



Cover by Ericka Kaimer

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The Morpheus staff thanks senior Ericka Kaimer for her lovely cover page and for all the covers she has created for us over the past few years. Thank you, Ericka, and good luck in graduate school!

Editor's Note

Hello all!

I'm Kasandra Christner, editor of Morpheus Literary Magazine. It has been my pleasure working on this issue and putting on events surrounding reading and writing around Heidelberg's campus. This semester, we had the opportunity to speak with writer/editor Dan D'Angelo about career opportunities for English majors and about writing professionally in general.

We also held our annual writing contest, the winning pieces of which you will see in this issue. I want to extend a huge congratulations to the winners and a huge thank you to the people who submitted their works for publication. To learn more about future contests, keep an eye on our Twitter: @HUMorpheus.

Finally, I want to thank the lovely members of Morpheus who made this issue and our events possible. If you're interested in getting involved with our magazine, feel free to email morpheus@heidelberg.edu.

Enjoy our Fall issue!

The Process of Sinking

By Ivy Connolly

First Place Poetry Winner

Our love tangled together,

Like yarn drenched in alcohol.

Easily burned, easily drowned.

One

Summer

Night

The blackberry fell

From the tip of my tongue,

And landed on a needle.

I laid horizontal with the earth,

And floated away.

For my lover used to say,

“The greatest things in life, are best held beneath the surface.”

Needless to say,

I never learned to use my

Voice

How Easily the Spell is Broken

By Clarissa Jones

Second Place Poetry Winner

When I was small
My father's parents lived on a farm
That had long ceased to nurture,
If it ever truly had.
It was a grand ship set adrift in a sea of corn, soybeans, wheat;
Far from any shore.
You could scream
With every last ounce of breath in your voice,
And no one would come,
There was no one to hear.

There was a woman a mile up the road,
Old as the gnarled oak that seemed to lean on her barn as she leaned on her cane,
Support in troubled winds.
But then,
I was not even ten.
I do not know now
How old she really was.
I do still know her name,
Rosemary,
As I remember thinking that to share a name with a plant was to be breathtakingly
elegant.
I do not know what happened to her,
After my father's parents left the farm to fallow for good.

They would walk to her to bring her dinner every evening.
My father and I volunteered for the trek,
Desperate to escape their house
And its sulfur well-water smell,
And the sickly-sweet of the surrounding hay fields,
And the scream of the insects outside,

The deathly still silence within,
Punctuated with candy coated poison pills of conversation.
Desperate for human contact with someone who did not know too much about us.
We walked there hand in hand,
Laughing,
Mostly careless.
We stopped halfway,
Standing on the side of the road near a cornfield.
He told me to close my eyes and listen,
And if I listened hard enough,
I would hear the corn grow.
I closed my eyes and stood,
Arms outstretched, trying to make my body an antenna,
Built for receiving the mysteries of the Universe.
The discordant symphony of the cicadas, crickets, katydids,
Hiding among the plants, ringing in my ears,
But I never did hear that secret music of growing crops.
I never could tune myself into the right frequency.
It didn't occur to me then,
That he,
Like as not,
Was just telling stories.
We lingered at the old woman's house,
Wanting to extend the golden moment
But no light can last longer than it chooses.

On the way back,
My father threw himself in a waist-deep ditch,
To pluck out a plant.
He stripped the soft seeds off the feathery top in one fluid motion,
And the jagged blade of the stem bit into his palm,
Slicing it open thumb to heel.
A red dripping scratch,
Cutting across his Life Line,
Parallel to Head and Heart.

We were alone;
No way to call for help in those way back days,
And cars would pass hourly
If the day was unusually busy.
So he wiped what blood he could on his shirt,
And kept walking.
He reached for me again
As if the air had not been altered;
But I pulled my hand away,
Worried the wound would spread,
That the stain of blood would cause my skin to open up in sympathy of
His self-inflicted suffering.
We walked in silence,
The steady drip of his blood,
Leaving a trail the whole half-mile up the road
Drying brick-red in the late summer sun.

Fate's Epistle

After Addonizio

By Elyssa Williams

Third Place Poetry Winner

“no free will in those days,” they say,
no manner in which to change **that** day.

[*stuck in the ground with no will, plucked or trampled by gods*]
“you could beat your head against your fate, but still,”
they announce as they condemn my “will.”
they scorn me and hate me and try to redirect their fight;
yet, i truly have no say in their perilous plight.

i have no say— i have no voice;
i do not decide the weapon of choice.

i do not control the rumbling thunder in the dark sky;
i do not control the abused babe and its pitiful cry.
i do not control the savage man set to rule the world;
i do not control the beast with claw wicked and curled.
i do not control the blasted thread or the retched wheel;
i do not control the damned lives that It steals.

i do not decide the weapon of choice.
i have no say— i have no voice.

please do not condemn me with fire and flame,
for no more than you am i to blame.
though you see me as Narcissus, that schmuck,
i am but *a poor Echo, and someone's love stuck*
[*in the ground, the ground, the ground, the ground*]

they think that fate controls all world tragedy...
yet, i ask: have they thought of the One who dominates me?

Treasure Hunter

By Katharina Oehmichen
Honorable Mention

It began when you were not even aware of beginnings,
between then and now,
heaps of treasures
have been gathered
by your unconscious mind.

Mama strives to carefully select
the shimmering things,
and glimmering things,
and earnest things.
She puts them in your coat pockets,
when you're not looking,
for cold winter days.
The treasure appears,
out of nowhere,
between your freezing fingers.

Papa, thoughtlessly, collects for you
all the wondrous things,
peculiar and pretty,
solid and rich,
small and insignificant.

He scatters them all over the place.
Sometimes they cling to a strand of your hair,
or the sole of your shoe;
and you find them by looking
in the mirror.

Your brother gets lost a few many times
in wild forests and high mountains,
deep seas and swarming cities.

All treasure hunters
[you can't count them
on two hands]
are his friends.

They travel the world
and stop by to eat and drink;
and every time they leave
something behind
on the door step.

You catalogue some alphabetically.

You sort most treasures
by color and smell,
by taste and by shape.

Carelessly stuffed into your bag,
they get so mixed up.

Crumpled together like gum wrapper,
you have to start all over again.

And, every now and then
you have to decide
which ones to leave behind.
You deliberate
because every sample
had been selected for you
by chance or intention
and you feel guilty for
throwing them out
as if they've somehow
lost their worth.

You try hiding them
behind the door
or burying them in the yard.
When Papa stumbles over it,
the colorful-soft one,
he silently picks it up,
out of the trash.
He hides it in his pocket
to keep it safe.
He takes it home
for later, maybe
for you, maybe
when you decide you need it again.
If you decide you need it again.

Living

By Laila Gernert

Living is hard.
Living is feeling as if your head and throat are on fire.
Living is vomiting four times
Living is the taste of water and half dissolved pills.
Living is 120 heartbeats per minute.
Living is your best friend's tears as she watches the nurse plunge the IV into
your arm.
Living is ten days in a psychiatric ward; three of which were spent in the
Special Care Unit.
Living is looking your parents in the eye; finally showing them the
emotional torment you face every day.
Living is hand folding 23 paper frogs.
Living is 975 mg of antidepressants per day.
Living is accepting that you need help.
Living is trying new ways to cope with situations.
Living is waking up at 4 am; even though you had only closed your eyes at
1 am.
Living is knowing that everyone knows now.
Living is giving up the deep inner thoughts of your mind.
Living is waking up each day and getting dressed.
Living is hard, but I promised I'd try.

By Aedan Ginty

Emotion

Nature allows our emotions to sway
From dawn to the middle of the day
It paves us a solemn road
Filled with the feeling of mirth and gold

Fog Rising

In this solemn break
Fog rising around me
My eyes adjusting to sentimental surroundings
Birds chirping through heavy voices
Crickets clambering with bated breath
Foxes rustling through dense brushes with their kin
Leaves moving and waning in this passage
This tiny stream rushing with empty joy
This small crevice in the land standing aimlessly
I smile for the first time in a while
The fog grows thicker
And I
A passing wanderer
Become formless and vanish into eternity

The Strange Faces of Many Dreams

The Strange faces of many
Dreams try to talk from the clay
And say to the silent crowd
With mournful noises:

“We come from the ground today
With hands unraised to your sky
The same sky we were under
For our own life-path.”

