



***The Bottom Shelf Review
2012-2013***

Wilson College
Bottom Shelf Review
2012-2013

Wilson College's literary magazine

**The *Bottom Shelf Review* is a publication by and for the students,
faculty, and staff of Wilson College.**

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~ Enter the Labyrinth ~

*The works in the first
pieces in celebration of
labyrinth. A semester-
labyrinth was conducted
auspices of the College*



*section contain creative
the concept of the
long study of the
at the College under the
Chaplain, Rosie Magee.*

First Prize Winner, Poetry, Student Division

The Hunt

I stand at the precipice
knowing what I need to do
work on one thing

Confidence

The first step is always the hardest
knowing what must go through me
emotion, conflict

Pain

A tear runs down slowly, cleansing, erasing
sitting in my center, air flowing through me
finding what needs found

Peace

Finding my path, healing my soul
as water smooths river rocks, slowly, directly
walking, changing, flowing

Moving

The end is here and I feel alive
better than I have in years
having worked on one thing

Me.

-Amanda Stup

First Prize Winner, Faculty/Staff Division

Indiangrass

I.

The goat we saw in the high pale field
was not a goat but instead a young
albino deer who (we learned later)
hankered for the tender parts
of the neighbor's smooth azalea.

We entered a pact with all concerned
to keep it quiet
and our Indiangrass did its part
to swallow the fellow up and save it
from random (and deliberate)
blasts of lead from steel.

II.

I climbed past that same high field
across many seasons
in shoes not meant for hiking
wearing clothes that did not fit
to reach a plateau where
I could rest in nature's arms.

And the burden of my shadow
fell away
replaced by a new self
seen in a flowing stream of sparkle
where earth and sky
animal and human
were all luminous.

III.

Look there! you said
after whisking me out,
wind washing us taking our breath from us
to glimpse again the white wonder,
this time closer leggier leaping.

In winter, I lobbed logs

into the outside fire box and
wondered how many colors of flame
we must endure to purify
our selves into white deer.

IV.

I cannot claim Teresa's castle,
cathedrals constrain me
my eyes deceive me
and I have no power
to take breath away.

Please say you did not hear
any of this from me. Let me keep
these small surprises of self
quiet, safe, in Indiangrass.

-Sharon Erby

First Prize Winner, Graduate Student Division

Insomnomaniac

I'm just about to have an audience with the king of France and his charming wife, when my bladder begins to pull me from my dream. Half awake, I struggle to retain the mental footing I have in my imagined world. I turn toward those whose company I had been enjoying looking for help, but they seem too engrossed in their conversations to notice me. Cynicism creeps in along the small light shafts of awareness that seem to multiply by the second. My friends, whom only moments before had my admiration, now seem absurd in their elaborate clothing and wigs stacked so high that they dare not turn too quickly, lest risk tipping like over-dressed Weeble Wobbles. I stand my ground and refuse to leave without a fight. I'm not going anywhere until I've tried the cake!

My body is insistent, however. First there is only mere discomfort. But before long, tiny tendrils of pain creep across the floor of the long room. They encircle my stomach and slowly move me toward the door. I try planting my feet, my arms flailing as I look for something to grab hold to.

But it's no use. The shades of my consciousness have been thrown open and the dream is gone. Defeated, I open my eyes and glance at the clock. 2:13 am. Damn.

I make my way to the bathroom, placating the urge that intruded on my reverie. As my agitation wanes, I can't help but laugh a little at myself. I either need to lay off of the double scoop sundaes before bedtime or costume dramas. Or both.

Relieved, my bladder and I make our way back to bed. I climb under the covers thankful that the mattress is still warm. I wiggle and shift until I am comfortable and close my eyes. I lie that way for several minutes until a familiar feeling sweeps over me. I try desperately to not to think, though that only leads to thoughts about not thinking.

"Don't do this," I whisper to myself. I shut my eyes tighter in an attempt to block out the noisy chatter kicking up in my brain. It's too late—I've already entered into a labyrinth of runaway thoughts. I desperately back-peddle, trying to retrace my steps to the dark, quiet spot my mind occupied only a few moments ago. Words fall, blocking my way. Long, run-on sentences force me down a narrow, dark corridor toward the problems I left at the foot of my bed with my slippers last night.

Right or left? I turn right to find my mother's worried apprehension over my ability (or, more accurately, inability) to pay off my student loans with the salary I make at the bookstore—the only job I could find after I graduated. Well, maybe not the only job.

"I told you a humanities degree would be worthless!" I hear her say. From the perspective behind her large desk in her corporate suite, it never mattered that I had pursued what I loved. She always thought I should have followed in the shoes of her money driven ambition. "You're just like your grandfather, with his romantic sensibilities. You know where that got him? Nowhere. He died in the same house he was born in, after working the same land all his life."

"But he died happy," I say out loud, feeling immediately silly since I'm the only one in the room.

I turn my thoughts down a new path, a long meandering one paved with my hopes and dreams for the future. I picture myself happy and in love. I picture Philip. I see us living in a small cottage with a book-lined room where I sit and write. I picture myself as a mother. The

smooth rhythm of this path rocks is like a lullaby. I'm nearly asleep when a sharp turn forces me onto another path.

Alone. That single word shines bright, illuminating everything along the straight corridor that stretches before me. I look around, but find nothing else to focus on but the nooks and crannies of my own insufficiency. I know this path well. I've walked it many sleepless nights. When I'm lucky, something in my head throws a switch and things go black as I descend into fitful sleep. Tonight doesn't seem to be one of those nights, so I walk on. Alone.

I walk over the cobblestones marking my failures and defeats. Over shame and regret, heartache and fear. I lean down and touch the stone with Philip's name etched on it. My heart pounds as I trace the letters of his name. "*He's gone. It's over. Let it go,*" I whisper.

I stand and move on, one foot over another. I move past the job I should have taken, but didn't, thinking I was worth more. I'm not as different from my mother as she thinks. It's awful knowing how much you're worth.

I keep waiting for there to be a bend along the way or for a bit of shade from the unrelenting spotlight I've forced on myself. But there is no stopping this runaway train of thoughts.

After a while, my thinking and emoting starts to take its toll. I feel tension work its way up my back and toward my neck. My head begins to pound.

I reach for the glass of water on my nightstand just as my alarm goes off. "*Son of a bitch!*" I curse under my breath. I grasp the clock tight in my hand preparing to launch it across the room. I clench my teeth, feeling the muscles in my jaw bulge, and exhale—a long, slow, hissing breath. I turn the alarm off and set the clock back on my nightstand.

The puffy flesh around my eyes is tender and the rest of my body aches as though I had been in some sort of battle. I feel only half alive. Worse, the half alive part of me doesn't feel much like me. It feels more like some grumpy, sleep deprived creature—an insomniac.

"Well, if I don't want to lose my job, this insomniac better drag its ass out of bed." I say out loud. Talking to myself. Great. Not a good sign.

It's going to be a long day.

-Angella Dagenhart

First Prize Winner, Prose, Student Division

The Labyrinth That Is the Big Apple

Upon stepping outside the train, I get enveloped in the vibrancy of the city pulsing with life. I can almost hear the deep, low rumble of energy that it can barely contain.

The energy flows continuously—from the people to the city to the people. The equilibrium is not always maintained, however. I can feel the city lending me its energy, exhilarating me one moment, and sucking it right out of me the very next moment, taking what is rightfully its, exhausting me completely.

There are people—scores of people—rushing, pleading, begging, marveling, glaring, leering, jeering. There are more people—in *sarees*, *kurtas*, monkey caps—all fitting in, walking proud, no less American than the others. And then there are people speaking my tongue—as an unsure smile begins to form on my face on seeing them, they pass quietly, without so much as a glance in my direction.

I get filled with a sense of faint urgency. I walk, a feeling of quest probing me gently.

I make my way through the throng, and into the subway—complete with its stench and squalor—swallowing and spewing people of different sorts, with different tongues, origins, stories—they seem to be different in all ways except their glum, nonchalant expressions. Even though the train windows don't offer much of a view, these people stare into a faraway distance while in the train, some with bloodshot eyes—a result of too much crying, or too much drinking, or too many grueling night shifts.

At one of the numerous staircases of the station, I come across a spilled cup of coffee, perhaps dropped by someone in the morning rush of running for the train, with no time to lament over it, no time to even say goodbye.

The urgency intensifies.

Then comes the sound of music, the sort of awe-inspiring talent that no amount of money paid for expensive tickets could get one to, that gets voice only in the subway, that only people who can afford a little bit of valuable time are privy to.

I follow the sound waves. In a corner of the station lies my center—a guy with tetra-amelia plays the guitar, giving a whole new meaning to the act of making impossible possible, filling me with immense immediate inspiration, lending my life more meaning in that squalid corner amidst all the city's eclecticism, just like that.

-Jyotsna Dhakal

(untitled)

I visited a labyrinth earlier this year. It was a very enlightening experience. Walking through the labyrinth, I did a lot of thinking and when I got to the middle, I sat down and wrote this:

You know a crush isn't a bad thing. It's your heart. How on earth could that be bad? The truth will out and things will go as they are intended to. Nothing happens by chance. Remember, everything happens for a reason. Love is love and love is good.

Emotion lets you know you're alive. It is not a bad thing at all. Embrace any emotion that you are lucky enough to have and maybe someday someone will feel emotion for you.

Love is patient. Why aren't you? Love is kind. Treat those you love with care Love is God's greatest gift to man. When you find it (or it finds you), cherish it. Nurture it. Protect it. Keep it close. Give back tenfold everything it gives to you. You will reap the reward of kings.

I learned a lot about myself that day, including new ways to look at things that were plaguing me. Love has always confused me, but I feel as though this journey straightened it all out a little bit. Remember:

You can't always see in front of your face, but a friend will guide you home.

I realized that sometimes the next step is clearly laid out. The next goal isn't always within reach. The next task is always doable on your own. Sometimes, you have to turn to your friends. There is no shame in that. It is only life and living.

We have laughed, we have cried, we have lived a million lives.

I learned that life is about living. It's about the daily struggle and triumph. No one gets a free ride. We must all hold on tight and take what is thrown at us. It hit me so hard that day that I was focused on things that weren't important. I wasn't letting myself feel anymore. Just powering through and never examining what was happening was hurting me. Not in a good way, but in a bad way. I'd forgotten that emotion was good.

Let it hurt; then remember how it feels.

What I took away from that day, I won't soon forget. I learned that life and love and emotion are all intertwined. That they must all be experienced, that they all have their place and I in them become alive.

-Robin Kane

Labyrinth of Life

The earth born
with freewill
 hopes and dreams
 to fulfill.
 Growing old
 everyday
 much to do
much to say.
Tears are hid.
 Smiles are shown.
 Burden rid
 all alone.
 Paths to chose
 blissful peace,
 pain, despair,
one could meet.
Contentment.
 Found the way.
 Resentment.
 Lost today.
 If ones lost
 at a bend
 clear the mind
chose again.

-Susan Davies

Found Mercy

Sitting on her prayer mat
her legs folded
her head resting on the back wall
tears rolling down her face
staring intently into space
she felt hate, anger, regret, pain and a loss
as she sighed
holding her breath for a very long time
she whispered to Someone "I'm sorry!"
And she WAS

Drifting into deeper space her pain became stronger and real
Fighting to keep the tears back but to no avail, she heard
"If you cannot forgive yourself, how can I?"
She replied "even if I forgive I cannot forget"
The voice said "DON'T.
If you forget you are bound to do it again!"

In that instant, her life illuminated and the darkness was gone
pain, anger, regret and hatred were gone
It was like a weight was lifted off her shoulders
She could finally breathe
without a care for the first time in a long time
she had realized, life's full of mistakes and regrets
we can't cling to them and stop living
we have to forgive ourselves and others to be in peace
and at that spot she forgave, and He forgave
After all He is All-forgiving All-merciful...

-Shumaila Javed Bhatti

Life—a maze or a labyrinth?

As we proceed through life, we are constantly faced with decisions—do I take the left trail or do I take the right trail. We make those decisions, or so it seems, and are required to live with the consequences of those decisions. As the song goes, I'm falling in love as she walks away and I didn't even ask her name. Did you have a choice at that moment? Yes seems to be the answer but you didn't. Maybe you could not ask for her name. Maybe life is just a labyrinth; we believe we have the power to make decisions, but in reality we can only follow one path already set in motion by some power unknown to us. Think of it as going back in time and accidentally stepping on a bug. One different decision, one different step, in the past would alter everything around you. You would lose everything, your family, your job, your house, and whatever else is dear to you. We often think maybe I should have made this choice and life would have been different, but maybe it doesn't work that way. I believe there are some dimples in life's labyrinth that we can look back on as being a mistake, but in the end there is and was only one path that we must follow.

-Odrun Stevens

Labyrinth Poem

One step at a time,
Countless steps overall.
One way in,
The person before
never comes back out.

Anxiety and Fear accompany me on this journey.
Walking into uncertainty is a distasteful feeling.
Just when I sense that the center is close,
the path whips me in the opposite direction.
I am hopeless...

But then a strange thing happens,
calmness washes over me.
Suddenly, it is not a race to finish,
the emphasis lies on the journey.
Anxiety and Fear are left within the wondering walls.

I shed away the worry and doubt,
that weighs my body down.
I feel my true self glowing
And serenity is found
As I walk into the center,
The center of myself.

-Jocelyn Kirchner

*~ Other Voices:
Prose ~*

(untitled)

Where I was born, I never lived until the day I chose to begin again. I don't remember the day I was born but I often wonder what it is like. Was I just another one. No, I am the doll born to many. How happy my family must have been.

