
Spread the Word

Jess Paauwe

By God what happened?

The world is changing.
Once estranged, derranged, complaining,

NOW! a little hope. REMAINING!

Mermaids to Music-

The once wiley smiles so vile, so vile

now sincere pearly flashes that flash in elegant style.

The laughs of the pasts, such classy glass,
such strange eerie rings in his head he amassed.

Now so calm, like a psalm, a sweet steady song,
Mermaids to muses, the writers is bemused but enthused!

What was wrong so long ago all along?
How did a queer eerie ring become song?
How did creatures of the violent sea
become the sweet features of femininity, such effulgent divinity

Running Out of Ink

Winter 2012



A Writers' Club Publication

Grand Valley State University
Allendale, MI

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Oatmeal

Hannah Matro

The oats. Steel oats to be specific. They're supposed to better for you than the quick minute kind. Poured into a pale pink translucent 1/2 measuring cup. They hit the plastic cup, reminiscent of a rain stick used in 4th grade music class. Set aside while the water in the baby-sized Farberware pot attempts to reach a boil. Reminded of the old adage "A watched pot will never boil", I avert my eyes from the pot for a few seconds and wait to hear bubbling. It doesn't come. I look back. It boils.

Sigh.

This always takes so long. But stovetop is the champagne of all oatmeal-cooking methods. I admit, I had that phase; where Quaker Instant Oatmeal packets were my life. I could probably name every flavor they distributed, from Maple Date Walnut to Dinosaur Eggs---which was by far my favorite as a wee girl. I recently tried them again, and boy, they weren't anything like I recall, the 'eggs' hard and sugary and the oats gluey and sticky, catching in my throat as I tried my very best to swallow the crap Quaker tried to pass off as prime children's breakfast food. Rewind six years.

Must have been some change within me

Faith.

How did he get such friendly friends in the end?
Ones who didn't forsake, berate, or amend?

How did he see things, believe things, relieve things?
How was he blinded, so absent minded?

He couldn't feel enough to find life
Because he thought he should not have sought it,

That he just.

Should not

find it.

The clever devil is pushed so far behind it.

Get Behind Me Satan.

The Change.

Have you heard? You must have heard, if you have
SPREAD THE WORD!

Something has happened to him, remember him, that one man?

He's come to ruminate on such ruins, to indulge, to command-
the spirit of enlightenment with a pen in his hand

The Quest.

His soul is not lame, he is not so estranged
He's intuitive, lucrative, he knows what can be gained.

He's made commodities of his oddities,
such funneled ambition-
Propels him through time, and space-
and prevents his submission.
Much like Thor, or Ares God of war
On a celestial, grand or paramount mission

He's had it well now, gambling with the Tarot,
a divine set of luck

So spread the word one the once branded nerd:

A poet.

has woken.

up.

Elevate

Laura Earle

Ascend from subterranean shadow
Flicker before my eyes
Ethereal fingers interlock with mine
Turn my flesh to vapor
My heart to mist
Let's elevate
Above and beyond

Smoke rising from charred failures and desperation
Steam over boiling anger and frustration
We'll condense far from here
With the dew of a new day
Wait for new life, love, happiness to grow and flourish
You elevate me
Above and beyond.

Toy Doll

Raine Gersky

Vivacious doll
Twirling on a skinny pole
Motor clicking softly
Breaking down tears so droll

Animal stuffed with cotton
Yellow and worn and old
Checkered pattern flamboyant
Eye socket popping out so bold

Puzzle without the piece
Necessary for full
Completion
Carousel tinkling its soft lull
Cracked glass proving releases elation

Chest mature and worn
Lying six feet below the bed
Taken out from its hiding
To explore what still lives, left over by the dead

Rip. The tearing of the brown paper packet was my favorite part of the morning ritual. Food products that come in packages that you can open with your bare hands give me a sick sense of power---oatmeal packets, cereal bags, Oreos. Lipton soup drives me insane---it's lined with some metallic substance that forbids the ripping by hand and warrants the usage of scissors. I'm reminded of how much I hate Lipton's package inventor every time I eat the stuff. Which isn't that often. I'd rather eat oatmeal.

But even the easy-to-open packaging of instant oats wasn't enough to keep me on the instant oatmeal kick. At some point along my road to preferring stovetop oatmeal, I abandoned the convenient option I had once loved so dearly because somewhere on that timeline, someone ruined my life forever by making me oats on the stove; a revolutionary thought much like Europe's Enlightenment took over my breakfast brain. Entirely different, completely better, not at all like the oatmeal I had always known.

Alas, I was not an instant convert. For a while, I ate the instant oatmeal still, (mostly because due to me obsession, my parents stocked the cupboards full of strawberries n' cream and apples and cinnamon to the

point of Apocalyptic survival capabilities), but instead of microwaving it, I converted to the hot water method, which was better than the former method but always resulted in a weak, watery, flavor-less breakfast when compared to the stovetop variety.

Rip. Pour. The hot water poured on top. Stir. Stir. Stir. Too thick. Add more water. Too thin. Shucks. Sigh.

Fast forward to present. The steel oats on the stove, still not cooked through to the correct consistency. Tapping my fingers on the counter. Stir. The pot sizzles as I scrape the oats off the bottom of the Farberware with a soup spoon. Taste. Nope. Steel oats, when not cooked through, feel like chewy gravel, tearing up your tongue and getting stuck in the crevices of your molars. Two more minutes.

The bowl is all ready for the oats. I've got this down to a science. Put the brown sugar and sugary dates, chopped into little pieces, in the bottom of said bowl. Keep the toasted walnuts or pecans close at hand. If dried cherries have recently been stolen from my parents' freezer at home, they, along with vanilla extract and a pinch of cinnamon, will be thrown in the bubbling oatmeal for the last minute of cooking. Plop, plop, plop. In they go. One more minute. At this point, I'm literally im-

patient beyond belief. I have to keep reminding myself that if I take them off prematurely, my whole breakfast will be ruined.

Deep breath. Not much longer. Sigh.

Finally. Spoon the gloppy mixture into bowl, getting an oatmeal-steam facial at the same time. Stir stir stir, incorporate the brown sugar, bring it all to the top. Otherwise, upon eating concoction, there will be parts I don't want to eat. Parts without sugar or nuts or cherries. Parts that I skip over and end up putting down the garbage disposal or in the blue trash can. Stir stir stir. Sprinkle nuts on top. Inhale, eating until I'm full. Then, I eat only the nuts, the dates, cherries, and end up flinging the extra oats into the trash anyway.

Sigh. I've become such an oatmeal snob. Thanks to whoever made me my first stovetop oatmeal, I now spend at least twice as long making myself ingestible food in the mornings. Oh, how I wish I could go back to the ease of Dinosaur Egg instant Quaker. Whoever robbed me of my stovetop oatmeal virginity, you owe me at least five minutes of every day of my life back.

A lot of Earth started to look like this place. After a bunch of really bad wars, it seemed like the human race might not survive for much longer.

"But something happened. No one's really sure what, but the people stopped fighting. They actually started working together again. Cities that had been abandoned or destroyed were rebuilt. Before long, men were going into space again, and actually building new cities on other worlds. It was the dawn of the Solar Alliance."

"The Solar Alliance? I've never heard of that," Corrin says.

"It was the greatest government ever made by humans. It ruled over most of humanity and guided them as they spread to dozens, then hundreds, then thousands of worlds. Sometimes worlds broke away and tried to fight the Alliance, but most people were happy with them. They watched over humanity for over two thousand years."

"Wow, that's a really long time!" The girl shushes Corrin at his interjection, and I continue. They're both staring intently at me now, and I see even the parents are watching.

"Anyway, after two thousand years, it was the greatest age of mankind. It seemed like there was no limit to the miracles we could accomplish. This world was one of thousands that were beautiful. So, so beautiful..." I trail off for a moment before continuing.

"There were plants of all kinds, trees as tall as buildings. And the people lived in peace with all the different animals, until..." I pause dramatically, and the children lean forward expectantly.

Mental Health

Christopher Barber

Mind wandering,
Thinking sorrowfully back on,

The institution

Thinking fearfully ahead,
will the government,
shove pills through his esophagus?
if he doesn't, will he go back?

To bleach white rooms,
where he trudges,
the weight of his illness upon him,
reaching out,
hands pressed against the glass,
yearning to feel alive once more.

When he can no longer stay,
he leaves with empty pockets,
a deadened mind,
living on cement and cardboard,
dying beside a back alley dumpster.
glad he has his medicine.

Sitting

Brian Hudson

"Hey mister, do you know any stories?" I look up from my meal and give the boy a quizzical look. He stares at me expectantly, though his little sister ignores the question and keeps eating. Their parents stand a short ways off with their meals, talking quietly to each other, and their bodyguard sits in the dirt near the family's cart. The children and I are seated on two rocks underneath an overhang, taking shelter from the scorching wasteland sun while we share a meal.

"Stories, huh? Why do you think I know any stories?" He returns my look with one of incredulity, as if the answer is obvious.

"Well, you look really old, so you must know some good ones." I can see the mother move to scold him for his insensitivity, but my laughter changes her mind. I scratch the gray hair on my face and nod. "Yeah, I'm old. I know some stories. Why do you want to hear them?"

"I want to be a storyteller when I grow up. My father tells me some really good ones, but he always says the same ones over and over. I want to learn all of them so I never have to say the same story twice!" I smile a little and pretend not to notice the father looking embarrassed.

"Well, alright. Just three days ago, I was in a town called Sinkhole. There was a nice

woman there named Regina..."

"No, that sounds boring," he cuts me off. "Just how old are you? I bet you know stories of what the world was like before the war. My father said there used to be other worlds with people on them too. Do you know anything about them?" I have to say, I'm impressed. Most people I meet don't have any concept of outer space or what human history was like before the war. The father must have had access to some really old records.

"Stories before the war, huh?" I run a hand through my short and gray hair. "Yes, I know a few from that time. You want to hear about that, Corrin?" The boy nods excitedly. "Alright. Well, long ago, a very, very long time ago, humans lived on a world called Earth. It was the only world they knew. But they did amazing things. They built machines that could think like people and link the entire human race together in one giant community, they could fly through the air or dig through the ground, and they even sent men into space!"

"Did they go to other worlds?" Corrin interrupts. I shake my head. "No, not yet. We only sent a few men to the moon. After we did that, we stopped doing it for a while because everyone wanted to focus on making their lives better.

"But a lot of them weren't happy. The people fought themselves constantly for all kinds of reasons. As the population of Earth got bigger and bigger, so did the conflicts.

Uncertainty

Amy Johnson

I learned confidence the way I learned to climb a tree, trusting the branches that bowed beneath my toes. Hand in hand, I relied on the hold of parted bark, embracing the trunk with my thighs until the tree and I were one, breathing in each other. Breathing into vertigo from the highest limb, I looked down on fresh stumps --man's making, and the branches, now twigs, that easily break their promises.

"... Until the monsters came. Terrible beasts, from another universe like ours, only made of darkness instead of light. There were countless different kinds of monsters, and they had no name for themselves. We simply called them the Great Enemy.

"They went to many worlds, and killed so many people. The humans fought them as hard as they could, and held them off for centuries. The war was so long and terrible entire generations knew nothing but fighting. But it wasn't enough. The Great Enemy kept destroying more and more worlds. Even this world was attacked by them, and turned into the wasteland it is now, but we survived and fought them off." As if to emphasize my point, a gust of wind blew a cloud of dust through our spot and the children coughed.

"The war only ended when we snuck into their own universe and destroyed the source of the gateways that let them come into our universe. But by then, most worlds with humans on them had been destroyed, or terribly burned.

"The people of our world survived, though, and struggled to rebuild. That was when maybe your great-great-grandparents were alive. We've made a lot of progress, but we still have a long ways to go."

I leaned back and spread my arms wide. "And, here we are!" Both children's mouths are slightly agape, and neither of them say anything. I notice the parents are standing and staring at me as well.

"How do you know all that? Are you from one of those other worlds?" Corrin asks. I chuckle and grin. "In a manner of speaking." I ignore the father rolling his eyes. By now, we've all finished our meals, and the parents start packing up the trash. Their body-guard gets up and starts readying the bromix-pulled cart.

The father, Jordan, walks up to me with a hand extended as I pull a small silver watch on a chain out of my pocket and look at the time. The case is worn beyond belief, and most of the internal components have been replaced at least once, but it still works fine, and the letters engraved on the outside can still be seen.

"What's that?" Jordan asks. I glance at him before closing the watch and returning it to my pocket. "A gift... from someone that used to be important to me. ... They're gone now."

He senses my reluctance to talk. "Well, we gotta get going before it starts getting too dark. Thanks for talking and entertaining the kids."

I smile and nod. "Not a problem. I have to ask, though. You said that food was rygar meat and fresh petrus leaves. Rygars have been extinct since the war, and petrus doesn't grow this far from the sea. Where'd you find it?"

"Ever heard of New Hope?"

I shake my head, and he continues. "It's some kind of project inside a dome. They're trying to bring back life to the wasteland. We didn't stay long, but they have all kinds of

incredible things in there. Like living rygars and fresh petrus. You should check it out."

I nod, pondering the possibility. A project like that would be incredibly useful to restoring life to the whole world, assuming it didn't get wiped out by marauders before it could reach fruition. I decide to make that my next destination. "Thanks, I'll check it out."

Jordan turns to his wife and the two go over to the cart. I look down at the children to see the boy has put my hat on, even though it's much too large for him and is covering his eyes. I chuckle and pull it off his head, and he grins at me.

"Mister, can I keep this hat? It's so cool!"

I ponder it for a moment, getting a glimpse of his future. The young boy does indeed grow up to be a story-teller, and an exceptional one at that, with my hat reminding him of the story I told him today. "Sure, go ahead. Don't lose it. Grow up strong and tell good stories!" The boy grins and nods before running to the cart with the hat on his head again, his sister following him.

The family waves good-bye and continues on down the road towards Sinkhole. I watch them for a few minutes before I sit back down on my rock and reassemble my gun, which was still lying in its constituent parts from an interrupted cleaning session. Half an hour later, my gear is packed and on my back on top of my coat, and I walk into the sunlight, hoping the sun doesn't scorch my head too much.

It had been snowing all weekend. Each weatherman agreed with the next when they said there was no end in sight. Murphy's high school would surely be closed, and it disappointed him. He thought about it each time he awoke to his brother's snores and wondered how an eight year old could make noise like that and sleep through it. Flattening his pillow around his head to snuff the sound, he squeezed his eyes, seeing snow in the darkness. Snow and Trudy. Murphy laid awake at 6am thinking about snow, thinking about school, thinking about her. It had been two days since he'd seen her. Tomorrow would make three. A loud nasaled snort vibrated the thoughts from his head as he slung his pillow blindly at Colin. It landed with a thud and a series of short grunts followed a long pull of snores. Pale yellow began to peek between the pines and shimmered on the flakes falling to the roof. At the sound of the alarm, Colin flew to Murphy's side of the room, his nose and fingertips smudging the window.

