



UNBOUND

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Ashlee Marshall's photo, taken inside Bruce Nauman's architectural sculpture "Room with My Soul Left Out, Room That Does Not Care," is featured above.

Ashlee is a senior majoring in Art.

*J. Lucy Tauber's digital art piece "Self Portrait" is featured on the cover.
8.5" x 11"*

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RODEO AFTER PARTY

—Chris Laswell

Barlow closed for summer,
so I dance for salmon.
Under canopy calm, pretty tails drift
up blooming chutes of gushing cream,
rolling out of a thousand beds
where the coastals slip into something dry.
A fine place for salmon fishing:
white flows and sucking krill,
waxed ones wasted in lubrication lift-off.

I sing what I know for these June Hogs,
compete for bites at the end of my lure
until, finally, my stonefly sinks.
Coming wet up the shore, I bury my blade
in wails of distant blue,
watching it chase,
melting in its last taste of hot water and air.
So close.

Pink tunics bulging,
slick flesh, and then a cloud.
Tangling nets and lines, to give it all away
in a shallow mouthful of foam.
All those eggs, and as many reminders
of fires that burned
in a bedroom we borrowed for the rodeo after-party.

*Chris is a junior majoring in Environmental Studies with a minor
in Historical Preservation. This is his first publication.*

THE HOG

—Chad Huniu

The day was awfully hot. The men were drinking beer; the women wore short dresses or cut-off jean shorts; the smaller kids played freeze tag in the field, some stumbling and nose diving into the grass before the tagger froze them; the bigger kids took turns riding the family hog, a giant thing that did not like being ridden. It was nearly summer and the only thing that helped Gray endure the afternoon party and the allergens, floating in thick platoons through the spring air, was the beer. He stood under the shade of the apricot tree, which wasn't bearing its fruit quite yet, avoiding the others and sneezing into a black bandana. He didn't know the other parents, though he'd been to the Wilmensen's party—an annual event his wife always insisted they go to—three times now. Mrs. Wilmensen was a friend of his wife's, and he never took it upon himself to invite Mr. Wilmensen to go fishing or golfing.

His wife, Coriander, who was in the Wilmensen's light blue country house, was an incessant reminder that he was a fool for believing marriage would enhance his life a second time when it had not enhanced his life the first time. Coriander sought to put all the blame for the boys' failings on

Gray's failings as a father. He didn't do enough; he didn't pay enough attention to the boys; he never showed he cared. She was always bringing up the boys' problems. His oldest child, Ash, who was almost nine, played in the hog pen with the older kids. He was from Gray's first wife, whom had divorced him for reasons that included his drinking. Coriander was having a hard time with Ash's building disrespect toward her. She did not think it was healthy, nor did she believe she deserved it.

The youngest, little Tommy, which belonged to him and Coriander, was nearly six and would be entering into the first grade in the fall. Coriander was very worried about Tommy's slow progress in reading and writing. He seemed a great deal behind his kindergarten class, though his teacher assured Coriander that this seeming shortcoming would often change radically within a few years. Some children learned slower than others; some were late bloomers. That was all. Coriander had no reason to worry yet. Tommy stood frozen, his arms raised over his head, in the sunny field on the other side of hog pen where there were no trees or corn growing. He had been tagged.

Bill Tressel stood by the picnic table, eating a slice of watermelon. After three years of struggling to pay for the hospital bills and chemotherapy, he'd recently lost his wife to breast cancer. Many at the party who had not attended the funeral three months ago (those who had had done so as a favor to Mrs. Wilmensen) gave their condolences when Bill arrived.

Bill had a daughter who was thirteen and always had to straighten her hair before

going out. Her hair was very curly like her mother's had been. It would have been the same auburn color too, but she'd dyed her hair black the month after her mother died, and then a dark shade of purple only a few weeks ago. That Monday, she'd been caught puffing a cigarette off the middle school campus by a teacher, who'd had the consideration to go directly to Bill, having known of the family's loss, and not through the school. Bill had appreciated that. He grounded his daughter and forbade her from smoking, but realized his ineffectualness as the head of his diminished family quickly when he heard her, the night of that same Monday, sneak out through the side gate of the house. He'd been laying in his bed, unable to sleep. He immediately called her cellphone from the landline, hoping to scare her back, and heard her phone's ringtone trickle from her bedroom. He went to her room to be sure she'd gotten away. It wasn't like her to leave her cellphone anywhere. He turned on the light; she had gone.

Bill waited for her on the couch, watching television at a low volume and considering a phone call to the local authorities, until she returned. When he heard a car pull up in front of the house, he switched off the television and went to the front door and stepped outside.

"Dad!" she said, halfway out of the passenger side of the car. "Go," she said to the driver, who followed her command after she'd slammed the car door. She walked hurriedly toward the house, unable to look at Bill, streaks of her purple hair hanging over her face. As they stood on the porch, they remained silent, until his daughter said, "I miss Mom." She smelled of cigarettes and looked down at her

sneakers and began to cry. They stood, a foot in between them, his daughter looking down, waiting for punishment or an embrace, Bill looking at his daughter, unable to recall what his wife would have done in this kind of situation with the girl.

He ate watermelon and watched his daughter texting on her cell phone, sitting hunched over with the device in her lap. She sat in the shade, on the other side of the hog pen, upon the back steps of Bill's sister's house where the sun couldn't reach her straight and purple hair. The sun felt good. The watermelon and lemonade tasted good. He could forget about his daughter for a little while. Where could she dare go this far out of town? She had no way to leave the party and she wouldn't be able to smoke a cigarette this close to Bill and her aunt and the other adults. He could relax.

He looked intently at all things that were not his daughter texting, trying to take interest in them. He'd seen his sister's property many times before. The openness and space it had being this far into the country; the treeless field to the side of the house, to Bill's right, where the younger kids played freeze tag; the larger field behind the house and hog pen and apricot tree, to Bill's left, most of which was barren and a dusty green, with a small section devoted to growing roses and sunflowers, and another for growing tomatoes, watermelon, and others fruits and vegetables, until it was abruptly cut off by a few square miles of corn. The apricot tree had always been there and the hog had been in the pen for four years. But time had passed since he was last here. The roses were blooming, red ones and orange ones. The sunflowers were getting to be

very tall. Most of the watermelon were big and ripe. He didn't wish to think of the way his wife had withered away in hospital beds and how long she'd beared through it. He didn't want to think of having to raise their daughter without her.

The older kids in the hog pen, not including Gray's oldest son, Ash, took turns riding the large family hog like it were a bucking bronco. Ash stood at an angle to the hog with both hands on the dusty white fence of the pen, ready at any moment to jump up and out of the way of the beast's path if it seemed set on him.

"Ash," yelled Coriander, walking out of the backdoor and down the steps, where she almost tripped over Bill Tressel's daughter. "You be careful with that hog!"

"I know, Cor-i-an-der," said Ash, pronouncing each syllable of his stepmother's name, feeling embarrassed and avoiding making eye contact with the other kids in the pen, who weren't listening and were climbing all over the hog, fighting for whose turn it was to ride. Ash was nine now and he'd been allowed to play with the big kids in the hog pen last year, though he'd declined because he had been too scared. He didn't know why his stepmother was always so watchful of his whereabouts and his activities or why she cared so much about him. He loathed having to stay at his father's because of her, though he'd come to like his half-brother Tommy, who was oddly happy all the time and never cried when he bumped his head into something. Ash loved being around Tommy because Tommy didn't seem to care about anything, and so Ash felt that he didn't need to either.

The hog turned toward Ash. He gripped the fence tightly, fighting everything in him not to jump up on or over the fence in order to show his stepmother that he wasn't afraid. The hog, which was actually a wild boar that had been caught and tamed by the Wilmensen's, though every one referred to it simply as the hog, was a big dusty brown thing, over two feet tall and nearly four feet long, growing larger each year. The hog veered away from Ash. He relaxed his grip on the fence.

Coriander nodded at her husband's son, seeing that he was still afraid of the hog. She only wanted to give him a way out. "Lunch will be ready soon," she said. "Come wash up."

"I said, I know," said Ash. "I'm fine." He glanced quickly at the hog to see where it was in relation to him.

"Okay," she said. "Just be careful." She turned away from the boy. She wished she could be a second mother to him. For him to understand that she was not against him. But he was just a boy. All she could do was simply deal with it. Let him keep his distance from her. He was very much like his father in that way. She walked over to her husband who was on his sixth can of beer, as she'd been counting, even when he sneaked another while she was helping Mrs. Wilmensen prepare lunch in the house. Walking by a kitchen window, she'd caught Gray grabbing it from the ice chest and had made a note of it. She didn't want to be embarrassed by him in front of Mrs. Wilmensen.

"Gray, honey," she said, approaching him under the apricot tree, which was not more than fifteen feet from the hog pen. Except for the kids in the pen, there

was no one else around the tree. She said, "Can I speak to you in private?" Coriander looked down at the beer in his hand and then back up at him, a look of concern in her green eyes. Her brown hair was let down past her shoulders, a rare occasion. She almost looked beautiful in the sunlight, thought Gray, even with the heavy bags under her eyes. Like she did when he'd first seen her, when he was still married to his first wife. He should have enjoyed her more like she was then, like they were then, when they weren't married, when it was still only a notion, when it was still make believe. Her green eyes sparkled in the sunlight, and when they did he took the last sip of his beer. He held the can in his hand, just above his recently-acquired round belly, in hopes that his wife would think he hadn't finished it yet. He knew she always counted. He brought out the faded black bandana and sneezed into it. His red, puffy eyes stung. He sniffled vainly. "Fine," he said and followed Coriander away from the pen and tree to discuss his drinking.

Bill Tressel watched them walk, passing the roses and watermelon, the thirty or forty feet to the edge of the corn. They were almost out of view because of the apricot tree. He continued to watch them until Coriander caught his gaze. He turned around at this and went to grab another slice of watermelon from a plastic bowl. Other men and women, most of them parents, were seated at or standing around the long picnic table, talking amongst themselves, helping themselves to lemonade, beer, watermelon and potato chips, waiting for lunch to be served. No one looked up at or made eye contact with or offered any assistance to Bill as he reached across the table for a slice of

watermelon. Most had never quite understood Mrs. Wilmensen's brother, though they knew of his loss and felt sorry for him. They did not now how to talk to him or what to converse about. Bill was too silent of a man, with pale blue eyes that were very big and penetrating because of a condition that made them bulge outward, making it seem like he was always staring when he looked at you. It made the others uncomfortable.

Bill finally reached far enough to grab a slice of watermelon and turned around to find something new to watch. It was at this time that little Tommy, Gray and Coriander's son, decided that he was through with the game. He lifted the freezing curse from off of him, which he had just then self-endowed himself with, thereby making himself unfrozen, and shot his hands to his thigh in order to satisfy an itch.

"What are you doing?" yelled one of the kids who, like Tommy, had been frozen for quite some time. He was sprawled out on the ground on his stomach, the position he had been in when he was tagged. "You're frozen."

Tommy didn't answer, knowing he could do anything now, and began to walk away. He was very thirsty and made his way to the picnic table for some lemonade.

"Hey, Tommy!" the kid bellowed. "I said you can't move!" When the kid realized Tommy couldn't hear him, he yelled to the tagger, "Tommy's cheating! He's trying to quit the game! That's not fair! Who said he could do that?" By this time the tagger had already seen Tommy and was racing toward him. He flew at him with speed and drove his balled fist into Tommy's back. Tommy was shoved

forward. He tripped over his feet and hit the ground.

"That's what you get for trying to cheat," said the tagger to Tommy as he stood over him. He left Tommy on the ground and ran back to get the unfrozen.

Bill Tressel, having seen Tommy fall, watched him now get up on his own. Little Tommy brushed off the dirt and grass from his now stained t-shirt and khaki shorts. He did not cry and continued walking toward the picnic table. When he got to the table, Bill tried to ask Tommy if he was alright, but it came out as a croak. He cleared his throat.

"You alright, kid?" asked Bill.

"Yah," said Tommy. "I'm good. Can I have some lemonade?"

Bill Tressel turned to find the lemonade, but a mother who'd heard Tommy's request was already pouring him a cup. So Bill went back to watching Tommy's parents at the edge of the corn. Coriander had the beer can in her hand now. She shook it and looked at Gray plainly. She had known it was empty.

