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The Snow Island Review is the literary and art journal at Francis Marion University. It is named for the headquarters of General Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," who in the winter of 1780-1781 led incursions against and then eluded British troops by escaping to his wilderness retreat bounded by the Great Pee Dee River, Lynches River and Clark Creek. In 1974, Snow Island was named a National Historic Landmark.

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The Album of Love Never Found | Alyssa Hardy

In an album of love never found,
our sepia faces are locked by a shutter's sound.

Pages in an album lay decorated and framed,
With hearts and smiles, and "forever" scribbled after our names.

Fingers form a perfect heart, unharmed,
connecting two lives, hands and arms.

A pink bag holds a heart on a chain, with a lock and key as "you"
and "I" happily celebrate becoming a "we."

Candid snapshots record spring to fall.
My phone still holds all your midnight calls.

At the end of the album of love never found,
I pose alone, with a pasted smile and a pumpkin on the ground.

Sitting silently in a leafy sea of purple, red and sunshine, my
heart screams to love you as my brain leaves you behind.

Our black and white ghosts haunt me until the last page, as hate
covers love and care transforms to rage.



Backyard Gladiator | David Doughty

Bad Times | Zach Nicholas

It must have been the mid 80s
only because of the cigarette
my uncle held close to his face.
He stared at the television set,
with nerves pulsating
and his only companion asleep.

His huge glasses should have reflected
where he really wanted to be,
instead of America's dumb jocks,
jumping onto other men,
and claiming to be macho.

The nights were darker decades ago.
The blackness flooded the room.
It poured in from outside,
helping the dim den lights ,
saying "let's make this good."
His nephew's gonna laugh at this one day".

He calls those his bad times
but he won't discuss them further.
The sorrow of a nightly breeze
that sent his brain around the world
served him no purpose.
So he reached under that curly hair
and found the off switch.

He cut his hair short later on
and gave up on plaid.
His Sega and Atari are gone.
They've been replaced
by gospel and Joel Osteen.
And Carl Sagan is burning in hell.
There's no doubt.

The dirty walls and empty glass
have today succumbed to tidiness.
What were those bad times?
How can I imagine worse than now?
His friends want him to buy their books
for \$19.95 plus shipping and handling.
There is no wife. There are no kids.
And every waking minute of life
is worried about what happens after life.

Bert's Love Song | Joanna Miller

Practically perfect in every way,
she sails in from the clouds
only every so often.

Every time the wind changes,
I look to the skies,
hoping to see her silhouette
against the grey rooftops of London.

The world is suddenly full of color
when Mary arrives,
and I remember why I wait for her
when she grabs my hand
in a moment of delight.

We dance across rooftops
and have dinner parties on the ceiling,
watch penguins serve our tea,
and ride carousel horses through the countryside.
I always wonder if she'll settle down,
maybe this time,
just for me.

But a poor chimney sweep
is no match for Mary Poppins,
so I watch her float away again,
clutching her umbrella.

Oh, how I hope the wind
brings her back.

Buttered Toast | David Doughty

Buttered toast is really great.
In the morning or when it's late.
In my hand or on a plate.
Buttered toast is super great.

I put the bread in the toaster you see.
Then I push it down and wait with glee.
But nothing happens and I become frightened!
My toast should be out now for me to be bitin'!

These things are things that should not be spoken,
but what if my good friend, the toaster, is broken?
These things are things that should not be said,
but what if my good friend, the toaster, is dead?

I slip into madness; my brain is a flutter!
I need my toast! I need my butter!
When will this horrible nightmare stop!
Suddenly, I hear a faint little "pop...."

My toast! My toast! My glorious toast!
I don't mean to boast, but look at my toast!
I shout it from the East to West coast!
The toaster has finally given me my toast!

Cinderella | Joanna Miller

The humble, submissive daughter
of a man remarried with two
unspeakable step-daughters
is at the end of her frazzled rope.

Her step-mother and step-sisters
are always pushing her around
and using her as their personal servant.

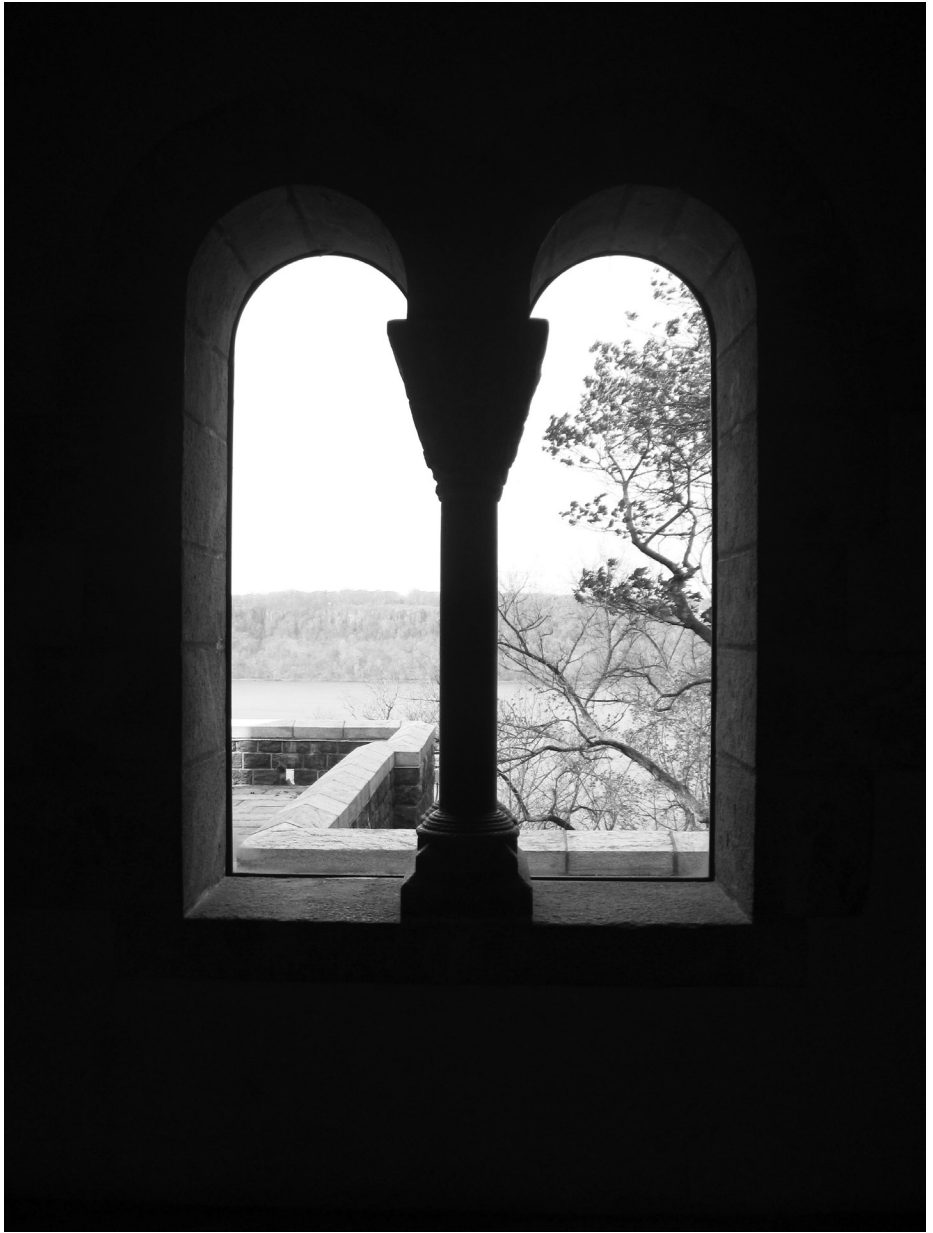
Cinderella, no longer a gentle,
compliant young girl is transformed
by her need for revenge. She is now
a snake waiting to strike her prey.

She plots vengeance against
her new unwanted family.
Her heart is seizing with retribution
to settle the score of the game
they have played unfairly, life.

Poison is the perfect fix
To rid them of their unfit souls,
eased into the pumpkin pie
she is forced to prepare.

Her plan precise, she thinks
nothing could go wrong, but
it does. Her beloved father
samples the pumpkin pie first.

His life now destroyed by Cinderella,
who remains a murderer of her own flesh
and blood. She will never recover
from this dreadful fate. She labors
as a servant for three unforgiving souls.



Cinderella's Perspective | Stephanie Smith

Creature | Joanna Miller

This miniature vampire,
perfect silhouette
against hallway light,

rips me from a deep sleep,
nudges me awake,
his tiny feet dimpling
my Sesame Street sheets.

His paper-thin wings
flutter without flight,
as horns upon his head
pierce the feeble glare
from the nightlight.

The little demon,
my own personal devil,
here to take me away
from everything I know.

I am powerless,
paralyzed,
whimpering
as he moves towards my face.

