re wearing?”

“I don’t know.”

“Have you been in my vanity again?”

“No.”

“Where’s the rest of it, Madeline?”

“I don’t know.”

“Ragh!” Maddy’s mother roared as she tilted her head and hands upward, fingers spread like claws. Maddy’s mother had suddenly transformed into a demon screaming at God. Then she reached forward and opened the door to Maddy’s room. Buster sat on Maddy’s bed with an empty tube of lipstick poking out of his mouth.

“Oh my God, Maddy! What? What did you do? That lipstick is thirty dollars apiece!”

“I didn’t know where it came from. I found it on my vanity. Mr. Boo must have stolen it.”

Maddy’s mother buried her face in her hands, shook her head, and took a deep breath.

“I can’t handle this right now, not with two hours before your father’s flight. Madeline, you’ve got to stop acting like this. I know things are different with Abigail around, but it’s been nine months, and she’s not going anywhere.”

Maddy’s mother was true to her word. Every time Abby needed changing that day, Mrs. Velasquez, the babysitter, made Maddy do it.



Mrs. Velasquez also made Maddy give Buster a bath. It was one of the worst days in her life, second only to the day that Abby was born.



After eating a few more fries, Abby had fallen asleep, which left Maddy to eat her own food in peace. Her mother focused on the road and the rest of the car ride was rather quiet. When the caul-de-sac and their blue, two-story house came into view, Maddy was happy to see that her father's car was already in the driveway and a thin cloud of smoke was coming from the backyard. After her mother parked the minivan in the garage, Maddy didn't waste any time unbuckling herself, leaping out of the car, and rushing for the door to the backyard.

"Be sure to remind Agatha that her mother wants her home by dinner, okay?" said Maddy's mother.

"Kay, Mom." Maddy replied, though she wasn't really listening.

Before she could make it through the door, however, Maddy was cut off by Buster shooting past her. The dog began circling along the tall, white fence, leaping at everyone present. Maddy's father shooed Buster with his foot while his business partner, Mr. Kazemaki, brandished a pair of barbecue tongs, clacking them together in a futile effort to scare Buster away. The dog's attention shifted to the two girls sitting on a blanket in the far corner of the yard. Kimiko and Agatha screamed and giggled as Buster tackled them, making a mess of their small picnic.

"Buster, get in here!" Maddy's mother shouted from the sliding glass door to the kitchen. Buster stopped, looked at her, and then went flying toward the kitchen door. Maddy's mother blew her husband a kiss and then promptly shut the door.

Maddy's father and Mr. Kazemaki had stripped down to just their dress pants and a pair of matching aprons that had some Japanese symbols on them followed by the phrase "Sake bito." They were taking turns drinking out of a large bottle, and judging by the smell, Maddy guessed that Mr. Kazemaki was making his seafood teriyaki shishkebabs again. *Gross*, Maddy thought.

"There's my little fashionista!" Maddy's father exclaimed, walking toward her with his arms open for a hug. Since he and Mr. Kazemaki had just gotten back from a trip to Spain that morning, Maddy's father would be 1.) excited to see his family, and 2.) drunk. He picked Maddy

up and gave her a twirling hug, followed by a peck on the cheek. Maddy smiled and hugged him back, even though he smelled like smoked fish and alcohol.

"That stuff stinks, Daddy."

"I know, Babydoll, but it helps Daddy and Toshi unwind after a long week at the office."

"Are we watching monster movies tonight?"

"You know it! This time, we've got King Kong vs. Godzilla."

"It's Gojira, get it right!" Mr. Kazemaki exclaimed as he rotated the shishkebobs.

"Why does Mr. Kazemaki call it that, Daddy?" Maddy asked.

"Because Godzilla's originally from Japan, and his Japanese name was Gojira. Toshi's been watching the movies since he was your age, so he really doesn't like how Americans changed Gojira's name to Godzilla."

Maddy was glad to see her father again after he'd been gone for a week, but his alcohol and fish breath was making her sick.

"Can I go play with my friends now?"

"Alright, Babydoll."

Maddy's father set her down and went back to his discussion with Mr. Kazemaki. Maddy could never understand what they were talking about, but it had a lot to do with numbers and different countries. It was even harder to understand because they kept switching between English and Japanese.

"Hello, ladies!" Maddy said as she attempted to walk elegantly toward her two friends and sit down. They were trying to salvage what remained of their picnic.

Though she was only a year older than Maddy and Agatha, Kimiko was rapidly growing taller than either of them. Maddy's mother explained that Kimiko was just growing into a proper young lady, and that Maddy and Agatha would start growing soon as well. Only, Maddy didn't want to wait. She was jealous that Kimiko was going to become a proper lady before her.

"Hello, Madeline," Agatha and Kimiko responded in unison, trying their best to sound dignified.

"I see you chose purple and white today," Agatha stated, looking at Maddy's outfit.

“Oh yes, isn’t it lovely?” Maddy replied.

The trio laughed and went into a long discussion about their outfits. Kimiko was wearing a blue dress with pink flowers on it. She explained that it was a traditional Japanese outfit called a kimono and that her father had gotten it for her on his last trip to Tokyo. Kimiko’s dad loved America and encouraged Kimiko to act American, but he also liked to remind her of where she was from by adding his own Japanese twist to everything.

“My dad says that if I’m going to play lady with you girls, I should at least look like a Japanese lady,” Kimiko explained.

Agatha, on the other hand, was wearing a yellow, sleeveless dress and a large straw hat.

“Agatha, don’t you get sunburned really easily?” Maddy asked.

“Why yes, Madeline, I do, but that’s why I have this hat,” Agatha replied, pulling off the hat to scratch her head and shake her bob of red hair. “Besides, my mother gave me some sunscreen that works good, and it smells like watermelon.”

“Is Buster okay, Maddy? He looks kind of pink,” Kimiko asked as she stared at the dog, which was now licking the sliding glass door.

“Mr. Boo colored him with my mom’s lipstick.” Maddy replied, momentarily forgetting to speak lady-like. “It sucked cause I got in trouble and had to give Buster a bath,” Maddy explained. “I washed most of it out, but he’s still kinda pink.”

The other two girls looked at each other and kept quiet for a while. Maddy felt her face heat up, realizing that she had just mentioned Mr. Boo in front of her friends. They were always like that when Maddy talked about him. Kimiko said that they were too old to have imaginary friends. Agatha said that Mr. Boo wasn’t real and imaginary friends were for babies.

“If you’re gonna talk about your imaginary friend, I’m gonna head home,” Agatha said. “It’s almost dinner time anyway.” Maddy knew this last part was just an excuse; there was at least two hours before Agatha’s usual dinner time.

“No, please don’t go,” Maddy pleaded. “I won’t talk about him, I promise.”

Agatha hugged Kimiko goodbye, and then walked away. Maddy

scowled and felt tears welling up in her eyes. She was both sad and angry, but as Agatha opened the sliding glass door to head back inside, Buster escaped. Before Maddy could do anything, she had a dog jumping on top of her and making an even bigger mess of the picnic. She started screaming and slapping at Buster as he relentlessly licked her face.

Kimiko pulled Buster away and Mr. Kazemaki came over to remove the dog. "You're a bad little beast," he scolded before hauling Buster back to the house. Maddy's outfit was covered in crackers, peanut butter, and strawberry jelly. She was past tears now. She was too angry to cry.

"You should probably go change," Kimiko suggested.

Maddy didn't reply; she just stomped toward the garage door. It was easier to keep Buster from escaping by going through the garage and then into the house. Maddy headed for the laundry room, passing her sister, who was slowly crawling across the kitchen floor with a chew ring in her mouth.

Things had been so much better before Abby was born. Maddy didn't have to share her mother on Fast Food Fridays or when they went shopping. They would dress up in outfits with matching colors and go to the movies. Maddy, Agatha, and Kimiko would play ladies and then watch old monster movies with Maddy's dad and Mr. Kazemaki. But now, Maddy's mother spent all of her time with Abby, and everyone had to be quiet when watching monster movies or risk waking Abby up.

Maddy dug through the laundry basket, looking for one of her new outfits from the last shopping trip. Abby crawled closer and sat down in the laundry room doorway. Abby was still over six feet away, but Maddy was too angry to deal with her sister. She imagined herself as Godzilla and Abby as King Kong.

"Rawr!" Maddy yelled, hoping it would scare the little monster away or make her cry.

Instead, Abby laughed and continued to crawl further into the laundry room. Maddy threw anything that didn't belong to her at her sister, but Abby just repeated her laughter and blew raspberries. Maddy stopped and stared at her sister, realizing that clothing wasn't a very good weapon. She slowly began to smile. Mr. Boo popped out of the

laundry basket and began throwing clothes at Abby as well.

“Get her, Rodan! Rawr!” Maddy yelled, deciding that Mr. Boo was now Rodan, Godzilla’s giant bird side-kick from the movies.

Mr. Boo hit Abby with a pair of Maddy’s underwear, but Abby just laughed, pulled the underwear off her face, and stuck them in her mouth. Abby stopped crawling forward as a pile of clothing began to block her way. She grabbed ahold of a sock and attempted to throw it back at Maddy, but forgot to let go of it. She smiled and attempted again, but the sock only fell back into the clothing pile in front of her.

Maddy walked forward until she was right in front of her sister. “Rawr!” she repeated. Abby laughed and shoved a pair of underwear toward Maddy’s chest. Maddy took them and pulled them over her sister’s face. Abby smiled and started looking around, grasping at the underwear, trying to find a way out. Then, their mother walked in. There was a cold anger in her eyes as she looked at the massive pile of formerly clean clothes sitting in the middle of the laundry room, but her eyes softened when she saw the smiles on both her daughters’ faces.

“I take it Mr. Boo did it?”

Maddy didn’t say anything for a moment. Mr. Boo nodded at her and began to rub himself up against Abby. Maddy’s mother was staring expectantly, but she didn’t look angry anymore. Abby pulled on her sister’s dress, apparently wondering why their game had stopped.