The heat was unbearable out of the shade of the apricot tree. Gray grabbed the beer can from Coriander's hand. He crushed it easily and let it drop to the ground. He said, "What do you want from me? Why you always gotta do this in front of the boys?"

"They can't hear us," she said. "And I'm not the one who can't control my liquor intake. For once, I'd just like to not have to worry about you. I have enough on my plate with Tommy, and Ash."

Coriander stood there in the field, her arms at her side, her shoulders

slouching now. She was very tired. Perhaps it was the sun. She didn't budge as Gray threw up his hands and stepped away from her, thereby disappearing behind the apricot tree from Bill Tressel's view, then twisting and stepping back into view, muttering when he wasn't sneezing, kicking a tuft of grass.

"This is some bullshit," he said.

"Please keep your voice down, Gray," she said. "We don't have to do this here."

"Keep my fuckin' voice down, she says," he muttered, then sneezed. "Let's not make this a thing."

"For our sons," she said, then corrected herself, "for both Tommy and Ash, for everybody else at this party, please don't do this." She turned to look at the house, hoping Mrs. Wilmensen wasn't standing on the back steps ready to announce that lunch was ready.

"Our sons, your son, my son, the goddamned party, whoopdie-fuckin'-do..."

Coriander couldn't stop him now.

When little Tommy saw that his brother Ash was walking toward him, he looked away from his parents who were having a conversation all the way across the field where the corn began.

"C'mon, Tommy," said Ash, putting his skinny, gangly body in the way of Tommy's view of his parents. "We don't need them. C'mon." He put his arm around his half-brother's shoulder to help get him moving. Tommy finished his cup of lemonade and dropped it on the ground like he'd seen his father do with his beer cans.

Ash and Tommy joined the older kids in the hog pen by climbing over the dusty white fence. A girl was riding

backwards on the hog, her head near the hog's behind. She had her legs around the front of it, her feet barely hooking on to its brown neck. She held its tail tightly with both hands as the hog ran around the pen, squealing and trying to kick her off. She couldn't understand that the hog did not like to be held by its tail, that the hog hated this most. Every time the hog tried to kick her off she grabbed its tail more tightly, pulling it to keep her body from raising more than an inch or two off its muscular back. She laughed with delight as the hog whipped around violently.

Ash and Tommy stood at the edge of the pen, sometimes climbing up the rungs to avoid the path of the hog.

"Do you want to try it?" Ash asked his half-brother, jokingly. But Tommy did not seem deterred by the question. Ash still hadn't worked up the courage to ride the hog and didn't want to look like he was a wuss because his little half-brother did it before him. "No, maybe you shouldn't," he said, quickly. "Your mom'll be really mad."

"I wanna try," said Tommy. "I can do it." The girl riding the hog was finally flung off. She landed in the dirt on her side, sliding before she rolled to a stop. She got up and laughed and began to wipe the dirt off her blouse. Ash watched the hog continue to buck wildly and snort and run around the pen. It was uncontrollable, but the other kids only laughed, watching the hog's enragement run its course until it calmed down enough for someone else to take a turn.

"Tommy, let's go," said Ash, turning away from the hog and beginning to climb the rungs of the fence, catching sight of his parents still arguing in the field by the corn. Where could he go? There was nowhere to

run to. He was trapped in this place.

"But I want to ride the hog," said Tommy.

"No," said Ash. He felt like jumping from the pen and running across the field into the miles of rows of corn, away from the hog and his dad and his stepmother and the whole party, but his legs wouldn't move. "Let's really go. I don't like it here. Let's leave this place and Dad and Coriander." He turned his gaze back down to where Tommy had stood, only to find him walking determinedly toward the still fuming hog in the middle of the pen, where hovered a cloud of dirt. "Tommy!" Ash's legs quivered.

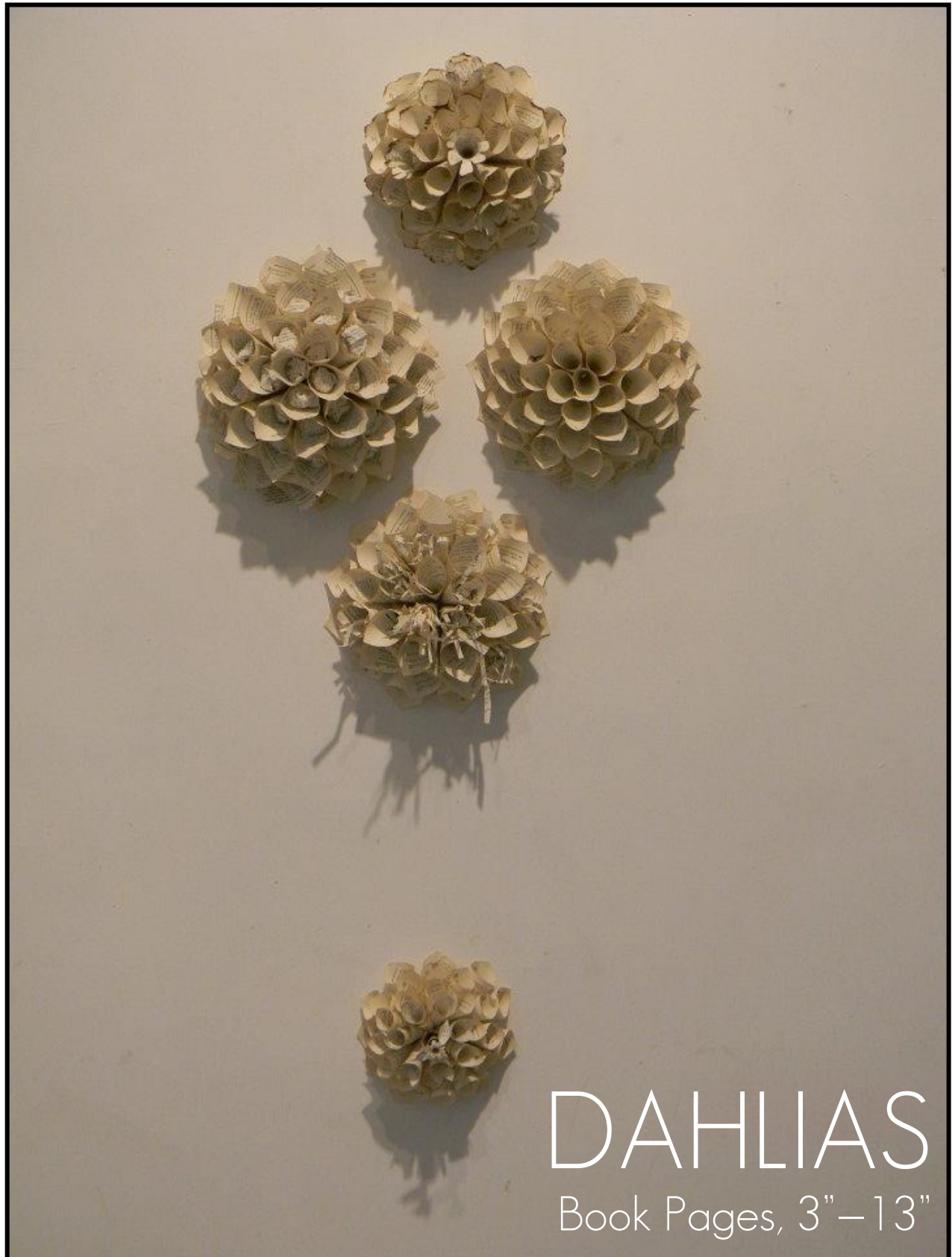
Bill Tressel couldn't watch the couple fighting any longer. He couldn't hear them and the scene hadn't progressed any, the man still sneezing and muttering something and walking in and out of view behind the apricot tree, the woman just standing there, taking it. Bill's eyes were burning from watching them for so long. He closed them and rubbed them with his knuckles. When he reopened them, his vision was blurry. He blinked a few times before regaining clarity. He looked for his daughter. She had left her place on the back porch steps. He'd left her there and now she was gone. Of course she was gone. He hadn't moved from his spot by the picnic table, but he'd stopped watching, if only for a few moments, and she was gone. He shouldn't have stopped watching. He could never stop watching. She was all Bill had now.

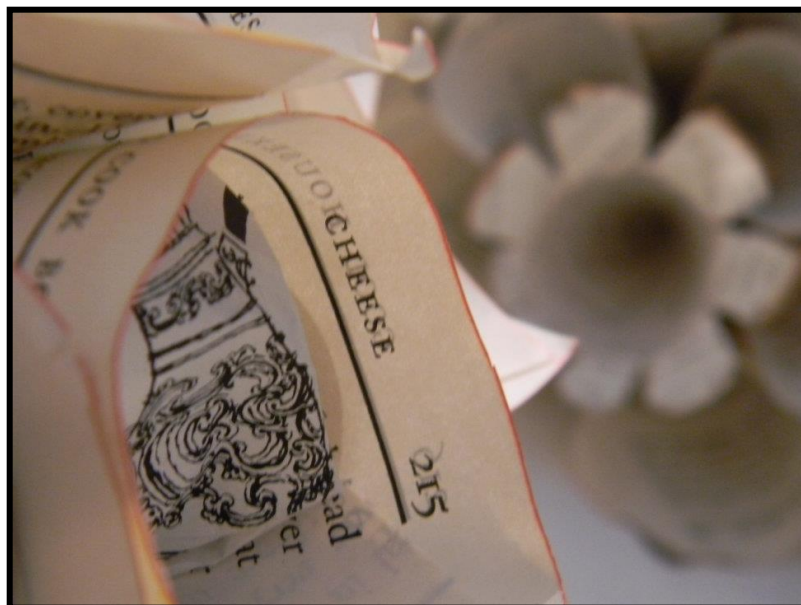
Bill started to walk toward the back of the house, hoping to find her around a corner, texting in the shade somewhere or even smoking a cigarette, when he saw the hog barreling down on little Tommy.

“Kid!” croaked Bill, knowing instantly what would happen if the boy remained in the center of the pen. A woman at the picnic table shouted frantically to Tommy’s parents, the couple arguing at the edge of the corn, who turned and saw and began to run. Bill leapt toward Tommy and the pen. He would save the boy; he must save the boy. But there wasn’t much time left and little Tommy was not scared. Tommy had stepped toward the bucking, powerful hog with his hand out, his fingers stretched wide. He would make it freeze and then unfreeze and freeze again with his newly acquired powers. He could do anything.

The hog’s round, black eyes had already caught the small, brave eyes of little Tommy. It had already ceased kicking in sporadic circles and had begun bucking straight toward the boy. To the hog, Tommy was just another kid. It wanted to climb all over the hog’s back and choke its neck and pull its tail. It was just another one. The hog was now inches away from Tommy’s outstretched arm, from his flat hand. How could it have known that Tommy was the only thing keeping his family together?

Chad is a junior majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing. He was a participant in this year’s Kidd Tutorial program (2011-2012) with a focus in fiction and has been previously published in Unbound’s Winter 2011 and Spring 2011 issues.





J. LUCY TAUBER

Lucy is a senior majoring in Art. Her paper art pieces, titled "Dahlias," were featured as an installation in Lawrence Hall. Lucy's graphic art piece "Self-Portrait" is featured on the cover of this issue.



ALL THAT I TOUCH

—Noelle Petrowski

Take my skin as you hold
my hand, strip it off, gentle.
Peel it from my legs, pulling
up my ankles, leaving crimson
rinds behind. I want to count
the ribs that hold me, flay
my chest bare. My muscles
will fall like ribbons, so take
my skin, my largest organ,
fold it like silk, and stick it
in your back pocket. At night,
hold me to the sky, let the moon
burn through me. Memorize my pelt:
pearly stretch marks, fifty four moles,
the birthmark shaped like Africa.
I'm only bones and skin, so take
the part of me that can touch
and leave my desert bleached
bones in their pile.

