



ARROW ROCK



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We hope you enjoy Issue #4 of *Arrow Rock*!



ARROW ROCK

|ssue 4

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Editors

Zach Alley

Courtney Cox

Hannah Lawson

Audrey Schroeder

ArrowRock@Lindenwood.edu

<http://www.lindenwood.edu/ArrowRock/>

Arrow Rock Literary Journal Mission Statement

Arrow Rock is committed to promoting and providing a mature environment for Lindenwood University students to publish quality short fiction, short nonfiction, poetry, essays, and artwork, while showcasing the integrity and the individual talents of each writer or artist.

The staff and contributors of *Arrow Rock* strive to produce a literary journal that interests and inspires.

Faculty Advisor

Spencer Hurst

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Creative Nonfiction



Russell Kluwe, Shelly

Courtney Cox

Let's Get Textual

When I was 16 years old, there was no bigger dilemma than finding a date to the annual Homecoming dance. At the time I saw myself as a scrawny, insecure band geek who had not yet mastered the art of flirting, so of course my prospects did not look good. While most of my friends danced the night away with their knights in shining braces, I often spent the evenings watching from against the wall, jealously waiting for my life to begin.

I clung to my hopes of attracting attention as the school year began and the date of the dance crept closer and closer. While I shopped for the perfect dress, couples began to form and with each day that passed my chances for companionship began to dwindle. Although it was technically socially acceptable to attend the Homecoming dance without a date, in my group of friends it was a bit taboo because almost everyone tended to pair off. I could almost hear the whispers behind my back, gossiping about how I was the perpetual third wheel, never able to find anyone desperate enough to take me. My busy schedule kept me distracted from this inconvenient truth, but in the back of my mind I made plans to buy a corsage of my own.

On one particular morning, I remember stumbling into school wearing sweatpants and no make-up after losing yet another epic battle between the demands of junior year coursework and going to sleep at a decent hour. This morning began like most others that year, with an overabundance of stress and general apathy towards my daily routines as I walked from class to class. Regardless of my hopes of standing out, I felt like a wallflower, invisible and insignificant in a sea of beauty and confidence. Aside from the slight buzz of excitement about the dance, this day was just as boring and repetitive as all the ones before. I returned home that night expecting nothing out of the ordinary but right as I settled in my room, ready for a soul-wrenching session of homework, I heard my phone vibrate from across the bed.

As I checked my messages, I saw a text from my slightly annoying friend Matt. He was a serial texter, and being the grammar Nazi that I am, his inattention to the rules of the English language never failed to irk me. I

spent a moment guessing at what he wanted, suspecting questions about our AP Stats homework, or an infuriating mass text ‘Hey’. To my horror, I looked down at my phone and saw what I least expected, “Do u wanna go to homecoming w me”

I couldn’t believe this... I was just asked out by a boy for the first time in my life via text message, and to top it all off, he didn’t even bother to add a question mark at the end! This moment should have been one I cherished, one worth calling my friends over. Instead, all I could think of was my anger towards the illiterate youth of America and the lack of chivalry that surrounded me. After I let my emotions simmer, I attempted to analyze this situation rationally. Matt, foolish and immature as he was, had just asked me out on a date. My mind went into overdrive. How was I supposed to tell him no? What if he never spoke to me again? In my desperation I typed out the most cliché rejection possible, “Thanks for asking me, but I really value you as a friend. I’m afraid that if we went to Homecoming together it might mess up our great relationship. :)”

As an extremely tightly wound individual, I remained in panic mode even after Matt answered my text, appearing not to be all too overwrought by my sugarcoated rejection. “K. Do you know if Kara has a date yet” My pulse began to slow just as my phone went off for the second time. I recognized the number as Jonathon’s, a good friend I’d known for years. Jon was the perfect mama’s boy. At sixteen, he still wore the clothes his mother picked out before she tucked him into bed. Despite the earlier text from Matt, I couldn’t believe my eyes when I read, “I’m so sorry that I couldn’t do this in person...I just really care about you, and I want to go to Homecoming together. I’ve liked you for so long and I couldn’t wait any longer to share with you how I feel.”

Suddenly I was forced to question all our years of friendship. For me, there had never been anything more than simple companionship, but looking back, I could understand how Jon could have thought we were evolving into something more. My mind flashed to an incident the month before when Jonathon showed up to a musical I was performing in, one which no one else bothered to attend. This show was very important to me because it was my first in this exclusive theatre group, so of course I was overjoyed as he handed me roses after the curtain call. As sweet as he was, and as comfortable as I felt when I was with him, I knew that our relationship could never move past

friendship. I stared at the phone completely torn.

“Court, I’m sweating bullets here...” he texted, as the minutes clocked by. Jonathon would be a beyond gracious and respectful date, but I knew that after all he had done for me, I owed him the chance to find someone who was legitimately interested in him. Telling this boy who meant so much to me that I was rejecting his offer remains one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. After all, Jonathan would have let me dress him exactly how I chose for the night and knew precisely how and when to use a question mark.

I was so surprised by these two offers that when my phone went off for a third time, the last thought in my mind would have been to suspect another suitor was about to swoop down in an attempt to knock me off my feet. This time the name Jansen flashed across my screen. I rolled my eyes, wishing he would simply leave me alone. Long, greasy hair framed his unintelligent, lazy eyes, which were always peering out at me as if he were a rabid rodent and I his next prey. I sighed, attempting to shake the sinking feelings that overtook my body whenever I thought about Jansen.

“Homecoming?”

“Yes, Jansen, Homecoming is in fact a real event.”

“But do you want to go?”

“Yes.”

“With me?”

“Sorry, I can’t.”

A girl can only take so much. My life had evolved into a sitcom right before my eyes, and frankly, I just wanted to change the channel. Nothing in my power could appease the awkwardness and shame I felt the next day when I had to face the reality of my actions without the buffer of technology. Three years later, I can still remember each emotion I felt on that fateful evening of my first romantic encounters. I remain flabbergasted that in a matter of hours I went from invisible to one of the most sought-after bachelorettes in all of Glenwood High School. My cynicism towards the role of technology in relationships remains for one simple reason: I have yet to be asked out without the aid of a text message.

Cole Figus

Nothingness

Nothingness. Consciousness. My room is dark save for a streetlight's illuminations on my wall in lines through my windows' blinds. I've peacefully awakened in the middle of the night, an occurrence I do not mind when I think about having a few hours left to sleep before I must get out of bed and go to work. It is a split second of tranquility. But the tranquility ends just as quickly as it began.

I become aware that my heart is beating at an insane BPM, and I am not breathing. My central nervous system jumps into crisis mode, inwardly screaming that my body is running out of oxygen. Adrenaline jolts my mind awake and heightens my senses so that I can react to the emergency, and I bolt upright in bed, throw off the sheets, and step down from the mattress. What do I do? The breath has been sucked out of me, and the resulting panic only intensifies my fear. I have no past experience to tell me what to do, but I move to get out of my room. There is no destination, but my body instinctively makes me run as if I can escape this suffocation anywhere other than my bed. I throw open my bedroom door, reach the hallway in front of the stairs leading down to the first floor, and hold myself up on the wooden banisters above the steps. As I peer down the staircase, my breath comes back to my lungs in gasps and I struggle to relearn how to breathe. Two minutes pass before my breathing returns to normal, and my heart stops pounding against my sternum. Once I've stopped gasping I listen to the silence in the house. No one in my family is awake. This deathly experience is a secret. The next day at six p.m. I have an unusual chest pain that pulses with my heartbeat. The pain is sharp and forces me to hold my hand over my heart as if to prevent it ripping free from my arteries. It retreats after ten seconds, but I am worried it will return. Later that night I wake up again with a racing heart rate amidst gasps for breath.

These symptoms begin repeating every day, with ten-second bouts of pain in my chest during afternoons, and nights haunted by sudden breathless wakeups. My nights get longer, and the wakeups become more frequent

until they sometimes occur as many as three times before morning. Each consecutive time I wake up, it is harder to fall back asleep because of the fear that I might have a heart attack and never wake up again. The anxiety over dying during the night scares me out of sleep again and again as the last glimmers of my consciousness imagine dying and the end of my existence. What is death? Does anything come after life?

I was raised by irreligious parents as my mother was told to leave her Lutheran church upon marrying my Jewish dad, who since childhood had never thought much about his Jewish faith. My extremely rational view of life and the universe further makes me doubtful of the divine, and I am not banking on a life after this one. So now, nightly facing the very convincing prospect of death, I am beginning to decide on what I think will happen when I die.

I realize I have never contemplated the absolute end to my existence. I have only known life, and when I die my life will cease. With no afterlife, I will become nothing: my heart will stop, my brain will die, there will only be an unfathomable nothingness. I find that I cannot comprehend the absolute end to my life, and this idea of a great void scares me because it is beyond my cognitive abilities to imagine. The closest I can get is that death will be like a dreamless sleep where there is no memory of life between falling asleep and waking up. Absolute nothingness.

These thoughts of not existing keep me up late into the night, day after day, and plague my thoughts while awake. They are more discomfoting than a hell to me because at least Hell will be something. Nothingness becomes a fear squatting in the back of my mind every minute of the day.

Struggling with these thoughts through two weeks of late night wakeups, my mind turns to a physical afterlife. My psychological and mental life will end abruptly, but my material body will not end so quickly. Some cells will continue to function for as much as a week or two after my heart stops, and surely my bones will be around much longer than any memory society has of my life. When thinking about this I feel that I must use the third person—my corpse is not me, but is instead Cole's corpse. I am only my mind, which will have gone dark. Cole as a living entity will die, but the matter that once comprised my body cannot end. Those atoms, elements, and compounds will be recycled into new forms, perhaps even new life someday,

but the matter will never be gone. The Matter Formerly Known As Cole will transform between living and nonliving entities hundreds or thousands of times, until eventually the sun turns supernova and destroys the Earth. The Matter Formerly Known As Cole will then take on other forms in the universe as parts of planets, stars, and space dust.

Throughout this ordeal I do not tell anyone what is happening on a nightly basis. For better or for worse, as a philosophy to my life, I accept what is coming to me because I feel worrying about what might happen sours life, which is much too short anyway. Every night I go to bed thinking that I very well may die, and though death at seventeen would not be ideal, I am happy with the life I have led. As three weeks go by, thoughts of death plague my daily schedule. I reach a point where a prism of death shadows everything I experience, and by the end of the third week, I accept it. I suddenly find that I am comfortable with dying and understand that though I will not exist anymore, not all of me is over.

This gives me the idea of materialism—that I am nothing but matter. I am Cole, a Homo sapien, but when the collection of matter that makes up my body breaks down I am a functioning life form made up of organ systems, organs, tissues, and cells, all of which are living. But when I break these down further something interesting happens: I become components of cells, then compounds, and even further than that I am simply elements, atoms, electrons, quarks, and smaller pieces of mass still, all of which are nonliving. I am a highly organized living being made up of very nonliving matter. Humans are so highly organized that we have consciousness, and have in many ways moved beyond Nature because of what we can do with it. In terms of chemistry, I am nothing more than stardust. My existence is possible only because all elements heavier than the lightest three have been forged via exploding supernovae stars billions of years ago. Genetically, I am a random assortment of DNA that has been evolving from the first replicating single cell to the dynamic Homo sapien species of which I am a member.

So what if I do die? I am not religious so I do not feel there will be any eternal judgment of my life, or that there is a heaven I have to strive to be invited to, so in a way life is a meaningless, unnecessary fluke. I am on a random rock, in a random galaxy, in an infinite universe. I am small and entirely insignificant. But the beautiful thing is that I am alive, and these

notions do not squash the value of living. A meaningless life is even more beautiful to me because I do not have to be here at all. I am a fluke that happened to be born in America to middle class parents who want me to do well in life. I have money in my wallet, food in my stomach, and easy access to more the next time I get hungry. My life is better than 99% of all humans that have ever existed, and every second I get to live is a beautiful gift from a universe that is indifferent to my existence.

After four full weeks of this wilderness, I have an exceptionally bad wakeup that convinces me I am about to have a heart attack. I get out of bed, get my breathing under control, and calmly tell my parents that I might need to go to the hospital. We wait ten minutes to see if any symptoms come back, and they do not. Then twenty. Then thirty. I am fine again. I go back to bed and have a peaceful night's sleep for the first time in a month. The next day I make a doctor's appointment, and when my heart's rhythm is tested they say nothing is wrong. The doctor tells me that if the problem persists I should come back for a second appointment and more rigorous tests, and I uneasily go about my life. Though the problem remains unidentified, I never experience the day pain or the night wakeups again; it ends just as mysteriously as it began. However, I now have an entirely new view of life as the thought that I may have died from the problem makes me feel like I have a new lease on life. In accepting death I find that life is even more beautiful.

Audrey Schroeder

You Probably Think This is Gross (and I Do Too)

I was nine when my mom decided I was old enough to learn about being an adult, by which I mean we had THE TALK. It had been a lazy summer day, and I was relaxed enough to not be suspicious when Mom said, “Let’s go for a walk.” It seemed innocent enough; a half hour of alone time with my mother was hard to come by with three siblings, so I jumped at the opportunity. By the time we’d gotten away from the house, I realized something was unusual. Mom was being curiously quiet, and when she finally broke the silence it was with the words, “Let’s talk about periods and sex.”

