



SATORI

SATORI

2016

A Student Literary
Magazine

Winona State University

Mission Statement

In Zen Buddhism, “Satori” is the Japanese word for enlightenment, seeing into one’s own true nature. Since 1970, Satori has provided a forum for Winona State University students to express and share their own true nature and their creations with the university community.

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Winona Prize
———— *in* ————
Creative Writing

THE WINONA PRIZE IN CREATIVE WRITING

Thanks to the generosity of a Winona State University alumnus, 2016 marks the first Winona Prize in Creative Writing. The donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, wants to encourage students to pursue their writing.

Students were able to submit their writing in three categories: fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. Author Patrick Hicks selected Leah Perri's story, "Date Night;" nonfiction writer Kent Cowgill selected Ana Alexander's creative nonfiction piece, "Stuck in the Clouds;" and poet Betsy Wheeler selected Kaysey Price's poem, "If All We Get Are Dopplegängers."

*Fiction
Prizewinner*

LEAH PERRI

Date Night

URSULA NEVER LIKED SUPERMARKETS. They always smelled funny, like the store was over sterilized; yet something was rotting. Kenosha's Stop & Shop was locally owned, earning favor in the community by supporting area events and hiring nice, young high school kids. Many of the kids irritated her.

"Would you like to donate some spare change for our spring fundraiser?" A girl in a blue smock asked her in the entrance of the store, holding out a bucket. She kept blinking as if she had just walked out into sunlight. "It's for our field trip to Chicago at the end of the year."

Ursula paused a moment, taking the girl in: an average face, unfortunately thin and lanky body, brown, mousy hair. She remembered how her son Jeffrey had gone on that same field trip back when he was in high school, before he moved half-way across the country and stopped talking to her.

"No," she said, with a flick of the hand. She grabbed a blue basket.

She made her way to the fruit and produce section, dropping her car keys into her green canvas handbag. She indulged in a free sample of peaches, spearing three slices on one toothpick. "Not even ripe," she grumbled. Reaching to the back of the strawberry display, she grabbed two containers, turning them over and inspecting them for any signs of mold. She planned on making shortcake later that afternoon. It was her signature dish; and being 53 years old and not getting any younger, Lord knows she would need it to impress. For the first time in ten years since she and Richard had divorced, she had a date.

She made her rounds in and out of the aisles, picking up ingredients. Her family used to rave about her strawberry shortcake. Born and raised in Kenosha, she had learned the technique from her own mother, who passed. She remembered, smiling slightly, the time she made it for Jeffrey when he had bombed his

chemistry exam his senior year. She and Richard had always been firm about getting good grades, but she knew Jeffrey had studied hard.

“Mom, you’re the best,” he had said in-between mouthfuls, smiling up at her in gratitude. Ursula had surprised him with a slice when he had gotten home from school. He had inherited her curly hair and Richard’s quiet disposition. He ran a finger along the plate to scoop up the remaining whipped cream. “I love you.”

She wished now she could go back to that moment — hear him say those words again.

IT WAS QUARTER TO five, and everything was perfect. The red-checked tablecloth was spread out across the wooden table. The shortcake was ready, covered in tinfoil on the kitchen counter. She had ham-pickle rollups prepared, a fresh vinaigrette salad, lemonade sweating in a pitcher, and homemade raviolis she had made and frozen last week. Working as a data-entry typist had its perks: she could work from home, choose her own hours, and best of all, she didn’t have to deal with people — especially all of those nosy Catholics — the ones who knew her family for years and watched her grow up. Kenosha was a big small town; people knew each other’s business, but there was room to hide away. The pay for the job wasn’t great, but it was enough to afford her small, duplex apartment in Heather Ridge, a sleepy neighborhood that seemed to swallow its inhabitants whole, blocking them out from the rest of the world and keeping them there.

The previous day, she had gone next door and talked to Mrs. Tenuta, the small Italian widow who shared a wall with her, about not blaring Frank Sinatra all evening while she drank too much red wine.

“Mrs. Tenuta, I will be having company tomorrow evening. Please refrain from playing your loud music,” she had said, standing in her doorway. A strong whiff of patchouli reached her nose as Mrs. Tenuta swayed side to side, her eyes already glossy at 7 p.m.

“Eh,” she said, shaking her head. Her long dark hair was speckled with gray, though Ursula suspected she wasn’t much older than her. Mrs. Tenuta muttered something in Italian.

“What was that?”

“Why do you tell me this?”

“Just keep it down, please.”

“Ohh, you have a man coming over?” she asked smiling, raising a crooked finger.

“I didn’t say that—”

“Oh you do. You do,” she said, smiling and raising her hands in the air as if to praise the gods above. “Ursula has a date!”

Ursula pivoted on her heel and walked down the wooden steps, around to the entrance of her apartment.

“Gooood luck!” Mrs. Tenuta had said, her voice echoing across the small courtyard.

Ursula straightened the tablecloth for the third time. Maybe the red checkers weren’t right? Were they too casual? She went to the closet and brought out a spring-themed one, then, thinking better of it, put it back. The checkers would have to do. She checked her watch. It was 5:15 p.m. Any minute now! She went to the doorway and looked out across the boulevard and the empty parking lot nearby. The Mettuchi children were playing across the street. Poor kids, she thought. There weren’t many other children in this neighborhood.

She turned to meet her reflection in the mirror next to the entrance. Since the divorce, she had really let herself go. Running a hand down her hips, she regretted not shopping for a different dress. The black and white patterned one had once accentuated her curves — now it hugged them a little too tightly. She patted at her short curls, reapplied her red lipstick. She had spent a good deal of time doing her makeup earlier in the day, but the cream-colored foundation had seemed to enhance her wrinkles, rather than hide them.

She leaned closer into the mirror, putting a finger to her temple and raising the wrinkled skin at the corner of her eye.

“My God,” she said.

IT WAS 6 P.M. Paul was forty-five minutes late, and she was starting to get antsy. Would he actually blow her off? They had talked several times at the weekly jazz concerts near Lake Michigan, and he had seemed very interested in her, even if she didn't quite feel the same. All men were the same to her, it seemed, and you had to put on an act for each one. She pursed her lips, staring out the window, then went to the kitchen for a bottle of Merlot, uncorked it and poured herself a glass. She nestled into her floral couch and logged onto Facebook to look at his profile page.

"Paul Piazecki," she said in a high, whining voice. "Ha!" She took a large gulp of wine. He was attractive, yes — slightly balding, but with a flashy, genuine smile. His profile picture was of him in Mexico or somewhere exotic. She flipped through more of his photos, read a few of his latest posts.

"Bastard," she said. She signed out and poured herself more wine. Of course, he would never measure up to Richard, she thought. She sat back, trying to get comfortable. Richard was a true gentleman — a man every woman in her right mind would want as a husband. He was tender, understanding, stable. He was a wonderful father, too. She grimaced, thinking back to when things had really begun to go wrong.

It was winter, and Jeffrey had just brought Sam home from college to meet them, even though Ursula had made her disapproval clear. Throughout dinner, she made little conversation. She could hardly look at her own son.

"I just can't do this — I won't," she said later in the evening to Richard, as she scrubbed at her face in the bathroom sink. Jeffrey and Sam had left early, skipping dessert.

"It's his life," Richard said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "This doesn't change anything."

She turned the sink off, pressing her face into a towel. "What?" she asked, turning to him, her eyes narrowing. "How could you say that? You honestly think this doesn't change anything?"

He met her gaze in silence, a look of pity on his face.

"It changes everything," she said, her voice breaking. She looked up, as if to tip the water that wasn't forming in her eyes

back down into her head. “This isn’t how it was supposed to be.”

Later that night while lying in bed, Richard had pulled her into a hug, rubbing her back. Things had been rocky between them for years, and it seemed with Jeffrey out of the house, things had only gotten worse. They barely spoke to one another. They didn’t laugh anymore. Richard had started to kiss her, softly at first, then with assertion, slipping a hand under her nightgown and waiting, silently asking a desperate question. Her response was the same every time. She turned to him and gave in, letting him try and comfort her, again and again.

A sharp knock at the door brought her back to her senses. Maybe Paul had finally come, she thought. She got up and shuffled across the room, feeling relaxed after her glass of wine. He shouldn’t have even bothered coming this late, she thought. She opened the door and immediately regretted not looking through the peephole.

“Ursula, my darling!” Mrs. Tenuta exclaimed, opening her arms wide. “Look at that dress! It’s... interesting. I mean, you look good. I’ve been watching for your man to arrive. I didn’t see — is he here or no?” she asked, trying to peer inside.

Ursula shifted her body to block the woman’s view, putting her hands on the frame of the door. She cleared her throat. “Why, yes he is actually — please don’t disturb, you’re being very rude.”

Mrs. Tenuta poked her head under Ursula’s arm. “Ohh, honey. You can’t fool me. Why do you lie to me?” She pushed through into the house, spotting the food laid out on the table. She immediately reached for a ham-pickle rollup, nodding as she chewed.

“Do you need help eating this food? Forget the man. He is stupid. What is his name? Let me see a picture,” she said, beckoning. She began spooning raviolis onto one of the two plates, spilling red sauce on the tablecloth.

Ursula fumed, still standing in the doorway. The smell of patchouli was hanging in the air. Though she and Mrs. Tenuta had been neighbors for several years now, Ursula tended to avoid her whenever possible.

“Mrs. Tenuta, I —”

“Please, call me Georgina,” she said with a wave of her hand. She walked into the kitchen to microwave her plate of raviolis. Her dark hair was pulled back into a soft bun, her olive-toned skin contrasting with the maroon of her sundress. In another life, she may have even been beautiful, Ursula thought.

“Georgina...” she said slowly. She had no way out now. She forced a smile on her face.

“Would you like a glass of Merlot?”

“Would I like a glass of Merlot? What kind of question is that?”

Ursula retrieved a second glass from the pantry, pouring the wine into it.

“More,” Georgina said, motioning with her fingers.

Ursula topped off her own glass and took a long drink. She served up her own plate of food, and sat down across from Georgina, who was already halfway done with her serving. Who would have thought such a small woman could put away that much food? Georgina ate her fill, all the while going on about the weather, her job working at the library, her upcoming trip back home.

“Now, tell me —” Georgina began. “Who is this man? You don’t get visitors often. He must be a special one.”

“Not really,” Ursula said flatly, chewing her food.

“What’s his name?”

“Paul.”

“Where’d you meet him?”

Ursula shifted in her seat, cleared her throat. “Jazz night,” she said.

Georgina smiled at her as she chewed. “You’re embarrassed. Why?”

“I’m not embarrassed, I just —”

“You’re embarrassed. It’s okay, honey. You know what you should do — look online,” she said, nodding fervently. “I’m online, you know.”

“You are?”

“Oh yes. Why so surprised? I’ve met a couple of men, too. No one for the long run. But that’s okay — I got what I needed

out of them,” she said with a wink.

Ursula blushed, taking another sip of wine as she roared with laughter, her nose scrunching up.

“Look at you turn red! Like a tomato you are! No need to be shy with me,” she said, reaching for more food. “Do you have more wine?”

THREE HOURS LATER, THE two women sprawled out on the couches, nearing the end of their second bottle of wine. Ursula sat back with a slight smile on her face. It was nice having someone to talk to, she thought. Georgina wasn’t so bad — the wine seemed to mellow her out a bit. They sat in a dazed silence for a while, listening to Frank Sinatra’s “Come Fly With Me” on record — at Georgina’s request. The wine warmed Ursula’s stomach, and she sank deeper into the couch. Georgina had just finished a long story about how she got to the states; about how she and her husband, Ned, were unable to have children; how Ned passed of cancer early in life. She had never remarried. Ursula admired her honesty. She felt bad for not giving her a chance sooner.

Sensing that the topic of conversation would soon be shifting to her, Ursula got up from the couch.

“Would you like some dessert? I made strawberry shortcake,” she said, crossing into the kitchen.

“How could I refuse? Yes, yes.”

Ursula retrieved two small plates from the cupboard and began cutting into the shortcake. It was a good batch: perfectly frosted, and the strawberries were plump and juicy. She was suddenly very aware of the silence: the sound of the clock ticking, the hum of the refrigerator. She could feel Georgina’s eyes on her.

“The record needs to be turned over again,” Ursula said quietly, not looking up. She brought two slices over to the couch. Georgina had untied her long, dark hair, which fell in soft waves around her face. She eyed Ursula, a slight smile on her face.

“So...” she began.

Here we go, Ursula thought. She took a large bite out of the shortcake, anticipating Georgina's next question.

"What about you? You had a husband — and a boy, right? You hear rumors in this town, but... who knows."

Ursula carved out another bite of cake. It tasted so sweet in comparison to the dry wine. She chewed slowly, choosing her words.

"Well... Richard and I divorced ten years ago." She took a deep breath in. "And my son, Jeffrey, he's living in New York..." she said, her eyes on her plate.

Georgina watched, waiting.

"...With his partner."

Ursula swallowed and looked out of the window, at the darkness beyond. She hadn't spoken of this to anyone before. Of course people talked: neighbors had asked her prying questions for years, but she always denied them the truth. Since the divorce, she had slowly broken contact with her remaining family and friends.

Georgina studied her in silence. The ticking of the clock seemed amplified.

Ursula's head buzzed with the warmth of the wine. She cleared her throat, shifted in her seat, bringing the plate down to her lap.

"And Richard and I..." she began, "Richard and I didn't agree on how to proceed."

Georgina raised her eyebrows, waited a moment. "I see," she said.

"You see what?" Ursula snapped.

Georgina raised her hands in the air. "Nothing, I just am trying to understand..."

"Understand what?"

"Why it bothers you so much," Georgina said, her voice soft.

They held their gaze. The silence seemed to envelop them. Ursula knew that she knew, and the shame of that knowledge stabbed deep, blocking out any small sense of relief.

Ursula looked away, then got up and grabbed the plates with a clatter. She walked to the kitchen, setting them in the sink.

"It's not natural," she said, running water over the plates,

scrubbing them. “That’s not how I raised my son.”

Georgina watched her, her head tilted to one side. She shrugged.

“Well how did you raise him? To be like you and Richard?”

Ursula let go of the plates, shut the water off with a swipe of the hand. “I think you should go now,” she said, not looking up.

THE NEXT MORNING, URSULA woke to the sun streaming in through her bedroom blinds. She got out of bed, putting a hand to her temple with a groan. With a blaring headache and dry mouth, she slumped down to the kitchen and poured a tall glass of water. Evidence of last night’s debacle was laid out before her: empty wine glasses, dirty plates crusted with food, the disheveled couch.

She thought back to Georgina’s words, a wave of frustration coming over her. “Well how did you raise him?” she mimicked as she began tidying up the kitchen and living room. She knew she should have just kicked her out of the house right away last night. She didn’t even have a kid — what did she know? She scrubbed the kitchen counter furiously, smelling last night’s wine as she began to sweat. “You don’t know a single thing about me or my family,” she said, throwing the dishrag to the side. She snorted as she rinsed the last of the dishes, started the dishwasher. “Stupid woman.” Her headache was worsening by the minute. And yet... she thought. Why did it bother her so much? She remembered Georgina’s warm gaze, the way she had tilted her head back when she listened to the music. They were having such a great night together, until...

She started toward the staircase, catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She looked like hell. Hustling up to the bathroom, she showered quickly and blow-dried her hair. She put on a little makeup and sprayed perfume before stepping into a casual sundress. She decided to cut a piece of the shortcake to bring over to Georgina.

Crossing the small boulevard, Ursula paused at Georgina’s entrance. Was this stupid? She thought, contemplating turning back. She gazed down at the potted flower plants lining the

steps, admiring the many colors. She knocked on the door.

Nothing from inside. Ursula waited, the seconds passing by like minutes. She looked at the shortcake slab she held on a paper plate in her hands. She's not going to want this, she thought, turning to leave. It was only 11 a.m. She started down the steps when the door unlocked and opened behind her with a creak. Georgina appeared, dressed in a blue bathrobe and slippers, her hair wild. She looked at Ursula, a knowing smile creeping onto her face.

"Why, hello there —" she said, feigning surprise, a soft chuckle escaping her. "Have you missed me that much?"

Ursula, a dumb smile on her face, made no response, suddenly forgetting why she had come.

"Is that for me?" Georgina said, raising her eyebrows at the cake, her smile never leaving her face.