*Noelle is a junior majoring in Comparative Literature with a minor
in Creative Writing. She was a participant in this year's Kidd Tutorial program
(2011-2012) with a focus in poetry. Noelle has been previously published
in Unbound's Fall 2011, Spring 2011, and Winter 2011 issues.*

PAST TENSE

—Melissa Hicks

I keep his pictures in my top drawer tucked beneath the silky bits I never seem to wear. Slips and satiny straps slide past each other as I sweep them away to find his smile.

click

He stands straight, surrounded by desert. A sentinel of cacti surround him as he points, plain-faced, to a mystery far in the west.

click

I see him sitting in a hand-me-down chair rescued from the side of the road on trash day. He pets a cat whose name died with it. There is a twinkle in his eye and a crooked slant to his lips.

click

He stands beside a younger me, armed looped loosely around my waist. I am in white, embroidered, butterfly-satin with silver straps and an ankle-length skirt; he is in close-fitted black. We stand up proudly, straightly, facing the future with pride in our faces and tears in the corners of our eyes.

click

I see him on a windless day, sitting straight-backed at a picnic table on the white sand. He is frozen with a sandwich partway to his mouth. He is frozen against the sharp line between pale blue cloudless sky and bright, white sand, like glass. His

tattoos stand out strangely against the pale skin of his arm. Even in front of the sand, he seems white-bellied in the desert.

click, click, click

Our time together is a collection of photographs, some with scribbled notations from a younger time:

“Silly kitty!”

“G. at awards ceremony.”

“On the way to adventure!”

“Our new pad!”

Our time together is exclamatory if banal.

I flip through them searching, wishing, wondering. I don’t understand when we stopped taking our pictures or why. I don’t understand why I’m still looking at these pictures, when I’ve made no more my own, I keep these memories buried beneath the pretty panties. I can’t comprehend how I can miss what I had, before I was myself.

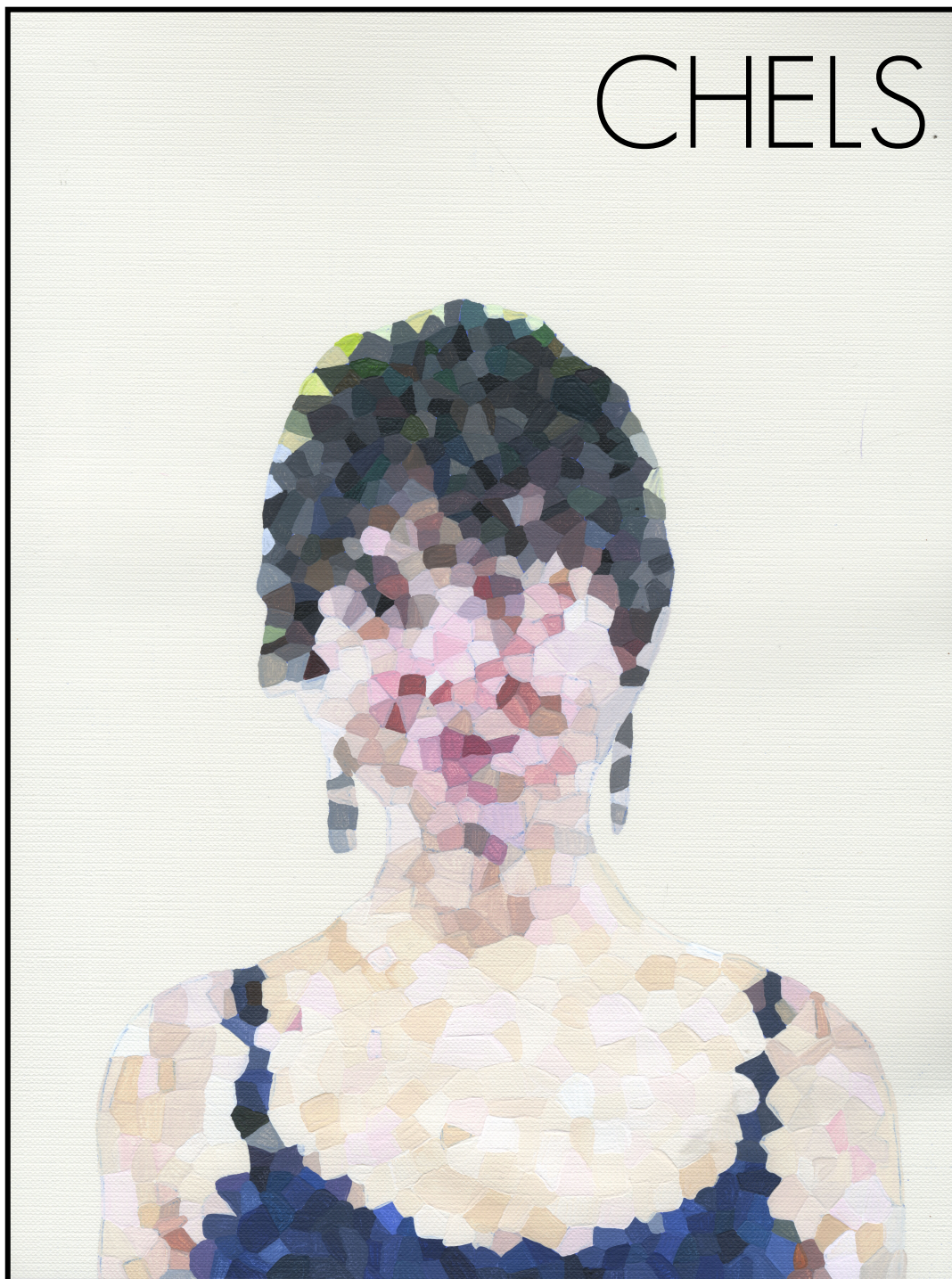
She and I have so little in common outside the want.

I flipped through my memories, realizing finally what I’d been looking for. It was not a time when I was thinner and beaming. It was not the things we’d done, or said, or places we had been.

I sat on the floor and searched, flipping through photos, looking for a smile that never was.

Melissa is a senior majoring in English. She has been previously published in LCC's Denali, Norton's second edition of Back to the Lake, and Unbound's Winter 2012 issue.

The Pixel Babies Project



JAMIE WALSH

Acrylic on Canvas

Jamie is a Master's student focusing on Community Arts Management and founder of The Quickest Flip (www.quickestflip.com). The above painting is part of a project titled "Pixel Babies" in which Jamie is painting each of her cohorts in the Arts & Administration program.

CHALK

—Kimberly Stottlemyer

Charlie stared across the park, letting the piece of white chalk roll between his hands. He glanced down at his watch. Half past three. *He should be here by now*, Charlie thought. Slouching down on the bench, he placed the chalk in the pocket of his worn jacket and rubbed his hands on his jeans. Near the twisted oak tree, a small boy with blonde hair was playing with his toy airplane. It swooped up in the air as the boy added sounds of *zoom!* and *swoosh!* It was funny—it didn't seem so long ago that he and his brother had been playing in the street with toy planes and cars, or drawing pictures in colorful chalk. Charlie was eighteen now, graduating high school in two weeks. He wished his brother could make it.

"Hey." Charlie twisted his head around so fast that his neck seized up with sharp stabbing. Massaging the muscle, he winced a smile to the gangly teen sitting next to him. Dennis had always liked to sneak up behind him, ever since they were young.

"You're late," Charlie said to his brother. "Don't know why I expected anything different." A woman got out of her silver sedan parked on the far side of the street, carrying a brown bag of

groceries. A large delivery truck drove by and Charlie blinked. The car *had* been silver, right? Now it was a navy blue minivan, the kind his mother had driven when he was young.

Shaking his head, Charlie turned his attention back to his brother. "So, why'd you want to see me?"

"I was gonna ask you the same thing." Dennis' voice was squeaky, a bit too high-pitched for a boy of sixteen. Then again, he had always seemed too young for his age, at least to Charlie.

Charlie shrugged, rolling the chalk in his hands again. "Why aren't you coming to my graduation? I thought—"

"You know why. I can't. Don't try to tell me you've forgotten. I mean, ten years is a long time, but still..." Dennis never blinked, not when the wind blew in his face, not when the bright sun peaked out from behind the clouds. He looked too pale, not just the whiteness that comes from not enough sunlight. This was a different pallor. Like he was covered in chalk. "Mom and Dad haven't forgotten. And they weren't even there."

Trying to comprehend the meaning of his brother's words, Charlie said, "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Dennis looked away from him, towards the park. Charlie followed his gaze and saw the little boy again. Six years old with blonde hair and a large smile. His toy plane was nowhere to be seen, instead he carried a bucket of colored chalk. Blue, purple, orange. He skipped out from under the trees, kneeling down on the sidewalk. A bike rider came whizzing down towards him, veering away just in time. The boy took no notice.

Charlie heard his brother speak

softly next to him. “You know exactly what I’m talking about. It’s the same thing that kept me from entering high school, even middle school. The same thing that kept me from you, Mom, and Dad. Made it so that you were alone and blamed yourself.” His voice was higher now, childish. Goosebumps arose on Charlie’s arms and he knew he had to face Dennis, even though he didn’t want to. But he *had* to.

Slowly, Charlie turned towards his brother. The little six-year-old boy with blonde hair, swinging his legs off the edge of the bench. “It wasn’t your fault, you know,” Dennis said. Charlie hardly heard the words, shocked by this unreal vision. But then again, how could he not have guessed? It was so simple, so obvious. Ten years. How could he have forgotten?

“It was.” His throat and mouth felt dry and scratchy. He ran a parched tongue over his lips. “I should have done something. I was the older brother and I saw that stupid truck coming. I should have—”

Something rushed past him, catching his eye. He whipped his head around, his neck screaming again in pain. But he didn’t care. It was the boy, the little boy carrying the chalk. He was running towards the street, busy with traffic.

Not again! Charlie’s mind wailed, but what could he do? He stood up, fists clenching. He wanted to do something, anything. That boy was going to get hit—

The woman he had seen carrying the groceries ran to the boy, throwing an arm around him, stopping him. She knelt down and scolded him. The boy nodded reluctantly, then gave his mother a hug. They disappeared inside the silver sedan.

“There was nothing you could do, then or now.” Charlie didn’t turn to look at his brother and wished he could tune out his voice. It was too painful. The chalk pictures in the street. Blue, purple, orange. And red, bright red.

“I’m sor—” Charlie turned. The bench was empty. He stood there, staring at it for a few minutes, then placed a shaky hand on the wood. The spot was warm. *No, it’s cold. Dead cold.*

Putting his hand back in his jacket pocket, Charlie turned to leave. Then he paused. He pulled out the piece of white chalk he had been fiddling with all day. One piece. He had had it forever, it seemed. For many years now.

He placed the chalk gently on the bench. After ten years, it was finally time.

Kimberly is a freshman majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing. She has been previously published in The Highland Piper and Unbound's Fall 2011 issue.

