ConjuRings

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Spring Awakening
By Betsy Abraham

I see many colored flowers blossom,
Bright green grass once dormant begins to grow
The birds fly high looking so very awesome.
As the good people watch from down below,
Nature begins to thrive with full of life.
The wind begins to sing its festive song,
Many couples walk as husband and wife,
After they pronounce their love as lifelong.
Picnics, birthdays, and gatherings galore,
Happiness fills the air from all around,
Spring is a time everyone will adore,
While everyone feels very safe and sound.
So long as Spring brings forth new life and joy,
Next Spring will be like a shiny new toy.

Grapes
By Reggie Brisku

Grapes
They come many colors
Flesh on the outside; full of seeds on the inside
They grow on long vines,
Edible, soft, and sweet
They are perfect on a mid-summer day

A Day at the Beach
By Samiha Badwan

Sea shells and sand castles are spotted on the beach
Animals and people stalk along the beach
Shiny clean blue water washes up on the beach
Children complain about ninjas and move fast at the beach
Parents read updates and post about their expensive trips to the beach
New ideas always spring from a day at the beach.

Niagara Falls
By Samiha Badwan

The lit up Ferris wheel came to a halt
My view of the Falls was great from atop
The rainbow lights shone down on the water
The sound of the Falls was calming while my seat tottered
My love for nature grew from that moment
I took every opportunity I had to get another glimpse of it
A boat ride near the Falls gave me a second look
I knew for sure that this was the best trip I ever took

The Sun Shines
By Samiha Badwan

The sun shines down and stings—her whole face.
Her heart races. She sings.
She tries to think of something
That rids her of this feeling.
Nine Lives

By Ashley Roberts

Most things have only one life
But there is one animal that doesn’t. They’re
Furry, cute and have four
Legs. It has whiskers on two
Sides of its face. It lands on its feet if you drop
It. The only animal with these traits is a cat.

The most interesting thing about a cat
Is that it has nine lives.
One time a drop
Of water was spilled over there
By the water bowl. Two
Cats ran to it before

It could get cleaned up. It only took four
Seconds before the cats
Were in the mess and running to
The bedroom. They scared the life
Out of their
Owners and made them drop

Their glass of milk. Milk drops
Flew all over the room. It was four
In the afternoon and their
Baby was napping. The cats
Immediately woke it up. It started screaming for
dear life.
The parent ran to

The room to
Calm their child. Tear drops
Were running down his face. The cat owners no
longer thought the cat could live

In the house with their four
Month old. The cats
Caused too many problems in their

House. It was decided. Their
Pets would have to
Go. They had a niece who has always wanted a
pet cat.
They decided to drop
Them off at her house on Saturday at four.
They knew that it would be a great place for the
Cats to live.

Mirrors

By: Amanda Syers

Turning around, I look down
No up, I see something, wait

Larger than life, too many
images to count, all mine

All the same, flawless
Never-ending hidden

This display is true
The image, perfect

Over 1000 hearts
All hidden inside

Beauty unfolds
I back away, I’m

In awe of life
I then return

To many
Mirrors
Synesthesia

By: Collin Benbrook

I turn off the house lights, but turn on the strobe lights and the LED's.
I turn my stereo up to the max, and the bass is thumping.
I blow smoke from my E-cig until the room is good and smoky.
Then I open my imagination, breaking down the barriers that my mind sets on me.
The lights from the LEDS cut through the smoke, and I can see the light hanging in midair.
The light approaches my body, and it sees into my soul.
I imagine the light passing through me, as I am not solid.
I am but trillions of atoms, held together by electrons spinning in space at the speed of light.
None of them are touching, I am only connected by electrical waves.
I realize at this time that I am not my body; I am electricity passing through neurons.
I feel my consciousness rise, I am vibrating at a ridiculous frequency.
The sound passes through my hollow body.
I no longer hear the music, I am the music.
I feel the bass, pass through every last inch of my existence.
It thumps along with my heart, Thump Thump Thump.
On my tongue, the music tastes so sweet.
The high frequencies taste like the sweetest candy, I have never felt this way before.
I feel like an orange slice keeps hitting my tongue, but it is only the music.
What is going on, sounds don’t have chemicals to stimulate my tongue.
I reach a moment of peace, as I feel connected with everything.
The music and the bright lights soothe my soul.
The music stops, and my meditative trance is broken.
Six Years

By Kourtni Blomker

Are we done yet, how long can this possibly last?
One of six when everything is new
Six years, forever and yet also oh so fast

Two of six, organic leaves the whole class aghast
Trying to use luck to make it through
Are we done yet, how long can this possibly last?

Three of six, white coats amassed
Fingers stained methylene blue
Six years, forever and yet also oh so fast

Four of six, surprised to have passed
The debt really starting to accrue
Are we done yet, how long can this possibly last?

Five of six,
An end almost in our view
Six years, forever and yet also oh so fast

The day will come when six of six lives only in the past
And we may feel foolish then for trying to rush through
“Are we done yet, how long can this possibly last?”
Six years, forever and yet also oh so very very fast

The Hunt

By Kourtni Blomker

A quiet street
Red eyes glare in the moonlight
The scratch of claws on pavement
The odor of unwashed fur

Then, a purr
Not of animal, but engine
The screech of tires
A blaring honk
The beast of metal and leather prepares to pounce

The creatures fly
Away
To the safety of the trees

The manmade beast hits the gas
Accelerating
Forward
Continuing the hunt

The Potatoes Heads

By Jessy Hoelscher

Love is like emoticons
Smiley- use a nose or no nose??
Get crazy with big eyes or a hat??
I prefer the no nose and a hat
But to each their own
Love is Emoticons
My First Job
By Ellie Breaux

My job was a job that no one would choose
But for me it would be titled as a dream.
I enjoyed my job like a glass of fresh squeezed
orange juice.
Or an assortment of various cold ice creams.

It began the summer I turned fifteen.
Cleaning stalls at the horse barn down the road.
I fell in love with making that barn pristine.
As well as all the horses that I rode.

I smelled like barn, and carried heavy things.
But I treasured it and all the times my boss told
me good job.

I had late nights, and early mornings.
But I loved cleaning that barn that housed four
legged slobs.

Today I study, where no dirt or horses reside—
inside.
what I wouldn’t give to go back and clean those
stalls just one more time.

Make Art
By: Nana Byun

Make art
make something, anything, and it is art.

Because art is something that everybody has
within them.
Art is the beauty that comes from the ugliness
of pain and betrayal.
Art turns scars into words and tears into
paintings.
Art is a silver lining and a pure expression.

So when you are choking on pain and
bitterness,
and your heart is splitting through the middle,

Breathe.
And make art.

Little Bird
By Ellie Breaux

The bird flies high.
For the first time, he soars with feathered wings
Among the clouds of the sky.
Like the wind, hi and low he sings.

The little bird tests
Soaring left, soaring right, his new wings strong
and steady.
But the little bird must rest,
For he has a long journey and he must be ready.

The fall will all too soon arrive.
The little bird must journey with his flock for
winter.
When warm, they survive,
But pending many days and nights, warm they
will enter.

Little bird is strong and smart.
He will journey with his flock among the
strongest of friend.
Little bird is prepared for the start.
And doesn’t stop until he sees the end.

Pretty Hurts
By: Nana Byun

Pretty isn’t size zero,
and perfect isn’t real.
A thigh gap shouldn’t be your goal,
starvation makes you ill.

A tan is not a necessity,
it doesn’t matter what you weigh.
Society’s idea of what looks good
gets stupider every day.

There is no ideal body type,
self hate won’t get you far.
Just remember to love yourself,
you’re perfect how you are.
The Creed

By: Samantha Bryant

What seems to be so simple,
Actually stands for so much more.
A creed, a statement.
Do you believe?

We believe in a maker
He created all things seen and unseen
A powerful statement
Can you agree?

We believe in a Son
He was sent to grant us salvation.
A wonderful hope
Do you feel free?

We believe in a Spirit within us.
A powerful connection within our hearts.
One true voice.
Can you hear?

All these entities become three in one
Soon granting resurrection from the dead
Eternal life
Are you saved?

The Starry Night

Artist: Vincent van Gogh
Year: 1889

The Beauty of Night

By: Samantha Bryant

Silent is the atmosphere of a starry night
Look high into the sky with avid sight.
See as the deep blue swirls through the sky
Notice the radiant yellow flowing from the stars
Ghostly is that bright and yellow moon
As it watches from above, the quite town.
Look to the church at the center of it all
See the steeple as it reaches so tall
The cypress bush standing alone
Cast its shadow amongst the stars in the sky
But above all those eleven fiery stars
That illuminate the night with their radiant light
Musings  
By Jerry Hu  
Strands of thought, aimless  
woven to meanings, untold  
Over time, forgotten  

Seven cosmetics  
By: Jasmine Carpenter  
Concealer to hide the hardships of life,  
Foundation in order to hide the truth,  
Eye shadow to properly display the eyes  
Blush to lift and brighten the cheeks,  
Eyeliner to embellish the sign of maturity,  
Mascara to thicken and lengthen the lashes,  
Lipstick, the final touch, on the lips.  

I Remember the Day  
By: Jasmine Carpenter  
I remember the wind blowing through my hair  
I remember the sand between my toes  
I remember the laughs we shared  
and the endless drinks that filled the cooler  
I remember the long walks  
I remember the beautiful sunsets  
I remember not ever wanting to leave  
Even when the rain poured  
I remember feeling like that’s truly where I belong  
But my favorite memory’s yet to come  

The Clearing  
By: Jasmine Carpenter  
Crunch, crunch, crunch,  
The sound the leaves make beneath my feet.  
The wind blows the fresh scent of trees into my face  
As I walk through the clearing.  
The beautiful clouds look like marshmallows in the sky,  
Parting from each other to let the deep blue sky enter my eyes.  
Birds fly past me  
And strange animals run by my feet.  
There is so much beauty in nature,  
I can barely speak.  

Life.  
By: Alicia Crim  
Making my life a dream,  
is harder than it seems.  
Growing older & wiser,  
Is not my desire.  
Living on my own and being alone,  
I find myself wishing to be back home.
His Hands

By: Sheri Chau

People love his hands
As he guides them throughout the day.
People hate them too,
Especially when its night.
His job is tough,
Never really stopping.

And if he tried stopping,
People would punish his hands,
Ripping his back with a tough,
Cold metal until he resumes his day.
He questions every night,
Why can't he be appreciated too?

His hands are tied to
A ticking bomb, stopping
Without his knowing, hopefully sometime at night,
Before someone replaces the bomb, hands
On his back until he resumes his day,
Working tough

His back all rugged, his hands on the wall looking all tough,
When reality, he wants some rest too.
When people leave the house through the day,
And he is replaced, why can't they tell him stopping
Is okay: “rest for the day,
And you can resume at night.”

But at night
Is always when he faces the tough
Curses placed on his hands
Screaming that his work is too stopping

Day

But at night,
People face the tough
Decision of whether to appreciate his hands.
His hands help them too,
But so frustratingly interrupting and stopping

S/he

This woman,
Moves heart and soul,
Caring and cooking for the crown,
The crown whom she only hopes to return with no hole.

This man,
Moves mountains and valleys,
Challenging and guiding for the crown,
The crown whom he marks each milestone with tallies

This woman,
Slaves day and night,
Works both as a teacher and a friend,
The friend who apologizes after every fight.

This man,
Motivates heart and soul,
Works both as an idol and a coach,
The coach who cheers when the crown finds his goal.

My mother
My father
Questionable

By Marissa Chow

I ask myself everyday
Why am I here?
I don’t sleep
Because I have no time to
Eat, study, and relax in the same day
Because I have no time to
Do my biology and chemistry homework in the same day
Because I have no time to
Truly enjoy my food and count all the stars in the sky in the same day

... But when I walk into the pharmacy And I know that I can help At least one person Today
It makes the Sleepness nights, 2 pots of coffee, and all those extra calories Worth it
Because I helped

Waiting for you (Txt poem)

By Kilian Horton

I left my pic on th ground wher u walk so that somday if th sun was jst right & th rain didnt wash me awa u might c me out of th corner of ur i & pic me up

Welcome to the Jungle

Carrie Cicirale & Steffi Thomas

Deep in the jungle
A cheetah sprints at the speed of light,
Followed by a sluggis armadillo
Chasing the cheetah in a furious fight.

But as the cheetah runs faster
The armadillo falls further and further behind,
And the cheetah taunts the armadillo Messing with its mind.

It makes the armadillo,
So naive and full of hope, believe it has a decent chance,
By slowing down and even stopping To do a ridiculing dance.

The cheetah never leaves the armadillos sight,
It stays just far enough ahead,
Fully knowing the foolish armadillo Will never catch him before he’s dead.

So the armadillo chases and chases The prize many strides on the horizon, Although, what it doesn’t know is that the gap Between them only widens.

So now transfer this scene to the halls of this school
And put yourself in the armadillo’s shell And imagine the cheetah is an A in a class,
And now you have entered our hell.
The Thrill of the Game

By: Taylor Craig

Playing ball was another life to her,
The thrill of the game so intense,
Stepping up to the plate,
Everything is at stake,
This moment could be so immense.

She takes a deep breath
And clears her mind,
Nothing else matters but this.
The pitch comes in,
She swings,
It's out!
She crosses home plate with bliss.

Baseball

By: Nathan Dodd

The crack of the bat,
the pop of the glove

The roar of the crowd
the smell of the grass

The heat in the air
the starry night sky

The red and white uniforms
the love for the game

List

By: Nathan Dodd

The bright sun shines down
Scents of freshly cut grass fill the air
Windows are open in every house in town
Hot day and warm nights make a good pair

Nights grow longer every day
Vacations, camping, and baseball fill the summer
Children stay outside to play
Winter is right around the corner, what a bummer

Soul

By April Gaines

You are the energy in my skin.
The ending to my new begin.
My prize when I open my eyes,
A breathe that I despise,

Why stir me in the wrong direction, without any forms of protection

My heart, my own soul is the only death I know.
Listen to love when you should just unplug, unwind, stop wasting time.

You are the energy in my skin.
The ending to my new begin. The one thing I truly despise when I open my eyes.

Bang

By: Nathan Dodd

Seven men sit in a room. Bang!
Six men begin to panic now. Bang!
Five men begin to sweat now. Bang!
Four men begin to pray now. Bang!
Three men begin to cry now. Bang!
Two men begin to beg now. Bang!
Only one man is left now. Bang!
Rain
By: Alyssa Farbak

When it rains
The clouds run together
When it rains
I can feel every drop on my face
When it rains
The streets are wet and the people take cover
Eventually it has to stop raining and the sun’s rays break through

Science
By: Alyssa Farbak

Carbons, ketoacetyl ACP
The enzymes
Reducing
Dehydrating
Synthesizing
Highly regulated
A headache
That I don’t want to deal with

Worrying
By: Rachel Ghazarian

Stress that is so crushing, breathing becomes labored.

Deep breaths.
Deep breaths.

Painting
By: Rachel Ghazarian

From my mind it flows.
Through my hand like so.
From there to the brush
And the bristles just go.

Bristles to page,
Page to eye.
The artworks resides now in both you and I.

The Past
By: Rachel Ghazarian

I would like to grow in the light
But sometimes I am caught in the shadow.
Memories and choices of the past, sleep in my heart.
When they wake, I feel the fear
That is when everything fades to the dark
But I am just a man

But I am just a learning man.
Growing into the light
Falling back into the dark
Becoming just a shadow.
Because of the past, I fear
It will eventually reach my heart.

I lost my heart
All to a man
Who also had fear
And walked in the light.
He fought the shadow
But he couldn’t beat the dark

He became the dark
It hardened his heart
Until he became the shadow
He was no man
He gave no light
He is who I fear

I Fear
the dark
So I run to the warm, shining light
My new bright star, he warms my heart
Letting me forget the man
Until some nights, I see his shadow

I should have known, if I were to foreshadow
I would never have this fear
I would never know the man
I would be free of the dark
I could give my heart
I should have fought for the light

Because of the shadow I live partly in the dark
Because of my fear I have hidden my heart
Because of the man I will fight for the light.
On that night
By: Tyler (Jeffrey) Giebelhausen

On that night,
I couldn’t wait to see you.
On that night,
I was ready to forget about my problems.
On that night,
I was going to have the time of my life.
On that night,
We were going to have the best party.
On that night,
I met new people.
On that night,
I made new friends.
On that night,
I lost a friend.
On that night,
I learned what gunshots truly sound like.
On that night,
I learned bullets do not discriminate.
On that night,
I learned the harsh reality of human nature.
On that night,
I felt completely helpless.
On that night,
I learned that life goes on.
On that night,
I learned how cruel life can be.
On that night,
I became weak, and then I became stronger.
On that night,
You left us, but will always be with us.

Graduation
By: Tyler (Jeffrey) Giebelhausen

Good morning young champion.
Today is your day,
This is the day you become legendary.
You’ve fought through this university and come out stronger,
Yet I wonder could you have been like a star like Barry Bonds?
You had all the glory,
But you ran yourself out of baseball at your homecoming
You couldn’t handle the flashing lights and the drunk hot girls.
You hit rock bottom and thought it was over,
But you had to be a big brother,
You had to set an example for your younger generation.
These moments made you everything you are,
You fought your way back to the top
And now your critics can’t tell you nothing.
So go young man, find your path and lead the way,
Enjoy yourself because you made it to the good life,
Welcome to graduation, good morning.

Welcome Spring!
By Grace Jang

The ending of cold, harsh winter sparks
The beginning of lively, flourishing spring
Flowers grow again and bloom
Some animals wake up from the long, deep sleep
The soft ground gets covered by the hairy, green grass
The birds chirp and sing,
“Spring has come!”
**A Cattleman’s Story**

By: Daniel Hemann

He scans the sky of the western plains,
While his cattle graze on the ocean of grass.
He has to move them before the rain,
But it’s really such a pain in the a**.

It’s a hard life for a man,
To be a cowboy in Wyoming.
But if you don’t have a plan,
You go anywhere without knowing.

Now he sleeps under the stars,
A Winchester---his best friend.
He hears a howl from afar,
The coyotes will be the end.

He gets up to load the gun,
And waits to have a little midnight fun.

**Looking for Stanley**

By: Daniel Hemann

Just another push-up----his arms quiver.
It’s not over, get up
They will save their ticket stubs
St. Louis wants that old cup!

**The First Morning**

By: Daniel Hemann

Grandpa and I went to bed
The morning would soon be near,
My nerves were in such a tangle
Because tomorrow I’d be hunting deer.

It was cold when we stepped outside
And at dawn we left the truck,
I anxiously got to my hunting spot
Because I was looking for a buck.

Sunlight peeked through the trees
That’s when I heard the first shot,
I tried to be as still as possible
Surely one would come by my hunting spot.

Boredom soon set in
I had been waiting there forever
But with a peak over my shoulder
I saw tall tines coming across the clover

**Pharmacists Rock**

By: Katelyn Huhn

I counseled a patient on her meds
so she would no longer be sick in bed
She thought she would die
“No” was my reply
You will be happy and healthy instead

**When the Rain Comes**

By: John Hunter

When the rain comes,
The Earth shall open her mouth.
When the rain comes,
The breath of life shall fill her breast.
When the rain comes,
Beauty shall spring forth.
When the rain comes,
Life shall flourish.
Dear God,
By Kook Hwang

No matter how many times I insulted you
No matter how often I disappointed you
No matter how many mistakes I made
No matter how often I brought tears in your eyes
You still love me for who I am.

I give my thanks to you.
I give my love to you for your kindness.
I give my sincere apologies
I give my full appreciation
For you are my God.

When I close my eyes
I stop judging others
When I cover my ears
I stop eavesdropping
When I close my mouth
I stop cursing at them

Peace from the Sea
By:  Mena Khaled

Peace upon the blue sea of the hot sanded Alexandria
Where freedom flew from the depth of the sea just to touch the tip of my heart
Peace upon the blue skies as it warms the inside of my heart
Where the happiness vibrates in harmony through my heart
That feeling that makes you want to break the sea open and fill with life from your heart

When I find peace
By: Mena Khaled

When I find peace
I will dance until the pain comes out
When I find peace
I will throw it out at the world
When I find peace
I will grow life out of struggle
When I find peace
I will plant trees out of dead seeds
When I find peace
I will go to the beach and fly out on a leaf
Morning and night
By: Kunhee Lee
Sun brings the morning
Quickly, moon brings the night
A new day comes now

The Rainbow
By: Kunhee Lee
Red apples are delicious
Orange football uniform reflects the sun’s lights
Yellow queso is good with the chips
Green mountains grab a lot of bikers
Blue car runs fast on the highway
Indigo flowers bring everyone joy
Violet hats protect people from the sun

Hidden
By Elizabeth Lemma
When I jump for joy, it’s in spurts of six seconds. I laugh for up to five minutes and listen for up to four hours. I can hug you up to three times, or as many as you need me too.
I am here, before you even count to one.

Before you meet me, I am just someone.
Getting to know me requires a sixth sense, and it requires commitment too.
I do not reveal myself to anyone. Five years it may take to unravel me. Three years it may take to decide if it’s worth it for you. There is no forewarning for what you may see. One might be cautious to come close to me. Three steps back for your own safety. Sixteen years ago, I was once a damsel in distress.
Five years later, I became my own villain. Two weeks ago, you and I have met. Too sure that I can allow you to unravel me so soon, for you are a fool. Five minutes ago, you said that you loved me. Once upon a time, I might have felt the same. Six seconds ago, I almost believed you. Three more minutes was all I needed. Three more minutes brought clarity to me. Two seconds later, I rejected you. Six blinks later, I saw your tears. On your forehead, I see lines of sadness. Like everyone else, it too shall pass. Five seconds later, you walk away. Five more seconds, till guilt sets in. Three more minutes and I too walk back home. One, two, three, four. I count the steps until I open the door. Two more steps and I am home. For me, rejecting and hurting is never easy.
Unplanned
BY: Elizabeth Lemma

Life never seems to work out the way you planned
This always seems to be true
You can never predict your journey but you can always try to understand

Life never seems to work out the way you planned
There are too many variables to anticipate
We are but one grain in the sand

There must be a plan too grand
And each moment is meant for the better
You can never predict your journey but you can always try to understand

Life never seems to work out the way you planned
This I can never doubt
But, maybe it’s to give me an upper hand

The truth of life has become a brand
Etched upon the fabric of my DNA
You can never predict your journey but you can always try to understand

Life never seems to work out the way you planned
Each battle can be endured longer
Rejoice in this truth and take a stand
You can never predict your journey but you can always try to understand

College
By: Jessica Pahng

The first week of college,
Can be described as one of the busiest weeks of your life.
Freshman year does not go unacknowledged.
Your memory of this time is as sharp as a knife.
The first month of school,
Homework starts to pile in,
Exams and papers begin to get a bit cruel
But it’s only been one month, so you still have a grin.
The first semester has almost gone by,
You have grown, changed, matured, and learned so much.
Studying for finals makes you almost want to die,
But your experience of college was barely a touch.
After finals, you are ready to take ten,
But in less than a month, you have to do it all over again.
By: Robyn Lowe

is definitely
worth the
anxiety
in the
END.

Leader of the Pack
By: Dan McGraw

So you want to be the leader of this pack?
This task can seem too hard to do
Just make sure to watch your back

A crazy few who are very whack
This we all know to be oh so true
So you want to be the leader of this pack?

There is one who’s name is Jack
No one knows quite what he’ll do
Just make sure to watch your back

He has been known to hack
Many of his friends in two
So you want to be the leader of this pack?