"School's gonna be closed today, I just know it Murphy!" His words fogged the glass. He went on about the snow fort he and Dave

Mona

Morgan Coby

Mona,
Mona,
Marvelous Mona,
Mocha complexion,
Matured expeditiously, generated a meandrous motif
Could have been mentioned with Melyssa Ford and Marilyn
Monroe
Majestic motions making men malfunction
Motivating malarkey from them, muttering:
"Muh-muh-maybe we could see a muh-movie"
Molting males not mackin' mistake-free
All of muliebrity maliciously murmured:
"Maybe she's made with it,
Maybe it's Maybelline."
Mona metamorphosed to maniac for
Materialistic, muddleheaded mofoes
Who'd murder to get her massive monkey
And whose main concerns were:
Money, moola, mazuma, and mediums of marketry
Moreover,
Murky and Malevolent as Mephistopheles
Miscreants magnetized her, made her as moist as marshland
...But Mona was far from a moron
Mindful of the marrow of mezmiration

Had the merit of modern medication
 ...Mona was a martinet
 Her medial entrance managing mentalities of motley men:
 Militants, masculine, meek, mindless, even metrosexual
 This moll migrated from man to man
 Mooching to maximize her meager restitution
 Her monkeyshines gave her a new moniker:
 Madam Mona the Money-Hungry
 ...Mona mutated to a muckamuck
 Using her magnum opus for a myriad of means:
 Mobile phone contracts, marble floors, menial moil, men to
 mate with, machines mended, merriment, medicine, merce-
 naries, Metropolitan lodging, Mercedes Benzes,
 Mutilated mutual funds from mawkish men who masturbated
 at midnight,
 Envisioning her legs moving to and fro, hearing her moan
 ...Mona had it made!
 Mona,
 Mona,
 Meretricious Mona,
 Wasn't even moderately modest
 Masquerading nothing for the mind
 Externally magnificent,
 Internally moldering from the many, many, many, many, many,
 many, MANY machos that meshed their flesh with hers
 Time met up with Mona,
 Giving her masterpiece physique a mastodonic markdown

Motions became maladroitness, marks of age materialized
 Makeup no longer masking her marred beauty
 Image gradually moved from the minds of many
 Mona,
 Mona,
 Misguided Mona,
 Didn't mind the memo
 Misappropriated her masterwork, manifesting a measureless
 murk around her renown
 Mona should have moseyed to a marriageable, mellow,
 soul-brotha
 The same mofos that were mundane in school, became mil-
 lionaires in mansions
 Mona,
 Mona,
 Misfortunate Mona,
 Offering mea culpa to the Most High
 Mourning morningly on what must have been
 A marital ritual
 Mona and Mr. Miraculous moving to a place on Melrose
 Having monuments made for her, being mollycoddled
 Her monstrous mistakes and messin' around left her unwed,
 unloved, and childless
 Mona was an enduring mockery among all
 Her misadventures and miseducation are unfortunately...
 ...Realities for sisters misusing what's mightier than machetes

about Colin's age. She smiled, gave his forehead a kiss, pulled his hat overtop of it and handed him a string cheese from the refrigerator. He continued yapping as he wobbled past Murphy and out the front door he fought to open with his puffy claw.

"Listen kiddo, I'm headin' out. Colin needs to be picked up at 3. You better get going, he's probably half way there by now." She nudged him, grabbing the pack of cigarettes and lighter that sat next to the coffee maker and placing them in her robe pocket.

Murphy clenched his coat, shoved his bare feet into his father's thick work boots and found the only matching set of mittens on the shelf. He thought of Trudy. He wondered if she had a full custody sibling and if her parents were drunks and gone all the time. Would she care that his were? His stomach burned with doubt. As he opened the door and saw the footprints he would always be in charge of following, he realized he didn't care.

had worked on all weekend and how today they'd dig a basement and maybe a small garage if it snowed enough. Murphy got up slowly as Colin tore down the stairs, shouldering the walls he poned between, jumping the last few steps and landing with a healthy plump. Murphy dropped into his dad's tattered green chair and wedged his hand between the seat and the arm where the remote usually was. He pulled out a hand of hair and cracker bits as Colin turned the television on from the couch behind him. He stuck his tongue out at Murphy at the sight of the finger he was being given.

"Mom said you'll go to hell if you keep doing that," Colin said, flipping to news.

"She's lying. I'm gonna tell her you swore," Murphy said.

The anchorwoman's mouth moved silently as school names scrolled across the bottom along with the holy word 'closed'. Murphy leaned back and ripped the remote from Colin's small hand.

"You need volume, doofus."

Colin whined. "You're gonna wake up dad!"

"What do you care," Murphy snapped, pressing the volume button rapidly. The clock above the television was slow. His father must have

snuck it back to bar time, his routine on the nights he would stagger home as Murphy was getting Colin up for school. The brunette on the screen distracted him from the rest of Colin's excited babble. She had the same dark waves as Trudy and they shared a lip shade. She had asked him to call and he wanted too but he didn't know what he'd say. They hadn't had a conversation outlasting the walk from biology to economics. He always made a dumb comment about the weather, which he considered using as an excuse to call her now. Colin hushed his usual rapid speech at the sound of his mother's throaty coughs coming into the room.

"You boys aren't going to school today," she said, wearing the squinty eyes she had every morning she woke up with a hangover. "I need you to shovel the driveway." She threw her unsteady finger towards Murphy at the emphasis of "you" and he noticed she was still wearing her work clothes. Seeing his school scroll the screen muted whatever snide comment he was going to mumble at his mother. Colin threw down his juice box and sprung from the couch, fists in the air, his pajama bottoms beginning to fall as he danced around Murphy.

"It's closed!" he chanted over and over, rambling again about his

snow fort mansion.

Murphy slowly walked upstairs, away from the annoyed grumbles of his mother as Colin, too young to know what hungover was, tried getting her to dance. Today would be like every day for the past four years and he would be forced to guardian angel his brother while his dad slept and his mom did whatever it was she did with her days. He sat on his bed, saddened that he wouldn't get to see Trudy and that his car was too snowed in to go anywhere worth going.

"Murphy!" his mom called from downstairs a few minutes later. "Walk your brother to Dave's please!" Throwing himself back onto his bed, he heaved a long sigh, knowing that please was said only for effect. He yelled his agreement and raised the finger that was apparently sending him to hell, shoving it into the air and clenching his teeth.

Mom was dressing Colin for the unfriendly outdoors when Murphy stuck his head in the kitchen. He was sitting on the counter getting his boots laced and making music with the Velcro on his gloves. Colin stopped and looked softly at his mother.

"You promise you'll be home for dinner?"

Murphy remembered asking this question every day until he was

[Lights up. A hazy, blue light illuminates most of the stage. Fog rolls in and there are sounds of rain playing softly. Thunder crashes occasionally. Stage left is a phone booth [or just a pay phone on a pole] toward the mid-back of the stage. The phone is disconnected from the pole. The payphone has been vandalized. An old bench, also vandalized, sits center stage next to a bus stop.

AUDREY, a 42 year old woman, walks to the stage through the audience. She is dressed in an old, knee-length prom dress; it's a bit garish and neon and heels and a trench coat fitted loosely over the dress. She is holding an umbrella over her head.]

AUDREY: We always used to meet here. Michael and I. There was this joke. Somehow, we had learned the phone number to the pay phone. We'd call each other, or we'd scare people waiting for their bus. [She laughs]. Even after the bus stopped making this stop—We were always at this intersection. He was always here. When I was scared, when I was upset. It was like magic. [Audrey walks on to the stage and sits on the bench, closing her umbrella. She's waiting for someone. The lights

Hay Bales

Amy Hinman

He tosses the bales
 until they scrape at the ceiling,
 disrupting swallows and bats
 and raising a green cloud of dust
 to the heavens. The cloud spreads,
 depositing bits of alfalfa in our
 noses and eyes and hair. The old barns
 new perfume of dried out sunshine and earth
 erases the musk and rot—everything is green and new
 and heavy. His forehead hosts streaks of sweat
 and green powder. It drips
 into his eyes and ears, and leaves pools
 down the back of his faded T-shirt. His arms
 ripple, never tiring, and never, ever
 failing. Five thousand pounds
 of green fuel to be stacked—
 and he still goes on, but I can never
 match him. I can roll, I can push,
 but never throw. The hay—ripe, new
 and bristling with potential, will be consumed.
 Fed to ruminating animals, thrown
 as bedding to be trampled, sacrificed
 to a garden to kill
 her weeds. I watch this man use himself up—

and I want him to stop. Who will throw the bales
once he cannot? Who will hold his grandchildren,
his wife? It is only he, and like the hay,
he too will become the chaff
that floats into every crevice,
every forgotten corner. A green river crawls
down my cheek—it's life is short; he doesn't
notice. So I join him in the chorus of
Hard Day's Night, our voices dancing
together, a duet of almost-harmonies.
For now, I roll him hay bales. And for now
he is mine to keep.

Drowning

Stephanie Plotkin

Listless
The storm screams at my
silence
I am drowning
Released from the burdens
of life
Saved by a forgiving knife
Rocked in a cradling wave
Receiving peace I had craved
Knowing the battle was won
Kissed by the solicitous sun
Stroked by the softening sea
Permitted to finally be free

I have drowned.

Restless
A surging storm swells inside me
I am drowning
Bathed in beautiful pain
Choked by relentless rain
Tempted by thoughts of sur-
render
I am drowning.

Endless
The undertow swallows me deep
I am drowning
Soothed by promising lies
Cried on by darkening skies
Calmed by the chaos of currents
I am drowning.

to interfere with our future.

[Joshua stands, still holding Audrey's hand. He looks her square in the eyes.]

JOSHUA: Mom? I graduated from college two years ago.

[He lets go of her hand. Audrey is on the verge of tears. She reaches her hand out to Joshua, but he doesn't take it. Instead he grabs her things and goes to grab the suitcases. She grasps at his arm.]

AUDREY: Mike. Please don't leave. I can't do this by myself. [Audrey starts to cry. She hugs her knees to herself.]

[Joshua sets down his mother's things and gently grabs her shoulders; he sits next to her.]

JOSHUA: I'm right here. I've always been here.

[She lays her head on his shoulder and puts her hand over her stomach. He strokes her hair.]

AUDREY: Always Mr. Responsible. [Audrey gets closer to Joshua. Faces four inches apart. She raises her hand and touches his cheek. Strokes it.] I'm sorry. You wouldn't want me now anyway. I'm old and ugly. It ruined my life, your life—our life. It's my fault—his fault you're gone. That I'm alone. [Audrey moves in closer still. Her face an inch or two

get a bit brighter. She smiles.] We'd always been friends—since we were five, and he put paint in my hair during art class. I cried and he laughed at me. But it wasn't until I was sixteen that I realized anything—how much I cared. I came here and told Mike that I was running away to California. I was going to be a movie star, of course—or a singer, a songwriter. It didn't matter 'cause I'd be famous. I stayed because he told me that he'd miss me. This was where everything started for us. [Pause.] Where everything...

[The lights dim and the phone rings. Audrey gazes off stage, into the audience absently for a moment before getting up and walking over to the pay phone. She picks up the receiver. The phone is no longer connected to the rest of the pole, but she doesn't notice. She dials a number and waits for a moment.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: Mike! I know I'll see you in two hours, but I have something I need to tell you. [Pause]. I'm at the bus stop. [Pause]. It's important. [Pause]. Just come, okay? [Audrey puts the receiver down and goes back to the bench. She sits with her face in her hands, and then lies on her back.] Fuck. He's going to hate me forever. [Pause]. Maybe I shouldn't tell him. We're so close to graduation, and if I told

him now he might put off college and get a job. He'll be "Mister Responsible" as always. Mike will want to keep it. He loves kids, but I'm sure as hell not ready for one. [Pause]. It would ruin everything.

[Audrey lays there for a moment before getting up and walking back over to the pay phone. She picks up the receiver again and dials.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: Mrs. Peak. How are you? [Pause]. I'm fine. Is Mike home? [Pause]. Oh, okay. Thanks. [She stands there lost in thought—phone still in her hand. She contemplates sitting on the ground, but stays standing. She hangs up the phone. The lights get a bit brighter.] He never came. I sat there like an idiot for almost two hours wondering where the hell he was. Mike never missed a date. I finally went home, and my mom was crying on the couch. She squeezed me so hard when I walked in the door. Her voice was barely audible between sobs, but I got the gist of it. Something about drunk driving—thought I was with him, so glad I'm okay. I practically died inside. Like I'd ever be okay again. I never got to tell him about Joshua—the thing that killed us both.

[There is a long pause before JOSHUA, 25, walks in from stage right. He's wearing jeans and a raincoat. He is carrying two suitcases. His

hair is wet. Everything is wet. He's been out for awhile. Audrey doesn't seem him at first.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: He was so small. I hated him. I could have left him there in the hospital, but his eyes. They were just like his father's. [The lights dim again. The phone rings. Audrey finally looks and notices Joshua. She practically runs to him, relieved. She wraps her arms around him.] You came? But I thought you were... It doesn't matter. Michael, I'm so glad you're okay.

[Joshua ignores what she says. He peels her off of him and holds her by the shoulders. He stares intensely. She backs off, and he lets go.]

JOSHUA: We've been looking for you for hours. You can't leave without telling anyone. I should have known I'd find you here. You know you aren't stable.

AUDREY: What do you mean? I called you twenty minutes ago. Your mom said you'd left the house. [She pulls Joshua to the bench. He resists for a moment; he doesn't want to do this again, but gives in. They sit. Audrey holds Joshua's hand. She strokes it gently and looks into his eyes.] I need to tell you. You have to promise, though, that you won't let this destroy your plans. You are going to college. Nothing is going

Sitting in the Dark

Theresa Johnstone

Sitting in the
Dark,
with only
one light
above your
head,
a red
potent
drink in
hand.
Thousands upon
thousands of
small pieces
of glass
scattered
across the
floor.

Mend them
together,
if you
can.
That piece,
sharp and

jagged is
your
anger.
That other
one,
bright and
shiny is
your
joy.
And that
Midnight black
one is
your
despair and
pain.

These pieces,
all of
them,
came from
that mirror
by your
side.
Its brown

away from Joshua's.] Please don't leave me again.[She closes her eyes and leans in farther as if she's going to kiss Joshua. He grabs her wrist—perhaps a bit more forcefully than he meant to.]

JOSHUA: I'm not him.[Joshua moves off the bench and takes a step back. Audrey stands up and steps toward Joshua.]

AUDREY: Michael?

JOSHUA: No. You're getting worse—can't you see that?

[The lights get brighter. Audrey takes a step toward Joshua.]

AUDREY: I did everything alone. We should have been together. College. Marriage. Maybe kids. That was the plan. All of it ruined.

Crappy jobs, apartments. Glimmers of hope. Everything went to shit. I never wanted a kid—sticky, dirty, always needing you, wanting you. So much crying. I could have strangled you in your sleep.[The lights get brighter, more intense, as Audrey advances on her son. For each step she takes forward, he takes half a step back.]

JOSHUA: You need better care. Constant attention that I can't give you. I packed your bags.

