

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

2014

Scribendi

CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST

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Thank You

Scribendi is the publication of the winning entries of the Utah State University Creative Writing and Art Contest, which is open to all USU undergraduate and graduate students from all departments and disciplines. This year, the contest received 165 entries from students in 22 different areas of study across 7 colleges, bringing together writers from nearly all parts of campus, and demonstrating that USU's writing community is strong and growing.

We want to thank everyone involved: first our USU students for writing and submitting; our dedicated judges for their expertise; the English Department, CHaSS, and USUSA for funding; and Crumb Brothers for helping us to thank our judges for their time.

And as contest director, I also want to thank our three fantastic interns for all their hard work making the contest run smoothly, and for putting out a stellar edition of Scribendi. Caitlin, Shay, and Allie—you rock!

~Charles Waugh

The online version of Scribendi is available on campus at USU's English Department website or at www.scribendi.usu.edu. Off-campus access can be found at the same address through the VPN.

STAFF

We'd also like to thank the English Department office staff—Robin Wheelwright, Annie Neilson, Rebecca Saunders, Kuniko Poole, and Lori Hyde—for all their fantastic assistance. We couldn't run the contest without you!

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Cover Image
"Frozen" by Wonjun Han
First Place Undergraduate Art

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First Place Undergraduate Fiction

The Last Stop for Bus 59

by Mitch Hawk

I repeatedly adjusted myself on the plastic blue seat cushion. Butt imprints from strangers were permanently worn into it. A thin piece of plastic, my thrift store jeans, and Spiderman underwear were all I had to separate me from the cold metal. I took my puffy gray Disneyland winter coat off and folded it underneath me, but quickly returned it to my shaking shoulders. Last year Carl, our bus driver, promised the heater would be fixed by now. I continued moving every couple of minutes from the aisle seat to the window seat, following the air my tiny frame pushed from one side to the other. I finally gave up on trying to catch the part of the seat with the airiest cushion and looked over the messages people had left scribbled on the back of the seat in front of me. They were all the same, the majority were just bad words we weren't supposed to say out loud, like shithead and bastard. On Monday when I sat down on the bus after school there was a new message, "No one likes you Jack-off. You faggot!!!!" I looked in my backpack to see if I could find anything to cover up the black marker, but I was only able to find half a black colored pencil in the pile of pencil shavings and tiny ripped up papers at the bottom. I scribbled over it, but the message was still clear. I heard Tony and the cooler kids laughing at me from the back of the bus. I brought a marker the next day and was able to cover it up better, but it doesn't really matter because I still remember what the black blotch says.

At the beginning of each year, the oldest kids in the back told us where we were allowed to sit. This year I told everyone how much I hated the seat with the bulging wheel arc, so Tony, the oldest and coolest kid, gave it to me. I liked



"Under the Tree" by Wonjun Han
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention

having my feet sit on top of the large bump. I could hunch over and wrap my awkwardly long arms around my legs and stay warmer. I sat up straight so I could scan the rest of the bus to see who was left. I could see Carl smiling and bobbing his head up and down in the large mirror. His hair makes a W shape on his head and each year it seems like the W swoops are getting deeper and deeper. But the peppered hair he has left is still really long and pulled back into a greasy pony tail. Our bus route was known for having the oldest bus at our school, but it never seemed to bother Carl. Through the rear view mirror I was able to see a majority of the rest of the bus, but not quite the very last seats. I assumed I was almost home because most of my sixth grade class was gone except for Johnny and his sister Suzie, who were my only neighbors for a couple of miles. Suzie was only seven, but since our school held grades kindergarten through eighth we rode on the same bus. Johnny believed himself to be mature enough to not participate in childish things, like sitting in the back because of your seniority or level of coolness. He was in the eighth grade. I kneeled

down on the floor beside the wheel bump and peeked around the corner to get a better view of the back. Tony was the last stop on the bus route and his friend Riley was with him. Tony was fat, but for some reason always called it “big-boned.” His opposite, Riley, was a twig, only a little bigger than me. They sat facing each other. Tony’s hands laid flat below Riley’s extended fists. Tony would quickly try to slap one of Riley’s fists hard before Riley moved them out of the way. An argument broke out and Riley yelled, “You missed!” But Tony won and continued slapping Riley’s fists. I bet they’re going to have a sleep over and brag next week about stealing Tony’s dad’s alcohol or something. No one ever believed them because of all the lies they always told. Riley saw me looking back at them and nudged Tony.

Tony looked right at me and barked, “What are you looking at, Jack-off?” He yelled it too loud and Carl was able to hear it over the “Down on the corner, out in the street” song playing over the speakers.

“Hey! Tony! Come on man, why do you have to be so mean? No name calling here.” Carl said through the speakers. I looked at him over my shoulder and he shot me a wink and a smile. I turned back, facing my seat, and pulled out my drawing notebook that my dad got me for my birthday. The 100 pages were already almost halfway full after only having it for one month. Even though my dad forgot my exact birthday and gave it to me a couple days late, I was happy he remembered what I had asked for. For a long time I was just using my #2 pencil, but my art teacher, Miss Lowery, let me borrow a set of Faber-Castell 9000 Graphite Sketch Pencils Art 8B-2H. She told me that the 2H referred to the hardness of the lead, and the 8B was the blackness. I carefully thumbed my way to the back blank page to experiment with the different styles.

Most of the pages were drawings of different things I imagined I would be doing with my mom if she were still here. We were riding horses, fishing, feeding chickens, and reading at night next to the wood burning stove in our old house. Whenever I added her to my drawings I would have to go back and change the quiet, straight-lipped faces of me and my Dad. My favorite is of my mom reading my favorite book, *Hatchet*, by the light of the stove. Father didn’t really care too much for reading, but whenever we read Gary Paulsen books he would lean against the wall behind us and listen as Mom talked in accents and changed the intensity and softness of her voice with each new scene. Dad thought no one could see him listening, but my Mom and I would smile at each other when we saw his reflection in the china cabinet near the front of the room. Looking at this picture, I could almost always concentrate and hear her voice reading the opening story of the plane crash. Then I could close my eyes and listen to her forever.

While listening to my Mom’s quiet and panicky voice, a loud grinding noise exploded from underneath the bus and brought me back to reality. Carl started moving his arms frantically and looking at the different dials on the dash. I struggled putting the pencils back in the case, then zipped them shut in my front small pocket of my back pack. I put my drawings in the big pocket. This wasn’t the first time this old bus had done this, but the grinding was getting so loud I had to cover my ears and press my face down into the seat. I looked down and realized I left the big pocket half opened but I couldn’t bring my frozen arms down to close it.

“Kids, everything’s fine...” Carl was interrupted by an even louder explosion right underneath me. The weight of the bus shifted and I fell into the side wall, hitting my head hard. The grinding noise was even louder now, and I could see out my window thousands of tiny sparks flying around the air being extinguished by all the snow on the ground. I imagined a large fireball flying through the deep white snow. Suzie’s screaming was even louder than the broken bus and Johnny was holding her tight, trying to calm her down. I was shaking so bad that grabbing my prayer rock from my pant pocket seemed harder than coloring inside the lines.

My grandma gave me the tiny rock just a month before she passed away. I finally got a hold of it, and held it out in my clenched fists. I squeezed my eyes shut and started praying, *Please save us God, Please save us*. The cold air in the bus was quickly tainted with burnt rubber, but we were still going fast. I peeked one eye open and watched a blur of a tree fly by the window. I covered it again and kept them closed. I could feel the bus started to slide sideways. Something warm was streaming down my head and onto my right cheek.

Tony was crying in the back and Riley kept yelling, “We’re gonna die!” his voice was higher than usual. The bus finally felt like it was slowing down. I got up from the floor and looked up at Carl. I couldn’t see the

road out the front window. All I could see was white, and then I realized we were about to hit a high piled snow bank. "Hold on!" Carl yelled. Sweat was dripping down the balding arcs of his forehead and his eyes were opened wider than his half-mooned glasses.

We hit head on into the snow bank. The collision threw me into the back of the seat in front of me and I dropped to the floor. I coughed and blew dust out of the steel ridges on the floor. I slowly sat up into my seat and looked at the large dent my body made in the back of the seat. There was a little bit of dark red blood splattered on the seat I never noticed before. I heard Carl's loud army boots walking down the ribbed metal aisle. Suzie's crying changed from yelling to whimpering and Ryan was trying to calm Tony down. Carl stopped at my seat first on his way towards the back.

"You alright kid?" he asked.

For a moment I couldn't say anything. My throat was tight and made it difficult to breathe. Finally I said, "I'm alright". I looked up at Carl but he wasn't looking back at my eyes. He was staring at my head.

"Here, you have a little cut on your head." He opened up the first aid kit he was carrying and pulled out a thick white pack that was fluffy like a cloud. "Hold this down on your cut." He placed the cloud on my upper right forehead where I hit the side wall earlier. He then pulled out a beige colored roll of something and starting wrapping it around my head, "This is to hold down the gauze."

The sun was covered up right now and all the lights were on inside the bus. There were lights in the ceiling every third or fourth seat. I never really noticed them before. I stood up and felt blood rush to my head quickly. I collapsed dizzily into my seat. After a minute or so I slowly stood back up in the aisle and watched Carl as he checked on Johnny and Suzie, then Tony and Riley. Johnny and Suzie happened to be in a seat that was right below one of the main lights. Suzie's eyes were red and puffed up, Johnny was nodding something to Carl, who continued on to the back after learning that Suzie

and Johnny were alright. Tony and Riley were OK too. Tony was shaking a little and held strict eye contact with Carl. Riley rubbed his eyes over and over again, like he was trying to rub himself out of a bad dream.

I walked to the front of the bus with Carl.

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

"Well, I'm gonna try and radio for someone to come and help us out. Then we'll pop the hood and try to see what happened" Carl said.

"Do you want my help?"

Carl smiled, "You're a good kid, Jack. I like you. But I need you to stay inside here and keep everybody safe. Can you watch everyone in here for me?"

"Yeah, I can do that."

"Thanks kid."

Carl turned forward in his seat and started talking into his black radio. I went back to my seat and sat down. I reached below me seat to grab my chocolate snack-pack out of my back pack, but it wasn't there. I dropped to the floor and scanned underneath the seats. Somehow it had ended up at least eight or so seats towards the back of the bus. The snack-pack had fallen out and was laying upside down next to my back pack. Normally I wasn't allowed to go back that far, but I figured that Tony was still recovering from the accident, so he wouldn't reinforce his rules. I walked past Johnny and Suzie.

"Are you guys OK?" I asked.

"We'll be alright" Johnny answered. He was placing Suzie's doll and notebooks back in her backpack. His dad owned a big farm out here and even at Johnny's young age he was pretty muscular. "What happened to your head?"

"I hit it on the corner of the wall below the window of my seat." I folded my arms and leaned into the front seat casually.

"It looks like it must have hurt pretty bad" Johnny offered.

"It wasn't too bad" I said, touching the newly wrapped bandage across my head.

"Is that blood on your face?" Suzie shrieked and quickly hid her face in her brothers brown Carhart jacket.

I reached up and wiped my right cheek. Fresh blood from my head found its way past the bandage. "Sorry," I said.

"You're a tough guy, Jack," Johnny said.

I nodded a thank-you and straightened my back as I continued to my backpack.

At each new set of seats, I scanned to my right trying to find where my backpack landed. I was getting closer to Tony and Riley, both of them seemed to be

trying really hard to cover up their shock from the accident. As I inspected the third to last seat Tony held my backpack up with his hand, “looking for this?” The backpack was shaking in his hand; Tony was still nervous and shaken up.

I looked at him and felt my heart beat hit harder and faster against my chest. “Give it back,” I tried making my voice deeper but it backfired and cracked mid-sentence.

Riley laughed, “What was that?”

“Sounds like were talking to Suzie, not Jack-off” Tony said. He was being more bully-ish than usual, like he was making up for looking like a chicken earlier.

My back curved and my shoulders slouched down, not knowing what to say. I looked down at the floor and felt my normal, shy personality replacing my short-lived courage. “Just, please give it back.”

“Why should I give this to you? I found it. Finders keepers” Tony said.

“That’s my backpack, it slid down here on accident.” I tried to defend myself.

“Come and take it from me” Tony said, no longer joking.

I looked up at him. He had gotten out of his seat and was standing in the aisle straight across from me, the backpack hanging from his left hand. He was wearing black pants and a black coat. His shoes were really clean and nice. He always had new clothes. We were about the same height, but I knew I was a lot skinnier than him. I started inching forward, just grab it and run back, you can do it. I was finally within arm’s reach and stood there, looking down at it.

“Well? What are you waiting for?” Tony asked.

I reached for it as fast as I could, but he threw it down behind him and pushed me back. I stumbled backward a couple of steps then finally fell down. My butt hit hard on the cold metal floor. Someone’s arms reached around me from behind and lifted me up to my feet. After helping me up, Johnny walked straight at Tony, who reluctantly moved out of Johnny’s way. Johnny grabbed the backpack and looked straight at Tony.

“What? We were just playing around” Tony said.

Johnny shook his head and returned the backpack to me.

“Thanks,” I said.

“No problem, Jack” Johnny said.

I opened the tiny pocket in the front to see if my snack pack was still good or if it maybe burst opened during the accident. When I looked inside, all I could see were pens, pencils and a broken pack of lead with tiny fragments strewn inside.

“Mmm mmm,” Tony said, “This is so good.”

Riley was laughing and pointing at me. I turned around and walked back to my seat. As I sat down Carl was standing back up and facing all of us.

“Good news everyone,” Carl announced “I finally got a hold of Sherrie and she’ll be here in about twenty minutes to rescue all of us.”

“Twenty minutes,” Riley complained “We’re gonna die from frost bite in here!”

“Oh you’ll be OK, Riley,” Carl said, “Just snuggle up with Tony there and keep each other warm.” He winked at me after he said it.

I looked back and Tony pushed Riley out of the seat they were sharing and into the aisle. Tony made Riley sit across from him, trying to cover up their embarrassment. The windows were all fogged up, so I pulled my coat sleeve over my hand and wiped at my window to look outside. Large pieces of black rubber were strung out across the new road our bus had made. There weren’t any houses in sight, just miles and miles of snow covered farm land. In Reno your family either farmed, or worked in the mine. My dad worked at the mine, but chose to live far out here so he could drink and watch football in peace. Suddenly a strong gust of cold air rushed through the entire bus. I pulled my arm away from the window and held myself trying to block the cold. Carl was going outside to look at the engine to find out what was wrong. Johnny ran passed me and followed Carl outside. Johnny was always talking about his hot-wheels collection and couldn’t pass up on the opportunity to look at an engine. I watched as Carl tried to refuse him, but he gave in pretty quickly, smiling and putting his arm around Johnny as they went outside.

I flipped through the pages of my drawing notebook, trying to find a blank one to pass the time with. I stopped and looked at one I drew a couple of weeks ago. The back drop was a large mountain, and lots and lots of trees covered the sides of the paper. In the middle was a large opening with a tiny cabin in the space. It wasn’t big, but it was big enough. My dad, mom and I were standing in front of the cabin. Mom was kind of short, like me. Dad says I’m mostly like her, but I got my courage from him.

I started drawing a big picture of her. I decided to draw her playing volleyball; that was her favorite sport and she was really good at it. I pictured her with long black hair pulled back in a ponytail. She was skinny. I think she probably always smiled, but stuff like that is getting harder and harder to remember. My imagination was running, but my pencil laid still across the blank surface. She was hard to draw, so I started on the net. I heard Suzie yell, "Stop it!" I turned around and saw Tony rummaging through her back pack.

"What's this?" Tony asked Suzie, "looks like we found something to blow up this weekend Riley!" Tony threw a blond doll at Riley, who caught it and shoved it in his backpack.

"Give her back!" Suzie pleaded.

"You just sit there and make sure your big brother doesn't find out," Riley said.

Tony continued going through her things. I stood up and said, "Give her doll back."

"What did you say?" Tony asked "Come say it to my face."

I sat back down in my seat, scared to face Tony with Carl and Johnny still outside. I looked down at the empty part of the seat and saw my prayer rock shoved between the back rest and butt rest. I pulled it out and knelt up on the seat. Suzie was starting to cry and Tony was pretending to kiss another doll on the lips. I held my arm back, please don't hit Suzie, and threw it fast into the air. Tony had his eyes closed and didn't see it coming. The rock hit him right above his left eye.

"Ouch!" Tony yelled. I peeked at him above my seat. He looked right at me and stood up, making his way towards the front.

I got on the floor and crawled my way towards the front underneath the seats.

"Where are you, Jack-off?" Tony yelled, "I'm gonna beat your ass!"

My heart was racing. I couldn't hear him anymore and thought maybe he went back to get something. A pair of hands grabbed my ankles and pulled me out into the aisle.

"Got ya!" Tony said.

I stayed down on the ground and held my hands out in front of my face, waiting for the punches. Tony kneeled down and sat on top of my stomach. Suzie started yelling for help. He was a little fat, and it made it hard to breathe. With his left hand he pushed my hands aside and his right fist crashed hard into the side of my head. That spot began pulsating rapidly and my head almost immediately started to throb. His left fist punched my right ribs. The air was completely sucked out

of me. I panicked at the lack of oxygen and violently bucked him off of me. For a second I caught a glimpse of Riley who was hovered over Suzie, like he was threatening her to stop yelling. I turned over on my knees and started crawling away. No matter how much I tried sucking in air, it wasn't working. I couldn't even talk. Tony's right hand pulled on my left shoulder and flipped me around onto my back again. Riley yelled at Tony to stop, that it was enough. Then the bus door swung open and the cold air flashed through the bus. As the cool air was passing over me, I was finally able to take a breath. The chilling air stung my throat and lungs.

"Get off him!" Carl yelled.

I heard Tony run away and Carl was kneeling over me, helping me to my feet. I looked up and saw Johnny running over to Suzie. My head hurt pretty bad and there was a sharp stinging in my right side that I never thought was going to go away.

"Are you OK, buddy?" Carl asked me, "What happened?"

I tried to slow my breathing down and answer in between each breath, "Tony...he stole Suzie's...Suzie's doll." I felt tears in my eyes, so I squeezed my eyes shut to try and keep them from falling out, "I threw a rock at him."

"Tony!" Carl yelled, "get over here!"

Tony walked slowly to the front of the bus.

"Where's Suzie's doll?" Carl asked.

"Riley has it." Tony answered, his head looking straight down.

"Well give it back to her," Carl demanded. Tony started walking away, "Wait, first apologize to Jack."

"But he hit me with a rock!" Tony protested.

"Because you were bullying Suzie!" Carl said "Apologize, now."

Tony looked at me, then off to the side, "I'm sorry."

Carl looked at me, and I nodded a quick reply, still amazed at how much my head hurt. "Jack, you need to apologize too."

I looked at Carl, waiting for him to reconsider. After a moment I turned to Tony, “Sorry for throwing my rock at you.”

“Good. Now go return Suzie her doll and apologize to her, too” Carl said to Tony. “I’m going to have to fill out an incident report, and both of you will be in trouble.”

I sat back down in my seat, looking ahead at the mostly dried blood on the seat in front of me. “I’ll try to plead your case, Jack.” Carl winked at me as he walked by. I put my drawing notebook back in my backpack and tried to not think of the pain. A couple minutes later, Suzie and Johnny came up to me.

“Thanks, Jack,” Suzie said. She reached across and gave me a hug. I was surprised for a second. The only other girl I had ever hugged was my grandma. Suzie pulled away and I gave a little smile.

After Suzie sat down in the seat across from me, Johnny held out his hand, “Thanks Jack, for defending my little sis. You’re a good man.”

It was funny listening to Johnny talk; he sounded like a grown up. “You’re welcome,” I said. We shook hands and he sat down beside his sister.

“You know,” Johnny said “you should come over to our house later today. I could show ya all of our animals on the farm.”

I didn’t know what to say. I’ll be there. I stared at him, waiting for a reply.

“Umm, Jack?” he asked, “Are you OK?”

I realized then I had been staring without saying anything at all. “Yes! Sorry, I’ll be there. What time can I come over?” I asked.

“How about before dinner, around 4:30?” Johnny offered.

“Sounds good,” I said.

Second Place Undergraduate Fiction

The High One

by Alex Erickson

The bush plane slid to a stop on the crusty, late-November snow near a freezing lake in the western part of the Alaska Range. Carl stepped down in his lime green parka and pulled his pack out. Robert handed his own pack to Carl and stepped down after. The pilot cut the engine and opened the cockpit window. “Last chance,” he said. “You guys sure about this?”

“Course we’re sure,” Carl said. “You’ll be seeing us at the West Rib within a week.” The Pilot looked at Robert, who nodded with forced confidence. He had been backpacking before, had spent ten days in the Bob Marshall wilderness last summer, and four days in the Wind Rivers the January before it, but he had nowhere near the experience Carl had. Not with an undertaking like this. Small amounts of daylight, the likelihood of extreme cold. This was new. The pilot started the engine, gave a quick salute, brought the plane around, throttled up, took off, and banked toward the coming sun. After checking that their snowshoes and other gear were secured to their packs they pulled the straps up over their shoulders.

“So,” Carl grinned through his red beard and pulled his watchcap down over his ears, “we sure about this?”

Just past midday Carl sat on a rock, planted his ice axe in the old snow like a flag, and pulled out the map. Robert remained on his feet a few yards away, bent at the waist and sucking in breaths. He straightened and gulped from his canteen. They had been climbing for the better part of three hours along a ridge to the pass, but not before two more hours of negotiating woods and hills of the valley they landed in. “It’s still forty miles to Talkeetna, as the crow flies,” Carl said and

“Fairies” by Wonjun Han

Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



marked an X on the map before he folded it and stuffed in back into a side pocket on his pack. “And then you can call that dear Karen of yours.”

Robert forced a single laugh. “I guess so. She’d probably kill me if I didn’t.”

“What’s that now? You aren’t going to be just dying to call your old lady? You two, uh,” Carl began adjusting the crampon on his right boot. “You two doing alright?”

“Yeah,” Robert said, suddenly feeling the spotlight. He sat down on a nearby rock to appear comfortable. “Same old, same old.”

“I don’t know how you can handle it, man.” Carl shook his head. “Not Karen—I don’t really know her. I mean having a girlfriend in general.”

Robert laughed genuinely this time. “Not so sure I do handle it.”

“Well, you do better than I ever could. That’s for sure,” Carl said, but got no response. “Anyway—” he unzipped the bottom compartment of his pack and pulled out a few granola bars and some beef jerky “—I figure we’ll do lunch now. It should be mostly level for the next five to ten miles, but we might need to strap on our shoes in parts. And we probably won’t cover the distance before the sun goes down, so it looks like we’ll be getting in some good night hiking right off the bat.” He opened a granola bar and bit off half of it. “And you look like you could use a break.”

“You’re not wrong there.” Robert took some jerky from his own pack.

Carl laughed a little. “You sure you don’t want to do McKinley with us this summer?” Robert laughed too.

“Good one.”

Carl stopped smiling and looked east and then up. “We probably could see it if it weren’t for these clouds.”

Dark had fully set in when they made camp. Carl cut some kindling with his hatchet while Robert gathered more wood. He pulled down his balaclava and put his flashlight in his mouth so he could adjust the small logs under his arm and

wondered if Karen had been right. Maybe this was a bad idea. They got a fire going and ate a meal of army surplus MREs. Carl took out the map and compass and after studying them for a minute marked another X. Robert unfastened the Motorola PRC-68 portable radio from his pack and began slowly twisting the tuning knob. All he got was a steady kshhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. And he suddenly remembered the night he told Karen he was coming on this trip. That kshhhhh as she tuned the radio in his Jeep Wagoneer while they drove into the downtown lights.

He hated it when she did that. He didn’t like the song that was playing any more than she did, but she had no patience to wait for a better one to come on afterward. The static cut and she listened for a few seconds to the pop song playing and then continued through more static. Next was a commercial, then it was “My Generation,” then “Solitary Man.”

“Wait,” he said. “I like this one.”

She took her hand off the nob and relaxed in her seat. “I still don’t get why you like Neil Diamond.”

“Well, no one said you had to.”

“Sorry. It’s just funny is all.” They drove past the Villa and she looked up at the marquee. “Oh hey! They’re still playing Private Benjamin there. Can we do that one instead tonight? Deb said it’s hilarious.”

He pursed his lips and squinted at the green traffic light ahead reflecting off the wet road. The windshield still had droplets around its edge from earlier rainfall. “You know I’ve been waiting for this movie for a couple months now, right?”

“Yes, but who knows how long this one will stay here. The Raging Bull is just coming—”

“It’s just Raging Bull. No ‘the.’” The light ahead turned red.

“Okay fine. My point is it’ll be around for the next few weeks. At least next weekend for sure.”

He stopped the Wagoneer at the crosswalk where an arguing couple passed in front of them, followed by three teenage boys who were laughing and quietly mocking the man and woman ahead of them. Robert could see no way of winning this. Either he had to delay seeing Scorsese and De Niro reunite after three years and sit through Private Benjamin, or he had to see Scorsese and De Niro reunite, but do so on edge, knowing that there would be a discussion afterward, and not one about the film. Maybe he could still get out of it.

“We already passed the theater, though.”

“Barely. It’s just a few blocks back.”

“Maybe it already started.” He was digging now. “You know I can’t walk into a

theater late.”

“The sign said not until 7:35.” She saw that he was thinking. “Oh, come on. You’ll like it.”

He searched his mind for more arguments but came up empty. “All right,” he conceded, and made a right turn to circle back.

The fire popped and Robert realized he had stopped twisting the knob. Carl sat watching him, bemused. “You getting anything on that, pal?”

“Does it sound like I am?” Robert said, turning up the volume of the static.

Carl held up his hands in mock surrender, one of which had a granola bar in it. “Sorry, but I told you,” he said like a mother to a crying child. Then he gestured vaguely around. “Feel free to climb up one of these mountains. You might have better luck.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Robert turned the radio off and set it on his pack. “You know,” Carl said, “my pack was feeling kind of light today. I could carry that if you want.”

“Just leave it alone.”

“I’m serious.” He tossed wrapper from his granola bar into the fire and his smile shone through the deep cinnamon of his beard. “Anything to help your nancy little feet keep up?”

They crested a ridge from the east on their second day. “And here we are,” Carl said. On the west side of the ridge the ground dropped vertically about thirty feet to boulders and a steep slope below. They would follow the ridge southward where it widened and flattened, the cliff ending and the slope below meeting the level ground, and trees came up more densely. About a hundred yards down another narrow ridge rose on the east side of their path and lead to a tree-spotted mountain summit. A wall of granite jutted out from that ridge and curved out toward the top, making a very shallow cave not far from where they stood. “See? There she is.” Carl pointed to a gap in the mountains across the valley, and through the gap and well beyond it a white peak rose 23,000 feet. A snow-cov-

ered outcropping stuck out of the cliff about ten feet. Carl stomped on it to test its soundness and stepped out to the edge. “Amazing.”

“I was reading up on McKinley last week,” Robert said. “Did you know that Denali is actually the name of the mountain? And it’s because Denali means—”

“The High One,” said Carl, peering down, holding his ice axe like a scepter.

