



HOMESPUN

TTU's Student Magazine for the Arts

Summer/Fall 2016 edition

Editors:

Madison Loftis

Olivia Jolley

Blake Marlow

Cody Matthews

Faculty Advisers:

Sharon Henry, English Department

Leslie Bohn, English Department

The views expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect those of the Homespun staff, its faculty advisor, the Department of English, or Tennessee Technological University. The work published in this magazine is the sole property of the authors and may not be republished or reproduced without their written permission.

Table of Contents

Elizabeth Rein
 “War Prayer” – Lora A. Printz Memorial Poetry Prize6

Justin R. Brown
 “After Dinner Speech”9
 “Graduation Speech” 13
 Poetry Compilation 16

Amanda J. Carpenter
 “Sunrises”20
 “What is the World Coming To?”21

Anita D. Dixon
 “I Am from Technology”26

Brenna Edwards
 “Fleeting Stare”28
 “Remember...?”28

Sarah Foy
 “Colored Faces”31

Kelly E. Maddle
 “January II”37
 “Milwaukee”37
 “Please Respect Our Decadence”38
 “Video Silence”38

Stacy E. Marmon
 “Ryan”41

Hillary Martin
 “Arcade”47
 “I am a Lady”49
 “Park Bench”50
 “Tenebrous Material”51

Chelsea M. Mathes	
"August"	54
"Cosmic Kiss"	54
"No Longer Sweet"	55
Stuart Neal	
"Dry It Up"	58
Chyna G. Patterson	
"Bad Guy"	71
Samantha Rose	
"Adolescence in an Hourglass"	77
Karen Warren	
"A Higher Call"	83

Lora A. Príntz
Memorial
Poetry Prize

Winner:
Elizabeth Reín

War Prayer

War Prayer

My mother doesn't recognize my face anymore.
These creases crack with canyons of dust and dirt and
blood that just won't go away.
Yesterday, I swear I saw a ghost of who I used to be
staring at me with bright eyes from a tree where hung a little boy.
And then just last week on the battlefield,
in a plume of dust and smoke,
I lost my innocence shouting into the void
for a God I don't even know,
for a God who lets this happen everywhere, all the time,
all the time.
My shaking hands are made of rivers flowing
with heartbeats and tears and so much grief.
How much of these rivers are me and mine?
They said they wash away in time but like my face,
canyons are starting to form that grow deeper
as the rivers flow by.

To a God who I don't believe in,
I'm in pain, I'm in pain,
and it isn't just in these tired legs of mine or in
the constant bombardment of bombs in my brain.
I hear things that aren't there.
My wife, my son, a gun, 5 guns,
and bullets zooming past my ear...
but that could be real.
Have you ever seen hands like mine?
Look at how honest these marks are.
They've held lives inside of them,
whole stars live within their wrinkles,
well, not today,
bloody dirt is in the way,
but they were good once, I promise they should have been good ...
Anyway, I want to pray to you
because the bottom of this whiskey bottle
isn't helping me
cope with some things

I've seen since I left home.
My dad called me a hero
but he doesn't know what I've done
and my grandmother said
there's a place for me in heaven
like I didn't leave empty seats at someone's dinner table.
My hands are dirty and my soul is suffering and I don't want to be alone.
I don't want to ask that much of you,
but there are some things I hope you can do:

*Let me live not in misplaced glory
nor in a mortal sin.
Wash my hands in holy water
but drown my soul in gin.*

JUSTÍN R. BROWN

After Dinner Speech

Graduation Speech

Poetry Compilation

After Dinner Speech

“Come on Justin. You need to eat your liver and onions.”

“OK Mom. (Takes one bite) Mmmhhmmm. This is the best thing I have ever eaten,” I said before I pushed away my plate in disgust.

At the age of four I was quite the actor. I would do anything and everything to look like I really enjoyed new food when in reality I was one of the pickiest eaters alive. For seven years I made it clear to my parents that I did not like trying new food at the dinner table. My diet consisted of peanut butter and jelly, spaghetti, cereal, eggs, and any dessert I could get my hands on.

Now don't get me wrong. I was healthy eater. I would eat the occasional vegetable, for example: potato chips, cheesy broccoli, or French fries! However, no matter how hard my parents endeavored I would not try new food. So how did I get to be 6'3" and 215 lbs? The short and cute answer is, I turned 13. But what didn't change was my hatred of trying new things. So at the end of this introduction we are left with this grand question. What on earth do sushi, ballet, and public speaking have in common? The answer is trying new things.

Sushi, my first point, illustrates why we as a human species have trouble trying new things. Even at an early age trying roasted broccoli with red peppers or that new lemon rosemary halibut mom made was like asking the INCREDIBLE HULK to patiently sew a sweater. It's just not realistic. I had trouble even trying the first bite. I just wasn't that courageous...

Then, there are the kids who can fake it. They are the heroes of America's youth, the achievers of deception, the masters of dishonesty. Just like the Avengers, these heroes have many different powers. For some it is mere deception, for others it is conniving genius.

I remember when I, one of the heroic greats, out-smarted my parents at the dinner table. When I was just 6 years old, I developed an ability like no other. I was able to cram vast amounts of food, COSMIC AMOUNTS of food into my mouth. Despite what my parents called grotesque, I was able to do

this while still having my mouth closed. By jamming my mouth with food, I was able to avoid the nasty taste and clean my plate at the same time. I would then excuse myself to the restroom, fill the commode with the toxic contents of my mouth, and flush away all evidence of my dark and genius crime. I was a natural genius!

Some of us may continue to be picky eaters, however, there comes the fateful day when we try that piece of sushi and realize... that our prejudices against new food have blinded us, and when tasting the wonder of flavors that explode, invigorate, and enchant our taste buds, we come to a new realization that trying new foods can be an unforgettable, breathtaking experience! That's what happened to me when I tried sushi.

After many servings of sushi, as a teenager I began to understand that trying new things might not be so bad, so I eventually found myself thrust into the world of... ballet. It was a pivotal moment. (Literally) Yes, it's true; I took ballet class for about eight weeks. But not only that, I participated in Ballet Gloria's performance of "Home." Ballet became the time in my adventure of trying new things that taught me to go the distance. It was a pretty large distance at that. So how did I, a young man who avoids new opportunities like the plague, decide to join a ballet class? Well I do not know. What I do know is a good friend of mine, Bob, asked me to participate in a ballet performance. Most guys are jealous of Bob because of the girls. He gets to dance with hundreds of girls six days a week. Bob is the only male dancer for his advanced level. What is guy who does ballet called anyway? I thought that since they're men they would be called ballerinos, but no, they are actually called danseurs.

Anyway, for this performance, they needed some extra guys, and since Bob is a good friend, and I really like girls, I decided to join the performance.

When I showed up, I felt really out of place. Well kind of. Part of me felt like this right where I should have been my whole life, in a room full of mirrors magnifying my muscular build while being surrounded by a hundred girls in leotards. But still, these girls and Bob were doing pleas, pirouettes,

pâté picas and some insane stretches, and I could barely touch my toes. Luckily after a few weeks I became more flexible and was able to perform a decent routine.

Soon it was time for dress rehearsal. It went very well. Saturday was the opening night of the show. As I waited for my debut, my heart started to race. It was my cue. I pulled myself together and as soon as my shoes hit the floor, all anxiety left. It was time to dance! When I came on for the second time, I embraced my female partner, one of the perks of being a bellerino... I mean danseur, in the spotlight and struck a pose when the choir hit the big number. I loved every moment I spent with all my fellow dancers. I had made friends and did not make a fool of myself.

Now that I had learned to go the distance when trying new things, there came a point where I had to make a choice. Was I going to choose to try and conquer a fear that rates at the top of the top ten fears of our society? The great Comedian Jerry Seinfeld once said, **“According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”** ([30 Funniest Jerry Seinfeld Quotes](http://www.2spare.com/item_61549.aspx) Published on 9/20/2006

http://www.2spare.com/item_61549.aspx) Well, I had already developed the taste buds of a connoisseur, I had turned into twinkle toes on the dance floor, and so why not blow away you all away through public speaking? Can't you tell by my eloquent writing and prose? Why are looking like that? Have I not blown you all away? This is awkward. Moving on.

Yes. Public speaking was and still is the final straw on my list of trying new things. So how did I conquer my fear of public speaking? The company Nike has the slogan *Just Do It*. I figured getting over my fear was no different. I didn't take any classes or read any books; I mean if Christopher Columbus didn't need directions why would I? I walked on to the competition floor like a fish out of water. How'd that speech go? Well halfway through I completely blanked out. Once I recognized this horror, I put my head on the podium like this. I felt like Arnold from the Magic School Bus wishing he had stayed at

home. I eventually finished that speech... like child trying to get through his or hers first haircut. I had to bear the hardship of a loser. I mean I had lost to the only other contestant that showed up. My parents gave me the usual talk, "It's not about winning. It's about having fun." Try telling that to the kid who lost his soccer game by eighteen points. Trying to conquer my fear of public speaking was off to a rough start.

Feeling defeated and downtrodden, I asked for help... from a speech class. It slowly but surely gave me the tools I needed. But it wasn't all sunshine and roses after a year of speech class.

I was asked to speak for one of our churches' middle school classes. I got to the church and realized that I forgot my manuscript. I ended up speaking as well as I could, about as good as a man trying to tell his wife he forgot their anniversary. I had to endure the grief and pain of embarrassment... more embarrassment than when I ripped my pants on Easter Sunday. Even still I trudged on. I decided to try something more challenging. I got involved in competitive debate. In my first tournaments, I was very passionate. (Debate Impression) Some of the judges said I was a little over passionate, but I am sure they appreciated my enthusiasm. I got back involved in speech and took what I had learned to increase my arsenal. Slowly but surely public speaking was a breeze, like the breeze you feel when you're skydiving from 15,000. Now don't get me wrong. I still get nervous. But it's different. It isn't a fear that conquers my spirit.

We can all agree that ballet, sushi and public speaking have a lot in common. Trying new helps us explore and experience new opportunities that help us grow. We can join a Zumba class, eat cow tongue tacos, and even give an after dinner speech. Trying new things can be hard, but take the challenge, you can accomplish more than you think. Before I say goodbye I would like end on a more serious point. It looks to me like you are all adults with Jobs or status of some kind. I have seen many adults, including my parents, get comfortable. They like the consistent paycheck, the same routine every week. But why? Are we to continue to live 9-5 lives? Nope. We are called to live the uncommon life.

Now I am not saying quit your jobs or anything. But when was the last time you tried something new? Did something out of the ordinary, almost or even completely extraordinary! Go bungee jumping! Hike the Appalachian Trail this summer, or at least some of it. Don't say no to the new. You are only saying no to you. My encouragement to you is don't second-guess, but to just dance your way to the sushi bar.