My brain was stuck between fight and flight. Should I run back to the house to escape the awkwardness, or should I accept my fate? Mom seemed to realize that she was losing the moment, because she plowed industriously onward, ignoring my disgust. “Motherhood is a wonderful thing, and that’s why you have a period.” At the word “motherhood,” my innocent mind went into hyper drive and filled the rest of the conversation with static. I was horrified at the idea that I, a nine-year-old tomboy with very little interest in boys, might have a screaming baby because of a biological function that I did not want. Up until this point, I’d come to the very logical conclusion that French kissing made babies, and it did not please me to learn that the actual process was much messier.

While I was in freak-out mode, Mom described how to use a tampon, a concept that terrified me for years, what to expect every month, and most importantly, the dangers of men. She made it sound as if every man on the street would be looking to prey on my young body. This led to months of terror, believing that men could somehow smell that I was able to get pregnant or see the pad in my pants and get an instant erection.

Somehow in my daze, Mom and I made it back to the house in an awkward half-hug position. Mom was trying to be reassuring, but I hadn’t recovered from my shock. As soon as I stepped into the house, Dad swooped down upon me and said, “Let’s go for a drive.” Apparently my parents had planned a coordinated attack to destroy my innocence in one awful day. I

climbed into the cab of the truck, my face devoid of expression.

Dad's talk went hand in hand with Mom's. He spoke largely of the sneaky nature of men. "I was a teenage boy once. I know how it is. You be careful with men, they only want to get in your pants." The thought of my father as a sexual deviant threw me deeper into shock. The rest of the drive passed in silence, and when we arrived at home I went to my room to sleep off the awkwardness.

As a Catholic private school kid, I was able to put the incident behind me quickly. Sex ed was limited in my education. I once had a teacher who offered to answer all our sex questions anonymously. She was fired at the end of the year, naturally, since she hadn't maintained the "abstinence only" curriculum. From that point on, my sex education consisted of learning the basic anatomy of males and females from a teacher who was more embarrassed than us sixth graders. When we got to talking about pregnancy, the diagram in our book showed something that looked suspiciously like a piece of poop holding the baby in the uterus. My teacher got flustered when we asked questions and hurried us on to the next page. To this day, I still suspect that that particular diagram may have been inaccurate.

When I entered public high school, sex ed became slightly more thorough and ten times more comical. We learned how to use condoms by struggling with bananas, we gagged over pictures of STD's, and the lunchroom was a far more educational place for learning about sex itself than the classroom. Having come from a sheltered home, these noon-hour question sessions were both uncomfortable and enlightening. I learned all sorts of vocabulary words that I'd never wanted to know, like teabag, 69, and Dirty Sanchez. What's more, there were seemingly a hundred different ways to say "penis" and "vagina." As I grew older, from freshman to senior, I became less of an uncomfortable student and more of a reluctant teacher. "What's a boner?" my Mormon friend, even more sheltered than me, once asked. Once the shouts of disbelief had quieted and her face had lost its redness, my friends and I stumbled through an explanation.

"It's when a man has an erection," I muttered.

"What?" my naïve friend asked.

"An erection, Jess!"

Laughter rose from the tables around us. It was not the first of the

lunchroom lessons I had to give. Despite the fact that I was becoming accustomed to sex talk and dirty jokes, I still actively avoided the subject at home. The closest my mother and I came to discussing sex again was when she raised the subject about why I wasn't dating anyone. And so I spent the last of my time in secondary education with no more parental sex talks.

With this slow transition into maturity and growing tolerance to all things sex-related came other changes. I graduated from high school and moved on to college, 150 miles away from my parents and friends. Still, I struggled through my homesickness by calling my mother multiple times a day. "Audrey, you just have to go out and meet people. Everything will be okay."

A few months into my first semester, circumstances changed as I entered my first real relationship. Mom was nearly as excited as I was, since I'd never dated anyone before. I suspect she was relieved that I wasn't too weird to have a normal relationship. Despite the happiness I felt upon leaving the universe of single people, it came with some unwanted consequences, as I would soon discover.

I went home for the holidays like most students do, and in a moment of generosity offered to help Mom wash the dishes. We chatted about college, how her job was, and the conversation began to feel like two adults speaking. I relaxed, surprised to find that talking about life with my mom felt like talking to a friend my age. Then I heard Mom say, "...and Rebecca was an accident. Well, more of a surprise really. After that your dad got snipped."

"MOM!" All the awkwardness and shock from my nine-year-old self came rushing back into my head.

"What? It's true! I know the Church doesn't believe in contraception, but we weren't about to be raising a family of ten kids."

The implications that my parents continually had sex were too much. I regressed back to childhood. "LA LA LA I CAN'T HEAR YOU!"

Mom somehow sensed that she should change the subject, and we were able to resume dishwashing, but if I thought the storm had passed, I was dead wrong.

A few days later we were folding laundry, when Mom tried to start a casual conversation. I say tried because when the words "sex", "urges", and "virginity" popped up in the first sentence, I ended up responding in a robot

voice.

“All the teachers at school couldn’t believe that Dad and I waited until we were married to have sex. Don’t get me wrong, it was hard to wait sometimes. We had urges.” A pregnant pause. “Do you and Joel have sex?”

I gave the automatic “no” and resumed my folding in silence.

“Because you know you should wait. There’s difficulty that comes with waiting, I know.”

“Mom, I know. We aren’t having sex.”

“Okay, that’s good.”

I waited, expecting more uncomfortable words. The minutes passed in silence, and mentally I breathed a sigh of relief. No more sex talks with Mom.

“You know, after we got married there were concerns that your dad might not fit right.”

WHAM! It was as though she waited for me to relax and then hit me with all her firepower. Alarm bells went off in my head and my body lapsed into panic mode, folding laundry with renewed energy, doing anything to escape as fast as possible. My mother just giggled at my discomfort.

“It’s so great that your parents are so in love,” say all my friends, but they have no idea just what that statement means. I prefer to imagine that my parents kiss chastely every night and sleep fully clothed. Maybe it comes from being raised with a healthy (unhealthy?) caution regarding sex, but somehow the nine-year-old in me cannot be reconciled with the idea of my Catholic forty-something parents having recreational sex.

Shae Barbieri

I Believe in Strength

Not physical strength, but inner strength. The ability to get through basically anything and when you get knocked down, to pick yourself back up and keep going. Even at times when a person thinks nothing can get better they still push right through it. When I think about inner strength, my mind instantly goes to my mother and everything she has overcome in her life.

My mom is the strongest woman I have ever met. I'm not just saying that because she is my mom, but because she has inner strength that exceeds any other person I have ever met. Having my dad die when my sister and I were so young meant my mom became our mother and our father figure. She does the work of a man just to support my sister and me as well as herself and I think that alone shows remarkable inner strength. Having my father pass away when I was so young was a life-changing experience for me as well, but it made me become a stronger person too because I had to grow up much faster than a lot of other kids my age.

I think that inner strength comes from having hardships and bad experiences as well as good ones. The good ones show you that fighting for something is always worth it. You push right through the bad times and see the light at the end of the darkest tunnels. Being 18 and having to go through everything I have, has made me who I am today and I don't think I would change that for anything. I think that finding the good in every bad situation makes it worth the fight to push through. In my Junior English class we had to read *7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* and my favorite quote was by Joel Osteen, "We may get knocked down on the outside, but the key to living in victory is to learn how to get up on the inside." I admire every person who has ever wanted to give up, but instead they stayed strong and pushed through it. It's not easy to have inner strength and I feel that it's one of my best characteristics because not everyone can go through everything I have been through and still be as tough as I am. This is because all the struggles that I have gone through made me into a stronger person by overcoming them.

I am not exactly sure where my life is going to take me, but I know

that no matter what happens, I have the strength inside of me to overcome it. I didn't come this far and overcome every bad thing that has happened to me just to give up now or when the going gets tough. I don't ever plan to give up either.

Kailey Garner

Enjoy Simple Things

I believe in savoring the simple things. Too often we find ourselves too busy to enjoy the gifts we've been given each day. We become so comfortable with the chaos of our daily routines. Wake up, get ready for school, go to class, leave for work, and then we come home only to get ready to do it all over again the next day. Sometimes I get so caught up in the stress of it all that I take the simple things for granted. Planning for the future is important, and should be taken seriously, but I believe that having plans shouldn't stop you from living in the moment. In the morning when I walk to class I try to stop myself from rushing past everyone and everything so that I can stop to enjoy the fact that life is happening all around me. I take it all in, a glance and a quick smile from a passing stranger, the ever changing seasons as they come and go, and the beauties of the world surrounding me that I too often ignore. The truth is that the little things are sometimes the most important. My best memories are not of the biggest events in my life, most of them aren't even of any particular occasion really. My best memories have derived from the joys of each and every day, no matter how ordinary. I remember growing up and spending time with my younger brother. My memories aren't of the toys we had or the clothes we wore. We were content with a cardboard box and a couple of sticks out in our back yard. The fact that we were playing with common objects didn't make our play time any less of an adventure. To us that cardboard box was magic! I remember the day I taught my brother how to ride a bike! When he fell off skinning his knees he cried and cried, but the mention of a Band-Aid and some ice cream sure cheered him up. My memories of high school are not of who had the cutest purse! Instead my memories consist of the kind people that filled the hallways, the sound of lockers clanking in the distance, and the smell of books when you passed the library. I remember the nights that I stayed out past curfew with my friends, giant belly laughs, and empty pizza boxes. Now I know that the memories I make here in college will reside with my crazy roommates, the enjoyment I get from walking around the campus on a nice day, or the appreciation for a good cup of coffee the

morning after. I had a little too much fun. I believe that the best memories come from the simple things. I believe that much like a child we should look at everything as if we are seeing it for the first time, with new and fresh outlooks. I believe in making life happen, and in the enjoyment of the life we lead.

Luke Reft

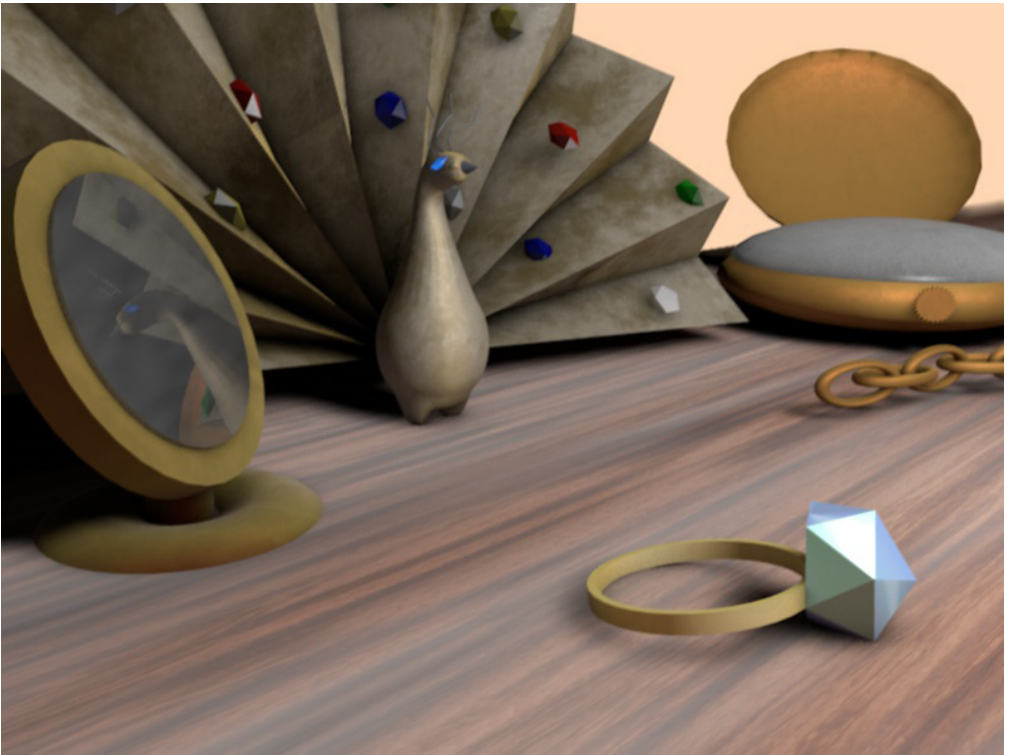
My Father Plays Pokémon

When I was a kid, Pokémon came out. It was the single most important thing in the world to my siblings and me. Our desire to train and battle our monsters drove us to play for hours every day. Nothing could stop us, not our parents or chores, or even illiteracy. When the Pokémon video game first came out, my little brother was very young and had not yet learned to read. He knew that his illiteracy would slow him down, so he recruited my father to help him play. My brother would sit on my father's lap and play the game while my father read all the text aloud to him. Before we knew it, my father had his own game and his own monsters. He would battle my siblings and me, and he enjoyed it. Through the years, my love for Pokémon has not faded although my passion for "being the very best" has gone away. My younger brother also quit playing, but my father did not. My father plays Pokémon. He buys the newest versions of the game and plays in his free time. My friends find it difficult to believe when I tell them about my father's desire to "catch'em all" because my father is a somewhat intimidating guy. My father is the wisest, strongest, hardest-working, most badass person I know, and he also plays Pokémon.

Some people would be embarrassed if their father played Pokémon, but I embrace it. My father can often be caught wearing his Pokémon T-shirt that my family bought him for father's day. My father's hobby has helped me to grow and understand what is important. The most important thing in the world is to do what you love. Just because you are a strong hard-working man doesn't mean you can't play Pokémon in your free time. As a child, I played baseball, basketball, and soccer. I always enjoyed these sports, but I have found that I am most passionate about table tennis. I have never had a passion for any other hobby like I do for table tennis. I have played enough of these sports to know that they are cooler than table tennis, and I understand that they are far more popular, but I don't care. I love table tennis, and doing what you love is very important. Everyone loves different things, which is what makes the world such a beautiful place. There is a reason that football and

chess exist, country music and jazz, apples and oranges, boxers and briefs, etc. Everyone is different and enjoys different things. My father is a great example of someone who does what they love, and I am happy that I have learned this lesson from him. Instead of being embarrassed by your love of Pokémon, it is best to just embrace it and enjoy yourself.