Ursula nodded, and the two women erupted in laughter. Ursula wiped the tears from her eyes and walked back up the step, handing her the cake. "Listen..." she began. "I'm sorry... about last night."

Georgina eyed her quietly, her brown eyes smiling.

"I guess it's just — it's hard for me. You know?"

Georgina pushed open the door a little wider. "Do you want to come in?"

Ursula followed Georgina through the small apartment, which looked almost identical to hers — except messier. It smelled distinctly of patchouli mixed with a faint scent of tomato sauce. Georgina led her to the living room: a bare room with a worn upholstered loveseat couch, a small TV, and a single coffee table in the middle of the room littered with magazines and newspapers. Ursula could hear music playing in a room further into the house. She sat down on the couch.

"I feel like shit," Georgina said, sniffing as she walked into the kitchen and grabbed two cups of water. "I haven't drank that much wine since my cousin Nikki got married — and I swore I would never drink again after that day. Ha! As if that lasted long!"

She shuffled back into the room, chuckling, and handed Ursula a glass of water. She plopped down on the couch next to

her. “So...” she began. “You’re awfully quiet, aren’t ya?”

Ursula rolled her eyes, smiled, and sat back on the couch. “I feel like shit, too.”

The two women sat quietly, staring straight ahead, while the sound of distant music played on.

*Creative
Nonfiction
Prizewinner*

ANA ALEXANDER

Stuck in the Clouds

“Skydiving changed my mindset. I went home and told our children they could do anything and do it well.” — Bonnie-Ross Parker

LOOKING OUT THE DOOR of the airplane, all I can see is a broad expanse of clouds, waves of white and grey rolling like tides beneath me. Speckled in a few places across the sky, small holes in the clouds break through the puffy abyss, revealing a glimpse at the green and brown patches of earth 14,000 feet away. I’m crouched down with my toes lined up at the edge of the plane floor, centimeters away from empty space. All I can hear is the massive roar of the wind as the plane cuts through the air.

“1...2...” My tandem instructor begins counting to three, at which point we will jump off the edge of the plane and hurtle towards the earth at 120 miles per hour. I take the opportunity to assess my feelings; I’ve been calm for most of the plane ride. I had expected myself to get scared once the door of the plane opened, and I realized I would actually be getting back to the ground via parachute instead of plane.

I am actually fucking insane, I think, as I realize that I’m just as calm as ever, at the same time that my tandem instructor yells “3!” into my ear and pushes me out of the plane.

The first few seconds are only the sounds of air rushing past my ears. Then I realize that my eyes are closed, and I remember that Taylor, my friend and manager at Skydive the Lakes, specifically told me not to close my eyes. If you close your eyes, you miss out on seeing everything during free fall, and you also have your eyes closed during your video, which isn’t fun to watch. Taylor told me to try to do cool things during my video and not just make the same faces or gestures, so my video would be funny and entertaining. She also told me to remember not to look down the entire time, because then my face wouldn’t be visible.

So I open my eyes, only to see pure white surrounding me. Then I realize I can't breathe.

This is a problem, for obvious reasons, but I'm also asthmatic, and one of my biggest fears is not being able to breathe. I mentally freak out, but then remember another piece of advice I was given: if you can't breathe, scream. If you let all of the air out of your lungs, it's easier to pull more in. I begin screaming and am suddenly able to breathe. I also discover that I can't hear myself screaming, which frustrates me for some reason. My tandem instructor stops me from kicking my legs around, which I hadn't noticed I was doing until I stopped.

After I stop flailing my legs around and figure out my system of breathing, I realize that Hodgie, my manager and videographer, has been in front of me this entire time, basically recording the struggles of a hardcore asthmatic making pathetic attempts to breathe in the atmosphere.

So I flash the rock on sign, because I'm freaking skydiving, and goddammit, it's awesome.

I try to simultaneously breathe, scream, and come up with new hand gestures but end up waving my hands around with the rock on sign. I attempt to make a new hand signal, but my altimeter gets in the way, and I realize I won't be able to pull the gesture off, so I give the camera a thumbs up instead.

It doesn't feel like I'm falling at all. It feels as if I'm floating in the air, which is supported by the solid, pure white around me. I realize that I'm currently falling through a cloud and get giddier, which I didn't know was possible. The only things I can see are my hands and Hodgie videotaping me, which I am super conscious of. I keep trying to think of cool things to do and keep coming up flat. I keep thinking my video is going to be horrible, then refocusing on the fact that I am falling through the sky.

I check my altimeter, because it feels as if I've been falling forever, but I've yet to reach the 5,500 mark, which is when I'll pull my parachute.

I zone out for a while, breathing, shaking my hands around, staring at the beauty of the cloud I'm traveling through, and eventually sneak peeks below me, despite Taylor's advice.

My tandem instructor guides my hand towards the parachute, and I pull, releasing the chute and swiftly slowing down our speed. We break through the cloud, and I'm jolted slightly by the tightening sensation of my gear — I'm now being supported by the tension running from my harness to the parachute, which is tauter than how it felt on the ground. I can now see the entirety of my small hometown — the most amazing view I've been privileged to see.

And that was just the first sixty seconds.

“SOME GUY ONCE TOLD me that skydiving is like cutting your throat and seeing if you can get to the doctor before you bleed to death.” — Brock Yates

My best friend from high school, Taylor, began working at the manifest desk at Skydive the Lakes at the end of our senior year and was promoted to manager in the 2014 season. She was looking for people to work for her over the summer, so she asked if I was interested, and it was an offer I couldn't pass up. So a few days a week, I drove out to the airport in Winsted, Minnesota, and helped people sign their lives away. I checked in jumpers, got all of their information, made sure their waivers were properly filled out, answered questions, and generally tried to calm people down and help them have a great experience at Skydive the Lakes. I'd always get asked how often I'd jumped, and I would always have to admit that I'd never gone. It was a little awkward, telling customers that they were braver than I was, and since I'd been offered another position for the following summer, I decided it was high time I went skydiving.

Before I went to the dropzone, or DZ, I made a list of reasons why I felt compelled to toss myself out of a tiny aircraft from 14,000 feet in the air. It looked something like this:

- Prove to myself that I can do anything.
- Overcome fear. Don't want to live a life full of fear.
- To stop holding myself back. I hold myself back WAY too much in life as a defense mechanism, and enough is enough!

- It'll be fun!
- To feel free, relieved of earthly burdens and to just live in the moment.
- My mom would never do this. Kind of feel like I'm turning into my mother, so I should probably jump out of a plane to prove to myself that I'm not.

I also made a list of my fears:

- That I'll be afraid. Right now (beforehand) I'm anxious and excited, but I'm afraid that fear will kick in once I get on the plane.
- That I'll hold myself back, not enjoy the jump, and not be in the moment.
- How well does the whole breathing thing work during freefall?

A lot of times in life, I've been afraid to go for the things I really want, because I'm afraid of failure. I decided that it was time to overcome that by doing something drastic to show myself exactly how capable I really am. A few years ago, I watched an interview with actress Julianne Hough, where she talked about taking risks in life. She said that if she gets an opportunity to do something that scares her, within reason, she does it, to face her fears and experience amazing things. Her mode of thinking inspired me to try to put any fears I had behind me and jump out of a plane.

Now, most people might put, "Parachute failing and hurtling towards my death" or "Climbing into a crappy, rickety airplane that was manufactured 60 years ago and jumping out" on their list of fears, but after working at Skydive the Lakes all summer, I knew better than to even think of adding those to my list of fears.

Skydive the Lakes is the proud owner of a very beautiful, non-sketchy, and visually appealing airplane (that makes a very lovely photobomber in skydiving photos, I might add). It's not like a lot of planes used for skydiving, that are almost unsound enough to make you wish you could jump out sooner; though it is a small plane, which means every single turn and angle it makes is entirely felt by all of its occupants.

As for the parachute failing, I wouldn't go as far as to say it would never be a problem, but the odds of your parachute failing are extremely low. Skydive the Lakes has never had an incident in which a parachute has failed. Even if you were to be the unlucky first person to have their parachute malfunction, every jumper has a second back-up parachute in their gear. To go even further, if you or your instructor were unable to deploy the reserve parachute, it would deploy on its own at a lower altitude. Every reserve parachute is rigged with Automatic Activation Devices, so there is essentially no way you wouldn't make it to the ground safely. And on the bright side, if you were the unlucky first person to need to deploy the reserve chute, you'd get a free skydive from Skydive the Lakes as a consolation prize.

I'd also seen many people walk into Skydive the Lakes and walk out sans injury or death, which was very reassuring. Additionally, everyone who works at Skydive the Lakes has jumped a minimum of 1,000 times, though many of them have jumped well over that requirement. I jumped with the owner of Skydive the Lakes, who has jumped over 10,000 times. So after watching these people jump 15-20 times every day in the summer, I was highly inclined to trust them with my life. They're professionals, and they know what they're doing — beyond that, they're really good at their jobs.

"IF AT FIRST YOU don't succeed then skydiving definitely isn't for you." — Steven Wright

"We always state the statistics...more people die from a deer jumping out in front of their car than they ever would doing a tandem skydive...Aside from the facts, we truly only live one life and there are so many opportunities for us, so why would we give this one up? It is such a unique experience, and it's indescribable; I wish that everyone would do it at least once."

— Taylor Haggard (Skydive the Lakes Manifest Manager)

The day I was scheduled to jump was extremely cloudy. In fact, in the morning it was too cloudy to even jump, so Skydive

the Lakes was forced to reschedule all of its appointments and give out rain checks. But suddenly, Taylor texted me: “Just kidding get here now!!!!” So I threw on some clothes, took a dose of my inhaler, and drove as fast as I could to the airport.

When I arrived, I had to fill out the standard paperwork, which is quite lengthy. I wasn’t sure if my hands were shaking from the albuterol pumping through my veins or from the anxiety and excitement I was feeling. I ignored all of the various descriptions of the possible ways I could die, because I had neither the time nor desire to know how many different ways I could perish during the experience, and initialed all of the blanks as fast as I could. Once I was done, I kept hopping around in excitement, taking selfies by the plane and posting a couple on my Snapchat story.

Before you can jump, you also have to have a little training session, which I attended along with the two other customers who would be doing tandem jumps in the same load as me.

This session was led by my bubbly coworker, Tubbs, who grinned at me and said, “You probably already know all of this!”

To which I responded with an enthusiastic and confident, “Yeah!”

Even though I had only paid attention to a few pieces of the training and had no idea what the entire spiel sounded like. The only part that I had heard before was the only part you couldn’t miss.

One of the other tandem instructors, Sonny, began his training with this line: “Now, the first thing you’re going to do when you get out of this plane is go ‘AHHHHHHH!!!!!’” at which point he would flail his arms around in the air while the customers laughed and let their nerves be calmed a little bit. For some reason, I didn’t think this would be exceptionally helpful during my skydive, so I listened extremely carefully to my own training session.

Tubbs ended the session by saying something I’d heard often over the summer: “Your tandem instructors will tell you all of this 2-3 more times, but once you jump out of the plane, you will forget everything I just told you. Just relax, have faith in your instructors, and have fun!”

However, I was determined to be a perfect skydiver. I repeated the instructions over and over again, drilling them into my mind. I wanted so badly to be an amazing skydiver and to nail it on the first time.

As soon as I jumped out of the plane, I forgot everything.

While I was gearing up, one of my coworkers asked if I was excited, and I responded with a very fervent affirmative.

“Be careful, it’s addictive,” he responded, which was accompanied with a knowing grin.

He was definitely not exaggerating.

One of the great things about the employees at Skydive the Lakes is that they know how to make you feel comfortable and how to calm your nerves. They like to make a lot of jokes about you possibly being injured and your potential insanity, which sounds like it wouldn’t be reassuring, but somehow is. Some of them would ask me if I was excited, and once I’d say yes, they’d laugh and say “Well that makes one of us!” or “It’ll be interesting to see what happens!” as if they didn’t do this fifty times a day. They just generally make you feel like you’re an extreme badass, and as if they’re envious of your renegade-like qualities.

“IF I COULD STAND in an open airplane doorway two-and-a-half miles above the ground and will myself to step into empty space, then I could do anything.” — Dave Stein

“I have learned just how strong and capable I am...When you can shake away from the hesitation of jumping by yourself out of the scary door, you know you are filled with something different.”

— Taylor Haggard

Once it was finally time to board the plane, I felt my first stroke of fear. We walked behind the plane, and I got a strong lungful of plane exhaust and couldn’t breathe for a moment. In that split second I thought, *IS THIS WHAT IT’S GOING TO BE LIKE IN THE AIR??* But then I moved out of the way of the plane’s engine, could breathe once more, and relaxed.

Then came take off. I hate taking off in planes. This doesn’t

make much sense, because you're closer to the earth at that point in time, but I just feel safer up in the air. I was seated near the door, which is basically a sturdy looking piece of plastic attached to the plane, whose usefulness was not something I wanted to test by falling into. The plane was small, so every single movement was extremely obvious to all of its occupants. We flew upwards at extreme angles, and when we turned, I was completely on my side at some points in time. I did not enjoy this part of the ride.

Finally, we evened out in the air, and I relaxed. In fact, I became surprisingly calm and began staring out at the sky, thinking things like, *Wow, this is so cool. I'm going to be jumping into that*, which caused another wave of excitement to fall over me.

Everyone on the plane was looking for a break in the clouds to jump through, and my tandem instructor, Joe, turned to me and asked, "Have you ever touched a cloud before?"

"No," I responded.

Secretly, I have always wanted to touch a cloud. One of my elementary school teachers once told our class that we wouldn't be able to touch a cloud, and that our only hope to experience such a thing would be by touching fog. The impermanence of fog had, from that point on, frustrated me, because all I ever wanted was to touch a cloud and prove my teacher wrong.

"Well, today you're going to." Joe responded, and I mentally freaked out for a minute, because it's not very often that one gets the opportunity to jump through a cloud.

After we searched for a break in the clouds, it was decided that we had to open the door to get a better look, which resulted in a huge WHOOSH erupting into the plane as air rushed inside.

There were four students on the plane who were training to get their skydiving licenses. They had crouched down near the edge of the plane, staring out, looking for holes. I contemplated whether or not that freaked them out a little bit, because it seemed like staring down 14,000 feet was no big deal to them.

We finally found a break, Joe yelled, "GO, GO, GO!" and two of the students jumped out of the plane together. It seemed

more like they were sucked out, like the sky vacuumed them right out of the plane into the clouds, and suddenly they vanished. I wondered if they ever got scared, instead of thinking that I would soon be just like them, jumping out of the plane.

Joe and I crawled towards the door, and I lined my toes up on the edge of the plane as Joe began to rock us back and forth towards the door and count to three.

“YOU HAVEN’T SEEN A tree until you’ve seen its shadow from the sky.” — Amelia Earhart

“The beauty of this world is outstanding and every time I land safely, I stand there with a huge smile on my face and know that something greater than me is blessing me with safety and opportunities to do incredible things in this sometimes way too structured world.” — Taylor Haggard

Once I pulled the parachute, we floated slowly down towards the earth. This part of the skydive lasted about five or six minutes and was the most amazing and breathtakingly beautiful thing I have ever experienced. I have never felt calmer in my entire life than when I was gently floating above my hometown. Everything was absolutely gorgeous from above. I looked down at the Mound, the section of land where skydivers land, and all across Winsted; everything seemed impossibly tiny. I felt like someone had set up a miniature toy set from the 50’s below me, and I was a giant hovering above it. I could see blocks of green, yellow, and brown fields sewn together by dirt roads to create a giant patchwork quilt, interrupted every now and then by shining blue spots of lake water and rivers.

I kept saying “Oh my God, this is so beautiful, this is crazy, this is so insane!” over and over again.

At this point, I knew this wouldn’t be my last skydive. The experience was so indescribably beautiful and awe-inspiring; all I could do was stare at my surroundings in wonder. I knew I would have to jump again, if just to experience the incredible feeling of floating above the earth, seeing the ground below my

feet, the clouds above, and the atmospheric break in the space between the two. There are some views you can only experience in the sky, and the little white strip of atmosphere between land and sky is something that cannot be felt through photos like it can be from the air. We glided above Winsted for a few minutes before we steered ourselves closer to the Mound, and I felt a small tinge of disappointment as I realized we had to land, and it was time to leave my peaceful little piece of sky.

