



Apogee

volume 58

APOGEE

VOLUME 58

2019-2020

FRANKLIN
COLLEGE 

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: SAM COLLIER
MANAGING EDITOR: MACKENZIE STEAGALL
SUBMITTABLE MANAGER AND COPY EDITOR: CAMRYN
PHELPS
CONTENT CREATION AND COPY EDITOR: ALLIE JONES
LAYOUT AND DESIGN EDITOR: KARA SIMON
BRANDING AND PR COORDINATOR: SOPHIA REYNOLDS
CAMPUS OUTREACH COORDINATOR: ALEX TURNER
DEVELOPMENT EDITORS: ASHTON HOERNER AND KAYCEE
CUMMINGS
EVENTS COORDINATOR: ISAAC GLEITZ
WEBSITE COORDINATOR: SAMANTHA FAIN
SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR: KITLEY KERN
PHOTOGRAPHY COORDINATOR: CASSIE HOFMANN
FACULTY ADVISOR: DR. CALLISTA BUCHEN

Apogee is an annual publication of the Department of English at Franklin College. Submissions are garnered anonymously through the journal's Submittable page; the staff selects the work for the publication without knowing the identity of the author or the artist.

The staff would like to thank the faculty of the Franklin College department of English and Creative Writing, as well as Christine Morris.
Another special thanks to Kayla Commons for the cover design.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF



It may be uncommon knowledge but the term ‘apogee’ means ‘height’ or ‘culmination’, a fact that has driven this edition like never before. This edition of our journal experienced new challenges as nation-wide closures sent our beloved grizzlies home for the remainder of the semester. Yet we never stopped. Our committed staff took this opportunity to go digital, creating a never-before-seen website along with an even stronger social media presence. As a result, we were able to build community in new ways by connecting to our readers via Twitter, Instagram, Zoom, and even YouTube. Through adversity, Apogee has pushed to newer heights.

With the bizarre ending to the 2020 semester, an important value emerges: the importance of art. The shelter-in-place order has left many feeling isolated and disoriented. To combat these feelings, we find ourselves turning to art, whether that means reading, writing, or looking at art. As the creative hub on campus, our goal is to promote art in all its forms and encourage every major to share with us their artistic sides. We hope our efforts within Apogee will continue to inspire others to share their work, especially in this historical time we find ourselves.

For this year’s edition of Apogee, we are thrilled to share with you artforms ranging from nonfiction to ceramics, and authors from outside the Fine Arts Major. We are truly amazed at how far the journal has adapted and transformed since beginning in the 1960’s. Originally, Apogee began as a way to introduce students to professional experience but has since extended beyond this purpose and into a greater one: a program dedicated to discovering and celebrating the creative minds at Franklin College.

As we end the 2020 Spring Semester, I want to thank you, all of you, for continuing to support the publication of our literary journal. Ultimately, Apogee would be nothing without our dedicated staff and inspired contributors.

Stay creative.
Samantha Collier
Editor-in-Chief

CONTENTS



- 8 **BIRDTALK**
SAMANTHA FAIN
- 9 **A BRIEF PAUSE**
CAMRYN PHELPS
- 11 **SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT**
REBECCA MCKINLEY
- 16 **FOR A MAN I'VE LOVED TO DUST**
SAMANTHA HARRISON
- 17 **STROLLING ATOP THE SEAS REMAINS**
SAM COLLIER
- 18 **THE WOMAN FROM CALYPSO'S DINER**
ALEXANDER TURNER
- 21 **THE TELEMARKETER IS LONELY**
SAMANTHA FAIN
- 22 **SUMMER SLUMBER**
SAM COLLIER
- 24 **WOKE**
ISAAC GLEITZ
- 26 **SELF PORTRAIT AS A VENUS FLYTRAP**
SAMANTHA FAIN
- 27 **I CANNOT EXPLAIN MY FEARS**
MACKENZIE STEAGALL
- 28 **ON DOING LAUNDRY IN FRANCE**
SAMANTHA FAIN
- 29 **STICKY**
CAMRYN PHELPS
- 33 **THE TEAPOT AND ROSE****
BEVERLY STAUFFER
- 34 **GRAPHITE DRAWING**
HAVEN TUNIN
- 35 **MARY THE RABBIT**
GREG POTTER
- 36 **COUNTRY HERITAGE WINE TRIO**
AVERY SPARKS

CONTENTS

- 37 **LAVA**
HAVEN TUNIN
- 38 **GODDESS OPOSSUM**
GREG POTTER
- 39 **MUTED NEON**
TARA SANDERS
- 40 **MAN 'O WARS IN BERMUDA ****
AVERY SPARKS
- 41 **WHERE IT'S GOING WHAT IT'S DOING**
HAVEN TUNIN
- 42 **SCOTTISH BADGER**
GREG POTTER
- 43 **INTO THE WOODS I GO**
EMMA CLARK
- 44 **SHE SEES THE WORLD IN BLACK AND WHITE**
LACEY SIDEREWICZ
- 45 **KITCHEN**
HAVEN TUNIN
- 46 **TREE REFLECTIONS**
JADE HARRIS
- 47 **GATO LIBRE AND THE BONE DIGGER**
GREG POTTER
- 48 **COAST**
ISAAC GLETZ
- 49 **HOLE PUNCH**
AVERY SPARKS
- 50 **CANDLES ****
HAVEN TUNIN
- 51 **THE UNFORTUNATE CONSUMPTION OF
BARBARA KNOLL**
CAMRYN PHELPS
- 63 **THE DAY AFTER THE RAIN**
SAMANTHA HARRISON
- 64 **MIRROR**
MACKENZIE STEAGALL

CONTENTS

- 65 **HANGER**
SAM COLLIER
- 66 **WHAT MAKES A WOMAN?**
REBECCA MCKINLEY
- 68 **MISERABLE WITH YOU**
MACKENZIE STEAGALL
- 72 **LEAF**
ISAAC GLEITZ
- 76 **GOOSEBERRY ****
SAMANTHA HARRISON
- 78 **WINTER 2005**
SAM COLLIER
- 79 **[SHOPPE]**
CAMRYN PHELPS
- 80 **AUSTERE FURNISHINGS**
SAM COLLIER
- 85 **FOURCH MALINE BRIDGE**
ALEXANDER TURNER
- 87 **ODE TO SHOPPING FOR PEACHES WHILE I
AM BROKE ****
SAMANTHA HARRISON
- 89 **STEWART'S QUICK MART**
MACKENZIE STEAGALL
- 94 **GEORGE STAYS IN THE PICTURE**
ALEXANDER TURNER
- 100 **IN MY HOME**
ASHTON HOERNER
- 103 **VICIOUS**
SAMANTHA FAIN
- 104 **SYNESTHESIA**
CAMRYN PHELPS

(**) indicates that the selection was awarded a prize of distinction

BIRDTALK

Samantha Fain

I want to ask them / how did you learn grace / do you nest in it / do you ever
want to be bigger / like a tall tree / a large hawk / did you learn your defenses
/ how come / can you teach me / can I fight back / how long can I chase
caterpillars / how long can I live alone / without shelter / with only beetles in
my mouth / are you tired / are you lonely / how come / did your mother leave
you too / once you fell and lost her smell / do you die too / once you're touched

A BRIEF PAUSE

Camryn Phelps

My mother's mouth is parted just enough to reveal the tip of her pink tongue moving nervously over her lower lip. She pushes a bit of her frizzy hair behind her ear impatiently, and I notice her tapping her fingers over her thigh. But why is she impatient? I'm the one who's spoken already; I'm the one who's waiting. My lips are drying, but I avoid licking them. I avoid mimicry.

I've just told her I love her, and I fear this pause. Anxious anticipation gathers in my chest like the chance after jumping from a plane that I haven't got a parachute, and the ground is rising to meet me. It's the terror of a child creeping down the basement stairs, trying not to wake the whatever that waits for them in the dark space they reach through before finding the dusty light switch. It's the dread of an adult woman who, in this moment, feels more like a child than she did at age seven when the metal bulk of a can opener collided with the back of her head, and she fell. And her mother laughed.

Maybe if it had cracked my skull open a bit wider, my brain could breathe a bit more today.

I think my mother notices how stress seeps from my body in waves because she looks even farther away and sighs a long sigh. I don't know how I can tell it's long, but her hair blows out from her face and lands awkwardly over her nose. She doesn't move it away again. I wonder how she can stand the tickle.

There is a whatever in a dark corner of my brain, and it woke when I walked into this coffee shop this morning and saw her. It laughed at me and told me to run, but I didn't. I stepped closer. I sat down. I said, Mom. Mom, I love you. Come back.

I can see the way her eyes still avoid mine now, and the sweat on my palms glistens. I feel it glisten. I want to hold her hand. Maybe to comfort her. Maybe to erase the symptoms of being trapped. I glance down to my wrist for the time. I have never worn a watch in my life.

Maybe she answered me. Did I not hear her? Have I gone deaf? I inhale deeply and feel the da-dump of my heart. I smell coffee and cinnamon, hear

the murmur of voices somewhere. My senses are working just fine, and yet...

I've never been the best judge of distance or time. I couldn't dodge the can opener. I can't see that she is no longer sitting in front of me. I can't hear her sigh, but I hear my own lungs working, wheezing. It is my own fingers tapping on my own thigh frantically.

She did not hear me. She never heard me.

How long has she been gone?

I remember gray in her hair.

And how it tickled.

SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT

Becca McKinley

The silent halls belong at a funeral, not the “Welcome Home” party that we have been planning for a week.

The Artemis missions are routine, run at least a dozen times a year without error— nothing more than maintenance and supply runs for the crew on the Moon. Two astronauts are sent to the Moon in a disposable ship to drop off supplies and assist the Lunar Crew in any way that they can. The astronauts return to Earth in the safety of the re-entry capsule, and everything is normal.

But Artemis 76 did not follow the routine.

Inside the hangar, where the re-entry capsule is supposed to be, sits the cargo hold of the ship. This belongs in space. It was only supposed to come with the two astronauts until they were sure they could enter Earth’s atmosphere with no problems, then it would be ejected back into space. It was not built to bring two people back to Earth. It was built to be closed off, sent into space, and never opened again.

“Silas, thank you for taking your sweet time in an emergency,” Luther tells me as I stare at the cargo hold like I expect it to explode. “You have two minutes to get to the Control Room. Put on your suit if you think you have time. If not...let’s just hope you don’t start glowing from the radiation.”

I don’t put on my suit. Instead, I stare at the box that contains Edith, whose state of life remains unknown to me. A gray metal box in an empty gray room the size of two football fields. Sterile equipment for repairing the ship sits at each of our stations, alongside the radiation suits. I ease myself onto the stool at my station to gather my thoughts. My Edith is in that box, and I have to figure out how to retrieve her. Whatever happened, it wasn’t her fault. She’s too smart for that.

The picture on my desk of her holding her doctorate is enough proof for me. Honey-colored hair contrasting against her black robes, my arms holding her waist, and her lips turned back to give me a kiss. Neither of us has been at this for long; I joined on Artemis 70, she on Artemis 72. As new as I am, it’s

still my responsibility to get Edith out.

I push past crews inspecting the box, ignore their warnings, put my hand against the metal, and let the lifeless cold flood my veins. I don't give a damn about radiation. I won't survive anyway if I can't touch Edith again.

My phone buzzes with a message from Luther that tells me to get to the Control Room. I let the icy space seep into my soul, trying to feel what Edith felt, before I walk across the hall to what will certainly be my doom. Everyone, other than Luther and I, has their suits on. Luther's calm composure puzzles me because he has someone in that box too, and I am anything but calm in this moment.

"We have approximately half an hour before they run out of oxygen," Luther begins. "Not a lot of time, but enough time to work. As we are all aware, the capsule from Artemis 76 did not land on Earth. The cargo hold landed in its place, and we believe it contains both Pearl Odom and Edith Weber, the crew members who were supposed to return in the capsule."

"What went wrong?" I ask out of turn. My hands tremble in the pockets of my sweatpants. I was supposed to come here in a suit, much later tonight. It always makes Edith smile when I wear suits. What I wouldn't give to see that smile again.

Luther sighs, deep and heavy, moving his entire body. "We don't know. We probably won't know unless we get both women out safe and sound. And to answer your next question, Dr. Weber," he winces on the word 'doctor' like it pains him to say it, "there are many reasons why we can't get them out just yet. The cargo hold is sealed off from both the outside and inside, practically impenetrable in order to prevent the pollution of space with mission supplies. The cargo hold also has no pressure stabilization system without either the capsule or the main flight deck to control it. Which means if we cut into it, they could implode."

My thoughts go silent except for the ringing in my ears from the sound of those words strung together like that. An implosion in my eardrum.

"Can we not communicate with them?" I ask.

Luther shakes his head and pinches the bridge of his nose between two pallid fingers. The color of death creeps into my own hands as well, almost like it's my life that might be over instead of Edith's. "Again, without the capsule or the main flight deck, there are almost no controls for anything

within the cargo hold. You would know this if you had shown up earlier.”

I don’t point out that he made sure I was the last person he called.

People take out notepads, tablets, computers— anything they can develop a plan on. Luther turns to the board, writing the word IDEAS in bold capital letters on the board. But I ask another question out of turn.

“And we don’t know if they’re alive or dead?”

Luther turns to me and holds my gaze for a moment. The coward fixates his gaze on the floor. “No, we don’t.”

“Then what’s stopping us from taking drastic measures if we only have half an hour?”

Luther shakes his head and ignores my stare. “We have a reputation to uphold, Dr. Weber. If we let the news of a failed mission with two fatalities get out, then we will lose our funding. Now, would you refrain from asking anymore pointless questions?”

I nod, and I exit the Control Room. No one stops me. The just-graduated husband of a rookie astronaut is not valued at these meetings. But that just gives me more time to save Edith. I take the stool from my station and move it beside the box so that when I lean back, my head touches the metal. Edith is both dead and alive to me in this moment, and even if the worst comes to pass...it will all work out if I can just hold her again.

