

# The Writer's Block Literary Magazine

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Volume 1 *New Beginnings*

Article 1

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## New Beginnings: The Writer's Block Literary Magazine, 2015

The Writer's Block

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**The Writer's Block**  
Literary Magazine

New Beginnings



**2015**



# Table of Contents

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<i>Letter from the Dean of Students</i>	2
<i>Letter from the President</i>	4
<i>Letter from the Editor</i>	6
Loud Girls Aren't Pretty Girls	8
The Look	10
A Day in the Life	12
From Ashes	14
Resurrection	15
The Monster Empire: The Siege of Tomahawk	17
Thoughts from 702D, 307S and the Flying Kia	21
The King's Garden	23
4-20	26
Water: A Vignette	29
Razor Blade Crayons	31
There's Nothing Like Birthdays	32
Dimensions	34
He Lays Me Down in Fields of Autumn	35
A Portrait of Laughter	37
New Beginnings, Old Friends	39
Blanket of the Universe	41
The Swap	43
An internal monologue...	45
VHS: Virtual Human Solitude	48

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# Letter from the Dean of Students

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It is truly my honor to congratulate the Writer's Block on their publication of the Writer's Block Literary and Art Magazine. The addition of the magazine to the outstanding arts offerings at The University of Alabama in Huntsville again demonstrates the extraordinary talent of our students. This year's inaugural magazine features visual arts and writing from students across the university, in a variety of disciplines and majors, all united by their creativity which is illustrated here. We are delighted to offer our support to this important effort and hope that this first edition of the Writer's Block Literary and Art Magazine will be only the beginning of this important endeavor. I again offer my personal congratulations to the students who were chosen to be showcased in the magazine and share my gratitude to the Writer's Block for their leadership in bringing their vision of the magazine to life for our campus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Regina Young Hyatt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Regina Young Hyatt, Ph.D.

Dean of Students



# Letter from the President

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In 2013, a close friend of mine approached me with the idea of starting a creative writing organization on campus. I gave a short chuckle at the thought, and sarcastically said “sure” not realizing the amount of interest in that particular topic at UAH. I was happily surprised when I saw the attendance at our first meeting. Since our modest first meeting, we have consistently grown. We have a membership of approximately 30 members, host a variety of different programs throughout the semester, and have weekly meetings in Charger Union. Every Thursday we meet for what we like to call “Creative Writing Workshops” to help members conquer their personal writer’s block by introducing new literary techniques and concepts that will help improve their writings and spark inspiration. The purpose of this organization is to create a community of writers on campus that will encourage and promote the pursuit of creative writing. We have come a long way, since our first meeting, but it is still astonishing that within two years we have established our first student-run literary and art magazine.

So, it is with great pleasure that I present “New Beginnings,” The Writer’s Block’s first Literary and Art Magazine. In this magazine, readers will find a collection of literary and art pieces created by the finest of UAH’s student talent out of a submission pool of over 200. I have thoroughly enjoyed working on this project with the members of The Writer’s Block. I commend their hard work, dedication, and passion to see this project through. I would also like to give a special thanks to our sponsors from the Student Life Office, Honors College, and Liberal Art College. Thank you for believing and supporting The Writer’s Block Literary Magazine. Your tremendous financial support is greatly appreciated. Lastly, I would like to thank our advisor Dr. Susan Friedman, for her continued support over the course of this project, and for our organization. On behalf of The Writer’s Block we hope that everyone enjoys this magazine, and we look forward to more submissions next year.



Jessica Lockett

President of “The Writer’s Block”





# Letter from the Editor

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Dear Readers,

The best part about the creative process is being able to look back at your finished work and say, “I did that, that’s mine.” This pride is further enhanced when someone else looks at what you’ve done and thinks it’s good enough to be published.

The authors, poets, photographers, and artists showcased in this magazine can look back at this publication with that same pride, with the knowledge that this is only the beginning of what is to become a part of them, and a part of the University of Alabama in Huntsville’s history.

As the first to be published in The Writer’s Block, I am proud to have been a part of making that part of their history a real, tangible thing. The Editing Team and I worked hard and stressed over this publication to make sure that every piece that was to be showcased in this magazine would be treated as fairly as possible. In the spirit of new beginnings, we strived to learn something new with every page. I hope you enjoy this, the fruits of our labor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Jones', with a stylized, cursive script.

Robert Jones

Editor in Chief



# Loud Girls Aren't Pretty Girls

She didn't grow up wanting to be an echo  
or a dream or a shadow or a nothing  
but these things happened and  
she struggled to keep up -  
to keep from having to be someone who fights,  
because no one loves a girl who fights,  
who has a little kick to her.  
No one loves a girl who swallows the footprints  
of everyone who walked before her  
and twists the ankle of anyone  
who steps on her toes.

She grew up wanting to be soft and quiet,  
the kind of gentle anti-force that you barely notice,  
who doesn't wake you up when she gets out of bed at 3 AM  
because she's busy trying to be silent and she wants to let you sleep.  
Not the kind who makes a lot of noise or takes up a lot of room.  
That's what she wanted because  
That's the kind of girl who knows the weight of a wedding ring,  
what the paint in a new living room smells like,  
and the stress of picking out baby shower invitations.

But what she got instead was flashes of  
purple like rainstorms when she fights for connection  
which she sees in the kaleidoscope shards of people she finds along the way.  
People who never really save her  
and never really want to.  
She grew up foolish and trusting, yet pragmatic to a fault.  
*Loud girls aren't pretty girls*, she was told once,  
and she's as loud as they come.

When she was younger, she asked her teachers  
why god designed everyone else's minds and mouths so differently from hers,  
calm and unassuming, able to be shut off when necessary.  
They had no answers except to tell her  
that the fault was her own.  
Maybe someday a man would care enough to tame her into timidity,  
to control her and keep her from being so vile and cheap  
because what is love if not discipline and change?

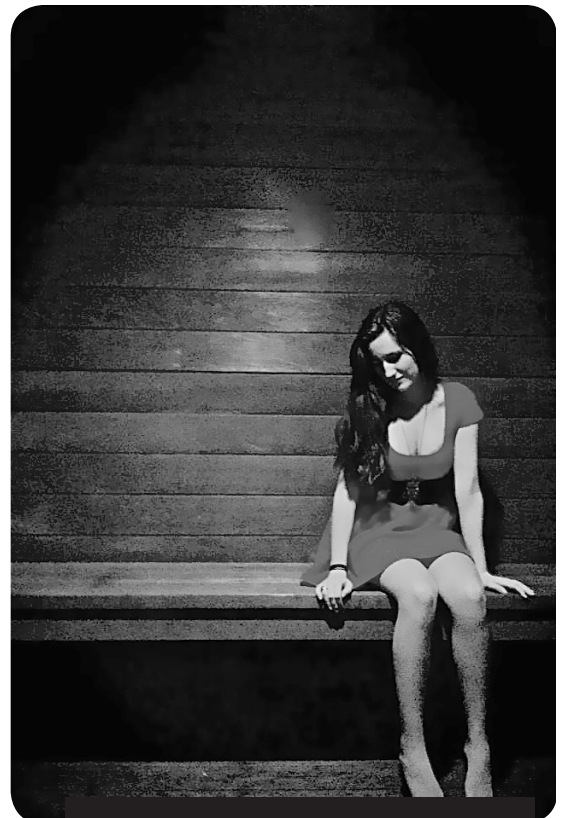
So she grew up wanting to be subdued and subversive,  
the kind of girl who finds her home in other people  
because other people knew how to construct roofs made out of futures  
and floors made out of pasts when all she's ever known is how to build doorways made out of maybes.  
She just wanted to carve a place for herself in the background.

But she is none of those things.  
She cries too much, kisses too fast, cusses like a sailor,  
and eats Apple Jacks with her mouth wide open.  
She dog ears pages of books at the bottom instead of the top because, she says,  
*life is just less messy that way.*  
She creates fierce antagonism with no reasoning  
and will pick a fight with you just because she feels like it,  
does nothing daintily but everything skeptically and repeats daily in her head  
that loud girls aren't pretty girls.

Maybe they had a point,  
using the word "loud," like an expletive, getting thrown like a bomb,  
careening through her mind as she unapologetically walks away  
from yet another car alarm harangue from someone who shouldn't matter  
repeating that loud girls aren't pretty girls  
as she tries to not listen.

She will never get used to the way that she's used  
but it's rooted in her and it's growing like a disease.  
She feels it getting larger every day,  
detaching and reinventing itself so it's always fresh and new.  
She can't find anything loud enough to cover up those words  
especially as the world continues to believe them.  
They will be repeated and unbroken,  
flashing behind the eyes of her future daughters as they fall asleep  
wondering why silly things like minding p's and q's are so important to their mother  
and all she will tell them is that it's so they don't end up like her  
as they get yet another time out for speaking out,  
and another time out for getting mud on their dresses  
when they should be inside, quietly learning their place.  
Another time out for crying too much, cussing like sailors,  
And eating Apple Jacks with their mouths wide open.

