

Satori

A Student Literary Magazine

Winona State University

2013

Cover Art: Painting Ezra Pound by Kayla Fayerweather

Acknowledgements

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Gary Eddy

Editor-in-Chief

Elise Nelson

Poetry Panel

Elise Nelson - Editor
Molly O'Keefe
Mitchell Johnson
Marie Helkenn
Grace Aakre

Art Panel

Abigail Peschges - Editor
Zichan Zhang
Kimi Sisson
Yang Xueyuan
Kate Edstrom
Sydney Erickson
Xia Dong

Prose Panel

A. Kathryn Barrett - Editor
Rebecca Mueller
Matt Carlson
Lauren Barker
Becky Loftfield
Jeremy Ertl
Mari Schlitter
Katie Logan
Michael Gourley
Michael T. Johnson
Hannah Nickelson

Mission Statement

Satori is a student-run annual magazine that expresses the artistic spirit of the students of Winona State University. We publish student poetry, prose, and graphic art every Spring, as we have since 1970.

-Dr. Gary Eddy, Faculty Advisor

Table of Contents

Poetry

| | |
|---|----|
| The Simplicity of Destruction..... | 3 |
| <i>Kimberly Truedson</i> | |
| Things You Leave..... | 4 |
| <i>Molly Barrett</i> | |
| Morning Tea..... | 5 |
| <i>Emily Kulich</i> | |
| Happiness..... | 6 |
| <i>Hannah Jones</i> | |
| Dental Hygiene..... | 7 |
| <i>Emily Kulich</i> | |
| Apocalyptic notes borrowed from Eliade..... | 8 |
| <i>Marcia Ratliff</i> | |
| Plea to Winter..... | 9 |
| <i>Taylor Mathias</i> | |
| I Didn't..... | 10 |
| <i>Molly Barrett</i> | |
| Shopping..... | 11 |
| <i>Olivia Wulf</i> | |
| Flash..... | 12 |
| <i>Lauren Barker</i> | |
| Fall(ing)..... | 13 |
| <i>Grace Aakre</i> | |
| It never goes how I planned..... | 14 |
| <i>Brianna Skalicky</i> | |
| I never got his name..... | 15 |
| <i>Marcia Ratliff</i> | |

Art

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Lost Direction | 19 |
| <i>Sydney Swanson</i> | |
| Frost on the Window | 20 |
| <i>Becky Loftfield</i> | |
| New Life | 21 |
| <i>Shannon Bolte</i> | |
| Blue Face | 22 |
| <i>Marie McMahon</i> | |
| Parisian Lamp | 23 |
| <i>Mari Schlitter</i> | |
| Looking In | 24 |
| <i>Sydney Swanson</i> | |
| Inside Notre Dame | 25 |
| <i>Becky Loftfield</i> | |
| Passing Prayers | 26 |
| <i>Anna Froemming</i> | |
| Hallowed Antiquity | 27 |
| <i>Bailey Bryans</i> | |
| Stories to be Remembered | 28 |
| <i>Shannon Bolte</i> | |

Prose

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| Mama K | 33 |
| <i>Emily Kulich</i> | |
| Locked Out | 38 |
| <i>Rebecca Mueller</i> | |
| Dear God | 40 |
| <i>Jodi Misar</i> | |
| The Bus Route | 47 |
| <i>Hannah Jones</i> | |



Poetry



The Simplicity of Destruction

Kimberly Truedson

It takes a village to raise a child

These words you “preached” to me from,
the pages of a story and (henceforth created the assumption)—
Greater strength is required to construct something magnificent.

For,

The Egyptian pyramids—
momentous slave labor
The invention of the light bulb—
a borrowed favor

And,

Over 220, 000 words compile to form the oxford dictionary—
a linguistic team effort.

But also,

You have shown me
It takes a single person to destroy a relationship
Already unstable unity—
Combined with increasing decibels of insensitivity
You pound your fists and shake the earth
Meticulously unscrew every bolt that once held sturdy foundations.
Robots in quiet recession, subdued and muted by your overpowering
roar

Like a lion you pace
This house your kingdom.

This village
This family
Confined within this story, marionettes suspended by your narrative
When will you discover the pages are not infinite?

Or

that your pen is running out of ink.
Tyrannical ruler – The I in team

Will you ever understand?

It’s nonexistent.

Things You Leave

Molly Barrett

I seem to leave a trail of bobby pins
After me wherever I go
It used to make you angry;
You said, "How can someone possibly lose this many?"
And I laughed it off and blamed it
On my huge mass of tangled hair
But the worst part, you told me,
Was finding them in the corners of your room,
In the folds of your sheets,
In the blank space next to your keyboard
Reminding you of where I'd been
When you knew I would never be
Those places
Any more.

Morning Tea

Emily Kulich

Like a child who colors
Outside the lines,
The dried bag of earth
Bleeds into the hot water.

Happiness

Hannah Jones

I wear a yellow sweater
With yellow earrings
On this rainy November day,
And I vow to myself to take happiness with me
Wherever I go,
Like chocolate-chip banana bread
Still warm, a live coal,
Like a Mozart opera stuck in my head,
Displacing dour and useless thoughts,
Always nearing the chorus,
Like love,
Intangible, but so real
Because I believe in it,
My fine new clothes
That only the heart can see.
And so I take my yellow
Out into the rain,
And I am a passing sun
With matching earrings.

Dental Hygiene

Emily Kulich

You floss your teeth in front of me for the first time,
Wiggling the thin white string between each healthy tooth.
I sit on your bathtub's wall trying not to slip into slumber and
It's nearly midnight and your beard is growing longer each day.
How long do you think facial hair can grow?
I'm comfortable in your sweatpants- cuffed at the ankle-
And your worn-in long-sleeve t-shirt-
Both of which you store in your kitchen cabinet.
Our eyes meet through the bathroom mirror's reflection.
You pause, with string hanging from two of your teeth
To insist, "This is the real me."
And although you're picking chewed particles
From old food stuck in your mouth,
I can't help but notice how striking you are.
Holding out the little white box you ask, "Want some floss?"
Just as serious as a man proposing to his future wife.

Apocalyptic notes borrowed from Eliade

Marcia Ratliff

There are only fragments of a shattered universe
and you are hopping between them like a
squirrel between trees. Your
sciurid movements don't betray
your thoughts: you might be excited or
terrified, but you keep hopping,

a small price to pay for that sense of eternity. Maybe grass grows
beneath you, on soft ground, between the fragments
which might be coming together, or apart.
But the feeling of blankness beneath you drives you,
abeyance of responsibility,
like when you are underwater

playing Marco Polo—no need to respond,
no point in responding,
even if you did hear something.
Or you are less dramatic, running between the splotches
of shade on the sidewalk, feeling the wind
at your back and breathing sweat and sunscreen, almost the

smell of childhood, summer again, anything
except here. You are not so much, not so perfect, but your senses
tell you that you are alive.
You abandon things only to find them again,
like the golf ball in the gutter or the Barbie you buried
beneath the chives.
You grow into your self and out of it, in an instant.

Plea to Winter

Taylor Mathias

I am
grasping
to see another day
everyone else has gone away
my time up here is not long
that is why I am still hanging on
Beauty is fleeting
my friends are receding
and to the human eye it pleases
oh do appreciate me before it freezes
for I am but an oak leaf
hanging
on

I Didn't

Molly Barrett

I didn't fall in love with you
At the overpriced sushi restaurant
Where you pulled out my chair a little too eagerly
My coat dragging on the floor
My visit to the bathroom punctuated by a six-year-old girl
Who told me, washing our hands in the grimy sink,
That "Pretty girls go on dates. Are you on a date?"