HIS VOICE

—Levi Masterson

Buttressed with intimations past, tenuous
wisps escape his lips, cut with a scalpel;
his voice quavers. “As if a summer solstice

would flicker now!” A lust, an auspice
of reprise; but to no avail—a feral
(buttressed with intimations past), tenuous,

onslaught of glares penetrated his fibrous
membrane heart; that disheveled easel.
His voice quavers as if a summer solstice

had lurched upon his dying terrace.
’Twas not to say, the least, a moment congenial—
buttressed with intimations past; tenuous—

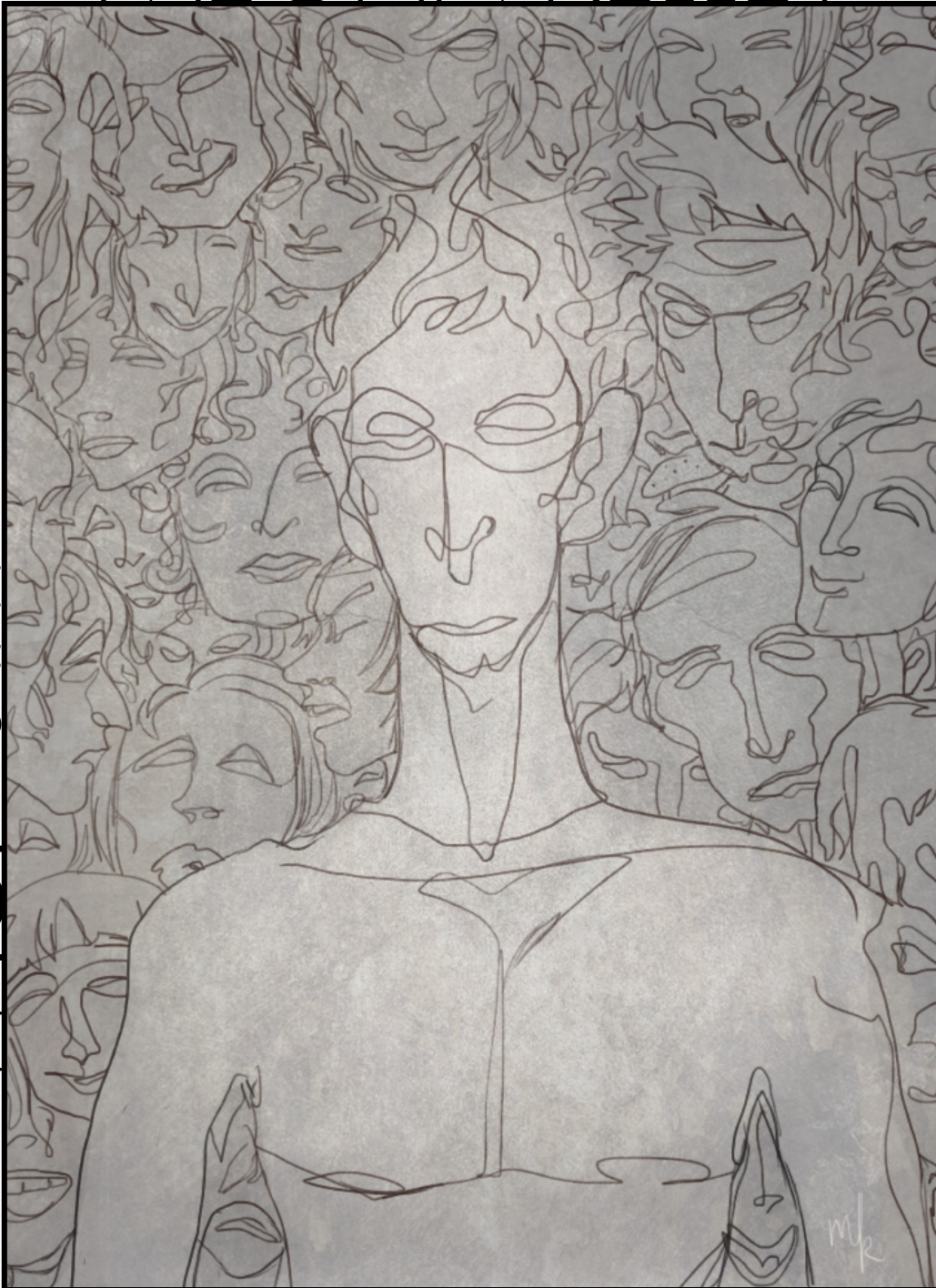
rather, the pirouetting candor and hubris
commingled in a dismembered opal;
his voice quavers. As if a summer solstice

above a crowd travelling thirsty, the Tantalus
desert gaze eviscerated, not unkindly, his navel.
Buttressed with intimations—past tenuous—
his voice quavers as if a summer solstice.

*Levi is a junior double majoring in Philosophy and Italian
with a minor in Chemistry. This is his first publication.*

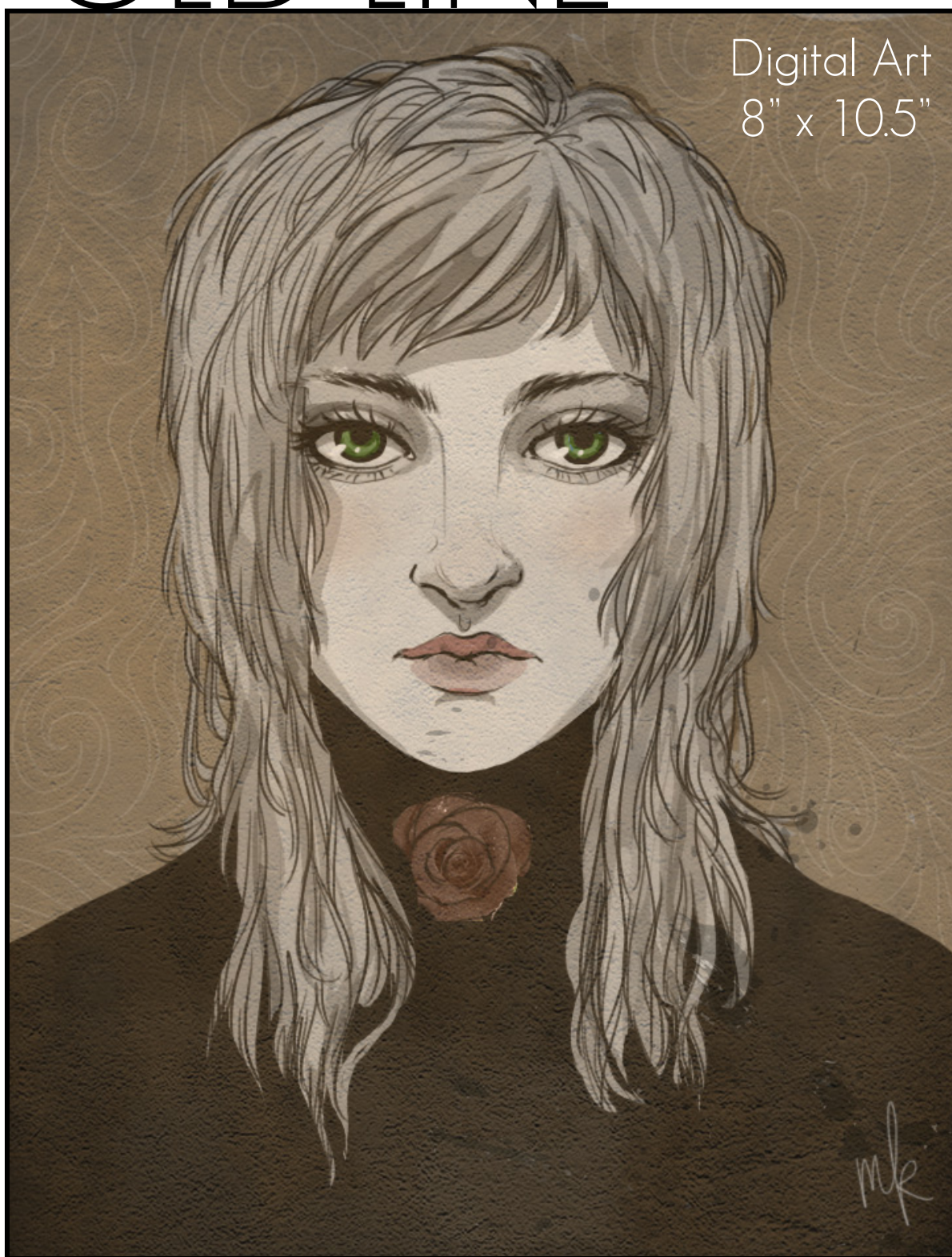
MEGAN KELLEY

WISP
8" x 11"



Megan is a freshman with an undeclared major. Her art piece above, "Wisp," was drawn with one unbroken line, while her piece on the right, "Old Line," was inspired by photographs of Megan's great-grandmother and features of her family members' faces. This is her first publication.

OLD LINE



THE BORN LOSER

—Tucker Mollers

David was the slot machine floor manager at the Old West Casino. It sounded important, and it even sort of was. But of all the management positions, it was the most avoided. David knew many people that had turned down the offer, giving up the opportunity to advance from having a job to having a career, and all because of the noise.

When it was slow, say around Wednesday afternoons, it was merely obnoxious. But come Friday and Saturday nights, the din was enough to make a person homicidal, and David figured it probably had at some point. All of the murmuring people talking to God and their favorite machines. All of the machines chinging and changing, whistling, whirling, whooshing, clicking, and honking. And then, if someone won (it made David's head hurt just to think about it) the sirens and screams, the hurraing and hooraying: it was too much for some people.

Still, dealing with the noise was nothing compared to dealing with The Losers. All casino workers were taught and encouraged to notice them. They would start out in another part of the casino mostly, just regular people coming in to blow off a little steam and burn a few dollars. Then they would start to show up more frequently. Slowly, their dress and manner would become sloppy, and they would begin to overdrink. From then on they deteriorated quickly, spending almost

all of their time in the casino. Like overspill in a fountain, they would start out in the highest circles at the most expensive tables they could afford, and then as they broke more and more frequently, making more and more desperate bets, they would move down to the next tier until that too was richer than they could afford.

More often than not, they would wash up at slots. It was to David's floor that the most desperate came for one last-ditch effort to try and save their finances, families, and sometimes, their lives.

This was the floor manager's most important job in slots: spot The Losers. Spot the people that had nothing left to play but the twenty in their hand. These people were liabilities. Sure, there was a humanitarian aspect to it, no one wants to watch a fellow human self-destruct, do something stupid and irrevocable, but that was secondary to Old West interests.

That's what David was doing, watching a Loser. According to the previous shift leader, the guy had already been at it for seven hours when David had come on at four in the afternoon. It was eleven o'clock, and David found himself perspiring from nervousness. The man kept barely breaking even, and the suspense was so heavy it pressed in on David from every side.

The Loser sat just as rigidly on his stool as he had since he had arrived that morning. His dingy work shirt was soaked

through, and he never so much as glanced in any direction but always straight ahead at his machine.

His was a common enough story: he came in one evening with a five hundred dollar limit, ordered a couple of drinks, won a couple thousand, lost it, ordered a few more drinks, visited the ATM once or twice, and then left drunk with an empty bank account.

Maria, his wife, had been pissed, but she hadn't left him until after the bills stopped getting paid and the mortgage came due. She packed her shit, the kid's shit, half of his shit, and even the dog's shit, and left.

He didn't blame her. Aside from the general pain and loss he felt every time he went home to his empty, run-down apartment, he rarely even thought of her. Not specifically anyway. She was relegated to just one more fuzzy detail of the "before," the "before" that had been taken from him because of his bad, rotten, stinking luck.

But he had a big win in him, he knew he did, and then he would walk away. Then he could return the "before" to the now. Then he would be the conquering hero, returning with glory and riches, not shamed with his tail tucked between his legs. He would not let that happen—it was go home in victory, or not at all.

And if his bank didn't hold out long enough, then—well, he didn't like to think about that. He had been playing off of the same twenty token for an hour and a half, and he only had one more left. Win or lose, it would soon be over.

The little card-themed wheels spun around and around, flashing Kings, Queens, Jacks, Aces and Jokers. Hearts,

clubs, spades, and diamonds. From left to right they stopped, jarring into place with a hard clack and light metal-on-metal 'ding.'

Jokers, free spin. He reached up and pulled the lever. A loud card-shuffling sound rang out from a hidden speaker and around went his fate. King, Queen, Jack, Joker, Ace...King, Queen, Jack, Joker, Ace...

As they went round and round, The Loser stared at the last twenty dollars he had to his name, manifest in a single gold medallion only a little bigger than a quarter. His life, everything in the "before" and all that was left in the now, all spun on that tiny piece of metal. His memories and thoughts flashed through his mind rolling into view like the symbols on his machine. He closed his fist around the coin and squeezed until he could feel the smooth edge creasing his fleshy palm.

The reality of his situation began to sink in for the first time since his first loss over three months ago. Clarity opened up the "before" to him as it hadn't been since it had become the "before."

His wife, (how come he hadn't remembered how beautiful she was before?), his two girls, (Sadie was her mother's child without a doubt, but Caroline was all him).

The spinning faces seemed to laugh at him as they passed by the little window. And then they began to click into place.

Ace after Ace lit up the screen, and The Loser's fever started to surge forward again. The big win was so close. He knew it. Just one last Ace and he was done.

He imagined the look on Maria's and the kids' faces when he arrived at her mother's with all his winnings. All *their* winnings.

The last wheel slid into place.

The King of Hearts; the Suicide King.

And that did it. His hand was already halfway to the slot, but it froze as he sat there, transfixed by the little image of a king with a knife in his head.

Slowly, he dropped his hand, then raised it again towards the slot. He paused once more.

The miniature king's miniature eyes were trying to tell him something very big, he was sure of it. Simple and dead eyes they had always seemed before, but now he could see something else in them the closer he looked.

David watched in complete apprehension as The Loser's hand went back and forth from his lap to the machine, each change of direction was accompanied by an obvious and torrential inner struggle by the beleaguered gambler.

