

# illuminations

Volume 15 • 2014



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# lluminations

A magazine of creative expression  
by students, faculty,  
and staff at  
Southeast Community College  
Beatrice/Lincoln/Milford, NE

Volume 15  
2014

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.”

*Mary Oliver*



## CREATIVITY LIVES HERE

Would you like to see your creative work in print? Are you an SCC student, staff, or faculty member? Email up to five attached submissions to editor Kimberly Fangman, [kfangman@southeast.edu](mailto:kfangman@southeast.edu), with the following information:

- The title and a brief description of each submission;
- Your name, ID#, and program/position at SCC;
- Your physical address, phone number, and email address;
- Your motivation for creating each submission;
- A brief, informal bio of yourself (unique traits, habits, guilty pleasures – whatever makes you *you*);
- The following statement with your typed “signature”: **This submission is my own original, unpublished work.**

Written work is accepted as Word or .RTF files.

Submit artwork images or photographs as high quality .TIF or .JPG files. (We can photograph or scan artwork for you if needed.)

**The deadline for Volume 16 submissions is May 23, 2014.**

“Like” our Facebook page for updates, creative challenges, news, spotlights on contributors, and more. [www.facebook.com/illuminationsscc](http://www.facebook.com/illuminationsscc)

*Still for Dan*

# ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 15

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**Editor:** Kimberly Fangman

**Graphic Designer:** Kristine Meek

**Editorial Team:** Teresa Bissegger, Jesse Byrd, Harmony Culp, Mekayla Grant, Hannah Dennick, Thomas Joyce, Anna Loden, Mary Ann Partin, Janey Patterson, Mary Ann Rowe, Kathryn Underhill

**Project Assistants:** Cathy Barringer, Jeanette Bean, Rebecca Burt, Nancy Hagler-Vujovic, Kate Loden, Rachel Mason, Donna Osterhoudt, Janalee Petsch, Carolee Ritter, Amy Rockel, Richard Ross, Kathy Samuelson, Laura Thompson, Barbara Tracy, Pat Underwood, Jessica Vetter, the English instructors of the Arts and Sciences Division

**Conceptual Creator:** Shane Zephier

*Illuminations* publishes creative prose, poetry, and visual art, as well as academic and literary writing. We encourage submissions from across the disciplines. Our mission is to feature outstanding artistic works with a diversity of voices, styles, and subjects meaningful to the SCC community. *Illuminations* is further evidence that original thought and creative expression are valued at Southeast Community College.

*Illuminations* is published in the spring of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from SCC students, faculty, and staff. Submission forms and guidelines can be found at [thehub.southeast.edu](http://thehub.southeast.edu) (under “Publications”) or in campus LRCs.

Submissions or questions should be directed to:

Kimberly Fangman  
c/o Southeast Community College  
8800 O Street  
Lincoln, NE 68520  
402-437-2844  
[kfangman@southeast.edu](mailto:kfangman@southeast.edu)

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PROSE

---

SHANNON WHITE	Black Violas . . . . .	12
ERIC TOMASEK	The Tale of Murphy the Legislator . . . . .	24
JOE LAMBRIX	Chapter 1 . . . . .	32
SHANDI HARVEY	The Dead Don't Tell Secrets . . . . .	40
MARK GUDGEL	Lord Gudgeon of Kensington is Received at Downton Abbey. . . . .	51
ISIDRO GALARZA-FERNANDEZ	The Different Wars We Fight . . . . .	58
COURTNEY HEAP	Scarred Hero. . . . .	62
GUILLERMO RIVAS	No Handlebars . . . . .	66
KARA GALL	A Late Frost . . . . .	72
SHARON EDIC	Such is the Way of Life. . . . .	76
STEPHEN M. KAMINSKI	Number 9 . . . . .	82
LINDSAY DOLAN	Helena. . . . .	90
KYLE BARNES	Why I Seek Approval . . . . .	98
RANDY J. BACK	Lessons Learned . . . . .	100
STEVE CASAREZ	This Gift of Life . . . . .	108
ADRIAN D. CALLARI	A Friend Indeed . . . . .	114
DINORAH GARCIA SANTOS	Perfume of Victories . . . . .	122
ASHLEY CORNELSEN	Homeless Dreams. . . . .	124
CORKI DAVISON	Hands . . . . .	131
THOMAS BROWN	Frozen in Time . . . . .	134
TAMMY WILLIAMSON	Serenity. . . . .	136
THOMAS JOYCE	The Hovel . . . . .	142
JOSHUA BRO	The Farm. . . . .	150
BRYANT FLEWELLING	Thoughts in the Dark . . . . .	154
KATSIARYNA LUPSIKOVA	Journal Entries . . . . .	158

## POETRY

---

CAMERON MAXWELL	Tomorrow Should be Fine . . . . .	8
	Burning Ships . . . . .	38
	The City's Outstretched Hand . . . . .	55
	Elegy. . . . .	56
LALEH ROHANI	Alaskan Warmth. . . . .	9
	Maturing. . . . .	121
	Worship . . . . .	168
PHIP ROSS	Batting Practice at Bedtime . . . . .	23
DANIEL ZEBERT	Black Monitor. . . . .	37
	Thought of Omaha . . . . .	118
ASHLEY HECKMAN	Ester . . . . .	39
	Day . . . . .	162
MYSTERY HARWOOD	Soul Solicitor . . . . .	47
	Outside the Car, The Middle of Spring, Misty. . . . .	69
	Nebraska in My 30s . . . . .	141
ALANNA K. JOHNSON	Deflowered . . . . .	50
	Reluctant Love . . . . .	75
	Somewhere Between. . . . .	166
	Descendants . . . . .	170
CODY DePALMA	To Heaven from Hell . . . . .	65
	Jack Daniels . . . . .	95
ANTHONY RUPPERT	In Passing . . . . .	97
DEBRENEE ADKISSON	L&O Lullaby . . . . .	112
	Ha'penny Bridge, After a Storm . . . . .	161
MARK GUDGEL	My Name is Not Refugee. . . . .	138
MICHAELA WILSON	Jagged Memories . . . . .	147
TERESA BISSEGER	When . . . . .	148
	Again . . . . .	153
KATIE SJUTS	Réverie . . . . .	156
ERICA MARIE BESTUL	For Jordy . . . . .	164

## ARTWORK & VIDEO

MEKAYLA GRANT	Winter Wonderland . . . . . 9 Peaceful . . . . . 21 Sweet as Can Be . . . . . 165 My Sister, My Best Friend . . . . . 165 Blue Eyes . . . . . 169
HARMONY LEIGH CULP	Music Army . . . . . 10 The Tentacles . . . . . 10 David Bowie . . . . . 11 True Love . . . . . 113 Blowing Bubbles . . . . . 117 White on Black . . . . . 22
ASSETT GARCIA DERRICK BRINKMEIER REBECCA BURT	Not on the Night . . . . . 30 Copper Flowers Artwork . . . . . 31 Perspective . . . . . 35 Cozumel Rugged Beach . . . . . 39
MEGAN CAMERON	Plant . . . . . 36 Japanese Style Collage . . . . . 61
CASEY LOWE	Playa Bonita . . . . . 48 Layla . . . . . 48 Boots of Love . . . . . 49 Cowboy Silhouette . . . . . 49 Eyes of Innocence . . . . . 123 Relax . . . . . 53
BRENDA HOFFMAN EMAILÉ CLEMENT	Profile . . . . . 54 Close Up . . . . . 57
CHRISTIE LEFEBVRE	Niobrara River . . . . . 68 Wall of Cloud . . . . . 139
NANCY HAGLER VUJOVIC	Oliver (Kiln God) . . . . . 70 Pot II . . . . . 71 Untitled Pottery . . . . . 71
LYNN DYER	Train Collage . . . . . 74 Pot Reflections . . . . . 147
BECKY HILL	Long Walk Home . . . . . 81 Dark Alleyway . . . . . 149
PATRICIA WAGNER	Adrift . . . . . 88 Rustic Teton Barn . . . . . 88 Sunset on Egg Harbor . . . . . 89 Needs Some Paint! . . . . . 89
EMILY DOBER LINDSAY DOLAN	Leaf with a Lot of Colors . . . . . 96 See Things . . . . . 106 Slip 'n Slide . . . . . 164
HALEY WEINER KATHRYN ENGSTROM UNDERHILL	Eyes . . . . . 107 Spring Blossoms . . . . . 111 Zinnias with Vase . . . . . 140 The Journey . . . . . 160
ROXIE TUBBS	Cherished Love . . . . . 120 Twinkling Eye . . . . . 121
DANIEL ZEBERT THOMAS JOYCE	Gray Man: Variation 4 . . . . . 130 Patriarch . . . . . 133 Eyes . . . . . 155
JESSICA MONTGOMERY	Country Barn . . . . . 137 Golden Car . . . . . 171 Home . . . . . 152
SUPRINA TUBBS KIMBERLY FANGMAN SANDY WASSENMILLER	Seduction . . . . . 157 Photobooth Self-Portrait I . . . . . 162 Photobooth Self-Portrait II . . . . .
BETH KEMPF	Boots . . . . . 167
Our Contributors . . . . .	172

Front cover image, “Boots of Love,” and  
back cover image, “Cowboy Silhouette,” by Casey Lowe

# ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 15 PRIZE WINNERS

EACH YEAR, THE EDITORIAL TEAM AWARDS PRIZES  
TO SIX OUTSTANDING STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS.

## PROSE WINNERS



**Grand Prize: Shannon White, “Black Violas”:**

Shannon wrote his powerful parable, “Black Violas,” to explore the relationships in the African-American community and the relationship between the African-American community and society. The resulting story is moving and shocking in its implications, as well as beautifully written. One Editorial Team member called the narrative “awesome and breathtaking” while another called it “unique” with a “strong use of descriptive words.” A third member wrote, “This story arrested my attention with its description of the fields and the deer. . . . The ending was unexpected and all the more exciting because of that.”

**Runner-Up: Eric Tomasek, “The Tale of Murphy the Legislator”:** A stark contrast to many dramatic works published in *Illuminations*, Eric’s “The Tale of Murphy the Legislator” won plaudits from the Editorial Team for its creativity and skillful use of humor. One team member wrote that the story “was funny and well-written, and it took me by surprise with a punch line I should have seen coming. Good job!” Another member wrote, “As the old saying goes, it’s harder to do comedy than to do tragedy. The fact that this writer was able to take a clever concept and weave such a creative story from it is remarkable.”

## POETRY WINNERS



**Grand Prize: Cameron Maxwell, Collection:**

Editorial Team members praised Cameron’s vivid imagery and skillful use of language. “There’s a gritty surrealism here,” says one team member, “that defies a simple reading of the poems. Each of them delivers an intense experience.” Another team member wrote, “I loved this writer’s work. Each poem has a desperation and moroseness, and there’s something wonderfully modern and interesting about that.” One more member commented, “Can a poem yearn? If so, this writer makes it happen. Brilliant writing!”



**Runner-Up: Alanna Johnson, Collection:** Alanna's poetry is sly, intelligent, and hip to the extreme. One team member wrote, "The poet manages to be both gutsy and poignant at the same time. She has a unique voice – it wasn't difficult to identify her poems among the pool of submissions." Another member echoed this sentiment and wrote of "Descendants" that the "love shines through this vivid description of an aging hippie. Beautiful." The team members also admired her unique approach – such as "Reluctant Love," in which her guitar attempts to seduce her as a lover would.

## ARTWORK WINNERS

**Grand Prize: Harmony Leigh Culp, Collection:** While there were many impressive contributors in the artwork category, Harmony's work rose to the top for its creativity and variety. Skilled in both photography and graphic design, Harmony had an eclectic group of pieces that impressed the Editorial Team. Of "Tentacles," one member wrote, "This piece was wholly original. Although close-up pictures of creatures are nothing new, the way that texture was overlain throughout gave the work a fresh look." Another member commented, "Tentacles draws the eye with its rich colors and graceful shapes. Love the art!" A third team member called the photo "True Love" "freaking adorable. The puppy's expression puts the icing on the cake."



**Runner-Up: Casey Lowe, Collection:** Casey's photos were among the favorites in last year's *Illuminations*, and her current submissions wowed the Editorial Team with their technical excellence and emotional resonance. Many of her images, like her two "cowboy" photos, have a playful nature to them. One team member wrote of "Cowboy Silhouette," "Not only does this piece depict a great sunset, complete with a sundog, but the silhouette communicates the love between the two folks subtly well." Of "Eyes of Innocence," another team member commented, "What a gorgeous photograph! This is a photographer with a strong eye for color and an original, brilliant approach. Can we give her a prize already?"

# TOMORROW SHOULD BE FINE

---

CAMERON MAXWELL • RECIPIENT OF THE GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

After the sun's final attempt  
to peel its rind and duck  
below the skirt of the horizon,  
the concrete shallowly  
reflected the cursed orange  
rays. I found myself underneath  
the crumbling viaduct. No  
light singed my toes  
against the city's concrete underbelly.

Hands on feet in cars  
with broken fingers and  
trucks on stilted boots  
that arched through the night;  
Howling bestial screams  
of light and smoke from apparitions  
with steamy breath, and eyes  
like dirty yellow clouds  
of tarnished crystals.

In the belly of the mechanical  
beasts, I flailed in my bounds;  
A plastic sack floated  
*Please Come Again* through  
the night air with his eyes  
set on mine, and howled  
with laughter as I struggled  
and bounced through  
his night, trapped like a child.

The city's a maze, golden  
with industrial sludge  
nestled from the back; the  
Roads close their eyes  
for the night. The sun is  
buried far below the cityscape,  
rooted down in a peaceful  
slumber, until dreams of  
Demons pulled me under  
the road's glossy face.

# WINTER WONDERLAND

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MEKAYLA GRANT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



## ALASKAN WARMTH

---

LALEH ROHANI • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

The white alone place sits under a blanket of blue,  
the salty smell is all over this place.  
Truth speaks to the land through three movable  
icy pieces floating on the sea.

The sky is dark, but everything looks white  
on the ground. Christine froze through the  
night in the snow, like a lacy, fancy woman's  
dress the landscape always wears. Christine,  
with her long blond hair hidden under her long  
brown jacket, could hear the roar of the polar bears.

Evening, she makes a fire to warm her friends  
near a hill. She laughs like mad and dances  
under the moon to warm herself. She is like a  
teddy bear with her long brown jacket which has  
smooth and soft white cotton, lost under teddy's fur.

# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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HARMONY LEIGH CULP • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD

MUSIC ARMY

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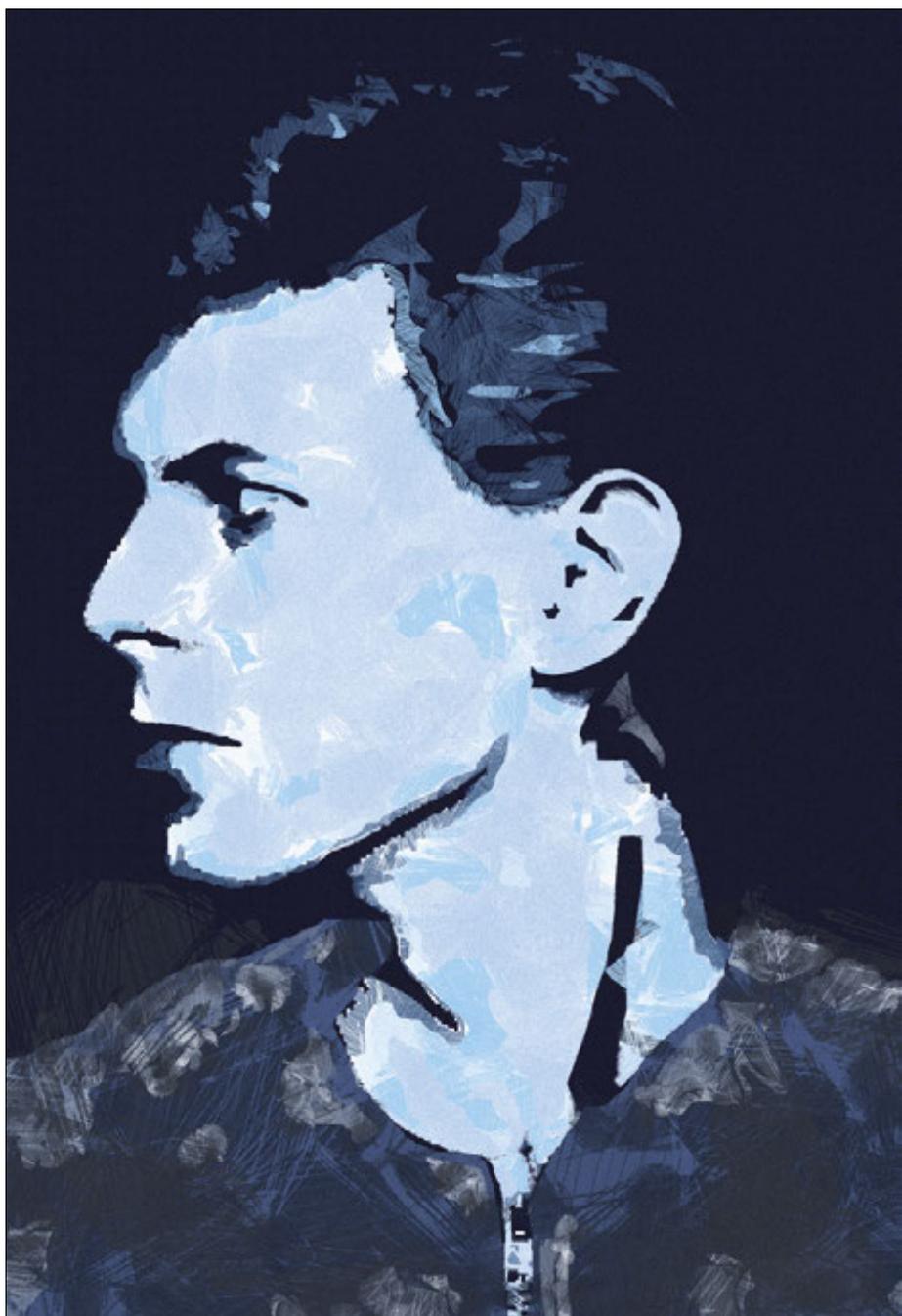
## THE TENTACLES

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DAVID BOWIE

---



# BLACK VIOLAS

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SHANNON WHITE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR PROSE

**T**he old man's words replayed over and over in his head like a scratched, worn record. He could hear the seasoned, raspy voice whispering in his ear: "There's this little spot on the other side of the road that no one knows about..." Those sweet words would be music to any hunter's ears, but they were always taken with a grain of apprehension. One would instantly question this information, wondering how many others before him were also told of this "secret" spot. Secret spots were becoming increasingly hard to find with the growing popularity of hunting and its sportsman's appeal. Hunters would scour the woods making racket, smelling up the area, and leaving behind human sign in search of that next trophy buck, often wasting meat and scaring off more deer than were killed.

Brother had never cared to look at hunting as a sport. He had one purpose in mind for his excursions to the woods—food for his family. He had once thought that he would not judge those who did hunt for sport, for he, too, had experienced the heart-thumping, intoxicating feeling that drove people into the woods and put them face-to-face with God's work in the form of a mature 10-point buck or a 400-pound bear. If the old man's words were true, "There's this little spot on the other side of the road that no one knows about..." then Brother would have the opportunity to feed his family and maybe—as an added bonus—gain eternal glory in the Boone & Crockett record books.

It seemed ironic to Brother that this was not the first old white man to give him hunting information. Earlier that spring, a man had stopped to talk with Brother on the way to a fishing hole; he had told Brother about a bedding area he had seen during his previous trips to the land's many fishing spots. Brother accepted this information and, according to the old man's directions, he went in search of this bedding area and successfully found the spot—a large, living room-sized clearing with waist-high grass surrounded by timber. In the center of the clearing were six coffee table-sized areas with the grass matted down perfectly from where the deer would rest and chew their cud during the day. This was amazing information, for Brother had grown up to mistrust old white men, knowing that they had once been young white men, some of the same young white men whose hoses had knocked down Brother's older relatives and

friends with high pressure water and whose dogs had been taught to attack. In Brother's mind, even if you didn't do the hosing or sic the dogs, if you didn't try and stop it, you were just as guilty. Yet at that moment, Brother had to rethink what he had once believed to be true.

Brother decided he might as well stop by the unknown spot and take a look. "It could be on the way home," he thought. "Couldn't hurt to check it out." As he drove, he noticed the "Private Land" sign first and started to think the worst. He continued to drive the gravel road looking in the prescribed direction when he spotted a small open field with a nearly invisible "Wildlife Management Area" sign at its edge. The field and the sign were small, so small that Brother almost missed them entirely, and he was forced to slam on the brakes, grinding the truck to a jarring halt. He reversed slowly and saw the sign again set 20 yards into the field covered in philodendron. Wild grass consumed the base of the sign and further hid it from view. "This is a 'good' sign," he chuckled to himself, half-jokingly, for he had driven down this road on numerous occasions and had never seen this particular area. Eyes fixated on the sign, he pulled his truck just off to the side of the gravel road.

Out of the truck he jumped with no backpack, binoculars, or knife—all things he would normally never leave behind. Thinking about the absent items only momentarily, Brother walked toward the sign. The closer he walked toward it, the more it seemed to be encompassed by vines constricting the brown and white rectangle like some sort of jungle snake or a woman clinching her robe tightly to avoid exposure.

"Strange," he thought. "That's a sign that doesn't want to be seen."

After looking at the sign for a few more moments, his eyes scanned around, focusing on the "Private Property" sign and fence he had momentarily noticed earlier; the fence stretched horizontally as far as he could see, bordering the left side of the field. He then scanned the field to his right and glassed over a tree line of old oak and aging cottonwood trees, which also stretched vertically as far as he could see. The opening was about 50 yards wide from where Brother was standing and 200 yards long, bordered along the back by thick brush and more hardwood trees. As he walked further into the field, Brother noticed a faint but detectable trail line running parallel to the private fence and disappearing into the back of the field. With his truck disappearing further from view, Brother instantly went into tracker mode and took inventory of everything he saw in the field. The wildflowers, trees, and birds were all noticed and put into his memory banks. Brother knew that the more information he had about the area, the easier it would be to map the land and find his quarry. As he made his way to the back of the field, the trail faded away into the thick brush. Glancing at the sky, Brother

figured he had about two hours' worth of sunlight, just enough to go a little farther in and still give him enough time to make it back to the truck before dark.

Toe to heel he stalked, focusing on every step and trying to make as little noise as possible. He pushed his way through the brush with his eyes scanning back and forth for signs. Just on the other side of the tree line and hidden below some thicket was a dried up creek bed. The recent drought had taken its toll leaving only a cracked and muddy creek bottom stretching in three directions. Sliding down the three-foot bank to its bottom, Brother first noticed the numerous deer tracks of various depths and sizes going in all three directions.

"Which way should I go?" he asked himself. Straight ahead, of course; right or left would lead him to private land making clear the obvious answer. He continued down the creek another 30 steps, stopping every few feet to look at tracks and listen for familiar noises. Brother took special care in noticing each track's features, looking for that one special sign that would give his prey away. One specific trail kept catching Brother's eye, as it seemed to be separate from the other tracks. It was bigger than the others and had light drag marks pointing forward in a way that Brother knew were from a large buck dragging his hooves as he walked. This set of tracks seemed promising and kept Brother's attention.

He had followed the tracks longer than he had wanted and suddenly noticed that the sun had already started sinking behind the treetops. As badly as he wanted to stay on those tracks, he knew that not bringing his backpack was a mistake, and with no flashlight, he had to get back to the truck before he could no longer see. Turning around, he suddenly felt a calmness come over the woods, as if the volume had been turned down and all of the noise makers had decided to listen instead of chirping, chattering, and buzzing. He heard a rustle in the bushes behind and above him, and he swung his head around instantly.

His eyes sprang open as he fell backwards and stumbled to the ground. He sprang back to his feet and froze as time stood still. He could not breathe for fear his heart would burst from his chest. His mind swirled trying to process what his eyes were showing them. Standing in the creek bottom, looking him straight in the eyes, and mirroring his expression was the most beautifully unique animal he had ever seen. Its fur was dark as night and shimmered like black violas when struck by the beams of light which shone down through the trees above. White patches separated the fur from both eyes giving the deer an ominous stare; it looked to Brother like an albino deer that had accidentally fallen in tar. Long, hand-like antlers jutted up from either side of the buck's head. Each beam was as thick as Brother's wrist and was at a glance at least three feet tall with each of the uncountable points covered in velvet the same

blackness as the fur. The animal's antlers seemed to be reaching up in an attempt to pluck the setting sun from the sky. It had two almost stalactite-size drop tines on each side giving its antlers an even more unnatural look. The deer stood as tall as Brother and stared him in the eyes for a brief moment before sinking down slightly and taking one giant leap, flying over Brother's head before jumping once more onto the top of the creek bank and then taking a brief moment to nod at Brother before bouncing off with his bright white undertail flagging.

Brother stood motionless, trying to wrap his mind around what had happened. A gnat buzzing in his ear snapped him to attention. "What the hell did I just see?" was the first thing he thought. "I must have been out in these woods way too long 'cuz I have to be seeing things." Then, just as suddenly as the noise in the woods had gone silent, it all started up again in a chorus led by the mating calls of an anxious field cricket.

Brother knew he didn't have much time before the light totally disappeared, so he climbed up the embankment and half trotted with no regard for stealth through the brush and field back to his truck. His brain was whirling with questions: *Where did the buck come from? Where did it get that color? Just how big was that rack of antlers? Why didn't I spook it? Why in the world did it jump over me like that?* By the time he reached his vehicle, Brother was exhausted. His hands were shaking, and his legs throbbed with fatigue. He took a moment to look back at the field, which had all but disappeared in the dark, leaving only emptiness and no hint of what lay deep in its brush.

For the next month leading up to the September 15<sup>th</sup> opening of bow hunting season, Brother spent every free moment preparing for an opportunity to stalk the buck. He nicknamed it "Tar Baby" and spent hours at the secret spot glassing the area with his binoculars and trying to see his new obsession. Even though he never saw another human soul scouting, he knew Tar Baby had to be smart, having lived to be old enough to own that enormous set of antlers. On occasion, he would catch a shadowy movement out of the corner of his eye, but he would turn to see nothing or to see a doe bounding off with fawns in tow. He never saw more than tracks and scat during this time from Tar Baby, which led him to believe the big buck came out only at night when it would be virtually invisible.

September 15<sup>th</sup> came in a blur, but Brother was ready. He had bought new arrows and broad heads. He had tuned his bow and made sure it was silent and deadly. He already owned everything else he needed—masks, gloves, binoculars, backpack, and his trusty boots. He packaged up a field-dressing bag for the all-important degutting of the deer. He made a map which detailed every tree,

trail, track, and sign he had encountered. He had spent hours at the bow range perfecting his shot from different distances. All of his knives were razor sharp, and his neck sported a brand new buck caller. Yes, Brother was more than ready.

He would often fall asleep thinking about Tar Baby. He doodled pictures of the buck's antlers on every piece of paper he could find. He was enthralled, but he also never told a soul—not about the secret place, not about Tar Baby, not about his experience in the woods with the great buck. He decided he would go out before sunrise on opening day to ensure he would have no complications. He packed a lunch and fell asleep the night before with little trouble.

On the morning of opening day, everything went just as planned. He left the house around 5:30 a.m. and was set up in his natural ground blind just before the sun crested the horizon. It was a cool morning, around 45 degrees. The cool air and anticipation made him shake uncontrollably. Brother knew he had picked a great place for a ground blind, building it among a patch of trees just yards from the three-way creek bottom intersection. There was a small amount of water in the creek, just enough to allow animals to wet their palettes as they traveled from cover to feeding areas and back again. Brother sat in the ground blind for about two hours, occasionally using the grunt caller or spraying himself with cover scent. The anticipation of seeing Tar Baby kept him alert. He saw several doe and spotted turkeys and pheasant, but no bucks. He had a permit, which allowed him to harvest an antlerless deer along with a buck, but he wanted to wait and fill that tag when he took the opportunity to hunt other areas. He wanted to save a tag specifically for Tar Baby.

After another 20 minutes, he decided to start still-hunting, hoping that moving would bring him closer to his target. He left the blind and toe-to-heeled along the top of the embankment overlooking the creek bottom. This allowed him to look down on passing deer, giving him the advantage of surprise and making for an easier shot.

The cool fall breeze numbed his face and kept him alert. He moved silently through the woods, taking more time to pause and listen than to step and move. Each noise caused him to freeze—tensing his muscles and racing his heart. Another hour passed with him crouched in stalking position; by then, his body was heating up and starting to feel the symptoms of fatigue. He could feel the sweat trickling down the small of his back. His leg and back muscles tensed, as he forced his body to move at the slowest of paces, almost sloth-like. His arm and shoulder ached from carrying his bow. Brother had walked deeper into the woods than ever before, and he thought the creek bottom would never end.

Just when he needed to stop and take a rest and as he started doubting he would ever reach the back of the property, he was invaded by yet another area,

first guarded by a fallen tree laying precariously across the ground—as if hinting that he should not pass—then surrounded by more thick brush. These bushes were different from anything he had ever seen in the woods. They were almost as large as the surrounding trees and so thick Brother could not see through them. He could see only two-inch thorns hidden amongst deep purple leaves in the shapes of robin eggs covering the bushes; the thorns were unbearable to look at let alone attempt to crawl through. The creek bottom seemed to dislike the bushes, also, ending abruptly and spreading out like a grassy river bank at the bushes' base. The ground around the bushes was thick, and the grass was rich. It seemed to Brother that this was one of the few areas in the woods that hadn't suffered the effects of the year's earlier droughts. Everything thrived in this one-acre area, and as Brother looked at the scene in front of him, he felt blessed and silently thanked that which was greater than him for the opportunity to be there.

In the middle of the ground was one door-sized patch of grass that was matted down and brown from being laid on repeatedly. Suddenly, Brother knew where *he* was and could barely contain himself. His knees began to shake, and his breath quickened. It all started to make sense; this beautifully unique animal, known to him now as Tar Baby, used this area as its place of solitude, hidden away deep in the woods where only the most curiously determined could find him. Brother had found him. Brother had found Tar Baby's bedding area.

Brother knew he didn't have much time. He needed to find a vantage point out of the buck's line of sight and smell. This proved difficult with the abundance of thorny bushes. He decided to backtrack and climb out of the creek bottom to the overlooking embankment. Brother positioned himself ten yards back from the creek at an angle where he could see whatever came walking through the creek bottom below.

As he settled for a long wait, Brother took off his gear and placed it in the grass next to him; he doused himself with more scent cover. He knocked a razor-sharp broad head arrow and leaned the bow against a nearby tree. He crouched on his knees, occasionally shifting his weight to remain comfortable. Now it was a waiting game. He had no idea when Tar Baby would return to bed, but he knew that leaving now would put himself at greater risk of being spotted or winded by the buck than just staying put and waiting for it to return. The sun had passed its noon position and was starting its descent when Brother heard the woods go silent. Like before, everything in the woods stopped making noises, and the only sound Brother could hear was his racing heart. Brother knew what would come next and tried to calm himself by slowing his breathing. "Steady, old boy," he thought, knowing if he rushed and panicked, all would be lost.

All he could see at first was that giant set of antlers. They were bone white and sharp pointed now, as Tar Baby had rubbed all the black velvet off and was prepared to spar with would-be rival bucks. The rack bobbed as Tar Baby walked the creek bottom. Brother could hear nothing but the rush of blood in his ears and his own heart pounding. He rose slowly, grabbing his loaded bow and crouching like an old man, trying to make sure he wasn't noticed. Brother let Tar Baby walk past him before pulling his bow to full draw. Slowly, Brother stood up fully and raised his bow; he looked through the peep and focused on the spot behind Tar Baby's shoulder that would lead his arrow to its heart and lungs.

His movement caused Tar Baby to freeze and turn its head in his direction, reflections of light bouncing off of his dark fur. Brother was once again staring eye to eye with Tar Baby, but this time he had the advantage of surprise over the buck. His drawing arm trembled as he took a deep breath and held it in order to steady himself. He could feel the string pressing into his fingers straining to be released. By then, Tar Baby could most assuredly hear Brother's heart pounding like a drum in his chest attempting to escape its capture. In that moment of truth, with his hard work and effort being put to the test, Brother was washed over with a feeling of peace. It was the kind of peace that felt like a mother's hug, full of love and protection—a peace that came with a subtle kiss or an "I love you" whispered.

"No," Brother thought, "this is not right. What am I doing?" How could he kill the most beautifully unique creation he had ever seen? He lowered his bow and stood looking at Tar Baby. To his surprise, Tar Baby did not run away but instead stood looking up ominously into Brother's eyes. As they stared at each other, Brother could gradually see that the same peace shone in Tar Baby's eyes, and he felt ashamed.

The buck turned and ran back the way it had come, leaving Brother standing alone to once again contemplate what had happened. Brother's opportunity had come and gone, and he felt no remorse, for he knew what he had done was right. Brother knew that Tar Baby had to live. Its unquestionable uniqueness made killing it a sin that he did not wish to commit. Almost on cue, the woods began to sing again bringing Brother back to the present. He blew out a deep breath and put his arrow back in its quiver. Collecting all of his gear, Brother began the long trek back to his truck.

He walked quickly this time with no regard for noise or possible detection. He was mentally drained and had no desire to shoot any deer. Working his way back through the brush, Brother jumped as the woods were interrupted by the sound of a single rifle shot. Brother instantly froze to insure he would not be mistaken for a possible target. He could tell the shot came from the private

property, which he knew was next to the area. As Brother passed through the bushes into the open field, he noticed a trail of blood leading into the bushes on the other side of the tree line. His body became stiff with fear as he contemplated from what animal this blood had come. He started following the blood trail, half running until he spotted a dark shadow lying in the tall grass in front of him.

Tar Baby was bleeding profusely from his neck. Blood spewed out of the artery, coating his fur in bright red. His legs were jutting out straight, and parts of one side of its antlers were dug into the ground. Brother fell upon the deer in a heap with no regard for his personal safety; his arms grasped tightly around the buck's body as if he was trying in vain to cover it in peace. He began to sob uncontrollably, pressing his face into the buck's fur, feeling the warmth against his skin. Brother looked into the buck's eyes, hoping it would help soothe the animal. He felt helpless. Tar Baby looked at Brother and blinked once before letting out a long gurgling breath and dying. Brother squeezed the buck's body tighter, his arms refusing to let go. He lay there still crying when his sadness was interrupted by the sound of people.

"Holy shit, Tommy, you got 'em! You fucking got 'em! That had to be a 200-yard shot, man. You fucking punched him out!"

"Did you see the size of the antlers on that thing?"

"I ain't ever seen no deer with fur like that, either; that deer was as black as a nigger!"

"Man, you right. That's definitely a wall hanger if I ever seen one."

"Forget the meat. Let's just skin 'em and cut off them horns."

The two hunters appeared in the clearing in front of Brother and the buck. They stopped walking upon seeing Brother, tears streaming down his face, lying over the buck. "Who the hell are you?" the man called Tommy finally said. He held the rifle at his waist and pointed it in Brother's direction; his head tilted slightly as he tried to get a better look at the curious sight. Brother looked up without wiping his eyes.

"What have you done?" he screamed in the hunters' general direction. "What have you done!" As Brother looked up at the two men who had committed the most grievous of offenses, he knew that Tar Baby did not deserve to die that way. Tar Baby's life was much too important to lose at the hands of those who did not appreciate him. In a flash, Brother knew what needed to be done. These men would never leave the woods with Tar Baby. Brother knew that the world was not ready and could not begin to appreciate the beautiful uniqueness of the animal that lay dead before him. Brother knew the men could not and would not leave Tar Baby alone. These men could never leave the woods. Brother knew

that Tar Baby must remain a secret, and he reached down to squeeze the handle of the hunting knife at his waist before rising to his feet.



