



Volume II, Issue I  
Fall 2013



## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR //

**Dear reader/appreciator of the arts/ human being,**

Thank you for picking up Volume II, Issue I of the magazine. You are just as important to the creative process of the magazine as the magazine itself. I can't believe how the magazine has grown this past year of 2013. I have had the incredible opportunity to witness the birth and growth of this wonderful creative project and feel beyond blessed to be a part of this fantastic team.

*"Why Eckleburg?"*

The name "Eckleburg" originated with the idea that Dr. T.J. Eckleburg from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* acts as all seeing eyes over the novel, observing every action, both good and bad. In order to be an artist, you must be observant; for each piece you create, you must absorb twice the amount from the world around you with listening eyes, silent skin, and loud ears. The community that an artist inhabits is vital to the final product of the art and the artist as a whole. *The Eckleburg Project* is an extension of the community found at Texas A&M University.

*"Why a literary magazine?"*

A literary magazine because art. Because art is important. Because art gives a voice to the voiceless. Because art changes people. Because art reminds us that we are not alone. Because art unifies people, cultures, gender, race, religion. Because our university needs more art and outlets for art.

I hope that this magazine speaks infinitely louder to you than all the negative voices that you may find in the world around you.

Till next time,

Madison Mae Parker  
*Editor in Chief*

## HISTORY //

*The Eckleburg Project* started as a small, nameless magazine in the back rooms of the Texas A&M University's University Writing Center in the cold, icy winters of 2012. (Okay. So not that cold. This is Texas, after all.) Starting with eight undergraduate students and the backing of the UWC, the first edition of the magazine went to the printers in April 2013 thanks to our fearless founder, Amanda Yanes '13. In the summer of 2013, TEP expanded its realms by becoming a student organization on the campus of A&M. With only five of the original members entering into the fall 2013 semester, being awarded the recognition as an organization was no easy task, but well worth the work. Applications opened for additional students to join the editorial board for the 2013-2014 school year; the response received was exciting and numerous. After a thorough process, *Eckleburg* welcomed an editorial team of thirty undergraduate students. For the newest edition of the magazine, over 150 people submitted, resulting in nearly 350-400 creative works considered for this issue. With additional funding from Texas A&M University, The Association of Former Students, and the University Writing Center, you are now able to hold Volume II, Issue I of *The Eckleburg Project*. Congratulations.

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“TOMORROW WE WILL RUN  
FASTER, STRETCH OUT OUR ARMS  
FARTHER... AND ONE FINE MORNING  
— SO WE BEAT ON, BOATS AGAINST  
THE CURRENT, BORNE CEASELESSLY  
INTO THE PAST.”

— THE GREAT GATSBY



# ON REPEAT, LESLEE NUGENT //

The soft notes of a dirge emerge around 2am  
My brain stem as the single string on a violin  
Ten bars of cars crashing into each other  
Then the smother of one whole note held above the  
rest until I can't breathe  
I heave in rhythm with these asymmetrical beats  
Like cleats hitting pavement  
A beautiful arrangement of chaos and mayhem  
Like the Salem Witch Trials  
If they'd had vials of my brain matter they'd have  
burned me at the stake.  
Fluid melodies don't usually gel with these waves of  
mine  
Not like sine or cosine but like  
Rewind and you still can't keep up  
Shut.  
Up.  
A renegade heart rate  
So ask me for a date and I'll find it in the produce  
section  
I'll shatter the glass with my reflection  
Accidentally blow up the only right selection  
My wind chimes ring car alarms and explosions in the  
sky  
"Why?"  
Still just shy of the answer.  
This symphony isn't like raindrops on a summer's night  
Or your tongue after a Danish delight  
It's blood curdling moans that rattle your bones  
Calling people on unplugged telephones  
Some bass tones when I feel most alone  
The tempo like a stone  
Heavy and grey  
Conveys the message right.  
Every day and night and everything in-between is a jet  
stream of sforzandos.  
Rapid highs then rapid lows with a few solid blows to  
my ego  
The sharpest thoughts hit like staccato

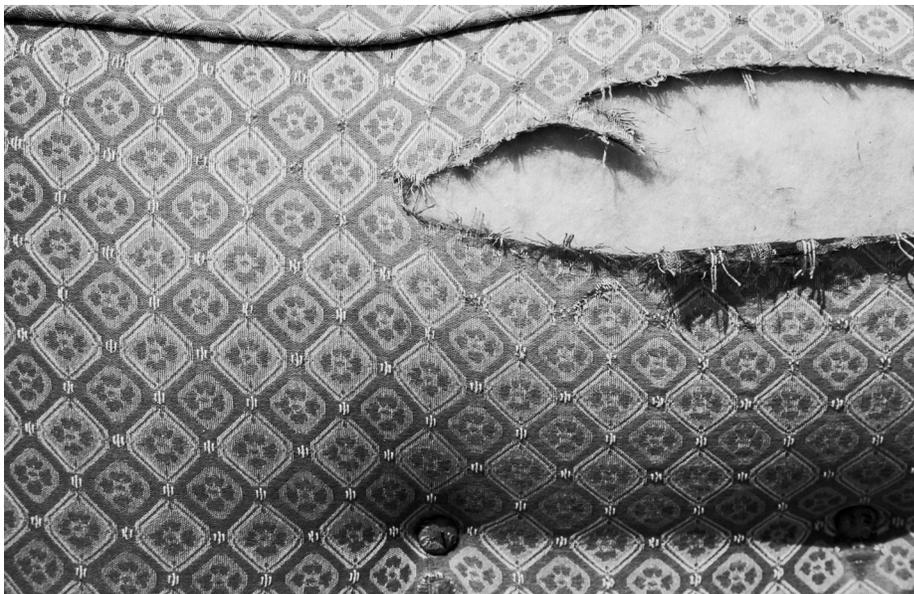
While vibrato carries the nicer ones through the  
gunshot wounds  
Lovely tunes float high like balloons  
Yet even in my own head I may never see them again.  
Some sunshine chords beaming through each minor  
key  
Reminds me I'm as free as I want to be.  
Three flats and sharps laid like tarps over every  
musical phrase  
Everyone but me plays the piano in the background  
Some are better than others.  
Sweet voices sing while others just bring noise  
So many beats per minute that every hour feels like  
six days at four different concerts.  
Hurts my ears all the time.  
None of the lyrics rhyme so it sounds more like a  
poem  
I slow 'em down so people can hear but all I have is my  
mirror  
Keeps my image clearer.  
I've never been the conductor  
Except of electricity  
Turns out the steel strings of my fingers have more  
elasticity than I thought.  
I toss and turn in time with the timpani between my  
temple  
But this temple doesn't like sleep too much  
A touch could be a harmony  
Or it could just be harm to me  
Both my arm and knee twitch uncontrollably  
Like syncopation  
Like irritation.  
Each ribbon of clustered notes carries life through my  
body  
Then warmth through my veins  
Reigns everything in when life rains me in  
When sleep finally finds me I always assume it's the  
finale  
Then I wake, and it begins again

# // EVEN LESS ABOUT, KAITLYN FORKS

By conversing with the clouds,  
I learned to spit swords,  
And swallow sounds.

While racing with rain,  
I learned to harvest doubt,  
And eat thoughts in my brain.

As far as love,  
I've learned little,  
And even less about,  
Learning to live well,  
As well as learning to live without.



# FLASH DRIVE, ALLIE MOCK //

If there were a flash drive for my brain  
I would click file SAVE all the memories I never  
wanted forget

The time my brother and I went swimming in the  
ocean during a storm  
Water pelted us from every direction and felt like a  
thousand stinging kisses  
He put me on his shoulders and I watched as flashes  
of lightning burned up the blackness  
I could feel the heat of his skin under my legs as I  
watched  
The world fall to pieces  
And I wanted to be something like that  
A catastrophe that shook the very foundations of our  
planet and made people question what was truth

The time I drank three bottles of Sunny D in ten  
minutes and spun around for hours pretending I could  
fly  
He told me we couldn't get married because humans  
don't marry birds  
I kicked him in the shin and took some of his Bubble  
Tape- which tasted terrible with the Sunny D  
The grass stuck to my skin and I watched as the  
clouds went down the drain and into the universe  
But I didn't care because I had finally figured out how  
to make my own kaleidoscope  
And I wanted to be something like that  
A disturbingly beautiful mystery that made people  
want to laugh and cry and throw up all at once

The first time I wrote something worth reading  
And read it, my voice shaky and stiff like my  
grandfather's walk  
I stood at the front of the room and watched as my  
teacher cried big wet tears that turned to diamonds  
that I threw up into the sky like a boomerang  
Praying for more inspiration from God  
Instead I got were feathers fluttering down as the

angels beat their wings in joy or sadness I couldn't tell  
And I wanted to be something like that  
An emotion so raw it gives you food poisoning when  
you try and swallow it so that people remember they  
are what they eat

I wish there were a flash drive for my brain  
I'd fill it with a thousand shining moments  
So I would never forget how it feels to be something,  
to be someone.

I'd pull it out when you open your mouth to tell me  
that you're sure that a Starbuck's apron will look nice  
hanging next to my creative writing degree  
Or that, a woman couldn't be president because she'd  
get blood on the oval office carpet  
Or that you can't wait to see what man will "tame me"  
even if that meant breaking my back

I'd pull out my flash drive and use it as a key to unlock  
the cage you so so carefully constructed to constrain  
me, because the truth is you are TERRIFIED of what I  
can, am, are going become.

At the end of my life, I'd wrap it in tissue paper that  
smelled like nostalgia, tie it with steel woven from my  
spine, and hand it to my daughter, praying she would  
never need it.

<< THIS WAS GRANDFATHER'S, MARTIN NELSON

## // FREEDOM, KRISLYN KOEHN

Before leaving the warmth of the loft, I bundle up in three layers of clothing. In the shade of the barn downstairs, the temperature usually lingers at about ten degrees below the temperature outside. I love the sound of my riding boots beating against the wooden floorboards as I pound down the stairs and outside. As I watch with anticipation, the sun peeks over the horizon and reaches out over the long grass in the far pasture. Its celestial glow turns the white wooden fence into pearl, and the rusty metal gate into gold. Forty-two horses stand patiently waiting to come inside the barn to their breakfast. The sun similarly makes its mark on them, mingling with their thick winter coats to create the illusion of candlelight. The clouds of condensation that waft from their muzzles become fiery smoke in the rays of young sun. Each one of those forty-two horses looks like a god, standing there, despite, or perhaps because, of their tragic pasts.