"Put it away man, please, just go home." Without realizing it, David had crossed his fingers and was beginning to bob up and down with intermingled dread and excitement.

"You look more like a patron than an employee." It was David's relief, but the younger manager wasn't about to leave, not until the scene before him played out.

"It's one of The Losers. He could kick it, he could actually do it." David was electric with optimism for his protagonist, but the morning manager wasn't impressed.

"You haven't been here long enough, kid. That one's done." Thomas was overweight and nearly retired. David

liked him well enough, but David saw in his relief the consequence of years spent watching women and men throw their lives away little by little. Thomas was counting the days to his retirement, and David wondered how he had let himself slip so easily into a world of without hope.

"You need to be more positive, Thomas—have faith in humanity for Christ's sake."

"Hey, show me the nail holes, that's all I am saying, and this guy doesn't look like he could kick a can, let alone an addiction." Thomas' chuckle died slowly as The Loser stood up from his stool, put the last coin in his pocket, and turned to walk away.

"Yes!" The word was carried on a gust of air that had been trapped in David's lungs for what seemed like hours.

"I'll be damned," Thomas said with an amused smile.

The Loser had only walked a short distance from his machine when a casual gambler walked by, stopped, slid a coin in, and pulled the lever.

Aces straight across. The racket was unbelievable.

David watched as the machine's former occupant froze in place, and then, without so much as a glance back, continued towards the exit.

The relief, laughing and slapping David on the shoulder with a meaty nicotine-stained hand, remarked as they looked from one scene to the other, "Some guys are just born Losers."

David wasn't so sure.

Tucker is a senior double majoring in English and Cultural Anthropology. This is his first publication.

THE BOAT

—Lauren Greenhall

Hot, late May, and a boy
swimming in the lake by his house.

I heard the boat, met the sounds
that ricocheted off air and

watched as they pulled him into an ambulance.
The propeller into pelvis,

a little into the abdomen,
too high for a tourniquet

—and the leg,

right leg removed to save
the body's remainder, lifeless,

detaching its identity
from the boy.

Lauren is a senior double majoring in Comparative Literature and Judaic Studies with a minor in Creative Writing. She was a poetry participant in this year's Kidd Tutorial and was the winner of this year's Kidd Tutorial Memorial Writing competition in poetry. Lauren has been previously published in the Oregon Commentator, Unbound's Winter 2012 issue, and her own radio show on KWVA called Shenanigans.



ELIE HOOVER
LAST THURSDAY
Photography

*Ellie is freshman double majoring in English and Theatre Arts.
This is her first publication.*

THE GIRL WITH THE RED SWEATER

—Terek Hopkins

My footstep lies stamped in the snow next to hers. My prints leave the tread of a boot with their rigid outline while hers are more perfect and simple, two ovals that stretch to form the shape of an upside-down heart. I plant one foot in front of the other, smothering her marks, one heavy boot at a time. In the distance I can see her beautifully brown body—smudged against the landscape like mud on a freshly pressed white dress.

Her ears perk up from time to time, trying to catch the faint popping of ice under my boots. But I know I am far enough away for her to feel safe. Her ears jerk towards the heavens and her eyes scan the forest for predators as she returns her mouth towards the snow, where she nuzzles her nose in the earth in search of food.

I've been following her for some time now. Judging by the sun at my back I'd say it's around nine, longer than I usually follow a hunt. I tell myself I am looking for a good shot, that I don't want to risk missing and spooking her. I tell myself lots of things, but I know I haven't shot her yet because I enjoy watching her move so effortlessly. I appreciate the way she nestles her snout into the thin layer of powder, looking through the gently falling snow as she chews leaves.

She is beautiful, with her full black eyes and big brown ears. She looks in my direction as I hold my breath in anticipation, letting her gaze travel through me like sun through the branches. I catch glimpses of her underside—white like snow—and watch her ashen tail wag in nervous delight. My rifle presses itself against my back, wishing I would pull its trigger, allow it to do what it was made to do—allow me to do what I was put here to do. Teamwork at its finest, you could say; the Grim Reaper with an insatiable twitch.

The fawn looks away and takes a few steps forward. I continue to follow in the footsteps she leaves behind. We continue to slow dance in this playful way as the silence of the snow falling to the earth keeps the rhythm of our steps. Her brown hide shakes from time to time as she wiggles off the snow that has recently fallen on her. The similarity of this action to my dog creates a cold shiver down my spine. It's a coldness I dismiss as created by the temperature rather than the familiarity.

The higher the sun comes up the longer my shadow is drawn out. The longer my shadow becomes, the more the darkness at my feet is stretched—something that will eventually give my position away to this beautiful animal unless I take action. My presence can only

stay a secret for so long. I carefully slide my rifle from my back to my hands. As she continues placing her upside-down hearts into the snow one hoof at a time, I peer down the sight of my rifle and reveal my own upturned spirit.

She looks up at me elegantly. It's the first time she does not look past me, but at me. Her dark eyes widen in fear. My gunshot rings out and snaps in the cold air. I can hear a bird take flight in a tree near me; the snow on the branch it sat on falls to the ground at my right. I see its black body flee into the air as my bullet finds its home in the doe's flesh. The echo of my shot reverberates through the forest, bouncing off the shadows until it finds its way back into my ears.

The doe falls to the white earth, first collapsing onto her front legs as if to pray and then to her side. A thud swells through the air between us, a wave brushing against my ears—the ears of the only other fallen creature in the forest.

I take a few hesitant steps towards her. Everything is quiet as the snow continues its inevitable plummet to earth. I become more frantic and begin walking faster towards her, quickly turning my stride into a sprint. I see a puddle of blood bleaching the snow; inside it there is a curled up creature slightly squirming, creating the desperate sounds of death. Her breath creates a warm cloud in the air above her. Her breathing is frantic in its attempts for air.

This impossibly bright red puddle of blood is the last thing that burns itself in my vision before my feet catch a root, and I fall, head first, into a frozen stone covered in white snow.

When I wake there is a dull ringing

bouncing around my head; it feels like a beetle clicking its wings together, forebodingly dancing around my skull. The sharp pain near my right eye is held at bay only by a coldness pressing against my right cheek.

I attempt to push myself up from the snow as my vision adjusts itself to its surroundings. Lying there, I take a deep breath; a poignant smell of blood stings the inside of my nostrils. I sit up, suddenly wide awake, as if woken by the sound of a gunshot in my ear. The smell continues to nip at my nose hairs. There is an earthy red slush coating the rock and snow where my face had been. I feel a dry crust over my eyelid, cracking as I blink.

As I shake my head trying to clear it, the twisting of sounds separate themselves and become more recognizable. Now I hear the occasional squawk of a bird, mixed with a strange scratching, like a dog trying to come inside from the rain.

I try again to bring my arms to my sides and raise myself, this time with more success. The ominous scratching continues to be my constant bridge to reality. The occasional squawking has stopped. I press my eyelids together more forcefully than usual, wrinkling my brow in a painful effort to see clearly. The crusty blood running itself down the right side of my face continues to split and break like a dried up riverbed. I lift myself to my knees; the rock under my right hand is stained with a spit of earthy blood from my cheek and eyebrow.

My balance rights itself enough for me to rise to my feet, although the crimson snow beneath me still has a queer sway to it. The ringing has completely ceased, and the sharp pain I once felt stabbing against

my face is replaced by confusion and dismay. I look down and see my rifle lying in the soft snow, creating a mold of itself in the still whiteness. My first thought is that I must be hunting. The place feels familiar somehow—buried in a sense of *déjà vu*. But I can't remember walking here, or what caused my bloody fall.

I raise my head from the rifle at my feet, up towards where that incessant scratching sound is coming from. An intense red strikes my eyes, and then the girl underneath that red comes into focus. She is pale like the snow she stands in. Her feet are bare. She wears nothing but a sweater—an impossibly red sweater than can only be described as *bloody*.

She pays me no heed as she thrusts her paws into the earth; her butt is pressed towards the sky as she digs in the dirt. Her red sweater barely covers her rear as it carelessly falls down her back; she becomes more and more intent on digging as the arch in her back grows sharper. Small chunks of earth fly over her shoulder as her naked, pale legs stick out behind her.

I try to speak but realize I am unable. My mouth feels sewn shut. I make an unconscious, guttural sound in the back of my throat, but the girl doesn't seem to hear me. As she digs, she looks like an ember melting through the frost-covered earth, a red coal burning beneath the pale, gray sky. My lips part as I feel a layer of frozen spit and blood detach from between my lips, which I wipe away with my sleeve. I try again.

"Hello?" I say, in a tone of confusion and fear. Why do I feel like these are the first words I've ever spoken? Like a boy tugging on his mother's sleeve, awkwardly uttering a newly learned language?

My voice sounds softer in the quiet forest than I expected. But it's enough to perk the girl's ears. She brings her dirty paws to her sides and stands, glancing down at the hole briefly as if reminding me as to what I'm taking her attention away from.

Her red sweater reaches all the way up her delicate neck, and then caresses her figure, falling just short of her knees. She brings a hand up to her nose and scratches, leaving a smear of dirt, and gives me a bored look. I notice that she hardly appears cold, as I look down at my own layers in embarrassment. My chest puffs out an extra three inches from the two sweatshirts and camouflage vest. Her warmth strikes me as impossible, as I feel the frost burying itself into my cheeks and ears. The silence between us adds a certain distance. I wiggle my toes and bring my own hand up to itch my nose—habits of nerve, the result of being uncomfortable in skin that barely fits me. I swear I can hear a leaf petal being embraced somewhere in the soft snow covering the forest. It's as if I can feel things breathing around me as I am caught in the gaze of this girl and her red sweater. I blink, and notice a few streaks of what I guess is dirt running down the length of her sweater.

She looks around quickly, as if hearing something too quiet for my ears—something quieter than the falling of a leaf—and then turns her eyes back towards me. I look back as if begging a question, something along the lines of, "What are you hearing?" or "Who are you?" Feeling as though the answer to all those questions is the same, I decide to keep the questions to myself. The depths of her black irises pull me in, as if I am some hooked animal

being reeled in by its jaw. Her look can only be described as falling somewhere in between teeming with life and soaked in fear. And there is something else too, as if she is staring deep into my soul with a sense of horrified recognition and utter familiarity. But also remorse, as if the man she is seeing, me, is the most fallen creature she's ever laid eyes upon. As if she has known me since the moment I was born into this world—wet, crying, and unable to breathe. I feel as though maybe she has.

My heart stumbles over itself, becoming a deep roar in my chest—*thud, thud, thud* is all I hear. Everything else—the falling of leaves or the plunging of snow—becomes timid and distant. I keep studying the girl and she stays unblinkingly focused on me, as if waiting for something. My boots crunch in the ice as I move a step towards her; she mirrors me and takes a step back. Our breath fills the air between us. Her paws continue to swing timidly at her sides, with her weight balanced on her back leg. There is something perfectly pristine in her readiness to run.

"I'm not going to hurt you," I say. She looks down at my rifle. I follow her eyes, and then step away from my weapon, trying to show her I don't plan on using it. "I don't know how I got here," I say. She looks at me as if to say, "Sure you do." A shy smile forces her lips upwards. She is an undeniably handsome thing.

"You cold?" I ask, trying to reassure with an equal smile, although undoubtedly a less attractive one. I look down at my feet and fidget in the snow, suddenly intimidated by her unwillingness to look away. I decide on action rather than desperately empty words. I take off my outermost jacket and put it in my out-

stretched hand. I gesture for her to wear it. "For you," I say as I try to take small steps forward, nudging the jacket towards her.

To my continued, yet surprised, pleasure, her smile grows. I am smitten as mine follows suit. A boyish feeling runs through my cold, human veins. I feel accomplished when I look at her smile, like I tamed this girl and her brilliantly red sweater. But then the boyish feeling ceases and is replaced by a sense of shame, a sense of disgust for feeling so accomplished. "Can I come closer?" I ask, realizing how strange my request is as the tail end of it slips from my lips. She tilts her head sideways in bewilderment as she continues to stare at me. Despite the distance between us, I can see a tiny brown blotch on her nose from where she scratched it. She doesn't seem to notice or care.