AUDREY: Kids don't appreciate you. You raise them; feed them, for what? So they can stick you in a nursing home when you're too much

trouble. They take—take everything you wanted in the world and kill it. He wouldn't have died. Life could have been perfect. He was good. [She stops advancing.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: He was better.

[Joshua walks close enough to his mother to be able to grab her. He shakes her.]

JOSHUA: You have to stop fucking comparing me to him! I've tried so hard to be there for you. To be him. My whole life you've held me to this standard of him—like he was perfect and couldn't do anything wrong. We idolize those that die young, but it was his God damn fault. He was high, and he was drunk. Don't you remember that he was driving the car? That he killed his best friend and a little girl in the other car?

[Audrey cowers into herself and covers her ears. Joshua realizes he's scared her and lets go of her shoulders. Audrey looks at Joshua, really looks at him for the first time. She reaches out and touches his face.]

AUDREY: So much like his father.

JOSHUA: I can't be him for you. I'm tired of trying.

AUDREY: Joshua. [Audrey wraps herself around Joshua. He hesitates for

a moment and hugs her back.]

JOSHUA: I can't take care of you anymore. Do you remember when I was seven, and I had the flu for a week and a half? All I did was cry, and whine, and puke, so you sent me to stay with grandma and grandpa because you couldn't deal with it anymore. [He sits. Audrey shows vague signs of recollecting the event.]

AUDREY: I'm sorry. [She reaches out to touch him.]

JOSHUA: I can't deal with it anymore. I thought I could take care of you, but it's been two years. You keep forgetting, running away, and I have to take off work to chase after you. Home care is too expensive. [He picks up her umbrella and opens it. He looks at her.] I'm not leaving you alone. [Joshua picks up the suitcases. He motions for Audrey to follow.] I promise.

[She stands; the phone rings. Audrey hesitates. The phone rings again. She turns like she is going to go to the phone and answer it. She closes her eyes. The lights brighten. Audrey goes to Joshua. She grabs his hand.]

AUDREY: Let's go.

[END]

Forget Me, Forget Me Not

Laura Earle

In a gray flash flood that dissolves the frozen world
 Spring arrives in its mercurial splendor
 Frigid air saturates the slushy carnage
 Covering the barren ground
 Taking a frosty jab
 Whenever the sun's back is turned

Spring is ambivalent in this world
 Frosted one day, green the next
 Forget me, forget me not

In a rogue flash of passion that disrupts our frozen world
 Love reveals its fickle nature
 Anger takes advantage of confusion
 Expressed within my hopeless gaze
 Taking an icy jab
 Whenever everyone's backs are turned

Spring is ambivalent in our world
 Distant one day, passionate the next
 Forget me, forget me not

wood frame is
 decorative and
 detailed as
 well as
 large.

Do you
 remember it,
 when it still
 had its
 glass.
 All the colors it
 had.
 They made
 you ugly,
 even though
 outside
 you were
 beautiful.
 That green
 color...
 envy.
 That gold
 color...
 greed.
 That purple
 color...

Pride.
 And that
 Black piece,
 that Black
 piece,
 sat in the
 middle.

Do you
 remember
 fearing that
 mirror while
 seeing
 yourself in
 it.
 Do you
 remember
 throwing your
 fist back.
 Do you
 remember,
 picking up
 each piece,
 with bloody
 hands,
 to wash
 out the

color.
That black
one,
that black
one,
was the
only one to
refuse.
Do you
remember the
hand mirror
in your
lap,
white and
plain,
its frame
empty and
waiting to
be filled.

Throw the
Black piece
away.
Do not
pick it
up.
Do not

place it
in this
new mirror.
Yet this
mirror will
feel
incomplete
with out
It.

Sitting in the
Dark,
with only
one light
above your
head,
a red
potent
drink in
hand.

Thousands upon
thousands of
small pieces
of glass
scattered
across the
floor.

Put yourself
back
together.
Find the
true
You
in the
pieces.
Before the
light goes
out.

insulated the windows and put a space heater out there for him. It was quite the step up from our garage. They bought him toys too, but he never played with them. He never played with anything or anyone. He just wanted to be pet, fed, and loved on.

This past spring my family adopted a baby kitten, whom we named Bella. I wasn't there the day Tom met Bella for the first time, but I heard about it. Apparently he hunched over, growled with his fur on end, and tried to pounce her. Tried and failed, because my dog Pippin got in the way. Pippin did not try to do anything to Tom; he merely got in Tom's way. After staring at Pip for a couple of seconds, Tom turned and left. It was the hottest news on the block. No one had ever seen or heard of Tom behaving in that way. I was surprised, but I shouldn't have been. The cuts, and occasional limps were evidence of this side of Tom's nature. Tom was a Tomcat all right. But that little encounter did nothing to change Tom's normal behavior, or ours. The children still mauled him, the adults still fed him, and the love kept flowing.

Jacob has been dead a week or so, and I have a dream that he says goodbye to me as he always used to. In the dream I feel as though he is telling me that everything is okay; that he is alright. I am not a person to put much stock in such things, but it does make me feel better; and I tell my father. He seems a little unnerved

Tom

Jesshynn Lappo

His fur was clean white with large abstract spots of orange on his back, tail, and face. He had six toes on his front feet so that it looked as though he possessed thumbs. He first entered our lives two years ago. I don't know who saw him first or where; by the time I met him the neighborhood kids had already named him Tom. I often heard some of the adults lengthen his name to Tomcat; and I think this is probably where the kids got his name. He was a very handsome, very big kitty. Tom was sleek, strong, and athletic, a powerful cat.

My entire block on South Grinnell loved Tom. The greatest reason he became so strongly imbedded in our hearts was his docile nature. At the time there were around seven kids under the age of nine on our block. Tom loved all of them. They would pick him up awkwardly, pull his fur, and maul him intensely; yet he would never meow at them, or bite them, or they to push away. Not only that, but he would seek them out. He sought us all out. Many a day I would wake up to find him meowing at the door, waiting for someone to shower him with attention. And I would. He was the kind of cat you wanted to pet all over. He would rub up against you, lay on his belly, roll around. Tom became the neighborhood cat. Everyone fed him, and everyone let him into their home. He belonged to all of us.

It is seventeen years ago, give or take some months. I am somewhere around two; and my cat *Wildthing* is about to have kittens. I am very excited when the call goes through the house that it is time for her to deliver, but I am made to stay downstairs. After the kittens are born I am not allowed to go near them. I am not even allowed to look at them. By this time, based on the way the adults are behaving, I am aware something is wrong. It isn't until years later I am told of the grotesque deformities of *Wildthing's* first litter of kittens. My mother tells me only one kitten has lived but I am not allowed to see it yet. For a week I am kept out of "the kitten's room". Finally my mother is convinced the kitten will live, and they let me play with it before bed. The only thing wrong with this one is an unusually large head. In the morning I rush to play with it again only to be told it had died on the very night I was first allowed to see it.

But despite how entirely loving and docile Tom was, we knew he was a tough kitty. No one ever actually saw him fight; but he would bring home scars from his battles with who knows what. One day he showed up with a gaping, bleeding wound on his jaw. It was so large that the whole block knew he could not be allowed to go on risking infection. My neighbor Theresa lost the neighborhood war of the wills. She took Tom into the vet to get stitched up. He looked really funny for awhile after that, with half his face shaved.

Tom spent that winter sleeping in our garage. It wasn't heated, but he managed somehow. The next summer he was the hottest bachelor on the block. Everyone lunged at the opportunity to pet him, and cuddle him, just because he seemed to love it so much. He never really purred, but he would rub up against you strongly, and he would drool. It was gross, but also endearing, and it meant you were making him happy.

It is eight years ago. I am around eleven. For her birthday my sister gets a cute little black and white kitten. He is very small, the runt of the litter; and she names him Jacob. Jacob was a sweet tiny Kitty. He had a habit of saying goodnight to my sister and me as we laid in bed before the lights were turned off. He would jump on the pillow, lick my face, and allow me to pet him before doing the same to my sister. One night my sister and I are out at a birthday party. By this time we have had Jacob for a few months. Just before we enter *Alskate* to celebrate and have fun, my father pulls into the parking lot. He bears with him the dead body of Jacob. He explains that he was a frail kitty and a sickness of some kind took him. He has brought the body so that we could say goodbye. Neither my sister nor I are happy about the corpse in front of us. We do not share our father's need to see the dead off in this way; and the lifeless frame is scaring us. He takes the cat away.

Tom spent last winter in a playhouse Theresa originally bought for her kids. She

Innocene

Christopher James

She choked on the mist
of tears as they burned away
the flesh and sinew of her
delicate face and washed away
her long lashes and full lips.

The acid torrent's flow
moved with the heaving of
her buxom chest, racing to
expose her blushing heart.
I thought to stop its frantic beating

with my crushing fist
as she whispered through
each exquisite cry
"How could you
do this to me?"

Her tears kept eating away,
cleansing her bones. They burned
through the hardwood floor
and into my basement
where I kept the bodies

when I tell him, and presses me for detail. Then he tells me he had a very similar dream that same night. He is very taken with this dream business and hangs on it for awhile afterward. Years later, my father confesses to me Jacob did not die of a sickness. My father had been working out in the basement, and did not notice Jacob had followed him and was at his feet. Entirely by accident, when my father dropped him dumbbell, it landed on Jacob's head. As my father tells me, I realize why the dream meant so much to him.

Then, a couple of months ago, Theresa announced that she and her family were moving. The blocks greatest fear was: will she take Tom with her? No one wanted Tom to go, but Theresa had been the one to take him to the vet, and make a winter abode for him. If she chose to take him, there was not much we could say against it. Then we discovered Theresa was not planning on taking Tom with her. Instead she was looking for an alternative home for him. By this time Tom's name had been lengthened to Tom Grinnell. Everyone on South Grinnell looked after that cat, and she wanted to give him to a stranger. We were all a bit upset.

At this point there was so much talk going on about Tom that a little piece of gossip was being passed around from neighbor to neighbor. The gossip was that Tom used to live in the red house behind our block. When Theresa heard about this she went to talk to the owners of that house. They told her Tom had belonged

to the previous owner of their house, who had moved out two years ago without his cat. As luck would have it, the people were able to help Theresa get in contact with Tom's previous owner.

It is about nine years ago. I am nine or ten, and Wildthing has had her second litter of kittens. By now we are living with a very big German Sheppard who has made it apparent she intends hostility on the newborns. Consequently, the kittens are kept in the kitchen, which is connected to the basement. We have to be very careful of the door so that the dog cannot sneak in and get to the kittens. We decide to have an outside family day sometime after the kittens' birth. The kittens and mother are taken to the fenced in portion of yard, and the dog is chained far away from them. Some friends of my mom's show up. My brother is eager to show them the kittens. We tell him not to, since to get to the adults he must pass the dog, but my brother says the kitten will be safe with him, and pushes us out of the way. As my brother passes my dog nothing happens, and we all breathe a sigh of relief. But on the way back to us my brother lets his guard down and my dog attacks the kitten, biting into it. We beat the dog away. The kitten does not die instantly. I have to watch it struggle for life for a moment. Wildthing had a litter of four to six kittens. I cannot remember the exact number. Due to the carelessness of this same brother, only one survives.

Theresa called this 'previous owner'. When told about Tom, the man replied,

"You've found Leelo!?" When I heard that I mentally barfed. Leelo was an awful name for Tom. Apparently the man had not been able to find Tom when he moved out; and he told Theresa he would like Tom back. Theresa agreed. The man told her Tom had been born in the country, and that he had taken Tom into the city when he lived there. That made all the sense in the world to me. Tom was definitely a country kitty.

When the news came back to the rest of our block it was bitter sweet. No one wanted Tom to go, but everyone was happy that he would have a solid home. People where especially happy that home would be with his original owner who now lived in the country. How great that Tom would be moving to a wide-open country home!

We had a goodbye party for Tom. We took pictures, pet him, held him, and cuddled him. All the kids were there, and all the adults. We must have finally broken Tom's patience that day, because he ended up running from the dozens of hands all trying to grab him at once. I caught him. As the kids ran around the yards yelling and searching for the escaped kitty, he was up on my porch with me, eating a piece of ham out of my hand.

He is out there now, running around a new home with his old owner. And I'll bet he's living it up, enjoying every minute of it. Except, I suppose he doesn't like being called Leelo.

to avoid it, so you resolve to light that cigarette and pray no one arrives before it is exhausted. You search your pockets for the lighter, but instead find the small dinosaur. Funny. You don't remember taking that. You'll put it back later, even though no one would realize it was gone. And for now, it will be your boy's dinosaur he gave to you to hold. You smile. That thought is more warming than the cigarette. You enjoy the smoke seeping into the pores of your lungs and twist your pawn-shop wedding band. Everything is so cold, even the second-hand circle of gold. Always, always cold. You pocket the lighter, and just like you've always done, you wait for the next car to come.

of those who came before,
Andrea, Katie, Megan and Sandra,
hanging on meat hooks that
I bought after my mother left,
with aspirations of holding up

the idea of love.

In a Minute

Josh Campeau

We should be gone,
which I emphasize
when I extract my phone from my pocket,
so I can check the time
and justify the tapping of my foot,

but this becomes mundane
so instead, I pace the hallway—
scanning for that promised minute
which fluttered away—

as mom chatters with grandma
and dad fixates his attention to the baseball game,
and I curse my idealism
that believed there was no need to drive separately,
so I could have avoided this masquerading minute.

Cigarettes

Amy Hinman

Outside of The Bistro House you stand, praying for someone—
anyone, to show up. It's a Friday night and at any moment the couples
will come roaring around the corner. Women in Louis Vuittons, clutching
handbags, and their leather coat wearing husbands will toss you their
keys. Then you will nod and get into their car. But first you put out your
cigarette; nobody wants their car to smell like your ashtray. You pull
their silver Buick into the lot, and pretend for a moment that the sun-
glasses in the console belong to you, and the business card on the floor
has her shopping list on the back. Maybe you go so far as to imagine
the small plastic dinosaur under the back seat belongs to your son. That
you'll return it to his chubby pink hands and he will squeeze your neck
because he loves you so very much. Yes, that is what you'll do. After
the car is parked, you take a moment to enjoy the New Car Smell and
the life that you so unknowingly stepped into. But this is a job, not a
daydream. You fumble for your lights as you walk back to the Bistro
House. It's cold—so very cold, always. The cold seeps into every crack
and makes itself at home. No matter how hard you try there is no way

your apartment. I know you were there because I saw your car. Why are you ignoring me? I really am sorry! Can we please just talk about this?"

November 5 - 7:33 AM: "Hello Rachel, this is Dr. McIntosh. I was calling to get a follow up from you. I hope the pills are working. Are you sleeping better? Have you noticed any side-effects? Make sure you let me or Dr. Nicholson know if you notice any changes in your behavior. Call the office when you get this."

November 5 - 8:01 AM: "Rachel, your mom just called me at work asking if I'd seen you lately. Where are you? No one has heard from you and your mom is freaking out! She's calling Brandon next. She's about ready to call the police and report a missing person. C'mon Rachel! Wake up! We are all wondering what happened to you!"

November 5 - 9:00 AM: "Rachel, it's Mom. Call me, sweetie. I'm worried."