Fiction



Audrey Schroeder, Trinkets

Courtney Cox

The Game

With my eyes covered, I was amazed by all that I could hear. The mechanical ticks of the machine summoned me, filling me with a sense of dread to a magnitude I had never before experienced. I began to shake and then remembered that I must stay completely still, like a board, rigid and lifeless. Whether it was just my overactive imagination, or my hearing heightened by adrenaline, the whispers of the MRI technicians echoed through my mind so loud they broke my concentration and shattered my inner peace.

“It’s sad to see them this young...isn’t it?”

“Yeah...but cancer doesn’t care about age.”

Instantly, the shaking began, a sensation I had become accustomed to, an involuntary response I’d been feeling for weeks. I could remember the first day I felt this fear. Back then, it was because I had no idea what was consuming my body, and the empty questions haunted me with answers that surpassed even my darkest fears. Today, it plagued me because I was just as sure of my diagnosis as they were. Here I lay, 17 years old, with death impending as quickly as the small opening of the MRI which was now closing around me.

I sensed the environment around me, seeing with internal, subconscious eyes. The details of my perception surprised me, as though my eyeballs had left my body, fleeing from behind my clenched eyelids. The MRI machine was constructed of off-white panels, as sterile and harmless as the open-backed gown I had slipped into minutes before. I hoped to keep my dignity as I walked down the hall, stepping farther from my family each second as I struggled to keep the gown around my body. They watched me through the glass windows of the waiting room, their little girl vulnerable and alone, walking straight into the capable hands of strangers who saw me as a number, a case study, medical experience. They watched me, with my wrists so thin the hospital bracelet could scarcely stay on. They watched me, with my spine exposed through the back opening of the gown, able to count each vertebra through the skin stretched too tight.

When I reached the door at the end of the corridor, I uttered my name to the awaiting nurse, and was led down hallway after hallway. My stocking feet made a slight patter on the tile, alongside the louder smack of her white tennis shoes. At first, she attempted conversation, but after sensing my introversion, she gave up. What could be said to a defenseless girl about to meet her fate? A name would be put on the wicked parasite inside of me, the monster that had taken my body and was inching quickly to take the rest of me.

Minutes passed, and I lost my way in the infinite maze of halls. This walk seemed intentional, a ploy to make me lose my way so that I had absolutely no option of escape. Within the endless walls and doorways, my family seemed miles away. Finally, we reached a door which the nurse opened, holding it for me like a forced gesture of welcome. One of the technicians pulled me onto the gurney positioned at the head of the MRI, and I was suddenly struck by the notion that I'm about to be entombed in the ground. I looked around, soaking up the insignificance of what could be my final glance. The room in front of me was small, with only enough room for the three medical technicians. I didn't have time or energy to notice or care about these individuals, and when I saw the woman step forward to cover my eyes with a cloth, my world went black. I entered into the chamber.

The gurney moved forward slowly, like a roller coaster making its ascent. I braced with anticipation for the drop...it never came. Nothingness surrounded me in the stillness of the chamber. I felt aware, yet disconnected. The outside world felt thousands of feet away. I felt so exposed here in this empty chamber, as if thousands of tiny cameras were peering at my insides. These were places I myself had never even seen, but for the next hour I would be pinned here, letting unfamiliar eyes creep into this shell of myself. Lying here I was like a specimen on a slide with the microscope on high-power examining me.

Everything here feels so sterile, so uncaring, so uniform. Where else could someone look the face of cancer in the eye and be so calm? This was my life and they couldn't even look upon this with the slightest morsel of sympathy or sadness. Life in the hospital was fueled by sickness and death, and the strange paradox of it all made me sick to my stomach. Inside me I felt my breakfast shift, and wondered if the doctors on the other side of the wall

saw my blueberries and crème oatmeal swish in my guts. I knew I shouldn't have eaten breakfast...with all the meals I've skipped lately; this one wouldn't have made a difference.

I hadn't always been this way. This apathy was a new sensation, and giving up seemed like the only option. Before my sickness, I'd had motivation and purpose. I felt like I had no control over anything, so that meant no reason to try. Every once in a while I allow myself to remember the last day I felt whole. Ignorance truly was bliss when I stepped into the X-ray machine after a routine yearly physical. Everything was entirely unremarkable until several days later, after the scans were developed and analyzed. I was home for a snow day when the phone rang, waking me from an extended winter nap. This ring was exactly like all the others I've heard before, but for some reason, I knew that this was different. Sure enough, my mother came in several minutes later, struggling to compose herself, telling me that they'd found what looked like a tumor and I'd have a doctor's appointment in two weeks. A tumor...and I was still put on the waiting list.

Tired of being alone with my thoughts, I opened my eyes, searching for some kind of distraction. My heavy eyelids parted and I felt the washcloth sliding off the side of my eyes, revealing the ceiling of the MRI which I felt was closing in upon me. Stillness. Nothing. Just as I began to become accustomed to the silence, my descent into hell began. The machine began to turn on, bringing with it the beating of machine guns, so loud it was as though I was the target in the middle of a warzone. The world around me could be incinerated in some post-apocalyptic blaze and I would still be here, protected by the machine I felt would destroy me.

"Hello? Please, I need to get out of here!"

Maybe the machine is too loud, or maybe I'm just too quiet. I try again, screaming louder this time. At last, this is it. Insanity....I was doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I tried once more,

"Please! I can't do this! Let me out!"

I breathed in deep from my lungs, trying to expel my air out strong enough for someone, anyone, to come and save me. As I opened my mouth, I heard laughter coming from deep inside my memories.

Last summer. I was at the park with my best friend, Heather. We were

playing the game, our game. The sky was overcast, but we hardly stopped to notice, as we ran from tree to tree screaming the name of my latest crush, trying to outdo each other. Heather and I never considered that Collin could actually be in the park; we just yelled, throwing our heads back and straining our throats until we forgot about the world. “Collin!” Heather yelled from a few trees over. “Collin!!!” I screamed trying to outdo her. “COLLINNN!!!” We burst out laughing, like children making mischief. Heather never let me win this game. For us, this was our way of speaking out, letting our voices be heard. This disruption always made me feel important, somehow. Heather had this way about her that even in the most immature moments I always felt as though I mattered. Even alone in this closed chamber, this good memory made me smile. It didn’t matter that things have never been the same with Heather since I told her I was sick. It didn’t matter that my voice was weak, cracked and quiet. It didn’t matter that I was in the middle of a hospital, hidden within millions of dollars of machinery. I was going to win this game today. My chest tightened as I felt the walls closing in around me. I reached deep inside myself for my last shred of humanity and screamed, “Let me out!”

I heard the MRI stop, and within a few seconds, I was sliding out head first. Although it might not mean much, for this moment I was in control.

Today, I won the game.

Kayla Erickson

Clara

Clara sat at her kitchen table, sipping her chamomile tea. She was trying to clear the fog in her head. She glanced at the clock. Why was she up so late? It was way past her bedtime. Oh well, fewer things made sense these days. The fog kept staying longer. She kept forgetting where she put things and forgetting to turn off the stove. She went to get her hair done at the parlor only to have her beautician tell her she'd just been there the day before. But it wasn't as bad as Rodney kept saying it was. They'd just spoken yesterday morning and she'd hung up on him. She felt guilty as she replayed their conversation in her mind.

"Mom, you really need to think about coming out here to live with me. California is not that bad. It's beautiful in San Diego, like springtime all year round. You'd love it," he said.

"I like it just fine here. Iowa's just as good as any other place. I've been here all my 76 years. And I have no intention of going off halfway around the world to be baby sat by you!"

"It's not good, you living out there on that dirt road like you do. You're all alone, the wrong kind of people could really take advantage of you. And I'd be way out here, couldn't get to you if you needed help."

Clara got angry at that. He was just trying to scare her! *I'll call his bluff*, she thought. "Well then, I'll just die right here! This is my home, no other place I'd rather be..." Her voice wavered at the end of the statement, which made her angry.

"Mom...I'm sorry. I'm just worried is all. Let's not fight. Now, I need to tell you something, me and --"

She interrupted him, "I need to go. I've got something on the stove."

"Wait! I need to tell you --" She hung up. He hadn't called back like he normally did.

The chime of the doorbell jolted her out of her thoughts. *Who on earth would be here this late? And in this weather?* She paused before getting up, Rodney's words were still very present in her mind. She brushed them aside

and shuffled to the door. Peering through the peep hole she saw, under the deluge of her porch light, a man and a woman with a baby in her arms. *What in heaven's name?* She thought. The man rang the bell again. *They looked harmless.* But still she cautiously cracked the door keeping the security chain latched. She pressed her left eye to the crack and examined the couple.

“Yes?” she said.

“Can we come in?” the man said anxiously. “We need to use your phone. Our cell phones are dead. The rental car we were driving stalled and we walked about a quarter mile in this rain. We found you pretty easily. Your house was the only one with lights on.”

“Well...” Clara hesitated. They were soaked through. And that baby looked like a little drowned rat, poor thing. “Well, alright then... bless your hearts.” She unlatched the door and opened it to let them in.

The small family came into the house. Clara closed the door. They all just stared at each other for a few awkward moments. “Oh! The phone’s in the kitchen,” Clara said. Once the man had the phone he started thumbing through Clara’s yellow pages. Clara invited the woman and baby to sit on the couch. *She’s looking at my house like she’s never been in one before,* Clara thought.

The woman’s eyes went from floor to ceiling taking in everything. She was blond and attractive, dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt. But Clara thought the woman looked like she was smelling something terrible. The baby wore pink pajamas which were soaked.

“Oh! Where are my manners?” Clara said. “Let me get you a towel for that baby!” Clara got up from the couch and went to retrieve one from the bathroom. When she returned she saw the man was no longer on the phone and he and his wife stood by the doorway. Their heads were together and they whispered. They saw Clara and stopped talking, attempting nonchalance. It made Clara uncomfortable. She asked, “What did you find out?” The couple walked back into the living room. Clara handed the woman the towel.

“We’ll have to stay here tonight,” the man said. “I’ll head out in a minute and get our things from the car. Do you have an umbrella I could use?”

“Stay here? You mean *here*...in my house?!”

“Yes. Nothing is open this time of night and we can’t get a tow out here ‘til morning”, he said.

Clara started to feel alarm. She stared at the man for a few seconds. He

was tall, dark with a full beard and his hair needed a trim. He wore flannel and jeans as well. She felt a little confusion about what she should do. She was still fighting that fog. They were harmless, surely. They had that little baby and all...she couldn't turn them out now. "Well... I *guess* it'll be alright. You all can have the spare bedroom. It's company ready." She smiled to hide her anxiety.

A while later the man returned laden with bags and suitcases. "Well..." Clara started to say goodnight, but the man interrupted. "You should go on to bed now." He was looking directly at Clara. "I know when it's my bedtime, sir. I've been knowing that a lot longer than you've been alive. Goodnight." Clara whirled and went to her bedroom, closed the door and locked it. *I don't care for him one bit. Good thing they're leaving tomorrow*, she thought.

Clara woke the next morning. She hadn't slept well with strangers in the house and that fog still hung on making it hard to stay present, focused. She got out of bed, put on her robe and tottered down the hallway. She came full awake at the sight of her house. Her house was a shambles. The living room was a disaster. There were pillows from the couch on the floor, crumbs littered the carpet. Magazines were strewn hither and yon. The kitchen was even worse. It looked like it hadn't been cleaned in days. Dirty plates, glasses, and coffee mugs were still on the table. The countertop was littered with paper towels, dirty silverware, plates, and bowls. A frying pan full of grease was still on the stove. A pot of oatmeal had boiled over, it was all over the stovetop.

"What happened?" Clara asked the woman, who was sitting on the couch, holding the baby.

"What do you mean?" the blonde asked.

"It looks like an A-bomb went off in my kitchen!" Clara said.

"Would you like me to help you clean up?"

"I thought you all would be gone by now," Clara said bluntly.

"Where's your husband?"

"He's taking care of business in town," the woman said.

"Oh, did he get a car to pick him up?" Clara asked. "No," she said.

"Then how did he –" Clara started and then rushed to the garage door and opened it. The garage door was open and the garage was empty. Her car

was gone! “What on earth...? Who...?What are you people doing?” Clara exclaimed. “You can’t just come into someone’s home and just...do what you’re doing! He didn’t ask me if he could take my car! You didn’t ask to eat any of my food!” Clara was exasperated. “He’ll be back shortly. I’m sure he’ll be really careful with it. We’ll be leaving soon don’t worry, Clara.”

“How do you know my name?”

“You told me.”

“No...no I didn’t tell you.” Clara was afraid they had been snooping in her personal things.

“Well, I’m gonna have a talk with your husband when he gets back,” she said. She went to her bedroom and got dressed, then started to work cleaning the kitchen. It took her most of the morning. The woman sat on the couch and watched TV, changed the baby’s diaper, here and there, and even warmed a bottle. All the while Clara cleaned.

That evening, the man returned. He almost ran into Clara when he came into the house. “I want to know when you’re leaving? And I want to know *right* now!”

