



**THE
SNOW
ISLAND
REVIEW**
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THE SNOW ISLAND REVIEW

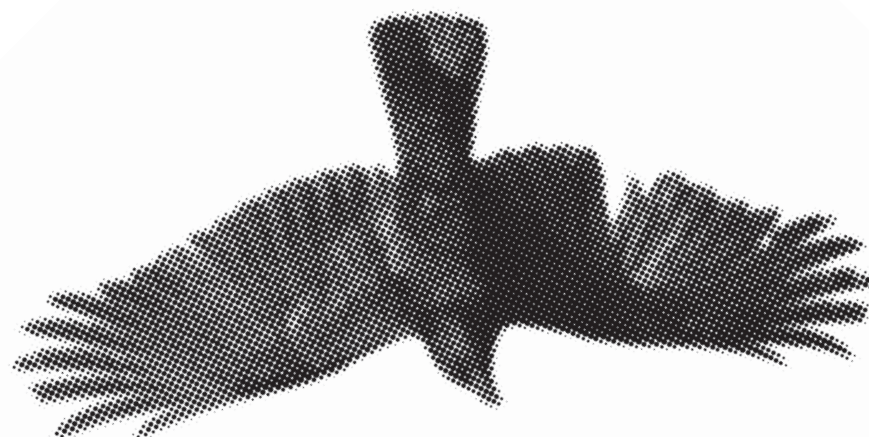
The Snow Island Review is the literary and art journal at Francis Marion University. It is named for the headquarters of General Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," who in the winter of 1780-1781 led incursions against and then eluded British troops by escaping to his wilderness retreat bounded by the Great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



**PLEASE ENJOY
YOUR STAY.**



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THE COVER

With this year's cover, we are challenging stereotypes and digging for deeper meaning. The images of crows are used to bring into question what they symbolize. In our modern American culture they are often thought of as an omen of death or doom. However, in other cultures, crows are symbols of mystery. They hide the meaning of life deep within their black-blue bodies. Thus they are chosen for the cover, and their common stereotypes have been challenged. Collaged in such a way, we reference the tests of Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach. These tests ask the viewer to dig for something deeper than just ink blots. They ask the viewer to see something that may or may not be there. This is exactly what literature and poetry do. They ask the reader to see the unseen, feel new feelings, experience new perspectives and ask new questions. These symbols are powerful in their abilities. Good literature inevitably asks the reader to see beyond words, to dig for a deeper meaning beyond the surface.

And so, this year's cover was born. Out of love for literature and art came a crow, burdened by the predisposed power of stereotype, flying high into the heavens, hiding life's secrets underneath her wing.

It was on a Thursday when it happened, ten at night. He kissed her neck but it moved her not. He grabbed her waist. He paused and waited. She kissed him back. She kissed him back and let him get carried away. She didn't stop him. She didn't say no. She didn't do anything at all.

As she tried to fall asleep that night, she stared at the ceiling and tried to make sense of what had happened. Why she couldn't feel. Why it was the problem that suddenly mattered.

It was there, in the early hours of the morning when she realized it.

"John?"

He didn't open his eyes, "Hmm?"

"Who are we?"

He rolled over to look at her, "What?"

"Who are we?"

"What do you mean, who are we?"

"Who are we, and why does it matter?"

"We're Mr. and Mrs. Smithson. I'm a computer technician and you're a cosmetologist."

She thought about it for a moment. He closed his eyes after she didn't reply back. She stared at the ceiling and wondered.

"Why do we do those things?"

He opened one eye, "It's what we're good at."

"People are good at a lot of different things. What makes us different?"

"I don't know."

"I mean, if you quit your job there are plenty of other computer technicians that could replace you, right?"

He opened both eyes, "I guess so. But you're different. You help make people beautiful."

"So do other people. Are they really beautiful, though?" She sat up in the bed.

"What do you mean?" He stared up at the ceiling, hoping she would fall asleep soon.

"I mean that they're only beautiful because I make them look like celebrities, or models on magazines. Why are they the definition of beauty? Who did that? Who said it was okay to put a label on what's beauty and what's not? Why do we believe that?"

"It's what everyone does, honey."

"And it's everyone that tells us to have jobs and make money and live in a house and to be happy with it? Are we happy?"

"Sure we are. We have a nice house, stable jobs, and we love each other. What else do – you want children? We could have children."

"Do children make it better?"

"I think you're tired, baby. You should go back to sleep." He closed his eyes.

"I was never asleep."

"Then lie down and try to. We have to get up early."

She fell back in the bed. She looked to her left at John.

She knew he could feel her staring when

he replied, "You're my wife. I love you. You make the world a beautiful place. Get some sleep."

She looked up at the ceiling and listened to his breathing slowly become deeper until she knew he was asleep.

She climbed out the bed and got dressed, without waking him. She looked for pen and paper in the dimly lit kitchen.

Slowly, she wrote the words on the paper, "We're no one, John. We're no one."

In her mind, she saw his blue eyes reading the white stationary note and asking,

Why? What do you mean 'we're no one?'

With his voice in her mind, she wrote her reply. "We have done nothing significant or extraordinary in our whole lives. We're ordinary."

But we're happy.

"We're just the same as everyone else."

But you love me, don't you?

"I don't even know who I am. How could I love someone else?"

She left the note on the kitchen table.

She grabbed her keys.

She walked outside and got in her car, but her hands could not put the keys into ignition. She sat there, waiting. But it did not come.

Back inside, she found the note on the kitchen table and tore it up so that he would not find it. He couldn't just find it; she wanted him to feel it. With the paper pieces piled up in her hand, she went to the trashcan and threw it away.

A glance in the bedroom showed that John was still asleep. A sigh passed through her lips. She changed back into her night clothes and went to bed.

It crossed her mind that he might ask her what that conversation was about when he woke up. A wild and insane thought had suddenly possessed her, and she knew she would not answer if he did ask. He would hear the answer in her silence, and then maybe he would know it too.

IN THAT MOMENT

BY MEGAN ROBERTS

Can we go back to that night?
With frames intertwined,
can we remove ourselves from time?
Would you jump into the darkness with me?
Where our greatness would be the only light.

Let's claim that island on the lake
at the end of that splintered, shaky bridge,
where subtle rippling
distorted our reflections.
Incandescent orbs spotlighting our escape.
There we were freed
from the concealments of our mind.

May the waters reflect God's given gift
of our predestined structure.
Now sweet and stable-
solidified by the storms that struck & shook us.

You looked into my eyes, and stayed there for a while.
And as your sweet words "My Belle, my Angel"
whispered to my soul I inhaled,
another memory.

Are you willing to take a stroll to the future?
To see how our works will flourish?
We'll kiss our son, with his hazel brown eyes
Watching the demolition of his surroundings,
still reflecting the progress of his upbringing
and look forward to changing the people of his time.
His caramel skin, salted with culture,
wisdom and greatness.

Let's drift back to the present.
Treat it as a gift.
Unwrapped, slowly, in perfect timing.
Unfolded, gently, to not become unglued.

I look at you,
formed so graciously.
Ginger rays line your figure in gold
as the horizon draws us back to time.

Let's enjoy the day,
avoiding all the shadows.
Leaving what's to come open ended.



Confusing, life

Where men walk as beasts,
Lions caught in a cage;
And people change skin
Different face Different name
But for some reason they're still the same

Like a madness that can't quite be mimicked
Thoughts roil like seaweed tossed in a soup
Memories bubble and bubble
Almost burning the flesh
But you have to keep going,
Have to keep them fresh.

Men fucking elephants in a puddle of piss
While beak faced goblins chase children through streets.
And deep in the woods, Iron Titans play

I can't go to sleep, there's too much to do
Not even sure I'm awake

We're playing in a picnic
Chasing each other through food
Can't cut the cake (Though it's ten stories tall)
We wander like ants, just wanting a way in
Why does Saran Wrap even exist.

What's the difference between the two?
When I wake I see monsters in every page
And every song tells a story.
When I dream, the only thing
Is that all the question marks disappear.

LOVE AND A GIRL FROM THE SOUTH

BY TIARA FELDER

The first time she fell in love, she fell hard. And quick. The way most of us do our first times. In a month, he gave her a ring. She began professing her love to him and claiming that she had found her soul mate. In three months, she was giving him everything he asked for. In six months, he had taken everything away. Including the ring.

The second time she fell in love, she was left more bruised than the first. She gave herself to him one night and never saw him again. A year later, she would remember his dark leather cowboy boots and the way he always smelled slightly like manure and cigarettes, but nothing else.

The third time she fell in love, she didn't really fall, just landed. She calculated. She multiplied the percent of his heart that was unclaimed by the number of times he had been hurt and divided it by the square root

of his feelings for her to find out how likely he was to leave. Her equation declared him relatively non-threatening, but we know that numbers, like boys, lie.

The fourth time she fell in love was the charm. Or she was charmed, at least. He told her that he had never been in love before and this was enough for her. He bought her a ring, bigger than the first, and a house with a white picket fence. They filled it with children. Sarah, Judith and Brad.

In ten years, he will kill himself. Shoot himself through the head with his hunting rifle and leave her with four kids, bills that she can't pay, and a one-word letter that reads, "Sorry." She will move into a trailer park and live off of government aid and small paychecks from a job that she hates. But she doesn't know this now.

Now, she is happy.

BUTTERFLIES

BY BLAKE TERRILL

I dream of the day you died. A single black butterfly lay smashed on the sidewalk outside your house. Dad placed it on your chest in the casket - you loved watching them in the garden.

I wake up the same way I have for three weeks, half-drunk and wholly depressed. Lips dried, cracked, and stuck together with a white film. A girl you would hate is curled up wearing my Journey tee-shirt; makeup cakes her eyes and smears across her white pillowcase. I stumble across the floor and spark a bowl... A black butterfly flutters by my window. I walk outside to watch it like you would. It dances in the warm wind and

kisses the flower petals as they pass. The earth inhales and holds its breath as the butterfly plants its sore feet on the grass. Its waxy wings shimmer in the sunlight as I bend down to pick it up. I hear your voice as I slide my hands beneath its delicate body. The girl you would hate squawks from the porch, "Do you have any cereal?" The butterfly hears her and floats down the flower bed. I put the piece to my mouth and take one long, slow draw. Smoke slides into my lungs and I am taken to a familiar place; I exhale and the bright morning is reduced to fog. I drag my feet lazily to the door and step inside a life without any butterflies.

THE AFFAIR

BY MEGAN ROBERTS

Oh Gizabelle
My sweetest view!
With eyes that sparkle and hair that glows.
Shining with the light of the Sun .
No one can hold a candle to your name.
So sweet that time seems to stop just for you.
Always taking a moment to appreciate
What has wandered into the mists,
Of the common man.
Your smile hides secrets.
Of course you'll never tell.
Hands dancing away from reach.
You simply turn and grin with your pearls.
How I love you !
How I hate you!
**I wish to burn that sun -kissed
mane.**
**And allow the wax from my candle
To blind those sparkling eyes.**
**Chipped polish on tidy nails only
make you seem lazy, my dear.**
**Whorish hands without their gloves,
Need to be removed from sight.**
**To pry the lovely pearls from your
mouth**
Would give me great pleasure.
For no secrets could they hide then.
**I could shrink your head and use you
as an ornament.**
**A keychain dangling by my window
And soon you'll see,**
Time stops for no one my dear.
Not even for you.

CROW OF OMBRA

BY AMANDA MCDANIEL



WHEN RUSSIANS TALK DIRTY

BY BROOKE ROGERS

I taste and score that mystic river
and feel the victorious emergence of vodka.
How sweetly satisfying is that gold, premium,
sterling harvest - over ice.
I feel myself rapidly slipping away
into emotional limbo.
Oh the faces, the living rooms, and backyards,
in the moonlight. I came to play.
I will drink, dance, touch
and watch my legend grow.
I am the master,
the best in the industry,
the flower of evil,
and you will praise me.

GETTIN' LOOSE WITH DR. SEUSS

BY BLAKE TERRILL

The famously popular children's writer Dr. Seuss has decided to further his career by taking on the pornographic film industry. He and a group of individuals who have gathered for their first filming session are in an old warehouse. There are couches with slip covers and a number of beds strewn randomly about the warehouse floor. Each has its own lighting and camera crew to film the action about to take place. The bedspreads and pillow covers are all obnoxious colors- neons and pastels litter every piece of furniture with the same child-like feel as Dr. Seuss' books. The individuals seem confused but eager to begin. The actors mingle with each other as they stand near a cardboard cutout of the Cat in the Hat. (Enter Dr. Seuss wearing a white tuxedo and thick, black framed glasses. His long white hair is put into a ponytail and his beard neatly trimmed)

Dr. Seuss: Good morning and welcome to this glorious adventure! An adventure full of fun with no one in dentures. I'm excited to see all your smiling faces, now quick, everyone get to your places!