Joe had me practice my landing position, which was to pull my legs up to my chest. We turned and spun above Winsted until we grew closer and closer to the Mound, flying just over Hodgie, who ran to capture our landing. I realized that I was going to have to land on my butt, and was a little afraid that it would hurt, expecting a jolt or a bounce from the ground. But instead, it was an extremely smooth landing; it felt like I just sat down on the ground.

I was overflowing with adrenaline at this point. After we landed, Hodgie ran up to ask me some final questions, and I began describing to him how insane and awesome skydiving is, because he has only jumped thousands of times, and might not have realized at that point how amazing skydiving is. Once I was finished with my tangent, I ran over to my parents and freaked out about the experience to them for a while before I went back to the DZ to take off my gear. Everyone high-fived me on the way into the DZ and was super supportive; they made me feel like I was invincible. I kept thanking everyone, and hopped around the DZ and manifest desk, overcome with happiness.

Soon, Joe came back into the DZ and talked with my parents a little bit.

“Now,” he said. “She might be a little tired later, because people get a little worn out, or she could be really energized because of the adrenaline. It’s usually one or the other, but if she gets an adrenaline rush and she’s really energized, it’ll probably wear off and she’ll be really tired later.”

They all turned and looked at me as I was jumping up and down enthusiastically with a wide grin stretching across my face.

Joe looked back at them and said, “Maybe energetic,” and everyone laughed, including myself.

“IF YOU SURRENDER TO the wind, you can ride it.” — Toni Morrison

Once I finally decided to leave the DZ and go home, I skipped happily all the way out to my car, at which point I stopped for a moment of consideration.

I was so full of energy and had stopped shaking only moments before, so I contemplated whether or not I was actually fit to drive myself home. I thought about how ironic it would be if I lived through a skydive and then got in some sort of accident on the drive home because I was so amped up. I got in my car and tried to calm myself down — unsuccessfully. I realized I was probably fine, so I started my car and screamed in joy and excitement the whole way home, which felt completely satisfying after not being able to hear myself screaming during free fall. What didn't feel as satisfying was the loss of my voice the next day.

Even now, when I think about my jump, I hop around and scream for a little bit in happiness.

“FOR ONCE YOU HAVE tasted flight you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skywards, for there you have been and there you will long to return.” — Leonardo da Vinci

After my jump, I started talking to Jim, one of the licensed skydivers who spends his weekends at the DZ. Jim told me in addition to tossing himself out of planes for fun, he is also a writer. He went out to his car and brought back a copy of a skydiving magazine with one of his articles in it and had me read it. Before I got a chance to take a look at it, my mom asked how he got into skydiving. He told us his life story and how skydiving changed his life. He didn't have a good relationship with his son, who had gotten into skydiving. His son asked him to go along with him one day, eventually got him a tandem jump as a gift, and in the hopes of mending their relationship, Jim agreed.

It soon became their “thing.” They grew closer together, and skydiving showed him that anything was possible. He was so grateful for the bond skydiving helped him form with his

son and for the possibilities it opened up for him in the writing world.

He told us that the first time he jumped he was sixty years old. My mom was shocked and told him that he didn't even look like he was sixty years old. He had an amazing response: "I'm like Dorian Gray; every time I jump, my parachute gets older, and I get younger."

Soon it was his turn to get geared up, and I took the opportunity to read his article. He talked about how wherever he goes, he brings his skydiving equipment with him in case he somehow ends up near the DZ and wants to jump. He ended his article by describing how he sees reminders of skydiving in the little things in everyday life, and how every time he pulls to a stop at the end of a road and looks in his rearview mirror, he expects to see his parachute trailing behind him. Jim writes:

Skydiving has changed my life in many subtle ways: I have the drop zone phone numbers in my speed dial. I visit a weather site more than any other site online. I imagine flaring as I come to a stop in my car. I see a flag ripple in the wind and think about which way I would be landing at the DZ. Skydiving is practically all I want to talk about.

AND AFTER THAT DAY, I would come to know exactly what Jim was talking about. While driving with my parents in the car the next day, I pointed up at the sky and said, "I've been in one of those."

"A plane? There's not a plane in the sky," my mom responded.

"No," I said, starting to smile. "A cloud."

Skydiving isn't just an extreme sport, or a way to get an adrenaline rush, or even an outlet for a mid-life crisis. It's a life changing experience, and what you take out of it is different for everybody. For people like Jim, it's a way to tighten familial bonds and reconnect with loved ones. For Taylor, it's a way of showing her how strong and independent she is. For others, it's a way to strengthen their faith; seeing the world God has created from above can be a spiritual experience. For myself, it's

given me the power to do whatever I set my mind to, the ambition to succeed, and the courage to do anything and do it with confidence.

Skydiving began to be the only thing I want to talk about. I obsess over it. I focus a lot of my poetry on it. If I ever need an energy boost, I watch my skydiving video to get a rush of energy and happiness. Every time I look up at the sky, I contemplate if it would be a good day for skydiving. It was an exhilarating and amazing experience, and I have never felt more alive. It's difficult to live without constantly thinking about such a powerful experience. Every time I have a difficult task to do, or need a lift in confidence, I just remind myself that I've jumped out of a plane, and I can do anything. Thinking back on the experience fills me with determination and the knowledge that I am capable of anything I set my mind to. And every single time I feel the rush of a breeze of wind across my face, I'm instantly brought back to a white void of clouds filled with the rushing sound of air and the absence of my screams, and I smile.

*Poetry
Prizewinner*

KAYSEY PRICE

If All We Get Are Doppelgängers

You couldn't know by listening
to the green demanding photosynthesis
of a cigarette buzz beating
from the inside out —
she thinks like a cicada;
I think not so simply
in slow hopefuls of seeing you
wringing hands, running fingers
through your hair —
in the corner a mirror, or a window
I can't see into —
You's watching *I's*,
eyes watching *we's*
in and out of a humming traffic heartbeat.
There is a breathing we could share:
you out
and me in or
vice versa but
never the same,
like a limping
or a sitting while you stand
trying to wavelength with me.
Just sun me.
Burn.
Don't feel it.
Aloe.
And repeat.
I want to enter your body
and quiet myself to your sound.
I want to mother you and walk away
with crossed arms.

Poetry

ABIGAIL PESCHGES

Coup de Foudre

*A French idiom meaning love at first sight.
The literal translation is bolt of lightning.*

Our fingers twist together
making the maple tree jealous
of our grasp on life.
And the dirt of our malleability
to the other's soul.
We cannot be blamed
for the Devil's curse
of such passion
and understanding.
We must celebrate it
because the time we'll have
is not enough.
It never is.
And God's gift of pain
will come as quick
as that flash of lightning had.
And it will be up to the lone hand
after the bolt has come and gone
to shape the glass,
left in the sand into a window
to let the light in.

MARIE HELKENN

Hurricanes, 2013

In the distance, thunder rumbles like an overturned oil drum,
Following us down the gravel road, a silent shadow
In the yellow sky.

Fat drops of rain dribble track marks on our arms
As we stand under a starry umbrella seeking love
In each other's arms.

Your fingers weave into mine, holding them tight
When I shudder from the lightning splitting the sky
In violent halves.

The wind moves with us, pressing our chests together
In the darkening sky, two women alone in the storm
Before we run for shelter.

MARIE HELKENN

Summer Storms, 2015

Harsh prairie wind cuts through the humidity.
Black walnuts drop, clanging down tin roofs
In a cacophony, warming up for the hot summer
Symphony. Loose sheets of tin hang off the barn,
Beating in time with the wind.

The raindrops begin to chime over malnourished
Pastures, moistening cracked earth and dried grasses.
The growing smell of lightning and petrichor
Beckon the heifers inside until the song ends
And sparks of passion ignite in the hayloft.

MEGAN B. WEFEL

Sleep

Sleep is
drowning
 falling
 dipping lightly
 submerged in
 melted night
 leaving body
 nothing
 else like it
 you are
 drowning
 in oceans
 you can
 breathe in
 falling
 down
 rabbit
 holes
 and you
 can awake
 lonely and
 lost
 longing
 between
 the heart and
 the head
 for when you sleep
 the other you
 takes over

and you relax
into the reigns

Where do
you begin
and where do
you end

JENNA SAUNDERS

The Phoenix on the Moon

Each and every morning, she awoke with the slightest urge to set her freckled skin ablaze. To watch the orange glow encase her forearm, travel to her shoulder, strike her chest, surround her, and peel away the thin sin that coated her. As the fire shed the layers, she crumbled gray and black into a pile of ash, resting in a heap at the foot of her twin bed. Like something of a myth, a dream, she rose stronger, better. When the moonlight trickled in across the worn down carpet, when the door creaked open — the figure black and tall came striding in to wake her from her sleep — she spread her red wings and flew across the room, over the windowpane, out, across the lawn, and past the bike she needed no more. Because, birds, they only need to fly, as high and as fast and as far as they can possibly go, and she flew until she reached the dusty surface of the silver moon. No one else lives there, on the moon, by the crevasses of astronaut shoes, but that's all right. It's all right, sometimes, most times, all the times, to be alone. Alone where nothing, no one, can grab hold of you, and the stars are the teeth of a smile, a smile that says words that sound like mush, but the more she listened, it began to sound like a melody.

KIMBERLY SCHNEIDER

Hönig

Ich esse erdbeere marmalade bröt mit hönig
and I am reminded of the Frankfurt foothills,
Luise hiking the dirt path ahead,
her freckles chuckling in the sun,
the rolling of one hill into another
like the curves of a woman's body.
We stopped for lunch
and munched on crunchy green grapes.

She said:

“Ich liebe trauben.”

Ich auch.

I popped another one in my mouth.
My occasional ability to understand her native tongue
sprouted a proud glow on her cheeks
and dripped golden,
like honey from a spoon.

KIMBERLY SCHNEIDER

Where the Wild Things Aren't

O queen of the sun, take the marriage flight and come back
with seeds of the earth. Plant warriors
of the world in the hive — they fight for our gardens
without ever receiving a “Hey neighbor!” or even a swat on the
back.

O honeybee, mourn the sacred temples where honey melted
in the heat, flowing like wines of the gods, self-nourishing as tears
of the widow — nurture her
with flowers in her backyard.
Sun queen,

build her a hive where saplings can grow roots in hexagons, warm
wax of their aunts holding
them like a babe in a womb. The bees themselves are creatures
of the sun, and in their wake a golden thread connecting
the Honey crisp to Haralson — a thread

that dissolves in fields of corn, the edges of the land mown down
to gravel. This is the
honeybee's desert and they are parched
without an oasis.

KIMBERLY SCHNEIDER

This is My America

This is the land of the free
With the chickens in their coop
And the pigs in their pen.

This is the land we have cultivated
By churning a season's worth of manure
With our bare feet in the fields.

Up North the Great Lakes are dry heaving
After a night of too much tequila;
Lake Michigan has asked Lake Superior
For a glass of water and a bucket
To qualm his sorely abused stomach.

Lake Ontario sneezes and white powder
Falls from the sky. A teenager in New York
Leans down to snort it.
He wonders when his life will turn.
He doesn't believe in broccoli or peas
Though his parents push them anyway.

This is the land of conformity.

Far off in zoos, tigers are drinking Pinot Noir,
Coughing up the black goo cigarettes have put
Into their lungs. Their two-month young cub
Is running a fever but they can't afford
A vet, so the mother hopes her striped fur
Is enough to deafen the chills.

Why are they suffering?
Because senators are snorting scripture
Through rolled up bills, the round face of Franklin
Smiling with slit, bloodshot eyes.

JONATHAN LEE

Nail Polish

It started with my nails.
I'd paint them white
with the nail polish labeled
White Privilege.
As I saw the stainless, spotless sheen,
I was stunned by its splendor.
I would paint my nails
and trail along down my fingers,
down the back of my hand,
onto my wrists,
all over my arms.
I wanted to look like those people:
beautiful.
I wanted to be looked at with the same
light that others looked at them with.
So I would paint my neck with the same
serene whiteness
that would get me noticed.
I would continue painting onto my face
starting with my chin,
then onto my cheeks,
onto my forehead —
all the white I could possibly fit,
concealing any pigmentation.
When I finished for the thirty-seventh time,
I'd look in the mirror and smile
and repeat what I always have:
I did it. I am beautiful.

NICOLE TOMPOS

Chaos of War

Mother, mother where did you go?
The soldiers came down with the snow.

Father, father where have you gone?
The bombs rained down at the dawn.

Brother, brother where are you now?
I want to come there just tell me how.

Sister, sister you left me alone —
completely abandoned, without a home?

Neighbor, neighbor are you turning me in?
Don't let this war cause you to sin.

MARIE HELKENN

Barn Burning, Westfield Township, 2000

Dry cedar branches snap beneath my steel-toed boots,
Leaves crumbling to pungent dust on the breeze.
The bitter taste of ash lingers in the air,
Thin trails of smoke, a grey-white haze.

Muddy water streams away, escaping
A mausoleum of burnt bone and roasted flesh,
Remnants of a dying breed, a dying dream —
Our dream — destroyed by a renegade brush fire.

Sifting through is best left for another day
When the ruins are no longer smoldering,
After the vultures and coyotes pick clean
Accidental carcasses — yet we survive.

LAUREN MUELLER

(Insert Their Name Here)

Your voice
like smoke
has made its home
in my body.
It has nestled itself
into the deepest
cush-de-sac of my lungs.
Now every time I cough
it sounds like you.

DANA SCOTT

Subject

Shortly after our
first date I joked
don't make me write a poem about you.

It's been a year and I laugh
because my poems
have become your home.

It's been a year and
you're kissing
someone else and
I'm just kissing people
who aren't you.

Waking up next to you
for the last time
we knew it was and
we had to tell each other
not to cry so we could
kiss for the last time.

When we broke
you said to me
I don't want to be the subject of one of your poems.

But I warned you.

DANA SCOTT

Forever in Almost

I read a poem applauding your second love
for teaching you that love still exists
after being broken, but what if your second love
is the same as your first, but not the same at all?

The same arms hold me, but they feel new.
Like when the bus is pulling away but stops
to let you on or when the light turns yellow
with just enough time for you to slip through
or when you catch the door before it closes
or when you drop something
and catch it in time.

We lost each other like missed exits that keep driving
but found ourselves and now we know all
we have to lose. Dancing with the words we
only danced around before like a spinning top,
one wrong breath could end it.
How can something so fragile not be beautiful?

To have the person who broke you be the person
to reintroduce you to 3am's,
drives with no destination,
street hugs covered in darkness,
and brown eyes being beautiful.

But he didn't break me. I broke
by telling myself I loved him when really,
he was the first person I wanted
to love and be loved back by
but I've learned that's not always how it works.
Sometimes you miss each other
like points plotted on the same grid
but not the same spot or parallel lines
that just run side-by-side.

Because, sometimes the bus leaves,
the light turns red,
the door closes,
and you can't
catch it in time.
Almost there,
but never doing
what it takes
to be there.

So we'll live together forever
in what we have built and left,
in what could have been,
in what almost was,
and what a beautiful
thing that is.

JONATHAN LEE

When a Stranger Meets You

Do not turn away;
listen to what he says:

Here,
I have a seed.
It can grow if
you water it and
give it sunlight.

Here,
I have a pot.
It homes the seed
if you so choose
to use it as shelter.

I give both to you
now. Now,
you are God.

KA VANG

1965

1. i plan our funerals before our wedding date
before either of us could say i do
before the world falls at our feet
and grass grows from our fingertips
and the flowers fade

2. our heads spin from the warm whiskey
and we make love in gas station restrooms
i'm dancing on clouds but i will countdown the days until you
no longer want me because i've always been one to plan ahead

3. i've got our last days playing over in my head
and i can feel it in my stomach like i'm breathing in water
like i'm choking on air and no one can save me but still
i plan our wedding day where you will say i do
and kiss me on the mouth like it's 1965
and you will love me until our dying breaths
and children will dance on our graves

KA VANG

Little Things

still emptiness lurks in when the world pretends to be asleep
between laughing, wheezing, tired reminiscent whispers of
when we had gone mad
our friends scattered on the floor by the couch on the pull out
bed: snoozing
here
now
everlasting
my head spins from the warm whiskey so i take my third bath
of the day before my fifth sleep

it's now 4:30 in the morning and the sun is dancing around the
idea of making its comeback
in golden orange and scattered dreams
i listen to the strum of your three string ukulele (kingsley the
cat had clawed off the fourth)
sleepy voices humming to Stars Fell on Alabama
and i think this is it

lazy smiles and starry kisses are forever frozen in time:
the portrait in which i am immortal

KIMBERLY SCHNEIDER

The Evergreen

Feel
the needle bite.
The cage vibrates
with unusual pleasure
mingled in pain. It passes
but the permanence
doesn't.