I didn't fall in love with you then, but I think
That I fell in love with you
Washing dishes at 7:30 p.m. in my small kitchen sink
Dunking my hands in the sudsy water and glancing over
At your five o'clock shadow, your hands drying the dishes
That I passed over to you.
When we were done with the pile, you pulled the plug in the drain
And wrapped your chapped hands around my waist,
Lifting my t-shirt to touch my skin underneath

I think I fell in love with the way you touched the back of my head
When you kissed me
With the dirt under your left fingernail
As I watched it slide across my palm as we watched a movie

I didn't fall in love with the flowers you got me,
Although, I'll admit, they were beautiful
And it didn't take the dates and the trips and the things you bought
For me to see you differently

It took me a while to understand
That love is not inside the velvet box
That you purchased with two paychecks
It's inside the soapy water that's
Running over both of our hands
As we clasp them together, once
Before we finish cleaning.

Shopping

Olivia Wulf

You remind me of someone.
Just there, behind your eyes, the slight
Smirk in your smile and I hear
His voice in yours. Really.
Yes, we dated once. It was all smiles and
Chinese food and broken people trying
To glue each other's pieces back together.
But you can't do that without actually
Feeling anything, can you?
It was rhetorical, I'm sorry. Please,
Forgive me for taking up so much time and—
It's just—it's a little bit nice.
To see you, I mean. To see him.
To think that maybe he's standing in line at
A bakery, too, being reminded of someone.
Not me, necessarily. But then, maybe he'd
Think that was nice, too.

Flash

Lauren Barker

I want someone to look at me
To care about me
To capture me in a moment in time
But no one ever does
Because that's my job

I get a lot of attention at parties
But it's short-lived
And then I'm put down
Cast aside
Dropped
Buried at the bottom of a bag

They only want what I can hold
That's all I'm good for
Holding memories in my defunct hands
No one holds me in their warm hands
For very long

Often, I go to clubs or bars
Shoved inside a purse or pocket
And I come out for a snap
Or a shot
Then I'm forced back into hiding

No one misses me
When I'm there and gone
In a flash

Fall(ing)

Grace Aakre

She disrobes,
her golden garments shivering
to rest in the withering grass
as she surrenders
to the will of the autumn wind.
His chill fingers slip through her hair
and down her spine,
sliding smoothly between the cracks in her bark.
She is awkward in her near nakedness,
rooted beneath the fading sky,
allowing him to caress her,
settling into his cold embrace.

It never goes how I planned

Brianna Skalicky

There's a one sided conversation going on inside my head.
The same conversation I almost initiated three years ago
When your family was getting ready for bed and it was just us in the
kitchen
And you were going on and on about how Taylor Swift can't sing
And I'm freaking out inside because your brown eyes are staring
into my blue ones
And I suddenly feel like I'm going to throw up but I know if I don't
say what I'm feeling now I never will
And I open my mouth to tell you and nothing comes out.
The cold air that I inhaled turns to warm air that I've exhaled
And my hands began to shake because you're waiting for me to say
something
And I'm feeling like an idiot because I can't remember how to say
anything.
And all I can hear is water running in the bathroom, someone snor-
ing loudly, and the clock ticking behind your head.
The silence is awkward and I can't come up with a joke to fill it
So you smile sweetly, give me a hug and say "goodnight"
And I feel a thousand pounds heavier as I walk out to my car.
Goosebumps cover my skin as I collapse into the front seat
And as the front porch light goes off, I whisper into the infinite
blackness "I Love You"
Like it's a secret said to no one but the darkness and me.

I never got his name

Marcia Ratliff

We are swimming across a wetland in the rain,
and the channel is all we can see, a thick hedge
on each side, cut like a Los Angeles wash
out of the ground, extending for miles in one 10-foot lane.
He and I, we can almost kiss in the rain,
and we want to, our faces pale and wet,
but we have never seen each other before this
endless day.

In it for the long haul? he asks.
I guess, I reply, coughing a laugh.
But I'm a terrible swimmer.
There must be a current around us, coming from behind,
because I am breathing easily, keeping pace
beside him, feeling the splash of his strokes,
rhythmic in the steady rain.
A few cars pass us on the road,

black cars with high beams on, maybe looking for us.
A group of men swims up behind us, loud,
and too excited to be swimming the endless channel,
even in such a warm rain.
They surround us, separate us.
I wake up as they are deciding how to kill
him, my partner, alarmed but silent
his bare chest heaving against the ripples.

I sleep again and immediately feel the rush of cold.
We are still in the channel, and now wind chills our skin
and I have cleared the men out, somehow,
while I was awake. They swim away,
shouting threats. It starts to rain again, warm again.
Our hair looks good in the rain, and we almost kiss,
because this is a dream, and that would be romantic,
but we are running out of time, the current at our backs.