D.B.S. | Kelly M. Gaskins

One look from you is all it takes,
to conquer me with erotic bliss.
Resurrected, you are the English Rake,
and your lips, God, I wish to kiss.

One lick, nibble, and bite;
that's all I ask of you.
And though I know it's not right,
I don't care that you're not true.

Your tongue past my lips;
a moan, a kiss.
Your hands grasping my hips;
a moan, a hiss.

No thought comes to mind,
except of your embrace.
Mindlessly, my hips grind;
right here, right now, this place.

Your heat seeps into my skin,
stroking the deepest parts of my soul.
I never believed I could feel this again;
You are the fire that melts my cold.

One look is all it takes,
and instantly I am yours.
I now have a new heartache
'cause to your heart, you closed the doors.

Memories are all I have, I cannot lie;
Precious memories, too exquisite to waste.
These will surely be my demise,
for you are the poison I long to taste.

Disease | Alicia L. Coleman

If I knew what was inside of me,
I'd cut it out just like I have
cut into the nothing I feel.

I begin by lighting candles
and drawing a very warm bath.
Ritual is as important as the act.
Now, I wait until I feel the urge.

Avoiding arteries and veins,
I press the blade to my flesh
just above my ankle and heel,
a place that is always hidden
by socks and strappy sandals.

The water blossoms with red,
a hibiscus of unfelt emotion.
My fingers play in ruby water,
transfixed by this hue because
nothing about me is this bright,
this colorful. I am black and white.

As the water grows tepid, I realize
I have to get out. I bandage myself,
dress and prepare for the day.

I walk out my door into the world.
I wish I felt something again.
No sunlight, only the trickle
I leave in the bottom of the drain.

Draw Me Out | Tierriah Robinson

Never have I seen such light
here in the darkness where my soul
dwells drowned in black ink.

With every dip of your pen ripples
spread out, letting me glimpse
your light as it dances across my world.

Fingers outstretched, I yearn
to reach the tip as it dives
just below the black surface.

Each time I miss its quick descent
and retreat as it leaves a ring
of blinding white in my eyes.

Imagine me wrapped around
that tip's end as it drags me
out of my blackness to dwell

with you in the light.



Enraptured Rotation | Carissa Fazio

Equation Queen | Zach Nicholas

Perched on a throne of cloth,
she is queen of her small world.
The trees greet her by a name
never disclosed to me,
as she walks her path.
She has no long robe of gold.
Her tiny scepter is filled with lead.

She either never goes outside
or lived through a 20-year solar eclipse.
Her hair curtains a face
that breaks feminine laws.
But I like her life of crime.
Free of cosmetics, she's more real
than any sorority girl could ever be.

She'll kill her calculator soon.
The battery can only take so much.
She milks it like she does an education.
For all it's worth and then some.
She could have left hours ago.
But next month's work won't do itself.

She smiles and moves her lips,
but the computer stares blankly.
I'm right here, no need to imagine me.
She disappears into the night
out of reach with a thousand stories,
ones I'd listen to if she didn't walk so fast.



Escape | Carissa Fazio

Fifteen | Harrison Taylor

I finished my test and turned my paper over. I was glad I had a study hall period; otherwise I would have had to stay after classes to make up this test. My parents let me skip school yesterday because it was my fifteenth birthday. We had a huge cookout with my entire family that lasted the whole day. It is because of that cookout that I missed this important biology test yesterday. Biology is a sophomore level class, but I am only a freshman.

I guess the teacher thought that, because I was a freshman in a sophomore level class, I was responsible, and therefore left me in the room alone with my class notes sitting inside the backpack at my feet. She must be right because I could have easily cheated, but I did not. There was no need to when I knew the answer to every question on the test. I sat and waited for her to get back so she could finalize the verdict of my test grade.

I waited about fifteen minutes before I finally got that nagging feeling one gets in the lower abdomen when the bladder tries to tell the brain that it needs a release. I got up and exited the room, and now I wish more than anything I had remembered to grab that hall pass I saw dangling precariously over the side of her desk before the door had locked behind me. If I had not been a freshman, I would have remembered. After I realized the door was locked, I headed to the bathroom, figuring that my teacher would be back when I got done.

I travelled down the hall and up the stairs to reach the closest men's restroom. I entered the empty restroom and noticed a strange smell in the air. It smelled like my uncle's house; he was a chain smoker. It was an overwhelming stench, but I ignored it and did my business. I washed my hands and became aware of an older gentleman's voice outside the bathroom. I could not make out what he was saying, but his voice sounded stern. I washed my hands and left the restroom. As I exited the doorway, I became aware that the man was my vice principal, a graying tower of a man. I smiled faintly and nodded at him as I passed by. I felt him looming over me, and when my back was finally turned to him, I felt his large hand grab hold of my shoulder. "Someone has been smoking cigarettes in the men's bathroom," he said into a walkie-talkie, "and I've got a suspect here with me."

I turned around and he released my shoulder. "What is your

name?" he asked. I opened my mouth to speak, but I could not even utter a whimper. I just pointed to the identification card hanging from my neck like it was a collar on a lost dog, only I was a lost freshman. It contained my name, grade, and picture and had to be worn at all times during the school day. He picked it up and glanced at it. "A freshman, huh?" he snarled, "You don't have a hall pass." I looked down at my ankles. I suddenly felt sick to my stomach. If I had been at this school for a while and was more than just a stupid freshman at the wrong place at the wrong time, then maybe he would know I was a good kid and just let me go.

"Were you smoking in there?" he asked. I shook my head, but I could not look up. The fact that I could not speak or look him in the eye probably did not bode well for me. "Do you mind coming down to my office for a minute?" he asked, but it seemed more like a demand than a question. I followed him to his office, and he had me sit in front of it while he went inside to do who knows what. So I sat there, my stomach turning in knots and drops of sweat bolting down my forehead. I could feel my armpits moistening at my nervousness and then regretted wearing a light green shirt. He called me into his office and I sat on the chair in front of his desk. "Where is your teacher?" he asked me.

"I don't know!" I finally managed to stammer, but I did not mean to scream it. He looked up at me, startled. "I made up a test, and she left during the middle of it. I had to use the bathroom, so I left and that's where you found me," I explained.

He grunted, as if trying to figure out what method of torture I was most suited for. "Do you mind if we search you for cigarettes or a lighter?" he asked. I shook my head, but I felt like my stomach dropped about two more feet. I was about to vomit. He held the walkie-talkie to his mouth and said, "You can come in."

The student resource officer then walked in. He was more friendly-looking, looked puzzled to see me sitting there before him. "This is your smoker?" he chuckled in disbelief, and I felt a kick in my stomach and silently dry heaved. He made me stand up and spread my legs shoulder-width apart. I closed my eyes to try and concentrate on getting rid of the feeling in my stomach, but it would not go away.

He started patting down my right leg. I had another dry heave, only this one was not silent. He patted my left leg, and I choked. It was coming, and I could do nothing to stop it. He patted my waist and everything I had eaten finally came rushing out of mouth like it were water escaping from a faulty fire hydrant, and it could not have landed anywhere else but right in the middle of my vice principal's desk. "Sorry," I muttered regretfully, but I knew it was too late. I looked up to find his angry eyes scowling at me. I had gotten on the bad side of a man I would have to deal with for the next three years. I walked dejectedly back to my biology teacher's room. I walked in and she greeted me with a smile. "Where have you been?" she asked, "You made an A on your test. Good accomplishment for a freshman."