Between
dusk and dawn,
cold nips at evergreen
needles, but when first light lays
its damp hand, the evergreen
stands resistant.

Beyond
wooden cores and
years traced in rings,
a quiet resilience grows
roots deep under earth's
epidermis.

Feel —
the needle bites.
As the artist dips dye,
bones bristle at its touch.
Winter dissipates but its mark
doesn't.

Art & Design

EMMA MASIULEWICZ

It's All About Point of View



MELODY VANG

Prison of the Mind



KA VANG

Give



TORI JOHNSON

Oak on Water



AUTUMN BEIREIS

Daydream



EMMA MASIULEWICZ

Waves of Turks



KA VANG

Human



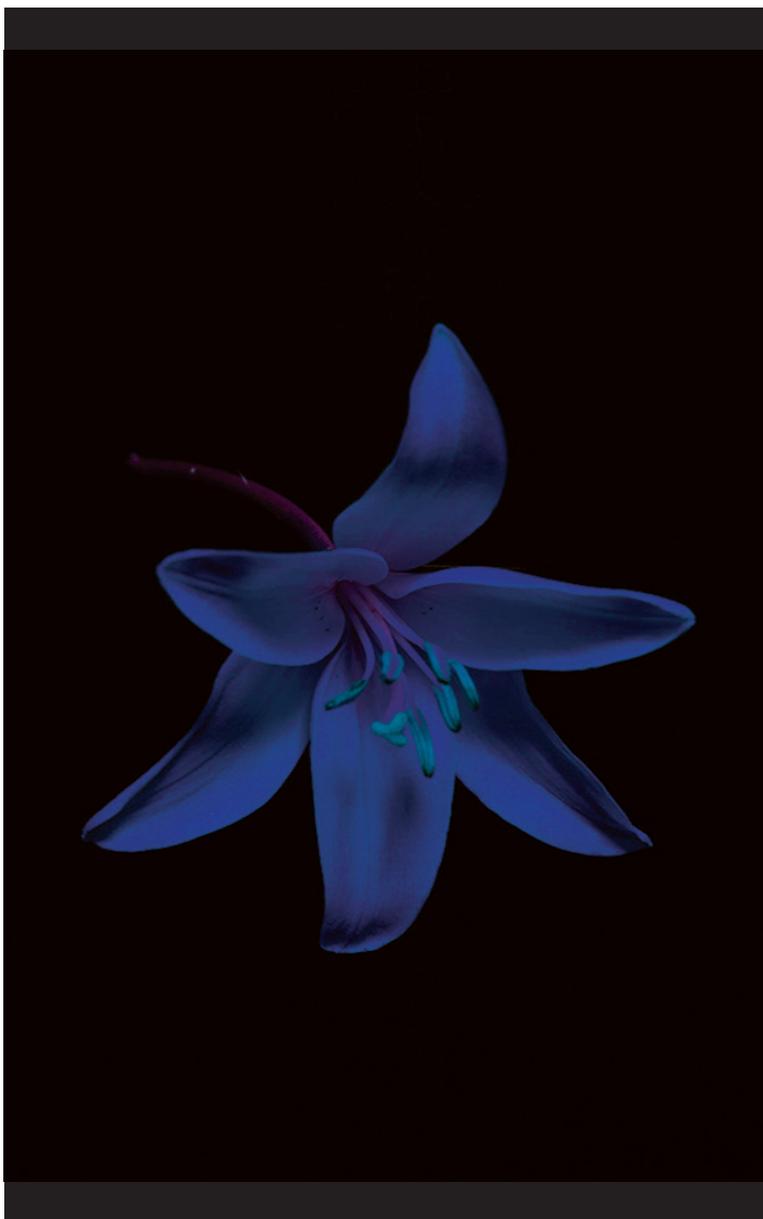
TORI JOHNSON

Woods in Fog



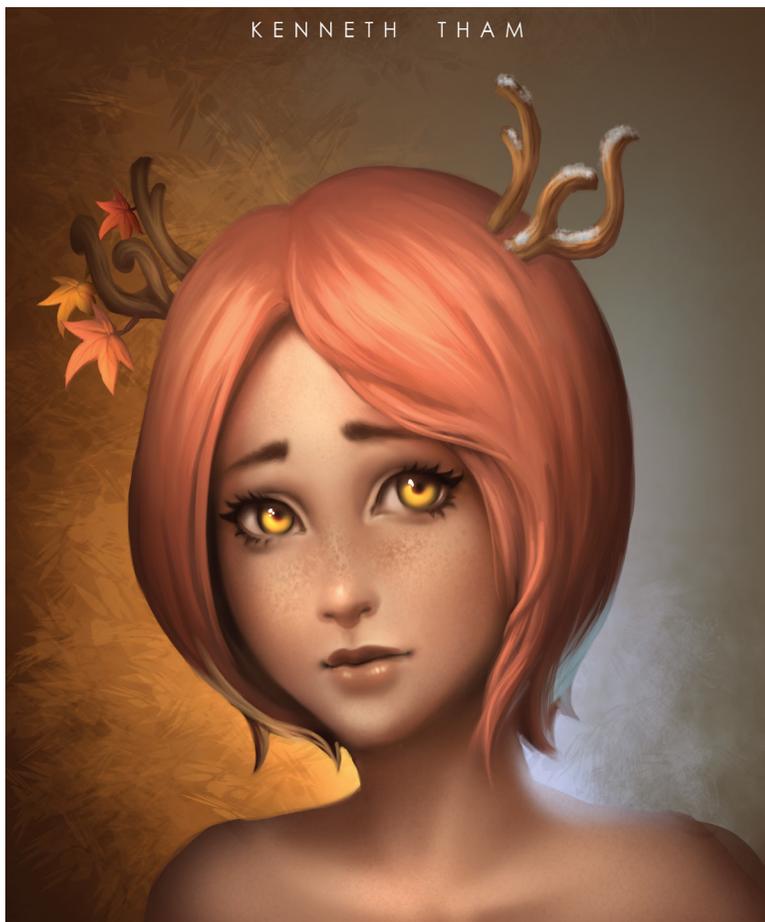
NICOLE CULLINAN

Midnight Lily



KENNETH THAM

The End of Autumn



AUTUMN BEIREIS

Tangled



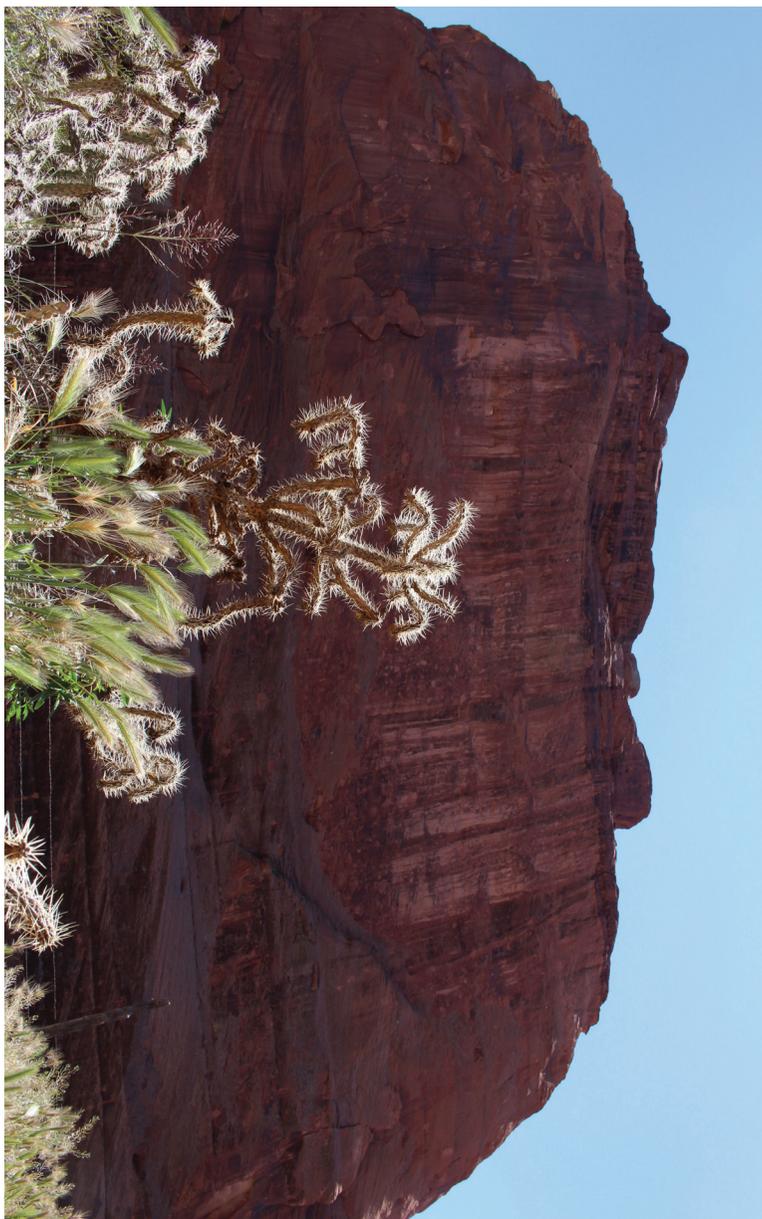
NICOLE CULLINAN

Slay



KIMBERLY SCHNEIDER

Desert Teddy Bear



Prose

EMILY DEAN

Uncle Frank

ALEXANDER HELD THE PACKAGE of Virginia Slims between his forefinger and thumb as if it were a used tissue filled with deadly germs. In the driver's seat, his Uncle Frank fiddled with the cigarette lighter under the radio, had no hands on the wheel, and was swearing profusely.

"Son-of-a-bitch-no-good-piece-of-shit!" Frank yelled as a spark flew on his unbuttoned Hawaiian shirt.

Alexander fidgeted with his seatbelt as the car inched dangerously close to the ditch. Frank snatched the package out of Alexander's hands.

"Thanks bud," Frank said. "Could I interest you in a Slim?"

Alexander took a glance at the pink and white package and shook his head hard, hitting each side of the headrest.

"You're right. Your mother would have my balls if she found out. It's a bad habit anyway, probably shouldn't start 'til you're at least 15," Frank said, taking a long drag.

"How long until the rest stop?" Alexander asked.

"We've got a while, bud. Minnesota is nothing but road."

Alexander nodded and wiped his sweaty palms on his jeans. He glanced back over to Frank, who again had his hands off the wheel and was now flipping through a case of CDs.

"The best part of road trips is the tunes, Xandman. That, and the gas station roast beef sandwiches. What do you kids listen to now-a-days? You like that rap shit, Xanny? That's all my girls listen to. I couldn't stand being in the car with them with that music all the way to South Dakota."

Alexander shook his head no. "Mom doesn't let us listen to rap music."

"No rap music, no television, no fun. Typical, that old salty bitch. I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't lose your virginity until you're 50 at this rate!"

Alexander blushed.

"It's not so bad," he said under his breath.

“STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN!” Frank shouted over Alexander. “Forget that rap shit. Stevie is where it’s at. Listen to this guy play.”

Frank turned up the radio to full blast while he strummed on the air guitar in his lap.

“LORD KNOWS I’M A VOODOO CHILD!”

Alexander began tapping his foot to the music, feeling his muscles unclench.

“I play a little,” Alexander shouted over the music.

“No shit, kid. You?” Frank playfully hit Alexander on the shoulder. “Wouldn’t have thought you had it in you.”

“Do you have any Beatles in there?” Alexander asked, glancing at the binder of CDs.

“Fuck them!” Frank yelled, swerving the car over the centerline. “Those faggots were the worst thing that ever happened to America. And that’s the goddamned truth,” Frank said, shaking his cigarette too close to Alexander’s face.

Alexander blushed. “Grandpa liked the Beatles.”

Frank turned down the music, nodding solemnly. “Damn straight he did. Smart man. Wiser than I am, that’s for damn sure.”

“Mom wants me to sing a Beatles song at the memorial tomorrow,” Alexander said.

“*GOOD LORD IN HEAVEN*, someone call 911!” Cordelia screeched, fanning herself with a roadmap. “He’s got my baby!”

“Shut it, Cordelia. He’s fine. They probably just missed an exit,” Cordelia’s sister, Nancy, said.

Cordelia plopped down dramatically on the curb outside of the rest stop. “I should have never let him get in your husband’s car. What was I thinking? This road trip is making me crazy. I’m going to call the police, Nancy.”

“No one is calling the police. They’re fine. If anything, we’ll just meet them at the next scheduled stop. Alexander is probably having the time of his life. He’s probably glad to get out of your stuffy car of oppression,” Nancy said, glancing at Cordelia’s other two children, Carl and Shaun, who were sitting

quietly in the van with the doors open, their eyes glued to their iPads.

Nancy and Frank's two teenage twin girls, Daphne and Gabby, were inside the rest stop barefoot, flirting with the gas station attendant and filling up their Slurpee cups for the sixth time since they entered Minnesota.

ALEXANDER'S PALMS WERE DRENCHED with sweat, his breath sporadic with the pattern of the blinking red and blue lights behind him. Frank snatched a comb out of his breast pocket and smoothed his hair down in the mirror.

"What's the matter with you?" Frank asked as he threw the comb into Alexander's lap. "You ain't scared of them pigs are you?" he asked with a chuckle. "Law enforcement is filled with little wussies that got picked on too much at school. Just let Uncle Frank do the talking, alright?" Frank puffed out his chest dramatically.

Alexander picked up the comb in his lap and flattened his hair down like Frank had done seconds ago. He watched as the cop approached the car slowly, his hand on his belt. The officer tapped on Frank's window with the back of his knuckles.

Frank cranked the window down without looking at the officer.

"License and proof of insurance please," the officer said, eyeing Frank and Alexander.

Alexander offered the cop a shaky smile as Frank pulled out the cards from his wallet.

"Do you know why I pulled you over today, sir?" The cop asked.

"No fucking clue," Frank replied.

The cop backed up in surprise and laughed.

"You're kidding, right? You're going to look me in the face and tell me you didn't just pass a car on the right? You were practically in the ditch! I was right behind you! How thick are you?"

"I didn't do anything illegal, sir. My nephew over here was having a severe asthma attack and the exhaust from that car up

there was nearly choking him to death.”

Alexander froze with embarrassment and shook his head forcefully.

“N-No,” Alexander muttered. “I don’t—”

“Look at him officer! He’s having some kind of a fit! Poor kid. He’s just trying to breathe, goddamnit!”

The cop eyed Alexander suspiciously.

“I’m going to run your card. Don’t move.”

The cop walked back to his car, shaking his head the whole way.

“Uncle Frank. I don’t have asthma!”

“Don’t blow it, kid! This is our story and we’re sticking with it. The least you could do is wheeze or cough or something. Help me out here,” Frank instructed.

The cop walked back to Frank’s car and handed him his license.

“You’ve got quite the record, Frank,” The cop said, looking more stern than he had minutes ago. “Why don’t the two of you step out of the car?”

Alexander again found himself shaking his head in protest, sure that Frank was going to be arrested this time. He remembered stories his mother told him about Frank when they had been in high school. Every weekend, Frank would drive Nancy and Cordelia around town, playing chicken with the other boys at their school. Back then Nancy and Cordelia were best friends, but that was a long time ago, and Alexander couldn’t imagine his mother being friends with people like Nancy and Frank.

“You don’t look sick to me,” the officer said, giving Alexander a once over. “How old are you?”

Frank kicked his shoe, and Alexander gave a feeble cough.

“Eleven,” Alexander choked out.

Frank rolled his eyes and turned on the charm for the officer.

“Listen officer, my sweet nephew here is too embarrassed to say so, but he’s been real torn up on this road trip. His grandpa just died last week and we’re heading out to South Dakota to spread his ashes. His asthma’s just been through the roof since

his granddad's death. You see? I'm just trying to get him there safe and sound."

