

WILSON COLLEGE



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Bottom Shelf Review
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Table of Contents

Title	Author
Grow Up	Kim Allen
Triptych	Ashley Barner
Untitled	Ashley Barner
Almost into Nothingness	Heather Burke
Becoming Me	C. S. Calusic
I Dream On	Biva Chapagain
My Refusal	Rebecca Cheek
Ugly	Rebecca Cheek
Christmas Vanitas	Elizabeth Clever
Ode to Venus	Elizabeth Clever
Little Girls	Michael G. Cornelius
One Good Trick...	Michael G. Cornelius
Crowning Terror	Michael G. Cornelius
Reflection	Jess Elser
The Haunting Past	Jess Elser
The Rain	Jess Elser
Distance	Rebecca Heston
I Went To Sleep Last Night	Caryn Watson
If I Only Knew	Susana Gore
You Prove Me Wrong	Susana Gore
No Longer By Yourself ...	Susana Gore
Darkness	Dorothy M. Malinowski
Friends	Dorothy M. Malinowski
Love's True Light	Dorothy M. Malinowski
Standing Out	Dorothy M. Malinowski
Fruit Punch	Meg Oldman
A Sample	Erika Raines
The Stitch In Time	Erika Raines
Thread of Life	Erika Raines
Why Vagina?	Erika Raines
Out of Reach	Erin Tallman
Sky is Blue	Erin Tallman
Tender Eyes	Erin Tallman
Dark World	Lucinda Wells
Elements	Lucinda Wells
The Mask	Lucinda Wells
Better Place	Samantha Winkler
Thankful	Samantha Winkler
Skyline: Friends in the Night	Jamie Maas
Seasons	Heather Layman

(To navigate the BSR, use your CNTRL-F key to search for pieces by author.)

Grow Up Kimberly Allen

Its funny how you can't remember anything in the beginnin'
Even though you knew you were sinnin'
Startin' off with that immaturity that lead to the insecurities
That leads to the impurities of yourself, and not anyone else
Yeah you make mistakes
But it seems like that one person can't take the time to forgive you
They call you a fake
But it's too late to turn back the hands of time
To stop and give your mind the opportunity
To think with that maturity that you know is inside of you
To think about what you were supposed to do
To make things right
And not fight the hostilities of other infidelities
Just live and give your all, and know all you need to do is grow
Let your mind grow
Let your heart grow
Let your spirit grow
Let it flow with all the love, let it fly, let it soar
Know that it's yours and you don't have to fall short no more
No more givin' up, 'cause its time to Grow Up

Don't sit around and not let things happen
Just do it
Don't let the chance come where you would say, "I blew it."
'Cause then everybody would be able to say, "I knew it"
I knew that you would lose and you would never find the clues
That would lead you to the path that would lead your from your past
You look them in the eyes and tell them it's never gonna end
'Cause you're gonna tend to what lies within your heart
Be smart and don't let anyone tear you apart
You see, you've come too far to let anyone scar your tissues
You tell them to deal with their own issues
As you're dealin' with yours
Tell them to put their knees to the floor
Repent to God as you have, 'cause that's the task to be done
'Cause he's the only one who can take it all away
Don't let anyone lead you astray
You gotta say. "Jesus fill me, Lord I need you to heal me."
You gotta let him know that you know that you know you gotta grow
So... when people come to you with all the negativity
Don't let it fill your head up
Listen to God and Grow Up.

Triptych

Ashley Barner

John

He's my best friend, and I am nearest him, at his right hand. So I lean back against him and turn my head to ask. His shoulder is warm and hard with carpentry work, the material of his robe rough against my shoulder.

"Who is it?" I ask him quietly.

His rich brown eyes meet mine with a sad expression, and the oil on his dark hair glints in the dim lamplight. I notice a crumb of bread caught in his beard, and there is a pimple scar on his cheek.

"The one to whom I give this bread," he answers confidentially in Aramaic, with that familiar, provincial Galilean accent. When he speaks, I can smell the wine on his breath.

His rough hands, browned in the sun, break off a piece of bread, and he dips it in the dish. Each hair on his arm shines in the lamplight as he passes it to Judah.

Judah looks up at him, his expression startled, puzzled—and pained, all at once.

"What you are about to do," Joshua tells him, quietly and calmly, "do quickly."

Their eyes lock for one moment as I look between them, this strange moment burning itself into my mind. Then Judah breaks his gaze first and pushes himself to his feet.

"Going to give gifts to the poor?" Phillip calls over to him, but Judah doesn't hear him, only turns and leaves the room, the piece of bread still held unregarded in his hand. I hear his footsteps on the stairs, and peer over my shoulder at Joshua again.

His expression is unreadable as he stares fixedly at the food on the table for a moment, the low conversation still going on around us.

Finally he shakes himself and looks up to see me watching him. He manages to conjure up a wan smile, turning his head so that the lamplight reveals for a moment the tiny bare patch in his beard. It's over the scar he got the time we were eight, playing tag through the village. He slipped on loose stones and fell, scraping up his chin and chipping one of his teeth. He bore it bravely, only cried a little, but how his mother scolded once her fear was over!

I smile back, half at him and half at the memory of him.

Repeating Judah's movement, he pushes himself up to stand.

"Come," he says, then takes in the rest with his gaze. "Let us go."

Malchus

I heft my club in my right hand as I move up the hill. The burning torch held by the man next to me lights the ground before me, the resinous wood smelling pleasant on the night air.

But there is nothing pleasant about this duty, only grimly satisfying. This blasphemous man has caused a great deal of trouble in the city, and we are to arrest him and take him to be tried by the chief priest, my master.

Torchlight and lantern light flicker around me, the sound of angry and apprehensive murmurs and the clink of a lamp in its terra-cotta holder.

I see the shadow of this man and his followers on the hillside long before I can

hear them, silhouetted against the moonlight—the nearly full moon of Passover. The shadows of olive trees loom up in the dark.

Our informer leads us straight up to them and kisses one of the dozen or so men in greeting.

That was the prearranged signal. We move forward. I reach out to take the accused man's arm, and am momentarily surprised to find that he's a few inches shorter than me.

Suddenly there is a commotion. A few of the man's followers have drawn their short swords, shouting. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a swift glint of metal in the torchlight, and duck instinctively.

There is a whoosh and a horrible sound, and I reel. Some of my comrades are shouting, but I can barely hear them. There's a sudden rush of pain, and I hear blood flowing. Crying out in pain and fear, I drop my club, unable to stop myself from clapping my hand to my ear to feel the damage. My stomach clenches as I realize that my ear has been cut off, barely held on by a bit of skin. The blood pouring down the side of my head makes my shaking fingers slip.

The accused man is addressing his followers angrily, but I'm obviously not listening, the rush of blood the only sound I can distinguish.

Suddenly, the blasphemer is right in front of me, looking pitying and consternated all at once. He gently pulls my hand from my ear, and surprisingly, I let him. I'm halted in my frantic dance of pain by the expression in his face, lit dimly and fitfully by our torches.

He puts out his hand, picking up the horrid thing that had been my ear and setting it back in place. As suddenly as it came, the pain is gone; the rushing sound of blood flow is gone...

He steps back, and I reach up tentatively to touch my ear again. I feel no dangling chunk of flesh, no flowing blood to coat my neck, no seam in my skin. He has healed my ear.

More words are said on either side, but I don't hear them, standing there dumbfounded with my hand on my ear, feeling the blood slowly drying on my neck and the shoulder of my robe.

They tie the man's hands and begin to march him away. A wave of fear crashes over his followers, and in a moment they scatter, fleeing off into the shadows of the olive trees. I recognize one—a man I've seen in my master's house before—John, I think his name is. He runs with the man who cut off my ear.

Strange, I think distractedly.

Someone calls my name, pulling me out of my reverie. "Malchus!"

I blink in the darkness. The procession of soldiers and officials is already halfway down the hill, the prisoner with them. I am left alone, the last man on the top of the hill.

I stoop to pick up my club, pause, then leave it to lie on the ground. Deliberately, I pick up a fallen torch and follow my healer down into the dark city.

Cleopas

We have reached our destination: Emmaus is before us. We have walked sixty stadia from Jerusalem this day, but I barely feel weary. My mind is reeling too much from emotion and thought and epiphany. This man who joined us on the road speaks as

no one I have heard before—except our Lord himself. And I rarely ever had a chance for a long and close conversation with him as my friend and I have had today with this stranger. He has explained all the scriptures in a way that makes me want to shout and leap into the air, to cry, “Of course!”

“Here is our destination,” my companion states as we approach the village.

“I will wish you well,” the stranger says, and makes to continue down the road.

“Wait!” I say, unable to stop myself. “Stay with us this night.”

“Yes,” my companion adds, “it is nearly evening. The day is almost over, and you will not want to walk on in the dark.”

The stranger pauses, his brown robe and his growing shadow dark against the light dust of the road. Where have I seen his face before?

I feel he *must* accept our offer. I feel I can barely stand to see him disappear again, and never spend more time with him, never hear him speak like this again.

“Very well,” he finally agrees, and I exchange a relieved and joyful smile with my companion. It is the first time the two of us have smiled in three days, since our Lord’s arrest.

We certainly did not expect to smile this morning, when this strange man surprised us so by joining us and asking what we were discussing. The sound of crunching dirt and stones ceased abruptly as both of us stopped dead and looked at the ground, overcome by grief and doubt. Finally, I asked him, “Are you just passing through Jerusalem, that you do not know the things that have happened there?”

“What things?” he asked, and we told him—about how Joshua had preached and healed the people, how he had been arrested and executed, and how all our hopes were gone now that three days had passed since his death. His soul had gone from his body and his body gone mysteriously from his tomb, some of the women returning with a tale of angels and some of his inner circle confirming that his corpse was gone.

“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” the stranger exclaimed, and far from being offended, we were amazed at the authority and compassion in his voice. “Didn’t the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And we all began to walk again, and as we walked, he taught us.

I would gladly walk sixty stadia with him again.

We take our places about the table, leaning on our left elbows to eat together. My companion seats our guest in the place of honor, and entreats him to give the blessing for the food. I nod my agreement.

He takes the bread, and gives thanks to God, and breaking it, begins to give it to us.

In a moment, I see everything clearer than I have ever seen before.

As I and my companion both give a strangled cry of wonder and joy, our Teacher and Lord is suddenly gone, the bread that was held in his upraised hand falling to the table with a soft sound.

We leap to our feet and stare at one another, open-mouthed with a joy so large, I feel I will burst for trying to contain it.

“Was your heart burning within you while he talked on the road? While he opened the Scriptures to us?” my companion asks, and I agree. We stand staring at one another, shaking our heads with silly grins plastered on our faces and tears running down

our cheeks.

He *has* risen. I tripped and bumped against him on the road, and he was solid—solid and real as the table between us or the floor beneath our feet. No ghost. Real.

Messiah.

We turn with one accord and leave the room, dashing headlong down the stairs and out of the house. Almost evening or no, we must tell the others. I thought before that I would gladly walk another sixty stadia with this man. Now we will walk, run, *leap* sixty stadia back to Jerusalem to share our good news with our brothers.

The sun is setting in an orange and golden glow as we jog back out into the road, the inhabitants of nearby houses staring at us in bemusement. I see the expression on my companion's face, and we laugh like little children playing at tag down a street of our village. We will walk far in the darkness if we must.

The sun is setting, but only so it can rise again on our joy.

Untitled
Ashley Barner

Though I be old and in my wintertime,
Though whitest snows are fallen on my brow,
Yet still I sense the warmth of April's clime
And scent of apple blossoms on bare boughs.
As when in Feb'ry warm sun shows his face
And fools the birds to sing on ev'ry branch,
And though we know the air must cool apace,
Still out-of-doors we pour on lawns to dance;
Sometimes, though old and timeworn I may be,
The cadences of spring still move my heart.
Warm winds breathe news of budtime yet to be
Though now white winter works his deadly art.
For warm days lead us on to spring surmise,
And breaths of joy still hint that I shall rise.

Almost Into Nothingness
Heather Burke

*“...Her feelings she hides,
Her dreams she can't find,
She's losing her mind,
She can't find her place,
She's losing her faith,
She's fallen from grace...”*

The wind was cold and the light hooded sweatshirt was doing very little to keep me warm as I stood there, alone in the darkness, listening as my headphones, cranked up to full volume, blared the last few lines of a song called “Nobody’s Home”. During the break between tracks, I caught the faint babbling of the blackened creek that had run near the edge of the campus for as long as anyone could recall. I knew the water was cold, freezing cold, and many times as I’d stood there on the bridge, I’d thought of jumping in, praying that the water below would be deep enough that I’d drown, sucked forever beneath the murky surface. The thought came to me again as the next track began to play. *It’d be so easy*, I thought, staring at the water, *so easy*. But it was a foolish thought. I knew the water wasn’t deep enough. The bridge wasn’t far enough off the ground to even hope of breaking my neck upon hitting the icy darkness. If I tried it, all I’d get was broken pride, not to mention getting soaked.

Turning to my right, I began the walk back to my dorm room, having gotten enough of the cold outside. Part of me wanted to curl up in bed and sleep, but I knew better. There were still things to be done before I could even imagine sleeping. *Work for what?* I thought. *Other than to get into fucking grad school, what’s the real point?*

I felt the vibration and heard a muffled rumbling sound as a car flew past me on my left. A shiver ran down my spine as I watched the red tail lights fade from my view.

Car upside down. Glass. Twisted metal. Lifeless body....

Reaching the patio door, I turned down my CD player, keeping the volume up just enough that people’s voices would muffle and I could pretend not to hear anyone who passed. I wasn’t in the mood for conversation, and as I mounted the winding staircase, my head was down, eyes to the floor in front of me. People usually left me alone that way, but then again, they left me alone for other reasons. My long, curly hair was now a shiny black, making my dark brown eyes all the more noticeable and threatening whenever I glared, as well as helping to bring out the natural paleness of my skin, which perhaps made me look as dead as I felt.