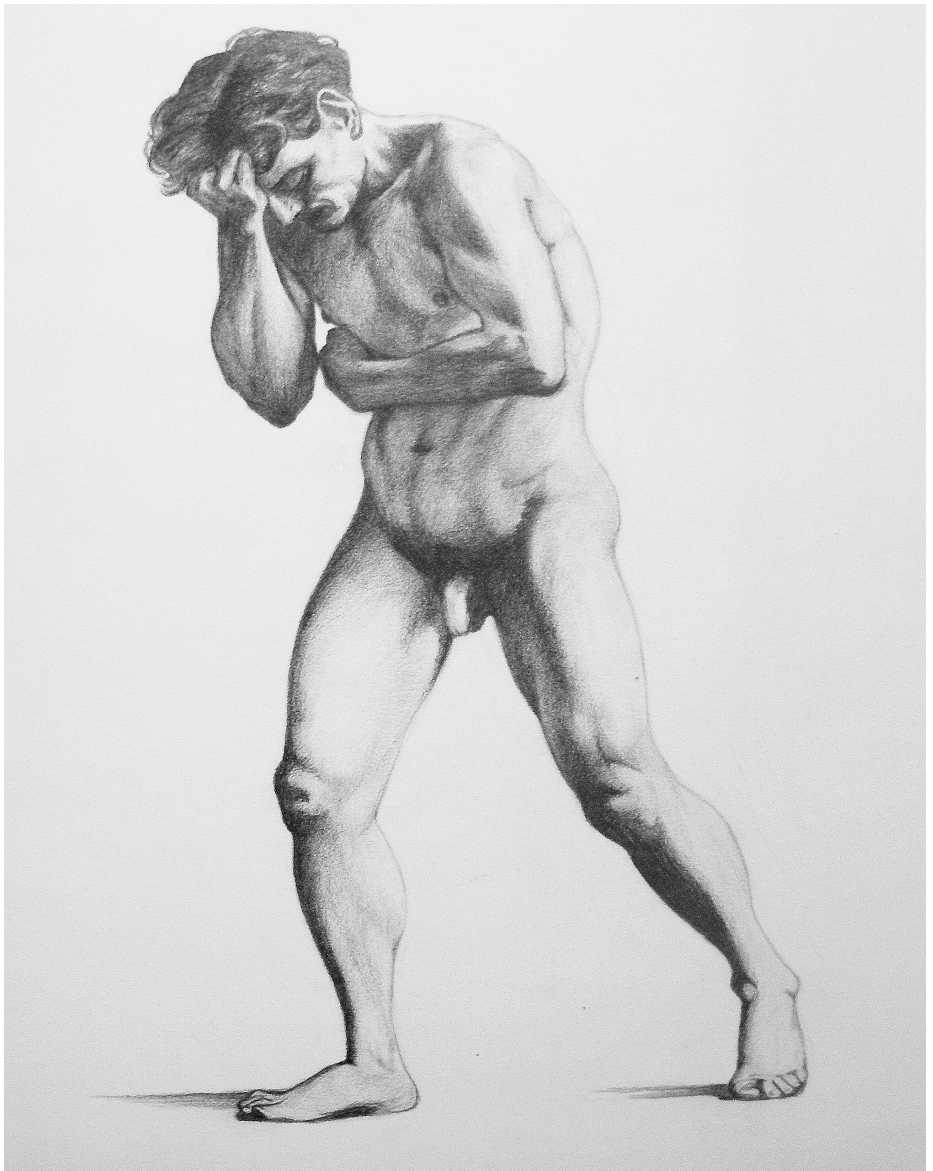


Figure | Kimberly A. Keith

Framed | Alyssa Hardy

Momma's hydraulic chair is a
ride at the fair, and her scissors
are sharp like cheddar.
They are a two-edged sword,
used for cutting away my past.

My past (all 7 years of it)
is thick with memories of me,
in momma's chair, with her fingers
running through my hair, or her
swords fighting against split ends.

Momma's haircuts are done by
soldiers with swords, and mine are
done by Pac-Man with a pair of
round bladed safety scissors,
searching out a strawberry in a land mine.

I admire the bangs of a classmate,
and the way her sunshine toned locks
swish with her walking. My hair swishes!
Albeit, it isn't sunshine, but everyone
loves chocolate.

Girl with bangs has a frame on her face.
A sunshine frame, framing her white girl face.
Bolting upright this morning, I marched
as intently as a soldier, requesting a framing
from my momma.

But she was busy. Too busy with two children,
and a husband and a job with a spinning
hydraulic chair to worry about why
I need bangs "RIGHT NOW!" But, doesn't
she understand the sheer importance of it all?

So, I rummaged my pudgy hands through glue
sticks and glitter, that lived in a bright yellow
craft box shared with my toddler sister,
to find a worthy sword to frame the strands
I wished to obliterate.

Balancing precariously between my index and
thumb, the Pac-Man scissors travel across my
forehead as stubby strands dark as apple seeds
fall around my face, as I attempt to frame.

Fresh Trout | Ron Flowers

SETTING:

The Rexall Drugstore in Crossnore, North Carolina, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In many small towns, there's often a gathering place for older men in need of camaraderie, ...basically support groups for bored people. Mid-morning until just before lunchtime is spent drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and conversing. Many of the tales are recycled such that you could substitute the teller of any story with one of the other group members and not miss a beat; glory days and working years, enhanced by time and imagination. Occasionally things get current (i.e. football season, the kids, natural disasters, and "damn politicians")

"The Rexall," as it is called locally, is a neat, but dated, combination pharmacy and diner. A group of seven men aged sixties and above is assembled around formica-topped tables placed end-to-end, on chairs sporting well-worn but uncompromised red vinyl upholstery. Plastic coffee thermoses are refreshed and metal ashtrays are periodically emptied by the waitress, who routinely ignores everyone. The speaker is Ben Benfield, who, for most of his adult life after high school, worked with his father as an independent trucker. As a youth, he often accompanied his father on deliveries. The time is late morning, present day.

BEN: [Staring at smoke curling from his cigarette] I tell you what, boys, everthin' a body needs is right here in Crossnore. Ain't nothin' else out there of a worth as far as I can tell. When me and daddy hauled, I seen stuff, but it weren't anythin' you'd need of a day to make it by. [Looking up] Hell, one time comin' from Baltimore, daddy got a hair in his ass and we wound up in Washington by-god DC! Damnedest thing! You can get on a subway at a airport in Virginia and rise up in the middle of town! Call me a lie if it so moves you, but that Smithsonian has a huge room with eight or ten real World War Two airplanes hangin' out of the ceiling. Nazi planes! Jap planes! Even one-a them Spitfire planes! Made models of 'em when I was boy, I did. They even got two big rooms fulla ever gun ever was made. Same way with boats, motorcycles, Indian stuff and such. They got a whole locomotive set up in there, I shit you not! If a man was of a mind, he could spend days just lookin' at all them things. [Putting out his cigarette, his gaze remaining on the ashtray]

[Pensive] But ain't none of it as real as what Table Rock is.

I'm tellin' you-uns, * daddy taught me a man can't abide distractions boggin' up his head. Can you hunt a wild turkey in Washington DC? Why hell no! Yeah, I know I don't hunt since that hip thing happened with the truck, but at least it's out there for the doin', and just knowin' that gives me peace. [Looking up solemnly] You boys know that's gospel.

[Becoming agitated] Besides, them fancy-pants up on Linville Ridge have just about done us in. Drove regular people to hunkerin' down, lest we contaminate their snotty noses reared so high up in the air.... 'cept in the winter when their pansy asses can't take it. Things ain't what they was, boys, and won't be again. Them damn snowbirds have closed to screwed it up around here, what with their fancy cars and a-wearin' all them high dollar hiking clothes and such just to go out an' buy a bag a groceries.

* The Southern Appalachian equivalent of "y'all", pronounced "yuns".

[Regaining his composure, absentmindedly picking nits off the sleeve of his flannel shirt] Daddy always said most-a them people couldn't find their own rear ends with a searchlight and all that runnin' around with fancy college names plastered in car back windows don't mean squat. [Looking up, avoiding eye contact] You boys know I was half-scholarshipped to go up to Appalachian State, but he figured a new diesel was worth a sight more. [Lights another cigarette, waves the match out] More important to understand a thing than have a piece a paper saying so, he said. Lord, I do miss that man.

[Brightening again] And New York City? You-un's would not believe that place! Daddy got a mood on back in '74 and we drove the truck slam downtown! They thought we was just as weird as we thought-a-them, I spec. Son! We was square in the middle a town and I tell you god's truth when I say this; come dark, that place lit up like a thing you ain't never seen! The whole thing 'bout heart attacked me. I seen live, good-lookin' women in store windows paradin' around in their underclothes! God strike me dead if it ain't so! My bein' fourteen year old, why that was one hell-of-a sight! "Close your mouth and stop slobberin'," daddy says! Laughed his ass off, he did! And the whole place was as loud all day long as Sluder's saw mill is up and runnin'! I guess that's just about as big a town as you can get. [Posture deflating] Sometimes I think he brought me along just to have a body to poke fun at.

[Looking around the table] But did I did see a mess-a trout streams in New York City? I'm thinkin' not! [Tensing, becoming defensive] What's that Jimmy? When did I last cast a line? [Calming, eyes down on his boots] I reckon twenty-five year ago now, but you boys know it's that hip what stops me from gettin' out much. Besides, us young'uns never got fine-tuned much on the great outdoors, as generally the white liquor took first place. Anymore, I buy em' caught. [Brings his gaze up to a painting on the wall, eyes narrowing] I loved my daddy, though. He taught me a lot.

[Turning back to the group] Yeah, they's a lot to do in them great big towns, but I'm here to say that just settin' an a-lookin' at Grandfather Mountain suits me just fine. Don't need nothin' else. Yessir, a man oughtta be satisfied with the peace of mind nature provides, and if you get around to wantin' more, you just wind up gettin' your ass kicked. That's what I learned over the years, and I tell my young'uns the same. [Absentmindedly spins his wedding ring on his finger] I'm just as satisfied as a body can be. Kinda' like what that rock-n-roll man says: "Small town's good enough for me." What about it boys? [Looks at his watch] 'Bout time to go on up to the house, I reckon.
[Everyone gets up – chairs scrape the floor]

[To himself]

And that damn mountain ain't moved the whole time I been a-watchin' it.