Frank patted Alexander on the head. Alexander looked up at his uncle and, to his surprise, saw that there were real tears sparkling in his eyes.

Frank pulled Alexander tight into his smoke-scented Hawaiian shirt. "Shhhhh, it's okay, Xandy. You'll see your papa again some day," Frank said, in-between a loud snuffle.

Alexander stood suffocated in Frank's embrace, waiting for the cop to give them some kind of command. As if to dismiss them from their awkward silence, Frank's phone started to ring and, with a blink of an eye, his crocodile tears were gone. He held up a finger to the cop and answered his phone.

"It's your mom," he whispered to Alexander before greeting her loudly.

Alexander was left standing on the side of the road, face-to-face with the cop, whose eyes were still on Frank. Alexander let out a feeble cough again, confused as to whether they were still conning the cop into believing that he really did have asthma.

"My grandpa was a doctor," Alexander blurted out. "He died last week. He had a heart attack, and now we're going to spread his ashes in a lake. He's the only person I've ever known who's died."

The cop looked at Alexander with a strange expression on his face and looked back at Frank, who was swearing loudly into the phone.

"I'M NOT BRAIN DEAD, CORDELIA. I HEAR YOU! YOU'LL GET HIM BACK IN WORTHINGTON....OH FOR FUCK'S SAKE, I KNOW!"

"You've got a weird family, kid," the cop said with his hand still on his belt. Just then, a woman's voice came crackling through the officer's radio. She read off some numbers and said the word "backup" multiple times.

"Shit. Listen kid, tell your uncle that he's one lucky bastard. I have to let you two off on a warning. But tell him if he drives like that in my state again, he'll go to jail."

Confused, Alexander watched the cop walk away. He had only been pulled over once when he was in the car with his

mom. She had only been going 10 miles over the speed limit and she got a ticket.

Frank jumped in the driver's side and motioned for Alexander to follow him. He got into the car, and Frank handed him the cell phone.

"Good work, kiddo! I thought that pig was never going to leave. Looks like you've taken a page out of Uncle Frank's book."

Alexander took the phone and closed his eyes, anticipating his mother's angry voice.

"Alexander? Are you okay?" Cordelia asked, sounding shaky.

"Yeah, mom. The cop didn't even give us a ticket."

"A cop?! There are police there?! Give me back to Frank," Cordelia yelled into the phone.

"No mom, we're fine, really. Frank's actually really fun."

Frank chuckled from the driver's side and fist bumped Alexander.

"I'm picking you up at the next stop, Alexander. It's not safe riding with him. I should have never let you get in his car."

Alexander wanted to protest but knew there was nothing else he could say to convince his mother to let him ride with Frank the rest of the way to South Dakota.

"Alright. I'll see you there," Alexander said. He handed the phone back to Frank.

"Buck up, kid! Don't you forget, we have a whole weekend of family fun ahead of us. Don't you worry about your mom; she's always got to be so uptight about everything. But how about that cop, man?! You told him! How'd you get us out of that? Did you try hacking up a lung? Did you kick him in the balls and make him run crying for his mamma?"

Alexander laughed. "I just told him the truth: that we are on a road trip to scatter grandpa's ashes."

"Well, whatever works. I gotta tell you, I was shittin' my pants for a second there. I thought ole Uncle Frank was going to be hauled away in the paddy wagon for sure this time. But what'd I tell you? Them pigs ain't nothing but big wussies. They're just bullies."

They sat there for a moment in silence. Frank got the pack of Virginia Slims out again and started chain smoking.

"I'm glad I got to ride with you," Alexander said. "Mom has been crying a lot on this trip, and it makes me feel weird."

"You're mom's a good woman for planning this trip and getting us together. She can be a real bitch sometimes, but she's a good woman. Your grandpa would be proud that we all got together as a family. I feel like you and I missed out on spending time together."

Alexander nodded. "I've never been to a memorial service before. Are Mom and Aunt Nancy going to cry a lot?"

"Hell Xandy, I'll probably shed a tear or two. Your grandpa was a good man. He was like a father to me. I gave him hell, but he treated me like a son no matter what kind of stupid shit I was up to."

"I don't want to cry in front of my brothers, and I can't believe mom is making me sing. The other boys don't have to do that."

"Think of it this way, kid, your grandpa would have loved to hear you sing. You've got an ear for music that your brothers don't. The talentless little shits don't have anything worth showcasing! Only the good musicians get to sing at memorials. If they give you shit tomorrow, they'll have to deal with me later."

Alexander grabbed the CD case from the backseat and flipped through all of the different colored CDs. He had never heard of many of the bands, even though he was a fan of rock music.

"I wonder what Grandpa would have wanted me to sing. How do you feel about Pink Floyd?" Alexander asked, paging through the case.

"I don't know; let's throw that fucker on and practice," Frank said.

FRANK AND ALEXANDER PLAYED through the entire album twice. Alexander learned the words to "Wish You Were Here" and decided it would be a good song to sing the next day at the lake.

An hour later, Alexander looked out his window and saw a big blue sign for Worthington, Minnesota.

“Is this where we are stopping?” Alexander asked.

Frank swerved towards exit 56, almost missing it. Alexander’s heart sank. He wished Frank would have been fiddling with the radio again or lighting a cigarette, accidentally driving past the exit just like last time, but Frank turned into a gas station right off the exit. He saw Nancy standing outside, talking with his brothers and cousins.

Alexander could see his mother pacing outside, checking her watch every couple of seconds. Alexander sighed.

“Don’t let them get you down, Xandman. So your mom won’t let you ride with me? We’ll go fishing once we’re there. And tomorrow morning I’ll help you practice your song, alright?”

Alexander’s frown disappeared.

They pulled up next to the other cars. Alexander got out and gave his mom a hug.

“Thank god you’re alright! I thought he had kidnapped you!” Cordelia said, eyes puffy as if she’d been crying.

Nancy rolled her eyes at her sister but scolded Frank a minute later for missing the first exit.

“She’s been worried sick, Frank,” Nancy said.

“The kid was fine. He had a good time, didn’t you, bud?”

Alexander nodded and reluctantly got into his mom’s car.

NOW EXITING MINNESOTA IN the backseat of his mother’s minivan, Alexander, squeezed between his sleeping brothers, pulled out a skinny white stick, a stolen Virginia Slim, from his pocket. For the first time in his life he held the weight of a cigarette in his fingers. He moved the stick up to his mouth, breathing in the sweet smell of rebellion and smiled. With the cigarette still between his lips, Alexander glanced into the rear-view mirror and gave himself a Frank-worthy wink.

ELLEN PETERSEN

The Battles Rage

*L*IEUTENANT T. FREDERICK HANSON sat pensively on his gray wool bedroll, pulling on his long, black leather Cavalry boots. He could hear his men grumbling, coughing, and rustling outside. The smell of cornmeal in the pan permeated the thin canvas of the tent; its promise of warmth was enticing, but the monotonous taste that he knew accompanied it made exiting the tent for breakfast easier to avoid.

He couldn't remember a time when he had felt more confused, more conflicted, than in this moment. There were too many things that he wanted. He wanted to show his father and brothers that he was one of them, a good Confederate soldier. He wanted to go home and see his mother for the first time in almost a full year. He wanted to sleep in a real bed.

But, perhaps above all, he wanted to saddle his horse and ride full speed through the battlefields, across state lines, until he reached Liza's farm. To explain to her how sorry he was for the way he had behaved his last night there. To finally tell her that he loved her. He had written her a short note telling her these things a month ago, and stuffed it in the breast pocket of his gray wool jacket. On the envelope, it told the finder to deliver it, upon Hanson's death, to Miss Elizabeth Payne of Piedmont, Virginia.

He shook his head to clear it, his copper colored hair tousling from the movement. He could do none of the things he wanted to right now. Even his thoughts were supposed to belong to the army when there was a battle to prepare for.

The war was not going well for the Confederates in late January of 1865. He was sure that total surrender was not far off, and yet here he was, back in a cold Confederate encampment, back in his gray uniform with the yellow epaulettes. The same gray uniform in which he had been shot six months before. The same gray uniform in which he had limped to Liza's door and out of which her manservant Lyle had gingerly stripped

him so that Liza could inspect his wounds. The same uniform that Liza had painstakingly repaired, as his shoulder and ankle healed under her watchful eye, despite the fact that he and his family represented all that she was trying to undo. The same gray uniform that she had bitterly thrown at him, in better condition than when it had been issued to him, after their argument the last time he had seen her.

That argument would live in his memory forever as one of the most humbling and painful moments of his life. This included being shot off of his horse and breaking his ankle mid fall.

The most painful part was that they were in such high spirits just before. Liza, Lyle, Liza's cousin Zella, and Liza's maid Trudy had thrown a going away party for him and fellow injured soldier, Jack Riley. Everyone had dressed in their best clothes; all the women wore hoop-skirted dresses and corsets, and the men wore waistcoats, jackets, and polished boots. Trudy had cooked one of Liza's last chickens and a sweet potato pie made from about a quarter of the contents of the cellar. After this veritable feast, the men had pushed the table and chairs up to the walls and Lyle pulled out his fiddle to play. Trudy clapped along as Jack took Zella for a spin around the clearing in Liza's dining room. Hanson decided that they should not have all of the fun, and taking Liza by the hand, pulled her into a fast paced jig, then a waltz, and on and on for what felt like forever.

She was radiant as they danced. Her face, naturally so pale, had tanned (somewhat unfashionably, not that he minded) in the summer's farm work in the sun. Now it flushed from the exercise and, he hoped wildly, from his close proximity. Her golden blonde hair flew loose in strands from her usually neat bun and framed her blushing cheeks. Her blue eyes sparkled in amusement as she laughed and smiled while they whirled about the dining room, the skirt of her dress swaying like a ringing bell.

In those carefree, stolen moments, Liza looked much younger than Hanson had ever seen, much closer to her twenty-one years. It made his heart constrict to see her as the young

lady she should have been if not for the deaths of her parents and this dreadful war.

Eventually, the dining room got too warm, so, as Lyle and Trudy put the room to rights again, Jack took Zella on a stroll about the lawn. Hanson offered Liza his arm, escorting her to the garden to take in the beauty of the dying autumn day.

It was cool but comfortable in the garden, a welcome relief from the heat of the dining room. Liza's arm remained looped through Hanson's as they walked through the growing shadows between the tall cottonwood trees behind her house. It smelled of autumn. Half of the leaves had already lost their purchase on the branches above and had floated down to form an almost glowing, golden carpet, which crunched lightly beneath their feet. This, he thought, must be what it's like in heaven: a cool, gentle breeze in the air, a warm glow all around, walking side-by-side with an angel.

Without warning, Liza stopped, forcing him to stop too. "Lieutenant Hanson, can I confess something to you?" she asked, looking at him uncertainly. "I haven't told many people this before, but I feel you are a trustworthy and decent man, despite..."

Hanson stared at her. Surely she wasn't about to confess her deep and undying love for him. That would be, in a word, wonderful, but in another word, unlikely. She was looking at him oddly, her head cocked slightly to the side, one eyebrow scrunched down in an adorably inquisitive expression. He jerked himself back to the conversation, realizing that he had been silent for too long. "Yes, of course you can," he prompted.

Liza's face morphed back, though she still looked somewhat apprehensive. "I've wanted to tell you about my situation for a while, but I hadn't the heart to do it until today. I suppose I can't wait any longer, can I?"

Hanson steeled himself, ready for both a confession of passionate love and an observation on her financial status — or something of the kind.

She took a deep breath. "I don't actually own slaves," she said, studying his face intently, the inquisitive brow descending again to touch her golden eyelashes.

“What? Of course you do! What do you call Lyle and Trudy?” He asked, a skeptical smirk adorning his handsome face, his lip curling upward on the right side.

“No, I truly don’t. Lyle and Trudy are paid servants and can leave my employ whenever they so choose. They have not, as yet, so chosen,” she replied, sticking her nose proudly in the air, her eyebrow ascending past its natural point to an almost haughty high ground on her forehead. “In fact, nobody in my family has ever owned a slave.”

“That simply cannot be,” he said slowly, shaking his head with a sad smile on his lips, pity in his green eyes. What game was she playing? “Your family has to have owned slaves. You live on an indigo and tobacco plantation in Virginia, for God’s sake. You would have been ridiculed into abandoning this place ages ago.”

“It most certainly is the truth. Nobody knows.” Her answer was prompt and sharp.

“Well, if that is so, please, explain it to me. I cannot see how anybody could possibly perpetuate such a ruse for such an extended period.”

Liza then launched into a long story about how her grandfather had seen the terrible ill-treatment of African slaves in the Caribbean when he was sailing on a sugar merchant’s ship as a young man, and had vowed before a priest in confession that if he ever owned enough land in America, he would do everything he could to save as many slaves as possible. He bought and settled on that plot of land, deciding to grow indigo and tobacco. He needed help farming all of the land, but he couldn’t break his promise to himself or God. So he came up with a plan: they would buy ten slaves at the next auction, but not keep them as slaves. He would privately tell the new workers that they would be more like indentured servants: the workers would be “paid” a half dollar per day until the price Liza’s grandfather had paid was paid off. At that time, they could either choose to remain on the plantation for a pay of ten cents per day, or Liza’s grandfather would arrange for them to be sent north to New Hampshire, where a friend of his would find them paid work. The first group of ten slaves set Liza’s

family back two thousand dollars, at two hundred dollars each. After four hundred days, seven went north, while a maid and two field hands stayed behind. Liza's grandfather then went to another auction and bought ten more slaves. This tradition had carried down through Liza's father and down to Liza.

When she had finished her tale, she stared at him, warily expectant, eyebrows still high.

Hanson didn't know what to think. None of her story had really made sense.

"What I don't understand here is why your sainted grandfather had to spend all that money over and over and over again when slavery is completely legal in Virginia."

Her eyes flashed a furious blue-grey color and her eyebrows fell into angry golden furrows across her forehead. "He was a witness to horrific punishments of slaves in the Caribbean, and thought, as my parents did and as I do, that it is un-Christian and downright barbaric to treat another human being in that manner — to subject them to excruciating punishments for perceived wrongs, cruelly long working days, and filthy quarters in the likes of which I wouldn't keep my hogs!"

"Un-Christian! There is slavery in the Bible, in the book of the teachings of God! And slavery makes more economic sense. You don't have to waste money paying for work done on your own land." His voice and temper escalated, his face flushing a blotchy, livid brick red, which clashed horribly with his copper red hair.

"We have and make enough money from the crops to afford to pay both our workers and our taxes! As do most plantation and slave owners," Liza said quietly through clenched teeth, her face becoming pale with rage. "And the Bible lays out laws for humane treatment of slaves, who can be released after seven years of servitude. That is not the kind of slavery practiced in the Americas, nor by your illustrious family, I imagine. The slavery here is nearer to the slavery practiced by the Egyptians upon the Israelites — the kind bad enough to force God to tell Moses to free his people!" Her voice had risen as her speech became more impassioned.

Hanson gritted his teeth. "You know nothing about my

family!” He fumed. “For your information, we treat our slaves fairly. We punish them when they need to be punished, work them fair hours, and give them adequate living space! And like it or not, you do participate in slavery. You buy slaves, which encourages and enables the sellers to buy and sell more slaves. Your money still goes to benefit the whole system of slavery. So no matter what you say, how many times you go to church, or how many slaves you funnel across the Mason-Dixon, you still allow slavery to continue.”

He didn’t know what to expect next, but a slap should have been on his list. The mark her palm left immediately started to smart and turn a rosy shade of red darker and angrier than its current shade. Its deliverer resumed her shouting, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears. “You dirty, ungrateful, hypocritical, blowhard! I saved your life — fed, clothed, healed, and housed you for months, and this is what my Christian hospitality has given me! And here I thought that you were your own man, not a puppet restating everything your father and the Confederacy ever said. Thank heavens that you’ll be leaving tomorrow, or God knows what I would do to you!”

He just stared at her, somewhat bewildered, as she stormed back into the house, slamming the back door behind her. Dark clouds had rolled in unnoticed as they feuded. The pleasant breeze had gusted up to an outright cold wind that whipped the leaves into a frenzied swirling dance and gusted across his hot cheeks, cooling the imprint that Liza’s hand had left behind. After a few minutes, the shock wore off, and he walked slowly back into the house.