But who gave a damn how I felt? Who really cared that inside my chest, it seemed as though a war had broken out. There were knives being thrown, claw like hands seemed to be strangling my lungs, making it difficult at times to breathe, and a sort of ice was crawling over my heart, seeming to stop its pulse.

Going through the main lobby, I faintly heard a few girls chatting to my right amongst the plush couches and chairs, but they were so lost in their rambling that they didn’t notice as I moved past them to the elevator. I pressed the button and watched the yellowish light until it switched off again, signaling that the heavy metal door was going to open. I punched in the appropriate security code and then pressed the whitish gray

button for the third floor. As the elevator rose, I noticed my fingers began to thaw out as the surrounding air got warmer.

Someone was playing the piano in the lounge. I could hear it, somewhat muffled and distorted through the noise in my headphones. The “ding” of the elevator bell shot through them clearly however, and I stepped out, heading right through the room. The piano continued, the tune being something lighter, possibly a minuet of some kind.

He would like that, I thought, my pace slowing just a little and I turned down my headphones a few more notches. I listened as the notes flew up and down, went softer suddenly, only to rise again in a second’s time. *He’d love that*, I thought. *He always loves music like that*.

Pulling back the lavender fire door (everything on the hall was a horrible shade of lavender, the tile floor being an almost sickly shade of pink,) I noticed that the room next to mine, room 315, had its door wide open. The girl who lived there was very kind, and she always had her door open, as if inviting the world to come in and say hello. A smile tugged at the corner of my lips, remembering her kindness. She was the type of person who got along with everyone, never failing to make friends. She had a good and caring heart.

For a moment, I wondered if she’d miss me.

If any of them would miss me.

Moving past her open door, never saying anything, I dug in my pocket for my keys. Just as I had unlocked my door, she poked her head out and said, “Hey! What’s up?”

Reluctantly, I turned, to see her now standing in her doorway, staring at me with a smile on her face. What did I look like to her?

Leave me alone...you can’t help me...

She must have seen something because she asked, “Are you alright? Is everything okay?”

No...are you fucking blind? How could it be alright after...after...

Quickly I broke out a smile, forcing myself to move my mouth into some friendly shape. “Yeah,” I said. “I just went out for a walk. I’m just cold.”

Oh, how little she knew about just how cold I felt. And empty. And hallow.

“Oh,” she replied. “So, how are classes going so far?”

“Fine,” I said with a fake annoyed sigh, “but I’ve got a lot of fuck—” I broke off suddenly, remembering that she didn’t like people cursing, and started again. “I have a lot of work to do for them.”

“That’s no surprise,” she said. “I’m swamped with it.” She sighed, “Well, I just wanted to say hello. I’d better get back to this chemistry stuff.” She turned to go back inside her room, but then stopped and looked at me, “Are you sure you’re all right?” she asked again with more concern in her voice.

No...how could I be? Dying...so close to leaving...

I nodded. “Yeah,” I said, the smile beginning to wane on my face, “I’m fine,” and in one last ditch effort, I made the biggest smile I could muster. “Don’t worry about it. Like I said, it’s cold outside.”

She nodded, disappearing now into her room.

A small sigh escaped me, and my face fell back again as if someone had just let go of my cheeks.

I stepped inside my room, closing the door behind me and bolting the lock.
No one would be getting in.

Turning my CD player off, I was almost shocked by the moment of dead silence that filled my ears. Somewhere, I thought I heard a voice whispering, "Please....don't..."

Then I could hear the piano in the lounge more clearly, and was brought back swiftly to reality, as well as to the war raging inside me. I set the player down, pulled off my black jacket, and hung it on the back of my desk chair. Plopping myself down in the seat, I quickly resumed my "musical drowning," the song that came out of my speakers seeming to reflect my soul exactly:

*"Do you ever feel like breaking down?
Do you ever feel out of place?
Like somehow you just don't belong?
Like no one understands you?*

*Do you ever wanna run away?
Do you lock yourself in your room?
With the radio on, turned up so loud,
That no one hears you screaming...?"*

I got up and walked slowly to the full length mirror on the back of my door, trying to look into my own eyes as I moved, hoping in desperation that the battle from within didn't show. At first, all I could make out was the black long sleeve shirt; the low cut blue jeans, and black boots that clad my five foot frame. Even from that distance, I knew I looked horrible; my arms seeming dead at my sides, my shoulders slightly forward and down, and this became even more evident once I'd reached the reflective glass, my face coming into focus.

My dark eyes were soft with sadness, and had the slight hint of dark circles under them. I'd never slept very well, always being awoken by nightmares from my past, and from the more recent present. Nightmares of people dying. Nightmares of my closest and dearest friends perishing in some horrific way while I was forced to stand by and watch. Horrors from my childhood. My father when he'd yell at me, curse me out. Children laughing in my face. Blurry images of a man of twenty-three, who'd taken advantage of me at the age of eighteen.

The song continued in the background:

*"No, you don't know what it's like,
When nothing feels alright,
You don't know what it's like,
To be like me..."*

*To be hurt,
To feel lost,
To be left out in the dark,
To be kicked,
When you're down,
To feel like you've been pushed around,
To be on the edge of breaking down,*

And no one's there to save you..."

I reached up to rub my eyes, a small disgusted groan escaping my lips, realizing that the warmth in the room was drawing the urge to sleep over me more tightly. But no, there would be plenty of time to sleep. There would be enough time for everything where I was going.

Again I wondered if anyone would miss me.

If anyone was going to cry for me.

Going back to my desk, I moved my eyes over the various photographs that sat on the ugly lavender shelves to the right. They settled on a taller man with blond hair and blue eyes, dressed in a black shirt and pants. I was standing next to him in a black dress, a smile on my face. We were holding each other's hands, looking directly into the camera, an ice sculpture of a swan behind us on a white draped table. That guy didn't work out, and a small shiver ran up my back as I caught the faint glimmer of a silver ring on my left hand. The same band was on his left hand.

I shook my head. How foolish I had been.

My thoughts ran back to my father suddenly. The heavy set man with strong arms and large hands. A man whom in my youth had frightened me beyond comprehension. The only memories I had of him were when he was angry, standing over me, intimidating me, making me feel like a cringing dog. He'd never hit me, but his words seemed to do more damage than his fists ever could. The degrading phrases and endless stream of curses that emerged from his mouth seemed to go right through me, like a million rusty nails. All I ever remembered of him was his hard brown eyes, seeming to pierce into my soul, seeming to burn me alive from the inside out, and the harsh words continued to resound in my ears. "Stop crying!" he'd say "My God you're so pathetic! You're such a baby....do you whine to your mom like that? Are you really that much of a 'mommy's girl'?"

I narrowed my eyes in rage. *You fucking son of a bitch! You never gave a damn! I was never good enough...will never be good enough! You'll always hate me! You'll never see me for who I am! You'll always see me for my defects, my limitations! You fucking bastard! Why don't you give a damn about your own daughter? Have you not seen what I've become? It was never good enough...I was never good enough...never be good enough...*

I sighed softly, letting my gaze loosen again as the anger died away. It didn't matter. He wasn't going to miss me. I'd just be one less person, one less good-for-nothing, incompetent freak, and for a second, I thought he would be happy that I'd be gone.

My eyes then drifted downwards, to the bottom shelf, where a seven by five photo sat in a dark wooden frame. It was a closer up image of me and my best friend. It was kind of an awkward shot, since he'd taken the picture himself, stretching his arm out in front of us before capturing the image. I was to the right, my head tilted a little towards him, my eyes bright with happiness, a warm smile spread across my face.

How long had it been since I'd looked like that?

How long since I'd felt that way?

The memory seemed so distant now, the feeling so detached, that as much as I tried to recapture it, it slipped through my grasp every time. Part of me longed to feel that

way again, to smile like that again, but the hope for it was already dead, shot down by something dark and hallow.

He had somewhat of a rounder face as he smiled. He had lighter skin despite him being half Native American, and he had dark hair, which I knew was long, even though it couldn't be seen well in the darkness of the background. It was tied behind his head in a low ponytail, and I could make out the very top of the collar of his turquoise shirt. His dark eyes were looking a little to the one side, but only slightly, and they seemed to be staring out at me from the frames of his glasses, staring out from the pane of glass itself, directly into my face.

I'd fallen in love with him months before, but the spark never got ignited. He just didn't like me that way. But that wasn't the cause of the pain that was building inside my chest again as I stared at his image. No, this pain was brought from much deeper, by something much more frightening. A week ago, he'd been in an accident while riding in the back of a friend's car. I'd heard the news from one of his roommates when I'd tried to call him the day after. They'd told me they didn't know exactly what had happened to cause the accident, in which the car had flipped and skidded off the road, but people were speculating that it may have had something to do with ice. My best friend now lay in a hospital in intensive care, hooked up to a horrid heart monitor and a breathing machine, unconscious and unmoving. I was told he was in a coma, and that no one knew if he'd come out of it or not. They said that all I could do was hope for the best.

I hardly ever hoped for the best. I was always too busy fearing the worst.

It was another tragedy, another friend seeming to have been swallowed up in the shadows of life, another frightening event to add to my nightmares.

I imagined the scene in my head. Car hitting black ice. Hitting the curb and flipping. Shooting off the road, sliding to a halt on its back. My friend trapped upside down inside, hanging from a seat belt. His eyes shut, his limbs seeming lifeless. Shards of shattered glass embedded in his hair....blood....cut on his face....

My heart was racing and my body was shaking.

I tried to tear my eyes off his face, tried to pull myself away from the image that was beginning to blur now, as I felt the hot tears lingering at the corners of my eyes. I had just heard only hours before that even the doctors were expecting the worst for him, and that it wasn't looking good.

This can't be happening, I thought, not to you. Not to one whose heart is so big, not to someone who cares so much.

The only light in my entire life, the only person who had offered me a way out of the dark, couldn't possibly be this close to going out. The idea was almost unfathomable. It was too much. On top of everything else, on top of all my other horrors, on top of all the other people who had let me slip through the cracks. God was going to take away my only light on earth, was going to leave me here to suffer alone, detached from all the ties I'd ever made.

I couldn't let that happen. If my only light was leaving, I was going to follow it across the divide.

I had resolved to myself on that bridge what I was going to do. I had made up my mind right there. Nothing was worth the torture and torment of the endless depression spells, the loneliness, the hallow, cold void inside of me. I was tired, but it wasn't entirely because of the sleepiness. I was simply tired of life, of losing every close connection I

ever made. I was tired of feeling lost and confused, tired of feeling like I'd lived a million lifetimes over, died a million times over. I was tired of the guilt and the shame from my various mistakes and blunders.

I was tired of it all. My friends were gone. My father didn't give a shit one way or the other. And now, the only person I had ever trusted enough, the only person I cherished with my entire soul, was being slowly ripped from my grasp.

I was alone. There was simply nothing left to keep me tied to the world of the living.

I moved to my dresser, pulling open the top drawer:

*“...I don't know what's worth fighting for,
Or why I have to scream,
I don't know why I instigate,
And say what I don't mean,
I don't know how I got this way,
I know it's not alright,
So I'm breaking the habit
I'm breaking the habit—tonight...”*

I pulled from the drawer a knife.

It had a dark brown wooden handle, with gold plating on either end. I had swiped it two or three years before when I'd found it inside a cooler of half rotten food. I'd worked at a horse farm then.

The two of us had visited the farm a month earlier. He'd loved the horses....he'd used to ride horses he'd told me.....

I'd been told to clean out the cooler, which had been left over from a horse show. Having dumped out its contents into the grass, there the knife had fallen at my feet, glittering in the warm July sunshine. Unfortunately, I had never been able to get the rotten smell of watermelon to fade completely from it, and as I held it in my hands, my nose scrunched up as the faint lingering scent stung my nostrils.

But it was no matter. I had a blade and, smell or no, that was all I required.

Turning, I moved back to my desk, reaching for the knob on my speakers. No one would hear me.

I wouldn't let them hear me scream.

The song came out louder, the base booming, I being able to feel the vibrations slightly in the floor:

*“Clutching my cure,
I tightly lock the door,
I try to catch my breath again,
I hurt much more,
Than any time before,
I had no options left again...”*

I gave one last look at the photograph of my friend, the horrifying image of him hanging from that car flashing up in my mind. “See ya,” I whispered softly, moving

slowly towards my bed, where I sank down on the floor, my back to the wooden post. I flipped up the blade:

*“I don’t know what’s worth fighting for...
Or why I have to scream...”*

The silver glittered in the light, the sharpened edge close to my left wrist. I closed my eyes and let the memories come racing back. I let the blurry images seep into my soul, rip apart my heart, and destroy me inside. I allowed them to rampage, tearing up any ounce of will I had left. I felt my heart race suddenly then tighten along with my lungs. Breath was coming more rapidly, as I seemed to be suffocating on the thoughts, on the images, on the secret fears and past expectations, past hopes, past dreams. I felt tears forming at the corners of my eyes; a knot was building in my throat, making it even harder to get the air into my burning lungs:

*“I’ll paint it on the walls,
Cause I’m the one at fault,
I’ll never fight again,
And this is how it ends...”*

I saw that twenty-three-year-old in front of me. Shaggy brown hair stuck to his head with sweat. His voice creeping into my recollection, sounding like nails on a chalkboard. Breath raspy against my ear as he stole from me, as he took from me everything: my esteem, my voice, my sanity.

I saw my father. Enraged and yelling at the top of his voice. “What were you thinking?! Don’t you use your head? You’re so pathetic! Can’t you do anything right?!”

I saw that blond haired man who had promised me the world. “I love you,” he said softly, placing that silver ring on my finger. “My promise to you.....”

My friend, lying in the hospital bed, lingering somewhere between this world and the next. I could almost hear the heart monitor, that horrid ringing sound signaling that life was present. But for how much longer?

I felt the sting as the blade cut through the skin, felt the warmth of blood as it trickled down my hand. The whirlwind of memories continued.

Children laughed. Teachers scolded.

Twenty-three-year-old holding me down...hurting me....

My father’s hard eyes, his face. “You’re so pathetic!”

Horses....piano.....my friend’s face.....his smile...his eyes...his laugh. Flashes of a car...glass.....blood.....

