
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA BEAUFORT



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CREATIVE WRITING & ART

The Pen

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THE PEN FALL 2015

Department of English, Theater, and Liberal Studies
University of South Carolina Beaufort
One University Boulevard
Bluffton, South Carolina 29909
ThePenUSCB@gmail.com

Editorial Board

— Katie Hart

— Alexis Henderson

— Brenda Hill

— Bill Lisbon

— Ciera Love

— Taylor Piscitello

Graphic Design

— Bill Lisbon

Faculty Advisor

— Dr. Ellen Malphrus

Cover Photo

— Bill Lisbon

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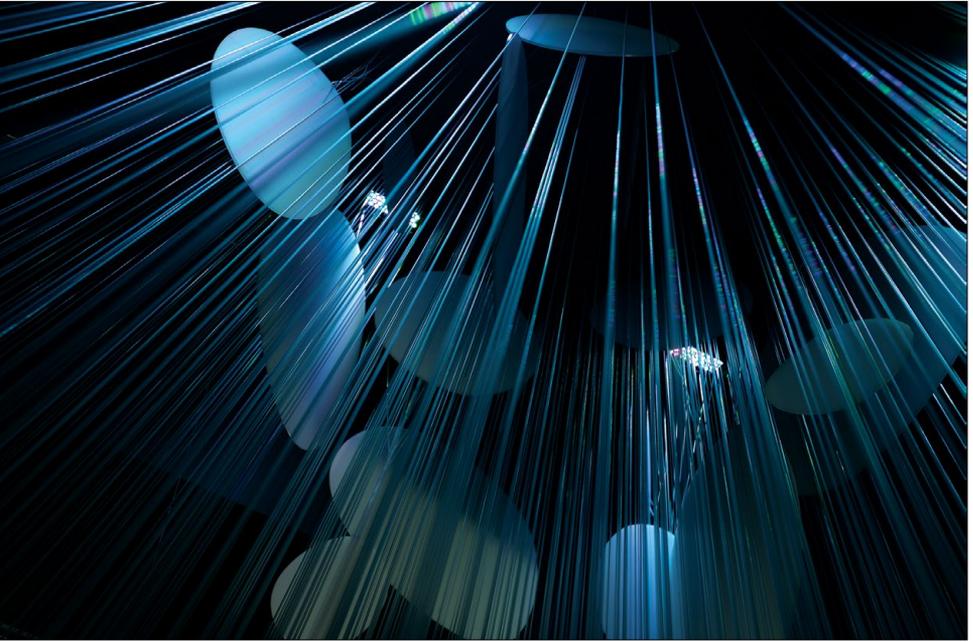
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THIS IS WATER



photograph by Bill Lisbon

ABOUT THE PEN

Thank you for picking up the latest edition of *The Pen*, a biannual publication of the Society of Creative Writers, produced under the supervision of the Department of English, Theater and Liberal Studies at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. *The Pen* features the original work of USCB students in the realm of creative writing, which includes primarily fiction and poetry, as well as other creative arts, such as photography and painting. The aim of *The Pen* is to highlight commendable, creative student work and provide students a place where their work may be published with credit.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF CREATIVE WRITERS

The University of South Carolina Beaufort's Society of Creative Writers is dedicated to sharing a passion for the written word with like-minded peers. This student-led group allows writers of any experience level to share their work, get constructive criticism and other feedback from classmates, network or just hang out and talk about writing. The group typically meets on campus once a week during the Fall and Spring semesters and holds a public reading at the end of each semester. For more information, email ThePenUSCB@gmail.com or join the public Facebook group titled "USCB Society of Creative Writers."

ICARUS



photograph by Eric Danko

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Dear Reader,

I call you Reader because I don't, in fact, know your name, though you may not be expecting me to anyway. After all, you don't know who I am. At least, you don't think you do.

The truth is, you've met me before, in different form, for different occasions, and with a different altitude of consciousness. Sometimes you hate me, sometimes you curse me, sometimes you pray to me, sometimes you even spite me. I do not expect any less, with all everyone has done to try and control me. I'm used to it. But no one, not even you, dear Reader, can stop me. Many have tried. They've tricked and bartered, mocked and judged, cared and not cared. They've fought and blamed and appeased and analyzed too much and interpreted even less. They've accepted and acknowledged and didn't try to understand and it still doesn't help. They've logically created channels and premeditated illogical channels to try and come to terms with my permanent evolution. They've lived vicariously through that which they will all eventually die vicariously. They've put heaps of false appearances on like too much makeup, but it's all in vain. And usually out of vain too. Nobody wants to be common. But unfortunately, everything changes. And yet, it always changes the same way.

I care not for your purposes, for your reasoning or calculations. You cannot know the things I have created, the things I was created for. Though I speak condescendingly, do not for one moment think I see you insignificant. That is the beauty of faceless statistics—there are so many, it might just not matter at all, but behind the untroubled semblance is a world that really does care. If nothing mattered, laziness would take over and there would be nothing to matter. Laziness, what a war of a word. But that is one war that can never be. It cannot be forever. Because the universe changes with each word or action or thought or manifestation—tangible or otherwise—of energy in the atmosphere. How lucky we are that there is the faceless statistic. Perhaps when it's not about anybody, it's really about everybody. There are so, so many anybodies to do, do what

they don't even know they are doing, even though they make the reasons to matter. You make the reason to matter, everyone does, because there are so many everyone's, we make our own obligations.

So do not hold me in contempt, I am not trying to be different or new—if you knew who I was, you would see this irony. It is not me that has dictated my power. This is the great paradox. I am the biggest thing around you that you only have a small part of, that you cannot change, that you cannot make faultless, that you cannot control. But I am the biggest thing in you that you can amend, that you can make perfect, that you can direct in any way you choose. It's just as long as you make the choice. You are the reason it matters, because there are no reasons not to.

Who has power over me?

You.

Because it's your worth that defines what I'm worth; and who better to define your worth than you? That never changes the same way.

Sincerely,

(I never sign my letters—you'll have to guess)

Crystallizing

by Katie Hart |

It is nine p.m. on a Sunday. I didn't think these kinds of things were supposed to happen on Sundays – the day of rest and all. But here we are, everyone outside on our lawns staring up at the sky dumbstruck. Crystals are spread out above us, shimmering away our shock whilst heightening our confusion. Our homes with doors ajar have televisions on various news channels with anchors stumbling to report what happened ... how it is history, a tragedy, it will change our lives forever. It's definitely something straight out of H.G. Wells.

By daylight these channels will have an array of scientists informing us about the expectations of our new world, seated to frighten us with all the things that will now change. How the tides will be affected, what this will mean for the harvest seasons, menstrual cycles, the sky's will turn darker, days will be shorter, and over time the axis will tilt and with that life may not be able to find a way on Earth. Mom will blame her blood pressure issues on this. We'll see only the issues that scare us, what we can't fix instead of looking at that country the rock burned a hole through – all those poor people.

But right now shards are swirling about our heads. Mom holds me close and we share a struggle to wrap our heads around what we just saw. Dad's talking to her about what other countries must be saying and goes inside to change the T.V. to the BBC. Slowly other neighborhood figures make the move back inside to suck up the information. They're over the news and want to see the News. I'm standing still with my mother, dazzled by what once was in the sky. We're crystallized.

Becoming a Statistic

| by Jaia Jones

She's always been pro-life. That is, until she allowed her boyfriend of three months to unzip her little black dress and invade her Garden of Eden. She's always been pro-life. That is, until she realized that her father would begin preaching about her, and her mother would nod in agreement, while sitting on the front row with a big hat on. She's always been pro-life. That is, until she found herself in a cold room all alone with a doctor. "Are you sure," he asked? She's always been pro-life. That is, until she cried, "I'm sure."

Over the Counter

by Bill Lisbon |

As a pharmacy cashier, you learn pretty quick not to look at what people are buying. I used to work in one of those nationwide drug store chains like Walgreens, where you'd think the pharmacists in the back with the white coats really got to see behind the curtains, but no. They knew of the conditions people were comfortable talking about. They made an appointment, sat in a waiting room, saw a doctor, billed their insurance company, and so on. No, the stuff they bought over the counter were for ailments they didn't want anyone to know about. Skinny teenage girls buying diet pills. Old men buying diapers. Mothers buying wine and romance novels. Husbands buying condoms. Gas-X, Preparation H, Compound W. Lice shampoo. Pregnancy tests. Do-it-yourself tattoo removal kits, cheap toys, disposable cellphones, hair dye, painkillers, vanishing crème. Enemas. They probably all passed by my register, but I never looked. I never connected the people with the things, because then I would know their stories, and I didn't want to know their stories. They were always pitiful, and more often than not, reminded me of my story and why I worked there.

The one thing I couldn't avoid was when people came up to me and asked where a certain product was located. Thankfully, most would rather walk around the store for half an hour. Very, very few came right to the point, and those people I immediately blocked out, thinking only of the item they were looking for and directing them to the appropriate numbered aisle.

Until one day, I broke my rule. That's how I met Olive. She wanted an umbrella.

* * *

"Good sir, I say, where do you keep your bumbershoots?"

I looked up from a word search to see a petite young woman in a red pleated skirt and a black sweatshirt with a hood framing a pair of green eyes that outshined the rest of her face. She was drenched, and she was barefoot.

What's a bumbershoot, I thought. If that's some sort of colon cleanser, we don't carry that brand.

"What's that?" I asked.

"It's an umbrella, silly man."

She tilted her head to one side and smiled.

"Don't you think it's too late for that?" I said.

I didn't think it was raining. I looked outside, and it was sunny.

"I want to be prepared for next time."

"But how did you get ... never mind." I didn't want to know. "They're right over there."

She returned a moment later and dumped a dozen umbrellas of various sizes and colors on the counter.

"I'm Olive," she said extending her hand.

"Mitch," I said, pointing to my name tag instead.

"I know. We've met before."

* * *

We hadn't really met before, but she told me later that she'd been in the pharmacy several times over the past two weeks to make purchases. I rang them up, apparently, but I don't remember her. On the first visit, she purchased 96 AA batteries and a bag of cough drops. The next time, she bought five pairs of shoelaces for dress shoes and a screwdriver. Another time, a birthday card, a Christmas card and a sympathy card but only one envelope.

