


# Crosscut

2018-2019

Husson University's Literary Magazine

## Welcome to the 26th edition of *Crosscut,* Husson University's literary magazine!

We hope that you will find, located in the pages of this magazine, writing and art that reflects, inspires, and entertains. *Crosscut* showcases the poetry, prose, essays, photography, and art of Husson University students in a quality publication. The magazine represents a "crosscut" of the lives of our students and their life-inspiring relationships with Husson University, their friends, and their families. Each student submission to the magazine is selected through a juried process where the merits of the piece are carefully reviewed by the editors. We, the editors, believe in publishing as a mechanism that both honors students' creativity and allows their efforts to radiate among their peers.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy this publication and that, should you be creatively inclined, you will find your own work located inside the pages of the next edition.

We, the editors, would like to thank the Husson University administration for their support and offer a special thanks to Dr. Patricia Bixel, Dean of the College of Science and Humanities.

*Crosscut* 2018-2019 has been a labor of love. Enjoy!

Maria J. Cahill, PhD, Editor
Kaitlyn Hill, Associate Editor
Jonathan Smith, Associate Editor
Janessa Corrigan, Assistant Editor



**By Samara Muth**

**Front Cover Photograph: Patrick Orcutt**
**Back Cover Art: Eric Cooper**

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David Cahill
Ani Inman
Hanna Jordan
Ty Bassett
Eric Cooper, *Back Cover*




**By Jonathan Smith**

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**Our contributors represent Husson University from a wide-variety of degree programs. This year, our contributors are from English, secondary education, nursing, video production, psychology, journalism, and radio broadcasting.**



**By Jonathan Smith**

## English Degree/Department

The English major at Husson University offers a degree that promotes the professional success of students and supports them within a close, highly interactive departmental family. Students who complete the English degree at Husson University find themselves prepared for a broad array of employment opportunities upon graduation. English students study with accomplished faculty from a variety of interdisciplinary backgrounds as they intensify critical thinking abilities, strengthen communication skills, and utilize current technologies. English majors become astute readers of literature and culture, builders of critical arguments, and writers of creative narrative and poetic texts. English majors and Husson students across disciplines are able to explore and hone their writing skills through a unique array of English and communications courses, such as creative writing, creative nonfiction, professional communication, technical communication, science writing, and playwriting.

**English Graduates:** Our recent graduates have found careers in a broad array of fields, including public relations, fundraising, finance, and teaching. Several have gone on to pursue advanced degrees in literature, law, rhetoric and composition, business, and health care.

**Creative Participation:** Students may challenge and express their creativity by participating in the English and Creative Writing Club: Get Lit(erature), the Husson University literary magazine, *Crosscut,* and the biannual open mic event, "BlueBlack Evenings."

**Literary Conferences:** Students also have opportunities to participate in literary conferences, such as the American Conference for Irish Studies, New England Regional Meeting, which was hosted by Husson University, and our very own Dr. Greg Winston, Fall 2017. The conference theme last year was "Irish Studies, Anti-Globalisation, and Neo-Nationalism."

**Opportunities for Service:** Service is an important component of Husson University as a whole. Get Lit(erature) has teamed up with the Bangor area's Ronald McDonald House in an effort to promote literacy beyond our campus by helping to supply and maintain the RMCH library.

**Writing Center:** The aim of Husson University's Writing Center is to help students across campus develop effective writing strategies. To achieve this aim, the Writing Center employs undergraduate English majors, offering them the opportunity to use their skills to assist their peers in becoming better writers. In addition to guiding students through the challenges associated with writing, writing consultants also further develop their own writing abilities as they "do the work" in the field.

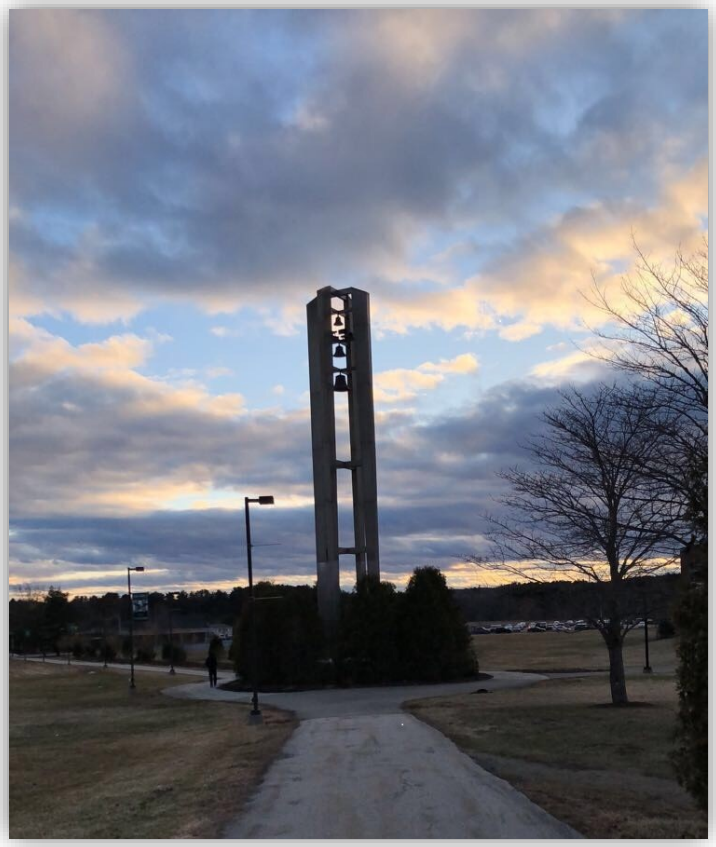
***Crosscut* Assistant/Associate Editors:** Opportunities are available for English majors and other students, across campus, interested in working as editors for *Crosscut.*

**The English Department** offers these various intellectual, creative, service, and professional opportunities that allow students to publish, perform, organize, lead, and contribute not only to the English program, but also to the Husson campus and the Bangor area community. **Please join us!**

For more information, contact: Dr. Clifton Guthrie at guthriec@husson.edu or Dr. Maria J. Cahill at cahillm@husson.edu.

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Address all correspondence to Editorial Staff,
*Crosscut* Magazine, Meeting House 117, Department of Humanities, Husson University, One College Circle, Bangor, ME 04401

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**By Janessa Corrigan**



**By Patrick Orcutt**

## Survival
**By Nicholas Pelletier**

Two survivors awake in a grog
Their plane struck down in the thunder
They hunt for shelter in the fog
They soon find a wing to hide under

Their stomachs rumble
No snacks and dry lips
In search of food they fumble
To find just one bag of chips

Here comes another man
A man named Walter
More mouths mean less food
Friendships begin to falter

In the end, the two said goodbye to Walt
Deciding that he would taste better
with salt

## A Thief Named Alzheimer's
**By Jonathan Smith**

A man once lived who was content
to seek his family's betterment.
He slaved all day, into the night.
He lost his mind while doing right.

Rarely ever did he take a break.
He'd slave and work and sleep.
He loved his family just too much
for greed or apathy.

Forty years of dusk til' dawn,
he's now forlorn and meek.
This man whom I called Daddy,
is now confused and weak.

To see it now, you'd never know,
he was a first time college grad.
His mother, who passed on herself,
once bragged of this bright lad.

He gave it all, and now he's gone.
His body lives but strains.
Alzheimer's has robbed his mind,
but our love for him remains.



**By David Cahill**

## Clouds
**By Rachele Tatosky**

"Look at that one, Robbie. It looks like a newborn with a smile on his face. Have you ever seen something so pure?" she gasps.

"Pure? A newborn? Are we looking at the same cloud? I see a young lion with the face of a predator, scoping his prey," he says laughing.

She sighs, then says, "Look at that one! You can't tell me you don't see a diamond ring."

"I see a circle. Now you're just trying to make stuff up," he says.

"What about that one over there?" she says excitedly, hoping he'll catch her hints. She continues, "It's shaped like a heart! But look, the cloud is breaking in half. The heart is no longer whole."

He sits up, then bursts out with, "I don't want to play anymore! You keep making stuff up! It's not a heart; it's a damn cloud. They're constantly changing and moving on. Let the clouds move on." He hopes she'll catch his hint.

She sits up as he walks away. She whispers to herself, "My heart is breaking, and you're constantly changing and moving on." She lets him move on.

He fades away like a cloud.



**By Patrick Orcutt**



**By Patrick Orcutt**

## Our Love

**By Michaela Lounsberry**

Our love is eternal:
visible to the naked eye,
envied by all.

Our love is special;
nothing can compare,
The truest form of
unconditional love.

Our love is still here.
Even though you are gone,
no longer on this plane,
I still love you.
And you still love me.

## Sunset on the Beach

**By Nicholas Pelletier**

Crackling under the sunset sky,
bathing the beach in a burning fire,
the waves whisk away the stress;
a brief escape from the urban mire.

Surrounded by pain and hate,
we all hope to find such release
as we fumble through our lives
in a world devoid of peace.

Beneath our feet, Earth lies scorned
as it suffocates from our abuse of power.
A new world is coming, synthetic and wrong;
humanity's fate has begun to turn sour.

With such suffering on the way
and hope just out of reach,
I am thankful to have lived
to see the sunset on the beach.



**By Patrick Orcutt**

## Infidelity
**By Caitlin Race**

Infidelity chases me like a madman in a movie.
Strolling along beside me,
lurking around after me.
Infidelity is an unlikely friend, an acquaintance, perhaps.

Infidelity is a rose-gold colored flower.
Tricking me with his beauty,
pricking me with his thorn when he thinks I'm not looking.
Infidelity is a siren, luring me in with his song.

Infidelity is the eye of the storm.
The calm from the rain.
The break of the wind.
Infidelity is starting a video game in the middle of a battle.

Infidelity is a broken glass.
He is a cursed word thrown into the wind.
He is a shoved shoulder after a fight.
Infidelity is a can crushed under a boot.

Infidelity is the ticking of the clock
during a long work shift.
The fear after missing a step on the stairs,
the flash of headlights before the collision.
Infidelity is the end of an unfinished book.

Infidelity is the expressionless stare after a tragedy.
He is the motionless water on a lake.
He is the loveless embrace of old friends.
Infidelity is a cold reminder of what he used to be.

## To Endure
**By Isaiah Kafka**

The water appears so blue and pure.
Waves crashing make sounds I can always endure.
The salt, seaweed, and fish fill the air with powerful aroma;
it's so peaceful and calm, nearly putting me into a deep coma.
A sense of whole fills my spirits, making me smile greater than ever.
I'm home, back to the ocean that fits me better than a snug sweater.



**By Patrick Orcutt**

## El Taco

**By Jonathan Smith**

El Taco is my crunchy friend;
he's spicy, gooey, soft within.
He tastes too good to be a sin.
To call him by a pompous name
would be soft-shelled, alas profane.
For El Taco is never vane.

His yellow, crunchy shell cries to me,
"See here; some beef, some shredded greens!
A little guac, tomato — onions, too.
With love, I 'ceed this shell to you."

Yes, some tacos are hard to beat.
The best of them come from the street:
New York, Oakland, or south L.A.
But only one taco will make your day.

## Riverside

**By Kerrie Wilson**

The brine is the first thing that hits you;
That almost low-tide, putrefied salty sea air.
Then the eyesore of a building comes into view;
That brick red ramshackle rusty framework --
It has seen better days.

The athletes gather 'round every corner;
blatant, clamorous, deep conversations bounce off the walls --
their excitement and dread mingle in the haze.
The day seems too windy for any rowing,
but that doesn't mean any of them will be going.
The coaches decide a run will do them good;
To wait for a clear sky and ceaseless seas.

The taste of copper pennies on their tongues will keep them calm.
They groan and mumble and complain;
they all hope it rains.
The coach just laughs - rain will make conditions better.
Unless there's thunder or choppy water, practice goes on.
They will row, whatever the weather.



**By David Cahill**

## Shadows from My Heart

**By Kaitlyn Hill**

I let the shadows fall
back to where they came from,
knowing that it would open one door
and close another.
I wanted it to fill the spaces between
the words you always left unsaid.
Instead, it left me aching,
longing for something
that was never even mine
in the
first place.

## The Only Thing that Lasts

**By Kaitlyn Hill**

The only thing that lasts
is the love you have for yourself.

The love she had for him
was sewn into the crisscross patterns of her veins.
It was tucked safely into the space between her heart and her ribcage.
There was no room for anything else.
She thought it was just as vital as her lungs,
as they pulled air in to give her life.

He gave her life.
His presence was her drug; the less she had of it,
the more she wanted.
She pushed the other pieces of her away,
just to make more room for him.

What she failed to realize is that she was letting go of herself in order to be
the picture perfect image she knew he wanted.

She forgot how to love herself, and in doing so
she became the shadow of a girl,
once shining,
now burned out.

She felt herself cracking open as he walked away
for the last time.
Her heart shattered into pieces as she realized
he wasn't coming back
and there was no way she could fill the space she had carved for him
without still being hollow,
for she let go of self-love, tossed it away,
for something fleeting and uncertain, coming through in the form of a boy
she thought would love her forever.

# The Old Mirror
## By Rachele Tatosky

Kyleigh drove hurriedly, dodging potholes and bumps all along the side road. Her windows were down on one of the windiest days of the week, so her eyes teared up from the air blowing in her face. Her short brown hair formed knots from the wind's force, and her glasses flew off her face with every swerve, glasses she got for her 18th birthday last year. Samantha, her best-friend, drove far behind her, remaining cautious about driving too fast down an unfamiliar hill. The wind also blew her long blonde hair out of her face. It chilled her arms, sending goosebumps across her white, toned body, dressed in sweats and a baggy sweatshirt. She remained stiff and focused, striving to reach Kyleigh to park behind her. Kyleigh reached the home before Samantha, stepped out of her vehicle that was older than she was, and stared mournfully at the empty house. Stepping out of her car, Samantha felt Kyleigh grab her hand, and she watched a tear appear in the corner of her eye.

"I can't believe she's really gone…. I didn't get to say goodbye to her," Kyleigh said, looking at the house, the only thing she had left of her grandmother, Mary, who had just died. Mary was diagnosed with stage three lung cancer a couple of months ago, and Kyleigh had been caring for her day and night. With miraculous strength, Mary's ending days consisted of smiles, laughs, and a lively facade. She died in her sleep one Tuesday night, and Kyleigh was not expecting it the next morning. They had both been living a few towns over ever since Kyleigh's parents died tragically in a car accident almost two decades ago in the same neighborhood. Mary told her the old house was sold years ago.

"I know, but I'm not going anywhere. You'll always have me. This will be good for you, Ky. I can't believe this place is yours now. It's going to take weeks to explore everything and get it fixed up. Did your grandmother leave you any money?" Samantha asked, feeling overwhelmed.

"I didn't even know she still owned this place. Here, look at this letter she left me." Kyleigh pulled a crumpled up piece of lined paper from her purse and handed it over to Samantha.

Samantha read it aloud. "My dear Kyleigh, if you are reading this, it means I have passed away. I have been preparing for this, so I do not want my death to bring you down. You mean everything to me; thank you for keeping me grounded during my old age and brightening up my life with your smile." Samantha continued to tearfully read the rest quietly to herself, and then spoke up at the end. "I am passing almost everything over to you. I have roughly $10,000 saved up with your name on it. I am giving our current home to an old, dear friend of mine; but, I am giving you the house your mother and I grew up in -- the house you were born in. I am sorry I did not tell you I still owned the building; every step I took inside after your parents' accident sparked the memory of it, and I could not take it any longer. I think you will value some of the belongings I left there for you, though," Samantha read aloud, her voice sadly drifting nearing the end.

Kyleigh was speechless, unable to grasp the last few days of her life. She looked over to the abandoned house; she could not believe the place was still standing: the roof sagged dreadfully, the broken window glass formed daggers, and the shingles were curling with age. The two girls slowly made their way inside, lingering from room to room, breathing in the stale air. There was a lot of junk inside: old bed mattresses, battered boxes with nothing in them, broken chairs and TV stands. She found old photographs, ones that were enough to remind her of two things: Mary's appearance, which was strikingly similar to Kyleigh's, and her liveliest moments in life. She recalled the photographs of her grandmother, the ones that captured her beautiful smile, her brown hair similar to hers, and her pearl necklace she always wore.

There was one more thing that stood out to Kyleigh and Samantha. At the top of the squeaky wooden stairs that felt as sturdy as a piece of cardboard stood a large mirror that was dusty, but it didn't have a scratch or crack on it. The edges were a stainless matte black. It matched the wallpaper, a black and white vertically striped pattern with careless tears along the bottom. It stood at half Kyleigh's height, and it felt like it was full of rocks along the sides when she attempted to pick it up. The mirror carried an unusual presence with it. The girls stopped and stared with a blank expression on their face like they were staring eye to eye with a ghost.

"It's beautiful..." Samantha said as she walked over to the square reflection.

"It is. Help me bring it to my new room. It's heavy," Kyleigh said as they both struggled to pick it up. It needed a little dusting, so Kyleigh wiped it once with the bottom corner of her sweater after reaching the top of the rickety staircase. Quickly realizing her sweater would not suffice, she grabbed a face-cloth from her suitcase and seamlessly wiped off the grime. Once she was done, she couldn't believe how brand new it looked.

"Oh wow, look how beautiful it is!" Samantha exclaimed, walking over; she had been fixating her attention on some old novels shoved messily in a wooden bookshelf. Samantha always made Kyleigh laugh; she was curious about everything, but equally as anxious approaching situations. Kyleigh knew the abandoned house was overwhelming her, and she knew her fast driving worried her on the way there. Yet, her fascination for antiques and love for Kyleigh helped her tiptoe through each nervous step. Kyleigh was grateful for her friendship.

After helping Kyleigh with the mirror, Samantha decided to go home for lunch. When she left, Kyleigh placed the mirror on one side of her room, sitting directly in front of it. She felt like she could feel the presence of everyone who lived in the room before her; she thought that if she looked hard enough at her reflection, she could feel the warmth of the bodies that were once where she sat, or she could smell the wet paint from the first time the room was covered in a bright yellow.

The room resembled a rectangle, feeling almost like a long, wide hallway rather than a bedroom. It had only an old twin-sized bed that she knew would not suit her well. She sighed at the thought of having to dump most of the furniture here, replacing

it with her current belongings. But she knew it would be worth replacing the tattered, faded rug with her white, furry one she got for Christmas. The bedroom had a glorious view of the sunset; she knew that was going to be enjoyable.

Looking at her own reflection, she noticed Mary in the background. She was sitting on the bed behind her. To her dismay, she was young. She knew it was her because she was wearing the same pearl necklace she always wore. Her wavy hair sat beautifully on her shoulders, and the sickness Kyleigh had been witnessing for months no longer invaded her entire presence. It was like she was staring at a photograph or the beginning of a film. The wall wasn't a rusty yellow anymore, but rather a dandelion shade that shined beautifully when the sun hit the window. The old bed sagged when she first entered the room, but now it sat strongly on the bed stand behind her, holding Mary up with ease. Kyleigh sat motionless, dazed by the human-like figure that stared at her through a mirror that was as old as her grandmother. Over in the corner, Kyleigh spotted a crib. Mary stood up and smiled at someone entering the room.

"Good morning, Mom. Is Kyleigh alright?" asked Kyleigh's mother, Anna, entering the room in a frantic hurry. The room was decorated beautifully; the bedspread was the same one Kyleigh had been using for years; it was one of the few things she had that reminded her of Anna.

"She's perfect. One look at me and her cry turned into a smile," Mary said, hoping to get Anna to smile, too. "What's wrong, my dear? Aren't you excited to finally go home?"

"Of course I am. I want Kyleigh to be with her father again; it's been draining having to worry about him in the war. I'll relax when I know he's home safe," Anna said with her head down.

"He'll be fine. I promise, dear. It's going to be a good year. I can feel it," Mary said with her chin high.

It was 1946. Kyleigh was an infant, only 22 months old. The house was occupied by Mary and Anna, both caring for Kyleigh while her father was gone. But, the house only belonged to Mary; Anna had to stay there for a couple of years as she needed help with the baby. The war was over and Anna had to start looking for a new home. She was excited for her husband to return; her excitement grew with each passing day, like a flower blooming in a garden. Anna beamed with natural beauty, with a nose full of freckles and tan skin thanks to her Native American background (Kyleigh always loved that about their heritage). Her smile formed prominent dimples on both sides of her mouth, but Kyleigh couldn't enjoy them enough; Anna's worriment caused a constant frown.

Even with a plan and a bright future ahead of her, Anna fiddled with her fingers and avoided eye contact with Mary with every response.

"Anna, sit down; tell me what's on your mind," Mary said wearily, patting the end of the bed.

"I'm sorry if it seems like I'm being rude. I'm just out of it. The past couple of years have been hard. Even though everything feels like it's in place, I can't help but feel like something isn't right." Anna glanced over at the crib. "I want to give her the best life she can possibly have." She looked back over to her mother and said, "What if I can't give that to her?"

"Please don't worry about that. I will make sure everything falls into place. If there are bumps along the way, we will handle them gracefully and confidently," Mary said with a half-smile, staring into her green eyes, which resembled Kyleigh's a great deal.