The memories rushed in and out of each other, until I could barely see them clearly anymore, and they became one great blur of sounds, images, and feelings of fear.

The knife went deeper.

I screamed.

A voice. Through the pain and the memories, through the piercing sound, came the words, “Open your eyes. Look at me. Please...”

I felt a hand on my right one, pulling the knife from my flesh. To my surprise, I let it be pried away, and heard the metal ring as it hit the floor. “Open your eyes,” the voice beckoned, “Please...look at me....”

I realized the room had gone quiet now. The music had died away, and there was

only silence, except for this male voice coaxing me. “Please...” it begged, “please...”

Slowly, I opened my eyes.

There he was in front of me, his long dark hair pulled back, his dark eyes peering into mine, full of fear and inner concern. He looked as he had the day the photograph had been taken, dressed the same in his turquoise shirt and black pants, except I noticed the sliver dragon pendant I’d given him hanging around his neck on a chain. He was kneeling in front of me, holding my left wrist now in his hands. The touch felt real, but how could that be? He wasn’t here, it was only my imagination. He was dying, leaving me behind forever. This was impossible.

The blood still flowed, but as the wound disappeared beneath his fingers, so did the blood. The only traces now were those drops that had hit the floor beside me. I moved my eyes back to his face, looking through the wire of his glasses, hardly believing what I saw.

“No,” he said to me. He shook his head, “No, I won’t let you.”

“How....” I whispered, continuing to stare into his eyes. “How....” I attempted to start again.

“You can’t do this,” he went on, never seeming to notice what I’d said.

“Please..... it’s not worth it....”

“Why?” I asked suddenly, my own voice startling me somewhat, “No one gives a damn anyway. No one needs me.”

“Yes they do,” he said, “not everything is hopeless. I promised you things would get better. Didn’t you believe me?” He paused for a moment, taking off the necklace, and placing it around my neck. “Please listen to me....” His eyes were brimming with tears, “Haven’t I shown you there is still light despite the darkness? Haven’t I shown you that someone cares about you?” I saw a tear slid down his face, something I had never seen before. “I care about you.....doesn’t that mean anything? I’m your friend.....I told you I’d always be there for you....”

“You’re dead,” I said, “you’re not coming back to me. You’re disappearing! You promised me you’d never! You’re nothing but a ghost!” I was crying now, my sobs shaking my entire body. “You’re never coming back!”

I felt the press of his fingers on the side of my face. God, they felt so real! So much like I remembered! But how could this possibly be?

“I still need you...” he said, “you can’t go.....” and in a flash, the image disappeared.

I woke with a start, my heart racing, my breathing rapid, I seeming not to be able to get enough air into my lungs. All around me was blackness. I felt my left wrist. There was no blood, there was no wound, and there was no knife. My heart was beginning to slow as I pushed back the covers and slid to the edge of my bed. I moved to flip on the light switch next to my door. The white light cascaded over me as I caught my reflection in the mirror.

It had all been a dream, another nightmare. He had not been here. He still lay in that hospital. Then I caught in the mirror’s reflection the drops of blood staining the pink floor next to my bedpost. Turning, I saw the blood stained knife lying a few feet away. It was then I looked back into the mirror to see the dragon hanging from its chain around my neck.

The phone rang, almost making me jump out of my skin. Hands shaking, I moved for the receiver. "Hello?" I said in a shaky voice.

"He's awake," the voice said with relief and happiness on the other end. "He's awake, and he's asking for you."

Becoming Me

C. S. Calusic

“I’m sick of it, Joan! I’m sick of all this ‘being a woman’ bullshit! I never asked for this. It’s so unfair.”

“Alex, what in God’s name are you talking about?”

“I hate being female . . . there’s really nothing good about it. When you’re a girl you hit that wonderful age called puberty where you develop bumps on your chest and eventually you have to deal with blood staining your panties twelve times a year. I mean what’s the use of breasts anyway? I always found them to be a nuisance. They were especially annoying when playing basketball, softball, horseback riding, and dance. They’d bounce around making the sport that much more difficult to do. And then there are the excruciating cramps twelve times a year. God, mine are so unbearable that it hurts to even walk. All I seem to want to do when I have cramps is lie in bed in the fetal position and eat a gallon of chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream. And it only gets worse, Joan.”

“Well, it’s not all horrible, Alex. We get to experience the miracle of child birth.”

“*Miracle?! Did you just say miracle?! Miracle my butt. I wish guys could experience the joy of child birth. I wish guys could get knocked up and have to carry something the size of a watermelon inside their abdomens. Oh, and then there’s the miracle of morning sickness . . . which for most women is not only in the morning but afternoon and evening as well. I mean who wouldn’t want to experience the miracle of feeling terribly nauseous every single day and vomiting into the porcelain throne?!*”

Joan just rolled her eyes and let out an annoyed sigh.

“I’m not trying to whine, Joan, I just want some empathy. I mean you’re a woman too . . . and quite frankly . . . it sucks! I mean after your water breaks and you either have your abdomen ripped open to have a cesarean or have metal forceps to pull that child right out your small hole it only continues to get worse. Eventually you go through the ‘Change of Life.’ I don’t know why they call it that. According to my mom it’s horrible . . . the whole menopause thing sucks. My mom tells me that she gets these awful hot flashes where she feels as though she’s in the middle of the Serengeti Desert melting like a pop sickle. Not only are there the hot flashes, but one day I caught my mom crying at a Downey fabric softener commercial. When I asked her what is wrong she whimpered, “It’s just so cute . . . that snuggle bear is just so darling.” I don’t know about you, Joan, but I don’t want my hormone imbalance to cause me to sob at corny TV commercials.”

A wry smile came to Joan’s face.

“Really Joan, guys have it *so* incredibly easy. What’s the worst thing they have to worry about . . . prostate problems? Well we have to worry about cervical cancer, uterine cancer, breast cancer . . . just to name a few of the infinite. Gosh, guys make me utterly peeved. They have no clue how much women have to suffer. Women have to go through so much awful pain. Guys are so lucky and so incredibly oblivious to our pain. Seriously, Joan, if I could have my entire femaleness removed . . . uterus, ovaries, cervix, breasts, the whole gamut, I would.”

“Whelp, Alex, until you fly to Thailand and have some quack doctor remove your breasts and uterus I guess you’ll just have to deal with being female.”

“I guess you’re right, Joan. But really, doesn’t being a woman suck?!”

Joan just smiled and let a soft laugh escape her lips. My ranting was comical but proved my point all too well.

I Dream On Biva Chapagain

I dreamt

I was not a pretty or "cute looking girl" growing up or even now. Moreover, having been brought up in a family where my lecturer dad's sole income was barely enough run the household expenses I felt that I was deprived of the many things that I used to wish for in my childhood. I felt even more miserable when my contemporary cousins, whose dads were very well-to-do businessmen in the country, were endowed with every conceivable amenity. They both went to probably the best and most expensive school in the country, in terms of quality of education and other resources, while I walked miles to get to school, whether in rain or under a scorching sun. All three of us grew together, only difference was they looked prettier day by day while I was the same (not pretty). In every family gathering they got the better attention than I did, and I used to feel pretty miserable about it, especially when I was still a little kid.

I started growing like a tomboy, playing basketball and not at all caring for my outer appearance. No guys ever looked at me twice in my teens like they do to the other girls. So the days went on and left me totally wrecked because I could not and did not speak out my feelings to anyone. However, I always had a dream in some blurry fringes of my mind that someday this would change.

I realized

The seasons changed, I got admitted to a very prestigious missionary school in South India for my Secondary school education. After four long days' journey, which was the first for me, I began to realize and accept that there was something more in the real than what I had dreamed all along. My new domicile provided me the opportunity to newer environment with simple and friendly faces. These folks, for the first time in my life, made me feel different. They helped me unbury my potential, develop and express them.

In the meantime, I started reading Bible for the first time in my life, which I was never exposed to as being born in a Hindu family. I could feel the gradual change inside me (realization of the real purpose of my life.). Every verse from the Bible made me contemplative. Then I realized the futility of my previous dreams. I was trying to become someone I truly wasn't and that life is very much more than what I was dreaming of. I realized I was not meant to have everything that the world had to offer. I realized that I could be an angel through my deeds and need not by my appearance. I could be someone second to none. I could radiate life because I was a life!

Thus, I changed

I started to focus more on constructive and creative thoughts with compassionate acts. It seemed as if all of a sudden everything has changed for me. The world looked beautiful. I started to feel good about myself and the life that I was endowed with. I wonder how

many people really think about the needs of the have-nots. How many reflect upon the fact that millions go hungry every night and cry during sleep, while we eat heartily and snuggle in the cozy warmth of our bed. Our priorities have blinded us and ripped us off of affection and compassion for each other. We seemed to be living dead, just living to satisfy the wacky whims of our parochial egos.

I dare to dream

Now, I dare to dream of a world where humanity would prevail and people would love each other without any expectations leaving all petty selfishness. Though it's difficult to observe that, I dare to make my dream a reality. After all, this life doesn't come twice- as my experiences have taught me- all that I have to do, I should try!

My Refusal
Rebecca Cheek

I refuse
To be abused
By the hand
Of any man
Don't treat me
Cruelly
You don't own
I'm not on loan
Don't talk trash
See this gash?
My soul ripped
Dignity stripped
No more now
I forever vow
Respect to get
I won't let
You defeat me
Don't you see?
I said no!
Just go
I finally choose
I won't be used!

Ugly
Rebecca Cheek

Ugly,
Shatter the mirror
Consumed with despair
Can't look, the pain
No one wants an ugly
Duckling
Compliments come,
Doubt will not flee
The "joke"
Like a knife furrows deep
And twists.
I want to scream
In agony
When will it end?
I am but filthy refuse
Singing my sad song
To the world

Christmas Vanitas
Elizabeth Clever

The ache of the ephemeral:
Transience girded in green,
Wrapped in red.
Church bells chime: *Thrumm, Throm...*
Echoic, metallic, sonorous;
Tintinnabulations swell proudly.
Like fading peals borne of silence,
Passing through, passing through
I am but passing through.
That fabled “winter wonderland”
Is but a fleeting scene:
Tiny towns perfectly preserved
Within a crystalline sheath,
A suspension of thought, sense, reason
With each draw of any icy breath.
Dispersing puffs fade
Into the silent night.
As a warm breath long forgotten by frigidity,
Passing through, passing through
I am but passing through.
My body is embraced by flickering lights
Piercing clear, starless darkness,
Illuminating storefronts and boulevards.
In the midst of bliss,
Eternity seems to beckon:
A longing for the Lamb,
The purity of things unseen, unheard, untouched.
Wrapped in perfect stillness,
Blustering breezes force their way
Rudely in my wake.
I must journey on,
Following the muse of temporality
Into the darkness preceding the Light.
My weary heart relinquishes to reality
All my dreams of constancy.
Sighing, I join in the carol of Fate.
Passing through, passing through
I am but passing through.

Ode to Venus

Elizabeth Clever

Venus.
An astonishing nighttime orb
Of glimmering, glowing green.
Silently she rises to greet her firmament:
That empty, vast sea of darkness
That she longs to fill with her striking beams.
O, seamlessly rotund rising star!
So grand a display she makes at night
That the stars become jealous
And even the full cratered moon
Has met its celestial rival.
Had she a mouth, she could tell the sky
Of where she hides in the daytime brightness,
Where blue meets white in sweet array.
Venus, where do you go?
Had she eyes, she could see
A shooting star above her,
Or a shining city below.
O, but she will never tell!
Not the sapient, vigilant Venus.
No, she shall sit in silent secrecy
Hidden by the sun's majesty;
Only to waken from her daytime slumbers;
The ambience returning to that familiar face;
Her radiance to return to the night sky
A thousand times more brilliant than any star.

Three Spooky Tales (told in 50 words or less)....

Little Girls

Michael G. Cornelius

My mother warned me about men. She did. “Little Red, you watch yourself, girl. You getting all grown up.” I thought I was just visiting Granny. Now this hairy chest, these strong arms, this ravenous mouth...

My mother warned me about men.

But she never warned me about wolves.

One Good Trick...

Michael G. Cornelius

Old trick. Wait till she goes downstairs to make breakfast. The ugly ones *always* make breakfast. Swoop down on the medicine chest—some painkillers, an anti-depressant—they’ll sell well. Hmm. What’s this one? Maybe just a sample...

“Thanks. Saves me the trouble of putting that strychnine into your juice.”

Crowning Terror

Michael G. Cornelius

“You haven’t been flossing.”

“Sure, I have.”

“Oh, please, there’s some gore stuck between your fangs right now.”

“That’s leftover from lunch. Honest.”

“Right. We already had to do a crown on the left fang. Your right fang will need a root canal if you don’t floss.”

“Yes, Dr. Goldstein.”

Reflection

Jess Elser

how is it that my reflection is not at all me
I stranger I see everyday
someone inadequate
features all skewed and imperfect
wide-eyed with fear and loathed by all
a portrait of all that we mock

then I wake up one morning to a perfect portrait
a beautiful, luminous face shining back at me
a capable and strong willed individual breaking free
facing the world with indomitable spirit

this person staring back at me
filled with all the perfection I once longed for
I realize is in fact my reflection
in the mirror that has been cleaned

The Haunting Past
Jess Elser

I find myself glancing behind
the past haunts my every step
a silent prowler
invisible yet there to the senses
when I am clean the past splatter me with mud
follows me and whispers to me
telling me the lack of worth I have earned
reminding me of my inadequacy
it measures me against all others to whom I can not be compared
and shows I continuously come up short
the past lurks...still following
I close my eyes and envision it
when my eyes are finally open and I awake from it
the world is dismal
I stand alone
breathing in the darkness
for sometimes when we close our eyes to focus on the past
all the things in front of us disappear

The Rain

Jess Elser

How can she go from being left alone crying innocent tears in the rain to standing in the rain completely restored letting each raindrop cleanse her skin as it gently falls? She stood alone out there in the darkness. In the rain. She let her head fall back and looked up to the sky feeling each tiny bead of water slide down her face and trace her every curve. This is where she comes to think. How does she deserve any of this? However, God's creation assures her repeatedly that life is full of unearned beauty that she could never comprehend until it is experienced. That is why she comes to hear the thunder and drench herself in the water that she feels is so cleansing and comforting.