November 5 - 10:34 AM: "Rachel, your mom just called me. I have no idea what is going on with you. Please, talk to someone. I get that you are mad at me but please, go see Nicholson or some-

The Voicemails of Rachel Wher

Paige Pierog

"Hey-o! This is Rachel. I'm either screening your call or busy doing something more important than talking to you. If this is a telemarketer, you have the wrong number. If this is my boss, don't worry, I'm working on it! If this is Sarah, stop calling, we just saw each other! If this is my mom, I'm doing great, stop worrying! If it's me, don't you think it's about time you used a grocery list like a normal person? The rest of you: you know what to do."

October 30 - 2:13 PM: "Sweetie I am so sorry they didn't like your manuscript! Those bastards don't know what's good! And don't worry about Brandon--he will come around. How about you come over? Your dad and I would love to see you! Maybe a night away from everything will do you some good? I'll make something special for dinner. Whatever you want! I love you!"

November 1 - 12:35 PM: "Hello, this is the Rite Aid on 3rd Street. We are calling to let you know that a prescription for Rachel Wehr is ready to be picked up. Have a good day."

November 2 - 6:26 PM: "Hey Rachel, it's Mom. Sorry dinner

didn't work out the other day. Glad to hear about the new medication. Take care of yourself! Just wondering how your week is going. I haven't heard from you in a while and just want to make sure you're okay. Okay. Call me back when you get this. Love you, sweetie!"

November 3 - 2:34 PM: "Rach! Long time no see! I'm in town tonight and I figured I'd hit you up! How about you and Sarah meet me for dinner somewhere? We've got some catching up to do! Let me know. I'll call Sarah. See you tonight!"

November 3 - 3:01 PM: "You will never believe who I just heard from! Gregg called me and invited us to dinner tonight. I haven't heard from him in ages! I'm up for dinner and drinks! Any good shows playing? You always know which ones are best. I told him we'd meet for 6:30. Bring your stuff over to my place around 5. We can get ready together and you can just stay overnight. All right! See you soon!"

November 3 - 5:16 PM: "Rachel, where are you? Are you not coming? Call me back!"

November 3 - 6:03 PM: "Rach, this is so not funny. Where are you?" November 3 - 11:57 PM: "Greg was pretty bummed you

didn't make dinner. I told him you had plans with your boyfriend. I didn't know what else to tell him. I'd appreciate a call to let me know where the hell you are!"

November 4 - 7:09 AM: "Hello, Rachel. I'm on my way to work. Your mom said that she called and you haven't called her back. I told her she is being paranoid but she had me call you, just in case. If you are mad at Mom you know Daddy's here for you. Love you, Rach. Talk to you soon."

November 4 - 11:54 AM: "Sorry dinner didn't work out last night. Maybe next time I'm in town we'll meet up. Miss you Rachel! Don't be a stranger!"

November 4 - 1:58 PM: "Look, Rachel. I don't want to fight anymore. Can I stop by after work? I think we should talk about this in person. Rachel, I'm sorry. I love you."

November 4 - 4:30 PM: "I stopped by your place after work. Your car was there but no one answered the door. I get that you are mad at Brandon, but please don't push me away! I'm your best friend! Where are you?"

November 4 - 5:36 PM: "Rachel, I just want to talk. I stopped by

Our softly spoken words of truth, life and love were barely audible over the splashing fountain, but helped warm our faces against the wind as a single gilded leaf fell between our outstretched hands.

thing. Where is Sarah? Call her. I love you, Rach."

November 5 - 1:23 PM: "Rachel, Brandon just called me in hysterics because no one can get in touch with you. I'm calling Dr. Nicholson to report a change in behavior. Where are you?"

November 5 - 2:00 PM: "Rachel, this is Dr. Nicholson. I was about to call you to follow up on your new medication when your friend Sarah called me to report that no one has heard from you in almost a week. You missed this week's appointment. I think you need to come in so we can talk about the changes in your life. Sarah said you've been down lately. I'm scheduling you for an emergency session tomorrow at 1. Do not miss it!"

November 5 - 4:00 PM: "Well, Rachel, your Mom lost it. Your parents, Brandon, and I are on our way to your house right now. Your mom reported you as missing to the police. If you don't answer the door, we are breaking in. Now would be a great time to start talking."

November 6 - 1:01 AM: "I had to call to hear your voice again. I already miss you so much. I love you, Rachel. You will always be my best friend."

The Recital

Amy Johnson

In blackness, pink slippers
tiptoe to metallic strips on
scuffed, black flooring. The
painted faces search for their

places behind the red velvet,
and a cough from the front
row echoes off of brick,
alluding an empty audience.

Uniformed minds reel, rewind,
replay, lazily marking
pas de bourrées because no one
is watching. I slouch because

no one is watching, until
a splinter of light grows
wider—expands like my
lungs. Draws my shoulders

back like the curtain that
reveals eyes—hundreds of
waiting eyes on me as I
stumble, fall, forget months

of rehearsal, but stand
back up to pirouette
as the others pique turn.

Beneath the Surface

Christopher James

Lisa and I sat at the edge
of the wishing well,
watching as summer's last
hopeful gasp turned to
mist on the dreams of those
who came before us to
cast a wish at Aphrodite's feet.

We, too, cast our silver dollar dreams
into the waves, as our dangling feet
skimmed the surface of the
cool water and brushed against
the golden leaves that struggled
to stay afloat on the sea, lest they fall
into the world of wishing.

I wondered what wish she had
whispered to the goddess,
imbuing the words within the silver
that now lay at the bottom of the
sea of dreams, just as my own had
come to rest on the image
of her pursed lips.

and she was even better to watch sports with. She took interests in things that were similar to him and knew things that appeared foreign. This interested Carlin, seeing as it interested her, and he put forth an effort in learning these new things. She was magnificent. In the short time they spent she had truly become his best friend. He liked her with all his heart.

However the greatest problem that Carlin experienced with the device was not a matter of its programming, or its actions at all. The company of the woman was fine.

But how can any being ever be satisfied when they spend their time clutching the cold body of a machine? Is this any more sensual than the feeling of a phone in the palm or any more erotic than a cushion in the loin?

Carlin's thoughts wandered, and he laughed a sad pathetic laugh which almost brought him to tears as he read, "Satisfaction," aloud to himself.

Every night for two months Carlin had lay down with that machine hoping that it would take the feel of a human. Hoping that he would feel her hips warm against his or that he would spontaneously be able to feel her breath or heart beat. But nothing: only lifeless rubbery latex skin and a cold tactile touch causing him to wake up shivering in the night. He would squeeze her and pull the body of the being closer, but all it would do would press more

Satisfaction Gaurenteed

Alex Baumgarten

Carlin sighed heavily as he proceeded to pick up the remaining bit of packing popcorn that had been carelessly tossed about the floor. His head bowed and his arms folded to form a chalice that was filled with the clingy white orbs. His back appeared broken as it curled, fixating his sight upon the floor. Awkwardly enclosing the Styrofoam pieces about his hands, Carlin proceeded to toss them gently into a large rectangular wooden crate that lay upon his living room floor. And with that the last gray bit of being that lay within it, cold with death, was covered and unseen.

Brushing the few Styrofoam pieces that clang to his hands like dirt from his skin, Carlin allowed his body to collapse upon a small armoire that had been pushed out away from the couch. A sigh bled out from his lips. He was sitting where she had sat. Quickly he thrashed his head back and forth in an absurd effort to prevent the oncoming tears. His head settled as he looked back at the box on the floor. The crate stretched a massive seven feet. However, amongst the sprawling space of the large home it appeared much smaller. With a blank bitter stare Carlin looked onward at the crate. Like a black hole the burnt insignia on its side drew his glare in.

Delin Robotics
Bionic Lover

She had already been placed back in the box, wrapped in a black foam sheet that caressed her as cloth would. She had been deactivated and her body fell loose in his arms. It hurt to place her in. Carlin told himself it was just the burden of the weight that caused the pain. Carlin was not a very strong man, he never was. In the crate's center he placed the manual that she had come with. Being close to the same girth as the bible, the scripture quickly sunk in the sea of Styrofoam beads eventually ending against the woman's chest.

The lid lay off as Carlin looked onward at it.

There had only been one other thing that she had left him, one thing he was unable to let go of. Coming with her, stapled to the lid of the crate had been a small ordinance from the manufacturer.

: Satisfaction guaranteed

Satisfaction. Carlin's lip curled when he read this. He contemplated his

own happiness and the ambiguity of satisfaction. But even a man of his youth and inexperience could understand the effects of love, or romance, of what a woman was able to bring, and he knew that this thing on his living room floor had not brought him satisfaction.

All this being said, Carlin still appeared to be somewhat undecided on his definition of this promised satisfaction. Had he been happy? Yes, very much so.

The truth be told the robot had done all that had been asked of it and more. It was capable of cooking, as well as cleaning, obviously this was so. And it's programming and existing knowledge of each field was impeccable.

But the robot also provided great company as well. She was capable of telling witty jokes that appeared to be perfectly catered to him. And better yet, the robot laughed at his. She gave the best massages, of all natures. She was a joy to be around. She had a smile that was unparalleled to any living being. Her hair radiated a scent that could not be adequately described in words with a breath that was unspeakable to the ability of all language. Her appearance would have been disrespected if explained and she always made Carlin blush with unworthy embarrassment when she graced him with her presence. Her company was gracious. She was a joy the time they went apple picking

A Farewell

Paige Pierog

Robins and sparrows sit still in the tree tops
 their heads bowed and beaks closed
 in an endless silent prayer
 the cicadas do not sing to the sun
 as it rises over the tops of the trees
 whose leaves are stiff to the wind,
 soundless in the breeze

The grass screams beneath my rubber soles
 it deafens me for a moment
 I beg for the waves of green to muffle
 the sound of my footsteps
 but the booming fills my eardrums
 and spills over to run down my face
 down my spine
 to the flowers shaking in my fingers

Petals float from the flowers and speckle the green
 small bursts of creamy pink,
 flawless whites,
 warm reds,
 all diluting the crass mud
 covering the entrance to another world
 with a thick layer of filth

cold metal against his own human flesh. He would squeeze harder but only cause her body to buckle and expose the actual emptiness of that which he held in his arms. Nothing beat in her, nothing breathed. She was cold, no matter how much warmth the smile she gave radiated back towards him when he woke her the following morning.

A knock at the door caused Carlin to cringe. He wished they would be less abrasive with his glass storm door. It was after all so fragile and loose; he did not want it to crack as it was so close to doing.

He opened the door and invited the man into his home. A tall man of medium girth carried in a dolly that would be used to lift the great weight of the box. His face was poorly shaven and looked to be covered with many blemishes that had accumulated about his mouth. Sweat began to form in body folds. His appearance caused a well-mannered man like Carlin to cringe.

"This one here?" the man asked. Carlin laughed, or tried to, to ease his own tension. He watched with his arms crossed and his fingers placed over his mouth as the man placed the lid upon the crate and struck a series of nails into its top.

The man went over to retrieve the crate. He made it look much easier

to move than Carlin had. To this man it was almost as if the crate had been empty. As the man bent to shift the crate on to the dolly a small chapped leather wallet fell from his pocket. It lay open on the floor as Carlin caught a glimpse of what looked to be the man's wife. Appearing to be of equal age, her hair had begun to gray and she looked to be wearing far too much make up. Her smile was crooked and her teeth stained with coffee. Carlin cringed at this appearance, equally as much as he had cringed at the mover. They had been a perfect match.

The mover lifted the box upright catching sight of his wallet.

"You like that?" he spoke to Carlin as he bent down to retrieve it. "That's the misses back home. Ain't she a looker?" Carlin looked down again and the hideous troll of a woman, now without wincing, and lied to the man.

"Yes, she is very beautiful!"

"You bet she is. That's Lorene. She's the best girl I could ever hope to have and I'll love her till the day I die." The mover placed the large box upon the dolly without a huff. "Yup," he spoke; he stayed strong in spite of the weight of the item. "She makes this job all worth it. I'd do anything just to make sure that she has everything she wants. Then maybe she could have half the things she's given me."

Carlin suddenly wanted the man out of his house.

However, Carlin's mouth began to quiver as the man moved towards the door; he could hardly bear it. He turned himself away so that his face could not be seen and held his head in embarrassment. However as the final wheel fell over the step of his stoop, Carlin ran to the box, calling out for the man to wait. He placed his hand on the crate for a moment, holding his breath.

He had to hear that laugh again,

See that smile.

But in an instant he retrieved his hand from the box as though it was a stove burner shining orange. He knew that even though he believed retrieving her from the box would bring happiness, it would not bring satisfaction. He would have felt no more satisfaction than that which the box brought him now; nothing but cold dead maple against the fleshy surface of his palm.



Join Writers' Club

Writers' Club at Grand Valley State University consists largely of student writers who do not study writing professionally. It is a designated time and place for students to convene once a week to discuss their writing and develop ideas. All genres are welcome at Writers' Club, including poetry, fiction, non-fiction and drama.

About this Publication

In winter 2009, we printed our first publication in many years, titled *Don't Open This*. In winter of 2010, the first publication of *Running Out of Ink* was released and in fall 2010 *Running Out of Ink* was published again with the intention of making it a semi-annual publication to be released both fall and winter semesters. Submissions from both members and non-members are accepted and considered for publication.

atop a shining silver vessel
made dull with the weight of grief
though containing the essence of beauty
safely within a pearl satin trim

A single slab of smooth white concrete
sleeps partially sunken into the upset ground
littered with grass seed and decaying petals
its sharp corners crawl with ants
that trudge over the oily smear of tears
that stained the pure white solidity
to carry the fallen colors to their own grave

The slab has no marks and no symbols
it is bare and purposeless, except
to provide a vapid foundation for a
marriage of the living and dead,
a pedestal for the mockery of
life growing from what was once lively
Flowers stand in vases
in a half moon of pigments splashed
among entwining leaves that
hug each other tightly
in a safe loop that suddenly
stops with no explanation

Daffodil, aster, and chrysanthemum

perfume swells in a cloud that begins bright,
reaching toward the warm rays of the sun,
but falls below the saltiness the grass breathes
from the tears the trees and blooms have cried
and never stop crying
the dampness so widespread
earth itself seems to be weeping,
sorry for swallowing such a being
in one, unforgiving gulp

I place my roses among the other blossoms
withholding one rose from the chorus
of solemn color that gently croons
of the sorrows of the lost and broken

My fingers brush the slab the sun
diligently tries to warm
but it is cold, not as ice,
but as something more permanent,
more breathtaking,
more sinister

A vigilant candle watches over
normally burning to provide comfort and warmth
but now out
perhaps from the overwhelming dampness
of an atmosphere heavy with sad drops

of helplessness and abandonment

I place my remaining rose, a crimson one,
single and loving,
on the edge of the slab so it almost kisses
a larger stone engraved with a justification

of God's mistake
holding my token is a small plaque with a promise,
my promise,
of a friendship that will, indeed,
last forever.

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<i>Theresa Johnstone</i>	

Spread the Word

Jess Paauwe

By God what happened?

