

manuscripts



manuscripts

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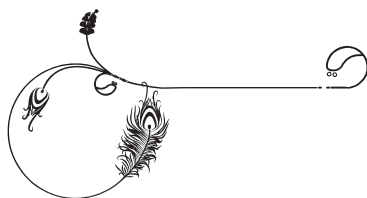
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ADVISOR'S NOTE



The bookshelf next to my desk holds the *Manuscripts* archive. The shelves hold a copy of every issue, dating back to 1938. It's a kind of timeline. I used to look at it and think: Over seventy-five years of history, one leaky roof away from total obliteration.

I don't worry about that so much anymore, because the entire backlist is being digitized by the Butler library and will be made available online—for free, for all—through their Digital Commons initiative. And this is only one of several recent changes for the magazine. Another is the sheer size of this volume. What you hold in your hand is not only the finest work of undergraduate writers and artists, it's also the biggest issue of *Manuscripts* to date.

In part, that's because we've cast a wider net. Historically, we've only considered work from Butler undergraduates, but this year the editors decided to accept submissions from any undergraduate enrolled in an Indiana college or university.

This was also the first year for a story contest, judged by a writer of national prominence. The judge this year was Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver* and many other books. Every story submitted to the magazine was eligible for the contest, and Lowry selected the winner in collaboration with the magazine's staff.

Interviews are another new feature. This issue features conversations with the poet Maurice Manning, novelist NoViolet Bulawayo, and prose writer and literary trickster Michael Martone. Incidentally, Martone was a frequent contributor to *Manuscripts* when he was an undergrad at Butler. The circle completes itself.

So, a big magazine, and big improvements. Credit goes to *Manuscripts* staff, an energetic and dedicated crew. This magazine is student-driven, from selection through design. In the driver's seat is Emily Yoo, Editor-in-Chief. What can I say about Yoo? She's a music major who knows literature. She's got the big-picture vision to guide a magazine and its staff of thirty students, and the attention to detail to put together a polished issue. Yoo's got game.

I call her Yoo, because the other editor is also named Emily. Emily Farrer (pronounced *Fair* in an unfair trick on anyone trying to sound out her name) is the Associate Editor. Like Yoo, Farrer is a music major who loves the Lit, and she demonstrates the kind of initiative and forward thinking that will lead to more big changes in the near future for *Manuscripts*.

So thank you, Yoo & Farrer, for your brilliant work and leadership. Thanks also to the English Department, and the chair, Dr. Levy, for support both financial and moral. Thank you to Sarah Wilson for teaching the editors the practical art of design and layout. The final note of appreciation goes to you, the reader. Art—whether literary or visual or any other form—is a transaction. It takes a creator and a viewer to complete the transaction. Without you, there is no magazine. Thanks for making this art happen.

Bryan Furuness

Faculty Advisor

CONTENTS



CAMILLE MILLIER	
<i>Roses and Bones</i>	10
BEKAH POLLARD	
<i>my smile takes up my whole face,</i>	15
<i>but I have clouds on my hands so I can't touch it</i>	
ALI CRAVENS	
<i>Vim: A Redepiction of BaxiaArt's "..."</i>	16
RACHEL DUPONT	
<i>The List</i>	17
NICOLE MANGES	
<i>Neverland</i>	20
CHLOE SELL	
<i>To the Elephants that Roam</i>	21
ELENA DECOOK	
<i>Harbinger</i>	22
RICHARD SHI	
<i>Cathedrals</i>	26
CHRISTIAN HARTSELLE	
<i>Interview with NoViolet Bulawayo</i>	28
ASHLEY SHUFFLEBARGER	
<i>Lovers in Appalachia</i>	36
DANIELLE LOVERO	
<i>Connection</i>	38
ELIZABETH TERRELL	
<i>Ingrid</i>	39
CAMILLE MILLIER	
<i>Spider Swing</i>	47

ALI SCHANBACHER	48
<i>Mine</i>	
ZACHARIA HEDIER	57
<i>To the sister I never had</i>	
ELANOR LEONNE BENNETT	60
<i>Move Yourself</i>	
MADDI RASOR	61
<i>Smoke and Mirrors</i>	
CHLOE SELL	67
<i>he was maxwell</i>	
EARL TOWNSEND	68
<i>Double Jeopardy</i>	
ALI CRAVENS	73
<i>Like I Am a Woman</i>	
WESLEY SEXTON	75
<i>unlikely circumstance</i>	
ALI CRAVENS	76
<i>Flowers of the Gutter</i>	
ROSS REAGAN	78
<i>Press 1 for More Option</i>	
JUSTINA KAISER	81
<i>A Small Shove</i>	
BEKAH POLLARD	100
<i>Sage</i>	
CHRISTIAN HARTSELLE	101
<i>Byron</i>	
DAVID PERRY	105
<i>The Neoteric Aphrodite</i>	
THIERRY MENCHHOFFER	106
<i>Hotdog</i>	

OLIVIA EMERICH	108
<i>Grown-Ups</i>	
WESLEY SEXTON	114
Interview <i>with Maurice Manning</i>	
SANAD EL-RAHAIBY	122
<i>Open Kitchen</i>	
DAVID PERRY	123
<i>Wooded Path at Dusk</i>	
CHELSEA YEDINAK	124
<i>Miss Murphy's Record</i>	
A.D. SHUFFLERBARGER	129
<i>I wouldn't live in the buffalo cave</i>	
BROOKE MARSHALL	130
<i>Yellow Light</i>	
ALI CRAVENS	135
<i>Newspaper People</i>	
BEKAH POLLARD	136
<i>sequence</i>	
RACHEL DUPONT	137
<i>In the Aftermath</i>	
MARY ARDERY	144
<i>The Ladies Here Have Topographic Hands</i>	
SARAH COFFING and EMILY YOO	145
Interview <i>with Michael Martone</i>	
SAMAEAL ATILANO	158
<i>The Happiness of an Object</i>	
ALI CRAVENS	160
<i>Watercolor Tree</i>	
CONTRIBUTORS	161

Camille Millier

Roses and Bones



Mr. Fayard Hawthorne died on October 27th, the year that I was thirteen. He was the first dead body I had ever seen. I never thought about death much before that. It was just what my Daddy did. I had heard all the stories from him. How he applied the makeup to make it look like they were less dead and pumped them full of special liquid to keep them from smelling. He told me stories about how some of them would still twitch in the basement under the fluorescent white lights, while little-kid-me sat wide-eyed in pigtails on the carpet of our living room. After Mr. Hawthorne died, Daddy decided I was old enough to come to work with him. He made sure the first body I ever saw on a slab wasn't someone I had known in their living years.

"Babygirl, you might own this thing yourself one day." Daddy winked a blue eye at me in the passenger's seat while Rob Zombie scratched his way out of the hearse stereo. There wasn't a body in the back, but he always did that. He would say that whoever was back there was on the way to their own party, we might as well let them have fun early.

"But respect is key, okay?" He gave me the stern father look.

"Death isn't a joke." I nodded, fiddling with the tiny gold heart on the chain around my neck. I had gotten it from my father on my eleventh birthday. I didn't understand the respect-for-the-dead thing. No one I knew had ever died, and thinking about myself dying was even more inconceivable.

I closed the heavy wooden doors behind us when we stepped into Hollow's Mortuary. The place was empty in preparation for the funeral tonight.

He led me down to the basement. Mr. Hawthorne wasn't down there. He'd already been dressed and made pretty and taken up to the fancy viewing room. I guessed that that was being saved for the grand finale. I sat on the edge of the metal table where the bodies go, resting my chin in one hand and twirling a strand of my blond hair in the other as Daddy picked up and talked about each clean, sparkling tool. First there was a scalpel to make a small opening for the arterial and drainage tubes. He showed me the embalming machine and which knobs controlled the power and speed. He showed me the shiny metal "angled forceps" or bent, scary, torture scissors. I wanted to see the body. Not only out of curiosity, but also because of the dare.

CJ, you have to kiss the dead man. Molly flipped her red ponytail. Everyone in our small circle giggled with delight, including me. Ever since the time I ran down the street at midnight wearing only my undershirt and a rainbow tutu while Molly and her cousin giggled down from the bedroom window, they all knew I was the only one brave enough, and they'd have an excuse to call me "death breath" for the rest of the year. *Come on. You weren't a scaredy cat when we played with the Ouija board in my basement.* Molly curled her lips into a mischievous grin. You know you want to. Everyone else made exaggerated vomit noises. And I did want to. Because Christopher St. Agnes was standing right there smiling at me, probably thinking about the week before when I had kissed him behind the brick wall of the schoolyard. I gave him a wink to show him I was game.

"Cynthia Jane."

My father's voice made me snap my eyes back to focused and look over to him where he held a small jar of mismatched glass eyeballs.

"Are you listening?" He wrinkled his eyebrows.

"Yeah," I said, "but I'm thirsty."

Then I put on my sweetest voice. "Can I go get a pop from the

vending machine?"

His stern mouth melted into a handsome smile.

"Yes, CJ. Just hurry."

I hopped down from the table, my thighs sticking as I peeled them off of the metal slab. I hummed a song as I skipped up the stairs, passed the vending machine in the hallway and turned to the heavy, dark cherry-wood doors that lead into the large viewing room. I pushed one open with difficulty and stuck my head inside. The high ceiling was lined with chipped gold-painted molding. There were round-back chairs set up in rows, with a path in the middle going all the way up to the front where there was a giant, glorious, shiny walnut casket. I slipped inside and made my way to the front. As I got closer, the folded white hands came into view, then the chest, and then the sharp profile of Mr. Fayard Hawthorne.

Next to the casket, a metal stand held a large framed picture of Mr. Hawthorne from when he was living. I compared the picture to his sleeping face. The photo must have been recent, because even in the casket he still looked to be in his late fifties, with just a bit more of a grayish tinge to his skin, but handsome for an old man just the same. I took a step forward to get a closer look. He had gray hair that probably used to be blond, parted on the side and combed back in an elegant swoop. His cheekbones were high and sharp above the deflated hollows of his cheeks. He was wearing a black tie with a gold tie clip, and a gold wedding band on one of his clasped fingers.

"Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Hawthorne." I chirped. "Today's your lucky day."

I bent at the waist and leaned my face in close. My stomach felt hollow for a second. The lines that showed the age on his face became more apparent. His lips were full, but pale, and pulled into a round frown. He reeked of the chemicals downstairs. I took a breath, puckered my own young, rosy lips, and pressed them against his. They were cold and still. *Duh*. I had at least expected them to feel room-temperature. I pulled away quickly. I touched my warm lips and looked down at my floral dress and shiny beige flats, half elated and shocked at what I had done.

The inside of the coffin was lined with cream satin. It looked cushiony and soft. Why did it matter if a dead person was comfortable? And why was it so *big*? It looked as though it could fit two people instead of one. Perhaps...a small girl of my size.

Without thinking, I swung one leg over the edge of the casket. Molly wants me to kiss a corpse? I'll do her one better.

I lifted the other leg and maneuvered myself gently inside,

pressing myself next to the tall, thin body.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell Mrs. Hawthorne.” I said as I reached up and slowly pulled down the hinged lid of the casket until the small crack of light shrunk and turned into darkness.

I shivered. “Cozy in here.”

There was no difference between opening my eyes and closing them. I blinked hard in the blackness. Nothing. The cold, rigid elbow underneath Mr. Hawthorne’s suit sleeve jabbed into my rib when I breathed. The thick stench of embalming fluid burned the inside of my nostrils. A stronger version of what I caught a hint of when Daddy came home in the evening and kissed my forehead. I whimpered. The smell was so heavy that I felt like it was clogging my insides and shriveling my lungs. I tried to hold my breath but there was no breath to hold. I gasped for air and frantically groped for the handle, until I realized there wouldn’t be a handle on the *inside*. I tried to push the lid up with my sweaty palms but it didn’t budge. I couldn’t see and I couldn’t breathe and all there was inside this tiny tomb with me was a dead old man that I had just violated. I was going to die in here next to him and get what I deserved. I thought about Mr. Hawthorne - how less than two days ago he may have been in line for a vanilla latte at the Rose Café. Or sitting on a bench at the train station, briefcase set on the floor by his feet while he read a two-month old issue of *GQ*. I realized that one day, I would be standing in front of a coffin much like this one, and my father would be the old man in it. Tears spilled out of the corners of my eyes and down my red cheeks. I banged my fists on the shallow, padded ceiling and screamed. Finally, one blow raised the lid up enough for the crack of light to appear again, and I used all my strength to push the door back up on its hinges.

I sprang from the coffin, falling on my knees just in front of it as I violently gulped in air. I got up, sprinted down the long room and exploded through the large door. Running for my life. As I rounded the corner I crashed into my father’s chest, tears still streaming.

He grabbed me by the shoulders and looked at my face. My breathing slowed and my heartbeat returned to normal.

“CJ, why would you do this?” He snapped. “I should have known you weren’t ready for this.”

I sniffled.

“I know it’s weird to see one for the first time.” He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “That’s why I wanted to be with you for it. You should have just waited for me.”

I buried my face in his *Lost Boys* t-shirt. The slim black suit would come later.

“I’m sorry, Daddy”.

The car ride home was silent before Daddy turned on the radio and nudged me playfully. I gave him a small smile, but then returned my somber gaze out the window. I never found my gold necklace after that day. I can only guess it was buried with Fayard Hawthorne.

Bekah Pollard

*my smile takes up my whole face, but
I have clouds on my hands so I can't touch it*



I sit in a freshly opened jar of marshmallow fluff,
tilting back ever-so-slightly.
The tips of my toes peeking out
from atop the mound.

A miniature man in overalls stands on my shoulders and pours
a tin bucket of luke-warm water
down my back, igniting my senses.

My lips tingle from a kiss.
My fingertips twitch from a touch.
The very tip of my right ring-finger toe tells me,
"Hey, this is fun."

The waterfall feels numb and present
as droplets dance and dart
across my back.
The man with the bucket takes a break
and opens a trap door above my left ear,
blowing the fog from the cracks in my brain.

I wrap myself in a blanket as
the tip of my right ring-finger toe
kisses the floor.
I fall asleep lying on my back
in a tub of warm water,
covering my ears halfway.



Rachel Dupont

The List



After studying the list she'd written entitled, "Things I Am Neurotic About," she took out her best pair of scissors, snipped each element free from the list, and proceeded to arrange them in alphabetical order.

She began with the As, placing apocalyptic films beneath angel figurines, followed by bar soap and bendy straws. But then, both of those could also fit under S. No, she had enough for the Ss, with spoons, smartphone commercials, and socks. Now for the Cs...damn, she didn't have any Cs written down. Well, that was no good, she couldn't have any letter unrepresented. She scrawled down incomplete alphabets, put the word "incomplete" in parentheses, and placed this new addition under the As.

Conference rooms—there, that would fit in the Cs. She'd had panic attacks in every meeting held in a conference room in the history of her career. Cats—that was another. Next was doctor's offices, followed by drinking fountains.

She sorted and arranged, occasionally remembering one she'd

overlooked. Then came more scrawling with the pen, more snipping with the scissors, more sliding bits of paper around the polished mahogany coffee table. The table was beautiful, except for that one coffee mug ring on the edge of it that always drew her eyes, often distracting her from noticing anything else in the room. She added that to the list.

Fingernails.

Shoe cleanliness.

Toilet seats.

Eyebrows.

Pants.

Vomit.

Phone calls.

Sorting. Remembering. Writing. Cutting. Sorting.

When she was satisfied—or, at the very least, as satisfied as she could reasonably be—she took a fresh sheet of paper from the pad before her, wrote down every item on her list, and snipped them apart once again.

This time, she arranged them next to the first list, but instead of alphabetizing them, she arranged them by category. Fingernails, eyebrows, and pubic hair were placed together. Milk, produce items, poultry. Pants went with other people's feet and face touching. Toilet seats were right up there with vomit. Sorting. Arranging. Duplicating (for some, of course, could fit under multiple classifications).

When her second list was finished, she put down her pen and ran her fingers over the bits of paper, making sure they were lined up straight, making sure she'd omitted nothing. She bit her upper lip until a tiny sampling of blood dripped onto her tongue, then picked up the pen once more.

Once more, she duplicated the first list.

Once more, she cut it to bits.

Once more she arranged, on the table, avoiding the ring, placing the third list next to the second one, which was next to the first one.

She arranged the third list in order of importance. Vomit was above drinking fountains, which was above milk, which was on par with other people's feet.

Cutting. Sorting. Rethinking. Resorting.

"Nell."

Dr. Rosenberg had said her name more times than she could count. She did not look up; she continued her sorting. She was not finished.

"Nell."

She continued sorting.

“Nell.”

Pubic hair. Eyebrows. Conference rooms.

“NELL.”

She changed her mind, put conference rooms next to smartphone commercials.

“Nell....”

She was finished. She looked up.

Dr. Rosenberg placed his coffee mug on the table, next to the third list. She lifted it up and put it on top of the notepad.

“Nell, I asked you to list the top five. You’ve taken up almost the whole hour.”

She looked at him wordlessly.

She pointed at the first list, under the Ls. The second list, under the second category. The third list, fourteenth item from the top.

All three read the same. He followed her finger.

List thoroughness.

Dr. Rosenberg pulled off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

She straightened a bit of paper, on which she’d written face touching.

Dr. Rosenberg put his glasses back on, doing a brief calculation in his head. Six more years. Six more years, then he could retire.

Nicole Manges

Neverland



My brother's gone to Neverland,
Where all the boys run free.
I'll bet he's sparred with Captain Hook
And sleeps in a hollow tree.
He knows no cares and no regrets
And thinks that girls have cooties.
The Lost Boys are his favorite chums;
They spend time counting booty.
He will not grow to be a man
But that's all right, I say.
Grown-ups think that they're all that;
I know he'd rather play.
I'm sure he'll have more fun with Pan
Than with a little wife.
Who needs a girl when you've got fun -
Indians and the like?
My parents say that he is gone
And we'll see him no more.
Just 'cause we buried him last week
At the tender age of four.
I know the truth, so don't you say
That I can't see him still
Someday I'll look out in the night
And he'll perch upon my sill.

Chloe Sell

To the Elephants that Roam



Oh dear hides, leather hides
that beat back the angry sand—
how do I become you?
How do I reach down, grasp
my own tough skin?
Tell me how to roam
the plain with perseverance.
Teach me to run and play and eat and rut
and mourn
Show me how to mourn—
Guide my child down
to the ground
Show me how to pack the dirt
so he won't feel cold
Remind me when to visit
his bones.

Elena DeCook

Harbinger



Finalist

She won't look at my hands until I hold them out to her. "This isn't your blood, is it, baby?"

The red is stained across both my palms and up one of my forearms. Uneven gloves. I shake my head and do not see her face collapse. When she lifts me off the ground, she is already blank and exhausted.

"Mama, in the woods," I say in between sobs. "A lady fell."

"I know, sweet," she says, balancing me on one hip and rummaging through her bag on the other. I get smudges of an oxidizing maroon on her blouse.

The siren rings out louder, just once. "Mama, *help!*"

She buckles me into a car seat, sluggish and sure. "I can't, Dia. I don't know how."

It was *unfair*.

That was the first thing I could think of, when I knew to think

about it. I couldn't figure out how I deserved it.

Allen Fishinger drops to the wood chips like a glass out of a soap actor's hand. I notice first, or at least I move first. He used to let his big palm fall on the top of my head when he approached my parents after church, and I feel it like a weight as I skid to my knees near his left shoulder. His eyelids twitch. It's cold enough that I can hear winter coats buzz against each other as the other kids hurtle in.

Snapping open her cell phone like a shield, Miss Ruth forces her way through the dying-person diameter of responsibility. I've had two fingers where Allen's pulse used to be for maybe a minute now, but she snatches at it herself as she navigates the whitewater of her 911 call. Splinters of dirt catch on the edge of my church dress as I settle further into the ground. Miss Ruth is listening to the air near his nose and mouth. I can't stop seeing the way Allen's eyes snapped open for the last time like a coffin lid slamming, and I'm glad I didn't know him any better.

Only one person looks back when I finally glance up. Mrs. Krotsky stands to my right, and I'm sure she saw me run first. She sees my two small hands wrapped around Allen's big one. She doesn't mean to, but she looks at me with daggers of distrust.

The timing was always impeccable, if unreliable—not that anyone bothered to tell me. Once a week, once every two? Too often.

"You two are late," Sawyer says, but he puts the attendance sheet away without marking a tardy. Jessie and Damian puff and apologize through the door.

In the seat next to me, Jessie curses very quietly as she settles, smiling through it. She dangles one hand over the side of the desk, fingers fluttering; Damian looks at them skeptically.

I cross and uncross my legs. I hate babies. Something bad might happen while I'm watching them; something bad might happen while I'm not. Four of the girls in my grade have delivered this year. I don't know if it's some completely subconscious maternal instinct or that they've registered the looks I give their infants, but I'll go weeks without making eye contact with any of the girls.

"Claudia," Jessie says, intently studying something above my right ear. "Will you watch Damian while I go to the bathroom?"

She's trying, and it's a noble effort, so I try back. For exactly three minutes and forty-eight seconds my world simmers down to the wrinkles on Damian's knuckles and the fluorescent-light drone of the

blood in my ears.

He looks like a monkey. My legs twitch with anxiety, heels tapping on the uninspired tile, arms quivering. It's silly to be so afraid of the worst happening when it's already happened hundreds of times.

Damian's chest rises and falls like divine grace.

Medical professionals can never tell you precisely when the point of no return is. I don't think there's really any way to know, not when I saw it so many times and was still never sure.

It's fair of me to run from Sierra, who's waxed rhapsodic about Brown until I can hardly keep from screaming. We're all pretty close to implosion, or at least I think we are. *That was the point of drinking, right?* I ask my reflection. That we'd go and party and stop thinking about what comes after for a few hours?

I blink until the mirror comes into focus. Maybe it's my imagination, but I think I can see every beat of the bass shake through the walls. It's kind of mesmerizing; I look up, almost hoping that plaster dust is coming down from the ceiling.

There's a strangled cough behind me.

"No," I say aloud. "No, no, no." Not now, for God's sakes. It's too much for right now.

But there they lie, the immobile legs protruding from the shower stall. I take three steps forward, like a park ranger with a bear.

There's metal in my mouth, like I've still got braces on. The drunkenness in my knees clamors louder than it did a second ago.

I cannot help walking up behind her, or at least I don't know if I can. Her elbows have given out under her; her face sinks into the bath mat. Her nose is almost in the contents of her stomach.

The showerhead hisses unhappily when I turn it on. I haul her to sitting.

My frayed willpower tugs rope-burns into my waist, and if I have any courage left—if what I am has anything to do with courage—it escapes now. Panic swallows my feet like flames at a witch-burning. Satellite dish faces turn towards me as I run through the house and out. Sierra is still talking in the kitchen about college. My future, stretching out endlessly in front of me, is full of bodies.

I learned early on not to talk about it, as you do. People would start thinking I was a serial killer. I might start thinking I was.

The nursing home is institutional taupe. Everywhere. they've freshened up with patches of a floral patterned fabric that looks like it was designed off of plastic flowers. Not inspiring, but safe.

I sit by Mr. Hernandez's bed and read him *Captain America* comics as he slips away. He's not a hand-holder, which I'm grateful for. I can always feel the heartbeat leaving through tissue-paper hands.

As soon as I'm sure he's gone, I press the call button and let someone else deal with the emergency of dying. Someone taps my shoulder as I leave the room, taking heaving breaths of stale, sanitized air. "Claudia, can I talk to you in my office?"

Mickey looks at me tiredly over his glasses. I don't know if I should or shouldn't be worried. I know what this is about, I think, but he always looks tired. Senior care is not a thrilling industry. Most of us have that kind of driftwood face.

"You've been present at four deaths in the past month alone," he says.

I nod and pick at a loop of thread escaping from the cushion in my chair.

"In fact, whenever someone passes on your shift, you're there almost every time." I nod to this too.

But the mortality rate hasn't gone up. There isn't anything for him to accuse me of. He says as much, then looks at my face through watery eyes.

"Is there anything I should know about?" he asks, like I might confess to statistically insignificant murder.

My white knuckles are piled together in my lap. "No, there isn't." There's nothing he should know.

It looks like the emergency is that I'll be shadowed whenever we have new workers. They need to get used to the reality of death. He'll be tough on them with my routine.

There were times when I wished I had premonitions to go with everything else. It would have been easier, maybe. Instead, I learned CPR, just in case it was my fault.

Snow sticks to my coat in clumps, and I self-indulgently imagine it gathering into heaviness on my back. The wet knees of my jeans chafe as I climb my mom's front steps. My coat is relatively clean, or at least clean enough to pass suspicion. The man in the alley wasn't too dirty. There

wasn't any blood. He was just sad—the kind where it meant something that he could breathe out with his head in someone's arms instead of on the pavement.

The welcome mat is icy enough to slip on, so I'm gingerly taking steps when I freeze with one hand raised to knock.

Vividly, violently, I can see through to the other side of the door. I can see myself on the couch, my mother in and out of the room on soft, slippered feet. She still tells me I should have kids. I still tell her maybe. Then the kitchen is a crime scene, an aneurysm—that simple. I rush towards the crash with the foolish assumption of dropped dishes.

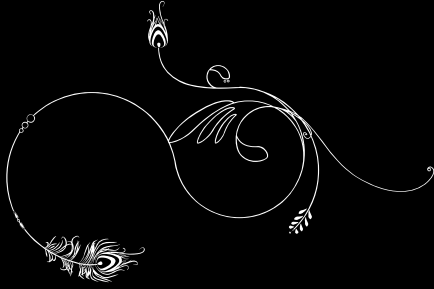
My hands balk at the feel of her bathrobe, cataloging them unwillingly with the textures of all the other fading bodies I've held. I scream like a banshee, although as far as I can tell, that's not part of my mythology. Where's my immunity? Where's my thick skin?



It was never a matter of getting used to anything. No matter how many people shuddered to a halt in front of my eyes, I never stopped wanting to wail, to scream, to order someone to fix it.

The snow brings me back to myself. I'm still standing on the front steps, frozen fist extended to pound on the door. Before I can think any more about it, I force my hand forward. It's unfair. I steel myself to find out anyway.