Berean Graduation Speech

Note to Self: Take your time. It would be better to be 8-10 minutes than cramming it into 5 minutes

Good afternoon. It's good to see my fellow classmates one more time before we head out into the big world. As Bilbo Baggins says in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Fellowship of the Ring", "I don't know half of you half as well as I should like, and I like less than half of you half as well as you deserve." (Pause for laughter) ... But seriously it is great to be here.

As I look out at you, my fellow classmates, friends and family I recall so many memories. Some good, some I'm glad to forget. Truth is we are future business leaders, athletes, heroes of society, the next Superman and Wonderwoman (Exaggerate here and pause for audience response) of tomorrow. The comic book heroes never die; they live on, withstanding the harms of time. We, however, do not have an eternity here on planet Earth. We are but a gasp in the melody of life and existence. When we are gone what will we have left behind? What will our legacy be? If this was your funeral today, and you were lying in the casket right behind me what would people say about you? If your friends could describe you in only one sentence what would they say? What would your parents say? What would your special someone say? What would you want them to say? Do you want them to read off your resume, ACT scores or your recent report card? If this was my funeral I am sure that my friends and family would come up here and say, "Justin Brown was focused. He was goal oriented." Whoopee! Was I just too focused on what was next to have time to play Legos with my brothers or go to the store with

my mom? What would your friends and family say about you? “Sarah was (Insert Definite beat here) fill in the blank”. The real question we all need to ask ourselves is “what do we want to be remembered for”.

We all have something as our claim to fame. Whether it’s winning a soccer tournament, even scoring the winning goal, having the best ACT score in our class, being the next YouTube sensation. We even spend hours on Facebook and twitter; you name it, trying to come up with the most liked status that will be talked about in our social circles for the next week. We spend countless amounts of time trying to produce the most heated comment. We have our Internet debates, our selfies. We all want to be noticed. To be seen. But what does it mean to be remembered?

We are entering the second phase of life whether it is entering the work force or going to college or both. I don’t know if it’s just me or not, but I am looking forward to college. I want to get really smart and then start making millions and drive a Lamborghini. (Watch for audience response) But when writing this speech I was struck like a deer in the headlights with the stark reality that all these things shall fade. Grades, accomplishments, statuses, images, you name it. They will not last. They will be forgotten. Even now some of us have already forgotten what we ate for breakfast. What do we want to be remembered for? Our relationships weigh our character. We should be more concerned about what we say to one another than how we dress. Let’s be remembered as the generation that gave it all and took nothing. Let’s live the uncommon life. Let us strive to be above laying up treasures here on earth. When we strive to make an A in Statistics or Global History, we should strive because we want to be in a position to impact others. We live in a world of constant communication and connection. But when was the last time we shared our hearts and cried with one another? How often do we care for someone else? When was the last time we sat down with that elderly couple at church and listened to that story one more time just to be with them and love them? When was the last time we invested our “oh so precious” time and energy and expected nothing back? When?!

When (Powerful Tone Starts here... add suspense and pauses), fellow graduates, will we begin to notice, to see, to feel, to touch the real world, a world of emotions, of feelings, a world that hurts and groans? When? (Slight pause) Now! We don't have to wait. We don't have to wait till we have money, a spouse, children and a car to spend our time investing in others. (Slow it/Chill it here) Relationships, emotional connection and impacts, these are things that last. We cannot wait till tomorrow.

We start now. Now is the time! To invest in others! To impact society! When we do this it will shake the very framework of our global society. College, work, family life, give us the opportunity to start building relationships, impacting people. Let's start now. Will we be remembered for grades? Fortune? Fame? Or will we take the time to listen to another story; sit with a child speak life into a situation that seems hopeless; serve an elderly couple by cleaning their home? It's our choice. Let's not take it lightly let's answer that question, not when college is over, not when graduation is over, let's answer that question now. What will we be remembered for?

Poetry Compilation

A Noble Question

Where does one find his heart?
Is it a place in his soul,
That he cannot live without?
Or is the invisible frame,
That can be torn apart?
For when one is in doubt,
One is sure to find his heart.

-

A Picnic

I like to eat with stork in New York.
He asked to share my pork
But I declined to suggestion,
And went on with my own digestion.

-

The Gargoyle

Amongst the crowds I stand alone,
Dark mysterious idle stone,
Not a whisper do I make,
Nor emotion do I quake,
I stand longing for word,
There is another lonesome bird,
Yet I stand alone

-

What is Inside
Wisdom is being self-aware,
Not being above repute,
But be humble, to serve, to care,
Wisdom is but truth,
Com, look deep inside,
Through pain we slowly unearth,
What do we find?
For there lies the devil's birth

-

A Man

I see in myself confusion and one who is lost,
Not a man but still a boy,
For I can not yet count the cost,
For all I hold dear my flesh seems to destroy,
Can one fight the good fight behind bars?
These bars of concrete flesh and sin?
The sin that leaves these mortal scars?
And only reeks havoc and destruction from
within?
How can a boy become a man?
Is it as simple as a walk in the park?

Or is it a treacherous journey,

Where only one knows the plan?

—

Romance isn't found... it's discovered.

Romance isn't found... it's discovered. You can discover it in the warmth of a wool blanket by the fire on a moon lit night by the lake while you both stare at each others eyes trying to tell if it is a full or crescent moon in the reflection laced across each others pupils while you watch them dilate with affection.

You can discover it in the words you exchange that only the two of you know mean more than what everyone else hears.

You can discover it when the both of you are in each-others embrace, dancing to a love song only listening to the beat of each-others heart waltz with the rhythm of the passion you both feel in your soul.

You can discover it when you are both cooking in the kitchen and as one of you spills something you are there to laugh and kiss him/her and say, "I love you."

You can discover it dancing in the rain, kissing in the rain, not because it's what romantics do, but because you are so in love you don't even know it's raining.

It's discovered when you can't go anywhere without holding hands. Even when you drive around together, just for fun, you hold hands. Even though it's dangerous, you hold hands while the other is driving because you trust them not only with your life, but also with your heart.

It is discovered when you sit down and pray together, praying for each other.

It is discovered when you say, "I'm sorry." And you always reply with, "I forgive you and I will always love you."

It is discovered when you both spend late nights together working out finances and when you have next to nothing left at the end of you can still say, "I will love you forever and always rich or poor."

Amanda J. Carpenter

Sunrises

What is the World Coming To?

Sunrises

A rapid beeping filters into my sleepy mind, and I am drifting in a haze before I recognize the sounds. There is a rustling of cloth and the scraping sound of a nylon sleeping bag on the plastic mattress covers, the immortal, infernal creaking of the camp beds' eternally rusty springs, the soft grunts and puffs of breath that accompany the clearly difficult task of pulling on shoes, all underscored by that incessant beeping. I might roll over and wait for my for my own alarm, five minutes later, but that noise is too effective, and I half-whisper, half groan at my mom to switch it off. More soft noises in the dark tell me we are not the only two awake, but no one else in our troop of girls, even our leader, wanted to be up so early, and there is only one, familiar shape making its way out to the bathroom.

I find my glasses and phone on the window-sill, quickly pulling on my socks and shoes in the dark and running tip-toe after Mom, down the three stairs in one jump and through the small kitchen where mist and tree-rain blots out my reflection in the windows. Mom insists I wear my jacket, which I hate because of how much noise it makes when I move, and even as I argue I am secretly grateful for it when we walk out under the trees. They are still hoarding last night's rain-drops like precious pearls, only to lose their grip over uncovered heads in the chill dark.

We have passed deer in the road before and glimpsed the wandering herd of turkeys that leave their tracks all over the camp, but there's nothing breathing nearby now. Though we are away from the campsite now, we still speak only in whispers, and while we both have flashlights we only use them when the trees blot out the dim glow of the sky. We cut across the field with the flag-pole, and my shoes are soaked in seconds from the dew. We need the flashlights again when we're across, as it's still too dim to easily find the little path to the watch-tower.

I am getting faster as I go—I still haven't learned to slow my pace to match my mother's, which gets slower as we both get older—and I all but run up the stairs to the watch tower, then have to wait for her to come up the stairs, fidgeting in place.

That first flare of gold through the fog is new, when I see it. Alone and unique and un-formed as a newborn child. It ducks between the clouds and the lake's flat horizon, the mountains too distant to block the view. Colors follow after, the same as I've seen before, but somehow more vibrant, more real, here, with my mom, where the trees are free and strong and the water is still with wonder. I start saying it first—"Look"—"Look"—and soon we are both *looking* and pointing, picking out trees as the sun hits them, pointing to the geese flying over the sometimes-island further down the lake, seeing dragons and fiery steeds in the golden clouds. Mom, experienced in these matters, tells me how to look for deer in the tall grass: no luck, but we do see some pressed-down spots where they slept the night before. We make guesses about the neat rows of planted trees we saw on the hike yesterday, deciding they are part of some ecological initiative of the camp's; talk about the Tree-House and how there are only a couple more years before they board it up—it's old, after all, and reaching the edge of safety—and the little stick teepees and lean-tos made for reasons unknown, which have always been around the Tree House and maybe will stay up long after my days are over.

Then, finally, hating to go, we head back to the campsite for breakfast. There's a lot still to do before the sun sets.

What Is the World Coming To?

"Have you heard what that man is doing?"

"That man? Here? Oh, right, his brother. He seems to be doing okay, last I knew. The funeral's Wednesday."

"No, no, not how, what! Did you hear—his plans for the dinner."

"What? You mean for the funeral? What's there to plan about it?"

“He's not going to do it.”

“So, he's going to have it at the wake, then?”

“No, he's not going to do it. His own brother, even!”

“Well, it's not un-heard-of to host the feast with just a few people. It keeps the costs down, and the heavens know that man doesn't have much family left to help with things. Not much of a job, either, with him spending all his time with those—barbarians.”

“Listen, you're not understanding me. He's not having it before the wake or after the wake or three weeks down the line. He's not having it in public, he's not having it in private; he's not having a funeral feast, period.”

“Really! His poor brother!”

“And do you know what he's doing with the body?”

“What?”

“He's going to bury it.”

“In the ground?”

“Yes, in the ground.”

“What, to rot like a criminal? What's he going to do with the bones?”

“No, he's burying him whole!”

“Whole! That's the most disgusting thing I've ever heard in my life! All that life and experience, just... rotting away.”

“Shameful, isn't it?”

“Shameful? It's just wasteful, is what it is! What'll happen to his heart, huh, if no one eats it? What about his strong arms, huh, his clever hands? Where's he going to rest, if his bones are covered in rotting flesh?”

“What I don't understand is what possessed him to do this. What's wrong with a man that he won't eat his own brother after he dies?”

“It's those barbarians, you know. You remember what he said, when he came back for his father's funeral—and a proper one, that; his brother made the arrangements. You remember what he said?”

“Yeah, how could I forget? He dashed off first thing, irresponsible bum, and when we—like concerned neighbors—asked him why he was abandoning his brother with their father's bones hardly cooling, he blamed it on us! Us! When he's the one who ran off to that farcical barbarian school in the first place!”

