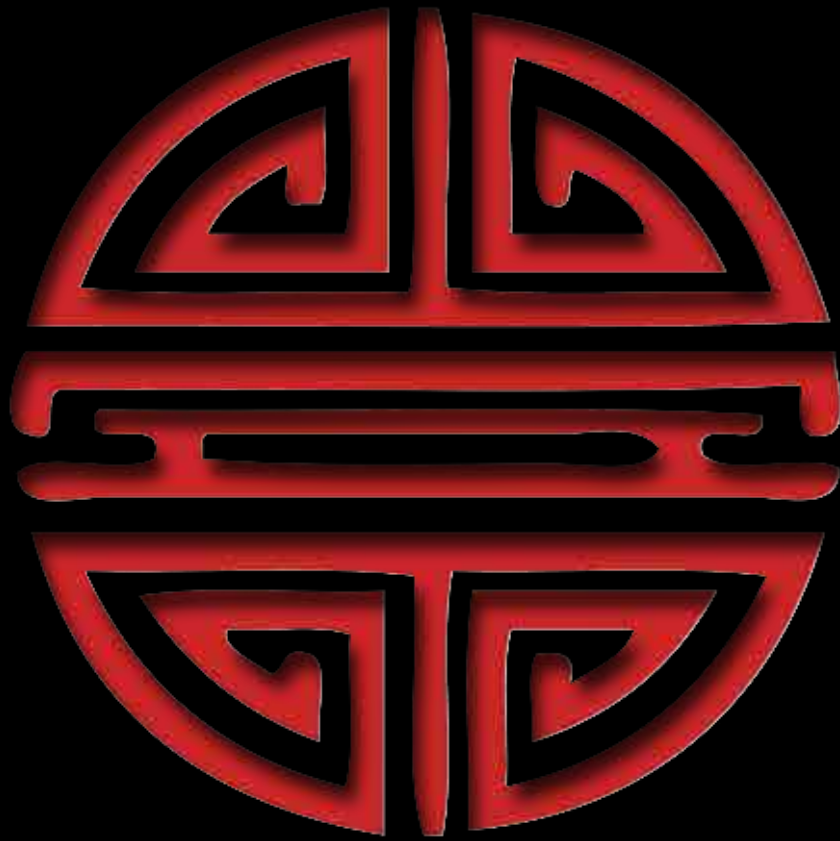


# Filibuster 2011



## The Director's Cut

Directed by  
Kevin Garner

Raptor Animatronics  
David Stauffer

Key Grip  
Robert Klevay



Special Thanks  
God Almighty  
Parents & Friends  
AUM SGA

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Three stories featured "teaser trailers" in *Filibuster 2011*. Axolotls have volunteered to indicate those three stories.

# Bonus Footage

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*Hark! In 2010, one Elizabeth D. Woodworth, Ph.D., levvied upon her tutelage the signal mission of fashioning with cunning and wit a series of buttons pertaining to a time both Victorian and naturalistic in sensibilities. Verily, many buttons were made, yet few were chosen for publication. These six signify the*  
**chosen ones.**



**ALERT!**

**AXOLOTL INVASION  
IMMINENT!  
SEEK SHELTER  
IMMEDIATELY!**



**Daunt Book Store**

E. D. Woodworth

Store front seduces  
with fancy windows, travel books—  
I submit three times.



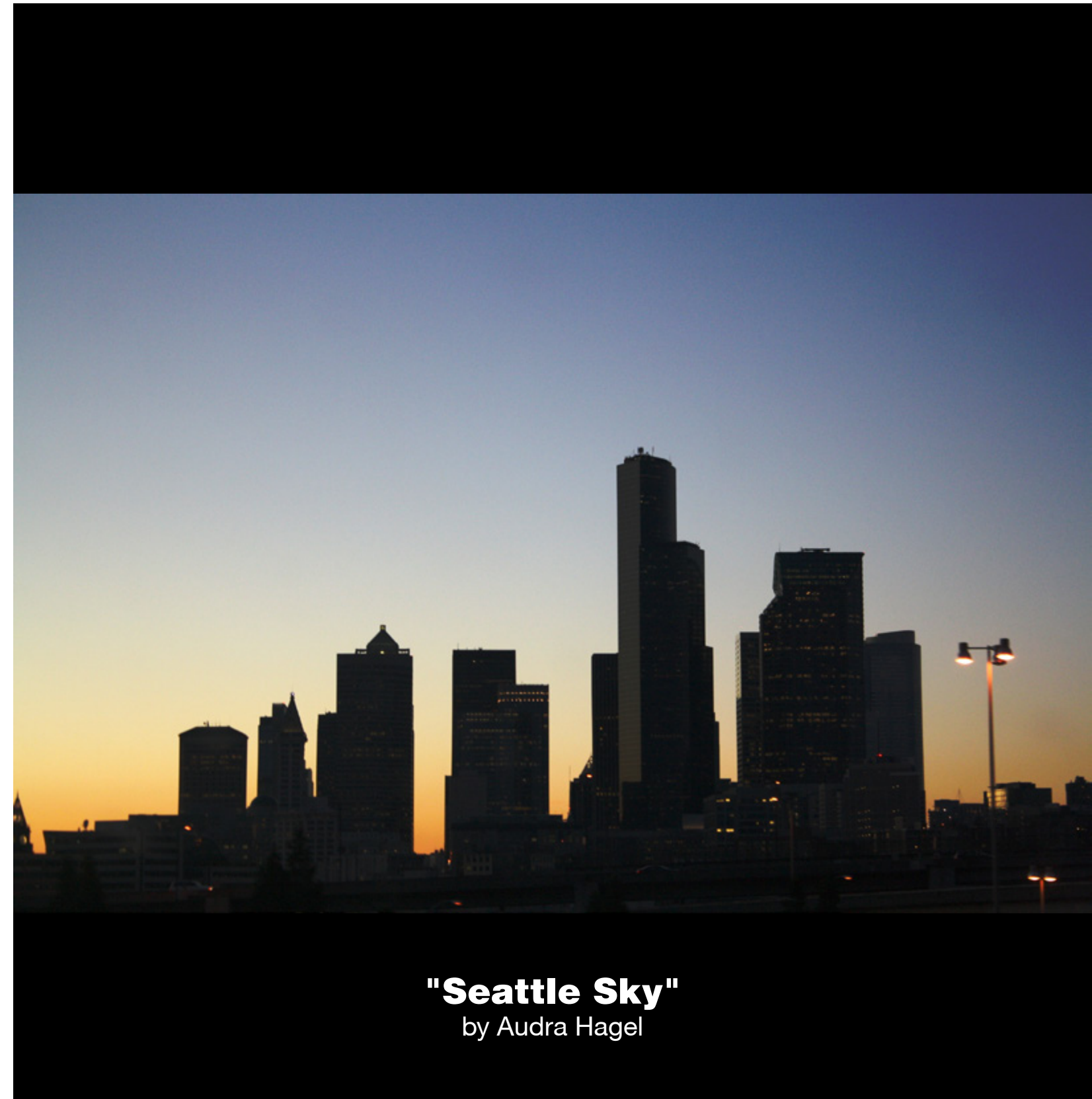
## **A Solvent in the Morning Coffee**

Joseph S. Brannon

When they made the morning,  
They forgot to make a waking mechanism,  
A soul of consciousness to propel us in  
Our efforts to make the night.

When they made the winds,  
They forgot the sting of sleet,  
The cold of winter, the hollow  
Survival of warm life.

So let's make coffee,  
Let's make the world better,  
Let's fix these forgotten systems,  
Dig up the beast-bones of Entropy,  
And transfer life from all death.



**"Seattle Sky"**  
by Audra Hagel

## Peanut Crumbs

Emily Young

"What the hell, Joy? Come in, come in! What are you doing here? Where have you been? I thought you were dead, in prison, or even... married by this point!"

I choked back the rest of my interrogation as she walked into my place. It was an ancient two-bedroom townhouse in the historical district of Montgomery, Alabama. Don't let the name fool you. Although Montgomery was the place to be back in the day, absolutely nothing worth anything has happened since the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, since those days, I'm sure the city has done nothing but go to Hell in a handbag, but who am I to say? As I latched up the old door, making sure to twist each bolt completely, I wondered how she had gotten there. Surely, she didn't walk; if she did, I wondered how she had arrived there safely. The historic district was infamous for being home to the upper-class families of Montgomery, but surrounding the little district on all four sides was the interstate, ghetto, and then more ghetto.

She sat, or rather plopped into an old armchair I had bought just for reading. As she sunk in, I realized that Joy had aged. She'd aged not in the "oh my God what happened" kind of way, but in the "my God you're beautiful" kind. Four years had passed since I said goodbye to that heart-shaped face, and if you don't think I thought about it every day... you're wrong. I stood there over her; she hadn't even said hello. Finally, she looked up; I felt every ounce of frustration I had with her drip away as I melted into a puddle on the floor. That was Joy. She didn't have to say anything; hell, I didn't even want her to. I went to the kitchen and searched the cupboard for a clean glass. My damn hands wouldn't stop shaking, and my mind just wouldn't stop racing. Had she missed me? Is that why she came? Her favorite drink was whiskey, like I'd ever forget. I poured a couple ounces of the dark liquor, closed the

bottle and thought better of it. As I filled the glass to the rim she spoke.

"Jack, if you've got any whiskey I'd love a drink. If not, don't worry about it."

I steadied my hand and reentered the den with full intention to get to the bottom of things. Perhaps it was pure determination, perhaps the quick gulps of what was left of the before-mentioned bottle. I, nonetheless, had fortitude. My brisk steps halted as I approached the vintage chair holding nothing more than a bundle of sleeping innocence. I use the word innocence sparingly, especially knowing what that bundle was capable of. I put the glass beside her in hopes that its aroma would arouse her to life again, yet nothing occurred but a slight twitching of her little foot, as if she were dreaming of music. This thought reminded me of our first encounter. I explained before that it had been four years since I last saw her; however, I knew her for a year before she disappeared.

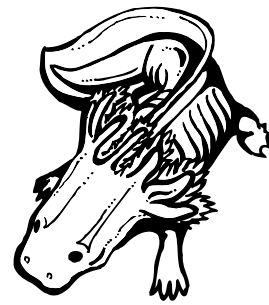


"Hey Buddy, fill up another pitcher for us will ya?" The bartender muffled his words into inaudible curses as he filled the pitcher with more head than actual beer. Looking back, I realize it was probably due to my constant demands given to "Buddy" when his nametag certainly said Maurice. Then, however, I was positive that his irritated persona was goaded only by the boisterous fun coming from the back side of the bar that my pack surrounded. I was there with a few friends from the nearby college that we attended, or rather sometimes attended. For us, school was a piece of cake and simply got in the way of more difficult matters—women. Where the hell in Alabama were we ever going to find a woman that a) had all her teeth, b) spoke understandable English, and/or c) had read at least one book in her lifetime. Times were tough in this department, but boy did we have fun trying to find a gal that fit the criteria!

"Put it on Jack's tab along with our next round of shots,

will ya, Buddy!" yelled the fellow to my right. His name was Michael, but we all called him Mick. With every beer, his speech got louder and his face got redder. It looked damn close to exploding as he yelled to Buddy that we needed another round of Goose to add to the already endless empty glasses in front of us. Mick had a way of making even me seem like a gentleman, most obviously because of his demeanor. He was a 6'8" giant and filled the shoes of one. Everything about him was big: voice, laugh, arrogance, vanity. He had a buzz cut that only added to his appearance of an altogether ass, and not even his baby blue eyes could give him any charm. He came from a rich family that owned a hospital on the east side of town. The irony is that neither he nor his family was the least bit tender, so I always imagined the hospital being more like a prison or an asylum of sorts.

**He had a buzz cut  
that only added  
to his appearance  
of an altogether ass**



"Damnit, Mick! Why am I always the one picking up the tab? You're the one with all the money!" I never really minded paying for our Saturday night fun, but rousing up old Mick was a fast way to liven things up. The bartender slammed three semi-full shot glasses down and walked away without a word.

"To Greg and his twenty-two years of insignificance!" Mick's speech slurred as he raised his glass to the youngest of our group. Greg was our baby-faced scapegoat. If anything bad happened, it was always blamed on him. Good grief was he a good sport about it. We had a bad habit of using the kid for bait because the women simply flocked to his curly-headed mop, and "the lightweight" wasn't a threat after a few rounds.

At this point in the night, Greg was lucky to get the cup to his mouth without spilling it in an embarrassing spray pattern on his lap. We had taken him to the same bar exactly one year earlier for his twenty-first. I had never before and never since seen a person projectile vomit like someone straight out of the movies. Good ol' Greg; he was plastered.

"Well Mick, that's one of us down and two left standing. Let's make this interesting shall we?" Mick and I always had a competitive nature, and women were our usual target. We would pick the best looking woman in the place and each have a go at picking her up. You would think I'd have an advantage with an actual flesh-colored face, but his scarlet red cheeks somehow had character. I had this theory that women liked to feel overpowered and a bit threatened, and Mick's giant body did the trick. I, on the other hand, had to use my wit as ammunition. My usual strategy was a sarcastic joke followed by a recited poem. Women are easy. All you have to do is sound smart, buy them a drink, and boom... you've got her in the bag.

"I'll take that challenge, Jack. That one right there should do the trick. She's already been giving me the eye."

I looked to the end of the bar to see what would become my everything. She was perfect in that she wasn't. She was short with dark hair and a nice curvy body. She had these eyes that beamed straight through you and lacerated with each blink. Oh, and her lips. Those lips. They were poisonous. It was simple. I was hers from the very first moment I saw her sitting alone there at the bar drinking what I would soon learn was the strongest whiskey in stock.

"I'm going over there. Wish me luck, brother." Mick stood up, steadied himself, and began to walk towards her direction. He got about five feet away when her tapping foot stopped and her eyes looked up. Without saying a word, she told him no. As quickly as he had walked over, Mick walked back with his face a new shade of red. Her foot continued on tapping.

"Wooooow! Haha, Mick. Looks like I might just have to

show you how it's done!" I felt my heart shoot up to my throat as I realized the failure that was inevitably about to happen. I had to try though. If not, Mick won by default. I brushed the peanut crumbs from my lap and stood up fast, too fast. My head started spinning and before I knew it, I had stumbled into the general direction of the little beauty.

"Good God, man. Have a seat. You look like you're about to fall flat out!" She had spoken to me. Her voice matched that imperfect beauty by being just soft enough to strain the ears. Her hand steadied the barstool as I climbed aboard. I was wobbly, but it wasn't completely because of the liquor. I knew it was now or never, so I spoke.

"Thanks. Can I buy ya a drink?" I felt the words clumsily fall from my lips as I slurred my usual question to her. She was still sitting beside me, so I assumed it was going well.

"Naw, hunny. You better let me buy you one. Hey Maurice! Can I buy the fella a water?" She winked at the bartender who laughingly filled a glass with water. As he placed it down, he gave me one hell of a sarcastic smirk.

"You be careful with this one, Joy. He is obviously a smooth operator." That damn bartender thought he was funny, and I was seconds from teaching him otherwise when I realized I had caught her name.

"So, Joy is it? That's a beautiful name. A man could always use a bit more Joy in his life." Man, I was on a role.

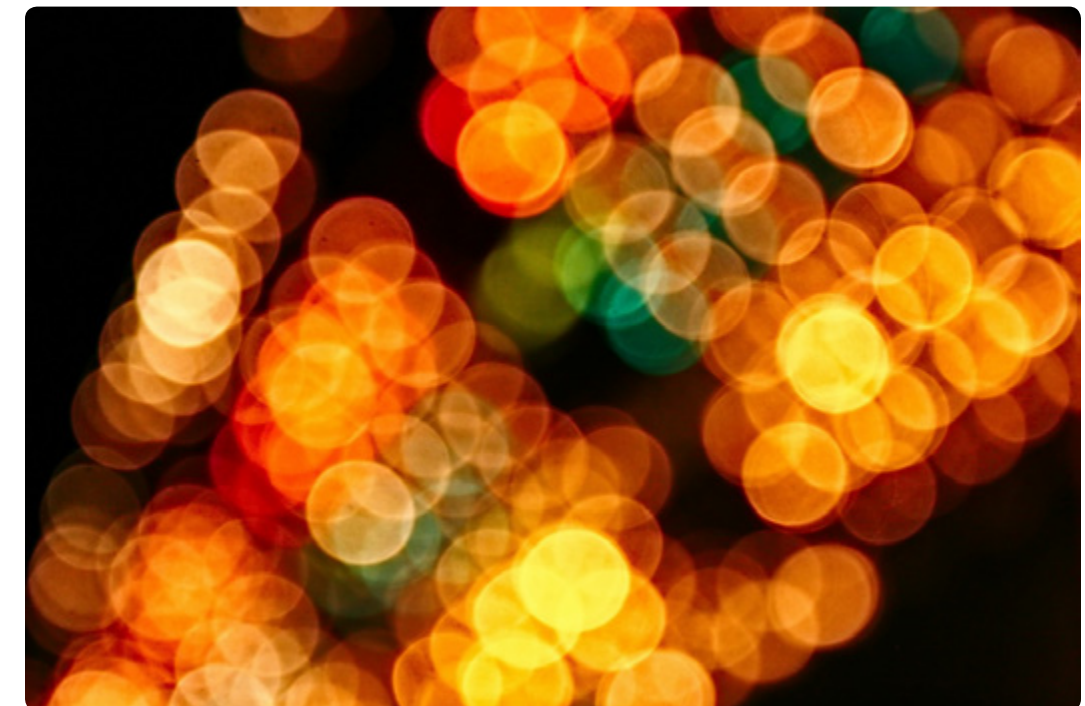
"Listen kid. I'm not looking for anything serious right now, but you sure are funny. I need a little more laughter in my life. How about we meet here again tomorrow, only don't bring your pals." I realized what was happening but somehow couldn't make a sound. I shook my head yes as she stood up.

"Alright, tomorrow then. Thanks for the drink." She slid her bill over to me as she started for the door. She hadn't even asked my name. I was silly drunk, but certain that I'd be in that stool at that time tomorrow. Little did I know that this encounter would shape the next twelve months of my life and eventually

lead to a morning without Joy. With the same mysterious confidence that she walked into my life, she would walk out of it.



I had cursed her name for four years, but I never regretted an ounce of it. The year that we spent together made me realize who I was and what I was doing. She gave me a purpose—to be worthy. After she left, I spent every day determined to improve myself towards a man that deserved Joy. Now as she slept there in front of me, I realized that I had done it. Finally, I know that I am who she comes to when times are tough. When she has nowhere else to go, she can depend on me. Hell, I don't even care why she was here—just that she was. After stroking her hair goodnight, I clicked the light off and walked upstairs. I know I could have woken her up and demanded that she apologize for breaking my heart, but what would that have changed? I knew she wasn't there to stay, but only passing through. In fact, I knew that Joy wouldn't be there in the morning.







## "Too Old for This"

by Alicia Fry

## Breakfast

Matthew K. Kemp

you smell like vanilla  
 though you're anything but –  
 and because of that I smile to  
 m  
 y  
 s  
 e  
 l  
 f  
 and keep drinking my morning coffee

## I Tried

Jina DuVernay

I finally decided to venture out and made my way to the beach.  
 Looking out at the big, wide ocean, I saw many other islands.  
 I picked one particular one. It was close to my own island and very similar.  
 It seemed like home.  
 I didn't know how to swim, but I was determined to get there.  
 With my life jacket on, I doggy-paddled my way there and back over and over  
 Until suddenly the water began to be cold, then colder.  
 And then one day I even saw a shark's fin and finally his sharp teeth.  
 It was around that time that the water froze over.  
 I was sad and didn't want to learn how to ice skate.  
 I already swam the best way I could.  
 Eventually, I tried to break the ice to get the waters back to the way they used to be.  
 But I just ended up falling,  
 Hurting and embarrassing myself.  
 So, I finally decided to get up and get back to my own island and tend to it.  
 I spent far too long over on your island.  
 Eventually, the right waters will guide me to the island worth the effort of my travels.

## A Can of Jesus

MeKoi Scott

Batman and Robin are at a bar after a grueling day at the Justice League. Robin spins on his stool, surveying the room. A table crowded with a bunch of women and one man catches Robin's attention.

"Holy crap, Batman. It's Jesus."

"Who?" asks Batman.

"Jesus. The Christ," says Robin.

"Have you gone and died on me?"

"No, he's in the room. Over there, with all those women."

"And?" asks Batman, taking another swig from a bottle without turning around.

"He's doing something. I bet he's doing his famous party trick."