There is another who goes by Mack
Is he the craziest of the two?
Just make sure to watch your back

The hacker known as Jack
The wacko known as Mack
So you want to be the leader of this pack?
Just make sure to watch your back
The Story of the Pack (inspired by Teen Wolf)
By: Dan McGraw

The leader is an Alpha
The lesser are the Betas
The loners are Omegas
Some are born with it, others require a bite
The rank is shown in their Eyes
The strength comes from the size of the pack

The leaders of the pack
While they are Alphas
With the red in their Eyes
Are nothing without their Betas
Who they have to bite
The weakest ones are Omegas

There are many lonely Omegas
Who run without a pack
With a howl scarier than their bite
The strongest is the Alphas
With three Betas
Who have blue and yellow Eyes

They can show just their Eyes
The lonely Omegas
Can work to join the Betas
With the goal to join the pack
But only if the Alpha
Is the one who gave the bite

It begins with a bite
It starts to change the Eyes
The decision by the Alphas
Who is stronger than the Omegas
As for who to join the pack
And join the ranks of the Betas

Some Betas
Who got the bite
Can start to lead the pack
And can gain the red in their Eyes
Even the Omegas
Can come to be the Alphas

The Alphas and his Betas
Can try and help Omegas with just a simple bite
To change the Eyes and have them join the pack

Our Surroundings
By: Alexandra Morgan

She walks in the sand
Warm breeze brushing
by her face, seashells poking
into her feet, sun blinding
from the sky, ocean waves roaring
Scowling and scolding the jumping children

He sits on the bench
Smelly people bustling
all around, loud siren sounding
from the street, children swinging
in the park, dirty dog running
Listening and dreaming with the busy crowd

The Roadtrip
By: Alexandra Morgan

In 2000,
Walkman
Duffle bag of CD's
Handheld Mancala game
Several books
Book light
Notebook
Pens and pencils
Crossword puzzles
Sudoku

In 2014,
iPhone

Breakfast
By: Alexandra Morgan

The scent of syrup
In the kitchen bacon pops
Lightly he awakes
**HP SOAP Note**  
**By: Alexandra Morgan**

S:
CC: “I need more money to keep my family living at our current lifestyle.”

HPI: HP is a 44 yo WM. He was demoted last year and has had trouble paying his bills the past few months. His family is upset about not having the nice things they previously had.

PMH: Debt (2013)

Medications : Second job (started last month)  
(+ debt, (+ stress, (- free time, (+ strife with family)

O:
Savings account: $19
Days worked/week: 60

A:
1. Uncontrolled debt 2/2 demotion. Risk factors include buying unnecessary thing, owning a large home, and letting the rest of the family’s expectations guide spending.

P
- Spend more time with family
- Find inexpensive activities to entertain the family
- Consider moving to a smaller home
- Monitor debt and spending daily

---

**Motorcycle Sunday**  
**By: Casey Moore**

The sound of the thumping engines were delightful  
The breeze on a cool march day was slightly chilly  
It was liberating, speed limits were nothing but a sign  
Following the bike in front of me like a coordinated symphony was quite serene  
Getting into a smooth rhythm like a fine ballet dancer  
  Weightless, painless, focused solely on keeping it shiny side up

---

**The Arena**  
**By: Casey Moore**

The Bears made their way to the city
Players swinging hitting catching and lazily running
Drinking by the lake makes spectators happy and gitty
The warm sun was quite cunning
Nine innings means plenty of time for a tan and slice of pizza
What a beautiful day to spend at the arena
Drum Flavors
By: Casey Moore
Snare Drum
Tight, light sustain, crispy
Bass drum
Loose, fat, and booming, medium sustain, meaty
Tom toms
Melodic, long duration, rich
Ride cymbal
Smooth pings with a cutting bell, sweet and sour
Crash cymbals
Loud, sharp, and used for accents, zesty
China cymbal
Dark crisp, trashy and explosive, bitter
Hi hat
Whatever you make it

Boba Tea
By: Kelsi (Padaokoula) Moua
The flashback of a hot summer day
Walking on Euclid Avenue
Lazy, carefree, and in need of a refresher
Spotted a little shop on the corner
Walked into the air-condition
Smells of health and light
Three dollars for coconut
Sweet syrup drink
Cold and slushy
Flecks of ice in a fruity concoction
And the boba beads
Chewy, black, and fun
Slurp it up a giant straw
Delightful treat soothes my throat
Cools me down on a summer day
Thanks for the treat
Walk out into the sunshine
Sunglasses and August air
Cold, spirit-lifting drink in hand
Oh, how I miss and want boba tea

Cats
By Ai-Chieh (A.J.) Lin
Cats
Adorable, Curious
Exploring, playing, wandering
My cute lovely babies
Precious

I AM
By Chiemezie Okafor
I am Dedicated, Hardworking, Confident,
Committed, Patient, Helpful, Educated
I am the hands that heal,
I am STLCOP’s Future Pharmacist
Untitled Sorrow....
By: Haenah Park

Life, it is extremely absurd.
I can’t even hear myself be heard.
Do I dare attempt to explore?
Yearning only to prove more....

Feeling discontent with circumstance
Do I really dare to take a chance?
When will I experience the feel?
It has been far too long to deal.

If only you knew of this
Maybe then, I’d be in bliss....

Technologically Enhanced Angst
By Haenah Park

Our connection is strong
Except it is abnormally long
Our relations are positive
Our conversations, quantitative

Mentally stimulating it is
Physically, it has missed

Embracing the flow
We both want it to mean more.

No switch can shut us off
Forced forever to take it soft.
I weep and bellow
Slowly growing mellow.
I wait....

Running
By Janki Patel

It’s when I run that I feel most alive
With every stride I live a little more
I don’t care if I have to wake at five
And go to sleep with legs that are so sore
I’ll run and run every day until I die
Because a day without a run is a waste
And if you want, I’d love to see you try
To keep up with my speedy rapid pace
When people ask me why I love to run
I have no clue what they want me to say
How can one begin to explain the one
Thing they cannot live without for one day
No matter what may happen I’ll have fun
As long as I can lace my shoes and run.

The Ghost
By Kishan S. Patel

I was walking down the hall
When I glanced at her looking like a doll
Oh how she grasped my gaze
She looking back at me all hazed
My heart skipped three beats
Aching for us to fall and meet
But before I could say a word
She vanished from the world.
Far From Home
By Kayla Pham

Far from home,
It’s where I’ll be.
One day I’m in Vietnam,
The next I’m in America.
“It is a dream?”
Please let it be.
I will always love home.
It’s where I’m supposed to be.
My home and me.

I Don’t Understand
By: Kushbu Patel

I don’t understand
Why you talk to me everyday
Why you keep flirting with me
Why you give me gifts
But most of all
Why you always make me smile
Why you can’t see my sorrows
Why you cry when I’m in pain
What I understand most is
Why you make me feel like I’m the only girl in
the world
Why you always want to see me happy
Why you love me so much

Walking over my heart again and again
By: Kushbu Patel

Walking over my heart again and again
Letting my tears drop like rain
Changing me each and every step
It’s getting really hard for me to move up a step
Don’t even want to complain
Stop making me change every lane
Lost in this weird feeling that I don’t want to
survive
Why did you kill me half way should have just
let me die!

The day I saw you
By: Kushbu Patel

The day I saw you
I felt butterflies in my stomach
I couldn’t keep my eyes off you
I felt like looking at you every second of my life
I couldn’t resist you
The day I saw you

Synesthsia
By Sagar Patel

She felt the breeze blow by
A leaf fell upon her palm
It was rough and coarse and fragile
The color was vibrant like strawberry red
As if licking it would give you the flavor you
sought
Chess
By Puja P. Patel

Have you ever wondered how
The game of chess can connect
The lives of basically all people?

You may think there is no way
All people’s lives intertwine.
However, that is where you are wrong.
Our worlds all connect if broken down
To the basics, just like chess.

The pawns represent your friends,
There are so many of them and
They are right in the front to protect
You from anything whether it be
A simple breakup or a death.
What ever would you do without those pawns?

Most individuals are privileged.
Privileged to have a roof over their heads.
The rook represents one’s shelter
Because of its house sort of shape.

Next in line are the knights.
The knight represents the
Closest people in one’s life.
There are only two because
People have a limited amount
Of people they can highly rely
On and trust with everything.
They are the bravest as well,
Because despite what happens in life
They are always there for you.

Then we have the bishops.
They represent one’s religion.
Although one does not have to
Believe in a certain religion or
Even believe in God for that
Matter, there is always a higher
Power in everyone’s lives that
They rely on.
Everyone could use a little
Hope and faith once in a while.

The Queen is one’s boyfriend,
Girlfriend, spouse, or just best
Friend. This person will stick
By one forever through the best
Of times and the worst of times.

And finally we end with the King.
The King is represented by you.
You are the person in charge of
Yourself. You know all the key
Information about yourself as
Well as trusting yourself with
Your life.

One may have never regarded
A chess board as being so significant,
However do not be fixed on only
One function of chess expand
Your mind and explore what is
Behind it instead.
As you can make connections
Not seen by the naked eye.

City Life
By: Bethany Meyer

The lights shine bright
Even on the cloudiest of nights
People move at maximum speed
As if they don’t even have time to breathe
Drivers honk and push their way through
Keeping up in the city is hard to do
The views are very limited, there is not much to see
There are only buildings and the occasional tree
There may be a lot to do
But the city will never compare to that country view
The Day I Slipped Down the Hall...
BY: Vruti Patel

I still remember that day as it was yesterday
I did not see it coming
I felt like such a fool
Doing a slip and slide seven feet down the hall
People were gathered all around their lockers
But no one had the time to take a look around
to see me on the floor
My friends started to laugh
And I started to laugh along with them
Thank the lord I was safe and sound with no
bruises what so ever
That was a day to remember!

Love...
BY: Vruti Patel

Love is a rose,
although beautiful,
you could be cut by a thorn and your heart will bleed.
A rose will always go through big changes,
yet it will grow and grow.
Although it might seem strange,
Love is a rose.

My life
BY: Vruti Patel

When I am upset
You make me happy
When I am lonely
Wait, I am never lonely because you are always
with me
When I am sick
You are my sweet and caring doctor
Staying up all night to make sure I am alright
When I am mad
You are a block of ice, easily cooling me down
When you are with me
I never miss a meal
because you watch my every move like a seagull
I am very lucky to have you
Not everyone has someone so special like you
Loving and Caring
That is why you will always be my life

Technology
By: Justin Patterson

iPhone
Black, Shiny
Talking, ringing, texting
Many technologies in one
Calling, gaming, playing
Small, musical
iPod

School
By: Justin Patterson

College
Intense, prestigious
Depressing, defeating, slaughtering
Makes you die inside
STLCOP

Break Time
By: Justin Patterson

Trying to escape
There is no way out of here
Time to take a break

Caffeine
By Emily Rucker

Creations of excitement
Addicting
For every drink the rush
Flows through your body
Endless feelings of enlightenment
Insomnia for hours at a time
Never sitting still always
Ending in a crash
Cosmos

By: Steven Pham

After the nuclear war we looked to the stars, hoping to find a new home in the unknown. We always dreamt of going to space and finding new planets to explore. Humans can now go anywhere with new light speed technology in our ships.

After Earth, our interstellar ships voyaged to remote galaxies and stars. The ability to travel at the speed of light led us to a habitable zone where aliens were on a quest for intergalactic domination of space.

They weren’t going to defeat the human race without a fight against our starships. We were well-prepared for a war and had enough firepower to blow up Mars. Space was now a battle-zone and was in for a hell of a fight.

The darkness of space was lit by bright lights flashing. Our military base was in range of their bombing zone. Battles were overshadowed by a solar eclipse and the passing of shooting stars, upon which we wished to end this war.

We blew up alien targets with C4 and showed them our might. Victory was almost ours. Our final battle in space saw us defeat their mother ships. The evil aliens have been overthrown.

Our victory became well-known in the galaxy, which was now an open door. We made many interstellar trips to friendly alien life, who were a delight. The final frontier is space and an endless sea of stars.

Silver Lining

By: Sabeena Rahman

I’ve lost myself
There’s nothing to live for
I’ve become invisible.

Where am I?
Does anyone care?
Is anyone out there?

I walk to the end of the road
Looking for hope
And a silver lining.

Is there a silver lining?

Life

By: Sabeena Rahman

Each day goes by and I am so grateful.
Stop and look around you, you will see it too.

A place for shelter, food to eat, family that loves you, friends who would die for you.

A car for transportation, beautiful scenery to take in, places to travel, so many places to see.

The world is full of wonders Don’t take it for granted. Stop and appreciate it, just once in a while.
It’s Time for Me to Go  
By: Razan Rajab

"Honey dear, don’t do this now,  
For I love you so much.  
I know you’re sick and tired sadly,  
But I will miss your touch.

Get well soon so we can go,  
Go far and never near,  
To live a life of happiness,  
Without disease or fear.”

“My love, don’t worry about me now,  
For I will be just fine.  
No matter what happens to me dear,  
You will always be mine.

Whether I stay alive or just pass,  
Just please know that why-  
Why my heart keeps beating now,  
Well my love for you won’t die.

The machine sound is dying down,  
So I really want you to know,  
My sweetheart, stay strong, I love you,  
But it’s time for me to go.”

Typical Day  
By: Razan Rajab

the breeze hit my face with force,  
the brightness of the sun casting on the tall  
buildings with strength,  
It was just another typical day for me

the rough sand stuck in my shoes,  
the loud, crackling sound of the seashells in my  
bag,  
It was just another typical day for me.

the bustling sound of movement hit me,  
the dirty smell of trash struck me,  
It was just another typical day for me.

the salty taste of the ocean in my mouth,  
the sound of the large waves in my ears,  
It was just another typical day for me.

Never Lost  
By: Razan Rajab

A moment is never wasted -- with you  
Happy, too elated,  
And always motivated,  
And your love never faded.

Call of the Wind  
By: Christina Ranick

In winter, cold and biting,  
In summer, warm and inviting.  
As you stand on a sidewalk or in a field,  
It taps you on the shoulder.

As you walk home,  
It whispers in your ear  
It calls you, beckons you, begs you,  
To chase after it

Though you know,  
You’ll never catch it

Death  
By: Christina Ranick

A man in a black coat counts stars,  
Searching through his money and gold,  
Licking them to uncover  
His own personal drugs
Learning what he can of the planets,  
Earth, Sun and Moon,  
As tears pour from his eyes,  
Having been warned  
By Death’s script –  
His health is soon to fade
An Apple
By: Christina Ranick

One day keeps the doctor away. Or so they say. This sweet fruit in red, green or gold, is a lovely, delightful, and delicious delicacy for all to behold. Pack in a lunch, or take it on the go, nothing beats this fruit everyone knows. The outside shines brightly in the sun, the inside a sweet treat, adults and children always enjoy biting into its crisp skin, though it is oftentimes not very neat. Sticky fingers grasp at the core, begging for more.

White Water
By: Ryan Soo Hoo

Down by the river, as the water flows quick, I thought to myself in contemplation, “was this even the right event to pick?”
Down by the river, as the water runs cold, I thought to myself with hesitation, “could I muster up enough courage, and be this bold?”
Down by the river, as the water foams white I thought to myself with self-preservation, “am I even of the safe and acceptable height?”
Down by the river, as the water makes a calm sound I thought to myself with revelation, “I am going to board this raft right now, and flow right down.”

The Fast Life
By: Ryan Soo Hoo

As I wait on the mountaintop
People below me pass by, busily walking towards their destination

As I wait on the mountaintop
Cars move sluggishly, slowly, rolling bumper to bumper, stuck in traffic

As I wait on the mountaintop
Lights flicker brilliantly, in hues of red, yellow, and green, throughout the city

As I wait on the mountaintop
A man in need sits in the middle of it all, ignored, neglected, and misjudged

As I look down from this mountaintop and think
City life must slow down at times, for much is being missed

Memory
By: Josh Siu

The shot heard round the stadium,
The roar of the crowd,
The feel of spikes snatching bitumen,
The rush of wind grinding against your face,
The exhaustion of leg muscles churning,
The screaming of girls and coaches,
The pumping of arms,
The grimace of competitors,
The relief of the final step,
The pain deep within your chest,
The sun shining upon your sweaty shoulders,
The wry grins upon your team,
Ecstasy.
Memories of the Waves  
By Sakina Saaduddin

Wishy washy waves
running away from the shore
carry the boat
away from the sand
and direct it towards the sun
so that it can be carried away by the ocean

The scenic ocean
which smooth's out the waves
absorbs the rays of the sun
but misses its days along the shore
where it could rest peacefully next to the sand
on the days before it carried the boat

the days on the boat
seem as lonely as the ocean
for it is away from the sand
away from familiar waves
away from the home it calls the shore
its only comfort now being the sun

It shines so bright, the loyal sun
radiating its beauty onto the boat
mimicking the shore
painting the ocean
carrying the waves
all while warming up the faraway sand

Warm and comfortable is the sand
absorbing heat from sun
while cooling itself down with cold waves
It pulls the boat
away from the vast ocean
in order to keep it loyal to the shore

Cautious is the shore
trying to catch the sand
while keeping itself away from the ocean
only to be caught by the sun
and impeded by the boat
which then turns it to the waves

The shore and the sun
The sand and the boat
Carry the memories they had of the ocean
though familiar waves

The Sleeping Hare  
By Zach Smith

Inside a hole deep underground,
something lies sleeping so safe so sound,
it's fur is so soft and warm to the touch,
you might just see it with a wee bit of luck
Missing Him
By: RJ Shaw

The way he held me when I was younger
Gave me much security.
As I grew up, he taught me how to play sports
And was my biggest fan.
In my schooling, he was always proud of me
No matter what.
He embarrassed me
At any chance he could even in public.
He did everything he could for me
Because I was his.
The only thing I want to change is
For him to see me receive my diploma.
I want to see him smile at me
As I walk across the stage.
I miss him.

Wedding Poem
By: Melissa Stutz

She had awaited this day,
For her whole life.
The day she would become
Some lucky man’s wife.

Her hair was tied up,
And her makeup was done.
Her heartbeat quickened,
As the clock neared one.
In a few short moments,
Her dreams would be real.
She slapped on a smile,
And slipped on her heels.

As the church doors opened,
Her father led her to the altar,
Where a tall man stood,
And she knew this was forever.

As the priest began to speak,
Her head became dizzy.
She needed time to think,
But the church was too busy.

With one quick movement,
She made a quick dash,
And ran through the doors
Closing them with a crash.
The man she left at the altar,
His poor heart had been shattered.
But when he met the bridesmaid,
His jilted heart did not matter.

7 things
By: RJ Shaw

I found the stone.
I exposed the secrets
Saved the prisoner from death.
I was magically entered into the goblet.
The order protects me from harm.
The prince loves my mother,
And I used the hallows to kill my enemy.

Spell
By: RJ Shaw

He casts his spell on evil men—chosen one
The wizard son saves all then
Cast, curse, kill all them
The chosen one wins a gem.
Next to the Fire
By: Blake Stigall
As we sit next to the fire,
Flames flickering through the wood,
Smoke plumes from wet leaves.
We hear the rippling of a nearby stream’s
water,
feel the breeze of cold air
like a warm embrace from mother nature’s
body.
I enjoy the solitude, nobody
but the two of us. Our fire
flicking into the air.
Running out of wood,
I have a drink of water
and wander onto the fallen leaves.
It seems so cold each time I leave,
numbness taking over part of my body.
Ice on my face from spilled water,
my hair will be thawed by the fire
after returning from these woods.
Eyes reminded of the cold in each puff of air.

I follow the light through frigid air
navigating over branches and leaves.
With hands full of wood,
The tree’s body
Is soon to be our fire,
only to be rescued by water.

I’m selfish with my water.
It fuels me like the air
fuels the fire
that leaves
our bodies
warm from wood.

So odd we would
treat mother nature this way. Take her water
to fuel our body,
fill our lungs with her air,
and yet burn her bounties and leave
her home on fire.

I’m not just anybody, I recycle her fallen wood.

Sacrifice it to the fire, extinguish the flames
with her water.
Ashes return up into her air, my job is finished, I
leave.

When you make a fire
By: Blake Stigall
When you make a fire
It starts with a spark, which can turn into a
flame
When you make a fire
It can burn fast or slow
When you make a fire
It can burn bright or dimly glow
When you make a fire
It requires work to not burn out
When you make a fire
The work of two does more than of just one
When you make a fire
It can be reminiscent of love.

The Perfect Recipe
By: Melissa Stutz
1 cup of humor
2 tablespoons of glee
3 ounces of confidence
4 teaspoons of insanity

A pinch of sass
And a dash of lust
A handful of honesty
And a sprinkle of pixie dust.

Mix until blended into the perfect friend,
Enjoy every last bit until the bitter end.
A Perfect Potato
By: Erik Suh

You're launched from canons, you're cut into fries
You please everyone, you see it in their eyes.
When I look at you though, I see a reflection,
My creativity is like you, potato you're a perfection.

After the Party
By: Erik Suh

I crept through the kitchen to grab a beer,
There the cold pizza sat staring at my empty stomach.
The life of last night's party looked me in the eyes begging to be held.
My beer in my left, a slice in my right,
Everything that night turned out alright.

Life’s Beauty
By Todd Pieper

Caterpillar
Hungry, slow
Walking, eating, creating
A sleepy birth, renewal
Moving, breaking, flying
Agile, hungry
Butterfly

Where am I?
By: Peter Sung

Tic Toc Tic Toc
Tic Toc Tic Toc
The hand of the clock is moving
My hands, legs, fingers, and toes are all in place
Where am I?
Left, Right, Left, Right
I see books, a computer, a desk, a lamp, and a door
A woman approaches me
Telling me to eat breakfast
I feel like this place is somewhere I have been before
I am at home

Tears
By: Peter Sung

Salty
Water Drops
Pouring out of my eyes
Constantly flowing down my face
Easing the pain or increasing it
Joy or Sorrow
At this point I don’t know
It is a disease that cannot be cured
Tears

Change
By: Ashley Sutherland

She was happy when he was there,
When he wasn’t she was scared,
She loved him,
He loved her,
When they stopped talking,
He lost her,
She wondered why he didn’t care,
She moved on,
She was happy on her own,
Then he realized everything he had was gone.
The Beach
By: Ashley Sutherland

I feel the sand in between my toes,
The cool water against my legs,
The blistering sun beating down on my skin,
I hear the crash of the wave,
The shrill of the seagulls,
The wind whistling in the air,
The beach is the perfect place

Lost and Hurt
By: Amanda Syers

Can you tell me where I belong?
I’m lost and in search of a place
What you did to me was wrong

I go to work all day long
All I can do is imagine starring at your face
Can you tell me where I belong?

I feel weak but know I am strong
You hurt me and showed me no grace
What you did to me was wrong

Afraid to sing you a little song
In fear that you will pull out mace
Can you tell me where I belong?

Have felt empty inside all along
Trying to run but losing the race
What you did to me was wrong

I have made mistakes all lifelong
I’m asking if you know just in case
Can you tell me where I belong?
What you did to me was wrong

A box
By: Amanda Syers

Something small but big
Able to fit many things into it
Storage and Delivery
A box
Not big enough for one’s own life
You can’t put me in a box
But wait, then how can you put God in a box
Someone which is way beyond ourselves
How can you make him so small?
When looking at the world
you see his beauty
A box
Only for ones things
Not for one’s whole life
Don’t take my Savior
And put him in

Paradise, Lonely
By: Shawn Thomas

Always so nice, it used to be
The ocean and salty breeze
Where children played
In the waves, jumping
Under the sun, running
Between parents, swinging
Always so nice, it used to be
Where lovers walked
Along the dark sand
Hands clasped, hearts full
Tangled in the game of love
Always so nice it used to be
A bustling, loud crowd
Of beachgoers, worries forgotten
Extinct, no more, listen now
And you shall hear, nothing
Where seashells once lay
Rotten garbage now fills
The deserted land, dirty
The polluted air, smelly
Never busy, but lonely
Always so nice, it used to be
Relationship Pie
By: Kayla Gray

5 Tablespoons of Friendship, 1 Cup of Understanding, 1/2 Cup of Sweetness, 3 Tablespoons of Like, 6 Tablespoons of Love, 1/2 Cup of Trust, 4 Tablespoons of Goofiness and a pinch of Romance Desire and Commitment. Directions: Start with the basic ingredients of Love and Like, seasoned with Desire, Need and Commitment, then add 1/2 cup of Sweetness and stir until soft, but peaking. Add tablespoons of Goofiness until the lumps are gone, then continue to add Friendship until it is very smooth. Mix "briskly" until thick. Cook slowly – for too much heat too quickly, may scorch it, damaging your previous efforts. If this is to happen, make sure that you just get rid of the outer shell, and add the desired ingredients to the inside. Re-cook, and remember— that at the outer part was the only thing damaged and the insides still remain the same.