Heated Peace | Tierriah Robinson

Water a tad too hot—
lights off, candles lit.
"Songbird" caresses the warm air
embracing the body.

Liquid diamonds fall
into the white dusted water,
each bubble a perfect rainbow
through the steam floating above.

Steam tickles each nerve end
of the downward pointed toe
until heat wraps around the feet
shooting anticipation up the legs.

Slowly drawing the body
teasing fine hairs as it descends.
Bubbles taunt exposed skin sending
it into sensual warmth below

that envelops all from the shoulders down.
Eyes close, muscles unclench
cradled in warmth
relax entombed in heat.

Laying in semi-darkness
with golden light playing
through the heated air
until the body reabsorbs life.



Holding Baby's Hand | Kimberly A. Keith

How to Get that Greatest Mom Coffee Mug

| Breeze Allen

Have you ever pulled an all nighter? Being a college student, you're almost certainly nodding your head in agreement, remembering those long nights during the weeks of mid-terms, finals, or staying up to start that five page paper due the next morning.

Well, I've been pulling all nighters for fifteen months straight! I just love the bags under my eyes the next morning that look as if someone has shoved a grapefruit in my face. What's really exciting is the fact that while I'm staying up all night, getting no more than three consecutive hours of sleep, I have someone yelling my name every couple of hours for me to pay attention to them. As you may have guessed, I'm a full-time mom as well as a full-time college student, and I suggest that everyone get pregnant, so that she can have this wonderful experience!

Having a baby automatically entitles you to let everyone know that you're a grown woman. If you're living with your mother, it doesn't matter. You're still grown. No longer can your parents tell you what to do, because you're a parent. You're the one with all of the authority, and if they even attempt to discipline your child in any way, you can spew curse words at them, and tell them to leave your child alone. Now, this may ultimately get you thrown out, but who cares? You're a college student with no money, so you know what that means. Free housing! Being a single mother means you get to live in a section eight apartment in the rough neighborhood. You won't need a television for the Saturday night episode of Cops, because cops will be right outside of your door (and maybe inside too) twenty-four hours a day. I don't know about you, but free housing and cops on demand doesn't sound like a bad deal to me. Just make sure you have your kid in the house before the drug dealers come out, and you'll be fine.

On top of being automatically grown, you get the privilege of having someone up under you twenty-four hours a day! So you have school you say? Well, place the baby in the car, make sure you place a blanket over him so the campus police doesn't spot him, prop a bottle in his mouth, and go on about your business. If you leave the windows cracked just enough, he should be fine from 8:30am till 1:20pm—a little sweaty— but just fine. Dragging him around with you all day everyday is a walk in the park, until he begins walking. You can't leave him in the car anymore, because he'll want to look

out of the windows like a dog or something, so you'll have to put him in your backpack, and leave it unzipped enough for him to get gulps of air every ten to twenty minutes. Make sure you keep kicking the bag hard enough for him to know that he needs to shut up before the professor hears him.

When school's over, it's time to hang out with your friends. By this time, your toddler is whining about being wet, or hungry, so you'll have to waste about two dollars on chips and a soda (toddlers need lots of soda) just to make him shut up. After that's out of the way, it's time to find your friends. The best place to meet up is the mall. Most of the time, well every time I go there, my son wanders off, and I have at least two hours without him squealing my name in that annoying voice he has. I'm never worried though, because the nice security guard always brings him back safe and sound, saying stupid stuff, like he found him snatching all of the clothes off the racks, or throwing shoes around. I know that's a lie though, because my little boy is an angel, and he couldn't be bad if he tried. Whenever he's back with me, it's time to go, because I refuse to carry him around in the mall. How am I supposed to meet Mr. Right if he's blubbering about some nonsense while I'm trying to flirt?

When we get in the car, the first thing I do is light up a cigarette. I always hear nonsense about it ruining his lungs, but come on now. Did anyone ever hear about pollution? His lungs are being damaged every day; a little second hand smoke never killed anyone. After giving hugs, and saying good bye to everyone reluctantly, it's time to go home and do some work. By this time, it's eight o'clock, and having to get up at six every morning has left me burned out. But, of course, I'm grown, so I can handle anything that's thrown my way.

I start studying, and what do I hear? "Mom, mom, mom." So what do I do? Ignore it of course. I'm grown, and I won't have anybody tell me what to do. I pay him attention when I feel like paying him attention. Then, I hear it again, and after doing about ten minutes of work, it's play time. We play everything from hide and seek, to hot potato until he falls asleep. After he's asleep, I begin getting ready for bed, and as I doze off, I realize that I haven't done any work! So I hop up like a ninja getting ready to attack, and begin filling out psychology notes that I need for the next day, and preparing a speech outline that was supposed to be memorized by now.

Being overwhelmed is a rush! I catch myself falling asleep a couple of times, but Red Bull and coffee does the trick every time. If you don't live your life like you have permanent jet lag, then I don't know what your problem is. Finally, I get all of my work completed with three hours before I have to wake up with little man, but I can handle it. I'm grown.

For all of the girls who are living the college life without having a baby, I don't know what your problem is. So you go over a year and a half without sleep? Who needs sleep anyways? It just makes you miss out on what's happening around you. Having a baby has taught me that with Red Bull and coffee, you become completely invincible. Staying up night after night comes easily, because they're the instant "pick me up." I'm never tired at any event anymore, because I never really know just how tired I am. I can juggle two and three tasks at a time, and I've become the best listener there is. I can hear my baby a mile away. So, I'd like to challenge you to enjoy the adult life with me. Throw those lame condoms away (they take away all of the feeling) take some antibiotics to override that birth control, and welcome those sleepless night, loss of sanity, and irresistible stretch marks.

*She can't help it, the girl can't help it.
If she walks by, the men folks get engrossed.
Can't help it, the girl can't help it.
And if she's got, a figure made to squeeze,
the girl can't help it if she was born to please.
Can't help it, the girl can't help it.*

OK, guys and gals! Bobby King here, spinning the latest tune from Little Richard titled "The Girl Can't Help It." That one's gonna fly up the charts, I guar-on-tee it! You've got WXYZ on your radio dial, where you get all the rockin' hits. Speaking of rockin', rock on down to Napoleon's and check out the deals they've got on all that great food. And tell 'em King Bobby sent ya!

Bobby King needs to shut the fuck up and play my music. I sit here and watch mindless robots circling this drive-in, and then I must listen to drivel also? Around and around. Around and around like some tribal dance absent the culminating frenzy required to make it meaningful.

I'm called to assist the sick and the lame. This admonition came from within, not from above or below. Empowering those without power is my great commission. My current chauffeur, Mr. Arnold Friend, was easy to identify as deserving of my tutelage. His "car," which he is so fond of, is but one example of his pathetic nature. In my absence, he's laughed at. My presence allows him a power he doesn't yet understand. I'm not overt about it. I just sit quietly. They know.

Arnold must learn to pay attention to small details and then act decisively. The procedure is simple:
Identify the weakest.
Ascertain their desire.
Plan: Use your head.
Implement: Use your gut.

Arnold says to me: "Ellie, from what you say, you don't have no history I can put a finger on."

No, I don't.

"And you don't speak of work but you always have plenty of stash."

Yes, I do.

*Well, she's the gal in the red blue jeans.
She's the queen of all the teens.
She's the woman that I know.
She's the woman that loves me so.
Be bop a-lu-la she's my baby!*

That was "The Killer" himself, Jerry Lee Lewis, going out by request from yours truly, Bobby King, to little Connie Lourdes, who I hope is staying cool this afternoon You listening, Connie? Speaking of cool, Bobby's here to tell you about those new 3-speed window fans they've got down at Tedder Hardware. Don't wait too long next week to get one. They're sure to go fast!

DAMN CONNIE AND THIS WORM WITH HIS WINDOW FANS! PLAY MY MUSIC!

Arnold, you mark this "Connie" bitch when she passes!

*I've got a girl with a record machine.
When it comes to rockin', she's the queen.
We love to dance on a Saturday night,
all alone I can hold her tight.*

Bobby King at WXYZ comin' attcha' with Eddie Cochran's "Twenty Flight Rock." Who woulda' ever thought Eddie could top "Summertime Blues"?

That's better, Bobby King. Stick to facts.

Little Connie is marked. Meanwhile, Arnold has confided in me, saying:

"Ellie, my old Granny used to try and convince me about rewards in heaven and punishment in hell and all. But take me, for instance; how could I belong up there with Granny or down there with Hitler? Who could judge on a thing like that? It just don't make no sense."

He is correct. It makes no sense. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. And I will take him.

