

PORTALS



Spring 2018

PORTALS

A Literary and Arts Magazine

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Students, faculty, and staff members affiliated with CFCC in Fall of 2018 are invited to submit original creative works. Go to cfcc.edu/portals for more details.

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Wander

Lindsay Polera

1st place Art

The Creative Struggles: Procrastination Strikes

Kylie Baker

Transom Award

This is going to be the best thing I have ever made.

A young woman was sprinting down a dusty dirt road, heading for a small house in the distance. The heat and dust did nothing to stop her from reaching her destination. In one arm, she carried a notebook with the plastic cover peeling and a handful of pens. She was having trouble keeping them all from escaping her grip and falling on the ground.

“Hey, slow down!”

The young woman glanced over her shoulder at two young men trying to keep up with her. One was short and dressed in ridiculously colorful clothes. His hair was an explosion of orange, pinned desperately by a red baseball cap. The other was much taller and dressed in drab, neat clothes. His white-yellow hair was perfectly styled; not a single piece was out of place.

The two boys were carrying strange yellow puff balls in their arms, trying to keep them from squirming away and escaping. However, this was proving to be quite the challenge.

“Hurry up you two!” The woman said as she stopped in her tracks, “We have to hurry before *someone* gets distracted again!”

The drab-colored boy gasped in offense, “Excuse you! I was hungry and wanted a snack!”

The boys finally caught up with the girl. The yellow puff balls were still trying to squirm out of their hold and escape.

“Do you have all my Ideas?” the woman asked.

The colorful boy nodded, only for one of the puff balls to jump out of his arms and make a break for it. Luckily, he managed to grab it before it could make it to freedom.

“These Ideas are all over the place,” complained the drab boy. “Can we please go home and get them ordered?”

“I *was* working on that until you insisted on a break, Motivation,” the woman shot back.

The short boy snickered.

“And you, Inspiration!” roared the female, “I can’t believe you almost gave up just because you read a book whose writing was a little bit better than ours. I thought you were over that kind of thinking!”

Inspiration looked down in shame. “Hey, they were *really* good. It’s kind of intimidating.”

Motivation looked annoyed at the both of them. “Why can’t we just take a break from all this *creative* stuff anyway? I’m exhausted from carrying around all these Ideas.”

The woman glared at him. “Because that’s my job around these parts. I am Creative Process!” She glimpsed at the Ideas wriggling in Inspiration’s arms. “Now let’s get back to my workspace before the Ideas decide they have something better to do. We’re on a time schedule here!” She started down the road again with the boys lagging behind.

Finally, the three reached the house. Creative Process threw open the door. She took in the familiar smell of polished wood floors and air freshener. In one corner of the kitchen, facing a gorgeous arched window, was a desk, littered with papers, pens, and art supplies.

“We’re going to get this done,” Creative Process said as she slammed her notebook down on the desk. Motivation and Inspiration crowded in behind her with the Ideas desperately trying to jump out of their arms.

“Time to organize?” questioned Motivation, looking hopeful.

“Yes,” Creative Process replied with a nod. “Let the Ideas go.”

As soon as Inspiration and Motivation released the Ideas, they dropped to the floor and zipped across the room, ricocheting off the walls like fuzzy bullets.

Creative Process sat at her desk. Taking a pen and her notebook, she started to jot down everything that had been bubbling up in her mind for the past few hours. Her focus tightened as she attempted to gather all her Ideas into one comprehensible line. Though the Ideas had no structure at the moment, she would organize them so they wouldn’t be bouncing all over the place.

Inspiration appeared worried at the sight of the insane fur balls flying everywhere. “They’re still all over the place!”

“Give me a second!” Creative Process winced as she wrote, as if the action of organizing her ideas was painful.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the Ideas slowed down. They grinded to a halt and stood there for a moment. After a while, they all bounced over to the same area. They carefully rearranged themselves into a single-file line.

After what seemed like weeks of nothing but random, unorganized Ideas flying around her head, Creative Process had gotten her Ideas in a line. Not only that, but she also had Motivation and Inspiration in the *same room*: a feat that only occurred once in a blue moon. Finally, Creative Process could start her brand new story. This time she wasn’t going to keep it to herself like all the other stories she had written. Instead she would share this with the world.

I won’t let anything stop me, the girl thought to herself. I’m going to write this story and publish it, no matter what gets in my way!

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Motivation made a move to answer it, but Creative Process shot up from her chair and grabbed his arm.

“Don’t you dare move an inch,” She warned him. “I can’t lose you or Inspiration again.”

Motivation rolled his eyes. “Jeez, calm down. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Well, you *are* easily distracted,” snickered Inspiration.

“Shut up,” snapped the taller boy.

Trusting that Motivation, Inspiration, and the Ideas wouldn’t be moving anytime soon, Creative Process went to answer the door. However, as she opened the door, she was greeted with the sight of nothing before her.

“Must have been a ring and run!” Inspiration suggested.

Creative Process took a quick glance around the area outside. There were no fresh footprints in the dirt near the door, nor was there any sign of someone possibly hiding in the bushes. With an annoyed sigh, Creative Process returned inside and closed the door. Motivation, Inspiration, and all of her little Ideas were still standing there, thank goodness.

“No one there?” Motivation questioned.

Creative Process shrugged. “Probably some kids just trying to distract us. Let’s get back to work.”

As they turned back to the desk, they all suddenly shrieked in surprise. Sitting on the desk was a man, though they were sure he hadn't been there before.

The man appeared as though he had just stepped out of a silent movie. He wore a black tuxedo and top hat with a purple tie and black dress shoes. He had expertly styled white hair and a handlebar mustache that was perfectly trimmed. He was casually sitting on Creative Process' desk, his rear planted on one of her notebooks. She immediately cringed at the thought of the ink smudging.

"Oh. Hello," greeted the man with a smile. "Terribly sorry to startle you."

"Who are you?" Inspiration demanded, sassily placing his hands on his hips.

"How did you get in here?" questioned Motivation, appearing frightened.

Creative Process pushed past her companions and glared at the man. "More importantly, would you *please* stop smudging my notes with your butt?"

As if to spite her, the man started to wiggle around, further smudging the ink with his rear. Creative Process knew that she wasn't going to like the guy.

"Ah yes, wherever are my manners?" asked the stranger. He flashed a friendly smile and tipped his hat. "The name's Procrastination, your new best friend."

The Ideas didn't seem to like this Procrastination character at all. They trembled and growled at him like frightened puppies.

Creative Process could only stare at him in confusion, "Okay... I'm not sure who you are or how you got in here, but I want you off my notebooks *now*."

Procrastination snatched the notebook out from underneath him and darted to the nearest chair before Creative Process could get to him. He casually flipped through the pages and tutted at what he saw, "You're Creative Process, aren't you? You're supposed to be the best at, well, *creating* things, right?" He held up the notebook with a disgusted face. "Then what in heaven's name is this?"

Creative Process' face turned red with anger. "Who are you to come into my house and criticize my work?"

Procrastination snickered. "My dear, I am the voice of reason. I am your built-in editor. Whereas you're the one who creates, I am the one who makes sure everything you create lives up to society's standards. And if it doesn't..." He sneered at the notebook and threw it in the nearest wastebasket, "Well, you'll never even get close to publishing it."

"Hey!" Creative Process screamed. She dove into the trashcan trying to retrieve her book.

"Hey man, that's kind of cold," Inspiration said. "That's only her first draft. And to be honest, me and Stretch here were kind of slacking off."

Motivation was about to object, but he was suddenly cut off with a silencing glare from Procrastination.

"Slacking off?" he asked with a haughty laugh. He glanced at Creative Process, his smile becoming malicious. "You expect to publish something that you and your team *slacked off* on?"

"Well, I mean..." Creative Process began shyly, "I *just* got all my Ideas organized." She gestured weakly to the Ideas still lined up in an orderly fashion, "That's got to mean something, right?"

Procrastination burst into amused laughter. "You're kidding, right? You *just* got your Ideas organized? All this time and you haven't even begun to write your last drafts? How do you expect to live up to the masters when you're ever so..." He glared at the notebook in her hands. "Mediocre?"

"Well I-!" Creative Process began to argue back. Suddenly, she stopped. She realized what Procrastination was saying; how could she possibly compare to some of the brilliant artists and writers out there when she could hardly get her Ideas lined up? All of her drafts, even some of her later drafts were ugly and disorganized.

"Hey!" Inspiration yelled, suddenly squaring up to the tall, well-dressed man. "That was uncalled for! What's your problem, buddy?"

Procrastination regarded the tiny boy with contempt. "I am simply trying to help. Do you really want to publish something that everyone is going to hate?" He gave a small chuckle. "I would certainly hope not."

Creative Process stared down at her notebook. “Do... Do you really think everyone’s going to hate it?”

Motivation and Inspiration both tried to say something, but they were interrupted by Procrastination. “Of course! It’s mindless, childish drivel! Only small children would be entertained by such things!” He smirked. “Why do you think you’re the only one who ever reads your stories?”

Creative Process gripped her notebook tightly to her chest. She felt as though she were going to cry. All of what Procrastination had said was true; there was a reason that she was the only one who ever read her stories. They were horribly disorganized, unprofessional, childish stories that no one would ever care to read. How would she ever make it as a writer if she couldn’t even come close to society’s standards?

Without any warning, Creative Process threw her notebook in the trash. At this, Procrastination’s smile grew twice its size. He was most certainly gloating.

“Wait!” cried Motivation. “I thought we were going to write the greatest story ever? Why are you giving up?” He angrily gestured to Procrastination. “Why are you listening to *that* guy?”

“Because he’s right,” Creative Process said. “I’m an awful writer. Everyone will hate what I write.”