Two seasons had passed since the death of Tar Baby and the disappearance of the two hunters. The search had died down, and hope of finding the hunters had been all but lost and faded into memory. Brother felt the time had come for him to go and pay his respects to Tar Baby, whom he now considered a fallen friend. Carrying only his backpack with essential supplies, Brother made the trek to the secret spot in the back of the woods where Tar Baby's bedding area once was. A small mound of dirt covered in clover replaced the door-sized patch of brown grass that Tar Baby had once lain in. A single blossoming black viola stood watch over the mound like a romantic tombstone. Brother stood staring at the viola and thought about Tar Baby. He had long since stopped crying at the thought of the buck's death, but he still had a hollow sick feeling in his stomach each time he recalled that day. Brother stood silently for a moment before glancing briefly at the other mound of dirt, which lay more inconspicuously underneath the thorny bushes. After feeling satisfied, Brother turned around to start the long hike out of the woods.

As he looked up, he saw standing on the ridge over the creek bottom a doe and two yearlings lightly grazing. One yearling was a typical light brown, but the other yearling was pitch black with white circles around its eyes. The doe and two yearlings tilted their heads upward and smelled the air around them. Upon winding Brother, the doe took off running, closely followed by the brown yearling. The black yearling, who seemed much braver than his mother and sibling, stood for a moment looking intently at Brother, as if familiar with him. Brother's eyes began misting, and he whispered to the young buck, "I knew your father."

The black yearling nodded its head as if in approval and looked Brother over once more before bounding off to catch its mother. Brother turned and took a look at the black viola one last time; he smiled and nodded his head at his old friend before leaving the secret spot forever. 

# PEACEFUL

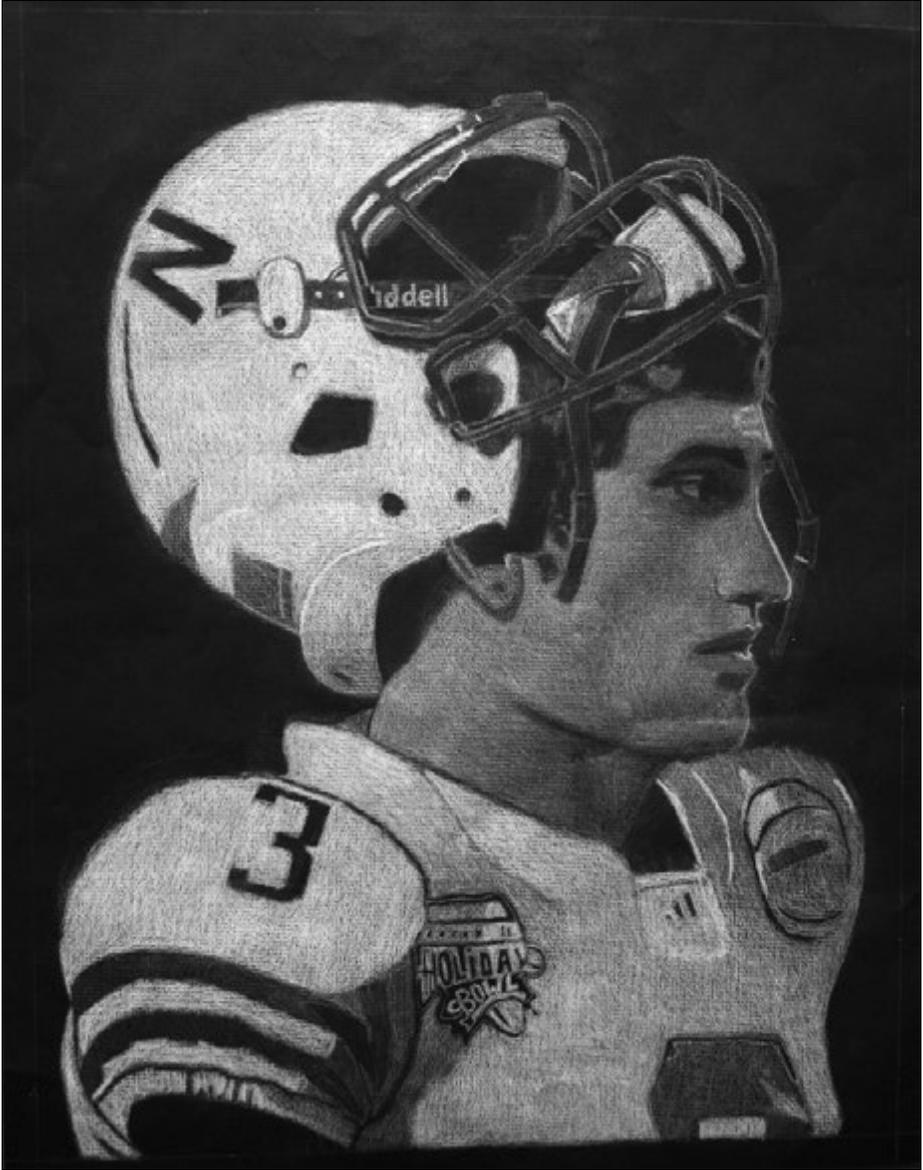
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MEKAYLA GRANT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# WHITE ON BLACK

ASSENET GARCIA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# BATTING PRACTICE AT BEDTIME

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PHIP ROSS • ENGLISH CO-CHAIR

Up to home plate  
while already in bed

a blanket across my neck,  
one pillow folded underhead,

socks in a pile nearby—  
I level the bat across a knuckle

to lay down the first bunt  
on the ball field behind my eyes.

Again and again pitches  
catch the sweet spot

on the fat end of the bat  
with the dull knock of wood

in a rhythm of baseballs rolling  
down the chalky third baseline

until the park lights dim and I sink  
into the dugout of my bed, satisfied

and ready, at last, to let go of a day  
of wild swings at most everything.

# THE TALE OF MURPHY THE LEGISLATOR

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ERIC TOMASEK • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR PROSE

Murphy carefully arranged his robes. They were a deep dark purple that screamed *rich*. Tyrian purple. It was the shade of jealousy before green got the bid.

He may have been compensating.

Slender, well-formed fingers rearranged soft folds of cloth as it folded its way over his sturdy frame. Murphy was rather a stickler for appearances. Even with impeccable royal blood, it was difficult to get a posh Legislator position without a strong lean towards perfectionism.

Rocking back slightly in his chair, he sighed and looked up toward the door. Waiting for the Council was always an exercise in patience, but he carefully reminded himself that most of the Council was dead. Of the many benefits to be derived from war, Murphy appreciated this one most.

With this pleasant thought, Murphy saw the door open. He stood immediately. When it came to politics, you really had to be a cocky bastard to stay seated. It was a calculated risk. Murphy figured it was best to cover the bases, so he used his ample physique to lend extra authority to his position.

A diminutive figure entered. Definitely not Councilman Jones. Definitely not any of the other Council members of greater or lesser esteem. In fact, plain gray robes marked the entrant as a servant.

“Where is Jones?” Murphy took a step forward, nose slightly elevated, chest thrust forward, shoulders back. Murphy was an exquisite specimen when it came to physical aesthetics. As he stepped, he heard a slight *keerrrrriiiiiikkkkkkkkkkk* and felt a tug at the back of his robes.

His face turned to a scowl. “What the...?” He turned and found the corner of his beautifully dyed robe caught under one of the forelegs of his chair. He turned back to the servant to see the man approaching uncertainly, eyes averted as if pretending not to notice the plight of Murphy.

Under his breath, Murphy muttered, “Can’t get anything right today.” Then louder, “Where is Jones? I have been expecting him this last hour or more!” With an authoritative tug, Murphy freed the fringe of his robes and took another step forward.

“Uh, that’s why I’m here, sir.” The man fiddled with his fingers; he wished he had a set of keys—or a strange cube with distinctly colored facets and a curious internal mechanism that would allow for each side to be rotated in sections—or some other object that might lend itself well to fidgeting. “You see, the Council members were gathered through the night discussing various battle plans, and so breakfast was catered in. Apparently, the Erittians poisoned the water.” Eyes downcast, the man ended his story with an odd abruptness.

“What are you saying, man!” Murphy had things to do. This was a waste of his time. “What happened next?”

“Well, you see, Legislator, they were all thirsty.” He paused again.

“Yes? And then?” Murphy’s face scowled further. *Things are definitely going wrong today*, he thought.

“Well. It seems the poison is quite bad, Legislator.”

“Yes, but where is Councilman Jones?”

“Just now?”

“YES.” Murphy took another step forward as a rush of blood reduced the function of his ears with a low thrumming drum of increased heart rate.

“Dead, I’m sure, although he was still twitching when I was dispatched, Sir Legislator.”

Murphy was quite without words. Momentarily. “So. The Council all drank the water?”

The servant fidgeted more before nodding.

“Well, that’s just fantastic. Who else was there?” His brain started working itself into a frenzy. With the Council out of the way, this could honestly be a good development! They had been restricting every attempt at power since Murphy had taken office. If he could just get the military under his grasp as well, the city would be his!

“Er...Armsmaster Frank, Sir Legislator.”

Murphy’s face split into a grin that the servant couldn’t have seen, as his eyes were glued to the floor. Had the servant seen that victorious and gleeful visage, he may have been disturbed. Murphy composed himself quickly, however, and feigned a mournful look.

“I was...well. See, there’s no one left to...er...lead...the troops, Legislator.” With dwindling volume, the quaky voice of the servant delivered the final part of his message, and Murphy’s pretense of sadness turned quickly into genuine horror.

“WHAT! Who will replace the Armsmaster?”

The servant looked up, almost meeting Murphy’s eyes. “By your own law,” he cleared his throat, “should the Armsmaster die not at arms, the Legislator will

fill in until some suitable replacement might be found.”

Murphy fumed. “So gather the Captains. Suitable replacement will be found.”

“Sir, the Captains are busy.”

“Well, UN-busy them.”

Looking at his feet again, the servant mumbled, “Seems, Sir Legislator, they are preparing for battle.”

“Who in their right mind prepares for battle at 7:00 a.m.?” Murphy paced three steps, turned, and paced back to the servant; his formidable physique dominated the small, slumped servant.

“Agreed, sir. The Erritians...horrible folk. Attacking so early. Er...”

“Er...WHAT?”

“Uh...seems they’ve been assaulting the wall since before sunrise, Sir Legislator.”

Murphy paced. Every thought of his rise to power faded like dew before the burning summer sun as he realized the difficult predicament he’d unknowingly thrust himself into. Who could have known that the Armsmaster would be poisoned by someone else? Furthermore, who could have guessed that he would be poisoned during a time of war and die in the midst of a siege? How much worse could things be?

“Sir?” The servant interrupted Murphy’s deep thought.

Mid-step, Murphy swiveled to face the servant. “What?”

“Your armor is on the way.” Murphy stood, silenced by the implication.

“Uh...your sword, also.”

Murphy simply nodded. It was a bad day. His shoulders sagged in defeat, thought put on pause as a heavy cloud of depression settled over what was normally a famed mental process. At least the army would be in good order with the Captains working hard to prepare and lead the soldiers. Armsmaster Frank had been a disciplinarian, and his troops had won campaign after campaign with few losses.

An hour later found Legislator Murphy, now also Chief Councilman Murphy and Armsmaster Murphy, to the barracks. A battering ram hammered itself into the thick wood of the front gates as he descended from the government district, which stood proud atop a hill. He passed through the old wall and into the commons of the city and heard the ram slam again into wood. His steps quickened, as he wondered what was being done to ensure a third go at the gates didn’t happen.

One thought kept mingling itself with the others. Armor was heavy. And hot.

Breathing hard, Murphy strode into the barracks. Back on top of his game, he approached the first armored man he could find. While he had never taken an interest in military ranking, he knew one thing everyone knew—soldiers

couldn't afford armor. The man had to be rank.

Dull eyes looked him over as he strode up. Murphy stretched his spine to its limit, exerting his towering height.

"Who's in charge here?" demanded Murphy.

"I think Cap'n Jakes may be kickin' yet, but the whole lot's been mostly slaid proper, Sir...uh..." Dim wits lead the man's eyes to a poorly motivated appraisal of Murphy, with absolutely no success of identification.

Murphy ended the poor fool's blundering. "Sir Legislator. Or Armsmaster, to you. Lead me to Jakes."

Wide eyes met Murphy's calculated gaze. Then, with newfound acuity, the soldier smartly turned and lead the way to the infirmary. Murphy's thoughts churned away as he considered the implications of their direction.

Dying soldiers were piled on dead soldiers—no room for new patients and a rather impatient patient line at the door. The scene was dismal. Murphy was lead to a corner of the compound where, propped on pillows, Captain Jakes was issuing a few orders between coughing. Each violent cough was accompanied by a bout of blood that was more than enough to diagnose the man as terminal.

Murphy strode confidently toward the cot. "What goes on here, Jakes?"

"Who the bloody—" (he coughed, as if speaking the word "blood" had conjured the liquid in his throat) "—hell are you?" Murphy noticed the alert and intelligent look in the dying man's eye, and lamented, momentarily, at the loss of such a fine replacement for the deceased Armsmaster.

"Legislator Murphy. Chief Councilman Murphy. Armsmaster Murphy." The man raised an eyebrow then coughed again. Defiance drained from Jakes' face as pain wracked his body. He nodded, not even attempting the confrontation.

"Fine. I won't ask for details. The wall is nearly taken. The gates will fail soon. If Master Frank fell, then I have a list to give you."

With some struggle, Jakes twisted and reached for a nearby nightstand. Its single drawer fought a moment and then opened. Within was a single sheet of paper, which Jakes bloodied as he lifted it and handed it to Murphy.

"The men refuse to fight unless these demands are met. Seems Master Frank was a little too rough on the soldiers."

"At's right!" said the soldier who'd lead Murphy to Jakes. Murphy turned a rather heated gaze at the man, who then added, "Sir Legislator," to the end of his exclamation.

"What in the hell is going on today!" Snatching the paper with a quick flick of his wrist, Murphy read the demands over, eyebrows raising progressively as pay, vacation, and compensation for surviving family were all described on the contract. At its bottom were sloppy signatures or symbols from what looked to be the entire army.

“So, Captain, you’re telling me there’s no one manning the walls and defending the city?” Murphy asked. Jakes went to respond when a gray-robed servant was ushered into the infirmary. The man looked around in horror for a moment before remembering his task. With quick nervous steps, the man hustled forward, holding out a scroll as he announced himself.

Murphy swiped the scroll and tore its seal open quickly, but not so quickly as to miss the seal of his wife’s family.

“Murphy,” it started in his wife’s handwriting. “I have decided it best to accept the marriage proposal of Randal, whose high rank in the Erritian military promises a good future for our children. If I am able, I will argue for a light sentence for you... perhaps in the mines or some such. Farewell. P.S. I am taking our dog. And changing his name. You know I hated Bruno from the start.”

Murphy’s face turned pale as he read, word by word, the betrayal he’d been expecting for years. Jessica had been courted by Randal but had refused him after Murphy’s timely promotion. Now the tables were turned.

His fingers curled their way around the letter till they formed a fist—skin stretched around large knuckles, color changing to red, then white, as rage tightened his fingers.

“What else!” The exclamation thundered through the infirmary, drowning out the death whimpers of dying soldiers. “What else can go wrong?”

Thunder shook the foundations of the compound, and a swish of rain sounded loudly. Murphy simply stared out a nearby window. Thunder drove home its point, and the sound of wood splintering answered in echo as the gates failed.

Shaking in rage, Murphy gathered a second sword from Jakes’ bedside and strode with angry determination toward the sound of running soldiers. The gates had failed. The Council members had drunk themselves to death, and the military was on strike. Even the weather was against him.

But he would not die quietly. Not before noon, and not without a proper cup of tea.

Soldiers rushed at him as they poured through the gates. Long ago, someone had designed the outer gates with considerable foresight and left only a narrow passage as entrance to the city. Invaders had to struggle for three abreast.

Murphy stood his ground in the middle of the passage, armor gleaming, a sword in each hand. Had any of the attackers seen the horrible scowl on his face, they may have second-guessed their blind adherence to orders, but instead, Murphy’s helmet gleamed fiercely in the overcast gloom.

Erritians came forward, three at a time, and Murphy met them. As it so

happened that Legislators have very little *real* work to do, Murphy had been training for years. His swords flashed, catching the unarmored soldiers in the throat and heart and in other less vital but still crippling places. The forward rush faltered as bodies piled up in the narrow passage.

Yet more came. And fell. The ring of steel echoed off sunbaked brick as Murphy's blades whirled in a deadly blur born of anger, desperation, and fear. With each rise and fall of steel, his thought recalled and then banished the morning's disappointments and betrayals, lending strength and speed to what was already a death-dealing machine.

The soldiers came and fell and piled and climbed and fell more, and as blood slicked the ground, Murphy stepped back so as to leave more room for the piled heap of dead.

Rain, too, poured into the narrow passage. Dirt and water and blood mixed to a mired mess, which worsened the situation for invading forces as they stumbled and struggled to advance.

Murphy grinned to himself as he slaughtered soldier after soldier. Finally, something was going right. *I might come out of this yet*, he thought, as the steady advance of soldiers slowed and finally ceased.

"Legislator Murphy!" A loud voice thundered through the downpour of thunderstorm. "Let us end this! A duel!"

"Agreed!" Rage surged again, as he answered. He recognized Randal's voice. He would always remember that bastard's deep melodious tone.

So, with the sort of haste that happens when anger drains hunger, Murphy struggled his way over mounds of dead soldiers and slogged through the blood and rain and mud and through the front gates.

Upon a horse sat his wife holding their children and a leash. Bruno barked excitedly around the horse's feet. How the well-trained steed managed to not bolt was beyond Murphy, but he didn't have time to consider that conundrum. Instead he turned his gaze to Randal, who stood with spear and shield at the ready.

No time was to be wasted. Randal roared, and Murphy met his utterance with his own vigorous roar. The two met. Swords flashed as lightning issued from dark clouds. The Legislator's blades pounded against shield and spear in a furious onslaught that drove Randal back and down until he cowered on one knee.

Randal struggled to protect himself from the constant hammer of blades, dropping his spear as a mighty blow drove him to his side. He sprawled in the mud. Lightning forked its way around the silhouette of the blood-coated form of Murphy.

Laughing, Murphy set down his sword and lifted Randal's own spear, hefting it in his hand as he prepared to skewer Randal. "Seems things have

turned out in my favor anyway! So I am feeling generous. I'll leave you with these two boons..." He paused, pacing as he gloated.

"First, please keep my ex-wife. She was never worth the trouble. Men everywhere will be happy to know her husband doesn't suffer her company because he's DEAD." Murphy crackled a laugh that was drowned out by a boom of lightning.

"Second, a word of wisdom. Anything that can go wrong, will!" And with that he drew back the spear, its point jutting towards the boiling clouds above as the mighty form of Murphy the Legislator prepared to end the life of Randal.

Then, as if in answer to his final piece of legislation, lightning streaked, bright and fatal, to that raised spear. In a flash, Murphy convulsed once. The lightning knocked Randal back and charred the ground around the proud Legislator.

Then Murphy fell, twitched once, and was gone. 🏹

## NOT ON THE NIGHT

DERRICK BRINKMEIER • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

Derrick's video production of *Not on the Night*, a play presented by the Theater Production class in Beatrice in December, 2012, can be found on SCC's *Illuminations* YouTube channel. Please view Derrick's production at this link:

[http://youtu.be/HA3Ysp\\_MVNM](http://youtu.be/HA3Ysp_MVNM)

*(Permission granted by Pioneer Drama Services)*



# COPPER FLOWERS ARTWORK

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



# CHAPTER 1

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JOE LAMBRIX • BUSINESS, MARKETING FOCUS

The thunder roared overhead like a great lion. “You take care of yourself, Oliver!” Scott’s voice boomed from his office.

“Don’t I always?” Oliver replied smartly. He turned and pushed his way through the door of the small comic shop where he worked. With worry, he looked up into the dark clouds. *I should have gotten a ride.* He turned his head to both sides as he checked his surroundings. It was too dark to make out any significant landmarks.

*You’re fine, Oliver. You remember the directions: three blocks to the right, eleven blocks to the left, then one more left.* The light that poured out of the shop behind Oliver suddenly ceased, blanketing him in more darkness. *Fantastic. If I hurry, maybe I can catch Scott.* Oliver began to pull his keys out to unlock the door. The rain made it hard to grasp the metal ring that held his keys, and he couldn’t tell which key he needed without light.

He was on the verge of jamming every key into the lock when he saw a pair of headlights flash by. Oliver’s dark brown eyes squinted, hoping to catch the license plate of the car. He made out the last half of the plate before it disappeared into the downpour. It had been Scott’s car. Oliver stuffed the keys back into his pocket and turned his back to the shop. *Better start walking.*

The sky lit up with a flash of lightning, which made Oliver flinch. He shivered once and started down the street to his right. Humidity made each breath heavy as he struggled through the rain. *Now I really wish I could have gotten a ride.* Oliver could barely keep his head up as rain poured into his face from the skies above. His shoes splashed against puddles that formed in the cracks of the sidewalk. Oliver picked his head up quickly and looked around. *I wish I could see something to at least put me in the right direction.* He couldn’t tell how far he’d walked. The rain almost blurred out the few streetlights that dotted the street.

Feeling brave, Oliver crossed the street. His feet caused water to splash in every direction when he stepped. After stepping onto the sidewalk, Oliver continued going straight. Lightning struck quickly, illuminating the dark street. A sense of desperation overcame him, and his pace increased to a jog. His clothes were drenched with rain, making each stride even more uncomfortable. *You’ll be fine; you’ll be fine.*

“The mysterious and elusive Dreamweaver strikes again!” Oliver’s head tilted to the left as he tried to make out what a woman was saying. “More murders have been reported. Please be on the lookout for Dreamweaver. He is presumed armed and very dangerous. The Charlotte Police Department is following every lead into taking this terrorist and his group down.”

Oliver looked around, trying to locate the source of the sound. Finally he spotted a small radio resting on the ground near a ratty old building. *Most of this must be abandoned...or the ghetto.*

Without warning, a trash can fell over, which made his head snap toward the noise. He blinked once and gasped as a cloth sack enveloped his head. Panicking, he flailed his fists, hoping to catch his attacker in the jaw. His foot slipped on the water, causing him to stumble. His motions ceased as he felt cool metal against his neck. A deep voice roared from somewhere to his left.

“What do we have here?” voices snickered and whispered around Oliver, causing the hair on the back of his neck to stand up. He refused to move, but the cool rain made him shiver uncontrollably. He tried to calm down by taking a deep breath. The gun against his neck was pressed harder.

“What are ya doing in my part of town?” the deep voice interrogated. Footsteps echoed across the gravel. The cool touch of the gun disappeared from Oliver’s neck. He relaxed slightly, hoping his attackers would let him go.

“Let’s bring him with us!” the voice boomed throughout the neighborhood. Oliver was grabbed by his wrists and dragged down the street. He tried to shake off the hands that held him but was forced to stop when a leg slammed into his side and knocked the wind out of him. The crash of thunder echoed off old windows and doors. Whispers were barely noticeable through the wet cloth.

A voice squeaked behind him, “Aye, T, you better get home before your sister freaks out again.” Oliver’s legs dragged against the rough pavement, and he winced as tiny rocks tore at his skin. The cloth sack over his face was drenched from the rain making it hard to breath.

The voice of a teenager cracked, “Forget my sister, man, she worries too much. I can handle myself.”

Oliver tried to fight his nerves as the thugs dragged him down the street. *This will all be over soon. These guys won’t kill me. I’m fine.* His jeans tore against the jagged pavement with each inch they travelled. The pain in his legs was excruciating, as if his legs were being cut up by knives.

The dull glow of a light penetrated the rain-soaked cloth as Oliver was dragged into a building. His face slammed against the cold floor with a thud. Suddenly, he was lifted onto his knees by more hands.

“You may remove your ‘hat,’” the voice chuckled. Oliver reached up and removed his mask with a shaky grip. Two barely dressed women stood at either side of the throne-like chair at the center of the room. A curtain of neon colors separated Oliver from his captor. He coughed once in an attempt to clear his lungs.

His head whipped around, bringing gang members into his sight. The room had an ominous feel. Besides the curtain and the chair, there was nothing but gray. It was a lifeless room. While looking around, Oliver noticed a window filled with strangers trying to catch a glimpse of the action.

His eyes rested on a small boy, no older than 16, standing awkwardly against the doorway; his eyes bounced from the curtain to the numbers on his Charlotte Bobcats jersey. *That’s Caroline’s brother! What is Timmy doing here!?* Caroline was Oliver’s girlfriend of over a year. *He probably hasn’t recognized me yet.* Oliver turned back to the curtain and chair quickly so that Timmy couldn’t see his face.

“Trespassing usually,” the deep voice started, “results in death, but since you haven’t tried to escape, you get a warning.” Oliver suddenly felt thrilled by the person’s words. He started to stand up but was pushed back down by one of the thugs standing nearby. Thunder tore overhead, causing many to flinch, but not the figure behind the curtain.

“Bag him and take him outside!” The two closest men reached Oliver and returned the cloth sack to his head. Their fingers locked around his wrists tightly as they dragged him across the floor once again. Snickers and gasps rose and faded like the rain outside. The pain in Oliver’s legs sharpened as his legs slid across the floor. Tears slid down his cheeks.

A door slammed open, the outside greeting its guests with the roar of thunder.

“Pop a lid for our guest.” Oliver could feel the sarcasm in the man’s voice. The cloth bag was removed, and he squinted through the downpour of rain. Oil drums were lined up against either side of a rickety fence, and two sat empty in the far left corner. He shook from the rain that had soaked his body.

The men holding him planted their feet and tossed him into the middle of the tiny lot. He landed face first with a thud against the soggy earth. His hands pushed him over onto his back. A small crowd of people started to gather to watch the spectacle unfold. Standing in the middle of the doorway was a tall man. Lightning flashed again in the distance.

For a moment, Oliver saw the man perfectly; he was standing under the shade of the building with a cane in his hand and a soft smile on his ivory skin. His eyes looked painfully familiar.

“I wish you luck...Oliver.” He could feel the smile in the man’s voice. “We’ll be in touch.”

The hair on Oliver’s neck stood up. *He knows me?!* He tried to get up, but something to his left caught his eye. An oil drum was tilted in his direction; the open lid emitted a dull yellow glow. Oliver’s eyes closed, and he heard the barrel thud against the earth. The cool liquid splashed over Oliver’s entire body. Chuckles and giggles were suddenly drowned out by the deafening roar of thunder. Oliver’s eyes squinted open and were assaulted by a blinding flash. He heard sizzling and popping in his ear, as if he was sitting over a fire. His body froze, and his mind went blank for a moment.

Gasps and shrieks filled in between the roar of the rain, but Oliver couldn’t move to cover his ears. The last thing he remembered before blacking out was an arc of electricity passing over his eyes. ⚡

## PERSPECTIVE

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



# PLANT

MEGAN CAMERON • GRAPHIC DESIGN



# BLACK MONITOR

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DANIEL ZEBERT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Arc of electricity—mercury lined  
musculature saturated with light.

A body defined—shadow and bone  
doubled back, about to snap.

Burned in the air—entangled phantom exposures in  
tentacle tracers.

Panic unthreads a spool in eyes above  
a galaxy of freckles on her chest.

The static tether pops,  
severed with an acoustic resonance.

Audible release escapes the separation.

Horizontal bars of white from blinds  
flash a film reel shutter speed.

A bare forehead sticks to his neck.

Hair that clung to her temples  
tickles his nose,  
plasters his shoulders,  
conceals flushed jawline,  
dimples and purple  
wine-stained teeth that  
chew on his clavicle.

Peering over shoulder blades,  
slick undulating contours,  
crumpled bedsheets,  
shadows flicker through  
window lines of light.

He imagines a black monitor  
lizard—rat twitching in its teeth—  
squeezing between plastic blades of mini blinds,  
dropping from the window sill,  
enameled claws skittering across  
wooden floorboards beneath,  
curling up at the foot his bed,  
powerful jaws snapping through its catch.

# BURNING SHIPS

---

CAMERON MAXWELL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF THE GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

Stars endure through holes  
punched into the dark  
cobalt canvas stretched from  
east to west, above the horse  
trail where trees engraved  
the last rays of wasted sunlight.

Twisted, knobby fingers  
crossed on top of the hillock;  
A copse scooped up  
away from the green wicker  
forest, beyond Illinois where  
only horses, no troops

or Cops, crossed. There  
nights didn't listen to  
the Hammer's beat  
on metal petunias. And  
Granted the airwaves to  
Wailing crickets and toads.

The bite of pinched light  
reflected yachts on  
the tiny milk lake.  
Rough waters carried  
the burning ships all  
the way to their fiery shore.

# COZUMEL RUGGED BEACH

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REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



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## ESTER

---

ASHLEY HECKMAN • MEDICAL ASSISTING

Visit the sea  
twice the size of all the stars;  
from thence you will encounter  
life and be well.  
We turn ourselves inward  
right from the start  
and let nothing rise.  
Go forth and be more;  
the wait is not that long.  
Embrace the sky, earth, and love.  
Call the people who care;  
shine on.

# THE DEAD DON'T TELL SECRETS

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SHANDI HARVEY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I hate airplanes—the smell, the people that crowd you no matter where you go, and the fact that there is never enough leg room when sitting in those seats.

My anxieties overwhelm me; in two hours, I will arrive at the airport and wait to board my plane. I know my mom is excited to see me and that a plane is the quickest way to arrive, but still, I just want to stay here in bed while my roommate blasts some band I have never heard of out of her iPod. My alarm is going off, and I know if I hit the OFF button, that will mean I need to get out of my comfortable bed with its dark green comforter and begin the day.

With a groan, I roll onto my left side and hit the button on my alarm clock; I see Sarah has already left. I sit up on the left side of my bed and check my phone—three new text messages and two missed calls, all from Mom. I text her back, grab my towel, and make my way to the communal shower that is for the newbie college students. The warmth of the water begins to ease some of the tension I am feeling; I breathe in deep the steam from the shower, and it begins to clear my head a bit.

Once out of the shower, I make sure I have everything and my flight itinerary; my bag is all packed except for the phone charger. Now that everything is in order, I put my hair up in a ponytail and call for my cab. The ride to the airport will take no time, so I begin to appreciate my surroundings. I rarely think to take a minute and admire the campus or the trees that are in full bloom or how the sun hits the science building just right, casting little shadows onto the bike path. Now I have more of an appreciation for the sights I am taking in; maybe it's because I am not rushing to make it to my next class in time.

My taxi pulls up, and the driver helps me with my luggage. He wears a badge with the name Mike. For some reason, he doesn't look like his name should be Mike; he looks more like a Dan or a Steve. He is nice enough and tries to make polite small talk as he drives. He asks where I am going and why; I explain that I'm going to see my mom. He nods and smiles politely. When we reach the airport, I pay him and leave a generous tip.

On my way inside the airport, my stomach begins to twist and turn; my nerves are back. I call my mom.

“Hi, Mom. I just wanted to let you know that I am checked in. I should see you in a few hours,” I say, twirling my hair around my finger.

“Great! I miss you so much, honey, and I can’t wait to see you! Did you double check that you had everything packed right? Did you make sure to label your luggage correctly? Did you bring a jacket?” She is always a talker, which I love most days, but today I am annoyed with the incessant questions.

“Yes, yes, and yes, Mom. I just wanted to touch base with you so you would know I made it here okay and to let you know to be at the airport by 4:15.”

“I will, honey, don’t you worry. I will probably be there early just to make sure your plane arrives on time and that my face is the first one you see when you get off the plane.”

“Oh, uh, great, Mom. I better go, though; it’s close to boarding time. I love you, Mom.”

“Make sure you follow the directions of the flight attendant, honey. I love you too, darling.”

I make my way to the attendant to hand her my boarding pass, and she waves me on after she double checks it. I walk up the long ramp attached to the doors of the plane, and I am hoping, begging, even praying that I will have a whole row to myself. Who knows what you can catch from people on a plane? I find my seat—toward the middle, but closer to the back of the plane. I have a window seat, which doesn’t help my fears. I know I will close my eyes while the plane takes off and when it lands.

So far, so good—a lot of people have boarded, and not a single person has the seat next to mine or even the aisle seat in my row. Maybe my luck is going to look up today, and I can possibly enjoy this flight. A few minutes go by, and more people shuffle about—mothers with their children and businessmen with their laptops and other technological gadgets. I slide my headphones onto my ears, and just when I am about to relax, a man in his mid-forties sits next to me. He has on a suit that reminds me of a college professor’s, a briefcase that he puts down in front of him, and a look on his aged face that says, “Get me home, get me home.” I know the feeling. Maybe he is just as nervous as I am when it comes to airplanes. He looks over at me and smiles—or at least, I think it is a smile. I smile back at him, and then I notice the eyes behind his wire-rimmed glasses are bloodshot, and his pupils cover almost all of his irises; a very thin circle of hazel is the only color I see.

He turns to the front of the plane, as I do. The “fasten seat belt” light flashes on, and I fumble with my belt. The man does the same; his hands are dirty, like grime under the fingernails dirty. Of course, I would get stuck next to him. Who knows what I will catch now? The flight attendant begins to go over the rules and regulations of the plane. I am trying to listen, but all I can hear is the breathing and mumbling of this man. I want to ask him to be quiet, but I

am afraid of offending him, so I keep my mouth shut. I reach for the foldout describing the proper techniques for putting the breathing mask on in case of an emergency. I envision the mask dropping down in front of my face as the plane has some sort of malfunction. I don't know why I do this, as I only get myself more worked up.

I put the pamphlet back and take a deep breath. Okay—this is where we take off. My hands grip the armrests of the seats so tightly my knuckles turn white. The man next to me doesn't seem to notice; he is going through papers in his briefcase and is still mumbling—something about secrets and “they were right.” *Who was right?*, I want to ask, but I don't.

“Can I ask you something?” the man asks.

“Sure, what is it?”

“Are you scared of flying?” He turns slightly in his seat to meet my eyes.

“Yeah, I am, a little bit. I don't like heights, and I am a bit claustrophobic.”

“Don't be scared. Planes are safe for the most part; besides, if this is the scariest experience you have to go through, you will be fine,” he says with such assurance that I can't help but feel a little better.

“How can you be so calm? You must take planes a lot,” I say smiling.

“I do, actually, and once you get through the first flight, the next one is much easier.”

“It really does get easier?”

“Yes, of course. I have been taking flights from all over the country for the last twelve years or so.” He fumbles through more of his papers. I see some of the papers, and they indicate that he studies different religions.

“What is it you do, exactly?” I ask him.

“I am a professor of religious and paranormal studies in different cultures.”

“That has to be interesting!” I was intrigued. I've always been interested in the paranormal, but all my knowledge comes from movies or the ghost hunters on TV.

“It is quite interesting, but it can also be quite disturbing,” he says. “I have just come from an investigation. What I learned there—I am still trying to make sense of it all. There is something about this particular investigation that isn't sitting well with me.” He stops talking and looks down at his papers again; his right hand reaches up and tugs on his right earlobe.

“Can I ask what you were investigating?” I am curious now; maybe I can help him make sense of it.

“I can't tell you all of the details, but I can tell you a bit about it.” He looks nervous. Did I really want to hear it?

“I was in a remote village in the Middle East. I won't tell you where, exactly,

and your curiosity won't be satisfied, but I refuse to tell you the exact location." He puts his papers back into his briefcase and rubs his hands together.

"I won't ask. I respect that."

"I had received a call from a respected colleague in the same area of expertise that I am in. He said that there was a case I definitely didn't want to pass up. I learned that in this village, the people believed there were demons possessing their loved ones while they slept. Most of them would be perfectly fine, but when they went to sleep, they woke as completely different people. The people that weren't 'possessed'—and I use that term loosely—would tie up the others in a shack and leave them there.