The quantity may be slightly reduced, but not equality. Note: It is perfectly acceptable to add a pinch of argument and misunderstanding: this adds flavor that’s appreciable.

Standardization Should be Banned
By Keaton Wall

Math, critical reading and writing, the three basic genres of the SAT. A standardized test to measure what my intelligence should be.

What about science and history, do they not count? The stress of these standardized tests continues to mount.

The score I receive determines my collegiate future
And here I thought education should nurture.
Witch’s Stew
By: Shawn Thomas

4 cups water, not see through
3 alligator claws, straight from the bayou
2 foot intestine, from swine will do
1 child’s eyeball, make sure its blue
For exactly 7 days, let that brew
Cooking something sweet, this isn’t voodoo
When it’s done, stir ‘round until goo
Consider adding sugar, never mind, eww
4 ingredients, for a perfect witch’s stew.

Rain
By: Shawn Thomas

Rain
Recycled, peaceful
Falling, refreshing, cleaning
Bringer of new life
Shower

Picture
By: Justin Vadukumcherry

The night is but a swirl of lights
The stars dance and flicker away
The smooth lights reflect off the
People, as they glance up for a look
The wind blows with a swirl
And everyone seems to twirl
The night is silent, but louder than ever. The silence is beautiful yet scary. So much without so little.
The sky becomes mesmerizing,
Lost without words the people are speechless.

No worries
By: Justin Vadukumcherry

It was warm and the sun was bright
I could feel the wind tickle my back
As it slithered around my neck
Children running and screaming
All around. Mothers calling their children
Fathers laughing. The mood was set
The pool was wet. I was drenched in water
Cold, shivering for heat. I was waiting in line
The diving board. I wanted to fly high and soar.
I wanted to jump without worries. Every step up
A surge of energy lifted my spirits. I could
Feel the energy in my legs. I ran and couldn’t stop

Ice Cream
By: Haseeb Wajid

I love so many flavors
Cookies and Cream mixed with
English Toffee
Cake added to it makes everything taste better
Reach for a spoon
Enjoy it as much as possible
Always
Make sure you always eat more

Family
By: Haseeb Wajid

Family
very loving
very caring siblings
Providing a strong affection
Kindred
The Broken Heart  
By: Haseeb Wajid

Why did she break my heart
Why did she pierce it with a dart
I can’t tell whether she likes me or not
I feel like my mind is tied in a knot
What am I to make of this
I just want to be free
She took my heart away
I wish I could just be free
If she doesn’t like me
Then why does she tease me
One moment she notices
Other times she doesn’t
Just let me be
Don’t talk to me
Let me forget you
So that I don’t need to wonder
Or ponder
On this girl
That stole my heart

Scenes of my Life  
By: Jessica Woolsey

Greenery hung all around me
I watched the animals swing between branches
I listened to the birds hum their sweet words
Then, something stirred in the bushes
I admired this place, although it was haunting and dark
The noise got louder and made its mark
I begin walking, then running, then frantically jumping
Fear filled my lungs
I escaped, leaving the edge of this place

People walked hurriedly past
Pushing, shoving, throughout this city that was so vast
The streets were bustling
Sounds were loud here
But the aroma, oh
It was dirty and smelly
This wasn’t a place I wanted to be
The busy life just wasn’t for me

“Curious Cat”  
By: Trey Weishaar

Curiosity killed the cat
The cat was just too shy
Or maybe it was quite sly
Either way, it was fat
And on its belly it lay flat
Sometimes it couldn’t get by
And jumping, it thought it could fly
Curiously it chased the rat.

What’s going to happen to this cat?
Perhaps it may stay alive
But for that there is no stat
I reached down and gave it a pat
It’s good to see it thrive
As its lives are down to five

Beachin’  
By: Jessica Woolsey

The breeze was warm, the ocean was cool
The seashells were sprinkled throughout the sand like jewels
The yellow sun was remarkably bright
But not like the stars that hung overhead at night
This place, just wasn’t like the two others
I think I’m going to stay here
For many of years
RAINDROPS
By: Jessica Woolsey

A
drip, a drop
the rain falls down.
Drenching my clothes, wetting
my hair. Funny how the weather mimics
my feelings. My emotions flood down, drenching
my heart. My head is muddy. My eyes are soaked. The light
is nowhere to be found. On days like these, the sun
refuses to shine. I’m looking forward to tomorrow,
having hope for a brighter day and
what once was.

Where?
By: Kelsey Toler

Where do we go from here?
When our time sifts away like the sand on the shore

Where do we go from here?
When we stand upon the threshold of two worlds

Where do we go from here?
Hurtling through space; a comet forged from earthly material

Where do we go from here?
Growing brilliant with grace and love

Where do we go from here?
Reunited and strong once again with others we love

Where do we go from here?
Never knowing what evil and sadness are

Where do we go from here?
Looking down, showering the ones we’ve gone before

Where do we go from here?
Waiting, for when we can embrace once again.
My Only Wish  
By: Kelsey Toler

In the bustling flow of bodies  
So loud, it surrounds me  
So smelly, dirty, busy  
My mind drifts away

Golden sun, mirrored by sand  
A breeze caresses my skin  
My heart swells like the ocean  
I see, as I gather seashells on the shore

Oh, to jump, to run  
To walk without any fear  
Time swings like a pendulum  
And I listen, as my dream disappears.

First Day of School  
By: Jessie Um

Unfortunately, it looks like we are back at it  
A brand new year and I already want to throw a fit  
I’m patiently waiting for time to go by  
Even though I know it will be a very long day  
Time is going but going by very slowly  
I just have to wait very patiently  
Can summer just come already?  
Just thinking about getting busy makes me angry

Oh, to jump, to run  
To walk without any fear  
Time swings like a pendulum  
And I listen, as my dream disappears.

Serpent  
By: Kelsey Toler

She walked down the dusty lane—when, oh dear!  
A snake, near her came  
Fleeting, running, like a train  
Never to play again

Rocket  
By: Jessie Um

1
Two
Three
And Blast

Off it goes into  
Space, not knowing  
When it will come back  
To Earth or if it’ll ever come  
Back at all, but all we have to do is wait  
Hoping that it  
Will come back

Motherly love  
By Vy Trinh

My child, my love at first sight  
Your eyes give me life, always forever  
Your smile I yearn and adore, alright!  
Your tears I fear, it is whatever  
Your body I protect twenty four- seven  
It is a hobby, not a job  
I’ll give you all that I got.
The Pearl Necklace
By Samiha Badwan

Rae was sad about her grandmother’s death. Even though she and her family knew that it was only a matter of time, Rae and her grandmother were extremely close. “Grandmother Rose was my hero. I knew that I could go to her with anything, and she would still love me,” Rae said at the funeral. Rose had given Rae a long strand of pearls a few years ago when Rae turned sixteen. She told Rae that necklace was the one she wore every day when she was a teenager. It was not just an ordinary necklace, though. This strand of pearls had a pink pendant in the very center with her initials engraved in it. When she was thinking of what to bury with her grandmother, Rae thought of the necklace. She knew that her grandmother’s happiest days were those when she was a teenager, so she decided that the necklace would be the best thing to leave with her grandmother. After giving a eulogy, Rae walked over to the casket and gently laid the necklace beside her grandmother. It was such a hard thing to do because Rae knew that she was saying goodbye to her best friend as well as the one item that reminded her of Grandmother Rose.

Weeks of mourning went by, and Rae tried her best to go about life even though she had this huge hole in her heart. She was finally caught up on all of the school work she had missed when her best friends Lucie and Grace asked her to go to dinner with them one Friday night. Rae was a bit hesitant as she was still not sure that she could go out with her friends without breaking down and crying when she thought of her grandmother. “Come on, Rae. We think it’d be good for you to get out. The only place you go these days is school. We wanna cheer you up. Please just come to dinner!” Grace begged.

Rae thought about it for a while before she let out a sigh and said, “Okay fine. I’ll go to dinner.” She knew they were right, that she needed to get out. Plus, Grandmother Rose would want her to go.

They went out to eat to their favorite Mexican restaurant that Friday evening. Over the course of their high school years, this place had become their spot, the one place they could go when they were happy, mad, or sad. They had their regular meals and chatted about the usual-boys, the latest gossip, and their favorite TV shows. Rae looked down at her phone and saw that it was already 9:30. “Guys, I should get going. I have that Calculus test tomorrow, and I haven’t studied yet.”

“Oh yeah, we do have a test in that class, don’t we?” Lucie asked. They left their cash on the table and headed out to their cars.

As Rae walked towards her car, she saw something shining on the windshield. “Could it be? No, there is no way,” she thought. She walked closer to the windshield and thought she was hallucinating. Her grandmother’s pearl necklace! It was right before her eyes on the windshield. “GUYS! Come here right now!”

Lucie and Grace ran over when they heard the fear in Rae’s voice. “What’s wrong?” Rae was silent as she held up a finger to point at the windshield. Lucie and Grace were both as shocked as Rae was. They were both at the ceremony and knew the story behind the necklace. “There’s no way, Rae. Someone’s probably just playing a sick joke on us,” Grace said.

“No. This is the one. Look at the pendant.” They took a closer look and sure enough, Rose’s initials were engraved on the necklace.

“Wait what is that?” Lucie noticed a small piece of paper tucked in the windshield behind the necklace.

It was a letter that read: “Dear Rae, if you want to know why I’ve followed you here, meet me in the woods behind El Azteca.” The girls were mortified at this point. El Azteca was the restaurant they were at right now, and the woods were just down the street.
Grace and Lucie both looked at Rae and firmly said, “NO.” They knew that Rae was already the adventurous one of the group, and now that someone had dug up her grandmother’s necklace she was surely going to want to.

“I’m sorry, but I’m GOING to find out who wrote this letter and how they got Grandmother Rose’s necklace. This is not a joke to me.”

Before they could stop her, Rae was running to the woods. By the time Grace and Lucie caught up to her, they were practically in the middle of nowhere. Just as Rae’s friends suspected, there was no one and nothing in the woods waiting for them. “Rae, why on earth did you fall for this? We told you, it’s probably just some heartless idiot trying to mess with your feelings.”

“Well whoever did this is going to pay,” Rae was fuming with anger. Rae and her friends ended up going home that night, and Rae told everything to her parents. They comforted her because they knew she was upset, but at the same time, they begged her not to look into this too much because they really felt that it was just a rude prank. Rae was annoyed that both her friends and her parents were telling her to ignore something so serious. She decided she was going to have to look into this on her own.

The next day at school, she thought about whether anyone had been acting strange toward her to figure out whether it really was a prank or not. She couldn’t think of anyone, but then Gabe came to mind. Gabe was a football player who was in many of Rae’s classes. He had been flirting with her a lot lately, but she was just now remembering how weird he acted last Friday at school. He asked Rae to hang out with him several times, but she kept turning him down because she was still so upset about her grandmother. Was he mad that she went out with Grace and Lucie and not him? Come to the think of it, Rae thought, he was at the funeral, so he knew about the necklace. But still, why would he pull a prank like that if he was interested in her?

The bell rang, and Rae walked over to her desk in Calculus class. Gabe, who normally sat behind her, sat a few rows over today. Rae couldn’t understand what was going on with him. After class, she caught up to him before he could sneak out. “Hey Gabe,” she said.

“Uh yeah?” He was clearly wanting to avoid her today.

“It was you, wasn’t it?”

“What are you talking about?” he asked.

“I know you took my grandmother’s necklace and put in on my car last weekend.”

“No I—”

“Don’t even try to lie. Why’d you do it?”

Gabe exhaled, and said “Ahh okay. Fine. I did it. Well kind of. You see, the necklace on your car was just a replica of your grandmother’s necklace. I really wanted to hang out with you that night, and I couldn’t think of any other way to get your attention because I heard you talk about how much the necklace meant to you.”

“Gabe, are you serious? You made me think that someone dug up my grandmother’s necklace out of her grave. That was not a good way to get me to hang out with you.”

“I know,” he began, “and I’m really sorry. I felt guilty about tricking you right away, and that’s why there was no one waiting in the woods.”

“Well I guess I’m glad you know what you did was wrong, but I’m still mad that you would do something like that,” Rae said.

“I know. It was a stupid idea,” Gabe said with his head down.

“Well Grandmother Rose did always teach me how important forgiveness is, so I forgive you, Gabe. But please, next time you wanna hang out, don’t go looking for copies of my grandmother’s stuff. It’s just a little weird.”
The Fishing Shirt’s story

By: Collin Benbrook

Yo, what’s up? I’m Jack, and I’m a fishing shirt. I can already hear you thinking, “What, shirts don’t talk or write.” Well I’m here to tell you that you’re wrong. Yeah, shirts definitely are alive too. Apparently we’re just not cool enough to get a movie about our life like toys did. But my life kind of sucks anyways, for real. I wake up every day in a dark closet. The closet occasionally opens, and that is the scary part my friend. Every time that the closet opens, I pray to Cottoney, the God of the shirts, that today is not my day to be worn. You see, I wouldn’t mind being worn if I was a tight Hooters shirt in a Hooters girl’s closet. But I’m not. I’m a fishing shirt in Bob’s closet. Bob is overweight, hairy, and is just plain disgusting. Yeah, that’s right. When I get worn, I am strapped down skin tight to a fat hairy man. Sounds lovely, doesn’t it? But it gets worse. Bob will put me on, then he goes for his morning cup of coffee. I swear, he spills some on me every time he wears me. EVERY TIME. And it’s not good coffee either. It’s always black with no sugar or creamer, and it tastes terrible. Oh, and I may have forgot to mention, shirts have senses as well. We have the same five senses that humans have in fact.

Anyways, on with my day. After I get coffee spilled on me, I have to listen to Bob’s wife chew him out for going fishing. I’ll hear, “BOB! No fishing today. The car needs washed and the garbage needs taken out.” This will go on for four or five minutes, until Bob finally screams, “WOMAN, I’M GOING FISHING TODAY.” Me and Bob will head out the door and into his old Ford truck. He starts the truck, and I’m just starting to feel relaxed and comfortable when Bob lights up a cigarette. Yup, I’ve already had hot coffee spilled on me today and now I am about to have hot cigarette ash spilled on me. Great. Oh well, it only gets worse. The highlight of my day is when we pick up Bob’s friend, Bill. Bill is a little bit crazy, and he is usually quite drunk by the time we pick him up. The reason I like Bill is that he tells the most fascinating stories about the government. He swears up and down that they have it out for us and that they’re spying on us and can’t be trusted. I wonder what a government is anyways.

After the car ride, we finally show up to the pond, and Bob and Bill will get their fishing lines out and begin to fish. This is actually pretty calm and nice for me. I get to relax and enjoy nature. That is, until Bob catches a fish. Bob will get so excited and start screaming, “OH MY GOD. OH MY GOD,” and then starts reeling the line in like a mad man. He holds the fish up and the fish splashes water all over me! After that, Bob takes the fish off the line and puts it in the cooler. Then, he completely ruins my whole life. He wipes off his stinky hands on me. Do you know how bad fish smells? The only way to describe the smell of fish, is that it smells like fish. And I think everyone knows that awful smell. After this goes on for a few hours, we go home and I get thrown into a giant white machine that spins me in circles, soaks me in water and makes me throw up. After I get out of that, Bob puts me into another machine that is so hot and spins me in circles again until I’m dry. After that, he’ll put me on a clothes hanger and back to the closet I go. Finally, I’m back to my safe home. But there is one more problem. None of the other shirts want to talk to me or be friends with me because I still smell like fish. Yeah, some life I have.

Senses & Food

By: Steven Phan

When I see food,
My salivary glands begin to overreact

When I see food,

My smell sense begins to overreact

When I see food,

My vision begins to underreact
The Hags of Hawaii
By: Kourtni Blomker

“Ashley, come on. You’re soooo slow.”

My brother Trent yells, several feet ahead of me. I knew I shouldn’t have gone on this stupid volcano tour. My time would be much better spent tanning and relaxing by the pool, flirting with the occasional muscular tan boy at our resort. But Trent had been adamant about seeing the “super cool” dormant volcano, and the ‘rents had some super gushy date night thing planned, meaning I was forced to take him (though the $40 bribe was much appreciated.) Why would anyone want to stare at some big blackish rocks anyway? We had already been on the tour for about 45 minutes; I’d gotten bored within 5.

“Come with me to see the volcano’s core, you could save the world.”

An old woman startles me from behind. She’s old, haggard, and her rotten teeth make it look like she must be on something.

“Beat it granny, I want nothing to do with that stupid volcano.”

She huffs and makes her way up the trail.

“Quite the character, huh?”

I look at the cute boy walking on my left. We strike up a conversation and talk for about 10 minutes as we walk among the charred rocks until the tour guide calls out that the tour is over. I give the boy my number and then turn to look for Trent.

“Trent?”

He’s no longer in front of me. I frantically push aside a few other tourists, searching for his face. Just then the ground begins to shake. The volcano!

“TRENT!”

“ASHLEY!”

I almost miss him as he is dragged into an opening in the side of the volcano by the old hag from earlier. I sprint towards the opening, once through I find myself winding through a dark cool tunnel. The shaking is beginning to intensify, and I’m starting to get warm. What feels like hours, but was most likely minutes” I burst through into a clearing. There are 3 other hag-like women circling Trent, with a wall of lava behind them. I pick up a large rock at my feet.

“...accept this sacrifice, that we may destroy this world in fire and create it anew.”

One of them pulls out a knife, and I lunge at her hitting her hard over the head with the rock.

“Trent, RUN.”

He pushes the lady nearest him hard into the wall of rock. The final woman reaches for him, and I push her towards the curtain of lava. I just grab Trent’s hand and run for the passageway. Finally we bust through the opening into the light.

“Hey the rumbling stopped.”

“Next time you want to see some super cool volcano, you’re taking Mom or Dad.” We both burst out laughing with relief.

May through August
By Kourtni Blomker

Summer
Hot relaxing
Bike swim play
Why must it end?
Sleep read unwind
Endless fleeting
Break
Super Glue
By Ellie Breaux

Every Wednesday night my parents go out on date night to get dinner with friends. I recently turned eleven years old and they have started letting me stay home and babysit my brother, Carter, while they are gone. He is four years younger than me. I feel grown up that they trust that I am responsible enough to hold down the fort. They are not gone for long though, so I know that they worry while they are away.

I wave as my parents back out of the garage and start down the driveway. They told me they are going to get dinner and will be back in two hours. We don’t do much while they are gone, I usually go outside and play with the horses while my brother watches TV or plays with his Pokémon cards. We don’t cause trouble, and we live out in the middle of nowhere so there’s not much trouble we can get into. Unless you get really creative. Today the sun is shining and it’s not too hot so I decide that I will swing on the swing we have in our big oak tree.

As I swing on the swing I do not worry about what my brother is doing. He knows not to start a fire inside or anything, so as long as he can find me if he needs to I can do whatever I want. I’m a pretty cool babysitter if I do say so myself. I swing back and forth and spin round and round and round until I am dizzy. I hope that mom and dad bring home their leftovers for us to eat tonight!

When I am too dizzy to continue spinning on the swing I stumble inside and collapse on the couch. SpongeBob is on. Of course it is. Carter must have been watching it while I was swinging. I assume he has already seen this episode and so he’s probably upstairs playing in his room.

I don’t know how long I have been laying here enthralled by SpongeBob, but after a while I realize I don’t hear any sounds coming from upstairs. I get up from the TV and yell upstairs to see if he’s up there. No response. As I turn around the kitchen door to our garage flies open and Carter is standing there. Both hands are clasped to his forehead and he has a horrified look on his face. I almost laugh because he looks so silly.

“Where were you??” I ask him.

“Um, I was in the garage.” He responds, but he still looks horrified.

“What? What did you do?” I questioned. He still has not taken his hands down from his forehead. I walk toward him, laughing now.

“Well, I, um…I was playing with the super glue, and, well…” He takes his hands away from his face, “I may have gotten a rock stuck to my forehead.”

I cannot control myself. I lose it. I am laughing and crying at the same time as I watch my brothers’ horrified face contort with a rock super glued smack dab in the middle of his forehead. It’s not a pebble either. It’s probably the side of the palm of his hand and it is heavy enough to pull the skin down with its weight.

“How in the world did you manage this?” I ask, still laughing and crying. He is now frustrated with the situation and can see tears welling up in his eyes. “Did you really super glue a rock to your forehead?”

“Just get it off!!” He screams at me. I examine the rock and think we should send him in to advertise for super glue. It is stuck.

“Come in here and we will run it under hot water and see if that helps.” I lead him and his rock to the bathroom where we dunk his head in the sink and let hot water run. Every few minutes I slowly peel away the rocks edges, but it is not without sacrifice of his forehead and many tears. I can see a large red circle appearing as the rock begins to loosen.
“How in the world did this happen? Did you think it wouldn’t stick? Well I guess they call it super glue for a reason!” I keep repeating as we work the rock away. Carter has not said anymore, too embarrassed, too much pain, too much regret. Finally we work the rock free and we look at the large red circle left on his forehead. Carter begins to cry again. I laugh.

“Well how was your evening?” My mom asks as her and my dad unloads their leftovers for us. Carter has been upstairs for the last forty-five minutes.

“Oh so much fun!” I say, grinning ear to ear, as my parents give me wary looks. Just then Carter appears at the foot of the stairs, eyes to the ground, forehead shining like a new tattoo. I see my parents eyes widen and say, “We had a lot of fun didn’t we Carter?”

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**Life Lesson**

**By Jasmine Carpenter**

As I sat in Terminal C in Hartfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, I saw a man walking in the distance with a bright red shirt. This shirt in particular stood out to me because it was covered in pockets, from top to bottom. The man continued to walk in my direction and realized that someone was staring at him. As soon as we made eye contact, I looked away and remembered how rude it is to stare. Even though people-watching in airports and other locations was one of my hobbies since my career involves a great deal of traveling, I sometimes forgot my manners. Then, the man was in front of me and asked if the seat next to me was available. I immediately responded, told him that the seat was available and looked away. I looked down at my watch only to see that I had two more hours before my flight departed to Italy.

After about ten minutes, the man looked over at me and asked about my trip. I told him that I was going on a business trip for work and it was nothing exciting. He looked surprised for a moment until I asked him why he was traveling to Italy. He looked sad for a moment, then smiled and said that he’s going in memory of his father.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what happened to your father?” I asked.

“Well... it’s a long story, but...” and he began to tell me all about his childhood with his father. He told me about their travels and father-son fishing trips. Their favorite things to do together were traveling and fishing. They planned to go to Italy together one day, but never had the chance due to his father suddenly dying from an aneurysm. He emphasized how important it was to live each day like it’s your last.

“I wish that my father could be on this trip with me, but I’m going to enjoy this trip enough for both of us. I’m taking this as a life lesson: don’t plan for the future, but live each day you have left to the fullest.” He said.
Camping
By Samantha Bryant

Sarah stared out the window of the small coffee shop located in the quaint town of Tomahawk, Tennessee watching the leaves blow across the ground. Fall had set in and the thought of the season to follow sent chills across her. Fall was her favorite season because of the lovely smell of harvest in the air. However, it could be a lonely time and her boyfriend had been gone for a week on holiday with potential stock buyers. The coffee she was drinking was a dark expresso filled with strong, robust flavor. Tasting the bitterness of the coffee made her mind wonder through all of her mixed emotions and then to other parts of the world. The coffee beans that filled her cup had come from miles away . . . traveling all the way from the fields in South America to her cup, giving her the warmth she needed on this lonely fall day.