“Just irresponsible; the whole thing's irresponsible. But he said, at the end he said, 'I feel more welcome with the barbarians than in my own home-town!' Now, look, is that not a classic sign of barbarian madness?”

“Oh, it's madness, alright, but he was never quite right. Always such a lazy child, you know how he was... always scribbling and talking crazy. It wasn't his father or his mother, rest their clean bones—unlike his brother, hmph! It wasn't his brother, either. His whole family, while he was playing with his papers, they were working hard in the fields to feed and clothe him with the sweat of their brows. I always said he wasn't right... we tried, didn't we? We tried to warn his poor parents, help them set him on the right path.”

“Too late, now, even if they were still alive. The barbarians have him, completely. What else would compel a man to abandon his family, his town, and seek the company of total strangers? Why else would he spend a fortune to stuff his head with nonsense, when his poor family is forced to send him money to live? Why else would a man refuse to let anyone eat his own brother? Really, what *is* the world coming to?”

"It's partly our fault, you know, for not stopping it all sooner. I feel so guilty about it. There's got to something we can do."

"Only one thing, you know. I can't even think about it, almost."

"Is it really that bad?"

"You know how it has to be. You came to me, didn't you? You know how it takes them, how it spreads. One wild idea, and, before you know, they're leaving left and right for that blasted barbarian city. Our safety's at stake. What happens if your son follows after him, huh? Your daughter?"

"You've convinced me. When he dies, I'm not eating him, and I'm not letting my wife touch him, either!"

"No, that's not enough. If he drives someone else as mad as him, we'll be right back where we started."

"You're right. We can't keep this to ourselves. Let's divide up the neighborhood. You take north, I'll go south."

"It's got to be done. When he dies, he's going to *rot*."

Anita D. Dixon

I Am from Technology

I Am from Technology

I am from a technology generation
where smartphones and tablets
run the world.

Where family and education
are second to none.

I am from a social media frenzy,
from Twitter and Facebook accounts
to Instagram posted "selfies."

Every piece of information,
blasted for the world to see.

I am from a place where personal

means public,

and nothing rings true

unless confirmed online.

I am from a virtual world

where people are more themselves

through a video game persona.

Without it some would be nothing.

It has shaped the world,

one pixel at a time.

Technology is where I am from.

Brenna Edwards

Fleeting Stare

Remember

Fleeting Stare

Last night, I swore you knew

The way we locked eyes, and didn't look away

The way I held onto you

As we both swayed closer, and not away

But then I remembered:

You were high and she was there.

So that moment we shared?

Nothing more than a fleeting stare.

Remember...?

Remember the days where all we talked about was running away to New York or L.A.?

Planning how we would support ourselves day by day, you playing your guitar, singing so sweetly; me working somewhere so neatly.

Then we'd go back to our cute little apartment, say goodnight, then depart.

As I would spend my nights wishing I was with you in the next room over, praying you would stick your head through the crack in my door, and softly whisper, "Hey, I can't sleep, will you scoot over?"

My heart explodes as you quietly climb under the sheets; close, but not too close, just toes lightly brushing toes.

Remember the night you asked if we could hide a dog beneath your desk? I said, "Of course, yes."

Because then it would be our secret, a tiny little dog, ours to keep it safe, fed, and warm. I would do my darndest to keep you both safe from harm.

Because you and that dog and our dream runaway is a thought that keeps me sane some days. The days I'm stressed and miss you, that one daydream keeps me going and hoping that one day, maybe I'll be lucky enough to be with you.

Remember the night you asked me to stay? I was all packed up, ready to walk away.

But instead I decided to stay, and we talked and listened to music as the hours ticked away.

As I left, you said, "Thank you." I smiled as I left, called over my shoulder, "Anytime for you."

...remember that dance, the moment I knew? That I don't want to miss a thing with you.

Believe it or not, you're a star, and you're going to go places, near and far.

I hope I still know you when you achieve your dreams; it will be beautiful to behold, just like your soul.

Maybe I will, maybe I won't. Who knows what the future holds?

All I know is that I want to hold you until we both grow old.

Sarah Foy

Colored Faces

Colored Faces

It was during the peaceful time, after all the white protestors forgot why they were holding up signs, that the heads started showing up. At the start there were only one or two at a time, but the city felt tense. Convinced the killer could be anywhere, parents held onto their kids tighter than usual as they walked through the crowded sidewalks in the central part of the city, and no one went anywhere alone. Three weeks after the first murder happened, the Recreation Center that my mom headed up when I was in elementary school became the central crime scene.

The underclassmen at West Peak High School had state testing this particular morning, so all the seniors got to come in after lunch. I ate as I walked to class, mostly looking at the mushy, autumn leaves under my feet. A slick stream of highlighter yellow appeared instantly, and I followed its trail to a fence of crime scene tape around the perimeter of the Center. Behind the tape, hundreds of heads lined the walls of the worn building. It took me a minute, but after the initial shock of seeing heads unattached to their bodies, I began to recognize some of the faces— all white, all belonging to protestors I had seen gathered around in the busiest parts of the city earlier this year. Now, I'm pretty sure that's who the heads belonged to. Honestly, it was hard to tell because each face was painted with various colors and markings similar to warriors in artwork from my history textbook depicting the Haitian Revolution. Another surge of shock came over me, and I turned away from the scene and puked up my lunch on the side of the road.

I remember when the riots started a few states over from mine. I came home from school to find my mom standing, stone faced, in front of our television flashing clips of chaos. It took less than two minutes for her to get angry enough to turn it off. She said, "I'm just glad your grandma isn't around to see all this again."

My mom is half Haitian— her mom lived in a small town just outside of Port-au-Prince, the

nation's capital, until she was nineteen and a white missionary, whom she quickly fell in love with, married her and took her back to the States with him. Grandma always said only a fool would bring a black girl to America in the sixties. Though my grandpa was a good man, mom was always bitter about that. She held onto the Haitian traditions grandma taught her— recipes, clothing, even religion. As a kid, I would ask about the figurines of the saints she had scattered around the house; I went to a Catholic school until the ninth grade, but few of the figures looked familiar. She said they belonged to Haiti's version of Catholicism. I was never allowed in her office at the Recreation Center because that's where she did a lot of her praying and stuff. It confused me why she kept me so far from the tradition of this Haitian religion, but when the riots started, I began to understand. I think she believed it would be safer for me here if I was white.

Shortly after that day, a pattern of police brutality emerged throughout the country, and my mom rarely turned on the TV. My Twitter feed was flooded with posts saying #blacklivesmatter and the social activists in the city, always looking for a new cause, took to the streets. The kids at school took a sudden interest in my race.

"My grandma was from Haiti."

"I don't know who my dad is."

"Yes. He was white."

My friend Raya, who was about as Anglo-Saxon as it gets with her perfect, porcelain skin and her parents' seemingly inexhaustible bank account, seemed to care more about all the attention I was getting than I did. She always cared about everything more than I did, especially when it came to race. Raya was the president of the Racial Reconciliation club, which she started as a sophomore, and led monthly conversations about working through racism and prejudice among the student body.

"They're all ridiculous. No one cared about where your parents were from two weeks ago," she spoke with her mouth full, too fired up to care about manners. Pointing across the cafeteria with

a french fry, Raya said, “And those kids sitting with Nayaleigh are the same ones who made fun of her name last month. Everyone’s so afraid of ‘being on the wrong side of history’ that they’re finally treating people how they should have in the first place. It’s not going to last.”

I told my mom that story, and she nodded her head in agreement. She’s always loved Raya.

Ray was right— it wasn’t long before people settled back into their normal ways again. Kids at school found a new wave of humor to Nayaleigh’s name. The white protestors held up new signs demanding healthier school lunches for their children. The people who had talked to my mom about funding the Recreation Center again to “give those inner city kids a safe place off the streets to have fun and do school work” never called back.

An officer at the crime scene told me to get off the streets and go home, so I did, as fast as I could, stopping to heave every few blocks. Back at the house, I sat on my couch for days waiting for news to flood in. A strict curfew was set for everyone in the city. Everyone over the age of eighteen was allowed outside of their homes for one hour every week to get groceries and only if there was an adult at home to supervise any minors. Outside the window in my room facing Second Avenue, a major street on the West side of the city, garbage was piled like a barricade on the sidewalks and I saw no one on the road for blocks. Despite the new laws, the heads of white civilians were still showing up at the Recreation Center alongside previously found heads that had supposedly been taken in for examining already. The lawn had turned into a sea of colored faces. Information came out in slow, sparse leaks, and the more I read online, the less sleep I got. I stopped sleeping altogether the day a new batch of heads was identified as West Peak High School students. It couldn’t be Raya, but I called her house, just in case. Her mom answered, saying that Raya was asleep but assuring me she was home, safe and sound. Online, there was one leaked picture, and I recognized a girl from my art class. I had only spoken to her once when she asked me if I was “part black.” In the article with the leaked picture, the writer mentioned that none of the parents ever saw their children

leave the house. I knew the trend of killings was of white people, but how was the killer supposed to know that I was one-fourth Hai- tian? Would I be next?

My mom spent regular time everyday locked in her bedroom. I figured she was praying to her Haitian gods, so I prayed to my Catholic one.

One night, I couldn't tell you the day of the week, I had lost track by then, the mayor came on the television. His words came out polished, but his eyes were weary, as if he hadn't slept in months as he announced, "The police department of our great city has been working tirelessly to find the killer of these four thousand, four hundred innocent civilians. There is, um... no trace of DNA on any of the remains and the paint which colors the faces of the victims is made up of berries and vegetation that do not grow in this region or, to our knowledge, anywhere in this great country. The police chief and his officers are at a dead end." People in the audience began to murmur, and the mayor started looking from side to side, losing his composure. He cleared his throat, "The chief and I, we believe the situation can no longer be contained. An evacuation of the city will begin in the next few days—"

I turned the TV off and went to the laptop in my room that was charging on my bed. The sun was setting outside my window, making dreamy shadows across my gray walls. Despite my eyelids getting heavy, I scoured online forums for more speculated information about what the police had or hadn't found.

Where are the bodies????!?? (245 comments below)

PROOF alienz ARE behind it! (436 comments below)

Recreation Center is HAUNTED (208 comments below)

I clicked on the post and read under the title, "The Recreation Center used to be a segregated funeral home! Angry black ghosts are murdering innocent white people..."

Shaking my head, I exited that page and went back to the title links.

Black supremacist alien magic

THEORIES ON THE BODIES

12 Reasons why Vodou Priests are behind the killings

This particular link caught my eye, but before I could open it, I fell asleep.

When I woke up, I was in a bright, blue room and an unfamiliar bed.