My left hand held over my head, tightly fisted. I don't cry. I pacify myself with my hand in my face and thumb in my mouth. It will be like that for a long time. Le Bel, the beautiful, the handsome—the wrong destiny. I am forbidden from elegance. I came home, the base where everything is orderly. Where inside, nothing is ordered. There are secrets yet to be made. Beth took me as her puppet. I don't remember. My first move of many began with the trip to California. The Man is relocates and we follow. Another move to Texas and twenty- three months later, Ray-Ray replaces my innocence. I no longer have to fulfill the role of the doll. I must be happy. I run and play with my older brothers, Timmy and Steven. They teach me what it is to be rough. They taunt me and I love them. They take her, the frog I lay my head on each night, and tear her eyes out. I glue them back on. She is even more beautiful. My Timmy loves me most. He reads books all the time and leaves me alone. I want to be like him. Inside of me won't allow this precious gift. It isn't for me. I am to run. He hits me if I want him to play with me. Steven makes me climb the roof and it is I that gets the spanking. Steven still plays with me. I am still his doll.

Two more little dolls for me. Sarah and Gracie; Arizona is lucky. I become the glue to each side. Three and three and me, the one in between. The leader and lover of The Girls. The last broken follower of the older broken three. Not too broken... yet. Our days we spend together. Who else will play with the strange kids down the road. Beth, Steven and Timmy at school and I; I am too scared to go. I go to school for three confusing days. I never know what the teacher says and I never play with the other children. I watch them play games they never invite me to play. I am too awkward and free. I leave. I am not smart enough. Mommy tells me that I should stay home and play. What a good idea, Mommy. My mind ran open after that, nothing is imposed, nothing is taught, nothing is fulfilling. As one of The Girls, I take them outside, we play; we are buddies, bodies, and gaga-gouch. Our own language, the purest ever spoken. My lovers I entertain. They laugh into my heart and I am silly. The heat in the air, so hot, so dry. Locked outside, we love the sun, it pains my skin. We are free. The Girls ran stripped of clothing into the streets. The bare feet so tenderly loving the pavement with untainted soles. Wholesome, agonizing pleasure. Please, keep your kids inside. It isn't innocent to the neighbors. The pure skin burning in the sun. How strange The Girls.

The Girls. Gorgeous. But not the one in between. Their beauty I envy. The hair that fell. The flaxen to Ray-Ray. The black to Sarah. The gold to Gracie. Mine never decides. They are my angels. I am proud. They are mine. They follow me. Like stairs, I stood tallest. I look down to them, I am nothing without them. I often put them on my pedestal, anything they wish, I protect them, and I give them all of me.

My little frog, Clarence, he is my muse. I shared him. I played with him; I made him grotesque faces with my hand. The Girls laughed. How beautiful the sound in my eyes to hear them laugh. My sustenance. Their happiness. His legs, mangle funny, hung down from my hand as I used him as our distraction. There is never a moment where yelling cease inside our home. His corrupt body upon my hand pleases my senses. What a perfect moment. The Girls' gentle smiles at my strange imagination; they saw what I want them to see. Behind the frog, the secrets

begin. The Girls will never know. They will look for me in amusement and careless pleasure. I am their protector. The one to give instead of them. I will give them my soul. My body. They will never know. My body.

I am still a doll. In the middle of nowhere, my heart is ripped from my soul for the first time. My legs dangle beneath me. They are bare beneath my clothes. Steven puts me up on his pedestal of resentment. He resents the Man who we both adore. I won't hate the Man until later. I don't know anything else. My feet stick out bare. My hands stick out bare. My face isn't bare at all. I stare into his eyes. His clasp is strong and tight. On the wall life a still portrait, perfectly painted without emotion. You want to see me cry. His anger pours into his fingers. I feel the anger inside him. It is holding me up at his level. I stare into his eyes, his anger, and his future. He wants me to give in. I hold my breath, just as this happened many times before, this time I am ready. I will not give in my eyes repeat. Bearing through his anger, my hands are clutched on the wall I hang. The sweat in my hands is red. I hold the sweat perfectly still. Only one drop escapes. The wall wouldn't know what the floor felt. The wall is helping him. It is helping me. It is his support. It is my breath. It is a portrait of raging stillness. His body frames me in. The anger punctuates the picture. Nothing pours from the holes. The colors are the only witnesses. They perforate with rage. My own rage inside remains still; unable to come out. The breath remains still. His muse, me, his contest, is my anger. His arm gave in, I win. My bare feet gave in. I fall to my knees. I am pleased that I won. I bear hatred of myself. I wish to be like him. Like a man. He is not a man. I am. I don't win, he does. He knows that. I am on my knees as he walks away in his shoes. The colors go away. My face becomes bare again. I wipe the sweat from my hands. The streak will remain. I was playing on the fence. My hands were caught. That's why. My head hurt. It screams inside for air. I breathe heavily until my heart tells me it is okay and my legs regain their strength.

His body is forming. Mine stays the same shapelessness we had shared as children. He becomes different. We are no longer equal. This isn't the only time. He won't make it the last. He will forget this.

I never forgot the first time my brother took me to the wall to express his sorrow with anger. The Man beat him and touched his innocence until he is marked into adulthood. The Man didn't know: I was, too.

- Alexandre Collette (Howard)

Puppet On a String

Nancy Farmer looked around the fair. So many sights and sounds and smells to take in. It had taken hours to get here and she was impatient to eat some cotton candy while watching the acts.

“Daddy, what’s that?” she asked, her blonde head bobbing up and down.

“That’s the puppet master’s tent,” her father responded, taking her hand.

“Can we go see?” she asked excitedly.

“I don’t see why not.”

Nancy squealed in excitement as she dragged her father towards the black and red topped tent. As they reached the entrance a midget in green pinstriped pants and a flowing red peasant’s shirt stepped in their way.

“No adults,” said the midget, eyeing them over his extremely long nose.

“What do you mean no adults?” asked Nancy’s father.

“No adults,” was the response.

“Is that all you can say?”

“No adults.”

“Daddy, I want to go in!” whined Nancy.

“Maybe not this one, sweetheart. I think we should go…” said her father.

“No!” Nancy screamed. She pushed her way past her father and rushed into the tent.

It was pitch black. Nancy screamed. A light turned on to reveal a set of stairs that led down to a single chair placed in front of a small stage. She followed the stairs and sat down as the curtain lifted. Music started and a female puppet in a blue dress and petticoat appeared on stage. It began to dance and sing until a gentleman puppet in britches and a green tailcoat appeared on the other side of the stage. The female puppet started to giggle as the gentleman started dancing toward her. The second doll grabbed the first and started to twirl. Nancy giggled. They stopped and took a bow as a third puppet came on stage. It was an ugly puppet. It looked exactly like the midget blocking the opening of the tent. He held a chain that led off stage in his left hand and gave it a tug. Nancy gasped. Out slumped a puppet that looked just like her father. The woman and two men proceeded to kick her father’s effigy until the thing was simpering in pain.

“Daddy!” she screamed.

The puppets started giggling with each other and at her as the midget puppet dragged her father off the stage.

Nancy ran out of the tent crying but stopped when she saw she was no longer at the fair. It was simply all gone. Only garbage littered the ground. She turned back and saw the tent was no longer there. Just the woman, the man, and the midget, all life sized.

“Your father belongs to us now,” said the midget. “Goodbye.”

-Caitlyn E. Minelli

Fragmented Daylight

Without a smile I walk into a glade. The foot lands just as the lightning bolt struck. Ribbons, still catching up with the dress, flow behind in gold streaks. Un-brushed hair falls softly with each stride. Purple flowers effortlessly floating in the sunset colored hair. The moonlight illuminating the green grass, still how dark it feels. There isn't a print in sight. Long blades dance with the wind as the hand holding a daisy shifts like water. Lightening enhances each curled eyelash. These moments are still in my mind as each bolt angrily strikes. From a distance, holding breathless, this raging waterfall- silent as the night- leaps across the open without a pause. As still as the darkness, watching with eyes wide open, I cannot miss anything.

Bright sun rays creep through the sky. Just suddenly the invisible wind brings bright blue colors to the gold stricken night. A peek from the sun and everything vanishes. One stolen glance away and it is gone. Four hours pass by in an instant or *is this a dream interrupted?* Will there be another night like this? Certainly, another night will come

Tired and with a blank stare full of wonder, I walk deeper though the forest fighting against the sunlight striking through.

I lift the dead oak branch to see better. She is beautiful. Gardens full of color. I can smell the chamomile and lavender so rich in purple. A picture of yellow, orange, pink, and red. *I want to see more.*

Elegance is all she stands. As if it came out of the ground, her browns and stone had been laid with caress and natural order. Open windows let me in to look further. The home's well-groomed decor is pleasing to the eye. Each room resembles a story, a place, or a time, is enchanting to stare with awe. The pictures on the walls come from the same bloodline. The hand moves throughout the generations, brushing the same stroke expressing the line of sapphire blood in skill. Each painting carries a tale. Warm and welcome to anyone so privileged with coming here. The cottage, or so it seemed was lit for all to see, hidden away. *I didn't see it from behind the dead tree. How could I see it now?* Warming to the soul, the home makes not a stir in nature. It belongs there.

A cat is in the window guarding the secret of inhabitants. The white and brown cat is smiling, but it is guarding something more I can tell. The grey cat stares past me. I look around to see an orchard kept in precise order of nature's muddle. The oddest contradiction so handsome. The well-trimmed branches, like open arms, hold impeccable dappled fruits. The very sight is delicious. Little specks of blue, red, and black caught my eye. I lean in to see berries bursting with lovely ecstasy. It must be moral to eat for they are full and ripe. The flowers that bring each garden together are melodic lilies, daffodils, orchids, and for-get-me-not's. *I will never forget this place.* This feeling, airy and free, makes me want to dance in a pretty white dress and a lace of sweet pea shade around my waist. Still, remaining on the edge of that tree in this place hidden in the mountains. This place so full of life, *why is this a secret?* I desire to smile with its enchantment.

I watch vigilant waiting for more, if there can possibly be more. What more can it have? How happy it must be for this sapphire line to be here in this like the silent isle Avalon. Even the gargoyles standing handsome on the sides of the entrance are welcoming. They must keep the family safe from harm. How the gargoyles stand. The charming expression they bring to the home, yet the fear and doubt they give to those who are not tainted with this blue is magnificent. Fearfully gorgeous.

I wish I were a fairy. I think I would belong here.

I sense myself moving fast. I was being pulled and blinded; *I think I will pass out.* How strange this feeling is. It is almost comforting. What is happening? This embrace is overwhelming. A tingle crosses my fingers so I quiver between the little breezes flowing across my face. I feel like the Lady of Shallot being drowned in happiness. It doesn't last for long, the mist from the river at Kellswater began to rise and I am suddenly warm with that carefree feeling I longed for while watching the home. I smile. *I am still here!* No. *I live here.*

- Alexandre Colette (Howard)

My Little Prince

Have you ever read “The Little Prince?” Some people may remember the first part of this story. When a pilot, the main character, drew a picture of a snake eating an elephant, it ended up looking like a hat. Nobody understood the drawing. However, the picture was clear for the little prince. The pilot and the little prince became friends, but at the end of the story, the little prince disappeared. I once had my own little prince, who inspired me to do great things, yet I never fully realized the importance of his friendship. I believe many people can relate to the story of “The Little Prince” and I would like to share mine.

When I met my little prince, I was nine years old. I was an elementary school student. One day, a boy came to my class. He was a transfer student. It was summer, so many children in my class were sunburned and their skin was dark brown. But the boy’s skin was too bright. Some boys laughed and said, “He was too white.” The homeroom teacher introduced him. He had lived in Australia for years and had just arrived in my hometown. He looked like a foreigner. Even though he wasn’t smiling, I wanted to get to know him. At the same time, I was afraid of him. After class, I went home. I lived on the nineteenth floor in the apartment building. To go upstairs, I took an elevator. To my surprise there was the boy. He didn’t say anything. I just saw him press the twentieth floor button. I knew that he lived in my apartment building on the twentieth floor right upstairs.

That was the first time I met him. After that day, we grew closer. He loved movies and reading books. Sometimes he said that he wanted to be a movie director. Then I thought I wanted to be an actress to perform in his movies. One day, he told me he would be a writer. So I dreamed of becoming a writer like him. When he read a book in the classroom, I studied that book cover carefully and I bought the same one and read it. I thought that I could know his mind if I read the books he had. Most of all his books were very interesting. Thanks to him, I started to enjoy reading books and I’m dreaming of becoming a writer one day.

He and I were both classmates and neighbors. We even did the same after school programs. During elementary school days, I was always with him. We were good friends. I liked him. At the same time, I envied him. In my perspective, he read more books than I did and looked smarter than me. Next year, he and I went to the same middle school and high school. It was not the usual thing in my hometown, but we did. Almost every day, I would meet him. However, he went to another college right after graduating from high school and my family moved to another place.

I entered a college and a new semester started. I stayed on campus in dormitory. I graduated from elementary to high school in my hometown. My college was in another city. I met new friends and saw new places. I enjoyed my new campus life. I hung around new friends and went to new restaurants and new pubs near campus. He and I didn’t meet anymore. He didn’t call me. I almost forgot him in my mind. But whenever I came back to my dorm room alone, I found myself thinking of him. He used to inspire me. Because of him, I had a dream of becoming an actress and a writer. I suddenly wanted to read the books he read again.

I tried to get in touch with him. I heard news about him from other friends during the summer of 2010. He went to Italy for a trip. After a long trip, he decided to study in France. I was not sure, but many friends told me he was not in my country. Even if I could contact with him, I would not have. I wouldn’t know what to say, and that made me feel sorry. His phone

number had changed and now I'm in another country. I used to think he would always be with me. That's why I didn't take a picture with him and I never wrote down phone number.

Now I realize that he is my best friend. He inspired me like the little prince story affect the pilot. As the little prince has disappeared, so has my best friend. I miss him. If you have a close friend who is always with you, do not take them for granted. If your friend ever leaves you, you will regret not recognizing their importance sooner. As for myself, I can only hope that my little prince is well, and I get to see him again someday.