INTERVIEW
with NoViolet Bulawayo

Interview with NoViolet Bulawayo

by Christian Hartselle

NoViolet Bulawayo, today a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University and recognized with a Truman Capote Fellowship, carries with her the life of an American and her childhood's Zimbabwe. She explores this duality in *We Need New Names*, published in 2013, and is the winner of a myriad of awards, including the Hemingway Foundation Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction, and Etisalat Prize for Literature.

CH: To get us started, what were some responses to the novel that were surprising to you after its publication?

NB: One that was surprising was the idea that the book was written for the West because I wasn't thinking of any audience when I was writing. I mean, I was holed up in workshop and all that existed were my blank pages and the story inside me. If you'd told me then that the thing would be published, and to even 2 cents acclaim, I'd have laughed probably, publication was another universe I wasn't worried about at the time, thanks to my mentor Helena Maria Viramontes, who kept me grounded and focused on the right thing, which was writing and honoring the damn story. What annoys me about this response is that it's not only very lazy, but also supposes that the West is some kind of center, which is not true. Sure I live and produce from here but my creative impulse is more complicated.

That said, I guess after a while, you realize when your book is out, you no longer own it; readers will have opinions and that's one of them.

CH: We were talking last night at the dinner about picture-taking in the novel. First, in *Hitting Budapest*, Darling and her friends encounter a white woman who is astounded by these children in poverty, and she photographs them without even asking. Then,

later, when the NGOs arrive to Paradise, the NGOs take pictures of all of the children again. Was one of your goals in the novel to introduce to Westerners the dehumanization that Zimbabweans might feel with this kind of picture-taking?

NB: When I am considering the culture of NGOs going into the “third world,” I’m interested in how viewing “the other” plays out especially through visual representation. I wasn’t necessarily thinking of Zimbabwe specifically because it’s happening all over. But I wanted the outsider/picture-taker to rethink their engagement. Forget about yourself and gadgets for a minute, what does it mean to be on the other side, to be the one whose picture is taken? What does it mean to have it taken without your consent, without anyone caring? I think one of the kids says something like “the NGO people don’t care that we’re embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we’d rather not take pictures, but they do it all the same.” It is a question of power, it’s a question of privilege, of entitlement over another’s body, and it’s not a good thing.

Part of the social media experience today is that people are always posting all sorts of pictures of other people taken on trips, and some of them are quite saddening to see. I don’t understand the obsession myself, perhaps I’m missing something. But I’ll mention that as someone who came into the U.S. as an outsider, I don’t remember going around taking pictures of Americans especially in less fortunate situations, and I don’t see tourists generally doing this. I feel like it’s our responsibility to reconsider some of the things that we do to others, violence comes in all forms.

CH: That makes me think of how Chipso, like Paris Hilton, doesn’t want too many pictures. Darling understands references to Western celebrities and she can use them, and she’s not even in this celebrity-obsessed culture. Maybe speak a bit on what you were saying when you wrote that.

NB: Darling and her friends may not necessarily live in a celebrity-obsessed culture but they are still aware of it, and are generally very much aware of the “out-there” because of the fluidity of

culture, and how factors like technology and migration mean that the world is now a small space, more connected than ever before. But of course what is striking to me is how one-sided this is—a kid in Mozambique can tell you who Barack Obama is, but sometimes you will meet Western kids in college who cannot name the president of Zimbabwe, for instance.

So the challenge—since we're here with undergrads, I'll say that the challenge is to have students rethink their relationship with the world. Information is at our fingertips, and it doesn't take much to be curious about how other people live, to learn what is out there beyond you. And just educate yourself so you become more of a citizen of the world.

CH: Let's talk about the second half of the novel when Darling's in the States. When Darling gets here, she comments that the maize in America insults her teeth. Given that she was starving in Paradise, I didn't think she would have minded this American maize, but now that she's an American, she's just thinking, I don't like the way that tastes. What do you think are some things that people like Darling never adjust to?

NB: Everyone who leaves their homeland to live in another has to deal with all sorts of adjustments and of course one of the easy ones, as in Darling's case, is food. But beyond that she has a hard time with the harsh Michigan winters (when we first meet her she is indoors and not by choice, but because the cold and the snow have taken over the outside, making it unliveable for someone who's otherwise spent most of her life outdoors). There's also alienation from the homeland itself, the geographic space, and from family. There is the language barrier that may be dealt with but not totally done away with. And that specific melancholy that may occasionally seize an immigrant because the body and soul remembers another space and will crave for it.

CH: Are you familiar with the term Islamophobia? I'm talking about a fear or dislike of Muslim people post-9/11. I bring this up because, in your book, there was a woman in a hijab in a car next to Darling, and then immediately there is a mention by Darling's friend of a

boy who brought a gun to school, almost as if the first one emotionally triggered the next. Was this a sort of subtle reference to Islamophobia?

NB: We don't exactly see Islamophobia play out in the scene itself but we still need to think about the issues around the scene. George brings a gun to school, because at the time I was writing, I was just troubled by kids bringing guns to school and shooting other kids. To actually have that level of atrocity, kids losing their lives because another kid was able to get possession of a gun and make the decision to take lives, that was and still remains troubling for me personally. I understand that there are sometimes mental health issues involved, but it still doesn't make sense, and of course as it keeps happening, I'm like, when will this country take the necessary steps to make sure that no more blood is spilled in schools? When will it say, enough? When will it put children's lives first? Given that *We Need New Names* is really a book that is hopefully meant to have people thinking and talking about what should concern us as communities, especially with school kids themselves reading it, I hope that section gets the necessary conversation going in schools. Now with the woman, I believe they are coming from the mall and they see her, they just look at her, they just look at each other...

CH: And keep driving.

NB: They drive off. The kids are struggling to understand difference in that scene. They are aware of her because she is different, but they are also living in a time when they are bombarded with these negative images of Muslims that may start creating even further divisions between people of different cultures. People who are not better informed might think of a woman in a hijab one way based on what they've seen on TV but as we as readers hopefully know, at least from what we read from the George narrative, is that violence is being committed by all sorts of people.

CH: Some parts of the novel, like the chapter title "How They Left," didn't resemble the rest of the narrative... I read them more like poetry. The language is gorgeous, and what it was saying was

much more, I guess, collective in a sense. Did you draw from your experience with poetry when writing these parts?

NB: I drew both from my experience with poetry and my experience with orature. I tried my hand at poetry writing before fiction took over, and of course I'm haunted by the distinct voices of my pops and grandmother, among the many storytellers I knew growing up. But what I was doing there is I was trying to step outside Darling's voice and evoke the community because we really don't live our lives as individuals, and on that note I needed Darling's story to have the communal narrative somewhere in the background, sort of anchoring and complimenting it. I don't know if I succeeded, but I really wanted those sections to be beautiful.

CH: They were.

NB: Thank you. I was also dealing with things that were especially painful to write, so I imagined paring them with beautiful language could perhaps make for a somewhat bearable reading experience.

CH: And I think that's refreshing for American readers. They don't usually read something in that collective voice. I want to ask about the ending. Were you always going to end with Chipó on the phone, and the image of the dog?

NB: That wasn't the original ending. I don't remember what the ending was, it could have even been in the U.S. because that's where Darling was physically. But as I was saying earlier, some of the things that end up making it into the book, and work well, can actually come from desperation, come from you saying, "What can I do now since what I had in mind is not working?" And this ending came at the last minute. I suddenly woke up to the realization that I had to make the book come full circle. I had to have Darling go back home. Which became important considering the fact that she couldn't physically go at the time. So what do you do when you are an immigrant and your papers don't allow you to go home?

Memory can be something that allows you to make that journey,

you can just go in your head you know. Technology, too, luckily for us nowadays—it can forge a bridge between that distance—but for Darling it was remembering. She keeps Paradise alive through remembering, and that ending is her remembering what it was like in that place at that time.

CH: It was interesting because the further you got into the second half, the less she was referencing her culture but then at the end, she goes back in memory.

If you'll let me shift gears, I'd like to ask a craft question. Are you more of a pre-writer or a revisor?

NB: I do both. My process starts in the head. I grew up hearing stories all the time. So I try to tell myself a story in the head. Sometimes that takes a while depending on what the story is and how long it is. I spent a long time sorting it out before I even attempt to write it because I like the experience of just sitting down and letting it flow. I get a high from working like that. And for me to get there, I have to prepare as much as I can in my head. When it gets to the writing, I write in my notebooks first. I like the process of sitting down and putting word on paper until my hand hurts. I think differently this way, I relate to what I am writing differently, and of course my revisions happen in notebooks as well. By the time I get onto the computer, I am quite close to where I need to be getting. But of course there is still more revision to come.

CH: So you do a lot of writing by hand.

NB: I do. I can't write on a computer, really.

CH: That's unique.

NB: That's how I got into it. And with all of the traveling I do, it's helpful not to rely on gadgets, especially when you may not have power.

CH: Last question: which part of the book was the hardest part to write?

NB: The first half was hardest to write because it came from a real place, it was fueled by what my country was going through at the time and it wasn't pretty. As somebody who grew up knowing a normal country and had a beautiful childhood in it, it was jarring to get used to a country of power cuts, a country of water cuts, a country where a high percentage of people lost their jobs. A country where the health system went down. A country where an election was suddenly marred by violence. That was especially hard.

I wrote the project for many reasons, but some of it was actually dealing with and making sense of this unravelling. Things have changed, and fortunately, Zimbabwe's no longer the exact same place of desperation that gave birth to *We Need New Names*. The country has dusted its clothes and tucked a flower in her hair and is looking ahead with a brave smile, so I kind of see the project as a snapshot of a particular moment in Zimbabwe's recent history. My prayer is that we don't return to it, especially the years 2008-9.

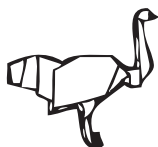
All that said, there is still room for celebrating place and for voice. I was able to enjoy those things in the first half of the book. Inasmuch as the circumstances were hard, Darling's humanity, voice and humor allowed me some light to balance it all out.

CH: Thanks so much for talking to me. It was very enlightening, and I enjoyed your book a lot.

NB: It's my pleasure. Thank you for reading.

Ashley Shufflebarger

Lovers in Appalachia



Remember the widow woman
down the mountain who fried
dry cornpone at family dinners,
poured Coke in a bottle
for her rowdy toddler?
She always looked the hindquarters

of hard luck, but her Euel
worked nights with your daddy
before the coal dust took him home
and Mama made sure you fixed a plate
for her at the table every night.
Know how Loretta Lynn lived just down

Butcher Holler? You swooned
when she sang proud about the mines,
though the egg smell on Daddy's hands
always made you want to gag.
Remember waitressing nights
at the diner? You once served soup beans

to the skinny dobro-picker
and maybe three hours later
he asked you to marry him.
I want a love like that—quick
as fried okra and painful as rotted teeth.
I want to pine for my man
over a pan of dry bread.
A week ago you cried to me about the divorce
and all the extra bologna you fried
for no one in particular. Part of me
knows you wish you'd not been born
to a family who dressed in burlap,

but now we weave stories where the sack tore,
and dream about young lovers in Appalachia.

"All that we see...
there must be a
connection"



Elizabeth Terrell

Ingrid



Runner-Up

When I wake up with a dewy feeling between my legs, I ask God, if he's listening, about our punishment. I can't decide what's worse: the fact that he has presented me with fertility, or that he has taken it away from everyone else. Granted, I don't blame him. We're all fucked anyway.

According to the rest of the world, I'm Project L—meaning I am the 12th person discovered fertile. I was Ingrid before I was given my new identification, but anyone who ever meant something to me sold me out to “save the world.” I think it's a bunch of bullshit, really; all of these lab rats keep probing me as if I can birth a new generation.

The panic started when the Artifice—the artificial uterus, that is—stopped working. First, there were a lot of miscarriages, but many people dismissed the idea that something was wrong because they had grown too comfortable with millions of uteri giving birth to their children. Eventually, babies stopped showing up—that's when everyone started realizing they were screwed. People tried reverting back to natural birth but, as the old saying goes, if you don't use it, you lose it. Try as he could, John couldn't knock up Jane, and humans found themselves to be

the cause of the apocalypse.

People get really religious when they're afraid. My mom's generation is all about the God stuff, so much so that they began the Great Effort, a global movement that illegally and desperately destroyed every Artifice possible in the name of 'insert-creator's-name-here.' It didn't matter which God someone believed in as long as they could get into the labs and tear apart what they could. The Effort hardly met any resistance; even the doctors behind everything were scrambling for hope.

The original mission was to restore human values and morals in society so that God could let us breed again. However, as time passed, it has become the supposed last hope of being granted entry to Heaven after we all die out. I'm not sure I quite believe that, though—who are we to speak for the Holy?

"We're ready for you, Ingrid," a voice announces over the intercom.

After being thoroughly bathed by a team of people who I believe are determined to prune me, I am handed a disposable gown, thin white shorts to cover my posterior, and a pair of loose fitting socks. I dress myself—though I hardly see the point, everyone who scrubbed me is still at my side—and let them assist me to the elevator. Once inside, a blindfold is wrapped around my head several times so I cannot see which floor we are going to. Once the elevator dings, and the doors open, a hand softly presses against the small of my back and leads me through a hallway to the door of our final destination. When the blindfold is lifted, I see two unarmed guards standing on either side of the thick silver door. My team backs away from me, a guard opens a door, and I am given a false sense of privacy as I enter the room. I know there are cameras everywhere, and that my son and I are never alone.

"Mommy!" Liam says, and it's enough to make a lot of things better.

Before Liam was born, I was assumed to be just like everyone else—hopeless in a deserted world. I came from an Artifice, so my mom and dad presumed I was doomed as fewer and fewer babies were born. Dad committed suicide when I was little. My parents had tried to make a sibling for me, but the doctors revealed that the plague had struck them, too. He couldn't handle it, but my mom could. She raised me to believe in the Great Effort, and to believe that God would guide us through.

She believed there was a reason for everything—including all of the evil surrounding us.

I can't quite say I believe in that, though, because God took her

from me. It was the first day of my period, ever, and I remember asking her what it felt like to be fertile. She told me it didn't feel like much, but it gave her hope when she had it. I slept beside her that night, telling her how much I wanted to give her hope. When I woke up the next morning, she was unresponsive. When the medics came, they told me that the reason she wasn't responding was because she had died. Brain aneurysm. There was nothing I could do.

Thus, I became an orphan. The orphanage they sent me to sat on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean and used to be an aquarium. We didn't have rooms, but we were split into sections and slept in the spaces where exhibits once were. I remember being the youngest one there, even though I was already twelve years old. The older kids treated me like I was one of them. During my time of grief, they were the ones to pull me through. We knew we were the end, so we made the most of it. We would sneak out onto the beach at night until we found our way to the mounds—they were filled with sand spurs that clung to us like leeches, but they were the only way for us to travel discreetly. Once we got to the shacks, we would split up and go our own ways in hopes of entertainment. Not much happened—a lot of us broke into an abandoned cottage that was way too big to be ignored. We would mainly complain about everything, and then some. A few people hooked up in the bedrooms upstairs, some decided to drink and smoke their worries away, while Jim and I talked. Just talked.

There was some new law passed in which girls of birthing age were required to have pregnancy tests every month. Jim and I thought it was funny, especially since we considered it useless. He would joke about getting me pregnant, which made me feel incredibly awkward despite the fact that I thought I was infertile.

When I was fourteen, I guess our talking turned into something more. I wasn't aware of it, but he was. He had just turned eighteen and was going to be 'removed' from the orphanage later that week, and I was the only person who gave a shit about him leaving. He was upset beyond belief. I gave him a hug to make him feel better, but I think he thought it was something more. I wasn't comfortable with him on top of me, or inside of me, but I let him continue because, if I hadn't, I would've lost my best friend.

When I went in for my pregnancy test the next month, I was obviously not expecting positive results. After multiple re-tests and scans, I was declared pregnant, and was formally told that I had twenty-four hours to pack my things and prepare for life in a lab. After two years of complete freedom, a lab was the last place I wanted to go. I

searched for Jim at all of his work spots. I finally found him behind the counter of the deli section at a grocery store and begged him to follow me outside, in private. When he followed me, I told him everything—from my pregnancy, to needing to hide away. He agreed to help me, and that night we stowed away in the basement of the cottage with only a small flashlight for light.

I didn't leave the basement for days, but I would open the door to the stairs to let some sunlight in. Jim would sneak out at night and steal food from the grocery. One morning, he woke me up and told me I needed more vitamin D or I would die. After heavy persuasion, I listened. It wasn't really a mistake; the cops would have come to escort me away anyway—Jim only made it graceful. He had been paid off to give me to them, and when I asked him why he betrayed me, he said to save the world. They took him, too, but he was far less valuable at the moment. *I* had the living child inside of me.

"Have you seen your daddy lately?" I ask Liam. He nods and pulls my hair.

"Mhm, but I wish I could see you both right now," he chirps. I wonder if I was this cute when I was five years old.

"Maybe someday you will," I lie, and I feel guilty for it. Jim and I are not on speaking terms, nor will we ever be.

"I wish I could," he repeats.

I wish I could tell him everything. I want to say, "Liam, your dad is a very bad man," but I can't. Maybe it was to save the world, but I think it was greed. Karma has placed him where he belongs, though—in the labs, just like me. Or maybe that was God's doing. Anyway, the chances of Liam seeing us together are as slim as us getting out of here. It's not *completely* my fault—the nurses have seen how we act around each other, and refuse to put Liam in the middle of it. I guess it's for the best.

Even though his conception was unfair, and even though it has meant living in this giant, lifeless building, I'm glad I have my son. He is worth it. If only most of the other projects could feel the same way.

Chloe and Ephraim, A and B, turned themselves in—they were the only people in the known world to have produced a baby, at the time. The doctors performed several tests on the baby and exhausted it—then down came baby, cradle and all. They begged Chloe and Ephraim to produce another child, but they refused. Rumor has it that they have a dead Artifice sitting around somewhere that pumped out as many of their babies as possible with the DNA from their tests. Ephraim wants to

know the truth, but Chloe tells him that even if the babies exist and have their genes, they aren't actually theirs—they had belonged to science from the second that Ephraim called the police.

Esther and Marcus didn't let science kill their baby. Instead, they killed the baby themselves. Most of the projects who once lived on the grid think that the two are terrible, but the way I see it is that they were always wanderers—homeless, living under houses, and resistant to the government. Esther never took a monthly pregnancy test; she found out about her pregnancy when a small bump started taking over her body. She and Marcus agreed to kill the baby so that they would never be roped into the experiments, and so that the baby wouldn't have to experience the apocalypse. Marcus brought her all the booze imaginable, and six months later she had a miscarriage. They wouldn't have been caught if they hadn't made a habit of visiting the burial site every day. Police got suspicious, found and dug the baby up, and then dragged the couple to the lab. Similar to Chloe and Ephraim, they refused to reproduce again.

Karmel and Omar have a girl who is seven years old, and they are allowed to see her twice a week, while Jim and I have to divide our visits with Liam. Their child's name is Kalila, and she has the most beautifully dark complexion. She and Liam have thirty-minute play dates every day, or so I'm told, so that the kids can learn to have social interactions outside of the family and the caretakers. Karmel often tells me she's so glad that the two are friends; we can't imagine what life would be like in the apocalypse without any friends.

The remaining four—Projects G,H,I, and J—took their chance to get out of here and jumped. No one knows what happened to their children. The outside world roared in anger, saying they couldn't believe that our living conditions were so poor that we would commit suicide. To those critics, I say, have you ever lain on a table for several hours, letting people stick things up you, in you, and in your face, all the while asking you questions you don't have the answer to?

I'd take the chance, but I need be with Liam for as long as I can. Besides—there are nets outside of the windows now. I'd be caught like a bug in a web, then forced back to being torn apart.



"How was your visit with Liam?" Chloe asks me. It's dinner, and all of the projects have congregated around the same table per usual. I sit as far away as I can from Jim, but avoiding him completely is impossible. He sometimes tries to directly talk to me, but Esther and Marcus usually answer for me when they can.

"It was like every other visit. He insists on asking me questions. Recently he has become persistent in figuring out some things," I tell her quietly, so that Jim won't hear.

"What's he trying to figure out?" Jim inquires, and I feel the joints in my hand stiffen while I ball my hands into fists. This isn't the type of question my friends can answer.

"He's trying to figure out... Why..." I begin.

"Why what?"

"Why he doesn't see us together," I hesitantly reveal. "He knows that Kalila sees *her* parents together, so I suppose he's a little jealous."

"Why doesn't he see us together?" Jim presses further.

"Jim, that's enough," Marcus grumbles, and the table goes silent.

Omar and Karmel usually try to lighten the mood with their stories about Kalila, but today they are just as beaten down as the rest of us.

"I don't see the point anymore," Omar mumbles. Karmel puts her hand on his shoulder and gently rubs his back. "Why is humanity so desperate to keep surviving? The animals that met extinction before us at least did it with grace; they accepted their fate and died out. Why can we not accept it?"

We all sit, quietly, for the remainder of dinner. I think about Omar's question—why can't we accept our fate? I want to argue that it's because we're not just animals, we're *rational* animals. But then I wonder, are we? Our 'rationality' landed us here, in this condition, only to ask more questions. What would have happened without the Artifice? I ask God all the time. He never answers, but I have this feeling that we wouldn't have ended up like this.

Maybe that's his answer.

I take my food tray to the drop-off, and Karmel follows me.

"You usually stay back and sit awhile with Omar. Is something wrong?" I ask as I walk in the direction of my unit. She matches my pace and follows me.

"Ing, I have a bad feeling," she tells me.

"I wonder why. It's not like humanity is ending, or something like that," I sarcastically mumble. We have just exited the dining hall, and the doors we passed have closed. Karmel grabs my arm and stops me from walking any further.

"You don't understand," she sighs. "I had a dream."

"Lots of people do."

"I dreamed that tomorrow's the day," she blurts. The light in her

eyes tells me that she's serious.

"Should I believe you're a prophet?" I laugh to break tension, but her demeanor remains the same.

"Until tomorrow passes," she suggests. "Ing, we only have a few hours to come to peace with ourselves. If there's anything you need to take care of before we die, I suggest you do it."

"Karmel," I hesitantly begin, "I don't know where this is coming from. Seriously, is everything okay?"

"You have to believe me," she pleads. "I know you want an apology from Jim, and I know you wouldn't want to die without Liam seeing you together." Now she's speaking outside her limits, and I don't want to hear her tell me my business. I keep marching forward, desperate to get to my unit so that I can close the door and go to bed—the closest thing that I can compare to death. This heavy bullshit has come from the middle of nowhere and Karmel can't make me listen anymore than God could at this moment. "He knows you're angry!"

The shout echoes down the hall, and I turn to face her again and roll my eyes.

"And who would that be?"

"He knows you're angry. He knows you hate him. But he *had* to give you your past so that you would end up here."

"Are you talking about God?"

"I'm talking about whoever gave me the dream," she answers.

"Why don't you have another dream and ask him what good I am doing him by ending up here?" I sharply request. "What good could possibly come out of this? He is definitely not a *good* God."

"We don't understand him at all. If we did, wouldn't we be Gods?" She responds. "What you're going through has a purpose. You should accept that."

And now she reminds me of my mother. Mom believed there was a reason for everything—including all of the evil surrounding us.



I can't fall asleep. I finally roll over onto my back and reach my arms for the edges of the bed—I feel like I need to hold onto something in order to breathe. I think about all that has happened today. I woke up to a pool of blood in my sheets. I saw my son, and for the first time ever I told him that he might be able to see his father and me together.

I talked to Jim enough to convince him to 'forfeit' his time with Liam for later in the week so that the nurses would let us see our son, together, for the first and last time (if Karmel has it right). After we

watched our son fall asleep in our laps, he finally apologized for the bad things he had done. At first, I didn't want to, but Karmel talked me into it—I finally forgave him.

My cramps become exceedingly worse, but I only faintly recognize them in my dreams. The room starts to violently shake, and I feel my body tremor along with it. It continues to get worse, with thunder and lightning striking every corner of the earth. Fire consumes me, but I don't mind—I am clothed with the sun and the stars.

Camille Millier

Spider Swing



The saxophone, wild and
silky, creeps from the wet street below-
up, up, up- crawls through the open window
with the January breeze
and makes the candle flames dance.

Hey there Mister,
cool cat,

Why don't you hustle those
Daddy long legs
up the fire escape,
and appear in your black suede shoes
that can step and swing
with me
until the flames burn out
and these arachnids go to sleep.

Ali Schanbacher

Mine



He was mine first.

Sure, it wasn't like I had any real claim on him. I didn't even know his name. But that didn't matter. When he turned around in his desk to ask me what assignment had been due for Spanish that day, and I had noticed for the first time how adorable he was. His soft brown eyes almost hidden behind impossibly long lashes, his freckles speckled along his nose, his arm resting on the edge of my own desk so that I could see the muscles and veins underneath his skin, it was decided. He was mine.

It was instantaneous. I saw the two of us together, walking hand in hand through the halls so all those nasty girls on the volleyball team would see. I imagined the two of us skipping class and ducking down behind the football bleachers. I had already begun to clear room inside my head for where thoughts of him would belong. But as soon as it started, he was taken away.

The last bell of the day had rung and bodies filled the hall like swarming flies or frantic cattle. I was making my way through the

ruckus when I saw, past the blur of letterman jackets and neon-colored backpacks, a long blond ponytail across the hall.

"Hannah!" I called out, but she didn't hear me.

I pressed through the current of students rushing to the buses or their cars. It was only when I was able to break apart that I realized that Hannah wasn't alone. She was talking to him. My boy.

I saw it right away. Hannah was pulling on that blond ponytail of hers. She was twisting those golden locks round and round her finger. And though there were dozens of voices crowding around me, I could distantly make out that high-pitched laugh of hers, the one that became even squeaker the more excited she got. In my mind, I could see the expression on her face even though she was turned away. Those dimples on her cheeks were no doubt showing, and her nose was probably crinkled, just like all those times we used to lay on her trampoline talking about boys.

But it wasn't just her. I could easily see his face from over her shoulder, and the way his eyes were focused completely on her, like they were incapable of looking away, brought me to a stop right there in the hectic high school halls. It was only when someone hit me roughly with their shoulder that I continued forward, unable to look away from Hannah and my boy.

My stomach twisted. It was obvious. It's not like it's that hard to tell when a boy likes a girl. He had one hand in the pocket of his jeans, the other held the door of his locker, his head inclined toward her. He was very focused, almost too attentive, hanging on every word that came out of her mouth. And then he had this lopsided smile on his face, one of those perfect smiles that a girl couldn't resist. It was all very sickening.