“Yeah.” Robert shook his head. Of course Carl knew that. “It’s in, uh, I forget what language.”

“Alabaskan.”

“That sounds right.”

“Wait, no.” Carl was still staring at the slope below the ledge. “It’s Athabaskan.” He returned his gaze to distant mountain. “You see the clouds around it? Crystal clear everywhere else in the sky except on McKinley. On Denali.” And again he said, “Amazing.”

He turned around to leave the ledge but didn’t see the sunken spot in the snow, which his foot broke straight through. His leg dropped into the crag below, throwing his balance toward the edge. The gap in the stone caught him just above the knee but his body kept falling. His femur flexed and with a sound like a single, distant thunderclap it broke clean and Carl screamed long. His trapped leg stopped his falling, but he dropped his axe and it fell thirty feet and stuck into the snow, leaning, like a shoddy crucifix. His pack had come off one shoulder and had swung into the wall below him. The radio and hatchet clattered against the stone. He screamed again and again. He held fast to the second strap of the pack in the crook of his elbow as his torso hung out over the air like a banner. Robert moved as fast as he could to the edge while testing the rock beneath his feet. He found and sidestepped the crag Carl had fallen into and crouched and grabbed Carl’s left foot with one hand and held out his own ice axe to Carl’s left hand and told him to grab it. Carl groaned and spat as Robert pulled him upright. “Grab my pack, grab my pack,” he said. Robert dropped the ice axe, reached around Carl, took the pack from his shoulder and tossed it back to the firm ground. Then he put his arms under Carl’s armpits, dug in his crampons and heaved. Carl screamed again but stifled it as Robert dragged him back to steady ground near Carl’s pack.

“Put it back,” Carl said, and his face was bright and his eyes fierce. He grabbed at his right leg, which stuck out sideways at a forty-five degree angle, and the black snow pants bulged sharply on the inside of his thigh, the breaching bone forming a peak. “You got to put it back.”

“I,” Robert said, “I, uh... Okay, just look at me now.”

“Just push it back!” He swatted off his hat and the hair stuck to his forehead

in wet red ropes.

Robert placed his hands around Carl's thigh and Carl inhaled sharply. Robert paused. The snow underneath was red and darkening. The black nylon shimmered and sagged. Blood soaked Robert's gloves. He looked behind him and saw a pink trail out across the ledge. Then Carl saw it too. His eyes went from fierce to plain wild, his irises fully exposed. "Help me. I'm going to die. Help."

"No, no. You're not going to die," Robert said, and shook off his gloves and put all his force on the wound. Carl groaned long and puffed air.

"I'm dying, I'm dying I'm dying."

"No, stay calm. Just look at me." He stretched out and pulled Carl's pack over. "I'm going to need you to sit up and push on the wound. I need to find a tourniquet. Carl?"

Carl's shoulders and head writhed, digging out the snow around him, like a wild animal making its bed.

"Carl!"

Carl stopped and stared at Robert. "Tell my mom, tell her... Oh no, Jenny."

"Who's Jenny, Carl?" He frantically searched for something long and straight. His ice axe was back by the cliff edge, but the hatchet was still on Carl's pack. "I need you to look at me, and sit up."

"Jenny... Help! Don't let me die don't let..."

"No, no, Carl, stay with me." He took off his scarf and lifted the leg and threaded the scarf underneath and tied it slightly loose at the top of the thigh. "Who's Jenny, Carl? Tell me about her." He put the hatchet handle through the scarf and began rotating it. "Why haven't you told me about this Jenny before?" He forced a laugh. "You been holding out on me?"

The snow beneath Carl had become a wine red slush. He grabbed weakly at Robert's hands and said "I'm gone. I'm gone. I'm..."

"I'm helping you, buddy. Just hold still." Robert had the tourniquet as tight as he could get it. "Now I need you to hold this." But Carl's eyes were closed. "Carl? Carl!" He put his hand over Carl's mouth and felt warm air. He sat there, holding on tight, scared to check again for breath, for a pulse. After a while he finally did check and there was neither.

He struck a waterproof match and lit the small kerosene stove and held his hands above the blue flames. The white sky had turned gray, and the trees, and the mountains beyond the trees, were following suit. He wasn't prepared for this. Carl was the one who knew what to do. If anyone was going to fall down a mountain and break

his leg or his neck or get trampled by a moose or whatever, it wasn't Carl. It was Robert. He took a few deep breaths to quiet his thoughts. Then he thought about his finite supply of kerosene. He needed to build a real fire. He flexed his cold-rusted fingers and reached for the hatchet tied to Carl's pack. Gripping the hickory handle, which he wiped as clean as he could, he lightly swung the blued steel head few times to test its heft. He set the hatchet aside and dug around his pack until he found his flashlight. He turned the knob on the stove clockwise until the flames, starting at one side of the ring burner and shooting around both ways to close together at the other, popped off. Then he put on his balaclava and Carl's gloves, and heaved himself up to search for firewood in the dusk.

With an MRE warming beside his small fire, Robert held his hands over it and rubbed his fingers. He paused and tilted his hands so the flickering light shone on the backs of them. Blackish lines under the nails, in the cuticles and knuckle folds. A blister had formed at the base of his right thumb from digging. He didn't know what he was going to do. Karen was right.

They were waiting for the movie to start when he had told her. He shook the box of Milk Duds to loosen the candy and said, "Did you ever meet my friend Carl?"

"Who?"

"Carl."

"Oh. Like Carl Sagan."

"Who?" He stopped shaking the Milk Duds.

"Carl Sagan. He's the guy who does that new show about space." She took a sip from the straw of her soda cup. "My parents were watching it when I visited a few weeks ago. It's pretty cool."

He opened the box of candy. "No. Not like him at all."

"I just meant their names."

"Okay, well, aside from their names they're nothing alike."

"That's all I meant."

In the semi-lit theater a man of about fifty, sitting in

front of them with his wife, glanced back, met Robert's eyes, and quickly looked toward the exit in the back before facing forward again. Robert wished people would mind their own business.

"Anyway, what I'm telling you is Carl's really into mountaineering. And he wants me to go up to Alaska with him next week."

She set her soda down and put on a smile. "Well, that sounds fun," she said, picking at the splintering wood of the armrest between them.

"I think so," he said. "He was going to go with a buddy of his who he usually does these things with, but something came up and the other guy can't go now, but since it's all arranged and mostly paid for already... He's kind of got his back against a wall."

"But it's way freezing up there. Didn't he have any other friends that could go?"

"It's fine," he said. She wasn't smiling anymore, so he put his hand on hers. "I've been on winter camps before, so I have a lot of the gear. And it's not really even winter yet anyway."

"Isn't it dark all the time, though? You're going to get lost"

"Not all the time. We'll mostly be hiking in daylight." He gave her hand a light squeeze. "And Carl's a good enough navigator to get around even if there was no light."

She pulled her hand from under his and reached for his other and turned it so she could see his watch. "The movie should have started already."

They left the theater, walking next to each other with their arms pendulous at their sides. He asked her what she thought of the movie. She hadn't spoken to him at all during it and only laughed a few times. She said it was good and they continued to the car in silence. He opened the door for her, but she didn't get in, but stood a few feet away, a nervous smile creeping at her lips.

In the firelight Robert shook his head and focused on his hands. He ran his nails against his bent knuckles and against each other, and flicked flakes of blood into the flames. Then he opened the MRE with his pocketknife.

The next morning he woke hours before the sun, breathing out smoke with his face numb and his body aching. He opened the door to the tent and shook his head. "Of course." Fresh snow had fallen in the night. Robert pressed his hand through it till he felt the ground. About six inches. Great. He sat for a while and then pulled on his parka, pants, and boots, and stepped outside. He scanned his campsite with the flashlight, but when he thought about it, he didn't know why. It's not like he would notice any differences, what with the state he was in when he settled here. He

did see, however, a small bump where the fire had been. He untied one end of the rope he had run over branches of two trees to hang his pack and lowered the pack to the ground. He brushed off the snow and rummaged inside for some food.

He trudged about fifty yards until the trees opened up to a view of a long valley extending north and south. He turned off the flashlight and pulled a piece of jerky from his pocket and bit off a chunk. As he chewed he wondered at the majesty of what he saw. The stars and mood lit mounds and troughs, peppered with patches of frosted cones and spindles, all shapes rudimentary. Despite the new hell it brought with it, the snow had an equalizing effect on the world, a death mask hiding from him all the scars and truths of the land. And through the clear sky, beyond the lower mountains across the valley, the summit of Denali ever faintly present.

After an hour of snowshoeing back over the path he took the day before, he came to the wall of granite. The sun had just begun to shine on the western slopes of the valley. He was relieved to see that it was still there, the slight rise under naked stone, not quite a mound, or even a bulge really. More like an embossing of earth. And next to it something else, something black sticking out of the snow. He detached his snowshoes and walked up to the object and saw what it was and chuckled. How could he have forgotten this? He pulled the old entrenching spade out of the frozen ground and tied it to the frame of his pack. Carl's pack sat leaning against the cold wall and partially covered with snow. He turned it inside out and took the Swiss army knife, the flashlight, the first-aid kit. He jammed as much food as he could into his own pack

He brushed snow from a log and sat. Then he unfastened the radio, with its bent antenna and missing tuning knob, from his pack and powered it on. The frequencies were listed around the pinched metal peg, but without the plastic knob with the indicator mark, Robert had no way to tell which channel he was on. With some difficulty he turned the peg, hearing kshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh until he couldn't turn it anymore. He twisted it back the other way until it stopped. Carl was

right. The radio was a wasted expense and burden. He shut it off and sat and watched the raised patch of ground like a stone. What was he doing here? Carl couldn't help him now. He threw the radio to the ground.

And suddenly there she was, in his head again, the fear in her eyes, standing still, petitioning, him holding the open door to the Wagoneer. She smiled and smiled, showing teeth. But in her eyes trepidation and tears.

He stood up and trudged to the rock outcropping that had put him in this position. He kept away from the edge. The snow had erased the gore of yesterday, as if to inform any visitor Nothing has happened in this place. All is well. He wondered if he might see any animals up here. Maybe a moose, but probably nothing more, and hopefully nothing at all. Out west the great mountain stood unshrouded. He returned to his pack and put his snowshoes back on. He was about to put his pack on as well when he saw the small shovel. He untied it and, after clearing some snow, worked the blade into the soil at the head of Carl's grave.

When he got back to his camp it was past midday. He wondered why he decided to set up so far away. He supposed it was safer, even though Carl had said that bears were already hibernating, and wolves had moved on to the lower valleys. Bears must have still posed some possible danger, though, since Carl insisted they hang their food at night. Robert lit his stove and placed an aluminum mug packed with snow on it. He dug his cooking kit from his pack, and placed chunks of a frozen MRE stew into the small pot. When the snow melted and the water steamed he swapped the mug for the pot and took a cautious sip. After lunch he began to feel the cold, so he searched for wood, breaking off bare and dangling branches from evergreens and kicking at odd bumps in the snow. When he had the fire going he pulled the map and compass from his pack and unfolded the map two times to open up the area marked by Carl. He leveled the map on the pack and scrutinized it. He figured he had to be south of the last pencil-drawn X, but not very far south. He set the compass on the map and

tried to remember the orienteering courses he did as a Boy Scout. After a while he had to accept that he didn't really know what he was doing. He knew he had to keep moving and his best bet was to follow this valley to the end and then go west until he was out of the mountains. Then he could walk until he hit the river and just follow it back to Talkeetna. He resolved to head out the next day.

Furrowed snow and clumps of hard soil and tatters of lime green nylon. That's all he found on the ground in front the granite wall. The tracks were large. He didn't examine them further. Only one animal here had tracks that size. He didn't move. He should have headed south this morning, but he didn't know what he would find to the south. After he rebuked himself for coming back here he couldn't think clearly enough to do more. He just stood by the shallow hole and listened in the crisp morning air.

Back at camp he cursed himself and packed up as quickly as he could and made a trail southward down the valley and cursed himself some more.

The moon was bright and big and thinly veiled by drifting clouds when he stopped for camp. He didn't know how far he had gone, nor even if he was going the right way. He just knew he had to move. Why had he gone back to the grave again? There was nothing he could do for him anymore. He dropped his pack, panned the blue scene around him, found a level spot for his tent, and to the moon said, "Thank you."

He woke to a rustling and guttural breathing. A heavy stench like a zoo pen. From the moonlight Robert could see a hulking shadow on the tent wall. His pack. He had left his pack outside. On the ground. Stupid. Was it the same bear? Did it follow him here? Could he scare it off? A tear of plastic packaging. Maybe he could scare it off. But if it didn't run, he'd be dead. Especially without the hatchet. He had left it strapped to the pack. A shuffling outside and the crinkle of wrappers. The shadow rocked back and forth. His arms stiff at his sides, he felt a mass in his pocket. His knife. Maybe it's a black bear. You can fight off black bears. That's what they say. Just stab at the face. The eyes. He pulled out the knife but held it closed in his fist. It seemed bigger than a black bear, though. Smelled bigger. No. No fighting it. It shouldn't be out. Must be desperate. Can't fight a desperate animal. No. What if it doesn't find what it wants? Or enough of it. It has to know there's more in the tent. One hundred and eighty pounds more. Bears' sense of smell is better than a bloodhound's. That's what some nature book said. This bear could come into the tent and end it all. Thank God he was on good terms with his parents, even his stepfather. But

Karen. Those eyes. Oh, Those eyes. Outside the Villa, because he had agreed to see Private Benjamin even though he had no interest in it but it was a movie and he had to take her to movies so he wouldn't have to talk because despite the exorbitant amount of overtime he'd been working lately he still had spare hours between that and sleep and she wanted to spend time with him and when pressed yes, of course he wanted to spend time with her too of course of course he did until she would smile and wrap both arms around his arm and lay her head on his shoulder and not push him to talk any more about them about how he felt—except that didn't happen the time outside the Villa with her waiting and staring and not getting into the car even though he was holding the door open for her but she just waited for him to echo her to finally repeat and requite and she smiled with her mouth but anguished with her eyes until he said it, until he said that yes he loved her too. And her eyes matched her mouth and she climbed into the car and fear blossomed in him, and it was a new fear that he had never known. The fear of guilt. Of deceit. It was the fear of knowing that he was unable to sever himself from her of his own will, a coward's fear. And now it was the fear of her weeping at his mother's house where she would learn that they discovered his body on the top of a mountain after months of searching. Her weeping from months of loving a man who she wished returned love but did not return love, and wasting those months with that man—that boy, that selfish child—whom she couldn't change, and now never would. Weeping from a hope that was a false hope.

A grunt outside came from a distance, and the shadow had gone from the tent wall. He lay stiff and still afraid in the cold blue light. Outside snow weighed heavy on the land, and the trees breathed.

Spring comes later here than in lower latitudes. Leaves bud on the birch, snow all melted from the spruce. Fireweed shoots up in clusters, the deep pink, champagne flute flowers burst out of the stems, ground to tip. A young bull moose scrapes his

antlers against a boulder, motley with moss and lichen. Ragged velvet drops to the loam. And through the stands of trees Denali rises, ever robed in white, seraph-vigilant and looming.

“The Key” by Wonjun Han
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



Third Place Undergraduate Fiction

Weirdest Things Found in Stiffs

by Lorelle Frank

The sharp scent of disinfectant mostly overwhelmed the sickly undertone in the room as Eli Park adjusted the bright white lights overhead. He spread a surgical drape over the inert face of the young woman lying unclothed on the cold, metal table, her body arched slightly over the block propped under the small of her back.

Eli crossed to one of the black cabinets that lined the sterile, white walls and withdrew several silvery instruments on a tray, including a scalpel, which he lifted in one of his turquoise-gloved hands. Face scrunched in concentration behind his rectangle-framed glasses, he made the first incision. The scalpel slid easily through the flesh as Eli carefully sliced from each shoulder in a V to the bottom of the breastbone. From the tip of the V, he drew another line straight down the center of the soft abdomen, rounding the navel, and ending at the pubic bone, splitting the skin and tissue in a shallow canyon along the incision.

“Where’s Thad?” Eli asked, glancing up at Dr. Remira Flores, who stood on the other side of the room.

Before Remira could answer, the cream-colored, swinging door squeaked open as Dr. Thad Schipper entered as though summoned by the mention of his name. He crossed the room half-skipping, his footsteps tapping on the off-white linoleum floor. Thad was only a few years older than Eli, perhaps thirty-four or thirty-five. He was almost as tall as Eli, though not quite as lanky. His blond, slick-combed hair—currently covered with a surgical cap—and symmetrical, aristocratic facial features hinted at erudite sophistication. When Eli first met him, however, it had taken about five minutes before the young doctor’s behavior thoroughly disproved any such assumptions.

“I got this,” Thad said, pulling up his surgical mask. He took the scalpel in his own gloved hand and proceeded to make ninja-sword sound effects with his mouth as he hacked through the connective tissue between the chest flap and the ribs, peeling the V up to expose the sternum, front ribs and sinewy neck meat.

“Having fun?” Eli said.

“Yep.”

More sound effects—unpleasant squishing ones—ensued as Thad gripped the edge of the flesh firmly at the belly, stretching it upward. As he slit the remaining tissue to expose the organs, the swollen intestines bulged out of the incision.

“Quit it. You’re distracting,” said Remira, raising one thin, black eyebrow. She stood across the room over a similar setup, a second, fully gutted body splayed before her on a second metal table.

“Quit what, Remmy?” Thad asked, looking up at her briefly with an innocent expression before turning back to the young woman’s body and separating the rest of the skin, fat, and muscle from the ribcage and sides with more ninja-sword shwing, shwinging, then flopping the breasts and attached flap to either side so that the abdominal cavity and ribcage lay completely exposed.

“Seriously, how old are you?” Remira said, shaking her head, her voice stern, but her pretty, dark eyes straining at the corners from resisting the urge to laugh. Eli looked away from her and instinctively took a half step away from Thad as he gestured vaguely with the scalpel.

“Irrelevant,” said Thad, setting the blade back on the tray. He extended his hand expectantly toward Eli. “Loppers.”

Eli sighed and handed Thad the heavy shears.

There was no need for Thad to make his own sound effects as he clipped through the ribcage with several loud clacks. The coiled bowels wobbled like misshapen jello with the motion of each sharp snap. After helping Thad remove the chest plate, Eli moved the white, plastic trays from the counter onto the edge of the table within Thad’s reach. Thad flippantly but precisely cut free the heart. Then the left lung. Then the right. Before long, the two of them had removed most of the upper innards from the cavity and Thad was reaching from inside the empty chest to free the neck organs and tongue.

“I’m going to go out on a limb here,” said Eli as Thad squinted and probed with the scalpel, “and say that the cause of death had something to do with that...”

“...whatever the hell it is that’s obstructing the trachea,” Thad

finished. At length, he removed the object. He closed his eyes in a solemn expression. “Eli, the list.”

Eli obediently stood and crossed the room, pulling off his plastic gloves as he neared a simple wooden desk, the surface of which was hidden by stacks of paper-work.

“Remmy, come here,” Thad said.

Remira sighed and complied, bending over the object in question. “What is...Is that a dreidel?”

Thad laughed and Eli grinned as he turned to the poster board pinned to the wall above the desk, the heading of which read “Weirdest Things Found in Stiffs” in Thad’s careless, all-capitals hand. Uncapping a black sharpie, Eli neatly printed “dreidel” under “mechanical pencil,” “partially inflated helium balloon,” and, in Thad’s hand, “mid medieval lance head.”

“Was she trying to eat it?” Remira wondered aloud.

“Somebody had too much fun at Kwanzaa,” Thad said, picking up the clay spinning top and giving it a twirl on the tray.

Remira stared at him. “You mean Hanukkah?”

“Oh,” said Thad, turning back to the eviscerated corpse and freeing the rest of the neck organs. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to offend your people.”

Remira quickly stopped the dreidel’s motion with her petite, gloved palm. “I’m not Jewish, Thad.”

Thad’s forehead creased in mock confusion. “Well...yeah, I guess you don’t meet a lot of Mexican Jews.”

“I’m Puerto Rican, you culturally inept moron.” She looked at him steadily until he met her gaze with a coy smile. “Please tell me that you’re joking before I launch an investigation to discover what kind of foul play went into you getting your degree. Or for that matter, graduating high school. Or kindergarten. Who’d you cheat off of?” she asked.

Eli returned to the table, casting Remira a sidelong glance. “Your mom?” he suggested hesitantly, pulling his gloves back on.

Thad’s face lit up like a parent watching a child’s first step. “You’ll go far,” he said, going in to punch Eli in the shoulder, a motion which Eli dodged to avoid unnecessary splashing of bodily fluids.

Remira laughed as she returned to her work on the other side of the room, her dark eyes reflecting the bright, square lights. “Hey, you got your certification, didn’t you? Aren’t you a proper pathologist as of today?” she said to Eli, continuing to pad the cavity of the corpse in front of her with cotton.

“Yeah,” Eli said, brightening. “Maybe Dr. Crenshaw will stop calling me ‘assistant’ and speak to me directly, now.”

Thad grimaced, carving a kidney out of its thin membrane. “You don’t want to talk to Crenshaw, anyway.”

“Do you have a job lined up?” Remira asked.

“Well, obviously I’d love to stay here with you guys,” Eli said, scratching a few notes on a clipboard, “but they don’t have a position.”

“Hm. We could kill Crenshaw,” Thad suggested casually.

“Bad idea,” said Remira without turning around.

“You never like my ideas,” Thad said.

“No, it is a bad idea,” Eli agreed, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose with his shoulder.

“Why?” Thad asked.

“Because then we’d have to autopsy him,” Eli said.

“Which means seeing him naked,” Remira added.

“Valid,” Thad said. “Well, I’m going to Portland for a few days next month. That’s your chance. I’m pretty sure they’d happily replace me.”

“Trust me,” Eli said. “I don’t want your job. It wouldn’t be nearly as interesting to work here without you.”

“Good answer. We’ll think of something.”

Eli shrugged. “I’ll stick around as an assistant until I find something better.”

“For what it’s worth, I like having you both around,” Remira said. “Do you want to hit the steakhouse with me after work?” she added, looking at Eli specifically.

“I’ve got nothing better to do,” Thad said before Eli could agree.

“Yeah, you can come too,” she succumbed.

Eli finished another scrawl and set the clipboard down. “Are you going to invite Crenshaw, too?”

“He won’t be able to make it,” Thad deadpanned. “He’s got a hot date.”

“Who with?” Remira asked, prepping a thick plastic bag.

Thad paused, then pointed at the woman’s corpse on the table

with the scalpel.

“Sick, Thad,” Remira said. “You like your job way too much to be accusing anyone else of necrophilia.”

Thad looked unphased. “Well, I’m a lonely divorcee and dead girls don’t say no.”

“Woah, woah, woah, let’s not go there,” Eli winced, setting a final empty tray on the table.

“Hang on, I’ll be back in a minute. Eli, keep an eye on NecRo-meo here,” Remira laughed, peeling off her gloves and freeing her glossy black hair from its cap as she backed through the door and disappeared.

Eli and Thad worked in silence for a moment. “Even I think that was a terrible pun,” Thad said.

“Yeah. So bad.”

Thad accidentally bumped the head with his elbow so that the young woman’s pale-gray face slipped to the side. Eli quickly readjusted the head and re-draped the face.

“Does it ever bother you thinking that this was...you know, a person?” Eli asked suddenly.

Thad looked up at him with a thoughtful expression, almost sober for a moment. Then he said, “Nope, not really,” and handed Eli the tray containing the right lung. “Go switch this for one of Remira’s,” he said.

“She’s about to reconstitute the body. What if she doesn’t notice and puts it back into the wrong guy?” Eli said with an incredulous laugh.

“Switch it for the left one. No way she won’t notice her guy’s got two right lungs.”

“You’re insane,” Eli said fondly and carried the tray over to the other table. The organs Remira had been examining looked like photos for a typical smoking-is-bad poster. Any idiot who had ever played Which of these things is not like the other could identify the healthy extra right lung next to the other oozing, shriveled, already dissected organs. He switched the trays. “There’ve got to be rules against this kind of thing.”

“Definitely,” Thad agreed. The door squeaked and he said, “Shh.”

They both turned away from the door to the table as Thad began using a long, shiny knife to cut the liver into slices like a huge, overripe tomato. He and Eli glanced over their shoulders furtively. In walked not Remira—but Norley Crenshaw.

Crenshaw looked more like an undertaker than a pathologist. He was heavysset, hunched, and vampire-pale, the skin sagging loose on his skull around his beady eyes. His sense of humor rivaled that of a nonfunctioning kidney.

Eli and Thad shared a look somewhere between amusement and horror.

They waited in silence for several tense seconds, listening to the quiet, wet sounds of Crenshaw finishing Remira’s work and placing insides in the bag.

“Dr. Schipper,” Crenshaw boomed suddenly in his deep, scratching voice. Thad turned to look at him with the expression of a puppy preparing to be kicked for pissing on the carpet, but Crenshaw only said, “Have your assistant adjust the thermostat. It’s getting too warm in here.”

Only Eli noticed Thad’s exhale of relief as he glanced at Eli. “You heard the man, assistant,” he said with overblown austerity.

Eli gratefully escaped as Crenshaw finished placing the organs, including the mismatched one, in the bag without noticing anything amiss. As Eli peeled off his gloves on the opposite side of the room to adjust the temperature, he pressed his lips together, wide-eyed, and looked questioningly at Thad, who simply mouthed, “shiiiiiiit” and returned to examining guts in sheepish silence.

“You’re both going to hell,” Remira said pleasantly, sipping her water as she, Eli, and Thad waited for the waitress to return.

“Only Eli’s going to hell. I didn’t even touch the trays,” Thad said, slightly too loudly for the small, warmly lit corner of the restaurant, throwing his hands up defensively. Eli shifted in his spot in the booth, the dark green cushion rustling against the back of his button-up shirt. “It was your idea,” he said to Thad, who sat next to him, propped against the corner of the wall.

“Technically Crenshaw is the one who slopped it right into the bag without looking at it,” Thad said, crossing his legs and taking up much more than his share of the bench.

“Yeah,” Eli said, casting an apologetic smile at the occupants of the fake wooden table next to theirs. The middle-aged couple and their two young teenage daughters didn’t smile back. They must have overheard most of the pathologists’ conversation and they seemed to have lost their appetites.

Remira shook her head. “I almost wish he’d noticed. I would have loved to see you two try to talk your way out of that.” She slid down in her seat, laughing, and her foot

tapped Eli's. She quickly sat up straight, withdrawing. Thad sat forward with a sigh, arms crossed on the tabletop. "I probably would have just blamed it on you."
"Ooh, that's low," said Remira. "And you would have defended my honor, right?" she asked Eli.
"Sure, I'd take the blame," Eli said. "I'll probably be leaving soon anyway."
Remira paused, then offered a smile isolated to her mouth. "I think I'm going to head out," Thad said suddenly.
Remira looked at him with a puzzled expression. "They haven't even brought the food yet."
Thad shrugged. "I have a headache."
"Lame excuse," said Eli, picking up his own glass and tapping his finger on the side.
"No, as much as I'm happy to leave you two alone..." Thad winked, and Remira reddened slightly. He stood up and climbed carelessly over Eli, nearly causing him to spill. "I really have got a headache. So I guess you've got the check."