Following her visit to the coffee shop Sarah decided that she needed to get away for a while. Just a small camping trip to Cherokee National Forest would help cure the restlessness that flowed through her. None of her friends were really into that sort of things and she wondered why. The outdoors was a mysterious place, and if you separate yourself from the hassles of everyday life, it can be utterly refreshing. Her favorite part about camping was laying out beneath the stars and listening to the sounds of the forest. She didn’t want to go alone on the trip so she began to search through her contacts to find any willing soul that was ‘brave’ enough to leave their phone and other technology behind for the weekend.

After looking through her contacts she contemplated calling her boyfriend and begging him to cut his trip short, but she was too proud to plead for something of that sort. All of a sudden it hit her! Why not ask her cousin, Nathaniel? They had gone on trips like this before and he was probably on fall break this weekend. She set down everything she was doing and called him immediately.

They met just outside of Knoxville, so they could carpool a majority of the way to Cherokee Forest. The goal was to pack lightly so they would be able to track deep into the forest and avoid the annoyance of other amateur hikers, but like always Nathaniel had brought way more than needed; including an immense alcohol stash. Sarah had to shut him down on all that nonsense, but they did agree upon leaving the bourbon in his pack for the pure fact that it warms the body head to toe. As they drove through Tennessee, the mountains became more prominent and the roads became windier. The sun was rising over the mountains when they reached the park and it a glorious sight. Colors burst through the clouds, illuminating the sky with warmth. Starring at something so beautiful made her wonder how people did not believe in a divine creator.

Loading everything they needed onto their backs didn’t take very long, and minutes later they had set out on the nearest trail heading east deeper into the mountains. After about two hours of hiking they reached a stream and decided to rest while they were near water. Nathaniel collected water and filtered it into two separate canteens. As they looked around for the trail, a slight fear sunk into them as they realized the trail was no longer in sight. How far had they gone from the trail? Sarah quickly pulled out her compass to get them going back in the right direction, but something was wrong with it. The arrow was going back and forth as if it could not tell what way was up and what way was down. Fear would have overcome an inexperienced hiker at this point in the game, but they both remained calm. What was the point of freaking out? They had prepared for a five day trip and they knew what they were doing, so instead of going back towards the trail, they crossed the stream and started up the side of the adjacent mountain side. Little did they know that they were going deeper and deeper into uncharted territory, leaving the well-worn trail far behind them.

Hiking became hard as they traveled up the side of the mountain with just the ram and other wildlife trails to guide them. After some while they reached a small clearing with level, grass-covered ground. Nearly the perfect spot to set up camp and prepare for the night ahead. The sun was setting quickly, so they needed to build a fire as soon as possible. They separated duties in order to set up
camp more quickly. Sarah began to unpack the pup
tents and set them up while Nathaniel gathered
kindling and logs for the fire. After about an hour
the camp was fully set up with the fire roaring. Soon
thereafter they began to talk about the trails and
how they were going to get back to civilization.
Sarah had a worried look on her face and her cousin
noticed it, so to rescue her from engulfing fear he
suggested to break out the bourbon.

Breaking out the bourbon was possibly the
idea for that moment in time. Soon they were both
feeling the warmth of not only the fire but the
alcohol. After a few good drinks they began to talk
about all their troubles as if they could leave them
behind when they left in the morning. Sarah talked
about her relationship woes and Nathaniel did the
same; except everything seemed to be going great
for him. He had found the perfect girl and explained
he soon planned to propose to this amazing
woman. Sarah had been expecting a proposal from
her boyfriend; the nice dinner had been planned, he
had sent her flowers along with a beautiful evening
dress, and picked her up from her apartment. That
last evening they had spent together was going
perfect until he told her that he would be going
away again on another business trip. That news had
sent her to the coffee shop that day; it had made
her mind and heart go astray from the idea of them
being together.

After a long night of conversing and starring
out into the stars counting as the fell to the earth,
they retired to their tents to rest up. In the morning
they needed to find the trail and return back to
their initial idea of a campsite. They would wake up
and finish up the side of the mountain so they could
get a real good view of the surrounding area. Sarah
listened quietly to the whistling of the wind through
the trees, the occasional hoot of an owl, and the
howling of the wolves out in the distance. She was
soon washed into a deep sleep as her worries faded
away.

When they awoke the next morning, it was
under uncertain circumstances. They had heard
stomping of hooves in the distance and the whinny
of a horse soon followed. A park ranger was close
by! They hurried out of their tents and began to
shout for assistance. Sarah was blowing her rescue
whistle and Nathaniel was fanning the fire yelling to
the park ranger. After a few short seconds a horse
and rider appeared into the clearing. It was their
lucky day according to the ranger, but Sarah knew
they could have managed their way back.
Regardless, they were led back to the trail and back
to safety. Their trip continued for two more days
until they decided it was time to return back to
civilization. Reluctantly they left the trails back to
the car. The trip had been one of the best times of
their lives, but they had to return back to their lives.
Although the trip was over, they would never forget
the sense of freedom that came from straying off
the trail and creating their own path.

The Office
By: Bobby Varghese

Deadlines deadlines are no fun,
Stacks of paperwork I take on the run.
Mondays bring such gloom and sorrow,
For I know the printers won’t work till tomorrow.
Onwards to Tuesday and my co-workers are
thinking,
Is there an earthquake or is this office sinking?
Hump day Wednesday, we’re half-way there,
Paycheck soon please, so I can afford dental care.
Looking out my window on Thursday for something
inspiring,
Glancing at the Cost-co across the street and
wondering if their hiring.
Thank goodness, it’s Friday, working shall soon
cease
What’s that on my paycheck? Why it’s a salary
increase!
**Auto Parts**

By Alyssa Farbak

I arrived at work and opened the dealership like normal, made my morning cup of coffee, and sat at my desk thinking about how bad I could rip someone off today. Possibly an old couple? Maybe a clueless women? All I knew was that I had to make money, and lots of it, and it didn’t matter how. Ten o’clock rolled around and finally a customer walked in, an older man about 60. He said he needed a car that was good on gas millage, and had less than 50,000 miles on it. I knew just the one! It was a 7 year old Volvo that I had turned the miles back from 100,000 to just under 50,000. Not only was the car’s millage turned back but most if not almost all the parts were stolen off of cars parked in the alley behind me. I brought the man over and he started to look at it. He opened the hood and looked around; he seemed pleased with it. We started to talk prices and settled at $6,000. In my head all I could think about was the $3,000 profit I made by switching the miles back. He signed the papers and was off with what he thought was a good deal.

A few days later back at the dealer the same older man came in, but this time with a few police officers. I started to sweat and my mind started to race. The man said he was and undercover police officer sent in to buy a car due to rumors of stolen auto parts and fraud. The officers said they were able to trace back 7 parts from the Volvo I sold him to 5 different cars in the area. He went on to say that I was under arrest and the used car dealership would close.

**Reality**

By Sheri Chau

“You know that feeling when you park your car in the parking lot and all of a sudden, you’re like... how did I even get here?” Samantha pondered.

May shakes her head in disagreement.

Year 2115. It’s been a hundred years since telepathic communication was discovered and we still can’t understand each other... Sometimes, I wonder if May might just not have fully learned how to use her ability to communicate.

Instantly, May revokes, “Samantha. No, I am perfectly fine. You’re the one who is crazily talking to yourself. You probably just went off into a daze this morning. I don’t understand why you always imagine and think we’re... being controlled or something. Anyway, I'll catch you after class.”

May enters a learning cubicle as I watch her eyes close. It just doesn’t make sense how we can slip into a box and suddenly when we wake up, information has magically telepathically entered our brain. There must be some deeper reason for how everything is the way it is. I walk to the next cubicle and scan my time sheet then enter the cubicle for “class.” As I close my eyes for class, metal cuffs spring out of the arm rests and the bottom of the seat. A needle then springs out of the cuffs and injects a substance into my veins.

When I wake up, I am strapped onto a chair in an auditorium filled with people identified with tags labeled as “SIMS.”
Privileged

By Tyler Giebelhausen

I’m the coolest kid there is; my name is Chaz Charleston IV and I’m the most respected man on campus. My dad always taught me respect comes in two ways, the way where other people look up to you for being inspiring, or the way where you look down on others and they fear you. People respect me because they fear me. I come from a long line of stock brokers who made a few good investments themselves and built their fortune. I plan on continuing that line when I graduate from college. My mother’s side of the family has some good bonds with a big Italian family if you know what I mean. None of the university staff dared to mess with me because they know my father is a major donator and a good friend of the chancellor. Basically, I can do whatever the hell I want. If a teacher ever gives me a grade I don’t like, they have 30 seconds to fix it before the chancellor is on the phone. If one of the frats decide to pick on me at a flag football game, well they can expect a house fire courtesy of my mother’s family real soon. People say I’m a smartass but I have a better view of the world than them because I sit a little higher than them. My father tells me that I have to quit relying on the family to carry me through life, but all these people are out to get me because I have so much money. I don’t ask for these people to come after me; I guess I just have a target on my back. One thing that really annoys me is that my dad makes me walk to college every day. Yea I live a mile from campus, but everybody else I know drives to school, and it’s not like we can’t afford it, but he insists it’ll give me character.

I was annoyed this particular day because I had to walk to school on my day off to chew out a professor because they gave me an unfair grade on an exam. I met all the requirements, but Dr. English thought I had way too many grammatical errors and marked me down to 85% which is silly. After meeting with the professor and making a few threats, I got the grade changed to a 95%. Pleased with the result, I went to the nearby steakhouse to eat and grab a beer. As the server came over, I recognized her; she was the server who spilled a beer on me when I was there with my date the previous week. I had taken care of her for that. She came over very timid and asked what I wanted. I replied “I’ll take an 8 ounce filet mignon and a Stella Artois to drink, preferably in the glass and not my lap.” The server shot me a dirty look and walked away. She can be mad at me, but she knows if she tries something funny, she’ll regret it. After enjoying my meal and leaving a light tip, I started to walk home. The steakhouse was out of the way between campus and my house so I decided to cut through one of the side streets. I started to curse my dad under my breath for making me walk; it was so cold out and I hated the cold. I should’ve just made my dad pay for me to go to college in Florida. As I was walking, I noticed a man slowly walk towards me. Oh great, another bum going to ask me for money; I wish they would stop begging and just get a job of their own. As he came to a stop in front of me, we made eye contact, and I said, “I don’t have any change for you; try getting a job.” Suddenly the man grabbed me by the neck and threw me down in the nearby alleyway and pulled a knife on me.

He said, “give me your wallet and your phone and your jacket!”
I sneered and said, “do you know who I am? Walk away now and I’ll be merciful.”

The man kicked me in the head and replied, “I don’t give a damn who you are; give me your wallet.”

I was shocked; this man honestly had no idea who I was or what I could do. My father’s people were going to have to sink this man. He then pressed the blade into my neck; luckily he hadn’t cut it, but he repeated, “give me your wallet!” I gave the man my wallet, phone, and jacket to avoid any further trouble, and he ran off. I got up and ran to one of the businesses nearby and asked to use their phone to call the police and my father. The police finally came and I gave them a report. When my father finally arrived, I told him I wanted the guy to be taken care of. He told me to calm down and asked me what the guy looked like. I hadn’t really thought about it but the guy had a bandana over his face so I couldn’t make out any facial features. I told my father this and he told me there was nothing he could do about it. I was about to get outraged and yell at my father but in that moment I realized that no matter how many connections or how much power I have, I have to be able to fend for myself; otherwise this world will eat me alive. From that point out I stopped using my connections (as much as possible) to get what I wanted and instead relied on my work.
Kayla’s version of The Bernstein’s’ B Book

By Kayla Gray

Big Blue
Big Blue Bird
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug, Babbling Blowfish
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug, Babbling Blowfish, Bopping Balls
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug, Babbling Blowfish, Bopping Balls, Biking Backwards
BAMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!!!!
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug, Babbling Blowfish, Bopping Balls, Biking Backwards, Bam Billy’s Bowl’s
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug, Babbling Blowfish, Bopping Ball,s Biking Backwards, Bam Billy’s Bowl’s and Barbara’s Breadbaskets
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug, Babbling Blowfish, Bopping Balls, Biking Backwards, Bam Billy’s Bowl’s and Barbara’s Breadbaskets and Bobby’s Banana Boxes
Big Blue Bird, Brown Bug, Babbling Blowfish, Bopping Balls, Biking Backwards, Bam Billy’s Bowl’s and Barbara’s Breadbaskets and Bobby’s Banana Boxes and Buster’s Bugle Band
And that is what....
Popped Baby Bird’s Balloon.

The Worst Day Ever

By John Hunter

Today was easily the worst day of my life. It all started while I was driving to school. It was a particularly dreary day with a wind chill approaching zero. Needless to say, it wasn’t a day you would want to go for an afternoon stroll. The previous week, Mother Nature decided to bless us with a white Christmas. However, I think she went a little overboard for most people’s taste. In most places, the snow accumulated to nearly 6 inches. Thank goodness, I had a nice truck to keep me from getting stuck.

As I made my 10 minute drive to school, I noticed one of my friends stuck in the snow. He was just spinning his wheels in his little BMW and going nowhere. I made it a point to slow down, laugh and flip him off. There was no malice in the gesture as we did this to each other all the time. However, I wanted to make sure he saw me. As I looked in my rearview mirror, I saw him getting out of his car to try and shovel some of the snow away from his wheels by hand. I began to feel bad. As I said before, it wasn’t a very pleasant day to be outside, especially without appropriate winter gear.

No sooner than thirty seconds after passing him, I heard a loud bang followed by a very hard rattle in my steering wheel. I immediately stopped the truck and pulled over to the side of the road. With great reluctance, I exited my truck and looked around to see if there was any damage to the vehicle. Sure enough, my rear passenger-side tire was completely shredded. I couldn’t believe it. I quickly realized that I would need to change the tire on the side of the road no more than a half mile from where my friend was stuck in the snow.

With numb fingers, I fumbled around with my jack and spare tire for nearly fifteen minutes. Finally, I had the tire in place ready to install and get on my way. As I looked up while tightening the last bolt, I saw my friend in his car slowing down, honking his horn and flipping me off. I couldn’t hear him through his car windows, but I saw his mouth move in a way that looked like “Payback is a (explitive).” As mad as I was that he didn’t stop, I had to laugh. That's what I get for not helping him when he needed it. As they say, karma always has a way of catching up to you sooner or later.
Penrose Street  
By Shawn Thomas, Sagar Patel, Ellie Breaux, Elizabeth Lemma

As I walk down the street, I can feel the presence of someone watching me. I glance around, taking in my surroundings for any sign of life. Nothing but run down houses and old trashcans vacate this block. The street lays cold and quiet. Not a window was lit in any house. If I hadn’t previously been here in the day time, I wouldn’t believe anyone even lived here. An empty, parked car lines the street ahead under the orange glow of the only street light. As I walk toward it, I see something move in the shadows. My heart starts racing. Just before I reach the car, a cat runs out in front of me. Panicked, I let out a scream before realizing what happened. It was only a cat, nothing scary about a cat. Once my heart rate returns to normal and I catch my breath, I continue past the car into the darkness. Not much farther, I hear something behind me. Quickly my imagination begins to run wild again. I try to calm myself down by saying it must have been the wind or that stupid cat. Even I can’t believe that lie and begin to walk faster toward to destination.

After what seemed like ages, I reach the last house on the street. It’s easily the oldest house around and certainly needs the most work. I push open the rusty, iron fence gate as I walk up the sidewalk. The porch is missing several boards I have to navigate around to reach the front door. As I reach for the doorbell, I find myself hoping this is the right house.

The ring of the doorbell was haunting, and the silence of the night seemed to magnify the sinister sound. The door slowly, but surely, opened, and the creak of its opening was almost piercing. In front of me, was no one. How had the door managed to open by itself? A shiver coursed through my body, in anticipation of what was to come. I hesitantly walked forward, “Hello. Is there anyone in here?” I walked further into the house. Once I reached mid-way into the house, I heard a loud slam. I jumped and turned around. The door had been shut. I quickly ran back to try to open the door, but it was no use. The door had been locked. My heart starts to race again, and I can feel panic set in. Calm down, I thought. Just finish what you have to do here and then figure out how to get out. You’ll be fine. I walked back further toward the house and said, “Hello, is there anyone here? Why is the door locked?” I heard a faint whisper upstairs. I couldn’t decipher the meaning so I went up the stairs and said again, “Hello, is there anyone there?”

The whisper grew louder and more pronounced.

Finally, I arrived inside a bedroom, where the source of the sound came from. The bedroom looked as normal as a bedroom could look, except for one strange detail. The bed had a faint layer of dust that covered it. No one must have slept in this room for quite some time. One last time, I said “Is there anyone there? Where are you?” All of a sudden, the closet door slammed open and I jumped back, frightened and anxious.

“GOT YOU! You should have seen the look on your face!!”

“OH MY GOSH YOU IDIOT. What did you have to go and do that for?” I screamed when I saw Carson shaking off cobwebs from his hair.

“Oh come on, it was just a joke!” He laughed and shoved me on his way out of the bedroom. I knew this was a bad idea. Whenever Carson’s in something, it’s usually a bad idea. I walk down the winding stairs and hear Carson moving things around in the main room. The door that I came through was still shut and I could see the lock tightly secure.

“Dude, why do we have to do this here?” I asked. Carson seemed genuinely unconcerned.

“No one comes around here, so they will never track us down.” Carson has dragged me along on another of his schemes to vandalize the Alumni President of our Fraternity’s house a few blocks away. Carson has brought all the tools, and had me meet him here.

“We. Are. Going. To. Get. Caught.” I tell him as I check the door. “And Carson, why the hell did
you lock the door on me? Now it’s stuck.” I say putting my full weight on it.

“I didn’t lock the door. It’s old, probably just jammed. But if you’re that scared that we’re going to get caught, then now the cops can’t get in.” Carson said holding up three cans of spray paint. Suddenly we heard footsteps running over our head. I internally freak out again and feel my pulse reach my ears.

“Whoa, ho, ho!” Carson yells, laughing. “What the hell was that?” He drops the cans of paint and starts for the stairs.

Carson is daring and willing to go to great lengths for some excitement, although, we share a desire to not get caught. We both make it to the stairs and are pushing each other trying to escape. When all of a sudden, we hear footsteps coming around the corner behind us. I whisper to Carson, “There isn’t enough time for us to get out, we have to hide!” Carson blares back, “are you crazy; if we get caught, we’re done for; they will kick us out!” “We don’t have a choice,” I snapped as I grabbed him by the arm and dragged him behind into one of the bedrooms.

Steps pounded down the hall. We heard a breathless voice say, “I know they’re here; I know what they plan on doing. Nobody is going to vandalize my house! We’ll find them. We’ll search every room.”

“Damn, we’ve got to get out,” Carson said softly, looking out the window.

“Uh, Carson,” I whispered back “that voice was not the voice of our Alumni President. In fact I think I’ve probably never heard that voice. It’s not from our fraternity.”

“Has to be. Who else could it be who would even care about us? We could try climbing out the window. There seems to be a porch roof underneath it. From that we could jump to the ground.”

I was about to decline when I heard the footsteps returning. Carson opened the window and jumped. CRASH! RIP! SCREECH! BOOM! SCRUMCH! I looked out the window at a gaping hole in the small roof. “Carson,” I screamed, forgetting all about getting caught. “Are you alive? Are you hurt?”

“Gotcha!” A stranger leaped into the room followed by two more guys.

We all looked at one another, puzzled until I heard Carson’s voice yelling, “Come help me, Dammit!”

I bounded around the three strangers and jumped down the stairs, flinging myself at the door. All I did was bruise myself and fall backwards to the floor. The door was still locked. The three guys who had followed me down the stairs, broke up laughing. “Good lock, that was a piece of genius,” one of them said.

“My bud is hurt outside. Open this door immediately.” I yelled.

“Why? What the hell were you doing in my grandma’s old house? Give us some answers, and maybe, just maybe, we’ll let you out.”

“Help me” I heard Carson yell. “We were just using this as a stopping off place so we could vandalize the Alumni President’s house. What did you think?”

“Hmmm. I thought you were going to steal from my house.”

“I don’t know who you are or what you have worth stealing. Let me out.”

The big guy gave me a steely stare, but said, “Joe, unlock the door and kick this guy out. I think his supplies will pay for the damage he’s done.

I rushed out to find Carson, sitting on the weeds near the window he jumped from. His jeans were ripped but he seemed able to walk. We took off. When we got home, we found he had some deep scratches, but otherwise seemed fine. “We’ve got to find another half-way house,” he mused.
Money
By Daniel Hemann

Things hadn’t been easy for Timothy since losing his wife a few years back. He was quite depressed but kept going for his 15 year old son and 12 year old daughter; they were all he had left. His kids were oblivious, but things were not as easy in any way without their mother around. As a successful real-estate broker, she brought in majority of the money for the household. He only really did the library job because of the kids, but quite frankly it just didn’t pay well. It was a work of love that now couldn’t support them without the help of his wife.

The mail today brought the 3rd and final notice that if his house payment didn’t come, the bank was going to be forced to evict them. He had appealed both of the other notices with plea letters explaining the situation. Unfortunately, as far as he could tell the bank manager was some high up honcho who didn’t care one bit about anything but the profit.

Tim skimmed the letter, all the same legal jargon as the other two except for the last line which he read, “We are sincerely sorry to notify you that this is your final notice, and that if payment is not received, the bank will be forced to evict you. Best wishes, Rick Lyons.”

Tim threw the letter on the counter. He couldn’t believe anyone could just disregard his situation. A late wife, two young kids, and a job that was service over profit; there was no hope.

He decided his last hope was to drive to Ricky’s house and talk to him. He had a past relationship with him; they had gone to the same high school that Tim now worked as librarian at. They weren’t much more than acquaintances back then either, but it was worth a shot.

Tim arrived just as Rick was closing the hatch on a gorgeous Cadillac Escalade which was packed to the brim with travel supplies and luggage. It was clear that he was going somewhere nice judging by his golf-like attire, amazing watch and fancy sunglasses.

Timothy greeted Rick and learned that he was headed to his vacation house in Peru for the next two weeks. Initially Rick seemed as if he knew nothing of Tim’s situation until after a bit of an emotional refresher. Then he started to recall the series of letters and notices.

In the most unemotional voice ever, Rick said, “Tim, that’s just how it is. I can’t help you. If I let your payment slide, then it’s my pay that suffers. How am I supposed to keep paying for all of this?” All as he gestured to his house, escalade and boat.

Tim shook his head and walked away; it was clear that it was a lost cause. Some people were too selfish to understand something like this. He stopped to get groceries on his way home while pondering what he was going to do. He would have to sell the house and move his family somewhere more economical. There was no other choice. The kids would certainly be opposed to moving from the place that held all the memories of their mother, but he had to tell them. He prepared himself as he turned the corner to the house.

In the drive was a gold Cadillac Escalade, packed to the brim with travel supplies. Rick stepped out and said, “Tim, I’m sorry about your wife. The bank will forgive you on your tardiness, and we can extend your loan to lower your payments. It’ll be alright.”