As I approached, his eyes flicked in my direction, making my heart jump, but his attention immediately returned to Hannah.

"I'll see you Monday then," he said to her as he closed his locker.

"And if you need any help with the homework just text me or something," Hannah squeaked.

That stupid crooked smile came back again. "And same to you."

Hannah bounced on her heels and I knew she had to be grinning. "Good luck."

"See you later," he replied, making sure to give her one last heart-catching look before he was gone, disappearing into the flock of students.

By that time, I was just a few steps away so that when Hannah's eyes trailed down the hall to follow my boy, they landed on me instead.

"Mel!" she exclaimed like I was the light of the world.

Usually I would have called back to her. Usually I would have let

her practically tackle me with one of her fierce hugs, but instead I found myself asking, "Who was he?"

A fierce blush came to her face and her dimples deepened. "That's Michael Jameson. He's my lab partner for chemistry."

Of course he is.

"He seems nice," I might have said with just a hint of bite in my voice.

But Hannah didn't notice as a bubbly smile stretched across her face. "Yeah. He is," she replied as she pulled on her ponytail.

For a moment, the chatter of the students sounded like sirens and I wanted to scream. But I took a breath and was able to push it away until the sirens became a dull buzzing in the back of my mind.

"Hey," I spoke up, "are we going to go or do you plan on just hanging around here all day?"

"Of course not." She hooked her arm through mine. "Let's go."

She grinned at me, but instead of smiling back like I usually did, I found myself looking away, trying to ignore the tightening in my chest.

When her phone buzzed again, I was close to flinging the remote at her.

"Is that him again?"

Hannah grinned, her whole face flushed. "Maybe."

I sunk deeper into her couch and jabbed at buttons on her remote, flipping through the channels without seeing what was even on. Hannah's furball of a cat hopped onto the end of the couch. She purred madly and began to nuzzle my feet, but I jerked away from her.

"Stop that!" I snapped. "I already told you I don't want to pet you! Shoo. Leave me alone."

"She just wants some attention," Hannah told me from where she sat on the floor. Her homework and textbooks spread across the coffee table. When she was finished texting, she balanced her phone on her thigh, just where I could see it from the corner of my eye if I looked hard enough.

I pulled my legs to my chest and wrapped my arms around my knees. "I don't care. She can go away."

"Then I'll pet her." Hannah started to reach out for her cat, but her phone beeped again.

I groaned loudly. "You're supposed to be studying."

"You're not studying."

"I get As in everything. I don't need to." When she picked up her

phone again, I almost smacked it out of her hands. "*Hannah*. Study."

"Just one more. I promise," she insisted, but a moment later, she gasped. "Oh gosh. Oh gosh."

I rolled my eyes. "What?"

Hannah looked up at me with a stricken expression. "He just asked me on a date...I think. I don't know. Maybe."

I jerked up. "What?"

"He just asked me if I wanted to get coffee Saturday. That's a date, right? That's what he's asking?" I grabbed her phone out of her hand and looked at it for myself, but just like she said, Michael's question was too stark, too clear for me to ignore.

"What do I do? What should I say?" Hannah asked. Her shining blue eyes were big, pleading. "You know how clueless I am."

My fingers curled around her phone. When the screen went dark, I could see my reflection staring back at me, my features distorted by smudges. "You know," I said slowly, carefully, "you really don't have to go out with him if you don't want to. It's okay. You don't need to do this if you don't think you're ready."

She smiled, her dimples deepening. "But I really want to."

And then she reached out and slipped her phone out of my grasp.

It was happening. I was losing him.

My throat started to constrict as she began to text him and I blurted out quickly before it was too late, "Then I should come with you."

Hannah stopped and looked at me.

"What?"

The idea was quickly taking shape in my mind. It was almost too easy, too perfect. "First dates are a lot of pressure, even something as low key as getting coffee. It's really easy for something to go wrong, especially since you haven't done anything like this before. So I'll come with you and everything will just be so much more casual. It'll be relaxed. And then if things go well, then, well..."

Hannah's face brightened and she grabbed my hand. "You would do that?"

I squeezed her fingers. "Anything for my bestest friend."

Hannah giggled and turned back to her phone. She was almost bouncing where she sat. "What should I say?" she asked, looking for my help like always.

Her cat started to creep back over to me, but I moved away, swinging my legs over the side of the couch so that I could read Hannah's phone over her shoulder. "Tell him that you already made plans with

your friend to get coffee that day, but that she thinks it would be fun if he came along.” I grabbed her shoulder so that she met my eyes. “And just make sure he comes.”

Hannah wrote what I said and then beamed up at me. “Thank you.”

I grinned back at her, seeing Michael in my mind. “Of course.”

I would do anything for Hannah, I kept telling myself as I put on my best skirt, the one that miraculously showed off both my stunning legs and my tiny waist. If Michael really wanted her, then I would step aside. I would give him up. I would be a martyr. As I put on lipstick, I told myself that everything I did was for Hannah’s own good, and if this little crush of hers actually went anywhere, I would know in my heart that it would have been because of me, because I was a true friend. I would let Hannah have the boy if that’s what they both really, really wanted. But that didn’t mean I could look nice while I was being her third wheel.

But when I pushed through the door of the coffee shop, my eyes went to him immediately. He was sitting on the couch by the window, a patch of sunlight beaming right on him like a beacon. He had one arm resting along the back of the couch and he set down his coffee so that he could shield his eyes from the sharp light. And as he did so, those soft brown eyes turned to me.

My heart pounded.

I didn’t even see Hannah, not until I heard her screech my name and then two arms came around me.

“Mel, you’re here!”

“Yeah, I am.” I hugged her back just briefly before I untangled myself. “So isn’t there someone I’m supposed to meet?”

“Right, right!” Hannah bounced back over and Michael’s eyes followed her. My jaw tightened, but I did my best to smile as Hannah introduced, “Michael, this is Melissa. Melissa, Michael.”

Melissa and Michael. Our names even sounded perfect together.

“Hello.” I slid my hair over one shoulder and I said like it had just come to me, “Hey, wait, aren’t you in my Spanish class?”

Michael looked at me, really looked at me for the first time and I sent him a slow smile, just like the one I had practiced in the mirror. But not for him, of course.

“Oh, yeah.” He took a drink of his coffee. “You ready for that test next week?”

“Definitely. I’ve gotten perfect scores on all the assignments.

And it's not like this chapter is very hard. The imperfect tense is cake, especially after learning the preterit. I just need to make sure that I'm using the right one, which really isn't that hard. And then other than that, there's only..." But I drifted off when his eyes went back to Hannah as she sat down in the armchair across from him. His attention was on her as she took a drink of her tea, and when she looked at him over the rim, he couldn't resist a smile, like a silent joke had been passed between them without me even knowing.

I noticed that the other end of the couch, the spot right next to Michael was open. I began to move toward it, stepping around the other chair where they both probably expected me to sit, but I stopped when Hannah spoke up.

"Do you know what you want to order? I'm trying their new ginger tea and it's amazing."

"Right." I glanced toward the counter. "You know, I think I'm just going to get my latte. I'll be right back." I tossed that last bit back at Michael, but he was too busy shielding his eyes from the sunlight to hear me.

My hands bunched around the end of my skirt. What was the matter with him? I know Hannah is darling. I know that better than anyone else. Who else would make me a cupcake every year on my birthday? Who else would stick notes up the slots of my locker? Who else would weave me another bracelet when I wanted one even after she had already made me ten others? But, I was great too. In some ways, a lot of ways really, I was even better than her. I got better grades than her. I have always been more athletic, being the star player on the volleyball team that made the other girls jealous. And I can watch all the gory movies that she could never stomach. Sure, I might not have her dimples, but I have practically perfect legs, legs of which I was showing off to my fullest and he hardly gave me a second look.

I glanced back at him after I had put in my order. It really wasn't fair. Why did he have to sit back like, one arm still slung over the back of the couch, in the way that was subconsciously beckoning me over. He was making my heart race faster. He was making my thoughts run out of control. If I hadn't been such a good friend, it would have been easy. If I had really wanted him, really, *really* wanted him, I could have had him wrapped around my finger. Right then even. All I had to do was distract Hannah, ask her to get something out of her car for me, it didn't matter what it was. And the once she was gone, all I would have to do was take Michael's hand and lead him down the hall to single bathroom. He might ask questions. He might mention Hannah, but all I would have to do was

put my hand on his chest and shove him into the bathroom. Then I would kiss him and Hannah's name would die between our lips.

I could feel it all even as I stood there besides the counter waiting for my latte. The wall is against my back. My hand is groping for the lock, but his arm brushes mine and he beats me to it. So instead, in the dark of the bathroom, I grab his shirt and pull him up against me. By then he is kissing me hungrily, ravenously, like he is trying to suck the air right out of my lungs and I keep opening my mouth up wider. My hands have now made it underneath his shirt and I can feel the heat of his skin, the hard muscles of his back coiling under my fingertips as his lips leave mine and make their way down my throat. I try to catch my breath, but I can't, not as he starts to trail kisses along the edge of my tank top. And then I feel his hands on my thighs, his touch sliding up, up, up past the edge of my skirt.

"Miss."

I was yanked out of the bathroom with a start.

"Sorry, miss," the barista said as she slid a mug toward me. "Your latte."

"Oh. Yes." I combed my fingers through my hair. "Thanks."

Even as I picked up my latte and tried to compose myself, I could still feel faint touches on my skin where his hands and lips had never been. My face was too warm and I knew I had to get control of myself. I couldn't do this in a public place for crying out loud. It was already bad enough that I was practically drooling over the guy Hannah had feelings for, but did I have to do it here, now?

I turned away from the counter and promised myself I would behave. I was a good friend, really. I could at least pretend to act like it. For Hannah.

But as I started back toward the couch, I stopped suddenly.

They were gone. Both of them.

They...left me?

Hannah left me?

No. Wait. Wait, this isn't right. This doesn't make sense. Hannah would never. Not to me.

Panic and hurt and anger all started to bubble to the surface until I heard Hannah call out to me. I looked over my shoulder to see that they had only moved over to a vacant table off to the side, out of the sun. I let out a breath of relief. But as I started toward them, I realized it was a table for two. There wasn't any room for me.

So I stood there in the middle of the coffee shop with a latte that I really never had a desire to drink.

Hannah and Michael were chatting about something I couldn't make out, but I heard her high-pitched laughter ring out, the laughter that I knew best. But it wasn't meant for me, not anymore.

She was able to pull herself away from the conversation just long enough to tell me to bring one of the empty chairs from the bar over so I could join them. I hesitated, feeling my stomach churn, but then I came forward. It was as I was heaving the chair over that I was able to pinpoint my mistake. I had let myself get distracted by those soft brown eyes and the light of them. I had been so focused on claiming the boy for myself that I hadn't realized that I was the one being played instead of the other way around.

I knew I should have left, made some excuse and just let them be alone like I knew they wanted. I should have just got out of there, kept some of my pride while I could, but instead I pulled my chair up close to the small table where it didn't belong and bumped my knee on the sharp corner so that an ugly blue bruise would remain days later, staying even though it wasn't wanted.

I told myself I wouldn't be there long. I would leave and put all thoughts of Hannah and Michael and Michael and Hannah together out of my mind. I would finish my latte and then I would go, but even when I set my empty cup aside, I didn't get up. I didn't leave. I listened to them talk about people and plans and past conversations that I knew nothing about. I kept trying to join in, adding in a comment here or there, and they both, at least, made an attempt to respond before they turned back to each other. All I could do was watch the two of them. Michael had his forearms on the table and he kept leaning in closer while Hannah steadily twirled her ponytail. It was like they couldn't see or hear me. I could have slipped away and they wouldn't have noticed. But I didn't leave. No, I stayed sitting there on that barstool, trying to sit comfortably in my skirt, but only knocking my knee into the corner of the table over and over again. No matter how many hints they tried to drop, I stayed and kept trying to infiltrate their conversation. I kept trying to ease my way into their private jokes by reminding Hannah of our own. Like the time I had forced her to help me TP the house of the boy who cheated on me. Or when we had bicycled clear across town just to get free pancakes from IHOP on National Pancake Day. Or when we had went to the water park and spent hours drifting round and round and round the lazy river with our inner tubes hooked together and we spent the whole time spying on the hot lifeguards or blocking the little kids who tried to splash past or talking about anything that came to mind until we were so sunburned that we were in pain for weeks. *Remember when*, I kept saying, wanting to

grab her ponytail and jerk her toward me. *Remember when, Hannah. Don't you remember?* I kept repeating it over and over again until it became a plead. Sometimes it was even an apology.

But she didn't seem to notice, not when those soft brown eyes were focused on her.

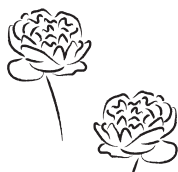
She was mine first, I wanted to say. There was so many times those words started to rise up my throat to burst out into the open, but I managed to swallow them back down even as they chimed inside my head, right along with her obnoxious laughter.

She was mine first. She had always been mine.

Instead, I just remained quiet, not moving from my awkward perch. I would often open my mouth, but anything I thought to say was quickly dismissed. But even then, I still didn't leave. I stubbornly stayed right where I was even as I watched myself become more and more insignificant until it felt like I was fading away, until the boy I had thought was mine took away what I had had to begin with.

Zacharia Heider

To the sister I never had



I will always regret the things
we could have shared:
the nights I'd stay awake
because you would not put the phone down –
these walls are very thin;
the days you – (mom) –
would make me play house
when I wanted to play Army Men;
the days that you had to play Army Men
anyway.

I will miss seeing things your way
when I ask for advice;
you: another lens
you: a funny way of making life
seem like a movie in 3D;
your favorite color
was always blue.

Sister, it breaks my heart
to know that I will never counsel you.
I will miss the night that you finally put the phone down
and shed your thousandth tear:
pounding,
heavy,
like the horns from *Inception*, I'd hear;

these walls are very thin.
 I won't show up at your door with
 two spoons
 one gallon –
 triple chocolate –
 and (500) *Days of Summer* – your favorite –
 to stay up all night with boxes and boxes of tissues.
 We will set the phone in our laps as we gorge.
 You will complain about it going straight to your butt;
 I say: at least you have one and
 we laugh.

Each time you look
 from bowl to screen
 to phone to screen
 to bowl to
 phone I would
 resist the urge to say:
 He's not calling you back.
 Instead I would give you
 three hundred calories of muscular flexion:
 I will hug every last ounce of sadness out,
 I will wring your pulp heart dry of every salt memory
 until all you have left is a damp,
 wrinkled core
 left in the sun to dry.
 And you fall asleep on my shoulder.

I will never
 be the first one to hear you scream
 when the night terrors won't leave;
 be the first one to hold you,
 be the one to dig through the attic, cluttered,
 3' AM – half scared to death myself
 just to find an old blankie or
 bear,
 press it into your arms and

hush you back to sleep,
it's beautiful.

You are so beautiful.

So when I say
that he doesn't deserve you,
I really mean it.
You are exceptional,
you are beyond words and
I wish

O sister, how I wish,
that you could be more
than this poem.



Maddi Rasor

Smoke and Mirrors



Finalist

The instant I got home from school that day, I knew trouble was brewing and about to boil over.

I got out of the carpool and immediately noticed my big brother's beat-up Chevy in the driveway. As I hauled my overstuffed backpack up the driveway hill, I wondered, *What's he doing here? Not that it's a problem, just... weird.* He was in college and should've been an hour and a half south at the Harvard on the Hocking. There wasn't a break anywhere in the near future; it was third quarter for me, second semester for him. Sure it was Thursday, but he didn't come home for weekends, and he hadn't since he'd been a freshman.

But sure enough, there he was, sitting with his Sperrys on the kitchen table and smoking a cigarette, the way Mom always yelled at him not to. He was dressed in sweatpants and one of his fraternity t-shirts from Homecoming or their charity run or something. His 'do I look like I'm trying to impress you?' clothing.

"I never got home after four o'clock," Fletcher said in lieu of greeting, "when I was in high school."

I shrugged. "You drove like a maniac."

"You think so?"

"Yeah."

There was an awkward silence as Fletcher snuffed out his cigarette in the ashtray that normally sat outside on the porch. He got to his feet, awkwardly shoving his hands in his pockets. "Want to go to Dairy Queen?"

"Sure." Blizzards were sort of like currency between us kids. I wondered what he'd done now that he needed me in his corner. "Only... aren't you gonna change?"

Fletcher glanced down at himself, then cracked a sheepish smile. "Right. Good call, Tessa. It's cold outside." He disappeared back into the laundry room.

When he returned, the only difference was the ratty sweatshirt he was now wearing over his former ensemble. This from my brother, the Frat-star, who never went out less than dressed to kill. I hoped he hadn't come down with something. "Let's go," he said, jingling the keys in my face. A leftover taunt from the time before I could drive. "I'll try not to drive like a maniac."

Out on the road, Fletcher was just as quiet. His car—formerly our older sister Mae's—still creaked and groaned like a crotchety old man, but ran just fine, like an aged former marine. Country music pulsed from the stereo, a blast of summer in the dead of winter. It painted a picture of ocean breezes and cold Corona—which, according to Fletcher and Mae, was a shitty beer, and there were plenty of better ones made in Mexico.

"Fletch," I said carefully, "is there a reason you came home for the weekend?"

The real, unspoken question hung between us.

He sighed and went searching for his cigarettes. "Yeah. Mom and Dad asked me to be home this weekend. Supposedly Mae and RJ are too, but that one's still up in the air, 'cause you know she's pregnant." He lit one of the tiny rolls of paper and stuck it between his teeth. "And apparently due soon."

I rolled down my window as I thought on this. "Why do they want all three of us home, do you know?"

Fletcher took a long drag on his cigarette, saying nothing. "I think so," he finally got out around the smoke.

I actually recoiled in surprise. "You do?"

He nodded once, still staring straight ahead at the road. "Yeah. I

overheard them talking this morning when I got home.” He flicked a supposedly nonchalant glance at me, and I could tell he was genuinely concerned—worried, even. “But Blizzards first.”

Bad news, Dad always said, should come with something sweet to chase away the bitter aftertaste.

“Did Dad lose his job or something?” I asked, now into full-on worry-mode. I got it from Mom.

“No, but...”

“Is something wrong with Grandma? Or Uncle Jameson?”

“No, but...”

“Or...”

“Tessa!” Fletcher half-exclaimed, half-laughed. “Jesus H. Christ, calm down!” He flicked his cigarette butt out the window, even though it was only half-smoked. “I told you, Blizzards first.”

I folded my arms across my sternum. “You’re no fun, Fletch.”

He didn’t really reply, only went *Hmm* and kept driving.

We pulled into the Dairy Queen parking lot, only to discover that half the town had the same idea and was in the drive-thru lane. “To hell with that,” Fletcher said, and he jerkily maneuvered the car into a spot.

Inside, the place was almost empty, like a ghost town where all the spirits were in the boneyard instead of the streets. We strode right up to the counter, and Fletcher had ordered and paid for both of us before I could even pull my wallet out. “Hey,” I said mock-sternly, “it was supposed to be my turn.”

“You don’t have a job,” he countered, holding one of the paper cups out to me. Cookie dough, as always. “So don’t worry about it, yeah?”

“Yeah. Sure.”

We found a table in the corner that overlooked the scenic, slush-filled parking lot. “Is that all you say now?” my big brother teased. “*Yeah?*”

I glanced up from my Blizzard and forced myself to keep a straight face. “Yeah.”

His laugh was raspier than usual, and I had a feeling it had nothing to do with the cigarettes. He gets hoarse when he’s been drinking too much (siblings weekend taught me that one), when he’s getting sick (living with my older brother for the first fifteen years of my life taught me *that* one), and when he’s been shouting (ditto for that last one). I wondered which it had been, or if it was somehow a combination of all three—*plus* the cigarettes.

“So what’s the bad news?” I asked, and instantly, the atmosphere

sobered.

Fletcher sighed, and set down his plastic spoon. His jaw opened and shut a few times like he couldn't really figure out what it was, exactly, he was trying to say. Then he blurted out:

"Mom and Dad are getting a divorce."

I nearly choked on the bite of ice cream I'd just taken. "They're *what?*"

He was no longer looking at me, but searching his own Blizzard for the meaning of life. "Getting. A. Divorce."

"What?" I sat back in my chair in shock, ignoring the metal and plastic frame digging into my back. "How? *Why?* Are... are you *sure?*"

"Tessa." Fletcher made a 'calm down' motion with his hands, and I immediately shut up. "They're getting a divorce through a divorce attorney, I'd think, 'cause Dad's been having an affair, and yes." His glance flicked up, and he drew in a deep breath. "I'm *damn* sure." When I didn't say anything, he added, "They wanted to wait until you were out of high school, but Mom can't take it anymore."

Something snapped to attention in my head. "Did you say Dad's *been having* an affair?"

Fletcher nodded stiffly, stirring his ice cream despondently with that weird-ass, blocky plastic spoon Dairy Queen has. "Yeah. He has a *girlfriend*." He stabbed his Blizzard at that. "You remember the one secretary in his office who's like, four years older than Mae?"

My jaw actually dropped, like this was a movie and not real life. "*Her?*"

Fletch nodded. "Yup." Another stabbing of the Blizzard. His was rapidly turning into sludge. "A woman who obviously knows about Mom, and you, me, and Mae, and didn't *care*." He was shaking his head, his teeth gritted.

I wasn't sure which exactly I was feeling in that moment—deep, white-hot anger, painfully intense sorrow, intangible and unknowable fear, or one of those other things swimming around in my gut that I couldn't name and didn't want to. Fletcher was always easy to read; his face was an open book. He got that from Mom. But Mae and I, we were harder to read, harder to understand, like Dad.

Like our *goddamn* dad.

Tears were rolling down my cheeks but I wasn't crying, I was *pissed*. My hands were shaking, so I clasped them around the plastic Blizzard cup. It was still mostly full of ice cream and memories. But even when I did that, my shoulders, my arms, my whole *body* was shaking with fury and fear and something damn close to hate.

"They wanted to tell you tonight," Fletcher continued, almost apologetically, "but I... I don't know, I thought you'd want to hear it from Mae or me before..."

"Before Dad tried to explain," I interrupted.

Fletcher winced. "I'm sorry, Tessa, I..."

"It's not your damn fault."

"I made you cry, though."

"That's not..." I began again.

But his phone went off on the table, too many vibrations to be a text. He snatched it up before the final ring. "Hello?" A pause. "Hey Mae. Yeah, I just... okay. Okay, we'll be back soon. Bye." He let out an exhausted breath, and slammed his phone back down on the table. "Mom and Dad want us home."

I snorted. "Yeah, I bet they do."

We both stood, quiet as ghosts and just as faded, threw out our not even half-eaten Blizzards because neither of us had the stomach for the rest just then, and piled back into the car. Fletcher turned off the country music, and in the mounting silence, I could practically feel us both seething. Who the hell decided to cheat on his wife of twenty-some years, and who the hell wanted a sugar daddy with a mortgage and three kids? What kind of man was that? What kind of woman?

And more importantly, who the hell decided to put up with that shit?

Fletcher pulled into the driveway behind Dad's Mazda and Mae's Ford. We sat there a moment, listening to that not-quite-perfect silence an idling car gives. Neither of us needed to ask what the other was thinking; we knew. Somehow, siblings always know. Fletcher pulled out a cigarette but didn't light it. He chewed on the end instead, like he was some gangster with a cigar in a '30s movie. It was only then after his phone went off again that he killed the engine, and we both got out.

"Hey," Fletch called to me.

I turned back to face him. "Yeah?"

He pulled me into a hug, which was something Fletcher never, *ever* did. "Don't let them lie to you, okay?"

I nodded into his shoulder. "Okay."

"And Tessa?"

"Yeah?"

"Mae and I got your back no matter what shit Dad pulls." He stepped back to look me dead in the eye. The seriousness of the moment was kind of undermined by the unlit cigarette dangling precariously from between his teeth. "So don't let him. You got me?"

I couldn't help but smile just a little as I said, "Yeah."

Fletcher half-smiled himself, lit the cigarette, and then we both started making the trek up the driveway and through the front door.

Chloe Sell

he was maxwell



In my father's arms is a newborn boy
beautiful as God—

no: a softer, kinder beauty—

lamb's ears

milk chocolate

cabbage butterflies and nets

that catch then let go...

He is stunning in his inhumanness—

a flushed piglet with a

torso crumpled like a bag of flour, and

fatly folded thighs that nestle

themselves into Daddy's

spotted, wrinkled skin

as he squeals...

He must be *my* child, my breath

was never more absent, or my eyes

and heart

so wet.

Earl Townsend

Double Jeopardy



1

A statue of a bronze Olympian cat is by my left ear lobe. My thigh is almost punctured by a puffer fish. A model car is parked too close to me.

I think if I jumped I could make it to the couch.

An old-style bicycle with a big wheel in the front is thinking about coming over and having dinner. I retreat to the corner by the forgotten Queen of Hearts and try to think of my old home. That's life on a living room shelf.

The old man comes into the room and turns on the T.V. It's a 70-inch plasma screen Panasonic. He turns the channel to NBC and watches *Jeopardy*. The old woman comes in five minutes later with a tray of cheddar cheese and crackers.

She sits by the old man and they both watch *Jeopardy*.

The girl descends the blue staircase on the left with wet hair. She walks back to the kitchen. Someone knocks on the door and the old man gets up to answer it.

It's the pizza lady. She's wearing her usual low-cut white uniform. The old man thinks of Puerto Rico for a split second as he blinks into the extraterrestrial moonlight. He pays the pizza lady, puts the pizza on the small, square, dining room table, and shuts the door.

The girl gets some pizza and sits down by her parents in time to watch Final Jeopardy. An acupuncturist from Rhode Island named Rachel wins \$45,000. She'd already won four shows before that and now she has made \$178,500.

"I hope she keeps winning!" the girl says.

2

I was hospitalized after tightrope walking from a low building to a high one. A turquoise nurse walked into the room and said, "I want all of your mind." Another nurse came in and said, "I want all of your body." Soon ten nurses were in the room and they all wanted something from me. I said, "No one's getting anything. Where's my doctor?"

The first nurse came in dressed in doctor clothes. Discovering I was perfectly fine, I got up and walked out of the room. I then walked out of the hospital. I walked to the edge of the street. I waved to an old friend standing on the other side. It was almost not daytime.