“No, I did it,” Maddy finally replied.

Their mother smiled and seemed calmer than she had been in months. Mr. Boo smiled as well. Then he disappeared, his paw waving in the air.



## “LOCALS ONLY”

*Cheri Schafer*

# CASSANDRA TO HER BROTHERS

*By Trevor Penland*

I've tried to convince myself time and again  
that this whole thing was my fault, that I  
brought all this upon me, but, brothers,  
I can't. No matter how much I tried to tell  
you, to warn you, you didn't listen. "Madness,"  
you claimed. Well, do you believe me now?

I still remember the simpler days now  
and then. I wish we could go back again,  
to the days laughter was our only madness.  
We'd run in the gardens. Remember my  
games and stories about your futures, telling  
you of your great deeds to come, brothers,

ruling our city? But destiny governs brothers  
and sisters, fathers and mothers and now  
nothing is the same. If you'll listen, I'll tell  
you why: sex. I didn't want or try to gain  
Apollo's attention. But he wanted me, and I'd  
refused him. Enraged, he told me I was mad,

cursed me for my "insolence," my "madness"—  
to always be right but never heeded by brothers  
or father. Is that my fault? Which is to blame? Eyes?  
Lips? Legs? I didn't ask for those things, then or now.  
I have felt the pain of his curse again and again.  
I knew, Paris, your lust would undo us. I tried telling

all of you, but nobody would listen. I told  
him he would bring death with this madness,  
kill us all for sex. Of course, I was right again.  
War came, and you fought to atone for our brother,  
but it was not enough to protect our city. Now,

I lie dying at the feet of the wife of the enemy I warned you about. I was ripped from the effigy I clung to and raped on the altar after that tell-tale Sinon tricked you. The city's destroyed now. Their king brought me home, where his mad wife murdered him and stabbed me. Brothers, you are all dead and can't be redeemed again.

I'm sorry now for my attractiveness, and I'm sorry again for always being right. But tell me which sex's madness is worse, brothers.



## MAKING ART

*By Ryan Riehle*

Veracious passion at first sight allures him.  
Her hips and rolling shoulders wave by boldly  
as ocean currents flow across the dance floor.  
Enthralling scent prolongs the fluid feeling.  
The flirtatious chance of shapely delight compels him  
to pulsate with the conga drums of this art.

A backward roll of the shoulder coyly kills—  
a lively droplet curves from neck to breasts—  
as she caresses her sun-kissed brown hair  
with a playful hand. His strong arms gently will  
her course, leaving them both vigorously breathless.  
The moment fades and the twilit night succumbs:  
They part ways while the soul of salsa drums.

## THE ELEGIACS OF FRUIT AND CHOCOLATE

*By Stefan Milne*

Mr. Hitchcock liked Bosco, so Marion Crane died from Bosco loss. Ms. Crane suffered this loss because weeks after her death and on a sound stage miles away, Mr. Hitchcock said, “Casaba,” and casaba melons were stabbed repeatedly. Let us imagine this word—*casaba*—spoken in the voice of a god. And let us imagine that Ms. Crane could have, at any point before her death, opened her veins with a knife or razor and drained these veins into a glass of milk and stirred and drunk. And let us also imagine that had Ms. Crane known about the sweetness in her veins, and had she so chosen, she could have been a closed loop, a self-sustaining circuit, by simply opening her veins and drinking of herself; but when the melons were stabbed and the Bosco was not redirected into Ms. Crane’s mouth but instead allowed to mix with the water and pass down the drain, Ms. Crane also passed (though we must wonder if Norman Bates did not mix himself a beverage before he bagged Ms. Crane’s body and set it in the trunk of the car and rolled it into the swamp—he must have, at the very least, licked her spilled syrup from his fingers, accompanied by the succulent *pop... pop... pop...* as each finger left his lips). And now consider: perhaps this is how you will die. Perhaps someone far off, in a different time, a different place, will stab or shoot or pummel some piece of fruit. Perhaps a strawberry crushed beneath a foot and your heart explodes in your chest. Or a forgotten apple going rotten in a refrigerator drawer and the rot of dementia in your brain. Or an insect burrowing into a fallen cherry and a Lyme-diseased tick burrows into you. Or perhaps a food fight or even just an enthusiastic meal, and you and hundreds of others are caught up in a hurricane, flung against walls, impaled on tine-like gates. And, perhaps, on the day of your funeral while you lie cold in the casket, your family, too grief-stricken to cook, will hire caterers who will melt chocolate and in it dip strawberries, apples, cherries, melons.

## RE: A PERUSAL

*By Talea Anderson*

(This poem was previously published in *kill author*.)

I'd make a poor naturalist. It's not entirely for lack of effort. You see, I'm quite near-sighted, having had cataracts when I was a baby and other eye problems besides. Usually, outdoors, I play the part of blind Mary Ingalls, with some fully sighted person filling me in on the great blue heron or the hummingbird or the killdeer standing nearby. I can think of many a family vacation when I was told to, for instance, "look at that huge bear just over there," and I sat, a little bored, while everyone else stuck their noses to the windows and made all sorts of delighted noises.

So, as you can imagine, I was less than enthusiastic one day when my brother and future sister-in-law invited me along on an aquatic insect-hunting expedition. My sister-in-law is a fine naturalist herself—a fish biologist, in fact—and as she was taking a course in entomology at the time, she needed samples. My smitten brother, a snowboarder and committed adventure sportsman, suddenly found that nothing fascinated him more than pond life.

This is how I found myself at a pond in Eastern Washington, watching my brother skim a net across the surface of the water. As I'd expected, I quickly lost interest as the two of them discussed dragonflies, waterbugs, water striders, pupae and hatching cycles. From my perspective, they might as well have been acting out this bizarre pantomime—combing the water for effect, exclaiming over and then pocketing samples of thin air. I seated myself rather grumpily a ways off and decided, since I was taking a poetry class at the time, to force myself to write a verse about this experience.

I'm not a poet, but I did write a poem that day. I remember that my poetry professor was intrigued by this poem but ultimately confused. At the time, I had no explanation for the disconnected series of lines

which I titled “A Perusal of Pond Scum.” Insects figure in lines 1 and 2 but thereafter receive no mention. In the remainder of the poem, I recorded snippets of that afternoon’s conversation between my brother and sister-in-law-to-be. Looking at the poem now, I gather that their conversation proceeded as follows, touching on these topics:

1. Helium; specifically, the likelihood that helium would slip through Earth’s atmosphere and disappear entirely from the human record.
2. Self-immolation; specifically, the proliferation of self-immolating monks during the Vietnam War.
3. Carnivorous plants; specifics unknown.
4. The word “labile;” specifically, the contrast between labile and labial life forms.

I didn’t know how to end the poem from there, so I resorted to the classic scene: we depart from the pond and my brother absconds with the insect pupae; grinning all the while, he retreats into the sunset. The End.

As I think about that day now, I remember things I didn’t put in the poem—how my brother leaned toward his wife-to-be when he was talking to her; how they peered into the same net, their heads close together; how eagerly they sought out things to tell each other, whether from a chemistry textbook, a dictionary, or a book about Vietnam.

Limited as my poem was, when I look back on it now, I think the important pieces are all there. That day, blind as I was, I saw a display every bit as spectacular as the flight of two dragonflies—one showing off its bright wings, swooping dives, and hairpin turns. One throws some stats on self-immolation into the air and the other bats its eyes, making the catch.

## THIS IS A PHOTOGRAPH OF HIM

*Imitation of Margaret Atwood's "This Is  
a Photograph of Me"*

*By Lisa Carlyle*

It was taken about a month ago.  
At first it seems to  
reflect how happy he was.  
But pictures can be deceiving.

As you scan  
it, you can see in the background  
there are train tracks  
that run through our town.  
The noise so constant  
that we don't hear it anymore.

Behind those tracks, there is our  
school, and beyond that, his house.

(The photograph was taken  
the day before he got hit.

He was in that ditch,  
after the train caught his leg.

It is difficult to say exactly  
when this happened,  
or precisely why he did it

but if you look close enough,  
eventually  
you will see the dirt that was later  
on bloodied by his rolling remains.)

## COMPOSING MY PASSION

*By Brody Blackburn*

### *Catalyst*

In August of 2001, I hopped into the back seat of a beige Ford Explorer with four friends. We were destined for Spokane Raceway Park. I was off to see my first rock concert—a band from Los Angeles named Incubus. At 15, I didn't know what an Incubus was, though it sounded thrilling. Now, of course, I find it ironic that a demon from the City of Angels sets out to pursue sexual relations with sleeping women. Also at 15, had I the choice, I'd have taken a night with a succubus over a night with an incubus regardless of the consequences—life-long health detriment, or death.

As we walked through the line of people toward the front gate, I felt a mixture of elation and relief, as if I had just finished a huge homework assignment and could breathe in something exciting and less mundane. I was free from the lingering repetition of a teenager: chores, re-runs on television, chores, boredom, sleep, and start it all over again. The pre-concert hype sent me higher than any substance could.

“Here, take this,” my friend Taylor said, holding a glow-stick. “Don't crack it yet.”

“How the hell are we gonna sneak this shit past security? They don't allow anything through the gates.” I was nervous. I didn't want to be caught and risk having my ticket pulled.

“Stick it in your shoe!”

Sneaking glow-sticks into a rock concert wasn't a big deal, but I had seen enough trouble for one summer. I was lucky my parents gave me permission to attend the concert with this group of individuals. Two months prior to the concert, I admitted to getting drunk while on a camping trip in the Methow Valley with the same group. I was the youngest and was easily influenced. We drank Smirnoff Ice, built a fire as big as possible without burning the forest down, and screamed “stellar” into the open night air while pointing at the stars. “Stellar” was one of Incubus' hit singles from 1999 right next to Shawn Mullin's one hit wonder “Lullaby” and the Red Hot Chili Peppers' “Scar Tissue.” That camping trip was one of the best times of my teenage life. To

this day I still think getting drunk and acting like a fool was worth the punishment of having to pull weeds, shovel pig shit and then haul it.