She definitely had stories, and they were good.

Still, I didn't want to let myself want to know them.

But we seemed to be in disagreement about that.

* * *

The next sunny day, I think Olive tried to sneak in without me seeing. I spotted her outside squatting behind a newspaper stand, peaking over the top every so often. Heralded by the little chime that plays every time the pharmacy's automatic door opened, she finally entered in the wake of a broad-shouldered man as if she was using him to conceal her.

Once inside, she took up a position midway down the aisle across from my register. Then she opened one of her recently purchased umbrellas, placed the center shaft on her shoulder and twirled it. The yellow canopy and ribs and stretchers swirled behind her head like a cloudy sunrise. Olive lifted her eyes to catch mine, watching her this whole time, and she grinned.

"You know, it's supposed to be bad luck to open an umbrella indoors," I said.

"What happens if it rains inside?"

"It doesn't rain inside."

She looked back at me incredulously.

"If you say so. Mitch."

Olive skipped toward me and stopped beside the display of cheap DVDs.

"So, what's your saga?"

"My saga?"

"Your tale, your epic, your gospel," she said. "Your story, silly man."

"I don't have one."

"Everyone has a story."

"Mine's not very exciting."

"Now, now. You're just in the middle," she said. "Tell me, do you like the ocean?"

"Not anymore."

Olive's eyes widened for an instant, then we both noticed an older woman making her way toward the counter, shuffling behind a walker with four tennis balls for shoes. Just before the woman came between us, Olive stepped forward and handed me the umbrella. Then she stepped back to let the woman by. I rang her up with one hand while I held the open umbrella in the other.

"Weatherman says it might rain later," said the woman without a hint of curiosity.

"Uh-hmm," I replied, nodding in agreement.

After the woman left, I looked around for Olive, but she was gone.

* * *

I didn't see Olive for awhile after that. I wanted to, which is why I was hoping I wouldn't see her again. She exuded an awkward energy that evoked something I had buried, which I couldn't awaken. I wouldn't. Still, I might unravel the story of her strange purchases. I could do that without taking on more than I could handle. I had a feeling her stories would not be sad. And we didn't stock those here.

I kept her umbrella beside me on the floor behind the counter, picking it up frequently and opening it when no one was in the store, wondering if my luck would change and she would return.

* * *

I had just handed someone a bag of boxes and bottles, when I noticed Olive sitting on the edge of the counter at the next register. Her legs dangled and swung like opposing pendulums.

"Miss me?"

"I didn't see you come in," I said, using atrophied muscles.

"Glad to see you still brush regularly."

"How have you been?" I finally asked her after making many sounds that weren't words; my facial muscles weren't the only things out of shape.

"Believe it or not, I'm only here to visit you."

I didn't know what to say.

"You don't know what to say, do you?"

"How could you tell?"

"Because you didn't say anything, silly man."

After that, we talked—bantered really. Why does your pharmacy sell cigarettes and nudie magazines? For the same reason we sell chocolate and perfume, because they help people, and we sell treatments. Not cures? Those don't exist. Then why do you work here? It's my treatment. If only you could be cured. If only.

"Why did you need those things you bought before?"

"Trade secret."

* * *

In the weeks that followed, Olive visited me every day, but never for

too long. She claimed she had other pharmacies to visit. I worried I was allowing myself to become too eager to see her. I would chastise myself when I realized I was looking outside or when I started acknowledging people again and wondering about their stories.

From the counter we watched the customers sniffing through the aisles like labyrinthine rodents. Several slow elderly people. A go-go-go mom with her little boy. Overweight guy with a really in-shape costumed hero ironed on his T-shirt.

“Tell me again why you work here?”

“So I don’t have to talk to people.”

“You’re talking to me.”

“You’re different.”

“Do you have a problem with people?”

“I would just rather not be one of them.”

“Too late,” said Olive, hopping off her now regular perch at the next register and heading down an aisle out of view.

“No, it’s not,” I called after her.

“You’re a person, Mitch,” sounded her voice from somewhere unseen.

I reached for the public address system’s microphone.

“I’m not a person, Olive,” I said with static, and then quietly, after letting go of the button, “... at least I shouldn’t be.”

“What was that?” said Olive, suddenly in front of me.

“Nothing.”

Olive shook her head and walked backwards into the aisle, allowing a delivery man to set down his dolly stacked tall with heavy crates of soda. He said he’d forgotten his clipboard in the truck and was coming right back. The little boy, separated from his mother, looked up at the tower of crates and reached for a bottle from the top.

“Hey kid, don’t do that. Kid,” I said.

He started climbing up the crates, which wobbled with his weight.

“What’s wrong with you?” said Olive, her eyes ablaze.

I saw Olive stepping over the pile of bottles, many hissing foam and rolling away, and the unscathed little boy hurrying back toward his calling mother. I struggled to speak, to move. Somehow I lost the last

several moments.

Olive marched up to the counter and leaned offensively toward me, inches from my face, searching my eyes that wanted to look anywhere but back into hers. While she glared, she reached behind the counter and retrieved her umbrella.

“I’m very disappointed in you, Mitch.”

Walking toward the door, Olive opened the umbrella. She stopped beside the fire alarm and turned to look at me once more.

“Very disappointed,” she said and pulled the handle.

* * *

The pharmacy was closed for two weeks while we mopped up and restocked. The police questioned me, but I was as vague as possible with details about Olive, and as often as she was in the store talking to me, none of the other employees paid us any attention. The sprinklers frizzed out the surveillance footage too.

I knew I’d never see Olive again. She’d be foolish to return, but I wanted to apologize for freezing up, even though I don’t remember what happened. I knew why I froze, though. Why I worked here. Why I was in exile from the human race and all their always sad stories.

* * *

“I’d like to return this.”

I looked up from a word search to see a closed yellow umbrella lying across the counter.

“Olive!”

“I’m sorry I made it rain.”

“I’m sorry, too.”

“Do you want to tell me now why you don’t like the ocean?”

“OK.”

She propped her elbows on the counter, her chin upon her hands, watching me with patience.

“I used to have this job that I couldn’t get away from, even on vacation. We were at the ocean. Karen, my wife, wasn’t feeling well, but Dylan

really wanted to go the beach. I took my phone. I was glued to that thing. Everyone kept texting or calling, unable to make their own decisions, asking questions, wanting to tell me their stories. I don't remember when I stopped watching him. ... Karen couldn't forgive me. I couldn't sleep. I quit my job, but they would've fired me sooner or later because I just stopped listening. I couldn't fix their problems. So one night, I stopped at a place like this and bought a couple of bottles of sleeping pills and a box of wine. I wasn't going to do anything. I just needed help sleeping. But when I put those items on the counter, the cashier didn't even give it a second thought. Didn't even ID me. Right then, I knew that was the job for me. So I stepped in here, and I've been swallowed up ever since."

When I looked at Olive I was surprised by her reaction—a look of relief, as if my unloading had unburdened her as well.

"Don't you think it's time you came back to shore?" she said.

"What do you mean?"

"You can't hide in here forever."

"How can I not? It's the only place I can."

"We need you back. You can help people again."

I took her hand.

"There you go," said Olive, with a sighing smile.

She pulled her hand away after a few moments and skipped toward the door, just as someone else was coming inside.

"Wait."

I hopped up and slid over the counter to follow her, getting in a short tangled dance with the customer. I finally dashed outside and scanned the parking lot. She was vapor.

"My name's really Jonah."

* * *

She wrote him, telling him she'd had a dream and saw it as a sign to say hello, but she wouldn't, shouldn't, tell him about the dream, saying it wouldn't be fair to him. How a heart can glow and burst in tandem, and continue to mark the time spent since. She didn't need to tell him about the dream—only that she'd had one she had not the courage to recount—for him to know enough of the scenes lingering in her mind even after waking. She said things without saying things. He had the same dreams too, but in daylight.

He didn't think of her reluctance as unfair. She wasn't burdening him with more than he'd already borne for two decades. She told him to keep shouldering. Maybe that was the only unfair part, but it gave him a position at which to rest. He wondered what caverns she's visited recently to seed the dream. Sensitive material, she classified it, saying she was scared to spell it out, but said it wasn't bad at all. He didn't know what she meant by bad, but in any context, it was good on some level of meaning only they understood even across the years of silence and a distance ever shortening and lengthening.

She had a daughter now, and children have fathers; wives husbands. He had a son, who stays with his mother. They remain afloat, swaying, pinging the depths every so often. Maybe she heard him playing the opening bars of *Für Elise* on Friday night; the only notes he knows she taught him in a city by the ocean. He told her she could tell him anything. He told her dreams don't follow rules like math. As much as he wanted to learn about the dream, he wouldn't pry a word. He'd rather receive these precious messages, these fleeting glimpses, than force her to a decision she already made and would make every time. Still, they knew. They counted their heartbeats, and she knew when his stalled. Even their stretching fingertips send sparks sometimes, to jumpstart.

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GETTING TIRED



| photograph by Jay Cheatham

Do You?

by Jeremy Breland |

Adequate is inadequate
more more
High wages, no skill in its place
Ten dollars to occupy space
more more
No longer a puff or a snuff
The clear air has had enough
more more
Forced second in line
Give a chance to those whom are "behind"
more more
Forsake the cross, or
Society will have you tossed
more more
Oh speaking your mind is a must
But only if you speak like us
more more
More to shove in your face
Only for the pleasure of taste
more more
More of this world is a sore, a bore
Gun in hand through the school door
more more
More I'm right, you're wrong
You're weak, I'm strong
Same old, same old song
more more
Do you want some more?

The Song of Self

| by Angela Cleland

I am the second daughter of my parents.
I am a sister to my siblings.
I am the youngest aunt to three children.
I am the cousin of several.
I am the granddaughter to a maternal grandmother.
I am one who also inherited anger issues.
I am one who is a worrier in the best of times.
I am forgetful and confused in the worst moments.
I am temperamental, and at times an instigator.
I am a student and an avid reader (just not the best listener).

Do you see me?
I stand with my head bowed or raised.
I stand with a book and pen.
I stand before you, one in many.
I stand with, yet apart from, you.
Do you see me?