The atmosphere had been stunned and atomized by a Listerine squirt gun. I hailed a rickshaw. My new wife was already in the backseat. Full of youngness, she looked at me and became spaceless. Her hang gliders of light vacuumed my vision field. She said that we had to go home.

I said, "Good. I like home."

The skinny man with turbo legs started running and we started moving. Way up high there was a building reflecting traffic lights using the frozen rain lines of its windows. The lights changed between red, yellow, and green. I felt the heat of her voice hit my face from the left.

"We're going downtown tonight."

"I have to go uptown tomorrow."

"We're only going to dinner."

"Okay, good. We're just stopping by the house then?"

"Yeah. I forgot my underpants."

I had been put on the white shelf in a hallway an hour and 32 minutes ago by an exotic woman who was somewhere between 23 and 27 years old. A man walked through the white door I was facing and held the door open for the exotic woman to step through. They seemed to be in a relaxed rush.

He said to her, "So where are we going to dinner?"

"Vinnutti's!"

"Great. I love Vinnutti's. I'm very hungry, you know."

"I bet you are."

The exotic woman walked to the left on the bamboo floor and the man waited by the white door. In twenty-eight seconds she returned and they both went out the white door. I was still standing on the white shelf. My new neighbor was a lava lamp from Oregon. He used to belong to a horticulturist named Tina but she gave him to Goodwill. He went through several Goodwill transfers and ended up here, by me, on the white shelf in the hallway of the exotic woman, facing the white door.

3

I was looking at a sunny beach. There was a bright blue ocean beyond the beach. There were palm trees laughing at the breeze. I was on a wooden shelf facing a wall that was a window. And I was looking at the sunny beach.

A hippie man without any clothes on came into the room and started meditating.

He meditated for an hour without moving. The sunlight slowly made its way into the room until the entire room was cloaked in optimism.

I had stayed with the exotic woman and her husband for four months before I was given to this man, who was said to be her brother. It was the first time I'd ever been alone on a shelf and it was a welcome change of pace. Maybe I should try to stay here?

4

Five months in and I was still with the hippie man. He had no visitor's in that time and he meditated every morning at 7 a.m. He would then make a breakfast of alfalfa sprouts and mashed yeast and take a shower. He would then get dressed in a gray suit and leave.

I would usually start a conversation with the green floor lamp across the room and ask him all the usual things one asks of others like, "How are you today?" and "How long have you lived here?" He had lived there for five years. He said that the man, whose name was David, rarely changed anything in the house. He said that David had eaten the same breakfast everyday he'd been there. "Five years straight of alfalfa sprouts and mashed yeast," the lamp said.

Once a beach ball rolled across the beach. Then more beach balls came rolling by until the entire beach ball was filled with beach balls

rolling down it.

“Well that’s weird,” the lamp said.

“Yeah,” I said.

Another peaceful month passed and it only rained once. Then one evening, when David was making his dinner of quinoa and tofu dressed in balsamic vinegar, four men in gray suits came in and said, “David!”

“Yes?” David said.

The men formed a quick semicircle around David and then one of them said, “Can you make us some of that quinoa and tofu salad?”

“Yes, of course,” David said.

David made the salad and they all sat around a low circular table and ate sitting on the hemp rug.

David said, “I made this table myself.”

“That so?”

“That doesn’t surprise me, David. You’ve always been very resourceful.”

“Yeah. Remember that time in Hong Kong?” said one of the men.

“Yes! How could I forget the time in Hong Kong!” David said.

“Hell of a time,” two of the men said.

“Yeah,” David said.

They ate and talked respectfully and calmly. When everyone was done, everyone stood up. The men went out the door and said, “See you tomorrow, David.”

“Sure,” David said.

5

The next month went by without incident and I was by that time very relaxed and content with my new home. One day David didn’t meditate. He just made his breakfast and read the news on his iPad. The day was as sunny as all the rest and the seagulls were doing a synchronized dance routine. Anytime a human could see them, they stopped and scattered slightly, but they started up again when no one was watching.

At 8:10 a.m. the exotic woman and her husband walked in and said, “Hello. David!” She was as young as ever and seemed to radiate everything good. He was still in very good spirits. She said, “Thanks for letting us come, David. We needed to get away.”

“I bet. It’s hectic up there.”

“Very,” said the husband.

“Well, I’ll be back in a week. Have a good time. There’s no rain in

sight,” David said.

“Okay. Thanks again, David,” said the exotic woman.

“Yep.”

David left in his gray suit holding a large buckle-filled leather luggage bag.

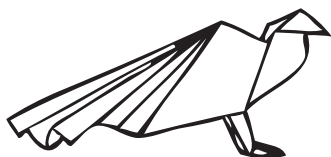
The exotic woman, whose name was Rosalie, and her husband, whose name I can’t remember, were very happy the whole week. They went out for every meal and made human origami every night. They sunbathed on the beach and swam in the bright blue ocean every day. They were even happier than when I lived with them.

David came back the following Tuesday and Rosalie and her husband left. They all said pleasant “thank-yous” and “goodbyes.”

The evening came and I watched twenty-five pelicans scratch the surface of the ocean with their long wings. The seagulls did their sunset dance routine and an iguana contemplated his existence as the sun dripped behind the edge of the ocean.

Ali Cravens

Like I Am a Woman



I put on my costume day to day
 Of stilettos and rouge and Vera Wang,
 Outline my eyes and angle my cheeks
 Guised as a delicate version of me
 In my pretend dainty bones and wishful, thinnèd figurine.

Though my features smudge and smear together
 And the fat smooths over my face,
 I put on my costume every morning
 And enter the feminine race.

I am a woman

I wail

From beneath the irregular curves that smother my middle.

I am fragile

I cry

From beneath the thickened flesh that enwraps my thighs.

Look at me

Like I'm a woman

*Petite and small and light
Made of polish and lace and pearls and gloss
And all the finer things in life*

All day this is what I scream,

From beneath the folds of fat and the chubby cheeks,

I am a woman.

Look at me.

Wesley Sexton

unlikely circumstance



The windows are gathering plenty
of late-afternoon light, and

the blinds are chopping the happy
light into

long,
thin
rect-
angles
which

are dancing with the brown shadows
already on my floor; and

somehow that same late-afternoon light has made
a beautiful tri-colored spread appear

on the corner of my ceiling;
and just above my head a thin cobweb

looks like it's sparkling and
hiding behind the fuzzy, late-afternoon light

that is walking in through my
window;

I have spent years in
this room without seeing it like this

and you can be sure—it won't
look quite this way ever again.

manuscripts





One knows that your
world
Others are made of
distance and mystery

Ross Reagan

Press 1 for More Options



Thank you for calling 911. This call may be monitored for quality assurance. To use this system in English, press 1.

[beep]

Thank you for calling your local emergency hotline. Your time is very important to us. We value your call and take pride in knowing that we are your first choice in fast and timely health care. . .

You are first in line and your call will be answered in the order it was received.

If this emergency is health related, please press 1.

[beep]

*If **you** specifically are experiencing the emergency, please press 1.*

[beep]

To better help us serve you, we will need to know the severity of the emergency. Based on a 10 point scale--0 being no pain and 10 being you're already dead--please say the number corresponding to your pain level.

. . .

manuscripts

I'm sorry. I didn't catch that. If this health emergency involves a severed limb, stab, gunshot wound, car accident, fire, cat in a tree, or missing teeth press 1. If this involves a heart attack, stroke, diabetic coma, allergic reaction, or any other displeasing bodily reaction, please press 2.

[beep]

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in a random survey. Your participation is completely anonymous and will have no bearing on the outcome of this call. Would you be willing. . .

[beep]

*So you do **not** wish to participate in the survey? Is this correct? Press 1 for yes—2 for no.*

[beeeeeep]

I'm sorry. I didn't catch that. Press 1 for yes. Press 2 for no.

*Yes you **do not** wish to participate or yes you **do** wish to participate? Press 1 for yes. . . and 2 for no.*

[beeeeeeeeeeeep]

Okay. Thank you. We value your patience. Has this emergency transpired within the last 10 minutes? Press 1 for yes. . .

[beep]

Okay. Is the victim conscious? Press 1 for. . .

[beep]

Has the victim left the country within the past 60 days and been exposed to any life-threatening illnesses? Press 1 for yes—2 for no.

[beep]

Okay. Thank you. Almost done. Do you have an account with us? Press 1 for yes—2 for no.

. . .

Are you still with us? Press 1 for yes—2 for no.

[beep]

Okay. Glad to hear that. How are you paying for this service today? Press 1 for credit or debit card. Press 2 for express check. Press 3 for other.

[beep]

We see that you have chosen the third option. This requires us to check your account balance. Please enter your account number followed by the pound key.

*[**** #]*

One moment while I look that up for you. . .

I'm sorry, but your account is past due and a full payment needs to be received in order for us to assist you. If at any time you would like to speak to an operator, please press 0.

[beep]

Okay, One moment while we transfer you. . .

. . .

. . . .

.

Main menu.

Thank you for calling your local emergency hotline. If this is a life threatening emergency, please hang up and dial 911. Please press 1 for more options.

Justina Kaiser

A Small Shove



It all began when Eliot Turner revealed that he had superpowers. Because as soon as he had, everyone else seemed to gain them as well.

To be fair, little Connor was the one who revealed them. Wicker Elementary's sixth-grade class walked down the hallway as it always did—in two neat columns, one of pushing boys, the other of shoving girls. There were a few children in the middle, for no apparent reason other than that they could be, which seemed a very good reason indeed when you were in sixth grade and were tired of the bothersome columns.

Connor was one of those rather unfortunate few who were in the middle. He was short and plain, and he was dwelling on his own problems—for everyone has problems, be him an adult of eighty or a child of twelve—so much that he didn't see the line leaders halt at the stairs while the teacher counted heads. He kept walking and ran straight into the boy and girl in front of him.

They stumbled, because even a small shove, if unexpected, could make one trip. Their fall started a chain reaction. Children fell everywhere, to the right, to the left, forward and even backward. Some

tried to keep their balance with graceful hops and tremulous twirls. Only a few succeeded. Most just fell flat.

Eliot was one of those poor few who fell flat. He, as class assistant for the week—a lofty position that he took with pride—stood at the very front, the only student really allowed to be in the middle of the lines. The only thing to fall flat on were the twelve stairs before him. By all rights, he should have crashed down and landed horribly on his face.

To his classmates' and his own surprise, he didn't. One second he was falling, arms flailing around to no avail; the next, Eliot stood on the landing below, as though he hadn't just been one flight of steps up. His hands slowly stopped circling around him and he straightened himself, blinking in shock.

There was an instant uproar. The students rushed to him, nearly tripping themselves again to get down the steps and join their waylaid classmate. Mrs. Garrett, their teacher, was among them, not quite sure what to do but quite positive she was supposed to do something. When it became apparent to everyone that nothing horrendous or even remotely bad had happened, she cleared her throat.

"Yes, in line, in line," she said in a voice that was dryer than usual. "As you were. You all have...what was it, again? Oh, yes, gym." She briefly wondered if her students ought to go to gym class, what with that excitement, whatever it was. Her class watched hopefully. Then she changed her mind, because surely physical education would make things more normal. "Yes, come along. Robert, get back in line. Tess, get out of that center, that's better. Eliot..."

She could think of nothing to do with Eliot, however, so she put him back in the front of the line and led on.

Quiet, however, never quite returned that day. It was apparent to almost every student, that Eliot was special. Not everyone could escape a fall like that.

In fact, the only people who thought Eliot wasn't a superhero of some sort, or at least a highly skilled acrobat, were Connor and Tess. The former was as such because he hadn't actually seen anything, so afraid he would get in trouble for starting a massive fall that he had been hiding behind tall Robert during the entire ordeal.

Tess simply knew better.

Eliot didn't display any signs of his superpowers again, although that didn't stop most of his classmates from watching carefully, just in case. Sean and Robert took turns throwing stuff at him, hoping to catch him off balance, but they hit him more often than not. Grace and Grayson were quite sure his power involved flying—how else had Eliot gotten to

the bottom of the stairs without cracking his head open or even skinning a knee?—so they tried cajoling him to the top of stairs and to the highest sets on the playground. Eliot politely refused and continued talking to his friends, as usual. His closest comrades, Christian and Emery, tried to get him to explain what had happened, but he was, quite honestly, clueless.

After about a week of this, right before everyone got too bored and moved on to a new subject, a new student got a new superpower. Megan was supposed to be carrying glass vials from the science lab across the hallway into Mrs. Garrett's classroom. Transparent bottles clinked in a cardboard tray.

This would have been fine—Megan had done this several times that year already, because Mrs. Garrett was a fan of chemical reactions and liquids changing colors—except that she was wearing heels for the first time in her life. Thick, obnoxiously light blue heels a good three inches tall that centered on a point at the very back that made balance all but impossible. Megan felt very grown-up. Everyone else was a mixture of impressed and bemused.

However, as she carried those vials, halfway through the hallway she stepped strangely. She knew she had, as soon as she put her right foot down. One aqua heel snapped under her foot, and she tumbled heavily forward. The tray flew to the ground with a loud and brittle tinkling. From inside the room, students could hear a harsh clank and a small shriek. Several classmates rushed out the door, sure what they would see: shattered glass, a fallen Megan, and the end of an unfortunate pair of heels.

Tess was the first to arrive, and Robert after her. There were no broken bottles, no snapped heel. Megan stood stiffly in the center of the hall, shocked, but that was all. The vials still sat on their tray, lying in her hands innocently enough. There was nothing else that could have made that tinkling, breaking sound.

Obviously, Megan must have the power to go back in time, or something of that nature. Even Connor thought so. Tess decided not to tell anyone what she knew really happened.

Other strange events happened, resulting in more seeming powers. Andrew Marrow found he could make his lima bean plants resurrect from dead dry leaves to bulging green pods. Sean breathed underwater for a few minutes, when Connor accidentally dragged him under in the pool; Connor was gifted, he would tell anyone who stopped to listen long enough, with some sort of wind power to help him get out of that pool. There was a rumor that Emery could see into the

future when she somehow convinced Mrs. Garrett the class should stay indoors one windy day, a miracle in its own right—and more so, when an overlarge tree branch fell right over the children's favorite play spot during recess that afternoon.

Nobody kept the special abilities for very long. That didn't quite matter. Mrs. Garrett's sixth grade class, the rest of the school started to murmur, was special. The only one who knew better was Tess.

"In light," Mrs. Garrett began class one morning, with a long pause, "of recent events," she paused again, looking from Eliot to Megan to Connor to Emery, "your principal thinks it best—and I quite agree—to have a brief discussion with you." She always called Ms. Narne "your principal," as though she were not Mrs. Garrett's own supervisor as well. Ms. Narne was younger than Mrs. Garrett, and a popular theory among the students was that the latter had been spurned the principal job several times. "She'll be in this afternoon, so represent us well."

The lesson started—reading—but no one, not even Emery, who was known for raising her hand too often, paid it much attention. The class was still abuzz as soon as break began, about an hour after the announcement.

"Represent us well," Eliot repeated with a knowing grin as soon as Mrs. Garrett had turned to write the day's assignments on the board. "I mean, I'm sure we can do that, since we're the best class, after all. At least, as class assistant, I think so."

"Get off it. You exchanged that role Monday. Aren't you class janitor now?" Sean retorted, pulling an apple out of a sleeve and taking a large, crunchy bite out of it. "Tess is class assistant. Says so on the board. Anyway, you don't suppose it has anything to do with the...*events*, do you?" Sean asked, looking curiously at Eliot, hoping he would spill something about flight.

Eliot didn't notice. "Mrs. Garrett did mention 'in light of recent events,' so it would have to. Although I'm not sure what Narne thinks she can do. She's just one person. Our class would be better suited to starting something. Maybe we should rebel." Now that he wasn't class assistant, he felt empowered in a different way.

"Rebel what?" Emery asked. She already had her notebook out, to doodle on. "School lunches?"

On the other side of the room, Tess, who was indeed the class assistant that week, was getting instructions from Mrs. Garrett. She hated being class assistant—all the responsibility, when she'd rather be reading or finishing her homework!—but there was not much she could do about it. No one had ever rejected the assistant role, and Tess was

determined not to be the first. She left the teacher, finally, a long list in her hands. She was just about to start her chores—making sure the waste bin was empty and that the chalkboard was clean, or at least less dusty than usual, and that the class was behaving itself for the most part—when Robert came up beside her. He gave her a long, searching stare, but he didn't say anything for a time. Finally, Tess grew impatient and cleared her throat.

"Yes, Robert?" she asked, flipping her blonde pigtails behind her shoulders to act more professionally. "Can...may I help you with something?" She severely hoped not. She was class assistant, so she was supposed to be available to help anyone—but, as far as she knew, no one had actually gone to a class assistant for help before.

For a small while, it seemed she wouldn't have to; Robert just kept giving her the harsh stare, as though he were trying to read something in her that she wasn't aware she could let be known. Then he took a breath.

"You give powers," Robert said, quite unexpectedly.

For a moment, Tess just stared back. Robert took this as confirmation.

"You do, don't you?" he said in muffled victory. "You really give out powers!" He hopped once, in an excited fashion. If their teacher noticed, she didn't say anything.

"That's ridiculous!" Tess finally spurted. She looked around the room, but no one attended to them. Small Connor, nearby, picked up paper shreds he'd dropped on the ground, but he didn't matter. Mrs. Garrett was back at her desk talking to Hannah Atkins about a math problem from the previous night's homework, while the rest of the class was in equal parts working and gossiping. Tess looked back at Robert. His too-wide face was still inspecting her. "What gave you that idea, really?"

"Oh, you know, everything," he answered. He looked entirely too pleased with himself. His eyes were shining and his cheeks were starting to glow a ruddy blush that forms when one is proud or excited, or, in this case, both. "Our entire class can't be gifted."

"And why not?"

"It just doesn't make sense," Robert answered simply. "We'd be prodigies. The government would be in to see us, sooner than the principal." At that age, government was still a vague, incomprehensible notion. Government was a large beefy man with a briefcase and handcuffs, or perhaps a silver-haired woman in a black-and-white pencil skirt and a judge's hammer. Neither sounded pleasant. Tess gulped.

"Why would you think I give powers, then? Why not anyone

else?" she asked abruptly.

Robert thought for a moment. He seemed unsure, himself, which Tess noted rather smugly. At long last he answered. "It's just a feeling, I suppose. That, and you get a look whenever something happens. As though you were holding your breath and trying to swallow at the same time. Your face turns reddish, more than normal."

"That's your proof?" Tess laughed, albeit uneasily. "That's nothing. I just get headaches often."

"Liar. You're always there when it happens, too. Just admit it, already."

Try as he might, Robert was too calm for him to be scaring her. And Tess was class assistant for the week, which meant something, much as she hated it. "You're entirely wrong," she said as haughtily as she could. "Besides, the entire class is always there, not just me. Now, excuse me," and she grabbed her duties binder and walked past him, chin high in the air.

She thought she ended that, there and then. She did several of her necessities, told Mary and Sean off for chatting when they should have been studying their algebra, and even convinced Andrew to help clean off the chalkboard.

Her, give powers! What a silly, impossible notion!

Unfortunately, it was entirely true.

Tess had just entered the supply room, a few doors down, to collect the science packets they'd go over that afternoon as they piled up out the printer. Students weren't normally allowed there, except when they were running errands, as Tess was now or like Megan had when the incident with the heels and vials occurred. The room muffled sound nicely, which Tess supposed gave the teachers an air of secrecy when they entered. Really, it was just a glorified closet, with barely enough room for all the cabinets, tables, and printing material that had been shoved inside.

She was just contributing to the mess of papers when the door opened behind her. Small Connor stood in the entrance, watching her knowingly. It was an uncomfortable feeling, being watched as though someone else understood everything. Tess didn't appreciate it. She glared at him and flipped her pigtails around. "Go away. You're not permitted."

"Nor are you to give us powers," he blurted, almost as unexpectedly as when Robert spoke to her earlier. Connor blushed for a moment, which made his orange hair seem to morph into his face, then he continued in a small manner. "You never asked."

"I never gave them!" Tess lied. "That's a horrid rumor, and you know it!"

“Robert thinks it’s true. And he’s usually right about stuff like that.”

“But not this time,” Tess explained. “There was nothing to give! Maybe you’re all just special. Isn’t that good?”

“Not if it’s not true,” Connor said loudly. Tess flinched, he said it in such an accusatory way. She took a deep breath, grabbing more papers heavily. If she ignored him, perhaps the annoying boy would go away, and she could go back to doing her own thing. Namely, she could return to her existence of giving out powers without being questioned. Purposefully ignoring him, Tess started stacking the papers, organizing worksheets and stapling them in the top left corner, packet by packet.

Connor, however, didn’t want to be ignored. After a few moments of watching her shuffle around, he stepped into the room and started talking jubilantly. “See, I was wondering what your limits were,” he said, as if she hadn’t just denied his every word. “There has to be something. Otherwise, I’d still be able to cut through water, and Emery would still predict the future.”

“I didn’t give her that.”

“Oh! So you admit it, you give powers!”

Tess looked down furiously. She hadn’t meant to say anything, except that thing with Emery was a mistake, and she’d been annoyed with it all week. “I never said that. I didn’t give her anything. And that’s the truth.” It was; the Emery thing was a fluke. It was a happy accident, but Tess was almost positive she hadn’t been the cause of it.

“Then,” Connor raised his eyebrows in a crafty way, “you gave all the other powers, just not Emery’s.”

He was entirely too clever for his own good. Tess never realized that about him. Connor usually just sat in the back of the room fiddling with pencil shavings and paper ruffles; he wasn’t normally a threat.

Tess wasn’t sure what she would have done next—perhaps she’d have spilled everything, or perhaps she would’ve convinced him otherwise. Maybe she’d even have given him a new power, something that would get him out of her way, although she didn’t know if she had such a power to give.

However, before she could even respond to his newest accusation, the door opened again. Tess and Connor both jumped guiltily. They stood next to each other—when had Connor gotten so close?—as one of the other teachers entered the supply room. He nodded at them, his grey suit jacket flapping openly, and went straight to pour himself coffee from an ancient-looking machine. The man took a newspaper from the table and sat down and started to read. It seemed he would be in there for a while.

With a glare and a huff, Connor left, stomping his feet angrily as he went.

Tess breathed a sigh of relief, and an even greater sigh came when the teacher left shortly after, while she was only halfway through stapling science packets. She put the stapler down on the round table and closed her eyes. It was a pain, being powered. It meant she had to do stuff, or else she'd feel guilty.

The problem was, her power wasn't like those she gave. She didn't actually have any powers in the usual sense of the word. She couldn't fly or read minds, try as she might. She couldn't breathe underwater or perform amazing feats of strength, or even jump time back a few seconds.

What she could do was much, much stranger, in her opinion. Tess could gift others with those powers. She just couldn't give them to herself.

Which was horribly annoying, because she really wanted to fly someday. Gifting herself just never seemed to work.

Blast Connor! And Robert! They were just scratching at straws, still; they couldn't possibly *know* Tess was the cause of all the heroic—or more heroic than usual—saves Mrs. Garrett's class had lately. He just chose her because...because...for no good reason. Robert was immature and Connor was just a little boy, and Tess had half a mind to tell the teacher they'd been spreading rumors, or to use her privileges as class assistant to alter their records herself. She didn't know if she had such privileges, and she didn't quite dare, but it was tempting.

Of course she hadn't asked if anyone had wanted powers; most of the time, it was a split decision, like with Eliot. If she hadn't acted, he'd have been injured, probably quite badly. And, even if she were to ask, where would she start? "Yes, I give out powers," Tess muttered to herself. "So, do you want to fly?"

She could see a million reasons wrong with letting people know that; she had thought of most of them when she first discovered her power about a year ago, when she had accidentally let her mother read her father's mind. That wasn't something she cared to remember, come to think of it. There was a lot of yelling, and her parents hadn't been all too friendly since then.

Tess returned to stapling with fervor. She would just have to be more careful, somehow. Maybe she'd have to feel guilty and not help everyone, not when it wasn't important. She needn't have helped Andrew with his beans; that was a whim. And Sean would have been fine in the water; Connor, too, for that matter. She should have just let Connor drown.

Why, Robert and Connor could have her power, if they cared so much! Tess finished the papers and threw the stapler back into its drawer, returning to the table to angrily pat the papers into a neat, even stack. She stomped her way out, just as Connor had. As she left the room, she imagined how nice it would be if someone else had to be responsible for helping others. Connor would be overwhelmed in a day! Her face screwed in annoyance as she considered the idea, of him having her power, the stupidest, most bothersome power of all—

At that moment, in the middle of the hallway, in the midst of her imaginings, something changed.

It was as if the air around her was sucked away. She could still breathe, but it was uncomfortable, like it was after holding one's breath for too long. Everything felt fuzzy and muddled; the walls seemed immensely long, the carpet deep and rough and thick, the ceiling stories tall—and then everything bounced back, unmistakably clear and vivid and as it should have been.

And yet the air still seemed wrong. It was thinner, perhaps, Tess thought, vaguely. She blinked. Her hands were scrunching up the packets, creating conspicuous creases along them as she held too tightly. Taking an unsatisfactory breath, Tess darted down the hallway and back inside her classroom.

In there, everything seemed normal. Mrs. Garrett was just finishing up helping Hannah with her math problem from however long ago. Andrew was still trying to move the dust on the chalkboard around, although he had mostly given up and kept dropping the eraser to make a white splotch on the carpet. Connor had taken his seat in the back of the class, although when Tess entered he glared heavily at her. Robert glared as well, from his perch by the back wall. She glared right back, but it didn't last. Nor did theirs, for that matter. They seemed out of it; Connor was tapping his desk loudly with his pencil and Robert went to staring out the window again, although no one seemed to mind much.

Tess decided to continue ignoring them. She gave the papers to Mrs. Garrett, who nodded and went back to working on grading worksheets. Tess returned to her seat and took out her folders, flipping through them without actually seeing anything. A remarkably small amount of time had passed since she had gone to the supplies room, but it seemed like hours. She was growing rather concerned at how horrible everything felt. Maybe she was sick—that would account for the strange shortness of breath; but when she felt her forehead, it felt cold, not hot.

During the rest of the morning's classes, there was little she could do. Everything was off, in a way that made everything seem clear except

the air, somehow. She only half paid attention to the lessons, and when it came time to organize the class to go to the lunchroom, a duty held by class assistant, Robert, taking pity on her, helped her shout everyone into their lines. At lunch, she found her appetite was gone; during recess, she sat at the corner of the ball court, unclear enough to even care if a ball came at her.