Art



Lost Direction

Sydney Swanson



Frost on the Window

Becky Loftfield



New Life

Shannon Bolte



Blue Face

Marie McMahon



Parisian Lamp

Mari Schlitter



Looking In

Sydney Swanson



Inside Notre Dame

Becky Loftfield



Passing Prayers

Anna Froemming



Hallowed Antiquity

Bailey Bryans



Stories to be Remembered

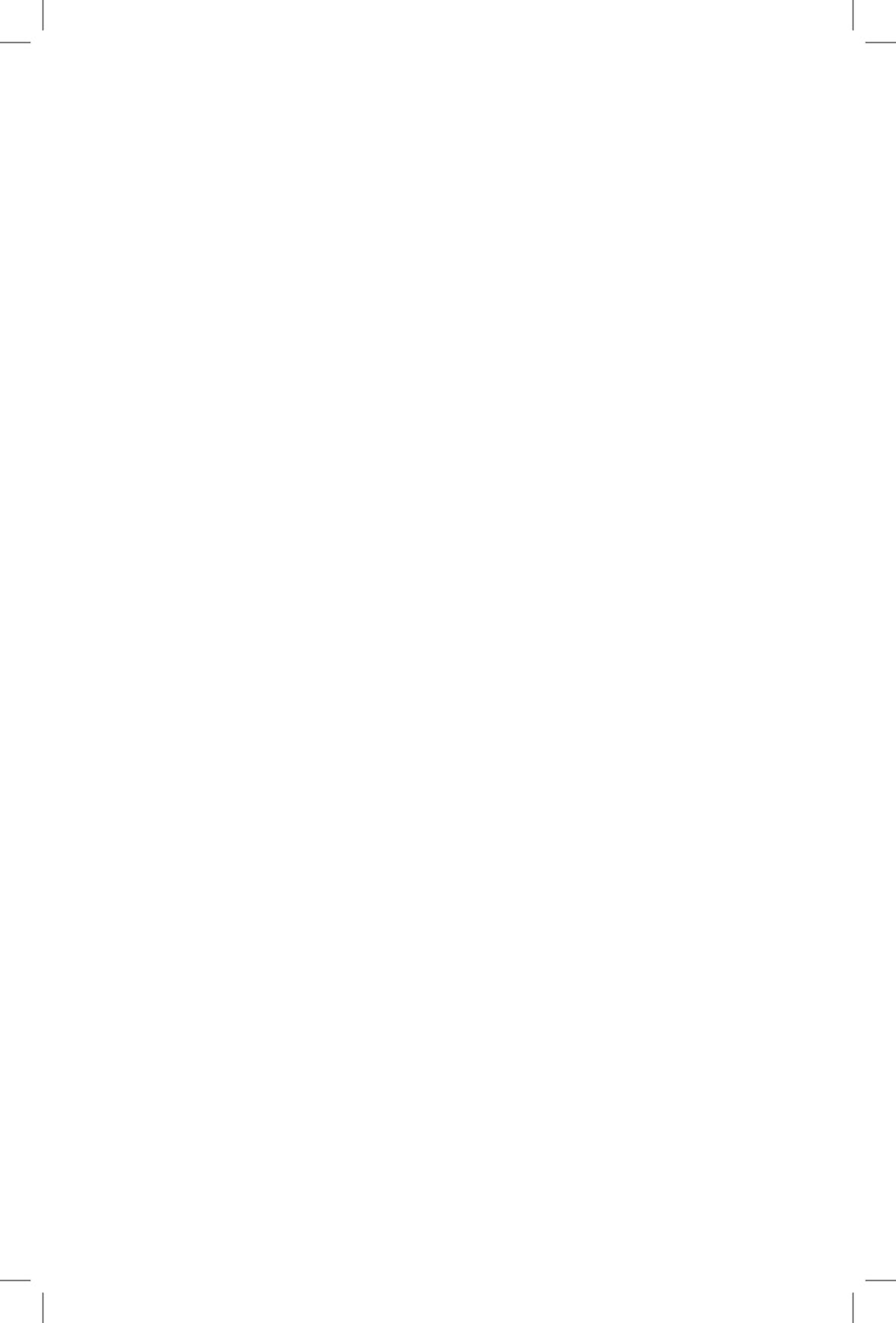
Shannon Bolte







Prose



Mama K

Emily Kulich

There was no point in trying to escape the heat that day. It was the sort of summer day where your body energy is robbed from the sunlight and you have no other choice but to sit outside in your sweat, licking popsicles and hoping for a nice fresh breeze to greet your skin. That day the air was stiff and the sun's heat felt like it could melt plastic. I chose to wear only a peach hued bikini and sun-tan lotion while spread out across a towel on my front yard's grass. A hummingbird floated near the pink flowers as a black ant crawled across my skin. The sweating water bottle I'd filled earlier with ice cubes (now disintegrating) spooned my left thigh as I rested on the ground. It was the coldest temperature I'd felt for days.

The sun was still pinned in the sky when I looked at my cell phone and realized it was ten minutes to six, ten minutes before my shift at the Winona 7 started.

It was hot outside, yet somehow when I ran back into my house, indoors felt even hotter. Because my roommates were gone for the summer most of the two-story house's windows were shut tight. This, unfortunately, created the atmosphere of a greenhouse but my forget-me-not pot flourished with delicate green petals.

I dressed swiftly in my black dress pants, with my white collared shirt tucked in. The sleeves were permanently stained with oily butter that had accumulated gradually over my last year of employment. The bowtie around my neck hugged my breathing passage a little too comfortably. Being wrapped up in my uniform provoked my recently exercised sweat glands to activate yet again.

It was five minutes to six, and all I had left to do was put my obnoxiously large rhinestone earrings in. The perspiration of the hot day still slept on my fingertips and awoke as they touched the ceramic jewelry box I'd had for years.

When I was young, I had admired the jewelry box that sat on my mom's long maple dresser. The box was shaped like a short cylinder painted with intricate chains of flowers that surrounded the border of the container. On top, the cream surface was adorned with a small painting of fresh flowers varying in pale shades of pinks, yellows, purples, and blues that were tied into a bouquet.

I found my mom's jewelry box beautiful and enchanting. I knew it was delicate because my mom didn't like me touching it too much. This fragility made me want to touch it even more. As soon as my mom left her bedroom (and me) to go to the bathroom or to check up on my brother (who mostly played Legos in the basement), I would sprint over to my mom's dresser and slowly take the jewelry box's top off just to peek into the container.

Every time I looked into the jewelry box during the day it was empty. At night, before she went to bed, my mom would take her wedding and engagement rings off, and place them in the box. In here, every night a single diamond held hands with one gold band while the other gold band slept alone. Although its contents never changed I continued to peek under its lid.

At some point my mom must have noticed my fascination with her jewelry box because one day she gave me my own jewelry box, one identical to hers. Throughout the years I kept coins, bracelets, a collection of two-dollar bills, and earrings in it. Anything I collected or saw of value I stored in the jewelry box; I knew it would be safe there.

On that hot summer day, it was not safe. The jewelry box slipped out of my hands in one fluid motion and crashed onto my dark wood dresser with a helping hand from gravity. "Dammit!" escaped from my lips faster than a running cheetah. I had shattered my jewelry box.

In my chaos, I took a moment and stood silent to observe the broken ceramic corpse. I pulled the single tear escaping my left tear duct back into my body. I was late for work. I didn't have time to cry. Immediately my mind's jukebox played the line, "Just leave the pieces when you go," over and over again, like a broken record. I took the song's advice and left for work.

Later that night after the summer sun had finally sunk past the horizon and I had finished my shift, I returned to the jewelry box's resting place. At first I figured I might as well throw it away: the jewelry box was too broken to mend back together. Slowly I began to clean up the broken shards.

The first piece of ceramic I picked up was the largest. It was curved at its breaking point like my mom's frosted glass Chloe perfume bottle, arched abstractly like an opening rose bud. The liquid inside, a rich amber, could have been mistaken for whiskey.

Every Sunday morning as a little girl I would watch my mom get ready while she faced the illuminated mirror in her

bathroom. Dressed for church, she wore her white and aqua splatter print dress that offset her brown black hair and soft blue eyes.

I'd watch her highlight her eyes with coffee brown eyeliner, powder her cheeks with rose blush, and fill her lips in with iridescent powder pink lipstick. Then, as a finishing touch, she'd take her Chloe perfume bottle in her right hand and spray her left wrist once with the warm scent. Throughout the morning the perfume would sink deeper into her skin like water absorbing into a flowerpot's soil.

After church service, the congregation would migrate slowly out of the sanctuary and into the conversation hall like herded sheep. Here, my mom and dad would wait in a long line to buy a Styrofoam cup of the church's hot watery coffee. While they waited in line, my brother and I would take the coins my dad had given us and buy three-donut holes for a nickel apiece. My brother and I always bought powdered sugar donut holes for us, and a chocolate dipped donut hole for my mom.

I was older than my brother and therefore I held the scratchy beige napkin with our Sunday treats on our way back to my mom and dad. It was like a maze—weaving in and out of the churchgoers' legs like trees in a forest. When we returned to my parents, I was comforted by the light scent of Chloe perfume melted into her skin.

Now years later, she rarely picks up the smooth bottle to scent her skin. Instead of being elastic and firm, day after day her skin is beginning to look like silken tissue paper splashed with freckles and sunspots.

I picked up another sharp edge that had been broken from the jewelry box. This piece of ceramic had a curved edge and a straight edge, like half of a heart. I have always loved my mom, but sometimes that love was more of an I-have-to-love-my-mom-because-she's-my-mom love.

As a teenager, I tended to sleep late into the morning on weekends and this bothered my mom. I remember waking up around 10 am to the sound of the obsessively fast beats of her knuckles hitting my bedroom door. That was my weekend wakeup call. I always kept my door shut, whether I was inside my room or somewhere else. My closed bedroom door was my attempt at privacy. Drowsy, I'd respond to her, half awake yet half asleep, "Ok! Ok! Ok! I'm getting up now!" I sleepily slurred this line to satisfy her for a while longer. However, one too many of my responses would spur my mom into six quick but sharp knocks, and without another second,

she'd turn my door's lock-free knob and enter. I knew a fight about my messy room was inevitable.

I was a very passionate scrapbooker, and my flooring highlighted this passion—or rather obsession. Pictures, scraps of colored and patterned paper, glue, stickers, and glitter were spread across my floor. It was also covered in clothes—lots of clothes. Up above, resting on top of my bookshelf, dresser, and nightstand I collected the plates, silverware, and drinking glasses from my late night snacks. My laziness and lack of motivation welcomed any and all clutter.

My family knew I was messy, but if my bedroom door was closed and they didn't have to see the mess, it was easier to pretend it wasn't an issue. It became an issue when my mom entered my room without warning. Once in a while, she'd threaten to throw everything on my floor into garbage bags and I wouldn't be able to see them for a very long time. I think she was scared I'd grow up to be some kind of hoarder—the kind that's now exploited on TV networks. I hated when she'd barge into my room because that's when I'd see disappointment on her face.

I began to hum as I picked up another shard of broken ceramic. It reminded me of “hummers” and the summer after my first year of college.

My mom had showed me her newly expanded garden in the backyard, which included twenty new hostas in the shade, a new tomato plant potted on the stained deck, and several new budding bulb flowers placed against the house's external wall.

Tula, my Doberman lab mix, rested on the deck's bench and watched my mom and me wander around the grassy yard. It was so muggy out that day; Tula breathed heavily while sitting completely still and I perspired through my grey Winona State t-shirt. My mom and I decided it would be best to go inside to cool off and rehydrate in the air-conditioned house.