With the swagger of a cripple, I walked the rest of the line behind my friends, calm and collected on the outside, arrhythmic on the inside. When we reached the gate, the others made it through. Security gave a quick frisk and let me go—relief.

I was in complete awe through the whole concert. I had never experienced a sound system so large, and with such velocity. Being an individual from the town of Pateros, Washington—population, 600 full-time residents—I was in culture shock upon witnessing the diversities so foreign to me. I couldn't help but stare at dreadlocked Rastafarian cliques and self-mutilated faces with tattoos that made Mike Tyson look normal.

Lead singer Brandon Boyd came running up from stage left with microphone in hand. The whole crowd made one simultaneous surge toward the front fence surrounding the stage. After a few songs, my friends and I lined up and took aim for the stage, each with one glow-stick in hand. We drew back and released them into the air with precision. The glow-sticks landed with the force of a child's fist. One hit Brandon directly in the chest. He grabbed the glow-stick from the stage, placed it in the front of his pants, and said through the microphone, "You know it's going to be a good night when you have glowing rods coming out your pants. Feel free to throw anything glowing, or smoking, and lingerie is preferred." He then threw the stick out to a girl in the crowd. As I watched her scream with joy, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life.

## *Obsession*

I grew out my hair so it would hang down past my ears just like Brandon Boyd's. I envied the one inch gauges he had in his ears, but my parents cringed at the thought of me mutilating my ears and wouldn't allow it. My friends and I talked about his interviews on TV. Watching the *MorningView Sessions: Incubus, live from New York* DVD became a daily routine. I wanted that sex appeal and I wanted girls to want me. I wanted sex, drugs, and rock and roll—all the while reassuring my parents that I had no intention of doing any drugs of any kind.

When I was 15, I knew little about Jesus Christ, but Brandon Boyd was my savior. He had the demeanor of an incubus and the perfected beauty of Lucifer—a true rock and roll god. I bought every Incubus album and memorized every word of every song. I practiced singing exactly like him. I bought my first guitar—an Ibanez Classical Acoustic. I examined my newly acquired possession, noticing the little white dots on the top of the neck to indicate fret positioning. I saw my reflection off the back of the mahogany wood’s polished finish. I knew nothing about classical guitars and didn’t like the nylon strings that came with the guitar, so I equipped it with steel bronze strings made for dreadnaught acoustic guitars. I spent hours just trying to tune it, carefully turning the pearl tuners, listening as closely as possible. I didn’t want to over tune and risk breaking a string.

When I properly tuned my guitar, I used the internet to find tablature to learn the correct finger placement, only to play for a few hours and find it out of tune again. Apparently strings stretch. I chopped through all the basic chords with little rhythm and no clue about song structure, so I researched chord structures to my favorite songs—“Mexico,” by Incubus, “Save Tonight,” by Eagle Eye Cherry, “What I Got,” by Sublime. When I began writing my own songs, they started out overly sentimental and had weak rhymes. I was ignorant about how much time it would take to create a wall-of-sound large enough to rattle Phil Spector back to Gold Star Studios. My family heightened my awareness with their sincere, yet brutal feedback.

“Hey, Brody,” my brother shouted half way through a song. “Would you shut the fuck up? You sound like a dying cat.”

The honesty stung, but it was greatly needed. My brother has always been my harshest critic. The rest of my family would usually give me feedback in a more round-about way, but my brother’s insensitivity did bring up the point that my falsetto was far from par. I had some work to do.

## *Reformation*

I took vocal lessons with a woman trained both classically and in jazz. We started with pitch discrimination and breathing techniques. After a few months we had moved on to tone and vibrato. I later began singing



in harmony. I was picking it up fast. The more I learned, the more I began to develop an appreciation for all types of music. As I grew older, I started listening to soulful singers and songwriters like Damien Rice and Ray Lamontagne. I started playing more relaxed and mellow songs with insightful lyrics. I found peace in them. I still idolized Brandon Boyd, but for different qualities. I began to focus on his skill as a musician and songwriter.

When I was finally able to play and sing a few songs, I started performing for friends at parties. When I began getting praise from friends, I started performing at Open Mic events.

I can still remember the sweat trickling from my palms as I quietly sat, waiting for my name to be announced at the Thursday night Open Mic session at The Old Schoolhouse Brewery in Winthrop. I was a junior in high school and it was my first public performance. The bar wasn't fully filled, but the dozen or so people occupying the building had their eyes carefully focused on main stage. My hands maintained a slight quiver as I walked to the microphone. I closed my eyes and began to strum my guitar with thoughts of Pink Floyd and Incubus posters from my bedroom. Psychologically, I needed to be in a familiar place. I didn't think about the song I was playing. I let it flow from my subconscious memory so I wouldn't mess up. When I was finished, I didn't hear a roar of applause. I heard a few meager courtesy claps and noticed a crowd that was far less intimidating than before. I had accomplished what I set out to do, and I was determined to keep doing it.

I continued learning more and more songs, and after a few years, I had enough material and experience to play whole shows on my own. Eventually, venues started booking me to perform. *I'm going to be the entertainment for the night? People actually want to sit down and listen to what I have to sing about?* If I was going to put my time into this, I needed to do it with conviction. I began to obtain an obsession for music itself. My discipline for music never stopped.

## *Recognition*

As time passed, the extra-curricular things—the sex, drugs, and Incubus—became less important, and would later become an annoyance. When asked why we do the things we do, I have often heard

people respond, “it is what it is.”—the response for people who lack the knowledge in themselves to truly describe what “it” actually is.

We so often witness attempts at success with poor vision of expectation: natural athletes with lazy work ethics; awe inspiring, extreme sports adrenaline junkies with meth addictions; eccentric artists who let their eccentricities get the best of them. My biggest fears are getting caught up in the extra-curricular distractions that might take away from my passion—succumbing to the same influences experienced during youth. I’m weary of the dark figures that approach after every popular show giving praise and loaded offerings—a man who used to slap concert posters to lamp posts for some record label in the 70’s isn’t a qualified manager; rather, more of a glorified fan. I fear hypocrisy, so I focus on the musical work I need to complete. I fear the feeling that my hard work will start to feel like *work*, and I will have forgotten *play*. I try to avoid knowing my ability to distinguish the two because I fear it will nullify my position as a creative thinker. The only thing I need to know is that I know very little, and hopefully, curiosity to know more will keep me driven and focused, diminishing my fears.

Every-so-often an impending doubt creeps out from the back of my mind like those same shadowy figures, questioning my significance and emphasizing the real-life difficulties of being a musician. Is my music really good enough for people to want to buy? What if I can’t schedule enough gigs to make a living? I can’t live off student loans forever.

### *Commitment*

It has been six years since I first started performing in public. I am set up in the corner of Campbell’s Pub & Bistro in Chelan, Washington, with my Crafter acoustic/electric six-string in front of me. The pub is a decent little place with over-priced food and drinks. I have agreed to play for the people who are half-attentive. An old man with white hair and round glasses walks by me with a grin—not because he is enjoying the music, but because of the recent conversation with his companions—gives me a head-nod and drops a couple dollars in the tip jar on his way out the door. After having performed for so long, playing becomes muscle memory, and I have developed the skill of comprehending outside conversations while performing, though I

refuse to butt in until the song is over. As the group walks out, I make sure to close my eyes and sing the next line to avoid eye contact:

Rock me like some Old Crow.  
Kill the lights and I'll become your hero.  
Cut the cords and kill the news, impartial to partial truths.  
Like those pills and doses seem to know you;  
They're garnered with your self-sustaining false rue.  
Call in that party of two; reserve ourselves for those in view.

I am never ungrateful for a tip; it just seems a shame to mess up the song by saying “thank you.” I hold on to the daydream of one day performing in a sold-out stadium. The Law of Attraction tells me to be patient.

I continue to pluck out the E minor chord. Every note resonates through the mutters of dinner conversation and off the walls and into my ears. My eyes are still closed—the elation stronger than what I felt at the Incubus concert. The utterances slowly quiet and fade away as the notes of my guitar carry me into a higher state of consciousness. Tranquility. The way I want to feel every passing minute of my day. This music is no longer a part of what I do. Music is who I am. Cling! A fork hits the floor. I am back in the corner of the bar.

## DUVET LOVE

*By Alyssa Foland*

If I could make love to you, I would.  
Your frame is strong and welcomes me.

Here we are, you and me, alone again.  
I want to lie on you, but your perfection intimidates.  
I would hate to ruffle your soft feathers.

The smell of fresh vanilla and lilac fills me—  
Claiming my senses as I take you in.  
I wish for you to take me in.

Nothing would please me more  
Than to be wrapped in your embrace—  
Your body molding to mine, keeping me safe.  
The very thought calms me, soothes me.

I'll wait until the sun goes down—  
The only time we can be together,  
And then we will part at daybreak, as custom.

Tonight I am yours, and you are mine,  
Just like every night before and each after.

## DOUBTFUL DEFENSE

*by Erick Borst*

He hurries to another town, an unknown rite-aid,  
hoping to remain nameless. Glows red walking  
through the door. His heart hammers his chest.  
He pushes past people, head hidden under hood.

The goal in sight, aisle right, confusion halts him.  
Too many. Too many different brands and sizes.  
He snatches two boxes, "large" and "regular."  
Better safe than sorry: the reason for the trip.

Boxes now hidden under unneeded necessities,  
he sneaks to the register where female smiles.  
"Honey, put this back. You won't need it,"  
handing him the box labeled "large."

## COMPUTER LAB

*By Dahlia Avila*

Eyes,  
red and watery,  
glued like a smashed  
fly on the sunny window  
to the lit-up collage of parading faces.