On this bed I lie

by Angela Cleland |

On this bed I lie;
pustules exploit their
authority over septic, yellowing
skin. I feel every seeping

sore. The fire flashes along
the trails left by escaping
liquefied flesh, poison to the
defenseless cotton of the bedclothes.

Tear-stricken eyes watch my
tainted body, grief etched in
the mirrors that reflect the
grotesque shell I've come to be.

Do not fear, love,
I'll not infect you with
this depraved fate.
I die at the close of this syllable.

As of this moment, time is no longer a factor
It is no longer tangible or comprehensive,
Instead of measuring our moments together by seconds and minutes
Let's measure them by hugs and kisses,
We no longer count the seasons,
 but the smiles we share suffice just as well
The days our eyes connected and our souls intertwined
 cannot be written on paper as but a memory,
But should a walking manifestation
 be seen by all while we're both still here
Let us not count the months we spend together
But count the skipped heartbeats and breathtaking moments
 that our mere existence brings each other
I no longer wish to measure time
Because time stopped when you became mine

UNLEASHED



photograph by Eric Danko |

Mantra of the Phoenix

| by Tia Dobson

When your enemy's negativity is bringing you down like gravity
Keep your head in the clouds, smile and be free
When you believe you are you will be
Wolf in sheep's clothing almost believing in their own false facades
And I was ignoring the signs like I was a driver about to receive a DUI
Devils can't wear halos too long before their horns show
It was like holding a rose to my heart
 and forgetting that the thorns grow
But the scars I've gotten will no longer be hidden
Through the doubt and the darkness, I am the phoenix who has risen
I refuse to be kept in a prison, mind blank, hands bound, screaming
 silently for change but never making a sound
I'm not only rocking the boat, I've decided to become captain
Not only do I have dreams, I've decided to make them happen
Whether the world is on my side
 or I can count my friends with one hand
Or if I must be a one woman army, I will continue to stand
This is my mantra for greatness
The mark of the phoenix
You see I already found What Was Missing
 so this is something like the remix
I can do all things through the help of the Most High
They thought they could clip my wings but I'll continue to fly
They can try to bring me down, but even through it all
I'll keep my head held high and I'll remain walking tall

Drive to Charleston

by Cristófer J. Gutiérrez |

A few long miles,
Sitting in this car,
Every thought is an eternity of jaded circumstances.
A broken man,
Father,
Unwanted by love,
Dressing the future with shine of silver,
Because I'm all out of gold,
And diamonds don't come cheap,
Best skill is carbon mining for the chemist,
With no instruction for this life.
Let's,
Dig,
Dig deep,
Don't mind the smell,
The bodies are stacked up high.

It's dark in here.
I say again, it's dark in here,
Can someone help me?
Silence—go figure!

Lying beside the dead word (human),
Alongside the placebo,
The reality that is "humankind."
It's all written on our faces,
Blank masks of different shades, not races,
Segregated by nations,
War,
Government,
And worst of all,
Sex and gender.

There is no sound in here,
Can anybody hear me?
I say again,
Someone please help me.

Graffiti on the wall is the cry of young struggles,
The flow of mud and silt that covers golden plains,
A new generation not stepping down,
Its new politics called graffiti,
It's actually an art,
Get used to it.

I can't feel anything,
I'm reaching out to you,
Please help me,
Please!

So many more steps to climb,
Contempt with bare treads,
Abrade the synapses myelin fresh,
Loosing contact with reality.
These heavy bodies,
Hollow minds,
Float the valley with echo,
Death.

Listen someone,
If you are out there,
Please help,
I'm one of you.

No social view,
No equal tongue,
Or tool deters the lighter type.
Shocking Tasers,
Running faces,
Caught on video traces,
Less the people and times the crowd,
The voice only reaches barreled guns,
The silt is thicker on golden badges,
Wearing “watch this” stickers just for money
On the line of three,
Justice is one,
Never the case when it’s a gutter-fed rat,
Long distances must it go for the meal it seeks,
The rat made it,
Justice at one tilt—no blinds—
Weighted greater than it.

Please brother,
Sister,
Mother,
Friend,
Or anyone by any other name,
Please help me!
I’m lost in thought,
And this is only mile one.

Dopamine rich at the border,
Lipid thick in the center,
America breathes for sons and daughters,
With short breaths and heavy beats,
BEATS the drums of our fathers,

Not blue, red, or grey,
No luster, gem, or color can describe it.
Tame the senate lion,
Brood-hungry green-eyed creature,
Mane of sun-reaching rays,
Giving life, cancer, suffering, and death.
Playing with your food is no way to run a country.

I'm losing my life,
If you hear me,
Don't bother,
The darkness is me
And I am it
And you and I are the same.

A neighbor and close enemy,
The locust plague of great proportion,
Only silt to feed the hunger on the view for blades of green,
The only green found,
Made ill,
Meta-forms the locust red,
Slit lines admired three,
Air, land, and sea,
Sealed, packaged,
White matter,
Programmed to break,
Lines and minds,
Upward tainted flags,
Return to the plague,
With no blade,
No green,
No pill,
Lost limbs.

I'm broken,
The voice won't stop,
It tells me to fight,
But I want to give up,
My arms are tired,
My throat is sore,
No help will come ...

- *Hey, who is that?*
- *I'm in the dark just like you.*

I'm not alone,
I'm not alone,
I'm in the dark,
I am lost,
I can't feel, touch, or see,
And I will die,
But I am not alone.

- *You were never alone,*
- *I too have many miles to go.*

It's unnatural,
the silky texture, glittering brilliance,
like tears falling down sky blue backdrops of old poster art.

The fluid motion of a distant desert mirage,
seeping reborn hellfire across sunset horizons.

It sounds of virgin chatter, lined with innocent touches of strange
circumstances, clammy acceptance slipping between tight lips.

The trading of brine filled car-ni-val between foreign skins,
it's the language spoken, written, and known of ages, but never
understood.

Axial pins of binding needles,
torn from fresh tender fumes of former flames,
Gathering feathers of unfolding wings,
dripped and too heavy to lift.

Whispers sing hollow voices, echoed choices,
bellowing goliath sweet demise,
letting go the vector citizen of the self, the soul, and the scientist.

It's unnatural,
selected by distant lines, paths of roads alongside lonely red doors,
opening mortal clutches of passion yet to be identified.

Give in to it,
give it all you have.

Give me more!

It's only natural to be unnaturally loved.

You take it for granted
Never knowing how it is
To walk in my shoes
Because you're yet walking in the
Skin that protects you
See look mine ain't BULLETPROOF
And yes I admit that I
View life a lot more differently than you
Every day striving to exceed the expectations
That your fellow man set before my youth
Stunted that is.
See in reality we are a prized being
Purposefully classified as fool's gold
In return our being hidden
Behind the story UNTOLD
Leaving the true Ebony Essence
Of my generation
Bitter and Cold.

Droning cicadas
Static on the radio
Nonsense songs dirges

Beyond the bleak sky
To the stark and barren wood
The crows fly screaming

Meditations on the Color White

by Alexis Henderson

They say white is the color of purity
But there is nothing pure about
Hospital walls or bleached bones
Curling tendrils of cigarette smoke
White is the color of a deep wound before
The blood flows
And it is not white I see when
I close my eyes
White is not the warm dim
Beneath a blanket
The color of the sky in the midnight
Hours when all is hushed and quiet
White is not the color of a hot cup
Of coffee brewed strong
White is a lightning spearhead
White is two lips parted
Cold

The truth slit her open with a rusty scalpel
Beat her silly and left her there
On the cold kitchen floor
A bloodless slaughter

It was a bleary Tuesday evening
The pork roast burned in the oven
Tongues of smoke slithered, serpentine
In the back room the baby screamed

She lay there for a while
Thinking about long-gone things
Whispers and white lies
The culling

Beside her the man stood pinching
a singed cigarette eyes closed
Lips pursed
Grinning

Pepsi, Peanuts and Pride

by Brenda Hill

This quiet man, he rarely spoke to me.
So dark and tan, a vivid memory.
And in the wooden chair he always sat
With cards in hand, he wore a grey ball cap.

He'd drop the peanuts in his soda pop
And light a smoke, his ashtray sat on top.
The game he played was always Solitaire.
It wasn't strange to hear the old man swear.

He was a member of the Choctaw tribe.
I found this out upon the day he died.
The stories that they told around the grave
Were stories that I heard a bit too late.

It was a bitter cold and weary day.
We all had words we never got to say.
If only I had tried to speak to him
Instead I sat and watched him with each win.

I at eight and he at seventy-three
I guess I thought that there he'd always be
I never even got to say goodbye.
It broke my heart to see my Grandma cry

So lost she looked and sadly I did too.
Our hands embraced like mourners always do.
We stood beside the grave with heads bowed low
Among the ones he loved but could not show.

Friday in Paris

| by Brenda Hill

There was power in the air that day.
Inspiration blew in the breeze.
In the grass I spread my blanket grey
down underneath the trees.

Sipping a glass of chardonnay,
I watched them come and go.
Their peaceful walks, their easy pace,
always taking it slow.