Weathery Emotions
By: Steven Phan

Breezy represents the calmness of the mind
Hot represents the anger and hatred stored
Rainy represents sorrow and sadness within one
Cloudy represents the confusion one is experiencing
Snowy represent the beauty lies within life
Stormy represents the demise that lies beyond
Sunny represents smiles and happiness in life
Hogwarts: A Reunion
By Elizabeth Lemma

It had been far too long. Hermione and Ron had decided to take some time off from working in the Ministry of Magic and travel the world. I had not seen those two in almost a year. I missed them. Terribly. What with my three kids, Lily, Albus, and Severus, already at Hogwarts, and my wife, Ginny, currently on the other side of the world playing Quidditch professionally, I feel like an old and lonely man. The three of us agreed to meet at Hogwarts, where we could visit our children, and catch up on the past year.

I had been looking forward to this for quite some time. Arriving at Hogwarts felt different, yet familiar at the same time. The hallowed hallways were filled to the brim with students heading to their classes and conversing with their friends. Some stopped in their tracks, begin to stare at me, and whisper to their friends, “Is that Harry Potter?” and then scurry to their next class.

Looking at the castle, it looked almost exactly like he remembered. Almost. The Battle of Hogwarts had left some permanent marks, whether they displayed themselves among the walls or within us. Things had changed, but, for the better this time.

Stopping by the Great Hall, I felt a wave of nostalgia and sadness hit me. Ah, this was where was I was first sorted. Where I met my friends, where I met my wife. This was where I found Remus and Tonks dead, Fred dead, and many more. We had lost so many. So much was destroyed.

I headed to the Headmaster’s office. Remembering the password Headmaster McGonagall had told me not too long ago, I said “Wulfric.” The gargoyle jumped aside and I headed inside. “Harry!” McGonagall exclaimed. “It’s good to see you. How are you? How’s Ginerva?”

I replied, “I am well and Ginny is well. She’s currently playing Quidditch in Japan against Team Kappas.”

McGonagall said, “Well, that’s good to hear. What brings you to Hogwarts?”

I said, “Well, Ron, Hermione and I are going to meet here and go visit our kids for a little while.”

McGonagall replied, “Ah. I see. Well, you’re welcome to roam about. Hogwarts will always be our home.”

I smiled. “Thank you Headmaster. I’ll see myself out and go meet with them. Take care.”

McGonagall said kindly, “Take care, Harry.”

I headed outside toward Hagrid’s hut, where I would soon meet with Hermione and Ron. Once I arrived near Hagrid’s hut, I caught sight of the Forbidden Forest. Ah, there was where we ran from the massive spiders that Hagrid had befriended. There was where I saw Voldemort drink the blood of a unicorn, and where we left Umbridge with the centaurs. For a place so forbidden, I, as well as Ron and Hermione, had a tendency of coming there.

Once I arrived at Hagrid’s hut, the door opened and there was Ron, Hermione, and Hagrid. Hagrid rushed over first and gave me a rib-breaking hug. “‘ARRY!” shouted Hagrid. “Es’ so good ta see ya! Is’ been too long.

Once he let me go, I gasped, “Good to see you too, Hagrid.” Hermione and Ron greeted me as well, looking happy and relaxed. It was clear that they enjoyed their time off.

Seeing us together made me realize that the trio was finally reunited. I was truly home, again.
A Never Forgetful Day
By Razan Rajab, Todd Pieper, Dan Hemann, Dan McGraw, Kelsey Toler

It was a cold, icy day in St. Louis. My alarm clock rang at 8 o’clock, and I rushed out of bed. In this weather, if I don’t leave my house two hours early, then I still have a chance of not making it to my first class at 10 on time. I quickly had a small breakfast, washed up, and got dressed, and hurried to my car. As the car was warming up, I realized I was almost out of gas.

“Great, just great! How am I supposed to make it to school in time for my exam if I still have to fill up the car?!” I yelled to myself.

I decided not to fill up the car. “I’m sure it’ll last until I get to school,” I hoped.

Getting out of my neighborhood was the worst. The roads were not cleaned up from the snow, so my car continued to slide at every twist and turn. Avoiding the cars parked on the side of the streets, I finally made it up hill and out of my neighborhood after FIFTEEN MINUTES. I was so worried about not making it to the exam on time.

The outside streets and highways were fine and safe, just completely full of traffic. Every few minutes, the cars would move up three or four feet. JUST MY LUCK.

Suddenly, a warning came up on my dashboard screen that I am very close to running out of gas. I couldn’t have my car run out of gas! First, I’m stuck in traffic. Second, I need to make it to my exam in about forty-five minutes.

While being stuck in that awful traffic, I reached for my backpack and took out my notes for the exam. I had to review since I would not have time to do that before class started. I studied too hard for this exam to just have me not take it.

Soon a strange man walked up beside the car. The road I was on seemed to be the seminal portion to the major road I have yet to travel on. He must have wanted money or food. I locked my door. To my surprise the man laughed at me. He seemed very old and dirty. I could not imagine being him in this cold weather. I felt like I must help him out. After all, I was going to be a pharmacist. Pharmacists help others in distress. We are basically super heroes.

In no time, I moved my car out of the highway area and pulled up to a nearby Wendy’s. At that point, the light changed to green. It must have been at least five minutes for that intersection to finally let people drive. I saw the guy retreat to his humble collection. I raced over into the restaurant and purchased a hardy meal. This guy needed something tasty from all of the hardships he had to face. I ordered a frosty, two hamburgers, a bowl of chili, and a Coca-Cola to go. After about five minutes, I took the warm food and left. I noticed that the man moved down the road a little ways. So with the meal in hand, I took a deep breath and ran to his cart of goodies. I did not want him to see me so I could be anonymous. When I got to a bush next to the cart, I looked to see when he had his back turned. Upon his immediate turn, I placed the food in his cart. After, I went to my car to get back on the icy roads. To my sudden disbelief, I only had thirty minutes left to get to school.

I got onto the service road and got back on the highway. At this point, I ignored the snow on the ground. The car sped up to 70 mph. I chuckled at the thought of driving over the speed limit. I usually do not travel so fast. The car was running on fumes of gasoline. My heart raced as I was travelling down the road. I cannot run out of gas; I didn’t have any time to waste. To my luck, I found a gas station. From the service road, I turned into the station and parked near one of the gas tanks. My vehicle shut down from the loss of energy. I got out of the
car and noticed that the spot to put the gasoline in was on the opposite side of my car. I looked up to the sky and held my fists in the air. Could this day get any worse?

To no surprise of mine the answer was a very simple and resounding yes! As I sat down to flip my car to align the gas tank with the gas pump; my worst nightmare happened. All I could hear was the terrifying sound of an engine struggling to start and then losing the battle.

“Well there goes my pharmacy career, right down the tubes,” I thought to myself. My car won’t start and I don’t know why, I still have at least twenty-five minutes till I reach that campus I dread so much, and then I have to try and pass this impossible exam with all that has happened today. This has got to be the worst day of my life and there is nothing I can do to change that.

However, it seemed that someone had been watching me as I struggled with my car, what a piece of junk, and they casually strolled over to lend me some assistance. This is when my luck started to turn for the better this miserable day. He had a gas can with him; now there’s an idea that wouldn’t be bad to start doing, and he seemingly filled it up to the brim. My first thought was he’ll just put enough in to get my car turned around, but I soon realized that he was putting in much more than that. It seemed like forever, but he eventually came around to the other side and gave my car a much needed drink. As I got out of my car to thank him; he was gone. It was like he disappeared into thin air.

As I returned to my car, I heard the sound of my phone vibrating in the cup holder where I leave it while driving. As I unlocked it, my heart began to race. There my email icon is with the red bubble indicating that I had one new message. Could it be….. I didn’t want to get my hopes up just for them to be smashed to pieces. I tapped my screen gently, as if not to disturb the message just in case it would disappear. The next moment I think everyone from California to Maine heard me scream from pure joy and utter happiness. There on my screen read this very message

“The college is closed today due to the inclement weather and dangerous road conditions.”

This was strange, but maybe karma does exist. Would it be possible that one act of kindness and generosity influenced my school’s decision to close, or was it just pure coincidence? I may never know.

Either way, I climbed back in my car and headed in the opposite direction. I couldn’t wait to be home, and the traffic was much lighter on this side of the road. I felt sorry for the stopped cars that were still trying to push their way through the rush hour traffic that I thankfully did not have to deal with anymore.

I merged onto the interstate once again only to come around the first bend and see that my side of the road now looked like a parking lot. “Wow,” I thought to myself. Someone was clearly off in the ditch and the tow truck and cops had the road blocked. However, I wasn’t concerned. As inconvenient as it was, I was still overwhelmed by thankfulness from the individual’s help at the gas station and the college closing. I just sat back and took a deep breath and kind of smiled at the sky. It was an awful day but for some reason it had a little glow that most lacked. Eventually the road cleared and I was again on my way home slowly but surely.

As I began my slow commute home, I reflected back on how the day had seemed to be a rollercoaster ride. I remembered how awful I must have treated people, or how rude I must have been to the worker at the Wendy’s counter. But, most of all, I had felt guilty about locking my doors on the old, homeless man who was stuck out in the cold and snow. As I was mulling over the way he laughed at me through my car window, I then realized that I had just been given a test of faith today. With everything else going on in my life, I was put into the path of someone who needed my help. I thought that I was pretty helpful, from classmates who needed
help with homework to lending out some cash to a roommate who needed a soda during late night study sessions. But then, I realized, this kind of helpfulness wasn’t what would help me later on in my career. Just like the homeless man, I would come into contact with people who may not come from the same background or financial standing as I. And, sometimes, helping those people could be a little bit out of my comfort zone. But, isn’t that what I pledged myself to do whenever I received my White Coat: to help other human beings, regardless of the skin or color or creed? Maybe giving that man a full, hot meal wasn’t just showing him kindness: maybe it was showing him that someone still cared about him out in this great big world we live in.

Now, I’ve graduated from pharmacy school and am practicing at a hospital that I really love. People and patients come and go, but I have never forgotten what that old homeless man taught me that one snowy day: treat others as your equal, and never forget that sometimes a small act of kindness can mean the world of difference to someone in need of help.

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**Hawaiian Vacation**

*By Dan McGraw*

It was a beautiful day on the big island. The sun was shining and my family was excited and looking forward to our week long vacation. My siblings and I had been looking forward to going to Hawaii since our parents went for their 25th wedding anniversary. We went to see the sunrise, which was astonishing, and then we made our way to the volcano. This was the part of the trip I looked forward to the most. This volcano hasn’t been active for 50 years, but I had gone and seen a few other inactive volcanoes in Washington State and they were absolutely breath taking.

As we walked around the gigantic girth of the volcano with our tour guide, she gave us little tid bits of information that were very interesting. The most interesting fact was that when this volcano erupted the last time, the smoke could be seen from the main land of the continental US. The volcano had also decimated the landscape around it and it had only just finally grown almost all of the way back.

When we finished our tour, we were able to talk more with our tour guide and ask her any questions that hadn’t been answered during the tour. There was one question that she couldn’t answer her though. Where was my little brother?? During the course of the tour I could’ve sworn I remembered seeing him with my parents and now he was gone. My parents had just noticed as well and had fallen into a state of panic. Their panic grew, along with the rest of our tour group, when from deep below the surface of the Earth we felt a rumble that was like nothing we had ever felt before.

The search for my brother increased to desperation as we had the whole tour group and even the tour guide helping us look for him. When we thought he was lost forever, there he came stumbling out of the trees and right into the middle of our little search party.

“We were worried sick about you,” my mother said, but you could see the relief on her face that we had found him.

“Sorry mom, I really had to go, and there isn’t a bathroom anywhere around this place!”

Now that we had solved our little mystery, we all headed back down away from the volcano as fast as we could safely retreat. We hadn’t felt another rumble, but you can bet your ass that we weren’t going to wait around and find out if we were going to feel a second one.
Simple Love
By Casey Moore

Angela met her parents at Oktoberfest. Her parents drove separately because Angela headed to a party afterwards. Her mother’s birthday was coming up soon. She decided she was going to have her mother’s ring refurbished. The ring was very important to her mother. It was given to her mother by her mother, or Angela’s grandmother. Angela’s mother was arrested while traveling in Mexico. While she was being processed, she needed a way to hide the ring from the police because she knew they would take it. She had to swallow it and wait until she got home to find it again. That made the ring worth a lot. Angela’s parents had left the house so right then was a great opportunity to take the ring without her mother knowing. She went into her study, opened the safe, put the ring in her pocket, and headed to the festival. The next Monday, Angela was looking for the ring so she could take it to the jeweler to be refurbished. She looked everywhere and couldn’t find it. She knew it was in her coat pocket, she put it there. Fearing the worst, she headed back to the park to look.

Joe knew that time of year was a great opportunity to collect cans. See, Joe is uneducated. He never liked school, never tried, and never even graduated high school. He made his living by collecting cans and turning them into the recyclers for money. He was walking through Frontier Park because he knew there would be cans all over the roads and in the dumpster. This was an easy opportunity to make some fast cash. He was picking cans all along the road when he came to the Holy Grail. There was a dumpster just overflowing with cans. He started picking up the cans around the dumpster when he noticed an older varnished ring. He picked it up. Before long, he had gathered all the cans he could carry. He set off to the recyclers.

While walking out of the park he saw a pretty good looking woman driving slowly up and down the streets. “Wow, ain’t she a looker” he thought. This woman was Angela, who was frantically looking for the ring she had lost. Joe dropped off the cans at the recyclers and came all the way back to the dumpster in the park. He saw the good looking woman searching around the dumpster and he got an even better look. She had beautiful auburn hair, tan coat, brown leather boots, and a nice scarf. “You look too good to be dumpster diving, can I help you with something?”

Angela replied, “Yes, perhaps you can. I lost my mother’s ring the other day. This ring is very important to her and I need to find it.” She thought she lost it at the dumpster because she took a smoke around there and figured it must have fallen out when she got her lighter out. Joe offered to help Angela look for the ring. He figured the one he found earlier was not near nice enough to be what she was looking for. So he helped her look for it until sundown. They had no luck finding it. Angela had to explain to her mother what happened to the ring. Her mother was very upset.

Angela and Joe really hit it off looking for the ring. She found something charming about him. They began seeing each other. Angela came to love the simple lifestyle, living off the fat of the land. She liked the cozy little log cabin tool shed that Joe lived in. She even came to love Joe’s exclusive outfit consisting of a flannel shirt and jeans. After a year of dating, Joe decided it was time to propose. After a hard week of collecting cans, Joe took Angela to Tony’s, a very expensive Italian restaurant. When they sat down, Angela noticed a huge, serrated bread knife at the table. “Honey, look how big that knife is!” she said. After their meal, Joe got on one knee and asked Angela to be his wife. As soon as she saw the ring, she freaked. She was furious Joe didn’t tell her he found it the day they met. Losing that ring was very stressful to her. She felt awful for losing it and her mother was devastated. Angela became filled with rage. She picked up the giant, serrated bread knife and stabbed Joe in the stomach right there in the restaurant. She didn’t even have a chance to think her reckless action through before it happened.

Once she realized the gravity of what she had just done, she grabbed the ring and waited for the police. Angela was arrested. While in the booking room, Angela remembered the story her grandmother told about having to hide the ring when she was arrested in Mexico. After remembering that story, Angela was nervous that the ring would be confiscated, stolen, or lost. She had to find a way to hide it from the police so it wasn’t confiscated. She followed her grandmother’s example and swallowed it. However, Joe ended up dying in intensive care a couple days later. Angela went to court and was sentenced to life in jail without possibility of parole.
Finding Squirt
By Sagar Patel

Squirt was one of Nemo’s best friends in the whole wide world. School was the most fun thing for them. They only spent time learning fun and interesting things that they would need to live or that were just cool about their home. Every morning would start with their parents dropping them off at the manta ray bus stop and then they were off. It was hard to sleep some nights because of all the excitement to go on an adventure the next morning. They would spend every day swimming to different parts of the coral forest and exploring the vast ocean.

One night, Squirt came over to try to get Nemo to come out with him.
“Nemo, we gotta go check out the giant clam again; it was like the coolest thing I’ve ever seen!”

“We really shouldn’t go out right now, Squirt.”
“But we have to; there are so many people there in the morning that I can’t even get close enough”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea, Squirt!”
“What are you, scared; you’re a scaredy cat!”

“Nu uh! Fine let’s go!”

They went out while the sun was setting and it was starting to get dark soon. They swam and swam and finally got to the coral forest. The day before the class had come here and seen a giant clam that was said to have one of the largest pearls in the ocean. This particular clam was said to never stay in the same spot for more than a day, so Squirt wanted to come back before it moved. Nemo swam up close to it and was amazed at how shiny its pearl was. It was glimmering in the settling sunlight and looked as if it was burning fire red while the sun shone upon it. Squirt was always trying to one up Nemo.

“That’s it; I’m going to touch it!”

Before Nemo could stop him, Squirt swam straight up to the pearl and put his hand on it. All of a sudden, the clam slammed shut and began to wedge itself free and swim away. Nemo raced after it and tackled it as hard as he could but it was no good, the clam was too hard and swam too fast. Before he could think of something else to do, the clam was out of sight. His heart was racing and his mind went blank, he had no idea what to do.

He began to swim home as fast as he could. On the way home he randomly ran into his teacher, Mr. Manta. Nemo told him everything that happened.

“Take me back to where you last saw him, son!”

Mr. Manta came and inspected the scene and then took Nemo to his friend’s place. Mr. Manta had a friend that was a professional tracker. His name was Denny and he was going to help them rescue Squirt. Denny suggested that Nemo stay behind because it might be hard for him to keep up, but he insisted that he come along because he needed to help save his best friend.

They swam fast and long through the night. It was fascinating seeing how well Denny knew the ocean floor. He was using what seemed like such simple things to determine which way the giant clam went. If somebody knew to look for these signs, it would be easy, although if they did not know, then it would make no sense and would be useless.

They saw a giant clam sitting off in the distance and decided to make a battle plan. Nemo was going to swim up behind it very sneakily because he was the smallest. Then he was going to begin to tickle it so that it would start laughing and open its shell so that Squirt would be able to get out. Nemo snuck up behind the giant clam and began to tickle it; as it started to laugh, it opened its shell and lying there was Squirt. He was a little beat up and his leg was caught under the giant pearl. Mr. Manta saw that Squirt was pinned and swam up as fast as he could and grabbed Squirt by the arm and pulled him hard. They both got out of the way right as the giant clam slammed shut. Mr. Manta carried Squirt on his back as they all swam home. As soon as Squirt swam in the door, his mother began to cry and scold him but was mostly just happy that he was home.
The Brown Bag
By Sakina Saaduddin

Samantha Erickson is a woman who has everything going for her. She is the head attorney at Johnson & Johnson Law firm. She just moved into her penthouse located in the heart of NYC, and rumor has it, her boyfriend Caleb might propose to her soon. Her life is perfect. Until one day.

Samantha was running late. More late than ever, to an especially special dinner from her boyfriend. Is this THE dinner? she thought. The dinner that will change my life forever because my boyfriend will finally propose to me? All the signs were pointing to it. He decided to take her to The Bistro, which was the nicest restaurant in town and presented her with a pass for an all exclusive spa the day before. He was going to propose and she knew it. But, Gosh darn it! she thought. Her work had her held up until 5:30, and knowing NYC traffic, Samantha would not make it to dinner on time if she drove. So she decided to take the metro.

Samantha had only been on the metro once in her life. It was to see a Broadway show when she was seven years old, so she didn’t have much memory of it since then. When she arrived on the platform however, she was taken aback. There were so many different people of different colors and backgrounds. She had never seen this before. Her world was filled with properly lined suits and dresses. But this was completely different. She didn’t know what to think and felt like an outsider looking in. But no time to think, she thought. Her mind was on the important dinner she had to go to tonight. Following the person in front of her, Samantha walked into the train and it was packed. There was no space to sit anywhere. But as determined and as stubborn as she was, Samantha went up and down the train until she found a seat.

It was a small spot, barely a child could fit into it. But her legs were tired after a long day in the office, so Samantha decided to sit. She didn’t even notice the woman sitting next to her until she heard what sounded like a cough come out of her small body. She was a peculiar woman, wearing a tattered purple coat that looked like it hadn’t been washed in days. Her boots were faded, grey and overused. She was wearing a hat with a flower sticking out of it unattractively. For some reason, she was carrying a large brown bag, very tightly, as if it carried something of great value to her. Samantha thought it was strange but she had seen people like this woman before. They were the kind of people who used to sit outside her office building begging for money. “These people” according to her, were too lazy to get jobs. Instead they decide to beg for money around people who actually work hard to make a living. And this woman was no different. At least she thought so.

The train was running smoothly until it halted for some odd reason. The conductor announced there was a wiring problem so the train had to stall for the time being. Great! thought Samantha. She was already running late, and now she was going to miss dinner. She was about to call her boyfriend when she heard the flower hat woman next to her start crying. Profusely. As if she just experienced the death of a loved one or something to that extent.

Samantha didn’t know what to think, but reached out her hand to calm the woman down. What is wrong? she asked the woman. After some time the woman was able to calm herself down and then pointed to the brown bag she was carrying. She then told Samantha that inside her brown bag was a large chocolate ice cream cake and it was melting. Samantha was confused. Why is this woman crying over a melted ice cream cake? She can just buy another one. The woman then proceeded to tell that she was working two jobs, one at the Holiday Inn and another one as a waitress to a local diner. She had been saving up money to buy her granddaughter this cake, which was no ordinary cake by the way. It was one of those cakes that was seen in the newspaper ad the week before from the famous French bistro down the street from her office. Those cakes were pricey. Only people who were as wealthy as Samantha could afford to eat them on a daily basis. But now it was ruined and melted.

The woman could not control herself and kept on crying. Her tears moved Samantha. Never in
her life did Samantha meet a person who could be so attached to something so small and trivial. But this cake meant the world to this odd woman on the train. She worked so hard to earn money to buy this cake. And not for herself, but for her granddaughter. Samantha had never seen something so raw and human like this before. She was taken aback. All those times of looking down on people suddenly came back to her. A deep feeling of remorse came over her. She was ashamed of herself for thinking so highly of herself. Not everyone could afford to have the same opportunities as she did. This woman, who at first seemed strange and unimportant, quickly became the most real person Samantha had ever come across.

The train began to function at that moment and Samantha’s stop was next. She had to leave but asked of one favor from the woman. Her address.

The next day, two chocolate ice cream cakes were delivered to the woman with the flower hat. There was no return address and the sender chose to remain anonymous.

**Stagnancy**

*By: Jerry Hu*

I’ve got places to go
and things to do,
I’ve got people to know
and passions to pursue.

Why would I stay another day,
If another day is one more
Wasted away.

**Survival**

*By Justin Patterson*

It’s been three months since the power has been out. Five months since the broadcasts stopped. Eight months since the infection began. David had reached an endpoint. He had lost his daughters and wife just a week ago. They were on the way to a refugee camp, called Safe Haven, in the middle of Nebraska. They were headed there on a rumor that Safe Haven had many Marines guarding the small camp. After he lost his family, he stopped in a small town for a while. He went to the local bar and got some booze and just sat and drank. After a few bottles of whisky, he decided to make his family’s sacrifice count for something. If they couldn’t make it, he would make it for them. He jumped in his car and just started racing to Nebraska. He was only a few miles away from the Nebraska boarder. It was just a two hour drive to reach the location thought to be Safe Haven; the town for survivors of World War Z. It was already dusk and David could see the spotlight coming from the camp. He was hopeful and triumphant that he had made it at the cost of his family. As he got closer, he noticed some sort of burning smell. He reached the doors to Safe Haven; they were busted open. David slowly drove through the blistered wooden doors. He noticed several of the many houses were on fire. There were also tons of zombies just walking around the camp, so much for Safe Haven. David just parked the car. He was in disbelief that he had lost his family to find out the Safe Haven had been overrun. David took his pistol and put it to his head. All of a sudden automatic gunfire came out of nowhere. David put his pistol down and looked up. Over a hundred Marines were on the walls and roofs shooting down on the horde. It looks like there was a Safe Haven after all.
Bathsheba

By Alexandra Morgan

Bathsheba sat alone looking out the window and thinking of the life she had left behind. Uriah would have just been coming back from the war if he were still alive. They would have been together again. He’d be home and she would probably be pregnant by now. That was their plan; he would go to war then come home to start their family. But then she had to mess it all up by getting involved with David. She missed Uriah so much; every time so about got over him, something reminded her of her old life. Today it had been a young girl walking on the street. The girl reminded Bathsheba so much of herself, who she used to be. Turning away from the window, she noticed David had walked in the room. “Come have supper with me,” he said, reaching out his hand to lead her down to the stairs. She didn’t take his hand, but followed to the table.