If everyone understood the majesty of God's creation as she understood it, then maybe they would know the beauty of what she is feeling now. Nobody understands because it does not make sense that a girl who was so broken can be restored with three simple words. A girl who was on her knees in that very rain pleading for it all to be taken away from her. The girl who was so trusting once, only to have it shattered before her eyes. The girl who cried out to God because she didn't know what she hated more....God...or herself. Now here she was in this rain of mercy whispering a soft thanks over and over again. Repeatedly it slides over her tongue and out through her lips. Thank you for giving me another chance. Thank you for opening my eyes. Thank you...for love.

Love? The one thing that had always brought her to her knees in pain...now the only praise leaving her lips. It's amazing how she met him one day and thought nothing of it, and now he's what keeps her humble. He means the world to her, and she only wishes he could feel her heartbeat every time he slides his hand into hers or looks into her eyes and makes everything inside of her tremble. She wishes he knew that every night he is the last thought that runs through her weary mind and the first one that greets her each morning. She wishes that he knew that in each kiss, she feels so unsure of where she is and how she got there, but knows, where she is going and where she wants to be. She wishes he knew.

But perhaps he does. Because maybe...just maybe...he feels the same way. Maybe thoughts of her race through his mind day after day, and maybe her touch makes him tremble. Maybe he looks at her and everything melts away and he forgets where he is and all he knows is that he loves her. Maybe her beauty overwhelms him and he wonders how he ever found her. Maybe every time he says those three words, it feels like the first time. Maybe. She smiles and begins to hum softly as she walks back to her home...in the rain.

Distance: A Story of Person and Place

Rebecca Heston

BEYOND THE ORCHARD

South Mountain has a reputation for being isolated. The nearest town is eight miles away, nestled safely down in a valley below her forested skirts. Atop the mountain's summit, beside a line of scraggly trees abused by angry wind, a small bundle of houses stands far from society. These homes are too few and too scattered to adopt the name of a community; mail for the inhabitants is addressed to the valley, and they call themselves residents of the Mountain. They are associated with the woods climbing her lonely sides, called wild and distant like some feral people of a forlorn land. They are remote, like their lone mountain on the outskirts of the Appalachian belt.

I moved to South Mountain with my family in 1990 and began public school one year later. The school was located in the closest valley, although it was still half of an hour's drive away. The bus rides were long, close to an hour, to cover the great distance. I had always found them relaxing, a time to listen to music or read. The large yellow vehicles were my link to friendship; they carried me daily from loneliness to companionship. My family traveled little, so I became easily amazed by different locations. I was a Mountain Kid and easily impressionable.

My own two feet could carry me to no purposeful destinations when I was younger. I would watch the orchards of the valley slide past the school bus windows, knowing I had no place in the farming worlds so far away. The smell of ripe Macintosh was foreign to me, though seasonal tradition to my friends. I only knew the untamed woods of my home, the odor of rotting leaves or the occasional musk of fox.

"What is that sound, mom?"

"Deer running through the woods."

I wanted to be like the deer running away.

TOO FAR TO DRIVE

"You have to join track!"

Ronda said it; Liza said it. All my friends wanted me to join their favorite sport. For three years in high school, they offered fun stories from their track and field practices. I listened, always remembering their previous exclamations of injustice upon joining. The first year, they had all wanted to quit; they had all wanted to get away from demanding coaches and unjust competitions. Yet, they kept practicing, and encouraged me to do the same.

"I can't drive to practice," I told them. Cars killed people who were close. I knew a girl who died in our junior year, killed instantly when another driver tried to pass. He never saw the oncoming car. After that, no one was the same. I watched each of my friends die slowly, to be replaced by people I did not know.

As the years passed, my high school friends began to attain vehicles of their own. I would see them driving from school, driving a mere five minutes away. I still rode the bus, feeling my skin stick to leather seats if the sun grew angry, or I curled into the leather for warmth in winter. I often pondered the nature of things as the seasons rolled on outside the windows. From a distance, time travels quickly.

On the mountain, loggers began to cut large stands. It started with the oaks, plentiful on the mountain. In my senior year, they decimated the green hemlock stand a mile from my home. It was said they were stopping blight by cutting diseased trees, but hemlock is valuable wood. Every day, more of the lush lively trees were felled. I watched as the land's true nature was ripped from her, as she was exploited to provide warmth for cold stoves. At last, the loggers moved on, leaving a small patch of trees around a pool. The sun shone brilliant rays through the few remaining trees onto that pool, as though an artist's painting had been brought to life. But I could not look at the picture; the comforting depth behind it had been taken.

My friends often turned to me for answers in high school. I gave them, but my ideas were discarded and burned. By my senior year, I had no answers left.

THE EIGHT MILE HIKE

In 2005, my disgust had driven me to anger. After watching an insulting video that was a senior class requirement, I left the school to board a familiar yellow bus. But the mellow bus only hinted of more closed spaces inside. Young boys had begun to rule my moving refuge, starting fights across the whole vehicle. I was accustomed to fights, but they had often been centered in one seat. I did not want to become involved.

I decided to do something I had long wanted to do. Turning instead to the sidewalk, I began to walk. The road to my home was eight miles long, and so I had never walked it before. That day, I decided I would. The weather was wonderful for a hike, and I felt relieved immediately upon leaving school grounds. Slowly, with my old backpack strapped to my thin shoulders, I began to place my feet on every mile of road I had so often rode over. The asphalt was continuous beneath me, occasionally broken but always present. The air was fresh with clean breaths of spring, and the ground sloped steadily up beneath me. I felt encouraged; the mountain was lifting me higher with every step. She wanted me to climb.

Beside me, the scenery moved on much slower than I was accustomed. The orchards were soon far behind, but the trees kept vigil over me. They were the same trees I had known since childhood, but I began to see them through older eyes. The towering oaks were suddenly short and young, still starting a new forest after being clear-cut in the forties. They had already succeeded the white pines in many places, but their branches would barely hold a bobcat. They were thin woods, almost sickly, though there was much hope in the small shoots of spring.

On my trek, several people had asked if I needed help. They couldn't understand that I was merely walking. To them, distance could not be covered on two lonely feet. In the hollow of the mountain, where roads lead away to Ortanna, I was stopped by an oppressively black police car. The driver was a middle-aged woman with rotting teeth from a chain-smoking habit. She was one of only three police in the valley, and she was stubborn. One of my friends had called, and she was obligated to drive me home. I could not refuse.

I tell myself now that I walked all the way home, because the distance was part of me that day. Detachment was also strong in the valley, though in the form of misunderstandings. I had conquered the distance between an immortal mountain and the valley below her. My friends had failed to conquer their own distances.

MOVING AWAY

In August of 2005, I moved to Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. This was a mere sixteen miles from the small bundle of houses atop South Mountain, but it was a whole different world to my young woman's spirit. I would be living on a college campus, sharing my room with a roommate from a different country. There would be no distance between my fellow students and myself. The Mountain had been left, and I had finally turned to the valley below.

At college, I learned about many things. Among the educational statistics and literary information, I discovered the existence of other mountains. Giant peaks reach for the clouds across the Earth's ground. Some points are perpetually snow-covered, bathed in the mists of the heavens around them. I remembered South Mountain with its adolescent tree stands and juvenile formation. It became common and small in the shifting memories of my mind, though its beauty was still unrivaled.

"We are proud of you," my parents often said that first semester. They had never studied intently or sought to change the world. They never traveled far away from South Mountain. I was reaching higher for goals than they had ever conceived I could. And I stood tall when I came home.

The end of the semester held many trials, including arguments with cherished friends. Yet, I kept standing. In November, I finally realized that no person could hurt me; the frightening abyss of distance no longer affected my actions. All that I did was influenced by the more powerful knowledge that I always carry a mountain inside my heart: the immutable strength and beauty of a Wilson Woman.

I Went to Sleep Last Night
Caryn Watson

Too tired to work any longer
I laid me down to sleep
Taking with me the cares of life
I went suddenly into the deep

Suddenly I awoke
The light was bright as day
My mind was thinking one thing
My body went its own way

My heart it beat so rapidly
My head became so light
The deafening silence kept me
Otherwise scream I might

My body back in its place
I laid me down to sleep
The light became a trace
As I went suddenly into the deep

Suddenly I awoke
The darkness pierced the night
I grasped for comprehension
My breath heavy as if in a fight

My heart it beat so faintly
My mind could not comprehend
My senses were weak in the darkness
I wished that the battle would end

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray thee Lord my soul do keep
Those were the words I said
Before I went suddenly into the deep

I did not awake
The battle continued through the night
The angel stood and protected me
The darkness shadowed by light

What a wonderful morning
What beauty and delight
What angel up in heaven

Kept me when I went to sleep last night

If I Only Knew
Susana A.F. Gore

I feel lonely and empty
I'm hungry and thirsty for you
How can I survive with out you?
You are my only hope, my only strength
My only love

You who know my past
And hold my present
And behold my future
How can I survive with out you?

You who love me more
Than I wish you would
Who know my hurts, my pain and see my scars.
Yet you still love me.

If I only knew what you want for me
If I only knew what my future holds
If I knew what I really want
If I really knew what it is that I'm searching for?

I don't have the answers
I only have you
And in you I'll wait
For you have the answers.

I come searching for you
To you broken I come
Hungry and thirsty
Searching for your love I come.

Searching for your tender words
That reassures me that you are with me
Loving me, helping me
To see the beauty of every passing moment,

Even when it is hard to see
Remind me that I well be ok
Because you are with me
Teaching me to be more like you.

You prove me wrong

Susana A.F. Gore

When I less believe you,
You believed in me
When I need it you,
You were by my side

When I lay down
You cover me
When I cry
You comforted me

When I was alone and desperate
You brought a stranger to me
Later I did not realize it
That it was you

When I need it love
You pour out yours to me
When I doubted
You proved yourself to me

When I was wounded
You healed each wound
With time I learned to lean
More and amore on you

No Longer By Yourself You'll Walk
Susana A.F. Gore

In the record of history there has been a man
Who walked with God and was sinless.
On the cross of Calvary 2,000 years ago,
He paid the price for you and me.

He's alive and by your side.
He offers eternal life
To those who open up their hearts
And let him in.

He will forgive your sins
Therefore you can forgive yourself,
He has overlooked your sins,
And offers you a new beginning.

No longer by yourself you'll walk
Because he will be right by your side.
And he will give you what you need
And never ever leave your side.

He's more than a mother or a father to you
He's caring and compassionate towards you
Because he wants the best for you
He'll guide you and discipline you with love.

In times of trouble he'll be with you
And when the load is too heavy,
He'll carry that for you.
Or he'll carry you on his shoulders.

In times of happiness and prosperity don't forget him,
He also wants to rejoice with you.
So call on him at anytime
He wants to hear and be with you.

He wants to hold you near his heart
And give you all the love you never had.
He wants to mend your broken heart,
And give you a new head start.

Darkness

Dorothy Marie Malinowski

Darkness consumes
suffocating black
Lost and lonely
never look back
Blank Empty
hope all gone
Fear scared
is this the end
Alone, lost, darkness, fear, scared, empty.

Friends

Dorothy Marie Malinowski

Times together
lost in space
Fleeting moments
Never to replace
Having laughs
and sugar galore
Giggle fits
and so much more
Important you are
All of us the same
No longer lost
Without a name.

Love's True Light

Dorothy Marie Malinowski

Once upon a time, many, many years ago, in a far away land called Wilsonville, everything seemed perfect. Now in this land of Wilsonville there was a wonderful princess named Rachael. She was not only the fairest maiden in the land, but she was the sweetest, like apple blossoms on a warm spring day. In addition, she was also the most treasured daughter of her mother and father, the king and queen, and the jewel of the court's eye.

Shortly before her sixteenth birthday, a dark cloud fell across the land and an evil presence became known to the people. Their days felt like night and their nights felt far worse, filling the wonderful people of Wilsonville with a loss of hope and full of despair.

Now this feeling crept into the very soul of the land. People and animals started to wither and die; all felt death's grip, except the princess. Her sweetness like apple blossoms was just what the village needed. She walked through the town filling it with her warmth and strength.

In another kingdom very far from the first, there lived a prince, now he was known to all as an evil elfin, not really human, not really magical, but unwanted by all.

Now no one really knows whether the prince, Jordan, was truly evil or not. What was known about him is that he's a sad lonely soul with an iced over heart. It was said that to be in the same room with him, one could feel the cold of the grave itself. However, he was not always like this.

Now when he was younger a horrible curse was placed on his head by his mother the priestess Awrem. She considered her son, the prince, as the single sign of the end of her power and for this she had to do away with the child. However, his captor felt pity on him, and could not kill him. When the priestess found this out, a curse was placed.

Since it was the prince who sent the dark cloud, he couldn't have the princess messing up all his plans. Therefore, he did what any cruel being would do, and he stole her away in the dead of the never-ending night. He took her to his dark castle, which was guarded by a dark dragon as well as himself and his curse.

Now the prince knew that the king had until the start of winter to save the princess or Rachael would belong to him for all eternity. The king was worried what would he do without the princess of apple blossoms. She was his heir and the savior of the land. Soon he made the only choice he could. He sent out a decree 'The one knight who brought the princess back would have her hand in marriage.' It was tacked up in every Village Square, tavern and stable. Surely, someone would save her. Soon knights from all over came and tried, but the evil prince was bent on making the kidnapped princess his bride.

Soon the hours grew colder; victory was in the grasp of Prince Jordan. Nothing was going to stand in his way. Tears rolled down Rachael's cheek as all hope of ever being saved was becoming lost.

Back at the kingdom, a new knight walked into the throne room. This knight was smaller than most, in fact this wasn't a knight at all. This was a stable worker, the one in charge of the princess's horse, disguised as a knight for a chance to save the princess. The knight asked the king to place his decree in writing, complete with the royal seal, half afraid that the promise wouldn't be honored if the truth came out. Even though the

king thought this was a silly idea, he agreed and did what was asked. The knight thanked the king and set out to save the princess. At least the easy part was over.