She was so out of it, she didn't even notice Connor join her until he must have been there for a while. "Hey," he said. Tess must have seen him sit down, cross-legged, next to her—he wasn't trying to hide, after all—except she hadn't noticed, or at least processed, that he had.

"You again," she said in a resigned manner. He seemed determined to bug her today.

"Yep," Connor responded, tapping the ground as he had tapped his desk, in his antsy way. "What did you do?"

"Nothing," Tess said sorrowfully. "Please stop asking." She hugged her knees closer, although that didn't seem to help at all.

Connor gave her one of his looks. "Do you feel okay?"

"Not especially," she said. "Go away."

He didn't, however. "You have to have done something," Connor insisted. "Because—"

Tess didn't attend to what happened, but she saw it in her blank stare. A ball flew toward them, big and bright orange and about as large as her head. It came right at her. Normally, she would have scrunched up her face and imagined someone—perhaps Chris, he was nearby—to come and do something to stop the ball. Super-speed, perhaps. He was already moving; it would be a cinch just to give him the extra distance. But she didn't have the energy right then, and, besides, Connor was right next to her. He didn't need any more reason to incriminate her of giving away powers without asking—

And then Chris was holding the ball a few inches from her face. Tess flinched suddenly, and perhaps a little lately. By that time, the rest of the class, always on the lookout for the development of a new power, had noticed; they were gathering around Chris, who stood awkwardly and red-faced.

"I didn't do that," Tess said quickly to Connor. "I swear, that wasn't me."

She needn't have said anything, however, because his face was scrunched up and puckered, and he was glaring at her. "That was me."

"But...you're normal."

"I know. Do you see the problem? I've never done this before. So what did you do?"

"I must have...but..." Tess fought against the vivid haze. "I...I imagined you with my powers, since you were so insistent I was doing it wrong—"

"I never said that!"

"—and...and I made a mistake," she realized. "I gave you my power, of giving people power." That wasn't supposed to happen, not at all. She hadn't even thought it were possible, to give someone her own unique skill.

Tess was quite alarmed now. She looked around. Spotting Grace, she concentrated on giving her...she thought for a moment...flight usually worked well. She tried giving Grace flight.

Grace's feet stayed firmly planted on the ground.

Tess quickly turned. She felt she should say something, only words wouldn't be enough. She kept trying. She gifted Grayson with super-strength, Sean with strong hearing, Yasmine with the ability to speak to the squirrel that was a foot from her.

Nothing unusual happened.

The crowd of congratulatory children talked loudly before them, still interested in Chris and his miraculous save. A few teachers were coming over to see why so many students were gathered so unexpectedly. Even the kids who usually joked around on the swing set had forsaken the heights and were rushing over. Students not from Mrs. Garrett's class were trying to shove their way past—they thought they had the right to know the peculiars by then—but Mrs. Garrett's sixth graders shoved right back. No one seemed to notice Tess and Connor sitting on the ground a few feet from them.

That was probably for the better. Connor looked angry rather than relieved, and Tess was too tired and astonished and worried to fake excitement at a new power. The noise made it so they couldn't talk properly where they were, and by the time Connor had dragged Tess off the asphalt and to a more deserted section under a slide, the bell was ringing for recess to end.

Still, as she shuffled her way in line behind giggling Hannah and Mary, Tess realized something would have to be done.

At first, it seemed there would be no time to do anything. Mrs. Garrett was a flustered mess during their math lesson, so much so that when she tried to throw a piece of paper into the trash can next to her desk, she missed twice and had to have Robert pluck it in for her. The class was all whispers, with more than one admiring glare to poor Charles, who was altogether wishing he had never played ball to begin with.

Things kept happening, the wrong sort. Chalk broke for no reason in Mrs. Garrett's hand. When she tried to put it down, it made a scratching noise and a line appeared in the air before her, as though there were an invisible board in the air itself—where it stayed for a stunned minute before disappearing in a small heap of dust. The math lesson ended shortly afterward, and then there was science, but something was off there, as well. When Hannah tried to pass out the packets, she found them hovering wherever she left them. Talk quickly left Charles and turned to her, and then to Eliot when he displayed a new power of setting his packet on fire. Mary saved the day with some sort of freezing skill that left Eliot's desk, as well as half the room, covered with breezy white snowflakes, not unlike the chalk dust.

During this time, Robert, rather unhelpfully, glared at Tess, quite sure she was responsible for the strange uncontrollable disasters all over. Tess equally glared at Connor next to her, who glared right back, although he looked rather smug now.

Several minutes later, when the lesson had grinded to a halt and most of the class awed at the sudden variety in powers, there was no mistaking it: he was definitely smug. All traces of anger had been lost.

"Connor," Tess said between her teeth.

"Yes?" he asked with a hyper sort of calm.

"You've had your fun. Now, give it back."

"But you weren't doing anything," he said in a mock falsetto, "and nor am I."

"Connor!" Tess said sharply through the clear haze that still besieged her. "This isn't funny. I'm sorry I lied, but, really. There's responsibilities. And you don't know them." Tess didn't quite know the extent of the responsibilities herself, but she decided not to mention that.

With a flick of his hand, Connor reclined against his desk. "Who cares if you lied? I see why. This is awesome."

It really wasn't. Connor didn't understand how much a duty it was to have this kind of control. Tess didn't know how to describe it—it just *existed*, and limited. Limits were what Connor needed. Hadn't he asked about that before? It seemed he'd quite forgotten any of his earlier qualms. "Aren't you worried about being caught?" Tess asked hurriedly. "Think how bothersome it'd be if people knew, and were always coming to you to make you give them impossible wishes."

She would have gone on, except loud noises were erupting from somewhere in the back of the room, and Connor joined most of the class in whooping and shouting encouragements to whoever was causing the

sounds. Tess took out her anger by jabbing him with the back of her pencil.

His smugness dissipated when Eliot, trying to unfreeze his desk, let his fire power get out of control. He shook his hand, as one would after it had been grasping something for too long. Several heated sparks fell from it, onto the carpet. They might not have spread—had not Lily Anderson, who had spent all week hoping loudly for the gift of flight, suddenly garnered a wind power. She shot in the air, to her surprise and delight. The fire, incited by her sudden movement and the gust it created, grew.

No one noticed the fire at first. They were all too busy coming to terms with their giftedness, as most of the class was, or glaring at one another, as Tess, Connor, and Robert were.

Mrs. Garrett saw, however, as it took a friendly light on Eliot's desk. She calmly went over to him and asked in a resigned manner, "Dear, put out the fire. Sooner, rather than later."

Eliot, sheepish, bent down and blew on it. The fire was so small, a direct gust would have easily destroyed it, no harm done. Mrs. Garrett hadn't remembered Eliot's new power, however. Out of his mouth didn't come quenching air, but more flame.

For her part, Mrs. Garrett remained calm. Tess thought she was rather in a state of shock. It came of having too much unpredictability in one class. Mrs. Garrett, slowly and surely, looked over to Mary and said, "You had the ice, yes? Would you mind?"

Mary looked over from where she had been talking with Hannah. She was shocked for a moment—she hadn't noticed the fire, but now the rest of the class was catching on. Mary nodded and pointed her palms at the growing fire. Ice shot out. It hit the fire straight on.

However, the fire didn't disappear. At this point, the rest of the class—even Andrew, who had regained his ability to grow lima bean plants and was enjoying himself in the back of the room in a tangle of vines—noticed. They all stopped what they were doing and stared. Where the fire had been, and the ice had been shot, was a swirling icy blue mass. It was as though the fire and ice had joined, or were battling for dominance.

There was a hushed silence for a moment.

"What did you give?" Tess asked in utter awe.

Connor blinked, stunned himself. "I...I was...just imagining."

The fire-ice mixture was still for a moment more. Then it started to grow, cackling and cracking uncomfortably in sharp bursts.

Mrs. Garrett's sixth grade class ought to have been commended.

No one ran. No one screamed. Perhaps they behaved too rationally. One by one, the class stood up and hurried to the door, single-file as they'd practiced every month.

Again, they hadn't remembered one of the powers. Hannah, who had gotten to the door first, quickly walked outside, letting the door swing shut behind her. When Emery, who was next to reach it, tried to push it open, she found she was quite unable to. The door was stuck as it was, not unlike the packets had been when they had floated over the desks where Hannah had placed them.

"Hannah! Hannah, calm down and pull this open!" Emery called out in a carrying whisper. Hannah, however, was already down the hall, completely unaware of what she had done. Perhaps there was delayed reaction to what was happening inside. Whatever it was, she didn't have any wish to return to the classroom and its oddities.

The door was left open a few inches—enough for Emery to get her hand through, but not enough for even Connor, if he so tried, to squeeze around. Not that he did try.

Tess shot another dirty look at Connor, who watched the fire in amazement. "Give it back. Now! You're doing it all wrong!"

"Connor had the power?" came Robert's voice. Tess jumped and looked around. He was standing next to her desk and gazing thoughtfully at the ice-fire. "Tess, you're invisible, you know that?"

"Of course." She hadn't, but when she looked down at where she knew she was, she saw nothing but her chair under her. Tess fumed. Turning people invisible—what gave Connor the right?! She was even more annoyed that, when she finally got a superpower, it was something as meaningless as invisibility. "Connor, you give it back right now!"

"No!" he shot back. "This is too interesting!"

"That's not interesting—that's dangerous! You're going to kill someone!"

"Connor has the power?" Robert asked again. His head turned from where he supposed Tess was to the smaller boy, and back again.

Connor ignored him. "I haven't yet, have I? I've got this all under control!"

The fire was still growing; it was now consuming several desks. What it touched first sizzled, then froze in a sheen of ice, which then melted in a puddle of water. It didn't look dangerous, but nor did it look exactly safe.

"Control? That's not control, that's chaos!"

"I'm not worse than you were, so shove off!"

"Connor has control?" Robert questioned insistently.

This time, Tess deemed to answer him. "Yes! He stole it, and he's making a mess of things, and I want it back!" She waved her arms indignantly, then snorted harshly when she realized no one could see them, anyway.

"I didn't steal it! You gave it up to me," Connor shot back.

It was pure luck that no one heard them. The rest of the class had decided the safest way out would be through the windows, into the courtyard. However, Andrew's lima beans had grown extraordinarily well and were covering the panes. Half the class was hacking at the stems with safety scissors, and the other half was trying to stop the fire. Mrs. Garrett directed, still utterly calm. Perhaps she thought she was in a dream.

Nothing seemed to stop the ice-fire. Stomping on it only left half-melted, half-frozen shoes; soon there was a pile of destroyed footwear lying in the corner. Water froze, and air just made it spin in circles. Emery had the bright idea to put regular kindling in it, and she was right, in a sense; the paper fizzled and simply disappeared in the flames without any sign of burning. It didn't stop the ice-fire, however, and now the fire had a strange quality of paper smell about it.

Mary and Eliot looked especially guilty. As far as they knew, they had caused the catastrophe, and nothing they did would stop it. Neither wanted to use his or her power again, for fear something else would go horribly wrong.

Again, Connor had given the powers too well. Nothing the class did would destroy the lima bean shoots. Where one was cut, another instantly grew. Andrew even turned and sat in a corner, and tried to will the plants to return to their dying seedlings, but the plants didn't agree with that. The entire wall, windows and ceiling, were covered with irremovable vines.

"Connor," Robert said softly, when the fire had taken up half the room and the class gathered against the far wall, "give me a power."

"What? You? No way!" he responded. Robert and he had never got along. Robert was smart and aloof, and while Connor was also intelligent and a loner, they acted in different ways. Robert could get along with anyone; he just chose not to. Connor, however, listened to the entire class and never seemed to be heard in return.

However, even he could feel the ice-fire now, a horrible mixture of intense heat and extreme cold. His body couldn't figure out how to respond, so it just became clammy and sweaty. "What kind of power?" he asked suspiciously.

Robert whispered something. Connor thought for a moment;

then he nodded.

Tess could feel Connor give out the power. It was similar to a rush of wind, although it didn't move anything as it swept from him to Robert. Perhaps that was why Robert had been so sure she gave out powers, and why he couldn't explain why he knew.

Robert went straight to the wall. No one thought it odd; Sean even moved out of his way. The class had long since passed the boundary of disbelief. The only thing left was inexplicable acceptance. Everyone watched silently as Robert pressed his hands gently on the plaster bricks. He pushed, slightly at first, then harder and harder.

The wall crumbled neatly in front of him. Not the entire wall—just enough to form a rather concise hole, a foot taller than he was and about twice as wide as his shoulders. It led into the hallway. Robert turned back to the class and gave a wry grin.

"Everyone, single-file, please," Mrs. Garrett said politely. Again, nobody rushed. Tess was jostled until she started speaking, at which point students realized they couldn't see her and gave the disembodied voice some space. Still, she and Connor were the last students out.

"Connor," Robert said slowly as the small boy walked out, "what did you do this time?"

The hall wasn't a hall anymore. Or, rather, it was a hall that didn't connect to anything. There were no walls; it was as if, after leaving the classroom, the school just vanished. There was a patch of light where the class had left their room, but that was the only sign of anything related to a classroom. Around them was just empty space; below them was the rectangular shape of the carpeted hallway, but where the walls would have been there seemed to be a never-ending drop.

Connor seemed to grow smaller into himself. "I...nothing. Nothing!" Then, in a mere whisper, "I was just imagining."

"Who did you give this to?"

"I...I'm not sure. Mrs. Garrett, perhaps. Or Lidia. I don't know!"

The class had nowhere to go. It stood in a huddle in the middle of the floor, whispering. They might have stood there till the end of time, except Tess looked back and saw a flicker of blue-red flame licking through the hole in the emptiness. "Connor, you dolt!"

And then there was pandemonium. It was a reserved chaos, but, still, there was finally the running and muffled screaming one would have expected a half-hour ago. "There's nothing there," one student shouted. Another sat down on the floor, as though it would do something productive.

Mrs. Garrett was at a loss. This had to be a dream, and a bad one,

at that. She tried to organize the class again, but her voice was too quiet and her will was gone.

"You have to give Tess back the power," Robert said bluntly. He towered over Connor, a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

Connor immediately shook his head. "No way. She would make just as much a mess!"

"But she never did before!"

"How do you know? Maybe she gave someone a power to erase memories!"

Tess flinched. She had never done such a thing—but she might have. It crossed her mind, now: If she did that, then her parents wouldn't argue so much and Robert would never have accused her and let Connor hear and accidentally make him cause this disaster.

The fact was, she never even considered it before. She was about to say so when something knocked into her from the side. Sean didn't see her as he ran around the hallway floor, trying to find a way out. Tess lost her balance—and balance is hard to regain when one can't see where one's legs are. Before she knew it, she fell. It was pure luck that she managed to twist herself and grab the edge of the hallway by her elbows. Her invisible feet dangled below her; her arms struggled to keep hold. If someone were to trip on her, she would fall.

"Help," she said quietly. She might have said it louder, except everyone else had taken up screaming similarly. "Please." Everything was clear and fuzzy, and her arms tingled and her feet twisted, trying to find something to step on that wasn't there.

Robert, in the meantime, had decided he would make Connor give back the power. The ice-fire was through the door. It swirled around, dividing the hallway in half. They had to act soon, before it touched one of them and did something horrible. He grabbed Connor's arm roughly and pulled him along. "Tess, Connor's going to give it back. Now."

Tess didn't answer. She was having trouble breathing, the ice-fire was so close. Smoke kept getting in her face, causing her to cough, and then a burst of dry cold would come and cause her to cough even more.

Robert realized Tess wasn't with them. He turned around several times, trying to locate her—then he remembered she was invisible, anyway. "Connor!"

"I'm trying, I'm trying!" Connor responded avidly. He stared at the fire in shock. Whenever he tried to focus his mind, he saw one of the flames lick forward, and the concentration broke. Half the class huddled at one end of the hall; the other half, separated by the fire, grouped around the other side. There was no sign of Tess.

It was that realization—that Tess was missing completely—that made Connor especially nervous. What if he, accidentally, gave someone a power to make someone else disappear for good? What if he made her cease to exist completely? He breathed heavily; everything seemed to spin around him, but perhaps that was the dry smoke that congregated.

He screwed up his face and thought as hard as he could.

For Tess, it seemed the entire room sagged. She nearly lost her hold on the floor. Everything seemed to stretch around them, like a widening mouth—and then the mouth closed, in a way, and everything shot back to normal. When the mouth closed, it swallowed with it the dizzying fuzzy clearness. Tess gasped slightly and looked around in relief. The fuzzy clearness had gone. Through the flames she could see Connor gasping heavily and Robert looking frantically for Tess.

There was no time to make her presence known. She closed her eyes and focused.

After a moment, she opened them again.

The walls were back. Classroom doors, bad drawings, school announcements all fluttered around them. The ice-fire disappeared; the floors showed no sign it ever existed, but for a few rather black spots and several strange ice patches.

Tess herself was still dangling. She had somehow arrived at the stairwell, on the other side of the metal railing that normally stopped students from falling over. She didn't know how she got so far from the classroom, but it appeared the altered space they had been in had strange proportions; students that had been grouped together were now feet apart.

Then Robert and Conner arrived in front of her. They could see her again—once she got her power back, she lost her invisibility. With more struggle than was perhaps necessary, they pulled her up over the railing and back onto solid ground.

Tess didn't realize until she was panting on the rough carpet that she forgot to give them superpowers.

They didn't say anything. Connor looked guiltily at the ground; Robert held his head high, but he appeared guilty, also, for some reason. Tess, for her part, had nothing to say. She was just tired.

The class slowly gathered back in the classroom, arriving in small trickles and pairs. The room, normal again, showed remarkably few scars from the prior events. Only the lima beans, still reaching the ceiling, were any indication that something strange had happened. Each student took his or her seat heavily. Mrs. Garrett sat at her desk, staring at the chalkboard. Even Hannah returned; it seemed she spent the last bit of

time hiding in the girls' bathroom on the first floor.

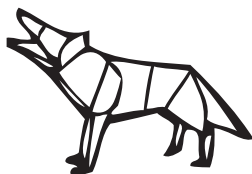
When the principal came in, she found a well-behaved class. The only comment she gave at the end of her short inspection—for the students seemed to be having a private study time, and had taken out books and drawings and homework, one by one, to work on—was that the lima beans ought to be in the county fair.

By the time school ended, Mrs. Garrett's sixth grade class set a new record for silence. They left, single-file, quietly and orderly. If they went straight to their rooms when they arrived home, and were more taciturn than normal that night, no parent would complain. And if several called off the next day due to strange fits of coughing, no one thought that too abnormal.

And if Connor was a little nicer the next day, and Robert a little less aloof, and Tess a little more talkative to the two, then no one thought that odd, either. After all, superpowers still appeared.

Bekah Pollard

Sage



The boy made of spices intrigues me so.
His striped hat traps thoughts
and all that he knows.
Gingerbread strands strain the stripes,
wanting free
Like spikes spewing thoughts
with electric energy.
He speaks slowly and surely,
his voice cracked, gravelly, and worn.
Words work through the air
as his lips become torn.
His cloudy conscience gusts thoughts
out into the cool open space.
He feels no sense of urgency,
moving at his own pace.
The boy made of spices knows something I don't.
I want him to tell me, but I fear that he won't.

Christian Hartselle

Byron



He picks me up and my first thought is that I hate his teeth.

They're more dilapidated than the passenger door I shut behind me, and the amount of space between them is appalling. When he puts a cigarette in his mouth, I want to show him the mirror and tell him he doesn't need it. But I'm being paid, so I ask for one instead.

"What are you looking to do?"

"Just normal stuff, I guess. Can you get me a quote for that?"

"The going rate."

"That's fair."

His speech patterns are interrupted to an extent that the interruptions become a part of the pattern. First of all, he's always coughing. I audaciously point this out, but he insists it's a habit more than it's the tobacco.

I won't see them until we're into the night, but he has a lot of tattoos. It's not something he likes talking about, though. They're not any good. They're trash.

A deer below his shoulder blade: he assures me it's dead. He hunts

and keeps all the meat. An ankle tattoo — I'd think a little geeky for this guy. It's a flower, I think. He got that one when he was fifteen. The rest I can't view by him peeling down the cloth, but he said there's not one he's proud of anyway. He knows that removal is possible. He doesn't want to.

Every two minutes, his phone rings —

Errybody's addicted to something

Errybody gotta grip onto something...

He keeps cancelling the calls and talking to me, but he won't just silence the damn thing.

He's friendly, for sure. And not in the creepy way I thought I would come to expect in this industry. I guess you'd say he's professional. Loves talking to me like anyone else, as if we're going bowling.

I learn a lot about his nephew Sam. He's ten. Doing okay in school but hates it. Won't stop playing video games.

Sam only calls his uncle Brian even though everyone else calls him Byron. Sam doesn't live with his mom anymore. That's Byron's sister. She got cancer in her bones and it hurts so much she doesn't want to be around people anymore. In fact, it's been that way for several years, and Byron worries about his nephew the way his mother should be able to worry about her son. Anyway, his point is, I'm a girlfriend as far as Sam is concerned. Uncle Byron needs to set a good example.

Cough. Cough, cough, cough.

He asks me what kind of pizza I like and orders it for all three of us. I discover another pattern to his speech: he's constantly mentioning that he's tired. He does it in a surprised way, as if every three minutes he is surprised by how tired he is.

After he parks, he runs around the car to open my door before I can lift the handle. Sam's shooting veterans when we walk into the darkness with him. He's intensely focused on this task. It doesn't stop him from asking questions, though.

"Who are you?"

Byron answers for me. "This is Haddie."

"How old are you?"

I answer the question as a reflex like a dumbass, "Nineteen."

Sam looks at his uncle. "Woah, Brian."

"She's legal, Sam. Don't worry about it. Play your game."

"You're thirty-one!"

"Play your game."

He reclines on the couch with me. He grins at me with those teeth but doesn't so much as lean on me with Sam present.

He says he should get some laundry done if the pizza is going to take this long. He dumps the basket into the machine. The washer is in a little room next to the kitchen. Pretty close to the television, too. That must be annoying.

He removes his own shirt and adds it to the load. He honestly fit an absurd amount of tattoos on his skinny frame. No colors, just that shade of green that men consider acceptable. Those typical vine tattoos on his side. I think that kind is supposed to hurt, especially there. That's a star with someone's name in it. I assume it's a woman, but it says *Nicholas*. I ask, it's his father. Doesn't actually know his name, but he always imagined him as a Nicholas. Is that the grim reaper? Ah, yes: *Only God will judge me*. I'm thinking he had to be fifteen to get that one too.

The calls don't stop. *Errybody's addicted to somethin*.

It isn't my job to understand B.O.B.'s interruptions, but I still ask. He starts with a laugh, telling me he has an untaxed income. I don't say I want more than that, but he tells me that people are calling him, begging for Oxy.

It's a Friday evening and according to Byron's phone, eleven different numbers have called asking for more. Most of them, more than three times. Byron won't go back; it was calming and euphoric, but he kept itching for half a tablet more. He would stop using for months and come back with the pills no weaker. He would crush them to make the effects come faster. It's too lucrative to turn others away. He makes six figures. Not taxed, either.

It started with a procedure he had with Sam's mother's doctor that has sustained for the last half-year. Byron's sister already has the prescription, and by simply embellishing her stage, he is able to obtain 80g for a regular dosage, and by simply continuing the prescription, an excellent base for his business is set. His new contacts coupled with whatever bone cancer friends his sister made at the care center, he has an excellent influx of product, and he hasn't yet come across a client who wants to stop.

I'm playing one of the shooting games with his nephew now, because I'm nervous that he can understand everything his uncle is saying. It's a distraction.

"What do you like to learn about in school?"

Sam looks at me.

"I guess I like science," he says. He looks back at the game.

Byron doesn't send Sam away, but waits for him to get tired and

retreat upstairs to bed. It's exhausting for me too; I didn't think the kid would ever stop.

This is where my job starts. I climb over him first and listen to his heart palpitations. I already feel strange about it.

His breathing is slow. He tells me I'm beautiful. And then it stops.



Thierry Menchhofer

Hotdog



I

Some foods stir up memories, nostalgia, and patriotism more than others.
One food that seems to just as much,
if not more than the hamburger,
is the hotdog.

II

The hotdog has been a prominent menu item for ball parks and race tracks.

Whenever there is a work free holiday you are always asked, "hamburger or hotdog?"

III

Early memories of being surrounded by other 3 to 5 year olds
and our cut up hotdogs arranged on a paper plate with rippled edges,
and soggy by the ketchup and mustard concoctions.

Red and yellow swirled together presenting a picture of the Fibonacci sequence.

IV

The hotdog is cooked of course;
but did you know you could snack on it cold?
Right out of the package.
Right out of the fridge.
The lights are out in the house,

manuscripts

except for this illumination beaming from the kitchen;
and your breath smells of raw hotdogs.

V

My brother showed me how a wiener can shake
when he put a hotdog in front of his crotch and wagged it up and down.
It was only a hotdog;
but the sight of it still made me look away.

VI

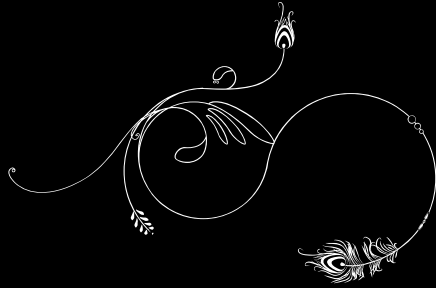
In junior high, sixth grade in fact,
I sat across from an Iraqi kid in the cafeteria.
Unknowingly, he chowed down on the flesh forbidden by his religion
wrapped deliciously in fried bread.
When he thought to ask a standing adult what it was he was eating,
I saw his face turn white in terror of the shame he could not seem to let
pass.
I couldn't grasp the magnitude of the sin that suddenly branded his soul,
but I knew it was because his God had commanded not to eat the flesh of
pig...Or is it cow? ...Or is it both?

VII

My grandmother and her family used to picnic by the Speedway track;
and trying to do something normal,
they made no exceptions after the second world war.
Her oldest brother had recently arrived safe from the explosions in Italy.
That day at the park became a literal tale of the brother who bit off more
than he could chew.
(I don't think they had hotdogs in Italy.)

