

A Reverie

There is music to every place. Listen. The streets sing their song, the bricks theirs, the air itself hums its own melody. The entire city throbs and jerks to the rhythm coursing through its heart.

In a small courtyard off of the Boulevard Etrangers, a boy is dancing. He twists and spins, bare feet pounding on the cobblestones. A girl dressed in silks the color of raw meat plays a sitar, weaving its tones into the boy's movements. She never takes her gaze off of him, following his every step with eyes the color of aged glass. The boy is blind to her attention, though; he is lost in the dance. His eyes are dark and wild, seeing straight through the tenements and mews to some distant desert place. His cheeks are flushed, his breathing ragged, his brow crowned with fever-sweat. But still he dances, and still the girl watches him, playing softly. Trailing her melody across his face, down his arms—touching with her music what she will never feel beneath her own hands. Listen now to the tune those hands pick out on the strings, the longing in those fingers—she has heard the music of this place; she has felt the rhythm of these streets.

[Untitled]

Shutter the lanterns. The night is dark and full of forms that seek to harm. Sometimes it is better not to be seen.

The sound of shouting—not too distant. A deep groaning, as if the streets are tearing themselves apart. *So this is what a dying city sounds like.*

You lie tense and sleepless in my arms, ready for flight. Glass breaks a few blocks over, and I feel you jump soundlessly. Your eyes, illuminated by the wounded glow on the horizon, are those of an animal hunted to exhaustion.

Once we took a trip to the coast, and sat watching the sea. You pushed back hair tousled by the wind, and laughed. We talked of this and that, mindless words, nothings. We had other ways of communicating.

Now we crouch here, alert and wary, waiting for something we cannot see. Dawn is a long time coming. Sometimes it is better not to be seen.

Claire S.

This can't be (our end), I miss you.

If I become your memory
Please don't forget me

If I become your summer fling
Please don't throw me away

If I become your mistake
Please don't regret me

If I become your regret
Please don't abandon me

If I become your impulse
Please don't quit me

If I become your emotion
Please don't delete me

If I become your fear
Please don't run from me

If I become your fallen label
Then these Are what I am
Please don't forget me

My neon bible hit full screen
Tonight, I sit and watch the world fall
Into the street my mind wanders blank
The smell of your drug deals
Your lies, your deceit
What secrets haunt this blown up lifestyle?
Prostitution hugs every corner
Homelessness is the hallowed art form
What more do you have to live for?
Easy access to your addiction
Why wouldn't you stay
Money comes easy here
If your body can earn it
Hurt to Hurt, to love-this never-ending
Cycle through it, keep alive
Nothing's broken, except for me
What face sits on the corner?
Is it me? Lost and broken, I sit
Am I waiting?
Are you coming back to me
You promised I wouldn't have to do this
I can't bear to sell myself again
My dragon was my only love
My salvation
My friend
To keep it in reach
I lose myself to blackness
The last time, I promise
I don't deserve this
Neither does my shattered home
Yet every night I stand here
Waiting for a pickup
A drop off
A place to cry and hate myself
Because I don't want to be like this
I want to go back to when my life was good
Before my bible was neon
Before my houses were shady motels
Before nights ended here
On this corner, facing east
Watching my sunrise
Remember.....
This wasn't always my life
Don't judge my mistakes
Learn from my lifetime
Mistakes take flight here
Vegas is a dangerous place
You won't find salvation
The churches take your money in machines
Your bibles are neon
Clutched to every turn and alley
Dropping to your knees won't save you this time
No one falls in prayer here
Except to pray it's the last one
Money runs the streets
Get out before it catches you
You don't want to live like me
You don't want to be stuck.

Coming Home

By: Solstice Lappin

I wake up to a faint knocking on our door
I roll over to see if you are here,
But you're not.
I lift myself out of our bed and open the curtains.
Red and blue lights flood our bedroom and
Bounce off the freshly painted white walls.
I walk down our hallway to the front door
With a feeling of dread,
Eating away my insides.
I open the door only to find a man in uniform
Staring at your hat in his hands.
He tells me something but I don't know what.
I am too tired to hear.
He hands me your hat and suddenly it hits,
You're not coming home.
I hold your hat close and walk away without closing the door,
But I still hear the familiar click of it locking shut.
I walk down my hallway and into my bedroom.
I fall into my bed and place your hat on the pillow beside me,
Where your head should be.
I roll over,
Still expecting you to wrap your arms around me.

Destruction Is a Form of Creation

I create.

I carry joy.

I bestow hope.

I accompany excitement.

I drag despair.

I drill pain.

I destroy.

Broken Concentration

3:30 AM.
On the deck.
Bugs like kamikaze pilots,
Everywhere.

Here comes the questioning face:
One brow furrows,
The other cocks.
Wrinkles on the forehead rumple like whipped cream.
The corners of the mouth make little spiral staircases.
The eyes' pupils like black holes.

“It's awkward holding on,
 While scratching one leg with the other.
 Perhaps shorts weren't in order.”

The forehead smoothes,
The lips grow thin.
It's the eyes' corners turn to wrinkle.
Only one side dimples.

The smile contains the universe now,
Except the bugs still biting.
Ow.

Emma Wilbur

Sand

You're what I want to be.

You're a curve of heat, so loving, with chilled edges.

You're my favorite memory, so unforgettable and unique, everywhere.

You're happy rolling tumbles, smiles and dust.

You're a smoother, skin, tempers, topics. A soother: mind, body, and soul.

You're the different I need.

You're a billion tiny fragments, pieces that click together, make a mass, make a cosmos.

You're adrenaline: running, jumping, swimming, screaming.

You're support for when the adrenaline leaves and I'm falling for you to catch me.

THE DANCE

She sways from left to right
Pulsing and spinning
Clothed in scarlet and black, amber and gold
She leaps up, her arms stretched high above her
Reaching for the ceiling
She drops, her coppery hair touching her jet black shoes
Her hands brushing the floor
She smolders gently, then goes out.
Smoke.

IT IS

It is the music of light upon skin
It is the warmth floating on the breeze
It is the deep coming in through the window
It is the sun in the back of a pickup
It is this morning's breakfast on an airplane
It is the rhythm of life.
--Kristin Winkle

Past, present, future

Lesleigh Hartley

This is the time that we've lost
This is the song that was never sung
This is the heart that was broken like light bulbs thrown against rocks
Maybe we'll gain back the time
Maybe someone will sing this song
Maybe we will mend the heart to reverse the pain
But only the future will tell
For the present states no more than the obvious

Home

The sun drips off the roof leaving a sparkling trail of bright yellow in its wake.
A river of trees rushes somewhere nearby whispering and singing in the soft mid-morning air.
Thoughts swim in my head. None of them are good enough.
But where do they come from?
Do they have a home?
Green hair grows from the skull of the earth its soft and lush.
Lost in silence I run my fingers through it.
In a distant land a voice calls out quite at first but it grows louder to the point that it bounces back in my ears.
It dances gracefully in a heart pounding rhythm.
Slowly I draw from my dream and look around.
There is a tree standing high above my head birds sing from its branches.
I follow a path through the darkening forest.
It leads me home.

America

We argue behind glasses
Because we see things differently.

Marker in hand, you
Illustrate sound,
Practice the emphasis on our sentences.

I loved the lies that you wiped off
Your glasses with the
Aluminum pink shirt.

The jury is still out on this one.
During recess, school kids sing:
'You say po-tay-to, I say po-tah-to!'
While they send chalk outlines
As a border to keep out unwanted details.

We argue behind glasses
Because we see things differently
And without them we'd see the same.

Moments

A little boy looks into his father's eyes, at a baseball game.
A little girl smiles onstage after her first ballet recital.
With the first flame of passion.
The girl's eyes, an ocean swimming pool.
The boy's ears pink, like salmon, from the cold.
From the first, they know.
This is a world of opportunities and possibilities.
And they'll soon learn
100 dollars is not much money
And 100 miles away is not *too* far.
As they dance to the rhyme of life
They soon learn things they did not want to.
But from the first dace,
to the first song
and with the first kiss
They know.
These are the moments they created,
And there will be many more to come.

The Conductor
Maya Heubner

The conductor flicks his baton
in a frenzy, sweat dripping down his face.
His energy-filled body is working overtime.
His arms wave erratically with
the seven-eight meter of the music
and he rapidly turns pages of sheet music, temporarily
forgetting to wipe away the gray hair falling in his eyes.
The violent grand finale comes around, pinning
the people in the crowd to their seats. The last note
reverberates through the concert hall,
and the band has gotten to the heart
of the frantic, suspenseful song.
Cheers come from the audience.
The conductor steps off the podium, proud
of a job well done.

It's a Cruel World Out There

These pitiful beings,
Don't they see?
That they are being
What they don't want to be?

Trapped in a cubicle
For your whole life.
The style is maniacal
And so is your life.

Have you ever wondered
What it would be like
To be a wonder
Or to be liked?

It is a shame,
People these days.
They'd do nothing for fame,
And are in it for the pay.

They don't realize it,
But we have one goal.
You can take my word for it
Or call me a fool.

We need to be remembered.
We need to make history.
So we can be remembered,
And not a mystery.

People are forgotten,
Lost here and there.
No care for what they thought,
All alone in despair.

So don't get lost,
Be remembered.
Your work might have a cause
And be not dismembered.

Shades of Brown

I once had a great grandfather. I only met him once, when I was little. He lived in a little house, where everything seemed like a shade of brown.

When we were visiting, he offered my father coffee. My father declined and asked for Lipton Tea. My father is so weird in that way. He would only drink Lipton Tea with a pound of sugar in it. He was also weird in his tastes and ideas.

He came all the way from Pakistan to the United States, not for the college that he had been accepted into, but to marry a blonde woman.

He got with this one chick, I think her name was Wendy, but she left him. Then he met my mom, who was also blonde, and had me. They were married for thirteen years before they separated. But after this, my father learned “the errors of his ways”. He went back to Pakistan, married a Pakistani woman that he knew for a day, and is bringing her back to the States to live in the freezing state of Alaska.

I want to strangle him, to get him to hear me, “What the crap, dad? You’re over fifty, and you marry this thirty-five year old that wants babies? There must be something seriously wrong with your head.”

And the woman, I don’t even know how to spell her name, hunts pigs. She hunts pigs with pistols.

My dad is trying to give me a reason to spend time with this woman, so he decides to voice his opinion, “We should go hunting when she comes over.”

Are there even pigs in Alaska?

I said “sure”, but only if bought me a pistol. And now, he’s got it in his head that he’s going to get me a woman pistol. You know his definition of a “woman pistol”?

A pink one.

A pink pistol. He wants me to run around with this woman in the woods, hunting non-existent Alaskan boar with a pink pistol. Who the heck wants that? Uh, maybe someone mentally unstable.

Hmm, that brings me back to the shades of brown...

Chrystalina

Pokémon. My sister, Chrystalina, and I found the concept of Pokémon amazing, intriguing, and amusing. I remember watching the first episode with her, and getting hooked the moment I saw Pikachu.

I had the cards, but not as many as my sister. We would play for hours, building our decks, demolishing each other.

Then, the Gameboy game came out. My sister got the Gold Version, while I got the Silver. We would capture new Pokémon and fight each other, using a glitchy cord. She usually won, seeing as how she had more patience than I.

There were these caves in the game. They were pitch black, and you could only see a few squares around you. I would always get lost in them and be attacked by horribly strong Pokémon. I would run to my sister, begging her to get me out. I swear, that girl had maps! She would take my Gameboy, tap it a few times, and hand it back. I would thank and hug her, running away to keep playing.

I would then, promptly, get lost in another cave.

Oh, the Gym Leaders! I myself would usually finish all the Gym leaders before my sister. But the Pokémon League was all her.

With the Gym Leaders, it was just one fight. So brute force was all you really needed, and that's what I was best at. But, the Pokémon League was a series of battles against insanely strong opponents. I would take down one, and then be crushed by the next.

You needed patience and strategy, and that's what my sister had.

She would knock them down, one by one. She would smile as their Pokémon fainted from her beating. She was a Goddess of War among tiny gamers. She was glorious. She was dedicated. She is all I've ever wanted to be.

Childhood Memories

Claire Swanson

A simple room, small but pretty. Open yet contained. Entry was rarely granted, but when it was, memories sprouted out of the dusty rose carpet, hundreds at a time. Those walls still pound with the laughter and rain, while the carpet holds countless spills and stories. Stories too mature, but still told in whispers if mouths were kept closed. A poster on the closet door never hung straight, and neither did the clothing rack. A window seat high in the corner, under the right window. Here's where a child sat, listening in on the words of things much beyond the comprehension of a six-year old. Cherry blankets lined the bed, while a heater, steel gray in color blasted comforting heat inside. Brown door with its limited entry held the favorite times of childhood, while the hallway outside it held the dark, cold, and uninviting memories. Its hospital white carpeting contains the begging, the waiting, and the crying. Forever will that small section of the old house stand up full with memories.

Emily Bowman

Changes

Growing up, my parents were loose with my brother's and my TV schedules. We lived in Virginia from when I was two to when I was seven, and had quite a large TV in our ranch-style house's living room. My brother and I attended a religious elementary/primary school that was definitely the polar opposite of the school I attend now. Afternoons were spent either at soccer practice, or at home, on the lazy boy, watching TV.

TV has never been a "do it yourself" kind of activity at my house; we like to believe that it is a social event, not something that keeps you from interacting with anyone except for during commercials which were also used as snack breaks. It was "chill time" but more like a fun, talkative, connect-with-each other chill time. Better than all reading separate magazines in a quiet room, and getting shushed when you breathe too loudly.

My brother's and my favorite shows were the same back then. Hey Arnold! Was among our favorites, and I still remember the glorious days of when it aired. This show is a cartoon that was on Nickelodeon. It was about a boy that had a football-shaped head, growing up in New York, and attending an inner-city school, while living with his grandparents. The show had what every elementary school show needed: the kid who always got hurt, the bully, the bratty little girl, and the generally awesome in every way best friend that spoke more sense than the rest of the characters.

My brother and I would watch this while my parents cooked dinner or until it was late enough for us to go out to eat. In our house the kitchen and living room were joined together, so interacting in this small space was reasonable enough that we didn't have to move. Our bodies could veg out, while our minds and mouths were entertained. Pure relaxation, kid style.

Now that I'm older, I realize that my relationship with the media has developed in a way I'd rather it didn't. I find myself subscribing to Seventeen magazine. The pages of this are filled with tips and tricks for everyday life as a young woman such as: "108 make-up tips for your skin tone", "how to make him yours" and, "Get jeans for your body-type" (the pictures of the girls that are close to my body type, look awfully disproportioned, as if their advice would make you stand out awkwardly when the petite, and tall and slim clothing styles are fashionable, and cute).

My friend Brook and I are the only ones out of my group of friends that read this magazine religiously. She and I will go through the many I've collected over the years, and comment on the dating advice pages or embarrassing stories that other readers like us, submit. I'll also go through, and make shopping lists so that I can be up-to-date on makeup and clothing trends, however the list ends up costing more than I would imagine any need-to-have basic would.

Cassie, another close friend, is sort of cut off from the media world. She lives 18 miles out the Haines Highway, and her house lacks running water, and satellite. This forces me to catch her up on many important details, such as popular hair trends, and new TV shows that have sparked multiple inside jokes. Every once in a while she gets fed up with my utter obsession with all-things-media, and will go off on me about how I need to stop obsessing that brightly colored converse were last year's thing. She's my rock and keeps me grounded when I start crying because I can't look like the girls in these magazines.