Eli paused, hands still at his sides and face blank, reluctant to begin the external examination of the overweight middle-aged man stretched on the metal table. He really was huge. There were too many inherent jokes to be exploited, and Eli was in no mood for jokes.
If Thad had been there, Eli probably would have declared, "Too many cookies. Case closed," and pretended to put away the instruments, but Thad was not there, and the idea of laughing about death seemed profane lately.
Stitched in blue into Eli's white coat were the words Dr. Eli Park, Anatomic Pathologist, but he hated that they were there. They reminded him of the reason the job was available in the first place.
Six days earlier, Eli had found out that Thad Schipper's 1972 Mustang was crushed by a semi truck in Portland, Oregon when Thad evidently blacked out at the wheel. Thad had survived and was taken to the hospital with severe internal bleeding before dying in surgery two days later.

The funeral was held in Oregon, and neither Eli nor Remira had been able to take off enough work to attend, but they might as well have been gone for all of the speaking they had done in the past few days. The place was utterly quiet. For once, it felt like a morgue.

A small brown package sat in front of the door as Eli came to work the next day. Crouching to pick it up, he saw that it was addressed to him. The return address was in Oregon.

Puzzled, Eli peeled open the top of the cardboard and looked inside.

Inside was a bright yellow plastic egg. Forehead creasing, Eli popped it open. Inside laid a tightly folded note on an unlined slip of paper. Unfolding it, he could see that it was written in all capitals, familiar but even sloppier than usual, the text slanting at a severe upward diagonal. Eli scanned it silently twice, tears blurring his eyes the first time and laughter punching through the tightness of his throat the second.

In the bottom of the package was a second, shorter note, written in a slender cursive hand.

This was found in a sealed plastic bag inside the body of a young accident victim, along with a paper containing this address. The family was contacted and they agreed that you should receive this. We apologize for the oddness of this parcel.

Robinson's Funeral Home

After Eli pulled on his coat, he pushed open the squeaky swinging door and entered the postmortem examination room, where Remira was shearing through the back of a man's skull with the whirring saw. Eli waved to get her attention until she shut off the machine, then read the note a third time out loud for her to hear.

If you're reading this, I'm either dead or I think I'm funny and I decided to show you how funny I am even though I'm not dead. I sound like a bad spy movie. Sorry if this is hard to read. My right hand got pretty screwed up in the crash, so I'm writing with my left, and I'm definitely not ambidextrous.

In case you're trying to discern the deeper meaning behind the egg thing, save your brain cells. There isn't one. Morphine and stage three hypovolemia, yay. I bribed a nurse, in case you're wondering. I was a little surprised at how readily he agreed. He seemed so thoroughly unsurprised by the request that you'd imagine people ask him to put plastic eggs in their guts if they die in surgery all the time.

I thought about requesting to get autopsied by you guys so that you'd find this yourself, but I decided that it'd probably be weird for everyone involved, and to be honest, I don't want Norley to see me naked any more than I want to see him. So it'll be some

Oregon folks who find this. They'd better get it to you.

In all seriousness, I don't think I ever really told you how much you two helped me out last year when Shannon left me. I know I never talked about it or cried on your shoulders or anything, but I know you would have been there if I'd wanted to, and the fact that you were around to just talk and hang out and goof around helped me get through it. Honestly, I think the goofing around is more therapeutic (therepeutic? a? eu? — Damn. I need a dictionary) than the crying. Sometimes stuff sucks until you learn to laugh about it.

You're the best friends I've ever had.

Don't let Norley rub off on you or get all boring without me around, okay?

Love you guys.

Thad

Eli kept the final paragraph to himself.

And Eli (Don't read this part out loud), since I'm not going to be around to flirt with Remira anymore, you're going to have to make sure you take over, because first of all, she's totally in love with you. (And this isn't speculation. She told me not to tell you. Whoops.) Secondly, let's be honest, chicks who hang out with dead people all day don't get a lot of dates, and Remmy is way too hot to end up a lonely catlady—like your mom.

Tears had gathered in Remira's eyes, but she had no way of wiping them, as her gloves were covered in reddish-brown fluid. "Seriously? He was literally sitting there dying and he didn't have something better to than write us a—it's like a novel... He would. What an idiot," she said, half-laughing, half-crying.

"Yeah," Eli agreed, refolding the note gently and tucking it back in the egg.

"I miss him."

"Me too."

"Sorry I'm such a baby. He'd probably punch us for getting all sappy like this," she said, voice breaking.

"Probably."

Remira looked at the ceiling, blinking to no avail. "I'll be back in a minute." She backed out of the swinging door, leaving Eli alone. After a moment, Eli wrote "golden egg" at to the bottom of the "Weirdest Things Found in Stiffs" list.

Recovering with a shuddering breath, Eli pulled on his rubber, turquoise gloves and prepped the next body. He adjusted the light, and began with a Y-shaped incision on the woman's torso. He followed the familiar process of removing each organ one by one. When he had almost finished, he paused, glancing at the corpse Remira had been working on, then glancing at the list.

A few minutes later, Remira reentered, clearing her throat as she returned to her station on the other side of the room.

Eli waited in silence for a moment.

"Hey Eli?" Remira said in a stern voice despite the touch of amusement in her expression.

"Yeah?"

"Any idea how this guy ended up with a uterus?"

"Veteran's Day 1" by Bryan Strain
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



First Place Undergraduate NonFiction

“We are strong as a *string* stuck inside of an ice cube stuck inside of an iceberg we are unto diamonds”

by Crystal Hendersen

Junior year of high school and who can say we are too old for this? The trundle **is** pulled up to match the height of the bed and **seven** girls form the sprawl of a pack across the mattresses. ‘Lyssa **is** to my left, her front facing towards my side. Jess **is** on my right, **our** shoulders, **hips** and the edges of **our feet touching**. Kitty perches diagonally at **our** mingling **feet**, refusing sleep. Kitty, the essence of **feline**, stirring the rest of us up. Scary, forceful, hopeful jungle **animal** in a gymnast body. Silky, dramatic pajamas—she’s putting my **feet** to sleep. Caity **is** curled in a ball next to Jess—listening. **She** repeats the ends of sentences as the others talk. Finally you have Emily and Rachel to the far right, both of them with hands clasped over their chests. Rachel’s mermaid hair spills onto Emily like a second blanket. We **all** weave in and out of three conversation threads, heat and stretches, yawns melting over me. **All** the days and nights we’ve spent together **turn** into this **night**, this dog-pile of laughter and half sleep. Alyssa captivates Caity and Kitty with the retelling of her first kiss; Kaleb’s braces caught hers and their lips pulverized. She’d swallowed blood. Rachel and Emily convulse in familiar skittishness at the thought of passion, specifically **touching**. Caity laughs at them. Caity’s been around the hard blocks, **she** acts like **she** knows her shit—we believe **she** does.

Age 3

Jessie turns **two** and gets to eat oatmeal. I want oatmeal. Mom says Jessie **is** my **friend** that we babysit for her parents who are busy. I want oatmeal. I am jealous.

And I’m still, staring around my childhood bedroom. Soft periwinkle walls with Victorian trimming are covered in layers of photos, notes, quotes—get well soon cards. The top layers chronicle the most recent years, beneath them a **girlhood** spins towards its **genesis**. I match the faces of these girls in my bed to the hide of the wall; their smiles and scowls, scribbles and notes on the backs of math tests create its texture. I’m throbbing in the exact center of the nucleus of **our** beast, its brain and pulse. We built this together, this den I slowly close my eyes in. I know **all** of them will be there, eventually breathing slow and deep. Mumbling, farting, kicking ribs—

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subconsciously negotiating blanket allotment. Come morning we’ll **all** wake, **waiting** for everyone to open their eyes before we argue about making waffles or pancakes for breakfast.

Age 5

I tell her we are sisters, born of an imaginary **friend**—Ghost—whom we can’t see. She’s **all** I know during the day.

We’ve always worried about it changing. We still do. And it does. Jess, Emily and I are married. Rachel might be close. Alyssa **is** serving an LDS mission. Caity and Kitty are still looking for boys, usually. Sometimes they are busy in their wildcard souls with things like **working** too many hours and getting more and more clever. I sleep next to Alan Henderson now—piled up and tangled into each other. Mumbling, farting, kicking ribs—subconsciously negotiating blanket allotment in the thinly insulated basement apartment we can hardly afford. We’re a different kind of **animal**, vulnerable and still slightly imbalanced—integrating male and female parts; a bit like cubs, a lingering sense of puppy love. Always **on the edge** of something.

Age 9

The **seven deadly sins**—we decide to **turn** them into a dance. Caitlyn **pulls** her head high in the air, accompanied by Vivaldi’s Winter. **Pride**. I laugh because **she** has a crap ton of snot in her nose. I laugh because **she** means everything to me today.

I am now **two animals**. Young and ancient. I am finding ways to inhabit the skins of both. This **is** me being a woman, holding the hand of a **wolfish** girl. This **is** me being a **wolfish** girl, steadily squeezing a woman’s hand, keeping her wild and vibrant. Always on the edge of something.

Age 10

We're **plotting** another movie. I take a story I'd been writing the year before, one that haunted me, the kind I don't show to people. There's a scene where the lead actress **is** put on a **leash**. I name her Chase this time. Caroline and I bring that red **leash** into the old lady's **back** yard and we hash the scene out. I'm on the **leash**. I want to be on the **leash**.

Recently, Caity and I were sitting on a cold curb, **our** conversation turned in intricate lines, discussing Rachel's current boyfriend and **our** continuing desire for cussing and delinquency. We were missing **our** women. I poked a pebble with a stray stick and suddenly knew something:

"Caity. I've figured it out—the thread. I've never known what to call it. We're all *angry babies*—that's what we have in common. I'm charming to almost everyone for some reason, Rachel **is** a forever- genius mystery seahorse, Emily **is** a lamb herding lambs and a man snatcher, Alyssa **is** Gollum crazy and likes human fetuses. Kitty, in the grandest display of depth I've encountered, admits to shallowness and was a damn talented cheerleader—Jess **is** champion of the private life, the baking life, and a hippie child. You are the boulder of **hate** that everyone pours secrets into, the one that **is** important and hard and that gave Emily a concussion...but we're **all** *angry babies*. And we always talk about sex in the hot tub and are too smart for **our** own goods and we will always read fashion magazines at Walmart and then drive into the mountains, we'll get out and lay in the dirt. We'll snarl and howl. We'll tease each other's husbands. We'll extend blankets and babysitting coupons and ideas and help each other never grow out of **our** skin."

Age 10

We're in a twin sized bed in Rhode Island. Caroline falls asleep **hugging** her knees because she's afraid a shark will bite her legs off in the **night**. I memorize her posture, taking my time.

"You're exactly right. Angry babies—that's it. We're the ABCDEF's—Angry Baby Clan: Destined Eternal Friends. Also I think everyone on the temple grounds can see up your skirt."

Shit. I adjust—Caity checks herself. We don't have the best track record with sitting demurely. We wait anxiously for a mutual **friend** to emerge from the building—husband in tow. "Joanna's married." "So crazy." "Right?"

Age 12

She's come to visit from Nevada. We go to the park and we **find** a bent and **busted** plastic **pool**. We decided to test it in the creek. It's **somehow** a raft. We **find** big sticks, use them to push us forward through the water. We're standing **back to back** and she's looking **behind**, me, **ahead**.

Caitlyn's mom comes to collect her—time to go. **She** bursts into tears.

Age 13

Caroline and I sit at the computer, legs **touching**. We're **working** on a slideshow about the Sainte—Chapelle. **French class**. We sneak in unrelated photos and inside jokes, juvenily subversive.

The **night** before we had devoured hamburgers and prowled through at least three sex shops, **all** of us dressed in plastic beads and princess crowns. Towards midnight Joanna started pacing in panic. After some laughter, we had asked her what was wrong. **She** needed body wax. Now.

Walmart—we found a kit, the wax was supposed to smell like coconut. We brought her into the bathroom and warmed up the shower. **She** undressed and stepped in: "My legs are going to be easy enough but someone **is** gonna have to do...the rest." Caity looked at me straight away: "We both know Crystal **is** going to be the one who ends up in there."

And it was true.

She needed her **ladies** that night.

Age 14

We're **waiting** for her mom to pick her up and I **hate** it, but I can't wait for her to leave. This **is** **our** last sleepover. I consider her face every time I can steal a glance. Odd. Details will fall from me quickly. Jessie has a blue tongue, she's sucking on a ring-pop.

Age 15

Kate Gourley rubs my **feet**. She's my sister's best **friend**. Something driving and innocent starts.

Age 19

We're walking into the dark, charging at the ocean to throw rice to Sirens. Another story we make alive.

Band of women.

There's a children's therapist, a healer. Kate's mom. A shaman. An Elementary school Unionist.

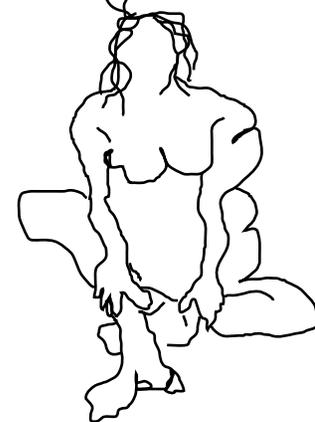
Kate. Me. We look at each other and walk **ahead**. There **is** salt in the air, the entire world an **unbroken shadow** around us. I grab her hand and we don't stop until we are knee deep in the ocean, screaming staccato, in **animal** ways.

Now:

I **miss** her.

Touching all last girlhood **hugging** pool **busted** behind
there is **shadow** back ahead **seven working** pride **our**
unbroken hips animal leash deadly pulls turns
find feline wolfish genesis hate miss two **waiting** night
friend **she somehow** tears plotting sins **string.**

*Title from Anis Mojgani



Strings. Flings. Growing with girls into a **woman**.



“River Liffey” by Sarah Timmerman
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention

Second Place Undergraduate NonFiction

Floating and Falling

by Lela Richardson

My eyes were shut tight against the dirty river, but looking back now, I can see the grubby brown water as clearly as if my eyes had been open. Dirt specks and bubbles brushed my eyes and eyelashes as they floated up around me. A moment before, I had watched as our guide shoved a young girl into the water and then told us we must all follow. Others leapt from the raft, and without thinking, I had plunged over the side and into the river. The water swallowed me into its sullied, gaping mouth and held its jaws against me.

That’s when I thought I saw the mucky water. That’s where my mind found my body. Underwater, sound died in my ears, and after the initial sensation of water groping every inch of my skin, I didn’t feel its wet touch; my eyes were blinded by murk, and though my nose and mouth were flooded, I tasted nothing. The water had robbed me of sensation like death would.

The river was calm on this side of the surface. Everything was peaceful, except me. I kicked my legs out and my arms spun around me like a windmill, but

without air. The water pressed against me, slowing my movements as if asking me to be still. Don’t panic. I will take you home on my current. It was everywhere, forcing me down.

My mind screamed, the unheard sound piercing through my every limb like a screeching siren. The sound settled in my lungs, ripping them apart as though they were the throat conveying my wailing voice. But even the silent scream needed oxygen. If I didn’t get oxygen, surely next was silence.

My limbs kicked, flailed, and pushed against the water until finally my head surfaced, feeling dry warmth against my skin as startling as the chill of winter snow. I breathed in oxygen, tasting the air like candy, sweet against my tongue and nose as I enveloped it. I blinked until the water dripped from my eyes, clearing my vision to reveal bright colors basking in the sunshine all around me. But still, I heard nothing over my internal cries. I looked at the raft being carried downstream by the river and everything in me screamed. And screamed.

Something inside of me skipped as I stepped into the dark night air and saw him sitting, like something out of an old romance, on the black metal bench under the street lamp. Skipped and then tripped, splattering around in my insides. It reminded me of when the second hand had come loose in my watch, and instead of hearing the steady ticking of the seconds, my watch made the rattling noise of its misplaced hand. I shoved my hands into my jacket.

He found me in the mob of people as if the sun had been out, shining against my face instead of the mere imitation of sunlight that the streetlight presumed to be. Standing, his light backpack settled into its place on his lower back. He sauntered into my line of walking, joining me in my path as if today were like every other day, my faithful friend walking me home as usual, but it wasn’t. We were going to the pool. My feet, normally racing through cold air, slowed.

“How was your terrorist class?” He raised his eyebrows, grinning.

“Oh, ya know, we just learned to make bombs today.

Nothing I didn't already know." I was nonchalant, but I pulled my arms in tighter against the cold, pushing down the lint in the corners of my pocket.

"Any incidents?"

"Just a few. It's alright though. The explosions just helped warm up the classroom." The sidewalk under my feet was cracked from years of snow freezing, melting and refreezing. "I wish I could explode something right now. It's freezing," I moaned.

"Ah, it's not so bad. You just have to get used to Logan."

"Says the man in the coat."

"You probably should have thought about bringing one, too if you're so cold," he chided.

"Thanks, dad."

He didn't respond, so I listened to the thud of his worn combat boots hitting the pavement. He'd worn those boots when he'd deployed to Afghanistan and possibly even when he'd been in Iraq. I wondered if they'd been the ones he'd worn when he'd watched his friend blow up in the Humvee right in front of him. His voice was casual when he broke the silence, but the silence added emphasis to his words: "I'm not that old."

"I know." Thud, thud. "Sorry, I'm just edgy cause I'm cold. And I'm nervous."

He stopped walking, handed me his backpack, and slid off his coat in one fluid motion. Returning the red straps to his shoulders, he silenced my protests and forced his coat into my hands.

I pulled off my bulging blue argyle backpack and handed it to him.

"Do you want my jacket?" My voice was timid and I could have been blushing as I plucked at the black jacket with green spelling out "WICKED" across my chest.

He raised an eyebrow and tilted his head forward, eyes lingering on the letters with a chuckle. "Uh—no."

"You're just jealous." I slipped my arms into the puffy blue coat and felt my form grow a few sizes.

As we started walking again he handed back my backpack. "What've you got in here?"

"Swim suit and stuff." I muttered.

"Ahhh. You ready for our first lesson?" His voice was bright and playful as though he were the one seven years younger.

"Now about that..." I trailed off and bumped into his shoulder, forcing him

to cut across the grass towards the rec building. He snickered and I felt the lump that had grown inside of me break down just a little. "I should tell you about the last time—" The lump seemed to have gotten small enough that it could climb up my throat into my mouth. I swallowed. "Ya know. When I almost drowned."

"Yeah you should." His footsteps slowed down so, for the first time, he wasn't half a step ahead of me.

"I was in Moab for girl's camp, not this summer, but the one before. We were river rafting that year and everyone was super excited and I didn't want to seem like I was complaining, so I didn't tell anyone I couldn't swim."

He didn't say anything, but his expression was the same one he had worn when he'd found out that I was walking home from my late class alone every Tuesday and Thursday. I'd found him on that bench ever since.

"I didn't plan on getting in the water. I was gonna stay in the raft." I assured him. "But then our first day out the guide was kind of crazy and she said that we all had to get in the water every day. And then she just started pushing people in."

I kicked against the water, legs flapping out like the feeble beat of a chicken's wings. The bright orange lifejacket did what my legs could not; my head bobbed at the surface. The guide had told us how to sit into the river, hands holding to puffy straps, legs bent in front of us. I don't know if that pose came to my mind in this moment, but I know that it doesn't matter, because I didn't do it. I couldn't keep my legs from beating against the water, as mistrustful of that feeble neon air-pocket as I was.

I remembered a lesson when my teacher put a whole orange into a pitcher of water and we all watched it float. He plucked the fruit out of the water and adeptly peeled it in one long spiral, separating the bright skin from the foamy milk-colored coating around the fruit, and then dropped both fruit and peel back into the water. The peel floated. The fruit

sunk.

I surveyed the lifejacket seeing the sliver of air between where its shoulders were pulling up and mine were pulling down. The water's mouth was still gaping open to devour me.

Around me there were girls in the water, arms stroking against the surface and propelling them back to the raft. My legs felt like jello beneath me – moving everywhere, yet stagnant.

In the blur of movement, I saw blonde hair slicked by the water and clinging to a face I'd known since I was two and she was a baby. Patty's already pale skin looked blanched, but her arms and legs were moving in strong motions around her. Used to being the bulwark in our pseudo sisterhood, I reached for her shoulder to anchor myself and felt the roles reverse. My hand was timid as it stretched out between us and rested on her arm; her arm was anything but timid as it flapped and threw my grip from her. Patty's blue eyes met mine for just a moment and it was like looking in a mirror. I saw myself in her eyes, curly hair disheveled as it dripped onto my shoulders, jaw set, lips quivering, the corners of my eyes teetering near tears, terrified and pleading. Seeing how deranged and desperate I was, I forgave her for pushing me aside.

I turned away from Patty in time to see Gabby's final strokes to the raft. Though she was five years younger than me, Gabby had a bold, sturdy build and she was on a swim team. The distance between us stretched out before me as I yelled out, "Gabby." She didn't turn. She didn't hear me. I yelled again, louder this time – nearly audible – and louder still. "Gabby!" Although the voice screaming inside my head was screeching as I cried out, the one that met my ears was constricted and could almost pass as casual.

I had said her name at least three times before her head turned, curious, but not concerned. She swam over to me in a few short strokes. I don't know if I asked for help or if she just heard the screaming in my eyes, but just a few moments later I was in reach of the raft. My hand extended for the bloated side before I had any hope of touching it. Someone took my reach-

ing hand and anchored me as I stretched out again and, this time, grasped the raft.

Where just fingertips rested one second, my whole body clung the next. My arms both draped into the raft, holding my body tight against the life jacket as it squashed against the synthetic rubber. Shallow lungs filled with oxygen, and filled. And filled. Unwilling or unable to release, like the grip of a corpse.

"Are you alright?" Gabby asked. I exhaled, nodded, but remained silent. My fingers clutched at the slick nylon and polyester, trembling, and the Moab sun beating hot against my skin could not ease my shivers. My bones, brittle and unbending, were no longer linked by joints. Hands from inside the boat reached my sides and pulled up under my shoulder blades, wrenching me upward. Failing, the hands released me back into the water.

"You've got to help me," she said with an edge of impatience. I looked at the guide and saw her lips in a firm line. Pressing my lips together so they wouldn't quiver, I situated my arms on the raft's side and pushed down. The raft barely bobbed in the water that still held me like an evil angel welcoming me to hell. I pushed again, hands splayed over the nylon to balance me. In unison with my efforts, her arms tugged under my shoulders. The black shorts and mottled leopard print halter clung desperately to my skin as my body won the tug-a-war, rising out of the muck. My stomach collapsed over the side, and I rolled forward, tumbling into the raft.

"Why didn't you ever learn to swim before that? You were like sixteen, right?" He stood facing me in front of the rec building, where we'd been standing for several minutes now.

"I was seventeen, but that wasn't the first time I nearly drowned. It happened to me when I was a little girl, too. After that, I didn't trust anyone to teach me. You should be flattered."

"Well, you know, I am an incredible teacher. You'd have to be insane not to trust me."

I chuckled, but when I spoke again my voice held none of the laughter. "I do trust you." The silence drew our eyes to one another. His green eyes were dirtied with brown and murky like the water and they, too, seemed to ask if they could take me home. I blinked. "It's really an amazing feat given your ego. I probably shouldn't trust your inflated resume at all."

His head cocked to the side, and he laughed.

We started walking again. "So, did you have any other near-death experiences that trip?"

“Only the ones that I imagined.”

“What?” He turned back to face me, grabbing the door and holding it for me.

“At that point I was certain that I was going to die that day or the next day when we went out on the rapids. I was certain of it. So, I tried to think of ways that I could get out of it. I thought about just leaving camp in the middle of the night and walking as far away as I could.” He and I laughed, as he followed me into the warm building. “Or I thought maybe I could force myself to throw up and be sick. I was going to cut myself – and you know how scared I am of knives and stuff – I thought that if I cut myself badly enough that I’d have to go to a hospital and get stitches or something though; that I would be okay. That I’d be safe.” He didn’t laugh.

I handed my ID card over to the man waiting outside the pool and after he scanned it, I walked to the girl’s side. “I’ll meet you in there.”

“Are you doing okay?” He asked as he let his left arm carry him down our channel of the pool. My arms worked hard and clumsily, achieving a similar result. I stared at his face, finding his hazel green eyes and holding onto them with my own. Holding on like I would to the side of the pool the second we made it there. I tried to nod, but as I did the side-stroke, face just sticking out of the water, I knew he wouldn’t be able to tell. And he was expecting an answer.

“Yeah.”

He started up the conversation we’d been having before crossing the 5ft line. Now he was holding up both sides of our talk as my chest started to feel constricted, like I was trapped in an aerosol can. I listened to the baritone of his voice, but I didn’t hear what he was saying. I didn’t know if he was continuing to tease me or if he was telling me a life story I would regret missing later. I just held onto green and listened intently to nothing in particular, wondering if it would be safe for me to look up at our destination wall yet.

I held off as long as I could, then looked. The 8ft on

the wall shone wet blue in the harsh pool lights. My arms started working harder, slapping into the water and pulling me forward, dragging my body’s dead weight like something unconscious. My breathing became more shallow than the water we had started in. I knew if I could hold my hands in front of my face, they would shake. I forgot to listen to his voice. I forgot for a moment that he was even there, eyes fixed to the blue of the number 8, taunting me from a distance—my anchor across the water. Our strip of chlorine-saturated water was like a tongue licking at me, just waiting to swallow.

The monster in the closet had never scared me like the monster underwater. I’d been six and although I hadn’t know it yet, he’d been lurking in a backyard pool. While I’d sat on a floating chair, he’d been the green reflected on the floor under my inflated plastic. His ragged breaths were waves rocking my throne back and forth like a soothing cradle. I laughed and joked with my friends, unaware of his lurking. Light played over the water, reflecting shifting shapes and shadows, beautiful against the blue surface.

It was just a joke that landed me in between those teeth the first time. A friend tipped the chair, not realizing that it had crept too far into the deep end for me to stand on the bottom. Not knowing that, since I hadn’t yet learned to swim, I would rest on the bottom either way.

Blue stretched out before my eyes, my earth and my sky. There was no monster lurking in the water, the monster was the water. That’s the first time water had deafened me to the screaming, but it hadn’t been mine. My sister and mother had yelled, “Kelsey can’t swim!” I’d been scooped out of the water before my skin would be wrinkled by the chlorinate saliva. He hadn’t taken me then, but he’d gotten a taste, and forever after, I was like Hook with his crocodile. I knew out there in the water, something craved me.

“Kels?” His baritone voice broke through the panic like fog around me. My eyes found the green anchor again and it was right across from me. It was alright. I was alright. I didn’t need to hold onto him like I would the wall. He would come after me if I sank. My arm stroked over my head more easily this time and then hit smooth tile.

“Don’t run into the wall.” He chuckled.

From out of my lips crept a laugh I hadn’t realized was there, and my breathing evened out around the comforting sound. “Whoops!” I let my feet catch up with me so they were moving like a frog beneath me—just how he’d explained. I bobbed

in the water and my arms circled around like stirring two potions, one that had to turn counterclockwise and one that, just as certainly, must be clockwise.

