

The North Coast Review

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A Journal of the Creative Writing Institute of Lorain County Community College, Bruce Weigl, Director

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We are proud to go online this semester with the first issue of the North Coast Review , a literary journal dedicated to publishing a wide range of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, articles, essays, commentary, reviews and artwork by students, faculty, staff and alumni of the Lorain Country Community College. In addition, the journal will provide information about literary events on our campus, and about creative writing offerings in our curriculum. The Creative Writing Institute also sponsors workshops and master classes, free to residents of Lorain and Cuyahoga counties; dates of future workshops will be announced in these pages.

We hope that this first issue will also serve as an invitation to all of those eligible to submit their work for consideration.

Editorial/Submissions

The North Coast Review is published once a semester by the Creative Writing Institute of the Lorain County Community College for the students, faculty, staff and alumna of the college. The Review will publish poetry, fiction, nonfiction, articles, essays, commentary, reviews, occasional interviews, and artwork. To be eligible you must either be currently enrolled at the College, currently an employee at the College, or an alumnus of the college. Submissions should be sent to <mailto:ncr@lorainccc.edu>, attention Bruce Weigl or Kim Greenfield, editors, and must include your name and e-mail address. Submissions should be no longer than ten pages of poetry or fifteen pages of fiction or nonfiction, and should include a brief biographical statement including your relationship with the College. All decisions about what goes into the journal will be made by the editorial staff after careful consideration and are final. For further information about the Journal or about the Institute for Creative Writing contact Bruce Weigl, Director, Creative Writing Institute, Lorain County Community College at 440-366-7141. Other inquiries should be sent to The Review's e-mail address.

THE NORTH COAST REVIEW

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Emily Katitus

Remembering

" . . . in our hearts we did believe that her favorite color was probably green." -Carissa's Wierd

she had so many, many shoes and they were very great shoes, you just have to believe me. when i was little my aunt thought something was wrong with me because i liked to try them on and i thought it was funny and so did my gram. so we took these very great pictures. they are very great even though it is a little embarrassing that i used to wear girl's shoes and liked it. i don't like to wear them anymore. anyway we never developed those pictures because that is how my family is. we always do things, and some of those things are very fun, but then we forget about them and nobody really likes to talk about them and i don't know why because i once heard that the remembering is even better than the happening and i think that sounds right to me because i'm remembering something right now and it is making me happy but also sad so maybe i'm confused. anyway my gram started doing this crying thing and she did it a lot and i wanted to help her stop so i asked about those pictures and she said she never got them developed but she always meant to. and then she cried again because she told me she was colorblind. i asked if this had just happened and she said no but it had just happened that she was sad about it. i didn't get that then because wouldn't a sad thing always be sad or could it really just start being sad later or could a sad thing someday not be so sad?

at her funeral i put up the pictures in black and white because i wanted to remember like she did.

Tom DeRoma

The Vision of Normalcy

“Mom, that man -- is missing an arm,” I said, speaking strictly through my teeth so as not to let the one-armed-man hear. “Well don’t stare,” my mother said, “You think you’re the vision of normalcy?” The man walked by us in the park, smiled at me, the one staring unblinkingly, and waved his remaining hand at my mother, who kindly smiled back.

The vision of normalcy? Well, I’m not missing an arm like that guy, nor am I running any sort of surplus on appendages; I’m not connected at the head to my brother; I’m not a giant *or* a midget for that matter; I’m not pierced or tattooed and have no special inclination for leather; Yes. I am the vision: the smiling white figure with the black dotted line down the center of his body to show symmetry; I am him, normal, perfectly *normal*. Well, perfectly besides the purplish birthmark on my right thigh. And I guess I have a few moles too. Then there’s still that scar on my arm from falling through the glass table last year and people do kind of wince when they see it. And I do sometimes like the feeling of sticking pencils in my ears and I suppose not many boys collect their own hair or wear their mother’s high heels around either.

Does my mother hear the conversations I have with myself in the mirror, repeating the same words over and over to see what my mouth looks like when I speak? Does she know about my strange dreams and the missing underwear? I remained silent for the rest of the walk home, no longer studying others for their abnormalities, but for their stares; they were on to me, this little freak child.

Dane Leimbach

Sons of Farmers

A friend and I beheaded golden beans in seclusion. I despaired at the end of something; he argued that this is the process: these beans and all things die. Eight feet above the earth we can see the backs of rabbits dodge the teeth of the auger. I'm reminded there are things outside myself. Surrounded by tall sons of the sun, trees fading fingers shed brown skins and block our sight of a world that stinks of split atoms and concrete streets. We are perfect eight feet above the ground. I let myself breathe once I spot a rabbit resting outside the path of the combine.

Philistine Ayad

Beit-Hanina Checkpoint

The sweltering heat, and lack of air-conditioning, left no option other than to have all of the windows thrown open—begging for a nonexistent breeze. An old woman walks up to the car, and sorrowfully says, “Not good.” The inhabitants of the car look at each other in confusion. Suddenly, the checkpoint becomes utter bedlam. Another skirmish between the local youth and the tyrannical soldiers is underway. Rocks are hurtled uselessly against metal, as bullets pierce through flesh. The gunpowder screams as it wreaks destruction. “Get down!” the driver yells as he peels out of the checkpoint, evading merciless gunfire, driving swiftly past the tear inflicting clouds. The terrified shaking stops as we reach our home, and is replaced by trembling of a different nature. We laugh because we have experienced yet another adventure and have escaped unscathed. We laugh because we will live to see another day: not really occurring to us, until years of maturity later, that some other children would not.

Kevin P. Keating

Antiquing

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They were lost, well, maybe not quite lost, how could they be, there were only so many roads out here, impossibly long ribbons of two-lane highway that cut across fallow fields, bisecting one another at ninety degree angles every two or three square miles, a thousand nameless lines plotted with monstrous logic on a grid in the middle of this gray, treeless, March desolation. Few things attracted their attention--power lines, the rusted hulk of a burned out car, here and there an old grain silo, a crumbling barn, a dozen rotting fence posts marking either the beginning or the end of a wilderness, it was difficult to tell which. On occasion the simple white gravestones of a forlorn cemetery dotted a distant hillside, the last inhabitants of an abandoned town returned at last to the anonymity of scattered dust. Some of the stones had been toppled over by drunk and listless teenagers, the inscriptions erased by a century of wind and rain.

“I bet the coffins slide down that hill,” Ed said. His coffee had gone stale and cold miles back but he drank it anyway because it gave him something to do. “Erosion, you know. The soil gets thin, the earth crumbles away. Imagine this place after a heavy rain. I wouldn’t be surprised to see a pile of bones right there in the gulch.”

Karen studied her nails. Except when their finances became the topic of conversation she rarely listened to anything he had to say. A thousand times he wanted to reassure her that they had nothing to worry about, that they could always make the minimum payments, everything was under control, but as the sedan screeched around sudden bends and struggled over abrupt hills, Ed recalled with the mounting panic that had come to define his life that the car payment was now two months overdue. Of course this fact hadn’t deterred them from embarking on yet another pointless excursion. How much money had they spent? No, he wouldn’t think about that just yet. They were having too much fun.

“Maybe,” he said, “I’d be better off buried up there.” Self-pity came naturally to him, and over the years he’d mastered its gratifying tone of despair. It gave him such pleasure that at times he felt like a hedonist, shamelessly wallowing in his own anguish

and misery. “I’d be the first new resident in a hundred years, maybe more. Gotta be cheap for a plot. Save on funeral costs.”

Karen smirked. “Ed, darling, we couldn’t get credit for a pine box.”

Her voice had an omniscient quality, it never went away, not entirely. During the long afternoons when Ed dozed in his cubicle at work and late at night when he fell fast asleep and dreamed of forbidden delights the voice came to him, shrill and acrimonious, injecting him with a near fatal dose of spite, and even now, as he drove through this barren landscape, he heard it, a coiling phantasm that rattled and hissed in the claustrophobic confines of the car. Over the years he’d built up an immunity and found that it soothed him, calmed him, lulled him into passivity, made him think of warm water, blue skies, white sand; it was so hypnotic in fact that he didn’t hear Karen suddenly shriek beside him, didn’t see her turn away from the windshield and cover her eyes. By then of course it was much too late to hit the breaks.

He felt a sudden thud against the bumper, heard the snap and crunch of bones, the wet splatter of disembowelment, saw a shock of scarlet against the endless gray expanse and the great shaggy carcass tumbling end over end along the gravel road.

Karen folded her hands on her lap, breathed in and out, contorted herself with the stillness and austerity of a Buddhist sage. Maybe the yoga classes were at last paying off. “Just keep going,” she instructed him.

“But we can’t do that.”

“Why are you slowing down, Ed?”

Ed scratched the stubble on his chin. He hadn’t shaved since they’d left home. How long had it been now? The days were as dreary and formless as the sky. He tried to envision this place in the summer, lush and green with stalks of corn in the fields and Queen Anne’s lace on the side of the road, but he simply couldn’t do it. He suffered from a lack of imagination, that’s what Karen always told him anyway, even as he made love to her last night at the bed and breakfast. He stopped the car but wasn’t so foolish as to cut the engine.

“I’m sure we have some kind of, you know, legal obligation.”

“Lawyers, Ed? Keep driving, please.”

“There’s no need to worry. When the time comes I’ll explain everything.”

She pointed to the thing in the road. “How do you intend to explain *that*?”

“You don’t give me enough credit.”

Karen breathed deeply. “I’m sorry to tell you this, Ed dear, I really am, but I think you’re losing it. I think you’re fucking delusional.” She reached into her purse for her pills, huge pink tablets that he suspected were some kind of placebo. As far as he could tell they had no effect on her. “Besides, you didn’t do anything wrong. It was already dead when you hit it.”

Ed shifted in his seat. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, dead in the middle of the road. Flies buzzing all around it.”

“But...”

“Don’t make me repeat myself, Ed. You weren’t paying attention. Obviously. Now please drive away. I’m getting nauseous.”

For a moment, maybe because he couldn’t quite accept the reality of it, he let out a sigh of relief, kissed his wife’s hand out of gratitude, smelled her lotion, oversweet and cloying, yet it was like a magical balm capable of absolving his innumerable transgressions, and he put the car in drive, but before pulling away he couldn’t help but look back one last time to study the thing at the edge of a muddy ditch, carrion for the great birds of prey that hovered always in the sky, huge creatures prehistoric in their visage that swooped low over the fields and perched on rusty wires to peck madly at the vermin burrowing in their black wings, and though he couldn’t be certain, he thought he saw the thing shudder and writhe with unimaginable suffering, doomed to take its last agonizing breaths beside a pasture reeking of cow shit.

“Keep your eyes on the road,” Karen snapped.

He brooded, gazed dreamily into the distance, and after driving a mile or two he once again imagined hundreds of exhumed townspeople, thousands of them, gleefully riding coffins rank and fetid down the steep hillside into oblivion.

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They trolled the empty streets of a small town, searching for a cafe, a bakery, a trendy bistro but found only the usual boarded up storefronts and bars where men in denim coveralls smoked cigarettes and checked their lottery tickets and grumbled about the weather. A canal of sludge and stagnant water circled the town and its crumbling

brick warehouses like a mote. Weeds sprouted from the cracked pavement. Crumpled cans of beer and busted bottles of whiskey littered the curbs. In the uppermost branches of the oaks and elms, blue plastic bags flapped in the wind and sounded like a thousand voices laughing deep inside a well. From the lopsided porch of a clapboard frame house a horde of dirty children stared blankly back at them and pointed.

At the edge of town a diner. They decided to go in. Ed lowered his head to avoid the scorn of the other customers who chewed their buttermilk biscuits sopping with gravy and regarded them with unmistakable loathing as if to say, *There is something not right about you people, you are depraved and ruinous, now leave us be.*

Karen ordered the fish, using the tongs of her fork to pick with surgical precision at its bones, and somehow knew that it had been scooped up out of the noxious waters of the canal with a net kept beside the diner's back door and fried up in a greasy skillet. She tossed her fork down with a loud clatter.

Ed leaned forward. "Honey," he whispered.

"Goddamn tourist trap." She snapped her fingers three times. "Waitress, would you come here for just a moment, please?"

Ed kept his eyes focused on his plate because he knew that by looking up he would be implicated in this crime, an accessory to his wife's brutal condemnation, but the waitress was young and pretty, no more than nineteen- or twenty-years old, and he *needed* to inspect, to study, to fantasize about her slim physique, her disproportionately ample bust, the caked muck around her eyes, he had to supply his dwindling libido with some kind of fuel however meager, he had no choice in the matter, the human soul yearns for variety. For three days now he'd been subjected to a gauntlet of morbidly obese ladies who sighed and grunted every time they trundled their hefty rolls along the cramped aisles of antique shops or tried to wedge themselves into narrow booths at ice cream parlors, women whose necks jiggled whenever they belted out that raucous laughter of theirs and whose noses were sometimes pitted from excessive drink.

"I can't eat this fish," Karen informed the waitress.

The waitress's eyes instantly glazed over with boredom. "That's your prerogative, ma'am."

“Prerogative? My, my, someone’s been taking night classes at the community college.”

Karen was much too proud of her education, she’d earned a master’s degree at the University of Chicago in American Studies, and whenever she could she worked this tidbit of information into the conversation, “Chicago, oh, yes, I lived there for a time, Hyde Park. Hmmm? Yes, I did attend the University of Chicago,” still bragged about the seminar she had with Saul Bellow who, she claimed, made a pass at her at the end of the semester. Ed didn’t believe this story, not for a minute, but then Karen got tipsy on scotch at a dinner party over the holidays and confessed to yielding to the great man’s advances (“The dirty old sonofabitch stank like garlic but he screwed like a champ”), Ed stormed over to the shelves, found her copy of The Adventures of Augie March, signed in bold black letters by the author himself, and tossed it onto the fireplace. The pages crackled with a sort of lilting musical quality and gave off the heat of a Chicago blast furnace. Karen screamed, called him a book-burning, goose-stepping Nazi, but Ed quietly insisted, even while their guests looked at their watches and started to make excuses, that no one should possess that kind of talent, it wasn’t natural, it was to be perfectly frank about it freakish, abnormal, and thus doomed to extinction, but it satisfied him that the ashes of the book looked no different than the ashes of the newspaper he used earlier that evening to kindle the fire.

The waitress pointed. “No refunds, ma’am. Says so right there on the door. Sorry.”

Karen smiled. “Oh, I’m sure you are, sweetie. Well, could you please box up our food so that when we leave this filthy little establishment I can toss the box into the trashcan so your customers can see just what I thought of your ‘home cookin’?”

“You want that in a Styrofoam box, ma’am?”

“Styrofoam would be lovely. It releases toxins, you know.”

As the waitress strode off to the kitchen, Ed followed her with his eyes, admiring how her thin cotton blouse, which was just a little too short for her tiny frame, so that crept up her back whenever she leaned over a table to pour a fresh cup of coffee, revealing the small butterfly tattooed only a few breathless centimeters from the glorious crack of her ass.

Karen, who had a sixth sense about these things, caught him staring.

“Let’s go, Ed.” She stood up.

“But the waitress hasn’t brought us our check.”

“She’s lucky I don’t talk to her manager. Come on.”

He considered tossing a few singles on the table, the spare change in his pockets; instead, he scurried obediently behind his wife and once again tried to avoid the scornful glares of the other customers who seemed relieved that the weird couple surrounded by the swirling haze of madness were at last decamping from their tranquil town.

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They continued driving, still lost. Karen, who’d given up miles back on the whole adventure, thought they should keep going until they ran out of gas and were forced to walk to the next bed and breakfast where they’d at least be greeted by two aging hippies, but Ed no longer listened to what she had to say because that omniscient and needling voice had returned, a perpetual drone between his ears, the volume rising and falling, fading in and out at unexpected moments like a radio frequency, its unrelenting tone of scorn and bombast reminding him of those AM preachers, though whenever he closed his eyes the voice seemed almost to vanish and he was at long last able to indulge in his fantasies, saw the waitress from the restaurant, skinny little country girl bored out of her mind, nothing to do on a Saturday night but get drunk and fuck her good-for-nothing boyfriend, the bruises on her arms told him as much, rough fingers pressed into soft flesh, just the way she liked it, lots of dirty talk, vivid instruction, sheets sullied with sweat and stinking of cigarettes and hashish.

He opened his eyes. Off to the right another barn with a faded American flag painted across the rotting planks of wood.

“I gotta piss,” Ed announced.

He pulled over and marched across the field to the barn and stood behind the great decomposing door where he took his penis in his hand and masturbated ferociously. He moaned with pleasure and self-loathing. Something told him that the waitress probably had ugly tits. Large, with areolas like slices of baloney, asymmetrical and pink as the belly of a prize-winning pig. Such details aroused him. Razor burn on the inside of her thighs. Fingernails bitten and chewed. He imagined her bent over the table, the butterfly

rocking back and forth as he thrust his hips with wild abandon, his wife watching impassively, saying between sips of coffee, “Big deal. I fucked Saul Bellow.”

He clutched himself more tightly, varied the rhythm, unwilling to give up on the project, some kind of catharsis was needed, but after a short time the voice turned into the drone of an old engine, the sputter and boom of a rusty machine barreling down the road at speeds much too dangerous, and this made it impossible for him to climax. Through the cracks in the barn he glimpsed a red pickup truck, and with a grunt of resignation he stuffed his disobedient prick back into his pants and watched the truck veer around their mud-splattered silver sedan and pull over to the shoulder.