However, I try explaining to her that my insecurities as a person don't come from social-media influence, and that it's just my lack of a romantic relationship that makes me so

insecure. This is the perfect comeback, mainly because she's had a boyfriend every year since sixth grade, and wouldn't understand my so-called pain. But I do know that my yearn for a connection like that has been exaggerated by the things I expose myself to, that like to tell stories of perfect connections that only happen once in a blue moon if they're not truly dysfunctional, or staged.

Recently, my enthusiasm with Seventeen has spread to my TV watching habits. My favorite shows have gone from Mythbusters and CSI to America's Next Top Model and What Not to Wear. Shows that I would've laughed at two years ago, but that now fill my head with scales of beauty that my genes can't even pretend to match. I used to think that the girls that got depressed from these expectations were taking them too seriously, but now, with depression lingering I sympathize with insecure-body-conscious teenage girls, because I have become one.

Emily

I watch her slip away. The girl who confided in her parents and who felt guilty when she lied to authority figures. She's changing, whether it's with or without the influence of her surrounding, she is fading into what I am. Fading into what I must be, for if I were non-existent there would be no separation of her and I, and no bridge to the social norms that are all too confusing to her innocent mind.

She shows up less often now. She will present herself to new teachers, and to parents of friends, but never to her peers. It feels as though Emily is the mask as I grow. She is the curtain that I hide behind when faced with trouble. Tides have turned and she's almost gone. Yet I can feel something inside me that's screaming out for her to stay. That knows of consequences that I have not foreseen that come with losing reality, and only holding on to the mask which once never controlled her actions, but now has control over everything. This life is mine now, and the nice girl that confided in her parents and felt guilty when she lied to authority figures, is just a character that I play very well.

Emma Wilbur

Pills

When I am not her, people change inside. She sees them as funny, beautiful, interesting. All I can see is shallow, immature, their lack of personality cut through their blank smiling faces.

When I'm not her, I change too. I'm not sinking for you to laugh. My thoughts balloon underneath and shoot me up the vein until I'm inside the brain and all I can see are more questions.

When I am not her, I love. There are new colors splashing, bubbling in front of me; there are new dimensions, new brains for exploration. I'm so happy. I'm so happy, I can't be near you. I'm not part of you. We're different pieces of sky and I'm repelling you. Because I'm happy.

When I am her, I'm a fool. I'm stupid and selfish and arrogant, oh god, she's so arrogant. She's so opposite, I don't know how I contracted her, how she's my disease. She's who you'll meet and some people like her. Why do you like her? Can you see me back here, the one at the edge of the frame? Can you see anyone?

My Soul in a Locked Chest

There are some things in life that cannot be explained in words. Moments in time lasting only a split second that, no matter how hard you try, you can never quite remake. They leave you with scattered remnants of feelings rare as a blue moon. Feelings so gloriously-wonderful, that all you want to do is shower the Earth with them, allowing the entire population to feel as good as you. Feelings that you can't get from any substance; only from the sound of a loved one's laughter, the smile on their face, or the beauty of sun-shine sending rays through a blanket of fog on a snow-capped mountain causing the ocean below to sparkle with all the glory of perfectly shaped diamonds

And still these descriptions cannot give justice to the objects and ideas I have tried to write about. What I want to share with the world.

Because you cannot open a locked chest without the right key; and what I have attempted to write on paper, is my soul.

My soul in a locked chest.

By: Jackie Tew

Goodbye

I hated saying it. I wasn't going to. Saying that word meant that the time I knew was inevitable, and still thought would never really come, was here.

I watched as she dumped her bags into the back of the car, telling myself over and over that she wasn't going to leave, and at the same time, that she was leaving

How could she? Pfft! She wasn't really going to leave me alone. This was all just a huge joke.

Any second now, she was going to turn around and laugh at me for believing that she was really going away. She would tell me that she wasn't going anywhere. She would tell me that she was staying. But she didn't, and somewhere in my subconscious mind, I knew that she wasn't going to. She was leaving.

She walked up to me and grabbed my shoulders, grinning. "I did it." She said. "I'm going to college. I'll miss you, a lot. And I'll make sure to call and keep in touch." Then she gave me a hug, and hugged her back, thinking that maybe, just maybe, if I didn't let go, she wouldn't leave. But I knew that was a ridiculous idea. I did let go, however reluctant.

She grabbed my hand and squeezed it tight. "Bye, Jackie. I love you." Then she walked away and got into the passenger seat, closing the door behind her. Tears started to fall onto my cheeks as the door clicked shut, keeping me out.

I waved, and watched with a heavy heart as the car drove off. I had to say it.

"Goodbye."

By: Jackie Tew

Love Stories by Jacob W. Fast

“I love you!” The Girl said, almost insane, holding a knife to her throat. The Boy backs away, afraid of what could be. He feels a sudden strength and moves like a viper, effectively disarming the crazed girl. The Boy looks upon the knife with disgust.

“Attention...” He says,

“What?!?” shrieks the Girl

“You love the attention I give you... No... *gave* you.”

“NO!” she screams, “*I LOVE YOU!!!*”

The Boy idly shakes his head. He’s made up his mind. Never again. He stands up and lets the knife drop from his hand. It sticks up from the soft carpet. “Goodbye.” As he leaves, a certain freedom washes over him.

“What is love?” the young man ponders to himself

“Is love the desire to be with someone? Is it wanting to make someone happy?” He begins to expand his thinking.

“Is it wanting to give the best to someone?”

“No.” He replies to himself

“It isn’t any of those...”

“Love is the lack of logic in the desire to selflessly see someone happy, whether or not you are in their life.”

He is amazed how he found the answer to a question that has plagued many people for so long. How no one else ever told him this. How no one else seemed to know this. This last thought saddens him.

Two people are walking, hand in hand. A man and a woman,
The rain gently mists over them. They don't seem to notice. The man
gets a look on his face, one that the woman knows all too well. He
wants to say something. She decides she'll press about it this time.

"What is it?" she asks

"Oh... Nothing."

"No, That was definitely something."

The man becomes very conscious of the rain, and wishes it
would stop.

"Words" He says

"What words?"

"Three words"

It was this moment that the woman had been waiting for, but
the man becomes afraid. Too many times these words had been used
against him. He weighs the possible pain against the joys he had
already had with her. "She's worth it" he decides

"I Love You" he says.

NIGHT

It was the night sky with sparkling stars and insignificant at first but space, with do much depth, all around them, polluted from the world's collection of cars and factories. The haze hangs in front of the glimmering stars reflecting the street lights back at me. I feel the asphalt still warm from the day's heat under my back and the smell of freshly cut grass is coming from somewhere nearby. A car's engine roars coming closer and closer. A horn honks; I jump up losing my focus on the beautiful space to get out of the way of the speeding vehicle. I am left behind in a cloud of disguising, gray pollution and as the pollution clears a gust of wind comes by. I look up to see the haze swept away and instantly I am lost in the marvelous, clear, glistening space, as far as the eye can see.

Maiji Castro 2010

Moving Alaska By Drew Turner

Of the 50 states of the U.S., only two are not connected with all of the others. While Hawaii is warm, tropical, over populated. Alaska is cold, extreme, under populated. I propose the idea of manually detaching Alaska and its many islands, from both Canada and the ocean seafloor, turning it into a large island.

The next step would be to (with the force of as many aircrafts and/or naval crafts as the world could muster) tow Alaska through the Pacific Ocean to rest west of California, Oregon, and Washington and be North of Hawaii. Alaska would then be secured to the ocean floor once again with gigantic anchor-like weights.

Yes, this operation may sound absurd and impossible. But if you will allow me to quote from the film version entitled: *Prince of Persia*. A character in the trailer clearly states "Nothings impossible, just difficult".

If this were to succeed, Much of Alaska's wildlife may die from shock, migration patterns would crumble and all the snow would melt, thus resulting in floods and water levels rising. Despite all those banes, imagine the boons of this deed.

Alaska would now be warm and tropical as Hawaii is, resulting in more tourists and occupants to live there. Much of the un-flooded parts of Northern Alaska could be cultivated into farmland. Prairies that would now be warm and safe could be converted into mass fields of solar panels, channeling the energy of the sun to enough energy that could be used to power most of the U.S.

Back to the means of detaching Alaska: explosives. Powerful devices such as atom or hydrogen bombs could be strategically placed on the borders, coastline and underneath Alaska itself to accomplish this feat. Though first, contracts must be signed by Canada and roads would need to be closed off.

If this motive of detachment were not enough, another way could be discovered. All the mystical and magical creatures of this world could be summoned to gather at one point. With the rather power of so much magic, we could channel it into an enchanted gauntlet. This power combined with the gauntlet, would no doubt be enough to summon the forces of the earth to move land itself. With that force, Alaska could be swiftly detached and moved to the spot meant for it.

More boons of such a feat include things such as transportation. Plane rides would now be shorter, and with the right materials, one could sail a boat from eastern Alaska to the west coast of the rest of the U.S.

Faces

Faces.

I am not me.

Nor am I her, or she myself.

Rather, we are sisters. Close enough in relation to be mistaken for one another; to share traits like hair and eyes and smiles. But like any siblings will tell you, we are not the same.

There's the fun sister, who rides life like a rollercoaster, always throwing common sense over her shoulder without looking back to see where it lands.

The wise sister knows better than such things. She listens to advice, and helps others, and tells a storm-ridden friend that one day it will stop raining.

I have a smart one; a quiet one. One who's a loving daughter. An angry sister, and a hyper sister. There's one who's exactly like me; one who's reflective, and intuitive.

But she is not me, and I am not her.

Just a sister.

Paige Perez

The Point at Which Nothing is Interesting Anymore

Entertainment. People pay a lot for entertainment. People seem to be too lazy to entertain themselves most of the time. They could entertain themselves with the arts and the imagination instead of being in boredom and being lazy.

Parents sit their infants down in front of the TV the first time they become “too busy” to watch their child, and they go back to the TV for relief every time they’re “too busy” “too frustrated” or “just need a break”.

Children then become engulfed in stereotypes, false information, persuasive advertising, gender roles and cartoons from the beginning. The bright colors, photo shopped images, and society standards become ingrained into their brains as what must be true because it’s the first they ever saw. And of course, they can’t contradict the “seeing is believing” saying because they don’t know any better.

Their learning comes from the TV when for scarcely more money you pay to get cable (or possibly even less) you could teach them a valuable skill or develop a talent that would bring them success in the rest of their life; you could develop a major part of their life which would in turn benefit the child by helping to express emotions and occupying the attention span rather than sitting down on a couch and saying, “Well, I’m here. Entertain me,” like so many lazy couch potatoes.

Now, it’s as if everybody has ADHD—there was a study recently done in which more people are being diagnosed with ADD and ADHD more than there ever was at any given time. Scientists argue that either 1. Since the disorder was less widely known and hadn’t been studied in depth, not many were diagnosed unless it was more of an extreme case. Or 2. All the distractions in our life are causing us to pay less attention to everything and try to evenly distribute our attention over several things at once, making one seeming to have attention deficit disorder as so many things need constant switching between to monitor.

Basically, you must Tweet to all of your followers every half hour about how you sat on the couch, and are still there watching the same marathon show. You must be distracted by advertisements with perfect people on them and shows with special effects because plain old shows aren’t cool enough anymore. Not vibrant enough, not green screened enough to be supernatural. The media has taken human interests in things to ridiculous levels, such as celebrity gossip watches, ridiculous emphasis on sexuality and looking good, etc.

The world will soon be too boring for the newest generation with all of this desensitivity to the natural. Shirts need to light up, backpacks need speakers; clothing needs to be shredded to bits to buy it first, as regular wash jeans aren’t interesting enough. Neon colors, skin tight—Clothing gets more ridiculous every year, especially among teens. Regular long sleeve, bold colored shirts and flaired

jeans aren't cool anymore. People who wear things like that are perceived differently by the rest of the world too, but I don't think they're any different other than that they see beauty in simplicity.

New TV shows are on all the time—but they're identical in story, in plot. We've started running out of ideas since we've educated the general public out of their imagination and creativity. We remake movies all the time because everybody's imagination has run dry.

Rarely anybody takes the time to learn music, draw still life, paint a landscape, and learn to dance, or perform a theatrical scene. Nor do they take the time to attempt putting their children into those enjoyable pastimes because they do not find it important—hey, they lived without it, right?

Those who took the time are looked upon as amazing or a freak. High school especially, which pushes people out of passions they would have otherwise continued. Negativity to the arts takes its toll on the budding artist.

Though not all entertainment is bad. Relaxing and witnessing isn't bad, it's just the frequency in which we do it when we could gain a skill ourselves to perfect and perform (in one way or another). We just don't seem to find regular instrument recitals, galleries, or making pots interesting anymore, technology has to enhance it to be anywhere near grabbing your attention.

And that, my friends, is how we're losing our own culture.

--Sierra Udland

Being Watched

I am being watched. Followed. Copied.

She watches, no matter what I'm doing, she watches.

It's insane. I take a cough drop out of my pocket? She watches until she knows what it is, exactly, that I'm unwrapping.

I get up early? She sits, and she watches. She looks at me for approval, acceptance. As if I am the one she wants to be, and is it okay if she's different? It's okay with me, but I feel her longing to be me.

She's the follower, not a leader. I'm a leader, and she's paired with me. Two leaders would be too much, two followers too little. But she always watches me, enough for me to wonder:

What exactly about me is she wanting for herself? A physical appearance, an internal appearance?

She is obsessed with her mirror—

She looks at it once to start, to fiddle.

She looks again at herself, not good enough. But not good enough by whose standards? On goes the makeup.

Still not good enough, she has decided. Changes clothes.

Glances at me.

“What?”

“Oh, nothing.”

But I suppose that's what it's like when you wish to eliminate your two selves and mesh them into one. One is weary of being the other; one is desperate to be the first.

--Sierra Udland

Tania Cohen

“Vuillame a Paris.” Those are the words etched on the back of my violin. My baby. Its deep, honey-shaded wood glistens, antiquated and beautiful. Handmade in France 150 years ago, it is my masterpiece. It isn’t a masterpiece in the sense of a Stradivarius or the original Vuillame that it replicates, but it is handcrafted, not manufactured in China like most instruments today. I came upon it by pure, beautiful coincidence. I believe it was made especially for me. Its body is petite; a rarity in adult size violins but perfect for my tiny hands, and precisely what I had been looking for without success until then. Its faintly striped back is scratched slightly, and the wood seams are no longer smooth, but its imperfections make it genuine. They give my violin character, and most importantly, don’t hinder its rich, sweet voice. They make it a true instrument, crafted with love, instead of cookie-cutter slabs of wood glued by machines. I don’t know what kind of history is hidden in my violin. I leave its story to my imagination, but really, it doesn’t matter. When I look at it, when I play it, I know it is something special.

Unknown

I stood in agonizing silence. My fists were clenched tight and the passing air tickled my nervous ears which made each peach fuzz hair stand tall and aware. The sea breeze cooled my sparkling citrus lips that haven't met yours in months. Our relationship built over telephone lines that once held strong is now bursting at the seams.

