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the pen

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THE PEN
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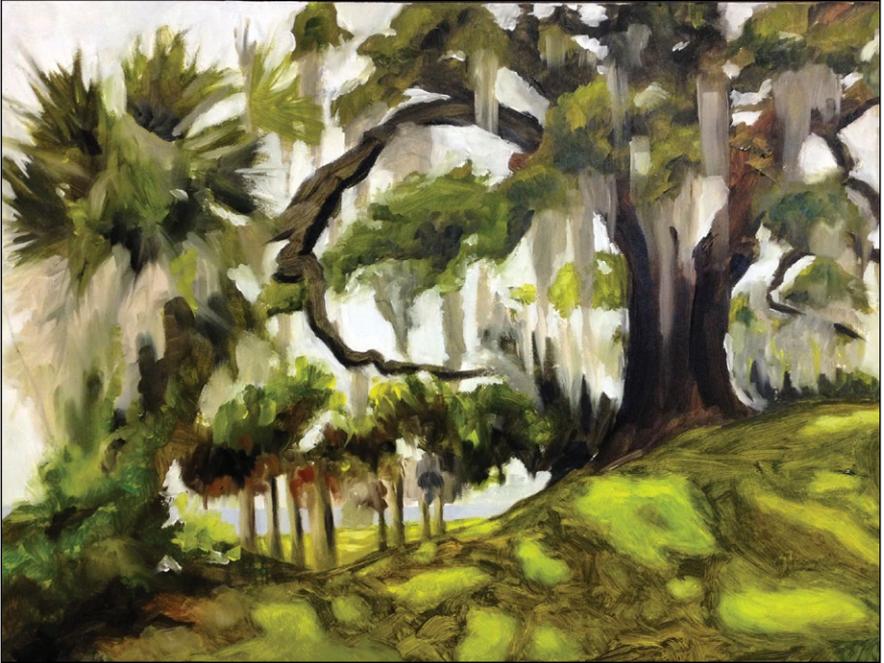
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“The Trees Have Eyes”
photograph by Lincoln Joly

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 English and Theater Department 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.



“Midday on Bay”
oil on canvas by Emily Keenan

The Mango Tree

by Hayley Edwards

The mangoes keep falling and the pile by his mailbox keeps growing. But of course it gets small again; the old man runs out to distribute the plump, juicy fruit to every passerby—native, tourist, anyone—as though they are bombs about to go off in his hands. Sometimes he is met with gratefulness, sometimes pity, and other times just strange stares. But that old man never stops giving. The pile swells and dwindles down all summer long, like the ebb and flow of the Caribbean tide. They drop, he stacks. Drop, stack, drop, stack... Each summer since Leah and I moved into this house four years ago, I've sat on my porch and observed this recurring spectacle.

"Hello, Oscar!" he shouts cheerily from across the street. His skinny, feeble arms are covered with dark, leathery skin and loaded down with mangoes. His tattered, gray clothing fades into the paint-chipped exterior of the dingy hut behind him.

"Hi, Hector." Crazy old man.

It's become a sport for me, really, this activity of his. Except for that first summer—that first summer I was angry. You see I have a mango tree, too. When I first moved to this dump, I thought I'd at least make the best of it and sell my fruit from my cart. But when Hector across the street is giving away mangoes that are just as good and free, well, you know, there's not much business there. I cursed that old man and his selflessness for a few days, but I got over it.

Now all summer long, after cleaning the day's catch, I sit on the porch and count how many he gives away, making tally marks in the floor with my knife. It's foolishness, I know. I observe him with resigned disdain, but I just can't stop watching him. We're up to forty-nine this month.

There's a tap from the kitchen window. "Oscar, dinner!" Leah might not be good for much, but her Johnnycakes and beans are the reason I come home everyday.

"I don't get why Hector does that all day," I say between fork loads without glancing at her across the table.

"Because he's got nothing better to do after Loretta died. And because he's nice and likes making people happy. Not that you'd know anything about that."

I've long been numb to her bristling remarks, and I'm too tired to talk back tonight. We sort of coexist, Leah and I. We were neighbors growing up, and once we got older and our home lives went south, we figured we'd just team up since we found each other tolerable.

"We brought in eighty pounds today." I scrape my plate into the dog bucket before stacking it by the sink.

"Did you hear me, Leah?" She doesn't usually pay me much mind, but she's been even stranger lately, staring blankly out of windows when I speak to her.

She turns around. “Yeah, I heard you.”

Women.

* * *

Stepping outside, I squat down to my usual perch on the top stair of the porch. There’s a strong breeze, but it isn’t cool. Belize is hot as hell. It’s hot outside, hot inside. The only escape is Julio’s air-conditioned paint store in the city. After work I sometimes spend a good half hour in there, pretending to debate over various shades of beige.

The moon is bright and the dogs are howling like mad. I throw a beer can at them like I do every night to shut them up, but their silence doesn’t last. I look up at the stars and my mind drifts to that heinous dress Leah was wearing tonight. *She’s always wearing that thing, tattered and full of holes. I hate it.* I pick up a rock and throw it across the yard onto the dirt road, creating a puff of dirt and dust illuminated by the moonlight.

And I hate my job, I think. Stretching my arms out and yawning, I wince at the seizure of pain in my back. After my net had snapped for the third time today and my skiff had sprung a leak, I thought seriously about quitting all of it and becoming a tour guide like my brother, Philip. He says that’s where the money’s at, and buses are air-conditioned. But I could never do that. “I hate tourists, too,” I mutter to myself.

Such are my thoughts every night on the porch. I twiddle some twigs between my fingers and stare up at the stars until Leah cuts out the light and goes to bed. My eyelids droop down and I lean my head against the rickety stair rail, glad for the respite of dreams.

* * *

Today it was supposed to storm, but it hasn’t yet. So I missed the bus to the wharf this morning for nothing, and Leah asked me in a loud voice if I was the weatherman, and did I not realize we needed money to fix the washing machine, and we’re too poor for me to take a vacation and bum around the house all day. I appeased her by pledging to work in the garden all day. So here I am with my knees in the dirt, wishing I were one of the lazy iguanas tanning themselves on the bricks beside me.

Every time I take a break to wipe the sweat from my eyes and look up, there’s Hector harvesting his mangoes. Around lunchtime a tour bus drives by and stops so

the vacationers can take pictures. *What could they possibly want a picture of here, I always think when they stop on our corner.*

I set down the trowel, settle down onto the porch, and get out my pocketknife, ready to make more notches in the floor. Sure enough, as soon as the crowd of about twenty tourists unloads from the bus, out runs Hector with a bag full of fruit. And so it begins.

“Hello! Please enjoy some fresh Belizean mangoes!” he says eagerly, walking toward the group of leisurely dressed, gadget-laden travelers.

Upon spotting him, an elderly woman in a fanny pack and neon-pink visor scurries quickly back onto the bus. A young couple meets him and accepts the gift with pitying smiles, as do several others. Some say, “Oh, we couldn’t possibly!” with feigned kindness, as if they believe the mangoes are all the old man has to live on. They comment to each other about how our homes are so “quaint,” which is American-speak for poor and dingy. Others have fancy cameras in hand and are taking pictures of Hector and his house. Some turn to take pictures of me and my house. I do not smile for the camera.

Although Hector’s cheeriness annoys me and I think he’s a kook, I cringe for him in this moment. This is why I hate tourists. They descend upon our village and enter our world for a few short hours; they take pictures of us, our houses, our iguanas, see ‘poverty’ in real life, and then quickly retreat back to their oasis by the sea where the sand is combed daily by my friends wearing the only collared shirts they own.

After they’ve exhausted this attraction, the tourists get back on the bus and drive away as Hector wishes them Godspeed. He doesn’t seem to notice that he was just treated like an animal in a zoo.

I stand up to get back to work, but find myself walking across the street. Leaning on my shovel, I watch Hector scurry to replenish the pile and am compelled to ask him the question that always bugs me. “Why do you do that, Hector?” He smiles at me as if he knows something I don’t.

Completely ignoring my question, he asks, “How’ve you been, Oscar?”

I don’t repeat the question. “Fine,” I say with a huff. He nods briefly and bends down to straighten the pile. For some reason I keep talking.

“Work’s been a real pain. Our pay was cut back. And Leah speaks to me even less now. I think she likes you better than me. Guess there’s not much I can do.” I dig my shovel into the sun-baked earth, waiting for a reply.

Hector looks at me with his eyebrows furrowed, as if about to say something profound and inspired. “You just have to love people and keep believing things will turn out alright,” he says finally, patting my shoulder.

That is terrible advice, I think. Clearly that’s worked so well for you.

“Okay, Hector,” I say and start back towards my house. He hurries back over to his tree, apparently not noticing my departure.

But when I reach my yard I hear a shout from across the street: “Oh Oscar, here, take some mangoes!”

I roll my eyes and don’t even turn around. I know he’s standing there by the tree with that smile on his face, arms extended to me and laden with fruit.

“I have a mango tree, Hector,” I say, and walk inside.

The Decision

by Alexandra Girardi

She clutched her stomach.

Was her life important, or was the one inside her more valuable?

She said yes.

Deceit

by Alexandra Girardi

He opened the door to a stoic officer. He fell to his knees. His wife smiled.



“Deserted”
photograph by Holli Coble-Nunn



“Storm”

photograph by Holli Coble-Nunn

Begonia

by Katie Hart

(Kyle)

Every morning they spelled out something different and by the afternoon they were gone. No matter what the stones were there arranged significantly out on the hill across from my home – my bedroom window. Today they spelled out hydrangea, meaning perseverance.

Sometimes I think its mom leaving the notes. A little sign from St. Anne designed to get through the day. They started appearing last week, one week after the incident. On occasion they do help, like last Tuesday when Willie picked on the lunch Dad made and all the other boys my age were laughing along with him, I had remembered that the hill said, *Gladiolus*, strength in one's character. It helped me to ignore what Willie and the others were saying because the real point of the bagged lunch was that dad was still trying. The recent days haven't been easy for the Lytle family and the gesture was big enough for me.

Today's message put me in a mood. I had been persevering every day since it happened. Now I'm tired, and I want things to start being as they used to be...despite things being us two. But I know better than to question the patron saint of mothers, and the stones always provide comfort. After all, they are solely for me, Dad never saw them when he went to work and they were always gone by the time he made it home. Whoever was leaving them was making it clear the hidden messages are mine.

* * *

"Kyle Lytle?"

"Here" But mom isn't.

"Lennon Malone?"

"—Oh cool! Like John Lennon!" Willie interjected.

"I like to think of myself as more of a Leonard a la Leonard Nimoy, but I go by Lennie."

"Yeah, you'd know that Roy if you'd quit playing sick all the time to your mom. She's such a sucker."

"At least I have a mom to sucker around."

Perseverance.

"Roy, Kyle, seeing as you both weren't here last week, this is Lennie our new student. Lennie I'm sorry, I keep forgetting to change your name on the roster."

"It's okay Mrs. Mondale. I get to throw out *Star Trek* references when you call me Lennon."