I imagine the family I wanted to have, the family I was going to suggest we try to start tonight. Two children, with her honey hair and none of my mud brown going prematurely gray. She would tell me that my hair is the color of the Moon, and I would laugh at the thought that I’m getting old enough to go gray. The children would get the gap in their smiles from me and their dimples from her. And I would hold Edith and tell her how I will never stop loving her.

Because, if anything goes wrong, then I will never hold Edith again.

“Why don’t we just cut into the box?” All heads turn to me. “I mean, won’t they run out of oxygen anyway? Worst case scenario, either way, they’re dead. But if there is even a tiny chance that they survive because we tried something irrational as a last-ditch effort, then I’m willing to try it. We don’t know whether they’re alive or dead in there right now. They might as well be both for all that it matters! I just know we need to try something, or they will definitely be dead! And I can’t live with myself if I know I did nothing.”

Luther's eyes connect with mine. "It's too dangerous, Silas."

"If we do nothing, then we will kill them. At least we're trying by doing this." I put my hand on his shoulder, both of us still the color of ghosts. "I know you love Pearl. And I love Edith. But this is a risk we have to take. There are no other options."

He shakes his head. "You don't understand. We have to make sacrifices in this line of work, and this is one of them."

I march up to him and stand less than an inch from his face. "Evacuate the building. Cut into the ship and make a sacrifice for love instead."

"Silas, stop. It's pointless."

"No. Doing nothing is pointless. Doing something is the only chance we have to make sure there are no fatalities."

Luther looks to the other engineers. "Evacuate. I will stay here with Dr. Weber while he cuts into the cargo hold."

Luther would rather sacrifice me than any of his lead engineers if the worst occurs. So, I wheel over the torch, put on my visor, and wait for the all clear before I begin. The only goal is to supply the hold with oxygen, so it's a small hole, barely big enough for a human to crawl through.

"I love you, Edith."

I reach the end of the hole. My brain ceases to function as I prepare to punch out the circle I've cut in the metal.

3...

I love you.

2...

I'm sorry.

1...

Goodbye.

CLANG.

There's no implosion. No moment where either my life or Edith's comes to an end. Just the sound of metal hitting metal. I don't hesitate to look through the hole, but I choke on my breath when I see what appears to be two corpses.

The molten metal doesn't concern me; I crawl through with the minimum amount of caution to make sure I survive. When I see the gentle rise of her chest, I know something is right while something else is entirely wrong.

My Edith.

Either alive, dead, or somewhere in between.

I pick up her body and cradle it close to mine. She's unconscious and barely breathing. Tomorrow, she may not be alive, and she may not be dead. But I'm holding her, and I will tell her goodbye or hello or whatever else needs to be said. Because our universe will survive her extinction.

FOR A MAN I'VE LOVED TO DUST

Samantha Harrison

everything is ashes to ashes. everything is
alright if it can be swept up into a dustpan.

here's the truth—I loved him with my hands around his neck.
I squashed his throat between my thumbs because I could.

he told me I was a sun. he told me that a sun
is only meant to touch people from afar.

I felt more like god. I felt like I could lay waste
to cities and men. he stood like Sodom, Gomorrah,

under my divinity. so I laid him to waste and put him to bed.
here's the truth— I love when people try to pray to me.

he told me he could never give me what I needed. he told me
that he was already bruised from worshipping me. already starting

to fall apart. so here's the truth—I forgot my fury. he crumbled under me.
suddenly just an echo. suddenly just dust suspended in a beam of light.

STROLLING ATOP THE SEA'S REMAINS

Sam Collier

Sea shells line the beach, faded pinks and purples,
Sometimes flashing silver, like fish scales in shoals.
Each curling wave, a push and tug towards land,
While swirling sand buries the sea's remains,
Vestiges of darker depths, covered in golden grains.
Most shells reduced to bits, others marred by barnacles.
To find one whole, unblemished, untouched,
Is one that's unused, perhaps too new to this world—
No chance to be smashed by tumulus waves,
Or crushed, perchance, beneath careless feet.
Yet one rose murex reposes, untouched
As waves surge and spume, collecting sand
And bits around the shell inch by inch until
Only a flake peeks through, but the next passing
Wave buries and hides its flawless remains.

THE WOMAN FROM CALYPSO'S DINER

Alexander Turner

The people of Odessa, Texas found Rhonda the Waitress amongst the rubble of the recently demolished Jack Rabbit Casino. Crowds gathered and began to ask, ask, ask all their special questions to Rhonda. Rhonda said no, no, no. They wanted to know how the 72-year old waitress had gotten inside the building before it was demolished. And how, in fact, she had survived.

The people had been standing there when the casino was demolished, and they wept at the loss of blackjack by wiping their eyes with their rusted tokens. The people of Odessa, Texas jingled for months after that, carrying around the now useless tokens. They were still dying to know, however, just how Rhonda the Waitress had found her way in before the explosion.

And why, exactly, she refused to leave her spot in the rubble.

Rhonda the Waitress remained in the same spot of the rubble for two whole weeks. During that time, she tried to tell the people exactly what happened. She told them that she had just taken an order for some biscuits and gravy at the local diner when, suddenly, she found herself in the building just moments before the blast.

The townspeople were fascinated by her, and some felt as though she may be symbolic of something much larger at play. The townspeople first began to gather on the second day that Rhonda sat there. No matter what happened they made sure not to take their eyes off of her in any case.

Rhonda the Waitress, at first, liked the attention that she had attracted. Her husband had died nearly ten years ago from a pulmonary embolism. Since then, she was rarely seen outside of work. Now, with her newfound attention, Rhonda the Waitress decided to amuse herself. She began to sensationalize the account of the incident to the crowds, and so they came back day after day, and every day she changed a few details. Sometimes she heard noises before she ended up at the casino, and other times she was sucked up into a beam of light.

Rhonda the Storyteller didn't know what had brought her here, and so by the end of the first week, she had begun to lose her mind. Yet, the townspeople still hung on to her every word. Then the orphans came and began to throw themselves upon the rubble still surrounding Rhonda, which they had deemed an altar. They called her a blessing, and she had tried to ask them their names, but they said that it didn't matter who they were as long as they were. Whether it was the fact she had barely had any food or the fact she had been sitting still for so long—Rhonda began to forget who exactly she was. Her story started to come out in fragments, and the townspeople were concerned but not concerned enough to seek help.

Rhonda never slept and would often just stare, her sunken dark eyelids contrasting with the signature pink blush of her cheeks. Rhonda told the people, in one of her final coherent sentences, that she just wanted to get the hell out of Odessa.

They nodded in silence, and the townspeople all began to hold hands. They began to weep and cry, cry, cry.

They begged Rhonda not to leave, but Rhonda could not have if she wanted to.

She wasn't sure how she was still alive at this point, but thoughts like those subsided with her onset delirium. The townspeople still came during the second week and listened to Rhonda's sentences, which had become a combination of bible verses and diner slang.

Rhonda, from that point on until the end of those two weeks, continued to babble.

“Praise the lord...two dots and a dash.”

“Noah's ark...put wheels on it...sunny side up.”

“King Solomon...wreck 'em.”

The religious folks in the town were glad to see she still knew some of the bible, and the other folks were so hungry from all of the diner slang they began to eat their meals in front of her.

“Adam and Eve...dogs and maggots!” she said on her next to last day.

She began to foam at the mouth—perhaps a sign of infection. She continued to talk, sounding as if she was underwater, as the foam came out.

The townspeople had become enchanted with her. Everyone that had seen the foam thought that she would be dead within hours. Eventually the

townspeople dispersed at around eight o' clock on that final night, leaving her alone again.

Only a few people returned the following morning to the site to pick up their stadium-style lawn chairs which they had used to observe her. Eventually, the sanitation crews came in and asked the woman to leave, but she didn't answer them. Her hands were as black as the coffee she once served.

And then, the woman, who hadn't spoken for days, said her final sentence:

“Jehovah...Jamoka...Jehovah...Jamoka.”

When the people heard of the woman's death, they returned to the site.

The nameless mayor of Odessa came and held a week-long press conference—and for that whole week no one left the area.

“Jehovah...Jamoka...Jehovah...Jamoka,” wept the townspeople.

THE TELEMARKETER IS LONELY

Samantha Fain

The telemarketer is lonely. He waits for someone—anyone—to answer. He lingers on the line, everwaiting. Might as well be an astronaut. Might as well be tethered to Earth by a single string.

He describes isolation as soaking underwater: immersed but never touching.

He traces little moons on his desk in potato chip dust, imagining what it is like to have something revolve around him. He talks to the granola bar resting by his keyboard, reintroducing himself every day at lunchtime. He knows that food cannot speak.

The community microwave is dirty. He does not even own the mess. He cleans the spaghetti stains, the crusty noodles caked on glass, his arms scrubbing surfaces like they are his body. Might as well wash it all away.

Even on his ears, his headset feels cold.

In his backyard, he skips stones on grass and watches them land softly, never skipping. Of course they don't skip. He knows this. He knows the gravity of loneliness is heavy. He fills the house with sound—music, television, cries.

He tires of himself, too.

He can't reach the ceiling without standing on his bed. He sticks glow-in-the-dark stars above his head and miscounts them as he lies between his sheets. Eight or nine. They lose their shine quickly, within days. He wakes with a meteor on his forehead.

He is bruised. Sometimes he makes himself fall just to see if anyone will catch him. Sometimes he sits in his bathtub and lathers his scalp until it turns red. Sometimes he writes letters to no one in particular asking when he will swell into something that matters. He burns them at his one-man bonfire.

They keep him warm for an hour.

SUMMER SLUMBER

Sam Collier

Somewhere along an old gravel road stood a grass-stained farm house whose neighbors consisted of a cornfield, an abandoned hayfield, and a patch of woods. A brother and sister crouched in the shade beneath the walnut tree that divided their land from the hayfield.

“Is he sleeping?” the sister asked.

The brother gently poked the soft fur with the end of a stick. The squirrel didn’t move. Dead, he thought, but the brother would not admit this to her. He carefully set the stick down and motioned for his sister to follow him back to the house.

“He’s awfully tired, best let him rest,” he said, taking her hand. Her eyes remained fixated on the motionless squirrel, waiting to see if it jumped or scurried back up the tree.

“How long will he be asleep?” Her round eyes lifted up to his.

“In this heat? Probably all day. Wouldn’t you?” She considered this but shook her head.

“He can nap—not me.” The brother smiled, tussling her hair.

“Come on,” he said, “I’ll race you inside.”

Her giggles traversed the soft lawn as she ran after him. But before reaching the house, he slowed, feigning exhaustion as he crawled onto his hands and knees and collapsed before the door.

“Ah, you beat me!” He reached lazily for her foot, but she swung the screen door open, knocking his head. “Ouch you little-” he yelped, chasing her into the house.

“Hey, hey! No running in the house.” Their mother held her glass of sweet tea out of harm’s way. “And take your shoes off!”

They ignored her shouts as they raced through the back of the house. The sister cut into the stair hall, where she dashed up the winding staircase. He followed, taking the steps two at a time until she was within arm’s reach. He plucked her from the final step, eliciting screams of exhilaration as he wrestled and tickled her to the ground.

“Look who’s laughing now! Hit my head— that means tickle torture!”

She cackled, a mix between hysteria and desperation as she squirmed and kicked in attempt to break free. Suddenly she threw her head back— THUD—knocking it harshly against the wooden floor. Immediately, her body went limp beneath his hands. “Sis? Sissy.” He gently shook her chest, but her eyes would not open. A knot coiled in his stomach, slippery and heavy like the dark question that crept to the forefront of his mind. He tried once more with shaking hands, but still, her eyes would not open.

Picking her up, he carried her into the bedroom and laid her small body across the twin-sized bed. He covered her with a blanket, moving mechanically as he tucked her in. Walking downstairs, his mom sat reclined in the sofa with a magazine and a sweating glass of sweet tea.

“Where’s your sister?” She asked, looking up from the article.

He walked towards the screen door. “Taking a nap.”

WOKE

Isaac Gleitz

“Sleep is for the weak.” That’s what Alfred insists, day after day. He is too tired to come up with any legitimate justification for perpetual sentience.

He craves sleep like a virgin chimpanzee craves a mate, like a venus fly trap craves a fool. He wants nothing more than to just collapse in repose, but alas, he can’t.

He claims sleeplessness is proof of his strength, but the truth is impossible. He has forgotten how to sleep.

How do I know this? I study him. As a mother, I am compelled to ponder what goes on in his head. I feel the urge to draw hasty conclusions. Sometimes, I surprise him with my knowledge, but most of the time, I conceal my suspicions.

My son, Alfred P. Aldain, has become a stranger to night—to the zzzzzzz, the soothing insect sounds, the monotonous clicking of the climate control jolting on and off throughout the dark duration. None of these melodies are doing him any favors. Who knows what he did to piss them off?

I’ve heard him at night. Shit, how could I not?

I mean he’s not yelling, but talking is enough—it’s too much, actually. He speaks confidently. He never goes a night without shooting the breeze about something. Sometimes, he talks about his job at the license branch. Other times, he talks about a funny quip someone shot at him earlier in the day. But sometimes, (I shudder) he talks about his problem or as he calls it, his “fight.”

I suppose he just lies there and talks about his fight with the night. He seems to think he can talk his way out of it. It has never worked; he’s been wide awake for three years.

One day, when he was 17, he arrived at the breakfast table with a frown and a sigh. He slouched onto a stool and said, “I didn’t sleep last night—at all.”

“That’s odd,” I said. “I guess that means you’ll sleep like a baby tonight.”

I laughed. I didn't know how unfortunate my reaction had been.