He stood there too. He was tall, strong, and was looking at me long with his hands tucked away in his front Levi pockets. His lips made small movements, but he vocalized no sound. I squinted as if I was asking him what he was trying to say. He released the air from his lungs like a too full balloon, forcing the words past his thin lips.

"I'm so sorry," he said quietly and afraid.

I found myself unable to speak. He could sense my upset confusion, and he began to repeat those same three words like they were the only words he knew. He's so sorry? Damn it, he's so sorry? After all the senseless 2 AM phone calls and adventures plotted and promised to be had, all he was able to do was just say sorry?

Finally, I found the ability to speak once again and a flurry of clustered words filled my guts, and they began to spill from my gaping mind. Words escaped from my grinding teeth that I knew would just drown him. He tried to swim to the surface, but I was holding his head under water. I walked away from him for the last time strong and proud.

But after only a day I realized what was missing, and now that I'm miles away, yet again, I will never be able to tell him, show him, or give him what that was. I loved him. A simple hug felt unreal, and when I gave him my all, I expected nothing in return. It was a friendship caught on fire, but our love was different. It was hidden away between you and I. Our love was slowly disintegrating like paper to water before we could even realize the paper was there. There will always be mushy gushes left behind, but I don't know if you'll ever see that.

Stasha Lee

30 Minutes

By: Solstice Lappin

This morning was like any other morning. I woke up and got dressed like I always do. I brushed my teeth and went to the cafeteria for breakfast. I sat with my two best friends. I had finished my French toast and was looking around the basically empty room, when it happened. The doors swung open with a loud crash, and as I turned to see what on earth was going on, three very defined shots tore through the silent air. Small pieces of the ceiling fell down around us, as we sat in shock of what just happened. The young men had fiery anger in their eyes and when they shouted out instructions you could hear the thick hatred oozing out with every word. The three men rounded us up into groups: One with boys the other with girls. One man watched the boys and the other two men watched us girls. The men had the ten of us line up facing them, then one by one they came and turned us the other way. The next thing I knew shots were ringing through the air.

It wasn't an execution, nor was it random. They thought about who they wanted. Out of the ten of us only three were left standing. The men had us facing away from the windows but I could still see the flashing blue and red lights. I could hear the muffled talk of the men as they decided what to do next. The phone rang; I was standing right next to it. I didn't know if I should try answering it and yelling for help. I decided not to, I didn't want to see any other girls or boys die. I felt a cold round thing at the back of my neck and I knew immediately what it was. I heard a muffled low voice,

"Answer the phone"

I reach over and pick up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hello? Who am I talking to?"

"This is Anastasia St. Clair"

"Ok Anastasia, I want you to keep calm and tell me as much as you can. Are you injured?"

"No."

"Is anyone else injured?"

"Yes"

The man behind me takes the phone and hangs it up. He moves me so I am facing the windows and slowly we start walking towards them. I look out the window and see men running around trying to make order out of the chaos. I see a man tap the shoulder of what looks like the chief and he points to the window where I am standing. I watch him pick up a

phone still looking at me. I can hear the phone behind me start to ring and someone answering it.

“What we want is a helicopter with 50 grand in it in 10 minutes. Or this young girl will join the rest of her friends on the floor.” I hear him drop the phone, and walk over to where I am standing.

I can hear doors opening and I see the police rush forward with shields as the boys come running out. I turn to look at the man behind me with a questioning look on my face. He looks down at me, his black eyes looking into my heart, and smiles his dark chilling smile. He pulls me back from the window and I see the other two girls sitting in chairs facing me, both with terrified looks. I hear a crash behind me and a flash of light; the man grabs at my arm and yanks me to the side. I can feel the cold of his gun as he pushes it into the side of my neck. I am still blinded by the flash but I can make out black figures moving around, trying to free us.

“LET HER GO!”

“We had a deal. You give me the helicopter with the 50 grand and I let her live. Since you have not given me what I want, I will take her and if you want to see her pretty little face again; you will not follow us.” We back into the kitchen, with the gun still at my head.

I can hear the men in black radio from one to the other. They saved the other two girls and caught the men. I can tell that this surprise attack was not my captives first. The rest of the day is a blur. I remember breaking free of the man’s death grip; then everything went black. A few days later I woke up in the hospital, and was informed of what happened. The men in black caught the man holding me hostage of guard, causing him to trip. When he fell I broke loose but he shot three times in my direction. Only two bullets hit, once in my leg another in my chest. The other two girls are fine just a little shaken up, but the other seven; three died, one is in a coma, and the other three are expected to have a full recovery with lots of help. This event in my life seemed like it took years to unfold when it really only took 30 minutes.

Fair

A Story of Obsession

Adria's Memory

I can still remember that day. Seventh grade, I walked into my homeroom class, and a boy was sitting at my desk.

He was pretty for a boy, with his black hair and deep eyes. I decided that he was new and walked to the seat next to him. He still had his backpack with him, like he hadn't been assigned a locker yet. I had a few pieces of candy in my pocket, from a recent birthday party, so I fished two out. I tapped him on the shoulder and held a piece of chocolate out to him.

"I'm Adria."

Simple and sweet. That's how it went for both of us.

"I'm Jacob."

We both smiled at each other.

For the next few days, it was perfect. It was like we were snorting happiness. We were best friends for three days, before she came in.

We were eating lunch at our regular table, when Kacee and her gang came up from behind. Kacee yelled into the crowded cafeteria.

"I'm dating Jacob Fair!"

The room went silent, waiting for his response. He looked around the room with his calm, oblivious face. And then, he spoke the words that changed my life forever.

"Um, okay."

I was pushed from my seat, lunch and all, so I went to the table facing my old spot. It lined up perfectly with Jacob.

So, I've sat here, for the last five years. Protecting and guiding him in the disguise of a friend; pretending that that's all I really want. But it's not. From that moment on, my life had a new purpose. Jacob was my sun, and I, his loyal planets. Kacee was scum that had to be purged from his glorious solar system.

You could say that I became obsessed. And I would agree with you. Because for the last five years, I've sat here.

Staring at my happiness.

Proposal

Adria pulled him aside before entering the theatre.

“Jacob, we need to talk.”

“No, it's time.”

She grabbed his arm. “Why?” She looked around, Kacee was buying a drink.

“This has been going on for a while; people think it's time to stop playing around.”

“But this is your life. Why should you let other people tell you when to do something this big?”

“But... the movies seem like the best place.”

Adria shook her head, “Dude, we're going to see a horror film. This place defiantly does not have a romantic vibe.”

Jacob looked defeated. “Okay. I'll wait.” He headed to where Kacee was eating a tub of popcorn.

A grimace fell off Adria's face as she smiled; she had only delayed him from proposing, and she was going to have to do something drastic the next time. But as she fell into one of the uniform theatre chairs, she knew that for at least tonight, she could watch zombies eat people in peace.

It had been a couple weeks since their conversation at the movies, and Adria felt confident that this stretch of calm would continue for a little longer.

Adria was slipping herself into a black evening dress, the thin straps wrapping around her shoulders, the cool material falling just below the knees.

Kacee's parents were holding a small get-together to celebrate Kacee being accepted into college. Being her boyfriend, Jacob was invited. Being Jacob's parents' safeguard against Kacee somehow seducing him before he was married, Adria was also invited.

The party was going to be small, with cake and crab puffs. And no doubt with a live ensemble, Adria thought as she rang the doorbell at the Galleens' front door.

She was let in by a butler. A butler! He swept her coat off, pushing her towards a huge living room. He whispered in her ear as they hurried.

“Ms. McKay, Ms. Galleen altered your invitation. You are an hour late. Dinner has ended, and the main event is about to begin.”

He showed her to the double doors that lead to this living room. The butler made the letter “F” in sign language, and then walked away.

Adria sighed as she moved swiftly through the crowd of people. It had always been like this with Ann and Raoul Fair. They wanted Adria to help protect Jacob, but they were always so secretive about it. Their range of communication went from messages in bottles to whispering butlers.

She moved to the front of the crown that ringed around a small stage. Adria chuckled to herself, a stage in the living room? She swept the crowd for people she knew. Ann stood to the side of the stage, her eyes cold. Raoul was just staring at Jacob, who was dressed smartly in a tux, and was also on stage.

Adria did a double take. Why was Jacob on stage? She looked around. And why was Kacee onstage with him?

The butler was onstage now. He stared into Adria's soul as he projected his words.

"And now, a very special announcement."

Jacob and Kacee moved downstage. Jacob pulled out a velvety box, opening it as he knelt down. He held Kacee's hand as he spoke. The whole room craned to listen.

"Will you, Kacee Galleen, marry me?"

Adria heard every word in detail. Each letter cut into her.

Kacee was smiling, she knew about this. It was all planned. She shed a fake tear as she said the word she must have been practicing for weeks.

"Yes."

The whole room sighed. Ann caught Adria's eyes. She was pleading. She wanted Adria to save the day; to save her little boy.

Adria turned her back to the stage. She had always succeeded in keeping Kacee's bed sheets straight, keeping Jacob's pants on. But now, she had failed. She failed, the first time that it really mattered.

She held her arm out, to find the butler already there; leading her to a bathroom.

Adria's face was still frozen in the look of total surprise as the butler lifted the toilet seat. She knelt on front of it, the butler already tying her hair out of her face.

"Who are you?"

The butler smiled. "Jenkins, Ma'am. Just your loyal servant, Jenkins."

Adria tried to smile back at the familiar phrase. "Thank you, Jen-Bleh!"

Adria keeled over the toilet, her breakfast spewing. Jenkins got on his knees, rubbing her shoulders.

"Shh, shh. It'll stop soon."

Adria threw up once more, then followed with a round of dry heaves. Then she was crying. Jenkins cradled her head, rocking back and forth.

"Who are you?" she rasped.

"Jenkins, Ma'am."

“No,” she shook her head. “What are you?”

He smiled, kissing the top of her head. “Jenkins, Ma’am. Just your loyal angel, Jenkins.”

Adria smiled, pushing him away. She turned to the toilet once more. She had always joked about how she was the condom in Kacee and Jacob’s relationship. She had always thought that her feelings for Jacob made her stronger, easier to react. But now, it was her weakness. She heaved one last time. Looks like the condom broke.

Huge. That’s the first word that came to Adria as she walked into the wedding agency. Huge and white.

The Galleens had employed a wedding agency to plan their youngest daughter’s wedding. So, that naturally implied that there was a bridal shop on the top floor, and a stationary room on the one below it.

Adria had been surprised to be invited to take any part in planning Kacee’s wedding, so she was even more surprised when Jacob asked her to be his best man. She had just nodded as Jacob went on about how all of his male friends had left for college, and Kacee already had a maid of honor.

Adria walked up to a modern white desk; the receptionist lounging in a bubble chair behind it. Adria tapped the desk to get her attention.

“Excuse me; I’m here for the Fair-Galleen party.

“Sure,” the woman bobbed her head, “They’re n the bridal shop; top floor.”

“Thanks you, I can find my way.”

Adria hopped into the closest elevator, pressing the “10” button. The strangest elevator music played. It was like “Here Comes the Bride”, but with a techno beat. When the doors opened, she quickly stepped out, only to find herself before a wall of gauze.

Dresses were everywhere; sparkly ones, smooth ones, puffy ones, sheer ones.

Adria battled her way through the earthly clouds. She pushed her arm forward, and grabbed a hand. There was a split second of confusion before the hand panicked. The hand retreated to the rest of its body, dragging Adria with it.

She was pulled from the racks of gowns, dropped into a circle of air. Adria could feel eyes on her as she sat, gasping on the floor.

“Adria?”

Adria lifted her head to see Jacob standing over her.

“Are you alright?”

She stood up, pointing a finger at a woman holding a clipboard, no doubt the planner.

“What the hell was that?”

The woman looked up from the clipboard. “Excuse me?” her French accent was thick.

Adria twirled around, pointing at the dresses. “This is supposed to be a professional business! Why the hell isn’t there a path?!” She was panting now.

The planner looked at her calmly.

“You must have taken the wrong elevator.” She pointed to a small opening in the forest, “The elevator you should have taken is over there.

To Be

Continued...

Blue Acoustic

By Hannah Palof

Sebastian almost always wore large, dark sunglasses to hide the fact that his eyes changed color with his mood swings. And it wasn't subtle. They could change from a bright, merry green to an agitated amber in half a second if you said something that ticked him off. Some people found it hypnotic, others disturbing.

Alex had discovered this phenomenon when Robert had taken him to Sebastian's house; they had been helping his family move to a house a few blocks away. Alex had been fascinated by the deep blue acoustic guitar that sat on a pedestal in Sebastian's emptying room.

When the older boy came in again (without his glasses, it should be noted), it was to find Alex standing with the strapless guitar, strumming nonsense chords while trying not to drop the instrument.

"Alex, stop!" Sebastian bounded across the floor and took the guitar away. Alex, who never said anything, glared at Sebastian and grabbed at the neck.

"Alex, no!" said Sebastian, trying to straighten up, but Alex wouldn't let go of the guitar. With his other hand, he grabbed at the strings, trying to use his weight to pull it back toward him. Sebastian's eyes turned red.

Not just the irises, though that was shocking enough in itself. The whites became pink, as if he were having an allergic reaction to his own anger. "Let go, Alex," he said, his voice dangerously low.

Alex let go and stepped back a few paces. Sebastian straightened up, looking confused. His whites cleared, and his irises faded to a pale blue. "Alex," he murmured, taking a step toward him, "I..."

Alex ran from the room. "Alex!" called Sebastian, his voice filled with desperate apology. Alex didn't look back. He ran downstairs, into the arms of Robert, who stared in bewilderment up at Sebastian, who had followed Alex down. He was still holding the guitar, his eyes covered with his thick sunglasses.

Later, Alex heard Sebastian explain himself to Robert. He said that he had overreacted to something that Alex had did, and that he felt bad about it. That was all.

For the next few weeks, Alex watched Sebastian wearily from a distance. The older kid never went anywhere with his eyes uncovered anymore. He kept his head low at all times, not even daring to look at them. He tried to smile at Alex a few times, but to the small boy, the smile without the eyes was almost as disconcerting as the glare with the eyes. He stayed away from Sebastian at all costs, never wanting to be alone with him. He was surprised when Sebastian left him alone after that. He soon began to miss the boy's sarcastic comments and the way that he sometimes picked him up and spun him around. The thought of Sebastian's eyes still terrified Alex, but as weeks turned into a month, he began to wonder if it had really been that scary.

One evening, Alex heard Robert talking with their mother about Sebastian. It was right after dinner, and Robert was on kitchen duty. Between the clink of plates, Alex could hear his brother talking about how Sebastian hadn't seemed himself when Robert had seen him last.

"Always looking down....doesn't make jokes....always seems nervous....guilty....No! He wouldn't....he's not like that....something must be wrong....I'm really worried...."

Alex stopped listening. He felt awful. He missed Sebastian.

A few days later, when Sebastian was home listening to music, Alex came up into his room. Sebastian looked up, surprised to see the little boy standing there in the doorway.

"Hey," said Sebastian, raising a hand in greeting.

Alex didn't say anything. He never did.

Sebastian stood up to turn the music off, which was pounding so loud that Alex had thought his ears would never stop ringing, even after the heavy metal vanished into the world of unplayed songs.