She poured herself a glass of Brita filtered water and made her way over to the kitchen sink to refill the pitcher. While waiting for the container to fill, she looked through the window above the sink and screamed, “Em, come look!”

She'd yelled like this before and I knew it was nothing to be alarmed about. Our ranch style house had a deep backyard. The left side of the yard led to a cul-de-sac and the right side of the yard faded into a grey forest. Frequently, wild animals like deer and even bucks would wander into our backyard. I raced to the kitchen sink out of curiosity.

“It’s a hummer!” she said as she pointed forward, her finger almost pressing against the glass window.

Like the average person submerged into the media-crazed society, the noun “hummer” brought to mind a mountain sized SUV originally developed by the Army. I looked out the window to see what my mom had seen, as I always did, half-expecting to see a canary-yellow or lipstick red SUV in the cul-de-sac to the left. Instead, I saw a hummingbird.

Every summer my mom hangs the same clear plastic hummingbird feeder outside her kitchen window. The red nectar she mixes and pours inside the feeder looks like strawberry Jello, forming in a clear mold. The bright accent of color stands out against the complementary leafy green scenery. Watching her hummingbird feeder is like watching a National Geographic special: countless hummingbirds feed off the red nectar each summer.

That day, my eyes settled on a single flittering hummingbird. Its feathers faded from emerald green to sapphire blue while it sucked the red sugar water from my mom’s feeder.

Somehow with time, summer after summer, hummingbird after hummingbird, my mom had abbreviated the species’ title into an SUV-inspired nickname. Perhaps the abbreviation is easier to shout into the next room, where my lanky father reclines in his vintage mid-century aqua chair after a long day of writing specs at his architecture firm. Perhaps the expansion of textspeak has influenced her everyday language and she’s convinced she’s hip with the fresh generation by abbreviating “hummingbird.” Her only attempt at a more youthful life has been through the use of anti-wrinkle facial lotion, more commonly used in everyday life than sun block is used at the beach on a hot summer day. I’ve never corrected her use of the noun because I’m sure she didn’t intentionally mean to trigger this reaction in me, but I find her flexibility in her vocabulary charming, refreshing, and inventive. Why does she call them hummers? The answer is just as mysterious as a flying bird, suspended in the air.

With every broken piece of my jewelry box I placed in my bare hands, memory after memory of my mom surfaced. Our relationship is decorative paintings and sharp edges. How could I throw it away?

That night, after an emergency midnight run to Walmart for crazy glue, piece by piece, I stuck my jewelry box back together.

Locked Out

Rebecca Mueller

Hey, it's me. I'm really sorry to bother you at work, but I just wanted to let you know that...um, I can't seem to find my house key. I swore I had it in my pocket when I got to the bus stop this morning. But now I'm locked out of the house. I just got home about ten minutes ago and I retraced my steps the best that I could between the house and the bus stop. I'll go back and look again in a little while. Oh man, I really thought I had it with me. I know I locked the door when I left.

Maybe if I try the back door? I know the lock isn't too good on that door and sometimes it swings open on its own. I'm just going to try it really quick...nope. No dice.

Oh hang on. Sarah's coming down the driveway right now. I guess she saw me freaking out just now. Hang on a sec.

Hey Sarah. Yeah, I can't find my house key. I think it fell out of my pocket this morning. My mom's going to kill me if I don't fix this. Last time I messed up this bad, she got really mad and threw her coffee mug and it broke and she made me clean it up and I hid in my room for the rest of the weekend because if she saw me, she'd start yelling at me again and I just don't want that to happen again— Oh my gosh, really? Are you sure? Thank you so much!

Sarah just said that I could stay at her house until you get home. Sarah and I are going to do our homework together for a little bit and then we're going to go back out and look for the house key again. If I do find the key and get back inside the house before you get home, I'll call you again so you don't have to worry.

Look, just please don't be mad at me. I made sure that the door was locked when I left, so the house is safe. I know I can be forgetful sometimes, but not with this. I would never forget to lock the door. I know that you're stressed out at work right now and that you have to work late tonight and I'm doing everything I can to fix this. Honest, I am. If Sarah and I can't find the key in the backyard, then we're going to call the bus company and maybe Sarah's dad can drive us back up to the middle school to see if someone turned it in to the front office and I just want to show you that I can handle this problem on my own so that you don't have to get mad at me!

Ok. Calm down. Breathe.

Hey, I'm sorry for freaking out just now. Anyway, I'll keep you posted, but I don't want you to worry because I'll be safe at Sarah's house. I hope everything's going okay for you at work today. I'll see you when you get home. Bye.

Dear God

Marcia Ratliff

It wasn't as if anyone had taught Shirley to pray or even expected her to. She was nice enough without being bound to God-given morals and hadn't undergone any crisis to make her reach out for God as a crutch, but there was something about solitude that lent itself to prayer. And she was alone enough to give it a try anyway.

It wasn't as if Shirley was unfriendly in the least, for she had enough friends when she wanted them. It was just that she preferred to run alone. She preferred running in the mornings alone, when the sun was just deciding whether or not to brighten another day. After she took up praying, she always prayed that it would.

It wasn't as if Shirley needed to run to lose weight. She wasn't obsessed with her appearance and didn't care much about what people thought of her. She just decided that she had arrived at a time in her life where she should start forming habits. She was starting her junior year of high school, after all, and wanted to adopt a good habit or two since she wasn't much for hobbies.

It wasn't as if running came easily to Shirley. In fact, most days she wanted to give up or at least cut a few corners. She didn't think it was quite natural for her heart to beat that loud and fast or for her lungs to feel as desperate for air as they did when she ran. But that was part of the reason Shirley kept at it. The one thing Shirley knew about herself was that she wasn't a quitter.

So that was why Shirley ran. She ran the streets of her neighborhood or through the cemetery across the highway depending on the day. She ran uphill and downhill, past houses and ditches filled with a colorful mix of tall weeds and wildflowers during the summer and white frost or snow during the winter. Sometimes it rained, but mostly it was dry. There were cold days, but they were never cold enough to keep her from warming up after a mile or two of beating the pavement with her purple, hand-me-down Nike shoes.

Shirley began to run in autumn when the air turned crisp like the leaves that covered her driveway. She ran with music for the first week, thinking that increasing her musical exposure would be a good use of time. Her little brother let her use his iPod, but only if she promised to put new music on it and return it before he woke

up. It was too much of a hassle to sneak into his room each morning, much less figure out how to use iTunes. And even if she learned how to navigate the online music store, she didn't feel like making a habit that cost money. She didn't feel like making a habit that cost anything at all.

So that was why Shirley started praying. It was free, and seemed like a good way to occupy her mind while she ran in the mornings alone. To her, praying came off as the less egocentric version of talking to herself. After all, a lot of good people pray, she thought. She looked up some Youtube videos of people praying, just to get an idea of where to start, but that didn't help her much. There were a good number of videos featuring energetic preachers shouting prayers in city streets and others showing large crowds of people crying out in strange languages, so she tried Google instead. Each of the first three sites out of the 187 million results in 0.19 seconds from her search, "how to pray," gave her different instructions, so she decided there weren't really any rules at all. She had only to talk to God, whoever God happened to be.

She decided to pray silently, or whisper at most, to avoid drawing attention to herself in case she crossed someone's path as she ran in the mornings by herself. The last thing she needed was to entertain the neighborhood with loud rambling. What she had to say was between her and God alone, if some God cared to listen. Shirley's prayers began shyly, not because she was afraid of offending God, but because she wasn't sure what to say. She had never spoken to a complete stranger before.

"Dear God," she began, because it reminded her who she was talking to. "I'm Shirley, if you didn't know that already. I hope you don't mind me talking to you like this when I run in the mornings. I've heard that you like it when people pray to you. What sort of prayers are your favorites? You don't need to answer that." Shirley never pressured God into answering anything even though she was dying to know if he had any other names.