At the table, food was placed before her. She may have been reading into every little action too much, but she felt so out of place. The servants wouldn’t look her in the eye. More than once over the past months she had walked into a room to hushed whispers and glares. She was glad to have a hall to herself away from any other wives “Did you hear me?” David says, interrupting her thoughts. “I said that I wished you would talk with me and tell me what you were thinking about.”

“I’m fine. May I be excused?” Bathsheba replied folding her napkin on the table and rushing out of the room.

Why hadn’t he let her be? She had pleaded to go back to her town. It would have been much better to be with her father and friends then here feeling all alone. She wasn’t meant to be the king’s wife. She wanted to provide for a family, to cook, to clothe, to shelter. Now she sat all day with nothing to do. Why God?

Months past, and Bathsheba continued to feel alone. But slowly, she befriended some of the servants who allowed her to help with some of the work. She loved being busy and having jobs to occupy her day. She took walks around the grounds and began learning to play one of David’s old lyres. She even began to enjoy her time with David. He really was a kind man. He was patient and encouraged her to share her thoughts and feelings. She waited patiently for his visits and loved when he spent the night in her room every few nights. Before long, she found out she was pregnant.

“Bathsheba, I’m grateful for this second chance we have been given. I know you don’t like to think of our first child we lost, but I really do think this child you will have will help us heal. I’m so sorry for all I have put you through. Hopefully God has a plan for us still,” David told Bathsheba one day at dinner.

“I agree,” She replied. “I’m so excited for this child. I had a very hard time forgetting about my plans for the future, but I believe God had bigger plans than I could imagine. I truly do forgive you, and I know God does too. I’m even beginning to forgive myself.”

But he didn’t get to complete his thought since his other wife, Ahinoam burst in the room in tears. “Our son Amnon’s dead and your son killed him!!” she screamed. David stood from his seat, tore his clothes, and lay on the ground. Bathsheba snuck out the back door not knowing what else she could do. Listening at the door, tears began to roll down her face as she placed her hand on her bulging belly.

You

By: Alicia Crim

What traits make you, you?

Looks, Life, Decisions, Paths, Growth

Make it what you want.
The Dark Soul
By Robbie Obradovic

Inehart limped his way in the darkness, not knowing where he was going or how he got there. He limped further and further, eventually approaching a large arch in front of a lake. The arch began to glow an eerie blue hue as Inehart got closer. Ancient markings appeared as bodies began to rise from the mud and as spirits ascended from the lake. The silence was broken by a slight hum that quickly evolved into a roaring wind. The spirits and the undead fled from the lake as it began to churn. Faster it turned, getting deeper and wider until it became a bottomless chasm. Shrieks erupted from the phantoms as Inehart wordlessly trenched forward. Inehart stopped at the edge of the abyss. He heard tempestuous wind, chilling cries of the cursed undead; saw spirits flashing about and an endless gaping maw in front of him. Without any thought or even knowing why, Inehart chose to fall in.

Inehart fell in the darkness; the water turned into stone as he fell deeper and deeper into nothingness. After a seemingly endless plummet, Inehart crashed into the ground with a dull thud. He lay still for a short while. Inehart got up and observed his surroundings. Strange plants illuminated the cavern with a faint glow, revealing a worn path as if a thousand others had walked along it. He made his way along the path and found a small wooden hut lit by the light of a mere two torches. Inehart walk up and opened the door to be met by three ancient women. Each woman wore a worn red cloak over their withered bodies, hiding their decrepit faces.

One woman croaked, “It’s an undead. An undead has come to play.”

Another woman added, “They all end up here, all the ones like you. You’re finished. You’ll go Hollow.”

The third clarified, “Hollows prey upon men and feast upon their souls. This is the fate of the cursed. All who come here wish to break the curse. You’re no different. You don’t stand a chance.”

The second asks, “You, what is your name?”

Inehart paused for a moment and replied in a hoarse voice, “I-Inehart.”

The first woman chuckled, “Well, at least you know your name...hee hee hee...” She reached under her sleeve and pulled out a small, hollow, wooden man and handed it to Inehart. “Here take this. What is it you see?”

Inehart turned the object in his hands inspecting it for a few moments. Slowly memories started to creep their way back into his head bit by bit. A house. A wife. A child. More details emerged. His wife. His child. Suddenly everything became clear. Inehart gasped at the recollection. Inehart remembered his family, remembered their faces, remembered their shock.

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Inehart was making his way home one night after a rather normal day. He approached his home, a silhouette in the moonlight, casting a shadow over him as he got closer to the door. Inehart walked in and was greeted by silence. He called out for his family- no reply- he decided to look in the living room. He turned the corner and saw his wife sitting in the middle of the room on a wooden chair holding his child. His wife looked distressed. Inehart approached them, but was stopped abruptly.

“No!” His wife yelled.

Inehart fell to the floor, his eyes fixated on his family which were now tinted red. Blood pooled underneath him as he lay there, still keeping eye contact with his wife. Tears rolled down her face as his vision altered. Her face became blurred, her eyes became empty sockets, and her skin began to melt from her face leaving nothing left but a skull.

“No!” She screamed.

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“Take a closer look. Think back, deep into your past,” the first woman continued.
Inehart turned the wooden man around and saw what appeared to be a burn mark on its back between the shoulder blades on the side of its heart. Inehart rubbed the scorch mark and winced at the memory. The memory of how he got here.

“Yes, it’s an effigy of you,” quipped the ancient lady. “All people come here for the same reason. To break the curse.”

Inehart looked down at his hands and saw that they were no longer covered in dirt and dried blood, but were normal. Inehart looked over his whole body and saw he was human again. The effigy had temporally relieved him of his curse.

The third lady spoke again, “Go through the door and trot along to the kingdom. But remember, hold onto your souls. They’re all that keep you from going hollow...Oh, I’ll fool you no longer...You’ll lose your souls...All of them. Over and over again.”

The three ancient women busted out in laughter as Inehart made his way out the doorway, the sounds ceasing only after he closed the door. He trudged ahead in the darkness and eventually came across a small mound of kindling with a broken sword buried in the center of the pile. The small warmth radiating from the kindling was inviting to Inehart so he decided to light the small pile and take a rest. Soon the feeble embers became a roaring bonfire. Once the flames reached a safe strength, Inehart sat down and let the warmth flow through his body. The flames felt invigorating and life sustaining, banishing the darkness and illuminating everything around. Inehart stared into the flames, and for the first time since he could remember, he felt at home.

Some time passed and after a rejuvenating rest, Inehart got back up to begin his journey. He saw that the path ahead was dark so he picked up a burning log from the bonfire to light his way. Inehart continued his journey as he marched into the darkness. He soon found himself at the bottom of a crevice, only the light from his torch lit his way. Deeper into the emptiness Inehart went. He walked along until he heard a groan. Inehart stopped and looked around. He saw nothing and continued, but was interrupted by a groan again. This time a human figure limped its way into the torch light. It was wearing worn leather armor from head to toe and carried a short sword at its side as if it was too heavy to hold. Its skin was degraded with chunks of missing, pale green flesh, its face held together by mere threads of skin. A Hollow.

The monster approached Inehart, hungry for his flesh and soul, raising its sword high above its head and quickly swung down. Inehart dodged the first assault but was unprepared for the follow up attack. The Hollow arched the sword and sliced diagonally, cutting Inehart across his chest. Inehart grunted in pain as the blood seeped down his body. The Hollow attacked again, this time in a forward thrusting motion, intending to skew Inehart, hunger blazed in its glazed eyes. Adrenaline pumped in Inehart; he side stepped, and before the Hollow could react, he hit it across the head with his torch, knocking the top of its head ninety degrees of its lower jaw. The Hollow spun from the force of the blow and toppled over. Inehart quickly grabbed the sword from the Hollow and ran it straight through its heart with a dull thump to ensure that it was, in fact, dead. He scavenged what he could from the currently “lifeless” body and began to tend to his wounds. He patched himself up with scraps of his old robe and journeyed forward with heavy steps.

Quickly Inehart began to hear more groaning, and he began to run. Hollows started to appear left and right, each intending to devour Inehart and his undead, human soul. Inehart saw sunlight in the distance, and he began to sprint. Hollows started attacking, they sliced, they jabbed, and some even threw their swords in desperation-none landed their mark. Inehart was fifty meters away from his destination, but his endurance was running critically low. Suddenly, one sword came in from his right, slicing Inehart across the side of his skull. Inehart lost pace and stopped from exhaustion and pain. The Hollow horde caught up with Inehart. He drew his short sword and fought for his very life. He decapitated the first Hollow in one slice, but the second lunged at him before he could recuperate. Inehart fell as Hollows piled up on him. The Hollows hungrily ripped Inehart apart with whatever they could: their rusted swords, their decayed hands, their rotten teeth. Inehart screamed
in pain as Hollows tore his body apart chunk by chunk. Inehart died with his last glimpse of life at sunlight just ten feet away.

Inehart awoke with a sharp gasp. He breathed quickly, terrified by what he just dreamt. He sat up straight by the bonfire hoping that it would help ease his frightened nerves. He stared into the fire trying to forget the horrid nightmare and began to rock to comfort himself. He then noticed that he wasn’t wearing the same clothes as before and discovered he was wearing leather armor and wielding the short sword he scavenged from the first Hollow. Inehart began to tremble. He went to remove his leather gloves with shaky hands to reveal that his hands were no longer normal. They were pale green and blood stained, the back of his hands revealing his bones. He went for his face and felt loose skin and many holes. Inehart bolted up trembling as he faced the same path he had just traveled. Then Inehart remembered.

“You don’t stand a chance,” The first ancient lady’s voice echoed.

“You’ll lose your souls...All of them. Over and over again,” the second old lady recited.

With a hesitant step, Inehart moved forward with a torch in one hand and a sword in the other, swearing he could hear the three ancient women laughing.

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Blind Date Gone Wrong
By Abbey Meers

As I am sitting here on this awful blind date, I try to think back as to what my friend told me about him that made me want to go on this date in the first place. She told me that he is “extremely handsome,” and after seeing his high water pants, neon yellow shirt, and mullet hair style, this is clearly a lie. She also told me that he was “very intelligent,” which is only true if you were questioning him on video games and Pokémon cards. Lastly, she told me that he is “super easy to talk to,” but after sitting across the table from him for the past hour and a half as he rambles on about nonsense, I know this is also a lie. To make things even worse, while he was demonstrating the epic sword fights he endured to win one of the countless number of video games he played, he knocked his drink over twice and it spilled all over my favorite dress.

From the first moment I saw him walk into the restaurant, I had been thinking of various ways I could escape without his suspicion. I could say I had to take an important call, or I could say I had to go to the bathroom and make my escape then. Either way, I could not stand to listen to this babbling from him anymore. He started talking about yet another sword fight and managed to spill his drink on me yet again. This was the last straw for me, so without saying a word, I grabbed my purse and rushed to the bathroom. I had formulated my escape route out the front door and just got done drying off my dress, so I swung open the bathroom door and peaked around the corner to see if my blind date was looking.

I zoomed around the corner and nearly sprinted to the restaurant bar where I ducked my head under so he wouldn’t see me. As I sat under the bar, completely blind to my surroundings, I planned my final escape out the front door of the restaurant. Out of nowhere, this handsome man plopped down on the floor next to me as asked what a girl in a beautiful dress was doing sitting alone under a bar. Without hesitation, I explained to him my circumstances and told him how I planned to escape. A stunned look crossed his face followed by a chuckle and he told me that he was in the exact same situation. He stuck out his hand and told me his name was Peter and asked if I would like to accompany him on his journey through the front door. Of course after he flashed me a smile revealing his perfect white teeth, I couldn’t say no. Hand in hand, we jumped to our feet and darted to the door without even a glance behind us to see if our blind dates were looking. Finally, we were free from the misery of listening to one more word from them. We scurried off down the sidewalk, exchanging stories about ourselves all the way into an ice cream parlor. Meeting Peter and sharing an ice cream sundae with him changed my night from awful to absolutely wonderful. Hopefully I will never have to experience a blind date again.
Falling Through Paintings

By Collin Benbrook, Samantha Bryant, Nana Byun, Jasmine Carpenter, Michelle Albert

Don and Anna hadn’t had a Saturday off in a good while. It had been well over a month since they had spent a carefree day together. They probably didn’t know just how interesting their day was going to be either.

Don thought he would surprise Anna and take her to the art museum. Off they went in Don’s old beaten down car, which sounded like it was about to fly apart at any given moment. It was a cold day, and there was a little bit of snow on the ground. Once they arrived at the museum, Anna hurried Don in as she was feeling anxious to see some artwork.

The paintings in the museum were gorgeous. Don’s favorite painting was a portrait of a large lion standing on top of a waterfall, appearing as he was the king of the world. Anna’s favorite painting was a scene in ancient Egypt, and was a beautiful depiction of the pyramids. Anna just couldn’t stop looking at that painting. Suddenly, Anna tripped and she fell right through the wall and into the painting. Anna was in ancient Egypt!

Don was terrified. He was about to scream when Anna stood up and smiled. She looked John in the eyes and said, “come on, let’s go!” Don didn’t know what was about to happen, but he stepped into the painting anyway and their adventure began. Moments later they found themselves amongst the hustle and bustle of a busy village market. Anna was fascinated by the beauty and detail of all the fabric, jewelry, and pottery. She wondered why things weren’t made with such detail anymore. Everything she laid her eyes on was a work of art, from the smallest spoon to the largest vase. Don had an uneasy feeling about this predicament they had fallen into, but he went with it just because he loved the new, fresh smile that was stuck on his wife’s face.

Curiosity plagued Anna’s mind... how did this happen? Is this real? How will we get back? Wait… How will we get back? There was no magical painting in this world that would lead back to theirs. It was if they had gone back in time and were actually in ancient Egypt. Worried looks ran across both their faces; Don was the first one to come up with a plan. First, they needed to find other clothes; the outfits they had on hardly matched the normal drab that everyone around them was wearing. They headed down an ally-way to escape the eyes of the Egyptians. Don and Anna frantically looked around for an ounce of clothing left unwatched; just at the end of the ally, strung high between the buildings were many articles of clothing. Luckily they had found something to wear; they just needed a way to get to it.

Thinking on his feet, Don realized that there was a small opening that led to a set of winding stairs. Quietly, they snuck up the stairs until the clothes were in reach. They quickly grabbed some of the slightly damp clothes and tossed them on. Anna shoved their normal clothes into her bag and they hurried away, so they would not have to face the mad woman whose clothes they had stolen. They found themselves back in the busy streets wondering what they should do. Anna, being the optimistic one, suggested that since they were there,
they might as well go check out the pyramids! They should be almost new; what an exciting idea, seeing the great pyramids only years after their initial construction.

As Don and Anna were on their adventure to find the great pyramids, they encountered camels. Anna wished that she had her digital camera to take pictures of this unique experience and capture the memories that they were making together. Hours passed and their legs were tired. Since sand was getting in their shoes, they decided to take their shoes off and walk barefoot. Don wanted to give up, but Anna encouraged him saying they were probably close. Ten minutes later, they arrived in front of the great pyramids. They both looked at each other with a smile on their faces. They were so ecstatic that they could share this unforgettable memory together.

After gazing and admiring the structure of the pyramids from afar, they moved closer so that they could see the walls of the pyramid up close. It wasn’t long before Anna wished that they could go inside and see what treasures lay hidden in there. She knew that it would be near impossible for them to be able to go in there now since there were guards surrounding the only known entrance. If only there was a way she could sneak inside without alerting the guards. “There has to be another entrance somewhere,” she thought as she felt along the walls. Anna must have stumbled upon a secret entrance because after knocking on a portion of the wall, it began to open.

Don and Anna looked inside the dark opening in the wall and wondered if they should go inside. Anna, being the risk-taker of the two, grabbed Don’s hand and stepped into the darkness…. Then, they realized there was no floor and they were falling into the darkness. Anna felt herself hitting the ground and opened her eyes. She and Don were back in the museum.

“Awww man,” she said. They found themselves lying on the floor of the museum, people looking at them bewildered. They laughed realizing that they were still in their ancient Egypt attire.

“Man, what just happened Don; did you put something in my breakfast?!?”

He laughed, they couldn’t believe what just happened. Why did it happen? Why did they get so lucky? Was it just a screw up with the universe? They were happy but in disbelief.

Anna was already up and on her way to other paintings. “Come on!” she said, walking into the next room. Don was hesitant; he had had enough traveling for one day and hoped that he wouldn’t get sucked into another painting. He heard Anna calling him “Don…Don…Don…”

“Don wake up!” Don woke up shaken and gasped. Covered in cold sweat, he was surprised as ever.

“What’s wrong! It’s our day off! What should we do!??”

Don, completely mystified, mumbled, “anything but the museum.”

“Ok…” Anna said with a weird look on her face.
The Game
By Christina Ranick

Blindfolded. Bound. I couldn’t see anything, or feel my way around. I could sense a small light, but it vanished as I was pushed into a room and a door slammed behind me. The light had disappeared, along with my chances of getting away. I heard soft scratching noises, tuning into their location ahead of me. And then the smell hit me. Blood. I knew it well. My past was terrible, but I hoped that since I made it out of that horrible place, I might have a chance to get out of here as well. I prayed that I would.

The scratching noise stopped and I heard footsteps. I could feel the floor vibrate under my knees, and shuddered at the thought of what could happen next. Would I be killed? Set free? Tortured? There were endless possibilities, and an easy escape seemed far too unlikely. The room fell quiet as the noise stopped in front of me, and with a heavy breath, I awaited my fate.

A deep voice pierced the silence.

“What have we here? What is this little thing?” I felt the man’s gaze on me and I froze, holding my breath. Though I couldn’t see, I knew he was grinning maliciously, silently taunting me and my helplessness. A whimper escaped from my throat, and something cold and thin lifted my chin up. I felt a warm trickling down my neck, and tears welled up in my eyes.

“What have we here? What is this little thing?” I felt the man’s gaze on me and I froze, holding my breath. Though I couldn’t see, I knew he was grinning maliciously, silently taunting me and my helplessness. A whimper escaped from my throat, and something cold and thin lifted my chin up. I felt a warm trickling down my neck, and tears welled up in my eyes.

“Now, now, don’t be frightened, let’s just play a little game”. The hairs stood up on my neck. “If you win, I’ll set you free and you can go back to your normal life”.

“But then it hit me. There was a reason to fight. Something to protect. Someone to protect. I couldn’t just surrender so easily. I shifted my feet around, wiggling my body into position, and without any hesitation, I stood up, and faced the direction of the voice. I mustered all my courage and composure, glaring at him from underneath my blindfold. “Game on”.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Dog
By Haseeb Wajid

I wasn’t really excited. I told my mom to get me a dog and she ended up getting me a turtle. You’d think that they would do something cool, but no, they are extremely slow and boring. Anyways since we have show and tell and since I’ve already shown my wolverine action figure a hundred times, I figured I might as well take my turtle to school. I don’t expect many people to find it cool, but whatever.

Anyways I got ready for school and everything and was waiting outside for the bus. Oh wait! I forgot my turtle! Hopefully I could run home, grab my turtle and then run back to the bus stop! I ran and got my turtle, but by the time I got to the bus stop, the bus was already leaving. I tried chasing it, but it just went off. Great, my day was ruined because I forgot my turtle. I guessed I was just going to have to walk to school.

I passed the neighborhood with all the smaller houses. Eventually I came by the nuclear power plant! Gee I wondered if anything cool was going on there! Anyways I somehow snuck in and found a whole bunch of toxic waste. “Oh my god!” I thought. What if I dropped my turtle in? Wouldn’t he turn into a teenage mutant ninja turtle? I mean that’s how they came about. So I thought about it and figured it’d be much cooler than just an ordinary turtle. So I dropped him in. I thought I heard a wailing sound as he sank into the toxic waste. I waited 15 minutes for him to reappear, but he never came out. I didn’t know what to do. I ended up going to school and figured I would check the power plant for a week to see if he came back. Finally, I ended up telling my mom what happened and how he never came back as a ninja turtle. She yelled at me at first, then ended up getting me a dog. There aren’t any teenage mutant ninja dogs.
Vacation
By Josh Siu

"JESSA! WAKE UP! COME ON!" Jessa sighed, lifting her head out of the bundled mass of sheets, and instantly smiled as she set her gaze on a pelican perched on the guardrail of the balcony. She swung her long legs out of bed, and almost skipped her way out of the room, ecstatic that she was far far away from her Saint Louis, and the workload of college courses. Her mom and younger sister were seated at the bar, as her dad made blueberry pancakes on the stove. "Hey there, kiddo, up for some hiking today?" inquired her dad as she sprang into view.

"I dunno dad...I was planning on tanning a bit on the beach. Maybe another day?" she asked hopefully.

"Aw come on...it's a one in a lifetime experience with this tour guide I met!"

"Fineeee," Jessa groaned as she rolled her eyes. Her dad's infamous “great” experiences were never as good as they sounded. Besides, she thought to herself, since when were the Virgin Islands known for hiking locations?

A few hours later, as Jessa trudged along the worn path, guarding the rear of the “convoy” to keep an eye on her sister, she caught sight of a mysterious-looking cave a few hundred meters ahead. Being the tallest one in her family, it appeared that no one else had seen it yet. As they drew nearer, Diana squealed with intrigue as soon as she saw it, dashing off through a dense thicket of shrubs before anyone else could say a word. Benjy, their guide for that afternoon, froze in his steps, spinning towards her in an attempt to snatch her before she disappeared in the mess of plants. Unsuccessful in his attempt, he instead shouted after her, "NOO! Come back, you don’t want to go in there!" Jessa, reacting in the heat of the moment, immediately bolted after her little sister, hoping her long legs would allow her to chase down the bundle of high energy contained inside of the 10-year old. She heard the calls of her parents and Benjy as they called after her, pleading her to return, but she continued her mad dash through the jungle-like overgrown grass, towards the towering cave entrance. As she reached the stone fissure, she took a moment to marvel at its size, wondering what had made it, before plunging into the darkness, in hot pursuit of Diana.

Jessa stumbled in the pitch-black dark, only occasionally whipping out her iPhone to save its battery. After a ten minute journey on a downwards slope, she reached an immense cavern, one that was reminiscent of a sports stadium in terms of sheer size. Spots of light peeked through a few holes in the ceiling, and to her surprise, she caught a glimpse of her sister’s green hoodie as she dashed towards a massive lizard-like statue.

Suddenly, a gigantic cloud of smoke obscured her view, and the ground shook as a massive shadow rose. Wings unfurled, and she saw the gleam of razor-sharp teeth as a deafening roar echoed through the chamber. As the dust cleared, she almost fainted at what she saw. A lava-colored dragon stood in front of her sister, who by comparison was the size of one of the dragon’s teeth. She sprinted towards her sister, determined to do what she could to save her from the monster, but to her surprise, the dragon suddenly dropped to its belly, nudging her sister towards its back. Diana climbed on, holding onto a scale for dear life, as suddenly the dragon took flight, flapping its car-sized wings as it lifted into the air, before ripping through the dirt roof, and disappearing from view, never to be seen again.