“We look for truth in you men,
But you run amuck like sheep
Thinking we are here to take
Your souls to our world.”

“All we ask of you is to
See us as you, but ones that
Have moved on to another
Land of dark and light.”

“Now, will you accept our hands,
Or are we just little Tomin
-O, flying through the chasm of
Hell on empty wings?”

My Precious, Little, Snowflake

By Fletcher Grey

I cannot Show of my Affections,
Within the Times I've heard your Voice,
With such Divine, and the Sweetest Splendor,
That awaits every time that You may Come;
As I shall Spend that Moment with You...

What Delicious Things, There, may then be served,
Upon the plate of a Second,
Where hours of feasting may arise,
From the single glance that we may but share,
Within the span of a Second.
As I shall Spend that Moment with You...

How honorable I have become,
To the woman that Takes me as I am,
and cannot Speak when she feels the Need,
Lest her fears of her Walls be Broken;
I could not Know of a Better Though,
Thankful and Knowing that she is Safe;
Even though I am always Worried,
For the though lying After the Second.

and how our Bodies have Mingled Since,
That right hand touching her Left...
A Handshake, as it Were, between two estranged Lovers,
Amongst these Fields of Irony...
And Fate getting in the Way,
Causing this Clock's Ticking to Break Pattern.

No Matter;
The Clock shall keep marching on,
And eventually, fix the cracks therein,
And let the smaller hand keep running on,
And release the weights from Her.
And the Bigger Hand Shall Catch up to her,

And Snuggle Up Besides...
And grant her all the Lovings needed,
After, During, and Before the Break has been Mended.

If even for the Second Then,
I shall spend that Moment with You;
Though Life May then get in the Way,
And waste such Precious Memories,
You shall always be My Masterpiece,
Given to me by some God or Creation...

If only for the Moment, I shall Spend it with You.

My Precious, Little, Snowflake.

The Curse of Time

By Zachary Hahn

Time has come and yet the time lost it's core.

Dreams begin to fade and soon disappear,

Whilst nightmares no longer haunt anymore.

Soon all memories shall be in the rear.

The children at play will soon understand,

A truth to whom all alive shall offend,

Everything through life has its own demand.

The cruel term shall never come to end.

Next flowers and crops will soon come to wilt,

For decay of life's inevitable,

And all creatures shall be forced to the hilt,

While no breath is truly memorable.

Yet in all life there still remains a chance,

The new acumen granted shall enhance.

By Ericka Kaimer

Front Porch Thunderstorms

Pleasant Plain, Ohio

where the wood meets the house and wraps delicately in front of the window. where from a few short steps the ground is eons away. the chair, a sad, pale blue, memory of times sat within its fabric, its existence has thus ceased, stretched and torn. two persons sit, waiting for the storm to begin, to see the dark clouds blow into the once clear sky. water pattering gently, begins to smack the roof, it can be heard for miles, yet the world seems only a trickle to this great storm. before the sky fully loosed, laced the air with its cold, damp liquid, there was a calm. so calm, that the destruction to follow was almost desired. from that chair I was patiently waiting to run and be engulfed by the now frigid droplets, that clung to the only warmth that could be found. you synchronized your pattering with the slow beat of my heart, as I gaze up at the gray, swollen clouds, this enchanting time brings sweet ecstasy, contradicting every part of what is good and what is bad. So quickly, the mud begins to run, slipping, shaking, shivering, I'm running back under cover of the tiny wood that meets the house, (where now I sit, watching with mama), wrapping me, squeezing my soaked skin, water seeps through, chilling my bones, stealing my innocence. then a sudden halt, the rolling stops, I feel you losing your own grip on the water down below. my childhood stops, I wait for those slow drops to become but a distant memory, the drops slipping through my fingertips one last time, a peak of shimmer enters your clouds, the sun begins licking the tattered flowers, dries the muddied driveway, the dripping and shaking of the trees are your final cry, then your destruction, exists only when enticed from down below.

Grandpa

Today is one of those days when I miss you
A day I can't help but want to call you up
To hear your voice, tell you about my day
Today is one of those days when I miss you

The day you left me, I didn't shed a tear
I stood, stoic-faced in church, as you disappeared.
You never went into the ground, just in an urn
The day you left me, I didn't shed a tear.

My silent tears return for you once again
What little time I had you before you forgot who I was
But a passing moment and then you were gone.
My silent tears return for you once again

You have no grave, no grave for me to see
No grave for me to place flowers, to cry my tears
I can't see you in your urn, I see only clay
You have no grave, no grave for me to see

Today is one of those days when I miss you
When I want to give you the biggest hug
To come home and visit, to listen to your old stories
Today is a day I want my "bud" back, and I can't.

The Valor of the Helmet

For Robert “Bob” Randall

At dawn, I am seen, hanging on that hook—
Sweat, hair and oil line the brim
Crested with a seal,
Hand-tooled.
Hand-sewn.
Leather-trim--
A reminder of the fires I never quite shook

Valor-- classic nobility, the fireman’s guard.
Emblazoned with my station number
A representation of my brothers, a company
Forever signifying the fight against lumber.

Self-sacrificial armour--
Tipped with beaten copper; charred.

Headgear of the tribe, protector, heavy smoke
Pitted against the elements of fire
Saving those, protecting the helpless--
Is dire.

Til’ the hard helmet shield finally broke.

And I am seen no more on the hook above the shoes--
My helmet hangs high above that grave.
My crest is my crown, ceremoniously presented.
A reminder of those I saved--

To begin again, this life I’d always choose.

By Amanda Ovary

Inclusion

[Other People | *Child with a Disability* / Parent of that Child]

1.

I wonder what goes through her mind.
When she sits in silence,
when she refuses to resonate her reasoning,
when she shuts down with no explanation.

*I wonder what they think of me.
When I have no interest in the things they do,
when I can't figure out how to explain myself,
when my only option is to collapse within.*

I wonder if they know.
That she is a little behind.
That her brain functions differently.
That she needs a little extra help.

I wonder what goes through her mind.
When she doesn't stop talking,
when her stories lack detail,
when her mouth moves a mile a minute.

*I wonder what they think of me.
When my brain is thinking too fast,
when I try to describe my day but it doesn't make sense,
when I try to share but no one understands.*

I wonder if they know.
That she can't help it.
That she was born with it.
That she tries her best.

I wonder what goes through her mind.
When she sits at home alone,
when no one asks her to do anything,
when her laughter instantly turns to anger.

*I wonder what they think of me.
When I can't help but to feel alone,
when my friends don't include me,
when a simple act makes me angry and I don't know why.*

I wonder if they know.
That all she wants is to be included.
That she struggles in all aspects.
That my child has a disability.

Awareness

[Other People | *Child with a Disability* / Parent of that Child]

2.

Why is her child behaving like that?

I know I shouldn't be acting like this but I can't help it.

Why can't she just behave like a normal child in public?

*My parents told me that my brain functions differently,
I was born unlike those around me,
that I am unique.*

We told her that she will have tougher times,
that her brain functions differently,
that she has a learning disability.

*I don't understand,
why my friends are always those who are younger,
why those my age always make fun of me.*

Her social skill development is years behind,
her comprehensiveness is lacking,
and I don't know how to teach her empathy.

*Sometimes I get angry,
I can't express myself fully,
and I don't know why.*

I wish other people wouldn't judge her.
I wish they could see a loving child,
I wish they could accept her differences.

I wish people understood me.

I wish it wasn't so hard for me to understand others.

I wish normal things weren't difficult for me

I just want everyone to be aware.

I just want everyone to know how it feels.

Buzz

By Carly Evans
First Place Short Story Winner

The commotion of the party floated up the stairs and down the hall. The most social people in the city invaded the house, holding martini glasses in one hand and picked up hors d'oeuvres in the other. They talked about whatever middle-aged people gossiped about—the new neighbors, the children's grades, television programs, and maybe if they were feeling generous enough to spare some of their pity they would talk about the war. Over the talking, music from two decades ago played on the new turntable, and they danced to pretend that they had no responsibilities resting above them.

The boys could hear the tipsy chatter and laughter from Jim's bedroom. A stolen bottle of wine laid between them on the bed. They didn't know what kind it was—Moscato, rosé, pinot noir. All those labels were lost on them. To them, to their childish palate, it was only known as their attempts to numb their deep sorrow.