Because her parents died when she was only two years old, Kyleigh couldn't remember the pleasure of hearing her mother's voice. This was her first time hearing the softness of her voice and the authenticity of her phrases. She noticed how she scrunched her nose every time Mary made her laugh. She noticed that right away because she did it, too. Her heart suddenly sank to the bottom of her chest. She swung backwards as a tear flew from her eye; she wanted to run to the other side of the room and hug her, but both Anna and Mary weren't sitting on the bed anymore, and the dandelion-colored wall was once again dirty and battered.

Kyleigh stared blankly at the empty bed for a few minutes, slowly absorbing what had occurred. Nervously, she turned her vision on the mirror that still outlined the realistic bodies of Anna and Mary. But there was someone new in the frame. It was her father, John.

Her dad was sharp looking, carrying roughly 180 pounds that was pure muscle. Kyleigh and Anna's hair was brown, but John's hair was as dark as the stars' canvas after the sun sets. Kyleigh never caught that in old photographs; her heart lifted from the bottom of her chest, realizing she got her hair from her mother. Mary never shared stuff like that. She then noticed that her father had a tattoo on his left shoulder. It spelled out Anna's name and below that was Kyleigh's name and a black heart. Kyleigh was barely two years old at the time, and he already had her name tattooed on his shoulder. She thought that was beautiful.

"Where is she? Kyleigh, daddy's home!" John yelled with a smile on his face as he barged through Kyleigh's bedroom door and rushed over to her crib.

"She's been waiting for you, John. We're both so glad you're finally home," Anna said happily, sitting on the end of the bed and bouncing up and down.

"She's absolutely beautiful…. I can't believe she's turning two in a couple months. I've missed so much time with her," John said sadly as his voice became quieter. Two-year old Kyleigh had round, green eyes with feathery eyelashes that matched the color of her hair. She was a big baby, born at 10 pounds, growing consistently ever since. Her beauty showed at a young age.

"Well, you're here now. Everything is finally falling into place," Anna said standing up, cuddling into John's right arm as he held Kyleigh in his left.

Kyleigh had seen many old photographs similar to this image: John holding her in his arms while Anna posed next to him.

But this time, the moment was pure. The image was not posed; it was genuine. The mirror captured the aesthetic of a photograph, but it presented the image as a film, one that pieced together all of the questions she had about her parents: How did they act? What did their voices sound like? How did they get along? And, most importantly, did they love her? She saw bits of herself in the tiniest things, ranging from the color of their hair to the way they laughed, and also what made them laugh, for that matter. A million photographs couldn't replace the realism the mirror was granting her, despite the possibility of it being a wishful dream.

John gently placed Kyleigh in her crib. He tucked her in, grabbed Anna's hand, and he sat down on the bed with her. "I have something I want to ask you," John stated, following a nervous sigh.

"What is it?" Anna asked worriedly, lowering her eyebrows and forming wrinkled lines on her forehead.

"It's great here. Your mother has been so kind to us, especially while I've been gone. I know we have been planning to move in a couple months. But, dear, I found a great place a couple blocks down. And if we want it, we can move in next week," John said, grasping Anna's hand tighter, eager for her response.

"I-I don't know, John. I haven't even seen the place yet, I," Anna stuttered.

"It's beautiful - just like you and Kyleigh. Trust me. I think it's perfect for our new family," John said with a heightened voice.

Anna paused, then said, "I trust you. Let's do it. Let's move next week! November 15th! Mark the date!" she exclaimed, suddenly excited.

Kyleigh sat in front of the mirror motionless and in awe of the moment. She couldn't keep her eyes off of the square piece of glass, afraid of looking behind her and losing them forever. Every time she blinked was like a button on a TV remote, changing the channel without wanting the show to end. She heard her mother shout the date November 15th. That day sounded oddly familiar. But why? She basked in her parents hugging each other happily, and then it hit her. "Wait... wait, no! No! Don't go! Don't move! Stay right here! Please, I beg you guys!" Kyleigh yelled frantically, inching closer to the mirror, trying to get her parents' attention. Even though she could see them clear as day, she was a ghost to them. The mirror was her looking glass; but to her parents, the mirror was a wall, shielding Kyleigh's calls.

November 15th was the day Anna and John died in their car accident. They were in the prime of their life -- happily married with a baby and eager to begin their lives together. Nothing could go wrong. The new house was only a couple blocks away, but that was enough for one careless driver to lay out Kyleigh's lonely future. She would never meet the person who hit them, but in some twist of fate, she was meeting the ones who truly mattered.

Kyleigh sat in front of the mirror with her head down, trying to control her breathing before looking back up. After a couple of seconds, something touched her left shoulder. She jumped as she didn't expect it, and she slowly picked her head up in fear of who or what she would see. Looking directly in the mirror, it was Anna kneeling behind her. Behind Anna stood John, also staring at Kyleigh with a comforting smile on his face. Kyleigh felt overwhelmed, then she closed her eyes.

"Kyleigh, we love you. We want you to know that we look down on you every day. We are so proud of you. Whenever you feel lonely, we are always around. Live life - be happy. We want nothing more than that," Anna said gracefully as her voice slowly drifted away.

Kyleigh opened her eyes. Except, she was lying on the bed. She was no longer crying a river on the bottom of her Beatles t-shirt in front of the mirror. She was staring at the ceiling. She sat up and immediately looked for the mirror. It was still there, but its magical essence was no longer present; her parents and grandmother weren't there anymore. Kyleigh sat up and moved to the end of the bed. This was where Anna and John sat when they hugged each other, cried to one another, laughed at silly things, and made their last decision in life. She felt their presence around her. For the first time, she pictured them accurately in her mind. That image lifted her spirits as she knew their spirits were always with her.

"Kyleigh! Kyleigh! Do you wanna go get something to eat? Sorry, your front door was open. I think I forgot to lock it when I left," Samantha yelled, running up the stairs.

"Yeah, let's go," Kyleigh said, barely capable of forming her words. Reality struck at that moment.

"Are you ok? You look like you just saw a ghost or had a bad dream," Samantha said with her eyebrows down and a worried look in her eyes.

"Actually, I'm great. I feel really good," Kyleigh said softly as she took a deep breath. She picked up the mirror and hung it on an old, rusty nail on the wall. She brushed off the last speck of dirt and looked at her reflection. Except this time, she saw herself differently. She saw bits and pieces of her family, and she never felt more complete.

## Tranquility
**By Jessica Toomey**

Upon stepping outside, it is frosty and brittle.
The waft from a chimney warms you a little.
As the dove-grey sky gently releases flakes
the only sound breaking serenity is the thud after an icicle breaks.
Sipping hot coco and watching the blue jays,
this is how I picture a perfect winter day.



**By David Cahill**

## The Girl with Golden Eyes...
**By Kasey Poligni**

can see the truths that lie behind
the world and those forever in
forgotten dreams and Heaven's sins.
Past the rivers and against the flow,
above the mountain-tops and all we know.
She sees it all and knows we're wrong.
We're living in a Governed Song.
She sees the tranquil mirror
that's said to reflect the world.
But knows it destroys all beauty
and starved the teenage girl.
She sees the cities' towers fill the streets with light,
and God they be so pretty,
but damn they're Devil's sight.

Because in every brightened room be a worker's soul,
working all its life away to fix the man-made hole.
She sees the abandoned streets
once filled with childish games.
And friends and families say goodbye
and give in to idealistic shames.
And she sadly knows that soon
their abandoned souls will die.
Their mad minds will race,
and their foolish hearts will cry
because the perfect world they thought
was always on their side
revealed to be a misery,
of all man's darkest lies.
And when this happens, then they'll, too, see
with Golden Eyes.

# The City that Never Sleeps

**By Kaitlyn Hill**

Five minutes in New York City, only one bathroom break, and I had toilet paper stuck to the bottom of my boot.

I mean*, come on,* really?

As I came out of the bathroom, my boyfriend, Freeman, laughed and pointed at my foot. Much to my chagrin, I tried to see what he was pointing at, but I kept twisting my torso the wrong way. I didn't want to be annoyed — I mean, 'We made it to New York!' — but I had just spent nine hours traveling on cramped, smelly busses, and waiting in places with more people than I was used to. And besides, didn't that kind of thing only happen in the movies? My mouth twisted into a scowl as I ripped the offensive scrap of white off my boot, balled it up, and tossed it at him. He caught it midair and lobbed it into a nearby trashcan.

"You could have just said something instead of laughing about it," I muttered, rolling my eyes.

"I know, I know, but it was funny. I thought that kind of shit only happened in movies."

I had to laugh. I have never had toilet paper stuck to my shoe before, and it happens at Port Authority bus terminal, the moment I arrive in the city? Totally not the glamor I expected.

August and I met when we were both freshmen at Hermon High School. I took one look at his peach-colored shorts and decided that we would be best friends. We were inseparable through four years of teen angst. It nearly broke me in two when he told me he was going to college at NYU. I was happy for him, but also really sad in a selfish kind of way. I wished him well with promises to visit. When I made those promises, I never thought it would take me four and a half years to actually keep them. And yet, here I was — love of my life in tow — ready to experience the big city that my very best friend had carved into his home.

I was a fanny pack and a visor shy of being the ultimate tourist. I had my fleece jacket draped over one of my backpack straps. We borrowed my sister's suitcases for the trip, and they were purple with white polka dots. I swiped a map off a mecca of tourist-related materials and had my nose buried in it. My hair was wrapped tightly into my standard bun, up out of my face, and my burgundy t-shirt was rumpled from the trip. Freeman stood by me dutifully in his standard blue jeans and black t-shirt, twisting strands of his too-long beard around with his fingers. He had finagled his backpack straps around his suitcase until it stayed in place, and with his other hand, had a vice grip on the handle.

Freeman and I started wandering around the bus station, dragging our suitcases behind us, exhausted but feeling the buzz that New York City willingly hands out to anyone who is eager to accept it. I knew August was coming via subway to collect us and bring us via subway to his apartment in Brooklyn. I also knew that due to the madman they let drive the bus we took from Boston to New York, we were a solid 45 minutes early, and August was still underground and not expected to arrive anytime soon. Not to mention that I had no idea where the hell he was going to arrive, having absolutely no understanding of how the subway system works in the first place. The thought made me nervous, but I knew it would be fine.

Freeman looked around and pointed to what looked like a subway entrance. We investigated, and upon further inspection, bought seven day Metro passes. We saw a group of guys our age standing by the turnstiles, swiping their Metrocards for people who were willing to slyly hand them money. I watched, amused, the toilet paper long forgotten, happy simply to be in New York. August told me he was coming on the C train, and I noticed with slight panic but also humor that there were no signs anywhere near us that indicated that the C train would arrive at this particular gate. We figured we would hang tight until August gained cell reception back and let us know where he was. We headed for the escalator, hopeful that once we got up to street-level, we could find some place to hunker down yet where we would be spotted easily.

"I have no idea where he's going to be," I told Freeman honestly. We were standing in front of the escalator, letting a couple and an old man with a cane go before us.

"Yeah, I have no idea either, babe," Freeman replied, his hand on the small of my back. "We'll find him, though."

"Do you guys need help? Are you lost?" We looked up to see an old man, four steps up the escalator, staring down at our pitiful lost selves. His dark, dark skin contrasted against his graying beard, and he had a smile full of holes. His cane was in one hand, hovering above the escalator stair, and in his other hand lived a small bag of peanuts.

"Uh, we're just looking for one of our friends. He's coming to meet us," I responded quickly, not making eye contact. My mom would have passed out and died right there on the floor if she had seen me talking to a complete stranger in a bus station in New York City. Then, I'm fairly certain she would have come back to life and kicked my ass.

The old man marched his way down the escalator backwards, and joined us once again. "Well, come right on with me. I will bring you up to street level, to Duane Reade. Then you can text him and let him know where you are," he replied.

Freeman looked at me, his eyes full of question. 'What the hell is Duane Reade?' I shrugged back, not wanting to be rude, but also not wanting to be kidnapped and killed after less than an hour in the Big Apple.

"Sure, man, that would be great, thanks," Freeman responded. I noticed with love that he tucked me behind him as we fell into step behind the old man.

The helpful but slightly creepy man with the cane took us straight to the doors to the outside world, and I was hit smack in the face by my first real, full glimpse of the city. We were on the fringes of Times Square, and I was mesmerized. Immediately.

"Holy. Shit. We're. In. New. York," I gasped in Freeman's direction as I gaped at the lights, the people, the busyness, the movement.

“Wow,” was all Freeman could say. Honestly, “wow” was the last word I thought would come out of Freeman’s gun-toting, country-loving mouth, but he was entranced.

“Take it all in, baby,” Mr. New Yorker said and grinned at us. He held his arms out, cane swinging, proud, like a new dad presenting his newborn baby to his extended family members for the first time.

“We’re in fucking New York!” I squealed.

“You’re in New York! Let’s go right across the street to Duane Reade,” the old man pointed to our left. Sure enough, I saw the huge sign on the storefront. We followed him, and I noted with horror how he just waltzed across the street with cars barreling toward him. Doing so is something I would get used to as the week progressed, but in that moment, I was stunned.

I was pretty nervous about the people in New York, having heard horror stories about big cities. However, our newfound friend waited with us until August returned my phone call. August determined that he was only a few blocks away from us, and assured me that he was running to meet us. The old man was genuinely delighted to hear that he had brought us somewhere where we would be easily found. He was so happy to help us, and my heart was full, again, grateful to be on this journey in the first place. He did ask for “a little something as thanks,” and I gave him the three crumpled ones I had in my wallet. I know it wasn’t much, but it was the only cash we had, having not hit an ATM yet. He grumbled something, mouth full of peanuts, but he took the money and went back the way we came with a wave.

When August finally made it to us, we followed him dutifully, trying to look at everything around us while also trying to avoid being run over. It was almost 11:00 at night, but everyone had somewhere to be, and I loved it.

We spent Thanksgiving week seeing the city. We went to the 9/11 Memorial, the Charging Bull, the MoMa, the Met, the Frick, Rockefeller Center, Grand Central Station, Central Park, Times Square, Strand Bookstore, Union Square…. I saw Lady Liberty from Battery Park. I walked the streets of Brooklyn in the middle of the night. I ate dollar pizza (some of the best pizza I have ever had), and discovered a new love for vodka-cranberry drinks. I listened wholeheartedly to the people playing music in the subways, letting their beautiful voices echo off the underground walls and wrap around me, a hug from an old friend. I gave money to every single street performer I saw. I wanted to be a tourist; I wanted to see everything.

With each step on the concrete, I fell more in love with New York. I mulled over the notion of graduate school in the city. I felt like I had come home after years of being away. I never really understood August’s desire to leave everything he had known for something so big and daunting, but standing under the lights in the heart of Times Square, I finally found the pull. The city had thrown a rope around my middle and was slowly reeling me in. It snatched away my small-town loving, and cracked me open and pulled me outward, leaving me with a need to fill the newfound parts of me with the brightness only New York City can provide.

This giant place I thought I would be a stranger in welcomed me. The concrete and the scaffolding and the smell of street food surrounded me and opened my eyes and my heart to the prospect of something bigger than myself.

I have never felt more alive.



**By Patrick Orcutt**

# Overcoming a Never Ending Feeling of Apprehension

**By Jade Hichborn**

In his book, *Turtles All the Way Down*, John Green gives us this glimpse into what a life of anxiety is like. Luckily, it's a book, and we don't have to experience this feeling first hand.

Unless we do.

I've spent the majority of my life in what I would call a pretty average fashion. Throughout this time I've had my fair share of episodic anxiety, but really, who hasn't? I wasn't the most adventurous or social person in the world, but I also didn't feel completely incapacitated by these bouts of anxiety. Not yet, anyway.

This brings me to about six months ago. The beginning of my second year of college starts off the same as the first. I am exhausted because I haven't actually gotten back into the pattern of going to sleep at a reasonable hour, and I am also excited. Excited for my new classes, a new semester, a new beginning.

I amble into Peabody 228, a room that I have sat in too many times before. I examine all of the faces around me, some familiar and some new. I sit down in my usual seat and engage in some light-hearted conversation with a friend about my recent engagement and her trip to Europe. Things seem right. The horseshoe arrangement of desks starts to fill, and what I had expected to be twelve or thirteen turns into twenty-five bodies, elbow to elbow, in an increasingly warm room. Our professor enters, and I am glad to see her warm smile. Once class starts, I will have something to focus on other than the gap that is closing in on me.

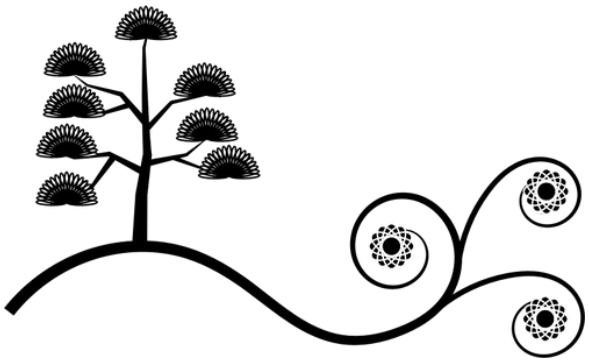
About twenty minutes into the class, things are no longer fine. I can no longer ignore the harsh aroma of cigarette smoke carried by the girl to my left, and why is this guy wearing so much damn cologne? Good Lord, why is it so hot in here? This feeling of sensory overload builds up; suddenly, I'm sure I'm going to throw up. Now. I've never gotten up in the middle of class before, but this is necessary. You'd think I'd be too concerned with vomiting on myself to care what anyone thinks about me walking out of class, but you'd be wrong. It seems like I'm walking in slow motion. Stepping over an array of backpacks, squeezing behind pushed out chairs of those who like to stretch out — a classroom turned into a labyrinth. This walk that should take fifteen seconds is never ending, and the door seems to be an unreachable goal. I'm looking around and I'm sure everyone is staring at me, wondering why I'm leaving.

I make it into the empty hallway, yet I'm still unsure of my surroundings. The yellow tiled bathroom I stumble into gives me solace, and I thank God I'm alone. I lock myself in a stall, read the poorly taped copy of "Toilet Times" on the back of the door, and breathe. I no longer feel like throwing up; so, obviously, I just got too warm or something. I'll go back to class. I walk back to my seat and reposition myself. About five minutes go by before I realize that this feeling is back, and it's not going away anytime soon.

After an exhausting fifty minutes of, 'Am I going to throw up? Oh, maybe I should be paying attention in case this is on a test. Can she tell that I'm not listening to her right now? Could these people sit any f***ing closer to me?' I'm ready to go home.

'Obviously,' I tell myself, 'this is an isolated incident.' Wrong. This goes on for the next 112 days. Things get so bad that I call out of work, and I start to skip classes. I need my fiancé to give me pep talks over the phone before I can perform the simple task of exiting my car in the parking lot. I go to the doctor because I've been in a constant state of nausea and denial and this needs to stop. I try a medication that makes my heart beat so fast that I pace the house sixty times before my mother can finally convince me that I'm not going to die in my sleep. I eventually pass out from exhaustion and sadness.

This sounds bleak, I know. It's hard to change the tone of a narrative in the last paragraph, but let me assure you of one thing: this was perhaps the greatest thing that ever happened to me. It took feeling like my world was coming to an end on a daily basis for me to realize that some things just aren't worth ruining yourself for. After spending months being dependent on someone else, I finally felt like I had to trust myself; I had to accept myself for who I am. Now, I'm still far from where I'd like to be. I still have times when it seems like I'll never feel human again and that I can never live a productive life of my choosing. But I don't have a problem getting out of bed in the morning. I don't cry in my car before heading to U.S. History. And I don't feel like I need to obsess about what people think of me. Perhaps John Green is correct, and we don't have a choice in this matter of being scared by our own thoughts, but we do have a choice to hope for a better tomorrow.



# The Enemy Within Us

**By Rachele Tatosky**

Bell Hooks, powerful feminist speaker and writer, once wrote, “The enemy within must be transformed before we can confront the enemy outside.” Now, Hooks was referring to a woman’s unconscious tendency to be sexist while also advocating for the feminist movement. It is true — you can’t make an impact on the outside world if your unconscious aims to drag that down. As aspiring writers, we need to know where *we* stand on something before we influence potential readers. We must come to terms with our internal truth, something truly important to *us*, before we convince others it should be important to them, too. It is when we attack writing with this sincerity that we make an imprint on our desired audience.

Think about where you are all sitting right now. Don’t think about your uncomfortable chair or the unevenly-tiled floor; think about the context. You are sitting in the middle of a vital transition in your life. Professors have spent the last few years choosing writing subjects for you. You have been writing with minor freedom by the rules of their rubrics and expectations. Whether you decide to become a novelist, a columnist, or a poet within any such writing profession, you will begin writing about topics of your own discretion; you will have the openness to dig deep into the core of your aspirations and ask yourself one question: What matters to me? When you answer this question, then you can use your inner passion to write a powerful piece, a piece worthy of making an impact.