-Shinyoung Lee

Kasper: The Not-So-Friendly Ghost Hunter

The house looked...disgusting, decrepit, and in serious need of a new coat of paint. Honestly, what possessed a person to paint a house pink? Kasper *knew* it wasn't a ghost. Even *they* have more taste than that. She took a step toward the wide country style porch, and suddenly had to dodge to the side when a brick hurtled towards her from an upstairs window. *Great, a house with 'tude. A pink house with 'tude.* Her green eyes scanned the overgrown yard. Crabgrass choked a once beautiful garden and the overgrown hedges that lined the house would have given a military general a heart attack. The putrid, pink paint chipped and flaked in unattractive patches revealing the original hard wood underneath. Windows were broken; some were boarded up. Tiles were missing from the roof, and the chimney lay in shambles on one side of the house. As the wind blew her black braid around her shoulders, Kasper looked up at the sky, where dark thunder clouds collected over the house. *And only this house. Wow, that's not peculiar,* she thought sarcastically as she tried again to make her way to the porch. *Great a high level specter. This is gonna be a pain in the ass. So much for getting back in time for American Idol.*

She knocked on the door and fiddled with her bag strap. As she waited for someone to answer, her thoughts went back to the phone call she had received that afternoon. She had just walked in the door after a relatively uneventful day at school when the phone rang. When she picked up, the woman on the other line was distraught.

"Please, you're the only one who can help. No one believes me and all the other...exorcists...couldn't or wouldn't help."

Kasper wasn't surprised. The commercial exorcists might talk a good game, but the first time something says "*BOO!*" they hightail it out of there faster than Scooby-Doo.

"Please, I don't know what else to do," she said sounding almost in tears.

Kasper sighed. This was not the way she wanted to spend her birthday. "Alright, what's your name?" she asked in a bored voice.

"Jacqueline Whitaker. Does this mean you'll help?" Jacqueline asked hopefully.

"Maybe. Where do you live?"

"61 Side Street in Worcester. It's the pink house."

Ugh. Pink. I hate this job already. "Okay, Jacqueline, I'll be there around four."

"Can't you come any earlier?"

"No."

"Um... Okay. What will you do when you get here?"

"Depends on what's going on."

"What does that mean?"

"It means let me do my job and don't ask stupid questions. I'll come by at four. I'm not promising that I'll be able to help," said Kasper in a businesslike tone.

"Okay. Thank you," Jacqueline said sounding relieved.

"Whatever," Kasper said as she hung up the phone.

And that's how she landed herself here. *Why can't I have at least one normal day for a birthday present?* She was still griping when there was shuffling behind the door.

"Who's there?" asked a muffled voice through the door.

"I dunno. Did you call another exorcist to meet you at four?" asked Kasper in a bored tone. *I bet she's blonde. She probably just saw a shadow. Or a shadow of a shadow.*

The door opened and a blonde, she assumed Jacqueline, peeked out.

“Are you the exorcist?”

“Yeah. Now let me in. The sooner I solve your problem the sooner I get to go home.”

The woman opened the door and Kasper took in her appearance. Her clothes were dirty and ripped. She had dark circles under her eyes and her hair was ratty and tangled. Kasper didn't take her appearance as a sign. She'd been called to houses before where the owner appeared distraught, had an unkempt appearance, and claimed that they were being haunted. It wasn't until they were ranting crazy shit and trying to kill her that she realized they were just plain nuts.

“Can I come in? Or are we chatting outside?” asked Kasper.

“Oh, yes,” Jacqueline moved aside and let her in.

Kasper kept an eye on her as she looked the place over. The wallpaper was torn. Broken glass scattered the floor. A couch and coffee table were turned over and the stuffing was coming out of one of the arm chairs. She heard a leaky faucet somewhere, probably in the kitchen. Still not definitive signs that the place was haunted.

Kasper didn't buy into it until she saw some real activity. Sometimes it took a few tries to get a response. That's why she charged through the nose. She wanted good compensation for her time being taken from her because a ghost decided to be shy. Sometimes the owners wouldn't believe her and kept calling her back insisting that their house was infested with ectoplasm. Who was she to say no if they were willing to pay her price? If they were still insistent she would perform a hokey séance to get them to lay off. It usually did the trick.

She started to right the couch when Jacqueline stopped her.

“No. Please don't! It'll start again!” she screamed.

“What'll start?” asked Kasper.

Jacqueline didn't say anything as she looked up the stairs.

“Something up there?” Kasper asked eyeing her.

“No.”

Kasper put the couch and table back and Jacqueline winced. “You sure?”

“Um...”

Kasper started picking up pictures and placing them on the mantle all the while watching Jacqueline, who kept tossing glances toward her and then back up the stairs. She was glad she brought her 9 mm Glock. This chick looked disturbed, and Kasper was ready to see if her lessons at the shooting range paid off. She saw a broom in the corner and began sweeping up the glass.

“Stop! Just stop!” Jacqueline screamed.

“Or what?” Kasper shot back.

“Or he'll come back,” she said sobbing.

“Who'll come back, Jacqueline?”

Silence. “You need to tell me in order for me to help, Jacqueline,” Kasper explained, keeping her temper in check. She hated hysterical clients. They were the ones who bordered on crazy.

Jacqueline took a deep breath. “It started with the faucet. It just kept dripping and dripping. It drove me nuts! And no matter how many plumbers I called, they couldn't fix it. So I shoved a rag into the spigot. Then the sink started rattling and water just came pouring out of it. It took me hours to clean up. At first I just thought the pipes had gone bad. This house is so old...”

“And? What else happened?” Kasper pressed.

“My grandmother’s silverware and china plates disappeared. I was so upset at first, then freaked out because I thought I had gotten robbed. I called the police but they said there was no sign of forced entry. I got an alarm system and had it installed the next day. But other things kept disappearing, too.

“Like what?”

“Notes for work and my jewelry. I kept calling the police but they couldn’t help me. Then I found my mother’s diamond necklace in my medicine cabinet. Later, I started having nightmares. They were about this man and he kept chasing me. At first I’d wake up before he’d catch me. But he’s gotten closer. He says I can’t run anymore. I don’t know what else to do,” she said as she started sobbing.

Kasper put her hands on the distraught woman’s shoulder. “You need to calm down and tell me everything.”

Jacqueline took a few gulps of air and sniffled. “Okay. Last week...”

Clunk. Clunk. Clunk.

The girls looked to the right and saw a spoon fall down the stairs. Step by step it made its way down the staircase and finally landed on the floor.

Jacqueline did not take *that* well. Her eyes were nonstop faucets on full blast and the wrenching sobs that she was able to choke out between gasps were pathetic. *Civilians, oi.*

“Hey!” Kasper yelled, “I know this is freaky and new and all, but you gotta just shut up.”

At this point Jacqueline had stopped crying, and her only response was to hiccup. Kasper sighed. Like always this was up to her.

“Why don’t we sit on the couch,” she said leading Jacqueline over to the loveseat.

Kasper set her bag down and began rifling through it. “What are you looking for?” asked Jacqueline wiping her eyes and nose.

“Ghost repellent,” Kasper said as she pulled out a bottle of liquid, some dried plants, a can of salt, garlic, and sprigs of rosemary and placed them on the coffee table. “Close your eyes,” Kasper instructed as she sprayed Jacqueline with the bottle of liquid. Jacqueline sputtered. “Why did you spray me? And what is that? It smells like lavender.”

“It’s lavender water. Calming smells usually keep the bad ghosts away. Usually,” Kasper informed her while handing her some garlic and rosemary, and the dried plants. “Put the garlic and rosemary in your pockets and hold out the sage while I light it.”

“Is that what that weird plant thing is?” Jacqueline asked as she stuffed her jeans and shirt with the herbs. She held the smudge stick of sage while Kasper took out a lighter. She lit the sage and waited for it to smolder before putting out the flame. Smoke swirled towards the ceiling. “You keep that and don’t let it go,” Kasper ordered. She lit three more sticks and placed them on the table. Soon the room was lightly hazy with smoke.

Then Kasper grabbed the can of salt and made a wide circle around the table and couch. “What’s the salt for?” asked Jacqueline.

“Salt’s used to purify things and keep evil things out. Can you tell me the layout of the upstairs?” Kasper asked, straightening.

Jacqueline just stared. Kasper snapped her fingers in front of Jacqueline’s face. “Hey, stay with me here. I can go without a description, but it’s easier if I have one.”

Jacqueline took a minute to respond. “Why would you go up there!? That’s where it is!” she said giving her a look of disbelief.

“No shit, Sherlock! Isn’t that why I’m here in the first place?” Kasper yelled, which only caused Jacqueline to start crying again. *Mother fucker, this bitch is beyond real. Maybe I should retire. Wait, then I wouldn’t be able to pay for those leather boots I saw in JC Penny.*

“Look, I’m trying to help you. If you’re not gonna be cooperative I’m out of here.”

That did not go over well. Jacqueline launched herself at Kasper and held on with a death grip. “You can’t! You can’t! I need to get rid of this thing, please!”

“Fine. But. Get. A. Grip. Preferably not on me. And get back in that circle. I mean it. No matter what you hear you stay there.”

Jacqueline nodded. She let go of Kasper, sat back down and took a couple of deep breaths. “Um, when you get to the top of the stairs the first room is on the left, that’s the guest bedroom. If you go further down the hall there’s a room on the right, that’s the hall bathroom.”

She took another breath. “The last room is the master bedroom.”

“Do you have an attic?”

Silence.

“Look, I’m tired of playing these games with you. You either tell me or I’m leaving.”

“There’s an attic...” she whispered.

“Yeah, and...?”

“Um, you have to pull a cord from the ceiling. That’ll let down the stairs. I don’t really know what’s up there. I haven’t really gone to look.”

“Fine. Stay here,” Kasper said lighting another sage stick.

“You can’t go up there alone.”

“Are you volunteering to come with me?”

No answer. “Didn’t think so,” Kasper said as she headed toward the stairs with the stick.

As she climbed the stairwell the steps creaked all the way up. *So much for the element of surprise.* Kasper reached the landing and looked around. Nothing noteworthy, other than a draft, jumped out. All the doors except for the last were closed. “Hey, is it okay if I look through the rooms?” she yelled down the stairs.

“That’s fine,” yelled Jacqueline.

She held her sage up and got ready to open the door to the first room. Nothing jumped out and screamed “*BOO!*” as Kasper made her way around the room. She checked under the bed, behind the door, in the closet, and the guest bathroom. Kasper didn’t really expect to find anything until the attic, the usual and clichéd home of all B-rated specters. Then she moved to the hall bathroom. Other than a woman’s usual toiletries and a dirty plunger nothing seemed too hazardous.

As she walked towards the last room, the door slammed shut. *Ha, I gotcha. Time to whip some ectoplasmic ass.*

She slid the door open slowly in case the ghost decided to work on his pitch and throw something. From what she could see the room was white. The bed in the center had a light blue covering with a frilly white dust ruffle and a lot of pillows with cross stitching. Next to the bed was a nightstand with a glass lamp and an alarm clock. *Was Martha Stewart her aunt or something?* She opened the door further and saw a table with two chairs in the far right corner with the ghost lounging cross legged in one of the chairs. *Didn’t see that coming.* Usually ghosts hid until they were pissed or they were already pissed and were ready to kill you.

The ghost was male, as far as she could tell. He looked Caucasian and had what had to have been black hair in his previous life. His eyes were the hardest. They were a light color but she didn’t think they were blue; maybe green like hers.

All while she was sizing him up he sat there with his hands folded in his lap with a slight smile on his face. He had a look that said he was doing the same to her as she was to him. *A ghost who sits in a chair and acts as if he owns the place. What an ass.*

Now for the hard part: getting rid of him.

“So, what’s the deal? You here for revenge or something? Did one of Jacqueline’s ancestors do something to piss you off? Or were you not able to finish that one last important thing in your previous life?”

The ghost just sat there. Looking. Watching. Listening. Weird. Ghosts usually liked to chat it up about their pathetic afterlives and problems.

“If it’s the last one you can forget me helping you. I’m just here to get rid of you, not make you feel better about dying. You had your chance and blew it, so get over it.”

Still silent. *I think I should give Jacqueline more credit. She’s Chatty Cathy compared to this guy.*

“Do you even realize you’re dead?” Kasper asked exasperated.

At that his smile widened.

“What?”

He chuckled. “It’s nothing really. You just don’t know how to shut up.”

“Excuse me!? What do you mean by that?” she asked indignantly.

“Nothing.” Then he went back to his previous stoic pose.

“Oh, no you don’t. You’re gonna tell me why the hell you’ve been terrorizing a defenseless young woman.”

“It’s simple really.”

“Oh, yeah? How simple?”

He chuckled again. “Sheer pleasure.”

Freeze. Back up a sec.

“What do mean by *sheer pleasure*?”

“I just love seeing women in distress. That’s all,” he said shrugging his shoulders.

“Is that why you’ve been terrorizing Jacqueline, you sick fuck?”

“Well, it was kind of a hobby of mine when I was alive,” said the ghost nostalgically.

“What do you mean?”

“I used to bring my dates home with me. And instead of playing the kinky games they thought we were going to play, I’d chain them up in the basement and torture them until their screaming ceased to be amusing. Then I’d chop them up, burry them in the floor of my basement, and cover them up with cement.”

“How the hell did you get away with that? Didn’t your neighbors hear?” asked Kasper incredulously. She knew people were desensitized nowadays but this was ridiculous.

“I did have that neighbor, Ms. Parker. I swear she had binoculars for eyes. Had my basement soundproofed so she wouldn’t notice the screaming,” he pondered.

“Did anyone find out?” Kasper asked getting sick.