VIII

I dreamt I was being chased by the dead,
and I was enthralled by the familiar smell of hotdog.
Nearing a parking lot I looked up in the trees
and there from the trees hung hundreds of naked hotdogs,
like leaves or the rosaries draped on tree limbs
to mark some holy landmark.



Winner of the
2015 Manuscripts
Prose Contest
with
Lois Lowry

Olivia Emerich

Grown-Ups



Winner

Chapala, a town plastered with brightly colored homes, was small enough you could walk from one end to the other, but still occupied enough for Mami to remind us not to go out at night and even in daylight to travel in twos.

I was seven years old when a lady with a wrinkly face brought me here to the orphanage. I remember not long after that my mother visited me for lunch. There is a picture of it in my file. We were taught to make this orphanage our home. We called our caretakers Papi and Mami. All of us did—the boys and the girls. We had five mothers and one father. Papi Francisco and Mami Claudia were the oldest. Their daughter, Mami Juana, was my primary caretaker. She had round cheeks, a large soft stomach, kinky hair, and a husband we never saw. But we thought she spent time with her husband on the weekends when she left for her *días del descanso*. It was on one of these days that Fernanda and I decided to walk to the Soriana to purchase some lipstick. We were going to have a photo shoot.

“Mami Claudia,” Fernanda said, running ahead of me and slipping

her arm around Mami's stomach. "Can Peti and I walk to the *tiendita*?"

"What are you looking for that you must go to the store?" Mami Claudia always spoke fast, like warm tortillas rolled, her Rs quickly turning into Ls.

"We just really want some *taquis*," Fernanda pleaded. Us children considered the hardened miniature tortillas with orange pepper and crystallized lime a staple.

"And you have money?" Mami asked.

"Yes, Peti has the money that her sponsors gave her last week," said Fernanda.

I gave Mami Claudia a quick nod while holding out my hand to reveal two coins of ten pesos each.

"Okay," Mami conceded, "But go quickly."

Fernanda and I hopped from rock to rock on the narrow cobblestone road. A few boys with dark matted hair and dirt-streaked faces sat on the sidewalk, a soccer ball resting between them.

"Ch-ch," they called, "ch-ch. Eh, eh, eh, *gordita*."

"Ignore them," said Fernanda, jutting her head in the opposite direction of the boys. As we were just past, I gave my head a slight turn and glanced over at the boys out of the corner of my eye. They were still looking at us, and the one on the right, the one with dimples, winked at me. I quickly turned my head back around.

"I wish I looked more like you," I told Fernanda. "The boys always call out to you."

"How do you know they weren't calling to you?" she said defensively.

"Because," I hesitated, "they said '*gordita*.'"

"Yeah, well, they still could have been talking to you. You know, I watched you when you were changing this morning and your stomach looked kind of fat. But you don't have an ass, so they probably were talking to me. That's all they really see, you know," she said with a sigh.

Fernanda tended to get mad easily. Just last week she and Marcos got into a fist fight on the way home from school. George, the driver, pulled the bus over and separated them, setting Fernanda in the front row of the van and Marcos in the last. Once we pulled up to the orphanage, Fernanda was sent straight to the psychiatrist while Marcos, nose bloodied, had to talk with Papi Francisco. Fernanda also knew a lot more about boys than I did. At twelve-and-a-half years old, she was five months older than me, but in her mind, I might as well have been a four year old.

We quickly ran down the main sidewalk through the orphanage,

mango trees and small labeled buildings on either side: *escuelita*, *oficina*, *casa de niños*, *cocina* and finally *casa de niñas*. The “Rose Building,” as the adults called the housing for girls, was named for the pink paint that now chipped from the doorways and window frames. Fernanda ran past the row of bunk beds to her own, reached underneath and grabbed out a flat bill cap with the letters NY on the front. It looked just like the one we had seen Daddy Yankee wearing in his music video. Fernanda applied the pink-plum lipstick as I folded the bottom of my tank top to reveal my stomach, tucking it securely into my bra. I looked down at my chest and imagined when the gaps in my bra would be filled and I had more than nubs for boobs.

“Okay, your turn,” Fernanda passed me the tube of lipstick, “Wait—I’ll do it. I don’t want you to mess it up.” She cupped my face with her left hand while slowly lining my puckered lips with the pink stain. I dug the tight black mini skirt out from the bottom of my panty drawer and shoved it into my small pink sequined purse. Fernanda and I would trade off wearing the skirt during our photo shoot, since our Papi and Mamis constantly sifted through the donated clothes, usually throwing out such “immodest” materials. We slipped out the back gate and headed toward the plaza.

Carlos was a friend from school. While Fernanda and I were in sixth grade, Carlos was two grades ahead in eighth. I had never met him, but Fernanda said that he took pictures of all the eighth grade girls and only of sixth-graders when they were really pretty, so I needed to keep quiet and let her do the flirting. Carlos’ family owned a *paletería* on the street just behind the plaza. This is where Carlos met us girls. He took us behind the ice cream bar and through a large hall serving as a pathway from his family’s living space to the shop. Their home smelled of a mixture of sweet bread and musty plaster. The room he took us to was simple: typical plastered walls, a dingy white loveseat, a camera, and a picture of bloodied Christ on the cross. In the corner, behind a rigged-up curtain, was where we could change.

“Okay, *chicas*,” Carlos said from the other side of the curtain. “We’re all ready out here.”

Fernanda grabbed the Daddy Yankee hat from the floor and led me out. Carlos let out a whistle as soon as we came into his view.

“Looking good, *chicas*.” Carlos had a friend. I recognized him now as the boy with dimples. I felt my heart beating while a surge of energy passed through my stomach.

Carlos got behind the camera, and Fernanda positioned herself on the couch, sitting on the edge. Carlos went back and forth from looking

behind the camera to repositioning Fernanda on the couch, his hands wandering freely through her hair, down her arms and finally to her legs, each time preparing her for a pose he'd either seen on a "music video one time" or in a "sexy movie."

Carlos' friend moved toward me and smiled. "I'm Alejandro. I think I've seen you around—maybe school. You go to the *Técnica*, right?"

I nodded.

"I remember you," he said, "because I always think of how pretty you are."

"Thanks," I said as my stomach fluttered.

"Let's see," he said, "You like music?"

"Yeah," I replied.

"*Maná*?"

"Of course," I replied, "everyone loves *Maná*."

"*Labios compartidos, labios divididos, mi amor*," he began singing.

I laughed.

"Why are you laughing at me?" he asked.

"Because," I said, "you're not very good at singing."

He chuckled at this and leaned in closer.

"Can I kiss you?" he asked.

I was shocked since we hadn't even held hands. I thought that came first, then we'd go to the movies and we'd sit really close and take turns tickling each other's hands, and then maybe we'd walk back to the orphanage in the dark, and I'd tease him while leaning against the gate and then he'd ask, "Can I kiss you?"

"You okay?" Alex said.

"Yeah, I'm just really not feeling well. I think I might be sick or something."

"Really?" Alex asked with raised eyebrows. He laughed. "Let me guess, you've never been kissed."

I had been kissed. By a man much older than me, at an age much younger than I already was. I just thought this was supposed to be different. Maybe the kids at school didn't talk about why kids like us were in the orphanage. Maybe they really didn't know.

"No," I let out a soft laugh. "I've never been kissed."

Carlos joined Fernanda on the couch, and now they were in a full make-out session. He dipped his head to Fernanda's chest and began to smooch his face between her breasts. Fernanda looked up at me with widened eyes. She would never admit it, but I could see she was scared. This was the life we'd been rescued from. I couldn't remember why we

thought this photo shoot was a good idea. Alex's hand felt like a brick around my waist. I gave Fernanda a slight wave, signaling for her to come over. She either didn't see or ignored me. Either way, I ran.

As I raced down the cobblestone road toward the orphanage, I pulled my shirt to cover my stomach, and tears fell from my eyes. About a block away from the orphanage, I stopped and sat down on a corner. I didn't want to go in without Fernanda, but I also knew I didn't want to go back to the *paletería*.

A few moments later Fernanda came into view, her short legs in a sluggish jog. She slowed to a walk as she saw me, her hands wrapped around her waist, breathing heavily.

"What in the world, Peti?" she said between pants. "What is your problem?"

"My problem? I didn't like what he was doing to you. This was supposed to be fun."

"Really, Peti? Grow up. What did you expect?"

I lowered my eyes. My argument started sounding dumb. "I don't know. I just didn't expect he would—"

"Listen, Peti," she cut in as if I were a first-grader. "You embarrassed me. I doubt Carlos will ever talk to me again. I liked what he was doing to me. It's just part of growing up, you know." She sighed.

But I didn't know. I didn't.



INTERVIEW
with Maurice Manning

Interview with Maurice Manning

by Wesley Sexton

Maurice Manning has published five books of poems, the most recent being his *The Gone and The Going Away*. In January he found time to sneak away from his 20 acre Kentucky farm to read several of his newest poems as the first of many authors to visit Butler University under the Vivian S. Delbrook Visiting Writer's Series. During his short stay at Butler, Manning took time to speak with the *Manuscripts* staff.

WS: Writing poetry is a unique process among the creative arts. What attention do you give to that process, and in what ways does it affect your writing?

MM: For several generations now, any poet who talks about the process of writing poetry tends to advocate for the value of that process. It's a famous example, but the poet W.H. Auden said that for him, the subject of his poems was not the source of fascination or attention, but that he gave most of his attention to working out the intricacies of form—the laborious process of composition. I often find myself agreeing with that. For instance, almost every poem I have written in the last several years is in a version of iambic tetrameter (the four-beat line); and about ten years ago, I was drawn to pentameter—the five-beat line. It's like playing a musical instrument or a sport—you do your training: your rote, repetitive scales or you practice your foul shots; and hopefully doing that rote, repetitive work improves your skills and abilities across the board.

So, I was doing this pentameter, and I realized that it seemed awkward to me. That fifth foot was too much in the line – it gave too much weight to the line, and it limited the line for me. Or in some ways, it didn't limit the line enough. I like counterintuitive things. For instance, the pentameter line is an ingenious development because it has five feet, which means it doesn't have

a middle. You can't have a half line and an equal second half line. It has to be asymmetric. The four-beat line can be divided in half, but the counterintuitive part of me likes to have that symmetry and yet resist utilizing it. If that is a way to talk about process, that is part of what I'm thinking about. When I'm writing I'm thinking about the asymmetric properties of a symmetrical line.

WS: You mentioned at the reading you gave at Butler University that you often put arbitrary restraints on yourself, in terms of form. For example, *Bucolics* does not use the word "and," and all of the short, six-line poems in *The Gone and the Going Away* have exactly thirty words. What effect does limiting yourself, in terms of form, have on your writing?

MM: I have had a conventional experience with form. In my first book there are a number of poems that follow the traditional rules of a sonnet. There are another bunch of poems in the first book that borrow forms from other areas: there is a geometric proof, which takes a mathematical form and imports it to poetry. I have enjoyed that—there is a legal brief in there as well.

In the second book, I used blank verse a lot.

In the third book, I was using a heavily enjambed iambic line that resolves over the course of the book into iambic tetrameter, and that was an important formal device for me, because in *Bucolics*, the protagonist is in a one-sided dialogue with God. He begins in frustration and concludes in something approaching redemption or reconciliation in a spiritual sense; and it makes sense (to me at least) to have the metrical resolve.

The fourth book is all in couplets of tetrameter, and to me there is logic there. I tend to think of the couplet as the primary formal unit for narrative, going back in literary tradition. Because all the poems in *The Common Man* are narrative, it made sense to me to utilize this old-fashioned formal tool intended for narrative. Many of the poems for that book are spun out of the world of tall tales and oral tradition, and the couplet seems connected to that tradition as well.

In the fifth book, there are narrative poems but there are a bunch of poems that are just outbursts or utterances of sound or whimsy—talking animals and stuff like that. Those short poems are built on a stanza that I invented—a six line stanza where each line has five words. The odd numbered lines (1, 3, and 5) begin with an iambic foot; while the even numbered lines (2, 4, and 6) begin with a trochaic foot, so you have an upstairs-downstairs movement among the lines. Then, since it's a numerical end to the line rather than a metrical end, each line has a blunt stop. A friend of mine, who is a great poet and wonderful human being—Brooks Haxton—he very nicely described those short 30-word poems as “Honky-tonkas” and that suits me. I think that's a nice description for those. In those poems, I was very consciously thinking about the stanza as a little room for a poem. What poem can be housed in the parameters of this room? It was a lot of fun to realize that it's almost endless, what you can do within the confines of the form.

In the book that's coming out in about a year, I don't believe I really worked in an official stanza. I think of those poems as stacks of lines. Probably what I worked most with in that book is what might be called knotty syntax. Just seeing how the phrase and the sentence can twist and turn through the tetrameter lines.

WS: It's interesting that you pay so much attention to meter, because your poems often read as if they are being spoken, and I think much of that is due to the fact that there is often a unifying voice or place to your books as a whole. For instance, in *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions* we have Lawrence Booth as the speaker throughout the book, and in *A Companion to Owls*, we have Daniel Boone narrating for us. *The Gone and the Going Away* is similarly unified by the focus on place. When you are conceiving of books, how does that principle of unity affect your writing, and at what stage in the writing process does it enter?

MM: It sort of happens along the way. For instance, with *Lawrence Booth*, I had flirted with that material for ten years before I figured out a way to deal with it. I was at graduate school at the University

of Alabama when a light bulb came on, and I just thought one day, “Oh, I’ll have this third person omniscient perspective to be the stage manager for the theatrics of these poems.” And that proved to be valuable, because I could then distance myself from some of the material and see it more objectively, seeing it from a broader and wider scope. Then I could come at it from all sides if I wanted to. But that was 10 years into figuring out how to deal with that material.

The Daniel Boone book is a bit of an exception because I pretty quickly—after writing just a few poems—realized that there was something to relish in trying to embody the voice of Daniel Boone, 200 years after he was around.

In *Bucolics*, I had written 10 or 15 poems in that style before I felt the groove, so to speak. Then I heard the voice of the protagonist, and I better defined the world that that protagonist was inhabiting.

With *The Common Man*—in 2005, I had a month-long writing fellowship to this great place in Scotland, called the Hawthornden International Retreat for Writers. I took it very seriously; I wanted to really work and get a lot done. So I went over there and I assigned myself a monastic duty to write one poem a day. At the end of the month I had 30 poems all in pentameter. I came back home, and a couple of months later I was looking back through the poems and I just shook my head and thought, this is not what I want to be doing. I don’t like these: they’re clearly exercises. They’re not really doing anything other than demonstrating someone trying to write in pentameter. So I’ve not done anything with those poems. But I’ve learned how necessary it was to spend a month failing—to spend a month flailing—not doing the right work. That led me to do the work that I really wanted to be doing, which became that tetrameter line, and the couplets that came up in *The Common Man*. Making mistakes is clearly an important part of the process – sometimes big mistakes.

WS: Sometimes contemporary poetry can be aggressively abstract, and the real world is so far removed from the language that it can

be hard to get a foothold. To your credit, your poems often bring the real world in, and they are (in some ways) more accessible because of that. What drives that kind of writing for you?

MM: There is a fine line between what we think of as abstract and what we think of as concrete or accessible. This is something that may perhaps be a part of one's development, but I found myself more and more interested in approaching that line – veering closer to things that are abstract or uncertain or unclear. I read a poem last night “The Place Unnamed, The Vision Unclear,” and I don't think the poem is abstract. I wasn't trying to write an abstract poem, but it's a concrete poem about an abstract circumstance. That suits me. I'm happy to play with the see-saw between abstraction and verifiable reality. I love that, actually, and increasingly I've come to appreciate that in other forms of art—especially painting. I haven't seen it yet, because where we live in Kentucky there is no fancy movie theater, but there is a movie out about the British painter J.M.W. Turner who was a Romantic painter and someone that Wordsworth and Coleridge would have known about and vice-versa. He is a terrific painter because he paints these large-scale scenes of things that aren't quite defined. In the English countryside, which is where he set a lot of his paintings, fog and mist and cloud are always infringing on the concrete things in the painting, so it's a nice mix of fuzzy uncertainty and minute certainty. I'm not an art historian, so I'm searching for a way to describe this, but I really enjoy that. I understand it. I think that is one of the realms that art needs to address—that line between things we know for certain and things that are always shrouded in uncertainty, and how often the two are right next to each other and interfused with each other. Those are rich moments in life, and things that keep us thinking, hopefully.

WS: Another thing your poems seem to be saying is that, in some way, nature gives rise to the imagination. I'm curious about how you feel nature has affected you creatively.

MM: I think nature is the great analog for the human imagination. If you want to understand the human imagination, go out in the

woods. Go walk by a stream, get lost, and be amazed by the natural world. It appears to be spontaneous. It appears to be completely organic and unplanned, and yet at a biological level, trees and plants follow a process. They have a biological design that informs their growth, reproduction, lifespan, etc.

I think that is useful when thinking about the human imagination. There is a wildness and a freedom—an organic quality—to the imagination, and yet you have to steer it. You have to tend it, or prune it. You have to guide it in some way or else what comes out of it doesn't have much meaning.

WS: Who are some of your favorite poets to read these days?

MM: Just recently I was at a poetry festival in Palm Beach, Florida, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and while I was there I got to meet a poet that I've long admired, named Robert Wrigley. I bought a book of his that I did not have previously and I've really been enjoying that. I've read him for years, but have gained a newfound attention for his poetry—stuff that is up my alley, so to speak. There are a lot of contemporary poets whose work I will always admire and respect—some who are coming to Butler this semester. Louis Glück and Ellen Bryant Voigt especially are poets that I admire, and they are mentors in their way. I'm really fond of Claudia Emerson, who passed away in the fall. Alan Shapiro, Andrew Hudgins, Kay Ryan, Natasha Trethewey, my former colleague Ross Gay. There are a lot of great poets out there right now.

I probably spend more of my reading time with poets who are no longer on the face of the Earth, and that's just owing to my education. When I was in college the focus was not on contemporary literature. The focus was on experiencing literature from a historical perspective, and that just took root in me. I've spent a lot of time with the Romantics, and any poet who had a pastoral inkling. I spend a lot of time with Shakespeare. I've come increasingly to believe that all literature (if there is an audience for it) requires some dramatic element. I spend a lot of time with Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Gerard Manley Hopkins—always I go to Hopkins. In fact, yesterday in one of

my classes at Transylvania, we were singing the praises of Hopkins for enlivening the language and reviving its Anglo-Saxon roots.

Recently I've been reading a lot of Edward Thomas, who we sometimes think of as a WWI poet—he was killed in the war—but he wrote about more than the war. He was a real craftsman, and there is a lot to learn and admire in his work.

WS: It's interesting that you mention the drama of literature, because I've heard you speak about that in interviews before, and I personally see that inclination toward drama in *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions*, for example. I'm just curious how that tendency toward drama affects the way you write and think about poems.

MM: I think one of the paradoxes and challenges of writing a poem that's going to reach somebody else, is that you are using a two-dimensional medium (words written on a flat page) to create a three-dimensional effect. You want to use these abstract symbols on a flat page to render a world that the reader can experience in three dimensions – a space where things really are; where there's light, and shadow created by the light and an object in the space, and there's a voice in there that actually sounds like something. There is a mind in there that is actually thinking something, and there is a little drama in there working itself out. It might just be a tiny little movement of a branch floating in the wind up and down, and that's it. Or it might be something of apparently greater consequence. I tend to appreciate — especially here lately — creating that dramatic space where the tiniest little thing happens, and implying that no matter what, that is of consequence.

Sanad El-Rahaiby

Open Kitchen



Thank you sir you're welcome miss please feed
 bowl whisk stir dish fresh quick spatula spread
 blur bread spice dash slice mash steam smoke
 stir sir whisk miss dish dash you're welcome cash
 pay stay 2allday refill serve lard char par bake fake
 styro grin foam smiles saran wink wrap eyes
 closed no open yes withazest diet sweet tea coke
 holdtheyolk white heads iceberg red eggs said
 ontheside pennies pies nickel knives quarters rush
 dime per dozen blur yea sure wait grrrr him her
 sir stir miss whisk dish bowl
 on the FLYYy yyy yy y y y y y
 soul?

girls guys burns cries fish fry flour kneed batter
 bleed cold cuts hot clean sweat spic bead span
 scrub tick pan tock mop tick bucket tock floor tick
 slick tock stir sir tick whisk miss tock
 Thank you sir tick You're welcome miss tock

manuscripts



Chelsea Yedinak

Miss Murphy's Record



It's interesting, the things people say in their last moments. Sometimes, they try to rush everything in at once, as though they can summarize their years of wisdom in a sentence or two. Other people cry out for God, their mothers, their husbands or wives. Yet others say nothing at all. Old Jacob Applebaum looked at me and my notepad, shook his head once, and died without a peep. His wife Holly Applebaum, on the other hand, gave an entire monologue before she passed on. But whatever the words, I'm supposed to record them in the Diary of Departures for future generations.

I read the list of departures every morning during my breakfast, which consists of a half grapefruit with one packet of sweetener and one piece of buttered, whole-grain toast sliced diagonally. I wash that down with a glass of milk on my way out the door. My assistant scribe Mallory follows me with the Diary and we make our way across town to the hospital.

Today, the list has three departures listed. Although each patient is expected to die today, there is no way of knowing who will go when.

manuscripts

Some may even last through tomorrow, when their names will move to the top of the list.

I maintain a brisk pace without pausing until I reach the nurses' station. "Good morning, Joanne. List?" Nurse Trudy is my favorite because she knows the routine and doesn't waste time. "Looks like you've got a busy day. I'll pull the charts." I watch her walk through doors marked *Staff Only* behind the desk.

Then I examine the desk, as I do every day, looking at all the black specks in clusters of varying sizes and shapes scattered across the blue-gray surface. If I let my eyes go out of focus, I can see a horse leaping through the middle of a brown circle where a careless nurse left her mug. By the spilled red drop of sparkling nail polish, there is a hooded figure, the Grim Reaper perhaps. Rather fitting, I think. Just as I begin to wonder which President the speck by Trudy's name placard resembles, she reappears with the files I need.

"Here you go. I'd probably start with Miss Murphy. She's been on that list for nearly a week now, almost a record. I think she's going to go soon." Her tone is matter-of-fact, like she doesn't realize it's good to have a new record. That it's good to outlive the odds.

"Thanks, Trudy. I'll be back at the end of the day." I head toward the elevator with Mallory at my heels. "Looks like we're starting with Miss Everly Murphy."

"According to the chart, she's on the 16th floor in the burn unit. Her apartment complex burned down when a neighbor's... laboratory exploded. She was first placed on the list six days ago after a sudden decline in her condition. Twenty-four. No family, friends, or pets."

Everly Murphy's story is, unfortunately, a common one. Crime has been on the rise in our town for over a decade with no signs of stopping. Drug labs explode weekly, murderers roam the streets at night, and cars are stolen in broad daylight. Mayor Gillson is doing what he can, but there's just not enough to go around, so people turn to crime to get by.

In these troubled times, my job is especially important. When society loses its way, it becomes more vital than ever to remember the words of the departed. It reminds us of our shared humanity, according to the Governor.

The elevator stops with a shudder at the 16th floor and we enter the burn unit. Stepping through the doors, screams and whimpers of victims greet us. The hospital's twenty-five floors form a hollow circle with a large garden in the center. Everly is supposed to be in room 37, directly across the circle from the elevator. The rooms closer to the

elevator are given to patients with hopes of improving so nurses and doctors can reach them more quickly.

"Mallory, please prepare the Diary for the newest entry. Leave the name blank for now. Miss Murphy might surprise us yet." As we walk, Mallory pulls the large leatherbound book from the bag slung over her shoulder. She is the tallest assistant I have ever had by at least a foot and comes from the next town over. I believe her father is a dairy farmer, but we've never officially discussed it.

At room 37, I assume my professional demeanor. It is important for a scribe to remain slightly detached or the work can become overwhelming. Over the past six days, I have grown to admire Everly Murphy, in spite of my best efforts.

"Good morning, Miss Murphy," I say, opening the door slowly.

"It's rather early. I guess they told you I'm supposed to go first?" She lost all of her hair and most of her skin in the blaze. Her face, when not covered in bandages, is a frightening shade of red. The first time I saw her, I struggled not to gasp.

"How are we feeling today, Miss Murphy?"

"Please dismiss with the niceties. You're not here to breakfast with me. You're here because I'm going to die. At least call me Everly."

"How are you feeling today, Everly?"

"Ecstatic, I believe I'm ready to be discharged."

"If you do not feel ready for your departure, I can return later." She is the most stubborn patient I have encountered in my work. Most people are on the list no more than twice, although the record is eight days.

"Let's do that," she lifts her withered wrist to dismiss me. "Close the door."

I don't want to leave, but I have to follow protocol. I can't miss the other two departures, so I close the door and go back to the elevator.

"Joanne, has anyone ever gone off the list without dying?"

"Not to my knowledge. Why?" She nods her head toward Everly's door. "Ah. If anyone is stubborn enough, it would be Miss Murphy. But, scribes must remain impartial. Do not allow your emotions to get the best of you. Now, who's next?"

We moved through the other two departures within one hour. Mr. David was an old-age departure, so he had an index card with his last words prepared. He dictated them to me and then sat silently by the window. It took me a moment to realize he was dead, then I called the nurses and went to the next room.

The middle-aged Mrs. Sparrow was dying of cancer, so she was

also somewhat prepared. Unlike both Mr. David and Everly, her bed was attended by dozens of family members and friends. That's another purpose of the scribe: companionship. Mrs. Sparrow gave a lovely speech about family that reduced everyone present, excluding myself and Mallory, to tears. I wrote down the last words and stayed only ten minutes. When she passed on, it was time to return to Everly.

"Oh, it's you again." The disappointment in her voice surprises me, although it shouldn't. "I fell asleep and thought maybe it was a new day, or I was finally dead. Either one would be preferable to this again."

"How are you feeling, Everly?"

"Like death." I know she was being sarcastic, but there was still a hint of sincerity in that sentence. It poked holes in her tough exterior.

"Do you have your last words ready?"

"No. I'm twenty-four."

"I'm not sure how that's relevant."

"I'm not supposed to have last words ready. I'm twenty-four." For the first time since I met her, I can see how scared she is.

"Some people choose to remain silent. If this is your wish, nod once." I had to follow protocol. If she didn't have any words, she was supposed to nod.

"I don't want to be silent. I don't want to die."

"There are a variety of stock phrases and sayings, including poems. You may choose one of those if you cannot think of anything." That was a new option. Some people couldn't think of their last words, but they wanted to have something in the Diary.