Kelly E. Maddie

January 11

Milwaukee

Please Respect Our Decadence

Video Silence

January II

I choke on the new year as it comes in like a tide
all rolling and burning thick and morose
like a tide of boiling water for making tea
at four in the morning, my mom's kitchen
dark except for the porch lights and echoing
with my thoughts as they pass. I choke on the weight
around my neck all broken-glass summers
and Merry Christmases and waiters tripping
over their own feet, my order flying through the air.
heavy coughing times and albatrosses and pearls
all through the burning spring, a new year
made of a bang AND a whimper and an apology
for the wrongs of last year and the forever days,
the days of chiding and loveless restless weakness
in my mother's kitchen making coffee now
and wiping my hands on her good towels.
Thick grass and thick weeds and a concrete winter
and minty breath and a nighttime glow
of fast-food joints through the southern darkness
with ramps all lit-up, orange parking garages
lamp-lit with Wednesday pallor, broken-down cars
stuck in their places, white plates waiting
on lace tablecloths, men dreaming in wooden beds,
late-night early-morning commerce Wall St nightmares

under beds waiting in closets. Heavy weight
choking the breath out of me when I go to buy bread
every Saturday and the supermarket line is long.
We look for shoes in the alleys and there are none;
we wait outside and watch the painted clouds
and the graffiti on the walls purple ink blue streets
sunsets penciled in on the ashy greyness
of evening, our breaths drenched in cold and visible
coming from our mouths, the depths of our coats
as we walk arm-in-arm down the quietness,
dodging telephone poles, sucking in the smoky air
and detritus of factory nights like fireflies
lighting up the buildings with tiny fires of nothing
but lost things in the winter and nothing else
important, nothing real, just broken wheels
and tangerines and gravel stuck in the soles of our boots;
we are walkers of a different street than this one
and the night closes in on the thickness
that chokes out the new year and my breath
is stolen: January, too, is restless.

Milwaukee

In the gourmet emptiness of a cold Midwestern night
I could taste her sweat, and the remnants
of the makeup she had so carefully applied
this morning. Snowflakes pressed briefly

against the diner window, over and over,
showing up as little points of disappearing white
in the unending dark outside, broken only occasionally
by headlights, or the door opening and shutting
when another worker left. A woman wiped tables
in the corner. Methodical, quiet, strong
were her strokes with the rag. She did not turn.
There was no music; the world was muffled
and waiting for our held breaths to be released,
and on our shared breath the taste of coffee
and loneliness, the things on which such a diner
subsists. Inside the place it was yellow-dark
and in the back, a lone cook moved,
his silhouette sometimes passing the service window;
we stared in opposite directions
as our hands tightened damp grips
and our cheeks grew heavy with one another's tears
and sweat, the salty burn of sitting too close
yet still with the sticky table between us.

Please Respect Our Decadence

Oh the thick wet dreams that haunted my sleep
in bone-winter nights, an age ago;
Adrienne and I drift on brassy seas
that sink us, effortless, then overflow—
and she and I retreat to baths we know.

A pan of Somethings boils on the stove;
the two of us, we watch it like the eye
of a storm gathering to strike – and yet,
though tin roofs shudder, and overhead, sky
curdles and broils and groans, the dirt stays dry.

Video Silence

Her eyes fixed on the cold curdling of summer
like sour milk, like milk at the end of its life
and the worms start to spawn in it. Her eyes
fixed on the horizon all violetblack with winter night
and snow that hadn't started yet and wouldn't end
till the winter was over forever, but winter
is never over, not in the eyes of the beholder,
the mover through time and space, with her hands
like frozen icicles of flesh, stuck out the screen door
with its mesh torn ragged, warped metal frame,
her thoughts not on the flesh. the flesh
secondary to the immaterial concept of living
and the coldness of the void
that exists even in the summer, but in the summer
there is no violetblack sky invading
through warped screen doors, to break fingers
like twigs and to curdle the heat like sour milk
into a long shivering night. Fence posts

like broken teeth protrude from the aching ground
to penetrate, to penetrate the glassy constant
of the winteriness of things, like broken teeth
in a mouth made of unfallen snow, the roof of it
made of nothing but storm clouds and darkness
and the quiet rasp of metal, the door

against the doorframe, metal and wood, sourness
of existing, of breathing, of anything
that requires success. For her to shut the door
would be to admit that this night will have no heat
and the sinks will run cold.

Stacy E. MARMON

Ryan

Ryan

What is it about children that can make the coldest of hearts turn soft? Perhaps, it is their utter innocence that can only be preserved for a rather short period in time. A child is only a child for so long, before the world transforms them into just another one of us. The saddest thing that can occur is when a child is forced to make this transition too soon. They're robbed of their "time," just as the gelada baboon robs her unborn child of its "time."



A gelada baboon is a peculiar creature that also hides a disturbing pattern within each and every one of them. According to scholars, Akio Mori, Gurja Belay, and Toshitaka Iwamoto, the gelada's formal name is *Theropithecus gelada*, but it is commonly referred to as the "bleeding-heart baboon (*Primates* 217). How did this

particular ape earn its nickname? Well for starters, *Theropithecus* is derived from the Greek root words for "beast-ape" (Mori, Belay, and Iwamoto 217).

The alpha-male gelada has a history of living a gruesome lifestyle. When a male gelada baboon takes over a breeding group from a previous male, he usually exterminates any offspring of the former union (Mori, Belay, and Iwamoto 218). In a desperate attempt to spare their babies unjustified hardship after they're born, some female geladas will abort the lives of their unborn descendants (Mori, Belay, and Iwamoto 218).

Prior to the 1950s, people who viewed these primates, looked upon them as innocent beings. It was not until 1959, when biologist, Hilda Bruce, discovered the breeds' alarming behaviors. She referred to it as the "Bruce effect" (Mori, Belay, and Iwamoto 218). Primates are not the only species comprising the animal kingdom, whom are capable of committing monstrosities. Even seemingly innocent birds of various species have been found to carry out mortifying infanticides.



Take the coot bird, for example. Basically, nine to ten of them are born at a time. J.A. Horsfall writes in *Animal Behaviour* about how coots are not birds of prey, so most of the meals that the parents can scrounge up are unsatisfactory parcels of various insects (216). The parents attempt to evenly distribute fruitless nuggets of food amongst their malnourished chicks. The little chicks remain hungry, and by now are protesting nonstop about it

(Horsfall 217).

After several tantrum-filled days, the demonic side of the parents becomes increasingly prominent. Coot parents, unable to handle the responsibility of feeding such a boisterous brood, start attacking their own children -- biting them on the head and making it impeccably clear that the soup's off (Horsfall 217).

Eventually, the negligent parents stop attacking their brood as a whole. Instead, they zoom in on whomever they feel is the weakest. The weakest link of the brood then gets bitten, pecked, and shunned, every time it yells for food. The frail, feeble chick finally gets the point and keeps quiet. Unfortunately, this does not mean an invite back to the dinner table. The little bird has officially been repudiated, and anything it does will simply invite more violence upon itself. The sole option, being a defenseless baby, is to slink off and gradually die of starvation (Horsfall 217). This cycle of singling out the weakest link continues, until the coot count whittles down to an acceptable level -- namely, two or

three chicks. The hardships of the gelada and the coot are usually able to draw emotion out of those who become educated on their situations. However, many people continue to remain oblivious to the various otiosities that remain ever-present in our society today.

From visiting an under-privileged school in the metropolitan area of Nashville, I had the opportunity to meet a little boy with frazzled, blonde hair. I visited the school in an effort to satisfy my requirement of a senior project during my last year of high school. The little boy with frazzled hair had the palest blue of eyes. In fact, they resembled two shallow puddles of ocean water from the South Pacific. His arms exemplified two pale, frail twigs, which hinted toward signs of malnourishment.

After a few days of visiting this particular classroom, I began to notice that the little boy, who had initially grabbed my attention, was accustomed to being the center of focus. He had earned himself a permanent seat that had him faced towards a wall, because he constantly disrupted the rest of the class with his antics.

Ryan was a brilliant kid, but he withheld any sort of intentions in applying himself to his education. He was constantly made the outlier amongst his peers. During recess, Ryan could always be found playing imaginary games alone. In class, he constantly strived for attention by making his fellow classmates laugh at him. Ryan always managed to wear thin on his teacher's patience because of that. Ryan had an almost permanent home inside of the principal's office due to his failure to comply by the rules.

Ryan did many obscene things, which earned himself the stigma as the "bad kid." He remained the constant subject of the faculty, so not many people favored Ryan. However, Ryan secretly became my favorite of the children in that particular class of students. I saw a part of myself in him; except, Ryan's antics topped my own during my days as a child. I wanted to figure out what exactly it was, which caused the boy with frazzled hair to be so desperate for attention from his peers. Eventually, my own question was answered by his teacher.

At the age of three, Ryan was made to be a witness of an amiss crime. His biological mother was a drug addict who did not handle her post-pardon depression too well after giving birth to Ryan's little brother. Just after giving birth, Ryan's mother took Ryan and his little brother out to the backyard. She then proceeded to dispose of her newborn baby's body by burying it in the backyard, all with Ryan watching.

After hearing Ryan's story, a sense of sympathy overwhelmed me. He was a young child without the presence of a mother or father. It later became apparent that he also was without proper authority figures. His current caretakers did not value Ryan whatsoever. He was deemed a burden in their eyes. The only food that Ryan received was from the school. He went home, only to wish for tomorrow to hurry, so that he could eat again.

Many of the faculty at that public school in Nashville were aware of Ryan's situation. Interestingly enough, the lack of understanding that they felt for him was obvious. They basically turned the other way and ignored it, just as the female gelada baboons ignore their alpha-male by just complying with his own selfish wants. The teachers ignored Ryan's troubles, just as the coot bird parents eliminate their excess offspring, instead of facing the issue at hand.

You never know the battles that a person goes through on a daily basis. Many battles that are fought involve the lives of innocent minds. Ryan's mother terminated her newborn child in an effort to alleviate her own psychological problems. In the process, his mother also managed to subject Ryan to the viewing of a gruesome act, which permanently altered his own life in ways unimaginable. The victims of domestic violence, such as Ryan, deserve to have their voices heard, because more awareness on the topic will lead to a better understanding. How much longer will kids like Ryan be ignored? We all view the gelada baboons and the coot bird parents terminating their unwanted offspring as sickening. However, the general population fails to acknowledge the horrific acts of violence that are happening

daily, and are immensely affecting the innocent beings of our own species. Children, such as Ryan, are not problems of society, but are actually victims of society.

Works Cited

Horsfall, J.A. "Brood Reduction and Brood Division in Coots." *Animal Behaviour* 32.1. Elsevier Ltd. Print. 1984: 216-25.

Lieberman, Shayna. "Photo Contest 2014." Advertisement. *National Geographic*. 07 July 2014: 25.

Mori, Akio, Gurja Belay, and Toshitaka Iwamoto. "Changes in Unit Structures and Infanticide Observed in Arsi Geladas." *Primates* 44.3. Springer-Verlag. Print. 2003: 217-23.

Moul, Bob. "American Coot." Advertisement. *National Geographic*. February 2007: 43.