“Eventually,” the ghost sighed. “Patricia. She was able to escape while I was out and went right to the police. By the time I got home, my house was surrounded by cop cars. I tried to run, but they shot me down in my own driveway. Didn’t make it to the hospital. The next thing I knew, I was floating and transparent. Not a good way to start a day.”

“So you pass the time by torturing the tenants?” asked Kasper.

“Pretty much.”

Kasper sighed. “Well, I hate to break it to you, but that’s gotta stop. Now. So, why don’t you let me kill you so I can get back to my life and you can go on with your afterlife? No questions asked.”

“Hmm. How about we switch that around? You can die and I can go on having fun,” he said. Then he launched himself at her.

Kasper tucked and rolled. The ghost let out a fierce snarl. “No one’s getting out of here. No one!”

“Tell that to Patricia,” Kasper yelled as she grabbed him.

“How can you touch me?” he asked dumbfounded.

“I’m half ghost, bitch,” she said as she shoved the sage stick into his head.

The ghost screamed in anguish. He started expanding until he looked like a balloon. Then slowly he deflated until there was nothing left.

Kasper went down stairs. Jacqueline was still sitting on the couch. She looked up as she saw Kasper walk down the stairs.

“Is he gone?”

“Yeah. That’ll be five hundred dollars,” Kasper said as she doused the sage and packed her bag.

“Five hundred? You said it would only be three hundred,” Jacqueline argued.

“That was before I knew what I was dealing with. By the way, I think you should move,” Kasper said as she left the house.

At the end of the driveway she checked her watch. “God damn it. I missed American Idol!”

-Caitlyn E. Minelli

This Is Me

First and foremost I consider myself to be open-minded only because I've lived what seemed to me a life without direction. So I was constantly thrown in directions not suitable to a girl who just turned eleven years old, would be comfortable with. Of the more troubling times in my life was the time of adolescence. Much to my dismay nothing was ever explained to me. "Why am I gaining this weight?" was always met with a lie that I have been cursed and would need to be dead before I found some sort of self respect. These things were always given without a hint of sympathy, and children of my age were torturous. It sounds small now, but when you're as sensitive as I was, there was no way I could muster any sense of confidence. Thank goodness I know now that the weight gain was a normal part of "growing up". It's like the foundation was my family, or rather the lack of support I was lifted from. The failure was I. My family was unable to lift me and that was my entire fault. It sounds presumptuous, but the taunting was the building blocks that failed at containing my self respect more than the false structures ever chanced. It is the thought that I have lived a life seemingly wallowed in blackness that tends to throw me under the bus. I think that any challenges now would be met with an obvious blow to reality. To better explain this, I have woken and plan to keep fighting my way out of here. These sorts of things are incorporated through feeling, modesty and the ability to realize that I have an insight to that of a teenager.

I want to figure out the wonders of being a teen. As a young women reflecting back without nostalgia, I realize the wonders of growing up are experience in *dealing*. I think I can bring creativity to young minds because through my eyes there would always be room for change. That's what helps keep me waking everyday looking forward to another day. I want to be a writer, I am a writer. I have the authority to favor change the deception of Medias' thoughts on what beauty really is. It is not so much focusing on a girl's body, but what positive tasks they are doing to change the way of their lives and future "tomorrows." If I can make a change like that, for which I am definitely ready to take on, then I have met my match. To empower young women of the ages of 12-23 is enough for my idea of myself. I want to perceive woman as they are, who they are and who they are aiming to become. One day conglomerates, big studios or even photographers will incorporate photos of real woman in their media. They will represent real young women, like you and I, who are proud of imperfections. I know from experience, that someone raw or rather fresh like myself comes crawling at your heels to show you the power of living, and you will smile. I will enjoy seeing you smile. Because you are smiling. Because I am smiling. Because of *me*.

-April Davila

Madness

I am going to die.

It was all the dark haired man could think in his last few moments of breath. His mind reeled. Somehow, it drifted backwards in time, revealing the events that had led to not only his death, but also the death of a nation and perhaps even the world. What had they done...

It was a lonely steel corridor. The walls were cold, the feeling of death emanating all around. Victor Emmanings strode through, confident that this time, this last hope that he had, would not fail. He had worked too hard to let this project fade as the past ones had. He didn't think he could stand another death. Not that their deaths mattered, no, that was a foolish idea. It was the fact that he had failed and not worked out the little kinks that still existed in the process that was the real problem. However, this last one had promise.

Her deep green eyes were lost in a tangle of thick black ringlets that looked a mess on her deteriorated form. Victor approached the glass, peering in to see what the scientists below were doing. Good, they were doing as he asked. He was tired of having to force these men to do what he asked. Surely they should have realized by now that the work being done here would change the world, and guarantee their country prosperity like no other.

The girl was not old, though she was beginning to show signs of old age, wrinkles appearing increasingly throughout her skin, and spotting that was not typically seen on anyone but the elderly. Even with the serum, she was aging far too fast. The last batch (subjects? Or the concoction?) had been better; at least those two had the strength and power he had been striving to cultivate in this project. No, this one would not do. Death would come quickly to her, most likely before the sun rose tomorrow morning.

Victor sighed. Another of his test subjects was gone. Only a handful remained. He was going to have to call up for another batch to be brought in. Of course, that would mean harassment from his "superiors" or whatever they wished to call themselves. He was confident that he was much more intelligent than any of them.

He had only gone through forty-six human specimens so far, that was far less than what many of the others on the initial research team had projected, when they had first began this project two years ago. He had made far more progress than anyone had expected. There was no reason why he should be pestered to find the final result so soon. Only two years had gone by, so there was no reason to rush.

Only one more to check on tonight, and he hoped for a breakthrough on Subject 47. Although, he seriously doubted it with this one. Subject 47 was docile. All it ever did was cry on occasion and become fearful. Subject 47 never thrashed about, always did what it was told, and never spoke to anyone. Subject 47 was his favorite, so easy, so perfect in every way, except for the fact that there was never any change.

He slipped into the room containing 47, turned on the lights in the containment cell, and sat down to watch the subject's actions. Unlike the previous subject, this one did not have to be tied. Subject 47 was strong enough to move on its own which was something many of the previous subjects lacked. It was a pleasing factor, but there were still no other results on subject 47. Perhaps he should call it "her", as it was a female human, with a slightly altered genome. That alone made her an "it" rather than a "she" in Victor's mind. She was no longer human, but a

subspecies—an “it”. Either way, it did not bother him. He had noticed the other scientists always referring to them as “it”, or as “the subject”. They had used these terms to prevent the issues of coping with the fact that they were researching and manipulating humans, or former humans. Victor liked to throw in a few “she” or “he” pronouns, every now and then just to unsettle the others. It was entertaining, and helped to get his mind off of all his previous failures. That was a frustrating thing, for he rarely unsuccessful, ever was.

The project was moving along at a slow pace, at least by his standards. The fact the Subject 47 was still alive was a turning point in the project. The other test subjects had either mutated and died as a result of that mutation, or the serum simply killed them. He had not yet analyzed the reason behind the deaths of those that had not mutated, though Victor believed that it was due to the instability that the serum caused in the subjects. He had noted that even though no notable mutations or desired results came from the injections, mutation rates were higher, and the cells of the subjects tended to degenerate and lose DNA.

As he watched Subject 47, he noticed slight changes. He quickly flipped on the microphone for the room, allowing him to hear what was occurring in there. Mumbling, that’s what he heard. It was barely audible, but there it was. The first true noises he had heard Subject 47 make since she was first induced in the lab. Thinking back to that moment Victor remembered 47 had fallen silent. Her body had contorted in pain the whole night. He had had her monitored to be sure that she did not fade away as most of them had.

Only seven of his experimental subjects had survived the initial serum treatment, and only four of them through the second. Subject 47 was one of those, though he had expected her to be dead that first night. She had stopped breathing, and her chest had stopped rising and falling. He himself had rushed in, but before he could do anything to resuscitate her lifeless form, she shook and breathed again. She had been the only surviving subject to do this. It was noted that this occurred, but it was not a major concern. She lived, and that alone was a major development. Victor was perfectly content to just watch as she survived where the others fell.

Victor flipped on the microphone that allowed him to converse with the subjects inside. He usually used it to at least attempt to calm down the more violent and vicious ones.

“Subject 47.” his voice was smooth and calm. He wanted her to return to her usual serene self. “What is wrong, you are always so quiet, yet now you mutter to yourself in the corner. That is not normal my dear.” It was best to be kind to them, unless they responded positively to harshness.

Her response to his voice was slight, she stopped making her noises and cocked her head to the side. He laughed, as she looked confused. He had of course, never directly addressed her before this. How many days had this one survived in comparison to the others? If he remembered correctly, it was only about a week, though that was significant. She was most likely breaking down, a sad thing, but he knew it would happen eventually.

What Victor had not expected was words to come from Subject 47. It was strange to hear. “Quiet... you think I am quiet old man?” The voice was soft, a whisper that came from her dark little corner. For a moment, Victor was almost afraid. He flinched slightly as the door to the small observatory opened.

“Damn it!” Victor quickly pushed off the microphone. “What the hell do you want in here, who authorized you to access this room?” He was furious, though it was more at himself for being frightened even slightly of Subject 47.

The person who walked through was one of the younger staff and if Victor remembered correctly, his name was Erik Hastens. The man was barely old enough to be called a man,

probably only in his 20's. Still, Victor had to give this one credit; he didn't balk at confronting others.

"Sorry sir. I was informed that I should get you if anything changed with Subject 39." He shrugged and took a few steps forward to glance at Subject 47. "She looks worse as well..." he frowned and peered down harder at her.

"Well." Victor snapped at Hastens. The man had not even told him what had happened to Subject 39 yet. He was already sidetracked. Obviously, Hastens did not realize what he was asking, for he merely gave Victor a curious look. Victor was going to have to spell it out for him. "What the hell changed with our other subject?"

He coughed and shifted slightly from foot to foot. "Ah. Yes, that. A rather unfortunate incident, Subject 39 is now deceased." There was no emotion in his voice, and the only hint of feeling was that of curiosity as he turned to look once more at Subject 47. Victor was growing slightly annoyed, but he may need assistance in a moment for what he was about to do.

"Yes, that is a pity. Subject 39 could have been our best product yet if she hadn't aged at such an accelerated rate. That matter aside, I may have need of you, Hastens." Victor paused, thinking of what he would need Hastens for exactly. "I want to gather a few more samples of Subject 47. I would need you to help me by monitoring her while I go in. I don't believe she will become violent like the others, but she is certainly capable."

The man shrugged once more and followed Victor as he left the room. Victor slipped through a door on the opposite side of the room, and punched in a quick long code. Before it clicked, he leaned down, allowing it to scan his eye with a light. It beeped and the door opened with a click. Victor did not bother to look behind to see if Hastens followed, he just assumed he would.

Victor hated how many doors he had to go through. It was only two, but the second was worse than the first. The code was longer, the retinal scan was longer, and he had to bleed. Oh well, it was not like he could do anything less. The security needed to be tight. If one of his experiments were loose (exposed), chaos would reign. That would only be true of one with any powers though, Subject 47 was not in that category. (not sure what you mean here) They really did not need all of this security for her.

He sighed as the door swung open. He slipped inside and heard the door lock behind him as Hastens proceeded through to position himself beside Victor. "Go secure her."

Hastens moved quickly to do as he had commanded. He reached out a tentative hand to grasp her. Subject 47 meekly followed as Hastens led her by the hand. It was a slightly strange sight for Victor to see, and he did not understand why Hastens had taken her hand, grabbing her shoulder would have done far better. Foolish youth move, thinking he could do no wrong. Victor shook his head slightly. The subject was not within reach, and Hastens pulled her close and whispered something in her ear. Subject 47 looked up at him and then to Victor, her eyes dull and listless. The way they always appeared.

Hastens gently held her arm, and Victor still could not understand why the man continued to be so gentle and kind to her. She was a freak, no longer human. Granted, he had made her that way, yet he was proud of that fact. Subjects like her had no right to freedom or any sort of rights like everyone else. Their sole purpose was to die and provide insight for future experiments. That was all.

Victor took a few skin samples, two vials of blood and a cheek swab. Better to be safe than sorry. The more tests he ran, the better the results. There was a moment when Hastens

departed, headed for the door, and Victor felt that fear come back on him. Even though she had no genetic mutation that he had noticed, he still would not like to remain alone with her.

He turned to leave. Hastens should not have left first, it was quite rude. He felt something firmly tug on his coat, startling him to a standstill. He whirled around, looking right into the eyes of Subject 47. They were different now, a fire of fury that seemed to have kindled there.

“What have you done to me?” her eyes did not let him leave. They held him there. He could not move, and he could barely breathe. “Why am I like this, why did you make “her”?” Subject 47’s voice faded off. An arm reached out and yanked her away from him. He stumbled backwards, startled by what had just occurred.

Hastens had his arm around her waist, holding her gently. Yet his grip was fierce. He was talking to her, telling her something.

“Why would you do that? Do you wish to die?” Hastens looked worried, his eyes expressed concern as he continued to speak to 47. The rest of the conversation was whispers. As he spoke to her, Subject 47 calmed down, her body relaxed against him, and her eyes calmed. She was the usual 47 once more.

Hastens picked her up and placed her onto the small cot in the far corner of the room. He whispered into her ear again before leaving and coming back to Victor. Victor waited until they both left the room, and made sure the door was good and locked, before he spoke up.

“What the hell was that Hastens?”

Hastens glanced at Victor and sighed, moving towards the second door. “It was nothing sir, I know as much as you do about why she snapped like that. Normally, Subject 47 would never do that. She is usually quite tame and sweet natured.” Hastens looked sullen as they moved back into the corridor. He was leading the way and heading back towards where Subject 39 was being held. “I did not know what to do at first. So, I just did what I thought was right. I figured pulling her off of you was the best possible choice in that sort of situation.”