“You need to calm down,” the man said. “There’s no need for you to get all worked up like this. We’re going to be staying another night,” he said to his wife, ignoring Clara. His wife had come into the kitchen.

“Just calm down,” he said to Clara, “we’ll be leaving soon.” He left out of the house and came back in with a box. “I’ve got pizza!” he said. The couple made themselves at home in her kitchen.

In her room that night, Clara fretted over what to do. She hated to admit it, but Rodney was right. She just couldn’t handle things like she used to. And somehow dying here didn’t seem nearly as attractive as it did a few days ago. Maybe they would be gone tomorrow.

The next morning started much like the previous day, but today the man was at home. Today he was in the bedroom speaking on his cellular phone. After a long while he hadn’t come out of the room. Clara walked to the bedroom. He’d closed the door, but she heard his voice inside. She strained to hear the conversation. She only got bits here and there. “...worth a lot... money’s worth. Yes, but she’ll be difficult...I know...do what needs to be done...harder than I thought it would be...yeah...I’ll take care of it...” Clara’s heart pounded. This was much worse than she imagined. They were going

to kill her. That man was going to kill her, and they were going to live in her house and drive her car and eat in her kitchen!

Clara walked, as calmly as she dared, back to her room and locked the door. She grabbed the phone by her bed and with shaking fingers dialed 911. She told the operator that there was a man, a woman, and baby that she didn't know living in her house. They were tearing up her things, eating all her food, and using her car. She wanted them out! And she thought they might be trying to kill her.

She sat on her bed and waited for the police to arrive. There was a knock at her door. "Ms. Clara Cooper? You called 911 about intruders?" She opened the door to find a policeman standing there and the man and woman were close behind him. The officer said, "This man says he's your son, ma'am."

"Absolutely not! I don't know them!"

"He makes a pretty good case..." said the officer. "He's come all the way from California to get you. He's been in town taking care business for you these past few days. You seem to have let things go around here."

Clara was fighting that fog. She was so confused. "...I just don't know which way is up..." she said.

"Mom, I'm sorry," said the man. "I had no idea things were this bad with you! Don't you know me at all?" He'd stepped closer. Clara just felt confused and afraid.

"Imagine me without the beard," the man said.

She tried and somehow the fog lifted and there stood her son. Clara started to cry with relief. "Yes, I remember. I'm sorry...I'm so sorry, son."

"No, I'm sorry. You're just skin and bones. The house is a wreck," he said. The woman came closer with the baby. "You remember Susan don't you? And baby Clara?" Clara nodded.

"We'll take care of you now," said Susan smiling.

Clara embraced her little family. "I'm so glad you came," she said.

Casey Freeman

Ella May

She dresses herself up just to bring herself down. She struts into her bedroom, skin bared for all to see through the open window. Beige towel slung over her shoulder, waiting to soak up the glistening droplets on her body. She sways to her dresser, blowing kisses at the mirror as she hauls out a bag—no, a chest—of makeup. She tilts her head toward the window and smirks. She caught the frantic closing of blinds from the neighbor boy’s room. It fills her with a certain smugness as she goes back to the mirror. She pulls out one, two, three bottles of foundation until she finds the perfect shade of ivory. Two, four tubes of lipstick until she finds the perfect burgundy red. Eight compacts of eyeshadow for the perfect blend of gold and brown. Not to mention five different brands of mascara, eyeliner, and gloss. Her blonde curls must stand out. Her blue eyes must be accented perfectly. She applies it all with the slow precision of the most delicate of artists. The beige towel lies forgotten on the floor as she adjusts her breasts once, twice, and slides her hands along her curves. She opens the drawer and selects a lacy cloth that barely qualifies as a thong. She slips it on with a certain elegance and, deciding to forgo a bra, waltzes over to her closet. She peruses her wardrobe; the dress she chooses must be perfect. A certain shade of red is on her mind, the perfect shade of red. And then her fingers find it; a silky, sensual cocktail dress that’s the epitome of her desires. Excited now, she slips it on, forgetting to check for the neighbor boy. She looks to the mirror and beams. Perfection, she thinks. Pure perfection.

She walks to her bed, slowly and deliberately. She lies on her satin sheets, satisfied and smiling. She turns to grab her porcelain cup, sitting daintily on the nightstand, and sips her perfect blend of tea. Chamomile, milk, and a heaping spoonful of arsenic. She smiles and closes her eyes. She dresses herself up just to bring herself down.

Hannah Lawson

It Was Black

“Please just let me go... When can I leave?”

In my head, I am asking a question, but I know better than to ask it out loud to Mama. She is beside me, but her lips are closed so tightly shut that I am afraid she will not talk to me at all. The question bounces noisily in my brain, distracting me; I almost bump into the tall, white-haired man beside me. There are hundreds of people flocking through the tall, carved wooden doors. Everywhere there is black. I think to myself that I want to make all the strangers leave this place, the crowd that my mother and I are now a part of. Or maybe, if I cannot make them go, I will leave: pushing my way through them, even though I am small, to run out into the fresh air. Either way, I do not like it here.

I came through the door with my mother just minutes ago, but I already feel stifled by the heavily carpeted rooms and low ceilings. I notice that the building is big and tall and nice; nicer, even, than our church, with its velvet pews and stained glass windows. But the air is thick; at our church the air is clear, and sweet, and it smells like lemonade. In this building, I'm choking on the scent of too many flowers. I try to take deep breaths, but the scent becomes worse, and now it's in my mouth.

The crowd never stops talking, but I can't decide if they are having fun or not. The chatter surrounding me reminds me of the buzzing of bees in my ears when I play in the field by my house, and the sound makes me uncomfortable, just like bees do, though I don't know why. My mother leaves me on a chair near the back of the room—“Don't move, Maria”—she says, and I don't move, but I turn my head as far as I can each way to see the whole room and all the people in it.

The men are dressed in suits and ties. The women have chosen skirts or dark-colored dresses. It looks like Easter at church, but without the purples and yellows. The color black is everywhere. I see babies being carried, and I twist my neck till it hurts, trying to find girls like me: there are a few. They are wearing nice dresses like mine. I smile a little at one; she drops her head

and stares at her shoes: nice shoes, church shoes. I fidget a little and touch the ribbon in my hair; do I look nice? I decide that my red ribbon is very pretty. But everyone looks beautiful and handsome here; my Mama is especially beautiful. I can see her talking to strangers, but I don't know what she's talking about.

All around me, there are families and friends, I think. I hear conversations, people meeting each other. "Hello, Aunt Mary," "It's been good to talk with you, Uncle Carl," they say, but the strangers don't say anything to me. There are more questions in my head; I wonder why my mother has brought me here. She had not said much before we got in the car to come to this place.

"Maria, put on your black church dress and your black tights. We need to go somewhere this afternoon."

"Why, Mama? It's not Sunday."

"Because, Maria. I have to go somewhere, and you can't stay at home because the sitter can't come."

I looked hard at Mama's face, deciding whether I should pout or listen. I chose to hurry into my nice clothes, and she quickly braided my hair, her hands moving like she was not thinking about it at all.

Now that we are here, though, the number of people is too overwhelming for me; I have never seen so many people in one place. I see a girl glance toward the door, and I think she feels like I do. Maybe she is uncomfortable in her church clothes, as I am. I stare at my tights, where they bunch into a million wrinkles around my knees. I wonder what song the birds are singing, and if the wind is dancing in the trees.

I have a feeling of sadness. I can see a lot of smiles, and I hear laughter. But the laughter is hollow, and the carpet—the soft, deep carpet covered by the ugliest flowers I have ever seen—seems to swallow it in, and gulp it up. One lady, a little older than my Mama, wears a jacket and skirt the color of dark green moss. She looks like she is enjoying herself. I sit alone on my hard chair and curl myself up as small as possible, tucking my legs underneath me. No one is looking in my direction, and I feel that I can stare without anyone stopping me. I watch the lady in green, and hear her start to talk.

"Mrs. Spencer!" The green lady says, in a voice that screeches a little.

She is talking to a woman who is older than me, but younger than my Mama.

“The last time I saw you, you were a miss,” the green lady continues, her voice not as screechy now.

The young lady talks so quietly that I can’t hear her, and I give up trying to listen. But the green lady is soon talking to everyone who comes through the doorway. “He was handsome, wasn’t he? And our darling Carolyn says he was such a wonderful husband,” she says. The green lady looks for a very long time at a photograph of a man who reminds me of my father.

The green lady seems very different than the woman who has been standing at the front of the room since we got here; I have been watching them both, wondering if they know each other. The woman at the front is dressed in black, like almost everyone else, and she wears a very sad smile; it is the same smile Mama gets when I’ve done something wrong. Everyone seems to know this woman, and they push towards her, shaking her hand, and wiping their eyes with tissues. I think they call her Carolyn. Carolyn just keeps smiling her sad smile. Behind her is a box that is almost lost in a pile of flowers: but when I stand out of my chair, on my toes, I see that it is very, very shiny. I think if I were closer, I could catch myself staring in the polished wood. I mean to ask Mama what the box is, but I don’t even know where my Mama is anymore. She is lost in a sea of people that are pushing to get closer to the front of the room. They seem very rude, and impatient, even though they speak to each other, and I hear them talking, always talking. I catch some of the things they say. “Wasn’t he wonderful? In his last moments...” “It’s true, I didn’t know him very well, but my late husband was close to him...” The conversation fades in and out, sometimes loud, sometimes soft.

In the middle of the bustling and chatter, a man wearing a perfect suit that is not wrinkled at all, not even one bit, gets up in front of us and starts to speak. I want to touch the suit to feel how smooth it is, but I don’t know what he is saying, because Mama is grabbing my hand and taking me downstairs before I can listen. I cast a glance back at him, and I have a feeling that he is sad. Downstairs there is a kind lady who has blue eyes, just like my teacher has, and she talks to me for a while when Mama leaves, asking me questions like how many pets I have and if I have brothers and sisters.

After what seems like a day, Mama comes back downstairs, and she

seems more serious than when we arrived. She pulls me away, up the stairs, back to the front of the building. Is it time to go? A man dressed in a suit opens the door for us; he looks at Mama, all in black, wearing a string of pearls. "I'm sorry for your loss," he says to her as we finally leave. I have heard people saying that again and again and again today, but I don't really know what it means, and it slips out of my mind as we walk outside. When we walk outside it is raining; the air is cool and dark and damp. My Mama makes a comment that the rain is nice today. I wonder why she says that; she hates rain.

As soon as we get home I kick off my shoes and wriggle out of my tights, replacing them by a coat and red rubber boots. I am different than Mama; I love rain. The rest of my day is spent in puddles, until I am shivering, soaked to the bone, and Mama forces me to come inside. She has hot chocolate waiting for me.

The next day, I go to school, just like normal.

"Did you do anything fun this week?"

My teacher asks in class, as we were marched into our classroom.

"I went to a birthday party!" My best friend Sophia exclaims, smiling.

"I went somewhere too," I say.

My teacher looks directly at me, and her blue eyes are kind. "Where did you go, Maria?"

"I went somewhere with my Mama," I said, remembering the experience.

"Oh, that's nice." said my teacher.

"It wasn't nice." I said. "It was sad. It was black."

Jesi Nelson

Silence the Soul

Darkness. I'm lying naked on a cold, hard surface surrounded by complete darkness. I can feel goosebumps raising on my skin as the coldness from the icy surface touching my back begins to permeate my body. The chill begins at my heels, creeps up my calves, onto my buttocks and into my back. I shiver. I feel a paper thin cover laying over me, as if protecting me from the coldness, but it doesn't help. I reach up and touch my eyes; just to be sure they're open. My eye lashes flutter on my fingers. I can feel my fingers lingering on my eyes, but I can not see them. Slowly, anxiously, I reach my hands above my body. My fingers press firmly against another cold, hard surface. I slide my hands along this ceiling and quickly, a little too quickly, find the corners where the ceiling meets the walls. I raise my hands above my head, elbows bent, and bang them into another wall—closer than I had hoped.

I take a deep breath, although I can't seem to feel the air filling my lungs, and try not to panic. I listen intently for sound, any sound, that will give me a clue as to where I am. Nothing. I can't even hear the sound of my own heart beating, and the intense quiet is deafening.

"HELLO?" I scream, hoping someone will hear me. "GET ME OUT OF HERE!" I listen. Again, nothing. I begin to frantically bang on the sides of the enclosure, the twang of the metal sound echoing through the area, as I scream to get someone's attention. I don't know how much time has passed, but my hands hurt, and I'm tired. I close my eyes and allow exhaustion to overtake me.

I am awakened by the loud sound of a click, like a lock being opened. Again, I begin to scream. "HELLO? CAN YOU HEAR ME?" A door opens at my feet, and light begins filling the area. "Please, you have to get me out of here. I don't know what's going on." I can hear the grinding of metal as the surface I'm lying on begins moving out of the box. The heat from the light above begins warming my toes, my legs, my stomach, my chest. Apprehension overwhelms me as I'm pulled further out of the box, anxiously waiting for my head to clear the opening so I can sit up. I'm jolted to a stop as

the locks on the mechanism engage, preventing the surface I'm lying on from falling to the ground.

The florescent lights in the ceiling blind me as my eyes try to adjust to the change. I close my eyes as they burn from the intense brightness, and try to take a deep breath. I hear the gentle rhythm of shoes on the ceramic floor moving away from me. I can hear the rapid click of the keys on a computer keyboard as someone is typing. "Hello? Where am I? What's going on?" No response. I open my eyes and blink at the light. "Please, tell me what's going on." I plead. I try to sit up, but suddenly feel as if the sheet that's covering me weighs a hundred pounds. Why can't I sit up? What the hell is going on? Where the hell am I? Okay.....okay.....don't panic.