– Rachel Tanner



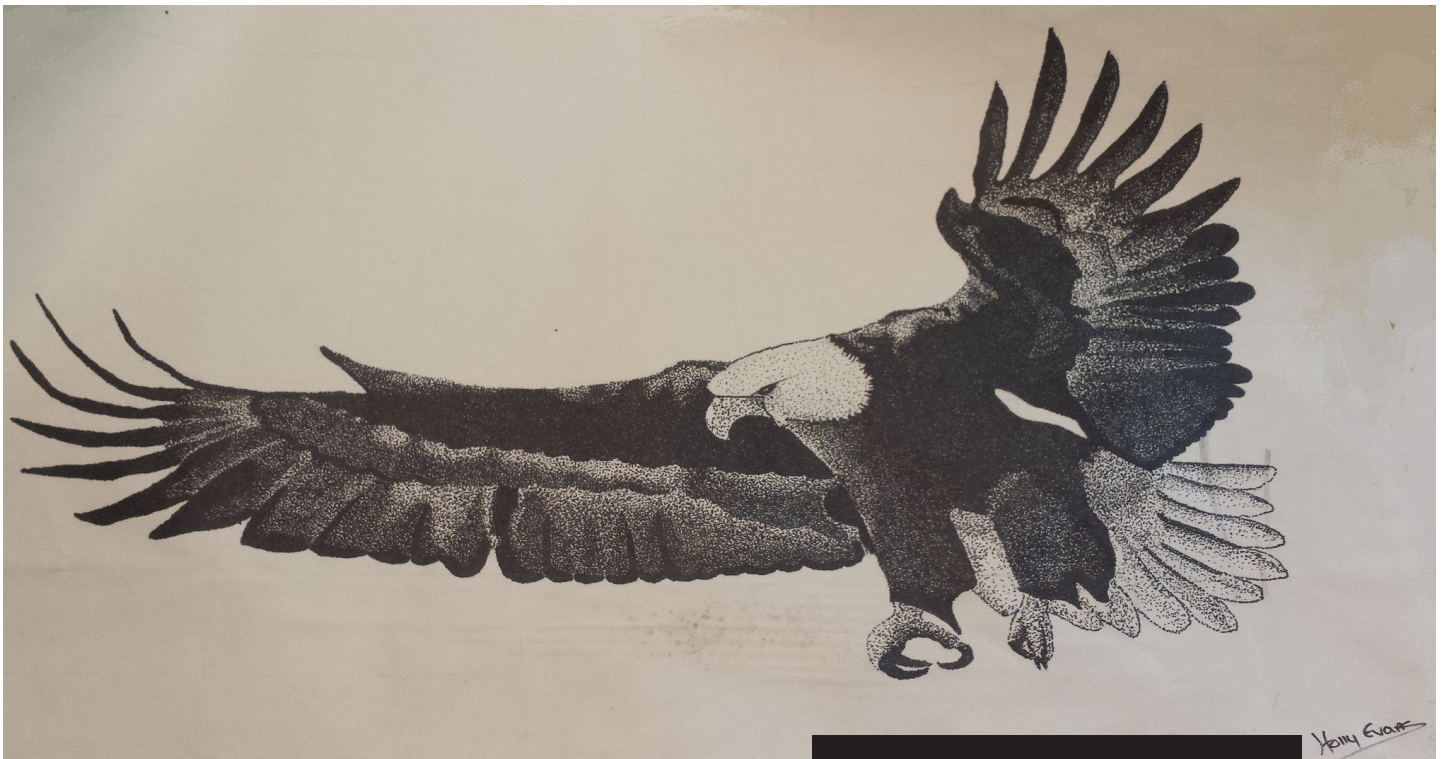
"Burdened" by Alexandra Wiegand

# The Look

Incandescent beams milked flesh ripe with disease;  
All those faces, staring straight into an imaginary abyss,  
Dummy mouths hanging open, a word forever on their tongue,  
Never to be uttered or understood.  
I clutched my father's fingers, staring beyond large bay windows,  
Into a concrete sky, cannon-fire thunder from the West,  
Amplified by the man-made crater yawning at us  
From across the crowded parking lot, past the two snakes,  
Shimmying up the shaft of a cross, into that room,  
Dimly lit to obscure the dread on adjacent faces.  
My father had a funny feeling that morning,  
So we had come in the wake of the day,  
To see my mother's shaven head,  
    Her withered arms, tangled in plastic tubes,  
        Her sunken skull, eye sockets black from a night of retching,  
        Her lips, crusted with the tar of congealed blood.  
Recycled air funneled through the Kleenex walls,  
Reeking of death rattles and quiet sobbing,  
As her round retinas jerked behind comatose eyelids,  
And wishing I could utter the three words I had taken for granted.  
But this time, those same words would admit defeat;  
That the plague ravaging her bones and blood  
Had finally won, and I would never see or speak to her  
Ever again.  
    Instead, I mumbled a small amount of faith into her ear.  
She would be dead by noon the following day,  
And I would finally understand those somber faces;  
My father staring ceaselessly at the pit  
In the dim light of the waiting room;  
The look of regret,  
    The look of someone who knows the future,  
        The look of those who wished to be strong,  
  
But in the end, only wept on the shoulder of their father.

– Garrett Hibbard





**"Bald Eagle" by Holly Evans**

# A Day in the Life

by Alan Brown

This is a story about a man who wakes up at 6 AM. The alarm goes off every day at 6, except on weekends when he allows himself to sleep in until 7. He gets up, makes some coffee, and takes a shower.

By 8 AM he is fully dressed. Nothing fancy, just a shirt and jeans. He cooks breakfast: usually bacon and eggs, but sometimes he treats himself to French toast if he has enough supplies. He feeds Spike, his Siberian husky, the leftovers if he's especially generous. Spike is his best friend. At 9 AM, he checks the perimeter camera feeds. There is nothing suspicious outside, not today... or perhaps, not yet.

After he's ready for work, he heads down to the farm. The corn is coming along nicely, and there are plenty of soy beans and wheat. They are watered automatically by machines, but he has to occasionally spread the fertilizer on them by himself. The plants need lots of nutrients to grow in this concrete chamber underground.

He takes a lunch break from his work. He eats the same thing he ate yesterday and the day before: rations, vacuum sealed for years, with some vegetables he grew himself. He still hadn't figured out exactly what kind of meat the rations came with. It was a mashed-up blend, kind of like spam. Anybody that knew what it was had been gone for a long time.

He eats upstairs, where he can see out the windows. Barren wastelands stretch out for miles, but he enjoyed the view anyway. Sometimes he wished he could go out there, but he knew it was too dangerous. Since the disaster, the outdoors had become a no-man's land. Abandoned vehicles could be seen in the distance. Shoes were hung up on telephone lines that no longer functioned. He would often wonder who abandoned those cars, or whose shoes were strung up like that, but it didn't matter. They wouldn't be coming back.

He heard a loud, pounding noise. The hair stood up on the back of his neck. Quickly, he leaped to his feet and ran over to the control panel by the wall. With a press of a button, metal hatches came down over the windows. The pounding continued, accompanied by groans. They wouldn't get in. They never did, and yet every time this happened it frightened him. Spike whimpered. He led the dog back downstairs. To get his mind off of this, he and the dog would spend some time playing with the radio.

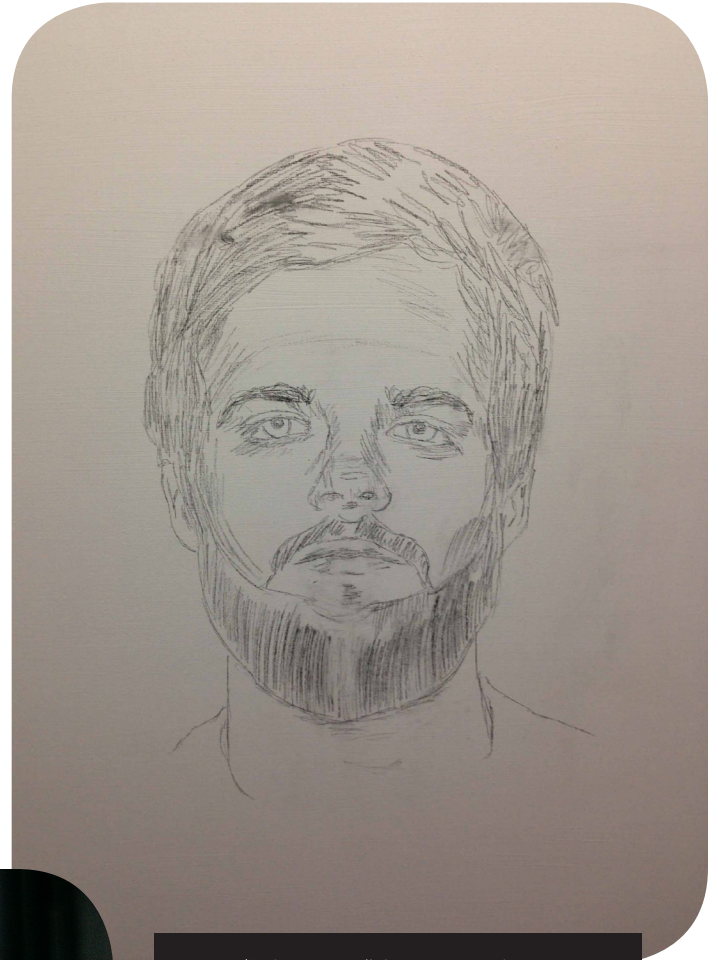
It crackled with static when he turned it on. Carefully, he turned the knob and listened, one channel at a time. Just static... he turns the knob... more static. Sometimes he found other people with other radios. Once he even found a station that played old jazz records, but that was a long time ago. He tried not to think about what might have happened to the people running it. Spike would lie at his feet while he carefully probed the airwaves, one station at a time.

After hours of searching, there was a noise — somebody speaking! "Contamination level... coordinates zero, foxtrot..." the message was distorted. The man furrowed his brow — the voice sounded like a machine speaking, rather than a human. He narrowed down the frequency and it became clearer, but the voice still sounded very unnatural. "Contamination level lowered since last spring. Special code foxtrot, alpha, niner. Survivors, contact us with your coordinates for safe transport."



He smiled and picked up the microphone. He opened his mouth to speak, but froze. The voice on the radio kept repeating the same message, over and over. The machine chanted it like a mantra of false hope. "Contamination level lowered since last spring. Special code foxtrot, alpha, niner. Survivors, contact us with your coordinates for safe transport." It wasn't another survivor. It was only a recording.

He put the microphone down and began to cry. Spike was sad, too. Spike always understood him, because Spike was the only friend he had left in the whole world. Maybe someday he would find another person, a real human being who he could trust. Not today, but maybe tomorrow. At 10 PM, after working for the rest of the afternoon, he crawls into bed and falls asleep.

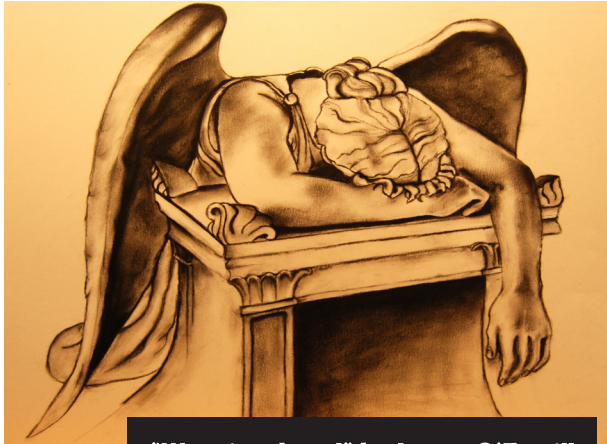


**From "Identities" by Amanda Blanton**



**Photograph by Hannah Thomas**

# From Ashes



**"Weeping Angel" by Laura O'Farrill**

On the Seventh Day He rested,  
For They needed some time apart.  
In Her absence the days replayed –  
A distant past, the ghost of memories –  
And traced the moment when time had stopped.

On the Sixth Day, there were Men.  
He spoke the Truth to life, and She responded:  
And there were Women, too.  
From one accusation sprung the other,  
One sin for another.  
Her eyes stung with tears,  
Because it wasn't fair –  
They created these beasts Together.

On the Fifth Day, birds flew and fish swam.  
He remembered how it felt to soar among clouds.  
But winter settled, and He felt the chill.  
Too cold to soar, His mind swam, too,  
In search of warmth She couldn't give.  
There were other Fish in the sea.