The actors look around at each other as if looking for direction from someone who knows what to do and where to go. Nobody makes a move.

The first scene starts out with a three person bang... there was frolicking and fun til the doorbell rang. One knock, two knocks, three knocks, four. Wait til her husband finds out she's a ... bore! Everyone knows two's better than one. Cuz' double the toys means double the fun.

But why stop there? Let's keep on counting! There's no stopping all the people mounting!

Dr. Seuss looks to his actors and begins pointing at each of them individually. He is counting the number of men compared to women.

One stick, two sticks, three, four, five, six sticks! Six sticks for eight chicks. Eight chicks do tricks with six sticks. Hope the name sticks. Quick! What if he licks the eight chicks? Can your name be Nick?

Some of the actors begin giggling at Seuss for his inability to speak normally. They notice he is not using any vulgarity and that he is rhyming like he does in his books. They begin whispering behind his back when he turns around.

What's that you say? She's got pox on her box? That's why we have all these wonderful socks. Socks that are big. Socks that are small. Red socks, blue socks... Come try them all!

Long socks, short socks... Even only for sport socks. Some that glow. Some have eyes. All will catch your salty surprise.

So, why are we waiting? Let's get this thing going! There's no time to lose. His package is showing. It's showing and showing and oh my... It's growing!

Hurry up ladies! I guess he'll be first. If first is the worst than second is cursed. Second will

sit while the first has his way. Second will have a long, long day.

Each guy has a thing. They're all shapes and sizes. Each has an opening. Each thing rises. Things can be funny. They're skinny and wide. Thing one could be fun. Thing two might be shy.

So come get your things- ladies of mine. One, two, even three would be fine!

Go play with these things. Play over there. Play on the couch. Play anywhere!

The actors disperse and immediately begin joking and laughing as they walk to the filming areas with their partner/s.

(Giving direction to all the actors): On the bed? In the shed? Like I said, just use your head! Play in the car. Play at the bar. Play with your things, just don't go far.

Guys, it's your turn. Please the ladies. Come here Nick. You play with Katie.

Katie has fur on her lips. The lips between her hips. Play a game called just the ship... Or just the tip if you don't like seamen. She'll be screamin'. You'll be squeamin'. Either way, it's a hairy double teamin'.

Dr. Seuss walks over to a cameraman and begins watching the various groups performing. He focuses on a midget named Linus struggling to get his girl to even make a sound. She lies on her back with her arms crossed and looks up at the ceiling.

(To the cameraman): Linus the midget is being whiny. His girl is bored. How could she be bored? His thing is too tiny.

The actors start growing tired of each other and get bored with Dr. Seuss' direction. They start leaving the stage one by one- much to his discontent. A woman enters the warehouse. She has a very manly figure and an Adam's apple, but is dressed in black lace lingerie. Dr. Seuss runs over and drags her to introduce her.

Why, oh, why must all of you go? There's much to do! There's more to show! Here's my friend! Her name is Autumn. She can hide anything in her bottom.

Three of the men approach the woman and take her over to the bed where she begins performing oral sex on all three of them. Dr. Seuss watches intently as the other cast members are intrigued.

Take a bottle of pop. Don't watch her weep. Start off slow then shove it deep. She will hop, but she won't make a peep.

Take off her top. Where are the melons? No bra needed. Her secret I'm tellin. Autumn's a felon. She went to jail. One thing I forgot: Autumn is male.

The men all look at each other and jump off the bed and immediately begin putting all their clothes on and head for the exit. Dr. Seuss runs after them and tries justifying what

happened.

She had a thing. Much like you men. Oddly enough... Now she's a ten. Her thing would dangle when she's on all fours. But funny thing- it was bigger than yours!

The actors all begin laughing and carrying on.

That's ok; remember our talk. Men are not judged by the size of their stalk. Walk the walk and deliver the goo; women will show you all of their hoo-hoo.

Remember this men: not all hoo-hoos are great. So choose wisely when picking a mate. Some might be brown. Others are pink. Some smell fine while others just stink.

All the actors have now left as Dr. Seuss has changed this from a pornographic film to an informational video. He stands alone on stage in front of a full length mirror propped up against one of the beds. He speaks to himself in the mirror.

Well Teddy, you did it again. The girls weren't ready. Nor were the men. You had what you needed. The cast was completed. When the actors were seated all innocence conceded.

You had the fox and plenty of box. Nobody too old and noone in crocs. The men had the rocks. You provided socks. Yet nobody could handle a scene with hard knocks.

Seussy it must mean that they wanted you. If I weren't me, I'd want it too. One Seuss, two Seuss, have a drink and get loose. Wish I knew that Mother Goose. She'd get rid of this love juice.

Play with three: call it a foursome.

Play with two: call it a threesome.

Play with one: call it a twosome.

Guess that's why they call me handsome.

Dr. Seuss unzips his pants and sticks his hand down them as all the lights go out in the warehouse.

**THE
ACT**
BY TIARA FELDER

Bones bending, breaking, crushing mine.
Pale hands through my black hair; entwined.

We know we're wrong for what we're doing, but push our Bibles to the side...

Nerve endings never ending,
Sending fire through your tongue.

...along with all our Christian teachings and we like what we become.

Sighs escaping, flesh awaking.
Our desires come. Undone.

**BUTTERFLY
KISSES**
BY LAUREN COLE



WHY NOT

BY LUCAS BERRY

Poetry goes on the left

And verse breaks its lines all the time, better make sure every line is just the same,
Unless
You've
Got
A
Good
Reason.

Every
Line
Is
Single
Spaced
It
Saves
Space
You
See.

And if you dare to break the rules, they'll hate you and ridicule you, unless it's so well done
that all they

can do is stare.

**Don't Italicize Or Underline, It's considered bad form bold. And Keep your
capitalization TO A SENSIBLE minimum, THaNK yOu VERY MUCH.**

Don't rhyme,
Cause that's a crime
It makes it singsong
Like a bad thong
And if the rhymes are forced
That's even worse.
Slant rhymes are best

At least that's the latest
Trend in this thing we call poetry.

So why indeed must it be on this side that poetry must go? Is it a magic trick at a magic show?
Is poetry on the left, better somehow? Do all of my lines on the left mean more to you now?

I don't think so. Someone once said that we should make it all new,
And I think that's just what we should do, change things up
Find our own rhythm,
Our own style.
Carve our own trail,
instead of taking the path less traveled by.

SHARING A PIPE WITH THE TREES

BY MICHAEL BRITT

A bag of pine beneath evergreens,
I smoke alone just me and trees.
I raise my pipe to entice their boughs.
Their limbs, the smoke rings, and I can see.

The trees do not know how to smoke;
My smoke rings forming figurines
But I'll make lyrics of you all
Cause soon enough it will be spring.

I sing—the trunks sway with the breeze.
I dance—my smoke rings promenade
Still sober, we perform off key
Jazzed—and we all serenade

Let's vow—beyond Neptune's sun—to be friends
And meet where immortal forest ends.

MONSTERS

BY LUCAS BERRY

The man walked into the room (what should we call him? Scribe will do I think) and the door locked behind him. It was only we two in the room although there were a dozen (at least) guards outside. I was chained to a chair, wrapped in chains like bandages, until my entire body was covered. And though I loathed them, I also realized the importance of these chains. They were holding me up. My chair was bolted upside down to the ceiling, so that I hung with my head towards the floor (some stupid, superstitious precaution against magic probably; it was both ineffective, and annoying). The ceiling was so low in this dark, dank room that my eyes were on level with the Scribe who was now sitting across from me (his chair was on the floor). He was...boring. Average height, slightly smaller than average build, brown hair, brown eyes, nothing at all remarkable about him. And yet, he was probably the second or third most powerful man in the world. You see, there had been a revolution. The common people had risen up against their oppressor and torn down a dark regime that had lasted for a thousand years. Of course, the common people need leaders to guide them in such things (and of course to rule them once the revolution is over). This man was one such leader, a Lord of the Revolution if you will. Although, I may be being a bit unfair here. From all that I had heard of him in particular, he truly was a

man of the people, unlike his counterparts, who were merely power-hungry men looking to use the people as I had used magic, (or at least as how I had used magic from their perspective) as a means to an end.

He readied pen and parchment, and asked me if I were ready to begin the interview, said that if I cooperated it would go better for me.

I chuckled and grabbed onto the spark of magic I had been nurturing for the last few days (There was a round-the-clock cadre of magi whose sole task was to lock down my access to my magic, to stop me from using the reservoir of power inside me. So far, they had been surprisingly successful, impressive for these uneducated mongrels). The spark was small, microscopic compared to even my smallest workings in normal circumstances. But small is a comparative term, and this small spark was more than enough to melt the chains wrapped around me.

And melt them I did.

A sudden burst of pure heat, a quick drop that ended in a roll (perfectly executed, thank you 2000 years of combat experience), and I stood next to the man, liquid steel rolling off of my bare skin like water, shocked screams for guards pouring from his mouth. I smiled, grinning (in what must have been a very sane-looking fashion), as I shook the last of the liquid metal from my hands, and winked at the Scribe, pushing him back

down as he tried to get up. I took two steps forward and slammed my shoulder into the door just in time to shut it on the guards trying to push their way through. The last of the magic was slipping through my fingers; there was just enough left for what I needed, provided I was as careful as I was quick.

My left hand drew back, my body twisting so that my right shoulder could stay pressed against the door, keeping out the dozen or so guards trying to smash their way in. My hand snapped forward, into the joint between the wall and the door, and spent the last bit of magic that I was ever likely to see. It was like spending the last of my soul.

It worked perfectly. The door became one with the wall, the very fabric of the two blending (for about a meter in every direction anyway), the stone gained all the flexibility and unity of the wooden door, and the door gained all of the strength and durability of the stone block wall. A few of the guards screamed as they rammed once more into what had been the door, and the distinct sounds of both joints dislocating and bones crunching were audible in the cell.

I turned back to the Scribe, who was standing again, his wooden chair toppled behind him, his mouth open, his face halfway between rage, surprise, and fear. He stood frozen, staring at me as I walked over to where my chair hung from the ceiling, and quickly pulled it down. Even the screeching

of the steel bolts as they were ripped out didn't disturb his stare. It wasn't until I set his chair back up behind him and touched him lightly on the shoulder that his reverie broke. He jumped when I touched him and sat down when I motioned. He started making small noises, wheezing through his teeth, keening almost, like a dying animal. He mumbled things (not quite words), under his breath, his eyes darting around, never focusing. The noises his chair made as it creaked under his frantically rocking form served only to disturb him more, his eyes darting at every sound. Perhaps he wasn't used to people being able to change the fabric of reality with little more than their hands. Either way, I needed that to change and quickly.

My little magical transformation, while of genius-level quality and quite impressive, still had its weak points. The door-wall was still thinner where the door had been than the rest of the wall; it could still be broken through. And the guards were starting to pound on it with their fists and yell through, trying to contact the Scribe. If he didn't respond soon, they would find a way in, and likely kill me in all the excitement (yes, I would take a dozen or more with me, but no man, no matter how powerful, can fight an army alone without magic. And I wanted to live).

So, I slapped him in the face. Not hard.

I didn't want to hurt him (or more likely kill him), and while I took the risk of alienating him completely (turning him into a screaming panicking wreck) or sending him back into his dazed state, luckily, this time it worked out for me (there's just something about the sharp Crack of a hand across a face that can really wake a person up). And so when I told him to, he went over to the door-wall and yelled through to the guards that everything was fine. There had been a misunderstanding; he would let them know as soon as we were done (It took him several tries, his voice was shaking, and his stuttering was nearly incomprehensible, even to me, on this side of the wall). Then, he came back and gingerly sat back down facing me, a proper amount of fear carved into every line on his body and stamped beneath his face, though he tried to keep his expression calm and serious. It didn't help that he flinched when I took the pen, ink, and parchment from where it had fallen beside his chair.