The gentle patter of shoes moving across a ceramic floor returns, getting closer. "Please. You have to help me. You have to get me out of here. PLEASE!" Again, no response, although I can feel someone standing next to me, hovering beside me. He leans over me and now I can see him. He's an older gentleman with short gray hair and chocolate brown eyes, covered by glasses. He stares at me for a moment with a somber look on his face. I'm frightened. Again, I begin to plead with him. "Please, sir. Please tell me what's going on. Where am I? What's happening?"

"Okay." he says. "Let's get you ready."

"Ready?for what?" I can't contain the panic. I again try to sit up, still unable to move. "Please," I beg, "please just tell me what's going on." A lump has grown in my throat, and I try to swallow it, suddenly realizing that my throat is dry. "Please sir. Whatever it is....I'm sure we can work something out. Please just tell me what's going on."

He reaches above my head to grab something, and when his hands return to my line of vision, I can see that he is putting latex gloves on. The panic swells in my chest and I struggle to control it. I hear a clunk as he pushes a button and the surface I'm lying on begins to tilt so that my head is above my feet. It comes to an abrupt halt when my head is at a forty-five degree angle from the floor. The man slowly backs away and I begin to hear scraping across the ceramic floor as he pulls something closer to him. "Oh God! Please help me!" He returns to his position at my right side and pulls a small metal table up next to him. I hear a clink as he picks up something metal off of it. He leans over me and the lights from above bounce off the

metal object in his hand.....a scalpel.

“Oh my God! NO!” I scream. I struggle to move but feel as though I’m paralyzed. I try to frantically kick my legs and flap my arms, but they remain weighted to the table. I try to thrash my head from side to side, but it, too, doesn’t move. He places a hand on my shoulder. “PLEASE DON’T DO THIS. I’ll do whatever you want, just PLEASE!” I can no longer control the panic and the tears start to flow, although the wetness never touches my skin. He tilts my head to the left, and although I can’t feel the blade, I can hear the soft tearing of skin as he makes two incisions in my neck. I begin to sob uncontrollably, but the wetness never comes, and my body remains completely still.

I hear the plink as he drops the scalpel back on the metal table. I feel the pressure, although no pain, as he gently pushes plastic tubes, one in each hole, into the incisions in my neck. A click and the soft whirring of a machine soon follow. “Stop! Get away from me! We can talk about this! Just give me a chance. I don’t understand. Why are you doing this?” I plead. Soon, he turns the machine off and the whirring stops. He pulls the two tubes out of my neck and places them on the table above my head. He reaches up and, again, picks something up off the table. He appears to be threading a needle. He leans close to the incisions and begins sewing them closed. I close my eyes and attempt to cry, trying to make sense of it all. I’m so confused. I feel no pain, there are no tears, he’s not responding to me. It’s almost like he can’t hear my pleas.

The gentle patter of shoes on the ceramic floor indicates that he is walking away from me. I again try in vain to get off the table. I hear a squeak, followed by the gushing of water and the loud consistent whoosh as a bucket is filled. He returns to my side, bends down to place the bucket on the floor and removes the sheet. This is my chance! I have to get out of here! I try to jump off the table and realize that it wasn’t the sheet that was holding me down. I still can’t move. Oh God! He must have given me something! Did he drug me? Why can’t I move! He bends down and pulls a sponge out of the bucket. I hear the drips of water as they drop off the sponge and land back in the bucket on the floor. He gently rubs the sponge over my arms, my legs, my stomach, my chest. He pauses as he looks at my face. Fear and rage run through me. He gently places the sponge on my cheek and begins

washing my face. The sponge makes a splash as he drops it back into the bucket. He grabs a towel from his table beside me and begins drying my face. He places the towel back on the table and pulls the sheet back over me, covering my naked body. The clunk of the button being pressed returns, and the table begins to descend to the starting position. Soon, my entire body is, once again, parallel to the floor.

The table beside me scrapes against the ceramic floor as he pushes it away from him, and pulls another one near. “You’re very pretty. It’s not going to take much.” I hear a clink as he picks something up, places it back down, and chooses something else. In a moment, I feel the soft bristles of a makeup brush gently rub across first one cheek, then the other. Thoughts begin to swim in my head.

“Makeup? Why are you putting makeup on me? Please, just tell me what’s going on!” I feel an overwhelming sense of despair and I want to cry, but my eyes are dry.

“Lillian.”

I suddenly feel the weight holding me to the table begin to diminish. I turn my head to the left as I hear my name called. Standing by the door is a figure that resembles a man, though something about him, I’m not sure what exactly, gives the implication that he is not human. The warmth and tranquility in his gaze and the softness of his voice has a soothing effect on me. I instantly feel safe in his presence.

“Everything’s going to be okay, Lillian. Sit up.” He instructs.

I’m confused. “I can’t. I think he’s given me something. Please help me. I don’t know what he’s doing to me, or why I can’t feel it, but you’ve got to stop him. I think he’s insane!” I plead.

“Lillian, trust me. Sit up.” He calmly instructs again.

I slowly place my hands on the sides of the surface and push myself to a sitting position. I look down at my arms and realize that I am no longer naked, and am instantly confused. The realization that I can move slams into me. I throw my legs over the side of the surface, push myself to a standing position and quickly run to the figure, anxious to get out of there.

He wraps his arms around me as if protecting me. I look up into his eyes and see a troubled expression on his face. I push him away and turn to look at the man at the table. I’m frightened by what I see. There, lying on the

surface I just left, is me. The man is still applying makeup to my face.

“WHAT THE HELL???” I’m extremely confused.

The figure places his hand on my shoulder as I gaze, bewildered, at the scene in front of me. “I can explain everything, Lillian.”

“What’s going on here, and how do you know my name?” Anger is beginning to rage through me as I struggle to make sense of it all. I can’t take my eyes off my body lying on the table.

“My name is Michael, and I’m here to help you.”

“That doesn’t explain anything!” I yell at him. The panic returns and I begin to shake uncontrollably. The man continues to work on me, uninterrupted, as I watch intently, waiting for some semblance of clarity to return to me. Thoughts begin to run through my mind. Is this a dream? Surely I’m going to wake up and this is all just going to be a dream....no, a nightmare!

“It’s not a dream, Lillian. You were in an accident and you didn’t make it.” Michael begins.

I spin on my heels and glare at him. “What are you saying exactly?”

“You’re dead.” He explains.

“Dead? I can’t be dead! I was moving when I was in that box thing over there! I was banging my hands! I could feel the coldness! I’ve been screaming, trying to get him to understand that I’m still alive. I’m standing here talking to you, aren’t I? I walked, well, RAN over here to you, didn’t I? If I’m dead, how do you explain that, huh?” Now I’m furious. “I don’t know what kind of game or hidden camera show this is, and I don’t know how you found someone who looks identical to me to put on that table over there, but I’m done playing! I want to go home!”

“Sometimes, when a person passes, their soul doesn’t immediately realize what’s happened. You weren’t really moving and couldn’t really feel the coldness. Your subconscious knew you were in a refrigerator. That’s why you thought you could feel the cold and bang your arms. And that’s why that man over there didn’t respond to your pleas. He couldn’t hear you because you weren’t really talking.”

“You’re wrong!” I reply through gritted teeth. “Now let me go home!”

“I don’t usually do this, but it appears that you are a little more difficult than some of the other souls I try to help. Let me show you

something. Follow me, please.” Michael turns and exits through the door. I stand there staring after him for a moment, bewildered. Although I feel safe in his presence, I’m still really confused. I turn and take one last look at my body on the table and the man putting his tools away before I bolt out the door.

I catch up to Michael and he leads me down a long, dimly lit hallway to a set of stairs. We climb the stairs to find the door at the top is open. Passing through the doorway, we enter into a large hallway with several doors on both sides, and a large door leading to the outside at the end of the hallway. I pause for a moment and consider bolting out the front door, but curiosity as to what Michael wants to show me gets the best of me, and I continue to follow him. He leads me to a set of doors, one of which is ajar, and steps aside so I can peer into the room.

The room is set up for a funeral. A large mantle to hold the casket has been placed delicately at the front of the room and is surrounded by large sprays of flowers. Chairs have been placed neatly in rows, facing the mantle. Flower arrangements of different sizes and colors have been placed sporadically throughout the room, and a table has been set up in the front corner of the room and holds what appear to be pictures. Slowly, I push the door open so I can enter the room. Michael silently follows me in. I cautiously make my way to the front of the room and stop in front of the table. As I look down at the table, I see reproductions from many aspects of my life; my first birthday, the day I learned to ride a bike, my first car, prom, graduation. Pictures of me with my family are scattered all about. I am instantly filled with sorrow, as the realization of what is happening begins to radiate through me.

Soft voices in the distance, getting closer, break me from my reverie. I turn and look at Michael, who is standing behind me. As I look into his eyes, understanding begins to wash over me. Before I can speak, I’m startled by the sound of both doors to the room swinging open. My mother, my father, and my sister slowly, somberly enter the room.

“Mom!” I yell. As I begin to race over to her, Michael places a hand on my shoulder, stopping me.

The three of them make their way to the table where I’m standing. My mom looks down at the pictures scattered about and tears begin to well in her

eyes. She picks up the picture of our last vacation together and begins to cry.

My father wraps his arms around her and pulls my sister close. They stand there in a loving embrace, crying because I'm gone.

I'm no longer confused or afraid. I'm certain that what Michael has been telling me is the truth. I take one last look at my family, and know that this is the end. "Okay," I say to Michael. "Take me home."

Michael gently places his hand on my back and guides me out the door.

Audrey Schroeder

Mommy Dearest

Mommy walked into the kitchen with Baby clutched tightly in her arms. She set him gently into his high chair before turning to the stove. Peter had been playing with his Lego's, but as soon as Mommy looked away, he crept up to the high chair, peeking just over the edge of the tray. Baby locked his curious blue eyes on Peter. Each waited for the other to make a move. Slowly, slowly, Peter reached out and poked Baby's cheek.

Baby gurgled happily.

"Peter! What are you doing? Don't touch the new baby!"

Peter scowled, but said nothing.

"Peter, did you hear me, young man? Do not touch Baby!"

Peter mumbled assent and ran back to his Lego's. Mommy was being such a bully! She didn't used to be angry with him, but now it was all about Baby. Peter sulked for the rest of the afternoon. He even skipped dinner and fell asleep early.

That night, for the third time in a row, Peter woke to Baby's crying. Were all babies so loud? Mommy usually rushed to the room quickly so Peter didn't have to endure such torture, but tonight several minutes passed and Baby's wails did not subside. Such a racket! Peter decided to go quiet Baby himself. He padded quietly down the hall and saw Mommy emerge from her room, reading a thick book. Quickly, Peter ducked into the bathroom before Mommy could see him. After she entered the nursery, Peter crept quietly to the doorway of Baby's room unnoticed and peered in.

Mommy was sitting next to the bed, fingers in her ears, poring over the book as Baby banged on the side of the crib, screaming. Mommy's lips moved soundlessly as she read until finally she seemed to have found what she was looking for. She stood, turned Baby around roughly, and began to probe the back of his neck. Peter heard a soft snap like a light switch and suddenly Baby's wails ceased. In fact, Baby wasn't making any sounds at all. His round blue eyes were open wide, like a trapped animal, but he didn't seem to be moving.

Suddenly, Peter realized that Mommy was looking in his direction. He sprinted to his room and jumped into the bed, heart pounding heavily. Peter held his breath, the silence more deafening than Baby's screams. He waited, eternities passing with each second.

A beam of light slid over the edge of the bed, and there was Mommy, silhouetted in the doorway. Peter didn't dare open his eyes as he tried to slow his breathing.

"Peter?" He kept his eyes locked shut and gave a little snore, as though that would make his charade more believable. He waited for Mommy to leave and the light to dissipate, but nothing happened. Was she still there?

The bed sank as Mommy sat down. "Peter, let's talk about what you just saw." Stubbornly, Peter's eyes stayed closed, clinging to their faux slumber.

"Peter, sometimes Baby is very loud and naughty. It's a lot for Mommy to deal with, you understand. Mommy just needs a break. I know it must seem terrible, Peter, but Baby is fine. Now come give Mommy a hug."

Peter's willpower broke at the unexpected offer of forgiveness and he reached out to Mommy, crying. She stroked his head and rocked him as though he were still her perfect little boy. "There there, love, it will all be alright. Just hush now." Peter basked in the embrace, enjoying Mommy's comforting hands. As his tears subsided, he felt her hand come to rest on his neck, and with cold certainty he realized what was about to happen.

He hit Mommy hard in the face and jumped off her lap to the floor. "Naughty Peter!" Mommy's yells tailed behind him as his terror carried him down the hall. He half tumbled down the stairs, desperately searching for a place to hide. Peter tore through the house until he reached the basement door. Mommy had always warned him not to go down there, but her heavy footsteps on the stairs were coming closer. Peter yanked the door open and closed it shut behind him. Blind in the dark, he crawled down as quietly as he could into the musty basement. He felt his way around until he reached the crawl space under the stairs.

Safe at last, Peter began to sob quietly. Mommy had tried to quiet him just like she'd done to Baby. Baby had looked terrified, and who knew if he was even still alive? Peter realized he had no way to escape and no idea what he might do if he could. He was trapped. The tears dripped onto Peter's

pajamas as he sobbed himself into oblivious sleep.