"Priests or people of a strong religious background in the village would come to the 'possessed' and try to rid them of their demons. The tactics they used to 'rid' the people of their demons was inhumane. The government would not step in, however, and left the villagers to themselves. Many people died, and the more my colleague told me about this, the more intrigued I became, so I went. I will tell you right now, I don't believe any of those people were possessed. I believe they were mentally ill and didn't get the proper medical care they needed. But that is all I am going to tell you. I hope you understand." He says nothing more, but during his story, he has become severely pale. The veins in his face stand out, and he looks like death.

"I won't ask questions, but I would have found that situation to be quite difficult to witness, especially with people you thought to have a mental illness. Those poor people were killed because they didn't have the proper care."

"I tried to help, but I couldn't get that close. There was always someone watching. I finally got my chance to investigate these people in question my last night there, and I really wish I hadn't."

"Why not?"

"You said you wouldn't ask any questions. You shouldn't lie—that is a sin." He is becoming agitated, and his forehead has broken out in a sweat. He stares at me for a long time; those eyes—they scare me.

"I didn't mean to ask you a question—I-I'm sorry," I stammer.

"Leave me to my work now. I will no longer be telling you stories."

I let the subject be and chalk his snippiness up to lack of sleep and long flights. Hoping to speed up the time, I drift into sleep.

*SLUUURP... SLUUURP... SLUUURP...*

What is that noise? I am afraid to open my eyes! The noise coming from the right of my seat scares me—it sounds animalistic! Hoping I am having a nightmare, I squeeze my eyes more tightly shut.

“Tell me your secrets...Tell me your secrets...TELL ME YOUR SECRETS!” the man next to me screams. He repeats these words over and over. I hear others screaming, but it sounds distant. I can't hear anything distinctly over him chanting these same words. Knowing that I have to find out what is going on, I slowly open my eyes. I look to my right, and there he is with his back to me, tearing savagely at something.

“S-sir, are you alright?” I can hear the fear in my voice, and I know that whatever has happened to him, he definitely is not alright.

“Tell me your secrets!” He turns to me, and when I see his face, I scream in terror. This is no longer my neighbor on the plane! He looks savage—his face covered in blood and his pupils completely black.

He reaches for me, and I scream again. I jump over the seat into the row in front of me, and that is when I realize that pandemonium has broken loose on the plane. The blood on the man's face belongs to a stewardess. I look down at the poor woman. Her face is completely mangled, her right eye hangs from its socket, and her left eye is missing; her right ear has been gnawed, leaving a black, tar-like substance running down her neck. I back up, trying to get away from whatever this is.

I make my way out of the aisle that I am confined in, while the man keeps laughing and screaming, laughing and screaming.

“Help! Help! Someone has to help!” I scream. I look for someone that still looks relatively human. All I see is person after person with blood-smearred face chanting various words.

“He wouldn't tell me his secrets, SO I ATE THEM!”

“God doesn't like sin, BUT WE DO!”

“Flesh is always better in the afternoon, ISN'T IT!”

Everywhere I turn, I see more people turning into whatever the professor is. I run through the carnage desperately trying to reach the pilots. Surely, they are alive, and they will get help, won't they? I nearly fall when I trip on something. I look down and see a man with his chest ripped open. I can see through to his ribcage, and crimson oozes out of him as if from a fountain. He is missing some of his ribs, and his heart is gone. *Be strong. Be strong! You can get through this. We can't be that far from the airport.*

Ahead is the door to the pilots, and I hear the radio frantically emitting noise. I can't make out the noise because of the tearing of flesh and the horrendous screams going on behind me. The door is cracked, and I slowly open it. Another stewardess is in the pilots' area, but she is no longer a stewardess. Her lips are pressed to the pilot's ear as she whispers something. A sulphur-like smell emits from her parted lips as she speaks. The pilot seems

asleep and to have no idea what is happening to him. I run up behind her and grab her off him.

“Not nice, not nice, NOT NICE!” she screams. The smell hits my nostrils, and I gag. I can feel the bile rise in my throat like a tidal wave.

“Stop!” I scream back, and she continues gnashing her lips with that awful smell. Saliva shoots from her mouth, and it looks like tar. A drop lands on my arm as I have her pinned between the wall and myself, and I scream. It burns badly, and my skin peels away, exposing tendons and bone.

She laughs a deep menacing laugh. Purposefully, she spits, enjoying the burning of my flesh. I let her go, and she returns to whispering in the pilot’s ear. I look for the captain of the plane, but he isn’t in the cockpit. I grab the radio.

“Hello, hello—we need help! People are dying! Most of the passengers are dead or... changed. Please, we need help!” I cry over the radio with hope that someone will tell me what to do.

“Miss, this is Aircraft Control. Where is the captain?”

“I-I don’t know where he is. I came in here seeking safety and to explain what was happening, but he wasn’t in here, and the co-pilot, I am afraid, is near death.”

“What do you mean—close to death?”

“There has been a massacre on this plane, sir, and the ones that haven’t died have changed into something awful. Please help me!”

“Ma’am there isn’t much we can do for you now. You are descending at a slow rate; is the plane on auto-pilot?”

“I don’t know—and what do you mean there isn’t anything you can do? People are dead, and more are going to die if you don’t help!”

“Please calm down, miss. You are only 20 minutes outside of the airport. I don’t suppose you know how to land a plane?”

“No, I don’t.” The reality of it all is beginning to sink in; we are all likely to die, anyway. With the co-pilot either dead or changed and the captain missing, we all have the same fate. Besides, how can I let anyone open the airplane’s door and let these things out? They would be further spreading this awful disease—or whatever it is. But I don’t want to die—I have so much to live for. I’m only 20 years old—I haven’t even begun to live my life yet. I pull my cell phone out of my pocket and turn it on.

“Hi, Mom? I just wanted to tell you I love you, and whatever happens, know you have always been my best friend,” I say as I try not to cry.

“Honey, I love you, too, but what are you talking about?”

I put the phone down as I watch the ground approaching us. To my relief, we aren’t going to hit as hard as I had imagined. I get on the radio one last time.

“Whatever you do, don’t open the door to this plane,” I plead. “If you do, even more people will die.”



Mrs. Conway hears the screams on the other end of the phone. Her daughter, her only daughter, is on a plane where something horrible is happening.

“My baby girl, please pick up the phone. Mommy loves you!”

She is on her way to the airport; it is 3:30 p.m.—45 minutes more and her daughter’s plane will arrive. As she drives, she looks out her window and swears that the plane above is her daughter’s. *Don’t worry, my baby. Mommy’s coming—everything will be fine.* As she winds down the highway, she feels as if she can’t get there fast enough; her anxiety rises, and she tries desperately not to assume the worse. She doesn’t end the phone call, so she can continue to hear what is happening, but the sounds are becoming distorted now. She hears screams and gurgling and people chanting—something about... secrets?—and then the phone goes dead, and she can’t hear anything more. She picks it up in disbelief.

She drives toward the entrance of the airport and sees dark, ominous smoke bellowing into the sky. She sees several fire trucks and big, black SUVs. The entire area is blocked off for a five-mile radius around the airport. She comes to a stop and rolls down her window; a man in a suit approaches her vehicle.

“Ma’am the airport is closed. You will have to turn around and go back the way you came.”

“But sir, my daughter is set to arrive at 4:15. Will her plane be re-routed to another airport?”

“No, ma’am. I’m sorry to tell you this, but the plane you are expecting had an engine explode on the runway; the plane ran itself directly into the airport. I’m sorry, but there are no survivors.” With that, the man walks back to one of the SUVs and speaks into a radio.

*I’ve lost everything in just a few simple, spoken sentences.* Tears escape Mrs. Conway as she turns her car around and drives away.



“Steve, can you believe that plane actually landed without wrecking? And to think the entire crew was either killed or turned,” Special Agent Andrew Erickson says.

“Actually, I can’t believe it, but it was a good thing we got here when we did, man. Otherwise, could you imagine if those things had gotten loose? We would be knee-deep in a shit storm!” Steve says chuckling.

“Oh, man, you got that right!”

“Hey, boss, where do you want the extra crispies?” a man in a hazard suit asks.

“Just throw them in a pile, and we’ll make sure they turn to ash before

midnight,” Andrew replies. “How did this type of infestation happen in America?” he ponders as he lights a cigarette. “Everyone in the agency knows about that village, but it seems nearly impossible for the infection to make it to the United States—especially with the government assisting us with keeping it contained.”

“Drew, are you ready to make an official statement to the news?” Steve shakes him from his pondering.

“Sure, man. It’s show time.” 

## SOUL SOLICITOR

MYSTERY HARWOOD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

frogs don't have wings he said,  
 his suit coat darker than my own head.  
 he just came on up  
 serious as a newsreel.  
 as he spouted thees and thous,  
 i saw the water on my face  
 for all those burning berries,  
 all those grapes left in the sun.  
 that day i dropped my faith  
 and wouldn't pick it up.  
 his slablike hands  
 shoveled coal but my furnace  
 simply would not give.  
 i knew what he needed when  
 i saw him caress the iron  
 the tubes of his fingers lingering.  
 he stammered, he hemmed,  
 the fire sputtered in his pocket,  
 when i asked about the babies  
 their pink skin grayed like leach.  
 how they never got to pick a side.  
 his eyes got shifty. he knew  
 the tricks of a white dress and a surname  
 couldn't conjure them a home.

# PHOTO COLLECTION

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CASEY LOWE • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS  
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD

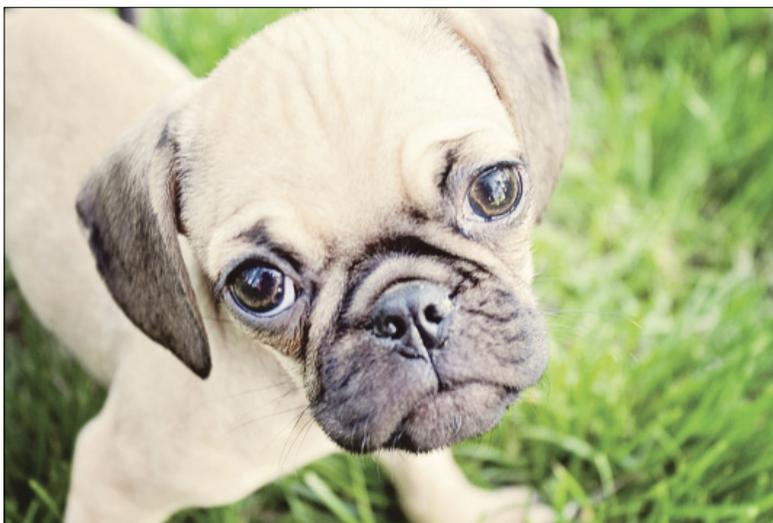
## PLAYA BONITA

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## LAYLA

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CASEY LOWE COLLECTION

## BOOTS OF LOVE

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## COWBOY SILHOUETTE

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# DEFLOWERED

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ALANNA K. JOHNSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF THE RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR POETRY

What if you were to peel a Petunia?  
Open her like a sandwich  
And ruin the yellowish-green Style.  
You would scoop her out  
Because you don't like that  
Part. She's always there.  
Even when you ask for the  
Pickles off. You accuse this  
Flower, pinched and twisted,  
That it's her fault. No matter  
How many times you ask,  
The troop of green stays  
Fighting to cross your path  
Again and again, enduring your  
Fiery peeling. When there is  
Nothing left to part, you leave.  
Who ruined this part of her  
Spirit? Once it granted peace,  
Now knobby, dark, forgotten.  
She's cloudy like this milk,  
Twisted like this...petunia.  
She'll rarely bloom around  
Your medaled cross anymore.  
Stripped of her honeysuckle  
Innocence, spring no longer  
Stiffens her once green unbroken  
Stem.

# LORD GUDGEL OF KENSINGTON IS RECEIVED AT DOWNTON ABBEY (OR WHY I LOVE A GOOD STORY)

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MARK GUDGEL • ADJUNCT ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

I am not sure if, until today, I had ever sprawled out on a grassy, sunlit hillside and taken an afternoon nap. If in my youth I ever was so lucky, I surely don't recall it, though if memory serves, I was far too full of imp and energy as a boy to do much napping. Why I waited so long to bask in what I can only now describe as one of life's essential pleasures I cannot say, but with conviction I am willing to declare that I feel strongly it should happen again—and soon.

As God would have it for whatever His purposes, divine or common, the first truly pleasant day of the year, at least so far as the weather has been concerned, fell squarely upon the bank holiday of May Day, the first Monday of May in the United Kingdom, a “liberal holiday” that I gather some approve of while others do not, yet which seemingly everyone indulges in without complaint. (The principles of the hyper-conservative do have a tendency to take a day off now and again.) Under normal circumstances a slave to my desk and my own self-imposed deadlines, I decided upon the eleventh hour to go ahead and have a brief holiday of my own this day and to strike out for Highclere Castle, or as I have better known it for a few years now, Downton Abbey.

In no way deviant from my usual experiences here in England where I am currently living, the morning's travel was a delightful experience. As usual, I tubed from my tiny flat (“the cupboard under the stairs,” as I affectionately referred to it) in West Kensington to Paddington Station, home not only to the famous storybook bear but also to a snowy owl named “Ernie” whose business there was scaring pigeons. Ernie and I met weeks ago when my wife was visiting me in London. I regarded Ernie as a friend, and I believe he regarded me as a nuisance. From Paddington, it was an hour by train to Newbury, and from Newbury, a brief (albeit pricey) cab ride, and I was delivered upon the doorstep of the storied castle, flags flying from her immense Gothic turrets, and the sun finally behaving as we had all been wishing for some time that it would.

With no email to distract me, no telephone, no Facebook, no Twitter, no Skype, and no camera allowed inside the fortress-like walls, I was able to take in the castle as I saw it on television—that is, free of distraction, as though

existing in a simpler time. By design, the great structure insisted upon leisure and peaceful relaxation, perhaps also indulgence and pomp, and I was more than happy to accept these gifts. I toured the castle, then took a slow coffee in the courtyard. I strolled through the vast expanse of well-maintained gardens as though they were my own, then had a salad lunch under the canopy of a massive elm tree. After, I visited the animals, mostly sheep, and perused the Egyptology exhibit (the Lord Carnarvon who lived there long ago being famous for having uncovered King Tut's burial grounds). And when the early afternoon sun had finally burnt away the dew, I experienced my glorious nap before taking tea in a repurposed little gatehouse overlooking the grounds. I chatted with the locals and my fellow tourists alike, listened to the lambs' affectionate bleating for their mothers, watched children play football on the path, coexisted with the bees, and shared the sunshine and the hillsides and the great green lawns with one and all. Had my wife been by my side, I doubt if we ever could have found the motivation to depart.

The castle was an ancient thing with gargoyles and statues and wonderful furniture and a library to be jealous of. I won't bore anyone still reading with a lesson in the history of British aristocracy, a topic about which I lack any qualification whatsoever. I will mention, however, that Napoleon's desk was rather grand for such a tiny man to have utilized effectively and that much of what we know of "Downton" is also true of Highclere, not least the establishment by the Lady Carnarvon of a military hospital during The Great War. It is not the place, but rather the story, that makes it all so magical.

What *Downton Abbey* does as a television program is to grant us access to a world which each of us must suspect exists, and yet for some reason cannot properly conceive by ourselves. Like any great author, the director gives us mere glimpses of an entire world, a complete world but a world in which we do not live, and then allows us by our own inferences to interact within it. In this way, from historical reality, a fiction is created. But to visit the place in which the fiction has become a reality for so many is an utterly surreal happening. In this place, invention has made a full trip around, and now what was merely a story has begun to find its way back into our reality. Stepping inside of Highclere Castle, the host of my favorite period piece of all time, was in every way as satisfying as arriving at Middle Earth or Hogwarts or Narnia. My fantasies suddenly loomed all around me, as real as any other aspect of my life, and I half expected the Dowager Countess (played by Dame Maggie Smith) to appear and scold me for my informal appearance.

So this is what great storytelling does. Rather than stifling imagination as I have heard it suggested, it tickles it, teases it, coaxes it out from hiding

behind the worries of life and the stresses of day-to-day existence. Then it transports us to a place we always hoped could be our own but had never dared to create for ourselves, and there it allows us to live for a while, free of charge. By the end of my day, I had conceded all to my imagination. I had not spent a day at Highclere Castle at all, but instead at Downton Abbey. After all, the imagination is a device to be enjoyed, yes, but not argued with.

My lone regret about the entire grand experience is that I spent the day in only my own intimate company, without my wife or family or colleagues or even my adorable little dog, Mollie, who surely would have enjoyed running around the vast expanse of lawns. Much like dear little Lucy, my elation at my own discovery was undeniable, yet I desperately wished for my loved ones to have come with me through the wardrobe. Great occasions, acts of the imagination, and life in all its splendor and magnificence are, after all, better when shared with those we hold dear. But that is, I think, the reason for which I bother to write these things down in the first place; they are always more enjoyable when I can bring you here with me. 🍀

*Mark R. Gudgel; Highclere Castle, Newbury, UK (6 May, 2013)*

## RELAX

BRENDA HOFFMAN • HUMAN SERVICES



# PROFILE

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EMAILE CLEMENT • UNDECLARED



# THE CITY'S OUTSTRETCHED HAND

CAMERON MAXWELL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF THE GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

I'm on the edge of my sheets, peering out into the endless sea, through sideways alleyways that cut behind multi-story business complexes like mirrors. On their roofs, I kick and fight the fireflies that buzz along the tops of streetlights and hand out their mangled bodies in straws, like flashlights to carve out the night. I'm on the edge of the streets, far from my sheets but all too close to the roof's edge, cars swerve and crash a symphony of metal on bone collisions, broken bulbs and light thrown all over the ground, in shards of needle-bitten arms of junkies who watched too long the carnival of empty-chaired circus entertainers that moved along the outskirts of the sinking city. The city was deep into the night, sunk into the ground, myriad obstructions into the green sky, falling, falling into a whirling cesspool, a sinkhole lined with the city's wasted youth, their teeth stained yellow on chalkboard dust and their feet without shoes bore the affront of gnarled branches in winter's grip. They would ask me on their journeys *What is it like to lay upon the sky?* and I would reply *Well, it's like rolling in the street only it is blue and there is no one else around.*

*The clouds...the clouds!!*

They wondered, *Really just an inconvenience, they'll go away if you think about it hard enough.* It wasn't true though, and they battered my eyes like a police battalion mounted on horseback with nightsticks that were as long as the skyscrapers, thicker than the city's back, and with fingers that could pick me up and hurl me so far into the sky that I welcomed the sight of even just one cloud, one cloud spread thin like sand across the stratosphere, to rest my head and body on, before gently riding the rain back to the ocean. I would then ride the tide back to the city's outstretched hand, cracked, bitten, torn it would lift me up to the sun, to the rooftops and the endless black sky of her cloudless streets. Where I would sit on the edge of my sheets until the earth lifted, again, the moon to hang like burning meat above the streets.

# ELEGY

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CAMERON MAXWELL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF THE GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

In the middle of the night, glassed over by ice, I followed you there.  
I followed you past the bench where we used to sit;  
it was covered with icicles, half melted  
and accumulated in pools like mirrors on the ground;  
I studied them, I looked at my face in the mirror  
rippling with each new drop cast from the tips of their icy fingers.

The trees stood black in the night sky, and whispered  
amongst themselves about the wind and birds in their hair.  
And how lovers used to carve their names in their skin,  
a vow so sacred that they welcomed their defamation.  
I picked up an icicle and tried to carve out our names there,  
the trees laughed amongst themselves as it melted in my hand.

You kept floating through the trees along the winding road;  
the stars began pissing on my head, and the ground was soaked.  
You walked so elegantly above the horizon, no doubt the sky withheld  
its piss from falling on your head. It drained in my eyes,  
it coated my glasses, it melted the snow, it filed through the branches.  
Through it all you were a small blur of white and gold, radiating

so brightly that all light might have come right from you.  
I called out but I gargled on my words. I called out  
but my mouth was so full. I ran. But so did you.  
Did you hear me call? Or did the sound feet in the night scare you?  
I think you knew it was me. Did you hear the gossip of the trees?  
Rain, or tears, began to wash you from my eyes.

Behind the horizon you disappeared; your golden hair burned out  
like a supernova. I fell to my knees, rain-soaked clothes  
conformed to every last contour of my body and were weighted bounds  
that pulled me down. Couldn't you wait? I knew you wouldn't,  
you were close to home. I could follow you all the way there,  
but I knew the door would be locked and the lights would be off.

It has been four months since you and I walked this way, too  
long for you to remember where we used to sit. We would talk there  
behind the commotion, behind the droves of cyclists and motors,  
behind dogs walking, and strollers with children. But you walked past it all  
without a passing glance from your golden head. Your golden, white  
airy form floated from beyond the horizon into the night and nestled in the sky.

# CLOSE UP

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EMAILE CLEMENT • UNDECLARED



# THE DIFFERENT WARS WE FIGHT

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ISIDRO GALARZA-FERNANDEZ • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The story I am about to tell you is about two different wars. War usually means destruction, death, and anarchy. I want to share a story with you about two individuals that come from different parts of the world. These individuals come from different cultures and customs. They speak different languages and have different skin colors, but they both have fought wars—one a war of poverty and the other a war for freedom.

When I was growing up in Mexico, my family didn't have much to live on. We were so poor that we didn't have a lot of food or clothes. Sometimes, we had to skip a meal during the day. Other times, we didn't have anything to eat for days on end. My aunt worked double shifts just to have money to pay for the next month of rent, so my cousins and I would have a roof to live under during the next 30 days. The money she made was enough to cover only rent and sometimes coffee for our breakfast the next morning. There was nothing left after that.

My cousins and I learned at a young age that even though we were kids, we needed to help provide for our family. Seeing my aunt suffer to provide for us, we realized that if we wanted to have something in life, we had to work for it. We wanted to help her, to give her some relief and to help her with bills. Although we were still too young to work, we did what we could when she wasn't watching us. For example, when I was nine, I used to steal from others to feed my cousins and myself. This may sound like the story of Robin Hood, but this isn't a story. It was real life, my life. I wasn't just another poor kid trying to steal to get money to buy toys or candy; rather, I wanted to help provide a meal for my family. Maybe that's why God was watching me at all times. God was watching when I took a pound of the best ham into the fitting rooms on the other side of the store to hide it between my legs so the guard wouldn't catch me stealing. God was even (surprisingly!) watching when my only purpose for going to church in the afternoons was to take money from the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe in the local cathedral on my way to town to buy bread for the ham and have a nice sandwich. Although the sandwiches did not have lettuce or mayonnaise, they were delicious!

I knew we were poor, but we were together. That was the whole point. I understood that as long as my cousins and I were together, nothing was really

so bad. Life wasn't about being rich and having lots of money. Life was about how family was 100% greater than money, even when money could buy almost everything in life.

Still, I grew up thinking that my life was very unfair and that my childhood wasn't anything like the childhoods I saw painted in storybooks. It was as if my life was not a life at all. Poverty made me feel like I was being punished for something I didn't do. I always felt that the poor people had the worst lives.

I felt this way until I met my friend, Yves Koumangoyi. Like me, Yves was a student at Southeast Community College. In the spring of 2013, we shared two classes in college, Reading Strategies and Beginning Writing. In our writing class, we talked mostly about class and our assignments, in particular. Having Yves as a classmate has been both a blessing and a major learning experience. In one of our assignments in class, I discovered that Yves and I had a lot in common. At first, I assumed that the way he lived his childhood was very similar to mine until he started speaking further and deeper about his life.

Yves has been living in the United States since 2009. He told me that in 2003, civil war in Africa officially started. The dispute between the officials and the high ranking soldiers brought the civil war to Africa in a heartbeat. One of the places affected by this civil war was Congo, where Yves came from. Because of this war, Yves grew up with limitations, just like I did. However, I did not grow up having to fear for my life every day. I was poor, but I was free. Yves was poor and had no freedom. In his own country, the land of his birth, he was a threat to the government just because he wanted to be free. He had to worry about being killed by the shootings that occurred on the streets while he was on his way to work. He had to worry about the rebels fighting against the soldiers on the streets. He had to worry about the vindictive soldiers who were mad because they couldn't finish the war by their actions. He had to live with these fears every day.

Today, Yves says, this war is still going on—maybe not with the same force it was in 2003, but there are still people, rebels, and soldiers who are corrupted by this new government. The only way they know how to survive is by taking justice into their own hands by having a civil war. Congo is still a country of no peace.

After the war was partially over, people in Congo didn't have much to live on. The war destroyed almost everything. There was no work or food, so people started to look for a better place to live. According to Yves, when people wanted to move out of Congo for a better place for their families, they were at risk of being killed for trying to cross the borders between Congo and Gabon, Africa.

I was shocked when he told me about the people who tried to cross the borders of Gabon. If you were caught trying to leave Congo for Gabon and you spoke with a different accent (in this case, from Congo), you could get killed for the simple reason of not being able to speak with the accent of the area—just like that, just like nothing happened, just like your life as a human being wasn't valuable to anyone.

I wish I could tell you that Yves didn't face anything like this during his search for a better place to live and to raise a family, but the fact is he did. He experienced horrible events that no one should ever face, events in which his life depended on others' ideals and beliefs.

Finally, though, Yves crossed the border without trouble. He could hardly remember when he walked through the gates that separated the borders because he was scared out of his mind. He made it to the United States, where he now has a family and is going to college.

Those bad events and experiences that Yves and I lived through when we were younger are what helped to make us who we are today. There is no way to compare my way of growing up in Mexico to his way of life in Africa. We both suffered; we both struggled. By sharing the personal battles we survived, we saw beyond our differences, and we created something many in the world have forgotten about—*friendship*. The only thing we knew for sure was that those terrible moments from our pasts taught us to be better individuals. They taught us to be better to others. Maybe we appreciated every day a little more than others. We have fought our wars, and we are stronger and more peaceful for fighting them. Life has meaning to us because we had to fight for it. In my interview with Yves at SCC's Writing Center, my final question to him was, "Do you think that if you had not left Africa, you would be dead right now?"

He looked at me and without a moment's hesitation said, "Yes, but I am not dead. I am alive, and it feels good to be in school after all those things that I lived through in Africa. Living in the United States has been good for me and my family, and it is a good feeling to be free." 🌀

# JAPANESE STYLE COLLAGE

MEGAN CAMERON • GRAPHIC DESIGN



# SCARRED HERO

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COURTNEY HEAP • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

“Courtney, come here for a sec,” my mom said as she leaned against the threshold of the front door, her back to mine. I slid forward from my perch on the couch, confused and more than a little irritated as I slung a cocoon of blankets from my legs and walked into an unwelcome rush of cold air, triggering a thousand little goose pimples to pop up and down the length of my body. Once I was outside, she stretched her neck up toward the sky and took a deep breath in, eyes closed.

“There, do you smell that?” she asked. I followed suit and came up dry.

With my eyebrows knit together, I made no attempt to mask the annoyance in my voice when I spat, “No—what?!”

Expecting her to react to the tone in my voice, I folded my arms and prepared for defense mode.

“Do you remember when you were little, and we used to sit outside on the porch and watch the clouds shift...?” Trailing off, she breathed in once more. She told me I was the only one who could appreciate the moment with her—the anticipation of rain drawing near.

In that moment, my mind began to wander. On the top shelf of my closet, buried deep in the back, resting next to my baby blanket and snapshots of me in diapers is a small wooden box. My name is carved along its surface with a sun and a few scattered stars. Inside are a few trinkets of my past: my birth certificate, a fake rose encased in a clear glass tube, a second-place beauty pageant ribbon...but most importantly, a small three-by-three print with rounded edges, my favorite picture ever taken of my mother.

The shot is dark and fuzzy. It features my mom standing in the middle of the room; she is no more than three-and-a-half feet tall and is dressed in a blue floral print dress and shimmery lace coverlet with ruffles. Clutched to her chest is a white cake plate that belonged to my great grandmother; it bears a chocolate frosted cake with a big yellow number five candle plunged into its center. Visibly soft brunette hair frames flushed dimpled cheeks and curls at the tips where it crops at her shoulders. And her face glows with the sweetest five-year-old birthday girl smile, stretching from ear to ear.

Looking at this endearing photo of a little girl on her birthday, you would never guess that she would be raised by an abusive father. You could not extract

from the purity of her smile that hate-filled impurities rained down on the struggle of her everyday life. The excited gleam in her eyes gave no pretense to the fact that each new day was a constant source of fear—that as a form of punishment, she would be forced to position her hands in-between the crack of a door as her father slammed it shut, breaking all her fingers in the process. As a result, she would spend the majority of her childhood in and out of friendship homes with her mother and three siblings, who suffered equal accounts of abuse.

The first time I laid eyes on the picture of the sweet dimpled child, I had no idea it was my mother. Three short years of advancing Multiple Sclerosis had transformed her from the person who had raised me into the weathered beauty standing before me. As she tipped her head back, hair fell in black strands well past her shoulders. A deep shade of lavender colored the bags underneath eyes that appeared sunken and tired, even when closed. Her jaw was taut, her lips downturned at the plight of pushing through daily chronic pain.

She placed her hand upon her chest, directly above her heart, reminding me of the time we visited my father at his apartment. It was soon after the divorce. She said they needed to have an “adult conversation,” so my brother led me outside to play. There wasn’t much to do, but fortunately we ran into a kid we knew, who invited us to his apartment for some ice cream. A sharp knock at the door ended all conversation. It was our mother. Her hair was sticking out in every direction, and her cheeks were flushed with anger. She had traveled from door to door of the entire apartment complex to find us. We shuffled out of our friend’s apartment, embarrassed at our mother’s outburst. Her hand covered the area directly above her heart as she breathed in and exclaimed, “You guys don’t understand. You are my air! Take that away, and I can’t breathe.” She shuttered a deep sigh of relief, and we didn’t argue.

My mom had my brother and me at a young age. She didn’t always hold the tools to be Mother of the Year, but she did the best with what she had. I remember one Christmas in particular when I was twelve, and the financial well ran particularly dry. I woke up Christmas Day, giddy and excited, and rushed from room to room to wake my mom and older brother. A few brightly wrapped packages were dotted sparsely underneath the tree, and my mom walked into the room with an apology on her face. She sat nervously by as we ripped our presents to shreds, shame coloring her cheeks when the last gift was soon dispersed and revealed. My brother contentedly explored his new things, but I did nothing to hide my disappointment. I stared down at the meager offerings with disgust and sat on my hands. I did not even take the time to realize that the space in front of her was bare. *You manipulative little bitch.* My mom’s voice reverberated through my mind, and I felt a hollow ache deep

inside. She stormed out of the house that morning in a cloud of rushed words that she would later regret and that I could have acted differently to prevent.

That Christmas was not the first time she would yell so loudly that my bones would shake, and it wouldn't be the last. Our relationship throughout the years would range from hostile indifference to a mutual ceasefire understanding, especially when I became a teenager. Amidst the confrontation, there would be brief periods of time when we wouldn't mind being in the same room with one another, sharing a smile or two. And then she was diagnosed in the fall of 2009 with Multiple Sclerosis, and our household took a dramatic shift. As her condition worsened, I picked up more slack, argued less. We began to talk more and to reach new understandings.

Last Valentine's Day, I left a stuffed animal, a potted Gerber daisy, and a card resting on an ottoman at the end of the stairs. I didn't have a lot of time to pour into the message of the card, so I kept it simple: "You are my friend, my soul mate, my hero, and I am proud to call you my mother." I wasn't there to see her reaction once she found the gifts, but later in the day, she told me that my card had made her cry. When I asked why, her eyes glazed over while her eyebrows pulled together and her lips pursed into a slight pout. "Not one of my three children has ever called me their hero before." I rolled my eyes and smiled, but I knew that we had reached a new level in our relationship.

A drop of rain landed on my cheek and snapped me back to the present. My mom shifted her weight from one leg to the other and held out her hands as a few raindrops stained the cement at our feet. Looking down, I caught sight of the scars peeking out from under her shorts. Multiple swipes from one blade had warped the once smooth skin of her upper thighs—deep crimson lines amongst the thin silver strips of her adolescence. I felt a stab of pain in my chest and began to turn away.

"I'm going to bed, crazy lady," I said softly, walking toward the door and the promising warmth of my bed. My mind returned to the wooden box at the back of my closet. Past the lid with my name carved on its surface and underneath the small souvenirs of my past lay a message burned into the bottom. It read: *Always and forever—Love, Mom.*

I stopped at the front door with my hand on the handle and then turned toward her once more.

"Who?" I prodded.

Not one ounce of confusion passed over her features as the corners of her mouth rose and she replied, "Who loves you the most?"

The familiar words filled me with warmth. "You," I answered.

"Always and forever," she finished.

I turned back around and entered the house as tears filled my eyes. My childhood wasn't perfect. My mom made mistakes, but she was aware of her faults and tried to do what was best in the end. She never pretended to be someone she wasn't and never made a promise she didn't intend to keep. Above all, I knew that I was loved and had someone to turn to when I needed it the most. I raised my right hand to my chest as a silent salute to my hero smiling outside in the rain and headed for bed with the promise of eternal love burning in my heart and a slight grin lifting the sides of my face. 🍷

## TO HEAVEN FROM HELL

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CODY DEPALMA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Knives  
 make rest  
 in my back,  
 keeping me paralyzed,  
 unable to move forward.  
 Chains are tied to their  
 hilts, so ghosts can pull me  
 back, dragging me deeper  
 into an abyss so cold,  
 so numbing,  
 I feel as though  
 death may be a  
 sweet release.

But a warm  
 hand strokes my spine,  
 sending tingles throughout my body.  
 She breathes magic in my ear,  
 holding onto me  
 as we make  
 our ascent.

As I look down,  
 the ghosts are gone,  
 and their chains are laid broken.

# NO HANDLEBARS

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GUILLERMO RIVAS • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

*can ride my bike with no handlebars, no handlebars, no handlebars...*

Flobot was my favorite band during the summer of '01 when I was eleven. Their song "Handlebars" was the anthem to my summer—that was until one dreadful evening in Woodland Park when the lyrics were forever engraved in my inner thoughts as a childish mistake. The event was also a turning point and a reminder to not agree to do everything people asked or dared me to do.

I was in the midst of my summer vacation on my way into fourth grade at Woodland Park Elementary. The sun's pounding heat was starting to ease as sunset approached. With sweat dripping from our foreheads and time running out to play for the day, Brandon, Torey, and I decided to hop on our bikes for one last ride before we had to go home.

We wasted no time, pedaling as fast as our legs could spin. Not even the smell of the perfectly cut grass could spare the yards from our tire tracks. With every curve we hopped came bigger obstacles to challenge each other with. Our journey took us to the top of the neighborhood hill. The bottom of the hill separated us into two different directions, so we stopped to say goodbye. That was when Torey came up with one last challenge.

"Hey, want to know why you guys are all little chickens?" Torey asked.

"I'm no chicken!" I shouted as I attempted to kick his tire.

"Then prove it. I dare you to ride down the hill with no hands on the handlebars."

Before he finished his sentence, there was no doubt in my mind that this was a horrible idea. This was no ordinary hill. At the top, I could overlook all of Woodland Park and spot each one of our houses. Just riding their bikes up the hill would force the sixth graders to surrender and walk the remainder of the trip.

"I double dare you," said Brandon in order to save himself from the death trap.

"Triple dog dare you!" added Torey.

I now knew I couldn't back down from the challenge. I knew that if I accomplished this dare, I would return to school next month a folk hero, like the ones we had read about. I knew the challenge had to be done. Staring down the hill, I realized how small I was compared to the world. I felt as if I was the size of an ant looking down my colony's hill. At last, I knew it was now or never.

"See you chickens down the hill."

