

UNBOUND

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Above: Hannah Fuller's "Stand Alone"

Black and White Photography

*Hannah is a freshman and has been
previously published in Unbound.*

*Braeden Cox's piece "Iron" is featured
on the cover of this issue.*

Digital Amalgamation

24" x 24"

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ALWAYS RUNNING FORWARD

—Katey James

“Are you awake?”

My whisper seemed to shake the silence of the dark room. I could feel your warm breathing, long and slow. Your vulnerable, boyish face seemed to glow, illuminated by the filter of moonlight that came in through the cracks of the blinds.

I edged off the bed, inch by inch, never taking my eyes off you.

The carpet was soft under my bare feet. I stepped around the tangle of sheets and blankets that had ended up on the ground. I slid into my jeans—the denim gone cold in my absence. I buttoned them and slid the zipper up, tooth by tooth, praying for silence. Turning my head, I glanced at your walls, which had always felt too naked to me. The TV in the corner of the room was only used for video games, and even then, that was when you had time off work and weren’t busy keeping up on your schoolwork. I caught sight of my yellow hoodie, draped over the back of your computer chair. I picked it up and folded it under my arm. My brain skittered around in circles as I tried to think, to decide. Finally I pulled the folded paper from my pocket and dropped it onto the desktop, bare except for your laptop and the cord that ran across it and down to the power outlet. You would notice it

immediately there. You had always been a lot neater than other boys I’d been with.

I took my time opening the door. Sometimes it creaked, but tonight it kept my secret. Slipping out into the hall, I took a quick look at you one more time. My favorite part about staying at your place had always been looking when you’re asleep. The dark curls falling over your eyes, rimmed with thick lashes. Your long, lanky limbs, always finding their way in the night to curl around me and pull me in closer, warmer. I could actually sleep through the night with you. There was something so safe and comfortable about you that I never fully understand.

Still you didn’t stir. I carefully closed the door behind me.

I tiptoed past your roommate’s open door. He snored gently, his laptop lit up by a movie, the end credits rolling across the screen.

My Vans were lined up at the door next to yours. Without unlacing them, I shoved my feet inside, toes curling. My fingers shook as I unbolted the door. I tried to steady them, my breath caught, anxious and panic, in my cold chest. I nudged the door until the crisp midnight air of January brushed against my bare skin, raising puckers of goosebumps. My heart, pounding, sounded like thunder pulsing in my veins. I closed the door and quickly turned. Suddenly I found myself running down the walkway, past the rows of apartment doors. My shoes squeaked, still wet from our day at the dog park. Why had I ever let things go this far?

I unlocked my Trailblazer and

climbed into my seat. It was only when I heard my own long sigh that I realized I had been holding my breath. My car had smelled like oranges or something fruity like that since you bought me that silly palm tree air freshener. The floor mats were muddy and I never felt inclined to clean them. You were the only person I knew who was bothered by them. I don't think it was on purpose, but I always felt like you were trying to clean everything up, including me and my cluttered life.

I started the engine, willing it to be as quiet as possible. The motor purred as I backed out of the space, painstakingly slow. I didn't put on my seat belt. I didn't even turn on my lights until I reached the complex parking lot exit.

Sometimes I didn't know if I hated doing this or loved the thrill of it. I waited until the relationship was getting serious, then freaked out and left in the dead of night. It wasn't really on purpose in the sense that I never planned it from the start. But I could always sense it coming and I always let it happen. It felt natural, my bag in the backseat, my phone in my hand, leaving. All my life, I had bounced back and forth between my parents. Now it would be time to stay with my dad. By the time I sank my next relationship, my mom would have transferred to a new job, a fresh town. Mom understood running away from things.

The trees bowed and bent as I drove by, dancing in the darkness, whispering. I tried not to think about you, but I did anyway. It would probably hurt you, the unexpected punch, the loss.

I wondered how you would react. If perhaps the little things would still ache, deep in your gut. Finding my hair on your pillow. Smelling me, us, between your sheets. But I had taken the things that mattered: the letters I wrote, the CDs I made, the mug you had painted for me to drink my morning tea in. I took back the things that would remind you of what died between us.

As I pulled onto the main road, I realized there was a sharp pain in my chest. I had always felt so heartless, leaving and never looking back. But you were one of the better ones. Sweet. Maybe too sweet. Always asking what I thought, how I felt. You made plans, offered a future. You had a good job and did well in school and wanted me to stay in one place so I could actually finish classes and figure out what I wanted to do with my life. You had a dog and liked spending time with your family and had friends who understood you and you wanted me to be part of everything in your life because you said I made you happy. Perhaps that was what scared me--someone who would actually take care of me and make me happy, too. You were grown-up compared to everything else I thought I had fallen in love with. You were a whole, complete person and you wanted to help me become the same.

For the first time, I wondered if I was making a mistake.

But then another car pulled out, close behind me. I stepped on the gas a little, and the feeling shrank. I sped up a bit more, and remembered that running away has always been the only option. Always running forward, never looking back.

*Katey is a freshman majoring in Journalism.
This is her first publication.*



Braeden Cox
RED CABBAGE

Digital Art
18" x 24"

VENUS AT THE NEW YEAR

—Max Miller

I

Johannes Kepler once mapped out
the orbit Venus makes when viewed
from Earth in eight-year intervals.
The shape created is a rose
with five symmetrical petals.

II

The morning star lies low tonight,
exalted on the canopy
of these prostrated evergreens,
a valley rising up to meet
her, crowded foothills drawn in close
around me, begging my silence.

They bear a goddess, their breath soft
as though eternal beauty might
begrudge such clumsy, earthen praise.

She wears the very light of day
about her, even as she sleeps.
It bends around her shoulder blade,
illuminating what the sun
could only burn.

That glaring star
would shake her from her resting place,
but dawn is kept from tearing off
this blanket that was spread for love.
She'll sleep in the horizon's care
until she wakes to dance again
and weaves her perfect gratitude.

*Max is a Senior majoring in English.
He has been previously published in Unbound.*

SAY ANYTHING

—Annie Dropek

We're fourteen and just starting to play at sex. Our sleepy Texas town doesn't have much going on, so we fill the time by studying the dirty movies we borrow from Lindy's older brother's room.

I met Lindy when we were six years old and she kicked a boy in the balls for calling me names. We've been inseparable since. She has stylishly short blond hair, perfect blue eyes, and a body that's just coming into its curves. I think I look a bit like a scarecrow compared to her; way too skinny, curly brown hair that never stays put, dark brown button-eyes, boobs that refuse to pop up, and freckles all over the place like somebody spilled pepper on me.

Today we happen to be crouched down in front of my tiny television. It's old but has one of those built in VCR's, only it's broken so we can't rewind anything or it'll pull all the black tape out and we have to spend hours winding it all back up again.

Lindy and I have got the volume turned down real low with one ear listening to the exaggerated moans from the speakers, and the other perked for any sound out in the hall that would signal my parents coming to check on us.

We're staring at the screen, watching something going on that neither of us really understand, but the woman's making so many noises that it must be something good so we pause it and take down some notes in our journal.

We share a little spiral that we pass off every other day. We write notes back and forth, talk gossip about people, tell each other stories, stuff like that. We're on our fifth right now. The other four are in a locked case under Lindy's bed. Lately the journal is filled with sex positions and interesting tips we've learned from the videos.

It was only just last summer we started getting interested in sex. We knew about it of course, from the class we had in school. But we didn't really get much out of that except that sex before marriage leads to pregnancy, disease, and possibly death.

Lindy also started her period real early on, a whole year and a half before me. Her mom gave her a little talk about growing up and what it means to be a woman and all that, which Lindy immediately wrote down in the journal to share with me.

When I finally started mine, a couple months ago, my mom gave me my dead grandma's wedding ring and congratulated me on becoming a woman. I'm not really sure how that's supposed to help me figure out what to do.

Then, just a few weeks ago, Lindy walked in on her brother and his girlfriend going at it. He'd yelled at her and slammed the door in her face but she caught enough to draw out a little diagram in the journal. Now that we've discovered the tapes in his closet and started borrowing them to study, we're getting a really good idea of how sex is supposed to work.

Lindy seems real interested in the tapes. I think they're sort of fun from an educational point of view but it's all actually kind of gross. I tried to explain that to

Lindy one time but she thought I was crazy. She can't wait to have sex, but since she's so picky it's taking her awhile to figure out who she wants to lose it to. There aren't all that many boys around here to choose from, but since just about every one of them wants in her pants, she can afford to be choosy.

Lindy is currently peering closely at the paused screen and frowning. "I'm not sure if that's even physically possible, Ren."

"Of course it is," I say. "The evidence is right in front of your face."

"Yeah, but they can do all sorts of stuff to film these days to make something look real."

"Linds, it's porn. It's real, OK? Just write it down."

"Yeah, cause you would know, right?"

I just glare and punch her on the shoulder, even though she's right of course. I haven't done much of anything except let Peter Pietta fumble around under my shirt for a few minutes. It didn't really feel like much of anything, except kind of annoying cause he kept shoving his tongue in my mouth and wiggling it around like a big slimy slug.

Lindy's gone to third base with like five guys already and assures me that it gets better. I'm not really sure if I believe her though. I've known her long enough to tell the difference between her telling the truth and her trying to make me think she's telling the truth.

Anyway, I'm about to hit play again and get to the next scene when we both hear the sound of shoes on my creaky staircase. We instantly leap up and shut the TV off. I grab a random school book from the pile by my closet and sit down on the

bed. Lindy shoves the journal in a drawer and flips open a magazine. A short knock comes at the door and my dad opens it a crack to peer in.

"Hey, Renee? Can you come down and start dinner, your mom is going to be a little late tonight."

"Why don't you start it? You know I suck at cooking."

He just stares at me and raises his eyebrows in warning. I don't know why he thinks that just cause I'm a girl I automatically know how to make food, like it's a built in genetic trait or something. I can barely heat up waffles in the toaster without burning them.

"Fine. I'll be down in a minute."

He nods and leaves.

"Your dad is so hot," Lindy whispers as we listen to him descend the stairs and vanish into his office.

"Ew. Don't ever say that again."

"Well, it's true," she adds playfully and jumps up, dragging me with her. "Come on, let's go make dinner like good little girls should." She sticks out her tongue and makes a gross face, which has me cracking up as we race down the steps to the kitchen.

~*~

I'm trudging down the block on my way to Lindy's house. The morning heat is sticky and tiny droplets of sweat keep dripping off my eyebrows and stinging my eyes. When I get to her driveway I notice she's already outside waiting for me. I wave and trot closer, and am about to beg for a glass of water when she interrupts me by grabbing my face and directing it to the house three doors down where a large

moving van sits out front.

"Do you see what I see?" She asks excitedly.

I shrug and peer through the steamy haze. "Fancy furniture?"

"You're hopeless," she sighs. "Look closer, up by the front door."

I bring my hand up to my forehead to shield the sun and finally notice what she's talking about. A young guy, probably around our age but maybe a bit older, is standing in the shade of a tree with his shirt off.

"Look at those abs, those shoulders, those arms. Mmmm... Let's go introduce ourselves." Lindy starts walking over, dragging me behind her.

"Aw, come on Linds, let's just go drop the tape off before your brother gets home."

"Oh, we have plenty of time for that. Come on."

We reach the lawn of the new guy and I just kind of stand there awkwardly.

"Hi. I'm Lindy. You new here?"

The guy smiles. A kind of smile that takes up his whole face until his eyes are all scrunched and his teeth all show. It makes me slightly nauseous.

"Well, we do have a moving van." He says.

Lindy lets out this high giggle and I'm nauseous again. "Hey..." I whisper. "Um, I think I'm gonna head home." They don't seem to hear me though. They're talking about some movie I've never heard of and I'm pretty sure Lindy hasn't either cause I've seen all the movies she's seen. "Right. Well, I'll see you later," I mumble as I start to slink away. Neither of them notice.

~*~

It's a week later and I'm sitting on my bed staring at the black television with my face staring back at me. Lindy was supposed to have met me over an hour ago, but I'm not going to call her, I know where she is. She's with him. She's always with him now. All she can think about, talk about, dream about, or write about is him.

I'm extremely jealous and it's making me sick. Mainly because my jealousy isn't that she's got some guy to hang out with and I don't. I mean, she's always fooling around with some guy, but it's never a big deal, and it's never cut into our time together before. I've always been the most important person in her life. But now there's him.

Is this how friends are supposed to feel? Shouldn't I be happy for her? She keeps going on and on about how he's the one she wants. That she's finally picked someone to give it up to. I should, as her best friend, be excited for her right?

I hear the sound of pounding feet on the stairs and now Lindy's bursting into the room like a hurricane.

"Hey! Sorry I'm late. Tony's parents are out of town." She grins mischievously and I don't bother asking her what she means. I already know and I don't want to know.

"Yeah, well. I've got a lot of chores to do anyway."

"Oh... OK. Well, if you get done in time, do you want to go see that new movie with Tony and me tonight?"

Yeah, cause that sounds like so much fun.

"Um, no that's cool. I really have a lot to do."

"You sure? Tony would probably pay for you if I asked him."

Well, isn't that just adorable.

"No, really. It's OK. You guys enjoy the movie."

They probably won't be able to pry themselves off each other long enough to figure out the plot.

"Alright." She pauses for a few seconds and picks at a loose thread on my comforter before smiling at me teasingly.

"So, I think tonight's the night."

Oh, joy.

"Good luck."

"I don't need luck. I've got the journal. And after tonight I'll be able to add in a whole bunch of first hand experience. We'll be able to sell all the knowledge we've collected. We could get rich!" This is all said in a loud, way too cheery voice, like those beauty queen pageant women my mom likes to watch on TV.

"Sounds great."

She must sense my lack of enthusiasm for the conversation because she gets to her feet and heads towards the door. She stops with her hand on the knob and turns around to look me in the eyes.

"You like him, right Ren? You think he's a good choice?" She sounds sort of serious and I think about being serious right back and telling her what a big, stupid goon he is.

"Yeah, sure. He seems great." Now I'm the cheery beauty queen.

I force a smile that feels more like a frown and she grins back at me in a way that looks more like a grimace, then rushes over and wraps me in a giant bear hug that seems to last a little longer than usual. She smells like vanilla and some type of fruit. With another quick smile she rushes off and I'm left wallowing in a confused puddle of self-pity.

~*~

I've been staring at the same words for at least ten minutes and I still have no idea what I'm reading. I glance sideways at the clock on my bedside table and read the time as half past ten. They're probably back from the movie by now.