I lost my attention after that. Mrs. Mondale went on to talk about geography ... or space ... I'm not really sure. None of it matters without mom around. She got so excited to hear about what I was learning in class every day. I want my mother back. All I want is to go home, back to the sanctum that is mom's room (Dad's been sleeping in the guest room which I've deemed the apartment) and stare at her things. How is everyone going on without her? She was so beloved by everyone and now it's like the world has forgotten her name. Forget-me-nots ... *I miss you.*

(Lennie)

Abandoned as a newborn Lennie had been in and out of foster care since she could breathe. The previous family she had been with dropped her back at the orphanage after four months of adopting her. They hadn't liked that she didn't want to be controlled; even as an eleven year old, she wanted the freedom she knew she deserved.

A month before her twelfth birthday, Tim and Nessa Malone walked through the orphanage doors. Tim had been scary to the children and Nessa had been warm and soft. She had talked to the children, smiled and treated them with such respect Lennie was almost tempted to approach her. But she stayed back. She was the oldest and wouldn't be picked to go home with the Malones.

She was sitting back against a wall when Tim approached her. He leaned back next to her, crossing his arms across his chest as he watched his wife talk with a group of little girls.

"What's your name?" Tim asked. Lennie looked up at him, making sure she was the one he was talking to.

"Lennon ... Lennie," she muttered.

"How many families have you been with, Lennie?"

"Just got dumped from my eighth," she grumbled, turning away to look back at Nessa. The woman turned to her husband, her face bright as she gave Lennie a beautiful smile, which she fell in love with right away.

"You interested in a ninth?" Tim asked. Lennie turned her gaze away and stared up at him in shock.

"What?" she asked. She watched Tim nod to his wife, who stumbled to her feet, careful of the children as she moved to her husband.

"We haven't had luck with making—" Tim started, his face saddening as he pulled his wife into his arms. "But we would still like to have a child."

Lennie knew couples that couldn't actually have children themselves but they always looked for babies or toddlers while adopting. So she had no idea why they were talking to her.

“We fear we may be a bit hopeless with an actual infant. And you look like you would love to get out of here,” Tim said. Lennie watched Nessa nudge him with her elbow and then laughed and turned to her, holding out her hand.

That hand would save her life, Lennie knew as she grabbed hold of it.

Lennie hadn't been easy at first. She had purposely caused a lot of trouble to test them. They hadn't broken, like many of her other families had. They hadn't left her or abandoned her. She was a Malone — and always would be.

Two years later Ellie came. A surprise to all. Lennie panicked and ran away for three days because she thought they were going to send her back since they didn't need her anymore. They were going to have a child of their own. Tim, in a rage, tore the town apart looking for *his* daughter and Nessa was beside herself with the thought that Lennie left because she no longer felt like their child.

When Tim found her she had been hurt. He brought her to the hospital where Nessa fussed. When she came home they sat her down and drilled into her that she was their daughter and always would be. That was when Lennie started calling them Mom and Dad.

(Present day)

“And where are you off to at six in the morning missy?”

“Jesus dad! You scared me.”

“Lennie,” he stressed.

“I have something I have to do, Dad. I promise it's safe.”

“Awfully early ... must be important. Have anything to do with you leaving school early?”

“Tim, don't do your dad thing.”

He stands up and kisses me on the top of my head, “Watch out for the mud, Speedy. You know how your mother gets.”

“I'm in my dirty shoes.”

“You know, Speedy, if you need any help with what you're doing, your dad would love the quality time.”

“I'll keep that in mind, Dad. Love you, be back soon!”

He must be bored, with Ellie now three she's starting to sleep in later. The early bird tendencies I have come from him. Truthfully, I'd love to have Dad come join me — particularly when it comes to the heavy lifting — but this has to be all mine.

Because I get it. It'll only make Mom and Dad sad if they find out why I started this. But it's important, I understand feeling loss and lost. And that poor boy is so sad it breaks my heart. I have to be spending too much time around Mom. It's making me sappy — a gooey marshmallow girl. ... This is the best I can think of to

help him.

I don't even know him, yet I feel intimately connected to that sad boy.

* * *

Mom's car is parked on the side of his street – waiting for me once I finish.

"Hi honey, I figured you needed a ride. You don't want to be late. I brought you some clean shoes."

"You're a lifesaver mom. Where's Ellie?"

"At the park with your dad. You wanna talk?"

I sighed. "I don't know mom, he's just so sad. It touches me. I blame you."

She smiled at me, "You can relate to him. I think it's an incredibly sweet thing you're trying to do."

"Thanks Mom, for understanding."

"Are you planning on letting him know?"

"Maybe. I haven't gotten that far. You know us Malones, we don't tend to plan ahead."

"That's from your father. The babbling comes from me," Mom said with a wink. I responded with a smile.

"Thanks for the ride mom! I'll see you after school. Love you!"

"Have a wonderful day, baby."

(Kyle)

The *Alstroemeria* flower means friendship. That was the message for today, *Alstroemeria*. But the few friends I had decided I couldn't get over mom's death fast enough for them. I was "too sad" and brought them down. I don't know why the stones would say that when I no longer have friendship. The puzzle follows me, and I haven't noticed that Mrs. Mondale's assigning groups for the annual science project.

"Kyle and Lennon, you two can work together. And now how about ..." her voice fades as I try to think.

Lennon? Oh Lennie, the new girl. I turn and she's getting up, the tips of her silver-blond hair bounce against her shoulders. She's in a kaleidoscope of colors and there's a small mud patch on her left ankle. As she sits she thrusts her left hand in front of me.

"Hey! I'm Lennie." I surprise myself by not hesitating to reach for that hand and respond.

"I'm Kyle, nice to meet you." Her soft brownish grey eyes focus completely on mine. She looks like a fairy, soft, lovely, and inviting.

We discuss ideas for the project and I don't once think of mom and how I won't be able to talk to her about this. Lennie's so excited about our ideas, and she's so animated with her movements when she talks. I don't know anyone like her.

"You want to come by my place after school and work on it some more?" she asks, and I'm surprised by it. "I mean, you don't have to if you don't want to. Obviously. But I really like your ideas and I can supply all the pizza you want. My mom says pizza's the best brain food. That is, if you like pizza but really who—"

"I like pizza," I interject, ending her babbling.

"Yeah? Great, me too! But really who doesn't? What do you like on it?"

"On my pizza?"

"Yeah, you can tell everything about a person by their pizza toppings."

"Um, pepperoni and olives. Both black and green."

She smiled at me, a great big beaming smile and I couldn't stop myself from smiling back at it.

"Kyle, we're pizza soul mates. We're going to be friends for life, I just know it."

* * *

(Lennie)

"When will you tell him?"

"I'm still not sure if I should. What if he hates me after I tell him?"

"I'm more than happy to put the fear of god into anyone who hurts any of my girls."

"I'm serious Dad."

"He'll probably hate you, you should be prepared for that. But he'll get over it, he'll see you're a genuine, caring girl who tries to help people when she can. He'll be an idiot not to."

"Yeah?"

"Positive Speedy."

"Okay. I'm gonna go."

"Now?"

"Of course, while I have that top notch speech is still fresh."

(Kyle)

"When will you tell her?"

"I'm not going to."

"Oh? Why not?"

"She'll get embarrassed if I call her out on it. Besides, it doesn't matter who. The

messages made things easier, and that's all that matters."

"That's pretty grown up of you Kyle."

"It's what Mom would have said."

"Pretty sweet of that girl, she barely knew you."

"Mmhmm, Lennie's the best."

"And speaking of the best, here she comes. Hello Lennie."

"Hi Mr. Lytle."

"I was on my way to the kitchen, want anything?"

"Thanks but I'm fine, I needed to talk to Kyle about something."

Dad went into the kitchen and I shifted towards her on the sofa.

"No you don't Lennie," Kyle said.

"Yes I do. It's important."

"Lennie, trust me. There's nothing to say."

"But—?" She stared at me with a confused expression. I tried to make an expression signaling I knew what she had come to tell me.

"Look at me Len, there's nothing 'important' I need to know."

"...you swear?"

"On my Mom."

She broke into a smile, the one that I always feel compelled to respond with a smile of my own.

"Thank you Kyle."

Shaking my head I responded, "Thank you Lennie."

Sin Eater

by Alexis Henderson

They say that all the sin eaters in Appalachia died out. Went by way of the dodo birds and the Indians who once made homes up in the mountains before the whites chased them off. My father was the first to tell me otherwise.

He said that when night fell around the tops of the mountains peaks, thick and velveteen, when the fog settled low-slung and the grieviers shook in their beds, and the echoes of dirges moved between tree trunks, you could hear them up there singing along, glutting themselves on the sins of the dead.

When I asked him why they didn't come down he told me, "People like to die with what they have. They like to keep their evils close."

"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders, lit a cigarette. "You live with yourself, you die with yourself. Don't need no damn sin eater to atone for what you should've already made peace with."

I pulled my legs up to my chest, set my chin on my kneecaps. "That why they're all gone?"

"Not gone," he said, and he took a long plug of cigarette smoke, "just away."

* * *

Four years later he died in a wreck along the highway. There was a woman in the car with him, not my mother, some girl he picked up from a rest stop, bruised and bleeding, with silver hoops through her ears big enough for me to fit my hand through. She was sixteen, just a year off my age. A young little thing, or at least that's what they called her on the news.

Down at the morgue they took blood from his arm, found traces of alcohol in his system along with a cocktail of other things, cocaine and heroin, the prescription pills my mom kept in the medicine cabinet above the bathroom sink.

That night while my mom sat in the living room, sipping coffee black and staring at the TV, I stood out on the porch and prayed to the Eaters, asked them to take his sins from him, chew them up and swallow them so he could make it to heaven.

The moon hung low that night and there was mist about the treetops. I got no answer save for the sound of humming cicadas. They slow drag of my own heart beating.

* * *

We put him in the ground a few days later. Gathered in the church where I was baptized and my parents married. Sang a couple hymns, clamped clammy hands and accepted condolences from distant relatives and schoolteachers, a few family members that came down from Pittsburgh for the funeral.

After they put him in the ground there was a small reception in the basement of the church. We piled our plates with fried chicken thighs and the green slop of over-boiled collards, squares of cornbread, and crumbles of dry dressing. People talked while they ate, thick words through mouthfuls, chicken grease spattering pressed suits, napkins bunched and shoved into shirt collars. There was the clash of forks on plastic plates, chairs scraping across tile, a smell of Thanksgiving on the air thick and noxious as though the event was something to celebrate.

Across the room a woman spoke my father's name, talked about the kind of man he was. "A good one," she said. "He was a good man."

I pushed back from the table. Stood up fast with my hands fisted. My chair hit the floor, clattered.

I felt eyes on me. A lot of them. Looks from around the room.

I started to say something about my father. About the how he fell into a bad way and the things he did to me and my mother. The reek of the food and the sick sounds of their chewing, meat torn off chicken bones, drinks guzzled, cups emptied. Porcine dining. Gluttony. I wanted to speak to all of it.

"Lydia," said my mother, her fork bobbing in her hand, the prongs slick with gravy and dripping. "Please."

* * *

I left for the mountains the day after the funeral. Packed a hiking bag and three of the lunchboxes I use to carry as a kid, put ice packs at the bottom and filled it full of the leftovers from the funeral feast. I pulled my hiking boots from the closet, a windbreaker and thick wool scarf. I started on the mountain path a few hours before sunset, took one of the snaking dirt roads that lead to crags where the Eaters lurked. I walked with my pack bumping my spine, sweat beading along my brow, the sun slanting down through the treetops and dappling the forest floor. The sky was stinging blue.