On the Fourth Day, They watched the stars.  
The moon lit Her eyes,  
Quiet nights in His arms.  
She shone like the Sun,  
And dreamed like the Moon,  
But His mind was worlds away.

On the Third Day, He found ground.  
Solid, steadfast – He lighted from flight,  
And viewed the distance passed.  
So long above the clouds;  
They'd covered so much ground.  
But here was the Earth He Created.

On the Second Day, They made Heaven.  
With rising tides, like crashing passion,  
They were swept up in Their own waves of ecstasy.  
His wings were strong, and He soared new skies,  
For Heaven was endless, and waters deep,  
And She flew faithfully by His side.

On the First Day, there was Light.  
He'd shown Her from the Darkness  
A warmth She never knew.  
She dazzled with a brightness  
That lit His Darkest days,  
And from first Light, They knew it was Love.

In the Beginning, there was Darkness.  
The stillness of anticipation,  
Of awakening senses and fate.  
For Destiny decided He'd see Her one day,  
And be taken by her beauty and grace.  
Together, They would forge the future.

Here He stood at the edge of Time,  
Grasping days like withering ashes  
That filled the air where Heaven once hung.  
A silence He commanded, solitude at His request –  
For before Him lay the days of Their history,  
And behind, a shadow of Her self.  
A crippled form of smothered Light,  
She was Darkened.

In His hands, He held the World –  
Creation and Time and Hope and Penitence.  
But night had fallen, with no hope of dawn.  
So from His hand He let it drop,  
And shattered Their World against the floor.  
Shrapnel of stars burst forth and spread,  
Rushing like fire, violent as a Bang,  
Skittering across the cold, hard ground,  
Fractured pieces spanning Time,  
From the Beginning, in the End.

And Her World was shattered, too.

And again there was Darkness,  
And in Darkness She reposed.  
For Destiny makes plans,  
And lives are dashed away.  
Chaos is imminent and havoc essential,  
For Worlds must burn and ashes rise  
For Life to begin again.

– Cosine O'Kearney

# Resurrection

i hit my baseball into the cow field  
it was the oldest baseball i had in yellow boxes  
it was my father's father's baseball  
but now he's gone from all the playing  
and his ball is in the field

we looked beneath the blackberries  
we looked in the fire ant grass  
i stretched my hand through all the stickers  
to the blackest widow places  
but my ball is gone from all the playing  
from the open morning glories  
the ball has glories now that we don't know

i bet that it is feeling  
all those other kinds of feelings  
when you watch the sun come up and sit across the melted sky  
or smell the rain come down  
and wash the red out of the brown thunder mud  
or hear the junkwood sumac leaves blow and shake  
the saddest clouds  
or feel the skinny umbrella ice that sits in all the moo cow stepping places

what is a ball when it stops  
and won't roll a hole through berry fingers  
but still has all the rolling Heaven in its middle?

what is a ball when it can't feel the boy bat swing  
and it can't fly to make us smaller  
and watch us look at all its running?

where is the ball when i look straight across  
the lumping pasture?  
i bet it's with the blue freckle shell pieces of  
a thousand pecking duckbirds  
i bet it's making a nest in maypops  
so round from all that stopping

no one else in the whole world will know  
about this kind of thing  
that when the last hit was knocked  
we all looked the wrongest way  
we saw the last time that hardball drove and shot  
and hid itself away  
it must be tired of all the pain

and no one else will almost remember  
how i sometimes wonder when I'm crying  
on the backseat of the longest car with my head straight up  
in melted crayon colors



**"Apples and Reflections" by Anna Parks**



why all the passing blue eyed stars are standing still

that ball has whispers, i know cause it told me that it did  
it showed me all the forgotten lost dreaming big day summers  
the yelling wonder in the grass  
that rolls tightly in the sun field  
where the boys sweat and run and holler their fathers  
to hit again  
again

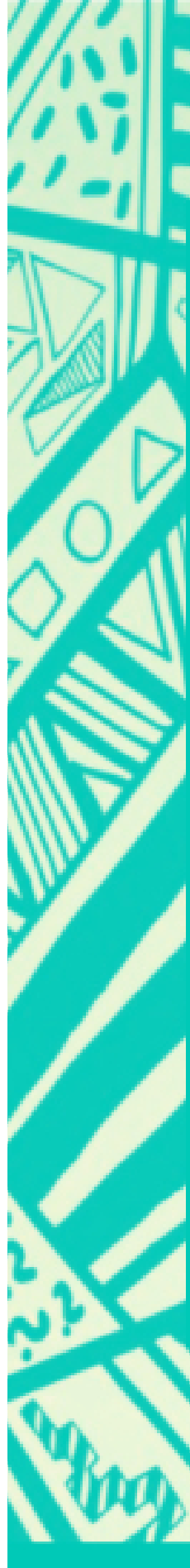
in the redfoot ouching dirt

maybe, maybe  
another boy will come  
another boy with yellow hair will climb the red heart fence  
and step on praying stems  
and find my dad's black buried ball  
before we lose our summer

and that boy who climbs the hog wire fence  
who comes into the cow field  
will find my ball and take it from its rubbing grave  
and tote it home to hanging porches  
where the ice cream hammer lays

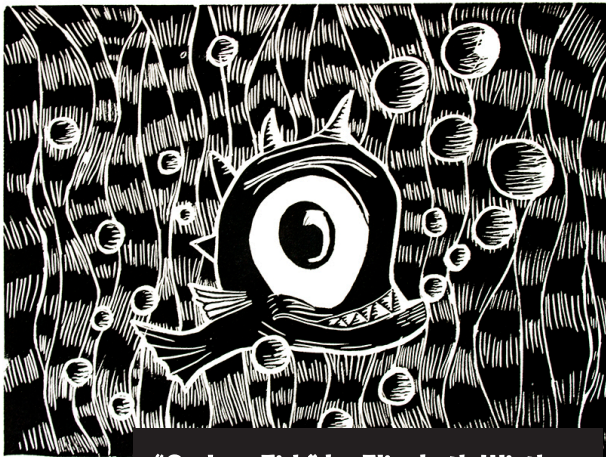
and someday someday someday  
he will knock my good ball white  
he will smash the dead wrong seasons off its hide  
through a window in the sky  
all the way to a place  
where anybody boy enough can see it  
shining on a hill  
forever  
and ever  
amen

– Russ Nelson



# The Monster Empire: The Siege of Tomahawk

by Norris Vaughn III



**"Cyclops Fish" by Elizabeth Wiethop**

On the Monster's imperial flagship, known as *The Father of All Mother ships* – or simply *The Father ship* – as well as one of the largest spaceships in the existence, on the darkened bridge, the king and his prime minister plotted against their foe. For the better part of a decade, their efforts to conquer Earth #1925 had been blocked by a single organization: The Galaxy Protection Institute, or the GPI. Their greatest hero and the greatest threat to the Monsters was a young man known as Tomahawk. Every warrior sent his way has been sent back defeated time and time again. The times, however, were about to change.

"Have you completed all the preparations, Isaac old boy?" A British accent asked, as a pair of large florescent green, laser panel eyes broke through the darkness of the bridge. The rest of his body remained hidden within the shadows, as the figure sat on his throne looking down at his fellow kin.

"Yes, your Highness, all the preparations have been met," a valentine heart-shaped monster with a high pitched voice replied with his large eyes looking up at his king.

"Excellent, Isaac. Now send down a monster, and once we have Tomahawk where we want him, send down our secret weapon," the king said, and his orders were carried out to the letter.

Meanwhile, on the GPI orbital headquarters, Tomahawk returned from a long trip to yet another alternate universe the Monsters threatened to take over for about the seventh or eighth time. He was so exhausted from the journey; he hunched himself over as he walked to his office. With a heavy sigh, he plopped himself into his desk chair and began to relax. He closed his eyes, and wished for the day to end. It was then the alarm sounded off from his computer, which indicated another Monster warrior had landed on Earth.

"Not now..." Tomahawk groaned. "OK computer.

Who is it this time; is it Fred or Shadow again? If it is, then I'm going to be very upset because I can't deal with their antics today."

The artificial intelligence unit in the computer responded in an inhuman and robotic voice, "Neither, Agent Tomahawk. This is a new monster codenamed 'Muay Thai Centipede.' This particular monster is a master of the Monster's own version of one of our most dangerous martial arts, Muay Thai Boxing, or the Art of Eight Limbs. This martial relies on the use of the knees and elbows as separate limbs."

A holographic projection of the monster then appeared from Tomahawk's desk. According to the height scale shown within the projection, this monster stood at 6' 8" from antennae to foot. He had large jaws, large eyes, and bandanna across his forehead. According to the archives this monster had avoided capture a total fifteen times, severely injuring fifty-seven GPI operatives. This warrior monster had, although still a centipede, twenty-eight limbs, each with gloves on them. Six were legs, three on either side, and eleven arms on opposite sides; the top two arms were jointed in the same shoulder socket, but one set of arms was in an upward position and the second set was faced forward. He stood upright with an "S" shape body that was segmented. This new monster was certainly high risk, and Tomahawk thought he could use the exercise.

The Monster Empire by then had become more of a nuisance than an actual threat. Although he had been fighting them since the age of eight, things had become routine. True, there was the occasional invasion from outer space with massive armies which would indeed lead to an epic showdown, but even that had gotten quite old. Nowadays, however, the Monsters had resorted to their old strategy of sending one monster warrior to fight the world's greatest hero one on one. That hero, of course, was Tomahawk.

Were the monsters running out of ideas? Had they

become just another brand of Power Ranger villain? Or were they really up to something else? Tomahawk didn't really give these questions much thought, as he boarded his ship, The Dragon Mecha, and was launched into space with a similar device that launches jets off aircraft carriers. He raced down to Earth to face his newest opponent, hoping that it would be over quickly.

Once he landed on Earth, Tomahawk approached the rampaging monster. The centipede monster looked exactly like the holograph from before. With a single punch, the monster warrior flipped and sent a car flying fifteen feet into the air. Tomahawk, however, stood in place with a stern expression, not impressed. He had seen it before, and this guy was just another monster with martial arts training and super strength. In other words, it was just another day on the job for Tomahawk.

The centipede finally noticed Tomahawk, raised his many arms into the air, yelling a battle cry before he said, "So, you decided to meet your end at the force of my gloves, Tomahawk!?"

"Yeah, yeah, whatever; can we just get this over with already?" Tomahawk responded.

The confused insect monster tilted his head, lowered all but two of his arms and asked, "Um, what?"

"Look, I've dealt with a million monsters just like you; they all said similar stuff like what you just said, and I always win. True you monsters are a bit of a challenge, but that's all you are to me," Tomahawk replied.