Rolling over, I slam my face into the pillow. Why? Why can't I stop thinking about them? More importantly, why can't I stop thinking about what kind of fruit Lindy smelled like when she left my room? I need to get out of the house. I need to do something. Maybe I should just go peer in his window. Just to see what's happening. Nah, that's crazy.

~*~

Thirteen minutes later and now I'm crouched down uncomfortably in the bushes outside his house. My right foot has fallen asleep and my hand is aching from trying to hold myself up. I duck my head as some headlights flash across. When I'm sure the car has passed, I crane my neck and wipe some dirt away from the pane of glass in the window.

I can just see them. They're on what I assume is his bed and I can hear a low pulse through the wall that must be some music playing. They still have all their clothes on and I watch them roll around for a while. I can't make out much through the glass without standing up, but that's fine because I have no idea why I'm even here and I really need to just go.

I can no longer feel my foot at all and my hand is shaking from supporting all my weight. All I can think about is that the

tapes have never prepared me for anything like this. I'm all flushed and my stomach feels like a bunch of jack rabbits are bounding around in it. I'm angry. Angry that she's doing it with him and not with me. The thought comes out of nowhere and I've never thought about it before but now that I'm thinking it I can't stop thinking it. Sitting there in the mud with thorns sticking in my side, leaves tangled up in my hair, looking like a crazy person, I finally figure it out. Not that I will ever, ever tell her.

I turn away from the image of them sticking together like peanut butter and jelly and I look down at the dirt. All I want to do now is go home, curl up in my bed, and erase my brain for a while.

I slowly slide my dead foot out from under me and shake it to try and bring some life back to the limb. I ease myself out from under the bushes as quietly as I can, not that they would notice anything right now anyway. I'm just about free when the hand that was holding me up decides to conspire against me and collapse.

I pitch forward and my face slams into the window. A huge thud sounds out and I'm attempting to pick myself up and shake the dizziness out of my bruised skull but even through my ringing ears I dimly recognize the sound of the front door slamming open.

"Renee? Is that you?"

Dammit. I crawl out from the bushes and stand up on one foot. The right one's still out of order.

"Uh, hi. How's it going?" I'm cradling my damaged head in one hand and trying to avoid eye contact with her.

"It *was* going just fine," she kind of

squeaks out like a mouse. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Oh, you know. Just taking a walk."

He comes rushing out to stand next to her. "What's going on, Linds?" He asks.

I call her Linds. That's my name for her. Not his.

"I'm not sure." She walks over to me and cups my face in her hands, forcing me to look at her. "Ren, what are you doing?"

Her lips seem bigger than normal and her cheeks are all flushed. I hate him.

"Nothing. I'm just, I'm going home. Sorry for interrupting."

I pull my face from her hands and start to walk quickly away, breathing a prayer of thanks that my right foot has decided to join the rest of my body. I can hear them whispering behind me, then he shouts and she shouts back.

I'm so close to being home. My head's killing me and I'm slightly dizzy but I'm walking as fast as my wobbly feet will carry me. I'm just about to reach my front door and disappear. But before I can touch the knob, I'm spun around by a small hand on my shoulder.

She's out of breath and slightly sweaty and her hair's all crazy but she still smells slightly of vanilla and that stupid mystery fruit. She's staring at me with her forehead all scrunched up, out of concern, annoyance, or anger I can't tell. Maybe all three. I'm too scared to say anything in case I burst out with words I know I don't really want to say.

Maybe she feels the same cause she's not saying anything either. She just reaches up to touch the bump on my forehead, all gentle like it's an egg that might crack. The thought of my brains spilling out like yolk makes me nauseous again.

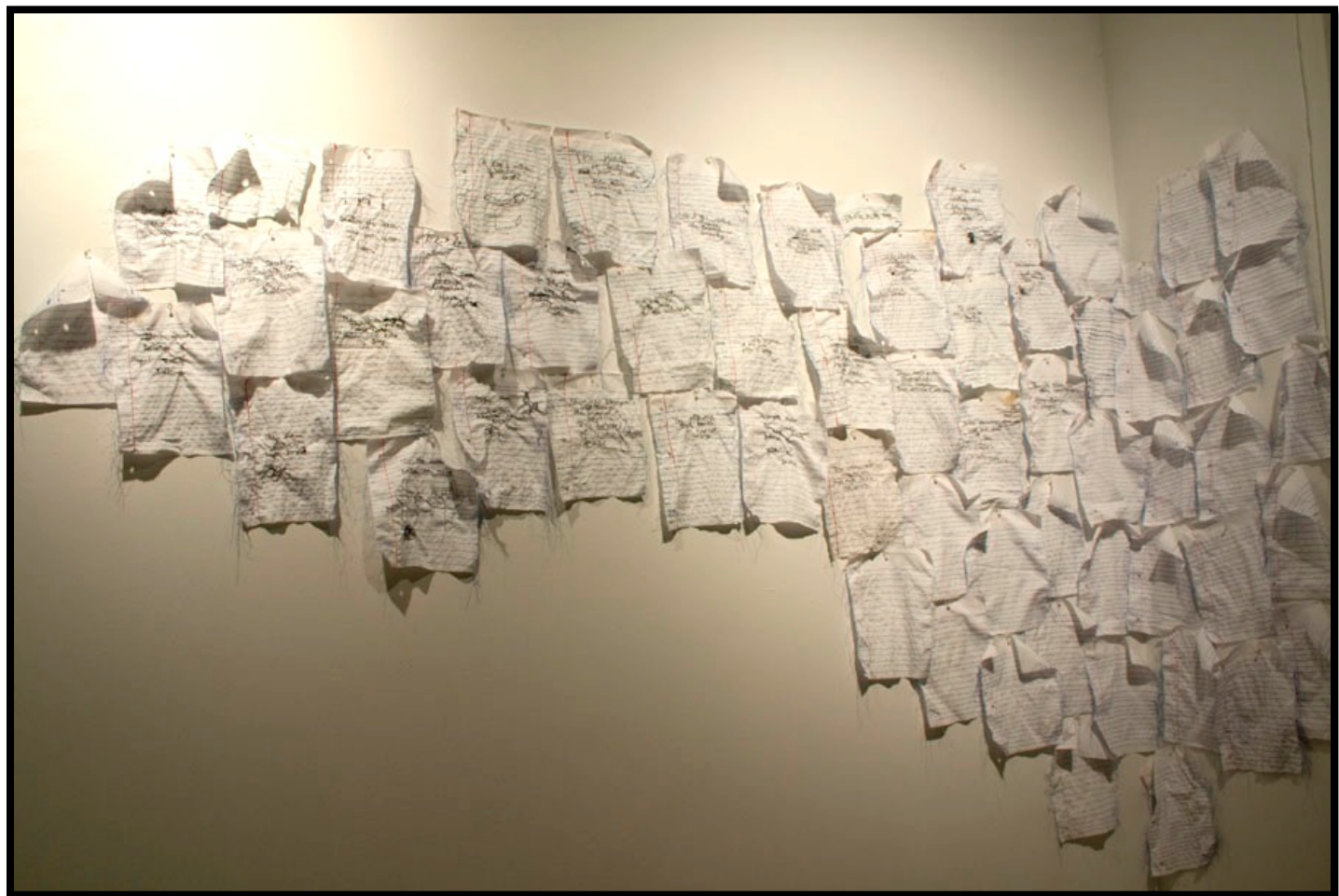
I turn around and pull open the door. I leave it open and she follows me in. We head upstairs to my room, the way we have a million times before. I flop down on my bed and she flops down beside me and we just lay there, not touching, not looking at each other, not hardly breathing. All I can think about is that thought I had outside his window, and I really don't want to be thinking about that, so I poke the egg on my head to see if it really will crack open, because even though it hurts like crazy it keeps me from thinking about that thing I don't want to be thinking about. She must hear me wince or something because she reaches over and grabs my hand to keep me from trying to poke my brains out. We're still not saying anything but now she's holding my hand in between us on the bed and I feel like I really should say something.

"Sorry for ruining your night." I mumble it out and I know it sounds bad because I'm not really sorry, but what else am I supposed to say?

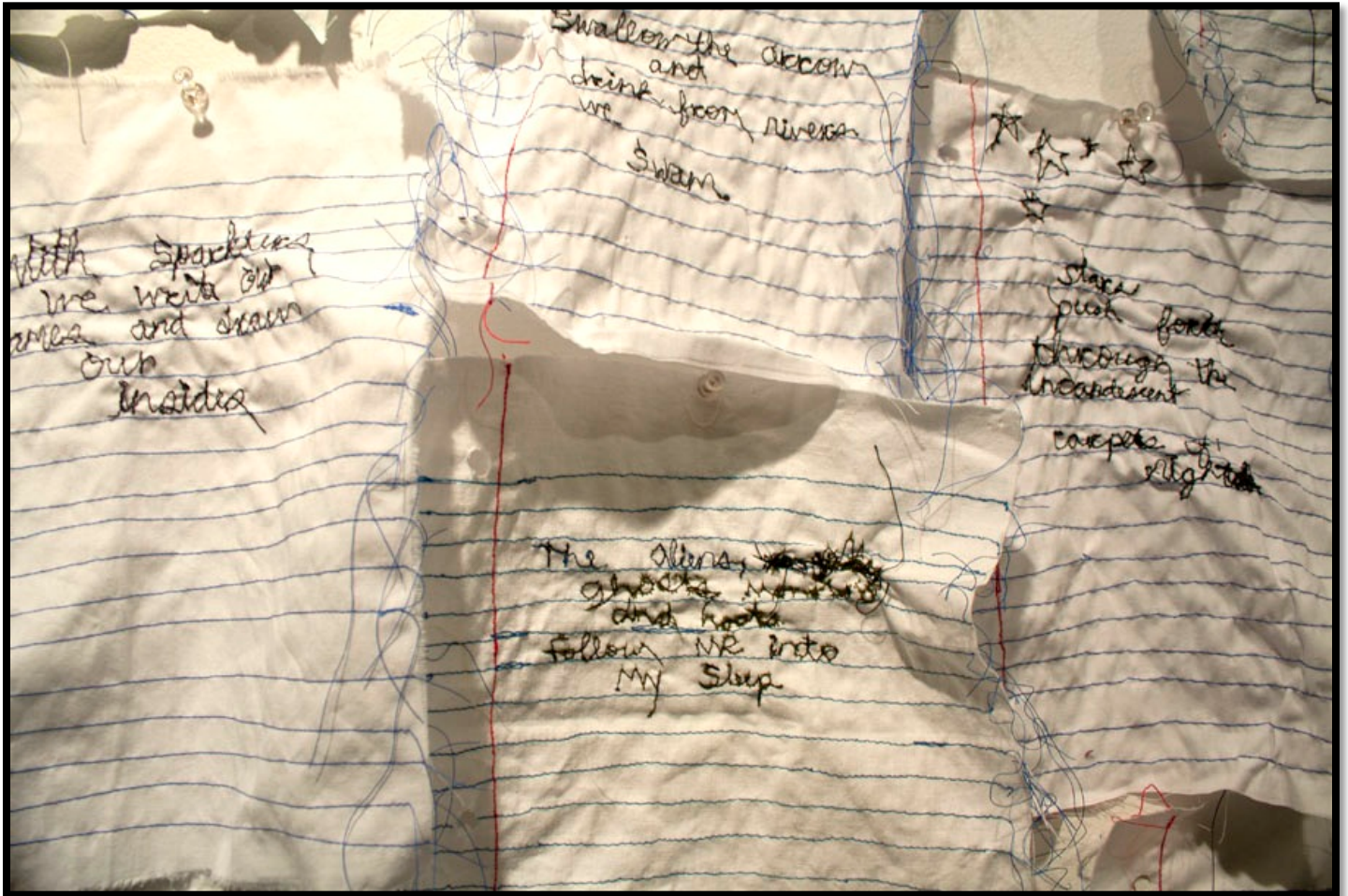
"You didn't."

I look over and she's smiling at me but not in a beauty queen way. She's smiling at me in a Lindy way and I can't help but smile back.

*Annie is a Masters student in Secondary Education.
This is her first publication.*



Sam Cohen
WIDE RULED
Cloth, Thread, Hand-Stitched
Pages: 8.5" x 11"



Sam Cohen

WIDE RULED

Cloth, Thread, Hand-Stitched

Pages: 8.5" x 11"

*Sam is a Master of Fine Arts student.
This is her first publication.*

STANZAS IN CHALK

—Brianna Persons

Young triplets skipping in a circle,
Drawing their path through sun-sewn eyes
With multi-colored chalk and
The conviction of a cat,
Hunting and stalking amidst the grass
With a furrowed brow so coarse, it pricks each foot that steps on it,
It's irritation growing in weeds.

You stumble upon a letter-to-yourself,
With the shoddy envelope aged with dust,
And the crinkled letter,
So crinkled you can see every crease of a broken dream,
The I-wills, the I-won'ts, somehow mashed up in the blender of a child's doing,
With the wrong fruits and the wrong cream.
I should know the taste;
It's lingered on my tongue for years
And spoken sour stanzas with breaths in between.

Now the chalk has been littered on the sidewalks like strange caterpillars
Mummified by the cold night air.
The shouts have been given, drawn-out voices meant to lure the children
Into a night of dinner and after-hour conversation
Without a peep of disagreement.
Maybe when I sit on the grass outside my house,
Those same nurturing voices will call out to me,
And whisk me inside before my feet have touched the floor.

*Brianna is a freshman majoring in English.
This is her first publication.*

THE NIGHT BEGAN WITH FISHING

—Ian Geronimo

The night began with fishing. We'd docked in a canyon to beat the setting sun. Mr. Tunsenko had been driving the boat. Now the giant cliff faces along the horizon were gone, the monolithic totems of rock, red and human-looking in the daytime, were nothing but pitch black cut-outs from an otherwise starry sky. We shined our flashlights. We pointed the beams of light to track the carp with their monster scales and whiskers trolling their random routes along the lake floor in the not-so-deep water alongside the Tunsenko's house boat.

Everyone except Sam Tunsenko had caught a fish on the trip. Even me, the only girl among the five of us kids. Mine was a silvery smallmouth bass I pulled in on the evening of the first day. We'd been docked in a canyon, uglier and closer to the marina than this one, and my dad's howling as he lept across the boat to help me reel the fish in echoed down the canyon and back again.

On this night the fish were oblivious to our spotlights, uninterested and unafraid of our baited lines.

All the boys tried to invent the perfect formula to catch one of those big carp and impress my dad or Mr. Tunsenko. They pushed all kinds of things onto their hooks. Bread balls, old hot dog bits, marshmallows or chunks of cheddar cheese. The stinkier, the better, John

Tunsenko kept saying. But the nocturnal lake fish that night had more wisdom than any of us had patience, and eventually we trickled one by one down the metal gang plank and off the boat to join our parents around the fire. They were drunk and happy to see us. Mrs. Tunsenko got up from her chair and held me, kissed me on the hair as her boys watched curiously. I thought she must be quite drunk and wishing she had a daughter of her own. We gathered around the fire. I pulled my knees up and watched the Tunsenko boys watching the parents.