After a week without sleep, I took him to the doctor. All that Dr. Drudley had to say was that there seemed to be nothing wrong with him. That visit was a joke.

I tried to cure him at home. I tried random things: pills, darts, yoga, etc. I made him watch an entire dog show on the telly. His brain flexed its obstinacy. That was when I surmised that he would never saunter with slumber again.

Today, he is a tourist attraction. People come from all around to see the sleepless man. He gladly takes their money, yet material gains only provide him with temporary satisfaction. I know he would trade any amount of money for a precious collapse of consciousness. I can see the resentment in his eyes when he's watching a movie with someone or at a bar late at night, and someone yawns, "Welp, I suppose I'm off to bed." He looks like a dog from an ASPCA commercial.

While others are going off to bed, he's reentering introspection.

SELF-PORTRAIT AS A VENUS FLY TRAP

Samantha Fain

Step closer to me. You don't need
to live on the fringes.
We can dance near my triggers.
Don't worry. My mouth unhinges
only when it has to.

Let me make it easier.
Let me call you baby.

I can promise you poetry,
playtoys. I'll let you braid my hair.

The difference between prayer
and prey is the stomach,
who eats who.

Touch me. I dare you.

Can you feel it? I'm building myself
up as we speak. Closer,
so I can smell your heartbeat.

Keep crawling.
I'm hungry, darling.
I bet you taste so sweet.
The beetles ghosted,
the spiders left,

and baby, you look peaty.

I CANNOT EXPLAIN MY FEARS

Mackenzie Steagall

Fear of dirty pillowcases, fear of amoebas, and fear of eating hairs. Fear of getting fleas, specifically from my dog who doesn't have fleas. Fear of touching; fear of not touching. Fear of not being able to move, fear of small places, and fear of closed things, too. Fear that I will get into a car accident and the last song I hear playing on the radio will be stuck in my head forever, like an annoying one, like "Who Let the Dogs Out." Fear of knowing; fear of not knowing. Fear of becoming overweight and not realizing, which is why sister and I made a pact to let each other know if we lose control of our weight, but I fear she won't tell me because she'll think it's funny. Fear of things that are wet, slimy, or bumpy. Fear of acting out my dreams although I've never made it farther than walking out my bedroom door. Fear of remembering; fear of forgetting. Fear of accidentally changing someone's life, for better or worse. Fear of Venus Fly Traps, personal baldness, pencils without erasers, and teeth cavities. Fear of saying something I shouldn't, fear of not saying something when I should, fear of pronouncing a word wrong out loud. Fear of getting a pet and not being able to love it enough; fear of love. Fear of passing out at an inappropriate time compared to an appropriate time. I passed out at my grandma's doctor's appointment once; they took her off the table and put me on the table. Fear of undiagnosed medical issues, unidentified growths, and the silent-but-deadly. Fear of not being in control.

ON DOING LAUNDRY IN FRANCE

Samantha Fain

I am scared to wash my laundry because
someone could steal it and I could not decide
which tram to use to track them down
or there could be instructions to read but
I could not know how or the shop could close
in the middle of my cycle or the thumping
could wake the neighbors again and again
or the machines could be too foreign
to comprehend and my shirts could
shrink and the dryer could shriek
if I press the wrong button
or the washer could lock
and never open leaving
me naked and sad
but not as sad as
a sock without its
match because
there is nothing
sadder than a
sock without
its match

STICKY

Camryn Phelps

On the day Laura's parents were killed, Laura ate a peanut butter and banana sandwich for lunch.

It was her favorite kind of sandwich, and even though Sarah, her best friend in the whole world, always told her it was gross and would give her gas, she didn't care. Sitting at the round cafeteria table, she plopped her pink plastic lunch box down in front of her. The beautifully drawn cocker spaniel on the front greeted her with its large eyes and lolling tongue before Laura popped open the box. Laura removed the sandwich from its clear Ziploc bag and took a large bite, closing her eyes to savor it.

On the day Laura's parents were killed, Sarah was trying to tell her about the new kitten her parents had gotten her for her birthday, but Laura didn't hear a word. Far too soon, she was chewing the last bite. It stuck to the roof of her mouth and glued it shut so she couldn't protest when Mrs. Cheryl, a kind kindergarten teacher with frizzy hair, pulled her from the cafeteria before Laura could wash down her food with tropical punch. As she was led through the heavy doors into the hall, Laura saw Sarah snatch her drink.

Sitting in the principal's office, Laura felt her stomach churn and the banana chunks threatened to rise up if she was left to wonder what she had done wrong much longer. She had only been to the principal's office once before for chucking a bedazzled notebook at a boy who mocked her for liking its sparkly rainbow cover. Maybe Sarah had tattled about her outburst at lunch last week. She had thrown a good portion of her salad at Sarah after she announced that she was going to Disneyland for spring break, and that she was inviting the boy she liked to come with her instead of inviting Laura like she had promised she would a bajillion times. So, in a sudden burst of five-year-old rage, Laura had taken a fistful of ranch-soaked lettuce and tossed it into Sarah's surprised face, exclaiming, "Booya!"

When Mrs. Cheryl reentered the office with Principal Jake, Laura was trying to get the remaining peanut butter clinging to the inside of her cheeks to go down, and when Principal Jake gently informed Laura of her parents'

accident, she didn't quite hear because a piece of bread was stuck behind one of her teeth, and she almost had it out when Mrs. Cheryl crouched down in front of her and told her she must be in shock after hearing such devastating news.

Laura triumphantly swallowed the pesky bit of bread and finally looked at Mrs. Cheryl and Principal Jake. A long moment passed before she asked them if she was in trouble for throwing lettuce at her friend Sarah the other day. A small wave of shame washed over her, and the banana chunks in her stomach felt it was nearly time to make their escape, but Mrs. Cheryl quietly asked if Laura had been paying attention to what Principal Jake was saying.

More shame filled Laura's little kindergarten heart as she informed them of the sandwich she had eaten for lunch and how her mother made it with extra bananas even though they almost always spilled out the sides of the bread and that Mrs. Cheryl had left Laura's juice box in the cafeteria so she had been trying to get the last of the peanut butter and bread out from between her teeth and gums while Principal Jake was talking and that she was so, so sorry for not paying attention. Her mom told her that she had a lot to say for a girl her age and that she needed to work on listening more, but she always had a smile for Laura when she said that.

Mrs. Cheryl assured her she was not in trouble, although her eyebrows raised when Laura mentioned the lettuce. She offered to buy Laura another juice box from the cafeteria once they were done talking, and Laura smiled, her front tooth missing and forgotten globs of peanut butter gathered at the corners of her mouth. Adjusting his tie nervously, Principal Jake scratched his bald head as he, once again, began to inform Laura of the events involving her parents, speaking much slower than the first time.

After hearing that they had been hit by a driver, she asked if she could go see her parents. Where were they now? Were they hurting a lot? She wanted to hug them. When she scraped her knees playing outside, hugs always helped her feel better. Especially hugs from her dad. His arms were strong and warm, and his beard tickled her forehead when he held her tightly. Laura pointed at Principal Jake's beard and explained her dad's was much bushier, like if Santa Claus dyed his brown.

Mrs. Cheryl said Laura's name, trying to redirect her attention.

After being told that they were transported to the hospital once the

ambulances reached them, Laura asked if her parents would be there long. Were the people at the hospital nice to them? She didn't really like hospitals because they smelled funny, kind of sweet, and there were always babies crying somewhere in the building, but the doctors usually talked calmly to her and made her feel better in the end, so she hoped her parents had the best doctors possible. Were grown up doctors meaner? Laura hoped not. Her parents were too nice to make people angry.

Mrs. Cheryl said her name a bit louder this time.

Laura asked what part of her parents were hurt. If they had been hit by a car, she suspected they were sore all over their bodies because cars were big and fast. They were loud, too. Why hadn't they seen the car coming? Were any of their bones broken? Laura had only ever broken one bone before, and it had just been her big toe. She stuck her foot out and wiggled her toes in her flip flops to show Mrs. Cheryl and Principal Jake. Her tiny cast had been green because the doctor ran out of pink wrapping stuff, and green was the only other color Laura considered pretty. Her eyes were green like her mom's, and she was proud of them.

Mrs. Cheryl looked up at Principal Jake as Laura continued speaking, and he nodded before leaving the room.

Laura asked if he was going to get her lunch box for her. It was pink and had a dog drawn on it. Her mom had decorated it for her because she was an artist. Did Mrs. Cheryl like art? The art teacher, Laura couldn't remember her name, was a rude old hag. Laura covered her mouth after realizing what she had said. Before she could apologize, Mrs. Cheryl hesitantly took Laura's hand, still sticky with peanut butter, and sighed sadly. Laura told her that if Principal Jake was going to get her a new juice box, she liked tropical punch the best.

Principal Jake returned and sat beside Laura in a plastic classroom chair as Mrs. Cheryl stood across from them, and Laura watched him warily. His round glasses perched on the edge of his round nose, and the only hair he had besides his beard grew on the sides of his round head.

He handed her a juice box. She took it without a second thought and drank it greedily before thanking him, telling him about her peanut butter and banana sandwich and how it was her favorite but that it wasn't the same without a juice box. He had even brought her a tropical punch juice box like

she wanted. Had he ever eaten a peanut butter and banana sandwich before? Principal Jake smiled slightly and said she was very welcome, and no, he had never tried that kind of sandwich before, but he would have to try it sometime.

Laura said she would like to be taken to see her parents now if that was okay. She wanted to help the doctors make them feel better. Did they miss her? They wouldn't like that she was skipping class, but she was positive that they would love to see her as soon as possible.

Principal Jake breathed in and out audibly before he told Laura her parents hadn't survived the accident, and she blinked up at him, confusion shining in her green eyes.

He finally met her gaze and slowly told Laura her parents were dead, and she let the empty juice box clatter to the floor as her thin eyebrows furrowed.

Finally, Principal Jake told Laura that her parents weren't ever coming back, and the banana chunks were let loose on the floor at her feet as her small body convulsed, throwing up the remnants of her lunch.

Mrs. Cheryl shrieked in surprise as she rushed to hold Laura, dragging a trash bin through the puddle of peanut butter and banana sludge to rest it in front of Laura should she get sick again. Laura coughed as Mrs. Cheryl rubbed her back, and once she caught her breath, she demanded to be taken to her parents. Principal Jake told Laura that her aunt was driving as fast as she could from upstate to come get her. Laura asked what happened to her parents. Where did they go? Why weren't they coming back?

Laura thought she knew what the word dead meant, but her parents couldn't be that. They weren't gone. They were her parents. They weren't old and wrinkly and gray and grumpy like her grandma was. Her grandma would be dead soon. But her parents were hers to keep for a long, long time still.

Mrs. Cheryl said sorry over and over and kept rubbing Laura's back. The smell of sour bananas and curdled peanut butter wafted through the room.

Painting Contest Winner

THE TEAPOT AND ROSE

Beverly Stauffer



GRAPHITE DRAWING

Haven Tunin



MARY THE RABBIT

Greg Potter



COUNTRY HERITAGE WINE TRIO

Avery Sparks



LAVA

Haven Tunin



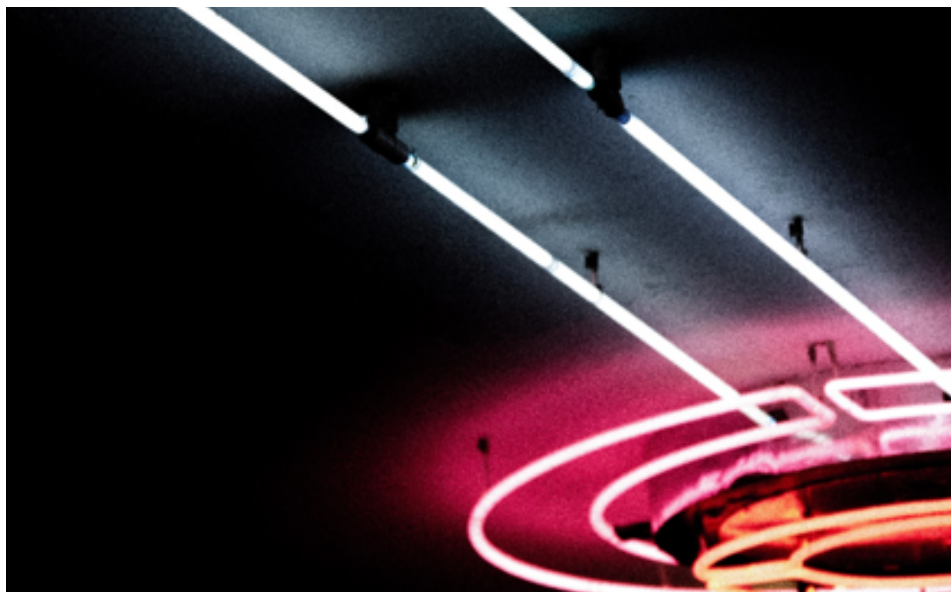
GODDESS OPPOSSUM

Greg Potter



MUTED NEON

Tara Sander



Photography Contest Winner

MAN O' WARS IN BERMUDA

Avery Sparks



WHERE IT'S GOING WHAT IT'S DOING

Haven Tunin



SCOTTISH BADGER

Greg Potter



INTO THE WOODS I GO

Emma Clark



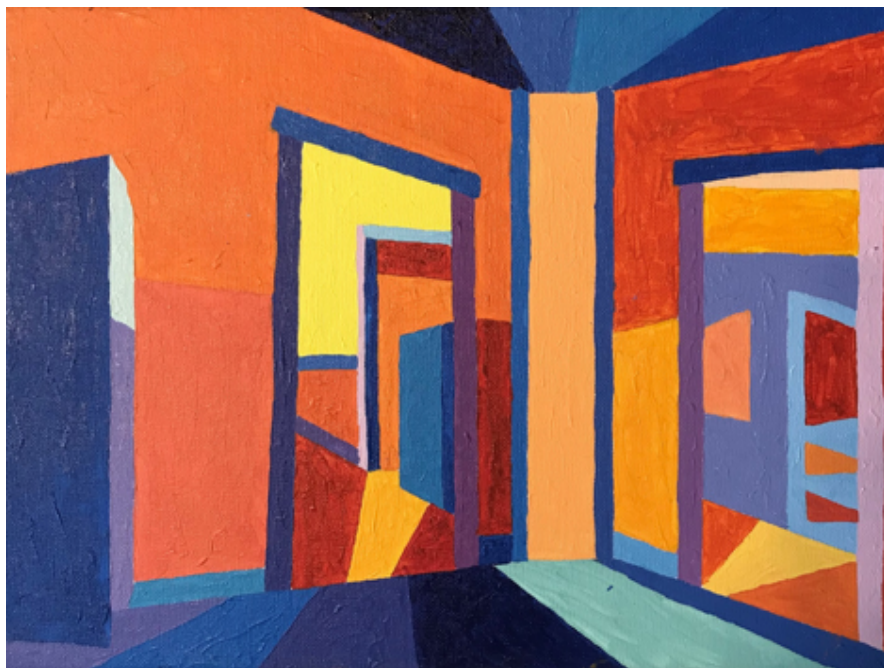
SHE SEES THE WORLD IN BLACK AND WHITE

Lacey Siderewicz



KITCHEN

Haven Tunin



TREE REFLECTIONS

Jade Harris



GATO LIBRE AND THE BONE DIGGER

Greg Potter



COAST

Isaac Gleitz



HOLE PUNCH

Avery Sparks



Drawing Contest Winner

CANDLES

Haven Tunin



THE UNFORTUNATE CONSUMPTION OF BARBARA KNOLL

Camryn Phelps

CHARACTERS

BARBARA KNOLL, former kindergarten teacher on trial for multiple accounts of cannibalism, woman, 47