“Why should you care what other people think?” Inspiration asked. “Maybe they don’t know good literature!”

Motivation stood up, seeming braver than he had been before. “And how do you know if everyone hates your stories? You never let anyone read them.”

“Because they are indeed *horrible* stories,” Procrastination added, tapping his fingers on the desk with a look of boredom.

Motivation accusingly pointed at Procrastination. “You, shut up.” He turned back to the slouching girl. “Again, you’ve never let anyone read them. Someone could find them amazing!”

“And yeah, not everyone’s going to like them,” Inspiration agreed before quickly adding, “But that’s just people. Not everyone likes the same things!”

“Writing is an art,” Motivation said, his eyes gleaming with hope. “Everyone’s got a different story. One story isn’t better than the other, because everyone likes different things.”

Inspiration nodded. "You just have to at least try. And if at first you don't succeed...."

"Learn from your mistakes and try again!" finished Motivation.

Procrastination snickered rudely. "How cute. It's not like anyone's going to actually *like* her story. It's ever so childish and-!"

"No," Creative Process suddenly spoke. "They're right."

"Er... What?" Procrastination demanded. "They're *right*?"

Creative Process retrieved her notebook from the trash. She dusted off the front and smiled at it. "Yes. I think everyone has a story to tell. Some people go their whole life without telling it because they're scared of what people will think. And it's because of people like you that make them think less of themselves. Someone could have the best story to tell, but never write about it because of all the negative thoughts in their head. Procrastination," she started smirking, "Why do you feel the need to mess with poor, innocent writers? Do you have nothing better to do?"

Now it was Inspiration's and Motivation's turn to snicker. Procrastination seemed caught unaware, as though someone had asked him to solve a trigonometry question in an English class.

"I... Well I..." he stuttered.

"You were trying to get me to quit, weren't you?" Creative Process teased. "Well, you're not very good at your job, are you?"

Procrastination's face scrunched up in anger. "How dare you! I am *extremely* good at my job! I've gotten thousands of people like you to give up on their dreams! If I wasn't so impatient, I could get you to give up! Why I-!"

As Procrastination ranted, Motivation and Inspiration quietly pushed him to the door. They successfully shoved him outside and slammed the door in his face. They could still hear him fuming, even from outside.

"What a jerk," Motivation sneered.

Creative Process giggled. "Thank you two, for reminding me of what matters the most in my life. I do have a lot

of fears and doubts about what I'm doing, but you helped me overcome them."

"Hey, you're the one who told Procrastination he was wrong," Inspiration reminded. "We just told you the facts."

Creative Process smiled at the two boys. She gazed at all of the Ideas still lined up in a perfectly straight row. She had plenty of time to write her story while Motivation and Inspiration were still at their peaks.

"Come on," she said. "Let's make the best thing this world's ever seen."



Well Used

Hallie Kammerer

I Was Silent

Kayla Dorsey

When the first blow was dealt
and the first scar born,
I thought it was no big deal, so
I was silent.

When both tongue and fist
struck both mind and flesh,
I believed it was my fault, so
I was silent.

When bruises grew too many
to cover with cloth or powder,
I spun stories 'til I ran out, and then
I was silent.

When the marks began to show
and my stories to unravel,
no one seemed to care, so
I was silent.

When I finally did speak
and reveal my waking terror,
nothing was ever done. In shock,
I was silent.

When the storms came
and the world around me darkened,
my tears soaked the pillow, and yet
I was silent.

When I took my last breath,
and closed my eyes to rest,
finally at peace,
I was silent.

When you find someone
who welcomes death as relief

from the torment of life,
I beg of you, don't be silent.



Underwater Galaxy

Kayla Dorsey



Time Passed
Crystal Williams

They Talk

Kalina Todorov

They were talking
with their limbs,
with each blade
dancing their story.
The trees - they were talking.

And I see the wind
vivifies, manifests their tale.
He paints a dress of trees' whispers
which enfolds my body.
Trees' aura that resonates to my bones.

Room Temperature

Kara Elyse MacMillan

With a firm grip on the peeler, moving in efficient swipes, the potatoes lost their skins to the sink drain. She was enjoying the same satisfaction that all humans feel when each strip comes off clean. The newly white potatoes were placed in a metal colander, and she paused to take an extended sip of Sauvignon Blanc. It was sweeter than she preferred, but it was his favorite. The round bottom of the glass hit unintentionally hard against the counter and she cursed to herself, afraid it had cracked. It did not.

The colander was lifted from the sink and set down again next to a wooden chopping block and a newly sharpened chef's knife. No matter how sharp the knife, cutting potatoes always proved challenging and left her with a sore wrist. Without realizing it, her chopping started to merge with the rhythm of the music. She hated the song and so did he. It was a joke between them, and a memory from their first trip to Paris. They were riding on the top level of a double-decker tour bus, and they grew furious with the constant replay of "Champs Elysees." The fury eventually turned into hilarity at the situation, and afterward they would begin to sing it out loud to tease one another.

The starchy fragments of potato plopped into the stock pot, and after another sip of wine, she commenced to gently scrub the dirt off the roots of the leeks. They were so fragrant. Homegrown vegetables always taste better than store bought, or even the Farmer's Market. It took her a few years to get a decent harvest, but she had succeeded for the last five years. She trimmed the untamed, fibrous roots away, and tossed the pearly rings into the stock like miniature discuses. The gas stove popped, then lit with a low, rapid hum. She finished her wine and immediately poured another, then settled on their downy couch. The chorus of the song hummed again and she smiled to herself, thinking of how funny it had been that afternoon, blaring in their ears as they crossed back and forth over the Seine. The sun had been brutal, and they both grew sweat drops on their lips whenever the bus would stop. They had gotten off at Notre Dame, and went in search of a café for a refreshing drink. They

sat down in two wicker chairs divided by a small table. The waiter came out immediately and asked what they would like, and she requested, in French, “Something cold.” The snooty Parisian made half an eye roll and came back moments later with two small bowls of something white, with a sprinkling of bacon and green herb on the top.

“Il fait froid,” the waiter said with snark before disappearing back into the café.

“I should have been more specific,” she had said to him, impressed with the waiter’s audacity. She picked up her spoon and tried a bite. It was heavenly. He watched as she rapidly thrust spoonful after spoonful into her eager mouth, and his curiosity was peaked. He slid a small sip between his own lips, and was massively delighted. Both bowls were empty less than a minute later when the waiter returned.

“Ah. Tu aimes le vichyssoise,” he noted.

She spent every weekend after that perfecting her own recipe. It was a dish she made on special occasions. Anniversaries, Valentine’s Day, and nights when she just felt like surprising him. Her personal garden grew its own potatoes, leeks, and even chervil, for garnish. The dairy across town never sold any products directly to customers, but after her emphatic pleading they agreed to slide her a jar of fresh cream whenever she needed it. She returned the favor by divulging her recipe.

The room became fragrant along with audible simmering. She stood up from her perch to give the pot a stir and take the moulinette out of the cabinet. It was dusty. It made her realize how long it had been since she last used it. Rather, how long it had been since the two of them had something to celebrate, or even acknowledged the things worth celebrating. It’s a pity that people don’t normally realize what in life is fleeting until it’s already fled, she thought. She gave the moulinette a swift rinse under the nozzle and patted it dry with a towel. Misty drops of stock bounced around while the rest of the mixture churned into silk and was returned to the pot once more. The wooden spoon left the wake of nearly perfect figure eights in the viscous broth, dodging the craters left by impatient bubbles. She was glad to find that her culinary ability hadn’t faded over the years, while the significance of it had.

The soup was poured into a metal bowl and set in the refrigerator. Her nerves began to peak as she had nothing left to do but wait. Wait on the soup to chill, and wait for her husband to come home and hopefully be warm. The night before, they both had come home and gone to bed without saying a word to one another. It wasn't an argument-induced silent treatment, they just didn't think to speak to one another. She hadn't realized how bad it had gotten until that moment when the lights went out. She knew things were stale, it was impossible to ignore. She also knew that there was another woman, but she couldn't bring herself to be angry, because she wasn't exactly keeping up with her role as the only woman in his life. The only thing in her life getting affection was her garden. The garden she had grown solely to reenact their trip to Paris. The week that was a whirlwind of laughter, excitement, and love.

Headlights sliced across the living room through the window, just as she was whisking a dollop of cream into each bowl. He had come home on time, that was a good sign. It gave her hope for the resurrection she was about to attempt. She lit two tall candles in the middle of the table, and laid a spoon at each setting. The key turned in the door, and he walked in briefcase first. She realized she had a chance when he stopped to take a deep breath through his nose and savor the scent in the air.

Heartbreak Soup

Sarah Miller

A reminder of the past
The aroma smashes into my nose
Quickly overwhelming me
Just like her blows to my head
I attempt to eat it anyways
Cold as her gaze
But only when it was on me
Waves of chills roll down my spine
Warning flags begin to appear, but I ignore them

Thicker than the silence
That grew every day
Tears well up but I force them back
I can't afford to show weakness
Stuck in my mouth
Countless protests go unheard
Harder to swallow than the truth
Eventually I force it down and have another spoonful
Maybe I'm not trying hard enough

Sharp on my tongue
Causing me to recoil
A sting of harsh insults
Branding me with shame for things out of my control
Leaving behind a bitterness
Her words soon becoming my own
I want to stop eating but I can't
It would be rude and disrespectful
After everything she's done for me
What kind of friend would I be?