"You and your associates have made a mistake, Scribe, one that could prove fatal for you all. I have been beaten, but I am not broken. I am a wounded wolf, but I am by no means dead. Do not assume that everything you think and believe is true. Do not believe even in your own success. For truly, this revolution was not a success of yours, but a failure, of sorts, of mine. It was not your vigilance that won the day; it was my

apparent laxity that lost it. You are an ant trying to take apart the castle that has been built over its home, and you should never forget that."

I dipped the pen into the ink, and began to trace designs onto the parchment, swirling black lines, all curves and barbs, reminiscent of thorny vines or fire. His eyes jumped to me at the scratching of the nib, and he slowly began to focus, the creaking of his chair lessened. I glanced up before I spoke.

"Now, this is how things will go. This interview will commence at exactly the pace I set and will continue for exactly the duration I want it to. I will tell you what you need to know, you will tell me what I want to know, and we will come to an agreement by the end of this, as to just how your little revolution, will fit into my plans for my empire."

The look on his face as realization began to replace shock delighted me. It was incredulous and fearful at the same time, like he couldn't quite believe what he was hearing, but after my earlier display of power, he wasn't inclined to doubt my ability to do anything.

"You see," I continued, relaxing back into my chair as though it were my throne, "I was able to get here for many reasons, but the reason I did create this empire was so that I could pursue my passion without hindrance. You see, I'm obsessed with magic. I have a passion for it. It is the only

thing that really matters to me. But a man must eat; he must have a place to live; and beyond that, many of the materials that I require for my experiments and pursuits are exceedingly rare and ruinously expensive. And so I forged this empire to give myself the resources to do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, with the least effort possible."

I leaned forward and resumed drawing. Realization dawned across his face. He was a truly intelligent man, one who I would surely have put to good use, had I found him before the revolution had (ah but these are the costs of pursuing your passions).

"Delightful. I'm so glad you asked." I finished my drawing with a flourish and looked up. "You are quite correct; I didn't anticipate how incredibly demanding ruling would be, even for someone like me. I had no idea the amount of time running an empire would take. You see, I did try to appoint stewards, early on. But, I quickly found that it couldn't work. It always ended one of three ways. Either they became cripplingly corrupt, using the empire for their own personal gain, living like an emperor, rather than like the stewards they were; or they were useless, constantly deferring everything that resembled a problem to me, so that I was paying someone for nothing; or, they tried to do what you are trying to do. They tried to replace me and usurp my throne. I've had to put down more rebellions,

revolutions, and assassination attempts than I care to count or remember."

I placed the cork back into the ink bottle, and carefully cleaned the nib of the pen with some of the molding straw strewn about the cell.

"Eventually though, we all learn from our mistakes. A plan began to form in my head. I would pursue my goals. I would lose myself in my magic for a time and allow the seeds of rebellion to grow. In many cases I not only planted these seeds; I often had to water them so that this revolution of yours could take off."

I settled back into my chair, parchment and ink bottle held loosely in one hand, pen held in the other.

"And now we are here. You are set to take the empire back for the people, or so you believe."

I rolled the pen between my fingers. His eyes, still tight with fear, snapped to the ink bottle when it clinked against the stone as I set it on the floor. I winked at him when he saw that I had noticed.

"But, you and your compatriots have forgotten two of very important things. First, I have more than one army. You defeated but one of several forces, and if you do not do as I wish, you will cause a civil war that will last for generations as I fight to regain my empire. No one wants this, but I will not baulk from it. In fact, I would relish the

chance to once again destroy and terrify men with devastating displays of magic and power."

I leaned forward again, my elbows resting on my knees, and pointed to him with pen.

"Second, you, personally, forgot the nature of your fellow revolutionaries. They are not as you are. They are power-hungry men looking not to displace me and give freedom to the people, but rather they are looking to replace me and take my throne for themselves. You have been used, Scribe, by me and by your so-called friends; did you really believe that it would be as simple as they said? That you could simply capture me, gain what knowledge you could from me, and then give power to the people? Is that what you thought was going to happen?"

He hung his head. He knew that I was right. He had been used by those in power and by those who wanted power, and all that he had sought was to do what he thought was right (If I could be empathetic, I would have been just then. But I am what I am).

My smile grew even larger. "What is my plan you ask? It is quite simple really. I needed a revolution to take this empire off my hands, but I also needed the leaders to be sympathetic to my cause. I don't want to rule. I want to work magic."

I ran my nail down the edge of the pen's nib, peeling off a thin layer of the metal.

"The deal here is simple. I will serve

you, and you will serve me. You will rule my empire and supply me with whatever I need. In return, you can have my empire and my help in cementing your rule. I will be your sword, the most powerful and marvelous weapon you have ever seen. A sword that serves on its own terms true, but one that is very much willing to serve, provided you treat it with the proper respect. You will leave me to my devices with my magic, and I will leave you to yours with the empire. Run it how you wish. So long as you supply me as I need, so too will I serve you in your times of need."

I continued to sharpen the pen to a razor's edge with my thumb nail, tiny metal shavings falling on the stone at my feet. I tested its sharpness against my cheek. It came away wet.

He lifted his head, his face reddening with anger. His face was a perfection of self-righteous rage. He was so certain of himself, of his position. Of his purity.

Or at least he wanted to be.

I licked the blood from the makeshift knife, my tongue delicately cleaning the blade an inch from my lips. I laughed quietly.

"Oh yes yes, I am the definition of evil. Yes, I've raped, and murdered, and tortured. But you've left out the best parts. You forgot the genocide, the pillaging of sacred lands, the desecration of temples, and the enslavement of entire peoples. Yes, I'm the

worst kind of demon.

"Ha! But what are you than? You who understands my point and purpose? Don't be so outraged; drop your pathetic moral pretense. You sympathized with me from the moment we began talking, and you, you allowed yourself to be deceived by men as terrible as me. They wanted you to find how I had come to power, and how I kept my power. They wanted to know what my trick was. And you were going to give it to them, like a good, blind little monkey.

"Tell me Scribe, which is worse, the deceiver or the he who lets himself be deceived? Don't tell me that there weren't signs. If you're as honest as you believe yourself to be, you know that you should have known what would happen. You aren't

any better than me. You were willing to sacrifice anything, just to feel like you were working for the people. And now I'm giving you a chance, a real chance, to do just that. All you have to do is help me get what I want. So, what do you say Scribe? Will you make a deal with a demon to get what you want? Will you sacrifice your precious honor and morals to save the people from your compatriots? From me? Or will you cling to your hypocrisy; doom tens of thousands to death in a civil war all to spite me? Don't act as though you truly think we're different. We're both just men trying to get what we want. The only real difference between us is that I'm honest about it."

His face held his answer, and all I could do was laugh.



A GRAND DOG

BY AMANDA MCDANIEL



MASQUERADE

BY BROOKE ROGERS

Tailored perfectly to her face,
there is no space between the plastic
conformity and her white, porcelain skin.

The golden glitter deflects the reflections
of her coworkers, those alike and not.
They see her, and they approve.

It is not a disguise to them.
It is simply a mirror
in which they see themselves.

She sparkles and shines
and at a half past five,
she leaves to go home.

She removes the shimmery screen,
in favor of white fluff.
Her children and husband approve

of the soft, wrinkly feathers.
she clucks around the kitchen
pecking at each one about their day.

She pokes at the dishes
and at the dirt on the floor,
and all the toys the children didn't pick up.
In the bedroom she wears red lace
on her face, a veil of seduction.
She prances around like an exotic dancer.

Her husband believes
that she is herself, but
he can't see past the opacity on her face.

At night, when everyone is asleep,
she removes her skin and lies awake
in her bed, listening to the quiet.

She is still, and she can feel
her raw flesh bleed tears of blood
down her neck. But she is free.

She is herself,
just flesh, bone,
and absolutely no one.

MI MARIPOSA

BY MICHAEL BRITT

Wrongly convicted and sentenced to death,
I trudge this quagmire. Sweat soaked,
heading towards the border;
the only thing on my mind is Elena.

*Mi mariposa,
My Spanish butterfly.
Her lips, tan suaves como
una brisa de otoño.
Her hair, tan oscuro como
una noche de invierno.
Her scent, es de las
flores de primavera*

I hear the howl of hounds,
bouncing off the bark around me.
I stumble blindly through the
swamp surrounding the prison.
The hellish and sadistic place
I was confined to the last
seven years of my life.

The frigid night air pricks
my face and finger tips.
Every step seems to
add ten pounds to my
flimsy stress ridden frame.

Finally—I reach the other side, as
bolts of lightning
slash across
moonlit skies.
Oddly, the ominous clouds and

the sight of the safe-house
silhouetted by drops of rain
eases my heavy head.
Broken Spanish rolls off
the tip of my tongue
like silk ribbons blown by
the gusting gale.

*Elena,
No llores mi vida.*

Dios nos vigila.

She rushes out to meet me
as I stagger up the steps
fatigued, footsore, and famished.
We embrace and for a short while,
our world at peace.

Suddenly, a crash of thunder
followed by furious flashes of light.
The ground beneath me vanishes
and I see the family of me
supposed victim.

The smell of singed hair and
seared skin stings my nostrils,
as a lethal dose of electricity
courses thorough my veins.

*Mi mariposa,
tu eres mi razón de vivir,
my everything.*



Hi there. You don't know me. But I know you. I've known you for quite some time now actually. I like to think of us as friends. Well, kind of. And it's because I consider us such good friends that I'm debating whether or not I want to kill you.

You see, you were my first. The first person I learned. I've learned many people since you. A lot of them are dead. Some aren't so lucky. But you, you were my first.

How's your family doing? They were good earlier when I saw them. Your kids are wonderful. So sweet. I love children. They're wonderful. I don't understand them, but they're wonderful.

You know, I've never really understood people very well. That's why I decided to start learning people. That was just before I met you. That was such an exciting time in my life. I was really just coming into my own. I hadn't even learned how to kill then. My but it's been a fun time hasn't it? Oh, I forgot, you still don't know me, do you? That's ok, you will soon. Like I said. I'm debating whether or not to kill you.

Do you remember, years ago, that car crash near your school? The one that blocked the road really bad, and you had to take a different way home? I did that. It was a test, to see if I had learned you. To see if I could predict what you would do if I threw you off your normal routine. And, as it turned out, I did. I was there waiting for you when you got there.

I started learning more people after I learned you. When I could think your thoughts, I knew it was time for me to move on. But I never forgot you. I'd check back in on you every now and then. Don't worry, I never forgot about you. But I knew that I needed to learn more people. So I did.

The first person I learned after you was boring. He was a boob. Ignorant, foolish, and content with it. I didn't like him very much. You were so much better than he was. It drove me mad. So, when the urges came back, I punished him. I punished him for being so lazy and complacent when you were so great. I didn't really know what I was doing then. But I learned quickly. After him, I punished a lot of them, the people I learned. If they weren't worthy, and the urge came, I punished them. If they were worthy, I tried to hold back the urges. Just for a little while, just so I could keep knowing them. But that never lasted very long. When the urge got too strong, I killed them. But I was always gentle with them, the worthy ones. Or at least, I tried to be.

Being gentle was always so hard. And it always got harder. Every time I found someone worthy, it got harder and harder to kill them. Killing just never gave me quite the same...thrill. It never satisfied the urge for as long. Punishing them was always so much better.

I'll tell you a secret, sometimes, I cheated. It wasn't until really recently. Sometimes, I would pick people that I knew I would get to punish. And once, I even punished someone who I should have been gentle with. That was last time actually. That's why I came back to you. That's why I'm debating whether or not to kill you. Because you were the first. And the best. And I don't know if anyone else will be enough to calm the urges this time.

I got really good over the years. It took me a long time to learn you. A long, long time. But now, I can do it in less than a month. So much faster. And I got better at other things too. Things to keep me safe. I'm really good at everything I do now. I can blend in with other people now. No one in this town even thinks that I'm odd. Not at all in anyway. Which is amazing. And I have you to thank for that. So, thank you.

I haven't just gotten better at the safe things. The first guy, that first guy that I punished, I was so sloppy with him. It was fun, but after him, I started learning. And I'm really good now. Would you like me to tell you what I do now? It's so much fun! Let me explain.