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL, timid kindergarten teacher turned cannibal, woman, 27

TRISH TYRAN, YOUNG BARBARA's librarian coworker and temporary love interest, woman, 35

ATTORNEY, also referred to as Attorney for Families of the Consumed, man in a suit, 55

JUDGE TILL, judge presiding over BARBARA's court case, 60

OFFICER, in charge of investigating YOUNG BARBARA's residency

PLACE

Unnamed courtroom, Indianapolis, IN; apartment in a small town in Indiana.

TIME

The present, mid-morning; approximately 20 years previously.

SETTING

A packed and loud courtroom; YOUNG BARBARA's apartment.

AT RISE: The stage is divided in half. The left side contains the courtroom. Noise fills the courtroom, and onstage JUDGE TILL's bench faces the audience. ATTORNEY sits facing the bench, turned away from the audience. From behind the witness stand, only the top of BARBARA KNOLL's hair can be seen. The right side of the stage contains a modest living room that

looks lived in. An empty couch faces the audience, and a doorway, presumably leading to another section of the apartment, leads offstage.

(JUDGE TILL bangs his gavel lightly and sighs.)

JUDGE TILL

Order in the court...

(The noise continues before ATTORNEY loudly shushes the crowd. It gradually dies down to silence.)

JUDGE TILL Cont'd

Right. Back to business. Attorney? You had just called your witness, and—

(JUDGE TILL pauses as he looks slowly over at the witness stand, leaning over his bench comically to view it closer. ATTORNEY stands and walks out from behind his table, and JUDGE TILL sits upright again.)

ATTORNEY

Indeed, indeed I did, Your Honor. Miss Barbara Knoll is at the stand.

JUDGE TILL

Was the court able to, uh...swear in the witness?

(A clearing of the throat can be heard before a timid voice answers from behind the witness stand.)

BARBARA KNOLL

Yes, Your Honor.

(A collective gasp rises from the courtroom and murmuring starts up.)

JUDGE TILL

Do not...make me bang that godforsaken gavel again. Proceed, Attorney, with

your examination of...Miss Knoll.

(ATTORNEY approaches the witness stand.)

ATTORNEY

Please state your name for the court once again, miss. Nice and loud, now. That's a good girl.

(BARBARA clears her throat audibly again.)

BARBARA KNOLL

My name is Barbara Knoll, like you said. And I'm so, s-so sorry for what I did, you have no idea. I never meant—

ATTORNEY

We will get to that in a moment, Miss Knoll. For now, could you please explain to the court how you came to know a certain Miss Trish Tyran.

(BARBARA can be heard sobbing.)

BARBARA KNOLL

Trish...Oh god...

ATTORNEY

I'm going to need you to control yourself, Miss Knoll, if your testimony is to provide any useful information.

(Beat.)

ATTORNEY Cont'd

Perhaps I could acquire some tissues for you. Then we can—

BARBARA KNOLL

I can't...

(BARBARA sobs louder.)

BARBARA KNOLL Cont'd

I can't u-use tissues...

ATTORNEY

Can't use...Oh. Of course. Miss Knoll, back to my previous statement. How did you come to know Trish Tyran?

(BARBARA sniffs audibly as she begins to answer.)

BARBARA KNOLL

I knew Trish for a few years. We both worked at Harold Heights Elementary School. I was a kindergarten teacher, and she was the librarian. Her and her books...

(TRISH enters the living room on the right side of the stage, sitting on the couch and speaking to someone offstage.)

TRISH TYRAN

—and in the second series, David realizes he's actually related to Jane, and even magic-users are against incest, you know. So, he decides they can never speak again. Oh, it's so tragic—

BARBARA KNOLL

Did you know she told me once that what made her sad more than anything else was that—

TRISH TYRAN

—I'll never be able to read every single book on my to-read list, you know.

(TRISH sighs dramatically.)

TRISH TYRAN Cont'd

Alas, death comes for us all.

BARBARA KNOLL

She told me right after—

(YOUNG BARBARA speaks from offstage.)

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

I just gave you my virginity, and you're really going to moan and groan about death?

(YOUNG BARBARA enters and sits on the couch next to TRISH. BARBARA sobs again before speaking much quieter.)

TRISH TYRAN

I don't think snogging with your shirt off counts as losing your virginity.

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

I meant my lesbian-make-out virginity. My woman-snogging-woman virginity. My—

ATTORNEY

Were you involved with Trish Tyran romantically?

(TRISH laughs, kissing YOUNG BARBARA on the cheek and wrapping an arm around her shoulders.)

BARBARA KNOLL

Yes. For a short time. It ended...a-abruptly.

TRISH TYRAN

I didn't mean to kill the mood, love.

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

You are a mood, dear, all on your own.

(ATTORNEY nods and paces thoughtfully in front of the witness stand.)

ATTORNEY

Were you with Trish Tyran the night she was murdered?

(A few beats of silence.)

TRISH TYRAN

This silence is killing me. What should we do today?

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

I'm starving. Maybe we can go grab some lunch.

(TRISH laughs and shakes her head.)

TRISH TYRAN

You're still hungry? We ate like queens last night at that buffet. I almost had a food baby.

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

I told you, Your Majesty, I can't seem to get full. Maybe something is up with my metabolism.

(YOUNG BARBARA's stomach growls audibly.)

TRISH TYRAN

If even I can't satisfy you—

(YOUNG BARBARA swats at TRISH playfully.)

YOUNG BARBARA

Oh, stop. You're more than enough.

ATTORNEY

Miss Knoll?

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

I'm just hungry. Should we head out?

BARBARA KNOLL

Yes.

ATTORNEY

Were you present for the murder of Trish Tyran?

TRISH TYRAN

Killer idea, love.

(TRISH stands and stretches.)

TRISH TYRAN Cont'd

Just let me grab my purse.

BARBARA KNOLL

Yes...

(TRISH kisses YOUNG BARBARA's forehead. ATTORNEY ceases his pacing and faces the audience, his back to the witness stand.)

ATTORNEY

Did you murder her, Miss Knoll?

(TRISH strolls offstage through the doorway.)

ATTORNEY Cont'd

Did you murder Trish Tyran?

BARBARA KNOLL

No! It was an accident—

(A loud crash and a yell of some form of British profanity can be heard offstage where TRISH is presumed to be. YOUNG BARBARA stands abruptly and faces the doorway.)

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

What the hell? Trish!

(YOUNG BARBARA rushes offstage through the doorway.)

ATTORNEY

And was what you did afterward an accident?

(YOUNG BARBARA backs up through the doorway, reappearing onstage with a shocked expression as she stares presumably at TRISH.)

YOUNG BARBARA

Oh god...oh my god...

(YOUNG BARBARA hesitates before walking slowly back through the doorway offstage. Something being dragged can be heard before she reappears in the doorway, dragging TRISH by her legs. YOUNG BARBARA loses her grip on TRISH's body, dropping it so the audience can only see it from the shoulders down as it lies in the doorway. YOUNG BARBARA falls to her knees and her stomach growls again, louder.)

ATTORNEY

Miss Knoll, are you responsible for the death of Trish Tyran?

BARBARA KNOLL

No! Of course not!

(Murmurs start up in the courtroom again. JUDGE TILL has fallen asleep.)

ATTORNEY

Do you know what happened to the body?

BARBARA KNOLL

I...It...

(YOUNG BARBARA reaches to hold the hand of TRISH's body, a blank expression on her face.)

ATTORNEY

Of course you know Miss Knoll. Just tell us. Tell the court what you—

(ATTORNEY notices JUDGE TILL has fallen asleep after he lets out an especially loud snore. ATTORNEY steps up to the judge's bench and bangs the gavel. JUDGE TILL sits up, startled, and looks around, confused, before he settles back in his seat.)

BARBARA KNOLL

I ate it.

(The crowd in the courtroom gasps again. ATTORNEY faces the audience with a smug expression on his face. YOUNG BARBARA's stomach growls once more as she holds TRISH's hand closer to her face, staring curiously at it.)

ATTORNEY

You ate the body of Trish Tyran, Miss Knoll?

BARBARA KNOLL

I didn't mean to! I don't even remember...I don't remember any of it. It's just what the officer told me.

(JUDGE TILL eyes the witness stand again, this time leaning away from it with a horrified expression. ATTORNEY faces the witness stand.)

ATTORNEY

Are you still hungry, Miss Knoll? Even after eating...

(ATTORNEY checks a sheet of paper on his table.)

ATTORNEY Cont'd

Forty more bodies?

(JUDGE TILL heaves as if trying not to vomit, producing a barf bag from under his bench as the crowd begins murmuring loudly.)

ATTORNEY Cont'd

Miss Knoll?

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

Hungry...

(YOUNG BARBARA maintains her glazed expression as she bites into the hand a bit violently. She chews as the lights on the right side of the stage blackout.)

BARBARA KNOLL

I refuse to believe I would do such a thing to her. T-to anyone. B-but...the police. They insisted.

(A loud knocking can be heard as the lights return to the right side of the stage. YOUNG BARBARA sits relaxed on the couch, covered in what is presumably blood. She sniffs her armpit as the knocking can be heard again.)

OFFICER

Hello? Hello! My name is Officer—

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

Oh, thank goodness! I'll be right there.

(YOUNG BARBARA rises from the couch and walks offstage to the room assumed to be there. A door can be heard opening, and the characters' voices can be heard offstage.)

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL Cont'd

I'm so glad you're here, Officer. I woke up this morning to a terrible stench. I can't seem to recall it being there yesterday. It was Sunday, so I stayed in all day.

(Beat.)

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL Cont'd

Officer?

ATTORNEY

Miss Knoll?

BARBARA KNOLL

Yes?

ATTORNEY

I just asked—

OFFICER

Are you sure you can't identify the source of the smell, ma'am?

(YOUNG BARBARA reappears on the right side of the stage, still covered in blood as she straightens items in the room.)

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

I am absolutely positive, Officer...?

OFFICER

Officer—

BARBARA KNOLL

No.

ATTORNEY

No? So, you do not believe the authorities are correct in their deduction of your crimes?

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

Do you smell it, Officer?

(OFFICER eyes YOUNG BARBARA warily as he reaches for his radio.)

OFFICER

I do. Just... I need to call for back-up.

(OFFICER retreats offstage to the other existing room. YOUNG BARBARA looks perplexed.)

YOUNG BARBARA KNOLL

Back-up? For a smell? Well...

BARBARA KNOLL

How many times must I say I'm s-sorry for something that isn't m-my fault? I'm not a killer, not a cannibal, I'm not—

(BARBARA begins sobbing again. She sobs so violently that the stool she is perched on tips over, and she rolls out in front of the audience, revealing she is only a head now.)

ATTORNEY

Officers! Restrain her! She's making an escape!

(ATTORNEY dives ungracefully for BARBARA, the head.)

(BLACK OUT)

THE DAY AFTER THE RAIN

Samantha Harrison

*“but they say ‘I LOVE YOU’
and the sonnet is not dead.”
-Ted Berrigan, Sonnet XV*

hello? mother? it is late October now and
i haven't got much good to say about
the upcoming season because we've been in a limbo
since last Thanksgiving. here, you come and go
like a sore ghost with old boots on. say, i start,
*remember last year when we all tried to
sit down and carve the turkey?* no, you don't
think about the days before just the days to come.
and these lines can't keep it contained. i'm sorry
but i can only repeat the sound of the rain
i heard yesterday. *plip plip plip plip.* there it goes
kissing grandmother's tin roof while we exist like a memory
carving a turkey. you tilt your head back and laugh until
it is a hoarse cough. could we all be in love? in this memory?

MIRROR

Mackenzie Steagall

The mother is glass through which you see, in excruciating detail, yourself.
-Maggie Smith

Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
I am my mother after all.
Written across our faces
are lists of worries, scrawling
cursive notes that daily fill
the bags under our eyes. Written
in lipstick on her face, chapstick on mine.
My mother and I, we read these lists
throughout the day, worries smeared
into lines on our foreheads, eyelids,
lips, temples. I dodge glass and puddles,
and even you, mirror, in hopes of not seeing them.
My mother has given me her worries.
My worries are the same as my mother's.
Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
I am my mother after all.