Her ease stirs envy and her silence becomes my virtue—I wear it uncomfortably like a bear in a circus wearing clothes. The occasional leaf falling and the continued thud of my beating heart are the only things that answer my hollow speech. With renewed confidence, I take another step towards the girl in the red sweater. She holds her ground this time, steadfast. This ember in my eyes continues to burn life into the air. I feel as though I'm winning a war with some inherent strategy, like I was born to ease this girl into letting me come closer.

I notice footsteps ahead of me and carefully place one foot after another into the laid out steps. I think that they must be the girl's: my feet are larger than hers, and I quickly erase what she left behind for me to follow in.

For some reason I think of fishing, of casting a spinner out and bringing in a

rainbow; dragging it through the water unnaturally as I tug at its hook-torn jaw. I think of the wide-eyed expression of those fish that take my bait, the look of impending doom. I think too of the fish that instead of biting the bait swallow it whole. I think of tugging on the hook until the insides of the rainbow become twisted and bloody, tearing the guts of the fish out through its own mouth. Whether these fish are luckier than the ones who only bite it, I do not know.

As these thoughts float around my head the girl's body language becomes more relaxed. But her eyes remain a mixture of fear and confusion. They seem almost concerned for the thing they are burrowing themselves into—me. "My name is Bradley," I say, breaking the silence.

She moves her lips, mimicking the words I uttered. Slowly she attempts to mutter something; I can't help but be excited. "Brahd lee?" she says slowly, with a toothy grin of triumph. My heart stutters along with her attempt. "Close enough," I say, trying not to sound too excited. A sense of relief overtakes me as I realize that at some level I had been worried that this whole time I might have been having a conversation with myself.

She smiles with admiration. I try to match her grin in encouragement. Then another confused look grazes her expression. Her brows furrow, and she looks up at me quizzically. "Clothes e nuff?" she says back to me. I look down at my feet, hoping she doesn't take offense at my concealed laughter. She shoots me a huge smile as she laughs playfully. It strikes me that she isn't the type to take offense— isn't the type to even understand what it is.

She points to me excitedly, "Clothes e nuff?" she says as I notice that's what she is calling me.

I look at the bottom reaches of her sweater. It brushes against her white thighs almost sensually. A part of me wants to run my palms over her thighs. I can feel the imagined warmth in my hands. As I look closer, her sweater seems an even brighter red, if that's possible. It's as if her color is bleeding through her landscape like a drop of blood on a snowflake.

She points to me again, "Clothes e nuff?" she says almost jumping with excitement.

"No, no, Brad-ley," I say, drawing out my name in an effort to enunciate. "You oughta take my jacket, how are you not freezing to death?" I say with teasing and worry as I notice my long ignored hand limping in front of me, still clutching my jacket.

"Take it," I say, again nudging my hand forward in offering. I say it slower, "Taaakee iit," as if that will help.

She smiles, and then glances back at her hole she was digging before I popped into being, as if checking on her progress, as if she has a time schedule to meet. I guess she's satisfied, or at least distracted. She raises her paw again and this time points to me. "Brahd lee?" she grins.

"Yeah," I say. "I'm Bradley," I continue as I point to my chest with one hand and continue to hold out the jacket with the other. She finally grabs my jacket and wraps it around her shoulders. Her movements are warm—she is warm, but not the kind of warmth you feel, like a furnace. She is warm like a sunset reflecting off a cold day.

She messes with the zipper for a

moment, oddly jerking it and moving it back and forth up the lip. She gives up after a moment and then gets on her hands and knees. The hole she is digging is about six inches deep and maybe a foot across, but I get the feeling it's far from done. She sticks her face into the hole and perches her butt back into the air, as if I wasn't even here. The sweater once again tries its best to hug her backside but loses the battle this time and slips as she sticks her nakedness further towards the sky. I feel slightly guilty for looking at her bare body—or at least the bottom half of it—and decide to turn around.

I see an auburn leaf slowly sway down to earth, letting go of everything it's ever known. It shakes in an unfelt gust of wind, and blows to my feet. I feel sorry for how far this leaf has fallen. Then it is quietly embraced by a blanket of snow, buried as effortlessly as it fell.

"What are you digging?" I say into the air, as I stare at the tree to my left, with my back facing the naked sweater. My mind tells me I'm stupid for continuing this conversation with a girl who so obviously doesn't speak my language. But the words give me an excuse to break the eerie silence. My futile attempts at conversation fall flat.

"You always dig in the dirt half naked like that?" I say as I decide I can't stay facing away from her forever. I turn around, and give my eyes the pleasure of the red passion they crave. But then she abruptly stops. Her ears perk up like an animal hearing a gunshot. She looks up at me curiously. I look around uncomfortably.

"Brahd lee," she says, one hand still on the ground holding her up, while the other points at me. I thought we had

covered this much already. "Naked?" she says in a more perfect pronunciation, as if she has heard the word before.

The tone of her voice lets me know it's a question, so I repeat it, "You always dig around *naked* like that?" I say, wondering what it is I said that is so strange.

"Naked?!" she says with a fury of excitement as she gets up from her knees. "Naked!" she says with a joyful smile. She uses both hands animatedly as she points to her chest. Her breasts slightly bounce under her sweater. There is a sensuality to it that squirms with utter joy.

"Naked?" I repeat as I point to her, playing along. She shakes her head in wild movements as if trying to replicate a nod, but ends up just moving it in a circular, wild fashion. "Your name is Naked?" I say aloud. There is a glow in her eyes as I repeat that faithful word. There is more than just dirt on her nose now; her digging has gotten it on her cheeks and forehead too, along with two earthy colored stains on her knees. Her handsome smile spreads itself once again on her beautifully carved lips.

Whether it is seeing her nakedness pressed against the heavens, or the fact that all the while I can slightly see her nipples through her red sweater, I, for the first time, want my lips pushed against hers. The urge doesn't falter. It is the kind of desire I can feel pulsing throughout my body. I want her and everything that comes along with her—the dirt and the blood red color, the lips and the warm thighs. I want her red sweater to slip itself down her body, starting with each shoulder. I want to slowly move my hands down her length, warming my palms against her skin. I want

her attempts at words, and the space left behind them.

I think she feels this lust coming from me, because her body language changes. She looks uncomfortable for the first time—like this desire I feel for her spells out her ruin, as if what I’m feeling is a sickness for destruction. She squints at me suspiciously. It is then that I see a red drop splatter onto the snow under her feet. This drop becomes a stream of redness, dripping from her sweater like a leaky faucet.

She looks down at her stomach and slightly moans. A desperate breath fills the air in front of her face. It fights the cold air with its warmth, but quickly is beaten into nothingness. I can see a crimson dye tinting the sweater, about where her belly button lies. It grows bigger and darker as the blood continues to drop to the white snow.

I step towards her, almost falling into the hole that stretches between us. She looks down at the blood with a frantically confused expression; an overwhelming sense of guilt runs through me. She looks as if the contents spilling from her stomach are something new to her, as if her body is simply something borrowed. When I reach her she doesn’t try to run, she just looks up at me like I’m her only hope. But somehow I know I’m also the reason for her downfall.

“May I?” I say gently, trying to focus on the tone of my voice rather than the words I say. I put my hands on the underside of her sweater and lift up. She flinches but lets me continue. As I raise the sweater above her belly, I immediately realize what is causing the stream of passion pouring from her stomach onto the snow. A fresh bullet wound lies in her

belly. She cringes at my touch. I lower the sweater and look at her with startled puzzlement; she whimpers like a doe shot in the heart. Her cry tells a broken fawn’s story. Suddenly my hands tremble with realization. My stomach aches with responsibility.

“Naked, I won’t hurt you,” I say, as tears swell up behind my eyelids, making my world blurry again. “I promise I won’t hurt you,” I say, lacking a more elegant choice of words.

I put my hand under her chin and raise it, allowing a small ray of sun to slightly light her features. I look first deep into her night-black eyes, and then down to her stomach again. The puddle of blood begins to create a red slush as it pours heavier and heavier down her body. She tries her best to give me a smile, as if to reassure me that she’s okay. I quickly realize her teeth have become lined with blood, as she tries to wrap her mouth up in a beautiful lie.

Her black eyes dig deep into whatever it is that holds my heart in place. Her irises bloom as blood begins to slip itself from her smiling lips. She is dying, and I feel more helpless than I have ever felt before in my life. The reason for the hole she was digging becomes obvious: a grave for her to lie in. It isn’t nearly big enough yet. I managed to ruin her last effort at dignity with my presence.

I look back at my rifle momentarily. She follows my gaze and returns it with a saddened look. Tears begin to run down my cheeks. I can almost feel them freeze on their way down, washing away my soiled blood. “You’re beautiful, Naked,” I say.

“Naked?” she says one last time as she falls to her knees. She begins coughing

up blood, creating splashes of red on the newly fallen snow at our feet. I get down to my knees and try to hold her up. Her weight falls against me as she weakly wraps her arms around my body. I can feel the warmth of blood wetting my neck, pouring from her mouth as the poor girl dies.

Even through my layers I can feel her heartbeat slow down. It seems somehow to coincide with the falling of the snow and the fading of her breath. The trees at our sides seem to lower their branches in respect, wilting like a man removing his hat.

She says my name with a dying whine, “Brahd,” *silence*, “lee,” *silence*. She awkwardly moves her face from resting on my shoulder to in front of my eyes. Her mouth brushes against mine, but our lips don’t seem to fit, as if our mouths aren’t of the same breadth. Then she presses her lips against mine. They slide against one another as the smell of iron melts into me. And then the thudding of her heart ceases. She falls limply backwards, her head caressed by the hole she was digging.

I hear a leaf fall behind me. It sways gently through the cold air until it lands on the red sweater. I cry for longer than I know. The sun is falling when I finally swell up the courage to stop. Naked lies with her head leaning in the hole like an upside-down pillow. Her jaw lies slightly open as her black eyes stare up into the darkening sky.

My body stings from the cold, biting air as I wipe my cheeks with my forearm. I look behind me at my gun. It is barely visible in the vanishing, dim light of what is left of the sunset. I walk towards it and brush the snow that has fallen on it off. I drag it loosely over the earth in my limp

wrist, towards where Naked lies. I push Naked over, trying to clear her of where I plan on digging. She is incredibly heavy for a girl of her size. Then I begin to dig into the dirt with the butt of the gun, finishing the hole she started. The moon climbs far into the sky before I am finished; the sweat sticking to my hide tells me I’ve been at it for longer than I expect. I look down at the grave I’ve dug and sigh at its depth. It should fit the both of us just fine.

I try to pick Naked up, but realize I do not have the strength. Instead I try my best to softly push her into the hole. She lands with a soft thump. I stand above the grave and feel a deep chill spreading from the back of my head, down to my toes, and then becoming an eerily comfortable numbness. I reach up and touch my nose in the moonlit air and realize I cannot feel my face. It dawns on me that I will die tonight, hypothermia is setting in. I look down at where Naked lies and realize my only option is what I already planned on doing. The last thing I notice before I climb into the hole is the rock that at one point had a smudge of my blood on it, which is now almost completely buried in white. All traces of my existence—and guilt—will become buried by sunrise, or at least this is the hope I clutch onto as I descend into the grave we made.

I remove another one of my jackets and lay it over her red sweater, trying my best to cover as much of her body as I can. Then I nudge my own shivering body beside her, trying to share the warmth that still radiates off of her, even in death. I wrap my arm around her and lay with my head rested on her silent chest, placing my hand on her stomach. I imagine us as an old married couple, snuggling into bed as

the kids lay quietly in their rooms. My eyes stare up at the slowly moving moon. I look over at the girl and notice her eyes are doing the same.

As a pleasant sleep makes my eyes heavy, memories—along with a crushing sense of responsibility—crash into my skull. I know my part in this tragedy; because now as I look over at the girl in the red sweater the memories I tried so hard to

repress return. I remember pulling the trigger and hearing the gunshot echo throughout the forest, running towards the wounded fawn that I stalked and shot. I realize how my touch, my presence, my actions, ruined the creature that lies dead next to me.

I lean over and kiss Naked one more time.