As I rest my eyes, I listen  
papers shuffling  
tick tack  
of fingers typing  
click click click  
fast clicks and slow clicks  
three in a row like a stuttering child  
searching searching  
    never finding

my eyes are closed, and all I hear  
is ticktackclick  
ticktackclick  
Tick,  
    Tack,  
        Click.

## FIXING AMELIA

*By Crystal Sauby*

I threw my textbooks and school bag down on the bed, so hard that my history textbook bounced back and hit the floor. “I can’t believe you’re doing that! It’s horrible. How can you cut yourself?”

“It helps me feel better. It’s not like you would know anything about being depressed anyway.” Amelia was the only person I had ever known who could give an impression of having her nose in the air while she was looking at the ground, even when she was as obviously upset as she was now. She shuffled slowly through her backpack, keeping her head down. Finally she pulled out a small case, and then crossed our cramped room to the bathroom we shared.

“What are you doing?” I demanded. “Are you going to go cut up your arm some more?”

“What do you care? You said you didn’t love me anymore.”

“I did not say that. I said I didn’t want to be your girlfriend anymore, because I can’t deal with this! It’s not like I suddenly just stopped caring about you.”

She ignored me and the door slammed shut behind her. Hearing the lock click, I pounded on it, but she didn’t answer. Kicking it only dented the door, and she still didn’t answer. This was my fault, I thought, and burst into tears. The door opened. A roll of toilet paper flew out, hitting me in the head. I tried to shove my way in but she shoved me back and closed the door, locking it again.

“I’m calling my mom,” I warned her. When she still didn’t answer, I kicked the door once more and left the room.

I met Amelia in eighth grade. We had a mutual friend, Karen, who thought we would get along because we had a lot in common: we loved books, Tori Amos, Harry Potter fan fiction, and we both wanted to go to Japan someday. We were also both stumbling toward the realization that we liked girls, *that way*, and although we didn’t develop feelings for each other until much later, we bonded further over our mutual crush on another friend, Lara. Part of the reason I was so drawn to her, though, is because she had problems, and I wanted to help her.

From the beginning of our friendship, I knew Amelia had issues. She

was moody and temperamental, and I had to pry at her for hours before she would tell me anything about whatever was bothering her. She didn't talk to me for a week once, and when I finally found out that she had been angry because I had been reading one of her library books at lunch without asking her, I wanted to hit her.

But she was my best friend. She made me laugh and I liked to play with her long brown hair, even though she wouldn't let me straighten it because she thought I would burn her. The second year we were friends I admitted that I hated New Year's Eve because I was afraid every year that the world would end at midnight. She was visiting relatives in Pennsylvania, but she called me at midnight—Pennsylvania time—to assure me that the world hadn't ended there. While the rest of my family watched TV, I shivered in the study, spinning back and forth on the battered office chair. I clutched our old phone, holding the cord in at the base so it wouldn't short out. Along with Amelia's voice, I could hear her mother shouting that Amelia had to get up early for church in the morning, but she still stayed up, talking to me until midnight—Phoenix time—when I was sure that we were safe. My feet thumped against the wall each time they passed it, telling me, this is real. Someone cares about me this much. That was when I began to fall for her.

Amelia came from a troubled home. The root of her issues was something that had happened to her when she was a child. She would never tell me what it was, but she would also never talk about her father, who left her mother when she was ten. Her mother dated around, preferring men who drank often and knew where to get the good pot. I put this together from little things that she let drop over the years I knew her, each piece of information a fragment that I fit into the Amelia puzzle. She never invited me to her house, but then, she never invited anyone over. Once she told me that her mom didn't let her have friends over, so mostly we just hung out at my house.

In high school, most of our old friends ditched us for Drama Club. Amelia was too quiet for Drama Club, and I stuck with Amelia. We spent most of our time in my room playing *Tori Quotes*, a game we'd invented. One of us would say a line of lyrics from one of *Tori Amos's* songs, and the other one had to guess the song. We were playing this



game one night when she slept over, during winter break our freshman year.

Instead of giving Amelia the bed and sleeping on the floor like I usually did, I had suggested that we both sleep in my bed, since my mom's cat had peed on the extra blankets the night before. My bed was full-sized, so there was room for both of us. We faced each other, whispering in the dark, and suddenly she kissed me. Her lips brushed the space between my nose and mouth, and I wondered if it had been an accident. She didn't laugh or say anything, and the silence hung between us. So I kissed her back.

The progression of our relationship from friends to sort-of-girlfriends made me more determined to "fix" her. I never thought of it this way during our friendship, but I wanted her to be happy, and she wasn't, at least, not very much of the time. So, somehow, I had to help her find happiness. Preferably, with me.

The summer before our junior year, I convinced my mom that Amelia's mother didn't care about her and that she should live with us. My mom said that since she already practically lived with us, why not. Since Amelia had been held back a year, she was already eighteen, so she simply moved out, leaving a note behind. We crammed her bookshelves next to mine, switched my bed for my sister's split-up bunk beds, and I finally cleaned out my closet.

Although in middle school, I had been so thrilled to finally move into a house where I had my own room, after a few weeks I couldn't remember what it had been like to walk into my room without seeing Amelia reading on her bed, or hang up my clothes without having to move her sweaters aside. I loved pushing our beds together every night and then waking up early and pulling them back apart before my mom came to wake us up. I loved to see her bangs sticking up in the morning when she emerged from the pile of pillows she slept under. She seemed happier in my house, and although she still went quiet sometimes and would only give me blank stares when I asked what was wrong, she didn't shut down as often as she once had, and she didn't pick fights with me. For a few months, anyway.

After dinner one night, I went to our room and noticed that Amelia had some new library books. I wondered when she got them, since

we hadn't been to the public library lately, and took a few out to look through. We had similar taste in books, and she had found some I'd never seen before. She must have gone to the library without me, probably the day I had stayed after for the Photography Club meeting. Even though I had been busy, I was suddenly upset that she had gone without me and hadn't even told me. We always went to the library together.

When Amelia came in from doing dishes, she crossed the room quickly, snatched the books away from me, and stuffed them back into the empty spaces on her shelf.

Openmouthed, I stared at her from where I sat cross-legged on the wooden floor.

"Those are mine! Don't touch my stuff." There was actual anger in her voice.

"Are you kidding me? Half of your stuff is my old stuff. You live in my house." I knew I shouldn't have said it, but I was so surprised at the sudden change back to the old Amelia that I didn't think about what I was saying.

"Yeah, thanks for reminding me. I knew this was a dumb idea."

"What are you talking about? You wanted to live here!" She wouldn't answer, even though I kept asking until I cried, frustrated. We didn't push our beds together that night, and I couldn't sleep. Around two in the morning, I heard her whisper that she was sorry, but I didn't answer. Maybe if I had, things would have been different.

We didn't talk about it, but I stayed away from her things, even if they were really the library's things. From then, our relationship started to crumble. She didn't want me to touch her, and she would only talk about things like homework, our chores, or which movie we should rent. She started skipping class, and her grades fell. I tried to help her do her homework, but she didn't care about it.

"What if I fail? I'll just get a job or something. No one cares anyway." She tossed her Japanese textbook, which she loved, onto the floor.

"I care! I don't want you to fail." I picked it back up and smoothed the pages before placing it on the shelf out of her reach.

"Only because it would make you look bad. I'm your project, and if I fail, you fail," Amelia whispered harshly.

“What are you talking about?”

“You don’t think I know what you’re doing? You want me to get better so I can be your perfect girlfriend.”

“No, I want you to get better so you can be happy.”

“With you.”

She flung out my thoughts so bluntly, it frightened me. I didn’t know what to say to her, and she withdrew further. I could tell that she was hurt and angry, but she wouldn’t talk to me about anything. Even though I was supposed to be her best friend, her girlfriend, she had completely shut me out.

In October, it got worse.

We were both library TAs, and spent our free seventh period in the library. Usually we just read, but that day there was shelving to do. I was shelving nonfiction in the same aisle as she was, ignoring her, but I happened to glance over when she was reaching up to the top shelf. Her sleeve had fallen back, exposing sharp red lines, neatly lined up below her wrist.

At first I thought she had drawn on herself. Then she moved a little, and I could tell that the lines were cuts, too perfect to be accidental. She still hadn’t noticed me staring at her arm, so I did the only thing I could think of. I pushed her, just a little.

“What did you *do*?” I demanded, whispering as loudly as I could. Then all my pushed-back anger, fear, and loneliness from the past weeks surged through me and erupted. “I don’t even know who you are anymore. You won’t tell me anything, you won’t touch me, you won’t look at me half the time. I can’t do this. I’m tired of this. You’re right, this was a dumb idea. Just go back to your house. I can’t be your girlfriend anymore.” I dropped my stack of books at her feet. She jumped. Her eyes were wet. Good, I thought, and stormed out.

My mom rushed home after I called her. Amelia was still locked in the bathroom, and she wouldn’t answer us or unlock the door, so my mom called the police. I was glad when they said they were on their way. This was my first experience with cutting; I thought people only cut their wrists when they actually wanted to die, and I didn’t want to think about what she might be doing behind the door.

When the police arrived, they spoke to her gently but threatened

to take the door down. Finally she opened the door, her face white. Her wrists were intact, as far as I could tell. The police officers and my mother arranged for her to spend a night in the hospital for a psychological evaluation. Amelia didn't argue. I sat on my bed and watched her gather her things, unable to take my eyes away from her. She wouldn't look in my direction, and she didn't say a thing.

Her bag on her shoulder, she picked up her shoes and put her hand on the door, then finally turned to face me. My heart thumped awfully. Possibilities ran through my head. Would she say she loved me one last time? Would she say she was sorry? That she hated me? That she would miss me?

She didn't say anything. I met her gaze until seeing the irreparable fragments of what we'd shared was too painful, and I had to turn away.

## HAPPINESS LIKE WEEDS

*By Trevor Penland*

—after *Lisel Mueller*

It sneaks through the cracks  
in the sidewalk.