A small letter sat on Jim's lap. It had been read over a hundred times by the two of them.

"Maybe you won't pass the physical," David said.

"I doubt it. I don't have that kind of luck."

"Men get out of service for a lot of things. My uncle told me that he was almost drafted into World War II, but they didn't let him in after he told them he has flat feet."

Jim closed his eyes and leaned against the headboard.

They were a pitiful sight. Their ties were loosened, and Jim's jacket was laid across his desk. David, whose jacket was still on but parted to reveal an unbuttoned collar, was slumped against the wall. His legs were tangled with Jim's. He felt a little safer with physical contact. He and Jim were so close, they were almost the same person.

Their wine glasses had been forgotten when they realized it was easier to drink from the bottle.

David didn't want to think about the possibilities of the next few months. He stared at his lap and refused to believe it would turn out for the worst. The universe couldn't be so cruel to such young men. It couldn't lull them into a sense of safety in suburban life only to rip them away from it.

"I could tell them things that would make them tear up my draft card and kick me out of the office before they even began my physical," Jim said, his lips curling into a short-lived, bitter smile.

David looked up at him. "Like what?"

Jim didn't say anything. He only stared at David with blank eyes like his mind was a thousand miles away—maybe already in Vietnam at a makeshift campsite. The laughter and voices from the parlor faded as David focused on Jim's face. He was pale. Not a hint of color had returned to his cheeks from that afternoon when his mother handed him the envelope with "SELECTIVE SERVICE" printed on the top left-hand corner. His sandy hair was usually combed and styled so well, but now it fell across his forehead and brushed against the freckles he had earned from too many summer days at the beach. They had faded since they were children. David remembered when they were bolder against the bridge of his nose and across his forehead. David was always so captivated by the little spots sprinkled over his face and on top of his

shoulders. David's skin was always clear of anything but teenage acne. It wasn't quite jealousy but more of fascination.

Eventually, Jim smirked and leaned forward to close the little space between them. His lips nearly brushed against David's ear.

"I'm really a Viet Cong spy."

David sighed and leaned away. "Jim—"

"It's true. I was raised here but I'm a commie through and through."

"Don't joke about that."

"This is all part of my plan to join the other side."

"Stop! Seriously, it's not funny."

"Why not? It's just you and me."

"And the people out there—including my dad."

"Your dad wouldn't do shit. He's known me too long, and he hates the war as much as we do."

"It's still not funny."

David knew that he was only joking because he didn't know what else to do. Too often, Jim's stress spilled from his mouth as obscene dialogue. It took him only a few moments to sober up, and David could continue an appropriate conversation.

"Maybe I can enlist myself, and we might end up in the same unit. At least we would be in the same country."

Jim was already shaking his head no.

"You have asthma," he said. "If they didn't take your uncle for having flat feet, they're not going to take you with your disabled lungs. I'm not sure if you know, but you kinda need to run for your life over there. Viet Cong soldiers don't let you stop and use your inhaler. It's not a game of tag at recess. It's a game of 'oh shit they have guns, too, but it's harder to hit a moving target.'"

"My asthma's not that bad anymore."

"You don't belong there."

"Neither do you! Tell them you're going to school, and they'll let you stay here for at least a little bit longer."

"But why put it off?"

"Because..." David shook his head, trying to think how he would form his thoughts into a decent, coherent sentence. "It's selfish, but I don't want to be away from you. I don't want to be here alone. You're my best friend."

"You have some purpose here, though. You've always been better at school than me. You have your life planned out. You're gonna be a professor someday and publish books. I barely even wanted to apply to college, and I didn't even think I'd get accepted. And you know what? This is what I get. I didn't want to go to school enough, so I got drafted instead. Maybe it's better for me. Maybe I can finally find some direction like my dad keeps telling me to."

"But I don't want to go to school without you."

Jim rubbed his eyes. David imagined how frustrated he was. Through childhood and adolescence, they had learned how to read each other's minds. They had spent countless nights together, telling secrets in the dark. It had started with small childhood fears. Clowns made David uneasy. Jim hated snakes. By high school, they were confessing their insecurities. They knew each other as well as they knew themselves. There were only a few moments where David didn't understand Jim.

He remembered Jim's disembodied 15-year-old voice—still a little high from youth and prone to cracking every few sentences—whispering across the living room floor. It had felt like they were alone in the world. If they had left the house and walked outside, David would have expected the streets to be soulless. Nothing else mattered but Jim, so nothing else should have had the nerve to exist.

"I don't think I'm ever going to fall in love with a girl."

David had asked him what he meant. Jim took a moment of silence before making a dismissive comment about how the only girls worth his time would be burnouts within a decade and began laughing. David's chest had felt tight for some reason he had never been able to place. Maybe he was nervous the laughing would wake up his parents. But that didn't feel exactly right. David didn't care too much about his parents being disturbed. He knew that Jim's answer wasn't truthful, and knowing so ate away at him.

Jim never did give a real explanation. That night he continued to laugh until David laughed with him, and their stomachs ached while they tried muffling their noise with pillows.

David knew that Jim wanted him to drop the conversation about enlisting. He wasn't laughing, but his hands were restless. He was like an animal backed into a corner, clawing at his own bedspread. He was past point of laughing. There were only a few times in their lives when David had seen Jim so serious.

"Go to college." Jim said. "Read your Whitman and smoke weed. Just get as high as you possibly can and try not to think about me missing from your classes or the empty bed next to you. Listen to music. Go to concerts. Grow out your hair. Do everything we talked about doing together. You're going to live your best life there, okay? Live it for the both of us. I'll focus on just living. Besides, you can't believe everything you're seeing on TV. It can't all be as bad as they keep saying. It might end soon, anyways. It's already 1966. They might turn me around as soon as I get there."

David had heard his father talk about the war for years. He had curled up in the hall when his father's government friends were in the kitchen, reciting what they had heard in meetings and at gossipy dinners. David was supposed to stay in his room, but he had found that no one would know he was eavesdropping if he stayed just out of eyesight. The war was definitely as bad as it was shown on TV.

"Don't worry about me," Jim said. "Write me letters. Tell me what you're doing. I'll let you know what's going on over there. It won't be as bad as we think, okay?"

"Okay."

David didn't believe it, but Jim smiled at him. His heart beat at ease when he saw that smile.

All the Grief our Hearts Cannot Hold

By Clarissa Jones

Second Place Short Story Winner

When I first met the woman who became my wife, she told me her family suffered under a long-cast curse. She told me over coffee, with an ironic smile, that some far flung ancestor committed some long forgotten crime that stained her family for every generation afterward. At the time, I thought she was joking. At the time, I thought she was just a funny girl with a strange sense of humor, a glint of darkness in her eyes. At the time, I found it charming. At the time, I was just the same.

Before I met the woman who became my wife I did not believe in such things as curses, or ghosts, or anything I could not see, or touch, or taste. I was solid in my bedrock of belief, could not be swayed in my skepticism. And I stayed that way, for a while. I did not laugh at the little rituals she told me kept her safe, and she loved me for that. I did not laugh, when she hung wind chimes to keep away dark spirits, when she refused to kill crickets to stave off bad luck, when she had to throw a pinch of spilled salt over her shoulder before cleaning it, but I did not believe either. I never told her that. I should have, I know, but she was the prettiest girl who ever liked me as much as I liked her, and I didn't think something so small as a white lie should shatter that. I thought she should have her rituals if she wanted them, that it was not up to me to tell her it wasn't real. I knew it was real to her. I realize now that my steadfast skepticism was just another kind of faith, and that any faith can be shaken in a strong enough wind.

The first time the woman who would be my wife took me to meet her parents I was nervous, for the usual reasons. The first time I had brought a girl home it had ended badly, and I had been cast off from my family like ballast from a sinking ship. I thought her too kind, too sweet, too special a person to have to live with that. I did not want to be blamed for losing her family. I need not to have worried, not about that. I did notice, once they were all together, they all had those shadowed, half-haunted eyes. I did not think much of it, then. It was not as if the house was cold, or dark, or in any way foreboding. It was filled with light, and laughter, and it felt like home. They welcomed me like a member of their own little clan, long lost and now returned. I forgot about the curse.