I approach a large chestnut gelding named Max and run my hand over his velvet muzzle, then his broad forehead. The air rushing in and out of his quivering nostrils tickles my skin. He seems to want to inhale life itself, and everything it has to offer. The white star between his eyes marks him like a halo. Just below it my fingers feel the small dent in his skull where his last owner shot him. Behind his ears I see the hairless spots where a barbed wire halter scarred him. Only a few feet away stands an appaloosa mare, her belly swollen with foal. Seeing me so near, she flattens her ears and backs away. She has not yet learned to trust people again the way Max has. A white mare standing further away spots me with her glittering brown eyes and makes her way over for a good scratch behind the ears. I can hear her old joints creak and pop when she moves. Bays, dapple greys, and buckskins move all around me in a rainbow, each with a different story to tell, stories that coincide on one point: their owners each shut them away and forgot about them.

I do not know what remains of a horse after its owner has locked it away and abused it. What remains of freedom when it lays bound in chains and subdued? Obviously something must remain because look: those horses still breathe. Even if the wind no longer rushes through the mane of that creaky old mare, it rushes in and out of her lungs. Max's scars will slowly fade and the appaloosa will have her foal. I hear another woman a ways off call the horses and a glint of gold catches my eye as she opens the gate. The horses know it means breakfast. Every one of them sets off at a canter, leaving me completely forgotten. Manes snap erect like flags and hooves beat in and out of time, melting into a consonant thunder. They seem to charge into war: a war against every chain, every bullet, and every strand of barbed wire. They go to war against the scars on their own bodies, the early aging that stiffens their own joints. I know in this moment, that they never had their freedom infringed. Their abilities do not make them the icon of freedom. A horse will run itself to death for the very sake of the race; there lies its freedom. Even after its body gives up and gives in, I know its fighting spirit joins a herd in heaven of all the horses that refused to stop running, and they run there still. Somewhere up there, the fences come from actual pearl, the gates from real gold. The early sunlight never grows old and the morning dew never dries. Somewhere up there, those horses really do exist as gods, the keepers of freedom—the ones who truly understand what it means to never give up.

# SKELETON, ANNABETH REEB //

She stood in front of her reflection  
and stared at her ribs  
one by one  
The cage around her heart—  
feeling the skeleton under her skin  
Perhaps too sharp, her hip bones  
pressed out—challenging the thin blanket  
of flesh  
Her neglected carcass—  
weighed down by everything  
that wasn't there  
What if she broke?  
and spilled out of her body—  
weeks of uneaten meals  
missing, for everyone not to see  
Could her heart still hold  
the sweet, savory, sin?  
The only taste she wanted  
was Hunger.



# // WORD, ASHLEY RIGGS

The boy lay in the hospital bed, making strange and feeble noises with his vocal chords. He had been hit by a car as he was leaving school and was now breathing with the assistance of a humming respirator. The Doctor worriedly turned to the parents and politely poked their minds. Has he made these noises at any time since exiting Life Stage Two? They glanced at one another and gave a negative response. The Doctor was suspicious, but he respectfully avoided testing their thoughts for mind blocks they might have thrown up out of embarrassment. Truthfully, the Doctor had seen cases like this before. They were always dealt with efficiently and silently, as was everything.

Children normally made the sounds in Life Stages One and Two, but by the time they began school, they were expected to be silent. Classes weren't what they had been when the Doctor was starting school as a Life Stage Three, not much older than this boy. Back then, the Instructor had administered electric shocks if the students so much as sighed. Every thought, every emotion, had to be communicated mentally. Once the students could express their emotions through disjointed images like a flickering slide show, they had advanced to learning how to convey more succinct messages. They were taught proper etiquette in asking to read other people's thoughts. Finally, their graduation had culminated in learning how to block other people out of private thoughts. Effective mind blocks were the trickiest skill to master. Many of his classmates only achieved the basic curtain, easily pulled aside by a persistent intruder. The Doctor, though, erected impregnable barricades, thick and impossible to navigate around. He glowed with pride at the memory: top in his class, recommended for higher studies since he had displayed supreme self-control and communicative abilities.

What was becoming of the education system these days? The other day in the waiting room, the Doctor had heard a young woman of mating age make a bubbly sort of sound when she found a joke amusing. She had blushed at her outburst, and ducked her head quickly. He had certainly also noticed a decline in people's manners; his nurses often barged into one another's thoughts, justifying their rudeness since it was an "emergency." Half the time, what the nurses considered an emergency was little more than a Band-Aid job. This boy, however, was more severe.

Approaching the parents' minds again, the Doctor asked permission to inspect the boy's thoughts. They quickly refused, worried that probing their son's mind now could hurt him in his physical state. The Doctor prized himself on being professional and courteous with his patients, so he did not press the matter. Legally, he was obligated to obey the parents' wishes. But he was also legally obligated to handle these types of cases before they grew unmanageable. That evening, after dismissing the night nurse for a coffee break, the Doctor sat at the sleeping boy's bedside and entered his mind fully.

This was always uncomfortable, but the Doctor was accustomed to invasive procedures. He braced himself for the pressure as he tried to fit himself awkwardly into the boy's thought patterns. The pressure was just stabilizing when BAM! The Doctor hit a barrier and found himself stunned, at the boy's bedside again. He tentatively prodded at the boy and drew back as if electrocuted. The Doctor was perplexed. This tiny little boy, perhaps no older than eight years and in his sleep, had constructed a mind block unlike any the Doctor had ever felt before. This block was not only thick and hard, it was also barbed to inflict pain on the intruder. Frowning, the Doctor went to fetch a hypodermic needle and a dose of norepinephrine relaxant. After injecting the

drug into the boy's veins, the Doctor waited for the boy's memory to soften before gingerly trying again. There was the familiar pressure, then the acclimation period, and then the Doctor was successfully in the boy's subconscious.

*I want Grandpa. I miss us walking out back behind the house by the river where nobody could hear us. He liked to sing. My favoritest was the one about the baby hushing up because the Mama was going to buy it a mockingbird. Grandpa called me his little Mockingbird. "You listen to my words and say what I say, Little Mockingbird." I did and he'd get all teary in the eyes. "We must keep silent about this because if they ever find out, they'll kill us. Don't ever tell anyone that we still remember words and we know how to speak. You keep these words deep in your heart and when you get old, you pass them on to your little mockingbirds." Grandpa had once called Mama his little mockingbird and tried to teach her the words, but now they were all forgotten and unused. Mama had thought Grandpa was crazy.*

*And didn't I do what Grandpa told me to? I kept my promise, hiding the beautiful words. Even at school, I didn't talk when they started teaching us the awful, very bad brain lessons. I don't ever want to get like Mama and forget words. I love my Mama though. Maybe that's why I tried to talk to her today. We were walking out to the car from school and she was up ahead of me just a little ways and I called out softly, in a whisper voice, "Mama." She turned around and looked at me and for a moment, I thought maybe she remembered what it felt like to have a name and be called by your name, how words spoke us humans into existence and how can we be people, how can we live without The Word? Then, she looked away. And then when no one else was looking, she shoved me in front of the car.*

That was all, the Doctor decided, he needed to know. He extricated himself from the boy's mind and looked down at him pitifully. The boy's mother would have to answer for her actions. The Doctor could solve the problem of the boy right now though, just as he had with the other speaking incidents. He flipped a few switches on the boy's respirator and the machine stopped humming. The heart rate monitor flat lined and all was quiet except for a lone bird singing outside the window.

# // MAGNOLIA, BEN GRONER III

After the frigid rains had gone  
And the spring sun reigned again  
I climbed the mammoth magnolia tree  
And sat cradled in the giant's hand

Green foliage spread below and around  
And fifty feet into the pristine sky  
While the sun suffused the flattened leaves  
That shone like mirrors in the golden light

Enclosed within this sea of green  
I swayed in the wind's playful jostlings  
As I was held within the branches' grasp  
Clinging to the trunk as it clung to me

Till I became like an overgrown leaf  
Deep in the heart of this ancient tree  
Hidden from all but the magnolia itself  
Yet no less real for not being seen

Then I stared through the walls of shade  
To the blue stretching infinitely away  
And began the long descent back down  
To the wide world of men and coppery clay.



# STAINED, EMILY STURROCK //

( )

\ 'ni-gər\ n. offensive **1.** a contemptuous term for a black or dark-skinned person

First used in America in 1619, John Rolfe coined the term “nigar” to describe a boatful of slaves shipping to the Virginia colony. He did not use the term as an insult; it was simply a description.

During the fur trade of the early 1800s to the late 1840s in the Western United States, the word was spelled “niggar.”

In 1874, the McLoughlin Brothers of New York produced a puzzle game called “Chopped Up ( )s.”

By the 1900s, ( ) had become a pejorative word and had several variations.

( ) **lipping:** Wetting the end of a cigarette while smoking it.

( ) **lover:** Derogatory term aimed at Whites lacking in the necessary loathing of Blacks.

( ) **luck:** Exceptionally, but undeserved good luck.

( ) **-flicker:** A small knife or razor with one side heavily taped to preserve the user’s fingers.

( ) **heaven:** Designated places, usually the balcony, where Blacks were forced to sit, for example, in an integrated movie theater or church.

( ) **knocker:** Axe handle or weapon made from an axe handle.

( ) **rich:** Deeply in debt but flamboyant.

( ) **shooter:** A slingshot.

( ) **steak:** A slice of liver or a cheap piece of meat.

( ) **stick:** Police officer’s baton.

( ) **tip:** Leaving a small tip or no tip in a restaurant.

( ) **in the woodpile:** A concealed motive or unknown factor affecting a situation in an adverse way.

( ) **work:** Demeaning, menial tasks.

Currently, black Americans use ( )—often spelled “nigga” or “niggah”—to neutralize its impact. The theory is if ( ) is used often enough, then it loses its meaning, just like any other word.

Broccoli. Broccoli.

The word starts to sound silly like a mouthful of cotton. Just funny sounds, no meaning.

So why can’t I say ( )? It’s just a word. “A rose called by any other name would smell as sweet.” A word like any other word.