"Look buddy, just play the dang role already, OK? I came here to fight the so-called Great Tomahawk, not some guy going through a mid-life crisis," the centipede replied, acting annoyed.

Tomahawk actually seemed shocked by this comment. What sort of monster would go around and tell

what kind of person he was?

"I'm not going through a mid-life crisis; for crying-out-loud, I'm only 20 years old," Tomahawk replied.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, just shut up and fight me already, human!" The centipede replied.

With the roll of his eyes, Tomahawk accepted his challenge. He took out his tomahawks and prepared himself for the upcoming fight. As the centipede lunged himself into the air and at Tomahawk, sword blades sprouted from the tops of his weapons. Tomahawk ducked and dodged to his right, rolling to a stop and sprung up back onto his feet. A mirage of punches came at Tomahawk with one that hit him straight in the face. Feeling no pain, Tomahawk fell back and returned to his feet in an instant. He had his tomahawks merge together and form an oval shaped shield. The centipede came at Tomahawk with elbow and knee strikes which were all blocked by the shield.

The moment the centipede backed off, Tomahawk saw his chance to strike back. A small cannon barrel slowly emerged from the center of the shield with a light mechanical sound. While the centipede was left in a panic, unaware of this weapon of Tomahawk's, the superhero fired a small, yet powerful, laser blast. The monster was hit in the dead center of his abdomen and was sent flying several yards, falling hard onto his back. Tomahawk stood up straight, turned the shield back into a simple pair of tomahawks, and had them turn back into swords. It was time to finish the fight.

Tomahawk shouted, "Tornado spin!"

With that command, his whole body began to spin around and around like a killer top. With his arms outstretched and his blades swinging with the velocity of a F5 tornado, he launched himself at the monster. The

centipede managed to get onto his feet before he realized Tomahawk was coming at him at high speed. Wide-eyed and scared out of his wits, the centipede froze up in fear. He stumbled back before Tomahawk zoomed right through him. The monster was sliced in half across the middle, yelling in severe pain before his lower half exploded. The upper half of the monster was sent flying over Tomahawk's head, screaming through the air like a cartoon villain in defeat. The monster then landed with a thud.

Tomahawk walked up to the defeated monster which was groaning in pain and coughing up yellow blood.

"Told you, you were just another pointless minion," Tomahawk said sternly.

Unexpectedly, the centipede began to laugh. He laughed so hard, he coughed even harder than before.

"What's so darn funny?" Tomahawk asked.

"You've already lost, Tomahawk! The monster empire has won at long last! You're finished, Tomahawk!" cried the Centipede.

As Tomahawk looked down at the monster bewildered, the earth itself began to shake violently. Tomahawk turned and looked up to the sky above to see what he had feared for the better part of a decade: the invasion had begun. The imperial fleet had passed the GPI fleet and entered the Earth's atmosphere. It was then he knew this monster was just a simple distraction. Tomahawk had been duped, and his planet was about to pay.





**"Onset Beach" by Aimee Woodward**



**"Gay Head Beach" by Aimee Woodward**



# Thoughts from 702D, 307S and the Flying Kia

Our love is lazy on Sundays.  
We barely take out the bullshit from our week  
Before nodding off to Netflix at 2 a.m.  
A mess of tangled limbs resting,  
Hanging off of twin size beds--  
But we don't care--  
Spider-man posters protect our dreams.

I found out that  
Giving you a bag of cashews  
Could solve a lot of our problems.  
Our love, young and naïve in this,  
But wise enough  
Not to let anger  
Settle seeds  
And grow.  
We just don't have room for it in this  
15 x15 Studio Apartment,  
I hope we never forget . . .

The first time I rode in that Kia  
Was my discovery that tiny cars  
Could fly.  
We zoomed passed street lights  
And signs  
Like something out of a Michael Bay movie,  
Puerto Rican flag set ablaze in the wind,  
Dubstep blaring through weak speakers,  
Our typical day,  
And I loved it.

You gave my heart a home.  
Someone to belong to  
In a world that never really  
Belonged to anyone.  
I fell in love with the ease  
Of just being  
Next to you and free,  
Nothing spoken in reassurance, but with uncontrollable desire.



**"Help Each Other Grow"**  
by Kelsey Marie Crawford

You turn me on,  
Our connection is so electric  
That the currents never stop running through our fingertips,  
So every touch is a new sensation--  
Another discovery,  
Another home.  
If only for a moment,  
I know I have lived and not existed.  
No more routines,  
No more idle love waking up to the horizon.

We raised a different kind of world  
Full of hippie-clad engineers,  
Listen to Neo-soul,  
Eating plantains  
In the morning.  
We, the prototypes  
Chilling--  
On top of that Kia  
I hold your starlight gaze--  
You whisk my doubts away;  
Stop me in my train of thoughts  
Kiss me--  
Then ask me to play Metal Gear Solid  
When we get home.

True love.

– Jessica Lockett

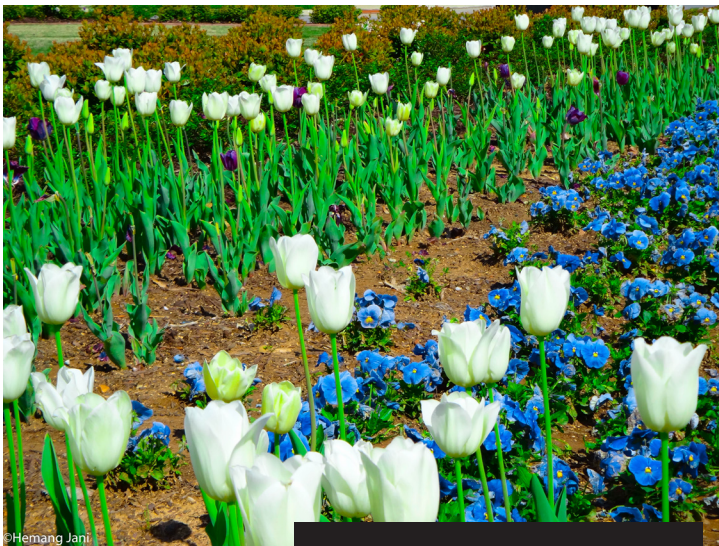


**"Recreation of Gustav Klimt's 'The Kiss'"**  
**by Kelsey Marie Crawford**



# The King's Garden

By Alan Brown



Photograph by Hemang Jani

Deep within the palace, a chamber was dimly lit with glowing crystals. The king's private garden contained many exotic flowers, ferns, and other such plants. In a desert kingdom like this, such flora is never seen by the commoners. The beautiful specimens were given to the king as gifts from foreign nobles and painstakingly preserved in all their beauty, grown in antique vases and shielded by glass bubbles. It sure would be a shame if somebody were to try and steal them.

The infamous thief Zalinero looked down on the gallery from the skylight above. Clad in black, he had stalked his way through the night to find this treasure trove. He pulled a curved dagger from the sash around his waist and gently cut a ring in the window to the room below. The circular section he cut out fell down to the floor below and shattered with a soft tinkling noise. Zalinero cringed. Hesitating for a moment, he let out a quiet sigh of relief when no guard came to investigate. Zalinero was a peculiar sort of person in that his luck was extremely polarized. Extraordinarily unlikely things happened around him, but they were as catastrophic as often as they were fortuitous. He never could be sure whether a small accident was the start of something great or the signal for disaster.

He silently dropped from the ceiling and tiptoed up to the vase in the center of the room. The soft stockings he wore over his feet made no noise as he sauntered toward his target. It was a navy blue urn etched with zigzagging patterns, placed on a marble pedestal. A beautiful purple chrysanthemum grew in it, but he didn't care. This was a special vase, one that had been passed down through the royal family for generations. On the black market, it would be worth at least two thousand rupees.

He gingerly removed the glass covering from the flower and set it aside. He scooped up the big vase and thought to himself, *No traps? Laaame. This was almost too easy.* He took two steps toward the clay arch decorating the room's only exit, but then something sharp stabbed into his foot. "Dammit!" he exclaimed. The broken glass left by his entry

had cut up his left foot. He hopped up and down on his right foot, then lost his grip on the vase. Swiftly diving, he was able to catch it before it hit the floor. Instinctively, he reached out with one hand to stop himself from falling face-first, and his reward was a palm full of broken glass. "Damn it all!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. He shook the glass out of his cut hand, but in the process he accidentally knocked over another one of the vases. A green pot containing several blue roses shattered with a loud crash.

He sighed. Easy come, easy go. "What was that?" a guardsman bellowed. The guard, spear in hand, appeared in the archway. The big, burly man saw a short, thin fellow dressed in black standing next to a mess of scattered dirt and broken terra cotta. With the blue urn under one arm, Zalinero used his free hand to pull down the bandana covering his face. "Well, you see, um, I'm a security system appraiser that your king hired to...."

The guard didn't listen. He pulled a bugle off of his belt and lifted it up to his mouth. With puffed up cheeks, he sent out a loud signal that echoed through the palace halls. Zalinero triggered the compact crossbow he wore on his right forearm with a flex of his wrist. The bolt cut into the guard's jugular, killing him instantly, but it was too late. He could hear other guards in the palace blowing on their trumpets to relay the signal to every one of their comrades: intruder alert! Zalinero ran out of the room and down the hall. He didn't know where he was going, but his mind was quick at work figuring that out.

Within minutes, the palace was in uproar. Zalinero killed one guard after another, swashbuckling with a

stolen scimitar. The thief fought using hit and run tactics. Any time he was discovered, he would swiftly dispatch a guard and disappear into the shadows, never stopping, no matter how many cuts and glancing blows the guards inflicted on him. Search parties swept through the halls, trying to corner him. After twenty minutes of watching bodies pile up, the guard captain himself stepped into the fray.

Sarkesh was a veteran soldier. Before being promoted to the cushy position of captain of the palace guards, he fought in hundreds of battles. He had a certain kind of wisdom that few warriors ever achieve. Once his men had cornered Zalinero in a cavernous ballroom, Sarkesh

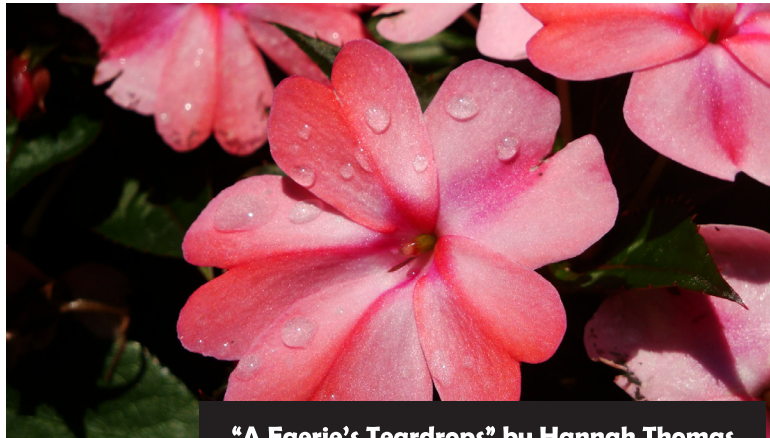
stepped in, wearing full plate armor lined with silver accents. He put one hand on the pommel of the sword sheathed at his waist and stared down the thief.