A small dash of green in the middle
When there were good days
A reason for the pain
A shoulder to lean on
Protecting me from the cruelty of my peers like a best friend
should

But it was only a mask
Covering the true flavors underneath
Keeping my friends from asking too many questions
I'm too tired to reach out anymore

The color of beige
Too bland to hold her interest
Weak enough to never fight back
A self-confidence so fragile
The mere ghosting of fingertips shatters it
Yet she ate it anyways
The perfect canvas for her to use
Grinning from ear to ear
Reveling in the displeasure



Wraith

Margaret Godwin

Halloween Baby

Danielle Lanigan

My husband holds my hand as we wait as patiently as possible for the sonographer to perform the ultrasound. We have only known that I'm pregnant for a few days, but the severe cramping I've been experiencing has alarmed us and the OBGYN, so here we sit. I have already emptied my bladder twice in the past twenty minutes. The sonographer says this is because I am nervous.

Finally, she looks at us and smiles. "You are about five-and-a-half weeks pregnant, and the baby's heartbeat is strong. Your baby is due on October 31st." My husband and I sigh in relief; our baby appears to be doing well. October 31st. Halloween. I look up and smile toward the ceiling. I know this is a gesture from my grandmother, Grandma Mary, and I can't help but think of the last time I saw her alive, fourteen years ago, when I was a junior in college.

Along with our cousins, Heather, my older sister, and I stood, circling our grandmother's hospital bed. The day before, our dad broke the news to me and Heather. "Girls, your grandma isn't going to make it. You should come here if you want to say goodbye," he warned. We drove all night.

Grandma Mary looked small in the hospital bed. The week prior, my grandmother had fallen while climbing her porch stairs and broke her clavicle and a few ribs. A couple days before Heather and I arrived at the hospital, Grandma received a blood transfusion, but due to her leukemia, her body rejected the transfusion.

Surprisingly, after Heather, our cousins and I arrived, Grandma awoke and was coherent for a few hours throughout the afternoon. "All of my girls are here," she told us. We reminisced of the cat nightgowns Grandma allowed us to open and wear each Christmas Eve, of holidays and summers spent at her house, and of her famous homemade nut rolls, pierogis, and pepperoni rolls. We could never visit Grandma Mary's home without expecting to eat. We laughed while we talked of playing *Frogger* on the Atari, with Barbies and our Cousin Jennifer's

Michael Jackson doll, all of which Grandma kept at her house for us.

Our laughter turned to heavy tears as we remembered the crocheted afghans crafted by her and of her homemade wedding albums meant to house our wedding pictures. I hadn't had time to use my album, yet; I was only twenty-one. I began to struggle with containing the sobs trying to escape my throat. I was not ready to say goodbye.

That evening, family members and friends drifted through Grandma Mary's hospital room. Others stood in the hospital hallway and asked, "How is Mary doing?" They tried to console my mom and her younger brothers.

As I grew older, I gathered facts of the lives my grandparents lived. My grandmother, born on March 1, 1918 as Mary J. Narog, married my grandfather, William V. Waskis, when she was eighteen and he was twenty. While he worked in the coal mine, she ran their household and raised their four children: Anthony, Delores, who is my mom, Johnny, and Tommy. She was Polish and a devout Catholic, who rarely missed mass. She survived two tragic deaths: Anthony, my mom's older brother, died from cancer when he was only ten-years-old, and William, a month before turning fifty, died when a piece of slate fell on him in the coal mine. Mary became a widow at the young age of forty-eight, but she never dated or remarried.

But these facts are not the most important parts of my grandmother's life. To know her truly, one must know the stories of her. My grandma's house was the safest place I knew as a child. She never yelled or got angry with us kids. And when she did get mad, she cussed in Polish so we wouldn't know what or who she was talking about. My Cousin Lauren and I spent many summer days swinging on Grandma's front porch, dragging our bare feet across the gray, wooden porch floor as we watched coal trucks pass by.

With the daily news airing in the background, Grandma Mary spent her days canning tomatoes and peppers, baking and sewing. Occasionally, she would drink one beer alongside my dad at her kitchen table, sifting through the town newspaper and

sipping on the glass of Bud Light over the course of an hour or so.

My cousin, Nicholas, growing tired of shuffling between his divorced parents' homes, lived with Grandma Mary while he completed high school and college. As Nick and I stood in front of the funeral home during Grandma Mary's wake, Nicholas explained, "Grandma's house was the only home I ever really knew." Many of Nick's fraternity brothers also spent many nights at our grandma's house after consuming too much alcohol. As we laughed with tears in our eyes, Nick told tales of Grandma insisting on making the boys eat breakfast before leaving her house in the morning.

When Heather had gotten pregnant at the age of nineteen, my mom called Grandma Mary in desperation. As Mom cried into the phone receiver expecting to be consoled by her mother, Grandma sighed and exclaimed, "Oh my God, Delores, that's it? I thought you were going to tell me she had cancer or something!" Grandma Mary always knew how to put things into perspective.

But Grandma was not a pushover, and she expected a lady to act as such. The summer before I attended college, with Lauren only being a year behind me, Grandma Mary yelled at me for the first and only time of my life. Lauren had been working at a local McDonalds for a few months and had developed a crush on one of her shift managers. As Lauren and I stretched across one of the beds upstairs at Grandma Mary's house late one night, we took turns talking to Lauren's crush on the phone, both of us holding an ear to the receiver. On her way to the bathroom downstairs, Grandma walked by the phone in her kitchen. The red light on the phone base let Grandma know that Lauren and I were using the phone upstairs. As Lauren's manager asked me, "So you're only going to be about ten minutes from the beach at college?" Grandma picked up the other line and yelled into the phone, "Girls, get off of the damn phone. It's three o'clock in the morning!" We hurriedly said goodnight, hung up the phone, and crawled under the covers, giggling until we fell asleep.

But I only remember Grandma Mary truly losing control once. I was no more than four-years-old when my dad and my

mom's brother, Johnny, got into a brawl in my grandma's living room.

Hearing my mom's and aunt's screams while playing upstairs in my mom's childhood bedroom, my cousins, Heather and I pounded down the stairs and through the kitchen. We ended up trapped standing behind Grandma Mary in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room.

As I peered through my grandma's plaid-sleeved arms, I saw Dad and Uncle Johnny rolling back and forth on the carpet between the couch and loveseat. Neither man, both in their thirties, seemed to have an advantage. With a football game blaring on the TV and the grunts and groans of both men growing louder, the room was in chaos. My heart beat faster as numerous thoughts ran through my mind. What if Dad got hurt? What if he hurt Uncle Johnny? Mom was going to be so angry.

Grandma Mary grabbed a stack of plates out of her kitchen cabinet. As the two men rolled back and forth across the carpet, my grandma began to throw her white ceramic dishes at them. Plates shattered among the two men as my grandma yelled, "Go ahead! Tear it all up! Just tear it all up!"

As the plates rained on them, Dad and Uncle Johnny released each other and climbed to their knees, clutching their chests. Through their panting, looking at my grandmother in disbelief, they both began to laugh. Chuckling, Dad exclaimed, "Mary, what are you doing? Don't break your good dishes!"

Dad and Uncle Johnny apologized to each other with Dad saying something about how he never should have called my uncle a boy, and the entire room relaxed as my family members broke out in a contagious hysterical laughter while gathering the broken plate pieces scattered across the floor.

Before Grandma Mary died on Halloween night in 2003, she began to drift in and out of consciousness. She whispered, "Anthony and William are calling to me. They are telling me to come home."

Through her tears, my mom whispered back, "You can go to them, Mom. Go home, Mom."

After Grandma had fallen into a deep sleep in the hospital room, Heather and I took my niece and nephew trick-or-treating with Lauren and her younger sister, Rachel.

Mom said Grandma wouldn't want the kids to miss out, and nothing would make Grandma happier than knowing we were all together.

Around ten-thirty that night, my parents got the call that Grandma had passed away. Back at the hospital, standing by my grandmother's bed, my mom cried out, "Oh Mom, why did you go now? The only night in a week that I haven't been here!" But the nurses said people often wait to die when they are alone and without their loved ones by their side.

Fourteen years later, "October 31st?" I ask the sonographer, just double-checking.

"Looks that way," she smiles and replies. "A Halloween baby."

A few weeks later, when my husband and I announce that our son is due on Halloween, Lauren messages me, "You know that is a sign from Grandma Mary, right?"

"Yes, I know," I tell her, feeling a bit special that Grandma chose to communicate with me this way.

Room 314

Briana Stone

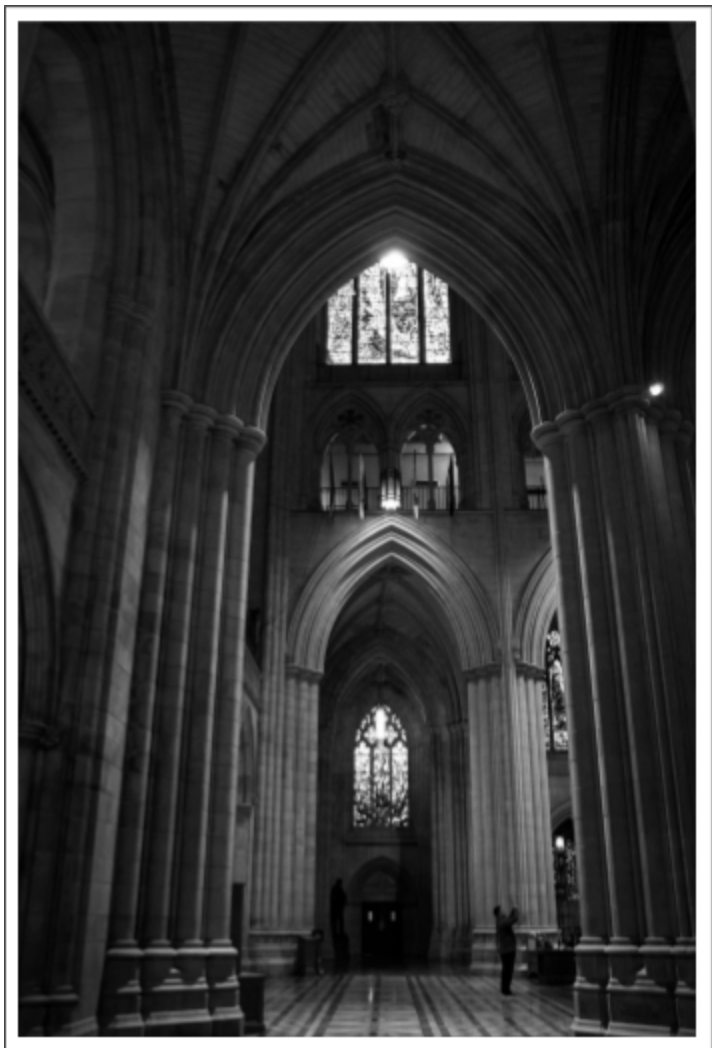
I stumbled upon a vacancy sign
Hanging from your quiet lips
Mine happen to be
Looking for a place to stay
Could you spare the time
To book me for a few nights?
Just don't bite your tongue
If I outstay my welcome