Donald Glover, a black American comedian and TV actor, believes if everyone uses ( ), then it will no longer carry meaning at all. The history will be forgotten, or at least overlooked. The overuse of it will desensitize us, and everyone will use it freely without consequence or further analysis.

Picture this—two white undergrads in Panera. One orders a brownie. One doesn’t.

“Why didn’t you order a brownie, Kaylee?”

“( ), you know I’m on a diet.”

# << SMUDGE, MARTIN NELSON



# HALLELUJAH, STEPHEN CAMPBELL //

Hallelujah

How good it must feel to say it, to mean it  
Not a half-hearted mess of verbiage  
Tied together to express something... anything  
The invisible weight heavy pulling my head down  
In submission to depressed and repressed emotions  
That have carved out my naked figure  
To the bare, boney, barely breathing body you see  
before you

Hallelujah

If only the word could lift me  
If its meaning could cleanse me  
I might be moved, I might be filled, I might exist again  
Instead of stationary, sinking silently into soil I'm  
sitting on  
Afraid to look, afraid to live, afraid to feel  
Love wasn't the love I thought it was  
Even when it was there it was leaving

Hallelujah

I can faintly feel its familiar form  
Like a small whisper  
It is building up inside of me  
Absorbed by my feet from the singing, solid, ground  
Replacing me, with me, with something more than me  
Making me swell to the brim, my body lifting  
The weight reversed, pulling me gently upward

Hallelujah

It is in my head dancing  
Each syllable it's own personality  
Implanting perfection in every cell  
Warmth over taking the left behind loneliness  
The emphatuating emotionalism  
Making love a part of me  
The love that's more love than I ever thought it could be

Hallelujah!

I scream it

Hallelujah!

I sing it

Hallelujah

Standing straight, arms raised in the air high and  
strong  
Head tilted back, mouth wide open sweetly screaming  
As it overflows from my insides to overcome  
everything  
I float off the ground still naked but free  
Feeling joy, feeling freedom, feeling passion  
That has been delicately transplanted into my soul  
To change my substance and remove me from my old  
reality

Hallelujah

I will never return back to that sad sitting place

Hallelujah

I will say it over and over again for eternity

Hallelujah

Hallelujah

Hallelujah

# // TEATIME, KAITLYN MOORE

As she sips, the steam curls gently—

wrapping around

her cheek and

nose and

tight jaw.

the tea

burns —

her lips

tongue

throat

but she drinks it anyway,

She likes the feeling.

Her fiancée sits across the table.

his eyes are

tideless

green water, tepid

they hang there

(in empty space.)

didn't they burn once?

He talks, but she forgets to listen:

his words

elevator music

sweet & bland.

She tilts the cup

All the way back:

The last swallow is too bitter

and full of pieces

(blacktea.clove.orangezest.)

but,

at least it's full of

(something.)



# NOT UNDER THE BED, SARAH VAN SCIVER //

It was a stupid law. Sure it was a grand idea five years ago, when Phillips was the President. *Scumbag*.

Catherine jabbed her finger into the little “x” in the corner of the news site on the screen of her iPad, and rose angrily, leaving it on the table with the dishes from the boxed-macaroni dinner. She picked up Louisa’s sippy-cup from the tile floor that she had been meaning to mop all week, and refilled it with apple juice, shoving it in the fridge for later.

She began clearing the dishes, more noisily than usual, throwing them into the basin of the sink with little ceremony. Her bare heels made quick, muffled thuds on the tile floor as she marched back and forth from the small table with plastic-ware piled high. She recoiled suddenly, mid-stride, on her way back to the table. Leaning against the cabinets, she grasped at her foot. Cursing inwardly, she located the little Lego man where her foot had been moments ago.

“Michael!”

“Yes, Mom?”

“Get over here; don’t yell at your mother from your room.”

The boy entered the kitchen with trepidation, keeping his eyes somewhat downcast. His dad’s old college shirt fit him like a dress.

“Were you playing video games?”

“Jus’ one level.” he murmured.

“Have you finished your homework yet?”

“Almost.”

“Almost means no. You know the rules; no video games unless your homework is done. All the way done, not almost done.”

Michael nodded, “I’m sorry Mom.”

Catherine sighed and held up the Lego, “What is this doing in the kitchen?”

Michael looked up, his big chestnut eyes attempting to convey innocence. “I dunno, maybe he sneaked out of the big red box.”

“Michael, you’re six now. You know better than to leave your toys on the floor. Put him back in your room with all the others.” She held out the little man, with his factory-printed smile and bald cylinder head, dropping him into her son’s palm. The boy smiled a little and closed his fist around the man, scurrying back down the hall to his room to go play with the Lego he had forgotten about until now.

“No video games!” Catherine called after her son as he turned the corner and retreated down the hallway.

Catherine leaned over the sink, putting her weight on both hands, her fingers curled loosely around the stainless-steel basin. After staring for a few moments, lost in thought, she left the pile of bowls with murky cheese-water where they stood in the sink and walked quietly into the carpeted living room.

She sat on the edge of the couch, refusing to relax, and pressed the power button on the remote control—one of the few buttons she knew how to use effectively. Catherine watched TV from time to time with Michael and Louisa, but not enough to know which channels had what. Her husband had insisted on the cable package with the most

channels. He had wanted to be able to watch all the different angles the news was taking towards the new laws, but he hardly had any time to watch them anymore. He was so busy.

She flipped through the channels for a few minutes; *commercial, cartoon, some couple making out, commercial, crime show*, until she saw the face of a familiar newscaster appear in the middle of the screen.

“And now we go to Washington where Jessica is live on the ground with the protesters of today’s scheduled farewell address. Jessica?”

A blonde reporter in a long black coat was talking to protesters outside of the White House. She yelled some question into the microphone and threw it into a college student’s unshaven face. Catherine turned up the volume, but she wasn’t really listening. She was watching the student’s eyes burn with anger and frustration. His brown eyes, deep and hooded by thick eyebrows, were untested by the disappointments of the world; green to its cold irony. They darted back and forth as he spoke, his face contorting in unison with his words, as if he needed his whole face, and his hands, to explain exactly how “fucked up the government really is.”

*Not exactly news, college boy.*

Her own optimism about the government had faded since college. Jordan still believed they were doing the right thing somehow; still believed this law would prevent the selfish from running for office. They fought about it often, filling the quiet hours after Michael and Louisa were in bed.

The law had been passed on their anniversary five years ago. Jordan got home late wearing a smile,

but Catherine had already abandoned her dress for pajamas, angrily brushing out the curls she had spent an hour sculpting. She never believed him when he said he was sorry.

*Sorry he hurt me, maybe*, but Jordan could not have been happier with the law. He felt like he was making a difference. No matter how often Catherine told him how much he meant to Michael and no matter how often Louisa kissed his cheek and told him he was the best dad in the world, he would always need to do, and be, and give *more*.

Catherine threw the remote at the small pillow on the other end of the couch and tucked her feet under her, exhaling sharply through flared nostrils and folding her arms across her chest as she leaned back. They can’t really intend to follow through with this, she thought, watching the reporter turn her attention back to the camera and shout something boring and summative above the din of angry college students, the jobless, the amateur politicians, and the poll takers.

The refrigerator door slammed shut from the kitchen.

“Hush, Michael! Get your snack quietly!” she yelled without moving.

The President was speaking now on the screen; his podium encapsulated in microphones all pointed at his pale lips. He spoke gently, in that manner that had won him so much support from his nation. No lies, no party angle, no games.

Maybe it had started as a sick joke; certainly things had gotten so bad before that more than one person had cried out for blood. Unemployment skyrocketed, nursing homes lost funding, and politicians had tried to clip branches instead of brambles. Death

became the jester's song that brought a crooked grin to the masses as they ate in front of the TV. As Americans grew angrier and angrier about the power struggle Phillips had spear-headed with Congress – his flagrant attempt to assume ultimate legislative authority following the end of his term – less people cared about maintaining civility.

The Executive Order. *How clever.* Maybe if people knew the presidency meant giving your life, it would demand sacrifice: a higher call to take the bullet for the nation, the dutiful soldier throwing himself on a grenade. Well, the experiment had proven effective. President Williams was willing to die for his country, but was it a sense of sacrifice that guided him? Or was it a desire for the glory of martyrdom?

Then it happened: just a muffled shot, and he crumpled to the ground. The silencer on the barrel didn't keep the senators and congressmen around him from flinching.

Catherine stared, her gut suddenly wrenched so tight that she couldn't even find the strength to cry. She really didn't think they would do it, not to him. She was sure that someone would speak up, would cry out for an exception to be made.

*Why didn't someone stop them?*

"Mommy?"

Catherine whirled around, and tried to shake color back into her face.

"Louisa, honey! What is it? I thought you were lying down."

The little blonde girl looked from her mother to the screen and back, her head gently cocked to the side

and her tiny lips curled into a puzzled frown.

"Did that man *really* die?"

Catherine felt her heart sink *Yes, they murdered him; those sick bastards actually did it!* But how could she tell her baby the truth? How could she tell her that the world was full of monsters? And they didn't live under the bed. We let them walk around like they were normal people. But normal people had hearts and brains and reason.

"Come here, Louisa."

The four-year old walked over to her mother's outstretched arms, taking a big sip of the apple juice in her sippy-cup. Catherine picked her up off the ground and placed Louisa on her lap, trying to cradle her so that her bright blue eyes were turned away from the screen.

"Is it a movie, Mommy?" Louisa turned her head so that she could see, refusing to look away from the strange scene.

"No baby...it's not a movie," she wrapped her arms around her little girl and held her tight, trying not to cry as the American flag was draped over the man's body. *Taps, fucking Taps.* She reached for the remote and turned the volume down so she wouldn't have to hear the mournful droning of the bugle.

"Why did they shoot him then?" The girl's voice was heavy with confusion. "Was he a bad guy?"

"No! No, he was a good man."

"Are they bad guys?"

We're all bad guys, thought Catherine bitterly as she

*We're all bad guys*, thought Catherine bitterly as she blinked back tears. "No, honey, it's just...just a silly law. The law is the bad guy. They are just trying to do what they think is right."