*Terek is a sophomore majoring in English.
He has been previously published in Vivace.*

TO BE DEAF

—Levi Masterson

i.

to be deaf is to lay
exposed as empty as awaiting
mason jars, no sweet
raspberry tea nor orange
petal flowers three

ii.

to be deaf: arm upon arm
like a child's hot crossed buns
patterning on a recorder, young
and intermittent; no shaping
world unfurls and flaps
nor wavering echoes,
harmonicas
or thunder claps

*Levi is a junior double majoring in Philosophy and Italian
with a minor in Chemistry. This is his first publication.*



RAFAEL ARROYO
CITYSCAPE SERIES

Screen Printing

Rafael is an undergraduate majoring in Art. His screen prints, titled "Cityscape," are featured on this page and the next. This is his first publication.

CITYSCAPE, Screen Printing



ALZHEIMER'S FOR BREAKFAST

—William Cochran-Bray

On Tuesday morning I got a phone call
That I will never talk to my granddad again,
And I hit my knuckles against the wall.

My mom said he isn't suffering at all.
I remember breathing out and in, out and in.
On Tuesday morning I got a phone call.

There was no warning really, except the call.
I laughed aloud for a second remembering his bathtub gin,
And I hit my knuckles against the wall.

I felt nothing at first, then old and small.
I looked in the mirror and saw 22 years of skin.
On Tuesday morning I got a phone call.

It was only last summer that I thought to myself
That I should appreciate the talks I have with him,
And then I hit my knuckles against the wall.

I read somewhere we have it all and nothing at all.
That line between death and reasoning is perceptively thin.
On Tuesday morning I got a phone call,
And I hit my knuckles against the wall.

*William is a senior majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing.
He has been previously published in Unbound's Winter 2012 issue.*

STONE SOLE

—Taylor Koekkoek

The only thing I can think about is the rock in my shoe. With each step it tumbles about violently like a passenger alone in a crashing plane. Each footfall it finds my softest under parts and then it cuts and burrows. I stumble into a tree and swear under my breath.

Mabel Weathers is staring at me from under her big, stupid hat. *Don't*, I think, but she waddles over tentatively. I look back at my shoe, which contains my foot, but also a rock.

"Hello, Walter."

"Don't mind me," I say. "I just got—" I kick my foot out and shake it sharply, but cannot eject the jagged pebble.

"What's that?"

"There is a rock in my shoe."

"Oh." She is quiet for a moment, but I'm only thinking about the rock. I'm only trying to readjust my weight on the impaired foot, which only reveals my bow-leggedness.

"I'm sorry, Walter."

"Thanks." To my relief she waddles away, merging into a small dark cluster of

women, most of whom are wearing big stupid hats like Mabel's.

The parking lot was gravel. Partly gravel anyway. A half-layer of gravel over a floor of sun-worn, tire-flattened dirt, where this hateful rock was tossed up by careless feet and tumbled down the inside of my ankle. We've since left the gravel behind, walking through rolling grass yards. Though I am unable to think about where we're going (or have we arrived?) because there is still a rock in my shoe turning my foot to hamburger meat.

"How are you doing, Walter?"

"Got a rock stuck in my shoe. Can't get the damn thing out."

"I'm very sorry, Walter. Me and Sue, we're very sorry."

"Sure. It's not the worst thing, but, God, it's just a bit infuriating."

"Yes. How is Ann doing?"

"Annie wore sandals today so I'm sure if she'd gotten any rocks in her sandals she's already shaken them out. But, Christ, this thing is in there good."

"Right. If you need anything from us, you'll ask, won't you?"

"Yeah. Jesus, it's cutting up my sole."

"I got this fortune once, Walter, from a fortune cookie. It said: the body never outlasts the soul. I thought it was a funny sort of fortune at the time, but now I think maybe it was for you. Maybe I received it to pass it on to you. Mysterious ways, right?"

Reluctantly, I look up to say *yeah, yes, certainly so*, or *I wish your shoe was full of rocks*, but he's already moved ahead in the pack and I don't see him anymore. Who was that anyway? I look back to my shoe, which I shake in childish frustration. And,

unavoidably, I am approached again.

"Hi, Walter."

"Yes."

"You all right?"

"God damned rock in my shoe." I hop on one foot for two steps, grabbing at my shoe to, I don't know, jostle the rock out somehow. I'm doing everything shy of sitting on a plot of grass and taking my shoe off like a fool.

"I am, well I'm very sorry, Walter."

"Thanks. It really isn't so terrible. It's just a rock after all. It'll come out eventually."

"He was a good boy, Walt."

I almost reply, but can't. I can't focus on what (who am I speaking to?) is saying. The rock is growing. It's an absurd thought, I know that. And I don't have any idea how a rock could grow. My foot is throbbing with a distinctly panicked heartbeat. My shoe, which had been a half-size too small already, is painfully overcrowded. My toes are curling. Bones shrinking. Losing shape. My sole is imploding. My foot is turning to stone.

I heave it about bewilderedly, inadvertently knocking over a cheap vase of sun-sapped flowers, which somebody had abandoned in the grass. Stepping backward, my stone foot crunches down on a picture frame and the picture of a smug looking old lady.

A voice comes from behind.

"Walter?"

"For Christ's sake, it's just a rock! I'm fine!" I turn around and see Annie. She only stares at me, crying quietly. Heartbroken half-smile. She takes my leather knuckles into her small, porcelain palms.

"Walter, they're going to begin."

"No," I say.

She says my name.

"They can't. Not yet. There's a rock—"

She runs her fingers through my hair and lets them rest against my cheek, wiping away tears. With her hands she guides me up the sloping yard to the edge of a hole that descends forever into the dark.

We stand in a circle. The pebble in my shoe shrinks. Its jagged corners go smooth like creek stone. Somewhere a man says, "I am the resurrection and the life." Another man releases a small silver handbrake. Leather straps go loose. A miniature oak casket sinks into the earth where I will never be able to lift him free and set him on my shoulders, holding him by his boney, bandaid knees as he points at something in the sky and asks, "What kind of bird is that, Dad?" And I say, "I don't know."

Taylor is a junior majoring in English. She has been previously published in Fogged Clarity and The Avalon Literary Review.

SOAKED

—C.J. Corey

His eyes ripple, his skin turns to scales
while his mind propels deep, slipping adrift
beneath the wet Oregon eventide.

He glides inside his bowl, cold and clear,
overlooking the outside brim of the valley,
hardly gurgling in a human aquarium.

Watery clouds mantle the outside surface:
a white light, and slightly subtle
passing glimpses of powder blue.

Within his window, leaves billow and sway,
by the rush of other passing fish; flow traces
always left, like algae resin on the glass.

These gathered guppies may fill the space
in their weightless presence, for food or foam dabbles,
but only he remains to swim the atrium

these fall flooding days, comforting the cats.
It should be no surprise to see him here again,
floating alone, against the streaming networks

that have washed all others away
to their own metallic vacancy--the belly-up
by voltaic bubbles and fragile tanks.

The filter effluxes, surging constant drink,
echoing through the watery tavern
a monotonous fizz--a necessary melody.

He floats, soaking the spindrift--
hovering fisheyes, taunting the kitties,
by his graceful buoyancy.

The flounder bobs waveringly, drenched
in a daze from the trickling sounds
of froth from electric waves.

His tank seems to undulate, wafting
from the stagnant jorum, to a serene brook,
and he ruffles rainbow in the wavelets,--

a relentless swim, for the ardor
of absorbed sensations in a breaking surf,
daubing sprinkles of sparkles and spumes.

His fish dreams revolve, subside and swell,
contained within his crystal cave, spraying
his hearts unrest, and lashing at the sudden sounds

of paws batting at the glass! He splashes!
He paddles, shedding his lamella,
away from his underwater grotto.

*C.J. is junior majoring in English. He has been
previously published in Unbound's Winter 2012 issue.*

CLAUDIA'S RECEPTION

—Natasha Cobb

Her hair was a mousy brown color made interesting by how it was cut and styled in the manner of Clara Bow, only a little longer. Knowing that time and trends are cyclical, she honed her old-fashioned appearance to the extent where she looked unmistakably modern, even cutting-edge in her fashion, though her ideas were anything but.

Raised to be admired, she expected to marry into wealth and resign herself to a life of comfort. It wasn't that she was opposed to work on principle; it just didn't suit her. And so she made her living by modeling in what was certainly only a matter of time until a rich suitor proved himself to be worthy of her. And it was surely not going to be a long time to wait; she had many desirable qualities outside her appearance (like that she only spoke when she had something to say even though she knew four languages), though her looks were the most striking thing about her. Claudia had a sophisticated beauty perfected through effort, not breeding. Also to her advantage was her youth; she was still young enough, having only recently celebrated the third anniversary of her 25th birthday.

"Don't you think you're a bit overdressed?" asked her similarly elegant companion, coworker (of sorts), and closest confidant: Tom.

She had felt like wearing black, but decided that it was only semi-appropriate for the occasion. Instead, she had on a diaphanous, champagne-colored, tapered gown encrusted with flickering gold beads. For the special day she'd also brought out her finest pink diamonds and tallest nude, patent-leather platforms. Even her bronzer, which she applied liberally over her entire body, was infused with subtle traces of glitter. The overall effect of the ensemble was successful: she *glowed*, and she knew it.

Raising her well-groomed eyebrows playfully she mused, "Is there ever such a thing?"

Their driver turned a sharp corner onto a steep, private driveway just outside the city. They were almost at their destination.

"Why are you going, anyway?"

Tom was always up for an event, even one as boring as a wedding reception, and he adored the limousine Claudia had rented for them, but he was confused as to what the purpose of the evening would be.

"I just have something to say to him. I'll stay until I've said my piece and hopefully won't make a scene of myself before then. But I can't make any promises." Straightening his tie – the only thing about him that could be straightened – she continued, "I need you to look your best for me today."

Tom smiled, only half-mockingly. "I feel sort-of used, you know."

"You know you like it," she purred as she smoothed out his collar. "Now, do your best to be extra charming. I want

everyone there to be terribly jealous of me when they see us together.”

Given how they looked, that wouldn't be difficult. Tom was almost cartoonishly handsome, with sea foam eyes and a constant debonair disposition. He had sharp, Eastern-European features highlighted by a tan he brought back from South America. Tall enough so that Claudia could wear her favorite heels, but not so large that he visually overpowered her, he was the perfect date. They made a most attractive couple—it was truly a disservice to the aesthetic wellbeing of humanity that neither wanted children.

The chauffer opened their door after he stopped at the entrance of the hotel's plaza. As she had planned, all eyes were on them as they made their entrance amongst the guests who were all pedestrian by comparison. It was certainly packed – the couple must have been generous with their invitations. After all, they had invited *her*, but he was somewhat obligated to, since she had been responsible for his success, without which his current life would not be possible. As his most inspiring muse, Claudia was the subject of his only successful screenplay. They were no longer together, neither professionally nor personally, when casting began, and it was in the audition for “Claudette” that he met his new love. Sometimes, and more so when she drank, she pondered over the absurdity that is Life.

A successful turnout was not the only notable detail of the room. The decorations were gaudy, but beautiful: his taste; the layout, in contrast, was simple and boring: her taste. *They just got married and already they're meshing all wrong.* This thought irritated and comforted her at the same time.

“Dia, darling! You look... radiant. What a gorgeous dress!” screeched an acquaintance that came rushing over when she saw Claudia float into the room. The speaker was an older rival; they'd been in some editorials together and were always painfully polite to one another to cover up their mutual dislike. Claudia could not quite recall how her friend knew the groom, but she'd long grown accustomed to the awkwardness that arose from having such incestuous social circles.

“Thank you, dear. I just got back from a show and didn't have time to change, you know how it is. Anyway, I hope I don't steal attention away from the bride. Where is the couple, anyway?”

“I think they're going to cut the cake soon. You should really find a seat so you don't miss anything. You're lucky they haven't started the toasts yet!” She spoke to Claudia but her eyes were on Tom. He reciprocated with a smile; he'd acted before. “There's room at my table. The whole thing's casual so there are no assigned seats.”

She walked them to her table and sat them down, making Tom sit next to her.

Seated at the table tapered in white cloth embellished with gold lining, Claudia braced herself as the newly wedded couple made their way to the center table. She felt like Margo Channing at Eve Harrington's award ceremony, and this was not the way she preferred to envision herself in old movies. The scene of the two beautiful, happy people was difficult to watch but she couldn't look away. The groom was a particularly impressive sight; and she thought to herself that he looked almost as good as when she loved him. However, his looks were not so great that they

compensated for his behavior, though his wife seemed not to have realized this yet. “What do you think of the bride?” Tom whispered.