The world is changing.
Once estranged, derranged, complaining,

NOW! a little hope. REMAINING!

Mermaids to Music-

The once wiley smiles so vile, so vile

now sincere pearly flashes that flash in elegant style.

The laughs of the pasts, such classy glass,
such strange eerie rings in his head he amassed.

Now so calm, like a psalm, a sweet steady song,
Mermaids to muses, the writers is bemused but enthused!

What was wrong so long ago all along?
How did a queer eerie ring become song?
How did creatures of the violent sea
become the sweet features of femininity, such effulgent divinity

Running Out of Ink

Winter 2012



A Writers' Club Publication

Grand Valley State University
Allendale, MI

*Layout and design by Ellen Lundgren, Hannah Moeggenborg & Drake Parker
Edited by Hannah Moeggenborg & Josh Campeau*

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Oatmeal

Hannah Matro

The oats. Steel oats to be specific. They're supposed to better for you than the quick minute kind. Poured into a pale pink translucent 1/2 measuring cup. They hit the plastic cup, reminiscent of a rain stick used in 4th grade music class. Set aside while the water in the baby-sized Farberware pot attempts to reach a boil. Reminded of the old adage "A watched pot will never boil", I avert my eyes from the pot for a few seconds and wait to hear bubbling. It doesn't come. I look back. It boils.

Sigh.

This always takes so long. But stovetop is the champagne of all oatmeal-cooking methods. I admit, I had that phase; where Quaker Instant Oatmeal packets were my life. I could probably name every flavor they distributed, from Maple Date Walnut to Dinosaur Eggs---which was by far my favorite as a wee girl. I recently tried them again, and boy, they weren't anything like I recall, the 'eggs' hard and sugary and the oats gluey and sticky, catching in my throat as I tried my very best to swallow the crap Quaker tried to pass off as prime children's breakfast food. Rewind six years.

Must have been some change within me

Faith.

How did he get such friendly friends in the end?
Ones who didn't forsake, berate, or amend?

How did he see things, believe things, relieve things?
How was he blinded, so absent minded?

He couldn't feel enough to find life
Because he thought he should not have sought it,

That he just.

Should not

find it.

The clever devil is pushed so far behind it.

Get Behind Me Satan.

The Change.

Have you heard? You must have heard, if you have
SPREAD THE WORD!

Something has happened to him, remember him, that one man?

He's come to ruminate on such ruins, to indulge, to command-
the spirit of enlightenment with a pen in his hand

The Quest.

His soul is not lame, he is not so estranged
He's intuitive, lucrative, he knows what can be gained.

He's made commodities of his oddities,
such funneled ambition-
Propels him through time, and space-
and prevents his submission.
Much like Thor, or Ares God of war
On a celestial, grand or paramount mission

He's had it well now, gambling with the Tarot,
a divine set of luck

So spread the word one the once branded nerd:

A poet.

has woken.

up.

Elevate

Laura Earle

Ascend from subterranean shadow
Flicker before my eyes
Ethereal fingers interlock with mine
Turn my flesh to vapor
My heart to mist
Let's elevate
Above and beyond

Smoke rising from charred failures and desperation
Steam over boiling anger and frustration
We'll condense far from here
With the dew of a new day
Wait for new life, love, happiness to grow and flourish
You elevate me
Above and beyond.

Toy Doll

Raine Gersky

Vivacious doll
Twirling on a skinny pole
Motor clicking softly
Breaking down tears so droll

Animal stuffed with cotton
Yellow and worn and old
Checkered pattern flamboyant
Eye socket popping out so bold

Puzzle without the piece
Necessary for full
Completion
Carousel tinkling its soft lull
Cracked glass proving releases elation

Chest mature and worn
Lying six feet below the bed
Taken out from its hiding
To explore what still lives, left over by the dead

Rip. The tearing of the brown paper packet was my favorite part of the morning ritual. Food products that come in packages that you can open with your bare hands give me a sick sense of power---oatmeal packets, cereal bags, Oreos. Lipton soup drives me insane---it's lined with some metallic substance that forbids the ripping by hand and warrants the usage of scissors. I'm reminded of how much I hate Lipton's package inventor every time I eat the stuff. Which isn't that often. I'd rather eat oatmeal.

But even the easy-to-open packaging of instant oats wasn't enough to keep me on the instant oatmeal kick. At some point along my road to preferring stovetop oatmeal, I abandoned the convenient option I had once loved so dearly because somewhere on that timeline, someone ruined my life forever by making me oats on the stove; a revolutionary thought much like Europe's Enlightenment took over my breakfast brain. Entirely different, completely better, not at all like the oatmeal I had always known.

Alas, I was not an instant convert. For a while, I ate the instant oatmeal still, (mostly because due to me obsession, my parents stocked the cupboards full of strawberries n' cream and apples and cinnamon to the

point of Apocalyptic survival capabilities), but instead of microwaving it, I converted to the hot water method, which was better than the former method but always resulted in a weak, watery, flavor-less breakfast when compared to the stovetop variety.

Rip. Pour. The hot water poured on top. Stir. Stir. Stir. Too thick. Add more water. Too thin. Shucks. Sigh.

Fast forward to present. The steel oats on the stove, still not cooked through to the correct consistency. Tapping my fingers on the counter. Stir. The pot sizzles as I scrape the oats off the bottom of the Farberware with a soup spoon. Taste. Nope. Steel oats, when not cooked through, feel like chewy gravel, tearing up your tongue and getting stuck in the crevices of your molars. Two more minutes.

The bowl is all ready for the oats. I've got this down to a science. Put the brown sugar and sugary dates, chopped into little pieces, in the bottom of said bowl. Keep the toasted walnuts or pecans close at hand. If dried cherries have recently been stolen from my parents' freezer at home, they, along with vanilla extract and a pinch of cinnamon, will be thrown in the bubbling oatmeal for the last minute of cooking. Plop, plop, plop. In they go. One more minute. At this point, I'm literally im-

patient beyond belief. I have to keep reminding myself that if I take them off prematurely, my whole breakfast will be ruined.

Deep breath. Not much longer. Sigh.

Finally. Spoon the gloppy mixture into bowl, getting an oatmeal-steam facial at the same time. Stir stir stir, incorporate the brown sugar, bring it all to the top. Otherwise, upon eating concoction, there will be parts I don't want to eat. Parts without sugar or nuts or cherries. Parts that I skip over and end up putting down the garbage disposal or in the blue trash can. Stir stir stir. Sprinkle nuts on top. Inhale, eating until I'm full. Then, I eat only the nuts, the dates, cherries, and end up flinging the extra oats into the trash anyway.

Sigh. I've become such an oatmeal snob. Thanks to whoever made me my first stovetop oatmeal, I now spend at least twice as long making myself ingestible food in the mornings. Oh, how I wish I could go back to the ease of Dinosaur Egg instant Quaker. Whoever robbed me of my stovetop oatmeal virginity, you owe me at least five minutes of every day of my life back.

A lot of Earth started to look like this place. After a bunch of really bad wars, it seemed like the human race might not survive for much longer.

"But something happened. No one's really sure what, but the people stopped fighting. They actually started working together again. Cities that had been abandoned or destroyed were rebuilt. Before long, men were going into space again, and actually building new cities on other worlds. It was the dawn of the Solar Alliance."

"The Solar Alliance? I've never heard of that," Corrin says.

"It was the greatest government ever made by humans. It ruled over most of humanity and guided them as they spread to dozens, then hundreds, then thousands of worlds. Sometimes worlds broke away and tried to fight the Alliance, but most people were happy with them. They watched over humanity for over two thousand years."

"Wow, that's a really long time!" The girl shushes Corrin at his interjection, and I continue. They're both staring intently at me now, and I see even the parents are watching.

"Anyway, after two thousand years, it was the greatest age of mankind. It seemed like there was no limit to the miracles we could accomplish. This world was one of thousands that were beautiful. So, so beautiful..." I trail off for a moment before continuing.

"There were plants of all kinds, trees as tall as buildings. And the people lived in peace with all the different animals, until..." I pause dramatically, and the children lean forward expectantly.

Mental Health

Christopher Barber

Mind wandering,
Thinking sorrowfully back on,

The institution

Thinking fearfully ahead,
will the government,
shove pills through his esophagus?
if he doesn't, will he go back?

To bleach white rooms,
where he trudges,
the weight of his illness upon him,
reaching out,
hands pressed against the glass,
yearning to feel alive once more.

When he can no longer stay,
he leaves with empty pockets,
a deadened mind,
living on cement and cardboard,
dying beside a back alley dumpster.
glad he has his medicine.

Sitting

Brian Hudson

"Hey mister, do you know any stories?" I look up from my meal and give the boy a quizzical look. He stares at me expectantly, though his little sister ignores the question and keeps eating. Their parents stand a short ways off with their meals, talking quietly to each other, and their bodyguard sits in the dirt near the family's cart. The children and I are seated on two rocks underneath an overhang, taking shelter from the scorching wasteland sun while we share a meal.

"Stories, huh? Why do you think I know any stories?" He returns my look with one of incredulity, as if the answer is obvious.

"Well, you look really old, so you must know some good ones." I can see the mother move to scold him for his insensitivity, but my laughter changes her mind. I scratch the gray hair on my face and nod. "Yeah, I'm old. I know some stories. Why do you want to hear them?"

"I want to be a storyteller when I grow up. My father tells me some really good ones, but he always says the same ones over and over. I want to learn all of them so I never have to say the same story twice!" I smile a little and pretend not to notice the father looking embarrassed.

"Well, alright. Just three days ago, I was in a town called Sinkhole. There was a nice

woman there named Regina..."

"No, that sounds boring," he cuts me off. "Just how old are you? I bet you know stories of what the world was like before the war. My father said there used to be other worlds with people on them too. Do you know anything about them?" I have to say, I'm impressed. Most people I meet don't have any concept of outer space or what human history was like before the war. The father must have had access to some really old records.

"Stories before the war, huh?" I run a hand through my short and gray hair. "Yes, I know a few from that time. You want to hear about that, Corrin?" The boy nods excitedly. "Alright. Well, long ago, a very, very long time ago, humans lived on a world called Earth. It was the only world they knew. But they did amazing things. They built machines that could think like people and link the entire human race together in one giant community, they could fly through the air or dig through the ground, and they even sent men into space!"

"Did they go to other worlds?" Corrin interrupts. I shake my head. "No, not yet. We only sent a few men to the moon. After we did that, we stopped doing it for a while because everyone wanted to focus on making their lives better.

"But a lot of them weren't happy. The people fought themselves constantly for all kinds of reasons. As the population of Earth got bigger and bigger, so did the conflicts.

Uncertainty

Amy Johnson

I learned confidence the way I learned to climb a tree, trusting the branches that bowed beneath my toes. Hand in hand, I relied on the hold of parted bark, embracing the trunk with my thighs until the tree and I were one, breathing in each other. Breathing into vertigo from the highest limb, I looked down on fresh stumps --man's making, and the branches, now twigs, that easily break their promises.

"... Until the monsters came. Terrible beasts, from another universe like ours, only made of darkness instead of light. There were countless different kinds of monsters, and they had no name for themselves. We simply called them the Great Enemy.

"They went to many worlds, and killed so many people. The humans fought them as hard as they could, and held them off for centuries. The war was so long and terrible entire generations knew nothing but fighting. But it wasn't enough. The Great Enemy kept destroying more and more worlds. Even this world was attacked by them, and turned into the wasteland it is now, but we survived and fought them off." As if to emphasize my point, a gust of wind blew a cloud of dust through our spot and the children coughed.

"The war only ended when we snuck into their own universe and destroyed the source of the gateways that let them come into our universe. But by then, most worlds with humans on them had been destroyed, or terribly burned.

"The people of our world survived, though, and struggled to rebuild. That was when maybe your great-great-grandparents were alive. We've made a lot of progress, but we still have a long ways to go."

I leaned back and spread my arms wide. "And, here we are!" Both children's mouths are slightly agape, and neither of them say anything. I notice the parents are standing and staring at me as well.

"How do you know all that? Are you from one of those other worlds?" Corrin asks. I chuckle and grin. "In a manner of speaking." I ignore the father rolling his eyes. By now, we've all finished our meals, and the parents start packing up the trash. Their body-guard gets up and starts readying the bromix-pulled cart.

The father, Jordan, walks up to me with a hand extended as I pull a small silver watch on a chain out of my pocket and look at the time. The case is worn beyond belief, and most of the internal components have been replaced at least once, but it still works fine, and the letters engraved on the outside can still be seen.

"What's that?" Jordan asks. I glance at him before closing the watch and returning it to my pocket. "A gift... from someone that used to be important to me. ... They're gone now."

He senses my reluctance to talk. "Well, we gotta get going before it starts getting too dark. Thanks for talking and entertaining the kids."

I smile and nod. "Not a problem. I have to ask, though. You said that food was rygar meat and fresh petrus leaves. Rygars have been extinct since the war, and petrus doesn't grow this far from the sea. Where'd you find it?"

"Ever heard of New Hope?"

I shake my head, and he continues. "It's some kind of project inside a dome. They're trying to bring back life to the wasteland. We didn't stay long, but they have all kinds of

incredible things in there. Like living rygars and fresh petrus. You should check it out."

I nod, pondering the possibility. A project like that would be incredibly useful to restoring life to the whole world, assuming it didn't get wiped out by marauders before it could reach fruition. I decide to make that my next destination. "Thanks, I'll check it out."

Jordan turns to his wife and the two go over to the cart. I look down at the children to see the boy has put my hat on, even though it's much too large for him and is covering his eyes. I chuckle and pull it off his head, and he grins at me.

"Mister, can I keep this hat? It's so cool!"

I ponder it for a moment, getting a glimpse of his future. The young boy does indeed grow up to be a story-teller, and an exceptional one at that, with my hat reminding him of the story I told him today. "Sure, go ahead. Don't lose it. Grow up strong and tell good stories!" The boy grins and nods before running to the cart with the hat on his head again, his sister following him.

The family waves good-bye and continues on down the road towards Sinkhole. I watch them for a few minutes before I sit back down on my rock and reassemble my gun, which was still lying in its constituent parts from an interrupted cleaning session. Half an hour later, my gear is packed and on my back on top of my coat, and I walk into the sunlight, hoping the sun doesn't scorch my head too much.

It had been snowing all weekend. Each weatherman agreed with the next when they said there was no end in sight. Murphy's high school would surely be closed, and it disappointed him. He thought about it each time he awoke to his brother's snores and wondered how an eight year old could make noise like that and sleep through it. Flattening his pillow around his head to snuff the sound, he squeezed his eyes, seeing snow in the darkness. Snow and Trudy. Murphy laid awake at 6am thinking about snow, thinking about school, thinking about her. It had been two days since he'd seen her. Tomorrow would make three. A loud nasaled snort vibrated the thoughts from his head as he slung his pillow blindly at Colin. It landed with a thud and a series of short grunts followed a long pull of snores. Pale yellow began to peek between the pines and shimmered on the flakes falling to the roof. At the sound of the alarm, Colin flew to Murphy's side of the room, his nose and fingertips smudging the window.