A few does crossed my path as I walked. Rabbits ran wild through the thrush and thickets and I could hear the humming of bees on the air, the whisper of wind in the bare branches of the birch trees.

My dad taught me how to hunt them when I was little. Bought me a little 22-caliber pistol, with small steel bullets. Taught me how to hold the butt of the

gun to my shoulder, fire with one eye closed. For hours we'd crouch between the pines, or behind blackberry brambles waiting for rabbits to cross our paths. On the good days we'd come home with bunches of them, on the bad days we'd trudge down the mountain bone tired and spitting pissed. We didn't have a lot of bad days back then.

Sometimes my father and I would walk the woods for the hell of it. I'd pocket pebbles and pine cones gnawed skinny by some hungry squirrel stockpiling for winter. Once we found the skull of a possum in the nook between two tree roots. Dad picked it up and brushed it clean, spit on it a bit to get the dirt off. Then he held it up to the sun so he could see the light shine through its eye sockets.

"Beautiful," he said, and he handed it to me. "God's work."

It was dark by the time I reached the top of the mountain. I limped on swelled feet, my toes thick and throbbing, sticky with sweat and panting. Half out of my mind with tiredness.

Across a field of gravel and flowers I saw a small cabin. A girl stood by it, dressed in a white sundress, barefoot despite the cold. She had her hair down around her shoulders, bruises and bite marks up her arms.

I took the lunch box out of my backpack, held it out to her. "I'm here on behalf of my father. I want you to take his sins, all of them."

She came forward, took the lunchbox from me, opened it up and unwrapped the cornbread, gnawed on a chicken leg, slurped up wet collard leaves. She chewed through the chicken bones and sucked the marrow out, licked the crumbs off the bottom of the box and bit into the ice packs. Ravenous.

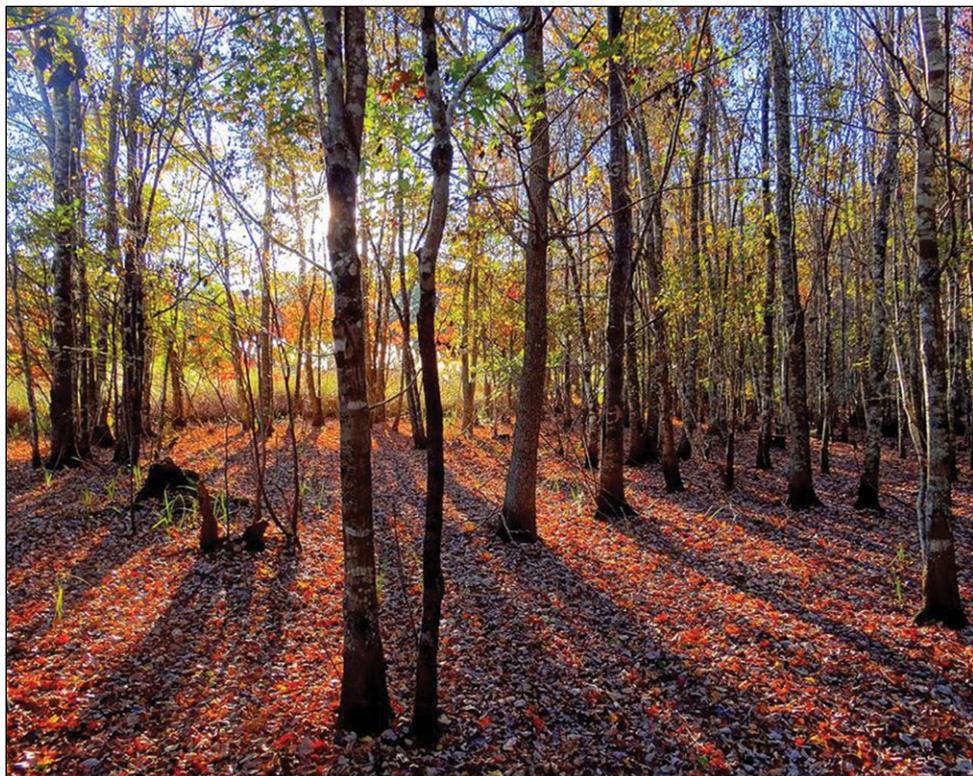
A west wind swept along the mountainside and whistled through the pine needles. I felt the dirt shift under my feet; little pebbles loosed themselves and ricocheted down the mountainside. The girl kept eating, tore into the side of the lunchbox, bloodying her mouth as she worked through the metal. She swallowed the handle last, and wiped her mouth clean on the back of her hand, smearing blood and gravy.

The cicadas quit singing.

The wind went quiet.

I felt a sickness in my stomach like worms writhing.

"Hold still," she said and she started towards me, "this is God's work."



“Home Is Where The Heart Is”
photograph by Lincoln Joly

Out of His Hands

by Brenda Hill

He sat amongst the night with his head hanging down. As he rubbed his aching joints, recollections of his life as a pianist danced in front of him. His hands, which were once strong, now only served as vessels of pain. The energy spilling through his fingertips would cease and the piano would become a past lover. One last touch was needed to say goodbye. The music, whispering quietly in his ear, beckoned. He fumbled for the light switch and made his way toward the instrument. There he struggled with his final performance, pouring his passion over the ivory keys.

Returns

by Bill Lisbon

A middle-aged woman with a fake smile approached him, leery.

Between them, costly mediums of arbitration.

“I need to return this,” he said placing the box and receipt upon glass.

He didn’t want to look her in the eye. He hadn’t looked anyone in the eye for two weeks. Including himself.

“Alright, sir. Does it not fit or perhaps you would like to look at something different?”

She wasn’t the same person as before, and for some reason that was a small comfort. He was too unabashed with that one, too gushy.

“No. I just don’t need it anymore.”

The woman nodded knowingly, with rehearsed sympathy. He wondered how many men stood here, before her, trying to unring bells and recork champagne. Returning to a fork in the road with severely botched signs, arrows pointing in all the wrong directions, poisonous darts dripping with blood.

“These things happen, I’m afraid. Don’t be too hard on yourself. Maybe she’ll change her mind.”

He didn’t move.

After a moment, she examined the receipt and opened the box.

“Sir?” she said. “Sir? It looks this was one of our clearance models, and because you did get it altered, we can’t refund your money. Store policy. Sorry.”

Eyes agape, lost and unfocused, he muttered to himself, “She already has one.”

The woman raised her hand to an open mouth, never hearing that reason before.

“We can still offer you store credit,” she said. “You can use it for, you know, next time.”

He snorted a laugh, closed his eyes and shook his head slowly like a metronome establishing the tempo at which he would play out the remainder of his life.

“I doubt you’ll stay in business that long.”

She watched him shuffle toward the exit, fist plunging with the box and crumpled receipt into the front pocket of his crumpled jeans. When he opened the door, the little bell above it refused to ring.

The Two of Us

by Ciera Love

We sat in the car for six silent seconds before my dad even put the key in the ignition. Staring out of the slightly tinted windows into the parking lot were healthy and eager dogs pulling their families into the vet by their leashes. This didn't help. The memories already began to sting and puncture the left side of my chest. Usually, I've no patience, but today time was trivial.

"Take me home. Get me out of here," my mother demanded, breaking the silence and blowing her nose into a fast food napkin from the glove compartment.

My dad flicked on the windshield wipers and pulled into five o'clock traffic.

I didn't even want to go home.

Not without him.

I buckled my seatbelt and noticed his traces everywhere in our family sized Ford. I picked each golden hair off of my faded black hoodie one by one. Tears fell two by two, mimicking the raindrops outside the car window.

Walking back into the house, I hung up his leash perfectly, trying to leave it dangling low enough so he could reach it with his canines and drag it to whomever he chose to walk him around the neighborhood.

My mother was still sobbing into his grey collar while my little sister packed up his food and water bowls from the kitchen floor.

"Leave it!" I yelled.

The first words I managed since we left the vet. It was too soon.

I ran upstairs and collapsed on my bed.

Looking up at my half closed door, I waited for him to open it further with his nose, prance in my room, and plop down in his usual spot. Pointless. Instead I stared at the medium speed set ceiling fan, fixed on watching little specs of dust fall.

My door creaked open and I sat up eagerly.

It was just my little sister prancing into my room.

"So mommy said we're getting him cremated. Ever heard of that for a dog?"

I resented her. She was young and losses weren't the same to her elementary mind, they didn't resonate. She stood at the foot of my bed, in his exact spot, anxiously awaiting a response.

"I've heard of cremating family members," I finally said.

"Yeah, me too, but a dog? Sounds funny. Like—"

"Nothing about it is funny. Get out of my room."

Half embarrassed, half guilty, she slowly exited in deep thought, innocently questioning where her attempts at comforting me went wrong.

Lifting up the blinds to my window, I noticed his wet nose residue on the glass

where he would watch people and the rain fall with me and I smiled to myself.

“It’s like you’re still here,” I said.

It’s as if he never left me at all.

Additions

by Ciera Love

“I’m getting a sister.”

“Me too. I already have one, you. So I’ll have two.”

“YEAH BUT—”

“Hey. Hey, you two. We’re all getting another family member, another one of us to love. That’s all,” interrupted my dad.

I mean, sure. Technically every one in the family was getting the same little being that I was, but I was six and the younger sister of a 10-year-old bully of a brother. This baby sister was going to benefit me the most. I would have someone to be my ally in all things. There could now be a vote for what color blankets the fort would be made out of and the possibility of it finally being pink or purple increased. No more blue and green blankets that smelled like Doritos and old sweat.

Preparation included clearing out a section of my room for the new addition with old toys that I thought would be baby friendly. Like my old My Little Pony and the doll my grandmother gave me two Christmases ago that I never even named. I had to make her feel at home and welcomed immediately. It was my job to see to it that she would want to be on my side, to appear as the cooler and more caring sibling. My brother would be hard to compete with, though. He had the 1,000 count-table piece set of Legos and a bunk bed.

My brother didn’t seem to care much about winning her over and I figured this was one of his strategies to get me to let up on my master plan. It didn’t work, though. I would be ready. We got ready to leave for the hospital and my dad ran back inside of the house to look for the car keys as I nervously stood outside of the van next to my cool and collected brother. I started a conversation with my rival out of apprehension.

“Do I look okay?” I asked, using the car as a mirror.

“It doesn’t matter how we look.”

“Yes it does. It’s our first time meeting her. Well, her meeting us.”

“She’s not going to remember this.”

“Yes she will.”

“Yeah, if she even has her eyes open!”

“WHAT, WHY WOULDN’T HER EYES OPEN? IS SHE SICK?”

“No. No. It’s perfectly normal. You didn’t open your eyes until a gazillion days after you finally came out.”

“Ohhh, okay. . . .” I said as my dad came out with the keys and buckled me in the seatbelt.

“You think I should sing to her?” I asked my brother.

“You can’t even sing, Ciera. Please don’t.”

“Can too, I’ve been practicing and—”

“Plus mommy probably won’t like too much noise. Babies are enough noise.”

“They are? So we’ll have to be quiet all the time?”

“Probably. Everything is gonna suck.”

“No, every thing is supposed to be perfect!”

“Well it won’t be and she won’t even like any one but mommy.”

I crossed my arms, fixed my curls, and looked out the window at unfamiliar streets.