The woman who would be my wife's father died a week before our wedding was scheduled. The funeral planned for what was meant to be our wedding day. I did not begrudge him this. He was a good man in life, as much bad fortune his death caused us. We canceled our rentals, our receptions, apologized to our friends, and drove to her parents' house. The morning of the day that we were supposed to marry, the morning of her father's funeral, we swerved to avoid a deer in the road and hit a patch of ice, the car spinning like a child's toy into the ditch on the side of the road. She started to cry, and I worried she was hurt. I reached for her, and she grabbed my wrist, her small hand locking on like restraints, and looked in my eyes and told me in a soft, still voice that she spent her whole life trying to run from the curse and it still caught up with her. She asked me what it was I thought we swerved to avoid, if I had seen where it went. A deer, I told her, only a deer; it had trotted off, unbothered, shaking off the surprise like frost from its antlers. She pursed her lips and looked away. I still don't know what it was I should have seen, never asked why she wanted me to watch it go.

It was then that the music started. Now and then, at the funeral, a family member would enquire about where that music was coming from, what is that music, who's playing music? I

never heard a thing. I didn't pay much mind to it, grief does funny things to people. I did not ask the women who would be my wife about it. She sat in her chair at the funeral home, stock still, face pale and haggard, stare fixed on the wall across from her. I knew not to ask.

There was music again at our wedding, three months later. There was music when she walked down the aisle, her older brother leading her, in place of their father. There was music at the reception, when we danced into the night. And then, in the hotel, in the honeymoon suit, there was music. She asked me if I heard it. I told her I did not. She told me it sounded like dancing. I still did not hear. I told her it was probably some kids on spring break, to please come back to bed. And she did come back, that night.

The music came back too, over and over. She stopped asking me if I heard it after a while. She already knew the answer. After a while, voices came with the music. They're calling me to come dance, she told me one night. I did not ask her who was calling. I did not want to know. I wanted to suggest she call a doctor, I wanted to suggest she call her mother. All I did was tell her to come to bed, that it was too late for dancing.

The sleepwalking started the year after we got married. Or, at least doctors called it sleepwalking. But it wasn't, not really. I knew that much. She was dancing. It was not the kind of dancing I had seen her do before, wild, uninhibited in a club. It was that rigid, formulaic ballroom pose. I woke up one night to find the bed empty, and the woman who was my wife at the top of the stairs, waltzing with an invisible partner. I led her away, remembering all the stories that tell you to never wake a sleepwalker. We called a clinic after that, she went in for a sleep study. The test results were inconclusive, and remained so.

It went on like this, a few years, me calling her back when she danced near a ledge in the thin, watery moonlight. The week before our five year anniversary I was called away on business. She promised me she would be fine, and I promised I would call every night. I kept my promise. I decided I would come home a day early, to surprise her. I came in with a bouquet of snow white lilies, her favorite. And she was gone. There was, of course, a crumpled doll at the foot of the stairs in the shape of the woman who was my wife, but I knew the truth. I knew her curse had come to claim her. I knew she danced off into the shadows on some bridge I could not see, with some partner I did not know, on a path where I could not follow.

It was nearly ten years ago, when the woman who was my wife danced off into a dream. I did not remarry. I kept in contact with her family, good people, who have claimed me as one of their own. My mother-in-law has told me their curse still clings to me like the silky tendrils after you walk through a spider web, that I should stop visiting them, that I should leave the house we had lived in together, so happy for our short time; that leaving would dust off the cobwebs and leave me clean and safe. But I can't. I can't leave the walls that still hold her shadow. My mother-in-law doesn't know that I've started to hear the music. I didn't tell her. Part of me thinks she may know regardless, she's seen it many times, her daughter, her husband, her own mother, dancing into the darkness. The music was faint at first, but clear, playing soft in the background of her funeral. But it has grown stronger every night. It is almost familiar, but I cannot never quite manage to place the melody. It is old fashioned, but has a life, a vitality, a newness of all its own. I heard her voice last night. The woman who was my wife, calling to me in the dark, that she misses me, come dance with her. It will not be long. I am ready for her now. And when the time comes, when she comes for me, I will put on the dress I wore when we married, and we will dance off into the dark together.

Elderly Woman Seeking Young, Fun-Loving Boyfriend

By Erica Dame

Third Place Short Story Winner

“Elderly woman seeking young, fun-loving boyfriend.” That was the ad I saw in the paper today while I was absolutely bored out of my skull waiting for the breakfast bake Mom had started in the oven before she left for work. I couldn’t help but laugh out loud. This old lady must be crazy. Doesn’t she realize how creepy putting an ad out for something like this is? She might even draw in a serial killer who targets old ladies. But I don’t mean myself, of course. *That* would be crazy. As I read on, I saw that the old bag even put her address in the paper. What a bat.

“24 Lane Avenue,” I told the cab driver. Okay, yeah, I know. I’m the crazy one for actually going to see this old lady. But c’mon, how bad could she be? The least I can do for her is tell her how bad of an idea this is so that she doesn’t get murdered or something. I don’t want to have something like that on my conscience. Plus, with the semester done and a 2.7 GPA, I don’t have anything to do for the summer. My parents want me to get a job but why the hell should I do that? I have a place to live and they pay for school. I mean, I live in the basement on breaks, but I do chores for them. Shit, I forgot to take out the trash this morning...

“Yer here,” the cab driver said in his gravely voice. “That’ll be ten bucks.”

I passed him my crumpled-up money that was wadded up in my coat pocket. I lost my wallet last week, but Mom and Dad called the bank for me to cancel my credit card and gave me some money to go around town. I mean, I was supposed to go grocery shopping to grab bread and milk for them since they’re both working, but the store doesn’t close until late and I wanted to see this old lady first. For all I knew she could already be dead. What if she has a gazillion cats and they’ve eaten her down to the bone? That’d be sick. I don’t even wanna know how bad that would smell...

I looked up at the house, immediately regretting my decision to play hero. The shutters were drawn tight, the siding was gray but clean, the front porch had no hint of lemonade or cigarettes, the front lawn was well-kept, and the walkway seemed deserted. I looked to her neighbor’s house which had a picket fence – no joke – and a flowerbed around the porch. I double-checked the address from the paper. C’mon, *please* be the normal old lady house. Damn. Okay, maybe this was a bad idea. Maybe *she’s* the serial killer trying to lure young, fun-loving guys into her lair, so she can bludgeon them to death with her walker. I’m sure it’s not unheard of. There’s gotta be something on Dateline about it. Nevertheless, I strode up to the house, heart starting to beat just a hair faster. Scenarios of what would happen after I knocked on her door whizzed through my head. Flashes of floral bedspreads and matching curtains and stacks of medication bottles and – oh God – a little yappy dog. She’d probably be too far gone in her dementia to notice I was definitely not her husband back from the war in the good ole days. That was what happened to my grandma at least. If this lady was anything like her, she’d have to get her life together. At least, what she has left of it.

My hand made a fist at my side, getting into prime knocking position. I dragged my sneaker nervously back and forth on the porch. Forward – I knock. Backward – I walk away. Forward – I knock. Backward – I walk away. Forward... I knocked on the door softly at first, part of me hoping she’s too deaf to hear it. There was no annoying bark to alert her to my

presence and I breathed a small sigh of relief. I knocked a little louder this time and my heart picked up speed.

“For God’s sake! I’m coming! You interrupt a lady’s program and then you rush her to the door?” came from inside the house. She swung the door open violently. “What are ya? Some kind of door-to-door salesman?” She looked me up and down with hard, brown eyes. Her hair was kept in a tight poof around her head and was the definition of lacking color. I could smell her strong perfume, but it didn’t smell like a funeral home like old ladies usually smelled. Thank *God*. Her clothes didn’t have a floral or leopard print pattern like my demented grandma wore but included normal jeans and a t-shirt that had the breast cancer ribbon and “Save the Ta-Tas” on it. Overall, I sensed something unusual about her. My grandma baked cookies. This one looked like she would sooner smack me upside the head with a spoon than mix dough with it. “Well? Are you gonna just gawk there because looks aren’t free ‘round here,” she snapped to jerk me out of my thoughts.

“Um,” I stammered. “I just saw your ad in the paper –”

“What ad?” she asked with the ferocity of an attacking cobra.