"School's gonna be closed today, I just know it Murphy!" His words fogged the glass. He went on about the snow fort he and Dave

Mona

Morgan Coby

Mona,
Mona,
Marvelous Mona,
Mocha complexion,
Matured expeditiously, generated a meandrous motif
Could have been mentioned with Melyssa Ford and Marilyn
Monroe
Majestic motions making men malfunction
Motivating malarkey from them, muttering:
"Muh-muh-maybe we could see a muh-movie"
Molting males not mackin' mistake-free
All of muliebriety maliciously murmured:
"Maybe she's made with it,
Maybe it's Maybelline."
Mona metamorphosed to maniac for
Materialistic, muddleheaded mofos
Who'd murder to get her massive monkey
And whose main concerns were:
Money, moola, mazuma, and mediums of marketry
Moreover,
Murky and Malevolent as Mephistopheles
Miscreants magnetized her, made her as moist as marshland
...But Mona was far from a moron
Mindful of the marrow of mezmiration

Had the merit of modern medication
 ...Mona was a martinet
 Her medial entrance managing mentalities of motley men:
 Militants, masculine, meek, mindless, even metrosexual
 This moll migrated from man to man
 Mooching to maximize her meager restitution
 Her monkeyshines gave her a new moniker:
 Madam Mona the Money-Hungry
 ...Mona mutated to a muckamuck
 Using her magnum opus for a myriad of means:
 Mobile phone contracts, marble floors, menial moil, men to
 mate with, machines mended, merriment, medicine, merce-
 naries, Metropolitan lodging, Mercedes Benzes,
 Mutilated mutual funds from mawkish men who masturbated
 at midnight,
 Envisioning her legs moving to and fro, hearing her moan
 ...Mona had it made!
 Mona,
 Mona,
 Meretricious Mona,
 Wasn't even moderately modest
 Masquerading nothing for the mind
 Externally magnificent,
 Internally moldering from the many, many, many, many, many,
 many, MANY machos that meshed their flesh with hers
 Time met up with Mona,
 Giving her masterpiece physique a mastodonic markdown

Motions became maladroitness, marks of age materialized
 Makeup no longer masking her marred beauty
 Image gradually moved from the minds of many
 Mona,
 Mona,
 Misguided Mona,
 Didn't mind the memo
 Misappropriated her masterwork, manifesting a measureless
 murk around her renown
 Mona should have moseyed to a marriageable, mellow,
 soul-brotha
 The same mofos that were mundane in school, became mil-
 lionaires in mansions
 Mona,
 Mona,
 Misfortunate Mona,
 Offering mea culpa to the Most High
 Mourning morningly on what must have been
 A marital ritual
 Mona and Mr. Miraculous moving to a place on Melrose
 Having monuments made for her, being mollycoddled
 Her monstrous mistakes and messin' around left her unwed,
 unloved, and childless
 Mona was an enduring mockery among all
 Her misadventures and miseducation are unfortunately...
 ...Realities for sisters misusing what's mightier than machetes

about Colin's age. She smiled, gave his forehead a kiss, pulled his hat overtop of it and handed him a string cheese from the refrigerator. He continued yapping as he wobbled past Murphy and out the front door he fought to open with his puffy claw.

"Listen kiddo, I'm headin' out. Colin needs to be picked up at 3. You better get going, he's probably half way there by now." She nudged him, grabbing the pack of cigarettes and lighter that sat next to the coffee maker and placing them in her robe pocket.

Murphy clenched his coat, shoved his bare feet into his father's thick work boots and found the only matching set of mittens on the shelf. He thought of Trudy. He wondered if she had a full custody sibling and if her parents were drunks and gone all the time. Would she care that his were? His stomach burned with doubt. As he opened the door and saw the footprints he would always be in charge of following, he realized he didn't care.

had worked on all weekend and how today they'd dig a basement and maybe a small garage if it snowed enough. Murphy got up slowly as Colin tore down the stairs, shouldering the walls he poned between, jumping the last few steps and landing with a healthy plump. Murphy dropped into his dad's tattered green chair and wedged his hand between the seat and the arm where the remote usually was. He pulled out a hand of hair and cracker bits as Colin turned the television on from the couch behind him. He stuck his tongue out at Murphy at the sight of the finger he was being given.

"Mom said you'll go to hell if you keep doing that," Colin said, flipping to news.

"She's lying. I'm gonna tell her you swore," Murphy said.

The anchorwoman's mouth moved silently as school names scrolled across the bottom along with the holy word 'closed'. Murphy leaned back and ripped the remote from Colin's small hand.

"You need volume, doofus."

Colin whined. "You're gonna wake up dad!"

"What do you care," Murphy snapped, pressing the volume button rapidly. The clock above the television was slow. His father must have

snuck it back to bar time, his routine on the nights he would stagger home as Murphy was getting Colin up for school. The brunette on the screen distracted him from the rest of Colin's excited babble. She had the same dark waves as Trudy and they shared a lip shade. She had asked him to call and he wanted too but he didn't know what he'd say. They hadn't had a conversation outlasting the walk from biology to economics. He always made a dumb comment about the weather, which he considered using as an excuse to call her now. Colin hushed his usual rapid speech at the sound of his mother's throaty coughs coming into the room.

"You boys aren't going to school today," she said, wearing the squinty eyes she had every morning she woke up with a hangover. "I need you to shovel the driveway." She threw her unsteady finger towards Murphy at the emphasis of "you" and he noticed she was still wearing her work clothes. Seeing his school scroll the screen muted whatever snide comment he was going to mumble at his mother. Colin threw down his juice box and sprung from the couch, fists in the air, his pajama bottoms beginning to fall as he danced around Murphy.

"It's closed!" he chanted over and over, rambling again about his

snow fort mansion.

Murphy slowly walked upstairs, away from the annoyed grumbles of his mother as Colin, too young to know what hungover was, tried getting her to dance. Today would be like every day for the past four years and he would be forced to guardian angel his brother while his dad slept and his mom did whatever it was she did with her days. He sat on his bed, saddened that he wouldn't get to see Trudy and that his car was too snowed in to go anywhere worth going.

"Murphy!" his mom called from downstairs a few minutes later. "Walk your brother to Dave's please!" Throwing himself back onto his bed, he heaved a long sigh, knowing that please was said only for effect. He yelled his agreement and raised the finger that was apparently sending him to hell, shoving it into the air and clenching his teeth.

Mom was dressing Colin for the unfriendly outdoors when Murphy stuck his head in the kitchen. He was sitting on the counter getting his boots laced and making music with the Velcro on his gloves. Colin stopped and looked softly at his mother.

"You promise you'll be home for dinner?"

Murphy remembered asking this question every day until he was

[Lights up. A hazy, blue light illuminates most of the stage. Fog rolls in and there are sounds of rain playing softly. Thunder crashes occasionally. Stage left is a phone booth [or just a pay phone on a pole] toward the mid-back of the stage. The phone is disconnected from the pole. The payphone has been vandalized. An old bench, also vandalized, sits center stage next to a bus stop.]

AUDREY, a 42 year old woman, walks to the stage through the audience. She is dressed in an old, knee-length prom dress; it's a bit garish and neon and heels and a trench coat fitted loosely over the dress. She is holding an umbrella over her head.]

AUDREY: We always used to meet here. Michael and I. There was this joke. Somehow, we had learned the phone number to the pay phone. We'd call each other, or we'd scare people waiting for their bus. [She laughs]. Even after the bus stopped making this stop—We were always at this intersection. He was always here. When I was scared, when I was upset. It was like magic. [Audrey walks on to the stage and sits on the bench, closing her umbrella. She's waiting for someone. The lights

Hay Bales

Amy Hinman

He tosses the bales
 until they scrape at the ceiling,
 disrupting swallows and bats
 and raising a green cloud of dust
 to the heavens. The cloud spreads,
 depositing bits of alfalfa in our
 noses and eyes and hair. The old barns
 new perfume of dried out sunshine and earth
 erases the musk and rot—everything is green and new
 and heavy. His forehead hosts streaks of sweat
 and green powder. It drips
 into his eyes and ears, and leaves pools
 down the back of his faded T-shirt. His arms
 ripple, never tiring, and never, ever
 failing. Five thousand pounds
 of green fuel to be stacked—
 and he still goes on, but I can never
 match him. I can roll, I can push,
 but never throw. The hay—ripe, new
 and bristling with potential, will be consumed.
 Fed to ruminating animals, thrown
 as bedding to be trampled, sacrificed
 to a garden to kill
 her weeds. I watch this man use himself up—

and I want him to stop. Who will throw the bales
once he cannot? Who will hold his grandchildren,
his wife? It is only he, and like the hay,
he too will become the chaff
that floats into every crevice,
every forgotten corner. A green river crawls
down my cheek—it's life is short; he doesn't
notice. So I join him in the chorus of
Hard Day's Night, our voices dancing
together, a duet of almost-harmonies.
For now, I roll him hay bales. And for now
he is mine to keep.

Drowning

Stephanie Plotkin

Listless
The storm screams at my
silence
I am drowning
Released from the burdens
of life
Saved by a forgiving knife
Rocked in a cradling wave
Receiving peace I had craved
Knowing the battle was won
Kissed by the solicitous sun
Stroked by the softening sea
Permitted to finally be free

I have drowned.

Restless
A surging storm swells inside me
I am drowning
Bathed in beautiful pain
Choked by relentless rain
Tempted by thoughts of sur-
render
I am drowning.

Endless
The undertow swallows me deep
I am drowning
Soothed by promising lies
Cried on by darkening skies
Calmed by the chaos of currents
I am drowning.

to interfere with our future.

[Joshua stands, still holding Audrey's hand. He looks her square in the eyes.]

JOSHUA: Mom? I graduated from college two years ago.

[He lets go of her hand. Audrey is on the verge of tears. She reaches her hand out to Joshua, but he doesn't take it. Instead he grabs her things and goes to grab the suitcases. She grasps at his arm.]

AUDREY: Mike. Please don't leave. I can't do this by myself. [Audrey starts to cry. She hugs her knees to herself.]

[Joshua sets down his mother's things and gently grabs her shoulders; he sits next to her.]

JOSHUA: I'm right here. I've always been here.

[She lays her head on his shoulder and puts her hand over her stomach. He strokes her hair.]

AUDREY: Always Mr. Responsible. [Audrey gets closer to Joshua. Faces four inches apart. She raises her hand and touches his cheek. Strokes it.] I'm sorry. You wouldn't want me now anyway. I'm old and ugly. It ruined my life, your life—our life. It's my fault—his fault you're gone. That I'm alone. [Audrey moves in closer still. Her face an inch or two

get a bit brighter. She smiles.] We'd always been friends—since we were five, and he put paint in my hair during art class. I cried and he laughed at me. But it wasn't until I was sixteen that I realized anything—how much I cared. I came here and told Mike that I was running away to California. I was going to be a movie star, of course—or a singer, a songwriter. It didn't matter 'cause I'd be famous. I stayed because he told me that he'd miss me. This was where everything started for us. [Pause.] Where everything...

[The lights dim and the phone rings. Audrey gazes off stage, into the audience absently for a moment before getting up and walking over to the pay phone. She picks up the receiver. The phone is no longer connected to the rest of the pole, but she doesn't notice. She dials a number and waits for a moment.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: Mike! I know I'll see you in two hours, but I have something I need to tell you. [Pause]. I'm at the bus stop. [Pause]. It's important. [Pause]. Just come, okay? [Audrey puts the receiver down and goes back to the bench. She sits with her face in her hands, and then lies on her back.] Fuck. He's going to hate me forever. [Pause]. Maybe I shouldn't tell him. We're so close to graduation, and if I told

him now he might put off college and get a job. He'll be "Mister Responsible" as always. Mike will want to keep it. He loves kids, but I'm sure as hell not ready for one. [Pause]. It would ruin everything.

[Audrey lays there for a moment before getting up and walking back over to the pay phone. She picks up the receiver again and dials.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: Mrs. Peak. How are you? [Pause]. I'm fine. Is Mike home? [Pause]. Oh, okay. Thanks. [She stands there lost in thought—phone still in her hand. She contemplates sitting on the ground, but stays standing. She hangs up the phone. The lights get a bit brighter.] He never came. I sat there like an idiot for almost two hours wondering where the hell he was. Mike never missed a date. I finally went home, and my mom was crying on the couch. She squeezed me so hard when I walked in the door. Her voice was barely audible between sobs, but I got the gist of it. Something about drunk driving—thought I was with him, so glad I'm okay. I practically died inside. Like I'd ever be okay again. I never got to tell him about Joshua—the thing that killed us both.

[There is a long pause before JOSHUA, 25, walks in from stage right. He's wearing jeans and a raincoat. He is carrying two suitcases. His

hair is wet. Everything is wet. He's been out for awhile. Audrey doesn't seem him at first.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: He was so small. I hated him. I could have left him there in the hospital, but his eyes. They were just like his father's. [The lights dim again. The phone rings. Audrey finally looks and notices Joshua. She practically runs to him, relieved. She wraps her arms around him.] You came? But I thought you were... It doesn't matter. Michael, I'm so glad you're okay.

[Joshua ignores what she says. He peels her off of him and holds her by the shoulders. He stares intensely. She backs off, and he lets go.]

JOSHUA: We've been looking for you for hours. You can't leave without telling anyone. I should have known I'd find you here. You know you aren't stable.

AUDREY: What do you mean? I called you twenty minutes ago. Your mom said you'd left the house. [She pulls Joshua to the bench. He resists for a moment; he doesn't want to do this again, but gives in. They sit. Audrey holds Joshua's hand. She strokes it gently and looks into his eyes.] I need to tell you. You have to promise, though, that you won't let this destroy your plans. You are going to college. Nothing is going

Sitting in the Dark

Theresa Johnstone

Sitting in the
Dark,
with only
one light
above your
head,
a red
potent
drink in
hand.
Thousands upon
thousands of
small pieces
of glass
scattered
across the
floor.

Mend them
together,
if you
can.
That piece,
sharp and

jagged is
your
anger.
That other
one,
bright and
shiny is
your
joy.
And that
Midnight black
one is
your
despair and
pain.

These pieces,
all of
them,
came from
that mirror
by your
side.
Its brown

away from Joshua's.] Please don't leave me again.[She closes her eyes and leans in farther as if she's going to kiss Joshua. He grabs her wrist—perhaps a bit more forcefully than he meant to.]

JOSHUA: I'm not him.[Joshua moves off the bench and takes a step back. Audrey stands up and steps toward Joshua.]

AUDREY: Michael?

JOSHUA: No. You're getting worse—can't you see that?

[The lights get brighter. Audrey takes a step toward Joshua.]

AUDREY: I did everything alone. We should have been together. College. Marriage. Maybe kids. That was the plan. All of it ruined.

Crappy jobs, apartments. Glimmers of hope. Everything went to shit. I never wanted a kid—sticky, dirty, always needing you, wanting you. So much crying. I could have strangled you in your sleep.[The lights get brighter, more intense, as Audrey advances on her son. For each step she takes forward, he takes half a step back.]

JOSHUA: You need better care. Constant attention that I can't give you. I packed your bags.