Haiku
By: Michelle Albert

I laugh looking up
What a beautiful sight seen
The sky is lovely
Safety
By Ryan Soo Hoo

It was a calm, Saturday night in December. The college had just finished its first semester and the students were now free from class. It seemed like everyone had already left to return to their families for the holidays, all except for Johnny. As always, his aptitude for planning was poor, causing him to purchase a plane ticket just a couple days earlier. Johnny had just finished packing his bags and was ready to escape the incoming blizzard that was about to hit New York, hopeful that his return to California would be a much warmer one.

Grabbing his bags and other belongings, Johnny left his apartment, heading a few blocks south towards the conveniently located subway entrance. It was a straight shot to the airport with the subway, taking about thirty minutes without any major delays. As he entered the subway, Johnny had an uneasy feeling. Nothing and no one stood out as unordinary, yet he had felt extra cautious entering the underground station. With only two hours left before his flight, he couldn’t delay any further. Shrugging off his worries, Johnny boarded the subway train with his bags and set out to go home.

As Johnny sat quietly on the subway, he overheard some people talking quickly with a concerned voice. Something about a virus? He saw families with loads of luggage; they weren’t coming back anytime soon. People on the train looked like they were anxious to get out of New York. Johnny just told himself that they were just in a hurry to go home for Christmas and that it was nothing to worry about. After arriving at the airport everyone rushed out, except Johnny. “What’s the hurry?” he thought.

He was walking towards the terminal to check in his boarding pass, as he saw security guards clearing people out. There were no airline employees to be seen and everyone was running in chaos.

“What’s going on?” Johnny asked.

“The virus has spread and there are walkers here. You need to get – ahhhh!”

A zombie grabbed and bit the TSA Officer in the neck from behind. The Officer fell to the floor and three more zombies came to eat him. Johnny couldn’t believe his eyes. The zombies looked like dead people, and yet they were still feeding on the flesh of the living. Johnny dropped his bags and sprinted outside. The whole airport was overrun with zombies; people were being chased, cars were stuck in the parking lot, and death was everywhere.

Johnny didn’t know what he would do. The scene was complete chaos. The only thing he could think to do was run. There was no way he was getting back on the subway. What if a zombie made its way on the subway and he was stuck with it? That wasn’t an option. After he ran outside, he went to the parking lot. He decided he was going to try to steal a car to get away or find someone to take him away. He skimmed the parking lot. It was completely empty of people. He thought maybe he could hotwire a car. He’d never done it before but had seen it in movies. It can’t be that hard right?

As he was skimming the cars deciding which one he would try to steal, he saw some movement in one of them. He decided to go see what it was. As he walked up to the small car he noticed a younger woman in the driver’s seat. He had her roll down the window. As she did, he saw tears coming from her eyes. “Are you okay?” he asked. She didn’t say anything, but kept crying. She seemed to be okay physically. He told her about the zombies and what was going on in the airport. She began to sob even harder. “We have to get out of here” he said. He could tell that she was in no shape to drive. He asked if she would allow him to drive and he promised he would get both of them out of the area safely. She agreed to it. She got out of the car and sat in the passenger’s seat as he stepped in the driver’s seat.

Without a moment of hesitation, Johnny slammed down on the pedal and began to drive. Trying to get out of the airport parking lot was going to be even harder than getting out of the airport.
There were cars and zombies everywhere. But that didn't matter to Johnny. He was determined to get out. He zig-zagged across the whole parking lot hitting a few zombies along the way. When he finally got to the ramp, ten zombies were lined up in a straight line, eagerly awaiting their foe. In the blink of an eye, they ran up to the car and began bashing on the windows. The girl sitting in the passenger seat began to scream and ducked her head down as far as she could.

Three of the zombies were on Johnny’s side. As lifeless as they were, these zombies were strong and their determination to get into the car was even stronger. They kept banging on the window until a crack began to form in the middle of the window. Like a ripple in the water, the crack became bigger and bigger until the window could take it no more and broke through. At that moment, all seemed hopeless. With a flashlight, Johnny tried to smash the zombies and stun them but nothing seemed to work. Then, from out of nowhere, a van with what looked like spikes on the bumper, crashed into the swarm of zombies. With the zombies pushed dispersed several feet away from their car, Johnny and the girl knew it was their only opportunity to escape. Quickly opening the doors, Johnny and the girl ran towards the van. Almost simultaneously, the sliding door flung open, with a man wearing a hunting hat in the doorway. Equipped with a rifle, the man shot a few rounds at the approaching zombies. Before the hoard of zombies got too close, the man closed the door and the van sped away. Safe for the time being, Johnny and the girl stayed in the van. Looking backwards, Johnny could see the miles of destruction caused by the swarm of zombies, the countless lifeless bodies piled on the ground. At that moment, it hit him. Johnny needed to find a way to reunite with his family and this newly discovered group of peers was his only way to do so.

No Carousel
By Vy Trinh

People called me Bert, which is shortened from Berto. My mother often told me that my name means intelligent, which is what she wanted me to be. I’m 5 years old and I find many things interesting. I like to play with my siblings but sometimes I enjoy spending time with my animal friends. Because I am stronger than others, I often protect my peers from enemies. My day consists of fighting my imaginary enemies and eating delicious food. My parents like to take me and my siblings to the amusement park once every other week because we always have the best time playing there. Today is amusement park day.

The local amusement park is my second home, as I know every path by heart. While I enjoy all the rides, my favorite one is the merry-go-round. One time I rode that at least five times in a row. Although my siblings complain about the dizziness they get, it does not apply to me. My father takes my siblings to the swing boat, which is scarier in my opinion; because I prefer subtle rides rather than those fast rides. On the other hand, my mother usually stays with me because I tend to do different things at the park. She lets me watch the merry-go-round while she goes to the nearby ticket booth. The park is more busy than usual since July 4th is around the corner. After ten or fifteen minutes, I anticipate for my mother to return. As soon as I see my mother’s thin back, I run towards her. Part of me is excited to ride the merry-go-round, and the other part is ready to fight other kids for my favorite horse. Unexpectedly, my mother acts differently today. She pushes me away and refuses to hand me the tickets. Out of the corner of my eyes, I notice that my favorite horse has been taken, and yet my mother refuses to give me the tickets. Tears run down my face as I cannot control my own emotions. Someone in the crowd pulls me back, my mother that is. It takes a few seconds for me to process everything. While my mother apologizes to people, I realize that I just mistook a random lady for my mother and yet threw a tantrum at her. Because it is so embarrassing, I hide behind my mother’s back. Once everything is resolved, I go on a few rounds on the merry-go-round and proceed to return home earlier than usual.
"You know, Honey, I’m just sick of all the sally safety slow drivers that’re out today! I’ve got to go, but I’ve got a surprise when I get home. “ I said to my wife through the speaker phone of my new, black, big and bad, Ford F150. I pass a stupid, red Prius. He’s probably going the speed limit. He’s not even driving a fast car; get out of the passing lane. “Why won’t this guy get out of my way!?" I exclaimed, almost hitting the bumper of the car in front of me. “Finally!” as the guy switched lanes, I floor it. The exhaust rumbles. I approach yet another car in my way. They’re always in my way. I change to the right lane. Surely passing them in the slow lane lets them know they were a hindrance to my driving today. “Oooh!” I bellowed as I punch the gas, making a hard left, barely making the yellow light. “This baby takes turns like a champ,” I say to myself, proud of my new purchase.

Okay, made it to the grocery store. I park at the back of the lot, sure to have empty space all around me. I don’t want to be ‘that guy,’ but double parking’s okay if you’re at the end of the lot, right? I want to keep the doors ding free for as long as I can help it. As I’m walking into the store, I blank. Now what did she say she wanted? Dinner... what are we having for dinner? I need to grab steak and... brussels sprouts? What in the hell are brussels sprouts? Are those green? Ew... I’m getting myself a potato. No better way to celebrate manliness than a new truck followed by a steak and potato dinner. Walking towards the checkout, a bouquet of flowers catches my eye. She likes tulips right? I get the bouquet; even if she doesn’t like the truck, she’ll definitely like these flowers.

I walk into the lot. I see another car parked next to mine. Parked over the lines, just as I had. I guess he didn’t think double parking this far out was a nice gesture. The lot did seem to fill up. I hop into the driver’s seat. Boy do I love having to step up into my truck instead of falling down into that old car. I turn the key. The truck wakes up with a roar. “I need to name this beast,” I say to the truck, checking it out in its mirrors.

Heading home, I’m more excited than ever to be behind the wheel. The new car feel overpowers the smell. So anxious to see the look on her face. The light turns yellow; the van in front of me hits the brakes to make the stop. I quickly swerve into the left lane, still stopping at the light. I couldn’t have reaccelerated to make it; the jack-off driving the van made me slam the breaks to keep from hitting him. I’m annoyed, but the beast is ready to take him off the line. He’s about to lose a race he didn’t know he was in. The lights in front of us are red. They begin turning green, one by one, getting ever closer to our light. He doesn’t know it, but minivan dad’s about to get smoked. I’m antsy in anticipation, ready for the GO. Light changes; I floor it.

I’m spinning. I’ve been hit! HOLY HELL! My new truck! It hadn’t even been home yet! I didn’t even get to show my wife! I was so careful! The bed of my beautiful new truck had been smashed. I suppose I’m lucky the truck accelerated like it did or he could have hit right into my door. My beautiful new truck, ruined. “That jerk blew through the intersection in his little beater-mobile trying to make the yellow light.” I told the officer.
Barry the Barn Owl
By Shawn Thomas

Out in the old barn behind farmer Bill’s house lived a friendly owl. He was small, and gray with big eyes. He was a barn owl. Barry was his name. Barry the barn owl. He loved living in the barn with all the farm animals. He lived high up in the rafters, where he could keep an eye on everyone. All of the farm animals knew about Barry, because he was so friendly. They also knew about him because he loved to hoot. He would hoot every evening, just right after the sun would set, for all the farm animals to hear. It was one of Barry’s favorite times of the day. But once his hooting was over, and the darkness of night crept in, it was Barry’s least favorite time of the day: night. Barry was scared of the dark. He hated it. And every night he always sat in the rafters, alone and waited for the sun’s rays to come through the barn window the next morning. On one night, it seemed especially dark to Barry, probably because the moon was hidden behind some clouds. Anyway, Barry was really scared and really wished he had a friend up in the rafters to keep him company. That’s when Barry heard a strange noise coming from the other side of the barn. It was a bug, and he seemed to be lost up in the rafters. Barry flew over to see if he could help.

‘Excuse me mister bug, are you lost?’ Barry asked.
‘Please don’t eat me!’ the bug yelled.
‘Oh, I won’t eat you. I’m a friendly barn owl. What’s your name?’ Barry asked.
‘Phew, you had me scared. I’m Leo. It’s so dark in here, I couldn’t tell who was coming over.’ Leo said.
‘I know, I’m terribly scared of this dark. I’m always scared and lonely up here in the rafters every night.’ Barry said sadly.

‘Just a sec, maybe I can help!’ Leo exclaimed.
Leo turned around and wiggled his butt and a bright flash of light appeared. Leo was a lightning bug! He could glow whenever he wanted.

‘This is great!’ Barry said. ‘I’m no longer scared up here.’
‘Awesome. I can stay with you as long as you’d like. I was actually looking for a new place to live and this old barn looked perfect.’ Leo said.

So for every night there on after, Barry was no longer scared of the dark thanks to Leo’s light and Leo found a loving place to live with the farm animals and a new best friend named Barry.

Seven Natural Wonders
By: Abbey Meers

Carved from rivers, expose famous red rock. (Grand Canyon)
Vivid coral reef seen from outer space. (Great Barrier Reef)
Superb shore line with vibrant blue waters. (Harbor of Rio de Janeiro)
Highest snow covered mount for daring hikers. (Mount Everest)
Sea of colors that paint dark skies. (Aurora)
Cinder cone volcano by lava covered village. (Paricutin Volcano)
Falling waters and smoke that thunders. (Victoria Falls)
It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood?
By Kelsey Toler

Joe was going about his day like it was any other. It was a gorgeous spring day in April and he was walking the street in downtown Manhattan just as if it was any other day. He turned down a narrow street and met eyes with a middle aged woman at the other end. Just then a man leapt from the shadows and grabbed her. She was slammed against the wall and he fought for her purse. Joe was struck for a moment with the shock of the situation.

Suddenly, Joe’s insides began to tingle and vibrate. He shut his eyes tightly to the weird sensation, but didn’t fight against it. Ever since he was a small child, whenever he was put in a stressful situation or someone was in harm’s way, this feeling would come and he would come to minutes later, within a pile of shredded clothing. He always blacked out after this feeling hit him and never knew what had elapsed over the course of his unconsciousness. But, today, the robber struggling for the woman’s handbag at the end of the alley would know what happened to Joe.

Joe let out a scream of rage, and as the scream lengthened, it turned into something more feral, more carnal in nature. His canine teeth grew to sharp points which protruded out from his upper lip. His eyes, normally shining and blue, turned crimson, their pupils slits of their formal selves. His body morphed, forcing him onto all fours, pads and claws growing from nails and hands and feet. His hair snaked around his face, forming a long, shaggy mane that framed his face. In a matter of two seconds, Joe had transformed into a wild Sabertooth tiger.

“The squabbling at the end of the alley ceased, as the robber and the woman watched with a look of awe and horror upon their faces. As the Sabertooth turned to face the pair, the woman let out a small gasp, and then fainted, dropping to the unforgiving pavement at her feet. The robber, the hulking brute that he was, let out a very unmanly scream, but quickly regained his composure and withdrew a long machete from his waistband. He eyed the Sabertooth with bloodlust in his eyes, and held out his hand in a motion saying Bring it, big boy!

The Sabertooth lithely slinked towards the grisly foe, eyeing him with the canniness and focus of a wild beast. The Sabertooth stopped about ten yards from the robber, and crouched down. Suddenly, he crossed the gap between them with one single leap, legs taut with bunched, strong muscle. The robber’s eyes grew as big as dinner plates as the Sabertooth’s massive body slammed into him like a freight train. Letting out a gasp for air, the robber swore under his breath at the Sabertooth.

“Dude, what the HELL are you?!”

The Sabertooth stared the grisly man with his blood-red eyes. As he opened his mouth, saliva dribbled down his long canine teeth, and a voice like the rumbling of thunder said,

“I’m your worst nightmare, pal. Now beat it before someone gets hurt.”

With that, the robber took the Sabertooth’s advice, and scuttled out from under his pin and into the shadows of the alleyway, leaving behind his treasure: the woman and her purse. The Sabertooth gently picked up the purse strap with his mouth, and set it beside the unconscious woman.

He gazed into her face, seeing how badly this event had, and would continue to, traumatize her. He wished that he could stay with the woman until she awakened, to comfort her and make sure she was going to be alright, but he knew whenever the police arrived, a giant Sabertooth tiger standing over an unconscious woman would be a very unwelcoming sight. So, the Sabertooth slipped into the shadows, away to lay down, and wait for his human counterpart to come to once again.
Flashback
By Bobby Varghese

I’ve never been a fan of nighttime. Even at 28, I’m probably the world’s oldest, not to mention most pathetic, noctophobist. Something about the way the sun disappears and the moon presents itself in the clear, cold sky, eerie. I guess it all emerged from my childhood dislike of bedtime and my perpetual dependence on my night-light. Oh, was it worse as a child. Thankfully, as an adult I have replaced my night-light with a ten milligram dose of Ambien and glass of ginger ale. But, let me tell you the story of how it all started....

At the highly impressionable age of 9, I was a young, curious, alert, and perhaps a tad bit obnoxious, 4th grader. Enrolled at J Edgar Hoover Elementary, I had the world at my tiny fingertips. I knew how to work the system, play the field, trick the adults into thinking I was the best, most-behaved child. At recess, I would use my “please” and “thank-yous” when using the hulu-hoops or gym equipment. I’d even volunteer to be line-leader and safety monitor. The teachers and teachers aids adored my good behavior and rewarded my loyalty with special privileges like first choice in toys or extra time spent in the beanie-bag. Of course, none of these things really mattered to me, because the only thing I REALLY wanted was the highly coveted “night light” which was the prize awarded to the best student each year from pre-5. This year was coming close to an end and I really wanted to snatch the opportunity before any of my peers did. The night light not only symbolized winning, but also, would help soothe my long-time fear of the monsters under my bed. Back in the day, when I was 5 years old, mom would tell me these stories in bed, stories of a greater time, from medieval to Morrocan, she had a story for every occasion. Mom made up the best stories, perhaps because she has a Bachelors degree in arts from Yale under her belt. Her scary stories, however, had the power to psychologically debilitate even the strongest-minded of characters. I definitely know they do. Ever since her story about the Headless Horseman, the brutal sorcery and magic entailed narrative taking place in colonial America, I’ve never been able to get a good night’s sleep since. It’s a love-hate relationship. I can’t muster enough strength to tell my mother that her stories are too intense for my 9-year old self to swallow; therefore, I must keep hearing the stories and keep “pretending” to fall asleep each night, ignoring every small creak I hear in my house and thinking nothing of it. Well, one day, there was much to be thought about the noises. In fact, I remember this day all too well! Mom had just finished her rendition of Sleepy Hollow and I distinctly remember the irony of me not getting any sleep that night. At 9 years old, Washington Irving was NOT an endearing household name. The details, the vivid imagery of the story, it was almost as if my mom had witnessed the decapitation going on in 18th century New England. I had to yawn before the story hit a climatic point, so as to spare my ears from the gory details of said Mr. Horseman. I shouted my loudest yawn and pretended to doze off into Neverland and watched as my mom carefully evacuated my room. She may have left the room, but the residual words of the storyline lingered in the air. Suddenly, I felt a spike of coldness in the air, so I dove deeper into the comforter to warm my freezing flesh. After placing myself in the epicenter of blankets, pillows and teddy bear, I still felt as if I was sleeping in an igloo while on an expedition in central Antarctica. Something was not right.

I stepped out of the bed and my foot froze immediately upon placing it on the ground. I had to use quite a bit of strength to pick it up again. I ran towards the window to see if there was anything on the forecast tonight that would cause this monstrous weather. Nothing. Empty dark sky. Clear and eerie. I took my gaze away from the darkness and saw that there was a large shadow cast on the ground. I look towards my right and there was nothing there. I peered my head towards the left and I gasped loudly as I shut the window tightly.

I thought this was a huge prank. Perhaps something mom had planned for a while now. Something from her story that she wanted to “bring to life” maybe? Or my big brother Bart just trying to get back at me for eating the last snack pack. I’ll admit, I deserved retribution, but this, this was way over the line. I run towards the closet, arguably the safest haven in my room for times of distress. I think this moment qualifies as time of distress. The creature or whatever it was sitting outside my door, staring into my eyes was not looking for
friendship. In fact, the creature outside my door did not look one bit amiable. Its eyes were tiny and beedy, its skin was pail and grey, the creature had gargoyle-like demeanor and that is all I could see before I slammed the window shut.

Five minutes later, I heard a scratch upon my window-sill. Too afraid of the dark to open my eyes, I lay in fetal position in my closet.

The morning sun had soon cast its beacon of hope over my windowsill and into my eyes as my mom found me asleep in my closet. She asked me what had become of myself and I had no reply. Bad digestion, I replied. Terrible lie, Never been a great fabricator of stories, no, I had not inherited that trait from my mother. I was as honest as Abe Lincoln, except for this one secret about disliking my mother’s stories. My mom didn’t believe me. I guess I wasn’t as convincing as I could be. She saw right through me. I started whimpering and she knew immediately what was wrong.

She scanned my window and opened the sill. She examined outside the window 360 degrees. Mom was always good at resolving issues. She saw through my problem almost immediately. She looked outside on the left, and right where the monster was last night, she took a baseball bat to gently poke around and realized our cat, Minnie, had taken a permanent residence on top of my windowsill. Mom laughed, then sighed when she realized how much this had upset me. I was just glad this had been resolved and there was no actual monster living inside my house. My mom told me that she was going to lay off on the scary stories for a while, and make sure Minnie stayed inside the house from now on. I admitted to being an avid fearer of scary stories and she handed me a wrapped box. I didn’t know what was inside because Christmas had just passed and my birthday wasn’t for another 8 months. I hadn’t asked her for anything and I don’t think Hasbro © had come out with another board game. So what could it be? I opened in anticipation and then a huge grin appeared on my face. The gift was well planned, thoughtful and well-received, to say the least. She had wrapped me a night-light. She knew.

19 years later, I’m thankful to say these troubles are long behind me. I no longer worry about the darkness, no. The problem extends more so from the fear of the unknown. How can you prevent the unavoidable?

Speeding
By Kayla Gray

“I was first sergeant the whole time I was going through basic training just outside Fort Knox. Once I got up to the sergeant level, I was allowed to get a 50 mile 3 day pass which allowed me to travel within 50 miles of the camp. Well at this time I was sweet on Ma and I didn’t have any intention of losing her. So every time I got a three day 50 mile pass, I would make my way back up into southern Illinois. Well one specific weekend I was headed back to camp and I was running late. I made it all the way down near Poise and I was scooting quite fast. I blew through a stop sign, and hiding behind an old Coke sign was a trooper. Well I hadn’t made it a quarter of a mile before I saw them lights shining in my rear view mirror. Well I pulled on over and got out my papers. He told me that I was in a mighty heap of troublin’ when he saw my outfit, and at the point I could only hope to be cuffed because that would be so much better than what would happen at camp if they found out I went past 50 miles. Well I was on my best behavior and said, Yes Sir, No Sir, and all the bit. When I was done babbling away, that ole trooper gave me a half grin and said as long as I slowed my ass down, I wouldn’t get no write up. I thanked him over and over, and then as soon as I was getting ready, he pulled away and said, “son, just remember next time if you’re outta range to slow down, and the only reason I’m letting you off is because I am a retired general.”
In the not too distant future, the Megabus rushes through the rural lands of Illinois from the university in Champaign on its way to Chicago. On board is Jack, a 65 year old disgruntled, former Chicago police officer. In his glory days, he and his partner Alex were unstoppable. They took down the weapons trade, human trafficking rings, and the Chicago mafia. However, the two were ambushed by Cashcorp hitmen one day. Alex was murdered and Jack took a bullet to the knee, ending his days as a police officer. Jack often spent his evenings in the local bar smoking cigarettes and reminiscing with any who would listen. He is on his way to visit old colleagues at the Chicago Police Department.

Also aboard the Megabus is Amanda, a gifted senior college student majoring in archeology. Working with one of her professors, Prof. Nadeem, she has discovered a major excavation site just outside of Chicago. The recent earthquake appears to have revealed ancient Native American artifacts hidden in a cave. Amanda received a call from Prof. Nadeem on her iPhone 9.

"Please be careful there, Amanda. Corrupt police and SWAT men took over our excavation site. They must have been hired by Cashcorp, a greedy corporation that just wants the artifacts for money, not for the science and history!"

After hanging up, Amanda looks around her seat. She doesn’t know anyone and there are very loud, annoying people on the bus. Despite the noise, she attempts to take a nap in her seat. Meanwhile, Jack notices a suspicious man in a trench coat walking through the aisle, approaching a sleeping girl. Suddenly, the man draws a handgun from his coat. Remembering his training from the academy, Jack leaps to his feet, disarming the man, and knocking him out with one blow.

"Still got it in me..."

"Whoa!“ exclaims Amanda, waking up from her nap, examines the suspicious man’s wallet, revealing a Cashcorp badge.

"Why was a Cashcorp henchman trying to take you out? And not in a nice way."

"I’m not sure. Maybe he overheard my phone call and found out I was going after the relics at the excavation site. What you just did to that guy was incredible!"

"No, young lady. Paintings of crying clowns and dogs playing poker; those are incredible. What I did was just part of the job. If Cashcorp is involved then something’s up. I should investigate. This could be my chance to get back in the game."

Amanda and Jack then join forces to infiltrate the excavation site, a giant cavern filled with ancient cave paintings and Native American artifacts. They sneak past multiple guards and make their way towards the inner regions. Finally, they discover the mystic, colorful Sky Spirit Mask sitting at the center of a room, surrounded by totem poles.