It was hard for him to believe that this scrawny little man was the thief

Zalinero, spoken of in hushed tones as if he were a living legend. The thief had bleeding cuts all over his body. His lungs heaved and huffed as he pressed his back against a corner, clinging onto the vase with one hand and brandishing the scimitar with the other. His fierce eyes issued a silent challenge to the captain: *Come closer and I'll kill you.*

"Zalinero, I have heard many tales about your heists," Sarkesh announced. His soldiers watched from the sides of the room. "I couldn't pass up the chance to cream you myself."

Zalinero's face twisted in disgust. He mockingly turned one ear to the captain. "What did you just say? You pass out when you cream yourself? Buddy, you really



**"A Faerie's Teardrops" by Hannah Thomas**

ought to see a doctor about that." One of the guards stifled a laugh.

Sarkesh furrowed his brow. "I wish to fight honorably whether you are taking this seriously or not. The way I see it, fighting a wounded opponent is a coward's strategy." He pulled a small glass bottle from a pouch on his belt. Red liquid swirled inside. "This potion will heal any wounds you have, plus invigorate you with energy to make up for any lost stamina. Take it, and we can duel as gentlemen... but if you want to catch it, you'll have to put down that vase. Or drop your weapon. Which will it be?"

Zalinero eyed him suspiciously at first. After a moment of hesitation, he slowly lowered the vase to the ground and held out his hand. Sarkesh tossed him the potion, and he caught it. The thief uncorked the bottle with this thumb and gulped it down. It felt warm, dribbling down his throat. A strange sensation overtook him. The room around him swirled, and his legs felt like jelly. "What did you do?"

The guard captain laughed a loud, booming laugh. "You dumbass! That wasn't a healing potion, it was a sleeping potion! What a sucker!" All the guards joined their captain in laughing at the thief as he collapsed on the floor.

The next day, Sarkesh presented the stolen vase to the king. The flower was still firmly planted in the soil, even after all it had been through.

"Did he take them out of the bottom?" the king asked, rising from his throne.

"Take what?" Sarkesh was confused.

The king snatched up the vase. He pulled the flower out of the soil and tossed it to the ground. Sarkesh watched, astonished, as the king shoveled fistfuls of dirt out onto

the immaculate tile floor of the throne room. "My liege, what is wrong?"

"It's gone! He took them!" After the king emptied the vase, he threw it to the ground with enough force to shatter it. His face was red, and a vein was bulging out of his forehead.

"What's going on, your majesty?" Sarkesh had never seen his master this upset before.

"In my father's time, there were many spies in the palace. Treasure kept disappearing no matter how many guards we put in front of the royal vaults. Since that time, we've hidden most of our kingdom's wealth in the garden's flowerpots. Rubies! Emeralds! Sandworm pearls! Each vase contains a satchel of jewels because really, who would think to steal a garden?"

A guard ran into the throne room, panic in his eyes. "My lords, there's an emergency!"

The realization hit Sarkesh like a ton of bricks. "Zalinero," was the only word he could muster.

"He's escaped? But how?" The king thundered.

The guard got down on one knee, trembling. "I'm sorry, but we don't know. He was just gone, but he left a note." He offered the scrap of parchment to Sarkesh.

It read: *Joke's on you, sucker.*

"What does it say?" The king asked Sarkesh.

The guard captain blushed and crumpled the paper up into a ball. "Nothing. Nothing at all, sir."



# 4-20

by Autumn Helton

3:00

The bell rang and Mr. Mercier woke. After a moment of contemplation, he rolled from the couch and moved around his apartment sleepily, gathering the articles of clothing he had left in various places. His work shirt and spectacles were on the kitchenette counter next to a half-empty glass of tap water. He drank, pulled his shirt on, zipped up his pants, and buckled his belt. He then put on his glasses and stepped into the leather shoes he had kicked across the room earlier. Once he was acceptable, he buried his head between two couch cushions and sighed.

3:15

Mr. Mercier dug himself up. He went to the only window in his apartment, tugged aside the blackout curtain, and squinted at the little red schoolhouse at the top of the hill. The double doors were hanging open and the bell was still. The students were congregated in the courtyard, watching a group of prep-boys play monkey-in-the-middle with the new kid's notebook.

A group of girls called the "pops" were standing in front of the crowd. They had their hair tied with matching satin ribbons. One of the girls who normally accompanied them – a curly-headed blonde – was standing off to the side, weeping. No one comforted her. Her hair was not properly adorned, so she might as well have not existed.

3:18

The new kid finally jumped high enough to knock his notebook to the ground. It landed in a muddy puddle with the front cover bent. One of the prep-boys patted his back, as if to say it was all in good fun, then their audience dispersed. The new kid picked up his notebook and saw that it could not be saved. He left it in the mud and walked home with his face in his hands.

3:24

The nerds felt safe enough to leave the building. They came out like a circus parade, most of them too tall or too short, too fat or too thin. Mr. Mercier imagined himself among them. He was also a freak in high school, standing just under five feet tall until his senior year. When he did finally hit his growth spurt, he became lanky and awkward in his movements. His shirts were too tight and his jeans never covered his ankles. He would stare at the floor when he walked in the hallway, in hopes that no one would notice him. He was a nobody and nothing had changed.

There was only one thing that gave Mr. Mercier a sense of purpose: the neighbor-girl, Annabel. Shortly after he moved in August, Annabel's drunken father locked her out of their apartment. After she scratched at the door for several minutes, Mr. Mercier invited her in. They spent the next few hours discussing Annabel's problems at home and in school. Mr. Mercier had never related to anyone so well.

3:32

She meandered out of the schoolhouse, last as customary. Mr. Mercier always grew anxious when he saw the little red dot moving slowly down the grey backdrop. He hurried to the bathroom and performed his purification ritual: splashing his face, brushing his teeth, and patting down his overgrown black hair. When the process was finished, he finally glanced at himself in the mirror, then looked hesitantly down at the strip of photo negatives that lay on the counter. He hurried out decisively, knowing that he would never leave if he gave himself time to think.

3:40

It was the type of wet, dreary day that Mr. Mercier enjoyed. He fantasized about his "theatre fag" days in high school and walked to the mailbox with an upbeat performance. He opened it, though he knew nothing was inside. There was a flash of red in the corner of his eye.

"Mr. Mercier!" Annabel shouted, accenting the mispronounced "air."

He turned and she smashed into his ribs. Her freckled arms wrapped around his belt. "What's wrong, Annabel?"

She yanked away and squinted at him. "Don't tell me you didn't hear!"

"Hear what?"

"Were you asleep all day again?"

"Well," Mr. Mercier eyed the ground, "I did not get off of work until five."

"Ugh!" She exclaimed playfully, "you hibernate more than bats and bears combined!"

"Bats don't hibernate. It's called torpor."

She rolled her eyes and they began walking. "How could you have not heard?"

"Just tell me—"

"A couple of kids shot a bunch of people at their school in Colorado! And I mean a bunch! Students and teachers!"

Mr. Mercier paused in the middle of a puddle. "Oh wow, that's just—"

"Terrible!" She twirled slowly around a light post, "The news says the shooters got bullied a lot. It must have been real bad!"

Mr. Mercier nodded and they continued walking.

"You said you were bullied in school, but you never thought about killing anyone, right?"

"No, not just anyone," he said carefully.

Annabel continued naively. "Sometimes when the girls at school talk about me, I wanna hit 'em...but I don't think I could ever look anyone in the eye and pull the trigger, no matter what they say about me!"

"Girls never like other pretty girls..." Mr. Mercier said slowly.

Annabel raised her eyebrows. "That's silly. If I were pretty, the boys wouldn't tease me too!"

"But boys always tease the girls they like!"

"Ha! If they liked me, they'd ask me out!" She punctuated with a self-assured stomp.

3:46

They were stopped in front of Mr. Mercier's apartment. Annabel had her back turned to her own, denying her residence there. Mr. Mercier had given her sanctuary. He opened the door and she made herself at home, throwing her backpack onto the ground and resting her head against the countertop. Mr. Mercier

opened a box of macaroni and began boiling water.

"Did you have girlfriends in school?" Annabel asked, perking her head up.

"Um," Mr. Mercier muttered, "I actually did not date until after college."

"Really?" She slid towards him. "You never said you went to college!"

"I have a bachelor's in biology."

"Why do you unload trucks all night then? Why don't you go be a scientist?"

He laughed uneasily and drained the noodles. "Most good scientists have PhD's. I lucked out and got paid to do some research for a company in Dover, but when the project was finished they let me go."

"I still don't get why you'd move from Dover to a miserable place like this!"

Mr. Mercier bit his lip and watched the steam rise in front of her freckled face. "Could you go wash up?"

"Okie-dokie!" She sang as she skipped to the bathroom.

Mr. Mercier mixed the cheese sauce and poured the noodles evenly into two Styrofoam bowls. Annabel bumped around in the bathroom, hummed, and loudly sniffed his after shave. Then it grew intensely quiet and the noodles stopped steaming.

"Are you okay?" Mr. Mercier called nervously.

"Mr. Mercier...I did something bad..."

He ran into the bathroom and saw Annabel tugging at her thumb. "I can't get it off!" She whined, presenting her dainty freckled hand.

He swallowed hard, took her hand in his, and held it under hot running water. He then pulled at her thumb for several heartwrenching moments before the ring flew off. It landed on the edge of the drain and spun; gold against gold. Mr. Mercier reached out to save it, but he was a moment too late. The performance was over and he was speechless.

Annabel gasped. "I'm so sorry..."

4:07

"Whose ring was it?" She asked after several moments of silence.

Mr. Mercier rolled his eyes upward to prevent the flow of tears. He then let go of Annabel's hand and

placed it on the strip of negatives. She did not have to look at them – she had eyed them earlier – it was five frames of Mr. Mercier and a red-headed woman. In the final photo, he was wearing antlers and sitting on her lap Santa Clause-style. They looked happy. Annabel lowered her head.

“I feel terrible.”

4:09

Annabel finally exited the bathroom and retrieved her cold macaroni. She sat on the couch and turned on the television:

“The two young killers are dead. Investigators are calling it a suicide mission.”

Mr. Mercier appeared in the door frame, shaking. “Annabel please–” His voice faded and his eyes widened. He stared blankly at the wall.

“What is it?”