There were never many people out as early as Shirley, but she liked to imagine that those who were out had some special reason for being there. She imagined that her old, gray neighbor whose name she could never recall was out and about so early to embrace the new day with gratitude. The people she saw in the cemetery, she imagined, had come early to visit their loved ones in the lonely hours of the morning while no one else was around. She imagined them talking or crying or laughing, maybe even singing to a headstone until they noticed her

running by. She wished that they would keep on singing as she passed.

So that was why she decided to pray for the people she saw as she ran. She prayed that the old lady embracing the day would have many more to be thankful for and she prayed that God would let the cries and songs of the cemetery visitors be heard in heaven. “Dear God“ tumbled naturally out of her mouth as if she had been praying that way since childhood. She was pleased with how it felt rolling off of her tongue in a whisper. The words tasted so sweet on her mouth that she soon forgot that she had ever wondered about the name of the one she spoke to.

Upon returning home each morning, with her insides still steaming and skin still slimy with sweat, Shirley would stretch and sit on the top step of her front porch. She sat there in the moment between the preface and beginning of her day where the world seemed to offer endless opportunity. She stood and sighed a final “amen” before being swallowed up by the smells and sounds of her home. On most days, it smelled a lot like burning toast and sounded like her little brother practicing a new song on his guitar and her dad complaining about the damn toaster. Shirley never felt bad about leaving God out on the front step because it would be kind of creepy if he were to stalk her all day long.

After a few months of running alone in the mornings, Shirley started to notice things. She noticed that her little brother picked up playing the drums, and the sound of him practicing wasn’t contained within the walls of the house any more. The pounding and clanging from his drum set filled the entire valley with a heartbeat, but one that might need a check-up.

She noticed that her old, gray neighbor whose name she could never recall had started a ritual of combing her lawn for debris each morning. The antique lady would stoop down to pick up any leaf or scrap of anything and then shuffle over to her next-door neighbor’s bright blue garbage can to deposit her find. Shirley was pretty sure that the bright blue cans were made for recycling.

She noticed there was a woman jogging every Wednesday morning who always looked as if she was about to die. Her face displayed an odd combination of intensity and exhaustion, her brow crunched up and mouth flopped wide open. As she past, the woman would make a sound that was intended to be a greeting but fell somewhere in between a moan and hiccup instead.

She noticed a thin balding man wearing tight black and neon green pants and a wide grin who always zipped past on his

bike. He had one of those smiles that was far too happy to be real. It was a smile that said, "Good morning, sweaty neighbor. I am glad to see that you're trying to get your act together. And I'm glad that I'm in better shape than you. Isn't it obvious by the way my teeth are all showing at one time?" Once in spring, Shirley noticed that a gnat had hit the man's teeth and died there.

Shirley prayed for what she noticed. She prayed that the old lady whose name she still couldn't remember would be able to stand up straight again without breaking her back and that she would get her own can made for garbage, but she did not pray that she would remember the lady's name. She prayed that the jogging woman would make it home alive. And she prayed that she would keep her greetings to herself in the future, for the effect wasn't nearly worth the effort. Shirley didn't pray that the woman would quit running, only that she would quit trying to be friendly to every random passerby. Shirley prayed that the man on the bike would be kept from pride, and if he fell, she prayed that the fall would knock some sense into him and he would realize that he wasn't the only one who had the self-discipline to get out of bed in the morning. She did not pray that the gnats would steer clear of his teeth. Shirley laughed at her own prayers and wondered when she had become so cynical. But she didn't pray that she would be less cynical.

On days when Shirley didn't notice anything except the pattern of her own breathing and the sweat stinging the corners of her eyes, she prayed about things that seemed to matter, like world peace and a cure for cancer, for as long as she could stay focused. She sometimes asked questions, but since no one answered, she continued to talk to God about whatever came to mind.

"Well, God. It looks like it's just you and me out here today." She laughed at her idea of a prayer and imagined that God would be doing the same if he heard her.

After a year had passed, Shirley noticed that the cemetery people who had come to cry stopped coming after a little while, and those who talked to tombstones stopped talking after the first frost fell. Shirley learned that, in reality, no one sings to dead people. The only music that she ever heard in the graveyard came from a motion-activated, battery-powered star she encountered the first morning after the last New Year.

It was in the moment of the morning where everything is a dark, dull gray. The sky was gray and the silhouetted trees, headstones, and houses were all gray too. It was the kind of gray

that swallowed up any sound or sign of life. The air was so nasty cold and dry that it seemed to suck the breath straight out of Shirley's mouth, pinch her cheeks, and poke her eyes until tears came out. She was taking the turn of the cemetery path at the top of the hill where all the leftover dead people are stacked on shelves. She prayed that the ones in shelves wouldn't be bothered by the cold of this day since they had it bad enough already being stacked like a card catalog no one needs to use anymore. Then she ran around the corner and set it off.

She thought she must have jumped five feet in the air. After she landed with both feet planted on the ground from her initial launch and after silence returned, she stepped back onto the path like a soldier in a minefield.

When it went off a second time, she saw a blinking plastic star driven into the dirt with a medal tent stake near a small gravestone a foot to the left of the path. The light from the star illuminated the gravestone just enough for Shirley to read the words, "At home with God." She wondered what the dead person's name was but didn't want to get close enough to find out. The lighthearted melody of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" seemed out of place in the dark and cold cemetery. She stared at the artificial looking yellow glow until it disappeared as the song came to a close. Then she laughed. She laughed at how it startled her, but mostly she laughed at the thought of someone coming out to a cemetery in the dead of winter to rig up a motion-detecting music device to entertain the dead when no one wanted to go through the hassle of visiting.

She laughed a little each time she ran past the singing star and looked forward to hearing its simple tune morning after morning. She started enjoying it less after it began losing battery power. The star's gradual decline didn't surprise Shirley because nothing that convenient could ever last. If someone wanted their dearly beloved lulled to sweet music within the grave, they would have to stand by the headstone and sing it out. Shirley thought that the corpse would be more likely to hear the song if it was sung by a familiar voice anyhow. No one six feet under would bother listening to a sad little star stuck in the ground serenading a headstone with their name on it.

After a few weeks, the star glowed dimmer and "Twinkle, Twinkle" took on a sickening twang. Of course she could have avoided the motion detector altogether, but it became for her a kind of intriguing experiment. How long would the plastic gadget sing to

the body of a person it didn't know? She wanted to hear and see the star at each stage of its slow, dramatic death. It sounded like a dying duck and looked like a twitching cat's eye before it finally stopped responding to her jogging past. She didn't laugh the day it didn't play when she rounded the corner.

It was autumn again, the week before the beginning of another school year. Out of habit, Shirley ran through her neighborhood or the cemetery across the highway in the mornings as the sun was deciding whether or not to brighten another day. "Dear God" fell out of her mouth without any special thought now, just like a breath. Her lungs and heart had adjusted to the excitement of running, so her breaths no longer pained her. She didn't have to gasp for air with every step anymore.

The old lady whose name she had never bothered to learn stopped wandering around her front yard in the mornings. As the days passed, fallen leaves littered her lawn and the wind broke branches off the trees. Shirley was glad that she had never gotten to know the brittle lady in case she was gone for good. There was no need to get attached to someone just because she saw her day after day. She didn't even know her name. Shirley laughed to herself as she thought that maybe she should start looking for her old neighbor when she ran through the cemetery and came upon any new gravesite.

Shirley laughed about it while she ran in the mornings by herself until a sound in the cemetery caused her to stop dead in her tracks. She heard it as she was taking the turn of the cemetery path at the top of the hill. She thought that she had imagined the music and the crying until she noticed a figure draped in shadows kneeling in the dew-drenched grass in between the shelves of leftover dead bodies. The girl's sorrowful melody stopped when Shirley did, but quiet sobs and sniffles continued to chip away at the silence of the morning. It was as if Shirley had interrupted a sacred moment, a conversation between friends. She stood as still as her body would allow, but her heartbeat seemed to shake the ground and send out shockwaves to disrupt the air. As she turned slowly to walk away, Shirley heard two familiar words buried deep within the figure's sorrow – "Dear God," the person murmured between sobs, and it sounded as if she really meant for God to hear her. It was almost as if the mourning girl was praying to escape the solitude.