HANGER

Sam Collier

Skeleton in the closet,
Cold, frail frame

Bent, twisted by hands,
Bruised metal skin.

Hooked hand cuts,
A rusty blade,

Black alley business,
An affair with pain.

Contractions
Sepsis

Bleeding gangrene,
A wound between legs.

She lays unused,
Sweater-less,

Hanging on by a finger,
Shunned in darkness.

WHAT MAKES A WOMAN?

Rebecca McKinley

I realized I was a woman when
My choice in footwear at night
Became authorized by
My ability to run for my life in them.

I realized I was a woman when
My breath flew out of my lungs
Because a man was following
My every move.

I realized I was a woman when
My clothing choice
Could become his scapegoat,
My fatal error.

I realized I was a woman when
My heart exploded like a bomb
As I walked alone in the dark,
My footsteps creating a target.

I realized I was a woman when
My ears heard him call out
With unwarranted demands.
I was not his puppet.

I became a woman when
Men decided it.
I was treated as a plaything;
My actions dictated by their desires.

I realized I was a woman when
My thoughts came to a halt
At the mention of what could happen,
My mind fixated forever.

MISERABLE WITH YOU

Mackenzie Steagall

“Don’t sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me, anyone else but me,” John sang to himself as he dug a new hole, and when his shovel clinked against a buried pipe suddenly, he stopped. This is exactly where his wife Diana wanted him to plant her new Crimson King. She had spent over an hour last night in the backyard with a tape-measure and a can of yellow spray paint deciding on the perfect place in relation to the house, the other trees, the barn. This morning, John had found a yellow circle marring the grass in the diameter of the root ball of the new tree and took the hint.

He couldn’t move the sewer pipe or water line or whatever it was just for a tree. Diana wasn’t going to be happy, but that was fine with John. That hadn’t been his job in 48 years of marriage. He attempted to wipe the dirt from his creased hands onto his worn jeans and sauntered towards the back of the house, his hips grinding like rusty lug nuts with each step.

He could see her through the kitchen window above the sink scrubbing plates with yellow rubber gloves up to her elbows. The closer he got to the window, the more clearly he could see the frown pulling her graying eyebrows together over her sunken eyes. The frown appeared long ago and never left. It had become like another person in their marriage: John, Diana, and Diana’s frown. Once John reached the window, he paused. He leaned forward and lightly tapped on the glass to get her attention.

She jumped, and water droplets splashed in an arc on the window. “What?” she shouted, throwing the Brillo pad with sudden force into the sink.

“There’s a pipe where you want that tree to go.” John raised his voice enough for her to hear him but was conscious of the near neighbors in the old suburb, too. “Wanna come find somewhere else for it?”

“If you think I can hear you through this blasted window, I can’t, and you expect me to stop what I’m doing, to just stop...” Diana rambled at full volume, and in an instant, turned from the window.

John couldn’t decipher what she was saying or find the strength to look away. They had never really talked to each other in all their married

life, so this verbal outburst was like nothing he had seen before. In her fit of frustration and surprise, Diana had forgotten he was there, so she kept talking to herself and the dishes as she worked. His boots sunk in the soft spring dirt while he watched Diana through the window, as if he were an audience watching a live soap opera performance in his own home.

Her floral pleated skirt spun around her knees as she turned and took a light blue towel from the drawer. She slammed the drawer closed, and the freshly scoured plates shivered in the drying rack. As she turned, John watched her lips continue to move, quieter now, so that only indecipherable shapes formed. One, two, three plates were dried, and the towel quickly snapped like Diana's apron strings as she moved from the sink, to the cabinet, and back again.

They had nothing in common, not when they got married and not now. They hadn't planned to marry, but with Diana three months pregnant right before he had been drafted, marriage was not a choice but a requirement, an expectation from both of their parents.

After two years stationed in Europe, John had returned home from his deployment to only a wife. She never asked about the war and he never asked what he'd missed while he was gone. By the time he had mustered enough guts to approach the subject, years had passed, and he convinced himself it didn't matter anymore. They had each moved on in their own silent way.

He remembered feeling like she was a different person when he came home, like he had to get to know her all over again, this woman who wore his wedding ring. Over time, they eventually settled into a somewhat comfortable co-habitation, although quiet. They split the house in two as much as possible. Diana had the master bedroom and bath, while John made do with the guest room. She converted the dining room into a sewing room; he possessed the garage. They each scheduled time to share the car throughout the week and had their own circles of friends. Despite their differences, they never spoke of leaving each other. He didn't believe in divorce, but even if he did, they didn't have the money for it until years after he returned home from the service.

That was how they did marriage. That was how they did marriage for 48 years.

Since his retirement a few years ago, John continued to do what he had always done which were the bare necessities to keep her satisfied. Like planting

a new red-leafed tree in their yard. He hated red; he also hated that mowing their grass nearly gave him vertigo from driving in circles around all the trees and bushes she had him plant through the years. It wasn't that he did things, like make their yard into a forest, because he loved her. He just did what he had always done.

While the water dried in streaks on the window, John continued to watch her move and talk. Diana had removed her dish gloves and rummaged through the fridge gathering mayo, bologna, and wheat bread in a line on the countertop. She worked like a machine and never once paused; no movement was too exact or without purpose.

As she turned to reach for the handle of the utensil drawer, Diana saw him through the window and stopped. A tiny space of surprise appeared between her eyebrows, and he watched her mouth snap shut. John looked at Diana. When had they aged? When had she given up her glowing skin for wrinkles and sags? When had he given up his 20/20 vision for gold-rimmed glasses with bifocals? She had traded her high heels for Dr. Scholl's; he had traded his belts for suspenders and elastic waistbands. Neither of them had even stopped to notice the changes in the other.

They didn't move, just stared through the window, looking at each other. Finally, John watched Diana's mouth begin to move again, talking, talking, and talking, but he still couldn't hear her. Why was she talking so much all of a sudden? He had things he wanted to say too.

"Listen, I don't know what I've done here, with you, for so long," he said to her through the glass.

She didn't stop, so he kept on talking on his side. He had been meaning to tell her this for some time now. This was good practice for when she could actually hear him.

"I'm older, but I'm not decrepit. Not by a long shot. I still want to do things, go places, get out." John found himself waving his dirt covered hands in the air, gesturing in broad curves at the world around him. He didn't care if he looked like a tree in the wind or not. "George invited me to go on a golf outing this summer, a whole weekend retreat with a few other fellows from the lodge, and I want to go, without you and your frown. I'm going to..." he stopped and caught his breath as Diana reached for the window lock and slid the pane out of the way.

Their barrier was gone. They stood in silence with a few feet of space between them. The spring breeze blew into the house with a gust, and John watched the wispy gray hairs around Diana's ears float for half a second and then drop. His hands hid in the pockets of his jeans.

"Her name was Eleanor, and she was beautiful," Diana breathed out the words in one tired gush. She spoke clearly. John listened.

"I saw her little blood-red face, but I didn't hear her scream. And that was it. I never held her. I never kissed her. I never counted her tiny toes or saw the color of her eyes. I left that hospital alone."

John felt as though he were sinking more and more into the dirt from the weight of this news. Surely it was up to his knees by now. Maybe he would totally disappear in the softness before he heard any more of what she said.

"I was mailed birth and death certificates later that week. I was alone for months before you came home." She spoke without emotion, cold and matter-of-fact. John noticed the frown had temporarily receded.

"I got this in the mail today." She pulled an envelope from her apron pocket and passed it through the window to him.

He opened it and read. Results: positive.

"I knew the results before I opened it. I just knew in my gut," she said. John put the letter back in the envelope.

"Let's be honest, John. We don't love each other. But I don't want to be alone to experience death again, especially when it's mine. I would rather be miserable with you than happy with someone else."

John breathed. He thought about Diana. He thought about Eleanor. He thought about himself and the future golf trip. He thought about time; and freedom; and life; and death.

"And I...would rather be miserable with you," he said. "Let me help you find a new place for that tree."

LEAF

Isaac Gleitz

1

“Screw this, man! Let’s just turn around,” Roger sighed. “We’ve been walking for hours.”

I contested, “I mean, we’ve already come so far. Should we...”

“Well, the farther we walk now, the farther we will have to walk again later,” reasoned Jeff.

We all peered at the ground for a few seconds. The ground was as saturated as a forgotten bowl of cereal. The brilliant colors of leaves contrasted with each other over the backdrop of brownie-black sludge. We were all entranced in silence.

I was lost in the moment as I gazed at one particular leaf as it was assaulted by a rogue raindrop. The leaf doubled over in reaction, like a man being shot in the stomach.

“Do you even know where we are?” Roger asked.

“Uh, we’re somewhere in the U.P, eh,” I coughed, intending to lighten the mood a bit. My friends laughed uneasily. A symphonic etude of coughing followed.

Everything was so wet. We watched fog rise from the forest floor. The sound of dripping was constant.

Is this what we came for—what we drove a whole day for? Had we slaved away at the steering wheel to be miserable and lost? They looked at me expectantly. I was the one who had chosen this location. Suddenly, I doubted my judgement and I suspected that they might be doing the same. The whole premise of the trip was to hike along the shore of Lake Superior. Here we were a day and a half into the trip, and we had not yet seen it.

I said, “Let’s just go farther. I have a feeling that it will work out.”

“Alright, but we have to turn back eventually,” Roger replied.

“Let’s just give it twenty minutes. If we don’t see the lake, then we’ll turn back,” Jeff concluded.

We all agreed to the terms. No one wanted to accept the bitterness

of admitting that our fall break was slipping away uneventfully. We were ashamed, like mischievous puppies.

We trekked on, our grimy soles penetrating the muck with a repeated gloop. Daylight was waning.

Something struck me. I saw blue. I stopped and stared. The others followed suit. They probably thought I was about to have a mental breakdown.

“Well, would ya look at that,” I laughed.

We advanced toward the speckled canvas of eggshell blue. Before we knew it, we were in the vast openness of a shoreline. We were pelted with an arctic breeze. Our hair sailed, as if it had just been emancipated from a lifetime of confinement. The scene quaked with movement and force.

We all smiled in agreement. Just to spite all uncertainty, we had arrived. Our trip was merely at its advent.

2

Looking back, this was just one example of many instances in which we doubted ourselves on our trip. Our competence was repeatedly tested.

Upon arrival at the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, we discovered that we had no idea where our campsite was or how to get there. I resolved to Google it and landed upon a painful realization: there was no service anywhere around. I felt a collapsing sensation in my viscera.

•••

On the third day, as dusk was taking hold of the forest, we heard an unmistakable sound. It was a deep, angry growl—a moan. The sky’s malice echoed off the cliffs with perfect clarity. The announcement was followed by a stark silence that we had not yet noticed. We were alone.

Nature could have had its way with us, but it settled on mercy. We sat and listened to the sound of power pounding all around us.

•••

On the return trip, we had made it halfway through Michigan when one of the tire pressure icons flickered from green to red. Jeff, who was the driver at the time, was the first one to notice.

We did not panic. We relegated the importance of this problem by saying, “It should be fine” and “Don’t worry about it.”

Soon enough, it became apparent that complacency was not an adequate solution. As we entered Lansing, the tire was so dilapidated that we

puttered along at twenty miles an hour. We had no choice but to take the next exit.

As teenagers who had only a vague semblance of how to conduct ourselves as adults, we resolved that the only reasonable recourse was to call someone's parents. We pulled into a sketchy gas station, and Roger pressed the call button.

Roger's stepfather Jim grunted, "Wut?"

Roger replied timidly, "Uh, we have a flat tire. What do we do?"

"Change it," he said without emotion or interest.

We all shrank a bit. We had little knowledge of car mechanics. "Ok, but how?" Roger retorted.

"There should be a manual in the glove box."

So, it was up to us now. We took a deep breath.

Twenty minutes in, we were all highly petulant. We didn't know if we were following the steps correctly. Roger barked, "Shit! Let's just call AAA." This remark embodied how we all felt, but we had to at least try to be adults.

At this point, a dark figure walked in our direction. He wore old, baggy clothes and was scratching his neck. We felt that recurring sinking motion in our guts. All our stuff was strewn about behind our car, and we were utterly vulnerable.

He wheezed, "Aye man. You boys needs any help now?"

I instinctively replied, "No, thanks." He just turned and slunk away.

3

Challenges are often coupled with euphoria. I will never forget how it felt to be on Chapel Beach. It was sensory overload.

Waves crashed into rocky coves, filling the air with white noise. Wind gusted right through our clothes and animated every follicle of our hair into jubilation. The sunset spewed strands of brilliant orange, red, and yellow, which contrasted tantalizingly with the turquoise lake.

In the moment, I thought, "I'm here. This is where I want to stay. I've landed." We all just had to stand for a minute and process.

We ran around and tackled each other like children. Maybe we secretly knew what part of ourselves we had shed.

We rested and soaked in the moisture and sun. We threw rocks as far as we could. We did not know there was a silent interloper, keeping a detached

eye on us.

Laying on the gritty orbs, I discovered a pale, yellow leaf resting boldly amidst comparative acres of sand-dominated real estate. Who gave it the right to be there? Why was it there? How?

“Tell me your secret,” I murmured.

It held its tongue. Clearly it had been interrogated before. It said enough just by being there.

Now, I wonder: have we said enough?

Fiction Contest Winner

GOOSEBERRY

Samantha Harrison

The gooseberry bush grew against the brick wall near the garden. Marcie and her grandson Michael were out picking the fruit. It was a muggy morning in late June.

Marcie had lived in the brick house since 1952, when she and her husband bought the home. There was nothing but soybean fields on each side of the house, and the small yard was perfect for raising children and a garden. Now, her children had left and occasionally her grandchildren stopped in. Some of the grandchildren had begun to have children of their own. Time had passed smoothly and slowly like warm molasses.