The man who emerged from the cab didn’t look particularly menacing, he was elderly, stooped, trembling slightly with what might have been the onset of Parkinson’s, and in the mist small droplets of water formed on his forehead and trickled down the bridge of his nose. A gentleman farmer on his way home from church, a familiar hymn on his lips, a Bible opened beside him on the seat, the pages turned to Leviticus. The Jesus fish on his back bumper gave him away. So did his sober blue suit. But Ed did not move, did not to stir. Maybe because the man cradled a shotgun in his arms. This Ed took as a bad sign.

It wouldn’t be easy to hide in here, but if the man was hell bent on senseless slaughter, Ed could always scramble into the rafters and remain absolutely still until he’d finished his business with Karen and disappeared again into the gloom, but the longer Ed lingered in the barn the longer he would have to endure Karen’s taunts and insults (“You were *hoping* he would kill me, weren’t you, that would make you so happy”) so with his chin held high and his shoulder thrust back he emerged from the barn and, waving one hand above his head, called, “Howdy!” but the moment the word left his lips he cringed. Nobody used that word around here, wrong part of the country, probably wrong decade as well. He struggled up the muddy embankment, choking on the blue fumes spewing from the truck’s tailpipe.

At first the man said nothing, only nodded, looked into the sky as if wondering when the real rain would come or when the hand of god would stamp them all out like scuttling black bugs. When he spoke his voice was high-pitched and plaintive.

“I believe you’re the folks that ran over my dog.”

Ed stuffed his hands deep in his pockets, stared at the tips of his shoes.

The old man pointed to the bed of the truck. “You wanna take a look, see if you know him?”

Ed stepped forward, peered in. “Godalmighty,” he gasped.

The thing was still alive. It seemed impossible.

Karen rolled down her window. “Excuse me! We’re in a hurry here!”

The farmer leaned over the tailgate and stroked the dog’s head. “Ain’t right, you know, to let an animal suffer like that. Maybe you folks never had a family pet.”

“I’m allergic to cats and dogs,” Karen said. “Tell him, Ed.”

“It’s true. We never kept any animals in our house. We used to have a bird feeder but the robins and blue jays kept shitting on our cars so we poisoned them. Poisoned the rabbits, too. They kept eating our hostas. We don’t have children. My wife is barren, you see.”

Karen laughed. “Funny, Ed. Your boys don’t swim!”

The old man looked baffled, and for a moment Ed hoped he might get back in his truck and drive off. “Well, I don’t know anything about none of that,” he said. “What I come here to say is that since it was you who run down my dog I figured you should put him out of his misery. It’d be the decent thing to do.”

“Sir, my husband didn’t hit your dog. Ed, admit nothing. Isn’t there a vet around here? A quick shot in the hind leg and it’s all over. Rover will be playing fetch with Saint Peter.”

Ed gestured to the gun. “I’ve never handled one of those things. But if you show me, I’ll be the one to pull the trigger.”

“Ain’t nothin to it. Just point and squeeze. It’s already loaded. Buckshot.”

The gun felt heavier than he expected, smelled vaguely of powder and oil, the black barrel glimmering faintly in the light muted and dulled by the heavy clouds inflexible and motionless as sheets of steel. Inside the bed of the truck the dog lifted a paw toward him, its reeking innards bubbling and foaming. He couldn’t tell the breed, but guessed it was some kind of sheep dog, black, large, in need of grooming. He stepped forward, paused a moment, waiting maybe for some message imparted on the wind, but this seemed a silly thing to do, the silence was stunningly banal, though he did

catch a small whimper, whether from the man, the dog or his wife he did not know. His eyes were shut tight at that point, and when he finally squeezed the trigger he counted the echoes from the blast--three, four, five--each one ricocheting off the ugly little hillocks of clay on the far horizon, a sound gradually swallowed up by the land and its dumb immensity.

The old man quietly wept, his head bowed.

Ed handed the gun back and felt compelled to say something. "I don't believe in god, haven't been in a church since my wedding, but I said a prayer for your dog anyway."

The man plodded over to the cab of the truck, tossed the gun through the window, and leaned heavily against the door, his hands spread out across the rusting surface, fingers picking absently at the flakes of red paint. Then with a small grunt of discomfort he climbed inside where he sat for a time behind the wheel, staring at the road. He wiped rain from his forehead, the tears from his cheeks, and with a smile as intractable and harsh as the desolation all around turned slowly to Ed and said to him, "Don't believe in god. Then, my friend, you will burn, you will burn."

Had it been a dry day, the kind of day in July when the sun scorches the fields and blisters the backs and arms of the indigent workers who came each summer to pick the soybeans, Ed would have felt the sharp sting of gravel against his face as the man sped away, but it was March and the road was pliant and the tires of the truck didn't spin with the ferocity the old man would have liked and so Ed felt only the soft splatter of mud against the cuffs of his pants, and he watched the truck rise and fall on the ribbons of road like a boat carried high and low by the swells of a sea, and he kept watching for what must have been miles and miles because there were no other roads out there in that mindless waste, nowhere to turn off, and even though his wife urged him to get back in the car because they were in a hurry, the antique shops closed early today, he stood very still and breathed very quietly and waited to see if the old man would pull over to bury his dog high atop one of the distant hills.

Elijah Turan

The Moses of Cleveland

It was a dark night as I stood by the water, over looking the bay, and as I looked out at the deserted harbor, I remembered how I had once, only a few years ago, worked on the dockyards of the now abandoned steel mill. I remembered how the crews of the incoming ships waved at me as I labored by the water.

They watched from the decks their industrial freighters, and they could see that I was tall with a solid frame, yet gaunt in a way. I was over fifty, and my long beard, once red, looked white as it blew in the wind. I wore old boots and fatigues for pants, and my long grey coat looked like the steam that rose from the pavement.

My hands were large and weathered; they engulfed the tools I wielded. They saw me stand straight in the slanting rain, and I looked strong, yet frail and gentle at the same time, as older men sometimes do.

They called me the Moses of Cleveland, and the title was fitting in a way; I never made it to the promised land: the land of milk and honey, thirty years and a pension. I wandered for forty years in a land of pay-cuts and forced overtime.

I was a unionist, a member of the masses, Rousseau's noble savage in a barbarous civilization. I began work in my teens, far later than my father had, as the grandchild of Eastern-European peasantry. My family had made their way to Ellis Island like live-stock packed in steerage, deep in the hull of the trans-Atlantic ship. Later, they were packed like animals in cattle cars, men, women and children, and shipped to the coal mines. There, the mine owners controlled them completely. My grandmother remembered how, when she was young, the boss would have his way with

her when grandfather was away work.

The U.S. was the land of freedom; and freedom they found. Freedom to watch children starve, to perish in the coal shafts, freedom to die of black-lung disease after thirty-five years of labor. My grandfather had been broken by the mine shafts, and he watched as his own son went off to work in those same shafts. It was a cycle, but I promised myself that we would break that cycle; I wouldn't allow us to be exploited the way that they had been.

I was only a boy when our family moved up North, to the city of Cleveland. We went in search of a new future, but also to escape the past. Although conditions had greatly improved at the mines, my father had seen his friends killed by strike-breakers, and he promised himself that someday, when he had the money, he would leave that place.

It was there, in Cleveland, that I grew-up, alongside all the other boys and girls that would someday fill the city's factories and stockrooms. We were laborers like our parents before us; but in a way, we were a new kind of worker. JFK, MLK, and RFK had changed things: Issues were not so much looked at in terms of blacks and whites, but rather, in terms of workers and owners.

I was part of a group, that graduating class, that hit the workforce at the tail-end of the Vietnam War. We had grown up in the shadow of Cleveland's smoke towers; we were people of the machine. Our air was the smoke of the factory, and our water was the fuel of the engine; you could run a tank on the vodka we drank. Despite being part of the rich man's machine, we knew that without us there would be no machine. We didn't believe God was a fat white man who wore a suit and worked on Wall

Street.

It was the mid-70s when I joined the union. And of course, society said, “he is a mobster” or “he is a Stalinist”. And of course, they said, “he hates to work” and “he is selfish.” And in a way, I was selfish. I was selfish enough to desire a future for my children. I was selfish to want to stand in the presence of my wife and not feel like a failure. Not that such things came easily. There was a strike in the late 1980s and another in the early 90s. Those were hard years; those were years without. And there was violence: fights with the strike-breakers, tear-gas and Molotov cocktails.

But despite those things, we had our time. I owned my own home, something father had never done. And I watched my children, my two girls, attend college, something that *I* had never done. When my wife became sick, I was able to afford her antibiotics.

We were proud, us unionists. But no one’s time lasts forever. It was just around the turn of the millennium that the factory owners began an exodus of their own. First Ford closed, then LTV shut down, and Midland left the country. The fat-cats weren’t fat for nothing, they invented the meaning of “cut-and-run”. And ran they did, to places like Mexico, China and Saipan, places that never heard of OSHA, minimum wage and age restrictions.

After I lost my job of twenty years at the steel mill, I watched as my coworkers tried to start over. Many of them were old; they had only a few years left before they had planned to retire. Now they were back at square one. I saw fifty-year old men selling hamburgers, sixty-year-old women mopping bathroom floors. My friend Frank had a stroke while bagging groceries; he was eighty-one.

I remember visiting Frank at the hospital. I brought him his mail: two bills and an eviction notice. I looked down at my friend. Half of his face had been paralyzed; he couldn't walk. Frank had fought on Guam and Bougainville. Now, he couldn't even stand. He had sacrificed for society. Why would society not sacrifice for him?

It was then that my friends started retiring early, instant pension with a .38 special to the head. Not all of them, but some. There was that group, too young to retire but too old to start again, that couldn't adjust. They were the lost tribes of Cleveland. But these tribes had not been scattered to the winds by the Assyrians; they blew their fucking brains out.

I wore my suit, the one from my wedding, to their funerals. Altogether, there were about ten of them that year. And for a time, I thought about killing myself as well. Certainly I spoke about it: to friends, at the bars, to my case workers on the phone. People smiled and looked the other way, not knowing quite what to say, not knowing how to sweep me under the rug. They changed the subject, spoke about the Dow and the NASDAQ, corporate growth and Pax-Americana.

My family tried to help me, to make things better. But how could they? How could they even approach such a situation? This man, who they loved, who had once been so alive, now lived on like a ghost. I walked through life with no hope for the future.

It was a dark night when I stood on the coast, overlooking the blackened waves. From where I stood, on a concrete pier jutting deep into the water, the tides left a froth against the shoreline.

I had lived my life by those waters, by the blue expanse of Lake Erie. As a boy, I had fished on her sands, and as a man, I had labored in her quarries. She had sent me my wife, as I labored in the dockyards, one clear Autumn day.

I was young then, and I loaded shipments of cargo under the watchful gaze of seagulls overhead. There was a chill in the air, and I wore a knit cap and flannel shirt. My sleeves were rolled up along my strong arms, and my beard was short against the contours of my face. Despite the cold air, I had begun to sweat.

I remembered how she, Tabitha, had approached me. There was a cup of water in her hands, and she held it out. Her hair was auburn, and her eyes were like the face of the sea. She wore a home-made sweater, blue and white, and her hands were worn by the sun and the wind. I had smiled, reached out, and touched her fingers with mine while taking hold of the old tin cup.

But those were days long ago. Age had taken its toll on me, and, standing on the embankment, I drank from the flask that I kept in my coat. I could feel the clear vodka burn my lips as it flowed down the back of my throat. Twisting the cap, a sharp pain went down my hand. I had injured myself the year before I lost my job; a shattered nerve ran from my neck down the length of my arm. My fingertips throbbed in pain. Our family had no health insurance; we couldn't afford medication. At one time, I used to drink to feel good. Now, I drank to feel nothing.

I just wanted it to end. There was a blackness in my heart. It was the blackness of the coal mines. Father had tried to save me from it, but I had carried that darkness with me and had kept it, deep inside, through all the years.

I looked out onto the water. For as long as anyone could remember, Lake Erie had cared for the city, like a mother to her children. We had taken everything from her, and she asked nothing in return. How fitting then, I thought, that my journey should end in her embrace.

In the distance, the light of a small cottage cut through the darkness. It was there, in that cottage, that Tabitha and I had stayed, just before our wedding. One night, in the Winter, we crept out of the bedroom and drank hot chocolate in the tiny kitchen. From outside, you could see our naked silhouettes through the frosted glass.

I remember how I, standing close to her, had asked about her dreams. I wanted to know how, as her husband, I could make her happy. She smiled and spoke about a house in the country. We could have a pond and a little boat. A dog could run in the yard, and we could sit on the porch swing as the children played in the grass.

I imagined coming home after work, day by day, and spending my life with her. My needs would no longer matter, and I could dedicate myself to the good of her and the children. It was then, in the cottage, as we stared into each other's eyes, that I felt as if we could do great things in life.

But we had not done great things. Every year, I had tried to make Tabitha's dreams come true, and every year I had failed. A few years after our marriage, we took a loan out for a house in the city. It was small, and the neighborhood was run-down, but we told ourselves that it would be a starter home; we would only be there for a few years.

But we did not stay for only a few years; we stayed for nearly thirty years. I had never been able to save the money for a down payment on the home we wanted. After the needs of the children, the bills, and the taxes, there was never anything left. There was a moment, a brief moment, when I thought that I would succeed; the economy was good and I was finally able to put some money away. But then, there was the strike, and I watched as our savings dwindled to nothing.

It didn't have to be that way. I could have gone back to work. But I wouldn't do that. I stood by my ideals: the few should never prosper at the expense of the many. I knew that; I believed that.

After the economy went under and I lost my job, it was a struggle to keep hold of even the little that we had. Tabitha and I came home everyday with our tiny incomes. She never blamed me for losing my job, for not being rich, but, in her eyes, I couldn't help but see a trace of disappointment.

Standing on the pier, I took another drink and thought about my wife. She had wasted her life with me. She had put her faith in me, and I had not been true. She deserved so much better. Some much greater man should have married her, a man with far more ability than me.

Perhaps, it was not too late to make it up. It would not be easy at first; she would miss me. She loved me, I knew that; I could see that. But there was the policy letter, and, in time, she could forget about me. She could finally have what she should have had so long ago.

I knelt down and picked up a brick from a pile that lay at my feet and looked down into the dark waters; it wouldn't be so bad. Both the girls were married, and my father had passed on years ago. My mother suffered from Alzheimer's; she couldn't even remember my face. The world wouldn't mourn the loss of an old cripple.

I placed the brick in my right cargo pocket. Another went into the left. Four of them fit into the pockets of my coat. And my hands, I held two more. There were eight bricks total.

I crept toward the front of the pier until my toes hung over the edge, and I looked

down as the white foam cascaded against the embankment. Slowly, I inched forward; only my heels held on to the concrete.

I felt weighed down by the bricks and, for a second, lost my balance. It felt as if I would fall and plunge into the water head-first, so I swung my arms forward while shifting my weight back.

I regained myself, but my heart pounded after imagining crashing face-first against the surface of the water. I stood motionless while trying to compose myself and, for a moment, I thought myself funny. Why should it matter if I went in head first or feet first? What difference would it make in the end?

But in a way, it did matter. I wanted to feel, for the first time in a long time, as if I had control over my life, even if that life was about to end. I wanted to do it on my own accord.

I gathered myself. I had been thinking too much, and it was not about thinking; it was about acting. I took a deep breath, looked back to the skyline, said goodbye to my city, and jumped.

It was a peaceful suicide; I had expected much worse. In the weeks and days leading up to the act, I found myself obsessed with playing out the scenario in my mind. For an unexplainable reason, there had been a need to know exactly how I would die. Step by step, compulsively, I had envisioned the process of drowning.

First, my body would break the surface of the water. I did not imagine a clean break, like the silent cut of a knife. Rather, I foresaw a loud, intrusive splash.

My immediate reaction would be surprise at the cold water against my skin. It

would not engulf my entire body at first; rather, it would take a few seconds to work through my boots and coat.

I would panic; the frigid, claustrophobic water would cause me to flail my arms and legs. I would change my mind, wish to turn back, but the weight of the bricks would drag me down.

Finally, probably before reaching the bottom, I would try to breathe. The water would enter my lungs, but it would not be a full breath. I imagined the pain from breathing water up my nose, as I had done while swimming on occasion, yet more so.

It would burn my chest and sinuses, and my body would reject it. I would cough violently, trying to expel the fluid. Without breathing in, I would gag the air out of my lungs, until only water remained, and it would trickle down to the bottom.

Still trying to cough, I would breathe in deeply, filling my entire chest cavity with water. There would be a terrible pain.

I would vomit. There would be an intense pressure, and the capillaries in my head would burst. The skin on my face would be blotched, and my eyes would become red, bloated orbs.

My body would writhe; it would convulse uncontrollably. My stomach would fill with water, and I would try to vomit again but fail; my diaphragm would be compressed.

During my last moments, I would see stars: bright white stars in the midnight water. My system would go into shock, and the pain would subside; my bloated body would roll over on the lake-floor, and I would slip into unconsciousness.