Shirley decided right then and there to stop praying. It wasn't because there were never any answers, because she never

expected there to be. And it wasn't because she ran out of things to say.

It was almost as if Shirley had become too familiar with someone she didn't even know. As if she had broken some unwritten rule about prayer. Like she was talking to herself in the name of prayer or laughing alone at her same joke day after day when it was never really funny.

The Bus Route

Hannah Jones

If there was a prize for “world’s shortest bus route,” Ed Garrison thought he might have a shot. With a grand total of one block from point A to point B, Ed’s bus route took him an average of ten seconds to complete either way—and he did time himself, racing his own personal bests. These little contests were what made the day doable when he worked his short route. In a heartbeat, he would trade it for a much longer, more arduous route, or a circuit in San Francisco during a freak ice storm. He would trade it for anything, really, besides driving a school bus, which he had done once and would never do again. Then again, there were some days when he thought may as well have been doing just that.

One day in late April, Ed pulled his bus into his stop bright and early at six in the morning, twisted the top off of his daily Diet Mountain Dew, and took the first fizzy swig of another day on the job. The morning was damp, but not quite cold, so Ed dressed in his old blue windbreaker and his Vikings cap—a refreshingly light ensemble after three and a half months of overcoats and stocking hats. He still hadn’t shaved off his winter beard, which had earned him the name “Mountain Man” among his coworkers. Too scary for schoolchildren, he’d been told. Fine with him. At six thirty, his first customer shuffled out of the drizzly mist.

He immediately recognized his silhouette, even in the gray of an early spring morning. Walt was a regular on Ed Garrison’s bus. A shriveled, bird-boned man with a nose the size and shape of a small eggplant, Walt walked with a peculiar, stiff-legged giddy-up, like one of those mechanical wind-up toys that ambled in circles until their keys stopped turning. Walt approached the bus stop like a man on a mission, looking directly at the ground in front of him and seldom blinking. Ed pulled the lever and opened the door for him.

“Good morning, sir,” he said. Walt didn’t answer, but immediately began the painstaking process of pulling himself by the railing onto the bus, a long, arduous task for a man with roughly as much muscle tone as a buffalo wing. “Would you like any help?” Ed asked.

“Fuck you,” Walt spat. Ed took another swig of his Diet

Dew and settled into his chair, keeping an eye on Walt. He did eventually make it up the steps, and chose a window seat halfway down the aisle. Ed watched him in his rearview mirror. Walt stared out of the glass, his mouth slightly open, panting from exertion, his eyes flitting across the scenery like agitated moths.

“Where are we going today?” Ed asked him.

“The Ringling Brother’s Circus,” Walt breathed. Ed sighed, put the bus in gear, and started counting. By the time he reached ten, he had pulled into their destination. Silver Maples Rest Home, with its revolving door and its pristine artificial pond and walking paths could have resembled a fairly classy hotel if not for the typical ambulances parked out front. Supposedly the place was upscale as far as elder homes went, but every so often, a confused or restless tenant would wander his or her way outside and make a break for the nearest bus stop. There, Ed Garrison waited, collected the senior citizen escapees, and drove them directly back to the rest home they had just attempted to leave. Walt, however, wandered far more often than any other resident Ed knew of. Several attendants were already waiting for Walt when Ed made his stop. Without missing a beat, a stout nurse with wavy chestnut hair boarded the bus and made her way to Walt’s seat.

“Mister Travis, it’s breakfast time. We need to go back to your room now,” she said, placing a hand on Walt’s shoulder.

“Fuck you, I’m going to the circus,” Walt exclaimed, shrugging away.

“Mister Travis, we’re going to get your chair and lower you off the bus with the ramp in the back, okay?”

“Kidnapping! I’m being kidnapped!” Walt bellowed. Ed opened the back door of the bus and took another drink, trying his best to ignore Walt’s screeches as two nurses gently but firmly placed him in his chair and rolled him off the bus. By the time they had him on the ground, however, he had quieted down and seemingly accepted defeat, a petulant glower puckering his raisin face as they rolled him through the revolving door. Ed capped his Diet Dew, put the bus in gear, and drove back to his post.

As he counted the seconds and the lampposts that floated by (nine and three respectively) Ed swilled the electric green liquid in his soda bottle and chastised himself for not getting coffee instead. Ed Garrison had never been a habitual coffee drinker. While his colleagues crowded around the office brewer for their cups of joe, he would politely decline offers to pour him a cup and stick

to his sugary, carbonated drinks for his morning caffeine boost. However, on a previous Tuesday—or perhaps it was a Thursday—Ed had been forced into another part of town for his lunch break by a construction-induced detour. Unfamiliar with the fast food in the area and running short on time, he had hastily entered a Starbucks in hopes they had something decent for lunch. In Ed’s opinion, they didn’t, but as he paid for his lukewarm egg and sausage sandwich, he found himself sidetracked by the curly-haired cashier who handed him his change and told him she liked his beard. She had long, slender fingers, he noticed, and a smattering of tiny freckles across her nose. She asked him whether he was getting anything to drink, and when he jokingly admitted that he didn’t even like coffee, she laughed. Her nose wrinkled up and the freckles wiggled and danced and he saw all of her teeth, which were yellowed and crowded and honest.

That’s when Ed decided that he would not shave the beard, and he would try to like coffee a little more.

* * *

At seven ten, his next passengers arrived. By that time, the sun was finally up and shining at full force behind a sheen of pearly gray clouds, evaporating some of the damp residue of the night before and making it warm enough for Ed to remove his windbreaker. The two figures slowly approaching in his rearview mirror had their arms stiffly linked. Awkwardly, they pulled and stumbled in different directions, unable to agree on a cohesive rhythm for their walk. Ed pulled the lever and opened the door for them.

Walt stood in the doorway, dressed this time in a worn trench coat that engulfed his thin body and a matching hat that balanced precariously on his wing nut ears. He had on his arm a stooped old woman with hair as blue and wispy as cotton candy, who was wearing a fur coat that appeared to be shedding silver hairs wherever she went.

“After you,” Walt said, impatiently gesturing to the steps. The old woman smiled up at Ed, her grin warm but a little crooked in the jaw, and sweetly asked if the nice young man with the purple hat would help her. Ed rose from his chair and offered her both of his arms, being as delicate as he could in lifting the fragile blue-haired lady onto the bus.

“So polite, so kind,” she crooned, fishing around in a frayed

satin handbag. "Here's a little something for you."

"I couldn't," Ed protested, but the woman pressed a something into his palm anyway. Ed took a look and saw that he had been given a button and two bobby pins.

"Let's go, Stretch, my date and I have places to be," Walt grouched, hauling himself onto the bus.

"Where are we going again?" the woman asked.

"The goddamn circus, Hilda."

"Oh, the circus!" Hilda cried. "I adore circus elephants! I rode an elephant once, in the Orient. Back then, of course, my husband owned all the bananas in Borneo, and could afford it, but it was dreadfully exciting—"

"Shut your fool mouth, Hilda," Walt growled, plunking himself next to her. "Well, Stretch, don't just stand there; we're going to miss the acrobats!" Ed sat down, put the bus in gear, and started counting.

By the time he reached eleven this time, he had pulled up to the rest home. A nurse boarded the bus and immediately stood next to Walt, who was sitting with his spindly legs splayed open and his arm around Hilda's shoulders like a high-roller in a limo. "Mister Travis, what are you doing?" the nurse asked.

"Going to the goddamn circus! What the hell does it look like?" he asked.

"Oh, the circus!" Hilda said. "Can we go see the elephants? I rode one, once, in the Orient..."

"Shut up, Hilda," Walt barked.

"No circus today, Mister Travis. We've been through this. Do you remember?"

"No."

"Well, we have been. We're getting chairs for the both of you."