He and Jack had left at dawn the next day. The clouds had remained overnight, so the day was fated to start overcast, not only with clouds but with gloomy bitterness between former friends. Liza, Zella, and Trudy stood out on the front porch. Zella and Trudy waved goodbye as Lyle drove the mule and cart down the drive. Liza pulled her knit wrap closer around her shoulders and stared, tightlipped and determined, out past the cart as it bumped along the long drive toward the road. Hanson watched her figure as it got smaller and smaller, until, just before they turned on to the actual road, he turned away

from her, resolving to willingly look away from her as a way to start recovering from the dull and throbbing pain in his chest that he knew would turn out to be a broken heart.

That was three months ago. He had replayed every second of her story and their argument in his head over and over until every word was carved on the inside of his eyelids. Every time he slept or even blinked, he saw them there: his misguided dismissal of three generations of her family's fight against the horrors of slavery, her well-placed insults, her valid points, his terrible attempts to justify his family's traditions, everything.

The intervening months had given him time to reflect on his own beliefs about slavery — not just those drilled into him by his father.

He had mainly been raised by the household slaves, he mused for the umpteenth time as he buttoned his gray wool jacket and saddled his horse. He was the youngest of ten boys, and what plantation family had the time or will to raise ten rambunctious boys? The maids and manservants would play hide-and-seek with him as they dusted and cleaned. The field workers taught him to skip stones across the pond. The stable boys taught him to care for his horses. They treated him well and he treated them with the utmost respect, practicing the manners on them that his schoolmaster and parents taught him. His father did not like him “fraternizing with the help,” but young Hanson and the slaves hid their friendship from him.

Hanson realized, as he mounted his horse for the battle to come, that he had loved the slaves his whole life — that he valued them as friends, teachers, and confidants. He stopped for a moment, in that gray uniform, black boots still shining from the tin of polish Lyle had given him as a going away present, sword at his side, sitting atop his steed, ironically the very picture of a Confederate soldier.

Slaves were human. He had known it all along, but it was separate from the philosophies his father had engrained in him from a young age. He had only just now reconciled the two, and realized that he disagreed with his father.

He disagreed with his father. What a revelation! But before

any further revelations could come along, the troops started their trip toward a town they needed to recapture.

The Union troops opened fire and burst forth from the trenches as soon as the troops came within sight of the town. The battle was on — it was utter chaos. Men dropped off their horses like sacks of rocks, falling to the ground with empty thuds. The combination of the smell of gunpowder and metallic blood filled and thickened the air. The roar of the cannons was far off, but it rumbled like the thunder of a coming storm, the flashing muzzles creating the lightning of this storm. Bullets whizzed by Hanson's head like a swarm of angry bees as he dismounted his horse and entered the fray of charging Union soldiers, swinging his long curved sword to save his own life.

An hour passed, and the battle had turned from a hand-to-hand brawl in the muddy trenches to the Confederates hiding in the tree line, waiting for the Union troops to advance. Unfortunately, the Union was winning at this style of warfare, as the majority of their personnel had made it to the trench line nearest to the trees, which was still a good one hundred yards away.

Hanson finally had time to think again about his father while the Union regrouped. Slumped between the trunk of a tree and a large fallen log, cleaning and reloading his revolver, he thought of all of the things that his father had forced him to "believe." His father was obviously wrong about slaves' humanity. Liza had said a lot of things that he hadn't taken the time to think through before spouting his father's prescribed response back at her, but the more he thought through the meaning behind her words, the more convinced he became that he disagreed completely with his father.

Just then, the Union decided to make their move to push the Confederates into a final retreat. They swelled and rose out of their trenches like a great blue wave rolling toward a gray shore, their deafening battle cry crashing over Confederate ears. As they advanced, Hanson and his men noticed that one of the regiments was made up of all black men. They even had a young black boy as a flag bearer. Hanson's men let out a Rebel whoop.

“Aaaaah haaaa! Look at that black devil out there, bold as brass, pretending to be a damn Yankee!”

Hanson watched in horror as the men of his regiment took aim at the defenseless boy. He couldn't have been more than thirteen, but was still short and skinny. The flag he bore was almost as big as he was. The boy tripped over a downed man's boot and fell face-first to the ground. Hanson's men let out a series of yips and started shooting at the poor boy with renewed gusto. Hanson was speechless, or else he would have ordered the men to stop.

He would have been powerless to stop them anyway. Just as the boy was regaining his feet and raised the flag once more, a bullet tore through his right shoulder. The boy was lifted up and backward by the force of the impact and landed on his back, the flag clutched to his chest. His blood stained the white stripes of the flag a deep and sickening maroon.

Hanson's entire world slowed. Deep down, he had known since he had been a boy that he had a choice to make: to follow his father's edicts and ways of life or to find a different path to follow all alone. After he had met Liza, he realized that maybe he didn't have to walk that other path alone, which made their falling out all the more painful.

But he realized now that he still had the option to forge a new path, one that was his and his alone. This path, the new one, was not Liza's path, but it was parallel to it. Similar, but not the same, and that was just fine by him. He could finally see what he needed to do to be his own man: follow the beliefs he had held since childhood and believe that boy was a human too — a human who did not deserve to die like the mindless animal Hanson's men thought him to be.

Hanson stood, peeled off the gray jacket and his white undershirt in spite of the cold, dropped his sword, and ran toward the injured black boy, waving his shirt like a flag of surrender. He reached the boy unscathed by Union bullets and slung the youth easily over his broad shoulder, planting the flag with one swift motion into the ground next to him. Hanson took off again, still waving the shirt, toward the town.

He got about five steps before his left calf was grazed by the

regrettably familiar, searing pain of a bullet. He kept running, even with a significant limp — the pain intensifying with each stride. The edges of his vision were starting to get fuzzy and dark as he ran. He could barely hear the roar of battle, the cracks of rifles and booms of artillery.

The boy started to become heavier on his shoulder, and Hanson began to stagger as he entered the town, searching for a hospital. The clouds around his vision became steadily darker and encroached more and more on his field of view. Even so, he thought he could make out a man in a white coat running toward him. The man must have been real, either that or he had dropped the boy, because the boy's weight over his shoulder was gone. His entire leg felt like it was on fire, and he could only see the light of the sun now, which was odd, as the day had been overcast.

I must have fallen over, he thought. Yes, there was certainly pressure against his back, and he knew he was in the town. Somebody would find the boy and help, that's all that mattered. As he lay there, he thought of Liza. Would she be proud? What would she say if she could see him now? He closed his heavy eyelids for a moment, and for the first time in months, instead of seeing a pale-faced Liza screaming at him, she was smiling, a golden glow of sunshine behind her, making her hair even more radiant than it normally was, her blue eyes kind.

"Frederick," she said slowly, her smile wrapping warmth around every word, "I knew you were your own man — a good man. Just please, don't let this be the last decent thing you do."

He felt his lips turn up at the corners.

The glow started to be replaced by darkness. He didn't mind. She was smiling, as she ever would be, and so was he.

SARA GETZIN

Order in Disorder

ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. You live in a constant state of anxiety. It consumes you, controls your every thought and action. You start to believe you will never be completely safe again.

This fear doesn't come from living in a war-torn country. It doesn't stem from the desperation of surviving in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. A weight rests on your shoulders, which comes from navigating the everyday world — a world drawn askew by your own imagination. Life becomes a battlefield, and you yourself are the enemy. The relentless ferocity of your mind never ceases to bring you to your knees as it warps the simplest of actions into harbingers of despair. Your thoughts are perverted. They whisper to you your deepest fears, the ones you locked away in the recesses of your memory. The only defenses you have against the onslaught are the obsessive acts you carry out helplessly. Your submission is the only thing that stands between the horrors of your psyche and everything you care about.

This is my struggle, my burden, my life. Most people are only familiar with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, more commonly known as OCD, through shows and movies such as *Monk* and *As Good As It Gets*. Others are much more intimately familiar with the disorder through their own personal experiences. I am one of those people. OCD is an anxiety disorder that manifests itself through obsessions and compulsions. These obsessions and compulsions are different for every individual, but certain ones are more prevalent than others.

Excessive hand washing is the most common ritual associated with OCD, and for me the only constant ritual I've had to contend with through the years. I am compelled to constantly wash my hands, even when there is really no reason to do so at all. It's a feeling that takes over — a feeling that my hands are

filthy, as if I had just spent hours digging in the earth, and my hands are caked with soil, and dirt is embedded beneath my nails. So I scrub. I scrub my hands, my arms, until the blood rushes to the surface and the skin cracks, red and raw. Eventually, everything feels right again. If it's a good day, I won't feel the urge to wash my hands again for a couple of hours. Unfortunately, it's just as likely that it will be closer to half an hour, or even ten minutes, before I return to the harshness of the scalding soap and water.

The struggle is that I am helpless against carrying out these compulsions. OCD is something that takes over like a possession. I am fully aware of how foolish it all is, but I can't do anything except what my darker side is telling me to do. If I try and stop, to fight, I will crumble, turn to dust and blow away, and every bad thing that I can possibly imagine will happen because I wasn't strong enough to suffer through the ritual. The only choice I really have is to wash my hands and turn the lights on and off seven times exactly.

Very little is known about OCD and most mental disorders in general. Some people believe the cause of OCD to be a genetic abnormality, which results in the signals in the brain misfiring. Others think it may be caused by a traumatic event in the person's life. I believe I was born with OCD. Since infancy, I have displayed an acute hypersensitivity to my surrounding. My grandfather was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis years before I was born. My parents tell me that even as a baby, I seemed to be aware of my grandfather's illness, much to the puzzlement of my family. Whenever he would stand up from his chair or shuffle across the room, my careful watch would follow his every move. His most vulnerable moments caused me extreme anxiety.

As a toddler and child, my unique habits continued. One winter when I was three years old, my family built a snowman. A joyous winter activity became a terrifying experience as my parents moved to place the hat on its head. I was overtaken by panic. It had somehow gotten into my head that, just like in *Frosty the Snowman*, if the hat was to touch our icy creation's head, it would come to life. I'm not sure why I thought a magical singing snowman would be a bad thing, but I did and the idea terrified me.

During my first fire drill experience in kindergarten, I attempted to walk home in order to check on my mom and sister who were at home. I thought that while there may not be a fire at the school, maybe a fire had started at home and my family was in danger. I informed the teacher and principal of my intentions, and told them that as soon as I made sure my family was okay, I would return to class. Of course, it wouldn't be good school policy to allow a five-year-old to walk home alone. They informed me as such and pointed out a perimeter to establish just how far I could go: from the lamppost, to that car, to the curb. I purposefully walked every inch of the perimeter before going back inside.

Several months later my teachers noticed that I had stopped eating my lunches. My OCD had convinced me that if at any point metal were to come in contact with another piece of metal, there would be an explosion. I knew the ladies who served me lunch wore jewelry, and the utensils at the school were made of metal. Thus, if the cafeteria workers ever touched the silverware, the results would be catastrophic. My solution was this: don't eat lunch. If you find that logic confusing, don't worry — OCD rarely makes much sense. It doesn't use rationale, but somewhere in the mind of a five-year-old kid, it made everything okay.

My parents and teachers were baffled by my actions. At the time I didn't realize that what I was doing was weird. Every kid had their fears, their boogeyman in the closet, their monster under the bed — was I really all that different? I didn't realize that most kids didn't try to walk home during fire drills or stave off an explosion by avoiding cafeteria lunches. I was just me. Alone.

Strange quirks and habits defined me through grade school, often preventing me from making many friends. I had my books and the one or two classmates who I would talk to on occasion, but I didn't need anything else. I didn't need it. At least that's what I told myself. I made friends with the characters on the printed page instead. They never questioned my actions. They didn't leave me behind when my rituals and obsession took over. They were always there. When fears ruled my mind, I knew I could turn to literature. It was a safe haven for me, a place where everything is set in stone, written on the page, unchangeable. No

matter what rituals came, no matter what obsessions I concocted, no matter what I did, I could never change the outcome of the story. Its immobility became my rock.

Middle school began, and the cruel combination of curiosity and fear in my pre-teen classmates left me more ostracized than ever. The more alone I became, the more the anxiety took over and, eventually, the dormant beast became a monster. Until this point, my OCD had never been extreme. It had never stopped me from living my life. It hadn't even been diagnosed. By my seventh grade year, I had lost all control over something I hadn't even realized I was holding back. The earliest signs came with the hand washing. I became adamant, absolutely obsessed. Time passed and the skin from the tips of my fingers to well above my wrists became raw, red, and chapped. The cold dry air of winter worsened them as the flesh cracked and the blood bubbled to the surface, drying over in morbid landmarks on the surface of my skin.

Despite the pain, I couldn't stop. I had to keep washing. I had to keep using Germ-X. I had to do anything to bring some relief to my mind. My body came second. At home, I had amassed a collection of hand creams in hopes of reducing the stinging and throbbing, but it didn't help. I rarely remembered to apply them and, when I did remember, it wasn't long before it was washed away again. That was only the beginning.

New rituals formed rapidly. Getting ready for school in the morning took hours. Eating dinner became impossible. My bedtime rituals seemed to never end. I did all of it to protect myself and the ones I love from the horrible ideas that consumed me. Every ritual I worked through broke me a little bit more — made me hate myself a little bit more. I wasn't strong enough to suffer through my obsessions, and I wasn't strong enough to ignore the OCD.

By January of my seventh grade year, it was considered a miracle for me to survive until lunch. Making it through the entire day was unheard of. At the time, I was without any friends. The way I acted was too bizarre, and it was all too much for any twelve-year-old to have to deal with. My teachers didn't understand what I was going through. Some didn't make the effort

to understand. Others came up with their own ideas of how to help me. Both caused more harm than good. Most mornings, I broke down before the first bell rang. The need to walk in and out, in and out, of doorways, the constant desire to wipe down the seats before I sat — it all became too much. My only safe place was at home where I had the help and support of my family.

Somehow, I managed to keep up with my schoolwork. With the help of my parents, I finished my assignments and turned them in on time. It was a long and stressful process that often ended with me in tears. I would dictate my answers to my parents when I could no longer write for myself. What would take me an hour to write, the average student could write in a minute. I would tear through sheets upon sheets of paper. I would erase words and copy over them dozens of times, until the plywood desk beneath was engraved with my words as I persevered.

In my experience, very few people in Mississippi understand OCD or know how to manage it. Because of this, I had many trials in finding a psychiatrist who would be a good fit for me. Over the course of several months, I visited several therapists. Some were local while others were located several hours away and, yet, I couldn't really place my trust in any of them. In my opinion, most of the therapists had no real interest in their patients. Some were only interested in money, and others preferred to examine me as though I were a prime specimen. In my opinion the worst were those who thought that their way was the only way. They were the ones who hurt me the most. By forcing their ideas and plans for healing on me, they were only hurting me more. In the end, it was my pediatrician that became my greatest source of guidance. Neither of us had extensive knowledge of the disorder that controlled me or how to manage it, but together we worked to find the best combination of therapy and medication to help me begin fighting back.

I found outlets during this time — distractions to take my mind off the thoughts that constantly plagued me. Action movies are one of my favorite past times. I would spend hours on the couch watching *Rambo*, *Die Hard*, and *The Boy Scout*. The

fact that these characters were able to face very real dangers and overcome them offered me a kind of catharsis. Games were another escape. The option to go back and start over, make different choices the next time around, gave me the same kind of comfort as movies. My biggest escape of all was in my books. I always carried one with me where I went — a world to which I could run to no matter where I was. During my darkest periods with OCD, even reading was taken away from me. I would flip back and forth, back and forth, between the pages until it wasn't even worth it anymore.

In the end the only person who can break the cycle is myself. The medicine, the doctors, and the therapists are all key tools, but only I can decide to overcome it. Don't misunderstand me: I'm not saying it's easy, and I'm not saying it's instantaneous. It takes hard work; it takes an understanding of my situation; but most importantly, it takes deciding that this disorder will no longer control my life.

After almost two years of suffering, I finally decided that I needed to change things. I had to acknowledge the fact that no matter how many times I performed my rituals, or how closely I obsessed over something, it wouldn't change my life for the better. It would only keep me trapped in the life that was destroying me.

I began to fight back the fears. Slowly I was able to stop the OCD from controlling my every action. The obsessions and compulsions didn't disappear completely, of course. I don't think they will ever be gone, but they are no longer my entire world. I finally have more control over OCD than it has over me. I feel like I am finally free, like the weight has begun to lift from my shoulders, and the chains that dragged me down have broken.