After that, who knew?

But this was not the case at all. I did not panic. The cold water felt good against my skin, and I descended tranquilly downward. My boots planted firmly against the bottom and nestled softly into the mud. I calmly held the air in my lungs.

All around me was darkness, and I wondered how deeply I had fallen. To my surprise, I was happy.

There was a satisfaction, a certain vindication in my spirit; I had acted properly. My main fear up until that point had been that I would panic, breathe in, and die before I could remove the bricks from my pockets. Had that happened, I could only hope that my body would remain hidden at the bottom of the lake. If I were found, the life insurance company would record me as a suicide and cancel my policy.

But this was no longer a threat; I would remove the bricks at the last moment, my bloated body would float to the surface, and the coroner would detect alcohol in my system: just another drunk who had fallen in the bay.

I had always kept a sizable policy. Work was dangerous and accidents happened. As a boy, I had witnessed a blaze at the industrial park. The magnesium factory had went up in flames, and plumes of blue fire reached up into the night sky like the grotesque fingers of a deformed hand.

In the distance, I had seen the fire fighters scrambling on the ledges, trying to control the flames, trying to pull out the screaming workers. All of a sudden, I felt a wind at my back, and the plumes of fire retreated into the compound. The building sounded as if it had taken a breath, and there was a moment of silence.

Suddenly there was an explosion; the roof jumped off the building, and a cloud of fire engulfed the sky. I shielded my eyes from the heat, and the city was

awash with light. The shadows of the on-lookers were stretched along the ground.

I remember seeing the tiny bodies of the fire fighters as they sailed through the air. They had been thrown into the sky, and looked like baby-dolls as they landed lifelessly on the ground. It was the first time I had seen death. It would not be the last, however.

Once, during the terrible winter of '78, when I worked at the steel mill, I watched a scab traverse an icy catwalk over the molten steel. The scabs were often untrained, inexperienced workers, and I could see that he had not tied himself off. The catwalk was slick and the worker lost his balance. He fell and grasped onto the ledge, and, as he clutched on with his fingers, I could see that he was very young. He looked as if he was just out of high school, and his voice cracked as he screamed for help.

The workers rushed to his aid, but it was too late; he lost his grip and fell towards the vat. In seconds, his body had turned into a ball of flame; there was nothing left when he reached the liquid metal. The boy had not been in the union; his family never received compensation. But all these memories were behind me now. I had raised my insurance policy last month; I was worth \$150,000, and I felt a righteous satisfaction at the thought of them paying up.

I stood like a statue at the bottom of the harbor; I had done what I had to do. It had been over one minute now, and I wanted to see how long I could hold out. As teenagers, my friends and I would place bets on who could stay under the longest. The lake was a cesspool in those days, and we swam in the waste of the factories.

As I waited, it seemed odd how calm I was. I did not know what it

would be like after death, but I was not afraid. Honestly, I had never worried much about hell. Even then, while committing suicide, the concept didn't bother me. Rather, it was the possibility of no after-life at all that I found disturbing. For some reason, the idea of complete non-existence scared me more than the fear of eternal damnation. But then, upon reaching the end of life, even that did not matter.

“Let it be,” I thought. “Let it be.”

I relaxed my body, and my heart rate had become slow. I thought about my wife; my time was soon, and I wanted to die with her on my mind.

I remembered that night in the cottage, the night we had told each other our dreams. After drinking the hot chocolate, we crawled back into bed. She lay her body next to mine, and, beneath the weight of the quilt, I could feel her skin press against me. I could smell her hair, as she laid her head on his chest. Once again, I asked what would make her happy.

“Just you,” she said.

Beneath the water, those words stuck in my mind. “Just you,” I thought to myself. And it was then that I marveled at how strange life could be. I thought it funny that I could spend nearly thirty years with my wife and never truly understand her. Yet now, as odd as it was, standing in the water, at the end of all things, I could see her clearly for the first time.

Her dreams: the house in the country, the pond and the porch swing, she had wanted those things for *me*. She had wanted those things *with* me. I understood then, that although I had failed to give her everything she deserved in life, she still admired me. I knew then, that despite the fact we had very little, it was ours to have

together. Things were hard, they had always been hard, but they were not impossible; they were not without hope. Me, my family, the city, we had to go on together: we had to try, to persevere; we had to live.

I threw off my coat; it sank quickly to the bottom. I took the bricks out of my pockets and dropped them to the ground. I looked up and could see the stars through the top of the water. I reached my arms out: I wanted to strive for those stars, I wanted to touch them.

But I could not touch them; I had been rooted to the ground. My feet had worked into the mud, and I had been fixed in place. I strained his body upward: I wanted to ascend, to live, to escape the pressure that surrounded me, engulfed me, suffocated me. But no matter how hard I tried, no matter how hard I worked, I only descended deeper and deeper into the mire. I had been trapped in that mud my entire life.

My heart had begun to pound. I needed air, I needed to get out, I needed to breathe. There was only one chance and I knew it. Crouching low to the ground, I pressed my hands against the mud, and it felt cold against my skin. I positioned myself, struggled a bit, shifted my weight, and, with the arms that had once built the city, pushed away from the abyss that held me captive.

The nerves in my bad arm erupted in fire, and a shock of pain reverberated throughout my body. I screamed out into the void, and the air in my lungs exploded into a cloud of bubbles, as I exerted the last of my strength.

There was no more pain. There was no more suffering in my broken body. I saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing. I found myself in a great darkness.

I drifted and felt as if I were floating, though I knew not where. I was no longer trapped in my place; I no longer had a place. I could see all about myself, and I could see nothing all about myself.

And then, from the great distance, like a moth to the flame, I became transfixed. At last, I could see it, more clearly than ever now, the *light*. It was true; it was strong. I could feel its pull, and I drifted toward it. In the light, there were many things.

I could see my daughters. They would have children, and those children would never see the pain in my eyes; those children would never carry my burden. I was happy for that.

And there was my wife; she would live on, and every day would be a new day: every breath would be another moment of life. The pains, trials, and tribulations that had seemed so important before, that had weighed so heavily on our marriage, would be a thing of the past. She could once again live with a hope for the future.

Steadily now, all the things that I had seen, done and heard melted away. All the feelings of helplessness, loneliness and despair were lifted like a veil before me. I no longer felt the anger in my heart; I no longer felt forlorn in the face of my unanswered prayers: those prayers, the one recourse I had in a world in which the few held such power, such disregard, to the shattered hopes, dreams and desires of the many.

Over the years, I had come to believe that those prayers had went unheard, that they had been lost on the way to Heaven. But now, as I drifted forward in

the darkness, I could see that they had not been lost; I could see them in the light.

All of these memories washed over my mind, as I struggled onward. The light was closer, stronger now, and I could see that it was not a single light. Rather, it was a great multitude. They shined like the wings of a thousand angels.

I was close. Reaching forward; it seemed as if I could feel them, touch them.

The air was cold against my skin as I broke through the surface of the lake. I coughed and gagged the water out of my system, breathed in, and felt the air, the air of life, in my body.

There was a peace, a tranquility in the night, as I stared off at the lights of the city: the lights of the buildings, the houses, the Terminal Tower; the glowing lights of the billboards and the blinking lights of the planes in flight. The cars shined like a river of red and white, as they flowed through the city streets.

And, as I bobbed peacefully in the drift, I was amazed at how beautiful the Cleveland skyline could be.

To old friends and new hopes

Emily Katitus

Funeral For a Sunflower

I: Funeral for a Sunflower

It was the kind of August afternoon that makes kids dance to keep their chalky bare feet from being scalded by the sidewalks. The heat was so oppressive that it placed a baked silence over the world and singed the few clouds wilting in the sky. I was perched on the old cherry rocker on our porch, listening to the groan of its weary limbs keeping time with the snip of mom's scissors as she cut sunflowers. The earthy perfume of the blossoms pervaded the air, making the warmth feel thicker, stickier.

I don't know why, but every summer, when my mother chops the stalks of those flowers, then lovingly fingers the stems and silky petals, she cries. She slashes the stems in an almost brutal way, then gathers the blossoms apologetically. During the entire scene, tears, like big watery pearls, stream down her cheeks. As she thrashes, strokes and weeps, she forgets that I am even present. I think her whole world becomes nothing but flowers and memories. I can only watch, wordlessly pleading with her to let me understand her sorrow.

The only thing I know about my dad is that he loved music. My sole inheritance from him consists of a small collection of LPs: Nat King Cole (my favorite), Simon & Garfunkel, Carole King, The Eagles, The Beatles. I know that the reason I haven't learned anything else about my dad is because I won't ask. My mom won't talk about him of her own volition, and she only cries once annually. For the rest of the year she wavers between feverish attempts to teach me everything about love and learning, and staring numbly into a sink of dishes and mounds of soapy water, haunting in their very fragility.

"Darling? Kristi?" My reverie is shattered. "Oh! I didn't know you were still outside, dear. Um . . . will you please go into the house and find as many vases as you can? I've cut all our sunflowers in such a hurry! Let's not have them wither in this heat! Thank you, dear."

I kicked off my shoes and went into the house. But I didn't go on a quest for mason jars. Instead, I gently closed the door and sunk to the floor, feeling smothered in humidity and despondency.

Soon the sadness felt heavier than the heat, and I decided to go for a walk.

II: Rigby Records

We're old acquaintances, the store and I. I pass it by every day during the school year, yet, I've never actually gone inside. The truth is I fear it will force me to meditate on extraordinary things or forgotten subjects: music, my dad, history, emotions.

III: Yellow Lights, Green Eyes, and a Confession

When I went inside Rigby's, I felt my feet seep into a thick bed of moss. I gazed at the floor and found it covered in thick olive carpeting from the 1970s. The ceiling, in contrast, was high and lined with rows of tiny, yellow modern lights, their characters more lugubrious than luminous. Against the walls and stretching all the way to the ceiling were shelves stocked with LPs. The piles of records were disheveled and slightly damaged, wrapped in cloaks of dust marred only by an occasional fingerprint. The whole place smelled musty and weary. Even as I closed the door, the tinkling melody of the bell above it sang of sadness and a forgotten time.

I was a dismal picture, but I couldn't help imagining how wonderful it might be with a little organization, creativity and life. I let my eyes and mind wander as my imagination straightened the untidy shelves and peeled away the starched curtains shielding the summer sun.

I was so enthralled with the store's potential that I hadn't noticed an old woman perched on a stool behind the counter. She was sketching Lilliputian pictures inside the squares of a crossword puzzle: tiny musical notes, flowers and faces, and humming "Easy Living" off key. Apparently, she hadn't noticed me until then either. She looked at me and smiled a brilliant smile--not a beautiful smile by any means, but very bright and genuine. Her cheeks were pinched, and her hair was thin and frizzy, each gray strand curling defiantly. She wore a blue and white polka dot dress in the style of the 1950s and gaudy plastic earrings, pink like the slather on her lips. I concluded that although she was not a very lovely woman at all, she did possess one lovely feature: her eyes. I realized that her vivid green irises encompassed by sweeping jetty lashes were responsible for her sweet and bright aura.

She stopped humming and sipped tea, surveying me all the while. I felt awkward; I thought I'd become accustomed to my five feet, eleven inches, but her petite figure and eccentricity made me feel ridiculously out of place, especially in my Jimi Hendrix T-shirt and jeans.

"Hi. I'm Kristi Wells," I said.

She continued to stare up at me with her penetrating green eyes but didn't utter a syllable.

"I wanted to see if you were hiring anyone for the summer? I'm sixteen."

When she remained silent, I cast a surreptitious glance at the ceiling and tried desperately to think of more to say. I was taciturn by nature, and even introducing myself

could be painful. Finally, she ended the silence herself.

"My first name is my life long sorrow," she sighed. "I never would marry and surrender my last name, oh no, no. Nothing could induce me to sacrifice that. But do you know what is tragic and horrid? My first name . . . is . . . Lenora. Lenora Rigby. Awful and terrible! Depressing and . . . heartbreaking!" As she spoke, her pink earring trembled almost imperceptibly with her efforts to stifle rising tears.

I must have looked at her quizzically; I was confused and startled by her outburst of woe. But my curiosity was soon satisfied, for with one determined snuffle, she proceeded to play a Beatles' record on a turntable behind the counter. I'm not exactly sure what made me say what I said next. I suppose it was that I commiserated with her in her need to be someone else.

"If you want, I could call you Eleanor Rigby."

"You would . . . why . . . would you?"

"If you want me to."

"But you really would? Oh, that would be wondrous and excellent!" She let out a frothy laugh, as her dark mood metamorphosed into one of bliss. "I know I'm frivolous and silly. But yes--yes, do call me Eleanor Rigby. It would give me great joy and happiness to be called by my dream name. Now . . . I feel much better. But what was it you were asking about? Oh, nevermind, let's not talk about anything prosaic. Let's just *listen.*"

We listened intently to the melody about lonely people. While the haunting song played, I wondered what I was doing there. I didn't think of myself as a habitually capricious person, so for that reason I hoped Mrs. Rigby wouldn't discover that I'd waltzed into her store and requested employment on a whim. The idea to find a summer

job was premeditated, but the way in which I was going about finding one was rather impulsive, and that fact made me feel a little nervous. I decided to allow her to be the one to ask questions.

But to my surprise, as Eleanor Rigby concluded, Lenora Rigby didn't seem to know what to do anymore than I did. She asked whether or not I would like some peppermint tea, which I accepted.

"It would be very pleasant and nice to have some help," she said, handing me a lukewarm china teacup, identical to her own. "Oh, and you won't have to worry about remembering whose teacup is whose, because mine has lipstick on it!" She laughed.

We sat in silence for sometime, Mrs. Rigby looking very pensive while I still felt a little awkward.

"When I was much younger," she said suddenly, "I used to have a lovely and beautiful garden. I wove little pathways of stepping stones through my garden, and I would water my flowers and sing to them everyday. They were so precious to me!" Her face was radiant as she reminisced.

"What kind of flowers did you plant?" I asked.

"Only white roses. Hundreds and hundreds of elegant and stunning white roses. I think they are the loveliest flowers of all. Wouldn't you agree? Red roses *force* you to love them; white ones ask gently and sweetly. I haven't forgotten my little garden. I still treasure its memory in my heart so very dearly and tenderly. I often purchase a bouquet for myself from the florist." She looked at me with a peculiar, questioning air.

"What do you think white roses symbolize?"

I thought for a moment.

"Hope."

She nodded, as if she approved my answer.

"You could start by organizing that shelf over there, if you don't mind." She indicated a shelf to my left with her eyes.

I smiled and set my teacup on the counter. Sitting down on the deep shag carpet, I determined that the bottom shelf had to be the "C" section; I found Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, The Cure, and The Carpenters. It took a long time to sort the records, and as the afternoon progressed, Mrs. Rigby would disappear, play music, and talk to me about sundry subjects in her quirky way.

*

After I had sorted the records into piles and felt dizzy from flipping through them, Mrs. Rigby helped me place them on the shelves again. She looked so pleased with the result that I couldn't help but comply when she requested that I tackle another shelf.

Maybe my task was simple, but accomplishing it gave me a sense of relief. It was comforting to be needed, even in a minor way, and to listen.

IV: Conversations

"How are your parents?" She inquired later that day, as if we were old friends. I smiled.

"Well, honestly, I don't know."

"Of course you know. Stop being ridiculous. How are they doing?" She raised her eyebrows like a school teacher. I usually didn't like it when adults persisted in prying, but by now, although I didn't understand why she asked the questions she did, I could perceive that nothing Mrs. Rigby said was meant to be interpreted as an affront. So I

assented.

"I really mean that, though. I don't know."

"Why?"

"My mom doesn't talk to me very much. I don't like to try to make her, because it might hurt her."

I realized the heaviness of my reply, and felt a little startled by my own frankness. However, Mrs. Rigby simply looked into my eyes, empathy and kindness reflected in her own, and that kind of silence seemed to say enough.

"What about your father?"

"He died."

"Oh . . . oh."

She nodded, patted my shoulder, and went to sit down behind the counter.

"It's okay," I said. "I don't mind that you asked me about it, really. Please don't feel badly."

"Oh," she said again, but her voice was fluttery and I could see she hadn't heard me. I knew the far away look in her eyes very well. I wished I hadn't been so honest.

V: Twilight

It was around eight thirty when I paused to take a break and drink tea with Mrs. Rigby again.

"Twilight reminds me of Christmastime," she said. "So I like to play Christmas albums everyday at sunset. That's rather romantic and silly, isn't it?" She giggled.

"Yeah, maybe it's a little silly, but I like it."

"Oh! So you won't mind it then. Very good." She proceeded to play "A Christmas Portrait", setting the needle with exaggerated sweeping motions. She started swaying and humming off key again.

"This is one of my favorites," I said smiling. "I love the Carpenters."

She gave me one of her winsome smiles in response and rose from her stool to dance like a clumsy ballerina, twirling in her polka dot dress, perfectly jubilant and forgetful of everything for just that one moment. I almost started laughing; I hardly knew this moody old lady, but it made me happy to see her so simply blissful.

VI: A Rose for a Sunflower

When I said goodbye to Mrs. Rigby, it was past ten. She had asked that I come back at noon the next day, and I'd promised to be punctual. Just as I was opening the door, and the diminutive bell was chiming its tune again, she stopped me and handed me a slightly withered white rose.