It creeps along the side of your house  
until the house is enveloped.

When you were a kid, you spread  
its seeds without regard.

When pulled, it leaves a gooey,  
white, bitter reminder.

It pops up all over your yard  
where it doesn't belong.

Despite growing along every road  
and being guarded by thorns,

it has the sweetest berries  
you've ever tasted.

## DOG DAYS

*By Lisa Miller*

*Dog Days of Summer-The hottest, most sultry days of summer when the Dog Star, Sirius, is brightest in the heavens.*

Dust rose from their feet and hung in the air as Ryan and Emma, his German Shepherd, ran up the path from the woods to the backyard. The late summer sun shone through the tops of the cedar and fir trees to the west of the house. School was starting in a few days, and I'd called Ryan up to the house to give him a haircut. I waited for him to settle down on the stool on the back deck. After a summer of running wild, swimming in the creek, and sleeping in his tent, Ryan's blond hair was overgrown, pushed back from his forehead and tucked behind his ears.

"Sit up straight, Ryan," I said as he wedged his dirty heels onto the top rung of the red stool.

"I know. Sit up, don't move, and don't scratch," Ryan sighed as he tugged on the bottom of his blue t-shirt.

Emma rubbed against my legs like a cat and got tangled up in the hair clipper's power cord. I unwound the cord from around her hind legs as she looked up at me with her sweet face. Emma started out as my dog when I'd brought her home three years before, but she soon chose Ryan as her constant companion. If he was asleep, Emma slept on the rug next to his bed. If he was watching TV, Emma curled up in front of the couch so Ryan could rest his feet on her back. And when Ryan camped out in the woods or went fishing in the creek, Emma was his shadow. Boy and dog spent the entire summer together, never more than five feet apart.

As I combed the snarls and dust from Ryan's blond hair, I noticed the roots had darkened to the same deep brown as his eyebrows. He would not be blond again after this haircut.

"How short do you want it?" I asked.

"I want it to stand up on top and be really short on the sides."

I snapped the guide onto the hair clippers. The first swath of hair fell to the deck and lay there like a small animal. Emma sniffed at it and sneezed. In five days, Ryan would start fourth grade and leave Emma at

home with me all day. The first week of school was always hard. Emma would worry and pace in the front yard, waiting for the school bus to bring Ryan home each afternoon. She'd wiggle with delight when it was time to go for a walk with me, or ride to town in the truck, but as soon as we'd come home she'd take up her vigil in the front yard. By the third week, Emma would figure out that her boy always came home in the afternoon, and it was much better to hang out in the kitchen with me where treats fell off the kitchen counter and landed on the floor in front of her nose. I would have my part-time dog to keep me company until she heard the school bus rumbling up the road.

"How much longer?" Ryan asked, picking at a scab on his knee.

"Just a few minutes. I have to get the edges straight."

The buzz of the clippers hummed along with the whir of the locusts in the trees and crickets chirping in grass along the back of the house.

"Mom? Will Emma miss me a lot when I go to school?"

"Yeah," I said as I clipped the hair over his ear into a neat arc. "But she'll get over it. You'll be home to play with her every afternoon."

"You'll take care of her, right? She doesn't like to be alone."

"I know. I'll take good care of her. And if she's extra lonely, I'll even let her curl up on the couch and watch cartoons."

After I smoothed in a little hair gel to make his hair stand up, Ryan ran a hand over his short, brown hair.

"Cool! Thanks, Mom. C'mon, Emma!"

They sprinted off to sleep in his tent for one more night before they had to move back into the house to start the school routine. Dust flew from their feet as they ran towards the trees and disappeared.

## IDENTITIES

*By Jamie Klouse*

One of my earliest memories is sitting with my older sisters on the sidewalk outside our house, dressed up like Laura Ingalls of *Little House on the Prairie* fame. We had recently returned from a trip to Walnut Grove—the Ingalls’ historical home in Minnesota—and we had decided to sell lemonade. We donned our best Ingalls costumes, which consisted of Easter dresses and bonnets we’d bought from a gift store in Walnut Grove. I didn’t have any Easter dresses of my own, so my sisters lent me theirs.

We blithely sold lemonade, under the supervision of my oldest big sister, in our neighborhood for most of the afternoon. The sun beat down, but our bonnets protected our eyes. Neighbors made constant comments about how cute we were. Eventually, my father walked up the cul-de-sac to our lemonade stand. We offered him some lemonade, but he only wanted me to take off “that ridiculous dress.” He put me in jeans and a t-shirt, the way it should be.

Not one year had passed before I found myself in kindergarten, part of the proud order of children about to begin a formal education. But first, there were blocks that needed to be arranged and lines that needed to be colored within. I was terrible at both of these things. Instead of building a fort of blocks, I wanted to build a house. Instead of coloring in the lines, I wanted to cover the page in crayon and draw pictures in the margins that weren’t already outlined for us. When the boys and girls split up on opposite sides of the room for playtime, I went with the girls. In 1988, no one knew how to treat gender dysphoria.

In elementary school, there was a boy who made fun of me for using the stall in the bathroom. He said it meant I was a girl—boys stand up to pee. He used to follow me home from school, and pelt me with his idea of insults the entire way. He called me “Katie,” which was my oldest sister’s name, and told me that my hair looked like a girl’s. When I complained to my parents, their solution was to cut my hair. My father threatened to paint my fingernails if I didn’t clip them. I didn’t understand why having my nails painted would be shameful when my



sisters seemed to enjoy it. Why should it be a punishment for me?

One Christmas, my grandparents filled the base of the tree with presents and the excitement in the house was palpable. When Katie opened her first present, she found a fluffy pink bathrobe and soaps; then it was Jenny's turn: a small plastic vanity set, complete with child-friendly makeup. When I opened mine, I found a "shaving" kit—some foam with a dull plastic razor. In the next round of gifts, Jenny got some Ninja Turtle underwear and Katie and I each received a pink dress that could be reversed into a different color dress of the same design. I was so excited that someone had finally gotten me something I wanted, but before I could try it on, everyone but me realized there'd been a mistake. The dress was taken from me, and I was given the Ninja Turtle underwear instead.

An average Sunday would start with the family taking baths, eating breakfast, and preparing for church. Being the youngest, I always bathed last. When I got out of the tub, my sisters would be beautiful in their Sunday dresses with flowery shoes, and my mom would have my suit laid out on the bed. I would argue with her, refuse to wear it, and inevitably run from the room in naked rebellion.

As time went on, it got harder to exist in that little bubble. Every event reinforced the idea that it was wrong for me to be a girl. Every night, I prayed to God and asked to wake up a girl the next morning—I'd do anything: I'd go to church, preach in Africa, believe in Him forever and ever, I promise. My wish was never granted. My faith in God soon came to mirror my faith in myself.

By puberty, I found myself not only annoyed by the invisible lines I could never cross, but also how my body fought against me. My voice began to drop; muscles and body hair grew. While other girls were growing breasts and long, beautiful hair, I was starting to look like a troll. The only time I could find to stay sane were the afternoons I had in junior high before my sisters came home from school. I would raid their closets and for just two hours every weekday, I could almost feel comfortable in my skin again.

It's surprising to say that at some point after this, it would become necessary for me to come out to my parents. Instead of getting caught or being so flamboyant that everyone just "knew," I developed a

secondary personality that was extra masculine, and I wore that mask every day. As time went on, I buried my inner feelings. I made myself busy with school and music. When that wasn't enough, I played a video game until the thought had left my mind. I entered into a depression that lasted for over a decade. My body was at odds with me, and I had tricked my mind to ally with my body. Somewhere inside me was a little girl, and I drowned her for over ten years. None of it came to roost until I was in college.

I graduated high school in 2002 and got into the music program at Eastern Washington University with a scholarship. Slowly, I began to realize that I was no longer under the constant supervision of my parents—the very thing that had stopped me from being myself for almost twenty years. I finally had an opportunity to actually make a change, but the personality I created to hide behind had its own life now. I found a conflict within myself, between who I was and who I had become. This sent me into a deadly spiral.

For most of my sophomore year, before bed I would brush my teeth, refill my water bottle, then wander onto the 7<sup>th</sup> floor balcony of Streeter Hall and stare down at the pavement, wondering how long it would take for someone to call the police if I jumped. I wanted to talk to my friends, but I was in Spokane—who even knew what it meant to be transgender? I didn't even know. Was I a “tranny” like the women on the porn sites? Did I just want to be a woman so I could end up a spectacle for some sick asshole's amusement? I didn't want to end up looking like a monster, fresh from a botched surgery. How do you even go about transition? No one had ever told me. I didn't even know what was possible.

Even as I played my female characters in video games, I continued to deny myself—certain that it could only be a destructive path to walk. Inevitably, I was forced to withdraw from so many classes that I ended up under academic probation and was summarily suspended from EWU until I could complete a quarter on my own money to prove myself again. Since I was unable to pay, I moved back home and found a job.

Thus began a six-year period of working and self-discovery. I moved out of the house, I came out to my friends; I even had my first boyfriend, though it was short-lived. I did research, found communities,

read stories. I talked to women online and found that my own thoughts still mirrored theirs.

I did so much research that soon I became a respected authority in the community—someone a young trans person could go to and ask questions. Where can I find a trans-friendly doctor? How much Estradiol should I ask for? What side effects are there from spironolactone? What should I do if my parents don't accept me? Why shouldn't I just kill myself? Can I ever truly be a woman? I had friends expelled from their families, homeless, hungry, beaten—all for their gender identity. I helped a friend emancipate herself from literal slavery in Portland—lured by understanding and wide-open arms, but trapped by a sociopath.