Since then, I have gained even further control over my OCD. At times it comes back, especially when I am stressed or going through changes in my life. In eighth grade, I transferred from public school to a small private school, where my needs were more closely accommodated. There I was able to focus on my love of learning, and grow stronger in my own time. I graduated from high school a year early, and was accepted into

the Honors Program at Winona State University.

OCD may have slowed me down, but it has never stopped me. I know that OCD will always be a part of me, but I will never allow it to become the monster that it once was. My OCD has forged me. It taught me how to live through the harder times, how to laugh at myself, and how to keep a bright outlook on life. It allows me to see things in a different light — things not everyone else sees. My reality, what once was a twisted landscape, a hellish nightmare made up of the demons of my own conscious, has become a vivid dream full of the beauty, possibility, and strangeness of my own wonderland. As I continue my journey, I choose to look forward, forward to the struggles, the joys, and the revelations that my own adventures will hold. It's my life now, and no one will tell me how to live it.

MICK ALSLEBEN

Impure Hands

I*SURE HOPE THE* Jumailee kids bring their moms to the field today, ‘cuz after we are done with them somebody needs to be there to dry up all their tears.” Khalid made a pouting face and wiped at invisible tears. That was one of the reasons we were such good friends — he always made me laugh.

Khalid and I made our way down the alley towards the soccer field in the middle of town. We turned the corner and up ahead, as expected, Muhammad was waiting for us. Ali was with him today. Khalid and I couldn’t stand Muhammad’s whiney little brother.

“Him again?” I yelled. “There is no way I’m going to let him blow the game today. Shit, he is almost six, can’t he stay home this time?”

“Leave him alone,” Muhammad sighed. “And don’t swear. My dad would beat us all if he heard you talk like that.”

We made our way down the street and could see two groups of kids gathering on the field. One large group of boys was from my mosque. We all belonged to the Janabi tribe. The other group, the soon-to-be losers, were the kids from the Jumailee tribe. On the other end of the field sat an unwelcome sight, which made my skin crawl. Two American war trucks were parked on the corners of the new, but unused, medical clinic. A few days ago construction equipment dug out a big trench on the outside of the courtyard wall. This, however, made me nervous. The trucks were only parked thirty meters from the Jumailee goal and, the way I saw it, we were going to be spending a lot of time down there.

“Do you think this has anything to do with Ibrahim?” Khalid asked quietly.

“Quiet!” I looked around to make sure nobody was watching. “I don’t think so,” I replied.

Khalid was referring to my eldest cousin Ibrahim. I felt a sting at the bottom of my stomach thinking about it. My grip on

my soccer ball tightened, despite the fact that the sweat on my palms made it a little slick. I must have made a weak attempt to hide my anxiety because Khalid put a comforting hand on my shoulder.

“Don’t worry — why would they wait for you to play soccer to kidnap you? They are more than capable of coming into your house in the middle of the night,” he said with a giant smirk on his face.

“Don’t be a jerk, or I will make you eat sand again,” I yelled.

“They... they don’t actually do that, do they?” asked a wide-eyed Ali.

Muhammad stepped in to save his little brother from the unrelenting torment I was about to give him.

“Remember what Dad says: leave them alone and they will leave you alone,” Muhammad lectured.

“Like snakes!” Khalid added.

We continued towards the soccer field — our eyes fixed on the trucks, on the figures inside, on the guns. Most of the kids from both tribes were already picking up the garbage on the field. Heckling was limited this morning because everyone was as curious as they were nervous about our new spectators.

“What are they doing here?” I asked.

“They found Osama Bin Laden inside the clinic. President Bush and I talked about it over tea this morning.”

I turned around to find a smart-mouthed Jumailee kid. I didn’t know his name, and I didn’t want to, but I had considered him my rival for quite some time now. He was about a year older than me, but way uglier. His family had a lot of money from working at the oil refinery. He was the only one out there playing with shoes. That addition alone had made him a pretty good soccer player. He was not shy of letting everyone know about it, too. Oh, the mouth on that kid. I hated him.

“Shut your fuckin’ mouth,” I yelled.

I cut myself a little short with the stinging fear that there was an adult nearby. I did a quick scan of the area for anybody coming to hit me.

“You are a little crabby this morning. What’s the matter, can’t afford breakfast?” He taunted me from the middle of his tribesmen.

“No,” I said as calmly as I could. “I had a big breakfast. I’m just mad that your dad tried to bribe us so you guys could finally win this time.”

His face reddened.

Ha, I thought, got ‘em!

I turned to go and sit on the stairs at the edge of the field. The massive building they had belonged to was long gone. I heard that at one point, President Saddam had given a speech on these stairs, telling everyone of the great victory that we had won over the greedy Kuwaitis. It just didn’t make sense — why would they start a war with us? But praise be to Allah that Saddam was there to protect us.

The thought of Saddam snapped me back into reality, as I remembered the gun trucks. There was a small crowd of kids gathered near one of the trucks.

“Candy! Candy! Chocolate! Money!” They were a chorus of beggars.

My eye caught Khalid in the back. I ran over to him, trying not to make eye contact with the men inside.

“Are you crazy? Do you want to be poisoned?” I whispered in his ear.

“Listen,” he whispered back. “I don’t really care what your cousin does in his spare time, but I want some candy and these dummies just hand it out sometimes.”

My cousin Ibrahim had been famous in the city since he was born. He had a rare set of green eyes that all the girls swooned over. But now, Ibrahim’s fame had been tied with the revolution ever since the war started. Now he was practically running it in our city. For a man of twenty-three, he always had money. A few times he helped support our family by floating my dad some extra cash. He made sure there was always food on the table. Every time he visited, I loved to sit down and talk with him. He taught me a lot about Allah, women, and even how to smoke. But he would always end with talking about the atrocities the Americans were committing everyday, and that it was his job to stop them. Someday, he said, it would be my job. He told me of rapes and murders that knew no bounds of age or gender. He told me of the great desecrations to the Koran

and to mosques. He also told me that it was Allah, by means of the Prophet, who had told him to fight back. I was not allowed to join his revolution until I was fourteen because war was a man's task. I always got excited when he extended the invitation. Four more years seemed like a lifetime.

We were burning daylight just standing here. The mid-morning sun was climbing, and our game would soon be cut short by the noontime call to prayer. I had only one way to break this crowd up. I threw the ball that I had been clutching all morning into the air.

"Today belongs to the Janabis," I screamed as I took off after the ball.

As expected, everyone was on my heels. The game was on. Teams were not defined by jerseys or bright colors. They were composed of the faces we did and didn't know. We all chased wildly after the ball, kicking and pushing just to get the chance to touch it.

Within minutes, the ravenous mob started to form into a legitimate looking soccer game. Most of the younger kids left the field in the increasing violence. The number of wounded also started to pile up. Not me though — I was indestructible. In a high stakes game like this, nothing could break my determination — until my face collided with a well-placed fist.

"My father is an honorable man!" shouted my nemesis as he dribbled the stolen ball away.

I could taste blood in my mouth. I had to stop and take stock of what had happened and what was said. The searing pain in my jaw brought my world back into focus again. I took off towards the Jumailee kid, hell-bent on his destruction. He didn't have the ball anymore, but everyone knew what was going to happen. I tackled him and threw an unstoppable barrage of fists at his face. Within seconds, Khalid had pulled me off, and a Jumailee emissary was holding back his friend from a counterattack.

My death stare was fractured by the sight of Muhammad rapidly approaching the Jumailee goal with the ball. He stopped, and with a powerful kick, sent the ball straight for the goal. With a deflection from the goalie, the ball skipped up and

over the goal and disappeared just outside of the wall of the clinic.

“The trench,” Khalid had taken the words from my lips.

“Well, go get it. Unless you can afford another one,” said my enemy.

Will he ever shut his mouth? I looked back and forth between the trench and the closest American truck. They were looking back and forth between the trench and us.

“C’mon,” I said to Khalid. “And you, too.” I pointed at Muhammad.

Out of nowhere, Ali appeared at Muhammad’s side, and the four of us left the gawking, murmuring crowd. We cautiously walked up to the trench, looking for any signs of aggression from the Americans. I looked into the trench and my heart sank. It was six feet deep and three feet wide. Lining the bottom was a continuous silver coil of razor wire. The walls were perfectly vertical, and there was no room to step without getting cut. Between the wire coils, my still shiny soccer ball sat among the trash at the bottom. Next to my ball was a mangled, gray cat that had met its demise when it had decided to go on an adventure.

“How do we get it out of there?” Muhammad asked.

“Well, I think that is the intended design. Nothing goes in because it has no chance of getting out,” Khalid suggested.

“This is their trench, so they can go and get it,” I said, pointing to the massive vehicle.

My heart was racing as I turned towards the staring Americans. I had never talked to one or even seen one up close. I started to gather up all the English I knew.

“Mista giv ne futbol,” I shouted at the top of my lungs towards the truck. I heard giggling from the other players behind us, but they wanted no part in this.

“Mista giv ne futbol!” I repeated myself louder and pointed down the trench.

We stood and watched as the two soldiers inside the truck had a short conversation while putting on gear. They got out and slammed the doors that sounded like they were a thousand kilos. They started walking towards us with rifles at their sides.

Every instinct in my body was telling me to run, but I knew I couldn't in the interest of saving my dignity and whatever credibility I possessed. They came to us looking like fat, gray robots. They had on tons of gear, and the only identifiable flesh was around their mouths. They had pouches and pouches of ammunition and grenades. One of the beasts had a pistol attached to his chest and big yellow teeth. He leaned to the side and spit a big brown string of saliva. He smiled at me — there were brown specks in his teeth. This turned my stomach. The other soldier had been casually smoking a cigarette and seemed normal, except for those weird, orange dots he had running across his nose and cheeks. *He must be ill*, I thought.

“English,” he said.

“Arabic,” I replied.

Well now that we got that settled, it is all gestures from here on out.

“You.” I pointed at him. “Get my ball.” Then I pointed back towards the trench.

He understood but shook his head no. He mimicked my actions by pointing at me and then the pit. I turned back to my friends.

“These guys are really simple,” I said.

They all laughed, and I turned back around to see the Americans staring at me. By the looks on their faces, they were not impressed.

Then, Disgusting Mouth had an idea. He mimed a show where they would lower an unlucky boy into their pit of death.

“Great idea!” I exclaimed. I grabbed Ali by the arm and pushed him towards the Americans. He bounced off one of them and staggered back, horrified. He jumped behind Muhammad when they went to grab him. They were confused for a moment until Khalid and I started laughing hysterically. They caught on pretty quickly.

“Scare the shit out of him why don't ya!” Muhammad snapped at me.

“It was funny, and you know it. Besides, I figured you wanted him to go in your place anyhow,” I said.

“What makes you think it is my job to go in there in the first place?” he asked.

“Well, the way I see it, moron kicks ball in hole, moron retrieves ball. Pretty simple I would say.”

My answer must have hit him the wrong way because, instinctively, his fists balled.

“Maybe the moron should inform your new friends of what Ibrahim did last Thursday night,” he said in a menacing whisper. “Now go get your own damn ball!”

I am not sure if Muhammad would have dared say anything. I am not even sure how he would have overcome the language barrier. The one thing I did know for sure was that I didn’t want to challenge him. I turned back to the soldiers who were becoming increasingly impatient. I stepped to the edge of the trench and put my arms up. As if on cue, both of them grabbed me by an arm and started lowering me down. I felt sick — sick to my stomach that I was letting these murderous rapists touch me and, above all, that they were putting me in one of their razor-lined death-pits.

As soon as I got far enough down, the razor wire started catching my clothes. Small tears and cuts in my pants gave way, and the wire began cutting into my skin. My bare feet finally touched the earth below and, despite the wire, I was able to stand awkwardly. I leaned forward to get the ball, but there was too much pressure on one particular spike, and my leg gave way to the pain. I was falling forward and grabbed onto the only thing that wouldn’t cut me: the dead cat. The corpse squished a little under my weight, but it saved me from a lot of pain. Carefully, I righted myself and grabbed the ball. As I tossed it out of my would-have-been grave, I could hear a roar of cheers coming from both my teammates and my opponents. The Americans were already there with outstretched hands to drag me back to the surface. With a seemingly effortless heave, they pulled me up. The game had already resumed on the field, and Disgusting Mouth was dusting me off and looking at my bleeding cuts. He was saying something in English, but I wasn’t paying attention to him. My eyes locked onto a black sedan on the street on the other side of the field. Inside, an unmistakable set of piercing green eyes fixed on me. He had undoubtedly witnessed the entire ordeal. Slowly, the window rolled up, and the car began to move down the street — my street.

I knew he would wait there. I knew he would beat me like no other. And I knew he would revoke his offer — his invitation — and I would never fight by his side.

MEGAN B. WEFEL

The House on the Hill

THE DIVIL AIN'T THAT bad when yea get to know him." Ailbe's grandfather's words floated around his head as he looked out the bus window. Rain lashed and smeared itself against the bus in a fury. He rubbed his hand against the cold window and tried to make out anything other than the gray-green blur that rushed past.

He felt warm and cold all at the same time. The thought of rain made him shiver, but the bus was warm with the hot breaths of the packed people around him. The bus heaved as it turned, making the tourists in the front grip their seats tightly. It amused him that they sucked in tight breaths whenever a car appeared in the opposite lane. They were obviously convinced that the bus driver didn't know how to drive or, perhaps, the rain and narrow pathway made them think that the bus wasn't supposed to be on these roads. It was almost too narrow, but he'd never heard of any bus crashes in his life.

The landscape that looked like a bright green ocean when the bus first started moving was long gone. It had been replaced by a heavy, gray limbo. Ailbe wondered if he stepped out of the bus right now, whether he would be lost to this world forever — stuck in some sort of twilight realm of nothingness.

He closed his eyes and tried to picture his college. Caelan was no doubt bundled up in the library with a blanket overhead and doing "research," which meant reading something interesting while forgetting about any actual homework that had to be done. Eventually Caelan would hear the rain and leave for some tea — hopefully not the black stuff. Ailbe hated it when Caelan went out and got locked outside without him; it always made Ailbe worry.

As Ailbe imagined the warm library and Caelan's cozy reading tent, his eyelids began to droop more and more. He finally gave in, knowing that the bus would go all night and, in the morning, he'd only be a few paces away from his grandfather's farm. He rested his head against the window but instantly

perked up, glancing back at what the bus had just passed. He swore there was a short, old man in a black coat, leaning on a cane in the ditch. He had looked directly at Ailbe with a red-eyed smirk. Ireland may be famous for its tales of fairies, banshees, selkies, and the like, but what most don't know is that Ireland is the Devil's territory.

AILBE STRETCHED UNCOMFORTABLY AS the sun started to rise, and the bus began to slow. His neck was stiff; his legs were cramping; and his arse felt numb. He stood up and followed most of the groggy, just-awoken crowd off the bus. The bus had stopped at a tiny station in a tiny town a little ways away from the Moors; he assumed most of the crowd would head up there. Ailbe, on the other hand, turned immediately opposite, going past the shops and houses and towards the back of the town, which had a few shops and many pubs. He found a worn-out dirt path for horse-drawn carriages and the occasional car. He followed it up and away from the town and out towards the rolling hills that jutted up gracefully and majestically. The land was covered with green as far as the eye could see.

Yesterday's rain made everything surreal. The slick stones shone and glittered in the sunlight, and the colors around him seemed unnaturally bright. The brown rocks and fields looked almost purple. It'd been a year since Ailbe had been to the countryside. When he finally got accepted at Trinity College, he moved to Dublin full-time. He had been living there part-time with his mother who had found her big break and went from lecturer to professor. Ailbe's father had died in an accident when he was a baby.

As the sun neared the middle of the sky, Ailbe hiked to the top of the last hill, before spotting his family's farm. His grandparent's house was tucked at the base of four hills, and the large shaving barn was close behind it. His grandmother had convinced his grandfather to let her name the farm Shamrock Haven, because the four hills were so even. She liked to joke that they lived in the center of a four-leaf shamrock. When he

was little, she used to convince him to go looking for gold with her.

He trudged down the hill, taking his time. Three of the hills around the barn were covered in white specks — sheep wandering up and down the hills. They looked as natural on those hills as clouds do in the sky.