Hillary Martín

Arcade

I am a Lady

Parke Bench

Tenebrous Material

Arcade

Clink, the silver ball falls into its place

above a spring coil.

Agile thumbs send silver into spinning motion.

Clink, stop calling him.

Clink, 500 points.

Clink, your mom called again.

Sphere disappears.

TRY AGAIN?

Clink, religious recycle

awaiting rejuvenation.

Clink, -50 points.

Clink, you're failing your classes again.

Clink, I'm terrified of dying alone.

Clink, another ball falls.

Clink, 20 points. Clink clink, 15 points. Clink, 1,000 points. Clink, daddy said he loved you.

Twin sister silver loses its flow,

continues its downward spiral.

Heart race slows.

Thumbs fling circles of constant contamination.

Clink, -5 points.

25, 234 points until you beat your own

high score.

Clink, rape.

Clink, you'll never be good enough.

Clink, you're so damn dirty.

50 points until you'll reach your old high score.

Clink, his clothes hitting the floor.

Clink, she promised.

Clink, 12 missed calls.

Clink, forget his name.

Sweaty fingers

slip.

Ovoid becomes avoided.

TRY AGAIN?

I am a Lady

I am a lady.

My legs are the roots,

That lead to the stems,

Where the essence of being a lady blooms.

I am bodaciously beautiful

With curves in all the right places,

but my hour glass frame is not an arrow saying "Look here."

I am a lady.

My skin is soft to the touch,

But my eyes have grown hard because

people tell me that I am not lady like enough.

Enough.

My thighs touch and my arms jiggle.

My shirts can be too tight

and sometimes I have to wiggle

into my favorite pair of jeans that accentuate that

I am a lady.

My mouth sometimes forms the word fuck

and I have been known to walk without shoes on days

where my soul begs to be free.

To be me.

Then someone sees the dirt on my knees, the twig in my curls.

The giant tshirt hiding my lady like curves.

And they call me, a tomboy.

Because a lady does not dig for treasure in the dirt

or walk with bare feet into the depths of a creek..

But so what if I choose to wear my bones on the outside of my kaleidoscope skin,

look into my broken prisms.

See my depth that lies within because there

I am always a lady.

Cross your legs, don't slouch or spit.

Know how to use a broom

but always hide your wit because

thats the most dangerous thing that a lady can hold.

Shh... Don't speak unless spoken to.

Hold your breath in while you're at it too.

You look slimmer that way.

Make sure you show some skin,

But not enough that it causes HIM to sin.

Bow your head and pray,

Pray that no one finds out that you lost what they taught makes you a lady.

Close your eyes, don't let him see that you're not into it.

Let him feel like a man because you are his lady.

Hold your head high, but not high enough that it surpasses him.

Never forgetting that you are a lady.
Stand in line so they can check off their list,
making sure that you're falling into what they call being a
lady.
A lady must be this.
A lady must be that.
Bitch keep your box,
I'm not stepping into it.
Light that box on fire,
watch as the flames disintegrate it.

Park Bench

Hi, my name is Percy Boone
and I've been serving you
for twenty seven years now.
I've seen small butts,
And round butts,
Big ole shake the ground butts.
I've seen smelly butts
And fake butts,
someone needs to jump in the lake butts.
Last month,
Two people sat on me and I closed my eyes tight
Listened to them talk about how their love was now out of
sight

And not in the good way.
When they sat down their hands touched,
But she peeled her fingers from between hers and I felt
raindrops fall from the sky.
So the one with the long blonde curls ran,
While the brunette stayed seated
and let her tears fall in unison with the clouds.
Two days ago,
One butt bumped into me,
And didn't even have the decency to say sorry.
So I jabbed a piece of wood into her thumb,
And she cursed me for days.
A couple years ago,
He coaxed her onto me, and he slid his arm around
But she kept her feet firmly on that ground
While he tried to pull her close,
she tried to scoot away
But he tightened his grip and she fell to her knees,
Prayed to God that someone would hear her screams
But the sun was down,
And no one comes to the park when it's dark
(Except druggies and horny kids).
But today someone came and sat,
carved their initials into me just like that.
Pulled apart the layers of my skin. Now I'm marked.

JCS WUZ HERE.

But he wasn't here long enough to realize that I had felt his

skin on mine,

And that he'd be with me permanently.

When I was young they painted me green

Resembling the tree

They cut me from.

But storms have come and washed away

The majority of the paint.

I've been frozen in snow,

Watched the grass grow,

And all the children

Have children of their own.

I've been serving butts

For twenty-seven years now.

I've never gone anywhere

But God, I have seen the earth move.

Tenebrous Material

There's a tornado in my skull

Pink color is stained on bone,

While thoughts are ripped from my cerebral matter.

I cannot seem to make sense

of everything that is happening to me.

Hands on hardwood holding myself steady.

Keep the boat we're on steady

so that there are no rattled skulls.

Can you hear me?

I feel this in my bones.

You say I'm not making sense,

then why does any of this matter?

"Love is all that matters."

Someone hold me steady,

All this profound wisdom finally makes earth shattering
sense.

Please use my skull,

to soak up all the knowledge you have spilled, into my
bones.

The more you speak the more you astound me.

I cannot see me,

my eyes are clotted with matter.

I'm tired of standing on sore bones.

Hold onto counter tops to keep me steady,

but I slipped and cracked my skull.

Blood on tile is the only thing that makes sense.

Sense

Me.

Let me tip toe into your skull.
You're the only thing to matter.
But I cannot hold you steady,
and the wind knocks you down, breaking bones.

Graveyards full of bone.
The ghosts can sense
that my heart beat is not steady.

The Grim Reaper is coming for me,
but his presence doesn't matter
because I've already opened up my own skull.

Can't anyone save me?
There is so much dark matter
filling up the crevices in my skull.

Chelsea M. Mathes

August

Cosmic Kiss

No Longer Sweet

August

Oh, August,
with your warm nights,
comforting walls of knowledge,
Where be you?
on this eve of June.
Basking in the sun perhaps.
This suffocating sun.
You have a sun too, August.
A sun, though, that brings the brightness
of new beginnings
rather than the burning of lonely nights.
Relaxing next to September perhaps.
In some cool wood.
Just waiting for your first day.
Just biding your time
until reluctant young minds
come dragging their feet
at your mercy.
Cooking up some new feats perhaps.
Some new challenges.
Some new dares.
Getting ready some new games.
Teasing me with your joyful,

stressful nights.

Oh, August.
Where be you?
On this eve of June.
Come back to me, my sweet.
I long to walk with you
down a crowded street.
Bring me some love.
Some news.
Some knowledge.
Bring me some nights
filled to the brim with espresso
and laughter.
Oh, August.
Where be you?
Why do you run?

Cosmic Kiss

How many sunrises have I missed?
All because I'm star kissed.
All because the cool
pull of the moon
makes me swoon.
All because wine tastes
better in the dark.

What is dark anyway?
Besides the absence of light?
The shade of my heart?
The color of my soul?
Or the hue of your eyes?
Of his eyes?
A sunrise means the death
of stars.
The dimming of that late night
sparkle glowing
in your eyes
as you kiss me—
a sweet whiskey kiss
on my dripping lips.
And I fall
down the rabbit hole.
Down. Down. Down.
I go.
And time goes
with me
not as a companion
or guide
but as my own
personal hell.

I've missed two decades
of God painting the sky
all because
my coffee isn't strong enough.
All because the exploding
cosmos dance
across my skin
until they find a way in—
slowly killing me.
And finally,
I find myself
resting at the feet
of all comfort, childlike joy,
and pure love;
like this, I read poetry
desperately clinging
to all the sunrises
I missed
not even realizing
all the stars I've kissed.

No Longer Sweet

What has become of us?
That our love of life
is so diminished.

That our brilliance

is dulled.

That our adventurous spirits

are tamed.

That our beautiful souls

rarely see beauty anymore.

That our lips

cease to utter lovely words.

That our hands

no longer touch gently.

That our hearts

are cold, hardened.

That our temperaments

are no longer sweet but bitter and harsh.

That our minds

are closed.

What has the world done to us?

What have WE done to us?

Stuart Neal

Dry it up

Dry It Up

I am far from the unluckiest human.

As I sit in geography listening to Mr. Stout on his twentieth lecture about mountainvalleyoceanvolcanoes, I want to throw continents at C. J. Cazee for staring me up and down and then shaking his head in shame like I'm LeBron James and just announced I'd rather be a painter.

"What a waste," he whispers to Brittany Bray, who nods her head dramatically. This, after I watched him spend an entire forty-five minutes drawing dicks all over his notebook page and showing them to Seth Dow so they could crack up for I have no idea what reason, so who is actually the waste here?

I follow his gaze down to my feet as he looks me over again, squinting his eyes. I have on black shoes that Mom bought me at Walmart, black jogging pants that some lady at work gave her in a trash bag of used clothes, a long sleeve shirt covered in skulls from the same bag, and a black wrist band that I have made sure is visible by sliding my right sleeve up just enough. I had spent most of middle school with hair so blonde it blinded people probably, and today is the first day they are seeing me with my newly dyed brown shaggy head, the darkest brown I could find because Mom refused to let me get black.

I wish I could say I'm standing up and punching him in the face and snickering as I get sent to the principal's office, but I have no spine or any other bones really, so I just sit there and let him shake his head and imagine how cool it would be to watch South America land on his stupid face. I actually think I hear it crashing through the roof for a second, but it's only the bell, which I'm equally thankful for because, hey, class sucks no matter where you are on the social hierarchy of Martinsville East Middle School. Our mascot is an artesian. I've been here three years and I have no idea what that means.

I'm the first one out of class (as usual) because I walk around this place like a cheetah, if the cheetah was surrounded by teachers who pretend to care about you and really all they do is yell at you

for chewing gum and refuse to let you run at the speed of light to your locker to avoid actually interacting with a school full of kids who hate you. I keep my head down so I don't have to look at anyone, because that greatly decreases the chances of me having to talk to someone, and make my way as fast as possible to the cafeteria, aka pretty much the whole world.

The cafeteria is the kind you see in movies, each group of friends staking claim to their own tables for the entire year. The preppy jock douche bags need the two longest, largest tables because popularity is contagious in this school but somehow I am immune. If you sit in someone else's seat, get ready to be zapped into nonexistence.

The lunch line is always approximately seven billion miles long because all of eighth grade goes to lunch at the same time, so you get a lot of time to stand in line and map out where you're gonna sit. Everyone starts throwing each other super obnoxious glances and screaming, "Save me a seat!"

Except for me. It helps to actually have friends who want to see you before you scream across the lunchroom at them.

"What's up, man?"

Nick Sk8rboi Dodson comes up behind me in line.

"Hi," I say, because I don't know how to talk like a normal teenage guy. They say things like what's up, bro, duuuuuuuuuude, and all I can say is "hi" like I'm five years old and hiding behind my mom's leg as a creepy cousin at a family reunion tells me how tall I've gotten. Nick is actually not a total dick to me. He lets me sit with him at lunch if there's room after all his other friends get there, which is really great because there is nothing worse than walking around with a tray of food and watching everyone stare at you and throw their legs up into the seats next to them so you can't sit down.