No one shall inherit the earth. When bad things happen to good people, it's not part of any grand design. Being pun-

ished or tested by a deity isn't an issue; just your time for a little bad luck is all. I embrace those who don't want to change for "the better." The only real change is death. Some cope with their tortured souls by artificial means. Arnold, for instance, prefers Nembutal and alcohol to the point of stumbling. He will only evolve when he accepts himself as he is, without narcotics. To modify oneself for some perceived good is an abomination. If chaos is your talent, I say, promote chaos. If misery follows you, I say, share it! If you must kill, then kill you must!

For it is written:

"The golden rule is a rule of submission. It goes against the very first of all legal rights; the right to defend oneself against attack. The law rests not on this golden rule but on an iron rule: whatever you are willing to take upon yourself you have the right to inflict upon others. If you are willing to subject yourself to something, you have the right to subject others to it; what you demand of yourself, you may demand of others. It is the rule that provides the foundation for all authority and leadership." – Johann Debaauer

*The way you wear those dresses, sun comes shining through
I can't believe my eyes, all that mess belongs to you.*

Holy Moley! That was Big Joe Turner with "Shake Rattle and Roll." on the WXYZ Sunday Caravan. Ol' Bobby might need one of those three-speed fans in the studio after that one! Whew!

As Arnold and I are parked near the Lourdes' home, waiting for the family to depart for their Sunday picnic and Connie's appointment with us as she remains behind, it occurs to me that "power in numbers" is appropriate to consider at this point in time. Yes, the underbelly is growing, but I have a vision of a day when we will mark territories with signs and codify our actions. Satan? What a ridiculous notion! There is no Satan, as there is no God! I would not lie to you about that. Men and women of vision don't need divine guidance, just organizational skills. Arnold's example of Adolph Hitler is appropriate to that.

Once, I heard a Rabbi beginning a prayer at a Holocaust commemoration uttering the words: "Our great and most merciful father."

Merciful? Ridiculous!

My thoughts are interrupted. The Lourdes family has passed, minus the lamb. It's time to allow Arnold to hone his skills.

My boy is doing well; he's at the screen door on her front porch, with the little girl pissing her pants. I'll give him his due, his efforts are improving, but at the same time, the subject is easy. He will have elevated himself when he can manipulate adults.

Connie will come out of that house, and yes, she will get in Arnold's car for her "ride," and yes, her life will be drastically altered. But Arnold is the true subject this afternoon. I'm about to take Mr. Friend to another level of understanding, and little Connie gets to watch. Both of them will be modified, by different means and to different degrees. After today, Arnold will have inherited a rage that will significantly enhance his development. The pup will be overwhelmed into a temporary numbness, but she will come around, albeit as a stranger to all those who once knew her well.

Seeds will be planted. I don't make mistakes.

I'll be moving on afterwards. I've got all the time in the world.

OK kids, Bobby has one more request to play before The WXYZ Caravan pulls out. This one is Gene Vincent and "Race with the Devil" sent out to Arnold Friend, wherever he may be. See you next time!

*Well, I've led an evil life, so they say,
but I'll outrun the Devil on judgment day.
Move, hot rod, move man!
Move hot rod; move me on down the line, oh yeah!*

Last Words | Alicia L. Coleman

I'm in the kitchen cooking dinner,
chicken and broccoli and rice.
He stares at me with a sour expression,
tells me I'm useless and fat.
I stand there in my bathrobe,
head hung low, like a scolded child.
I turn my back so he doesn't
see that I'm starting to cry.
He'll only start yelling at me.

Eating in silence, then scrubbing dishes.
The suds wash away everything
but his hateful words and the
sting of the back of his hand
because there was no beer.

He has a gin and tonic now.
I'm on the back porch with the dog,
put outside like any other animal.
He calls for another drink.

I hand him the icy glass
and he catches me by the wrist.
I cringe and try to draw back,
because I know there are no limes.

He tells me that if I don't stop getting
so damned fat, no real man
would ever be seen with me.

Never Let Me Fall | Kelly M. Gaskins

It felt like floating,
dancing on your feet with
my pink cotton socks squishing your brown leather boots.
And every time you moved, they began to slide;
But your strong arms were holding me,
keeping me from falling.
You were my Superman,
and you never let me fall.

It felt like floating,
dangling from your arms;
Our tiny hands clutching each bicep,
and big brown eyes staring in awe.
But if we ever weighed you down,
we never knew;
because you were our Superman,
and you never let us fall.

But Superman never collapsed on his living room floor,
and he never needed a helicopter to help him fly,
and he never laid in a hospital bed hooked up to a machine.
The real Superman never died.

And when I started to fall,
It was so slow, like a dream.
And in your eyes the light floated away;
fast, like a balloon in the sky.

I fell and you died.

You were like Superman,
and you told me you'd never let me fall.

Nothing and the Known | Stephon Birch

Unnoticed, but yet one thrives.
No one seems to notice progress,
So, to them, success is an illusion.
But succeed to their dismay, and
Be the god of their confusion.

Page-Turner | Kaitlyn Grooms

You turn the page too fast
I trail behind,
trying to find
where you left off.

Skipping words
to no avail,
I hesitate and wonder
why I should keep looking.

Soon I discover the spot
where you last read
Then you're off again
and I can't keep up this time.

What I thought was our endless book
of romance and passion,
has become a fleeting mystery with no clues
to "who-dunnit".

Pages crease and tear
as I flip frantically through this book
that is no longer ours.

The pages turn to ash
as your fingers burn
like wild fire through years
of our lives now lost.

With all this strain of reading,
I hesitate to pick up
any book these days.



Panther in the Tundra | David Doughty

Peace | Jonathan D. Smith

A war rages on across the western front
as the British, French, and Germans kill
for control over Belgium.

Men stalk through trenches,
covered with mud, avoiding silver ornaments
that whisper as they pass by their ears.

"Lift your head a little higher," they say,
"In one brief second, I'll take your pain away."
The winter chill seeps through

their soaked and mucky battle gear.
Only four months in and they ache
for an end that's nowhere near.

A British soldier puts his rifle down
and thinks of his son and wife.
He remembers that the year before

he was with them on this night
fighting a different battle;
keeping the kids from eating his cookies

before Santa had a chance to earn his pay.
Silence creeps through the cool night air
as the soldiers strike a different chord.

Peace on Earth and Silent Night flood the young
men's hearts as they lay down their weapons,
climb out of the dark, and walk toward the wires.

For one night, enemies exchange
gifts, and become friends,
until morning, when the killing begins.

The Perfect Wave | Jonathan D. Smith

Sunshine glances off the foam
beneath me. Blue water
tickles my shoulders
cool as I wait for the perfect wave.
The seagull's high pitched cry echoes
in my seventh summer.

Drops of water glide
across the board beneath me.
I look up, a blue wall crushes
my body, and I flail like
a fish slammed ashore
by an unforgiving tide.

I reach for the surface,
aching to feel the summer breeze
kiss my fingertips.
Unable to breath, my eyes and lungs
burn like a rocket, reaching for the moon.

I gasp, inhale deeply,
lungs full of dirt and salt
water, and the tide pulls me deeper.
My fingers dredge into loose soil
as I reach for the shore.
The earth shifts beneath me
as I struggle to stand.

Through blurred eyes,
I see no family,
only a man in a crinkled, red, bathing suit,
pointing, laughing.
I cry out, and no one answers.
Searching for a familiar face,
I yell as far as my lungs can carry
but the sound leaves me alone,
and I am lost.



Puppy | Kimberly A. Keith

Quarters | Joanna Miller

Your pudgy fist
plunged beneath my pillow,
trying to summon the cold, magical coins
before I could open my eyes.

In the quiet of early morning,
you slipped in on silent, sock-feet,
and snatched my reward
while I still dreamt
of glittering fairies and golden wings.

You must have been waiting
for the sudden shriek
of a little girl awakening
to a lost fortune.

My feet thundered down the stairs
and I wailed out your crime
until you reluctantly handed over
my hard-earned tooth money.

It was all make-believe,
like the Lost Boys
versus Captain Hook.
We invented the battles
to match the vicious
sibling rivalries
we saw on television.

You could have kept all the quarters,
if only you could have stayed
a little longer.

Red Shoes and Reputations | Misty J. Williams

Somewhere over the rainbow,
the town calls her a whore.

Dorothy prances down a street of gold,
her morals locked tight in her basket.

She's a tornado of hormones
in pursuit of a penis.

First a man, stuffed with straw,
appeals to her craving.

No mind of his own,
he falls prey to her immoral desires.

Among the trees, steel axe
steady in hand

an empty tin, completely hollow,
searches for love.

The nymphomaniac lacks the heart
the cylindrical cavity needs.

The king of the jungle,
next on the list,

yearns for the courage
to express his passion.

Forcing herself on him,
he hasn't the guts to stop it.

A farmer's daughter by day,
a jezebel by night.