The days and nights mounted and yet the knight continued. Our brave knight kept walking all the while attempting to prepare for the battle with the dragon, the only thing besides the prince that was standing in the way.

Once the knight came to a stop, there were no more paths, only the small forest that surrounded the castle, this was it. Without taking a pause, our brave knight proceeded into the castle, never second-guessing the reasons for this act to save the princess.

For many years, our fine stable hand had watched the princess, attempting to work up the courage to speak to this beautiful flower, but failed each time miserably. The knight believed that the princess was destined to love another as was written in the stars at that time. However, for her freedom, the knight would risk everything, and so on our valiant knight proceeded.

Soon the castle came in view, large bloody battlements stood tall along the top. The dragon lay in the first chamber. All around the knight were statues of other knight frozen in stone. With their last frightful expression etched onto their faces.

As the knight entered the room, a cold chill blew in. Now came the task of the dragon's games, as with all the previous knights the dragon will ask a riddle. Those who do not answer right will be turned to living stone forever.

The knight never wavered; the riddle came as the knight walked in. The dragons voice boomed 'What walks on four legs in the morn, two at noon and three at dusk?' The knight paused and let true love guide the answer. Without batting an eye, the knight responded 'A human.' The dragon was stunned, no one had ever beaten him; it was impossible.

The dragon stood there as his own curse took its effect, and the dragon turned to stone. A sigh of relief left the knight. The battle with the dragon was not so tough as our brave knight would have thought.

The knight proceeded to the princess's keep. Soon the knight needn't look any farther now the prince was the only thing standing in the way. And thought his curse protected him, he himself had little power, but no mere man could kill him for he was invulnerable to their blades.

They each drew their swords and the weapons clanged. Each fighting valiantly, both heavily wounded. Our brave knight raised the sword, and with one attack, struck the prince with the fatal blow.

Jordan, stumbled backwards, in only the way one who thought he could not be hurt, could know he was dying. He dropped to his knees holding his side. The princess stood knowing that she is now free and soon the prince will never harm another living thing.

"Good Knight, please remove your helmet."

"I would princess but we must return"

"No," she said forcefully. "I know of my father's decree, and for that I shall try to love you, and this shall be our home, but I should warn you, I love another, my dearest and sweetest dove. The one who could never belong to me, but the one my heart will always belong to."

"My princess" the knight said while removing the helmet her long brown hair

cascaded down her back, "I only wish for your happiness, and for that I release you from your fathers vow." Her head drifted down in sadness.

"Sarah, my sweet, it is you who I love, for I can love no other. You my sweet will never break my heart, unless you truly release me from my vow."

"Never then, I will hold you to it forever"

"No, much, much longer."

As the prince lay dying a single tear rolled down his cheek for all the love in his life that he will never feel, whether it is from true love, a parent or a friend; as in life, he will die alone and unwanted. Pain gripped his heart; the story couldn't end this way, could it. He was the prince she was the princess this is supposed to be the happy ever after part.

He reached down to his side and pulled out a short dagger. Again, he shuddered in pain. Reaching up he flung the dagger at Sarah with almost all of his strength. Rachael saw the dagger out of the corner of her eye, without thinking, she stepped in front of Sarah, switching their positions. The dagger sliced through the air and imbedded itself deep within her shoulder. She fell to her knees. Blood seeped down her clothing and Sarah was fearful for her beloved's life. Rachael ripped the dagger out, intent on finishing the prince off herself, but alas, he was dead.

Out of strength and utterly spent Rachael collapsed to the ground. The blood started to pool round her neck and head. Sarah applied pressure to the wound, as she held Rachael's head in her lap. All teary eyed, and murmuring of their life and how perfect it will be. Hopes and dreams of togetherness poured from her lips. Rachael's breath slowed and she became quiet, as Sarah held her close.

The night loomed forever. Fear, fever, sadness and even death crept around them throughout the night. It was in these hours of the first dawn that Rachael slipped into nothingness. Her breath ceased and her warmth left. Soon she was as still and as cold as ice.

Sarah wept into her hair cradling her body and rocking back and forth. Tears of pain, sadness, and loss poured out of her body, showering the lost love. Her mournful wails echoed down the hall, into the never-ending silence.

She cried for days on end, her love truly gone, 'can it be' she thought. "This isn't fair," she screamed in to the nothingness, who knew that after all this time her heart could still be breaking.

"No it isn't but that's the way it is," said a voice in the darkness. Sarah wiped her eyes in a pitiful attempt to look presentable.

"Wh- who are you" she stuttered.

"That isn't important my child" suddenly there was a small glimmer in the direction of the voice. The glimmer grew into a shimmer, and then into actual light. However, not normal light but more like a glow.

"I know you, you're the priestess Awrem. All of this is your fault. If only you knew what love was, than maybe you could of passed it on to your son." Awrem looked away from Sarah. Most of what she said was true. Sarah noticed the shameful expression on the priestess's face.

"No, it's not possible." She looked on in disbelief. "No, you did know love" she looked over at the fallen prince "you feared him, and loved him at the same time, was that the reason for the curse, so no one could harm him no matter what" she screamed.

“What would you have me do, I was his mother, he would be my destruction is he stayed with me, but he was my son. Of course I loved him, sending him out to be killed was a lie. I needed to protect him.” One lone tear slid down her pale white cheek. “I thought I was protecting him, if I had known I’d make his heart so cold I would of done something. All I can offer is to undo all he has done,” She sighed and placed a small chaste kiss upon Rachael’s forehead.

In that moment, her skin began to glow. It circulated through her body eventually settling on her lips, at that moment the glow pulsed it brightest gleam, her eyes fluttered and her heart started to beat once again. Soon her breathing became regular, and her eyes opened to the world completely.

She sat up “Sarah, why are you crying” a smile fell from her lips. She didn’t understand what was happening, all she knew was that the one she loved was sad, and that broke her heart.

Sarah choked back a sob, “Rachael, you’re alive.” She cried. “Promise you’ll never leave me” she choked back some tears, as she threw herself at Rachael. The princess winced in pain from the wound her shoulder.

“I promise my dove. I will be by your side forever, and much longer.” With those words, Rachael kissed her, as only on who was dead, but was granted a second chance at life could.

As they kissed the glow that had engulfed Rachael’s body bringing it back from the grave spread through Sarah, intertwining their souls forever. A powerful beam of light shot up into the sky and showered down onto the castle; banishing the evil presence from its grounds, and in its place it left only love’s pure light. All things were made new again and would remain that way until their love dies, which will be at the end of time.

Still when they separated, they heard crying, they turned in the direction of Awrem, she was kneeling on the ground where Jordan once lay. The ground around there was scorched, and they assumed the worst. Since there was no love or good in his heart Jordan must have been obliterated.

However, that’s when they heard the strangest thing, the coo of a small baby boy, Awrem turned towards them and in her arms was a small child no bigger than a new born. “I think I’ll call him Jacob” Awrem sighed. “It seems that I gained a second chance at love, just like you.”

“Thank you for everything” Sarah said softly.

“What everything, child, all I did was brought her back, you two did the rest” she smiled at them.

“But how,” asked Rachael.

“True Love, there is no greater magic in all the worlds.” She smiled at the couple, “Always hold to that and nothing will be impossible.” With that, she dissipated. She left the two very stunned but smiling.

Later that evening when the stars came out to play in the sun’s twilight, they held their ceremony, intertwining their lives just like their souls. They had a ceremony, of commitment through all the ages, and of undying love, proclaimed before themselves and the heavenly host on high.

As a sign to all that love even, the greatest of all love will be met with opposition, and yet through faith all things are possible.

Standing out
Dorothy Marie Malinowski

People talking in circles they share,
Friends and only friends aware.
Their own private chatter talking by,
Left on the out side
disregarded alone to die.

Fruit Punch

Meg Oldman

I woke drowsily, shivering from the cold, Canadian morning air with a face covered in dried tears. My face itched from the irritation of the cotton and wool blankets I was cozily nestled under rubbing against my cheeks. I hastily raised my hand, wanting to keep it warm, and scratched my face with nonexistent nails. Realizing I was failing, I got up reluctantly, leaving my warm nest, so I could wash my face off.

Silently tiptoeing past Alison, my best friend, I opened the creaky door slowly, trying not to wake her. I took one step into the hall and pranced over the squeaky spot in the floor, leaping into the linoleum kitchen, slipping slightly because of lost traction between my socks and the floor. From there I trudged over to the bathroom.

The mirror reflected exactly how I felt; tired, emotionally exhausted, too old for my age. My hair, that was pulled back in an elevated bun the night before was falling out and tussled into a mass of knots. I groaned and gazed into my eyes. They were red, slightly glazed over from crying myself to sleep the night before. “Did I really cry that much?” I wondered, turning the knob that had a *C* written on it in an over exaggerated cursive. I let the water run a second as I looked into the mirror. I started to think back to when it had all started. Two weeks earlier. “Well, if I count April, then it would have been two months ago,” I thought as I reached down to splash the water on my face. “Two months since all of this growing up.”

I reached underneath of the faucet with cupped hands, only to pull them away quickly. “Dammit!” I cried out. I quickly turned off the knob with the *C*, and turned on the knob with the *F*. I had forgotten that *C* in French meant ‘chaud’ or ‘hot’, not cold as I had thought. “Oh, it’s too EARLY for French,” I groaned with agony. I turned the *froid* knob and let the water cool down before I tried to wash my face again. The cool water splashed onto my face, as I thought back.

Two months earlier, the day after Easter, I had gotten a phone call from Alison, my best friend in the entire known cosmos, saying her father had passed away. I was grieved to hear that someone I loved dearly was gone for good. I could recall an almost emptiness about me, but after several days, I was able to restore some of my perk and carry out my days seeming like everything was honky dory. But it was not to last. Approximately two months later, while my family and I were preparing to go to Canada like we always had every summer, we were alerted that my father had some unknown masses on his liver. They informed us a few days later it was cancer. My parents planned for me to go up to Canada and stay with family and friends because I had to work. I had been given a job at the Canteen, the snack stand at the Club, a sort of laid back liberal country club located on an island. The job consisted of going and buying all of the supplies we would need with a cash advance from the Club, stocking up the Canteen, keeping track of funds, and making sure we got a profit. Basically, it was an opportunity for teenagers at the lake to run their own business and make some spending money. It’s very difficult, especially if you don’t know how to appropriately manage funds, so a parent is usually needed for such help. Unfortunately, I was sans parents for the summer, in which case Pam’s dad stepped in to manage our money.

So I was sent up alone, while my mother and brother took care of my father as he

received his first doses of chemotherapy. I was left with two options. The first was living with my cousin who had children ages seven and below, or I could live with Alison, who had been sent up by herself since her mother had to work and secure a new house for the two of them to live in. Naturally, I chose Alison.

The two of us had been staying together roughly three days in Alison's cottage before the harsh reality of living by ourselves kicked in. We actually had to cook our own food, make our own beds, and plan our own schedules. Needless to say, thank God for grilled cheese squishers. However, the two of us had to grow up really quickly in order to provide for ourselves and still carry out a normal happy summer. After all, this was going to be my last official full summer up at The Lake, the place that housed most of my childhood memories, and somehow I had to make it enjoyable and memorable.

I scrubbed at my face, wiping away the last of the dried lines on my face. "I've been doing this too often," I thought painfully to myself. "I have to stop crying myself to sleep. I'm seventeen, for Christ's sake. I don't need to be doing this." I chucked the towel onto the towel rack and shuffled back to Alison's room, praying that my nest of bed coverings were still warm enough to consider going back to sleep in. I skipped over the squeaky floor spot and slowly opened Al's door. I crept back towards my bed, only glancing back to check the time. 9:29 am. Fantastic; I had a little under an hour and a half before I had to start down the lake to go baby sitting my cousins until three in the afternoon. "And of course they have to be little demon children," I thought grumpily as I scooted myself back into bed and closed my eyes. I let out a sigh of relaxation and smiled slightly. "There's nothing better than a fluffy, heated..."

SCREE, SCREE, SCREE, SCREE, SCREE!!!

Dammit.

I moaned as the alarm let out a rigid, harsh screech. "Al! Shut it up!" I whimpered, not wanting to admit it was time to officially get up. The next thing I heard was a hand slam down on the alarm's snooze with a bang. A fumbling sound came from the other side of the room and then a click, alerting me Alison had turned off the alarm and it was actually time to get up and make breakfast. Alison glanced over at me and snorted with disapproval that it was so early. She brushed her light brown hair out of her face, creating a sort of mane around her head. I snickered at her disheveled appearance, in return receiving a disgruntled glare from Alison's deep brown, soul scorching eyes. Although she was not an early riser, Alison was quite a lovely person. She was an average height though a couple inches taller than me, something she rarely let me forget; she always insisted she had to be up on me in some way since I was a year older than her in age. Her hair fell barely onto her shoulders, and usually had a thick, spacious wave, causing her hair to flip out gently at the ends. She always had a bit of a dark complexion because of her dark eyes, light brown hair and consistent tan. Although she constantly complained about her appearance, be it how fat she was or how much she hated her nose, she was an average weight and was quite beautiful.

I crawled out of bed and hopped over to Alison's, lying on top of the covers as she stayed in her sheets.

"Can I get a blanket? It's cold," I said, trying my hardest to look cute.

"No, you're cold. Screw off," she yawned, stretching underneath of the blankets.

"You suck," I said with the slightest of laughs, just so she could tell I was

kidding. “What are we doing today?”

“Eating, grocery shopping, committing suicide, oops! I mean babysitting,” she said slapping her hand to her mouth as I laughed. “Oh, and don’t you have to stock the Canteen tonight with Pam Ham? You do have to open this Thursday, don’t you?”

“Ah, crap...you’re right. Mofo!” I proclaimed, forgetting about the gloom that awaited me that night.