“What’s up?” asked Sebastian, smiling weakly. Alex remained quiet.

“Is Robert here?” Sebastian took a step toward the door, then stopped, as if afraid he would scare Alex. The little kid nodded.

“Alright,” said Sebastian, and he made to leave. Alex threw himself on Sebastian’s leg, hugging it with all his might. “Um....Alex?” He knelt down to gently pry the boy off, when Alex snatched the sunglasses off.

The two looked each other directly in the eyes. Alex saw Sebastian’s eyebrows raise in surprise, and just for a moment, his irises flashed amber. Alex’s stomach flipped over, but he smiled anyway. Slowly, Sebastian’s eyes faded to pale blue, and then they deepened into a rich hazel as he smiled back.

Alex let go of the older boy’s leg and walked over to the bed in the far corner, where the blue guitar sat. He gently picked it up, noting the instance of protest on Sebastian’s part, and he carefully carried it to Sebastian, holding it out to him. Sebastian blinked, then took the guitar uncertainly. Alex pointed at Sebastian, then held out his left arm as if making a toast, waving his right hand between his belly button and his heart. Slowly, Sebastian knelt down, propping the guitar on his knee, and began to play softly.

A few minutes later, they were both sitting on the bed, and Alex began to hum to the tune of the song. Sebastian’s eyes were still hazel.

Connections happen

Claire Swanson

"It shouldn't be difficult anymore. It's a new place, with new people. The only one who knows here is me, and it's going to stay that way."

That was the first thing Camden whispered to himself when he awoke. The bedside clock read 6:25 am, and he arose slowly and began to get himself ready. Senior year was beginning, the second time for him. His mother walked into his bedroom, and sat on his bed.

"Camden..." she began. "I know it's hard for you right now. Moving here, dealing with losing Michaela, and taking care of Natalie, but you're doing amazingly well."

"Thanks mom." Camden said. "I've got to go get Natalie up and ready for daycare now."

"Oh I already did, she's in the kitchen all ready to go."

"Thanks mom."

"Anytime Cam, I'm going to help you with her as much as possible. I know you weren't expecting this to happen, but Michaela's parents thought she'd be better off with you. After everything... They can't cope with raising her."

"I know mom. It's okay."

His mother left the room and he sat down on his bed, ruffled from the sleepless night. He put his head in his hands and tried not to let everything get to him. A cry from the kitchen reminded him of his job, so he quickly threw on a blue plaid shirt and jeans, both stained from repairing his old Chevy truck. Backpack and Lakers hat in hand, he jogged down the faded, carpeted hallway to the kitchen.

Her blonde hair and sparkling green eyes turned towards him as she reached out her arms for a hug. He picked her up and gave her a kiss, even though his heart ached whenever he held her.

"Good morning beautiful" he said with a false sense of happiness. "Are you ready to go?"

"Hi daddy." She said in a giggle. "Am I going to school with you?"

"No baby, not today. You're going to daycare until I get out of school."

"But daddy..."

"No honey, you have too. Let's go get in the truck, it's time to go."

He bent down with Natalie on his hip to pick up her bags. All the years playing football came in handy now that he had so much to carry on his shoulders. He carried Natalie and her bags to the old green truck, and strapped her into the car seat. After she and all her bags were tucked away, he started the truck and ran back inside to say goodbye to his mom. He slammed the front screen door and ran into the living room where his mother was sitting. Without saying a word, she stuck out her arm, and in her hand was a 100 dollar bill. He reached for it hesitantly, unsure as to why he was getting it.

"For gas, and anything Natalie needs." His mother said.

"Thanks mom, I really really needed this."

"I know Camden, I know you're trying."

Camden bent down to give his mother a hug, then he jogged back out to the truck. He pulled out of the driveway and put his favorite mix CD into the player.

"Natalie?" he said, "I don't want you repeating these song words to anyone, okay?"

"Okay daddy."

"Good girl."

He selected his favorite song, "California" by Hollywood Undead, and pulled onto the freeway. Traffic was light, and he was able to find the daycare quickly. He unloaded Natalie and all her bags; he had forgotten how much toddlers needed. They walked inside, and she ran to play while he signed all the paperwork, and explained that his mom would be picking Natalie up at the ends of the days. After everything was taken care of, he slipped out the swinging door and got back into his

truck with a sigh of relief. He loved Natalie, he really did, but it hurt so much to be around her. She looked so much like Michaela, that he couldn't look at Natalie without wanting to cry. He knew that one day he would have to move past that, Natalie needed a dad who could be strong, and he couldn't let Michaela's parents down. Natalie had lived with Michaela and her parents when she was born, so that they could help Michaela take care of her. And they had, but after the accident they couldn't give Natalie the care or attention she needed. So they changed full custody to Camden, and he couldn't say no. They had sent Natalie back to Camden a month ago, and everyday still stung as much as the first day he saw her again. But he loved her, and he was trying. That thought played on repeat in his mind on the drive to school. He pulled into the crumbling parking lot of his new school and put the truck into park.

"Lakeview High School, home of the Dolphins." He muttered in a mocking tone. They were in Montana for god's sake. There weren't any lakes for miles, or dolphins for that matter. With a sigh, he slammed his door shut and swung his backpack over his shoulder.

The school was like every other he had ever been too, rusty doors hugging the entrance, fluorescent lights overhead in the hallways, casting a sickly light on whatever happened to be underneath, and caffeine-deprived students and teachers around every corner. Camden tried to avoid them all, it was easier that way. The school had sent him a letter that summer, explaining that he would have to come by the registration office in the morning. He quickly found the tiny office, but on his way in, a flash of cascading blonde hair caught his eye. With his paternal instincts on reflex, he dove to catch the falling girl. As his bag hit the floor, he contorted his body and caught the girl in his arms. She landed on his braced arms, gasping as her adrenaline began to kick in. Camden brought the girl back to her feet, and steadied her while he reached to pick her plum colored backpack up from the ground.

"She's a pretty girl," he thought to himself. "I wonder what her name is."

Right as he thought that, the girl turned to him, smiled, and stuck out her hand.

"Thank you." She said. "I'm Lorraine, it's my first day."

"Camden, it's my first day too."

"Nice to meet you."

"You too."

"Do you have your classes yet?" she asked.

"No, I'm about to go get them. Would you like to wait for me while I grab my schedule?"

"I wish I could, but I have to get to the other side of the school for first hour. I'd love to have lunch together though; will you find me in the commons at lunch?"

"Of course." Camden answered. "I'll see you then Lorraine."

He watched her walk down the hallway, her hips swaying in time with his heartbeat. He mentally slapped himself, how could he even think about a girl? He loved Michaela, and he had a three year old. No girl in high school wanted a boyfriend with a baby. Sure, he'd eat lunch with her, but he knew he'd have to tell her right away that he wasn't the type of guy she'd want to be around. He went into the office and dealt with the irritating secretary, who finally handed him a pale, stained copy of his schedule. He sat through Calculus, Biology, and a very awkward, required parenting class. Finally, the fourth bell rang to let everyone free for lunch. He made his way to the commons, scanning the crowd for her backpack. He caught sight of her leaning against the old staircase as he walked over to her.

"Hello Camden" she said. "Where would you like to eat?"

"Anywhere works, how about my truck?"

"That sounds nice, lead the way." Lorraine answered.

He purposely picked the truck so that the car seat would give everything away. She'd be out of the truck in two seconds, and then he'd ditch the rest of school and just drive around. It had been a while since he last had a cigarette, and the cravings were coming back from stress. He thought he'd go grab a couple and drive out to the valleys. They walked over to the truck, and she jumped into the

passenger side and started to spread out her lunch. As he jumped in to his side, he watched her eyes carefully to see where they would wander too. She bit into her avocado sandwich and smiled up at him.

“So how old is your daughter?” she asked.

Camden was taken aback at the easiness of her question. He decided to play dumb.

“How did you know I had a daughter?” he asked.

“The pink car seat, the diaper bag on the floor, and the picture of the two of you in the cup holder.” She said plainly. “You either have a daughter or you really love your little sister.”

Camden was surprised at her reactions; most girls would have instantly turned away.

“Her name is Natalie, she’s three.” He said quietly.

“Pretty name, pretty cute kid too.” Lorraine said. “She got her daddies eyes, that’s for sure.”

Camden smiled at that. “I guess so” he said. “She got everything else from her mom.”

“Does the mom live back in California? Or are you married and she’s here?”

“How did you know I’m from California?”

“License plates.”

“Oh.” He said stupidly. “Uhm, no. She died a couple months ago, and her parents thought Natalie was better off living with me.”

Lorraine looked up from the picture in the cup holder.

“I’m so sorry” she said. “I know how much losing someone hurts. As long as we’re talking about our kids, I had a son who would be about Natalie’s age now.”

“Had?” asked Camden. “What happened to him?”

“He died at the start of summer.” She said quietly. “He had an infection and the doctors couldn’t stop it in time.”

Camden paused for a second, then leaned forward and took Lorraine into his arms. She started to cry, heaving sobs into his shoulders. He held her there for a long time, stroking her hair, while crying himself. Eventually they both sat up, realizing how late for class they were. Instead of going back into class, they decided to take a drive up to the valleys. Speeding down the highway, the sounds of music blasted through the truck. Camden ran every red light, knowing there was some urgency to get to the valley as fast as he could. They peeled into the turnaround at the top of the valley and he slammed the truck into park.

“Are you okay?” Lorraine asked as she reached for his hand.

“No, I’m not.” Camden said shakily. “I don’t know what it is, I met you seven hours ago and I already feel the amazing attachment to you. I don’t know why, and that scares me.”

Lorraine scooted over to the middle of the truck and took Camden in a hug.

“I understand exactly what you mean, because I feel it too. Sometimes people meet because fate intervenes; I don’t think it was coincidence that you were there to catch me.”

Camden looked down into her lustful eyes and told her something that had been on his mind all day.

“I haven’t given another girl a glance since I met Michaela. When she died, I swore I’d never fall for someone again, but when I look at you, something clicks. I know this is crazy, but you’re the first person I’ve been around in months who made me able to smile. When I’m around you, I forget about the pain and it feels okay to like you.”

Lorraine turned her face up to meet Camden’s. Without a word, she turned her lips to align with his, and gave him one soft kiss. At first, everything in Camden’s mind told him it was wrong, but then his mind relaxed and he began kissing her back. Her hair tangled with his as she leaned farther in. They paused and he took her into his lap and hugged her. They sat in the truck, locked in an embrace while the sun began to set over the valleys edge. The crimson color in the sky reminded them of the time.

“I’ve got to get home; I didn’t realize it was so late.” Camden whispered.

“Can I come over?” asked Lorraine. “I’d like to meet your mom, and Natalie.”

“Are you sure you want a boyfriend who has a kid?” Camden asked hesitantly. “That’s not a responsibility you should have to take on.”

“Camden, I love kids, and I think it’s great that you’re trying to be such a good dad. I like you, and I want to be with you.”

“Well, if you’re sure, let’s go introduce you.” Camden answered.

They drove back down the freeway, hands still linked. As he pulled into his driveway he saw his mom pushing Natalie in the front yard swing. For the first time since she had come to live with him, he could look at her and smile, and the pain he felt was gone. His mom looked up at the sound of his truck turning off, and she stood up brushing the dirt from her hands.

“You’re late Cam.” She said. “Who’s this?”

“Mom, this is my girlfriend, Lorraine.”

His mom showed no intent on hiding her surprise.

“Oh? Does she know about Natalie?”

“Yes Ma’am, I do.” Lorraine said. “I love kids, and I don’t mind at all that he has a daughter.”

“Well then, I’m glad Camden met you.” His mom said. “This is the first time I’ve seen a real smile on his face in months.”

Lorraine smiled at that. “I’m glad I can help, he makes me happy too.”

Camden had slipped over to the swing while Lorraine was talking to his mom. He thought it best to tell Natalie who Lorraine was before bringing her over. He knelt down beside her and looked her in the eye.

“Natalie,” he began. “There’s someone here I want you to meet. Her name is Lorraine, and she’s my new girlfriend. That doesn’t mean I don’t still love Mommy, but I think Mommy would want me to be happy, don’t you?”

“Of course Daddy. Mommy tells me in my sleep every night that she loves us and wants us to be happy.”

Camden leaned over, picked Natalie up, and held her close.

“I’m glad you think so baby.” He choked out. “Let’s go see Lorraine okay?”

He carried Natalie over to Lorraine.

“Lorraine, this is Natalie.”

“Hi there angel.” Lorraine said. “Can I hold her?”

“Sure.” Camden said as he passed her off.

“Hi Lorraine,” Natalie said shyly.

“Hello cutie,” Lorraine said.

“I’m glad you met my daddy.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because you remind me of my mommy, and I know my daddy misses my mommy.”

Lorraine paused for a moment, and then turned so she was looking at Camden while she spoke to Natalie.

“I’m glad I met your daddy too. He’s someone I connect with. I’m not trying to replace your mommy; I couldn’t do that and I don’t want to ever have you feel like that’s my intent. But I’m a part of Camden’s life now, and I hope you all like having me around.”

Camden came over and took Natalie back, set her down, and gave Lorraine a kiss.

“I want you here.” He said. “You remind me that it’s okay to want to be with someone again.”

Natalie tugged on Camden’s jeans and he bent back down to lift her up. She swung one arm around Lorraine’s neck and pulled them together. It was a picture perfect moment and it was one they would remember as their lives went on. As for what happens in their lives ahead, they didn’t know now, but as the three of them stood there as the sun finished setting, they knew they would all stay together, three lives now intertwined forever.

Two Generations

by Haley L. Jones

The room is a small square, unbeknownst to the rest of the world, and shrouded in shadow. Furniture is found only in the forms of two chairs and a white, immaculate bed. The light comes from a window poised above it, its ivory curtains billowing as the summer breeze rolls through – proof, indeed, that there is a life other than this. Upon one of the chairs sits an old man smoking a pipe and pensively gazing outside. His face, in darkness, cannot be identified but for the cloud of ash encircling him.

The woman pushes her way through the wooden door inside; the attendants had told not to knock before entering. She instantly goes rigid as silence greets her. The man says nothing at first. He gestures to a second chair, his arthritis-stricken hand illuminated briefly by sunlight before vanishing like a specter.

“I’m glad you are here.” His voice is raspy with age. The woman sits, feeling awkward and afraid in this place. She watches the curl of smog and the wisp of curtains.

“They allow you to smoke in here?” she asks.

“No.”

She doesn’t probe the subject any further. Even in her anxiety, the light seems to attract to her like some kind of magnet, and she radiates with it. Collecting her bearings, the woman announces: “I assume you have already heard the news about Henry.”

Judging by silence and not by expression, she assumes he has not. She deeply inhales the scent of dust and continues, “He was killed on duty in Iraq by a roadside bomb, about a week ago.”

“My son, Henry?” he inquires. “You’re talking about Henry?”

“Yes.”

“I never thought he’d join the army.” The man is otherwise uninterested. She notices, in her peripheral view, a bottle of pills sitting benignly upon the bed sheets beside her. This triggers fear in her, and it shoots through her bloodstream akin to the drugs themselves.

“The funeral is November third, at three p.m., at the Arlington Cemetery. He’ll be buried with some of his fellow soldiers who lost their lives to the same attack.” As she speaks, she is struck by how detached she sounds. Imparting such news should leave her in a paroxysm of tears and misery – but alas, all she can contemplate is the obscure and intimidating figure she speaks to.