They watched the TV for a few minutes in silence, staring at the commercials for better razors, dinner deals, and Pillow Pets. The sound was so low that you couldn't really hear the reason why you should spend your money on these things, but at least the actors looked happy. Their smiles and laughter had been recorded before the live televising of the President's farewell address, but Catherine was still jealous of their apparent disregard for the haunting horn still playing in her head. *All is well, safely rest.*

*God is nigh.*

"Mommy?"

"What is it?"

"When Daddy is President, he won't let them kill anyone again."

Catherine finally let the tears pour.

"Of course not, baby." She kissed the little girl's forehead, "Daddy's not afraid of monsters."



# ANATOMY LESSON, JESSICA SMARR //

This is a science lesson,  
and you best pay attention real close,

Because *damn boy*  
you've got a body and  
you're more than just the cherry filling  
for an empty grave.

I mean, look at your hands,  
you're fingers broken record players  
up in the roots of my hair,  
playing and pulling the same one-two-one-two  
*I want you, I want you, I want you* tune.  
And I guess that would make those fingertips the  
grooves of records, you know that noise they make  
when you play 'em a-thump-thump-thumpin' down my  
spine. That's the devil's music slidin' on down my back,  
sweat beads fallin' down a Sunday School dress, but I  
can't help but *burn* with conviction.

Your eyebrows now, they're made of blackberry jam,  
gobs of it,  
smears from ear to ear.  
The gobble-it-up kind, but eyebrows are too often  
ignored,  
getting stuck at the back of your momma's fridge like  
it just ain't fair.  
Nobody means to forget about 'em,  
to cover their toast in your blueberry preserve eyes  
every mornin' instead,  
but I make sure to swipe my fingertips across your  
forehead,  
something sweet drippin' down,  
down,  
down my hands,  
gigglin' as I'm lickin' it off like I ain't ate for weeks.

And boy you know you've got a mouth full of piano  
keys,  
and I've never been any kind of musician

but I know I've just gotta run my tongue across each  
note every single night,  
makin' sure to hit every one just a' right, right, *right*,  
can you feel it, can't you feel it?

I know how you practice each morning when you  
brush your teeth  
an up-down-up-down-and-a-to-the-side-now and  
you've got it,  
always in rhythm, always an up-down-up-down  
knowing just when to play that low, low note.

You're lips ain't nothin' more than talk radio, darlin'.  
I set my ear beside 'em, needin' to know what's  
happenin' in my world,  
tellin' me the facts one by one by one,  
rollin' 'em in waves down my arms,  
"I fell in love" an'  
"I wanna fuck you" an'  
"I'll be home for dinner"  
peekin' out under my sleeves for the neighbors to see  
when I lock your door behind me in the mornin'.

And your heart, well,  
you've got a heart like an ol' science book,  
lines and lines of somethin' I don't understand but I'll  
keep on readin', what do you say baby?  
Because if I can't ever learn it all,  
I surely won't ever get bored, a hearin' that heart  
pound-pound-poundin' with each new line,  
and I could live a life of learnin' like some kind of  
college girl,  
feet propped up on the edge of the kitchen sink,  
holdin' some book in my hands,  
with some pretty little kind of ease,  
day after day after day after day.

<< I'M INTO YOU, TAYLOR SMITH

# // THE HEARSE, AMANDA ROTHBAUER

She stares empty-minded  
out the window of the back  
seat. No music  
plays, not even the classical  
flute-violin-harp  
combo her husband always loved,  
always forced her to listen to.  
She remembers  
braiding her hair,  
second date preparations  
more important than the first.  
Should it be plain  
down her back,  
falling in the middle of the ridge  
formed between her shoulder blades,  
her rib cage, her pelvic bones  
when she sat up straight or laid  
belly down?  
Should it be French,  
exotic like the man she was trying to impress?  
Should she try  
something new like he  
suggested only a few nights before  
twisting a braid into a bun?  
She smiles, thinking of his stunned  
look when she stepped into his truck.  
Even while he was dying he still  
gazed at her with the same  
admiration of her beauty. She thinks that  
she has grown old and that her loveliness  
faded long ago like fabric in the sunlight, but  
he always disagreed. Who will tell her now  
that she looks just as fresh as when they first met?  
She left her hair for last,  
plenty of time to spare  
after donning her dress  
and applying mascara and rouge.  
One braid down the back  
she decided.

With her blind stare out the glass,  
she sees people getting  
frustrated as they try to enter the  
highway, suddenly halted  
by the procession. She makes eye  
contact with a girl around 17  
years old who bangs the steering  
wheel then sits back in submission.  
She starts fiddling with the ends  
of her hair to keep her idle  
hands busy. The widow  
knows that restless feeling well.  
Her hands moved quick,  
intricate. She pulled,  
yanked, tugged until every curly  
strand was in place. She wasn't the  
kind of girl who liked loose braids.  
A good braid is like a good marriage.  
The weaving should be tight.  
Her wiry grey hair  
doesn't plait like it  
used to. She can't pull it tight  
anymore with her sensitive  
scalp. So she fingers  
through her hair like she's playing a  
harp, gently  
plucking the music her husband loved.



# // HOPE, CHRISTOPHER JOLLY

Every place in life that stands on truth  
Radiates light with living, abiding hope.

Thus, every place in life that does not glisten with  
hope  
Is a place founded on a lie. Stuck in its twists.  
From that place, darkness permeates and constricts.

Like the rising sun reflects over the surface of the  
ocean,  
An ocean deep in love, strong in grace, vast in mercy,  
Shimmers with rays from Love's true light, brilliantly  
bright!  
So with my heart when founded in truth.

Yet as the storm with thick gloom robs the light of life,  
This sea of dark clouds blankets and obstructs,  
Hovering over deep waters that toss and erupt:  
So with my heart when ensnared in a lie.

Hope's freedom finds green pastures  
And is freest in Love's light, planted in Love's hands.

But these lies deprive me like clouds cover the sun-  
rise.  
Strongholds sprout from these dark, tossing waves  
With strong footholds rooted in unstable, shifting  
ground.

These places stripped of hope become strongholds  
too great:  
How can one cope? From this storm, where does one  
escape?  
Where has the light of hope gone?  
Was hope here or placed in the wrong care?

Hope burns through morning haze  
With light that bursts through darkest days.  
Awake, oh Hope, and part this overcast.  
Separate with light brilliant and vast!  
Awake, my heart! No longer be downcast!

Awake, my soul! Your night has passed!

In this wondrous light, hope blazes and gleams,  
Rending the storm at its seams.  
My heart glows and glistens from vivid beams.

If the sunrise could meet the sunset over the ocean,  
The waters between would array morning glory with  
colors magnificent,  
Painted with hues awesomely deep, glowingly bright.  
Darkness exposed in every hiding place, losing all its  
might;  
Constantly exposed to Hope's embrace, overcome by  
true light.

As I look upon the Son's face,  
I know of no other place than this ocean of love and  
grace.  
The deeper I go, the brighter light shines from Hope's  
face.  
The stronger warmth grows from its embrace.

Oh, to see You face-to-face.  
Like the ocean greets the sun in full shine,  
This heart will glisten with hope divine.

# BLOOD DRIVE, MARK DORE //

Violet wanted nothing less than to go to class the day following a family member's deathday (if people had birthdays, it stood to reason we'd be consistent). A bus shuttled her from her apartment to campus. She had to give A&M credit. Much of its social engineering sucked, but the bus system was well oiled. Frictionless. The bus dropped her off six minutes after she locked her apartment door.

She didn't live in the sorority house anymore. That was for sophomores, mostly. The house didn't have enough bookshelf space for a girl like Violet. She didn't hate being in a sorority. Some of the sisterhood stuff rubbed off on her like tobacco smoke rubs off on a lung. But one year with forty women was enough.

She rattled off a head count of her immediate family: Mom, Dad, Violet, Rube. Scratch the last one. Four became three. In twenty-four hours Violet lost twenty-five percent of her family. A trembling thumb navigated her music and hit play on a Disney soundtrack compilation. She needed to stab-and-ditch this thought—fast.

She saw a rack of newspapers as she stepped off the bus. Plastered on the entire front page were two photos—one from Rube's swearing in as student body president and the other of Rube's house from outside the crime scene tape. The headline read, "STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT DEAD," in caps. She set the paper down, gently, careful not to crease Rube's face. He would have hated that.

She noticed something about campus: there were plenty of benches. As she sat on one, she thought it might be her first time. This campus had its endearments, but sitting and looking wasn't one of them. Violet was one of the converts, but A&M didn't win her over for the normal reasons. Here she found the mouth of a whale big enough to swallow her whenever she so chose. She liked the size; it was bigger than her.

"What now?" she asked no one.

Rube was her big brother. Few people knew more than one or two of the skins of Violet the Social Chameleon. Rube knew them all. He was distant in just the right ways. He never pried. He let Violet be Violet and he let her collapse onto his shoulder whenever she needed and blend her pain and snot and tears on one of his crisp gingham shirts. Sometimes he opened up to her. Maybe Violet had known something wasn't right with him these last months. A symptom of his election as student body president, she told herself, but maybe she knew something more was at play.

She pulled out a stick of gum and chewed it to occupy her jaw and keep it from clenching. Other people had a long line of dead friends, mothers, cousins, cats, and car engines. Violet didn't.

She chewed her gum in a manner she thought pensive and realized she wasn't sad. She should rip her hair out. Dance the crazy dance. The only surviving member of her family with whom she cared to talk to was her dad, and they talked about books. She had few family ties compared to her friends who went home to big family potluck dinners and now she had fewer.

Class forgotten, her feet carried her to the MSC. She jammed headphones in her ears and played something sad and walked, head down. She laughed because the plug-in-and-tune-out routine she wanted to be an act of somber grief and penance looked to the world like a further testament to her social conformity. The earbuds, her leggings and her headband, her backpack—it was all the same. Her outside looked like others' outsides. The thought slowed her pulse and her pace.

When she stepped through the doors she realized the purgatory that was to follow. There would be a Silver Taps ceremony. Aggie Muster some time after that. A memorial service. A wake. A funeral.

She could tell from the hum of the MSC as she walked in that the news had spread. She could sense the under-breath hisses. She didn't see anyone who would out her as the sister of the deceased, though, so she continued inside through the Honor entrance, or the Respect entrance, or the whatever-the-hell entrance, named after the Aggie core values. Violet wondered how many entrances she would desecrate in the next half hour.