I took a gentle push with my foot, and off I was to meet my destiny. No peddling was needed to build momentum. In no time, I was zooming down the sharply inclined hill.

“You’re crazy!” both Brandon and Torey shouted.

My eyes grew big as I made my way down. By the third house, I built the courage to gradually and cautiously release my hands from the handlebars. My tempo continued to gain, but my balance remained steady. The wind pushed through my hair as my mood went from petrified to excited. I felt like I was on top of Mount Everest and was making my way to the bottom on my way to claim my spot as the little kid that lived on Forest Drive who conquered the unthinkable and the unimaginable. My heart pounded as I made my way to the homestretch.

With adrenaline pumping through my veins and my eyes bulging, I noticed what I hadn’t on my countless other trips through the years. Poor maintenance of the road had contributed to the last 20 yards being sheer ruggedness. The shakes began before I could accept defeat and grab firmly to the handlebars. It felt as if the whole road was quaking. Not wanting to see what was about to happen next, I closed my eyes. Suddenly, I flipped over the handlebars and flew into the air like a professional gymnast.

My eyes stayed shut as I heard screams in the distance. In a state of confusion, I was not sure what had happened. I opened my eyes and stared at the orange sky. As I remained numb, I turned my head to assess the damage that had been inflicted on my bike. By now, Brandon and Torey had raced down the hill and were staring at me in utter shock. I was saddened to think that my bike had been destroyed when I saw the looks on their faces. I tried to get up as if I was Hulk Hogan, but I had no strength to push myself up. Confused, I looked down, and that’s when my face went pale. My bike wasn’t the one that felt the impact of the crash—my right arm did. Deformed and battered, my arm resembled an uncooked Ramen Noodle. Instantly, I lost feeling as my body tilted back to the pavement.

“Are you okay?” asked Brandon in a casual tone.

“No, he’s not okay, you goof. Look at his arm!” shouted Torey

“Help!” they both screamed as I stayed motionless.

“Hey, is everything okay over there?” asked a neighbor that had been tending to his garden. He quickly walked toward my limp body. The look in his eyes was a reminder of how badly beat my arm was. “Let’s get you home to your parents, buddy.”

As I rode in the man’s rusty truck, all I could think about was if my parents were going to be mad at me. The thought of being yelled at or disciplined for my foolish attempt numbed any pain in my arm. Once we were onto Forest Drive, I could see

that both my dad and mom were outside our tan house. My mother was watering her precious roses as my dad polished his black Durango. My parents turned toward the truck as they heard the sound of doors closing. At first glance, my parents were puzzled as to why I had just gotten out of a stranger's truck. Their eyes focused on me clenching my arm before they could say a word. My mother, slack-jawed at the sight of seeing her youngest child in pain, quickly began asking questions.

“What happened to you? Are you okay? Does it hurt?” my mother began asking.

“Honey, relax. It's okay,” said my dad in an attempt to calm my worried mother. “Looks like you had a little too much fun today, kiddo.”

I was relieved to know my parents were not mad at me and were just happy to know that I was okay. As quickly as my mom was asking questions, we were off to the hospital to replace elbow pads for a cast.

A month later, summer ended, and I was back to riding my bike to Woodland Park Elementary. I was to begin fourth grade with a blue cast still shielding my arm. I came to a halt as I was about to pass that mountainous hill. I took a moment to reflect on why I was forced to wear the restraint. I then realized that there were some lyrics you should only sing along to and not attempt. More importantly, you shouldn't accept every challenge or dare that comes your way. I was now forever known in elementary as the only person to ever try—and fail—riding down Woodland Park's giant hill with no hands on the handlebars. 🐉

## NIOBRARA RIVER

CHRISTIE LEFEBVRE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# OUTSIDE THE CAR, THE MIDDLE OF SPRING, MISTY

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*MYSTERY HARWOOD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER*

i  
wander in the night's indifference  
through two birdsongs and three meat vendors.  
i didn't know at night they call  
the birds to the men  
the men back to the birds  
whose plumage is inky like the air that slinks  
across my bare skin, not wet but still slick,  
the fluid of the night.  
i press it against my wrists,  
the air. i lift them to my brow and breathe.  
thoughts are there in ferment  
i can pick one up and examine it.  
a warmth in my palm, it collides  
with the night and flees.  
it spills away, into a haze away  
above my head and drifting  
slipping farther than my hands,  
curled and furred in the tinkling breeze,  
can reach.

# ARTWORK COLLECTION

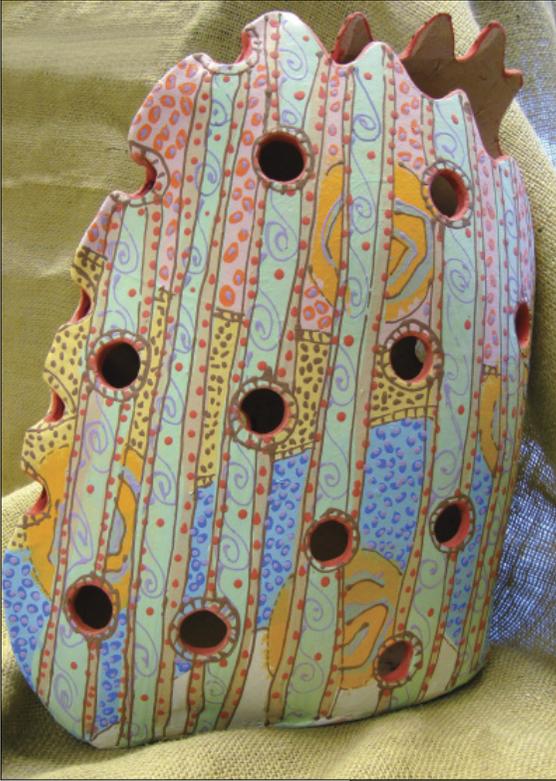
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NANCY HAGLER VUJOVIC • ART INSTRUCTOR

## OLIVER (KILN GOD)

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POT II

---

UNTITLED  
POTTERY

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# A LATE FROST

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KARA GALL • ADJUNCT ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

We thought we had made it. We had put out tremendous flight on a balmy day in early March, and since then, we'd been making multiple trips to the fields closest to the hive. Sure, the nectar flows were weak, but our reserves were growing. Yesterday, we finally started capping some cells. Until we begin capping, our food can disappear in a day or two. Traditionally, the capping of the cells heralds our Great Rite, *The Flush of Spring Bloom*, and by evening, word had come down from the Queen that we would gather at midnight. We feasted throughout the night on high-sugar honey, sure of a prosperous season.

Needless to say, I didn't want to go out this morning. Better to stay in. Better not to break the low-humming trance juddering from thousands of rapidly moving wings. Sometime in the night, I'd had a revelation. I understood, on a primal level, the great spiritual cycle I was born into. I felt the sugar reserves transforming into raw power, fueling my wing muscles. I wasn't bee—I was glucose, pure energy. The urgency of rubbing wing to wing, the thrumming infinity of all of us humming as one—we were the honey. I knew it then, that the sound and vibration was a kind of karmic passcode. These were my credentials. They echoed through the combs of the hive and confirmed that I belong.

In the wake of such visions, no wonder I feel cold. Still, there is a job to do, and I have never been one to shirk responsibility. I crawl out from the hive and take flight toward flowers, the last tendrils of sound clinging to me like pollen.

At first, the flight is easy. Over the past few weeks, the scouts had outlined a clear path through the flowering canyon. Everything seems numinous today. The plants signal a flight pattern, a landing strip, a subtle cobalt arrow of intention that I feel I have followed in hundreds of lifetimes. Each flower beckons enticingly, a beacon in a sea of rock. I fly further than I have flown before, yearning to taste the nectar beyond. Today is the day after *The Flush—The Flush!*—and I feel prosperous. I exist to bring prosperity to my hive.

The electricity of a bright yellow flower, a buzzing ultraviolet blue to my bee eyes, guides me in. Before I have even landed, the pollen snaps around me, embracing me. The flower's sepal arches under me, tilting briefly toward the ground and then bouncing upward again. Yet, something is not right. As I scoot down toward the pistil and stamen, the cool ridges of the petal surface chill my

feet. I probe the first nectary, then the next, but I can't seem to get to any sweet ambrosia. I've heard stories—urban legends, I thought—propagated by the brood nannies to keep us in line, of bees injuring their proboscises. *Hole in the straw, no food in the maw*, they preached. Perhaps I injured myself at *The Flush*? No, surely something is wrong with the nectar.

I must try another source. I lift off from the flower, my body heavy with pollen. No, not just pollen. I am heavy with cold. What I thought was the psychic residue of the previous night's festivities is real, honest-to-goodness cold. I struggle to remember something my teacher told me about frosts, the moon, and the first song of the cicada. The chill is starting to affect my mind. I can't remember the proverb, but I remember the warning. *Bees that chill soon lie still*. If I get too cold, I will no longer be able to fly. I stretch my wings, trying to make them longer, willing the muscles to break the rusty frost, determined to make the distance back across the ridge to the hive.

Contingency plans. I must make contingency plans. If I lose control, I will fall to the ground. If I fall in shadow, the cold earth will rob me of what little body heat I have left. I see myself lying comatose on a ground, torpid but aware. I will temporarily have just enough compound vision left to see the bodies of my hive mates peppering the ground. In multi-faceted dimensions, capturing my attention from 6000 small angles of light, I'll note the indigo shape of horned lizard scurrying across the ground. Weak and paralyzed from the cold, I'll see it stalking the others. One after the other, in cruel succession, it will approach the fallen on squat legs until at least it hovers above me, picking me up with its beak. With the last bit of struggle I possess, I will sting, leaving one dignified character in a row of sting marks written inside the margin of this lizard's lips. But my sting will be nothing more than spice to the pan, a savory sensation before the delicate crunch of my body meets the roof of reptile mouth.

No! I must pull myself from this vision. *Only see where you want to be* my teacher told me. I cannot wait to lose control. Better to land purposefully outside of shadow, outside the path of hunger. Better to find a small patch of ground where the sun will shine on my feathered back, warming me until I am strong enough to begin the ancient ritual of flight preparation. I imagine the sun. I imagine buzzing my wings in bursts, ridding myself of any extra weight from my flying surfaces, cleansing my eyes, my wings, my body. I'll unload my pollen baskets and be free for flight once again. Then, I'll take off in normal flight back to the hive, a pulsing warm fullness filling my belly. Inside the hive, heated to my maximum muscular and neural pitch, I will move freely once again into the dark congestion of family. I'll give them my credentials, and, together, we'll jam nectar into every cell. 

# TRAIN COLLAGE

LYNN DYER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# RELUCTANT LOVE

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ALANNA JOHNSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR POETRY

Staring is a bad habit for my guitar.  
His stare always faced me,  
Beckoned to be played.  
Lazily strumming didn't count,  
playing meant always  
to strum with purpose.

I faced back, and begged him to stop  
The guilt look on his curved face.  
Beckoned somewhere else;  
I had *things* to do.  
If he could play himself, I knew  
he would.

The "hammer ons" and  
"picking offs" would be directed at me.  
My guitar didn't understand,  
dust just meant maturity;  
other guitars meant nothing,  
I promised.

I stopped all potential focus,  
faced him with adult intentions,  
and played his seductive tune.  
Despite the glaring argument  
that occurred, I apologized  
by means of minor chords.

Apology accepted, I set him faced up right  
Allowing him to rest his now  
Warmed timber against the couch's thigh.  
His gaping mouth smirked,  
Humming the strum I left him with.

# SUCH IS THE WAY OF LIFE

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SHARON EDIC • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

It was the usual routine for my mother to throw my belongings into a black garbage bag, pull the yellow plastic drawstrings together into a tight knot, and then throw the bag in the car. I was never sure why she did this; I was never sure where she was taking me; but then again, I was never sure of anything back then. I was four years old at the time with hair color of fire auburn red and green and golden dried sunflower-colored eyes. I never had clothes that fit. They were always either too small or too big. All I remember are a few fading memories that were spent with her. The memories I recall do not bring me a happy feeling. It feels like I've lived different lives during this lifetime; I am older and wiser.

When I try to draw memories from my memory bank that stores the tales of lost times spent with my mother, I don't remember her being in the picture often, but I do remember thinking she was the most beautiful woman in the world; at the time, I could see past her ugly spirit. She had long, dark, ale-colored waves of hair that sat perfectly curled upon her shoulders. She had big blue eyes that either brought comfort to me knowing that she was home, or—when she opened them as wide as she could—, would send pure terror shivers down my spine. To me, she was a giant, taller than the trees and with the body of a goddess. No one was more gorgeous than my precious mother, but I realized there were few who were as ugly as she when my childish perception started to meet maturity and understanding.

“Mommy, where are you?” I remember thinking to my four-year-old self. “I'm so hungry.” I remember grabbing a broken chair from underneath the table and pushing it up against the white fridge. I crawled up onto the chair to open the freezer. I looked around the freezer, and all I saw were bags of frozen corn and peas and loaves of bread. At the age of four, I could not make these things for myself. I crawled off the stool. My knees were burning from my skin rubbing against the wood so fiercely. I opened the fridge, and there was only a carton of eggs and spoiled milk. As my tummy growled, I plopped myself down on the brown velvet couch and began to scan the coffee table in front of me for something to eat. I saw an ashtray with used matches, and cluttered to the side were some papers. I began to lick the matches, and the taste was catching with salt and ash. I began to tear the papers into shreds and rolled them up into little

balls and placed them in my mouth. I let my saliva soak the paper until I was able to swallow it. All of a sudden, I heard the door handle to the trailer turn, and I turned to look.

I'm not sure why I was afraid, but I remember being purely terrified. I saw my mother and ran to hide behind the brown velvet couch. She was angry about something. "Mommy, don't!" I remember crying between high-pitched screams. Without saying anything, she grabbed my upper arm and dragged me out from behind the couch. My unclipped large toenail on the right foot caught on the carpet and tore down to the skin as she dragged me into the back bedroom. She snapped her belt to make a loud whip noise. She drew her hand back and whipped it towards me. I blacked out. When I came back to reality, I was hiding underneath the newly blood-stained white sheets that cupped her bed. I remember a dark feeling, one that crept over me with such a haunting, sad emotion. I was confused as to why my own mother would do this to me, but I loved her unconditionally, and I thought it was natural.

The next day, I saw my mother grabbing my clothes and stuffing them into a garbage bag. I didn't have much except for clothes that never fit right and a toy pony. She didn't say anything to me; instead she had her eyes so wide open that I knew I had done something wrong, so I stayed out of her way. From the trailer window, I watched her throw the trash bag into the maroon car and slam the door. My heart was flickering with anxiety and the fear of what was to come next. She stomped through the door, picked me up, and slammed the cheaply made metal door behind her. We flew down the broken wood steps and onto the gravel driveway. She set me down and opened the backseat door and shoved me into the car. I felt confused and thought, "What did I do wrong? What did I do?" I ran my fingers against the velvet and pulled my fingers away from it instantly. The feeling of velvet was suddenly made into a trigger for me, a trigger that velvet would cause for the rest of my life when it brought me instantly back to that memory.

"Mommy, where are we going?" I asked. She said nothing. I then became scared.

Finally, she took a deep breath and said, "Tesia, you are going to stay with a couple of close friends for a while. Everything is going to be fine." I noticed that she was in a state I had never seen her in before. Her eyes were intent, and a frown masked her face. She had a sickly aura floating off her. Usually, when she was angry, she didn't have such a morbid look to her, and I never sensed such a feeling before. I thought she was running from an abusive boyfriend or a drug dealer; she always had those problems, and I thought nothing of it. I wasn't too bothered when she told me she was dropping me

off somewhere. I knew she'd be back and that she just had to take care of something...for us—right?

We traveled a long time and pulled off onto a gravel road. After several miles, we finally came to a driveway, and that driveway led up to a beautiful, large brick house. Something at the time didn't feel right, but then again, not feeling right was a regular feeling for me in the first place. I wasn't much afraid, but this time I knew something was different due to the tears falling down my mother's face. We walked up to the house, and a lady with blonde curly hair opened the door. My mother didn't even go inside. She handed the trash bag to the lady and said, "Thank you." She then turned to me, got down on her knees, and said, "I love you very much, Tes. I will be back for you." I remember looking at her and feeling no emotion. She kissed me on my forehead, and I watched her get into her car and drive away.

My head was buzzing, and I had an out-of-body experience at that moment. The lady behind me got down on her knees in front of me. There were tears in her eyes, and I didn't understand why. "Tesia, my name is Julie. This is going to be your new home. I want you to know the truth, and it's going to hurt you. Your mother isn't coming back for you, and we are never going to let her hurt you again." I shook my head as if I understood, but I didn't. I didn't know what adoption meant, and I surely didn't know that it meant I would never see my mother again. I had hope, though. My heart forever stayed on that doorstep waiting for my mother to come back for me.

Later that night, Julie waited for her children and husband to come home. They were a well-off, organized family. They were all clean-cut; the children were honor students, and the parents were modest farmers. Julie lined her children up from oldest to youngest. "This is Kayla, the oldest. Then comes Karissa, Andrew, Brianna, and Janessa. This is my husband, Bruce. You may call us Mom and Dad if you want to; if not, I understand. We will be having dinner soon, and in the meantime, why don't we go unpack your things in your new room?" She grabbed my hand and showed me my room.

I had never had a room before—already I felt like a princess. The bed had Pocahontas covers on it, and there was a Princess toy chest just for me to put all my toys in. The walls were plain white but had Disney Princess posters all over them. Julie started to unpack all my clothes out of the trash bag. She pulled out a pair of pants that were obviously too small for me and lifted them to her nose. She sniffed and made a scowling face and threw them to the side; she then picked up the next article of clothing and repeated the same thing. Instead of pulling out the rest of the clothes, she looked overwhelmed and said to me, "This is much worse than we thought it was."

*14 years later*

A year after my mother left me with Julie, I was put into a home with another couple. Bruce and Julie were unable to keep me because they already had five children of their own, and it was difficult to take care of me. It was emotionally rough for the next several years of my life. Every day, there was an empty hole in me and devout confusion. There were many other hardships I had to endure that were just as rough as that particular event in my life, if not more difficult. My adopted mother didn't truly want me, but my adopted father did. He passed away from colon cancer when I was 17. My adopted mother then did everything she could to take the money my father had left me, and she tried to put me back in the system. I fell into drugs and was constantly in trouble with the law. I wouldn't say I had it easy. I'd rather say I'd been dealt a tough hand, but such is the way of life. Every time I'd fall into a deep, dark pit of what I thought was emotional despair, everything that added up to that point in my life would come crumbling apart. It would always break down to the exact moment my mother left me. It would seem that the room was spinning, and sharp physical pain would shoot through my heart and sting my fingertips. My face would be buried in my pillow or partaking in substances, depending on which dark area of my life I was in, crying for my mother—asking where she was, why she had left me, and how this had happened to me; I did nothing to deserve this life. I still yearned for my mother because the adopted mother took everything from me; she didn't love or want me. She constantly betrayed me by lying about me to teachers, family, and strangers. I was struggling to be a teenager, and another mother that didn't want me made it emotionally hard. I had no one to talk to. Then it came to me. Instead of beating on my chest with utterly pathetic emotions flowing through me, I'd ask her the questions myself.

I sought out my mother. I had to start from the roots, the first family to take me in from the foster system. I called up my wonderful temporary mother to ask her a few questions about my mother and where I could possibly find her. Julie was always stern and honest in her ways, and she told me news that may have stirred some negative feelings toward my mother and my "unconditional love" for her. "This choice to meet your mother could affect you emotionally for the rest of your life. Be sure this is what you want to do. Since you are 18, you are now old enough to understand; I will tell you the details about your mother and why the situation happened in the first place. You see, your mother was a negligent drug addict. She had mental issues and refused to work. She would drop you off at places for weeks at a time, and people would have to find her to pick you back up again. There were people calling the State because she had screwed-up intentions for you. When you first came to me, you had no clothes

that fit, and they were all covered in urine. You were not potty trained at the age of four, and when we gave you food, you hid it in the corner of the closet and covered it in newspaper like someone who was hoarding to survive..." She continued on with even more ridiculous details that would make any right individual's gut wrench with sadness and disgust. I was heartbroken and utterly crushed, but I still needed to get the answers I craved from my mother herself.

After a year or two of searching for her, I found a biological aunt on Facebook who gave me my mother's number. When I finally received the number from my aunt, I dialed it on my phone. Time stopped ticking, and I felt that I experienced an out-of-body phenomenon. Everything was surreal; there was only a send button between me and the woman who made me pay for her sins my entire life, the woman I had overflowing love for. Everything in my life surrounded that moment, the moment I had been waiting for. All I wanted was to ask why. I nervously pushed the send button, and the phone started ringing.

*Ring.*

*Ring.*

"Hello?" she said.

"Ugh...um...hi...this is Tesia...I..." I stammered out. I had not planned what I wanted to say to her. All the emotions from the past memories were stirring in me; tears stung my eyes.

"Oh, Tesia!" she exclaimed with relief and bursts of cries. "I'm so, so sorry for everything. I'm so sorry." I let her explain everything with great detail, and I was happy to start getting answers, but I soon began to feel sickness in my gut. I did not remember most of the conversation because I stopped listening when I realized she was lying to me. I could feel it; her words weren't matching the original story.

She then turned the conversation into how it was my fault that our family was destroyed. She yelled at me, "What did you tell them?!"

I was so confused; everything went dark and chaotic. I hung up on her and broke down. I thought, "I should have listened to Julie. These questions would have been better off left unanswered." This experience answered my questions, but it hurt more than ever before. I swore to myself that I would never be a mother like that if I ever had a child.

This has made me into who I am. It is in solitude where I find happiness, and it was the way I have learned to adapt and to live. It is hard to be strong, but sometimes a person becomes so numb that she tricks others into thinking she is strong. I grew up never needing anyone in my life emotionally, and that philosophy has made me a bitter individual. My experience was hard to handle, and I didn't want anyone else going through that, especially my own child. I am

now a single mother of a beautiful son named Kai. I am so afraid of becoming my mother that it has made me overprotective. I treat my son exactly how I wished I would have been treated growing up. I will do anything to make sure that my son has a mother that will never hurt him, betray him, or leave him. 🍀

## LONG WALK HOME

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BECKY HILL • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



# NUMBER 9

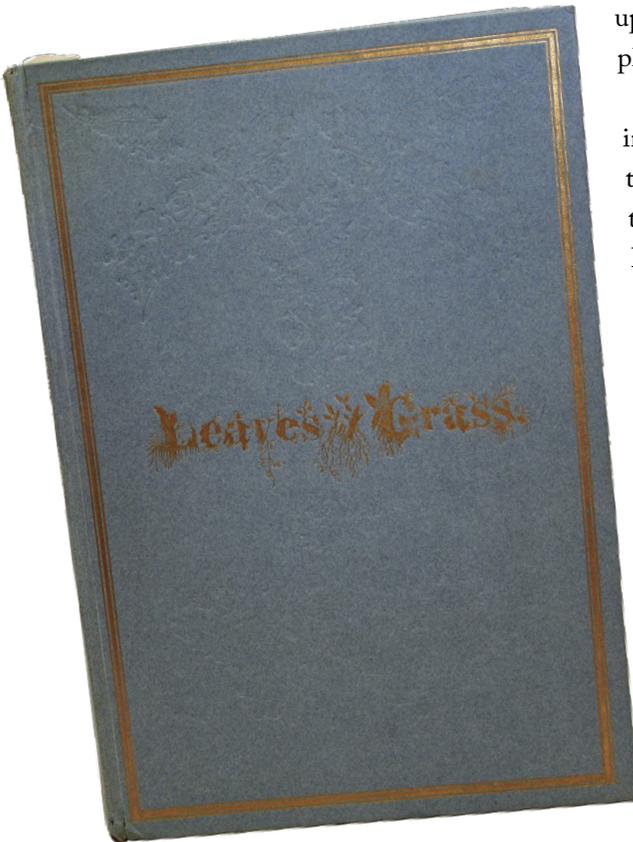
STEPHEN M. KAMINSKI • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

**A** *uthor's note:* Always in search of an old book with stories to be told—outside of the ones written within it—I obtained number 9 of 100 in a facsimile edition of the original *Leaves of Grass*. In retrospect, what book would have more stories to tell than a nearly 100-year-old *Leaves of Grass*? Upon receiving this book, I found an *Ex Libris* stamp of William Sturgis Bigelow that started my journey to find and, consequently, tell the story of Number 9. It was a magical journey of opening doors that had been closed and may have stayed closed forever if no one had taken the time to open them and see what was there.

The year was 1919, the place, Portland, Maine. It was 100 years from the date of birth of the renowned poet Walt Whitman. It is here where this story of Number 9 will begin a journey that will take us far from then while ending us

up in very much the same place.

Something special was in the works, something that would forever change the year 1919—Thomas Bird Mosher would see to that. He took it upon himself to celebrate the birth of Whitman by re-releasing the time-changing poetry *Leaves of Grass*. Mosher knew that just another copy of this masterpiece would be an injustice. In order to do this right, it had to be a facsimile edition of the 1855 original. It would have the same powder blue paper-board



cover with gold gilt lettering celebrating the title. Roots, entangling each letter within the title, would represent what little control one has of nature. Leaf and flower motifs, embedded in the face as well as the spine, would give the look of the original, but that would not be enough. Each of the 95 pages would come from only the highest quality paper. Hand-made, uncut Van Gelder would be the choice to embrace the letters within this work of art. Upon completion, the book would be perfect, the mirror image of its maker. The only thing left to do was to limit this edition; there would be only 100 copies made, ensuring that only true admirers of Whitman's work obtained one.

With calm winds moving the clouds just enough to let the sun burn off a morning fog, Mosher opened his print shop. The silence within gave him time to understand. Soon, the process would begin.

Settings were calibrated to fit the eight by eleven-inch frame of the hardback, and with the typesets in place, anticipation built. The time was now. The smell of dried uncut paper followed by that of fresh ink blocked out all sound; hours passed. As the mid-morning sun worked to break through the years of incrustation on the south facing windows, the paper seemed to have purpose. Life was near. With its last efforts, the sun's rays broke in, illuminating the space as if it knew. Number 9, still warm, was offered to the world.

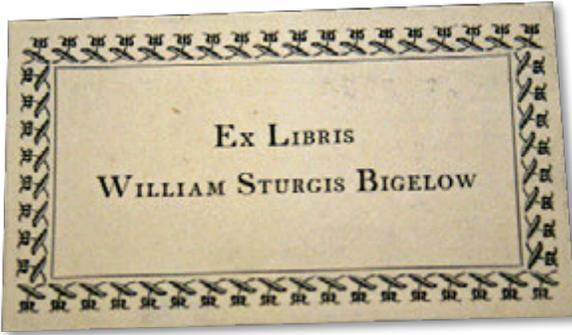
As the day's work concluded, the sunlight left, taking the life that had earlier filled the room through the window in which it had come. The *Leaves of Grass* 1919 facsimiles were now completed, stacked, and ready for distribution. As expected, most of this edition would be spoken for in advance. Number 9 of 100 was on the way to begin life in the home of a man, William Sturgis Bigelow.

Bigelow's obtaining Number 9 of this limited edition would come as no surprise to the ones who knew him. Bigelow was a scholar and a lover of the arts. He also lived his life in such a way that it celebrated the many things that Whitman's work stood for. When word of this re-release reached Bigelow, he instantly knew a copy must complement his library—and complement it did, for the next seven years.



*Upon arrival at my new home, my excitement was uncontrollable as I saw where I would be spending my days. I would rest next to the most sought after titles of my time to the most obscure; the spice of life would be plentiful in Bigelow's extensive library. I, like the others within his collection, would be welcomed with an Ex Libris stamp inside my front cover that would forever tell of my location.*

*As the days passed, I could not have been more pleased with my home, as Bigelow entertained on a regular basis. It would not be uncommon for the likes of Henry Adams and Theodore Roosevelt to be enjoying me during the many lawish gatherings*



at Bigelow's retreat in Nantucket. I will tell you, life could not get any better for me; I could not ask for more. Sadly, though, change would be on the horizon as Bigelow passed on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of October, 1926. This brought an unfamiliar feel to the air surrounding my

still young and fragile life. For the first time, I felt uncertain.

As the passing of the only man I ever knew came upon me, I would try to process loss; I was far too young to understand. With Bigelow having no wife or children, I would, without a doubt, be preparing for a future in an unknown place with unknown people. I woke one morning and found myself no longer on the shelves of the library that embraced me for the first seven years of my life. Overlooking beautiful Tuckernuck Island in Nantucket was now a memory.



Over the years, I would live in any number of areas throughout the Northeast; passing days felt like years. I would be sent from auction to auction never to be home. I was sold countless times to where I no longer had feeling. The orphan life had become a new normal. This life would prove difficult as struggling for acceptance, never to realize its unattainability, is an empty life. I would begin to contemplate my existence; how could it be that I was treated in this way? After all, I was Leaves of Grass.

During these endless years of dejection, I would, many times, think of my brothers and sisters in print. I wondered how their lives had turned out. Would they be better off than I? I dreamt of how much better they must have it, and how I had nothing. It would be at a destination in Buffalo where I hit bottom. During yet other relocation, I was carelessly tossed toward a storage box, and my life would be forever changed. The year was 1978, and my hinge would officially become loose. I was no longer whole.



With 30 years past, I reached what would turn out to be a more stable location. I would rest in the home of a New York man who came across me at an outdoor flea market. This would be a fine stop in comparison to others, but my damaged soul would not allow me to get too comfortable. I would become complacent here until the next something came along. Life was livable.

It was here that I overheard a rumor of the location of one of my sisters, Number 68. I trembled with anxiousness as the details came forth. Number 68 was for sale through an online dealer. My excitement grew, as this was the first I had known of the others since inception. As Number 68's description was made known, my mood

suddenly changed. It was the feeling one gets when the heart knows something that has not yet been shared with the mind. Number 68 had seen difficult times and had taken on serious damage. The cover had completely separated from the text, and there were significant water stains throughout. If this was not enough, the unspeakable was forthcoming: Number 68 would be without all of the glorious uncut pages within. I took this moment to reflect.

As I lay in a stack with countless others, I began to think maybe things were not that bad, maybe this life was one to envy. After all, I had all of my pages and was able to bring joy to so many destinations, be it monetarily more times than not, but still, joy was joy. At this time I looked within myself for the answers. I came to the only conclusion possible: I would stop feeling sorry for myself and begin to celebrate myself.

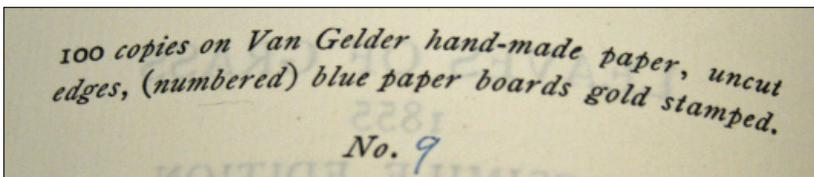
This new outlook on my life would bring me great pleasure and comfort in the same way that the poems within me had brought pleasure and comfort to so many. I found myself at the bottom of yet another old box, ready for an estate auction. The year had just turned 2012; I was changed and rejoiced in the idea of bringing happiness to another unknown home. Later that day, I was packed with many others that would be, in others' eyes, not worthy of sharing a space with a literary masterpiece like *Leaves of Grass*. This fact didn't bother me a bit; as I now shared Whitman's love of pure companionship, I would show no prejudice. I reached a new understanding of life.



The cool morning air brought more than a chill to the prospective bidders at an auction in Marlborough, New York. The unknown future of Number 9 was soon to be addressed. The auctioneer, who had no knowledge of Number 9 living in that old box, would begin the bidding at a minimum. The set that auction goes would call a "lot" would shortly be awarded to a gentleman who was in from Ohio. Going once, going twice, sold! Number 9 had a new home, and for the first time, it would not be in the beautiful Northeast.



I made many more stops on that day-long trip that felt like a month, but alas, I arrived at my new home. As the pickup pulled into the drive, I had visions of glass cases with possibly an accent light. I was getting ahead of myself—a wooden shelf would be more than pleasant. With anxiety at a high, I remembered hearing the astonishment in the voice of the man when he discovered me in the bottom of the box.



*"Amazing!" the man roared. "Simply amazing!" Dollar signs overtook him while familiarity did me.*



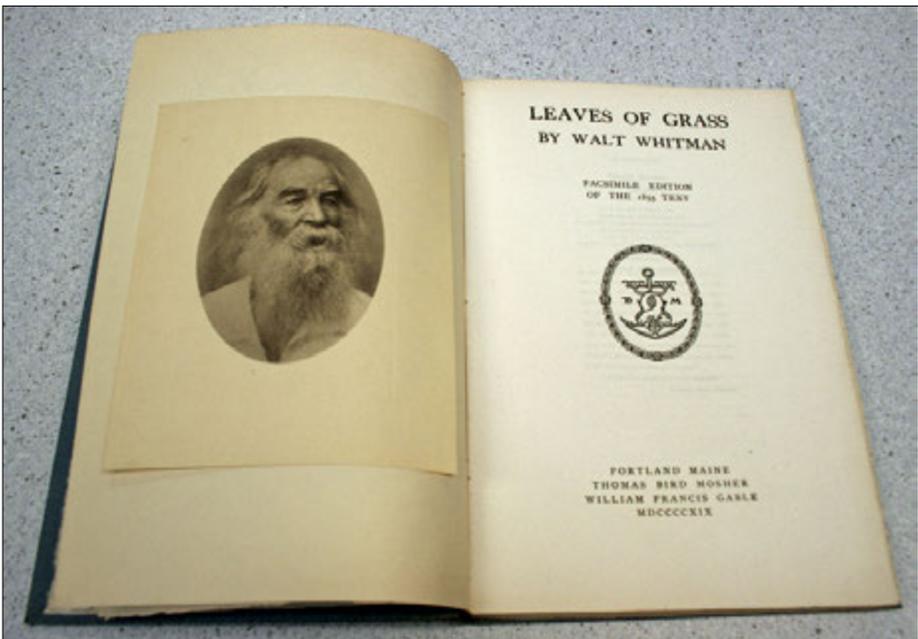
This would be another short stay; Number 9 was listed for sale the following week.

As the online auction began, the new owner had high hopes; he would not be let down, as Number 9 would sell quickly. A couple from a bedroom community in eastern Nebraska would show an interest and take advantage of a seller that was looking for a quick gain, and quite possibly, did not know exactly what he had. Number 9 was sold to Conrad Michael for a more than reasonable price. Conrad and his wife, lovers of poetry and the arts, would lose sleep the following nights awaiting the arrival of Number 9 to their home. Finally, on an unseasonably warm day late in the year, the delivery was made. It was a time that would not soon be forgotten. Number 9 was innocent to the future.



*As my new owner delicately opened my front cover, I immediately let out a breath. Nearly 100 years of life filled the air with the smells that only one of my experiences could possess. I was a bit dusty, but as I took in my new surroundings, I knew something was different. This was not an auction house, and in no way did it feel as though I was going to be instantly packaged and resold. No, something was different. This stop reminded me of a place, but I could not connect that faded memory just yet.*

*As I became more acquainted, I noticed the subtleties of my new resting place. There were works of art adorning the walls and the sound of music softly filling the*



*air. I remember thinking, could this be true? Had I finally arrived in a home where I would be celebrated? That afternoon, friends of the Michaels stopped by to appreciate me and later that night, took turns reading from me. Oh, it had been years since anyone had read from me, celebrating all that was *Leaves of Grass*. My old memories reemerged in perfect clarity; I recalled my first home with Bigelow.*

*It had been nearly 90 years since I had graced that beautiful man's home, and I was embarrassed to say that I had lost track of the last time I had even thought of him. Time can be cruel in that way. As I contemplated these thoughts, it seemed that all of the less than desirable situations of the past were fading from my memory; this new experience was flooding my every thought. At this time, I was put into my new home, an early 1900's dark walnut case with glass doors and an accent light, mind you—complete satisfaction. Just when I thought I could live in that moment forever, I noticed something, opposite side of me, on the same shelf. The words read "Buddhism and Immortality"; my emotions took complete control of me. The small burgundy colored hardback would be one of a lecture series by my William Sturgis Bigelow that was published in 1908. It was at this moment that I would succumb to complete nirvana. I was home, again, for the first time. 🌀*



Stephen Kaminski, "Conrad Michael" in his story, holds No. 9.