"For your mother," she said brightly. "My garden is no longer, but I like I said, I still can't help buying a few of these beauties once in awhile."

I tried to thank her with my eyes. I couldn't seem to say anything at all.

VII: Dreaming in Black and Blue

When I stepped outside, I breathed in the evening air and felt the heavy humidity permeate my lungs and surface to my eyes. It was a peculiar kind of cry because I was standing up, rather than smothering my tears in a quilt, frantically trying to catch them before they burned my cheeks.

I've always had an aversion to crying; not because I think it's an act of weakness, but

because I don't understand it. I never know what to do when my mom cries, and feeling the watery pinch in my own eyes is even more perplexing. I thought as deeply as I could. Perhaps I was just exasperated with the confusion that was my family and my life.

As I trudged down the road, distressed and disconcerted, I felt like I was dreaming. So many images were streaming through my mind like battered photos. I imagined Mrs. Rigby's beautiful garden, rife with blossoms and fragile beauty, and thought of her traipsing through it, joyful and carefree. I recalled how my mom's garden was a source of sadness for her, and how her golden and brown flowers were watered with her tears. I thought about Mrs. Rigby bouncing around the store, straightening the curtains and sorting mail meticulously, but never thinking to wash the windows. I saw a morose picture of my mother, standing listlessly at the sink, leaving even trivial tasks neglected. I thought that it was funny how hungry Mrs. Rigby was to talk for the sake of being heard, and how I longed to hear for the sake of listening. I cringed slightly as I thought of Mrs. Rigby's horrendous singing voice, and how my mom never sang in the house, or at all. I tried to gather all of Mrs. Rigby's funny speeches soaring through my mind like so many flighty butterflies, and capture them so that I would never forget a single one. And then, finally, in the midst of all my nonsensical recollections, I let myself wonder about the question that seemed to subtly define all the sadness in my life. I asked myself *why* time had stolen something from my family, leaving us bereft of simple happiness.

I thought about my mom and how much I loved her, and how that love would make everything I might ask more muddy and painful. As I walked past our small barren garden, I knew she would be sitting inside, knitting or playing solitaire with prematurely wrinkled hands and an afflicted expression. I mounted the porch steps, feeling like a confused little girl imprisoned by dark, unanswered questions. But even as the night became a bruised blur, black and blue with tears and apprehension, I felt determined.

Justin Reynolds

EAT

I ride buses.

I am lost. I do not know my name. I do not have amnesia. I have been lost for some time now. But I am intent on finding purpose. I have time to burn. All I am taking on this journey are the clothes on my person, the sandals on my feet, and the staff in my hand. Around my neck I wear a black-corded necklace with a metallic “Z” attached. The “Z” stands for Zion, my mother. She folded the necklace into the palm of my hand the day that I left. I have not seen her since, but even still I feel her spirit working within me. It has guided me for years. It has served me well.

Today I am in the desert. Tomorrow it will be the lush of forest, or the grains of the beach, it is always something, I am always someplace. I’ve walked for days, years. I am curious by nature. My father told me it would be the death of me. He could not have been farther from the truth, from me. I believe curiosity to be the life of me. It may very well be the only time he’s been wrong.

I am waiting for the bus. Again. And as it pulls alongside the road where I stand in wait, I smile. The bus driver opens his doors to me, sighs upon his recognition of who I am. He knows me. All the bus drivers do.

There is something mythical about the bus. It is long-bodied serpent, rumbling and slithering through cityscape and countryside. It is a dragon reincarnated. Its interior reminds me of old ships, its passengers the ship hands. Everyone is on a journey together, the aged and the young, lovers and enemies. The bus is an instrument of balance. It levels the human plane, aligning man against man in his humblest form. A high-powered businessman on the bus is forced to share a seat with the high-school dropout. All must deal, comfort relies on compromise.

I greet the bus driver with a solemn demeanor. He asks me for my ticket. I pull out my pockets like rabbit ears. He tells me I cannot ride for free. I tell him nothing is free. I tell him that I have a score to settle with the bus. He asks me what score. I tell him to ask the bus. He laughs at me awkwardly, not sure if I am legitimately crazy or pulling his leg. I do not return his laugh. He tells me to get on and move to the back. I

thank him, and tell him that the back is where I have been most comfortable. I do not wait for his response. As I walk down the aisle I am met with curious eyes. Eyes of distrust. Eyes of suspicion. I can hear the women clenching their purse-straps. I can smell the men sizing me up. I settle on the last seat next to the window. I situate my staff in the seat next to me, and look ahead. The bus is near half-full. I think about my perception of its occupancy. Half-full. I smile to myself, content at present with my optimistic spirit. Such an outlook will no doubt prove necessary.

I settle in my seat as the bus comes alive. We pull away from the station, leaving behind an onslaught of men and women, boys and girls, waving to their departed as if their safety was not promised. I breathe deep and listen.

The bus has something to say to me.

“Where are you going?” it asks.

“I am hunting,” I say back.

“Hunting for what?”

“Myself.”

“Where do you hope to find yourself?”

“I hope to find myself in peace.”

“You have come to the wrong place. There is no peace here.”

“I know.”

“Then why did you come?”

“...”

“Why?”

“I am seeking answers.”

“What do you wish to know?”

“Everything.”

“That is impossible,” said the bus.

“Who are you?”

“I am merely a means of travel.”

“Yes, but where are we going?”

“To the place we’ve been running from.”

“Where is that?”

“The beginning.”

The bus returns its attention back to the road. I close my eyes for a moment, to escape the unrelenting glare peeking into my window. It plays hide-n-seek with me, seeking refuge behind skyscrapers and corner stores. It jumps out from behind a concrete-filled horizon, screaming into the center of my forehead. I blink twice for emphasis, clarity. I clear my throat as a monk clears his mind. My vocal chords are completely free of hindrance, and with the calm of a freedman, I begin to hum the music to an old gospel hymn I picked up from a homeless man I met once. I gave him a used ten-dollar bill, shaking its wrinkles as I removed it crumpled from my coat. He told me his name was Frederick. Frederick would not let me leave without retribution. But he did not have any money. All his personal effects were confined to a grocery cart he pushed down dingy city streets, aluminum cans jangling as if loose change in a pocket. I told him I did not need anything in return. But his pride would not allow him to accept a handout. He began to sing a song, an old field holler his father used to recite to him as he tucked Frederick in at night. He told me this was his gift to me. His song. I do not remember all the words. Or maybe it is less a matter of memory and more an issue of responsibility. Perhaps I am not ready to accept their import. For now, I just hum the melody.

I can feel the Sun’s light warming up to me. It replaces the accusatory hot glare with a faint glow. Its rays kiss my right cheek and brush through my hair with its soft bristles. I welcome their company.

I begin to write, using my finger as a pen, the dirty window my paper. My lettering is small and crooked. I write backwards. It is a message to those on the outside to read:

i walk in pigeon patterns

dance in convoluted circles

to keep myself guessing about my direction

i fast for seventy days,

deprive-(minus "ledge")
i hope to return to you with greater
apperception,
di-scar(ed) my previous being
being ignorant
being contemptible
being worldly
being lonely
being me
minus the hostility towards love

It is a lot to say, to write, but somehow it fits. I wonder who will read my words, but that is not important. Who will understand them? The red-haired woman sitting three rows ahead keeps looking back at me. Her curiosity is stronger than her will. She pretends to be stretching her neck. I wave to her. She acts as if she does not see my greeting. This is okay. She is not ready.

The bus comes to a stop. We seem to have been traveling for days. But not more than three hours have passed. Everyone stands, some yawning, others cat-like in their approach to awaken their sleeping body parts. Some of the passengers fumble in purses or shirt pockets, searching for a pack of cigarettes to ease their restlessness. Nicotine knows them by their first name. A man in a gray suit turns to me and asks if I have a light. I tell him no. He sneers at me and turns back around, following the rest of the crowd off the bus for a brief rest. Smokers are a strange group. They are full of paradox. They fight for equal rights, voicing their disgust with society's general disapproval of their habit. Yet, they know their rights infringe on others. Smokers are the only people who understand smokers. The simple act of providing a flame through a match or lighter instantly unites recipient and provider. It sparks conversation of all nature. Politics. Sports. But usually all such chatter begins with an emphatic declaration of the weather. "It's cold as hell out here" or "It is hot as hell out here" are standard protocol. At times these statements are followed by a quick summation of rights and civil liberties and how these are being violated by the very fact that they have to smoke outside in the blazing

heat and freezing cold. These dissertations are always received among the other smokers with a chorus of head nods and agreeable puffs. Inevitably, a non-smoker passes by at this moment, and when brave enough, suggests that they give up on smoking. He is quickly excused with a barrage of insults and curses. This is why smokers travel in packs. Moral support. I do not smoke, but I understand the need for rebellion, for acceptance.

I remove my staff from the seat beside me and make my way down the aisle and off the bus. I thank the driver once again. He mumbles something. He asks me where I am going. I ask him where the bus is headed. He shakes his head and returns to his clipboard. I make my way through the billows of smoke, careful not to cough. I notice the red-haired woman standing off to the side, alone. I smile at her. She forces out a crooked grin, and points to my staff. I approach her.

“What’s with the stick?” she asks.

“It is supposed to guide me,” I answer.

“Guide you?” she says. Her face contorts in confusion.

“In my journey,” I answer simply.

“Where are you going where you need a stick?”

“Where are you going where you don’t need one? We all need guidance,” I respond.

I can see her frustration with our conversation. She wants more than what I have offered her.

“Are you some kind of priest?” she asks.

“No.”

“Some sort of spiritual leader?”

“Hardly.”

She is becoming increasingly agitated.

“Is Victor your husband?” I ask her.

She looks surprised. Concerned. “How do you know Victor?” she demands.

I point to the tattoo peeking out from behind her collared shirt. It is barely visible, etched in cursive blue ink on the side of her neck. With my explanation I can see relief draining from her eyes to her feet.

“Why are you running from him?”

“Who says I’m running?”

“I’m sorry.”

She walks away, joining the smokers. One of them offers her a drag from his cigarette. She accepts, taking a long measured pull. She refuses to look back at me. I go into the diner. Its outside appearance is indicative of its interior. It is rundown and from the looks of it, rarely frequented. There is a small color television in the corner behind the counter, and it is spouting off election coverage. The woman behind the counter seems to know the bus driver rather well. They are joking and winking at each other as she pours him cold coffee that he will not drink. My stare eventually pries her away from the driver and she slides in my direction at the end of the counter.

“What can I get you, sugar?”

“How about a few biscuits with honey to go.”

“Sure thing, sugar,” she says, plopping three biscuits that were resting under a glass dish into a brown paper bag. She drops in a couple packets of pure honey and closes the bag.

“Is that it, sugar?”

“Do you mind if I take a stack of napkins?” I ask.

She pushes a small mound in my hand. “Here, sweetheart, they’re yours. Anything else?”

“Do you have a pen that I could buy?”

She pulls the pen out from the bun in her hair. “How’s this, sugar? On the house.”

“Thank you,” I say, sliding two dollars into her palm. But she slides the money back in my hand.

“I said on the house, sugar.”

I thank her, and when she walks away, I leave the two dollars on the countertop. I scribble my appreciation onto one of the napkins with my borrowed pen. I walk back outside to the bus. Everyone has already started re-boarding. I take my seat in the rear. I look out my window. I see the woman kiss the bus driver on his cheek as he leaves the

diner. I watch as she walks to the end of the counter, and finds my two-dollars and my note. I can make out her surprise as she reads it.

i must apologize in advance
please excuse my swearing
I swear I am in love with your person
your personality
your persona
your personification
you personally

i am still reeling
like
a firebug on a cutstring

your blessing has been cosmic

I see her leave her space from behind the counter and make her way to the diner-front window. She presses her face to its glass, fighting the soft sheen of sun. She is searching for me along the rows of bus seats. As the bus pulls off, she finds me. I feel her smile chasing me down the dusty road, sprinting until it tires and slowly returns to her.

I settle back in my seat. I notice the red-haired woman spying me. She is whispering to the gentleman sitting beside her and he is throwing not-so-secret glances my way. I enjoy their company for a bit, before retiring my eyes in meditation. I drift in consciousness, centering my thoughts on the barren land on either side of the bus. The land has never been inhabited. Never been plowed. Or settled. Man has not planted his flag in its earth. Yet it lives on, unwalked upon. Untouched. Cherry blossoms cling to cacti needles. Birds feel safe enough to land in thickets and soft clay. This land has not been enslaved. It wears innocence, a forgotten virtue. I whisper to the land to inquire of its secret. But we cannot communicate. It has never learned English. It has not needed

to. Instead the desert shadows flicker like morse code, filling the sky with consonants and vowels, long and short.

I decipher the message onto one of my napkins:

The Land of the F(r)ee has nothing on us. Nowhere is everywhere.

I am jealous for the land's confidence. I long for its understanding. But I am content with its patience.

A black woman sitting across the aisle taps me on my arm, jostling my concentration. I look at her. She is a pretty woman. Skin dark and velvet like sweaty nights. She smiles at me, says she was noticing my formula. I told her it was not mine to claim. She just smiles. But she cannot ignore my scrawl. She has to speak, the words lukewarm in the mouth, she needs to vomit them to sooth the acid in her throat.

Her: Where are you from?

Me: I am from here and there. From up there (I point skyward) and below here. Nowhere really.

Her: (puzzled) I do not understand.

Me: Nor do I.

Her: Do you believe in reparations? (She does not bother for transition. She was raised not to waste words.)

Me: Yes.

Her: How much do you feel should be paid?

Me: We cannot be repaid.

Her: (confused) So you do not believe in reparations?

Me: I do.

Her: What are you looking for?

Me: An apology.

Her: I am sorry.

Me: What are you sorry for?

Her: That you will never be paid in full.

Me: My sister. Pay me in your prayers.

Her: My brother. You will be a rich man.

I smile at this. I believe it to be my first uninhibited smile. It feels natural. I turn to my staff. Its head now has baby sprouts poking out from its core. I wonder what flowers are planted in its heart. I wonder what is planted in mine.

Several rows ahead of me a baby is crying. I watch as her mother brings the baby to her bosom instinctively. How does she know it is her mother's hands that hold her? How does the mother understand the baby's needs? Why does she care? Where does her affection come from? And I think to Mother Earth, how she loves her children. We abuse her. Treat her viciously. Still she allows us to stay. Kisses us with day and night. And we give her...Hell. The day that we kill her will be the day that we will cease to be. Who will be left to cry?

The red-haired woman rises from her seat and walks toward me. She is frowning. She asks to sit next to me. I move my staff and she slides into the seat. She is holding a newspaper, it is folded vertically, and it opens on her lap.

"Who you voting for," she asks. She points to the headline that consumes the page in bold type.

MANN vs. LIGHT for PRESIDENT.

"The lesser of two...evils," I tell her, laughing at the irony that is apparent to no one but me.

"And which one is that?" Her finger, the index, is smoothing out the skin beneath her eyes, as if to suggest that the dark wrinkles that have begun to take hold there take their leave, come back later. She is old before her time.

"I've only voted once," I tell her. "A long time ago."

"And?" she asks, sensing there is much more to the story than I am prepared to give.

"And," I say. "And it didn't go over well. Not at first."

"But then?"

I wink at her, which is weird because I know winking is but an illusion of comfort and confidence. Winking is an awkward pause. "Jury's still out." I bite my lip.

"Story of my life," she says.

But I am floating in and out of the conversation, and I realize I may have missed something. “What?”

“Jury’s still out,” she says, a wisp of a smile appears on her face, but is quickly swallowed by a frown. She does not know to smile without sadness. “That’s the story of my life.”

I nod. “Yeah.”

“I like Light. I think he just needs another four years to really get things turned around.”

“Maybe,” I say.

“You think Mann’s the lesser of two evils?” She is no longer looking at me, but staring straight ahead, at the seat in front of her someone has left a message of semi-permanence, *Jay & Ro - - 4 Eva*. Except the Ro is fading, there was more to Ro before, maybe Rosalyn or Roland or Rotting. She tries to think of other names, things, words that begin with Ro.

“I think Mann deserves a chance. The way you and I deserve a chance.”

She traces her fingers across the heart that *Jay & Ro* pierce through. “Who says we deserve a chance?” She laughs, not sure what she believes, not sure she believes anything, anymore, at all.

“If I had to pick,” I say.

“You have to pick,” she says. “We all pick.”

“Light is good, but he...keeps his distance. He’s like a...like a...”

“...Ghost...” she says, nodding, her fingers pulling her hair away from her forehead.

I nod. “Yes. He keeps his distance from the people. Just goes about his business. But Mann...Mann’s in the trenches, rolling up sleeves and pants legs, getting dirty, kissing babies and wheeling around the elderly.”

“Mann keeps it real,” she says, choking out a laugh that she knows is forced.

“What?”

“That’s what Victor always says. ‘Keep it real, girl.’ ‘Keep it real, son.’”

“That’s all I’ve ever wanted, to keep it real.”

“I’m sick of Ghosts,” she says.

“So pick differently.”

“Let me see your pen,” she says. And I hand it to her. She turns toward the window, a blackbird, maybe a crow, is flying alongside the bus, alongside the window, it looks in at them, and then catches the wind, and soars upward. “I am running,” she says.