All these things and more I encountered and dealt with, even without coming out to my own parents, or getting my own prescriptions. I realized that getting treatment was going to be a step in my returning to a normal life. I wanted to go back to college and finish my degree, but I knew I couldn't be happy enough to succeed without help. So I sought help. As I lived on the breadcrumbs and couches of friends, I found low-income counseling in Seattle, got a letter of recommended treatment from my counselor, and found a trans-friendly doctor that offered low-income services at a community health clinic. Finally, after several months, he gave me a prescription for estradiol and spironolactone. And on a cold afternoon in the fall of my 26<sup>th</sup> year, I finally came out to my parents and told them my plans. They told me they loved me and supported me, but they couldn't support my decision. I wondered how they defined "support".

Taking hormones for the first time was like discovering that all your life you'd been filling your gas tank with sawdust. Within a week, I felt as though a cloud had been lifted. Instead of staying in bed until someone forced me out, or spending my day regretting every single thing I'd done to become a perpetually depressed 27 year-old non-graduate, I suddenly saw the path I needed to walk to get my life back on track. Of course I still get frustrated about the mistakes I made, but they no longer consume me. Instead of problems, I now see solutions and there's nothing I can't fix without sleeping on it and waking up fresh and ready to tackle it.

I still live most of my time presenting as a male. Depression and age have changed my body, and I'm uncomfortable with presenting as female for now. My hairline receded from my naturally occurring high levels of testosterone, but it's begun to grow back, and after a year of hormone therapy, I have enough hair to start growing it out. I've begun to lose weight because I no longer play video games late into the night, drinking soda and eating junk food, to distract myself from reality. I applied and was accepted to Central Washington University, where I am now poised to finish my degree in the next year. My daily conflicts of gender no longer inspire rage or induce depression. Instead, they make me laugh.

I especially love picking up my prescriptions.

"I'm picking up for Jamie Klouse. K-L-O-U-S-E."

"Alright, just a moment," the pharmacist says, turning to search for the bag containing my prescriptions. She returns, "Is Jamie aware of the risks of these medications?"

"Yes, she's aware."

"Alright then, let me ring you up."

# INSPIRE

*By Trevor Penland*

A word we found along the road,  
 beautiful, alone, naïve.  
 We picked her up, took her home with us.  
 There, we stole everything from her.  
 She stayed; she had nowhere else  
 to go. But at night, she wanders awake,  
 remembering:

*to breathe into*  
*to incite action, influence,*  
*encourage toward a goal,*  
*to draw forth*

The Muses breathed on Orpheus as he slept,  
 Homer as he tuned his lyre—  
 the soft coolness of Athena's breath on Odysseus.  
 Fauna exchanging breaths with flora,  
 the very act of living;  
 the exhale of relief after the final push  
 as the child gulps new air;  
 the disturbed pulse from the shared breath  
 of embracing lovers.

Often, she'll sit on the side of a road  
 in the dark, waiting for someone,  
 breathing slowly.

# THOUGHTS OF A BEACHED WHALE

*By Jeremy Nelson*

So here I am, washed up again.

You'd think I would have learned my lesson by now.

"Don't swim where the humans are," they always "Don't go close to where the humans are," they always said.

But did I listen?

No.

Instead, I always swim along the shorelines,  
rising to the surface to do fancy tricks for the humans.

It's so much fun! I mean, look at me:

I am quite impressive.

But, boy does my timing suck.

I always swim in at low tide without realizing it,

And somehow or another,

I get stuck.

Here I am, lying on the beach,  
suffocating slowly.

This sand doesn't part for me like the water,

So I can't move.

I'm alone here.

Killer whale indeed!

I hear this is how Shamu got caught.

Yes, I know of Shamu. He's quite a legend in our pod.

Nay, not a legend. More like a horror story.

One that we tell our children to keep them away from the beaches.

Oy!

This is twice in one year.

I guess this is evolution at work.  
 I'm feeling weaker now.  
 No one has found me yet, and the tide hasn't returned.  
 I'm trying to move, but I can't.  
 Why even try? Just my luck  
 To wash up on an abandoned nudist beach.  
 Oh yes, I know what you humans are up to.

My vision is getting cloudy,  
 and my skin is drying.  
 I'm dying, Aren't I?  
 I feel myself starting to get desperate—  
 desperate for water, for home.  
 I need to be back in the salt water!  
 But I'm too weak. I can't move.  
 It's hopeless, isn't it?  
 No one's going to find me.  
 Not here.  
 Not now.  
 I'm so tired.  
 Maybe I should just sleep....

Wait!

I hear a noise.  
 What is that loud sound?  
 Ow! Turn those high beams off, will you?  
 Some metal vehicle is sitting in front of me,  
 though I can hardly see it.  
 Stupid lights. Now, I'm dying AND blind.  
 Thanks a lot Mr. Human.

Whoa! What was that?  
 Cold! Brrrrrr! Was that—  
 Aaah! Stop it! Stop throwing that on me.  
 What are you trying to do, drown me?

Wait, water? Yes, water!  
Give me more water!  
Buckets of water! Yes, right there,  
That's the spot. Throw it again.  
More water? Yes please!

Hahaha.

Maybe I won't die after all.  
But when will the tide turn?  
I hate the fact that I fell asleep  
When father was explaining lunar cycles.  
I never did memorize my times tables.

Aaaah, more water.  
I haven't felt so much relief in a long time.  
There are lots of pink-fleshed humans around me,  
Dousing me in life-sustaining water.  
My strength is slowly returning.

Hahaha!

Sorry, Shamu.  
I'm not joining you just yet.



## IN TWO WORDS

*By Ryan Riehle*

What was it like? War, you know.

Barbequed pie. That's right,  
you heard me. Pie—which is everything  
that is good in the world—barbequed!  
Who the fuck barbeques a pie?  
Marines do. Sanity demands it,  
buying a grill with no way of attaining  
red meat. Now, a glorified Bunsen burner  
is all of what it is, not glorious, no,  
just a substitution  
for a cheap microwave—  
temporary, with no real  
solution or sense to it.

being naked in a sandstorm  
after taking a shower;  
madness wrapped,  
squeezed into a heart shaped—  
please, may I have another—  
care package;  
a suggestive scent  
in a rotting building;  
the ankle barb on a seemingly  
harmless mammal.

Barbequed pie,  
tart cranberry, with the sweetest stench  
and the reddest filling.

## GO FOR BROKE

*By Levi Robischon*

We were Nisei, American-born citizens of Japanese descent. We were no less American than any other immigrant, but after Pearl Harbor we became public suspects. The only solution the government could find was to round us up and imprison us in internment camps. Some of us were resigned to these indignities, but others were determined to become more than prisoners.

We were the 442<sup>nd</sup> Combat Infantry Regiment, 3,800 strong, all Nisei. I was Corporal Yuji Nakamura, born in Seattle, the son of a small Asian food shop owner. Private Ryu Yamada born, in Oregon, was our sniper, the best marksmen in our entire company. Corporal Daisuke Suzuki from Honolulu, our medic, had witnessed Pearl Harbor. Sergeant Shin Anno was from San Diego. His wife was four months pregnant when he enlisted and had since given birth to a son.

We enlisted for different reasons. I wanted to prove to the people who imprisoned me that I was a loyal American citizen. Yamada was defiantly determined to show those Anglos that a Nisei could be a better soldier than even the most hardened white man. Suzuki enlisted hoping to fight the empire on account of his family back in the home country, who were never heard from again after the nationalists took power. He also had friends who were killed on the *U.S.S. Arizona*. Anno simply hoped that he could impart a lesson of honor to his son.

We fought harder and more valiantly than most other army units. However, regardless of our reasons, our training, and our oaths, we were still called “Japs” by plenty of other soldiers. So imagine our surprise when, as we were marching POWs to base camp, a wounded German turned to us and spat out in a heavy accent, “*American pigs.*” What could we do but laugh—we were beginning to like this Kraut already.

## TENTS AND COTS: A DEPLOYMENT

*By David Allen*

We said our farewells to loved ones, not knowing if we would ever see them again. Some of these were directed to mothers and fathers, others to wives and children. Charlie was the only dog there that day, a smaller mixed-breed beagle. The fur on his face had only recently started to turn white. Watching him sit beside my mother, I waved goodbye.

It was Halloween 2007, and we had been in Iraq for a little over a month. The platoon and the rest of the company were anxiously awaiting orders for our next major operation. These operations tended to last anywhere from one week to a month, and they were always changing. “Hurry up and wait” has been said so much that it tends to lose its meaning, but for lack of a better phrase, that is what each one of us were doing. Each of us in the tent were sitting on our cots, cleaning our weapons, and anticipating orders telling us to get ready to use them. Most of us would never have to.

Some of us were joking with each other. Others were trying to catch the last comfortable sleep they would get for days. But most of us just sat. If you were not important enough to be in the briefing room, that is what you did. You sat and waited for someone to yell at you for doing just that. When someone finally returned from the meeting to tell us that we would be taking the next day off before we “kicked it into high gear,” we didn’t know what to do.

Boredom gave way to more productive impulses inside the tent. Reiger had found a way to catch the rats in the floorboards. Alford had built himself a bookshelf. Moore had crafted a flyswatter. And I had found a way to hang wet laundry. But at the end of the day, we would all return to our cots. We were all hoping the mission would be short, and that we would return to this same tent in a few days. These dreams were crushed the following day.

“Pack up the stuff you need. We’re leaving tonight. If you don’t need it, find someone who is not going with us and see if they want it. If you can’t, it is garbage. Understand?” Staff Sergeant Harris had a way of dumbing things down so that, as he put it, “even window-lickers could

understand.”There would soon be trash cans full of books and letters that would never be read. We were to leave nothing behind and discard the unnecessary. We were moving.

The mission was supposed to last two months. Our mission was to provide security allowing the civilians to make their pilgrimage to Mecca peacefully, with little to no insurgent interference. We were to set up a base that would soon become one of the largest in Iraq. All in just two months. None of us believed this, and all of us were right. “Home by Christmas” would be repeated in our minds for the next three weeks. Some believed this, and they were wrong. For the remainder of the deployment, we were referred to as the homeless battalion.