One of the older border collies bounded up to him, barking at the stranger's presence. It wasn't until she got closer that she began to wag her tail and lick at his hands. Ailbe recognized his mother's old dog instantly.

"Hey girl, hush now."

Although, in the open space like this, Ailbe supposed it didn't matter whether she hushed or not. She kept barking as he neared the house.

"Bri! What are yea barkin' at?" Ailbe's grandma came out of the house and, the instant she saw Ailbe, her eyes filled with tears. "Ailbe! Ailbe!"

She rushed over to him and hugged him. Ailbe was just a little bit taller than her, but she squeezed him so tight he thought he was going to pop. He looked down at the top of her gray, braided hair. She was thin but as strong as ever.

"Hi, Gran," Ailbe said.

She pulled away and began to survey her skinny grandson. Ailbe was wearing the white-knit sweater she had made him for Christmas, and she looked at it proudly, although it made him look even paler than he already was. It was made from the wool harvested right at their farm. He was sure there were many like it all around Ireland, but his gran treated it as though it was special. And he knew they weren't cheap — tourists ate these up at prices over a hundred euros. She took off his gray, flat cap that he never liked to take off and ruffled his sandy blonde hair. She took one last look into his amber eyes, squeezed his shoulders, and beckoned him inside.

"Breakfast is nearly done, and your uncle and granda should be in any minute," she said.

Ailbe nodded and sat down at the large dining room table. He could see his grandfather climbing down the hill, the dogs at his ankles. He looked like a big black monster with his black

raincoat, boots, and hat. He was so fascinated watching his grandfather that he hadn't noticed the feast his gran had set out on the table: rashers, sausage, eggs, black pudding, beans, and fresh soda bread — and orange juice to top it off. Ailbe had to stop himself from drooling.

“Gran, this is...”

She smiled at him. “I’m going to wet the tea. Say hello to your granda before you start eating.”

His grandfather slammed the door behind him. Ailbe smelled his grandfather before he saw him. Granda smelled like wet earth, hay, and dog. Ailbe watched his grandfather take a hesitant seat next to him. They stared at each other for a long time.

“Do yea ever eat, Boyo? Yer as thin as an unfed mutt,” his grandfather asked then turned to his food.

Ailbe gave a small smile as his gran and his uncle, who lived up the street a ways and would take over the farm one day, sat down.

“Nice to see yea, Albs. How’s the ole woman?”

Ailbe instantly flinched and glanced at his grandfather who ignored it and continued eating.

“Good...”

“How’s school?” his gran asked.

“Good too. I’m...ah... having fun.”

“Fun? Boyo, ain’t you going to that school to learn like yer ma? Yea better not be no slackin’ eijit!” his grandfather yelled.

His gran glanced at Ailbe with worry in her eyes, but Ailbe just smiled. “Of course, Granda, I’m learning.”

“Good,” his grandfather said, and Ailbe felt a little better.

His grandfather never cared much for higher education. He always believed working with your hands was better than working with your head. They ate in silence for a while before his uncle once again spoke up.

“So yea got yerself a lass yet, Albs?”

Ailbe and his gran flinched together.

“Finley!” Ailbe’s gran yelled.

“What?” his uncle asked.

His granda stood up loudly and pushed away from the table,

grabbing his dishes as he went. He threw them in the sing and then walked out the door once more. Ailbe followed after him, grabbing his gray, flat cap off the table.

“I’m going to the house!” Ailbe yelled up to him.

His grandfather stopped. “What did you say?”

“I said...” Ailbe caught up to him and stared straight into his amber eyes. “I’m going to the house on the hill.” His grandfather stared him down. A slight smile caught at the corner of his mouth.

“Is that why yea came?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t yea say so?” His grandfather rubbed at his nose.

Ailbe smiled at him. His grandfather actually seemed proud — proud of him for the first time that Ailbe could remember. He swung his arm around Ailbe and gave his shoulder a squeeze, making Ailbe flinch.

“Well, come on, I’ll take yea!”

THE WALK WAS MUCH longer than what Ailbe had remembered when he was little, and he found it odd that his grandfather had talked to him along the whole walk. He brought up life advice, stories and traditions of each of his ancestors when they went to the house, the original owner of the house — his great great great, how ever many, granda, who was a doctor — and even a little bit about Ailbe’s mother.

“I’m glad yea didn’t listen to her,” his grandfather said as the first glimpse of the old house came into view. “Your ma — she didn’t believe in this...or didn’t agree with it. I dun know but, either way, she was wrong, and I’m glad yea see that.”

“Ya,” Ailbe swallowed. If it wasn’t for Caelan, Ailbe wouldn’t be here either. And he still wasn’t sure whether or not he believed in it.

“Well this is as far as I should go. You’ll be on yer own from here.” He turned away and put his hand on Ailbe’s shoulder: one last squeeze. “Good luck, son.”

Ailbe stood on the hill for a long time, waiting until Granda

was long gone. He stared at the shack — barely a house. It was blackened and lonely. Siting there against the green, it wasn't the only relic left untouched on the hills, but it seemed like one of the strangest. It had caught fire several times, but a rainstorm always saved it. Ailbe certainly didn't think the old doctor's shack should still be standing. Finally, he moved towards it, and the warm wind seemed to push him close, like a mother hugging a child to her breast. Ailbe stepped inside.

It was just as one would expect it to be on the inside: cobwebs, ash, dust, and soot. It was as black on the inside as it was on the outside, and anything you touched left its mark on you.

“Hello?” Ailbe's voice sounded like a childish version of himself, and he was aware of the hair standing on the back of his neck. There was no answer.

Ailbe eyed the fire pit and watched in amazement as the old soot and ash went from gray to a glowing gold. The embers turned to sparks and the sparks to flame until there was a roaring fire in the pit. Ailbe took a step back and ran into something — or someone. He whipped around.

“Aye, Boyo. Have yea come tah see me?” The old man with a pointed, white goatee smiled a yellow and crooked smile at Ailbe. He leaned on a cane, and a long, black coat covered his hump-like back. His eyes weren't as red as what he had seen on the bus, but he could still see a reddish glow, like the embers in the fire pit.

“Yes,” Ailbe said at long last.

“I knew yea were coming; all of you Ó Braonáin — or Brennen, or whatever your family goes by nowadays — come. I'm not good with keepin' up with the times. But, when the doctor lived here, you were the Ó Braonáin.” His long, yellow fingernails pulled at his pointy beard. “Times change, and I am sometimes left ignorant.” He grinned again. “But some traditions never do. What have yea come to ask me, Young Fella?” He moved closer to Ailbe and, with each step, he poked at him. “Have yea come to ask for knowledge? For wealth? For health? For power?” The last step, he jabbed Ailbe straight in the chest. The boney finger sent a great pulse through Ailbe's body, and he found himself coughing and gasping for air as if he'd just

been punched.

“Love!” Ailbe finally choked out.

“Love?” he snorted and coughed. It sounded as if he were dying. “Take after your granda do ya?”

“My granda asked for love?” Ailbe asked.

“Aye, yer granda asked for love — came up with a right tricky plan for it, too. How do you think he got such a fine ole doll as yer gran?” The devil snorted some more.

Ailbe shook off the comment with a bit of childish disgust.

“And after him, yer uncle asked for power. Ah, but you may not know that one yet. When he takes over your farm, expect some big changes.” He chuckled again. Ailbe stared ahead wondering how that would work out for his dumb uncle.

“And yer ma —” the devil started.

Albie took a step back. “My ma never made a deal with you. She wouldn’t do that,” Ailbe said.

The old creature was keeling over with laughter now. “Is that what yea believe? She’s been here twice, my boy — twice!”

Ailbe didn’t respond and stared at him like a child who had figured out the magician’s trick and was now calling him a liar. The old devil noticed this and moved closer to Albie’s face, spitting at him.

“Yes! Yer ma came twice — once after your pa died. She came and begged for his soul! She was going to give me your soul in his place! She almost did it, too — that slapper! At the last minute, she changed ‘er mind. But she came crawling back, needing a new life and money of her own. How do yea think she got her position at that college? Yea know she didn’t have enough credentials for the position she got?” He eyed Ailbe and laughed deep and low. “But don’t ya worry, Boy. They will all get out of their deals. They always do.”

Ailbe watched as the old man grew in force and intensity.

“Cause yea know what else is a tradition with yer God-for-saken family? They’re all liars! Cheats! And tricksters!” He hollered so loudly that saliva and blood spat out. “And you’ll trick me too, if yer smart like the rest of yer family. So I ask again, Boyo: what do you want?”

Ailbe swallowed hard. His heart was racing. He closed his

eyes and pictured Caelan. “Caelan.”

“What was that?”

“I want Caelan’s family to accept me — accept us. I want them to accept our love and let us marry.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

The man growled. “That’s never it! You are all too greedy for that! Caelan already loves you enough that you don’t have to force ‘er love?”

Ailbe raised an eyebrow, and an idea spread over him, calming his heart and his nerves. He crossed his arms. “Yes.”

“So just ‘er family needs to accept yer love, and you’d come to me for that?”

“I’m desperate.”

“So yea are.”

“But —”

“But?”

“But, since it seems I should ask for more, I want a job.”

“A job? Boy —”

“I want a job I love, a sturdy one, and I want to make enough money to pay for a ring out of my own pocket — not anyone else’s money.”

“I see. Seeking opportunity like yer Ma, are yea?”

“Yes.”

The old man scratched at his beard, pulling at it, forcing his rubbery skin to be pulled off the bone of his chin. He looked Ailbe up and down. “Yea look like a school boy. What are yea studying?”

“Art.”

“ART?!” The devil rolled down to his knees in laughter.

“You may be a fool yet. Are yea sure you’ll be wanting to make a deal with me?”

“Yes.” Ailbe stood up straight, “I want to have Caelan’s family accept me and our love. I want to be married to Caelan — in a year!” he added hastily. “And I want a job I love where I’ll make enough to buy Caelan a ring that I earned,” he paused. “And I want this in writing!”

“Yea be a precise one like yer ma. Fine,” he said and waved

his hand. A yellow parchment appeared in midair with a black quill pen that looked like a raven's feather. Ailbe reached for the paper.

"Ah, ah, ah." The old man snatched it back. "And what will yea be given me in return?"

"My soul, of course, on the day of my wedding."

"Aye, on the day of yer wedding to yer ole doll?"

"Yes, when I wed my girl."

"Yer not thinking of tricking me are yea?" He eyed Ailbe, and his eyes began to glow as if a fire had been lit behind them.

Ailbe said nothing.

"Just like yer ancestor, the damned doctor, and all his kin after." The devil crossed his arms and grew large again. Ailbe could see horns appear on the flickering shadow of the old man. "Then I'll be wanting more reassurance."

"You want more?"

"Yes. I never say anything I don't mean."

"Fine. Caelan's soul."

"Caelan's!"

"Yes, one year from now, on this very day, when I marry my girl, I will give you both of our souls."

"Only a year, Boyo? Do yea and yer lass plan to spend yer honeymoon in Hell?"

Ailbe didn't answer.

"There's no way out of this one, Boyo. You've given yourself little room to wiggle! Unless —"

"Unless?" Ailbe asked.

"Unless you plan on getting married in a church where I cannot enter!" He roared, and the flames grew so large Ailbe was sure the place would catch fire. Of course, Ailbe had thought of that possibility.

"Then I promise not to get married in a church."

"Eh?" The flames subsided.

"One year from now, I will get married on the Moors to Caelan, and you can collect us then."

"So one year from now, I will steal you away on your wedding night to yer girl?"

"Yes. Put in writing exactly what you just said," Ailbe said.

It appeared on the parchment word for word.

“How will you be getting out of this one? Or have yea resigned yerself to yer fate? Are yea that desperate?”

Ailbe said nothing.

The man paused. He was thinking it through. “What is it you most desire?”

“To be with Caelan where our love is accepted.”

“You won’t trick me by not getting married?”

“No, I want nothing more in life than to be married to Caelan.”

“Fine.” Satisfied, the devil smiled crookedly with blood-red lips. “Sign it.”

Ailbe took the pen and read the parchment over one more time. “In one year’s time, when I marry my girl, you will take our souls. In return, all my desires as listed will come true.”

He signed it.

When he lifted up the quill, a gust of wind came through so harsh that Ailbe nearly toppled over. In an instant, the fire was out, and the old man and parchment were nowhere to be found. The quill turned to ash in his hand. He shivered and wiped the sweat from his face with his wool sleeve. The absent fire made the evening feel very cool. He readjusted his flat cap and, sticking his hands in his pockets, he began to whistle as he walked back towards Shamrock Haven.

AILBE STOOD ON THE top of the Moors on the other side of the wooden fence that said not to cross. Ailbe decided this spot was perfect. The priest was much more hesitant to stand on the overlooking rock, and his knees wobbled with every step. The ceremony was a private one. It would just be the three of them — and perhaps one extra witness. The waves crashed restlessly against the jagged cliff, and white gulls circled the sky like sheep on a hill. Yellow, white, purple, and blue wildflowers grew in abundance over the pointed rocks and peaked out as if they, too, wanted to watch the wedding.

Ailbe smoothed out his suit cuffs. He wore a suit and a white, flat cap. He had on a white bowtie, and a yellow rose

stuck out of his pocket. He heard his name drift towards him and turned, watching a beautiful Caelan climbing over the fence. With the backdrop of the Moors, and his love walking towards him, Ailbe knew there would never be a more beautiful scene.

THE DEVIL ARRIVED SHORTLY after the ceremony had finished. Looking for a woman in white, he scoured the rocks. Instead, the devil found Ailbe who was looking down at him while standing proudly on one of the high rocks. The devil immediately appeared before him and glanced at his left finger — the one with the braided silver ring.

“It looks like you failed to come up with something to outwit me. Perhaps yea should have asked for more time,” he cackled. He was still in the same old man get-up. “Where is yer blushing bride?”

“Caelan, c’mere.” Ailbe said, and a small head peeked around from behind the priest, whom Caelan was just talking to.

Caelan bounded up to Ailbe. He grabbed Ailbe’s arm and hugged him tight. “Who’s this?” he asked in a timid, sing-song voice.

The devil looked aghast. Caelan wore a white suit and cocked his curly red-haired head to the side. His green, doe eyes stared softly at the old man. He was shorter than Ailbe, making Ailbe seem much bigger and stronger than he was. A hand with a very familiar silver ring curled tighter around Ailbe’s arm. Ailbe turned and cupped Caelan’s head in his hands, kissing him passionately. When Ailbe finally released him, he smiled a wide grin at the devil — one that trumped the devil’s crooked, yellow grin.

“I never said that the one I love is a girl.”

LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

This year's poetry team was small but mighty. We aimed to represent the poets and poetry on campus as a whole: personal narrative to surreal, sonnet to prose poem, and any piece therein or any daring, worthy outlier. We toiled away on the 3rd floor of Minné discussing the excellent submissions and often took to heated debate over impassioned opinions about poetry. I would like to thank the poetry team, this year's editors and, of course, Dr. Eddy for making Satori possible.

KAYSEY PRICE

The prose committee worked exceptionally well together to select a diverse range of prose to represent the hard work and creativity that students cultivate while at Winona State. I would like to thank Dr. Eddy for making this issue possible, as well as my wonderful committee for their dedication and tireless work. I would also like to thank all of the talented students for submitting their prose; we received many excellent pieces, and I encourage students to continue to submit their work to Satori in the future.

ANA ALEXANDER

This issue marks my third and final time of being a part of Satori. It has been an amazing journey working with so many hard working students and coming together to showcase such inspiring talent. Thank you to everyone who submitted their artwork this year! I want to also thank my team member for his dedication and willingness to help me throughout this semester. I hope that Satori will continue to grow and reflect the artistic side of WSU students. Finally, I want to give a big thank you to my fellow editors for their hard work and patience and to Dr. Eddy for making Satori possible.

AUTUMN BEIREIS

Ana Alexander

Mick Alsleben

Autumn Beireis

Nicole Cullinan

Emily Dean

Sara Getzin

Marie Helkenn

Tori Johnson

Jonathan Lee

Emma Masiulewicz

Lauren Mueller

Leah Perri

Ellen Petersen

Kaysey Price

Abigail Peschges

Jenna Saunders

Kimberly Schneider

Dana Scott

Kenneth Tham

Nicole Tompos

Ka Vang

Melody Vang