It wasn't until much later, when we'd been left alone with the fire, that my brother and the Tunsenko boys began to be fun again. John was puffing on the end of a smoldering stick like it was a cigar and making a voice like a Hollywood fat cat. Sam diligently rebuilt the fire. My brother and Kerbie both seemed intoxicated by John's character and tried to imitate the funny voice he was making.

Samuel walked off into the darkness in search of some firewood while the other boys jabbed their fingers at each other and yelled, all three of them trying to be the most belligerent, the biggest boss. John was the best at it. They were funny some of the time, but I mostly just watched their goonish faces in the firelight, and felt as

though I'd gone invisible to them.

Our invisible fathers laughed hysterically and periodically smashed aluminum cans somewhere upwind from us, down at the shore line, and the lake carried their sounds to me. Our invisible mothers spoke in muted voices, sharing cigarettes off the deck at the back of the boat, their muffled laughter riding the black surface of the lake back to me. Me, cross-legged by the fire with my older brother Justin and the three beautiful Tunsenko boys. John, the oldest and most beautiful. Samuel, the one with the rare smile, always with thoughts in his eyes. And little Kerbie, the joker.

Samuel returned with a bundle of sticks in his arms and dropped them next to the fire, and suddenly the boys' attention turned to him.

"What kinda fire building technique is that there boy boy, the teepee technique?" John said in his crazy fat cat voice, pointing his stick cigar at Samuel.

"Where'd you learn to build fires, cooking school?" my brother said.

Samuel ignored them both, leaning back on his haunches and blowing onto the fire, which had begun to dwindle in his absence.

"Listen here Sammy boy, you need to learn how to do two things, build fires and fish fish. It's synchy, see?" John took a handful from the stack of sticks Samuel had collected and tossed some onto the fire.

The other boys chimed in, telling Samuel it was synchy and tossing sticks of their own onto the fire. Sam just watched the fire. When they were finished, he began to remove some of the extraneous sticks

from the fire, blowing on it to make it burn better.

My brother and I looked to John to see what type of joke he might spin, but it was Kerbie who piped up first.

"Leave the fire alone Lucy, it's fine," he yelled, pointing his smoldering stick cigar like a sword.

"Yeah, Lucy! Yeah! How's about you leave the fire building to the big boys and go get us some beers," John said. They all seemed to love calling Samuel by that name -- Lucy. Samuel looked like he wanted to crack a smile and join the game, but I could see he had no way to enter it. He even began to burn the end of a cigar-sized stick, but it was too late to join. John slapped Samuel's stick into the fire, and when Samuel reached for it again, John wacked him on the hand, causing Samuel to drop the stick for good and clutch his fingers. He glanced at me, but I said nothing, and watched the other boys as they laughed and shouted.

"Lucy, bring me some lake water!"

"Lucy, a beer for the boys!"

"Lucy, catch me a bass!"

"Lucy, bring the boat around!"

"Lucy, cans of soda all around, and a juice box for the lady!"

Eventually, Samuel stood up and looked into the fire. The others continued patting their bellies and squinting their eyes at him and swaying around, pretending they were drunk.

"What's gotten into you Lucy, you used to be such a nice broad?" John said.

"If I get us all sodas, will you stop calling me Lucy?" Samuel asked, with that concerned look on his face.

"You've got yourself a goddam deal," John said, and spit into the fire.

Sam headed back, out of the glow of the firelight, to the houseboat, where our parents had reconvened on the deck and were continuing to drink. The boys around the fire quieted without anyone to make fun of for a time. But when Samuel returned with arm-fulls of soda, a can for each of us, and I knew, despite this gesture, the others would be worse than ever.

“I said Pepsi, not Coke Lucy!”

“Lucy, this soda stings my nose – you trying to poison me?”

“Don’t quit your day job Lucy!”

The fire stayed burning bright for a time since the boys had thrown all the sticks onto at once, but soon the fire faltered and there was no more wood. Samuel hugged his knees, close to the fire, and the other boys began to take in the night for the first time. As the light of the fire dimmed, the stars above gained power, the milky-way thick in the sky. I could see through the low flames that Samuel was unmoved by the night -- just another one like many. I wanted to go put my arms around his shoulders, to hold him from behind, but it would be many years before I would have that kind of courage.

We retreated to the boat before the fire died completely. Everyone seemed to have worn themselves out. They went to

their sleeping bags, on the roof and on the bunks inside, and crawled in without much more joking or fuss. I laid on an air mattress I shared with my brother on the roof of the boat. Again, the lake was quiet. The only sounds were the hollow drums of water against the pontoons on the lake, Mr. Tunsenko’s snoring from down in the cabin, and all the boys, yelping softly and grinding their jaws in their sleep.

I woke with a start deep into the night and the moon was huge and crazy above me. I heard the sounds of water churning coming from the deck below. I slid out of my sleeping bag and looked around, making sure I was the only one awake. Samuel was missing from his spot, but all the others were there. I padded gently across the roof, the plaster of the Tunsenko’s houseboat cold under my feet, and came down the stairs.

On the bottom deck, I saw Samuel sitting on the railing. Into the water he was tossing little bread balls, and below him, dozens of fish mouths broke the moonlit surface of the lake to fight over the food. I watched as he fed the army of fish, without a hook or a line, so late at night he thought no one would see.

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He has been previously published in Unbound.*



Eva Bertoglio
THE QUEEN
Pen, Ink, Watercolor, Collage
11" x 14"

LAST BAPTISM

—Laura Mangano

Two demigods descend on the iodine air,
Are in diabolical moods
Tripping, kicking, tricking,
Stalking starfish, bothering sea robins.

One an orphan of shadow,
Her mind a sideshow of loss.
The other a lust cursed siren
Bearing the birth of galaxies.

They worship the sky,
Pay penance to constellations,
Offer themselves to the undertow,
Weep into the primordial sea.

Slick as newts with venomous bellies
Sipping the fresh drip of
Rainwater trickling down cliffs,
Tending to the mortal thirst of mischief

In the blue-black twilight of high night.
Towards the split orange mirage of sunset,
Float like ghosts over brackish mirrors
Of minnow and barnacle,

Past kelp whips, driftwood, hissing
Mussels clicking a waterlogged language
Rock-clung, forming razor caves that
Collect the green froth of waves.

Night perfects their slight immortality
And so hypnotized, possessed,
Both bolt towards hazy meridian
Leaping into the cold melt of cloud, sun, and sea

To bathe in the prehistoric winter Pacific.
Watery sheets dissolve the liquid glass
Depressions of their footprints,
The violence of an invisible past.

Volcanic ash and stardust
In the palm of mitochondrial eve.
Those haunting collisions,
That holy holder of smallest deaths,

Ever towards the
Collapse of agony and ecstasy,
A purity of ineffable peace
Distilled into this single, eternal awe.

An ocean's labored heaving recedes
By the bobbing lull and pull of the moon
As she casts her cratered shade,
Glowing powdery on their floating brows.

In groves of coral like hollow bones
Wind pours over the naked
Tubes like a lute, a call
To the corners, the cries of loons.

In the night
When stars are endless and wild,
Brief streaks of luminescent fire
Explode manically.

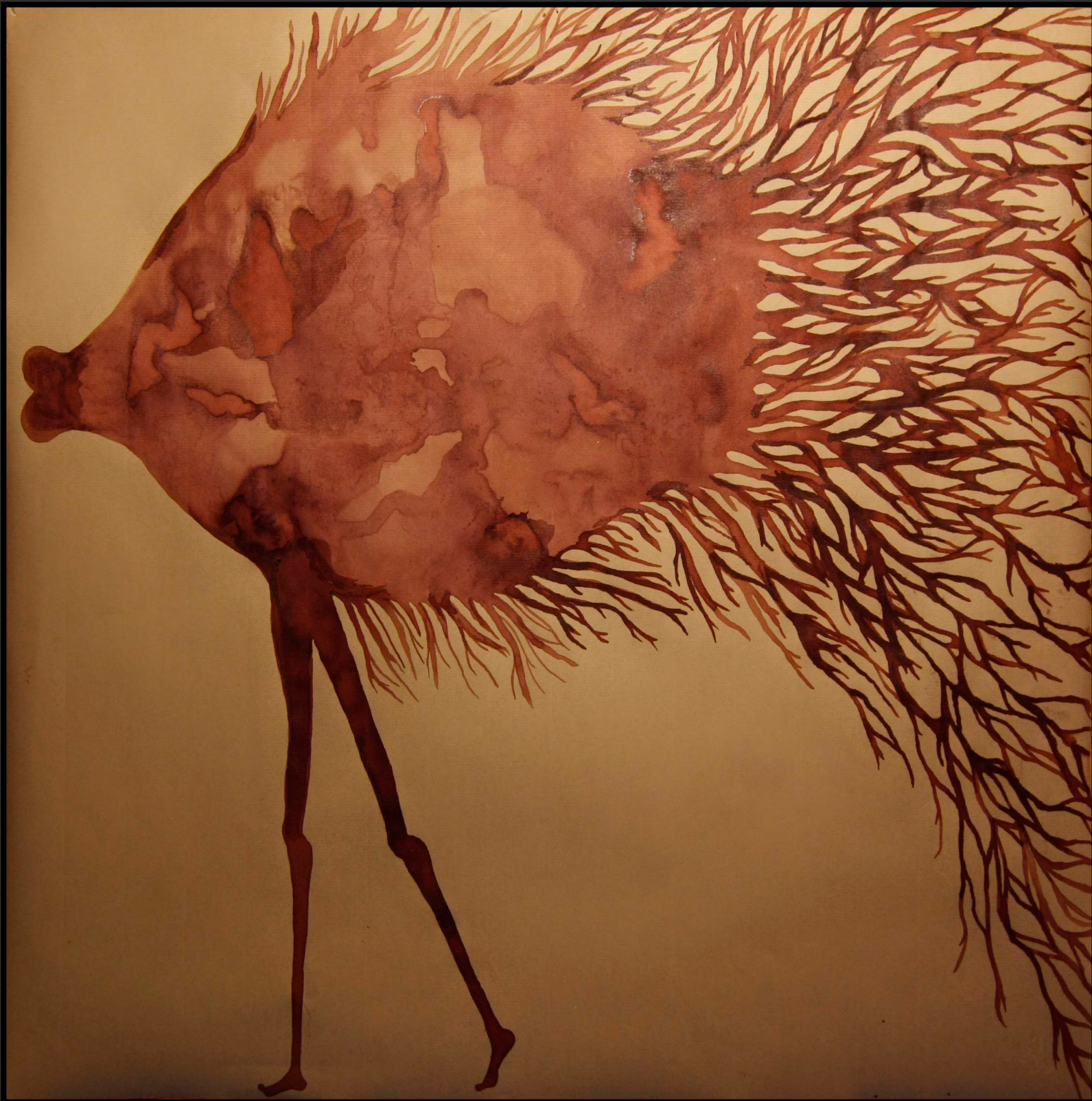
Such fissures of space and love, time and mineral
Free from the terror of sleep.
These light workers, star keepers,
Identical others, finally fused.

*Laura is a fourth year Ph.D. student in Comparative Literature.
She has previously been published in Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine.*



Sara Lebeck
TRIO
Ink and Watercolor

*Sara is a junior majoring in Digital and Fine Arts.
She has previously been published in Unbound.*





SWEET POTATOES

—Kamiiya Williams

Meryl folded the fresh linen sheets that lay across the bed her mother died in only two days before. With a few quick pats, she flattened them neatly and fell back on it with a hard, tired plop. Staring at the colorless ceiling and the fan that spun rapidly in the middle, she recalled how as a child she often tried to keep up with the blades as they turned, keeping one distinct from the others, but of course, she always failed. The room was hot and full of an odor she knew well; the stale smell of age struck her from everywhere. It was in the sheets and the curtains and the carpet, crawling up her nose in such a defiling way. And for some even greater oddity, age smelled dry. It was a smell she'd grown to know for years that led up to this day, and it was still there, to remind her, that one day, it would conquer her too.

"Meryl!" Joan yelled from the foot of the steps. She could see her now standing there with one foot propped up, a damp towel dangling from one fist at her hip, a vexed expression upon her often stolid face. "You done making up that bed?" she asked, hinting that she would scream if she hadn't. Joan was the middle child of their mother's three girls. Meryl was the youngest and Marla the oldest. "Yah," replied Meryl in a long exasperated tone. She closed her eyes, hoping everything would disappear; that every sound would suddenly mute, and blackness would fall upon her. "Alright, when you get a chance could you come throw these

curtains in the washer? I think I may give them to Aunt Aileen." She was silent for a moment and then sat up, and took again another long breath, her back hanging over her knees, where her head fell loosely between. "Meryl?" She still said nothing and heard Joan's footsteps as she walked away, muttering something beneath her breath.

Meryl walked over to the mirror set above a large wooden dresser. After years of use, it was now chipped and cracked. Perhaps it grew old as her mother did, but it would never vanish, as her mother did; they could repair it, with a fresh coat of paint, and it would be new, once again. It intrigued her to consider the longevity of this inanimate thing and how it made her mother's life seem so much shorter, that it had outlived generations of people and it would, indeed, outlive her.

It was at this dresser and this mirror that she watched her mother get dressed until she reached her teens. She'd grab an armful of dresses and lay them across the bed. Then she'd stand over them with a patient, indecisive look upon her heart-shaped face, her hair pinned in fine curls, and neck choked with pearls, pinching her chin as if she had a short beard. After she found "the one" she walked over to the closet, crowded with hangers, empty and useful, some with freshly ironed skirts, the plastic still over them, and others loosely thrown onto them, falling and limbering over the bar. At the bottom of this chaos were rows of neatly lined shoes, from bright or soft-colored heels to short comfortable flats, from which she decided would match her outfit best. Once she was done, she turned toward the mirror, Meryl sitting atop the bed, big-eyed and grinning

innocently, and said “How do I look?” and Meryl would throw her hands up saying, “You look *beautiful* Mommy!” in her full-of-life kiddy tone.

Now she looked into this mirror and couldn’t find an ounce of her mother’s blood. She looked beaten and tired; her eyes shot with red and her hair matted upon her egg-shaped head, partly brown and partly grey. Her mottled face wore no makeup and her teeth, once full and white, were now mossy and fractured. At twenty-seven, a shameful reflection of loss stared back at her, loss of beauty, loss of dignity. She walked away from the mirror, trying hard not to be affected by the person she saw in it, and went over to her purse to fetch a cigarette.