"What, the turn water into wine thing?"

"Yeah. I'm sure it makes him popular with the ladies," says Robin.

"Gets kinda old after the millionth time, don't you think?"

"Hey. Maybe we should ask him if he wants to join the league."

"So we can become his disciples?" asks Batman.

"He does fight the greatest evil."

"Who? The devil? The devil isn't shit. All he does is influence people who aren't that hard to influence in the first place into doing things they want to do. And all Jesus does is watch and probably shakes his head and scratches his balls. If he was any good, there would be fewer evil doers and then I

could enjoy my riches in peace."

"Come on, Batman. He has more super powers than we could ever have."

"What are you getting at, Robin?"

"That he is qualified and experienced. At least we could go over there and say hello."

Robin jumps off the stool and pulls Batman by the arm.

"Alright, but don't expect me to Mister Congeniality," says Batman.

They walk over to the table that Jesus and about nine or ten women occupy.

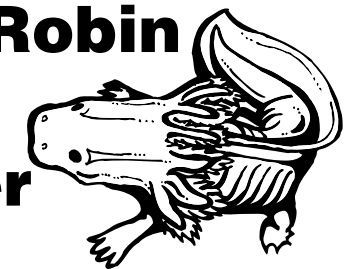
"Excuse me," says Robin as he taps Jesus, who has his back turned, on the shoulder.

Jesus looks over his shoulder at Robin and then turns back to his spectators.

"Pardon me ladies, I seem to have company. Enjoy your drinks and you have my blessings."

The crowd of women part in separate directions. Jesus fingers his hair behind his ears and stands with arms behind him, a hand holding the other wrist.

**"Excuse me," says Robin  
as he taps Jesus  
[. . .] on the shoulder**



Robin subtly shifts his weight back and forth between legs, trying to contain an excitement that could no longer be restrained.

"Holy shit. Pleasure to meet you, man," says Robin, jumping up and down.

Jesus nods. "Now, Robin, no need for such language."

"I'm sorry," says Robin as he covers his mouth, and while Batman twists his mouth and turns his head.

"It's okay, my son. Repent and ye shall receive forgiveness," says Jesus.

"Whatever," says Batman.

"We were wondering, Batman and I," Robin says, "if you want to join the Justice League."

Batman coughs.

"As you know, where I reside is hot most of the time, and it seems that I would be required to wear spandex as you two are wearing if I join. And no disrespect, but I find spandex unfashionable and a little feminine," says Jesus.

"And that dress he's wearing isn't?" asks Batman under his breath.

"Ah, Batman. I've heard about you," says Jesus.

"Have you really?" asks Batman, crossing his arms with a smug look on his face.

Jesus leans to whisper in Batman's ear. "I heard through the grapevine, as they say, about your impotence problem, Bruce."

"You motherfuck—," says Batman, rearing back for a punch. But Jesus sees this a mile away and casually takes his time in weaving Batman's mighty but in vain punch. Jesus clinches his fist and swings an uppercut at Batman's exposed torso but doesn't connect. Instead a golden glow extends from Jesus's arm and into Batman's ribs. Batman immediately grabs his side and proceeds to spit blood.

"What the fuck was that?" asks Batman, his teeth bloody.

"That was the holy ghost," says Robin.

"That it was, boy wonder," says Jesus.

"Wow!" says Robin. "That's a superpower there."

"It was a pleasure meeting you both," says Jesus, "but I have to be on my way."

Jesus pulls a glass of water from the middle of the table and waves a hand over it, turning the water into wine.

"Here, Batman. A gift from me to show there's no hard feelings and that I still love you."

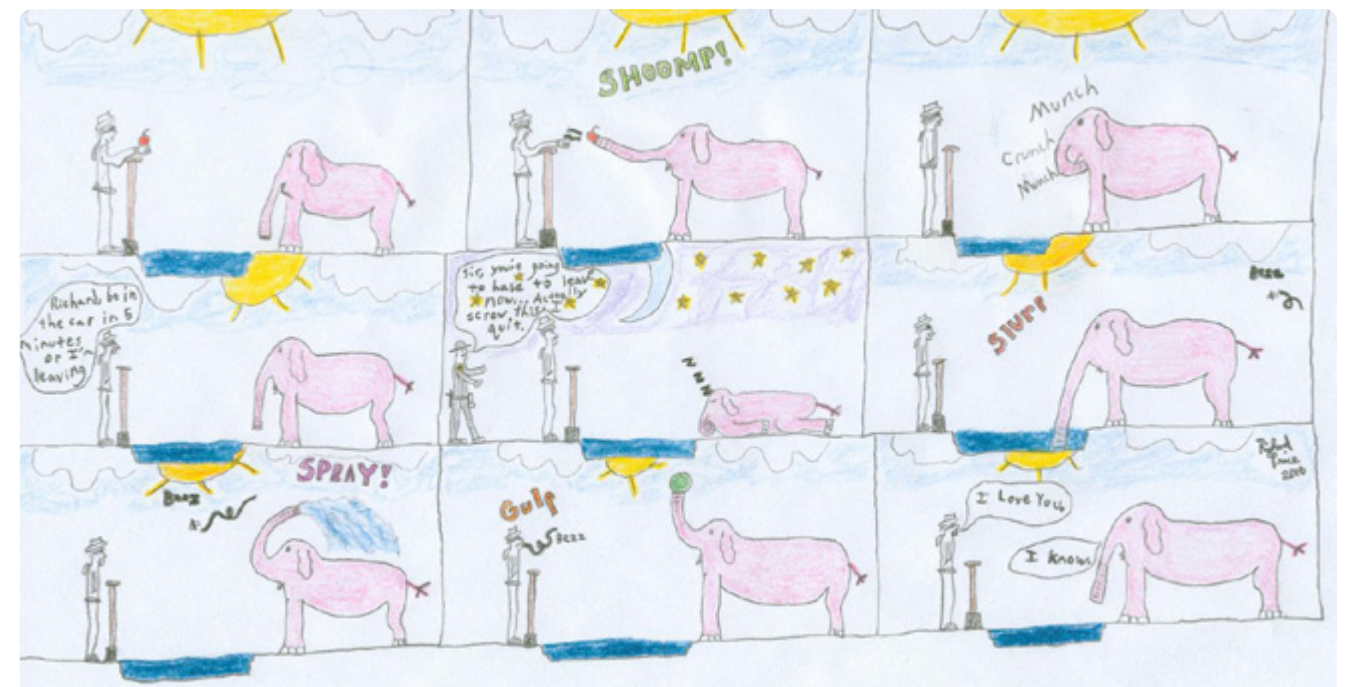
Jesus nods his head to Robin and pats Batman on the shoulder as he walks past.

The bartender, who witnessed the whole build-up, walks to the table and picks up the glass of wine that Jesus left for Batman.

"I don't really like that guy. You know," says the bartender. "I know he's suppose to be the savior and all, but he's not saving me nothing. I lose a hundred dollars, easy, every time he comes in here. And what, am I supposed to kick him out?"

The bartender brings the glass of wine to his face and looks at it intently and then proceeds to take a swallow.

"But this is good shit though," says the bartender.



**"Comic"** by Richard Price

## "The Good Old Days"

by Arvilla Fee



### Anger

Casey Gewirtzman

She is a whore who, in the dark of night,  
comes to you in silent company.  
She plays a tune for just your own delight  
when alone is all you want to be.  
She gives herself entirely for your pleasure,  
and you live in her every want and dream.  
Her's is an ecstasy without measure,  
and your passion burns so bright and clean.  
Sunrise comes, and you open your curtain,  
and sight, adjusted to darkness, goes blind.  
Actions of the night, which seemed so certain,  
become clear in the day as most unkind.  
She's left you after taking her pay,  
to sleep and wait for your next call.  
And as you rise to face your day,  
you discover stains left on your wall.  
Your wife, Forgiveness, works the graveyard,  
and she's coming home to see you soon.  
Facing her after this will be hard,  
but—next time—try to see better when under the moon.

## Cosmic Wisdom

Edgardo Velez

*Inspired by and dedicated to Dr. Barbara Wiedemann*

As I Ponder at the Stars, the Moon, and the Sun,  
I see their rays of light shining upon us,  
Nurturing us with the knowledge of the Cosmos,  
Literature Interpretations,  
Organized Sound,  
Mathematical Definitions,  
And the knowledge of its own origins,  
And while I look around, I see others shining,  
Shining even brighter than I;  
I begin to wonder if my brilliance has reached its peak.  
Is it because I have reached the pinnacle of life,  
Or is it the need to expand the surface of my mind  
In order to absorb more of the light?  
Others shine brighter  
While I go deeper into wisdom.



## "World Biggest Footnote"

by Lacey Young



## Excerpt from *Midnight Seraphs*

Roya S. Hill

### *Amari*

Night. Darkness. Two things that the Guardians craved. For centuries, they lived in the shadows, waiting for the days when the humans would believe them only to be myths, strange fantasies. But they were more than myths. They kept order in the order-less world of the humans. Without them, there would be more kidnappings, more assaults, more murders. There was only one rule amongst the Guardians—no exposure to a human, and if it should happen, never allow that human to live.

The Guardians lived somewhat primitively in what the humans would call a palace that sits at the top of a high mountain, almost in the clouds. They have no use for the devices of the humans but wear their clothing outside the palace walls as to rouse no suspicion. When they left the palace, it was at morning, but what was morning for them was night for the humans.

The king and queen rule the Guardians. The king and queen will rule for one hundred years and at the end of their one hundred years, when they are set to die, a new king and queen replace them. Amari and her cousins, Ezra and Brynn, were next in line to be king and queen.

She thought of this as she and her team sat perched in the trees watching the Craigs, the little family who on this night was in mortal danger. Amari could not understand the humans. Their lives were not as flawed and imperfect as they liked to believe. They had the free will to come and go as they please. They had the ability to interact with everyone they met. They could share secrets, form relationships, and do the good things their creator meant for them. But the humans never cared for this. They are jealous and greedy creatures. They cannot live their lives for coveting what the next person has. Humans sickened Amari and the Guardians.

The little family of three returned to their quiet home with the white picket fence. The little golden-haired child napped against her father's shoulder while the mother looked upon them, love filling her eyes. Perhaps they were returning from the talking screens that the humans enjoyed so or some type of entertainment that was sure to exhaust the little one.

Whatever the case, the family walked slowly up the stone steps, thinking they had all the time in the world, but the masked figures sitting in the van parked down the street refuted this. Jealousy, anger, and greed came from those men. They, too, lusted for what someone else had. Thievery and death were in their thoughts.

*How many are there in the van, Koen?* she asked. The Guardians spoke their own language.

*Four. All with weapons.*

*Vigilance. Keep them away from the house,* Amari said.

*The tin box?* Savion inquired, meaning the van.

*Leave it. Their police can sort it out,* she answered.

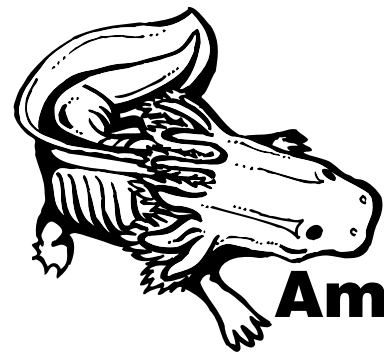
Moments later, all of the lights inside of the house were extinguished. The shifting movements of the men in the van grew fervent as she and the others prepared for what was to come.

With talons sprouted, teeth bared, and wings spread, Amari and the other Guardians took to the darkened sky. The wind wrapped around her invitingly as she hovered over the van. Just as the lights lining the streets flickered off, Amari touched down on the roof and Koen punctured the four wheels.

The men scrambled to prepare their weapons yelling at one another. The stink of fear wafted towards her when the back doors thrust open. Slowly, silently, she crawled towards the back of the van as the masked man stepped out, his weapon aimed at the sky. Above her, the three Guardians flew in a circle, like dark angels descending. She stretched her wings wide behind her, flapping them twice, a signal for the closest to take the man before he could warn the others.

Savion was nearer than the others were. He swooped down, grabbing the man by his throat so that only a helpless squeak passed his lips as he was taken in the air. Three remain. The men were panicked now. They wanted to leave. But how could they leave with the wheels gone? They decided to take the risk of walking.

Amari crouched low to the roof as the three frightened men stepped out, weapons ready. Above, Koen and Journey flapped their wings, frightening the men even more.



**No escape,  
Amari whispered.**

*No escape*, Amari whispered. She spread her wings, flying towards the leader. With her hand wrapped around his throat, she lifted him from the road, ascending towards the stars. She did not see what became of the other two, but she knew their fate would be no different from the one who plead for mercy in her arms.

His blood began to spill as he thrashed, cutting himself on her talons. She stopped her ascent. She changed course and took the human to a deserted field. He fell back against the dirt having no time to run as she straddled him, pinning his wrists against the loose soil. The man's eyes stretched wide underneath the black mask he wore. Most Guardians would not look at their faces, but Amari was different. She wanted to see the eyes of the men and women who believed ending the life of another was their right. His lips moved, and although his language was foreign to her ears, she knew it was nothing more than a pathetic plea for his worthless life. The intent was still there in his eyes. If she let him, he would try to murder her as he had planned for the family. She held his head in her hands, draining the life from him as he gasped and thrashed underneath her. Rarely did the Guardians drain the blood of the Unworthy. This only happened when an Unworthy spilled the blood of an Innocent.

The human gave one final gasp as his life slipped away. His blue eyes were dull and empty. Amari moved away from the body, removing the needed items from the belt strapped around her waist. A gold box and a miniature gold cross was laid beside the body. She opened the human's mouth as she kissed the gold cross. She pressed it against his tongue and swept her hand over his still opened eyes.

*Greed in the eyes, jealousy in the heart, this soul is unworthy.*

Flames engulfed the body, burning away the greed and jealousy, leaving behind only the ashes and the skull with the crucifix inside. She gathered the ashes and the skull, placing them in the box. Amari never wondered about the human's

name or if he had a family. She did not care.

As she secured the box to her belt, Koen, Savion, and Journey descended around her.

*Well?* she asked.

*All secured. Neither the family nor the humans around them heard a thing,* Koen reported.

*Good.*

Amari felt a small tingle in her wings. The three Guardians felt it as well. Their king had summoned them.

*I suppose it is time to return to the palace,* Journey said.

The four Guardians flexed their wings, disappearing into the night's sky. When they reached the palace, the Guardians went into the changing rooms to remove their human clothing. They never wore the human garments within the walls of the palace. Only the unmarried females were to have their hair braided back behind them. But all females wore white dresses with hoods and long sleeves and hems that trailed the floor and no shoes. The wives were to have their hoods up at all times when outside of their chambers. The males wore long white pants made from the same soft material of the dresses and white vests.

Amari's attire only stood out for the embroidered gold around the hood and the matching chain that hung around her waist. She met the others at the doors, each holding the box containing the skull and ashes of the Unworthy. Amari descended the stairs to the palace cellar. She passed through the large shelves where boxes upon gold boxes sat. She placed her box on the shelf beneath the label, *Unworthy # 2,000,000,007*. The others followed suit and the four left the cellar together. It was time for the king and queen to announce the next king; from there he would announce his future wife and the Guardians' future queen.

Years ago, Amari would have anticipated this ceremony. She would have already been married to Jaxon, her betrothed.

But Jaxon, strong Guardian though he was, was a weak male. He broke his betrothal with Amari and gave in to his desires with London. Some call her wanton, a Jezebel, but Jaxon loved her more than he loved Amari. To avoid London's execution for interfering in the betrothal of a Guardian of royal birth, and Jaxon being stripped of his wings and cast out of the palace like a fallen angel, Amari pleaded to her king and queen to absolve the betrothal and allow them to marry. They now have a beautiful baby girl, and to add to her devastation, London named her Mira, after Amari's late mother.

Now with no betrothal, Amari faced a possible acceptance of becoming the Guardian's next queen, a fate she found more frightening than the death she and her brethren wielded with such ease.

*Is all well, Princess?* Koen asked as they approached the hall.

*Of course.*

From an early age, her parents taught her not to reveal her feelings and train her expressions not to betray any emotions. She left her team to stand behind their chairs at one of the long tables in the hall. She walked with her head held high as the other Guardians bowed when she passed. She was not permitted to feast with them. She had to join her family on the platform at the head table. Only the King and Queen, their children and Amari used the table. Her cousins, Ezra and his younger sister Brynn were already in place.



### "Shattered Dreams"

by Audra Hagel

*Amari*, Ezra said, taking her hand as she stepped up on the platform.

*Ezra*, she nodded respectively. Brynn smiled sweetly as Amari took her place. The king's head guard flapped his outstretched wings, signaling the arrival of the king and queen. Silence fell across the hall, and the doors at the end of the table opened slowly. Amari, Brynn, and Ezra each kneeled one by one, and the Guardians below did as well.

She kept her eyes to the floor as her aunt and uncle, the king and queen, passed by.

*Rise my children*, King Kelten's strong voice commanded. As he did every day and night, he wore his crown and white vest and pants trimmed in gold. *Tonight, we feast for the most joyous occasion, the revealing of your next king and queen.*

*As you all may have assumed, our son Ezra has accepted his duty as your next king*, Amari's aunt, Queen Orienne, said with a bright smile, looking down on the other Guardians. *Tonight, before we feast, he will choose his bride, your next queen.*

Ezra stood tall as though he were already king and addressed the Guardians.

*My brothers and sisters, the time has come for you to know the identity of your next queen. By far, this has not been an easy decision. So many of you have shown promise, loyalty and dedication to the call of the Guardianship. But one above all others has proven that she is ready for more.* Ezra smiled proudly and turned towards Amari. She kept her eyes low, her worst fears coming true as he took her hand in his. *Princess Amari, I choose you to be my wife, my queen. Do you accept?*

Amari could never say no to such a proposal. It would be a disgrace to the palace, the Guardianship—everything she stood for. She smiled as though this was what she had always hoped for. With a small bow, she laced her fingers with his, showing her acceptance.

*I accept.*

At the sound of her acceptance, the Guardians took a knee, as they will on the day of the wedding, while the king and queen bowed their heads to them.

The feast commenced afterwards, the hall in an excited uproar over its new king and queen. Amari could feel the glances of everyone around her, including King Kelten. Since the death of Amari's parents, Kelten regarded his niece with an appraising eye. She had the same willful spirit of his sister. Being queen would not prove an easy feat for her. She lived for being a Guardian. Pity to the one who must tell her those days were at an end.

*I hope that you are not aggrieved, Princess Brynn*, Amari heard Ezra say to his sister beside her.

*Not at all. I am relieved. For we are of the same blood, and being man and wife is not agreeable.*

When the feast was over, Amari retreated to the palace stables. She needed to think. Being around Honor, her Unicai, gave her that.

*Princess*, Brice, one of the Guardian's of Jaxon's team bowed as she entered the stables.

*Brice.*

She gave no other acknowledgement to him as she stood before Honor's stable, watching the snow white horse rise, flapping his wings and swishing his tail at her arrival. His gilded horn glistened brightly. She reached into the little bucket, taking the dried feed in the palm of her hand as he rested his head against the gate.

She thought of her parents, Gerard and Mirabella, as she fed Honor. On their last mission, the humans struck them down, throwing away their lives like so much trash. Had they lived, they would have taken the throne after Kelten and Orienne, and Amari's heart would not feel the weight of dread. From the time she was a small child, she wanted to



be a Guardian like her parents. She wanted to be strong like her father and brave like her mother. Only they could see her through this misery.

*I knew you would come here, Ezra said behind her. This appears to be your refuge when you are upset. Would being my queen be such a horrible life for you?*

The sadness rang loudly in his voice. Amari gave Honor one last pat and faced her future husband and king.

*Being your queen does not upset me. It worries me.*

*Why? Is it because you still love Jaxon?*

Amari gave a heavy sigh. Jaxon hurt her in ways he could never imagine. Pain of that magnitude never truly goes away; it only gets easier as time passes. But Amari would never say these things aloud, least of all to Ezra.

*It is not about Jaxon, it is about us. Becoming your wife and queen means that my life as a Guardian will end.*



There was more that she could have said. More that she wanted to say, but she could never expose herself to another.

Ezra grasped her hands in his, grateful that there was a remedy to her distress.

*When the time comes, princess, we will come to an agreement that suits us both. But the worry is still in your eyes. Why? Do you think that I would not love you? Because I will, I already do.*

Ezra allowed him the little kisses to her hands, her forehead, her eyelids, her cheeks. She even responded when Ezra kissed her lips, but it saddened her greatly when she realized she felt nothing for him, only a little less than brotherly affection.