“Ciera, get up. We’re here,” my brother said.

I woke with eagerness, unbuckled my seatbelt, and jumped out of my seat, stopped by the child lock on my door. As I waited for my dad to come around and open it I used my reflection in the window to practice my best and most sisterly smile.

“Perfect,” I said.

When dad opened my door and picked me up I immediately had him put me down. This was a first. How childish I would seem to the baby if I let my dad carry me into the room.

“So what’s her name again?” my brother asked.

“Alaya. Her name is Alaya,” I said.

“Come on, you knew that,” my dad fussed.

“I knew, Daddy. I told him.”

“I know, baby girl. Let’s go.”

I grabbed hold of my brother and dad’s hands as we crossed the street and skipped through the sliding double doors, hardly able to contain my excitement.

“So does my sister look like me? Since we’re both girls,”

“She looks like a baby!” my brother insisted.

We entered my mother’s room and I ran to her bedside.

“WHAT IS THIS? WHAT IS IT?”

“This is your baby sister, Ciera,” my mother smiled.

The baby cried.

“No it is not. It’s yellow. It’s purple. It’s Chinese.”

“See I told you,” my brother laughed from the doorway.

Closet Chronicles

by Ciera Love

“When will you tell her?”

“I won’t.”

“You won’t? That’s your mom, she should know. You should tell her.”

“Exactly. That’s my mom. She should already know.”

“She should, yeah. So what’s stopping you from telling her?”

“I know her.”

“C’mon, there’s always clear skies after a storm.”

“Yeah – and rainbows after rain. You know, a walk-in closet is a must whenever we start apartment hunting for a place of our own. This one here isn’t big enough for the both of our stuff. It’s always a mess.”

“I always clean my side out.”

* * *

“None of that was true!”

“Well you really liked the boy from the church.”

“That wasn’t real.”

“And the boy who played baseball for the university, you went out with him twice.”

“None of that was true.”

“So Jade, the one who moved away when her parents divorced?”

“Yes, mom.”

“– I knew it. Why didn’t you just tell me sooner?”

“Because you knew.”

* * *

“That is why I didn’t want to tell her.”

“I get it now. I get it.”

“I had to, though. You deserve that much. I deserve that much.”

“But I should’ve known you had your reasons.”

“She should’ve known a long time ago. Can you pass me the place mats?”

“Sure. Here. I just hated tip-toeing around us.”

“Me too.”

“Well it’s done now. Did you remember to get utensils for the housewarming? We have to at least offer something to our guests who bear gifts.”

“Thankfully, and yes, but I forgot butter knives. I lost the list you made.”

* * *

I didn’t mean those things.”

“...”

“I want you to come.”

“I won’t.”

“C’mon, mom. This is a big step for us. Come and bring dad.”

“He doesn’t know.”

“...”

“When will you tell him?”

“He won’t believe me, he won’t think it’s true.”

The Better Halves

by Taylor Riley

An insatiable look played across my face, I'm sure. I remember taping my cigarette over the ashtray as I continued,

“Whaddaya say, doll?”

One long smooth leg crossed over the other, she sat, infinitely cool and chic in her burgundy silk dress. Luxurious black hair hung, as elegantly as Babylon's own gardens. She had been waiting for some sap at this small table in the corner of a smoky jazz club, very clearly bored.

Finally, she let slip a sultry smile. A ring of pale skin wrapped around the fourth finger of each of our left hands, very clearly visible.

Oh, If Only To See The Sun Again

by Taylor Riley

Click *Click* *Click*

The sound echoed off of rows of cracked limestone tiles and against two long, narrow limestone walls.

Click

It reverberated in an ear which was incessantly collecting beads of sweat at its lobe.

Click

The sharp, heavy metallic ringing bore its way slowly into a fragile mind drawn taut with fear.

Click

Slow and monotonous like some patient executioner.

Click

The miserable sound was only broken by the deep heartbeat of a man who hadn't dared to let a breath escape between his cracked & quivering lips for nearly sixteen counts of that every approaching sound-off.

Click *Thump-Thump* *Thump-Thump* *Click*

The man was crouched in a fetal position, face resting on the stone cold wall of his iron-gated coffin. His face was gaunt; a crisscross of scars across his back lent an identity to him. He was feeble, nearly naked; his face cut and swollen. Dried blood, his war paint, was drawn across his withered pale body abstractly.

Click *Thump-Thump*

His bruised muscles shifted slightly. The soft pat-pat of a leisurely stroll crept up behind the heavy iron cane's crude beat; an incessant beating which surely ushered in the devil himself. An iron ringed, leather soled hand griped the weapon casually.

BOOM

That awful sound, at the foot of his cell. Two quiet feet stood at the top of the pitiful man's ever fading vision. A hollow mechanical turn of the lock, a single step forward, and an enthusiastic swing of the iron cane: the man's body was laid across the floor, wet blood leaking profusely from his temple. A rough hand grabbed his wild overgrown hair. The poor man was dragged, sobbing and cursing, to the end of the long stone tunnel, up narrow winding stairs, through heavy oak doors and onto a grassy, sun drenched, spectator filled courtyard, to the center of a high dais; so as to be closer to the heavens. Here, head drooped over a wet block, on his knees, face-to-face with a frozen wide-eyed head resting in a bucket, he was finally delivered straight to the pits of hell.

For Better or Worse

by Taylor Riley

“This; this is just fucking sick.”

“Peter! You’ve got to listen to me for a second—”

“I had’ta listen enough before I even got to the goddamn door.” I had already turned my back to the bed which I hadn’t seen in too long.

“Pete, this isn’t about... She ne—”

I rounded on him, shooting out “Danny, say one more goddamn thing about my wife, I will ring your fucking neck.”

“Peter, we can talk, we could always talk; look, I just—I’ve needed to talk to you.” She was getting out gently from under the ruffled blankets.

“Talk? Put some fucking clothes on.”

“Pete, things ... changed; got complicated; you have to believe ...” As I heard him say these things my feet were taking me well past the door frame, and down a flight of stairs.

From a filthy kitchen, I got a glass of lukewarm water out of the sink. I drank it in a moment and whipped the empty glass sidearm onto a cold tile; a hundred crystalline shards spread across the floor violently. Teeth biting into dry lips fiercely, I paced across the length of the kitchen for several moments until I tasted blood. I walked back, boots crunching over glass, and filled up a new cup. A shaky hand lifted a small swig to my lips, and I spit watered down blood into the sink. It helped fill some of the pots and plates which were at the top of a pile of dishes.

Dropping the cup carelessly into the filth, I stooped low, opened a cabinet and reached a hand in blindly; I instinctively fished out a small plastic bottle of bourbon from a nifty hole in the shoddy cabinetry, past the cleaning supplies. I lifted myself up, a hand against the counter, and took a few gulps; I swallowed, blood and all. Onto a love seat I slumped, just outside the kitchen. I had never sat in it before. It was painful to sit in and disgusting to look at. In the corner of a strange, dimly lit living room, I took several more drinks and brooded. Two clenched hands—both around the bottle—settled into my lap; they took turns raising it to my lips periodically. My eyes: anxiety-driven, wandering, and downcast.

“Honey ...” The timid voice began at the top of the stairs and tiptoed down on two frail legs “You’re upset, but if you just let me talk; things got complicated since you left. I learned things. You’ve been gone so long and—well ...”

“Long? I’m there for nine months—”

“Well, that’s just it; I know it seems unfair to—”

“To who? To me? To our son? Or to our baby in the room next to yours? Yeah, I hope she’s been able to get enough sleep lately, you filthy—You know, you’re just

too easy, aren't you? Always were. Jesus, what have you been doing to me this whole time?"

"Peter. You know this is not about what I'm doing to you, it's abo—"

"Bout what you're doing for you."

"Peter." Her voice had grown more confident.

"Un-fucking-believable."

"Stop! Stop acting like this is, what, some kind of shock to you? Our relationship has always been just painfully riddled with 'loyalty' hasn't it! Why did you think he was helping me with the baby in the first place; because you two are such great fucking pals, right?"

"So just what the fuck are you telling me, exactly?" I had two narrow slits aimed at my wife.

"You are pathetic. You really are, Peter. The fact your drunk ass even made it, over there, without any ... It should go without saying: she's not yours. He wishes he wasn't yours. We'd all be better off if he wasn't. You didn't even have one thing to say when I offered up Kayla; you didn't care. Jesus, Peter, do you even know what her middle initial is? With all the time you had, you couldn't even think to ask about her, could you. You haven't done anything for yourself, let alone your goddamn 'family'; You never cared about me, your son—"

"I was there for him as much as I could be."

"Stop."

My eyes had rounded out; they felt soft and pathetic for but a moment. They were steadily fixed on her own.

"I did everything I could for him."

"Just stop; that is pathetic."

"Why now? Why didn't you mention THIS in your fucking letters?" My voice quavered over the expletive.

"We needed to talk about it."

"Clearly you didn't need to talk about it before you got yourself knocked up, stateside, behind my back you—"

"While you were at some disgusting strip club, like the drunk pig you are."

"What the hell would you know?" was my defense. Assertive, yet uselessly ambiguous.

"It's not very believable, is it? That I should know what you were doing all those 'work nights'. God knows—"

I cut her off harshly "horseshit— listen to me, you cunt—"

"Pete." A voice from the stairway interrupted sternly yet calmly, "It'd be best if you'd just leave for now; if you really even care, we can all talk about the kids later;

find a lawyer. Or don't. Listen, you just weren't there. You let yourself fall flat on your ass too many times and, honestly, I feel sick for ya; it was pathetic to watch at the time; it really was. I called you a cab. Find a motel. Better yet, there is a bus stop a few streets down, on Broken Oak."

My wife's face appeared distracted, looking to the side and only slightly down, at nothing; what they were doing was patiently shunning my wet eyes, even as insistent as they were.

I let the cheap bottle of bourbon fall to the ground, dry and hollow. A hot fist ripped out a snub nosed revolver from my jacket pocket. I had been intently aware of my fingers on the cold steel ever since I was told my wife had held another man's child.

I staggered past my speechless wife and I smacked Danny across his stupid puzzled face with the heavy steel barrel; I dug a fist into a mop of hair and, grabbing at the roots, I pulled him into the kitchen. To the far corner we went; he moaned softly as his knees dragged over the crushed glass. I let go, and with a foot at his back I pushed him, belly-flat, onto the ground. His face against the grimy floor, I dug the barrel deep into that mop of hair, and squeezed once. This, done into militarily precise fashion, took no more than a few moments. I turned and left the mess just as a sudden jumping shriek came from the living room. Something loudly cracked against the bare wood of the living room floor. I was in the next room as the panicked shuffle of feet were at the stairs. They tripped over the second plateau, and didn't recover well. She climbed hand and feet over the hard wood stairs sobbing. Delicate nails clicked frantically against each step. Our home phone sat off the receiver, and on the ground. It still held a call to 911, I was sure. I grabbed the base with my free hand and ripped it from the wall as I ran to the stairs.

The roots of her silky hair were at the tips of my fingers by the time she had crawled her way upstairs and in front of the door she had been racing towards. The revolver was back in my pocket, for the moment. My hand, over her soft lips, could feel the power of the poor woman screaming in alarm. Although she was muffled, there was a babbling response from the other side of the door.