# PHOTO COLLECTION

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PATRICIA WAGNER • BEATRICE CAMPUS SECRETARY

## ADRIFT

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## RUSTIC TETON BARN

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# SUNSET ON EGG HARBOR

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NEEDS SOME PAINT!

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# HELENA

BY LINDSAY DOLAN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

“Miss.” A practiced voice calls for my attention. I close my book, my index finger keeping place between the pages, and look over my shoulder at the man.

“Yes?” I say unsociably.

“Your mother demands you see her at once.” Disappointed, I look down at my book. It’s a shame; I had only just reached the climax—Mother has impeccable timing. I set the book down on the tea table and stand up tall and straight.

“Well, I mustn’t keep her waiting.”

I walk into my mother’s private quarters where she stands with her back to me wearing the same color she’s grieved in for the last two seasons. It is no secret to me, nor to the entire town of Brookshire, that she has not yet gotten past my father’s death. Personally, I never knew the man closely, as he was quite the working man and never too affectionate. But it suits him, and our family, well. “You called on me, Mother?” I say in the most obsequious tone I can draw up. She takes a long minute to answer me, and I wait, patiently, with my hands behind my back.

“I have a proposition for you,” she says finally. I sway slightly forward to keep the blood flowing through my legs beneath my skirt.

“What will you have of me?”

“We have been offered a proposal of marriage. You are our only heir, my daughter.” She pauses, and I do not speak, for I am completely speechless. “Willard Thomas has asked me for your hand. And I accepted.”

“Mother...,” the word comes out in a whisper. “He is nearly twice my age!” Mother turns around so quickly that her black dress vaguely spins up. Her dark blue eyes stare back at me with a sort of urgency that says she is not to be crossed.

“And it is a good match! He is a good man, one of the wealthiest in town. You will never have to be concerned about money or status with him, my dear. Mr. Thomas will treat you fairly, and he will do our family good. And it seems your charm and beauty has intrigued him. He adores you.”

Adore? *Adore. Adore.* Not love, but adore. That is the lonesome, empty word I fear I will be facing for the rest of my life. “Mother, forgive me, but our family is well off as it is. What is the true meaning behind your acceptance to Mr. Thomas’s proposal?”

Mother runs her hands down the front of her dress, revealing to me another emotion. Shame? Certainly a moment of unease. She looks at me sternly. “The money is gone.”

“What do you mean? How? All of it?”

“Your father damned us with nothing but an empty account hidden behind an acceptable name.”

I look at her apologetically, even remorsefully. “My apologies, Mother. I had no idea.”

She walks across the room to me and caresses my hands softly. “You and Mr. Thomas make a fine match. Be grateful. He is going to save our family and our name from humiliation and bankruptcy.”

I pause. “What about James?”

This time, my mother looks at me with pity. “James is an acceptable young man, Clarisse, but he is not for you. He has no money. No savings. And no high-end name—nothing to benefit this family.” I pause to consider this.

“My dear mother, he is not a poor man.”

“Don’t be foolish. James Hawkwood is a dreamer, Clarisse. Now, I am aware of what you seek and that the boy gives you exactly that. But he has only enough to get by with the barest of minimums. I will have nothing and no one if you marry such a man.”

I turn my chin and gaze out the window in a dreary haze. “Clarisse? Do you understand me?” Mother’s voice barks, echoing off the richly-colored walls. Her tone is similar to a scolding and makes me freeze, as any child getting scolded would react. “Clarisse!”

“I understand, Mother.”

“Promise me you will never see James privately again.”

My eyes flash to my mother in terror as she speaks her last demand.

“Clarisse! Do not bite your bottom lip; you know how I hate that!”

My top teeth pull out of my cushiony pink lip, and I say gravely, “I promise.”



“Jim?” I call out into the night. My eyes stare wide at the shadows of the night as if the wider I open them, the better I will see. The edge of the forest by Yellow Strings Pond is one of our secret meeting spots. When the moon is big and bright in the sky, every secret that lays hidden in the shadows is revealed. But when the moon has vanished on a night like tonight, every secret stays exactly that—secret.

Peering through the night, I meander through the Everwood trees, calm but aware. “James?” I call out again, just as I hear a quiet, swift step ahead—the rhythm all too familiar. The corner of my lips curls into a smile.

“No, no!” I giggle, lying beside Jim in the meadow. “That’s completely irrelevant!” I shake my head fiercely, my hair tangling around my face. To me, Jim’s laugh is like the sound of Heaven’s chimes. Simply hearing it is intoxicating, and I praise it all the same.

“My dear Clare, you’ve never worked a day of hard labor in your life. You haven’t a clue what strength simply chopping wood demands. It’s an art to chop the logs up just right, all day, with blistered covered palms.”

Beaming up at the night sky and tinkering with my necklace between my fingers, I replay some of our most precious moments together. Eight years ago when we first met, as I was shopping with Mother in town and Jim was just James, even then he was working hard labor. He and his old pap were unloading a truck of lumber down at Mr. Croak’s shop, and my mother said right then, “We must stop at the ribbon shop after this, Clarisse. I won’t have my daughter presented in any cheap...” And fate gave me the gush of courage to tell Mother something, rather than ask.

“I’ll meet you there, Mother. I need some fresh air.” Fate obeyed, and Mother nodded.

But our memories were endless. After Jim would get off work, and I out of school, tutoring, and piano lessons, we’d spend the rest of our summer days together in the late afternoon hours into late nights until my curfew. Then Jim would sneak me back out again and have me back before Mother or anyone else could notice.

After he’d get off work in the summer, he’d take me fishing. He taught me how to fix and cast my own line, and he’d sing as we waited for a bite. I’ve not once heard a gospel song from his lips—the only music Mother deems appropriate. He sang only songs I had never heard of. Jim spent countless hours teaching me lyrics that Mother would say would send a soul straight to hell. His voice wasn’t the kindest by any means, but when he sang those damned lyrics, I’ve never felt closer to Heaven.

Jim taught me to throw a ball, gut a fish, and ride a bicycle. He introduced me to lake water, mud between my toes, tire swings, and God forbid, how to shoot a gun. The simple common knowledge of a man’s activities and the poor class (but a rich life) was above average for a girl like me—unnatural. All of the shenanigans that have built up over the years would have caused dear Mother to have a heart attack—if she only knew.

I don’t pretend to think Mother doesn’t know about Jim. I know she does, although she’s never confronted me directly about him because I’ve been careful and secretive enough to keep our affair out of the public. Because I’ve treated it so, she has allowed me to continue with the shenanigans. When

Father was still here, Jim, or any man of a class lower than himself, went unnoticed to his eyes.

Jim wasn't the only one who shared knowledge. I would read him poems in our meeting spot in the meadow against the big oak tree next to Loftwood Lake. I taught him bits of Spanish, French, and other schooling. Together, we were complete. We made each other better and taught each other things we never would have had the chance to learn without the other. Jim was not only my best friend, my love, my playmate, and my teacher, but he was also my other half.

Soon, Jim says, he will teach me how to properly chop a piece of wood, how to hold the ax just right. I turn the necklace over between my fingertips. Smiling up at the stars, I say to him, "You will teach me."

Jim chuckles. "I'll teach you." But the cover of darkness and trees aren't enough tonight to keep the real world from finding my thoughts. My mother says I'm to be married to another man, someone short of a stranger to me.

The muscles in my face turn on me, and the corners of my lips dive down. "I'm engaged, Jim."

The silence that follows is agonizing, but when he speaks, his voice is soft. "To who?"

"Willard Thomas."

Another short silence follows.

"Jim, I..." I am interrupted by the turn of his body over mine and his lips pressed softly against mine. His fingers gently brush across my cheek and through my hair. I feel his lips pull away, and when I open my eyes, he's staring down at me. He has only ever kissed me—just that and nothing more—, but I know his touch and his soft lips well, for I have memorized the sensation.

"I love you, Clare."

"I love you too, Jim."



The last of Jim's words are irrevocably engraved in my mind. It's been eight months and eleven days since I've seen him, privately or publicly. But I can still feel his last kiss on my lips and hear his last words in my mind as I'm doing the last fitting for my wedding dress.

The next morning after my last night with James, Mother informed me I was to have a luncheon with Willard Thomas. The lunch was anything but personal. We were accompanied by two dozen of his people and mine, and the press was in and out of the room. Willard himself is a good man—driven, loud, direct, humorous, and even adoring. His looks are more than agreeable and fashionably handsome. That day, he wore suit attire, and his black hair was combed and cut nicely.

Since that day, Willard Thomas has had me on dates, breakfasts, luncheons, and dinners; he even took me dancing in the fanciest of restaurants. On the days I did not see him due to his business trips, he sent me flowers or jewelry. Not once have I thought myself good enough for Willard. He is a good man with a good heart, a rich businessman with five times the heart my father ever had. His adoration for me grew into feelings, and he liked to show it in the most honorable, respectful, and traditional ways. As the months passed, our date companions lessened, and after time, we weren't chaperoned at all. It was all very tasteful and much like two businesses working their way up to a contract.

Mother hands me the bouquet of roses as I stand in front of the mirror in a private room in the back of the church. "You look exquisite, Clarisse."

"Absolutely stunning," a bridesmaid gushes with several more compliments showered at me from the perky, pastel-dressed women that surround me.

Suddenly, a knock comes at the door, and everyone turns as a face peeps around the white painted wood. "It's time."

With a waning smile, I take one last look in the mirror at the dress. It feels unsuitable to stand in white when the occasion calls for black. My skin has fallen pale, and the room feels cold. Jim's voice singing by the lake is all I can hear. His is the only name I can speak, so I'm careful to not say any. His face, every detail, is the only one that crosses my mind. "Don't cry, Clarisse. You'll ruin your makeup!" Mother's bark interrupts my thoughts.

"Look at her! She's so happy!" another cheers.

The cathedral doors open, and the congregation stands at the sight of a promised bride-to-be. I see hundreds of faces in the crowd, but not one satisfies the burning anxiety in my chest. So many have gathered for the service. Willard Thomas grabs my hand and fondly looks at me at the bottom step of the altar. I give him a polite nod in return, and my eyes fall on the window I am closing.

Behind Willard stands James Hawkwood between two gentlemen dressed in finer attire than he. From the second row, Jim's eyes stare into mine, telling me it is my last chance at happiness. I feel a gentle tug on my hand, and I let my fiancé lead me up the altar steps. The preacher's words are a blur, and his tone is grave; the room holds it silent and somber.

"Do you, Willard Thomas, take Clarisse Helena Brouillette to be your..." My time is running out. Disparity and grimaces sweep over me, and my chest tightens under the lace that feels like chains. The room seems to darken, and shadows creep from beneath every bench and corner. "Do you, Clarisse Helena Brouillette, take Willard..." My eyes meet Jim's from the crowd, and I hear my heart pounding through my body, telling me to flee, to save what light there is left in me.

With the weight of the world on me, all eyes staring at me, burning through my soul, it is time for me to speak. My eyes skip from Jim to Mother, and in that moment I feel the Reaper's eyes upon me.

"I do." The words leave my cold lips.

My eyes flash to James, and I see a look of hatred. With one arm hooked for balance and for the beautifully portrayed scene, I fix my eyes on the cathedral doors as they open, letting in the sun. Through glistening vision, I walk the steps to a haunting rhythm into the light. ✨

## JACK DANIELS

CODY DEPALMA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Eyes red,  
soul dead,  
black as the raven.  
Blood  
pours  
from  
lips  
through sharp teeth.  
Chewed through bone, didn't they?  
Hollowed out  
dozens of  
chest cavities  
to find the perfect  
heart.

Claws  
rip  
and tear,  
made many scars,  
didn't they?

This is the monster,  
rumbling in the deep,  
awaiting the moment  
to be released  
when my friend, Jack Daniels,  
comes along  
jingling the keys.

# LEAF WITH A LOT OF COLORS

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EMILY DOBER • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



# IN PASSING

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ANTHONY RUPPERT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

*The Spirit of Illinois*

lies at anchor in the vast  
expanse of Erie. The yacht,  
cloaked in white and black paint,  
nestles in the calm waters  
ready to cross the Great Lakes.



*HMS Cobalt Hammer*

crossed the Channel to France  
on her maiden voyage.  
The reflection in the cool  
water subdued her fiery  
aura heading off to war.



*The Spirit* presses on past

Detroit toward Green Bay Harbor.  
The cold spring wind propels the  
peaceful vessel across the  
merciless Superior,  
vigilant of any storms.



Consumed by Sea, the frigate  
struck by a German U-boat;  
the *Hammer's* journey over  
before the Great War began.  
Down, down, into her cold, dark  
grave she went, to share it with her crew.



# WHY I SEEK APPROVAL

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KYLE BARNES • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

In everyone I meet, I seek approval. It's safe to say that I am the definition of the term "people pleaser." I want people to like me; I hate confrontation, and anytime I assume that someone thinks ill of me, I shrivel up inside and begin working tirelessly to make the perceived wrong right again. Even when I am putting myself at a disadvantage, I still strive for that encompassing sense of approval. In my mind, approval equals validation.

When I was small, my father would disappear for days at a time. Sitting in the back of a Gremlin—awash in the smell of old car, menthol cigarettes, and my mother's tears—I would roam the city with my mother, going to my dad's regular haunts, looking for his car. My mom would whisper, "Stay here," followed by a knock and a tearful plea to please tell my dad to come home if he showed up there. Sitting on a priest's lap in a dingy church office while my mom cried, getting advice on how to pray for my father to be saved. Sliding down a green slide in a park while my mom cried and told me everything would be okay. Dusty memories of parties and handfuls of pennies thrown into a vacant room behind a closed door. "It's a game," they said. "You can keep all the pennies you find." The sound of laughter and the pungent odor of cheap weed seeping into my sequestered space from downstairs. It was my fault. My dad didn't want me.

It was hot and desperately humid. Sweat was popping out on my forehead and trickling down my back as I walked up the stairs. Slowly trailing the hunched-over man in front of me, listening to his mumbled curses, my back hunched over, too, as I carried a heavy bucket filled to the brim with paint supplies up long flights of stairs. I remember thinking, "Will I get big calf muscles from this?" To this day, I blame my enormous calf muscles on those summer afternoons. The morning spent sitting in my grandparents' kitchen with coffee and menthol cigarettes perfuming the air. It's funny how my childhood was redolent with the odor of menthol cigarettes.

Eating Grape Nuts Flakes with half-and-half because I was "too skinny." Light-filled empty rooms; hearing my grandfather hum under his breath to the 50s AM music that was always in the background. The soft sound of painter's tape purring off the roll. After the morning tasks, walking across

the street to the most hated of all things—summer school. It was there I felt love—with my grandfather, painting empty apartments. There I learned to count to ten in Spanish. How to take the face plates off a grimy wall and soak them in Pine-Sol until the grease and dirt would finally scrub off. It was there I was safe and could share the heavy feelings that constantly threatened to take my breath away.

As I cried, I would spill out the words that came from my red-faced screaming mother—“You are worthless!” “Why are you so stupid?” “You will never make anything of yourself!”—as my dad sat silent in the living room with his beer and the sheepish air of someone afraid to interject because the rage would turn on him. Her saying, “Your dad would never take this from me; I don’t have anyone else to take it out on,” as if that made it okay. My poppa would hug me and tell me, “Never mind them, Ky-lo.” That was his nickname for me, one that my brother coined because my name was too big for his tiny mouth. The one that makes my heart break today knowing my poppa isn’t here to say it anymore. His words echoing in my ears: “They just don’t know how to be any different, but they love you—I love you.”

It was in those rooms, with the man I loved most in the world, that I began to understand. My mom and dad might never like me or be proud of me. They might always think of me as an enemy or someone to be jealous of. All I ever wanted was what I considered to be “normal” parents. As my heart broke and I stood there smelling paint and my own tears mixed with my grandfather’s Polo cologne, as I cried with his arms around me, I realized I would never be good enough. Good enough to be worthy of the love I saw those around me getting from their parents. As those moments unfurled, I understood I would never have what I most wanted in life—what I still do want most in life.

In that instant, I began to seek approval from anyone who would give it to me. 🐉

# LESSONS LEARNED

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RANDY J. BACK • *ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY*

Life is never as easy as one thinks it should be or as hard as it is perceived to be. Throughout my 33 years of an event-filled life, I have learned many lessons—most of them the hard way. As I reflect on a few of the lessons I have learned, I feel grateful. I have survived the death of my parents, living in my car at 15, suicidal thoughts, and alcohol and drug addiction. Having survived these rough spots and trials has made me the man I am today. I am far from perfect; however, I am a little stronger and wiser by having prevailed through it all.

I grew up in an older, two-bedroom house in central Lincoln. It was located only half a block from Clinton Elementary School, where I was a student from second through sixth grade. I hated the ugly, brown, fake brick siding that covered the outside of our home. However, the inside was the complete opposite—it blossomed with love. My mother had succeeded at making the inside glow with her feminine touch. She was fond of the brass swans and the small birds that perched upon the entertainment center. I would do my best to keep them polished to a high gloss shine for her. The ceramic blue jays and cardinals that stood on display in curio cabinets were a nice touch, as well. Of course, as a child, my favorite part of the house was our back yard. It was not huge, but we had plenty of room to play. My father had transformed the dirt yard into a flowing green field for the daycare kids and me to play on. It was complete with a huge sandbox that he built for us and an extra-long metal swing set. For my mother, he built a little red well and a shimmering rock garden surrounded by mischievous gnomes and little critters frozen in time.

My mother babysat children of all ages during the days and certain nights. She would care for the children of her friends, as well as for those of my older sister, as though they were her own. Our cozy little house was an asylum of organized chaos, filled with children and laughter. At any time, there would be an infant being fed or changed, children playing board games on the huge dining room table, or kids outside swinging, sliding, playing ball, or creating castles in the sandbox. I would have grown up like an only child if it had not been for all the kids my mother watched. My closest sibling was 15 years older than I was. Therefore, both of my brothers and my sister were living their own lives by the time I turned six. My niece and nephews grew to be like my

brothers and sisters. Only two months younger than I, my oldest niece Sandy and I grew exceptionally close.

My mother—Jeanne, or Aunt Jean to most people who knew her—was a tall woman with a luminous smile and a compassionate heart. Never cruel to another living soul, she was incredibly kind and affectionate to each person she encountered. She was willing to help anybody in need of a helping hand or a kind word. She was always delivering food to people who had less than we did. Mom sought out the best in people and freely showed love, even to complete strangers and people who took advantage of her. I would often hear her friends say, “I don’t have the money right now. Can I pay you next week?” That “next week” never came, but nevertheless, she continued to watch their children.

“If I don’t watch her kids, I don’t know who will end up watching them,” or, “That family doesn’t have much, and they can’t afford a regular daycare,” is what my mother would tell me when I asked her why she let parents walk all over her. On those days, she taught me the importance of empathy for others as well as how important it was to show respect and affection to each person I met.

Throughout my childhood, my mother was my best friend. When I would be feeling down or hurt, she would find me and comfort me. “You’re perfect exactly the way God made you,” she would tell me when I was bullied at school, or, “If you give up every time someone tells you no, you’ll never be happy,” when I was discouraged. No matter how old I was or how much she had going on, she made time for her boy a priority. She had a gentle spirit when it came to discipline, as well; Mom would gently sit me down to talk about what I had done wrong. During the evening, Mom, Dad, and I would sit in the living room together watching *ALF*, *America’s Most Wanted*, or (Dad’s favorite) *Married with Children*.

Although we were not as close as my mother and I, my father was still my hero. When he would make the time to spend with me, I cherished it. My favorite times were when we would go fishing; he would drive us in his little green Datsun down endless dirt roads in the county. I would pretend we were flying in a starship as we sliced through the rolling dust clouds the enemy ships left in their wake. Once we arrived at the river, my dad would bait my hook and sit patiently as I waited for a fish that rarely came. Once I grew bored, he would pull his BB gun out of the trunk. Mom had said, “No way in hell!” when I had asked for a BB gun for my birthday.

However, the first time Dad handed that gun to me, he claimed, “What she doesn’t know won’t hurt her!” That was my favorite part of the trip. He would toss his beer cans into the river, so I could practice my aim as they rolled and bounced in the smelly water.

My father was a hardworking man. He always had a can of Old Milwaukee and a cigarette in hand, which had aged his young skin prematurely. In his 50s (I was just a teen), he looked as if he were a small-framed 60-year-old man. However, he still had a full head of salt and pepper hair that saved his handsome looks. He spent his days removing dents and rust on cars and trucks for a Toyota dealership, transforming them into new vehicles again. Then he would come home and spend his nights fixing the endless stream of toys that the daycare kids and I would break or repairing the old Chevy station wagon for the hundredth time. My father was a smart man; he could mend, repair, glue, refurbish, or fix whatever needed it. I thought he could repair all things until my mother became ill, for he was not able to mend her.

In 1992, I was barely an eleven-year-old kid in middle school; I loved to go on long bike rides on unmarked trails. My only worries were if I would pick up another thorn in my bike tire or if I could find my way back home after riding to the middle of nowhere. The day my mother came into my bedroom, sat on the bed, and told me, "I have been diagnosed with breast cancer, and the doctors are going to have to cut it out," I didn't know what a devastating event it would be. To an eleven-year-old boy, it was the same as catching a cold—simply go to the doctor, receive a shot or pill, and all would be fine again. As far as I knew, the chemo treatments were merely doctors' appointments, where she went to become better. It was many years later when I learned the hell that chemo had put her body through. My mother was a strong woman, who never let me see the pain she was suffering or the fear she must have experienced. It took another four years for the cancer to creep throughout her body, starting with her breast then circulating to her lymphoid and ending up as a tumor in her brain.

It was tough watching such a strong-spirited woman being beaten down by a ghastly disease, and it had become exceedingly painful to watch her suffer. Therefore, I spent most days in bed avoiding her because I did not want to remember her as suffering. However, the guilt of ignoring her was building to a breaking point. Having witnessed my mother go from a loving caretaker to a prisoner in a hospital bed in the dining room, I felt the whole ordeal tear at my soul. Nurses would take care of her basic needs as if she were an infant. She would lay in bed, unable to sit up, weakened, scarred, bald, and struggling to push past the morphine to form a clear thought.

I can only guess at the agony my father was experiencing at the time as he witnessed his love being eaten alive by cancer. He would sit next to the head of her bed for long periods and talk softly to his wife. With all the daycare kids long gone, the house was unnervingly quiet, and Dad no longer had much to fix. Instead, he spent the remainder of his time in the basement listening to his old

country records at his workbench. He never expressed any emotions around me; instead, he put on a brave face. I learned then that showing no emotions was how men dealt with life; whatever soul-crushing feelings one was experiencing, a man merely put on a brave face and acted as if nothing was wrong. Therefore, that was exactly what I did. I stuffed my feelings deep where no one could see them and plastered on a fake smile. Little did I know that stuffing the pain down only caused it to transform into a corrosive poison that ate away at my soul, leaving a gaping hole.

On January 21, 1997, the house was full of people. My aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, in-laws, the family pastor, and a nurse all came to say their final farewells. Some of them gave me sympathetic looks and hugs. One by one, they would come up and say, "I'm so sorry," or, "You're so mature for being only 15—you're handling it so well," then head over to have a real conversation with someone else. I did not mind the brief encounters, though, because I did not want to talk to any of them. The whole day was like walking through a dream, confusing and incredibly slow, waiting for the inevitable.

Sometime during the day, the hospice nurse told me, "Today your mother is going to pass on," but I had already known before any of them had said a word.

"No shit! Go do your job and leave me alone, you worthless old bag!" is what I pictured saying to her, but I nodded and went to my room instead. I had mixed feelings about my mother's death. I was barely 15 years old and dreaded having to say goodbye, but I hated seeing my mother in pain. The miserable day had turned to night, and the emotional stress had drained every ounce of energy I had. I retreated to my bed and pillow and slid on top of the covers. It was not but five minutes later when my door eased open, and my sister crept in and softly woke me.

"Mom has passed on. Come and tell her good bye," was all she told me. My dear mother had held on to her life the entire day and finally let go once I lay down. Paralyzed with fear, I lay there for a long time before I forced my way out into the living room to say my last, "I love you." Life as I knew it was over.

A few days later, I went back to Northeast High School where I continued on to my classes and tried to act as if my worst nightmare had not recently come true. By then, I had become an expert at stuffing my feelings down and putting up a decent front because I thought that was what men did. Grades no longer mattered to me; I did not want to be at school, but I did not want to go home, either. I loathed the sympathetic looks and the fake smiles from kids who had never given me a second glance before. I simply breathed in the shell of my body and was present in class; I tried being whatever I thought teachers and friends expected me to be.

On April 18, 1997, a particularly gloomy day, the principal called me into his office. I was no stranger to this—for I had a tendency to be in the wrong place at the wrong time in high school. However, this time was different. He did not call me in his smelly office to interrogate or lecture me.

“Your brother Richard is here to pick you up. He is waiting outside for you. You’re excused from classes for the rest of the day,” was all my adversary told me. Why was he so nice this time? What was wrong with him?

“He didn’t have any smart ass comments about my Metallica t-shirt today,” I wondered as I slowly dragged myself outside. There was something off in the universe for Mr. Larsen to be so nice to me.

Once I stepped out the front doors, I saw my oldest brother Rich. Each stranger I ran across that knew him said, “Are you Richie’s little brother? You look exactly like him without the mustache!” There he was—black hair, glasses, mustache, a zigzag t-shirt and jeans—standing outside of his faded black Mustang.

“So that’s me with a mustache,” I thought as I walked up to the car.

“Let’s go! I don’t have a license, and a cop patrols this school,” he said, interrupting my thoughts. I hopped in the passenger side, and off we went, but all we did was drive aimlessly. I noticed that his eyes were sunken back, and his skin looked pale. Rich had a haunted look on his face that I was not accustomed to seeing. I was sure he was going to tell me he was dying, too.

“I found dad lying in bed when I went home. Dad had kept a bottle of Mom’s morphine after she died. He swallowed the entire bottle and drank until his heart gave out, and he died,” Rich finally said, as tears threatened to spill out.

*This cannot be real!* I thought. *No, not again!*

“Then take me home. I want to see him!” I yelled at Rich. “Why are we driving around? I don’t believe you!”

Rich barely muttered, “You don’t want to see him like that. I will never be able to forget that image.” I was in a state of shock as the realization of what had happened slowly sunk in. The two of us drove in awkward silence for an hour or so until the house had cleared out. The ambulance, police, and mortician had all come and gone by the time we pulled up. There was a strange sensation when I stepped through the front door of the house I had grown up in. The house had the 36-inch Sony television that Mom and Dad had saved up to buy on the left and my mother’s faded brown La-Z-Boy recliner in front of me. I looked around and saw all of our other worldly possessions, but the place felt empty and hollow. That house was no longer my home.

I spent the next couple of months living with Rich in a little trailer he had rented. It worked out okay for a while until my brother’s drug addictions were

more than I could handle. After we lost Mom and he found our father dead, Rich suffered from severe depression. Meth and alcohol had become his way of handling his feelings. He went out partying with random bar rats during the day then came home at night drunk or high if not both. He went from being nice and funny to becoming completely outraged over the smallest incident. Minute events could set him off—if a dirty dish was left in the sink, or if he imagined that one of the girls he brought home had stolen money from him. When he would grow angry and paranoid, what set him off did not always make sense. Once again, I spent all of my time locked in my room. However, I refused to be the recipient of his drug-fueled rage, so I grabbed a handful of my belongings one day and left.

I started smoking large quantities of pot and drinking alcohol to cope with the depression and loneliness. For the next few months, I used pot as payment to “friends” to let me sleep on one couch or another. Once I ran out of couches, I found myself sleeping in my Dodge cargo van for a few months until I found a landlord that would let a 16-year-old sign a lease. I dropped out of school and started working full time as a shift manager at KFC. The job did not pay the best, but I had my own place, and my bills were paid. I had learned I could not depend on any person but myself and that I would be taken advantage of the moment I showed any weakness.

The next ten years progressed by as an alcohol-fueled blur. I spent my life trying to fill the growing void in my soul. I tried unsuccessfully to smother all the grief and anger with gallons of Southern Comfort, Jägermeister, and pot. By the time I was 21, I had been pronounced dead twice from alcohol poisoning. I presumed I must be around for a reason because God would simply not let me die—no matter how much I did not want to live. I was too proud to consider suicide an option but too blinded by self-pity to see what a fool I was. I simply could not grasp what possible reason a lost soul like mine would have for being saved. I had lost all faith in God and in humanity; I was depressed and plagued with low self-esteem. “If my own father didn’t think I was worth sticking around for, what use am I?” was a consistent thought I tried hard to silence.

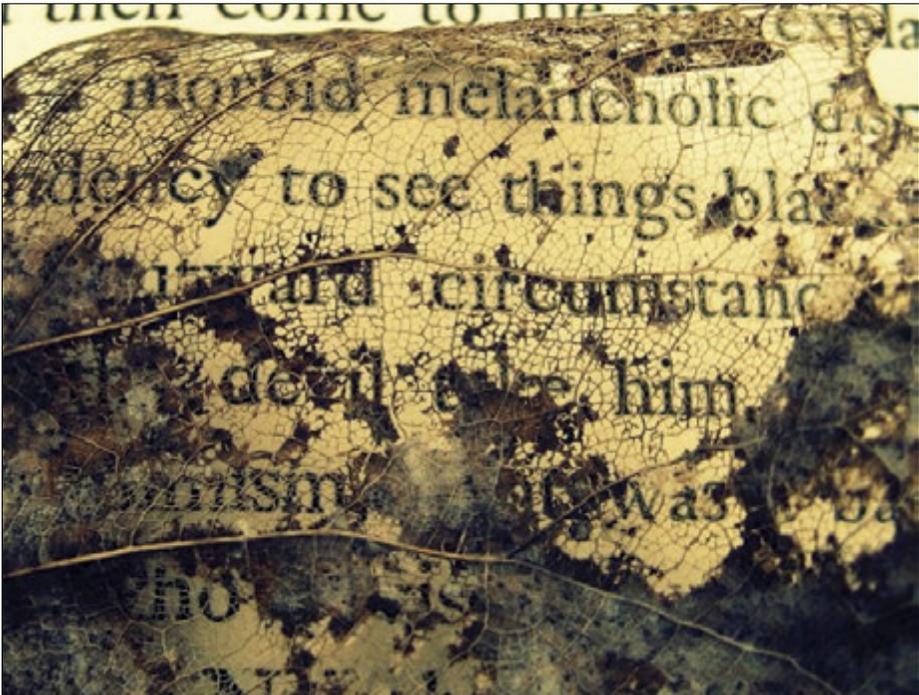
I continued to let alcohol and chaos rule my life until I met my wife, Stasha. It took Stasha a few more years of love and kindness to penetrate the thick walls and defenses I had grown to depend on for survival. I started to believe I was worth having around. I slowly learned to start trusting people again and that I needed to take responsibility for my life. When my son was born, I made a decision to not leave him as my dad had left me—abandoned, scared, and full of insecurities. I decided it was time to snap out of it and to stop the drinking and drugs. My life was no longer my own to ruin.

Had I not gone through the trials and agony that I endured, I might not be the loving, devoted husband and father of five beautiful children that I have become. I wasted many years before I was able to accept what had happened in my life and to start learning from it. I cannot hold a grudge with God because His plans differed from mine. I have learned that every person has a different perspective on any given situation. From my father's perspective, he could not see living life without my mother. Maybe he thought my brothers would have stepped up to take better care of me than he would have been able to. I will never know what he was thinking at the time of his death. However, I no longer choose to believe that it was because I was worthless that he chose to leave. I gained nothing by staying mad at him or at God. It was through forgiveness that I found freedom and peace.

Sixteen years later, I still do not have all the answers as to why the events of my life unfolded as they did, and I probably never will. The best advice I can share from my experiences is to take each day as it comes, embrace it and love it—and embrace every other soul around. Do not dwell on the negative events that occur because a beautiful future may blossom from them later. 🌿

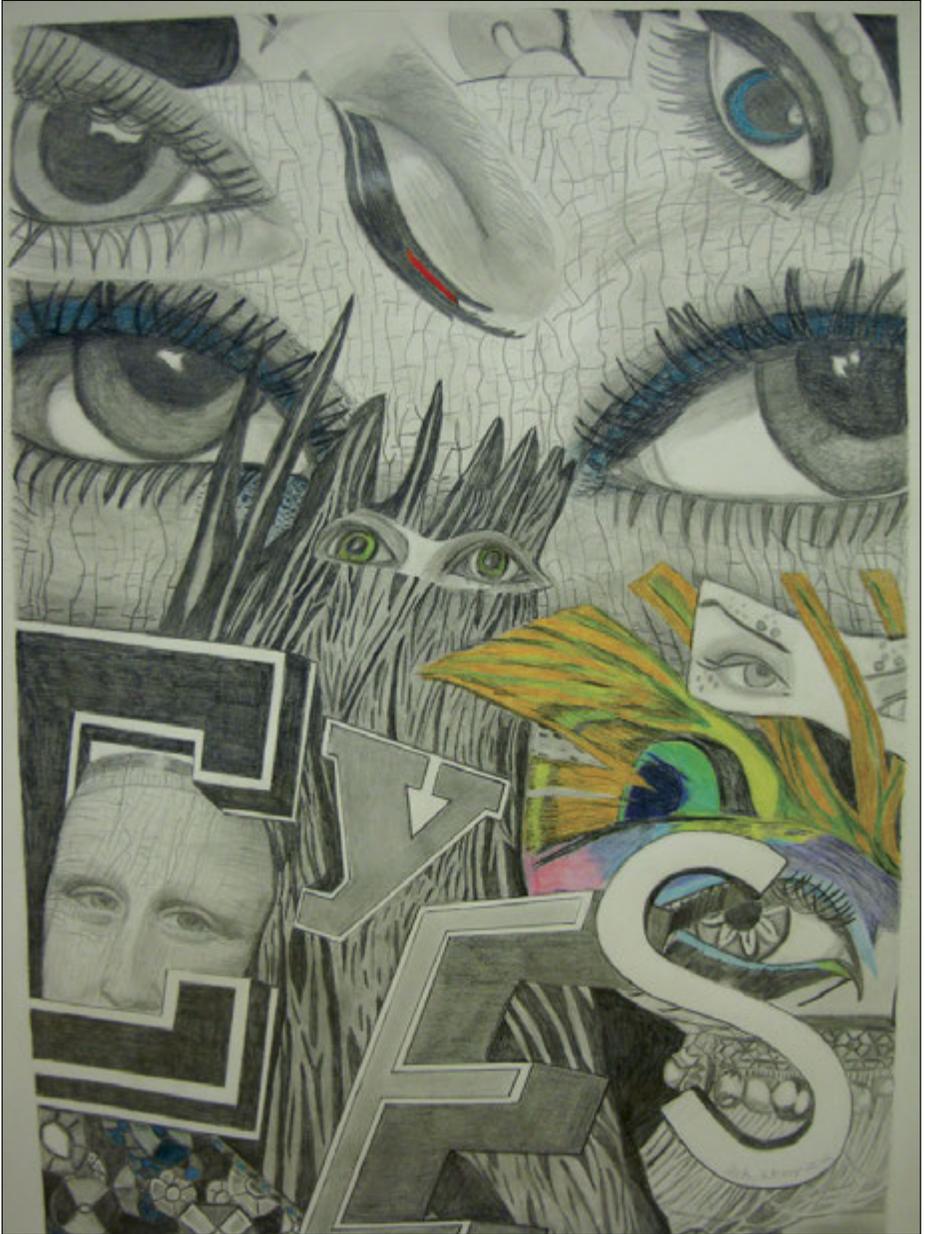
## SEE THINGS

LINDSAY DOLAN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# EYES

HALEY WEINER • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



# THIS GIFT OF LIFE

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STEVE CASAREZ • CRIMINAL JUSTICE

September 14<sup>th</sup> was the big day! The morning sky was pink and feathered with wispy white clouds, and it was a bit breezy and cool out. It was the most perfect Friday to have a baby. I loaded up the bags of my wife's essentials into the car, took in a deep breath, and then went back inside to see if she was ready. My wife and I then headed to Brian L.G.H. to have our baby boy induced at 8:00 a.m.