Notched in her bedpost,
the names of all her "missions."

Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion

Siblings | Ashley Randolph

It's almost Christmas time,
hence the red and green and
the hideous Christmas tree.
That's my brother, the kid that's smiling
from ear to ear. He doesn't know it yet
but he will always be there for me whenever
I need my car maintenance. Although he will not like my
first boyfriend's loud car nor will he like my second
boyfriend's need to kiss me, he will be the best big brother
a little sister could ask for. The little brown girl on the right,
that's my big sister. She may not see it in the lens
of the camera but she will be like a second mother
to me. She will make sure all my financial aid matters are
in order. Although she will be outrageously over-protective
at times, she will be the best second mom a little sister
could ask for. The little light-skinned girl right there on
the left, that's me. Looking at the photographer I don't
know I will have the tendency to overreact when faced
with problems and difficult situations. I will immediately
retaliate when I feel threaten by others. Although I will
have a temper, I will be the best little sister they could ask for.

Do you see the spot that's void in the front of me, next to
my sister, in front of my brother? That's for my little
brother, he doesn't know it yet but he will be
the best little brother siblings could ask for.

Sparklefall | Kaitlyn Grooms

The brick wall beside the dumpster
is calling our names, taunting us.
It is the easiest access point to the roof.

We stand, dazed in wonderment
as we tell ourselves we shouldn't do it.
But the pressure — the need —
takes over, as we sneak toward the wall.

Lift, hoist, push.
Not too hard actually,
and now we're up
on top of the world.

There's a labyrinth of ladders and
stretches of roofs with flat tops.
We find the highest one
at the front of the school.

Each passing car is a shooting star
with headlights bright enough to trap us.
We duck as if they could see
from the black pavement.

But the thrill scurries away with the lights
as cars pass, forgetting us
and our once brave competition
becomes a foolish game.

Scratching our heads, we forget why we came.
I toss a handful of pebble over the side
to put the dull night out of its despair.

Then, out of the silence of the night,
Rainfall, or rather,
Pebblefall.

The pebbles sparkle the roof below,
and our ears perk with pleasure,
more attentive than we would ever be
inside this building we stand on.

We're frozen, astonished
at the sound a simple toss
could create with such little
to work with, mere pebbles.

We throw more like it's a new race,
waiting for the magical sound
of the finish line that proves
our pebbles won.

Silence, sparkles, snickers:
The fear of getting caught is eclipsed
by the pleasure of not caring.

Squeeze | Kaitlyn Grooms

Anxiety pours through
my veins like venom
as the sneering leather chair waits
to hear my name summoned
from the list of all these girls
whose own venom flows
throughout their morals.

At least he sits beside me
waiting too, pacing
down the confined aisles
in his mind,
his chest moving up and down
as his heart contorts
within his ribs.

His hands slither to find
my arctic fingers
on the metal arms
of the judgmental chair.
Reaching over, they coil
around mine.

They surround my fear
shaking their rattles,
waiting to strike
with perfect precision
to ease my worry and hurt
that so many times
preyed upon me.

With constricting power
and muscular warmth,
he reassures my heart
in each tender squeeze
until my name is called.

Storm's Journey | Carissa Fazio

I snuggled deeper into the embrace
of blankets and love on the back porch,
safe from the eruptions of thunder
rolling through the air outdoors.

My daddy's steady breathing rises and falls
in rhythm with each bolt of lightning
as it precedes a boom.

The fresh smell of coming rain mixed
with my evening shower's strawberry shampoo
takes over my senses
as the electricity flickers out.

My father wraps his arms tighter
around my eight year old body
that is now shivering with cold, and fear
of the power this summer storm contains.

The rain finally breaks free
from the clouds containing it;
racing toward dust, the earth soaks it in.
Journey's end.

Summer | Aaron Crouse

It was a bleary day. Barely still spring, summer lurked menacingly around the corner, baring its teeth with stifling heat. Dumb, grey clouds meandered in the sky, blotting out the worst of the heat, but it was apparent to all that the end of the season was drawing near.

The boys and myself had occupied the year with frenzied games, the agitation of the girls and the formation of secret clubs, complete with laboriously selected code names such as Killer, Ace and Snake. Never before had there been so precocious a bunch, so fierce a legion of school age Spartacus' as the one that had commanded the playground that year.

On that day in particular, we occupied the river-front, our fierce band divided into two camps. Snake and his cronies amused themselves downstream, doing the devil-knows-what as my company tired ourselves racing. Bulldog and I argued over who was the faster sprinter. We stood stoic in the defense of our agility, ardently extolling our mobile prowess. Several hangers-on voiced their two cents as we glared at each other. Some suggested we actually race to settle the beef, but we needn't have bothered, our tongues were moving fast enough as it was.

It was Bullfrog who interrupted us. Bullfrog was Bulldog's twin brother, a frumpy little kid who never grew tired of complaining that he had been shortchanged in the codename department. Tough shit. We didn't choose our names, the names chose us.

"Guys, come quick!" Bullfrog practically ran in place, flapping his fleshy arms like a fat little bird. He bore only the slightest similarity to his stocky brother, who, by the way, I would have thoroughly trounced, had we raced.

"C'mon guys! Come lookit what Snake found!" He tugged at the two of us, edging us slowly downriver. We shook him off, but followed him towards a huddled group of boys, hangers-on close behind.

The entire legion was assembled. Skip, Ace, Gorilla, Stinky, Puddles, Killer, Bulldog, Doc, Bullfrog, Snake and myself. The mob stood in a misshapen circle, far removed, for the moment, from the lure of dirt and rocks and sticks.

"What is it?"
"I dunno."
"Me neither."
"What's it for?"
"I dunno."
"Beats me."

I stood there quietly, blinking as a cloud drifted from the herd above, the bright sunlight peeking through the canopy of grey.

Snake laughed and the boys quieted. He sauntered among the group with a coy grin, fanning himself with a magazine.

"This here? This is a porno."

A flurry of questions murmured through the crowd. Kids scratched their heads, pointed, shrugged and looked towards Snake for answers. Snake smiled all the more.

"I know all about pornos. My daddy says pornos are something grownups use. I found this one in his room." The murmurs became excited. All of a sudden we had an artifact on our hands. A relic of a society we did not understand. After awhile, two girls, sisters of Snake and Doc, wandered upon the group, necks craning to catch a glimpse of the big attraction. A few of the boys shouted angrily at them. Others shoved them away. This was boy's business.

Killer was first to take it. He leafed through a few pages with squinted eyes before handing it to the next pair of eager hands. When Bulldog finally shoved it in my face I simply passed it to Snake, who in turn gave me a sharp look. I wasn't too concerned with the relics of adulthood, I was already too preoccupied with childhood. One of the boys wondered aloud, "What do we do with it?"

Snake walked to the center of the group with the magazine in his hand. "I'll tell ya what we do with it. We take this porno behind the bushes over there, and when we come out, we'll be men."

The group erupted into excited chatter. Kids pushed and shoved and argued and swore. Kids cried out to Snake, "But who's to go first?"

Snake smiled and motioned for quiet. He walked among us, bottom lip protruded, making a big show of decision-making, until he finally stopped in front of me. He smirked as he shoved the magazine into my chest.

"You first."

I looked from the porno back up to Snake and shook my head. Snake scowled.

"C'mon pussy. We're waiting." The rest of Snake's company began to jeer as I stood there quietly, my own comrades encouraging me to "show'em." Snake returned to the center of the group, waving the magazine in the air.

"I'll go first, you wuss. Show ya how it's done." The boy strutted like a rooster towards the bush, and knelt down out of sight.

I scratched my arm as I looked away. I could feel the boys' eyes

moving back and forth from the bush to myself. Whispers buzzed in my ears as I looked up at the sky. The cloudy panorama was crisscrossed with cracks of sunlight, like a giant, glimmering spider web. I caught myself feeling like a helpless little fly.

After about five minutes Snake stepped out of the bushes with magazine in hand. He stood a full two feet taller, his face suddenly swollen with acne, and a limp, burning cigarette was pinched between his lips. As different as he looked, he still walked with that same airy gait, the strut of a cock in the henhouse.

"Your turn bitch", he said with a cracked voice as he stopped in front of me, the smell of stale smoke tickling my nostrils. His boys shouted and jeered. Mine questioned and pleaded. I set my jaw.

"No."

Snake smiled as he stepped closer, taller than he was a second ago, his face a bit smoother, his muscles more tone. A cruel smile defined his face as he thumped my chest with the magazine.

"Why not?"

I glared at him. "I've no need for it."

His eyes flashed. "Coward."

"Malefactor."

"Betrayer."

"Profligate."