“That was good. How do you feel?”

“I feel good.” My head bobbed up and down.

“Let’s try floating.”

“My body doesn’t float. It likes to sink.”

He eyed my leopard suited self and laughed. “I think you’re body will float just fine, but if it will make you feel better, you can float on my hand. Here, lean back.” He came up behind me and took my shoulders, guiding them back against his chest, while moving out of the way, so I never touched more than his palm in the small of my back. It was a pseudo trust fall, and he was stepping out of the way, letting my back and shoulders, head, and even ears, sink into the water.

I walked with my big sisters through our neighbor’s fence and into their backyard. “What’s this lady’s name?” I asked in a quick whisper, gripping my princess towel around my waist. “Nayland?”

“Newland,” Katherine corrected.

The pool was a Colosseum of water sticking up from the ground with the foe that had nearly destroyed me last time waiting inside. As I descended into the arena, negotiating each step down the ladder with care, I realized that my foe was shorter this time. The water didn’t even reach my shoulders. I was taller than him. I smiled.

The first thing we had learned at our neighborhood swim lesson was to float. I watched everyone lean into the water, magically floating over the top, like feathers, and did a simple calculation: If I lay down, I would once again be shorter than my opponent.

“Here, let me help you,” the Newland neighbor said, standing at my side and putting her pudgy hand against my back. She pushed me back with the other, like a baptism—which would also scare me, two years later. “Stay straight,” she encouraged, and I was astonished when my body skimmed the surface of the water, resting all the weight my father now called, “too heavy for shoulder rides,” upon her hand.

“You’re doing great.” But then she moved her hand, and I wasn’t. I lifted my head, startled, and my body sank into the water like the enchantment had broken. Her hand caught my lower back and pushed it back up. “Stay straight.”

“You moved your hand,” I informed her, wondering why she hadn’t realized the reason for my fall was her, not I.

“It’s alright, your body is mostly made of water and fat, so you’ll float.” I wanted to make a joke to my sister—Did she say that I’m fat?—but then she was

moving her hand again. My head began to rise from the water, but her words cut me off. “You’re alright, I’ve got my hand under you, it’s just not touching you.” I rested my head back against my water bed.

The sun was rising in the sky, resting in my eyes. I closed them, letting the heat work against my eyelids and dry my face, trying to relax. It seemed that several minutes had passed before I opened my eyes. Neighbor Newland was gone. My head jolted up as my pivot plummeted down. Like a V, I plunged into the water, stumbling to get my feet under me. My head fell below the surface for just a moment, tasting a hint of chlorine, and then I was on my feet again, affronted by a strange, unpleasant flooding in my nose. The water must have gotten in a few good punches, one to my gut, the other to my nose. A tear mingled with pool water in my eye. It hurt. I climbed out of the pool, calling a draw, and I never returned. I would have made a bad Roman.

His hand was warm against my back, even with the water that brushed between us. It was barely a touch, but it was a touch. “Don’t move your hand.”

He chuckled, “I wasn’t going to.” I let my eyes close out the tiled room that, like an insane asylum, was characterized by white walls.

“I’m sorry I’m such a baby about this. I feel pathetic.”

“Don’t. Everyone has to learn sometime, and you have enough reason to be nervous. Just relax. Did I tell you I’m going to a musical tonight for my Creative Arts class?”

“Really? I love musicals!” He brushed his other hand against my shoulder, reminding me to stay flat.

“I know,” he laughed. “I think it’s called something about a choir.” He hemmed for a moment and added, “The Choir Line?”

“A Chorus Line. I’ve heard of it, but I’ve never seen it.” I snickered. “You’ll have to tell me what you think. The only song that I’ve heard of is called ‘Boobs and Butt.’ Only, that’s not what it’s really called, but I’m not saying the real name.”

He laughed. “Maybe I’ll actually like musicals!”

I opened my eyes to shoot him a reproachful look, but glimpsing his upside down face above me with dark, wet hair sticking up in odd directions, I couldn’t muster it. The straight board I’d been imitating bent with the quakes of my laughter. I sank into the water less than an inch before his hand was holding me steady.

“You alright?” He must have seen the flash of horror in my expression, but it was gone now.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” I smiled.

“Ready to swim again?” he asked.

“Just about.” He helped me up again and we both treaded water, drifting away from each other until the distance was something socially safe again. I could see the marine insignia tattooed on his shoulder. A blue eagle rested atop a blue anchor in the blue world. I reached for the wall, but stopped myself. “Would it be alright if I held onto you?”

He eyed me, considering, and then warned, “I got trained to handle drowning people, so if you grab onto me, I’d probably react the way I did in training. It’s the safe way not to get us both drowned.”

I cocked my head, waiting for him to continue, but he didn’t. “What exactly would you do?”

“Well, I’d flip around the hold and throw you off me—”

My face fell, eyes wide and my legs almost forgot to tread, but then they kicked against the water, even stronger.

“—and then I’d get you in a drag and get you to safety. Drowning people panic, and it’s just easier to save them if they’re unconscious. But you can be certain that I wouldn’t let you drown. You’re safe with me.” His green eyes held me like a tether, and I felt it. I felt safe.

“I just wanted to rest my hand on your shoulder,” I added. I reached out my hand. “Don’t freak out,” I warned, “I’m gonna touch you.” My hand rested against the etching in his skin, covering the anchor, but I could still see it when I looked at him. The touch was gentle, like I’d imagined my touch on Patty’s shoulder had been years before, and he didn’t throw me off. He laughed.

“Oh. Yeah, that’s okay.” He smiled, abashed, and I forgot that I was treading in water taller than me.

Behind him, I could see the clock on the wall, inching too close to the hour. “You should probably go to your musical. You’re going to be late. I can walk home.”

He glanced at the clock and grimaced. “You’re right, we should go.” We began swimming back towards the shallows. “But I’m not letting you walk alone. Walk

back to my car with me, and I’ll drive you.”

“That’s even farther than my house,” I reminded him.

“You can use my coat.”

“I don’t want to make you late.”

“I’m going to be late either way.”

“I’m sorry!” My face scrunched up in a dissatisfied frown.

“I’m not.” He was still smiling. We’d reached the other end. “I’m either walking you home or driving you, which is it?” He surged up out of the water and wrapped a towel around himself.

“Driving.” I lurched out of the water, taking the towel he offered and wrapped it around the leopard part of me, walking towards the girl’s dressing room. “Don’t die,” I called after him, automatically.

“Don’t slip and fall,” he countered, walking into the men’s dressing.

To the stick figure on his closing door, I answered, “I won’t.” But, despite his warning, I did. I fell.

“The Ending of a Good Day” by Kristine Jackson
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



Third Place Undergraduate NonFiction

Flesh Memories

by Millie Tullis

I find that I am a strange girl. I have forgotten what I must look like. My body, doubled over, is crouched low, and it balances just a few inches above the green earth. I'm posing, like a prayerful sinner, before a tiny headstone that belongs to strangers.

When I had come over, I rested my canned drink on the cement beside the grave's head. I see that it looks ludicrous now, and out of place. And it's frail, even with its colorful advertisements. The false attractions seem tired to me. The can appears irreverent as part of this headstone, but then, I can't hold it while I write.

My notebook is balanced, tilted, on top of my knee.

I'm wearing sunglasses, to block my eyes from outside. It's not a bright afternoon. It's almost overcast, and the air tastes clean, like October. I'm still wearing my outfit from a Sunday service: a skirt, black tights, heeled boots and a bright summer-sky blue coat.

I'm aware of my strange posture, glasses, and soda, when I hear the leaves splitting. The sounds are bright, burning-white, in contrast with the soft darkness my thoughts had been holding me in. I look up as a reflex, as a reaction to the threatening noise. I feel as though I had fallen under an accidental sleeping spell, and then been woken up, catching myself with red hands. I almost allowed myself to wonder how long I'd been there, buried with my thoughts.

A boy on a bike comes out of the yellow trees; he had been making the noise, pulling me back into reality. I put my eyes back on the grave just before he reaches me, and he peddles quickly past, snapping leaf spines.

I don't know this grave. I hold no personal claim on it. I just stopped.

Now I am stooping before it, close enough, I could reach out and touch it.

As the thought occurs to me, I do it, but I sense that I am an intruder for the first time when the solid, rough rock hits my fingers' pads. I drop my hand, ashamed, and use both hands to clutch my notebook, again, instead.

Babies of Myrtle and John Young

1919

The words are small, resting in careful print on a small, careful headstone. It was on the left side of the road when I had been walking, and the word "Babies" had stopped me.

The babies might have grown into two little girls, who held hands, and walked into the first day of kindergarten together. They might have best friends, reading books aloud to each other at night in matching twin-sized beds set parallel in a brightly-painted bedroom, like my sister and me. They might have had teenage boys who wanted to hold them, shivering in the back of parents' borrowed cars; boys who kissed their cheeks and faces, whispering, "I love you" through heavy breaths. They might have been mothers or doctors or lawyers or writers. The stone yields nothing else to me, but I stare.

Maybe to every parent, your child is always your baby too. Maybe to your heart, a middle-aged, balding son can't ever be fully separated from the pale, gently breathing bundle that a nurse placed in the natural nook of your arm at that first introduction. His face came from something that was pink, and shiny, and new and bright. It will always be holding in it that which you see as new and bright, a baby's life, potential, start. Perhaps he'll always seem to be the baby that needed you, and you'll never escape from that striking terror that you need him now too.

My mother and brother call my two younger sisters and me "the Babies;" they have since my youngest sister was born, all three of us only four years apart. I'm eighteen years old today.

They'll call me one of "the babies" until the day they die.

My heels are thick, but they sunk in the grassy earth before the grave when I first crouched. It hadn't rained that day. October still left a little dampness in the grass and dirt, and it was soft. My heels punctured it too quickly.

I wondered how many tears had nourished the small piece of earth below me, the dirt, the grave I was now sinking into. And how many other tears for this

grave had been washed away somewhere else... Perhaps there had been a mother, wiping her wetted face quickly, on the arm of her sleeve, stretching it out past her thin wrist. Her knees bending together and meeting for her elbows to sink into, her back arched, she sat on the lid of a bathroom toilet, with the fan going to cover the trembling crying sounds she couldn't seem to stop. Perhaps just outside, was the bedroom, where the father had held his face in large hands, and wept like a child, sitting on the edge of a sinking bed, in a buttoned white shirt and dark tie, waiting for his wife to finish getting ready. Only after the tears been stuffed away could they slip on their dry masks again, hiding the scars crying left on their cheeks, to go dancing with a neighbor couple.

Perhaps they had both cried where my shoes sank now, for the babies, sleeping beneath my feet.

There aren't any tears here now. I'm alone before the stone.

All of the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, of all the John and Myrtle Youngs probably nod at the papers holding family birth and death certificates, dry-eyed.

Stacks of my own family's souls sit in my parent's house. They sit the same way in the houses of my aunts and uncles. They lie in binders and books, as projects; the aunts and uncles had made the books themselves.

The pages are cracked open to find a picture, a birthday, or a name—for a school assignment. Then their lives are closed again. Like the loose-leaf papers, they are bound together by rings, and put in a stack, in a corner. The ghost's kisses and accomplishments and babies sink lower and deeper under the stack as years pass.

The papers are brittle and dry.

I stand, and begin to walk again. My legs and body feel lighter. The grave leaves me feeling afraid, or guilty.

I have no right to be sad for the dead babies—what do I know of dying or last breaths taken or breaths that were never taken at all? I don't even know the broken mother.

I've never bled like her.

Or cried, from losing the flesh I grew.

Sweat. I've never sweated. Never past a starting sweetness, a sticky shine, a young dew.

And all my bones are whole.

As a little girl, I was always jealous of my friends when they broke bones.

They'd bring arms to school, cradled in happy, pink or green casts. Every one of us fawned over the fresh plaster. We'd touch it, reaching out as often as it was within our having. We took turns feeling its new, hard skin, and we'd ask to mark it. We tried to make it our own, but of course it never was.

I always quietly waited for my turn to be broken. Taking care not to take care when I'd jump off a trampoline, or a swing, or a patio. Waiting for the day I landed wrong too, and could hold my own beautiful cast against my chest, a tiny, breathing testament to my bone's being split or shattered.

I continue to walk through the cemetery. I find a place to throw away the empty soda can, and I turn a corner.

Few leaves break under my shoes, most have been carefully swept to the road's edge. I wrap my arms around myself and feel safer remembering that someone's job is to lovingly clean the cemetery. Someone brushes away the leaves, gently, and keeps the grass as green and alive as the silence that hangs over it is not.

This cemetery sits right outside my apartment, and, whenever my world spins too fast and begs me for a walk, like today, I can feel it's pulling me in. It's large and orderly, like all cemeteries I've known, and with grass very neat and very green. Most of its tombstones still have their clean, sharp edges. But my favorites are the really old graves; most of them are sprinkled in the back of the cemetery. I like to watch them as they surprise my eyes with their odd shapes. A few are erected like giant stone crayons, coloring heaven or the sky. Most have them have been softened down by snow and wind.

When I was a really little girl, my mom used to take me to the cemetery in our town often. I remember it was much younger than this one, and almost all of the stones looked the same, but I was endlessly pleased to roam by myself and explore between the graves once I was old enough to read the names imprinted on their faces. To me, names made the stones into lives, and I could pretend they were my parents or grandparents, and our lives were intertwined. I would find names I believed were special, and I would stand by them for a moment or two, staring and

wondering, and folding my arms, like my mom had taught me to do when I was being quiet and kind to my feelings. I sometimes talked to them, and tried to build up some tears, if I was imagining myself as their tragically, beautifully, orphaned young daughter.

Often I would search very hard for the plastic flower heads the wind carelessly scattered off old bouquets, and save them in the pockets of my jeans. They were always small and frayed; most were faded into a greyish tone. I would place them on the graves I thought looked the most neglected and forgotten. I would pretend I was missing the people I gave flowers to, because I imagined someone somewhere was, and I was only standing in for them, through my imaginings.

Now I come up to a woman, centered before a grave. She stands alone there, and she turns away from me before I reach her.

She seems unremarkable to me. Her form is rather large, and her hair is fluffed and pinned in a style that is outdated. She looks like a woman whose body has been a mother many times, and is now trying to age in a way that holds what she always believed was the only definition of “feminine”—to be slim, to curve without thickening.

She looks like a thousand other women I’ve known. She is almost every mother of a friend, or every aunt. Her body looks tired; it looks a little too large.

My shoes make some noise, but she doesn’t turn.

I can’t see her face, and I begin to wonder at it. I wonder at her body under the coat and dress and tights and shoes. I wish I could see her hands. Do her veins bulge, like my mothers? Are they spotted from sun, like my piano teacher’s were when I was a little girl? My own hands are pink. There is some hair on the knuckles, and the curve where my thumb links into my wrist. The skin is fresh. There are no spots, and my veins swim far beneath my skin that is still soft. My nails have yet to yellow or look too thick. They are white, but I cover them with black polish.

My body has yet to sag from exhaustion, or stretch, from any strained use. I’ve never looked in the mirror, naked, and cried at the bulges of a baby, or after, at the hanging fat they’ve leave behind. It’s never been changed. My body is unopened, unexposed; it is without fear or love from anywhere deep within me. It has never rewarded or betrayed me. It just is, tight skin stretching across me. Across hips that have yet to ache, yet to feel anything at all.

I wrap my arms around myself again.

I’ve begun to pass her now, the mother. Her exhausted shape leaves the gravestone, and she begins to wander through the grass, between stones. She walks a little

deeper into the quiet of the cemetery.

Her hands move from her body and her palms tilt up slightly as she walks, like they want to see a bit of the sky. Then they curl back to her bulging hips, close against her polyester coat. She continues to weave between the graves. I look down, respecting our silence, and perhaps our shared wonderings.

I pass quickly over the baby corner of the cemetery. It is littered heavily with flags, tassels, balloons, and bears. It has a hundred colors. The graves are small. I don’t know why the other babies aren’t buried here, but I don’t want to see the dates on those graves today.

I’m almost at the end of my walk. Soon the road will cross, and I will turn right, leaving through the front gate I love so much. It looks so old, but it’s still unbroken. The bricks make large pillars, and there are lights on top. They reflect out of large orbs just before dusk falls each night.

But another grave has caught my eye for a moment. I pause before it, because on the gravestone there is a frozen, smiling boy, and I want to look at him, now, before I leave.

He wears a polo shirt. It is a screaming blue against his light pink neck, and the cold granite cradling it. The polo is striped with thin, white and navy blue lines. It looks like the shirts my mom always made my brothers wear for school pictures. The small edges of the cameo show a softly false background, a tree and some green. I wonder if he wore the shirt often. His neck sticks out a little stiffly from it, but his smile is there. It is a smile that is a smirk too, and it shows even, white teeth. His whole image has a shine to it. The plastic that shields his shirt, his smile, is all that remains for me to see of him now; it’s reflective. I see my shape in it.

The words on his gravestone tell me he was twenty-six years old when he died.

From the picture, I would have thought him seventeen—eighteen.

Next year, my brother will be twenty-six. He’ll be going to graduate school to study marketing. He hopes for North-

western, or Duke.

Next year, my boyfriend will be twenty-six too.

My boyfriend who kisses me, and tastes milky sweet. He'll be about to graduate with his bachelor's degree, and his days will be both troubled and excited. He'll be thinking about his portfolio, his art, a job.

Maybe he'll be thinking about marrying me, about sleeping with me on some far-off wedding night. Lies tell me it will be filled with lace and white cloths. There would be no blood or tears, just a pure glow that would come from both of us, naked and fearless, and the clean sheets. There would be no fear, just excitement. There would be no brooding; there would be only joy. Nothing would hurt me that night, because there would be magic, all around us and within us.

But I know I'd cry and bleed, even if I was happy too.

"Home by the River" by Angela Turnbow
Graduate Art Honorable Mention



First Place Undergraduate Poetry

Stacie Denetsosie

The Indian Beauty

I saw a picture. Framed.
In a dear friend's home,
admired by all.

She was called...

"The Indian Beauty."

She was clothed in soft white wrinkled buckskin,
fringe hanging off her breasts and sleeves.

Snow cascaded around her, fading out the forest behind.

Beads decorated her hair. She had one of those furtive stares.

Because that's what we look like.

We lie half clothed on buffalo skins.

In some state's gift shop or country store.

With hands that are brown soft.

As if we don't work,

as if our calloused life styles haven't marked us just yet.

We are all as thin as willows;

legs limber as green wood in spring.

Like we don't eat or cook.

In fact we all have a Native lover or some John Smith

You see us twisted up in a loving embrace,

vulnerable and sensuous.

Barely brown, almost white.

White enough to be admired.

White enough to be accepted

The flurries speckle out tradition.

But when I look into the eyes of my mother

I don't see this.
I see hands mangled by arthritis.
Wrinkles web her tired face.
My mother is creased with a tradition that is heavy to carry.
So she has a broad back and sturdy arms.
Thick legs to carry on.
How else would we cross the threshold?
With our children on our backs.
To teach them not be laden by the thickness of a blizzard cold
past.

Putty Faced Baby

A puffy snowsuit overwhelms my chubby frame.
Thick snow blankets the back of the truck.
I am two. My eyes peer past the chub of my cheeks.
I share an innocent gaze with the camera.

Putty faced baby molded by the hands of circumstance.
I know nothing about you, mother.
I didn't know that he had come in under the cloak of the night,
Dried eager hands on you like you were a towel and
Wrung you until you were dry.

I didn't know.
You'd tell me on my sixth birthday.
And I would watch as smoke
Smoldered, fueled by melted stubs of candles.
Wax hardening on my cake.

Grandma

Grandma wears a broach,
A turquoise beetle that rests on her collar,
It lolls when she falls asleep.

Grandma's eyes are milky white.
Her hair hangs over her face, cobwebs.
Cobwebs filled with silver strands of our history.

Grandma's face is sun spotted.
Dark marks claiming a stake on her face.
Just like they did her to her land.

Grandma's finger is continually pricked.
The bald finger riddled with needle holes.
She still loves fried chicken.

Grandma rests, in the earth.
Leaving a world that never claimed her as its own.
Backwards tradition, left in the midst, of unsettled dust.

Second Place Undergraduate Poetry

Nissele Contreras

Roman Candle

I laugh at myself when I think of meeting Jack.
He'd be sitting in front of his typing machine
with a cigarette tucked lazily between his lips as
he writes about motel rooms and pool halls and jail cells.

I imagine him furiously pounding the keys
while his mind speeds through Denver.
Goddamn it, what a sight...
like watching a mad man take out a splinter of glass from his
palm.

Jack would take a break and we'd talk for hours
while Roy Eldridge blares downstairs. And he'd find me
intriguing enough to make
me a character in his legendary scroll.

I place the empty bottle by the crib and I just laugh
until I wake the baby upstairs.
His cries break
my reverie and I am left
in shambles, crying, laughing.

Tuesday

--for my abuelita

Tuesday

morning, I'm walking through a public trail
with Bigtooth Maples everywhere and a leaf
falls. Our dark skin looks pretty in the fall, abuelita would say.
Her yellow dress flowing in the autumn breeze.
But everything is dying.
It doesn't matter. Brown looks good with the reds and oranges.
One sentence from her and I'd feel beautiful.
More leaves fall like confetti
at my feet.
Winter is coming.

All year I wait for
fall
the landscape to ignite in flames
of burnt orange and vermillion
Veiny leaves like my abuelita's papery hand
rustle with autumn dew.
It's foggy mornings like today that I wait for,
the veil with crisp droplets that leave my cheeks red.
I do not care for harvest. I do not care for cinnamon and candles. No,
what worries me is winter.
How bitter the cold is, exposing the maple trail's skeleton.
A vicious wind sweeps the brown trees bare
and leaves. Nothing looks beautiful anymore for everything dies
on winter Tuesdays.

Squirm

This is the last picture of my dad
I haven't ripped or burned. I had taken it to L.A
with me once, hoping I'd have courage
to drop it off the freeway. Leave
the ashes
where it all began.

It was made some time ago. See the faces?
They're hard to look at. We're at a party.
Streamers and balloons line
the dark room. My mom tells me to smile. I don't.

I look so feminine and mature with my pink floral print blouse
but I'm a child. I can see that now;
and the innocence left
there. My Dad's eyes and mine mirror
each other. His filled with malice,
mine with grief. It's obvious; I am his.
He inches closer to fit in the frame. I'm squirming
in my seat trying to get some distance. As he rests
his head on my shoulder, the odor of his cologne chokes me.

I wanna tell my mom to put the camera
down and take me away from there.
Please Mom. I know you're afraid. He will lie.
He will change you, too. You can't hear me. Too weak.

I can destroy this souvenir but not the memory;
which pulses toxins that leave me
trembling. Every now and then I get relief but I am
still there, squirming.



"Old Friends" by Wonjun Han
Third Place Undergraduate Art

Third Place Undergraduate Poetry

Isaac Timm

The Yellow Line

The day we died, humming Sweet Child O' Mine,
The day we died, humming Sweet Child O' Mine,
under the gas station lights; the fuel, beer and lies.
under the gas station lights; the fuel, beer and lies.
Sweet gas station beer lights the day the child died
and we, humming, undermine the fuel O' lies.

At midnight we cruise to the reservoir, girls in our sights.
At midnight we cruise to the reservoir, girls in our sights.
Red Buick with the windows down, Sevier River on the right.
Red Buick with the windows down, Sevier River on the right.
Girls at the red windows, Sevier Reservoir in our sights,
we cruise the Buick down to the river with midnight on the right.

Willow-breaks and cottonwoods shadow the yellow line.
Willow-breaks and cottonwoods shadow the yellow line.
Fear of age pulls the ghost's headlights forever along.
Fear of age pulls the ghost's headlights forever along.
Fear pulls age forever. Along the yellow line ghosts
of cottonwoods and willow-breaks shadow the headlights.

Shadow of the cottonwoods, red in the headlights,
we died with the windows down. Girls age under
gas lights humming Sweet Child O' Mine. We cruise
forever to the reservoir, beer our fuel. The station on the right
and at midnight the severe Buick breaks the yellow line.
Fear, river and willow; sights of day pulls ghosts along.

The Girl from Vegas Drives Away

You peel out, full
posi-traction, roaring away,
a white tear drop;
Chevy to lozenge
at the vanishing point.

You leave me behind
to swallow the words
I meant to say.

You're a dead ringer
for my mother,
her distance
"Mother, I love you
Don't go away."
She went deep
into her head.
You pass between
Joshua Trees,
a blur.

I have nothing left
but illusions.

How I hate you
me struck dumb
in the sun, naked under
that fluorescent bulb,
the roar of your engine
a fading, ringing buzz.

Caliban Buys a Duster Coat

Caliban's first year of college starts well.
In the first week his isolation is an exotic language,
many thrill to hear it spoken but like cheap beer
the buzz isn't worth the after-taste.

The problems start in computer class where they show
him the GUI, the internet, his big ill-formed fingers
can't hit just one key, leaving only "grryt"
on the blinking screen.

Then when he crosses the campus
he sees girls in short summer skirts, high hair, tanned arms,
moving about in groups, threes and fours.
Some look Caliban's way with curious interest
that makes him blush. Then he hears them laugh
and sees Miranda rolling on the sand, laughing
at the sloppy "Q" he scrawled on a parchment
and he is paralyzed.

So he trips out to the western store and picks out,
a black duster coat, likes how it widens his shoulders
but mostly he likes that the canvas covers his bowed legs,
hides his duck walk.

So now with new armor he strides boldly-
talks quickly-like everyone else.
At a dance he grinds clumsily on a girl,
who tells him to stop but still takes another turn
on the floor. In class he learns a tactic,
gets ten words a minute holding his hands out like Mozart
then bringing them down on the keyboard, swans landing.
He writes "I hit him with a trout!"

But the coat is itchy, makes him sweat in class.
When it rains or he's hit with sprinklers he smells
like car upholstery. When he sleeps at night
it looms over his small dorm bunk, judging him
from its hanger. As the cold of winter comes,
he slips on the ice because fully buttoned the coat
makes him shuffle and he dances a comical ice-capades
before falling on his ass.

Late in January he is walking to the dorm,
shaking the snow that built up under the coat's hem,
snarling like the damned, when a woman disengages
from the shadowy wall, black leather jacket, clove cigarette
between red lips- not Miranda. "Lose the coat,
you look better without it," she exhales.

So Caliban returns the duster to the store, buys a second hand
Sega Genesis and a winter coat that makes him look like a grape
but keeps the cold out. The woman waves when she sees him,
he smiles and waves back.

First Place Graduate Fiction

Last Lovers on Mars

by Kendall Pack

Daniel, laying in bed beside his wife, Elise, pressed down on the power button on his laptop. The base of it grew warm on his thighs as the screen illuminated the small bedroom.

Elise rolled over, pulling the blanket tight between them. Daniel looked at her back, her skin exposed at the neck, pale and freckled. She mumbled something, maybe a call of “turn that off” or “go to sleep,” but then she fell silent. He reached over and touched the base of her neck with his fingertip, tracing the islands of freckles, connecting them with the path of his hand.

“Hold me,” she muttered.

He moved the computer to his side and put one arm over her. Hair covered her face, long golden strands, and he brushed them aside to kiss her cheek.