“Your ad in the paper. ‘Elderly woman seeking young, fun-loving boyfriend.’ It gave me your address and everything.” I lifted the paper in my hand to show her. As she looked intently at it I saw that she did not need glasses.

“Oh, dammit, Marge!”

“What’s wrong?”

“That senile bitch put this ad in the paper, not me. She’s been telling me how I need some fun in my life and then I tell her to screw off. That’s usually how our conversations go now that her husband’s passed. Mine’s been gone a while so I have no more sympathy left...” She trailed off and she seemed absent as her eyes stared blankly at the newspaper. “Anyway, what am I tellin’ all this to you for?” She snapped out of her stare so suddenly that it made me jump a little. “Are you some sort of sissy who’s scared of an old lady?” Before I could answer she continued. “What do you want then? I didn’t put this ad in the paper, so you best get goin’.” She shut the door in my face and I had a feeling that if she had her strength, she would’ve slammed it.

God, Marge was right. This lady was in desperate need of some fun. What was she before? A cranky principal at an elementary school? A drill sergeant? Whatever she was, she’s a major bitch now. She could’ve been Miss Trunchbull for all I knew. She seemed pretty mad, but I still wanted to knock again. This time it was more of a banging, like the police do when they’ve found their suspect and are going to arrest him.

“Go away or I’ll call the police!” she yelled from behind the door.

“C’mon,” I asserted. “I took a cab here. Can I at least use your phone to call my parents or something? I need to tell them they’re going to have to pick up the bread and milk cuz I used that money to get the cab –” She interrupted me by swinging the door open.

“What did you just say?” she asked sternly.

“Um, that I used the grocery money to get the cab.”

“And you’re gonna make your parents pick up the essentials because your lazy ass can’t handle doing one simple thing?”

“Hey lady, I only came here to make sure you weren’t going to get yourself killed. Putting an ad in the paper like that will attract all sorts of creeps.”

“Well,” she said with a huff, looking me up and down again, “I guess you’re right.”

Again, she slammed the door in my face. “I was just trying to help!” I shouted. I was about to storm off when I realized the sun was starting to set and the street-lights were coming on

and there was no way I was going to walk home in the dark. Too many weirdos went out at night around here. This lady is psychotic! Calling *me* the creep? Puh-leez. I thought I was doing a good deed by protecting an old lady. Nope. That wasn't going to fly with her. But I needed a ride home or something. See, this was why I asked for the new iPhone for Christmas. Yeah, I know, they're expensive but I wouldn't be in this kind of trouble if I had one since my old one just quit on me. It was like they *wanted* me to get the new one. I'll make sure to tell Mom and Dad all about this horrible experience when I get home, I thought. *If* I got home. I knocked on the door again. "Lady, I need to use your phone to get home. I won't bother you ever again if you just help me out."

The door opened gently this time, though I was bracing myself. "Get in here," was all she snapped at me. I followed her into the small entry hallway. It was very uniform: one coat on the wall hanger, one pair of boots, and one pair of shoes set square on the shoe mat, a full-length mirror on the wall opposite the wall hanger, swept wood floors, and an empty bench. Absolutely no sign of little muddy boots coming in from stomping in the puddles because their grandma said so.

There was a door at the end of the entry way and I followed her through it. What we came to was chaos in the kitchen. There were stacks of newspapers from God only knows how long ago, in their own separate stack were coupons years, maybe even decades, expired. The dishes were done to perfection though. What the hell? I figured she'd be more uptight than Fort Knox. I guess everyone has that one room that's gone to hell in a handbasket, I just didn't think she did. I figured she was more alien than human. From the kitchen and into the dining room we went where the mess continued. What's with this lady? I was starting to get the feeling that not many people made it past her entry room. Is there some kind of test you had to pass? There's no way I would've known to study for her test. I didn't even know I was in a class. C'mon, it's the summer. I'm supposed to be on break.

"What are you gaping at?" she snarled. I guess I hadn't realized I was staring at the wall. What is it about this lady that flusters me? Every time I'm lulled into my own thoughts, there she is like a teenager behind a bush waiting for little kids to pass by on Halloween. Of course, I was the one behind the bush.

"I was just thinking."

"Thinking? Why do I get the feeling you don't do that often?" She sat down in a rocking chair situated in the corner of her living room. Although, it was hard to believe it was a living room, what with the tidiness, lack of dust, and overall uncomfortable feeling. All her furniture was wood without a single pillow or cushion in sight.

My jaw dropped. Did she seriously just say that to me? I sat down on the most comfortable looking chair – there were slim pickings – and waited for her speak. After the pinpricks she's been giving me I don't want to get in more trouble.

"What are you waiting for? Where's your manners?"

"What do you mean where's my manners? Where's yours? You haven't offered me a drink or even told me your name since I got here." God, what's her problem? Somebody was dumb enough to marry this lady?

She looked at me as if no one had ever spoken to her like that in her life. But how could they not if she was always this much of a bitch? "Young man, I don't owe you anything. You dropped into my home unannounced and all you asked was to borrow my phone. Well," she said as she pointed to the phone on the wall, "there it is. Make your call and be on your way."

I got up and went to the phone. There was a clock on the wall above it that said five-thirty. Mom and Dad wouldn't be done at work until at least seven thirty. I mean, they've got to come get their son, how could their boss say no to that? I dialed my mom's work number and as I waited I could feel the old lady watching me. It went to her voice mail, so I hung up. "Seriously?" I muttered to myself in frustration. I tried my dad's number instead. Same thing. "What the hell guys?"

"Something the matter?" the old lady said, mocking me. Or maybe I was just pissed enough to take it as mocking.

"They didn't answer so I'm stuck here." I sat back down in the uncomfortable comfortable chair.

"Oh, boo hoo. You're a grown young man. Why don't you just walk home? Where's your house?" Again with those hard, brown eyes watching me. I felt like my soul was naked and that wasn't how I wanted to feel around this ancient lady.

I crossed my arms over my stomach to help my self-conscious feeling. "I mean, it's not too far away, but I'm not gonna just walk."

"And why not? You've got two legs that work, don't you?" I noticed she wasn't rocking in the chair. How does she manage to sit so still in a chair that is meant to move?

"I mean, yeah. But it's dark."

"And why haven't you asked me if I can drive you home?" She laced her fingers over her stomach, almost like I had my arms crossed.

I immediately uncrossed my arms, not wanting to mirror her in any way. "I figured you were too old to drive."

She rolled her eyes at me. This old lady *rolled her eyes at me*. "Young man, I'm not too old for a lot of things in life. But it seems like you're too young for a lot of what I do."

I thought about that for a second, but it was too much like a riddle. "What do you mean?"

Without taking her eyes off me she responded, "I have let you into my home. I let you use my phone. And when your parents didn't answer, I offered to drive you home."

"And?"

"And what have you offered me besides ignorant insults?"

"The only reason I came here was to make sure you weren't going to get killed by some creep who gets off by killing old ladies. I thought your ad was dangerous and wanted you to know that."

Her shoulders relaxed slightly, her eyes softened, and her fingers unlaced. "Well, young man, I appreciate your concern. But there is something you need to know about people: it's best to stay out of their business if it doesn't concern you."

"I'm sorry for butting in. Believe me, I am."

"What's your name?" she asked suddenly.

"What?"

"What is your name?" she repeated, louder like you would for an old person who's hard of hearing. Ironic.

"Um, Jackson."

She chuckled slightly, like my name was some sort of inside joke. What's so funny? I wanted to ask her. "Hello, Jackson. Nice to meet you." She reached out her hand to me and things got weird.

"Oh," I stammered as I got up to shake it. "Nice to meet you, too."

“So, Jackson,” she said as I sat back down, another chuckle to herself, “what have you been doing for your summer? Do you have a job?”

“No. I had a pretty good semester though. And my parents said that I could stay in the basement over breaks. But I do stuff around the house for them.” Why do I feel like I have to explain myself to her?

“You can’t underestimate the skills you’d gain from hard work.”

“But it’s the summer.”

“So what? Humans are constantly developing. Don’t you think you should, too?”

“Well, uh.” I had no response for that.

“Or do you want to forget about the trash every day of your life, so someone else has to get it for you?”

“How do you know about that?”