“That’s the Sky Spirit Mask. Legend says it gives its wearer unbelievable powers. My partner Alex and I had a lead that would have led us here, if it weren’t for Cashcorp ambushing us” explains Jack.

A grey-haired man with an eye patch appears from the shadows wielding a quadruple-barreled laser shotgun and says “How perceptive of you, Officer Jack Lawler. Or should I say, former Officer Jack Lawler? I remember putting the hit on you and Alex.”

“Commissioner Graves!” exclaims Jack.

“Who’s he?” inquires Amanda.

“Commissioner Graves was my boss and mentor; taught me everything I know. No way he’d betray us. Not him.”

“Believe it, Jack. Cashcorp’s going to pay me a fortune to get their hands on this mask. No one
can stop me; especially not a cripple and a stupid, bratty girl.”

Amanda replies, “That belongs in a museum! And excuse me? I’m not stupid. I graduated high school with a 4.3 GPA and I’m now at the top of my senior class in college majoring in – eek!”

Graves narrowly misses Amanda with his shotgun.

“Curse this eye patch! Almost had her.” growls Graves.

Jack rushes in, disarming Graves and engaging in hand-to-hand combat. They trade blow for blow. Jack seems to be winning, until Graves kicks him in his knee. The critical strike knocks Jack down and Graves walks over to a heavy rock to lift it up.

Graves looks down on Jack and says “I’ve trained you well; you were my best student. It’s a shame you and Alex didn’t follow orders to stop looking for the mask. Now it’s lights out forever!”

“Wrong. Lights on!” yells Amanda.

Graves could smash the rock on Jack, Amanda uses the flashlight feature on her iPhone 9 to stun him. Seeing his opportunity, Jack grabbed Graves’ shotgun on the ground and fires plasma pellets into Graves’ head, killing him.

“He was always open-minded.” says Jack.

Amanda and Jack bring the Sky Spirit Mask back to Prof. Nadeem at museum.

“You’re a hero.” Amanda says to Jack.

“I’m no hero.” Jack replies. “Teachers, doctors, and janitors; they’re the real heroes. I’m just an old cop doing my job.”

As Amanda and Jack leave the museum, Prof. Nadeem stares at the Sky Spirit Mask, laughing evilly as his eyes glow red.

The Goldfish
By: Christina Ranick

I glanced sideways at the clock. Almost noon. My friend had slept over last night, and we were up until four in the morning working on art projects. She was on the floor, staring at the ceiling, blinking every so often. She checked the time on her phone and sighed. “What is it?” I mumbled sleepily. Moments later, her phone went off and it made both of us jump. Guess we were up now.

“Hello?” she answered. “Oh hi mom, what’s up?” She paused. “What really? No way! Ugh, you’ve got to be kidding….I’ll be right there…” She hung up and flopped back onto the pillows, slowly unzipping the sleeping bag and wiggling herself out.

“What’s going on?” I asked. I stood up and walked to the dresser, pulling out a pair of worn jeans and a baggy t-shirt.

“My mom said that my dad sent me a text. It looks like we’ve got a little emergency on our hands. Get ready to go.” She stood and sauntered over to her backpack, stuffing her computer and cords inside and pulling out her car keys.

“What happened now?”

“What do you think? It’s that silly goldfish again. This time, he’s Up. Side. Down” she articulated every syllable in the word. I laughed a little and sighed.

“Ah yes, that stupid, stupid goldfish…” We packed up our things and drove away. Ten minutes later, we arrived at her house and blasted through the side door, straight into the kitchen.

We set down our bags, and crowded around the fish tank. Sure enough, the goldfish was swimming upside down. He spotted us and righted himself, swimming frantically and looking for food, just as he always did. She groaned, tapping on the class and growling “You stupid idiot of a fish! You got me all worried for nothing! Stop getting into trouble!” Her dad came in through the back door and had a concerned look on his face. My friend sighed, “There’s nothing wrong with him, he’s just tipsy and drunk. Off air bubbles.” She tapped on the glass of the aquarium again, “He’s perfectly fine, so I’m out of here.” And with that, we left the house to get lunch.
Pauly the Unique Pup
By: Todd Pieper

There once was a little pup named Pauly. He lived on a farm, and today was in fact his birthday, his first birthday. He was the littlest one around momma dog along with all of his brothers and sisters. Momma was sure tired the day he first met her. In fact, that is all he noticed for the remainder of the day was momma, sisters, and brothers.

After a few weeks, little Pauly noticed that few of his brothers and sisters were left. They were usually gone the next morning he awoke. Each day was like the last for him; he would get up and walk towards momma and greet his remaining family. One day, he began thinking about where he was. He finally noticed how small his world was. Nothing but brown, stretchable walls kept him in with his family. He even looked up and saw something very peculiar to him.

He saw eyes. Around these eyes were large heads that would make sweet noises as they looked at his family and him. At this time, he was a little larger and could walk more coordinately. Lately, he often walked away from momma and the others. He felt like he was in danger from the creatures that overlooked him. He noticed where his brothers and sisters would go. Appendages much larger than Pauly’s hands would reach down and scoop up a sister or brother. Sometimes, the arms would reach down for two! Pauly was getting more and more lonely. After a month or two, Pauly’s sisters and brothers were gone. Momma was not even around that often. He started to wish to have hands come and take him away too.

His world was so lonely and there was not much to do. He would wake up and walk towards his bowl and eat some food or play with his few toys that littered the floor.

From behind, he was lifted high into the air. He went higher and higher and higher till he was able to see a little giant. This one, Pauly thought, was the prettiest one he has ever seen. She had straight red hair which smoothly covered her ears. Her eyes twinkled with joy as she smiled at Pauly. She could not control her happiness and reached out in a desperate attempt to grab Pauly. Finally after the giants talked, Pauly was handed to the girl. Pauly could fit right into her arms.

“Now, dear,” said the large female, “make sure this is the best puppy for you. Remember that there are other puppies we can see. Is your heart set on this one?”

The little girl hugged and held the little Pauly. All she replied was, “He is perfect for me mother. See and he matches me. He has one arm and two legs just like me! What other dog could be just as perfect?”

Football
By: Josh Siu

The crowd shrieks for blood
Players lower their shoulders
Aiming for a head
Westward

By Jessica Woolsey

Another hot day. It was mid-June and we had just entered Wyoming. As I walked alongside the wagon train, I peered down at my black boots. The bottom of my dress was torn and tattered. Considering that we’ve been on the trail for quite some time now, it was in good condition. I haven’t even really worn my second set of clothing yet.

Sometimes I got to thinkin’. Why are we even doing this? Pa says it’s to have a better life. But was a better life really worth all the sufferin’? Billy got the mumps a ways back and passed. We buried him next to the river. Sue fell off the wagon and broke her ankle. The infection got really bad and we couldn’t find any medicine to trade for. She died shortly after. Uncle Merle got bit by a snake of some sort. After that, it wasn’t long until he was one with the dirt.

All that was left was me, Ma, Pa, Timmy, Kate, Aunt Wilma, Paul, and William.

We were practically starving to death. The last river we crossed, an ox slipped and most of our food went flowing down the river. Now we’ve been trying to hunt as much as possible. But that was hard to do when it was so dry out. The dust kickin’ up practically blinded us on the trail. I just can’t understand how there is a possibility of a better life with so much we’ve already given up.

While walking along the side the wagon, I looked up at the sky. There wasn’t a cloud in sight. It was a beautiful bright blue. So peaceful and simple.

“Hey Pa,” I hollered toward the wagon.

“Yes Emily?” he responded back.

“Are we coming along another river yet?”

“Very soon.”

What both of us didn’t need to say weighed on our minds. We heard stories of Indian attacks and massacres near the next river. We weren’t sure what caused them or how much danger we would be in. But we heard vicious stories of the Natives and how they acted like savages. I looked back up at the sky, as peaceful as it was, and wished that we’d have the same peace the remainder of our trip.

As we continued on our journey the next few days, it began to storm. This storm was harsh, fierce, and dark. Big dark clouds hovered overhead. It down-poured hard on the second day. Lightening began striking the base of the earth the following. Pa decided it was best to rest for a day.

We set up camp a few miles from the river. I helped Ma cook the food we had and clean up after supper. Once the night tucked us in, I began to day dream about what life would be like in Oregon. Being from east of St. Louis, our poor farming family couldn’t even imagine what it was like in the west.

I began dreaming of what our life would be like once we arrived. We’d be given a new, fresh start. New land, new people. 320 acres of land handed to us to build a new home and start a new business. The younger kids might even be able to attend school somewhere. I might even meet someone to marry in Oregon. Life seemed exciting because of all the opportunities ahead. Thinking about this made the days pass a little faster. While we left a lot behind, we were coming upon even more...

I began to doze off and dreamed of what more could be waiting for me in the West, in my future.
The Light’s Shadow

By: Afreen Ziauddin

Bleak rays of sun peaked through her hands as she shielded herself from the scorching heat. She stood there, observing, looking around as the ringing of rickshaws and the usual bustle of vehicles that flooded the streets below the balcony.

“Tomatoes! Tomatoes! Twenty rupees a kilo!” a man called out as he hauled vegetables in a cart across the street. The aroma of freshly made *pakoras* and *samosas* filled the air. Faint music could be heard from the small neighborhood shops that were lined up in the street below where Noor stood. This was just the typical bustle of the neighborhood. It’s all that she had ever known. And even though it was the same scenery she had seen every day, the view still intrigued her every morning when she would--

“Don’t just stand there! Go hang the clothes over there!” Ammi scorned as she shoved countless damp shirts and pants in Noor’s hands. “I need your help and you’re just standing there in the sun, the *dhoop.*” She scolded her, her voice almost expressing disgust. “As if you’re not already dark!” she rebuked with no hesitation. “Children never even help their parents these days! It’s as if they want their parents to die of a heart attack or another grave disease. Absolutely no care in the world!” she went on as if she was delivering a monologue to a brick wall. As if Noor wasn’t there to listen to her rant. Ammi frantically went around the room in search of ridding it from the smallest speck of dust. Meanwhile, downstairs in the kitchen, Nifaqat was making *rotis*, carefully rolling out the dough while the *khorma* was being heated on the stove. The *gulab jamun* sweets were put out on a tray in preparation for the guests that would be coming in the evening. Everything was expected to nothing short of perfection. God willing, everything was expected to go well.

“You should get ready. I’ll make the rest of the *rotis*.” Noor offered as she came downstairs. “You are the one they want to see,” she added with grin accompanied by a twinkle in her eye.

“You don’t even know how to make them properly. If I let you make the rest, they’ll look like ovals.” Nifaqat teased and playfully flicked flakes of flour on Noor’s face. Even when she worked in the kitchen for hours, Nifaqat looked beautiful, Noor thought with envy. Unlike Noor, Nifaqat inherited features from Ammi’s side of the family. She was fair skinned with long and straight black hair. She was slender and had light brown eyes that almost made her look like an Arab. Her beauty caught everyone’s attention at weddings; all of the boys in the neighborhood looked out for her in the streets; aunties always pestered Ammi in hopes that Nifaqat would marry their sons.

Noor was another story, nonetheless. She looked nothing like Ammi or Nifaqat. When she was born, it was said that Ammi was horrified when she saw how dark her newborn child was. Ammi had assumed that since Nifaqat was light, Noor would turn out the same way. Seeing how dark her complexion was, Ammi and Baba decided to name her Noor in hopes that her skin would become lighter in the later years. After all, a person’s name would determine the person who they are, was the notion of the time. Even though her name meant “light” in Arabic, that was the least of her features. Although she had brown eyes like Nifaqat, it was overshadowed by her noticeably dark skin that puzzled anyone who saw her walking with Ammi and Nifaqat. Often, she would be mistaken as a villager from Southern India, or worse: a maid. Even at the age of fourteen, Noor was used to hearing the occasional remarks of aunties who overtly commented on her rather hyper-pigmented complexion. One aunty notoriously suggested that she scrub dried animal fat on herself every day. Another swore on the grave of her dead ancestor that using a mixture of ginger and turmeric paste every night before going to sleep would do the trick and rid her of her dark skin forever. Neither of the two remedies worked, however. After months of
scrubbing animal fat, Noor finally told Ammi that she couldn’t stand the stench any longer. The spice paste only made Noor’s face sting. By then, Ammi grew wary of her lost efforts and only instructed Noor to stay out of the sun as much as possible. With the damage already apparent, the most she could do was prevent it from being worse. Despite Noor’s shortcomings, Ammi was grateful though that she had possessed least one daughter that she could take pride in, one daughter to carry on the beauty of her ancestors. At least one daughter who would bring her a good son-in-law and unparalleled pride.

Although Noor could never be truly beautiful in Ammi’s eyes, Baba always took the time to remind her that she had more to offer to the world. Baba, who was rather darker in complexion himself, though not as dark as Noor, still related to her strife. He always compensated for Ammi’s remarks by constantly praising Noor for her strengths. “You are intelligent, Noor jaan.” He would always remind her. “You have the ability to do what others can’t.” In Baba’s eyes, Noor was more than just being marriageable and responsible for bearing children. Her job in the world was to take advantage of her brilliance. Her job was to do what her talents would lead her to do. As much as she nodded her head in agreement every time Baba would utter those words, Noor could never really believe the words that Baba told her every day. It didn’t matter what Baba thought of her. He only said that because he was her father. She and Baba knew that the world didn’t see her the same way.

While Nifaqat got ready, Noor dusted the porch and dusted the room once more. Just then Baba entered the room and just came back from the government office where he worked.

“Noor jaan,” he called out loud when he saw her after coming through the door. In Urdu, the word jaan was a form of endearment. Noor felt special because she was the only one he always called Noor jaan. And it was always her name that he called first when he would come back from work every day. Noor instantly ran up to Baba and gave him a hug. He had a box of chocolates in her his hand, for her of course, as always.

“You’re here now?” Ammi yelled coming down the stairs without saying salaam first. “They’ll be here any minute now!” she noted, filled with unnecessary stress and anxiety even though all the tasks had been done. Still, she took his briefcase and made him go upstairs to get ready despite the fact that the guests would be arriving in two hours. She looked at the box of chocolates in his other hands and took them out of his hands as well. “How many times have I told you to not bring so many sweets in this house?! Chocolate makes her skin darker!” She cried with frustration. Baba said nothing as usual and apologized. When this dilemma usually happened, Noor knew that Baba would end up sneaking it under Noor’s pillow after Ammi would fall asleep at night. “And you?” she looked at Noor pointing her finger at her. “Did you clean everything like I asked?”

“Yes, Ammi.” Noor replied with a hushed and docile voice that displayed respect. “Is there anything else that I should do?” She knew of course, that there was always something Ammi had for her to do. She prepared herself for Ammi’s sarcasm.

“No, just go get ready.” Ammi said as she scanned the room one last time to make sure it was spotless. As Noor walked up the stairs, she heard Ammi’s voice again. “Your shalwar kameez has been ironed. It’s the pink one on your bed.” Ammi said.

Noor found herself quietly making her way to the top of the roof. It was where she usually sat when she wanted to think without the intrusion of others. She often came here when she wanted to escape Ammi and the rest of the world that made her feel so little and unloved. It was windy tonight; it
was nights like these that Noor found the most perfect and pleasing, the way the cool breeze caressed her face and the way her hair ran away with the wind. From the rooftop, Noor could see the rest of the hillside below and the roofs of the other buildings that stood over the streets. She could hear the sounds of the city while still being able to see the moon and the stars above watch her sit there in silence. There she replayed the events of what had happened in her mind, trying to grasp and make sense of what had happened as tears started to well up in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks like a stream.

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“That’s enough, kaafi hai” Shabnam Aunty said politely and smiled. Nifaqat stopped pouring the chai in her cup and smiled back while putting it back on the center table which was strewed with an assortment of tea, sweets, and pakoras. “Your daughter is very beautiful. Very sweet, I must add.” Shabnam Aunty said looking at Ammi. “Wouldn’t you say the same, Siraj?” Shabnam Aunty looked over at her husband, who sat next to her. He took a look at Nifaqat and nodded his head.

“She looks like a good girl.” He said nonchalantly, clearly distracted as he busily relished a samosa. Their son sat at the end of the couch, next to Siraj Uncle. He had a tall frame, with curly black hair and dark eyebrows. His name was Jameel. He had dark almond eyes that were covered by his glasses. He was someone Ammi would confidently describe as “sharp” and “smart.”; a man that had a good career, good marks, and success paved in his path. Noor noticed Jameel occasionally taking a few glances at Nifaqat; He would instantly look away at the floor in fear of the parents noticing how struck he was by her beauty.

Ammi blushed as if Shabnam Aunty was complimenting her instead. “Yes, she is. She is a very good girl, indeed. Nifaqat is very good towards us, very khuloos and always listens to us. She always helps around the house and I have never had a problem with her.” Ammi made sure to note looking at Nifaqat, the way she emphasized the word never. Nifaqat sat back down on the sofa and kept her gaze to the floor out of shyness. It was typical to be talked about in third person in Indian culture, especially when parents talked about their children in front of other parents.

Noor suddenly found herself as the center of Shabnam Aunty’s attention, the way she looked at her. Noor knew what she was thinking and prepared for the worst.

“So this is your other daughter?” Shabnam Aunty nosily inquired with an eyebrow raised, keeping her eyes on Noor who sat at the end of the sofa next to Nifaqat. “She doesn’t exactly look like you,” she commented rather flatly. Ammi, who was used to these comments, was rather taken aback this time.

“Well, she takes more from her father’s side, more from her dadiyaal, you see.” Ammi replied with nervousness creeping in her voice. Noor kept her mouth shut as she had always done. She hated being talked about in third person as if she wasn’t there. Baba and Ammi had warned her not to talk back and only speak when she was instructed to do so. “However, Nifaqat looks more like my relatives from Pakistan.” Ammi turned the conversation back to Nifaqat. She hoped to change the subject and that too, fast.

“So Jameel is doing medicine I hear?” Baba spoke up, feeling the tension in the room.

“He is in medical school right now.” Siraj Uncle cut in this time, and said with pride as he patted his son on his shoulder. Jameel smiled and kept his eyes on the floor and followed the same directions.
“He will be done in a few months, actually. He actually hopes to go to America afterward, my son.” Shabnam Aunty added, lovingly glancing at her son.

“Well, that’s very wonderful. Surely he must be a good student.” Ammi added with full praise, with her face in awe.

“Son, beta, you might as well look at her, now. What do you think? Do you like her?” Siraj Uncle finally asked humorously addressing the elephant in the room as he gleefully reached for a pakora. Jameel only nodded and blushed more, keeping his eyes further glued to the floor. He looked up at Nifaqat and tried not to let his smile seep through the serious face he was trying so hard to maintain. Nifaqat looked away feeling rather infatuated. It was evident the feelings were mutual. He was tall, light skinned, and a doctor in the making. And she was a beautiful girl, a girl that could be the perfect wife for him. And if Shabnam Aunty was right, if Jameel did go to America, Nifaqat would live a dream abroad. Ammi liked the idea better than ever. However, all this talk made Noor felt rather uncomfortable, being here in the room. She felt as though she didn’t belong. As if she wasn’t a person, simply something as tedious as a rug, an inanimate object that couldn’t speak.

“Noor, go bring the gulab jamoon” Ammi ordered, still conversing with Shabnam Aunty. As it became evident that the feelings were mutual and that both parties were in agreement, they began to discuss wedding details. There was talk of a ring, a wedding dress, and of course, a dowry. Noor brought back the tray of sweets in the room and handed a bowl of dumplings first to Siraj Uncle, then Shabnam Aunty, Jameel, and then Baba, Ammi, and Nifaqat. There was then a moment of silence when Shabnam Aunty spoke again, this time rather coyly.

“I think that our families will match well,” Shabnam Aunty began. “And with a few conditions fulfilled we can create this union, not just between our two children,” she said with a smile looking over at Nifaqat. “But it’s important that our family name remain untarnished,” she said. Noor began to sink in the sofa, expectant of what she was about to say. “We simply ask that if there is a possibility, everyone must make our family look well.” She kept going on. This time, her gaze on Noor was rather over. “For this reason I’d like to ask whether you have considered doing something about your daughter’s skin?” she asked Ammi with concern. Jameel and Nifaqat stood still. Baba’s fists had started to clench. Siraj Uncle was frozen as he held a pakora in his hand.

“We have tried everything,” Ammi began timidly. “Perhaps there are still some measures we could try.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand how this affects the union of our two families--” Baba interjected. “Quite frankly, I believe we are getting Nifaqat married to Jameel, not Noor.” He said with indignation. “I apologize for coming off as rude, Shabnam ji but you can accept us and our daughter for who we are, or you can find yourself a rishta, a match, elsewhere.” He stood tall and firm with his eyes widened and his face looking somewhat grave. Ammi sat there in disbelief.

“Surely, we can do something about this,” Ammi began. But it was already too late. Shabnam Aunty’s face resembled a dark cherry. She said nothing and mumbled on her way out as her son and her husband followed her out the door. Nifaqat stood with her eyes

“You are wasting away a good opportunity for Nifaqat,” she said to Ammi whose eyes shown embarrassment and shock. Jameel and Siraj Uncle silently followed her out the door.
Baba remained where he stood until they left and had no remorse. Nifaqat ran up to her room and shut the door. Ammi stood outside the gates of their home as they left. She walked back inside and released her fury.

“You! You ruined her chances! Such a good family they were!” she screamed at Baba. He stood there with his face still.

“And you! How many times have I told you to scrub your face with animal fat! I try to help you and you only cause me grief! You just cost your sister a proposal! Who knows how many others they will tell about us?” Ammi’s face with seething with anger towards Noor and Baba, especially Noor.

“She is your daughter too! How can you stand to let others belittle her like that! I will not allow any of my daughters to marry into a family that has no values!” Baba cried. This was the first time he talked back. “The fact that you are willing to sacrifice your own daughter for such filth!” he yelled louder this time pointing his finger at Ammi. “It shows how much of a mother you are!”

Ammi wouldn’t give it a rest and certainly wouldn’t let this go. “A good mother?!” she started to pound her chest, quite dramatically on her part. “I have been nothing but a good mother to this family! I have tried, I have prayed that my daughters are able to marry into a good family so that we can die in peace! And you?” she said with disgust. “All you think about is what they want. You only spoil them to bits. Look at her!” she pointed to Noor.

“You have caused nothing but fitna, hardship!” she screamed at Noor. “It’s your fault! Look what you’ve done!”

In those moments, Noor was unable to move, unable to think. Ammi’s words hit her like a brick hitting a steel wall. Her words were felt, but they were thrown at her too often. She was only immune to them. It was these words that would cause her to express her misery when no one else was around. She would find a way to end her sadness and the burden she had put on her family somehow.

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As Noor climbed back from the top of the roof, she made her way to the bathroom and stood there in the mirror and saw her insecurities reflecting back at her. Her hair was wisped back from the wind outside. Her eyes still puffy and her skin showing a bit of pink from tears. How many times she had prayed, how many times she had pleaded to God to make her skin lighter, she thought to herself. How many times she had endured words of hate, feelings of neglect from Ammi and others who found every reason to ostracize her and make her feel as if she wasn’t deserving of love or acceptance simply because she wasn’t light enough.

Reluctantly, she dug into the cabinet beneath the sink and began to scrub a bar of animal fat on herself again, hoping to scrub away until she could see the dirt on her skin wash away.
Lotus Flower

By: Sheri Chau

Lotus Flower
Drowning deep down, disregarded,
She submerges in soil, sinking in sadness
Nurtured by nature, matured by mud,
She stretches and sprouts
Growing greatly
Against the anxious, aging anomalies
Blooming beautifully behind the bunch
From the farthest and foulest filth
She stood superior of standards
Defying all doubts, developed
Into an indeed intricate Beauty