He asks pointedly, “Why are you telling me this?”

There is the sound of the highway coming in distantly from the window; and to her, the noise is as loud as an oncoming train. Shakily, she replies, “You have more right to know than anyone. Listen, I can do all the paperwork to get you out of here. I’ll even pay for the plane tickets and all other costs. Everything. Don’t worry. I’ll handle everything.”

“There’s nothing to handle.” The man leans forward and stops smoking for a moment. “Did Henry ever explain to you how I ended up here?”

“No.”

“I murdered three people at a bar in Wichita. I blew their brains out with a machine gun and took their money. I was in jail for seventeen years until I lost it and beat one of my cell mates within an inch of his life. The judge said I was schizophrenic and manic-depressive. Now this – medication and straitjackets.”

She is silent.

“In case you didn’t get the message, the only way I’m leaving this place is in a casket.” He sits back and relaxes, the cloud around him becoming so thick it is nearly opaque.

The wind is dying down and the fluttering curtain settles. The woman feels chained to her chair, caught in a cold sweat and a horrible flood of memories. How could her husband have dealt with all this, let alone emerged from such disaster unscathed? If *only* she herself could face the current tragedy with the same valor.

“I’m glad you are here,” the man says again. Specks of cinders fall to the grimy floor, and the woman once again notices the bottle of pills with a horrible premonition. “Who are you?” he asks.

“...I’m Clara, sir. Your daughter-in-law.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” he says. He speaks not another word.

The woman is petrified as the smoke completely envelops him; becoming him, wreathing him in sickness and despair. She doesn’t want to leave with nothing more than this perplexed terror – but, ironically, it is that terror that keeps her from taking action. As the tobacco scent wafts over she finds a tear spilling down her cheek; sweeping it away, she gets up to depart. During her escape she swears she hears a low chuckle behind her; but assuming that this asylum is playing tricks on even her stable mind, she forgets in a matter of minutes.

Shortly following the woman’s exit, the caustic din of a fire alarm splits the building. After a swift but messy evacuation the firemen burst into the room and douse it with extinguisher. There they find an old man dead on the floor with an empty bottle of medication in his rigid hand. The fire, caused by a pipe carelessly abandoned on the bed sheets, quietly goes out, leaving only ashes behind.

Plateau, Jasmin Evans

Crelasha stood on the edge of the plateau, peering past the mist that the waterfall produced. Through the spray was a yellow and white landscape—not one spec of green could be seen. The sun claimed its property over the sky after hiding behind a particularly large patch of mist and Crelasha’s eyes forced themselves shut until she pulled her hand up and shaded them.

The desert was a curious beast to the Mingou, who were the tribe people of the plateau. Mainly they stayed on top where the waterfall provided for them plenty of water, and plant life grew and kept them alive.

Rather quickly, Crelasha became bored of the waterfall that careened down and almost instantly evaporated from the desert sand. She dug her heels into the ground and pivoted to face the opposite direction.

With ankle bracelets clanging loudly as she walked through the forest, Crelasha examined the trees as she did many times while walking home in chronic curiosity. The trees where she was were rather stout compared to the ones that sprung up in the distant demon’s wood, and unlike the demon’s wood, the trees were bushy and produced plenty of habitats for a variety of creatures. Many of the entities in the forest held little fear for the Mingou due to their general vegetarianism—this gave Crelasha the joy of seeing a particularly clumsy Rackshaw Lemur leaping out of a tree, its purple and yellow plumage at the end of its tail followed the line of the jump, and skidded the top of the trees as the lemur almost fell into the canopy below. Crelasha couldn’t help but laugh when the lemur whirled around and chattered, as it violently groomed its plumage and glared at her.

“It’s not my fault!” She teased the lemur, and ran to the trunk of the tree to have a conversation—albeit it most likely be the one way kind. The conversation never came to be, however; the lemur let out an alarming screech and tore away from the clearing that the tree framed, almost falling again in its panic.

The screech rang in her ears as her heart rate crept in to replace it. The Rockshaw Lemurs were known to be very playful and rarely screeched even if danger stared at them from the bottom of their trees. Looking around wildly, Crelasha saw nothing, which was what she feared more than seeing something. The Rockshaw Lemurs on the plateau had a peculiar aversion to rock tortoises. The fact that nothing was visible meant more than seeing something. Crelasha planted her feet into the ground and stood still. If what she thought was just behind the dense underbrush was she might not have a chance to make it home.

She stood still, unblinking, for twenty long minutes, and began to wonder if the lemur had sat in a wasp’s nest and there had been no need to stand still. To relieve her eyes, Crelasha blinked and silence gave way to the falling of trees and the fury of a monster with scales that appeared like dead leaves and immense unblinking eyes that glowed in its hunt for prey. What most people should have reacted to the encounter was with a shout and a jump, Crelasha forced her eyes open to stay open and stared right into the ‘moving death’. Stillness was the thing that would save her, Crelasha was aware, for the creature before her known as the lek only saw in contrasts in movement.

Many people had been lost to the lek in Crelasha’s village, and those who did manage to live were the lucky few who had an animal unwittingly run in front while the Lek attempted to frighten its prey into focus. And the talented ones managed to move just slowly enough to get away while the lek sat watching the empty space.

But Crelasha had no idea how to move slowly enough; and if she did the bracelets and loose clothing she wore would alarm the lek of any movement tenfold. The best action for her was hope for an unlucky Rockshaw Lemur to wander by.

The lek in its own right was a creature of outlandish magnificence, and when the being’s eyes brightened and it bellowed, she could see not only that the eyes of the lek were glowing, but its entire skeleton lit up. She realized it was trying to scare her into moving. Despite the knowledge of the lek using fear to try to make her move, she couldn’t stop her eyelids from flickering in surprise. The lek lunged toward her face, and froze only a few feet from her head, its mouth open and tongue lolling out. The glowing eyes were level with hers and commanded all of Crelasha’s focus.

An escape wasn’t an option now.

Johanna Richter

Carla Martin sat down at her desk and put her hand down on the scanner to confirm her identity. Her desk screen flashed on and immediately began to display a flurry of statistics and numbers. To the untrained eye it was all nonsense, a meaningless collection of symbols, but Carla immediately began to sort through them with an experienced hand, this had been her job for over ten years, and anyways, it wasn't extremely difficult, not for someone as bright as her anyways. She pulled up the first set of numbers. 2% risk of heart disease, expected IQ of around 140, no apparent genetic disorders, etc, everything about the embryo corresponding to the data seemed to be within normal perimeters. This embryo was qualified for any average job. In the list of options on her screen, Carla selected nurse, and proceeded to insert the strands of specialty DNA the embryo would need, like an excess ability to concentrate, and especially a strong immune system and so forth. Through the glass panel in front of her desk she could see the robotic arm select something, presumably the embryo although she could not see it, and whisk it off to make the proper adjustments. She pulled up the stats for the next embryo and did the same thing, IQ 160, no genetic disorders, and a .05 risk of heart disease. 160 was higher than average, this embryo would defiantly be a genetic engineer. She quickly worked her way through the next few embryos and chose a teacher, an accountant, and a Politician, the next embryo she pulled up seemed normal, IQ 140, no disorders, but something about it seemed strange, a slight irregularity in the data, she pulled up the entire DNA sequence and looked closer, and let out a small gasp. There, nestled nondescriptly with all the other data was a small amount of information, only a couple of letters long. It was the genetic code for a boy baby. She had heard of this happening before, but the instances were extremely rare, only about 1 in 9 billion. All males had been exterminated 100 years ago, in the peace revolution. A feminist group had come to power and pointed out that man was the primary cause of war, a few years later, a particularly bloody and pointless battle occurred, and the movement gained support. A scientist had invented a toxin that killed only males, and released it into the atmosphere. A few days later, nearly every male was dead, and females that sympathized with them had their memories wiped. Feelings of romance were oppressed throughout the entire population by pills that everyone was required to take, and a few years later, when babies began to be engineered, the gene that controlled that brain region that was responsible for capacity of being romantically attached to someone was deleted from the DNA sequence. Only XX chromosomes were selected in the engineering, a baby boy shouldn't have ever been even thought of let alone made, and yet here it was, a microscopic male embryo floating in the reproductive ether. Her hands fluttered over the terminate button, she knew that was the right thing to do, but a curiosity began to grow in her. She had never seen a male, never examined one, and this would be the perfect opportunity. She could build an incubator at home, it wouldn't be difficult. "You could take it; no one would ever have to know." She thought. "But on the other hand, males were responsible for so much destruction, what if something happened." "You could exterminate it if it got out of hand, or change it to a girl, it will be okay, besides, when will you ever see an opportunity like this again?" the scientist in her head soothed. In one deft motion she pressed the eject button. And whirring sound began and a small glass tube dropped out of the incubator. She slipped it into her pocket.

Eight hours later Carla shut and locked the front door of her house. She had been on pins and needles all day, jumping at the slightest of sounds. She didn't even want to think about what the consequences would be if she got caught. Males were considered the greatest threat to the new world order, and even protesting for their existence was considered high treason. She opened her suitcase and began to take out spare incubator parts she had taken from storage. Most likely, they wouldn't be missed, and if they were, she could say she had been experimenting with a different type of incubating design and no one would question her. She had been one of the original designers of the incubator, and was revered within the scientific community. She assembled it quickly and injected the fluid containing the embryo into the incubator. Because of technological advancements, what the development that had previously taken 9 months took 2 days. Carla had decided earlier she would raise the baby and allow it to develop naturally for a month, in order to study it, and then give it hormones to feminize it. It was an old technique that had been developed before it had been discovered it was possible to completely eliminate male chromosomes, but it was fairly effective. She would tell the people at work that she had decided to raise a baby, and she would be on maternity leave. She wouldn't let anyone see the baby until it was female. Afterwards, she would say she wasn't ready for a child and pass the baby off to someone else. It wasn't particularly uncommon for a baby to live several different homes, and when it was three it would become property of the school, and no one would ever have to know. She zoomed in with the microscope and watched the cells divide. It always amazed her how intricate and precise a process it was, how the cells knew where to go and how to divide. As a scientist she found it profoundly beautiful. As she sat and watched, a feeling of attachment began to grow, too small for her even to notice, but as she watched, little did she know she was about to change history.

Never Forget

Joshua Eidler

I shudder when I think about my entire life – how many years had it been? Far too long to keep track. I have seen a lot of things, some amazing and some horrendous. I am reminded of these things in my dreams, which, more often than not, become nightmares.

I remember one of the worst nightmares I have ever had, the memory that haunts me most. My first love, Janet, oh Janet, had just passed. She was a victim of circumstance and I cannot help but feel partially responsible for the course of events that lead to her death; she was buying me a birthday present – too much time has passed to even remember when my birthday is, but that seems far from important. While she was in the store a man walked in, armed with a loaded twelve gauge and he was hell-bent on clearing out every purse, wallet, and register in the establishment. In an attempt at heroics, she was always a brave girl, she started to dial the police; before the first ring was over she had received a face full of buckshot.

This hit me hard; I had already lost my parents, now her too. She was my everything and she was so young – too young to die. I constantly think, ‘Why couldn’t it have been me? Why did you have to take someone so good, so beautiful away?’ Then I tell myself, she called the cops, who, shortly after her demise, arrived and detained that murderous bastard. She probably saved a lot of lives, but at what cost? Then I received the call that call that all loved ones received after the most tragic of events has occurred. I was devastated; it pains me to this very day when I think about what the policeman said, “She’s gone.”

The day after I climbed to the top of our apartment building’s stairs and pushed open the door marked with red lettering that spelled out, ‘Roof Access.’ I strode quickly to the edge of that urbanized cliff and looked down at the almost empty street below. There were a few people all attending to their daily business; a businessman talking on his cell phone; a meter maid writing tickets while a brunette races towards her to dispute the ticket; an old woman talking to her dog as it did its business. I took a deep breath and began to replay every happy moment we had together, every kiss we shared, every perfect smile she shot in my direction.

I couldn’t hold my emotions in any longer; I felt the tears starting to stream down my face, the salty droplets burning my eyes and cheeks as I stepped up onto the ledge. I looked down once more, then up to the heavens, cursing the Gods, all of them, for taking her instead of me. I closed my eyes and mouthed the words, ‘I’ll see you soon, Sunshine,’ and leapt.

As I fell to my concrete demise, I could’ve sworn I could see Janet gliding down beside me. She said, “Harold, it is not your time.” It was then I realized what a grave mistake I had made; Janet wouldn’t have wanted me to die, she would have wanted me to live my life to the fullest and make the world a better place, just like she tried to do with her last valiant act. The tears came more freely now. I swore at my own stupidity, the ground below growing ever closer. I closed my eyes, then BAM! I landed right smack in the middle of the roof of a blue 1997 Toyota Camry.

The pain was unbearable for a moment then all was numb. I was blinded by the red tint of my own blood. ‘Is this what death is like?’ I asked rhetorically. That’s when I began to hear it – the cracking of the bones in my severely broken neck resetting. When I regained motility, so I looked down to my chest. There was a shard of twisted metal protruding through where my right lung should’ve been, yet I was breathing with ease.

I just laid there wondering how a 12 story fall did more damage to the compact car I landed on than to me. I felt the shattered bones in my arms start to reassemble and snap into place and my ribcage restored itself to its original shape, no longer collapsed inward. I slowly moved

my fingers, then my toes. ‘Surely this is all a dream,’ I thought, ‘No it couldn’t be, you don’t feel pain in dreams.’

I moved my hands to grasp the sides of the car. I then hoisted myself off of the metal spire and rolled off the car onto the pavement; this hurt, a lot, but only for a brief moment. I felt my lung inflate. The wound in my chest slowly closing, I wondered, ‘why hadn’t I died?’ But before I could contemplate the answer anymore, I began to notice the people crowding around me. I could see the emotions on their faces, some surprised, some fearful, and then there was one man – he was angry. I knew then that it was his car I had decimated, but that was of little importance. I had survived something that should’ve killed me, something that even the strongest man in the world wouldn’t have survived, and to top it all off, I am unscathed, not even a scratch or scar.

It was as if I had never jumped off that building; the only things that could verify this occurrence were a few people’s stories and a mangled car soaked in blood. That is when the adrenaline kicked in; I had to get away from the scene – if I was so curious as to why this happened to me, that means other people would be, bad people. I could hardly imagine what the government would do to me if they found me, what tests they would perform. I shook these thoughts from my head and looked around again. The onlookers mouths were agape, their eyes like spotlights signaling my whereabouts. I heard the businessman on his cell phone say, “...we need an ambulance to 451 Adams St. A man-” but I was on my feet before he could finish.

I ran, just ran, as fast as I could go. ‘Had it been Janet who had saved me? Was I really not meant to die yet? Did I have a purpose?’ There were so many unanswered questions, and the most important one had yet to be answered, ‘Where do I go now?’ I continued to run in a zigzag pattern going up one block, taking a right, then a left, then a right, a trail of crimson footsteps following me. I finally came upon a dark alley where I could sit and collect my thoughts. ‘I have to accept this ‘gift,’ I wouldn’t have gotten a second chance unless I had some unfinished business.’ I stood up and looked up at the sky, just as raindrops started to fall onto my face, then muttered to myself, “It’s not my time.”