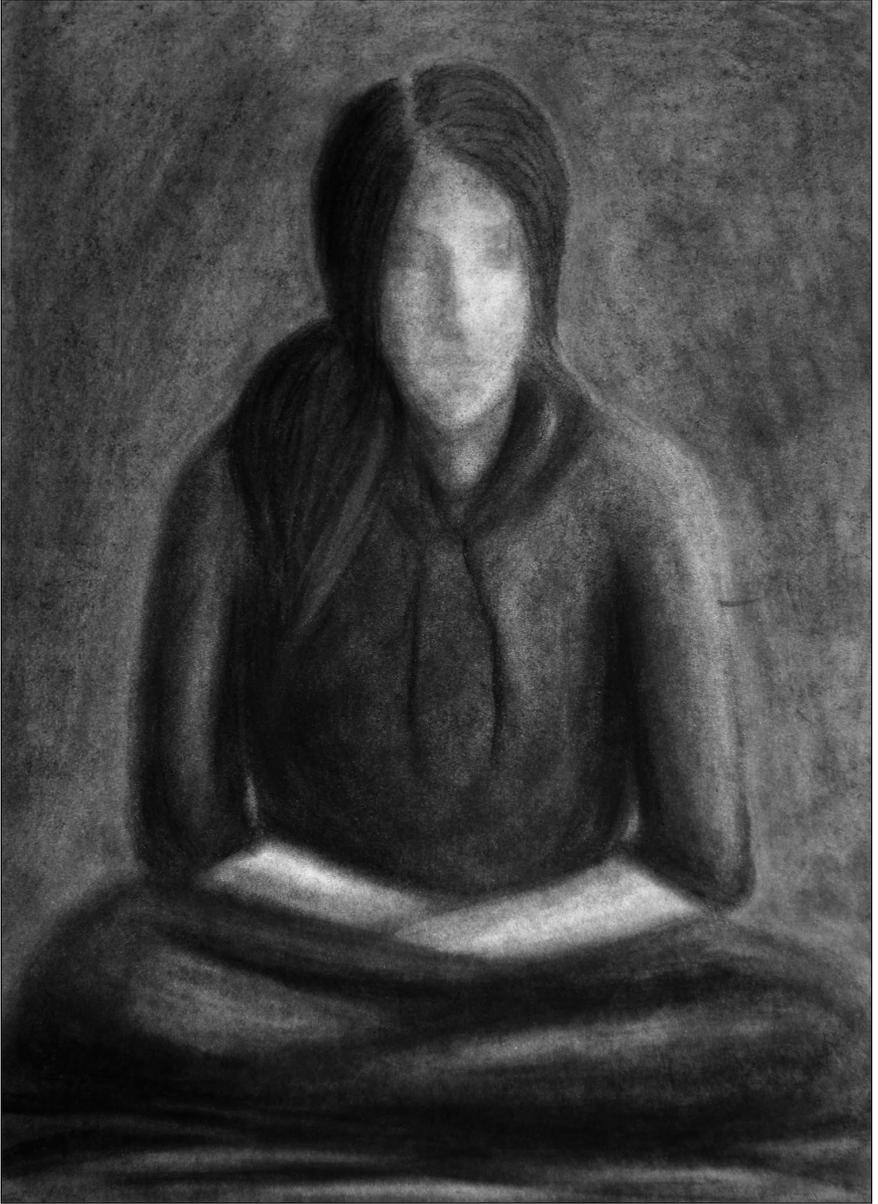
A reminder to cherish the time we have,
for time goes passing by.
So I chose to linger here a while
and let the poetic words fly.

In contemplation, I asked myself
with a heartfelt sincerity,
“If I die tomorrow did I grasp
life or did I let it grasp me?”

Supplications

by Brenda Hill |

Inside the aging church
lighting candles,
saying prayers.
A moment of solemnity
on a wooden chair.
A well-worn shawl with threads of grey
pulled up around her face.
With head bowed, eyes closed
asking for Amazing Grace.
The Spirit moves,
peace is found,
she rises from her seat.
With cane in hand
she turns around
it's then that our eyes meet.
With feeble steps
she walks my way
and stops beside my chair.
Her gentle kiss
upon my head
was proof that God was there.



Mary Beth's Cross

by Brenda Hill |

Here on the side
of a gravel road,
vibrancy met
lifelessness.

Worn out wooden handles
of a rusty post hole digger
cut through patches of grass,
into earth's layers
making way for the
marking of her journey.

Crippled with sorrow, we
erected this timber tribute, adorning
it with roses and tears. We saw her
effervescent spirit come to life that day
in the playfulness of a dragonfly.

Delicate pages,
empty of thoughts,
await the arrival
of words.

Words,
groomed
for their debut,
eager to be nestled
among others.

Finding their way
from deep within,
they come together,
one united voice
to be heard.

Whether unnoticed, skimmed,
or deeply gazed upon, when
you find the heart of
it, you've found a poem.

Cradle Song Blues

by Brenda Hill |

Even Momma needs a lullaby
A sweet serenade when life is rough
Never mind that she might seem tough
Momma needs a lullaby

Even Momma needs a lullaby
When uncertainties linger near
Struggling to mask tear after tear
Momma needs a lullaby

Even Momma needs a lullaby
A touch, a sweet embrace
The comfort of a smiling face
Yes, even Momma needs a lullaby.

Addiction

| by Brenda Hill —

I don't want to stop.
I never want the point to dull.
Let it pour over and through me,
out onto the page.

Symphony No. 7

by Brenda Hill |

Beats pound
like a drum,
making
a war call.

Breath exhales
like a soft tap
of sheepskin
drumsticks
whispering
a sad song.

Peace and
anxiety bang
against each other
like untuned cymbals,
creating
chaos.

Worries begin
on the sax, on the horn,
always improv night,
playing
the blues.

Thoughts race 'round like
an electric guitar
screaming
heavy metal.

Serenity sits near,
with harp in hand.
Wanting someone to hear her
strumming
the chords.

The orchestra, the maestro,
walk away from the stage.
It's the arrangement of
an imperfect love song.

Fatal Attacks

by Brenda Hill |

All jacked up on heartache.
All strung out on pain.
Numbed by fears and
bombarding thoughts,
I'm battling the blame.

I'm not a switch

| by Bill Lisbon

Sit. Stare.

Wait for words. Never there
when you want them.

Wait for wires to crisscross and spark something.

Hard angles are opportunities for crashing,
confrontations for coming together.

Wait for signals across space and time zones.

The time here is different there, and it takes longer, lasts.

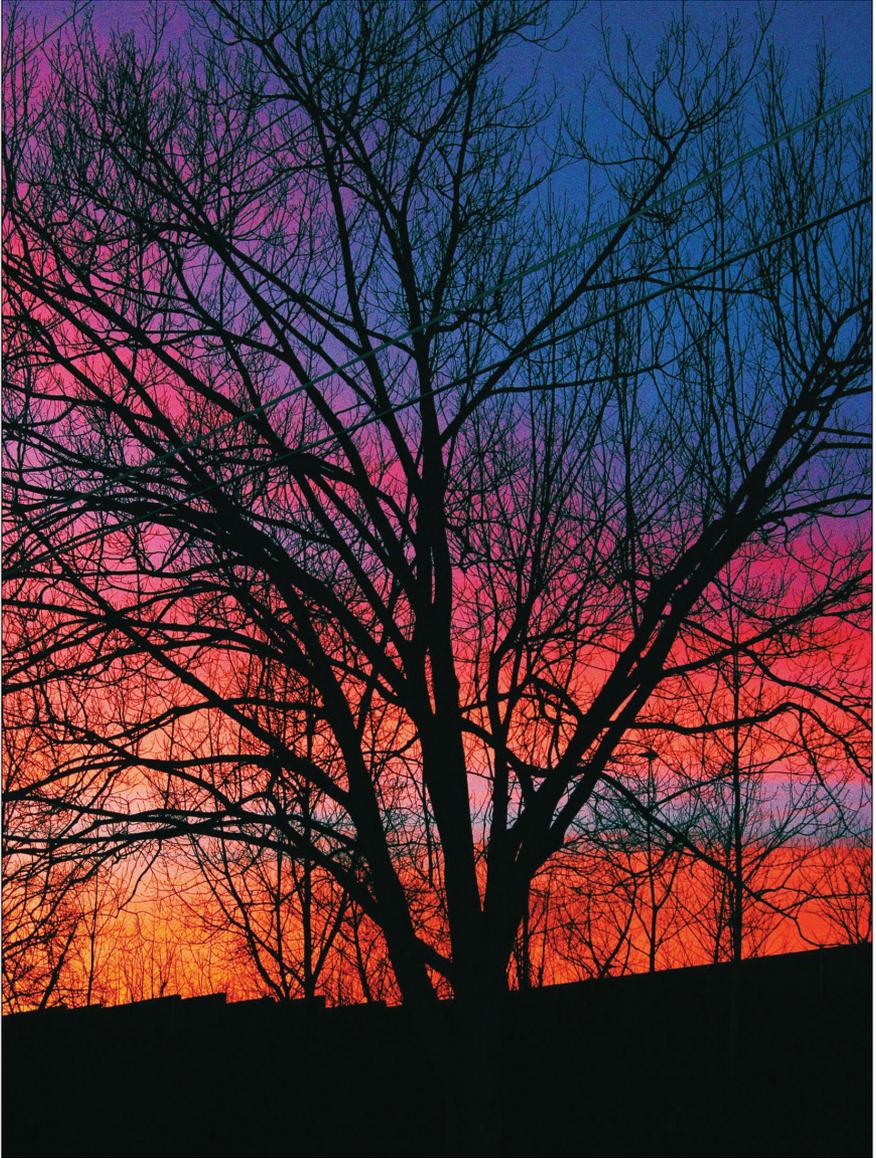
Desires crossed, hardwired.

Too many words when you only want one.

I'm not a switch.

Stop staring at me, and start.

COLORS OF THE WIND



— photograph by Asia Wheeler |

The Mere Song on Him

| by Ciera Love

I am a strand of hair on the pillow
I am the stray cat peeking through a window
I am the ripple that goes against the tide
I am the red popsicle juices that line a child's summer smile
I am the morning fog, a blush of greys
I am a Tyger burning bright in the forests of the night
I am the texture of worn wood
I am the dulllest star
I am the warmth of midnight
I am the sun in your eyes
I am the burnt sienna on the leaves of the fall
I am the calm just around the riverbend
I am a palette of the same color
I am a bird walking to its destination
I am a light flickering in the alleyway of Chicago
I am a gust of wind in the eye of Hugo
I am the wool of an aging lamb
I am the entire consciousness of these things

You see, I am barely alive, I am barely alive
I stand parallel to the world
I stand parallel to religion
I stand parallel to the only begotten son of Him
I am all that is unnoticed
You see, I am barely alive, I am barely alive

And The Home of The Blues

by Ciera Love |

Why keep society in such a place
where ghosts and goblins inform the masses?
Where some slip through cracks and teach our classes
and we wonder why generations face
constant backlash when ignorance can be easily traced.
Sparkle silver and shine our best glasses
but close our eyes to all man-made classes.
United States in emergency states.

Just once I want to turn on the TV
and see life, liberty, and the truth.
Another name. Another school. We bleed
red, white, and blue but won't cut on the news.
Where do we go from here? We're empty.
Who listens when you're tired of the blues?