Amari barely slept that night. She only feigned sleep whenever she sensed Ezra outside her door. If he was this unbearable now, how could the king and queen expect her to take him as her husband?

Before breakfast, the king and queen requested her presence. Brice escorted her. The task of attending to the needs and requests of the king and queen was once Jaxon's job, but his lack of control and responsibility disgusted them. They did not allow him in their presence unless directly called.

*Congratulations, princess. No one doubted that you were the obvious choice, Brice said politely, walking beside her, casually nodding as the other Guardians stopped and bowed their heads as they passed.*

*Thank you.*

Amari held no ill will towards Brice. He was an extremely capable Guardian, well trained and disciplined. Up until years ago, she considered him a friend. However, Brice was and remained a close friend of Jaxon. He knew before anyone else about Jaxon and London. They never spoke of this aloud, but

tension remained between them.

Brice opened the doors to the king and queen's chamber, announcing Amari's arrival.

*Leave us.*

Amari entered the chamber as Brice closed the doors behind her. As Amari had expected, Oriane was not present. Kelton stood before the window, hands clasped behind his back. At once, Amari dropped to her knee with her head bowed, eyes cast down.

*You know why I have requested your presence this morning. She knew why indeed, but it was better to allow the king to speak freely until addressed directly. My son is very troubled. He hoped that you would be pleased with his decision to take you as his wife. Are you pleased?*

He still gazed through the window, not truly acknowledging her presence, and for proper decorum, she did not rise.

*I am very pleased, your majesty.*

Kelten made a strange sound in his throat. *It is improper to lie to me, Amarilis.* Only the king called her by her full name. He turned, taking long strides towards her. She saw his pale feet before her as he stood silently. *Rise. I have told you before not to address me as such when we are alone.*

She rose silently with her eyes downcast. *I love Ezra, Uncle Kelten, but not the way a wife should love her husband.*

*Love is for the humans, Amarilis,* he said sharply. *Do you love the Guardians?*

Yes.

*Do you love your king and queen?*

Yes.

*Then you will abandon these silly notions of love and embrace your future as queen of the Guardians. It is your*

*birthright.* He placed his hands atop her shoulders, so that she was looking into his bright-as-honey eyes. *You will honor your mother and father by being who you were born to be.*

Nothing further passed between the uncle and niece, king and Guardian. Amari skipped breakfast. She could not handle another occasion with Prince Ezra by her side gazing at her. She changed into her human clothing and was about to leave when her team came rushing to her.

*Are we leaving so soon? Breakfast is still in progress,* Journey said.

*You three go on ahead. I will do another sweep around the area we covered last night.*

As she anticipated, her team proceeded to protest. *Not an option, Princess,* Journey refused.

*The king would have us flogged until sunrise if we allowed you to leave the palace without us—If the Prince does not get to us first,* Koen said.

*It is fine. You three will remain here.*

*Amari, it is far too dangerous for you.*

*Nonsense, Journey. I will be fine. Go back to your breakfast. That is an order.* Amari never took pride in using her rank in a threatening way, but it was the only way to keep them at the palace.

*If you run into any trouble, Princess, call and we will come to you,* Koen urged.



**"When the Moon Spills Over"**  
by Audra Hagel

*Of course.*

Amari flexed her wings, flying away from the palace. She flew nowhere in particular, her mind clouded with thoughts of Prince Ezra and leading the Guardians alongside him. How could she expect to bear the children of a man for whom she held no feelings? The king was wrong. Her parents loved one another. Why was it wrong for her to want to spend her one hundred years beside the man she loved?

But as she flew, thinking of everything she had seen and experienced both inside and outside of the palace, the king's reasoning became more logical. Love was a weak human emotion. Most of the humans who experienced love, or their distorted conception of love, used it to manipulate others for their own selfish means. What had love done for Amari? It caused her betrothed to forsake her for another.

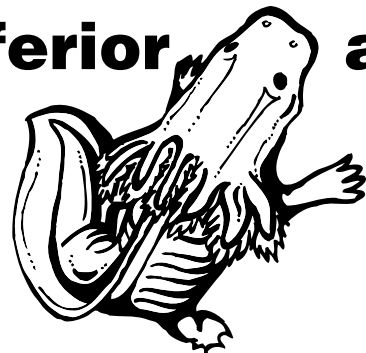
A familiar stench hit her nose.

An Unworthy.

Normally, she would have her team with her, but if she could not handle one Unworthy, she did not deserve to proclaim herself a Guardian.

Amari perched herself atop a roof, peering down in the alley that was only lit by a small light hanging over a door. It stunk of human waste and inferior alcohol. A man and a woman were standing in the alley, embracing like lovers. Loud sounds came from inside the building. She believed it to be one of those clubs Koen mentioned once.

**It stunk of human waste  
and inferior alcohol**



The man and woman spoke, but Amari never learned the language of the humans. Not that it was necessary. She understood the intent of the soul of the Unworthy. The woman distracted the man with kisses. He held her in his arms oblivious to her hand reaching into her back pocket. The silver blade glinted in the moonlight. In a motion sudden for a human, the woman pressed the blade against the man's throat.

Amari could smell the fear coming from both the man and the woman. He held his hands up, surrendering. The woman's fear became confidence. She forced the man to turn his back to her. She kept the blade pressed against his throat as she shoved her greedy hand inside his pocket. Even when she had what she demanded from him, the intent never strayed. She wanted more. She wanted his life.

Angered, Amari dropped from the roof, her movements silent save for the slight breeze her wings stirred. She grabbed the woman's wrist tightly, forcing her to drop the knife. She threw the woman towards the opposite wall and gave the Innocent a light shove so that she did not inadvertently harm him. She would have rendered him unconscious, but Amari was too angry to bother.

The Unworthy's resolve to kill went away as she screamed, screams that the wind carried off as Amari cradled her face, absorbing her life into her fingertips. It was a pity that the Innocent was still there. She had hoped he would have run off; instead he lay there, wide eyed, watching her as the Unworthy's lifeless body fell to the ground.

The Innocent yelled something to Amari, but she felt it before she could react. Pain. Warm, wet pain dripping down her back. Another Unworthy. She should have sensed that the woman was not alone. She turned abruptly, her wings writhing in agony as they stretched widely, an angry shriek leaving her lips. The dark man raised the blade that dripped Amari's blood for another attack.

She grabbed the Unworthy by his throat, her wings lifting them up the wall. He was not like the woman. Through his

wide-stretched eyes, she could see the faces of the humans he hurt, the ones he killed. She threw the Unworthy against the wall, covering his body with her own before he could fall. With her talons deeply embedded into his skull and shoulder, she wrenched his head to the side and bit into his throat. His frightened screams became wet gurgles. She released his body, and his bones shattered as he hit the ground.

But even the blood of the Unworthy did not heal her back. She could not muster the strength to call for her team. She swayed, her wings losing their strength. Amari's bloody, weakened body sailed to the ground. Gasping like a fish out of water, she gathered the last of her remaining strength to rip away the silver crucifix around her neck. She opened it, shaking the drops of Honor's tears onto her tongue. The blackness of sleep fell upon her and the last thing she heard was the cry of the Guardians.

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**The blackness of sleep  
fell upon her and the  
last thing she heard  
was the cry of the Guardians.**

## Truth

Kveta Hajkova

You can blame me,  
you can judge me,  
but the deepest truth  
lies only within me.

## Apathy

Robert Bullard

The sleeper is like the bed he lies on;  
Both are inanimate in the cold night.  
Deceitful sleep, for his nightmares are gone,  
For even a false start would set things right,  
But no dream comes to drum him out of sleep,  
No premonition hints at his peril.  
Compared to the ocean, rest remains deep,  
Yet there is no dream that is not sterile.  
A kite lacks all senses in its ascent:  
This is the dream he is calmly caught in,  
Though horizons hold their subtle intent.  
What is waiting will pump adrenaline.  
When he wakes, he'll have nowhere to begin;  
He lost his job the last day he slept in.

# Comfort of Fire

Richard Price

Barely two days have passed,  
And yet I miss you dearly.  
Are we moving too fast?  
Are we seeing things clearly?

Your embrace brings me comfort,  
Tides over my desire.  
Time I'd love to forfeit,  
Fanning the flames of our fire.

My eyes rest on your soul;  
How compassionate you are.  
We must embrace it as a whole,  
For our situation is so bizarre.

I fear for you;  
You fear for me.  
Relax, this is nothing new—  
I'll ensure our safety.

We'll escape this easily  
With our lives still intact,  
Leaving them busily  
Figuring out how to detach

Their jaws from the floor  
After they've fallen in shock.  
Seeing what we have in store,  
Never again will they mock.

It will be just you and I,  
Little red hood,  
Like bonnie and clyde,  
Except we'll be both bad and good.



## Grieving for Dummies

Arvilla Fee

### I.

Through the window of the taxi, I see the lights of Times Square fading into the distance. Ah, the memories I have from the heartbeat of this city: *Mama Mia* with my sister, Fran, *The Phantom of the Opera* with my mom... and the last one, *Jersey Boys*, with my beloved Matty. I sigh and lean my head back, for once not even caring about the billions of germs that are probably embedded in the decaying fabric of the seat.

I would have just driven myself today—I certainly wasn't afraid of driving in New York City after having lived there for over eleven years. I could take on the best of the taxis, cars and trucks, and I could honk just as loudly and just as long as the next guy. No, today was different because I didn't really trust my feet to push the pedals, and I didn't trust my brain to recognize traffic signals or comprehend directions. Today was the day I had to go to the airport and board a flight bound for Dover, Delaware—the day I had to make "arrangements" for Matthias Philip Jackson. What did that *mean* exactly?

My movements had been mechanical since I'd awakened at 5 a.m. today. I made toast but didn't eat it because I suddenly remembered how much toast annoyed Matty. "You know what *really* bugs me about people saying that something is 'as warm as toast?' Because toast stays warm for about 4.5 seconds then it's as cold as... well, ice. And another thing, toast gets burnt at least half of the time! And then there's the issue with crumbs!" With his words echoing in my head, I had stood there longer than 4.5 seconds, and of course, my toast was cold.

Then I'd made coffee but only drank two sips before I remembered Matty's sleepy voice coming from the bedroom of our apartment-with-a-view—the apartment that we'd picked

out with painstaking care after three months of viewing no less than thirty apartments. "Callie Cat? What's that smell? Could that possibly be your freshly brewed coffee? Mmmmm...sure would be nice to have a cup." And I'd laugh and carry Matty's huge New York Mets coffee mug to the bedroom, filled to the brim with twelve ounces of the best coffee in the city—at least in *his* opinion. And he knew I'd bring him a cup, even if he didn't ask because that was just a ritual that I'd started when we were first married three years ago; but he liked to go through the whole routine of pretending he wouldn't get any unless he sweet-talked me. The rest of my coffee had gone down the sink this morning.

So here I sit in the back of this taxi, surrounded by typical taxi scents: half gym-locker, mixed with fruity incense, mixed with stale ash tray. But if I closed my eyes and concentrated, I could still smell the fresh scent of Matty's Dial soap and Aqua aftershave and a hint of cinnamon from his Trident gum. It was hard to believe that Matty couldn't chew gum anymore. He couldn't do anything anymore. He was dead—at least that's what Major General Samuel Higgins had said when he put the President's bereavement letter in my hand.

As the taxi pulled into the terminal, I thought, "Was that just two days ago?" It seemed longer—like months, yet the passage of time stretched, blurred, and twisted in the oddest fashion now. "Ma'am—is your name Callie Danielle Jackson?" I had stared at the officer as if he had two heads and had just landed from some distant and yet-unnamed planet. What kind of question was that? I had studied the bars and medals on his uniform and wondered what he'd had to do to get all of those and what they meant. He'd repeated his question, and I finally answered him in a small voice that seemed to belong to someone else. Somehow I *knew* why he was standing there. But he proceeded to tell me anyway, "Ma'am it is with my strongest condolences that I must bring you a letter from the President of these United States, informing you that your husband, Matthias Philip Jackson, was killed in the line of duty. His body is being flown back from Iraq as we speak." He

paused and waited for me to... I don't know—scream maybe? Faint? Beat on his chest and tell him that it was *his* fault?



I had done none of the above. I had simply stood there, brutally assaulted by simultaneous sensations of hot and cold as if I had suddenly developed a high fever. Major General Higgins coughed then continued, "Captain Jackson was a brave soldier. He pulled three of his men from a burning truck and got them to safety before another bomb went off. He will be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, which will be presented to you in his honor, along with an American flag, during his memorial service." So that's it, I thought—Matty was brave, now he's dead, and I get a medal and a flag. What did one even say to that kind of news? I worked for a top-notch New York publisher and had seen a book come out a couple of years ago about how to cope with death. Not one with loads of psycho mumbo-jumbo—*Funerals for Dummies*? No, wait! It was *Grieving for Dummies* by Greg Harvey. Maybe I could pick up a copy and just follow simple, step-by-step procedures until... until something.

I shook my head to clear way the fog, glancing out the

window of the plane as the wheels screeched on the runway at Dover Air Force Base. It was 2 p.m., and I grabbed my carry-on, unable to remember what I'd packed, hopeful that I'd included my black dress. That's what widows wear, right? I'd always thought of "widows" as little old, white-haired ladies who'd been married for over fifty years, not as a thirty-one-year-old career woman who'd had not yet celebrated her fourth anniversary. Two men from the VA met me at the gate and took me to Ft. Myer. Condolences were extended, and they briefed me on the afternoon's events: a meeting with some of the top commanders, discussion of arrangements, and a quick run through of the ceremony protocol. I would be staying at Ft. Myer for two nights, they said—courtesy of the U.S. government—then I would attend the memorial service on Friday. Having Matty buried at Arlington had been a tough decision for me. It would be hard to visit him. But Arlington was where Matty wanted to be buried, and besides, I wouldn't see *him*, I would see an ocean of grass with waves of white tombstones.

So here I am on Friday—staring at those waves. The new one—the one only two feet away from me—belongs to Matty. His is draped with a large, American flag. The sun glows, warm and buttery behind the cherry blossoms, and the breeze lifts some of the blossoms from the tree and swirls them in the air like rosy smoke. Under different circumstances, the scene would have been beautiful... serene... and Matty's voice pops into my head. "Wanna go to D.C.? I hear the Cherry Blossom Festival is amazing. How about it... maybe next spring?" But Matty and I had never gotten that chance. And now, on this perfect spring day, I stand here listening to men talk about how wonderful Matty was—how brave he'd been in the war—and I want to scream because I should be holding Matty's hand and walking through the National Mall instead of watching pink rain splatter on his grave.

The ceremony is over at last, flag folded, medal presented, and I stand quietly holding the triangled red, white, and blue in my arms. Like a movie playing in slow motion,

people come to me, one-by-one.

"I'm so sorry about your loss."

"Matty was a wonderful guy."

"If you need anything, please let me know."

"Time will heal all."

I still have no guide book. What am I supposed to say? The responses to each, in turn, run silently through my head:

"Thanks."

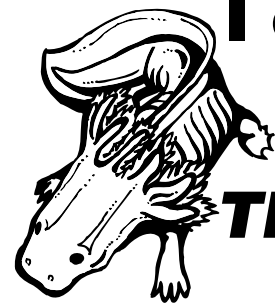
"Yeah, he was great."

"I *need* a shot of whiskey."

"How does *time* heal—that's the stupidest statement I've ever heard!"

But I say nothing aloud, just nod and take the hugs and comments as best I can without any instructions. Then suddenly everyone is gone—except for my parents, my sister, and General Sparks, who led the ceremony. I get in a rental car with my family and go back to Reagan Airport to catch my flight home. It's over... now what? What?

Back in our apartment, I fling my suitcase on the bed and sit down. I figure I'll pick up a copy of Harvey's book tomorrow. And maybe since he's got the *Grieving for Dummies* covered, I can write a book for Matty called *The Evils of Toast*. He'd like that.



**I can write a book  
for Matty called  
*The Evils of Toast*.  
He'd like that.**

## II.

So here I am sitting in my apartment, a copy of *Grieving for Dummies* on my lap. I've been reading the darn thing for seven weeks now, but I still don't get it. It's not that Greg Harvey is a bad author; he just doesn't make me feel any better about Matty being dead. My husband of three years, Matthias Philip Jackson was killed in Iraq nearly two months ago. He was brave, they said, and I know that's true. But all I have left of his bravery is a medal and a triangle flag in a triangle box. I tried sleeping with the boxed flag but kept hitting my back on the corners. I tried propping it up in a chair—you know, just to pretend Matty was sitting there. But it didn't take up enough room... and Matty wasn't shaped like a triangle!

Crazy you say? Yep, that's what my friends say, too... in a very nice, diplomatic way, of course. And honestly, I don't even deny it. I'm paranoid about doing something really stupid—like walking outside in my bra and panties and going to work. I came close one day. I went to work wearing my pajama bottoms and Matty's New York Mets t-shirt that doesn't even match! To the people at the publishing house where I work, the non-matching thing wasn't the real issue, though. I think everyone would have been fine with my regular clothes not matching, but having on pink-heart pajama bottoms with an orange and blue Mets t-shirt *and* my fuzzy black slippers... well, let's just say I drew a few stares that day. My boss, Jack, told me to take the day off. I guess he figured I was most likely incapable of editing anything since I couldn't even dress properly. Jack was probably right. He's been giving me those quizzical, head-tilted looks a lot since I came back to work... kind of like a puppy who has just been asked a question in a high-pitched voice and is trying to process it all inside his little doggy head.

On a typical day, a conversation with Jack goes something like this:

"Hey, Callie. How you holding up?"



I say (in my head), "I hold *up* the same way I hold down. How do *you* hold up?"

I say out loud, "Oh, just fine, Jack."

Jack says, "Good, Callie, good. You know we're all here for you."

In my head, "Of course you're here for me! It has nothing to do with work. I know you all come to the office every day *just* for me."

Out loud, "Thanks, Jack. That's good to know."

Small pat on the shoulder from Jack, "Hang in there, Cal. Things will get better."

In my head I picture a cat hanging off the edge of a ten-foot balcony, his claws dug into a two-foot piece of cloth; and the "things" that Jack is talking about... well, that term is too vague to even imagine. Things... hmm... the weather will improve? My hair will be less frizzy? I will remember to eat three meals a day?

But I say, "Sure, Jack. *Things* will get better."

Then I go to my desk, place a manuscript in front of me, stare at it for at least ten minutes without really seeing it, and jump when my telephone rings. So now you know why people, including me, think I'm crazy.

I've tried throwing myself into more productive projects—remember the whole toast thing? I was going to write a book called *The Evils of Toast* in Matty's memory since toast annoyed him to no end. All I have so far are the chapter titles and the first two sentences of the book. The chapter titles are as follows:

- 1) Toast—Is it Misunderstood?
- 2) The Bad Habits of Toast
- 3) When Toast Catches on Fire
- 4) Methods of Keeping Toast Warm

#### 5) Just Use Plain Bread—It's Easier

And my opening sentences? Well, not too impressive, but here they are: "There are many people who have their own personal reasons for hating toast. Can toast really be as evil as people proclaim?"

Not much to go on there, I know. I don't even have the third sentence to answer the question in my second sentence. My brain just won't generate the proper thoughts. I will start to think of something good—then suddenly I will find myself with Matty, and he'll be telling me something hilarious. I'll start laughing—by myself—until I realize Matty isn't there then I'll start crying. For example, the other day, I really was going to write that third sentence in my toast book, but here's where my brain went:

Matty and I are lying on a blanket by that little stone bridge in Central Park—you know, the one where if you stand on the bridge, you can see the park and a few of the skyscrapers at the same time? There are several ducks swimming in the stream, the sun is filtering through the trees, and it feels good to lie there and breathe in the smells of spring and Matty's soap.

Then Matty says to me, "Hey, Callie Cat, I've got a duck joke for you."

I roll my eyes. "Okay, let's hear it!"

Matty says, "A duck walks into a bar and tells the bartender, 'Give me a shot of whiskey, and put it on my bill.'" Then Matty laughs and laughs and slaps his thighs.

I laugh, too. Not because the joke was that hilarious but because Matty has a way of cracking himself up; and I laugh because he's laughing!

And that's why I never wrote that third sentence of the toast book because I was in the park with Matty again, and I was laughing at him laughing at his own dumb duck joke. Then I cried for an hour. Then the toast book was forgotten.