“Please –” His knees buckled and he fell to the ground with a loud thump. Annabel ran to him and began frantically feeling his chest and neck. Saliva bubbled at his lips and his entire body trembled. She ran outside and screamed for someone to call an ambulance.

4:20

Mr. Mercier looked around, dazed, and wiped the spit from his chin. A splash of red approached him, caressed his hair, and mumbled something. He looked up at the TV and saw several images of parents and children weeping.

“This is a real tragedy,” The news anchor concluded.

He closed his eyes and dreamt of better days.



**“Recreation of Girl with the Pearl Earring”  
by Kelsey Marie Crawford**



# Water: A Vignette

Millen is going to die.

She knows this, she is certain, she thinks it unfair to know the ending before it comes, like the neighbor boy spoiling the surprise party for her and then saying “just act surprised”; it’s never the same.

She has spoiled her own surprise, one that surely every person is entitled to, if that is their preference.

She could have died after consuming a variety of spoiled, canned goods that were stacked in the moth-infested pantry of her grandmother’s house. She could have died a famous actress, whose death would be mourned by masses of people who all seemed to have the same face. She could have died an old, old woman, snug in her knit dressing gown and content with not waking up, with not having a surprise.

But she is here, she is drowning, she is eleven years old and her hair is starting to blur with the undulating plant life of the emerald lake that is becoming increasingly agitated by her kicks and thrusts, her pink fists squeezing at nothing.

She accepts that this is the way she will go, but chooses to prolong the moment, staring into the grainy water, looking to see if any fishes are watching, telling their children *look away now, this part is a bad part to watch*, if she has accidentally crunched her foot down on any of them, as she is certain that she has planted her feet in the soft pillow bottom. She cannot see them, so she decides not to worry about it.

Her nightgown swirls up, exposing her belly and what she imagined would be breasts one day; she was sure she would be full-busted like her grandmother was in the creased photographs, the photographs that are gently wrapped in a mauve scarf under her bed. The nightgown floats back down with the delicate sway of the water.

She is standing still, now. The fragments of dead insects mix with the dying; the grains slow their vitriolic swirl.

Perhaps she is standing on a very large fish, one that fishermen will fight and yank and slice thick and thin and sell to the wives of the bay, who will then bake and poach and fry the fish in pans of smooth oil and feed back to the fishermen.

How would she know? She knows that she cannot see the top, or bottom, just what is in front. Everything is in front. Everything is dark and green, and her chest and eyes hurt.

She lets her feet rise in a panicked attempt to prove to the lake that she was so much *smarter* than it thought. That she was the morsel of food that is prematurely swallowed and then coughed back up, because it’s not quite done, even though it thought that it was.

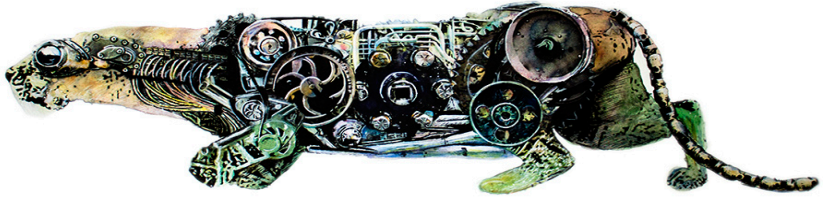
Millen is in the water and she sees what her life was, what her life is, what it will be. She is eleven years old and dying. She is fond of the color green now.

— Sydney Johnson



**"Reflected" by Alexandra Wiegand**





**"Lioness" by Elizabeth Wiethop**

# Razor Blade Crayons

It was at the height of summer,  
When turquoise skies  
Mixed with purple haze--  
Mornings drenched in laziness and uncertainty--  
No longer fazed her.  
She was oblivious;  
She was changed.

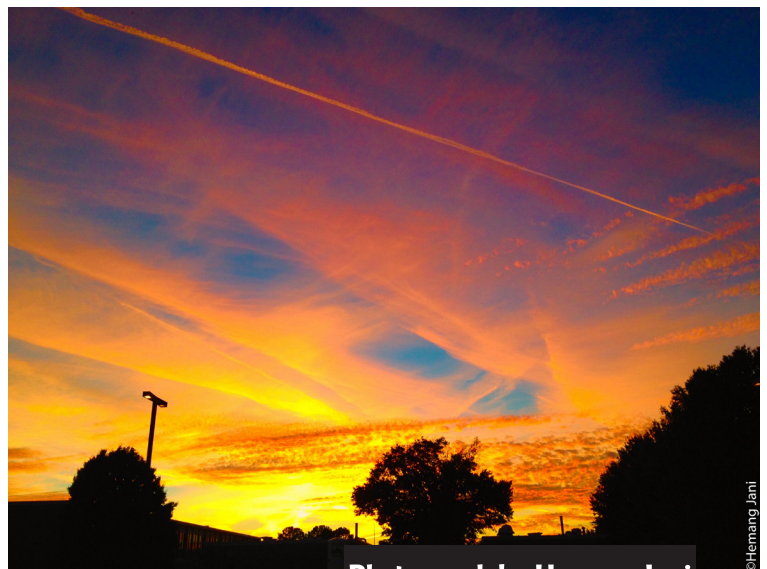
With held breath  
And small incisions,  
She broke dawn each night.  
The sun,  
No match for her shade,  
Buckled around her;  
Collapsed upon her cool flesh,  
Slowly . . .  
and  
unashamed.

She had become a master of this craft,  
Learned a long time ago  
That the world could break  
As easily as crayons pressed too hard on paper.  
So she carved out her emotions and became hollow;  
Her body,  
A blank canvas waiting to endure--  
The color of pain:  
Red  
Of regret,  
Black  
of self-pity,  
Green,  
All pigments burning the fabric of pale flesh.

When they found her,

She was a violent violet--  
The aftermath of suffocation,  
From a ruptured vein.  
Pouring--  
Crimson over crooked wrist,  
And skinny legs.  
Pink matter  
Scattered across gray sheets,  
And brown flesh--  
Slowly drying out the rainbow,  
Whose warped ends never quite touch the ground.  
She was free.

– Jessica Lockett



**Photograph by Hemang Jani**

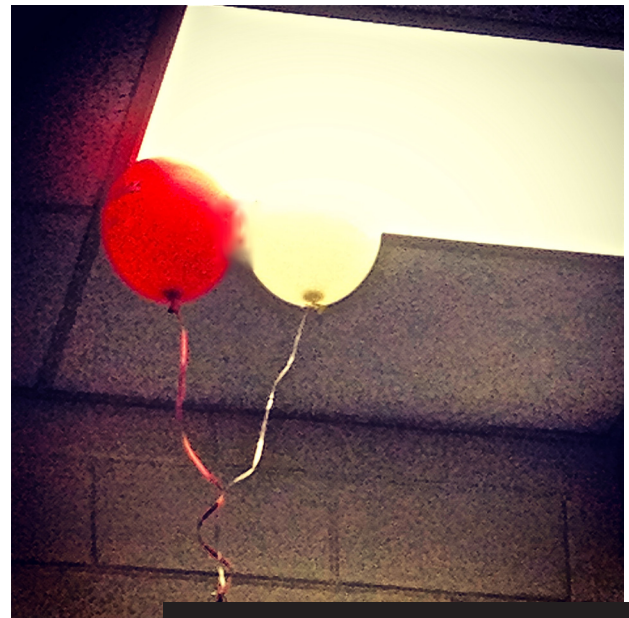
# There's Nothing Like Birthdays

by Ryan Levie

There's nothing like birthdays.

It is the anniversary of my eighth year on this planet. As is the custom, a celebration was to be held. Given that my residence was absolutely inappropriate for a gathering of any nature, my grandparents' farm was chosen as the venue. This farm was situated several miles outside Huntsville proper. There are condominiums there now. If that says anything about the inevitable march of progress, I am not qualified to comment. But this was not now. The day of celebration was at hand, and all the customary accoutrements were in place. There was a cake, as there always must be. Never mind that I never liked cake. It is only with the lens of hindsight that I understand that birthday parties and all the things that they entail are not necessarily for the birthday-person. But there was cake, and there was a song, and there were guests. So all the requirements were there, yes? Let us set the stage more fully.

The farm in question had a large outdoor deck that overlooked a fenced in space of about a hundred yards. Most important to me in this fenced area was a large play structure that contained two swings and an iron crossbar attached to a rope. This crossbar was suspended about five feet from the ground. High enough that I could reach it at the time, but not so high as to make it a difficult venture. This is our *dramatis persona*.



**"Tied Together" by Alexandra Wiegand**

Something must be said about the guests. Normally, for a situation like this you would invite the friends of the birthday-person. This would be difficult as I only had two friends at the time. One was in his early twenties, the other just turned sixteen. Remember that I was eight. This should be sufficient to describe me – I was not a normal child. But they were the closest things I had to friends, and so they were there. Beyond that there were my parents, my grandparents, and also in attendance were the friends of my step-brother. My step-brother was cool in the way that only older punk brothers could be. In truth, he was an obnoxious tool. But I couldn't know that. I was eight. Since he didn't want to attend his little brother's birthday alone, he brought all of his cool friends that he could pull away from their cool lives. This swelled the event considerably and (unbeknownst to me) made it incredibly awkward for my grandparents to have all these teenage skater-punks at their home.

So now we have the scene. Twenty-odd people. Most of them strangers to each other in one form or another. None of them were really close to my age. Milling about on the deck, trying to fake conversation. One hand holding a paper-plate with mediocre cake on it. The other gesturing with a fork at nothing in particular. Copy and paste a dozen times. Where was I? Playing out in the backyard by myself. Heedless of the ruin that was

swiftly approaching.

It is about now in the story that I get one of those possibly random spurts of youthful energy that we all seem to have. This urge to do something crazy and joyful and alive. Relationships are started and ended on such surges. Mistakes and regrets. But I am eight, and have no idea of such things. I have been playing on the iron crossbar, holding on with my hands and swinging my legs, dragging them ever so lightly, kicking up small puffs of the red clay that makes up the under-soil around here. But then I have an idea.

I stand about four feet from the crossbar, eying it like a matador. It does not eye me back. It is a round tube of iron. I glance back to the deck once, twice. On the fourth time I catch my sixteen year old - Matt's - eye. An imperceptible nod across forty yards seals it. He is still young; he understands the youthful exuberance I am experiencing. I turn back to the iron crossbar as a hush takes over the deck. I can feel the attention of everyone in my small life focusing on me and this crossbar. But it is not a crossbar, not anymore. I am Indiana Jones, and it is a cliff-edge. I am Raphael, and it is a retreating ledge inside the Terrordrome. I squint my eyes and focus all of my heroes and their triumphs into me. I dash, I leap...