First, I drug them. Knock them out completely. There are lots of different drugs to use. And since I'm a surgeon, well you didn't know that but still. I'm a surgeon, so I've got access to anything you can think of. Not that I'm saying you're simple-minded. You're the best. After I drug them, I put them in the bed of my truck, under the cover, so no one can see them. And then we go on a road trip. We go out somewhere deep in the woods, sometimes even up to my hunting cabin. Actually, now that I think about it, we go up there most times. Once we get where we're going, then the real fun begins. First, I chain them down to the table, the one I always have set up in advance. I used to put a ball gag in their mouth, but now I just make sure I go where no one can hear them scream. Once they're chained down I cut off the drugs, and let them wake up. They're always so cute. So disorientated and confused and scared. I let them beg and scream for a while. And then I heat up the soldering iron. Of course, I know better and safer ways to cauterize now. I am a doctor. But that's the way I first did it, and nothing else I tried ever quite gave me the same enjoyment. It's always a struggle to pick what I'm going to burn out or off first. Sometimes I go for the hands first. Of course, I have to use the saw to get through the bones and a few of the tougher muscles and ligaments. Same with the feet. The tongue though, that I can do with just the soldering iron. Same with the eyes, and the ears, and the nose. It's always fun to feel their eyes squish and steam when I push the soldering iron into them. The ears and nose aren't as fun to burn. They don't squish or steam as much. But the screams are just as fun. I always save the tongue for last. So I can

hear them scream better, and so they can talk until the very end. Then, I drop them off at a firehouse in a small town a few states over. Oh, and I wash them down quite thoroughly with bleach just before I pack up the truck to drive them. They always squirm and try to scream. It's always so fun. The fire departments always make sure that they stay alive. Which is exactly the point. I want them to spend the entire rest of their lives helpless. Trapped in a dark, silent, tasteless world without hands, without feet. Entirely dependent on other people, never knowing what is going on, what will happen next. That is their punishment for living complacent, common lives.

Being gentle is so much harder. I catch them the same way. Drugs, table, chains, everything's the same, but instead of a soldering iron and saw, I use icicles I make out of distilled water. I stab them through their eyes and into their brain. I let them wake up first, but the screams are never as good. It's never as long. Never as fun. But then, I'm not punishing them. Which is why I'm debating on whether or not to kill you.

You're the best. You're the standard by which all the others were judged. It would be wrong to punish you. You don't deserve it. You of all people don't deserve to be punished. But the urge is so strong this time. I don't know what else to do. Which is why I'm debating whether or not to kill you.

TO TAYLOR'S BLANKET

BY TIARA FELDER

You held her scent for a while.
Sweet, milky sourness clung to your
pale purple threads as tightly as her
tiny fingers clung to mine.

You reminded us. Even your
smoothness was reminiscent
of her touch and her perfect,
unlined, unblemished skin.

Holding you was like holding her
all over again. As we rested under
you one night, my mother warned me:
"You know, it won't always feel like this."

She was right.

Now, you smell like Hawaiian Breeze.
Are unraveling at the ends.
You're not so much purple as you are gray,
a color she hated, and you're rough and
worn where gum dropped onto you and
melted under the heat of the sun.

Still, holding you reminds me of holding her,
and that's enough for me.

FADING

BY KATIE MITCHELL



STRANGERS

BY BROOKE ROGERS

Friday

I met an old man, while drinking my latte in Starbucks. I've never seen 'im before in my life, but he looks at me and starts talking.

"Ain't it funny, how we're all just strangers?" He pushes the glasses up on his nose and takes a sip of his black coffee. "We spend our whole lives searchin' for who we are, cause we just don't know?" He puts his coffee cup back down. "Strangers!"

I lean back in my chair and think for a moment.

Foreign Food

He ruffles his dark brown hair and looks at me with his puppy dog eyes.

"I like you."

In an attempt to look cute, I bat my lashes at him. "So why don't you take me out on a date?"

"Where you wanna go?"

"Take me to that little Japanese restaurant near that old coffee shop that closed down."

"For a first date?"

"Well, why not? Is that too exotic for you?" I smirk at him.

"Oh, no, no, no. It's fine."

He slips his hand into mine and pulls me closer, as if I was his.

I didn't even know him.

Begin

"I don't kiss boys that aren't my boyfriend." I watch his face turn bright red, and he opens his mouth to say something but decides against it. I stare him down. "Well?"

"I thought...I mean we went out. I thought I already was."

"Are you?"

He stares at me. "If you want me to be."

"If I didn't, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

He regains some color. "Oh."

Why didn't I see it then? Before it began? I knew. I had to know.

Static

"I mean it! You just don't understand!" I'm sobbing on the phone. "Go ahead, call me a bitch. I know you want to."

He takes in a breath of air, and his voice goes soft. "Don't say words like that. You're too pretty."

That wasn't the point. That had nothing to do with it at all.

Darkness

It's late, and we just left the new Italian restaurant that opened up a few weeks ago. Most of the stores had already closed for the night. He turns onto a back road to take the long way back to my home.

"I want to know you better. Don't you think? We should know each other better." I'm in the passenger's seat, and I'm wearing my black dress.

The streetlights flicker out.

He looks over at me and says, "That could take years. And we still might not get there."

But that doesn't make it right. That didn't make this, or us, or anything right.

Forgiveness

He puts my hand somewhere I don't want it.

"It's okay. God will forgive us." He says. "It's okay."

God dammit! It wasn't fucking - Okay. And I just didn't know how to say - No.

Go. Set. Red.

I'm driving the car, and I stop at the intersection. I look at him. "But what if..."

He looks over from the passenger's seat. "What if what?"

I can't believe I have to say it. He should know. "What if I got pregnant?"

He puts his hand on my knee. I feel my insides want to pull away. He does that damn thing where he looks at me with his stinkin' puppy dog eyes. "And what if you did? It'd be okay. My parents would take care of us."

My throat burns, and I look back at the stop light. Red.

My eyes are set on the light ahead. "No. I wouldn't want it."

He's unfazed. "You're scared, but I know you. You would never, ever do that." He squeezes my knee. "You would keep the baby and we would be a family."

"You don't know that! You don't know me!"
Tears blur my vision, and I see the light turn green.
Go. I should have floored it then. I should have gone.

Friday con't.

I imagine the old man was growing impatient with my silence. I look back at him and smile. "That is funny. I wonder if that's the point. Searching gives us something to do."

He nods at me. "Maybe." He stares straight ahead, and I know my answer didn't help any. I try to think if there was ever a time when I wasn't a stranger. Was there ever a time when I wasn't searching?

Break

"I love you. Why can't that be enough!"

I don't reply. I can't. I can't do it anymore.

He's talking too fast. "Give me another chance. Please. Please. I can make this right." He grows quiet, and for the first time, I know what I want to say.

Something possesses me and I laugh. "You had another chance. Every day that I stayed was another chance!"

Every god damn day that I stayed. And you still couldn't.

"Please," his voice breaks. "I'm scared."

Don't talk to me about being scared.

Well, Bless Their Hearts

And I stood there in the church parking lot with the summer sun blazing down on me and wondered how true is the truth? Listen to this: I saw five church members run the stop sign.

But guess what. It's okay - god will forgive them.

I feel my sweaty palm lose grip on the bible, and it falls to the ground.

Foreigners

Present day:

It's been two years now. I finally get the nerve to go back to that little Japanese restaurant with some friends. Then he walks in with a doe eyed girl that looks a lot like me

back before

we -.

To be polite, I smile and wave as he walks by. He stares at the ceiling to avoid my eyes. And I know, I know I look better than whatever the hell is on that damn ceiling.

What the hell was wrong with you? You dated him for three years and all this time...

Yesterday

You wanna know what I wish I had said to that old man? You know, that old man I met in Starbucks yesterday?

He had looked at me and said "Ain't it funny, how we're all just strangers?" I was thinking that was kind of funny. "We spend our whole lives searchin' for who we are, cause, we just don't know?" And he was damn right.

I wish I had said "Those things don't matter when we're dead."

THE SUNLIT LIFFEY

BY KATIE MITCHELL



ODE TO A LOVER'S FIST

BY LUCAS BERRY

Men don't get hit.

Men don't get hurt.

But it's the bruises
That changed me, love
It's the bruises
That made me, love.
And it was love you know,
The way you hit me.
Left yellow-green bruises on
My body, and bloody
Holes in my mind.
It was love, you know,
But of course you know,
You loved me so much,
You let your fist take the
Air from my lungs whenever
Your excuse for a father
Made you mad.
Of course it was love,
Nothing else makes you
Quite so...excited.
You were the first you know,
First time, first love,
First one to meet my parents.
They never saw the yellow
Flowers you left there
Above my kidneys.
They only heard us,
Screaming over the phone,
So in love.
Though I do protest too much,

You and I both know it was love,
Because we have no other word
To describe this thing that
Was between us.
It was mad, love,
It was wild, we were
Like rabbits in the spring,
And the next day
We were like boxers
In the ring, at least
You were.
But you changed me love,
With your fists, love,
The ones at the end of your
Arms, and at the end of your
Tongue. You twisted me, love,
Up in knots, there
Inside my mind.
One blow from
Your tongue, love,
Could leave me
Furious for days.
A single blow, love,
Could break dams inside my
Mind, to put New Orleans
To shame. You made
Katrina proud, when,
During my darkest days,
You made me lay with you,
You writhed, love,
Beneath me, and upon me,
While I did my best not
To vomit all over the floor.

You changed me, love,
For that I thank you.
You were beautiful, love,
While I held you,
But men don't get hit, love,
And men don't get hurt, love.
That's why I left you.

AN EVEN BURN

BY GRANT TOTH

It was a cool Sunday afternoon, six months ago, when I came home to see the Century 21 sign being taken down, which had stood for eight months. Every Sunday I would take my 1960 Chrysler 300F to Sam and Omie's for breakfast. After returning and parking the old hunk in the garage, I made a mug of my favorite Columbian roast from Morning View Coffee Company, remaining on schedule for the day. After being in the military for so long I relied on my schedule. After all, schedules keep the world turning. I enjoyed smoking a full body cigar on my front porch while I read The New York Times.

After making dinner, I returned to the porch to smoke another fine cigar. I spend a lot of time on that porch. Most nights, I cleaned my guns or reminisced on the 20 years I spent in the United States Navy and the 22 years I spent as an accountant. Those 42 years of my life have made me who I am, a 60 year old manic man. I have never married and have no children. Going to Vietnam sure didn't help me find a wife. Not many women wanted to marry a man that might not ever come home again. Being single has given me one thing though. Money.

That evening, I was sitting on the porch when I looked up to see a young pair of slender legs walk onto my porch.

"Hello, how are you sir? I'm Jennifer Wright. I just moved in next door."

"Well howdy darlin'. I'm Arnold Smith. Nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you."

"What brings you here?"

"I just transferred here to take a new job. I'm 35 and it's always been my dream to move to Charleston."

"Well I sure hope the best for you. If you need anything, my door is always open. But I reckon most of the time I'll be right here."

"See you around Mr. Smith."

"Please, call me Arnold."

And this was how it all started.

It's always nice meeting a classy young woman. I forget they are still out there. She actually had enough clothes on to cover her body. Ain't too many women doing that these days.

It had been three weeks since I'd seen much of anyone. My whole schedule was screwed up. I mean for Christ sakes I couldn't even go to the grocery store until 2 A.M. because you damn sure weren't going catch me shopping with all those crazies. I didn't want to do anything but lie

around all day. But then I started to wonder how Jennifer was doing and if she had been able to get adjusted.

Fuck! What the hell was that? I thought. I jumped out of bed and grabbed my Glock 21. It was the closest gun to my bed. Armed and ready to kick some ass, I flung the door open.

"Oh my! Is this a bad time Mr. Smith?"

I tucked my gun into the back of my jeans and tried to calm myself. I said, "No, I'm sorry darlin'. You startled me, that's all. Oh and please, Arnold."

"Yes sir, I have been super busy at work these last few weeks, but I would love to have you over for dinner sometime this week. Would you be interested?"

"Um yea, what day?"

"Tuesday?"

"Well on Tuesdays I usually watch Forest Gump or Lion King, but I guess I can skip it this week."

"Fantastic! See you then."

"Hello, Arnold. How are you this evening?"

"You finally got my name right. I'm doing well."

I walked in and had a seat on her brown Italian leather couch while she finished cooking dinner. It was a nice place: modern and very stylish. It was kind of her to invite me over for dinner; it was almost as if southern hospitality had been instilled in her already. I couldn't tell if it was the fried chicken or the sweet tea, but Jennifer had put a few pounds on. It looked good. She is such a sweet young lady. I kept telling my self there is no way she is a Yankee. She's just a southern belle that grew up in the wrong part of the nation.