Ed realized he was out of Diet Dew as Hilda and Walt were carted away, Walt cussing up a storm the entire time. Calmly, Ed reached into an insulated lunchbox by his chair and pulled out a fresh bottle. While he drove back to his pickup point, he thought about Walt and Hilda feeding peanuts to elephants and smiled a little.

* * *

A day or two after that fateful Tuesday or Thursday, Ed

Garrison had seen the same construction detour in place and zipped to Starbucks without a second thought. He hadn't been entirely certain what to expect, but he had been entirely unprepared to see the same curly-haired, freckled cashier ringing up a business executive's latte with a polite smile. A middle-aged woman in a sweatsuit pushed past him, and he realized he had been standing, inert, in the doorway of a coffee shop and staring like an idiot. He cleared his throat and bumbled inside, throwing himself in line while attempting to drudge up something funny to say about coffee.

Too quickly for comfort, he found himself facing her, looking at her adorable freckles and her honest teeth, and she was asking him what he would like that day. Suddenly, her eyes widened, and her smile widened with it. "You came in here the other day, didn't you?" she asked. "I remember your beard." Ed could only smile and nod in reply. He had forgotten how to talk altogether. After a brief, awkward silence, she asked him if she could get him anything. Ed confessed, truthfully, that he didn't drink coffee, and he didn't know what to get. She recommended a drink: some artisanal, flavored brew with pumpkin spice in the name. He barely managed to accept, dropping his wallet twice in the process of paying. Then she got him his coffee, he thanked her, and left. The meeting hadn't exactly been groundbreaking. He had made an idiot of himself in front of a pretty girl, he still didn't know said girl's name, he hadn't gotten anything for lunch, and the drink had tasted like a scented candle. Since then, Ed had not gone back to Starbucks.

* * *

That day in late April, Ed had a twenty-five minute break for his lunch at eleven, and for five of them, he had been staring at his dashboard, completely immobile. The construction was gone, and the detour with it. On a normal day, he would go directly to Arby's and get a large roast beef sandwich and a small helping of curly fries. The employees there knew his order and knew exactly what drink that went with it. That day, however, Ed was paralyzed by a seemingly small decision. He could go to Arby's, just as he would on a normal day, or, instead, he could go to Starbucks.

He had no idea if the freckled cashier would be working, or if she would remember him, or if she would still think he was funny. He thought, irrationally, that she might call him out; you don't even like coffee—what are you even doing here? The whole scene played

in his mind over and over for another five minutes. The prospect of being humiliated and interrogated in the middle of Starbucks terrified him. But then there was the alternative: a roast beef sandwich, a small carton of fries—a normal day. Nothing special ever happened on a normal day. Fifteen minutes into his lunch break, Ed finally stepped on the gas. He had wasted too much time deliberating, and with only ten minutes left to pick up lunch, the adjacent McDonald's was his only option.

The cashier there did not know his order, and did not have freckles. Ed ordered a Big Mac in a monotone and did not smile. He told himself not to be sour and simply enjoy his burger. After all, what was he really missing out on? In what universe did Ed Garrison, the thickset third grader who brought his He-Man action figures to school with him, Ed Garrison, the pimpled high schooler who couldn't make the football team no matter how many times he tried out, Ed Garrison, the bearded bus driver with the world's shortest bus route, get cute cashiers from Starbucks? He was fortunate not to have gone. He only would have embarrassed himself.

Ed came back to the job with a Big Mac and a bad mood.

* * *

As the last bite of Ed's Big Mac was going down like a lump of wet cement, a lone figure tottered toward his bus stop. Ed opened the door for his passenger, who wore a familiar trench coat and hat, but with the addition of an oversized pair of sunglasses and a kerchief tied around his considerable nose. Ed took a second just to take it all in.

"What are you staring at, Stretch?" Walt barked, his voice muffled by his kerchief.

"Nothing, sir, nothing," Walt said.

"Now, keep real cool, Stretch," Walt said, hauling himself into the bus. "I'm on the lam. I'll pay you for your trouble, once I square a few debts, but I need you to take me to—"

"The Ringling Brother's Circus," Ed finished dryly. Walt paused mid step, taken aback.

"How did you know? You been spying on me? You with those goddamn commies back at the—?"

"Walt, I literally see you at least five times every single day," Ed said.

"How did you know my—?"

“You try to get out of the rest home at least five times a day, Walt, and you always come to my bus stop, and I always take you back, and you never remember. We have been doing this for months.” He had never before told the old man that they had ever met, that he was Ed’s chief passenger in his sad, short little bus route back to the rest home. Almost immediately he regretted having said anything, but he found he couldn’t retract the statement. Weeks of the same routine, the same roast beef sandwiches and the same stream of cusses had come to a head, and Ed could no longer let the whole charade wash over him. Besides, he realized, if he offended the old man in any way, he wouldn’t remember the incident after about two hours’ separation, at which point he would attempt another escape and board the bus yet again. Ed examined Walt’s disguised face in his rearview mirror. He couldn’t see much of him behind the glasses and the kerchief, but he could hear his leathery cheeks pouching in and out as he huffed and spluttered. Finally, he came up with an adequate retort:

“Fuck you, that’s a lie.”

“It’s not a lie. And let me tell you something else: this escape plan has never worked. Not once. Not even close. And yet you still do it. It’s wasted energy.” Walt, for the first time, was silent. At the lack of an answer, Ed put the bus in gear and pulled away from the curb.

“Are you taking me back?” Walt asked quietly.

“Yes,” Ed replied.

“You do this every day?” he asked. “Five times?”

“You heard right,” Ed said. “But you won’t remember.”

“Fuck you, I remember just fine.” Ed shook his head and pulled up to the rest home.

“Why don’t you just stay inside for the rest of the day?” he asked. “Why do you even bother? You’ll just come back to me, and I’ll just take you back here.” Walt, his crabbed old hand shaking up a storm, removed his sunglasses and eyed Ed through the rearview mirror.

“In my day,” he said, “even when the odds were against us, we never, ever gave up.”

That’s when the nurse came on the bus, placing her hands on her hips and sighing wearily. “Mister Travis, we’re going to take you back to your room now,” she said.

“Leave me be,” Walt snapped at her.

“We’re getting you a chair.”

“I’ll piss on it.”

“Come on, Mister Travis...”

“Wait,” Ed found himself saying. The nurse turned, perplexed. In all his days driving his bus, he realized he had never once spoken to her, in spite of the fact that she daily boarded the bus repeatedly just to collect her charge.

“Yes?” she asked, prompting him.

“What if... what if I just took him where he wanted to go?” Ed asked. The nurse furrowed her brow.

“Where does he want to go?” she asked.

“The goddamn circus!” Walt roared.

“The goddamn circus,” Ed affirmed. “I could just take him on a little trip there, stay for a few minutes, maybe look at the elephants, and bring him back. Then he’s happy, and you guys don’t have to chase after him as much.”

“I got out once, I can do it again!” Walt thundered.

“Not once, five times a day,” Ed corrected.

“Fuck you.”

“Is the circus even in town?” the nurse asked, folding her arms. This hadn’t occurred to Ed. The Ringlings, he was fairly certain, had not had a circus in these parts for quite some time.

“I- I don’t know,” he confessed. “I could look it up on my phone, or maybe if there isn’t one in town, just take him to the zoo or something.” The nurse silently raised an eyebrow. “I’m responsible, and I can keep an eye on him,” Ed insisted. “After all, after weeks of driving him around, we practically know each other.”

“I have no idea who the hell you are!”

“Or, anyway, I know him.”

“I don’t think that’s going to work,” the nurse said quickly, shaking her head.

“Why not?” Ed asks. “He wants this more than anything, and I can just take some time at the end of my shift, and—”

“I don’t need a goddamn babysitter! Just take me to the circus!” Walt yelled.

“We can’t just take a resident out on a daytrip with a chaperone we don’t know,” the nurse said, ignoring him. “He has an entire binder full of medications and diet specifications that you don’t know about, and he has to be twenty feet from emergency equipment at all times.”