An area to her left consisted of carefully arranged tables and chairs, a bank of public computers, restrooms, murals. A standard-issue modern campus study venue, and occupied. The first test week of the semester approached. A dining area lay ahead of her but a rat-poop-and-cockroach fiasco some weeks back turned her off the place. The Starbucks to her right had a long line. By Violet's count five Starbucks franchises occupied the town and the lines all looked like this, no matter the time. The coffee market could not be saturated.

Violet kept her head down and almost missed the blood drive. It had the standard allotment: two workers, two beds (though she thought she might call them gurneys if she watched more *Grey's Anatomy*), plastic bins, and reclined chairs for those who had just given blood. Two or three people sat in the chairs and chewed cookies and Cheetos. They rested until it was safe to leave their blood behind and carry on with their day.

"American Red Cross," a sign read. "If you really want to lend a hand, lend an arm." It was the kind of blood drive that told a girl she could save three lives if she gave what Violet imagined a significant portion of her

blood. The implication: choosing not to give meant killing three people, but Violet never brought that up. And what if one person uses two-thirds of the blood? Then it would save two lives. Or three people could use her blood and two could die anyway. Or a greedy bastard could use all her blood and die anyway. How many times did one blood donation actually save three lives?

She looked on as a woman in pink scrubs and a man in grey scrubs sucked blood through tubes from two students lying on their backs. Violet stopped and watched the redness of the blood explore the tube and soil the clearness of it. Everything it touched became red. Scorched earth; General Sherman; Shenandoah Valley. The blood looked like the boiling fast-crawl of molten lava. Violet hated the blood.

It gave the semblance of life but it wasn't. Wasn't even incubated life. The blood was death. The people in the scrubs were the death-takers. The people whose blood they drew were the death-givers. Violet's inner courts found all parties guilty.

People stigmatized blood and it made her laugh. It carries disease, or it gives life, or it gives something, or it takes something, or it represents something. Violet was in on a secret few others seemed to know: blood was blood. Rube still had his allotment. He hung himself to death with an extension cord. (Dying by hanging? What is this, Rube, *Pirates of the Caribbean*? The Civil War? Show some ingenuity.) And if Rube had blood but had no life, blood couldn't be life. Suck on that, science.

Blood-red skies are ominous. Blood is a symbol of heritage ("it's in the blood"), of mortality ("all men bleed"), of allegiance ("blood kin"). She wondered how many bags of allegiance they had in those crates. A sign said the drive began at ten and it was noon, so for two hours this scrub-bound duo had harvested

from the willing. How many blood oaths could you sign with that stash? How many Tours de France could Lance Armstrong win with that much oxygenated blood to shove down his veins?

Even the term “blood bank” pissed her off. We have euphemisms for everything. The guy who made her sandwich at the deli was a “sandwich artist.” She got, like, two pieces of turkey on white bread. He was history’s worst artist. Why couldn’t someone come up with a euphemistic term for “blood bank”? Diluting hard concepts was easy. America had generations of practice. No one even liked banks. Banks had to be bailed out. Banks failed. The bad guys in cartoons were always bankers. And yet “blood bank” is the best we could come up with.

This was sexual, wasn’t it? There was penetration. Blood was personal. Skin felt tender and sensitive, felt private, but blood was a person. There was nowhere deeper to go. Violet remembered reading—and by “read” she meant “watched on Criminal Minds”—that some killers found they could only perform sexually, could only “get off,” by stabbing. By penetrating. A knife, and by proxy a needle, was as obviously a phallus as Violet could conjure. In her imagination a few of these scrubbed-up vampires had joined up because they were the stabby-stabby-sex type, sadists who had to muffle the sigh of ecstasy as they guided the needles in. Violet was in a weird mood.

No one cared that these two had screwed the blood out of consenting partners, in public, for hours. Violet cared.

She reached for a phone and sent a text message to Martin Pope, the tired, not-ugly reporter she met during Rube’s campaign. Someone should see what she did, and a) she thought he was nice and b) he was the only reporter whose phone number she knew. “Get to the MSC in ten minutes or less,” her text

message read. “Bring your notebook, or camera, or whatever it is you people use.”

Her gaze drifted up to a television mounted above eye level on the opposite wall, tuned to a local newscast. A transition to the next bulletin: “Suicide suspected in the death of Rube Strong.” Laughter welled and cracked, snapped and simmered within her. Rube always wanted to get his sheened mop of hair onto the TV, and now he’d done it. A few students stared up at the screen. Seated in a vacant chair, she waited. When her cell phone clock told her Martin’s ten minutes were up, she stood.

One girl looked up and Violet couldn’t hold in her laughter any longer. For once in their lives her fellow students appeared rapt in their studies. Only this girl—with a pink, round face and skinny jeans—saw her walk, laughing, toward the girl in pink and the man in grey. The man was skinny and sleep-deprived but not bad on the eyes. The woman had a few too many medical school Oreos on the doctor’s Trail of Tears. Her cheeks and neck hung loose over a crisp facial structure. Pink Scrubs smiled as Violet approached, assumed her best “how can I help you” expression. Do you even have to be a doctor to work a blood drive? Maybe this girl just liked to eat. Violet could relate.

Violet mouthed an apology as she punched that face and felt its nose give way beneath her Aggie ring. Pink Scrubs dropped. Grey Scrubs shrieked, backed away. The punch made little noise, but his whining drew an audience. Violet gave a coy grin—almost seductive—and waved a hand, palm down, in a gesture you might use to shoo away a stray dog.

She took her time. Peeled the black lid off what had to be the storage site for the donated blood. Twenty or thirty bags of blood stared up at her. She heard the snap of a cell phone camera. Rube was the showman of the family, and that was true in death. Today she

took a page from his book. A salute. If she'd had a champagne glass, she'd raise it in toast. But she only had bags of blood.

She grabbed a bag in her left and dominant hand, and holy hell, she thought, her fifth-grade softball coach would be proud. The bag hit Grey Scrubs in the abdomen as he backed away and doubled him over. Violet cackled.

The next bag hit Watching Girl who sat, mouth agape, fifteen feet away. It hit like a water balloon that didn't break. The girl wailed. Violet's eyes pooled with laughter. Looking down, she saw one of the beds (now empty—the patients had, predictably, skirted away) and saw a crease of exposed metal. She grabbed another bag and brought it down on the metal. It punctured and the spurt of blood was comically cinematic. It sloshed across the front of her shirt and on her cheek. It speckled her shoes. She tasted of it at the corner of her mouth. The bag didn't travel so far as the first two and hit no one, but when it landed it burst and peppered a table of bystanders.

People fled. The study area emptied, but some stayed and formed a perimeter. No one wanted to be in range, but no one wanted to miss the spectacle. She knew some might think she had a gun, or that she planned to escalate in some way. If the campus gun-nuts had their way and concealed carry was made legal, someone would have popped her by now.

The twinkle of cell phone cameras illuminated the red blood in her vision. Violet thought it a pretty color. The knot of observing students underestimated her throwing arm and the next bag landed among them. Blood matted hair and squelched in the pits of knees. One girl complained about an eye. The roar rose. Violet wondered when she would see the University police.

Her world became a collage of blood and laughter. These peoples' worlds are so small, she chanted in her head. So small. *Heave*. So small. *Splash*. So small. Heave. The generations previous determined our social cues, our gender roles, our castes. They left nothing for us, she thought. She created something new with each thrown bag. A new world order. An uprising. A revolution, and nothing less. She shed the sweltering societal garment placed on her from womb's exit and she felt free. She threw for the Rube she knew and the Rube the EMTs cut from his cord. She threw for her mother, whom she didn't hate but didn't like, and her father, the weak-as-oatmeal bartender. She was The Liberator. She owned the world. Her peers were pawns. They fit inside her hand's creases.

A student with a patched neck-beard rushed her. What a hero. A bag of blood hit Hero in the face and must have found his throat because he fell and writhed, vomiting on the carpet.

When the police arrived she had emptied all but two bags at her disposal. The floors slicked in a layer of blood. The scrub-vampires had hoarded the blood; now it belonged to the public. Rob from the rich and give to the poor. To hell with the Russell Crowe movie—Violet was her generation's Robin Hood. More than one person slipped on the slimed tiles. As she looked down at her shirt and shorts held taut against her skin, Violet hoped she looked sufficiently Carrie-like.

King would write something like this, she thought. Traumatic family accident leads to a snap. When she thought it in her head she thought not of the word but of the onomatopoeia. She heard the *snap*. She didn't know where all the *snaps* in crime shows and Stephen King books happened. The head, she assumed. Something mental. And as she accidentally licked someone's (or two someone's, maybe three) blood

from her lips, she thought, This is it. I'm really doing it. I'm insane. The padded walls, institutionalized kind. State-of-the-art, military grade, Hannibal Lector, Rick Santorum brand of crazy.

"Violet, what the hell are you doing?"

She looked to the face and a smirk blushed at her lips: Adam Tharp. The guy who had a Big Gulp-sized crush on Violet their freshman year. She'd thought she liked him, too, and it was college, so maybe, you know, no need for saliva swap. She dove onto his dorm room bed, and he had a little dignity, or something, and then they were done. He had edged to the front of the crowd. He wore a tie even though it was a Monday. He didn't even have chapter meeting tonight; he did it for the pretension. It could use some red, she thought. Just behind Adam stood Martin Pope, the journalist. She was glad he hadn't missed the show. He had a camera out, one of the big journo kinds that would capture each little droplet of blood in the air, with the background blurred for effect. She winked at Martin, who smiled back. Ha, she thought, this guy gets it! The world could use a sense of humor.

The two police officers yelled something at her. They came from her right so she grabbed the two remaining bags of blood and went left, toward Adam, and just behind, Martin. She clapped them against one another and they punctured. When she ran she felt slow, like running feels in a dream.

She tasted the iron-taste of blood and nothing had ever been funnier. She heard the police, heard Adam, heard the bubbling horror of the students, heard the clatter of Martin's shutter, but she was in a Saving Private Ryan-style trance. The sound blurred and compressed like a .ZIP file located somewhere behind her head. It seemed days had passed since her mother called about Rube. Maybe she turned some eyes away from him and she hoped whatever she

did would be worse than what he did. Or maybe she had flung blood (pun sure-as-hell intended) over the entire ordeal and further drenched her family.