Peter woke with a start, his neck cramped uncomfortably. He could hear Mommy's voice on the stairs and his heart began to race again. "I can't find him anywhere, Jean. Yes, I think he's been sleepwalking again, it's quite normal. Yes, Baby is fine, thank you for asking. Why wouldn't he be?" Mommy walked to the back of the basement and began moving boxes around. "I'm checking the basement now, Jean, and when I find him I think maybe we'll just go somewhere for a weekend. A nice relaxing weekend." Peter's breath was caught in his throat and he squeezed his eyes shut. Mommy had said Baby was fine, but how could he know if that was true? Mommy had lied last night. She could be lying again. Mommy's voice grew closer. "Peter? Peter, darling, where are you hiding?" Peter retreated even further into the cobwebbed corner. "Peter, sweetheart, please come out." Mommy's voice chilled Peter and he clapped his hands over his neck. Suddenly her face came into view. "Oh there you are, Peter! I've been so worried! Come out now and we can talk."

Peter shook his head frantically, not daring to speak.

"Peter, stop being ridiculous!" Mommy reached in angrily and dragged Peter out of the crawl space. She scooped him up in an unbreakable hug and began to pry his hands off of his neck. Peter squirmed out of Mommy's grip, scratching at her arms as he fell. He clambered up the stairs, knocking boxes into Mommy's path and desperately looked for another place to hide. He darted into the kitchen and started to pull the oven door open, not thinking about how heavy it was. As he started to crawl inside, his stomach began to churn.

The interior of the oven smelled terribly burnt, and there were the leftovers of something all over the oven rack. Peter began to pull his legs inside too when his hand touched what was unmistakably bone. It was much too large to be a chicken bone, or anything else Mommy cooked for that matter. Peter realized with horror as he touched an infant-sized skull that he was sitting in the charred remains of Baby.

All of the bile in Peter's empty stomach rose to his throat, but even as he gagged, he ran into the next room, seeking a safe place. He could hear Mommy's angry footsteps coming up the stairs, so he snuck into the only room available: the utility closet. Carefully, Peter climbed on top of the dryer

as he'd been scolded for doing so many times. He opened the door of the washing machine and let it close slowly above him. He was careful to not make noise and especially to not think about the soot on his pajamas.

Cramped uncomfortably in the washer, time dragged on for Peter. He didn't dare make a sound or try to move in case Mommy should hear. Seconds passed, and then minutes. How would he know when it was safe? Could he risk peeking out now?

A loud thunk reverberated above Peter's head. A cold jet of water sprayed onto his head and the machine began to fill up. In a panic, Peter began pounding on the door, but it barely moved. He could hear Mommy's laugh, muffled. "Be a good boy now, Peter, and stay put until I come back. I have to take care of Baby."

What Mommy meant by that, Peter didn't know. He waited a few moments until he was sure she was gone, and then he began pushing on the door as hard as he could. No matter how hard he tried, he could not get the door open. Frantically he began jumping with all his force to try and move whatever was on top of the washing machine. His feet sloshed with every jump as the water rose higher. Finally he began to feel progress. The door was lifting a little more each time! With one last burst of strength Peter slammed into the door and heard something hit the floor. He shoved the door open and emerged, soaked up to his chest. Mommy's old steel sewing machine lay on the floor.

Peter dragged himself through the kitchen and out the front door into the bright afternoon sun, exhausted from his struggle. Once outside, he realized he had nowhere to go, but he didn't want to go back to Mommy. He wandered down streets, heading for the only landmark he knew: the local playground. Before he reached his destination, Peter noticed a police car driving alongside him.

"Young man, are you lost?" the officer asked. Peter nodded. "Well, let's get you home then."

"No!" Peter shouted vehemently. "Mommy is a bad person! I won't go back!"

The officer seemed taken aback by Peter's hysterics. He immediately opened the passenger door to let Peter in. He tried to ask Peter more questions about Mommy, but he got nothing but sobs and unintelligible responses.

When they arrived at the station, the officer wrapped Peter in a thick gray blanket and made him some hot chocolate. “Everything will be okay, son. I’m going to see if we can’t get a relative to come get you.” Peter gave half a smile. He sprawled out on the hard chairs in the lobby, ignoring his wet sooty pajamas, and let the terrible events of the day fade away as he drifted to sleep.

“...all wet and dirty, and he got pretty upset.” Peter was aware of voices nearby.

“Understandable, he’s at an excitable age, Officer.” That voice sounded familiar.

“Well, considering the shock he’s had, let’s not wake him.” Gentle hands slid under Peter’s back and legs as the officer picked him up. The swaying motion of footsteps rocked Peter back into his half-asleep state. He felt himself being set carefully in a car, and the door slammed shut. Another door opened and shut, this time on the driver’s side. With a quiet hum, the car started and Peter sighed contentedly, prepared to doze off again.

“Peter, honey,” the familiar voice said. A hand stroked his hair. “Wake up, sweetie.”

Peter blinked and met Mommy’s eyes.

Erica Wagner

The Hollow Ones

She moved thousands of miles away. A Greyhound bus carried her farther and farther from her past, to a new place where she could start over. Obviously there was plenty of heroin where she was now, but she couldn't base her relocation off of where she could score. She made that promise long ago. *Heroin will not define my life anymore.* Avoiding it was still vital, but before her addiction, even before him, she had always wanted to move to a big city. After everything, her options were narrowed down for her; L.A. became too expensive, Chicago too close. New York seemed like her only option. She could rent a studio apartment in downtown Brooklyn for under \$1500 a month, which a good waitressing job could easily support. *That was the one good thing that came from the past couple of years,* she thought to herself. *At least I still have a skill.* Living in the nation's most populous city was quite a contrast from living in the Midwestern suburbs, but she enjoyed the change. The grit of the city felt more welcoming to her damaged soul than the pristine lawns of the privileged which she once called home. Sure, there were a lot fewer police sirens in the upper middle-class neighborhood where she grew up, but her new neighborhood's daunting streets provided just the right amount of danger to fuel a steady pump of adrenaline in her veins, flushing out the last traces of their previous inhabitants.

Moving in on her own was easy, as she had nothing of much value, sentimental or otherwise, except some of her old clothes and pictures, a blanket her grandma knit for her, a few CD's, and some books. These were her only reminders of the life she once had, a spoiled only child of two successful attorneys—parents who loved her, but not enough to take the wool from over their eyes and use some discipline. Her savings were nonexistent, but she only needed to scrimp for a couple more months until her twenty-second birthday, when her grandparents' trust would be available to her. She remembered how, when they died, she couldn't understand why she didn't get a giant check, like in movies and on TV. At eleven, these were the only points of reference she had for loss. Now she had enough experience with loss to last a lifetime.

“One day you’ll get what they left you, Olivia,” her parents explained, “just not until you’re responsible enough to use it well.” Just thinking about all she would do with that money now as opposed to what she would have done with that money a year ago sent waves of nausea through her gut. Had her grandparents known their children were raising a disaster? The picture of the three of them, laughing at a forgotten joke at their last Christmas together, hanging on her wall was the first she put up.

A fresh start in a filthy city. *How do I start over? Can I? Is it even possible for a human who has known the life that I knew to her past behind and move forward?* Really, she already had started over once before. She turned her back on her safe life and became, in her eyes at least, a monster. She threw away the three years of college education her parents had funded, abandoned her ideas of becoming a writer, left the friends who could not and would not handle her new way of life behind. After considering starting over in that way she knew she could do it, though this time it would be much, much harder. There would be no magic injection to make her forget she had no one and nothing but him and an empty stomach, like last time. No, this time, she knew, she would have to feel it. And it would hurt.

The last time she saw Caleb she was strapped to a gurney. He couldn’t even bring himself to come inside the hospital room, where her parents sat at her side with tears in their eyes, saying they couldn’t do this again, that she had to get it together. She stared through the window in the door—doubly glass with tiny metal wires intertwined with one another, so no lunatic could break through—trying to fight the tremors, pulling her wrists against the restraints, driving the straps into her skin, which she was sure was going to burst into flame and freeze off all at once, ignoring their sobs and pleas. She couldn’t hear their words anyway. Their voices were metal on metal in her ears. She caught sight of him, standing there staring at her with a look of utmost pain and self-loathing on his beautiful face. The green-blue eyes that stared back at her were not his anymore, she knew that. But she could not help but hope that he would fill the ten steps between them and help her, that he would make the shaking and sweating and heaving stop. But he didn’t. She mouthed his name, trying to get it out, but only managing to slip “Cal” into her gasps. “Liv,” he breathed, and she saw tears welling in his eyes, his hands gripping the hair on the back of his head, his arms slamming tight against the

sides of it. She was about to yell out at him, but before she could find enough air, he had turned away from her. And then he walked away. She became hysterical. The thrashing became more violent, the gasps turned into screams, and before she knew what was happening, a nurse was pumping a vial of something into her IV drip, murmuring soothing words to deaf ears. Blackness dragged her under, and when she resurfaced, all she felt was emptiness. Thoughts like these are what keep her from relapsing. The pain of the withdrawals, the shaking. The memory of her reflection as she changed out of her hospital gown and into her own clothes in the rehab clinic, which showed every rib and protruding hip bones. The hurt and anger she felt toward him, the person who caused all of this. He called her in rehab. He was high and she hung up. He tried to visit, and she heard his voice echoing her name down the hall since they would not let him in. After her month's stay here, she was determined to get away. She called him one morning, hoping to wake him, to catch him before his breakfast injection.

"I can't stay here," she said.

"I know, Liv. I'll get you out of there. I'll explain everything. I'll—"

"No, Cal. I can't stay here. In this town. I need a clean break. I can't go through the things I do with you anymore. When I get released, I'm leaving, and I can't tell you where I'm going. You can't come looking for me. You just can't. It will kill me if you do. Do you understand?"

After a long pause, Caleb spoke. "You can't do this to me. What am I supposed to do here without you? You promised me, we promised each other we'd never do this. You can't do this." Silence. "Don't do this." More silence. "Please, Liv."

A final silence, then, "Goodbye, Cal."

And she hung up.

They first met at a Halloween party, introduced by mutual friends. They were both nineteen, starting their sophomore year of school, and finding out who they were. She was attracted to his stunning good looks, the way his bright eyes contrasted with his black hair, the way the muscle in his jaw moved when he was silent, his still-athletic frame—shown off by his Indiana Jones costume, always a favorite character of hers—which most of the guys their age had lost after the fatal "freshman fifteen" kicked in. He was attracted to her smile, the way she talked and moved, her honey brown hair and tan skin

which would soon fade to a creamy pale hue. He clung to her side the rest of the night, and when he walked her back to her apartment she made him cling even longer. They talked, they dated, they fell in love instantaneously. In less than a year they were talking about their future in “we” terms. They both liked trying new, rebellious things. She took her first drink in her parents’ basement at twelve and was hospitalized for alcohol poisoning by seventeen. Cal was lectured by teachers, principals, parents, older sisters, and even police, when each in turn caught him with pot. Both liked to defy what they knew their parents wanted from them, which was why they both chose seemingly careerless majors: her English, him Anthropology. They felt like Romeo and Juliet—martyrs to their society, their upbringing, their cushy lives—thrown together by fate. They were intense. They did everything together. Their first New Years’ Eve she insisted he try ecstasy with her. They were going to a rave and she wanted to push their limits. But she never intended to take it farther than that. Then again, she never considered cocaine until they tried it together. Cal got a taste for new highs, and it overtook him. Heroin was the only logical outlet left for them, he reasoned, but she knew what heroin was capable of. He didn’t want to do anything without her. He was ready to jump off the cliff, and he needed to drag her with him. She resisted as long as she could, until finally she couldn’t refuse him anymore. She loved him too much to deny him anything. They agreed just once would be enough. And it was enough. A year later, locked in a hospital room with a social worker and her parents, she knew it was enough. Beautiful, intelligent, privileged Olivia Lee never thought that she would become an addict. Or that she would overdose on heroin before her twenty-first birthday. Above all, she never thought that she would do it alone.

Looking back, she knew it was her own idiocy that got her to this point. He weighed fifty pounds more than her and they were injecting the same amount. Of course she turned blue, of course she stopped breathing. He called 911, but left through the back door of her apartment as soon as the flashing lights came into view. She wasn’t mad anymore. She even understood his reasoning. How could he be with her in the hospital if he was being arrested for possession? What she couldn’t understand was the look on his face when their eyes met that last time. She saw pain, she saw longing, but she also saw him turn his back on her. Why had he not come to her? How could he have left her when she was so broken? When she needed him most? So

instead of forgiving, she chose to forget. She would wipe him out. As her body recovered in the clinic, so would her heart.

She was lucky to find a job serving at a new restaurant in Tribeca. Between the business lunches and the afternoon gossip fests between “stay-at-home” moms whose kids were with the nannies, the rumor that the chef just opened his third restaurant in Paris, every shift became a busy one. Olivia soon bolstered her savings enough to furnish her apartment and still have money left over. She started yoga classes to boost her self-control, which helped reduce the residual tremors, and as a result felt better than she would have ever thought possible a few months ago. She even emailed her parents a long letter of apology, letting them know what she was up to and that she was actually okay for the first time in a year. She celebrated a very uneventful twenty-second birthday with her coworkers and a cupcake with a candle stuck in it in the kitchen at work. For the first time in a long time, she felt optimistic about her future. Time to start making some plans, she thought.