“You were speaking to her.” Victor made that comment, hinting he wanted to know what was said. The man had calmed her down almost immediately. It was a strange incident.

Hastens only shrugged, looking away as they approached the door to Subject 39’s observatory room. He finally spoke, just as they entered. “I merely asked her to quiet herself, and then I spoke nonsense. She probably is not all there. Perhaps brain damage was done in the initial or secondary procedures.” He was done after that. Victor could see that Hastens was not going to speak another word on the matter. Not that it meant anything anyway.

There was some commotion in both the observatory room, and Subject 39’s small area. She was indeed dead. Her body was lifeless and looked cold even from far away. Her skin looked a slight ashy color, and her body looked far older than when he had seen her only an hour or so before. He was going to have to reformulate the serum again. He had been hoping that she would regenerate, but that was obviously not possible now. Victor decided it was time for him to go process those samples from Subject 47. He didn’t need to mull over another death.

It was almost midnight when Victor finally finished the initial processing of the samples. He didn’t want a subordinate to do it as it was his last test subject and was the most important at this time. Once another batch came in, he would allow them to do whatever they wanted, but for now he wanted to be sure to look over everything as he had always done with this project.

As he waited for the computer to synthesize the sequences, comparing them to the previous set, he didn’t really bother to pay too much attention. He knew there would be no

difference; he did not even know why he still insisted on checking them. Perhaps it was just habit because the others did change and so he expected the same of Subject 47.

The computer moved through the list pretty quickly. As he watched, the computer pulled sequences that were different. He was a bit taken aback. That's not right. That was an 'A' before... Victor leapt back to the previous lines. There were such slight changes, almost indistinguishable. How had he not seen these before? How long had they been here?

This was a frightening discovery, the fact that her genes had changed and so subtly was something that should not have occurred. Every other subject had changed drastically after the first and second procedures. Was she actually stable?

As he mused, someone rushed into the lab. The woman was out of breath, she was gasping for air. Victor was slightly angered that she would enter the lab unannounced, but from her body language and fearful look, he figured he should let her off easy.

"What do you want?"

"Sir, there has been an... an accident." She looked even more startled. "They cannot contain her, she is attacking them!" her voice rose, fear evident now. She was almost hysterical.

"Calm yourself. What are you talking about, what sort of accident has happened?"

She gasped and tried to catch her breath. "The Subject, she... she is loose!" the woman continued to gasp as she leaned over the desk. "She has it Dr. Emmanings, she has it..." she trailed off and gazed back at the doorway, fear in her eyes. "We have to run, she is bringing the whole building down on us!" with that, she stumbled up and rushed to the door.

As Victor watched her leave, he processed what had just occurred. She had what, the gene he had been searching for? If that was the case, he had to restrain her. The woman had not been to clear, if only she had been specific.

It didn't matter to him. He quickly leapt up and strode down the halls to the containment cell for Subject 47. AS he began, he saw destruction. Walls were bent out, huge dents the size of craters seemed to be everywhere. There was an actual hole in spot, as he looked through it, he saw a hole through all of the walls to the outside. *I might as well find her now. She will obey me, she has always been that way.*

There were no traces of any of the staff/ he found that odd. Victor continued through the torn steel until he felt the outside night air strike him. He looked up and saw a few faint stars. There was no cause for alarm, he could easily take care of the problem. Then, he saw them.

It was a strange site, the white of bodies littered everywhere. The lights reflected off of them. How many were there? Twenty, thirty? He didn't know. He choked for a moment.

"I am only returning the favor, Doctor." A cold voice came from above him. He whirled around, gazing upward to see a person standing on the roof. The roof was at least twenty feet in the air, so how could they be up there. As he continued to stare, the shadowy figure leapt down right in front of him. "You killed so many, what do they matter. You obviously hold no regard for human life. Am I wrong?"

It was Subject 47. She was here, right before his eyes. How had he not seen it before. She was his work, the object of his labor. "You changed." It was all he could say. Nothing else seemed suitable. He had succeeded. Everything he had wanted was right before him. He knew he was right. He had just needed the right test subject.

"Yes, I changed." She glanced away for a moment. "Well, I wouldn't say changed exactly." She grinned. It was slightly frightening, though he didn't know why. In a single moment, her demeanor changed. She went from being coy to in his face. "This is what you wanted, isn't it? Death, power? I'm giving it to you. You gave it to me, so the least I could do

was this. It's why I was created, wasn't it?" She spread her hands out gesturing to the dead staff. "I don't care about being who I was anymore. I gave into it. I just didn't care anymore. It is so much better now, I am doing what I was made to do. It feels good." That smile again, it scared him. He took a step back.

"Don't run!" She leapt forward and grabbed him by the coat, pulling him forward slightly. "I am not done with you. You see, I have done what you wanted, so now you must do something for me. Do you know what that is?" He shook his head slowly, best not to provoke her, he didn't know what she had done so far, he didn't know how they had died. "No? Oh well, I guess I'll have to tell you then." She sighed, as though it was a hassle for her to explain it to him.

She pushed him down violently. He coughed, glancing down at his hand, he saw a splash of blood. *Shit*. Her voice was cold, her eyes shadowed, a halo of very pale light consumed her figure. "I want you dead."

She was insane, Victor looked up, looking directly into the eyes of the creature he had created, and realized what he had done. He now realized what was going to happen as well.

I'm going to die...

-Mallory Sunderland

The Boy Next Door

She dug her heels into her hiking boots, willing herself to become smaller. As she tried to wriggle even closer to the slim, black oak tree she had plastered herself against, she silently repeated, “Be quiet. He mustn’t see you.”

Suddenly, the absurdity of the situation hit her, and she felt the urge to laugh. If anyone could see this forty-five-year-old woman, hiding behind a tree in an isolated section of the forested mountain, trying desperately not to be seen by the young man she had purposely come to spy on, they would swear she was nuts.

Just about that time, Travis looked straight toward her, and any humor that she might have seen in the situation dissolved in an instant. If Travis saw her, who knows what the disturbed young man with the expressionless face might do. After all, he was crazy. At least that’s what Holly and her girlfriend, Tara, had come to believe.

But Travis looked away, kneeling down in front of a dark opening between several gray rocks that were part of a large outcropping along a steep slope.

Thank God, Holly thought. She wondered if she could slip unnoticed from behind the tree and walk off, undetected, in the opposite direction. Maybe there was a way out of this situation. But even as she pondered how to make her escape, her curiosity nagged. “What is he doing?”

This was the reason she had come here—the reason she’d followed him once before, when she was able to figure out the general vicinity that Travis made his way to, but never learned exactly where he went or what he did there.

Travis Bickle (that wasn’t his real name—Tara had named him after the homicidal manic played by Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver* because he was so weird) lived next door to Holly and Tara. They figured him to be about twenty-eight years old. He lived with his parents, a kindly middle-aged couple named Bud and Shirley. He and his brother, Dave, had both lived there for a while. Dave was quite the social butterfly, constantly coming and going with a seemingly endless supply of friends until he eventually found a girlfriend and moved in with her. Travis, however, never had any visitors. He never went anywhere, except to his job. He worked nights. He appeared to have no friends.

The brooding young man with the short-cropped hair and small-but-muscular build intrigued Holly. “What’s with him?” she often asked Tara.

“Who cares?” Tara would typically reply.

“What does he do all day? How can he stand to live with his parents? Why doesn’t he have any friends?” Holly would say. “I sort of feel sorry for him.”

“It’s none of our business.”

“I know. I just can’t help but wonder.”

That was usually how the conversation ended: Tara, irritated by Holly’s nosiness; Holly defensive and unable to understand why Tara wasn’t as curious about their odd neighbor as she.

They all lived on a narrow, paved road that turned to gravel about fifty yards beyond Travis’ house. A few modest homes, built mostly in the 1950s and ’60s by hardy but coarse mountain folk, lined the paved part of the road, which entered a tract of state forest land and climbed nearly a thousand feet to the top of the mountain, before continuing on for about thirty miles. It was part of the state forest network of roads mostly built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression.

Holly had moved into her small, blue, one-story house on the out-of-the-way road about nine years ago. Tara joined her there about a year later. Although there was plenty of space between their house and the neighbor's on the west side, the house Travis and his parents lived in was close—only about twenty-five feet to the east.

Shortly after Holly moved in, she had an evergreen tree—a Douglas fir, to be precise—planted along the property line because she didn't like that her bedroom window was directly across from a window in Travis' house. Tara, who worked in the nursery and landscaping field, later began planting trees, large bushes and other border plants between the houses to create more privacy.

Over the years, Holly had been able to figure out what room in her neighbors' house corresponded with each window facing her house. *I guess these people don't believe in blinds*, Holly thought soon after she moved in. The front porch, which had been enclosed at some point, was Dave's room before he moved out. The next window was the living room—she knew because of the constant sound emanating from a television. The next room was Travis'—she'd seen him through the window many times. And the last window toward the back of the house was Bud and Shirley's bedroom. One day, as the trees grew bigger, she wouldn't be able to see in so easily, she hoped.

Holly got to know Bud and Shirley soon after moving in. Bud helped her remove a large yew bush in her neglected front yard by attaching a chain to the root ball and pulling on it with his pickup truck. To welcome her to the neighborhood, Shirley baked homemade bread and tucked it into a basket with a candle and some religious tracts. They seemed nice enough.

At first, Holly barely noticed Travis. At that time, two other brothers – Dave and the eldest, Dan—lived there, too. They were more sociable, and it took a while for her to realize that there was another brother, Travis, the middle son. At some point, she remembered thinking idly how much he seemed like a middle child—the forgotten brother, the quiet one who didn't get much attention from his parents.

Dan was the first to move out. He got married and left the house not long after Holly moved to the neighborhood. Several years passed before Dave moved in with his girlfriend.

Travis remained. In those days, he had long, stringy hair. He hardly ever spoke to anyone, at least not that Holly noticed. He had his routine. In nice weather, he would hang out outside during the day, smoking, not really doing anything, except sometimes, shooting a BB gun or throwing knives at a target in the backyard.

Every day, just after noon, he would slowly walk across the street to the mailbox and collect any mail that had come. He never helped with outside chores or mowed the grass. He just milled around the yard, sometimes sitting at a wooden picnic table, contemplating things Holly could only guess at. In mid-afternoon, he drove off to work and returned around midnight.

Part of Travis' routine was his daily walk up the road and into the mountain, which was rugged and had many isolated spots. Lots of folks walked their dogs up the road, including Holly and Tara, but only a half-mile or so to the spot where the road began to make its steep ascent. Travis went farther. He would leave and not return for an hour or more.

“Where does he go and what could he possibly do up there every day?” Holly often wondered.

Once, in one of those brief exchanges Holly occasionally had with Travis' mother, Shirley mentioned that she worried about her middle son. “He doesn't have any friends,” Shirley confided. Holly thought little of it at the time. But later, when another neighbor told her about Travis' past, she began to develop ideas about the young man.

The neighbor, Camille, was a part-time college professor who dabbled in wicca. Holly enjoyed Camille because she was more educated than the other neighbors and they could have intelligent conversations about politics. Claiming Native American heritage, Camille fancied herself an Earth Mother and advised Holly and Tara on how to treat their cases of poison ivy or colds with natural methods. She didn't believe in Western medicine. Camille celebrated every spring and winter solstice, burning candles and incense in the yard while she beat a small drum and chanted. Ordinary, she was not. Holly found her entertaining.

One day while stopping to chat in the street, Camille told Holly that when Travis finished high school, he had left home for the West Coast.

"Really?" Holly said. "I never imagined him leaving home."

"Oh yes," said Camille. "He said he wanted to go to California and become a homeless person."

The women rolled their eyes at each other. Then Camille explained that Travis fulfilled his desire to live on the streets, but got mixed up with drugs and had some sort of a breakdown. Probably too much acid, Camille suggested. Travis' parents had to fly out to the coast and retrieve him. For a while after he got home, he was downright nuts, according to Camille.

But over time, Travis regained his senses, at least enough to get and hold a job and function—although not very well, it seemed.

Holly found this new tidbit of information a bit unsettling. The idea that the quiet young man next door might have a screw loose made her wonder what he might actually be capable of. The frightening true-crime shows she watched on television made her just a tad paranoid.

"Every day, some oddball loner murders his family or goes on a killing spree before turning the gun on himself," she told Tara, trying to justify her suspicions about Travis.

"You've seen too many episodes of *I Survived*," Tara teased. "Not everyone has murder on their mind."

But Holly was unfazed. *Here I am, she thought, living only twenty-five feet away from Travis, with only my little Cairn terrier, Willem, to protect me and Tara.*

She shuddered, then shook off the thought, but only temporarily.

The one verbal exchange she ever remembered having with Travis came after his dumpy Plymouth sedan was rear-ended at the end of their street. After the accident, he cut his hair and began wearing it shorn closely to his head. The change in his appearance was striking. He looked practically normal.

Travis began working out with weights. Holly knew this because his body became more muscular, and she noticed jug after jug of protein powder in the family's recycling bin, which they kept, like their trash can, at the curb all the time.

He bought a new car, a PT Cruiser. Even though Holly didn't like them, it was such an improvement that she couldn't resist calling over to Travis one day when they were out in their respective back yards. "I like your new car!"

"Thanks," Travis called back, flashing a slight smile. "I guess it was about time I got a new one anyway."

"Yeah, well, it's nice." Holly couldn't think of anything else to say and returned to idly watering plants.

After that, Holly had hopes of drawing Travis out of his shell a bit, but she didn't have many opportunities to speak to him. Occasionally she smiled at him or they would nod at each other.

Just when Holly would convince herself that maybe she had misjudged Travis and there was nothing that odd about him, something would happen to cast suspicion on him. Her cats, for instance. Holly had six cats when she moved in next to Travis. She had a habit of taking in every stray or orphaned cat that crossed her path. Most had lived outdoors and she didn't have the heart to keep them in the house, so they traveled freely in and out through a cat door.