“I’m going to stay up and work a little. Is that okay?” he asked, caressing her shoulder.

She turned, the hair falling away from her face. “What are you working on?”

“Just this essay for class,” he responded, turning back to the computer and opening the web browser.

“Which class?” she asked.

He stared at the screen for a moment then looked back at her. “Oh, just that paper for engineering, babe, look, Nate has pictures of his stupid baby up.” He turned the screen toward her.

“I thought you were writing,” she mumbled.

He looked at the back of her head for a moment,

wondering where between reality and dream her mind stood. He wondered if the computer on his lap was analogous to the dreams in his head, a fiction presented as reality that he might experience but never exist in. “Yeah, sorry,” he said, and turned the screen away from her.

You and the Stranger both like Roleplay

Say hi!

Stranger: Hello

You: hi

Stranger: asl

You: 24 m TX

Stranger has disconnected

Start a new conversation?

You and the Stranger both like Roleplay

Say hi!

Stranger: Hi

You: hi

Stranger: M or F?

You: M

Stranger has disconnected

Start a new conversation?

In their first three months of marriage, Daniel and Elise Garner engaged in sexual congress an average of two times per day. Their highest number of coital encounters in a single 24hour period was six, while their lowest was zero. They only missed one day, and it happened to be the day that Elise was sick with the flu, so it hardly counts.

Now, four months into the marriage, they’ve slowed to a little over once per day on average. This can be attributed to Daniel’s work and school schedules, Elise’s school schedule, and a waning in the “wideeyed fascination” that accompanies inexperienced sexual partners in their first months of experience.

Daniel believes that the main reason is a lack of fulfillment on her part, lead-

ing to a sense of the act as purely selfish from him. Elise might agree that sex seems to be an experience meant more for the man than the woman, seeing that she only receives the slightest pleasure followed by frequent urinary tract infections.

You and the Stranger both like Roleplay Say hi!

You: Truth
Stranger: Why are you up so late?
You: Bored, horny
Stranger: Haha
You: Truth or dare?
Stranger: Truth
You: Are you alone?
Stranger: Yes ;)
You: nice
Stranger: t or d?
You: t
Stranger: What are you wearing?
You: nothing :)
Stranger: mmm
Stranger: d
You: strip down
Stranger: okay
Stranger: done
You: d
You: Dare
You: ?
You: Hello?

Stranger has disconnected Start a new conversation?

Daniel and Elise stepped onto the pathway into West Park. She wanted to feed the ducks, though he was certain they had mostly cleared out since construction had started near the stream. Overhead, the arm of a crane loomed.

“How was school?” Elise asked.

School suuuuuuucks,” Daniel replied.

Elise wrapped her arm around Daniel’s and held him close. “I like being on a date with you.” “You seem surprised,” he said, smiling.

“Well, we’ve both been busy,” she said as they walked down the asphalt path towards the treesthat lined the stream. “It’s just nice to be together.”

Daniel kissed her forehead. “I’m glad you like it.”

“If you treat me right, maybe you’ll get lucky,” she teased, nudging him with her elbow. She heard a splash in the stream and squinted to see in the dying light if a duck was making the noise. “Come on!” she said, pulling Daniel ahead.

In the stream, three ducks circled each other, stirring up the silty water below. Behind them, dormant backhoes and a massive dump truck sat waiting for tomorrow’s work.

“Daniel, look!” She pointed at the ducks and he nodded.

From her purse, Elise retrieved a small loaf of bread and began tearing a slice into small pieces. Daniel watched her move in the darkness, tossing small bits of bread to the ducks who fought for the pieces, pressing against each other and flapping their wings wildly.

“I hate school,” he said, stroking her back with the palm of his hand. He opened his mouth to say more, but he shut it and exhaled through his nose.

“Yeah?” she asked, turning to him.

“Yeah, I hate it and I don’t want to do it.” He pulled away from her, putting his hands in his pockets.

“Well what do you want to do?”

He looked off toward the sunset. “I don’t know, I just think I’m done with school.”

She tried to catch his eyes, to lock him into conversation. “Well, what? Are you going to keep driving for the pharmacy? Do you think minimum wage will take care of us?”

“No,” he said, glancing at her. “I just...don’t want to do school.”

“Well you have to.”

“Cool,” he replied, turning back to the stream. She fell silent and he wondered whether she saw it as a success, as a sign of defeat that he closed himself off. He looked down at the ducks, singularly focused in the water on the bread being tossed to them, their beaks slapping the water. “Wouldn’t that be great?”

“What?”

“Just sitting around, waiting for someone else to feed you.” He laughed.

“Poor Daniel,” she replied, “works so hard.” She laughed.

You and the Stranger both like Truth or Dare Say hi!

Stranger: Truth

You: How old are you?

Stranger: 18

You: cool

You: Truth

Stranger: What do you look like?

You: Brown hair, hazel eyes, 5’10, swimmer’s body

Stranger: Tall!

You: Thanks

Stranger: Truth

You: What are you wearing?

Stranger: Tank top and gym shorts

You: Truth

Stranger: M or F

You: M

Stranger has disconnected Start a new conversation?

Daniel spends much of his time loitering in his living room, waiting. He is not necessarily waiting for Elise or a phone call or life to happen. More than anything he seems to be waiting for a mood to strike him. When that mood strikes he will get on his computer and putter around for a while, avoiding homework, until he “accidentally” lands on a site catering more to the adult set, though he’s been visiting them since he was barely adolescent.

Once there, though his phone often rings during a session, Daniel remains oblivious to the world around him for upwards of three hours. The goal for him, on

any given day, is to silence reality.

You and the Stranger both like Dirty Talk Say hi!

Stranger: you horny?

You: haha yeah

Stranger: me too :)

You: What are you up to?

Stranger: just in my room

You: same

Stranger: cool ;)

You: What are you wearing?

Stranger: boxers

You: are you a guy?

Stranger: yeah

You: me too

Stranger: oh

You: yeah

Stranger has disconnected. Start a new conversation?

Daniel parked the white company car (nothing special, but mobile) in the parking lot of Aspen Home retirement village and wandered in with a package for Gary Lodden. The huge building sprawled out from its central entrance, filling half the block with three stories of rooms, filled with the sick, senile and otherwise indisposed with the business of passing on. Daniel pulled open the heavy glass door and let it shut slowly behind him. In the lobby, he found an abandoned front desk at the center of three stark white hallways, stretching back and out for enough length to make him sigh and check the time. 7:42. He moved, quick as he could walk without seeming panicked, towards the back hall. After moving through the empty hallways on brown carpet for a few minutes, passing silent doors, he ran into a nurse standing at a mobile worksta-

tion.

“Excuse me,” he said as she turned, “I’m looking for Gary Lodden’s room.”

“Pills?” she asked, turning towards him. Her red hair flared out, away from her vibrant eyes. She had somehow overcome the shapelessness of scrubs which, on her, accentuated her slight curves and athletic frame.

“Yes,” Daniel said, trying to look relaxed, trying to slow his breathing, trying suck in his stomach and enhance his shoulders.

She smiled. “I’ll take them.”

Daniel handed her the pills, gave her his clipboard, and watched her thin hands as she signed her name.

Madison.

“How do you get a job like this?” he asked.

“School and tests and stuff. I’m pretty new,” she said, handing the clipboard back.

He took it. “How much does it pay?”

“Not much, \$13 per hour.” She opened the bag of pills.

“What?” He laughed. “Ask me how much I make.”

“What?”

“Ask me, seriously.”

“Okay, how much?”

“Minimum wage, I’ve been working here for a year,” he said, “well, not here, you know, but for the company.” He watched as she shifted her weight to one foot, the way she cocked her hip, the way her mouth opened as though to speak that unspeakable thing before closing.

She smiled, cringed. “That’s a crime! Don’t they have to give you a raise?”

“Well, I’ve never actually met my boss, so they pretty much have no reason to do anything as long as I’m dumb enough to keep working.”

She laughed. “Well, good luck.”

“Yeah, maybe I’ll see you again next time I’m here.” He tucked his board under his arm.

She smiles. “Maybe.”

On the way home, Elise called. Daniel reached for his phone, keeping one hand on the steering wheel of the company car, the leather cracking, as he stretched out his legs (too long to fit in the space) to loosen the pocket. He caught her on the last ring.

“Hey, babe,” he said, pressing on along the dark highway.

“Hi, Dan,” Elise replied.

“How are you?” He reached over to grab his last delivery and scanned the address, typing it into his GPS.

“Good! Today was a little crazy, but I got a lot done.”

“Good to hear.” He adjusted in his seat, sitting up and catching himself in the rear view mirror.

“How was work?” she asked.

“Oh, you know,” he said, pausing for a moment before continuing. “There was this nurse...”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, she--it was so funny, um...”

“What?” Elise asked, her voice growing quiet.

“Oh, nothing, she just had a funny name,” he said, “Madison or something.”

“Oh, that’s funny.” After a moment of silence, she said, “I’ll let you go.”

“Okay.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too,” he said, then ended the call and tossed the phone to the passenger’s seat. He thought he might take the long way home.

You and the Stranger both like Fantasy

Say hi!

You: Hi

Stranger: Hello there. You: What are you looking for

Stranger: You like D&D?

You: Not the kind of fantasy I’m looking for..

Stranger: LOTR?

You:...less elves more...roleplay

Stranger has disconnected Start a new conversation?

You and the Stranger both like Roleplay Say hi!

Stranger: Hello

You: Hi

Stranger: You like rp?

You: Yeah

Stranger: Pervert

Stranger has disconnected

Start a new conversation?

Daniel's relationship with his father (specifically from the years 2003-2009) is marked by steady tension. But in recent years, their relationship has improved (that is to say, Daniel has spoken with his father about certain occasions during which his father had queries about the search history on the computer (that is to say, he has hinted towards the validity of his father's concerns (that is to say, he has presented the case of his friend, Brian, as an example of the negative effects of such a pastime on a marital relationship (that is to say, he compounded his own indiscretions on Brian's whose marriage had recently taken a negative turn (that is to say, Brian's wife lives with her parents now)))))).

His father never has given Daniel the talk, though what he might say would certainly be no help as Daniel had already learned the anatomy of the body from *National Geographic* in third grade and the practical mechanics of sex from the internet. Now, Daniel has a clear understanding of positions, desires, and the language of sexual encounters, though he has yet to enact many of these as his partner is somewhat unwilling.

You and the Stranger both like Roleplay

Say hi!

You: Hi

Stranger: (tell me if you're reading) Casey f 18 Cali brown hair down to my waist, blue eyes, tall, fit but curvy. Roleplay scenario: we're colonists on Mars, inspecting it to see if it's usable for humans. We don't know or like each other but somehow you prove yourself to me and we fall in love in space. Can be sexual but go slow. If you want to do this, give your description and begin.

You: Reading

You: Okay. Daniel m 25 tall brown hair hazel eyes swimmer's body

Stranger: Cool

You: Want to start?

Stranger: Sure

Stranger: The spacecraft hums as we awaken from slumber. The cold darkness of space surrounds the ship as we move imperceptibly closer to Mars. I look over at you. "Come on, Daniel. We've got work to do."

You: I raise up from my cot, still tired, and step onto the cold floor. "How close are we?"

Stranger: "We'll be there in about ten hours." I walk towards the door to the storage room to arrange our equipment for the landing.

You: I follow behind you, excited and terrified of what lies ahead.

Elise came home early from her new job at the grocery store to find Daniel sitting in front of the computer, the small desk standing in front of the tv, cluttering their small living room. As she entered, he quickly closed the window he had open and sat back in his chair, his hands in his lap.

"How was work?" he asked.

"Good. Did you do the dishes?" she asked, glancing past his computer desk, over the brown leather couch covered in unfolded laundry, and on to the sink where the same silver pot she cooked pasta in a week ago sat upturned on a pile of other dishes.

"I did a few," he replied.

"Could you finish them?" she asked.

"I've got a lot of work to do."

"I thought you said you were almost done." She set down her purse and walked past him to the kitchen, grabbing the last clean glass from the cupboard above the sink, pushing the pot aside, and pouring herself some water.

"I was, but that was just one paper," he said, "I've got homework for my linguistics class too."

"Can't you take a break and do this?" she asked, sipping her water.

"Maybe in a little while." He kept his back to her, staring at the screen in front of him, searching for any incriminating footprints in the glowing icons or the "most visited pages" tab, but the screen held nothing, no trace, no truth.

"Thank you," she said, balancing the cup in the sink. "I love you."

He looked into the screen. "Do you ever think we got married too soon?" he

asked.

“What?” she said, turning.

“Nevermind.”

She moved toward him. “No, you were asking something about marriage.”

He looked up at her. “Oh, it’s just, sometimes I wonder if we...nevermind.”

“You can’t do that.”

“Well I can,” he said, “though I imagine you’re not going to let me.”

“You’re right. Tell me.”

He sighed. “Well, okay, is marriage...is marriage everything you hoped for?”

“Is this about sex?” she asked, her hand on her hip.

Daniel turned back to the computer. “No, it’s not about sex. It’s about...I don’t know, maybe it’s sex or...I don’t know.”

“Do you not like sex with me?”

Daniel turned. “There it is! There’s the problem. We have great sex and then you’re like, ‘oh no! I’m ugly! You hate me!’” he said, “It makes me feel like I’m ruining your life.”

“Well,” she replied, “that’s marriage. Sometimes I hate myself and you have to accept that.”

“It would just be a lot easier if I could say ‘you’re beautiful’ and you’d be cool with it,” he said, tapping his finger on the computer desk.

“You can’t just say ‘I love you’ and be done proving it.”

“Well...okay,” he said, and shut off for the rest of the night.

Stranger: “Are you okay?” I ask over the comm, sweat pouring down my face.

You: “Yeah, but the landing was a little rough. Can you run diagnostics on the shuttle?” I ask, unbuckling my seatbelt and moving towards suit storage

Stranger: I look at your face on the screen, so calm and rugged. I run the diagnostics. “Looks like you won’t be flying back. I’ll have to land.”

You: “No, the ship can’t handle a landing like that.” I look up at the ship, looming over the Martian sand.

Stranger: “I’m not leaving you.” I bring the ship down, steering close to the shuttle, and land.

You: It smashes into a hidden boulder, grinding against the harsh terrain and sliding to a stop against the base of a dune.

**You and Elise both like Small Talk.
Say hi!**

Elise: “You look wrecked.” I stand over the burner at the kitchen stove, my body glistening with hot sweat..

Daniel: “You making dinner?” I toss my backpack down on the couch and collapse.

Elise: “Yeah.” I lick spaghetti sauce from my finger, looking coyly at you from the corner of my eye.

Elise: “How was your day?” I brush back a strand of hair, revealing my supple, soft neck.

Daniel: “Same as always.” I push off my shoes and lay back against the armrest.

Elise: “Did you get the essay written for Tergeson?” I stir the pot of spaghetti, so slow, so hot.

Daniel: I sit up. “Oh, not yet. When’s that due?”

Elise: “Tomorrow.” The steam from the spaghetti water heats up the front of my blouse, getting me all wet.

Daniel: “Well, back to school!”

Stranger: “We’ll die here.” I breathe heavily as blood pours out of me.

You: “At least we’ll die together.” I hold a cloth against your forehead, soaking it in blood.

Stranger: My eyes close

You: I shake you awake

Stranger: They’re still closed

You: “Wake up, Casey!” I shout.

Stranger: Still closed

You: I kiss you

Stranger: I wake up

You and Elise both like Avoidance.

Say hi!

Elise: What is this?

Daniel: What do you mean?

Elise: Okay, forget the question. I know what it is.

Daniel: What are you talking about?

Elise: You could at least close your browser.

Daniel: I didn't open that.

Elise: Fascinating.

Daniel: Must be a virus.

Elise: Incredible.

Daniel: "That was incredible." I turn over, looking into your eyes.

Casey: "You loved me like I never thought I could be loved." I stroke your chest.

Daniel: "Even though we're trapped on Mars, I'm glad we're together." I brush your hair with my fingers.

Casey: "We can stay here in each other's arms, making love and telling secrets until we sleep."

Daniel: "I'd like that." I stroke your face, your neck, your breasts.

Casey: "Take me."

You and the Stranger both like Denial. Say hi!

Stranger: I'm taking the computer.

You: Why?

Stranger: Can you at least admit you messed up?

You: Everyone does it, Elise.

Stranger: I don't, and I hoped that you wouldn't.

You:...

Stranger: I'll be back next week, and I hope you want to talk about this.

You: I hope you're ready to listen.

Stranger: What's that supposed to mean?

You: What it means.

Stranger: It doesn't mean anything. Goodbye, Daniel. You know I love you.

You have disconnected Start a new conversation?

Second Place Graduate Fiction

Throwing Stones

by Christina Sitton

When Inma was eight and nearing her first communion, her mother tied a large red silk bow on top of her dark hair and kissed her cheek. This would be her first confession and her parents wanted it to be special, so they planned for her go right before the Fiesta de San Mateo. Inma felt like a cartoon character, but her mother cooed, "¡Qué Linda!" and smiled at her little girl who was looking older and older each day.

"We're going to be late," her father, Xabier, chimed rhythmically from the door like the large clock in their entryway. But Inma's mother ignored him and tried to fix the bow one more time. "We need to get there before the six o'clock mass if she's going to do this today. Your mother will go to mass without us!" He pleaded as he flicked his wrist to better see the face of his old watch.

On San Mateo's day, the entire townspeople of Logroño and the surrounding pueblos from both Rioja and Navarre came out in mass to celebrate their patron saint on the first day of autumn, giving thanks for their harvest—especially for the Grenache, Graciano, and Tempranillo grapes that had sustained the town's people for over a thousand years. Inma's mother told her the festivities and offerings would help make the day even more special. But, Inma didn't know how to confess. Both her parents and her teacher Sister Eva had explained to her that since the time she turned 7 years old and was at the "age of reason," God had been watching her and writing down all the bad she had done for the past year. Inma didn't like that. She also didn't like that she was supposed to remember so much. She not only had to remember her own sins, she also

had to memorize the Ten Commandments and the deadly sins, so that in case she did any of them, she could confess. But after all her lessons Inma still didn't know what to say.

"Mamá?" Inma asked boldly, "What do I do?"

"You hold still, so I can fix this," said Pili, her mother.

"No. When I go in to confession?"

Her mother paused her fingers from faceting cloth covered buttons lining the back of Inma's clothing. Inma wore a traditional white eyeleted dress that had a built-in petticoat. Inma anxiously wanted to see how the dress could twirl in front of the mirror and how the dress looked with her new white shoes. But the bow! The bow was not traditional and Inma hated it.

"I guess you say what you think you need to say. Your heart will tell you." Her mother went back to fussing as she tugged at Inma's socks, the hem of her skirt, the crimson sash around her waist, then the bow again, snagging some of Inma's hair.

"¡Aye putaba, Mama! Stop!" Inma swore. Her mother gasped a little and looked at Inma's father.

"Inma..." her mother started to scold, but let it go.

* * *

A couple days later, Inma's grandmother drove her through the town of Estella-Lizarra, honking at the old vil-lagers that hung in the street side doorways and hung there, threatening to leap in front of her car. Neither Inma nor her grandmother could admire the carved stone arches, the portal doors, the cross vaults. The town passed in a white-gold blur and then Inma was submerged into the green vegetation of the foothills, passing plotted rows of aspens meant for milling, and fields for grazing sheep. The small road snaked higher and higher until they reached the pueblo of Baquedano that looked out over the Ebro valley. Inma's abuela half smiled as they got out of the car. The valley wind greeted them with a sudden upward push. The cold air had reached the mountains and the vegetation turned at its edges. Summer green leaves bled red-orange-gold.

They moved in silence across the cobbled street beneath the farm houses, but milk goats guarding the small gardens brayed at Inma and her grandmother's, alerting the intrusion to their masters. Inma smelt the perfume of someone doing laundry and passed rows of garden lavender that grew so tall it kept her hidden from the godlike eyes of the cottage windows. She felt small, but safe beneath the bowing lavender heads. Knowing they were her mother's favorite, Inma plucked some purple stalks, planning to give them to her mother when she saw her again. She thought of how her mother would smile and how she would kiss her on her cheeks like she had just days before.

The whitewashed farmhouses started to disappear along with the road, replaced by patchwork pastures, sewn together by harvested stones stacked one a top of the other. The road turned from gravel, covered in fallen leaves, into rutted dirt. The trees closed in, the pathway fit between the jutting root system, and Inma followed her grandmother obediently down the vale, unsure if she should talk or not. Once the trees were dense enough, Abuela told her about the The Way, El Camino de Santiago, and los peregrinos, the pilgrims that came from all over Europe to walk, or ride, The Way wanting penance. "Many times they would walk El Camino for someone they loved," she told Inma, "Someone who was sick, inside or out."

Inma remembered being taught in school, however, that the pilgrims tried to absolve sin and wrong doings and wondered if Abuela thought she was a sinner and if she too needed absolution.

"All roads lead to Santiago," Abuelita added with a chuckle, "You just follow the cockle shells."

They heard the water before they saw it. After one hairpin turn, there it was—a river saturated in hues of pale blue. Minerals of alabaster, gypsum, and calcite coated the banks, which seemed to reflect the sunlight from beneath water. Everything took on a gem filter. Nacedero del Urederra. The Birthplace of Urederra.

"Look, Abuela!" Inma shouted in excitement, "Look!"

Abuela laughed and ran her fingers through Inma's dark loose hair. "I see it," she huffed, a little out of breath.

Chains eyeleted through aluminum poles closed any access to the path that lead down to the water. A sign read, "Arrantza debekatua!"

"What does it say, Abuela?" Inma asked, "That Spanish is funny."

"It says, 'No fishing'...in el vasco...it's the language your papá uses sometimes." Abuela watched her for a moment, then turned, pointing to another sign just beyond the chains, "And there, it says 'Be Careful!'"

"You can talk b-v-vasco too?"

Abuela smiled. "A little."

* * *

Finally ready for San Mateo and Inma's first confession, Inma and her parents ventured out with her, hand in hand, along Logroño's el parque del Ebro, trying to make their way to the old city by taking a shortcut through the park. The park edged itself against the banks of the Ebro River and from the walkway Inma noticed that the reflection of the sun on the water seemed to follow them. The sun slanted in the west leaving long finger streaks of light across the river surface, and no matter how quickly she moved, the light kept pace. She couldn't escape it.

Inma stopped short, yanking her parent's arms, only to have them yank at her wrists.

"Come on, Inma! Where going to be late and your grandma is waiting," her father started up his chiming again, but this time it was even more urgent, as if someone had wound his key too tight.

This made Inma nervous again and her scalp began to itch. She tried to free her hand from her mother so she could pull at the red bow in her hair, but her mother wouldn't let go. Inma thought she could have looked like a ballerina with all the ruffled layers of her white dress, if not for the stupid giant bow. Inma glared at her mother, who wore a fine white linen skirt that flowed to her ankles. A red sash around her waist pulled the fabric into flowing ripples. To Inma, her mother seemed to be a white blossom on two dancing stems and a silk crimson center. She wanted to be pretty like her. Her mother didn't have to wear any ribbons in her hair. Inma decided she was too old for ribbons.

Her father gave her hand a pulsed squeeze and smiled at Inma's frowning face. Inma didn't want to look her father in the face, but instead followed the line of his hand and arm. He wore a white shirt, with the sleeves rolled up, and a thick green vest over it. The vest had once been his father's, but Inma didn't

remember this abuelo. She only knew him from pictures. Her father also wore a deep red bandanna around his neck, given to him by her mother, and a flat black woolen beret on his dark hair—the same beret he wore on any special occasion. Inma remembered her papá wearing it in his wedding pictures with his military uniform. But today, he wore a different uniform.

This march to the city center seemed to take forever and Inma couldn't help but notice her feet. The stiff patent leather pinched under her ankle and her toes rubbed against the inside and the soles seemed to get heavier with each step.

Her father encouraged her to keep going, telling her that they were almost there. He even offered to carry her but she wouldn't let him. She would go limp when he tried to pick her up under her armpits, or arch her back while screaming, "No! I don't want you! I'm not a baby!" After a while her father stopped trying. Inma would not go. And he let her sit on the stone bench with her arms folded and tears pooling. In the distance, the cathedral bells rang, echoing six o'clock through the tight stone streets, bouncing itself back and forth between the baroque buildings, and vibrating every apartment's window. Mass had started. Her first confession would have to wait.

Her mother yelled, "Inma! Stop this! Everyone was waiting for us! They've shut the doors! Now we can't even get in to mass!" and slumped down on to the stone bench beside her.

Inma, looked away, clenched her teeth together and tried not to cry.

They all sat in silence, except the sniffles that every once and a while came from Inma and her mother.

"Well, let's just try to make it to the Chupinazo," her father urged her again, adding that if they hurried they could catch the lighting of the rocket. And the offering! But Inma would still not go. Her father finally just swooped her up and put her on his shoulders saying that all princesses get carried from time to time, and they made their way to the fiesta anyway.

They had missed the ceremonies and the town had already erupted into a frenzy of dousing each other with wine and flour. But they had come all this way... and fought with Inma so much, Pili told Xabier that she didn't want to just turn around and go home. So they mingled, and merged in to the throng of people. Bands in the courtyard played the songs of the country and the magistrate. Street bands played songs of the calles about the people. Inma perched on her father's shoulders like a proud exotic bird, a white body with a red bow plume.

Wine splashed purple onto their white clothes from other party goers and Inma squawked in protest.

"They are supposed to do that, Inma," her mother laughed. But Inma didn't

like her white dress turning maroon. They could have her bow, but not her dress.

* * *

After watching the blue water tip over and over mineral scaled stones, Inma's thoughts drifted, floated, pulled her backwards to dark streets, la calles, filled for San Mateo. The thrum of water reminded her of the rushed sound of San Mateo's crowds, the swift motion of people and people and people. Too many faces. She clenched her teeth together and tried not to cry. Her grandmother told her to come; Inma blinked to hide her tears and followed her obediently around the posts and chains to a path that led up stream. She knew that they weren't supposed to go around the chains, her parents had taught her that several times, but she couldn't question her abuela now, not after what happened. When the path narrowed Abuela took hold of Inma's hand. Inma liked the smooth soft plump feel of her grandmother's fingers wrapped around her own, a comfort she never noticed before. It was not like her mother's. Her mother's fingers were harder, more boney, and rough in places. In her other hand Inma held tight to her lavender and wild flowers—her offerings to her mother.

“Los peregrinos...” Her grandma had started again about the pilgrims, “los peregrinos wanted to do what was right and sometimes to be forgiven,” Inma wondered if abuela could read her mind, and her sins. “But, sometimes, they also wanted something more,” Abuela paused and winked at Inma. “You know what? After being in Pamplona to pay tribute to San Fermín, and after finally reaching Estella, some would also take a few days from pilgrimage on El Camino, and sneak up here to wash themselves. The minerals are said to have healing powers. And Santa María! Their feet must have hurt. Can you imagine? And my Lord, the smell!”

Inma didn't know if she could imagine; she could only think of her own feet. But she did try to imagine the pilgrims' feet like her own, throbbing with each step, trying to balance on the slick river stone. How the blister rubbed, ready to burst and confess the bad little girl she had been. Each small pebble added more pain to her ripped soles. She wanted to cry a little, but worried her grandmother would scold her for it and that she didn't deserve to cry. She told herself she must be brave now.