“I know.”

“I’m scared of him. Victor.”

“I know.”

“What should I do?”

“Escape.”

“Where will I go?”

“Faraway.”

She takes my hand into hers. Her skin is cold, but forgiving. Her hair is wild like saffron. Her lips are full and purposeful. She clings to my hand. And I feel myself drawn to her spirit. Our connection is inexplicable. Kismet. Divine. As our hands create passion, I feel myself falling in love with her. Repeatedly. Over and over again. My heart swings pendulum-style. I began to recite random proverbs that are not-so-random. I sing and talk and cry and she does the same. And I feel Victor slipping away, and I know that he is dead now. We escape into uncharted cosmos, flying into the eyes of blackholes, walking in hurricanes. We know no pain. We speak in muted gibberish, scating our lust like jazz-driven break beats.

We talk in sophisticated baby language. A language not dependent on word tense, or predicates, or sense stress.

We borrow the language of the ancients. Body speaking in ways vocal chords dream of.

And she takes me back, forces the recollection. There is a story about a boy named me that my father used to tell me. A story I wanted to leave on his bouncing knee, but he tied it upon my finger, it is a stowaway. I cannot forget.

Before buses, I walked. I had been walking for hours before I saw her, laying in her skin amid a field of pomegranates. I hovered over her, beauty chiseled indelibly into her figure. I looked to the sky, past the clouds, and smiled.

Hallelujah.

Sunshine, sunshine. Wake up.

Her eyes cracked open, large and curious, walnuts offering their meat. I swallowed her eyes, greedily. She exceeds all of my attempts to define purity. Celestial. Her bosom, golden orbs. The way the sun skimmed across her thighs, catching strange angles of light, a rainbow reflected onto the sea.

She seemed surprised at my presence, but not afraid. Her nature was inviting. She would not dismiss me. And we spoke both at once, but with mouths closed. Our eyes talked. Hers, violent green. Mine, baobab grey.

Green: What are you?

Baobab: What do you mean?

Green: What are you? From where do you come? (She had not yet learned to say Who)

Baobab: Here and there.

Green: What are you? There is only two.

Baobab: Then who am I?

Green: ...

Baobab: Who do you think I am?

Green: ... Who?

Baobab: Yes, who. Who am I?

Green: You cannot be.

Baobab: Then explain our words.

Our eyes grew silent. Our lips parted, manifesting voice to our thoughts that cycloned in the air between us.

“You do not know me and yet you have no fear?” I ask.

“Fear?”

“Yes, fear. You wouldn’t know fear, would you? You shouldn’t.”

“Who are you?” she repeats.

“...”

“What is on you?”

“What do you mean?” I looked down at my self. “These are garments. You’re naked.”

“Why do you hide who you are?”

“That is why I am here, now. I refuse to hide myself...I just want to rest a while. Before I go.”

“But where are you going?”

“Deep into the undiscovered. I want to walk and run where the land has never been touched. The things I’ll see.”

“Where are you from? Will you return there?”

“I was exiled, banished.”

“I do not know what this is.”

“You will.”

I motioned at the tree she had slept beneath, planted amid the field of pomegranates. She followed my eyes, read my plans.

“You’re hungry.”

“Yes.”

“But you cannot eat.”

“?”

“We’re not supposed to...”

“Eat?”

“...forbidden...”

“Why?”

“Not here. It is not our right. Not ours to take.”

“If I am hungry, I eat.”

“Not here.”

“I will eat and you will also.”

“I am not hungry.”

“But you are,” I said. “Haven’t you imagined its taste all these years? Woken up in the mid of night reaching for its nectar?”

“...” she said.

“Eat.”

I reached for the tree, but she snatched at my arm, rebuked me. "You'll die."
I turned to her, stared into her violent eyes. "No. I'll live."
And I bit down slowly, and reentered the world. She joined me there.
The world beckoned me, tugging at my pants' leg. "Father, I can't see. Father!
Father, pick me up!" And I obliged. We would die? No, we would live and thrive.
I do not remember the taste, except that it was heaven. In that one swallow the
tree opened me, opened its leaves, its trunk and transported me. In that swallow I was
alive. Then dead. Then borne again. I am still digesting.

And then I am brought back to the bus. And the red-haired woman is speaking
still, though I do not hear her. I am listening to a scene developing outside the bus, a
million miles away. I am always in more than once place, in more than one space. It is
what it means to rove this earth, to slither across the land upon one's belly, ear to the
ground. I must hear everything it says. What I hear now is familiar. The curse of this
place.

"Don't shoot. Please don't shoot..." She dug her toenails into the asphalt.

"It's okay, baby. It won't hurt."

But she couldn't hear him over the beating heart. Hers.

*Her back pushed in between the spaces of the wired fence, her flesh cold,
scared.*

The moon teased her hair, scattering frothy beams, natural highlights.

"...Green..."

"What you talkin' 'bout, baby?"

"...Green...That's my real eye color..."

*She still didn't look up. But she could see his shadow shrug its shoulders,
its reflection licking the warehouse wall.*

"I don't understand whatchu talkin' bout, beautiful."

"...I just remembered...green..."

"..."

"...please don't shoot..."

But the click came. Then light. Then...

"I thought you wanted to be a star." He tossed her a robe.

But it was too late to cover.

The camera gave birth to exposures.

I do not know her, this green-eyed woman, but I will go to her. It is inevitable. We will be passengers on the same bus, headed to the same place. She will buy her ticket tonight and board. She will punch her ticket in her runaway.

I turn to the her of here and now, her red-hair on fire, a burning bush, and I wonder what she sees in me. She is a voyeur peering through Venetian blinds hung across my mentality. Is she love? For what is love except our better suit. What is hate, except our better suit a shade darker. I clothe myself with better versions of other men and hem, taking-in or letting out their seams and cuffs. Sometimes I simply alter myself. I return to the scene outside the bus, behind some warehouse, down some dark alley.

"Baby, don't shoot."

"..." Her pupils widened, attempting to adjust to this new light. Green growing all the moment. The roles have been reversed.

"Baby, beautiful...I thought you wanted to be a star."

She holds her eyes in her hands. Takes aim.

Green surrounds, intrudes. A moss colored trigger itches her index.

She looks up. The moon is making love, hidden behind the city's bleachers.

"Stars...stars don't happen...overnight. Stars are. They just are."

"But baby, listen to me. I'm telling you got the potential to be-"

She holds her eyes to her lips. Says to be quiet. Hush.

The robe falls to the ground, gripping the asphalt around her ankles. She allows it.

His eyes fall emerald.

Click. Click. Light.

Tonight she will board, and she will leave for good.

I turn back to the red-haired woman, my words as lumber pitched into her flames.
“I came for you.”

“What?” she says.

"Don't shoot us..." we say.

but we cannot look away. she is beautiful. disrobed, cold, flesh scared.

"Baby, beautiful..." we stammer.

but we've lost sight of her. ourselves. for all this green.

“I came for you,” I repeat. “On this bus, I came for you.”

“I know,” she says.

“Taste and see.”

“Amen,” she says, no religion implied. She lays her head upon my shoulder, and I brush the hair away from her eyes so that she can see. The desert is going to sleep now, the sun has said so long.

Green ivy grows, tangles inside me. Hides in and under my eyelids. But I'm used to the lush. As she slips into slumber, the newspaper falls from her lap to the floor, and I look, and I notice for the first time that someone, maybe her, has drawn in horns and a

long mustache over Mann's photograph, in black ink. Except now there are big, approving circles around his face, the way you might circle a job or apartment in the classifieds, the more circles the higher your interest. And someone, maybe her, has attempted to change the horns and mustache into something flattering, the horns are a makeshift hat, the mustache a business-trimmed goatee, the edits are elementary, like a novice tattoo artist trying to make amends for an errant stroke. Light, he has not fared as well, a large X looms ominously across his brow, a X so impassioned that it has ripped the newspaper, Light is torn. And I cannot help but grin.

A green hush hangs over the world, a kitchen towel draped across the sink, a strange fruit growing wild in the brush. I will free them. One bus, one passenger at a time. They will. Eat.

THE NORTH COAST REVIEW

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Emily Katitus

Dreaming Again

Between the desperate and the timid, she's trapped--

whether their tears, or her fear, does it.

Speak, stresses her therapist, in signs.

It's a shame, whispered the innocent, the loss of her silvery voice.

Lethargic lips burning the heart. A pearlescent sonata

pounds her numb ears and falls

to the floor, resisting

the concept of acceptance.

Tortured by memories of sound, now restricted

to metallic songs.

The hands of an artist blister, mourning

over deaf ears--she wavers.

Tom DeRoma

Haikus

Used coloring book
for Christmas, child's only gift.
He'll learn the lines well.

Homeless child dies
on my doorstep in Winter,
I have no doorstep.

*Hope Justice**A Curse to You, Briar Rose*

Your limp and sterile King
celebrates his newfound virility:
You are a blessing,
 Beautiful babe.
The while Kingdom feasts.
but thirteen is unlucky,
 like
 an uninvited fairy.
In your fifteenth year
 a prick,
 and then a century of slumber.
O Sleeping Beauty,
as an Old Witch I die
 alone.
No spell or potion could give me
 A Happily Ever After—

*Hope Justice**The Frog Prince*

shy to an unknown
 wilderness
 undaunted by the current of fear
 to please engulfed by the rapids
 of desire

upon my bed of lily pads
 The Frog Prince croaks
 begging for a kiss

i laugh softly excited
 by his eagerness
 fumbling with my bra strap
 his rigid
 fingers clammy cold skin
 slick with perspiration
 slimy like a dead fish

sliding in velvet strokes
 violent shudders creep
 to the surface
 the Frog King cringes

licking my lips
 i whisper
 now you're a man

Dane Leimbach

A Peach for Saraswati

You know I know
You chipped through the oak boards to peek,
Making your finger nails bleed.
You tasted them, telling yourself
The flavor was earth and
River soaked leaves.
I was on the other side
Near the oak fence,
Near the peach tree.
You leaped
Into my old man's garden
With a song book
Between your teeth,
And mumbled a song sweet
While taking a peach.

Dane Leimbach

The Taste of April

When I was eight I tasted fire
In my innocent eye,
In my virgin belly.
I witnessed confusion in leaders
Mumbling their actions
Were necessary, were purposeful.
April tastes like TV
At nine in the morning
With pasted over eyes,
With a hungry stomach
Tossing acid on its tongue
Because there are children
In a big home with big brothers
Pushing steel fingers deep
In windows.
April tastes like fire;
April tastes like Waco.

Andy Gardner

Banjo Lesson

A man with his son on his knee

Thinks about the boy's life

As he teaches from his own.

Through the old pots and pans

Dented and rusty,

The twang of a banjo can be heard by anyone.

The small, delicate fingers of the boy are guided

When the man's tired hands

Play a familiar tune,

The child tries for himself.

Outside, It gets brighter.

Andy Gardner

Overdue

An old yellow book,
it has not been checked out since
nineteen eighty-nine.

The book, it begs me
To put on my thick glasses
And squint at the words.

It's been eighteen years.
After all of the reading,
The book is now closed.

Philistine Ayad

Grieving Widow

The ominous cello calls out,
Slowly weeping a seductive melody,
An ancient song, crushing hope
The grass sighs; the pond ripples;
Lotus blossoms float listlessly.
Paper screen doors invite a breeze,
Through fist sized holes in once pristine doors,
Involuntarily revealing a destructive tale.
And still, the cello continues in a lazy pace,
Playing only for the solitary feminine figure.
A beautiful woman is draped in a kimono,
It hangs upon her as her mantle of depression,
Falling from her smooth shoulders,
As she dances a psychotic rhythm.
Her raven hair comes down slowly,
As her wedding ring falls to the ground.

Philistine Ayad

Palestine

lays upon the street broken,
 torn apart and
dying—smothered—stifled,
 painted in blood.
happiness does not laugh
 for us—instead
bitter and hate filled sounds
 resonate in the distance
gunshots—explosions—crying,
 a yellow cloud
forms among the struggling youth,
 who choke—burn—suffocate
as air is robbed from juvenile lungs
 bullets cut swiftly
through the rain with malicious intent,
 piercing bodies—taking lives.
Defeat tastes copper-like,
 trickling from their mouths
splattering the floor.
And still we continue to fight.
 For our homes, our lives,
For the right to exist.

Andrew Arbogast

Invisible Shoes

The Invisible children must mend
Listen to their words, they are broken.

We swallow what we're fed, "This is truth"
With closed eyes pretend we're not broken.

Pot bellies are sleeping on the ground
How can this nation not be broken?

Children are in the rebel army
No choice! Their innocence is broken.

G-d bless the world not America
Don't ignore that this world is broken.

We hear the cries. Will you turn away?
In unity we are not broken

Heather Chase

Benign

You've scarred my body
past the point of perfection.
Lucky, they say,
lucky that I found you,
lucky that my family knew
that you would smell
this weakness
and come running after.
You've left for now,
I think.
But I know that you'll
be back to visit
your old home,
to say hello
to all your favorite
places, and maybe
add a few
more scars.

Joe Piedmonte

Waiting for the Drop

Within a darkened room
that color floods through,
a window locked and single shuttered.
Outside, the lonely ones wait for
the symphony of setting suns,
to melt frozen fingers from
their worn out faces. Underneath,
rich hearts beat, full of greener
blood. All united finally,
waiting for the drop.

Joe Piedmonte

Trees and Machines

Revolving above,
the darkened machines cast a
glow of destruction.

The archers stand their
ground accepting their defeat.
Green arrow tips glint.

Bystanders watch but
never come between the two.
Balance has broken.

Joe Piedmonte

Handpicked

Legal notices a get fast,
successful candidate.
A one of a kind
sports-minded
record reposessor,
who goes below
the book but always
above top dollar,
beneath and beyond
the umbrella of courtship
the lime and limpid greens
a second scene,
where flowers thrive
and they're alive.

Jon Hofener

Friend of the Magpie

Silently pressing my calves against snow,

I am melting her secretly—she is making me numb.

Arresting my attention with careless confidence,

A song perched on the fence

Sings a spell to my senses and

Lifts her eyes to a cream and mint sky.

In plain melody, she tells me that she could reach that sky

Before I could stand to touch her.

Spying over the trees, light spots her movement and

Places her figure at the edge of my reach.

Ignoring the cold creeping up past my knees,

I flick my wrist and pose my hand at her side,

Fingers wrestling shadow lines,

Passing hours with the ghost of her form

Until frostbite cuts in.

Adam J. Wendorff

Mistress

My world succumbs when you arrive,
but may there never be melancholy darkness
between you and me.

Savage-like façade in the sky,
the next most diffuse ashes,
your face so vivid with color,
mine with fading memories.

Not all your wandering eyes envisioned
tonight could be understood.

But I have watched you rise and fall,
And if you have ignored me when I called,
You have forsaken me when I was down,
And all but free.

That night she vanished abruptly,
Night had her uneasiness about her.

Dalton Rooney

It's a Barbershop, Not a Salon

Secretaries with fake personalities
weaken my mood.

The products in the air taste
bitter, sticking to your tongue
just like hair.

The chairs are covered in thick plastic
and a poster hangs on the wall,
with pictures of haircuts dating back
to my grandfathers time and age.

What I want from my barber
isn't anything out of the ordinary.

But I have no faith in him.

Just give me a haircut that
accommodates my generation.

I try to explain,
but he's just so old.

I look in the mirror,
and that piece of shit is staring right me
asking *how do ya like it?*

I lie and say it's perfect,
it looks great, thank you.

My barber's blade is rusty, just like his style.

Gripping my forehead, he pulls the
razor across my throat.

I hear it pop, my head relaxes over the headrest,
blood saturating my shirt.

I don't like my haircut,
but I'll survive.

I tell the secretary
that the tip is included in the check.

Lindy Smith

God

when religion fails

you cynics, I still feel

there is something more

Lindy Smith

Falling Away

she stood to the growl
 of their engines over the ocean as,
 they snaked out of the orchards
 half-smile of peaches
 each peck thirty-four cents.
 gray boots dusting
 the lampshade like filthy frost
 their shadows stained the futon
 the way sun sparkles with shadow.
 plush ribbons tied around letters
 briefly stung hearts
 too hard to move at all
 yet never resisted moving.
 the tides, swelling died, even
 then they feigned composure.
 exhaust, exfoliating the perfume of nature
 as if they were brewing a toxic tea
 they penned their book-
 trash wrought
 disgusting.
 she fitted his ring, he thought
 of her as they crawled out of straitjackets
 with little indentations of glass
 scuffing an imprint on smooth yellow skin.
 by then rifles had imposed
 the fox, and the flower, dense
 within the jungle, mud or sand. drinking
 from pitchers of debris.
 rousing her Siamese, whose tail
 ignites mocha brown, dusting
 a low neckline.
 ...the tablecloth of finalized documents.
 she resists suddenly the slow, irreversible
 moment-to-moment
 passion of everything to keep flowing
 (foreword?)
 then stood awhile reading
 what the bottom of the photograph had to say
 while the plush ribbons loosened
 a scattering of sand and the screw
 fell clear of the frame

Lindy Smith

He Likes Sex but Only From Rachel

he takes me in
the purple abyss of 3 A.M.
to cuddle and kiss
and to serve as
his blanket
undercover
to grab my hand
and to rattle my unwilling heart
 defenseless
 naive
 resisting
him

he has a girlfriend
back home in West Virginia
who argues
to unmend him
from his own spirit and will
closer to her side
which makes him crave
her absence
and makes him unravel
my messy
untamed sense

Nicholas Leverknight

haikus

ice pellet barrage

keys locked inside the car

hooray for winter

smoke-stained fingernails

leaf through fitness manuals

flanked by Camel ads

Nick Leverknight

Nine o'clock, Eastern Standard

Warm to a fault, I read Proust
in a bus stop. The woman beside me
has one tooth, and the bench
we share is rigidly cold, so I spread
fifty cent newspaper for her to sit on.
The bus arrives, and as we board,
she turns rheumatically, asking for nickels, but
all I can give her is a dime's worth of grapes.
A rush of blood chokes me, a wind that could
expand and explode
the arteries supplying my brain

THE NORTH COAST REVIEW

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Thomas Kelly

A Personal Utopia

The driving cultural force of my utopia is the University. In modifying the outline provided for our Plato's Republic discussion, I will describe the University's significance in my society as it applies to that outline's categories. Further, some of those provided categories and questions will be addressed and resolved as a result of the University's omnipresence in my utopia's culture. I have also created simple codes of equality, conduct, and corrections.