Over the course of the time Holly had lived next to Travis, a total of four of her cats had gone missing—vanished without a trace. She and Tara spent many days and nights wondering what had happened to their beloved felines. Holly particularly missed Malcolm, a hale and hearty gray tabby with green eyes that she and Tara were particularly fond of. Holly had rescued him from an animal shelter and he had to have surgery shortly thereafter. He cost her a fortune, but he repaid her in cuteness and personality. Holly put a bright red collar with a bell on him because he liked to roam outside. She thought it would help her find him if he ever got lost. She would watch him through the window sometimes, stalking some insect or bird in her flower garden – his red collar flashing and bell jingling when he pounced.

Malcolm disappeared not long after Holly moved into her mountain neighborhood. She was distraught, not knowing what could have happened to him or who might be responsible. It wasn't like he turned up, hit by a car or injured from tangling with a dog. He just vanished, just like her other cats. Tara thought it might be coyotes or foxes. She'd seen both in the vicinity. But after the third cat disappeared, Holly and Tara became convinced that one of the neighbors was responsible. Travis seemed a likely suspect, but so did several others, including Camille's husband Bob, who was a fanatic about feeding birds. He was a trapper and sometimes even put traps in his yard to catch things he didn't like visiting—including nuisance birds. Or maybe even a cat?

As the months passed, Holly began to get more curious about where Travis went on his daily sojourns up the mountain. Occasionally when she walked Willem up the road and was coming back, she would pass Travis going up. Usually, he would nod and smile slightly. That was it.

When she wanted a good workout, Holly sometimes left little Willem behind and walked briskly about a mile up the road. It became very steep after about a quarter mile and really got her heart pumping. One day when she didn't have to work, she had taken a reluctant Willem along. The road attracted a lot of people who were up to no good – using the mountain for partying, clandestine meetings, dumping household trash or brush. She'd seen evidence of partying—the beer cans tossed along the road and parked cars that would take off as soon as someone approached. Probably getting high, she figured.

But occasionally, the men in the vehicles she encountered on her walks made her feel uneasy. Both Shirley and Camille had warned her about walking too far out on her own. Two men in a pickup truck had passed Shirley several times on the daily walks she used to take, spooking her so badly that she took off from the main road into the woods and ran the whole way home. “Something about the way they looked at me,” she had told Holly. “It gave me the willies.”

So Holly didn't go too far most days. One day on one of her fitness walks, after she'd gone as far as she wanted and had turned back, Travis passed her going the opposite direction. Her curiosity got the better of her. She waited a minute, then turned to follow him.

If he sees me and wonders what I'm doing, I can always say I changed my mind and decided to walk a bit farther, Holly reasoned.

Still, she was nervous and hung back, trying hard not to be detected. Travis walked and walked. Eventually, he turned off the road at a power line right-of-way. She followed him a bit farther, but turned back after a time because she would have had to walk out in the open and was afraid of being seen. Now at least she had some idea of where he went.

What in the world could he do up there every day? Holly wondered.

Maybe he was growing some pot plants.

Or maybe it was something more sinister.

And that is what led her here today. It was a Sunday afternoon and she had decided to walk up the road just after supper. Travis didn't work on Sundays and he usually took his weekend walks in the evening. She'd walked to where she'd seen him on the previous occasion; then continued another half-mile or so. She spent an hour or so looking around, trying to remain inconspicuous while still exploring the area. Around the time she had decided, *Okay, this is ridiculous. I've got better things to do*, she saw movement below her and on the other side of the opening. It was Travis.

She carefully made her way to a better vantage point behind the oak tree and waited. Travis eventually stopped and knelt down in front of the opening between the rocks. Holly felt the hair on her neck stand on end. This is what she'd come here for, but now that she was on the verge of finding out what Travis came here for, she suddenly didn't want to know.

As she watched, Travis pulled off a small, worn backpack he'd been carrying and set it on the ground. He pulled something from it, but she couldn't tell what. Then she saw a flash, sun glinting off metal. He held a knife—the big kind hunters use to gut game.

Travis brushed some leaves aside and pulled something from a hole in the ground. It was a small cooler. He pulled something that looked like a large plastic bag from it.

Holly inhaled sharply. Now, he was cutting something, pressing the knife in and drawing it back and forth. It looked like...meat?

As she tried to figure out what he was carving, she noticed movement behind Travis, coming from the dark opening between the rocks. Squinting to see better, she saw one red fox kit, then another, emerge from the den and move toward Travis. He looked up at them, smiling, and held out his hand. The kits rubbed against him, as if they were dogs and he was their master. Just then, a full-grown fox sauntered out to join them. Their mother. She gave Travis the same kind of greeting her kits had.

As Holly watched, she realized that here was Travis, a man she suspected of being some sort of homicidal maniac, feeding a family of foxes he must have befriended long ago. Perhaps this was the second, third or fourth litter of kits he'd helped the mother raise.

She felt a mix of silliness and shame, as well as a new admiration, for her enigmatic young neighbor. She was an animal lover herself, and what he was doing reminded her of something she might do. She thought she might approach Travis now, and tell him how much she admired what he was doing to help the little family of foxes.

No, he wouldn't understand why I followed him.

Holly waited until Travis had left before emerging from behind the tree. Curious, she walked over to where he had been feeding and playing with the foxes. She noticed the spot he had re-covered with leaves and dirt. *Why can't I leave well enough alone?* Holly thought as she reached in to pull the cooler from the earth. She opened it, pulled out the plastic bag and paused a moment before opening it. What was inside looked rather disgusting, sort of like some kind of meat, but there was something else that looked almost like fur. Gray fur.

Oh come on, just do this.

Then Holly noticed something red, partially covered with dirt at the edge of the hole. As she focused on it, she could make out red fabric and, as she tugged on it harder, a clasp and a small silver bell dulled by grime.

-Cathy Mentzer

Life Beneath the Blades

There are a thousand of them. Or is there just one? My eyes deceive me. The many images are just one magnificent creature, one stunning slayer of life.

He doesn't see me; I am on the other side of the water. The water glistens and reflects his thin body. His big arms are innocently folded, as if pondering life and its mysterious irony. His elegant face, envy green, appears wise. I can hear his breathing as gently as his steps on the lush soil. No footprints left behind him. It is a magician's game. His eyes told him where to step next.

My body remains still; my arms hold close to the wood beneath my feet just above the water. I will not look down to my reflection. My gaze remains cast in his direction. If I were to move, would he feel the break in presence? The sun casts his shadow against the blades of the grass. His steps deceive me. I dare not move. He moves like a graceful snake; he keeps me in awe and I, entranced, feel my wings yearning to move. I can't leave now; I want just one more glimpse of his life.

Beneath his feet, my head became the trophy for which he stands proud. I can see his brilliant eyes; their menace, how beautiful. His strong grasp around my neck. I no longer can save myself from his gnarled smile.

He is on top of me; I sense his anger within. I feel it in his claws. My neck.

There, I twitch my wings, hurting to leave the torment. I must try to push through his immense arms holding me. His teeth bear through the orange slaughter, I see my body becoming his medals of honor. The cries made by my wings aren't even heard by the ants. It is desolate and the skies are black with rain. I am alone with these livid eyes fighting. It isn't fighting; he's ripping the orange blood that gave me life and I am letting it become his attire. Scarfed in my essence, his teeth tearing from me half my sight, I want him to be finished.

It begins to rain.

Is it the hole in my head and mind deceiving me? I turn my head to see him still there. The pain does not deceive. He has taken half my sight. I do not have the strength or sharp edges that he has. My battle is effortless. The shaking is like the rain drowning us both.

Again and again, the water consumes me, he consumes me. I consume me.

My mouth is drenched with it, with the rain that will save me. I gasp for the air around him. It is foul from the life weeping slowly out of my body.

My wretched wings—the few left—I wrench them from his gazing fury. This searing sting I feel as he dangles me by my wing, yet I shall fall to the water beneath his green feet. His feet like mine, small, delicate, and thin. His are longer. More powerful. I can get away now, but I have only three wet wings, which he mangles beneath him. I cannot breathe. The rain strikes us both. His foot, his ominous foot, compresses my chest into the ground beneath the water to help save himself from the sky's plague.

My orange existence trickling from his snaring mouth.

Half of my energy remains in his envious claw. My eye looks to him with disdain; his elegant steps throb inside my soul. I will never fly again.

The sky burns into his death. He falls to my demise, and my departure. I crawl through his legs and leave him trembling in my orange acid. Beneath the blades of sodden green, my eye regards the skies' tears shivering for the disgust of the graceful man.

The mantis drowned in front of my lifeless body; I became the dragon of the dirt.

-Alexandre Collette (Howard)

Nyctophobia

It was dark. Very dark. She shivered slightly, a small convulsion as she gazed at the door, knowing the moment it opened the darkness would be there. Another shiver as she braced herself to turn the knob, pull open the door, and turn on the lights. Once the lights were on, well, then the fear was gone. *I do this every time. How many times have I done this tonight?* She spoke inwardly, feeling stupid for her actions and her fear. She was not scared of the dark; she was scared of the dark in this place.

Inhaling sharply, she followed her thoughts, yanking the door open violently and flipping the light on in a rushed manner. The darkness had been there, but just for a moment. She only had to go down into the depths of her home once more after this.

She quickly pulled the still wet clothes from the washing machine, shoving them violently into the dryer before switching the big machine on. Even though the lights blazed as she did this, she still felt as though something in the dark was watching her.

She made a beeline for the door, darting up the stairs. She got to the top, and just as she had before, she switched off the light quickly and slammed the door behind her. She swore. Something chased her up those stairs every single time. She knew it.

She sighed, knowing that she was simply acting nuts. She shuffled over to the leather couch, flopping into it and leaning into the cushions. She gazed at the television, trying to get distracted by the odd shows that were on at such a late hour. She hated being unable to sleep. Her mind wandered as she thought about her irrational fears of the basement. *How could I possibly be scared? I know there is nothing there. Still, every time I go down...* She trailed off once more.

It was hard to imagine what actually scared her about the place. Perhaps it was all the cement, like a prison cell, or that she could see no actual ceiling, just pipes and air ducts instead of a solid construct. Maybe, just maybe, it was the fact that it was partially under the earth, a sort of underworld, her own personal hell. She didn't know and, frankly, she didn't care. Well, she cared a bit, but she was almost done now.

She had been sitting on the couch for almost an hour, channel surfing her time away. She had barely felt the hour go by, but here it was, the moment she would go back down and repeat the process. Maybe this time she would try not to run up the stairs. *Yeah, right.* She almost laughed at herself. She would always run up those stairs. The least she could do is try not to feel paranoid while she was doing it.

Suddenly feeling a tad more confident, she leapt off the couch and strode over to the door. Her false bravado was just that—false. She could feign fearlessness; it made her feel better. She turned on the light and walked down the stairs rather than her traditional trot. She took the clothes from the dryer and hurled them into the basket at her feet. She paused a moment, smelling a pair of socks. *They smell clean.* Once all her laundry was in the basket, she hefted it onto her right hip.

She walked around the corner towards the stairs. A sudden shiver crept up her spine; someone, or something, was watching her. She hated her imagination and the tricks it played. She was starting to feel panic rising, but she fought it down. It was just her nerves getting the best of her. It didn't matter. She wouldn't have to come back for a week or two; she could make her clothes last for two weeks. Now she could finally escape this room and rush back up the stairs.

She made it to the top. All she could think was that even if she couldn't sleep, she would never stay up to do her laundry this late again. The lack of sleep was making her jumpy. That was it.

The lights flickered out just then, but she didn't notice. She reached the top of the steps, happy and relieved. At the doorway, slightly out of breath, grinning like a fool, she dropped the laundry basket and reached to turn off the lights. It was then she noticed they were already out.

She suddenly felt the oddest sensation, almost like a tickle. Almost like an itch, but not quite. It felt like something—the feeling of tightening, the sensation of constricting her—was around her ankle. She looked down to see a green, almost black, vine coiling itself around her ankle, right into the shadow of her body. She looked behind her; there was nothing but darkness. She tried to move her leg, but now the vine was pulling it back.

She struggled, grabbing at the doorway. It was no use. The darkness had her now. It yanked hard. Her body fell with a sickening thud, but she still fought it, clawing madly at anything within reach.

As the vine pulled, strong and slow, she found herself dropped further into the darkness. Her last chance of hope diminished as the door, as if it had a mind of its own, as if it wished for her demise, slowly creaked shut above her.

And then there truly was only darkness.

-Mallory Sunderland

The Hunter

It began like any other Saturday morning on the farm. I awoke before my housemate and padded downstairs to the kitchen, dog at my heels, to start the coffee I depend on to jumpstart my brain each day. As usual, I opened the door for my black Lab-Husky mix, Digby, without thinking twice.

Our farm was situated on nine acres bordered by an underground electronic fence, which kept Digby and the neighbors' three unruly dogs confined to the property. Thanks to the size of the farm and the fence, the dogs enjoyed an unusual degree of freedom. The four of them had formed a wolf-like pack, with my landladies' big Chesapeake Bay retriever as the leader and Digby second-in-command.

As I stumbled about the kitchen in my typical morning stupor, I was vaguely aware of the sound of barking. The dogs, I absentmindedly thought, were up to their usual hijinks. Perhaps they were playing, barking at each other or some inanimate object. The retriever, Keller, had an amusing/annoying habit of barking at rocks. He would stare trancelike at large rocks he procured from the driveway or some other out-of-the-way spot and carried to the backyard, barking with almost religious fervor. This behavior had prompted us to joke often that rocks *were* a religion to the dog, because he seemed to worship them.

At first, I didn't give the barking a second thought. As time passed, though, I became aware that the barking had continued for quite a long time. And I began to realize it was not the kind of barking that so often accompanied the dogs' play. It was more of a frenzied sound. The dogs were hysterical.