She had a ragged brown purse she borrowed from Marla a couple years ago and never returned. Now one of the straps was missing and pieces of stitching unraveled along the side. She searched through the bag without any ounce of patience, though it was her own fault she carried around a bag of clutter. She turned it upside down and a mountain of stuff poured onto the sheets; scraps of paper with phone numbers she never memorized with names that were more or less important, tons and tons of lottery tickets and the dimes and pennies she used to scrape them, a few key chains without keys, old faded photos of her and friends, some black and white and others an antique-looking sepia, lighters, always at least three of them, and a host of other miscellaneous things. Finally she grasped a pack of Newports, with only two left in the pack. She went downstairs, leaving the things scattered across the bed.

“I’m going to have a smoke,” she told Joan starting toward the back door.

“Did you put the curtains in the washer?” she took her eyes off the dishes in the sink below her, drowning in an overflow of white bubbles.

“I’ll do it goddammit! The world doesn’t move at your command.”

“I just asked a question,” she put her head back down. It wasn’t hard to put Joan back in her place. She was weak.

“Well, just leave me alone.” Meryl stalked out of the room with a loud slam of the screen door, taking a seat on the patio that overlooked a large round swimming pool surrounded by green grass. A small garage tucked in a corner of the yard, next to a wooden swing that hung from a tree. All of this enclosed by a tall wired gate, that seemed to convey to her as a kid, “Children live here, no evil allowed.” In fact, stepping out into that yard was like taking a step back into childhood, where she and Marla picked dandelions for fun or chased each other in circles until they fell dizzy. Joan was always off in the house reading a book or getting in grown folks’ business. She couldn’t possibly feel what Meryl felt when she walked out into that yard.

The day was calm. She leaned back in the chair, overwhelmed by the soft cushion and warm sun. The neighbor next door was barbecuing something tasty on the grill and she thought about going over to ask for a plate but decided not to, for the old man didn’t know how to keep a conversation short. He always succeeded at “talking her damn ear off.” She got up and leaned against the wooden rail that offset the pool, the cigarette settled between her fingers, one foot crossed in front of the other, smoke streaming from her blackened lips, in the softest and shortest of breaths.

She’d been in a dungeon for a week with no money and no means of getting

anywhere. And with each day passing after her mother's death, the need to get high became more urgent and more sickening. At night she began to feel her stomach burn, as if she wanted to vomit, but there was nothing to turn up except beer and a bad cough; a nasty cough, full of bronchitis, and the awful stench of cigarette-breath. But, it was all she had, to keep her mind off the high, the high she hadn't been able to have. She didn't even have enough change to catch a bus to the West side of town to meet Greg.

He was a short, wide-eyed, buck-toothed bum who hid his late night pleasures well, for he worked a steady job as a security guard at a local grocery store, so he always had money. Despite how many times he showed up to work late or high out of his mind or cursed out a customer, they never let him go. She guessed they'd rather pay a crack head who asked for just a little bit of nothing to support his habit than an upright costly whoever else that walked in there wanting a job. But maybe they felt sorry for him. He had a way of crafting some heartfelt sob story to get out of trouble, for his grandmother died every other month. However, she had no care for his personal troubles. All she cared was that he had money, which mean he had rocks, and for just a little bit of pussy, he'd give it all up, or at least half. And as he entered her on those cold sweaty nights, asking, "Do you love me?" she'd say in a harsh, heavy voice, "Just get it over with." She chucked the cigarette over the side of the gate into a pile of rocks beside the pool and walked back into the house.

Joan was now peeling sweet potatoes at the counter. She had a pudgy figure that

Meryl despised aloud whenever they fought, with short curly hair that she dyed blonde and a buttery face splashed with freckles. Meryl smacked her lips as she walked pass, "I told you I would make the sweet potatoes." Meryl and Marla were always the cooks of the house when their mother fell ill. Joan never took any interest in cooking growing up, but Meryl now felt that she did out of guilt, for all the times she told Mother she had no use for cooking and that she'd be more in life than some old man's housemaid. However it was her idea that they should get together to clean out this smelly old house and sit down to talk about where they would go from here, over dinner. But, Joan didn't say anything about her being the one to cook it, for anyone would have immediately objected. "You also said you would wash the curtains," Joan snapped.

Meryl went over to the living area and slouched down on the couch. Joan stared at her with snarling eyes, before starting back at the potatoes, chopping them more viciously and anxiously than before. They were all large and oddly shaped and hardly feasible. She started by taking one of the smaller pieces, for they seemed friendlier, and sat it straight up, just as she saw her mother and Marla do, and peeled from the top-down. The skin of the potato looked dirt brown, rough and old-looking, that made her think of a sack race. For some reason, she could not get one good peel, one good slicing, and it was embarrassing. Meryl look at her with a sort of evil sardonic grin and said, "Sure look like you could use some help to me," but Joan said nothing. The knife kept slipping through the skin, never quite catching on, and the counter looked like someone had

shredded a brown paper bag.

"Let me borrow a few dollars, I'm about to run and get a pack of cigarettes," Meryl said with bold audacity rising from the couch. She stretched her back and arms and opened her mouth wide letting out a loud annoying yawn. "I don't have any money," Joan said curtly.

"What," Meryl looked at her, her eyes glaring, and mouth, wry.

"I said I don't have any money."

"You a goddamn lie Joan," she started toward her, "I know Mama left you a hell of a lot of money. You a damn fool if you think I ain't going to see a dime of it."

"So you can smoke it up," Joan muttered, "over my dead body." She laid the knife on the table, grabbed the broom and dustpan from the closet, and began sweeping the tiled floor.

"You know what your problem is," *here we go*, Joan thought, "You think somebody supposed to bow down to you! Just because you went to school. So fucking what! I was here with Mama while you were out earning all your damn degrees, taking care of her, cooking and cleaning. All the shit you trying to do now, but it's far too late. Hell, you just the same as everyone else, don't care about anybody but yourself. But you'll see," she started up the staircase, "soon enough."

Nothing Meryl said phased her anymore. Joan decided to get used to it long ago when Meryl made it clear that she wasn't going to rehab. All this started back while Joan was still going to school at the University of Illinois. She was starting her second year and had just found out what it was she really wanted to do. Her mother called her hysterical saying that Meryl was out of control and she didn't know what to do. Marla took the time to interfere a few

times, but she had her own hands full with her three boys. First, she started stealing, little things, like a few dollars out of Marla's purse, but then little things turned into big things, like jewelry or Mama's furs or her credit card. At sixty-five, her mother was too old to chase Meryl around or stay up late at night, just to make sure everything stayed in its proper place. Thus, she called Joan. She took a weekend to come home and help her straighten things out.

When she arrived, her mother opened the door, holding her bathrobe at the waist, her hair stood up in pink bulky rollers. She gave Joan a wet kiss and hugged her tightly before telling her to come in and take a seat on the couch. "Let me make you some tea, sugar," she said, "go sit over there on that couch. I want you to tell me all about college." Joan smiled, "I have so much to say, I really love it." She wished she could share with her mother everything she'd experienced. All the classes she had taken the professors she met, and friends. But there was always this awkward distance between them, which perhaps, she created, fearing that her mother wouldn't possibly be able to relate, never having gone to college herself.

As she warmed up a cup of water, her mother ran on and on about how proud she was of her for going to school and how she was the first in the family to go to a university and how she never ceased bragging to her friends at church. All of her hopes rested on Joan, the middle child, and her ability to do well in life.

Joan took a seat on the couch, which her mother never took the plastic off of, and thus it made a plasticity sound when you sat on it, and if you were shorts on a hot day, it stuck to your behind as you got up.

Her mother came in, still fumbling with her robe, placing two mugs onto the table, heat rising from their rims, and took a seat across from Joan, a hearty smile across her face.

"So what's been going on around here Ma," she began, "Marla tells me you've been having some trouble and you sounded worried the last time we talked."

"Honey, your sister has really surprised me."

"I hear," she waited for an explanation, "Marla told me she's been acting up. Going through her rebellious phase, I suppose."

"This ain't just no phase."

"What do you mean?"

"Joan, your sister's a junkie."

"A junkie," her mouth fell open and she laughed, somewhat mockingly, "Ma, I hardly think that's the case. What makes you think so?"

"I wasn't born yesterday Joan. The girl practically steals everything in sight. I can't even leave one second without questioning whether she will take something or not. And you should see this new crowd she been running round' here with. A pack of dusty, filthy looking gals, walking around here with their hair a mess, wearing the same clothes, always looking high. Then I asked one of them where their parents where and you know what this here child told me?" she looked almost angry, "that she doesn't need parents and it wasn't none of my business."

"Well, I don't know if that means she's on *drugs*," Joan was the hardest person to convince, "you sure she's not just stealing money to buy some fast-looking clothes and sneaking out to see some boy."

"You don't believe me. Well, you

can believe what you want. I'm just saying don't leave your purse lying around because you might not find everything in it that you did last time."

"And where do you think she's staying when she's out all night?"

"Out with those druggie friends of hers. I doubt they even have houses to live in. For all I know she could be sleeping on the streets. She come in here the other day sometime after midnight, and I asked where she'd been and she say 'don't worry about it,' and trot right up the stairs like I ain't got no business asking her questions, and this my house!" She tightened her robe again and looked off to the side, rocking a little in her seat. After a few seconds of silence she said, "I ain't got much time left on this earth baby, and I need you to know that. I've done all I could to try to help your sister and I'm afraid I can't do anymore. I'm putting it all in God's hands from here on out."

"Don't worry Ma. I will help you. Meryl will be fine. She just needs a good talking to. You need not get worked up about it. You know the doctor warned you about your blood pressure. All this stress will just make it worse," but her mother didn't say anything, yet steady looked off to the side, as if she'd just said her peace, and that was that. Meryl walked back down the stairs in silence, avoiding eye contact with Joan, slipping quickly out the back door. Something about this felt strange, normally she would expect a rude comment, a smack of the lips, maybe even another attempt to get money, but now Joan sensed she was up to something. She stood in the middle of the kitchen for a while looking pensive and baffled, as if irked by an insolvable puzzle. A pot of water boiled on the stove,

steam rushing toward the ceiling. "Christ!" she ran up the stairs in panic realizing that she'd left her purse upstairs in their old bedroom. The bag was still there, but that didn't mean much. She searched through it frantically but her wallet and keys were gone.

She ran senselessly downstairs to catch Meryl, knowing she'd already driven off. She wondered how she could have slipped like that and gave her thighs a hard slap before entering back into the house and swinging the door hard behind her. In the middle of the kitchen again, she found herself standing there, staring at the pot of steaming water, but not seeing that it was there. Tears welled up in her eyes and she went over to the couch to sit, burying her face in her palms, beaten up with grief.

2

Marla emerged from the attic with a crate full of things she'd been gathering for the past two days, things that their mother had meant to pass on to them years ago, but never found time to sift through. She sat them on the dining room table, declaring, "Child, you should see all the old stuff I found packed away upstairs in that old dusty attic; cases and cases of things. I was just sitting up there crying my eyes out, especially at these here pictures."

Marla dealt with death a lot differently than Joan, it was just her. As she handed Joan a photo album from their childhood, Joan held out her hand hesitantly, part of her wanting to grieve with Marla, and the other part of her wanting to run away. She took the book and looked through it speedily, noting a photograph of the four of them at Disney Land, around the time Meryl was two.

"Well would you look at that," she said holding back a bucket of tears that stung her eyes. "Ain't that something," replied Marla, "you were so little, and Mama looked fabulous as usual," and then after a short silence, "I'm going to have to put this up and frame it." Joan flipped through the rest of the pages and sat the book down on the table, as if anymore would just be unbearable. "I'll look at the rest later, I need to finish cooking."

"You're not doing too bad in there," Marla said charmingly, finding a comfortable spot on the couch where Meryl insulted Joan earlier, "smells good."

"Well, thank you," she always admired Marla's kind energy. She was a bright spice of life, always reminiscing on the good times, and laughing at the bad. She had peanut butter skin and a soft, plain smile with eyes shaped like almonds and long thick lashes that seemed to flap when she blinked. Unlike Joan, she had a petite frame that would never suggest she'd popped out three boys in her short lifetime. She was their mother's favorite up until she got pregnant with her first son, Daniel, when she was barely eighteen. It was quite unexpected; for her mother knew she'd been dating a young man from school, but didn't take it too seriously. After she found out about the pregnancy, Marla packed up her things and moved in with Daniel's parents. They married shortly after and she had two more children, William and James. However, by the time she turned twenty-five, both Marla and her husband, realized, suddenly, that everything happened too early and too fast. He struggled to support the five of them, working two, sometimes three jobs, and she felt lonelier than ever. They divorced around the time Daniel turned seven, she kept the house and car,

and he moved across town. Their mother didn't approve of Marla's decisions, even after she married and could be called an "honest woman." But Mama said that it was only a "cover-up for her sin" and she was only leading herself down to a disaster. However, Marla had given her three grandchildren, and she accepted them with all the love in heart she had to give. Marla taught Joan almost everything: how to read and sew and dress and flirt with boys, pretty much all except cook. She knew how to make everyone laugh and people noticed her whenever she walked into a room. Even sitting there on that ancient-looking couch, still covered with plastic, there seemed to be a special glow around her. She wore a floral patterned sundress that draped just past her knees and moved when she walked, and a pair of modest wedge heels, a handbag that looked expensive lying by her side, but Joan was sure she got it at a thrift store downtown. She prided herself on taking old things and making them look "new" or taking something poor and making it "rich." The very air of her voice was rich; rich in laughter and love, and sitting there in all her beauty, she reminded Joan more and more of their mother.

She got up and walked over the window, opening the long sheer curtains. Something about these curtains always appeared grand as they were growing up and the idea of thrusting them open brought a peculiar joy to their innocent hearts. A faint light poured into the room and spilled over the cherry wood floors. "Where's your car honey? I don't see it out front."

"Take a wild guess."

"No," she looked at Joan sideways

with puckered lips.

"Yes," Marla shook her head at this, "I left my purse on the bed upstairs. It's my fault."

"We really have to get that girl some help. It's a shame she can't even act right on a day like this."

"She needs to *want* help first. You can't help anybody that doesn't *want* to be helped."

"She does. You don't know Meryl like I do."

"I don't?" she sounded perplexed, but her expression was flat, as she mixed a bowl of dressing with her bare hands.

"She's going through something that we can't understand, and haven't really tried to either."