It is essential to mention that some of the following precepts were developed in the classroom and involved the ideas and contributions of my fellow students.

When speaking of my utopia, it is helpful to understand that I speak of a world-community; utopias, I think, cannot exist in a socio-cultural vacuum. The forces of economics, the distribution of goods, and ethical or moral rejection will isolate a community – such as an island or other geographic isolate – out of existence. In a modernizing world-community, where interaction with the whole of humanity is becoming the norm, particular cultural and moral standards of behavior will serve to drive isolated communities into extinction. This is not to say that these diverse cultures should completely abandon all of their traditions. However, it is some of the more controversial traditions, for example, female genital excision among tribes in the Horn of Africa, or honor killing in some Pakistani Muslim sects, that may best be recognized for the anachronisms that they are in our modern context, and their practices subsequently abandoned.

The University is the center of my utopia; regional Universities will exist in all geographic locations. All human individuals will be born in the Universities' hospitals and it is at the Universities that, from the ages of five to twenty-five years (or beyond), all humans will be educated. Primary, secondary, collegiate, and technical/vocational schools will be located within the Universities; all levels of education will be available to everyone, depending on their abilities and desires.

All discriminations – including, but not limited to those based on sex, sexual identity, skin color, spiritual preference, ethnicity, and country or planet of origin – will be eliminated under the adoption of The New Ethics. This ethical standard will include

the Difference Feminist idea that women and men have disparate, but equally important ways of evaluating a moral dilemma; the Buddhist ideas of balance, right thinking and acting, and interconnectedness; and the Hindu view that all beings are part of a Substantial, Universal Whole. Women in this society may, through the mandatory and equal education process, find an appropriate and suitable vocation. The choice of a woman's career will be exclusively her own; she may choose to be a mother or a genetic physicist, an artificial intelligence psychologist, or a forklift operator. The New Ethics will also include provisions for the right and ethical treatment of all living things, plant or animal, as well as that for the ethical stewardship of Earth and its natural resources.

Two sentient beings may choose to "marry" in this society, although the term "marriage" will generally not be a part of the society's lexicon. Individuals will join in a legally and socio-psychologically agreeable pledge that could include spiritual rites as well. Their pledge to each other may be initiated as early as their eighteenth year; however, procreation will not be possible until both partners have completed educations in their twenty-fifth year. The reproductive systems of both sexes will be physically nullified until this time. This nullification of the reproductive organs will be accomplished through the work of the society's genetic research facilities, will apply to all humans, and will be reversible. The University will not interfere in any individual or couple's choice of spiritual endeavor, nor will the University interfere in an individual or couple's decision to raise the number of children they choose as long as they provide for their children in an acceptable manner. Children are expected to be physically and emotionally nourished, appropriately clothed, and protected from the natural elements and other hazards to their physical and emotional well being. While only women will remain capable of childbearing – a crucial difference addressed by The Code of Equality – they will not suffer discrimination regarding their education, socio-cultural desires, or vocational choices.

The division of labor in this society will be based on an individual's educational aptitudes or desires. All children in the primary educational grades will be offered an equal education; in the secondary grades, aptitudes will be identified and stressed; at the collegiate or vocational level, those stressed aptitudes will be further developed and a career course will be chosen by the individual. If the individual shows an adequate

proficiency in that course of education, they will be employed in that career. The career an individual chooses will determine their level of compensation; for example, professors and engineers will earn more than bus drivers or construction workers. Goods and services will be available at all monetary levels, from the purely practical to the luxurious, and the attainment of these goods and services will be limited only by an individual's earning potential. Likewise, individuals and families will live in dwellings that they acquire according to their means, living where they choose. All individuals will find their places in the society based on their attributes, skills, and educational achievements. Not everyone in a society can be a civil engineer nor can everyone be a truck driver. The divisions of labor are realized, in my society, through educational merit. Those divisions of labor beget levels of income that beget commensurate buying power.

This is a point of view that I extend to government. I don't think there is anything wrong with our governmental structure, just the manner in which individuals are elected to public office. In my society, a public servant will be identified in the same manner that a physicist or a carpenter would, through the identification of a political aptitude by the professorial staff of the University. The structure of my utopia's government will be the same as that of the United States, with a representative, an executive, and a judicial branch. Local Universities will choose the candidates for public office; the winners will be selected based on their intellectual and socio-cultural proficiencies, not on their ability to campaign and raise funds. Here I defer to the creators of our government: Jefferson, Jay, Hamilton, and others whose ideas about government are sound, but whose intended process has been corrupted.

With a combination of ethical ideas based in Difference Feminism and Eastern moral theories, our founding fathers' governmental ideas, and an intense emphasis on extensive education, I have endeavored to design a society complete with a simple judicial code of conduct, a selection process for public officers, and an ethics of equality. My utopia places a particular emphasis on that which I think to be most lacking in our society: education. With an adequately educated population, sound social, economic, and political theories have an operational chance beyond abstract theory.

Appendix I: The Code of Justice and Ethics

The Code of Justice and Ethics is a distillation of the Bible's Ten Commandments. The number of rules has been reduced to three as there is some redundancy in the Commandments. For example, coveting one's neighbor's wife may be emotionally harmful to a human being and is addressed in Rule I of The Code. Those Commandments regarding taking the Lord's name in vain and keeping the Sabbath holy are not addressed by The Code as they are based in the metaphysical or spiritual realm and do not apply to my system of justice and ethics. While spirituality is accepted and encouraged in my utopia, it will remain a part of the private sphere.

The Code of Justice and Ethics

- I. Do not intentionally take the life of or physically or emotionally harm any human being, other than for the purpose of self-preservation or immediate safety of any other human.
- II. Do not remove from another human being any item or right belonging to that being, except where the removal of a personally guarded item or right may be useful for self-preservation or for the justified good and immediate safety of any human being.
- III. Do not speak untruths, except for self-preservation or for the justified good and immediate safety of any human being.

Appendix II: Addendum to The Code of Justice and Ethics: The Code of Equality

The Code of Equality

¶ As all human beings are regarded as equals and are further determined by The New Ethics to be a part of a Universal, Substantial Whole, with like access to health care, education, information, and social goods and protections, they shall not be judged regarding their genetic attributes or traits, but shall be accepted and nurtured within the guidelines set forth by the University and The Code of Justice and Ethics.

¶ In regards to a female's unique ability of childbearing, she and the other genetically responsible party shall be given adequate opportunity from the University – the extent of which shall be determined by those same parties – to bring forth and sustain the product of conception in such a way that is in accord with the social outline set forth by The Code of Justice and Ethics.

¶ That unique ability of the female of the human species discussed in Paragraph Two of this Code of Equality shall stand to bear no impingement on those rights and privileges set forth by Paragraph One of this Code of Equality.

Appendix III: Addendum to The Code of Justice and Ethics: The Code of Corrections

The Code of Corrections

¶ Those sentient humans found to be in violation of the first (I) Code of Justice and Ethics shall be confined with the University's Health Division. Violators will be deprived of their social privileges – except the privilege of public information gathering and that of monthly visitations – and they will fall under the purview of the Director of Sanitation. Violators who took the life of another human will permanently perform duties related to the removal and disposal of human and medical waste; those violators who otherwise physically or mentally harmed another human will perform those same duties for such a period of time as thought necessary by a jury of twelve (12) professors.

¶ Those sentient humans found to be in violation of the second (II) Code of Justice and Ethics shall – in addition to reimbursement to the victim(s) in cases of the removal of personally guarded items – temporarily be confined with the University's Economic Division. Violators will be deprived of their social privileges – except the privilege of public information gathering and that of weekly visitations – and they will fall under the purview of the Director of Warehousing. Violators will perform merchandise warehousing and custodial duties for such a period of time as thought necessary by a jury of seven (7) professors.

¶ Those sentient humans found to be in violation of the third (III) Code of Justice and Ethics shall temporarily be confined with the University's Justice Division. Violators will be deprived of their social privileges – except the privilege of public information gathering and that of weekly visitations – and they will fall under the purview of the Director of Investigations. Violators will perform information verification and custodial duties for such a period of time as thought necessary by a jury of seven (7) professors.

*Hope Justice**Enough*

Everyone has heard the cliché “enough is enough.” Well, when do you decide that you’ve reached that point—the point where you just can’t take it? It’s the so-called “point of no return”—that crucial moment when the metaphorical shit hits the fan—the realization that you can’t keep feeling sorry for yourself and that you have to get up and do something about the all the shit people put you through. I reached that pivotal point in my life with Adam, in my summer season of suffering—when all my pain was in full bloom and its growth was unstoppable. It was like a wildfire in my chest. Every hurt Adam had ever inflicted on me burst into flames all at once, igniting instantly this horrible burning hatred inside me that was inextinguishable. It charred every good memory we ever had together and tainted what little love I had left for him.

I remember that night I stopped loving him through a fog. Some things I’m glad I can’t really see clearly. I was at Shoreway Bowling Alley with a small group of friends. Adam had been ignoring my phone calls all night and finally when I did get an answer he sounded angry. We got into an argument and I started to cry in front of my friends. I was too embarrassed to be there, and Michael lived only minutes away, so I went to his house against my better judgment (and against his protests). I walked into the basement and he was there, waiting for me, lips pursed ready for a fight. I lost my temper that night and I regret it now more than ever.

I started to scream at him. I pushed him. What happened next is shrouded. I remember him screaming in my face, his nose touching mine. I wasn’t scared then. Instead I smiled at him, I didn’t mean to, it just happened. I knew then that I had made a mistake. He grabbed me roughly around my upper arm and twisted me towards the staircase. He shouted, “get out get out get out,” over and over until it made my ears sick. I remember sobbing and saying, “Please Adam, please don’t.” I knew he couldn’t hear me. Then he pushed me. Hard. I fell backward down the steps and landed on my back. He threw himself on me. It was like some horrible late night movie that you watch with no-name actors, except I was the star.

I didn't know him then. I realized that all the things we had done together had been a lie. The love I had felt for him was false, he didn't love me enough to stop hurting me. I didn't recognize his face because it was contorted from anger. I don't know if I made sense in what I was saying. I just heard my voice choked from some strange fear begging for something I didn't know.

He started to shake me. My back bounced off the stair repeatedly, making a sick thud every time. Then he just stopped, almost as if he had realized what he was doing, but he didn't seem sorry. He just looked as if he was done.

I looked up as he passed me and I grabbed his heel. I begged him not to leave me there like that, but he just threw my things out the basement door and said, "Get the fuck out." I screamed his name until my voice was raw and my throat ached. It seemed long but I knew it couldn't have been because then the pain hit me. I tried to stand but I was too weak, so I crawled up to the top three steps. The pain searing across my ribcage was so intense I couldn't breathe. I began to gasp desperately for air, and when I could I called out for Adam. He never came. I lay there like that for as long as I could, barely breathing, and I began to vomit. My stomach wrenched and my lungs burnt from the effort of breathing. I threw up until the liquid was clear and frothy and burnt coming up. I managed to gasp enough air to yell, "Call 911." At first there was no response, only the sound of my vile hitting the steps. Then I heard an angry voice say, "What the hell Hope?" He saw me there, sprawled out like road kill, vomit down my shirt and face, and he loved me again. In between the worried creases in his brow, I seen the first night we made love and he wept in my arms because he wanted me forever; I saw Christmas Eve night and our loving in the snow mounds we had built to play; I saw the night of our anniversary at that out-of-the-way hotel with the small hot tub; I saw the night he proposed to me and promised me a life time of unmade memories.

When the ambulance came he had to carry me out. My legs refused to work. Is it possible to love somebody and hate them at the same time? Because, when the EMS team put me on the stretcher, I looked at Adam and his tears of regret and I hated him. I hated him with every bruised rib in my body; I hated him with every fiery gasp of air I took; but mostly I hated him because I still loved him.

As the months passed I just stopped loving him, and when that happened something inside me broke. I felt like a seashell lying on the shore, once beautiful and full of life, now washed up upon the beach—discarded and used—no longer wanted or admired. If you listen closely to a sea shell, you can hear the soft moaning singing through its own inanimate pain, that when whispered to echoes back with an eerie, faint hollowness; and if you run your lips over its smooth surface, worn from the weary journey from the sea floor to the shore, you can kiss its lovely façade, beaten and grooved by vicious waves.

*Hope Justice**Deer on the Highway*

Friday night, and it was early fall. The moon parted in a way that made the luminescent ivory cover Route 58 and blanket the September Oak leaves along the road, comforting me into a bed of thoughts on the highway. My eyes dropped to the bare ring finger of my left hand grasping the steering wheel. Broken promises. Broken dreams. Every emotion mossed over by the constant growth of regret. My mind riveted from memory to memory of the love I had lost for Adam, the man who I was supposed to marry when we finished college, the man who I had left out of fear.

Adam, I saw you there, sitting next to me in the passenger seat, fussing with the radio dials, turning up the bass, bobbing your head and puffing out your lips, dancing “old school” like you called it, with your arms above your head, snapping your fingers, singing, “You know you wish you could dance like me,” to some made up melody. I laugh; you laugh; I smile; you’re gone.

Then there was the quiet of the radio. I was in my truck; No, I’m in your basement. “Wild Horses” is playing, and we’re dancing. I’m singing. Your eyes don’t move, they just absorb mine. Your eyes are tea-colored, mine honey, and they stir in one another until your nose touches mine, and you kiss me.

Wetness on my face brings me back to the littered highway—the litter tiny fragments of loose memories gusting around my truck. Other cars passed them by, unnoticed; I watched each one out of the corner of my eye, and for each, a bead of a tear rolled down my face.

The clouds break for a moment, and the stars become your freckles—“No, angel kisses,” you would say, and I would laugh, “Nope! Freckles.” The freckles turn back to stars and the clouds smother the opening again, those tiny lights extinguished.

I drove pass a church with a vacant parking lot. Then I was sitting there with you, and it wasn’t fall, it was early summer, and the air was warm and salty by the lake. We were lying on the grass just above the rocky slope of Lake Erie behind St. Michael’s Catholic Church. The sky was clear—stars splattered everywhere—and you were crying.

“Hope, don’t leave me. I love you so much.”

“Adam—I can’t do this anymore. You just break promise after promise and you’re tearin’ me apart. What the hell is so special about gettin’ high? Am I not enough to make you happy?”

You take my hand, put it to your chest.

“You feel that?”

I nod my head.

“That’s my heart, Hope. That’s me and you. Nothin’ else okay? I can change. Give me another chance. I need you to help me through it. It’s hard. It’s been a long time since I’ve been sober. If you leave me I’ll have no reason to try to get better.”

I don’t want to cry, but I’m crying. It sounds like the truth, and I believe you.

“Hope, common. Stop cryin’. I’m sorry.”

You lift my chin with your hand, look me in the face.

“Adam don’t look at me. I’m all puffy.”

“You’re beautiful. Most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

You point up at the sky, “You see those stars? Aren’t they amazing? They don’t even come close to you baby. You’re gorgeous.”

I passed a sign that said 50mph. St. Michael’s disappeared, the summer warmth gone. It was fall again. I couldn’t shake my head clear. I was possessed by memories that kept me from moving forward with my life. I was stuck in this neutral in between, far away enough from the past to want to move on, but hurting so much I couldn’t accept my future.

I sighed—told myself, “Concentrate on driving.” Think: *wheels on pavement*. Further down the road I saw two lanterns floating, just headlights on the highway. A sudden movement tore my eyes from the headlights; a brown deer hurdled across the line between the grass and the pavement—that white line screaming danger. The headlights were close now, too close, and the headlights became a whole car that clipped the hind leg of the deer. I slowed fast enough to watch the deer run from its own injury across the road to the other side. The car had never slowed. Speed contained, it drove on.

The deer reached the grass and collapsed there, convulsing. Then, I didn’t understand what had made me so angry at the car that never slowed. I wanted to hit that person hard, and hurt them, make them stand there with me stopped in the middle of the

road and watch that deer die. I sat in the driver's seat of my truck, foot lightly on the break, until the deer stopped moving. The hit hadn't looked bad, but the deer died anyway.