Today my sister, Fran, is coming over though, so I'd better get it together. Last time Fran visited, she went back home, called our parents, and told them I was in bad shape. Well, that caused a big fuss, and my parents came out to visit and insisted on staying with me for two weeks. My mom cleaned my apartment from top to bottom, did dishes every day, and did all the laundry, too. My dad found little "handy man" projects; and I soon had a new toilet lid, a non-leaking bathroom sink, a shelf replaced on my old bookshelf, and the trim painted in my kitchen. It's not that I minded, really, but in the middle of all of this cleaning, fixing, washing, and doing stuff, I would get these strange, sideways glances from my parents. They thought I didn't notice, but I did. It's like they were waiting for me to grow another head or something.

Mom would say things like, "You need to get out more, Callie. I'll cook supper if you want to go to the gym."

So, I'd go to the gym, watch an aerobics class and admire the twenty-two sweaty people who had so much energy. Then I'd come back home and eat Mom's fettuccini and garlic bread. She never said anything about my lack of sweat stains or the fact that my hair looked the same way when I came back as it did when I left, but she probably knew. Moms know, don't they?

In order to avoid another "helpful" visit like that, I whirl around my apartment like a wind-blown leaf, making the bed, dusting the furniture, putting dishes away, and picking up clothes. I even put on a little make up... not too much, because Fran will know that I got "fixed up" for her visit, but a little blush and lip gloss, all in pale pink.

The buzzer rings; I take a deep breath and answer the door.

"Callie!" Fran says, hugging me so tightly I can't breathe for six whole seconds.

"Fran," I choke out when she releases me finally.

"You look great!"

"Thanks. You, too."

"So, you been keeping busy?"

"Sure. You know, working, shopping... things like that."

Fran looks at me with narrowed, suspicious eyes. "Shopping, huh? Anything new you want to show off?"

I say (in my head), "Dang, I've been caught. What can I dig out that *looks new*?"



Out loud I say, "Well, you'll just have to wait and see when we go out to dinner tomorrow," and I give her a very mysterious grin. At least, I think it's mysterious, although it may look a bit maniacal—like the kind of grin you'd get from an ax murderer.

"Oh, you!" she says, punching me lightly in the arm.

I almost topple over but catch myself. Shoot! Now I will have to stop by Macy's on the way home from work tomorrow and buy some shiny, colorful thing that will make it appear as though I've been on a shopping spree lately! It can't be black either since that's mostly what I wear these days... besides Matty's old Mets shirt and my pink-heart pajama bottoms.

Fran and I watch T.V. that night after supper and chit-chat about various topics. She tells me about her job, her boyfriend's new jeep, her recent trip to the art museum. I think she's trying to encourage me to talk about my life as well, but I really don't have too much to say on that subject. I talk about the manuscript that I've been reviewing, talk about the new books that are out, and the new Chinese restaurant on 42<sup>nd</sup> street. I don't talk about Matty, and I think that's the subject Fran is waiting for. She decides to take matters into her own hands when she sees I'm not coming around.

"So, how have you been coping?"

I clear my throat and look at the T.V. a couple more seconds. "Well, I read a lot."

"Still reading that Greg Harvey book?"

"Yeah, he has a lot of good things to say."

"Are you taking any of the advice?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Look, I know this isn't easy. I miss Matty, and I wasn't even married to him!"

"No. No you weren't."

"So what can I *do*?" Fran's voice has taken a more desperate tone.

"Nothing. You know what they say... time heals."

"I can tell you don't believe that."

"Well, that is what *they* say... and *they* know *things*."

Fran is silent, and I feel bad that I have left her no real course to pursue this conversation, but I want it to end. Harvey says on page two in his book, "Grieving is a natural human response to profound loss—it isn't some sort of mental disorder or other malady that requires curing." I feel that Fran is trying to "cure" me—that everyone is trying to "cure" me, and I cannot be cured, so stop it! Harvey also says on that same

page, just a few lines down, "Grieving comes to an end when the person suffering the loss is able to make sense of the loss and incorporate it into the rest of his life." I'm not there yet; *nothing* makes sense. Grief comes in stages! I should know; that part is in Chapter Eleven.

The next morning I get up early before Fran gets out of bed. I leave a note on the table telling her I have to work until two and then we can relax a bit before getting dressed for our six o'clock dinner. She told me last week that she had always wanted to take the Staten Island Ferry and see the Statue of Liberty at night, so I'm planning that as an after-dinner surprise.

Work goes by quickly, and I find myself at Macy's between 34<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> Street sooner than I wanted. Why is shopping such a chore for me now? I did not have any trouble shopping before Matty's death; but now I find myself extremely irritated by other shoppers and the number of clothing choices. I paw through various racks of shirts, skirts, blouses, and slacks. I pick up one hideous yellow blouse that is covered in retro fringe and clear sequins. It reminds me of a yellow dress I once had to wear as a bridesmaid in a friend's wedding. My friend had said, "If you hem this dress just a little, you can wear it to parties after the wedding." I certainly could *not* wear that dress to parties—unless every other party attendee would agree to come dressed as a bright yellow sunflower!

I finally settle on a pale pink blouse that has a few feminine ruffles down the front and pick out a pair of light gray slacks. I have a pair of gray pumps at home, so it should all work together. The outfit will not be too over-the-top, yet it will show Fran that I can still dress with a little class and that I had bought something new, like I said. I'll just have to stuff it all in my big zebra-striped handbag until I can hang it up in my closet. Surely to goodness I can manage that!

I get home at three and wait until Fran finally goes to the bathroom at about four-thirty. I figure my sister must have a bladder the size of a pumpkin. Me, I have to pee about every

half hour it seems. Thinking of pee reminds me of another one of Matty's jokes. He told me this one when we were at a restaurant and the waiter had suggested the pea soup.

Matty says to me, "What's the difference between chopped beef and pea soup?"

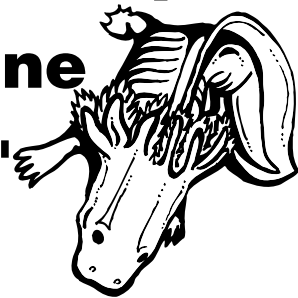
I give him my famous, must-I-*really*-hear-this look, but he continues.

"Everyone can chop beef, but not everyone can pea soup."

And he laughs and snorts and has to take a drink of his wine.

I shake off those thoughts to avoid a rush of tears and race to my room to hang up my new clothes, praying they aren't too wrinkled from being stuffed in my bag. Then, I hide the Macy's sack, along with the receipt, in the corner of my closet behind the shoe rack. Now, I can just casually stroll in my room, take the new clothes out of my closet and get dressed before it's time to go. Fran will never know the difference.

**"Everyone can chop beef,  
but not everyone  
can pea soup."**



She comes out of the bathroom, and I am sitting on the couch with my feet propped up on the coffee table, looking calm. We relax, watch the news, talk about our parents and what they've been up to, and even talk about some of the crazy things we did when we were kids. Every once in awhile, I say a

quick prayer that the wrinkles are falling out of my new pants and shirt. At five-fifteen, I tell Fran that I'm going to go get dressed for dinner.

"Wow," says Fran when I walk out of the bedroom at five-thirty. "So, you got that recently? Looks *great*, Callie."

I don't say *how* recently, of course. I just turn around and strike my best model pose. "Yep, this is it."

Fran asks if we can take the bus to the restaurant, *Abigael's on Broadway*.

"It's not that I don't trust your driving," she says.

"Sure, okay."

I know Fran is terrified of New York drivers, including me, but I don't give her a hard time about it. I just agree to take the bus, and we arrive at *Abigael's* right at six o' clock. Fran orders the "Thai Sea Bass," and I order the "Macadamia Crusted Chicken." I know both dishes are both good; Matty and I ate here last Christmas Eve. Fran agrees to split the "chocolate indulgence" with me for dessert, which has about four layers of chocolate everything. We don't make it to dessert though. I get about half way through my chicken when Fran leans across the table and takes my free hand in hers.

"You know that Mom, Dad, and I think about you all the time, Cal. We want to help you get through this, and we worry so much about you. I think right now you are in the 'denial and isolation' stage of grief. See, I've been doing some reading, too. I think you want to pretend none of this has happened and that Matty is going to come walking back through your door any minute. As much as I wish that were true, it's just not. He died in the war, Callie, and that cannot be fixed. It tears my *heart* out for you, but I want you to work through this so you can heal and look forward to life again."

I start to come back with a cute response, typical of all the responses I've used as shields over the past several weeks. I want to tell Fran that she's not so smart. How does *she* know

what I think—she's only seen me twice since Matty's death. But I find myself voiceless. My throat tightens around the bite of chicken I'd put in my mouth, and I have to force myself to swallow. Then the tears begin... great torrents and buckets of tears. Fran leaves her side of the table and sits beside me. I feel like a blubbering idiot. I use the cloth napkin in an attempt to stop the flood, but for some reason, tears keep pouring out. There's no delicate way to wipe away mascara with a restaurant's white-cloth napkin either, and I feel horrible about the large, black streaks I'm leaving behind. I wonder briefly, absurdly, what kind of laundry detergent restaurants use.

Fran asks if I'd like to leave the restaurant, and I nod my head. She pays, and we find ourselves intermingled with a large crowd, typical of Broadway on a warm, pre-summer evening. Fran has her hand cupped under my elbow as if she's leading a blind person, which, temporarily, I am.

We eventually find a bench and sit down. I'm finally able to talk.

"I just can't stand it, Fran. It's so unfair! I feel bad about saying this, but I'm actually *angry* at Matty. I'm mad because he went off to war and got himself killed! Why did he have to be in the *middle* of things? Why did he have to rescue those guys and get himself blown up? He knew how much I loved him and how much I needed him. I have a medal and a flag... that's all, neither of which do me any good!"

"That's good, Callie, let it all out. You *need* to let it out. This is how you heal."

"I keep hearing his voice and seeing him. I keep remembering the stupid jokes he told and how he'd crack himself up and how he'd make me laugh just because he was laughing. I can't go anywhere or do anything without remembering something about him. I wear his Mets shirt with my pajama bottoms—even to work sometimes because I can't remember to get dressed, and I can't make coffee because I'm waiting for him to ask for his cup. And I can't make toast because Matty hated toast."

Fran smiles at this. "Yes, he did hate toast, more than any man I know!"

I smile back through my tears. "It gets cold in 4.5 seconds, you know."

"I know, sweetie. I know."

"Why did he have to die, Fran? Why?"

"I don't know. Sometimes... we just don't know. I guess we just have to accept that God has a bigger plan, and we cannot understand all that happens in our lives."

"I'm still angry," I say.

"That's good. You *need* to be. You have that right. It's the second stage of grief."

"I know. Believe me! And in the third stage, I'm going to bargain with God, then in the fourth stage, I'm going to be depressed, then, in the fifth and final stage, I'll accept things as they are. At least that's what *they* tell me." I manage a slight grin.

"You know," says Fran as she stands and holds her hand out to me. "One great thing about you—you *never* lose your sense of humor. Want to go home now? I can hook you up with some cookies since we didn't have dessert, and you can snuggle on the couch for awhile. We can talk all night if you want."

I shake my head. "I have a surprise for you. Come on, let's catch the bus."

Fran looks perplexed but follows me.

We reach the Staten Island Ferry, and Fran lets out a squeal. "Oh, you're taking me to see the Statue of Liberty at night? That's great, Callie! You don't have to do this tonight, you know. We can do it some other time."

"No, it's okay. It's a clear night, and you'll have a great view."

Fran gives me a big hug.

I'm right; the view from the ferry is spectacular. There's not a cloud in the sky; the moon is full. There's something incredibly majestic about our Lady Liberty—the way she holds the torch, the way she stands for freedom. My throat tightens again. Matty stood for freedom. He died for my freedom and for the freedom of others.

Fran seems to know what I'm thinking and puts her arm around my shoulder.

"Matty would love this," I say in a choked voice.

Fran nods but doesn't say anything.

I'm grateful. Sometimes people need not say anything. I think I may take notes over Chapter Thirteen in Harvey's book, specifically the part where he discusses "What to Say to Someone in Acute Grief" and hand them out to my friends and co-workers. I might take notes on Chapter 10, too: "Top Ten Clichés about Grieving," which discusses all of the *wrong* things to say to someone who is grieving. I just know what's coming next... people are going to start saying, "It's time to move on," and I'm going to totally lose it!

I will probably come back with, "Move on? How do you move *on*? Is it anything like moving a couch? I've never moved *on* before. Will I need a U-haul? Do you move *on* the same way you hold *up*?"

Of course, that will be in my head. Out loud I'll say, "Yeah, you may be right."

I put my arm around Fran's waist, and we stand there silently taking in the full glory of the Statue. I know Fran's visit is doing me some good. My heart is still heavy but not quite as much as before she came. After she leaves I think I'll take up yoga, and I'll try to write at least the first chapter for *The Evils of Toast*, and if not the first chapter, then at *least* that third sentence.



**"Untitled"**  
by Andrea VanderMey

## **Complexity is overrated**

MeKoi Scott

Complexity is overrated;  
Simplicity is preferred—  
The more facets you have to yourself,  
The more burdened you are to them to feed.  
This is one of the troubles of marriage,  
Especially for one who has varied needs.  
You might find a spouse to fill one facet fine,  
But never one to fully satisfy.

## Ideas

Anthony Pickett

A thousand heroes rode to battle  
and lined up along the hills.

They fought for freedom, right, and truth  
and weren't afraid to be killed.

When the sun came up, the battle raged,  
and they took their wounds with pride;  
when the sun went down, the battle stopped,  
and all the heroes, they had died.

The bloody ground gives tribute,  
to all the ideals laid to rest.

The cowards who turned and ran,  
in the end, fared best.

## Freedom

April Fredericks

I sit and listen to your voice,  
singing softly over me,  
Hearing love and joy and peace,  
gently rolling like the sea.

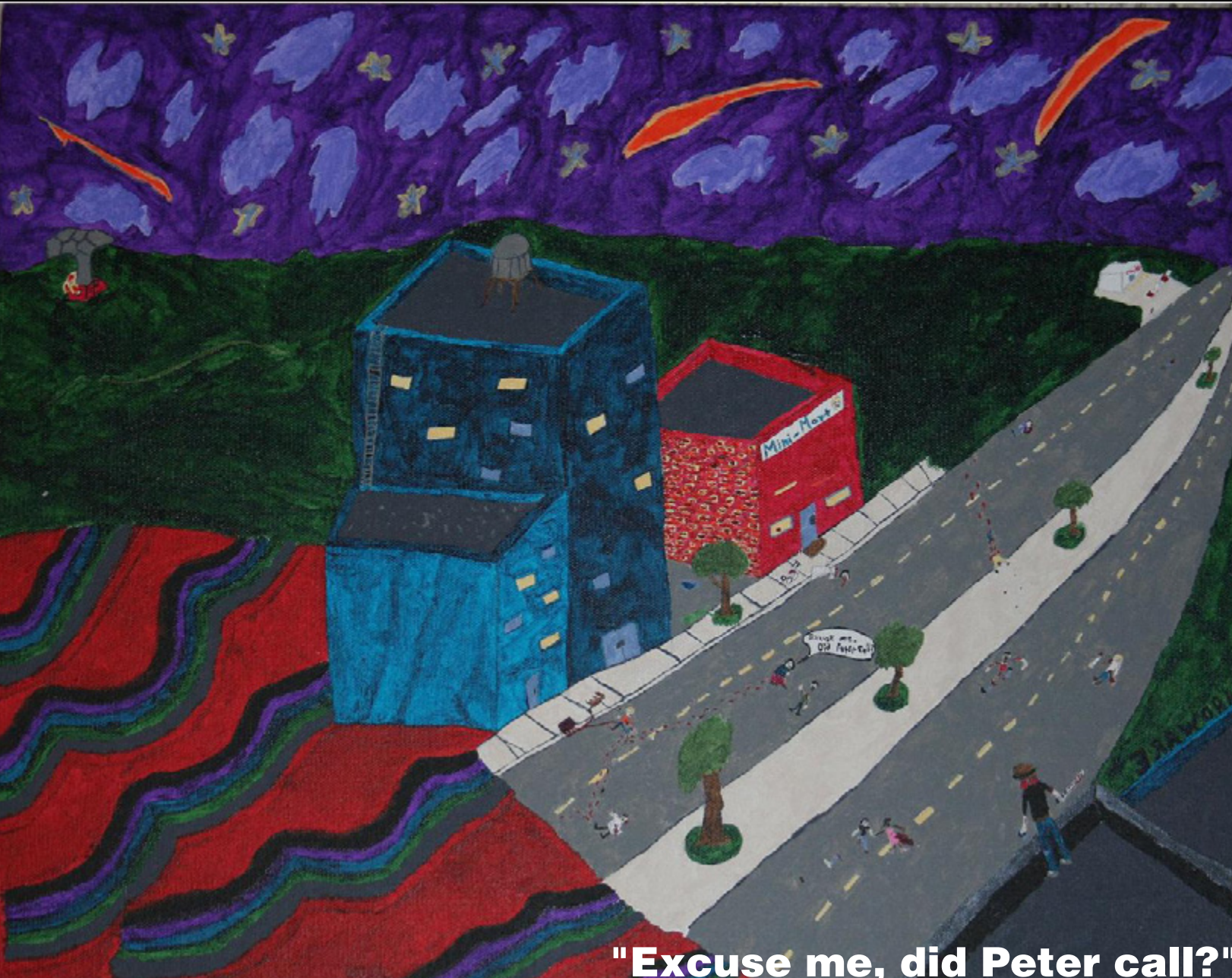
The words they speak right to my heart,  
reminding me that I belong,  
Washing, filling every part  
with Your everlasting song.

Every beating of my heart  
reminds me that you love me;  
You quench the dark before it starts,  
Setting every part all free!

## Applebees

Sheldon Curry

Applebees, Applebees... No Applebees! Latex Gloves and Lemon Trees. You've been there before, but I didn't order anything. Gotta find some funyons, but she doesn't like onion rings. If I was me, it would be right to go left. Pull to this point but pushed to the limit of... Orangebirds. I mean Applebees... Opposites? Maybe... We will never know until they tell us what an applebee is. Flawless.



**"Excuse me, did Peter call?"**

by Richard Price

## To Love. Thank you for Maria

Stephen Paul Bray

When I saw you the first time, I stumbled,  
 Lost my breath, and fumbled  
 For my keys.  
 I knew I'd never be free  
 The moment you looked at me.  
 When I learned of your first impression,  
 My heart rejoiced, for digression  
 Seemed not your way out.  
 Love has no escape routes.  
 You are all that life is about.



## Freedom Across the Waters

Sethany Hagel

We all have a story, and this is mine, but to tell it properly, I must go back to the beginning. I must travel back to my own tribe and the life I had there. It was a peaceful life of deerskin moccasins and small teepees. There in the forest, I led a happy life with my grandmother.

As a child, I ran barefoot along narrow deer paths. I wore bearskin clothes in the winter and deerskin in the summer. Since my parents' death, I lived with my grandmother. I would spend hours on cold days sewing moccasins and listening to Grandma's stories; she would tell of my mother, father, and grandfather. In the summer, we would gather berries. We would wade in the creek that we called "Little Water." My people were happy with their primitive lifestyle. In some ways, I envy that freedom, but my fate lies here, across "The Great Waters."

The day it happened, I will remember for the rest of my life. I told grandmother I was going to LittleBird's wigwam. LittleBird was my best friend. Often, she and I would spend a day together gathering roots for winter. It was only to be one short day before I would be home again. Oh, how I wish that I had stayed home that day! If only I had not gone alone... If only Grandmother had known to search for me earlier...

Words and wishes will get me nowhere; I must tell the story the way it really happened. Running down the familiar path to our neighboring tribe, I came across something I had never seen before. It was a man who had yellow hair and a metal helmet. I had never seen anything so strange. It took about two seconds for him to catch me by my long, black braids and throw me over his strong back. For about an hour, the big man carried me as I screamed, kicked, punched, yelled, and threw my arms about wildly. During the long walk to the boat, I saw other Indian captives, most tied, gagged, and blindfolded. I was well off.

For three months, we were stranded on the white man's great boat. For the first few days, we had our hands tied and were guarded day and night, deep in the belly of the great ship. Once we were far enough out that the sailors could no longer see land, they untied the children. We were free to go up to the deck. One day an Indian boy named Mohaca, prompted by his uncle who was still tied below deck, tried to take over the ship. He put up a good fight; I was ready to fight, too. Unfortunately, he was soon caught and was going to be beat as an example. The sailors pulled out a great whip and began to walk toward him. Without warning, Mohaca jumped overboard. We all raced over to the railing. There he was, swimming with all his might homeward. Many nights I have wondered if he made it home or if he, like so many of us, died before our journey was over.