Everyone but Adam and Martin recoiled and the moment turned to sludge. Adam looked at her, and she at him, and she could feel the bags dripping as twin jets of blood traced her path to her almost-ex-boyfriend. She felt thin most days, but she had never felt weightless. And right now, her life behind her, the consequences still unfelt, she carried none of the society that raised her. She had broken from it. Whether or not she had *snapped* she would answer later.

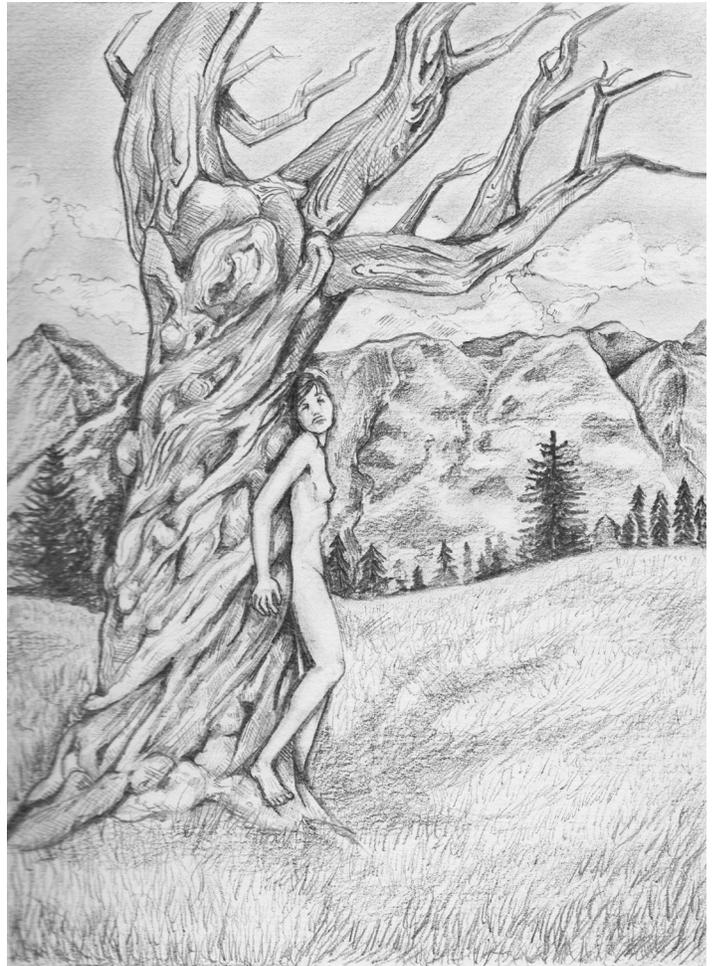
Another step and she reached Adam. He extended his arms in front of him, not protective like a block, but open. Like he expected an embrace. Like he expected to rescue her from herself. She brought the bags behind her back with her arms extended, feeling the stretch in her shoulder blades, like an Olympic swimmer during her warm-up. Then she brought them together in front of her and whooped with glee. The bags burst and she and Adam were caught in an embrace of blood. She drenched him as she threw herself on him. Her legs wrapped around his waist and she squeezed her bloody lips onto his. He didn't resist, the pervert. She pictured the iconic image of a sailor reuniting with the love he left behind in the service of his country. She was the photographer and this was her shot. Martin's camera shutter sounded like a machine gun.

Adam lost his footing in the blood. She landed on top of him and she heard the crack of his tailbone on the tile. She laughed as the police cuffed her and carried her away. Martin's camera kept clicking.

# // OPHELIA, MADISON LEE

Footprints, bloody  
on the sidewalk  
Trip in in pairs of two  
And I wonder in a whispering  
if your voice was ever true.  
See, even now the red is fading  
just up to unblemished clear  
Who besides myself and God  
knows what marks once were here?  
The cobblestones are obsolete  
and the white skin  
is scrubbed clean.  
I follow the tune of the water,  
dipping my fingers in the waves  
I can see her outline lapping up  
amid the weedy caves.  
The eyes are closed, her mouth is open  
her song is for me now  
I ask her what it's like to drown,  
she says: "I'll show you how."  
The minnows dart between her teeth  
the flowers have long since dried  
Still the perfume lingers on  
The lifeline of the tide.  
Her ghostly fingers, pale as breath  
reach up to stroke my hair  
And she laughs at the damp streaks they leave,  
saying: "Darling girl, beware."  
"The world is full of voices,  
not all of them are real  
The world is full of people  
that have forgotten how to feel.  
On the earth there are songs  
as mute as unspoken lies  
There is a broken-hearted silence  
in the way humanity dies.  
Because it is that you must see  
the way we meet our ends,  
A soul's suicide can go unheard  
without the knowledge of our friends.  
We die not because we cannot live,

but, rather, because we can.  
Your very essence is dispersing  
like the wind that catches sand.  
You'll die a hundred-thousand deaths  
before you fall underground  
Or if you are indeed like me,  
you'll jump before Fate makes a sound.  
This is how the river flows  
telling all who make their way here  
Just how to swallow the ocean  
and how best safety lies in fear."



# BAD ROMANCE, PAIGE WASKOW//

Hey, girl.

I've been at my camp for a while now, and I know you have been at yours, too. Are you sufficiently sunburned? Have you been pooping irregularly? Good. Me too. Now we're both officially camp counselors.

This job is weird. I don't think I like it. I've resigned myself to the fact that I may wake up in the middle of the night to the sound of puke spattering off the cabin's linoleum floor, only to spend the next two hours holding a twelve-year-old's hair as she regurgitates chicken fingers and rainbow sherbet. Also, there's a good chance that at least once a week, a fifth grader will suggest that I join a convent, because, at the ripe age of twenty, I've reached my sexual prime and have nothing to show for it. It's like they can smell that I'm single.

Yeah, I don't like it.

Do you think kids are maturing faster nowadays? When they're not obsessed with my love life, they're working to develop their own. I guess when I was pre-pubescent, I had a crush on every boy I saw and thought by the time I was twenty (going on twenty-one) I'd have a man on each hip and a pair of double Ds, but we both know how that ended. It just seems like they're all in a rush to stick their tongues in each other's mouths. Like, what is that all about? I might have had a crush on all the boys, but I'm pretty damn sure I never made eye contact with a single one. I blame Justin Bieber. But anyway, despite our camp staff's attempts to eliminate any "camp babies," by telling campers that PDA is not allowed, every week, the relationships begin to blossom, except not in the normal way.

You know how normally you'll see two people flirting and you form some sort of opinion about them? You

say, "oh, they're of equal attractiveness and both seem to enjoy eating. I bet they'll make it," or maybe you think, "there's no way in hell." Why do we try to predict relationships between other people? I don't know. Anyway, when it comes to camp, I always think there's no way in hell, but then it works out. That's exactly what happened with two campers recently.

CeCe was in my cabin last week. She was probably the prettiest sixth grader I've ever seen. You know how when we were younger there was always the "popular" girl, and she was only popular because she was beautiful, but beyond that, she actually wasn't that cool? That's how CeCe is. There's nothing remarkable about her, except that she's exceptionally good-looking, and she knows it. And that makes her kind of a bitch. I know I'm not supposed to bad-mouth campers, but let's be real, some of them just suck.

CeCe always had her sassy pants on. I can't even tell you how many times she rolled her eyes at me, just because I told her it was time to go to bed or that she had to eat more than one bite of her corndog (she had early onset anorexia, if you ask me). Every morning, she'd roll out of bed five minutes before we had to leave the cabin to go to breakfast, and ask me to put her long, blonde hair into a ponytail. Now, I'm aware that I'm not exactly the savviest when it comes to these sorts of things, but I think I can manage to put someone's hair in a ponytail. I'd brush her hair, then gather it all up in my hands at the crown of her head before wrapping her hair tie around it as we were walking out the door. And it would look alright, considering the circumstances. This is camp, for God's sake, not *Toddlers and Tiaras*.

Anyway, the whole way to breakfast she'd complain that something was wrong with it. It was either hurting her head or it was too high or it was too low or her hair was in her eyes. By the end of the week, I asked her why she continued to choose me to fix her hair

<< KNOTTED, MADISON WIGLEY

when: A.) She is twelve. She is capable of doing it herself, and B.) I apparently was the worst hair stylist she's ever had. She retorted, "Well, my mom usually does it because she wants me to look perfect, and that nothing ever gets done right unless you do it yourself. And you have to do it because I'm trying to teach you to fix hair correctly, because your own hair looks like a mess. This is actually a favor." CeCe in a nutshell, my friend.

So, on the second day of camp I was walking a little bit behind her as she was on her way to the pool with her friends. Their faces were close as they talked. They occasionally giggled disturbingly, and often looked around to make sure no one knew what they were discussing. I could tell they were up to no good, but I've learned that ignorance to the gossip of pre-teens is bliss. I put their interactions in the back of my mind, and headed to the zipline to work my shift.

When I got to the zipline, there was a group of about ten boys waiting for instructions. They all looked pretty normal, most of them wearing basketball shorts, Under Armour shirts, and those high black socks with their Nikes (Why is that a trend? Just, why?). They were trying so desperately to fit in, and succeeding, I guess, at least among each other. Except one.

Drake wore a pair of checkered Vans, black, plastic-rimmed glasses, skinny jeans (in July. In Texas. Once again, why?), and a Red Hot Chili Peppers t-shirt. He was one of those "hipster wannabes," you know? And I mean, that was annoying, but I'm actually pretty sure that we would be best friends if he were eight years older.

Drake was totally nerdy in the most adorable kind of way. When I was getting him strapped into his harness in preparation for his ride down the zipline, he referred to it as his "chastity belt." Then, as he flew down the zip cable, he raised his fist high in the air and

yelled, "FOR NARNIAAAAAA!" at the top of his lungs. I'm positive everyone at camp could hear. It was kind of awesome.

I finished my shift at the zipline, and walked with Drake and the other boys to dinner. Drake talked to me about Harry Potter, while the other boys argued about who had shown the most bravery while going down the zip. "Well, I went down faster than you." "Yeah, but at least I didn't scream." Back and forth, back and forth. Whatever, I wasn't really listening. I was talking about the triumphant defeat of Voldemort with a cool camper.