“Grandma,” Michael said, plucking berries from the gooseberry bush, “I’m joinin’ up with the army.” He had been meaning to tell her this for months.

Marcie rolled a fat gooseberry between her old fingers.

“I’ll be goin’ down to Florida for training. It’s only a few states down from here.”

Marcie dropped the fat gooseberry into her small basket. She had woven it when Michael’s mother was just a girl.

“In fact it’s only ‘bout 10 hours from Tuscaloosa to my station. That’s not ‘n awful trip.”

The gooseberries rolled around in Marcie’s basket. As she walked, they bounced on top of one another. She kept plucking the fattest berries from the bush.

“Grandma, you ain’t mad, are you?” Michael followed close behind her, trying to find the berries that looked the least hairy.

Marcie licked her old forefinger and thumb and began rubbing the hairs off of the gooseberries she had picked. “Gotta git this hair off,” she said, “so I can make the jam without all them nasty hairs. All that hair ‘ill make the jam bad on the toast.”

“Grandma, come on now.”

“Lord knows how a few ‘lil hairs can turn the taste buds off. Lord knows.”

Michael put his basket down angrily. It was a basket his mother had weaved long ago. “Grandma, you ain’t gonna tell me you ain’t proud of me. I’m gonna do this country good.”

“Lord knows. Lord knows,” she shook her head. “These berries gonna be too ripe soon.”

“Grandpa woulda been real proud if he knew! He didn’t die for this country for nuthin’!”

Marcie walked past her grandson and picked his basket up. The morning air was getting sticky and oppressive with June heat. “Gotta go make this jam ‘fore it gets too hot. Come on inside now, Michael.”

“I’m leavin’. Y’all ‘bout deaf to a man’s pride.”

Michael left through the garden gate. The small wooden door rattled against the hinges. Marcie felt her old body shake. “Lord knows, Lord knows.” Her old hands trembled as she walked back towards the house.

The afternoon heat crept up the garden wall and through the gooseberry bush. Soon it would be too hot, and the gooseberries would be too ripe. Time passed smoothly and slowly like warm molasses.

WINTER 2005

Sam Collier

The dog's nose had chipped
Off due to cold.
Rabid, Dad had said
Before dragging the carcass
Away from the property.

Scarlet drops fell silently
From its slack jaw and
Onto the unflinching snow,
Rendered a crimson puddle.

I smuggled a towel to warm
Rigor mortis, tucking the fabric
Around the lab's head,
Swaddled its body in a cocoon
To help its stiff muscles thaw.

And when I left,
my wooly pink boots left
Soft indentations in the snow
As I padded back to the house—
Alone.

[SHOPPE]

Camryn Phelps

You made me
as you made her.
Made me
watch raspberry red insides,
outsides blueberry crushed, blackberry pounded,
chocolate dipped cone
waiting to be filled with
ice (cold heart)
cream (choke it down).
That Gwen Stefani song she stuttered
b-a-n-a-n-a-split (her in two)
licked your lips and left her laying there
spent
two cents (but senseless).
You made me
your cherry on top
but men choke on the pit
and it chips teeth (cracks pride)
so you spat me out (when you were done).

Two scoops for tonight
but how many tomorrow?

AUSTERE FURNISHINGS

Sam Collier

Jim found the advertisement through the community Facebook page where numerous people from the area sold miscellaneous items like quilts, futons, mason jars, and even gerbils. “Standard Vertical Chest made from real wood—\$100,” it said, “\$50 if you haul yourself.” The pictures revealed a gorgeous mahogany finish with crisp, ornate edgings. Sold, Jim thought as he sent an IM to the owner: “Hey Aaron, gorgeous piece, is it still available?” The message chimed and sent. Jim had hardly reclined in his chair when the IM box dinged again: “Yes.”

“Excellent,” Jim replied, “I can get it today.”

Aaron’s response was immediate. “Alright. Get it how?”

Jim quickly typed a response, “I have a pickup and some moving blankets—”

Another text from Aaron interrupted. “Sry, meant to say now.”

Jim deleted the previous text. “No problem,” he wrote, “I can be there in 15.” Jim walked out to the front porch, jingling the keys in his hand. His wife was hidden within the garden, her small frame crouched over a stubborn weed.

“I found a dresser for Jamie,” he said.

She wiped a gloved hand across her brow. “I thought we agreed not to buy her anything else.”

“It’s a great deal and matches the bedframe her and Patrick bought.”

“Are we going to return their other gifts?”

“I don’t see why we would.”

His wife removed one glove, lightly scratching the side of her nose with her fingernail. She finally sighed. “We can’t keep holding her hand like this.”

“It’s just one dresser. And for an unbeatable price.”

She began to put the glove back on her hand. “How much?”

“Fifty.”

“Fifty? Bucks?”

“Yes’m.”

His wife returned her gaze to the stubborn weed. “Alright,” she said. But she pointed a gloved hand at him. “No more though. I mean it.”

He agreed with a “mmhmm” and headed for his pickup.



The address led Jim to a small cottage home nestled in a quaint neighborhood not seven miles down the road. The house was made from gray brick and reposed beneath several mature trees. Maple and Dogwood, Jim identified. He parked his truck along the road, just before the painted wooden mailbox that read, “The Leichman’s.” The front door creaked open, and Aaron appeared. He was tall and far leaner than Jim had imagined he would be.

“You Jim?” he greeted, without taking another step outside. He appeared to be in his late twenties, about the same age as Jamie, with a mop of curly hair and thick-rimmed glasses.

Jim unfolded the bed of his truck and confirmed. “Yeah,” he said, “I’m here for the dresser.”

“Right inside.” Aaron waved him in, and Jim noticed now that the man wore blue sweatpants and not jeans and a yellow t-shirt featuring the Dave Matthews Band. Once inside, Aaron shook his hand. “Thanks for coming so soon. I appreciate it.”

Jim only shrugged. “It was no issue, I live just east of here.” The home had a sweet smell to it, like vanilla, and Jim noticed that there was an unusual amount of furniture stacked neatly in the living room.

“This all for sale?” he asked. Aaron turned, as if noticing the bookshelf, end tables, bedframe, and dresser for the first time.

“Yeah, um, a spring-cleaning thing. We’re gutting the old stuff.” Seeing the dresser, Jim approached it, running his hand along the smooth finish.

“It’s a gorgeous piece,” he said, looking up at the rest of the furniture, “all of it.”

“Yeah, we bought it all at this auction in Tennessee. Kind of a spur-of-the-moment thing.” His eyes lingered on the bedframe for a moment.

“You have buyers?” Jim gestured to the rest of the furniture.

Aaron glanced around dismissively. “Not yet. Just put them up this morning.”

Jim considered for a moment, thinking about what his wife would say. “I could probably take them off your hands. Would need to make a few trips, though.”

“Yeah, um, yeah. That’d be great if you could.” Aaron smiled weakly.

Jim turned back towards the dresser, mentally measuring how to load it all into the bed of his truck. “I think I can take the bedframe and the dresser now...,” he turned to inspect the rest, “and everything else should fit in the second trip.”

“Let’s load it up then.” Aaron began to remove the dresser drawers, stacking them beside the door. “I found out the hard way,” he said, “that this thing is way more difficult to move with the drawers inside.” Jim tested the weight of the emptied dresser, but it hardly budged. Together, they lifted the husk from the floor and waddled it out to the truck.

“Easy does it,” Jim huffed as he lifted the base up on its side. Aaron gave a final push and slid the dresser across the blanketed truck bed. “That’s good craftsmanship,” Jim breathed.

Aaron wiped his brow, glancing back at the husk, and nodded. “It’ll be a shame to see it all go.”

Together, they walked back to the house to retrieve the drawers. Jim grabbed one in each hand, noticing the solid weight of the wood. “Not to pry,” he said, “but why sell such a nice set? And at such a low price?”

The drawers knocked against Aaron’s leg. “Well, it was this or burn it all,” he said without taking his eyes off the truck.

Jim hesitated. “Is there an issue with the wood?”

Aaron laughed. “Not physically, no.”

Jim carefully lifted the drawers into the truck, unsure whether to ask further questions. But Aaron continued. “Just changes your perspective, you know? Nothing is the same.” He chucked the two drawers into the bed of the truck, smashing them loudly against each other. Thankfully, neither one splintered or cracked. Jim stepped back as Aaron began mumbling to himself, watching as the sweat-pants-wearing man retreated into the house. Jim did not follow. He had the dresser, and that was all he had agreed to buy, right? He jingled around in his pocket, feeling the metal of the truck keys and then the smooth leather of his wallet. Grabbing it, Jim plucked three twenties from the fold and listened for any movement inside the house.

“Hey, Aaron? I don’t think I have enough cash on me to get the rest, so I’ll just...Aaron?” Suddenly, the door swung open and the bedframe flew across the lawn, catching in the grass and crashing rudely to the ground. Jim jumped back as more furniture sailed and crashed onto the front lawn.

“Piece of shit furniture! Piece of shit house! Piece of shit vows!” Aaron came outside and began to wail on the bedframe with a wooden baseball bat. “How do you like that? No? Well how ‘bout this?” He turned on the house this time, finding a garden gnome among the bushes to assault. Jim backed away towards his truck, fumbling for his keys.

“I think I’ll leave the money here,” he said, shoving the twenties into the mailbox. Aaron stopped assaulting the gnome for a second, lifting his eyes to Jim. He readjusted his glasses and smiled to himself as Jim clung to the truck. Slowly, a laugh escaped the lean man, beginning first as a chuckle and then rising into a hysterical, knee-slapping fit. Jim watched, captivated by the strange, lean creature hooting and guffawing before him. He could not pull himself away. Try as he might, Jim could not bring himself to open the door and get in the pick-up. It was as though the rubber soles of his shoes had melted into the concrete, pinning him there before the man with the wooden bat and Dave Matthews shirt. Aaron sighed loudly, inhaling through his mouth as he tilted back, chest to the sky.

“It’s a gorgeous day, my man,” he said, turning back to Jim, who stood safely behind his truck. “So nice, in fact...” he dropped the bat and sauntered over to Jim, “just have it— here.” He opened the passenger side of the truck. “Let’s go and unload.”

“Oh, that’s not—”

“And then let’s go and see what else we can haul.”

Jim gingerly stepped into the truck and sat beside Aaron, who was busy bouncing his knee up and down. Jim did not start the car.

“You uh...you want to talk...about it?” Jim did not dare look to his right but saw Aaron stretch his legs out beneath the dashboard. Jim continued, “If you don’t want to...I mean—”

Aaron sighed, “What am I doing?” Jim risked a glance over to the man and found him staring forlornly out the window.

Jim cleared his throat. “Well right now...we are sitting in my truck...”

Aaron folded his hands into his lap, rotating his thumbs back and forth.

“Can I tell you something?” he asked.

Jim looked over again, but Aaron had his own gaze focused on his hands. “We met in college,” he began, “and God... I just knew she was the one.” Aaron squeezed his hands together, popping the knuckles. “The way she looked, standing next to that Ping-Pong table, her hair pinned back, her eyes...,” Aaron gestured with two fingers, “her eyes laser-focused, paddle in hand. Yeah, she wanted to win. And I let her...five years later, I let her. Let her decide where we lived, what job I pursued, everything. I gave her everything and she—she fucked it all up.”

Jim glanced over, “I uh, I’m sorry.” He knew not what else to say.

Aaron turned to him then. “This must be pretty awkward.” He turned back to the window, looking out at the lawn. “But when I went to move that bedframe...something just snapped...I could hear it creaking...like when I found her and—,” Aaron laughed then. “You know I don’t live here anymore?” He continued to laugh. “She kicked me out. Right now her and that—that piece of shit are going to a convention together. I had no clothes, nothing, for a week.” Aaron looked down at his yellow Dave Matthews shirt and pinched it off his chest. “This was actually our first date...” Aaron sat up and removed the shirt, revealing pale flesh. He opened the door then and got out.

“She’ll be back tomorrow,” he said as he surveyed the lawn, “and I should probably put this stuff back inside.” But before Aaron could say more, Jim leaned over, shut the door, and locked it. Aaron turned back and Jim started his truck, the engine roaring above his voice. Jim partially opened the window. “Thank you for the dresser. I left cash in the mailbox.” And he drove away, abandoning the shirtless man with the broken furniture.

FOURCH MALINE BRIDGE

Alexander Turner

Stalin made his five-year plan and so did Jerome—he was going to build that bridge one way or another. Jerome was a savvy businessman who had come from up the river one day and was determined to build that bridge just outside my town of Wilburton, Oklahoma. He had told me himself after our first date. He had driven me out there too. Brother made a big stink about it, but I wasn't too concerned. He would take me out there every night to that part of the creek. One time I said no, but he took me anyway. He said he just couldn't wait to see the look on my face when that bridge was built.

Town council didn't approve the bridge, however, and eventually Jerome split—leavin' me holding an engagement ring in my driveway. Mom was furious, but I told her it was alright because I didn't like Jerome's mangy mustache anyway. I took the ring and placed it on my ring finger every night. How nice of him to let me keep what had once been ours.

It was about seven years until I heard of that Jerome again. Said he winded up as a grocery clerk in St. Louis. I took a train out to St. Louis one day—hoping to give him his ring back once and for all—to tell him I was done with him. I made the day-long trip out to Missouri, and when I finally tracked down the store, they said he had left—said he had gone far away. I took the ring and gave it to the manager of the 'mart and told him to keep it just in case he ever saw Jerome again.

I took the train back, and my family asked how things went. They asked me if Jerome was there, and I shook my head no.