The Asylum
By Kristin Winkle

Have you ever felt like the world wants to shut you away? I know I have, ever since I was fifteen years old. My father never wanted me, not after he found out about my friends. My mother was more reluctant to let me go, but in the end she convinced herself it was for the best.

I wasn't sad to be sent away. *They* never understood me. I could see them watching me as I walked past. I could hear them whispering as though they thought I couldn't hear them, which I always could. I wasn't sad because I didn't care about them. I have my friends, after all.

At first my new home wasn't so bad. There were very nice people who were always asking me how I was feeling and trying to make me comfortable. Every week a good looking doctor in a clean, white coat would come and ask me lots of questions, mostly about my friends. He called me Helen the way my parents used to. I didn't like him though, because he made my friends afraid. Jeannie would hide her little face behind my skirt and cry and Clover would quiver from head to toe. I heard him tell his secretary in what he thought was a soft voice some funny words like "skitsofrenia" and "suppressed violence". The Doctor also gave me pills to take. I tried them once, and my friends were gone when I woke up. I was frightened of being alone and so I fed the pills to the black cat that prowls the halls at night.

At first I didn't realize I was trapped because no one had ever contained me before. But soon I began to notice that even though I could go for walks someone was always with me and I could never go beyond the concrete and barbed wire walls. I figured it was because I'm *funny*. That's what my Father used to call me-*funny*.

Every month my parents would come to visit. One day my mother came in with something in her arms. It was tiny and looked like a pink raisin. It made the most horrible noise, so I clamped my hands over my ears and grimaced. Father frowned. Mother told me it was a girl and they had named it Sarah. I told her I didn't care what it was. She got tears in her eyes and tried to be brave. Father just frowned.

As time wore on, the ache in my chest got heavier. I began to hate The Doctor and his fancy coat and his pills and special words. I cried all day and most of the night. I knew I had to get away from there, so my friends and I decided to run for it.

I took off my heavy shoes, tied back my thick, curly, dark brown hair, and dashed across the grounds. I ran as fast as I could, but someone spotted me before I made it to the gate. Soon all of the people who had been nice to me before were swarming me and yelling incoherently. They grabbed me and no matter how hard I struggled to get free they held on tighter. I kicked and screeched and flailed around in all directions, but instead of letting go they tied me in a weird jacket so I was left helpless and vulnerable. They took me back through the cool, clean, echoing halls to a new room in a different wing of the building. This room was plainer than my first one, with only a low bed, a chair, a desk, and a tiny window with bars, like from the jails on TV. There wasn't any door. The walls were a harsh grey and the floor was dusty. A small mirror hung over the desk. Often I would throw fits and they would tie me up and leave me on my bed to sob myself to sleep. They still made me visit The Doctor. I grew very thin, and when I caught sight of myself in the mirror I barely even recognized myself. My hair was dull, and my dark brown eyes were ringed with grey from lack of sleep.

Many months passed. I pretended to cooperate while all the time I was planning my second attempt at escape. I was very clever about it and never did anything to make them suspicious. I went for a walk every day with five guards and the whole time I spent memorizing every feature of the yard. I figured out which guard was the slowest runner and which shift he had and which face helped me get my way. I acted content and placid, never threw fits, and even pretended to take my pills. I never talked to my friends in front of other people, and The Doctor said he had high hopes for me. I waited for The Day.

It was my seventeenth birthday and the guards decorated my room pink during breakfast, which is funny because I hate pink. Normally they brought me my meals to eat alone in my room, but that day I got to eat in a big room with lots of other people. I even got especially good food. At lunch I got a cupcake with 17 written on it. And at dinner I got ice cream.

That evening I knocked on my handleless door and asked the hall guard if he would let me out so I could walk in the night air on my birthday and I made my special face, the one I had been practicing. At first he refused, but then his features softened and he said he would take me as soon as his shift was over.

It was around eleven o'clock when he escorted me out of the building. My friends were waiting to help me over the wall. I wandered all over the grounds, trying to confuse the out of shape, overweight hall guard. Unfortunately he was more alert than I thought, so I decided that he would just have to stay. I wandered casually towards the bare stretch between the trees and the wall, where we normally aren't allowed.

The guard put a hand on my arm to stop me from going any farther, and I almost lost my temper and blew the whole thing. As sneakily as I could, I slid the heavy, uncomfortable shoes from my feet and flexed my toes in the grass. The guard didn't notice a thing. I let a look of sheer terror cover my features and shrieked with all my might at the imaginary danger lurking in the bushes. The guard looked for a fraction of a second, but that was all I needed. Already there were more guards coming, drawn by the sound of my scream.

I shot off toward the wall, my legs burning with energy and my blood pumping with adrenaline. Faintly I heard the escape sirens wail and a surge of elation rose through me. There was still about fifteen feet to the wall and four guards were gaining on me fast. I forced my feet to push harder against the dew slicked grass.

I let my momentum carry me up onto the wall, where I clung like a spider, my arms and legs stretched wide and my nails digging into the hairline seams in the concrete. Clover was a few feet below me holding back my pursuers and Jeannie was cheering me from the top of the wall. I had twenty feet of slick darkness left to climb. Every time my hands gave way my heart would drop until it sat heavily in my feet then rise, thudding, back to the level of my ears.

After what felt like hours but in reality was less than a minute, I wearily dragged myself onto the top of the wall. I was very thin and I slid through the gap underneath the barbed wire easily, my clothes barely catching on the razor sharp points. The night was humid and lightning bugs flicked their lanterns on and off, twinkling over the lawn like tiny stars. I climbed out onto a willow limb and slowly descended until my feet touched solid ground. With surprise I realized I had tears leaking out of the corners of my eyes and I ran off down the road, the sound of the escape sirens and flashing lights still ringing in my ears.

As I ran I thought back on the last two years of my life, from my parents giving me away to the handsome, cruel Doctor and his simpering voice and evil pills, the cold, doorless

room and tiny window and the wails that echo down the corridor. I remembered the days I had thrown fits and they had tied me up in a coat so I was completely helpless and I couldn't move and the day my mother came to show me her replacement child and worst of all, all the days they had tried to take my only friends away from me. I felt the anger rise in me and I vowed that before my life is through my friends and I will have our revenge on every last one of them.

First, Last Kiss
By Lacie Parmenter

It may have been their third date, but things looked bleak for the couple. The majority of the evening was spent crammed inside of a booth, which was located in the only Pizza Hut in a fifty mile radius, staring solemnly at each other from across the counter. Anne drummed her fingers against the linoleum countertop, trying to keep beat with the clitter-clatter of dishes and silverware and the low of hum of intermingled conversations. Whenever she glanced up, Brian smiled, revealing a well-ordered set of teeth that would make even the most severe dentist proud. Earlier she had tried ordering a small Cesar salad, Italian dressing please, but he refused and instead ordered a large cheese pizza—emphasis on the cheese.

“But I’m lactose intolerant,” Anne muttered on her breath, but when the waitress asked if there would be anything else, Brian quickly shook his head and the waitress dispersed from their booth, scribbling on her tiny notepad. *He must have not heard me*, Anne thought, trying to reason through the injustice that had just occurred. *Just like at the movie theater, when I had asked for water and popcorn, and he had brought me Root beer and licorice. I hate licorice.*

She studied him for a moment or two, the corners of her mouth turned downward. As she continued to scrutinize him—through the corner of her eye, of course—she began to notice several distinguishing features she had not been able to recognize earlier. He had a large head that was shaped like a square, her least favorite geometric figure. He had reddish brown hair that hung around his ears in tufts, which he shook every five minutes because he suffered from a terrible disease known as Hair Tourette’s, which is a syndrome very common among men who are obsessed with the perfect placement of their hair. He wasn’t hideous, she noticed, but he wasn’t attractive either—but neither was she. Anne was mousy; it was as simple as that. She had mousy hair, eyes, face, and even nose. She was thin, but maybe a little too thin. She played on the varsity volleyball team, and while she was serving the girls on her team would often chant: “Flat as a board, thick as one too.” This is why Brian and Anne were perfect for each other. They were so utterly ordinary, it was almost sickening how well matched they really were.

She suppressed the thought and tried counting the ceiling tiles. The pizza, still steaming from the oven, arrived and the waitress set it on their table. Anne’s stomach churned. Brian immediately dug in, not even bothering to pause for Anne’s sake. For a few minutes, she watched him eat, or rather, devour the cheese pizza as if he’d never eaten pizza before, while she tried not to look too nauseated.

After a while, Brian looked up and asked, “What’s wrong?” But Anne could hardly hear him; his mouth was stuffed with half-chewed bread and cheese.

“What was that?” she asked.

“I said what’s wrong?”

“Huh?”

“Never mind.”

Anne shrugged and continued to watch quietly as Brian ate.

They pulled into an empty parking lot around midnight; Anne stared out the window into the darkness as Brian parked the car.

“Where are we?” she asked through clenched teeth, Anne thought he was finally taking her home. The street lights reflected off his face and smile, and Anne felt a sudden urge to break his teeth with a swift uppercut. But she resisted and instead replied smile of her own, her cheeks ached.

“So,” Brian said, “there’s a rumor you’ve never been kissed before.”

“Where did you hear that?” Anne shot, feeling defensive. It was a touchy subject she didn’t like talking about. But Brian didn’t reply, nor did he read further into her protective tone. Instead he leaned over and kissed her, or rather, he leaned over and shoved his face against hers. Anne fidgeted, trying to free herself from his wretched clutches, but he had pinned his upper body against hers, making it impossible for her to move. After a few seconds, although they felt like hours to Anne, Brian returned to his own seat.

“How was that?” he asked, Anne remained silent. “It would be better if you unclenched your lips though.” He tried leaned over again, but Anne retracted to the other side of the car, her entire body pressed against the passenger door. She quickly unlocked the car and stepped out, grabbing her coat and purse.

“I’m walking home, dick.”

My Dr. Said I should be a more giving person, share with the world, that sort of thing. "Be fully giving of yourself," he said. "Give with every fiber of your being."

I stared long and hard at the ad, thinking about his words.

"Give every fiber of my being..." kept cycling through my head.

With a simple phone call and a \$7.50 cab fare, I was sitting in some sterile waiting room. The walls were painted white once upon a time, but I'm not sure if the chairs had ever been in decent shape. Stuffing spilled out of torn seams and there were stains on one that looked like the aftermath of a brutal stabbing. In the corner was a fake plant, devoid of leaves, probably so old that the thin plastic had just disintegrated. The three magazines on the coffee table were over a decade out of date, boasting recent news like a snazzy new beeper or some high point in fashion like a pink unitard.

I was halfway through an article on breakthroughs in radio technology when the receptionist called me to her desk.

"Ah'm gunna nee' joo da feel aht dis fome, hunneh." There was a gap between her two front teeth and her eyes showed a layer of boredom you couldn't find from a sportscaster at a meteorologist's convention.

"Um... sure," was all I could manage.

There were some pretty weird questions on the forms, all supposedly meant to ensure my safety.

"List all pets you've had."

"What consists of your average diet?"

"On a scale of one to ten, rate your most traumatic memory, one being hardly traumatic, ten being earth-shatteringly traumatizing."

"What type of bed do you sleep on?"

After the bogus safety questions, there was one last question:

-Out of the following, which activities are you uncomfortable with your live-in partner performing?

- Smoking
 - Drinking
 - Intaking illicit drugs
 - Intense physical activity
 - Alterations of appearance (piercings, tattoos, hair dying, brands, etc.)
 - Other (Please specify)
-

I am comfortable with all of the above.

I considered for a moment.

"Give freely of myself, huh?" I don't even know if I said that out loud or not, but instead of figuring that out, I checked the circle at the bottom of the sheet and stood.

"Ya redee, hun?" I resisted the urge to fall over from the sheer scope of sass in her voice and nodded sharply.

"C'mawn back."

They said a side-effect of the process was some minor memory loss: just around the time of the initial surgery. I remember a long hallway and the receptionist's fat ass wagging in front of me as we walked down it. I remember something like a dentist's chair and being tipped back to face the ceiling. I remember a bright light above me and an ominous voice echoing around the room.

"Count backwards from 10."

Maybe it's better that I don't remember all of it.

I woke up in my own bed, feeling a bit hung over. Groggily, I stumbled from bed into the kitchen. I could see a faint reflection of myself in the brushed chrome surfaces of my appliances, my features blurred and distorted. Was I naked? I looked down. I guess so. I went to the fridge and opened it, searching for the OJ. I needed some OJ. I grabbed the box of juice and twisted off the cap in a single spin of my fingers. As I tasted the organic, 100% juice flowing into my mouth, the door of the refrigerator closed and I realized that I hadn't seen the yellow Post-it not stuck to the from. OJ still at my lips, but no longer drinking, I eyed the note.

First night out, had a blast. Made some friends, got a bit tipsy, came home at an

unreasonable hour. It's the good life.
Thanks for renting!
– Adam

After the following night, Zoe doctored a fat lip and a scrape under my eye.

“Are you sure this was a good idea?”

She dabbed at my cheek with a peroxide-wet towelette, cringing at my pain more than I was.

Zoe was an artist. My only friend that didn't have a heavy income, we'd met by happenstance in college, back when we'd though we'd wanted to be architects. Our lives took different turns, but we stayed close. My other friends called her my “charity case.” I could only imagine what they'd say about Adam.

“My doctor suggested it.” She groaned and rolled her eyes.

“That fat loser isn't a doctor.” She dabbed at the scrape more testily and the pain raised. “Why do you see him anyway?”

To be honest, I wasn't entirely sure. All of my other friends saw therapists. There was a point where everyone would sit around and brag about what their therapists had told them to do and what diagnoses they'd gotten and what pills they were taking. Everyone except me. It became clear that, when a person reached a certain point of success, they were required to have something wrong with them. OCD was always in vogue and paranoid anxiety was “tres chic,” as they say. And then there was me. I didn't know if I had schizophrenia like Byron, age 28 and owner of a four star hotel chain, because I didn't have a therapist.

But it's funny how much in life is just a phone call away.

When I told Zoe that I got a therapist, she had groaned and told me I didn't need one. She gave a strong case for my sanity and I was so close to believing her, so close to calling the new doctor again and cancelling all of my appointments. But I didn't.

Any time I brought him up, I could see her holding back a tidal wave of a rant, convincing me not to spend my money on sanity I've already got. She would always see that I didn't really know why I saw him and she would always try to make me realize that I didn't need him. She would *always* ask: “Why do you see him anyway?”

And I would *always* reply: “I have problems, Zoe.”

“Whatever,” was her *always* response. “But I think it's gone too far, this time.”

She put away the peroxide and tossed the towelette in the trash compactor.

“An experimental procedure like that sounds dangerous. Not to mention what this Adam guy does at night.”

Zoe was my best friend. I valued her opinion, I really did. But my therapist was a doctor. Wouldn't he know what he was talking about? Did I know what he was talking about?

I cast a “whatever” back to Zoe and carefully felt the bruises on my knuckles with the tips of my fingers.

“What is it?” I stared at it again, considering every shape and contour, but my head couldn't fit a name to it, couldn't label or identify it.

“I don't know.”