"Well, why don't you take her for a few weeks," she finally smiled, "and see how you feel afterwards. She said this to break the tension, but was more than serious, and then, 'What do you mean I don't know her like you do?'"

"She was always closer to me growing up," she walked into the kitchen, brushing down her dress, "she thought you looked down on her, thought everyone did, except me. This was before the drugs."

"*Looked down on her?*" She stopped mixing the dressing, and looked at Marla as if she was telling a joke, "Meryl's full of it. She's always done what she wanted to do. It didn't matter what I thought."

"Oh come on Joan!" she said throwing one hand up and setting it back at her waist, "All mama did was brag about you all the time. About how pretty you were, your grades, and how you went to college. Meryl hardly got any attention less' I was around. So, naturally, she rebelled. Everything you did, she didn't. And then

she got *lots* of attention.”

“And *you* think that how it started,”

At the beginning, yes. Over time, I think she began to like the high, and couldn’t be the same without it.”

“So what do you think we should do,” she walked over to the sink to wash her hands, “since that’s what it comes down to.”

“We wait for her to come around,” Marla said dissatisfied with her own answer, “and pray, I suppose, that she will soon.”

Joan shook the water from her hands and dried them with the apron tied around her, not looking at Marla. Even if what Marla was saying had been true, it still did not validate Meryl’s actions. They were merely excuses, but part of her began to feel a sense of guilt, guilt for having no compassion and guilt for having no love. The bottom of her ribs began to shiver and her stomach seemed to turn. A black cloud stationed over her and for a moment, she felt she was no better than Meryl, possibly even worse. She couldn’t tell what Marla thought, as they stood there in silence, each reflecting on their own faults.

“I see you planning to make some sweet potatoes over there,” Marla said abruptly.

“If I could ever get them in the pot,” she laughed at herself.

“You never were the cook of the house,” Marla laughed, “but I like your effort. Mind if I help?”

“Go right ahead. I’d like to see you slice those things myself.”

She took the peeler from atop the microwave, where Joan had left it, and gripped the potato confidently, stood it on its bottom, and skinned that thing like it

was second nature. The peelings fell perfectly and revealed a smooth bright orange. “Yes, that’s how it’s supposed to look, that’s how I remember it,” Joan smiled and then, “Okay, let me give it another try.” Marla handed over the knife. Joan stood one her failed ones from earlier on the buttocks and this time; put a little extra umph in her peel. But the same thing happened, brown paper shreds. “You’ll get it,” said Marla lightly patting her on the shoulder, and then, “someday.” They both looked at each other and laughed.

Greg took a sip of his drink before setting it back down on the floor. His apartment smelled like sour sheets and a foul odor rang from the kitchen, swelled with dirty dishes submerged in greasy brown water alongside piles and piles of garbage and a mossy mop bucket. The fridge was empty except for a carton of milk, likely spoiled, and a couple packs of lunch meat. The floor was blotchy and cracked, with muddy footprints starting from the back doors, evidence of drunken nights, when Greg came stumbling in. In the living area, where they sat, were two couches and a TV set atop a chair. “Come on, let me get some, stop playing,” said Meryl.

“What you going to do for me?” he said slouching back in his seat. His eyes were glassy and red and his bottom lip hung loose as he talked. “What you want me to do,” she said annoyed, knowing where this was going. “You know the routine,” he said, peering at her through lewd eyes. She didn’t say anything, and he took this to mean she agreed and with this agreeance, he got up and led her to the bedroom. In his bedroom, filthy drawers

and shirts laid all over the carpet, which was stained and grey. The bed sheets hung off the bed, exposing a pissed mattress. Across from the bed was a dresser, on which sat a few lighters, a stack of miscellaneous papers, a pipe, and one lonely lamp without a lampshade. Across the room was a small window, with a thick sheet of plastic over it. He shut the door behind them and began to loosen his belt buckle.

His heavy breath crept down her neck as he brushed his body against hers from behind, suddenly, she trembled. "I need to go to the bathroom," she said.

He crashed down on the bed, "Don't be long."

She sat on the edge of the tub, her head drooping in the same fashion it had earlier. It occurred to her, as she entered Greg's bedroom, that her mother could be watching, not from heaven, or some distant place, but there, in the bedroom, and was watching her now, as she sat alone. She walked over to the sink and looked into the mirror that hung above it. It was her face looking back at her but it did not feel like it. It was as if she saw herself looking into the mirror from some distant part of the room. And she looked at herself with utter disgust. She fell back onto the toilet seat, wrapping her arms around her waist, and rocking back and forth, her eyes about to burst with tears. The tortuous pain of withdrawal cramped her stomach and the eyes of her mother scowled from a place she could not see. She grasped the sides of the tub and an immense weight fell upon her shoulders, and as the warm tears trickled down her face, it became urgent to get out of that room, out of that house. The walls became compressed and she

found her breath harder to catch. Hugging her stomach, she slid down to the floor, the pain striking her like a sharp blade, and sobbed. She hoisted herself up on both hands, crawling toward the sink again, to turn on the water. The sound of running water crashed down on her ears, she cupped her hands underneath the faucet and splashed her face. "You alright in there baby?" Greg called from outside the door. She wiped her face with a corner of her shirt, "I'm fine. Be out in a sec." She looked at her reflection once again, seeing a long apologetic face, that seemed to grant her no mercy, no love. She opened the door.

Greg stood before her half-dressed, his paunchy belly exposed and a dark hairy chest that made her cringe. It wasn't the first time she'd seen him without clothes, but this time felt different. The smell of urine brushed her nose again as she sat down on the bed. He walked from her briefly to turn off the lamp and then stood at the foot of the bed, dropping his pants and drawers. The darkness struck her like a driver driving with no headlights in a pitch black sky. She couldn't see and she wanted to, she needed to, and her head began to waver and swerve, with ideas of how to break free of this dark tunnel, she now found herself driving through. He started toward her, his heavy shadow slowly crawling up from the foot of the bed and his breathing became more intense, more terrifying, like a large bear. For a moment, she had a peculiar thought that she was trapped in a vast forest, suffocating and surrounded by nothing but tall trees, trees as tall as the blank blue sky above her, and the only way to get out was to climb one of them, and only then would she be able to

breath. He was now at her legs, not seeming to care that she hadn't moved since she sat down. She jolted back, so violently, that her back hit the headboard and her foot kicked his shoulder. "What the hell is wrong with you, woman!" he shouted. She got up, stumbling toward the door, "I got to go, I can't do this," she said helplessly. She placed her hand on the knob and was suddenly thrust back onto the bed. She could feel the springs bounce up and down, and the squeaky noise it made, as she struggled to get up. But Greg pushed her back down and slapped her across the face. She began to scream, but his large sweaty palm covered her mouth while he unfastened her pants with the other. A rush of anger came over her and she bit his hand, tearing his teeth into his flesh, like a wild animal that'd just caught her prey. He howled as he held his wounded hand with the other and fell lamely on the side of her. She darted for the door again, tripping over her pants, and other things that she could not see. Her face flared with pain and she felt the skin begin to web. The room became hotter and more dense, the door began to move backward and shadows beneath and above her, crowded the doorway. He scooted on his back toward the edge of the bed and kicked her in the behind. She fell instantly onto her stomach, moaning and crying, yet still conscious. She turned over to see his enormous figure, that was once gaunt and weak, standing over her frail, pitiful body.

He ripped off her pants, pinning her hands above her head, to assure that she wouldn't be able to resist any longer. And he entered her, pounding his sex against her, grunting and sweating, like a giant dog. *Was mother watching this too?* She thought. The fight was over, and she surrendered,

defeated, paying the cost of her ill ways. She heard about when women were raped, how they had an outer body experience, how they would drift over themselves and their predator, watching. But she was still there, in her own skin, and felt everything. He began to slow down, his body wet and cold, and she sighed after a long period of holding her breath. *Why hadn't she screamed?* What difference did it make if she had screamed? Who was going to help her? A crackhead in a crackhouse, being raped by another crackhead, a case no one could have cared to investigate. And with a long bestial exhale of air, he finished. He laid there for a few moments, breathless and heavy, before pushing himself from her and standing to his feet. He gathered his clothing in silence, slipping on a grey tee shirt and a pair of dingy denims.

Meryl finally rose from the floor, fluid dripping from her nose, and her eyes damp, a blank look upon her face. She hurried to put on her bottoms before he switched on the lamp, for the light, would degrade her in greater ways than Greg had already. She grasped her purse off the bed, which she would have left, had she escaped earlier. Greg leaned on the dresser and lit a cigarette; a small flame appeared and disappeared, its remnants lying at the edge of his lips, as he inhaled. A deadly silence filled between them. He was the ugliest black bastard she'd ever seen. "I still got some rocks, if you want. If not, then you can leave," he finally said. She said nothing, her head downwardly fixed, and she did not move. "Well since you ain't moving," he burned out his cigarette in a tray that sat on the windowsill, "I'll take that as a yes," and he turned on the lamp and walked out of the room. The light burned her eyes and she looked around the room once again,

but now the stink was stinkier and the air thicker. The same clothes still lay about the rough carpet. A sting came from her elbow and she looked down to see her skin broken, a pink-red layer showing beneath her dark skin, a rug burn. At this she touched the side of her face, which still felt hot and tender. *Why hadn't she left?* He returned to the room with a bag of white rocks and fetched the pipe and lighter atop the dresser, before sitting down next to her on the bed. He filled the pipe and placed it to his mouth, and then lit it, closing his eyes, as he inhaled. At this, she looked at him, and her jaws began to loosen. The burn in her stomach grew stronger and her muscles began to tense. *She couldn't leave now.* He took another deep drag and smiled at her slyly from the corner of his eye. "Give it to me, you stupid fool!" she said with a sudden giggly tone, snatching the glass from his hand, taking her own pull. He watched her, a placid look in his eyes, and casual smirk upon his thick lips and then said, "You satisfied now?" She handed him the pipe, not knowing how to answer, and fell back onto the bed, laughing boisterously.

Marla hummed something soulful as she set the table, plates and silverware clacking occasionally. The house was quiet and a dim light burned at the ceiling above the dining room table. Joan washed the last few dishes in the sink. "So why didn't you bring the boys?" she asked Marla. "I thought about it," she paused, hoping that they were okay at the babysitter's, "but I figured it would be better for us to be alone. It's hard to talk and relax with the boys around."

"I know what you mean," said Joan empathetically, but had little experience with children to really know. Anyhow, she missed her nephews and wanted to see them, which was why she raised the question.

"You think Meryl's coming back?" Marla asked suddenly. She finished with the table and walked over to the kitchen to bring pots of food over; Mac and Cheese, dressing, sweet potatoes, and turkey. The aroma hit her nostrils delightfully and she smiled while walking back toward the table. "I sure do hope so, I *do* need to get back home," said Joan.

"Oh God, I keep forgetting she took your car. I'm sorry for bringing it up." Joan was silent. "I can take you home," Marla suggested.

"It's alright. I'd rather not leave until she gets back. I'll spend the night if necessary."

They heard fumbling at the door. Meryl walked into the house, closing the door quietly behind her, and wiping her shoes off on the mat. "Meryl, is that you?" Marla called from the kitchen. *Who else would it be,* Joan thought, but was relieved. Joan walked into the room and Marla followed. "May I have my keys please?" she asked coldly, already extending one of her hands. A wry smile came over Meryl's face as she reached into her pocket, the keys rattling at the bottom. Something about this sound made Joan anxious, made her want to slap Meryl across the face, (but it looked like she already had been) and kick her out of the house for good. But, the cloud of guilt rained over her again and she stood there, staring at her wretched sister, looking beaten and stupid, but too high to care,

taking in all her pity. She sat the keys on the table, deliberately ignoring Joan's hand, and started toward the staircase. "What happened to your face?" Marla asked.

"Don't worry about it."

"Well, aren't you going to have dinner with us?" Marla pressed. And this irritated Joan, who'd already retreated to her seat, fixing her napkin on her lap, prepared to take a scoop of dressing.

"I'm not hungry."

"Well, we still need to talk," she said, and then genuinely, "I'm sure our mother would like that."

Now Meryl stopped, almost half-way up the stairs, feeling conscious of her mother's eyes again, those reddened, painful eyes, sickened with grief. She turned toward Marla, "What we got to talk about?"

"The house. The funeral. Everything."

They were silent for a moment. Meryl stared at the wooden banister railing that guided the steps. When she was eight, Marla tried to teach her how to slide down it with her hands in the air. She started off well but fell down toward the middle and tumbled to the bottom of the staircase, causing a loud thump that alarmed her mother to coming running out of the kitchen. She wasn't hurt very bad, only a small pain in her arm, but Marla got a whooping that day. She walked down to the table.

"Okay, so let's get to talking. I'm not trying to be up all night."

The audacity of this comment made Joan snap. "What's your problem Meryl?

You're the one who stole my car and come barging in her five hours later. And you have the nerve to have an attitude. You, of all people."

"I don't give a fuck about your car Joan! I'd do it again. Hell, you weren't going anywhere. So what's the big fucking deal!"

"Alright both of you just calm down" interrupted Marla.

"No you calm down. This ain't none of your fucking business. Don't tell me what the hell to do," "You know what, she can leave," said Joan staring at both of them, but more directly to Marla, whose face was buried in her palms. "I think I will leave," and she walked heavily back up the stairs, cursing at the air, and waving her hands as she talked.

An awkward silence fell over the house. Outside, the wind whistled softly and rustled through the trees, which beat lightly against the window pane. Marla glared at Joan, who now shoved a fork of dressing into her flat mouth, her appetite instantly lost. *Why did she have to say anything?* She wanted to leave; her boys were waiting for her. A bitter taste pricked her tongue and she felt herself swallow it; the poison of anger floating through her blood, the same that triggered Meryl's addiction. She looked toward Joan again, now staring at nothing with that same stolid face she so often held, and she said, "I wish you wouldn't have said anything." Joan went back to her plate, scooping up a pile of potatoes, saying "she'll never change."

Kimiiya is a sophomore English major with a minor in Creative Writing. This is her first publication.



Eva Bertoglio

THE CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE
AND OUR FUTURE IS NOT HUMAN

Oil and Collage

11" x 14"

EVERY MAN A POPPY

—Hilary Ross

Back-broke, slapped with blood and mud-heavy,
Soldiers die.
Or worse, live.

Fingers raking at gnarled brows,
Their own ruinous ruminations murmur,
Mimicking a grim physician's diagnostic mantra.