* * *

And so now, my head rested on a single tight fist. That hand held a tuft of greasy black hair. My heavy shoulders loomed over two weak knees. I sat on a bed which I had nearly grown unfamiliar with. The sure grip of my fingertips on the roots of my hair, the only thing keeping my head straight.

A dead weight hung between my legs, glued to a hot fist. My eyes, resting on it,

numb.

I had just finished shooting my wife in the chest; centered, just above the sternum, and only slightly to the right. I had then sat, head level, on that disheveled bed. I had found myself looking at a painting I had never seen before. A happy painting, for her new happy life, I imagined.

As I stared dumbly at the image I suddenly became aware of the very distinct sound of my wife gasping grotesquely for air. I slowly looked over at her beautiful red lips; they were parted slightly, and twisting with passion. Lip stick was smeared across her face, my palm, and my fingers. I glanced back down at the snub-nose that jutted out, beyond my pale knuckles, for no longer than a moment. Again my head rose up and I looked at her. I looked at her lips. They still twisted unintelligibly. Unemotionally, I raised my eyes to her own. They were open. Trembling and laboring to remain open, but open. Her beautiful blue eyes had been largely overwhelmed by discs of black.

I broke my gaze from her own. It wasn't to the ground out of anguish, or to the sky for repentance, but to her bleeding chest for an explanation. I noted unsympathetically that this particular shirt did not look very good on her, as she lay. Awkward creases played over her body and it was pulled up on her neck, past where it should have naturally rested. She had thrown it on hastily, and it was not worn with dignity. A messy shirt for a mother to be wearing. There was an ever growing glistening stain on that white blouse. It emanated from a spot near the center of her chest, perhaps closer to her left than to mine. It had grown large and abstract so it was hard to tell.

I stooped down to get a closer look. I didn't bother glancing into her eyes again. I shunned them. I instead eyed a small hole near the center of that grim stain. I couldn't see much, so I dug two pairs of fingers in the fabric and tore it slightly, revealing more of her ugly, struggling body. She groaned, or, rather childishly, squealed and then squirmed as if she were lying in a pediatrician's office. Parting the cloth, and lifting up four wet fingers when done, I looked scientifically at her exposed skin. Her chest was shaking and muscles in her abdomen contracted violently and sporadically. There was a clean bullet wound several inches below the curve of her left breast.

As I had held the snub nose, aimed purposefully at her chest, I had looked into her wide eyes. I had done this purposefully too. At least, I hoped I had.

The aim of the dead weight in my wobbly outstretched arm did not hold true as I had squeezed it with fury. And so she lay, gasping grotesquely, her heart beating defiantly. For better or worse, it was a heart I had meant to destroy.

Hither & Thither

by Adam Trawick

Exile

It had all come to be too much — the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, even textures of his ubiety — sounded an overwhelming cacophony too deafening to comprehend. There were burgeoning questions daunting his every step. At that most imposing age of 23, he was spent. Residing in a stagnant city as a still-water moot-shed student, procuring hollow income as a food lackey in gaudy upscale eateries littered with caricatures of Fitzgerald-esque spendthrifts donning bloated egos and high regard for the ready-ability to belittle the efforts of others who they deemed ill-fit to satiate such beastly appetites for the self-proclaimed “civilized” — spawns of remembered wit, calculated outside the uncreated womb of the Eversoul.

Seth Perdix spied with lone, yellow film-coloured eyes the lone figures standing as still as Ireland mist. A single lone filament bound them in glorious sodality. Their cumulative aloneness as a whole cracked a chasm between the oneness through them and the singular oneness in all of him; infinite as the nights’ firmament: isolated stardust separated by infinite dark. The loss of her left only the stark infinite echo of his heartbeat, never ricocheted. Without her, the faces of those he knew closest were now rendered as a triumph of death; surrounded by mirth, not a genuine smile was to be found: goatish fiends, lecherous and stinking — each brimming with ready malignity. They were for him.

Hell had come to him. Reminders of any and all his youthful ill-deeds capered around his mind’s eye. He could find no respite, no nepenthe. He sought, without term, exile: exile from commonplace, exile from precarious happenstance — where, he thought. Where does one go in order to achieve such necessary recess from this, this warped carnival-mirror image of what once was proportionate and sensible? Where do you go when such a menacing pall is pulled over your eyes? Where do you go to seek refuge from the cold such warmth left behind? Her image, clear and illuminating no longer emanated warmth and light. When the human mind is left impoverished of patterns, it seeks a place of primitive complacency. It seeks kind familiarity. Where now? He closed his eyes and ripples of green and hazel circled him in kaleidoscopic dreamspin – the water, he thought, yes, the ocean — It seems so self-evident, now, to be drawn to the tide. There is an unshakably visceral ease that comes from its ebb and flow. South, he thought while following some biological compass ingrained within.

–Exile, he exclaimed, to the sea!



“Ocean”
photograph by Eric Danko

Optimistic

by Kat Trent

He thudded around the room, arms tossing and legs turning in different directions. He tried to stare ahead but only a distorted image of his bed came into view. His breathing slowed down, then a harsh collision with the much awaited bed. He impacted with it, then slid down its side, clutching the now obscured cylindrical item held tight within ghost white fingers from tension. The side of the bed cushioned his head which was only being held by his limp neck. The room continued to fade in and out of focus as his eyes vibrated from side to side to attempt to catch glimpses of the familiar world that lay before him. His pupils rolled back into his head as his eye lids drooped at last.

Click-Tick-Tick-Tick-Tick-Tick

His eyes slowly blinked open, taking in his filthy room, like he did every morning. He gently rubbed his tender neck—last night had not been good to him. Flashes of the dizzy memory flooded his mind, holding onto him like Death to its scythe. He stumbled back onto his feet, grasping the bed for stability then looked down at his watch— 3:00. Once more he glanced around, only to catch a glimpse of himself in the mirror—a gaunt figure with a five-o'clock shadow.

He stared at his reflection for a time. He looked the same, but something was off. It had to be the headache that pounded his brain, but that didn't seem right either. The longer he stared, the more he noticed the faint cyan flickers that trembled through his veins below his pail skin. He stood, an almost ghostly being, as he glared at his frail body.

Click-Tick-Tick-Tick-Tick

He rubbed his neck once more, then backed away from the mirror, his eyes brimming with confusion of what was different. He slowly maneuvered around the piles of clothes, searching for his work shirt. Once he found it he pulled his arms through and walked out the door. He began buttoning it up as he slowly went down the stairs toward the familiar.

As he exited the front door of his apartment complex, something clicked. Not a single neighbor had been outside, not even the elderly woman, Edna, who always said hi. *I think she always said hi.* He continued down the sidewalk, walking his usual route to work. His eyes darted toward his watch. 3:00.

He briefly paused. *It's gotta be broken.* He looked up from the useless watch. The street was always crowded, but why not today? Why not now? His heart pummeled within his chest as he picked up his pace down the street a little bit.

Ahead of him stood the garage, erected only to torture him. He cautiously approached the hell-scape.

He bellowed out a hello. No one answered, or cared to answer. He walked around the building, checking the break room, the smoking bench, but most importantly the hanger. The guys liked to hide there, ignoring the work that was going on just above their heads. No one.

He made his way back to the street, scrutinized every detail. It was empty, barren. He shoved his hands into his jean's pockets, and walked over to the gas station across the street. He pushed through the thick glass doors, waiting to be greeted by the Indian man behind the counter—nothing. It was empty. *The fuck?* His heart began to pound harder with each step he took closer to his apartment. He couldn't really be alone.

He made his way back into the building, then began to knock on the doors of neighbors he knew. Edna, who was on the floor below him was always nice, always tended to his wounds when his coworkers gave him a good punch. He knocked on her door—nothing. After a few minutes, he pounded on her door, anxious for an answer. Nothing. His eyes widened slightly as he ran down the stairs to Robert's room. He remembered when Rob helped him up the stairs when the guys broke his leg, took a while to heal. He slammed his fists into the door incessantly, then waited for the door to open with Robert yelling, but nothing.

Click-Tick-Tick-Tick

His legs crumbled underneath his frail frame. He was alone. He was actually alone. No one to yell at him for not fixing a car fast enough, no one to kick the back of his knees and laugh as he fell down, no one to torment him.

It's all a dream. Explains everything. He shook his head, it was impossible. Reality never worked that way-- at least never for him. He nervously laughed. *Even if it was a dream, why is it real? I felt pain...* He fell over onto his side in front of his neighbor's door, staring out through the hand rails. Alone. He had never been alone before, not like this.

He slowly reached up, grabbing his hair tight within his grip as he brought his knees to his chest. Tears dripped down his sunken cheek. He lay there on the dusty floor for hours, tears puddling around his face. Inevitable thoughts of being so alone plagued his thoughts, clouding him grim. Until a single thought crept into him, enveloping his mind with just one idea.

Maybe it was a good thing. He was finally away from the torture that found him every day. No one could hurt him. His mind flashed memories of people he knew, angels and devils alike.

They were like characters in the play that was his life, but he couldn't think of a time they made him feel whole. Even the angels like Edna and Robert still called him Reaper because of his skeletal frame.

He gingerly pushed himself back up and brushed off his jeans. He remembered everyone's names and stories, but they all felt so interchangeable now—so frail. *I've always been alone. Always.* He stared at his feet.

Click-Tick-Tick

Maybe he truly wanted this. For a single moment he felt complete. He no longer had to be berated day by day by his coworkers, feel judged by his neighbors for how he always needed their help. He was free. He wiped his face with a sleeve, then wandered to the street.

A slow smile peaked out onto his lips as he continued down the street. He was finally happy.

This is what happiness feels like.

Click-Tick

The sun slowly rose above the city's buildings. People starting their day, coffee brewing, pets barking, people trekking down the side walk. The garage full of people waiting to get their cars fixed, feet tapping in anticipation.

His alarm was going off with a steady old fashion telephone ring. 3:00 p.m. It kept going. His head continued to lay against the bed, his body limp and his hand relaxed, loose around the pill bottle. The snooze button was never pressed.



“A Beautiful Storm”
oil on canvas with digital photographs by Lincoln Joly

Rattled

by Various*

Through the glare I saw my life flash before me as I was hit by a bus.

But when I turned, I was still standing on the sidewalk.

It looked like it had rained, but I don't remember getting wet. All I wanted was to die but the sidewalk now owned me. But I wouldn't have it. I said, "You get up. Don't let them see you bleed."

That's when the dog walked though. It seemed to be calling me. So I followed.

And I was hit by a bus.

(*The several "Rattled" stories on the following pages are the result of a collaborative creative writing exercise conducted by the students of the Spring 2015 Fiction Workshop course (ENG 465). Each piece contains common text, while the remainder of the lines are invented by a number of different students.)

Rattled

by Various

Through the glare he couldn't make out who was ahead of him. But when he turned, she was there with tears in her eyes. It looked like she was levitating. All I wanted was to feel complete and loved. But she wouldn't have it. She said I'd never be good enough for her, for her world. That's when the dog walked through. It ran up to her and she gave it the love and attention I craved. Could've killed her for it. I thought I might.

Rattled

by Various

Through the glare I saw him. But when I turned, I slipped and broke my tailbone. It looked like he was the one for me. All I wanted was for him to forget I'd fallen, or to help me up, but he did neither. He wouldn't have it. He said I needed to pull myself up if he wanted me to earn his respect. That's when the dog walked though. It snarled at me, biting mad. Something about the dog gave me the motivation to get up and walk away.