I am confident that you will all reach this goal at one point or another, as long as your “enemy within,” as Hooks put it, does not hinder you. While a feminist’s enemy may be an unconscious inclination to pin women against women, or exclude men from the fight against sexism, an English graduate’s enemy may be lack of confidence. Ambitious, talented writers, much like all of you, can’t back away from a self-important concern in fear of backlash or negative feedback. You can’t back away from writing about your desires, your opinions, or your responses to issues in fear of not being published, or not being *heard*. This encroaching fear, this lack of confidence, needs to be abolished if you plan on making that imprint on the world.

Do you think Martin Luther King Jr. would have given his famous “I Have A Dream” speech if he was worried about the backlash of white supremacists? He conquered his “enemy within,” a lack of confidence many civil rights activists surely felt amidst the tension between races in the 60s. If he faltered because of the idea that the 250,000 people attending that day’s March on Washington, along with the rest of world who heard his address thereafter, would disagree and ridicule him, he would not have helped pave the path towards equal voting rights and desegregation policies. He would not have used the forceful effect behind his words to shape perspective amongst his audience.

Also, Frederick Douglass, former slave in the nineteenth-century, would have never made an impact on the abolitionist movement if he hadn’t taken his grief and inferiority as a slave and transformed those feelings into dominant pieces of writing. While writing his autobiography, Douglass took his own life experiences and wrote about them despite how difficult it doubtlessly was to revisit such unfortunate moments, a task writers often do to conquer their “enemy within” and to use their strength to influence others. Brave writers like himself would never be able to put historical issues into context for interested readers if their unconscious refused them of this goal.

Even Hooks herself, while aiding in the feminist movement, pushed past anti-feminism critics in order to address issues dear to her heart. Her fearlessly-written book answers the question: What matters to me? Well, women’s equality matters to her, and this shows through her confidence that spills itself on her pages as each word soaks it up. She, along with these other influential speakers and writers, identified their internal truth — a controversial topic they picked *themselves* to write about; it wasn’t picked for them by a professor. This freedom of choice made their writing that much stronger.

We should consider these examples as we embark on our own literary journeys past these walls and unevenly-tiled floors. We should consider the confidence among these influencers as we set out to rightfully embody a meaningful topic within our own writing. It is not until we feel eager and confident about something that we will do it justice. As you all sit in your uncomfortable seats, you should know this transition in your life is a great big step to releasing your “enemy within.” Your education has planted confidence inside of you that is patiently waiting to blossom; it is now up to you to decide how to use it.

So let me ask you one last thing: What matters to you?

# Love, Loss, & Lessons

## By Kylie O'Connell

After a six hour trip filled with laughter and many movies, we had arrived. We had fought hard to get here; knocking off the number one seed with a glorious goal in double overtime just days before. Castleton,Vermont: not the most exciting town I've ever been to, but there were clean, comfy beds that called my name. It was an uneventful night overall, and most of us went straight to bed. Some of us stayed up to talk about the nerves sitting in the pit of our stomachs even though the game was more than twelve hours away. I was exhausted, but I needed to try to shake this feeling before bed or else my slumber would be a restless one. Many of my teammates shared the same feelings. The mixture of excitement and nervousness began to settle as we relaxed and had a good laugh. When my eyes became heavy, I felt ready. Ready for the next day. Ready to play the sport I love: soccer. Ready to rightfully beat Castleton. Ready to win a championship.

We rose bright and early to prepare ourselves for the day ahead. A team breakfast to start the day, in a room filled with tangible hysteria. Not one of us could sit still. Not one of us could talk about anything but the game. And not one of us could stop ourselves from drawing the attention of the whole dining room by yelling, "It's game day!" the team catchphrase for every competition. We still had hours to wait, but it felt like we could've played that game at six in the morning fueled purely by team spirit. Coach reminded us over and over that we needed to relax and not lose the amazing energy we had before game time. We listened; we headed back to our rooms and distracted ourselves with school work. It seems strange, but it was calming to focus my mind and compose an essay when just minutes before my head was in one hundred different places. Soon enough it was time for pre-game practice. We geared up, reignited our energy, and headed to a field close by.

It felt good to step on the field and stretch out the muscles that had worked so hard in the past week to get us where we were. The practice was light and slow moving, but any spectator could tell we needed it. It was the first true glance of how the nerves were racing through our bodies. Passing was good, but not good enough. Shooting was good, but not good enough. Communication was good, but not good enough. I could hear my voice inside my head, saying, "It's not good enough, Kylie. Work harder." So, I did. But I know if we had stepped onto Castleton's field at that same moment, it would have been a totally different game than it was. Coach believed we had had enough and we cooled down. It was time for lunch; we needed fuel as game time was quickly approaching.

It felt like the day had flown by when it was time to board the bus that headed to the field. I couldn't help myself from becoming a big ball of nerves all over as I sat there thinking: 'How did we get here? How did we beat Colby Sawyer? How did I become a starting defender? How am I going to be able to play this whole game at full tilt? Can we do it? Can I do it? Millions of questions swirled through my brain; I was so nervous. My first championship game. Was I ready?' I still don't know the answer, but I decided to drown the questions and everyone around me out. It was time to focus, time to get my head in the game because, ready or not, the game was only a couple of hours away. Songs came and went, not even coming close to touching my nerves. Castleton was only minutes away when I had a moment of realization; words flowed through my headphones that grasped my nerves and put them to rest.

*Look, if you had one shot or one opportunity to seize everything you ever wanted in one moment, would you capture it? Or just let it slip? Yo, his palms are sweaty, knees weak, arms are heavy. There's vomit on his sweater already, mom's spaghetti. He's nervous, but on the surface he looks calm and ready.*

As cheesy as it sounds, it sparked something in me. I only had one chance at this, and I knew I was ready for it. I trusted myself and my team; there would be no let-downs that day.

When we arrived, anyone around us could have felt the tangible intensity that radiated from every girl who stepped off the bus. Something about being at the place of competition changes you. There is no more laughing, no more joking, no more nerves. You are just ready to play; you have to be. I love my team and I appreciated their enthusiasm as we entered the locker room, but it was my time to zone in. I went silent and focused on me. A lot of thoughts came rushing through my head as I began dressing for the game. As articles of clothing found their spot on my body, I felt the jumble of nerves and excitement start to crawl back into my stomach. I quickly told myself, 'No'; there was no time to psych myself out before the game. Fully dressed, I decided I needed to take a walk and get away from the madness that twenty-seven girls in one room can create.

I took five minutes to myself and then headed to the athletic trainer, someone I knew I could trust. While I was getting stretched out, I disclosed every one of my fears and the origin of my nerves. He gave me many kind words in return to ease my mind; however, I was so grateful to myself for expressing those feelings outwardly. It lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. It made me question why I was nervous in the first place; I love the game, win or lose. Sometimes, it is hard to remember that. Once I had, I was truly ready to go.

The timing was perfect; as that weight lifted from my shoulders, coach asked me to rally the troops and prepare them to head to the field. We walked over with adrenaline racing through our bodies and intensity smeared across our faces. The timing also led us to walk side by side by our opponents. I felt mean; I didn't want one of them to see me smile. I wanted them to be scared and nervous as I was just moments before. They were. They knew we should have beat them the first time around but fell 2-1 in a nail-biter. We were one hundred times more ready for them on the day of the championship.

We hit the field. Our warm-up felt quick, but that was okay as adrenaline would fuel us through this match. My excite-

ment began to grow as the seconds clicked down, and I saw two faces in the stands that were unexpected. At first I saw my mom, my number one fan who wouldn't miss a game, no surprise there. She then stepped aside to reveal my niece, my mini-me, my heart. She was there to support me and learn about the game of soccer, which she was also falling in love with. This gave me another splash of motivation, as I couldn't disappoint her. Just minutes before the sounding bell, I took a quick glance into the stands to see the turnout. I was worried about not only battling Castleton, but their fans as well. As I swept the crowd another familiar face came into view. My boyfriend had made the six hour journey to support me as a surprise. Another splash of motivation. I know it shouldn't matter who is watching you, but at that moment, my heart was so full. I felt so supported. I felt like anything could happen in this game, and they would be there for me. I felt like I needed to make them proud. I felt so ready to play. The sounding bell rung; it was game time.

Forty-five minutes flew by. My feet did not leave the turf for one second. My head was pounding from the numerous shots rocketed off it. Every muscle in my body was tired. I was sore but not even close to ready to give up. We got a break, only ten minutes, and discussed everything we needed to do to be better; there was a lot on that list. The most important thing was that we only had one more half and we needed to put the ball in the net.

In the next forty-five minutes my strength was tested. I worked harder than I ever had; I sent perfect balls to the back post, only to be ignored by my teammates. I played offense and defense, truly spreading myself thin. I filled in for my teammates when their bodies wouldn't allow them to get to where they needed to be. I was running myself into the ground. Then finally, a corner kick. It was frightening to allow the Spartans that opportunity, yet so refreshing to have a minute to breathe until, BAM. I was down. I was in a lot of pain as tears rushed to my eyes. I did not stay down for the fear of my mother rushing onto the field to check on me. However, in that moment, I couldn't move. My head was pounding in excruciating pain. The ball had flown into the eighteen yard box, inches from me. I jumped in hopes to clear the ball away from our keeper using my head; the Castleton forward had the same thought. It was like a ninety mile-per-hour car crash as her teeth collided with the back of my head.

I began to shake it off knowing that I could not leave the game. I would not leave the game. Our athletic trainer came running over to assess me and advised me to step off the field. As I looked up, I saw coach prepare a substitute for me, and I was enraged. I had worked so hard thus far and refused to hand that over to someone else. I felt my hand for blood and found none. That was my answer; I would not leave the game. I took a breath and prepared myself to continue. I played with no deficits until the final buzzer rang. Zero to zero. Both teams had held onto the tie, fighting their hardest fight for the championship title.

Overtime: ten minutes of pure chaos. The golden goal scorer walked away as the champion while their opponent left feeling defeated. Overtime felt like a complete blur to me, only remembering plowing through my exhaustion and never losing my energy as I encouraged the team. The game was still held at a tie when the first buzzer rang. One more ten minute chance to put the ball in the back of the net. Time clicked down at what felt like rapid speed. Any bystander could tell that every woman on that field was running out of gas. Frustrations began to show but no one gave up. With four minutes left, our exhaustion got the best of us. A midfield breakdown led me to step forward; the ball bounced on the turf in a way I was unable to get my foot on it. Bronwen Hopwood, the Castleton forward, flew by me. I credit her for the burst of energy she had after 105 minutes of intense soccer. When the ball met her foot, she did not stop until that ball hit the back of the net. The game was over. We were not NAC champions.

Everything in my head screamed, 'This is your fault!' I felt so many emotions rush through me as I walked off the field with my second family. Anger. Sadness. Guilt. Embarrassment. I wanted that game so badly, not only for myself but for the seniors as well. They deserved to be champions. With all these emotions flowing through my body, I shook hands with my opponents like a zombie. I was not ready to be happy for them in that moment. I stepped away afterwards and allowed myself to shed tears of disappointment. Many compliments flooded through our team, but we didn't believe them. How could we deserve that after we lost?

I was ready to get out of there. Getting through the award ceremony was tough; the Spartans radiated happiness, which they deserved, but I did not want to see. MVPs of the tournament were announced, and I was shocked to hear my name called. 'Why was I up here? I let them win the game.' As I walked off the field, I was greeted by many supportive fans and politely said thank you but did not feel like I deserved it. I was as ready to get away from that field as I was to step on it hours earlier.

This game taught me a lot even though it took me a long time to cope with the loss and understand why I was awarded for my hard work. It taught me how much I truly love the game and how much I was willing to give for my team. It taught me how to be happy for those who have taken something you truly wanted. It taught me that you will not always get the outcome you deserve even when you work your hardest. It taught me not to second guess myself because I did deserve to be recognized. And it taught me that disappointment then can lead to motivation now.

# Merry Thanksgiving
## By Samantha Ireland

Having a sick parent is always difficult. But to me, growing up with a sick parent was more normal than it was challenging. Half the time, I think it was easier dealing with everything when we were younger. Other times, I wonder if that was the worst thing that could have happened to kids as young as we were. I was freshly twelve, Lexi eight, Emilee six, and baby Reed a whopping four-years-old. I look back on things that happened when my dad was dying, and remember how life didn't seem so bad. Maybe because of how naive I was. There were plenty of benefit spaghetti dinners, casseroles brought to the house, and a few of my teachers even sent me home with cookies or brownies after school. I really enjoyed the food aspect of sympathy. The surplus of meals and snacks definitely seemed like a perk of having cancer in the home, and to be honest, I really enjoyed all of the attention I was receiving: "Oh, poor Sami; her dad has cancer." I quickly learned that food was the key to expressing pity, and I was positively okay with that. I think that that could be step one of having a sick parent: accept the pity food because sympathy tastes pretty damn good.

For some reason, food was a big theme in my dad's battle with cancer. When growing up with two six-foot tall parents, two younger sisters, and a baby brother, every battle involves food in some way or another. My dad was a broad and rugged forestry business man. The amount of food he consumed in one sitting was definitely a vital thing to remember when it came to preparing meals. Once he started needing a feeding tube, there was so much more food available for my siblings and me during dinner. Realizing we didn't have to fight over the last piece of pizza was a life-changing moment. Although it's kind of barbaric to see this as a chance to consume more food, that is how I, along with my three younger siblings, found the advantages in our unfortunate situation. Step two of having a sick parent? Find the advantages because it's easier than focusing on the disadvantages.

By the time Merry Thanksgiving came around, I had just turned 12. November was full of lasts for us that year, and this was our last Thanksgiving. A few days prior we had celebrated the last birthday party as a family; a few weeks before that my dad celebrated his last birthday all together. We had so many decorations for him that year. It was supposed to be a surprise party at the Legion Hall down the road, but since he was hooked up to oxygen and required hospice, we decided it was best to bring the party home to him. I hung the "Happy 40th" sign above the TV in the living room and remember thinking to myself, "God I hope he doesn't die today." That would ruin the whole day, wouldn't it? And how absurd would it be for someone to be born and die on the same day, just forty years later? That's what consumed my mind that day, and that was a normal thought for me.

For my last birthday as a family, I had the Swine Flu. Remember that? It was feared like Ebola back in 2009. That whole week, I wasn't even allowed in my father's room. We would joke sometimes, and he would call me from behind his closed door. My phone would ring, and I could hear his once hearty laugh on the other side of the wall. That's how it was for a while. We would ask about each other's day through the phone, even though we both knew the other had done the exact same thing the day before: lay in bed and slept. On my last birthday with him, one of my gifts was a hospital mask. To some people this would seem like a gag gift or a joke, but to me it meant that they, my mom and the hospice nurse, were allowing me to go visit with my dad. After about a week of distance, lying with him was a treat.

We finally got to watch "Jeopardy" together like we used to every night. We played it together over the phone even when he and my mom went to Dana-Farber in Boston for treatments. I think it was on my birthday that I finally beat him. He was so smart. He always scored higher than me and my sixth grade education. But that night, I finally won. He teased me saying he let me win for my birthday, but my mom said it was because of all the medication he was on. To me, though, it didn't matter. I finally won after two years. Step three of having a sick parent: have no mercy when it comes to "Jeopardy" (also a good life tip to remember). But I digress.

Merry Thanksgiving was when I started understanding that things were changing drastically. Not like, "Dad now wears an oxygen tank" or "Dad now needs a feeding tube," change; more like "Dad is going to die" change. It was Thanksgiving morning, and I woke up the way I do every morning, expecting nothing new. Dad was still sick, Mum was still sad, and I was still the champion of "Jeopardy." But my mom knocked on my door and came in with a smile on her face, which was odd. Not because she was smiling but because she never really seemed to have time to greet me in the morning anymore. "Merry Thanksgiving!" she said.

I smiled tiredly back. "Happy Thanksgiving to you, too, Mum." I stretched my arms out and rubbed the sleep from my eyes, praying she wasn't going to ask me to come downstairs and help her start cooking.

"No, no. Merry Thanksgiving," she laughed.

I looked at her, confused. She gestured for me to get up and follow her, so, that is exactly what I did. To be honest, I was nervous. I was wearing a ratty old Boston Red Sox shirt that was my dad's before chemo, and no pants. So I prayed we didn't have a crowd of visitors like we seemed to have a lot of the time lately. But there were no visitors; it was just my cute little family huddled around my dad's hospital bed in his room. Lexi, Emilee, and baby Reed all with their eyes closed and anxious with anticipation. There was a small pile of gifts on the floor in front of the bed. They were wrapped carefully in red and green paper, and I was instantly confused. Excited, definitely, but very confused.

We were unleashed onto the presents after a count of three, and my mom took more pictures than I thought possible on the small, cheap camera she bought from Walmart a few days before. She forced us to each take a picture with "Daddy" and to show him everything that we had gotten. I remember showing him the small pink iPod Shuffle I had opened up. It was like showing an old man without his glasses a newspaper clipping about something he clearly didn't understand. "Wow, that's really nice," he said, almost in a whisper. I could tell he was barely there. I don't know if it was the medication or if it was the pain, but I was done

with Merry Thanksgiving.

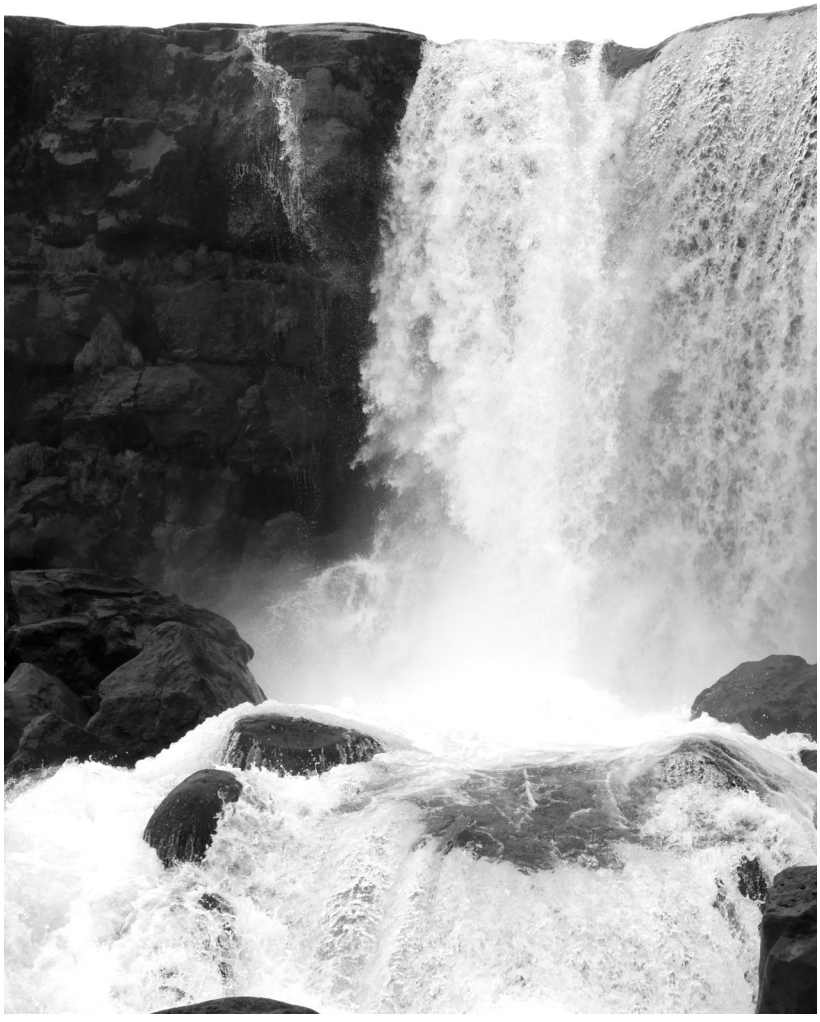
I could finally see my dad the way my mom saw him, and the way all of those visitors were seeing him. The once thick and dark stubble on his head now appeared grey and patchy. It almost looked like there was nothing there at all because of how grey and pale his skin looked. His once strong jawline now simply looked like it was being held together by the very smallest amount of skin and muscle. His cheeks were sunken in and so were his eyes. The darkness that circled them looked like mucky puddles, puddles that not even a toddler would dare to splash in. He could barely hold his head upright anymore. Pillows surrounded him as if they were holding all of his pieces together, keeping him from falling apart. His lips were chapped, and I could hear him breathing, or maybe it was just the sound of the oxygen tank blowing into his nose. If it wasn't for the occasional deep inhale, I could have believed he was already dead.

I was done because I knew what it was. I knew it wasn't just another reason to spoil the four kids. I knew it wasn't just another perk of having a sick parent. I knew exactly what it was, and it hurt me to see how ignorant my younger siblings were to everything. I'm sure that's how my mom must have felt the whole time, watching us act like nothing was wrong, letting us think that this was normal. All the while, she knew that this was his last Thanksgiving. Not only was this his last Thanksgiving, but in the same day it was also his last Christmas. That's when I knew the prognosis, and that is when I decided: Step four of having a sick parent is preparing to not have one anymore.