Eventually, you let me in
I ached for a sojourn
That lasted forever

I could feel your chest
Rise and fall
As you breathed, and
I would match my breath to yours
It felt like we were
Synchronized swimmers
At least a moment of inhales and exhales
Was something we could agree on

In a way,
I mourned you
Before I even lost you

Now, I look for you
In every person I meet
So far, no one's caliber
Can rival yours
Everyone else's lips amount to
Loose change
When compared to your
Million dollar fervor



Cathedral
Harlee Griffin



Hallway

Harlee Griffin

The Light Warmth of the Kitchen Kingdom

Jessica Pearce

1st Place Poetry

fresh-baked sweetness pulled out of the oven
floorboards creak, laughter rings through the halls
almost as quickly as the whipping wind.
everything tastes better when your nose
is red and running from the cold, and the
frenzied warmth of the five women in the kitchen
melts your heart in the same way that their
chocolatey treats melt in your mouth.
they'll swat at your hand but can't say
no- they'll slip you a bite and take one for
themselves too, quick as a kiss.

you'll set the table when they ask but spend
as much time as you can back in the light and warmth
of ovens, food, and deft bodies with swaying
hips moving around and between each other
in the dance of dinner. you know you'll be
one of them someday; maybe that's why
you're so drawn to their kitchen kingdom of radiance,
of sweet smiles, flushed cheeks and motherliness-
they are everything you wish to be as a woman.

that was the greatest gift they ever gave-
more than the food, the cold house made
cozy and clean, the presents under a tree
from the backwoods, even the light-warmth
of the kitchen before mealtime. you know
your heritage, the legacy of gathering
family and the food to sustain them all in
peace and happiness, because those women
taught you in the baking and breaking of
bread. pull it from the oven, remember,
and thank them.



Above the Fair Lights

Anna Pennington



Glass Frog

Jessie Robertson

Suicide is not the train wreck it's cracked up to be

Jana Mackin

Take getting old
Take graying hair
Take being a widow
Take being ripped off because you're old
Take being thought of as feeble because you're old
Take wearing your face as a Halloween mask
 that scares the be-Jesus
 out of everyone,
 including yourself
Take walking into a saloon full of corpses
Take blind dates to the cemetery
Take no dates to the cemetery
Take reading obits
Take taking the cure
Take not taking the cure
Take self medicating whatever that means
Take swearing under your breath
Take swearing over your breath
Take being a curmudgeon
Take taking the easy way out
Take taking the hard way out
Take one way tickets to hospitals
Take guided tours of the morgue
Take taking death at its word.

The Happy Act

Adrian Megee

I take a breath, and count to ten.

One, two, three, four.

I wink at myself in the mirror,

five, six,

seven, eight.

“Today’s gonna be great.”

Nine, ten.

I don’t want to do this again.

A well-placed giggle to the boy, and a carefree smile to the girl.

That’s how you make it in this

world. A little bounce in my step as I walk to class, and then
make sure my smile will last.

I take a deep breath and count to ten.

One, two, three, four.

Answer question and seem bored.

Five, six, seven, eight.

Hurry up, make sure you’re not late.

Nine, ten.

Don’t forget to smile
again.

I give a happy cheer, smiling as I type away. Ignoring that one
little jeer. I laugh at the joke they
tell. So that way my act won’t fail. This is how you survive in
the world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One, two, three, four.

I almost forgot to shut the door.

Five,

six, seven, eight.

Smile at the other team mates.

Nine...

Say hello before they wonder, or else
they might call your blunder.

Be peppy, and make sure I smile. Maybe my friends will last for
a while. Speak when spoken to,
and then be quick. And make sure not to look sick. That is how
you keep your place in the

world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One, two, three, four.

Ignore the fact they called you a whore.

Five, six, seven, eight.

Remember the poem with Nevermore.

N-

Oh! They are leaving again.

Sit in the office as they leave for class. Be happy and don't be

crass. Wait until they shut the

door. Now you can be in your little world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One, two, three, four.

Oh my god this is such a bore!

Five, six,

seven.

Think about Alex in heaven.

Hear the door start to open and give a smile. Accept their

apology for being gone for such a

while. Sit quietly and let them work. If I'm too loud then I'm a
jerk. This is their world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One, two, three, four.

Check your phone, read what they say

about their class being a snore.

Five, six-

Oh, they are talking about politics.

Take a breath and watch them go to lunch. While I stay in the

room, because they invite me

when I have a class. Give a smile at their fake sorrow, and say

"there's always tomorrow." This

is how you stay in the world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One, two, three, four.

Why is my life such a chore?

Five-

Don't

forget to smile or you won't survive.

Sit in class, and avoid the man. Because all he does is scare me.

Listen to the teacher and give a

fake laugh. Make her think my life is not bad. That's how you make it in the world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One two three four.

I don't want to put on the act anymore.

But here you stand on the stage, no one can see you break.

Walk back to the office fast, to see them all laugh. They get along so nicely, so smile and pretend I am studying. If someone ask it I'm okay, just tell them I am happy. That is how it's the world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One, two, three-

Oops, I almost stumbled and broke free.

What are they thinking about? Is it at me?

See some leave and bid them bye. Make sure my smile doesn't look like a lie. Sit straight and wait patiently. Maybe they will include me eventually. For this is the way you have to be in the world.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One, two-

Quickly apologize for zoning out of the issue. You must be perfect, no one knows you're flawed. But my strength is wearing out, fighting the odds.

Walk in the next day. As they laugh about their hangout they had without me. Give a smile and seem interested. Ignore the pain in my chest. For you're not in your world anymore.

I close my eyes and count to ten.

One-

There they laugh as you hide your scorn. Again you check your act, struggling to keep it in place. But there is my mask, it's breaking.

There I sit alone in the room. All of them somewhere else, not that I should care. After all, it's not like I wanted to be there. For you are in their world, you have to hide.

I close my eyes and start to scream. I punch the wall and pull my hair. My act has crumbled,

from the emotion I have inside. I cry until I'm out of breath and
turning blue. My face a mess as
I start to clean, for I'm bursting at the seams.
You open the door, there she is. The girl who has a happy face
all the time. She is listening to
her music, unknown to your appearance. You see her on her
stage, but the lights are off. Little
did she know, that you went to every show. Little did she know,
that you also, had your own...
Happy act.



Open
Jane Durden



Apple
Riley B. Tew

Breath

George Brown

1st Place Fiction

Their son in the back seat, just old enough now to ride without a booster, was too naive to understand the nature of the cold, serrated silence that permeated throughout the car. The muffled shouts of the night before, their contents a mystery, only the vague but palpable divide between mother and father was certain. Their son couldn't have understood what his father had done, nor the intention of the glares the mother stole at the father throughout the car ride. Nor his father's relentless varicose grip on the wheel, his body positioned in such a way as to display as little to his wife as possible, gripping so impossibly tight that technicolor clouds had distended across his vision, vague hallucinations of white noise and custody papers, rendering him oblivious to the rapidly approaching rear of the eighteen wheeler, blue tarp flapping haphazardly in the wind, scantily concealing its load, or the stray brick flung from the bed.

An unearthly screech. An imploding windshield. The father turned his body towards his wife for the first time in hours, moist hands peeling from the wheel like velcro, to throw an instinctive arm across her body. The brick flew with a velocity of intent, and within an instant of glimpsing the brick's path towards his palm, the father retracted his arm, leaving the projectile's path unimpeded, set directly between the mother's widened eyes. The pitched crumpling of custody papers. Her body slumped in the seat, the only movement left to recognize was in the remains of her face, mangled beyond all recognition, and pulsed red and wet as glass shards showered over her. A shrillness shrieked from the back seat. The father's hands shook violently as they floated over the mother's limped form as if the tension from a moment ago had been expelled from her body. How beautiful she'd looked to him only hours before as she buckled their son in, singing as she did. She always gave their son three kisses when she strapped him into the car, one on the forehead, one on the left cheek and then on the right. How she'd kissed their son and latched his door, how she'd assumed her place in the passenger's seat without so much as acknowledging her husband, her affective face then devoid of any of the prior

moment's loving enthusiasm. How she'd stared intently forward, as if the harder she exerted herself, the sooner she would be somewhere else with her child.

His son. The father lurched back, his cramped palms abandoned his wife, reaching back to soothe and stifle the curdling wails of his only child. So small and fragile. Innocent. Eyes of father and son met. The moment froze, a white noise permeated through the whole instant. Shards of glass hung in the violent air, reflecting the sun's light in an infinitely complex display. Tears clung to his son's face, projecting the father's deformed reflection. He reached to wipe his child's cheek.