About a week after her birthday, as she walked into work for the dinner shift, she saw a face she never expected to see in New York. How had he gotten here? How did he know where to find her? Cal looked like hell, skinnier than she had ever seen him with a yellow tinge to his once alabaster skin. She went over to where he sat with his foot twitching and his eyes fixed on his hands, which were playing with a set of silverware. She didn't sit down but he knew she was there. As he looked up at her their eyes locked on one another's. He had come here for her. He was still using, he was completely broken, but he was here. Loathing herself, she took a piece of paper from her apron and wrote out her address, got her key from her purse, and handed both to him. He left wordlessly, and she understood now why relapsing is so common. The craving she had been fighting for over a year was just too much, the need for a fix too strong. She had a void to fill.

Poetry



Audrey Schroeder, Weighted Flight

Sarah Allgood

You, Like Summer's Day

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day,
Where in Missouri one hates to stay?
The air is thick, suffocating: anxious
for the next season, when free from thy grip.

A Missouri summer the skin doth itch,
Effects of tiny creatures; "Son of a bitch!"
Long day suffers into uninvited night,
When sun's absence can't defeat thee—my plight.

Picnics planned for the park,
Filled with such promise and hope.
But when the door is opened into a sky dark,
The rain doth pour: a sweltering storm.

Expecting good times, met only with regret,
Loathing mistaken for happiness met.

Thou hast burdened me for long enough,
Make now like trees in fall, and leave.

Kaitlyn Bauer

Advice from the Hopeful

This world is your playground
But play with caution dear
For cautious ones are sound
And safe with reason found in fear.

This life is yours to create,
So create with hope and passion.
Passion may lead you to fate
And in fate become closer to One.

This love is for you to discover
But in wonder those seem to forget
The reasons of life to uncover
And lose hope for the journey of yet.

Make a promise of which to remember
Count your blessings and in hope do surrender.

Josh Bucher

Through the iPod

I walk the line through
the fire and flames. I follow
the white rabbit on
Melancholy Hill and see that
the House of the Rising Sun
has a white room and
I just have to paint it black.
Victoria, ain't no sunshine with you
knocking on Heaven's door.
On top of the universe, Captain Albert
Alexander and his steam man band are
out in the rain with brass goggles waiting
for the ice cream parade.
Across the sky the battle without honor
or humanity is simple and clean as
the demon slayer makes his crusade against
the beast of blood and beast of Pirate's Bay.
Johnny, I hardly knew ya in the golden
age while we did our magic dance.
Juliet, I'm drunk.

Princess Byrd

Don't Smile Too Hard

Frown lines or laugh lines...
Which are they really?
Choose your prize or demise,
But do it wise.
'Cause it plans to
Make you appear
Happy and sad
All at the same time.
Laugh lines or frown lines...
They're all the same it seems.

Endless Time

My time would run right by me if it had legs. So instead it flies by too high in the sky for me to catch hold of it. Yet, there's too much time for this, but not enough for that. But if I could I would collect all of the time that I've been granted on this earth and roll it up in a big bundle to share with no one but myself. Even yet, there still wouldn't be enough time to shine. Only to drink wine.

Courtney Cox

Our Autumn

The leaves have all fallen
Summer is a fleeting memory
The last remnants of you & me
Floating away in a blustery breeze.
All along, I knew you'd leave.
Seasons change, surely
Just like high school love.
Our first fall, we were red
Blushing, overwhelmed, bright, new
Feelings too strange for words
A year passed, problems arose.
But I still loved you orange
Muted, but somewhat strong.
Blotted out by broken promises
I longed for naïve trust.
Burning through me
Winter snowflakes in the forecast,
Yet, somehow, the feelings continued on
Then I loved you yellow
Fading quickly into a lifeless luster.
Then like a leaf caught in the breeze
 Distant, colorless now
He blew away.

Archaeological Ponderings

I hold in my hands
Relics of ancient lives
Shined to a perfect polish
On a day just like this
Dusted with questionable antiquity
Smeared with the mud of time
Cracked edges from nature's cruel hand
Bound to be misunderstood
By my objective ethnocentrism
These will be my possessions
Broken, shattered, obliterated
Embedded in some other dirt
Prodded by the tired trowel
Generations will come and go
My individuality forgotten
With every second I lose
Myself in this uniform posterity

Cole Figus

Bottles

They say money can't buy you happiness
But only cause it's free,
They would like to put it in a bottle
And sell it for a fee.

If they could bottle our freedom
We all know they would,
They'd bottle up all the air
And charge you if they could.

They would bottle all the oceans
And bottle mountains too,
They'd like to bottle love
And they'd even bottle you.

Let's break all their bottles
And share everything we see,
We'll live in the world for no charge
Just like it was meant to be.

Rapture

Magic preacher's Bible math,
Calculated to the day,
The end of the world is coming soon,
The rapture here tomorrow at noon.

Sell your belongings and say goodbye,
And give the preacher all you're worth,
The end is near but have no fear,
You're going straight to heaven dear.

Take his word on nonbelievers:
They can't get inside the pearly gates,
So go to bed with a happy heart,
And trust him that this choice was smart

Magic preacher Bible math,
Calculated to the day,
The end of the world, it passed so soon,
Then you awoke to a normal noon.

Mandy French Burkhead

Charity and Kindness

Greed and Envy were put to the test
Saint Martin offered a favor
“Whoever asks first gets his wish.
Whoever doesn’t, I will dish
Out double to him what the first one got.”
Greed wanted everything for himself
and would not go first—
Envy could not stand the thought
that greed would get more than he got.
Eventually a consensus was reached
Envy wished to lose an eye
and Greed lost twice.
In the end, both were blind.

Saint Martin then came upon
Greed and Envy’s enemies
Charity and Kindness.
Saint Martin put them also to the test
offering the same deal.
Charity, ever sacrificial,
offered to let Kindness choose second.
But Kindness could not stand the thought
of its brother having less than he got.
Neither could be bought.
Until dawn they gently conspired
neither willing to wish after the other
and Saint Martin left without bestowing a gift,
thinking to himself that
at least Greed and Envy had got
something for their lot.

Friendship Road

we are going too fast
growing too fast
the car is silent
the air heavy with the tension
that lingers between us
the road is dark
the headlights flicker
I cannot see your face
beside me
ahead there is a sign
friendship road
but I cannot slow in time
we pass the road
the sun is peeking
over the horizon ahead
I reach for you beside me
cannot find your hand
in the morning light I
take a brief glance
you are gone
I don't know when I lost you
or how
but there is no turning back
on this one-way road
I cry

No Fabio

You are no Fabio—
your muscleless chest,
rounded belly,
and pale skin
will never grace the cover
of a romance novel.
Your hair is not long and silky
and does not flow well in a breeze.
The skin of your face is naturally oily
your scalp flakes with dandruff
you wear glasses
and your eyes are dark—
not at all like pools of blue.
Your knees are bony,
your hands are veiny,
your toes are freakishly long.
You are tall,
but you slouch down when you stand
as if your height is awkward to you,
and you cannot dance.
No, you are no Fabio,
but I never much cared for Fabio anyway.
You are still my Highlander,
my Elven Warrior,
Noble Pirate, Untamable Rogue,
Stranger in the Moonlight,
and Laird for All Time.
But most importantly
you are mine.

Jamie Gierer

Beautiful

The woman,
wafer-thin,
sits on the storefront steps,
collapsing there
with finality,
as if she can move no more.
Trains could navigate
the tracks on her arms,
the homeless around her would love
to possess
bags as large and black
as those under her eyes.
Hips jut sharply
above low-slung pants,
Ribs as defined
as a xylophonist's wet dream
stretch above a taut, empty stomach.

A line of blood
escapes her nose
and she swipes it away,
absent-mindedly:
she's done this many times before.
Yesterday she celebrated,
today she'll stumble home to recover,
tomorrow will see her primped and combed,
made up,
clothed with designer labels,
tottering on towering heels
down the narrow catwalk,
leaving behind herself her real beauty:
her hips, her breasts, her confidence;
navigating her narrow way
to glossy magazine pages of perfection.

Anna Harkins

To Sleep, Perchance to Dream

after Shakespeare's Hamlet

Eyes closed, breathing deep, to slumber.
What goes on behind pale, black-lashed lids?
Under what spell does Morpheus hold the helpless lady,
swept away, where the tides of her dreams do bid.
Thoughts of darkness furrow the smooth white brow,
Clutching the blankets closer, she tosses and turns.
The dream weaves its spell, pulling her further down,
The lady surrenders, as her insides begin to churn.
She awakes, sweat cool upon her face,
What Visions, she thinks, do haunt my nights,
How strangely does my heart frightened race,
Taken to awful lands by fancy's flights.
Afraid to sleep, the lady sits, staring at the dark
Waiting for the morning birds call to hark.

Hannah Lawson

Intangible

Every memory is preserved so carefully
In pictures that can't possibly tell our story
Now I'm holding my breath, counting my steps:
Wanting to hold in my hands
Those poignant moments where our love began
—but I can't.

So in a box, I contain the past—letters, pictures,
All that remains: a splash of color, black ink on a page
And a necklace that's broken, but the meaning remains
A sentimental feeling, a snapped silver chain
Words tell this story better, but it's feelings that stay

And they linger like ghosts, in this prison I keep
It was a shoe-box once—now it's filled with warm thoughts,
Wistful, lingering, haunting—
Some so bitter, others sweet

And my heart aches now in the best kind of way— a kind of warmth
That I plead with, and bargain: please stay:
I'd trade a moment with you for the wealth of my days...

Exhausted, pleading, haunted by you:
I've been fighting my whole life through
And I want to hold on to the beautiful truth:

I've never known freedom
But a prison will do
For shackles have never been more welcomed
Than when I loved you.

Wordplay

A blessing, a curse, a writer's question: always asking, always seeking:

How do we release the beast within?— the feeling too vaporous,

Too dangerous, to be caught and held by prose?

Tiptoe

On the brink of

honesty—

Embracing what it means

To live dangerously.

Risk all just to find the right phrase, the right time

Create a prison for everything you don't wish to keep

And when you have slaughtered (or subdued) the beast

Turn from that place, and pursue beauty, and recklessly

Follow where it will lead: Go to the place where love is—

Close the door—bolt it shut—breathe it in

Till the vapors are strong, and you're half-insane

With visions you saw in that wonderful place

Then write what you will:

Because your hands would burn with words unsaid

If they couldn't follow where those words led

And write it—record it—with paper and pen

Then write what you must: and write it again.

Recast

I thought I knew you, and oh, was I wrong: Master of Deception, oh, Deceived One:
I sit here alone in the audience now: but I'm lost in the clapping, the roar of the crowd
The people are cheering; they'll be charmed till their graves. But your story is stained on every page.
I turn, and blue eyes catch my glance, but they're not turned my way:
 You've captured every heart in this place.
I grimace, and cry, "It's only a play!" But I am drowned out by every adoring gaze.

The final scene, the end is now: the strains of music screech to a halt,
 In solemn finality, the bows are drawn roughly across the strings,
The last of the beauty fades, a curtain drawn to subdue the past: The stage turns black.

I turn my face away, because the lies were kind.
 They hid the face of a monster, and you're still hiding,
Behind barricades of words, and behind the love that you drew from their hearts
 But every breath you draw is cursed to me.

The playbill is crumpled, and torn in my lap; blood-red lipstick smeared on every page
 It mingles with tears and blots the ink and blurs the words that I cannot stand
And "deception" is scrawled in a terrible hand! It mars every scene, distorts every word.

The crowd is moving, jostling now: but I stand and cry aloud:
 I call the actors off the stage,
 and beg,
 and beg,
 and beg,
 and beg,
To recast the part that you played.

But I am not heard; I scream the truth; the world will burn anyway.
The truth is too much for them to take in; my playbill falls, it is lost, I will not see it again.
 The world will burn, I'll burn this play
 Resolve to forget your name
 Forget the character you became.

Lorelei McPeck

Library Douche

Hey you, guy clicking his pen!
I see you are working on
a crossword puzzle.
Clicking your pen
won't help you figure out the answers.

Maybe,
some magic puzzle wizard
will come out of your pen,
with the way you constantly
click your pen,
every 5 seconds.

Or,
it could be worse:
if you continue to click,
a rusty spike will pop
out of the top and cram
into your thumb,
when you continue to click,
5 seconds after
the previous 5 seconds.

Do yourself a favor:
stop clicking your pen,
so no puzzle wizards or
rusty spikes will emerge,
from your abused pen.

Poisonous Lips

Our souls spring from peace
like a flower about to bloom
so gentle and beautiful
as soft as a touch
could give me chills
yet a kiss could kill.

Siren Song

My distressed maiden rests upon the top
of the Rhine River, hypnotizing men
with her sorrowful songs which capture their
hearts, leading them to death. My lethal ghost

bride, forgive my broken promise for not
coming home soon after my journey was
completed. My quest turned fatal and my
soul rests too far from the rock on the Rhine

river, where you jumped to your death,
caused by a deserted heart, that is now
trapped in a Siren's body. Your luscious
locks flow with the dramatic song you sing

in hopes of my returning to home.
My sweet Lorelei, I will arrive soon.

Jesi Nelson

Removing the Rum Goggles

I struggle to remember exactly when
the strength of your hold on me increased.

We started innocently enough: casual encounters,
dinner dates, parties with friends.

You introduced me to your cousins: Gin, Vodka, and Whiskey
and I instantly fell in love.

You helped me celebrate my sister's wedding,
my nephew's graduation, births,
holidays, family gatherings.

You helped me know laughter and friendship and love.

You comforted me in times of trouble and tribulations:
the death of my grandma, the loss of a love,
the end of a job, the loneliness I often felt,
even when I wasn't alone.