Stalin had made a five-year plan—but accountants do the same thing. They plan ahead and try to see the future. So, I did that for about another two years, and eventually, I found a steady job at the local bank becoming an accountant of sorts—even though I didn't know much about money. I buried my mother and my father. Got my own house. Over time, I climbed the positions at the bank, and one day they offered me a promotion. I got married and became respected in Wilburton. Even started wearing suits just to show how fancy I had become.

Then, just last week, during another one of them town meetings, I proposed we just build that bridge after all.



I'm lookin' at the newspaper now: "NEW BRIDGE TO BE BUILT OVER THE LOCAL PART OF FOURCH MALINE¹ CREEK."

I smile at the byline: "CITY EXPECTS COMPLETION IN FIVE YEARS."

I chuckle—spilling the orange juice I am holding all over the paper. I can wait five years.

1 Fourch Maline is French for "Bad Fork"

Poetry Contest Winner

ODE TO SHOPPING FOR PEACHES WHILE I AM BROKE

Samantha Harrison

after Allen Ginsberg

i was feeling enlightened (though the moon was new and blank in the sky). i was thinking about my consciousness and my inability to be too much. too humble or too prideful—the double-edged sword was dark because there was no moon up above the streetlights. and i started thinking about you, Ginsberg, stumbling down some sole-beaten sidewalk with me. with venom in your belly and a book about a quest for freedom in your hands. where are you off to tonight? let's stop by the supermarket off the highway and there we can pick up a pound of fruit.

any fruit can do when you're hungry enough.

where should we go, Allen? should we check the old fruit on sale first? i am so broke these days, honestly, i think everyone is broke these days—but Christ look at all the fresh fruit! look at those fat, rich peaches!

do you think anyone thinks about the size of the pit when they squeeze the peach? why should we? let's not think about anything. let's just stroll like we can buy the peaches and the damn peach tree too.

let's pretend we can afford them. the fresh fat peaches. let's put them in the sack and frolic over to the frozen goods. you know they sell entire frozen fish here? yeah, and some time ago, they even had live lobsters to gawk at. i felt like a rich girl. that was when i had to hold my mom's hand and stroll with her. now you're holding my hand.

which of us is the rich girl now?

when we leave the store what will we do? it is so dark out tonight but let's count the streetlights and count the little nuclear homes. they're all covered up for the night.

are we lonely or are we something else? not afraid of the dark or the new moon but more afraid of the things we can't think about without crying? i have some ideas about you, Allen Ginsberg, and your tired eyes. and your pickled body. and your beaten voice.

you should keep watching the sky. night only lasts so long. still, you baptize yourself in this dark, poor, America. you in your holy clothes, warn me about an American dream hiding just beyond

the streetlights and the supermarket off the highway. you go, into the dark, unafraid of disappearing into some good night, good evening, goodbye, poor howling father.

STEWART'S QUICK MART

Mackenzie Steagall

Today is the day I'm resigning from Stewart's Quick Mart, I remind myself while sitting in my car in the store parking lot. It's been eight years, and I'm as worn out as my green polo with "Stewart's" embroidered over my heart. Cashiering at the grocery store is great: it is steadily busy, it pays our mortgage, and I'm only tempted to burn my apron and nametag in the middle of the road, say, every night of the week. I'm thankful for my job, don't get me wrong. I'm just desperate for something new.

Just like every other morning, I juggle my purse, lunchbox, trashy paperback novel, water bottle, and coffee thermos while straining to press the lock button on my key fob. I say goodbye to Newton, my 1998 Ford Taurus and mutter threats of death to the pigeons in the oak tree nearby lest they befoul Newton again. (There is an element of shame in getting stuck at every spotlight downtown in a car that looks like it has been polka-dotted with just white paintballs.) The secret knowledge that this is my last Friday shift puts a pep in my step and orthopedic tennis shoes as I walk from the employee parking row over the cracks in the asphalt to the building.

The door is not far, yet this jaunt is what I imagine the hallway in Death Row is like. If I try, I can see myself from an exterior point of view, moving as if in slow motion to my certain doom waiting beyond the automatic sliding doors. Back in high school, I learned about Dante's *Inferno* and the great author's opinion that there are levels of Hell based on degrees of sin and other atrocities. In my personal opinion, Dante forgot to title one level "The nine-to-five shift at Stewart's." I think it would fit between level four, which is for the prodigal and avaricious, and level five, which is for the wrathful and gloomy.

While I stow everything in my breakroom locker, I have a moment of self-pity. Cashiering has infiltrated my body and my life. I have to wear plastic inserts in my shoes because standing on concrete floors for eight hours a day does something awful to one's arches. My fingernails are broken down to their cuticles from reaching for items on the endless conveyor belt. I have a pinched nerve in my back from pulling cases of beer and bags of dog food from one

side of the belt to the other. All this, and I'm not yet 30. At night, I sometimes wake myself up sitting straight up in bed, asking the imaginary customer in the darkness, "Did you find everything you were looking for today?" Once the fuzz of the dream dissipates, I slam my head back down on the pillow and hear my sleeping husband next to me groan at my flailing. He has been telling me to quit for a while, but we both knew we couldn't survive on just one income. I'll find a new job after today; I'll work anywhere that's not Stewart's Quick Mart.

I haven't told anyone today is my last day, not even my husband, so my shift begins as usual. I wave at Mary working at lane one, slip into lane two's cubby, and flick the switch so the yellow light bulb above my register glows in welcome. Quickly, I pull my curls into a ponytail and type my employee ID into the dinosaur-like computer system. The tan keyboard buttons are worn smooth, and some of them don't even have labels now. Customers who have been waiting in Mary's line transfer to mine in the hopes of winning the unstated race called Who Can Get Out of the Store Faster.

"Good morning! Did you find everything you—?"

"I can't believe you are out of celery. I talked to that kid back there in the produce section, and he said it didn't come in on the order." The middle-aged woman, as brown as a berry and smelling like a piña colada, continues to toss things on the moving conveyor belt as she speaks. "Seriously? He probably just didn't order it."

I take a deep breath as I methodically scan her items and send them down the belt to be bagged.

"I'm so sorry about that," I lie while holding the pity pout I have mastered for customers such as this.

"Yeah, me too. How much is it, anyway?" she asks while rummaging in her purse that is large enough to hold a small Caribbean island. Or a fleet of cruise ships. Maybe the Bermuda Triangle itself.

"Uh, comes to \$72.14."

As usual, the bagger assigned to my line is nowhere to be seen, so I jog down to the other end to bag her groceries myself.

"I swear, they just keep raising the prices here," she says in disgust. I watched her false eyelashes quickly flap and wonder if she feared flight when the wind blew in her direction.

I shake my head in feigned concern and break the hundred-dollar bill she gives me across the counter. I wordlessly give her the change. She watches in judging silence as I gently organize her bags in her cart and, like a real lady, grunts in response to my enthusiastic, “Thanks for shopping at Stewart’s!”

And so my morning begins. The line is an endless stream of faces, awkward conversations, and the register’s monotone beeps. Between customers, I sip my coffee I keep hidden under the register. A customer once told me coffee, essentially the caffeine in coffee, is the best way to ward off stress headaches. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t, but either way, I also keep Tums and Tylenol in a plastic bag in my purse. I expect some part of my body to act up during a full shift, so I come prepared.

The same songs play on the intercom every day like a broken record, from “Pump Up the Jam” to “Bad Moon Rising.” The same delivery people in their neon green vests arrive at the same time each day. Mary, my fellow front-end partner, tells me every day how she is going crazy. When I first met her, I scoffed and vouched for her sanity myself, but after eight years, I just remind her not to say it loud enough for the customers to hear.

As time passes, I quit paying attention to my customers, and I forget if I’ve greeted this man with the beard already, or was it the man from three customers ago? I try to keep my plan in the forefront of my mind as a means of motivation.

This is it, this is the last time for all of this.

Sometime in the afternoon, I see Mr. Reynolds patiently waiting in my line. Every Friday, he gets dressed to come to Stewart’s, and I’m talking pleated polyester trousers and bolo tie, just to buy his groceries. He buys the same staple items each week; I know his grocery list like the back of my hand.

He meanders up to the register, and even though he tries to resist and assume nonchalance like he didn’t intentionally choose my check-out line, a smile parts his thin lips and reveals his Hollywood white dentures glowing against his tan wrinkled skin. I can’t help but smile back. He leans toward me like he has a secret to share, and I smell Old Spice.

“I got a new one for you,” he rasps, his voice contrasting with his spiffy attire.

I raise my eyebrows in anticipation, playing along with him.

“A man goes to the doctor and says, ‘Hey, Doc, I can’t get the song

“She’s A Lady” out of my head,’ Doc says, ‘Mmm...sounds like a case of Tom Jones Syndrome.’”

Mr. Reynolds pauses for dramatic effect, but also to catch his breath, before continuing.

“The man says, ‘Is it serious?’ And the Doc says, ‘Well, “It’s Not Unusual.””

We share a laugh and chat about our spouses as I ring up his groceries. He brings me a new joke every Friday, and in return, an additional 10% off mysteriously appears on his receipt. Mr. Reynolds, just an old man I met on my first day at Stewart’s, really is one in a million.

On my lunch break, I sit alone at the gray employee picnic table by the dumpsters behind the store. It seems like this is the only quiet place around Stewart’s. My BLT doesn’t taste quite like it should, and I don’t even bother to open my trashy novel to give my mind a reprieve from the day so far. The sun is hot, but it feels better than the frigid air conditioning inside. I close my eyes and feel the sun’s rays bouncing off my face and hair like I’m a thawing Popsicle (the variety packs are B.O.G.O. this weekend). I feel uneasy.

If I leave, who is going to take care of these people? By “these people,” I mean the regulars, the good folks. Who will keep Officer Taylor’s donut secret? I think I’m the only one who knows he buys five donuts on Mondays, eats one in the store, and then takes the other four out to his partner in the squad car so they can each have two. Who will discreetly swipe the lady’s food stamp card who has the sick kid so other customers won’t see? Lord knows Mary doesn’t know anything about discretion. Who will know not to ask the mailman with the orange sneakers if he wants his receipt when he buys a single banana at a time? He never wants his receipt and was unnecessarily offended the first time I asked. I learned that lesson quick. Mr. Reynolds won’t have anyone to laugh at his jokes, and the mayor will get angry for being carded by an innocent cashier when he buys alcohol. I can hear him now growling, “Don’t you know who I am?!”

I suddenly feel attached to the customers, like we are somehow comrades in our everyday lives. They aren’t just Stewart’s Gold Star Steady Shoppers; they are people in our community, people I’ve connected with in some way over the last eight years, and I feel obligated to take care of them. I know the lady who always wears a fanny pack and rain jacket expects her milk to

be double-bagged, and I keep a pen at the ready for the construction worker with the mustache who always needs it to fill out his check. In a way, there is a comfort to the routine and the established, even though unstated, agreements we share.

Sure, Stewart's is my personal level of Hell, but while I sit on this splintery bench, I can't help but think it might be bearable. Maybe Stewart's is just my burden to bear, and I should be thankful rather than letting a good—more like mediocre—thing go. At least I have a job. Maybe this is where I am meant to be, at least for now.

As I cram my lunchbox and all the other things back into my locker, I pull out the envelope I keep tucked in the crack on the ceiling. It's my resignation and two-weeks notice. It's been there at the ready for a while now, but I think it can stay stashed away a while longer.

At least until next Friday.

GEORGE STAYS IN THE PICTURE

Alexander Turner

I found myself standing in front of the Georgian Hotel. Just three miles east of the Santa Monica pier, the old art deco style building stood freshly renovated. It wasn't much like the pictures shown online—it felt too clean and changed by time. I had parked my rental car and walked up to the front door. The bright sky blue of the interior didn't give me the kind of vibes it should. I didn't feel like I was walking into a historic 80-year old building, but rather a beachside Holiday Inn. The ugly brown and gold awning greeted me as I walked into the lobby. The floors were squeaky clean and the front desk screamed: *We'll call you two hours before checkout time to remind you about checkout time.*

The “no smoking” signs were a bit of a disappointment as well. I bet there weren't even any wild parties in the upper levels like there used to be in the 1930s. No Hollywood Strip Poker either, I bet! Just boring families staying at the beach. A perfect mixture of the disillusioned father, the resentful mother, and the children who don't let on as much as they know. The perfect place to be fake. Fake doesn't seem to mean what it used to. In this day and age, not a lot of open secrets were kept in a hotel like this one. No orgies till the late hours of the night. Not yet.

The front desk man asked me if I had a reservation.

“Yes, I do sir. George Fleschier,” I said it with an old Hollywood accent.

The small, stocky desk clerk clicked through menus with his computer mouse as he caressed his mustache. In the olden days, there were real mustaches—thin as a pencil and somehow people still took them seriously.

“Alright, this room is yours,” he said, handing me the door card.

I wished it was a fucking key. I wished it was a key that could get stuck in the lock. And I would have to call downstairs, and someone would have to call a maintenance man, and then maybe I would get to run into Hollywood royalty like George Raft taking an obscene number of drugs and women into his room. Then, finally, the service elevator would creak, and there would be

the maintenance man to help me get into my room. All would be well. I could see if I could get into some other parties and, if I was lucky, maybe catch polio.

I wondered if FDR was ever in the Santa Monica area. I wondered if FDR ever stayed in this now castrated hotel. I pulled out my phone to Google it and decided to put it away. They didn't have Google in the '30s, I say. I took the elevator up and found myself on the second floor. In a random boring room. In the middle of the hallway. In the middle of this tired hotel.

"Fuck it," I said, unlocking my door and revealing the master suite. Ah yes. Two rooms. The bedroom. And the waiting room.

I scanned around the room and found myself looking in the mirror on the far wall. I was only wearing a Harley Davidson tee and cargo shorts, but I imagined I looked a lot like James Cagney. I unzipped my suitcase and pulled out my prom suit from twelve years ago.

Hope it still fits, I thought to myself.

Hope I haven't gotten too fat.