From sheets of ash and desolate shadows
Spring stark vestiges
Of glacial swamps, shining deer-eyed skulls
And bloats of mustard gas,
That ebb and billow over twitching boys
Whose fathers now farm alone.
Who, when they wander homeward, wrinkling train tickets in withered fingers,
Find that the shrapnel has followed them back.
Who, when they wake in the hour of moaning willows and wind-tossed moths,
Wrestle with sweating, wheezing ghosts.
Who whip their heads when the whistling of missiles
Streaks through the kitchen,
And who, struck straight through the wits with the sharp chatter of
Bustling heels on cobblestone, the snapping spasm of a clock finger,
Shuddering ever onward—

But the poppies like polyps still slink skyward,
Elevating enervated veterans,
Inveterate survivors,
Who will perhaps one day
Survive again.

*Hilary is a freshman with an undeclared major and minor
in Creative Writing. This is her first publication.*

ANGLE OF OBSESSION

—Melissa Hicks

One day there is a knock on your door just as you are tidying up— clearing your supper dishes from the kitchen table. You are surprised; it's too late for deliveries. You hear my voice muffled through the door and smile as you put the plates in the sink.

"It's me," I say to the warm-honey wood of your door.

It's a voice you know well. There is no confusion as your hand clutches the other side of the cool brass handle. You pull the heavy oak door toward you slowly and I see you emerge from a crack in the wall, the "o" of your mouth expanding as I come fully into your view.

The door is pulled wide now; I am on one side, you are on the other.

My mind is open to you. Your jaw hangs at first, in astonishment, I think. I see you inhale; you breathe in my radiance. You are consuming my mind. My head is open. I feel the edges of my aura grow jagged, as if the sudden extra flow of energy loosed from my gleaming skull threatened to break its boundaries.

Here is the transparency true love demands.

I want to be you— to see me through your eyes, unreflectedly— to see your thoughts as you see, for the first time, my naked brain.

In my forehead are the perfect shutters to my brain case. You could not see them before, but I found the trick to open them— the double doors to my skull.

She did it backwards in the mirror while my hands held the knife. I drew it smoothly— the capitol "I". *It is the geometry of truth.* My own steady wrist pulling on the tiny curved blade I used for scoring the bread. Hot, slick, red lines I drew, and the girl in the mirror never flinched.

I hold my fingers now so that the flesh shutters are kept open. They are beginning to grow dry and crisp. Lightly scabbed at the edges, my shutters are now separate from my living flesh. The place where my thumbs rest, keeping the casements wide, pressing the skin-shutters back to my forehead, is soft and painful. It is kept moist and pulsing by the currents in my thumbs. These two spots below my fingertips are kept raw and alive by the magnitude of my will and by my deepest need— to keep the doorway to my mind open.

At first, my skull was a problem. I realized it was only a construct anyway.

She scraped away the bits of meat. I used two washcloths before we saw the error. I watched as in the mirror she held the bloody flaps open one at a time, with shining tweezers. She cauterized them with a disposable lighter and I closed my eyes when the flames began to lick at the edges of my window. I looked back and picked up my washcloth. I scrubbed and polished.

I changed my sweater.

I have no doubt the light shines
through the pale white bone.

Your brown eyes are open wide,
staring. I smile and wiggle the fingers that
are not propping open my mind. You gasp
and I wonder if my soul is leaking.

You seem confused and I wonder if
the symbolism is less blatant than I had
hoped. In my own mind, this picture
needed no words; no such clumsy
containers could contain the equation for
true love. I raise my right index finger for
a moment to tap the side of my head,
silently begging for you to understand me.

I smile as you gawp at me silently.
I'm proud to see your lips flutter as you
search for the right words to praise my
devotion. Lips curled, I wait, tranquil,
knowing at last you see how I feel about
you.

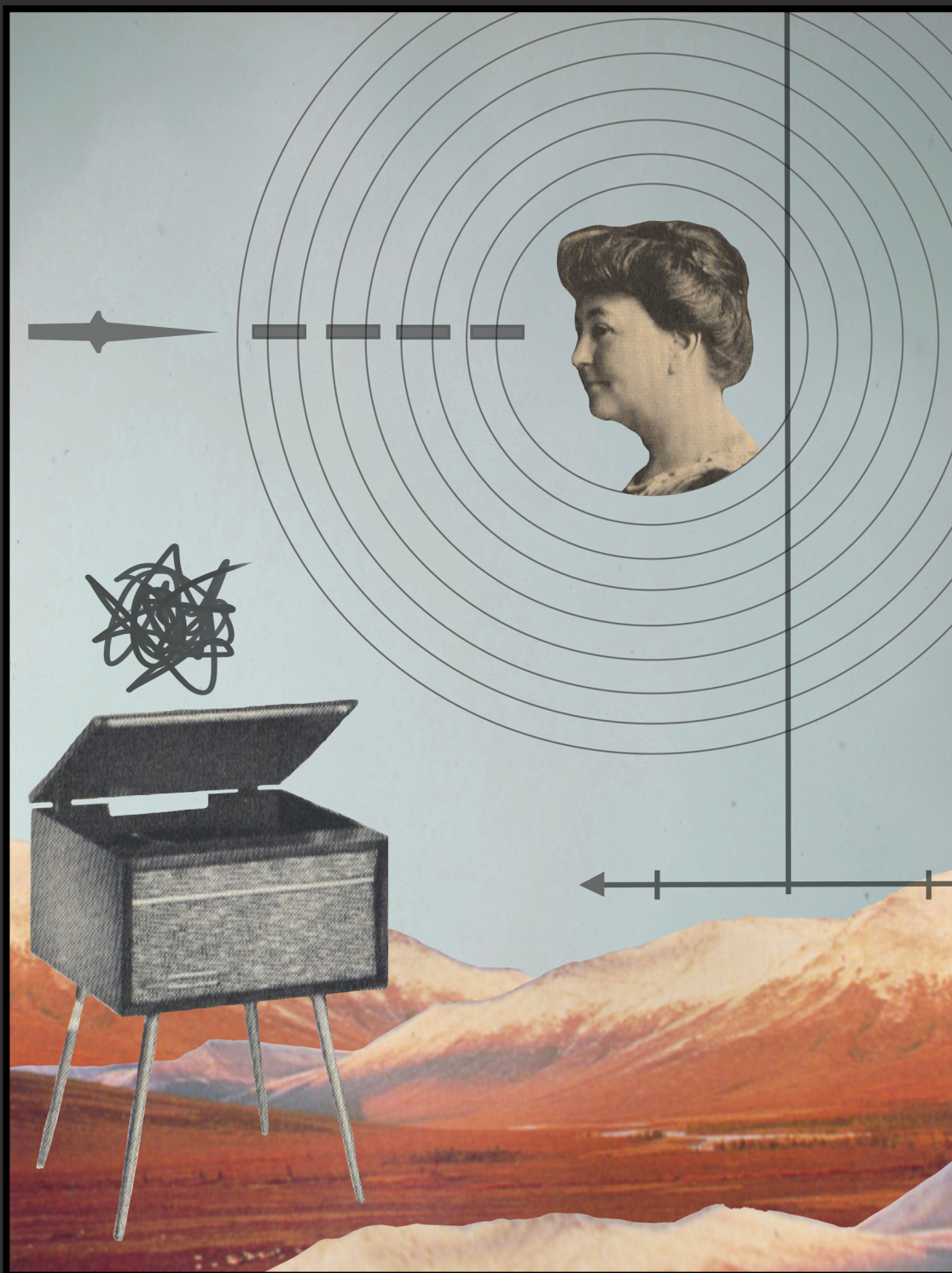
*Melissa is a junior majoring in English. She has previously
been published in By the Lake and Denali.*



Braeden Cox

THE RIGHT CUT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Digital Art
18" x 24"



Braeden Cox
RECORD

Digital Art
18" x 24"

PARTY

—Bethany Kaylor

The room smelled like ass and potpourri. I stared at a picture on the wall of one dog humping another. There was something nice about the way dogs looked at the camera, like they were having a good time; the one doing the humping looked straight at the lens and the one being humped had its tongue out, grinning.

The couch looked dirty but I didn't want to stand. Standing was for a girl who had nothing better to do with herself. There was a boy and girl on the couch already, but they didn't seem to be romantically involved. I wedged myself into the vacant corner of the couch; I didn't want our knees to bump. The boy was talking about a previous party, one that the girl hadn't attended but had heard stories about. Evidently someone had passed out onto the beer pong table headfirst. The other drunks at the party thought he was dead but he wasn't. The boy told the story with sincerity and fondness—the girl ate it up. Her hair was unnaturally stiff and her eyeliner a bit crooked, but she was thin-hipped and had delicate features. She was the kind of girl that football players point to in the stands after they make a huge play.

The boy finished his drink and made a face. The girl asked him if he wanted to get another drink, to which he nodded. They both got up, the girl pulling down her skirt

and the boy running his hand through his hair. Her strides were long, his slow, yet they moved in synchronization—they were in no rush for anyone.

I hoped someone else would come sit next to me, because a person sitting alone on a couch is pretty much the same as a person standing against a wall. I looked at the picture of the dogs again; I wished there was a dog that I could have pet, but then again I didn't because someone would probably make it drink beer. Even so, the company would have been nice. I touched the couch cushion and concentrated on the path of the fibers, following them with my fingers. The threads lodged beneath my unpainted fingernails. I closed my eyes and tapped my feet to the rhythm of the music from the other room. Maybe someone would glance over and be entranced by me. A moment later my eyes opened—the world had rearranged itself. Some people in the room were kind of dancing, their bodies moving against each other. They didn't make eye contact with each other. The humping dogs looked like they were having more fun. The people who weren't dancing were either hanging on to the edge of others' conversations or pretending to look busy like I was. They were more convincing; I wasn't even trying to pretend to text someone.

My drink was finished but I didn't want another because my insides were starting to hurt. I gathered my hair like I was going to put it into a ponytail, then let it fall. I liked the sensation it created, the hairs pulled against my scalp. A gaggle of girls burst out of the bathroom, giggling and bumping into each other.

Boys had their arms over stumbling girls' shoulders, like they had just caught a prized fish. My fingernails dug into my palms with the beat of the song that I still didn't know. By the hallway I saw the girl with the crooked eyeliner again. She was talking casually to a different boy in front of the staircase, and she occasionally ran her hand through her hair. It would have been sexy, like the ones in shampoo commercials, except her hair was too straight for it to fall naturally. The boy didn't seem to notice and kept talking to the space above her head. My stomach was hurting again. I needed to think about speed limit signs, but all I could think about was the girl's crooked eyeliner and how the boys with their arms over the girls kept looking over their shoulders and how I shouldn't have worn mascara because it looked stupid, so stupid.

Digging the heels of my palms into my eyes, I got up from the couch and headed to the bathroom. Someone was already in it, so I leaned against the wall and thought about

speed limit signs: 45, 55, 65. 65, 55, 45. The numbers weren't numbing enough and I tried to calm myself down by pinching my nails into my fingertips. The bathroom door opened and I wiped my face. A girl without any makeup was in the doorway, rubbing her hands on her jeans.

"Sorry," she said, moving her body to let me pass. I shook my head and mumbled, but I glanced at her bare face. I shut the door and ripped off the remaining toilet paper from the roll and dampened it. I scrubbed at my eyelashes and thought about speed limits and humping dogs and the girl who was beautiful without makeup. Someone knocked on the door. "One second," I said, clawing at my eyes, desperately trying to erase my mascara. "I'll be out in one second."

Bethany is a freshman with an undeclared major and minor in Creative Writing. This is her first publication.



Eva Bertoglio
MIND-MELD

Raku Ceramic
Inspired by Ovid's Myths
11" x 9"

*Eva is a freshman in the Honors College.
She has previously been published in Ephemera.*

SILVER LINING

i crave
the cold, metal taste
of a silver lining.

this feeling
sinks
its teeth
into
my chest,
sends
back green
signals
that blink.

the street-
lights pulse,
they mock,
repeat:
*you are now
crossing
franklin blvd.*

cemeteries
are a place
where i
can sit
and scream
and yell
at rocks
and nobody asks
why.

—Lauren Greenhall

Lauren is a senior with a double major in Comparative Literature and Judaic Studies with a minor in Creative Writing. She has previously been published in the Oregon Commentator and hosts the comedy show Shenenigals on KWVA.

EAST BROADWAY AND PEARL

—William Cochran-Bray

Stoplights move like a metronome to the cadence of the traffic.
Hazy-blue October skies make the terra-cotta buildings look ice cold.
In a moment of silent nostalgia, the street becomes vacant without
a trace of cars—steam billows like chimneys in dewy Oregon
from the steel sewer man-hole. The sounds return
softly, with windblown cyclists coasting back wheels—
like clockwork that high hum of metallic gears grinding
comes back with no remorse, in full force barging through
the corner stoplight like the spider I tried to grab last night as I opened
my sheets to sleep. That great traveler has crawled upon me
time and time again, leaving little bites that let me know
of his unwelcomed presence. Similar to the goose bumps protruding
from my right arm as the awning over me drips from the morning
Eugene dew. Shivering in the cold, I push my coat collar over my ears,
waiting for a fleeting moment when the sun will break from the clouds
and warm the shadows.

*William is a senior majoring in English
with a minor in Creative Writing.*



Braeden Cox
COLLISION ABOVE THE STARS

Digital Art
18" x 18"

PIRATES OF ILYRIA

—Ashley Reed

“Protect the lady Olivia!”

Olivia glanced to the door, eyebrow quirked. It remained tightly shut; the clapping of footfalls seemed to vanish well into the distant halls.

Peculiar quiet followed. With wrinkled brow, eyes still on the varnished wood, she clicked shut her ledger-book. The window behind her burst open.

Olivia whirled in her seat, snatching the miniature obsidian statue from her desk (an ugly thing from North Africa, some creature she supposed was a dog, and which she kept for how impressively it functioned as a blunt weapon) as a great surge of frozen air filled her cabin. She rounded on the window, teeth gritted, ready to dispatch whatever scoundrel would assault her craft.

She squinted against the assault of the outside cold. In the casement, defying all decorum, sense, and reality, crouched a young man. “Are you the lady of this ship?” he called, in an accent heavy and strange.

She turned her head to the side, eying him. He was a monkeyish thing, thin limbs and hair so fair as to be white, swimming in a flurry of loose-fitting trousers and jacket. He clung to the outside of the frame as the wind tugged at him, trying to pull him into the sky from which he had inexplicably come. Had he stowed

away? Boarded and scaled the outer balloon? No, her crew was not so incompetent, and would have discovered both. This man may well have been an apparition.

“Who are you?” she barked over the rush of air. “Who sent you?”

“So, so it is you?” he cried, and made to step into the ship. “May I just—”

“What is your business?” Olivia cried, jerking forward and brandishing the artifact. The young man jumped back, and Olivia half-expected him to topple into the open air. His hands were quick, however, and he held himself steady, adhering to the window frame. “If you are mad, begone. If you have reason, be brief.”