Zoe and I sat on my bed, my bare left arm stretched between us so that we could see the blue-black form that had appeared in the night. Zoe had woken me up that morning, coffee in one hand and orange juice in the other. Since Adam had taken up residency, she'd greeted me every morning this way. She was always prepared. Whichever I didn't drink, she would slowly sip as we stalked around the apartment, searching for clues about what Adam had done the night before. Usually, he lefts notes like

Dr. Called. I told him you weren't in. He
wants to schedule and apt. ASAP.

Or

Know how much you love OJ and you were
running low. Bought you some.

Sometimes

Great night. Had fun. Wish we could hang.

This morning, Zoe had let out a shriek of laughter.

“I SO knew this would happen, eventually.”

My arm was sore and, when I looked down at it, I saw an amoeba-esque shape in the bluish black tattoo ink, surrounded by a halo of redness.

We examined the tattoo for half an hour before even thinking that Adam might've left a note.

In just my silk boxers, I padded around the apartment in search of the telltale yellow square.

Zoe found the note on my imported bamboo coffee table and read it aloud.

"'Got a little drunk. Got a little tattoo.' He doesn't even say what it is. I'm starting to wonder what kind of guy this is. Why would he do that?"

Looking at my tattoo, Adam's tattoo, I zoned out a little. It was amorphous and seemingly shapeless, undefinable in terms of anything I'd seen before. But the more I looked at it, the more I saw. I saw that every lump, every wobble in the form was deliberate. He didn't just go in to the tattoo parlor and say, "Draw me a whatever." Without any explanation, I knew he wouldn't do that. It was a shape. It meant something, if not to me, then to Adam.

As I stared harder, I could almost see movement in it, too. A slow, soft undulation. It pulsed and surged. It twisted a limb and opened its mouth and let out a call.

"I think it's a bird," I said.

In the six months that Adam had been with me, I'd sort of slipped off the face of the planet. At first it was because I was hung over every morning, but it became something different. His notes every morning inspired me to go out and do stuff on my own, maybe follow his exploits around town, figure out exactly what he did the night before.

I didn't see my therapist for the first month because I couldn't figure out a sane way to tell him about what I'd done. But, after that, I felt like I didn't have anything to say to him. All of the most exciting stories in my life weren't mine and I had to piece each one together bit by bit. And the things that did happen to me were carefully recanted to Adam through our notes.

The notes got longer and longer. We'd always have the Post-its polka-dotting the apartment with little reminders to buy more OJ or to tell the other that we'd gotten drunk so they should lay low and take some Aspirin. But, maybe once a week, there were letters. Full length, pages-long letters.

He wrote the first one, telling me a bit about his life. Telling me he was thankful.

I replied saying that my doctor suggested the venture and that I didn't know why I did it or why I listened to anything my doctor said. I said that I didn't really feel like I had problems except that my friends expected me to have problems. I told him that Zoe was right all along: I didn't need a therapist, I needed a backbone. And I admitted that I wouldn't have met him without my therapist suggesting I "give freely of myself," so maybe he wasn't all bogus after all. And I told him that I'd never told these things to anyone before. For the first time, I'd actually spilled my heart to someone. The funny thing was that I expected it to be in a love letter to the woman of my dreams, but it ended up being to this guy I'd never actually met. I thanked him for making me feel whole for once and for making me feel just insane enough to stop attending my therapy sessions, a decision which, in turn, made me feel more sane than I ever had before.

When Adam responded, it was with a short Post-it note stuck to the front of my letter.

I know plenty about crying, but it's been
too long since I cried from joy. Thank you,
and it seems we've helped each other in
ways we couldn't have imagined.

I stopped taking my pills. I. Feel. Great!

Saw one of your friends tonight. She wasn't very nice. She thinks you're avoiding them. If I see her again, what should I say?

Just walk away.

Went to a painting class and made some pictures. You like?

They look great. I don't know why I never put paintings on my walls before.

You were waiting for me.

Obviously.

I want to get a motorcycle license, but I need proper documents with your personal info. I already know a guy who's willing to lend us his motorcycle for a couple months.

Everything you need is on the counter. Good luck with the test!

Zoe texted you last night. You okay if we hang out without you?

Would be there if I could. Go for it.

I woke to see Zoe laying next to me. The 800 thread-count sheets lay on the floor and there were two glasses of wine on my bedside table, mere sips left in the bottom of each one. The clock read 10:17.

Zoe stirred and, with a deep breath, opened her eyes. Seeing me, a smile crept across her face.

"Hey," she said.

"Hey." When I spoke, her face shifted.

"Oh, God, Harrison!" She sat upright and held her face in her hands. I grinned.

"Who else would I be?" She shot a glare my way and scooted off the bed.

"That's not funny."

"I'm just kidding." She stood at the window, her arms crossed over her chest. Rising from the bed, I stood next to her and put my hands on her shoulders. I looked at her face, but her gaze was focused out the window over the park.

"How was your night with Adam?" There was something weird in her eyes, something I hadn't seen there before. The glossy blue green almost sparkled in the morning light and her face tensed in apprehension of a new expression. There was almost something there, almost the trace of a change, of something stirred within her. And immediately after the words "stirred within her" passed through my mind, I chided myself for thinking so cheesily. But something was different. She wasn't the same Zoe I knew. A nearly silent voice in the back of my head asked me if it wasn't her that had changed. Since Adam had entered my life, I'd done a fair amount of changing.

"I have to go to Paris," she said. Lines crisscrossed my forehead, plainly spelling out confusion. Zoe just squeezed her eyes shut for a second, thinking as solidly as she could. I could see her throwing words together in her head, choosing the perfect thing to say and the perfect words to leave out.

"I got this great commission but the guy wants me to go to Paris. He's paying my way there and my housing and it's a lot of money. Too much to turn down."

"That's great!" Something in her expression said otherwise. My smile fell and I tried to look into her eyes again, her new eyes, but she started at the wall behind me. "Isn't that great?" I asked.

She sniffed. "I have to go." She quickly searched for her green flats and, finding them under the discarded sheets, rushed to the front door. I half followed her, half strolled to the doorway of my bedroom and leaned on the wall.

"You didn't tell me how your night was." Her hand on the door, she stopped and took a hesitant breath.

"It was great," she said. "Adam's great."

"What'd you two do?" Her eyes cast downwards for a split-second, like she didn't want to look at me.

"We just talked," she said. And then she was gone.

Zoe is in love with you.

I held the note in my hand, shaking it and watching the yellow paper wobble in the air. I couldn't decide if I felt like I was calling him out or just letting him know. It seemed important that he should know and equally important that he knew I knew. But was it my business? It was my best friend and my body... But something didn't feel right about it. I crumpled the note in my hand and tossed it in the trash compactor. It wasn't my place, it really wasn't.

My leg jittered and my finger tapped the counter. I could hear the clock ticking and I breathed in time with it. The fan buzzed and a wad of spit formed in my mouth. Groaning, I tore another Post-it from the pad and wrote down, again:

Zoe is in love with you.

He'd find it when he came to.

I found the note in the morning, still on the counter as though it hadn't been touched, hadn't been read. I recognized my handwriting, even remembered writing the words on it. But it was different; it said something new.

Zoe is in love with you.

Her phone went straight to voicemail, probably because it was off or she was out of service or something. Or something. I called her sixteen times before I actually left a message.

"Zoe. It's Harrison. I... We need to talk. Or... Whatever. Adam left me a note. I was confused at first, but I think I get it now. Zoe, I love you. For the first time in years I don't care what anyone thinks of me or of you or of the stupid things cluttering my apartment. I don't know how I didn't get it. You were always there and we were always together... But you didn't see it, either. Something was different the yesterday. He made you realize... and he made me realize, too. I just... I want to talk to you. I want... I want everything to be okay." I took a deep breath and slowed my thoughts. "Call me back," I said. "I... I guess I'll wait for you to come back from Paris." And I hung up.

The day was nothing else. I sat around, almost disgusted with everything. I couldn't imagine why I'd wanted everything so badly. It was all just... junk. I didn't want anything but Zoe now. She was all that was important. I went to bed at eight, leaving a note for Adam to find.

I called her in Paris, left a message. She
hasn't replied yet.

In the morning, everything was the same. It felt just like I'd woken up with nothing different. Almost Groundhog Day-esque, I felt as though, no matter what I did, nothing would change. On the counter, a Post-it was stuck to my note from the night before.

Give her time.

Almost immediately after I read that, my phone vibrated, buzzing on my coffee table in clattering bursts. It was a text from Zoe.

My phone's been acting up,
can't make calls. Just got
your message. I love you, too.
I'll be back in three months.

I spent the rest of the day trying to think of what my life would be like if Zoe and I had gotten together in college. I looked at apartments online thinking, "This is where we would have lived." I checked out furniture that was, ultimately, not as amazing as mine, but it would have been what we could have afforded. I looked at jobs I could have taken, opportunities I had missed. But after a while, I wasn't looking at the things I could've done differently in life. An apartment would catch my eye or a refrigerator would get me thinking, "What am I doing in this place? Nothing here has sentimental value to me." But that wasn't true. I turned on my couch, cradling the laptop, and looked at the wall behind me, littered with paintings that Adam had made. They had sentimental value to me. But, looking around the apartment, they were the only ones. My heavy-duty trash compactor and my nine hundred dollar sofa were just things. My bed wasn't even where I slept anymore. Hell, I wasn't even sure if I did sleep anymore. Everything was just an object. They meant nothing to me. For a quick second, I considered burning the place, but that just made me laugh. I wasn't that crazy yet.

Somehow, the day flowed by and, as I went to bed, I left Adam a note.

Check our text messages.

"Hello?" A girl's voice, young.

I said nothing.

"Hello? Who is this?"

"My name is Harrison James. Uh..."

"Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for Adam Drake. Are you still there?"

"Did you know him?" She couldn't see me wince.

"Kind of. Um. Yeah. We, uh... had a correspondence."

"The service is tomorrow. Can you make it? Hello?"

"I'll make it."

I still had that motorcycle. There was at least a week or two before I had to give it back. The trip blurred into lines of bright tail lights and reflective overpass signs. My motel was cheap and tasteless, but it was there. I couldn't remember the last time I watched cable or slept on sheets with a thread count of less than 800. In the morning, it was foggy and I slowly tightened my tie, making sure to get it perfect. He deserved that.

"You must be Harrison." I recognized her voice from the phone call. She was short with peanut butter hair, tucked carefully behind her ears. "You're the only one here I don't know. I'm Natalie." We shook hands halfheartedly, more for the sake of the custom than the pleasure of meeting each other.

I eyed the attendants.

"Not many people here." She looked with me.

"He didn't have many friends. He didn't get out much." A knowing smile crept onto my face, but I pushed it aside and nodded.

"I'm sure... The service was nice."

"Yeah," she said. "Yeah. Do you want to go for a walk? I live nearby and we could grab something to eat... or something."

"I'd love to." We walked for a bit, under a cherry tree and through the gates of the cemetery.

"Ok, I can't help it, how did you know him?" I paused for a moment and she spoke again: "Don't think about the right words, just say it. Nothing can hurt me anymore."

"I guess you could say he was a tenant of mine. I never saw him, never even spoke directly to him. But we left little notes to each other, sometimes letters. I could tell he was a great guy. I learned a lot from him." We walked in silence as she processed.

"You know," she finally said, "I kind of thought something like this was happening. I mean, I thought he was dreaming every night, but I knew something was making him happy. Something new." She stopped at a gate in a picket fence. "This is the house."

It looked like home that people would dream about. A picket fence lined the yard, a set of two grassy rectangles separated only by a cement walkway down the middle. White lattice hid the underbelly of the porch and columns supported the roof that jutted out to protect it from the rain. The squat gray house was adorable, really, with its white-trimmed windows and flowery curtains. On the front porch was a bench-swing and the door was painted bright green. It was old, obviously, and somewhat out of shape, but it was beautiful in its own way. I was sure they didn't have imported furniture or brushed-chrome appliances, they wouldn't have expensive sheets or a flat-screen TV. But they'd have paintings lining the walls and a couch that had been loved for years, potted plants in the windowsills and a testy sink that worked only when you hit it just right. I may not have had all of those, but Adam had at least gotten me the paintings. I felt like my own home was just a shell. A place full of stuff where I was just waiting to die. It didn't mean anything to me. It was a coffin with a nice view of the park.

"You live pretty close to the cemetery," I said.

"I know, right?" She forced a laugh as though it'd always been a joke to laugh at, but today it just wasn't funny. "Here" We sat on the porch, our feet on the top step. After a while, she spoke again: "Does it hurt?"

"A little," I said. "They made room for him to stay and now he's just gone. I kind of think that this is what ghost pains are like. Phantom limb or something." She nodded, apparently approving of my supposition.

"It's getting hot," she said. The fog had started burning away by the end of the service. As we sat, there was no longer any trace of it; the sun was high and the sky was as blue as I imagined Adam's eyes to be.

"Yeah," I said. It was hot enough, now, that I didn't need to be wearing my full suit anymore. The funeral was over, after all. I took off my jacket and started rolling up my sleeves.

"What's that?" I'd uncovered Adam's tattoo when I pulled up my left sleeve. I smiled and couldn't help but chuckle.

"Adam got this." She stared for a second.

"What even is it?"

"I think it's a bird." She considered, then nodded.

"Mm... I like it."

"I do, too." I looked at it for a minute, thinking about Adam. "I think I'll get another one."

"What of?" I explained it to her and she smiled. Her eyes got glossy and she cast her gaze downwards.

"That sounds really great." She sniffed. "Man, I didn't even cry at the service."

"Hey, don't worry about it." I pulled her in to an embrace. "Don't worry about it." She sobbed into my shoulder for a while and I held her until she was through. When we pulled away, my shoulder was wet and we laughed.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Don't worry about it." She sniffed and wiped her eyes.

"Do you have a place to stay tonight?" Before I could answer, "You could stay here, if you need."

"I have work in the morning. Thank you, though."

"So you're leaving, then."

"Yeah. I'll be driving all night." I checked my watch. "I should probably get going." I slipped my jacket on and made my way to the front gate.

"Harrison." I turned at my name and looked back at her.

"Send me a picture of your tattoo," she said. I smiled.

"I will."

It was maybe a month before I came back. I knocked on her front door and, when she appeared behind the screen, I could peer into her house and see that, indeed, she did have a couch that looked overloved and potted plants in all the windowsills. She grinned.

"I didn't expect to see you back so soon."

"You told me to send you a picture, but I wanted to show him, too. In person."

"Let me grab my coat." In half a second, we were walking together to the cemetery.

I rolled up my sleeve and tossed my jacket on the ground.

"I got a tattoo for you," I said. My knees sunk a little into the soft dirt. I could see grass trying to grow. Green strands poked their heads out of the soil.

"I think he likes it," she said.

"Yeah." We sat for a while and she traced the lines on my forearm.

Adam Drake was here.

FIN

Slender Man

By: Nathaniel Webber

He was running, faster than he ever had before. Dave had seen it, and he knew running was useless, but still he ran. It was following him. He didn't know why, but it'd been like this for weeks. He had recordings of it, long recordings, some of them. He had been being watched, and this thing was relentless, unnerving, and inhuman. Dave continued to run.

It continued to chase.

"Dave, come on, let's get started!"

"Hold on, Julia, I'm getting the camera set up."

"It doesn't take that long, and we aren't getting paid for your little class project. So hurry."

"You knew the commitment."

"Just get going!"

"Done."