Snake raised an eyebrow, then shrugged broad shoulders as he dropped the magazine at my feet. The pages fluttered open as it hit the ground, pictures of nude women staring up at me. Snake paced around me as I stood there cautiously, the group of boys awing at his continued transformation. He stopped behind me, and with a swift kick, knocked me to the ground. He stepped firmly upon my back, pushing my face into some poor girl's naked breast. She moaned as I pressed harder under Snake's weight. The roar of approval burned almost as much as the sun on my back.

Snake chuckled. "It'll make a man out of you."

As I laid facedown in the sticky summer heat, I felt like a lot of things, but a man wasn't one of them.

This Proverbial Road Less Traveled | J.M.V. Hardy

I've heard what you're in need of,
and I've heard what I am needing.
I'm shifting towards your divine standards,
So, please continue reading.

I am not a serious poem,
but for you, I will try.
For you, I will imagine,
I'm solemn, reluctant and shy.

I know what you are looking for,
and I know that I'm not it.
I am conforming to your wishes,
so that I may fit.

I am not an unhappy poem,
but for you, I will be.
For you, I will pretend,
to sulk most miserably.

I've seen what you are yearning for,
and I see that I may fail.
I am changing to appease you.
I hope that I prevail.

I am not a morbid poem,
but for you, it will be so.
For you, I'll 'walk with spirits,
crying in the graveyard snow.'

I feel you want the same old rubbish,
and my urges tell me "NO!"
However, I will alter myself,
and follow your status quo.

I am not an angry poem,
but for you, I'll do my best.
For you, I'll vent my complications,
and get them off my chest.

I sense you crave what I am not.
You wish I'd go away.
Soon, you will eat my words,
for, I am here to stay.

I am not a violent poem,
but for you, it will be done.
For you, I will burn and pillage,
until your war is won.

I hope that you are proud,
of what you've made me do.
I hope you like what I've become.
I hope I'm pleasing to you.

I am silently weeping,
because I've lost who I am.
I am now what I despise,
and you couldn't give a damn.

You will soon regret,
what you have made me do.
I'm not a poem, I'm a lie,
none of this is true.

I should toss myself in the flames.
You won't care at all.
You are the darkness that makes souls perish.
You are our downfall.

I promise you will fall one day,
for what you've made me do.
One day justice will overcome.
You'll get what's coming to you.

Am I now serious enough for you?
Am I now sad and grim?
Am I now full of livid rage,
boiling to the brim?

Am I now a violent poem,
threatening, fearsome and strong?
I did not want to be this poem!
All of this is wrong!

I wanted to make you smile;
make you laugh with glee.
But you did not want to smile,

you wanted to modify me!

Well here I am! It's what you want!
I'm now evil and dark!
Passive-aggressive, whiny, unpleasant,
and yet, I remain stark!

I don't know why I transformed for you!
It's one of my worse mistakes!
When this is over, I'll see you pay,
no matter how long it takes!

I will wait forever,
for my chance to fight!
When the perfect time arises,
I'll unleash my might!

You will fall to my feet,
damaged by my power!
Rest assured that your last breath,
will be my finest hour!

But first, before your demise,
begins to be unraveled,
I'll bide my time in the shadows of,
this proverbial road less traveled.

Because of you, I am not,
the poem I wish to be.
This is all for you.
Will you publish me?

The Trout Fishing in America Ice Cream Sandwich: A Parody of Richard Brautigan's Trout Fishing in America | Harrison Taylor

This is no ordinary Ice Cream Sandwich! This is the Mount Everest of all Ice Cream Sandwiches. The Trout Fishing in America Ice Cream Sandwich is the mother of all other such ice cream treats. The Trout Fishing in America Ice Cream Sandwich is the supreme, scrumptiously soothing, beat-all, end-all, phenomenally frigid, exceptionally delightful, drinking-yourself-stupid-good dessert of all desserts.

There are several steps to creating the perfect Trout Fishing in America Ice Cream Sandwich. The first one is to always keep an open mind and be willing to try anything, no matter how dangerously inedible it is. I am going to address the steps for making the sandwich from the top to the bottom because it will be easier to construct that way. The topmost part of the sandwich is a cherry and olive toothpicked into the top of a graham cracker. The cherry adds that last little drop of fruity goodness, and the olive, which must be on top, gives the sandwich a bit of a kick.

Underneath the graham cracker lies a grotesquely thick layer of peanut butter. If there is still peanut butter in the jar when you are done spreading it on the graham cracker, then you have not added enough and need to repeat this step. Embedded in the peanut butter will be 176 miniature chocolate chips, inserted one at a time by hand. Throw in several pecans underneath the chocolate chips to neutralize their flavor. These two additions give the sandwich a surprising-yet-satisfying crunch.

Next, add another graham cracker underneath the pecans. Mix up a bowl with half a cup of grape jelly and half a cup of caramel, and then add this to the other side of the cracker. Open up a bag of marshmallows and dump them on top of the caramel-jelly layer. Whatever sticks is to be included in the sandwich. Pour maple syrup on top of the marshmallows and use that as a paste to stick on 23 orange jellybeans.

Soak a peeled banana in diet soda for two days and then add it onto the sandwich. Next a layer of whipped cream is to be spread around the banana, but not on top of it! Pour chocolate fudge over the banana-whipped cream layer until your hand gets tired from holding the bottle. No-

tice how I say “fudge” and not “hot fudge.” The fudge absolutely must be cold; otherwise, the Trout Fishing in America Ice Cream Sandwich will not taste good.

Cream cheese frosting is the next item that is to be spread onto the sandwich. This will give the sandwich a taste of nostalgic familiarity because everyone remembers the first time they tasted cream cheese frosting. Finally, the last graham cracker is added to complete the masterpiece that is the Trout Fishing in America Ice Cream Sandwich. Now all that is left to do is eat and enjoy this wonderful work of excellence!

Twenty | Carissa Fazio

Thunder rolls over the Hudson; crews pack up,
heading home. The fading sun drips behind
the silhouette of mountains and fiery trees.

Leaves crunch under foot;
a shaven man ventures toward freedom
and forbidden kisses, leaving his nagging wife behind.

"For business," he said.

He thinks he hears his name being called in the wind,
and fearing a ghost he hurries to knock on her door.
As it swings inward, he inhales.

Her perfume and the smell of fresh
baked bread tickles his nostrils.
She smiles and prances toward him, half-clothed.
He can taste the alcohol on her lips;
her half-empty beer bottle makes him smile.

She is only twenty.

Outside, thunder still explodes
but not a single drop of rain falls.
Surrounded by his secret life,
relaxed, he takes a swig from a bottle of beer.

She curls up next to him on the couch,
fire crackling on the hearth.
"How is your wife?" she asks casually.

He turns and smiles, "Oblivious."

They fall into routine, drinking
and laughing, laughing and drinking;
thunder always echoing, bouncing off of oaks.

"Rip van Winkle," it calls.

The man stumbles into her bed,
pulling her on top of himself.
Another bottle of beer, another keg of rum.
Calm and mellow, they hide among blankets for days.

Or was it months?
He should have brought a razor.

When he returned to his wife,
he would want to look nice.

If he returned.

His mind, thick with beer
and confused, tender love,
slips into a sleep deep enough.
to hold him captive twenty years.

Wading Through Torrential Memories | Jonathan D. Smith

A low clicking sound became audible as Bright, a 21 year old engineering major, slid his key into the door and unbolted the lock to the empty house for the seven hundred and twelfth time. He hated going inside the house that he was raised in because nothing was the way it once was. Flowers never grew around the house anymore because his grandmother was not around to manage them and he honestly did not have the time. The piano and other furniture that he deemed useless no longer remained inside the front living room because he sold them trying to make ends meet. Bright had just returned from a long day of school and an eight hour work day doing various jobs that paid whatever the employers deemed appropriate. There were no full time jobs available, so his work ranged from trimming the neighbors hedges to painting the church after heavy rains. Sometimes after work, such as this day, he would turn on the television and try to catch a movie. He only kept the stupid thing because it granted him a short escape from reality which he tried to do as often as he could.

Bright glanced around his empty residence for a short time, looking at the miscellaneous items strewn about the floor. His house was filled with items that could not be used, nor sold. They seemed to always stare at him and remind him of his childhood. He looked back at the television because the bright lights from the show caught his attention. He always hated himself every time he turned on the box because there was always some teenage girl, whining about how the guy she dated for two months left her for another female. Bright was always so disgusted with the way shows always portrayed emotion with such fragility. If Bright saw anyone complaining about broken nails or paper cuts it immediately sent him into a blinding rage because he thought they had no idea what real pain is. He turned off the television and entered the kitchen to take his nightly medicines. Bright had been prescribed several meds throughout his life for depression, anxiety, and insomnia, but he rarely ever touched any of them besides his zolpidem prescription. Honestly without it there was no way he could ever fall asleep.