She seemed to have frozen his tongue, if the cold had not already done so. His mouth wagged wordlessly, brow furrowing, before a nervous laugh took his mouth. “I, uh, have a speech—”

“I forgive you it,” she interjected sternly. “Your business. What are you? What do you want?”

Again he paused, seemingly stunned. He composed himself, but only barely—she could see how his well-prepared words were lost as he launched a hand to his pocket, murmuring curses. Olivia wondered how much longer he could hold himself in place, particularly with one hand. Nothing would bring her more joy than to see a gondola rat tumble away into the cloud cover.

“I am a messenger,” he said, and suddenly a dagger flashed from his belt. Her mind whirled, her feet readied to pounce, push, dodge and bear the pain—and then there was a paper in that same hand, awkwardly pierced on the knife. “Here is my text, from Captain Orsino's

bosom!”

He flung the knife toward the wall—it bounced pathetically off the wood, tumbling with a sad clatter behind her desk. Olivia paused a moment, glanced from it to him, brow raised. “In what chapter of his bosom, may I ask?”

The man, wide-eyed and blank-faced as a tree frog, stared at the desk, his swear swallowed by the wind. By her eye he was too distracted to feel another insistent pull by the angry wind, nervously shifted his feet at just the wrong moment—a blast howled against the open window, and with a surprised squeal, he tumbled gracelessly from the frame into the open air.

Giving herself only a moment's shocked pause, Olivia rushed to the window, slamming it shut. She gazed out, searching for the last hints of the boy's body as it made its fatal plummet into the white—only to see a flicker of kite-wings, human-sized and shaped, looping and flitting away into the blue.

Olivia stared, brow furrowed, lips parted. She heard the footfalls of her crew drawing close, nervous yowls and a smattering of voices. She watched the swath of brown vanish into the distance as the dirigible carried on its course, none the wiser to her momentary passenger.

Orsino. The most infamous, and stubborn, pirate of these Illyrian skies. Apparently, he had acquired some new associates, and some new equipment for his pursuit.

This, she thought with a sigh, would be interesting, and decidedly unpleasant.

“Hard-hearted wench.”

Orsino took another swig of that blessedly mind-dampening drink before dropping the stein onto the table. It tottered, and he watched with lazy eyes as the boy snatched and uprighted it. A small smile graced his lips through his heartfelt anguish. Yes, this man was a good one.

“How do you like this music, my boy?” Orsino asked as he slowly lifted his pipe to his lips, breathing the luxuriously perfumed smoke deeply into his lungs. Let it calm their neighbor, his afflicted heart. “How does it speak to you?”

“It, um,” Cesario started, and seemed to ponder before answering, “it gives the very echo to the seat where love is throned.”

“What?”

“It's very nice, sir.”

“Well spoken, my boy.” Leaning forward, he clapped a hand on Cesario's thin knee and waved the stem of the pipe toward him, the movement pushing the boy back in his ornate armchair. Across the tavern Abram struck up a new tune on the harpsichord, something a bit more chipper, and around them the crew merrily clinked mugs. Oil lamps above the bar cast a warm, dim light about the room, thick with the smell of cigars and drink and filth—a pleasing atmosphere, if he did say so himself. A barmaid passed by, accidentally brushing Cesario's shoulder, making the boy jump and look about. The treble of Orsino's voice brought the nervously twitching boy back to attention. “By my life, as young as you are, I say you have known the likes of love.”

“A, a little,” he answered in that odd and oddly charming northerner's tongue, anxiously brushing the space beside his neck.

"A ha, of course!" Orsino took another swig, downing the remainder of the mug. "Guard your heart even in love, boy. Remember me, and how I have suffered!" He threw his arms up, casting them both into the air where her ships did sail, oh fair gypsy. "Fickle and inconstant for all but his beloved. Such as I am, all true lovers are! But do tell, what of your lady love? What sort of woman is she?"

Cesario sat in silence a moment, glancing up and down to take in the picture of the great lover. Orsino, in turn, took a moment to study that face—washed free of grime and steam-sweat; flight goggles draped loosely around a thin neck; skinny, glider friendly arms and legs drowning in too-large clothes. Not the picture of the well-versed lover, to be certain, but that heart-shaped face did belie some pretty charm. There was hope for him yet.

"Of your complexion," the boy finally said, and left it at that.

Orsino gave a great chuckle in answer. "She is not worth you then. What are her years?"

"About yours, captain."

"Ha! Dear boy, a lady love should always be younger of the two. Remember always that men's fancies are more giddy and unfirm, sooner lost and worn, and our affection cannot hold the bent of age. Remember that women are like roses, whose flower, once displayed, fall that very hour."

"I will remember that, sir."

"And tomorrow!" he started with a great bellow, reaching for his drink and, finding it empty, shouted for a barwench before carrying on. "Tomorrow, go again to Olivia. She will take my love, yet!"

"But captain, if she refuses—"

"I will not take no for an answer!"

"But what if you must?"

"For such sweet perfections, for all the passion of my love, all civil bounds must be leapt! Did you tarry on her ship blindfolded, boy? Soft auburn hair, cheek fair as Indian ivory, lips ripe to kiss yet all the fire and challenge they muster! Never mind her handsome coffers, though that alone might suffice, she could only be the fruit borne as Aphrodite lay down with Artemis. What ever man would not throw himself to the mercy of the winds, and hope himself a crow, just to chase at her tail fin, is a smaller and sadder man than I!"

"But—sir, if I may. What if there were a woman—h-hypothetically speaking—who loved you as much as you love this Mistress Olivia. Would she too have to be answered?"

"Don't be a fool, boy." He dropped a shilling into the barmaid's pretty palm, snatching up his mug and taking a hearty gulp. "No woman's heart has the retention for the love I feel. Their love is but appetite. Do not compare that to what I feel for Olivia!"

"Sir, I do know that—"

"What do you know?"

"I did have a sister once, sir, who," he paused, seemed to consider again his words, "who suffered for patient and secret love."

"But did she die of it, my boy?" Orsino interjected with pointed finger.

"She pined for an eternity, sir, for her love to come, and did not relent until the day she wasted away. Is that not the sort of longing you feel? M—um, *we men* say more, swear more, but we still prove more in our vows than we do in our love."

Silence fell between them for a

moment. Slowly, Orsino lifted the pipe to his lips again, considering. "You are good with your words, boy, but not forward enough with your speech."

"I am learning that, sir," Cesario answered with a sigh and a slump of thin shoulders.

Orsino felt the smile returning to his face. "We shall teach you another time. For now, prepare to seek out the lady tomorrow. A face as fine as yours, she can hardly turn you away a second time. Here." Leaning forward, he slipped the pipe into the youth's hand, patting it encouragingly. "What say you?"

As the tavern broke out into a rousing round of *It was a lover and his lass*, he chuckled as he watched Cesario grimace at the thing, turn it over, smoke it so delicately so as to not smoke at all. A man would be made of him, yet.

The shop bell tinkled merrily as Olivia stepped out through the door, bidding the keeper a good day as hefted his payment in her hand. She paused on the doorstep to check the coins within her mole-skin envelope, counting again in her head. She sighed at the lightness of the payment; shipments that had once belong entirely to Windsor Shipping divided, services quite recently scaled back. She felt her teeth gritting.

When she was satisfied as she could be, she slipped the envelope into her ledger and wove into the marketplace crowd. She shifted uncomfortably in the swelter—even her summer dress was not lean enough to avoid that human heat—but she suffered it, senses alight the instant she turned onto one of many side streets lined with

merchant stalls.

A thousand voices overwhelmed her hearing, salesmen calling over each other like squawking parrots. Bright fabrics filtered sunlight through their fibers, lighting on trinket-lined tables, the heavy scent of incense and spices tickling her nose. It was a kind feeling. The smallest of smiles turned the corners of her lips. Pleasant memories.

She paused in a booth to eye jars of eastern spices, small golden tokens, intricate tubes and pipes put on subtle display. She contemplated what the shipment prices must be, considered how to convince the foreign looking salesman onto her payroll . . .

She felt the swish of air, and heard the almost silent tip-tap of soles touching down behind her. Her copper pulse pistol was pulled from her garters and pressed to the man's ribs before she even realized who stood before her.

"Oh," she said, impassively, "it's you."

That lemur of a young man, face pale and eyes wide as tillers stared down at her, a whimper shivering from his closed lips. She glanced up, spotting the delicate swing of the fabrics hung in the rafters that made up the market's bones. She looked to him, back up, to him again. It would seem the Duke of pirates now held acrobats on his payroll.

"What do you want?" she asked, and pushed the gun against his flesh; she was almost repentant, for half a moment, at the little mewl of fear it elicited.

"I," he answered shakily, "I, of course I—I come from Captain Orsino."

Her sigh was mighty as she pulled the gun from his side, slipped it into her

ledger, and marched away. She would have infinitely preferred for their meeting to end there; the quiet trot of his feet against the cobbles, however, did cleanly away with that hope. “You waste your time, young man,” she announced, ducking through the crowd with precision he strained to match. “I have told your captain already. I cannot love him, and would not even if I could.”

“If I might ask on my master's behalf,” he called, narrowly dodging a cart bearing China-made pocket watches and ignoring the driver's swears, “what displeases you about him? With—with adoration and fertile tears, with groans of thunder and sighs of fire he laments his love for you.”

“He speaks pretty, lying heresies. Youth”—she turned to him as he caught up, realized that she did not know his name, and did not feel herself lacking for it—“you and your master know the idea he presents is simple foolishness, and I would ask that he not send you after me again. Remind him also that we are allowed, by decree of the queen, to respond with force against any who pursue the *Jessica*.”

“Lady, you and he both know of your beauty—” She stopped at a familiar stall selling rich Persian silks so quickly that he passed her by. Sadly, he reversed with great haste; her brow furrowed when, near her shoulder, she heard him muttering, “Excellently done, if God did all.” Before she could quite decipher the purpose of those words he ducked close, raising his voice again. “Lady, you are the cruelest she alive if you refuse to leave this sad world a copy.”

The laugh was unexpected, even to Olivia as it passed through her lips. She pulled herself up, extracting out a few

bronze coins to purchase a lovely copper teapot. “Oh, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted. I will give out inventory lists of my beauty.” She turned and marched, not caring if he followed, yet careful to listen for those dainty footsteps before she went on. “It shall be inventoried properly and every particle and utensil labeled to my will. *Item*, two lips indifferent red; *item*, two grey eyes, with lids to them; *item*, one neck, one chin, and so forth.”

“Why do you speak so frivolously?” he asked, and she nearly paused mid-step at the sudden note of anger in his voice. She glanced at him, then primly turned away with a roll of her eyes.

“You could say I find the idea of the sole living proprietor of the Windsor Shipping Company—on whom, dear foreigner, a good three-quarters of this market rely for their trade—to marry and turn over the business to a rogue such as Orsino rather unbecoming. I doubt there were a more thorough way to disservice my father and brother's name, may they rest in peace. Not, of course, to belabor the fact that he is a *pirate*. He may take upon him the lion's share of youth and stolen estate, and I suppose I would call him free and learned—perhaps even, for what he is, an oddly gracious person. But nonetheless, he is what he is, and he is as unfit for marriage as he is a dinner gown.”

She glanced up, and found herself taken aback by the grimace that drew across the youth's face, barely hidden behind civility. She blinked once, twice, then turned away and raised her chin, prominent enough to part a group of Turkish merchants chattering in the lane. “We do not remain the only rival to Venetian ports for nothing,” she

concluded, “and I shall not put such precious engagements in the hands of one such as your master.”

“Oh. I see what you are,” said the youth, and his voice is a dark thing, a mocking note in his tone. “You are too *proud*. But if you were the devil, you are fair. If I loved you as my master did, in your denial I would find no sense. I could not—no, no, I *would* not understand it.”

For a moment, her voice was stoppered, clever mind ceased in its calculating to stop and truly consider him. Such insolence from a servant, such frank talk. Intriguing. “Why,” she said, almost carefully, “what would you?”

“Make a cabin at your gate, and call to you within your house,” the man went on, without a pause for stammering thought. “Stow away in the most hidden places of your craft, and when I cannot, follow you to every port in which you dock. Write songs of my condemned love and sing them into the rafters in the dead of night, call your name into the skies you sail. I’d make the babbling gossip to the air and cry”—all at once, he whipped around, grabbed her by the shoulders—“Or—livia.”

Her hand nested already in her satchel, wrapped around the pistol, but did not move. She gazed at him, body stiff with surprise and something altogether unfamiliar. “You might do much,” she said, in lieu of something cleverer.

“Yes,” he answered, much the same.

They stood silently as the crowd milled about them. His lips pursed, hands light upon her shoulders, eyes wavering as he seemed to realize his speech. All lovely, she realized suddenly, and not without her own new pangs of confusion.

“What is your name?” she asked.

“Cesario is your servant’s name, cruel and fair princess.”

Oh, that you were, she thought, and dreaded to know why she did so. “You are servant to Orsino,” she said instead, “and you should return to him. Tell him not to send for me again—unless you, yourself, come to tell me how he takes it.” Her hand came free of the satchel, but with the weapon left behind. Instead, she held out a palm of gold coins from the day’s earnings, and held them out to him. “Take this for your pains.”

“I am no paid post, lady,” he answered, and pulled away. “Keep your purse.”

She was not sure why she moved as she did. As he turned to leave, her hand pushed forward, when his eyes were elsewhere, to deposit the pieces into his pocket—and, hidden among them, a ring plucked from her own finger.

In an instant he was gone, vanished again like a spirit into the ether, and she stood watching, wondering at the twisting in her belly.

“Do you think, because you are virtuous, there’ll be no more cakes and ale?”

Oh, here they went again. Maria rubbed the bridge of her nose and swirled her wine, steeling herself.

“You make an ale-house of my lady’s craft! And you heathens wonder why the servants’ quarters are so near the engine room,” Malvolio hissed, rubbing his face in that sanctimonious way he had long since perfected.

“Yes, so we might be as frivolous as we like!” Toby answered, throwing an arm around Maria's shoulder and nearly upsetting her cup. She wrinkled her nose at the smell of booze and engine grease as he leaned closer. “A stoup of wine, Maria!”

The ship groaned around them, balloon shifting loudly even at dock. Her ears nearly rang with the silence of the engine—and as sad as she was to admit the point, she knew that their cozy common room was near it for a reason—and as Toby snuggled close, she gently elbowed his ribs to press him back. “For the love of God,” she murmured, “peace!”