"What class you coming from, dude?"

I usually stare at his hair instead of his mouth when he talks to me. It is golden and shiny, the perfect skater style like all the emo bands do it. Sometimes it's hard to hear him talking because his hair

sings screamo music at full volume all day long. He also asks me the same question *every single day*, which leads me to believe that he has not once actually heard me when I answer him. Right now he's dating Taylor Wood, my ex-girlfriend from fifth grade, which basically wasn't a relationship so much as someone to talk to on the phone and listen to Green Day with. But still, if I had any actual masculine aura about me I would puff up my chest or something around him to show how much I don't care that he's dating the one girl in all of history who ever looked at me like something other than a potato.

"Math," I lie, to see if he'll even notice.

He swoops his hair to the side of his head, scanning the room and probably looking for Taylor.

"Cool. Me too," he says, still not looking at me. We have math together next period.

I finally get through the line with chicken nuggets. They are only good thing about our cafeteria. East Middle School has two forms of currency: any flavor of gum, and the crispy, golden nuggets that are rumored to be laced with crack. Anyway, I follow Nick towards his table because I let him get in front of me so he could talk to some guy in line about skateboards. As we weave through the crowd, he throws head nods and "sups" to everyone we pass, and I stare at my cup of watered down Kool-Aid, pretending I don't hear Austin Smith say, "Faggot" as I walk by, and all his friends start laughing. *Say that to me again and I'll slam your head into the table until your skull implodes and you bleed all over your Hollister hoodie*, I say to him, except I only say it in my head. Out loud, I look up at and laugh with them as if he said some hilarious joke and I wasn't the punch line. Like I said, NO. SPINE.

We get to Nick's table, and there is exactly one open seat. This one open seat is without a doubt his, even though most of the kids sitting around it are people I was friends with since first grade and he met when we were all twelve. He sits down, looks at me like he's so super sorry, and starts shoving chicken nuggets down his face. Everyone else stares at me and says nothing, including Taylor.

"What's up," I try.

“It’s not cool when you say it,” she replies, knives flying out of her mouth and shredding open my chest. Blood spatters all over Nick’s food but no one even notices. God, this place is hell.

I don’t really have anywhere else to go, not even beside weird Jacob who dips his chocolate Pop-Tarts in nacho cheese, because basically every other table would probably crowd surf me straight into a trashcan or a volcano if available, so I throw my food away and sit in the hallway. The only bench that isn’t full is right by the front doors of the school, and the cold air cuts right through the black jogging pants.

I am far from the unluckiest human. But sometimes I think I’m even farther from the luckiest.

Later during the day, I notice that a whole group of the popular kids are wearing the exact same shirt, with the letters *CIY* branded across the chest. They’re all huddled together, laughing and talking about what they’re gonna do next weekend. One guy, Beau Shields, is a football player and probably the most popular guy in school. His friend Charlie is talking about going fishing and Beau responds, “Hell yeah, man. Fishing is all about gettin’ drunk and shit.” Except we are fourteen years old and I don’t think he has a clue what fishing is about other than stabbing worms to death, but all his friends laugh at him anyway. Whatever.

When I get to class I look up the letters from their t-shirts online and find *Christ In Youth* across the website, with the same logo that is on their chests. I don’t give it much thought because I know zero things about Christ or anything they talk about behind church walls because I’ve never been to one, but these kids seem a lot meaner than Jesus, if Jesus was anything like people say he was.

“She’s so hot,” I hear Austin Smith saying behind me. One of the best parts of my life is that I get to have class with him every day right after lunch, so he gets twice the time to insult me and say things that make me question whether his IQ is even a number. “Dude, have you even *seen* her?”

“I know, man. I’d tap it.” Beau Shields has come to the rescue yet again with more things to say from his fourteen-year-old mouth that he knows nothing about. Unless he does? Do fourteen year olds do that stuff already? Did I miss something?

Austin turns toward me. “What you think, Stu? Would you bang her?” 1. He calls me “Stu”. Puke. 2. Shut up. 3. SHUT UP.

“Probably not,” I say, a magazine of some model I’ve never seen before thrust into my face. She looks like a Barbie actually, which has never appealed to me much.

He rolls his eyes and pulls the magazine back. “Of course not, because you’re a faggot.”

I turn back around, pretending he doesn’t exist. Mr. Wolfe, who is only feet away, looks up at us for a second before going back to grading papers on his desk.

“Ohhhh, now he’s mad. Don’t be mad, Stu. It’s okay to be a fag.”

Because I am 100% sure that I would lose in a fight with basically anyone in the whole school, I ignore him for the rest of class. Mr. Wolfe doesn’t look back up. Aren’t teachers supposed to do something when they hear things like this? The bell rings, and thank God it’s time to go to study hall, where it’s a requirement to sit in silence for an entire hour and I get to read my books without anyone calling me a nerd. It may or may not be books about Buffy the Vampire Slayer, so I try to hide the covers to avoid further harassment.

It sounds selfish to say, given that there are earthquakes and floods and world hunger causing endless problems, but I am stuck in a life I do not want. My mom works second shift, so she goes to work right before I get home from school, and she gets home right when I have to go to bed. This sucks because she is pretty much my only friend. We live with another woman named Penny and her daughter, Casey, who is two years younger than me and at this point fully considered my sister. It’s not a normal living situation, but when I was five and the trailer Mom and I lived in had to be torn down,

moving in with them seemed loads better than living in a hotel or probably a cardboard box. I wouldn't even be able to charge my iPod in a box.

Anyway, when I get home from school today, Mom is off work and that is always great because it means I don't have to take care of a Penny who is drunk beyond human function and I don't have to make my own dinner. Seeing her car in the driveway when I get off the bus is always the best news ever. When I get closer to the house, however, things do not sound pleasant.

They fight a lot more than they used to. It used to feel like we were some sort of weirdly functional family, normally abnormal, but I didn't care because I got to eat out every Friday night and buy new video games and everyone paid attention to me on holidays because I was the cute little boy. Now all of that stuff is starting to disappear. We didn't even visit the rest of my family for Thanksgiving this year, and that means I got to eat absolutely zero percent of my Granny's chocolate pie, which I think is made of the same stuff as the crack chicken nuggets from school.

"I don't care!" I hear my mom shout. "I can't deal with this shit! Do you think this is a good way for them to grow up?"

I walk through the front door to find Mom looking a whole lot like a tomato and a teapot all at once, Penny crying and sipping a Budweiser, and it feels like the house might blow up. "Go to your room," Mom says without looking at me. She has her commander voice turned on, and I do not argue with Commander Voice ever.

I sit down in front of my computer that doesn't even have dial up and open up the paint app because that's what I do until the talk shows go off and I can watch TV that doesn't make me want to stab my eyes. Mom and Penny are screaming louder now. Their words are blowing through the walls and cutting my face. Before I really understand what I'm doing, I'm typing. I keep listening to them fight and I feel like I'm part of it. Their hurt and anger and—love?—whatever else they are feeling is

exploding into my ears and flowing out of my fingers. Random letters begin to appear as words and the words start to rhyme and take form, and then I have ten lines.

I was always so cruel,
even when I thought I loved you.
It was like a secret rule,
but there was nothing we could do.
You stole my heart and I broke yours,
shattering the glass on unopened doors.
This was never really love,
it was just a twisted game.
It flew away just like a dove
and it will never be the same.

Probably not an award winner, but I've basically never written anything before in my life and I feel sort of proud. I stare at the words. What just happened? I don't really understand how their fights made *this* come out of *me*. I've never been in love. Not even close. Taylor from fifth grade doesn't count because we were eleven and I only went to her house once on her birthday to give her a necklace and she broke up with me two weeks later. I stare at the words on the screen for what feels like decades. I want to show Mom but their shouts have become black holes and they're sucking up half the city. I read it to myself out loud over and over again until I have it memorized, until it feels like me screaming at someone who broke *my* heart instead of my mom's.

It is months later. It is my last day of eighth grade. My mother has decided that we are no longer capable of living with an alcoholic who I have to carry to bed four nights a week, so we are moving in with some family in Tennessee until she can get a job and find us somewhere to live. The stupid part is

that I'm sad about it. I don't want to leave because I don't know what anywhere else in the world looks like, even though I can't tell you a single thing that makes me feel like staying is worth it. I have a school full of people who probably wouldn't notice if I disappeared, teachers who are too afraid to defend me, and a life at home where the most relieving part of my day is when I get to go to sleep.

I am standing the hallway by myself because I got up in the middle of my last class. Who is going to stop me? And what will they do? In ten minutes I am no longer their responsibility. I'm staring directly at my locker at the other end of the hall, imaging all of the times I speed walked to it and wished I could crawl inside. The people who picked on me here were never even kind enough to shove me inside it so I could be alone for a few minutes. I'm not wearing black clothes anymore. I threw away the wristband and the shirt with the skulls on it and died my hair back to blonde. Mom bought me blue and green shoes from Walmart for Christmas.

"What are you doing?"

Niesha, a girl who loves telling the world we are best friends even though we never hang out and when people start calling me gay she stands by and watches, is behind me.

"I don't want to leave," I say. I can feel stupid, stupid tears welling up in my eyes and I wish I was anything other than a person because inanimate objects don't cry about things as trivial as uprooting your shitty life and looking for something better. "I don't want to leave," I say again, and I sink my hands into my face like a dumb child, like an effing five-year-old, and feel her wrapping her arms around me. We stand there for an entire century and I'm crying too hard to tell her to let go of me because she isn't really my friend. The bell rings and I run to the bus, dodging past freaking hundreds of people who never said a word to me before but are talking about how much they're gonna miss me and wish I didn't have to leave. I say nothing. I sit down in my same bus seat where I carved my initials two years ago because I thought it was cool, and I put in my headphones to get rid of the world.

Except this time, for the last time, I don't press play. I listen to everyone talking on the bus and flood the entire county with tears that are storming out for what feels like no reason.

When I get home, I throw my backpack in the driveway—who even needs the dumb books now— and sprint to the back yard, to the woods, screaming like a total psycho would, probably. The neighbors are on their front porch and watching me race through the grass like a banshee, and then I disappear through the trees. Sticks and fallen tree branches are my weapons as I pick them up and slam them into trees, into boulders, into anything that will break them. I smash and scream and smash and scream and watch them all fall to pieces until my hands are red and I couldn't possibly have another tear inside me without being labeled as the fifth world ocean.

Then I walk slowly out of the woods, back into the back yard, across our basketball court, past our pool, past the shed that is falling apart but we repainted it anyway, past the tree I dreamed about floating under on three different nights, past the patio with all of the broken plastic lawn chairs, past the front porch steps that are crumbling away and you have to step a little higher to get to the door, past the table where I learned how to play poker in a cloud of smoke and beer breath, past the living room where I danced to Shania Twain and figured out what the word “bastard” means as I swore that Mario was one, past nine years of growing up in a terribly dysfunctional world and still somehow becoming a person, and start packing my life into boxes.