"I don't want your damn stock phrases! I don't want silence. I don't have a prepared speech. I don't have any wisdom to impart. I have nothing to contribute that will 'remind us of our shared humanity.' How can you just sit there and look at me while I'm dying?" Her heart rate monitor spiked rapidly throughout her speech. I grab the diary from Mallory and open to the blank space I ordered her to prepare earlier.

"As a scribe, it is my job to—"

"I know what your job is." The monitor's lines leap to the edges of the screen as the beeps grow more frequent and louder. "Fine. You need my last words for your precious book?"

"If you are ready, I can begin." I take the cap off of my silver pen and press it to the page. The afternoon light streams in and casts the sterile room in an orange glow.

"I am twenty-four years old. I wanted to die at eighty-five, but here I am. If you're reading this, for whatever reason, know that life sucks and it's too short. Don't trust people who say you have enough

time. They're lying." The monitor slows down with her final words. The beeping gets slower and slower before stopping at last.

I close the Diary, preserving Everly's last words inside, and hand it back to Mallory. She will take it to the City Hall for filing among the thousands of other Diaries. Maybe someone will read it in the future and gain something from it, but more likely it will be lost in the stacks.

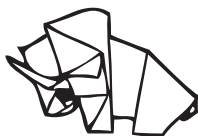
I close her eyes and press the button for nurses. When Trudy arrives, she realizes who it is and says, "About time. She lasted six days on that list."

"Almost a record," another nurse points out.

On my way out of the door, I nod. "Yeah. Almost."

A.D. Shufflebarger

I wouldn't live in the buffalo cave



even though Grandma nearly cries
whenever I hand over a string of words
as muddy as her dollar store pearls,

raves to our long line of relatives *thank God*
we have a family artist on a starry night
when we're burning hot dogs.

Those early Spaniards made bison
beautiful—ocher coats smeared
red as blood as in the crevices, eyes glazed

from the kill. I imagine if Van Gogh
dusted over his own thin fingers,
we'd find the same agile form

stamped on that damp wall in replicated
negatives. But my hands don't belong
in this cave, where the oldest artists

made sense of stampedes
and knew the exact stance of a boar
pulling up tubers in summer.

Grandma hopes to see my book
before she's a skeleton. She doesn't know
how I sit dumbly at our dying campfire

and run a stick in circles through the dirt.
And while I labor to master the animal's flared nostrils,
the buffalo cave is long complete.

Brooke Marshall

Yellow Light



Finalist

Her name was Audrey Seigle. She was hit by a train the summer after my junior year of high school. We weren't very close. In fact, it took me the past thirty minutes to remember her last name. While I wanted to introduce her as someone who opened the door for me when my hands were full or gave me a pencil when I needed one right before a test, I don't remember either of those things happening. To be honest, I barely remember her at all. I recall she wore a hearing aid, that her hair was short, but that's it. Oh, and that she committed suicide.

I remember the night she died more than I remember most years.

It was a little past 1 a.m. when Zach texted me. I crept down my stairs to the living room, gently opened the screen door, and then ran outside. The backyard's dry grass felt rough beneath my bare feet and the breeze felt cold against my thin pajama shorts. I ran across my backyard, up the hill on the side of my house, and then to Zach's car. When I opened the door of his car, I was out of breath.

Zach was anxiously tapping his steering wheel and glancing into his side mirror. In a blue sweatshirt that I recognized, I was surprised

by how his hair was poorly kept, even sticking straight up in places. I climbed into his car, and then shut the door. He didn't look at me. He just put the car into gear.

I pulled my feet onto the seat and wrapped my arms around my knees. Looking out the window, I saw darkness everywhere. No house lights were on, and no dogs were barking. When we drove through traffic lights, we never had to stop; it was too late for them to change colors. They were just blinking yellow.

He rubbed his eyes, then ran his hand through his hair. I watched him carefully; my cheek pressed against my knee. *Should I say something?*

Luckily, he broke the silence between us.

"How was Washington, D.C.?" he asked with fake enthusiasm.

I bit my lip. Memories of the trip filled my mind. Happy, fun memories. They all felt wrong.

"It was fine," I replied.

But as he looked at me, eyes tired and dark smudges underneath, I knew that was not what he wanted. He wanted a distraction.

"The lady I stayed with made us drive 2.5 hours to see her boyfriend because 'God told her to,' and while we were gone, this other lady that was staying in her house actually set her oven on fire. She completely ruined the oven."

Looking out at the road in front of him, a small smile formed on his lips. I could finally take a breath.

When we pulled onto the highway, my phone buzzed. It was a notification saying that Jane Nelson had posted on a Facebook page called "Rest in Peace, Audrey <3." I went onto Facebook and read her post. She had written about how wonderful of a person Audrey had been, how she was a kind and loving person. How she will be forever in her heart and would be missed very, very much.

Ugh. Bullshit.

I knew Jane. I knew who Jane's friends were. She had never spoken to Audrey one day in her life. So why pretend?

Only a few cars were on the highway. Every once in a while, we passed a semi-truck. Sometimes I would glance through their windows, often finding an overweight, middle-aged man smacking on his gum. He looked nonchalantly towards the road, like he had drove it hundreds of times. My mind drifted.

Who found her?

Leaning back in my seat, I suddenly felt deflated. *How could I not know the answer?* I thought irritated. Looking over at Zach, I thought about asking him, but I wasn't sure if he knew, and I didn't have the

courage to ask. I shivered, imagining finding her mutilated corpse on those railroad tracks.

"Are you cold?" Zach's voice cut through my thoughts.

Still picturing Audrey, I didn't register his question. He took my hesitation to equal agreement, and he shrugged off his sweatshirt. When he handed it to me, I blushed, and then put it on.

"How long until we're there?" I quietly asked.

"15 minutes. Where the newspaper said it happened was just down the street from the Coney Island on Washington Avenue."

I nodded.

We were silent for a while longer, listening to a rap song quietly radiating out of the stereo.

Zach's phone buzzed. He took it out of his pocket, glanced at it, and then turned it off. He looked forward, and I followed his eyes. The road in front of us was dark—only trees surrounded the highway and one set of tail lights were visible. Closing in on an overpass, we drove underneath it quickly. I noticed graffiti, but I wasn't able to make out what it said. A few seconds afterwards, I hear the sound of wind whistling. The window was open. Glancing over at Zach, I watched him pull his arm back and then hurl his phone out the window. I tried to watch it hit the asphalt, but it was engulfed by darkness.

"What the hell?" I screeched.

As the anger pulsed through him, Zach's face became a deep shade of red. He stared straight ahead, and I could feel the car beginning to speed up.

My eyes widened. "Zach!"

He gripped the steering wheel tightly, so much so that I thought his knuckles were becoming white. When he started to speak, he was loud; his voice echoing off the close car interior. "I can't take that stupid fucking Facebook page! 'Oh she's so great, oh I remember her.'" His voice became even louder. "I killed her. Okay, I killed her." He jabbed at the button turning the radio off.

The arrow on the speed dial was quickly moving higher.

I could feel my heart widely beating. The sound of the wind beating against the car was loud through Zach's open window. When Zach pulled onto an exit ramp, the car jeered.

"Stop the car!" I yelled. "You didn't kill her, ok? A train did. Not you. The train killed her."

"But I was mean to her!" The look in his eyes made my stomach crawl. "I made fun of her. If I had just been nicer, then maybe she wouldn't have—"

"It could've been an accident," I suggested.

He shook his head.

Letting the car cross the yellow line, Zach abruptly steered back into the right lane. I felt like I couldn't breathe. "Please stop the car," I whispered.

Approaching a blinking yellow traffic light, he slammed on the brakes. My chest rammed into my seatbelt and my neck snapped back. While the pain made me wince, I felt like I could finally take a breath.

Breathing unevenly, he put his hand over his eyes and sunk down in his seat.

My mind whirled. It took me a minute, but I started breathing normally again. I looked over at him, taking in how his hair was still out of control, how the hem of his t-shirt had a coffee stain, and how his body shook from both the anger and the guilt. He was falling apart, and suddenly I wanted to kiss him.

The thought slipped in unconsciously, but then I was overcome by the possibility. I imagined how I would just lean over, put my hand on his cheek, and then kiss him as hard as I could. And that's when I realized it: I didn't care about Audrey.

I didn't care if she was hit by a bus or a boat or an airplane. All I cared about was the boy sitting next to me. All I wanted to do was kiss this boy that I was completely and utterly in love with. *How wrong is that?*

Shouldn't I have been mourning Audrey? Shouldn't I have been feeling sorry for this girl that was hit by a fucking train?

I looked at Zach again. His hair was a mess, a tear escaping from underneath his hand. The urge to kiss him returned.

No. No. No. This is about Audrey.

I wanted to care. I wanted to cry about this girl that I went to middle school with.

But I couldn't.

The yellow traffic light caught my eye and I watched it for a bit. Then suddenly, I remembered Audrey. The only memory, to this day, that I remember of her: she stole my gel pens. These gel pens I bought from Target with my birthday money back in middle school. I accidentally left them on a table where she was sitting. When I came back, both her and the gel pens were gone. Two weeks later I saw her using one of them, but I never said anything.

This was the Audrey I now saw. Not the girl described on that Facebook group. Not the perfect angel who was accidentally run over by a train. I saw the truth. And I started to cry.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Zach sit up straighter in his

chair. But I kept looking at the yellow traffic light. The light blinked.

Yellow.

Nothing.

Yellow.

Nothing.

I registered Zach's voice, but just barely. He wiped the back of his hand against his eyes, and he looked out onto the road. Then he asked, "Ready?"

vive la vie

Fresh feres will dry the blue eyes

And now I'm in the world alone, Upon the wide, wide sea;
But why should I for others groan, When none will sigh?

Though the day of my destiny's over, And the star of my fate hath
Thy soft heart refused to discover The faults which so many could find; Thow
It shrunk not to share it with me, And the love which my spirit hath painted
Then when nature around me is smiling The last smile which angels to mine, I
Because it reminds me of thine; And when life's life is left with the dead, As
If their billows excite an emotion, I yet feel thy dear m
And its fragments are sunk in a wave, though I feel that
There is many a pang of the
'Tis of thee that I think of
Though woman, thou didst not
Though trusted, thou didst not di
Nor, mute, the world might

the sea. And the gentle south wind still
sea came h
id in
at B r: seas b
how at
d drew a h
ello! A
woe: F
and in
That me
Or tremble
Our ship is swift as
ily ali ne

food or y Came to the ma
wor
Why dost thou
That me
Or tremble
Our ship is swift as
ily ali ne

no more
in rowing so late

the billow's rag
the said the eye
is the breeze to
the breeze to
the breeze to

Major winter storm
ould bring 6 inches
of snow at midweel

Major winter storm
ould bring 6 inches
of snow at midweel

Major winter storm
ould bring 6 inches
of snow at midweel

no more
in rowing so late

Major winter storm
ould bring 6 inches
of snow at midweel

Bekah Pollard

sequence



smile. wave. awkward. hello.

eyes meet. across room. awkward. wave.
notice you. me busy. notice me. approach.
hi. hi. sit.

oh.

friends. hang out?
yes. numbers.

see you. far away. sit. hang out?
walk. barefoot. river. silence.

drinks. movie. walk.
summer.

text. weird. hang out?
school.

hang out. party. party. Kiss.
no.

friends. dinner. smiles. awkward.

river. cereal. hand holding. Kiss.

kiss. kiss. kiss. kiss.

Rachel Dupont

In the Aftermath



The first time I ever bled, I fainted and hit my head against the purple door of the school bathroom stall and I had a goose egg on my forehead for three days. It had happened a little earlier than with most girls, so my mother hadn't yet sat me down to have "that talk." I was nine, and I'd never been so scared in my entire life.

Until eleven days ago when I relived that day, but a hundred times worse. Because this time, when I awoke to that familiar squeeze in the deepest recess of my belly, when I found a spill of Merlot in my light blue bikini cut panties, I wasn't nine years old anymore. I was nine weeks pregnant.



I lay in bed on a Monday morning, and watch my husband Adam as he dresses for work. The man is a work of art. A masterpiece. He has put time and discipline into shaping his sculpted muscles, and he has a tendency to turn heads, even now in his early thirties. I've always loved

watching him move, so strong and assertive and...well, for lack of a less cheesy term, suave.

But today there is something different in his movements, which I've been noticing the past several days. It's more prominent now, as he prepares to go back to his office for the first time since that day that he rushed me to the emergency room, the both of us hoping that it was all a giant nightmare. I watch him pull on a plain blue button-down over his skin-tight undershirt and stiffly loop the buttons through their holes with trembling fingers. He tucks and untucks his shirt into his grey slacks four times before looping and buckling his belt. He ties his tie into a double Windsor knot, his movements slow and robotic, as if he has to think through every step of a knot that a week and a half ago he tied while dancing around the kitchen and fixing our coffee.

I want to reach through my half-sleep to ask him if he is okay, but I can't do it. I don't know why; maybe exhaustion. Maybe I am afraid of the answer, because if the strongest man I know is not okay, then there is no hope for me. It's probably nothing, he hasn't tied his tie in eleven days, that's all. He's fine.

He takes his black dress shoes off the rack hanging on the inside of the closet door to bring them over to the foot of the bed where he sits every weekday morning to tie them. As he turns around, he sees me watching him, and his face softens into a weary smile. His eyes are swollen from restless sleep and he hasn't shaved in at least three days, but still he looks handsome.

"Hannah," he says softly, and then he crawls into bed next to me and curls his arms around my body. "I didn't know you were awake."

I make an incoherent sound, trying not to stiffen under his embrace. I don't know why, but ever since that day I can't relax in his arms. His touch has always been the most comforting thing in the world to me, but somehow now I can't keep my spine from tensing and my lungs from constricting. I know he's noticed the difference but he hasn't said anything about it.

"Should I stay?" Adam asks. "I don't have to go to work. I can take more time."

He said this to me at least fourteen times yesterday.

I shake my head, my short dark hair catching in the stubble on his chin.

"You sure?" His voice cracks mid-whisper.

"I'm sure. You should go. The doctor said it'd be better if we got back to our normal routine."

The doctor didn't say that, actually. He said that we should take

all the time we needed to rest and grieve. Adam knows this as well as I do—he was with me the whole time. But he doesn't press the matter, and I am relieved.



I am not sure of the moment that he leaves for work. I had dozed off again in his arms, and I don't know how long he stayed with me before he slipped off the bed, pulled on his shoes, and backed his green truck out of the driveway.

In my dreams I keep reliving that horrible moment. Eleven days ago. On a Thursday. I had planned on having lunch with Adam's mother. We were going to spend the afternoon picking out paint colors and bedspreads and I knew I would end up faking enthusiasm over her every outdated and tacky suggestion, then picking everything out with Adam another day. Thank God he didn't get his taste from her.

But all those silly plans were canceled when I woke up to stabbing pain and torrential bleeding. Funny how something that happens every month under normal circumstances can suddenly become your worst nightmare.

I screamed, and Adam was in the bathroom seconds later, holding me as I vomited, trying to get me cleaned up and clothed, carrying me out to the truck and driving me to the emergency room. Poor guy didn't know what to do. He just kept touching my knee and squeezing my hand and saying, "I gotcha," because there was nothing else to say.

We've said very few words since then. It's like we're on opposite sides of a glass door. We can see each other, we can place our palms perfectly aligned against the glass, but no matter how close we get we can't seem to really touch.



I spent the next eight-and-a-half days after that in bed and the torrents continued, the tempest ravaging the life inside of me. It was too early to know the gender, but Adam and I had both had this gut feeling that we were having a she. We called her Charlotte—*Charlie*. And it would be an easy switch to Charles if we turned out to be wrong. All that time I lay there wondering, what do most people do with the name they've chosen? Do they recycle it for the next baby, pretend the first one never happened? It seemed so insensitive, like the baby who died didn't count, she was just a practice run. If we'd lost an eight year old, we wouldn't

give any other child the same name; it would seem like we were trying to replace the irreplaceable.

Which, of course, led me back to the question of getting pregnant again. That seemed impossible. It seemed like I would never stop bleeding. And even if I did, would another baby be safe inside me? I wasn't safe for baby Charlie. Maybe I drank too much coffee, maybe I took too many walks, maybe I didn't do enough yoga or eat enough protein. Maybe she didn't hear my voice enough, maybe I was too grouchy with Adam, maybe I was somehow unfit to carry life. Maybe I ran too fast to the bathroom every time morning sickness set in, maybe I didn't pray enough or maybe I used soaps with too many parabens in them.

And worst of all. Maybe it would happen again.



I had never felt so weak and tiny as I did sitting in that bland, boxy hospital room under flickering fluorescent lights, with a paper thin gown loosely covering me fastened only by a few strings tied along my spine. I couldn't bring myself to cry; I couldn't even look at Adam. I had lost my baby and my dignity. I felt like that nine year old again, scared and embarrassed, sitting in the elementary school nurse's office with her secret exposed to everyone.

A nurse I hadn't seen before came in to check my temperature and blood pressure right before I was dismissed, even though three other nurses had already checked them in the time that I had been there.

The nurse had bags under her eyes and rough, dry hands, and the demeanor of someone who had been up all night and didn't want to look at another patient, or even another human being. She tore off the blood pressure cuff with a sharp tearing sound and said, "Alright, you're good to go."

"Wait," I breathed, grabbing her wrist in a moment of desperation which she was clearly not inclined to deal with. "What do I do?"

I was almost begging at this point. I don't know what I expected, or *wanted*, her to say to me. Maybe the same thing I wanted to hear from Adam but was afraid to ask, maybe because I was afraid of the answer, or maybe just afraid he wouldn't understand. I needed to know that it wasn't my fault, that it wouldn't happen again, that I couldn't have done anything differently. That Charlotte didn't feel any pain, that this was somehow better for her.

The nurse sighed and picked up my chart, trying to muster the energy to see to the needs of her final patient before she could presumably

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end her shift. She clicked the button of her pen up and down, and said, calmly but hastily, as if it had been rehearsed a hundred times, “You’ll experience some heavy bleeding and cramping for about a week. You might notice some tissue and clotting. You can use a heating pad and take Tylenol or Motrin for the pain. Drink a lot of water and take it easy.” And then she was gone.

I could hear Adam quietly crying next to me, but still, I couldn’t shed a tear, not as long as anyone was in the room. I just stared into the vacant space where the nurse had been, wishing she was still there, wishing I could grab the neckline of her ugly pink scrubs and scream into her haggard face.

I knew my anger was unfounded. I knew it wasn’t her fault. But there had been more, *so much more*, to my question. I know what to do about a bad period. I’m a grown woman, for God’s sake. I’m not nine years old anymore.

What do I do when my baby just died?



Last night, the night before Adam’s first day back at work, he tried to make love to me. I didn’t know why he even wanted to. I had hardly moved from that bed in ten days. I needed to change the white linen sheets—they smelled like sweat and tears and unwashed hair. But still he crawled on top of me. My flat belly caved in under the stroke of his fingers, my neck curled away from his burrowed chin. Every inch of me retreated, and despite his whispering, “*Hannah...please*,” I pressed my palms against his chest and gently pushed him away.

His soft grey eyes misted over with more concern than hurt and he asked me, “You aren’t still bleeding, are you, baby?” And we both silently winced at his word choice.

I hadn’t bled in two days. But I so badly wanted to tell him yes, so that I would at least have a reason for not letting him touch me. A reason that I could explain, a reason that he wouldn’t question, and that wouldn’t hurt him. But I had to tell him the truth, because a lie would have resulted in a worried husband and an unnecessary trip back to the hospital.

“No,” I whispered, “I’m not.”

I couldn’t say anything else. I couldn’t look in those eyes, the eyes that I had never said no to, until now.

He laid down on his back next to me, facing the ceiling, an invisible line between us.



Around noon on Monday, I finally can't stay in bed anymore. So much rest has made me feel like I've been hit by a train; funny how it works backwards sometimes. I poke around the dark house, I change the soiled bedsheets, I listen to the concerned voicemails left by Adam's mother. She is the only one who knows what happened, and if I'd had it my way, we wouldn't have told anyone at all for at least a few more weeks.

She left at least one message every day.

"Hannah? Honey, how are you doing?"

"I made a casserole for you and Adam, I'll drop it by this afternoon."

"This happens, honey, you've got to just keep going. Please pick up the phone..."

"Do you want me to come clean the house for you?"

I delete every single one of them without listening to any the whole way through.

It irritates me when I realize she's right—my house is a mess. I pick up a laundry basket and slowly gather all of the dirty clothes around the house, still tired and achy. Adam has a habit of leaving socks and t-shirts in random places, so laundry has always been a scavenger hunt. I wash all of the clothes we've worn over the past week and a half, which for me is only sweatpants and tank tops.

I haven't bothered to open the blinds, so the afternoon slips away into dusk without my noticing. I can hear Adam's truck pulling up the driveway as I stack the piles of folded clean laundry into his dresser drawers.

I open his empty sock drawer. There is a rattling sound in the back of the drawer as it slides across the track and I pull it open farther to see what's inside. It isn't like Adam to hide things. I reach in, and what I see in my hand makes me feel like I'm going to vomit.

"Hannah?" I hear him call as he bounds up the stairs two at a time. "I'm home."

He comes and stands in the doorway, his eyes wide with guilt as he sees what is in my hand.

I recognized it right away. It was the pregnancy test I had taken six weeks ago, still reading positive.

"You kept this?" I choke. "Why?"

He swallows, scratching nervously at his beard. "I found it in the trash after...that day."

I had planned on keeping it, before that Thursday eleven days ago. A weird thing to put in a scrapbook, but I didn't care. But after that day, I couldn't look at it again.

"You dug it out?" I ask, still holding it, but unable to look at it.

He walks towards me slowly, as if the floor between us were a thin sheet of ice. "It's all I have of Charlie. All *we* have."

I try to hold back the tears but they have already begun to spill down my face.

He cradles my cheeks in his palms, stroking away my tears with his rough thumbs. "I lost her too, Hannah."

He puts his arms around me, and this time I don't push him away.

Mary Ardery

*The Ladies Here Have
Topographic Hands*



Blue mountain ranges bulge in thin lines,
red valleys and brown hills dot the plains.
The gold was mined out of this region long ago.

They peel apart their sandwiches, suspicious
of ham and cheese—can't remember what they enjoy.
They have memories but no memory.

No husbands, but they wear diamond rings.
The polish on one woman's nails smells fresh
and looks smooth—uncharted territory for now.

They have mapped out her patterns of comfort.
Next week, when she asks to try a new color,
they will use the pale pink they already know she loves.



INTERVIEW
with Michael Martone

Interview with Michael Martone

by Sarah Coffing and Emily Yoo

MICHAEL MARTONE grew up in Fort Wayne, IN. He received part of his undergraduate education at Butler University before transferring to Indiana University. He received his MA from Johns Hopkins University and has taught at colleges around the country, including Warren Wilson College, Iowa State University, Harvard University, and Syracuse University. He currently lives in Tuscaloosa and teaches at the University of Alabama. He has published more than a dozen books, has won two fellowships from the NEA, and won the 1998 Associated Writing Programs Award for Creative Nonfiction. Martone was a member of *Manuscripts* for a few years, and recently announced a writing grant to Butler students who wish to travel around Indiana and write about their experiences. When Martone visited campus in the fall of 2014, he was gracious enough to give an interview to Sarah Coffing and Emily Yoo.

SC: What is your favorite thing about writing?

MM: What I like is kind of the trickster nature. I like entertaining people. I like mixing things up. Also, I think it's hard for writers sometimes, and not so much when you play an instrument. I can't play a violin. I can't play a flute. I have to learn how to do that. But writing? Most of us know how to write or know how to speak, how to use language. So most people will say, "That's an easy art." I like to think of myself as an artist. I think most people tend to think that writing is more a craft. A lot of the things I'm interested in are sort of more conceptual and perhaps artistic than it is craft. Rethinking what writing is is very enjoyable for me. Just because a magazine looked like this and did this, how can you rethink it? How can it be made new?

Something happened on the way over here: I was walking over,

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and because—this is what I like about writing. I like it because it forces you to be defamiliarized and notice things. On Atherton, I looked, and all of a sudden there was a little box. It had three things hanging down from it. It's right on the building. And the box looks like the stone that Atherton is made out of. And a guy was walking by, and I said, "What's that on the building?" And he looked and he said, "I think that's a Wi-Fi antenna." And I said, "I think you're right. I think that's a Wi-Fi antenna." And I said, "Look, they actually tried to disguise it as part of the building." And he said, "Yeah. You know, I walk by here every day, and I never saw that before." And that's what I like about writing. I like seeing the things that are all around us that we just take for granted. That's what an artist does, too.

In my undergraduate creative writing class, we're outside all the time. These are kids who have been there three, four years, on the campus. There's a cherry orchard on campus, and I said, "Have you been to the cherry orchard?" And they say, "No," so I said, "Let's go." We get there, and they say, "I walk by here every day. I didn't know these were cherry trees." So it's all about noticing things.

There's a poem by Ezra Pound called "In a Station of the Metro." Metro is the subway in Paris. It says, "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough." What he's saying is the subway car comes in, and all of a sudden he sees a face, and that face reminds him of a pink petal on the black bow of a cherry tree. He notices something. So I told them that, and the cherry trees are there, all blossoming, and so then what I did was I took them—since we don't have a subway—to the busses. We have a bus that circles around campus, and I had the rest of the class in the bus. And all I told them to do was sit there and look out the window and write down things that they saw. I said, "Don't try to make it into a poem. Just the things you see." And then we got off the bus. All of them were on the same bus looking out the same windows. I had them read their lists, and they were all different. It's all about slowing you down and making you pay attention to the world.

EY: Do you have rituals that you go through every day to make yourself aware of things?

MM: I don't, but I think you can get into the habit of that. It is very difficult. I haven't gotten a smartphone yet. I'm afraid of that phone because I know what I'll do with it. I'll play with it, and it will distract me. It's hard, you know how hard it is because everybody says you've gotta be here, gotta do this, gotta do that. But there is a koan. It's a Zen practice. Zen is about what they call mindfulness; to be mindful of the moment. The koan that I repeat in order to put me in that frame of reference is, "Walk when you walk, talk when you talk, die when you die." What that's saying is that we use a heck of a lot of imagination. You guys are artists. You want to work imaginatively.