I parked in the middle of Route 58 and cried, because no one else cared to stop and cry for that deer. The other cars just went around me. I don't remember how long I stayed there or the rest of the ride home that night. That deer stayed with me, and it consumed my mind.

The next night, I drove to the gas station. I was distracted again, stuck on the past I had been trying so hard to forget. I came around a curve in the road, and I had to slam on the breaks. My tires protested, squealing loudly, but I stopped before I hit the deer standing in the middle of my lane. It stared into my headlights, terrified and unmoving. I stared back and smiled. I thought about the deer I had watched die the night before, and how cruel it had been, but I had stopped, the other car hadn't. This deer would live, but the other hadn't. I turned off my headlights, and the deer hesitated, then moved across the street.

I realized then why I had been crying, and at that moment smiling. I was that deer standing frozen in the headlights; I was that deer lying by the roadside on Route 58, and they were me:

The deer on Route 58 had been running, hoping to cross the highway without looking to see what might be coming. That had been me for the past year, trying to run away from the pain in my back, the curve of my spine unbearable, trying to hide in Adam, letting him cradle me so that I wasn't so afraid to be sick anymore. I wasn't aware of a future. I was so concentrated on the 'now' part of my life at the time, that I hadn't looked ahead and saw Adam fading out. That car was my health, quickly returning, unknown even to me. Health would cripple me, because I no longer would have that comfort zone. With my health had come change I hadn't expected. I left Adam after what had happened the night he had pushed me in his basement and I ran as fast as I could away from those happy and unhappy memories. All at once the pain of change had hit me, and I lay dead on the side of Route 58, because I couldn't move forward with my life like I had to, and there was no going back. The hit was permanent, and I had the choice to either get up and live or die there lost in memories and regret.

The deer caught in my headlights had been frightened, but searching. It was slowly inching forward across a path it wasn't familiar with. It was afraid of the unknown, but it still confronted it. The basic instinct to survive overcame the fear of an untraveled crossing. My headlights dictated life or death to that deer, and in a way to me. They represented all my worries and terrors. The oncoming light was experience, showing me where my life would go, me not ready to go there. I understood then that I had to accept my life as a different piece of a whole, rather than something alien. I had to realize that change would come, whether I was trapped in my past or not, and that if I was too afraid to accept it and finish my walk across the road, and lead myself into an abyss of self-discovery, my essence would die, trapped in what had been

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Emily Katitus

Dreaming Again

Between the desperate and the timid, she's trapped--

whether their tears, or her fear, does it.

Speak, stresses her therapist, in signs.

It's a shame, whispered the innocent, the loss of her silvery voice.

Lethargic lips burning the heart. A pearlescent sonata

pounds her numb ears and falls

to the floor, resisting

the concept of acceptance.

Tortured by memories of sound, now restricted

to metallic songs.

The hands of an artist blister, mourning

over deaf ears--she wavers.

Tom DeRoma

Haikus

Used coloring book
for Christmas, child's only gift.
He'll learn the lines well.

Homeless child dies
on my doorstep in Winter,
I have no doorstep.

*Hope Justice**A Curse to You, Briar Rose*

Your limp and sterile King
celebrates his newfound virility:
You are a blessing,
 Beautiful babe.
The while Kingdom feasts.
but thirteen is unlucky,
 like
 an uninvited fairy.
In your fifteenth year
 a prick,
 and then a century of slumber.
O Sleeping Beauty,
as an Old Witch I die
 alone.
No spell or potion could give me
 A Happily Ever After—

*Hope Justice**The Frog Prince*

shy to an unknown
 wilderness
 undaunted by the current of fear
 to please engulfed by the rapids
 of desire

upon my bed of lily pads
 The Frog Prince croaks
 begging for a kiss

i laugh softly excited
 by his eagerness
 fumbling with my bra strap
 his rigid
 fingers clammy cold skin
 slick with perspiration
 slimy like a dead fish

sliding in velvet strokes
 violent shudders creep
 to the surface
 the Frog King cringes

licking my lips
 i whisper
 now you're a man

Dane Leimbach

A Peach for Saraswati

You know I know
You chipped through the oak boards to peek,
Making your finger nails bleed.
You tasted them, telling yourself
The flavor was earth and
River soaked leaves.
I was on the other side
Near the oak fence,
Near the peach tree.
You leaped
Into my old man's garden
With a song book
Between your teeth,
And mumbled a song sweet
While taking a peach.

Dane Leimbach

The Taste of April

When I was eight I tasted fire
In my innocent eye,
In my virgin belly.
I witnessed confusion in leaders
Mumbling their actions
Were necessary, were purposeful.
April tastes like TV
At nine in the morning
With pasted over eyes,
With a hungry stomach
Tossing acid on its tongue
Because there are children
In a big home with big brothers
Pushing steel fingers deep
In windows.
April tastes like fire;
April tastes like Waco.

Andy Gardner

Banjo Lesson

A man with his son on his knee

Thinks about the boy's life

As he teaches from his own.

Through the old pots and pans

Dented and rusty,

The twang of a banjo can be heard by anyone.

The small, delicate fingers of the boy are guided

When the man's tired hands

Play a familiar tune,

The child tries for himself.

Outside, It gets brighter.

Andy Gardner

Overdue

An old yellow book,
it has not been checked out since
nineteen eighty-nine.

The book, it begs me
To put on my thick glasses
And squint at the words.

It's been eighteen years.
After all of the reading,
The book is now closed.

Philistine Ayad

Grieving Widow

The ominous cello calls out,
Slowly weeping a seductive melody,
An ancient song, crushing hope
The grass sighs; the pond ripples;
Lotus blossoms float listlessly.
Paper screen doors invite a breeze,
Through fist sized holes in once pristine doors,
Involuntarily revealing a destructive tale.
And still, the cello continues in a lazy pace,
Playing only for the solitary feminine figure.
A beautiful woman is draped in a kimono,
It hangs upon her as her mantle of depression,
Falling from her smooth shoulders,
As she dances a psychotic rhythm.
Her raven hair comes down slowly,
As her wedding ring falls to the ground.

Philistine Ayad

Palestine

lays upon the street broken,
 torn apart and
dying—smothered—stifled,
 painted in blood.
happiness does not laugh
 for us—instead
bitter and hate filled sounds
 resonate in the distance
gunshots—explosions—crying,
 a yellow cloud
forms among the struggling youth,
 who choke—burn—suffocate
as air is robbed from juvenile lungs
 bullets cut swiftly
through the rain with malicious intent,
 piercing bodies—taking lives.
Defeat tastes copper-like,
 trickling from their mouths
splattering the floor.
And still we continue to fight.
 For our homes, our lives,
For the right to exist.

Andrew Arbogast

Invisible Shoes

The Invisible children must mend
Listen to their words, they are broken.

We swallow what we're fed, "This is truth"
With closed eyes pretend we're not broken.

Pot bellies are sleeping on the ground
How can this nation not be broken?

Children are in the rebel army
No choice! Their innocence is broken.

G-d bless the world not America
Don't ignore that this world is broken.

We hear the cries. Will you turn away?
In unity we are not broken

Heather Chase

Benign

You've scarred my body
past the point of perfection.
Lucky, they say,
lucky that I found you,
lucky that my family knew
that you would smell
this weakness
and come running after.
You've left for now,
I think.
But I know that you'll
be back to visit
your old home,
to say hello
to all your favorite
places, and maybe
add a few
more scars.

Joe Piedmonte

Waiting for the Drop

Within a darkened room
that color floods through,
a window locked and single shuttered.
Outside, the lonely ones wait for
the symphony of setting suns,
to melt frozen fingers from
their worn out faces. Underneath,
rich hearts beat, full of greener
blood. All united finally,
waiting for the drop.

Joe Piedmonte

Trees and Machines

Revolving above,
the darkened machines cast a
glow of destruction.

The archers stand their
ground accepting their defeat.
Green arrow tips glint.

Bystanders watch but
never come between the two.
Balance has broken.

Joe Piedmonte

Handpicked

Legal notices a get fast,
successful candidate.
A one of a kind
sports-minded
record reposessor,
who goes below
the book but always
above top dollar,
beneath and beyond
the umbrella of courtship
the lime and limpid greens
a second scene,
where flowers thrive
and they're alive.

Jon Hofener

Friend of the Magpie

Silently pressing my calves against snow,

I am melting her secretly—she is making me numb.

Arresting my attention with careless confidence,

A song perched on the fence

Sings a spell to my senses and

Lifts her eyes to a cream and mint sky.

In plain melody, she tells me that she could reach that sky

Before I could stand to touch her.

Spying over the trees, light spots her movement and

Places her figure at the edge of my reach.

Ignoring the cold creeping up past my knees,

I flick my wrist and pose my hand at her side,

Fingers wrestling shadow lines,

Passing hours with the ghost of her form

Until frostbite cuts in.

Adam J. Wendorff

Mistress

My world succumbs when you arrive,
but may there never be melancholy darkness
between you and me.

Savage-like façade in the sky,
the next most diffuse ashes,
your face so vivid with color,
mine with fading memories.

Not all your wandering eyes envisioned
tonight could be understood.

But I have watched you rise and fall,
And if you have ignored me when I called,
You have forsaken me when I was down,
And all but free.

That night she vanished abruptly,
Night had her uneasiness about her.

Dalton Rooney

It's a Barbershop, Not a Salon

Secretaries with fake personalities
weaken my mood.

The products in the air taste
bitter, sticking to your tongue
just like hair.

The chairs are covered in thick plastic
and a poster hangs on the wall,
with pictures of haircuts dating back
to my grandfathers time and age.

What I want from my barber
isn't anything out of the ordinary.

But I have no faith in him.

Just give me a haircut that
accommodates my generation.

I try to explain,
but he's just so old.

I look in the mirror,
and that piece of shit is staring right me
asking *how do ya like it?*

I lie and say it's perfect,
it looks great, thank you.

My barber's blade is rusty, just like his style.

Gripping my forehead, he pulls the
razor across my throat.

I hear it pop, my head relaxes over the headrest,
blood saturating my shirt.

I don't like my haircut,
but I'll survive.

I tell the secretary
that the tip is included in the check.

Lindy Smith

God

when religion fails

you cynics, I still feel

there is something more

Lindy Smith

Falling Away

she stood to the growl
 of their engines over the ocean as,
 they snaked out of the orchards
 half-smile of peaches
 each peck thirty-four cents.
 gray boots dusting
 the lampshade like filthy frost
 their shadows stained the futon
 the way sun sparkles with shadow.
 plush ribbons tied around letters
 briefly stung hearts
 too hard to move at all
 yet never resisted moving.
 the tides, swelling died, even
 then they feigned composure.
 exhaust, exfoliating the perfume of nature
 as if they were brewing a toxic tea
 they penned their book-
 trash wrought
 disgusting.
 she fitted his ring, he thought
 of her as they crawled out of straitjackets
 with little indentations of glass
 scuffing an imprint on smooth yellow skin.
 by then rifles had imposed
 the fox, and the flower, dense
 within the jungle, mud or sand. drinking
 from pitchers of debris.
 rousing her Siamese, whose tail
 ignites mocha brown, dusting
 a low neckline.
 ...the tablecloth of finalized documents.
 she resists suddenly the slow, irreversible
 moment-to-moment
 passion of everything to keep flowing
 (foreword?)
 then stood awhile reading
 what the bottom of the photograph had to say
 while the plush ribbons loosened
 a scattering of sand and the screw
 fell clear of the frame

Lindy Smith

He Likes Sex but Only From Rachel

he takes me in
the purple abyss of 3 A.M.
to cuddle and kiss
and to serve as
his blanket
undercover
to grab my hand
and to rattle my unwilling heart
 defenseless
 naive
 resisting
him

he has a girlfriend
back home in West Virginia
who argues
to unmend him
from his own spirit and will
closer to her side
which makes him crave
her absence
and makes him unravel
my messy
untamed sense

Nicholas Leverknight

haikus

ice pellet barrage

keys locked inside the car

hooray for winter

smoke-stained fingernails

leaf through fitness manuals

flanked by Camel ads

Nick Leverknight

Nine o'clock, Eastern Standard

Warm to a fault, I read Proust
in a bus stop. The woman beside me
has one tooth, and the bench
we share is rigidly cold, so I spread
fifty cent newspaper for her to sit on.
The bus arrives, and as we board,
she turns rheumatically, asking for nickels, but
all I can give her is a dime's worth of grapes.
A rush of blood chokes me, a wind that could
expand and explode
the arteries supplying my brain

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Thomas Kelly

A Personal Utopia

The driving cultural force of my utopia is the University. In modifying the outline provided for our Plato's Republic discussion, I will describe the University's significance in my society as it applies to that outline's categories. Further, some of those provided categories and questions will be addressed and resolved as a result of the University's omnipresence in my utopia's culture. I have also created simple codes of equality, conduct, and corrections.

It is essential to mention that some of the following precepts were developed in the classroom and involved the ideas and contributions of my fellow students.

When speaking of my utopia, it is helpful to understand that I speak of a world-community; utopias, I think, cannot exist in a socio-cultural vacuum. The forces of economics, the distribution of goods, and ethical or moral rejection will isolate a community – such as an island or other geographic isolate – out of existence. In a modernizing world-community, where interaction with the whole of humanity is becoming the norm, particular cultural and moral standards of behavior will serve to drive isolated communities into extinction. This is not to say that these diverse cultures should completely abandon all of their traditions. However, it is some of the more controversial traditions, for example, female genital excision among tribes in the Horn of Africa, or honor killing in some Pakistani Muslim sects, that may best be recognized for the anachronisms that they are in our modern context, and their practices subsequently abandoned.

The University is the center of my utopia; regional Universities will exist in all geographic locations. All human individuals will be born in the Universities' hospitals and it is at the Universities that, from the ages of five to twenty-five years (or beyond), all humans will be educated. Primary, secondary, collegiate, and technical/vocational schools will be located within the Universities; all levels of education will be available to everyone, depending on their abilities and desires.

All discriminations – including, but not limited to those based on sex, sexual identity, skin color, spiritual preference, ethnicity, and country or planet of origin – will be eliminated under the adoption of The New Ethics. This ethical standard will include

the Difference Feminist idea that women and men have disparate, but equally important ways of evaluating a moral dilemma; the Buddhist ideas of balance, right thinking and acting, and interconnectedness; and the Hindu view that all beings are part of a Substantial, Universal Whole. Women in this society may, through the mandatory and equal education process, find an appropriate and suitable vocation. The choice of a woman's career will be exclusively her own; she may choose to be a mother or a genetic physicist, an artificial intelligence psychologist, or a forklift operator. The New Ethics will also include provisions for the right and ethical treatment of all living things, plant or animal, as well as that for the ethical stewardship of Earth and its natural resources.

Two sentient beings may choose to "marry" in this society, although the term "marriage" will generally not be a part of the society's lexicon. Individuals will join in a legally and socio-psychologically agreeable pledge that could include spiritual rites as well. Their pledge to each other may be initiated as early as their eighteenth year; however, procreation will not be possible until both partners have completed educations in their twenty-fifth year. The reproductive systems of both sexes will be physically nullified until this time. This nullification of the reproductive organs will be accomplished through the work of the society's genetic research facilities, will apply to all humans, and will be reversible. The University will not interfere in any individual or couple's choice of spiritual endeavor, nor will the University interfere in an individual or couple's decision to raise the number of children they choose as long as they provide for their children in an acceptable manner. Children are expected to be physically and emotionally nourished, appropriately clothed, and protected from the natural elements and other hazards to their physical and emotional well being. While only women will remain capable of childbearing – a crucial difference addressed by The Code of Equality – they will not suffer discrimination regarding their education, socio-cultural desires, or vocational choices.

The division of labor in this society will be based on an individual's educational aptitudes or desires. All children in the primary educational grades will be offered an equal education; in the secondary grades, aptitudes will be identified and stressed; at the collegiate or vocational level, those stressed aptitudes will be further developed and a career course will be chosen by the individual. If the individual shows an adequate

proficiency in that course of education, they will be employed in that career. The career an individual chooses will determine their level of compensation; for example, professors and engineers will earn more than bus drivers or construction workers. Goods and services will be available at all monetary levels, from the purely practical to the luxurious, and the attainment of these goods and services will be limited only by an individual's earning potential. Likewise, individuals and families will live in dwellings that they acquire according to their means, living where they choose. All individuals will find their places in the society based on their attributes, skills, and educational achievements. Not everyone in a society can be a civil engineer nor can everyone be a truck driver. The divisions of labor are realized, in my society, through educational merit. Those divisions of labor beget levels of income that beget commensurate buying power.

This is a point of view that I extend to government. I don't think there is anything wrong with our governmental structure, just the manner in which individuals are elected to public office. In my society, a public servant will be identified in the same manner that a physicist or a carpenter would, through the identification of a political aptitude by the professorial staff of the University. The structure of my utopia's government will be the same as that of the United States, with a representative, an executive, and a judicial branch. Local Universities will choose the candidates for public office; the winners will be selected based on their intellectual and socio-cultural proficiencies, not on their ability to campaign and raise funds. Here I defer to the creators of our government: Jefferson, Jay, Hamilton, and others whose ideas about government are sound, but whose intended process has been corrupted.