“Please,” Ed said, looking up at the nurse. “He wants this.” Her brow creased and her eyes guiltily averted, she compressed her

lips into a thin line and shook her head.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “We just can’t do it.”

Ed watched as the nurses placed the wheelchair on the ramp, letting it rise with painstaking slowness and cumbersome whirring, the wings of fate for Walt and his trip to the circus. Ed turned around in his chair and racked his brain for something to say to the old man, who merely glowered at the back of the seat in front of him and as his chariot slowly rose to claim him.

“I’m sorry,” Ed said, as quietly as he dared to a man with questionable hearing ability. “They just won’t go for it. They’re not going to let you go.” Walt shrugged, his bony shoulder rising and falling without so much as a spare “goddamn” or “fuck.” Ed realized that he could never envision Walt doddering the hours away at checkers or taking strolls around the pond at Silver Maples. “What are you going to do now?” Ed asked. Walt raised his head and looked Ed directly in the eye, his gaze surprisingly sharp in spite of the watery eyes and the eggplant nose and the ridiculous tufts of ear hair sprouting like mushrooms from the wing nuts on either side of his head.

“Well,” Walt said, “I’m going to see you tomorrow, Stretch. That’s what I’m going to do.” Before Ed could make a reply, the regular brigade of nurses had arrived with Walt’s chair, loaded the old man up, and carted him to the ramp. Ed watched him pass through the revolving door, his gaze set forward, unwavering.

It was a few moments before Ed finally put the bus in gear and eased it out of its parking spot. It took him only eight seconds to get back to his post, and thirty six minutes later, his shift ended, and he set off once again to retire the bus at the garage for the evening. He was quiet and thoughtful with his coworkers, most of which were busy recounting stories from busing children to and from school that day. John, a big-bellied school bus driver, hefted the coffee pot and offered Ed a cup. Ed politely declined, and, after a beat, said he was going out to get a cup later.

In his own car, Ed set out from the garage before he could change his mind. On his way, he came to a Cub Foods and pulled into the parking lot. He darted into the grocery store and came out again with a package of cotton candy and a five-dollar copy of Water For Elephants on DVD. From there, he made a quick stop at Silver Maples rest home, leaving the grocery sack at the reception desk with a request to have it delivered to Walt Travis’s room. The receptionist smiled and asked who she should say whom it was from. Ed thought a moment, then replied: “Stretch.”

He opened the door and strode inside, running his hand over his beard and praying his trip would not have been in vain. Miraculously, there she was, handing a small hot chocolate to a little girl in a puffy pink coat. She looked up and saw him, looked directly at him. Her smile was warm, her teeth truthful. Ed approached the counter.

“Hey,” she said, as if greeting an old friend.

“Hey,” he responded in the same tone.

“Getting some coffee?” she asked. “I can recommend something, if you’d like.”

“What’s your favorite?” Ed asked.

“Cinnamon latte,” she replied, “with soy and low sugar, but that’s just sort of a personal preference...”

“I’ll take that,” Ed said. “Exactly that.” She looked a little perplexed, but her nose wrinkled playfully as she set about preparing the drink. Ed paid, and she handed him the cup. Immediately, he handed it back to her. “From me,” he said. She hesitated, looking at the cup, looking at him. Ed, with his unspoken request cradled in a cup of coffee, waited tensely for a response. The thought crossed his mind: what if he was rejected? What was he going to do? The thought was replaced with the memory of Walt’s face, and Ed contented himself to keep waiting. He had gotten on board—time then to hope he was going in the right direction.

She smiled a smile of crowded, honest teeth, and took the cup.





Letters from the Editors

First and foremost, thank you to everyone who submitted this year. Satori would not be possible without you. The many difficult decisions that we were forced to make this year prove that Winona is full of talented writers. In the end, there was no doubt in our minds that these works were the very best and should represent Winona State University. Congratulations to those who were accepted, and we look forward to another year and another successful magazine!

Elise Nelson

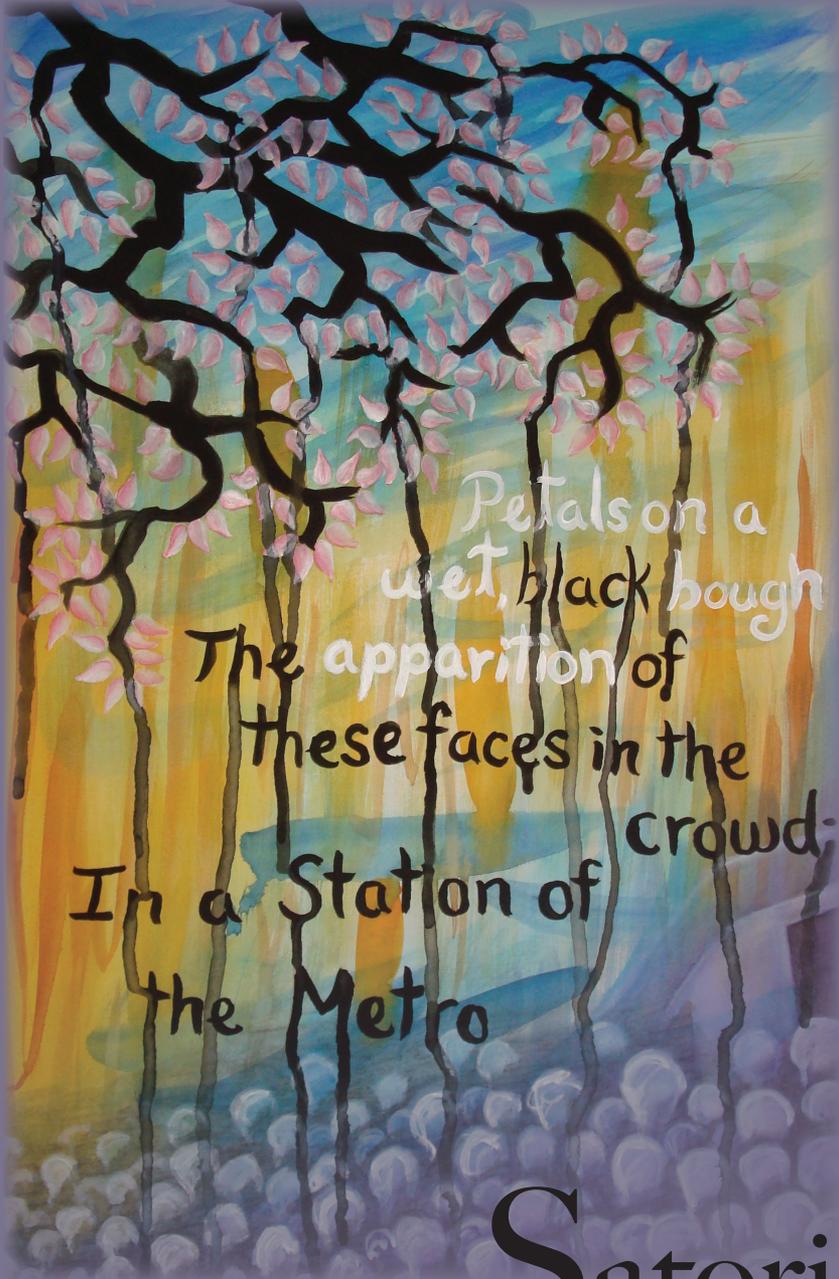
It was an absolute delight working with the Art committee this year. There were some fantastic submissions, and it was really difficult deciding the final entries. Winona State has amazing talent, and we should all be proud to call ourselves Warriors.

Abigail Peschges

Thanks to this year's Prose committee for their hard work and honest discussion. We got this done because of you. I am especially grateful to the writers who submitted this year. Whether or not your piece was accepted, thank you for giving us the opportunity to read your work. Satori has been a rewarding experience. I hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as I enjoyed helping to make it happen.

A. Kathryn Barrett





Petals on a
wet, black bough
The apparition of
these faces in the
crowd;
In a Station of
the Metro

Satori