She humped at that. “Please, I’m old, not stupid. You mentioned having to do chores for your parents and I think you’re the kind of young man who would forget.”

This was starting to get spooky. Am I really this predictable? “Why do you even care so much about me? I’m not your problem.”

Julia thought for a moment. “I was a lot like you, letting people do everything for me. After my husband died, I had to grow the hell up and start doing everything for myself. He did everything for me besides piss and shit and I’ll never forget how devastated I was the day he died not only for the loss of my husband, but for the loss of my provider. I was petrified about living on my own. I care because I was old when I finally grew up. You’re still young and you should grow up when you’re supposed to. It wasn’t until I realized how little I actually did for myself that I realized how little respect I had for myself. And I’ll tell you one thing about life, Jackson: You can’t get respect from others if you can’t respect yourself.”

She let that settle in my brain and I did my best to understand what she meant. What’s so bad about not wanting to get a job or take out the trash? That doesn’t make me a bad person, right? No, of course not. I’ve gotten this far in life, after all. I was starting to get angry. I mean, who does she think she is? “Listen lady,” I said standing up abruptly, “you don’t know me and you can’t tell me how to live my life. Screw waiting around. I’m just going to walk home. Thanks for nothing.”

You want to know how crazy this lady is? She was smiling at my little outburst and as I stormed out. Was she mocking me? Well, it doesn’t matter.

The cool air felt nice against the heat of my cheeks. I started for home which wasn’t too far from Julia’s. So why didn’t I just walk in the first place? Oh yeah. It was dark. C’mon Jackson, get your shit together. You don’t need a ride from Mom and Dad.

Further down the street I passed a small ice cream shop where I used to go with my grandma. Come to think of it, she lived pretty close to Julia. She would always pass me a dollar to give to the cashier so that I could feel like I paid for my own double scoop of chocolate mint. She would smile at me and tell the cashier I made that money by working hard at her house. Sure, I would clean underneath things she couldn’t reach any more. And I would rake her leaves. And I would do the dishes for her. And I would take out her trash that was too heavy for her. But it wasn’t like I had a real job, right? I noticed in the window of the ice cream shop they had put up a “Now Hiring” sign. That’s when it hit me what Julia meant. I had to start working hard in school and get a real job for the summer. One that pays up. If I really wanted that new phone, I’d just buy the damn thing for myself!

I came up to an intersection and the red hand was supposed to stop me from crossing the street, but I looked both ways and went anyways.

I can't go on like this anymore. I'm gonna take out the friggin' trash when I get home. I'm gonna go apply at that ice cream place. I'm gonna –

A flash of the word "TAXI" and my thoughts were interrupted by headlights and a blaring horn.

The Shrine in the Whispering Willows

By Aedan Ginty

When I was young, my family would go to a park about 20 miles out of town, down near Tippy, which was near the county border of Galloway and Fairfield. It was a nice, picturesque park with a lake in the middle and about 5 or 6 hiking trails. There were a few bronze statues of people like Thoreau and Darwin, which stood out against the green explosion of the leaves in the spring. Only on a few occasions did soft rain penetrate the serene nature of the park when we went there.

It was also a way of getting away from the inner city life. In the small apartment we lived in, cars could be heard screaming at each other, the neighbors talking about the “abomination” that was their son (their words, not mine), the landlady cracking open a silver lighter she got from her husband in the 1940s and having a smoke, the birds ecstatically chirping at one another, the hum of a rusted air-conditioner, and shirts flapping in the wind on a line. It could become claustrophobic to all of us, especially to my older sister. She would constantly freak out over the most innocuous things, and my mom would have to calm her down.

I don’t remember most of these trips, since it usually followed a formula. First, we would all pack ham and cheese sandwiches and a couple of water bottles and put them into a cooler. After that, we would then head to the park and walk the shortest trail, which took approximately two to three hours to complete. We would then head back home and watch either Jeopardy or some other trivia show. After that, we would have a small supper and head off to bed. Every trip that went like this blurred together into an incomprehensible scramble. Really, only one sticks out to me because it broke from this formula.

It was probably when I was 10 or 11, somewhere in between. My dad asked me quickly while I was eating cereal if I wanted to go to the park. His face was a little red, but he would not tell me why. His face also seemed a little mopey, as if it was a pug’s face. He then came to the table, with his favorite red bowl in his left hand, and asked me, “Hey, squirt. You wanna go to the park today?” His voice was very crackly, which was something that rarely happened with my father, so I knew something happened. I didn’t know what had happened, nor did my ten-year-old brain care, so I told him yes and we packed the usual up and headed out.

The traffic to get to the park was very hectic, which was unusual for my small town. As my dad and I passed the exit we needed to get on to get to the park, we could see that there was an accident about 400 yards away. A semi flipped over, pinning about two other cars under it. I could faintly see a bloodied hand on the underside of the bridge as we went under it. I looked in the newspapers about a day after this and saw that there were 5 people who were stuck under the semi. Apparently, the semi, driven by a middle-aged woman (who had either been depressed or been drinking, I can’t remember), didn’t see the two cars next to it and just crushed them. One of the eyewitness’ accounts still haunts me as an adult,

“It was as if the people enjoyed being crushed. All of them were smiling, one of them holding a picture of Mt. St. Helens during the autumn. It was a beautiful picture, serene even. However, the person holding them possibly never even saw it. It was unknown to them, but it held serene beauty in it. That’s why I think they smiled, even in death.”

My dad and I made it to the park about a half hour afterwards. Him and I grabbed the supplies, drank a few swigs of water, and then headed off into the entrance of the park. The

clouds were only wisps, lightly dancing through the blue overturned ocean. The wind carried itself through the trees, whispering names forgotten in the moment. Those fleeting memories becoming lost.

My dad walked a little faster than usual on this trip. I'm usually in the front, but this time it was even hard for me to keep up with him. I had to sort of speed walk to keep pace with him, all the while mosquitos were swarming around us, wanting to make us itchy.

Instead of taking the shortest path this time, my dad to take the 2nd shortest path, which was about a 4 miles hike. This wasn't bad by any means, but this trail was also the hardest to walk, as the elevation kept changing drastically. You could be sitting at the bottom of a valley one minute and be about 1000 feet higher the next. But that's what you get for living in Ohio: weird things happening and you just have to go with it.

After about an hour, my dad and I walked into the forest part of the trail. It stood out like a sore thumb as well: it was all green while the surrounding valley was either putting on their fall dress or covered by a hazy breath. The forest part kept its spring dress on, lavishing and gloating in that fact to the surrounding trees. It loved it and couldn't ask for more.

As the wind swayed the trees in front of us, I could see a small white and red roof ahead of us on the right. As we got closer, we saw a small shrine appear through the thicket. It seemed to be made out of bamboo, with a small ravine going through the middle of the shrine. The opening to the shrine had a small statue to Amaterasu, Izanami and Izanagi near it, with a small brick path going towards the entrance.

As we passed it, I saw a three people inside the almost depthless room. On the right, a woman with a violin in her hands, a lotus flower staying beautifully in her red, vibrant hair. She wore a kimono with a red ribbon tied around her waist. She wore small sandals on her feet, which seemed to have a small lilac pattern on it. On the left, a man with a flute sat on an oak chair.

Then there was the woman in the middle. Words couldn't describe how beautiful she was. She wore a purple kimono with a lotus flower design on it. She didn't wear anything on her feet, her feet being pure and clean. Her hair was long and dark, with her hair becoming spirals near the end. She was a goddess among us, which those few brief glimpses I can never regain again.

I wanted to see more of what the lady was dancing to, but my dad was in the distance, still walking straight as if he never saw the shrine. I wanted to stay, but I knew my mom would get angry with my dad if he just left me here, plus this was a new trail I've never been on, so I ran up to catch up to my dad.

Two years after this incident, we stopped going to the park. The managers changed hands a few times, and the new owners charged for people to go to the park, which made people go less and less, with my family being one of them. I came back home a week ago, after my first year of college, and decided to go to the park. I knew I had to pay, but I didn't mind. The incident had popped into my mind a month before I came back and it bothered me to the point that I needed to know what that shrine was. I paid the fee, got onto the trail, and then headed off into the direction.

As I came near the place of the shrine, a plaque came into my eyesight. As I stopped to read, my face become more droopy with sorrow. The plaque stated that the shrine had been destroyed in a storm a few years back and the manager didn't want to pay for the rebuilding. As I stood there, I looked forward, wondering about the dancing goddess.