With a combination of ethical ideas based in Difference Feminism and Eastern moral theories, our founding fathers' governmental ideas, and an intense emphasis on extensive education, I have endeavored to design a society complete with a simple judicial code of conduct, a selection process for public officers, and an ethics of equality. My utopia places a particular emphasis on that which I think to be most lacking in our society: education. With an adequately educated population, sound social, economic, and political theories have an operational chance beyond abstract theory.

Appendix I: The Code of Justice and Ethics

The Code of Justice and Ethics is a distillation of the Bible's Ten Commandments. The number of rules has been reduced to three as there is some redundancy in the Commandments. For example, coveting one's neighbor's wife may be emotionally harmful to a human being and is addressed in Rule I of The Code. Those Commandments regarding taking the Lord's name in vain and keeping the Sabbath holy are not addressed by The Code as they are based in the metaphysical or spiritual realm and do not apply to my system of justice and ethics. While spirituality is accepted and encouraged in my utopia, it will remain a part of the private sphere.

The Code of Justice and Ethics

- I. Do not intentionally take the life of or physically or emotionally harm any human being, other than for the purpose of self-preservation or immediate safety of any other human.
- II. Do not remove from another human being any item or right belonging to that being, except where the removal of a personally guarded item or right may be useful for self-preservation or for the justified good and immediate safety of any human being.
- III. Do not speak untruths, except for self-preservation or for the justified good and immediate safety of any human being.

Appendix II: Addendum to The Code of Justice and Ethics: The Code of Equality

The Code of Equality

¶ As all human beings are regarded as equals and are further determined by The New Ethics to be a part of a Universal, Substantial Whole, with like access to health care, education, information, and social goods and protections, they shall not be judged regarding their genetic attributes or traits, but shall be accepted and nurtured within the guidelines set forth by the University and The Code of Justice and Ethics.

¶ In regards to a female's unique ability of childbearing, she and the other genetically responsible party shall be given adequate opportunity from the University – the extent of which shall be determined by those same parties – to bring forth and sustain the product of conception in such a way that is in accord with the social outline set forth by The Code of Justice and Ethics.

¶ That unique ability of the female of the human species discussed in Paragraph Two of this Code of Equality shall stand to bear no impingement on those rights and privileges set forth by Paragraph One of this Code of Equality.

Appendix III: Addendum to The Code of Justice and Ethics: The Code of Corrections

The Code of Corrections

¶ Those sentient humans found to be in violation of the first (I) Code of Justice and Ethics shall be confined with the University's Health Division. Violators will be deprived of their social privileges – except the privilege of public information gathering and that of monthly visitations – and they will fall under the purview of the Director of Sanitation. Violators who took the life of another human will permanently perform duties related to the removal and disposal of human and medical waste; those violators who otherwise physically or mentally harmed another human will perform those same duties for such a period of time as thought necessary by a jury of twelve (12) professors.

¶ Those sentient humans found to be in violation of the second (II) Code of Justice and Ethics shall – in addition to reimbursement to the victim(s) in cases of the removal of personally guarded items – temporarily be confined with the University's Economic Division. Violators will be deprived of their social privileges – except the privilege of public information gathering and that of weekly visitations – and they will fall under the purview of the Director of Warehousing. Violators will perform merchandise warehousing and custodial duties for such a period of time as thought necessary by a jury of seven (7) professors.

¶ Those sentient humans found to be in violation of the third (III) Code of Justice and Ethics shall temporarily be confined with the University's Justice Division. Violators will be deprived of their social privileges – except the privilege of public information gathering and that of weekly visitations – and they will fall under the purview of the Director of Investigations. Violators will perform information verification and custodial duties for such a period of time as thought necessary by a jury of seven (7) professors.

*Hope Justice**Enough*

Everyone has heard the cliché “enough is enough.” Well, when do you decide that you’ve reached that point—the point where you just can’t take it? It’s the so-called “point of no return”—that crucial moment when the metaphorical shit hits the fan—the realization that you can’t keep feeling sorry for yourself and that you have to get up and do something about the all the shit people put you through. I reached that pivotal point in my life with Adam, in my summer season of suffering—when all my pain was in full bloom and its growth was unstoppable. It was like a wildfire in my chest. Every hurt Adam had ever inflicted on me burst into flames all at once, igniting instantly this horrible burning hatred inside me that was inextinguishable. It charred every good memory we ever had together and tainted what little love I had left for him.

I remember that night I stopped loving him through a fog. Some things I’m glad I can’t really see clearly. I was at Shoreway Bowling Alley with a small group of friends. Adam had been ignoring my phone calls all night and finally when I did get an answer he sounded angry. We got into an argument and I started to cry in front of my friends. I was too embarrassed to be there, and Michael lived only minutes away, so I went to his house against my better judgment (and against his protests). I walked into the basement and he was there, waiting for me, lips pursed ready for a fight. I lost my temper that night and I regret it now more than ever.

I started to scream at him. I pushed him. What happened next is shrouded. I remember him screaming in my face, his nose touching mine. I wasn’t scared then. Instead I smiled at him, I didn’t mean to, it just happened. I knew then that I had made a mistake. He grabbed me roughly around my upper arm and twisted me towards the staircase. He shouted, “get out get out get out,” over and over until it made my ears sick. I remember sobbing and saying, “Please Adam, please don’t.” I knew he couldn’t hear me. Then he pushed me. Hard. I fell backward down the steps and landed on my back. He threw himself on me. It was like some horrible late night movie that you watch with no-name actors, except I was the star.

I didn't know him then. I realized that all the things we had done together had been a lie. The love I had felt for him was false, he didn't love me enough to stop hurting me. I didn't recognize his face because it was contorted from anger. I don't know if I made sense in what I was saying. I just heard my voice choked from some strange fear begging for something I didn't know.

He started to shake me. My back bounced off the stair repeatedly, making a sick thud every time. Then he just stopped, almost as if he had realized what he was doing, but he didn't seem sorry. He just looked as if he was done.

I looked up as he passed me and I grabbed his heel. I begged him not to leave me there like that, but he just threw my things out the basement door and said, "Get the fuck out." I screamed his name until my voice was raw and my throat ached. It seemed long but I knew it couldn't have been because then the pain hit me. I tried to stand but I was too weak, so I crawled up to the top three steps. The pain searing across my ribcage was so intense I couldn't breathe. I began to gasp desperately for air, and when I could I called out for Adam. He never came. I lay there like that for as long as I could, barely breathing, and I began to vomit. My stomach wrenched and my lungs burnt from the effort of breathing. I threw up until the liquid was clear and frothy and burnt coming up. I managed to gasp enough air to yell, "Call 911." At first there was no response, only the sound of my vile hitting the steps. Then I heard an angry voice say, "What the hell Hope?" He saw me there, sprawled out like road kill, vomit down my shirt and face, and he loved me again. In between the worried creases in his brow, I seen the first night we made love and he wept in my arms because he wanted me forever; I saw Christmas Eve night and our loving in the snow mounds we had built to play; I saw the night of our anniversary at that out-of-the-way hotel with the small hot tub; I saw the night he proposed to me and promised me a life time of unmade memories.

When the ambulance came he had to carry me out. My legs refused to work. Is it possible to love somebody and hate them at the same time? Because, when the EMS team put me on the stretcher, I looked at Adam and his tears of regret and I hated him. I hated him with every bruised rib in my body; I hated him with every fiery gasp of air I took; but mostly I hated him because I still loved him.

As the months passed I just stopped loving him, and when that happened something inside me broke. I felt like a seashell lying on the shore, once beautiful and full of life, now washed up upon the beach—discarded and used—no longer wanted or admired. If you listen closely to a sea shell, you can hear the soft moaning singing through its own inanimate pain, that when whispered to echoes back with an eerie, faint hollowness; and if you run your lips over its smooth surface, worn from the weary journey from the sea floor to the shore, you can kiss its lovely façade, beaten and grooved by vicious waves.

*Hope Justice**Deer on the Highway*

Friday night, and it was early fall. The moon parted in a way that made the luminescent ivory cover Route 58 and blanket the September Oak leaves along the road, comforting me into a bed of thoughts on the highway. My eyes dropped to the bare ring finger of my left hand grasping the steering wheel. Broken promises. Broken dreams. Every emotion mossed over by the constant growth of regret. My mind riveted from memory to memory of the love I had lost for Adam, the man who I was supposed to marry when we finished college, the man who I had left out of fear.

Adam, I saw you there, sitting next to me in the passenger seat, fussing with the radio dials, turning up the bass, bobbing your head and puffing out your lips, dancing “old school” like you called it, with your arms above your head, snapping your fingers, singing, “You know you wish you could dance like me,” to some made up melody. I laugh; you laugh; I smile; you’re gone.

Then there was the quiet of the radio. I was in my truck; No, I’m in your basement. “Wild Horses” is playing, and we’re dancing. I’m singing. Your eyes don’t move, they just absorb mine. Your eyes are tea-colored, mine honey, and they stir in one another until your nose touches mine, and you kiss me.

Wetness on my face brings me back to the littered highway—the litter tiny fragments of loose memories gusting around my truck. Other cars passed them by, unnoticed; I watched each one out of the corner of my eye, and for each, a bead of a tear rolled down my face.

The clouds break for a moment, and the stars become your freckles—“No, angel kisses,” you would say, and I would laugh, “Nope! Freckers.” The freckles turn back to stars and the clouds smother the opening again, those tiny lights extinguished.

I drove pass a church with a vacant parking lot. Then I was sitting there with you, and it wasn’t fall, it was early summer, and the air was warm and salty by the lake. We were lying on the grass just above the rocky slope of Lake Erie behind St. Michael’s Catholic Church. The sky was clear—stars splattered everywhere—and you were crying.

“Hope, don’t leave me. I love you so much.”

“Adam—I can’t do this anymore. You just break promise after promise and you’re tearin’ me apart. What the hell is so special about gettin’ high? Am I not enough to make you happy?”

You take my hand, put it to your chest.

“You feel that?”

I nod my head.

“That’s my heart, Hope. That’s me and you. Nothin’ else okay? I can change. Give me another chance. I need you to help me through it. It’s hard. It’s been a long time since I’ve been sober. If you leave me I’ll have no reason to try to get better.”

I don’t want to cry, but I’m crying. It sounds like the truth, and I believe you.

“Hope, common. Stop cryin’. I’m sorry.”

You lift my chin with your hand, look me in the face.

“Adam don’t look at me. I’m all puffy.”

“You’re beautiful. Most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

You point up at the sky, “You see those stars? Aren’t they amazing? They don’t even come close to you baby. You’re gorgeous.”

I passed a sign that said 50mph. St. Michael’s disappeared, the summer warmth gone. It was fall again. I couldn’t shake my head clear. I was possessed by memories that kept me from moving forward with my life. I was stuck in this neutral in between, far away enough from the past to want to move on, but hurting so much I couldn’t accept my future.

I sighed—told myself, “Concentrate on driving.” Think: *wheels on pavement*. Further down the road I saw two lanterns floating, just headlights on the highway. A sudden movement tore my eyes from the headlights; a brown deer hurdled across the line between the grass and the pavement—that white line screaming danger. The headlights were close now, too close, and the headlights became a whole car that clipped the hind leg of the deer. I slowed fast enough to watch the deer run from its own injury across the road to the other side. The car had never slowed. Speed contained, it drove on.

The deer reached the grass and collapsed there, convulsing. Then, I didn’t understand what had made me so angry at the car that never slowed. I wanted to hit that person hard, and hurt them, make them stand there with me stopped in the middle of the

road and watch that deer die. I sat in the driver's seat of my truck, foot lightly on the break, until the deer stopped moving. The hit hadn't looked bad, but the deer died anyway.

I parked in the middle of Route 58 and cried, because no one else cared to stop and cry for that deer. The other cars just went around me. I don't remember how long I stayed there or the rest of the ride home that night. That deer stayed with me, and it consumed my mind.

The next night, I drove to the gas station. I was distracted again, stuck on the past I had been trying so hard to forget. I came around a curve in the road, and I had to slam on the breaks. My tires protested, squealing loudly, but I stopped before I hit the deer standing in the middle of my lane. It stared into my headlights, terrified and unmoving. I stared back and smiled. I thought about the deer I had watched die the night before, and how cruel it had been, but I had stopped, the other car hadn't. This deer would live, but the other hadn't. I turned off my headlights, and the deer hesitated, then moved across the street.

I realized then why I had been crying, and at that moment smiling. I was that deer standing frozen in the headlights; I was that deer lying by the roadside on Route 58, and they were me:

The deer on Route 58 had been running, hoping to cross the highway without looking to see what might be coming. That had been me for the past year, trying to run away from the pain in my back, the curve of my spine unbearable, trying to hide in Adam, letting him cradle me so that I wasn't so afraid to be sick anymore. I wasn't aware of a future. I was so concentrated on the 'now' part of my life at the time, that I hadn't looked ahead and saw Adam fading out. That car was my health, quickly returning, unknown even to me. Health would cripple me, because I no longer would have that comfort zone. With my health had come change I hadn't expected. I left Adam after what had happened the night he had pushed me in his basement and I ran as fast as I could away from those happy and unhappy memories. All at once the pain of change had hit me, and I lay dead on the side of Route 58, because I couldn't move forward with my life like I had to, and there was no going back. The hit was permanent, and I had the choice to either get up and live or die there lost in memories and regret.

The deer caught in my headlights had been frightened, but searching. It was slowly inching forward across a path it wasn't familiar with. It was afraid of the unknown, but it still confronted it. The basic instinct to survive overcame the fear of an untraveled crossing. My headlights dictated life or death to that deer, and in a way to me. They represented all my worries and terrors. The oncoming light was experience, showing me where my life would go, me not ready to go there. I understood then that I had to accept my life as a different piece of a whole, rather than something alien. I had to realize that change would come, whether I was trapped in my past or not, and that if I was too afraid to accept it and finish my walk across the road, and lead myself into an abyss of self-discovery, my essence would die, trapped in what had been

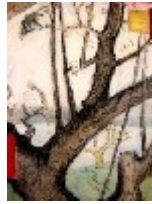
THE NORTH COAST REVIEW

Contents: Artwork and Photography

The images below represent artwork created by LCCC faculty. To view larger images, click on the name of the artist.



**Nancy Weymouth
Halbrook**



Jean Weigl



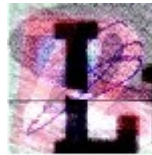
Liz Maugans



Marge Widmar



Elwyn Mehlman



Reid Wood

012407



Catherine Rozmarynowycz

Nancy Weymouth Halbrook

Nancy has been teaching at Lorain County Community College since 2003. She works primarily on paper: drawing, painting, pastels and monotypes. Most of her work is nature based. She will be having a retrospective of works on paper, 1987 to 2007, this fall In August/Sept at the Stocker Art Gallery LCCC.



Star Gazer Lily, 2005



Orange Lily, 2005



Fall Leaves, 2004



Bing Cherries-Blue Background

Liz Maugans

Liz Maugans teaches drawing I and II at Lorain County Community College.



Prity Pleas Club - A monoprint and chine colle done in 2006

Etching and chine colle called Future Eli

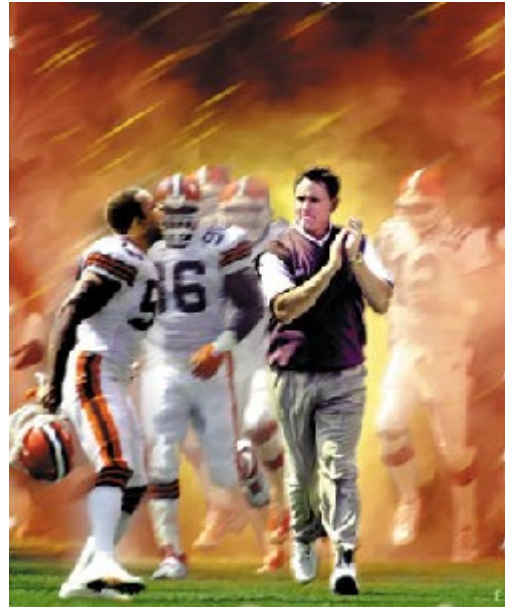


Etching and chine colle called Graphic Designer

Elwyn Mehlman



CoverEvo



Davis & Browns



Teen

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Porch

Catherine Rozmarynowycz

I am interested in creating images of man as a hybrid, either combined with plant forms or other natural elements. As I am working, I reference biological illustrations, both anatomical and botanical, as well as my own drawings from observation. These hybrids symbolize both our interconnectedness with nature and our environment as well as my own interest in creating fanciful, somewhat sinister imagery. As an artist, I have been inspired by Surrealism, specifically its use of the psyche to guide the image making process.



Medusa 2



Pollinating 2

Jean Weigl



After Hiroshige Pastel 001



After Hiroshige Pastel 002



After Hiroshige Pastel 006



After Hiroshige Pastel 014

Marge Widmar

Marge Widmar's major area of work is enamel and metalsmithing. Since around 2000, she has also been working with photo montage.



Pendant



Phone



**Superior Reliquary
for a Label**



Collectors Item

Reid Wood

Professor Emeritus
Lorain County Community College

Day 2



010907

Day 7



011407

Day 15



012307

Day 16



012407