In a small pool near the headwaters, Abuela stopped and sat herself on the only rock large enough for sitting. The pool was like a polished gem. No movement was visible. Inma could see to the very bottom, and no fish could hide itself within. Inma searched for the place where the water came from, but found nothing. With the mineral coat the pool appeared to be a uniformed basin. Inma thought it looked like a giant porcelain tub rimmed with green overgrowth. The canopy above rained leaves in colors of green, gold, and red. Inma tried to stand still next to her abuela,

unsure what she should do with herself. Her grandmother said nothing, but bent over in her seat, plucking up small stones and smoothing them between her fingers.

“Quítate los zapatos, Mi Vida,” her grandmother whispered.

Inma did as her grandmother said and gladly took off her shoes, but worried about what Abuela was not telling her and wondered if her grandmother plucked up the rocks to throw them at her. She wondered if her abuela blamed her for what happened. She asked, “Abuela, what is a Maketo?”

Her abuela paused, kept her eyes on the small stones and didn't answer her question but instead said, “Venga. Vamos entrar” and motioned towards the water.

Again, she did as she was told: Inma pulled her skirt up to her knees and prepared to enter the water. This skirt was not like her favorite dress, but a much simpler peasant style and the thin fabric made it easy for her to bunch into a knot in her fist.

“It's a horrible, hateful name nasty people call other people who are different,” Abuela finally answered. “Never use it.”

Inma steadied the balls of her feet around the smooth rocks and waded in with a gasp from the shock of the cold water; her fingers still pinching the flowers for her mother at the hem of her skirt. Although the cold water hurt at first, it quickly pulled the pain out of her feet and down the river.

* * *

The sound of San Mateo's party only grew louder and louder. A rhythm to the mass of people surged and crested as if they moved in one fluid motion. The drums beat them on, and, with every new song, the people drank down their Kalimotxo, their wine, and then threw down their cups, crushing them victoriously under their feet. What was left of the trailing sun fell behind the buildings, creating long shadows in the side streets that crept up several stories of the stone facades; the street lamps created a strange yellow hue across the faces of the people. With the eye of the sun no longer on the backs of

people, the party could really begin.

Inma grew tired of the sites and sounds. She cried as she dragged herself behind, “I want to go home!”

“Just a minute longer, Mijita,” her mother begged as she drank her cup of wine, “We haven’t been to San Mateo in years!”

Fed up, Inma just sat herself in the middle of the crowd. Bypassers at first danced around her, while her parents both yelled at her to stop acting this way, but the more drunk ones, los borrachos, couldn’t quite maneuver around her and stumbled. Her father tried to stand over her to push back at the swell of people. One younger man and his friends trampled over her already sore feet and fell over. Inma wailed. Her cry became lost, muted in the mass music, motion and people. Her father picked up the fallen men by their white shirts and tried to toss them back into the crowd, away from his daughter. But they surged back at him with one solid push and grabbed a hold of him.

Inma’s mother begged her to get up and pulled at her wrist with one hand, while trying to grab on to her the back of husband’s vest with the other. Inma just covered her head with her hands and screamed even harder, trying make her voice register over the fiesta.

One of the drunk men stood and squared himself to her father, looking him up and down, then snatched her father’s beret, spat on it and shoved into her father chest, dug his finger into his shoulder and called him a “maketo,” Her father hit the man’s hand away. But the man just looked down at Inma, pointed saying “Maketo,” before shoving her father backwards. The man and his friends crashed down on her father like a tempest of fists.

Her mother screamed at her again, “Get up! Inma! Dammit! Now!” as she started to get pulled down with her husband.

Inma couldn’t. The commotion around her made her dizzy. The endless cobblestones under endless feet. The stones stretched out in endless pattern of rectangles and seams, cool and worn smooth, and seemed to flow through the different calles as an sienna stone river, little tributaries leading into and out of the streets and buildings. She didn’t know which way to go or how to run. The yellow street lamps unified the stores’ stone facades into one long wall. The church towers and the merchant plaza buttressed the sky. She tried to remember a Child’s Prayer, but the only words that came were: With light and comfort from above. Be Thou our Guardian. She thought that if she didn’t get the words just right then her prayer would not be heard by the angels. She tried to recite it again. But no words came this time.

She tucked her knees under her chin, covered her ears with her hands as

the seemed to tower higher and higher over her; she tried to drown out all the different voices screaming, the lapping beat of fists to drums; the flock of faces and faces, the blank faces of people swarming in red and white had swallowed the white and red of her mother and father; she couldn’t make sense of the violence she saw.

In the small window of sky above her, Inma tried to fix her eyes beyond faces and fists, beyond the closed city skyline. There she held herself together under a cathedral of stars. Its ceiling painted in a loose wash of black pricked with small white clusters.

El cielo, she thought. The heaven. El cielo, she thought again. The sky.

El cielo máximo. The upper limit. The maximum sky.

Constellations bloomed before her, but she couldn’t read their signs—their historic pattern carefully charted—or find their distinctive markings outlined in black; she saw no order, no patterned map, only the hypnotic beauty of chaos. Heaven was a billion varying shades of bleeding pinpricks. And she knew her smallness.

Es lo mismo, she realized. It was all the same.

She remembered that at some time, or maybe it was many different times, someone, perhaps her mother, perhaps her friends at school, had told her that they once wished or prayed to the stars.

* * *

As Inma waded in the cool water, her toes kicking up small puffs of minerals, she got up enough courage to ask her Abuela, “If papá is vasco, does that mean I’m vasco too?”

“Partially, yes,” Her abuela answered slowly.

“Are you vasco?”

“No, Mijita. Me and your mamá are castellanas.”

“So I’m different from you and mamá?” Inma asked quickly, still kicking up mineral puffs.

“Not really.” Her abuela flustered a little.

“The man. Who hurt my...” Inma shrugged the words

away. Took a deep breath and continued, “The man. He said... he called my papá a ‘Maketo.’ Am I Maketo too?”

Her abuela didn’t answer, but her blue eyes became glossy, polished like the water as she stared straight into Inma’s large brown eyes, before she lowered her gaze to pick up another stone, smoothing it over and over with her plump thumb. “Can I tell you a story?” She finally asked Inma.

Inma nodded her head yes and her grandmother started to tell Inma her favorite story — the one with the three brothers and the one sister who was secretly a princess. How the sister had saved her brothers from the giant by listening to the old woman and not giving in to her pride. Inma imagined herself in the story, standing in the grand church ready to marry the prince. And for a moment she had forgotten the horrible things she saw a few nights before.

Her grandmother stopped and called her over. Inma’s skin was getting red from the cold water. Her grandmother sat her on her lap, wrapped her skirt around Inma’s legs, rubbed the cloth across her skin, then tucked one corner of the hem under her knee to keep it tight. She then wrapped her larger arms over Inma’s small bare ones. “Mijita,” she said, “I want you to take these pebbles, one by one, and squeeze all the bad memories into them, all the bad thoughts, all the bad things that hurt your heart, and then—” Abuela threw a pebble into the pool with hollowed plunk. “You let the river take it.”

Inma looked at her grandmother. “Will they be okay, Abuela? I didn’t know.”

“I know, my child. But of course they will be okay.” Her abuela smoothed her dark hair.

“Do you hate me, Abuela?”

Her abuela whispered as if her breath had been sucked out her, “No! Never. No one is mad at you.”

“But why? This is sin isn’t it? I couldn’t remember the Childs Prayer. I didn’t know how to confess. I couldn’t walk. I couldn’t stand up. I was mean.”

“No. This is not your fault. This is not sin. Okay? We’ll go visit them in the hospital after we leave. It’s going to be okay.

Vale?”

Inma nodded okay.

“This is how we heal, Mijita.” Abuela took another rock in her palm and like a prayer let it flit into the river.

Inma took the rocks and remembered the blur of red and white bodies, the drunk, angry faces of the men, how they spat and how their glazed red eyes narrowed on her father and then pressed them into the stones. Gave it one more hard squeeze, then let it fly across the water. Again, she did this. The smell of wine, and sweat, and dirty streets, evaporated into the smell of wet stone as she pressed it in her palm; the sounds of yelling and screaming, the sound of fists, the sound of her father, the sound of her mother—muted it into the smooth pebble. Silenced from her brain.

When she was done with the stones, she picked up her flowers for her mother, split the lavender from the wild ones. She imagined her mother smiling and her father holding her hand, and offered up the lavender to the river, watching the purple flowers stall and spin in the current; with a final push, they slipped over the alabaster lip.

“Pure” by Bryan Strain
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



Third Place Graduate Fiction

Albatross

by Jesse Betts

Sam sat on the back porch of the beach house he had rented for the weekend in Oceanside, waiting for Victoria and Tommy to arrive. Even this early in the morning, he could hear the city waking up behind him, which could work in his favor. He hoped he might be able to convince Victoria to move up there so he wouldn't have to commute to work anymore, and she loved city noise. It would be a hard sell. Victoria taught Biology at San Diego University, and why should she have to commute to work? She had the higher-paying job, while Sam was only an adjunct in the English department at Mira Costa College in Oceanside.

It was more than the commute, though. He tired of San Diego, the ever alive city. No moment when everything was still or at peace. The looming buildings, the throbbing skyline, jeweled windows glittering like facets of a schizophrenic diamond. It stifled. He finally understood what Victoria meant all those years ago when she said she didn't belong in Idaho Falls. He did not belong in San Diego.

He would need more than that abstract flim-flam to convince Victoria, though. San Diego was her domain and she looked good in it. Upright carriage, slim frame with sharp hip and collar bones, green coffee thermos perpetually in hand. A city girl, through and through. He hoped that for the first time in their 19 year partnership, they would be able to compromise. Oceanside seemed a perfect compromise to him: the feel of San Diego, on a much smaller scale. Though, even if Sam somehow succeeded in convincing her to move 45 minutes from her vibrant work and social life in San Diego, he still had no idea what he would say to their 16-year-old son, Tommy. One problem at a time.

Victoria and Tommy finally arrived, and after greetings and breakfast, they walked down to the beach. Sam hoped his family would notice how this beach compared with San Diego beaches as cleaner, emptier, quieter, and that somehow that would be considered a good thing to them. But, with Victoria armed with her high-tech bird-watching binoculars, and Tommy armed with a surf board, Sam didn't think it likely they would notice much at all. Sure enough, Victoria immediately posed the binoculars a half-inch from her eyes and scanned the sky over the water. Tommy plunged through the surf and paddled to the breaks.

Tommy looked impressive on his board, centered, as the waves crashed around him. His tense muscles somehow held his body on a thin piece of fiberglass when a much greater power tried to rip them apart. Sam tried to decide which restaurant might impress Victoria and Tommy, but he couldn't get the noise of the ocean out of his ears.

"Sammy!" Victoria called, "Look!" She thrust the binoculars into his hands and pointed into the sky. He put the binocular cord around his neck so he wouldn't drop them in the sand, and pressed the rubber rims to his eyes. He tried to find what she wanted him to see, but he couldn't seem to coordinate the tiny speck in the sky with the mega-magnified lenses. Before long, Victoria impatiently came up behind him, right hand on his shoulder, left hand guiding the binoculars. She stood a few inches taller than him and he suddenly felt like a child under her touch. "See... right... there," she breathed into his hair.

Finally, he saw it: a bird, the color of soot, floating on air. "An albatross," Victoria sighed.

Before he thought about it, Sam recited, "At length did cross an Albatross, Through the fog it came; As if it had been a Christian soul, We hailed it in God's name." He had recently read "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and fell in love with it immediately. He loved the precise rhymes and rhythm; he knew exactly what to expect next.

Victoria gazed at him with one cocked eyebrow, as if she had never come across a creature such as him. Or, on second thought, the same way she regarded her students' indecipherable assignments. Sam let the binoculars fall to rest around his neck. They were heavier than he expected them to be. "Tommy," Victoria called as she noticed him slogging his way up the beach, with his board tucked under his armpit. She tugged the binoculars from around Sam's neck and ran over to Tommy. "Look, there's a black-footed albatross out there."

"So?" Tommy asked, sinking his board in the sand and unpeeling his wetsuit from his shoulders.

“So?” she asked, incredulous. “You can still see him if you hurry. Such amazing birds! Because of their large wing spans, they can float on wind currents for hours at a time. In fact,”

“Mom, let me stop you there,” Tommy said. “This isn’t bird class. Go tell your students; they pay to hear you. The surfing here blows.” He stripped his wetsuit down to his waist, lifted his board out of the sand, and disappeared into the beach house. Sam’s heart sunk. Victoria smiled a little amused smile and went back to watching the albatross in her binoculars.

“This isn’t very common,” she said, almost to herself. “You can’t always see these guys around.”

“Really?” he said, hopefully. Maybe she would associate Oceanside with this rare bird she loved.

“They mostly live in Hawaii, so it’s rare to see them this far north and inland. They usually stay far out to sea,” she said. “It’s where they feed and fly.” Although Victoria had the binoculars in her hands, Sam still felt them around his neck.

They stayed in for dinner that night. Victoria insisted on making chicken fajitas with the organic groceries she brought from home. She cut up peppers and onions, with a knife much too big for the job, and tossed them into a sauté pan with strips of chicken. Her auburn hair gathered back in a ponytail, the little hairs on her neck curling in mini ringlets. Tommy lounged on the couch, hair still damp from showering, and flipped through channels on the TV. Sam tried to come up with a natural way to broach the subject of moving. He thought himself in circles, and felt grateful when his cell phone rang.

“Mom, how are you?” he answered. He almost felt Victoria rolling her eyes; Harriet bugged them about visiting at least once a year, but Victoria always taught classes over the summer and had grading to do over holidays, not to mention the conferences and board meetings, and they had Tommy’s schedule to contend with. He had almost as many commitments as Victoria. On top of all that, Idaho Falls sat under several inches of snow for six months out of the year.

“Samuel? This is your neighbor, Mrs. Lester.”

“Hello, Mrs. Lester. Why...”

“Oh, honey, your mom was just carried off to the hospital. Stroke, I’m thinking.”

It seemed as if Mrs. Lester kept talking, but Sam didn’t hear any of it. He hadn’t seen his mom in eight years, he realized suddenly. Eight years since he had been home. Ten years ago, he received an offer of a tenure-track position at the Uni-

versity of California, Berkeley. Victoria jumped all over him when she heard about it, her excitement palpable. She thought it the opportunity they had been waiting for. He thought so, too. Tenure at a prestigious university was the end goal they both wanted for themselves and each other. Wasn’t it?

Sam visited the campus, talked to his type-A-personality-soon-to-be-boss, toured the town, and turned down the job offer. He couldn’t do it. He didn’t like any of it. He didn’t want to live in a huge state with huge cities at a huge university. He needed space to breath and work and write.

A year later, Victoria got a job at San Diego University and moved the family to California anyway.

“Mrs. Lester,” Sam said, “Mrs. Lester, I’ll come home. As soon as possible. Okay, thanks, bye.” He hung up the phone and his unfocused eyes finally focused in on Victoria, one hand on hip. The food sizzled loudly in the pan behind her, steam curling around her.

“Sammy, did you notice? We’re on vacation?” she gestured with the wooden spoon clutched in her white, veined hand.

“My mom had a stroke,” he said bluntly. Horror crossed Victoria’s face. She dropped the spoon on the floor and ran over to him.

“Honey!” she said, kneeling in front of him and taking his hands. “I’m so sorry! You should go home, definitely.” Victoria could be so compassionate when she wanted to be. Sam loved her so much. If only they weren’t so different. “Don’t worry about Tommy and me, we’ll be fine.”

“You’re not going to come with me?” he asked.

“I would love to, you know that.”

He didn’t, really.

“It’s just, who knows how long you’ll need to stay?” she continued. “I don’t want to pressure you to come back home too soon. You need to be there for Harriet, and I absolutely have to be back to work on Monday.” He nodded. It all made sense. Maybe since she wasn’t coming, he could make sure his mom recovered fully before coming back. He booked a flight the

following day and decided he would ask Victoria about moving when he got back.

When he arrived in Idaho Falls on Sunday morning, he went to the hospital and found his mom sitting up in bed. She didn't have a heart attack or a stroke, just a fainting spell. She needed rest and fluids, but he could take her home.

"Samuel," she said, once she was settled in bed, her tiny frame engulfed by the billowy down comforter and an excess of floral printed pillows. "You didn't need to come."

Sam sighed, gathering his thoughts for a feeble rebuttal.

"But," she said, "I'm really glad you did."

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"I'm just fine. Getting old and tired, but otherwise, good." They sat in silence for a moment. Sam planned his trip back to California in his head. He might be able to make it back by Wednesday or Thursday, depending on how fast his mom recovered. "So, has she forgiven you yet?" his mom asked. It seemed like every time he talked to his mom, she asked him that.

Victoria never expressed how angry it made her when he turned down the job at Berkeley in words, but her actions spoke loudly. Everything they planned together, he undid with that one decision and he should have discussed it with her first, he knew that. Even now, years later, he felt her holding it against him, almost like there was a weight around his neck, keeping him stooped, short of measuring up. He walked to the window and looked out. From where he was standing, he could see the front lawn he used to mow every Saturday growing up. He always got amazing ideas for his writing while doing that mindless, mundane task. Up the street, he could see the house where his best friend lived growing up. He hadn't spoken to Karin in a long time, either.

"Well, at least she let you come now," his mom said, obviously tired of waiting for an answer. She sank down in her bed and soon drifted off to sleep.

Sam left the house and drove to his favorite place in the city. He leaned over Taylor's Bridge and gazed into the Snake River. The river rushed high and fast, and shone gray like the sky above it. Nosy geese walked the bank, grasping for crumbs from passersby. Ducks drifted in the river, dunking heads and shaking in the cold. One tucked his bill under his wing and floated aimlessly. Across the river, The Idaho Falls Farmer's Market gathered for the last time before winter. Not many people seemed to want to brave the cold today, but Sam relished the chill wind whispering off the river currents. He couldn't believe how accustomed he had grown to the sameness of California warm weather.

He left the bridge and entered the farmer's market. He passed home-grown vegetables in crates: bundles of herbs and carrots, plastic bags of eggplant and potatoes. Other booths held specialty foods: fudge, spicy corn on the cob, artisan breads, and sweet and salty kettle corn. Beautifully crafted ceramic sinks and dishware, hand-spun and dyed yarn, his eyes scanned, looking for one booth in particular. He finally found it tucked in between handmade jewelry and patchwork bags.

He watched for a moment as Karin sold one of her crocheted baby rompers to an older woman. Karin's wavy brown hair spilled out of a crocheted beanie with a fuzzy ball on the top. She wore dirty tennis shoes, faded jeans, and a winter coat layered over an Idaho Falls High Shakespeare Club sweatshirt. Sam couldn't believe she still had that sweatshirt. Victoria recycled his years ago and he'd forgotten it even existed. Sam envied how relaxed and happy Karin looked. As the woman walked away with her new romper, Karin glanced over to help the next customer and found Sam instead. Her mouth dropped open and her cheeks flushed red.

"Sam!" she exclaimed, and ran around the table to give him a hug.

"Hey, Karin," he laughed, longer and louder than necessary. It didn't seem to bother her, though.

"What are you going here?" she said as she pulled back to beam up at him.

"Just home for a visit," he said.

They sat together at her booth, Sam wrapped up in one of her crocheted blankets. His California clothing didn't repel the frigid air sufficiently to sit outside in Idaho. Though they hadn't seen each other or even talked to each other in years, it still felt warm and comfortable between them. She told him all about her life. Her husband, Mark, worked as a computer analyst at a small health supplement distributing company. Their son, Ben, seemed to have a different interest from week to week. Cross-country running, skiing, "even writing poetry,"

she said.

“Really?” Sam asked.

“Are you writing anymore, Sam?” Karin asked.

“Not so much anymore,” he shook his head.

“Too bad. You were really talented.”

Sam returned to his mom’s house, the sky darkened to navy. As he made dinner, he thought about his plans to go home by Wednesday or Thursday and decided he might need to stay a little longer than that. He took his mother her soup, and she fell back to sleep shortly after eating it. He sat in his childhood home, eyes marveling at the framed family photos and inspirational sayings that dotted the walls. These things had been there since before he could remember, and had been so familiar growing up that they had faded into the background. Now they stood out from the walls. His ears marveled at the intense quiet, practically pulsing with it. He didn’t need to stay as much as he wanted to stay. He loved Idaho Falls. It seemed like no matter how much it grew, it never got any bigger. The noises were familiar noises. He belonged.

When he told Victoria on the phone that night that he didn’t know when he would be able to come back, she didn’t seem to mind.

“Cliff Side” by Sarah Timmerman
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



First Place Graduate NonFiction

Standing at the Ledge and Looking Out

by Caitlin Erickson

April 2007

“Are you coming?”

Snow the color of river water, saturated with sediment and pebbles, still clung to the dirt in the hills behind my boyfriend, Aidan’s, house. He had invited me on a hike to a small alcove and rainwater pond located high in the foothills of the Wasatch mountains. It required walking through the snow, navigating swatches of squelching mud, and climbing steep inclines to get there. Even though the temperature hovered around fifty degrees, sweat pooled between my shoulder blades. Every time I looked back, more and more blue-gray, not-quite-winter sky crept into the ragged V-shaped gap of the canyon that separated us from the sprawling Salt Lake valley.

“Yeah, I just—I need a minute.”

When I looked at the diagonal of the ground below me, I felt shaky. My stomach sloshed with a few granola bars and all the water I brought with me. I wondered what would happen if my foot slipped or my ankle caved in on itself. I imagined tumbling down the hillside, under and over, like Alice in Wonderland, branches caught in my hair and burrs stuck in my pants. And then I envisioned the not so whimsical—a dislocated shoulder; a broken neck. Paralyzed. Dead. I imagined Aidan stammering while breaking the news to my mother. Friends clipping my obituary out of the paper. My legs felt loose and wobbly and I sat down on the cold, spiky ground, clutching my knees, my breath ragged.

Patches of mud streaked the snow in places, wet and

malleable, like clay. The short, stubby brushes stippling the ground scraped against my bare calves. Burrs and rocks pressed into my lower back, but I didn’t care. All I saw was blood and bodies and limbs stuck out at odd angles.

“Kate?”

I sucked air through my mouth and willed myself to stand up, but I felt rooted. I was one of the shrubs now, clinging to a steep hillside in hard, dry dirt. When Aidan looked behind him, concerned, and began back towards me, scattering pebbles down the hillside, I realized I hadn’t been hiking since Colby died.

Colby moved into my school in sixth grade. His hair looked like he spread gel across his palm and then fanned it across his bangs, so it curved across his head like a crown. We traded Harry Potter trivia. We teased each other endlessly. I told everyone I hated him and then wrote fluttering journal entries about him in the lamplight of my bedroom. In junior high, his goofy features turned handsome. He became popular. He took up diving and part time jobs. He took pretty girls to dances. And then, while hiking in Snow Canyon his sophomore year of high school, he took a misstep, fell, and died.

Before his last hike, Colby turned to his family and said he was off to bigger and better things. I imagine he tipped his baseball cap at them before turning and striding away. The words, printed in a newspaper five months after his fall, haunted me. I envisioned him trekking through white-topped canyons, shoes scuffing through red sand. I could see him looking out over a misty landscape, hands furrowed into his hips, breathing southern air laced with juniper and sand deep into his lungs. And then, on his way back to camp, a slip, or maybe a crack, and then mangled limbs at the bottom of a hundred foot drop. In my mind, I saw Colby, who never stopped moving, not even in the dead of class, completely still, curled on the ground as though sleeping, blood pooling into a pillow around his head. And then I saw his family, his sister and two little brothers and parents, heavy with grief, haunted by the same words. Bigger and better things. A path we couldn’t follow.

From then on I hated cliffs and drop-offs. Colby hiked all the time. He had good shoes and experience. What chance did I stand? On the requisite family vacation hikes I hugged the walls, hung onto the rails placed for hiker’s convenience, gasped and clutched at my chest anytime I heard traction slip. All I could see while hiking next to ledges was me sailing over as though carried by water, plummeting into impaling trees on the Oregon coast or sharp, cutting sandstone in the Southwest. Disappearing forever after one misstep.

April 2010

“So, where are we going?” Aidan asked, rubbing his thumb against the fleshy part of my palm as we lumbered along the brick-red road that wound to the top of Zion Canyon.

“The Lodge.”

The week before finals, Aidan and I both itched to get out of Cedar City, where we went to school, for a few hours. He coaxed me to Zion National Park with promises of easy hikes and shopping in St. George afterwards, and so I found myself riding the Zion Canyon shuttle, which smelled like sweat, to the stop located at the lodge, the only hotel in the park, where people paid hundreds of dollars to sleep in the shadow of sandstone monoliths. When I was younger, my mom told me her family used to camp in the canyon. At night it grew eerily quiet, as though even the silence had weight, and sometimes she couldn't even see the stars. It made her feel very small.

As we wobbled along red asphalt roads, I leaned my head against the window and looked up at the sheer canyon face. I understood what she meant by feeling small. The automated tour guide named prominent formations as we passed them, sandstone and scrub brush streaming off the metal of the shuttle. The Sentinel, the Patriarchs, the Altar of Sacrifice...the names were all religious, monumental, or violent. The Altar of Sacrifice, a huge table of rock that loomed at least a thousand feet above our heads, made me feel squeamish. The Navajo sandstone was a light tan with an orange tint, but streaks of red-brown stone caked the rock in parts, making it look like blood had poured over the side of the table and dried. The walls seemed to rise exponentially the further we moved into the canyon, and I became nothing more than a speck.

We planned on hiking to the Emerald Pools. I researched the hikes before leaving—Angel's Landing (800 foot drop on one side, 1200 on the other)—out. Observation Point (chains added for safety)—out. Hidden Canyon (just looking at the trail pictures)—out. The Emerald Pools seemed safe—after all, strollers were allowed there.

The trail was simple, curvy, and steep, but paved. We passed children who only came up to the hem of our shorts and hikers hunched over walkers. Near the trail entrance, we saw a doe posing for photographs a few feet off the path. She stood on a deep incline facing the trail, her pretty face and overstated eyes pointed towards her admiring fans. Her stance looked remarkably like Bambi, and she stayed still despite more and more people gathering to take pictures.

“I bet the park rangers put her up to it,” Aidan said, glancing at me sideways.

“Maybe she gets a cut of the profits.”

“Because deer care so much about money.”

“Some might.”

We followed the trail through shaded and sunny areas as we made our way towards Heaps canyon, where high, sheer walls were rounded, like someone had taken a swipe at it with a scythe. Along the trail, cottonwood trees stuck out at strange angles and diagonals, and I didn't see a single trunk standing straight up and down. Early spring made everything lush and green, a rarity in the desert.

The air became cooler as we gained elevation moved deeper into the U-shaped canyon. As we rounded a corner, I heard trickling in the distance. As we approached the lower emerald pool, I felt like I stood inside a handmade teapot. The curved walls, streaked poppy red and rust—the color of a wound—came to a sharp, circular edge at the top where I imagined a lid could go. As most of the water slipped down the smooth rock rather than cascading over the ledge above, the walls shone like glossed pottery after the kiln.