AUDREY: Kids don't appreciate you. You raise them; feed them, for what? So they can stick you in a nursing home when you're too much

trouble. They take—take everything you wanted in the world and kill it. He wouldn't have died. Life could have been perfect. He was good. [She stops advancing.]

AUDREY [CONT.]: He was better.

[Joshua walks close enough to his mother to be able to grab her. He shakes her.]

JOSHUA: You have to stop fucking comparing me to him! I've tried so hard to be there for you. To be him. My whole life you've held me to this standard of him—like he was perfect and couldn't do anything wrong. We idolize those that die young, but it was his God damn fault. He was high, and he was drunk. Don't you remember that he was driving the car? That he killed his best friend and a little girl in the other car?

[Audrey cowers into herself and covers her ears. Joshua realizes he's scared her and lets go of her shoulders. Audrey looks at Joshua, really looks at him for the first time. She reaches out and touches his face.]

AUDREY: So much like his father.

JOSHUA: I can't be him for you. I'm tired of trying.

AUDREY: Joshua. [Audrey wraps herself around Joshua. He hesitates for

a moment and hugs her back.]

JOSHUA: I can't take care of you anymore. Do you remember when I was seven, and I had the flu for a week and a half? All I did was cry, and whine, and puke, so you sent me to stay with grandma and grandpa because you couldn't deal with it anymore. [He sits. Audrey shows vague signs of recollecting the event.]

AUDREY: I'm sorry. [She reaches out to touch him.]

JOSHUA: I can't deal with it anymore. I thought I could take care of you, but it's been two years. You keep forgetting, running away, and I have to take off work to chase after you. Home care is too expensive. [He picks up her umbrella and opens it. He looks at her.] I'm not leaving you alone. [Joshua picks up the suitcases. He motions for Audrey to follow.] I promise.

[She stands; the phone rings. Audrey hesitates. The phone rings again. She turns like she is going to go to the phone and answer it. She closes her eyes. The lights brighten. Audrey goes to Joshua. She grabs his hand.]

AUDREY: Let's go.

[END]

Forget Me, Forget Me Not

Laura Earle

In a gray flash flood that dissolves the frozen world
 Spring arrives in its mercurial splendor
 Frigid air saturates the slushy carnage
 Covering the barren ground
 Taking a frosty jab
 Whenever the sun's back is turned

Spring is ambivalent in this world
 Frosted one day, green the next
 Forget me, forget me not

In a rogue flash of passion that disrupts our frozen world
 Love reveals its fickle nature
 Anger takes advantage of confusion
 Expressed within my hopeless gaze
 Taking an icy jab
 Whenever everyone's backs are turned

Spring is ambivalent in our world
 Distant one day, passionate the next
 Forget me, forget me not

wood frame is
 decorative and
 detailed as
 well as
 large.

Do you
 remember it,
 when it still
 had its
 glass.
 All the colors it
 had.
 They made
 you ugly,
 even though
 outside
 you were
 beautiful.
 That green
 color...
 envy.
 That gold
 color...
 greed.
 That purple
 color...

Pride.
 And that
 Black piece,
 that Black
 piece,
 sat in the
 middle.

Do you
 remember
 fearing that
 mirror while
 seeing
 yourself in
 it.
 Do you
 remember
 throwing your
 fist back.
 Do you
 remember,
 picking up
 each piece,
 with bloody
 hands,
 to wash
 out the

color.
That black
one,
that black
one,
was the
only one to
refuse.
Do you
remember the
hand mirror
in your
lap,
white and
plain,
its frame
empty and
waiting to
be filled.

Throw the
Black piece
away.
Do not
pick it
up.
Do not

place it
in this
new mirror.
Yet this
mirror will
feel
incomplete
with out
It.

Sitting in the
Dark,
with only
one light
above your
head,
a red
potent
drink in
hand.

Thousands upon
thousands of
small pieces
of glass
scattered
across the
floor.

Put yourself
back
together.
Find the
true
You
in the
pieces.
Before the
light goes
out.

insulated the windows and put a space heater out there for him. It was quite the step up from our garage. They bought him toys too, but he never played with them. He never played with anything or anyone. He just wanted to be pet, fed, and loved on.

This past spring my family adopted a baby kitten, whom we named Bella. I wasn't there the day Tom met Bella for the first time, but I heard about it. Apparently he hunched over, growled with his fur on end, and tried to pounce her. Tried and failed, because my dog Pippin got in the way. Pippin did not try to do anything to Tom; he merely got in Tom's way. After staring at Pip for a couple of seconds, Tom turned and left. It was the hottest news on the block. No one had ever seen or heard of Tom behaving in that way. I was surprised, but I shouldn't have been. The cuts, and occasional limps were evidence of this side of Tom's nature. Tom was a Tomcat all right. But that little encounter did nothing to change Tom's normal behavior, or ours. The children still mauled him, the adults still fed him, and the love kept flowing.

Jacob has been dead a week or so, and I have a dream that he says goodbye to me as he always used to. In the dream I feel as though he is telling me that everything is okay; that he is alright. I am not a person to put much stock in such things, but it does make me feel better; and I tell my father. He seems a little unnerved

Tom

Jesshynn Lappo

His fur was clean white with large abstract spots of orange on his back, tail, and face. He had six toes on his front feet so that it looked as though he possessed thumbs. He first entered our lives two years ago. I don't know who saw him first or where; by the time I met him the neighborhood kids had already named him Tom. I often heard some of the adults lengthen his name to Tomcat; and I think this is probably where the kids got his name. He was a very handsome, very big kitty. Tom was sleek, strong, and athletic, a powerful cat.

My entire block on South Grinnell loved Tom. The greatest reason he became so strongly imbedded in our hearts was his docile nature. At the time there were around seven kids under the age of nine on our block. Tom loved all of them. They would pick him up awkwardly, pull his fur, and maul him intensely; yet he would never meow at them, or bite them, or they to push away. Not only that, but he would seek them out. He sought us all out. Many a day I would wake up to find him meowing at the door, waiting for someone to shower him with attention. And I would. He was the kind of cat you wanted to pet all over. He would rub up against you, lay on his belly, roll around. Tom became the neighborhood cat. Everyone fed him, and everyone let him into their home. He belonged to all of us.

It is seventeen years ago, give or take some months. I am somewhere around two; and my cat Wildthing is about to have kittens. I am very excited when the call goes through the house that it is time for her to deliver, but I am made to stay downstairs. After the kittens are born I am not allowed to go near them. I am not even allowed to look at them. By this time, based on the way the adults are behaving, I am aware something is wrong. It isn't until years later I am told of the grotesque deformities of Wildthing's first litter of kittens. My mother tells me only one kitten has lived but I am not allowed to see it yet. For a week I am kept out of "the kitten's room". Finally my mother is convinced the kitten will live, and they let me play with it before bed. The only thing wrong with this one is an unusually large head. In the morning I rush to play with it again only to be told it had died on the very night I was first allowed to see it.

But despite how entirely loving and docile Tom was, we knew he was a tough kitty. No one ever actually saw him fight; but he would bring home scars from his battles with who knows what. One day he showed up with a gaping, bleeding wound on his jaw. It was so large that the whole block knew he could not be allowed to go on risking infection. My neighbor Theresa lost the neighborhood war of the wills. She took Tom into the vet to get stitched up. He looked really funny for awhile after that, with half his face shaved.

Tom spent that winter sleeping in our garage. It wasn't heated, but he managed somehow. The next summer he was the hottest bachelor on the block. Everyone lunged at the opportunity to pet him, and cuddle him, just because he seemed to love it so much. He never really purred, but he would rub up against you strongly, and he would drool. It was gross, but also endearing, and it meant you were making him happy.

It is eight years ago. I am around eleven. For her birthday my sister gets a cute little black and white kitten. He is very small, the runt of the litter; and she names him Jacob. Jacob was a sweet tiny Kitty. He had a habit of saying goodnight to my sister and me as we laid in bed before the lights were turned off. He would jump on the pillow, lick my face, and allow me to pet him before doing the same to my sister. One night my sister and I are out at a birthday party. By this time we have had Jacob for a few months. Just before we enter Alskate to celebrate and have fun, my father pulls into the parking lot. He bears with him the dead body of Jacob. He explains that he was a frail kitty and a sickness of some kind took him. He has brought the body so that we could say goodbye. Neither my sister nor I are happy about the corpse in front of us. We do not share our father's need to see the dead off in this way; and the lifeless frame is scaring us. He takes the cat away.

Tom spent last winter in a playhouse Theresa originally bought for her kids. She

Innocene

Christopher James

She choked on the mist
of tears as they burned away
the flesh and sinew of her
delicate face and washed away
her long lashes and full lips.

The acid torrent's flow
moved with the heaving of
her buxom chest, racing to
expose her blushing heart.
I thought to stop its frantic beating

with my crushing fist
as she whispered through
each exquisite cry
"How could you
do this to me?"

Her tears kept eating away,
cleansing her bones. They burned
through the hardwood floor
and into my basement
where I kept the bodies

when I tell him, and presses me for detail. Then he tells me he had a very similar dream that same night. He is very taken with this dream business and hangs on it for awhile afterward. Years later, my father confesses to me Jacob did not die of a sickness. My father had been working out in the basement, and did not notice Jacob had followed him and was at his feet. Entirely by accident, when my father dropped him dumbbell, it landed on Jacob's head. As my father tells me, I realize why the dream meant so much to him.

Then, a couple of months ago, Theresa announced that she and her family were moving. The blocks greatest fear was: will she take Tom with her? No one wanted Tom to go, but Theresa had been the one to take him to the vet, and make a winter abode for him. If she chose to take him, there was not much we could say against it. Then we discovered Theresa was not planning on taking Tom with her. Instead she was looking for an alternative home for him. By this time Tom's name had been lengthened to Tom Grinnell. Everyone on South Grinnell looked after that cat, and she wanted to give him to a stranger. We were all a bit upset.

At this point there was so much talk going on about Tom that a little piece of gossip was being passed around from neighbor to neighbor. The gossip was that Tom used to live in the red house behind our block. When Theresa heard about this she went to talk to the owners of that house. They told her Tom had belonged

to the previous owner of their house, who had moved out two years ago without his cat. As luck would have it, the people were able to help Theresa get in contact with Tom's previous owner.

It is about nine years ago. I am nine or ten, and Wildthing has had her second litter of kittens. By now we are living with a very big German Sheppard who has made it apparent she intends hostility on the newborns. Consequently, the kittens are kept in the kitchen, which is connected to the basement. We have to be very careful of the door so that the dog cannot sneak in and get to the kittens. We decide to have an outside family day sometime after the kittens' birth. The kittens and mother are taken to the fenced in portion of yard, and the dog is chained far away from them. Some friends of my mom's show up. My brother is eager to show them the kittens. We tell him not to, since to get to the adults he must pass the dog, but my brother says the kitten will be safe with him, and pushes us out of the way. As my brother passes my dog nothing happens, and we all breathe a sigh of relief. But on the way back to us my brother lets his guard down and my dog attacks the kitten, biting into it. We beat the dog away. The kitten does not die instantly. I have to watch it struggle for life for a moment. Wildthing had a litter of four to six kittens. I cannot remember the exact number. Due to the carelessness of this same brother, only one survives.

Theresa called this 'previous owner'. When told about Tom, the man replied,

"You've found Leelo!?" When I heard that I mentally barfed. Leelo was an awful name for Tom. Apparently the man had not been able to find Tom when he moved out; and he told Theresa he would like Tom back. Theresa agreed. The man told her Tom had been born in the country, and that he had taken Tom into the city when he lived there. That made all the sense in the world to me. Tom was definitely a country kitty.

When the news came back to the rest of our block it was bitter sweet. No one wanted Tom to go, but everyone was happy that he would have a solid home. People where especially happy that home would be with his original owner who now lived in the country. How great that Tom would be moving to a wide-open country home!

We had a goodbye party for Tom. We took pictures, pet him, held him, and cuddled him. All the kids were there, and all the adults. We must have finally broken Tom's patience that day, because he ended up running from the dozens of hands all trying to grab him at once. I caught him. As the kids ran around the yards yelling and searching for the escaped kitty, he was up on my porch with me, eating a piece of ham out of my hand.

He is out there now, running around a new home with his old owner. And I'll bet he's living it up, enjoying every minute of it. Except, I suppose he doesn't like being called Leelo.

to avoid it, so you resolve to light that cigarette and pray no one arrives before it is exhausted. You search your pockets for the lighter, but instead find the small dinosaur. Funny. You don't remember taking that. You'll put it back later, even though no one would realize it was gone. And for now, it will be your boy's dinosaur he gave to you to hold. You smile. That thought is more warming than the cigarette. You enjoy the smoke seeping into the pores of your lungs and twist your pawn-shop wedding band. Everything is so cold, even the second-hand circle of gold. Always, always cold. You pocket the lighter, and just like you've always done, you wait for the next car to come.

of those who came before,
Andrea, Katie, Megan and Sandra,
hanging on meat hooks that
I bought after my mother left,
with aspirations of holding up

the idea of love.

In a Minute

Josh Campeau

We should be gone,
which I emphasize
when I extract my phone from my pocket,
so I can check the time
and justify the tapping of my foot,

but this becomes mundane
so instead, I pace the hallway—
scanning for that promised minute
which fluttered away—

as mom chatters with grandma
and dad fixates his attention to the baseball game,
and I curse my idealism
that believed there was no need to drive separately,
so I could have avoided this masquerading minute.

Cigarettes

Amy Hinman

Outside of The Bistro House you stand, praying for someone—
anyone, to show up. It's a Friday night and at any moment the couples
will come roaring around the corner. Women in Louis Vuittons, clutching
handbags, and their leather coat wearing husbands will toss you their
keys. Then you will nod and get into their car. But first you put out your
cigarette; nobody wants their car to smell like your ashtray. You pull
their silver Buick into the lot, and pretend for a moment that the sun-
glasses in the console belong to you, and the business card on the floor
has her shopping list on the back. Maybe you go so far as to imagine
the small plastic dinosaur under the back seat belongs to your son. That
you'll return it to his chubby pink hands and he will squeeze your neck
because he loves you so very much. Yes, that is what you'll do. After
the car is parked, you take a moment to enjoy the New Car Smell and
the life that you so unknowingly stepped into. But this is a job, not a
daydream. You fumble for your lights as you walk back to the Bistro
House. It's cold—so very cold, always. The cold seeps into every crack
and makes itself at home. No matter how hard you try there is no way

your apartment. I know you were there because I saw your car. Why are you ignoring me? I really am sorry! Can we please just talk about this?"

November 5 - 7:33 AM: "Hello Rachel, this is Dr. McIntosh. I was calling to get a follow up from you. I hope the pills are working. Are you sleeping better? Have you noticed any side-effects? Make sure you let me or Dr. Nicholson know if you notice any changes in your behavior. Call the office when you get this."

November 5 - 8:01 AM: "Rachel, your mom just called me at work asking if I'd seen you lately. Where are you? No one has heard from you and your mom is freaking out! She's calling Brandon next. She's about ready to call the police and report a missing person. C'mon Rachel! Wake up! We are all wondering what happened to you!"