Before long, you were in every aspect of my waking days.

I couldn't stop thinking about you
and couldn't wait to get home to you.

You invaded my thoughts, invaded my dreams
began controlling my motives
and wouldn't let me make a decision without you.

It seemed like, overnight, you had
a death grip on me and I couldn't do anything,
couldn't go anywhere without you.

I started seeking you out every night
and often saw you alone in my living room,
sitting on the couch watching t.v.
and most nights I didn't remember going to bed.

The blackouts were the last straw.
I knew I couldn't have you anymore when
I started to forget what I had done last night.
The hardest thing I've ever had to do
is give you up knowing
I can never go back to you.

But I've realized that
I've missed out on much of my life
because of the strong hold you had on me.
I'm a different person now.
I'm able to deal with my feelings
and I feel much less alone now that you're gone.

It's been two years now
since our last meeting.
I wish I could say it's been easy
to go on without you,
and I still think of you often,
but it's definitely been worth it
to be able to see life without
the rum goggles on.

Life is an Oxymoron

When I feel like life is absolute chaos
I try to act naturally.
Sometimes I take a calculated risk
But then I become clearly confused.
Before things are a complete destruction
I search for constant change.
This life is not a final draft
It could be much less crazy.
I'm searching for a new routine
But once again I'm back
To the original copy that I began with.
So maybe I'll try things in random order
But I end up with the same difference.
Then things become strangely familiar
And my life feels like a virtual reality.

Ariel Niccum

Chained

Life dealt me a tough hand
When I was pretty young
It was a lot more than I thought I could handle,
A lot more than I thought I could stand.
There were days I didn't think I'd make it,
Days when hope seemed gone
I felt lost and helpless,
Hopeless,
And chained.

So I tried taking my own life,
Tried temporarily easing the pain
With the bite of a razor,
My tears crimson rain.

You weren't there when I needed you,
Were the cause of my pain
Every day I felt hopeless, helpless, worthless,
And chained.

No one thought I would walk
Across that graduation stage
But I walked with honors,
And beamed when they called my name.

You didn't stay to celebrate,
You left and didn't say goodbye.
You told me you were proud of me
I should have suspected it was a lie.
The only time you'd ever said the words
And when I realized what you'd done
I knew I was still helpless,
And chained.

I went to college
And you tried to ruin it for me
But I fought back,
Retaliated,
Determined to break free.

I won.

I found my own life
And you tried to ruin that too
I think it was then that you realized
I had broken away from you.

I may have lost the battles,
But, Daddy, I'm winning the war
You can take your chains and games,
I'm not who I was before.

I am not hopeless,
Helpless,
Worthless,
Or chained.

My Life, My Passion

Taking it all in,
Writing it all down,
This is what I do,
This is what I love.

The detailed sketching
Of a perfect moment in time,
Something with meaning,
Meant to both be shared and kept private
In our most personal places of memory.
For holding,
For safe keeping,
For use sometime later.

This is poetry,
This is prose,
This is Language,
And this is the power of words.

Faith Mary Otten

Between the Lines

Your words are always echoed by
Those things you'll never say...
They resonate so loudly
That I hear them anyway.

“You're pretty” and “I love you”
But not enough to stay.

“I'll be yours forever.”
Or, at the very least, today.

“Baby, I would never leave you”
But, if I get the chance, I may.

“You're my one and only”
Until I fall astray...

You believe yourself so crafty
But *darling*, your heart is on display.
For lit beneath the fluorescent truth
Are all those things you'll never say.

The Aftermath

I smell your salty tears
Like a breeze off some distant shoreline
Where your fragile heart sits breaking

The droplets fall from your eyes
Wet vulnerability splashing against my skin
Little bursts of your hurt that I've been allowed to share

I hear you choke on the sob in your throat
Your mouth is pressed against my shoulder as
My fingertips whisper comfort across the back of your neck

It's all there in those stormy-blue eyes
The aftermath of their careless judgments
If they could see what I see now, they would have held their tongues.

I smell your salty tears
Like a breeze off some distant shoreline
As it softly carries your heart into my awaiting arms.

Audrey Schroeder

An Index of Symptoms, Listed

Somewhat sore throat, possible problem

Appetite, near nonexistent

Alarm clock headache upon waking up

Chronic fatigue is persistent

Faux fever, a friend, almost convincing

Motivation to move, absent

Congestion beginning, should start up soon

Voice gone, all power is spent

Nausea, looming, probably maybe

Anticipated cough, consistent

Cramping most likely, in muscles and joints

Hope for the future, distant

Outlook, bleak, abysmal and grim

Attitude toward school, resistant.

Laine Scott

Ode to the Pen

There she sits, her writing desk lit by the
Dull gray light of a kitschy kitty lamp.
Her slender fingers twitch, clench, pinch a
Squirty pen that is blue, that is ink-damp.

She bites its cap, she bites its middle,
She fights the blank pages much more than a little.
Very little she writes, very little she scribbles,
Down on those blank pages, awash in blue spittle.

Suddenly (so suddenly) there comes quite a squabble,
As the pen, with such cunning, such fury, such wit,
Berates poor paper! Brands blazing words 'til,
Paper's top, bottom, middle are an indigo tint.

But she, the author, writes unknowingly,
"This is my life. Written only by me."

Brenna Swoboda

Being a Writer

An ounce of creativity
Burns within my palm
A quart of negativity
Is a very lacking balm.

In weaving words I'm caught
Away from failure I shrink.
But a mile's worth of thought
Only goes an inch in ink.

Visitor

Some say she's just excuses,
And some say she isn't real!
But when she visits, I can tell
She affects everything I feel!

Though she is invisible
I've learned to see her coming
I must recall that all is well,
Though she's pitiless and
cunning.

She's cruel and lacks compassion.
She's consistent in her plot
To take away my happiness
Leaving me with tears and snot.

She has counseled many a
woman
And brought each one to shame
Through broken trust and twisted
fate,
She's the one to blame!

Who is this deceitful vixen?
Well, I must confess...
A regular visitor she is to me
...Her name is PMS.

Samantha Triplett

Contents of a Life

Pull out a packet of salt from lunch so long ago,
a movie ticket stub from the movie,
and a crinkled receipt whose ink is faded.

Spread them out,
rearrange them,
reach back in—

pull out an unused napkin with useless scribbles,
a crumpled dollar bill from change for coffee,
and an empty gum wrapper from goodness knows when.

Dump them on the table,
wondering,
reach back in—

pull out a sticky note with a disconnected phone number,
a single black glove lost during the winter,
and a wad of scotch tape that's stuck together.

Pieces of a life lived in a rush,
with no time to put things
in their proper places,
carrying them around
like the memories they sprang from.

Character Overload

They won't leave me alone,
My personal stalkers
Impervious to restraining orders
Or privacy quarters.

They yell in my ear
Wake me up from a decent dream
Leaving me a nervous wreck;
Their lives are all quite a trek.

Fifteen files sit
With ideas to flesh out
Wait, make that twenty;
I've added somebody.

Fighting monsters
Driving through space
Seeking their place;
Great, now there's a pimple on my face.

They're driving me mad,
But I guess it isn't all that bad;
At least what I love will be
The death of me.

John Wheatley

Secrets in Ink

My signature in black ink
Its color masks what I feel
My heart feels nothing that's real
It disguises what I think

My alter writes his name in white
Feeling all emotions at once
Ink tells of none concerned in months
My want shone in apparent light

My mind a compendium of dates
Each day writes new entries in the book
Only my alter and I may look
They must read this before it's too late

My secret want written in verse
Nothing spoken this is my curse

Contributors

Sarah Allgood is a senior Creative Writing Major who cannot wait to pursue a career in Film and/or Publishing after graduation.

Shae Barbieri is a freshman at Lindenwood University. She spends most of her time working, going to school, and hanging with family. She is not sure where life is going to take her, but she knows that she can accomplish any task in her way. Her amazing strength is what drives her to keep moving forward.

Kaitlyn Bauer is an International Relations Undergraduate with a deep interest in cultures around the world, which includes many subsets of culture such as artistic expression. She has always been a lover of words and creative writing has always appealed to her, but she never thought of poetry as her forte. She is honored to have her work published for many readers to share and experience for themselves.

Josh Bucher is an English major at Lindenwood University. He enjoys playing video games and reading random material online for ideas for future stories, as well as gaining the motivation to write the stories in his head down.

Princess Byrd is a senior with the aspiration of obtaining an MFA in directing after she completes her BA in English. Her deepest passions consist of words, numbers, and producing innovative artworks in the forms of poetry, playwriting, and novels. Her ultimate goal is to leave a positive inspiration on society.

Courtney Cox is a sophomore studying cultural anthropology and archaeology with a minor in creative writing at Lindenwood University. Courtney loves being busy, words, exploring new things, deep conversations, music, and laughing. She longs to experience life to the fullest and write something worth remembering.

Kayla Erickson is an English Literature major at Lindenwood University. She lives in St. Peters, Missouri with her husband and precious dog, Zoe.

Cole Figs is studying acting and creative writing at Lindenwood University, and his work was done in Spencer Hurst's Intro. to Creative Writing class on planet Earth.

Casey Freeman is an English major at Lindenwood University. She transferred over from St. Charles Community College in the fall of 2012. She enjoys writing whenever she can and hopes to one day be able to write freelance, along with doing whatever career she settles with.

Mandy French Burkhead graduated from Lindenwood University in May 2012 with a Bachelor's in Creative Writing. She is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Library Science at Valdosta State. Her favorite genre is fantasy and she mostly writes short stories and novels, though she occasionally dabbles in poetry and graphic design.

Kailey Garner is a student at Lindenwood University studying business. She has a strong passion for art and dance, and believes that it is important to love the little things in life. "Wherever you go, go with all your heart!"

Jamie Gierer is a mother of three and a full-time student at Lindenwood.

Anna Harkins is a senior studying English and teaching. She hopes to teach middle school Comm. Arts, because those kids are hilarious. She wrote this particular work as an assignment for class, and is surprised and beyond flattered to have it included in this work.

Russell Kluwe is an Interactive Media Web Design major at Lindenwood University. He hopes to go to grad school to study animation and to one day own his own animation company.

Hannah Lawson is a lover of all things adventurous, artistic, and musical. She is a Creative Writing major and her future plans include writing and world travel. She is also passionate about mission work. Her favorite and most often pursued genres of writing are poetry and the short story.

Tommy Mains will graduate from Lindenwood University as an English and philosophy student. After graduation he will be applying for MFA programs in creative writing. He lives with his wife and his French Bulldog in St. Peters.

Lorelei McPeck will be graduating in May 2014 with a bachelor's in English-Creative Writing and continuing her education for a Ph.D. in Creative Writing. Being a professor will allow her to share her passion of writing and inspire students to explore different mediums of writing, her favorite being poetry.

Jesi Nelson is a senior at Lindenwood University, majoring in English Education. She's enjoyed writing for as long as she can remember and is constantly creating new stories and new characters in her head, which occasionally make it to paper. Writing fiction is her escape from the crazy, hectic reality she lives in.

Aeriel Niccum is currently a third year Criminal Justice major at Lindenwood University. She enjoys dabbling in photography, writing poetry, reading, nature, and cherishing the little things. “Front Yard Wonders” is her second published photograph. Her book, “No Subject: Life From A Teenager’s Point of View”, debuted in November 2010.

Faith Mary Otten is currently a sophomore at Lindenwood University pursuing a degree in English Creative Writing and a minor in Nonprofit Administration. Her hope is that one day, her words will reach out and touch at least one heart with the invaluable gift of inspiration.

Luke Reft is a freshman at Lindenwood University who plans to major in business administration and minor in music.

Audrey Schroeder is. Things happen, and sometimes she is a part of them. She thanks her creative writing professor for telling her to write like her parents were dead.

Laine Scott is an English Major at Lindenwood University.

Brenna Swoboda, junior at Lindenwood University, is an English Major with an emphasis in Creative Writing. Her favorite things to write include prose poetry and fictional stories. Being a farm kid to the core doesn’t stop her from enjoying city life, but it fuels her imagination wherever she goes.

Samantha Triplett is a double major and aspiring author who can usually be found in the pages of her sketchbook, her numerous rough draft manuscripts, or reading and writing fiction on either Wattpad or Deviantart. Most of her inspiration comes from her family, friends, and overall random life.

Erica Wagner is an English literature and secondary education major in her final year at Lindenwood University. She is excited to have her first fiction piece, “The Hollow Ones,” published in *Arrow Rock*.

John Wheatley has always had a darker taste than most, especially concepts and ideas that are outside normal thinking. In Renaissance Literature professor Ann Canale trained him to never be satisfied with what he writes and continually work at it to make it better.

Arrow Rock is currently accepting submissions for Issue 5. Please email your poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, photography or artwork to
ArrowRock@Lindenwood.edu.

To view previous issues of the *Arrow Rock* literary magazine visit

<http://www.lindenwood.edu/ArrowRock/>

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Contributors:

Sarah Allgood
Shae Barbieri
Kaitlyn Bauer
Josh Bucher
Princess Byrd
Courtney Cox
Kayla Erickson
Cole Figus
Casey Freeman
Mandy French Burkhead
Kailey Garner
Jamie Gierer
Anna Harkins
Russell Kluwe
Hannah Lawson
Tommy Mains
Lorelei McPeek
Jesi Nelson
Aerial Niccum
Faith Mary Otten
Luke Reft
Audrey Schroeder
Laine Scott
Brenna Swoboda
Samantha Triplett
Erica Wagner
John Wheatley