The morning of the move happens in slow motion. Me and Mom get up before Penny or Casey are awake to load up the car without them knowing. We only have a Toyota Corolla, so we have to take the necessities and come back in a few weeks with my grandmother's giant van that could probably house an entire family. Mom doesn't act sad or excited. She just seems cold, and she doesn't speak at all the entire time.

Here's the truth: I hate Penny. I hate her for making me spend the last three years watching her get drunk every night and scream at me and forcing me and Casey to clean the house and make our own

dinner after we finished our homework. I hate her because she used to feel like a second mother to me, until suddenly alcohol became her family and I became an accessory.

There were some times when Penny would leave all together to go drink with her friends and sell her Xanax. On those nights when my Mom also had to work, Casey and I were alone. We would do our homework together, cook dinner, do our chores. The best part though was when we were done and had time to do whatever we wanted. I have a really big stereo system that I got for my birthday, and we would listen to the popular station and call in requests for our favorite songs and then have dance parties in the living room. I'm going to miss that.

I don't want my mom to sound like she doesn't care about any of this. She didn't sit on the other side of the room for three years and watch these things happen. She is just always at work. I love it when she has weekends off work because that means I get to spend all day in town with her while she pays bills and does all of the grocery shopping. Sometimes we even get to go to Walmart and buy me a new hoodie or some jeans, or if I'm *really freaking lucky*, a new CD. When you don't have friends, music becomes a hallelujah chorus reining down from heaven, transforming you into a celestial being with extra arms and wings or something. The first time I realized a song could make the room change color was when I bought a new Good Charlotte album and it felt like the whole thing was written for me. In one week I knew all the words and was talking about the band like they were my best friends and I knew everything about them. The secret? I made it all up.

One night I came home with Mom from getting groceries and we found Penny lying on the floor passed out, her food fallen off of the table and scattered on the floor around her. Our dogs were let loose and picking through bits of meat off the carpet and licking her face. The beer was still in her hand. I cried because I'm an infant in a teenage body, and Mom took her to bed and cleaned everything up. That was the first night I knew that she didn't love us anymore.

The next time this crossed my mind was when she got so wasted that she decided she hated our cat and was going to put her in the truck and drive her down the road to dump her somewhere. I screamed at her and begged her to let me keep Momma the Calico Cat, but she wouldn't listen and I watched her drive away with the cat trying to climb out the window. I was so pissed that I grabbed her last cold Budweiser from the fridge, popped off the cap, and chugged half the bottle, saying to myself, "I hope she wrecks," over and over again. Twenty minutes later, she came in screaming for me to hide her beer because she totaled her truck and had to call the cops. I decided I had superpowers or something.

Anyway, we finish loading up the car and I start to think about the fact that I didn't tell Penny or Casey goodbye. I couldn't care less if I ever see Penny again, but Casey is my sister, who helped me cook and clean and take care of a drunk, except she doesn't have the chance to get out like I do. This is her mother, and she has to stay behind, with no way to escape a life that she doesn't want. I am not exactly good at opening up to people since most of them only speak to me when they want to make me feel like I'm two feet tall.

So what do I do? I leave a freaking note. A yellow Post-It on the kitchen table.

I'm not good at saying goodbye to people. I'll miss you. Text me sometime.

Pretty profound, right? It doesn't say anything that I want to say, but why bother? I have to leave either way. I have to cut off a childhood of memories together, learning how to play and laugh and climb trees and make mud potions and slide in an old fridge down a hill covered in broken glass. Why make it suck more for either of us? There is almost no way we will see each other again. It's like foster kids who get split up and go to different families.

Before I have time to think more about it, we are ready to leave. We are in the car. We are driving down the road. We're not even out of the county and I start crying. *Again*. The whole world rolls its eyes.

“Do you want to stay?” Mom asks. “I’m unhappy. I know you are, too. But if you want to stay I will turn around right now.”

I look straight ahead. I imagine the car moving a million miles per hour and that we are in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, some other state that doesn’t even exist. It’s barely sunrise. The fog is glowing and it feels like we are driving off the edge of the planet. I think of all the people at school who would be laughing at me right now if they saw me crying and flooding our car. I think of Penny, beer on her breath and trying to hug me, console me, beg me to stay. I think of Casey waking up to the world’s shortest letter written on a yellow Post-It note and her brother’s empty bedroom, still warm with the scent of my obnoxious Axe body spray. And a switch flips inside me.

“No,” I say. “Keep going.”

I suck it up. I dry it up. I grow up. And I don’t look behind us. Not once.

Chyna G. Patterson

Bad Guy

Bad Guy

I'm sitting on the rug in the middle of my bedroom floor because it's the only place I feel warm. My arms are holding my knees hard against my chest. I'm squeezing my eyes shut hoping if I close them tight enough I can't hear his words anymore. Tears start welling up but they can't seep through my eyelids. I'm gripping my phone in my hand, my knuckles are white. Just shut the hell up.

"It's John Halder and I want to know where my daughter is."

He never shuts the hell up. I've been doing it my whole life. It's not hard not to talk. All he does is keep talking. I try not to imagine the scenario in my head, but I can't fight it. Every word coming through the speaker paints a picture in my mind.

Twenty-two years ago, my father comes home from work to find a U-Haul hitch in his garage. He is confused, but not panicked yet. He doesn't know that I'm not there. He unlocks the door that leads from the garage to the kitchen. It's so quiet. Nobody is here. He runs upstairs to my room. It's empty. Downstairs to the basement, empty. He runs back up to the bedroom, worried now. He knows she left with my sister and me, but he won't let it sink in. He yanks the closet door open and the sliding door pops off the track it rolls on. My clothes are gone. My sister's clothes are gone. My mom's clothes are gone. He is alone.

"Look, I know you won't tell me where her mother is, and I don't care. I don't want to hurt her. I just want to find my kid. So here is what you're going to do. You're going to call Janet up and tell her if she doesn't tell me where she took my kid, she won't see another damn child support check from me again." He continues telling me the story of how my mom took me away from him when I was a baby.

My stomach is in knots. All I want to do is pass out so I won't have to listen to the rest of it. Either he makes my mom out to be the bad guy or my mom does the same to him. Ever since I was a child, they have been throwing one another under the bus to win my affection. I hate it. The truth is

they are both the bad guy. Everyone is a bad guy, though. The problem is that I am supposed to look up to both of these people. How can I, when all I ever hear about is how despicable they both are? For as long as I can remember, they have told me inappropriate things about one another to make themselves look like the better parent. Like the time my mom said he tried to make me miss my plane back home when I was five by telling me my flight was on the wrong day. Or the time my dad said my mom got drunk and fucked some guy in the back of a car in the parking lot of a bar.

“And, Chyna, let me tell you, five minutes later, I got a phone call from your mother. Once she realized she couldn’t get any more money out of this guy, she confessed and told me where she took you.”

He is so cocky. Maybe he is right; she told him where we were so she could get child support money. Or maybe she always planned on telling him, she just wanted to make sure he couldn’t stop her from leaving.

“I am pretty proud of myself for finding you. I hired a detective, but I did all this on my own. Looking at the phone bill, calling the different apartment buildings.”

My dad is always proud of himself. I don’t have to worry about trying to keep a steady voice through the lump in my throat. I haven’t said a word in the last forty-five minutes. I don’t have to. My dad is telling himself how heroic he is. He doesn’t need me to say anything.

“But anyway, like I said, I have a file of all the greeting cards I gave you when you were little. I bought two copies of every one because I thought your mom would just trash them and not let you see them. I was going to make a scrapbook to give to you one day. Just to let you know, in case I never got to see you or talk to you while you were growing up, that I was here and I was thinking about you. We’ll take a look at them the next time you visit. But I’ll let you go, I’m sure you have some studying to do.”

“Happy birthday, again, Dad.” I hang up the phone.

I received every single greeting card. My mom didn’t throw them away without letting me see them. Only one of them was sent back to my dad when my mom moved us again. She moved us around

a lot back then. We moved from apartment to apartment, then to a mobile home and then another apartment. I can't remember anything before the mobile home. That's where my life began to me. I don't remember the places my dad told me I lived or the man he said my mother married three different times. I know a name Daddy Jack, but I don't know the face.

When I was nine, my mom told me a story about my dad, kind of like the one my dad just told me.

"When we were in the middle of the custody battle, I had a dream. I had a dream that your dad was going to rent a car, come pick you up, and drive off with you. He was going to kidnap you. So I took him to court and he admitted it! God told me in that dream. That's why I got full custody of you."

My mom's voice is less proud as she tells me her story. Instead, she plays the victim. She just wants to make sure I know my dad is a bad guy. My dad says my mom got custody of me because her house was so clean, even though my mom had a lot less money than my dad. Really, I just think babies are hardly ever separated from their mom during custody battles unless the mom is on drugs. Lucky for me, my mom wasn't on drugs at that time. So my sister, who has a different father than me, and I got to live with mom.

I thank God so often for giving me to my mom instead of my dad. I used to think about what life would have been like if my father got full custody. I would be in a much larger house; I would have been living in that house for twenty-two years. I would have gone to much bigger and nicer schools. I would be living in a safe neighborhood. But I would be alone. I wouldn't have my sister. And my dad can't love me the way my mom does. He tries, but he isn't very good at it.

So what if according to my dad, my mom tried to kidnap me? According to my mom, my dad was going to kidnap me too. I don't know if I believe either one of their stories. I can't trust either of my parents. My mother is deceitful, but she is kind. My father is wealthy, but he doesn't know how to love

that well. I'm all grown up and I have lived my life the way it has been lived. I don't wonder what if anymore. I just believe things are the way they are supposed to be.

After hanging up the phone, I stay sitting in a ball on the rug. I finally unclench my eyes and let a couple of tears run down my face. I twirl my fingers through the soft fibers of the rug. My muscles are tense and I'm still light headed. I don't want to think about these things anymore. I don't want to think about how bad my mom is or how bad my dad is or how bad my childhood was. Despite all of these things that may or may not have happened, I feel lucky for the life I have had. At least I know who my dad is and he wants to know me. That's more than my sister can say. I think she is the only one that's not a bad guy.

When I was younger, I chased her around the house with the biggest knife I could find in the kitchen. Of course I wasn't ever going to hurt her, but I liked watching her be afraid. My step dad caught me once and took the knife from me. I can't remember what happened after that. He probably told my mom and I probably got in trouble. I'm glad my mother isn't married to him anymore. He made her unhappy. I don't know what would make my mom happy.

I pray all the time that she gets better, but I feel like her life just gets tougher. My sister is an adult, and I am an adult, so my mom should have everything figured out by now. Maybe I have to figure things out for myself and then figure her things out too. My sister doesn't have things to figure out. She never did. She is mature and smart. I am angry and impulsive. That's what my mom thinks. She tells me I am a sociopath and that's why I don't have any friends.