"Arnold, dinner is ready. What would you like to drink?"

"Sweet tea, darlin'."

After talking over dinner we sat down on her couch and looked at some of her photo albums. The phone rang a few times but she ignored it. Then she told me what it was like to live in Baltimore. I sure am glad I ain't no Yankee.

"So Arnold, where did you go to college?"

"Vietnam."

"Oh, How was that?"

"Two tours."

"Oh goodness. I'm sorry,"

"It's fine. I don't like to think much about it. Well, it's getting late."

"Well, It was nice to having you for dinner, Arnold."

"Yes, thank you again. Next time, dinner is on me."

I don't know what was in that food but damn if it didn't put me to sleep like momma's cookin'. It was starting to get cool out side, my favorite weather. There's nothin' like wearing shorts and a long sleeve flannel shirt while drinking a hot brew and smoking one of Nicaragua's finest.

A few weeks had passed. Jennifer and I were hanging out more. It was really nice to be able to take her out. Her company was so comforting. Since she was always so busy I got to plan everything, and that was fine with me. One of my favorite dates was the first time I took her shooting.

"Arnold, sweetie, you know that thing scares me"

"Yes I know. It will be ok. First, always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction. Next, pick it up from the table grabbing the handle; make sure you keep your pointer finger straight and away from the trigger. Then, take the safety off. Finally, aim at your target and pull the trigger."

"Ok, I think I can do that. Alright, muzzle away. Pointer finger straight. Safety off." And... BANG...BANG...BANG! "How was that babe?"

"Lets take a look. Well how bout that, three in the bulls-eye."

I was rather impressed by her shot. Not many women can shoot a gun well, especially Yankees.

Jennifer was a busy woman. She always got called into work at the oddest times. I reckon being a news writer isn't easy. She told me if a script or article got messed up she'd have to go in and fix it. Sometimes, we would be on the porch chatting and she would get a phone call and have to leave.

It'd been about a week since I'd seen her. The best part of a schedule is when everything else is off, you're right on target. It was just about time for my evening cigar when I was on my porch and I heard a sweet, exhausted voice.

"Hey Arnold."

"Jennifer, you look exhausted."

"Yeah, My boss has called me in every night this week." She said.

"Them writers messin' up again ain't they?"

"Yea it's been tough."

Just then Jennifer's phone rang. I told her to answer it, but she muted it and shoved it back into her pocket.

"Why didn't you pick that up?"

"He will be alright."

Another month had passed and Jennifer's job had started to slow down. We had gone through the dating stage so now we didn't go out as much. It felt great to relax on the couch and watch old Disney movies with her, after all they were safe.

"Jennifer your phone keeps vibrating, it's on the counter."

"Mmm I don't care I'm too comfy to get up."

The movie was over and it was time for Jennifer to go home. I always let her lay there as I gathered her things. After a long day at work I knew it made her feel good to have someone take care of her. As I was gathering her things her phone went off again. I let it vibrate. Then her screen said Chris: missed calls (6) and Chris "Are you ignoring me for that old man again?"

"Jennifer, wake up, what the hell is this?"

"Mmm what?"

"Who is Chris? Are you married? Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No baby, he is my ex-boyfriend and he will not stop calling me."

"Well why did he say that?"

"Because he knows we are together and is trying to break us up."

"Why haven't you told me about him. I can keep you safe."

"Because I didn't want you to get mad. I'm sorry"

Jennifer was in tears. I was mad. And neither of us were talking.

It was Sunday, and I was off to Sam and Omie's for breakfast, but when I went out to the old Chrysler she backfired on me. I jumped back so fast I ran into my workbench in the garage. My back hurt so bad so I decided it would just be better if I went back inside and got back in the bed, since today wasn't going well. I ended up falling asleep. Shortly after I had fallen asleep a damn chink was trying to blow my head off with his AK-47. I couldn't get away from them bastards; they came after me for two weeks.

Jennifer asked if she could come over to talk and take care of me, she knew I was having a rough time, so of course I said yes. Once she came over we sat on the couch and she ran her hand back and fourth over my back, until I calmed down.

"Sweetie, I hope you're feeling better"

"Yes I am."

"Chris keeps calling me. He left a voice message."

"What did it say?"

"You can listen to it if you want."

Just then Jennifer started crying.

Then I played the voice mail and Christ said "Fine if you don't want to answer the phone, I guess we will just have to handle this in person."

"Please don't be mad" Jennifer said while wiping her tears away.

I was aggravated but I said "Don't worry, I will always keep you safe."

Then Jennifer leaned over and kissed me and said "Thank you baby."

I was feeling better, it was a week and a half since Chris had called, so just as usual, Jennifer and I went out on the porch to talk while I smoked a cigar. It was a good night. My cigar was incredibly smooth and so was my woman. I felt like I was on top of the world talking with her. My hand was on her leg and hers on mine.

"I really hope Chris doesn't show up. I doubt he knows where I live."

"Darlin, I don't know. If he knows what's good for him he will keep his happy ass nowhere near you."

It was around 10:45 and I was about to walk Jennifer back to her house for the night. And right when we were walking to her porch a red Mazda pulled in her driveway.

"Oh my god... baby that's Chris."

Stumbling out of his car he came towards us on the porch and asked to talk to Jennifer alone.

"Absolutely not." I said

"Sweetheart just let us talk and everything will be over with. Come inside and sit on the couch while we handle things in my office."

After about ten minutes I was becoming antsy and Chris's voice was increasing in volume. I sat down in her brown leather couch and took my knife out and started to comb my hairs with the blade.

I heard a loud thud then Jennifer say "Chris stop!" and then I jumped up, ran to her office, and busted through the door. That piece of shit had his hands on my woman. I grabbed him by the throat and slammed him against the wall.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing? Huh?"

"Arnold, baby, it's ok."

"No Jennifer, this is not ok. Now tell me, what the hell you think you're doing."

I smelt alcohol on his breath. He didn't say a word. I reached for my gun but it wasn't there, Jennifer screamed, "Arnold stop, please!" After he was gasping for air I knocked him one good time to bloody his nose.

"Now tell me, what do you think you are doing here?" Then he coughed and mustered up a "screw you Arnold. You don't think I could figure out where my woman was at?"

I balled my fist up and slammed it into his cheekbone; I heard a sharp breaking sound.

"Arnold, Stop! Stop! Please stop!"

All I could think about was how much I hated this piece of shit. Coming into my town, trying to take my woman, and screwing up my life. I threw five more punches until I was out of breath and my hand bleeding. Jennifer was screaming at me to stop, but I couldn't stop. She tried to pull me off of him, but I wasn't done with him so I shoved her away and threw two more punches to his ribs.

"Arnold! STOP! You're going to kill him."

I looked over to her before I spoke and my heart stopped, because I was so angry that I pushed her to the ground.

"Arnold what were you doing?"

"Protecting you!"

I'll never forget that feelin' I got deep in my gut. I held my breath, and shook violently in anger. I was a monster. The look she gave me was like the first time I made eye contact with a deer, right before I pulled that trigger. BOOM! She was a goner.

I tried to call Jennifer and apologize but she would not answer the phone. She hadn't been home in a week and a half and her boss said he hadn't heard from her either.

I tried everything: cigars, movies, going shopping at 2 A.M. Nothing worked. I couldn't handle it.

"Arnold, What are you doing here?"

"I came to apologize. I cannot lose you, Jennifer."

"It's been three weeks since I left. And you drove all the way here to apologize. What about your schedule?"

"I tried everything, but nothing worked, If I don't have you I don't have anything."

"That's really sweet Arnold, but I don't know if I can be in a relationship with someone that acts the way you did. That night. I want to trust you but that scared me. You, scared me."

I put that old house up for sale, sold my 1960 Chrysler 300F, and I was moving to the big city. I couldn't live with out her.

It was willed to her
by a former
piano playing
friend, who, brushed
its argent keys
in some smoky
speak-easy during
prohibition.

Perhaps, down on
Lenox Avenue,
sweeping the
swinging beat
of A Black and
Tan Fantasy,
or maybe,
droning the
augmented airs
of Ruby My Dear.

No doubt in
its prime,
musicians and
patrons alike
shuffled and scuffed
their feet to
ragged, syncopated
rhythms, as booming
blue notes rumble
the rafters.

Now—it sits in a corner
at my mother's house
collecting dust, the
varnish finish cracked
and flaking,
skeleton keys
flat-out of tune.

THE LONELY ELM

BY MICHAEL BRITT

Shunned by the ubiquitous pine
and oak, it slumps in solitude.

While the other trees sway
in unison, leaves vibrant

and lively, limbs raised,
rejoicing the sun,

the elm is lifeless.
Gusts of wind whistle

through the trunk, holes of
departed branches. Once,

it ruled the horizon
and bloomed with ease.

Now, its crown is cracked,
bark spotted with disease.

Awaiting the frigid
chop of a winter breeze.

AUTUMN

BY COLLEEN KENNEDY



ELEGY TO MY BROKEN STARBUCKS TUMBLER

BY BROOKE ROGERS

The fourteen carat white gold plated Starbucks travel mug held concoctions from chai tea lattes, caramel cappuccinos to pure black espresso, and pumpkin spice coffee. I used to hold that golden cup of divinity to my lips and jump right into a sea of caffeine. But, the years of sipping out of the glittery, sparkly tumbler ended on a Wednesday morning in the Writing Center of Francis Marion University. A slip, a fall, all too fast, my golden ceramic mug fell to the carpeted ground in a frenzy of flying glass. Broken, I kneeled to the ground with my boss and slowly picked the pieces of my heart off the ground. Clink, clink, clink, the pieces sounded as my tumbler dropped into the makeshift grave of a trash can. I stood there silently as I wept over the all too short life of my beauty, my love, my golden Starbucks mug, as my boss swept the tiny, sharp pieces off the ground without saying a word.

MOONLIGHT

BY TERI KOURTIS

I think sometimes you overanalyze my words.
They are only letters tied together
not red fire ants that sting your ankles;
a feeling like walking slowly through icy water.

They are only letters tied together
attempting to show signs of affection
but your feet are already numb,
spreading up your body, freezing your thoughts.

Attempting to show signs of affection
I hold you to bring you back to life.
You pray for your memories to remain frozen
a block of ice to be left untouched.

I hold you to bring you back to life
to see the marvelous moonlight
that fills the sky above us,
and lights your face.

To see the marvelous moonlight
I put my words away
and give them to you
with a moonlit kiss.

POWERLESS

BY DAVID GUESS

The little economy car hummed down the freeway as it cut through frozen fields that stretched towards forever. It had been a long, mostly quiet 13 hours as the couple traveled towards their destination. Dane gripped the steering wheel as he navigated the black asphalt, eyes searching as white flakes lightly fell. Karen stared out the window, watching as countless barns passed by, each looking no different than the one that came before it.

The flat farmlands of Ohio had been their least favorite part of the trip in the past. It paled in comparison to the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, or the lush rolling hills of Kentucky in Dane's mind, though he imagined the fields held their own beauty during the waning days of harvest. He, however, had only seen on their previous drives unremarkable fields of dirt, which seemed to go on indefinitely.

Karen hated Ohio simply because she was raised in Michigan.

"We're almost there, thank God," Karen remarked with an air of intentional theatrics, her eyes still gazing out the passenger side window. "You know they will pull you here just for having Michigan plates..."

Dane had heard Karen perpetuate what he was sure was an urban myth shared amongst graduates of the University of Michigan, but they drove with South Carolina tags so there was no way to disprove the

claim. Karen had long since switched her "Great Lake's Splendor" for a deep blue silhouetted palmetto tree accompanied by a crescent moon. Dane had explained to her the historic significance of the state's flag early in their relationship, but Karen's father was the history buff in the clan, and Karen had long since allowed the information to fade from her memory. Dane only managed an "uh huh" as he continued to watch the road, the snow beginning to fall harder.

Karen rolled her eyes.

"Do you know how often I get to see my parents?" Karen folded her arms and glared at Dane.

"Yes, because you've already informed me repeatedly of the rarity in which we visit your family, dear." Dane again thought to himself that they had just made this trip in April for Easter, but that had not gone over well when he mentioned it in their previous "discussion." He began chewing on his lip, peeling away pieces of skin. They would chap in no time.

Karen let out a mock, you're ridiculous, laugh.