November 5 - 9:00 AM: "Rachel, it's Mom. Call me, sweetie. I'm worried."

November 5 - 10:34 AM: "Rachel, your mom just called me. I have no idea what is going on with you. Please, talk to someone. I get that you are mad at me but please, go see Nicholson or some-

The Voicemails of Rachel Wher

Paige Pierog

"Hey-o! This is Rachel. I'm either screening your call or busy doing something more important than talking to you. If this is a telemarketer, you have the wrong number. If this is my boss, don't worry, I'm working on it! If this is Sarah, stop calling, we just saw each other! If this is my mom, I'm doing great, stop worrying! If it's me, don't you think it's about time you used a grocery list like a normal person? The rest of you: you know what to do."

October 30 - 2:13 PM: "Sweetie I am so sorry they didn't like your manuscript! Those bastards don't know what's good! And don't worry about Brandon--he will come around. How about you come over? Your dad and I would love to see you! Maybe a night away from everything will do you some good? I'll make something special for dinner. Whatever you want! I love you!"

November 1 - 12:35 PM: "Hello, this is the Rite Aid on 3rd Street. We are calling to let you know that a prescription for Rachel Wehr is ready to be picked up. Have a good day."

November 2 - 6:26 PM: "Hey Rachel, it's Mom. Sorry dinner

didn't work out the other day. Glad to hear about the new medication. Take care of yourself! Just wondering how your week is going. I haven't heard from you in a while and just want to make sure you're okay. Okay. Call me back when you get this. Love you, sweetie!"

November 3 - 2:34 PM: "Rach! Long time no see! I'm in town tonight and I figured I'd hit you up! How about you and Sarah meet me for dinner somewhere? We've got some catching up to do! Let me know. I'll call Sarah. See you tonight!"

November 3 - 3:01 PM: "You will never believe who I just heard from! Gregg called me and invited us to dinner tonight. I haven't heard from him in ages! I'm up for dinner and drinks! Any good shows playing? You always know which ones are best. I told him we'd meet for 6:30. Bring your stuff over to my place around 5. We can get ready together and you can just stay overnight. All right! See you soon!"

November 3 - 5:16 PM: "Rachel, where are you? Are you not coming? Call me back!"

November 3 - 6:03 PM: "Rach, this is so not funny. Where are you?" November 3 - 11:57 PM: "Greg was pretty bummed you

didn't make dinner. I told him you had plans with your boyfriend. I didn't know what else to tell him. I'd appreciate a call to let me know where the hell you are!"

November 4 - 7:09 AM: "Hello, Rachel. I'm on my way to work. Your mom said that she called and you haven't called her back. I told her she is being paranoid but she had me call you, just in case. If you are mad at Mom you know Daddy's here for you. Love you, Rach. Talk to you soon."

November 4 - 11:54 AM: "Sorry dinner didn't work out last night. Maybe next time I'm in town we'll meet up. Miss you Rachel! Don't be a stranger!"

November 4 - 1:58 PM: "Look, Rachel. I don't want to fight anymore. Can I stop by after work? I think we should talk about this in person. Rachel, I'm sorry. I love you."

November 4 - 4:30 PM: "I stopped by your place after work. Your car was there but no one answered the door. I get that you are mad at Brandon, but please don't push me away! I'm your best friend! Where are you?"

November 4 - 5:36 PM: "Rachel, I just want to talk. I stopped by

Our softly spoken words of truth, life and love were barely audible over the splashing fountain, but helped warm our faces against the wind as a single gilded leaf fell between our outstretched hands.

thing. Where is Sarah? Call her. I love you, Rach."

November 5 - 1:23 PM: "Rachel, Brandon just called me in hysterics because no one can get in touch with you. I'm calling Dr. Nicholson to report a change in behavior. Where are you?"

November 5 - 2:00 PM: "Rachel, this is Dr. Nicholson. I was about to call you to follow up on your new medication when your friend Sarah called me to report that no one has heard from you in almost a week. You missed this week's appointment. I think you need to come in so we can talk about the changes in your life. Sarah said you've been down lately. I'm scheduling you for an emergency session tomorrow at 1. Do not miss it!"

November 5 - 4:00 PM: "Well, Rachel, your Mom lost it. Your parents, Brandon, and I are on our way to your house right now. Your mom reported you as missing to the police. If you don't answer the door, we are breaking in. Now would be a great time to start talking."

November 6 - 1:01 AM: "I had to call to hear your voice again. I already miss you so much. I love you, Rachel. You will always be my best friend."

The Recital

Amy Johnson

In blackness, pink slippers
tiptoe to metallic strips on
scuffed, black flooring. The
painted faces search for their

places behind the red velvet,
and a cough from the front
row echoes off of brick,
alluding an empty audience.

Uniformed minds reel, rewind,
replay, lazily marking
pas de bourrées because no one
is watching. I slouch because

no one is watching, until
a splinter of light grows
wider—expands like my
lungs. Draws my shoulders

back like the curtain that
reveals eyes—hundreds of
waiting eyes on me as I
stumble, fall, forget months

of rehearsal, but stand
back up to pirouette
as the others pique turn.

Beneath the Surface

Christopher James

Lisa and I sat at the edge
of the wishing well,
watching as summer's last
hopeful gasp turned to
mist on the dreams of those
who came before us to
cast a wish at Aphrodite's feet.

We, too, cast our silver dollar dreams
into the waves, as our dangling feet
skimmed the surface of the
cool water and brushed against
the golden leaves that struggled
to stay afloat on the sea, lest they fall
into the world of wishing.

I wondered what wish she had
whispered to the goddess,
imbuing the words within the silver
that now lay at the bottom of the
sea of dreams, just as my own had
come to rest on the image
of her pursed lips.

and she was even better to watch sports with. She took interests in things that were similar to him and knew things that appeared foreign. This interested Carlin, seeing as it interested her, and he put forth an effort in learning these new things. She was magnificent. In the short time they spent she had truly become his best friend. He liked her with all his heart.

However the greatest problem that Carlin experienced with the device was not a matter of its programming, or its actions at all. The company of the woman was fine.

But how can any being ever be satisfied when they spend their time clutching the cold body of a machine? Is this any more sensual than the feeling of a phone in the palm or any more erotic than a cushion in the loin?

Carlin's thoughts wandered, and he laughed a sad pathetic laugh which almost brought him to tears as he read, "Satisfaction," aloud to himself.

Every night for two months Carlin had lay down with that machine hoping that it would take the feel of a human. Hoping that he would feel her hips warm against his or that he would spontaneously be able to feel her breath or heart beat. But nothing: only lifeless rubbery latex skin and a cold tactile touch causing him to wake up shivering in the night. He would squeeze her and pull the body of the being closer, but all it would do would press more

Satisfaction Gaurenteed

Alex Baumgarten

Carlin sighed heavily as he proceeded to pick up the remaining bit of packing popcorn that had been carelessly tossed about the floor. His head bowed and his arms folded to form a chalice that was filled with the clingy white orbs. His back appeared broken as it curled, fixating his sight upon the floor. Awkwardly enclosing the Styrofoam pieces about his hands, Carlin proceeded to toss them gently into a large rectangular wooden crate that lay upon his living room floor. And with that the last gray bit of being that lay within it, cold with death, was covered and unseen.

Brushing the few Styrofoam pieces that clang to his hands like dirt from his skin, Carlin allowed his body to collapse upon a small armoire that had been pushed out away from the couch. A sigh bled out from his lips. He was sitting where she had sat. Quickly he thrashed his head back and forth in an absurd effort to prevent the oncoming tears. His head settled as he looked back at the box on the floor. The crate stretched a massive seven feet. However, amongst the sprawling space of the large home it appeared much smaller. With a blank bitter stare Carlin looked onward at the crate. Like a black hole the burnt insignia on its side drew his glare in.

Delin Robotics
Bionic Lover

She had already been placed back in the box, wrapped in a black foam sheet that caressed her as cloth would. She had been deactivated and her body fell loose in his arms. It hurt to place her in. Carlin told himself it was just the burden of the weight that caused the pain. Carlin was not a very strong man, he never was. In the crate's center he placed the manual that she had come with. Being close to the same girth as the bible, the scripture quickly sunk in the sea of Styrofoam beads eventually ending against the woman's chest.

The lid lay off as Carlin looked onward at it.

There had only been one other thing that she had left him, one thing he was unable to let go of. Coming with her, stapled to the lid of the crate had been a small ordinance from the manufacturer.

: Satisfaction guaranteed

Satisfaction. Carlin's lip curled when he read this. He contemplated his

own happiness and the ambiguity of satisfaction. But even a man of his youth and inexperience could understand the effects of love, or romance, of what a woman was able to bring, and he knew that this thing on his living room floor had not brought him satisfaction.

All this being said, Carlin still appeared to be somewhat undecided on his definition of this promised satisfaction. Had he been happy? Yes, very much so.

The truth be told the robot had done all that had been asked of it and more. It was capable of cooking, as well as cleaning, obviously this was so. And it's programming and existing knowledge of each field was impeccable.

But the robot also provided great company as well. She was capable of telling witty jokes that appeared to be perfectly catered to him. And better yet, the robot laughed at his. She gave the best massages, of all natures. She was a joy to be around. She had a smile that was unparalleled to any living being. Her hair radiated a scent that could not be adequately described in words with a breath that was unspeakable to the ability of all language. Her appearance would have been disrespected if explained and she always made Carlin blush with unworthy embarrassment when she graced him with her presence. Her company was gracious. She was a joy the time they went apple picking

A Farewell

Paige Pierog

Robins and sparrows sit still in the tree tops
 their heads bowed and beaks closed
 in an endless silent prayer
 the cicadas do not sing to the sun
 as it rises over the tops of the trees
 whose leaves are stiff to the wind,
 soundless in the breeze

The grass screams beneath my rubber soles
 it deafens me for a moment
 I beg for the waves of green to muffle
 the sound of my footsteps
 but the booming fills my eardrums
 and spills over to run down my face
 down my spine
 to the flowers shaking in my fingers

Petals float from the flowers and speckle the green
 small bursts of creamy pink,
 flawless whites,
 warm reds,
 all diluting the crass mud
 covering the entrance to another world
 with a thick layer of filth

cold metal against his own human flesh. He would squeeze harder but only cause her body to buckle and expose the actual emptiness of that which he held in his arms. Nothing beat in her, nothing breathed. She was cold, no matter how much warmth the smile she gave radiated back towards him when he woke her the following morning.

A knock at the door caused Carlin to cringe. He wished they would be less abrasive with his glass storm door. It was after all so fragile and loose; he did not want it to crack as it was so close to doing.

He opened the door and invited the man into his home. A tall man of medium girth carried in a dolly that would be used to lift the great weight of the box. His face was poorly shaven and looked to be covered with many blemishes that had accumulated about his mouth. Sweat began to form in body folds. His appearance caused a well-mannered man like Carlin to cringe.

"This one here?" the man asked. Carlin laughed, or tried to, to ease his own tension. He watched with his arms crossed and his fingers placed over his mouth as the man placed the lid upon the crate and struck a series of nails into its top.

The man went over to retrieve the crate. He made it look much easier

to move than Carlin had. To this man it was almost as if the crate had been empty. As the man bent to shift the crate on to the dolly a small chapped leather wallet fell from his pocket. It lay open on the floor as Carlin caught a glimpse of what looked to be the man's wife. Appearing to be of equal age, her hair had begun to gray and she looked to be wearing far too much make up. Her smile was crooked and her teeth stained with coffee. Carlin cringed at this appearance, equally as much as he had cringed at the mover. They had been a perfect match.

The mover lifted the box upright catching sight of his wallet.

"You like that?" he spoke to Carlin as he bent down to retrieve it. "That's the misses back home. Ain't she a looker?" Carlin looked down again and the hideous troll of a woman, now without wincing, and lied to the man.

"Yes, she is very beautiful!"

"You bet she is. That's Lorene. She's the best girl I could ever hope to have and I'll love her till the day I die." The mover placed the large box upon the dolly without a huff. "Yup," he spoke; he stayed strong in spite of the weight of the item. "She makes this job all worth it. I'd do anything just to make sure that she has everything she wants. Then maybe she could have half the things she's given me."

Carlin suddenly wanted the man out of his house.

However, Carlin's mouth began to quiver as the man moved towards the door; he could hardly bear it. He turned himself away so that his face could not be seen and held his head in embarrassment. However as the final wheel fell over the step of his stoop, Carlin ran to the box, calling out for the man to wait. He placed his hand on the crate for a moment, holding his breath.

He had to hear that laugh again,

See that smile.

But in an instant he retrieved his hand from the box as though it was a stove burner shining orange. He knew that even though he believed retrieving her from the box would bring happiness, it would not bring satisfaction. He would have felt no more satisfaction than that which the box brought him now; nothing but cold dead maple against the fleshy surface of his palm.



Join Writers' Club

Writers' Club at Grand Valley State University consists largely of student writers who do not study writing professionally. It is a designated time and place for students to convene once a week to discuss their writing and develop ideas. All genres are welcome at Writers' Club, including poetry, fiction, non-fiction and drama.

About this Publication

In winter 2009, we printed our first publication in many years, titled *Don't Open This*. In winter of 2010, the first publication of *Running Out of Ink* was released and in fall 2010 *Running Out of Ink* was published again with the intention of making it a semi-annual publication to be released both fall and winter semesters. Submissions from both members and non-members are accepted and considered for publication.

atop a shining silver vessel
made dull with the weight of grief
though containing the essence of beauty
safely within a pearl satin trim

A single slab of smooth white concrete
sleeps partially sunken into the upset ground
littered with grass seed and decaying petals
its sharp corners crawl with ants
that trudge over the oily smear of tears
that stained the pure white solidity
to carry the fallen colors to their own grave

The slab has no marks and no symbols
it is bare and purposeless, except
to provide a vapid foundation for a
marriage of the living and dead,
a pedestal for the mockery of
life growing from what was once lively
Flowers stand in vases
in a half moon of pigments splashed
among entwining leaves that
hug each other tightly
in a safe loop that suddenly
stops with no explanation

Daffodil, aster, and chrysanthemum

perfume swells in a cloud that begins bright,
reaching toward the warm rays of the sun,
but falls below the saltiness the grass breathes
from the tears the trees and blooms have cried
and never stop crying
the dampness so widespread
earth itself seems to be weeping,
sorry for swallowing such a being
in one, unforgiving gulp

I place my roses among the other blossoms
withholding one rose from the chorus
of solemn color that gently croons
of the sorrows of the lost and broken

My fingers brush the slab the sun
diligently tries to warm
but it is cold, not as ice,
but as something more permanent,
more breathtaking,
more sinister

A vigilant candle watches over
normally burning to provide comfort and warmth
but now out
perhaps from the overwhelming dampness
of an atmosphere heavy with sad drops

of helplessness and abandonment

I place my remaining rose, a crimson one,
single and loving,
on the edge of the slab so it almost kisses
a larger stone engraved with a justification

of God's mistake
holding my token is a small plaque with a promise,
my promise,
of a friendship that will, indeed,
last forever.

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