Home was just a tent. Home was anywhere there would be cots. Home was not sleeping on the ground. We would not see our real homes for another six months. Our real homes, as far as we were concerned, did not exist. All we had were our cots and our tent. Our pleasures were simple, tents and cots. Without these simple things, we *were* homeless. None of us would argue that.

The first few days of the mission were spent parked in our vehicles, watching the civilians from a distance. This would go on for hours. It would not take us long to regret throwing away all of those unread books. The few books that had somehow made the cut were read, shared, and reread. By the end of the mission, we had all read the same books, and had discussed them in uneducated detail and brilliance.

When the civilians had finally made it over the border, they were no longer our responsibility. We were soon setting up what was supposed to be a permanent base, in an area located about a day’s drive to the South. What had previously been an Iraqi airfield would now be occupied by the United States Marine Corps, complete with showers, laundry, tents, and cots.

As our vehicles rolled into the empty airfield, our disappointment grew. The place was barren. Broken down buildings and cracked pavement went on for half a mile. Three of the buildings were deemed salvageable, and the officers moved right in. The enlisted were given a large open area to park the vehicles, work on the vehicles, and sleep. We would be sleeping in the sand, smelling diesel, and breathing exhaust. Nothing had changed.

This new location had opened up a whole list of new missions for us to be sent out on. We soon discovered that we would rarely see the new base we had helped build. It served merely as a refueling point for the vehicles. We would conduct our missions far away from this base and live out the deployment on an endless patrol. On Christmas, we spent our first night on the base that we had helped build, and enjoyed our first real shower in almost two months. The next morning we were off again. A promise was given to us that when we came back to the base there would be tents and cots waiting for us.

As the weeks went by, we would patrol and search countless houses, cities, canyons, caverns, and vehicles. We would witness civilians dead in their own homes, at war amongst themselves. We would be bombed, rocketed, and shot. We would crash our vehicles. We would train Iraqi Police. We would meet civilians who loved us. We would meet civilians who hated us. We would meet civilians who were indifferent to us. And we would dream of tents and cots.

When we finally returned, there were tents waiting for us. They had covered the open area with gravel and set the tents over it. Finally, we would be sheltered from the wind and sand. Finally, we had a place to call home. However, there were no cots inside. We would be sleeping on gravel for the remainder of our stay. The story goes that the man in charge of setting up our area had spent so much of the battalion's money on the gravel that the battalion would not pay for any cots. But that's all just speculation. Everyone knows it was *really* to keep us angry and frustrated. That's what we told ourselves. Shortly after, many of us were asked to begin the reenlistment process. Out of the ten who were asked, only two went through with it.

A few days later we were told to tear everything down. Once again, we were moving. We were never given a proper explanation for why we were tearing down the base. Speculation grew that it was simply too far away from other bases. Other theories were that the battalion could not afford to continue building. We were told by our higher officers that we had done an "amazing job" on the mission. The same mission that promised to get us home by Christmas and had taken us into late February. Somehow we didn't feel that constituted an "amazing job."

Once again, we found ourselves waiting for new orders. This time we would wait sitting on the ground, next to our vehicles. We were waiting to leave the base we had built and torn down when we were told we would not be returning to another base. The remaining months would be filled with sporadic vehicle checkpoints, IED sweeps, residential searches, seizing of firearms, and firefights. We would lose one Marine to enemy fire. Lance Corporal Young would not be coming home with us.

It was not until the first week of April that we would see another base. When we arrived, our replacements had already been waiting for over a week. They wondered where we had been. They had already moved into what were supposed to be our tents. They were already sleeping on what were supposed to be our cots. Again, we would sleep outside, next to our vehicles.

After a series of post-deployment briefs, orders were soon to reach the lower ranks. We were to pack up all of our belongings and to discard anything we did not wish to bring back to the United States. No one complained. Anything unnecessary was thrown away, except for Lance Corporal Young's. His belongings would be itemized, inventoried, and brought back by another Marine. After we had filtered through our belongings, we were permitted to stage our gear near the flight line. We would spend the next few days here, awaiting orders to get on the next flight coming in.

One helicopter to Kuwait and one plane to Germany, and we were on our way home. The next day or so would be spent in a montage of airport drinking and silent inflight movies. We were allowed only two beers. The non-drinkers would happily buy us a few extras. With the mixture of intoxication and the culture shock of coming back to reality, many of us would forget the entire flight. Whether it was out of anxiety, excitement, or discomfort from the seats, very few of us slept.

There was a small delay in Maine, but we were soon headed for Miramar, California. From there we would board the bus that would take us to the city of Twenty-Nine Palms. A convoy of civilian motorcycles would follow the bus the whole way. On rare occasions, returning military personnel were picketed by extremist religious groups. The bus would drop us off at "Victory Field," though most of

us did not feel very victorious. It was dark and everyone was tired. We had not eaten what we considered real food in months, we had not been given the luxury of cots and tents, the war was not over, and we had lost a friend.

Many Marines were greeted by their wives. Some were greeted by children they had never seen before. Many looked for wives who were no longer theirs. I looked for Charlie. After a few minutes of searching, I found the only person holding a dog leash. My eyes followed the leash to Charlie's white face. I was greeted with a hug from my mother and a confused look from Charlie.

After a week of work and cleaning weapons, the battalion was released for a thirty-day leave block. Most of us went home to our families. Some had planned cruises. Others would spend their leave with their families and help raise their children for the first time. Others had court dates with their now ex-wives. I went home.

It is roughly a twenty-two hour drive from Twenty-Nine Palms, California, to Tacoma, Washington. My mother and I made it in twenty. We alternated driving and found no reason to stop and rest. I was greeted with hugs from family members I had never hugged before. No one asked how it was. They were just happy to see me back and know I was safe. Before long, it was as if I had never left. Soon my eyes grew heavy and I could not stay awake anymore. When it came time to sleep, I retired to what used to be my bedroom.

I let Charlie in and closed the door. I looked around the room and at the posters I had hung along the walls in high school. I quietly removed my Marine Corps posters. What had once brought me such inspiration had become something I didn't want to think about. I carefully folded them and reminded myself to discard them later. I didn't need them and I didn't know anyone who would want them. I left the video game posters and pictures of ex-girlfriends. A few feet below where the posters had been, I saw my bed exactly as I had remembered it. It was small, metal, and looked like it should belong in a hospital.

Hours went by, and I could not sleep. I had finally been given a proper bed to sleep on, but I could not make myself sleep. Charlie was snoring on the floor beside it. It was a comfortable bed. I used to call it the "Goldilocks Bed," but tonight my mind was keeping me awake. My

body had returned home, but my mind was still homeless. Listening to Charlie snore on the ground, I slid off the mattress and curled up beside him. Sleeping on a real bed would take some getting used to.



# THROUGH OPEN EYES, THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND

*By Trevor Penland*

That's what this poem is, isn't it?  
Me leading you along some path  
I've mapped out with my clever  
words and images. I guide you into emotions  
and beliefs, paint a masterpiece  
on the canvas of your mind.

I walk you down cold, clean corridors  
to sterile beds that hold the dead and dying.  
We lie in the grass and let the breeze  
and our mortality slide over us  
like a glacier.

But who's to say I see enough to guide you?  
I'm just like you: confused, imperfect,  
human, with all the baggage  
that word drags behind it like a full body  
bag. The blind are leading the blind  
to neither knows where.

But sometimes the blind get lucky,  
and we have our instincts. So take  
my hand, and I'll find us a way out.  
We don't need our eyes to know  
the right way to go: just follow  
the slight breeze and crisper air.

## MY TIME TO SHINE

*By Lisa Carlyle*

Every time I try to rhyme,  
people chime in with,  
“it’s fine but you’ll find  
my rhyme can kick  
your rhyme’s behind.”

I may be so green with  
envy that the queen bee  
of rhyming would just see me  
and be mean with her  
scheming demeanor.

I fight to write on that  
lined white paper while others write  
with such delight something that’s  
just right and I have to fight  
to get it right despite my insight.

I presume that in this classroom  
the others fume  
about feelings  
that consume  
their human lifestyles.

I can’t express my restlessness  
when all that comes out is a less  
than adequate performance  
of a mess that when addressed  
seemed better in my head.

My niche is not completely known  
and my writing is too concretely shown  
and I simply sit staring blankly  
as others can get the metaphorically  
blown pieces.

So I just fall silent  
to compliment while the critics  
give hints on how to make my piece click  
just right since I don't seem  
to have it... yet.

## FOR SUNGLASSES

*by Levi Robischon*

To the glorious pair of shades,  
vanguard of our ocular protection,  
shield of our vision from Helios' raging light.  
Functional? Indeed, but also stylish,  
for how else are we to know who is cool?  
Who is fashionable, who is a product of Gen X?  
It also safeguards our reputation,  
for what else hides from the world our hangover  
and the black eye from last night's bar fight?

## BREAKUP

*By Lisa Miller*

The sun is rising just above the rim  
of canyon walls that hold the coldness still,  
a bowl of singing air surrounds our heads  
and floods our ears with groans and wails like hymns  
that come from cracking ice, and tells the hills  
that spring is coming near. I think instead  
of wishing winter over, I'll softly tell him  
I can't see the ice melting off the doorsill.  
The promise that I'd surely stay misled  
us both with evanescent hopes, so slim,  
but once spring comes I will not have the skill  
to keep from him the truth: my love has fled.  
We stand upon a fragile, shifting shore,  
the sound of rending ice can't be ignored.

## LAST WORDS

*By Trevor Penland*

Maybe everybody has read Dylan Thomas.  
He clearly had some daddy issues and a legacy  
complex. But whether we rage or go gentle,  
he knew (or did he?) that we can't last.

None of us makes it out alive.  
Keats named Death "easeful" and "called him  
soft names" to tempt him. We're constantly  
taunting him. He probably doesn't like that.

We don't know what comes after; we're forced  
to forget what came before. That's why Socrates  
asked Crito to pay Asclepius the chicken  
Socrates owed him, as he finished his hemlock.