I looked out the kitchen window through my backyard to the pasture where the neighbors kept their goats and donkey. It was then that I spotted the deer.

Without hesitating, I flew out the back door and began running toward the field. The dogs had the deer—a buck I could now tell—backed against a section of fence. How, I thought, had he let himself be surrounded by them? Why hadn't he gotten away? Surely he could have outrun the dogs. But as I got closer, I realized what had happened. The buck's right front leg was dangling perversely, limp and useless. A bullet had entered his body at the same exact point where the leg joined his torso. Somehow, the leg was still attached, but barely.

Although we lived in Pennsylvania, the property was bordered on one side by the Mason-Dixon line. Often, we would traipse up the hill when friends came to visit to point out the old concrete marker that divided Pennsylvania and Maryland. Deer season opened the following Monday in Pennsylvania, but it had begun that morning in Maryland. A hunter must have shot the poor buck over there, and it had stumbled unwittingly to safety across the state line. Although he was no longer prey to a huntsman's bullet, he now faced another kind of danger. I began screaming at the dogs, trying to pull each of them away and back to the houses, but I couldn't grab all of them. As soon as I would get one away and go back for another, the first would rush back. I needed help. I didn't want to leave the deer with the dogs, though, so I yelled as loud as I could to the houses, cursing my housemate and the neighbors for their oblivion.

Finally, as I accepted the fact that I would have to leave the buck to get help, my neighbor, Camille, and her mother, Elizabeth—disturbed at last by the commotion—came outside with Camille's young nephew. I quickly told them what had happened and they helped me get the dogs inside. The deer hobbled away, heading toward the barn and some other old outbuildings on the opposite side of our houses.

My mind was racing. Without help, the deer would die a slow and most certainly agonizing death. I considered calling a veterinarian, but the impracticality of it settled in almost as soon as I thought it. Then Camille's nephew, who had followed the foundering buck, returned to report that the animal had collapsed behind an equipment shed.

We couldn't keep the dogs from finding him again, and we couldn't keep them inside indefinitely. The answer, the idea I hadn't wanted to consider, was becoming all too clear. I would have to act to end his pain.

I looked at Elizabeth, a wise southern woman—an ordained minister, in fact—whom I respected. "I have a gun," I told her. "Do you think I should shoot him and put him out of his misery?"

She said yes.

I'm the last person who ever expected to have a gun in her home. Growing up, my father never had guns. And I have always believed in strong gun control laws. I don't think anyone really needs to own a handgun. Yet that is exactly what I kept in my bureau drawer in the bedroom. I had bought the gun after a friend's brother visited our farm one day to shoot targets. He offered to let me try his Ruger Blackhawk Convertible revolver. The gun reminded me of the six-shooters I loved during my tomboy childhood. I still have those toy silver revolvers with the pearl handles. And when I shot that gun—the real one—I was thrilled by the power that surged through my hand, as well as with my own shooting prowess. I was a damn good shot. So, propelled by the sheer fun of it and the somewhat practical desire for protection—often, the dogs and I were the only ones home late at night, and the farm was pretty isolated—I bought a Ruger just like the one I had practiced with. From time to time, friends and I would take it out to one of the nearby fields and shoot at cans or targets propped in front of bales of straw. I was certain that I would never use the gun to kill anything.

Now, the fact that I had the means to kill this deer gave me a kind of control I hadn't experienced before. I knew I had the power to do what needed to be done. I knew it was the only alternative that made sense. What I didn't know was if I could go through with it.

I ran into the house and woke my roommate, Monica, asking her to accompany me, perhaps even hoping that she would volunteer to pull the trigger. Bleary-eyed and somewhat irritated, she got up and dressed while I checked and loaded the gun with .357 magnum shells. As we left the house and headed toward the equipment shed, I was thinking of what I was about to do. Mostly I was wondering if I would be able to do it. I doubted it.

When we got behind the building, we spotted the buck lying in some tall weeds, breathing heavily. A wave of pity overcame me. I wanted to cry. I suddenly had the urge to put my arms around him, to soothe him as I might my dog or one of my cats. But this was a wild creature. Seeing us, he became afraid and began to struggle to his feet. I knew that if I hesitated, the buck might get away. The horror of his leg, hanging by a few shreds of flesh, reminded me that his fate would be a slow, lingering death, probably from starvation, or attack by other animals.

I shot him. I aimed for his neck but I don't know where the bullet hit, just that it didn't kill him. I had to shoot two more times. Then he shuddered and shook—so this is how it looks to die, I remember thinking—then settled down for permanent sleep.

I stood there. I had actually been able to kill something. The adrenaline was pumping. I didn't want to contemplate how I would feel later, after the heat of the moment had passed.

After it was over, Monica and I got the idea that maybe we could turn the whole, sad experience into something positive by harvesting the venison. I called my brother-in-law, Tony,

who hunted, and he came down with my nephew. Not wanting to watch, I returned to the house while they began preparing the buck to be transported to Tony's friend's place, where he could be properly butchered.

At that point, I felt twinges of guilt about taking a life, along with a slight feeling of accomplishment. Even though it went against my nature, I had been able to get the job done. I had saved the deer from hours or days of panic and pain. I'd been cruel to be kind. That wasn't so wrong. Right?

-Cathy Mentzer

*~ Other Voices:
Poetry ~*

Beanie

pudgy and
 wrinkled,
 blonde and beautiful.
 his wise visage makes me
 wonder if he isn't the reincarnation of Buddha himself.
 always in the moment.

he is brave and strong, yet
 sometimes frightened, usually of things
 he shouldn't be.
 a pile of snow, an unfamiliar ball, a trash can
 out of place.
 i spring to comfort, soothe and protect.
 He's so guileless, sweet and innocent.

a stout little alien, he brings comic relief
 whenever I am sad or annoyed. unleashing a burst of energy, he becomes
 a whirling dervish of
 sweeping circles and figure eights.
 no matter how often i see it, it always makes me smile.

his pouty lip, his jaunty gait.
 mugging for the camera.
 spreading joy
 wherever he goes.
 children rush in to "ooh,"
 old folks to adore.
 he may not be my blood or
 even my species,
 but he is part of me.

when he came
 into my life, i could not imagine how full
 my heart would grow.
 this little ball of mischief, this corkscrew tail and cocked head. more clever than a child.
 How could I not fall in love?

-Cathy Mentzer

Holding on to Happiness

Entwine your fingers with mine.
Hold tight and run with me,
in the sun and through the rain.
Along the bustling busy streets,
past the whispering grassy fields,
and away from the eyes who watch us;

to the hammock swaying gently in the breeze.
Lay with me; balance yourself on the edge without falling.
Like the sweat on your brow, let the worries drip off you.
The only thing needed is the possibility,
that even for the briefest moment
anything is possible.

With the world below us,
Indulge yourself in a world that could otherwise never be.
Let the wind put its fingers through your hair.
In an instant our memories take me there.
What we have shared,
is the source of my happiness.

My arms pull you near,
The beat of your heart
keeps the memory flowing.
In each sway of the hammock,
passion rises and time slips away.
In a glimpse it defies the impossible.

When it gets dark, and lonely,
I run through the rain and whispering fields
to the hammock gently swaying in the breeze.
I wrap myself in the memories
recalling their warmth,
and happiness...

Until reality allows me to dream no longer,
and forces my eyes to open.
The bitter sting of life
is weak compared to what I once had.
Swinging with you in the hammock
and holding on to happiness.

-Jocelyn Kirchner

The Found is Never Lost

For I Seeketh your lovely presence but all I can ask
is WHERE FOR ART THOU- where dost your soul wander peacefully
amongst thy pastures of life?

Why haveth you dissipated;
maketh it difficult for us to smell d'sweet scent of hope and optimism?

I feel as if my whole being- secluded- excluded-reclusive-illusive; a jail-a prison.

There are rumors that you have risen.

I share same sense as Capulet & Montague, yet thinkst not capable of finding a mortal
Who can possess such power, diligence, perfection
That by which Thy holds the rare selection

Confusion-distraught now, shadows swallows sympathetically, my foot steps as
I try to trace your tracks of which you covered so benign,
Calmly calling out to us: For Where for Art Thou, LOVE?!

These words now echo in a crescendo- my heart shatters
Because this question which Thy asks, I can not fulfill as much as a task
Why dost thus pose?

Why **I** you haveth chose?

I am living, O' Thy rather count me deadeth to this curse of a charm.

I mean Thy no harm but I

Desperate

Hungry for the sound of Peace, Relinquish, Relief

Reality has no longer befriended me like Thy haveth always

Come Back LOVE- WHERE FOR

FOR ART THOU, cometh back?

Mountains stare downward- they twist, turmoil foreth

They not knowest why Thy has abandoned us

God boasted upon your glory- your splendor and now Thy seemeth ancient-
Prehistoric. An unsolved mystery- so tragic yet euphoric

In the sense that everything from microscopic to microcosm all anticipate your return

Abounding- Abundant- Steadfast for art Thou so

Where haveth Thy traveled- for whereth dost we go,

To be refilled with endless joy that which a toy gives to young girl and boy

Teach us what is meant to be missed-remembrance

Not. Ought ye to restore? Not to deplore! Wretched, this

I forbid thee, O' Merciful.

But mentor us just as that of the holy disciples

Cast in the hallows- in the Garden of Gethsemane

You cry out; Where For art Thou, LOVE?

LOVE, for you art prevalent and relevant every whereth the wind bloweth, delightfully
Living **On** inside o**V** Each and everyone of us

Lust Only Virtue Eternally.
Lies disgrace you- Truth thou Seeketh All.

Seeketh and thou shall findeth
But foundeth ought not to be seeked for what is *Lost* is Only oVer lookEd.

-Shaylah McQueen

The Table That Stood Still

The Use
to be creatively stylistic, concrete, certain, supportive, and flamboyant
Yet,
You are **Stale-Stiff-Stagnate**
like the puddles that linger effortlessly alongside the road after the storm sweeps away the
liveliness of the once animated scenery of an atmosphere
Procrastination and silence plague your very stance
Quick sand structure Standing in one place
Not moving nor budging like the trunk of a stillborn tree though its roots carry bits of nutrients
that barely remains
Just a disillusionment of outstation as gravity and Newton's Laws of motion slowly but surely
become inexistent We ought not to blame
You robotic excuse for a contraption
Only to be used
Abused
Amused
Refused
Infused amongst God's creations and nothing else
Nothing else- No Rules can bend your soul- Nothing else
For you have no soul Only existing for that which is far from inexorable
Termites hibernate in your hollow shell of a shelter They eat
eat
eat
At your core while
You stand **Stale-Stiff-Stagnate**
Move already- You are presumably a manufactured product of some sort
You were made to shape out your self and the world around you
But
You rather shield your features-your mistakes by
The perpetual benign polishing
Of dead moist decay of waste of a substance
Stand up!
You are no longer a statue
Even
In the beginning
You were flexible, fluid, a clod like ornament that sparkled and shimmered outshining the
twinkling of the stars
Transparent life- floating effortlessly in the walls of the sea vibrating
Walls of the ocean waves that befriended you
That covered you
That washed your slate clean
Your wood of a covering- whether authentic or artificial
It was cleansed
You were an individual

Now you are **Stale-Stiff-Stagnate**

Wake up!

For you ought to slay the inevitable sways of the dragon of time
Regardless if you desire to strive and dive into more than yourself

Shed the very scales of your skin and molt till you

Have transformed into more than just a table-

A solidified mummy molded and raped by its tomb of a lover

Live freely

Move freely

Take it from me- I am incapable

Immobilized

Handicap of being portable **You** have whole control of your body-mind-soul to live

To flourish

To meet

To greet

And choose your destination-

Your future

I am unfortunate

I am the permanence of the effulgence found in the sun's rays and in the moon's ghostly
reflecting aura

I am the rancid odor that is parasitic to a corpse

I am not in anyway liquefied

Limitless

Structure less as

Yourself

So take advantage of your ability to breathe- to walk

To be!

To be!

To exceedingly shift and transform into someone bigger-better

Than your circumstance and stop

Living a life that is gravely yet deliberately shadowed with the decomposition

Of potentially

Stagnate-Stiff and Staleness of a given opportunity—of a wasted privilege of free will

Of change

-Shaylah McQueen

The Surgeon

I diagnose problems but I'm not a doctor
Always working with my hands
I work on bodies and their insides
I use instruments, but not the musical kind.
I enjoy reading but not the type for study
I'll tell you what's wrong and charge lots of money to fix it
I wear a clean uniform
At the end of my shift it is a different color
It's a sport and a hobby
It takes a lot of time and money
I get paid
I went to school to get a degree
People's lives are in my hands when they leave
My job is to keep you and your friends, safe
I am a mechanic.

-Heather Jones

Escape

Your creations surround me, but I struggle to feel.
I know your words and what to say and yet at your feet I don't kneel.
What will escape me from this pain?
Knowing you are the only one who can and yet I turn away at your name.
I'm not okay and I'm not alright,
Waking up and going through life is a fight.
Day after day, night after night,
Seeing it and turning away from your light.
You're clear and visible to me each day.
You can stop this so why do I run away?
Am I scared to feel nothing at all?
Or waking up knowing what you saw?
I have to stop and walk on by,
Trusting and knowing you are by my side.

-Natalie Guerreiro

The View

Each person is placed in our life for a reason,
Whether they stay forever or just for a season.
You can take each day, a miserable mess,
Or smile at the sun and see how you are blessed.
To survive on this ride we call life,
You must hold on tight through toil and strife.
If to lose is to gain,
Then all the struggles will one day be worth the pain.
One must believe in all they hold true,
Knowing god has an ultimate plan for you.
To give up a fight and follow the ultimate path,
Not matter how the road turns you will never look back.
Each day will make more sense to you,
So sit back and watch God's work,
Go ahead,
Enjoy the view.