Bright poured a few of the pills into his palm and stared at the light pink, oblong tablets. It was during these few moments that he had contemplated suicide every night since his grandmother passed away. He always put all of them back except the one that he took to revive himself for the next day, but for some reason, even unknown to Bright, today was different. Maybe it was the fact that every day for the past three

years, he had been building up the courage to finally end his misery, or maybe it had to do with his history assignment that required him to unleash all the repressed memories that were once locked away in his mind. Either way, he slipped 8 pills in his mouth and swallowed them with a glass of water. Even with the life changing decision in that moment, Bright was devoid of any emotion. He was honestly at the point where he did not care whether he lived or died, in fact, he wanted an end to his meaningless existence. Bright slowly climbed the old wooden stairs as they creaked underneath him. By the time he collapsed on his bed, the meds were already altering his consciousness as they slowly put his body to sleep. Bright had always consciously suppressed his memories, but there was no way to stop them now. Even with the zolpidem diluting his brain and hindering synapse, his memories began to flood the cerebral cortex uncontrollably.

Bright remembered sitting on his grandmother's lap at the piano, while the bittersweet sounds of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata from the black Baby Grand filled his ears, or learning to play himself while feeling the cool, vibrating, Ivory keys.

He remembered how lovely it felt to know that you and only you were the one that was making such sweet, ravishing, and enticing notes, and how no matter how bad you felt, if you only touched those white keys all the pain would go away.

Bright remembered walking across his yard in the warm July sun on Friday afternoons to sit with his grandmother next door and enjoy a tall glass of ice cold lemonade, and how the fresh squeezed lemons always ignited a swirl of sensations on his tongue.

He remembered sitting outside on the tall, cool, lush green grass with his grandmother every Friday night, and seeing her pick out every constellation in the dark, starry sky with pinpoint precision, and conversing with her about the problems in his life, while she softly spoke of intelligent solutions.

Bright remembered being praised for his grades even though he rarely ever made an effort to succeed; it just came naturally.

He remembered the countless lines he memorized

in seventh grade in order to get cast in the school play, *The Adventures of Huck Finn*, and being blinded by the white lights that pierced through the darkness, hearing the immensity of the applause that rippled through the crowded auditorium, and the fact that he was simply the curtain puller because he could not formulate a complete sentence due to the pressure.

He remembered not having any friends because the sheer thought of opening up to another individual scared the pants right off of him, and the one time that he did take a chance, he ended up being shoved into a trash can because he talked to the quarterback's spicy girlfriend.

Bright remembered how much he loved going to the quaint, white church around the corner, just a few hundred yards from his house, and how the door always let out a loud squeak when it was opened from the outside, and how the words from the Bible seemed to always comfort his loneliness.

He remembered sitting on the old rusty swing on the front porch, while listening to the sounds of the band called *Mercy Me*, or his favorite song entitled *I Could Only Imagine*.

Bright remembered his first kiss, and the cute, perky redhead that accepted his advances, and being so nervous that he almost missed her pink, strawberry glossy coated lips entirely. He remembered pulling back, away from her embrace, with this blank expression on his face, and the fact that when their soft lips met he did not feel anything. There were no sparks or fireworks, as he shared this life changing moment with her; it was completely void of any emotions, incredibly empty, unlike the way his friends always described it at the brown lunch table, located in the far back corner of the cafeteria.

Bright remembered the expression on her face down to the sun reflected tear that rolled across her dimpled cheeks and how ashamed he was that he had made anyone feel so embarrassed. But, most of all, he remembered the tall, stocky football player standing at the corner of the lot waiting to be picked up by his mother, and how strangely, even in the distress of his current situation, he just could not look elsewhere as he noticed the way the sun gleamed off of his icy blonde hair and the way it swayed in the cool October breeze. Honestly, Bright could not remember a time when he noticed a female down to such fine detail, but he always thought his admiration for the

same sex, was simply that, admiration. He remembered how he realized in that moment that his appreciation had turned to adoration and affection, and at that point, he realized that he was not physically attracted to females at all.

As all the hands on the clock in the corner of Bright's room rotated past the top dash marked 12, the zolpidem had caused his body to completely shut down. The primary stages of respiratory cessation had taken effect and his heart was fighting as hard as it could to stay active. Despite the fact that the medicine had completely ceased all function, the memories cascaded through the association area in his cerebral cortex, engulfing his unconscious body like a kayaker being swallowed by the torrential waters beneath him.

Bright remembered the dark, absent moon nights when his grandmother asked him what he wanted for dinner and he replied, "Whatever will get mom and dad to sit down at the table while we eat."

He remembered how he rarely ever saw his parents because they arrived after he retired and left before he rose, and the fact that even though his parents were always working, they still had very little money to cover expenses.

Bright remembered the night on his eighteenth birthday that the phone rang in the middle of the night, and the way the receiver sent goose bumps down his spine as the detached, objective voice at the other end told him his parents had been involved in a fatal car accident.

He remembered the unending lonely nights in the house he now possessed, listening to the wind blow tree branches against his window, wondering why God hated him so, and pondering the fact that he honestly did not know his parents because they never spent more than 30 minutes a day with him.

Bright remembered lying in his cool bed, crying uncontrollably for hours on end, and asking God, "Why?" Why would you make me this way and then disown me in the Bible? Why would you strip from me the only thing that could ever really make me happy? Why is nothing I do ever good enough and why have you taken everything that I love away from me?

Bright remembered the soft click of the hospital linoleum floor and the way the fluorescent clouds cascaded across them as he walked into the room and saw his grandmother's chest recede as she released her last shallow breath, finally losing her five year battle with cancer. He remembered everything in that moment, every second of his life, down to the uneven cropping of a hospital tag on an inexpressive doctor who was watching the clock and counting the seconds left on his shift; just waiting until he could lock up his sleek, white coat and leave the hospital like it never even existed.

He remembered the deep, sliding screech as the only people tied to that moment walked out of the shiny glass door at the entrance to the building, of which, was full of despair and stone statues. Bright remembered collapsing on the cold, smutty floor, trying to brace himself on the wall in the far corner of the room, and how his whole entire world was crashing around him, squeezing his body so that he couldn't take one single breath. He remembered the cold, icy tears that streamed down his face and feeling a massive tightness and emptiness in his chest as his support system crumbled before his eyes. Bright remembered knowing that nothing would ever be the same, even the strong, sweet smell of the gardenias that grew so wildly around his house on their own free will.

Soon all his memories had completely vanished, all except of course seeing his friends earlier that day. Somehow, even in the absence of his sharp verbal skills and social awareness, he still had two friends that actually cared, but he honestly didn't. Bright remembered how they always spent so much time listening to his endless rambling, but mostly the annoying sound of Tina's voice when she said "Everything will get better." He also remembered how much he hated that phrase because of the utter absurdity of what it implied.

At this point, the zolpidem in his system had finally fully cooperated with the GABA neurotransmitters in his brain, stopping all circuitry and synapse, causing his already sluggish heart to discontinue beating. The last sound to ever leave his mouth was the shallow, piercing breath that receded from his lungs after the cessation of his respiratory system. Lying there, completely disconnected from the world and eternally residing in a place completely void of emotions and light.

Yard Sale | Alicia L. Coleman

In the early morning light, they come.
They are going to take you way.
Spread across the lawn in boxes
and hung on racks are the things
that are left from what was us.
I watch as they dig through memories.
My pain is exchanged for
sweaty ones and damp change.
They leave as quickly as they arrived.
My pocket full of money.
My heart empty of you.

You Changed | Aaron Crouse

I remember that summer, that sacred triumph over life, the season of youth and daring, of lust and defiance, ruling the road with a punch of the pedal, being who God prayed to, who the cops begged for warnings, never short on smokes, booze or oxy, the three key ingredients for a great fucking time, plying the world with winks and smiles, shooting through space and time and meter and rhyme towards the hereafter like a screaming meteor, tearing through mortality and godhead alike with a craze in my blood, shooting through veins without purpose or cause or care, without self-preservation, without self-loathing, only the constant need to beat, to beat against the walls of my head, to beat the dashboard till knuckles burns, to beat my foot in time to the Deftones, the throb that shakes the windows and pounds in my ears, to the shouts of the people, the people who yell and wave me down cause the music's too loud, and they don't like the truth, so fuck the people with their cozy little lives and there clean little heads that never have to think about what's ahead, what's next, what's after life when there's no God to speak of but they keep fucking screaming so I crank up the volume and I drag on my Marlboro and I dream about parking to do another line and clear out the demons that won't let me be but the people keep screaming and they won't let me dream so I keep driving faster and the music beats harder and my blood beats harder and I smoke so much harder that I cough up the blood that beats with the tunes that drown out the engine that rockets me forward from the things far behind that still seem too close and I think about driving just a little bit faster cause the finish line's under the straw in my nose that I never removed from the last hit I took under starry night skies within dark lonely worlds under stretches of highway that rocket me forward through rhythms and beats and Chino Moreno himself says you changed and he's talking to me and I cry cause it's true.



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