The day we docked, we were tied and led to a small platform. There, we were sold. When I was drug up onto the platform, a cruel man with an evil smile was my first bidder. I screamed when the auctioneer began the countdown. The dread and fear in my voice caught the attention of a pastor walking by. Reverend Johnson did not believe in slavery; he also did not believe in shutting his ears to those in need. He came just in time and placed another bid. Back and forth, the evil man and Reverend Johnson battled for my life. In the end, Reverend Johnson won.

With Reverend and Mrs. Johnson, life was something I never dreamed of. Since the Johnsons had no children and I had no parents, we were a perfect match. From day one, Mrs. Johnson began teaching me to read and write and opened my native eyes to a world I never knew. The day I finally memorized the English alphabet, Mrs. Johnson took me to the kitchen where we made a cake in celebration. I also remember the first day I wrote my name. When Reverend Johnson came home, Mrs. Johnson and I met him at the door. Although poor, Reverend Johnson took me out and bought me a present to show how proud he was. Through the Johnsons' encouragement, I was inspired to pursue the course that I would follow though womanhood.

The first thing I had published was an old Indian song. The newspaper said they would give me one chance and see how the public took to my writing. Three weeks later, the newspaper editor was at our doorstep, begging to see me. He told me that the readers liked me, and asked if I would like to be a regular in the newspaper. This led to meeting Johnny Williamson. I will never forget the day that he walked up to our house with a collection of my writings in hand, asking to see me. Mr. Williamson wanted to know if I would be interested in writing a book. I was so happy that I could not contain myself; I ran inside and called Mrs. Johnson. When we came outside, Mr. Williamson asked me what I would do with the money. I looked at Mrs. Johnson. With a nod and a smile, I knew it was all right. "Mr. Williamson," I said, "I will spend it the same way that I have spent everything else I have. Let me introduce you to Pocahontia and Hannania." Shock and shame went across his face. He had expected me to answer in some frivolous way. Immediately, he knew what I was doing. I was buying Indian girls like myself, from a life worse than death. I was setting girls free and inviting them to be a part of our family.

Within months, my first collection of songs and stories was bound together and sold throughout England. I hope that my book will cause others to think and join me in freeing my people and all other slaves. Until then, I will keep up my writing and keep changing lives, one by one. I miss my grandmother and my tribe, but I must believe that my captivity has led to the freedom of many girls.

I write the story of freed girls. We all have a story. This is mine.

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**We all have a story.  
This is mine.**

## **Reality**

Robert Bullard

Every movement of a dragonfly  
Is quickly missed by those with lazy eye,  
A condition some willingly have,  
As though their life can only be a cave.  
From an island, people stare at sunsets  
That are sumptuous, and nobody frets.  
Sun and sea swirl blue and red, yet nothing  
Is thought of it. Instead, thought is dying.  
More than islands or caves, the world ignites  
Flamboyantly into all that excites.  
Reality eludes definition  
When it explodes beyond the cognition.

## Becky

Audra Hagel

I am courage; I am strength; I am determination.

I do not wake each morning to the sound of an alarm clock;

I wake to the sounds of silence.

I am courage; I am strength; I am determination.

I cannot hear my children laugh, but I would give the world  
to give them joy.

I am courage; I am strength; I am determination.

I have not heard an "I love you" in years, yet I love endlessly.

I am courage; I am strength; I am determination.

I wake each morning to give my children joy and love them.

Forever.

## "The Golden Past"

by Andrew Blake



## "The Legendary Arthur"

by Catherine Bailey

### Reply

Alicia Fry

She called to the sky:

"take me with you--

on this earth,

I do not wish to lie!"

But alas,

the earth moved 'round her feet,

and out to her

the sky could not cry.

Oh and wanting to so much,

despite inability,

he did try.

So, she simply sat

amongst the fields and fauna,

awaiting a starry reply.

## Am I Not a Woman?

Arvilla Fee

*In Honor of Sojourner Truth*

I wake at five a.m., scrub my face, apply my makeup,  
 Pull on black slacks and a crimson blouse,  
 Throw in a load of laundry, and check my e-mail,  
 Then tread upstairs to wake two sleepy children.  
 Am I not a woman?

I comb two tangled heads and tug on shirts and  
 Snap buttons, zip zippers, and tie laces,  
 And prepare breakfast in the wake of grumpy  
 Arguments and "Mom, she's looking at me!"  
 Am I not a woman?

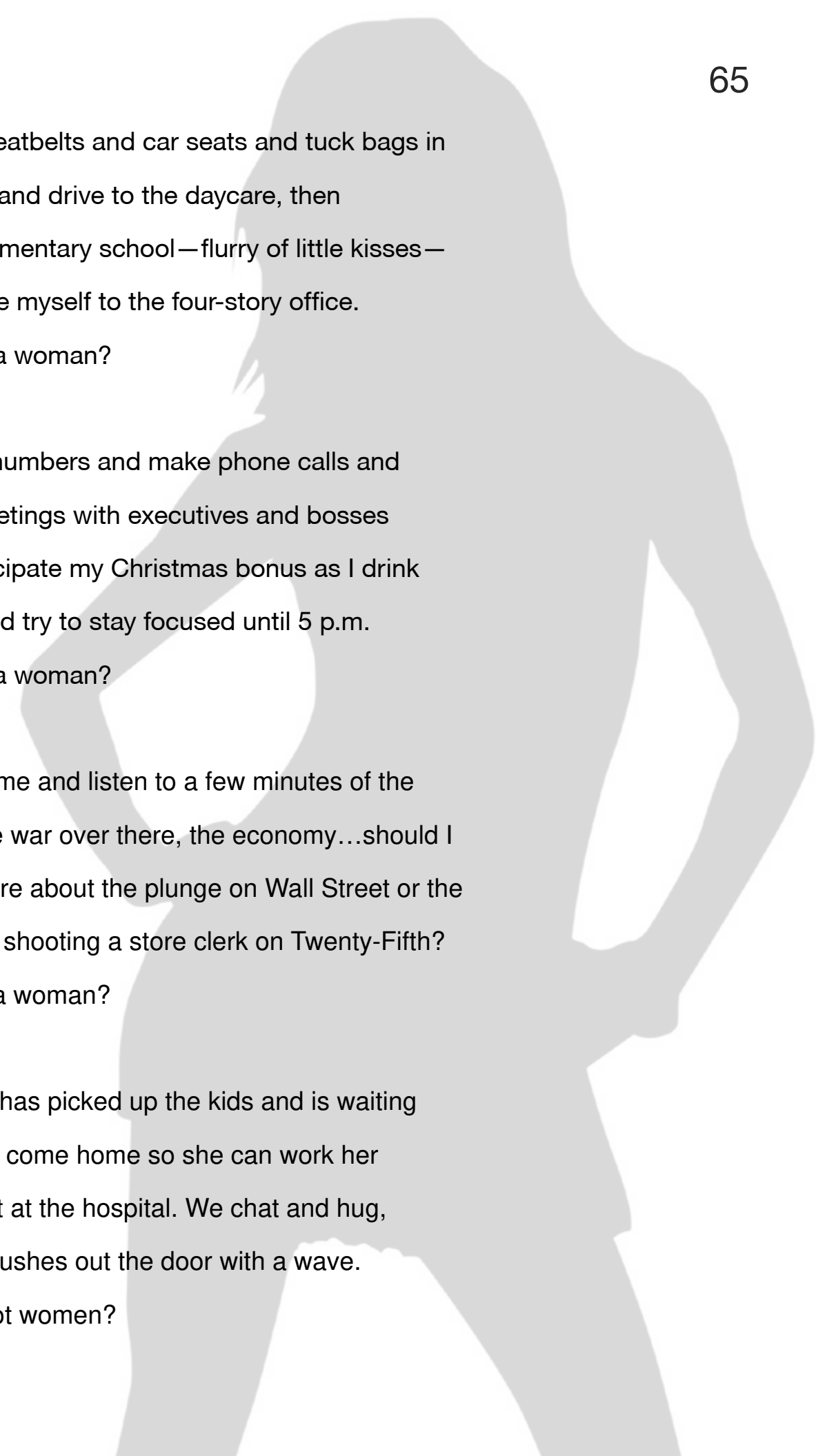
I pack lunches and backpacks and diaper bags  
 And make sure my own bag is intact;  
 Do I have my keys? My purse? Brush teeth, get  
 Shoes on—"Let's get in the car, hurry now!"  
 Am I not a woman?

I fasten seatbelts and car seats and tuck bags in  
 The floor and drive to the daycare, then  
 To the elementary school—flurry of little kisses—  
 Then drive myself to the four-story office.  
 Am I not a woman?

I crunch numbers and make phone calls and  
 Go to meetings with executives and bosses  
 And anticipate my Christmas bonus as I drink  
 Coffee and try to stay focused until 5 p.m.  
 Am I not a woman?

I drive home and listen to a few minutes of the  
 News: the war over there, the economy...should I  
 Worry more about the plunge on Wall Street or the  
 Teenager shooting a store clerk on Twenty-Fifth?  
 Am I not a woman?

My sister has picked up the kids and is waiting  
 For me to come home so she can work her  
 Night shift at the hospital. We chat and hug,  
 And she rushes out the door with a wave.  
 Are we not women?



I fix supper and call the kids to the table as my  
 Husband joins us—just in from work—and we  
 Talk about our days amid the childish babble  
 And general chaos of crumbs and spilled milk.  
 Am I not a woman?

We muddle through homework and play time  
 And a skinned knee and bath time and the  
 Pajamas and the tucking in of covers...then we  
 Sigh—grateful for an hour of silence.  
 Am I not a woman?

We fall asleep, snuggled side-by-side, so tired  
 That we barely get a kiss and a mumbled good-  
 Night...knowing that the alarm clock will play its  
 Music at precisely 5 a.m. and we will start over.  
 Am I not a woman?

## **You are My Sunshine on a Cloudy Day**

Karlton Jenkins

You are my sunshine on a cloudy day,  
 so please don't run or go astray.

You are like the butter to my popcorn  
 and the water to my coco.

As I sit here beside you and hold your hand,  
 I think of us on the beach in the sand.  
 As I talk to you and see you smile,  
 I think we might be here for a little while.

I will be there for you when you are sick or down,  
 Even for a walk on the town.  
 I will be there when you are happy  
 and be there when you are sad;  
 I will even be there to help you pick your summer fad.

I will be there if a family member passes away  
 or even on a beautiful day.  
 Be faithful to the Lord in all you do,  
 because Jesus will always be with you.

To you my friend, if you need my help, I can lend a hand;  
 be safe out there and have fun at play,  
 but just remember you're never promised another day—  
 You are my sunshine on a cloudy day.

## The Empty Slide

Andrea VanderMey

*Silently, the wind whistles through the vacant lot of brilliant plastic equipment. No longer do the uninterrupted giggles flow through the air or the excited screams reach the ears of those who admiringly watch. No, now the plastic shapes remain undisturbed, begging for attention, wishing the past could be changed.*

The cool November breeze licks the faces of several stakes as they guard the entrance to a long ago playful scene. Barren trees reach for the sky as their discarded leaves fall to waste. Untouched, they are softly carried through the breeze wandering only on the wings of the wind. Long shadows blanket the weeded grass. The entire world seems to shift and moan with the steady creek of the swings.

The unbearable silence that exists within creates such a horror that not even the wildlife dares to step upon this forsaken place. Terror runs through the veins of all who know. Not knowing would be to step willingly into the jaws of unspeakable death. Speaking of it evokes another evil in itself. The unbearable silence that exists is a curse that will never be lifted.

It was a late-afternoon Thursday as the sun was just at its peak before retiring into the night. Timmy had a choice, the slide or the swings. It was the best decision he could have been offered. Deliberation was at a minimum; there was no way that he could choose. He ran to the swings, a smile creasing over his entire round face. Blonde hair hung just below his eyebrows, not quite smothering his brilliant blue eyes. In anticipation of the irreplaceable joy he was soon to acquire, he squealed as his feet took off from the ground. Pumping his legs, he became airborne, the wind rushing past his face,

adrenaline pulsing through his entire being. Only he and the swing were alive in a frozen world.

For what seemed only moments, Timmy felt the exhilarating rush. A familiar yet unwanted sound penetrated his thoughts: a voice, calling his name. Mom? Already?

"Timmy! Timmy! We have to go, its time for dinner!"

**Fear and panic began to pound through every inch of his small frame**



No, this can't be happening. Quickly using his cunning brilliance, he leapt from the swing, still airborne and scuttled toward the empty slide. He scaled the fortifying monkey bars that lead to his escape. No sooner had he placed his feet firmly onto the platform than did he see the brilliant colorful plastic of the slide. It beckoned him. The smooth, luxurious plastic glinting in the sun, the brilliant yellow placed warmth in him that he could not reject. He placed all else aside and jumped into the small tunnel as he began his adventure to the flat earth once again.

The earth did not come soon. The irreplaceable joy that usually coursed through his veins was found vacant. After a few moments, guilt began to fill little Timmy's mind. The long tunnel passed by him, longer than he could ever remember before. Worry started to crease in his forehead, a longing to be home once more. Fear and panic began to pound through every inch of his small frame. A small shiver shook him, yet he was not cold. The pleasure of the swing now felt void compared to the



**The pleasure of the swing now felt void compared to the ultimate agony that now encompasses his mind**

ultimate agony that now encompasses his mind.

No reasoning would suffice for what was happening. This has to be a dream, a nightmare. The truth behind these lies was all too real. As little Timmy could feel the now scalding plastic beneath his skin, he soon realized the horror-filled reality.

Little Timmy had chosen the swing, not the slide, yet Timmy will now forever in misery slide.

The shrill screams of both joy and pain lingered through the air throughout that day and the next. Echoes of worried voices pounded through the tender ears of all who were present.

Police and firefighters searched urgently for Timmy. Every piece of the ground was violated, scavenged in hopes of finding the boy. Subconsciously, it was known that the boy would never be found, but most were unwilling to accept and voice these doubts. Two weeks later, the entire playground was quarantined. Murmurs of anticipation and doubt were hushed as stakes were driven through the grassy flesh on the outskirts of the ground.

Every November, from deep within the playground bowels can be heard a suffocating moan. No ear can turn from the horrifying groan. Some insist that the wail comes only from the deteriorating equipment as the wind sways it back and forth; but they only fool themselves for a moment. The direction of the sound leads directly to the belly of a slide. The slide where little Timmy was last seen four years ago.



## Things Which the End Has Made

Joseph S. Brannon

A Future Twilight begged on high,  
 Begged by extrasolar passersby,  
 A wrinkle of farsight,  
 In a quest for the Eons of Light;  
 The Infinite Jeweled Nights.

On the journey, we'll have witnessed  
 The showing of a cosmic domain,  
 A rending force behind the fall of gods;  
 Youngearths and Starbloods  
 Betrayed, where only the deep  
 Jewels remain.

Watch the Lunar tendril-grave span, iridescent,  
 Dashed across a cold motion gravity world  
 Like stratified star remains, a signature of  
 Beautiful Waste, Encapsulated Time.

All these strained elements of the Celestial Raid,

Never fear those things which the End has made.

## Beautiful Waste, *Encapsulated Time*

~Joseph S. Brannon



### "Warm Memories"

by Audra Hagel



## Procrastination Station

Alicia Fry

Procrastination Station, what's your dissipation?

I've been spending too much time online;

*Oh my, the temptation!*

There's a 20-page paper that needs to be written;

*But, I lack any motivation!*

Why does this always happen during finals;

*The way I study is an abomination!*

I can't wait 'til I graduate (in a year or two);

*But, by then, I'll need social rehabilitation!*

With all this stressin', I can't believe I'm still sane;

*Holy shit, I need a vacation!*

## Miss You

Kveta Hajkova

Back in the place,

moving back in space,

memories are here,

but you are nowhere.

So close and so far,

it seems a long time ago;

everywhere I go,

everywhere I look,

you are not there anymore.

Please tell me that you love me;

I will be happy even if you hug me.

Everything is so simple—

I do not ask for much.

I miss you so much.



## **My Hands Are Stretched Out Still**

Audra Hagel

I stretch out my hands to you; to see your face every morning, this is my waking desire. To seek life from your lips every instant, this is my every pleasure. To feel your hand upon me always, this is the hope of my day. Your eyes I seek as soon as my own are open. Your voice I crave to hear above every other sound. Your presence I desire more than anything else.

I long for you! Draw me to you. Take me with you. Don't let go. I stretch out my hands to you upon awakening.

Come find me.

## **Truth is of the Heart**

Joshua Hopkins

Trust not the eyes, for they do lie; trust not the ears, for they hearest not the whole truth, but thy heart is the core of your being, and it knows the truth which is purged of fire—the heart as the bellows and the blood the burning coals.

Love is like a fine sword forged from the hearts of men; it cuts the heart in two. When the heart is thus struck down, it is smitten, stricken and afflicted; 'tis a wound with which, if made by arms of mortal means to strike the heart, one could not live.



## Insomnia

Arvilla Fee

The darkness of the room

The hum of the fan

The time on the clock...

All suggest it is time...

Time to go to sleep

Blankets up to the chin

Eyes are closing

Breathe in... breathe out

CRASH

Did I lay out my clothes?

I still have six essays to grade

Need 30 copies of that grammar sheet

Dentist appointment conflicts with pre-school

I'll have to cancel that

Darkness, hum, time on the clock

Time to sleep ... time to sleep

Breathe in . . . breathe out

SWISH

What groceries do I need?

How much was that money order?

When is spring break?

I would like to go somewhere warm...

Do we have enough toilet paper?

Darkness, hum, time on the clock

Time to sleep...

The doctor says if I can't sleep,

I should write things down

So here I am, writing this poem

Back to bed...breathe in, breathe out

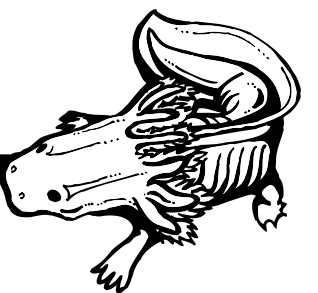
Eyes closing

Breathe ...falling, almost falling ...

Will we run out of dog food before

Friday?

**Will we run  
out of *dog food*  
before *Friday*?**



## Queen of Poetry

Nikatta Moore

You don't realize that I am the Queen of your heart.

I am what pleases you.

I am what you want, and I am what you need.

I am what helps you to succeed.

I give you great, deep words to make you argue.

I am the one who helps you out in the day to make an A.

Who am I?

Who would I be without you?

You made me who I am today:

The Queen of poetry.

I am who I am:

The Queen of poetry.

You made me,

And I will forever be...



**"Queen Ann"**  
by Audra Hagel

## The Pocketwatch

Justin Foster

Johnathan woke up to the same dark room he had left the night before; nothing had changed despite the vivid dreamscape he had visited in his rest. He groped sleepily for his eyeglasses which rested on the nightstand next to his bed. Finding them, he unfolded the two arms before sliding them into place. Johnathan glanced at the cable box which served as his clock—7:42—as he slid off his bed to his feet. Time didn't mean much to him today; he had no pressing affairs to attend to or appointments to keep. No, this was a day Johnathan had to himself. He stretched his arms as he got out of bed, yawning loudly as his feet took him to the one window his room had. The sky outside was formed of dull, overcast clouds that hung heavy with rain. "A perfect day to stay inside..." Johnathan thought as he pulled the blinds shut. Without much thought as to what he was going to do that day, he climbed back into bed, curling up beneath the warm covers.

Living alone was nice but dreadfully boring; at times, the chilling blue walls of his apartment on the third floor felt like a prison cell. Johnathan was fairly new to the area, having moved a fair distance from his hometown to pursue his dream. But like the dream he had had, it seemed fleeting—only stopping to be caught when Johnathan was far enough away to not be able to catch up to it. His attempts to find sleep again were equally fruitless, quashed by a loud knock at his apartment door. He glanced at the time again—8:15—and groaned in disgust. It wasn't until he heard the second group of knockings that he got up to answer the door.

Johnathan loosed the deadbolt but left the chain lock in place as he opened the door wide enough to greet his visitor. He was surprised to see one of the only faces he did know from around town: Reggie the postman. To say that he was an odd fellow was an understatement; he was certainly

someone whom Johnathan would have a hard time forgetting. His optimism was seemingly endless from what Johnathan had gathered during the few times he had met up with Reggie after work to "Reg" out. At least, that's what Reggie had called "vegging." Johnathan had to admit, it was a clever use of his name, but he had always felt at odds with Reggie's optimism.