"You can be such an asshole sometimes." She shook her head and returned her gaze to the passing nothing out the passenger window. "You never want to do anything, just sit at home, and decompose into your recliner. God forbid I want to do anything, go anywhere..."

Dane leaned over and turned up the radio, hoping to give his fiancée a hint to drop it. "You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout I'm telling you why..."

It was true that Dane was a homebody. He often opted to stay home and play video games or read as opposed to going out and socializing, and he was always reluctant to commit to trips; Dane envisioning an entire vacation spent running around rather than relaxing. Plus there was the fact that he had never traveled up North during the winter months. The prospect of traveling in snow, let alone ice, was discouraging. It was not an exaggeration in the South that people stocked up on milk and bread and barricaded themselves in their homes when the weatherman so much as breathed the possibility of snow. Southerners don't do snow. And then, there was the latest development which had spurned another week long fight between the couple leading up to the present circumstances.

Dane thought Hell was mowing lawns in 100-degree heat with humidity to match - heat that sucked the air out of your lungs and the drive out of your soul. But the North held its own version of Hell. Freezing temperatures and ice covered highways. And on top of all of this, a big house with no power or hot water to spend Christmas.

A severe ice storm had caused widespread

power outages across the palm and thumb of Michigan, and Karen's parents had been without electricity for two days. The hope was that power would be restored before Dane and Karen arrived, but the officials now lamented the possibility of 2-3 more days of blackout. Karen's parents had offered to pay for the couple to stay in a hotel, but Karen had immediately refused, not that there was likely an open room within 50 miles anyways.

Dane's thoughts drifted to previous drives, when they would talk excitedly for the whole 15 hours. They would share stories, make plans, debate public radio, and there was always a sense of surprise when they pulled up to the Masters' house, as if they had entered a time warp and arrived impossibly early. Now, they dreamed less and argued more, and Dane was conscious of the aches of a long ride. He counted Dollar Generals, roadside crosses, and vanity plates rather than risk discussion. Karen had made the occasional quip, but mostly slept or played on her smart phone. With only an hour left, she now seemed determined provoke another argument.

"I just wish you could be more excited. My family loves you, and we see your family all the time. Besides we have the big announcement to share with them." Karen looked at Dane, softening her gaze.

"I'm here ain't I."

"I want you to want to be here."

Dane felt his scalp begin to tingle as his blood pulsed harder, imploring fight.

"It wouldn't be a problem if you didn't have us out here in this crap. I like yer family just fine, I just don't think I should always use my vacation time to see them. And I'm sick of how you always throw how often we see my family in my face. My parents are five minutes away, not 15 hours, and besides, yer the one that always invites them over. I don't need to see my family every week. I'm not a child. I just don't understand why we're travelin INTO an ice storm!" Here we go, He thought. "Cry 'Havoc!' And let slip the dogs of war."

"No! It's our turn to travel and I want to be home, in MY house, for Christmas." Karen retaliated.

"Birds fly south fer the winter. Perhaps they're on to something. I just don't get why WE have to pack up and travel 15 hours into snow and ice to stay in a house that has had a power outage fer the better part of two days and temperatures droppin into the teens at night. They're saying it could be another two to three days before power is fully restored. Why do I have to spend half of my vacation in a place with no power? This whole scenario is ass backwards..."

"We spend half of your vacation? This is our vacation babe, and if I wasn't the one making an effort, you would just lay around

playing your games, avoiding all contact with the world. I wish you would act like an adult about this and be a little considerate of my feelings. I want to go home." Karen returned to staring out the window, her eyes glassy and burning. She fiddled with her ring, twisting it on and off.

Dane gritted his teeth and gripped the steering wheel tighter, searching for patches of invisible ice on the road, waiting to send the little Fiesta into a spin. The car's fuel economy was phenomenal at 40 mpg, but its handling in snow, especially Northern snow was untested, as was its driver.

"I just think this whole thing is pointless."

"Thanks babe. Thanks for again reminding me of how you think spending time with my family is a waste of your precious time. If staying in the house is such a damn inconvenience, I will pay for a hotel room. You can even have your own bed so you don't have to share a damn thing with me."

Dane felt the slight at his pride, though that would have been exactly what he would prefer. A warm room and water as opposed to the alternative. Karen had a knack for cutting just enough, like paper cuts in the webbing between your fingers.

"Yer so damn dramatic. I'm always there for you, supporting you. Yer just never satisfied, never satisfied with what I do, never satisfied with me. You never support me, or

what I want. You certainly didn't consider my opinion when Gary and Suzanne offered to put us in a hotel until the lights came back. You make decisions and refuse compromise. How would us sleeping in a hotel take away from time with your parents?"

"Are you serious? Really? Please, go ahead, Dane, play the martyr. Let's all feel sorry for Dane because he had to move a muscle and do something for someone other than himself for once."

Dane breathed in deep, like it was the last breath of air, a last act of any kind before he dove under. "Yes I'm the selfish one. I'm the one that critiques and dictates every aspect of this relationship. You insisted that we move in together. You pushed for the engagement. You picked out yer own ring for fuck sake! Yet here we are, in cold, middle of fucking nowhere, Michigan 'cause I'm the selfish asshole in the relationship!"

Karen stared at him, silent. She appeared to be studying him, perplexed as if a large gerbil were driving rather than her fiancée. After some minutes, she finally shifted her look towards her phone as she retrieved it from her purse.

"We're only ten minutes away..." she drifted off, saying nothing else.

The final stretch of trip was silent, with only the occasional click of a turn signal and snow crunching underneath. As they turned into the neighborhood, and then

the street of Karen's home, Dane became aware of the brightly lit homes, and children running through yards, throwing snowballs and collapsing in screams and laughter. They pulled into the driveway of the house, covered in hundreds of blinking lights, and parked. Dane felt a sense of relief flow over his being.

"Babe, I'm sorry for what I said. It was harsh. Blame it on the long car ride." Dane observed himself in the rearview mirror, easing his expression and trying on a smile as he pushed his hand through his hair.

"Sure." Karen unbuckled herself and twisted around to pull a couple of her bags from the back seat.

"Babe don't worry about the bags, I'll get them."

"No, I've got mine, thanks."

Dane and Karen exited the small car and stretched their stiff limbs. As they gathered the last of their belongings and approached the entrance with luggage in hand, Gary and Suzanne Masters appeared on the front porch, their grins radiating. Suzanne squealed and ran to her daughter as if she had not seen her in years.

"The power LITTERALLY just came back on, can you believe it?" Suzanne said as she hugged her daughter.

"That's wonderful Mom. A real Christmas miracle."

"I see you didn't freeze north of the

Mason-Dixon after all," Gary teased as he took Dane's bag and shook his hand.

"No sir, I'm just glad to finally be here," Dane laughed.

In the background was the familiar tune of "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" emanating from the home, and they all embraced, thankful to be there in the glow of the lights. Then, as they moved to walk inside, Dane looked to Karen and saw how perfect she looked as she stood in the falling snow, flakes glimmering in her light, golden blonde hair. He looked into her ice blue eyes and smiled as he took her hand in his, only to realize that her hand was naked, and her warmth gone.



ADDICTION

BY JOHN TRIECE MYERS

It hit me like a wave dragging the air from my lungs,
my throat burned as if stabbed by a thousand needles.
My mind swam trying to think of a way to escape.

My lungs screamed out for air as they filled with the freezing saltwater,
my arms and legs thrashing around me trying to fight this feeling,
grasping at nothing.

Wanting to break free.

I could hear the pounding of the blood behind my eyes as
I clawed at the dark water trying to break to the surface.

If I could just reach that light I knew I could make it,
I could almost hear the life guard yelling in my ear,
"Ma'am are you ok?"

But it was no use.

The harder I fought the more intense the waves became.
My limbs became numb and my movements less frantic, almost stiff
as if someone had thrown a heavy blanket over me.

I felt myself beginning to succumb to the murky waters.
My lungs began to convulse as I gasped taking in more water,
but it wasn't as painful as the first time.

I felt calm.
I felt light.
I felt free.

This was the feeling I had been searching for.
I closed my eyes, no longer fighting and floated into
the welcoming arms of the murky abyss.

THE SANDMAN'S CHILDREN

BY TIARA FELDER

We're all little puppets hanging on dreams,
manipulated by a wrinkled man who laughs
when we try to wake up or break away.
He is lord, and we are his vassals.

Manipulated by a man who laughs,
we comply with his demeaning demands.
He is lord. We are his vassals;
we've known our places since we were thirteen.

We comply with his demeaning demands,
unable to make any choices of our own.
We've know our places since we were thirteen:
Beneath him on bare backs with closed eyes.

Unable to make choices of our own,
our brains crumble from disuse.
Beneath him, on bare backs (eyes closed), or
aching knees, we submit ourselves repeatedly.

Our brains crumble from disuse
and fall out our ears like grains of sand.
We submit repeatedly on aching knees.
Just little puppets hanging on dreams.

SATAN IS IN THE SOUTH

BY MARIAH SPIGNER

Satan is in the South.
He's in the usual places—
the cemeteries, the brothels.
Even the hospitals, where
the sick and sinful abound.

Satan is at home in the South—
He's at home on the plantations.
He's in the columns and long untended
fields, in the ramshackle cabins,
and— He's in the Big House, where money
was made and wasted.

Satan's in the trees of the South,
hung with moss, clacking bones,
and the lynching noose. He's in the air—
in the traces of smog and brick dust,
overlaid with the stench of fear.

Satan rules the swamps of the South—
where fire flies in the sky and dinosaurs
still roam the rivers. When shadow men
take flight, and the shade with them,
it is He who provides their wings.

Satan beats his wife in the South—
on the very steps of the courthouse.
I've seen Him do it; He does it,
in the summer time, at least once a month
around here.

THIS IS A LOVE STORY

BY LUCAS BERRY

This is a love story. It begins with a young man and a young woman. He is of extensive means. She is not. She is beautiful, intelligent, resourceful. He is loving, dependable, and somewhat dull-witted. They live in a small town. It isn't in England, though it could easily be mistaken for it. They are in love.

In this small town, there is a phenomenon. Beings exist here, ones that look like people, though slightly greyer, and act like people, but they are not people. And one of these beings is the source of the conflict in this story. You see, these beings are each attached to a person. The person is rarely aware that this being is anything but ordinary. And the being is constantly around, and is constantly watching. You can always see them in pictures. Whenever a photograph of the person is taken, the being is sure to be in it. And the source of the conflict in this story is the influence these beings have on people. It is a subtle thing really. They might amplify certain things. In the case of a foolish young man of extensive means and even greater loyalty, it might muddle his mind even further, and cause him to remain in his hometown, despite his greatest desire to leave. And in the case of his rather snobbish family, it might cause their mild distaste of a young and beautiful woman to turn into flaming and violent hatred.

This is a love story. As is the case with many such stories, the young man and the young woman have sex, and she becomes pregnant. She is ecstatic, but she knows of the being attached to her lover. She has seen it in the photographs, with its huge, hateful, and watching eyes. And she knows that it will not abide her. She knows of the influence it has worked on the man she loves, and of its effects on his family.

And so she flees the small town. As is the nature of these stories, many dangers befall her on her journey, and she is nearly killed more than once. And, though she does make it safely out, her troubles are not ended, because she is a young single mother, and the world does not take kindly to ones such as her.

But she survives. She gives birth to a beautiful baby girl. She raises her, and her baby grows into a happy young woman who pursues her own life and falls in love in her turn. But the young woman, who is now an old woman, she never forgets her lover. Because she loves him. She loves him in these pages, and out of them. She loves him in your mind, and in mine. She loves him in the dream where this story began, and in all the dreams to come. She loves him across all space and time.

And then one day, when the young man, who is now an old man, is the last of his family left alive, and all the danger is abated, she returns to the small town. And she sees the man

she loves, and he sees her. And he knows his great foolishness for never having followed her. For as she loves him, so he loves her. And she kisses his neck, and they are one. And they love.

Those of you who care to look will see the bones of this story laid bare. Devices for plot's sake and conundrums do abound within this small and simple tale. But I care not. This is a love story. The story of a young man and a young woman who's love is greater. Perhaps you do not understand. Perhaps you cannot understand. But it is my dearest hope that you can, and that you do. Because this dream is dear to me. It is beautiful in a way that words cannot contain. But I hope that perhaps you have caught a glimpse of this love through these ill-fitting words. It is beautiful. Love.