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They say that acceptance is key and that there are multiple stages of grief. I believe I was in denial throughout his whole battle. He fought cancer twice, and I expected too much of him the second time around. Was I angry? Maybe in a way. I was angry that my best friend still had both of her parents. I was angry that the old couple down the street had been married for fifty years and my mom only got thirteen. I was angry with myself for getting sick and being selfish enough to only lay with him for a night while he was dying. Bargaining seemed pointless to me, even then. Nothing could have been changed; he was dead and a piece of all of us was dead. We were a broken home now. Life must go on. How could we build back up to be the home we were before? The truth is, we really couldn't. Depression hung over my family like a thunderstorm, but acceptance was where we needed to be. It rained, it poured, and we lashed out at each other like lightning. The fighting kept us from accepting that the once big, noisy house now felt quiet and empty.

We celebrate Merry Thanksgiving every year now. It's not as crazy as the first year. There aren't gifts and pictures, or a sick parent, but we all come together and talk to each other. We've had eight Merry Thanksgivings, each one ending up better than the last. We try to make Thanksgiving less about the food and more about what it is supposed to be: a day to show appreciation. There is no dwelling and there is no blame in the Ireland house now. There is only love and appreciation for what we do have, and for how long we have survived together. We are a team, loving each other more and more by the day. It isn't that we make light of being fatherless, we just no longer carry it with us every day. To be honest, I barely remember things about my dad, and that is okay. Life isn't about remembering and missing the dead; it's about loving and cherishing the people who are still very much alive. It's about taking time, even if it's one day out of the year, to celebrate life and to tell the people there that they are loved. My dad will always be dead, but my little brother won't always be alive. Remembering that will always push me to live for the people I love, and not for the people I've lost. That's step five of having a sick parent: do not die with them. Live on.



**By David Cahill**

# The Last Night in The Garden

## By David Cahill

A blue Toyota Corolla slides up to the curb and slams to a halt. Marvin, 20, with the body of a basketball player, swings open his door and breaks into an all-out sprint. His tall, athletic body races through the night. Amber, 19, with a face that's experienced much, throws her door open and follows closely behind him. Their feet stomp hard on the concrete, and then into the mud that precedes the entrance of the garden. Mud splashes all over Marvin's Converse.

"The moon is rising. Where are they?" Amber yells at Marvin.

The couple continues to run. The clouds hang low, and the dense trees dance in the wind. Marvin turns around and breaks a full smile at Amber, who returns the gesture. After a few minutes, Marvin and Amber arrive at *the spot.* The grass is a deep green and the trees are all oaks. The field stretches for acres. When a gust of wind travels through this clearing, everything flows with it. This is their spot. This is where Marvin asked Amber to go out with him. This is where they spent their anniversaries. Eventually, this is where they started distrusting each other. This is where they are going to watch the Harvest Moon. Amber and Marvin stand in awe. The orange circle contrasts against the grey/blue background.

After a few moments, Amber slides her backpack off and pulls out a crimson blanket. She lays it flat on the grass and then gets on all fours to spread it out to its full length. Like a game of Twister, Amber fumbles around for a few moments, trying to place objects from her backpack to hold the blanket down: a leather-bound Bible, an extra pair of Converse, and a jumbo box of tampons. After getting situated, she looks up to Marvin's tall and slim body.

"Marv!"

"Oh, right!"

Marvin sits down next to Amber. Her hair whips back and forth through the wind. As Marvin looks back to the moon, Amber looks at him. She studies his facial expression as he searches the skyline.

"Where are those fairies?" Marvin asks.

"I'm not sure," Amber answers.

As Amber looks at Marvin, she can't stop thinking about the last time they visited this garden. It was two months ago, which was the longest that they had been away from their spot in the garden.

The last time Amber and Marvin were in this garden, it was a windy summer day, and the sun was setting for the night. The grass was greener. The sky was brighter. Amber shudders as the wind sweeps through the green garden. She looks to Marvin. Marvin is looking down, focused on lacing his pair of black Converse perfectly. He threads the white lace with care through each eyelet. While trying not to disturb him, Amber pulls him closer to her. The wind whistles through the valley and through the garden. Marvin focuses on his laces.

Marvin doesn't care for this garden, especially during the day when he can see the sky. The clouds hang low and give him a feeling of claustrophobia. Despite this, he can tell how much Amber loves this garden by the number of times she has brought him there over the course of their two year relationship, which is now in its final trimester. Marvin hears the sounds of the city far in the background as the sun sets for the night.

'I wonder what's on TV right now. I wonder what Kimmel is talking about tonight,' Marvin thinks.

'If only every night could be like tonight,' Amber thinks while she rests her head on Marvin's shoulder. Unbeknownst to them, they would only visit the garden one time after tonight.

Amber comes back to reality when she feels a shake from Marvin. She turns to her right to realize that this must've been accidental. She had dozed off and now Marvin is wandering off.

"Marvin, what are you doing?"

"The fairies. They've gotta be around here somewhere."

Amber sighs. Another reason for Marvin to be aloof. Amber curses the other guys who convinced Marvin that fairies are supposed to float around this garden during the Harvest Moon.

"I'm sure we'll see the fairies from here."

Marvin doesn't answer.

"Marvin!" Amber yells through the sounds of the wind.

"No, this is wrong."

"Come back over here!"

Marvin stops and stares at Amber for a few moments. She can't see his eyes, as a nearby oak tree is blocking the orange glow from reaching him. Slowly Marvin starts to walk back to their blanket in the grass.

"If they are right—"

"If they are right," Marv says mockingly.

"If they are right, then we will see the fairies from here," Amber reasons.

"Then distract me while I wait."

Amber sits in silence for a moment. She is put off by Marvin's tone, but reluctant to stay silent.

"My birthday is coming up."

"Yeah, it is."

"What do you wanna do?" Amber asks innocently.

"I wanna go to this museum in Boston. It'll only take a few hours to get there. They have a new Tesla exhibit."

"Is it a dealership?" Amber asks as she giggles.

"No. Nikola Tesla, not the cars."

"But remember that we told my parents we'd have dinner with them that night?"

"The museum would probably take the whole day," Marvin says with a shrug.

Amber tries to drop the subject. Another gust of wind rolls through the garden. She can't be at odds with Marvin right now. She needs him for his warmth. "Well then...I don't know what we'll do," Amber says as she moves in closer to Marv.

"What do you wanna do? It's your birthday. Just choose."

"I don't know!" Amber says with an annoyed tone in her voice.

Marvin sits up. "I wanna go out and do something. I'm bored. However, it is your birthday, so if you just wanna get dinner with your parents, then let's do that."

"Why are you angry right now?"

"You're being indecisive," Marvin retorted.

"You need to chill out. I'm just trying to have a normal conversation with you."

"Fine, fine."

Marvin leans back into his original position. He looks down at his shoes and notices that the laces are uneven. Amber leans back onto Marvin. She is in awe of the orange glow coming from the Harvest Moon. "It's so pretty," Amber says. Marvin has taken the laces out of his right Converse and is steadily weaving it in and out of the eyelets. Amber has seen nights like this before. "How did Doug describe the fairies to you?" Amber asks.

Marvin takes his right lace out and starts again. "He told me that they matched the color of the moon, but they were brighter. He said they were so bright that he could barely look at them. He said that they danced along and hummed a tune together. He said that they were so content to just dance around for one night of the year."

"Maybe they don't know that they're only here for one night."

Marvin looks up at Amber. "Or maybe he made it up," Marvin says with a chuckle. Amber chuckles for a second. Then she breaks out into hysteria. Marvin soon follows. They laugh so hard. "He probably made it up," Marvin says out of breath from laughing.

"What a dumbass."

"No, he's not a dumbass. I'm the dumbass—sitting in the park in the middle of the night looking for fairies," Marvin says while still laughing.

After catching their breath, Marvin and Amber decide that they will go home soon because it is very late and very cold. The couple spends a few more moments basking in the Harvest Moon, while right behind them dances a merry group of bright orange fairies who hold hands as their small, orange bodies glide along the grass.

A few minutes go by until rain starts to lightly fall down on the two. Amber decides that she is ready to depart. Marvin stands up and gazes at the moon and the stars. Amber gathers her belongings—the crimson blanket, the leather bound Bible, the extra pair of Converse, and the jumbo box of tampons. They walk away.

"Where to next?"

"I'm hungry," Marvin says under his breath.

"Wanna go somewhe—"

Marvin waves his hand, dismissing her. "Let's just go home."

The light rainfall maintains. The couple slides into the car, one by one. Marvin sits in the driver's seat with Amber next to him. There is a mutual silence between the two, but it isn't awkward. Their relationship feels dynamic. After all of this, they don't feel the need to talk on end about things that don't matter. Marvin takes note of this. Maybe it's a sign of maturity. Maybe it's a sign of boredom.

Marvin yawns as he turns the key in the ignition. His Toyota screeches to life. Without looking, he runs his hand along the edges of his moon-roof, well, what's left of it. It now exists as a piece of cardboard duct taped to the top. He runs his hand along the edges to make sure that it is as airtight as the tape will allow. As he pulls the car out of the garden, Amber leans her seat back and places a blanket under her head as a pillow. Exhaustion rushes over Marvin as he realizes that he's going to have to drive the hour long drive home without any company.

Marv checks his watch—1:38.

"Dammit," Marv says matter-of-factly.

Marv looks back at Amber a couple times. She's fast asleep.

"Well, somehow I need to stay awake," Marv says to himself. "I could turn on the radio." Marv turns the radio on to hear static. "Great."

Marv jolts himself awake. He lets out a big yawn. He tries his best to open his eyes wide and focus. "Dammit."

Marv's right hand moves from the steering wheel into his center console. He opens it up, and moves his lengthy fingers tactfully along the insides. Eventually, he pulls out a knife. Marv allows himself to let go of the wheel for a split second to pull the

pocket knife out of its holder. He holds the blade in front of his face for a moment. All of a sudden, Marv moves the blade to the right side of his head, and stabs upwards, creating a whole in the cardboard moon-roof. He closes the blade into itself and returns it to the center console. Then, his hand makes its way back to the leather wheel.

Most of the makeshift roof is still in place, but cold drops of water now strike Marv on the head every time he starts to slip into a slumber. He takes a look back to Amber to make sure he didn't wake her. For forty-five more minutes, the cold rain drips on top of Marv's head and down his forehead until he arrives at his place.

For a few minutes, Marvin is locked into place. It's as if he's being held in his car by an invisible force. He's exhausted, and he does not want to move. That is until he sees a bright glow of orange coming from his right. A line of cheerful orange fairies dance along his vision. He rubs his eyes to make sure he is seeing clearly. They continue to dance and hum a tune as they float through the sky.

By now the Harvest Moon is losing its glow as the sun is starting to come up. Marv jumps out of the car to watch as the orange fairies float up into the sky, towards the moon. Marvin turns to Amber.

"Amber. Amber, wake up!"

Amber is still sound asleep.

"C'mon, Amber."

Amber slightly opens her eyes.

"What?" Amber asks.

"The fairies are here. Look!"

"You're funny, Marv." Amber rolls over and falls back into her slumber.

Marvin watches the sky in awe as fairies float beyond where he can see.



**By Patrick Orcutt**

# The Archivist
## By Jonathan Smith

I stepped into the elevator and pushed the button to head down to the first floor. Like the drab, subdued off-white colored hallways, this elevator was a relic, a testament to earlier times. The elevator shuddered, creaked momentarily, and stopped abruptly. Frustrated, I began to hit the operating panel several times to get the elevator moving again. Sluggishly, the elevator came to life and began the descent. I saw the first-floor light lit up, but the elevator continued, passing the first floor to who knows where. 'Well, this should be interesting,' I thought. Last week, Gerry from Circulation had mentioned a basement to me, before correcting himself. As the doors parted, I found myself in a large open bay with a stairwell to the left and a corridor to the right. 'Strange,' I thought. It was the kind of poorly lit, finished concrete basement that makes the skin crawl. Three years at Vermont State Library and I never knew we had a basement. On the far side of the open bay, large shelving units had been erected to house a plethora of obsolete journals and government documents.

I wondered why no one else had ever mentioned this part of the building to me. From the outside, the Vermont State Library looked dull and lifeless, a relic of the Cold War; the tall, gray stone building rose from the ground with a monolithic feel. The outside of the building was now overgrown with ivy, and the gothic eaves attracted bird nests and bats. Curious to explore, I walked down the dimly lit corridor, lit only with blueish tungsten lights. Ahead, I noticed light emitting underneath the door to what was ostensibly a storage room. The shadow of a woman cast itself through the opaque window panel of the door. As I crept forward to investigate, I suddenly felt something heavy strike me in the back of the head.

"Shit!" I yelled. "What the hell do you think you…."

I tried to turn and face my assailant, but the massive concussion was followed by a large gloved hand shoving me down to the floor. I felt myself fade in and out of consciousness as the smell of cheap cologne lingered and muffled footsteps walked away. As the room began to blur, I again felt myself fading.

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I felt myself coming to again, sluggish and dizzy. 'Oh, God. My head. What happened? Where was I? How long had I been out?' The room was permeated with the smell of cleaning chemicals and musty furniture, much like the government buildings at NHC Quantico. I faintly heard the shuffling sound of approaching footsteps. The painful squeak of a doorknob turned, and I wondered what kind of hellhole I had awakened in. I tried to pull myself up, but quickly became dizzy. Blood rushed to my head, and I felt my body slump over, collapsing onto a musty mattress that felt like a cot. Too weak to fight, I tried to see the two masked figures that pinned my arms to the cot.

"How did she end up downstairs?" a young female voice asked.

"I don't know. The elevator shouldn't have taken her down there. Paul disabled it two months ago. I caught her in the corridor. Boss is pissed, though," a familiar male voice said.

"You had better take care of it," the young female voice said and added, "You remember what happened to Paul, right?"

"A heart attack, I was told," the male voice said.

"Believe what you want to believe," the female voice replied. "So, I guess we try and wipe her memory. But we need to keep this job clean. So, you know what that means after, right?"

"I dump the body? There's no way she'll remember this," the male voice said.

The conversation that sounded like two disembodied voices was cut off as a sharp needle pierced my left arm. I groaned as the needle injected something into my skin. I was already borderline anemic. Why was this happening to me? Everything faded again as my blood pressure lowered and I lost consciousness.

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I felt myself struggling to wake up. I was in my office. 'What happened?' Maybe I had gone to sleep at work, but that wasn't like me. I faintly remembered running into Gerry earlier in the elevator. 'Wait, Gerry had said something about a basement.' Boom — boom — boom; the loud rapping of a person knocking interrupted my foggy state of mind. Confused, I sensed that something was missing — something had been taken from me. I didn't think I had been assaulted...or maybe I had.

'Shit. My head really hurts,' I thought.

My shift always starts at 4:00 p.m., but the time on my cell phone now reads 8:00 p.m. I remembered hearing voices and being hit with something. There had been a basement. I had barely been able to see down there, but something was going. I felt my head. I knew that the concussion was real. My arm stung still. 'Had I been stung, or was it from a needle? Why hadn't I been told of any of this before? None of this made sense. For the love of God, I was just a damn archivist at the Vermont State Library.'

A loud knocking continued. I recognized the comforting feel of my ergonomic work chair. 'Why couldn't I just have a normal night, digitizing old copies of State Legislature Records?'

"Hello," I said weakly.

"Hey, Abby, it's me," Gerry said. "Is everything okay? Did you fall asleep? Are you sick?"

"I...I don't know," I replied, hesitant to tell him everything. "Sometimes I get anemic from low iron. That's probably all it is. It's no big deal, really."

"Yeah, I didn't see you around earlier. I was a little worried," he said.

"Wait. Did I see you earlier?" I asked.

"No, not at all. Is it the concussion you got?" Gerry asked.

"Oh maybe, yeah maybe that's it," I said.

'How the hell did he know about the concussion?' I wondered.

"Oh sorry, I'm really sorry. I was working all evening and hadn't seen you around," Gerry said. "Besides, Abby, I didn't want to pry; your light was turned off earlier. Well, let me know if you need anything," he said.

"I will. Thank you," I replied, as Gerry turned and shut the office door behind him.

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It should have been like any other Thursday night. Normally, I felt bored out of my mind here in the drab, institutional setting of the Vermont State Library. Most days, this job felt like *Groundhog Day*, that old movie where Bill Murray wakes up to find he is reliving the same day over and over again. These days, I usually felt the boredom enclosing me as I worked mostly alone as the evening shift archivist. Well, I had been bored up until now.

Something didn't add up. Gerry had asked how my concussion was doing, but I hadn't told him that my head hurt. Some of my memory was coming back to me. I had taken the elevator earlier to go down to the first level. I vaguely remembered seeing Gerry in the elevator earlier that night. If it was like most days, I had probably teased him about his love for *Harry Potter* or *Star Wars*. Gerry seemed innocent enough. He gave off the aura of a fan-fiction geek who had scored his dream job working at a library. He usually took the elevator up to Bindery on the third floor every Tuesday and Thursday. As the main library for the state, we had a steady supply of one-of-a-kind books that required constant repair. I tried to remember more from earlier, but everything was still foggy to me.

'Had I been hurt in the elevator? No, something else must have happened. Maybe I had been hit in the basement. Yes, there was a basement.' I vaguely remembered a woman's voice. My head hurt like hell, and my arm throbbed from whatever had stung or pricked my arm. It should have been just another boring night for me digitizing archives.

On Thursday nights there were normally just two of us working here. 'If my office light was off for four hours, why had Gerry waited so long to check on me?' I wondered.

With Gerry gone, I began to regain my composure. It was nearly 11:00 p.m. now. That meant it was almost time to close and go home. Shutting my office door quietly, I walked towards the break room. As I cautiously passed Gerry's office, I noticed that the door was slightly ajar. Inside, Gerry's raspy voice sounded agitated as he spoke into the phone from behind his large oak desk.

"Look, I promise you, I didn't screw it up," Gerry said.

Gerry paused to listen to the caller on the other line.

"Yes, I got rid of the body. It's gone. I promise," Gerry said. "Just like they do it in the books." Gerry paused as his face grew a dark shade of red.

"Well, Margo, I think you are just being paranoid, okay?" he said and slammed the phone down.

I shuddered briefly. This wasn't the Gerry that I knew. Did he mean Margo from Acquisitions? At the Christmas party, she had told me how she had spent the past fifteen years as a curator for the Smithsonian. She was a little older than I, about forty-five with mousy hair. How could she possibly be connected to this? She worked across the hall from Judy. They both usually kept to themselves. I thought it was just introversion. This new side of Gerry was disconcerting. I had never seen it before. He had seemed so sweet before. My first six months here I had thought he was gay. His petty attempts at flirting were the only clues I had that he wasn't gay.

Shaken up by what I had overheard, I cautiously returned to my office and opened the second drawer of my desk. Underneath a stack of library request forms, I retrieved my old copy of *U.S. Navy Judicial Precedents, Volume One, 1989-1999*. It had practically been my Bible at Quantico. It was probably a good thing I had never discussed my old job. The ones who knew I was Navy probably thought I was some helpless damsel who only knew how to tie knots and plot nautical charts. Laying the book down flat, I flipped to page 85 and pulled back four 3M Velcro strips, revealing a hollowed-out cavity in the book. From the book, I drew out my old Navy CID pistol, a Sig Sauer P229 .40 handgun. I loaded the magazine and chambered a round. A quick function check followed, and I tucked the gun into the waistband of my black slacks.

After grabbing a flashlight and a can of OC pepper spray, I switched out my heels for a light pair of running shoes to limit the sound I would make while clearing the hallway. My head still hurt like hell, but I kept my eyes and ears open for anything unusual. Gerry's office light was off now, and he was nowhere in sight. Maybe he had left for the night, but then again, maybe not.

'No time for any hero shit, Abby.' I quietly walked down the hallway, clearing the adjacent rooms while holding my pistol at the low ready. It was almost midnight, and no one else should be working at this hour. I needed to call the PD. I stopped at the end of the hallway near a stairwell and quietly called my friend Sergeant Rocky Hernandez at the nearby Montpelier Police Department.

Back in 2004, Rocky had been in the Corp while I served in the Navy. We had served at Quantico together at the same time but had never actually met. Rocky's cursing was so bad he could make a Master Chief blush. His arms were covered with ink from multiple tattoo parlors, but Rocky was a straight shooter. Former Recon, he had always been a no-bullshit type of guy.

"Hey, Rocky, I may have a problem," I said.

"Okay, Abby. What's going on this time?" he asked with his thick Puerto Rican accent.

"Something isn't right in the library," I said.

"Well, no shit," he said laughing. "Nothing is ever right with the library."

"No, really, Rocky, this is serious. I woke up in my office from a concussion, and I think I may have been drugged," I said.

"Well, that is some weird shit. Abby, look, I'll be right down," he said.

"Oh, and my coworker Gerry is acting really evasive. I think something happened in the basement. I didn't even know we had one," I said.

"You guys got a basement there?" he asked incredulously. "I'll be right over."

"I can handle it, I think. You know I am not into that princess bullshit," I said. "I just need to know you'll back me up. I don't know what I am walking into downstairs."

"Okay sure, no problem. Who is working tonight?" he asked.