I never looked back.

Rattled

by Various

Through the glare came the bullets. But when I turned, my boys weren't with me. It looked like they were dead in the street. All I wanted was to see them alive, with life in their cheeks. But it seems god had different plans. That's when the dog walked through. It had wheels for back legs.

I wish they were here to see this.

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“Spiral”
photograph by Eric Danko

Boreas

by Angela Cleland

He leads winter's chilled wind
As he leaves his domain
Bringing icy stillness to the denizens

Of the world. Plant or creature—he pays no mind
To the emotions of those who remain;
He only leads the chilled winter winds

In a kaleidoscope of blue tinged trends
That the lands imitate while they maintain
The icy stillness brought among the denizens.

For what does the master of frigid kind
Offer to the sound Mountain
Gale? His leadership of winter's wind?

No. He himself as the northern binds
That tie the seasons; he that contains
The Frost created around the denizens.

Purple-tipped wings leave her behind
Each autumn's end. She alone stands within the mountain
As he leads winter's chilled wind,
Bringing its icy stillness to the denizens.

A Cursed Colour

by Angela Cleland

Not the darkest of colours
But the essence of life.
It pours when we're hurt
Drains when we're gone.
Shaped into flowers,
Tears will take your hue
Once given the chance.
How is it that you are so deep
When kept so shallow along the
Pathways left untraveled by mortals?
Are you scourged? Or are we who
Hold you captive the truly cursed?

The Nightmare

by Angela Cleland

Within rails of white lies a maiden fair,
skin of smooth cream and hair of softest silk;
a frightful dream disrupts the peaceful air.
a spirit of night, one of heated ilk,

Takes the reins of her mind; seeking that which
an innocent heart does shelter and hide.
Dew coats her body as she tosses with
abandon among the mass—sweat tipped tides.

Fear clouds the heart and soul even as fire
spreads. Opposed yet paired, forging ahead in
spite of the woeful pleas and haunting cries
for mercy and release sought in dream's sin.

Lust stares about his contemplative perch;
his mount looks on with lifeless eyes, alert.



“Gator Glare”
photograph by Lincoln Joly

calm of nations

by Angela Cleland

Ambassadors seek those
of the blue-orange colours.
Staff in hand, they unite
within the eye; the
calm of nations
evoked by stilled
silence.

Footsteps of Revival

by Jesslyn Craner

Swallow the key to life
And unlock all things inside you.
The unknown is hidden and you must search it out.
As far as the desert wind takes you,
As far as the fire burns,
You must search it out.
Find the moon and the night is yours.
Feed the coyote and she cries for you.
There is no line to cross because you make your own lines.
We must fix what is broken about ourselves
And then we will glow with perfection.
Not having attained it, but having believed it.

Canvas

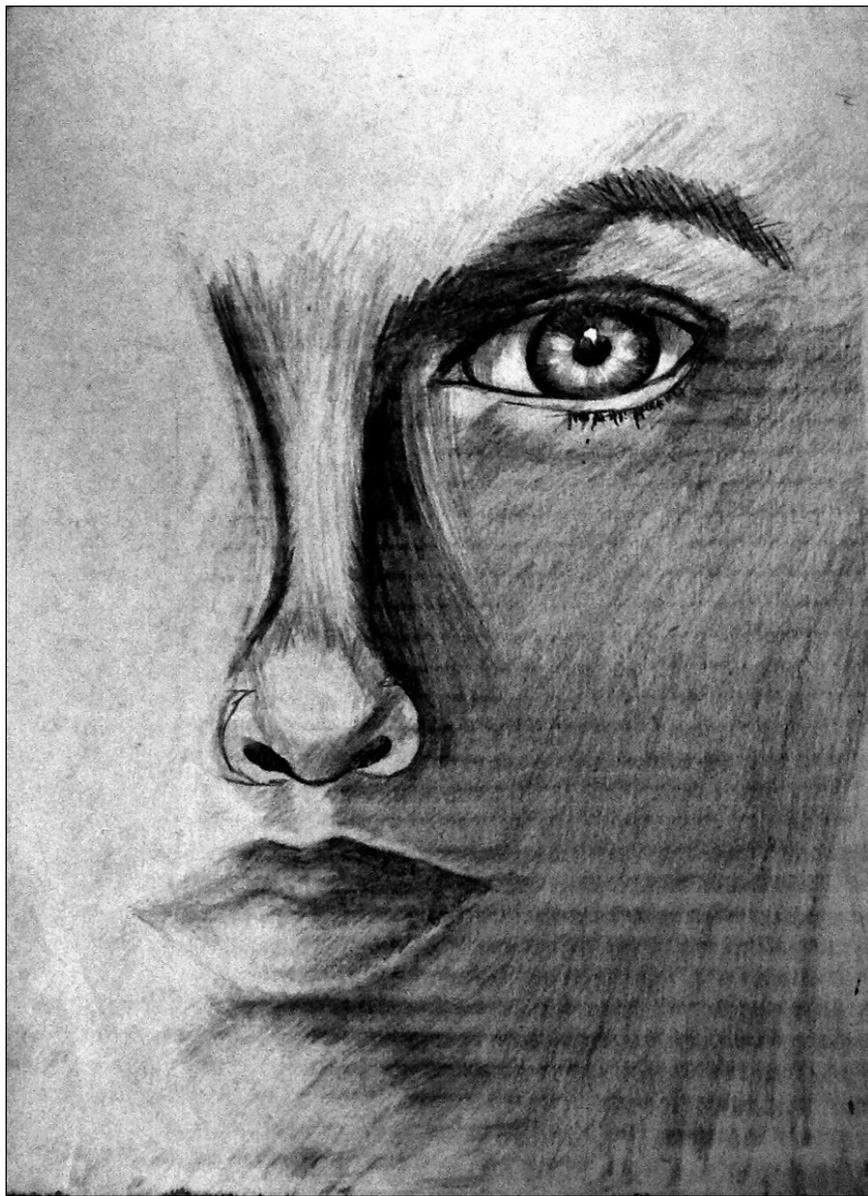
by Alexandra Girardi

A canvas of experience.
Wrinkles of wisdom swimming through skin,
Cracked and withered, a maze of expression.
Fists in anger, holding in adoration, toying in nervousness.
Promise, commitment, aggravation and well-being,
Each finger a representation.
Struggles and triumphs etched and stamped
Unwritten words on skin.

Strings & Things She Gave

by Christofer Gutierrez

“Because she is just a doll” they said
This doll sacrificed every string and every viable patch to make me whole again
She stood Silent, threaded a needle, the fibers rushed, creating friction
Every patch had color, positioned with perfection
Once whole
I stood on my stage proud and complete
Every sorrow
Every fear
Every insecurity
Patched away and mended without omission to detail
She watched me run, walking in frays behind me
Watched me fly and awaited my return
What wouldn't I give to put her back together
Return her to glory
To return the favor of mending this heart suspended by shame
What I would give
I would be her frayed battle flag
I would hang as a memory of her triumph
A rag in the wind without claim to body
Her strength
Her love
Her everything



"A little over half"
pencil on cardboard by Holli Coble-Nunn

She Sings For Me

by Christofer Gutierrez

Vibrations once thought to be only felt before death
I feel them when she sings to me.
The smell of sweet, crisp air
Only known to consume the spring
I breath in when she sings to me
The night and day has no meaning
No hold to claim
Because time has no passing
When she sings to me.
The colors burst into existence,
Prisms of light sensations I see
When she sings to me.
When the song is over, and the last note no longer rings,
I loose a little of myself.
A little piece of my existence stayed behind in the moment
When she sang to me.

dragonfly

by Brenda Hill

M P
y e
s a
t c
i f
c a l Dragonfly. l u

Flying with ease with wings as clear as You Reminding me of someone I knew.
silk. Transparent as my heart sometimes is. take In those eyes I see someone very dear
Seeing you when I need you most. my It is a special person who is no longer here.
Landing here and there you give me comfort. breath Are you there behind those magical eyes?
away!
Oh
to
hold
you
in
my
hand
just
once!

A Moon Lit Journey

by Brenda Hill

Standing here upon this battered deck
whitecaps crashing down with waves of peace
over a heart damaged from the shipwreck

Debris floats out with the tide, a release.

Ocean's song, is continuous.
The moon's glow, a spotlight on the sea.

Stars sprawling out in a sky so spacious,
stand at attention all around the moon.
Each one has a smile that's so gracious

Inviting glimmer motions to the dune,
a stepping-stone to reach celestial stairs.
Strolling up each rising star in tune.

Here in the crescent cradle it seems bizarre,
worries left behind are tiny specks from afar.

Our Eyes

by Brenda Hill

When I look in your eyes,
you don't really notice me.
I get a feeling in my heart,
which should be bursting with love
but because of you is only being filled with pain.
I wonder, "Where is my shelter?"

I always thought you were my shelter,
but, when you look into my eyes
you never look close enough to see the pain.
Never looking long enough at me
to see what I can't say. I am craving for your love
and while looking up, I stand here with an empty heart

begging for your attention with every crayon heart
I draw for you. How can it be you that I need shelter
from? It used to be when your arms wrapped around me I felt love.
Now I don't feel your arms at all. For once if I could look into your eyes
and see that they are not looking past me but at me
it would help ease so much of the pain.

Often a scared feeling comes with this pain
and not knowing how to describe it breaks my heart.
When I act out in frustration, you get mad at me.
Don't you know it's a plea for security and shelter?
I get sad, Mommy, and so do you, I see it in your eyes.
If you would just watch my ballet moves it would bring a smile on your face. It's my
dance for love.

I do a lot of things just to feel your love.
I do a lot of things not to feel our pain.
It is true, I look like you, I have lost the sparkle in my eyes,
I know because I felt it run down my cheeks right past my heart.
I am learning to depend on others and it is to those arms I run and find shelter.
I say all this like a four year old can only say, in a cry, in a tantrum, or in a tug
for you to notice me.

I know your friends are more fun to be with than a kid like me.
All the time you spend with them lets me know they must be easier to love.
Can't you just run to me, Mommy? I will be your shelter
and I will try hard not to cause you pain.
With my outstretched arms I plead one last time since this heart
that beats because of you, needs a mommy who will look her in the eyes.

As you walk past, I speak these words with my eyes. "When you finally look,
you might really see me.
I will be older, my heart will be tougher, but my love
will still be strong, for Mommy it wasn't you, but I did find shelter from the pain.

Lover's Release

by Brenda Hill

Intimate hours filled with love's caresses
Perfect harmony all through the night
Passion exudes from the body that presses
Lips traveling to places of delight

Unlocking legs, release the embrace.
This savage desire must cease and make way
for the ritualistic coming of the dawn we face.
Slow reluctant strides that begin our day.

Yes, passion must give in to reality.
As lovers we chant our goodbye song.
Words that emerge from sensuality
Crying, "Must you come today, oh Dawn?"

We're not ready to let go, though morning is here.
This hunger for more will continually burn
Departure opens the door for fear
Because we know as lovers we may never return.