One of the things that gets wasted is your imagination of the future. And that's called worry. I'm worried about this test, I'm worried about how I'll look when I go out on Friday, and that is a misuse of imagination. You walk when you walk, you talk when you talk, and you die when you die. But most of us are thinking, "Oh, I'm about to die." You just start there, present, for every one of those little things. So, if I wasn't walking when I was walking, I wouldn't have seen that little antenna. I was present. I wasn't thinking about, 'Oh, where am I going to have dinner tonight?' That's very hard to do, but for me, it's very important to be that kind of present.

There's a really interesting book called *Zen in the Art of Archery*. In Japan, the tea ritual, the kimono, everything... You're paying attention to it. That includes just drawing a bow. This German guy goes to Japan to study with this great master of the bow, and he's like, ninety years old. Most bows are now compound bows that have pulleys that will help, but these are regular bows. You have to put hundreds of pounds of pressure in that pull. So, this guy cannot bend the bow enough to string it. He keeps trying, he's incredibly strong, and he keeps trying. And he goes to the master and he says, "I cannot do this!" And the master—he's a little old guy! He takes the bow and immediately takes out an arrow and shoots it perfectly. He says, "I think we should start

with your breathing.” We in the West often think, “Oh, I’ve got to string a bow. That’s my job.” No, your trouble is you have to start with *the* most important thing, your breath. And then all will follow. It’s all of our problems in the way the West, America, Indianapolis, is. We just are so, so fast now. And we have to be attentive to that.

SC: You say that we all take life too seriously. How do you keep yourself from taking life too seriously?

MM: Have you heard of Montessori? Montessori was an Italian educator. But Montessori education now, in the West, we think of it as being for “special kids.” But she actually made it for kids who were poorer—kids who were not gifted at all. Her famous saying is, “A child’s play is his work.” Our classrooms are set up on what is known as a fiduciary model. That is, you, children, know nothing. Banks are fiduciary institutions because what you do is you give your money to your bank, and they hold it in trust until you ask for it back. Schools are like that with certain knowledge. I don’t know how to operate on the human heart. I don’t know what contract law is. I have to go to a place where they’re holding that knowledge, and then I sit in a room, and that knowledge is transferred to me. And because it is knowledge that I don’t know, it is tested. And I can test with the transference. If I get it, I am raised by degree. I am graded up, and I become the fiduciary. I know how to do the human heart. Now that works for a lot of stuff. You need to go find about math, about law, and about medicine. But that’s not true of art. That’s not true of a lot of things. I started talking when I was one or something—you all did. You didn’t have to learn or go to somebody to tell you what grammar was. You were born with it.

Montessori was interested in the kind of instruction that is truly student-led. The fiduciary classroom: you have kids sitting in rows, and you have a teacher up in front of the class, and it’s all about the transference of that knowledge. In a Montessori classroom, the classroom is filled up with all these various stations. Over here will be dress-up stuff. Over here will be a library. Here will be a sandbox. There will be manipulatives; beads and stuff

like that. And there'll be a kitchen. And there's no front of the classroom. And the teacher will meet you at the door and say, "How are you today? What would you like to do today? Oh, you want to go to the kitchen? That's great. Go into the kitchen. I just bought some grapefruit! I want you to find out about that grapefruit. There's an aide in there, she can help you cut it up, and I'll come back later and talk to you about that. And you want to do dress-up? Go over there and we'll talk about it later. And then later, we'll all get together and do some project." But the whole thing was, the student decides what they're learning, and the play itself is, in fact, instructive. My son played for four hours with his dolls, and that taught him certain things that didn't have to do with what I wanted him to learn or thought he should know, but he needed to know. He needed to figure something out there, and this is the way he did it. And Montessori provided that sort of education.

So, what I mean by you guys being so serious is that play or instructive play is now considered not good. You'll hear all the time, "Oh, you want to go to Butler because its program is *rigorous*." Right? Rigorous. And I always say, "'Rigorous' is very close to 'mortus.' Rigor mortis. And death. It's only a step away." It's all about that seriousness, and play looks like a waste of time, but in fact, for a lot of kinds of knowledge, we have to waste time because we don't know. We have to discover it on our own, we have to experience it. There's no way I'm going to walk into an operating room and perform open-heart surgery without rigorous instruction, but rigorous instruction will not make you write a poem. I can't tell you how to write a poem, and if I do, you only write the poem I want to write. You know the poem you want to write. My job as a teacher is to help you find what it is you already know. You already know this; you just don't know you know it.

I'll give you a great example. Before Michael Phelps, Mark Spitz was just as good in the '70s. And he trained down at IU. There was a famous coach there named Doc Counsilman. Spitz, at eighteen, was already a world-class swimmer and everything. So, Counsilman said, "Tell me about your stroke. How do you swim?"

And he said, “Well, I pull down the center part of my body.” He says, “Get in the pool.” At Indiana [University], the pool is all glass, so he put flashing lights on the fingers and toes so they could do a light tracing outside of the stroke. And this is what Spitz was doing. He was doing an S stroke, which is the perfect stroke. He was doing the perfect stroke, but he didn’t even know he was doing it! So, the coach’s job is to say, “Look what you’re doing. That, in fact, is what you’re doing! Can we make it better now? You already have this in you!” So you can think of poetry or art teaching as a kind of coaching. It coaches out of you the things that you already know. It doesn’t instill in you—in the fiduciary model. I don’t put the poems in you. The poems are already in you. So, it takes a kind of playfulness.

SC: A poetry professor of mine brought in a bunch of her sons’ toys and told us, “Okay, grab whatever you want. Now, go out and make a sculpture of it.” She gave us various prompts then, and it was difficult for us at first because we can be analytical, but it was actually very helpful.

MM: I like this person! Do you know the Muses? They’re the Greek gods of art and creativity. Their father is Zeus. In Greek mythology, that’s always a safe bet. Their mother is Memory. So, allegorically, what are the Greeks saying art is? It’s a combination of the analytical and the unconscious. But it isn’t one or the other. Part of what you’re discovering as an artist is how much you’re depending on the unconscious to bubble up, and once it kind of bubbles up, you’re using the analytical to shape it into the perfect shape. But it is a curious act of history that artistic pursuits, this kind of learning, ended up in the university, which is, from medieval times, a critical, analytical machine. You can imagine the administrators back in the ‘70s when creative writing came into the university saying, “We love your craziness! Come in! We’re all wearing white lab coats, but come on in! We’re not asking for much, just a grade.” And over time, this place can’t help itself. It wants to be critical, it wants to sort. It wants to say this is better than that. It all bears down. You can’t play that way. How can I say that the thing you picked up to play with is better than what she picked up? You can’t! It wants to make those

distinctions. The university constantly wants to say, "Oh, she's doing a better job than he is." You can't say that. You're doing your job, and you're doing your job. And most of the culture will say, "They need to know that they're no good." No! We can't possibly know that. All we need to do is produce it. Get it out there. Other people can make judgments about it, but you can't make judgments about it in the midst of the actual creation of it, or you'll stop. You won't do it because it won't be good enough.

EY: Is that the kind of vision you have for your grant to the university?

MM: Yes. The one thing I specifically said about this is, "I do not want this to be used as an award for something somebody has written," because universities have that. They have prizes. Someone writes a poem, and they submit it to a contest, and the judge says, "Yeah, this is the one that wins the money." I wanted to try to get as much money as possible to help as many people as possible create. I don't want something already written. But because it is a limited thing, they're going to have to make some sort of distinction, not on the basis of whether it's a good or bad thing, but whether it's possible. I said I would be fine if somebody said, "Look, I want to write about Shapiro's, and I need \$25 to go and buy a meal and Shapiro's and a bus ticket down there." That's fine. If that's going to help them write something, I don't care what they write. I'm not going to look at it and make sure they did it right. I don't believe that. In Parkour, you run, and there's an obstacle, and you go over it, or around it, or through it, and you fall down, and you get up. What I want the award to be is a propellant. I want velocity, I want movement, I want quantity. I'm not so much interested in quality. That's what the university is all about. The university is all about ranking and rating and stuff like that. I'm about making. As much stuff can be just total crap, I don't care, because you have to do the crap. You have to do all this before you understand what it is that you're actually happy with.

Workshop implies that it's where you want to go, but if you have twelve students in a workshop and you divide them into four groups of three, every fourth week, you have a story up. Over the

course of a semester, you maybe get to *be* a writer for three times. The rest of the time you're acting as a critic, talking about other people's work. What happens is that when you write something, the critical mind has been turned on so much that you're saying, "Well, if I write this, Emily is going to say this when I show it to her. When I write this, Bob's going to say this." And then it gets worse when you say, "If I write this, I'm going to say this." My critical mind is so there. Then you won't write at all! In the context of this university that's so critical by nature, you have to find a way to turn that off, and you have to convince the college itself to understand that, and it's very hard for administrators. Colleges go through assessments and association certificates, and they all want to look like they're very serious.

This all goes back to that question: why are you so serious? You guys get leaked on. You feel that. You feel the pressure and the anxiety of your teachers saying, "We want to be a world-class university." Everybody all of a sudden has to be so serious. So, that's why I ask about pranks and playfulness, and that's what's happened when I go to universities. They say, "We don't have time to do that!" And it's connected, of course, to the other problem of rising tuition. We're spending so much money, we can't possibly have fun. In my undergraduate class, I say to all twelve of them, "All of you get As. There is nothing you can do in which you will not get an A. But this is going to be one of the hardest classes you've ever taken. You've been in school now fourteen or fifteen years, and the only thing you've really learned is to come into class and figure out what I want and try to give it to me so that you can get what you want, which is an A. But you've already gotten an A. And here's the hard part: I don't want anything. This is an elective class. You've elected to write. I have thirty some years of experience writing. We have two and a half hours every Monday to think about that, but you have to decide what it is you want to do." People will drop the class because they've never been able to do something that they want to do. They're ill-equipped. They actually can't imagine what they're going to do for two and a half hours. They feel like they're not doing anything. They can't get their minds around it. You're thought of as an empty vessel that the school fills up as opposed

to a full vessel that you are going to express.

EY: Did the idea of gift-giving come to you because you've experienced that in the past?

MM: Part of this thinking about the way I teach is how to encourage the production of art. There was that, but also it did have to do with what I was very adamant about not wanting to do. I was given the ability to give this grant, and the gift is all about things that stay in motion. Where we are now, in the analytical mind, is this: If I go into a hardware store, and I give the guy a dollar, he gives me a light bulb, so we break away clean. The scales are balanced. But on Sunday, I'm going to get on an airplane. I'm going to be sitting next to a stranger, and that stranger turns to me and gives me a stick of gum, and I take it. What's the exchange? I don't have to give him a dollar. Instead, I'll have to talk to him. That's what that is. The stick of gum is worthless. It has no value. What has value is the transaction. And what it starts is the gift staying in motion. It is the movement of the gift. An award may look like a gift, but in fact, the kind of gift I'm talking about is more like a lottery. I want this to be like a lottery. And if it works correctly, you don't take that money and keep it like you would your light bulb. You take that money and you turn it into something that you give back.

Were you guys in the Pizza Hut reading program Book-It? This is why I'm adamantly against awards. The Book-It program was to get kids to read books. So, we think, "Oh, if they read a book, they get a point. If they get five points, they get a certificate to get a pizza from Pizza Hut." Kids actually read less. My son, the one who played with the Power Rangers, loved to read books. He was reading books when he was four. He went into his first grade class, and they were going to do the Book-It program. We said, "We're not sure about this reward or award for work." But they said, "Oh, yeah, it'll be great." All of a sudden, his reading fell off because now reading became a burden to get to the thing that the adults were saying was important, which was pizza. Before, reading was pizza. It was the award. But our award culture makes the assumption, again, that you all are lazy. That

you, in fact, are not interested in writing poems unless we say, "If you write a good poem, we'll give you an A." But the weird thing is that that A will actually cause you not to write poems because you'll be so worried about the right kind of poem to get an A that you won't write it! To me, it never made sense that in literary magazines and university that you had to create in order to get this prize. Because it's more about winning! If you do something, and it's not good enough, then nothing's valuable. You haven't written anything. You just are using this money to help get you to where you already want to go. It's you. You're the one who says, "Look, I need this." It's a need, not a reward for good writing, but a way to support writing.

I assume in my gift that you like to write. I mean, people are writing. I don't want to give the gift only to award something that you're already doing. I want to give the gift to help you do what it is you're already doing and not make a distinction about this writing as opposed to the other writing, that this writing is valuable. I don't know what writing is valuable. I want everybody to be writing. There used to be a magazine called *Assembling*. Back then, we didn't have computers, but we had mimeograph machines. It was a kind of cheap copier. If you wanted to be in the magazine *Assembling*, you ran off a hundred pages of your poem and you sent that to the editor. The editor takes everything and puts all the piles of a hundred poems together, and then walks down the line and puts it together and staples it. They just assembled the magazine. They didn't make any judgments about the writing. Instead, it was my job to put together all this different stuff, and the writer was in charge of reproducing stuff. My job as an editor was just to assemble it. So, you can think of editing as a kind of judgment and hierarchy, or you can think of it as, "How would you throw a party?" If you were throwing a party, you would not say, "Oh, you didn't dress right, you can't come." You want somebody dressed differently to make it sort of, you know, different. You'd want to include everybody, everybody who sort of wanted to join in together, and all of a sudden they're talking to each other. And again, we're at universities, and it's so much about judgment and hierarchy, but in what way is art much more horizontal as opposed to vertical? I had this money

but I just didn't want to do an award, you know?

SC: It's a very unique opportunity for the writers, too.

MM: Yeah, and as many as possible. That's my only sad part: it can't be more money that would generate more money to give to as many people as possible. People would say to me, "Well, what if somebody just takes the money and goes to Shapiro's and eats the sandwich and never writes?" I don't care because I'm in the gift economy. If I give you a sweater because I like you, I want you to be warm, but you use that sweater to chamois your car, because I gave it to you in the way I gave it to you, it's yours now. You can do anything you want with it. I don't feel bad. I won't feel like I'm being ripped off. That's what happens with grades, too. If I give everybody As, people say, "Well, what if this guy doesn't do anything?" I'll say, "So?" I have the ability to give an A. Here's the A. What you do with the A is not my problem if you're really thinking in terms of the gift. So what if there are people who cheat? Remember the gift like that stick of gum? It has no value to me. This money has no value to me. What is valuable is... I get to talk to you. That's the interesting thing. And if some people assume, 'I'm going to use this money to do something for somebody else.' Can you imagine, say, somebody who lives up in Mishawaka but her grandmother lives in Southern Indiana and she hasn't seen the grandmother in a while and she's dying? So, you get a bus ticket down to Madison to visit your dying grandmother, and you don't write anything. I don't care. It's no skin off my back. This is given away, but on the other hand, that person never would've had that experience with the grandmother—being with her while she was dying—and may have been moved to write something. You're all of the age when your grandparents are facing that. All of a sudden, you have to face that, and here's a poem about being with the grandmother when she died, and that resulted from a little gift of a bus ticket to go to Madison. But that's just it. We think that an A has value. The A has no value. The gift of my time, that's two and a half hours I'll spend with you to write. There's the value. But a lot of people can't see that as value anymore.

EY: That doesn't happen much anymore.

MM: No, it happens less and less. I'm a teacher down in Alabama. I get paid pretty well by the university. And my students pay tuition, but culturally, we understand something. When you pay your tuition, you pay somebody, the bursar, who pays somebody, who then pays me because we have to realize that this exchange is not a commodified exchange. Over in Jordan Hall 234, the classroom, if I stood in the doorway and said, "Before I tell you anything today, you need to pay me \$500." Our connection now is broken because I'm like a guy selling you a light bulb. Even though I still know what I know and you don't know what you don't know, you don't trust that anymore. Culturally, we do operate in the gift economy because what that says is, "Oh, Michael, you've gone into this to make money." But, really, I haven't. I don't go into this to make money. I do make money, but that is culturally diverted. That's why it's unfair when people say teachers aren't paid what they're worth. They aren't in it for that. Nurses aren't in it for that. We would not trust teachers or nurses who were only in it for the money. The same thing happens with a preacher. In fact, when we find a preacher who, all he seems to want is money from donations, we don't like the preacher anymore. There are these things that operate in the gift economy, but fewer and fewer of them do, and that's what capitalism sort of does. It wants to make everything in that kind of exchange; that my class is worth \$500.

Samael Atilano

The Happiness of an Object



Soft skin that hooks to his touch
each finger caressing the dead landscape
illuminating wherever they go
bringing to life wherever it passes.

Slowly, decaying whenever it leaves.

“God, you’re so...”

“...you know you want it.”

Yes.

I know.

I do.

Thank you.

Heavy breaths interrupt my response
stench of love penetrates my nose
stains of slobbery lust rest on my neck.
I wonder when it is going to end.

I wish it would never end.

“You’ve got such a nice...”

“...you like that don’t you?”

Yes.
I know.
I do.
Thank you.

Careful that our eyes never meet
our fingers are never to intersect
compliments are meaningless truths
climaxing at the same time.

Did I do good?

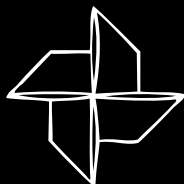
“You were...”

“...need a ride?”

Yes.
I know.
I do.
Thank you.



CONTRIBUTORS



MARY ARDERY

Mary Arderly was born and raised in Bloomington, IN, and is currently a senior at DePauw University. On Wednesday afternoons you can find her volunteering at the local retirement home in Greencastle. On Sundays she explores the county backroads, which never fail to provide artistic inspiration. Mary's poetry and photography have also been published in *A Midwestern Review* and *Eye on the World*.

SAMAEEL ATILANO

Samael Atilano is currently a freshman as a creative writing major. He aspires to make it as a big writer in the world and hopefully doesn't fail his task like he has before. He enjoys long walks on the beach, fried chicken (preferably Popeyes), and sleeping. His inspirations for his writings are people who can't hold their liquor, his family history, the strangers he meets, and those special nights he decides to make bad decisions.

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Eleanor Bennett is an internationally award-winning photographer and visual artist. She is the CIWEM Young Environmental Photographer of The Year 2013 and has also won first places with *National Geographic*, the World Photography Organisation, Nature's Best Photography and the National Trust to name only a few. Her photography has been published in the *Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, *Life Force Magazine*, *British Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and as the front cover of books and magazines extensively throughout the world. Visit her website at: www.eleanorleonnebennett.com.

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Ali Cravens is a senior writing major at Indiana Wesleyan University. She loves poetry, art, music, Jesus, and tree frogs. She has been previously published in *Caesura*, *SCOPE*, and *Red Fez*. She hopes to one day work for *The New Yorker* and travel around the world with a pet parakeet.

ELENA DECOOK

A freshman and writing major at Butler University, Elena spent her childhood penning mostly-plagiarized stories about talking dolls.

More recently, she has spent her time reading these stories, knowing she could write something better now, and then not writing that thing. She is a former ballet dancer, current sorority woman, and permanent feminist. Being raised in small-town Michigan means that this publication will make its rounds through her extended and super-extended family, so hi, guys. “Harbinger” is the product of a creative writing class deadline and some powerful latent morbidity. Her feelings toward it approximate the feelings of an emperor penguin toward its fluffy gray penguin baby.

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Rachel Dupont is twenty-three years old, and she’s been writing stories for as long as she can remember. She is a senior at IUPUI, studying creative writing with a focus on fiction. After she graduates, she has hopes of going on to complete a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing.

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Olivia Emerich is a junior at IUPUI. She is studying English with a focus in creative writing. She is currently finding herself within the theme of coming of age. She loves kitties, sweaters and coffee.

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Christian Hartselle is a freshman studying English, Spanish, and digital media production. Originally from Charleston, SC, he loves writing, reading, singing, meeting new people, and trying new things. He writes for the *Collegian* and is the founder and president of Butler’s chapter of the Thirst Project. He is thankful for the opportunity to interview NoViolet Bulawayo and to be a reader for this magazine.

ZACHARIA HEIDER

Zacharia Heider is a senior theatre major with a minor in English writing. In addition to his work in poetry, he has written and produced dramatic work for the Butler University mainstage and is currently writing a series of children’s stories for his nephew. Zach loves the *Manuscripts* staff and will begrudgingly leave them to graduate in May 2015.

JUSTINA KAISER

Justina Kaiser is a sophomore international business and mathematics major, classical studies minor, crocheter, writer, and reader from Highland, IN. She started writing in elementary school after failing to find any magical wardrobes.

DANIELLE LOVERO

Danielle Lovero is currently a freshman biology student on the research and lab track. Climbing, working out, singing, and sports are little hobbies of hers, but art has always been one of her true passions. Art always stuck out because no matter the time of day, everyone could have a favorite painter/artist. There are so many forms and styles of art that a new favorite will pop up almost every day in any way. "Expressing oneself is always important, and sometimes art is just another way of expressing what cannot be said in words," is an important frame of thought to her because the English language and communication in general is not always the easiest. Science even comes more natural to her.

NICOLE MANGES

Nicole Manges is an English literature and English writing double major at Huntington University. She is a graduate of Greenville Senior High School in Greenville, OH. While in high school, she wrote "Neverland" as part of a class project. "Neverland" is based on the major themes of J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*.

BROOKE MARSHALL

Brooke Marshall currently attends Butler University. Her major is in MIS (Management and Information Systems), with a minor in English literature. She grew up in Brighton, Michigan. Most recently, she is studying abroad in Marseille, France, for the Spring 2015 semester. Her future plans include eating carrots until she likes eating them, learning to drive a stick shift, and writing the next great American novel.

THIERRY MENCHHOFER

"Kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*).

Thierry Menchhofer is a junior at IUPUI studying creative writing with a concentration in poetry. She is also looking forward to graduate school where she will be working towards earning a Teaching Writing Certificate. To avoid pointless sentimental things, she writes to tell the truth, not to make things seem more beautiful or important than what they are. This process includes thinking back to situations she was in, and

analyzing what really happened: which then allows her to determine who she is able to trust, and who or what she will miss the most.

CAMILLE MILLIER

Camille Millier is a junior at Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis studying creative writing and film studies, and hopes to continue her writing career after college. She is also working on a Steam-punk graphic novel and prefers to write about events that would most likely occur under a full moon.

DAVID PERRY

David Perry was born and raised in Indianapolis. He grew up in very tight financial circumstances, moving many times all over central Indiana, with a few stints in Florida. His teenage years were spent primarily in Avon, where he graduated high school. He has been drawing since the age of five, and has taken a serious interest in concept illustration, cartooning, animation, and creative writing. He is also an avid karaoke singer. Several years after high school, he attended Butler University for two years, where he discovered his interest in writing. From there, he transferred to IUPUI to pursue his interest in animation and writing. He has been a member of IUPUI's orientation organization (OTeam), awarded a scholarship for writing, and accepted into the National Student Exchange Program, where he will be studying animation and creative writing at California State University-Northridge.

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Bekah Pollard is a junior art + design major, creative writing, and gender, women, and sexuality studies minors. She has previously published artwork in *Manuscripts*, but this is her first time publishing poetry in the magazine. This is also Bekah's first year on staff. Yippie!

MADDI RASOR

Maddi Rasor is a sophomore creative and professional writing major at Butler University. She is from Columbus, Ohio, and loves rock music, video games, and a good story. She also has two brothers, neither of whom are Fletcher.

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Ross Reagan is a junior at IUPUI studying English with a concentration in creative writing. Along with his yearning to find humility and humor in his everyday life, he adamantly collects classic movies and considers himself to be an "old soul" in every respect.

ALI SCHANBACHER

Ali Schanbacher is currently a senior at the University of Saint Francis where she is studying English and history. Since the age of nine, she has wanted to be an author and has not stopped writing since.

CHLOE SELL

Chloe Sell is a sophomore creative writing major at Butler University, with a special interest in poetry and blogging. Her poetry centers around such themes as nourishment, isolation, sexuality, race and spirituality. She is an avid feminist. She is from Fishers, IN, where she lives with her mother, brother, and beloved epileptic dog Gus. In fact, Gus and Chloe are epileptic twins that separated at birth and found each other years later.

WESLEY SEXTON

Wesley Sexton is a music and creative writing double major at Butler University, currently in his third year of study. His plans for the future are uncertain, but riding bikes, jumping on trampolines, and peeling oranges are currently some of his favorite things to do.

RICHARD SHI

Richard Shi found photography as a young teen with teenage woe and drama. What started as a hobby to “get away from it all” has now become an ever-changing canvas for expressing ideas, moods, and philosophies. For him, it’s a winding path—to follow or stray from, with danger or safety, in rain or sun. Currently a freshman at Purdue University, Richard intends to major in chemical engineering. He’s obsessed with logic, Sherlock Holmes, hard problems, and being challenged. However, he’s not completely rooted in the ground, being fond of Final Fantasy, Pokemon, Kingdom Hearts, and what he deems one of the best shows ever, Top Gear. Richard also has a fondness for what some people call “old man’s games,” particularly the ancient game of go. He’s ambitious, and hopes he isn’t rubbish. He also gives kudos to everyone who gets the reference.

A.D. SHUFFLEBARGER

A.D. Shufflebarger is an English creative writing major at IUPUI and an AmeriCorps VISTA at the Marion County Commission on Youth. She has a mild obsession with Robert Lowell and a severe obsession with Uni-ball Vision Elite Bold pens. In her spare time, A.D. likes to frolic in the great outdoors with her Super Mutt puppy, Luna Lovegood.

ELIZABETH TERRELL

Elizabeth Terrell is currently an undergrad at Butler University

studying creative writing. Having been a writer of fan-fiction since middle school, she is excited for her first published piece to be in the *Manuscripts* magazine. She is from North Carolina and most of her creative thoughts come about after she drinks a glass of sweet tea.

EARL TOWNSEND

Born on September 8, 1994, in Indianapolis, Earl Townsend's favorite foods are uni and St. Louis butter cake. His favorite poet is Arthur Rimbaud. His favorite musicians are Scott Walker and Bob Dylan. His favorite exercise is the clam dig with rotation. His favorite playwright is Shakespeare. His favorite essay is "The Myth of Sisyphus." His favorite clothing is no clothing at all. His main activity is songwriting.

CHELSEA YEDINAK

Chelsea Yedinak is an English literature and German major who spends her free time reading, writing, and watching Netflix with her friends. She plans to study abroad in Germany in spring 2016 and hopes to work in publishing after graduating from Butler. Chelsea is grateful to be a part of *Manuscripts* and excited to continue working on the literary magazine in the fall.