This Is Not A War Poem

| by Ciera Love

This is a poem about agony
and defeat.
About men and women
and children without a parent on holidays.
Or birthdays.
Or at recitals.
Or in the bleachers.
Or on the couch
in front of the TV with them
watching their idols.
It's about children without a parent for
the rest of their lives.
It's about sacrifice.
It's about adults sending love
through care packages
and missing sleep for
phone calls to foreign time zones.
This is a poem about cyclones.
And drones.
And stones that
jingle in a camouflage bag
alongside the things they carried.
It's about the people they married.
This is a poem about wishing
and missing first steps and words.
A poem about the last ones they heard
before.
The war.

Plumbum Glory

by Ciera Love |

It gets dull around here.
Right to left.
Write to rest.
Opaqueness one can hear.

It's only the poison that's feared,
but there's never enough
grey on white.
A beauty that blinds in the light.

There's always a chip.
There's always a crack.
Making marks in a world of cursive.
There's never too soft a surface.

Sit back.
Be led.
By lead.
And lead.

No cereal in my bowl but my prayer
when I got on the bus was that the lights
would be on when I returned home.
Not that the nights weren't cold.
Not that my clothes were my own
but it's hard to keep a smile when even
the church can't unfold
the mess of the world.
No tutus in my drawer but I twirled
in the mirror just in case their salary curled
and hurled me on the stage.
Sidelining my dreams.
Bench warming I've seen star players without
prayers not miss a shot
and I just wanted one.

Yesteryear

by Ciera Love |

Perhaps it was the shirt.

Perhaps it was the hat.

Hell. It could've been my sunglasses on top.

Whatever it was,

she looked at me,

and I gazed right on back.

We didn't smile.

I didn't blink,

but she did.

We were in sync.

We got a glimpse of clichés.

We would say nothing then,

but that day

she looked at me,

and I gazed right on back at her.

Coming Around the Mountain

| by Ciera Love

Dependency falls near the bottom.
Valleys. Alleyways. Everything opaque.
Turn the corner and fornicate
for no reason
in every season
without even a feeling.
Coming down.
Coming around.
Less often.
More venturing.
Not knowing where.
Not wanting to know where.

YOU AND WHAT ARMY?



photograph by Bill Lisbon |

I'm not the baby anymore;
there's another
so they won't read to me anymore.
I have my brother
but he won't pick on me anymore.
I kind of like our wrestles on the floor.
That will be no more.
I'm not sure of what's in store.
I'll share my room
and have to move out soon
But they won't care anymore.
They're all so happy.
What are these tears in my eyes for?
I'm not the baby anymore.

I Don't Even Know Where I'm At

by Ciera Love |

219 days away
and I'm not sure where I'll stay
or if I'll stay
or if I'll go
or if I should go back.
I should pack.
I know it's 219 days away
and I'm not in class.
Very few ask
about the new mask.
Maybe they don't notice it's new.
There are lions and tigers and bills
of mine.
and in due time
it'll be 219 days.
365 in the past
I would've laughed at
the content of this poem
and I'd probably be sober
but I grasp this paper
not wanting to turn the page
not wanting it to be 218 days.

Silhouette So Far

| by Ciera Love

The sky's the only one who gets praised for changing.

Sunset. Sunrise.

We've all got phases

but no one says to me

to "hide behind the trees"

or that they'll "wait until she raises."

I mean rises.

The sun is in my eye.

I'm right on the horizon.

Behind me there's a sunset, life, and a ton of truth.

I swear there are pinks and all sorts of hues.

I get lost in the depths of the blues

and of you I often wonder.

You should have seen me in living color.

Go Deeper

by Ciera Love |

Tonight I want to turn you on.

Make the light switch click in your brain so you feel what I'm saying
and drip with my pain.

Tonight I want to wet your cheeks
with the same tears I've feared for years
to let fall and reach the curl of my lips.

Tonight I want to equip you
with all the shit in my mind.

As the sun goes down
I want you to press against my chest
and hear what a broken heart sounds like
at its best.

White Teeth

| by Emily Miller

I want to crack the code
on your eyes so that you
can open them wide and see the
bright lights of the city and the
white breath of the kids that go as
fast as cigarettes behind the shed
and have a new appreciation for the
tempo in your wrists

Having Fun with Debt and Jokes

by Emily Miller |

there's something to say about my culture
our culture, these new and evolving people of
so many beliefs and loves
i love how things are becoming Things, how
we are starting to read obscure quotes and
and communicate in all these
different ways
the older generation says we are ungrateful
feel as if we are entitled to snatch what we
want, what we need, they don't understand
we take what we need because
there isn't much left after that
i go to school with some of the brightest people
i have ever known and i'm convinced that i ever will know
because they're that fucking smart, you know?
and it's true, sometimes i hate them
hate their grades and their achievements because
because i'm the dumb one, say you're an idiot for your
pathetic eighty as a test grade while i struggle for my sixty
i feel entitled to respect and knowledge, i feel entitled to
a load of things, yes
i hate that none of this new
bright
great success has a part of me, but still, there is success
and that is so much bigger than me, you see
everything is so much bigger as a girl, as
a daughter, as
a sister, as
a sufferer, as
a victim, that's the, that's
the kicker
the older generation calls me, us, everyone

a self proclaimed victim
refusing to accept the blame for the things they have
done, the things they have chosen that i
have never had a part of
this debt was not what i wanted
this uncertainty was not what i wanted
this hate
this fear
this unknown, great and terrifying, not in
an enormous black hole sort of way, because at
least that shit has some science behind it
no, my unknown is a white room with no doors
all simplicity but so complex
i want out but there's no way to leave, nothing
to escape because it's all just absence
my unknown is a blank paycheck in the
same way
that i don't know how i'll ever be able to
write my costs, the costs of fucking
living, how dare i want to have quality,
never quite be able to bring myself to bring out that black
ink pen to write in my costs, and
in the same way that i don't know if i
will get a job to give me confidence in signing
that fucking check, the money
to feel like i'm able to move
evolve
love
with this new world

Something Wicked This Way Lives

by Emily Miller |

at age eleven you held a pencil and said you're going to be a writer
you are going to be a poet, you are going to create but stop
fast forward, add years, and look at you now
you aren't a poet you aren't a writer you are nothing
you're pathetic hope and too much stress and not enough
not enough breath not enough drive not enough smarts
you're nothing and you aren't eleven, you're almost grown
but look, you've grown something
you've grown a *thing*, a nasty, horrible thing
it's a mass and it's all you, it's all your failures all the rejections
all those cuss words thrown at you like the glass shards from when you
hit that window and
it has glass teeth, that glass, it has words and it has a tongue to cut
and hands to slide across you, dirty, muddy hands that reach in and
twist you inside out
you aren't a writer you aren't a poet
but you're a gardener, you're a parent
to that, that thing
the only expectations you have now are the ticks of the timer
going off on your phone, the waiting and the knowledge
that one day you're going to not be a writer, you aren't going to be a
gardener, but look. you won't be nothing either
you get to be your very own monster, and isn't that beautiful,
you always wanted to create

PARIS METRO



photograph by Bill Lisbon

For You

by Emily Miller |

I want to know what it's like
to pour myself into the cracks you
have on the shattered wasteland of
your bones
and press so close your breath becomes
ours

I want to kiss your broken mouth
and love your sharp teeth
and become a part of you that you'd never
throw away

Walking down the streets
I'm always afraid.
Working long hours every week
And still less I am paid.

Considered inferior
For things beyond my control.
So many restrictions
They begin to take their toll.

And now I feel angry
Now I feel repressed.
It's time to stand up
Time to clean up this mess.

I am human
You can admit it's true,
So then it's time to believe
That I'm equal to you.

I deserve the same treatment,
Have earned the same pay,
Given birth to our future,
Done my share to pave the way.

This body is my own
Not here for your pleasure.
Value my autonomy
And you will see true treasure.

Time to call your bluff
We will stand our ground
Enough is enough
For greatness, we are bound.

No longer your victims
We let go of our anger
Together we stand united
The call is yours to answer.

You pay no mind
to the dirt streaked on your face
until a motherly hand
scrubs your skin clean
she presses too hard
and leaves your cheek feeling raw

Later, at bathtime
the purge begins
all the proof of your adventures
the dust and bits of grass stuck to your skin
collect in the drain
harsh fingers raze your scalp
fruity suds seep into your eyes
and get into your mouth to leave a sour taste

A scratchy towel to dry your skin
and plastic teeth tug at your hair
fighting until each tangle is gone
even though it will all return by tomorrow

Outsider

by Taylor Piscitello |

I am a square peg forced to sand its edges
I am the “problem child”
I am the one that talks back
I am the one that speaks out of turn
I am the one that steps out of line
I am the one that breaks the pattern
I am the one that gets strange looks
I am the piece to a different puzzle

But I am whole, I am whole
I remain despite disapproval
I remain to find success
I remain outside of my condition
I am whole, I am whole

Haiku #9

| by Taylor Riley —

booming black thunder
behind dense clear beaded drapes
raised eyes to the sky

NOTHING EVER DOES



photograph by Ciera Love

... On a Turkish Beach

| by Taylor Riley —

The Limp Body lay childishly
Upon the sun-bleached sand
 Waiting its turn
In an overtly selfless manner

 It was endearing
 In the eyes of the world

 Conversely
 The other bodies cry out in misery
 & therefore, seem cloaked by self-pity

vulgus

by Adam Trawick |

the idea sprung,
from where no one knows.
the idea sung,
eternity it goes.

rest easy in your cluster,
among your coterie;
for even rebellion
is a facet of conformity.

capering little leaf,
the wind suspires to the ground,
towards the dun colored morass
where the eglantine is thought to be found.

regards to those,
whom singularity was said to save,
left latticed as the manqué artisan
by the spiteful and caitiff knave
who promised a satiable pabulum:
worthy food for thought;
but the crowd's contumely showed,
they thought it not.

what silk-whispered idea spun the filament
quick as the light-bulb cracks?
heads rise for a glimpse
before the electric web retracts.

All the while the idea sprung
from where no one knows
as a deceitful melody, forward it flows:
the idea sung
eternity it goes.

Three years since
my son, only three,
passed away in the night;
sound asleep, peacefully.

Restless and sundered;
queried I am left
quietly outnumbered
once begotten now bereft.