Across the Pond

by Kara Kamperman

Scouse voices echo off of brick alleyways.
Iconic sounds come out of former Beatles venues.
Winds off the Mersey put a chill on my southern skin.
Cobblestone streets remind me of older, better times.
House music booms from the clubs
as smooth Lambert smoke fills my lungs.
Skinny men and made-up women crowd the sidewalks.
Tourists, like me, stick out like sore thumbs.
Pubs occupy every corner with
unrecognizable beers and entrées.
The smell of crumpets and scolding hot tea
consume the quaint homes outside the city.
Run down, vacant train tracks uneven under my feet
lead me to fields ripe with memories
of picnics on mild days.
This place, this foreign place,
there's no place I'd rather be.
Back in America, I hope
Liverpool remembers me.

Fraiser Fur

by Kara Kamperman

Full of life and spider nests.
You bring joy to children
and water to my pets.
Half your needles on the floor
the other half on my chest
from diving into presents
and a wrapping paper mess.

Come late January, you'll be brown.
The ornaments that hung from you
will all be taken down.
We'll lay you on your back
and drag you across the ground,
and leave you in a vacant lot
where the other dead Christmas trees are found.

Sonnet

by Kara Kamperman

Four crumbled presidents in my pocket,
the last of cash before it turns to Pounds.
Around my neck, a tarnished gold locket
that breathes with me in muffled ticking sounds.

It's nice to get away from the guilt trips
and finally take one that I can't miss.
Just up and go someplace that chaps my lips,
if from the cold or from her fervent kiss.

I'd leave it all behind to be with her.
My family and friends and all I love.
From summer days to winter nights a blur
with icy snow that tumbles from above.

But still I wonder if she'd do the same
or if she'd leave and watch her seasons change.

Home for the Holidays

by Kara Kamperman

Another year has come and passed.
I think of all the time I've wasted.
But I can't think that way,
"it's the most wonderful time of the year," so
I'd better start acting like it.
It's winter, holiday season again.

First, Thanksgiving. Dealing with relatives again.
Of course, all the ones I liked have passed
away. Everyone is unhappy, but hides it.
We all just get wasted
and act like it's not a problem. So
what? It's our family way.

We grab our plates and pile way
too much food on them. Then eat again
a few hours later. We're all in big sweaters so
who care if we're fat. The peas have been passed
up by all so the whole can is wasted.
No one knows why we even make it.

Before you know it,
it's Christmas. We do it the old fashioned way
with a real tree, eggnog, and wasted
money. Lights have to be put up again
and strands are passed
in an assembly line so

it can get done faster. So
many tacky Santas. My mom hates it.
She doesn't have to look at them long before she's passed
out on the couch. I don't bother to weigh
my options, I'll have rum again.
Might as well get wasted.

Yet I still think of all the time I've wasted
and how a new year is so
close. I'll have to do it all over again.
This time I hope I don't do it
the same way
and that the past remains the past.

Passed our and wasted,
way too much food, so
it must be the holidays again.

Suessy

by Chris Kehrer

Writing Seussically
Is musically amusing
It's soothing,
Choosing rhymes
Feeling sublime, can be quite refreshing
Almost like undressing
It's revealing while at the same time concealing
An underlying meaning
That I don't feel like revealing
Inspired by those hip hop kids
Andre, Pac and of course Bigs
Taking those rhythms pumping
Feeling it on the court as I'm jumping
Just another down south man
Pushing to carry out a plan
Hopefully no one strikes on this poem
Jackie Chan,
A poem filled with knowledge
Most not from college
So close to the end
Okay ladies and gents you can breathe again
A sigh of relief
As I am almost done
Just wasting time, sitting in the sun
Might as well roll a big fat one

all the reasons I'm stupid

by Bill Lisbon

I'm stupid like Lestrade when I should be Sherlock.
No, I'm stupid like Sherlock for deducing conclusions
 from clues dropped by a mastermind who meant to.
I'm stupid because I believed everything I read in the library
 and for believing nonfiction meant the same as true.
 Stupid for masking what I tried asking you.
 For not listening to the things you didn't say.
I'm stupid for still sleeping on my side of the bed.
 For studying your picture as if there's a test.
I'm stupid because I always change my mind,
 like the last time I changed my mind for the last time.

I'm stupid for thinking I'd get older with age.

I'm stupid for titling this the way I did,
 when reasons keep compounding like bids
 and run endless as Möbius.

Like a fish dining on an invertebrate with a barbed metal spine, I'm stupid.

I'm stupid because I believe in mirrors.
 Stupid for trusting gravity.
 For skydiving without a chute.
 For digging down to a root.

I'm stupid because I think this poem is salvageable

when it's built from a wreck.

bonne chance

by Bill Lisbon

I am ever the disposable one
the remainder of too many outcomes
flopped atop the discard pile

a joker, unwanted

we can't create any new color.
there's black and white and
everything in between.

it's all math, it's all recipes.
two parts this, three parts that,
pinch my cheeks, throw that shade in the vat.

so now it's all about renaming,
rebranding the primaries.

it's secondary.
exhausting tones, stirring emotion
into the mix to spice things.

“crimson confusion”

“cerulean satisfaction”

like throwing dice.

the outcome is confined to a Crayola spectrum.

hampered & clashing

by Bill Lisbon

His life left to hang, clothes
tell tales, stories spun in costumes worn
by colorful characters, but mostly drab and blue.
Follow the threads to the walk-in,
pressed and on display, frays and fades can be read
but few patches and patterns not.

Relics of fads, fated to resurge, yet some not
surviving the spin cycles, fits burst and come to a close.
Indie rock T-shirts from the D.C. years, Dischord in red,
Matador tangles and Merge, albums scratched and worn
thin, like his frame, once upon, waists and belts cinched in.
Seems those bear the most dust, musty, a chance he blew.

He hangs on to these stained snapshots; a tie ruined by cordon bleu
tumbling from a first-date fork, fancy fashions all for naught,
over balance, cloth napkins, reservations at the inn,
conversations, branded and labeled like clothes,
expensive, expected, statements ubiquitous and worn,
trailing off, fading, from taxi taillights smeared red.

Wardrobes weaved with the timeline, every book he's read,
every cross, every mimicked kiss caught and blew.
Across the spectrum, the fabric, hang shades too faded to warn.
The blackest piece, the suit donned to tie the knot,
reversible, protean vestments to celebrate when things begin and close,
pockets lined with cedar, saved now to sleep in.

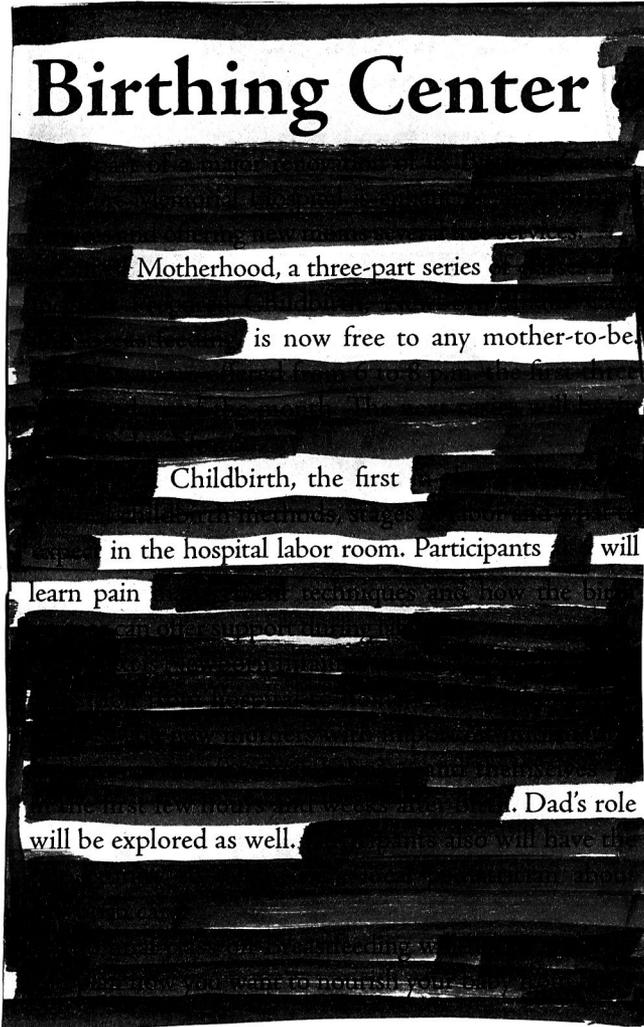
A collection cobbled, salvaged from clearance racks in
hip haberdasher hopes to lead the eye away from cheeks red
and blotched. In hotel bathtubs, washing clothes,
sweaters steeped in foreign smoke, grey tea parties in waters once blue
sloshed on icy tiles where he genuflects pleading, not
for a spree, but for a birthday suit to be comfortably worn.

A cloak to coat the slapdash stitching, a reflective vest to warn
of his contradictions, hampered and clashing, of the cave in
which venture sleuths, tempted to unravel the Gordian knot,
that sliver of articles, once exhaling perfume, paisley red
sweeping skirts, dreadful puffy shouldered shirts of brown and blue
looming, rupturing a suitcase he can't close.

Left to hang, his clothes reveal and conceal a life worn
thin, bruised purple and blue, shrouds to walk a long life in,
a perfectly suited hagiography to be read, though most try to decipher and can not.

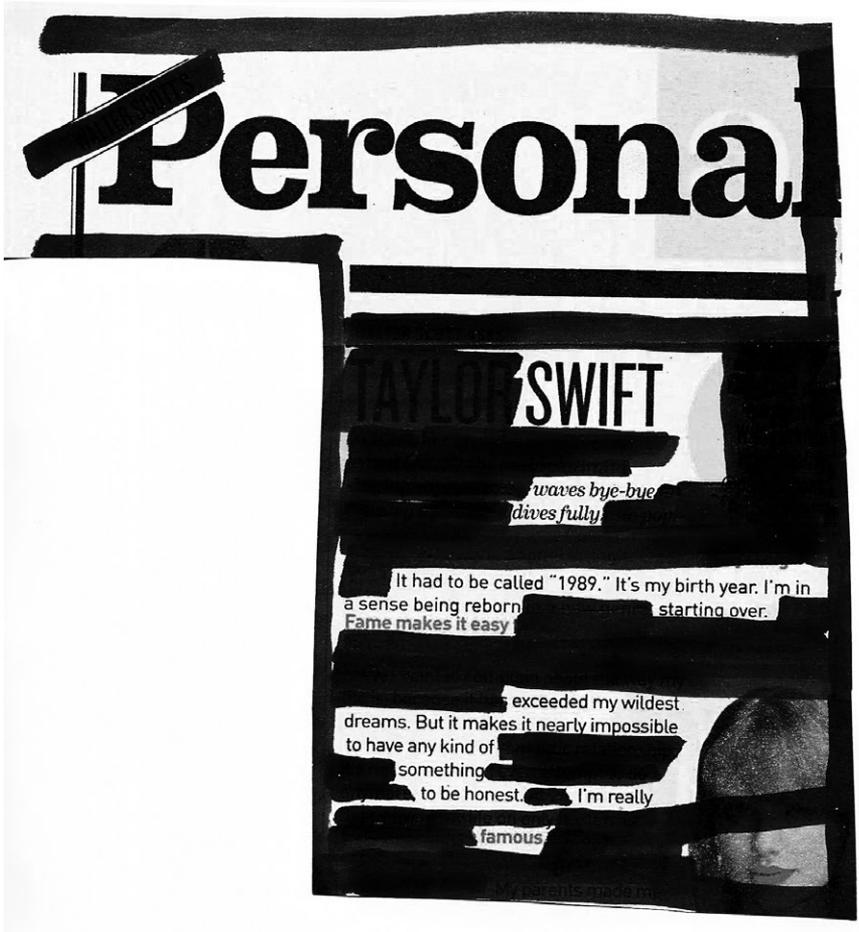
Birthing Center

by Bill Lisbon



Persona

by Bill Lisbon



Bloody Mess

by Ciera Love

Life was on the way and regret was all she could feel.