Take a metal pot and, very lightly, tap your fingernail to the side. That noise? I hear it still. I am closer to forty than eight and I still hear it. It is the noise of dashed hopes and lost youth. It is the noise my fingers made as they committed a horrific sin and *missed*.

I am told later that I reached full horizontal in my Quest for Bar. I don't remember. I do remember the *whuff* that came out of me when I hit that red clay, my whole body now making the puff of dirt. Oddly enough, I also remember the immediate silence. The heavy weighted pause after a disaster. I must have made some sort of noise or motion because the silence did not last. The laughter that followed was loud, raucous, and contagious as only real gut-reaching laughter can be. The laughter of universal sharing. What they just witnessed wasn't

just funny to *them*. It was funny to every living human on the planet. And to my young ears that was exactly who was laughing.

I remember getting up and running, huffing and squeezing down huge lungfuls of sob-filled air. I remember finding the barn in the back of the property and hiding in a loose pile of straw and hay. Time passes, and as dusk nears I hear the voice of the only individuals to come looking for me. My friends! Not my family, not my step-brother and his coterie. But friends! All two of them. But two is better than none, and I shall always consider quality a more important trait than quantity in that regard. Searching up and down the farm, I hear them calling for me. Come out, come out, they call. I am still embarrassed, and can only tell them no. I am afraid, I say. Afraid of being laughed at again. It's okay, they say. We're you're friends, they say. We promise we won't laugh. Okay.

To be fair, they ended up only being half liars. When I emerged straw covered, red-faced, my hair and face a mess from crying and landing in dirt, I must have been a sight. But promises are important when you are little. And a half-liar is still a liar. Upon seeing my "frog-mouthed horror face," as it was later called, Matt turned and ran. The other, Jason, stood stock still. There was literal pointing and laughing, his legs splayed apart for maximum stability. He did not run. Hand over mouth, index finger outstretched. He was there long enough for Matt to feel bad and sprint back to pull him bodily from the scene.

I crawled back into the hay. It could be argued that some part of me is still there to this day. There's nothing like birthdays.



# Dimensions

by Stephanie Ragan

I have often wondered if there has ever been anyone else who felt a longing for another era and more of a connection with antique objects than with human beings of their own age. Of course, I'm sure there has been, but where are they? Perhaps we could seek solace in one another as lost souls. I hunger for the glorious tales of days gone by that older people love to tell. As I listen with an intensity I can't describe, I gaze into a face crinkled with character that has seen more than I can imagine. A moment ago, their eyes were as aged as the person that bore them. But as they recount joyful memories of long ago, their souls become light and their eyes regain the youthful spark of a giddy teenage girl. Though they have experienced pain beyond compare, they prefer to share only stories that make them smile.

The most brutally honest and emotional tales are not spoken, but felt in the heart. I once encountered a storyteller such as this and I often return to its honesty. It, too, is shrunken and weather-beaten in its old age. Surrounded by pasture that meets the horizon, it stands at a fork in a dirt road, regaling the mystery of its past only to a nearby herd of cows. The curious passerby stops now and then to wonder why it still stands there. To them, it is an eyesore blocking the sinking sun that set the structure aflame in vivid reds and oranges. The small balcony on the face of this once cozy home stretches the length of the second floor and bows a bit in the middle,

making the house seem to grin in amusement – perhaps at people like me who find its run-down appearance oddly comforting. The windows in each corner have long since known the protection of glass panes. The rain falls inside, peeling up what flooring is left and revealing yellowed newspaper underneath, miraculously spared by Mother Nature. Young women modeling the latest fashions for flappers stare up at me from below a date that states it is July 19, 1927. Frozen in time, they seem to speak to me, hurt that they are forgotten. I do my

best to console them, saying that they live on in the souls of their aging counterparts, resurfacing occasionally to tell a story or two to a transfixed audience.



I stand to leave, for the eerie emotion that echoes in every creak and groan of the house is so powerful that I can stand it no more. But as I reach the front door, I pause for a second to gaze out over the weathered gray porch. I don't see the pebbled remnants of a sidewalk, but a brand-new, gleaming white one – surrounded not by hideously overgrown weeds and briars, but by a manicured lawn that's a shade of green the Irish would envy; it's tainted only by the occasional cluster of dandelions. The picket fence is once more standing upright and

covered in enough whitewash to make even Aunt Polly proud. A melancholy smile comes to my face as nostalgia for an era I never knew fills me. I reluctantly stroll back to my car to return to a world that I don't understand. However, I will carry on as though I do because I'm sure I'll find my purpose someday. Maybe one day, I will be the young woman speaking to another from a faded yellow newspaper.



**"Attached" by Anna Parks**

# He Lays Me Down in Fields of Autumn



He lays me down in fields of autumn  
And as my thoughts fade  
So do my eyes wander  
Sleeping while seeing  
Resting in thoughtless recognition of beauty  
Not straining a perception  
But understanding the grace this field is  
Questioning not my significance  
Nor my importance  
Who else would lie in this field?  
Who else was it made for?  
It is proof enough for me  
No need to challenge destiny  
This field of mine  
Is a sufficient sign  
I am loved and I am praised  
Though gifted, I am afraid  
Foolishly I fear  
For He lays me down in fields of autumn

– Robert Mitchell McDonald





©Hemang Jani

**Photograph by Hemang Jani**



**ANNAPARKS  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

**"Shirt Tail Bend" by Anna Parks**



# A Portrait of Laughter

by Danielle Washington

Dad was tall and slender, almost lanky, but strong. He stood six feet, four inches high, and as a child, I thought he must be the tallest man in the world. His hair was always cut the same way, a typical engineer's style, only slightly more fashionable than a bowl cut. At least it was that way until he got sick and everything changed. After his diagnosis, he pierced his ear (mostly for the amusement of his mother-in-law's reaction), got a tattoo that said, "Keep up the fight against ALS" on his forearm, and finally got a new haircut, closer to a buzz than a bowl. Dad always wore glasses, though they changed with the decades, from thick-framed, square plastic specs in the '80's and '90's, to the sleeker, more stylish, subtle frames of the 2000's. He wore khakis and a button-down every day to work, but on the weekends, he nearly always donned his trusty green-and-white-striped button down with his favorite pair of jeans. In approximately fifty percent of the pictures he's in, Dad's sporting that dependable, old, striped shirt.

I studied him, like an eager apprentice, because he exuded intellect and grace. Roller blading in our basement as a child, coasting smoothly over the cool, cement floor, I made a game out of dodging sawdust piles. Each time I'd pass my dad in his workshop, I'd pause to watch him do his woodworking or fix the latest busted lamp or fried out toaster. I wanted to be just like him, not an engineer, but smart, strong, and capable. Sometimes, on a sunny afternoon in late summer, when my sisters were upstairs with my mom or out playing at a friend's house, my dad and I would sneak away to the nearby gas station for popsicles. We'd hop into his prized possession, the '66 GTO he'd bought in

terrible condition and fixed up beautifully, and cruise down the road with the windows down, summer breeze tousling our hair. The Horsey Store, I called it, due to the emblem of a man riding a horse on the front of the building, housed seemingly hundreds of flavors of frozen treats. We'd peruse the selection of Flintstone's Push-Pops, Nestle Drumsticks, and Good Humor Ice Cream Sandwiches for several minutes, trying to decide what we wanted, but Dad and I always got the same thing—a Bomb Pop. That icy red, white, and blue treat seemed huge in my small grasp, and I almost couldn't believe I was allowed to have it. Dad would laugh, tilting his head back slightly, as the sugary colors melted, converging to purple as they dripped down my hand. We'd pull into the driveway just as we were finishing our popsicles, hoping that Mom hadn't noticed we'd been gone for twenty minutes.

When my grandparents gave birth to my dad, they also gave birth to his love of laughter, instilling in him a culture of joking that spanned his lifetime. Although he learned within the first year of marriage not to scare my mother for laughs, my sisters and I thought it hilarious. Dad would routinely try to scare us girls, and we'd squeal with fright and excitement, plotting our "revenge." Many evenings, when I knew Dad was on his way home from work, I'd hide at the bottom of the stairway in the basement, knowing that he'd walk right past me and hoping that he wouldn't turn on the light. My attempts at startling my dad were actually a bit of a sacrifice because I was more than a little afraid of the dark. The creepy, cold basement smelled like old cars and sawdust, and each time I hid down there, I would frequently check behind me to ensure that the big, bad dog from my recurrent nightmares wasn't lurking. Eventually, after what seemed like hours, I'd hear the garage door open, and instantaneously, the grumbles and growls of my dad's souped-up GTO bellowed throughout the basement. As soon as I heard that familiar

sound, I'd get nervously excited, awaiting just the right moment to pop out of hiding. When my dad walked by, I'd yell, "BOO!" and he'd jump, sometimes out of actual fear, but often out of appeasement. I could usually tell which it was, but I'd always know later that I actually startled him if he scared me back. Dad and I so routinely played the game of scaring each other that it became a challenge to really frighten the other person.

On one particular night in early elementary school, as we prepared a snack tray of cheese, crackers, and olives to eat while watching a family movie, my dad and I contrived a plan to scare my mom. "Hey, Danielle," he approached me with a sly smile on his face, "Let's get Mom tonight." I wondered not only how we were going to go about this, but also, wouldn't Mom get mad? She hated being scared. I referenced the story Dad had told me about how Mom slapped him out of shock and fear when he snuck up on her brushing her teeth fifteen years earlier. Dad assured me that it would be fine, so we plotted as we fixed our snack.

As a kid, when my fingers were still small enough to do so without breaking the olives, I'd slide a black, pitted olive onto each finger and eat them off faster than my dad could replenish the delicious, holed spheres. Of course, I got this idea from Dad, who thought it was adorable and hilarious to watch us eat olives, Bugles, and anything else with holes the right size in this manner. That night, Dad suggested that I take my olive-laden fingers and creep up behind Mom, who was busy cutting coupons quietly in the living room. He coached me on what to say, and when I was ready, I sneakily crept out of the kitchen, into the living room, and behind my mom's chair. She was entranced in the world of couponing, content that my

dad was watching us kids, and I got that same anxious feeling I always had when waiting to scare Dad. Just as instructed, I slowly bent my finger in the shape of a sign language "x" to the right of Mom's head, whispering, "Redrum... redrum..." Having not seen *The Shining* at the time, I had no idea what I was saying, but my mom gasped and dropped her scissors, yelling, not at me, but at my dad. Success! I'm sure that Dad endured some not-so-friendly "discussion" about not scaring my mom that night after we went to bed, but all I can remember is my dad's loud and comical laugh, roaring through the house, while my mom sat in her chair, looking miffed but stifling a smile.