-Natalie Guerreiro

One Man

One man weeps at a young life taken to soon.
One man dreams to reach the moon.
One man prays for someone to care.
One man holds tight, never to share.
One man shows love and respect to all.
One man hopes to succeed from another man's fall.
One man holds tight to his children and wife.
One man goes out to try to live the "life".
Each man in need of God's love.
One man will pray and send up to the one above.
One man will die.
One man's wife will cry.
One man will die.
With his career and "happiness," but none will cry.
One man.

-Natalie Guerreiro

(1)

EXPECTATIONS

My mind is blowing to find
My heart is strongly confined
Searching for my scattered dreams
I am badly ruined.
Lies, hurt and sorrows
Have scattered me like shards of glass
Searching for glue
Which can gather me again.
Oh God! Where are you?
I beg for your help.
Why do others fill me with their expectations?
I am fed up with that!
If any one of my dear expectations is left unfulfilled
It will greatly hurt me
Because I know,
Expectations always hurt . . .

(2)

SHATTERING

Shattering after listening to your words
Like a wind in a desert
Scattering me without giving a chance to hold onto myself
Like a cyclone in an ocean
Revolving me in its grip tightly
Like a thunderstorm in the wilderness
I don't know the cause of all this
Oh God! What is my fault?
Asking this question I walk alone
Afraid of my every step
I am running without my destiny . . .

-Sidra Khan

Some Mixed Feelings

Why can't people reward you for your love, sincerity, care and true love?
Why do I always hurt people by their silly mistakes?
Why can't I get hurt from them?
Why is the element of mistrust revolving around me?
Why are my own ones raising their fingers at me?
I don't care what people think about me
But I care when my kin mistake me
What is my fault?
I am facing the result of unsolved questions
Why is it my trust, my dreams that have to be broken?
I don't want to understand my life
Then why is it teaching me again and again?
It hurts me when people judge me without knowing the truth
And try to teach me about my life
Why don't they leave me alone?
Why don't they live and let me live?
I am fed up with this rope which has tightly held me
I want to free myself and breathe in fresh air
An air free of frustration, misunderstandings, jealousy
Oh GOD! Help me to get out from these clutches of difficulties
Please take my hands and pass me along
I can't face them alone . . .

-Sidra Khan

Cabana Dreams

As the Greyhound bus travels toward the east
The colors of autumn have my eyes a feast.
Staring out the window
The towns and cities are in limbo.
Beside me sits a teenage girl,
Her complexion as smooth and shiny as a pearl.

Her clothes are laden with western fringe,
As she sets out for her eastern rodeo binge.
Her eyes are fixed as her thoughts in a daze,
As we travel through the Midwest haze.

I thought not to disturb this rodeo gal.
Whose thoughts are seemingly with her horse pal.
Who rides in a trailer closely behind.
I am sure her thoughts are nothing but kind.

What kind of stories would one so young
Put to music to be sung?
By the gauchos around the fire
Out on the prairie or a hill much higher.

On her journey to the nation's capital,
If she rides her best she will earn collateral.
To purchase a ranch in her home state of Montana,
Which she will call Big Sky Cabana.

During the silence of the night
We end up talking, much to my delight.
As the rest of the passengers dream away,
She tells the plans of her Washington stay.
A rodeo, a museum, she as just got to see'um,
As children back home just get to dream'um.
The stories she'll tell to those left behind
Will fill up every corner of her mind.

As we near our final destination
Our conversation stops without hesitation.
Her eyes are closed, as well as mine,
Until the driver yells, "Stop nine!"
The bus arouses with chatter and clanging
As the tops of the luggage compartments keep banging.
The city outside makes the heart skip a beat,

Just like horses' hooves on a hot city street.
As she gathers her belongings western wear and all
She smiles at me softly, *see y'all!*

- Kristen M. Leitzell

Heartbeat

Two hearts beat within
Until their time together ends.
They are on the same track,
Together as one. I love you,
You love me back.
I need you, you need me too.
The beat we share is wonderful.
It's as if we are making a song;
Music that lasts all day and night long.
My heart and your heart together is so strong,
As if from the time we met we knew we belonged.
How could two hearts connect so much?
The feeling in my body gives me such an adrenaline rush,
And when you touch me my heart races,
Then with the sight of our faces,
The two hearts skip a beat.
Making the music remix to a song so deep.
I love you so much that I can't keep
My hands off of you or my heart
From not beating when we are apart.

-Nichole Morris

Red

Sunny afternoon
Never knew what would hit me
Only ten years-old

Waking up today
Momma still sleeping in bed.
Sisters are yelling.

What is for breakfast?
I ask this morning's sunshine.
Cereal and milk.

I watch some TV
Morning shows to clear the mind.
I am just a child.

Sitting in the couch
I feel something wet, leaky.
Have I gone crazy?

Getting up to see.
Excruciating pain hits.
Flowing even more.

I run to Angel
Showing her the pain of me
Seeping through my pants.

She sees and is shocked.
"Why so early?" she asks me.
I did not know why.

So much confusion.
So much cramping pain I had.
So many worries.

On that sunny day
Red. Always. Cramping. Midol.
Deflowering child.

-Nichole Morris

Looking Through the Window
From the Outside Within

At the quietest hour of the night, so quiet in fact that it's the strangest silence that excited me to uncontrollable obsession. I could no longer wait. I watch her as she sleeps in satin sheets. Through her window I go, almost every mid of the night. When I am not with her I feel empty. The desire to be with her, is only wanting to be, but I cannot be because she has taken it all away. Attraction in the way she walks while looking at men with her flirty eyes. Anxious I am to get close to her with unfounded thoughts, and strong feelings. In the day, her room smells of lavender and chamomile; the sweet fragrance of her. By night the fragrance is gone and it smells of burnt candles and Egyptian oils.

I'm lost in thought as I watch her sleep. She is an angel during the day and devil at night. Peering through her bedroom door, I want so badly to come in. The silence ceases and she awakens. Another has awaked only to find his clothes folded, ready to be handled and worn again. Night by night it is the same between her and another. Minimum conversation, a one night stand, and a simple goodbye are the routines that she has. I just hide. I watch through the bathroom door as she showers her sinful night body. Her angelic shape I can imagine during the day. I want it all back that she has taken from me.

The sound of running water stops and I run to hide. She steps into the room and almost instantly looks to the window. She sees me and I see her. There, the silence filled the room. Her eyes widened at the sight of me. I can tell that she is scared and a bit nervous. I try to speak up but she just cries out, "no." Her tears running down her face like a waterfall. Uncontrollably she weeps and for a moment I feel her pain. She looks at me and continues to sob and then she cries out, "I'm so sorry!"

- Nichole Morris

Father is Not My Lover

She wants to know what happened when that man entered
He carried a large belt in one hand as the other was red
He stomped his way in, not caring about what he smothered
She cries in utter desperation, "No, not now, please. I beg you!"

All of a sudden her eyes open and she realizes she's okay.
She's in the safety of her therapist's office and she asks,
"So what is it that happened next? You can tell me. You are safe.
She cries in utter desperation, "No, not now, please. I beg you!"

The nightmarish world of memories is almost as bad as waking
She always has the aching feeling that *he* comes to taking of
her innocence. It happened once; She is trying to fade the making of
the cry in utter desperation, " No, not now, please. I beg you!"

He does not near her for he's in the process of creating a home for her sweet dreams
It is her father after all. It's just her father, utterly harmless and courteous to her needs.

-April Davila

Death By Love

When the silence speaks louder than words
And your heart just doesn't feel the same anymore
Its death by love

You have given all the feeling and soul that is inherent of yourself
And now nothing is left for you
You cannot grasp anything concrete
You fall
But not into the pit of love
Felt for you by him
There is nothing left of that love
It has dried like plump grapes in the sun
Shriveled and dissatisfying

Crashing to the dry caked earth you are jolted
Into a state of striping pain that
Wrenches the last breath from your blackened diseased lungs
Charred by the fire of your passion
Your love has been an undetected cancer multiplying
Consuming your whole mind
Rotting away your logic, leaving behind
Blind emotions and rash actions

You are mocked by
Hind sight
You know now what destructive principle love is
But now it is too late to change fate

It is death by love

-Cortni Eran Quarles

Falling

Surly summer has long gone
 And multicolored carpets fall beneath
 Our bared and gracious heels.
 The air is thick and full
 With hot and noxious love.
 You grab my unwilling hand
 Taking me about the yard
 Near that lowly cliff.
 Either you do not notice
 Or disregard my faltering face.
 My fervent feelings have fallen
 And been trampled on
 Like the hairs of the trees.
 Vanishing sun has swept the heat from my passion
 Leaving cold ice ridden madness.
 You grab my hips clutching me close.
 Your lips flout across mine
 Like leaves dancing on the wind.
 I am repulsed and shaken
 With the sweet poison you taste of.
 Breaking your grasp
 I gravitate towards the cliff.
 You think I am teasing and come following after.
 Soon you catch me
 And intertwine our hands
 We spin endlessly
 Slipping closer to my newfound escape.
 My heart is racing
 I am so close to freedom
 That it's very essence
 Infuses my body with an electric charge.
 Finally we have reached the edge
 And I am teetering between freedom and prison
 My face must reveal my dark intentions
 Because you clinch my wrist
 But I slip through the iron grip and jump
 As I float towards my heaven
 I catch a glimpse of your heartbroken features
 A sliver of affection flits through my body
 So to ease your pain, I whisper,
I fell.

-Cortni Eran Quarles

Words

Potentially potent words,
Uttered with little sense,
Slip slowly, effortlessly, from your lips.
You speak with such uncontrolled recklessness, love.
The slight slits your manner produces upon my skin,
Go unnoticed by myself.
So focused in the hastiness of your anger,
I am scrapped, scratched, smashed
And that's not what bothers me.
Small senseless letters strung to together
Make small senseless words, my dear.
You seem sure words poorly chosen,
On your part,
Aid in the detrimental destruction of me.
My overlooking or acceptance of your behavior
Is not to be mistaken with weakness.
These unimportant words
Are like silly songs made during summertime shadows,
Easily forgotten.

-Cortni Eran Quarles

The Eyes

Through the trees, a coarse wind blows
On a narrow path below, twisting turning water flows.
While high in the sky a gleaming moon awaits
For the sun to rise and take its place.

Up in a tree sits a glowing pair of eyes,
Waiting for the right time to reveal their disguise.
The heart shaped face and small stature,
Do not describe the excellent catcher.

The eyes gaze down beneath the green
Resting on new prey it may seem.
But instead they come across a probable mate,
So they ponder a promising new fate.

Because the darkness still owns its persistence,
Not a soul can catch sight of the eyes' existence.
Then, silent as the dead of night,
The luminous eyes and great wings take flight.

-Kaylee Moog

The Creed Wins

I realized I will fall.
Against you; because of you,
I will fall from your tower.
Your tower is greater than me.
With moisture in my gaze when
I stand next to your tower I will fall.
Your tower you will choose.

You became my beating heart.
It never knew blood until you
touched its beat and gave it a rush.
You rushed through my heart
and now it knows life.

Your tower will replace me.
Your life. Your love. Your wife.
I stand in the shadow of your tower.
I am your night, you are my sun.
I will fall in the shadows.

Longer I keep you in the shadow
and you see me, your night.
Darkness in the shadow I keep you.
I touch you, your purest skin.
You teach me to love.
My heart beats with yours,
it memorized you.

Kisses on your chest are pulses of life
in my ears.
Your lips of the sun
in my hair antagonize my love.
Will you love me forever.
When you kiss me last
and walk away,
your taste will remain.

Pictures of you. Pictures of me.
It has been. It will be. It could be.
It is. Your tower says no.
My heart says everything of us.
Where are you love of my life.

I touch your golden skin
in the shadow of your tower's golden frame.
You adore its interior
I will choose to never see.
I think about us.
Turn off the light.

I obey. Our secret.
Not really. Our story. Never boring.
Our skin. Always together.
I will love you forever.
Can you see it on the wall.
That will fall too.

Tell me everything.
I want to know all your secrets.
I am your secret. Will you ever tell.
I am your love.
I make your lips belong to me.
Confess to me. My secrets are mine.
I choose to never confess.

Your fingers intertwined with mine,
I know you.
My heart knows your beat.
My love is yours.

Everything is us together.
Together in the shadow of your tower.
You will be inside the tower and I will fall.
Your secrets will never fall.
I will fall and my secrets, too.

It's my fault.
You loved my imperfections.
It's all your fault.
You confessed to me.
My heart knew nothing.
It's was nothing...

You put tears into me
and still they didn't know.
You kissed me my first.
I began to live.

I see your face in everything.

I cannot confess.
Speak to me two thousand miles away.
My chest yearns.
Should my tears fall too.

It doesn't matter. I have you.
Not now. I will have you.
Show me how you've missed me.
We will be known. It is our secret.
I will fall no matter the height.

-Alexandre Colette (Howard)

Observing Snow and Wolves

I hear them
The delicate footfalls
Pit pat
Through the pure fresh snow

I see them
Searching through the winter air
Puff puff
Their breaths rise
in little clouds
Swirling past the flakes

Suddenly
I realize with a start
That they
have seen me too

Nostrils twitch
Bodies freeze to a halt
Ears prick
And silently
they whirl and face
me in one swift move

My heart races
Chill air rushes to my lungs
I stand
motionless before them

Then the alpha
Swinging back his massive head
Heaves a
sudden breath
And the three
fade soundlessly from view

Muscles relax
I swing my legs forward
Crunch crunch
Continuing my journey

Pressing on
I spot flashes of golden brown
between the
laden boughs of
solitary pines -
The cabin beckons me

Finding my place
of thoughtful tranquility
I enter
to ponder my encounter

-Lauren Burk