Or how about that candied French comedian?  
Death couldn't swipe his wit. When asked  
to denounce Lucifer, "Now, now, my good man.  
This is no time for making new enemies."

That Irish Ulysses, with his obsession  
to be original, asked "Does nobody understand?"  
as the purple lividity set in. He needed  
to know, before he went, if he would last.

Villa, the Mexican revolutionary, knew his men  
needed profound last words. "Don't let it end  
like this. Tell them I said something." Death  
showed his hand: spade royal flush, every time.

The original communist thought he had it all  
figured out, shared it. He told his nurse,  
"Last words are for fools who haven't said enough."

*Poems by Judith Kleck Powell  
In loving memory*

*From her chapbook Winter Fruit  
(dPress, 2007)*

## NOT EASY

these mornings of the gray streaked sky,  
clouds breaking up, light breaking in.  
Even the blackened branches against the day  
do not move, but splay themselves needy  
and itching for weather. This is the calligrapher  
of doubt who scribes the white between the lines.

Not easy, this heart, these hands together again.  
Some days, it's heart in hand; others, hand over heart.  
Neither satisfies. Needy couple, they. One looking  
for love, the other for work; both wanting it honest  
and hard, not easy, not free, but clear. Not easy

this season between winter and spring. Literal  
and dry, absent of irony. The bones on the mat  
of lawn simply lie, white and bare. Even the dog  
won't tend them in this off season, season without name,  
season without ease or anger. Be still.

Dance the space between the steps; it is not stillness.  
Hear the music between the notes; it is not silence.  
Read the white between the lines; it's not empty.  
Here to gather. Breathe, stare, blink. This stillness  
is motion, this silence is music, the white space sings.

## FROM JUDITH KLECK POWELL'S BLOG: IN DOG YEARS I'M DEAD

*My right thumb and my iPhone are my link to the world these days. Using the app called shapewriter, which allows me to swipe my thumb from letter to letter rather than tap each word out, I can write at a pace that's bearable.*

*Once my fingers lost functionality, my writing was stymied. I had always counted on establishing the rhythm or music of a piece through the rhythms my fingers found on the keyboard. It was a little like playing a musical instrument. Not notes but words found their tempo and tone as I typed.*

*When I lost that access to the music of a phrase or sentence, I lost the way into a poem. Then I started typing in my head. Late at night or alone during the day, I began to write again. I am now working on this new process.*

*Here's the first poem that resulted. It stutters and stammers a bit, and then arrives at an ending which still surprises me.*

*Judithkpowell.com*



## POEM OF ONE THUMB

Has no punctuation  
 no capitals  
 to slow its stiff work  
 left & right & up & down  
 indifferent to rules—  
 the work of a hammer  
 seeking the nail's head  
 the work of a hand  
 genuflecting  
 as if to bless the page  
 with its clumsy lumbering  
 as if grace might reside  
 among these words taking  
 slow shape  
 despite the tremulous antics  
 of one sad digit  
 in search of a true line  
 one level without the slur of irony  
 without rancor or need.

If that shyster in the green visor offered me a deal—  
 trade this body  
 for the knowledge gained  
 in its diminishing  
 would I take the bait  
 or play the hand I have?

this opposable right thumb  
 lonely as it is  
 refuses to fold  
 and in one smooth arc  
 from left to right & up  
 finds the way  
 from 'n' to 'o'  
 and so I play on.

## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**David Allen** is from Tacoma, WA. He currently resides in Ellensburg with his two ferrets, Alice and Link.

**Talea Anderson** is a graduate student in the history department at CWU. As you might imagine, she enjoys reading and writing.

**Dahlia Avila** is a small-town girl from Dryden, WA. She's a senior at CWU-Wenatchee, and, if things go as planned, she'll be an elementary-school teacher this fall. That means she gets to share her passion for the language arts with a whole classroom of unsuspecting, wonder-eyed children! When she was a nose-picking fourth-grader herself, she began her first diary. Since then, she hasn't stopped writing.

**Brockton Bensch** is a senior at Central where he is a studio art major with a minor in sociology. He enjoys adventures and loves to be outdoors. His photo submission is part of an ongoing series he is shooting entitled, "Roadside Landscapes" composed of images he has gathered mostly from the roadsides of highways and freeways that he drives while traveling on the weekends.

**Katie Berberick** is a senior at CWU, majoring in Fine Arts. Her paintings are based on human experiences and conditions. Katie's intention is to maintain a sense of universality to insure that everyone might gain a unique and personal experience from the paintings.

**Brody Blackburn** is a Writing Specialization major at CWU, and a working musician. When he is not working on a new prose piece, he is writing a song. For inquiry about Brody's musical works, please visit: [iTunes.com/brodyblackburn](https://www.itunes.com/brodyblackburn).

**Erick Borst** is a senior this year at CWU, majoring in English Writing Specialization and minoring in Linguistics. He enjoys writing and reading. Therefore, his job as a lead writing consultant in the Learning Commons on campus is both enjoyable and fitting.

**Lisa Carlyle**, from Finley, Washington, is a English Writing Specialization major. She considers her strong areas to be in poetry and creative non-fiction. She hopes to become a sports writer.

**Nick Cawley** is an English major in the writing specialization at CWU, who was born and raised in Wenatchee, Washington, which he refers to as “the best town.” His hobbies include bear-baiting and fisticuffs.

**Alyssa Foland** is 21 and currently a junior at CWU majoring in English Literature with a Writing Specialization and a minoring in Women’s Studies. After she graduates, she wants to work for a publishing house as an editor and eventually publish a novel of her own.

**Landan Garcia** is a Writing Specialization major with an avid love of cats and Hemingway. He can often be found at the Rec Center or on Xbox Live owning noobs. His favorite food isn’t pizza.

**Patrick Hasserics** expects to graduate from CWU in spring 2012 with a B.A. in English: Writing Specialization. He is happily married to his wife, Anjela, and together they have a son, William, who was born in May 2011. Patrick has worked as a technical writer at CWU’s Civic Engagement Center for over two years and intends to pursue technical writing/editing as a career. He also enjoys writing creative non-fiction, magical realism, sci-fi/fantasy fiction, and fiction about eccentric characters.

**Jamie Klouse** is a Writing Specialization major at CWU, born and raised in Tacoma, Washington. Jamie draws inspiration from authors of historical or scientific/fantastical fiction, personal experiences and the powerful drama of everyday life.

**Marcus Mead** grew up in South-Eastern Washington and attended Walla Walla Community College before moving to Kittitas Valley in 2009. He will be graduating from CWU with an English degree in Summer, 2012. His interests include sustainable agriculture and punk rock, as well as playing piano, guitar, and banjo.

**Lisa Miller** is an English major in the Writing Specialization program. She left public education after 20 years in order to pursue a career as a technical writer. Lisa is married, has two teenage boys, and for the first time in 17 years does not have any pets or a mortgage. Lisa loves winter. She is also fond of taking pictures, reading, writing, and complaining about Facebook.

**Stefan Milne** is an English grad student. He sometimes does various things—other times less so. His piece first appeared in *kill author*. If you like it, you can read other things by Stefan in various places including *The Other Room*, *The Good Men Project*, and *Flyway*. Stefan thanks you very deeply for reading.

**Jeremy Nelson** is 24 and will be graduating in Spring 2012. He's majoring in English with a Creative Writing specialization and minoring in general Communications Studies. He's been writing since he was 16 and one day would like to be a published fiction author. After graduating, he's not entirely sure where he's headed. "God willing," says he, "I'll find a good job soon."

**Cassandra Nilsen** is a junior at Central Washington University. After graduating with an Associate in Arts Degree from Skagit Valley College, she moved to Ellensburg with her three children to complete her Bachelor's Degree. She is an English: Writing Specialization major with a minor in Communication. Though she dreams of writing from her beachside home someday, her more immediate (and perhaps more realistic) goal is to establish a career in publishing and/or editing, while continuing to write on the side.

**Trevor Penland** loves to refer to himself in the third person. He also loves the fact that he can now have an example of such a reference immortalized in print.

**Ryan Riehle** has lived in various areas, so he doesn't claim a particular hometown. When he was in the Marines for five years, he did three tours in Iraq. He has held numerous blue-collar jobs in the past. Currently, he is striving to graduate by the end of Spring with a major in English and a minor in Latin American Studies. When not working or studying, he dances salsa along with other kinds of Latin-influenced dances.

**Levi Robischon** was born in Olympia, Washington in 1986. He graduated from Timberline High School in 2005 and spent several years attending community college and working retail before coming to Central for his Bachelor's Degree in English. After graduation he would like to spend some time teaching English abroad, preferably in Japan or Europe.

**Justin Ruhe** is originally from Cincinnati, but moved into a house with his mother and stepfather during the end of his high school junior year, graduating from Decatur High School in 2009. He is now a junior at CWU in the Writing Specialization. Because he works as a tour guide for the school, you may see him around campus spouting out facts about the university. Besides writing, he loves to lift weights, play music, rap, and dance. He also plays the guitar and sings in his three-person rock band Scuffalo.

**Crystal Sauby** likes to write on the kitchen table with her feet up on the heating vent. When writing, she usually warms up the same cup of tea at least twice before remembering to drink it. She gets her best writing done when the Internet is down and she's read all the books in the house already.

**Cheri Schafer** is transfer student, new to CWU this year. She is planning on majoring in Sociology and minoring in Religious Studies. She loves using colored pencils because it allows her to quickly draw her ideas and bring them to life with vivid colors. She has no patience for painting, and it is not uncommon for Cheri to complete 5 or 6 drawings in one sitting.

**Dillon Trethewey** has attended CWU for four years, studying English, Creative Writing, and History. He's always liked Fantasy and Science Fiction stories, and "Illusions" is one of his first attempts to write the kind of stories that he enjoys so much. After college, he hopes to become a professional writer, so of course he's looking for jobs in Retail.

## EDITING STAFF

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