"Mosi" by Laura O'Farrill

Those are the times I like to remember. The times before the falling and the broken, bloody noses. Before the slurred speech that took coherent thought and jumbled it into auditory puzzles. Before the entrapment of the wheelchair and the feeding tube that stole his last ounces of independence. Dad really lived up to his tattoo: Keep up the fight against ALS—that's exactly what he did. Even after his diagnosis, Dad was strong, hard-working, and passionate. He never stopped being an engineer—he designed a lift that ran across his room to get him out of bed and into the bathroom, and he sent the blueprint to people who needed it all over the U.S. and Canada. He never stopped woodworking—he designed hope chests for all three of his daughters, and when he could no longer work on them, he commissioned his father to finish the job. More than anything, he never stopped being a jokester—sometimes, when I was pouring a nutritional drink in his feeding tube or helping him move into a more comfortable position, he would let out a loud growl, as if he were in pain. I'd jump and shriek, "Dad!!" afraid that I had hurt him, until the mischievous look in his eyes gave him away. We'd start to laugh, just like we always had, Dad tilting his head back a bit, his notoriously loud and animated laugh thundering through the house once more.

# New Beginnings, Old Friends

A knife, sharp as the samurai  
The sun, blistering as fire.  
Have at thee! Engarde!  
Coming home in second degree,  
I was told to "go on without me."  
Just like being dropped for a better offer,  
My heart had been broken and then became the scoffer.  
There once was "you and me"  
But now it's like there's you  
And then there's me.  
O the good ole days,  
But you've made lonely run both ways.  
A brick wall, strong for a hurricane.  
An apology as cold as the driven snow.  
He couldn't handle me,  
But now he takes you away.  
New beginnings, old friends  
There is a reason I stood in your way  
Big heart, fighter's shield.  
These words will be my own.  
Closing walls, dark room  
Barely alive to see my phone.  
I miss everything there was, no doubt no lie.  
But everything you said made me cry on the inside.  
Yesterday you said "I'll be right there. Let me go first."  
But you never came, not even before, and now I feel cursed.  
Lots of love in my heart, but you've brought the storm.  
Drifting apart, surely I don't hope so.  
Nobody there to keep me warm.  
Everything we had, I guess once was just like before.  
But nothing happens when you're in front of a closed door.  
Let me in, every answer has a key.  
But all you've done is hang me upside down in a tree.  
If you're still there, then there is still hope.  
Being patient like a nurse in the hospital I guess I can still cope.  
If not, then I guess I'll be alright.  
Because I've already found someone else to hold me tonight.

– Trey Cornelius





Photograph by Hannah Thomas



"Love in a Trashcan" by Zachery De La Cruz

# Blanket of the Universe

<p>If ever you feel the creeping cold Of sadness or loneliness Or if the pressure becomes too much And you shed even a single tear, Wrap yourself in the blanket Of the universe. Where love exists everlasting. Borrow just a small corner And sink yourself into it Into the arms of the universe And feel its love And you won't feel cold anymore.</p> <p>Snug inside your tiny corner The universe tucks you in; Makes sure the blanket is Wrapped around you tight To shield you from the creeping cold But roomy and comfortable As the open road in the country.</p> <p>Each breeze is a kiss from the universe. The sun is a gift of light and warmth That you might look Upon the universe and know unconditional love. Each and every star in the sky is a reminder That you are not alone Even in the darkest night.</p> <p>And when you go to sleep The universe is there to say goodnight At least until morning's first light And promises to be there Every morning when you wake Ready to embrace you As you emerge from the realm of dreams.</p>	<p>The universe stands above you A mother, always watching Always seeing, Always loving, But all at once is so much more.</p> <p>The universe is the eternal flame Which surrounds you. She will never leave you, Never doubt you, Never lose faith in you, Never stop loving you Because love is energy And energy cannot be destroyed It only changes forms.</p> <p>So go ahead It's okay. You're safe. She won't let you fall.</p> <p>Wrap yourself up in the blanket Of the universe. Where love exists everlasting. Borrow just a small corner And sink yourself into it Into the arms of the universe. And be warmed by her love.</p>
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– Matthew Elkin





Photograph by Hemang Jani

# The Swap

By Garrett Holmes

Landon waited outside his black Civic in the empty parking lot watching the headlights of cars driving by, taking deep drags from his cigarette. Every so often he ran one of his hands through his hair, and slowly transferred the oils from his face to his dark blond locks. A nervous habit.

He checked his watch, noticing they were late. As usual.

Landon looked around at the deserted lot of the elementary school. A few of the lamps overhead flickered occasionally and the once bright yellow stripes were now faded and stippled with black.

Finally he saw the blink of a turn signal break the monotony of white lights, and a silver 4Runner eased into the lot, stopping as it neared him. Landon quickly exhaled, flicked his smoking cigarette butt to the ground, and extinguished it with a swift step and turn of his sneaker. He hated letting Kara see him smoke.

The front passenger door opened and Liza emerged, not even giving him a glance.

Landon ran his hand through his hair.

"You look good," he said. She continued to ignore him and opened the back door, and leaned in to unfasten a small blond girl with pigtails from her car seat. Kara.

With the light on inside the SUV, Landon could see the driver. Dark hair and black rimmed glasses, eyes disdainfully locked on Landon. Mark. For a moment, Landon pondered the life that might have been his. He clenched his fists and broke eye contact.

Freed of her car seat, the bubbly five-year-old rushed over to Landon, "Daddy!" He stooped to embrace her, holding her tightly.

"Hey baby girl." Landon stood. Liza waited a little bit away, holding Kara's bag.

"We'll pick her up Sunday night. Same time," Liza said, holding out the bag. Landon grabbed it and put it into the car. "Bye sweetie," Liza said as she stooped to kiss Kara on the head and give her a hug before returning to the passenger seat of the 4Runner.

Landon watched the taillights speeding away and then turned his gaze to the girl standing by his side. She looked at him with her bright green eyes. "Ready to go, princess?" he asked. Her reply was a smile as she opened the back door.

Just as they were starting to ease into the road from the parking lot, Kara spoke up, "I like Mark. He's nice." Those few words fell on Landon and his grip on the steering wheel tightened along with his chest.

"When are you and Mommy going to live together again?" The magnitude of that simple question washed over him. Emptiness crept into his stomach and tears stung his eyes.

"Well," Landon fought back a lump in his throat. "I'm not so sure that will happen, honey." He cleared his throat. "Mommy decided she didn't want to be with Daddy anymore. She chose Mark instead."

"That's silly. I want to be with you Daddy. Always."

Everything Landon thought to say seemed lacking, so he remained silent. Landon had never wanted Liza to leave. Never wanted to give Kara a broken home. He ran his hand through his hair.





**"Light of the World" by Lauren Wright**

An internal monologue, in  
response to the serene smile  
that adorns her face as she  
sleeps, that derails into the  
midnight silence and crashes  
against the splinters of yellow  
streetlight that slip delicately  
through the broken blinds—

I wonder if she's prepared to see  
what comes when I fly into my fall  
frenzy, when I stop sleeping, and  
if she can handle that I cry  
whenever I read the final *Calvin  
and Hobbes* strip because ever  
since I read it that first time when  
I was only nine all I've ever  
wanted to do is go exploring but  
all these goddamned cops and  
judges and their hordes of  
bureaucrats want me to stay in  
one place so they can keep an eye  
on me and take my money so I can  
barely eat and make me pay an old  
man with a second mortgage on  
the house his ex-wife took when  
she left and less than a thousand  
bucks in his savings and makes  
just forty grand a year to watch  
me piss in a plastic cup to prove  
my sobriety for justice (or maybe  
society's) sake because  
then—maybe the fuck then I'll  
wake up at dawn on Sunday and  
go to a million-dollar church  
where the Holy Spirit will hit me  
and I'll fall to my knees in front of  
a rich man selling promises of  
eternity as he leers over me in a  
power stance with his hands  
towards the plaster  
ceiling—maybe then I'll condemn

my brother and my friends and  
myself and all the other heretics  
and sodomites for their so-called  
'sins' and I'll repent and pay my  
fucking taxes and yell "Roll Tide"  
like I actually give a shit,  
but I won't.

On an impulse I start to formulate  
different plans to hitchhike until I  
hit an ocean or get licensed to  
drive a semi and leave this  
embarrassing slice of the  
American Pie to haul produce or  
stereos or cheap furniture or  
pieces of war machines that cost  
more than feeding an indigent  
family of sixteen as I speed  
through the Rockies and  
Appalachians and over the Great  
Plains while composing the  
world's loneliest poetry on a  
cheap digital recorder taped to the  
dash as I try not to careen off the  
side of a mountain while I learn to  
simultaneously steer and  
masturbate, wondering if I even  
have a home anymore, or if I  
should just blow my pay where I  
stop and post up until I get  
another shipment to Little Rock or  
Los Angeles or Sioux City, if I  
should kill time with lot lizards at  
a truckstop that staggers the flat  
Nebraska landscape that  
surrounds me, if it's cheaper than  
therapy to stare at their jagged  
meth grins in a bathroom stall  
and try to convince both of us that  
I have a place I should go and  
something waiting for me and  
somewhere out there that feels  
like home,  
but I don't.



I wonder if Hemingway was manlier than me or if Pound and Eliot and H.D. ever swerved down Rue de Fleurus in someone else's Model-T and crashed in a ditch before the sun was up— I wonder if Stein and Toklas set aside bail money for the Paris scene, and if there's something real in their prose or their verse, a universal human truth in those worn-ragged words that we put on a pedestal and if they're even applicable to people's real lives and dreams that haven't been preserved in manifestos and anthologies, then why doesn't it feel anything like real human feelings? Why doesn't it make me feel the way I feel when I look again, over to my left, to the whistle of the breath from the woman beside me sleeping? The streetlight doesn't answer me.

I shift and the bed frame creaks beneath me as my eyes follow her form from polka-dotted black panties up to the greasestained work shirt I let her wear to sleep that holds her dark, tangled mane against her back.



Photograph by Hannah Thomas

## – Shawn Christian Murdock



"Floating-mouse-fish-man"  
by Elizabeth Wiethop





**"Dead Weight" by Timothy Arment**

# VHS: Virtual Human Solitude

Replaying,  
Haven't learned to perfect my mistakes,  
mundane, but not mild.  
Life's new and exciting energy keeps me running.

the present is so hard to unwrap  
almost broken, going backwards so often  
I don't mind – I retain regret  
Rewinding

Fast Forwarding,  
curiosity acts too fast, as does time;  
watch the other spool of life get smaller  
and farther away

Playing. Finally stable and as close to satisfaction I can achieve, albeit the quality is getting fuzzy.

Stop.  
Confusion.  
The ribbon holding life together is coming undone.

Eject,  
Removed from my bed,  
my home,  
and cooling off  
from life's friction  
and now flowing like  
a strip of film...1,410 feet long.

– Alexandra Wiegand



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