"Just Gerry, but I overheard him talking to Margo on the phone. I suspect Judy might be involved -- with what, I have no idea," I added.

Rocky said, "Okay, that helps. I'll be over in ten, maybe fifteen minutes max, with the new corporal. Be careful in the meantime, okay?"

I trusted Rocky enough, but I sure hoped this new corporal wasn't some rookie kid straight out of the academy.

"Thanks, Rocky. I'm headed to the basement," I said. "Hey, wish me luck," I added as I abruptly hung up the phone.

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After walking to the end of the hall, I cautiously entered the back stairwell. I suspected Gerry had gone downstairs, or perhaps he had left the building entirely for the night. The stairwell hopefully led to the basement. In any case, I felt it would be more discrete than taking the elevator.

I descended the stairwell slowly, cautiously clearing each level with my pistol. The bottom of the stairwell opened into the basement. Looking through window of the heavy door, I couldn't make out much on the other side of the door. After cracking the door, I noticed an open bay leading to a corridor that diverted off to adjacent rooms. I tried to close the door quietly, but the heavy metal door echoed through the empty bay as it latched. As I moved forward cautiously, I secretly hoped that the rumbling of a nearby boiler room would mask the sound of my arrival. A central room was lit, and I could I could hear an agitated voice yelling. It was Judy.

"What do you mean you didn't check her pulse?" she asked. "How do you know whether she is alive or dead, anyway?"

Gerry hesitated with a slight stutter and said, "I smothered her...you know, like they do in the movies."

She wasn't buying it, I could tell.

"You better not be lying. Do you want to end up like Paul? Because you can. Go check now!" Judy said.

Gerry grumbled under his breath and exited the office carrying two heavy duffel bags.

After setting the bags down on the table he let out a large sigh and paused. Seconds later, Margo emerged from around the corner with her mousy hair tied up in a bun as she pushed a cart loaded down with two heavy steel suitcases. Gerry began to head towards the stairwell but stopped and turned to help Margo as she strained to push the heavy cart. She must have taken the elevator down, or maybe she had come out from another room. Margo appeared visibly annoyed and quickly left the cart, turning abruptly to head back to wherever she had come from. The two said nothing to each other, and Gerry began to leave again. I suspected he planned to flee the building or hoped to return to my office to kill me.

As I peered through the shelving, I saw several of the bags lying open on the table to reveal freshly printed twenty-dollar greenbacks. 'Well, this is interesting,' I thought.

I paused and considered my situation. I didn't have much time. If Gerry left, he would possibly escape before Rocky showed up. Judy had returned to her office, but there but there was no sign of Margo anymore. I didn't know if anyone else was involved, but I decided to take a chance. I cautiously stood up from my cover behind the shelving.

As I stood, I walked towards Gerry who had paused, agitated, possibly contemplating his options. I had no intention of letting him leave the building. I knew I had to place him between myself and Judy's door in case she should reappear with a weapon. I still wasn't sure where Margo had gone.

Gerry began to walk again but turned his head back as if to say something.

With his back turned to me, I left the shadows of the shelving area and held my pistol at the high ready, pointing it between his shoulder blades.

"Get down on the ground — NOW!" I said.

Gerry, the bookworm turned criminal, was not expecting that. He opened his mouth as if to say something and met my own eyes with shock. I saw his left hand slowly reach for a leather sap tucked into his belt.

Before he could react, I brought my other hand up holding the pepper spray. I sprayed him with a steady stream of OC pepper spray, using my left hand to spray him while I kept my P229 pistol leveled with my right. Gerry tumbled to the floor, groaning in pain and screaming from the spray as it ran down his face.

In the background, I heard a door slam and I sensed what was coming.

"What the hell is going on out there?" Judy demanded, storming from her otherwise solitary room, her dour countenance livid and angry. In her left hand, she held a silver-colored .380 pistol.

"Drop the pistol, bitch," I said as I turned my .40 pistol towards her. "Drop it now!"

"I don't have to listen to a damn archivist," scoffed Judy as she raised her pistol and flashed it towards me.

I pulled the trigger of my pistol twice, firing two rounds that hit her chest center mass. Judy, the arrogant reference librarian turned criminal, screamed and staggered, slowly falling to the ground. As blood poured over the concrete and Judy gurgled for breath, Gerry lay nearby panic-breathing and mumbling incoherently to himself.

I heard more yelling and footsteps echo from the elevator corridor. I began to turn with my gun but lowered it as I saw Rocky and the corporal turning the sharp corner of the corridor with their guns drawn. Rocky drew down on Gerry while the corporal took his extra set of handcuffs out to search and cuff him.

"He's already pretty much useless," I said with a laugh.

"Well, Abby, I'm glad you're safe," Rocky said. "Damn, girl. You made quite a mess. Not that I had any doubts you could hold your own."

"Yeah, I'll be alright. Just a long night and my head still hurts," I said.

Rocky said, "Well, we caught Margo trying to take the elevator out of here. She thought she could run, but I don't think that girl has run once in her entire life," he said laughing. "She's cuffed to one of the sprinkler pipes down that hallway."

"So, Gerry boy, Gerry boy, what's this all about?" Rocky asked, walking over to Gerry who was hyperventilating and holding his flushed face.

Rocky's blue eyes penetrated Gerry with a stare that meant business. Rocky said, "If you don't talk, you are looking at Federal time. You know how they treat boys like you upstate?"

A weepy Gerry, his nose streaming, continued to mumble something incoherently as he lay cuffed on the floor. Twelve disheveled looking bags of money still lay out in the open on the tables. They had almost gotten away with it, whatever it was. I was too tired to care at this point. In the nearby side room, the corporal had found a cluttered desk and two end tables. Next to the desk were printing plates marked U.S. Treasury that indicated a sophisticated counterfeiting operation. So *that* was what the other librarians had been up to. I assumed that the FBI and Secret Service would be here in the morning coming from their Albany, New York office to investigate. Rocky and the corporal were taking Margo and Rocky to the Montpelier County Jail for the night until the Feds took over. As for me, I was tired. 'Well, so much for that boring government job,' I thought. It was already 3:00 a.m. 'I think I might call in tomorrow.'

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Two days later it was Saturday, and I was ready for the weekend. Rocky had left a message on my voicemail on Friday. I agreed to follow up with him on the case. Saturday morning, we met in downtown Montpelier at Brueghel's Bagels to discuss everything that had happened. This warm, cheerful atmosphere with customers smiling was a pleasant change of pace from two days earlier.

"So, is this a date?" I quipped to Rocky.

"It can be," he said half-joking. "Just don't pepper spray me if you get pissed off."

"I can't promise you that," I said with a grin. "Tell me about the case," I added, excited to hear what the investigators had found out.

"Well, you remember Margo, right?" he asked.

"Yeah, how could I not? But I never suspected she would be caught up in any of this," I responded.

"Turns out she worked at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing a few years back. Apparently, a set of plates went missing from the vault five years ago. Margo was a suspect, but they could never pin anything on her. Damn those librarians," he said laughing.

"No way; you're kidding. That's crazy," I said. "She was always nice enough around work. The only time she ever really spoke was at last year's Christmas Party."

"Why, what do mean?" Rocky asked.

"I guess she doesn't normally drink. Ole' Margo got into the punch. Next thing you know, she started table dancing and slurring her speech. She was screaming something about Hemingway or Faulkner, calling one of them an illiterate bastard. All I know is the Head of Reference had to drag her off the table and call her a cab," I said dryly.

"Yeah, that's pretty funny. Want to hear about the crazy part of the investigation?" he asked. "The Federal Reserve changes their plates every two years."

"So, so what does that mean?" I asked.

"None of that counterfeit money they printed would pass off as real currency," he said. "Chances are good they would have got busted the first time they tried passing it off as real money."

"So, what were the others up to?" I asked.

"Well, no surprise, but Judy apparently ran the counterfeiting ring," he said.

"She was always hard-headed and bossy," I countered.

"Yeah well, she offered Margo a huge cut of the money and had Paul as her lackey. He died, and they are saying a heart attack, but the Feds want an autopsy done now."

"Interesting," I said.

"Gerry still isn't talking much. Somehow, I think he will get off easy in court," Rocky said. "After Paul died, Gerry mysteri-

ously became Judy's lackey. A little too convenient, I think. I almost feel bad for him," he said. "So, Abby, are we still on for that date? Then, he quipped, "You know...I think I'm about due for another ex-wife."

"How's Thursday at noon?" I asked. "If you promise me no arrests or body bags," I added, daring him with my eyes.

"You know I can't promise you that," Rocky said belly laughing. "And besides -- that was your body bag."



**By Ani Inman**

# Mirror, Mirror

## By Nicholas Pelletier

"Damn, this place is depressing," Marty said as he gazed across all the broken glass and debris. "This place is a waste of both our time, bud. Creeps me out."

I sighed. "I know. Only reason I'm here is so that insane old woman will stop bugging me to come look at this place."

"Why'd you even come? There's nothing good about this place."

"She seemed desp…."

"You're too nice, Ronnie," he said as he cut me off. I sighed.

It was clear that my close friend Marty was not a fan of my choice to come check this house out. Then again, he wasn't wrong. This place had a certain foreboding air to it. The floor was blanketed in a layer of dust and grime. Shattered glass and splinters had waited at least a century to stab some unsuspecting soul. I wanted to leave as soon as possible; we'd already lost our afternoon. The sun would be setting in about an hour or so.

This house was known for being neglected over the years. When this tiny old lady came to the door, she said she was the real estate agent in charge of selling it. She looked so desperate that I couldn't help but say I would come look at the house. Strange thing is, she was supposed to meet me here, and I hadn't seen her since Marty and I pulled up an hour or so ago. I was running out of places and patience to look for her.

"Hey, Ronnie, you listening or am I just talking to myself here?" Marty asked while slowly shifting back and forth. He was clearly getting antsy to leave.

"Sorry, I was just thinking about the woman we're supposed to be meeting."

"She probably realized that you weren't gonna buy the house and skipped us," he said, stretching his arms. I moved towards the hallway leading to the one room we'd yet to explore. The hallway was silent, except for Marty's nagging.

Then again, I was used to his badgering by now. It was just one of his 'endearing' qualities, I suppose. We had been friends since I moved here in the first grade. He had longer hair than boys normally did at that age, and his dark hair was still pretty long. That made him different, and being different normally isn't good at a young age. I had just moved into town, so I was automatically ostracized. Both of us did not really belong anywhere else, so we found inclusion with each other. Over the years, he's been there for me through a lot of my rough times, and I did all I could to help when he lost his dad a few years back. After so many years, I've become much more patient with his sometimes tiresome traits.

"Just one last place to check out. Basement," I said to him. He made his unhappiness known immediately with a loud groan.

"I mean, why would she be in the basement, man? She blew us off; let's count our lucky stars we don't have to stay in this house any longer and get out of here," he stated.

"Fine, we'll get out of here, then. I just feel bad. She seemed so sad."

As we went to leave, we heard a loud door slam down the hall. Marty started groaning very loudly.

"Are you kidding me?" he whined.

"Let's just go see her real quick," I said.

I really did want to leave, but honestly, I was more concerned about that cryptic old woman who had practically begged me to come look at this place. She didn't even look like a real estate agent. Her hair was wild and wavy, and she was covered in weird jewelry. 'I can't imagine why it's so important that she sells it now. If it's been untouched for a hundred years, I don't see why it can't go another hundred more,' I thought.

Marty was shuffling behind me like a scolded child. I did feel bad. He was my best friend, and I was letting him down. I decided that I would just be sure to make it up to him when we left. We set off for the stairs to head down to see if she was there. I opened the door, and I was hit instantly with the smell of a century's worth of disease and mold. The stench of rot slammed into me, and I was overcome with dizziness. Marty stepped forward to make sure I was alright, but when he realized I was okay he started smirking like he was about to make a snide remark. Before he could speak, his face turned a shade of green that I'm sure matched the shade of green on my own face.

"Are you sure about this, Ronnie?" he said, muffled under his hand, trying to block the smell as much as possible. I reluctantly nodded. I steeled myself against the nasal assault I was undergoing and delved into the darkness of the basement. There is nothing that could be this pungent except for the one thing I certainly did not want to find: death. I would feel terrible if I had to drag Marty along to the police station to get questioned for the rest of the night. I was hoping that I could take him out to the wing place in town to repay him for coming along with me to this house. He deserved it. I just kept silently praying some skunk found its way in and met its end.

Of course, this house was so decrepit (it certainly didn't have electricity) that I saw almost nothing. I pulled out my phone and fumbled to find my flashlight app so I could see my way around this glorified pit. I caught Marty doing the same behind me.

"I got your back, Ronnie." As he said that, I saw a light come on behind me. I turned mine on and aimed it forwards. I started scanning closest to the stairs. The cement floor was full of cracks, but didn't look as bad as I would have expected. To my surprise, there wasn't much dust down here — none at all, in fact. I furrowed my brow as I tried to figure out why this place didn't

look like the rest of the house. As I thought, I mindlessly turned my flashlight to a corner, and I was suddenly blinded by a massive flash of light. But just before I was blinded, I saw the most alluring pair of eyes that were staring directly at me, almost through me. I couldn't help but let out a scream as I was knocked back by the light. After a pause, I realized I'd bounced my flashlight's beam off of a substantial mirror.

"Geez, are you scared of a mirror, bud?" Marty laughed mockingly. I tried to shoot him a look, but realized how silly I must've looked and started to laugh with him. He stepped down and patted me on the back, urging me forward. I continued down the stairs when it hit me. Those weren't my eyes. Something else had been staring at me. I suddenly became very frightened. I moved my flashlight more cautiously as we advanced from the stairs towards the mirror. I was surprised a mirror could survive this hellhole for a hundred years. It was breathtaking. The casing was encrusted with incredible looking jewels. I continued my examination of the mirror and found it to be immaculate. Everything else upstairs was covered in a thick layer of dust from the century of abandonment, but this mirror looked like it was just cleaned. This basement kept getting stranger and stranger.

I looked down and found the source of the terrible stench. It was a bloody mess and what looked to be a woman in a soggy pile, covered in slash marks and cut into a heap that didn't even look human. As I spread my light further, I saw more, a lot more. All these bodies in the same lumps of discarded skin and bone, all pooled together. The only difference was that some were...fresher. What used to be a body in front of me couldn't be more than a week old. Recent enough that I could still figure out an idea of her age. She was young, and I'm sure she would have been pretty as well. The most striking aspect of her was her eyes. Despite never seeing a dead body before, I had a feeling that eyes aren't supposed to look like that. They were there, but it was like they weren't. I could see all the muscles behind her eyes, like the color had fallen out of her head. I was struggling to not throw up.

I spun to see how Marty was reacting, but he wasn't. He was just standing. Staring. His gaze shot straight ahead toward that mirror.

"Marty," I swallowed. "We need to get out of here. Immediately." No response. "Marty, this isn't the time for your jokes." For the first time in a long time, Marty was completely speechless. I hadn't seen him look like this since the day his dad died in a car accident. When he had found out, he made a face much like the one he had now. He just looked empty. Not soon after he got the news, he started crying, but after only about a minute he stopped. He started building emotional walls at that point, and he adopted humor as his defense mechanism. He joked away all his problems, which I kept reminding him was unhealthy. He didn't seem like he was about to make a joke now, however. I didn't see any of that in his eyes anymore. I didn't see "Marty" in his eyes anymore. I didn't want to believe it, but his eyes were dripping with...fear? I was struggling to find a way to break his concentration and get his focus back on me. I stood in front of him and blocked his view. In an instant, his eyes grew huge and stared back at me.

"Marty, run…" I grabbed his hand and tried to run him towards the stairs, but he was locked in place. I turned and his gaze was pulled back on the mirror. He started to slowly shuffle towards the mirror. His feet kept locking up as he kept hesitating, but his feet wouldn't stop moving. His lifeless eyes were welling with tears as he pushed on. He squeezed my hand tighter.

"Marty, wha-what's going on with you?" I stammered, adding, "C'mon, man, this isn't funny! What's wrong?"

I stumbled towards him and pulled harder, trying to break him away. I peered into the mirror and saw something else next to the two of us. I spun back to look around, but we were truly alone. I turned back and saw the creature giggling menacingly in the mirror. This creature was feminine and beautiful. She looked almost perfectly human, but I've never seen a human's eyes so full of hate. She looked like she was beckoning Marty, but I never heard a sound. The siren was almost holographic. I could see her, but if I turned just the slightest it was gone. The only thing that remained was the eyes. They cut deep and burned with such an intensity that caused me to jump back from Marty. His mouth was moving, but no sound could escape his lips. It looked like he was trying to say my name. Over and over again: "Ron." That can't be it. He hated that name. He refused to call me any name other than Ronnie. He never explained why; however, I had a theory that he hated it because that's what the bullies called me in middle school. What people who didn't know me called me. Yet, he kept mouthing it over and over again. Then at the last second, I got it. One last time he tried to say it. It came out in the slightest whisper, and his voice sounded so strained.

"Run."

Tears were dripping down onto the pile of meat as his arm moved towards the mirror. He reached out and touched the mirror, and it shattered. But the mirror remained pristine. It was Marty that fell to the ground, broken.

I ran towards him to try and get him to wake up. But I saw Marty inside the mirror, screaming for me to save myself and escape. I shook my head and ran and slammed the butt end of my phone into this cursed mirror and watched as pieces chipped away. The shards fell to the ground with a clatter. I didn't stop pounding until the whole thing was smashed to bits. I was distracted by a gasping for air from behind me.

I spun to see Marty coughing up tiny pieces of broken glass. His mouth was full of blood. I helped him stand, and we moved quickly towards the stairs. As we did, I heard something move behind us. I spun my light to see that the mirror pieces had begun to reform. Not only that, but they were using the body parts to create a golem of skin and shard. The head of the young girl rose up and looked at us. In her eyes now replaced with pieces of mirror, I could see myself staring back. I could see how truly terrified I was. Then the siren appeared in every shard of the mirror. Her eyes blazed as she licked her lips. She disappeared, and the golem's mouth ripped open to reveal layers and layers of jagged reflective teeth as it appeared to smile at me. I threw my phone and smashed its new face and heard it rear back in pain. Its eyes cracked at the impact, and my phone landed on the ground with

the flashlight aiming up. The light struck the monstrosity and scattered to fill the basement. Once I could see the whole room, I saw more and more heaps of bodies. In the other corner of the room, there was a massive shrine covered with a strangely familiar symbol and dripping with blood everywhere. I held back vomit as I helped Marty move up the stairs.

When we reached the top, Marty was able to gather himself up enough to move on his own.

"I'm sorry, Marty. You were right. We should have just left when you asked!" I yelled as we ran out towards the car.

He coughed slightly and started to laugh. "If I'd known this is all it took for you to say that I'm right, I would have done this sooner," he smirked with blood running down his chin. This son of a bitch and his defense mechanisms, I swear. I wanted to be mad, but to be honest, I was just glad to have my friend back again. He really deserved a plate of wings at this point.

I ripped my door open and climbed in. Marty piled in next to me. Within a second my car was running, and I squealed away from this terrifying place. Thankfully, this house wasn't out in the middle of nowhere. It was only on the edge of town. The amber sun was just beginning to hide behind the hills as I ripped my car around. I sped out of the driveway and onto the main road. I finally let myself heave a sigh of relief.

"Why didn't you run like I told you?" he asked suddenly.

I thought back to all the times that he had saved me from bullies and helped me get through those terrible break-ups. "I just did what you'd do for me."

He smiled. Not a big smile, but a slight one. He coughed slightly.

I looked in my rear-view mirror to see if it was waiting for me in the backseat. Thankfully, it was not. Come to think of it, after I hit it with my phone, it didn't seem to give chase. I didn't hear any movement, but then again I was focused on getting us the hell out of there. Now I needed to get Marty to a hospital immediately. He had been trying to act like he was in better condition than he actually was. He was trying to stay strong to make me feel better, but I wouldn't feel better until I was positive he was alright.

My train of thought was derailed as I thought I saw something in the corner of my eye. I spun around to check my backseat, only to find that it was empty. I turned back to the road and saw what had moved. That empty looking siren from the mirror was staring at me from my rearview. It turned to me, and I watched as its devilish eyes winked at me. Its face contorted into what I can only describe as a grin. In that moment the mirror shattered. I was frozen in fear. I started coming to my senses again when I heard a loud sound. It kept getting louder and more powerful. I blinked my eyes.

"RONNIE!" Marty hollered.

My focus was immediately pulled back to the car, and I saw that Marty was trying to stop me from veering into oncoming traffic. A car was coming fast, and I spun the wheel to get out of his lane, but I didn't have enough time. I had turned slightly back towards my own lane, but the car had caught my left headlight, and I spun off the road. The car sped away as we came to a stop in a ditch. The airbag went off, and pieces of glass were slammed into my chest. After only just seconds, everything stopped, and I heard nothing. Nothing at all, despite all the pain I was in. I couldn't help but worry about how Marty felt. Not only physically, but what this would do to his mental state. He was already traumatized about his dad being in a car accident. Now him. I tried to turn and ask him if he was okay, but I didn't have the ability to coordinate the actions.