A Lovely Day at the Cemetery.

By Fletcher Grey

It's a beautiful day, isn't it? The pine trees behind us, the world before us, right at our feet.... What things tend to happen, when the flowers start to wither away from the frost, and lose their heat. I find it interesting how the people walk, all along this busy car-filled street, and yet people don't ask each other how they are, like you or I do. Don't you find that peculiar as well, Miss? I know you probably can't hear me, with all of this glass and all surrounding your head, but from a million miles away I can still hear your voice. Smelling still that crisp apple scent wafting off of your clothes, and the sweet smell of caramel and cinnamon hitting me with that scent of Home. I loved you a lot; and I knew, that I had gone so very far away. For us, an income must be ever present, just like everybody else.

This is a beautiful day, as I'm being directed this way and that, dodging cars and thorough crowds, asking somewhere to go from there, and you chuckling that heavenly sweet laugh. You were always better at directions than I ever was, but I knew that I made up for it in bravado and focus. Nevertheless, this always drove me forward, that chuckle, because it reminded me always of You. That is how we met, after all. I got lost, you were going your regular route, and we just...bumped into each other. Coffee spilled onto your petticoat, and I frantically apologized, grabbing napkins from my inside coat pocket. Love sometimes hits people like a blindness, and sometimes causes an angry conversation, like it did to us.

Then, as usual, you started to chuckle, and I, my hearty laugh. You gave me something new to experience; hope, as it were. Something awe inspiring, and wholesome, and something that I could never replace. It was happiness in an instant, and I was struck hardest out of any of these schmucks inside of that very metro.

You stared at me for a few seconds, and those eyes locked me in while I started gathering my papers. You liked my writings from the first glance; the others said that some things were "unique", or "interesting", while others simply said, "too long; didn't read". After a while, after we hopped onto the same train, we started chatting; found our similarities in the differences. Arts to Sciences, and Histories to Mathematics. After a while though, we kept talking about the deeper things... You almost made me miss my appointment. I granted you the reprieve by saying that I could help you out with house repairs whenever, with what little I knew about it. You were nearly late for work, yet the top you wore made you feel "like some bloated pig". We laughed, and I offered to pour coffee onto your top as a nod to the now dry and stained spot. You agreed sarcastically, and we got some plans down for what to do when the time came, like sly devils in the night.

Your Boss gave you two days off after we got the hysterics down, and after the cold coffee hit your petticoat, I slipped my number into your lower coat pocket, along with some fivers to hide the number and pay for a new coat. You smiled quizzically after thumbing through them real quick, but I reassured you about how much there was... and you smiled again. I always wondered why in god's name you would've given that plan a shot, but even then, you gave in and said that you didn't like that one anyways.

I kept that one, even though you wanted to toss it later on. Coats still had a purpose, so why waste the fabric? Besides, it's the famous coat after all... I'm still holding onto it, Doll. I remember the first date we've ever really had, after that little encounter. We got Rocky Road after getting some Italian, laughing like idiots when our noses got covered in that tiny bit... and

then we parted ways. It was four or five hours afterwards, until we got back together during another sudden chance. It was close to midnight, and our pipes were leaking, and you called the company that I worked at. A month later, our schedules met up again, and we had our Second Date. That was the day that we kept going on and on about our lives, and the day that we fell in love.

We kept things going for a good while there, Doll. Your porcelain features to my staunch stances, the snow to my fire, the ice to my smoke... and you melted away, slowly but surely. Don't you remember, that fateful night, where things went awry? We fought a tiny bit after we talked about finances... tricky stuff, as always. For dinner, we had some red wine and crusted chicken breasts, with some asparagus and garlic, turned aside by the baked russets. You wanted them scalloped, and I completely forgot the entire day through, grocery shopping in the slightest of movements. This was the '50s, as you can remember then, black and white.

I still got your photo on the mantelpiece, and the boys at the shop gave me a way to transfer the images to polaroids. It's so lifelike now... the colors still dance off of your skin, the way they did. If only I could snatch you out, carry you in my arms, feel that nipping cold again. The wind replaces that feeling; the snow here, lying down on the barren yet richly endowed soil. For dessert, a nice apple pie was made, as the cinnamon and cloves really gave it that edge. You gave me the world, and the bountiful memories were something I could never recreate entirely. And I've tried, Doll... really; after you were gone, I tried.

That day was beautiful, wasn't it? So many flowers, and the warm summer's day, with the subways loaded and I myself getting a bit shaken by the immense noise.... As I'm standing here at your grave plot, I asked all the time where our love went, while I was away. Instead of getting on that train, then and there, I could have pulled you away from that 5 hour rush, and saved you... if only, if only. If only you got lost for a couple seconds... if only that, or then, we were home. Instead of that 5 o'clock train, you would be here, instead of in the ground.... Doc Martin's got his work cut out for him. I guess these old and weary bones just aren't as strong and durable as they used to be. I never shovel my driveways anymore; the snow just reflects that special way again, just like your porcelain frame did. Those icy blue eyes still make me think about you, even if they're just a memory. Those... those, I think I miss the most. This was a lovely day at the cemetery, but I have to go soon. The Boss won't be happy that I took another detour to work... but, until the morning sun rises, my flame will always burn for you. As it was, this was a lovely day at the cemetery. It would only be better if I was with you.

Not My Ocean—Not My Home

By Alexandra Chakov

First Place Creative Nonfiction Winner

Imagine 45 track and field athletes and 6 coaches riding on a Greyhound bus for the eleven-hour drive to Myrtle Beach. I gave Taylor the window seat so she would be able to sleep better and the aisle seat was better for me to be able to stretch out my bad leg. Why my coaches decided leaving at 4 in the afternoon was a good idea is beyond me. Eleven hours on a cramped bus with snapping hip syndrome, piriformis syndrome, iliotibial band syndrome, and sciatica all on my right leg is just a blast. The only thing to make this bus ride even better is the hourly mandatory stretch breaks my coach, Coach Tones, has decided to make me do. Sleeping on a bus with the velvet, overused seats that gives the rider a constant fear of lice is hard enough without having to get up and stretch in the tiny aisle every hour.

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After three hours on the bus the coaches decided it was time we had dinner and get a bathroom break. Dinner was a hard choice between slimy ham sandwiches or stale peanut butter and jelly sandwiches—yum. Malnourishment seemed like the best option so I ate a lemon-flavored granola bar and some Ritz crackers while stretching outside of the bus. The rest stop was a pavilion with a few tables and benches and a bathroom. The bathroom smelled permanently like pee and only had toilet paper in one of the two stalls. It was a stereotypically sketchy highway rest stop. Once I was done with my “dinner”, Coach Tones gave me his foam roller so I could better stretch my leg. Sitting on the damp sidewalk rolling out my butt, groin, hamstrings, etc. while my friends laughed at how ridiculous I looked to any car that may notice me while driving by helped make the stop even better.

We loaded back onto the bus and within a half hour my right side from lower back to my foot was all tingly and no matter how much I moved my foot or wiggled around in my seat the feeling wouldn't come back in my toes. Putting down book one of the *Game of Thrones* series I stand up to try to keep my entire leg from going numb watching the cars zip by our bus on the left and the trees that line the highway on the right. Taylor offers me the window seat hoping to make the bus ride more comfortable for me and I accept it.

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I woke up and it's dark. The bus was eerily quiet. Taylor was asleep next to me her head almost resting on her legs. I wonder how she can sleep with her body in a 90-degree angle before I slipped back to sleep myself. I awoke again and my leg burned, there were tears in my eyes while I watched one of the boys on the team stand up from their seat and lay down in the aisle. Slightly disgusted by how dirty the floor is, yet jealous that I hadn't thought to do that, I fell back into an uneasy sleep. Finally I woke up as the bus makes a sharp turn hitting my head on the window. I watched as we slowly drive through the streets of a town. I saw McDonalds and a Waffle House, and a few closed mini-golf places, before the bus stops. The coaches talked quietly to themselves and I checked the time on my phone, a little after 4 in the morning.