Pamela Hamilton, or Pam Ham as we so fondly call her, was to us (and most other people who knew her) a whiney glutton who had atrocious table and people manners. How she got a job in customer food services with me was beyond anyone’s imagination. She had a high pitched, shrill voice that was consistently whining about something, and rarely bathed. I recall her actually being able to count on one hand the number of times she had washed her hair the previous summer and wanting to projectile vomit on myself. Her stomach protruded out like a pregnant belly, only she was still a virgin. Her legs, however, were incredibly muscular, calves jutting out sideways, looking disgustingly enormous. The most irritating and spine shivering thing about her though was her eating habits. When she ate, or grazed more like, she chewed so slowly that by the time she had swallowed that bite most of the other people at the table had finished most of their meal. Not only was she a slow eater, but she chewed with her mouth open producing the most skin crawling smacking sound ever imagined. Being with her is similar to being around a manatee. She’s very dull and large, and nothing exciting ever happens. Her only redeeming quality was that she had an awesome younger brother, Andrew, who Al and I adored with all of our hearts.

Andrew was the coolest fourteen year old that Alison and I had encountered in all of our lives. He was a gangly boy, very skinny and with long arms he had yet to grow into. His mass of curly hair, this summer, was a light aqua color that actually shimmered like water when the sun caught it, and when he bothered to wash it. Though much more hygienic than his sister and with better table manners, Andrew had one huge tragic flaw: he liked Alison and me, especially Alison. He would call every day to Alison’s cottage, begging for us to get together. We would say yes, and we would all get together and hang out. Our relationship with Andrew was merely a brother-sisters relationship, without all of the fighting and revenge seeking. To him, though, Alison and I were two pieces of really tasty candy, and he was window shopping at the Candy Store.

“WHY do I have to work with Pam Ham? Why did I get stuck with her?” I moaned as Alison and I made our way into the kitchen to feed the kitties, and make ourselves some breakfast. “You know she’s going to whine all night and we’re not going to make ANY progress.”

“Well, that’s not my fault that you wanted to continue doing the job from last year,” she said bluntly as she pulled the croissants out of the freezer. She took two out of the plastic bag and popped them in the microwave while I pulled out the apple juice and two little cups. Just as I was pouring the drinks, the phone rang. Alison wandered over to the phone and answered it.

“Hello?” Silence. “Yes, hold on one moment, please.” She brought the portable over to me. “I think its Martine.”

I rolled my eyes and took the phone. The cousin I babysat for had dubbed herself my mother for the summer and called frequently to make sure I wasn’t dead or starving. She did care about how I was doing, though sometimes it felt like she cared too much.

“Hello?”

“Bonjour! Meg?” My heart sank in my chest. My cousin being French Canadian loved to test my French, and seeing how I had proven I remembered *so* much of the language with the sink, I could tell I was in for a real treat.

“Oui. C’est moi.”

“Ah! Ma petite! Comment ca va aujourd’hui?” I racked my exhausted brain.

How are you today?

“Oh, uh, good...I mean, bien,” I stumbled correcting myself. “Et toi?” *That was right, wasn’t it?*

“Je suis bien, merci!” *Oh, I was right. Go me.* “I just wanted to let you know that you don’t have to baby sit the kids today. We’re going into town to visit their grandparents and won’t be back until after dinner, so you don’t have to worry about coming and watching the kids.” I thought I was going to do a dance of glee. “How are you doing this morning?”

“Oh, I’m doing good...I mean well,” I stumbled once more, beating myself for forgetting my first language as well. “Alison and I were just about to eat breakfast and I guess now we’re going to go grocery shopping as well.”

“Good, well, I’ll talk to you later, baby doll? OK? I love you!” She made a kissy sound on the other end of the phone.

“Okay, love you to! Bye!” I confidently pressed the ‘talk’ button and placed the phone back in its cradle. I strutted back into the kitchen, swaying my shoulders back and forth, over exaggerating my walk.

“Guess who isn’t babysitting today?!” I said moseying beside Alison. “I can come shopping with you and all that fun stuff.” I smiled largely at Alison who shot me a dirty glare.

“You mean Martine didn’t tell you that she was leaving to go into Montreal so you didn’t have to baby sit until this morning?”

I felt slightly confused. “Yes.”

“You mean to tell me that we got up early for no reason?” The microwave dinged and Alison snatched the croissants out and put them on plates. “Grab the juice. It’s breakfast in bed day, bitch!”

I squealed with glee as I grabbed the two cups containing apple juice. We went back into Alison’s room, crawled beneath the covers of our beds and munched contently on our breakfast. As we finished our meal, with empty plates and cups beside the beds, I glanced towards Alison and shot her a stupid smile.

“This was awesome.”

“Yeah it was. Did you get crumbs in the bed?”

I rolled my eyes. “No, calm down. Gosh.” I gave her a sweeter smile this time and flopped down on my pillow.

“You know what Alison? Today might not entirely suck.”

“Dude, what time is it?”

Alison leaned sideways on the sun porch’s bed and glanced at the clock in the living room. “5:00-ish. What time do you have to be there?”

I sighed with a whimper. “6:00. I don’t wanna go stock the Canteen with Pam Ham. She’s so...ew,” I said as Homer Simpson grabbed Bart’s neck on the old recorded

VHS tape we were watching on the TV. “Can I fake dead?”

“No, because then I’LL be stuck stocking the Canteen with her and potentially Andrew, who I *know* will be trying to hit on me, and that would just be bad.” She turned off the tape and got up. “Dinner time. Let’s go.”

I held up my hand reluctantly with a whine and Alison grabbed it, hoisting me up, muttering under her breath something about being an incompetent sloth. We walked through the living room, down the hall and into the kitchen where we decided to feast on an incredibly well balanced meal of Spaghetti-Os, cut apples and chocolate chip cookies.

“Ugh, I’m so stuffed,” I moaned, turning on the sink and rinsing off the plates. “Hey, you’re coming with me to stock the Canteen right?”

Alison looked up at me in disbelief. “Um, duh. I’m not leaving you alone with Pam Ham! She won’t do anything and then you won’t be home until midnight! Plus, who knows? She may bring Andrew, and I have to kick his ass for pushing me in the water yesterday.” She smiled sweetly causing me to laugh. Alison always had a way to sound maniacal and look sweet. We busied ourselves with washing the dishes and putting them away in their appropriate spots. I glanced up at the clock which read that it was 5:25. We had roughly twenty minutes to get ready and get to the club. I groaned and put the last plate away.

“God, this is such an inconvenience! We have to go deal with annoying Pam Ham. I mean, we’re suffering through enough being up here by ourselves without our mums and dads, and...” I stopped dead in the middle of what I was saying. Alison’s face had suddenly gone red, as if she was blushing, but I could tell that wasn’t why. “Oh, Alison, I didn’t mean...I’m, I’m sorry. It’s just I’m so used to saying...” I turned red and felt my head temperature increase. “Dammit.”

“It’s just not fair, you know?” Alison said quietly. “We’re good people and we’ve been given the shaft.”

I nodded and then went to the cupboard and reached for the plastic wine glasses Alison’s mom had purchased a couple summers before. “Here,” I said handing her a green one. “Let us drink our woes away. What do we have?”

Alison went over to the fridge and opened it up. “Um, Fruit des Champs or as you the genius would call it, Fruit Punch.”

I set a fake scowl on my face. “Ha ha, you’re a regular comedian,” I said sarcastically, but with a giggle. I held up the cups and she poured. “Cheers to us!” I exclaimed, handing her one. We both *thunked* our glasses and swigged the generic brand juice down.

I had never felt more intoxicated in my life. Alison and I staggered up and down the docks at the Club waiting for Pam to arrive with the stock. We would nudge each other closer to the edge of the dock only walk back just in the nick of time to escape falling in. We snickered about old inside jokes that had passed and ones that we had come up with days earlier. Neither of us could tell how it happened, but suddenly after toasting and drinking the punch, a wave of euphoria swept over us, causing us to explode into a fit of giggles. As we laughed hysterically over a stupid statement I had made, a boat motor could be heard over our hilarity. We looked out and saw a red light making slowly making its way towards to dock. As the boat neared us, the red light was accompanied with a green one, until all we could see was the starboard light.

“Oh goodness Mr. Gatsby! Look at who’s coming!” I proclaimed with false shock. “Why, I do believe its Ms. Daisy’s light!” I pretended to swoon as Alison caught me, laughing hysterically.

“What is wrong with us?” she gasped, giggling furiously.

“I don’t know. That was just fruit punch, right?”

“Yup.”

“Then we’re just screwed up in the head.” I burst into a fit of giggles and Alison followed. Our faces turned bright red as we gasped for oxygen.

The boat approached and the motor was cut. It drifted to the wharf where Andrew was waiting to jump onto the dock and tie up. He glanced at the two of us as we were literally rolling on the dock laughing.

“Do I even want to know?” he said, bending down to tie up the front and then rushing to the back to help his sister.

“Chances are about thiiiiis big,” I said. I squished my fingers together and distorted my face to look like I was trying to see this microscopic thing. Alison chortled, trying to compose herself.

“Well guys, we have to carry stuff up to the Club and get the place set up, okay?” squealed Pam, handing her brother packs upon packs of pop.

“Pamela, I can’t carry *everything* in one load! Calm down!” Andrew said angrily, putting some down.

“Andrew, we need to carry this upstairs,” Pam whined. Alison and I tried to cover our laughter.

“Okay, calm down everyone. Andrew, carry what you can. Pam, quit whining and grab some stuff. Now let’s MOVE OUT!” I bellowed. Alison laughed, grabbed some chocolate bar boxes and raced me up the stairs. Andrew followed us with a stupid grin on his face while Pam was left in the boat dumbfounded.

The rest of the night was spent loading candy bars and soda into the mold ridden fridges that we scrubbed fervently to clean. Alison and Andrew spent most of the time abusing on another with any random objects that they could find and that wasn’t going into the fridge as stock. *And she wonders why he likes her?* I thought to myself as she biffed him on the back of the head and a stupid grin spread across his face. When we were nearing the end of our work and I had gained some composure from having to concentrate, the topic came around to why we were so giddy. Alison and I exchanged looks and smirked.

“We were sad, so we tipped a couple glasses back,” Alison finally said after a long pause where we wouldn’t say anything, but merely snigger under our breath.

“You WHAT?!” cried Pam in panic. “You’re both drunk? Oh my God, what were you thinking? You can’t be here drunk!”

“Calm down Spazzy McGoo, we didn’t booze it up,” I said, getting a guffaw out of Andrew and Alison. “We had some fruit punch after a bit of a sad spell, and somehow it just went straight to our heads. We needed a little bit of cheeriness in our lives.” I glanced over to the fridge and noticed that we were done. “Well, we’re done!” I proclaimed. “Who wants to go swimming?”

Andrew and Alison tore down the hill to the waterfront, Alison shrieking something along the lines of Andrew losing his masculinity if he was to throw her in. Pam and I locked up the Canteen and walked down to the docks.

“So why are you guys *really* acting this way?” Pam asked, glancing at me as we descended down the steps.

I shrugged. “Adrenaline rush? We’re having a pretty crappy summer so far and we needed a moment of happiness, especially Alison.” I sighed, a smile still on my face. “I dunno, we had to grow up too soon. We’re both in a situation where we were out of both mums and dads, and we have to provide for ourselves. It’s hard really. So we just drank some fruit punch, *actual* fruit punch,” I said as I got a suspicious glance from Pam. “And all of a sudden we just started spazzing out.” I looked back at Pam who was still trying to process what I had said. “It sucks, growing up. I do not recommend it.” I smiled at Pam who still looked confused and ignorant to understanding what I had just said. “Don’t worry; I only have occasional philosophical moments. There won’t be another one for at least a week. HEY!” I said running over to Alison and Andrew, both struggling to keep out of the water but throw the other one in. “I wanna swim, so get in!”

“I’m wearing my Dave shirt!” exclaimed Alison in despair. “He wanted me to go in with my Dave shirt on! I told him no because it would shrink. I got this at a concert. I can’t get another one!” And with that, Alison raised the shirt up and took it off, revealing a shimmering blue bra. The Dave Matthew’s Band shirt went flopping to the ground, but that unfortunately was not where Andrew’s eyes were averted. My mouth hung open in shock, his in utter pleasure. I ran over to Alison and tried to shield her from Andrew’s gaze.

“Alison! What are you *doing*?!” I shrieked. “Andrew is looking!”

“I don’t want Dave to shrink!”

“Alison, let’s *think* for a second. Fourteen year old boy, your boobs. I don’t think that you should really be concerned if your shirt is going to shrink!”

“But...”

“I’ll buy you a new shirt if it does. **NOW PUT THAT ONE BACK ON!**”

Alison reluctantly threw the shirt back onto her body, grumbling about how her favorite shirt was sure to shrink and how it was a concert shirt. In the meantime, I ran over to Andrew and hissed violently into his ear, “I swear to God Andrew, if you found that in any way ‘exciting’, I’m kicking your ass.” Andrew looked at me, laughed, and chucked me in the water. Andrew and Alison followed suit, and Pam took a while to get in. Finally, we were all in, splashing and kicking, laughing and having the time of our lives. It was just how a day should end.

When we got back to the cottage, Alison and I stripped off our wet clothes and chucked them into the dryer. As she partook in her daily bathing ritual, I whipped out my diary and started writing. After she had finished, I showered, the goofy grin still on my face. We then whipped out our toothbrushes and (remembering that *C* meant hot) turned the faucet on to brush our teeth. Not for the first time that day, a mutual silence passed between us, until Alison spat into the sink and spoke.

“Hey Meg?”

“Mmrh?” I said, a mouth full of foamy toothpaste.

“I’m really glad we went swimming.”

“Mm weewee gwad we dwang dat fwoot ponch.”

“Spit darling and repeat.”

I spit my foam into the sink. “I said I’m really glad we drank that fruit punch.

Otherwise we would have had a really crappy time.”

Alison laughed and raised her eyebrows. “Ooooh yeah.” I giggled and washed my toothbrush out.

“I’m ready for bed, you ready for bed?”

“Yeah, let’s get.”

I hopped into bed wearing my purple sheep pajamas, and turned the electric blanket on. I nestled myself beneath the sheets and curled my stuffed beanie dog Tuffy close to me. I closed my eyes and started to breathe deeply, about to drift off until Alison’s voice broke the darkness.