I had yet to recover enough to move. My vision slowly became less blurry, and I was finally able to see. I painfully turned my head to look at Marty. I let out a sigh of relief as I saw that his injuries didn't look major, and at least he was groaning. Thankfully, he was alive. I quickly tapped the OnStar button. They assured me that help was coming. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Then, I looked back to see someone was coming. They got here impressively fast. I couldn't help but smile. The figure came closer, and, suddenly I wasn't happy anymore.

It was that old witch who begged me to look at the house. She looked down at me with a displeased look. Suddenly, my gut felt like it was full of concrete. She made her way to my door and stared down at me. I couldn't help but see a very large necklace, one that I hadn't noticed the first time we met. It was the same symbol from the basement. I pulled back in terror, but I couldn't move far. She waved her hand over me with a certain annoyance in her eyes. Suddenly, I felt exhausted. I fought to stay awake, but I couldn't help but close my eyes. I fell asleep to the sounds of cackling.

## Alive

**By Janessa Corrigan**

I make this walk almost every night,
But tonight it is different; it is refreshing.
As soon as my feet meet the pavement
I smell its dampness—the very scent promised by rainfall.
It keeps me company through the darkness.
Relentlessly, the October wind strikes my bare limbs,
Chilling me, reminding me I am alive.
As I walk I turn my head just right,
my ear catches the wind,
And I am greeted by a light whistling sound.
It is the same sound that a snow tube makes
As it races down an icy slope:
Clear, crisp, sharp.
Slowly it starts,
Then picks up speed as it goes.
This, too, becomes my friend.
I walk in a straight line,
Following the trail of fallen pine needles,
Now pressed to the asphalt under a layer of moisture.
Though wet, the trees still produce their signature scent,
Filling my mouth with the familiar taste of pine.
Surrounded by nature,
I am rid of all worries and doubt,
Remembering my place in this world.
I am as alive as the rain, the wind, the trees;
As alive as the night.

## The Fight

**By Laurie Corcoran**

Two lions appear out of the dark night
pushing aside the tall and fragrant grass.
Their flashing eyes are the plain's only light
to frighten the cowering prey they pass.
One lion pauses and lets out a roar,
challenging the second to stake its claim.
They clash together and wait for blood to pour,
since only one can succeed and find fame.
A lioness charges into the fray,
snarling and bearing strong teeth and sharp claw.
The lions spot her and don't wish to stay,
unless they want both their necks in her maw.
The lions run though they are called the king,
they are – 'til a lioness enters the ring.




**By Ty Bassett**



**By Hanna Jordan**

# Tight
## By Malorie Martin

I was always down for a good party. So, when my friend, Anna, told me to come to her New Year's Eve party, I didn't object. She was having it at her apartment, and I had asked if she needed help with anything, but she turned me down. I arrived at the party around ten with a bottle of cheap wine in hand. I took an Uber, and from the nearly empty parking lot of the complex, it seemed like plenty of people had had the same idea. This building was filled with college apartments, so I wasn't surprised to spot a couple other small parties around the area. I could tell there were already a good number of people at her apartment by the noise, and I could hear the pop music playing as I walked up the stairs to her door. I felt the need to take a deep breath before opening the door.

When I let myself in, I was greeted with the familiar scene of a packed room of intoxicated people dancing. Everyone had a cup in hand, and some joints were being passed around. There was a haze over the apartment from a mix of weed, cigarettes, and vapor. The living room and kitchen of the apartment were melded into one room, with a bathroom at the end, just past the kitchen. The furniture of the living room had been pushed to the walls to make room for dancing, and I could see a large speaker in the corner with someone's iPhone plugged in. A table sat at one end of the room, near the kitchen, and a game of beer pong was being set up. A short girl filled the cups with water as another slightly taller girl got ping pong balls out of a drawer nearby.

The only light was coming from the kitchen, where I could see Anna talking to a girl from one of our classes. I had only talked to the girl in passing when Anna included her in our discussions. They leaned on the combination island/sink and smoked cigarettes. I made my way to them, pushing through the crowd and apologizing nervously as I went. Anna's laugh cut through the noise as I got closer; it was a laugh I would recognize anywhere. Anna and the other girl were sharing stories of a boy they had both hooked up with and talked about his annoying habits.They ashed their cigarettes in the stainless steel basin of the sink.

"Hey!" I had to shout over the music. Anna smiled when she saw me and went in for a hug.

"This looks great. Did you put your address on Snapchat or something?"

She laughed and said, "No, people just love a place to get drunk."

"Totally." I laughed along with her.

Anna was wearing a black mini dress, and her long hair hung loose and undone over her shoulders. Her lips were painted a festive red that stained the cigarette she was smoking, and she wore heels so high they looked painful to walk in. If this were a movie, she'd be the popular girl all the boys had a crush on.

I grabbed a red cup off the counter nearby and poured myself a drink before stashing my wine in the back of the fridge. Hopefully, nobody would find it and help themselves. Anna had moved on to talking to someone else in the living room by the time I got back to the sink area. Uneasiness started to fill my chest. Leaning awkwardly against the counter, I looked around the room and tried to look like I had done this a million times.

The place was filled with people I really didn't know. Every now and again I'd see a face I recognized from a class or from the dorms. I felt out of place. The boys were tall, loud, and mostly drinking beer. The girls were dressed to the nines and sipping mixed drinks. I felt underdressed in leggings and a sweater. I saw people making out against the walls and others grinding on the 'dance floor.' The dim lighting made the walls look grey, even though they were really painted white. The cheap wooden floors creaked almost every time someone moved. Someone, probably Anna, had covered all the windows with sheets so that the cops couldn't see in if they drove by.

Quickly, I finished my first glass of wine and poured another, trying to drown the anxiety. I went into the thick of it and found Anna in the living room. She was flirtily dancing with a boy I knew she liked. They were surrounded by other pairs, as if this was the designated Flirting Area. There was a red mark on his cheek by his ear, her lipstick probably. When I interrupted them, he reluctantly moved away. Anna's attention was still on the boy moving away, but I tried not to let it get to me. We danced together to a string of trap songs I didn't know. The couch was beside us, and our shins bumped into it every now and again. Our drinks sloshed around with our sloppy moves. I couldn't tell if the alcohol was making me feel better or worse.

As I drank wine and inhaled secondhand marijuana smoke, I felt myself relaxing slowly. I closed my eyes for a moment and swayed to the music. Anna fluttered around the party, playing host and greeting almost everyone who came in. The second she left, I felt more self-conscious and out of place. Every few minutes she had to show someone new the bathroom or point someone towards where their friend went. I tried to keep dancing while she made rounds. Jealousy flooded my chest when I caught sight of her dancing with another girl she was friends with. 'Stop it,' I scolded myself; 'she's allowed to have other friends.'

I wanted to lose myself, be someone who could just dance alone at a party and not stress about it. Anna would come around every few songs and dance with me again for a moment. She would ask if I was having fun every time, and I readily reassured her I was so she wouldn't worry. Someone was snapping Polaroids around the party and handed me one at some point. When I took the time to look at it, I saw me and Anna smiling and holding up our cups. She looked radiant, and I looked like I was biting back tears. I shoved the photo in my pocket and kept drinking. Someone offered me a joint, and I took a hit.

Suddenly, the music cut off, and I felt my heart jolt. College parties like this were notorious for getting busted, and I was underage. My eyes went to the door expecting cops to bust in. Other people in the crowd exclaimed in surprise and annoyance. I could feel my breathing becoming more constricted.

"It's almost midnight!" It was Anna, standing on her coffee table. She had kicked her heels off and her cup lay crumpled on the floor near the speaker. I let out a shaky breath. It was just Anna. She pulled up a live countdown on her speakers and the sound blasted through the apartment.

"Forty five, forty four…" We all chanted along. I made my way to Anna, and she offered a hand to me. I felt overly exposed up there on the table, just the two of us. It felt like everyone's eyes were on us. We stood on her table screaming the numbers anyway. Someone pulled a party popper, and glitter shot out over the crowd. I watched it fall into Anna's hair, but she was too drunk to care.

"Five, four, three…."

On one we all screamed,"Happy New Year!" and Anna hugged me. I felt so far away from her, from the crowd. How could I feel so separate with everyone so close?

"Happy New Year!" I shouted at her, shaking off the intrusive thoughts.

"Happy New Year!" We held onto each other, unsteady and drunk on the table.

When the music was put back on, we got down off the table, and everyone was back to partying. I had had my fill of dancing for now. Someone was setting up a hookah in the kitchen, and I could smell the fruity smoke from across the room. I towed Anna to the kitchen to get another drink. She eyed the dance floor but came along anyway. We hopped up on the counter and smoked hookah with the girls who had set it up. There were less people there, and I could breathe a bit easier. Anna swung her legs and bounced her ankles off the cabinets.

"Your dress is so pretty," I slurred to one of the girls, more social now that I was intoxicated.

"You're so pretty," she said back, and we all laughed.

"Thanks," I mumbled. I felt my face heat up from the compliment, even if it wasn't completely sincere. We passed the hose around, all taking a hit before passing it on. The sink had filled up with empty bottles over the past few hours, mostly beer. Anna asked one of the girls what flavor we were smoking; she really liked it.

"Strawberry Mint," one of the girls replied, and Anna nodded.

After a while, Anna went to get another drink and disappeared back into the living room. Thoughts I couldn't stop came in. 'She doesn't like you.' Stop. 'She doesn't want to be your friend.' Stop. 'She's sick of you.' Stop, stop, stop. I could feel my heart rate increasing, and my breaths became more shallow. Alone with the Hookah Girls, I felt awkward and exposed. They were talking about their New Year's resolutions and ignoring me. I downed my fourth glass of wine and headed towards the bathroom. My chest felt so tight; it was like someone was squeezing the life out of me. I just needed a second alone. Then my mind would quiet, and I could come back out.

I locked the bathroom door and turned on the water with shaking hands. I drank some water and wiped my face. I knew that if I just relaxed for a few minutes the anxiety attack would fade, and I could head back to the party. I slid to the floor and counted my breaths. Ten seconds in, ten seconds out. I stared at the beige shower curtain, my eyes unfocused. My whole body was covered in a cold sweat. My heart was going a mile a minute.

After ten minutes of sitting in panic, someone knocked on the door, calling my name. It was Anna. I let her in, and we both sat on the floor in silence for a moment. I studied the tiles' geometric pattern, refusing to meet her eyes. I' can't tell her how I feel.' They were white and dark blue. 'She'll think I'm a freak.' The dark hexagons were surrounded by smaller white triangles. 'That I was just doing this for attention.'

"Are you okay? Sam saw you come in. She thought you were puking, but I know how you get…."

"Yeah, no, I'm great. I just needed a minute." I dug my nails into my palms. Why was I lying to her?

"I can see you're shaking." She took my hands and held them tightly in hers. "You're my best friend, you know. I'm not going to let you suffer alone."

I felt so guilty, sitting there, keeping Anna from her party. It wasn't fair. She didn't sign up to have a crazy friend. But it also felt so good, knowing that she cared and she noticed when I needed her.

"Just do your breath counting thing, okay? The one you said your therapist told you to do? We can sit here as long as you need, babe." She let go of my hands and stroked my back. I went back to breathing.

With her there, it only took a few more minutes for me to calm down. I felt my heart slow down and my body relax. Anna got me a cup of water from the sink. She watched in silence as I drank it.

"I'm sorry I get so jealous. I just feel like I'm such a freak…." I turned the empty cup in my hands.

"Everyone gets jealous. But I mean, I *invited you to* crash here after. I text you every time I get a new crush. You're my best friend. You have to remember that when you think I'm replacing you or whatever. Okay?" She didn't sound annoyed or impatient, only concerned.

I nodded my head and smiled at her. "Thank you. For like, always being here for me. It really means a lot." We left the bathroom together. It felt like we had been in there for hours but really it had only been twenty minutes.

"Do you want to dance?" I asked her. I was eager to make her happy again.

"Of course!" She smiled and led me to the dance floor. Someone offered us beers. I declined but Anna happily accepted. I was at my limit for the night. If I had any more, I risked another panic attack.

Anna was glued to my side the rest of the night. We danced, played beer bong, and mingled as a duo. It was embarrassing to admit how much I needed the attention, but she didn't question it or complain. It must of been three or four in

the morning before the crowd started thinning. I had been slipping Anna cups of water for an hour, and she drank them without complaint. We eventually shooed the last of the people out and were left in her quiet, empty apartment.

Bottles and cups littered the floor with a layer of glitter on top of it all. There were Polaroids here and there. Some of them were singed from joints and cigarettes that had been dropped on them. The room smelled like weed and liquor. Someone had lit and then knocked over a scented candle, so there was wax spilled near the front door. I watched Anna survey the mess before looking at me. She already knew I was staying the night and would happily help clean up.

"Tomorrow?" I asked her, and she nodded.

We stumbled up the stairs to her messy room. The walls were bare with no decoration. Clothes littered the floor, and she only had paper blinds to cover her windows. We both passed out on her bed fully clothed. In the morning, I'd help her pick up the bottles and trash, and we'd get breakfast. But then, we just slept.




**By David Cahill**

# Delayed Realization

## By Kaitlyn Hill

I am twenty-one years old.

I am twenty-one years old, and I am in my bathroom about to take a shower. The water is already running behind me. My clothes are in a pile at my feet.

I am twenty-one years old, and a memory is crashing into the back of my skull, forcing me to clutch onto the lip of the white countertop in front of me. My eyes twist shut as the pain threatens to knock me to my knees.

I have no idea why it hurts so much, but I can smell his aftershave. I can feel the roughness of the blue pants he always wore. I can see the pills covering his white shirt. 'Why did he always wear white shirts?'

The fear I felt at nine-years-old is filling up my lungs. It is replacing the blood that is flowing through my veins. Instead of oxygen being sent to my brain, his words are swirling around inside my head. They are reaching for me, threatening to pull me under.

His old and gravely voice is thunderous inside my head. The words are slamming against the sides of my brain, shaking me at my very center. I am completely unhinged.

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I am nine-years-old.

I am nine-years-old, and I am in my grandmother's living room, playing with my Polly Pockets.

I am nine-years-old, and my grandmother's boyfriend, Arnold, is in his recliner. He only gets up when he needs to use the bathroom. My grandmother waits on him hand and foot, but she always tells me and my sister Jessica that she isn't going to wait on us hand and foot. I don't understand. Still, I know better than to question her.

I brought my purple Polly Pocket Stretch Limo with me to dad's this weekend. My dad lives at his mom's house, my grandmother. My sister and I come here every weekend. We have been doing that since my parents told us they were "taking a break."

I have been playing with my toys all morning, and I am hungry. I look into the kitchen where my grandmother is sitting at her worn kitchen table, checking her sugars. Smiling at the thought of sitting with her, I stand up from the floor and head to the kitchen, but my smile falters as I realize that going to the kitchen means that I have to walk past Arnold's chair.

My heart starts thudding in my chest, and I walk forward slowly, hoping that Arnold doesn't decide to try to lunge for me. A brief glance at him reveals that he is pretty invested in *M*A*S*H,* so I think I'm safe. Still, my insides twist into a knot, and I feel myself starting to shake. I don't *think* he will do anything.

Wrong.

I try to fold my tiny body over the arm of the couch as Arnold leans forward and snatches at me. I twist my torso out of his reach, but he still manages to brush the pads of his fingers along my waist. The places where his fingers touched me are burning through my t-shirt.

"Let me see your pussy," Arnold's dry lips twist up into a smile. My eyes widen as I scuttle away toward my grandmother and toward safety. His words are inside my head, and then they drop into my stomach, where they twist my insides. Immediately, I'm not hungry anymore.

"Arnold! Leave her alone!" My grandmother's voice is shrill from the kitchen. She looks down over her glasses to scold him, but he is already watching *M*A*S*H* again. His comment is swept under the rug, and I am still shaking.

I sit with my grandmother for a little bit, watching her as she checks her sugars and then as she reads the paper. The fear in my belly has subsided for now, but I know that such a calm feeling is not meant to last.

I manage to stay in the kitchen until after dinner by helping my grandmother cook. But then she shoos me out so she can clean up. Sadly, I head back to the living room, the fear building inside me again as I get closer and closer to the recliner. I wipe my hands on my pants to get rid of the sweat.

"Hey! Let me see your pussy," Arnold snickers to himself as I pass by. I say nothing, my eyes cast down, praying that he leaves me alone. I sit down on the floor with my toys and meekly look up to see if my grandmother is going to come to my rescue. I notice, however, that she has disappeared to her bathroom, and I am alone with Arnold. I think my sister is in our bedroom down the hall, and my dad is outside working on his truck. My heart is thudding inside my chest, and I keep my eyes down to the floor. I can feel my cheeks getting red making my whole body hot all over.

"Let me kiss it," Arnold says, smiling at me. He purses his lips into a pucker and kisses the air in front of him.

I feel like I can't breathe as I shakily stand, gather my toys into my arms, and walk briskly to my room. I feel a small amount of comfort, knowing that he is not going to chase after me.

"Where you going?" Arnold asks my back. I keep moving.

**********

I am twenty-one years-old.

I am twenty-one years-old, and I am reeling from memories from my childhood. A multitude of instances where I am ambushed by inappropriate comments have long since been forgotten by everyone — even me, until now.

I am twenty-one-years-old, and I have slid down to the floor, still naked, exposed. The side of the bathtub is so cold against my back that it feels sharp. Tiny flecks of water are tapping at the back of my neck, insistent, as they peek out from behind the shower curtain. My shower long forgotten, I am numb.

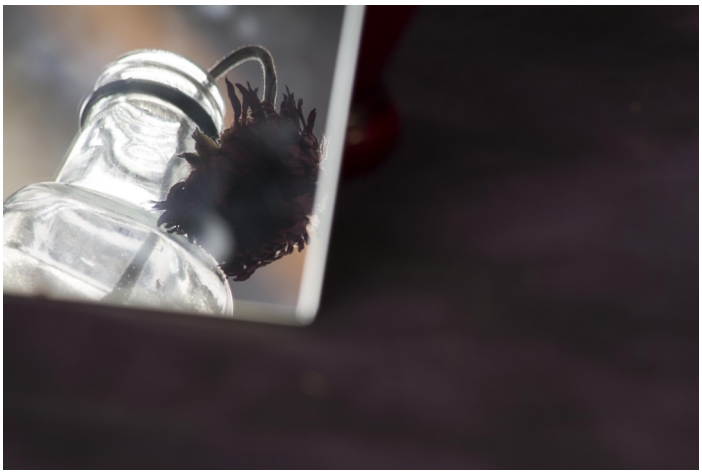
My head is still throbbing, but it feels cloudy now. I am a guest to this movie, but I have a really shitty seat, and while everything is fuzzy and distant, I feel a certain pull that tells me that these memories are not figments of my imagination — that I am not making things up as they come to me — that my brain isn't playing tricks on me.

'Holy shit. This really happened.'

I realize with relief but also confusion that these are the only memories I have of Arnold. He died a few years later, and nobody has spoken of him since. My body turns cold when I realize that inappropriate comments were all my nine-year-old self had to endure. While this delayed realization is confusing, I do realize that I am *very* lucky for it.

This invasion of memories feels like an awakening. I am realizing, for the first time, what his comments meant, what *he* meant.

I am left with questions, and I am also left with answers that I have no means to access. I am confused — beyond confused . But I realize that I am probably not going to find any answers any time soon. I know that I have made it this far, and, therefore, I refuse to let this remembrance break me. I resolve to put the memory in the back of my mind, where it has resided for twelve years, and finally take that shower.



**By David Cahill**

## Surprise Visit
**By Janessa Corrigan**

"Why didn't you call me?" I asked, pacing around the kitchen.

"I panicked. I'm sorry. But seriously, how crazy is this?"

I made my way into the living room and plopped myself onto the sofa. "I know, Denise," I said. "It was the last thing I was expecting, too."

It was crazy, but that last part was a lie; I was expecting it. I knew somebody was pregnant; I was just hoping it wasn't me. I had dreamt of people dying four times in the past two weeks, so I was waiting for someone to reveal a pregnancy. I just wasn't sure who. My mom and her sisters swear that dreams about death are a sure sign that someone is pregnant, just as dreams about birth bring good luck. After the third dream and no sign of pregnancy, I had rejected the theory, but sure enough, my childhood best friend was going to have a baby.

"Will you come with me to the doctor's office on Thursday?" she asked.

"Of course I will," I responded, and after finalizing our plans, I hung up the phone.

Denise and I had been friends since we were just three and four years old. We grew up in the same neighborhood, and even though she was a grade above me in school, we remained just as close from kindergarten all the way through high school graduation. People in our hometown were always mistaking us for sisters in elementary and middle school, and that is what we considered ourselves. We even tried to look the part, which inevitably failed when I grew to be seven inches taller than her with a head of blonde hair. She had dark brown locks and stood a mere 5'1" from the time she was twelve through adulthood. Still, we were sisters and always would be. Learning Denise was about to have a baby did catch me off guard, but it was not all that surprising. She was always a wild-card. I could never predict what she was going to say to me when I saw her name pop up on my phone screen. Plus, she was the type of girl who always had a boyfriend, so I had figured she would be first. I was excited for her and Jakob. They had been together for three years now, and she was happier than I'd ever seen her. This meant I would soon be a godmother; she had promised me when she was ten that I would be. Twelve years later and it was coming true. It almost didn't seem real.