DATE NIGHT

BY BROOKE ROGERS

I search the inside of our closet filing through twenty three, twenty five, twenty nine dresses, maybe more. He's hunched over on the bed with his cell phone glued to his ear, making reservations. He is not looking; he is too preoccupied to even notice my anxious attempts to get dressed for him. In the mirror this is too short, and that is too frilly. Oh—that's too old. None of these will do for tonight. But the tag on a dress beckons to me. The dress is unused, unworn, something new. Yes, this will do: black lace, gold shoes, and red lips. I turn to him and say, Honey, what do you think of this dress? He looks over at me, Darling, he says as he drops the phone, they all look the same when they're on the floor by your feet. Then, he kisses me.

BURNING RAGE

BY ANDREA K. HOFFMAN

Once it's lit, there's no stopping it.
It burns constantly, even if just a flicker,
Lurks in the back of your head like a tiny little whisper
Telling you something's got to be done.

And when it burns, it destroys.
Without a thought of what it could damage in its path
The monster knows nothing of itself.
Nonexistent remorse fuels the inferno.

Dreams as big as the house
Love as sturdy as its foundation
Both become engulfed in flames
And blaze into the night.

Ash fireflies fill the evening sky
And wisp through the air like dancing ballerinas.
They gently kiss the stars while the embers

Kindle through the dead of night.

Smoke suffocates dreams of a love

That was once vibrant and intriguing

And soot covers the ground in which

The ruins will forever smolder.

I chose to tattoo my wrists with its edge.

I let it create a mural of lines.

Allowed the blood to flow down from the wedge.

Giving me a high taller than the pines.

You have no clue that you're the reason why.

From wrist to elbow I construct greatness.

I lose this fight no matter how I try.

The feeling so numb it becomes painless.

Watch as it writes a beautiful story.

An opening to my darkest sins.

With time it heals to reveal its glory,

to make up for the pain that hides within.

I became a cutter to numb the pain.

Not knowing I'd only have scars to gain.

LOSS

BY STUART JOHNSON

I woke up and reached to the other side of the bed. It was cold and empty. *How many times, I thought, how many times will I wake up and reach for her?* She was gone and there was nothing I could do to bring her back. I swung my legs over the side of the bed, and glanced at the clock. *Three a.m., perfect. Well I won't be going back to sleep.* I put my head in my hands as the memories of that night came back to me.

She looked so beautiful that night. She was wearing the green dress and diamond earrings I had gotten her. She had her hair just hung around her shoulders because she knew that I preferred it that way. We were heading back to the hotel after celebrating our third year anniversary with dinner and some movie. We pulled up to a red light and looked over at her. She just smiled and leaned over and kissed me. A car horn behind us broke us apart, and we took off laughing. As we continued the drive, we started flirting like two teenagers that were out on their first date. She made me feel so comfortable. She was my heart.

I stood up and walked to the shower. I turned on just the hot water and stepped in. I stood in the middle of the cascading water waiting as the heat built. I use to flinch at the scolding water, but now it was just familiar.

If I had been paying more attention maybe things would be different. The light was green so I didn't even slow down. I just kept going oblivious to anything in the world but her. I always glanced in both directions even on a green light, but not on that night, all my glances were for her. I didn't see the truck that ran the red light until right before it smashed into our car. Glass went everywhere. The sound of the collision was deafening. When the car stopped moving, I looked over to her to make sure she was alright. The sight has been seared into my mind. She just hung in her seat belt. She was covered in glass and blood. I unhooked my seat belt ignoring my pains and checked her pulse. I had never prayed harder in my life than at that moment. I couldn't find a pulse. The fear consumed me. I had to do something. I grabbed her gently by the shoulders and pulled her from the car. I laid her on the ground and checked for her pulse again. Nothing. I immediately started CPR. I tried pushing life back into her. I would have pushed my life into her if I could. I don't know how long I did it before the paramedics dragged me off of her. They immediately put her in the stretcher and I climbed in the ambulance with her. Every time they tried to work on me, I would jerk out of their grip and tell them to just worry about her.

The water was still hot as I grabbed the rag that I use to scrub my body. I stood in the water as I scraped my skin with the rag. My skin was red now from the heat of the water and the rag dragging roughly over my skin.

They stopped me at the doors and told me I couldn't follow her. I stood there pacing back and forth, trying to steal glances from the small window in the door. A few minutes later a doctor came out to talk to me. I don't remember his name. All I remember was him telling my wife was dead. I broke down right there. I would never hear her laugh. I would never feel or taste her lips on mine again. I would never see her smile. I would never smell her fresh out the shower. I would never get to say goodbye.

My body was still red, but the heat had left the water. The icy water stung my body as I reached down and cut the water off. I grabbed a towel and pressed it to my face, wiping away the wetness. As I pulled the towel away, I looked into the mirror above the sink. The fog was gone, and all that was left was a shell of a man.



“...If I shall die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.” It took my eyes a moment to adjust to the darkness. As soon as I was able to make out the image of my dad standing over me, he pulled me up into a bear hug and spun me around. With my arms thrown around his neck, he held me tightly to him, making sure that I didn’t fall. He stopped, dropped us both onto my bed and began tickling me under my arms and down my sides.

I screamed, “Daddy, stop!” Tears threatened to fall, but I was overjoyed. Suddenly, the light cut on and I covered my hands with my eyes. My dad leaned over my body with one arm on either side above my head, almost protectively, and looked at the doorway where my mom stood frowning.

“It’s late,” she said dryly, but gave me a small smile. “Let Sarah get to sleep.”

The bed moaned quietly beneath my dad’s shifting weight, and then he was standing. “It’s just turned nine, Julia,” he spoke through tight lips. “I don’t think spending a little time with my daughter is going to hurt anyone.”

By that time, I had sat up to watch the exchange between them, nose as ever. Dad must have noticed this as he soon turned to face my mom and stepped in front of me, effectively blocking my view.

“Sunday school is early tomorrow. There’s a funeral after, remember?” I couldn’t see her face, but her voice sounded strange to me. Now that I know her better, I think that she must have been looking straight into my dad’s eyes with a smirk of satisfaction.

Dad sighed, defeated. With one movement, he turned and was leaning over me. He kissed both of my cheeks, then my forehead, then my chin as I giggled at our silly routine. “Goodnight, my sweet Sarah,” he smiled and tucked my blanket tightly around me. “Just holler if you need me.” And with that, they left me alone in my room, cutting out the light as they went.

I fell asleep quickly, drowning out the sounds of my parents’ whispered argument with dreams of flower fields, Sunday services, and the days last year when my parents and I would skip Sunday services and stay home instead. I dreamed that Mom made dinner and a fresh pitcher of pink lemonade, my favorite drink. In my dream, we were all laughing together again. Our voices were in perfect harmony.

* * * * *

When I woke up the next morning, I thought that my dream must have been coming true. Music was playing, and my parents were singing along to it. Their voices were more beautiful than the ones recorded. They blended perfectly together. My dad’s voice was a deep,

clear and protective tenor. Not too deep though, just deep enough.

I pulled the covers off of me and, using their voices as a guide, found them making breakfast together in the kitchen. Pancakes, bacon and eggs. My favorite. I climbed up into one of the barstools and started singing with them. My own voice was high and pure, innocent and still immature, but it sounded right in between my parents'. Mom sang in an even higher, more beautiful and sweet soprano. She turned to look at me as I joined in and laughed, making her voice sound so real that I almost thought I could touch it.

"Go get dressed for church, Sarah," she smiled warmly. "Breakfast will be finished when you come back out."

But I didn't want to go. I felt something tighten in my chest and began to worry. My parents had been different lately. Out of tune. They weren't getting along the way they did when I was a smaller child, and I wasn't sure if this would last. I wanted to relish in this moment for as long as I could, so I lied to try to bring us back to what we were before.

"I don't feel good, Mommy," I rested my arm on the breakfast bar in front of me and laid my head against it. I felt the urge to clarify, but held my tongue. I wasn't used to lying and it made me feel sick.

In a second, my dad was standing by me and lifting my head up. He pressed the back of his hand against my forehead and frowned. "You don't feel warm and it can't be your throat, you were singing. So what's wrong, baby?"

I froze. I didn't want to lie to him, but I didn't want us to leave the house. "I just feel really tired. My eyes hurt," And this was sort of the truth. I was tired of my parents arguing and feeling awkwardly in the middle.

"Well go back to bed, Sweetie," he leaned down and kissed my hair. "I'll bring your breakfast when it's finished." I started to step off of the stool when my mom's voice stopped me.

"I'll bring your breakfast in, Sarah," she turned to my dad. "I'll stay in with her this morning, you go on to church. We shouldn't both miss this funeral. The family's expecting to see us."

I felt Dad tense beside me, but he relaxed almost immediately, always remembering to choose his battles. "Fine," he said a little uneasily. "Is that okay with you?" He looked down at me and raised his left eyebrow. I looked back and forth between him and my mom feeling slightly defeated. I wanted them both to stay, but it didn't look like that was going to happen. I shrugged my shoulders and slid off of my seat.

When Dad left for church, he gave me a long hug. I buried my face into his black suit jacket and breathed in the scent of his woody cologne. Even though I knew he'd be back that night, I almost cried when he left. As I waved goodbye, I felt like I was saying goodbye forever. I wasn't, and I was.

* * * * *

I curled up beside my mom in my bed and felt the soft sweetness of her skin as we watched some cartoon movie about talking animals on a farm and snacked on popcorn and pink lemonade. Mom held me close to her, and I felt her heart beating slowly, strong.

I smelled her neck as I rested my face against it. The smell reminded me of my cousin, Kyle, when he was a small baby. Sweet and sour at the same time. Milky. I had forgotten how much I loved that smell and because I wasn't sure when I would get to smell it again, I inhaled deeply. Mom moved away slightly, then she spoke.

"Your Dad and I are probably going to be spending some time apart soon."

"I know," I said quietly.

She nodded. She didn't seem surprised. She pulled me closer and told me that he didn't love her anymore. I found this hard to imagine. I couldn't understand how you could just stop loving someone, but before I could ask, she continued on. She started speaking rapidly and told me that she was sorry for more than she could tell me. Then she kissed me. On the lips. Not a quick peck, but a kiss that lasted longer than I had been alive.

It felt weird to have my mother kissing me that way. Her lips were chapped, and I could taste the salty butter from the popcorn on them. When she pushed her tongue past my lips and into my mouth, I tasted the pink lemonade in her spit and almost threw up. She kept running her tongue across mine like she was looking for something, and I wanted her to stop and take it away.

She didn't stop. She didn't take it away. She was my Mom.

When she got tired of looking for something she would never find inside of my mouth, she searched for it in other places on my small body. My neck, my ears, my breasts that weren't quite breasts yet, my sides, my stomach, lower.

She kissed there for what must have been three hours, but I didn't feel it. I closed my eyes and just kept thinking, "Dad will be home soon." Later, I would think that someone must have iced me over before she got there because I stopped feeling her. I didn't feel her when she reached down and stroked me. I didn't feel her hand as it slipped awkwardly beneath me, cupping me. I didn't feel her when her fingers pushed inside- sharp nails scraping with every

push and pull. Hurting me. I didn't feel it when she stopped, and I definitely did not see the single drop of blood on my pink bedspread.

I hadn't been given the sex talk yet, but I knew that this was wrong and it made me feel old and close to death. I knew it was wrong, and at first I thought it was God punishing me for the lie I told. When I stopped believing that, I believed that it was my mom punishing me for the lie I told. When I stopped believing that, I didn't know what I believed in, but it wasn't any god and it wasn't my mother.

Afterwards, my mother cried as she pulled my pajama bottoms back up and asked if I loved her still. Instead of answering, I laid her head back against her mother's neck and breathed her in because I had always loved that smell and didn't know when I would smell it again. Besides, there was nothing else for me to do.

I lifted my head slightly as I heard the front door open. Dad was finally home.

A glance my way would suffice

To fulfill my appetite.

Instead he slips past my walls

And shows me where my boundaries fall.

It's not my fault. I must comply

When I look into those eyes.

Those eyes.

Those eyes.

I intrigue him. I can tell.

It's strange. He knows me all too well.

With one look, he understands

How desperately I need his hands

To touch, to grab, to pull, to hit,

And much more of that kinky shit.

We play, we fight, he bites, I moan,

But only when we're all alone.

A game's begun. Out match is set.

He'll take me there. I'll take that bet.