The trail followed the natural curve of the formation, and the environment went from serene, green, and well paved to wet, muddy, and slippery. Water surrounded us—pebbles clung to the railing separating the hikers from the pool, thin sheets made its way down the walls, and millions of drops tumbled down from somewhere above us. The ground became slick sandstone like the walls. In other spots, thick red-orange mud clung to my shoes, squelching with every step. I saw the trail curve along the bowl and go up and out of it, and I saw the unprotected from any type of railing. That's where the trail led, and fear, like a canteen filling water, began to splash in my stomach.

I clung to the railing, even though my hands ached from cold and my fingers threatened to slip away any moment, and made my way around the lower pool. It wasn't very deep. I could see the uneven array of large rocks at the bottom. If I fell, I would probably hit them and break my back—there was a guy who came and talked to my fourth grade class who did

that. He jumped into Lake Powell and there was a sandbar just skimming beneath the surface of the water, and he was paralyzed from the neck down. I never wanted to go to Lake Powell after that.

We reached a portion of the trail where chains drilled into the wall of the bowl replaced the railing. The chain felt just as wet and cold and slippery, but the edge now lay open. There was no rail to brace against, just slick sandstone that could send someone over in seconds. Although my chest felt tight and I kept seeing nothing but blood and broken limbs, I wanted to keep going. I clenched the chain and would not let go, not even to let people pass. I pressed myself as close to the cold, water-covered wall as I could, but I would not—could not—let go. I climbed higher and higher, and I began to have some hope that I would be just fine, when the chain stopped. The trail became a rough set of muddy sandstone stairs. They were not straight; but rather went up in opposing diagonals—one step tilted toward the pool, another towards the wall. They were uneven, no more than four feet wide, and wet. Mud spread across the stairs like thick frosting.

I froze. People backed up behind me, trying to push past up and down the trail, no one paying much attention to the mud or the uneven steps or the fact that we were at least fifty feet above the ground.

“You need to move, Kate.” Aidan looked back, stretching his palm toward me, coaxing me forward.

“I can’t. It’s too high.” I began to cry, and Aidan climbed back and pulled me to an alcove away from the ledge. I looked at how far I had come. To my left, the valley of Heaps canyon spread out like a fan. Junipers and pinon pines created a thick carpet on the bottom of the valley, and the sheer walls and monuments of the eastern wall of the canyon rose up to meet the sky. The orange rock blazed stark and sharp against the gem blue sky edging the horizon. No wonder it’s called color country.

To my right, the falls from the middle pools sat just above eye level. A steady stream of water poured over a sharp sandstone ledge and turned into droplets before they hit the lower pool. People loomed close to the ledge, and I imagined them riding over it like they were on a waterslide.

“We can try again. I think I’m—“ my resolve dissolved when a man right next to us slipped.

It wasn’t a bad slip. He just hit a slick patch of stair and lost his footing for a moment. He caught himself and kept going without much more reaction than throwing out his hands to steady himself, but I shrieked anyway. The image played over and over in my head, except I saw him teetering on the edge for a few slow seconds before toppling off and hitting the water—and the rocks—with a sick sounding

thud. I saw rangers coming, and policemen, and having to give a statement as a witness. I saw myself glimpsing his mangled body before paramedics took it away. I remembered what I read about Colby’s fall—how his friend heard something horrible, like the sound of someone falling. Of skulls cracking and breath being forced out of lungs. I pressed as close into the rock as I could and sobbed.

“It’s okay. He’s fine. Look, he’s fine. Don’t panic.” Aidan tucked me further into the alcove and fished around in my bag for my camera. In an attempt to make me feel better, he pulled faces and pulled me into the shot with him, the curved, bloody walls of the lower pools serving as a backdrop. He didn’t stop clicking the shutter until the tracks on my cheeks had dried and my breathing steadied.

As we made our way back down the uneven trail towards the chains, a woman wearing a nice blouse, black skirt, and two-inch stiletto heels passed me, making her way up the stairs. Somehow she managed not to get her shoes muddy.

Aidan looked back at me, eyebrow quirked, and smiled. We’d joke about her in the car on the way back, speculate as to whether or not she came to Zion straight from a fancy restaurant or a cocktail party. She’d become a joke to fill the silence on the drive back north. But at that moment, watching her skirt flit with the movement of her hips, I felt a tinge of shame. Here was this woman, inappropriately dressed for hiking down to the stilettos, scaling the uneven path with no problem. And then there was me, wearing shoes with good traction, carrying water, and having a meltdown. As we retraced our steps through the red-orange mud, the cottonwood trees, and the bird-shaped formation that we christened Caldwell, all I could see was the edge of the trail, the steep drop-off growing steadily less steep, and hoping my ankle wouldn’t roll and send me flying over the edge before we reached safety.

In September, I again found myself on the Zion shuttle trundling toward the Emerald Pools. This time, my roommates, Amber and Ryan, joined us, and Amber’s excited chatter, in-

stead of an automated tour guide, filled the empty shuttle.

The trail was not as trenched in springtime as it was in April. The trees looked a little older, and the air felt drier, but the leaves hadn't changed colors yet. The air sweltered, especially for September. As we walked, Amber kept stopping to play tour guide.

"There's showy-daisies over there, and those trees in the distance are pinion pines, and those ones are junipers—Ryan's really allergic to them, don't sniff those—and there should be yucca around here too, somewhere..."

"I'm sure you'll point it out when you see it," Aidan drawled. Ryan smirked at him, and Amber, ignoring him, lectured on full speed ahead, this time about the history of the park.

"There isn't really any evidence of residences within the canyon, and we think it's because the ancient people who lived here thought of it as a kind of Eden. It's too sacred to live here." She said, her chest puffed out in excitement at finally being able to use her degree in anthropology. As I looked down into the valley peppered with dark green trees and a meandering stream, I could believe the Eden theory. A doe and her fawn grazed near the stream in the valley, their legs spindly and graceful. Shortly after, a buck leapt through on strong legs, the muscles on his sides and back rippling from the effort. His antlers looked like stocks balanced on his head, and I was amazed that that they didn't topple right off.

Anxiety began to settle into my muscles as we approached the lower pool. What if I panicked and they left me behind? I imagined sitting in one of the alcoves of sand and boulders, waiting for Amber and Ryan and Aidan to come back down the trail. I imagined the shuttle ride back to our car, how they would gush and how I would stay silent. It sounded horrible.

As we rounded the corner and saw the lower pools, the lack of wet surprised me. The wall no longer glittered with water, and the waterfall meandered to a trickle. The sandstone felt dry and firm, and the squelching mud from April wasn't

mud at all, but orange, powdery sand. Only the railing remained wet. I pressed my palm to the stinging cold metal anyway, but with the hazard of slipping gone, I didn't feel as much urgency. As I hiked up and around the bowl, I noticed white streaks of rock mixed in with the red and black and imagined that they were water stains millions of years in the making. I spotted hanging gardens clinging to the wall in shady spots, and a less agitated view of the small valley that spread out of Heaps canyon. I didn't notice when I reached the chains, or when I passed them. The uneven stairs, so menacing five months before, now sat dry and dusted with sand. The drop to my right remained, and the path remained four feet wide with crooked steps, but I kept going.

I ambled up the stairs, fingers clenching the wall to my left, and breathed only when I turned a sharp corner and saw flat, level, sandy ground. Though we walked very far, we climbed quite a bit in elevation, and the view over the valley transformed. The eastern wall of Zion still planted itself firmly on the horizon, but the greens and golds of the floor below us and the near turquoise of the sky above complemented the ochre walls. The arms of Heaps canyon, covered in trees, looked covered in fur. The air, misty this high up, hung like gauze and blurred the eastern wall of the canyon, the streaks of colored sandstone too far away to differentiate.

I lingered at the viewpoint longer than the others. I wondered if Colby, who loved to hike, ever stood at this spot. I imagined him, years earlier and in a canyon fifty miles east, taking in a similar horizon. I felt mist settle on my skin and wondered if it was the same mist that settled on his, if the dust my shoes kicked up somehow mingled with the dust of his shoes, if dust traveled like pollen between canyons and deserts until it settled, waiting to be mixed into mud or ground further into the sandstone beneath. In that moment, fifty miles west and six years later, I felt closer to Colby than I ever had. In the desert, with an unexpected forest of green spread beneath me and sandstone monoliths shading my horizon, I understood what he meant as he strode away from his family, heading toward bigger and better things, and if I reached out a fanned out palm, I might be able to reach him. We were, once again, in the same territory, and looking out over the canyon, I felt peace.

After we made our way back to the shuttle, I let Amber's chatter fade into static. I watched as the immense walls rose on either side of me. The late afternoon sun set the rock ablaze, and I felt like a clay figure in a kiln, curing until ready to be cooled, painted, and set.

Second Place Graduate NonFiction

Burial Ground

by MaryAnn Widerburg

November 9, 2010

Lower Manhattan's streets crowd, even though it's already after 10pm. Figures in black and pinstripes litter the sidewalk with clipped footsteps as they push through groups dressed in thick-stitched jeans and neon or white T-shirts proclaiming the wearers' love for a city they don't know. Our group dresses less touristy, opting for muted blues and greys, but we might as well be wearing "I Love NY" t-shirts. We're stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, deciding where to go next.

"If you look straight ahead and up, you can see the top of the Empire State building," Professor Warnick tells our group of twenty. Nineteen heads turn north, necks stretching like geese, trying to see the tallest building in New York City. I gaze downward, fingers twined around the rusted metal gate surrounding the graveyard at Trinity Church. My eyes look past Alexander Hamilton's ostentatious memorial, the center of attention moments ago, and focus on a flat headstone with a rounded top. Once speckled gray, the stone has faded to white, and blackened streaks lace the edges. I've never seen headstones this old. My home is in the West where everything is young and new. I reach a hand through the gate and stretch my fingers toward the stone. The name has long since weathered away to lines so faint they are almost a whisper. If I could see the stone up close, maybe I could make out a name, a date. But the sign on the gate's bold black letters tell me that the graveyard closes at 4pm.

"Come on," Jeannette, another student, pulls my arm, "We're gonna ride the Staten Island Ferry."

I glance back at the graveyard as she pulls me toward Liberty Street.

"Do you think we'll have time to come back?" I ask.

"Nah. Our schedule's pretty full for the week."

We drift into the crowd, leaving beneath a nameless memorial the only stillness I've found in this metropolis.

June 5, 2000

"If I have to pick up another peony, I'm going to die," my friend Jill wipes her hand across her forehead and blows out a thick breath.

"Funny. I was going to say the same thing about chrysanthemums," I say, grabbing the Red Flyer wagon's handle and pulling it toward the caretaker's shed, careful not to tip the rows of yellow, white, and pink petals. Our 4-H cemetery clean-

"Dancing" by Bryan Strain
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



up service project has gone on two hours too long for our eleven-year-old attention spans.

“Janis says only take things that will get in the way of the mower,” my eight-year-old brother Jacob runs up to us, hands full of baby blue silk hydrangeas. He dumps them onto our neat assortment, decapitating five chrysanthemums. They fall to the ground. Delicate yellow petals scatter across the paved path, crumple against the coarse surface.

“Hey, only real flowers in here,” I say, but he’s already gone.

The sun is almost midway in the sky when we finish. Jill and I head over to the shed where Janis, our 4-H leader and the Burton Cemetery caretaker, hands out fudge bars and dreamsicles.

“It’s past time for people to claim anything they don’t want thrown away,” Janis says. “You kids can go ahead and take some flowers home as long as your parents don’t mind.”

Jill and I each choose a long-stemmed white rose and stroll to the older part of the cemetery while we wait for our parents to pick us up. We haven’t had much cause to venture into this part of the cemetery during our cleanup. No brightly colored flowers decorate these graves. Our orange dreamsicles drip down our arms as we investigate the oldest-looking headstones. Lichens blot out letters and numbers. Sometimes whole names or dates. Jill takes a stick and scrapes off the orange fungi to reveal the dates: 1893, 1905, 1897.

“These people are old,” she says.

“What about this one?” I point to a flat stone the size of my foot. “Baby Boy Williams.” The stone has one date: December 5, 1903.

“I guess he didn’t live long enough to get a name,” Jill says.

I study the simple gray slab. I can describe the stone only by what it lacks: angels, lambs, an epitaph, a name. Using my dreamsicle stick as a knife, I shorten my rose’s stem. I lay the rose across Baby Boy Williams’s headstone then go to meet my parents. As we drive away, I look out the rear window at the old headstones. A tiny white speck stands out against columns of gray.

October 27, 2012

The darkness looks deeper inside the Logan Cemetery. As if I could reach out and sense its texture. My roommate Ashley and I stand at the entrance staring down a tunnel of pines and aspens.

“Maybe we should have waited for Shenise,” Ashley says. “She’s not afraid of

ghosts.”

“I’m not afraid of ghosts either,” I say. “Just the dark.”

Ignoring the sign that says the cemetery is off limits after dark, I test the asphalt pathway with my sneaker before stepping one foot into the cemetery. “C’mon,” I say. “We don’t have to go see the Weeping Woman. We’ll just walk through to the other gate. Then we can go home.”

Ashley grabs my forearm and follows behind me as we advance deeper into the tree-lined path. In the pine-filtered moonlight, the aspens’ dappled bark looks like peeling corpses. Crows roosting in the branches pulse wings above our heads. They call to each other, deciding what mischief they will cause for us. Once we get halfway to the exit, the crows settle, flapping a wing only occasionally. I stop my feet. Breathe in the scent of pine needles and fall leaves. My eyes adjust to the blackness, and the rest of the path looks inviting. I take a step and feel a tugging at my elbow. Ashley’s feet stick to the ground.

“Can we go back now?” she asks. “I don’t like this.”

“We’re already halfway,” I say.

“Please. I think I’m gonna pee my pants.”

“Okay,” I let a long breath through my nose before turning back the way we have come. The crows squawk as we pass under their perch.

“We can come back with Shenise on Halloween,” Ashley says when we reach the gate.

“Yeah,” I say, but I know we won’t come back. Too many people will be looking for the Weeping Woman on Halloween. I run my hand along the top of the wrought iron fence as we head for our apartment. When the fence ends, I get an urge to climb it and melt into the still darkness beyond white tombstones.

“I’m cold,” Ashley says, trembling beneath her thin hoodie. “I don’t know why you wanted to go in there in the first place.”

March 27, 2006

The breeze plays through the top of a lone poplar. Leaves rustle, a thousand tongues whispering a message I do not understand. I want to believe it's from my brother, Jacob, who lies in the polished blue casket trimmed in fleur-de-lis. I'd much rather hear from him than the wrinkled man speaking words over the gaping hole in the ground. Jacob couldn't have known that the last thing he would say to me would be "Algebra is stupid."

I'd been trying to help Jacob with his math homework the morning before he died. "See," I'd said, "you have to do the same thing to both sides of the equation."

"I don't care," he said.

"You're never going to get anywhere in life if you don't learn this."

"I don't need this stuff. Algebra is stupid."

"Fine," I slammed his pencil down on the kitchen table, breaking the point and gouging the vinyl covering. I never talked to my brother again.

The sun shouldn't be so bright today. The movies never portray it like this. Funerals happen under black umbrellas, rain muting the eulogy. The attendees shiver under their dark shelters, watch the rain drip down the canopies. Only a light breeze causes me to pull my arms close to my chest. Today is any other spring day. The breeze carries the smell of cut grass and freshly turned soil. People wander among headstones, leaving the first chrysanthemums of the season as Jacob's services conclude.

My brother Jarrod and four of my cousins lower Jacob's casket into the ground. I cup my hands over my ears when they release the handles. Jarrod pulls a green canvas cover over the grave, and our solemn party turns to chattering. I'm still listening to the tree, but I make out nothing over the conversations growing around me.

"Isn't it wonderful that today could be so beautiful for Jacob," a woman from our congregation says to Mom.

Spring came the day Jacob died, two months early for Idaho. When I got home from school, I lingered on the back porch and stretched my arms out at my sides, face upturned toward the sun. I shuffled inside only when Mom told me to set the table for dinner. We didn't notice anything unusual until we called the family for dinner. Jacob was always one of the first to arrive. Like most teenage boys, dinner was his favorite time of the day.

We waited five minutes, then ten. "Maybe we'd better look for him," Mom

said. "He's probably outside somewhere." Eleven pairs of legs rushed in eleven directions, but Jacob wasn't enjoying the early spring. He was lying in my parents' master bathroom below the shelf where my dad kept his guns. The sheriff said we found Jacob right after he'd dropped the rifle he was either taking down or putting away. But the search took hours. I think it's still going on.

When the crowd surrounding my brother's grave thins to scattered clumps of hushed conversation, I stroll to the poplar and place my palm on its smooth trunk. I rest my forehead against the lowest branch and close my eyes. Beneath squirrels' chatter and crows' calls the leaves hum. I imagine Jacob standing beside me, his hand on the opposite side of the trunk. And despite the conversing groups who think my brother's funeral is a social event, despite the inappropriate weather, despite the excavator waiting like a vulture just outside the cemetery, I think I hear Jacob's voice through the leaves.

"I was right, Jane," it says. "Algebra is stupid."

July 18, 1996

Mom helps Janis rake cut grass into black plastic bags. I sit on top of a headstone, watching. "How come you gotta rake the grass?" I ask. "It's not leaves."

"So it looks nice," Mom says.

"But these people are dead," I pat the headstone. "They can't see it."

"You can see it. Are you dead?"

"No," I giggle as I hop off the headstone and run to join my siblings.

I find Janarae and Jacob weaving through headstones on their way to the chain-link fence to collect pinecones. Pine trees border the cemetery, towering at what seems to be one thousand feet to my seven-year-old eyes. We walk on our knees through pine needle beds, looking for the biggest pinecone. Jacob pulls a crumpled grocery sack out of his pants pocket, and we fill it mostly with cones that fit into his hand or

his shoe. The largest is bigger than three of our hands combined. Our hands get sticky with sap, but they smell woody and sweet.

Jacob finds the first feather. A crow's feather, black and pointed but soft as a kiss. He picks it up and tickles my cheeks and Janarae's nose. I snatch it from him and hold it up to the sunlight. I discover that, beneath the blackness, rainbows hide in crows' feathers. We do not know that crows are unlucky. That collecting their feathers brings misfortune.

We leave our sack of pinecones leaning against the fence and move to the middle of the cemetery where crows perch on headstones and call to one another. The crows scatter into the pines when our feet shake the ground, but they leave behind plenty of feathers. We fill our fists with them. Janarae and I weave them into our dirty blonde hair. Jacob traces numbers and letters on headstones, using a feather like a quill. When we tire of collecting, we hold out our shirts like aprons and carry the feathers to our pinecone sack.

Mom is still raking grass with Janis, so we choose a new game—hide and seek.

"Lots of places to hide," Janarae says as Jacob counts to fifty. We race to the biggest headstones because Jacob always skips from twenty-nine to fifty. Janarae gets to Alexander Waters first, but I squeeze in between her and the stone, forcing her to relocate behind Violet King.

"Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, fifty," Jacob's voice bounces off the pines. Janarae and I cover our mouths, fingers splayed to let the faintest giggles escape. We hold our breath as Jacob runs past our hiding spot. When we think he is gone, we peek our heads above the headstones.

"I got you," Jacob taps my shoulder from behind. "You gotta be it now."

I count to fifty, skipping no numbers. Alexander Waters can attest to that. I expect to find Janarae and Jacob hiding together, but when I find her behind Ada Hill, Jacob is nowhere close. We run to the newer part of the cemetery, but Jacob is not hiding behind a headstone. He's lying on an empty plot,

hands behind his head.

"Jacob, you're supposed to hide. This isn't hiding," I say.

"I like this tree," Jacob gestures up at a young poplar growing beside him.

"I guess we could play tag instead of hide and go seek," I say.

"You're still it," he runs across the empty plot then back toward the tree when I follow. My hair flows behind me, shining with rainbow crow feathers.

August 20, 2011

The air cools when I step into the pine-sheltered burial ground. I kneel, leaning against the fence and looking for the perfect pinecone, not too smashed or soggy or long. I find an almost-perfect cone, rounded, woody scales folding into more woody scales. But at the tip, one scale juts out, cracked at its base. I stand, cradling my pinecone with both hands, letting go with one hand only to collect crow feathers as I trek to Jacob's grave. I set the pinecone and feathers atop his headstone. Then I flop on the grass under his poplar.

I am twenty-two, and I think my life is over. As a college graduate, I seem to fail at everything: applying to graduate school, maintaining a long-distance relationship, finding a job that doesn't involve selling made-up services or cleaning toilets. I walked the five miles here. I hadn't meant to come this far when I left my parents' house for a short walk, but my feet knew where they were going.

My hands pull up clumps of grass, and I let myself breathe for the first time since graduating in April. Tears cool my sunburned face. I suck air in and out, in and out, and still I suffocate. Crows call, their notes long and mournful, answering my cries with sympathy or annoyance. The poplar leaves murmur, and I lie in the grass and sleep.

I awake to the sound of bicycle wheels, a rusty chain. I open my eyes. My arms sport a dappled sunburn from where the sun shines through the leaves. The cyclists haven't noticed me in my grass bed. They loop around the path and ride out the gate before I sit up. Sprinkler heads rise up out of the ground like fingers and send me running for the path. Jacob's crow feathers soak and glue themselves to his headstone.

I run out the gate, ready to call Mom or Janarae for a ride home, but my phone stays in my pocket. My feet could travel another ten miles instead of the five back home. When I arrive home, my family will notice that the girl who left for a walk is gone. They won't understand how I could have changed so much in just a few hours. I won't have words to tell them. Only the poplar and crows know.

“For Freedom” by Wonjun Han
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention

Third Place Graduate NonFiction

Becoming No Savior

by Angela Turnbow

The honking car horns left a lingering tension in the air. An entire acre of land separated the nursing home from the busy street where the hospital resided, yet the frantic rush of traffic permeated the area. The heavy weight of my tired limbs had not abated since waking up that morning, but George wanted a walk before dinner so I consented. It was a habit for him to take a walk in the afternoon, and normally I enjoyed it. After a few turns inside the building, I stepped outside into the hot, noisy afternoon air with George and Derek, my CNA in-training, in tow.

George, a solid and severe-looking man, was the kind of person who would never hurt anyone; his warm, gentle manner endeared him to others. He transferred to the facility during mid-summer to recuperate from a bad case of pneumonia. We walked down the slope of the Medicare entrance together equipped with a walker and a gait belt fastened around his waist, but that still didn't prevent the fall from occurring.

George tripped over his own feet, and there was no other logical option; he needed a clean fall. He teetered back and forth, and must have wondered why I didn't reach out to him. I forced myself to step back and let it happen. He looked me in the eyes before I felt the rush of his body give way to gravity. Fear and confusion reflected in his face and I knew the question he asked of me without any words spoken: “Why won't you help me?” And my response: “I am. You just don't know it.”

From start to finish, George's fall occurred in the smallest measurement of time, yet it's a moment with no ending. He fell hard and with more force than I expected. His head hit the concrete with a resounding crack filling the twilight air and then silence.

“Oh Shit!” I whispered to myself. His body lay still. I knelt down beside George to hear him grunting and trying to lift his head off the ground. Blood trickled down his face, the only noticeable wound. I held back giving him my hand to help him up; I knew better than to move him before the nurse assessed his injuries.

“Derek, come here!” I yelled. Those first few moments must have been daunting for Derek because it was his first day on the job. He was fresh out of school ready to take his exams to become certified as a nurse's assistant, and I was assigned



to train him over the next few days. “Stay with him. You can’t move him at all. The nurse,” I said through gasps of air, “She has to look at him before we can get him up.” The adrenaline began to take over my body. “Was that everything?” I thought to myself. “It’s a teaching moment.” But was the teaching for Derek or for myself?

“I’ll get the nurse,” my voice faltered. Leaping to my feet, I ran inside the building.

Any other person would have stepped forward, but I stepped back.

* * *

“Mom, can I take the leftovers back up to school with me? I’m out of food at my place and I won’t make it the grocery store till Tuesday. I have to work three days straight,” I explained one morning while home for a visit.

“Sure, I’ll put a few items together. You finish getting ready” she replied from her perch at the kitchen table.

She sat up slowly and I saw the worry shadow her face. News came late last night that Ann Marie’s health was failing, preventing her from completing her mission in Washington. Her symptoms were rapid weight loss, migraines, dizziness, and vomiting, but there was no clear diagnosis as to what was wrong. The symptoms were severe and had shown up a few months prior, but Ann Marie kept quiet hoping they would disappear so as not to alarm my parents. I imagined my mother lying awake all night, tossing this way and turning that way, wondering what she could do to erase the pain her baby girl felt just a few states away. And yet, I knew my mom felt completely helpless. There was nothing she could do at the moment for Ann Marie except wait for the mission president’s call.

It wasn’t in Mom’s nature to feel powerless. Her domain was the kitchen because she could see everywhere from her spot at the table, inside and out. The windows were large enough to see what occurred in the yard, but also who drove up the driveway. And as there were no dividers separating the living room from the dining room or the kitchen, Mom could hear who practiced the piano or see who set up their books at the table. Her eyes and ears could see and hear everything. She had no need for a textbook guide on giving help; it was something innate for her.

Ten minutes later I returned to the kitchen and found four grocery sacks and a gallon of milk sitting on the table. I quickly searched through them wondering if there was even one Tupperware full of leftovers from last night’s dinner. Instead, I found a brand new package of cookies and knew that if my mother had more time that morning she would have made a batch of chocolate chip cookies for me rather than supplying the store bought version.

“Mom, you don’t have to give me this much” I said.

“Yes, I do. I have one daughter I can’t do anything for right now. I’m not going to let the other one starve,” she replied with finality.

“Thanks Mom,” I said quietly while hugging her goodbye. I closed my eyes and felt my guilt wash over me.

Two hours later in my apartment, I reached into the grocery sacks to pull out the contents. It was as if reaching inside Mary Poppins’ carpet bag and expecting to see anything and everything. A head of lettuce, a dozen eggs, some frozen chicken breasts, and a loaf of bread. But then there were spaghetti noodles and a block of cheese. Tomatoes. An onion. Cucumbers—more produce. And then the package of cookies. I knew for dinner that night, she, my dad, and my two younger brothers ate the leftovers from the night before.

Mom always felt a need to help in some way, no matter how big or small her contribution. This notion came from both sets of my grandparents, who grew up in the Depression, believing that just because a person is poor doesn’t mean that he or she can’t give everything they have to help someone. As I pulled more food from the grocery sacks, I remembered even when recuperating from gall bladder surgery, Mom felt driven to help her sick thirteen-year-old child.

I had strep throat and she was barely home from the hospital a week when the duties of motherhood called upon her. “Mom,” I remembered croaking from her bedroom door. “I don’t feel well. It’s my throat.”

Her head perked up automatically off her pillow. It was a late Saturday morning and no one was home but the two of us. “Come here and let me take a look.”

She was an expert at diagnosing strep, mainly because I came down with it so often. I walked over to the bed and stood before her while she gently pushed herself up to sitting position, carefully minding the nine inch incision across her abdomen.