It's true that I don't have friends, but that's because I don't know anyone that I'd like to be around a lot. Everyone has things they need to figure out, and when you are around everyone, they want you to figure their things out for them. I don't want to do that for anyone except for my mom. I can see the hurt everyone has and I don't want to feel that. I want to be alone until the hurt goes away.

People keep telling me it gets better, and it has. I just don't feel like I used to. Maybe that is what being an adult is; learning how to be happy without feeling happy.

I stand up and go to my computer. The world doesn't change on the computer. People only talk about the present. They don't talk about how their parents beat them or who raped who. They just talk about the grade they made on that test. They talk about the new diets they started. I like the internet. People aren't real on the internet. Everybody pretends they are a good guy, including me. I think I am better than both of my parents, but I am still a bad guy. I promise myself to be a good guy when I have kids. I don't want them to get off the phone with me when they are twenty-two and wonder if everything I said was a lie. I want them to know that I am doing the best I can. Like my mom. She has always done the best she can. She raised two girls without any help. That's why, no matter what turns out to be the truth and what turns out to be a lie, I know she is the better bad guy.

Samantha Rose

Adolescence in an Hourglass

Adolescence in an Hourglass

I feel the fervent rays of the sun caress my skin invitingly, and with a sigh I close my eyes in submission. Warmth seeps into my veins and encompasses my bones as my soul shivers in pleasure. The delicate blades of grass are feather-soft against my fingers and invitingly offer a place of solace for me to lie. So I lie. Perspiration starts to trickle down my face and I feel drops of moisture run down my neck; to which the breeze affectionately kisses away. Here in this place, wrapped in the arms of nature, I wish to lie indefinitely.

Often I would come here to the field behind the stables and embrace the endless possibilities it offered me. In it I could be anything and behave any way without worry of admonishment, as long as I was hidden from Mama's oppressive eyes. The live oaks were never concerned with my frequent attempts to liberate my hair from its pinned imprisonment, in hopes it could fall freely down my back. But Mama frequently scolded me for such "indecent" behavior. The sun was enamored by the way I would sit so care-free and serene amidst the grass, unlike the "proper" daughters in other families who sat with their legs uncomfortably crossed. Mama habitually accused me of "indescient behavior" and tanned my hide whenever she caught me sitting so unkempt among the weeds. Yes, Mother Nature celebrated my unlikeness. Mama and Papa were the cause of my ultimate imprisonment.

Thoughts of Mama and Papa cause my eyes to reluctantly open and reality forces into the forefront of my brain. My fingers probe into the damp soil and I feel the chill of the earth press against my hands as I grope for substance; something, anything to anchor me permanently to this place. The sun is exceedingly bright, but I yearn for it to shine brighter. I yearn for a brightness that might blind my eyes from the repulsion my life has become.

Childhood provided comfort and freedom to spend my days idly blowing dandelions and riding my mare through the field; to enjoy what I truly loved before adolescence would push its suffocating expectations upon my shoulders. And now, instead of finding beauty in the puffs I'd turned into wishes,

I am expected to understand that dandelions are merely weeds. I am expected to think of my mare as merely a mare; instead of the only breathing entity that understood me.

A bitter pain begins to ache in my chest as my memory sketches her precious golden face, dappled with white from her age. Sadness clouds my eyes and threatens to envelope me as I remember the way it felt to ride upon her back; to feel her movements, so graceful and dangerous underneath me and yet trust her wholeheartedly with my life. I can still hear the thud of her hooves against the ground, coinciding with the beating of my heart. Our spirits were identical, inseparable, and together we spent many afternoons enjoying the beauty Mother Nature so kindly bestowed. Since I was a child, my mare would make a habit to nuzzle me with her silky nose and tickle my face with her little whiskers. She grew old as I grew older and yet her kindness only increased. Her breath, something I often felt on my face, is a sensation I will never be fortunate to feel again. A sharp, alien aroma has replaced her warm, familiar one. Breath belonging to my husband; a courteous yet insistent man responsible for the fate of my beloved mare, and a marriage that was demanded upon by my Mama and Papa.

Papa had always claimed that running a sugar plantation was a risky business that relied merely on luck; for a myriad of things could go wrong in the growing and selling of sugar. But for as long as I could remember, our plantation was profitable and successful. Whether it was the fault of childhood ignorance or the simple fact I was kept out of Papa's business affairs, I never realized that our luck was slowly deteriorating. But I would soon know. Shortly after the magnolias began to blossom, Mama forewarned me that I had become of age for marrying and that doing so was necessary to help Papa maintain the plantation.

Despite the warmth of the sun, I involuntarily shiver as a chill runs down the length of my spine in remembrance of the day it all began.

I was sitting in front of my mirror while Ruth brushed and dressed my hair. Mama had been nervously pacing behind me, which irritated me more than the tangles Ruth was carelessly yanking

through. I tried to focus on Ruth's dark, ebony hands in an attempt to control my irritation and drown out Mama's annoyingly high pitched voice. It seemed Mama always knew when I tried to ignore her, for her voice would grow steadily louder and more shrill.

“Mr. Boudreux is a wealthy man Grace. Any lady in the state of Louisiana would be lucky for him to even consider her for marriage. And he's considerin' you! We're lucky he's even interested in partnerin' with our sugar plantation. So please act like a lady Grace. You must be quiet and charming. Be flirtatious but for God's sake keep your legs crossed while sittin' or I'll have Ruth box your ears.”

Suddenly my tingling scalp and her pacing had seemed miniscule in comparison to the words that were spilling out of her mouth. I remember locking eyes with the wide, brown set in the mirror. Papa always told me my eyes reminded him of two café au' laits, and I wondered incidentally if Mr. Boudreux even liked coffee. Staring into eyes that so blatantly displayed my bewilderment made me think of the oppositely calm, brown eyes of my mare. I needed her tranquility; the smell of the stable to calm me. My mare never scolded, was never irritating, and never expected anything of me except affection and feed.

“Are you even listenin' to me Grace?”

I remember glancing at her reflection; her blue eyes glaring back at me in the mirror. She had her hands planted on her hips in annoyance and her cheeks were flushed with frustration. She was always easily frustrated by me, even as a child. But I was never much concerned by this, for the feeling was mutual.

With all the patience and respect I could muster I had replied, “Yes Mama I'm listenin' to you. But I was just wonderin' how I can be happy about marryin' a man I have never met.”

“You don't have to be happy Grace, or willin' for that matter, if he decides on marryin' you you'll marry him. His cotton makes far too much money for us to pass on an offer of partnership because of a silly girl; even if that silly girl is my daughter. Him marryin' you is an agreement to partner. You don't

understand how business works. You're too busy layin' under the oaks or ridin' that fossil of a horse, but if Mr. Boudreux isn't interested in you then this plantation won't make it many more winters."

I recall flinching as Ruth placed the final pin in my hair, stabbing my scalp in the process, and abruptly rising to head towards the bedroom door.

"You're tellin' me you don't have anythin' to say? Where do you think you're goin'?"

"It seems it doesn't matter what I think or say here. You and Papa find it acceptable to do my thinkin' for me. I'm goin' to the stable until supper; at least there I can have thoughts of my own." I had felt my face pulsing with heat; my distress spreading along my cheeks in red splotches.

Mama had scoffed at me. "You'll be doin' nothing of the sort Grace Ann. As if Mr. Boudreux would appreciate the first time meetin' you for you to smell like that horse outside. Go downstairs and busy yourself with your stitchin' until he arrives. It's much more lady-like."

My fingers begin to tingle as I remember the repetitive jabs they suffered in my poor attempts at stitching. My personal opinion was that Mr. Boudreux would have rathered met a lady who smelt unpretentious and comfortable instead of meeting an inexperienced girl with red, punctured fingers. But "Mama knows best." In all actuality Mr. Boudreux was indifferent to my stitching, and for the majority of his stay, to my presence in general. However, there were moments I would catch him staring at me with an expression of approval at what he had been offered for as a potential wife; approval of the brown eyed guarantee that ensured he would be the next inheritor to Papa's plantation. I remember how ecstatic Mama was when he proclaimed his adoration of me, claiming to think charming the way my hair would curl against my face from the heavy Louisiana humidity, assenting to become my husband. He would become both my jailer and my Papa's savior.

He did not understand me and did not try to. I guess he felt it was sufficient to claim I was lovely and graceful; to shower me with courtly gifts in futile attempts to win my heart. But I never cared for hair ribbons, for I never cared to wear my hair against my scalp. And what use was ordering Ruth to fan

me, when I longed to be outside in the heat? His intentions, although gracious, were never my taste. He did not sympathize with my love for the outdoors, and did not understand why I insisted on spending my time with “such an old mare” instead of him. I remember him coming to the stable once and finding me with my arms embraced around her neck in her stall. But he never commented on her gentle demeanor; never noticed how attached we were to one another. With a shake of his head he had exited but left me with a warning that my mare was too old and impractical to keep; that soon she would have to be put down and replaced with a younger, hard-working mare to match the others on the plantation. He assured me that this new mare would be for plantation use, not for leisurely rides; for once we were married I would have too many tasks to occupy my time. At the time, I did not concern myself with such a threat. I never dreamed Papa would consent to such a heartless act, to shoot the mare he gave me as a little girl. But my faith was broken with the thundering of his rifle; for to him and to everyone else, my mare was just a mare. And now, to everyone I am Mrs. Boudreux.

My cheeks are damp from my flowing tears and I hear the hanging moss of the live oaks rustle in the wind. They comfort me with their whispers and distract me from my memories. A breeze attempts to cool the back of my sticky neck as I rise and my spine straightens. How I will miss the freedom to enjoy such simple pleasures, for a “wife’s duty” does not consist of reveling in the simplicities of Mother Nature. I feel each individual bead of sweat as it runs down my neck; trailing between my shoulder blades. For a moment, time seems to slow as I focus on such a small sensation. But I yearn for time to stop; to stop while I am here, unguarded and carefree. I know it is futile; futile to grasp dirt in my hands. But I know moments like these are few and grow steadily fewer with each passing day I am his wife. I hear him call my name from the back porch and begrudgingly I rise from my angelic bed of grass. I open my hands and let the soil within them fall back to the earth as my leaden feet lead me towards my husband.

Karen Warren

A Higher Call

A Higher Call

Higher, and higher, he ascends with wings of great strength,
Soaring through heaven, daring to claim its breadth, its length!

He cannot, he will not, be bound with earthly chains,

He was chosen, he was elected, to rule, to reign!

With a loud cry, he answers the beckoning call,

Rising in triumph, declaring victory, power over all!

Proudly, swiftly, he glides through the boundless heights,

A symbol of freedom, of hope, of all that is right!

It is of an eagle's destiny of which I testify,

It is of yours, Golden Eagle, stretch forth your wings and fly!