The brakes. The truck. Time had been passing all this time. The father turned to awkwardly jab his foot at the pedal, but the wheels went on. An inconceivable force made itself known to the father in the next instant, dissolving his vision. Airbags flashed into existence, announcing their presence. The unmistakable crescendo of colliding metals, forcefully melding into one another, twisting and deforming, slicing eardrums. The rubber squeals of tires ripping apart as they scraped across jagged asphalt. The desperate pneumatic cries which sounded from the truck, as if signaling a deep pain. The threnody of helpless horns, all melting into a singular auditory gestalt. A brief but noxious scent of acrid octane met with the metallic pungency of blood. Then, the bitter smokiness of burnt rubber. The father sensed the world capsize; his stomach churned overtime. Wind screamed across his face as the car tumbled through the air, threatening to claim him from his seat. The gust brought with it a penetrating chill that dug itself into his body, like thousands of talons, which seemed to sink their grip infinitely deeper into him, such that no matter how far they dug in, there was always more flesh to pierce. Then, a fleeting moment of weightlessness. The talons retracted. The peaceful glide of a sheet of paper, tossed into the wind.

The father's vision returned in the ethereal instant to witness the sun flee behind the clouds. His son's shrieks had ceased, much like how his wife silenced them in the nights, when the son had woken, quivering and terrified, hot and cold and numb all at once, from some horrible nightmare that would send cold pangs through the father's stomach when he heard it. And his wife would rush out of bed to find their son in the middle of

the looming and empty darkness of the living room, quaking in his footed penguin pajamas, looking impossibly alone, wailing in desperation for nothing more than a loving body to rest his head upon. And the mother would rush to her son, and as she embraced her child, the wails would shrink into a perfect silence. So she would stand there with their child in the silence, holding him. No words, no hushes. Just silence. Just holding him. Holding him like there was nothing else in the vast and vivid world that she could be more compelled to do. She would hold their son for an immeasurable time until, eventually, the child would ask his mother some impossible question to which even the father, standing in the doorway, admiring the sight, would have deeply wished for an answer. And the mother would admit she didn't know, but it didn't matter because she and father loved him too much for it to matter.

The car seemed to pause at the peak of gravity's arc. In that unmoving instant, the father searched deeply within himself for any semblance of justification. How he could have ever betrayed her. How he ever could have jeopardized the opportunity to lay his eyes upon her lively affective face, to witness the bond of mother and child in those dark nights, in which whenever she returned from putting their son back to bed, the moon never failed to cast its humble light upon her face.

In the serenity of the moment, the sustained peak of the car, the father prayed. He prayed for his wife to hear him, to hear his cries, how sorry he was, for the night before and all the ones previous. He prayed they could forgive him. He prayed for strength to latch on tight to his family and pull them in, to crush them to his chest and keep them there close with him. He prayed for the strength, the vitality, the sheer willpower to not even reach for them, but to just cry out, to exclaim the beauty of his wife, her very essence nested inside of his. Even if he could express his guilt, his fear, his pain, and how yes he could find the courage to be stronger, he could show them, he promised he could show them if they could only just stay alive. Even if he could, his words would reach none, but be stolen by the wind, carried off into nothing. His wife couldn't hear him now, her limp body splayed across the dash like a child's discarded doll. His son had gone silent. There was no time now. The moment was too fast. Gravity claimed his family as the burden of weight

returned to his body. The world turned once more, the air screeched louder as the sight of the carnage on the interstate slipped back into view. The ground rushed with earnest to meet them, and as it did his conscience flooded with something awful and sour.

But that was then, the time when they died. It was little more than a memory now. A memory that stained and corroded, one that trailed and poisoned the sky wherever it might be led, but a memory all the same. However, it had not followed him up here, naked to the air surrounding him and the world below. The most timid of breezes was present, flowing across him like a soft, soothing hand, neither hot nor cold, but simply existing, gracing his skin, bound with a sort of omnipotent empathy. An enigmatic singularity of something warm and soft that, in this moment, with his arms outstretched, embracing that which he held no power over, gifted him with absolution. At least, a kind of absolution. The stain's lingering in his mind seemed impermanent now, visions of a dying day and fangs of metal, all to be released as vapor. The sun had returned since, and it hung low in the sky, gifting to the world its ephemeral but heavenly glow.

The deepest of the day's final rays beckoned his eyes to the world below. To all the fractals of humanity, the infinite multitudes of them, bodies amongst bodies. Conscious but unaware, continuously fleeing from that vague and uncertain something. Fleeing by enduring; by plunging into. That was the beauty of it all. Their mad flight, their omnipresent fear, which expressed itself through their very attempts to drown and conceal it. Fleeing both inward and out from that writhing mass of things rich and infinite of which they are informed of but disconnected. Terrified to ever give away to the world that of themselves which they considered most precious; a mute infinity dying to be released into a display of vivid energy, with such catharsis it might well be a form of salvation. Salvation for something. Of course, like a black miracle, this was all soon to be lost, and would never thenceforth matter.

So he breathed in the warm and still air, the breath full and alive. The glow of the sky hummed lower and lower, and the bands of orange across the ether began to slip into a deepening

purple that annunciated the sun's imminent passing. He closed his eyes before the sun could fade away again, leaving only the vague, vaporous energy of the complexity beneath him; all the love and the hate, the loudness and the silence, the motion and the stillness, how it would all dissolve and reform into the iridescence of all that was and was to come. How it would rise to meet him, gradually at first, and then accelerate to a singular apex such that he would at once become one with all the radiance of life and death that it pronounced. So it became that he gave himself fully to the will of the world, as rain, as he took a single weightless step off the ledge. And the air tried to carry him for a moment, but faltered, and as it relieved itself of his burden, he released an almost imperceptibly shallow sigh, that anyone who could have heard it would have recognized as the sound of a most visceral and total loneliness, forever known in all the more beautiful languages of the world.

Broken Faith

Sara Sanchez Quiroz

They left their dreams and spirits
for a land that promised them so much...
Legs and ankles bled
dehydrated bodies tumbled
to the burning sand.
Home was a lost comfort
but their families were their happiness.
Tired eyes... Tired limbs...
made it to the land of the free
Life became a tough climb
no work, no money, no shelter
this was not what they were promised
yet determined action prevailed.
Rough hands... Rough knees
Time slowly faded taking along promises.
Back home they were missed
through the phone they could not hear
the tired knot in their throats
Six Years Later
A little girl was born
reviving their hopes and dreams
of belonging here one day...
The sun shined bright
God had made another blessing
One more little girl
to fill their hearts with joy.
Years passed with laughs and smiles
One Day
Cloudy skies covered the bright sun.
A call through the phone...
her breaths cut short
her voice weak and tired
the next day...
the heavens opened to receive her.
She was gone.
His voice was gone.
His world was done.

His heart was shot.
A vacant hole...
Shoken awake from dreamy slumber
He worked for his life
He could not visit his wife's last moments...
He thought a phone call
would fix twenty years of emptiness.
Both sacrificed everything
All for a better life
for those who stayed
and those born
to the Promised Land.

As the Bagpipes Play

Tom Robinson

As the bagpipes are played and flags do wave,
Understand what has happened on this day.
Our brother is gone, a life has been lost,
A call to service has come at a great cost.
Hearts are broken and souls are torn,
Wondering what we will be in the morn.

We gather together at this time and place
Tears are seen on many a face
A life given in service for fellow man
To be taken from us was not in the plan
With pride and honor they answer the call
Not knowing when or if they will fall.

Each day we are given is considered a gift,
Do we lock it away or use it to live?
Have I given my all; was it considered enough?
Answering the call no matter how tough.
A duty to serve, a willingness to give,
Sacrificing it all so others may live.

Orange

Erin Russell

I am the marigold seed:
The way you pinch open
the shriveled, dried-up
prune-like pod.

A dozen seeds fall
from one —
what used to be —
flower.

Oh how I'm dead
with the sweet
potential to break-
open bear
fruit if only

I can.

In any soil, I can
grow easy:

The way I root
take seed, and die.

Death and Life
are together
and so often
separate.

Like Rilke
says, shoved —
to the far way

corner of the mind.
Out of the question.
So we live as though
we have
no end and
really, is that living?
The spent
blossoms dead-
headed are a new
flower's bloom.
I am the marigold
I fold and breathe—
I live only
because the soil
lets me.
Death, a part of life
Life,
a part
of me.



Snowdrops

Kalina Todorov



Capture
Ashly Farley



Falling
Ashly Farley

The Ford Explosion

Marva S. Moss

1st place Non-Fiction

The four youngsters rested on the flatbed of the Ford truck, leaning against its wooden sides. It was driven by their uncle. These helpers were tired after hours of helping with farm chores in one of several fields. They were “farm-hand” dirty, and happy to be returning to the family house.

An old Ford automobile had been converted into a truck by Uncle Cal, a very skillful man when it came to working with tools. He could repair or build almost anything; for example, washing machines, bicycles, tobacco barns, or change an old thirty-five Ford, into a truck.

The truck was a thing of pride for Uncle Cal. It was his farm transportation when moving from field to field. It had no doors and no rear window. The windows and doors had been removed during the renovation of the car.

As they giggled along from the field, the oldest child shared her thoughts with the group, speaking loud enough for her uncle to hear. “It would be great to drive the truck home.” Their uncle listened as they threw hints about wishful driving. Under his watchful eye, he had allowed them to drive his treasured truck, but only for very short distances.

Russ, the youngest nephew about eight or nine years old, joined the conversation. He argued that he had had the fewest turns at the wheel during the previous driving lessons. Russ tried to make it clear that he had been overlooked. As the slow vehicle made its way home, he complained, whined, and pleaded loudly for a turn to drive.