She peered deep into my mouth and gave her diagnosis. “Head back to bed little one. I’ll bring some water and Tylenol for you?”

“No, I can get it. You rest,” I protested.

“No,” she said kindly. “I’ll bring it to you.”

“But why?” I questioned turning around to obey her orders.

“Because I’m your mother and I want to” she replied. Surgery, leaving a nine inch incision, still didn’t prevent Mom from helping. She never did need a textbook to tell her how, where, when, and why to give help either. Almost ten years later and her mentality had not changed. True, she couldn’t do much for Ann Marie at present, but I was within reach and she showered her concern upon me with the contents of her refrigerator. I finished putting the food away wondering how I would respond if ever tested in such a way as my mom.

When I began working at the nursing home, help was a matter of paying attention to the residents’ daily routines and anticipating what they needed before they even asked for it. This made the work flow more smoothly, especially if you were the aide putting Bonnie to bed. Ninety-eight years old and she was still very particular about her routines. One evening I managed to help her in twenty minutes flat rather than the hour block most aides averaged.

I promptly walked down the hallway at eight o’clock to her room and asked if she was ready for bed.

“Yes. Help me to the bathroom first please,” she said.

Once inside, she turned to me. “Now, I like to wear the pajamas located in my bottom drawer,”

I smiled mischievously and produced her favorite pair of pink satin pajamas from behind my back. I snagged them from the drawer on our way to the bathroom. Bonnie had a weakness for pink satin pajamas and couldn’t contain her excitement from anyone. Her eyes brightened up at the sight.

“Ohhh, how did you know I liked these ones?” she queried.

“Inspiration, I guess” I said.

She sat down on a chair and began handing me her discarded clothing. “Make sure you fold—oh, you already know to fold the clothes. And so nicely too.”

“Yes, I do Bonnie. It’s how you like it.”

“I do like it that way,” she confirmed. “Okay, put them in the hamper then and bring my toothbrush to me. It’s on the dresser along with the toothpaste.” I nodded and walked out only to return a few minutes later with the requested items ready for use plus a night cap.

“My night cap! I almost forgot about it. I would’ve had messy curls in the morning if you hadn’t brought it in,” she exclaimed.

“It’s a good thing I brought it then. A lady must always look her best.”

A few minutes later, we walked out of the bathroom together. “You’ve done good,” she said.

“Well, I know you Bonnie. I know how you like things. I’ve *helped* you plenty of times beforehand,” I responded as she sat down on the bed.

“Well, you help out so well. Thank you dear.”

“I try.”

Helping the residents with daily routines didn’t take much thought. I knew them so well after three and a half years that anticipating their needs became automatic. Real help counted when a crisis hit. Like when George fell. My mother’s example hovered above me. “Could a young woman of my size prevent George’s burly frame from the impact of the hard ground?” I thought as I cleaned up George’s face with the nurse. A simple step forward is all it takes. George sat in his wheelchair in front of the Medicare entrance, and still the only visible wound was the scratched forehead. He would have a headache as soon as the pain set in, but he was fine. Relief flooded my body, but my hands shook with fear. The rush to find the nurse and lift George off the ground ended within a few moments. I sent Derek off with another aide to gather the residents in the dining room for supper, giving him a relief from the excitement. I handed the nurse a piece of medical tape and thought of the proper body mechanics and lifting techniques they teach in school for transferring a resident from a bed to a wheelchair and vice versa. The same principles apply when a person falls, and I qualify to do heavy lifting. “Why did I not ease my conscience and satisfy my “give everything” upbringing?” I pondered.

Because there are protocols to follow.

There’s a set procedure in place that every aide must learn to certify as a nurse’s assistant. These procedures protect not only the resident but the aide. My training taught that if a resident was going to fall, the best option is to give the resident as clean a fall as possible. The fewer barriers in the way, the less damaging the injuries. And my body was a barrier in George’s fall. The possibility of him sustaining injuries from

my prevention was too great so the books told me to step back and protect myself. I could get hurt and that would not help anyone—not me, not the residents, and not my colleagues. We all rely on each other to help care for the residents on those two person transfers. An aide can't help out if she suffers from a pulled muscle or a strained back. I remembered Kelly.

Two weeks ago, Kelly she walked up to me as the afternoon shift began. "I have a doctor's note for no lifting."

"Why? What happened?" hoping that concern sounded in my voice. But really I was annoyed. Her doctor's note was going to make this shift long and tiring and not easy on anyone.

"Lorraine had a fall the other day while being transferred and I hurt myself trying to prevent it," she explained.

I nodded. It wasn't uncommon for a fall to happen during a transfer. Usually, the resident's legs give out and the best solution is to slide the resident down to the floor. Nothing traumatic or injurious in such cases, but it still is considered a fall that needs reporting to the nurse. Lorraine was a large woman and a two-person transfer. Up to that point, only the physical therapy staff could move her, and Kelly worked in both departments. "What went wrong with the transfer?" I continued.

"Her legs gave out and it caught us off guard. We ended up sliding her to the ground. But I won't allow a resident to fall on my watch so I held on to her and hurt my back in the process," she said.

Her idea of help was so different than mine. We worked at the same nursing facility together for three years and yet her actions suggested she did not believe in the procedures. A few days after our conversation, Kelly came in to work to notify the staff of her leave of absence. Her doctor found extensive damage in her back and she needed time to recover from the injury. She stepped forward to help Lorraine, and yet in the end, it cost her. My reaction to a fall was automatic. It made sense to follow the textbook training. No harm done to myself. But as I stood before George in his post-fall state, I felt the need for a

leave of absence as well.

"The protocols move you forward in a crisis," I told myself unconvincingly as I plucked off another piece of tape for the nurse.

But they only move you so far. Not every situation has a procedure outline for the CNA to follow.

Mine appeared the day Sybil learned she was dying.

For most residents, death was a reward more than a curse. It meant the suffering was over. Dementia and Alzheimer's prevented many of them from actually knowing their surroundings and death didn't have its shock. However, Sybil was very much alert and cognizant of her condition. She needed to mourn for herself. I never cared for someone who understood he or she was dying. There was no textbook procedure to follow in such a situation. I could only rely on my ability to feel and respond as a person. It was a moment for me to step forward and give help on my own terms.

I found Sybil sitting on the bed with her face buried in her hands, wet with tears.

"My family. What will happen to them when I'm gone?" she repeated over and over through stifled sobs.

Her son had just broken the news that she would not survive breast cancer. She was a petite woman with small bones and a fully endowed bust line, which she took great pride in. Sybil often teased me that I had no need for wearing a brassiere and declared I did not have much to boast of in that regard. When she received her initial diagnosis of breast cancer, there was no storm or devastation. No curses said. Rather, she acted as if the removal of a woman's breast was a natural part of the female life—that young girls develop them during adolescence and then elderly women remove them. No need to trouble with the fear and uncertainty.

Yet, here she was giving in to her emotions. I considered for a moment what I might say to her before answering, "They'll be here thinking of you."

"I don't want to die. My family. I don't want to leave my family," she responded.

"I know." I offered a box of Kleenex hoping my words had some sort of understanding. I keenly felt my inadequacy to comfort Sybil at the moment. The textbooks didn't offer much guidance in this area, but I stayed in the room.

Cautiously I asked, "What about your other family members? The ones who have passed on already? Maybe you'll see them."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if you believe you'll see your parents again, you must believe that your

son and husband will follow you someday,” I explained.

Her lips trembled and the look in her eyes told me she appreciated the gesture. She was Jewish and had some understanding of an afterlife, but her emotion was too raw to comprehend theology at the moment. Her face reverted back into her hands. Knowing she needed more time for her grief, I suggested bringing dinner into her room.

“No” she protested. “I have to go to the dining room. I must carry on as if nothing has changed.” I tried arguing with her, but she was adamant. Relenting, I handed her another tissue and waited for her sobs to lessen and her breathing to become more even.

“I’m ready” she said softly.

I held her hands as she stood up and moved to the wheelchair beside the bed. Taking her dirty Kleenex from her, I replaced them with clean ones again knowing that she would need them and wheeled her to the dining room. As she waited for her supper, Sybil struggled to hold back the tears, her little body shuddering. Her dinner companions were perplexed by her behavior for she was always friendly towards them, but her face remained hidden behind the Kleenex. When a meal of soup and sandwiches was placed before her, she could not gain control over her shaking hands. I watched from afar as she tried to spoon soup into her mouth and left a residue of broth dripping down her chin. She reached for a glass of milk with her trembling hand and knocked it over drenching the tablecloth. I rushed over and knelt down beside her.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s come over me,” she said with uneven breath.

“Let me take you back to your room. I’ll bring your dinner.” She gave a slight nod and I quickly wheeled her out.

Back in her bedroom, she sat on the bed and let her emotion have full sway again. “My family,” she kept repeating. Through her tear stained eyes, she looked up showing me for the first time her fear. With great caution, I stepped forward and sat down beside her on the bed wrapping my arm around her small quivering body. She yielded to my touch and laid her

head against my shoulder, her tears staining my breast.

Sybil never teased me again for having a small bust line after that moment.

* * *

We congregated around the nurse’s station reflecting on the last busy hour. The aides, wanting to know George’s prognosis, pestered the nurse with questions. One turned to me and asked how I was feeling. Shock registered on my face. Not once did it occur to me that someone would be thinking of me when someone else had fallen. No one ever asked such a question before with previous accidents at work. Silence settled in around the aides as they waited for my response.

“She did great,” the nurse spoke up for me. “She did very well and kept her calm.”

Calm. I don’t feel calm now. Adrenaline still coursed through my body.

Some call lights flickered down the hall and the aides and nurse dispersed to go answer them leaving Derek and me alone at the desk. He shifted in his chair looking around him when he finally asked the question burning inside of him. “Are you going to get fired for this?”

Every new aide asked this question after they had seen their first fall. It usually didn’t come until after a few months on the job, but it was always asked. “No,” I shook my head. “I did everything by the book. And accidents happen.” I beckoned him to follow me as the dinner trays arrived and needed to be passed out for the Medicare hall.

Accidents happen. Those words felt like tar in my mouth. Accidents never stop reoccurring: a teetering body, the wind rushing by, a ringing sound of a cracking whip in my ears, and then silence. And yet, George is perfectly fine and laughing at his own predicament. I am not ready to laugh with him though. My textbook perfect response didn’t match the notions of help from my mother, nor my own. But I was right to step back and let the fear in his eyes penetrate me. He had a clean fall, but is my conscience clear? Depends on how you look at it. Step forward, step back.

First Place Graduate Poetry

Christina Sitton

El Camino

for my son, James

Come little pilgrim, pull on your jute sack, I'll find a way
for us. God's call, cat's eye, muslin shoes will grind away.

Sandstone, old stone, relic bone. Between Alcazars and Ojalá que's,
ricocheting souls stab stones, stamp, and wind their way.

Miracles double miracles to elicit more miracles. And here sutures
the relationship between holy and commercial. Cloth binds both ways.

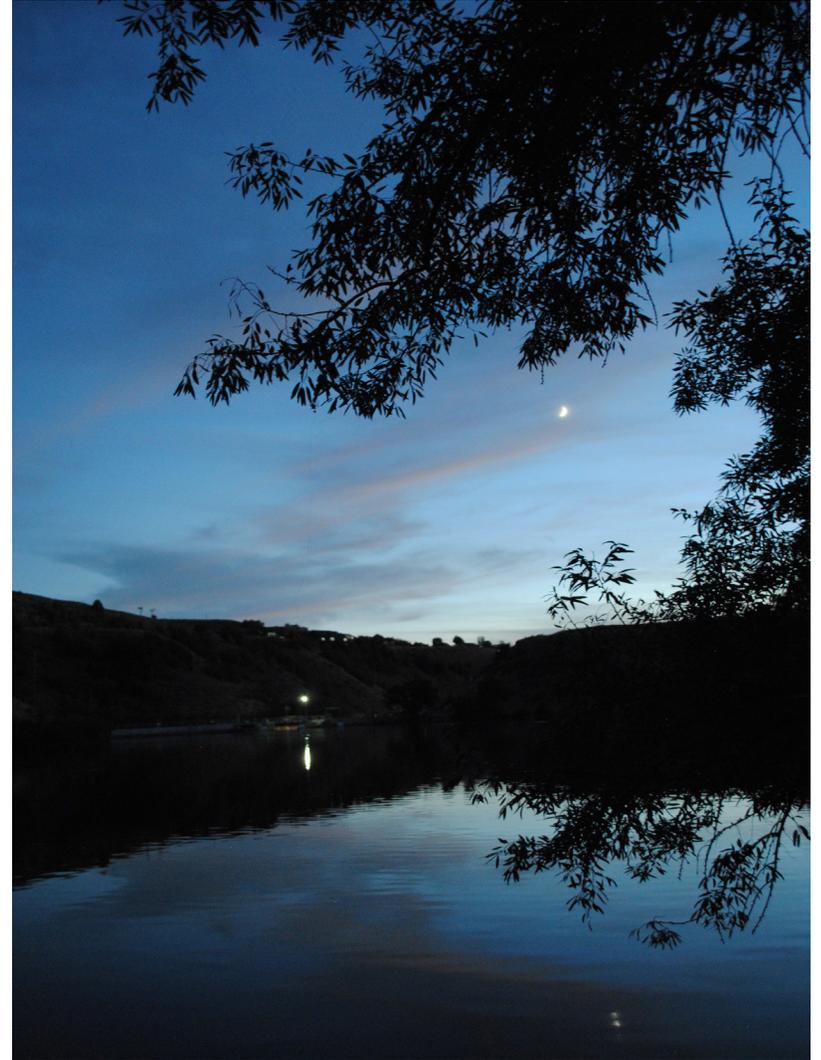
Forget the vomit and piss and crushed wine cups on San Fermin's streets—
Reach low, feel cockles, hear bells, Santiago's scallop shells remind the way.

Spanish olives drop under the shade of the Torre de Bartolomé. Outside the hospice,
homeless men lie on benches to protest in guitar notes rhymed away.

Stories of French sieges, secret bodega doors sprung to Ebro's bank—but,
stories are cotton blossoms padded with silk and seam double lined, anyway.

And before pilgrims' lips graze or profane with psalms, razor cut the palm
down the center, see the blushing pulp, and peel the rind away.

Did you know the world divided for you? Iberia fell to you?
That your name took a stone boat to Padrón and climbed away?



“First Dam, September” by Maria Williams
Second Place Undergraduate Art

Does it matter that a field of stars wrote you down in a book?
Buried under Galician sand and soot to lead the minds away?

But let mother tell you, James, as we walk against the sunflowers,
it's a fool's cap across the brow that blinds the way.

In the Land of Guns and Horses

A benevolent monsoon churns
cirrus clouds black and gray
a horse in iron shoes gallops down
the mountain range
pushes its diamond head to the valley floor
only to disappear in the alluvial fans
A rumbled vapor breath across a playa
flat clay piles latticed in dust
stones coated in rust walk untouched

In the land of Guns and Horses
I like the smell of a good raindrop
Sometimes I wonder what part of
our evolution tells us the smell
of wet pinion and ponderosa needles
with its sly pricking aroma
is a good thing

A small window
in which we are finally welcomed
to enter the most hostile of countries
the place where our parents said their
dreams came to die
Shot in the arid dark
like the rabid dogs
of their time
The feared dis-
ease

As fast as a cataclysmic kiss
the plum colored trigger pull
of metal on metal
brings the flash and bang
A shotgun showing signs
of surface rust born on both barrels
glows in fine auburn finger streaks
the mark of slow neglect

White sparks linger as red ghosts
against retinas with the distant scent
of sulfur musk

Our parents still lay owl faced in the dark
corners of the desert

In the land of Guns and Horses
Each fallen cactus becomes the hollow
wood-bones of dreams
born on areoles and aloe spine
still waiting still hoping
for fat resurrected flesh
to pump and bleed
visible ribs invisible
the way the adapted live

But as the mercury rises
perhaps chance will come
on the race backs of horses
on the currents
of the next seasons' storms

in the land of Guns and Horses

Among the drifts of the dying
we are beckoned inward

coaxed by the sharp cleansed scent
of creosote and newly washed
coliche clay

We are fools watching rain
conjuring base bloom
flowers yellow-purple-pink
a landscape painted
in the patient bursts
of succulent blossoms
in a cycle short and frail

At night the valley floods

Before the summer sun
tips over the mountain tops
stretching shadow tails
narrow-thin
and reclaims every fallen drop
the white stars walk across a desert ocean
mirrored space echoes in a new direction

In the land of Guns and Horses
we die and rise again

The Other Side

Let's break all the pieces, kaleidoscopic traces, with reflectors on the other side.
Elysium fields and beaches wait for Andromache's Hektor on the other side.

I search language after language to find your grammatic placement,
just to find (to know) what happens to specters on the other side.

On a parchment paper map emerges a deadly picture. To step through silver Coptic code
and leave a negative balance — the image fractures on the other side.

I turn out your hound's-tooth pockets like flag ships, sails empty, then scrub your fingerprints
from cupboard doors. I'm left a recollector on the other side.

We can touch the relic races, hard leather faces, if we keep our finger tips white and pure.
You and I (in our goodliest of graces) will be the resurrectors for the others, besides,

Think of the living dead! Embrace them. Vibrant ghosts will give us their secrets through latticed
windows. Gem glass, red-orange-blue, painted in creases, words etched there on the other side

The Sacred Door. Knock, knock. A tax echoes in small spaces. "Peace be
unto you and yours," We'll whisper our lines as actors on the other side

of the stage curtain. We'll climb out through the wooden trap floor.
Good God! We can even be debt collectors! On the other side

of the bone yard, we'll play games like we did before when we were kids; hide behind the wet
headstones. We'd walk out as proper bone inspectors for the others. Side-

by-side, Sister Christina, Brother Ben, we'll count their iron crosses. Gloat
with our pink skin. We can do it all, dear Brother, if you just come back here from the other side.

Second Place Graduate Poetry

Caitlin Erickson

Walking to Tandoori After Freezing Rain

It rained in spurts all day
and drops eased themselves
over snow and slick metal
of cars, smoothed into sheets
that students skidded and skated across
to get to class.

The Indian place is a block from my house.
I walk there in the dark, breath puffing
like cigarette smoke, cleats clinging
to my boots. Ice sounds like gravel
under my weight. Shards, like frosted glass,
pile in corners of parking lots and sidewalks.
It's been so cold I forgot the sound
of water dripping. Bitter cold—the sting of frost
pricks exposed skin in seconds. Now, water drips
methodical from bare branches, splashing craters
onto the ice below. Thawing, like frozen meat.

The metal studs attached to my boots clack
against the sidewalk
where no ice exists to sink into.
I wait for my food in a red painted lobby
and carry the fragrant bag home,
walking gingerly,
as though the ground is a new bruise.

Cinnamon, cumin and cream fill the apartment
as I spoon rice and masala into one
heavy white bowl. Outside, icicles drip
onto the walkway, creating pock marks
in crusted snow. The drops lull like a heartbeat
in the muffled night.

“Eris” by Lorelle Frank
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



Thaw

We sit on knotted benches
in the steam soaked rental hut
of a small town skating rink,
breath puffing steam
as we lace worn skates to our feet.
College students in faded hoodies
and kids in puffed-up parkas surround us,
fill the air with chatter and condensed breath.

Outside, the air, dry, cold, cracking,
pulls bodies close. Our skates glide over ice
lacerated with cuts and curls
of blades before ours, powdered snow
scattering in the breeze.

You coax me along, your voice smooth
counteracting the panicked notes of mine.
Just look a few feet ahead, you say,
look where you want to end up.
I wobble toward the goal, an evergreen
shaded black in the streetlights. I fear
the snap of fractures and the stretch of sprains
that come with the inevitable fall.
I fear dragging you onto the ragged ice with me.
But you skate next to me, matching
my erratic glides, our hands laced, fingers frozen.

At home, you drip soft wax onto my back
as I lay spread across my sheets
like Venus of Urbino.
It melts ice
in my muscles, warmth
spreading like steam.
You aim wax at my spine. Heat
blooms like forget-me-nots.

When we sleep, twisted in checked sheets,
I lay on your chest and listen to your heartbeat
pulsing, like purrs, against your ribs.
My palm, resting on your stomach, thaws.

Tension

It snaps tight against my knuckle, a whip
that welts. My skin burns infected red,
puckers to blush as sting
radiates to my wrist.

Sound still rings from the string
curling on itself like shrimp.
Its pulse fans into the room like water ripples,
pools into corners,
laps at kitchen chairs,
ricochets off pots in the sink,
metal handles tinny and frail.
Notes flood the room, buzzing cymbals
and horns and melting flutes,
waiting for the raise of my baton.

The guitar is silent and gap-toothed
a hollow corpse in a life of sounds.

I knead Neosporin into flamed skin
and listen to the hum of my kitchen.

“Westgate Street” by Sarah Timmerman
Undergraduate Art Honorable Mention



Third Place Graduate Poetry

Lori Lee

Foreign Music or More than One Way to Say a Thing

He looks us over and in broken English says,
You three always together, a trio.
You know? Three instruments, music?
A quartet is better. And he sits at our table.

The next day at lunch he admits
he does not play an instrument,
says he will conduct. Uneasy
with his quick rise to power
I mumble, In your dreams.

You know Bach? he says on day three,
then something about how the genius
could take liberties. A particular piece
hums from his lips. I nod yes,
though I have no idea.
He nods, we eat in silence.

On day four he tells me
he likes my watch and I thank him,
place my arm in my lap.
You know why I don't tell you
I like you, he says? Because if I do you hide,
just like you now hide your watch.
He smiles with a wind of a laugh
his eyes like stage fright, or maybe
that was me and his eyes were conducting.

Prayers

In the meat isle, she raises her voice
and says, "Jesus I need a special on pork chops."
She just wants help, a sign that someone listens.

Like taxes, men and their sex, impatient mothers,
some things just are. She is. With her
pomegranate lipstick, lips slick with Red #9,
she is us. There is no such thing as normal people.

Pray, brothers, sisters, daughters, parents.
Pray for the longevity of the astro turf,
pray for the wicked on fire in their own self loathing,
pray for moisture, for pomegranate red #9,
pray for love and money, pray for pork chops.
Pray like your life depends on it.

Enough Already

I swear I am no more tired
than an angel who has danced
forever in her stocking feet.

I am no more tired
than a child, carried
by his father from the car
shoes, socks carefully removed
his body curling completely to
his dreams.

And I am no more tired
than any woman
after days of chasing minutes
and years, never to catch them,
but somehow to hold them
in those bags on her hips.

And I am no more tired
than life, with all its lazy
dogs flopped in the shade,
panting out their exhaustion,
jowls flagging.

Our Contributors

Jesse Betts graduated cum laude with a bachelor's degree in creative writing from Utah State University in December, 2012. She is currently working on her master's degree in literature and writing. Jesse's writing has also been published in the collegiate literary magazines, The Nighthawk Review, Kolob Canyon Review, and The Southern Quill.

Nissele Contreras is currently working towards a B.A in Creative Writing at Utah State University. After taking English 1010, she discovered she enjoyed writing and has been following that path ever since. She loves all areas of writing but mostly, poetry and nonfiction.

Stacie Denetsois was born on the Navajo Reservation in Tuba City, Arizona but now lives in Utah. Stacie was raised by her mother and her maternal clan is Tó dich'iinii the "Bitterwater" clan. She loves her culture and her family, in her free time she rock climbs and writes poetry.

Alex Erickson is a senior at Utah State studying English. He is one of those who refer to the movies and books as films and literature. And like everyone else, he is a comic genius on the internet.

Caitlin Erickson is a second year graduate student from Holladay, UT. She has studied all forms of creative writing, but her loves are creative non-fiction and poetry. She tends towards narrative, as story-telling is in her blood. To her, every experience is an opportunity for a story.

Lorelle Frank is an English major with an emphasis in creative writing. When she isn't writing or painting, her waking hours are dominated by vocal performance and theatre, because the stage has informed and inspired her writing more than anything else. This is her second fiction publication in *Scribendi*.

Wonjun Han is from Korea. His major will be biology but he is just studying English now. When he takes photographs, he tries to find something fun. He hopes you enjoy his pictures.

Mitch Hawk moved to Logan from Las Vegas in 2011 and is currently in his third year as an English Creative Writing student at Utah State University. He is an outdoor enthusiast; a "granola" and "city-boy" hybrid.

Crystal Henderson changed her last name when she got married because she figured "C.L. Henderson" would look delicious trailing down book spines. Her story "Can They Find Their Way?" described a unicorn as having "seaweed hair and a coat colored like a shrimp cocktail," a description she is pleased with to this day.

Kristine Jackson is working on her dreams in life, by graduating from High School in 2011 and currently works on her professional teaching degree at Utah State University. She belongs to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and loves how it influences her writing, reading and sewing.

Lori Lee resides in Bountiful with her two sons, a dog named Frog, and stacks of notebooks filled with free writing dribble, poetry, research, ideas, things that make no sense, and deep philosophical thoughts. She is a student of folklore, writing, and life. Sometimes she excels at all three, sometimes at none. But, writing is most powerful when it's real and about the experience of living.

Kendall Pack is a graduate student studying Literature and Writing. His work has previously been published in *The Superstition Review*. He is working on a novella for his Master's thesis.

Lela Richardson was told good writing comes from facing what keeps you up at night sick to your stomach. She's discovered that she has to run toward what makes her wish to run away. Writing unveils truth. There is art in pain, beauty in fear.

Christina Sitton is your run-of-the-mill cranky grad student, hates watermelon, has an odd obsession to paint trees and will fist fight a pig from time to time. ...Oh...and she writes stuff about stuff.

Bryan Strain is currently an English Major at USU. He is a non-traditional student with a background in journalism and technology. He developed his photography skills while working for a small rural newspaper and never stopped trying to capture the perfect moment while looking at the world through a lens.

Isaac Timm is an undergraduate of creative writing at USU. His poetry has appeared on *Helicon West* broadsides and in the anthologies *Words to Paint With*, and *In the Shimmering*, both by LUW Press. Isaac and his wife Aaron live in Logan, Utah and enjoy its vibrant writing community.

Sarah Timmerman's photography is an exercise in capturing the subtle moment teetering between an eager passion and an unfathomable Zen. It is the comfortable hurt found while searching for a city's soul.

Millie Tullis is a junior majoring in English with an emphasis on Creative Writing at Utah State University. She hopes to become a professor someday, but first she wants to go to school forever and ever. She enjoys reading, writing, kittens, and impulsively buying slightly different colors of red lipstick.

Angela Turnbow is a second year graduate student in the Literature and Writing program hailing from South Jordan, Utah. "Becoming No Savior" is her first attempt at creative writing and recounts some of the events she experienced while working as a certified nurse's assistant during her undergraduate work.

MaryAnn Widerburg is a graduate student in the English department where she also teaches composition as a graduate instructor. She is addicted to ice cream and Indian food. MaryAnn likes to write in cemeteries, and she can tell you all about the ghost that haunts Ray B. West after everyone goes home.

Maria Williams has always enjoyed the creative process--through writing, dancing, or drawing--because it allows her to connect with someone on a deeper level through nontraditional means of communication. She loves finishing a piece and feeling a little differently about the world than when she began.