As we walked through the lobby, I caught myself thinking that the next time I walked through there, I was going to be one son richer. Up the elevator we rose, as did my anticipation. When the doors opened, we strolled across the Berber-carpeted floor through the plant and magazine-littered sitting room to the check-in counter. The staff checked us into our room and welcomed us with warm, energetic smiles. Two nurses, followed by the doctor, came in and began with questions and paperwork as they settled us in. My wife was all hooked up and ready to start the inducement within about half an hour, so I made myself comfortable with plenty of free snacks, drinks, and cable TV. It was a pretty nice time, really, as my wife and I looked back on the pregnancy and reflected on our adventure...



The sun was peeking between the blinds, projecting highlights of sunbeams on our bedroom walls. I rose from my quiet slumber with a long, slow stretch, arching my back and mashing my fists into my eyes. In a moment, my eyes began to focus; then I stumbled out of bed and headed straight for the kitchen to get a cup of Joe for my wife and me. I had set my coffeemaker the night before, so the coffee was ready to pour as soon as I woke. I mixed some sugar in my cup—not too sweet, not too hot, just right. Then to my wife's cup—one-fourth creamer, three tablespoons of sugar, then topped off with coffee. Talk about a morning sugar blast! I headed back to my bedroom to enjoy my cup in bed.

The warm, golden sunrays danced off my wife's jet-black hair revealing shades of copper and crimson as she lay soundly in our warm, cozy bed. I listened to the birds chirp to one another outside my window, and I wondered what they were saying. I didn't have a place to go or a thing to do until the afternoon. It was Saturday morning, and it was time to slow down and enjoy ourselves. My wife and I had been married just over a year. We had known each

other since high school but had gone on to live different lives. Almost 20 years later, we had finally met up for our first date, fallen in love, and tied the knot on November 11, 2011.

“Hey, babe,” I whispered, “good morning.” I loved our Saturday morning conversations over coffee in bed. I handed over her coffee, and she flashed me a smile.

“There was something I was going to tell you last night, but you fell asleep,” she said in her sweetest little morning voice.

“Oh, yeah, what’s up?”

“There’s really no way to ease into this,” she said, “so, here it is. We’re going to have a baby!”

I didn’t know how it happened, but I literally fell off the bed from complete shock and awe. There was something intoxicating about being told that I was having a baby. Luckily, my coffee was sitting on my nightstand by then. As I gathered myself and sat back down, the most asinine thing came out of my mouth. “Is it mine? I mean, uh, like from me?”

She broke out in hysterical laughter that sent her gasping for air. I didn’t know what to say. It was not that I didn’t want to have a baby; it was just that we already had four kids between the two of us. I brought a 13-year-old to the marriage, and she had a 14-year-old, a twelve-year-old, and an eight-year-old. All were boys. I hadn’t even thought of having a baby. I mean, I loved little kids. I had the sweetest little nieces and nephews, and I loved to get on the ground and play with them as if I were the same age. We’d wrestle on the floor, and I made sure they always got the best of me. I even enjoyed having them stay overnight. I just never in a billion years thought I was going to have another child of my own.

All these thoughts gushed through my mind. Next thing I knew, I had a sense of complete joy overcome me, followed by sweet emotion that flowed through me like a strong, powerful river. My body felt numb and weightless. I couldn’t believe it was real.

As the morning progressed, we set out to run a few errands. Driving away from our house, I glimpsed in the rearview mirror and imagined a car seat fixed in the back. The pregnancy burned itself into my mind. We walked into the local department store, and I gravitated to the baby department to look at car seats, clothes, a bouncer, and toys. I could not seem to think about anything else or why we even went to the store. I finally remembered—we were looking for curtain rods. The day went on along with my thoughts. It was soon dinner time, and we wrapped up our escapade and headed home. As we pulled into our drive, I imagined my energetic, young child frolicking through my front lawn.

The days went by, turning into weeks, then months. Doctors’ appointments, late night feedings, weird cravings, crazy dreams—and emotions ran wild. I

suppose that went for her, too. It didn't seem to take long before it was time for the baby to come; it was time for the inducement.



"Yeah, hello, Mom? We're in room 410. You'd better hurry; they want to take him soon!" My wife's contractions were coming and going frequently now, but there was a problem—the baby's heart rate and blood pressure were dropping dangerously low with each contraction. Within minutes, my mother showed up at the hospital along with my mother-in-law, so I went out in the hall with them to explain the situation and the urgency of it. Just then, behind my back, the door flew open, and the doctor came out and grabbed two nurses.

"Get the vac and the rest of the supplies. We need to take him now!" the doctor exclaimed.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa...what's going on?" I raised my voice.

"The baby can't take this much longer. We need to take him now—let's go!"

As the staff, our mothers, and I rushed into the room, the doctor explained that the umbilical cord was wrapped around our boy's neck, and he was going to use a vacuum in assisting him out.

The pushing started, and so did our praying. Energy levels rocketed through the roof, as my wife gave everything she had. The doctor was maneuvering the vacuum in painful looking ways. My heart pounded through my chest. Adrenalin surging through my veins, I let go of my wife's hand in fear of crushing it to pieces. She was fine, a warrior. I knew she was OK. She knew just what to do, as she told me to hold her head up and forward. So with my right hand, I gently did, and my left hand crippled the sidebar on her bed with such force I was sure it would implode under my massive, crushing grip. Making sure my wife's head was in the right position, I dropped mine. I clinched my eyes closed; I could hear our mothers behind me loudly whispering prayers, and I joined in.

"Father God, you brought us this far. Guide this doctor's hands and bring the gift of life that you created safely to us."

"Here he comes! You're doing great—almost there!" The doctor's voice rose as he rallied my wife's effort. Finally, it happened.

At 3:37 p.m., the baby was out. The doctor quickly unwrapped the cord from around the baby's neck not once, but twice, then twice more from around his shoulder. A few quick sucks from the big, blue nose plunger, and it began.

Elijah Estevan Casarez took his first God-given breath into the world, and he pierced the air with his brand new song. Dr. Hatten handed me the scissors. As I cut the cord, I thought, "My life has just changed—again." The nurse wrapped our gift and laid him on my wife's bosom.

“Thank you, Jesus,” I whispered as I leaned in to kiss my wife and son.

Today, Elijah is nearing five months old. Every morning, I gaze upon my prince sleeping so soundly and my wife, the queen, who brought him into this world, and I thank God for the many blessings yet to come. Hearing Elijah’s coos and laughter, seeing those big brown eyes and angelic smile, and watching him wake in the mornings as he arches his back and mashes his fists into his eyes, I never thought I would be so happy to have another baby. 🌸

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## SPRING BLOSSOMS

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KATHRYN ENGSTROM UNDERHILL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR



# L & O LULLABY

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DEBRENEE ADKISSON • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

When your eyelids begin to droop,  
the slits of cool jade reduced to nothing,  
and your too-long lashes  
skim too-high cheekbones—  
this is when I love you most,  
tired as a star.

I cradle you against me,  
count each sleeping freckle,  
and imagine drawing lines between them all.

I have long believed  
that if you and I would draw a line  
between ourselves,  
a rich, dark line from you to me,  
we just might find  
the face of God  
between us.

# TRUE LOVE

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*HARMONY LEIGH CULP • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD*



# A FRIEND INDEED

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ADRIAN D. CALLARI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER/ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE

I grew up without many people in my life—not many to rely on, anyway. I came from a poor background and lived with a variety of people most of my childhood. In fact, I lived with 13 people in all within a five-bedroom home. Some people have had it worse, I'm sure, but my home was always full of conflict. Everyone felt they were entitled to something—always pushing their weight around on everyone else and starting bullshit. At school, I never really made close friends, as most found me too strange. Rather, people opted out from getting too close to me. A few people would stick around—friends that would only abandon me later in life when they found new, better friends. But one person out of them all stuck around for the long haul, the guy I spent the most time with anyway. This probably came about because he had the same kind of upbringing, the same home life to escape as I did. We both lived in the exact same situation, Nathan and I.

I met Nathan in fifth grade while spending a day over at another friend's house playing video games. Nathan was originally an acquaintance through my friend's younger brother. He was three years my junior, but when we met, we hit it off pretty well, as we had some of the same interests and a common friend. We played a game called *Dragon Ball GT: Final Bout* on the original PlayStation console the first day we met. It was one of the latest games my friends and I were interested in. He was a good player, killing me as often as I got him, or maybe even more. Those were good times, and we became fast friends due to the intense rivalry that almost immediately developed.

Nathan and I weren't sure how to go about making new friends at that point in our lives; we were both somewhat awkward. So the first few times we hung out, we did so among our mutual friends. Nathan and I eventually ended up falling into a groove where we could hang out without the fiberglass-like wall of comfort our other friends provided with their presence. And after that awkward initial trial period of mutual acquaintance we've all experienced with new friends, we got together more often, and our strong friendship was born.

I can still vividly remember how he looked as a child: strong Italian nose, glasses, pierced ear on the right side, his black hair cut in a short shave and his big-ass forehead showing off his obvious lack of widow's peak. He almost always wore shorts, paired often with a white t-shirt covered by a patterned

button-up shirt made of what I assumed to be polyester. Nathan at the time was probably a good three inches shorter than I was due to our age difference. Honestly, I think that is the way I remember him best, yet it seems so long ago now. He had a distinctive laugh, too. His pitch trembled slightly through a full belly quickly echoing itself: “Huuh, huuh.” It makes me sad now that I have to watch times like those go. Looking back, I see that all the best moments simply passed by without my noticing them, but I guess that’s how memories work, right?

He was my little brother, and he still is, even though he’s grown up—as tall as I am now, if not a little taller, I imagine. It’s hard to see him as a child, as we grew up together, experiencing a lot of the same things for the first time side by side. I see him as more of an equal to me than anyone else I have met. I like to think that I influenced who he grew into. Be it good or bad, I’m proud to have been a presence in his life. Even if I’m the older brother, to say that he didn’t affect who I was or influence the person I would become would be spouting ignorance on my part.

We found laughter, common interests, goals, more rivalry, and intellectual growth together. We became a constant driving force for skills or talents—to the point that if one of us had a task or talent he excelled in, the other would never be too far behind. Our rivalry toward one another was a driving force in our gameplay, in our education, and in our outlook on life. In fact, the rivalry was probably the single most important part of our friendship. I suppose I needed that in a close friend, as he did, I’m sure. It gave us a goal to work for that was close enough to be within our grasp at any moment, yet far enough away that neither of us could gain ground. We never were much for self-motivation. Thankfully, though, little brother had to prove himself, and an older brother couldn’t let his younger sibling get the best of him. So we unwittingly pushed each other’s limits, constantly allowing each other to improve in anything we set our minds to.

The funny thing is it all spawned from that simple, low quality video game (at least by today’s standards). We played and played for hours on end trying to best each other, rapidly finding ourselves moving to new games as soon as we reached the limit of growth in the one we were playing. Each time we would battle it out, one on one, until we were both so good at the games that no one else could keep up with us.

Nathan was fiercely intelligent compared to most people I met. He was a very quick study when it came to a game or remembering something said to him. I remember once we played a game of chess, and he bested me in just two moves. And for any other game that required coordination of one’s hands or

feet, such as Hacky Sack, Nathan was almost a natural. He often improved by leaps and bounds within just a few days of practice. That usually inspired me to be more interested in what was going on, as the older brother should not fall behind the younger one.

As we grew into teenagers, we stayed the best of friends. We even had sleepovers straight into 20 years old. We were family—what was mine was his, and I never had any problem sharing with him. For that matter, he never had any problem sharing things with me; hell, we even bought each other food all the time when the other didn't have money. And we never skimmed on it. If I got a real meal, so did he, and if I didn't have the cash for that, we both got the same amount of food from the dollar menu and split a drink right down the middle.

To be honest, it's incredible we never split ways through our lifetimes because we had our rough patches. For example, he dated one of my ex-girlfriends, which caused a rift in our friendship for almost a year. Somehow, we endured, though, thanks in no small part to the connection my family held to him. Whenever we had a fight or didn't feel like seeing one another for whatever reason, it wouldn't go unnoticed by either of our families. Somehow, my mom always knew when we had an argument based on how I acted around the house.

By the time we were teenagers, he didn't need to knock on my door to come in my house. Hell, I wouldn't even have to be home, and he would show up, make food in the kitchen, go into my room, play video games, borrow a controller, and leave before I got off work. No one would even comment about it to him because he was part of the family. He even had presents under my tree every year on Christmas morning from my mom and grandparents.

It was just a year or so ago when I moved to Lincoln that we started to dim contact-wise. We had grown up. As adults, we both had choices to make, I like to think, but that didn't make it any easier to wake up and to know he was half a country away from me. Now he's hidden up in the mountains somewhere in San Bernardino, California. It's harder on me, I think, to miss my best friend, not that I have ever asked him directly how all the distance makes him feel. He's the only person who really got who I was, if that makes any sense—the person who always had my back, who always knew when I was full of shit. He knew when I was being a dick that I was just being myself, and he accepted me, even with all my faults. To this day, even as adults, we keep in contact every now and then, catch up on things, but it's not the same. Even if I feel we are still as good of friends as ever, it's tough knowing that one day, one of our lives will come to a close. That's the hardest thing for me to imagine. If I had to live with the fact that he passed from this world, I would doubtlessly be inconsolable.

Now I look back at our endless hours together, months on end—years when we practically lived together. We had so much time to develop our minds, our lives, and our friendship that I feel almost selfish for wishing it could all go in reverse. I would give up technology, good graphics in games, a good phone, the Internet. I would give up everything I own now—the experience, the knowledge, any skills I have attained. I would drop away relationships I have had, new friends I have met, and all the money I have made just to go back to those times, just to meet him again for the first time—to have our childhood back, to have my little brother and me relive the best days of my life. 🌀

## BLOWING BUBBLES

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HARMONY LEIGH CULP • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



# THOUGHT OF OMAHA

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DANIEL ZEBERT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

*for Jim Thompson*

Drinking muddy roadside  
diner coffee and chain-smoking  
unfiltered American Spirits.

Kennedy, stubble and a grin, across the table  
blowing bubbles in his Dr. Pepper with a straw.

“Where will you go?”  
he asks over his soda.

“The farm in Ord.”

He nods.

“Omaha first.”

“Samantha?”

Thinking of the last time I saw her.

On her kitchen floor, curled up  
clutching her arm, flashing  
wet gums at me like a dog.

She refused to cry when  
I snapped her wrist like an icicle.

Remembering that pisses me off, so  
I stick a finger in my drink.

It’s gone tepid and won’t bite.

The Kansas job went tits-up.  
Kennedy had to shoot Polish Bob  
after he caught a slug in the gut.

He would’ve slowed us down.  
A wounded man would rather live  
a rat than die a criminal.

Occupational hazard of robbery.  
Even a plumber understands he'll  
eventually get covered in shit.

One less man meant my  
share of the score was bigger.

"This was the last one," I say.  
"What are you going do?"

"Finance another film," Kennedy says.  
His idol Billy Wilder.

I met Kennedy sixteen years earlier  
in San Francisco.

He shot a fake movie that stopped traffic  
so we could hijack an armored car.

"I'm going to paint," I say.  
"Sip Booker's and paint all day."

"Until ya start ta itch," Kennedy says smiling,  
crunching on ice cubes from his drink.

"Nope, I'm done."

"A lotta uncertainty in our line of work," he says.

The waitress, a mummy with a fiery perm,  
brings the check for our drinks.

"I've had a good run," I say. "It can't last forever."

"You telling me ya wanna die an old man?"

"I want to live without looking over my shoulder."

Kennedy peers through me from his side of the booth.  
"Sometimes the biggest threat is right in front of you."

His hand slips under his jacket.  
I tense, wondering how fast I can draw the  
Remington Rand semi-automatic from my shoulder holster.

"Forget Omaha," Kennedy says.  
"You're alive because you're professional."

Heat crawls up my neck.  
His hand in his goddamn jacket.

“Omaha is full of personal business,” he says.  
“It’ll getcha killed.”

Kennedy pulls his wallet.  
I nearly squeal.

Crisp bills lay on our receipt.  
He stands and grasps my shoulder.

“Drink bourbon until ya go blind,” he says before he leaves.  
“Forget about that whore in Omaha,  
and gimme a call when ya get the itch.”

My coffee is cold slime.

I drink it anyway and think of  
Omaha, lighting my last cigarette,  
crumpling the foil wrapper into a ball,  
stuffing it in the bottom of my coffee cup.

## CHERISHED LOVE

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ROXIE TUBBS • HUMAN SERVICES



# TWINKLING EYE

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ROXIE TUBBS • HUMAN SERVICES



# MATURING

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LALEH ROHANI • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

In mid-October on their way to elementary school,  
young girls wear pairs of yellow heeled shoes.  
They make a “click-clack” sound,  
like a clock, “tick tack,” by walking fast.  
They create imaginary friends and play  
hopscotch until school starts.

None of them looks over their shoulder;  
those girls get older, smell of exotic perfume,  
their hands smooth and well cared for.  
They don't remember their elementary school days;  
they disdain those who do.

# PERFUME OF VICTORIES

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DINORAH GARCIA SANTOS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I still have her favorite perfume, Lutece. When I sense the bouquet of this woody and floral fragrance, I immediately have her presence around me.

When I smell it, I remember her clean clothes, her five minutes before leaving home, and Sunday Mass, where I was sitting beside her. Sofia brought me to her life just because she had too much love to give. She gave me her last smiles, her last memories, and the last chapter of her life.

She used to tell my story like a princess's story that started with a sad beginning. "I am not your mom. Your mom is in the sky with God, but you were with me since you were born. You are a daughter for me."

I looked at her; at five years old I could not understand all of that. I just said, "But you are my mommy, right?"

She smiled. "Yes, I am."

I came into her life a little late. I remember—clearer than a dream—her soft facial skin. She used to have wrinkles, but nobody paid attention to them because her white and velvet skin looked so radiant and clean. My lady had grey hair; she wanted it to turn white, but that never happened. Her short and tired figure walked slowly because she was loaded down by too many years. Her hands had spots of purple and brown flowers. Every day, she could count more bruises caused by any hard touch. Nonetheless, she was beautiful. She was beautiful because she knew about beautiful things, how to give a consoling kiss, a warming hug, and a loving care.

Her weak eyes were full of victories. Her difficult past formed her personality. She could not be a nurse; she lost her first love, and she decided to be alone after her widowhood. After each battle, she became stronger, but she did not notice that. She was nervous but brave; she was strict but sweet at the same time, realistic but a believer. Every night, she asked me if I was still awake because she loved to talk about her memories. She saw her little girl wondering at her stories, her characters, and her adventures. My favorite was about Pepe, her unique love. In 1939, she met him while walking with her girlfriends around the park. After a few months of hiding their love, her tattletale brothers told her father about it, and she could see Pepe no more. Her stories made us laugh and cry in the darkness of our room before sleep.

Unavoidably, I broke my promises. I grew. I did not ask her about her stories anymore. Her age and my age had 50 years of difference. She could not run, and I could not stop.

Her breath began to tire. Her illness was her plea for attention. She was always aware of what was going on; she was writing down the last pages of her life's book. Until the end, she was worried about her fragrance, her clothes, and her beautiful grey hair. In those days, she lost pounds of life from her body. The bed was too painful for her; the medicine could not relieve her nostalgia.

Likewise in those days, she was continually talking about her stories. At the time, I paid attention, because I knew these were the last times I would get to listen to her. Then when the end came, I told her about her story and her victories. About how strong I saw her when her fragile arms raised me every time I fell down. About how brave she was when she fought with her fears when we felt alone in the middle of the raining night. About her sweet voice that showed me how I could pray and believe that God gave us each other in this life, connecting my beginning to her end. 🌸

## EYES OF INNOCENCE

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CASEY LOWE • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS

RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



# HOMELESS DREAMS

ASHLEY CORNELSEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I sit down in the stiff, old office chair. A name plate that reads “Kathryn” along with the words “Catholic Social Services, Housing Director” is directly in front of me. It looks neat and clean on Kathryn’s desk of chaos. The tall stacks of papers and files seem daunting. I feel my heart flutter in my chest, a heavy stone in my throat. I try to swallow, but it stays. My hands feel shaky, so I lay them in my lap and try to sit up straight. I look down at the men’s cut-off T-shirt I am wearing. “Dick’s Balls” is printed across the front—the name of a sporting goods store here in town. Below that, I’m wearing basketball shorts that are too big. I had rolled the waist twice to make them look a little better. It was the only clean outfit I could borrow from a friend today. I can’t imagine what Kathryn must think of me. I want to keep looking down, but I remember that I should keep eye contact with an interviewer. As I speak, I hear my voice tremble.

“You see, I was just driving by, and I saw your sign out front. I really just need a gas voucher. My low fuel light came on this afternoon, and I need to get to my classes and to work.” I can feel the stone in my throat growing.

“I understand, and I’ll see what we can do about that. I do need to ask you—do you know how you will get groceries or diapers for your son?” Her voice is soft. I can’t tell if she is sincere or just curious. I feel my face flushing.

“No, ma’am. I mean, I get paid next week, and so if I can just make it until then.... We might be okay.” My eyes feel wet, and I try to swallow the hard stone again. It’s the size of a half dollar now, and I feel it rising higher in my throat.

“Hmm. Well, let me go talk to my supervisor.” She gets up and walks around me toward the door. “I’ll be back shortly. Please don’t leave.”

The door clicks shut behind her. I gasp for air, and two hot streams fall down my cheeks. I quickly wipe them. I feel as though I am naked on stage. I look to the door, and the thought of running out to the parking lot flashes through my mind. Then I think of my son, Adrian. He is only a year old. He will need more diapers soon. Then I hear two people talking outside the door. I try to listen, but it’s too muffled, and then I hear the doorknob turn. My heart jumps up and then drops into the pit of my stomach.

“Ashley, I want you to meet my supervisor. This is Tom. I want you to share your story with him, but first I’m going to give you a gas voucher and an application. We have a program here for people in your situation. We could

set you up in your own place, get you some groceries, and help you get back on your feet.”

I take a breath but try not to get my hopes up. I have heard that something this good always has a catch.

“Now, this is the stack of applications that we’ve received already.” She places her hand on the highest stack of papers. I feel a sharp pain in my chest as my heart begins to break. “Half of these people won’t even qualify. This program is meant to house the homeless.”

The words echo in my head. I haven’t heard anyone call me *homeless* before. I mean, yes, I’m in borrowed clothes, and no, I don’t have a real place to live right now. However, I haven’t gone to the City Mission or slept in the streets. My face feels hot again, and the flutter in my chest quickens. I feel the word beat me in the chest: *homeless*.

“Ashley, why don’t you tell Tom a little about yourself?”

“Umm...sure...well...,” I begin but the word is still ringing through my head. That is what I am. *I am a homeless*. It’s all I can think now, and I feel like I’ve lost my words. I attempt to collect myself. “Where should I start?”

“Well, why don’t you just start from the beginning?” Tom advises. “How did you become a single parent? Do you know your son’s father well?” His voice is sterner than hers. I feel his eyes sizing me up. I feel as though he is staring through me, trying to see if I am honest.

“Yes, I know his father well. We were engaged when I became pregnant. He was my high school sweetheart. I thought that if I loved him enough and tried to help him, he could change. He started hitting me freshman year of college. After our son was born, I decided I couldn’t raise my child in a house like that.” I feel the stone dissolve a little. The anger and abandonment I feel from that relationship pushes me to be stronger. “I grew up like that, and I know how awful it is. That’s why I can’t stay with my parents. I did for a few months, but it’s just not safe anymore.”

“So where have you been staying?” His voice lightens slightly.

“Well, sometimes with my grandmother, but she really can’t afford to keep us there. I also stay with my son’s godfather. He lets us stay in his room, and he sleeps on the couch, so I just don’t feel right staying there very often. I guess just friends’ houses. I have a couple others that let us stay with them once in a while.” I feel the stone creeping up again. I swallow and hold it down lower now.

“Well, I hope you fill out an application. We could give you a stable place to sleep, at least. We’re interviewing people this week. So try to get it in by today or tomorrow. There’s a small table in the lobby you can use to fill it out here if you’d like.” He stands up to lead me out to the front area.

I follow. My legs feel like softened noodles, and my hands are still shaking.



One week later, I am moving into a two-bedroom apartment. The walls are bare, and it is dirty, but it's mine. It's a "public assistance housing unit," and the neighborhood is the kind you don't walk through at night. The small grocery store a block away frequently calls the police to report robbery and theft.

"Sign here," says Kate, the woman I had met by chance the week before.

I look at the hefty lease. All great things have some kind of catch. I read that in order to live here I will need to meet with Kate once a week, set up and accomplish goals, work toward self-sufficiency, and sustain from use of alcohol and other drugs. No alcohol at all is allowed in the apartment. At the end it states, *If any of the above agreements are broken, the tenant may be immediately evicted.* Without a second thought, I sign quickly.

Kate smiles. "Here's the key. I'll let you get settled, and I'll call to check in with you in about a week."

The door shuts, and she is gone. I stand in the empty apartment. I don't know what to think. I feel so very light, as if I could float. I feel the streams starting down my cheeks again, and I cannot swallow the stone in my throat. I fall to my knees. I cannot hold back the emotion anymore. The waves of relief wash over me, and through the sobs I take long, deep breaths. It's a miracle. My chest feels warm and full. This is grand gratitude.



A year goes by; I have been working vigorously to get into a good school. I want to make a difference and be a miracle for someone else. I want to be a nurse. I have applied and been accepted to an extremely prestigious, but expensive college in town. Kate, the woman from Catholic Social Services, is now my caseworker. She comes to the apartment once a week to check on me. We talk about my goals and how I can get through school. She has helped me apply for a better job, scholarships, and state benefits. She talks to me about stress and how to cope with difficulties I am having and will be facing. I always look forward to our visits, but I am especially anxious today. In my hands, I hold a white envelope, which I told Kate I would open when she got here. I stand in the kitchen staring at it and reading my address and the return address over and over again. My palms are sweaty, and the paper feels a little moist now. I've been holding onto it all morning. I have butterflies funneling in my stomach; I don't know if I feel anxious or terrified. I set the letter down on the kitchen table and walk to the living room.

Inside the envelope is a letter from a scholarship foundation I applied to. I might be able to pay for tuition with loans and grants for the first year.

However, once clinical hours begin, I won't be able to work enough to pay for rent. I have been applying for many scholarships. Last month I spent nearly 30 hours searching for them and writing essays. This letter is from one of the biggest foundations I found. It is a national scholarship program. I try not to get my hopes up. After all, I'm not a perfect student. My GPA shows I'm mostly a B+ student. I keep telling myself, "Miracles have happened before. Lord Jesus, please help me. Thank you for this home. Thank you for watching over me. Please help me keep going."

I pray more often now. It helps to relax me, and it feels good to hand over the chances to a higher power. "I keep working with what is put in front of me, so just keep it coming, Lord."

I look around and think to myself, "If I had something to take my mind off it, then maybe this hour would go by a little faster.... I could vacuum!" I quickly run to the coat closet and pull out the vacuum. I begin, but I can feel the letter staring at me. I vacuum the entire apartment and begin using the hose to clean the nooks and trim around the living room. I get to a tight corner between the living room and the kitchen and realize I'm not paying attention to the carpet. I'm down on my knees, staring at the kitchen table. I stop vacuuming, get up, and walk toward the letter. I can't wait any longer; I have to open it. I look at the clock on the microwave. Kate will be here in 20 minutes, but I'm sure she will understand. I pick up the envelope again. I hold it tight and whisper one last prayer. *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

I begin to tear the envelope, and time slows to a crawl. I feel the pace of my respiration pick up. I can see the letterhead of the company as I pull the letter out, a beautiful deep blue and scarlet red "H." It looks formal and clean. I take a deep breath in and then exhale slowly as I begin reading.

*Ms. Ashley Lopez,*

*We have received and reviewed your application for the Hispanic Scholarship Fund General Scholarship. After much deliberation throughout the screening and awarding process, we would like to congratulate you. You have been awarded the First Generation Student Scholarship in the amount of \$5,000. Please return the enclosed enrollment verification form, along with a thank you note, after you have begun your fall semester. Congratulations! We look forward to hearing from you in the near future!*

I can't believe it. I read it over and over: ... *we would like to congratulate you.* I gasp. All of the sudden, I feel lighter than air. I pull a chair out from the kitchen table and sit down. I think about where I had been a year ago. The thought of

going on and actually graduating had seemed impossible. Now, opportunity is staring me in the face and grinning. All I have to do is take my chance.



The next three years fly by. The exams are harder than I could have ever imagined. I stay up late and review all of my notes, read all of the texts, and say out loud what I would look for in my patients. I work hard to do well, to keep my scholarships. I spend countless hours at the hospital reviewing, studying, and practicing. Before junior year begins, I have to quit my job. It has become physically impossible to balance work, courses, and my son. I give myself a gastric ulcer from the stress by the end of junior year. This degree is the hardest thing I have ever worked for, but it is worth the troubles. In clinical, I sit with one of my patients, an elderly man. He has just made the decision to stop his aggressive therapy to treat his heart failure and kidney disease. The doctor leaves the room to consult palliative care and hospice. The elderly man looks at me, and I can see that his face seems sunken. His eyes are dark and distant. I read the fear and depression in them, yet they seem to be beckoning for someone to just listen.

“Do you want to talk about your decision?” I start off by asking. “You understand everything that the doctors have told you, right?”

“Yes. My wife died of cancer about seven years ago. I took care of her until the end.” His voice trembles a little. “My God, she was in so much pain. Then they gave her all of these pain medications. Toward the end of her life, I don’t know if she even knew where she was. I don’t want to put my children through that again.” Tears begin to fill his eyes and roll down his cheeks. He turns his head away.

“I can understand that it would be very hard to see that. It sounds like you loved her very much and that *you* don’t want to be in pain or burden your children with your illness?” I scoot my chair up close to the bed and hold his hand. He sighs and wipes his eyes.

“Yes. It’s hard to see someone you love so much like that. That’s not how I want my children to remember me.”

“So, what is a happy memory you have of her?”

He faces me now. “The first time we met. I still remember she had this beautiful blue sundress on, and her hair was curled and down to her shoulders. Her face was glowing.” He smiles. I listen to his stories and ask him questions about his wife and his children for about an hour. Then he pauses for a moment.

“Will you nurses and doctors still care for me? Until I pass?”

“Of course.” I squeeze his hand a little. “You can’t get rid of me.” He smiles and squeezes back.

This is what I love, giving comfort to those in their time of crisis.

He sighs, and I offer him some time to rest; he agrees that he needs it. "I'll be back in a little bit, and we can talk some more," I say as I walk toward the door of his room. He exhales, lays his head down, and smiles. I see the look of relief wash over his face. I remember that weightless feeling, the feeling of relief that finally comes after a time in crisis is completely healing. I know that this is how I helped to heal him today.



It is graduation day. I am so proud of everything I have accomplished. My son Adrian sits with my grandmother in the audience. He is wearing a little blue suit from Younkers which Kate found for us. I remember him shouting as we got ready this morning, "Mommy is a nurse! Mommy is a nurse!" His smile is beaming, and I can see it clearly from my seat on stage. I get ready to give a short speech to the crowd of parents, family, friends, and professors who have come to the ceremony. I walk across the stage to the podium, my heart pounding. I step up and pull out my scribbled note cards. As my heart pounds rapidly, I swallow the stone in my throat. It stays down, and my voice begins strong.

*I was asked to give a short thank you speech to those who donated scholarships to everyone in our class. I cannot say enough. To some donors, the amount that you have given may not seem like a lot. Perhaps you wanted to help a student with books or some gas money. Maybe you gave more and thought you would lighten a work schedule for someone who was struggling to study. For me, you gave the opportunity to get my degree. Without the support through scholarships I received, I would not be standing here today. About a year before beginning school, I was homeless. I was scared. I didn't know how I was going to make it. Graduating with my Bachelor's seemed to be merely a dream. Scholarship donors and other supportive agencies, like Catholic Social Services, made it reality. Thank you for giving me the miracle of unburdening relief. I promise to give that back to those I care for. The amount of gratitude I hold in my heart is immeasurable and will not fade for many years. Thank you.*

I step down from the podium, shaky and light again. I had not told many of my classmates or professors about my circumstances until just now. I look down briefly to see that in this moment of humility, I am wearing a long blue, shining robe. The tassel from my cap falls in front of my face. I remember what I had been wearing the day I walked into Catholic Social Services. I look up and see Kate in the crowd. I can't imagine what she must think of me now. 

# GRAY MAN: VARIATION 4

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DANIEL ZEBERT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# HANDS

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CORKI DAVISON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I remember walking into his hospital room and, for the first time, he showed me emotion. My dad was looking down at his hands with a melancholy look on his face, and then a tear rolled out of his eye. I looked at him and asked him what was wrong. Without looking away from his hands, he said, “Look at my hands. What do you see?”

I looked down at his hands and replied, “I don’t see anything.”

“Exactly,” he said. “Nothing. There is nothing on my hands. They are clean.” With this comment, my heart dropped, and I felt sickened.

The normal reaction from most people when they would first see my dad was that he looked mean, especially when he would be on his motorcycle. My friends from school didn’t like coming over to my house at first because they were frightened by my dad. I told them that my dad’s bark was worse than his bite. Then people would actually get to know him and saw that he wasn’t some rough and tough biker, but more of a soft teddy bear. My dad had a firm, but loving hand. When my siblings or I would get into trouble, my dad would explain his reasons and that in the end, when we would get disciplined, it was because he loved us and only wanted us to do what was right.

When it came to my dad, everyone we equal. It didn’t matter to him what the person’s race, gender, or age was; no one person was better than another. Since my dad gave everyone a chance, he had friends everywhere. As kids, my sisters, brothers, and I couldn’t get away with anything without it getting back to our dad. “Don’t think you will ever be able to get away with anything. I have eyes everywhere,” he would say. As we grew older, we found out this was true. Still to this day, I meet people that knew my dad and know who we are, even if we don’t know them.

The day before Thanksgiving 2000, my dad was diagnosed with an extremely rare form of lymphoma cancer called Mantle Cell Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. This type of cancer was so rare that no oncologist in Nebraska knew what it was. This cancer was established in only 1992, and it is a fast growing cancer of the immune system. Though most victims of this type of cancer are over the age of 65, my dad was only 47 when he was diagnosed.

About three-fourths of all Mantle Cell Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma patients that are diagnosed with the disease are diagnosed with “advanced disease,”

known as Stage III and Stage IV. My dad was already Stage IV. Since his doctors had no idea what kind of cancer it was, they sent my dad's results to the Cancer Institute in Texas. Because my dad was in the later stages, his doctors hit him with four different types of chemo treatments. Due to this intense regime, my dad ended up becoming paralyzed from the waist down. This devastated my dad because he had always worked. My dad was a family man who worked hard to provide for his family. People depended on him; he didn't depend on people.