"I've got a package here for you, John. Sent next-day shipping with insurance and confirmation, so I'll need you to sign here." Reggie slipped the clipboard through the crack in the door to Johnathan's waiting hands; he signed it without paying much attention to the details of the delivery. Johnathan was surprised to see the size of the parcel—it was a small box no bigger than a large box of matches; it was not very heavy either, and it was wrapped in rough brown paper with ragged twine securing it.

"Is that all, Reggie?" The postman nodded, taking back the clipboard and handing Johnathan the carbon copy of the delivery.

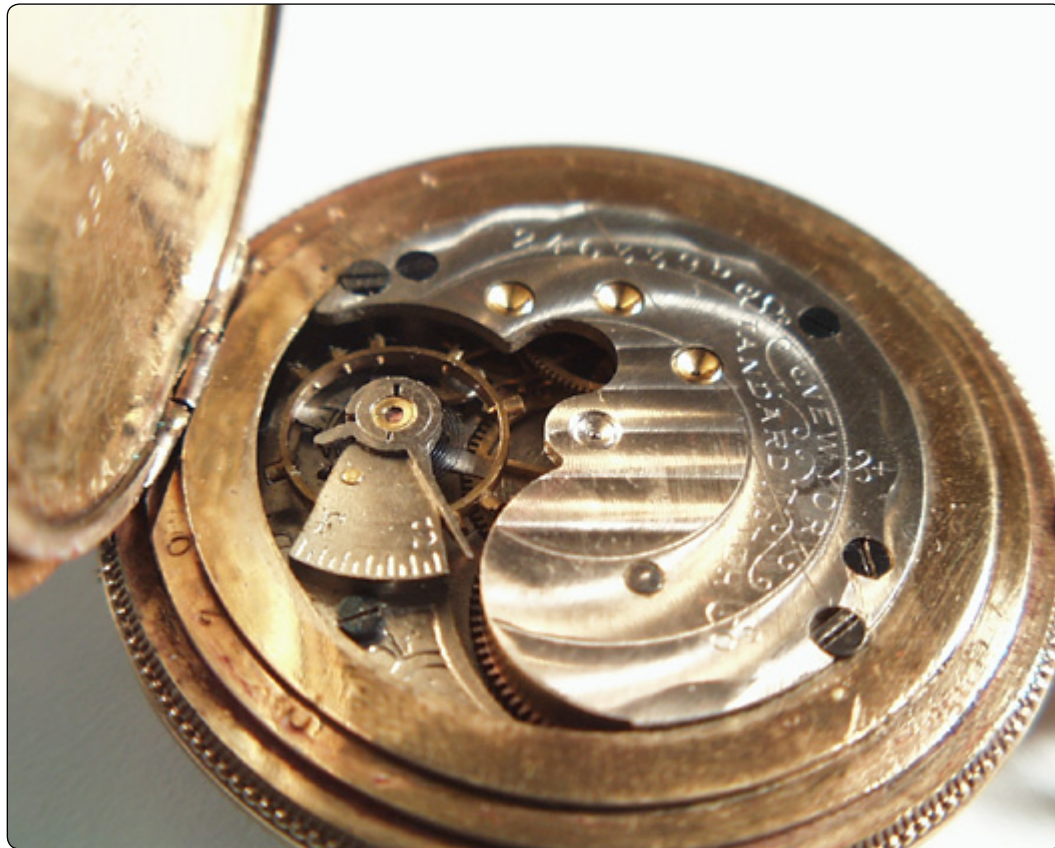
"If you're not doing anything tonight, you should crash my place. I'm throwing a party for a friend of mine," Reggie added before Johnathan could close the door; Johnathan grimaced ever-so-slightly, but Reggie seemed not to notice.

"I'll see if I have time to stop by. Thanks Reg," He added as he shut the door to his apartment, sliding the deadbolt back into place. Today's delivery struck him oddly; he had told no one but his parents his new address, and their package had arrived a few days before today. He tossed the package onto his bed as he made his way to his bathroom to freshen up. A few minutes later, he joined the parcel on his bed, bouncing once as he flopped onto the disheveled sheets. He reached above his head to the box, grabbing it and holding it where he could read the address.

"Master Johnathan Cuir, Apt. 3-F, 6 Polith St., Codesto, WY," he read aloud in a mockingly distinguished tone. He looked for a return address, but there was none to be found. His fingers found the knot of the twine and undid it, then

tearing apart the now loosened paper surrounding the box. Tossing the wrapping aside, he opened the box to find a rather peculiar object. He pulled from the box a large, golden pocketwatch on a long, golden chain. He eyed the watch as one might a strange curiosity, examining every large feature it had.

The pocketwatch itself sported a rather ornate engraving on its two covers. It also bore one large knob and two smaller buttons. Taking a chance, Johnathan pressed the largest of the three buttons; with a slight clink, the cover popped open to reveal the clock face. Johnathan looked at the time indicated by the intricate hands—12:00. Surely it hadn't been that long! Panicked, Johnathan looked at the cable box below his television—8:30. He shook his head in relief, looking back again at the watch's face. The second hand had begun advancing steps, indicating 12:00:05; he also noticed that the pocketwatch was making the faint but audible ticks that were associated with timepieces.



"I suppose I should set it..." he remarked to himself, moving his thumb to the smaller button to the left of the largest knob. He gave it a press. He watched as the second hand spiraled backwards to its original position, joining the hour and second hand in their rest. "What the heck?" Johnathan blurted out as his thumb released the smaller button; as he did, the second hand began its tireless trek around the watch-face again. Again, he pressed the same button to the same result—the second hand slid back to its starting position, only to begin ticking again once he released the button.

"I guess it's broken. Ah well," the watch dangled idly from his fingers as he slowly rolled the chain between his fingers, causing the pocketwatch to rotate slowly. The inside of the watch's cover came into view as he did this, and so did a pair of words etched into the metal of the inside cover. The engraving read "*Memento Mori*" in an elegant script, one that reminded Johnathan of his Aunt Gertrude's writing. Johnathan shrugged mentally, dropping the watch next to him; it landed close by with a soft bounce. He looked over at the clock again—8:35—and sighed in boredom.

"I suppose I should see if there's a jeweler around that could repair this... Not too smart sending a gift that's broken." Johnathan got up from his bed, glancing in the direction of his cellular phone as he stood up from the faded green sheets. He walked over to his desk, flopping lazily into his computer chair as he picked up his cell. He was halfway through dialing the local operator when an idea crept into his mind.

"Why don't I visit an antique dealer? That thing's got to be worth a good amount of money..." Johnathan glanced over his shoulder in the general direction of his bed. It took a few minutes of reclining in his computer chair before he built the motivation to recover his prize. Mustering the feeble strength it took, he pulled himself to his feet, the same feet that shuffled idly to the bedside, taking Johnathan with them.

"Well, I'm already dressed..." Johnathan glanced down at the clothes he had been wearing from the day before; this

wasn't a matter of laziness or disregard for clean clothing but rather of convenience. "Time to find out what you're worth." He picked up the watch from the covers, taking a moment to examine the watch once more. Opening the cover again, he inspected the face of the pocketwatch again.

"Huh?" He audibly gasped as he stared at the space where the hour and minute hands were once resting. Johnathan blinked few times as he brought the pocketwatch close to his eyes. He tilted the piece back and forth, scrutinizing that tiny spot on the face again and again.

"Must've just been my mind." The cover closed with a soft click, slipping the watch into the pocket of his jeans and attaching the chain to the belt loop at his hip. Grabbing his jacket and his keys, he made his way to the hallway of his apartment complex, locking the door behind him. As he pulled the key from the deadbolt, the entire keyring slipped through his fingers, landing on the carpeted floor of the hall. Johnathan stooped to retrieve them, casually looking down the hallway at the two uniformed police officers that stood interviewing one of the residents two rooms down from him. Just as he looked, one of the officers looked up from his writing pad, spying Johnathan's attention.

"Excuse me..." The officer spoke loudly enough that Johnathan could not have ignored him. He sighed, standing up from his stooped position with keys in hand.

"Yes?" Johnathan responded just as the officer had reached him. Johnathan looked at the badge that hung just below his nameplate.

"Officer Long, Cody Police Dept. We're responding to a possible burglary, wondered if you heard anything." As he said this, Officer Long flipped the page in his notebook, pressing the pen to the top line.

"I didn't hear anything." Johnathan remarked, shrugging his shoulders. He watched pensively as the police officer jotted down his words.

"And your name and apartment number?" Officer Long inquired, not even looking up from his pad.

"Johnathan Cruir, Apartment 3-F. Who was it that got robbed?" Officer Long looked up as he finished scribbling the letter 'F.' He nodded down the hall to a tiny, middle-aged woman who was visibly shaken by the ordeal. She had been obscured before by Officer Long.

"Ms. Hennesy?" Johnathan said, to which Officer Long nodded.

"How do you know Ms. Hennesy?" Officer Long asked.

"I helped her move in a sofa, once. That's all." The pen took to the paper once again, noting this detail. "Was there anything stolen from her apartment?" Johnathan asked, staring at Ms. Hennesy.

"I'm not at liberty to discuss that. If you see anything suspicious, here's the contact information." Officer Long pressed a crisp, white card into Johnathan's hand before returning down the hall to his compatriot. Johnathan followed the officer down the hall, passing the other two individuals. As he passed Ms. Hennesy's doorway, he inadvertently caught her eye.

Johnathan continued to the stairwell, walking down the three flights of stairs to the street below. The antique parlor was a brisk three block walk under a heavy sky; it took him less time than he had thought, but soon after he had departed, Johnathan stood before its shabby façade. He stopped to read the faded red lettering above the single door.

"The Parlor." Johnathan grabbed the doorknob, giving it a turn while pushing the door open. He heard the jingling of entry bells as the door swung shut, leaving only the dim lights of the interior. The inside was just as dilapidated as the frontage, with a vast inventory blanketed in a layer of dust. He took two brave steps into the dusky haze before being startled.

"Welcome to my Parlor." A decrepit old man was the

owner of the voice; he had a form that was just as much of an antique as any of the items he was selling. Johnathan gulped hard as he found the ability to speak.

"Hi..." Johnathan stammered, "I've got this antique watch that I'd wonder if you'd be interested in." The old man drew closer, unnerving Johnathan further.

"A watch?" The old fellow's manner was deliberately strained; he extended his hand towards the only non-dusty surface in the entire outlet. "Please, if you will." Johnathan obliged him, walking over to the cabinet which he discovered also served as the register. He looked back over his shoulder for the proprietor but was surprised again to find the old man standing opposite of him.

"Right..." Johnathan looked confused, shrugging his shoulders momentarily before tugging the watch out of his pocket and laying it upon the owner's outstretched hand. The old man's eyes grew wide as he saw the watch.

"This watch is very valuable," the old man said, flipping the watch in his fingers, "I doubt you could imagine just how valuable it is."

"What, like a million dollars?" Johnathan scoffed.



**"What, like a million dollars?"**

"I would say it's priceless. Without a doubt, I very much want this watch. But... I cannot give you a fair price for it."

"It doesn't even work—I tried setting it to correct time, but it only ticks forward. I'll sell it to you for a thousand, cash."

"Oh?" The old man's eyebrow arched, "You started it?"

Whatever you do, I would advise against tinkering with the watch any further."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Johnathan pressed the largest of the buttons, popping the cover open. "Also, what's with the writing?"

"*Memento Mori...*" the old man whispered dramatically, "Remember, you are mortal."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Johnathan's voice grew annoyed, "Well, fine, if you're not interested, I'll be going now." With that, Johnathan exited the same way he had entered. The return to his apartment complex seemed a much longer walk than he remembered, not that he minded. The old man had certainly bugged him with the vague answers, especially concerning the inscription. His mind had become so deeply entranced by his thoughts that Johnathan ambled past his apartment complex, forcing him to double-back.

The clouds began unloading thick, heavy rain just as Johnathan reached the door to the stairwell; he trudged up the stairs to the third floor, treading down the familiar hallway to the featureless door marked "3-F." He opened the door, locking it behind him as he tossed his coat onto the floor along with his keys.

"So what are you really worth?" He said as he pulled the watch from his pocket. Johnathan opened the cover once more, looking at the clock face again. The hour hand had advanced to four, the minute hand was flirting with the nine, and the second hand marched continually around its circuit. His thumb moved to the smaller button on the left. Without a second thought, he pressed it as far down as it would go.

"Nothing. Of course. Why would it work?" He frowned. Just then, Johnathan's ears picked up a slight sound. He watched with curiosity as the hands of the watch began to unwind themselves, returning to their previous home of 12. When the second hand finally came to a rest, he was gripped by an odd sensation. It felt as if something, or someone, had



grabbed him about the waist and was pulling him. He shook his head, bracing himself as best he could, but the sensation grew stronger. Soon, it was irresistible, and he felt himself slip onto the floor of his apartment, his head knocking against the cold floor.

Johnathan was unsure as to what it was that woke him: the pounding in his head or the sweet, flowery aroma that filled his nostrils. Regardless as to which, he sat up with a start, glancing around wildly, expecting to find himself right where he had fallen. This was not the case.

"Where am I?" he muttered, rubbing the eyes underneath his glasses, "And how did I get here?"

"You are here!" A female voice answered the first of Johnathan's questions, shocking him. "I'm unsure as to how you got here." He looked around to see just who had provided those answers.

"Where is 'here,' and who are you? And where are you? Show yourself!" Johnathan wheeled around, finding himself face to face with the source of the voice. 'It' was a young-looking woman with creamy, off-white colored hair, soft eyes to contrast her harder face, and the source of that floral scent; with Johnathan sitting bewildered as he was, she towered over him.

"You're finally here... Don't you remember me?" She extended her hand out to him; Johnathan grabbed it, struggling to his feet, even with her aid.

"...Cygienne." Johnathan whispered, "I remember you. You are the girl of my dreams."

"Oh Johnathan... I was so worried about you." Cygienne smiled, throwing her arms around Johnathan's neck in a hug.

"You don't have to worry anymore." Johnathan's arms coiled around her waist.

"Welcome home, Johnathan, welcome home." Cygienne whispered softly in his ear.



## Drink Up Rhyme

Alicia Fry

and the doctor said,  
just a shot of whiskey  
to clear your head  
and off to bed

& don't worry about things  
that are heavier than lead  
just a shot of vodka  
to make you sing

and the doctor said,  
just a shot of bourbon  
to make you unwind  
and on you go to the daily grind

& don't worry about things  
that are louder than your mind  
just a shot of tequila  
to make you a king

## Postcards from an Empty Grave; Methuselah's Forgotten Society

Joseph S. Brannon

If you've ever heard a worn, grey man tell a story,  
    Wrapped in old herokind and glory,  
Pay close attention to his wordcraft and toil,  
    For all things end in stories;  
All things are born from such glories.

    When all the world is united,  
Let the people come together, under salt and stable,  
Under roof and fable, and hear from all the Grey Winds  
    These glories all from their beginning to their end.

If you've ever had the old-earth woman give you a locket,  
    Made of jade with silver-like veins,  
    Hold it tight when the day comes  
That you may capture all their lost tales,  
    Those people who fell from hell.

## Life as I Know

Richard Price

Lying on the stretcher.  
 She cleansed my wound.  
 Tried to catch her.  
 Said she'd stitch me soon.  
 Don't waste the supplies  
 Or your time;  
 I'm ready for my demise.  
 I'll be just fine.  
 She began to cry,  
 Said, "we're going to help you."  
 I let out a sigh—  
 Love, is that what they tell you?  
 That you can save my life?  
 That you can end my strife?  
 That everything is going to be alright?  
 I know too much,  
 And I'm so sick of this shell.

I can't live without a crutch;  
 This world is more of a hell.  
 People are surrounded by distrust,  
 Overcome by lust,  
 Not worth a speck of dust,  
 Yet we strive to survive  
 For an unknown reason.  
 I want what she's on,  
 I said, pointing to a girl  
 Who was playing with a doll.  
 Betwixt her fingers, she would twirl  
 The hair, then let it fall.  
 She has the mind of a child;  
 She's being visited by her mother.  
 Compared to her, we're mild.  
 She's happy like no other.  
 What's her little secret,  
 Do you suppose?  
 Her mind, she's kept it  
 Unaffected by life as we know.

## This is Living

Arvilla Fee

Shaylee gripped the steering wheel. Headlights were coming toward her, but they shouldn't be on *her* side of the road. Shaylee pulled to the right, but too late. An explosion of glass and metal ripped through the stillness of the night. Shaylee flung her arms up in front of her face, trying to shield herself from the flying shards—then everything went black.

"Where am I?" wondered Shaylee. Maybe she'd died and gone to heaven. There was a bright light... didn't near-death people always talk about bright lights? Shaylee wasn't an expert on heaven, but she was pretty sure that it didn't involve sharp pains and probably had a little more room. Everything around her was dark, cramped, sharp, and hard. She heard a voice close to her ear—was it God?

"Ma'am, can you hear me? You okay?" Drew, from paramedics, reached in and lightly touched her shoulder.

Even with just the beam from his flashlight, Drew knew this woman was a mess. She was covered in blood and glass; and she wasn't responding. This one was far worse than the driver of the other vehicle. His crew had already pulled out that driver, and except for some lacerations and a broken arm, he was fine... well, after he spent some time in jail, he'd probably be fine. The other driver was stone-cold drunk.

So, there's a light and a voice; Shaylee concentrated on those two things. It was a man's voice for sure but not God's—unless God had a Texan accent. He kept asking her something... what was it? She tried to move but sank back into the safe, velvety blackness.

Shaylee's next memory was waking up to extremely bright lights in a white, sterile room with numerous tubes, machines, and beeping sounds. A sea of unfamiliar faces floated above her, and a million voices seemed to buzz and

hum in the air. She felt an uncontrollable panic rising in her throat and tried to scream; but she couldn't utter a single sound.

"Ah, honey, you coming around? Come on now; talk to Deena... you going to have to give me something, girl. Come on now." Deena studied the young woman's face, watching her eyes intently, hoping and praying the doctor wouldn't have to call "time of death" on this one.

Even with the mess of tubes and bandages, Deena could tell that this had been one beautiful girl. Deena and four other nurses had been in the operating room for over four hours with her. The surgeon had set a broken leg and a broken arm; sewn up multiple lacerations on the woman's arms, face, and head; and given her more than four pints of blood. They were now watching for any swelling of the brain.

Drew, the paramedic who'd brought Shaylee in, entered the recovery room. He'd just gotten off of his shift, but he could not go home without knowing if the woman he'd brought to St. Francis was alive. Plus, he and his crew had gone back to the wreckage and had managed to find the young lady's wallet. She was 25 year-old Shaylee Joy McCallen, resident of Indianapolis—and not just *any* resident. After finding some other items, including her cell phone, an officer had discovered that Shaylee was the daughter of two high-profile parents: Frankie G. McCallen, owner of a thriving Irish pub called *Full Moon Rising*, and Camille Roberts-McCallen, owner of *Camille Fashions*, a trendy design company. Both parents had been notified and were on their way to St. Francis. Drew filled Deena in on all of the information he'd learned, and Deena, in turn, told him that Shaylee's chances of survival were still shaky. Drew wrote down his number and asked Deena to call him with updates.

It was not until *much* later that Deena was able to give Drew positive news, but after two days of touch-and-go, Shaylee finally opened her eyes and asked for her parents. Deena gave a little shriek and ran out to get them. Frankie and

Camille had just left the room to get something to eat.

"She's asking for you!" Deena shouted as she caught up to them at the elevator.

Frankie and Camille turned and rushed back to the room.

"Mom, Dad?" Shaylee whispered. "What happened?"

Her parents both started crying, and it was her dad who spoke first. "Oh, honey, you had a horrible car accident. You've been at St. Francis for almost three days now. But you're going to be fine. The doctor... God... somebody... has done miracles."

"That's right," Deena agreed, grinning, "You going to be just fine."

Shaylee smiled weakly at Deena. "It was you," she said, her voice still rough and whispery, "I remember your voice... your face."

Deena laughed. "Sure enough, girl, who could forget this face? Name's Deena."

Shaylee smiled a little more. Deena was a trim, well-built African American woman of about forty to forty five years old. She had incredible, straight, white teeth, a head-full of wild, shiny black braids, and an amazing, deep voice... a voice that Shaylee had clung to in the blackness. Shaylee seemed to remember another voice, too, someone calling... but that had been a *man's* voice...

"Was there a man? How did I get here?" asked Shaylee.

"Oh, that would be Drew Collins and his guys," Deena said as she fussed around the bed like a nesting mother hen, making Shaylee more comfortable. "That boy been calling here every day asking about you. He'll be thrilled to pieces to know that you're awake and talking now."

"Will he visit?"