A breakfast for kings,
satiable even to the greediest belly.
Gluttony wasn't his plight, but hunger for
ephemeral seeing its entelechy.

Quiddity, it seems,
rarely manifests
if the form of forms
is all that is held to jest.

I told him a joke,
each and every night, adorning
the waking moment with the punch-line
each and every morning.

On the night he passed,
my son told one to me:
God and Shakespeare walk into a bar and get in a fight.
Who wins—in the morning you'll see.

Glass

by Kat Trent |

Touching oxygen,
breathing through.
You held me tight
refusing me freedom.

Never did I say no.
Never did you give a yes.
Stuck between parallels
that come to divide.

Twists become turns,
the goes—now stops.
We won't meet again.
The clock rotates forward.

No Looking Back.

| by Kat Trent

Backpack, no food, thumb out.
These books have gotten heavier,
Traveling from state to state,
The libraries will never guess.
One book, one state, one chance.
Worlds of knowledge at my penniless tips,
They grow heavier with each word I gather.

I live off pity.
I sleep on benches.

I drag my weary toes down highways
That blend together in waves—
Like the mirages that loom on these empty roads.

I wander—aiming West
Like the tumble weeds that gloat past my sides.

Always West.

You Can't Spell Smother Without _____

by Kat Trent |

Crisp and rolling tides, they are asunder.
Grasping at my memories' shore to pass,
but lost am I to this storm much like thunder,
soaking up the rain like a blade of grass.

The longing want to hold you once again.
The fearful thoughts that tell me to let go.
You gave me so little, only this skin.
I knew I should have left you long ago.

It crept into my thoughts when I was young,
and held me close till I was older yet.
Your words were twisted like a devil's tongue,
a villain in a storybook, my threat.

Accursed to me, with ever smother,
Acknowledge me now, you wretched mother.

Stepford Suburbia

| by Vance White II

I am just a man, okay.
Just a man who tries to stay
Away from those who wish to prey
Upon my simple kindly ways

I am just a man
Who mows his lawn
Every other week
Until the summer's gone
And then it's time to rake the leaves

Who humors the small child who stands
With lemonade, and an open hand
For 50 cents to buy
Some gum or book or a new toy

Some may say that I
Grow weary with each passing day
More mad and mad
But I'll still say that
I am just a man, okay?
Who tries to keep
Everything just the same
With each and every passing day,

Okay?

I sit here and I say to them
This calm and simple phrase, and
Yet it does not seem to faze them
And each and every passing day
They prey upon my simple ways

But either way
I can, and will
Tell them I'm just a man,
Who still
Tries to stay far away,
Yes, far away
From those who leer with their dismay
They try to hide
The people who still wish to lie
But despite their fears, they don't subside
In wishing that I would confide
In seeing things in black and white
With not a single inch of gray,
With each and every passing day
With each and every passing day.
They try and prey upon my simple kindly ways.

Pretty Good Week So Far.

Hamlet Limericks

| by Various

When the whole world doesn't believe
in the evil that might be conceived
you will not find vengeance
in serving your sentence
you must leave a father bereaved
— Christopher Petry

There once was a man named Claudy
who was indeed very naughty.
He killed his brother
then married Hamlet's mother.
Now Hamlet needs to learn karate.
— Jaia Jones

Insanity causes such sorrow
a mind for darkness to borrow
it takes a short time
to deliver my rhyme
for Hamlet's insanity comes tomorrow
— James Brinson

"Hamlet Before I Read It"

To show that I am not lazy
I wrote about Hamlet who's crazy.
There are scenes filled with dread
and people end up dead
and the rest to me is a bit hazy.
— Vance White II

*(the preceding limericks were selected from those composed by students
of Dr. Robert Kilgore's British Literature I class
during an impromptu creative writing exercise.)*

BANG?



photograph by Eric Danko

Drama

Alexis Henderson | 'The Investigation' | 86

Bill Lisbon | 'The Good Life' | 94

Taylor Riley | 'A play about imagination' | 100

The Investigation

by Alexis Henderson

Characters

DETECTIVE: A middle-aged

white man with a military cut

WOMAN: Ann Roberts, a slight, white
woman in her early 30s

(A police station interrogation room.)

DETECTIVE: Say your name into the microphone.

WOMAN: I don't have one.

DETECTIVE: What's the one on your driver's license?

WOMAN: Ann.

DETECTIVE: Ann, why are you here?

WOMAN: I don't know.

DETECTIVE: Why do you think you're here?

WOMAN: I don't know.

DETECTIVE: *(short pause)*

WOMAN: Your watch is nice. Did your daughter give it to you?

DETECTIVE: Let's consider what's at hand.

WOMAN: It was only a question.

DETECTIVE: I'm the one asking the questions.

WOMAN: Oh.

DETECTIVE: Where were you the night of the twenty-fifth?

WOMAN: Of April?

DETECTIVE: December.

WOMAN: Away.

DETECTIVE: Away where? Away from what?

WOMAN: I don't remember.

DETECTIVE: What do you remember?

WOMAN: The crash.

DETECTIVE: Could you describe it?

WOMAN: I crashed. In my car. It's a Buick. I don't know the model.

DETECTIVE: What were you doing prior the crash?

WOMAN: Talking to my husband.

DETECTIVE: What were you talking about?

WOMAN: Our wedding.

DETECTIVE: And what did he say?

WOMAN: I really like that watch.

DETECTIVE: Ann, what was your husband saying? What was he doing prior to the crash?

WOMAN: Is it Armani?

DETECTIVE: The question, Ann.

WOMAN: He was asleep.

DETECTIVE: How long was he sleeping?

WOMAN: Awhile. Only a little while.

DETECTIVE: Was your husband on any prescription pills?

WOMAN: Yes. Why do you ask?

DETECTIVE: Was there bad blood between you and your husband?

WOMAN: No.

DETECTIVE: What time did you—

WOMAN: I think it is Armani, your watch I mean.

DETECTIVE: It's going to be a long night if you continue like this.

WOMAN: I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm messing this up. Can we start again?

Are you recording this?

DETECTIVE: Let's go back to the question about bad blood.

WOMAN: Okay. Yes, yes there was. My husband was diabetic.

DETECTIVE: I mean did your husband and you quarrel? Did you fight? Did you have marital troubles?

WOMAN: Yes. No. I don't know. I'm confused.

DETECTIVE: How about you have some water.

WOMAN: I don't like the taste of it. I only drink Dasani.

DETECTIVE: Where was your husband when your car crashed Ann?

WOMAN: He was asleep.

DETECTIVE: Yes but where?

WOMAN: In the back of the car.

DETECTIVE: In the back seat?

WOMAN: Behind the back seat. He was in the trunk.

DETECTIVE: Why was he in the trunk?

WOMAN: I don't know.

DETECTIVE: That's not an answer.

WOMAN: I'm sorry. I'm bad at this. Can we begin again?

DETECTIVE: No.

WOMAN: I'm sorry.

DETECTIVE: No need to apologize. Let's go back to the bit about the trunk.

WOMAN: Okay.

DETECTIVE: How did your husband get in there?

WOMAN: I don't know.

DETECTIVE: Did he ask to go into the trunk?

WOMAN: I don't remember.

DETECTIVE: How long was he in the trunk?

WOMAN: A while.

DETECTIVE: Give me your best estimation.

WOMAN: About thirty minutes maybe.

DETECTIVE: That's about as long as the drive from your house to the place you crashed. Right?

WOMAN: How do you know where my house is?

DETECTIVE: Your license.

WOMAN: Oh.

DETECTIVE: You look nervous Ann.

WOMAN: I think ... I'd like to talk to my sister.

DETECTIVE: Perhaps she'll come visit you.

WOMAN: I'd rather visit her.

DETECTIVE: Ann, you do understand that this situation is a grave one, don't you?

WOMAN: Yes. It was a bad crash.

DETECTIVE: Yes. Yes it was.

WOMAN: Is there any way we could adjourn this meeting? I feel a little under the weather. I feel sick.

DETECTIVE: No.

WOMAN: Why not?

DETECTIVE: Because you're not free to leave.

WOMAN: Why? Is it because I crashed?

DETECTIVE: Because your husband was in the trunk. He was found in the trunk by my officer.

WOMAN: Oh.

DETECTIVE: Do you have a history of mental illness?

WOMAN: I'm anxious. I have anxiety. I take pills for that, Xanax, I took one today. Just before I left the house.

DETECTIVE: Is there anything else? Aside from the anxiety?

WOMAN: Sometimes when I'm stressed I bite my nails.

DETECTIVE: I meant—

WOMAN: I bite them bloody. Right down to the quick. It hurts a bit but it makes me feel better. My husband didn't understand that. He didn't understand anything about me.

DETECTIVE: I see.

WOMAN: People think we love each other. Sometimes I think that's true but-

DETECTIVE: But ...?

WOMAN: I don't know. I don't know.

DETECTIVE: Please, continue.

WOMAN: I'm going to be really messed up because of all of this, aren't I? I'm going to be really, really messed up.

DETECTIVE: I can't say.

WOMAN: Do you think I'm a bad person?

DETECTIVE: It doesn't matter what I think.

WOMAN: What does then?

(An officer enters, whispers something into the DETECTIVE's ear)

WOMAN: The watch you're wearing ... I've seen one like it. Rose gold, with little leaves engraved on the side.

DETECTIVE: My wife's watch is like that. She has one to match. Just like this one.

WOMAN: Does she? That's sweet. My husband and I we use to wear

couples jewelry sometimes. I had a bracelet to match his necklace—

DETECTIVE: It had the initials in this side. C.V.P.

WOMAN: Oh.

DETECTIVE: My wife wore it, always. Like a wedding ring.

WOMAN: Oh.

DETECTIVE: Charlotte Valorie Potters. That's her name. Charlotte. I call her Charlie.

WOMAN: *(Takes a drink of water.)*

DETECTIVE: She's been away since last week. To visit her sister in the Appalachia. She has a cabin up there. North of here.

WOMAN: How quaint.

DETECTIVE: Do you know her?

WOMAN: Your wife?

DETECTIVE: Yes Ann. My wife.

WOMAN: Why yes. Yes I do. Or I think I do. The memories are a bit blurry. Everything's all fuzzy. The Xanax maybe, or the stress of it all.