Without warning the bus lights turned on, blinding me and unhappily waking everyone else up. The coaches ordered us to get off the bus and quietly head up the ramp and take the stairs to the second-floor conference room. I one-strapped my backpack and bundled my blanket

up and made my way off the bus with the rest of my zombie like team. I stepped off the bus to see the ramp the coaches mentioned is not just a little ramp, but a straight up hill.

“Oh God,” I grumbled, “I’m going to die.”

“Oh, it’s just a little hill,” Coach Tones said as he made his way up the mountain like ramp.

I groaned and grumbled slowly making my way up the ramp, my body unnaturally bending to 90 degrees as I drag myself up. After the hike up the ramp I hobbled my way up the flight of stairs before being the last to arrive to the conference room.

“Alright, the hotel has been nice enough to allow us to use this conference room to sleep and hang out until our rooms are available at 3 this afternoon.” Coach Tones told us.

The team collectively groaned about our homelessness. The conference room has about ten circular tables with chairs, and one men’s and one women’s bathroom.

“This is better than staying on the bus,” Coach Tones said, “try to get some sleep we are leaving for practice at 6:45 am.”

I took my bag and set it on the floor by the windowed wall and wrapped myself in my blanket as a makeshift sleeping bag. My bag isn’t the comfiest pillow, the floor is hard, and it is extremely weird to be sleeping on the floor with my 30 male teammates, but I am too exhausted to even care.

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I was awoken by an unbearably pink brightness. Even though the sun was rising on the other side of the hotel, the windowed wall I laid down next to was not normal glass—it was bright pink glass and somehow the sun was *brightly* shining through it even though it had barely risen. The stained-glass window gave the entire room a pink glow and made it impossible to fall back asleep. I watched as my teammates all began to uneasily wake up from the unbearable pinkness, and one of the coaches even crawled out from under a table.

“Well at least we can all watch the sun rise on the beach.” Coach Tones said.

“I can see that every day at home.” I mumbled.

Every day on my way to high school I watched the sun rise over the ocean making the casinos on the Atlantic City boardwalk glow. This sunrise was nothing special to me.

“Oh my gosh there are dolphins,” Taylor squealed from the other side of the room, “Alex come look!”

I slowly got up and made my way to the non-pink window and watched as the dolphins jumped out of the glistening water. It reminded me of being at home and having the shoobies, what locals call tourists, run from the ocean thinking the dolphins were sharks. I let myself think about home while watching the sunrise before I got myself ready for practice.

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The whole team piled onto the bus like zombies to head over to the track. I looked out the window as we drove through Myrtle Beach and saw mini golf courses, touristy t-shirt shops, and restaurants all still closed for the season. Just like home Myrtle Beach was busiest for the summer, and not so busy during spring break since it could still be pretty chilly there unlike Florida beaches.

Once we got to the track the team split off into their own event groups. I am a mid-distance runner in track, so I went with Coach Tones and the other mid-distance runners to the infield.

“Okay we’re just doing 10x100 meter sprints. You’ll start the workout at 7:15 and every minute you’ll start the next 100 meters. The amount of rest you have will depend on how fast you run. If you run it in 15 seconds you’ll have a 45 second rest.” Coach Tones explained.

We all let him know we understood and ran our warm-up mile. At 7:15 we started our first 100 meters. My leg was in burning pain before the workout even started, but I tried my best to not think about it. I came through the first 100 meters in 17 seconds and tried to use my remaining time to stretch. With each 100 meters the pain I was in grew and grew, by the sixth one I was full blown sobbing and unable to calm myself down before I’d have to run the next one.

“Alex, you can call it,” Coach Tones called to me, “You’re in pain it’s okay to call it a day.”

I gritted my teeth and shook my head, I didn’t like quitting and I was already halfway down. I finished the whole workout and stayed around 17 seconds for them all even after my tears became concerning.

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I had a two-mile cool down after the workout and decided to run the half-mile down to the beach and run the rest on the sand. My feet sunk into the hard, yet soft sand as I ran down by the ocean. I could smell sunscreen mixing in with the salty/fishy smell of the ocean. The sand kicked up onto me, and it was itchy, yet familiar. My leg throbbed and I decided to stop under the fishing pier and give myself a second to stretch. I took in a deep breath and let out a shaky laugh, the ocean was thought to be healing however many years ago, but I’ve grown up at the beach my whole life and I was as injured as you get. My knee was shaking from holding my own body weight, and I let myself cry on the unfamiliar beach that felt like home. I let myself long for the Jersey ocean breeze I was used to, and for the fishing pier I started my runs at every day in high school. I let the pain of my leg and the ache in my chest for home consume me while I stared at an ocean that was the same as the one I use to see every day, but still not my ocean—not my home.

It was all Yellow.

By Kate Mundy
Second Place Creative Nonfiction Winner

As I look back on my life in that weird way that people do, where we only remember the smallest, stupidest things, I can see myself as a little girl thinking that a defining characteristic of myself was my favorite color. It was ever changing, trying desperately not to fall into clichés or norms, not even knowing what either of those words meant. I have no clue what my childhood favorite color was, but I do know one thing.

I despised the color yellow.

It was just *too* bright, *too* forcefully happy. It was the fake smile of all colors. I remember hearing the idea that just looking at the color yellow made people happy, but it disgusted me. It was the color of piss, of stomach acid after a long night of drinking far too much.

When I was eight years old, my parents let me pick what colors I wanted my room to be. I knew I wanted them to be wild and bright, like they always told me I was. So I picked orange because that was my favorite color at the time. And I wanted the trim to be red because red is another color that has stuck with me infinitely throughout my life, but that is a completely different story.

And I chose yellow.

Why? As soon as it was smeared onto the walls of my small, confined room, I wondered what had compelled me to make such a decision. It was like when my mom would paint my nails when I was little. I would always be so excited, but as soon as she was done I would beg her to take it off, absolutely hating the result no matter how well she did.

I stared at those walls for almost eight years. The light from my one small window would bounce off of the yellow wall next to my bed, waking me up every day whether I wanted it to or not. Trapped in a hell the color of jaundice.

When I got a little older, for yet another unknown reason, I made my mother buy me a pair of yellow Converse. And I never wore them. Until my family took a trip to DC, where I broke in these seemingly new shoes by walking almost twenty miles. Then the yellow of my heels started to turn red and I cried on a double-decker bus tour on the way to the Washington Monument.

Every time I was offered mustard as a condiment, I was repulsed. Not only at the taste, but at the horrible, soupy yellow that looked so artificial it hurt my organs just from looking at it. The way that it seeped into white bread on sandwiches was an image that I felt would be burned into my head for years to come.

But now life is different. And suddenly I'm 20.

And I bought a bright yellow tank top that makes me feel like summer. Like the way you feel when you are sitting under the warm sun, looking up at it, feeling it almost seep into your skin.

And then on the tables of an American Eagle, I gravitated towards a sweater with soft cream and yellow stripes. I bypassed the burgundy and the olive green, even the black, which were always what caught my eye. I held it up to my mother and asked her if she liked it, and she did. Who was I to go against my mother?

And my brother gave me his old shirt, having accidentally shrunk it in the wash. The faded black print on it seemed to melt into the yellow of it all. It hit me so perfectly in that too long sort of way. I wore it so often I started to get nervous that the writing would fade all together, so I stopped for a while. But I kept coming back.

And I needed a new lanyard because carrying a Bud Light one around when you are only 20 sets you up for failure. As I scoured the internet in that way that you do when you are so tired from simply moving the mouse that you have to hold your head with your hand to avoid self-destruction, I was shit out of luck. The stoner in me could not find the right design of hemp for one. Then I found one covered in bees with that muted color yellow as a background. So I bought it, without hesitation, and without a hand holding up my head making it all possible.

And now I walk around campus and it is fall. And I used to think the prettiest trees were the richest reds and the brightest oranges. And now I look up in sheer awe at the hues of yellow splattering the sky. And I consciously think about this. About how beautiful these yellows leaves are and how I have never taken the time to appreciate them until now.

I have missed out on nearly 20 years of yellow.

And I listened to Yellow by Coldplay on a bus ride recently, realizing now that I never used to *get* it. I never got why it all *had* to be yellow, of all things. Why the world contorted itself into a yellowing glob. What was even yellow? But now I see it.

I do not know what changed in my mind to make yellow seem so beautiful. But now I can see it all so clearly.

And it was all yellow.