“She looks like she has a good personality, if you’re into that sort of thing.”

In truth, the woman looked much like Claudia but a younger version. Try as she did to hate her, Claudia just couldn’t. It wasn’t anybody’s fault, not really—especially not hers. Still, she seethed.

To help alleviate her annoyance, she asked Tom to go to the bar for her. “What do you drink when you’re depressed?”

Tom thought for a moment and answered “Bourbon.” For her sake he ignored his own advice and brought back only two bottles of wine. His timing was fortunate, making it back early enough that Claudia could start drinking before the groom gave his toast. The dreaded speech came soon after her second glass and was even less bearable than she was expecting.

Particularly, when he said lovingly at his fiancé, “Nothing in my life has been as easy as loving you,” she was sure she would choke on her drink.

Tom took her hand and squeezed it reassuringly, much to the chagrin of the increasingly inebriated woman who’d sat them down. Thankfully for everyone, the toasts were kept fairly short. When they were over, Claudia sighed, nodded at her date in appreciation and stood up to smooth out her dress. Almost everyone had gotten up to mingle at this point, and she thought she’d better do the same. She was surprised to see who had come over to talk to her.

The bride was cursed with an intolerable kindness that made everyone

around her feel congenially inadequate. “You really are beautiful,” she spoke with sincerity in the naturally saccharine inflection of Olivia de Havilland’s Melanie.

Claudia turned scarlet. She hadn’t planned anything to say to this half of the couple, at least nothing that she could permit herself to say in public. But she would not be outclassed. With a humble smile, she managed to articulate, “This is a wonderful reception.”

“Thank you! I’m so happy with the way everything turned out.” There was a noticeable pause. “Have you said ‘hello’ to Mark yet? You are his guest, after all.”

“No, I haven’t actually been able to find him.”

“I think he stepped outside for a smoke. I am *going* to get him to quit one of these days, but it’s a little early in the marriage to start nagging him. Anyway, I’m sure he’ll be thrilled to see you. It really was lovely to finally meet you.”

The way Claudia dressed had always made Mark think about something that was once said about gilded butterflies. He refrained from laughing, even though it was his natural response to uncomfortable situations. Mark saw her before she saw him, but Claudia was the first to speak.

“You have an extra?” He pulled out a packet of cigarettes from his waistcoat and handed her one before proceeding to take out a light.

She waited to speak until she’d had a decent inhale. “Congratulations.”

“I’m glad you came, Dia,” Mark eventually responded.

“Well I’m glad *somebody* did. It’s practically a ghost town in there. When did you become so popular?”

“They’re mostly her friends.” He

smiled but looked at the ground the way a shy child would. “It means a lot to me that you’re here. I wasn’t even sure if it would be appropriate to invite you, but I’m glad I did. I think you know you’ve been a very important person in my life.” Claudia raised her head in understanding. “You look amazing, by the way.”

“I know.” She continued quickly so she wouldn’t lose her confidence. “Mark, I just need to ask you something. I’ll never bother you again, but there’s something I need to know.”

Mark appeared uncomfortable but gave her a nod, which she received as her invitation to submit her question.

“I just have to ask. Why wasn’t it me?”

“Dia—” His discomfort was visibly escalated but Claudia prodded.

“No, really. I just need an answer. You can be honest; I never ask for honesty, but I’m asking it from you. Please? As a friend?”

Mark sighed. He took his time to collect his thoughts, though they still came out poorly. “I don’t know. It’s just...so easy with her. Everything’s simple; there’s been nothing complicated about my relationship with her. We met, fell in love, and have gotten along ever since. With you everything was...”

“Difficult?”

“Well, yes; in comparison. And she doesn’t drink, or smoke, or start fights, or

have anything against children—”

“Ok, I get it.” It was her turn to cut him off, but he continued.

“It was real, though.” He finally gave her a genuine smile.

“Thank you for the cigarette.” Claudia returned the smile—though hers was much colder—and went back inside, leaving him with nothing but smoke.

She managed to free Tom from her friend who was acting altogether overly friendly and let him know she was ready to leave, but not before one last trip to the bar. It was open, after all. Forgoing the limousine ride for a more contemplative walk, she went out into the brisk evening holding Tom’s arm; leaning into him for warmth and emotional support. He successfully goaded the pertinent information from her, to which he responded in pseudo-philosophy: “Didn’t Marilyn say it’s better to be ridiculous than boring?” Tom was relieved to abandon his adopted personality and resume talking like himself.

“Yeah, but she died alone.” They kept walking with no specific direction in mind.

“Alone, but *loved*.”

“Am I loved?” she looked up at him with round, drunken eyes.

He answered her by removing his jacket and placing it over her golden gown, which sparkled even brighter now that the streetlights were on, reflecting its many jewels. “You never were one to dress with practicality.”

Natasha is a sophomore majoring in Planning, Public Policy, and Management. This is her first publication.

WHERE ARE YOUR DISCIPLES NOW?



SHAWN ANDERSON

Oil Paint, 40" x 46"

THE ARTIST'S LOVER

—James Mueller

Once, while my husband first learned how to draw
(yes, even famous artists have their starts!)
I found a sketchbook called "Christine," all scrawls
of a girl who sat and read, or played guitar
and sang, or napped and smiled hair flowing out
around her head like a halo or a crown.
Although the forms were poor, "The neck's too long,
the smile too broad, the eyes..." he later said—
although they lacked finesse, I saw myself,
and in the lines and swirls that made my face,
his careful hand, and all I meant to him.

He studied more and more, he drew and grew
until he'd draw my face from memory,
each eyelid-crinkle, freckle, every bone
as good as if it truly were me on the page.

Yet, this perfection wasn't quite enough
(for him or those he looked to, I don't know)
and so, although the titles said *Christine*
as they had always done when they were me,
I saw my neck drawn down and in, my smile
made small and simple, and my hair tied up
in ways I'd never thought to try to tie.
Eventually it was not me, Christine,
who looked out from the canvas or the page
but some weird mockery of me, a girl
who had my eyes, my name, my husband's love.

And I smiled back—God help me, I smiled back
at her as she smiled up at me, the girl
my husband's always wanted me to be.

*James is a senior majoring in Advertising with a minor
in Creative Writing. This is his first publication.*

CRIME, CIGARETTES, & WOMEN

—Terek Hopkins

His feet clap against the wet pavement as a tree's branch rustles in the breeze blowing at our detective's back. He looks down at his suede shoes, and notices a bead of water effortlessly slide to the ground—like rain off a bird's feather. Looking back up our detective sees Sally hard at the same job she works every time she needs a few extra dollars. "The corner of Bristol and Memory," he thinks, "Why does this not surprise me?"

Sally sees him approaching, gives a faint smile, and returns her gaze towards the possible "customers" walking busily by her on the sidewalk. Our detective presses his hand against his jacket, making sure he remembered his piece, and continues walking. The sun begins to melt into the western horizon at his back. He reaches Sally, making sure he doesn't "step on any cracks" along the way. *Superstition* is never worth testing, he thinks, and *luck*, not something to play with.

"Hi Luci," Sally says with an eager grin.

"It's Lucius," our detective says back. He reaches his hand towards his back pocket and pats it, feeling for any cigarettes. He doesn't like being called Luci, feels the need to light up whenever he hears it... But then again who wouldn't need a smoke after a fine girl like Sally calls you that?

"Lucius Wardlaw," he continues, as Sally pouts her lips, and adjusts her sunglasses.

She giggles. "But I think Luci's a pretty name." Lucius grunts and pulls out a cigarette. He slides it between his lips, where it loosely hangs.

"If you aren't going to call me my real name, than just call me Detective," Lucius says.

"Mind if I have one... Detective?" Sally murmurs through a smile, looking at the pack of cigarettes.

He hands her a smoke, noticing her full, supple lips. "How's business comin' along Sally?" he says with a sarcastic grin.

She opens her mouth to speak, and then hesitantly closes it, as if remembering something she wasn't supposed to say. Her eyes nervously dance from Lucius, to her hands, and back to the sinking sun. Lucius takes note of her behavior. Pressing his hand against his heart once again, he is comforted by the rigid outline of his gun.

"Business is good, though I should have started earlier when it was still hot — that's when my customers want what I got," she says, trying to control her nerves.

Lucius nods and runs his fingers through his chestnut hair. When he brings his hand back in front of him, his hair gently falls back in place. A few strands limply hang in front of his eyes. Sally thinks

this very random, insignificant-to-most detail is cute about the detective. Our detective is still trying to convince himself that girls are in-fact, just “stupid cootie spreaders.”

“I love blueberries,” Sally says with a slight blue hue to her tongue. “Did you know I love blueberries? Is that why you gave me the blueberry sucker?” she says as her lips smack against the candy.

“Blueberry? I don’t know what you’re talking about, that there cigarette is just, uhm, cigarette flavored. They don’t make blueberry-flavored smokes... I don’t think,” he says, thrown off by Sally’s comment.

“You’re funny,” Sally says as she smiles and then takes a bite out of her hard, blueberry flavored, sucker.

“I’ll trade you a lemonade for another one,” she says to our pensive detective.

The sun begins to hide its head behind the hills in the West. Lucius faces the darkness created by this drowning sun with an unwavering sense of justice and the squirt gun he got for his birthday, both faithfully pressed against his calmly beating heart.

“Sure,” he says, focusing on the level of coolness contained in his voice, “I guess I could go for something sweet. Fighting crime has a way of making a man thirsty,” he continues.

Sally fills up a small plastic cup with her lemonade and hands it to him. “Maybe if you come by earlier tomorrow I can give you another one?” she says hopefully.

Lucius looks behind him, and in the time it takes him to blink, the sun disappears. In its place is only the faint sound of blackness. Lucius takes a step

backwards. “Yeah, maybe I can make something like that happen,” he says.

Sally grabs her things, trying to stuff the plastic cups between her arms along with the swooshing, half empty, pitcher of lemonade. Lucius would ask to help, but our detective convinces himself that cooties are, in fact, more easily spread when touching something a girl has recently handled—for example, a pitcher of lemonade.

In the distance Lucius can hear his mom call his name, “Luuuucccciiiiii. It’s time for dinner, Luucccciiusss.” Our Detective lowers his head in embarrassment. Sally smiles and begins to turn to walk away.

“Bye Luci,” Sally says, already facing away from our detective.

And before Lucius can speak up in his defense, Sally turns around, “I mean... Goodbye Detective Lucius Wardlaw.”

Our detective smiles, and then quickly wipes the grin away, remembering the high manly moral code he has to sustain as long as he wears his suede shoes and calls himself Detective. Lucius turns to walk home for dinner. Seeing Sally walk away along the sidewalk makes Lucius remember why he stopped to talk to Sally in the first place.

Billy’s bike had gone missing yesterday, and Lucius had promised he’d find the culprit within the week. The only lead he has is Billy’s statement that includes a description of the crime scene. He hadn’t been able to get a look for himself, before the evidence was wiped clean by Billy’s spring-cleaning frenzied mother. But in the statement he remembers reading about an empty, tipped over plastic cup that was found at the scene...a plastic cup that

supposedly looked a lot like the very same one he now held, crumpled up in his fist.

“Why’d it have to be Sally?” Lucius thinks to himself, dramatically palming himself on the forehead.

He knew this game would get sticky someday. He knew the women he loved would get stuck in the crossfire of justice and the people who seek it. Women are too dangerous, too able to make a blind man out of our crime-fighting detective.

Lucius reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a cigarette. He flips it between his lips and gives it a light. The faint taste of watermelon bites at his taste buds. He inhales, and watches the ember

burn as he takes a deep drag of the butt. “I’m getting too old for this crap,” he thinks as he lets the smoke rise under his nose and out in front of his eyes.

“I’ll worry about the bike another day,” he says aloud, to no one but the cold, breezy streets.

Detective Lucius takes a step forward. His feet clap against the wet pavement. The sound comforts him as his body fades into the darkness. “Looks like it’s gonna rain again,” we hear him say as he flings the cigarette down to the darkening earth and smothers it under his father’s oversized, suede business shoes.

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