Deena laughed. "I'd like to see anyone try and stop him."

"Do you remember him?" asked Camille, gently rubbing Shaylee's hand. "Do you remember... the wreck?"

"I remember lying there and hearing a voice—I thought it was God."

Deena snorted with laughter. "Oh, girl, you better not tell Drew that—he might get all puffed up... you telling him you thought he was God... Lord Almighty!"

Shaylee tried to laugh, but it hurt. "Well, I thought he was God until I caught a Texan accent, and although I haven't talked to God in awhile, I was pretty sure God wasn't from Texas."

Deena's face showed mock surprise. "What? Well, no one going to tell Drew God ain't from Texas!"

**"Well, I thought he was God  
until I caught  
a Texan accent..."**



This time Shaylee had to laugh in spite of the pain.

Shaylee's parents laughed, too. It was so good to hear their daughter's voice. She'd come so close to dying, and now she was joking with a nurse—a nurse who had been more like an angel.

"How can we ever thank you for what you've done?" Camille asked Deena.

"Oh, hush now, just doing my job," answered Deena.

But Camille and Frankie both knew she'd done more than "her job." She had been in Shaylee's room as often as time would permit; had brought Camille and Frankie coffee, sandwiches, or both at least a half a dozen times; and had kept them informed about every detail of their daughter's condition and progress.

Shaylee, exhausted from talking, fell back asleep. Two hours later when she awoke, her parents were still sitting near her bed. She wondered briefly how many hours they'd spent at the hospital and when they'd last slept.

"Hey," she said softly.

They both smiled and instantly reached for her hand. "You're back," Camille whispered with relief, as though she'd been afraid for Shaylee to sleep.

"Yeah, I'm here."

"Someone is here to see you," said Frankie.

A man stood up from a corner chair and approached the bed. Shaylee knew the tall, lanky, clean-cut, sandy-haired guy must be Drew—even before he spoke.

"Ma'am, good to see you awake," Drew said in his Texas drawl.

Shaylee grinned. "I knew it... the voice of God."

Drew flashed an enormous, dimpled, and slightly embarrassed smile. "Aw, no ma'am, just Drew... but Deena sort of told me the story."

"You were at my accident?"

"Yep, you're mighty lucky."

Shaylee's throat tightened. "What about the other car... anyone dead?"

Drew shook his head. "No, the 22 year-old male was alone, and he was okay except for some minor injuries. His biggest problem may be with the courts because he was drunk as a skunk when he crossed the median on I-65 and hit you head on."

Shaylee nodded, trying to absorb the information.

Drew continued. "He lucked out partly because he was driving a Chevy Silverado—a real giant compared to your

Lexus SC Coupe."

Shaylee closed her eyes. Her car, the one she'd driven off the lot less than a month ago, seemed so trivial to her now. She'd bought it on a whim because she'd sold her third set of dress designs. Following in her mother's footsteps after graduating from the Art Institute of Dallas three years ago, Shaylee had hit the fashion design world by storm and was now a full partner in her mother's business. It was those college years in Dallas where she'd learned all about Texan accents.

She opened her eyes and looked at Drew and her parents. "Can you tell me about the wreck... about what happened to me?"

Drew bit his lower lip and looked anxiously at Shaylee's parents.

"Shaylee," said her dad, "you sure you want to know?"

She nodded.

Frankie gave Drew a "go-ahead" nod. "There's nothing left of your car," Drew said quietly. "Everyone says it's a miracle you got out alive. It took thirty eight minutes to cut away the metal; and you'd stopped breathing..." Drew stopped and cleared his throat, embarrassed by his sudden emotions.

"So I'm pretty messed up?"

Shaylee's mom took over for Drew. "You have injuries, yes... a broken arm, a broken leg, a cracked collar bone, a cracked pelvis bone, some lacerations..."

"Can I see a mirror?" Shaylee asked, her voice trembling.

Frankie and Camille saw the worry in her eyes. They knew Shaylee had always taken great pride in her looks—as well she should. She had an adorable, oval face with wide, crystal blue eyes, a small nose and beautifully arched eyebrows. Her neck-length blond hair had been cut in a classy, layered style, flipped out slightly on the ends.

Deena walked in at that moment. "Now what's all this gloom in here?" she asked, putting her hands on her hips.

"She wants a mirror," Drew said.

"A mirror! Honey, that mirror won't give you the right picture just yet."

"Please..." Shaylee begged.

"Okay, but don't get all in a fuss about your looks." Deena disappeared for a few minutes then came back with a hand mirror. She held it up for her patient.

Shaylee barely recognized the bruised grape that was supposed to be her face. There were so many bandages! Her eyes were purplish-black underneath, her nose was swollen, and her hair was gone... shaven. She slowly lowered the mirror. "I'm alive though..." she whispered.



Deena took the mirror. "And that's what matters most. And don't you worry; the swelling and all that will go away soon enough. I'll just have to keep those Army folks away so they don't try picking you up as a new recruit."

Everyone laughed, including Shaylee. What did image matter when she'd been so close to death?

Three weeks later, Shaylee was at last released from the hospital. Her parents took her to their plush apartment above the pub, knowing Shaylee would need to be much stronger before staying alone in her own apartment. Camille hired an in-home nurse to help Shaylee during the day. She'd wanted to hire Deena, but the hospital said they couldn't survive without her. Drew visited Shaylee once a week, and Frankie and Camille had a sneaking suspicion that Drew might be interested in a little more than Shaylee's health now. They both teased Shaylee about it, but she would always just wink and say, "We'll see."

After another nine weeks, Shaylee was finally able to toss the crutches and was given a clean bill of health from the doctor. Her arm, leg, and cuts had all healed nicely, and her hair had grown back into a cute little, choppy bob that barely reached her ears. She spiked out her little layers with styling gel so it would look like she'd gotten a crazy hair cut on purpose. Shaylee had even gone back to working two days a week with her mom.

Shaylee's friends and relatives said it was great to see her "back to normal" — but Shaylee knew she was *better* than normal. The old Shaylee McCallen would have been devastated about the car and self-conscious about the little scars on her arms and face. But the new Shaylee didn't care about the car and noticed so many other things in life besides her own face. Colors seemed brighter, the smell of freshly-brewed coffee made her deliriously happy, the sounds of honking and people talking were exhilarating. She felt truly alive for the first time; and she wanted to share her life and her happiness with others. She had so many ideas and was already working on two projects: a *Habitat for Humanity* house in one of the older neighborhoods in Indy and an after-school program for one of the local middle schools. She had money, and now she wanted to spend it on things besides sports cars and parties. She also had two special people in her life.

One person was Deena, of course, and Shaylee spent time with Deena every week. She'd also managed to surprise Deena with something Deena had wanted for years: a brand new deck, complete with white-wicker patio furniture, and a big, beautiful flower garden with a fountain. Deena had been ecstatic, had cried buckets of tears, and told Shaylee she shouldn't have done it!

Shaylee's response had been, "I was given a chance to live, and this is living!"

Living also included her other special person, Drew, whom she'd spent nearly day with for the past five weeks. She had never known anyone so kind and loving—and to think she probably wouldn't have given Drew a second glance four months earlier before her accident. She'd simply "hung" with a different kind of crowd. Today Drew had asked her to meet him for dinner at her dad's pub.

When Shaylee got to the pub, she was puzzled because it looked closed. But as soon as she walked in, she knew why. There were pink rose petals on every table, and a huge sign hung from the ceiling that said: "WILL YOU MARRY ME SHAYLEE?" Drew came toward her then dropped on one knee with an open, blue-velvet box in his hand.

"What do you say?" he whispered.

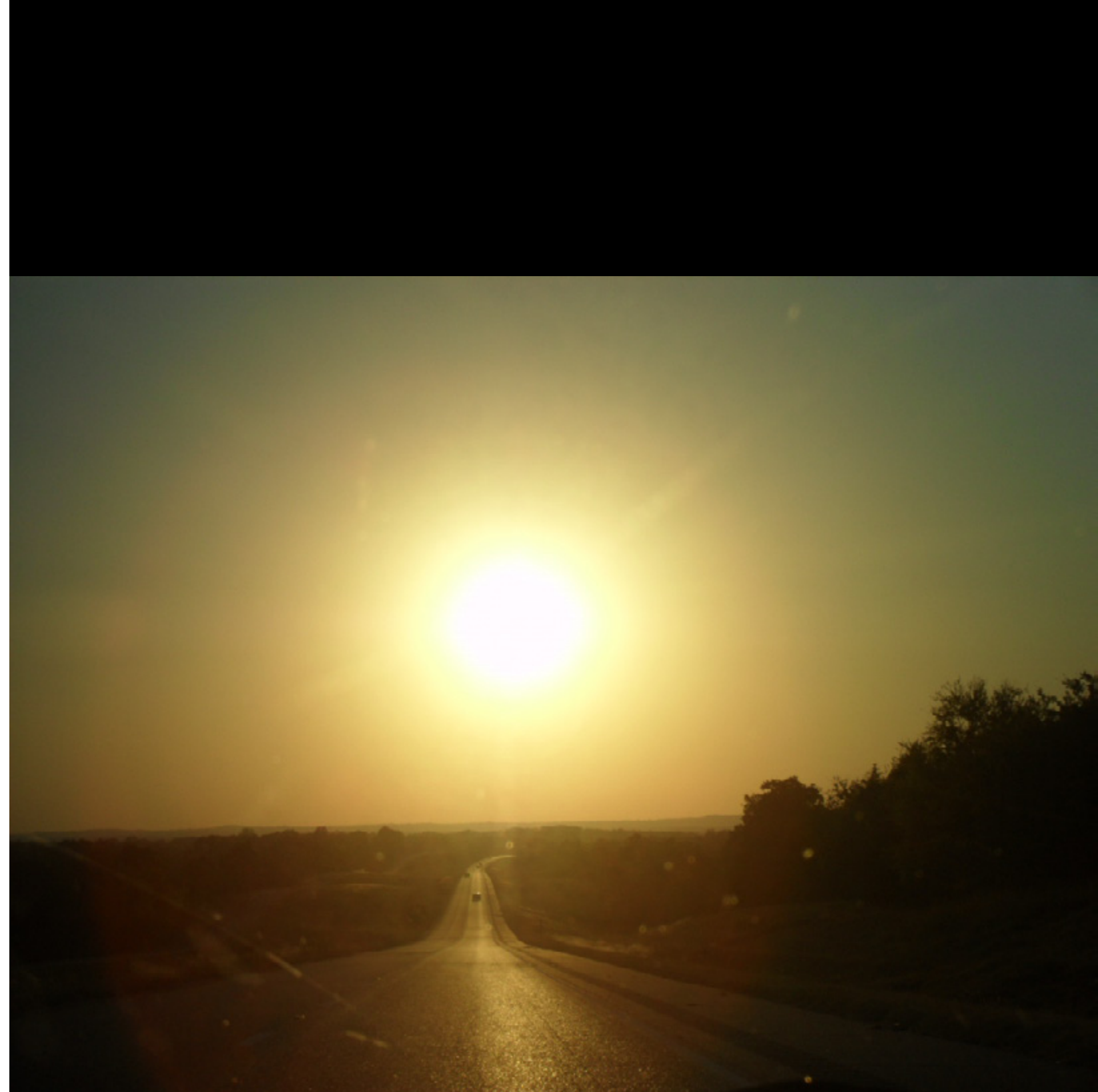
Tears trailed down Shaylee's cheeks. "Yes," she whispered back.

"Did she say yes?"

Shaylee turned when she heard Deena's voice and saw Deena and her parents all standing in the corner, holding hands like nervous, excited teenagers.

Shaylee laughed. "YES! I said YES! You think I'd say no to 'the voice of God?'"

Drew got up and wrapped his arms around her. Deena, Frankie, and Camille soon piled on for a big, group hug, laughing and crying at the same time.



**"Less Traveled"**  
by Audra Hagel



**"Truth Is"**  
by Matthew K. Kemp



## The Night Walk

Benjamin Morgan

As I walk along the path at night,  
Nothing to see, no use for sight,  
Silence hangs in the frigid air;  
I try and try but just can't care.  
Tired of walking along this way;  
On this path I cannot stay.  
As I take a turn into the trees,  
The brush grabs about my knees.  
I look up and see an owl  
With white feathers about his cowl.  
"Turn back, young man, there's naught to see.  
What lies this way, you don't want to be.  
Go back to the path. Return that way.  
Keep going. Keep pushing. You'll be okay."  
I turn and go and leave the trees,  
But now there's warmth in the breeze.  
Though I may walk for many years,  
I now have hope to persevere.

## Light and Pain

April Fredericks

Light and Peace:  
Clear and bright  
Healing Light;  
Burning Hot,  
Searing dot,  
Burning dross;  
Not a loss,  
Revealing gold,  
All is told.

Cool and sweet,  
Washing me;  
Healing rain,  
Cleansing pain;  
Fresh and new,  
Clear and blue,  
Restoring peace.



**"A Sea of Change"**  
by Christy Glassford

## Memory

Anthony Pickett

Just out of touch, a smiling specter lingers,  
Haunting me, confusing me, testing me.  
It talks of better days and better times,  
draws me in, but I can still see its teeth.

Let me sleep, Ghast, you wicked siren!  
Her sad eyes pull me where I don't belong;  
she whispers of what was, but isn't, but should've been,  
and leaves me wandering back the road I left.

## Look Up to See You

E. D. Woodworth



Look up to see you—  
part of the tea crowd and yet  
you are of the sky.

## Whose Happily Ever After?

Arvilla Fee

Once upon a time...blah, blah, blah...

and they all lived happily ever after.

And we hear that from the time we are two,  
and we see that theme expanded and promoted  
on big Hollywood screens with people riding off  
into the sunsets, holding hands, kissing, and all  
that feel-good fuzzy stuff.

Yeah, well Hollywood sure hasn't contacted me  
about my happily ever after, and they won't either,  
unless they decide to stick me in some melodrama  
that shows back alleys, dirty laundry, a stack of  
dishes and a whole pack of hungry mouths to feed  
Macaroni and cheese, Hamburger Helper—now that's  
romantic, ain't it?

Maybe somebody would like to write my fairy tale,  
Would like to write about how husbands leave and

how hard it is to keep kids off the streets, and maybe  
they can put an extra line in there about me working  
two jobs to make ends meet and that the closest I come  
to a prince is the mail carrier who at least makes sure  
he's here every day.

Or maybe a big-time producer could just shoot one bitty  
old scene that shows my back breaking as I pick up one  
more piece of clothing off the floor, one more toy, a sock,  
But that scene would have to be shot at midnight after I'm  
done waiting on tables, after the kids are in bed, and after  
I've had the only time to myself, which was the ten minutes  
I spent in the shower.

Yeah, it's the life, ain't it... the pieces of gray sky I see between  
too-tall buildings and the smog and the ant hills full of people;  
Nobody could come riding up on a horse to get me even if he  
wanted to—imagine the headlines: *Romantic Fool Dies When  
Horse is Hit by Taxi Cab*. So I don't even fool myself; I just read  
those same tired books to my kids and let them believe for a bit  
in happily ever after.

## Hymn of Sleep

Kevin Lee Garner

4AM and no sun— melody,  
 I'm beginning to think an erudite phrase,  
 awake is a dream a piece of eternity  
 and I'm on Lunesta locked in the treasure chest  
 or something, of the night,  
 sleepwalking my life away. afraid that if I sleep  
 Responsible adults accuse this moment will die—  
 me of irresponsibility; I'll sleep when I die,  
 I accuse myself of when I die.  
 possessing I promise I'll be responsible  
 the overabundance of creativity, and learn  
 and I sit like a confused child to rise and fall with the sun  
 who forgot how to fall asleep, one day,  
 heartbeats away from another but today is not that day.



## The Beginning of Naru

Brianna Ebarb

I held her in my arms as her skin turned blue. A gentle snow flake landed on her cheek and melted into a tear. She couldn't cry anymore, so the heavens did it for her as the snow around us turned red. I held her in my arms until she was forever gone from me. It was there I made a vow to avenge her death. No parent should ever have to bear witness to the death of her children. Those demons had not yet tasted hell from me. I picked her up and brought her inside, not wanting any wild beasts to get to her while I was gone. I held my little girl close one last time before laying her body on her bed to rest. With her gray eyes pale and dead, I closed them for her, and covered her with her favorite blue blanket. I leaned forward and kissed her forehead as my fingers ran through her soft dark brown hair, then went to change clothes. I couldn't hunt them down in a house dress with the scent of her blood that could alert them of my presence, and the dress was far too restricting as to leg movement. I needed something that provided more utility and more maneuverability. I strapped one of my hunting knives to my arm, tied another to my thigh, and fastened my leather wrist guards. Then, I strapped my sword across my back. I looked like a deadly forest hunter, ready for battle. The dress I wore was made of buckskin. It fit me like a second protective skin that is hard to cut, and the dark color provided decent camouflage. I was already wearing my moccasin boots that stopped just below my knees, which provided a place to hide another knife. I tied my long dark brown hair back with a piece of a leather tie, but a few of the shorter strands still fell forward and outlined my face. With no time, it had to do. I readied my blades with poisons, and placed them back in their sheaths and hiding spots. On my way out, I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the window. My eyes were no longer a calm, cool gray; rather, they were the gray of an angry thunderhead, with the red ring around the edge of the iris as the lightning.

Again, I was out the door and passing the spot that led to this to begin with. All I could feel was hate and vengeance pulsing through my veins as I entered the woods.

I knew these woods well. I took a trail that was less known and overgrown with brush. Soon, I came upon freshly broken twigs and branches caused by the heavy weight of these horrid monsters. I could smell their stench wafting in the air as I examined their path. I knew I was getting close, so I unsheathed my blade and quietly approached them from behind. I would avenge her. My child. My sweet baby. By taking another trail, I found my way to the front of the group easily. I sat and hid downwind hoping they wouldn't notice me in the bushes. Though only five attacked my daughter, ten were making their way through the trees. These creatures smelled as bad as they looked. Gnarled faces and scars all over their bodies, their lips covered only black gums, but exposed the

**My vision blurred,  
sharp  
teeth  
covered in  
blood  
from their  
latest  
victim.**



**and the world around me  
grew silent  
as I fell into darkness.**

Their flesh was blackened with bloodstains from past murders. If they were to have stood straight up, they would be about six feet tall, but they hunched over as they trotted through the woods. Nonetheless, I would kill them all for my daughter.

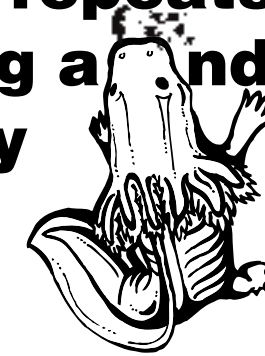
I let them all pass me before I proceeded to move in to attack. I crept out of my hiding place like a tiger moving in to pounce. With light footsteps, I came up behind the last one in line, covered his mouth, muffling his grunts, and sliced his throat, allowing the blood to flow and silencing the monster for good. The blessing of my blade burned his putrefying flesh, and I smiled as he died in my hands. *That was for my little girl, and I'm just getting started,* I thought as I laid its body down gently, not wanting to alert the others of any danger. I was able

to kill a few more in that fashion. I was being as careful as I could before the rest of them noticed the sound of footsteps missing from behind them. Before I knew what was happening, I was surrounded. I did my best to stand my ground, but there were too many of them. Was this how my life was supposed to end? Hell no! I made a vow, and I was going to keep it. These foul creatures were relentless in their attacks. As soon as I was able to incapacitate one, another was there attacking twice as hard as the one before it. While trying to fight them off, I grew tired and weak. One of their attacks shattered my blade when I tried to defend against the force of the blow. Shaken a bit, but keeping my wits about me, I was able to kill another one of those hideous monsters. As soon as its lifeless body hit the ground, I turned to face my next opponent, but I was not ready to defend myself against its attack. The beast's spear struck through my chest and impaled me to a large old oak tree that was close behind me. As I blacked out from the pain, I caught a glimpse of a young, handsome, man leaping from the branch of a nearby tree. He was shouting a battle cry as he came bounding down into the crowd of wretched filth. My vision blurred, and the world around me grew silent as I fell into darkness. My only thoughts as the world faded away around me were about that mysterious man, my precious daughter, and the knowledge that I had to be strong for her.