"Fucking idiot," I say to myself.

I changed into my suit as quick as I could and went in the bathroom to put thick gel through my hair. I pulled out my jumbo two-pound tub of gel and started taking globs and globs and putting it through my hair. The room was so hot that the gel even started to run down into my eyes.

"Shit!" I said, cupping my hands with water to rinse my eyes out.

It was almost 4 o'clock, and my party was supposed to happen at 6 o'clock. Oh, I just couldn't wait.

I went to the computer desk, or rather stationary table, and began writing in pen in my itinerary exactly how I wanted the night to go. I paced the room with excitement, waiting for the famous faces to appear. Christoph Waltz. Cate Blanchett. Robert DeNiro. Daniel Day-Lewis. Meryl Streep. All names on my list.

Soon, they would all be here. Just like in the '30s. I pulled out my portable record player, or rather my magic record box, and put on a rendition of "I'll Be Forever Blowing Bubbles."

I'm forever blowing bubbles it sings to me.

Pretty bubbles in the air.

I had begun to sway around the room.

I'm dreaming dreams.

I'm scheming schemes.

I had thrown down sheets all over the floor. I couldn't find any rose petals, so I began to cut up pages of the phone book, and I scattered them all over the floor.

In the '30s, it was rumored that maybe Al Capone would hang out here as well. Probably not for sex. Probably just for underground crime.

There was a knock at the door, and I opened it.

It was Meryl Streep.

"Is this room 218?" she asked

I couldn't believe that Meryl Streep was standing there in front of me.

"Yes, come on in, I didn't expect you to show up so early, Meryl," I replied.

"Of course," she said while laughing.

Her laugh echoed, and chills went down my spine.

"When are the others going to be here? I mean, have you been in contact with them?" I asked.

"Unfortunately, George, I hate to report that the others will not be coming. They've sent me here on their behalf," she said, resting her hands on my shoulders.

"For what?" I shrugged her off as I walked over to my jumbo gel jar to add more hair gel.

"George, I think you and I should sit down," Meryl said.

So, Meryl and I sat down on the sheets I had laid out.

"Again, it's such an honor to be in your presence."

Meryl lowered herself down with grace.

"I know, George," she said, staring back at me.

Meryl tapped her fingers against her cheek.

"How many invitations did you send out, George?"

"Only a couple."

"George."

"I guess like ten."

Meryl Streep sighed, and I felt like she was going to be disappointed if I didn't tell the truth.

"Five-hundred and twenty-seven," I said.

“You didn’t see a *problem* with that?”

“No, Meryl.”

“Again, like I said, I am here on behalf of most of the people you invited to tell you that we’re just not going to participate in this,” Meryl said softly.

“I don’t understand. I thought maybe some freaks would show up.”

“Is that why you laid out these bed sheets with—what is this? Shredded phone book?” Meryl asked, picking up the pieces of phone book and letting them fall.

“I didn’t have any petals, Meryl. Did you just come up to mock me?”

“Well, I’m not here to fuck, George.”

“Meryl, I think you have the wrong idea about me.”

“I think you’re a sick fuck, George.”

I couldn’t believe what Meryl was saying, so I turned around and faced the other way.

“George, turn around,” she said, tapping on my shoulder.

“No, Meryl. You’ve disappointed me.”

“George, you have to understand. It’s not the ‘30s anymore. I have tried to be as kind as possible.”

“Tell me, Meryl, tell me that everything will be okay.”

I had begun to cry, and I melted in Meryl’s arms.

“George, please get off of me,” she said.

“Meryl, are you sure no one is coming to my orgy?”

“George, no one is going to come.”

Meryl Streep stood up and began to walk to the door. She paused and turned around.

“George.”

“What?”

“Get some help.”

I was then left alone. Meryl was nicer than she had to be with such a poor chump like myself. Maybe her kindness was an act. I started to think about the invitations that I had sent out. Was I too direct?

I drank a bottle of wine, and no one showed up. Meryl was right.

Then, at about 3:30 in the morning, I woke up in a cold sweat. What if Meryl had been lying to me? What if she had told them lies? What if there was a competing party?

That had to be it, I thought to myself.

I got up and began pacing around the room. I needed to figure out if Meryl had lied to me. I felt myself drifting in and out of consciousness. I didn't even recognize my own voice as I went around the room pacing. I looked in the mirror, and I didn't see myself, but instead a room of movie stars looking back at me. They were screaming at me and yelling.

Meryl had called me a sick fuck, and now they all began to as well. I covered my eyes and ran into the other room. I began trying to look for something to cover my ears up. The noise had to be stopped. I could hear the orgy just beginning in the other room. I walked in and visualized them all there, and they were laughing at me. They told me they had waited until I had left to begin. In this self-deprecating fantasy, the phonebook pieces had actually turned to rose petals, and there was a full jazz quartet playing "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles." I screamed at them, and I told them to stop. I told them all to get out. Why were they doing this to me?

I laid back down in the bed, hoping this would all come to an end. Hoping that maybe I could leave this goal of mine behind. The clock struck 6 o'clock in the morning as I closed my eyes.

The phone rang just before the 8 o'clock mark. It was the front desk and, they called to remind me that checkout was at 11 o'clock, or I would be charged another day's fee.

I couldn't give up on my dream, I told myself. I began to slowly take off my prom suit that I had passed out in and changed back into a button-up shirt with a pattern of crocodiles on it. I didn't even bother to shave. I went downstairs and returned the room card. The front desk man was now a woman. A woman who looked nothing like Greta Garbo.

"Thanks for staying at the Georgian Hotel," she smiled.

I said nothing and walked out the door.

I walked out to my car and got in.

The damn thing wouldn't turn over. The key was stuck in the ignition, and it wouldn't budge. I slammed my fists against the dashboard and looked out my windshield at the Santa Monica Pier as I passed by.



I watched the road signs looking for the ones telling me how far San Francisco Bay was.

I had decided to stop looking at my gas gauge for fearing of missing a road sign.

I was standing in front of the San Francisco Bay. It was much dirtier than I imagined.

IN MY HOME

Ashton Hoerner

After Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room"

In Greenwood, Indiana,
on a school night
I played Call of Duty,
after 7 kills, I got to call
in air support. The Apache
rained fire, my points went up.
Then my older brother came,
turned off the game and led me
to the computer room.
He left the lights off,
he searched "Wiki Leaks"
and found a video of Afghanistan.
I saw through the eye of a
helicopter's gun, a white crosshair
on the screen. I thought it
was a new game, but the men
the camera stalked looked real.
They looked like anybody,
wearing pants and polos.
A few had cameras, hanging
from their shoulders. Journalists,
(I knew what those were)
with cameras for making movies.
But the gunner chanted
"That's a weapon, RPG! RPG!"
Another yelled, "Engage!
Engage! Open fire!"
Hysteria in the skies as

the men down below chit-chatted.
Then the gunner let loose,
and the men exploded into dust.
Suddenly, next to me,
came a hfff of amusement
from my Brother's nose.
One of those tiny, baby laughs.
I wasn't surprised, I knew
he was a violent, hateful man.
What surprised me
was that I had done it too.
I was the violent man.
The gunner, Brother, I,
we watched a man crawling
from the rubble and in unison
we said, "Keep shooting."

I told myself, "Nine years,
you're nine years old,
too young to play war games."
I had to separate myself,
I had to feel like I had never
killed anyone, would never,
and would never be killed.
I had to know that
I am here, and they are there.
But I didn't know why.
I asked myself why soldiers were
there and not here,
and how long until
my streets would be seen
black and white through
the lens of a cannon.
Will I be a soldier?
Will I be a corpse?

I squinted up at the collectibles
my father kept on the desk.
Novelty cereal boxes,
cards, beer bottles, knives.
They could all be, they
would all be, I knew,
someday rubble.

Why must I be my brother?
Or fight, or not?
What is it that makes us
a man? Being hateful, with an
RPG or a camera.
And all those tattered pants—
choices or design?
Mine and yours,
all we have
could all be made,
mine, or yours.
But what decides that?
Who wins?

The chopper circled the sky,
and the room as well spiraled,
like black, cold, tar down the drain
sinking around and around.

Then the video ended.
It was still a school night
in Greenwood, Indiana.
I walked out of the room
sat on the couch
and played Call of Duty.

VICIOUS

Samantha Fain

after Lucille Clifton

don't call me vicious. you didn't see the invasion.
you didn't witness the lady beetles storming the kitchen

walls. you didn't see them morph together
until their bodies looked like one large hand

about to suffocate me, the elytra almost
dancing. an orange taunt. don't act like colossuses

don't scare you. why must you mourn. understand:
i had to wheel out the vacuum. i had to suck them up

through the hose, like slurping up milk
from a full bowl of cheerios.

i didn't have to imagine their whimpers
as they cycloned, but i did. it satisfied me.

the feeling was close to joy,
something rosy. i deserve a shred of rosy

after all of that hard work.
now bring me a glass of milk.

SYNESTHESIA

Camryn Phelps

Numbers are human
and they count themselves on their own fingers
with their real names instead
and the sheep who guide them to rest
know them too. Their breathing
calculated
and their two lungs feel infinite.

Four and seven tenths liters of blood
and yet crimson
is only measured by the age a woman
is born or the age a man is born or
the age a person is no longer a child.

Numbers argue life is measurable
but how does one count the laughter
of too late cobalt nights,
or the warmth of honeyed bodies clinging,
or the shadows of rain hitting the muddied pavement,
or the freedom to choose.

Numbers count pulses
and insist veins could last
but they do not fathom the toll,
the cost of living. Years
do not propel age.
Living preserves.

CONTRIBUTORS

Emma Clark is a senior majoring in English and minoring in Creative Writing and Art Studio. She enjoys writing poetry and creative non-fiction, reading fantasy and mystery fiction, painting, and photography. Outside of class, she works part-time as a framer and enjoys hiking at Brown County. Her pieces are often influenced by personal experiences and close relationships. Emma is a devoted video game player, deep cleaner, and panda lover.

Sam Collier is a senior Creative Writing major with minors in both English and Spanish. She is heavily involved on campus, participating in extracurricular organizations like Earth Club, GrizPAC, and lacrosse, alongside her other duties as Editor in Chief of Apogee and assistant to the Humanities Department.

Samantha Fain is a senior in Creative Writing with minors in Spanish and Psychology. She is the Website Editor for Apogee, and she has been published in The Indianapolis Review, Rattle Poets Respond, SWWIM, and others.

Isaac Gleitz is a freshman at Franklin College studying Journalism and Spanish. He enjoys reading, writing, and anything creative. He is also a member of the Franklin College men's soccer team, Franklin College band, and The Franklin. Isaac grew up in Corydon, a small, rural town in southern Indiana. He supports the arts, so while he is not in plays or galleries, he encourages others to share their work.

Jade Harris is a student at Franklin College.

Samantha Harrison lives in Indiana and is an English major studying at Franklin College. In her free time, she enjoys writing, doodling cartoons, and gardening. She has a soft spot for confessional poetry and Kurt Vonnegut's short stories.

Ashton Hoerner is a Creative Writing major interested in the contemporary and classical world of literature. He finds he can unpack his life and childhood using poetry and enjoys expressing himself through art to feel better connected to the world around him.

Rebecca McKinley is a freshman at Franklin College planning to major in English and Creative Writing. She enjoys writing, theater, and playing her flute in her free time.

Camryn Phelps is from Edinburgh, Indiana and is currently attending Franklin College as a junior. She is pursuing a major in Creative Writing with minors in Women's Studies and English. Fantasy and horror are two of her favorite genres.

Greg Potter is a veteran artist who works in acrylics and oils on canvas and Masonite board. He often employs bold colors to paint animals in a surrealist manner. His animals are usually going somewhere, ready to begin a new journey, or challenging people's expectations about them. Some animals are tourists, others are explorers, and a few are misfits. Greg has exhibited his work in several art shows and galleries in the Indianapolis area.

Tara Sander is double majoring in Graphic Design and Photography with an Art History minor at Franklin College. She mainly works digitally when it comes to creating and editing art, and she really enjoys using her camera and editing within the Adobe Suite. Tara is currently working at Main and Madison Market Cafe, which allows her to orchestrate pictures for her social media. She is also the current Vice President of Kappa Pi Art Honor Society and the Vice President of the Art Club. Her hope is to find an amazing job after graduation that allows her to showcase her artistic voice to the world.

Lacey Siderewicz is a senior Graphic Design major at Franklin College.

Avery Sparks is from the Fort Wayne area and is finishing up her senior year as a Graphic Design major. She likes to spend most of her time watching Netflix, playing with her two doggies, and camping/spending time with friends and family. Her dream job is to design wine and beer labels for wineries and breweries all around the nation.

Beverly Stauffer is a mother of three sons. She grew up in Missouri, watched her mother learn to paint in her 50s, and admired her work. As an older non-traditional student, Beverly saw the opportunity to ‘grab the moment’ and try something new. With her teachers’ help, she has pursued her dreams in drawing and painting, but to have her son call her an ‘artist’ was her greatest honor. She plans to keep on learning and encouraging her grandchildren in art.

Mackenzie Steagall is a senior at Franklin College. She is majoring in English and minoring in Creative Writing. She has been on Apogee’s staff since her freshman year and has worked in a variety of positions. This year, Mackenzie is honored to serve as the Managing Editor of the journal. In her free time, she enjoys reading and writing nonfiction work.

Haven Tunin creates work with the intention of helping others see this world a little differently. Her work explores the subconscious realm and emphasizes our oneness with the universe, and in her pieces, Haven encompasses her critical view of society by suggesting that we should love everyone and everything equally. She hopes to influence society to become more harmonious and peaceful by accepting all as one.

Alexander Turner serves as the Outreach Coordinator on the Apogee staff and is an English major with a minor in Creative Writing. In his free time, he enjoys reading, writing, watching movies, and yelling in traffic.