It was her job to give birth to a baby.

“Blood of my blood. . .”

is what replayed and continued

in her head as she took the glove

off her hand before burying herself under the blanket.

She put on a smile to blanket

her emotions because she didn't want to feel,

but the kid outside the window playing catch with his new glove

didn't help suppress her ideas of the baby.

She thought, “who else would have continued

with this pregnancy?” as her blood

began to boil. “I cant even give blood,”

she sighed, as she rolled her eyes and threw the blanket

off her shivering body and continued

to her medicine, claiming she just wanted to feel

like this wasn't happening to the baby

of the misfits, using her high as her glove

to separate herself from the pain. The glove
of the doctor seemed so thin and yet so strong as he prepped to draw her blood.
“I’m here, baby!”

exclaimed an eager husband with a newly embroidered infant blanket.

“Wrong room. . .” the doctor said as he could feel
the awkwardness and confusion set in. The man left. The doctor continued

his examination as her silence continued
to define their encounter. “Why didn’t he wear a glove?”

He asked as he began to feel
for a good vein to take her blood.

“We didn’t even have a damn blanket!”
she said. “He didn’t plan to have my baby,

I didn’t plan to have my own baby,”
she continued,

“and there will be no child or a husband with a baby blanket
and no kid of mine outside playing catch with a new glove;
not with my blood.

AZT junkies need love too. We want to feel,

but we’re built to get high, not feel a kicking baby.

I’d have bad blood with Jesus if I continued.

There was no glove to prevent this. Only drugs to blanket.”

Nothing

by Ciera Love

This is a story about thinking too hard,
looking too deep into everything,
into black and white.

into grey areas,
and where the light
hits and defies night.

I change my mind.

This is a poem
about thinking too hard
and looking at nothing
and making up anything

to create something
for someone to read
and say, "Hey, I didn't see that!
I didn't *think* about it like that."

All the while completely leaving
out the fact

that

they

haven't

thought

at all

because someone thought too hard,
and looked too deep into something
to change their mind.

I change mine.

This is nothing.

More Melanin

by Ciera Love

I can't go to school because police don't want me to.
I can't go to school because my mom is out of work and my dad's phone doesn't work.
I can't go to school because the pension is running out.
I can't go to school because I might die on my way there.
I'll probably get choked to death on my way to an education.
Or put on probation.
I grew out of my gloves and I can't walk down the street with my hands in my pocket.
I walk past a door, they lock it.
I fit every description, I don't want to go to prison.
I shouldn't go to school because teachers don't teach my kind.
I shouldn't go to school because society doesn't believe in my kind,
Or rather, my pigment.
Cause we signed up to be ignorant and knowledge is for the privileged.
I live this, can't win this.
So I won't go to school because of the war.
Not sure what's the fighting for
I just don't want to gasp for my life on the way back from the convenience store.
Because my moms at home on the floor in pain.
I can tell her smiles a strain.
Please don't make me explain,
but I want to go to school to escape.
I want to go to school to erase
all the reasons we don't, as a race.

the past doesn't last, it lingers; that's corny but

by Ciera Love

Have you ever been dragged to the deacons to be prayed over?

As a sinner, I think they could have prayed more.

Head down, knees to the floor instead.

More scriptures and oil to the forehead.

Still better than bruises and beatings, I bled.

I even said a prayer or two right before bed.

I even said a prayer or two right. before. bed.

I even —

I didn't even think He could hear me,

But for you I prayed, for you I was weary.

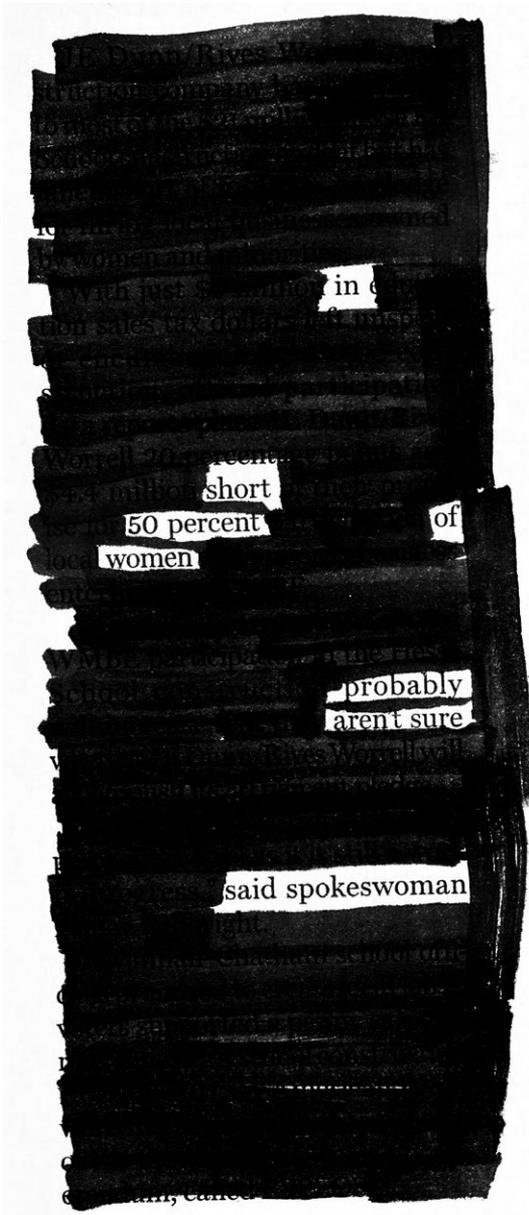
I hate cigarette smoke, but today I purchased my first package of cigarettes

by Ciera Love

Marlboro Smooth,
my days aren't the same without you.
We're a habit, us two.
Down the window.
Feel the breeze.
A flick of light
makes it harder to breathe.
All these residential things.
Cookie cut residential trees.
A breath of air alone.
In my residential home
your residue roams.

Women, on math:

by Ciera Love





“Imperfectly Perfect”
oil on canvas by Holli Coble-Nunn

I Am Me!

by Melissa Oharriz

I have been liberated, never knowing I was keeping myself imprisoned
Afraid to be me
Afraid to express who I am
Hiding behind a façade
Only letting people see a mask
A mere shadow of the whole
Admitting to myself, admitting out loud
I was able to set myself free
Now no one can tell me how to love
Now no one can tell me who to love

I am me!
And not even I will hold myself down any longer

Self-expression is now a release
Being me is its own reward
I am happy, I am centered, I am me!

The way I wear my hair, how I choose to dress
The people that I choose to love and those who choose to love me
You can take me or you can leave me
It makes no difference at all
I love me!
And I do not need you to validate me.

Submit

by Melissa Oharriz

Hands tied, struggling to break free
Rapid breathing sweaty skin
Pain makes the attempts more fervent
Moans being pulled forth
As the excitement continues to build
I should be afraid
I should want to escape
But instead I ask for more
More pain, more pleasure
They are both the same to me
There is a thrill brought along from trust
Allowing you to control me
Letting you bend me to your will
None of that can come without trust
Make me yours and I will obey

angel foot (the herald)

by Adam Trawick

Above,
a zephyr cast from seraphim wings.
& below I am bone — bald as rails.
Such a splendid augur.
She, ivory
& gold.
I,
gristle
& incarnadine.
She moves
as if making love to the wind.
I in longing, lean on ash cane, in wait for her message
below.

Brooding

by Adam Trawick

Along a wall of blood,

he writes of young maiden's hair
and orange oleanders as he buys into fine community;

where community buys
into esthetic ease.

Their beloved *wrong idea*,
revolving till it clicks.

what a breath

She wakes...
yet still in sleep.

Brute Moloch,
sent a caveat,
reddening,
smiling,
he
sang.

VII

by Adam Trawick

Sell to us, she said,
as he raised his head,
a taste of wisdom &
the influence of life's late people.

He felt like a soldier,
once again.
Always being photographed
on the courthouse steps.

Wounded as he took a drink,
he pulled some wisdom from his pocket:

*She likes the idea
of sleeping like a baby
on a silk mattress.*

*He likes the idea
that God is neutral.*

*We all think it's too bad
that just because it rhymes,
that doesn't mean it's true.*

But when dozens of men
were gathered on a beach ablaze
a chill crept full and deep.
He then knew that saints at the altar
and a thousand swallows
falling from the sky were one in the same.

Sell to us or
sell nothing.

::She blows a wind,
and he goes to pieces in a
tenth of a second::

Claws at my Throat

by Kat Trent

Instead of weed
I pop some pills
to numb the pain
to stop the chills.
The high I feel is addictive,
but who may care?
She is vindictive.
High eyes
dry mouth
numb hands-
she cries.
My monster peers and slowly sneers,
I want the pain to disappear.
She grows weary as meds wear off.
She wakes me again.
I can't fend her off.
I can't fend her off.
She wakes me again.
She grows weary as meds wear off.
I want to pain to disappear.
My monster peers and slowly sneers,
she cries.
numb hands-
dry mouth
High eyes
She is vindictive.
but who may care?
The high I feel is addictive,
to stop the chills.
to numb the pain
I pop some pills
Instead of weed.

Disobedience is the New Normal

by Kat Trent

A well-maintained yard doesn't
always breed an obedient march
of teen feet. It doesn't always
mean happiness in the form of
a family shopping together. No,
it sometimes breeds a different
kind. Ones that enjoy the lonely
five hour drive as they watch
those mixed up sunset layers
slowly descend below the
land, only to see a single
shoe on the interstate, and
reminisce.

Stained Glass

by Kat Trent

Shadows engulf you
Swirling within the dark night.
It paints the sky like stained glass
That could break with a single touch.
It pierces your mind,
Cracking the façade you made.

It carries you into the world it made
Just for you.
Shattering your mind-
Just like an unlit room at night,
Where you would hope and wait for mother's touch,
Praying that you don't leave your box of glass.

The same glass
That is self-made
surrounds your heart, "don't touch"
It cries out to all you
Encounter in this tearing night,
In hopes that no one will mind.

And when they do mind,
You strengthen the glass,
And curl up inside the night
That you have made
For yourself, that only you
Are allowed to touch.

But when someone else tries to touch
The place where you hide in your mind
you
recoil, for the thick glass
Causes an echo, and tries to crack what you made
To protect your heart in this shrouded night.

The never ending night,
Where no one can touch
Or hurt your man-made
Disaster, that runs deep in your mind
And sound like kids thumping on a fish's glass.
That was made for you.

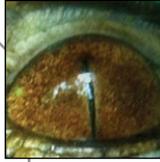
The night is alone within your mind,
When no one can touch you, with impenetrable glass
Surrounding all that was made, to protect you from you.

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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 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 Fall 2015 edition is October 9, 2015.

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

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."