When Thursday came, I drove my silver Toyota Camry thirty minutes to Denise's house. Now that we had graduated from college and lived in separate towns, we did not see each other as often, but this occasion certainly could not be missed. The drive was usually long and tedious, but today it went by quickly. I was too busy thinking about Denise and her baby— if it would be a boy or girl, what the name would be, what it would look like — to notice the time. I was so lost in thought that I almost missed the turn for her street, but didn't. I made the sharp left down Pine Street and followed the road to its end. 'Living on a dead end might be nice for raising a child,' I thought as I pulled into the driveway. 'It'll be nice and quiet, hardly any traffic.' Almost as soon as I put my car in park Denise was running toward me. She must've been watching out the window for me to arrive.

When she slid into the passenger seat, we exchanged looks of sheer eagerness and immediately started babbling about all that was to come. It had been at least three weeks since we had seen each other, so we had lots to catch up on. We discussed how Jakob reacted to the pregnancy, how her mom was doing with her recent surgery, what her new accounting job was like, and everything in between. It was twenty minutes before we even left the driveway. Good thing I had arrived early.

"Where's Jakob?" I asked. "He isn't coming with us?"

"He's working today," she responded. "But I'm kind of glad it's just us anyway. This is how I always pictured it." She grabbed my hand from across the seat.

Jakob works as an EMT, so I wasn't surprised.

"Me, too." I smiled.

Denise and I had always been close, but we weren't usually the kind of friends who cried together or shared mooshy-gooshy moments. This was probably the most emotional we had been since the eighth grade, when the fish we had bought together died.

"Plus he gets weird around doctors or something. I don't know." She turned the radio volume up and searched for a station, my cue to start driving.

I left the driveway and started toward Littleton, a neighboring town just ten minutes from Denise's house. I wasn't familiar with the drive, so she had to direct me. It was an easy ride; I already knew I'd be able to find my way back on my own at the end of the appointment. The only problem was the snow. My tires weren't great, and when it's January in New England, that spells trouble. It was fine, though. I just made sure to drive slowly. After all, we were carrying precious cargo.

Most of the drive was spent singing along loudly to whatever songs came on the radio, even if we didn't know all the words. It almost felt like we were teenagers again, except for the fact that in between songs we exchanged possible baby names and took turns guessing the due date.

Soon enough, we were on Harlow Street and could see the sign for the clinic up ahead as we sat in traffic. "Grafton County Family Health Services" it read in green and white letters. I looked to my right to check on Denise. She looked like she had just seen a ghost. She had gone from singing along to the radio with her feet up on the dashboard to complete silence. She stared straight ahead toward the sign, and her facial expression was blank. I turned down the music.

"I wish Jakob had come," she muttered, not removing her gaze from the sign.

"Shh," I started. "It will be fine. I'm here. I'll be there the whole time, Dena."

We pulled into the parking lot a few seconds later, and I put the car in park. After turning it off, I asked Denise if she was ready. She said she wasn't, but unbuckled and stepped out of the car anyway. I followed her up the stone steps and into the clinic, making our way toward the reception desk. While she checked in, I found us a place to sit.

The waiting room was large, but it wasn't very busy. I scanned the brightly lit room and noticed only three other groups of people. There was a mother and daughter, an elderly man by himself, and a couple expecting a baby. The pregnant woman's belly was huge; she had to be near her due date. I couldn't help but laugh as I imagined Denise eventually looking like that. She was a tiny woman, always had been. She was barely over five feet tall and could probably still fit into children's clothing, something she once did to save money on a brand new North Face jacket when we were still in high school.

I grabbed a magazine from a nearby shelf and made my way toward the corner of the room, still stifling a smile.

"What're you laughing at?" Denise asked, sneaking up on me from behind.

"Oh, nothing. What did the receptionist say?" I asked and sat down on one of the musty blue cushioned chairs.

"My doctor should be out to get me in just a few minutes. Dr. Beals. I've heard really good things about her. That's who my cousin saw when she was pregnant a few years ago." She sat down beside me.

"Oh, Megan? I haven't heard from her in ages! She had a son, right? What was his name again? Brett? I think I remember seeing that on Facebook."

Denise started to respond but wasn't able to finish before her doctor announced her name in the large, almost empty room. 'That was quick,' I thought, and we stood from our seats. I looked at Denise and smiled, hooked her arm in mine and started toward Dr. Beals. She was a tall woman with dirty blonde hair, and she greeted us as if we were old friends.

"Denise! How are you?" she asked, placing her hand on Denise's shoulder.

"I'm good," she responded.

"And who is this?" Dr. Beals gestured toward me with a smile.

"Oh, I'm sorry. This is my friend, Janelle. She's going to be little what's-his-face's godmother pretty soon," she said, placing her hand on her belly.

"That's great," said Dr. Beals. "Let's get the appointment started now, shall we?" She led us down the hallway and into

her room.

Denise was given a white hospital gown to change into, and Dr. Beals directed her to the bathroom a few doors down. I sat in one of the two chairs in the corner of the room, not far from the bed that Denise would be lying on during her ultrasound in just a few minutes. The chair I was seated in was the same as the musty blue ones from the waiting room. It squeaked every time I shifted, so I tried to stay still. I had never been to an appointment like this, so I wasn't sure exactly what to expect. The only thing I did know was that I'd be standing near the bed to hold Denise's hand during the procedure.

When she returned, Denise answered a series of health questions and got ready to have her blood drawn. I am squeamish around other people's blood, so I turned away for this part.

Next, Dr. Beals explained to the both of us exactly what the ultrasound would consist of. It would be simple and relatively quick; after all, this was only the first appointment. Mostly, the ultrasound was to confirm the pregnancy and to make sure everything was healthy so far, and by the end Denise would be equipped with prenatal vitamins and the knowledge of her due date. She wasn't quite sure how far along she was and was anxious to find out. So was I.

The ultrasound ended up looking pretty much exactly like I had seen in the movies. By now I was standing alongside the bed with a perfect view of both Denise and her doctor, ready for what was about to come. Denise's hospital gown was first pulled up to reveal her belly, which hadn't yet grown enough to show that she was pregnant, and then Dr. Beals rubbed a clear gel all over her abdomen. She flinched at her touch because the gel was cold, and when the doctor was finished, she asked if Denise was ready to "take a look."

"Ready as I'll ever be," she said, squeezing my hand quickly.

"Alright. Here we go," said Dr. Beals, placing the probe onto the center of Denise's slimy stomach.

She moved the probe around in a circular motion, and an image appeared on the monitor to her right.

"Wow," said Denise, unable to remove her eyes from the screen. "Wow."

"That's a baby, alright. Everything looks just fine so far," said Dr. Beals.

The image was unclear, but it looked pretty much just like all of the ultrasound photos I had seen in the past. I looked at it intently, about to remark how nice it was to be there with Denise for this, but suddenly I was overcome with an instant heat. I became light-headed all at once, and my vision started to blur just as quickly as my stomach started to churn. My hand slipped away from Denise's as I tried to collect myself, but the next thing I knew I was on the tile floor with Dr. Beals standing over me.

"Are you okay? Janelle? Can you hear me?" she asked.

"What? What?"

"Janelle, you fainted. Do you know where you are?"

"Yes," I said, confused. "Where's Denise? Aren't we supposed to be with Denise?"

"I'm here, Nelle. I'm here," said Denise from across the room.

"She's right over there, dear. Let's worry about you right now," said Dr. Beals as she helped me stand up and walked me back to the chair I had first sat in at the beginning of the appointment.

By now I was back to a normal temperature, and my vision had returned. I was no longer nauseous, either, so I suggested we move forward with Denise's ultrasound.

"Do you have any idea why you might have just fainted?" asked the doctor. "Have you been sick recently?"

"No," I responded. "I must have just been shocked to see Denise's baby, I guess."

"That could be, but we should rule out all other causes just in case, okay? Have you had much to eat today?"

"Yeah, I think so. I ate just before coming here. I'm fine, really."

"What about water? Are you well hydrated?"

"Yes. I should be."

"And is there any possibility that you could be pregnant?"

"Um, I don't think so…."

"When was your last menstrual period?"

I paused before answering, trying to recall. "Well, I should be on it this week, actually," I said.

"Would you like to do a quick pregnancy test? I could send you down the hall with another doctor, if you'd like."

I was reluctant to agree, but Denise thought I should anyway, just in case. 'While I'm here, it wouldn't hurt,' I thought, and, I let Dr. Beals direct me to another doctor down the hall. Before leaving the room, I said goodbye to Denise, assuring her that I'd be back in just a few minutes.

I followed this new doctor, Dr. McClain, down the same hall we had come from initially and into a new room. Dr. McClain was friendly and jumped right into small talk, something I've noticed all doctors do in an effort to ease the nerves of worried patients. I wasn't worried, though, so the small talk was not necessary. Still, it was nice of her. The room looked almost exactly like Dr. Beals's, and I sat quietly while I waited for her to begin the process. It would be my first pregnancy test ever, but I was pretty sure it would come back negative, so I wasn't concerned. Truthfully, I couldn't even focus on myself; I was too anxious that I'd miss hearing when Denise's due date would be. I was only taking the test to please Denise and Dr. Beals, and I was ready to get it over with as soon as possible.

When I was finished with Dr. McClain she allowed me to return to Denise's room. I would be receiving a call with my test results in a few days. When I entered the room, Denise was back in her regular clothes and was discussing the ultrasound with Dr.

Beals. They welcomed me back.

"Janelle! I'm eight weeks along!" exclaimed Denise.

"Wow, really? So when's the due date then?"

"July 15th!"

"What? The same as Maggie's birthday? That's great!"

Maggie is Denise's sister, who I'd known since I was only three years old. She would be thrilled when she found out.

"I know," said Denise, as she put on her winter coat to brave the cold outdoors.

I did the same, and after talking briefly once more with Dr. Beals, we made our way through the clean white hallways of the clinic, past the now almost full waiting room, and returned to my car. There we called Maggie and told her about the appointment. She was ecstatic, and once we had informed all of Denise's other closest relatives and friends of the news, we left the Littleton clinic and found our way back to her apartment in Plymouth.

When we arrived, Jakob's car was in the driveway. Excited to show him the photo from her ultrasound that she had clutched to her chest throughout the entire ride home, Denise hopped out of the car as quickly as possible. Before closing the door she thanked me, blew me a kiss, and said she would call me. I knew this was a lie; she would be too wrapped up in her excitement with Jakob and her family that she would forget to call, but I nodded along, anyway, and told her I looked forward to it.

Once I returned to my home in Gorham, my life resumed as usual. I dove right back into my work schedule and back into my weekly routine. The office was busier in the wintertime, and I was swamped with paperwork, especially since I had taken the day off to go to Denise's appointment. In fact, amidst the hustle and bustle of the appointment's following days, I completely forgot I had even taken a pregnancy test. I was quickly reminded when I got a phone call from Grafton County Family Health Services.

I answered my phone immediately and sat at my kitchen table while I listened carefully to the doctor, interested only in the line revealing the results. Finally, Dr. McClain told me: Positive. 'Did I hear that wrong?' I thought. I hadn't. Without moving from my seat, I called Denise.

"Denise."

"Hey, what's up?"

When she didn't hear anything on the other line, she spoke again.

"Are you okay, Nelle?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Well, we always did hope to have kids at the same time, didn't we?"

"Den, I don't know if I'm ready."

"It's scary. I know. I was scared, too. I still am, even. But you and Jackson are great together, and I know you can handle this. If I can, you can."

That might be true. Jackson and I hadn't even been together for a year, yet, but we were great together. And in all honesty, even though Denise was older than me, I always had been more responsible. If she could handle it, I could handle it. She was right. Even still, I wasn't ready.

"I'm going to make an appointment for next week. Will you come?"

"Of course. Wouldn't miss it. Just let me know what day."

I hung up the phone and let my head fall into my hands. 'Those damn death dreams,' I thought. 'Why do mothers always have to be right?'

When Friday came I made the drive to Plymouth, again, to pick up Denise. It was snowing lightly, and this time, the drive felt as tedious as usual. When I arrived she was waiting for me in the driveway, and I got out of the car to meet her. She gave me a long, tight hug, rubbing my back while she held me, and pulled away with a smile.

"Okay, I'm sick of snow landing on my eyelashes out here. Let's get in the car," she said. "Brrr." She climbed into the passenger seat and turned up the heat.

This ride was nothing like our last; there was no singing along to the radio or discussing possible baby names. Instead, it was silent. With the radio off, the only sound was that of the windshield wipers squeaking as they moved back and forth. Denise tried to lighten the mood by telling me old stories and asking me questions, but I wasn't feeling very talkative. I was too focused.

A few minutes later we passed Grafton County Family Health Services, and Denise turned to me.

"Oh, Janelle, you just passed it. That's alright, though. You can turn around up here on the right."

I kept driving and took the next left. I found a parking spot and stopped the car, turning to Denise.

"What is this place? What are we doing here?" she asked.

"Denise, I'm having an abortion," I said and got out of the car.

# All Within Two Hours

**By Christine Cahill**

The lights are off in the room, but there is a glint of sun shining through the shades that cover the sliding glass door. Footsteps coming closer echo outside the room. My eyes flutter open, and my mouth stretches into a large yawn. My eyelids are heavy, and my body is still. The nurse knocks on my door three times and tells me to get up. This is a familiar routine. This has been my home for a month, and I am already used to it. I step over to the egg-shell colored dresser and choose the underwear and pants I will wear for the day. Gray sweatpants are my choice, as usual. I take five steps to the left to the closet and reach for a long-sleeved shirt. I exit the room and walk to the bathroom. I take my toothbrush from the clear bin my toiletries are in and begin to brush my teeth. The minty paste helps me wake up. The large bags under my eyes and my sunken appearance are apparent. Stuck to the wide mirror above the sink are colorful sticky notes with encouraging words and quotes written on them. I take off my clothes, preparing to get in the shower, and with my eyes catch a glance of my body. Bones are protruding, and my skin is pale. My body is unrecognizable. Even though I don't want to be here, this treatment center for Anorexia will save me.

The warm shower is a great relief from the cold air. I turn the knob to the right to get hot water. The knob is sensitive, and it takes me a few attempts to get it on exactly the right temperature. My ten minute shower goes by quickly. I return to my bedroom and wait patiently for the other patients to finish getting ready so that we can go to the living room. Walking through the bedroom door, I longingly look back at my bed because I know it will be fourteen hours before I can get under the warmth of my covers again.

The floor tile is cold, but my red and green fuzzy socks protect me. I walk alongside my friends through the formal living room to the room where we spend 80% of every day. I turn left and sit on the far corner of the old, tan couch. The other four girls sit on two other couches that share the tan color that mine has. I have claimed my own couch, and they respect that I need my own space the most.

The counselor calls me into the kitchen, but I resist. I resist only long enough to not get in trouble, but I still take my time. I slide on my white converse, tie my laces, then enter the kitchen. I put on my sea foam green, transparent hair net and then wash my hands with the hospital-smelling soap. The nurse points to the counter where my meal plan for the day is laid out. I pick it up and sigh. This is too much. My mind starts racing, and my thoughts are focused on my last session with my dietitian. It won't be long before she adds more exchanges and calories to my meal plan. Heat radiates from the pan cooking my steel-cut oats. The boiling water rises, and I add the oats. Frequently, I glance over at the pot to make sure the oats don't overflow and go back and stir every two minutes, while I'm simultaneously cutting up strawberries and portioning out sliced almonds.

I sit down at my assigned spot at the dining room table. The counselor looks at me and tells me to take my jacket off. I do it and then sit back down. The icy air causes goosebumps to appear all over my body. I look at the ones on my arms, show the counselor, hoping that she will let me put my black fleece back on. She doesn't. That fleece is my only source of warmth. My emaciated body provides no protection. It does not protect me from the air. I squint to see the thermostat across the room, which appears to be set at 75. I don't believe it.

Breakfast concludes, and I return to my spot on the couch. I put a hoodie on, then my fleece, and curl into a ball to try to get warm again. My low temperature and anxiety cause me to shake. My eyes start to well up with tears, and I run into the formal living room. Feelings of anxiety, fear, and guilt flood my mind because of what I ate, and I sob. Tears fall down my face. There is a choking sensation in my throat, and I can't breathe**.** My cries become louder and louder until the nurse hears me and rushes to my side. With her care and helpful words, my breathing slows down to an almost normal rhythm. I become calmer and ready to face the day. The challenging and scary journey of recovery is no match for my wonderful treatment team in this center that really is a center for discovery.



**By David Cahill**

# An Unexpected Equation

**By Kristen Polky**

There was once a period in my life when I loathed going to school. I was eleven-years-old and caught in a web of despair. My father had succumbed to pancreatic cancer over the summer, and my mother was failing to cope with his death in a healthy way. Going to school meant I was separated from her, unable to be there and stop her frequent trips to the liquor store.

On this particular afternoon, I sat moodily in the back seat of my math classroom. I had my pencil box set out on the desk and went about snapping each pencil in half, one by one.

*Crack. Crack. Crack!*

My teacher, Mrs. Phillips, blatantly ignored me as she continued with her lecture on long division. I had long since given up trying to understand the complexity of math. Life was complicated enough as it was; I didn't need confusing equations to further mess up my head.

*Crack. Crack.*

I soon ran out of pencils and moved onto crayons. At this point in time, the class was drawing to an end, indicating that recess was about to begin. My friends and peers happily began organizing their folders and collecting the new set of homework.

"I'd like to talk with you Kristen," my teacher told me, loud enough for several people to hear.

Mrs. Phillips was twenty-six-years-old. She was married to a man in the Coast Guard, and they had a baby who was just shy of being one-year-old. She was quite pretty, too, with honey-colored hair and dark blue eyes. Naturally, she was everyone's favorite teacher, even mine, despite teaching my most hated subject.

I flushed red, suddenly ashamed by my classroom behavior. Out of all three of my fifth grade teachers, Mrs. Phillips was by far the kindest. She always made an effort to reach out to me, whether it was to give me new books to take home or to invite me and my friends to eat lunch in her classroom. She did not deserve this sort of treatment from me.

I was absolutely sure that I would be getting a scolding; therefore, I watched warily as she closed the door after the last student had left the room.

"I have an idea," she spoke again, once we were alone in the classroom. She took a seat at an empty desk beside me. "Why don't you come over tomorrow, and we can cook a surprise dinner for your mom?"

My mouth dropped open, as I was caught off-guard by her words. I had expected an invitation to a detention; needless to say, this was a very different sort of invitation.

"W-What?"

"Of course Alayna should come, too," Mrs. Phillips added as an afterthought, referring to my best friend. "We can make stuffed shells. Does your mom like those?"

There were several long moments of silence as I contemplated her words.

"My mom doesn't really eat dinner anymore," I confessed quietly, cheeks warming with shame at the fact that my mother had taken to replacing her dinner with Budweiser instead.

"But this would give her a reason to," Mrs. Phillips said, giving me a hopeful smile. "Just think of what a surprise it would be! I bet she would be thrilled."

"Maybe…." I relented, slowly warming up to the idea. I liked how she talked about my mother as if she were ill, and not just the newly appointed town drunk. It gave me hope that perhaps this problem really would fade away in time. My father would never be able to come back to me, but there was a chance that my mother might.

"It's a plan then," she stated. "I'll call Alayna's mom tonight."

I smiled a little, still a bit shocked that I was going to be cooking with my math teacher the next day. It was a very odd way in dealing with my wayward behavior.

"You can go finish the rest of recess if you'd like," she said, moving to sit at her own desk rather than the one next to me. "But you're more than welcome to stay here and get started on your homework. I can even go over the lesson again for you."

I hesitated, looking down at the homework sheet that was filled with math problems. It had been several weeks since my last attempt to do homework of any sort.

"I'll stay," I decided, pleased to see that she approved of my choice. She encouraged me to bring a chair over to her own desk, where we would have plenty of space to work.

"I think you'll need to borrow one of my pencils."

I took it sheepishly and thanked her. For the remainder of recess I listened to her carefully explain how to solve a long division problem. By the time the bell had rung, it no longer seemed as complicated as I had initially believed it to be.

The conversation that we had that day is very important to me, and something that I look back on quite often, as it opened a whole new chapter to my life. Little did I know at the time, but around a month or so later, Mrs. Phillips would take me into her home and become my temporary foster parent. Without her kind and gentle influence, I might have given up on school completely, and, therefore, I will be forever thankful for her presence in my life.

# Art, Art, and More Art

**By David Cahill**

I am someone who has always been interested in the arts and someone who has always participated in them. I've grown up around people who respect the arts. Despite this, I have come to be suspicious of the importance that people place on art. Don't worry, no one is saying that we should start burning books or anything. The problem seems to be with the culture surrounding art. I tend to be a contrarian, so when I see people speaking of artists and saying things like, "Oh, he's an old master," that comes across as pretentious to me; and again, I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with art. However, in this essay, I will be exploring the real meaning of art in an "intellectual" way. I put that in quotes because, for many, opinions on art can be very divisive. For example, if I were to imagine someone in my head saying that they don't know how important art really is, I would probably imagine some hillbilly from the forests of South Dakota. If that person were real and standing in front of me, I would most likely be tempted to ignore all of his opinions.