DETECTIVE: Where is my wife Ann? Where is my wife?

WOMAN: At the house. My house. She has her watch on. She has the watch. She had it on when I found her with him. I thought people were supposed to slip off their wedding rings when they slept with other people. That's not the way it was. Not when I found my husband. Not when I found your wife.

DETECTIVE: No. No.

WOMAN: You can start all over now. A little bruised but you can still begin again. When you think about it, when you really think about it, I did us a favor. I'm sorry but I did. You won't see it that way of course. It'll be a little while but you'll come to. Pills might help. You can ask your doctor for them. You'll get them, I'm sure. For as long as you need them. Anything you need to forget all of this.

DETECTIVE: Where's my wife? Where is she?

WOMAN: Second floor, in the bathroom off the master bedroom and in the tub. Naked.

DETECTIVE: That can't be.

WOMAN: Breathe. Have some water, water will help. The betrayal can

be bitter at first. Once you're over it you can think clearly.

DETECTIVE: I don't want water. I don't drink it from the tap.

WOMAN: We're alike that way. I think we're a lot alike.

DETECTIVE: Is she gone? Tell me the truth is she gone? Did you kill her?

WOMAN: It was a pretty watch. You were good to give it to her. That's something that a good husband would do.

DETECTIVE: Answer the question, Ann. Please just answer the question.

WOMAN: You know, these things do happen. Call it consummation, call it life, but they happen. Sometimes you just have to roll with the punches. Pander the watch to a pawnshop owner. Keep going.

DETECTIVE: That bitch.

WOMAN: There you go. See, it feels good. Do you see how good it feels?

DETECTIVE: She betrayed me.

WOMAN: They always do. Makes you feel odd on the inside, but it's good. It's good for you.

DETECTIVE: I can't breathe.

WOMAN: Yes you can. In through the nose and out again. Take the watch off if it makes you feel better. I'll keep it for you.

DETECTIVE: No. No I want the watch.

WOMAN: Mementos. I get it. Well all want those. I've got my husband's wedding ring in my bra. Safekeeping. That sort of thing.

DETECTIVE: I don't believe this. I can't believe all of this is happening.

WOMAN: It's okay. You're going to be okay. We're victims in this, you and I, but it's going to be okay. After all of this is over we can go out for coffee and beignets. I'm so fond of those. I like the sugar on top of them. Like sweet snow almost.

DETECTIVE: I like beignets.

WOMAN: Everyone does. They're food for the soul. Food for the grieving and we are doing that aren't we?

DETECTIVE: Yes. Yes we are.

WOMAN: We're broken both of us. Positively shattered.

DETECTIVE: We are. We are that.

WOMAN: We deserve something sweet after all of this stress; after all we've been through.

DETECTIVE: We could begin again.

WOMAN: Yes, yes we could.

DETECTIVE: Emerge from all of this.

WOMAN: Move to Mexico maybe, or Guatemala.

DETECTIVE: We could escape.

WOMAN: Set ourselves free. We could be free, the two of us. Wouldn't that be nice? Wouldn't that be lovely? A quaint cottage on the beach with toucans roosting in palm trees and turquoise waves crashing to white beaches—

DETECTIVE: Ann—

WOMAN: We could bathe in the ocean and eat mango gelato for breakfast, weave baskets and take long walks. Start a seashell collection.

DETECTIVE: Ann?

WOMAN: We would be so happy, the two of us. I think we could really grow to like each other. We could be okay.

DETECTIVE: Ann.

WOMAN: Yes officer?

DETECTIVE: I'm not married. I've never been married.

WOMAN: But the watch—

DETECTIVE: It's Armani. You were right about that.

WOMAN: And Charlotte—

DETECTIVE: Officers found her body over an hour ago. I have the pictures of her in the tub. Would you like to see them?

WOMAN: No. No I wouldn't.

DETECTIVE: Very well then.

WOMAN: What about the watch?

DETECTIVE: A gift from my mother. Purely coincidental.

WOMAN: I don't believe in coincidences.

DETECTIVE: And I don't believe in letting the guilty walk free.

WOMAN: So you lied to me then? You lied to me about all of it.

DETECTIVE: Yes.

WOMAN: You coerced me, played with me. You tricked me.

DETECTIVE: Into telling the truth.

WOMAN: I've given myself away haven't I? I have completely given myself away.

DETECTIVE: Yes. You have.

WOMAN: A mess. I've made such a mess of things. He made me make such a mess of things.

DETECTIVE: Ann Roberts—

WOMAN: Don't say it. I can't bear to hear you say it.

DETECTIVE: You're under arrest.

(End.)

The Good Life

by Bill Lisbon |

Characters

HANK: elderly, white man, not bald

GERTY: elderly, white woman;

Hank's wife

LOUISE: woman, age in 40s; Hank's

and Gerty's daughter

NURSE: any variety

(A typical patient room in a hospital or a nursing home.

*HANK is lying in bed with an IV in his arm
and a cannula in his nose.*

GERTY enters and sits in the chair beside the bed.)

GERTY: Good morning, dear. How are you feeling today?

HANK: About the same.

GERTY: The doctor have anything new to say?

HANK: Nope. I'm just an old clock about to run out of batteries.

GERTY: Oh, Hank.

HANK: Yep, this old chassis is almost out of gas.

GERTY: I wish you wouldn't be so flippant about it.

HANK: Well I ain't going to cry and moan over something that I know's coming.

GERTY: Hank.

HANK: Now, now. We talked about it.

GERTY: I know, I know. Save my tears for your funeral. *(Kisses HANK's forehead.)*

HANK: Besides, it's been a good run.

GERTY: Yes, I suppose it has.

HANK: I never had jury duty.

GERTY: *(brief laugh)* Well, I had it three times.

HANK: I never had my car stolen.

GERTY: Even during that week you spent in St. Louis.

HANK: I don't see why anyone would want to steal a car in the city. Streets are so crowded seems like everyone must already got one. And even if they didn't, you'd end up sitting in traffic so long, you should have walked in the first place.

GERTY: *(with sudden recollection)* Oh, Louise is coming by today.

HANK: She bringing her boys?

GERTY: No, they're in school.

HANK: On a Saturday?

GERTY: It's Tuesday, Hank.

HANK: Hmm. Wish she'd bring the boys. Ain't going to have many more times to see them.

GERTY: She's worried they won't understand.

HANK: Worried? They're practically teenagers. It would do them good to see.

GERTY: You know our Louise.

HANK: No, I never figured out that girl.

GERTY: You know what I mean, Henry.

HANK: *(smiling)* Mmm. I like it when you call me Henry.

GERTY: Which is why I don't do it very often. Don't want to wear it out.

How was your breakfast?

HANK: *(sour-faced)* Which time?

GERTY: Oh, Hank.

HANK: I don't even know why I eat it.

(a moment of silence.)

*The characters don't look at each other or interact;
they seem to be lost in their own thoughts.)*

HANK: I never broke a bone.

GERTY: You broke your nose that time you got in a fight with Richie Wilson.

HANK: Nose don't count.

GERTY: *(shaking head, amused)* Defending my honor.

HANK: He had it coming.

GERTY: You never got fired from a job.

HANK: Nope.

GERTY: Quit a few.

HANK: Yeah, but quitting on your own terms is alright.

(enter LOUISE)

LOUISE: Good morning! How you feeling, Dad? *(to GERTY)* You been here long?

GERTY: Oh, just a couple of minutes. We've just been busy thinking about how good life's been.

LOUISE: *(mildly surprised)* Yeah?

GERTY: Oh, yes. Your father was just saying how he's never broken a bone, or had a car stolen. Heck, he's even made it through without having to sit on a jury.

(HANK and GERTY laugh.)

LOUISE starts to breathe deeply and get visibly upset.)

HANK: I never lost my hair.

GERTY: Unlike your three brothers.

HANK: And my sister.

(HANK and GERTY laugh.)

LOUISE: You're not serious?

HANK: *(seeing that LOUISE is upset)* What's the matter, Lou?

LOUISE: I don't know what's worse. The fact that you're not remembering the good times or that you're thinking about a bunch of horrible things. Did you ever have to, I don't know, rob a bank to pay off your gambling debts?

HANK: No, I never did. That's a good one though, even though I was never much of gambler.

GERTY: Now, you always bought those raffle tickets from the volunteer firemen.

HANK: Raffles ain't gambling.

GERTY: You never won anything.

LOUISE: See? This is what I'm talking about. Why are you remembering such insignificant things? Why don't you remember your wedding day or your honeymoon?

HANK: We never really had a honeymoon.

GERTY: Money was tight back then on account of the drought.

LOUISE: (*frustrated*) Well, there's plenty of other stuff you could be thinking about, especially nowadays.

GERTY: How about the day you had Tommy and we didn't know about it for four hours because Hank didn't hang up the phone right. Luke kept getting a busy signal. Hank never could hang up the phone right.

LOUISE: Umm, ok. That's not really what I—

HANK: I never get to see my grandkids anymore.

GERTY: Now, Hank.

LOUISE: Dad, we talked about this.

HANK: No, you decided your boys need protecting for some reason.

You watch, they'll grow up weak.

LOUISE: They don't need to see bad things to have a good life.

HANK: So now your old man's a bad thing?

LOUISE: No, I just ... I don't want them to remember you like this! Stuck in a bed, tubes running in and out of you. Maybe if you get a little better and go back home.

HANK: Lou, I'm not going back home.

LOUISE: Maybe if you tried harder. If you let them—

HANK: Nothing's going to stop this. I'm going to die in this bed.

LOUISE: Mom, tell him to stop.

GERTY: He's right, dear.

(*NURSE enters, interrupting argument.*)

NURSE: Time for your check-up, Mr. Petersen.

(*NURSE puts thermometer in HANK's mouth
and starts to take his blood pressure.*)

GERTY takes LOUISE by the arm
and leads her to the far side of the room or out in the hall.)

LOUISE: There's a reason he still has his hair.

GERTY: Louise, now you stop this right now.

LOUISE: But, Mom, he's—

GERTY: Dying. He's dying, so he doesn't need you making it worse.

LOUISE: Worse? How can it be any worse?

GERTY: I've tried talking to you, but you keep storming off and refusing to listen. And I've had just about enough.