"Ok, so you all know the deal. This is my final for my video class, so *try* to actually act. That means you, Daniel."

"Hey!"

"Action! Wait... Hold on."

"What now?"

"There's someone in the shot, off there in the distance."

"Damn, he's tall. Why the hell is he wearing a suit? It's frigging hot out here."

"Hell if I know, Daniel, just get him out of here."

"Hey! You over there! Would you mind moving for a bit?"

"He's staying perfectly still."

"Can anyone make out what he looks like?"

"He's too far away. Seems bald though."

"Daniel, let's get out of here."

"What's wrong, Julia?"

"That guy gives me the creeps. It looks like he has no face."

"He's just too far away, come on, let's do the movie."

"I'm leaving with or without you."

"Dave, talk some sense into her, I don't want to have to drive all the way out here again."

"No, I think I'm going to go with Julia on this, this guy is just too weird."

"Damn it Dave. You're going to have to find yourself a new actor if you keep this crap up."

"Good-bye."

"Dave! What the hell! Ugh!"

Dave got into his car, and started it up. When he looked back at where the man was standing, he had disappeared. He drove off.

"...You should come visit me sometime, it's been lonely here without you."

"I know I should, but I need to finish Marble Hornets before the deadline for the class."

"Your movie is getting annoying, Dave."

"I Know." He sighed. "It'll be over soon. We've had some... Setbacks."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, no, not really. I'll see you in a few weeks, okay?"

"I hope so, I love you."

"I love you too, Carly."

Dave hung up the phone.

There's something wrong about that man. He thought. Was Julia right? Did he have no face? No, no, that's stupid. Ugh. I need some sleep...

Dave awoke suddenly to nothing in particular. He turned on his light and paced around the room. His bedroom door was wide open. Not slightly ajar like it usually was. *Oh god, oh god. Is he here? In the house? No, no, he can't be...*

Something touched his hand. He jumped a mile. *Lucy! Ugh! You scared the crap out of me!* He scratched the dog's ears. *That's why the door was open. She must've done that. God, I really need some sleep. Getting worked up over simple things...* He got up and closed the door until it was only open partway, turned off the lights and went back to bed.

In the darkness, a looming figure exited Dave's room. Pausing only long enough to make sure that the door was only slightly ajar.

When Dave got up the next morning, he felt refreshed and new. The previous day's worries forgotten for now. He grabbed a box of cold cereal from the cupboard and sat down to start editing his movie.

When he put in the first tape, it was a lot of static and white noise. He fast forwarded through it to see if there was any salvageable footage. *I was sure this tape was fine yesterday, what the heck happened?* As the tape was speeding forward there was a section of clear footage, which kept playing for a bit. Dave stopped the tape and rewound it to the starting point. The clear footage was of early planning stages of his movie, 'Marble Hornets' but it was a freeze-frame of a single part. Dave thought this was odd, so he paused the tape and started to look throughout the picture. He found nothing and hit play to see if there was anything else. *This tape is useless. Ugh, Daniel is not going to like doing those scenes over again... Wait, what was that?* Dave rewound the tape again. Back to the freeze-frame and prepared to hit pause right after. *There was something right after that image. It didn't look like Marble Hornets... and... NOW!* He hit pause at just the right moment. He wished he hadn't.

The image was one of him, sleeping in his bed. But it was what was behind him, which freaked him out to no end. The man who had been in the field was standing right behind his bed, presumably staring right at his sleeping figure, according to the tilt of his head. He couldn't tell exactly what the man, if you could call it that, was looking at. As he had no eyes, nor mouth, nose or ears. He was faceless. That was it. Faceless. He wore a long pinstripe suit and white gloves. He was so tall and slender, that he wouldn't have been able to stand up straight going through a doorway.

Dave was scared of what might happen, but he hit play regardless. The man stared at Dave's still figure for a time, and then looked straight at the camera. Then the camera cut to black, and immediately after it cut to a close up image of the slender man. The visual and audio distortion was enough to make anyone shut it off immediately and complain of their ears bleeding. Dave quickly reduced the volume. *Jesus H. Christ! That hurt!* Words were then superimposed across the screen;

LUCY? WHERE ARE YOU?

The white noise started up again. Dave sat there for a while in shock. *Lucy? No, no, no, no!* "LUCY! WHERE ARE YOU!?" There was no response, and Lucy always responded. Dave sat there with his head in his hands and began to cry.

"You're coming over? That's great news!"

"Yea, I need... some time away from this place. That's all."

"I can't wait to see you!"

"I'll talk to you when I reach Colorado, alright? Love you."

"Love you too Dave."

"Bye."

He picked up his suitcase and headed out the front door. He sighed to himself. *Why me? Why am I so important?* He turned around and saw a note neatly pinned with a thumbtack to the front of his door. With trembling hands he unpinned and opened it. It contained a simple three words:

Same time tomorrow?

Dave threw down the note and quickly walked to his car. *No. I'm leaving. Forever. Forget these mind games, they're not happening anymore.* He started up his car and drove off.

The shades closed on the inside of Dave's house, and a large figure headed outside. It picked up the note and slowly turned it over to the opposite side.

See you in Colorado.

He began to walk.

The Drug

Keefer Dunn

My fingers twitched with the overwhelming pleasure. The sharp prick before the warmth entered my blood stream, and my mind clouded into a happy bliss. All of today's prior events were lost, and I couldn't help but grin as the weight left my shoulders. This was the only way I could see them, the other things. Old, powerful things that hid in the shadows, between the cracks, and in plain view. The things forgotten by advancement, once worshipped, feared, or sought after, the keepers of anything, everything, and nothing.

I pulled the needle out of my arm. I didn't want to lose the sensation it gave me, but I could already hear them, feel them. I shivered with the pleasure I had given myself and the fear I felt. I rolled my black jacket back over my shoulders, hiding the collection of bruises on my arms. Placing the needle back into my purse, I stepped out of the darkness of the alley, into the streetlight- lit, crowded, New York streets.

I stifled a giggle at the mixture of people and the other things. Women with golden glowing hair striding down the streets, large scale covered cats sitting on windowsills, men with horns drinking out of plastic cups, and other bizarre sights crowding in between normal people. The drug did this to me, made me feel bubbly and loose. I almost lose myself sometimes, or I'll wake up without remembering what I did. I pushed the thought away, and stepped into the flow of people like that of a river, the crowd washing me away down the side walk. I collided with people, and laughed the whole way. I avoided the other things, rarely coming into contact. They frightened me too much. I did watch them though. They were too spectacular. Some were beautiful beyond words. Others were so horrible you couldn't look away.

After fumbling down the streets, I found something familiar, a small caravan parked in a wide alley that had Christmas lights strung throughout it and curtains that hid whatever was in the end of the alley. It was completely made of wood, and moss growing on its roof. The sides were carved elaborately with swirls and painted blue and green. One candle lit window broke through the twisted knots in the wood. Its wheels were large and round, and reminded me of carriages. The door was red, which reminded me of something that hurt a little, but I couldn't remember.

In the front of the alley was a folding table with jewelry, little containers of mostly unrecognizable substances, and other bizarre objects. The plump gypsy woman sat behind it, watching everyone closely. There was something different about the trinkets on the table this time. Some of them glowed faintly, something I had never noticed walking by on my way to the university. I couldn't resist, and had to stop. They looked so different, foreign.

"Hello darling," the gypsy said, her Russian accent chopping up the syllables.

"Hello." I didn't look up from the table.

"See something you like?"

"Ummm, just looking." She watched me carefully, obviously ready to grab me if I tried to run with something. I smiled a little, which made her frown. Then I saw it, a beautiful silver disc with a bright blue glow. A rune shaped like a P was carved into it, and a thin black cord ran through a small hole in its top. My fingers went out to stroke its smooth surface, but I was startled by an abrupt and loud grunt by the gypsy who was now smoking a small wood pipe.

"You like?"

"Yes, I do. How much?" I had a hard time not staring at it. It seemed to be calling me. Or maybe I was calling it, almost craving it for some reason lost to me.

"Are you sure? These charms are much nicer," she said, gesturing to the necklaces without glows. I smiled. She was trying to sell me a charm without a charm. I couldn't stop the giggle that bubbled up in me, and exploded out of me wildly. I had taken too much of the drug, and I was losing control of myself, falling away. I couldn't remember why. I could only think of the necklace.

"I'm sure. I like this one. What does the rune mean?" I asked as I caught my breathe.

"Strength. That's what it gives you," she grumbled, annoyed I was buying one of the real ones, but it was only strength. It's not like a charm for eternal life.

"Really?"

"True as my name is Dora." I was barely able to hear her. I felt a thousand miles away, and needed the charm. I realized that the need for it was mine. It wasn't the other person brought out by the drug, or was it like the sickening pull it had when I thought about how it felt when I put the needle under my skin.

Then that feeling that something had happened earlier that day sunk in. It felt rugged against the soft sides of heart. It increased the want for the necklace. I could barely think, and it was getting dark as the drug took over.

"How much?" I barely whispered.

How does one communicate to a god? I, as a student of anthropology, theology, and mythology, have found that many faiths use the imbibing of sacred substances: blessed food, holy wine, and most interestingly drugs. The horrible body destroying chemicals and toxins looked down on today were once regarded as some of the most powerful and spiritual things ever created to only be used by priests and kings. But the biggest question is: did it work? I had once asked myself that in the cellar of fellow student and friend, Fredrick. The answer has led me to a monthly visit to his cellar.

I pulled the strap of my purple purse a little higher up on to my shoulder as to keep it from falling off as I approached Fredrick's house. It was small, gray, and, in all sense of the word, bland with an almost flat roof. It was practically an apartment removed from the rest. I imagined the apartment building with the missing apartment, and I could help but smile.

Ignoring the front door, I walked around to the back where a small set of cement stairs descended into the ground where a red painted door was set into the base of the house. The door was barely more than a few planks nailed together with hinges, a handle, and easily pickable lock. This is because the house wasn't built with the door. The last owners had it put in, but measured too small a hole. Instead of paying for a custom door, they built their own. I always told him to get a new one, but Fredrick said he liked the quirkiness of it.

I knocked three times and waited. After a second of silence I heard the padding of bare feet on linoleum and the rustle of plastic wrap. The door opened to show Fredrick, who having been sick the last few days, had a scraggly beard, blood shot eyes, and a red nose to accompany his usual deep green eyes and messy blond hair that hung in front of them.

"Hey Janett," he said leaning against the door frame in his pajama bottoms and a faded band T-shirt of which I had never heard of. I smiled.

"Hey. Feeling better?" He pulled out a handkerchief, and blew his nose loudly following it with a series of painful coughs.

“No.”

“That sucks.”

“Come on in. It’s cold here.” He padded through the small entryway that was just some wall frames with plastic wrap stretched over them to try and keep the moisture out. He pulled up one corner and disappeared under it. I followed, pulling the door shut behind me.

I passed through the curtained doorway into what seemed to be Fredrick’s mind or a mad scientist’s lair. Most of the cellar had been turned into a lab with sterile white tables, scientific equipment, and some indistinguishable objects and samples. Fredrick was a genius who minored in everything science related. Much to his parents chagrin however, he decided to major in pharmaceuticals like me. This way he could do his class work at home when necessary as well as make some extra cash by occasionally manufacturing and dealing prescriptions drugs. The rest of the cellar had been devoted to his second obsession, wine. He had a full distillery, and successfully sold his own brand of red wine locally. In both the lab and distillery, the walls were posted with posters, pictures, papers, and order forms. The originally cement floor was covered in a tile patterned linoleum, and the whole room was lighted by harsh florescent lights.

“Is it already the twenty-second? Wow. I didn’t even realize it. I need to get better, and get out of here.” He said searching through a file cabinet. He pulled out a small bottle like an ink well, and two syringes.

“Cool,” I said. “I have to go. Give me a call when you do get better.”

“Remember the rules,” he warned. At first I thought he was joking, but then I noticed the serious expression on his face.

“Why do you say that?” My fingers itched at the sight of the drug. I wanted it, craved it.

“Because you are eyeing it like a junkie! This is so totally experimental. The effects could be major. You already appear to be addicted with only using it once every two weeks with small doses.”

“I’ve got it under control.” I had become frustrated he knew I could handle it. He knew me. He knew I had dealt with this kind of thing in the past. Was being sick making him paranoid or something?

“I just don’t want you to end up like...”

The hum of the lights filled the silence, and warned of the impending doom Fredrick was about to face. My expression was contorted by a storm of emotions. My fists balled up, and every muscle was tense. All the while I could feel the craving for the drug pumping through me, intensifying my anger.

“Like my coke-head brother? Naked, face down in a ditch from an overdose?” I yelled. My nails cutting into my skin.

“You know I’m just trying to-“

“Well stop. Just give me the drug.” He hesitated, rolling the needles over each other in his hand. Contemplating whether he should or not. I thrust my hand out, waiting for him to put them within my grasp.

“Be careful,” he said blandly, staring at the floor. He set them down on the counter of one of the lab tables, and went across the room where he started to examine something through a microscope. I watched him for a moment, grabbed the stuff, and left without a word.

"Dora, I'll take it for ten dollars, that's all I got." Dora rubbed her slightly bristled chin, calculating.

"K. But I want ring as well," she demanded, pointing at my left hand.

"Done." I pulled a wadded ten dollar bill out of my pocket, took off my ring, and placed it all down on the table. Dora handed me the glowing necklace, and I rubbed the cool metal between my fingers. The glow tickled slightly against my palm, and made my purple fingernail polish look black. I definitely could feel the tickle along my collarbone when I placed it around my neck. It almost seemed to brighten my soul and unclouded my thoughts. *Is the drug wearing off?* I thought. I looked around me. I could still see the glowing on the gypsy's table, the people with wings, monster in shadows, and someone who could of only of been the Greek god Artemis.

Strength. It had given me control, the strength to fight the drug. I no longer felt myself slipping away. I remembered clearly, remember things I didn't usually forget. I remembered the fight with Fredrick. Running into the alley, and take twice too much of the drug to forget it. I pushed the thought away. I couldn't face it right now, and the clarity I was having almost blinded me.

It was like taking the drug for the first time, and I noticed things I had never remembered off the drug, like the orange tint everything has. I realized I had never spoken with the other things. All these conversations with beings that had been around for ages just waiting to be had.

I instantly searched for something recognizable from my mythology classes. I heard the clapping of hooves, and I turned to find a group of four satyrs talking loudly and obnoxiously. Greek mythology, my favorite.

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "can I ask you guys some questions?" They all stopped and stared, surprised. They probably weren't use to normal people stopping them on the street.

"About?" one said in a thick Greek accent. They all looked bewildered.

"About you," I said, smiling awkwardly. I realizing how weird it was to just stop someone on the street, and ask them their life story. The one that spoke looked me up and down, and grinned wickedly.

"Sure beautiful," he said, winking. The rest laughed and hooted, and I couldn't help but smile. We started walking down the street, and I could only think, *Classic satyr*.

"So, are you guys truly from Greece?"

I rushed into the cellar, and pushed past the plastic wrap. It had been two days, and I hadn't talked to Fredrick. With the charm, I could now see how badly the drug had affected me. I needed to apologize.

"Fredrick, I'm so-" I froze. The room was empty. It had been cleared out except for a note on the table.

Dear Janett,
Be careful.
Fredrick.

He had left. He didn't stop trying to help.