So this is why I say that I am philosophizing about art in an "intellectual" way. This isn't from the perspective of someone who fits the stereotype of a person who thinks art is useless. This isn't from someone who doesn't understand art or who hasn't experienced any of it; I love art and have participated in many forms of it since before I can remember. I have felt an urge to ponder the meaning of art recently, most likely due to my creeping suspicion that everyone is wrong about everything.

Of course, I don't say that in a light-hearted way. I don't think that our modern society is terribly wrong about everything, but it's this feeling that I continually get. In the case of this essay, I'll use this to examine a statement that many "smart" people most likely don't ever consider:

"Of course art is important."

Well, yes, it is. Art is important in that it helps people express themselves. It's important in that it shows the viewer/listener what life is like through the viewpoint of others. This is probably the most significant part of art. I can't deny that art is great at stirring up emotions in people. In order to explain my points, I'm going to use rapper/fashion designer Kanye West as an example. He is an artist whom I have paid great attention to over the past few years. Recently, however, it has become more controversial to be a fan of Kanye than it has ever been.

Back when Kanye dropped his first album, he became adored by everybody. His music was personal to him, but also had a way of connecting to everyone who listened to it. However, as the years have gone by, Kanye's art has evolved. Where his first albums brought listeners new sounds and powerful lyrics that most people could agree with, his new work doesn't hit on the same level. In my opinion, his work gets better with every album, but nowadays his lyrics and his sounds are much harsher. Especially in his most recent two albums, "Yeezus" and "The Life of Pablo," Kanye can be heard rapping about things that he wouldn't earlier in his career. Much of these lyrics and verses are off-putting. They are crude, extremely sexual, violent, and mysterious. I believe that there is a great deal of meaning behind these artistic decisions, but for the sake of this argument, I'm going to take his work at face value.

When Kanye West raps about having sex at a Vogue dinner party or being "the black Oprah," I tend to wonder what the point of his music is. I still love it, but for a while I wasn't sure how much meaning it had compared to his old music. In the beginning of his career, he rapped about things that seemed more meaningful. Among many things, Kanye rapped about love, black culture, and Christianity. Compared to his new music, and also his foray into fashion, this has left some of his fans perplexed.

"What happened to the old Kanye?"

While his new music is more abstract and evolved compared to his older music, on the surface it seems like he's regressed. This is a reference to the vulgar lyrics I discussed earlier. I'm not going to get much into the deeper meaning of his music, which I know is there, but thinking about this has led me to a rather simple conclusion.

This may be a basic idea to some, but to me it took a long time to find it. The basis of this idea is that art doesn't need to be directly helpful to people. Music does not need to have themes that relate to people's lives in a literal way. We shouldn't be able to listen to a Kanye album or watch a Tarantino movie and feel like we were just preached to about how to live our lives; that only results in something kitsch.

Ignoring all the deeper meanings that may be involved in a great piece of music, the fact that it's "great" is all that matters. Even if Kanye West rapped about things that had nothing to do with my life, I would still consider him a ground-breaking artist. Now that I get this idea, I realize that Kanye West has been talking about it in interviews and songs for a long time now. Making art that inspires thought and curiosity in people is extremely important. People like Kanye make it their mission every day to make things that people love. Kanye is trying to give people more reasons to wake up in the morning and live great lives. Now, let me draw another example.

Elon Musk, owner of SpaceX and Tesla, has recently stated that Kanye West is a huge inspiration for him. While it may seem like those two are completely different, their goals are actually very similar. When one looks closer, one is able to recognize the similarities between the rapper and the tech genius, and how this relates to the importance of art.

While on the surface it may seem like Musk is just an eccentric who's obsessed with creating the greatest cars and rockets, his goals are actually much simpler than that; he wants to make the world a better, and, more specifically, more enjoyable place. Elon's main reason to make great self-driving cars, for example, is so that people don't have to spend years of their life driv-

ing. He champions the idea that people could spend that time doing things that they love and spending more time with their loved ones.

This relates to what Kanye's mission is. Disregarding the deeper meaning of a piece of art, the point is not directly to "make one's life better" or provide people with a moral compass. The point isn't for Kanye West to rap about being a great father or a man of the church, but to represent life in a way that inspires people, inspires thought, and excites people.

All in all, I've found a conclusion that makes me look at art a different way. When I think about ancient times, or even up to a hundred years ago, I think about how dull life must have been. Life had no color. People didn't have as much time or opportunities for fun as they do now. There were also dark ages when people didn't care about art at all. Now, I'm not saying that we didn't have art until 100 years ago; we've had spectacular art all throughout history, although it's only been within the past 100 years that the average person has begun to appreciate art to the extent that it should be appreciated. Art is penetrating our daily society, rather than just being a pastime for the wealthy and noble.

I now realize that artists/icons like Kanye West and Elon Musk are needed not just for their social commentary, but for the color they bring to a world constantly in need of it.

## Lost in Translation

**By Kerrie Wilson**

There are certain words in Spanish that can't be translated into English.
I can explain the definition of the word as much as I want, but you'd never fully understand.
For instance, one of my favorites:
Apapacho.
It's Aztec, very old. Sounds a little silly.
Feels weird in your mouth when you say it. Reminds me of something a two-year-old would say.
Lots of consonants in there.
One word, and yet it says everything. A one-word minefield full of imagery. If you knew Spanish you'd get a glimpse, but since not everyone does, I'll try to explain.
Apapacho literally means "soul cuddle." Like if you say, "Apapacho?" as a question, you're asking, "Can I cuddle your soul?"
But it also means "I see you. I see your soul."
And there's so much emotion.
You're saying, "I see you. I see your soul. I understand you. I love you."
With just one word.
There's nothing in English that comes close to that.



**By Patrick Orcutt**

# Bruised Jungle
## By Charlie Paulin

"I wanna thank you for coming out with me tonight." Daniel held Peg's hand, flesh to flesh to cheap tablecloth. Women with low-cut blouses and men in semi-wrinkled dress pants sat around them, murmuring to one another over guttering candles and inexpensive wine. Waiters in red aprons and black polos scurried from table to table, scribbling into little notepads. Maroon walls, high ceilings, and scarce lighting made the restaurant seem sophisticated to its patrons, but dingy to its employees. A crackling neon sign advertising Budweiser flickered above the glassy bar, at which two men, one of whom wore overalls, sat. Daniel and Peg sat away from the bar, lingering at their table over the dredges of their last wine bottle and a sad-looking piece of strawberry cheesecake.

"You know I've been trying, babe. You know I have." Daniel's eyes watered and he looked so lost it made Peg's chest hurt. "You don't deserve somebody like me." He tried to pull his hand out from beneath hers, but she held onto it firmly. His other hand fumbled for his wineglass.

"Daniel, tonight's been so good…." Peg blushed, adjusting her skirt to cover the fingertip bruises up her thigh. "We've been so good."

Daniel smiled. The waitress came to collect their plates and they both thanked her without taking their eyes off one another.

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Daniel pressed his hand into Peg's palm as they walked outside, which took her by surprise. He had never been known to display affection in public before. She smiled and squeezed his hand in response, and they meandered into the garden behind the restaurant.

Holiday lights glittered from tall maples and a village of gazebos. A fountain sparkled in the middle of a koi pond, reflecting white lights off the water and the scales of the red koi. "It's beautiful" Peg breathed. She felt Daniel's warm hand on her arm.

They strolled into the nearest gazebo, staring down at the fish peacefully swimming in the pond below. A warm breeze ruffled Peg's hair, and Daniel smiled before leaning in to kiss her.

"Peg?"

"Yes?"

"You know I don't do this whole...romantic gesture thing very well. But...Peg, I love you. I wanna be with you for the rest of my life. I wanna be there for you. I promise I'm gonna get better, babe. I promise. Will you marry me?" Daniel knelt in front of her, producing a cheap ring from his jacket pocket, looking up at Peg earnestly.

Peg's chest froze, and the koi swam faster. The lights rippled in the breeze and whirled around, unevenly illuminating Daniel's face. The moon began to spin, and the water began to rush. She said no.

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Daniel had been drinking since he woke up, prowling the house with a bottle of off-brand whiskey and muttering loudly to himself about Peg and her breasts that were too small, her stomach that was too big.

She had cowered in the corner, watching him reel around the kitchen, jerking open cupboards and drawers. The corkscrew wine bottle-opener glistened in his clenched fist, white knuckles pressing into cold steel. She stood to leave, but he lurched towards her.

"Where do you think you're going, you whore?" Peg had felt herself detach, floating upwards and upwards, leaving her body to mutely accept Daniel's drunken wrath.

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"Two years, Peg! Two!"

Peg had seen his face redden, his soft hands harden into fists. Before she could make sense of much else, her legs were propelling her across the garden, as far from Daniel as possible. She ran, hearing his dress shoes on the garden stones behind her. She flung off her pumps to even her pace, and shivered as her bare feet touched cold stone.

"You ungrateful bitch!" The dinnertime merlot thickened Daniel's throat, making him sound large and monstrous. Peg could hear birds shaking trees as they took off. She ducked into some shrubbery, thorns tearing through her legs and dress.

Peg tripped on a protruding root, falling and dirtying her knees, tearing her thorn-riddled dress further. She looked up at the blackness and sparkling stars beyond the leaf canopy with both fright and relief. She could no longer hear the roars or footfalls of her boyfriend. Tears prickled in her eyes and a sunken defeat crept over her. She had no idea where she was.

**********

"Gimme another wine, Peg." Daniel held out his empty glass.

"Bottle's empty."

"I know you're lying, whore. Come here."

"Daniel. We don't have any more wine. All we have left is your mom's tequila, and that's for her birthday tomorrow." Peg felt her neck disappear into her shoulders, scrunching herself smaller to lessen the impact of her words. She felt his fists before she saw them, his knuckles landing on her nose.

“Liar. I know about you and your coins, your programs. I’m not even worth getting drunk with anymore. I’m just another problem for you to deal with.” Daniel loomed above her, tears in his eyes and wine down his shirt.

“I’m sorry, I….”

“No, you’re not. You’ll say anything to get me to go away. Whore. I bet you’re sleeping with your sponsor,” Daniel spat.

Peg began to cry. “Daniel, you know I love you. I would never hurt you on purpose.” She slid to the floor, wrapping her head in her arms. The memories flooded back to her as Daniel stood above her shouting obscenities: her boss, the copy room, the duct tape criss-crossed over her mouth, the way the sweat from her legs had clung to the copy machine as her employer zipped up his fly. The words her boss had used as he had abused her.

Finally, Daniel reached over Peg, tired of her sobbing, and unscrewed the cap on the tequila before shuffling out of the kitchen.

**********

Peg was lost, frozen, and totally alone. Her legs were worn and scratched, her dress torn, her shoes gone. The soles of her feet were bloody. Although she felt some dull anxiety bubbling quietly in her chest, she felt oddly at peace. She stretched her toes, reveling in the distant sting she felt as her wounds gaped.

It was dark. Too dark to see past her hand, too dark to bother wandering further into the forest. So Peg laid down, feeling twigs and pebbles jutting into her spine, and fell asleep with her brow furrowed and her mouth set.

**********

“What’s this?” Peg returned from the bathroom to see the entire contents of her purse emptied out onto the queen-sized bed she shared with Daniel. He stood beside it, holding her one month recovery chip in his outstretched palm.

“I’ve...I’ve just been going to some meetings, and I’ve been thinking, y’know, ever since we lost Lucy.” Peg felt cold mentioning the loss of their stillborn daughter two years previous. It had never seemed to her that Daniel had cared much; the both of them had spent months after the hospital trip in their own respective drunken stupors. Peg had holed up in the bedroom, crying over vodka and ramen dinners and cursing her womb, while Daniel had disappeared from the house and shown up four months later with a full beard and a noticeable beer gut.

“You know how shitty this makes me feel, right? It’s like you don’t even care about me anymore. All you think about is that baby.”

“I lost her! I lost her because I couldn’t stop. I can never stop for good when I’m around you.” Peg’s lip trembled as those words escaped. Every hair on her neck stood up waiting for his response.

“Fuck you, Peg. You calling me an alcoholic? If I am, it’s because of you! Whoring around, fucking your boss and God knows who else, gettin’ knocked up and emotional. I gotta drink to deal with your bullshit!”

At the mention of her boss, Peg’s mind went blank. She whirled around and headed for the liquor cabinet.

**********

Peg shivered awake to blue dawn. She stiffly stood, arching her back and looking around. She ran her tongue over her cracked lips; the inside of her mouth felt dry and tacky.

Birch trees surrounded her in every visible direction, and sticky mud with light, patchy grass were covered by white twigs and dry leaves. Above the canopy of birch leaves floated an endless, cloudless cerulean sky.

Peg gazed up at the firmament, one hand over her eyes. Her body was caked in mud and twigs, her hair twisted and tangled, long unraveled from its original braid. She began to think of Lucy, the child she once longed to bring into this world. The same world she shared with Daniel, who punished every instance of individuality and extinguished every spark of passion Peg had once felt. The same world that housed her boss from her previous job, who ordered her into the copy room and humiliated Peg, used her. The judge who ruled Peg as a liar, as mentally unfit to retain her employment, just for a few thousand dollars from Peg’s employer.

Peg picked a twig out of her hair, considered tossing it, but then clenched it in her fist. One night sober. She took a step, winced at the pain it brought to her bloody foot.

She took another. Then another.

Peg began to walk.

## Untitled
**By Michaela Lounsberry**

Your words are knives
That pierce the skin
The gleam in your eyes
Tells a different story

You claim to be nice
But I see the devil within
Trick them with your charm
Reel them in too close

You trap them there
Never to be free again
It's hard to breathe
Too scared to move

You smile that awful smile
Freedom is gone
The limit of evil doesn't exist
Defeat is here; it's everywhere

## One Cliché After Another
**By Laurie Corcoran**

He wants to make a clean slate,
but he's bad to the bone.
He's caught in the crossfire,
and down on his luck.

It's easier said than done
to forgive and forget.
They say good things come to those who wait,
but they haven't a clue.

It goes without saying,
not to judge a book by its cover.
Keep a stiff upper lip,
like there's no tomorrow.

Make the best of it,
and never say never.
He's got one foot in the grave,
and he's playing with fire.

## Nightmare
**By Laurie Corcoran**

Intent on destroying her,
the shadows chase her.
Her legs are heavy
as time stalls.

She trips over a slick rock
that wasn't in this grass
the night before.

The shadows surround her.
Their eyes are bloodshot,
and they howl with hunger.

She throws her hands up,
but never feels the pain.
She opens her eyes,
and there is dawn light again.

Her mind forms this darkness;
the shades will reappear
when the next night comes.



**By Patrick Orcutt**

# Theatre is Life

## By Laurie Corcoran

I clutched the ticket in my hand as tightly as I could, fearing that it would somehow disappear if my grip on it loosened. The corners of the stark, white printer paper crinkled and bent under the pressure from my fingers, but the important parts of the ticket – the name of the show and where we were sitting – remained unscathed. I looked down to check these details often, worried that what was happening was just a dream. I tugged at the buttons of my black pea coat and shifted my weight from one foot to the other, silently cursing myself for choosing to wear black flats that were half a size too small. I stood on my tiptoes to try and see above the large groups of people around us, but I still couldn't get a clear view of the double-doors at the front of the room.

The crowd around us buzzed with questions and murmurs of excitement, and what had started as a makeshift line had become a crush of people waiting to get through the doors. Others maneuvered through the group to snag a T-shirt or souvenir from the smiling women who watched over the booth close to the entrance. The lamps affixed to the wall cast a soft glow around the room, bouncing off both the people and the hard marble floor. The ushers emerged out from the doors, and the muttering from the crowd ceased as people craned their necks to peak into the empty theater.

Outside, it was a relatively mild February day for New York City. The remnants of the last snowstorms had melted into the sidewalks, and heavier winter clothes had been left at home. Although the city of New York never slept, night had fallen and the outlines of people rushing to get to their destinations could be seen through the windows.

Inside, my sister, mom, and I had become a part of the crowd waiting to see the longest-running musical on Broadway, which also happened to be one of our favorites. It was the first time my sister and I had ever been to the city, and we were commemorating the occasion by visiting the Majestic Theater to see *Phantom of the Opera*. Listening to cast recordings and watching performances can be thrilling on their own, but now we were going to see and hear the show in person in 2013, shortly after the show's 25th anniversary of entertaining New York.

"Have your tickets ready, and be sure to turn off your cell phones as you settle into your seats," announced one of the ushers, as he held out his hand to review the tickets of those closest to him.

"Here we go!" Mom said, as my sister and I smiled at each other. We'd been looking forward to this day since Christmas, and nothing could ruin the euphoria for us, even as the line inched forward at a sluggish pace.

We passed through the doors and were directed to our seats in the rear mezzanine by one of the many ushers darting around the interior of the theatre. As we sank into the soft red seats, the infamous chandelier hanging from the ceiling caught my attention. It was unlit and unassuming in preparation for the show, but the hundreds of tiny lights would soon be sparking and flashing.

At the end of the first act, the Phantom disrupts the action happening on stage after the other characters ignore his wishes. He warns them in an earlier scene that some sort of disaster will occur if they don't listen to him, and this disaster is the chandelier dropping and swinging down to the center of the stage. The stomachs of the people in the first few rows would drop, and I'm sure it was the same for the orchestra, even if they did see it happen at every performance of *Phantom of the Opera.*

A hush fell over the theater as the lights above us dimmed slightly so the stage could appear brighter. The props were covered for the opening scene, and it seemed as if everyone was holding their breath to prepare themselves for the first booming notes of the organ to signify the overture and the start of the show. I forced myself not to lean forward and grab the armrests of my seat. A smile was glued to my face, and my heart was pounding at the thought of getting lost in the musical for the next few hours. My sister must have been experiencing something similar since she was also turned towards the stage and had ceased her talking. Even though she was quickly flipping through her Playbill one more time to see the list of songs and the cast, our mom paused to glance at us and smile at our sudden silence and intense focus on the stage below.

Suddenly, something blinding lit up beside my face, making me jump. I looked to the right to see that the woman beside me had decided this was the best moment to start checking her phone. I thought that people went to movies or musicals to escape from their daily lives for a while, but I guess that wasn't the case for her. I tried not to let it distract me, hoping that she was just wrapping something up so she could focus on the show.

When the brightness of the screen persisted in my peripheral vision, I couldn't help but grit my teeth. She must've seen the show many times before, yet I couldn't imagine someone going for the first time being so uninterested in it.

Just as the musical was about to officially begin, my savior came in the form of a blindingly bright flashlight beam capturing the woman in a circle of light. "Do you *mind*?" an usher hissed, her glare burning into the woman's face. The phone screen faded to black just in time, and my focus returned to the spectacle about to begin on stage.

The remainder of the show passed by in a blur without any more incidents, but I remember it being as magical as I had hoped it would be. The actors lifted the music and pierced us with their emotions, even though we were sitting so far from the stage. Gasps erupted as the chandelier fell from its original spot on the ceiling. By the time the curtain call had come, we had clapped so much that I couldn't feel my hands anymore. If I could have, I would have crammed as many more musicals as possible into that weekend.

Memories of the show itself may be somewhat fuzzy now, but what I've loved about theatre for so long is that the shows go on even if that magic is not guaranteed. At any moment something could go wrong, so there's a constant tension in the air, as

if the performance is balancing on a string. There are no do-overs or second chances; the actors and the crew must pick themselves up and continue with the show. Triumphs or disasters are equally possible, but theatre performers all over the world choose to take that risk and let themselves be vulnerable on stage to give the audience a memorable experience. It's a courageous and stressful process to undertake. But that drive to push on regardless of the risk continues to inspire me each time I've seen a show since, whether on Broadway or a theatre closer to home.




**By David Cahill**




**By Eric Cooper**

## Realizations

**By Kaitlyn Hill**

I've got my grip tight
Reality
But what you always fail to see
Is that I'm falling, downward, down
Back to where you always found
Found me beaten and confused
Where you always left me, used
I'm spiraling fast, to the end
The space where you try to make amends
But what you realize, much too late
Is that I fell at such a rate
That made it hard to keep my faith
So I let go, the darkness came
And after all that, I screamed your name
Hoping you'd find me alone
And bring me back to what I know
I want all the darkness to fade
And make so I'm not afraid
But all I'm left with is the thought:
The only things you ever brought
Were sadness, heartbreak, and confusion
So I'm letting go of the allusion
That you cared enough to save me
'Cause after all, you left me hanging
I'm learning now, not to trust
Based on the idea of lust
Instead, I keep myself faced forward
And try not to let myself be bothered
By the fact that you are gone
And all I have left is this song
A fading representation of you
I guess it's an image of me, too
Letting go of what has hurt me
And finding ways to let myself be
Free.