We walked into the lobby of the dining hall, and I turned to see CeCe standing in a circle with her friends, her back to us. She abruptly turned around to stare at us as we entered. Her eyes widened and her cheeks flushed (although maybe she had just forgotten to wear sunscreen even though I reminded her a million times) before she spun back around and erupted into a fit of giggles. One of the boys, Matt, shared a knowing glance with his friend. Matt was the most infamous of the group, notorious for convincing a girl last summer that he would be her date to the camp dance if she ate twelve pudding cups. After about nine, she threw up all over the cafeteria floor, as he admitted that he had never intended to take her in the first place. However, he is a charming, good-looking Little League baseball player, so basically girls are Play-Doh in his hands.

As CeCe and her friends continued with their obnoxious "oh-em-gee-you-liiiiiiiike-him-and-now-you're-in-the-same-building" laughter, Matt ran his fingers through his hair and wiped the sweat off his face with the bottom of his sports tank top, being sure to expose his abs (which, by the way, were not visible, because, allow me to remind you, he's twelve years old). He took a look back at me and the rest of the group of boys, and walked up to the circle.

“Hey, ladies,” he said.

They turned to acknowledge his presence.

Looking at CeCe, he continued, “Did it hurt?”

“Did what hurt?” she ignorantly replied.

“When you fell from Heaven.”

CeCe didn’t even reward him with a chuckle. She simply rolled her eyes and went back to conversing with her friends.

Matt walked back to our group, looking confused. Frankly, I was trying not to laugh. I asked him why he ever thought that it would be a good idea to use a cheesy pick-up-line to get a girl’s attention. “My counselor told me to!” he said. Typical. I’m pretty sure the male counselors at my camp are more immature than the campers. They tend to severely lack social skills.

As amused as I found myself at CeCe’s rejection of Matt, I have to admit I was also a little confused by it. I thought Matt would have been her type, since he’s just as douche-y as she is bitchy. Also, it was obvious that she was harboring a crush for one of the boys, given her strange-yet-totally-normal reaction when we walked in. But I didn’t think about it too hard. I was too busy worrying about if there would be any churros left by the time I got to eat dinner.

I followed the boy campers into the cafeteria, and stood behind them at the end of the line. Drake looked up at me.

“Hope, I think you’re my favorite counselor.”

I was flattered.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Sure!” I told him, hoping the question wasn’t going to lead to me having to look at all of his mosquito bites and then tell him if I thought was going to get West Nile.

“How do you get a girl to like you?”

I smiled.

“Well, not by using dumb pick-up-lines, that’s for sure.”

He laughed, and glanced at Matt, sulking a few yards ahead of us.

“But seriously. Just be nice to her. Girls like guys who are nice.”

“So, if she asks me to go swimming with her, I should do it, even though I hate swimming?”

“I mean, yeah, I think that would be nice of you.”

“Okay! Thanks, Hope.”

We reached the front of the line just as they were putting out a fresh batch of churros. Score.

The next day, I was walking to my shift at canoes, when I saw them. CeCe was holding Drake’s hand and practically dragging him to the pool. From fifteen yards away, I could hear her call him “Drakey Pie.” Ugh. Okay, first of all, did they miss the lecture about PDA? Second of all, just what? How did this even happen? Did I inadvertently give Drake advice on how to woo CeCe? Oops. Was Drake the one CeCe had been gossiping about and crushing on the whole week? I guess so. Maybe she saw him as exploitable. I briefly wondered if I had stepped into a parallel universe where it was normal for shallow girls to

go for nerdy pseudo-hipsters. Oh, wait. It wasn't a parallel universe. This was camp.

And that's the thing about camp. "Love" shows up in the strangest ways. I don't understand it, but it's the Camp Crush Phenomenon. It's like this. What if a baker was trying to bake cupcakes the same way he normally does, but then he ran out of flour? And the whole world suddenly ran out of flour, and the baker absolutely HAD to finish the order, so he substituted the flour for cocaine. Those would be some pretty shitty cupcakes.

Campers leave their friends and family at home, and they try to replace those relationships at camp, but in reality they have about as much in common with their camp lovers as flour does with cocaine: they're both white. And those cocaine cupcakes may be damn good for the first bite, and then suddenly you're lying on the ground praying for a miracle. There's no good substitute for flour. I hope Drake learns this quickly. And I hope CeCe ends up with a homeless ex-convict.

Anyway, I miss you! I can't wait to see you when we go back to school in the fall! I'm excited to hear about all of your camp adventures!

All my love,

Hope

P.S. I enclosed some Dulcolax. I thought you might need it. That shit's worked miracles.



## CLEMENTINE, MADYSON SMITH //

*And to start with  
something small,  
something so hidden,  
it cannot be seen at all...*

A seed--a little thing so full of promise, endowed with potential. Granted a beginning and given a life. A seed I was, stretching forth my limbs, spurting upward from birth.

Summer 2000. Melting popsicles. Sizzling sidewalks. The sweltering heat of May, summertime in Texas, had long set in. It was summer all right. Even at six years old, I could tell the difference.

My first school year had passed. I had mastered my ABCs, identified the color wheel by heart, and could count backwards. I judged I had to be older. And so as far as I was concerned, I had to be taller too.

Every May, Grandpa would line us up in the kitchen. All the cousins, clad in dripping wet bathing suits, crowded in the kitchen and hovered at the pantry doorway.

When it was my turn to be measured, I stood on my tiptoes while my chin gravitated upward as if to gain every possible inch. Pretending not to notice, my grandpa ticked off a tentative mark. After I had moved out of the way, he finalized it, engraving it further with the dark pen and adding my initials.

According to the new dash on the pantry doorway, I had grown three inches. I gushed with mounting pride as I glanced at this year's mark and noticed how much taller I was.

"Four feet!" he exclaimed. "How about that!"

Six years old and four feet tall! The opportunities flashed before me with my newfound height. An additional three inches meant I wouldn't have to

miss out on The Rattler, the rickety wooden coaster, this summer at Six Flags. I was finally tall enough to experience the bloodcurdling twists and turns that my sister and cousins always bragged about. I brimmed with pride and excitement.

But just as quickly my pride melted when my cousins took their turns in the doorway: one cousin measured at four foot eleven, the other at five foot one. My sister was next: five feet four inches. As my grandpa called out each height, I shrank smaller and smaller as they grew taller and taller. A squashed bug.

My sister and cousins, proud of their new heights, darted back outside and into the pool. I remained behind. Dejectedly I sprawled out on the floor, fixated intently on the pantry door... my dash beneath theirs. I realized I was always going to be the youngest and the shortest--the baby, the runt of the family.

My grandpa, now busy rinsing dishes at the sink, turned when he saw I had not followed the others back to the pool. He frowned at the image of me focusing on my dash mark on the frame.

"Why don't you go along and play outside?" He coaxed. "I think I hear a game of Marco Polo starting up!"

Realizing that I wouldn't budge at the lure of even my favorite game, my grandpa abruptly turned the water off and knelt down. His face--so close to mine--lit up, alive and vibrant with an idea that had taken root in his head. And he tugged gently on my arm.

"I want to show you something," he said.

He stood me up and reaching into the cupboard, he extracted a gleaming plastic bowl and a yellow pair of scissors. Then he moved to the sliding glass door and I knew I was to follow. I hurried after him, curious to see what this wise man had to show me.

<< THE LAMP POST, KAYLA SHELLEY

The pool was swarming with the “big kids,” cannonballing off the diving board and snickering when the spray of the water drenched the grown-ups, who were busy reading their home improvement magazines and their lawn mower advertisements. But we passed the pool, the kids and the adults, effectively dodging the splashing water, and rounded the edge of the patio into a new world.

Free of the sun’s heat, this shaded retreat before me was a tucked-in corner of land I had never noticed before. The loudness was drowned out from the silence of overwhelming beauty.

The harsh cement of the patio did not exist here. Instead, plush green grass tickled the crevices between my bare toes. And mud soaked through the grass to cool off the tired soles of my feet. It was the enrapturing beauty of it all that caused me to stop and take notice at this piece of land, untouched.

My grandpa, leaning on the fence ahead of me, called out my name and broke my hypnosis.

“This is what I wanted to show you.” He smiled as he gestured toward a potted plant and a puzzled look crept up my face in response.

“This tree?” I inquired.

It was a strange sight. Planted in the center of the large beige pot, a thin trunk supported a wide network of green leaves, a sprinkling of hidden white, starfish-shaped flowers, and an assortment of drooping saffron-colored spheres.

“What are those orange things?” I blurted.

“Clementines,” he answered me as he tenderly supported the weight of one in his wise hand.

“Clem-en-tines?” I articulated the unfamiliar word as if it belonged to a foreign tongue.

“Clementines,” he repeated, chuckling. “They are a special kind of fruit--tangy and sweet. Like candy. You’d like them.”

My grandpa lifted me up into his strong arms and gingerly laced my fingers with the scissors to cut off one special fruit. Snap! The clementine fell into his awaiting hand.

“I want to tell you a little story about this tree,” he began. “Before it ever was this tree, it started off as a small seed. I planted it in this pot--a promise, a beginning. It started out so small, hidden beneath layers and layers of dirt, until one day it stretched forth a long blade of limbs and spurted out from the soil. Finally, it was as big as any other clementine tree.”

His hands began working to peel back an outer orange layer of the fruit to reveal a hidden saffron sphere inside. He placed the soft clementine into my cupped open hands and held them together.

“You are like the seed that gave life to this fruit tree,” he told me. “You will keep growing and growing and one day, before you know it, you will be all grown into something beautiful. Like this tree.”

Because he was my grandpa, I knew it was true. Therefore, I found comfort in studying the clementine tree.

Fall came. Leaves began to alter, fading between gradients of yellows, oranges, and reds. Under the departing glow of the golden sun, the arriving chill rustled the vacant

tree down to its bare trunk. What crimson leaves remained among the naked branches would soon join their siblings, dropping to the dry autumn ground.

Winter followed. Grandpa was diagnosed with cancer. It was a cold, overcast day in December; the air was denied any of the sun's heat. The trees were bare, and dead leaves lined the rainy ground. The hospital room was winter white—sterile and cold—when we visited. Nothing was like the welcomed warmth that had radiated from the sunny month of May...