“Hey.”

“Hi.”

“I’m glad we’re still able to act like idiots and not have to be all mature and stuff.”

Although my face was beginning to hurt, I grinned once more. “Yeah,” I yawned. “I concur. Being an idiot is fun.”

A Sample
Erika Raines

a taste, a tease;
a piece of candy cut
 into bite size squares.
the square in the frame.
this is what she makes
 for him,
 for everyone,
 for no one in particular.
careful embroidered strokes
display her talent, or lack,
for any in the
 market
for a bride-toy to adorn his
 house.
this is it, the embellished
Lord's Prayer by which she
will be judged:
suitable or not.

The Stitch In Time
Erika Raines

Archaeologists agree,
Among the original bone tools
Rest the first needles.
Since early times
Women
 (one assumes)
Have stitched together
 furs,
 fabric,
Materials to build the
 tents,
 clothing
That protected nascent life.

Today we have a soulless
 machine
Built to do the same as the
 sliver of bone.
Seems to strip essence
From the work.
Yet it still locks
Together the dreams we are
 made of.

Thread of Life
Erika Raines

Maiden learns the art of
 spinning.
The thread that passes through
 excited fingers
Changes.
Now too thick,
Now too thin:
The variance of youth.

Mother bends over her
 work.
Fashioning strong, even fibers.
The Proverbial ideal wife, she works
 late into the night.
Anxious to provide
 every
Necessity of life.

Crone at the end of being,
Spins vibrance into all around her.
Eyes too weak to see,
Her fingers feel
 pain and
Life: Thread passing through them.
Instilling time's lessons
 in the childish.

She spins with patience,
Snips with precision.
Forming the lives of others
'Til her own is
 unspun.

Why Vagina?
Erika Raines

I don't understand how
medical names for
 amazing things
 came to be so
duplicitous.
consider "uterus."
 bland.
now "womb."
 warm.

science is not always dead,
from it we get a stand-in for
 "egg."
 harsh and fast.
"ovum"
 settles down in the back of the throat,
 hums softly on the lips.
a mother murmuring to her infant.

then, of course,
 "vagina."
 Latin for "sheath?"
why should we choose this?
passive incompleteness.
"cunt,"
 "source,"
 "flower,"
 "mound,"
"essence."
no name fits.
none sound like women,
none sound like
 home.

Out of Reach

Erin Tallman

Delicious slithers of creamy chocolate
The tips dipped in a dark-colored honey
Baby-blue sky of picturesque clearness
Deep passionate pie of succulent cherry

Warmth shivers electrically

Splitting ground from such thunder
Tremble, **rolling**, stop, **rolling**, stop
God's steam of vanilla, just *one* glass
To taste the pleasure of only *a* drop

Skim a little from the top

A whole distinct world out of reach
Shielded, protected from watchers
Delicate, tender, sorrowful moments
This portrayal awards its viewers

Before others, she captures

Sky is Blue
Erin Tallman

The entire sky
Playing the role of ocean waters
A deep, thick blue
As quiet as a puppy at rest
You can imagine
A child swimming back and forth
Back and forth
Trying so hard to do their best

They're smiling
They're laughing with their friends
Looking again
You see their friends disappear
The child cries
And you can feel their hurt
Seeing their tears
Still crying, its real you can hear

Then you smile
You see them in pain and smile
And you know why
Because you have felt their pain
In your own life
And with growing you've realized
The sky is blue
Underneath the dark clouds and the rain

Tender Eyes
Erin Tallman

Tender eyes that melt,
My lovely shade of brown,
Ears that tell your thoughts
And tail that cleans the groun'
A sweet neigh on a beautiful day
To me was an amazing soun'

In my hand lay something delish
Sugar, apples or carrots you wish

Through all the time I had you
You brightened up each day
Running fields, jumping bushes
I loved to watch you play

Miss your beautiful stare
That went with you everywhere
I still love you, I still care
Its true life isn't very fair
My heart continues to tear

But light shines on me from above
And I'm reminded of you with love;

Those tender eyes that would melt
Still my lovely shade of brown
Ears that told your thoughts
And tail that cleaned the groun'

Dark World
Lucinda Wells

For too long now I have felt the darkness
There inside clouding my vision
I have learned to see with out seeing
Learn to walk easily in the darkness

But then you came to guide me
Brought light back to my world
I was blinded first by the light
And turned away from it

But now I look and it is faded
A distant light on the horizon
My world is left in shadow
But not as dark as it was before

So here I sit in my field
That was once covered in darkness
Now holding new visions
With the dimmed light to see by

All is dead
No flowers no grass
Everything has died in the dark
I didn't even see it go

Elements
Lucinda Wells

The East is Air
A fluid movement
Always changing
But wind can tear thru anything
When it shows its power

The South is Fire
Heat that sustains life
Warmth that lets us survive
But fire can burn
When it shows its power

The West is Water
A necessity of life
Never solid
But it can drown life away
When it shows its power

The North is Earth
The strength under our feet
treasures hidden deep within
But it can tumble entire cities
When it shows its power

The Day is Light
Pure and Radiant
Hope for the world
It gives life to everything
When it shows its power

The Night is Darkness
Deep and engulfing
When everything rests
But it can make rest eternal
When it shows its power

The Mask
Lucinda Wells

I look around
A crowded room
I feel alone

They all know I'm here
But they don't see me
And they don't care

Each one different
But their all the same
I'm the different one

But they don't know that
So I'm ignored
They don't bother to look

But under every mask
And behind all the lies
Is the truth of who I am

They don't know
And shouldn't know
For the pain it would cause

So I continue to be alone
Surrounded by those like me
By those I see thru the mask

Better Place
Samantha Winkler

Would you lend a hand if it meant touching someone?
Would you take a stand if it had not been done?
Would you share a smile without getting one back?
Would you go the extra mile if it meant losing track?
Would you make a choice of what's right and wrong?
Would you raise your voice without a song?
Would you pay the price of a friend's debt?
Would you save a life without regret?
And would you say a pray for human race,
to make this world a better place.

Thankful
Samantha Winkler

Feeling or manifesting gratitude or thanks,
Can take your state of satisfaction to many lengths.
For me that satisfaction is all around,
If I look beyond the road to where I am bound.
The "hello" I get from the people I meet,
The friendly person who gives up their seat.
The loving parents that I possess,
My family, friends, and all the rest.
The struggles in life that make me stronger,
Some heal fast; some take longer.
The birds, the bees, and all of nature's creatures,
Everyone in the world with their different features.
The freedom that we have of speech and song,
The wanting of fellow man getting along.
But mostly I am thankful for,
My God above, to whom, I adore.

Skyline: Friends in the Night

Jamie Maas

Yeah, sure. Eleven will be fine. I thought back to the conversation Heather and I had with Dixon over lunch. As if she had read my mind, Heather signaled me discreetly from her top bunk. She tapped her wrist twice, to ask what time it was. I glanced at my watch and then counted off to her with my hands. 11:15. She rolled her eyes, and pantomimed strangling someone. I tried not to laugh, because even a giggle would be highly inappropriate in the middle of this late night heart-to-heart our cabin was having. To be honest, I didn't even know what they were talking about. I do know that the only dry eyes in the cabin belonged to me and Heather. Even Courtney and the other older girls who were in on the plan were paying enough attention to be choked up. I glanced at my watch again and sighed heavily.

We had planned tonight, being high school age kids stuck at a camp session with mostly junior-high students, to do something completely rebellious. My best friend, Heather, her older brother, Dixon, and I had hatched a plan to sneak out of the cabins for a bit of fun. Heather and I were to lead the escapade from the girls cabin, because we had been sneaking out of the cabins at Skyline Church Camp for years. A few of years previously, we had started the habit of sneaking out before the morning bell, in order to ensure that we would get hot showers. This effectively made us the masters, or more correctly, mistresses, of the trade. It was for this reason that she and I always chose the two bunks on the rear wall of the girls' cabin, U-nice Inn.

Finally the blubbing came to a stop and Patty, the camp counselor, began a heart felt prayer. Heather and I obediently bowed our heads, but not before exchanging another meaningful glance. The boys, if their plan was working better than ours, would have been hiding behind the propane tank under the bath house for almost twenty minutes at this point. I fervently hoped that they would figure out that because the lights in the cabin were all on, it would be a while before we could actually sneak out and join them.

The plan had been simple really. Lights out was normally at 9:30 or 10. It being the last night of camp, we planned a little extra room in, just in case Patty, or Glen, the boy's counselor, decided to be "generous" and give us a later lights out. So we had agreed to meet at the propane tank at 11. It should have been fine. But then something, I wasn't even sure what, triggered an emotional break down among half of the younger girls in the cabin. The normal night routine of the cabin had become a watery pow-wow that lasted an entire hour and a half, shooting our excellent plan to bits.

Patty finally wrapped up her prayer, and began turning the lights out. Making sure my flashlight was easily, and quietly, accessible, I crawled into my sleeping bag. I caught Heather's eye before the lights all turned out. I counted to twenty on my fingers to show her we would wait another twenty minutes before trying to sneak out. She nodded at me before rolling over to face the back wall. I lay down on my pillow and stared at the dark ceiling, hoping the emotional evening had left them exhausted and ready for sleep. As the rustling slowed, I began to change my pants under the sleeping bag. We had agreed we would all change into our PJ pants when the other girls did, so as to not be obvious, but this meant having to change back into jeans before we could leave. If there was one thing Buzz, the cranky but loveable caretaker made clear to us, it was that we were to never be

in the woods without jeans and tennis shoes, and at Skyline Buzz's word was second only to God's.

Once I got my jeans on, I sat up and looked around. The cabin, one large open room with fourteen sets of bunk beds, was dark but not so dark that I couldn't see the still forms of the other girls. I cupped the face of my watch before hitting the button to light it up. The glowing digital face read 11:45. I decided we had waited long enough.

Slowly and quietly I climbed down from the bunk, skipping the second step in the ladder, knowing that it creaked. Stepping onto the cold floor, I carefully reached under the bottom bunk, careful not to disturb the girl sleeping in it, and grabbed my shoes. I slid them on quickly, grabbed my flashlight and sweatshirt from my top bunk and made my way to Heather's bed.

"Heather," I breathed quietly, before reaching up to touch her shoulder. "Let's go." I heard her pillow move, and assumed she was nodding in response. While she climbed out of her bunk, I went to get the other high school girls. Luckily Courtney, Heather's bunkmate, was already up and quietly slipping on her shoes. Ginny and Cassie, in the bunk next to Heather, were not moving at all.

"Ginny." I laid a hand on her shoulder. "Ginny, you coming?" My whisper, though as soft as I could make it, sounded like a hundred voices shouting in my ears.

"No, it's too late. Cass and I are going to stay." her high pitched voice, normally elevated way above conversational level, sounded bizarre in the hushed tones of a whisper.

"You sure? It'll be fun."

"Yeah, we'll go next year."

I shrugged at her, and turned back around only to bump into Courtney, who was pulling her sweatshirt on, and heading my direction. Stifling our giggles, we made our way back to Heather's bunk and the back door. We carefully pulled the door open, moving slowly, so that the Venetian blinds covering the window didn't clank on the metal frame.

"I'll go first." Heather whispered as she stepped into the square of white moonlight pooling in the door way. She carefully unlatched the outer screen door, and opened it just enough to squeeze out. I realized she had gone first so that Courtney hadn't pushed it open to the point of making its hinges squeal, which they do when opened all the way. I heard her whispering something, but it wasn't until I was pulling the door shut behind myself, that I figured out what.

"Skip the bottom stair, it creaks, and don't walk on the gravel." She told Courtney. I nodded at her and cracked a smile at the way she was giving Courtney instructions. I had forgotten the younger girl didn't know the little idiosyncrasies of sneaking out of U-Nice.

"Half way there," I whispered to Heather, with a low chuckle.

"I know. I thought they'd never shut up tonight. And Patty just *had* to drag it on!"

"Eh, it's not her fault really. That sort of thing runs in her family." I whispered innocently. I used the sweatshirt I was carrying to stifle my giggles.

Patty's family was well known at Skyline. Her father, Bob, had been our camp director three years previously and, well, it had been a unique experience. He had been a 65 year old man trying to keep track of twenty junior-high kids in the woods. After the first day Bob kept us close to the main lodge and gave us a lot of "free meditation time,"

most of which had been spent on the couches on U-Nice's front porch, playing cards and chatting.

Heather was luckier than I was, however, as she only had to deal with that particular family at church camp. I, on the other hand, was not only blessed to have them active at Skyline, but they were also outstanding leaders in my home church, and Patty's daughter Kim, went to my school. The whole family was nice enough, but it was very easy to overdose on their presence.

"It's about time!" Dixon hissed once we had carefully walked around the cabin and made our way to the propane tank. "I thought you girls were never going to turn the lights out."

"No joke," Karl added as he moved to hug Courtney. "What were you doing, painting each other's toe nails?" Courtney elbowed him in the ribs playfully.

"We wish. No, someone turned on the water works and when it rains, it pours." I said dryly. "But let's get a little farther away from the cabins. I'm not sure they're all asleep yet."

"Where to?" Dixon asked.

"Let's head up to the chapel." Heather suggested to her brother. The rest of the group agreed on the location, and then determined that Dixon, being the oldest and most experienced, would lead the way. We cut through the woods behind U-Nice and looped back around behind the smaller, unused A-frames. It was a longer and harder route to take in the dark than just cutting across the gravel yard between the bath house and lodge, but we were less likely to get caught. We made our way past the row of cars parked alongside the lodge, and then we were home free.

Once the lodge was behind us, we all relaxed a little, feeling as though we were home free. I pulled my sweatshirt on as we carefully picked our way through the baseball field to the foot path that led to the chapel. We laughed and joke quietly as we walked, making sure to whisper when we got close to Buzz's camping trailer.

"Hey, Heather, do you remember that time we were playing hide and seek, and Buzz let us hide in his camper?" I asked her as we walked past the old camper. Buzz had always favored Heather and I little because we spent extra time at Skyline with our families on work weekends to help get the camp ready for the winter and then again for summer.