All my life, my dad had a beard and mustache; whether he kept it long and straggly or trimmed and neat, he always had hair on his face. At least, it was always there until my sophomore year in high school. My dad had gotten into some kind of chemical at work that caused him to get a rash on his face. Since my dad had his beard and mustache, he wasn't able to get his prescribed ointment through his beard where the rash was.

It was winter time of my sophomore year in high school, and my dad worked overtime when it snowed in case a city truck would break down. It just so happened that this one morning, my dad had gone into work early due to the snow but was coming home to pick my sister Amber and me up for school. While we were getting ready, our mom came in and told us that our dad was on his way to get us. She then turned to look at us with a serious look on her face, and said, "Don't say anything to your dad about his beard!"

We both looked at each other with confused looks and then turned to look at our mom when Amber asked, "What are you talking about?"

Mom replied, "Your dad shaved," and she left it at that.

When our dad arrived home to pick us up for school, Amber and I climbed into the truck without looking at or saying anything to our dad. Since we were both quiet, which our dad knew was not like us, he looked at us and asked, "What is the matter with you two?"

Amber answered, "Mom told us not to say anything."

Our dad looked like a totally different person. Honestly, if we were at a store, I wouldn't have recognized him. His facial hair was completely gone. His face was as smooth as a baby's bottom. A hairless Santa Claus is what sat in the driver's seat. He tried to grow his beard out again after the rash had healed, but it was a no-go. The rash came back almost like he was allergic to his once signature beard.

Eventually, it wouldn't matter that he couldn't grow his beard back out because soon he would be completely bald. Because of the cancer and the chemo treatments he had to undergo, he lost all of his hair. Before the chemo paralyzed my dad, he was still determined to work and to provide for his family. He went from working two jobs down to his full-time mechanic job, then down

to part-time, then down to a couple of days a week until he finally was forced to take medical retirement.

Shortly after that, my dad ended up in the hospital for good. He hated being in the hospital. He felt like a prisoner would feel if he had to go to “the hole.” My dad told us many times that he hated feeling so helpless and useless. It was painful to see someone who was once so independent, hardworking, and reliable have to rely on others.

While growing up, I remember my dad’s hands were always dirty. My dad was a very hard worker. For as long as I could remember, he worked two jobs. His second job changed every now and then, but his first job was the important one. My dad was a mechanic for the City of Lincoln at Public Works. Whether he was at work or at home, my dad always worked with his hands. At work, he fixed many different things, ranging from push lawn mowers to huge city vehicles. At home, he would work on lawn mowers, vehicles, or whatever needed to be fixed around our house or for other people. Since my dad was always fixing things, his hands were extremely stained from grease and oil. No matter what he used to wash his hands with or how many times he would wash his hands, they always looked dirty.

My dad, with his far too clean hands, passed away on June 26, 2001. The impact my dad left on me will live on forever. 🍀

## PATRIARCH

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THOMAS JOYCE • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION/ACCOUNTING FOCUS



# FROZEN IN TIME

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BY THOMAS BROWN • CRIMINAL JUSTICE

I remember waking to what I thought was thunder; instead, it was trash cans being kicked around by people running in the street. My small bedroom window was cracked open just enough to hear and smell what was happening outside. I sat up in my bed, which was facing the street, to look out the window. In the distance, I could see a large woman sitting down on what looked to be a white piece of carpet.

As people were running, breaking glass, and looting stores, the woman just sat there as if nothing was happening. I could not help but stare at her; she appeared calm and unfazed by what was going on. The city had been on fire for days with no relief from any fire stations. The smoke in the air was so thick that it looked like a gray blanket covering the city on a cold winter's night, but it was really the middle of summer and 100 degrees outside. In the blink of an eye, everything around me had been destroyed.

My dad had woken early that morning, and I had heard the television in the background reporting the news. Today, again, civil rights and the war in Vietnam were the main topics. I had also heard my mom saying, "What about women's rights?" I turned back to the sitting woman, and as the smoke cleared, I could see her as if she were sitting right before me. Like most women from the neighborhood, she wore a head scarf and a plain cotton dress. What she had on was nothing fancy. Most women dressed like her in our neighborhood, even my own mother.

This was one of the poorest sections of California during the '60s. Most people dressed in what they could find or what was handed down to them from other family members. As I continued to view her from my window, I thought about what might be going on inside her head. Why wasn't she angry like everyone else? Did she even care what was going on around her? She sat quietly without any movement, as if she were a bronze sculpture sitting in a gallery filled with pieces of unexplained artwork.

Moments later, a mob of angry people—throwing bottles and chanting obscenities—came marching down the block. Glass breaking, people screaming, and the sound of crackling wood from the burning buildings filled the air like a tornado as they came closer. Suddenly, the crowd stopped in front of the

woman. They glanced at her, and it grew very quiet. Even time seemed to stop at that precise moment.

I closed my window and waited for something to happen. Not able to hear what was being said, I watched, as everyone else did. She appeared like an angel from heaven with the sun shining upon only her. There was total silence; I could have heard a pin drop, even with my window closed.

Her skin looked tarnished and wrinkled like she had been there for centuries. Looking into her eyes, I could see the reflection from the broken glass, which made them look like diamonds. Her facial expression displayed a sense of thoughtfulness and sadness at the same time.

By looking at everyone's expressions, I knew they could see what she was feeling. I began to cry, thinking, "Why is all of this happening?" Then it finally hit me; for on that day, I realized why people were feeling like they were and why they were destroying the city.

People were angry and frustrated about their rights as citizens. On many nights, I lay in my bed listening to the sounds of angry voices and the destruction from people as they terrorized the neighborhood. My parents were always discussing issues like equal rights, better pay, and ending the war. I was just a kid back then and did not understand. Women with pensive looks on their faces as they passed by my small bedroom window had been mysteries to me.

The woman that was frozen in time made a clear, silent statement to everyone who stopped to watch her. Through the midst of it all, one had to stop and think about what was going on in the world. Life could not have been more unfair. The longer she sat, the more I watched her as if she hadn't been a real woman at all. Had this been a figment of my imagination, or had I become so deeply consumed with looking at her that she had become real to me?

She was so still that I fell asleep, dreaming I was still watching her through my window. In many ways, she reminded me of my mother—the same outfit, the same head scarf. My mother and I spent hours talking about problems that women had at that time—not being able to work a job reserved for a man, not being able to do other things they had a right to do.

At times, my mother would sit and stare, just as the woman through my small bedroom window did, without saying a word. As I awakened from the sunrays beaming through my small window, my eyes opened, and there appeared my mother before me. Had she been there all the time? 

# SERENITY

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TAMMY WILLIAMSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The place I hold near and dear to my heart is a five-acre piece of land in Pleasant Dale, Nebraska, about 20 miles west of Lincoln. As I load up a few items in the car, I am full of excitement to go to this farm. Once I hit the first gravel road, a feeling of home rushes over me. At the end of the first road is the hill known as Thomas's Hill. Then I take a left and go past the Havlats' house, and then a right past the Burianeks' place, and another left to the Ahrens' acreage. That is the one that is special to me.

My car creeps up the gravel driveway, careful not to orbit rocks into the huge squares of freshly mowed grass that line each side. As I approach the top, the whole view of my parents' acreage and a little piece of heaven becomes apparent. I am overwhelmed by the beauty of the meticulously mowed lawn and the grandiosity of the large white barn, standing so big and tall as though it is protecting the house and the other outbuildings.

I park my car in the roundabout and walk toward the big white giant. I notice the old horseshoes painted black and tacked to the right side of the barn in a diamond shape. The wooden boards that make up the barn are showing their age. White paint is chipping off, exposing the gray, tired wood beneath. I walk up a concrete slab to the entrance. The indentation of small handprints in the concrete catches my eye. My, how my hands have grown over the years! I peek through a knothole in the wood, and I can see all the way through to the inside of the barn.

With my left eye squeezed tightly shut and my right one pressed up against the knothole, I am drawn to two open windows on the back wall. Sunlight dances on mountains of hay bales, stacked neatly on each side of the barn. I see a coarse, thick rope dangling in the center of the space. As my eyes climb to the top of the rope, I see that it is secured to an iron bar that spans the width of the structure. Up farther from that is a metal cupola. The cupola has little BB gun holes in it, and when the sun shines through, the dark, musky barn looks like an observatory.

I step back from the knothole and relax my face. A light playful breeze bounces through the knothole toward me. My nose delights at the scent of the hay bales resting inside. The scent wakes my senses, and I realize I can also

smell the age of the barn. It is an aroma telling of the history of this gentle giant. I close my eyes and inhale deeply through my nose. I smell pigeon feathers, dirt, damp old wood, corn and milo, and animal droppings.

I put my ear to the knothole. I hold my breath so that the sound of my own breathing will not interrupt the sounds of the treasures inside. I hear the cooing of pigeons and the pecking of their beaks on the iron rod. I hear the wind pushing its way through the cracks in the walls. The barn doors tap against the frame when the wind catches them just right. Strangely, I believe I can hear calmness.

The stillness of the barn makes me so relaxed that I start to feel a little sleepy. I am happy to be home. I have a large collection of fond memories from this place. I wonder what it would be like to crawl up on one of those hay bales and take a nap. My spirits have been lifted, and my worries are gone. I am enjoying the peace and quiet—absolute serenity. 🌀

## COUNTRY BARN

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JESSICA MONTGOMERY • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



# MY NAME IS NOT REFUGEE

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MARK GUDGEL • ADJUNCT ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

My name is not Refugee,  
and even if you believe  
deep down inside of your  
world-saving heart that  
this is who I am,

I tell you  
I am not  
(not only)  
Refugee.

I am also Mother,  
I am also Daughter;  
until last year, when  
the Janjaweed took her,  
also I was Sister.

No more.

And I am also Cousin,  
and also I am Friend.

Sometimes I am Nurse,  
sometimes I am Chef.

I tell you  
I am not  
(not only)  
Refugee.

Sometimes I am Saviour,  
sometimes I am Saved.

Sometimes I am Victim,  
sometimes I am Villain.

Sometimes I am Fallen,  
other times I stand.

I tell you  
I am not  
(not only)  
Refugee.

I am Waiting,  
and Waited upon.

I can be Weak,  
and also Strong.

I am Alive,  
I once was Free.

I am not  
(not only)  
Refugee.

## WALL OF CLOUD

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CHRISTIE LEFEBVRE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# ZINNIAS WITH VASE

KATHRYN ENGSTROM UNDERHILL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR



# NEBRASKA IN MY 30s

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MYSTERY HARWOOD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

There's a lesson in these fields.  
once, i thought  
my feet couldn't run fast enough  
to get the corn from out my hair,  
the wheat and soy from under my fingernails.  
dirty farmer's jokes, i said.  
i only wanted marble,  
granite.  
monoliths to commerce and industrialism riding high  
towards the blank stare of sky.  
me riding them  
to some version of the word *great*  
i'd never clearly defined.  
i wanted to forget the proximity  
of hay bales to post offices.  
(but i forgot new york city  
isn't as big as new york state).  
i pined, i watched the clock.  
i blamed  
the air the wool the waste.  
apple pies on windowsills  
they make you sluggish, tired.  
i shot up like a cornstalk  
unfurled before winter  
crossed my seeds and pollinated.  
things melt into other things,  
one bean becomes a meal. i am laughing.  
snow now. i don't mind.  
in the golden wheat years,  
in my ripeness, i think maybe  
that maiden pink  
nebraska sunset  
is the salmon  
i've been chasing upstream.

# THE HOVEL

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THOMAS JOYCE • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION/ACCOUNTING FOCUS

Here I am; it's Friday night, and I'm sitting in my new apartment, one which I will later dub "The Hovel." I've got my clothes hung in the closet, my mattress on the floor (I couldn't squeeze the box springs up the stairs, so it didn't make the cut), and my one plate, one spoon, one knife, one fork, a pot and a pan, and a handful of ceramic mugs (and tea—I've got to make sure that I *always* have a supply of tea) stored in the kitchen cupboards, where I'm pretty sure I saw mouse droppings.

The guy who lives in the Porsche repair shop next door yelled at me earlier for blocking his driveway with my late 80's Cavalier station wagon, which has rusted spots in far greater proportion of total surface area than the white paint that hangs on precariously. I unload my meager furnishings without help from anyone other than the meth-dealing single mom who lives one flight of rickety stairs (festooned with bare wires) below me on the ground floor.

Darren, my new landlord, gave me a discount on the rent so I could buy cleaning supplies, but I haven't gotten around to cleaning the greasy dust (that looks like one of the aliens from the first season of *Star Trek: Voyager*) off the overhead fans, the unidentified motile brown stuff from the top of the stove, or the sentient mold from the bathroom. I open the door to the oven and quickly shut it, horrified by the scene within, and vow to never open it again.

The Hovel is located on the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> & N Streets in downtown Lincoln. Twelve one-bedroom apartments on three floors, it was once a hotel for railroaders, possibly built when the golden spike was being driven and great herds of buffalo still darkened the plains. Lincoln, Nebraska, home of the then-powerhouse Cornhuskers football team, Tree City, USA, highest per capita gay population, and highest percentage of police compared to total population. More homosexuals per square foot than San Francisco and more cops per wise guy than in New York—or so they tell me. Or maybe it was on the "Welcome to Lincoln" sign. Next to the Porsche garage is BB&R Pawn Shop, and behind my building is a parking lot that is used by the HMO across the street during the day and us hovel dwellers after sundown. Despite the dismal immediate surroundings, it's a pretty good location if your standards are somewhat negotiable. Russ's Market grocery store is less than a mile away, and Klein's Grocery is even closer if you don't mind the smallness, lack of selection, and

panhandlers; they *do* sell the *New York Times*. A block and a half away, the bars start sprouting. I've never counted, but there are probably several dozen drinking establishments within walking distance; with the University of Nebraska about five blocks northwest, this probably isn't enough. There's also the public library, The Gourmet Grill—a gyro joint where the Iranian workers claim me as one of them—, and a variety of other small restaurants within a stone's throw. Of course, the State Capitol and the Governor's Mansion are nearby if you want to hobnob with politicians. Or protest something. Or bribe somebody.

I'd lived in Lincoln at this point for just over 20 years. I spent six months in Kearney, and before that, six months in Sidney after moving to Nebraska from Queens, New York, where I was born and had spent the first 22 years and six weeks of my life, other than brief excursions to Ohio and New Jersey and a couple of trips to Washington, D.C. I got talked into coming to Nebraska, and I'm still here due to inertia or momentum—I'm not sure which is metaphorically correct in this case. Entropy definitely figures in.

It's pretty quiet here in The Hovel since I have no radio, no television, no CD or tape player, and no one to talk to. I have a bunch of books, but they don't make much noise. There's some activity outside from the bar across N Street and from the constant drone of traffic on the main drag, O Street, a half block to the north. Considering my options, I briefly consider blowing my brains out. The problem with that idea is that I have no gun and no idea where to get one at this hour. The idea itself, from my squalid corner, looks like it has some merit, though. How about jumping off a highway overpass? They've got those things all over town. Surely I can jump off a high one and hedge my bets by doing it into oncoming traffic, but I still have enough of a vestige of good citizenship that I don't want to land on the hood of some poor bastard who *hasn't* had his life slide into a pool of crap in the last couple of months. How about sticking my head in the oven and turning on the gas? Hell, no! I had made a vow to not open that thing again. As I think up and reject idea after idea, I fall asleep. One of these days, I'll get better at making a timely decision.

So I wake up the next morning. Apparently I *didn't* kill myself. If I was dead, surely I wouldn't be able to smell the—shall we say—*unique* aroma of The Hovel. Okay, change of plans: I'll *not* kill myself *and* do something about that smell. That's enough of a plan for now.

Before moving in the previous night, I had stopped by my part-time job and found out that they were closing down. I still had my full-time job, assistant store director in a local grocery store chain, but it would have been convenient to keep the income from that second job. Two years after the events of this paragraph, I sold my soul to the Devil for a dime and became a telemarketer.

That's right—I was the guy who, no matter what time you had dinner, called right as you sat down; the guy who was seemingly oblivious to your repeated ungrammatical assertion that you “didn't want none”; the guy who apparently *didn't* understand the meaning of the word “no.” I sold something called ASDC, which stood for Auto Savings Discount Club, but since it had nothing to do with autos, savings, or discounts and wasn't a club, it changed its name to *American* Savings Discount Club (yeah, I know—it makes little sense, but they thought that changing that one word solved the problem); we just called it ASDC.

We called people who for one reason or another couldn't get a credit card—who had effectively killed their credit and had credit scores that were expressed in fractions. We called and sold them “The Plan.” The Plan consisted of a “line of credit.” For a nominal fee of \$180, ASDC members could draw on a line of credit, instant cash they could “access at any time by calling the toll-free number.” All they had to do was give us their social security and bank account numbers and be recorded giving us permission to draw out \$180 from their checking or savings accounts. No way! No one would be stupid enough to do that! One would think not, but there were enough idiots out there that a couple dozen of us made pretty good money selling this questionable scheme.

We used to talk about the “ASDC Continuum.” On one end were the people who were too smart to ever buy anything over the phone in the first place and certainly not *this* plan. You could hear it in their voices even before you identified yourself; they were skeptical, they were suspicious, and they were *smart*. On the other end of the continuum were the dolts who were incapable of understanding what you were talking about. They couldn't have told you what was wrong with ASDC, but they also couldn't follow what you were saying. You might have been offering to send them a shoebox full of \$100 bills, and they'd say no. The people we sold to were right in the middle of the continuum—stupid enough to have ruined their credit, stupid enough to talk seriously to telemarketers, but smart enough to know what their checking account number was and to have a job of some sort. Okay, maybe not *right* in the middle—closer to the stupid side would be more accurate.

For two years and then some I labored on the phones peddling ASDC, sometimes also doing political polling or surveys (I helped elect Jon Corzine of New Jersey to the US Senate), but ASDC was our bread and butter, and I was good at selling to the cerebrally deficient and congenitally desperate. During training, they taught us to stick strictly to the script. If someone offered an objection, we were to reply using a list of predetermined answers. We were to talk to whomever answered the phone, target or not, and try to sell

them ASDC. There were several problems with that last part. No matter how carefully you explained that you understood that Mr. John Smith, the person you asked for, was not home and that you were *now* making this incredible offer to Mrs. Smith, or John's brother Ray, or whomever, and that you were pitching directly to *them* and not merely leaving a message for Mr. John Smith, the party would inevitably say at the end of the long and complicated spiel, "John's not home," so I stopped trying to sell to secondary residents. I stopped pushing for the sale to belligerent people and those who were plainly stringing me along. This meant I was breaking the rules; it also meant that since I was eliminating a large percentage of almost-guaranteed rejections without taking time to talk to them, my sales per hour went up, and I was making a large amount of bonus money, despite only working part time. Every time they hired a new quality assurance monitor, I'd get written up for breaking the rules until they figured out that I was making *everyone* a lot of money precisely because I *was* breaking the rules. Eventually they left me alone completely and even stopped scheduling me, just letting me show up whenever I pleased.

It was pretty good until some regulatory agency whose initials I forget shut down ASDC, and since ASDC was our biggest client, we were shut down too, just when I could have really used the money. Crap. So it's back to The Hovel; it's a Saturday, and I'm unlikely to find a job on the weekend. I still have to clean this place, and it still smells pretty bad.

Even though The Hovel was, well, a *hovel*, there was always an interesting cast of characters. Right across the hall was Denis the meat cutter, seemingly the only other person in the building who had a job of any kind. Denis always had some down-on-his-luck guy sleeping on his floor, but he often was one of the few people who seemed reasonably sane, although I suppose there are different ways to define "sane." After all, he *was* living in The Hovel, too.

In the first-floor front apartment was Ba, a guy who had spent a lot of time in Vietnamese prisons and was somewhat nuts. Ba could often be found walking up and down 27<sup>th</sup> Street shouting at passers-by in a mixture of Vietnamese and English or buying drinks for people with his large wad of bills (I never inquired about their source). One time, he fell asleep and left some food cooking on the stove; it caught fire, coming close to burning the building down. Several of us were finally able to wake him up after banging on his door and windows for 15 minutes. There was Dana, the gay born-again Christian, who moved in after the meth-dealing woman downstairs moved out and owned two big pit bulls. His church's position on homosexuality was that it was a sin, but he still *felt* gay, so his was a very

confusing life. He lived there until one of his dogs *ate* a small dog in the neighborhood and they went on the lam from the Humane Society. On the third floor were a father and son who didn't seem to have any visible means of support. The son would come down to my apartment to borrow my phone and then leave messages that he could be reached at *my* number. When they moved out, two guys who owned guitars and drums moved in; they played loud music and jumped out of the second-floor windows into the alley. One day, I came home to find them handcuffed and being led away by the Lincoln Police Department, the pieces of their meth lab laid out on a table in the parking lot. And who can forget the woman who stopped by to “borrow a cup of Jack Daniels”?

I lived in The Hovel for about two years. Most people were horrified by my living conditions, but it was cheap, it was close to the bars, and I was too lazy to move. What motivated me to move stemmed from the water being cut off. I came home late on Friday night in dire need of a shower and found that I had no water. The next morning, I bathed and shaved using bottled water I had in the fridge. After returning home from work the next day and finding that the water was working, I went about my business doing laundry, showering, using the toilet, and making tea. After about 45 minutes, I heard a horrific screaming from one of the downstairs apartments followed by its inhabitant, Leroy, running into the hall with murder in his eyes. Apparently, the reason we had no water was that a water main had cracked, and every time someone flushed the toilet or the washing machine drained, the drainage flowed into Leroy's apartment, geysering soap and human waste up through his toilet. I could see why he'd be upset. Everyone in the building had been cautioned to not flush the toilets, not use the washing machine, and to use water sparingly, but since I was one of the few who actually worked, “everyone” didn't include me. I persuaded Leroy to refrain from killing me, got the classifieds, and started looking for an apartment.

My landlord couldn't believe I wanted to move. 🐉

# JAGGED MEMORIES

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MICHAELA WILSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

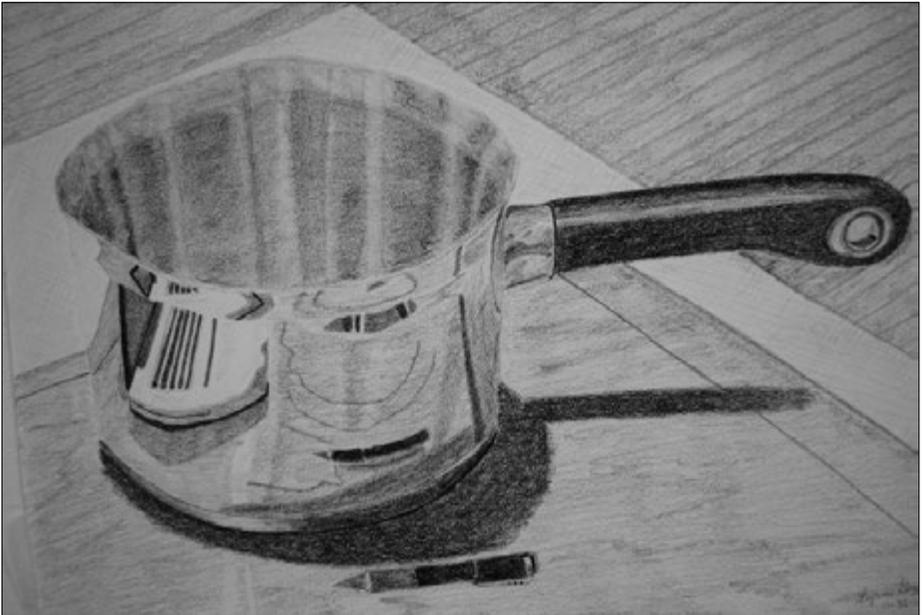
Despite everything, despite the things you put me through,  
Sometimes, late at night, I still think of you.  
I forget the tears, the blood, the scars and screams  
And remember your soft chocolate eyes, goofy smile,  
Your strong arms wrapped safely around me;  
Burying my face in your neck, just forgetting everything,  
How you were the only one who could make me laugh so easily,  
But then it all comes back,  
The dark, jagged memories.  
Icy hate in your eyes, screams echoing,  
Blood running down your arms, whispering that you failed me.  
Broken in pieces at your feet, begging you not to leave,  
But you didn't care, didn't see, just kept attacking.

And yet still you wonder why we couldn't be?

# POT REFLECTIONS

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LYNN DYER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# WHEN?

TERESA BISSEGGER • CONTINUING EDUCATION

When, oh when  
will you love me again?  
You hurt, I hurt, we all hurt.  
I caused the pain  
that runs so deep,  
like ink in tattooed veins.  
If you could open your mind,  
open your heart—  
you would see how freeing  
forgiveness could be.

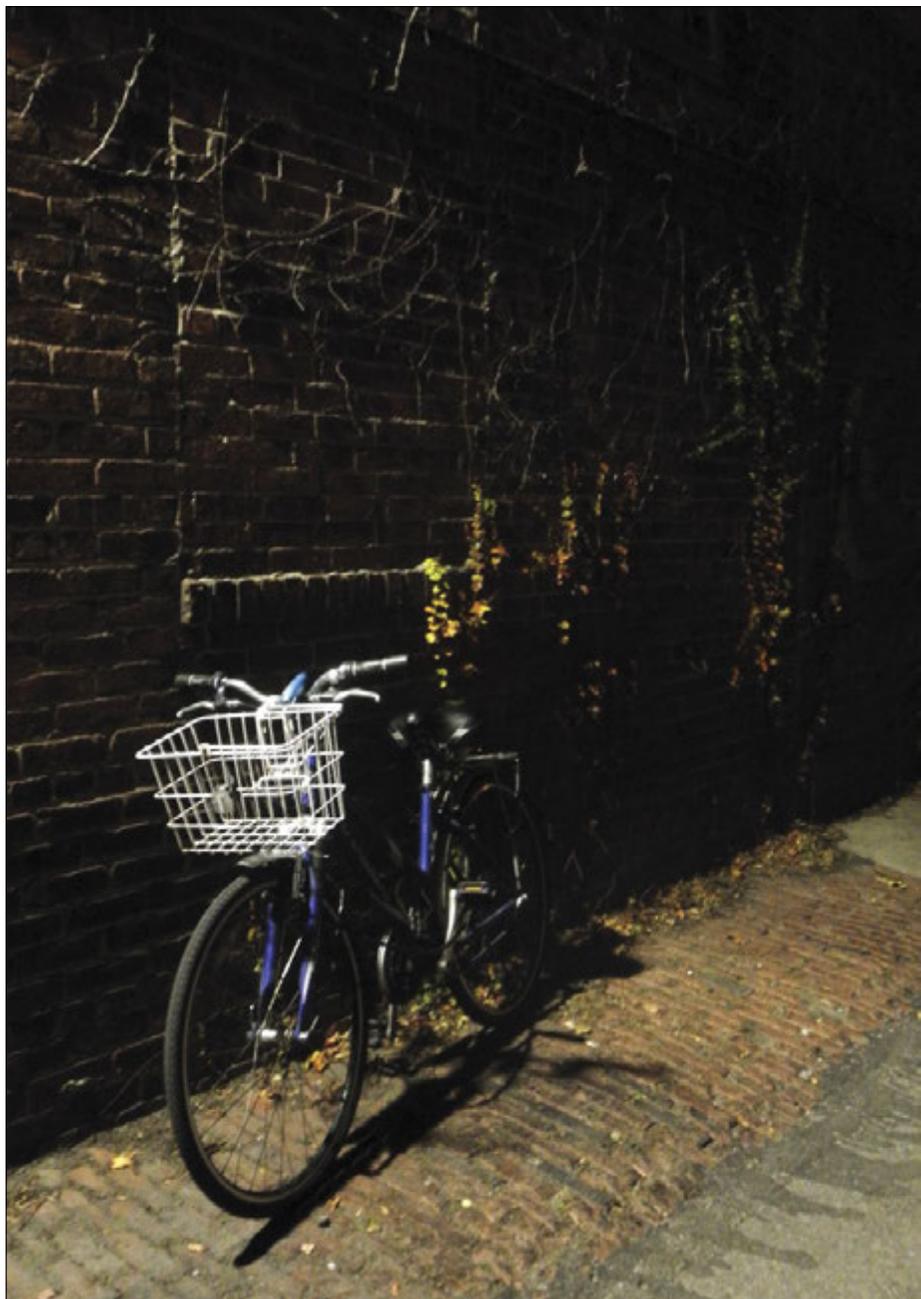
How long must I wait?  
How long will this go on?  
The anger inside of you  
permeates your brain  
like cancer spreading  
through every cell  
of your body.  
The hate you harbor against me  
is like a wild Mustang captured,  
fighting to be freed.

Don't you know  
that peace would come  
if bit by bit  
you would let love back in?  
A morsel of hate  
replaced by love,  
a scrap of forgiveness  
instead of anger.  
I would welcome  
each tiny scrap & every morsel  
into my soul  
like a feast fed  
to the homeless, weathered & worn.  
When, oh, when  
will you love me again?

# DARK ALLEYWAY

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BECKY HILL • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



# THE FARM

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JOSHUA BRO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

As I was growing up, few things excited me more than going to my uncle's farm. Even though the drive was long and torturous, it was more than worth it. My uncle, my two cousins, and my uncle's wife (who I called my aunt) lived there. I always had fun at the farm because there was so much to do, and no two days were the same.

It was a modest farm, not too big and not too small. The farm was somewhere in the middle, and, in my opinion, that was how it should be. Gravel roads lead to the farm. One was quickly met by an old-looking house, a large grey shed that doubled as a garage, and two barns. The first barn housed a large green tractor and had corn, wild cats, and feed in it. The second housed the cows, the mean rooster, and the hay loft.

My cousin Chase was tall, big, and very strong. He had dark, almost black hair, was over six feet, and had brown eyes. Small black stubble lay on his chin like a side note on a paper. His hands were cracked and rough and reminded me of the American West, like a desert. Whenever someone mentioned a farmer, I thought of my cousin Chase. He had worked on the farm all his life, and he had also played football. He was my inspiration to play football because I wanted to be just like him. He was my hero. Some kids had Spiderman, some Batman, but I had my cousin Chase. We got along well because he took me four-wheeling, played football with me, and put up with me asking questions about his cattle. Chase showed cattle and was pretty good at it, so naturally, I picked his brain. Now Chase is co-owner of a cattle feed factory.

Chase showed me my favorite place on the farm. The hay loft was a large maze of climbable hay, and I loved to climb the endless bales. The loft also had a wooden floor, high red walls, and an angled ceiling. The loft had a plank of wood that opened up, so I could view the farm in a way I would never forget. It was close enough to hear the cows mooing and the rooster clucking, but high enough to see the green rolling pastures I rarely saw otherwise.

My other cousin's name was Chad. Chad was tall, but not as tall as Chase or my uncle Terry. He was tanned and strong and had stubble; I wouldn't classify the stubble as a beard, but Chad still had more facial hair than Chase. He also had dark brown eyes and was hard-working. Chad had a thicker face and sideburns. He normally wore jeans and a button-down shirt. Chad wrestled, and if I am not mistaken, he was pretty good at it.

The four-wheeler was red and had mud caked on it. This four-wheeler—one large mud pie—could have classified as a monster from Scooby Doo. Nonetheless, it was fun to drive. My favorite pasture was a little down the road; it was also the largest pasture and had a dip that was good for ramping. However, when the cows were near that area, ramping was a no-go. Houston canceled that launch before it even began.

Every time I think of the farm, I think of the big, two-story barn. The barn was large and had cracked paint and smelt of hay and cattle feed. The barn was dark, and at night, it seemed that light didn't exist. When walking into the barn at night, I was reminded of a black hole. The floor was a cold, hard grey with dark veins. It reminded me of colored marble. I knew I could always find Chase in the barn getting farming equipment ready, and I would try to help, but I would end up in the way; what surprised me was he didn't seem to mind.

My uncle was tall and tanned, had grey hair, and never wore a shirt when he was working. He wore torn up, stained, khaki cargo shorts. He had chew in his mouth and a beer somewhere close by, but he rarely went overboard. The shorts never seemed to be the same pair each time he put them on. Each use added a new stain or tear. His hands were even rougher than Chase's, and they reminded me of cracked earth because they were rough, but fixable. My uncle worked so hard for everything he had, and growing up, I admired that.

My uncle was a Steelers fanatic, so he had a Steelers handkerchief. The handkerchief was yellow with the Steelers logo on it, and it looked soft, so I imagine he washed it daily. My uncle had a grey four-by-four truck that was hard to climb into because the truck was very tall. When I was a kid, it reminded me of a skyscraper. The interior was a soft grey fabric. Even though I was not normally a Ford guy, I liked his truck. It could be because it was his, but who knows.

My aunt was of medium height, had reddish-brown hair, and smelled of coconut. She had a round face and welcoming, soft brown eyes. Her smile was warming and contagious. She always had something funny to say and was very charming. She liked bright, vibrant colors and was one of my favorite aunts. I had never seen her without makeup on, and to see her without it seemed almost like a sin. She had a dark red Chevy Blazer for a vehicle. She had to replace her old one because it was hit by a train, but luckily, she was unhurt. She was always found in the large farmhouse.

The farmhouse was two stories and had a fresh coat of paint. There were pink flowers in the flower bed, and the lawn was freshly cut grass. The first room in was the kitchen. Polished wooden floors gleamed throughout the house. The floors could be hard to get traction on because they were well polished. The floors were normally cool to the touch and unforgiving if I fell on them. The house was over a century old; my aunt's grandmother had lived and grown up

there. The living room had a large, crimson leather couch that had a footrest. I remember thinking that the couch was a “three for one” deal because it looked like someone had molded three recliners into a couch. The living room had a large TV in the corner, so everyone could see it.

Upstairs was my cousins’ rooms and the guest bedroom. My cousins’ bedrooms were side by side, so that had to work out great when they were growing up. Chase’s room was large with a huge bed and a little TV. He had beer logos all over his walls and a huge hole in the floor. Although the hole was covered with carpet, it scared me each time I accidentally stepped there. Chad’s room was a lot smaller with a picture of his state wrestling medal with his singlet inside a frame, hanging there like a retired jersey. The walls of his room were covered with white wallpaper and pictures from his youth. His bed was tall and comfy with white sheets. It used to scare me each time I would sleep there because I was afraid of falling off the tall bed.

The family had a large black Lab named CJ. CJ was lazy for a farm dog. He and my uncle had a few things in common, the first of which was their love for beer, so my uncle shared his beer with the dog. CJ was mellow after that, and he lay next to my uncle without a worry. My uncle and CJ were the best of friends.

My uncle’s farm was one of my favorite places to visit as a kid. It featured Chase, Chad, my Uncle Terry, and my Aunt Polly. They had a nice house, nice vehicles, and one of the greatest dogs to walk the face of the earth. All in all, they had a nice life and were very good people. 🐾

## HOME

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SUPRINA TUBBS • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



# AGAIN

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TERESA BISSEGGER • CONTINUING EDUCATION

...And the pain begins...  
again.  
Living inside my head.  
I brush it away  
but it won't stay.  
It rebuilds like the  
spider and his web.  
It ebbs with the dawn.  
The slightest memory—  
a smell, a sound.  
It flows again—  
the pain.  
It rises,  
never ending,  
like campfire ash  
lifted in the wind.  
It fills me, follows me,  
feels heavy in my breath  
like the thick muggy air of summer.  
I acknowledge, accept  
the pain.  
Embrace it,  
love it, I suppose  
like we often do  
both hate and love the same.  
There is hope,  
and the pain fades  
with the passing of time.  
And I live and laugh and love.  
  
...until it begins...  
again.