I must admit I like the chase,

But towards the end, it's just a race.

Whoever wins doesn't matter;

It won't be spoken of hereafter,

But rather held inside my mind,

Just as he had me confined.

Tonight's adventure will be hard to follow.

I don't know what to expect tomorrow.

Perhaps we'll keep it simple and hit replay.

It's all in my head, anyway.

I hang here
And they worship me.
Twice a week at least,
They all gather here.
The man spews fire,
Brimstone fills the air.
Hands go up,
Hymns to me rise on high.
Some shake,
A few fall down.
All of them sing,
They sing to me.
They don't know,
Most don't care.
They dance and
Sing and it's all,
All,
For me.
Oh, they don't know,
They think it's for Him.
But when their prayers rise,
They don't go very high.
They rise to me,
But He never sees.
They don't see Him,
They see only me.
I hang here,
And they worship me.
Twice a week at least,
They all gather here,
To worship me,
Image of God.

9 WAYS TO EXPERIENCE THE BLUES

BY MICHAEL BRITT

I
Below the cloak of diaphanous smoke,
The drowsy crowd leans
To hear the King's bluesy whisper.

II
I was in three grooves,
Like the chords
Hammering down the thunder
Of Lightning Hopkins.

III
In the corner,
Rolling papers,
A pit of slant-eyed vipers,
Nod, bellies full of Led.

IV
Bass notes pulsate through speaker-wires,
Thumping a dulcet blue line
Produced by a Slow Hand.

V
At the bar,
A roost of hens
Bathe their beaks
In Muddy Waters.

VI
The booming kick-drum
And shuffling snares,
Quake the floor-boards
Like a Texas Flood.

VII
Sweeping scales
And pinched harmonics
Make me want to Dust my Broom.

VIII
I burrow through herds of people.
The blues harp moans,
Like a Howlin' Wolf.

IX
The loping beat takes me,
Beyond the crossroads
Along the banks of
The Mississippi-delta
To a grove of cypress trees.



Just this afternoon Mr. Humkin had to peel off a sticky condom from the inside of a bathroom stall. Mr. Humkin has been Brimsby High School's caretaker for 13 years now. He used to work at Cameron Elementary where he spent 22 years of his life, now making him about 55 years old. He spent those years picking up after the kid's mess, but he's found that high schoolers are actually worse. They're at that age where they think they can do whatever they want just to see how far they can get before getting in trouble. The condom was probably stuck there just to say "Hey, I'm having sex, that's right." There's always something to prove.

Mrs. Humkin would ask her husband the same question every single day when he arrived home. He closed the old creaking front door behind him and began wiping his boots on the outdated orange rug. "How was your day hunny?" she would yell from the kitchen.

"It was good sweetie, yours?" He always knew what to expect in return. She would ramble about what she watched on television, and who she spoke to on the phone, and then share all the new gossip she heard about the neighbours and family.

That night they shared a nice beef stew together with fresh bread that Mr. Humkin picked up on the way home from Tony's Bread and Buttered Goods. They ate in silence as Mr. Humkin kept his hand on his wife's thigh.

For the past two weeks Mr. Humkin has found himself in an odd situation every afternoon at 2 pm. It started when he entered the storage room at about this time one Thursday. He usually left for his afternoon coffee at this time, but had to complete an extra chore that was supposed to be done by Mr. Chiblett, the other janitor who is fairly new. It seemed as though Mr. Humkin was doing a lot of things to cover Chiblett's ass lately.

The storage room is rather large and shaped like the letter "L". He always enters from the front door which is the door right at the top of the "L" shape; the longer section. This particular afternoon was different though. The lights were off as usual, but he was not the only one present. He could hear the sounds of a girl moaning from around the corner. She sounded rather young, like one of the students. Mr. Humkin's first reaction was to turn around immediately and leave, but something about this girl's innocent noises soothed him. It reminded him of the first girl he'd fingered back in grade eight. Her name was Becky and she was rather popular due to her early development of large breasts. She turned out to be quite a catch in high school and everyone wanted to date her, including him. Mr. Humkin couldn't help but wonder what had happened to her.

The girl continued moaning and suddenly starting speaking. "Mmmm...yeah baby, just like

that." Mr. Humkin couldn't move. He couldn't help but think back to little Becky and who this girl was here in his storage room! Maybe it was Jessie in the 12th grade. She looked rather mature. Thinking about a student felt wrong and begin hearing his wife's voice in his head, and left immediately being careful not to make a sound.

The next afternoon Mr. Humkin's curiosity had the best of him. He went back to the storage room to find the same thing at 2 o'clock. It was the same girl's voice. Instead of leaving, Mr. Humkin decided he could perhaps stay for a few minutes. It wouldn't hurt anyone, he thought to make himself feel better. This time he could hear two people. Two girls! "Ohhhh you're so wet. Did you know that?" The other girl just giggled. Mr. Humkin could do nothing but carefully slide his back down the wall and sit on the floor with his knees to his chest. His heart beat so quickly, he knew what he was doing was wrong, but he was weak to the sounds of the girls' pleasure and what his imagination provided him. After a good ten minutes Mrs. Humkin's face appeared in his mind. He felt suddenly sick, as if he were betraying her. The sounds from around the corner slowed down anyway and he knew it was time to get out.

Mr. Humkin avoided the storage room for a couple of days until he actually needed to go in and grab a trash bag. It just so happened it was nearly 2 o'clock. Part of him was hoping for the noises to be there, but another part was dreading them. When he crept into the room, he was welcomed once again by moaning and other sounds of eroticism. He could do nothing but stay and listen a little while, trying to push his beloved wife's face out of his mind.

The next week Mr. Humkin spent about ten minutes sitting against the storage room wall like a child listening to their parents fighting from the next room. It was just about 2 o'clock and Mr. Humkin was on his way to the storage room. He had always been quite cautious about making sure no one saw him entering at that time. It wasn't too hard, as the storage room was at the very end of a quiet deserted hallway where there were extra unused lockers.

As Mr. Humkin turned into the hallway, the door to the storage room clicked shut. The door was already almost closed before he could make out the person who entered it. He waited another two minutes exactly where he was. No one else entered the storage room. Slowly, he made his way over to the door and opened it being more cautious than ever. Silently he closed the door leaving it slightly ajar. He stood there in the dark for a minute. It remained quiet until the usual noises began. There was only one girl this time, and suddenly he could hear a man's voice. Mr. Chiblett! "Fuck yeah baby, take it! Take it!" The young girl screamed.

"What the hell is going on back here!?" Mr. Humkin couldn't stand the thought of Chiblett fucking a student. He ran around the storage room corner to find an odd sight.

Mr. Chiblett could be seen with only the light coming from a tiny lap top screen. His pants were at his ankles with a look of horror on his face and his dick in his hands. The girl and man from the video continued fucking and screaming.

CRAZY

BY AMBER GRIFFITH

Crazy. Crazy? Who's crazy? I'm not crazy.
I'm just a little down, that's all.
I want to be alone.
I'm afraid to be by myself.
I feel empty. I feel numb. I feel nothing.
I feel bad for not feeling.
I need to get out. Leaving is too overwhelming.
I'm losing it. What's wrong with me?
I'm crazy. No. I am not crazy.
I refuse to be sick.
I refuse to be weak.
I refuse to be me.
What should I do?
Get a hold of yourself.
But how?
Get over it.
It's not that simple.
You're better than this.
Am I? I'm not so sure.
You have to be. There's no other choice.

REACH

BY CORDELIA JOHNSON



THE KATE UPTON ISSUE

BY MORGAN SOULANTIKAS

Let's take it from the top.

You sit there, I'll sit here, and we'll pretend

that we like each other.

We'll share small talk over coffee.

Caramel or Hazelnut?

You can't expect me to remember, it's been a while.

Even longer in dog years.

Don't be offended if Buster nips at your pant leg.

He never was fond of you anyway.

The day I brought him home from the shelter, he pissed

all over your new shirt and you popped him hard on

the nose with a Sports Illustrated.

I could have hit you back, but he needed discipline.

"Don't baby him," you said. "He'll never learn."

I watch you, staring at your phone across the table that
wobbles on a crippled leg.

I don't recall saying goodbye the first time, but what
difference does it make?

The chubby beagle trots eagerly by my side out
of the front door. The faint dinging of its
hinges signal the end of this round.

Game, set, match.

I don't even drink coffee.

CONTEMPORARY BLUES

BY TIARA FELDER

He has the most beautiful hair; of course
I noticed him. His dark half-curls bloom everywhere,
unrestricted like his calloused fingers as they groove
across guitar strings and piano keys in southern twangs: sounds
that my voice aches to twist in smooth harmonies with. He
doesn't even know that I sing or love listening

to this raw, organic style of music. That as I am listening
to it, I open myself up like a flower under sun. Let it course
through my veins, then fuse with my fleshy petals. He
has no idea that for me, it (and he) is everywhere,
so I look down at my feet to block out the sounds
of late American modernity as I begin a tango

for two alone, too afraid to ask him to join me for the dance
before the music fades and I'm left with nothing to listen
to except my own nagging regrets as they sound
perpetually in my mind: What if? Ideas from a gender course
I took last year entice me. "Girls are doing it everywhere,"
my enlightened ego nudges. But I'm Christian, shy, and he

already has his sights set on someone else. He,
like every coffee-skinned man, wants the girl who swings
on the tips of her toes and has traveled everywhere;
the girl who wears red lace, if anything at all, and listens
to King while braiding her hair, honey blonde and silken (not coarse,
like mine) and hits high notes with a blend of unique sounds-

Just a hint of her vibrato makes the oldest tunes sound
brand new. My understated alto would seem dull to him
in comparison as female singers who take the lower course
rarely get the glory. With her dancing, my steady, sanctioned waltz
appears regressive, and I still my feet. Now, nothing's left to listen
to but my heart's slowing beat and their laughter echoing everywhere

like every wish I've ever made breaking over glass. Everywhere,
her golden hips, thighs and hair drown out the tarnished sounds
of a more contemporary blues sung by those who listen
to it every day. Live it. Participate in its evolution. He
doesn't understand; he's just a man, and his eyes are locked
on her nearly perfect body. His ears take in her voice. Of course,

I can't blame him. She is everywhere, moving beautifully, and he
is under the spell of her fluttering sounds and sinfully sweet gyrations.
I'll listen until my music stops, then place the record on a gentler track.

SPLIT ENDS

BY MORGAN SOULANTIKAS



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THE LOVE SONG OF JAMES

BY BROOKE ROGERS

"Do I dare to eat a peach?" He smiled, "I always said I'd marry the woman who could tell me who wrote this line, but that doesn't mean you have to get it wrong."

She stared at him, blankly, blinking twice while she thought. He said his name was James. Her eyes took in the short black hair, tan skin, dark eyes, and lean physique of James. Attractive. No doubt. But he was so much older. Ten years. He had to be.

She repeated the words in her mind. 'Do I dare to eat a peach? ...that doesn't mean you have to get it wrong.'

But she didn't know. What would it change if she did? Would she still answer it the same? James. His name is James, and he said he'd marry her if she answered it right.

"No, I'm sorry. I don't know."

She moved closer to her car.

He stepped towards her. "It's the Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. You should look it up."

"I'll be sure to do that."

"Hold on a second," she watched him turn to his car, a black sports vehicle, and grab something out. She inhaled sharply as he began to walk back to her.

"I want you to have this."

She studied the book in his hand, Astrid and Veronika. The cover had two hands that held ruby red raspberries right in the palms. She looked back at James' dark eyes.

"Thank you," she took the book in her hand.

"It's a good read, you'll enjoy it," he smiled again.

Would he want it back? She could see him again. Maybe.

"Do you want it back after I finish reading it?"

"You can give it back if you want or you can keep it. Here is my number. But you can call even if you want to keep the book. I'd like to see you again, sometime." He ran his hand through his dark hair.

"Oh...yes. Thank you James." She moved closer to her car.

"I enjoyed talking to you Jessica." He didn't move.

"You too. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

She climbed in her car and got ready to leave. She saw him as he stood in the parking lot of the café. She started to drive, but she looked again in the rearview mirror.

There was James. James was standing there, and he was staring after her. She saw him stand up a little straighter when she did not put her foot to the gas to leave. She repeated the words in her head over and over with her eyes locked on the reflection of James.

Do I dare. Do I dare. Do I -

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THE SNOW ISLAND REVIEW

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