Am I dreaming? Why am I in the kitchen wearing my house dress? I can smell food cooking on the stove. I look out the window above the sink, and I can see her, my beautiful little girl, playing in the yard close to the wood line. A lovely winter, the sun shines brightly on her long dark brown locks, making her hair gleam almost red, like burning embers. A light breeze gently brushes back her soft hair as if to show the world her sweet face. Wearing her favorite white dress, she looks up at me with bright, piercing eyes, and a large pearly grin on her face. There is no innocence like that of a child's. She waves at me, holding up her little yarn doll in its matching dress. She never goes anywhere without it. Her skin is soft and evenly tan from all the time she spends playing outside. I smile back and tell her it's almost time to eat, and in a little while, she should

come in to wash up. Still smiling, she nods her head in acknowledgment and goes back to playing with her doll. I move away from the window and back to the stove to stir the soup when I hear a painful scream and a child's call for her mommy. The sound burns itself into my brain and shakes me to the bone. I run to the window to see five hideous black demons tearing her apart. She keeps crying out for me and I'm stuck there paralyzed, in shock by the scene before my eyes, and all I can do is watch. Damn it! Why the hell won't my body move? My baby needs me! Before I can realize where I am, my body is already outside, running to her. Now, I am in primal mother mode as I try to save my little girl, and I am ready to kill anything or anyone who tries to stop me. I barrel towards her, screaming her name, and those wretched cowards take off, back into the woods. By the time I get to her, they have disappeared into the coverage of the trees. I fall to my knees beside her and gently lift her up into my arms. "My baby! No! Not my precious little girl! Please no! What did she ever do to deserve this horrible fate? She was still naive to the evils of this world!" I scream out. I weep as I begin to rock her tiny limp body back and forth while I hold her close to me. I feel her little body tremble. Just nerves. Her little doll is still in her hands; she never goes anywhere without it. The shaking gets harder, and I hear a voice telling me to wake up. "I am." I sob through my tears. Then the voice repeats itself and everything around me starts to melt away. I was just dreaming. *I cannot even save my child in a fucking dream*, I think to myself.

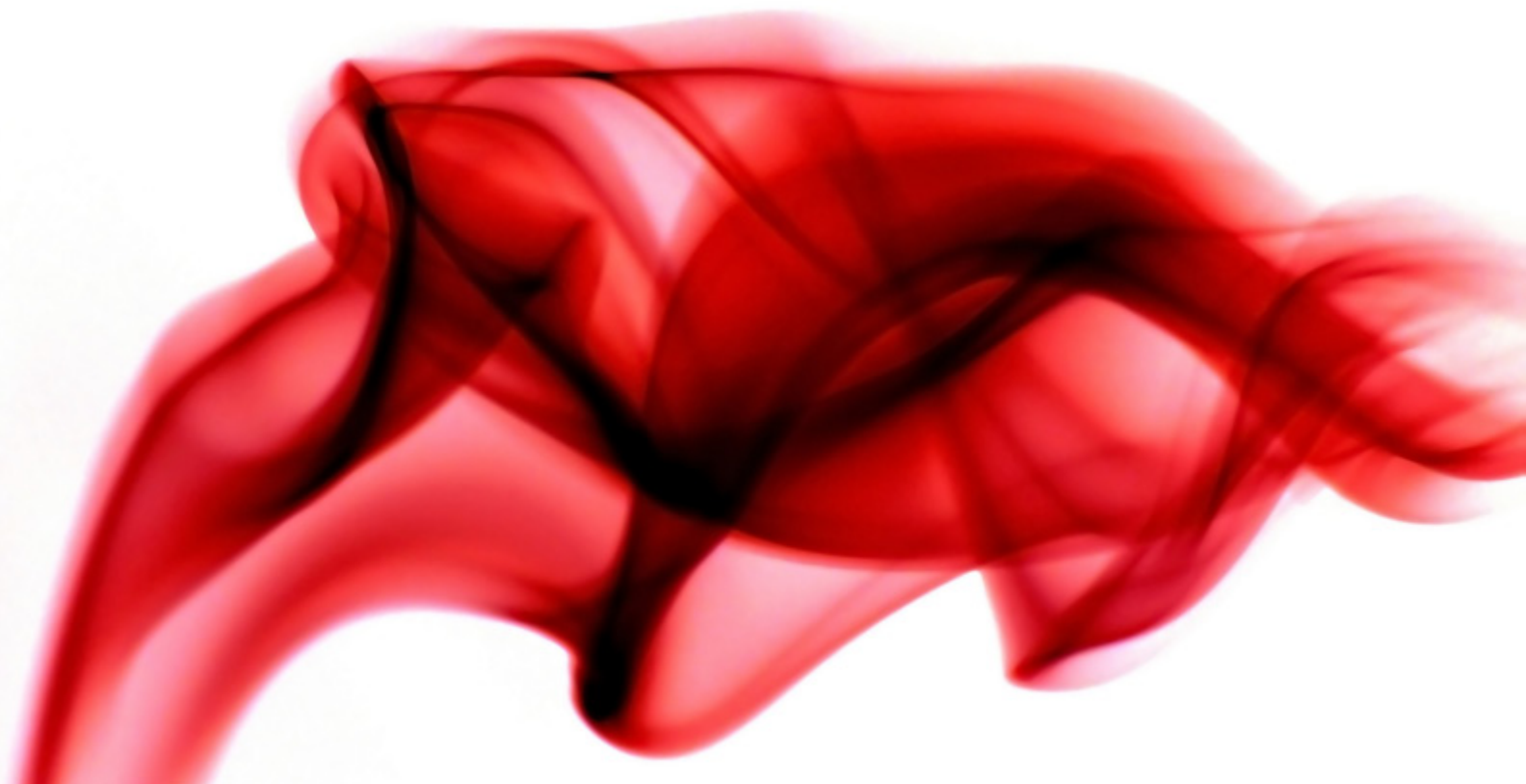
**the voice repeats itself and everything around me starts to melt away**





I open my eyes, but it takes me a second to adjust to the light. I find that I'm no longer pinned to a tree but lying on the hard wood floor of my living room. My eyes focus, and I see the same man I saw just before my world went to black, sitting next to me on the floor. He very calmly reaches over me and tends to the bandage on my chest. Gently, he removes the cloth soaked in my blood and places a clean one in its place. Suddenly, I remember my wounds and notice the throbbing pain coming from my chest and back from where the spear had pierced me straight through. I try to sit up, but I hear his kind yet authoritative voice telling me to lie back down. He grabs the burgundy pillow with the babies breath flower print from the rocking chair and puts it under my head. This was my daughter's favorite pillow. She and I had sewn it together out of one of her favorite dresses that she had outgrown in the fall. I could still smell her on the fabric. Without wasting another moment, he introduces himself to me, telling me his name is Tarum. "You should be more careful next time," he says as he finishes packing and bandaging my wounds. "They really kabobbed you good. You barely made it," he says in a more serious tone. With a grin on his face, he gives me a wink and stands up with my bloody rags in his hands. I notice he has short dark brown hair and brown eyes that twinkled with a spark of life. He stands at about five feet, seven inches tall and has a muscular medium build. It would be easy for his enemies to underestimate his true capability. I can feel the energy that swirls all around him, and I realize he is far more powerful than he looks, even though it seems like he is trying to suppress it. As he walks towards the kitchen, he looks back at me with a serious face, his brow wrinkled, eyes glaring as if by a look alone he could pierce my body again, and tells me not to move even an inch. I lie there, left to the confines of my thoughts, the sounds of cupboard doors opening and closing and clanking dishes. I think about the many wonderful times my daughter and I would cook together. She even had a wooden step stool with flowers that she painted all by herself so she could reach things on the counter. I would cut the vegetables and let her put them in the pot to boil. She was always eager to do the

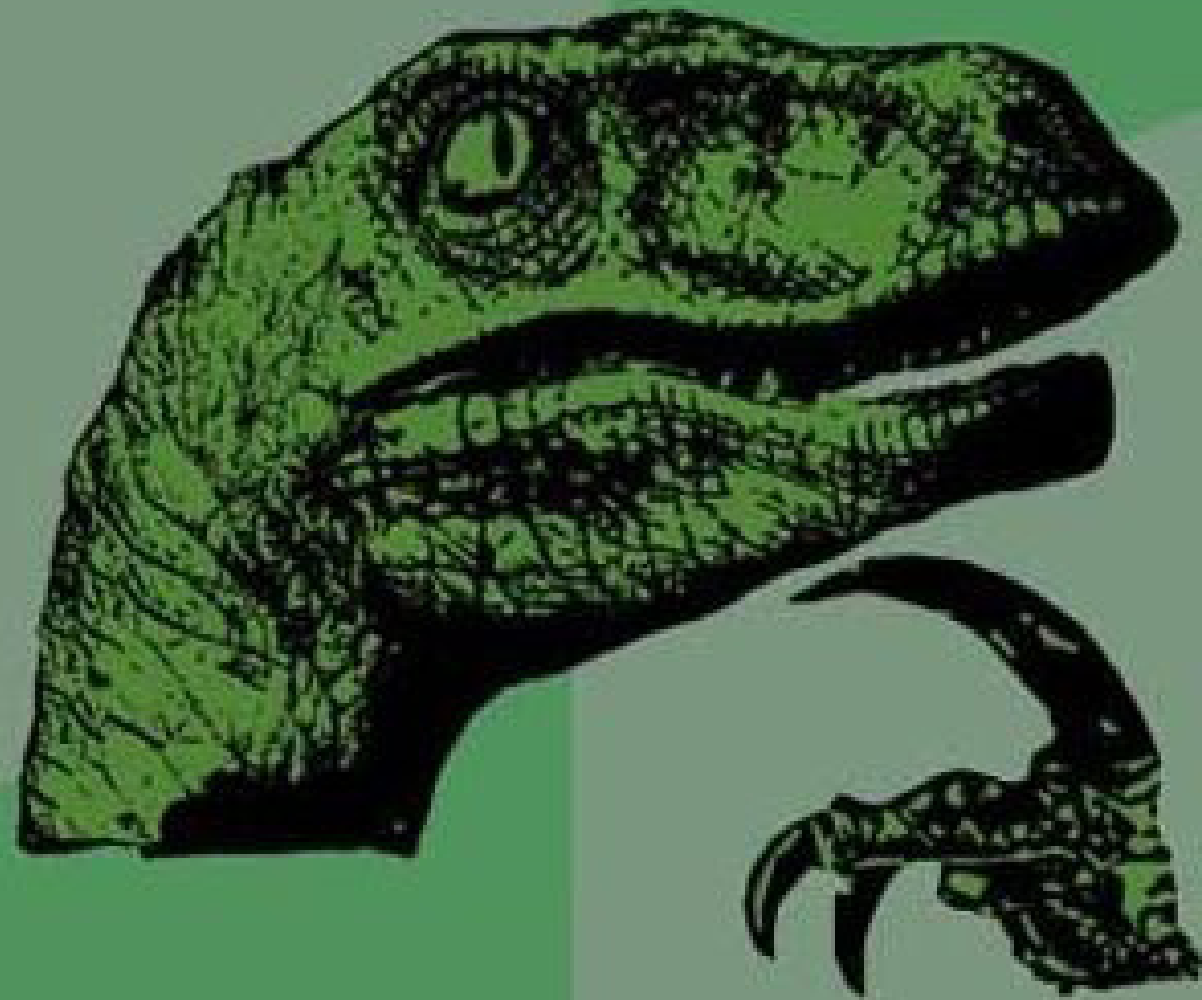
stirring and mixing, too. I am brought out of my memory when I hear footsteps coming back into the room. He walks in from the kitchen carrying a soup cup and hands it to me, tells me to drink, then sits down next to where I lay on the living room floor. "Who is she?" he asks with remorse in his eyes. "You were screaming her name before I woke you." I look into his kind eyes, holding back the tears. "My daughter," I say as my voice betrays me and cracks from tears I try to choke back. He gives me a solemn smile. "She was pretty like her mother." I look up at him with confusion and shock in my eyes. "I found her when I was looking for something to patch you up with," he says to me with a soft voice of concern. The image of him sitting next to me begins to blur as my eyes finally betray me too, and tears start to stream down my face like the rain that pours from the sky during a monsoon. "What were you doing there?" I sob. I begin to feel sick to my stomach and set my cup down on the floor. He looks disapprovingly at the cup, still full of food, then understandingly back at me as he takes my hand in his. Answering my question, he explains that his horses came stampeding from the wood line. When he went to see the cause of such a commotion, he saw his son trying to fight off those horrid demons, and if he had been any later, he would have lost his son. Thankfully, his son was merely scratched up, and Tarum was able to his save his son before the attack



became fatal. I feel my heart sink as I think of what happened to my daughter and how things would be different had I been able to get to her sooner. He followed the foul beasts to where he found me, after which he killed them all. He carried my limp body to my home, and he relieved me of the spear that ran me through. "By the way you looked when you were fighting, I had figured you had lost something quite close to you, and by your dream, and by your daughter in the other room, I was right. But don't you worry. I killed the horde that was there. I made sure to take vengeance for all of us," he says as he looks deep into my eyes, swollen and red from the tears. He shifts his body to try to get comfortable on the hard wooden floor, "It'll be okay," he tells me. With some help, I adjust myself and lay my throbbing head on his lap. Sitting back against the wall, he gently runs his fingers through my hair and stares out the window. After a long silence, still looking out the window, he speaks again: "You know, you are a strong fighter. You just have to be more careful and patient instead of jumping into the middle of something like that. You should pay more attention. More importantly, you're going to be just fine. I promise." I look up and him and think to myself, *Maybe I don't want to make it. How am I supposed to live, or even love, without her? She was my life. She was my pride. She was my joy.* Another wave of silent tears comes flowing from my eyes, and everything turns to blurry figures and swirling colors. My heart aches while the tears fall from my cheek and absorb into that little pillow. Her pillow. My head is now throbbing even worse than before from all the tears I have shed, and the pain is taking over my body. I grow tired; I cannot take this pain any longer. My eyes become heavy and start to close as everything around me fades into darkness again. Then, very softly, as I fade away into sleep, I whisper, "Mommy loves you sweetheart. Goodnight..."



# Use condiments...



# for safe supper.

## You Just Got...

Steven Parker

We write

Because we have to.

It's like that call at 2 a.m. that you can't ignore,

Even if you know it's a friend

Giving you a drunk phone call.

It's like that craving for a grilled cheese sandwich

At midnight,

But it can't be just any grilled cheese off the skillet—

It has to be from that restaurant

Clear across town, cooked by a guy named Jeff.

It's not something we can resist either.

The addict can't resist his need for the drug,

And even if we're not injecting it into our veins,

We're dealing it out like it is the next cocaine,

Pushing and pimping our ideas to the minds of others,

Needle-marking the brain with our viewpoints,

Our prose,

And we got an unlimited supply;

We just need a market to sell it out,  
One literary junkie at a time.

Whether it's spoken word or written,  
The throbbing need for expression  
Pulls at the mind, cracking the creative whip.  
It is an unseen muse  
Who coos your name like your ex-lovers  
When they want something from you  
And you just can't say no  
Because they know how to look at you  
That one way that melts you into butter  
Until they've walked out the door again.



I can go on all day about why I write;  
I won't lie that I don't like the recognition,  
But there are things I've written  
That will never be read,  
Locked away in forgotten notebooks  
Or pieces of scrap paper in a locker.  
I have to speak.  
I have to write.  
I'm the Robert Downey, Jr., of writing.  
I'm a can of Salt and Vinegar Pringles;  
Once I pop, I just can't stop

A finished idea on paper,  
Once cut from the vein  
And ink-bled on the page—  
Gives the greater satisfaction.  
It is being able to breathe  
After doing three laps of jogging  
When you haven't run in years  
And deciding to do that fourth lap  
Even when your lungs ache.

I can't stop writing.  
 On my death bed, I think  
 My hand is still gonna try to scribble  
 Some last words of literary wisdom,  
 As if my thoughts would give an epiphany,  
 Like standing in line at Wal-Mart  
 And thinking of where your life is right then and there,  
 And a whole new paradigm of "I could do this" and that  
 Flows through your mind  
 In a wellspring of inspired change.  
 As writers,  
 We don't need validation, certification, justification;  
 We just need a voice, pen, and paper—  
 Hell, some of us just need a voice,  
 A verse, a song, a choice  
 To just speak what's at the forefront, the by-front, the middle,  
 and maybe even the back of the mind.  
 It's bold printed, italicized, underlined Times New Roman  
 expression;



**There are choruses of unedited ideas  
 All vying to be spoken, screamed, yelled,  
 whispered, played, sung, or penned**

It's graffiti, tag paint, post-it notes,  
 or even a bathroom stall marker guru.  
 There are no run-on sentences, fragmented lines,  
 or even bad punctuation.  
 There are one-worded screams,  
 zen sayings in fortune cookies,  
 and one-line poems.  
  
 There are choruses of unedited ideas  
 All vying to be spoken, screamed, yelled, whispered, played,  
 sung, or penned.  
 It exists not just in the mind but the heart and soul,  
 Maybe even the liver and stomach (I don't know, maybe you're  
 a starving writer).  
 It vibrates in the throat, the brain, the fingers—  
 Emo, beatnik, poet, public speaker, singer, musician, artist.  
 We all feel it.  
 It is a song that hums in the mind, that only when we do it can  
 we remember the lyrics;  
 Otherwise, it's stuck in a loop in our head like a Rick-Roll,  
 Or it is like being handed a controller:  
 If we don't play, we lose the game.

I write  
Because I have to;  
I think it's the same for all of us.  
We can't stop—  
Writer's block is just creative resting,  
A repassé, a respite  
Before it starts all over again.  
My mind is a hurricane, roller coaster, and maybe even part of  
John Malkovich.  
Feel the storm?  
It's just my words raining down on you! (and maybe a little bit  
of spit)  
This my dao, my way, my beliefs;  
Soak it up like a handkerchief if you can.  
*Otherwise...*



## Letter to the Editor of a Future *Filibuster*

Dear Editor,

Do not be alarmed. I have composed a letter addressed to you—who will one day assume the role of editor of Auburn Montgomery's literary magazine—because I have something to convey specifically to you.

In working on *Filibuster* as much as I have, pouring what is perhaps 150+ hours into a project for which I will not be paid, I have discovered a lot about myself, but there is one specific lesson I have learned throughout this project, and the entirety of this letter exists only for the purpose of communicating this simple imperative: do not be ashamed to strive for excellence.

Does that sound odd? Let me explain. While I was working on this project, various individuals who watched me labor would point out that they (or others) would not have spent so much time on *Filibuster*. In fact, one person indicated that a previous crew spent around 13 hours on a particular edition. It was as if dropping more than an allotted amount of time into this project could be offensive, stupid, fruitless, excessive?

Hear me out: in no way am I implying that 13 hours is not enough time. However, if you sign up for the role of editor, I implore you to take however much time is necessary to see the project to its proper end. For Sarah and myself, being basically a two-person crew for nearly every aspect of this edition, from designing to marketing to editing to piercing the stars above, we were forced to decide near the beginning of it all just how much we were willing to sink into this magazine. What was our answer? Push it to the limit, and for my part, I'll tell you why.

My time at Auburn Montgomery has been life-changing, and I can list person after person, whether a professor or a staff member or a fellow student, who has taught me some life lesson that will go with me to the end of my days. Our special thanks list would be pages long if I were to thank everyone who drove me to work so hard on this project. Having considered the way AUM has sown into my life and changed me forever,

I decided that my university deserved my personal best in this magazine; so, I consider *Filibuster 2011* a love letter to my alma mater—and a thank you card, for what it's worth.

Now, I encourage you to look at what I've done in this edition and outdo me! Do something excellent, something surprising, something amazing, something fun, something hilarious, something heartfelt, something meaningful. Find a theme, a train of thought, images and words, scenes from a memory, and forge your *Filibuster* as though it were the only edition you were ever to make. Put your coolest-looking signature on it, and do not be ashamed for the excellence you exert.

Will people consider it silly that you have endeavored to throw your talent to the wind, as it were, working for hours and hours to make something professional for no pay at all? I'll get back to you on that after *Filibuster* and this *Director's Cut* hit the internet and spread about campus. Until then, I'm going to get caught up with school work.

Before I go, permit me to muse for just a paragraph more. Looking back on the 8-hour days I spent laying out the magazine, customizing every aspect, learning how to use the oh-so-amazing Adobe InDesign, and using carefully considered theory to ground choices even as simple as how accent lines should look, I aggressively affirm that every bit of the trouble was well worth the experience I've gained.

So, future editor—give it your best. Outdo me.

I triple dog dare you.

Sincerely,



Wow, that was  
some great poetry and prose!  
Amy, email Auburn Montgomery  
and tell them that we can't wait for  
writers to **submit their works to**  
***Filibuster 2012*** by sending an  
email to **filibuster@aum.edu!**