Uncle Cal believed in fairness, especially with his nephews and nieces. He questioned his own memory. Maybe he had forgotten how often, or how many children had been given the chance to drive the truck. His attention was centered around the farm work and care of his truck.

The nephew’s pleas reminded Uncle Cal of times when he too, as a child, had wished for a few minutes behind the steering wheel of a tractor. For the life of him, however, he could not truly remember a time when he had given Russ driving lessons on the truck.

The uncle stopped the truck at the beginning of the driveway, and to be sure that the boy had been given driving lessons and was not pulling his leg, he asked Russ to tell him the steps in starting and stopping the truck. The nephew--big and tall for his age--explained to his uncle that maybe it would be better to hear the instructions again since the past lessons had been given many days, or even weeks ago.

“Interesting explanation,” thought Uncle Cal. Still, he asked Russ, “Can you repeat any of the steps for driving this truck?” In an uneasy manner, the child began to speak, “First, push the starter button. Then press the pedal to give the engine some gas.” Quickly, he changed the order of operation and started to tell the order of the steps again. “No, no,” Russ scolded himself, then continued, “First I shift the gears and give it some gas. Then I ease up off the brake, and give it more gas, or ...”

“Stop, before you confuse yourself” his uncle spoke firmly. Uncle Cal stated the order of steps for driving the truck. “First, you push in the brake pedal, then press the starter button, shift the gears, give it a little gas, ease up off the brake, then, drive slowly.” He sounded as if the words were being read from a manual.

Following those directions, Russ sat on the driver’s seat and tried to recall the list of steps. He was barely able to peek over the front dash while sitting on top of an old farm jacket. For safety reasons, the flatbed was cleared of children. At a very slow pace, the “car-truck” bounced along the dirt pathway. To the left of the drive, was the two-story farmhouse, surrounded by a beautiful lawn and many beautiful flowers. To the right was the field where okra, beans, and peas would be planted, and straight ahead was the family garden spot.

The truck began to pick up speed. Children followed the truck--cheering, laughing, and running in excitement. They had forgotten how tired they were only minutes ago. Everyone was having fun!

Uncle Cal walked alongside the truck coaching the driver. Within seconds, he realized that the nephew behind the wheel – had never driven the truck! “Danger!” thought the uncle. His stride quickened beside the truck. He shifted his feet into a trot, then into a fast-paced run, as he shouted, “Hit the brakes, hit the brakes!”

Russ tried to follow the commands. He strained to listen. And tried to peek over the steering wheel to see where the truck was heading. How he wished he could remember which pedal was the brake!

The boy's foot pressed a pedal – the gas pedal! The truck, though old, accelerated in full speed ahead! Uncle Cal was just inches from the driver, but he could not help him. The children continued running behind the vehicle in the cloud of dust created by the truck. They found the excitement of the drive, to be the best activity of the day!

Suddenly, the truck came to a crashing stop, followed by the sound of an explosion! The sudden stop was not the result of Russ finding the brake pedal. It stopped because the truck had run into one of several sweet potato banks.

Sweet potatoes flew in many directions! Into a nearby field! Above the truck! And near the children, who had caught up with the excitement. The truck sat on top of a sweet potato bank. (The pattern of how the potatoes had been arranged in layers of pine straw and soil, in this special storage place, could be seen inside the pyramid-like structure).

The dust cloud which had followed the truck, the sounds of laughter from the children, and the mad run by Uncle Cal had all come to an abrupt stop! Children saw the seriousness of what had just happened and felt sorry for Russ, the truck, and Uncle Cal. Russ was shaken to tears! During his weeping, he tried to explain to Uncle Cal that he did not know the brake pedal from the gas pedal. As he spoke, steam rose from the front of the truck. The sound of water poured from the truck's radiator and onto the sweet potatoes.

The uncle was glad to see that Russ was okay. He helped him from the driver's seat, and ordered all of us to gather in front of the truck. "Hold on to the bumper!" he commanded. "When I say push - push the truck bumper." On signal, we followed his directions. Uncle Cal guided the truck off of the potato bank. After it was settled on the ground, we began rebuilding the sweet potato bank.

Needless to say, we all knew that none of us would ever drive the truck again. Many days and years following that event, we recall with laughter the story of the thirty-five Ford truck, and the sweet potato explosion.



Choices

Michael Williams

A Veil

Dylan Hedgepeth

I peer into the darkness ahead,
trying to pick out illusions.
The shadows sneak,
slowly,
slowly by.

The guise I have kept starts to
crumble away, tear by tear,
as I drown in the isolation.

Lies course in my veins,
spread throughout me,
cutting me down and tearing away.

They breathe down my neck,
they send shivers slowly down me as
they utter deceptions and doubts.

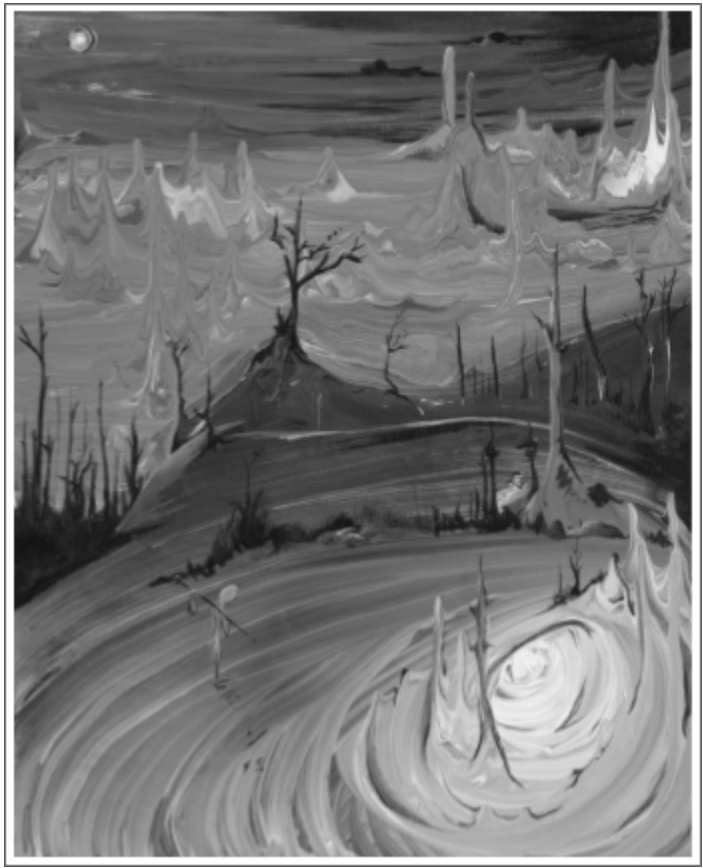
I peer in the dark again,
trying to pick out illusions as
you hand me a flashlight,
and you tell me to
lighten up.

A cone of light fills the room,
and for a moment, I
feel alive.

It dims,
it flickers,
and it vanishes.
I peer into the darkness ahead,
but I know what lies behind now.

And for the first time,
I don't need the flashlight.

the light flickers,
and returns.



Where;
Charles F. Rhodes

Walk

Josh Sekela

The dew on the grass turns my shoes darker brown.
As I wander this garden, I hear just one sound:
the cricket ensemble that plays from the ground.
Among all the roses bathed in a dull glow,
there's a lamppost that flickers as nearer I grow.
Surely you'd love this place that I've found,
you should come here some night when there's no one around.

Runaway Pumps

Kayla Dorsey

I did not lose my shoes,
I swear they ran away!
On my closet floor,
they never yearned to stay.

You know the ones I mean—
the shoes of brown and tan?
Those pretty, polished, precious pumps
I wear as often as I can.

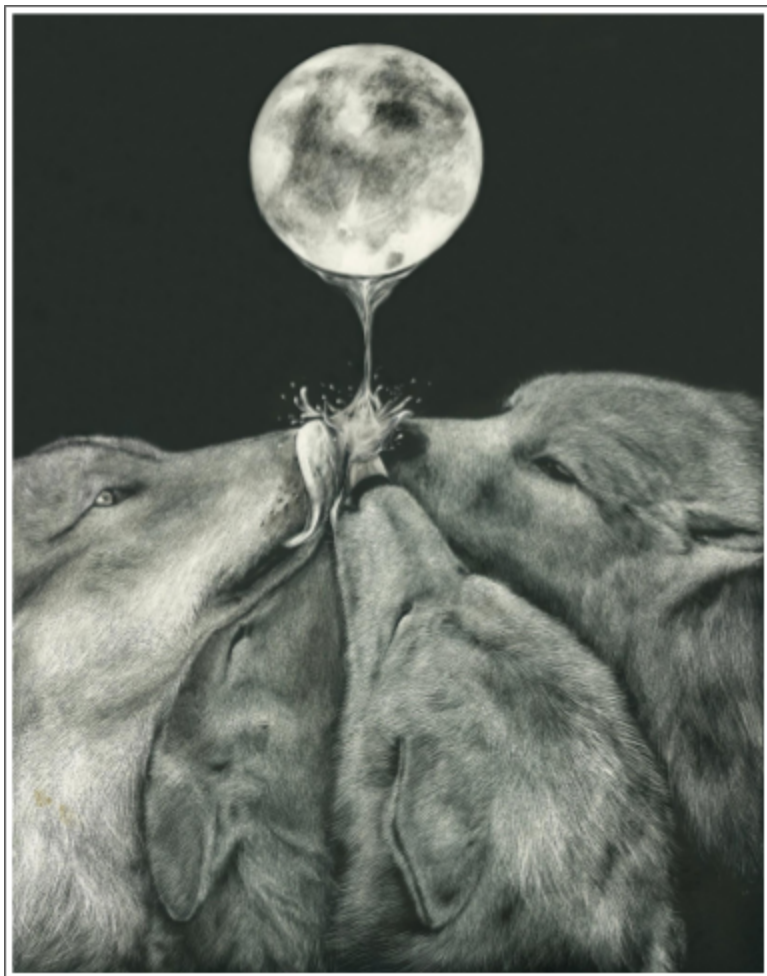
They go with almost everything,
every color and every style.
I'm so ever glad I bought them,
they're really worth my while.