My grandparents moved from their home on Scotia Drive to a retirement community on Frankford—a place with no backyard, no space for a clementine tree. Our clementine tree was left behind, like a forgotten sock. The months dragged by, without any improvement, and then the winter winds snatched away my hope. My grandpa died a week after his cancer treatment.

I wish I had taken the tree with me, could have told him I would take care of it for him. Because, even now, I still wonder whatever became of its branches. Does the new owner care for it? Water it patiently every day in the springtime? Pick its succulent fruit every May? Cover it during winter? Or do its neglected leaves shrivel up in the heat? Does its fruit simply drop to the ground, forgotten? I wonder who the new owner of their house is—if he has children, if he has told the seed story to them.

Mostly when I think of that tree, I think of my grandpa. In every root, every twist, every branch. But mostly in every orange globe—a product of that clementine tree—and that tree: a product of a single seed. I think of his seed story and I think of what he wanted me to realize—something I could not let slip away in the sands of time. All things have their beginning. All trees were once seeds. A seed I was, a tree I am.

*And to end with  
something grown...*

# // VARIATIONS, ZACHARY LANNES

**o.**

The boy put his foot to the ground  
Within seconds he felt  
A great nothing and lack of sound  
Ringing like the decay of a bell

Next thing he knew he lifted up  
(Which was actually down)  
He panicked and saw red drips from a cup  
Thus he met the ground

**i.**

Was the reflection above my head really?  
Black marks and  
Black screech  
What did he next to me?  
The door handle isn't where it should  
Call now what should I do now?

**ii.**

“Yes, we’ll send someone right away”  
Damn wreckless.  
Maybe He did  
No Can’t  
Why do kids?

My son that night  
Metal crunched and his head  
Kissing that glass wall  
My wife’s eyes more shattered

Damn wreckless

III.

Blur  
Blur and light

What did we?  
Fender-bender no maybe  
But I feel lucid and floating

IV.

Hurry  
Give me  
The portal to this world  
With metal jaws  
How did this?  
But I suppose  
I've  
Seen it all before, the will to live.

V.

I can't believe it  
He's mangled  
My friend  
  
Unfair this is unfair  
Mangled by the world  
How could he? How could you?  
Bent panels  
Sucked his life into small pieces  
Of r(t) and torques

VI.

Slow down.  
How did it?  
And why?  
That's certainly sad  
That'll get the tears jerkin  
"WHITE TEENAGE BOY DRIVES 100  
AND FLIES THE NEST."

VII.

Quiet. I was saying  
I always  
Read things like this  
And wonder about  
The fractal patterns of nature:  
How kids and metals and minds  
Bend and snap in an ever resounding man-  
ner  
And how this is an echo  
Of what I toyed with as a kid.



# OVER COFFEE AND SNOCONES, MADISON MAE PARKER

Every two seconds I think about my own suicide.  
Every other second I say, "No. Not today. Not ever."

When I die, this is what I will say to God, arms  
unbound by chains I placed myself in.

"Hey God. I made it. I'm here. I'm home. I finally made it. Did I do you proud, God? Did I wear that name you gave me like a crown of thorns? A veil of flowers? Can you wear my name in your mouth like youth? Like poetry? Did my two hands uncurl enough to shake hands with love? Did my teeth stop grinding enough to eat chocolate and stars out of your mouth? Hey, God. I made it. It was a long, hard, ugly fight. But I made it. I'm home. I'm finally home."

God would nod and the teacups in his voice would rattle,  
"Hang up your combat boots, Madison. You're home. You're finally home."



SELF-PORTRAIT, ERICA GUGGENHEIM >>

# // THE DEATH OF NATHAN TRAUSS, JOSHUA SCALES

This is the story of the death of Nathan Trauss. Nathan Trauss was barely a man when he died; he was in his early twenties. He died too young, too early. He was not deserving of death. He had so much to give the world. But this is not the story of the life he never had the chance to live. This is the story of his death.

I am not trying to make this story sad, nor am I trying to make it happy. I am merely the medium.

The very moment before Nathan Trauss died, he smiled. Now, it is important to understand what a moment is and what it is not. What a moment is not is a measurable lapse of time. You cannot measure a moment. Time is a measurement, a moment is not. A moment is an experience that occurs with no relation to time. It's like a dream where time is entirely distorted and irrelevant. Dreams can last for days even though it has only been a few hours. So, in the timeless moment before the synapses of Nathan Trauss' brain stopped flashing, he smiled.

The second before Nathan Trauss died, he exhaled his last breath. The air slowly escaped his lungs, whispering away. It was the last time he would ever feel the compression of his chest and the his breath brush past his lips.

Five seconds before Nathan Trauss died, he heard the last beat of his heart. He could feel the muscle become motionless. He realized this was the stillest he has ever been.

Thirty seconds before Nathan Trauss died, a dove flew over and (for lack of a better word) pooped on him. The pasty white waste landed with a noiseless splat on his broken left arm. It was the least the dove could do, to give Nathan Trauss some luck. But it was too late.

A minute before Nathan Trauss died, he could see

white clouds puff along in the blue sky. They sparkled in the sun's gentle gleam. His eyes were growing tired. He felt weary and fatigued but he wanted to keep watching the clouds and the way they glistened.

Two minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he no longer felt pain. He couldn't move any parts of his body but nothing hurt. He could still see and look around him. He could see someone running towards him. He could still hear the pounding of her footsteps on the concrete. He could still smell the remnants of the exhaust pipe. He could still feel the breeze against his skin. And he could still taste the blood in his mouth.

Five minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he could feel every nerve in his body singe him with burning agony. The pain was a constant, ceaseless fire that torched him from the inside out. Nathan Trauss did not understand how his brain had the capacity to register so much pain, all the while still retaining consciousness.

Six minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he landed on the black pavement and cracked open his skull. His blood colored the street in a beautiful deep crimson that stood out against the dark asphalt.

Six minutes and five seconds before Nathan Trauss died, he was suspended in air like a stringed puppet. The back of his head faced the ground. His arms and legs were shriveled and contorted above him like the limbs of a dead tree.

Six minutes and eight seconds before Nathan Trauss died, he was hit by the eighteen-wheeler. The windshield shattered. His right arm fractured. Two of his ribs on the right side snapped. His left arm slammed against the metal roof of the cab dislocating his shoulder. It shattered his left elbow causing white bone to tear through his skin.

Six minutes and ten seconds before Nathan Trauss died, he was launched into the air as if he were a coin being flipped.

Six minutes and eleven seconds before Nathan Trauss died, he was hit by a speeding car. The impact broke both his legs. His head smashed into the windshield, leaving cracks and smears of blood on the glass.

Six minutes and sixteen seconds before Nathan Trauss died, he had walked halfway through the crosswalk with eight seconds still left on the passing sign.

Seven minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he stood at the edge of the street waiting to cross.

Ten minutes before Nathan Trauss died he kissed Joliet McCarter outside the diner they just had lunch at. Her lips were gentle and tentative on his. He could taste the hamburger and Coca-Cola on her breath but he didn't mind. His brain was too focused on making sure his heart still worked properly since it had started to sputter sporadically.

Twelve minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he finished eating at a diner with Joliet McCarter. He had a chicken fried steak smothered in white gravy. On the side he had Southern green beans which had chopped red potatoes and bacon in it. Next to that were sweet corn and two freshly baked rolls. His glass of sweet tea perspired onto the coaster near his plate. She had a hamburger with onions, lettuce, and tomatoes. She had French fries on the side and a tall glass of Coke.

Sixteen minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he and Joliet McCarter talked about how their favorite book was *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut. They appreciated its play on linear plot line and the originality of the book.

Twenty minutes before Nathan Trauss died, Joliet McCarter laughed. Her green eyes grinned lightheartedly. He was mesmerized.

Twenty-one minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he told a joke that was not funny. Thirty minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he met Joliet McCarter. She was twenty-two, dirty-blonde, and had sparkling green eyes. Her lips were smooth, sharp at the corners, and rounded softly under her nose. If you believe in such a thing as soul mates then Joliet McCarter and Nathan Trauss were that. They liked to believe such a concept was possible and they could feel it within each other. They were compelled to one another. She would have been his wife in the story of the life he didn't have. But she isn't his wife and the time in the diner was all they had together. Joliet McCarter will see the report of the accident in the newspaper a few days later. She will stop, her heart will stumble and her eyes will water and she will wonder why she felt as if a significant fragment of herself had been ripped away. But she will live on and Nathan Trauss will still be dead.

Thirty-one minutes before Nathan Trauss died, he bumped into Joliet McCarter when entering the diner. She dropped her purse and he picked it up. They made eye contact when he handed it back to her.

An hour before Nathan Trauss died, he kissed his mother goodbye. He was leaving for lunch. She told him to be careful; the spell of caution which had always kept her son safe. This was the first time the love for her baby boy failed to protect him. And this was the last time

Nathan Trauss kissed his mother or smelled her lilac perfume.

Three hours before Nathan Trauss died, he promised his twelve-year-old sister Meaghan that he would take

her to go see a movie and then get ice cream that afternoon. When he didn't come home she became angry and cried, "He promised to take me to a movie! And after we were going to go to Sonic to get ice cream."

Mother sobbed and tried to explain, "Sweetie, Nathan isn't coming home. He...he's not coming back."

Meggy ran to her room and slammed the door. "But he promised...he promised..." she cried into her pillow, muttering over and over.

Six hours before Nathan Trauss died, he woke that Saturday morning with the feeling that any day could be his last. The feeling didn't unsettle or scare him. The thought of his death didn't sadden him. Sure there were plenty of things he wanted to do in his life. Like cradle the fragile heartbeat of a miracle he and his wife created. Or travel to another country and experience another culture, catching a glimpse of the beauty of humanity. But he had done what he could in the years he had lived. He had been a good man. He helped anyone who was in need and loved the world with his whole heart. He couldn't have asked for a better family or a better life. He was content. He was happy. And he would continue to live today like any other

So... six hours before the death of Nathan Trauss, he woke up. And after a moment, he smiled.

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Our hope is that you will find infinitely more joy, inspiration, and comfort from this magazine than can be expressed on a simple, tape-bound, 8.5x11" page.

And to all the hands and hearts that have influenced this work -- Cheers. It truly takes a village to raise a creative project. (That's how that saying goes, isn't it?)

—*The Eckleburg Project* Staff

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