LOUISE: I don't understand why you aren't taking this more seriously. Every time I come here you two are either talking about something trivial or making jokes. Now you're talking about things you never even did.

GERTY: What's wrong with being thankful? Besides, you're not here enough to hear everything we talk about.

LOUISE: I'm ... I just can't ... This place ...

GERTY: Do you remember Stetson?

LOUISE: No.

GERTY: Yes, you do. That dog got sick and was going to suffer if we didn't put him to sleep. Your Dad tried to make you ride with him to the vet, but you hid in your room and told yourself Stetson only ran away.

LOUISE: And?

GERTY: And we let it go, except you are the one that's been running away. And your father regrets that, and he doesn't want your kids to do it too.

LOUISE: You're changing the subject.

GERTY: No, I'm not. You have to accept that this is a part of life. It's not a pretty part of life, and your father understands that. So we have our laughs while we can.

LOUISE: Then aren't you doing the same thing? Aren't you avoiding it too?

GERTY: Maybe a little. But we know it's coming. You don't want to admit it is. Now, you stop being selfish because this is what he wants.

LOUISE: I'm not the only one being selfish.

GERTY: (*knowingly*) No. No, Louise. This may be the most selfless thing your father's ever done.

(NURSE *exits*.)

GERTY and LOUISE *return to HANK's bedside.*)

LOUISE: Ok, Dad. I've got to go.

HANK: But you just got here.

LOUISE: I know, but I have a lot of errands.

HANK: Alright.

(LOUISE *turns to leave, but stops and turns back.*)

LOUISE: I'll try to bring the boys by this weekend. (LOUISE *kisses*

HANK *on cheek*.)

I love you, dad.

HANK: I love you too, Lou.

(LOUISE *exits*.)

I'll never figure out that girl.

GERTY: She means well.

(*Beat*.)

HANK: I never got divorced.

GERTY: Probably because you would never be able to get remarried.

HANK: (*seriously*) I've never stopped loving you.

GERTY: (*sarcastically*) I thought about it.

HANK: I never had to watch my spouse die.

GERTY: Neither have I.

HANK: Yet.

(*End*.)

A play about imagination

by Taylor Riley |

Characters

JACK: a patient

KATE: a counselor

BETSY: a nurse

SCENE 1

(JACK is sitting on a bench in a courtyard in the back of a small mental hospital, looking at the sky. KATE sits with him.)

JACK: Why do you think the sun sits around like that all day? By itself, I mean. Sometimes, I wish it didn't. *(pause)* You know what happens when someone broods around like that. Wouldn't want someone like that looming over me all day.

KATE: Maybe it's right where it wants to be. A nice quiet place in the sky; sounds nice, doesn't it?

JACK: You're not wrong. It is awfully lonely up there, though. Like no one wants to be near him too long. *(pause)* The stars never stick around. Not long enough, anyway. The clouds just walk on by. Backs to him.

KATE: And what makes you think that they all have their backs to him?

JACK: Well, you can see their faces looking down on us, can't you?

KATE: Ahh, right you are.

JACK: Sometimes they jeer at him, you know. Boom at him, even. Could you imagine?

KATE: I guess not.

JACK: I could.

KATE: *(pause)* Haven't you ever seen the moon up there? With the sun.

JACK: I suppose. *(pause)* But only when he has the courage to ask her. It's out of pity, that's all it is. She's with the stars every night. The sun doesn't know it, but she is. *(pause)* She would never admit it, though. She's still sensitive enough.

KATE: So you think she's right? For doing that?

JACK: No one wants to feel any more lonely than the next person. That's

why she's doing it. It's not like she's really lying. *(pause)* She's doing the right thing, believe me.

KATE: I'm sure.

JACK: She's doing it for the right reason, believe me, ok? It's about protecting someone. Don't act like it's not. You're trying to make it sound like it's not, I know you.

KATE: I was just curious.

JACK: Curiosity killed the rat.

KATE: *(pause)* Are you hungry? Betsy tells me ham sandwiches for lunch.

JACK: I hate ham sandwiches.

KATE: *(laughs lightly)* They're the same ham sandwiches you loved last week.

JACK: I hate cold, soggy, week-old sandwiches.

KATE: Mm you're funny. *(pause)* What are you looking at?

JACK: That couple walking over there. They look happier right now than I think I've ever been.

KATE: Mm.

JACK: You didn't look.

KATE: Yes I did.

JACK: What kind of hat did the man have on?

KATE: *(pause)* It was a duck, Jack.

JACK: *(laughs)* You're sharp. If he waltzed in to a hat store, do you know what kind of hat he'd pick out? *(laughs)* Those are the kind of questions you people might never know the answer to. What else? A fedora.

KATE: *(with a laugh)* Right!

JACK: Ahh, was that a twitch of acknowledgment? I thought you people were trained better than that.

KATE: *(laughs)* I'm going to say hey to Bets, you in?

JACK: Mm.

(JACK and KATE walk inside, through twin doors, to a vast beige room with orderlies and patients mulling about. The sign above the doors reads:

"Bridgewater State Mental Hospital for the Criminally Insane.")

(End scene.)

SCENE 2

(Inside the hospital.

KATE whispers to BETSY as JACK walks up behind her.)

KATE: Stay out of trouble for me, Jack! *(laughs)* Bye, Bets!

BETSY: How are you feeling sir? You're looking fine this afternoon.

JACK: Less and less abnormal every day, Betsy.

(As he sits down on the plastic table, she sets down a tray with a ham sandwich, a glass of water, and a tiny paper cup of pills.

She sets down the pills in front of Jack, purposefully.)

BETSY: Here Jack; this first.

JACK: *(Pauses, glances at her.)* Sure thing, Bets.

(JACK throws back pills, and begins to eat the sandwich quickly.)

BETSY: I'm glad you like it so much.

JACK: Getting rid of that dirty brown lining helps.

BETSY: I'll let Kate know.

JACK: *(pause)* You shouldn't let her know too much. There's something strange about her.

BETSY: Okay, Jack. She's okay though, you know that.

JACK: I'm sure you've just never seen it before. May I go now?

BETSY: And where do you need to go all of a sudden?

JACK: Just to the bathroom, right now.

BETSY: *(Looks at JACK hard and pauses.)* You just ate, why would you need to go to the bathroom? You're going to have to hold it.

JACK: What do you mean? I haven't been since before breakfast. Juice and spinach omelets. I've gotta go! You know that.

BETSY: Fine, Jack.

(JACK goes into a bathroom. He pauses, and looks in the mirror for more than a minute.

He turns on the sink and throws up quietly in the toilet. BETSY listens through the door.)

(End.)

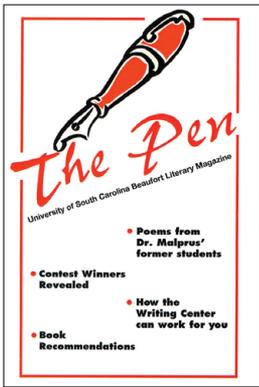
C'MON THIS WAY



photograph by Ciera Love

THE PEN COVER GALLERY

Since 2006, University of South Carolina Beaufort's Society of Creative Writers has published *The Pen*. Here's a look back at the covers of all our past editions, which are available at both USCB libraries.



2006



Fall 2007



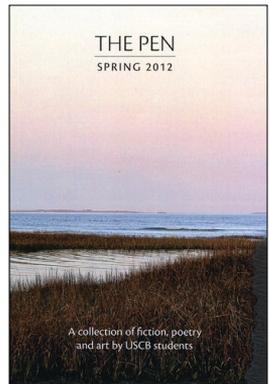
2008



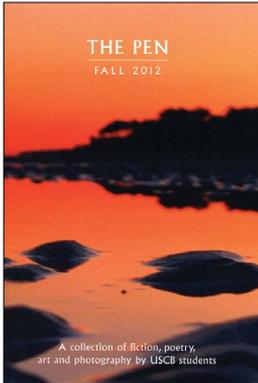
Fall 2010



Spring 2011



Spring 2012



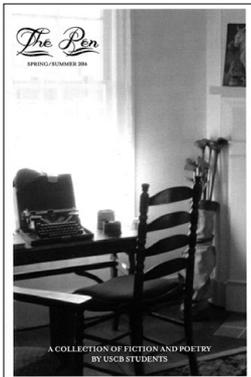
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Spring 2013



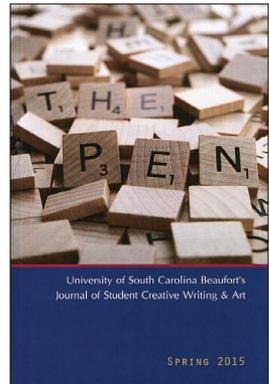
Fall 2013



Spring / Summer 2014



Fall 2014



Spring 2015

SUBMITTING WORK TO THE PEN

In order to be considered for publication in *The Pen*, writers must be current USCB students or prior students with no more than two years since their last active semester. Students need not be enrolled in an English or art course to submit work.

All work submitted for publication must be original, unpublished and preferably produced while the writer/artist was a USCB student. Most types of creative writing, art and other expression will be happily considered. ("Fan fiction" will not be accepted.)

There is no limit to the amount of submissions per person, however, writers are expected to send only polished, college-level work. Writing pieces should not exceed 2,500 words each.

All writing pieces must be sent via email, preferably in an attached Microsoft Word document. Ensure work is formatted as it is intended to appear on the page, especially poetry. Each piece should be sent in its own file, and each piece must include a title and the author's name.

While it is *The Pen's* goal to publish work exactly as it is submitted, the editorial staff does reserve the right to edit submissions for publication. Typically, this will include editing for spelling, punctuation, grammar and consistency. Writers should inform the editorial board of any intentional misspellings to avoid unintentional corrections.

All art and photography must be sent via email as a JPEG file no smaller than 5" x 7" at 300 dpi. Artists and photographers must include their name and a title for each entry as well as information on the medium (i.e., oil on canvas, charcoal on paper).

Published writers and artists will be provided with at least one free copy of *The Pen*.

Tentative deadline for the Spring 2016 edition is March 4, 2016.

To submit, or for more information, email the editorial board at ThePenUSCB@gmail.com.

THE PEN
FALL 2015

University of South Carolina Beaufort