“Mistress Mary,” came that voice out of the dim of the room, chiding like she was but a child; her sneer was as immediate as the rising of her hackles. “If you prized my lady's favor, you would not allow this lack of civility on her ship!”

“Oh, go shake your ears!” she snapped. Her anger was enough to keep her glare in place as the engineman dropped his head into her lap, singing drunkenly to himself. “You are not her keeper, Monsieur Malvolio, as much as you seem like to believe so.”

“Some fellow has to set the order around here,” he sniffed. “You mongrels are more suited to piracy. For any of you to ask for stock in this company”—he threw a pointed glance over his shoulder, where the helmsman Andrew sat smoking an opium pipe, fingers delicate and eyes glazed—“is despicable.”

She opened her mouth to speak again—to point out, perhaps, how the puritan's own love-lorn looks were hardly appropriate to a ship's steward—when the parlor door creaked open. In strode Feste, the mischievous smile he focused on her as

familiar as it was telling. “My lady,” the boatswain said with an overwrought bow, “*the* lady would like a piece of your company, if you would be so kind.”

With a hum and another rub of her head, Maria nodded, hardly noticing how her other hand toyed with the engineman's hair. “She *was* much out of quiet today.”

“Quite. Do not worry, lovely, I'll keep the order here in your absence.”

She did not miss Toby's pitiful groan of objection as he was forced from his resting place, Andrew's drug-induced confusion, nor the knowing raise of Feste's eyebrow. Most difficult to ignore, of course (and the one she would have wished to miss the least) was the small, jealous glare that Malvolio sent her way. Her mouth quirked in amusement.

“Be patient,” she murmured to Toby as she leaned close, giving his ear a flick. “I'll make a nayword of him yet, if I have enough wit to lay straight in my bed.”

“I'm not sure if you are capable of that, my good wench.” Another clap to his ear as she stood brought him to laughter, with a final, “Good night, Penthesia,” following her from the room.

Cesario. The name, a stubborn a thing as its owner, refused to leave her mind.

From under her blankets she raised her hand, turning it over in the pale light of the moon, squinting at the finger where her ring had been. It did not feel light for it, did not lack for it. She wondered if he had found the thing. She wondered why she cared.

She closed her eyes, trying to let

sleep take her—against her eyelids, she found the image of his face, lovely, even while full of rage. That passion, the feel of his hands on her shoulders, how those fingers would feel gripping her own with that same fervor. Thin and industrious, all limbs and clumsiness—yet, that spirit. It filled her mind in most uncomfortable ways.

She opened her eyes again, and gazed at the ceiling, the subtle movement of the room.

“Even so quickly may one catch the plague?” she whispered, silently mouthed, quieter than the quiet.

Slowly, she rolled over, glancing at the bundle of human and blanket that lay beside her, quietly snoozing. She reached over, touched that rough cheek, brushing hair from closed eyes. Maria sighed in her sleep and snuggled close, breasts pressing to Olivia's side.

She pressed a kiss to her second mate's mouth, and silently begged confusion to leave her.

The boy didn't even notice as Orsino peered over his shoulder, squinting at that closed palm. Only two heavy hands crashing down on his shoulders were enough to bring Cesario back to reality. “What do you have there?”

Cesario, light as he was, probably would have leapt into the sky had Orsino's palms not anchored him. As it were, it took all his grip to keep the boy from tumbling off the ship dock.

“N-nothing!”

Orsino chuckled, ruffling that light hair, paler than the white sunrise slowly lifting over the sea. “Don't try to fool me, boy. A favor from your lady, I bet.”

“I—” Cesario partially answered, gulping with that adam's apple that seemed never to have come in (Orsino couldn't help, at that thought, but notice that sleek and fair neck beneath those threads of hair, and found his eyebrows rising at the movement of his own mind), “I suppose so, captain.”

“Ha, no room in this world for uncertainty, boy.” He gave those shoulders a squeeze, a coaching rub; the boy squirmed, and Orsino made a mental note to work some lean mass onto those bird's-hollow bones. “Anything you want in this life, make it yours. It shan't be there in the next.”

“I'll—I—I'll remember that, sir. Captain, erm, could you, perhaps, please—stop that.”

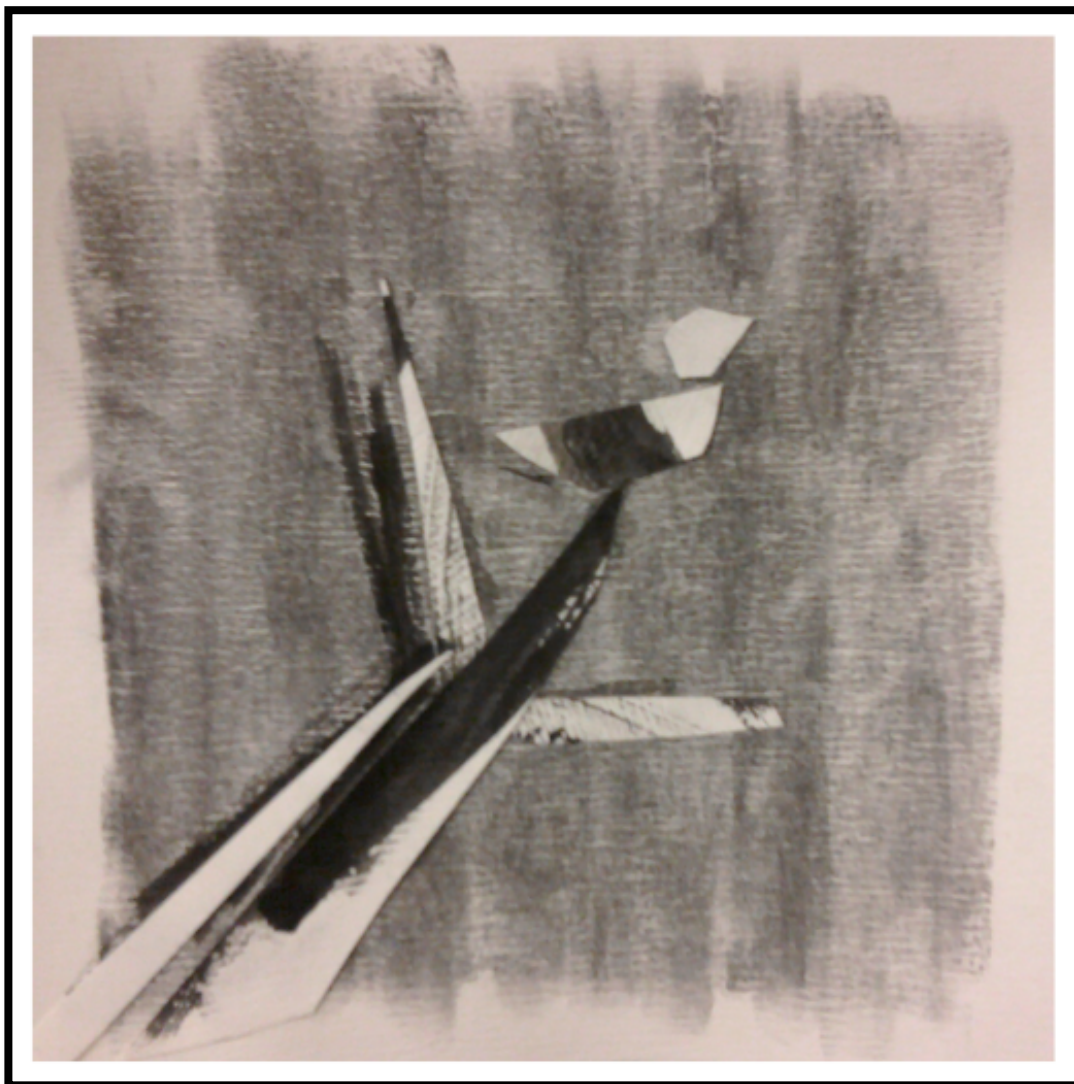
Orsino laughed outright this time, hauling the boy up by his shoulders and turning them both toward the cabin door.

“You'll be rid of me, boy, when you put yourself to swabbing. I want this ship well-cleaned by the time we raise anchor.”

“Yes, captain,” Cesario answered quickly, and Orsino could not help but admire the delicate pink hue on the boy's face as he quickly strode toward the hold. The smile left him, however, when he realized just where his thoughts had drifted.

This—this would take some consideration, he realized. It was only as he was walking away that he realized how nervous he was to do so.

*Ashley is a senior with a double major in English and Psychology.
She has previously been published in Unbound.*



Yegi Jeong

BIRD

Ink and Charcoal

6" x 6"

Yegi is a junior with a double major in History and Psychology. This is her first publication.

THE LEAF

—C.J. Corey

He is a leaf in a river; fallen
fruit petal in October; Huck Finn on his raft.
This Poet has different names for scrolls.
Such as folios, or leaflets.
He is the Man
lurking in the jungle. Voltaic.
He is ripe and pulpy.
Naked Emerald.

Webs dispersed across his skin.
Imprinted.
He writes these veiny runes,
dwindling from his threaded rachis,
clinging to the hardwood,
kissing the wind, drunk
from the suns libations,
then cleansed by the cloudburst.
A Leaf of Lyric.
Willow pluming.

A vernal tuft; a fount of flowering.
He flutters with the wind,
drips in the rain,
preens his own feathers.
A burgeoning creation,
the poets song flourishing.
Vert as clover, a rush of viridian.
He's a cloak and a lush. Absinthe.
Malachite.

His color will evanesce. Shades
of mood and season. Lime, cherry, and lemon
plucked
at the spine from anchoring foliage,
he dips and dives, slicing the air
with wilting scent.

He buds and wanes
in a swift ocean breath.
A swashbuckling bard
spilling ink over soil.
Poetic verses.

He flickers and he sings; sprouts and bates.
A verdurous visionary. Living and dying
every year, washed away
from the earth's skin to the sea:
the unknown poet
floating down the river.

*C.J. is an English major.
This is his first publication.*



Sam Cohen

LANDSCAPE PIE:

THE SEA, THE LAND, THE SKY

Fabric, Acrylic, Paper, Canvas, Hand-Stitched

50" Diameter x 7.5" Depth

NO STONE LEFT UNTURNED

—Mary Zilar

Henry hobbled through the park with his cane, following the curves of the sidewalk. Dusk was quickly descending and the lamps had already begun to glow orange. He could not find his glasses. The back of his neck was sticky from the effort of searching, and he stopped to unzip his jacket. It was still summer but the air was cool, and he welcomed the passing breeze.

He couldn't stop for long, though. His blurry vision was getting worse with the setting sun. With renewed vigor he rustled through the nearby bushes, turned over stones, parted flowers, dug in the sandpit. He checked the muddy drinking fountain, swept through the wood chips, peered into small crevices. And yet, he still could not find his glasses! His frustration mounted. A crow cawed, laughing at him. *You'll never find what you're looking for*, it seemed to say.

He scanned the area to see if there was anyone nearby who could help him. Squinting, he spotted a few children who were still meandering around the park, and he decided to ask them if they had seen his glasses. They were far away and when he got close to them he realized that they weren't really children at all. They were teenagers, clad in black clothing with silver spikes. Their faces were pierced and their arms were covered in tattoos. He

contemplated turning back until he remembered his own faded tattoo— a souvenir from his navy days. Maybe he could relate to them, after all! He rubbed his sweaty palms together and wiped them on his shorts. He could do this.

"Excuse me, but you haven't seen a pair of glasses lying around anywhere, have you?" he addressed the girl with purple pigtails. He liked pigtails since they reminded him of his 4-year old granddaughter Sandra. Or was it Sheila? Oh, her name... her name... he had it this morning.

The pigtailed girl raised an eyebrow, taking in his appearance. He wore a lightweight magenta jacket over a bright orange sweater vest, and his shorts left his boney legs exposed. The girl snorted, and he wondered why. It couldn't be his clothes, could it? He dressed pretty sharp for his age. The neighborhood ladies all complimented him for his socks-and-sandals combo. Just the other day Ms. Bountiful had, upon seeing his shoe choice, exclaimed, "Why, what nice Christmas socks you have on!" Her grin seemed to spread from one ear to the other. He liked to make people smile.

The girl with the pigtails stifled her laughter. "Sorry old man, we haven't seen your glasses."

Oh. Oh, dear. “Thank you anyway, Miss.” He sighed. Where hadn’t he searched? The playground? But he hadn’t even gone by there, had he?

He’d better check just to be sure.

He shuffled over to the tall, banana-colored slide and squatted, eyes skimming over the woodchips. It made no sense. He couldn’t remember setting down his glasses at all. But then again, he had been forgetting a lot of things lately—like why he had come to the park in the first place. Hadn’t he been with someone...? Who was it...? What was her name? He pursed his lips.

“Oh, where are those glasses?” he exclaimed. By now the sky had darkened and the purple clouds were barely visible. His tired eyes strained to see the ground around him.

“Are you looking for something, Mister?” A small boy walked up to him. Thank heavens!

“I seem to have lost my glasses. Would you mind helping me look?” Please, please, he thought. The young have great eyesight; he should be able to find them!

“Sure!” the boy agreed.

They both squatted and searched and searched. While squatting, the boy looked over at the man and glanced down at his feet. “Nice Christmas socks!” he commented, voice genuine. The boy lifted up the legs of his pants and exposed the tops of his own red reindeer socks. They shared a toothy grin.

After a time, the boy rose and went over to check the squeaky swings. He ran up and down the playground equipment and slid down the slides. No sign of the

glasses. He walked back over to the man.

“Sorry, sir,” he mumbled. “I couldn’t find anything, and I need to go. My mom doesn’t like me out at night.” Henry stood, his legs cracking. He stretched.

“It’s alright. Thank you for helping me search,” he replied. The boy beamed and ran off.

Henry’s face fell. He still hadn’t found his glasses. When he realized he would have to come back the following day, his shoulders slumped forward in defeat. He dragged himself all the way to the parking lot and started up his old Buick to drive home. He hoped he could make it with his fuzzy vision.

The engine rumbled as he rolled out of the parking lot, and he turned on the radio in an attempt to drown out the noise. Sighing, he listened as Billie Holiday crooned his favorite song, *Summertime*, through the crackling speakers. Her voice sounded too soft, though, and he moved to adjust the volume. Looking down, his eyes swept across the dash and, though his vision was unclear, he saw the outline of what appeared to be—

His glasses! There they were. His glasses! He placed them on the bridge of his nose and suddenly his face lit up in realization.

“Shelby!” he said triumphantly. His four-year old granddaughter Shelby had begged him to take her to the playground that morning. He must have taken off his glasses on the drive over. He let out a whoop and praised God for giving him back his sight.

He had finally found what he was looking for.

*Mary is a sophomore majoring in English.
This is her first publication.*

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