# THOUGHTS IN THE DARK

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BRYANT FLEWELLING • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

As I drive down an old abandoned blacktop, I wonder what has brought me here tonight. I could be so many places; why am I here, doing this? I find myself at the end of the pavement where an old cemetery lays to the west. As I pull in, I see the shadows cast off the huge oak trees and the moonlight shining off the headstones. I step out of the truck to find the warmth stolen from my body by a crisp gust across the dark prairie. The clouds are thin, allowing the moonlight to peek through them, and with it being a brisk 30 degrees out, I feel like I'm in a classic horror movie. I start walking, cinching up my coat as I wander across the front of the cemetery.

I notice all the headstones in front are green with moss, and the stones are pitted from a hundred years of weather beating down upon them. After living in the city for a few years, I can't help but hear how quiet the country is; it is nice, peaceful, and eerie. I feel as if the life is missing out of it—it isn't like it was when I was a kid. I begin thinking that there should be crickets and fireflies but quickly dispel the idea knowing it is too early in the year. The grass isn't well taken care of. The crab grass and weeds take up one half, and the other half is dead and burnt from last year's drought.

I have always noticed the tremendous statue of Christ in the middle of the cemetery, but I have never noticed how frightening it can be until I find myself in the shadow of the Lord. With a chill down my spine, I continue walking. Up the middle I walk with stones on either side of me and see the progression through the years. Once I reach the back of the cemetery, I turn and notice the moonlight gleaming over the polished colors of the perfectly smooth stones.

I notice a mound of dirt in front of one of the headstones. My eyes wander to the miniscule print neatly aligned on the front of the headstone. A gust of wind rushes over me, and a sharp pang rattles my heart. I know this man. I had worked hand-in-hand with him for three years and didn't even know that he left us a short week ago. A rush of emotions hits me; I don't know if I should feel relief for this old man, sadness for not being closer when he left, guilt for not showing my appreciation for the knowledge he had given, or happiness for the memories we had together.

After the memories pass, I walk along the back of the cemetery, and out of the corner of my eye, I notice something I have never seen before. It looks like a headstone isolated in the back corner 40 yards from any other stone. Confused

and curious, I have to look. I follow the road to the edge of the cemetery and find a single mowed path back to the stone. Along the way, I try to figure out why it would be all by itself, and the only thing I can think of is that the caretakers must have started in the back and then decided it would be a better idea to start in the front.

Now I have made it to the back. I find a large old stone facing the opposite direction from the other stones. Flashes of junior high come flying back to me. I see myself and the other boys in my class sitting in the hallway before first period, and Jared Montz is telling a story about how some of the boys and he were out at the old cemetery on Saturday night when they found this same headstone. He whispered that they had asked around about why it was there and in the wrong direction. They had heard it was because the man had killed himself, an act that wasn't looked lightly upon by the Catholic Church. I had never believed him, but now I don't doubt him. I'm standing here in amazement, trying to figure out how I feel about this. Does this guy deserve this kind of loneliness and exile? Is it justified or just cruel?

Rattled, I quickly walk away, deciding I have found enough to reflect on for one night. On the way back to the truck, I realize that the country has come to life. I can hear a truck down the county road, the coyotes howling down by the river, and the train coming into the next town seven miles away. This is the Nebraska I remember from my childhood. I get into my truck, and the rumble of the loud exhaust breaks the quiet night. I slowly drive the few miles back to town, not noticing that the heat is not on and the radio is muted, my mind drowning in the thoughts and emotions I find myself in tonight. 🍷

## EYES

THOMAS JOYCE • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION/ACCOUNTING FOCUS



# RÊVERIE

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KATIE SJUTS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Honeysuckled hillocks  
spin with pinched  
spirits of parted milk barns  
who endure despite green  
moss. Bitten dusk mirrors  
formerly ripe petunias,

    Withered with weight of  
the past, twisted memory  
of “Sign here\_\_”  
of “Approved”  
of “Sold!”

Lofted dreams of dominion  
weren’t what we wanted

When we sprouted proudly,  
eager to please, blooms ripped  
forth in the name  
of regard. Clouded sky means  
life or death, depends how  
you read the end.

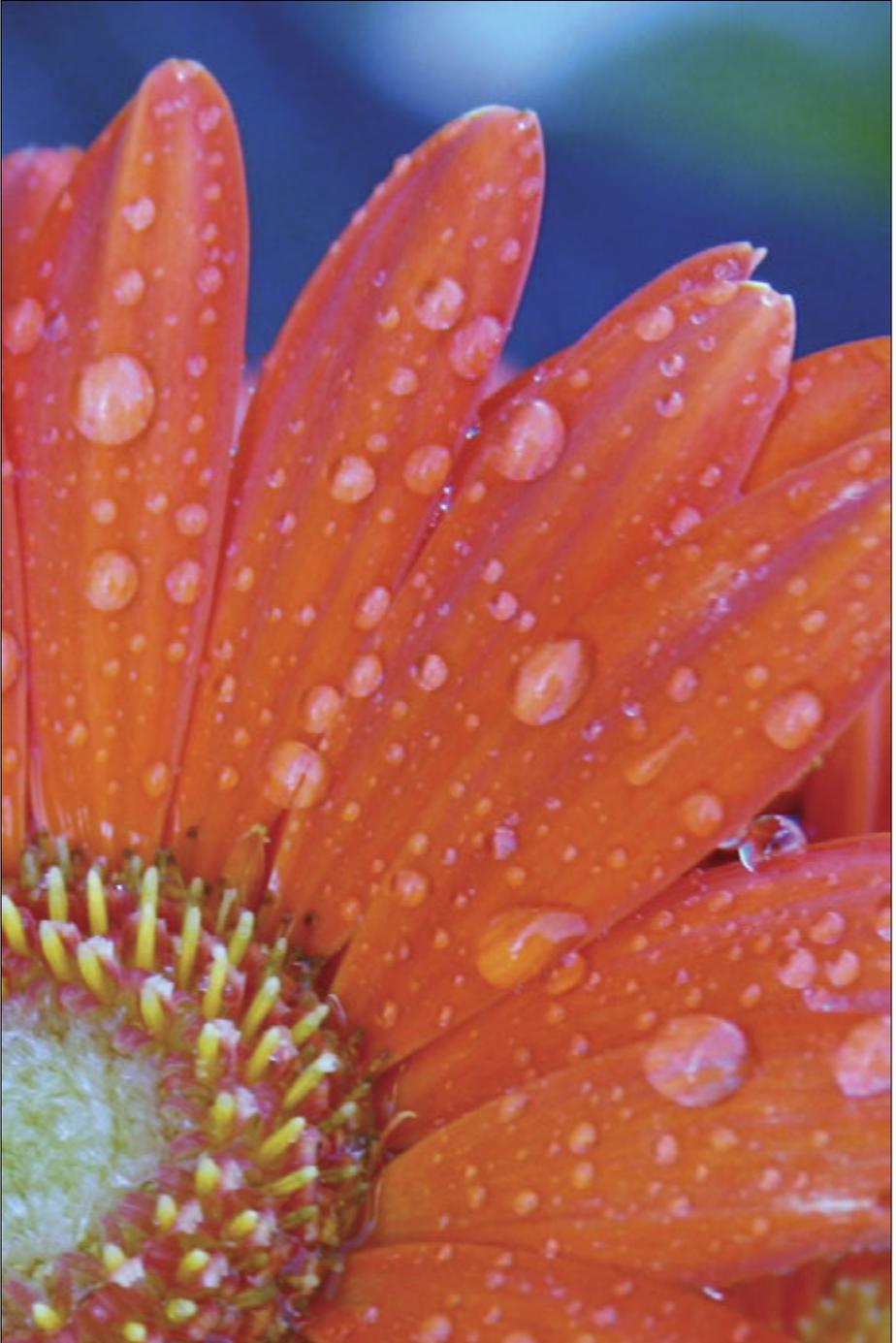
    Cobalt fiery sun burns  
on high, Hyperion  
zenith scoops a reflected  
trite existence, dipped in  
cool, salacious ignorance.

Listen, or part without me.

# SEDUCTION

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KIMBERY FANGMAN • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR



# JOURNAL ENTRIES

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BY KATSIARYNA LUPSIKOVA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



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Most of the time, I like doing something new: playing new video games, listening to new music, or tasting new food. I always look forward to making new friends and visiting new places. However, sometimes new is not better than old. Five years ago, when my family moved to Lincoln, I learned that a new, neat city can never be as wonderful as a rambling, untamed city of an old country.

My old city, Zhlobin, close to the Dneiper River in Belarus, was big enough, but the streets were completely disorganized. Zhlobin had a lot of huge old trees, many taller than the houses by them. The city was full of places with wild nature. The north side of the city was the site of massive metal factories that made steel cords and wires but mainly pipes. The central downtown area had many stores, restaurants, coffee houses, clubs, and administrative buildings. My friends and I loved to hang out downtown most of the time, which became the happiest times for all of us. Despite the transportation problem, there was something magical about that habitual city center. We used to know every neighborhood there and walk miles just to have fun. It seemed like my friends were always with me having fun.

When I was a teenager, my mother finally decided we needed to take the opportunity to move to a city in a new country, America. Lincoln was much bigger; the new neighborhoods were filled with excitement, definitely beyond comparison to my former city. The new city was neater, more organized, and completely asphalted. Unfortunately, I didn't see many trees at all—no wild nature which I used to enjoy so much. The city was strange, as well as the people. The strange part of it was that I did not see as many people on the streets as I used to in my old city—no neighborhood that I knew as my own. Nothing wild and not much variety—that was the problem. The streets were simply nothing more than parallel and perpendicular lines. To put it bluntly, the city was tidy, but boring. I did not have any transportation problems, but at the same time, I still loved to walk. Most of the people here do not like to walk, whereas my friends and I would walk many hundreds of miles in the old country. For this reason, it seemed like this city did not want to accept me.

Over the last five years, I became familiar with the new city and began to feel more comfortable. I guess all new cities are on their way to becoming old cities

eventually. However, it takes decades, and that is too slow for me. A new city takes much time to become convenient for me. If I will have to move somewhere again, I will remember in choosing a city that the old is always better than the new.

## Two

While working as a social worker at the Social Center in Zlobin in the spring of 2007, I met many interesting elderly people. These people usually liked to share stories of their lives, especially if they lived alone and did not have many visitors.

One of my clients was Maria, about 72 years old. She was a corpulent woman, short, with a puffy but friendly face; her curly gray hair was cut quite short. Maria was living alone in her one-bedroom apartment. Most of the people who visited her were friends and neighbors. She was glad to see any guests. She needed company more for talk than for actual help. After a couple months of visiting her, I already knew the full story of her life.

Maria was one of those persons whose life was unusually filled with stressful events. She was born in 1937 in a village close to Zhlobin City. She was the only child of a young family; she did not remember her parents much because she lost them when she was about five years old. Her parents were killed by German soldiers during World War II. Children and teenagers were mostly wanted for booty by German soldiers. They were used as free biological material, mostly as blood donors for German soldiers and for experiments. The older teenagers were used as free slaves.

Maria was taken to one of the camps as a blood donor. Even though she was only five years old, she remembered everything that happened like it was just yesterday. Especially, she remembered how those people in the camp were stabbing her with needles and how kids were physically abused by medical staff.

After World War II, Maria was in an orphanage until she turned 18 years old. A couple years later, she met a man who eventually became her husband. Maria's marriage was a disappointment because her husband was an alcoholic and abused her and their son. Finally, she divorced her husband and began raising her son alone. A few years later, she married again and lived with her second husband for more than 30 years.

Her husband fell sick suddenly and passed away, leaving Maria devastated. Soon after her husband passed away, her only son died tragically. All of these tragedies badly affected her health: she became a diabetic, gained a considerable amount of fat, developed high blood pressure, and lost a great deal of her vision.

Even though Maria's life was full of stressful events, she did not lose her faith. She was one of the kindest people I have known. I wish that more people could follow her example and be positive, no matter what is in their lives. 🍀

# THE JOURNEY

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KATHRYN ENGSTROM UNDERHILL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR



# HA'PENNY BRIDGE, AFTER A STORM

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DEBRENEE ADKISSON • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

*written in response to "Abstraktes Bild," by Gerhard Richter*

I  
have  
seen  
these  
colors before;  
once, right before waking, they bled  
behind my eyes; this evening they have  
come again as storm clouds cluster on the  
horizon, purged and empty. The summer people  
creep forward from dry shadows and begin again,  
sliding over slick cobbles, treading dampened paths  
to somewhere else. A vaporous veil adorns us; we are  
a thousand brides, a thousand metaphors in transit.  
Golden dusk-dust settles on the city, a fine bright  
shine and shimmer – the bridge trembles with  
the footsteps of a hundred hurried paces. We  
remember it vaguely, under our frantic feet.  
Its image dances with mine, dreamlike,  
in the waters below, in the raindrops  
on stone, in the misty traces of  
the long-dead,  
who,  
rain-cleansed,  
walk  
beside  
me.

# DAY

ASHLEY HECKMAN • MEDICAL ASSISTING

Tell the sky to stand outside,  
await the dawn to crown beside stars.  
Meteors and comets line prancing among the young.  
Vanish the color black or white.  
Oh what a beauty, marvelous sun,  
standing, swirling, spooning the earth.  
Fortunate flavors bundles of joy.  
One reason to sell the day.

# PHOTOBOOTH SELF-PORTRAIT I

SANDY WASSENMILLER • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL



# PHOTOBOOTH SELF-PORTRAIT II

SANDY WASSENMILLER • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL



# FOR JORDY

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ERICA MARIE BESTUL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

When shadows encroach on you  
and the day is nearly gone,  
I'll count your blessings on your fingers  
and add them one by one.

And when you forget your way  
and all the good you've done,  
I'll sing you the lullaby  
we wrote when we were young.

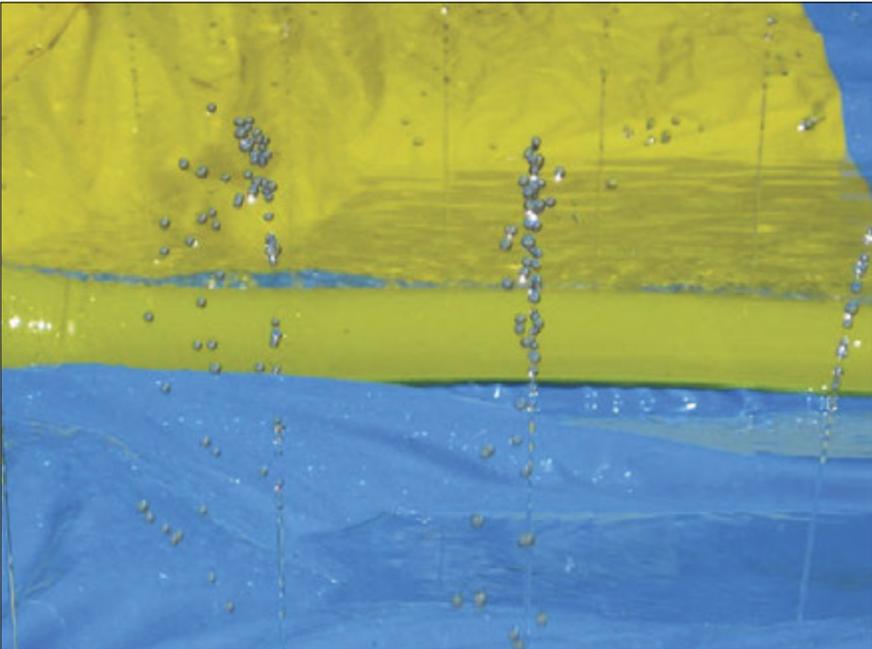
And when you are up all night,  
Too terrified to sleep,  
I'll watch the stars with you  
And keep the monsters locked up tight.

And when night is at an end  
and you've almost lost your mind,  
Darling, I'll lead you from the dark  
where the sun's about to rise.

# SLIP 'N SLIDE

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LINDSAY DOLAN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# SWEET AS CAN BE

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MEKAYLA GRANT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# MY SISTER, MY BEST FRIEND

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MEKAYLA GRANT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# SOMEWHERE BETWEEN

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ALANNA JOHNSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR POETRY

My country road rots with daisy weed  
And Buffalo grass. Dry dirt and gravel clouds  
In the middle, causing agitated flames of dust to trail  
The path that I am navigating.



Ending on the left of County Road 27  
Is my driveway. You'll miss it.  
But with a patient eye, you'll find a gray muzzled pup,  
Disguised as a dog, trot up the angled drive  
To meet you at a car door swing,  
Nestling your hip as you descend



What if I drove home tomorrow?  
The day after Tuesday. To mesh my white sharp  
City stone with smooth gravel pebbles.  
Why can't I go back tomorrow, or the next day?  
I love there. No sirens or blasphemy.  
Nature's caring spot, a special crust for my home



I cradle my smoggy city stone between hasty fingers,  
Begging its sharp edges for a prism of reality.  
Tightly I grasp, accepting the tinge of pain,  
And allow it to slip once more.  
I will never be Crystal rock, nor pebble smooth  
As the minerals in my drive meddle together,  
A blended identity.



## BOOTS

BETH KEMPF • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# WORSHIP

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LALEH ROHANI • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Nine years old now,  
he asks me a lot, searches for reasons;  
with blackish brown hair, not very long,  
and divided into two parts.  
His eyelashes get stuck  
in his big brown eyes.  
He wears shorts and t-shirt,  
orange-white tennis shoes,  
and loves to wear yellow, red,  
his favorite colors and the colors of his future.

One month he wants to be a pilot,  
then he changes it to be a President, also.

I can see his changing as he grows up:  
I laughed to his funny face when  
he lost nine teeth: two when  
he was six, four when  
he was seven, and three when  
he was eight, and I feel he grows  
under my heart continually.

One day he talks to me about two girls.  
He loves them, he says.  
It worries me that he grows up so soon.

He picks a dandelion for me;  
gives it to me and hugs me with his small hands,  
which reach halfway around my back.  
I can hear his voice,  
through his strong feeling:  
“I love you, Mom, forever.”

Calling his name, Yasna,  
reminds me of its meaning.

*“Yasna” means “Worship.”*

# BLUE EYES

MEKAYLA GRANT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# DESCENDANTS

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ALANNA K. JOHNSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF THE RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR POETRY

Somewhere, nowhere, stardust collected after a Celestial  
Explosion. The person it embodied twinkled along,  
Scouting a mate, creating me.  
Madonna phase in the '80s, militant in the '90s—  
Millennium here, she claims to hate the hair-band music.

“Weren’t you a wild child?” my question never fully answered.  
I already knew. Her porous face showed the smoking, laughing,  
Conflicting youth that weathered on her star-dusted skin.

Fingers smudge to hide the bleeding of lipstick lines  
Where the last cigarette hung eight years ago this July.  
That was a bad month; her complexion boiled when she yelled,  
Spider-veined when she came close to yelling.  
Not smoking made her furious.

Having two girls, the stars lined up just right for her,  
Combusting to form the prayers she said to God:  
“Please give me girls.”  
Ancestral light stooped down and granted that plea.  
Starry nights must have seen her face deep within them;  
She plucked spheres of gold and carefully filled tattered skin.  
Renewed youth.

“I cut down to a pack a day for you.”  
No hint of regret, puffing her now dusty breath on me.  
She does not look old, but she thinks so. Every time  
Denying the youthful character inside, a glimmer of star  
Shakes off, fades, incarnating the ground she walks on.

I can see her glow from Weston, still. Scouring around  
In a robed covering. Drinking in morning light.  
It can be five a.m., and I feel her. She'll clank around  
The kitchen—waking me when I was young and starry, like her.  
Passing down cosmic wisdom, of Those before us.

I don't deny my past as she does. Galaxies hold stories,  
Watching all that inhabits. Tracking their specs  
That once were strong burning balls of light.  
They walk the earth now, handing down all they know.  
Leaving only stardust to trace their existence.

## GOLDEN CAR

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JESSICA MONTGOMERY • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



# OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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**Debrenee Adkisson** enjoys teaching, napping, eating cupcakes, and playing with her cats. An engaged SCC English instructor when she submitted her poems, Debrenee is now happily married and living in Omaha.

**Randy Back** is a husband and father to five children. He enjoys reading suspenseful novels and favors the writers Dean Koontz, James Patterson, and Steve Berry. He also loves fixing and building things with his hands.

**Kyle Barnes** says she is transparent and sharing. She loves literature and is such an avid fan of Stephen King that she has a ¾ sleeve about King's *The Dark Tower* tattooed on her left arm. Even though she's a people pleaser by nature, Kyle refuses to be anything but genuine.

**Erica Bestul** plans to enroll in the Physical Therapy Assisting program at SCC. She loves to read and wrote a book when she was a senior in high school. "It turned out to be awful," Erica says, "but from there I learned how much I love writing, especially short stories and poems."

**Teresa Bissegger** is an antiques dealer who enjoys the "artsy" side of herself. She loves writing, photography, and creating unusual artwork out of broken stuff.

**Derrick Brinkmeier** calls himself a goofy comedian who loves the theater. His video of SCC's presentation of "Not On This Night" was a joint effort with Speech/Theater Instructor Deborah Freeman.

**Joshua Bro** is a hard worker who never quits, and he loves to make people laugh and smile. He says his experiences, his family, his friends, and his education make him who he is.

**Thomas Brown** is a Criminal Justice major whose hobbies are painting and fishing. He works as a staff member for the Lancaster County Boys and Girls Club through Park Middle School, and his goal is to join the FBI.

**Rebecca Burt** is an instructor of Life Sciences on the Beatrice campus. She loves teaching and also enjoys reading and bicycling.

**Adrian Callari** is a very reclusive person who usually doesn't like to write, but he does love playing strategy games. He is in SCC's Academic Transfer program.

**Megan Cameron** loves the "old style" of Japanese artwork, which led to her creation of her graphite-drawing collage. She is a student in SCC's Graphic Design program.

**Steve Casarez** is 37 years old and pursuing a Criminal Justice degree. Knowing that the results will benefit his family, he is currently working 40 hours a week and attending SCC full-time. Although he doesn't consider himself a great writer, Steve decided to submit his emotional essay after picking up a copy of *Illuminations* and thoroughly enjoying it.

**Emalie Clement** is a runner, a soccer player, and a lover of art, music, and coffee. Currently an undeclared student, Emalie found inspiration for her two drawings by looking through fashion magazines.

**Ashley Cornelsen** is an Academic Transfer graduate and is currently a senior in the nursing program at Bryan College of Health Services. She is excited to work as an RN in the ICU and says she has always found writing to be a great way to release stress and to express herself.

**Harmony Culp** was named after an Elton John song and loves to dabble in all forms of art and design, although she favors web design, photography, and composition. Having nearly completed her degree in her current program of Visual Publications, she plans to continue school to become an English instructor. Her favorite color, and flavor, is orange. Harmony says, “I still believe that love, music, and the world around me are my biggest inspirations—the world through my eyes is a very intriguing place!”

**Corki Davison** is back in school after a twelve-year break. She spends her time caring for her three wonderful children and planning for her upcoming wedding. When the weather’s nice, she can be found at a lake relaxing and reading a book with her oldest son or writing a story—in-between catching fish, of course!

**Cody De Palma** is a huge movie buff and knows far too many big words. In fact, he writes poetry for fun. Cody has a mild to moderate spastic diplegic Cerebral Palsy and enjoys ninja training on the weekends. He says he’s also single if any females are interested.

**Emily Dober** was motivated by a class assignment to create her intricate “Leaf with a Lot of Colors” pencil drawing. Emily enjoys playing softball and is a student in the Academic Transfer program. She credits her art teacher, Carol Pralle, with encouraging her to submit her work to *Illuminations*.

**Lindsay Dolan** loves writing, painting, and photography, along with other creative activities and projects. She’s a little obsessed with her movie collection and loves being outdoors, pranking, and eating in her free time. The song “Helena,” by My Chemical Romance, inspired her short story of the same name.

**Lynn Dyer** is currently completing her accounting degree and enjoys traveling, gardening, and spending time with her family. Her two graphite drawings appearing in *Illuminations* were completed as in-class projects.

**Sharon Edic** has an awesome, hilarious son named Kai. She enjoys playing a lot of video games, but she also plays the piano. If she’s around someone enough, Sharon says she’ll let loose her dry sense of humor and obnoxious personality.

**Kimberly Fangman** is the editor of *Illuminations* and an English instructor on the Lincoln campus. She loves old movies, her antique toy collection, and her basement full of books.

**Bryant Flewelling** says he’s just a simple guy with a knack for details. A student in the Computer Information Technology program, Bryant wrote his observational essay for his English class.

**Isidro Galarza-Fernandez** wrote his powerful essay, “The Different Wars We Fight,” for his ENGL0950 class before leaving for military training. He is in the Academic Transfer program.

**Kara Gall** actively seeks numinous experiences that leave her feeling “the thrumming infinity of all of us humming as one.” An SCC English Instructor, Kara has published her writing in the books *The Untidy Season: An Anthology of Nebraska Women Poets*, *Why We Ride: Women Writers on the Horses in their Lives*, *Women Who Eat*, *Breeder: Stories from the New Generation of Mothers*, and *ReGeneration*. She hopes her bee makes it back to the hive.

**Assenet Garcia** would play soccer 24/7 if she could, but when she’s not playing, she enjoys drawing. Assenet created the drawing of Taylor Martinez for her art history class and is proud of how it turned out.

**Dinorah Garcia Santos** believes that being thankful is the secret to being happy. A student in the Academic Transfer program, Dinorah promised English Instructor Dan Everhart that she would attempt to publish her writing, and a promise is a promise.

**Mekayla Grant** is going to transfer to Bellevue University for Graphic Design. She has a passion for graphic design and photography, as reflected in her charming photographic portraits.

**Mark Gudge** is in his tenth year of teaching and is convinced that next to being a good husband and, potentially, a good father one day, there is no higher calling than working in education. He recently returned from a sabbatical in London, where he conducted research into the use of labels in Holocaust education.

**Mystery Harwood** is obsessed with Rifftrax and MST3K because she loves to laugh. She is currently studying creative writing at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

**Shandi Harvey** is named after a Kiss song and says, “Writing fiction is what makes me ‘me’.” An Academic Transfer student, Shandi calls herself a huge book nerd.

**Courtney Heap** hates the smell of metal and likes to dance in the rain, and when the world gets to be too much, she’s one to tuck her sorrows away in-between the lines of a book. She won’t lie to you and tell you everything will be fine, but she’ll take your hand and stick by you through the fight.

**Ashley Heckman** believes that art is a great way to tell her story, and in addition to writing poetry, she loves photography and Irish dance. A student in the Medical Assisting program, Ashley became interested in entering the medical field after witnessing firsthand the courage and compassion of the medical technicians who once cared for her mother.

**Becky Hill** loves wandering around and taking photographs. She says, “There is beauty all around us, and I try to capture some of that natural beauty in my photography.” A student in our Visual Publications program, Becky is a huge fan of video games and nerdy TV shows. She also enjoys reading comic books and attending concerts.

**Brenda Hoffman** loves to learn new things. She enjoys reading and taking photos of her home and family. Her photo, “Relax,” forecasts the coming of a snowstorm.

**Alanna Johnson** loves playing guitar and piano. She grew up on a farm and raised alpacas for six years. She has always had a passion for writing, but her pieces in *Illuminations* represent her first try at poetry.

**Thomas Joyce** was born in New York City but eventually came to his senses and moved to Nebraska. He is the father of eight children and the grandfather of two. A wedding officiant, Thomas and his wife Susie have performed over 300 weddings in five states. Thomas also writes a blog called “Ill-Gotten Booty Beer Reviews,” devoted to the enjoyment of beer. Thomas and the rest of the Joyce family love to gather regularly to tell stories.

**Stephen Kaminski** is a lover of learning about the humans in history that have shaped the artistic world. He is also passionate about making the world a better place by helping the less fortunate. Along with his wife Megan and their two boys, Conrad and Reece, Stephen enjoys doing pottery, painting, reading, and taking nature hikes. He enjoys life to the fullest and tries never to be in a hurry.

**Beth Kempf** liked a photo of a pair of cowboy boots so much that she decided it would make a nice pencil drawing, resulting in “Boots.” A student in the Academic Transfer program, Beth enjoys participating in Roller Derby in Lincoln.

**Joe Lambrix** has been writing a book, titled *Dreamweaver*, since high school, and after sharing a chapter with his classmates in Composition I, he decided to submit it to *Illuminations*. He loves music and sports, particularly basketball. Joe has a Facebook page, titled Brix Books, for anyone who wants to keep up with his book’s progress.

**Christie Lefebvre** has always been into art in all its forms and has enjoyed taking pictures just for fun. In submitting her photos to *Illuminations*, she wanted to share the beauty that she sees in the natural world.

**Casey Lowe** recently married her love of six-and-a-half years and is working as a graphic designer at Transformation Marketing. She loves taking photos, cheering on the Huskers, spoiling her three dogs, designing pretty things, and shopping. Casey says she is also very competitive and is proud to have won her last fantasy football league.

**Katsiaryna Lupsiakova** came from Belarus to the United States and says that the move required her to start everything over, and that wasn't easy. She is a student in the Academic Transfer program.

**Cameron Maxwell** loves poetry and creative writing and hopes to make a lifelong habit of producing both. He is a student in the Academic Transfer program.

**Jessica Montgomery** loves making black-and-white photographs with selective color, and she's often working on new photography and graphic design techniques. Jessica is a student in the Visual Publications program.

**Guillermo Rivas** was born in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, but has lived in Norfolk and Lincoln almost his whole life. A student in the Business Administration program, he enjoys riding his motorcycle in his free time.

**Laleh Rohani** was born in Iran and lived there for 28 years. After earning an associate degree in computer software, she moved to Turkey and then to the U.S. in 2009. Laleh is the mother of a 9-year-old son and would like to work part-time in the accounting or business field after graduation from UNL.

**Phip Ross** says he tries to let a poem—like a morel mushroom hiding in the grass, like a bass in the shallows, like a wren flicking in the bush—find him. Phip teaches English on the main Lincoln campus.

**Anthony Ruppert** loves telling stories in the poems he writes. He also enjoys reading, eating, gaming, and hanging out with friends. He plans on studying political science and history.

**Katie Sjuts** is happiest with a chai tea latte and the biggest book she can find. While she's always been a bookworm, she also loves old Hollywood, her seven cats and one dog, and Cherry Garcia ice cream.

**Eric Tomasek** has had many interests in his life—including music, fitness, nutrition, computers, fashion, power kiting, and video games—, but one passion that has always remained constant for him is writing. Eric says it's pretty awesome that he can share with someone else the adventures that run wild through his imagination.

**Roxie Tubbs** enjoys taking candid photos of her friends and family; unfortunately, because she's always the one taking photos, she rarely appears in any! Roxie has worked in the Human Services field for the last ten years, and although she has a passion for helping teens, if she had it all to do over again, she would have gone to school for photography.

**Suprina Tubbs** has worked in group homes for at-risk youths for the last ten years but is now returning to school for a business administration degree. For the last four years, she has volunteered with the Nebraska Stampede women's football team as the on-field photographer, and it was through travelling and working with the team that she found her passion for photography.

**Kathryn Engstrom Underhill** has earned degrees in English, Art, Elementary Education, and Master of Education. She has also earned her pilot's license and studied meteorology. Kathryn would love to live in an art museum. She says that using her imagination to make the 'unseen seen' has been enticing, exhilarating, and edifying and has helped balance the struggles in her life.

**Nancy Hagler Vujovic** enjoys her dogs, her house, her family, her books, and her art. She also finds cooking to be a guilty pleasure. Nancy says, "I host foreign exchange students every year, and they share their culinary secrets with me!" Nancy is an art instructor on the Beatrice campus.

**Patricia Wagner's** fascination for photography began after taking photography classes in the late '70s while working at Colorado Mountain College. After returning to Nebraska, the 35 mm cameras were put in the closet and forgotten for many years, but an interest in photography was renewed when digital cameras made their appearance. Patricia loves travelling to the West and Southwest, where she has taken thousands of photos of her adventures. A 27-year employee with SCC, Patricia has served as Beatrice's Campus Secretary since 2004.

**Sandy Wassenmiller** says she's had a lifelong love of art and photography, resulting in a multitude of photographs, artist books, multi-media pieces, and other artwork creations. Sandy is currently working in art exhibition and installation and making artwork.

**Haley Weiner** was motivated by her art teacher, Carol Pralle, to submit her mixed media drawing to *Illuminations*. She is a first-time college student at the age of 34 and says she is enjoying every minute of her time at SCC.

**Shannon White** is an employee of Lincoln Public Schools and enjoys coaching football. He wrote his powerful story, "Black Violas," to explore the relationships in the African-American community and the relationship between the African-American community and society.

**Tammy Williamson** grew up on an acreage in Pleasant Dale, NE, which inspired her love of animals, people, and nature. She is a nontraditional student in the Academic Transfer program and is looking forward to a new and exciting career.

**Michaela Wilson** loves animals, the beauty of nature, and how all things are connected. She has three cats, a corn snake named Azula, and a leopard gecko named Arie. Her passions include reading, writing, and music, and she admits that she sings pretty much all the time.

**Daniel Zebert** works two jobs in addition to going to school. He hopes someday to publish and illustrate his own writing and says he'd love to do a collection of illustrated poems.



His eyes sprang open as he fell backwards and stumbled to the ground. He sprang back to his feet.... He could not breathe for fear his heart would burst from his chest.... Standing in the creek bottom, looking him straight in the eyes and mirroring his expression was the most beautifully unique animal he had ever seen. Its fur was dark as night and shimmered like black violas when struck by the beams of light which shone down through the trees above.

*Shannon White, "Black Violas"*

Her age and my age had 50 years of difference. She could not run, and I could not stop. Her breath began to tire.... Until the end, she was worried about her fragrance, her clothes, and her beautiful grey hair. In those days, she lost pounds of life from her body. The bed was too painful for her; the medicine could not relieve her nostalgia.

*Dinorah Garcia Santos  
"Perfume of Victories"*

The words echo in my head. I haven't heard anyone call me *homeless* before. I mean, yes, I'm in borrowed clothes, and no, I don't have a real place to live right now. However, I haven't gone to the City Mission or slept in the streets. My face feels hot again, and the flutter in my chest quickens. I feel the word beat me in the chest: *homeless*.

*Ashley Cornelsen  
"Homeless Dreams"*



By the third house, I built the courage to gradually and cautiously release my hands from the handlebars. My tempo continued to gain, but my balance remained steady. The wind pushed through my hair as my mood went from petrified to excited. I felt like I was on top of Mount Everest and was making my way to the bottom ... to claim my spot as the little kid that lived on Forest Drive who conquered the unthinkable and the unimaginable. My heart pounded as I made my way to the homestretch.

*Guillermo Rivas  
"No Handlebars"*

She had traveled from door to door of the entire apartment complex to find us. We shuffled out of our friend's apartment, embarrassed at our mother's outburst. Her hand covered the area directly above her heart as she breathed in and exclaimed, "You guys don't understand. You are my air! Take that away, and I can't breathe." She shuttered a deep sigh of relief, and we didn't argue.

*Courtney Heap, "Scarred Hero"*

Without warning, a trash can fell over.... He blinked once and gasped as a cloth sack enveloped his head. Panicking, he flailed his fists, hoping to catch his attacker in the jaw. His foot slipped on the water, causing him to stumble. "What do we have here?" voices snickered...., causing the hair on the back of his neck to stand up. He refused to move, but the cool rain made him shiver uncontrollably.... The gun against his neck was pressed harder.

*Joe Lambrix, "Chapter 1"*

On the third floor were a father and son.... The son would come down to my apartment to borrow my phone and then leave messages that he could be reached at *my* number. When they moved out, two guys who owned guitars and drums moved in; they played loud music and jumped out of the second-floor windows into the alley. One day, I came home to find them handcuffed and being led away by the LPD, the pieces of their meth lab laid out on a table in the parking lot. And who can forget the woman who stopped by to "borrow a cup of Jack Daniels"?

*Thomas Joyce, "The Hovel"*

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