"Heck, yeah! He gave us soda and we played cards while the other teams looked. That was awesome."

"I can't believe they never did find us."

We followed Dixon down the footpath, which was marked by sapling logs on either side of a deer trail. As we passed out of the field and into the woods, the moonlight began to cast strange shadows all around us. The sound of the wind in the aspen trees seemed to be growing louder. As the wind rustled the leaves they sounded more like a cascading waterfall now, than their normal imitation of a babbling brook. The farther into the woods we got, the smaller aspen trees gave way to the large, ominous pines. They towered over the dancing aspens, whispering to each other as the wind stirred their needled boughs. I shivered and hurried to stay close to the others.

After just a few minutes we reached the clearing that sheltered the outdoor chapel. I stepped onto the last log pew and hopped from log to log until I reached the last one, which rocked because of the rugged cobblestone floor of the chapel. That chapel was just

a small and shallow log cabin or lean-to, with the front wall missing. There was a small window in the back wall, which had a wooden cross in it. The view from the window was a gorgeous landscape of the valley below Skyline's fences. There were times we had held chapel services at just the right time, and the sun had lined up behind that window, perfectly silhouetting the cross.

"Jamie, get off of there, before you hurt yourself." Dixon told me. All week long, because he was the oldest, he had been acting more like a counselor than a camper. I stuck my tongue out at him, and began to hop back across the logs. He laughed and sat down in the chapel. Karl and Courtney joined him, while Heather and I continued to hop across the logs. When that grew boring we joined the others on the floor in the chapel.

"So, now that we're out, we really should do something fun." Dixon mused as we sat in silence.

"Yeah, but what?" Karl asked. He looked to Dixon, his role model for the week, for the answer. Dixon seemed to not even notice how the younger jr. high school boys looked up to him, or how the girls all flirted with him. He was a nice guy, and listened to everyone. He had a great natural charisma. But because I valued my friendship with Heather, and she had made it quite clear that her older brother was off limits, I had only shortly considered joining the other girls in their conquest. Still, he was a cute guy. It was hard to see it now, in the dark shadows of the chapel but he had a long, and tan face, with serious and dark eyes. He was tall and lean, and had the appearance of someone who worked outdoor a lot. His smile was rare but genuine.

"Hey, Jamie, do you remember that work weekend the youth group did this fall?" Courtney asked me, her white teeth flashing in the moonlight as her lips curled in a devious smile, I knew all too well. That smile meant trouble, but it was often fun trouble.

"Yeah, what of it?"

"Well, Kim and I stashed some toilet paper in the crawl way under McClure cabin thinking it *just* might come in handy this summer." She chuckled, and the rest of us grinned.

"Hmm....we could do Glen and Jean's car." Dixon proposed to the group. Glen and Jean were the husband and wife team that had reluctantly agreed to direct this year's Jr. high camp session. Jean had been particularly upset that she was going to have to work with Sr. high campers as well. Not that the whole situation was fun for us high school kids. Because no one wanted to hold a separate camp session for the 11 of us, we had been forced to combine with the younger junior-high kids. To make things worse, she had a tendency to run camp more like boot camp than the traditionally casual style of years past. In fact our lack of scheduled free time was part of what had prompted this late night escapade of ours in the first place.

The five of us agreed that Jean and Glen's car was the ideal target. It was an easy walk to McClure, as the road that intersected the chapel footpath curved around behind Buzz's camper and right to McClure's front door. We made our way back through the shadowy woods, and I made sure to stick close to either Heather or Dixon as we walked, trying not to peer too deeply into the forest around me. I didn't care that I knew the woods at Skyline like my own backyard, any woods at night are scary, and I wasn't about to be left alone in them. I was relieved when we finally reached the road.

The moon light reflected off of the gravel strewn across the packed dirt road, catching my eye as we walked.

“So Lucy and the others didn’t want to come?” Dixon asked.

“No, Ginny and Cassie said they were too tired. I think Lucy’s wrist was bothering her, and she told us at dinner, she was going to bed early if she could.” Heather answered her older brother.

“That explains why David changed his mind.” Karl commented smugly.

“Poor, Lucy,” I chimed in, ignoring his insinuation, true as it may have been.

“She sprained her ankle last year at camp, and breaks her arm this year right before camp. Maybe she should stay away from Skyline for her own health.”

“Well it worked to her advantage last year, getting to ride in Bob’s car up to The Cross. She didn’t have to make that five mile hike in the heat.” Heather replied. She was referring to a large cross, made by campers years before our time at Skyline had started, and put on top of a hill about two and a half miles from the camp. It was tradition, once you got into fifth or sixth grade, to hike up to the cross as a group and then back again. It was a long walk, and most of it was either below or above the tree line so it was all in direct sun.

“Yeah but she still had to climb that last hill, and that’s the worst part of the hike. I swear that hill grows during the winter.”

We had reached McClure and Courtney and I were working on opening the crawl space. There were two sliding bolts on the top and bottom of the right hand edge to fasten it into place. With a little jostling we were able to get them pushed back.

“Guys, that’s not going to work.” Dixon interrupted us. “It’s padlocked.”

“Damn Buzz and his always keeping track of stuff.” Karl muttered. I tugged on the padlock, just to make sure it was secure, before moving the bolts back into place.

“Now what?” I asked.

“I’m tired, and it’s getting cold. I think I’m heading back.” Courtney said, glancing longingly down the dirt road which led back to the main part of the camp. She gave Karl a look, and he nodded at her.

“Yeah, me too.” He said, but judging by the wink he gave Dixon, they weren’t heading straight to the cabin.

“Alright, you little wusses, go crawl into your beds.” Dixon drawled. “But you’ll regret it when we find something fun to do.”

“Right, whatever, man. G’night, guys.” Karl murmured as he and Courtney headed down the road. The crunching of their footsteps grew faint, and then silent as they walked around the bend. We stood there in silence, listening to the wind dance through the aspen leaves.

“Let’s head up to the Vanilla Tree.” Heather suggested off handedly, and with nothing better coming to mind, Dixon and I consented. We followed Karl and Courtney’s trail down the road. We quietly worked our way past U-Nice Inn, and around the front to get to the bridge. The bridge was pointless really, as they was rarely water in the ditch it covered, but I guess it did save us from having to jump the ditch. Well, saved Heather and I from jumping. Dixon did it anyway. We headed up the hill, and out of the trees into the field where the fire circle was.

“Heather, I think we need to re-assess our carpentry skills,” I quipped looking at the weather beaten cross that was standing just outside of the log-bench ring of the fire circle. We had built the cross as part of a camp improvement project a few years ago. Each group of campers did a project of some sorts every year. While the cross was still

standing, the crossbeam, which had been held in place by a single bolt, was always tilted at an odd angle. Tonight the cross bar was askew again and rocking unsteadily in the breeze.

“Yeah. We’re not building any houses anytime soon. Go put the rocks back on it.”

I walked over to it, and piled a couple of stones on one arm to balance it out, so that it at least looked like a cross.

“Much better,” I said, and brushed my hands off contentedly.

“You know, you guys really should have-“

”Dixon, shut up. If it bothers you, fix it. But we happen to like the way it is. It is unique and we had fun making it.” Judging by the exasperation in Heather’s voice I got the idea they’d had that conversation before. He shrugged and turned to continue his way up the hill. The path grew steep and began to work its way back into the woods. These woods were some of the thickest and darkest woods in camp. Even at high noon the path was dim and barely visible. Tonight, with only the moon for light, the path seemed to lead straight into a maw-like void.

I stood there staring at the maw for a few moments, remembering a time when Kali, another of my Skyline friends, and I had headed up to Vanilla Tree on our own. We had made it about half way through this bit of woods, when something, startled us. The two of us both thought we saw someone or something waiting at the top of the hill, and without discussion, had turned and fled back down the hill, not stopping until we reached the safety of the lodge. We never did figure out what we saw in the woods, that day, and I found myself wishing we had.

“Dixon, wait for us. We don’t want to walk in there without you.” Heather blurted out as she jogged to catch up with him. I was glad she said it, because I felt the same way. I reached out and grabbed her hand. I wished I could grab Dixon’s too, simply for the comfort of feeling him there, but I knew Heather wouldn’t have approved, so I pulled my flashlight out and flicked it on, being careful to shine it only a few feet in front of us and on the path itself. For some reason, shining a flashlight into the trees and then away, always seemed to make the forest seem even more foreboding.

We carefully made our way up the hill, to where the tunnel of trees ended in a patch of star filled sky. I focused on that as we walked and tried to filter out the now eerie sound of the wind in the towering pines. The patch of starlight wavered and moved as the branches framing it danced slowly in the wind. As we neared the top of the hill and the night sky grew more visible, the moon light reflected off the metal gate of the cemetery which crowned the hill.

It was a small fenced in plot, with a few modest and simple headstones. Under those headstones laid the remains of the Higby family, the homesteaders who had used the land of Skyline camp to earn a living. When they made their fortune, or so the legend goes, they donated their ranch to the Presbyterian church, under the condition that it could never be sold or rented, and it was to be used mainly as a summer camp for kids. The land and funds they left were meager. An 85 acre plot, mostly wooded with enough funds to build a few small cabins. Skyline lacked in fancy facilities, there was no swimming pool, or lake or even a river. There were no horses, and the camp’s recreational equipment was less than adequate. Yet, every year, kids came to Skyline. The numbers grew smaller as the groups grew older and even Heather and I had stories about the “good ol’ days at Skyline.” Despite all that though, the campers kept coming,

and even as a returning camper, I wasn't quite sure why.

We walked past the cemetery, and I tried not to think about what was under those headstones. Finally the tree line broke and we were once again in an open field, filled with the pungent sagebrush that could be found all over the mountain pastures. At the very edge of the tree line stood a massive pine tree, with a circle of log-benches around it. In the moonlight, it looked as though elves or woodland folk should be dancing around the kingly tree. The night's shadows hid the many burns that scored the trunk, showing the tree's resilience in the face of summer thunder storms. This giant of the forest was the Vanilla Tree, dubbed for its sweet smelling bark.

"How old do you think it is?" Dixon asked, laying a hand almost reverently on the trunk. "And how did it get here? It's not a lodgepole pine, like the rest of the forest is."

"Yeah. I'd say it's at least a hundred years old. Probably more." Heather said.

"Who knows, maybe the Higby's planted it here when they settled in. That was a tradition amongst homesteaders who moved to the west. Unfortunately, we probably won't know how old it is, until it dies." I answered quietly. The idea of Skyline without the Vanilla Tree was a somber one. Part of what made Skyline so incredible was its seeming invincibility. It seemed that every time you returned to Skyline, it was exactly the way you had left it the summer before. Only some of the faces changed from year to year.

Dixon stood there for a while longer, hand resting on the still sun-warmed bark of the tree, while Heather and I lay down in the tall, damp grass of the field. We lay there, staring into the expanse of stars above us. Having lived in a small city all my life, I rarely got to see the stars, and when I did, it was never as many as sparkled down on us that night. The bright stripe of the Milky Way seemed to be alive with movement, flowing endlessly upward, as we lay in silence, admiring the heavens. Quietly Dixon joined us, and after a few more moments of silence he and Heather began to talk, making an effort to include me in the conversation.

Really, the conversation wasn't that important. Even the next morning I couldn't remember what we discussed as we lay on the hilltop for the next two hours of the night. What was important was the epiphany I had while lying there, listening to their cadence of conversation rise and fall harmoniously in time with the song of nature around us. Occasionally it would stop altogether for a few moments - or were they hours?- before picking up again.

I realized that night, staring into the field of stars, just what it was that made this place, the small chunk of mountain valley we called Skyline, so important. Skyline was not only a refuge from the rest of the world, the rest of life, because here we were isolated in the woods. There was something more here at Skyline; there were people who allowed you to be genuinely honest about who you were, and they loved you for that, not despite of that. As I lay there listening to Heather talk to her brother, I thought about the years we had known each other. Our friendship had run strong for years through letters and e-mails, and phone calls, and one simple week a summer. While Heather was the one here now, there were other friendships I had forged at Skyline which were just as strong. It was these people and the bonds we shared that made Skyline the special place it was to all of us. And it was these people, the hope that they would be here again the next year, that kept us all coming back year after year. I wondered, as we stood up from the now soaking wet grass and started back down the hill, if the Higby family knew precisely how

generous they had been. They had donated a piece of land, and given a gift of unending friendship.

As we passed back into the dark tunnel of trees, I once again reached for Heather's hand. This time though, I wasn't scared.

Seasons
Heather Layman

Summer

Red rose,
so perfect
and full
of life.

How I long to pluck it!

A fat,
buzzing bee
kisses the rose,
lingers a moment,
and zooms away.

Lightening breaks the sky.

Suddenly, rolling thunder,
torrents of rain
quench the parched
golden, rolling sea
of thirsty grass.

The earth hungrily laps puddles.

The rose
sits perfectly,
silver mercury droplets
now cling to velvet petals.

Autumn

Purple autumn dawn,
 whisper me a sad song.
Sing it for the trees,
 whose last leaves glow and
tremble on the limbs of
skeleton trees, gnarled
 and twisting,
Nearly naked.
Leaves spiral down to the ground.
 I listen closely-
As they fall, I hear their song-
 It's not the least bit sad.

Winter

The longest night of the year.
Silver moonbeams illuminate the night.

We are alone,
the moon and I.

Isolated from the world,
we sit together in silence,
stillness that does not break, in
fear that very ground I stand on
will shatter and crumble away to pieces
like ice on a frozen lake, or
shards of a broken mirror,
broken pieces of my soul.

The moon is cloaked in dismal gray clouds.
Fat flakes tumble into the darkness.

Spring

Shining, dreaming, dancing-
I am alive.
Hints of life emerge-
Bursting.

Small song birds gather
at the base of the clothesline pole,
feathers ruffed by the newly warm breeze.
They sing a song of spring.
The melody carries on the ebb and flow of air.

Spinning, dreaming, dancing-
I sing.
Hints of spring emerge-
Rejoicing.