Did I say tan?—that's rather dark,
I guess you'd call them nude.
With a heel of brown height and lift,
they're sturdy, but not crude.

Oh, how I long to find them!
What others could I wear?
Nothing could ever match the same,
my feet forever bare.

What's this you say?!
They're in my dresser drawer?
How can it be,
since I left them on my floor?

Whoever could have put them there?
Was it Mother, Sister, or Friend?
Never mind, it doesn't matter—
reunited in the end.



Wolves and the Moon

Ashley Thompson



Wolf Eating Moon
Ashley Thompson

Sick and Ready

Gabriel Jennings

I'm sick,
sick of the trials in life,
sick of saying I deserve better
sick of not having what I want.

I'm sick of thinking this is all there is for me,
I'm sick of only praying when I'm in trouble or need something,
I'm sick of feeling alone,
I'm sick of bad habits and unfortunate events
but I'm also sick of sympathy.
I'm sick of feeling sorry for myself,
I'm sick of tears making me feel weak,
I'm sick of not accomplishing – sick of not reaching my goals,
I'm sick of dreams being just dreams,
I'm sick of people selling me dreams
I'm sick of buying them.
There are hundreds maybe even thousands more of things I'm
sick of
But most of all, I'm sick of being sick.

I'm so sick I'm ready,
I'm ready for my dreams to come true
ready to accomplish my goals,
I'm ready to have what I want,
but I'm also ready to fully understand that this is not all about
me,
I'm ready to give and receive,
I'm ready to accept all of my emotions – ready to face all of my
fears,
I'm ready to trust in something I cannot smell, touch, taste, hear
or see,
I'm ready to put my faith in faith,
I'm ready to be about action and not all talk,
I'm ready to show my true colors,
because truthfully I'm not a color,
I resemble nothing but ready.

And I'm really ready to see that myself,
I'm ready to be myself,
I'm ready to scream and shout it out all day,
I'm ready to shut up and listen.
Lord call me right now, I'm ready to go,
ready to run, walk, jog, hop, skip, jump, gallop, bounce,
if you're ready too,
we can ride, fly, sail, teleport, time travel, do what we got to do
cause I'm ready to get to where I got to go,
I'm late I'm ready to speed there,
And I know patience is not just granted,
I'm ready to learn it – the slow way.

I'm ready to sacrifice
I'm ready to cry – ready to die – no, no
I'm ready to live – but I'm ready to let go,
I'm ready to find in me what was lost,
I'm ready to pay the cost,
And I know the road may be hard and long
but I'm ready to stop saying I'm ready
I'm gone.



The Basilica
Jane Durden

Beer and Guns Don't Mix

Shana Hess

Roger's Bronco sped along a damp highway. His muddy hands were smearing the steering wheel as he tried to grip it tighter while skittering around a curve. He wiped sweat from his forehead and left a trail of mud across his face. He felt a tap on his right shoulder and jumped clear out of his seat, sure it was the devil himself come to take him home. It was Lil'Un, Roger's neighbor's dog resting her paw. Roger turned to look in the back seat. Lil'Un, a Jack Russell mix, sat reassuringly, almost smiling as she licked the mud on the side of Roger's face. Roger pushed her away and stepped harder on the gas pedal.

"Don't worry man," Roger said as he felt for the beer bottle in the console. It was still there. He shook it a little to make sure the thing was still in there. A dull thud moved side to side.

Jake, Roger's passenger shrieked as he held onto his hand. "You'll spill it! Put that bottle down, man!"

Jake's face turned white, then green as he heaved a sigh of relief when the bottle was safely nestled back in the console. He glanced up at the clearing night sky and considered praying. Jake spotted the lights of town looming closer in the distance, another ridge of mountains to go before finding help.

A clump of mud fell from Jake's boot onto the floorboard. The sound made Lil'Un turn her gaze to him momentarily before trying to climb over the seat on Roger's shoulder. Roger flinched and swatted her off. He took a curve too fast and hit the side ditch. Grass and mud splattered all over the windshield like raining locusts. Dirt sprayed into the Bronco through the slightly opened windows. Roger spit flecks of dirt and grass from his mouth and revved the car a few times before freeing it from the ditch. Jake held on to the beer bottle, pressing it into the console like it was a calf he was trying to rope. The bloody t-shirt came loose from Jake's right hand and flopped open to reveal the empty spot where his pinky once was. He quickly wrapped his hand back up and held it tight. "Hurry, Roger! I'm dying!" was all Jake could sputter out before sobbing

hysterically. He wiped snot from his nose and blood from the t-shirt streaked across his face. The lights of town were closer now; faces of civilization he had so longed to avoid were what he craved most now.

Roger slowed to stop at a red light. He turned to face Jake. Sincere regret enveloped him.

"I'm sorry, Jake. If I knew how much she meant to you, I never would have done what I did."

"It's too late for that," shouted Jake. "Just get me to the hospital before I bleed to death!"

Roger took a shortcut down a one-way street in the wrong direction, hopped a curb, and screeched to a halt under the awning of the brilliantly lit emergency room. He swung open the door of his Bronco, knocking into an emergency technician wheeling a gurney, ran around the front of the car, and opened the door for Jake. Jake cradled his t-shirt covered hand and was still able to hang on to the beer bottle. With his hands clasped, he looked like a praying mantis being escorted into the hospital.

"Out of my way," screamed Roger, "I've got a dying man!" He ushered Jake past an elderly lady lying on a stretcher and nearly tripped over her IV and oxygen tubes. A fevered baby's cry echoed through the hallway as its mother frantically bounced it on her knee.

At the front desk, Roger demanded immediate treatment. "He's lost a lot of blood," he said nodding toward Jake. An attendant took Jake aside for some paperwork, asked if he'd been drinking, and what was in the bottle.

Roger collapsed in a plastic orange armchair. How did it get to this point, he thought? How did a neighborly hunting trip turn so sour? But, things had been a little shaky between Roger and Jake for a while.

The trip was Sheila's idea, Roger's wife. She thought it would ease the tension between the two men who had lately taken to refusing to wave to each other in the front yard.

"You and Jake used to be such good friends," she said. "Such good neighbors. I don't understand why you bow up like a teenage boy every time you see Jake in his yard. It's like you two are jealous of each other, like two roosters circling a hen house."

Sheila pressed and pressed, even got Jake's wife, Katrina, in on the game. "We'll have a girls' night," the two

women insisted. “And you two can get deer season started off right with an overnight camping trip on the ridge.”

Katrina knew the ridge was Jake’s favorite place to hunt, nothing but miles of mountains, pure wilderness, and plenty of deer. The two men agreed. They packed up their gear and rifles on a Friday evening and headed to the woods.

As Roger drove the Bronco further up the dusty mountain road that evening, both men were thinking they’d outshine the other come dawn, shooting a buck with twice the number of points as the other. They set up camp in an empty field at the edge of the ridge. Dwindling daylight forced them to work quickly and gave them an excuse not to talk. The sky threatened rain, and Roger was glad he brought a second tarp.

It was Roger who insisted on taking Jake’s dog, Lil’Un. She needed a chance to prove she could sniff out deer as well as rabbits he’d said. Jake had been hesitant to bring her. As the two men gathered sticks for the fire, she ran in circles along the tree line, nudging her nose into the brush. Roger stood to watch her. He smiled longingly and shook his head. Jake grunted.

“That ought to be enough wood for tonight,” Jake said. He shoved the last of what he’d collected into Roger’s hands.

With the campfire lit, and a pot of beans heating on a rock next to the fire, the two men settled down. Darkness pressed them closer together, and there were no more excuses for not talking. Roger popped open a beer for himself, then handed one to Jake. Lil’Un sat between the two, and rested her head on Roger’s knee.

Roger tousled Lil’Un’s ears with his free hand, and said “You got yourself one good dog, Jake. What I’d give to have a dog half as good as her.”

Jake kicked back his beer and swallowed hard. “Some days, she’s all I got in this world.”

“What about Katrina?” Roger asked. “She ain’t nothin’ to laugh at.”

“Yeah, but I can’t trust her like I trust Lil’Un,” Jake said. “Just something about her.”

“I know what you mean,” said Roger. “Me and Sheila’s been married going on five years. She doesn’t know me any better now than the day we met.”

Jake held up his right hand into the firelight. "See this finger. This is why I don't trust her."

His right pinky, slightly flattened, dangled stiffly to the side. "You know I'm proud of it now, but there was a time when I couldn't look at this finger without crying."

Roger remembered the first day he moved in beside Jake. Jake walked up in the yard, shoved his right hand out to greet him. Roger had hesitated to shake his hand until Jake said, "Don't mind my dangle-fanger. It don't move." The two men had a good laugh that day, but Roger had never asked him how his right pinky got mangled.

"Jake," Roger asked, "Just how did you get your dangle-fanger?"

"It was a warm fall day when me and Katrina was still dating," Jake said as he stirred the beans. "We were four-wheeling with a couple of her friends on her daddy's land. She insisted on driving, and showing off. She floored it trying to jump the creek. The back wheel landed in the mud across the bank and we flipped upside down into the water. I got it turned back up, but the engine had stalled. Katrina sat on the four-wheeler trying to crank it while I fiddled with the spark plugs. Her friends had circled back looking for us as soon as I got it started. She just took off. Didn't give me time to even get my hand away from the wheel. Crushed my pinky. Guess I should be glad that was all that got crushed."

Roger opened another beer. "And you still married her?"

Jake took out a can of Gravy Train and opened it for Lil'Un. "But I loved her, even though you should never trust a girl that won't give you a chance to get back on first."

He rubbed Lil'Un's head as she ate. "This ol' girl's as good as any woman I've ever had. She's true blue. She'd never turn on me for someone else."

Roger and Jake sat in the misty moonlight admiring the little Jack Russell mix. She licked bits of dog food off her lip before nestling down closer to the fire. Both men's hands reached out to pet her. Roger's got there first.

The cool mist came down harder now. Roger stretched a tarp across the lower tree branches above them. He dished out some beans for them both and added another log to the fire.

Jake stirred the fire with a stick and watched the burning hot coals throb, it seemed to the beating of his heart. He threw a handful of dead leaves on the fire and watched them burn, turning into red coils that looked like wiggling worms. Lil'Un jumped into Roger's lap and Jake cringed, his heart pounding.

"You know, Jake, I'm glad we came on this trip," Roger said as he stroked Lil'Un's nose. "I guess things have been a little tense between us lately. Maybe I was jealous of you, and Katrina... and Lil'Un. Sheila and me haven't been getting along lately either. She's been sleeping in the spare room. Maybe that's why I did it."

"Did what?" asked Jake.

"You remember last winter when it snowed, and you couldn't find Lil'Un that night to put her up? I couldn't stand the thoughts of her out in the cold alone, so I let her in the house," Roger said as he took a long swig of beer. "She slept in my bed that night. I should have let her out when I heard you whistling for her. I'm sorry."

Jake stood up. His eyes bugged out and he waved his arms wildly like a man stuck on train tracks trying to stop an oncoming locomotive. His dangle-fanger jutted out from the side of his bottle, and beer rained down on the campfire. "You *slept* with her! I don't even sleep with her. She stays outside. Man, that's got to be breaking some kind of *law*! You can't just sleep with another man's dog!" Jake threw his beer down and grabbed his rifle.

Roger stood up and put both arms out to calm Jake. "Now hold on a minute. Put down the gun. It's just a dog. I let her out first thing the next morning."

Jake cocked his rifle and fired in the air. "I'm giving you five seconds to run!"

Roger grabbed his rifle and ran behind his Bronco. Jake found a rusted out tailgate in the weeds and propped it up, crouching behind it. The two men peered from behind their barricades. Lil'Un ran from one man to the next, sniffing wildly. She put her paw on Jake's leg. He glared down and pushed her away. He fired towards the Bronco and the bullet bounced off the front fender.

Roger pleaded with Jake to drop the gun. "Come on, man, it's just a dog! Let's have another beer."

Jake shot again. This time busting out the side view mirror.

“That’s it,” said Roger, as he aimed at Jake. The bullet hit Jake’s right hand.

“You SOB,” Jake screamed. “You shot off my dangle-fanger!”

The two men stared in amazement as the blown off dangle-fanger flew through the moonlit air, and landed just short of the campfire. Lil’ Un raced over to it immediately. She picked it up in her mouth and began running in circles around the men. Jake stood there sobbing as blood gushed from his hand. In that moment, Roger realized how broken Jake was, how he clung to his dangle-fanger with a sense of pride, that he had endured being ran over by Katrina, and had placed his heart in Lil’Un’s paw. Roger dropped his gun and chased Lil’Un across the field and back. She’d look back now and then, all the while with the bloody finger dangling from her mouth. Roger got close enough to reach Lil’Un. He fell to the ground trying to catch her, and grabbed a hold of her tail, only to have it pulled loose like a greased possum. Finally, he tackled her and pried the finger from her mouth.

“What am I going to do without my dangle-fanger?” Jake wailed. “I’m nothing without it.”

Roger saw how empty Jake was standing there beside a rusted tailgate, next to a smoldering campfire, sobbing into a bloody hand, feeling cheated by his only love, completely alone in the world.

He knew what he had to do. He grabbed an empty beer bottle from the ground, wiped the dirt off, and shoved what was left of the dangle-fanger inside it.

“Come on, man, I’m taking you to the hospital,” he said as he guided Jake into the passenger seat of his Bronco. Lil’Un bounded in after them, and the trio made the descent down from the ridge. Roger tried to steer away from ruts in the road. He raced against time, intent on not being the second person to crush this man in the woods. He had to salvage Jake’s dignity. He did what any good neighbor would do.

A Train's Perspective

Allison King

Who's boarding my railroad cars today?

Mr. Clarkson, with his wide fedora and smoking pipe.

Ms. Smith, who looks less than ordinary adorned with her
sequence and furs.

Mr. Thompson, with dull eyes and a deep yawn.

Mrs. Thompson, with bright eyes and squeals galore.

Mr. Parks, with an overly stuffed briefcase and perfectly pressed
suit.

As I march along through the icy winds and snow-filled tracks,
I watch, and listen to my passengers.

There is Mr. Parks.

All of his papers have spilled out of their home, and he's
feverishly scribbling on all of them.

There's Ms. Smith.

She is shouting at my staff for the daft, and how the meal wasn't
to her taste.

There's Mr. Thompson.

He's snoring loudly.

There's Mrs. Thompson.

She's finding wonder at every turn, and making sure to wake her
husband to witness it.

There's Mr. Clarkson.

With a pen and a single sheet of crisp paper, he writes and he
writes and he writes.

All of my passengers are different.

Some are diligent.

Some are bored.

Some are excited.

Some are rude.

And some are quiet as they let the inspiration seep into them.

I am amused by all of it.

As Ms. Smith fixes her make-up, I take a turn.

As Mr. Thompson falls into slumber, I numbingly chug along.

As Mrs. Thompson jolts her husband from slumber, my whistle
blares.

As Mr. Parks works through the hours, I rush through a dark
tunnel.

As Mr. Clarkson takes a break, I show him the most magnificent
view.

Soon my passengers will leave me.

They will never know how they entertained me.

There goes Mr. Parks, rushing away to his important meeting.

There goes Mrs. Thompson, dragging her husband to the next
tourist attraction.

There goes Mr. Thompson, being dragged and not fully awake
from his restless naps.

There goes Ms. Smith, who is sure to complain to her cab driver
for his incompetence.

There goes Mr. Clarkson, who stayed aboard my cart a few
moments longer to capture his last
sentence.

So many different people.

So many different places.

So amazing that I get to meet so many of them.

Who's next aboard?



Fritillaria

Kalina Todorov

Closure

Robert DeMers

Faculty Award

Closure . . . such an odd word, so simplistic and finite. It says so little. Listen to its lack of quality, or character: clo – zhur . . . It says nothing . . . useful. I looked it up in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and thesauruses. Not a one had a useful definition. The definitions just, pardon the pun, ended, concluded, ceased, terminated.

What did I expect? What was I looking for? I don't know. . .

They told us the cancer was terminal. No one had ever survived this particular type of cancer. After the operation to remove her lung, followed by radiation and chemotherapy, she was cancer free for two years — not a trace or a sign. Then her legs gave out while she was walking. There were brain tumors, and pieces were breaking off and going into her spinal fluid. In two weeks, she was no longer with me. I watched her suffocate, her entire body fighting for oxygen, while the tubes pumped the supposedly life sustaining fluid into her nostrils. I witnessed her last gasp. I saw the blank stare of her eyes. I closed her eyelids.

Neither of us believed in mysticism. Man created God in his own image. A God would not be contradictory and inconsistent as portrayed, by all religions. We were both familiar with the contradictory and inconsistent explanations for the contradictory and inconsistent dogma of religion.

In her last day at the hospital, before coming home, a man of the cloth came to her room. I don't know what denomination he followed, but she asked him for the "last rites," she asked for absolution, for closure. She looked at me, embarrassed at having asked for incantations to be pronounced over her; a magic spell that would give her everlasting peace. I smiled and nodded my head, "Thank you," I said. She knew it would be for the both of us. It would be our final significant action as husband and wife. She looked relieved, ready to accept her fate. I left them alone so she could get the closure she desperately needed. It didn't work. I know it didn't, because a couple of times during the night, when she thought I wasn't

there, she cried. She cried like a child, a child lost in the dark of night.

It has been four years and I still don't want to live without her. I think about her everyday. Most of my thoughts give me a warm comfortable feeling, thoughts of moments we shared. At other times I am torn by the pain of having lost her, I hear her last gasp in her fight for life; I see her blank eyes, the light of life, gone. Then, there is the void, the feeling of . . . nothing. No, not a numbness, not a result of being constantly overwhelmed by painful memories, but a complete lack of feeling, a cold dark void, which shrouds me so the world won't hear me cry out in agony, so I won't cry out, so I won't feel the pain.

Sometimes I think of her request for absolution, her need for an afterlife. I think of my granting her the right to desire it without feeling guilty for betraying her long held beliefs. I now know I needed her to believe in the afterlife so I could have something to hold on to when she was no longer a part of my world. I needed her approval. I needed her to accept my hope, my desire to join her in a different existence.

This hope, this desire for mystic relevance has become my nemesis. What are the rules? Do I have to suffer until some force beyond my control ends my earthly existence? If I end my suffering, will I lose my right to see her again, as some believe? Is this Ethereal Being sadistic by its nature? Am I supposed to suffer for its pleasure or does it expect me to end my suffering. How do I find out? Shouldn't the natural progression of a couple's lives not end, but continue on beyond their rotting corpses? Is it possible?

Does closure come when you die; does it come even then?

Define it for me. What in the hell is closure?